Oldham Local Development Framework

Landscape Character Assessment Final

Oldham
Council

Availability of Document

This document can be made available in other formats. Please call: 0161 770 1670 for information.

1 Background

1.1   The council appointed consultants Ferguson McIlveen to carry out a Landscape Character Assessment of the open areas of the borough. This document presents the key findings, including the Landscape Character Areas and Types identified in the borough. Between November and December 2008 the council consulted on the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and had regard to the comments made in finalising the LCA.

1.2   Landscape Character Assessment is a method of describing an area in a systematic way. It describes what elements make a place distinctive. It does not assign values to landscapes. The approach taken by the consultants was based on good practice guidance produced by Scottish Natural Heritage and the former Countryside Agency (now part of Natural England).

1.3   This assessment forms part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF) and we will have regard to it in preparing policies for the Core Strategy.

Links with the Peak District National Park

1.4   The south eastern corner of the borough lies within the Peak District National Park. Planning for this part of the borough is the responsibility of the Peak District National Park Authority. The Peak District National Park Authority has produced a Landscape Character Assessment as part of its work in drawing up a Landscape Strategy and new planning policies. It is important to ensure that future policies in the LDF's of both Oldham and the Peak Park are consistent in relation to the landscape lying to each side of the boundary between the two authorities. Reference is therefore made in chapter 5 to the Landscape Character Assessment of the Peak District National Park, as it relates to the borough.

1.5   Further information about the Peak District National Park Landscape Character Assessment can be found on the following link: http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/index/pubs/lca.htm

The Historic Dimension

1.6   A project is currently being carried out by the Greater Manchester Archaeology Unit which is looking at the historic character of the landscape across Greater Manchester. This is being carried out on a district by district basis with Oldham due to commence in summer 2009. The findings of this study will add a historical dimension to this Landscape Character Assessment.

2 Introduction

2.1 This Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has been prepared to describe the evolution of the borough's rural landscape and assess its special character, distinctiveness and qualities. It draws on both the natural and cultural features of the area and classifies **7 landscape areas** that contain more detailed **landscape types.**

What is a Landscape Character Assessment ?

2.2 The former Countryside Agency's publication 'Making Sense of Place' defines LCA as a tool for identifying the features that give a locality its sense of place and pinpointing what makes it different from its neighbouring areas. This is sometimes referred to as local distinctiveness.

2.3 The same publication goes on to state:

"Landscape Character Assessment provides a framework for describing an area in a systematic way. It lets different interest groups make better judgement by knowing what is present and what is distinct, so any change can respect local character, or add to it, and even change it if that is what is desired."

Why Landscape Character Matters

2.4 The former Countryside Agency gives the following broad definition of landscape and the value it has:

"Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It is the setting for our lives. It can mean a patch of local green space as much as a mountain range. Landscape has:

- **Economic value**, providing the setting for economic activity and often becoming a central factor in attracting business and tourism
- **Social and community value**, as an important part of people's lives, contributing to our sense of identity and well-being, and bringing enjoyment and inspiration
- **Environmental value**, as a home for wildlife and a cultural record of society's use of land"

2.5 The former Countryside Agency's 'Making Sense of Place' gives the following explanation to how a LCA works. It comprises two stages – characterisation, and then making judgements about land management.

Characterisation

2.6 The Characterisation stage defines the scope of the assessment, involves a desk study and field survey, and then a description of the landscape, dividing it into areas of common character, mapping them and describing their characteristic and key issues.

Making judgements

2.7 Land management decisions will ultimately lie with society - owners, politicians, land managers, local communities and many other stakeholders. But their decisions will be more sound if they are based on information assembled through the Landscape Character Assessment process.

The Value of Landscape Character Assessment

2.8   The former Countryside Agency, again in 'Making Sense of Place' identify the fact that:

"People can welcome development if it is well designed and contributes to quality of life. Policy makers and practitioners need ways of achieving this, and Landscape Character Assessment is one of the key techniques.

Landscape Character Assessment tells you what makes a place distinctive. You can use this information to achieve high quality development that is not only in the right place, but which respects and enhances its surroundings. It can also inform land management decisions that will help the economy, as well as sustain the environment."

2.9   Landscape Character Assessment can help:

- Form policies in development plans;
- Assess land availability for a range of uses, including new development;
- Inform the siting and design of particular types of development, such as housing, minerals, telecommunications and wind energy; and
- Provide information for Environmental Impact Assessments of plans, policies and individual development proposals.

How Landscape Character Assessment helps deliver sustainable development

2.10   The Government's Sustainable Development Strategy 'Securing the Future' (2005) cited objectives for the UK and world as a whole for defining sustainable development:

- Social progress that recognises the needs of everyone;
- Effective protection of the environment;
- Prudent use of natural resources; and
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

2.11   The former Countryside Agency considers that Landscape Character Assessment helps to address two of these objectives – 'effective environmental protection' and 'prudent natural resource use'. In particular, it can help:

- Identify the environmental and cultural features in a locality;
- Monitor change in the environment;
- Understand a location's sensitivity to development and change; and
- Set the conditions for any development and change.

Methodology for Study

2.12   A structured approach has been taken to establish a framework of character areas to make judgements about landscape quality and sensitivity. This approach is based on good practice guidance produced by the former Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage – 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' – 2002

2.13   A three-stage methodology was used from national guidelines, and is summarised as follows:

2.14   Stage 1 – Desk Based Exercise

- The consideration and review of relevant background reports, other data and mapped information to initially identify areas of common character (draft landscape character areas).
- Landscape character assessment workshop to authority officers and stakeholders to introduce the LCA process and present draft landscape character areas for discussion and feedback.

2.15 Stage 2 – Field Study

- 1 day officer training seminar, held at Tandle Hill Country Park Centre, to explain the LCA process, to undertake a typical assessment and feedback/normalisation review to ensure that all assessors considered an area in the same way.
- Using the draft landscape character areas identified in stage 1 as a guide, field survey work took place in collaboration with local council officers to record both objective information (roads, forests etc.) and subjective responses to the landscape (dramatic, exciting, enclosed etc.)
- A photographic record was taken to assist the rigorous process of redefining/checking character area boundaries defined at the desk based study stage.
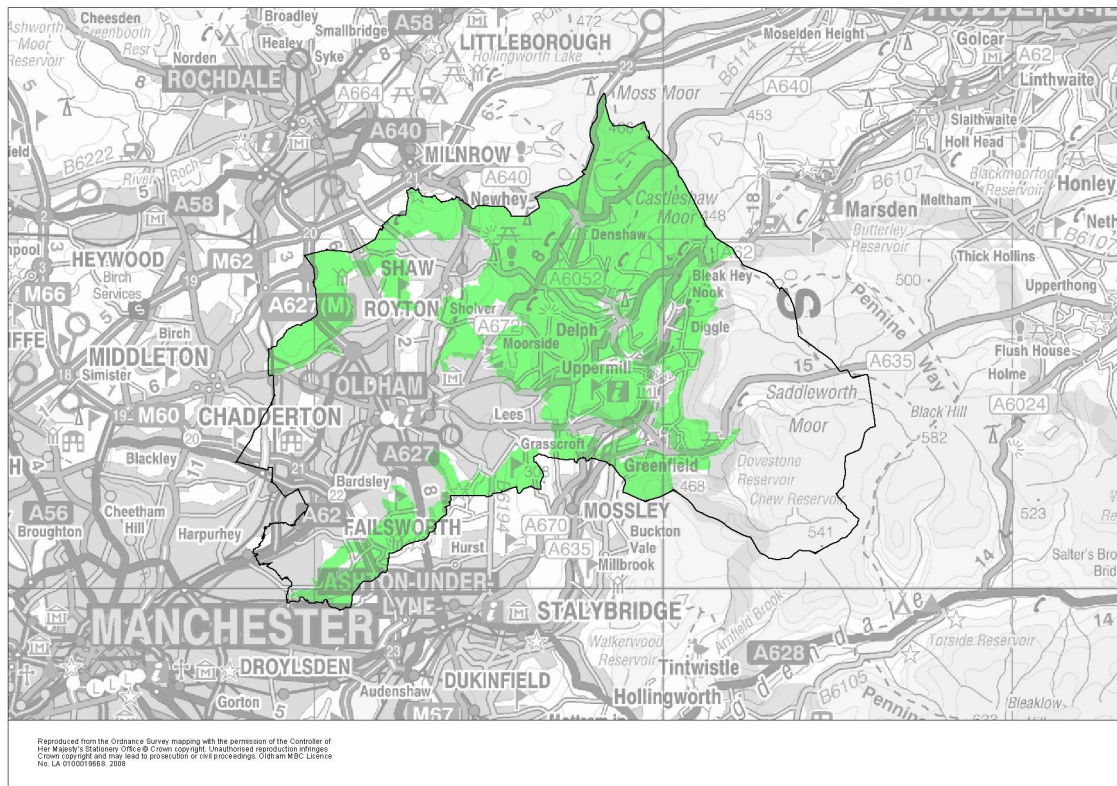
2.16 Stage 3 – Analysis and Assessment

- Using the landscape character areas as a framework about landscape quality and sensitivity, judgements were based on: landscape character, landscape quality and condition, landscape value and landscape capacity.
- Forming landscape character types that sub-divide the landscape character areas to provide further detail and establish objectives.

Study Area

2.17 The location plan and study area is shown in Map 1. It covers the Green Belt surrounding Oldham, which forms part of Character Area 54: Manchester Pennine Fringe as shown in the former Countryside Commission's Countryside Character of England Map.

2.18 The northeast boundary of the area is formed by the bordering South Pennine landscape that sits between the gritstone towns of Skipton, Keighley, Halifax, Rochdale and Oldham and creates a dramatic moorland backdrop to the densely populated valley bottoms.

2.19 To the southwest, the urban conurbation of Manchester presides, containing a network of corridors formed by numerous rivers, canals, railways and roads. The River Medlock provides a continual swath of countryside that extends from the heart of Manchester City Centre out to Oldham and the Pennine Moors beyond.

2.20 The part of the borough that falls within the Peak District National Park was not assessed by the consultants. A Landscape Character Assessment has been carried out by the Peak District National Park Authority which covers this area. (see Chapter 5).

Map 1 Study Area

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3 Hierarchy of Studies

3.1 This Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) presents a characterisation of the borough's Green Belt area, to inform the planning process and ensure that change in the landscape is positive, as far as possible.

3.2 This report draws upon two existing LCA's to form an additional layer in the spatial hierarchy of assessments for the area. This first was undertaken at national/regional level – 'Countryside Character Map of England' (http://www.countryscape.org/port_ca_map.htm) and second at regional/local level – 'SCOSPA – the Standing Conference of South Pennine Authorities – studies on the South Pennines'. **(1)** An example of the relationship between the different levels is shown below:

National and regional scale – to identify broad differences in landscape character across the whole of a country or region.
District scale – to identify landscape character at the county, district or unitary authority level in England, or at the council area level in Scotland.
Local scale – to describe the landscape character of smaller areas: an individual parish, perhaps, or a large farm estate, a country park or a proposed development site.
Assessments at different scales should fit seamlessly together to work at one level (e.g. regional), framing the detailed local assessments or amplifying the national framework above.

The Countryside Agency's Character of England

3.3 The former Countryside Agency's countryside character was concerned with the whole of England's countryside at national level and was intended to:

- Raise awareness of the diversity of countryside character we enjoy;
- Increase understanding of what contributes to that character and what may influence it in the future; and
- Encourage everyone to respect the character of the countryside and take account of it in everything that they do.

3.4 The Countryside Character Map of England provides a national context for more detailed assessments by local authorities and others. It provides the wider framework for securing the natural and historical heritage of our countryside for which more detailed assessments can establish further characterisations and make judgements leading to outputs such as environmental enhancement proposals, landscape strategies and guidelines. This LCA is just such a study.

3.5 Oldham's own study area lies within the wider national level character areas of:

- No. 36 Southern Pennines (this draws together the South Pennine Heritage Area and West Pennine Moors)
- No. 54 Manchester Pennine Fringe

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1   SCOSPA is now the South Pennines Rural Regeneration Company, known as 'Pennine Prospects'.

South Pennines Landscape Assessment

3.6   This assessment, supported by the Countryside Agency and the Heritage Lottery Fund, provides a classification of 11 main landscape types to represent the variation in landscape character across the South Pennine landscape. The assessment represents one of three integrated reports commissioned by SCOSPA, the others being 'Landscape Guidelines' and 'Countryside Design Summary'.

3.7   The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Understand how and why the landscape of the South Pennines has evolved;
- Classify and describe the landscape of the South Pennines;
- Identify factors that have influenced landscape change during the 20th century and to indicate forces for, and the direction of, change in the future;
- Provide the starting point for fuller assessment of the environmental qualities of the South Pennines;
- Promote an appreciation of landscape issues within the South Pennines; and
- Guide and influence those responsible for developing policies for the South Pennines, in particular by providing the basis for the development of an 'Integrated Management Strategy' for the area and support for future bids for capital and revenue funding.

3.8   Some areas contained within the South Pennines Landscape Assessment are developed further in this LCA to provide more character detail at a regional/local level. The areas this study expands upon include:

- Character Area A1- South Pennine Moors (within county level Landscape Type A – High Moorland Plateaux)
- Character Area D6 – Delph/Littleborough Moor Fringe (within county level Landscape Type D – Moorland Fringe / Upland Pasture)
- Character Area F7 – Tame Valley (Denshaw, Delph, Uppermill) (within county level Landscape Type F – Settled Valleys)

3.9   However, the South Pennines Landscape Assessment does not cover the whole of the borough's Green Belt area that is identified within this Landscape Character Assessment.

Oldham Landscape Character Assessment

3.10 This final level of Landscape Character Assessment provides detailed identification and analysis of landscape character at district level. It goes on to identify local level landscape character types and sets a principle landscape objective for each.

3.11 This document is seen as a reference tool to assist development control officers and those responsible for the management of the borough's Green Belt in recognising its important characteristics and how to work with them.

4 Evolution of Oldham's Landscape

4.1 The landscape of Oldham and the South Pennines is a product of a complex interaction between human influences and environmental responses. Its special character can be attributed to the mixture of landscapes generated through the industrial revolution combined with the 'prehistoric landscapes' still to be found on the upland areas. With very little separation between them, these landscapes present a unique and visually contrasting representation of Oldham's landscape evolution.

Natural Evolution

4.2 Oldham is dominated by the South Pennine ridge landscape. This distinctive ridge landform stretches from Derbyshire to the Scottish border and creates an enduring backdrop and feature for a large part of northern England. This landscape is characterised by a high moorland plateau, forming a series of ridges with gently rounded summits rising to above 500 metres incised by a network of river valleys and streams.

4.3 The solid millstone grit geology has been acted on by the forces of weathering and by rivers and ice, which has created a characteristic stepped profile with interlocking ridges and terraces on the moors. In some places shales have eroded so rapidly as to leave hard gritstone edges protruding along the side of hills.

4.4 The Pennine fringe area has been carved partly from the millstone grit and partly from the overlying of coal measures all of which dip sharply off the high ground and beneath the Manchester plain. Glacial drift geology is extensive only on the lower ground.

4.5 Post glacial climate change, along with the clearance of upland forests, promoted the natural development of peat. Today, the deep blanket bogs of the South Pennine summits form a habitat of international importance and are an important archaeological resource.

4.6 The dominance of millstone grit series has shaped the whole South Pennine landscape. The rock has been mined and quarried for centuries and is the principal building material in these upland areas.

4.7 The South Pennines landscape is of high nature conservation value and is described in the Natural Area profile for the Southern Pennine Natural Area 14. The natural area profile also highlights notable species and habitats, which have been identified as being of conservation concern by the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This provides the basis for local action plans to ensure their conservation and future survival.

4.8 At a local level Oldham Council has identified priority species and habitats through its own Biodiversity Action Plan system, which are listed below.

Biodiversity Action Plan Mammals
- Badger
- Bats
- Brown Hare
- Otter
- Water Vole

Biodiversity Action Plan Birds

- Bullfinch
- Lapwing
- Linnet
- Reed Bunting
- Skylark
- Song Thrush
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Tree Sparrow
- Grey Partridge

Biodiversity Action Plan Amphibians
- Great Crested Newt

Biodiversity Action Plan Plants
- Floating Water Plantain

Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats
- Hedgerows
- Ponds

4.9 The importance of the South Pennine Moors for biodiversity is also highlighted by the large amount of land which is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA). The South Pennines SPA, which extends beyond the borough's boundaries, covers approximately 21,000 hectares and is internationally important for breeding populations of merlin, peregrine, short-eared owl and golden plover as well as migratory birds such as curlew, lapwing, dunlin and snipe. The South Pennine Moors is also designated a Special Area for Conservation (SAC). These are European level designations which afford these areas the highest level of protection.

4.10 In addition, covering a large area of the South Pennines outside the SPA, numerous sites are designated at national and local level (SSSI's – Sites of Special Scientific Interest and SBI's – Sites of Biological Importance). These important semi-natural habitat types include:

Upland: Mosaic of upland habitats supporting heather Moorland, acidic grassland and blanket bog.

'In Bye' Land: Enclosed land forming the transition between the urban areas and the high moorland, critically important for some of the birds listed in SPA designation and the borough's BAP.

Woodland: Steep sided valleys and ravines (cloughs) support ancient and semi-ancient woodland, typically Oak and Rowan, which in turn support valuable flora and fauna.

Waterbodies and Wetland: The Southern Pennines are a valuable water catchment area with a large number of reservoirs throughout the region. Rivers, streams, canals and mill ponds all provide valuable aquatic and marginal flora and fauna habitats.

4.11 The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of human impact on the borough's landscapes. For a more detailed account refer to the SCOSPA 'South Pennines Landscape Assessment'.

Man-made Evolution

4.12 The early clearance of trees from the upland areas during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods (10,000 BC – 1750 BC) created the conditions for peat bogs, which started to develop some 7,000 years ago when the climate deteriorated. These internationally important habitats contain much information about the changing climate and environment from the time of their formation.

4.13 By the Bronze Age (1750 BC – 700BC) the moorland was largely settled and farmed land. Technological advances in tools increased productivity and woodland clearance accelerated; demand for land increased and land division and field systems were introduced. The fragile upland soils could not sustain such intensive land-use and this, in addition to a period of unstable weather, resulted in the land becoming unworkable. Once abandoned the upland zones converted to seasonal grazing and have been used in this way ever since. This land-use maintained the appearance of low shrubby heather and grass moor cover, which is still typical today.

4.14 The iron age (700 BC – AD 43) had relatively little impact on the moorland landscape. Enclosed and defended settlements became more common but the exposed treeless uplands were infertile and unsuitable for settlement so the settlers concentrated on the hillsides and undertook further woodland clearance.

4.15 The Romano-British Period (43-460) established a substantial military presence in the Northwest, with the hub of activity around the moorland fringes and lowland areas. Many Roman roads still exist throughout the study area.

4.16 With the collapse of the Roman Empire there followed a long period of political change (the Early Medieval Period 460-1066) and it is uncertain how human and natural resources were organised but there is evidence to suggest Anglian and Saxon farmers began extending woodland clearings and of Celtic farm systems.

4.17 During the Medieval period (1066-1540) the agricultural economy expanded dramatically. Hunting areas known as 'forests' were established by the king and higher aristocracy and included large cattle ranches. Outside the forests hillside farmsteads multiplied and communal farming on marginal land increased. Manorial water-powered corn mills became an important part of the medieval economy.

4.18 Changes in farming practice and the fragmentation of farmholdings resulted in diversification for many smaller farmsteads and textile production grew to become the second element in a dual economy. Coal and lime extraction also become important exports for the area and this, along with the expanding textile industry, increased the importance and number of packhorse trails.

4.19 Many of these trails now serve as Long Distance Routes/National Trails providing a valuable recreation resource linking the upland moors with the lower valleys. Some of the packhorse trails followed Roman routes, others struck out for new destinations. A number of these former important routes still exist in the borough's rural landscape. They should be mapped, assessed and where possible afforded additional protection from inappropriate development.

4.20 The latter part of the Medieval period saw the dual economy flourish, requiring new areas for cultivation and new buildings for the fledgling textile industry. Formal enclosure grew rapidly and new areas of pasture emerged on the open grazed moors.

4.21 The invention of powered spinning machines heralded the start of the Industrial Revolution (1770 – 1900) and the massive expansion of hand-loom weaving. Large specialised buildings emerged, sometimes on the site of existing corn mills, along with expansive settlements of terraced properties and service buildings. This period also saw the construction of canals in the borough including the Rochdale Canal, Huddersfield Narrow Canal and Hollinwood and Fairbottom Branch Canals. The industrial period has left a noteable and frequently townscape style in the Pennines and is one of the enduring landmarks of the Industrial Revolution.

4.22 The period following the 1900's witnessed an initial expansion of the textile industry followed by a decline during the inter-war years. During the 50's and 60's the economic base moved away from the Pennines to the cities at the periphery. Pylons and reservoirs became more commonplace in the Pennine landscape. As former growth areas became derelict the scars of industrial progression became apparent, with quarries and mining areas, blackened buildings and despoiled natural habitats a common feature. However, since this time these areas have been successfully colonised by new plant and animal communities.

4.23 The late 1980's onwards has seen moves towards regenerating the economy and environment of this valuable South Pennine Landscape. The significance of the area has been strengthened by the designation of an SPA (Special Protection Area) on the moorland areas and several national and regional landscape designations dispersed throughout the area. Further detail on the main forces for change acting on the borough's Green Belt area is contained in Chapter 6.

4.24 Of particular note are the two areas of Green Belt to the north and south of Oldham; these are titled Chadderton Rolling Hills and the Medlock Mixed Valley respectively in the forthcoming chapter.

4.25 Set at a lower elevation than the surrounding moorland they have benefitted from greater shelter and calmer local climate conditions. Their underlying coal measure geology has also provided more fertile, sustainable soils. The end result is the opportunity for more intensive farming including beef cattle and small dairy herds grazing on the better pasture.

4.26 By modern standards the agricultural areas do not lend themselves to large-scale arable or cereal production. Added to this is the pressure of being 'urban fringe' when landowners frequently experience trespass, vandalism and petty crime. Landowners have diversified to keep their land profitable with storage, transport and horse grazing as typical examples. The end result is that in places the rural characters of these areas is reduced.

4.27 The future for the rural area of the borough is one of vulnerability, requiring careful development control and one of opportunity, whereby the assets of the natural and cultural landscape are capitalised upon through well planned and managed improvements. Achieving this balance will be crucial in securing the effective renaissance of the area so that the landscape is secured for future generations.

5 Landscape Character Areas and Types Within Oldham

5.1 The borough's unique and distinctive landscape character is attributed to a complex interaction of natural and man made influences. The evolution of these two factors has created a landscape of contrasts; characterised by rolling farmland, remote upland pastures, industrial settled valleys and wild moorlands.

Map 2: Landscape Character Areas within Oldham
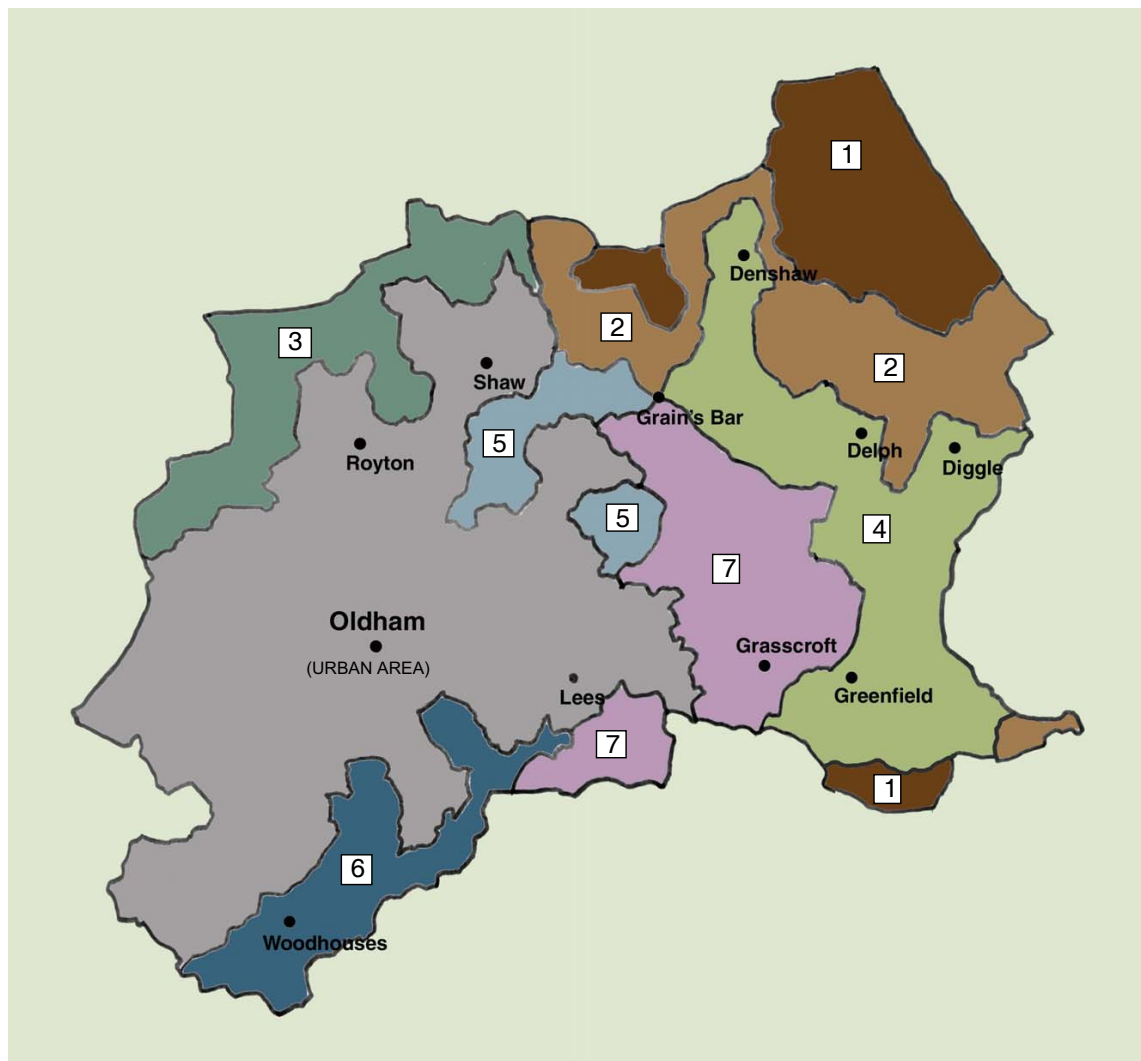
1. South Pennine Moors   5. Beal Defined Valleys

2. Moorland Fringe   6. Medlock Mixed Valley

3. Chadderton Rolling Hills   7. Wharmton Undulating Uplands

4. Tame Settled Valley

5.2 Seven landscape character areas have been devised to represent the variations in character. Each of the wider landscape character areas has been further sub-divided into separate landscape character types. These discrete geographical types possess common characteristics with the areas but have a distinct and recognisable local identity.

5.3 It should be remembered that there are subtle differences between and within the individual landscape areas and types. The boundaries illustrated, often indicate a gradual transition line rather than marked change on the ground.

5.4 The landscape character assessment of the borough, as described in the following pages, provides information on the special character, distinctiveness and qualities of the different landscape areas.

Peak District National Park Landscape Character Assessment

5.5 The Peak District National Park Authority has also undertaken a Landscape Character Assessment for the Peak District National Park. This is part of ongoing work to develop a landscape strategy and new planning policies. The map below shows the landscape areas that have been identified by the Peak Park Authority for that part of their assessment that relates to this borough.

Map 3: Peak Park Landscape Character Areas
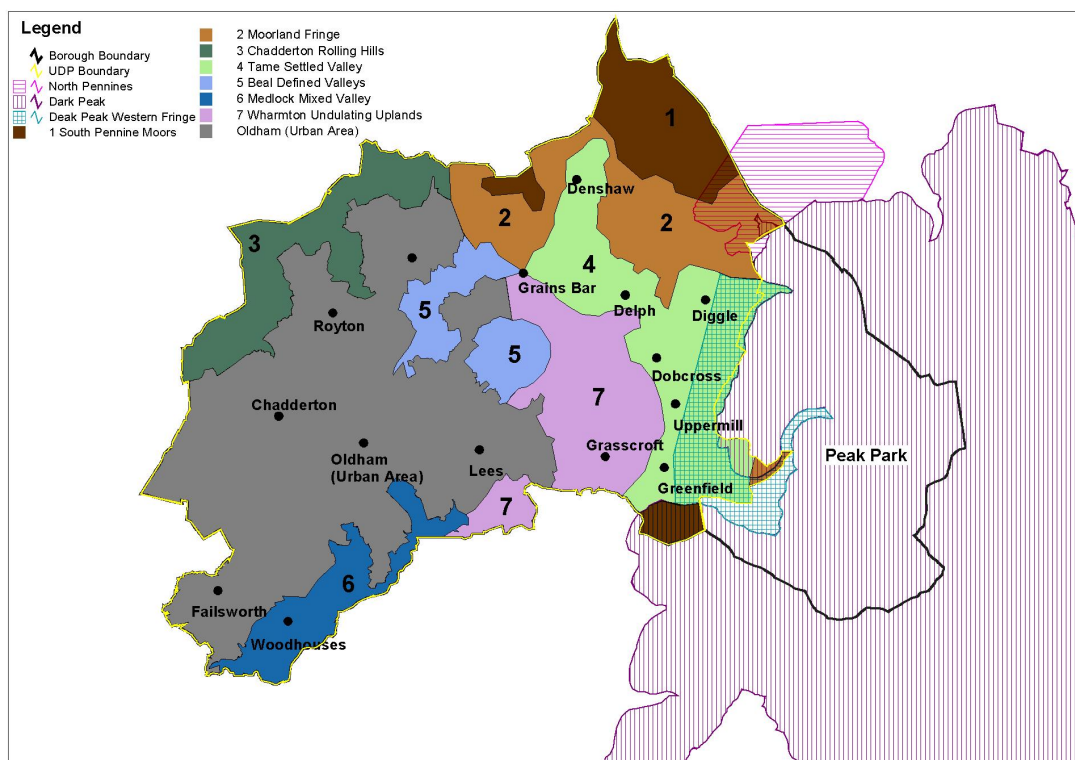
5.6 Oldham Council and the Peak District National Park Authority are working together to make sure that the landscape character areas each Authority assigns to Saddleworth are complementary with each other.

Words Relating to Landscape Character

5.7 We reproduce below important definitions from the former Countryside Agency's 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines for England and Scotland' regarding words used to describe landscape character.

Character - A distinct recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.

Characteristics - Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to distinctive character.

Elements - Individual components which make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.

Features - Particular prominent or eye catching elements like tree clumps,church towers, or wooded skylines.

Characterisation - The process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character.

Area 1 South Pennine Moors
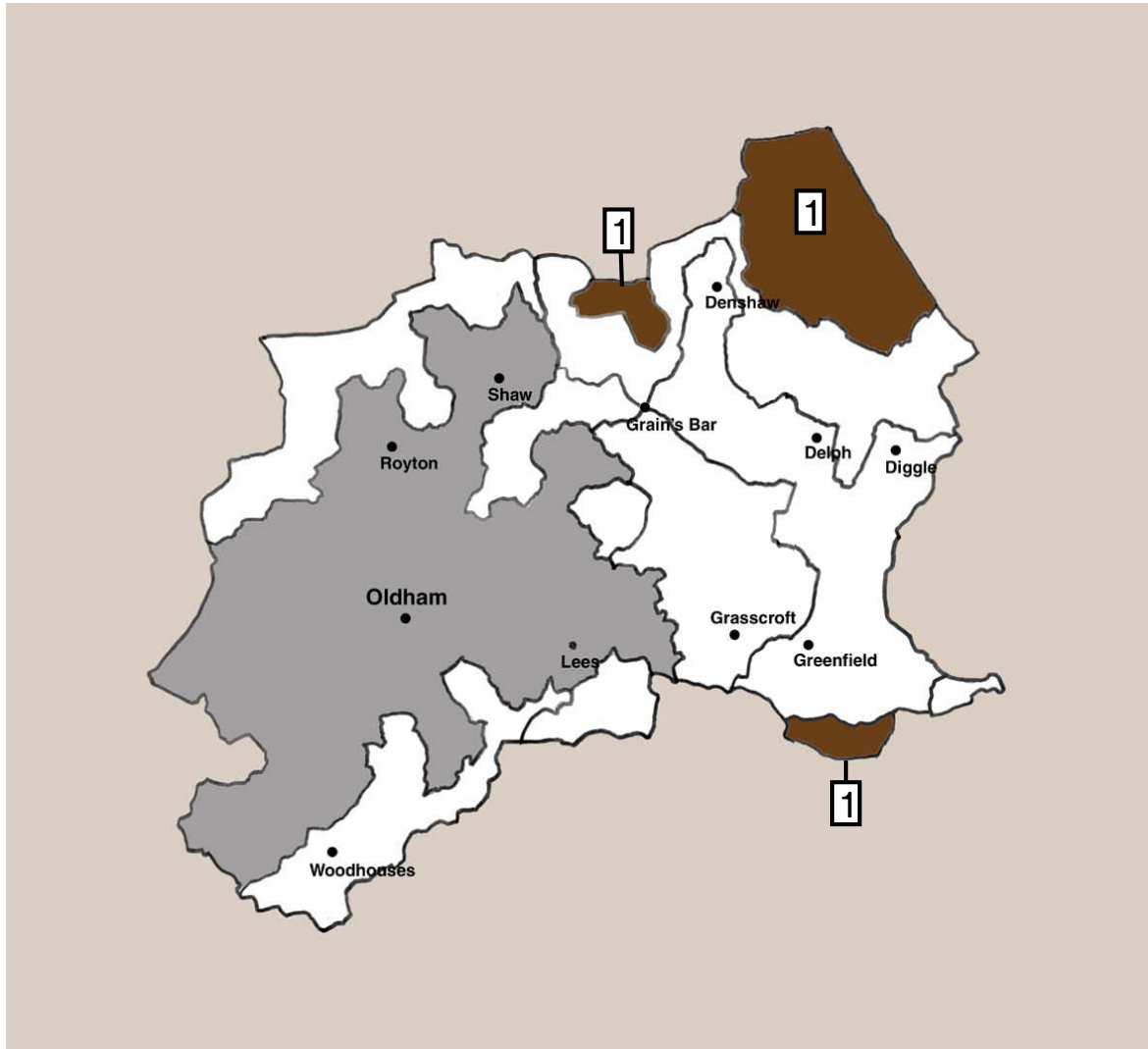
(Note: parts of this area fall within the Peak District Dark Peak and North Pennines character areas - see map 3)

Overview

5.8   The high moorland plateau forms the heart and core of the South Pennines landscape. It is an exposed and remote upland landscape, very sparsely settled with only occasional isolated farmhouses. Distinctive physical features include the characteristic stepped topography of interlocking terraces and edges. The moorland is rich in history, culture and wildlife. The mosaic of upland habitats including heather moorland, blanket bog, acid grassland and wet and dry heathland are of great importance for key bird species as reflected in the designation of the South Pennine Moors Special Protection Area (SPA). There is also good survival of prehistoric sites and the moorland landscapes represent a valuable resource for further archaeological research into the early stages of human exploitation of the Pennine area.

Key Landscape Characteristics

- A perception of remoteness, isolation and wildness.
- Sense of high ground and being within an upland area.
- Mosaic of upland habitats, including bog, heathland, grassland.
- Lack of trees within the scene.
- Lack of buildings.
- Important ancient landscape that appears unchanged.
- Lack of other built structures like roads or walls.
- Extensive views over rolling moorland.
- Distinctive landform of terraces and gritstone edges.
- High geological interest including exposed geological strata, at natural and quarried locations.
- Muted colours with subtle colour changes.
- Clean, sweeping skylines.
- Reservoirs within some valley headlands.
- Open views to the changing sky colours and patterns.
- Modern landscape elements like pylons or transmitters are highly visible.
- Small streams and brooks.
- Public path network.

Geology & Landform

5.9   The moorland plateau is underlain by rocks of the Millstone Grit series, comprising hard sandstones interleaved with softer shales. Hard layers of gritstone extend across the plateau forming high, rugged moorland scenery. The rocks outcrop as distinctive tors and rock stacks. The landform rolls in a series of high ridges intersected by valleys, typically at an altitude of between 300 - 500m above sea level. It is a large scale sweeping landform with an open character and expansive views. The characteristic stepped profile and terraced landform of plateau and interlocking escarpments are a distinctive feature of the moorland landscape.

Nature Conservation

5.10 The designation of the South Pennine Moors Special Protection Area (SPA) and the South Pennine Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) recognises the value of the moorland plateau for nature conservation. The SSSI recognises the value of the upland species, habitats and geology, with SPA status recognising its international importance for upland bird species. Acid grassland, despite a low species diversity, is valuable for its invertebrate species, which in turn support a range of important bird species. The South Pennine Moors also benefit from Special Area for Conservation, or SAC, designation.

Vegetation & Soils

5.11 Heather moorland is present, although some has been lost to grassland due to management changes; what remains is of European importance due to its national rarity. Acid grassland, although typically low in species diversity, is valuable for nature conservation. The transitional grass communities to fen, along with valley mires and wet heath are also present. Soils are a largely neglected study and have been significantly altered by humans over the last few thousand years. Soils are thin and

acidic due to the areas high rainfall. In boggy areas peat has formed. Peat wetlands can act as an important carbon store and their role in addressing climate change is increasingly being recognised.

Perceptual

5.12 The sweeping dynamic of this landscape and the lack of built form creates a remote, vacant feel. Buildings that do occur are isolated and sometimes abandoned and along with the disrepair of many stone walls suggests a rough uncared for environment. The large expanses of reservoir water, provide a pleasant setting for walkers and a highlight to the muted moorland character.

Land Use & Settlement

5.13 Much of the moorland area has traditionally been managed for grouse shooting, although this land use has declined in recent years. The demands of rough grazing, water and power supply, recreation, and mineral extraction have all left their imprint on the wider landscape, which has affected the sense of remoteness and isolation. The upland moorland contains some isolated rugged farmhouses, mostly abandoned, which cling to the steep hillsides and are a reminder of past farming endeavour. Rough grazing is the primary farming/settlement practice in the area with climate limiting the range of agricultural use.

Patterns & Features

**5.14** The land has largely been used for rough grazing, which has maintained the characteristic appearance and vegetation cover. Field enclosures, where present, are broad and expansive with remnants of dry stone walls. The vast waterbodies associated with the dams and reservoirs break the rolling high moorland pattern and help to visually identify lower areas.

Historic Features

5.15 The good survival of prehistoric remains, including carved rocks, ancient field systems and trackways, cairns and barrows on the high open moorland plateau contributes to its current landscape character. Peat is likely to have started to develop as early as 5,000BC. The blanket bogs are therefore an extremely important resource containing a wealth of environmental and archaeological data.

Type 1a Unenclosed Moorland Plateau

Map 5: Type 1a - Unenclosed Moorland Plateau
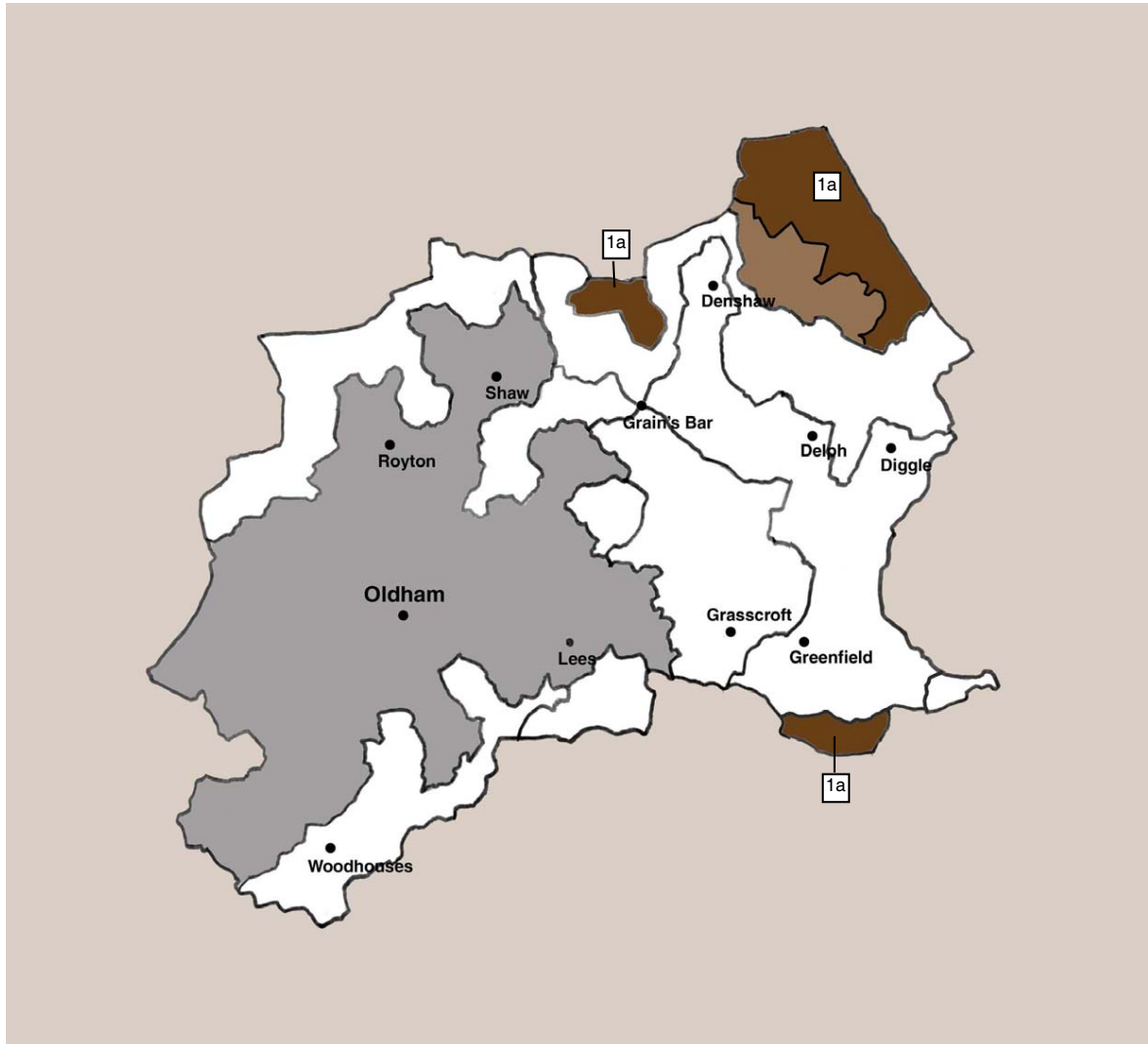
Key Features

- A strong perception of remoteness, isolation and wildness provided by the altitude, absence of trees and settlement.
- Unenclosed, expansive views with few obvious features to give the viewer scale.
- Important archaeological landscape with much prehistoric interest. The blanket bog is a significant archaeological and palaeoenvironmental resource.
- Strong cultural associations - powerful influence and inspiration for poets and writers, including the Bronte Sisters, Ted Hughes, and local poet Ammon Wrigley among others.
- Distinctive landform of terraces and gritstone edges reflecting the underlying geology and process of weathering.
- High geological interest at natural and quarried locations.
- Absence of settlement with only isolated dwellings and abandoned farmsteads.
- Lack of boundaries or enclosures such as walls, hedges and fences.

- Infrequent roads and footpaths are generally the only man-made feature on view.
- Strategic recreational routes including the Pennine Way, Oldham Way and Pennine Bridleway.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.16 To conserve the open moorland character and its special sense of remoteness, isolation and wildness.

Type 1b Valley Headlands

Map 6: Type 1b - Valley Headlands
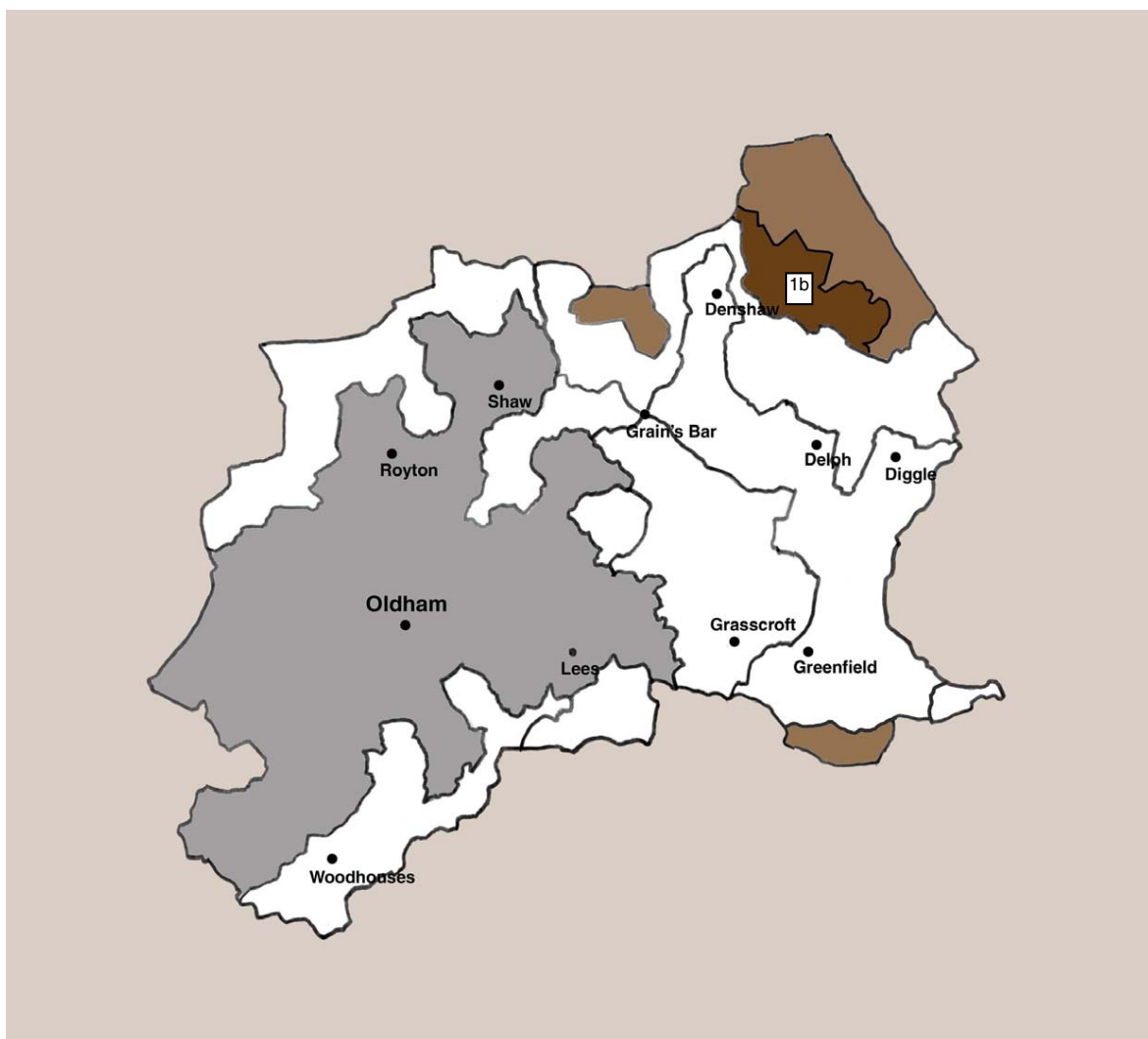
Key Features

- A general perception of remoteness, isolation and wildness provided by the altitude, absence of trees and settlement plus elevated views.
- Increased feeling of enclosure when compared to the un-enclosed moorland plateau.
- Reservoirs dominate some headlands presenting a broad flat landscape feature with a succession of weirs feeding down from the moorland valleys.
- Slight dip in landform often forming basins.

- Presence of some engineering features associated with reservoirs including dams, bridges, weirs and control buildings.
- Some grit stone walling although there are many signs of neglect and abandonment following former land use.
- Infrequent recreational activities - associated around reservoirs - trekking and bird watching.
- Very occasional broadleaf tree stands in sheltered cloughs or planted on boundaries.
- General absence of settlement with only occasional isolated dwellings, and abandoned farmsteads.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.17 To conserve the upland moorland character, with its remote, wild character and ensure current, or future, recreational use of the reservoirs does not have a negative impact on the landscape.

Area 2 Moorland Fringe

Map 7: Moorland Fringe
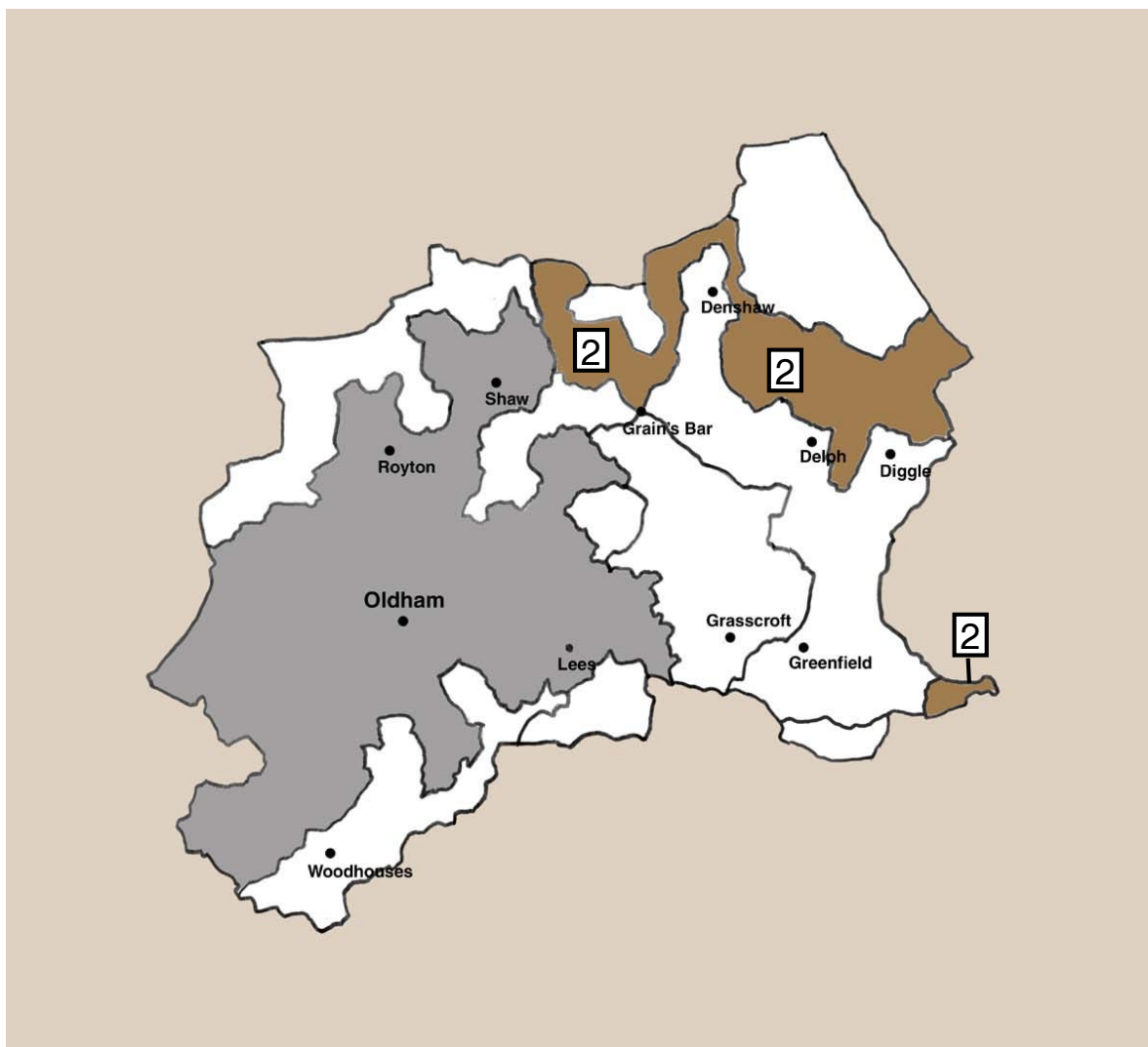
(Note: parts of this area fall within the Peak District Dark Peak, Dark Peak Western Fringe and North Pennines character areas - see map 3)

Overview

5.18 This upland area in the south of the South Pennines Area adjoins the high moorland of Chelburn Moor and Close Moss, and slopes steeply down towards Oldham, providing long views from the high ground. Scattered farmhouses are concentrated on the moorland edge, with fields predominantly under improved grassland and used for sheep grazing and silage, although some are unmanaged and are becoming rushy. Pockets of unenclosed moorland survive as, at Crompton Moor, where a heather cover has been restored. There are isolated fragments of unimproved damp/marshy pasture throughout the area. Large rectangular fields are defined by stone walls, although many are in a state of disrepair and post and wire fencing is also common. Reservoirs are a notable feature at the junction with the unenclosed high moorland, and often occur in association with notable conifer planting. Farming is typically marginal and horse paddocks and some makeshift farm buildings associated with diversification, are evident.

Key Landscape Characteristics

- Open landscape character created by altitude and panoramic views.
- Semi-improved grassland provides broad sweeping green land cover.
- Distinctive vernacular architecture using millstone grit building stone.
- A characteristic patchwork of small irregular and larger rectangular fields.
- A dense network of gritstone walls forming field enclosures.
- Post and wire fencing also common along roads and footpaths.
- Remnants of unimproved upland pastures.
- Numerous paved packhorse routes linking with an extensive Public Rights of Way network.
- Dispersed settlement pattern comprising scattered farmsteads and occasional short terraces of houses.
- Dispersed vegetation cover consisting of broadleaf trees and shrubs.
- Frequent long views across the valleys and out over the urban conurbation.
- Telecommunication network apparent in the vast majority of area.
- Open skylines with no visual obstructions.

Geology & Landform

5.19 The moorland fringes are almost entirely underlain by rocks of the Millstone Grit series. This landscape type occupies the high land fringing the main moorland blocks, typically at an altitude of between 250 and 300 metres above sea level. The land at about 300 metres forms the transition to the open moorland. It includes the 'internal' terraces that occur above the main valleys cutting through the South Pennines, such as River Tame headlands, as well as the slope to either side of the main upland ridge.

Nature Conservation

5.20 The remaining unimproved upland pastures are extremely valuable for nature conservation and, with the moorland, form an intimate part of the rich mosaic of upland habitats. Where parts of the land are still undrained, moisture-loving plants thrive. The acidic grasslands of the upland pastures are critically important for the survival of

several important bird species of the Special Protection Area. The hay meadows are valuable for twite while the wet rushy pastures provide soft ground for birds such as curlew, redshank, lapwing and snipe. Changes in farming practice including increased drainage and use of chemical fertilisers mean that both damp pastures and hay meadows are now rare.

Vegetation & Soils

5.21 The drier meadows, which have traditionally been managed to produce a summer hay crop, support characteristic plants including lady's mantle, sneezewort and adder's-tongue. The damp pastures of the undrained in-bye land can provide a colourful display of yellow iris, pink ragged robin, purple marsh thistle and self heal. Trees and woodlands are limited to a few areas where the heads of the valley cloughs penetrate the upland and occasional clumps of sycamore around the farmsteads. The gentler more sheltered slopes and broad terraces above the valleys have a thicker covering of soils compared to the moorland summits.

Perceptual

5.22 The Moorland Fringe is a landscape in transition and as such has a complex patchwork of enclosure and landuse. The varied landform and variation in colour and texture is stimulating and at times challenging to the eye. The area is fairly accessible offering wider panoramic views that feel safer than the higher moorland areas.

Land Use & Settlement

5.23 The land remains almost entirely grazed pasture. Most farms also have rights for summer grazing on the open moorland which forms an integral part of the hill farming system. The lower gentler slopes comprise older enclosures distinguished by their small size and irregular pattern. Today, the main farming type is sheep and cattle with some dairying. The wide level shelf above the valleys and below the moorland summits provided an important area for early settlement and farming. In addition small settlements comprising a short terrace of houses often in the middle of open countryside are a distinctive feature of the lower slopes.

Patterns & Features

5.24 The 'upland' landscape, created by its altitude, long views and dispersed settlement presents a patchwork character of upland pasture. The pattern is typified by small irregular fields and larger rectangular fields represented by later phases of moorland enclosure. The patterns are very strong and are defined by stone walls. They are an intrinsic part of this landscape character.

Historic Features

5.25 The majority of the hillside farmhouses are built of gritstone and follow vernacular South Pennine building styles. The distinctive 'laithe houses' are a special feature of the hillsides. These are part house, sometimes including a weaving workshop,and part laithe (a barn providing stalls for cattle and a hayloft). The laithes can be recognised by their large arched doors built to allow access for a loaded haycart. The terraces may include a line of weavers cottages sometimes distinguished by their long windows designed to increase light levels for weaving.

Type 2a Remote Moorland Fringe

Map 8: Type 2a - Remote Moorland Fringe
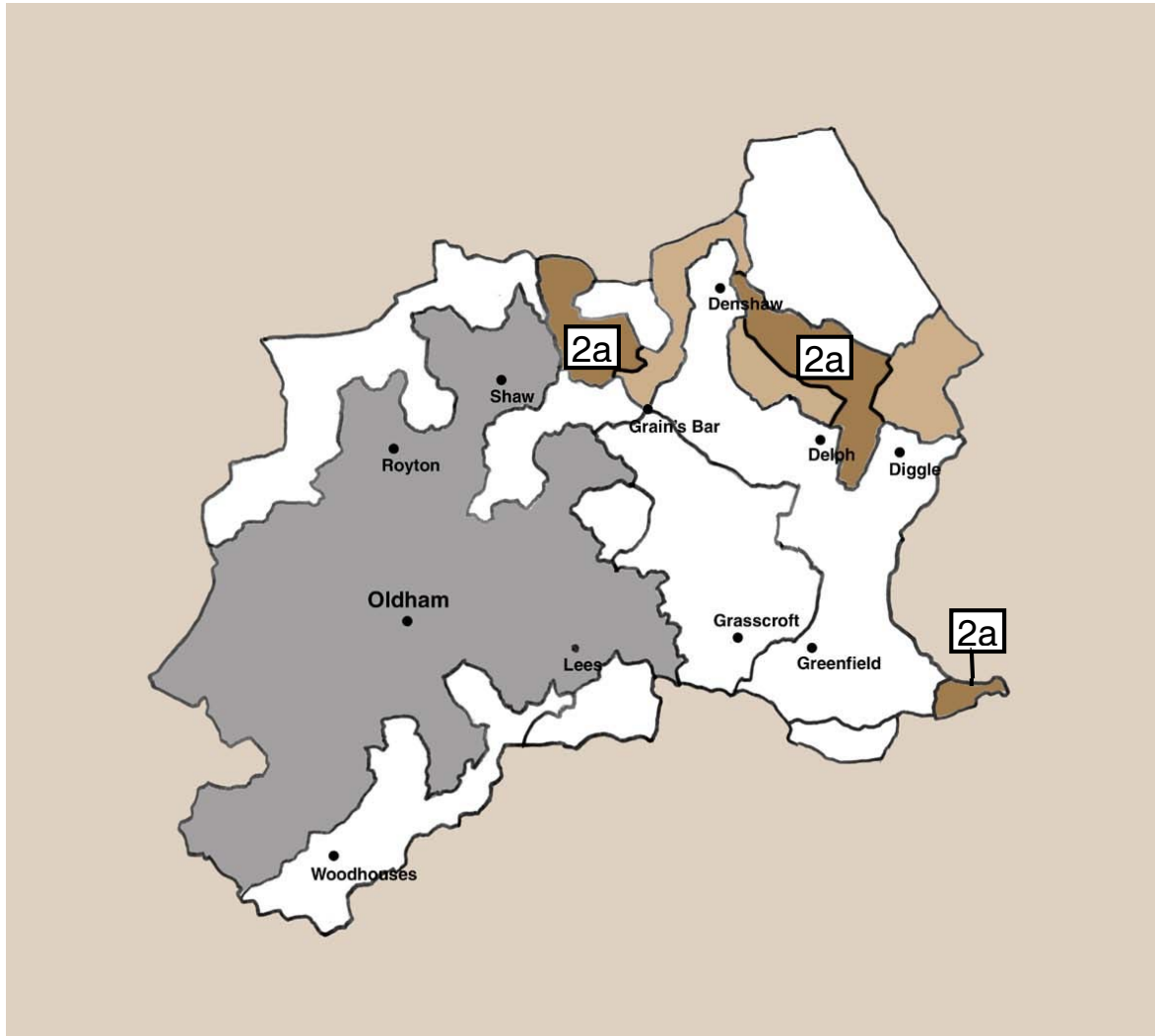
Key features

- Open, 'upland' landscape character created by the altitude, absence of trees and long views, often with a sense of remoteness and isolation.
- A characteristic patchwork of upland pastures including small irregular fields and larger rectangular fields representing a later phase of parliamentary moorland enclosure.
- A dense network of gritstone walls that are highly visible on the sloping hillside, creates the field enclosures. The stone walls provide shelter and habitat for wildlife and are also of considerable historical/cultural interest.
- Remnants of unimproved upland pastures including colourful species-rich hay meadows and damp pastures are an integral part of the mosaic of upland habitats and are of great importance for nature conservation.
- A network of narrow winding lanes is scattered throughout the area, often bound by gritstone walls with no grass verges or road kerbs.

- Remnants of sunken lanes exist that provide a unique landscape form of significant historical/cultural interest and create a contrasting intimate scale to the more open surrounding landscape.
- Frequent long views across the intersecting valleys and/or out over the urban conurbation that adjoins this part of the South Pennines uplands.
- Scattered disused quarries throughout the area have been reclaimed as informal recreational or incidental wildlife areas, providing varied naturalised landscapes and resources. e.g. Top o' th' Green quarry at Shore Edge.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.26 To retain and strengthen the transitional 'upland' landscape character of the Moorland fringe, which acts as an important backdrop to the settlements of Oldham borough.

Type 2b Settled Moorland Fringe

Map 9: Type 2b- Settled Moorland Fringe
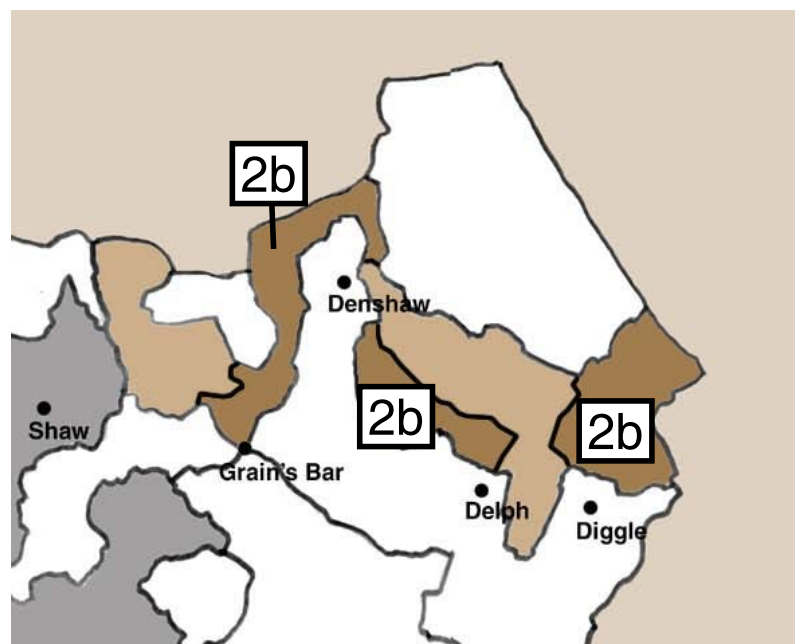
Key Features

- Open, 'upland' landscape character created by the altitude, long views and relative absence of trees.
- Dispersed settlement pattern consisting of scattered farmsteads (sometimes in fairly close proximity) and occasional short terraces of houses.
- A characteristic patchwork of upland pastures including small irregular fields and larger rectangular fields representing a later phase of parliamentary moorland enclosure.
- A dense network of gritstone walls and occasional post and wire fencing creates the field enclosures. The stone walls provide shelter and habitat for wildlife and are also of considerable historical/cultural interest.
- Remnants of unimproved upland pastures including colourful species-rich hay meadows and damp pastures are an integral part of the mosaic of upland habitats and are of great importance for nature conservation.

- A network of narrow winding lanes connects the dispersed farmsteads and settlements. Many lanes consist of gritstone walls with no grass verges. An absence of street lights and other urban road elements contribute to the rural feeling.
- Distinctive vernacular architecture typified by millstone grit building stone.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.27 To maintain the distinction between the Settled Moorland Fringes and the more sheltered valleys that cut into the moors.

Area 3 Chadderton Rolling Hills

Map 10: Chadderton Rolling Hills
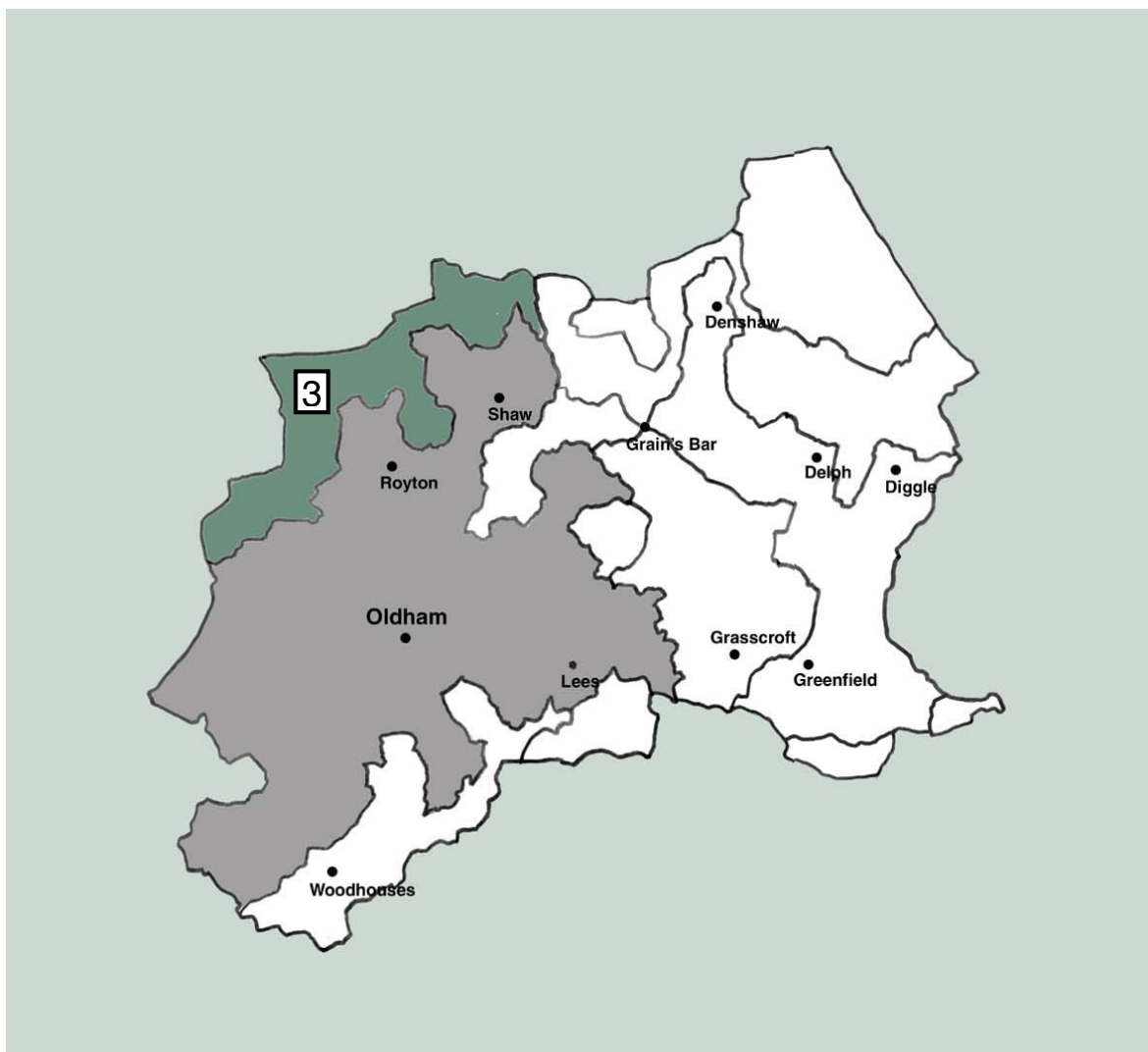
Overview

5.28 This marginal hillside wraps around the northern edge of the borough and the townships of Shaw, Royton and Chadderton and represents the surviving strip of Green Belt between the Rochdale and Oldham urban areas. The rolling landscape provides a valuable green buffer to the M62 motorway and affords some fine panoramic views

towards Manchester and beyond. Various stands of established broadleaf woodland are present throughout the area linked by a comprehensive network of footpaths and bridleways. Post and wire fencing is common, with many boundaries incorporating broken hedgerows and established clumps of hedgerow trees. The presence of transportation corridors, power lines and pylons dominates in the west around Chadderton Fold. Land use is primarily livestock farming, however several pockets of housing are present.

Key Landscape Characteristics

- Rolling landscape character accentuated in parts by large field plots.
- A predominance of post and rail fencing.
- Small blocks of established broadleaf woodland.
- Tandle Hill Country Park.
- Numerous footpaths and bridleways cross the area.
- Pockets of rural settlement and victorian terraces populate the primary highway routes.
- A broken network of hedgerows and clumps of hedgerow trees.
- Wide panoramic views over Greater Manchester and the M62 motorway.
- Power lines and communication masts dominate the skyline in the western corner.
- Five Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) designated within the area.
- Lush green semi-improved grassland dominates.

Geology & Landform

5.29 The Chadderton Rolling Hills are almost entirely underlain by sandstone. A short strip of Gritstone/Sandstone occupies the area between Whitfield Hall and Garside to the north east. This rolling landscape type occupies the altitude between 100 and 250 metres above sea level. The landform, accentuated by large field enclosure and subtle boundary treatment, appears 'wave like' in places with only small clumps of trees and hedgerows providing any natural definition. Other areas present a sweeping hillside landscape, sparsely vegetated.

Nature Conservation

5.30 Established clumps of hedgerow and hedgerow trees provide valuable local habitats and wildlife corridors. The more extensive areas of woodland, in particular Tandle Hill Country Park, are important habitats as are the many fields of species rich grassland. Several disused reservoirs exist that offer valuable species rich habitats. Five Sites of Biological Importance exist within this landscape character area.

Vegetation & soils

5.31 The landscape is broadly dominated by semi-improved grassland associated with stock rearing and rough grazing. Established clumps of hawthorn and beech hedgerows line field boundaries and highways, many incorporating mature stands of broadleaf trees. Localised clumps of deciduous woodland are dispersed throughout the area. Tandle Hill Country Park (a beech dominant woodland) offers a more diverse range of species and contains areas of restored heathland and species rich grassland.

Perceptual

5.32 The Chadderton Rolling Hills have a serene calming quality created by its undulating fields with few strong defining boundaries. The area culminates in Tandle Hill Country Park and this makes the area feel safe and populated even though many areas have little activity. The area provides commanding views all around the Oldham district and beyond which is attractive and inspiring. The high number of footpaths, along with the country park landscape, form an attractive visitor destination.

Land Use & Settlement

5.33 The land is predominantly improved grassland including horse pasture. The Chadderton Hills are well populated by small groupings of farmhouses and larger village settlements at Chadderton Fold and Low Crompton. The scattered farmhouses often include a range of modern outbuildings. The area is well furnished by public footpaths culminating in the country park landscape at Tandle Hill. Around Chadderton Fold low lying rough grazing and marshland surround the Rochdale Canal and an elevated rail embankment. Diversification of farming is apparent with uses such as haulage and riding schools present.

Patterns & Features

5.34 The landscape pattern is particularly muted in this area with a dominance of semi-improved grassland throughout. Blocks of established woodland and hedgerow plantations provide some highlight with power lines and communications dominating the skyline in the west. Dry stone walls provide some pattern and definition but many are in a poor state of repair.

Historic Features

5.35 Tandle Hill War Memorial commemorates the first and second world wars. The stone monument located at the peak of Tandle Hill commands wide and distant views over the surrounding landscape and is clearly visible from the M62 and A627 highway.

Type 3a Rolling Pasture Land

Map 11: Type 3a - Rolling Pasture Land
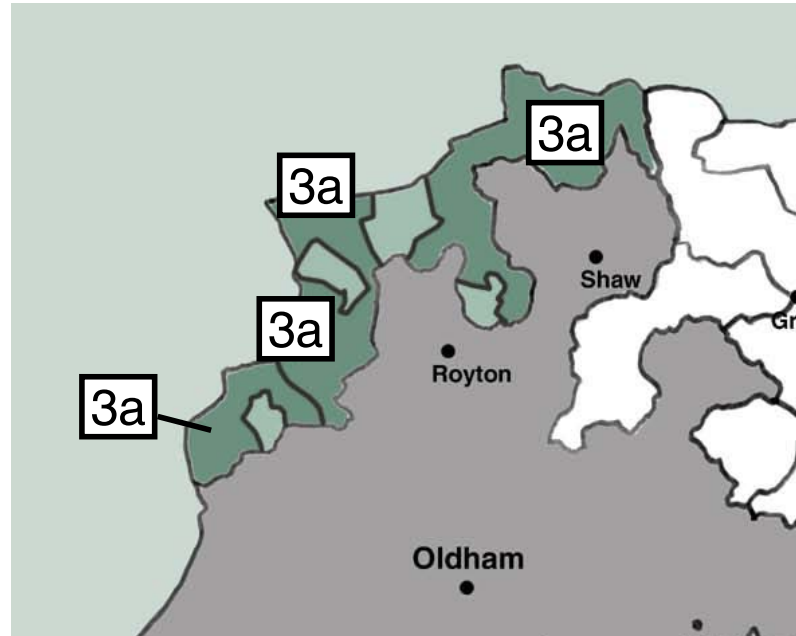
Key Landscape Features

- Rolling pastoral landscape character accentuated in parts by large field plots and variety in landform.
- A predominance of post and rail fencing creates a loose undefined landscape character.
- Some dry stone walling present, but there is evidence that these boundaries are not being repaired or maintained.
- Small blocks of established broadleaf woodland exist and are possible remnants surviving the industrial revolution.
- Numerous footpaths and bridleways scattered across the area, some long distance routes, that link up with an extensive Public Rights of Way network.
- Evidence of farm diversification with the conversion of many agricultural buildings to accomodate haulage and riding schools use.
- A broken network of hedgerows and clumps of hedgerow trees are present throughout the area situated along field boundaries and footpaths/bridleways.
- Wide panoramic views over the urban conurbation of Greater Manchester to the south west and the M62 to the north.
- Power lines and communication masts dominate the skyline in the western corner of this landscape type.
- Historic trans-pennine communication routes of rail and canal provide important cultural associations.
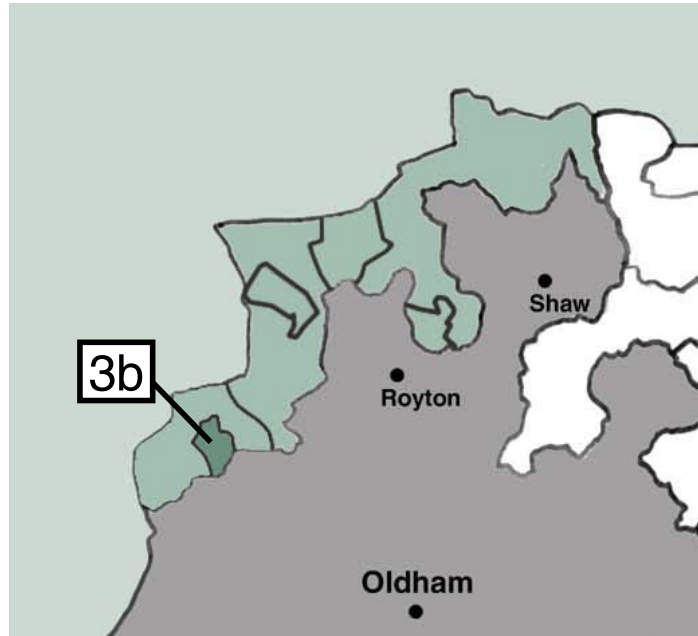
Principal Landscape Objective

5.36 To retain and strengthen the distinctive rolling landscape character surrounding the northern edge of the borough. The area acts as an important separation zone between the urban boundaries of Oldham and Rochdale.

Type 3b Rural Settlement

Map 12: Type 3b - Rural Settlement

Key Landscape Features

- A distinct but sheltered rural settlement on the rising slopes at Chadderton Fold.
- Varied building styles, mainly detached well presented properties, many with established vegetation and tree cover.
- Some gritstone walling associated with private dwellings and road boundaries provides a character more recognisable of the moorland fringe areas.
- Village church and small graveyard in secluded wooded grounds on border of Healds Green.
- Noticable character shift from settlement pattern typical of Chadderton area which is typically urban fringe.
- Dispersed settlement pattern comprising scattered farmsteads (sometimes in fairly close proximity) and occasional short terraces of houses.
- Close associations with the River Irk and Chadderton Hall Park which collectively form a valuable leisure resource that also links up with the recently improved Rochdale Canal.
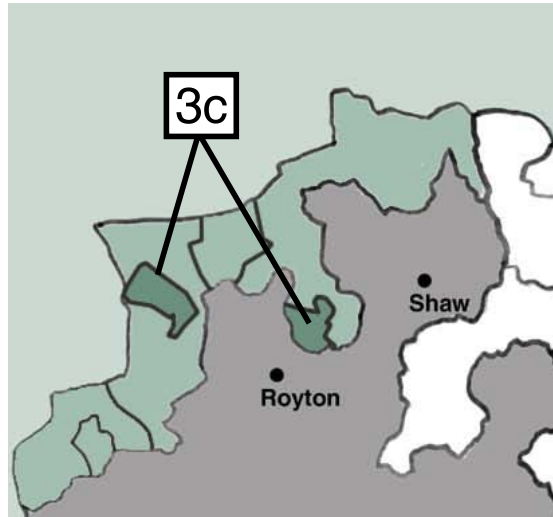
Principal Landscape Objective

5.37 To conserve the distinct character associated with Chadderton Fold, Healds Green and Chadderton Heights through sensitive planning control and environmental improvements that conserve and enhance the visual amenity.

Type 3c Recreational Land

**Map 13: Type 3c - Recreational Land**

Key Landscape Features

- Crompton and Royton Golf Club situated between the residential districts of Royton and Shaw.
- Highly maintained amenity grassland of golf landscape on varied and rolling typography.
- Tandle Hill Country Park - a mixture of beech dominant woodland, restored heathland and species rich grassland, with a wide panorama of the surrounding countryside. There are several walks around the park and links to Crompton Moor. Cafe in the Visitor Centre.
- Stone war memorial commemorating local service men and women killed in the the first and second world wars, prominant on peak of Tandle Hill and visible across wide area of surrounding landscape.
- Well established deciduous shelterbelt to golf course including small pockets of structure planting provide definition to greens.
- Site of Special Biological Importance (SBI) present at Tandle Hill Country Park.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.38 To promote the amenity value of Tandle Hill Country Park, to conserve and manage its SBI status and to provide environmental improvements that benefit the quality and facilities of the park for visitors. To promote effective screening and new planting for Crompton and Royton Golf Club whilst retaining its rolling landscape character.

Area 4 Tame Settled Valley

Map 14: Tame Settled Valley
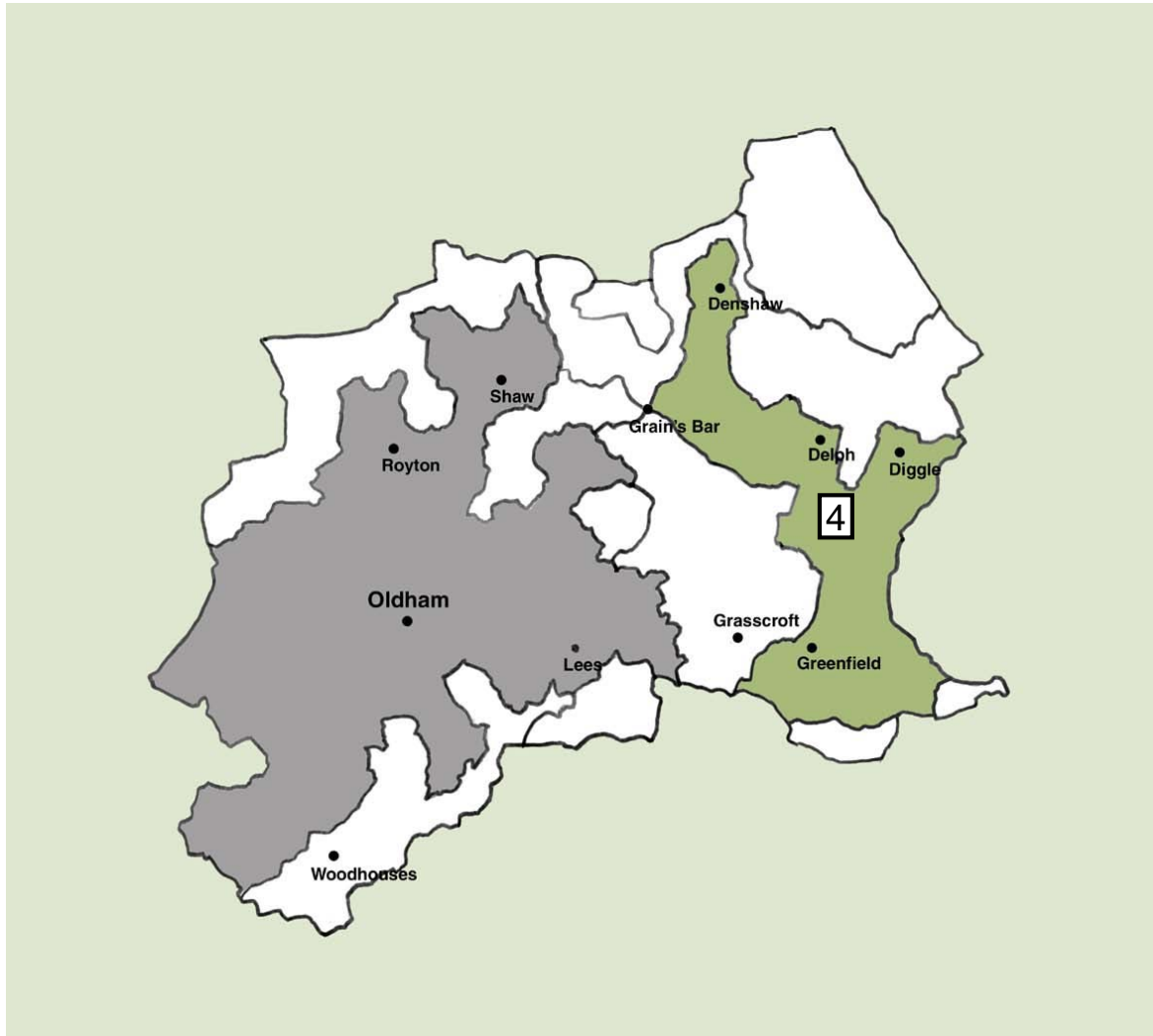
(Note: parts of this area fall within the Peak District Dark Peak and Dark Peak Western Fringe character areas - see map 3)

Overview

5.39 The Tame Valley bisects the higher ground of the adjacent undulating uplands and moorland fringe. The bottom of this deeply incised narrow valley contains areas of improved pasture and a series of settlements that originated during the early industrial age to serve the area's textile mills. These mills and their chimneys remain a distinctive hallmark of the South Pennines landscape. The settlements are characterised by tall gritstone terraces of weavers' cottages to the valley sides whilst the railway, canal and roads line the narrow valley floor. A sense of enclosure within the valley is reinforced by broadleaved woodlands that cling to the valley slopes and fill the side cloughs. The upper slopes of the valley are characterised by a patchwork of in-bye pastures enclosed by a distinctive field pattern of gritstone walls leading to the moorland fringe.

Key Landscape Characteristics

- Deep incised valley with steps and terraces and deep sided cloughs.
- Sense of enclosure provided by the steep-sided profile.
- Broadleaved woodland on the valley sides and in the side cloughs.
- Characteristic industrial settlement pattern.
- The settlements have views out to the woodland and pastures of the valley sides.
- Distinctive vernacular architecture of mills, and terraces of weaver's cottages.
- River Tame and Huddersfield Narrow Canal.
- Valley wetland habitats including fens and wet pastures.
- Wealth of historical and archaeological interest.
- Gritstone walls form a distinctive and highly visible field pattern.
- Pockets of new development in the vernacular style.
- Strong visual reference to historical industrial landuse.

Geology & Landform

5.40 The alternating geological layers of hard sandstone and softer shales have been cut by the swiftly flowing rivers to form a stepped valley profile. To the upper slopes, where the valley is at its steepest, sheer faces of the underlying rocks are exposed to create a dramatic feature. Elsewhere the sides are mantled with a thin soil cover. Alluvium and peat deposits are confined to a narrow belt along the open valley floor. The valley sides typically extend to a height of around 300m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) (height relative to the average sea level) above the narrow valley bottom.

Nature Conservation

5.41 Many of the woodlands that survive on the steep slopes of the valley sides are of ancient origin and represent a rich natural resource. They include alder and ash woods on the base-rich soils of the valley floors grading through to lowland oakwoods and upland oakwoods on the upper valley sides. The secluded woodland habitats are important for a number of birds including redstarts, pied flycatcher, sparrowhawk and goshawk. The in-bye pastures which are interspersed with the woods along the valley sides also provide feeding areas for upland bird species. On the valley floor the river and the canal provide an important green link and with the reduction in industrial pollution provide valuable freshwater habitat.

Vegetation & soils

5.42 The typical vegetation of the valley consists of alder and ash woodland to the valley floor grading to oak woodland on the valley sides. The thick canopy of alder, rowan, ash, birch and oak shelters a shrub layer of goat willow, grey willow and guelder rose and a carpet of woodland herbs including bluebells, wood sorrel and marsh hawks-beard, while the moist, shady stream sides support a variety of ferns and horsetails. Remnant areas of wetland habitat, including areas of fen and permanently soaked ground, survive alongside the water courses.

Perceptual

5.43 There are two distinct sets of perceptive feelings in this area. If viewed from higher up the valley sides there is a sense of attractive order, looking down upon the tightly packed developments within the valley bottom set against the distinct valley side and

moorland beyond. The combination and stark contrast of built form to the upland landscape beyond could be discordant but it is not as the main settlements appear nestled, safely and snugly in the valley bottom. If experienced from the valley bottom and especially from within the built settlements there is a great sense of intimacy and enclosure given by both the buildings and the steep valley sides.

Land Use & Settlement

5.44 The upper valley sides are characterised by moorland fringe grazing whilst the lower gentler slopes are characterised by a patchwork of pasture fields enclosed by stone walls interspersed with areas of broadleaved woodland. This farmland has traditionally been used as in-bye land for winter grazing. Settlements, transport links and associated industry are confined to the narrow valley floor. Settlements are constrained by the topography and have a tight-knit urban centre dominated by large textile mill buildings to the open valley bottom with terraces of cottages climbing the lower valley sides.

Patterns & Features

5.45 The pattern of the area is defined by the shape of the valley. Settlements are constrained to the open valley bottom giving way to pasture fields and areas of broadleaved woodland on the lower slopes that in turn give way to moorland fringe on the upper valley sides. The large textile mills and chimneys are significant landscape features in the lower valleys.

Historic Features

5.46 The settled valley is a legacy of the early industrial revolution based upon the textile industry. The settlements include the early communications infrastructure of the railways and canals and the very distinctive vernacular architecture of the textile industry. The landscape generated by the process of industrialisation is one of the most significant features of the South Pennines.

Type 4a Rural Valley Sides

Map 15: Type 4a - Rural Valley Sides
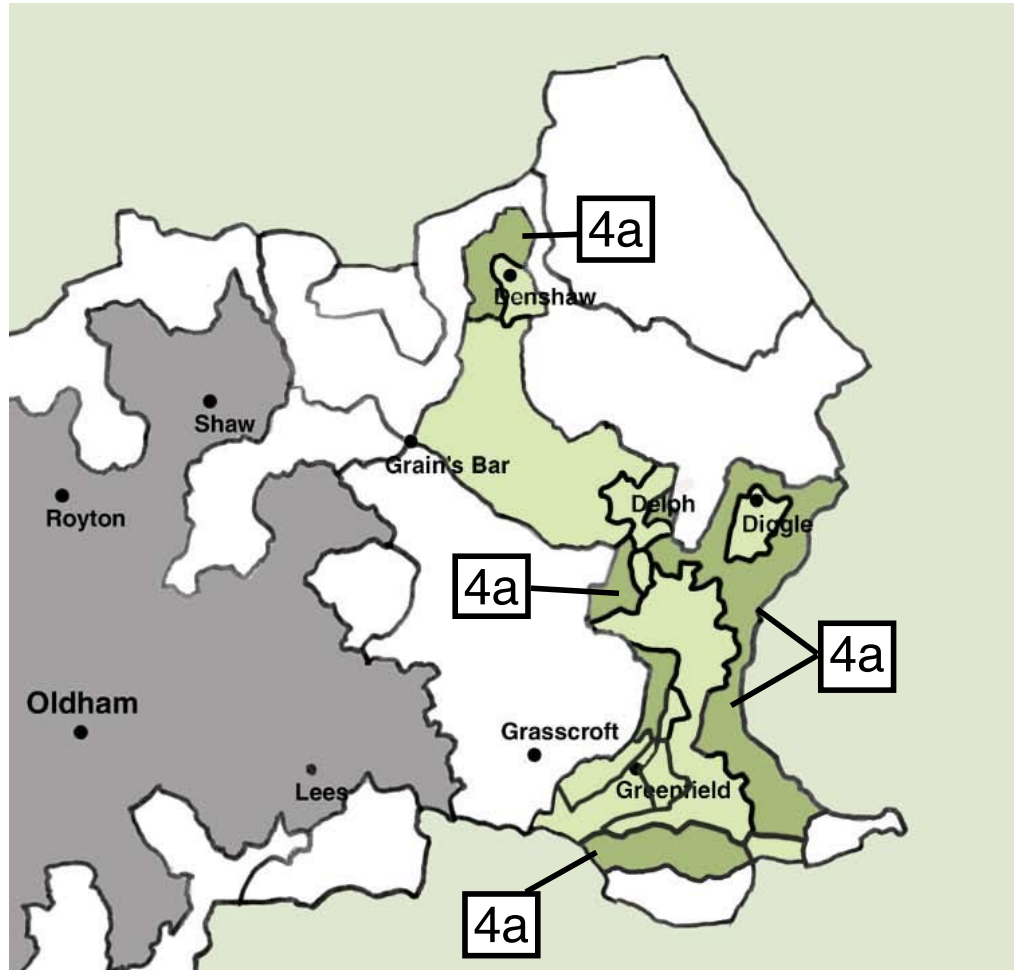
Key Features

- Steep valley sides with steps and terraces and deep sided cloughs reflecting the underlying geology and weathering process.
- A characteristic patchwork of in-bye pastures and hay meadows on the valley sides form an important element of the rich habitat mosaic.
- Broadleaved woodland, much of ancient origin, on the valley sides and in the side cloughs supporting important fern, bryophyte and bird species.
- Improved upland in-bye pastures including colourful species-rich hay meadows and damp pastures that are of great importance for nature conservation.
- Coniferous woodland blocks of regular shape and colour reducing the natural landscape character in parts.
- Out-bye pasture and moorland fringe to the upper slopes forming a visible and distinct boundary to the settled valley by enclosing the viewline from the valley floor. Where the upper slopes are at their steepest sheer faces of the underlying rocks exist and create a dramatic feature.
- Gritstone walls create a distinctive field pattern that is highly visible on the sloping valley sides. The stone walls provide shelter and habitat for wildlife, and are also of considerable historical/cultural interest.

- A network of narrow lanes connecting farms and the settlements. Stone walls without grass verges often form the lane boundaries.
- Frequent long views out over the urban settlements that nestle within the valley bottom.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.47 Conserve the characteristic landscape of woodlands and in-bye pastures on the steep hillsides in order to preserve the enclosed character of the valley.

Type 4b Urban Settlement

Map 16: Type 4b - Urban Settlement
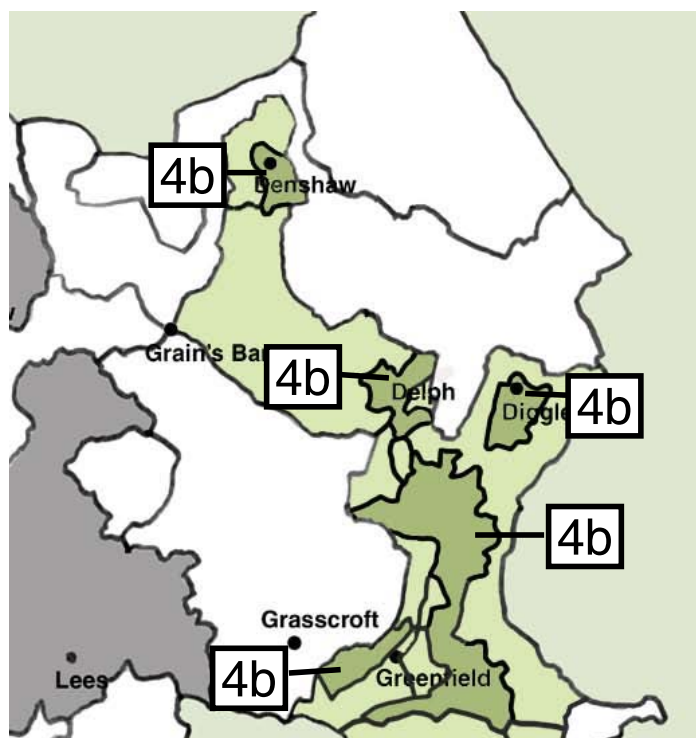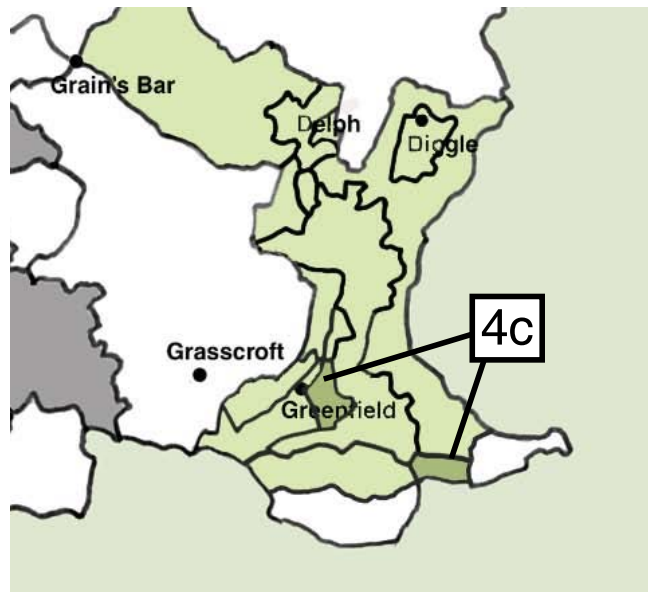

Key Features

- Characteristic linear pattern of urban settlement constrained by topography to the valley floor and the lower south facing slopes.
- Tight-knit urban centres dominated by large textile mill buildings that are a legacy of the settlements' origins based upon the textile industry of the early industrial revolution.
- Distinctive vernacular architecture based around textile mill buildings and terraces of weavers' cottages providing evidence of the important role of this area's industrial history.
- Rural views out to the woodland, pastures and the moorland fringe of the steep valley sides from between buildings providing a contrast of visual character.
- Sense of enclosure provided by the steep-sided valley profile, the closely spaced buildings and the presence of woodland on the valley sides.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.48 To preserve the characteristic linear settlement pattern within the narrow valley bottom.

Type 4c Industrial Valley Bottom

Map 17: Type 4c – Industrial Valley Bottom

Key Features

- Characteristic linear pattern of urban settlement on the valley floor and the lower south facing slopes. The mills in Greenfield typically represent the industrial origin of the Tame Valley settlements with industry located in the flat valley bottom and worker's terraces formed on the lower slopes above.
- Distinctive vernacular architecture of former industrial buildings including mills, chimneys and packhorse bridges providing evidence of the important role of these valleys in the area's industrial history.
- Transport system constrained within the valley bottom. This includes trunk roads, rail network and canal systems all of historical importance.
- Frequent contrasting views out to the woodland, pastures and the moorland fringe of the steep valley sides.
- Sense of enclosure provided by the steep-sided valley profile, the tightly developed buildings and the presence of woodland on the valley sides.
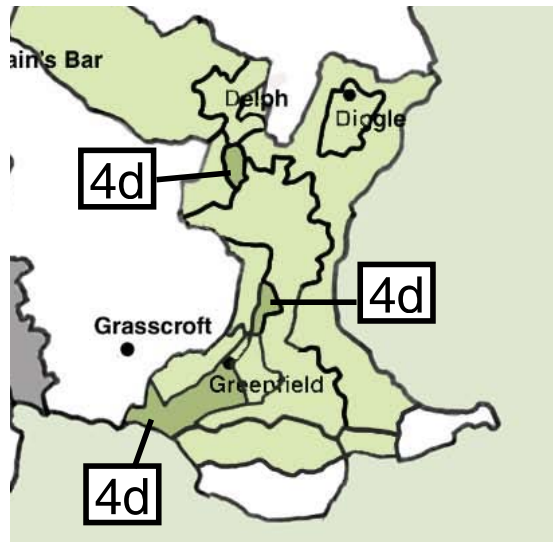
Principal Landscape Objective

5.49 To preserve the characteristic linear settlement pattern with its industrial heritage, along the narrow valley bottom.

Type 4d Open Valley Bottom

Key Features

- Areas of informal recreation confined to a narrow belt along the open valley floor.
- The River Tame and Huddersfield Narrow Canal create a green corridor through the valley bottom and a valuable recreational resource as well as important wetland habitats.
- Gritstone walls form the boundaries to the field patterns.
- Transport system constrained within the valley bottom. This includes the area's main road and rail network and the canal system.
- Valley wetland habitats including fens and wet pastures.
- Frequent long views out to the woodland, pastures and the moorland fringe of the steep valley sides.
- Sense of enclosure provided by the steep-sided profile and the presence of woodland on the valley sides.
- Four Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) designated to recognise important habitats for plants and animals.
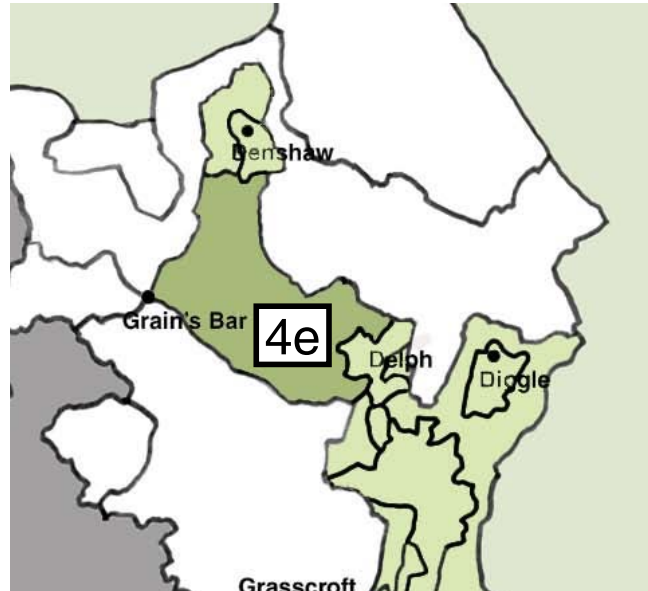
Principal Landscape Objective

5.50 To provide areas for informal recreation whilst maintaining open space between the Tame Valley settlements.

Type 4e Farmed Valley

Map 19: Type 4e - Farmed Valley


Key Features

- A characteristic patchwork of upland pastures including small irregular field enclosures.
- Dispersed settlement pattern comprising scattered farmsteads sometimes in fairly close proximity.
- A network of narrow winding lanes connecting the farmsteads and settlements. Stone walls without grass verges often bound the lanes.
- A network of gritstone walls that create the field enclosures. The stone walls provide shelter and habitat for wildlife and are also of considerable historical/cultural interest.
- Valley wetland habitats including fens and wet pastures.
- Frequent long views out over the urban settlements confined within the valley bottom.
- Sense of enclosure provided by the steep-sided profile and the presence of woodland on the valley sides.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.51 Conserve the characteristic landscape of in-bye pastures on the hillsides leading to the upland pastures and moorland fringe.

Area 5 Beal Defined Valleys

Map 20: Beal Defined Valleys
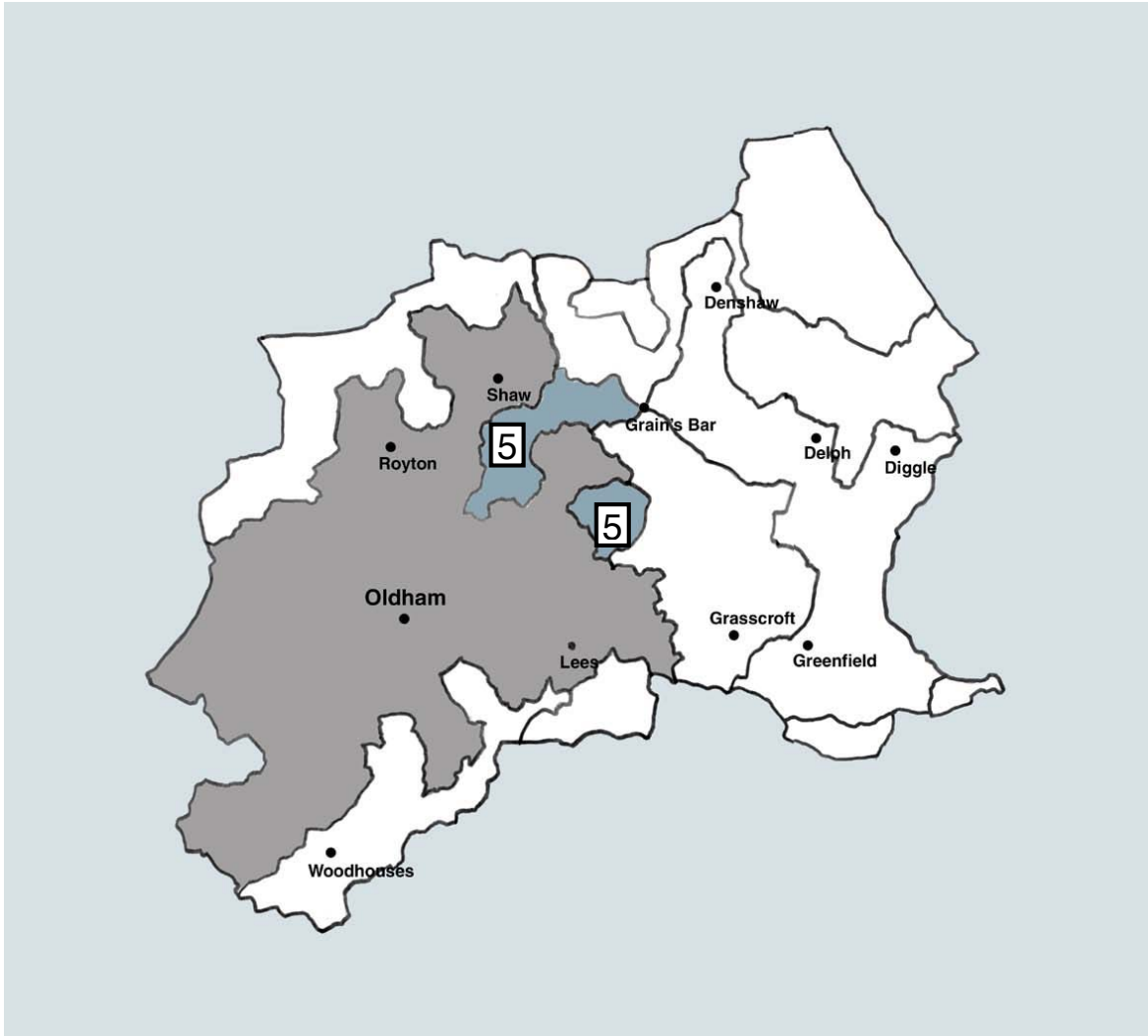
Overview

5.52 This transitional landscape area is flanked by development on high ground overlooking visually defined valleys. This is significantly different from the Settled Valleys where the settlement is in the valley bottom overlooked by open valley sides and ridges. These valleys have mixed land-uses including traditional farm grazing, horse paddocks, haulage yards, landfill sites and countryside park recreation. The River Beal flows through the Beal Valley and is followed by a designated footpath route called the Beal Valley Way. Other footpaths criss-cross the landscape area, some are designated rights of way, and others are desire lines running from the surrounding housing areas at Sholver, Heyside and Shaw. As a contrast a large part of the Beal Valley is subject to great visual upheaval as it has been subject to landfill. This negative landscape feature currently degrades the 'perceived' environmental character of the area but will be returned to a more attractive landscape form after reclamation.

Key Environmental Features

- Rolling topography with hills descending to form defined valleys.
- Marshy, obvious wet ground in parts of valley bottom.
- Traditional farmstead buildings.
- Area overlooked by modern houses on exposed ridges.
- Landmarks break the skyline.
- Windswept feel on higher ground.
- Sheltered within the valleys.
- No dominant boundary style with fences, hedges and drystone walls all present.
- Neglected feel in parts with abandoned buildings, fly tipping and poor field boundaries.
- Few roads cross the area; those that exist are narrow and winding.
- Predominantly improved pasture fields.
- Rural style parkland and planting in Strine Dale.
- General lack of mature tree cover.
- Views to distant hills and over conurbation.

Geology & Landform

5.53 This landscape area, like the majority of the borough, is part of the Millstone Grit series. The ridges of the hillsides have been rounded by glacial action dipping down towards the over deepened valley bottom where the small Beal and upper Medlock run. Tributaries flowed faster to reach the valley bottom rivers, creating the deeper cloughs that are characteristic of the area's landform. Flat terraces exist on some sides of the valleys. The southwest end of the Beal Valley that is subject to landfill at the moment has a disturbed and transient landform.

Vegetation and soils

5.54 The soils vary within these valleys. Higher up the hillsides they are thinner and are used to support rough grazing pasture. Lower down the hillsides, along the river corridors and on the terraces the soils are alluvial based and are thicker in depth. They have generally been improved by agricultural practices and fertilisers and are used for grazing of sheep and cattle. Major tree planting has taken place around the reservoir in Strine Dale to improve its appeal as a recreation destination.

Perceptual

5.55 There is a wide mix of perceptual qualities within this Landscape Area ranging from the remote attractiveness near Birshaw Farm to the unpleasant, unsettling feelings of the landfill site at Broadbent Moss. Repeating qualities include comfortable, busy, pleasant surroundings that contain features of interest to take the viewers. attention. The exception to this feeling is the response to the active land-fill site at the south end of this area that invokes an unpleasant feeling, that the landscape has been spoilt and is generally unlikeable at this moment in time.

Land Use & Settlement

5.56 The land-use ranges from rough grazing on the higher slopes of the valleys, to mixed farming lower down the slopes and along the valley bottom. Scattered farmhouses are situated on the midslopes to avoid the exposed climate of the hilltops and the flood

risk of the valley floor. Some of these farmhouses and outbuildings are now being diversified to storage units, haulage businesses and stables. The distinctly different landfill usage of the south end of the Beal Valley contrasts greatly with the more 'traditionally appearing' rural land-use.
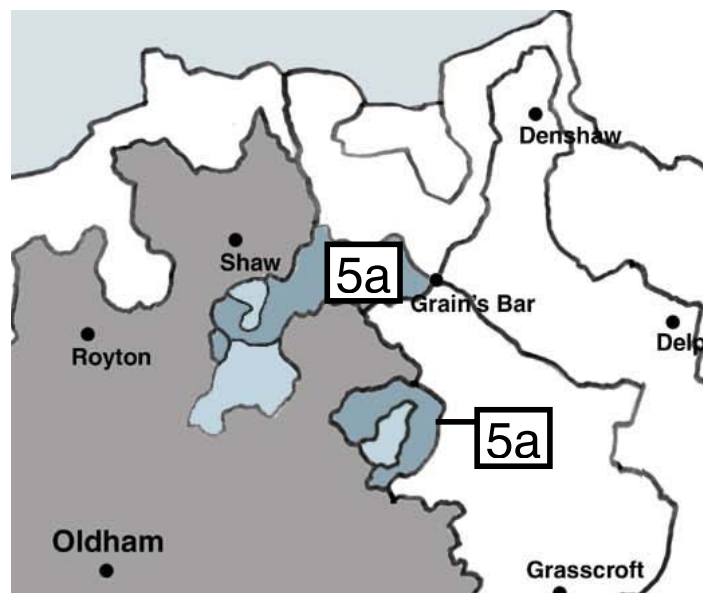
Patterns & Features

5.57 The main pattern within the area is the natural landform of the valley sides descending into the valleys. Supplementing this is the linear pattern formed by development along the ridges overlooking the valleys. Positive features include the square church tower of Sholver Lane that is visible from large parts of the Beal Valley and the reservoir in Strine Dale in the Medlock Valley. Less attractive features are the new housing in Sholver clad in brightly coloured bricks and pale render and the landfill site. The Bullcote Lane - Cop Road route across the valley is very narrow and is used as a traffic rat-run. It is not an attractive feature.

Historic Features

5.58 There are few obvious historic features within either of the valleys that make up this Landscape Area. However the areas are well served by historic footpaths and the Manchester-Rochdale railway runs through the Beal Valley reminding people that it has been used as an historic transport route. Further to the north can be seen the mills of Shaw, again indicating how the valley and the River Beal has been used for industrial production in the past.

Type 5a Farmed Valley Sides

Map 21:Type 5a - Farmed Valley Sides

Key Features

- Improved pasture on well-drained ground gives a generally uniform green colour and texture to the fields.
- Lack of hedges or stonewalls giving no direct sense of field enclosure, and limited field pattern within the views.

- Post and wire-mesh fences are the predominant field boundary in the area.
- Elevated feel to locations giving ability to look across to opposite valley side forming attractive views.
- Landmarks exist on the skyline on the opposite side of the valley as do the vertical presence of transmission pylons.
- Frequently windy exposed locations.
- Patches of individual hawthorn trees creates a dotted pattern on certain fields.
- Occasional mature hedge that creates linear tree breaks and woodland developing on some ungrazed fields.
- Small cloughs formed by seasonal streams flowing straight down valley sides.
- Dotted groupings of substantial farms and outhouses.
- The presence of industrial buildings and warehouses are common on the periphery of the area.
- Large-scale residential settlement is always in view emphasising the close proximity to densely populated areas.
- No obvious road along, or across the valley sides.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.59 To retain the open landscape character of the valley sides and reduce the visual presence of industrial and warehouse buildings within this reasonably attractive scene.

Type 5b Flat Valley Bottom

Map 22: Type 5b - Flat Valley Bottom
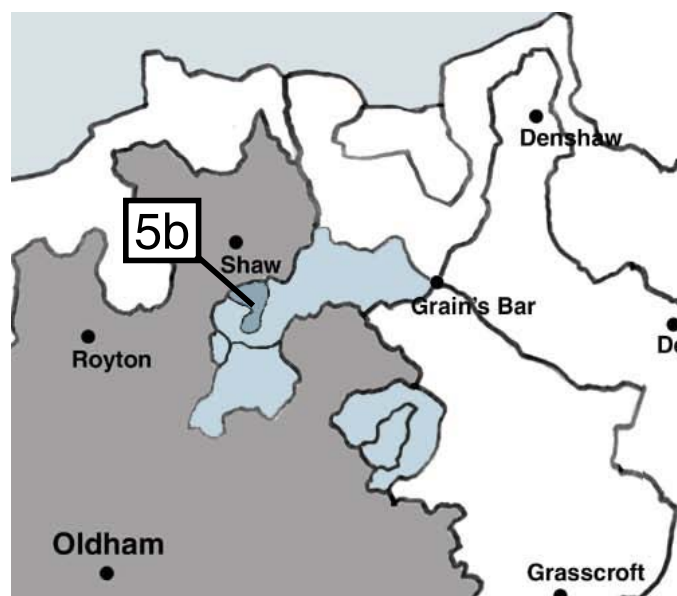
Key Features

- Sudden topographical change between steep sided valley sides and flat valley bottom.
- Different valley cross section to other areas where the two steep valley sides run into each other with little or no valley bottom.
- Marshy ground conditions with water tolerant grass species such as rushes and sedges.

- Small areas of standing water within the fields showing damp ground conditions.
- No walls or hedges with typical field boundary being timber post and wire mesh fences.
- Grass appears to be predominately improved pasture that is likely to be grazed in the summer months when the ground is dry enough.
- More sheltered than the farmed valley sides.
- Dotted individual hawthorn bushes appear in some of the fields.
- More enclosed views than farmed valley sides, typically looking along valley bottom, or up the valley side at shoulders of land or at the tree groups that grow there.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.60 To retain the flat topography and wet ground conditions of this landscape character type so that its distinctive marshy conditions, ecological interest and visual difference are not lost.

Type 5c Landscape in Transition

Map 23: Type 5c - Landscape in Transition
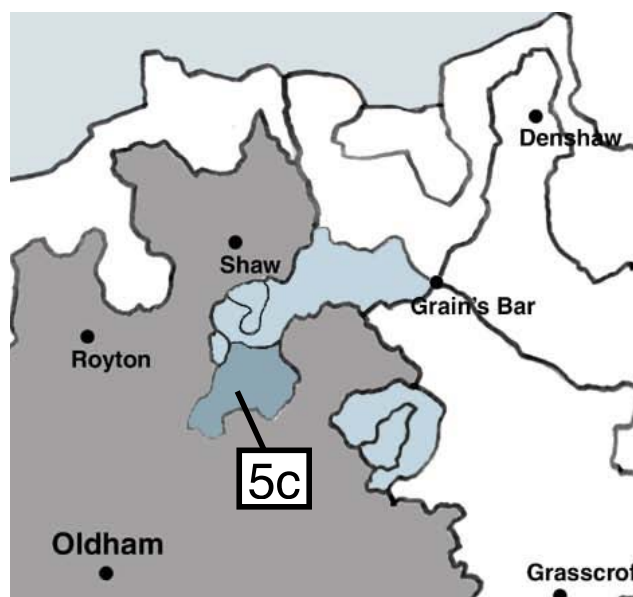
Key Features

- Intensive activity of waste delivery lorries and site machinery moving materials around site and capping the landfill.
- Distinctive disturbed landform of mounds and excavations, particularly when compared to sweeping convex slopes of adjacent farmed valley-side landscape type.
- The lumpy nature of the tip's ground form appears highly artificial.
- No field boundaries, mature trees or regular pattern within scene.
- Bare earth is exposed and landscape appears to be in a state of transition.
- No features of interest or landscape elements to engage and hold the viewer's eye.

- No agricultural production being generated on this land.
- Some areas of predominately hawthorn scrub have developed on areas of the tip that have not been disturbed for a number of years.

Landscape Objective

5.61 To plan for and deliver an attractive remediated landscape that compliments the surrounding landscape and that acts as a recreational resource for nearby communities that overlook the landfill site.

Type 5d Recreational Land

Map 24: Type 5d - Recreational Land
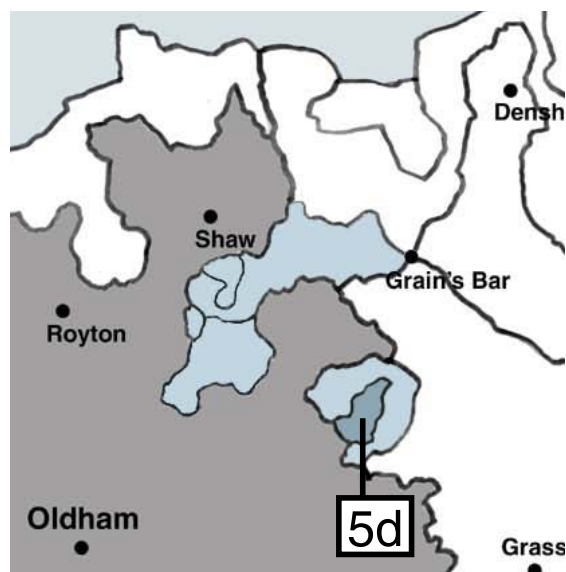
Key Features

- Recreational landscape of Strine Dale that is developing with footpath network and mass tree planting around the lake.
- The visual presence of the lake.
- The developing broadleaf woodland is noticeable due to its general absence from the rest of the valley, especially the grazed valley sides.
- Visitors' cars and access road giving the area the feel of a local visitor destination.
- Feeling of a 'secluded' valley as the access road stops and does not continue up and out of the valley.
- Enclosure by the surrounding valley sides.
- Change in topography around the covered reservoirs above the lake level.
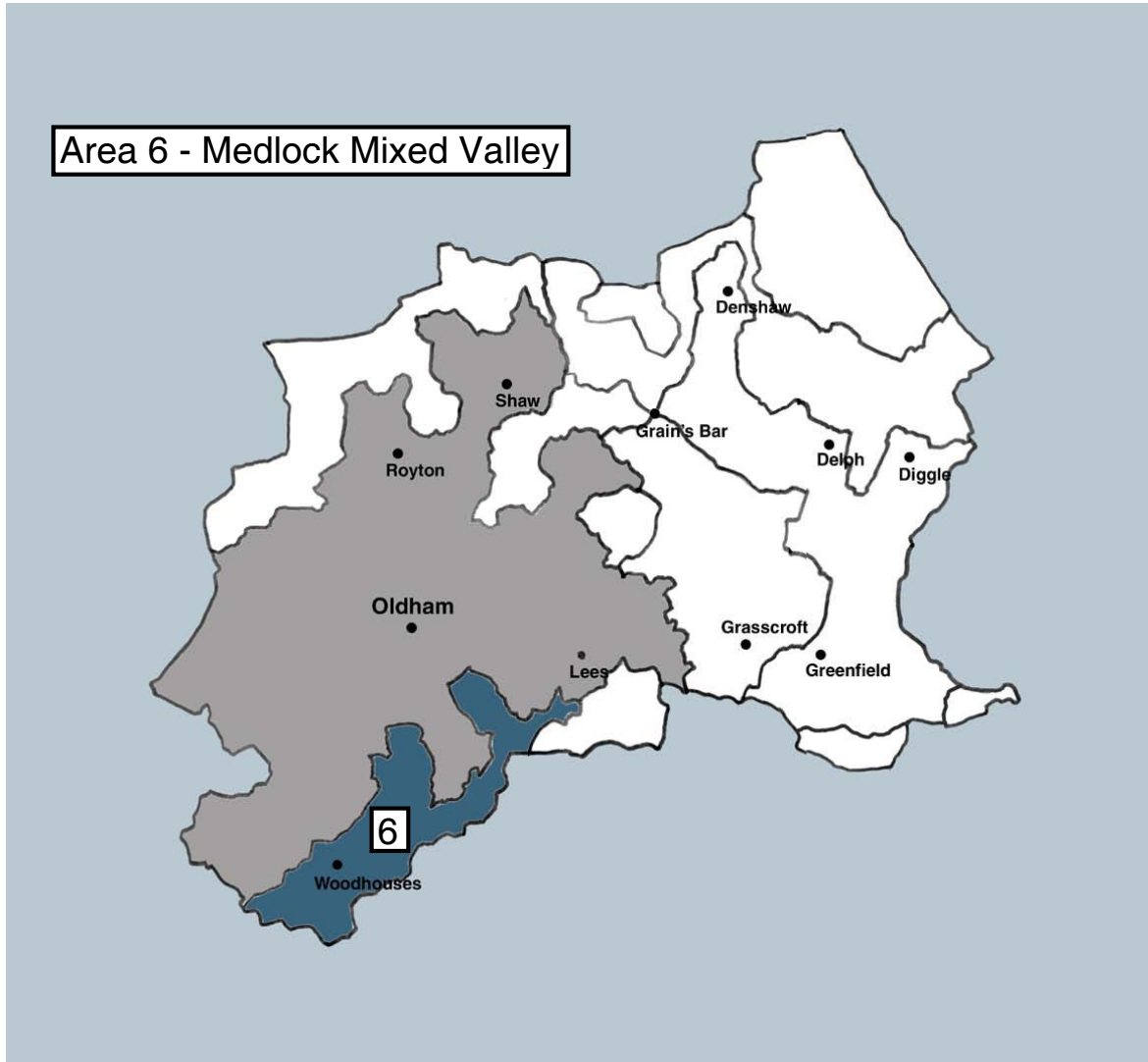- No obvious agricultural, or forestry use of the area.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.62 To maintain and where possible enhance the attractive amenity landscape and surrounding setting of this developing park.

Area 6 Medlock Mixed Valley

Area 6 - Medlock Mixed Valley

Overview

5.63 This area of the Medlock Valley is defined by the urban edge of Oldham to the north and the River Medlock itself to the south. An open rolling landscape intersected by side cloughs at Oldham's urban fringe gives way to the steep sides of the valley cut by the River Medlock. These cloughs are covered by areas of broadleaved woodland in contrast to the open rolling landscape of the higher Tame and Medlock valleys characterised by in-bye pasture. The improved grassland of these pastures has traditionally been used as winter grazing for sheep and cattle, however, numerous horse paddocks are now evident. The Medlock Mixed Valley is an important recreational resource for the population of the surrounding urban areas but in parts has a feeling of neglect.

Key Landscape Characteristics

- Broad rolling valley intersected by the steep sided cloughs.

- River Medlock and its tributaries containing extensive areas of broadleaved woodland.
- Suburban settlement of Woodhouses and Bottom of Woodhouses.
- Dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads (sometimes in fairly close proximity).
- In-bye pastures of improved grassland and areas of semi-improved grassland.
- A predominance of post and rail fencing.
- A broken network of hedgerows and clumps of hedgerow trees.
- Extensive views from the urban fringe of Oldham out over the lower Medlock Valley.
- Extensive areas of formal and informal recreation.
- Extensive network of footpaths and Public Rights of Way.
- Eleven Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) and nearby site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Tameside.
- Industrial heritage including Hollinwood and Fairbottom branches of the Ashton canal.

Geology & Landform

5.64 The Medlock Valley is underlain by alternating geological layers of hard sandstone and softer shales. The Medlock Vale descends from the Snipe, Rowton and Holden Clough near the Glodwick Brook area of Oldham through the narrow Bardsley, Belt and Weir Cloughs in a generally south-westerley direction from a height of around 175m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to around 65m AOD at Clayton Bridge. A series of side cloughs intersect the broad rolling valley that gently ascends between the Medlock Valley and the urban fringe of Oldham to the north.

Nature Conservation

5.65 The Medlock Valley and it's associated side cloughs contain an important resource of deciduous woodland that provide habitats for numerous important bird and animal species. These cloughs contain eleven Sites of Biological Importance (SBI).

Vegetation

5.66 The steep sided cloughs and side cloughs of the Medlock Valley are extensively wooded. These areas are typically made up of oak and ash dominant woodland providing a thick canopy of alder, rowan, ash, birch and oak.

Perception

5.67 The feelings experienced within this area are generally intimate and secure, due to the enclosed nature of the views and landform, especially within the many cloughs that lead down to the River Medlock. This is heightened by the close proximity of the housing to the majority of this area. However in certain locations where tall and dense tree planting has developed it could be perceived as threatening. It is considered to be an interesting area to be within from a visual perspective with only a few areas around Woodhouses considered bland with open, flat fields with little topographical change or interest.

Land Use & Settlement

5.68 The broad rolling valley is characterised by improved pastures enclosed by post and rail fencing with remnants of hedgerow and hedgerow trees. The field pattern is intricate being based upon quite small individual units. This farmland has traditionally been used as in-bye pasture for winter grazing of sheep and cattle. Today horse paddocks are playing an increasingly important role. The Medlock Mixed Valley contains two golf courses and one golf driving range whilst the Wood Park offers opportunities for informal recreation. The grouped pattern of modern housing at Woodhouses has reduced the continuity of building styles and materials.

Patterns & Features

5.69 The broad rolling valley gently descends from the urban fringe of Oldham towards the narrow steep sided clough of the River Medlock and its tributaries that lie on the borough boundary with Ashton-Under-Lyne. The broad rolling valley has a generally loose pattern due to the predominance of post and rail fencing with broken hedgerows whilst the steep sided cloughs that intersect the valley provide a strong linear pattern. Woodland planting and tall field boundaries often obscure longer views.

Historic Features

5.70 There are some buildings of merit in Woodhouses and Bottom of Woodhouses. Their style is rural in character and building materials include brick, stone and rendered facades. Industrial heritage includes the Hollinwood and Fairbottom branches of the Ashton Canal.

Type 6a Recreational Land

**Map 26: Type 6a - Recreational Land**
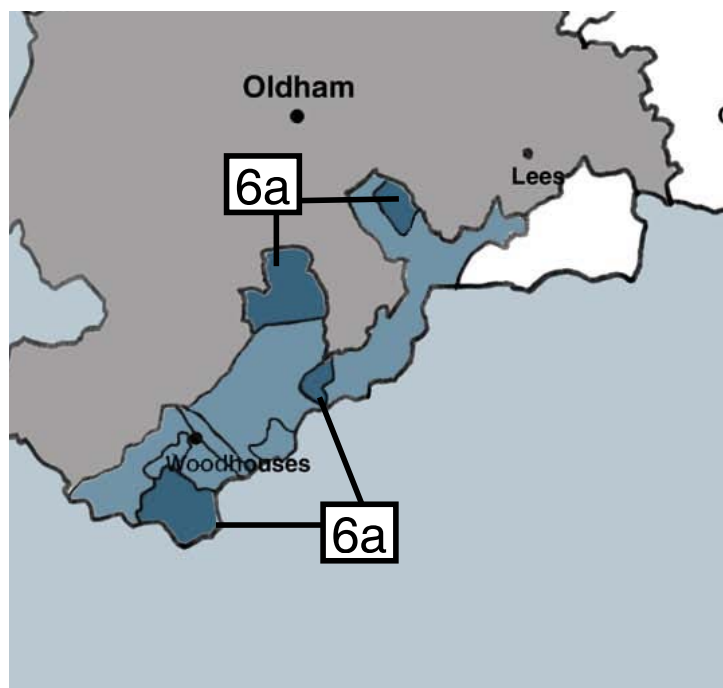
Key Features

- Werneth Golf Course, Brookdale Golf Course and Knott Lanes Golf Driving Range comprising highly maintained amenity grassland on varied and rolling topography.
- Lees Recreation Ground comprising two football pitches, play areas, allotment gardens and opportunities for informal recreation.
- Wood Park is an area of open ground alongside the Lime Gate area of Oldham that is utilised for informal recreation.
- Well established deciduous shelterbelt to golf course including small pockets of structure planting to create definition to greens.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.71 To promote the amenity value of the existing recreational resource whilst seeking to provide environmental improvements to the visual quality for visitors and the local community.

Type 6b Broad Valley Bottom

Map 27: Type 6b - Broad Valley Bottom
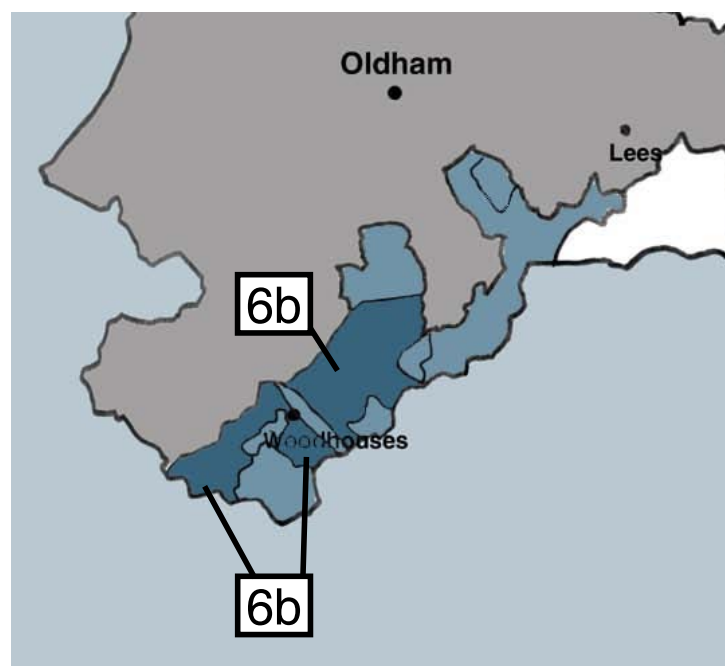
Key Features

- Open landscape character due to the flat topography of the Medlock Valley and its views out to the South Pennine Hills.
- Patchwork of pastures comprising traditional small irregular shaped fields utilised for grazing of livestock and as horse paddocks, with some being degraded as a result.
- Steep sided cloughs cut by the tributaries of the River Medlock containing extensive areas of broadleaved woodland.
- Loose network of post and rail fencing forming the field boundaries to the improved grassland.

- A broken network of hedgerows and clumps of hedgerow trees situated along field boundaries and footpaths/bridleways.
- Dispersed settlement pattern comprising scattered farmsteads.
- A network of narrow winding lanes connecting the farmsteads and settlements.
- Frequent long views across the Medlock Valley and out to the hills of the South Pennines.
- Crime Lake provides opportunities for fishing and informal recreation such as dog walking.
- Nature conservation value reflected in several SBI's.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.72 Conserve the characteristic open landscape of flat topography, pasture land with small, irregular field patterns, dispersed settlement pattern, and narrow winding lanes.

Type 6c Clough Valley

Map 28: Type 6c – Clough Valley
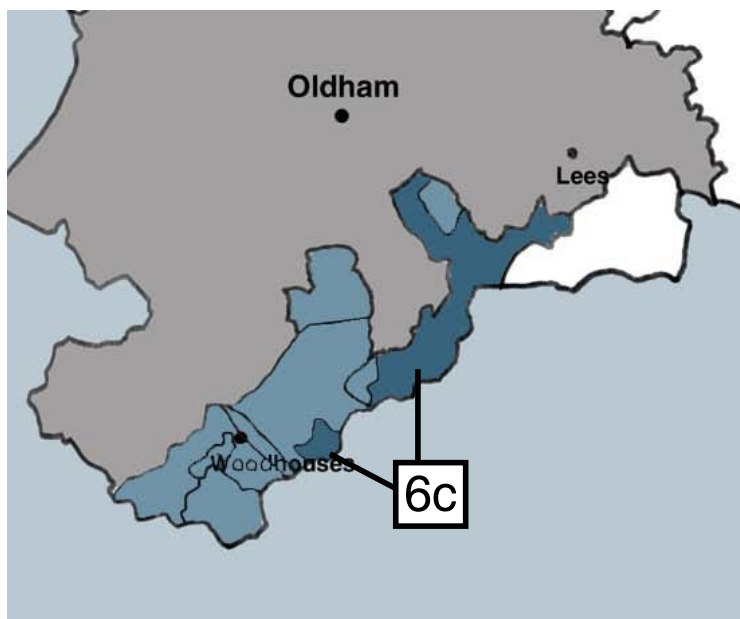
Key Features

- The River Medlock and the steep valley sides cut by the river and its tributaries.
- Extensive areas of broadleaved woodland supporting a wide range of bird and animal species.
- Sense of enclosure within the cloughs due to the restricted views and the dense woodland.
- Extensive network of footpaths and Public Rights of Way including the Medlock Valley Way, Oldham Way and the Tameside Trail.
- Numerous paved packhorse routes linking with an extensive Public Rights of Way network, providing not only distinctive features but evidence of the historic strategic importance for trade.
- Remaining features of canal system, particularly the Hollinwood and Fairbottom Branches of the Ashton Canal, reflect their historic role in trade and now provide recreational opportunities.

- Former tip within Snipe Clough characterised by thin soil cover and wet rushy ground.
- Daisy Nook country park includes footprint of Riversvale Hall (demolished in 1948) and its designed landscaped gardens.
- Nature conservation value reflected in several SBI's.
- Association with local writer and poet, Ben Brierley, who first used the name 'Daisy Nook'.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.73 To conserve the wooded, steep sided character of the cloughs and promote the informal recreational opportunities they offer. To protect and enhance the heritage features of the landscape.

Type 6d Suburban Settlement

Map 29: Type 6d - Suburban Settlement
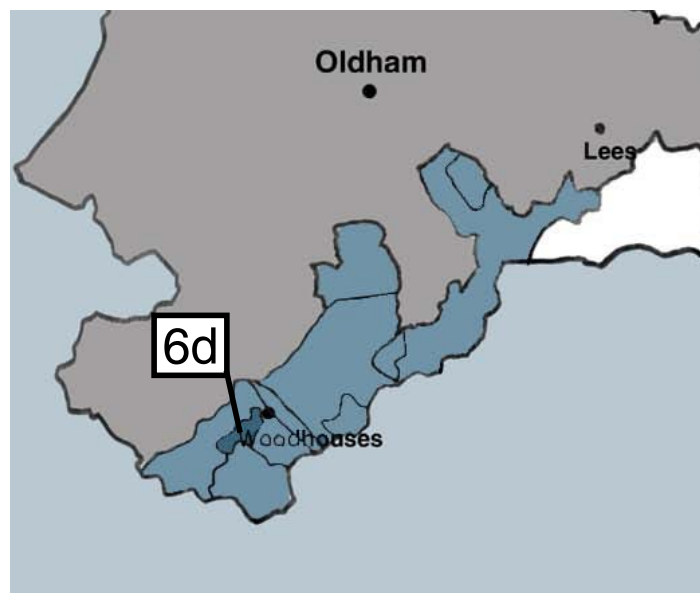
Key Features

- Linear urban settlement of Woodhouses straddling the Medlock Road on an area of higher ground between the Medlock Valley and Jericho Clough.
- 1900's -1950's semi-detached red brick housing occupies the majority of this small village.
- Traditional terraced properties located along main through road.
- On-street parking throughout the area reducing carriageway widths and dominating streetscape.
- Traditional privet hedge boundaries to many properties with established shrub and tree vegetation common.
- Basic surface treatment to road carriageway and footpaths.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.74 To ensure the settlement at Woodhouses is restricted in development terms to prevent further urban sprawl within the open space of the Medlock Valley. Control the development of any new buildings so they benefit the appearance of Woodhouses.

Type 6e M60 Corridor

Map 30: Type 6e - M60 Corridor
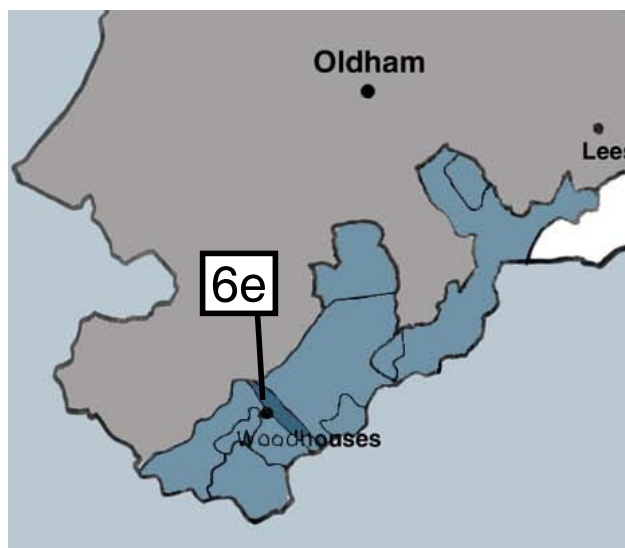
Key Features

- M60 as it travels in a north-south direction through the Medlock Vale.
- Grassed embankments and young structure planting to the sides of the M60 in order to screen the transport route from the surrounding area. The structure planting of native trees has yet to reach maturity.
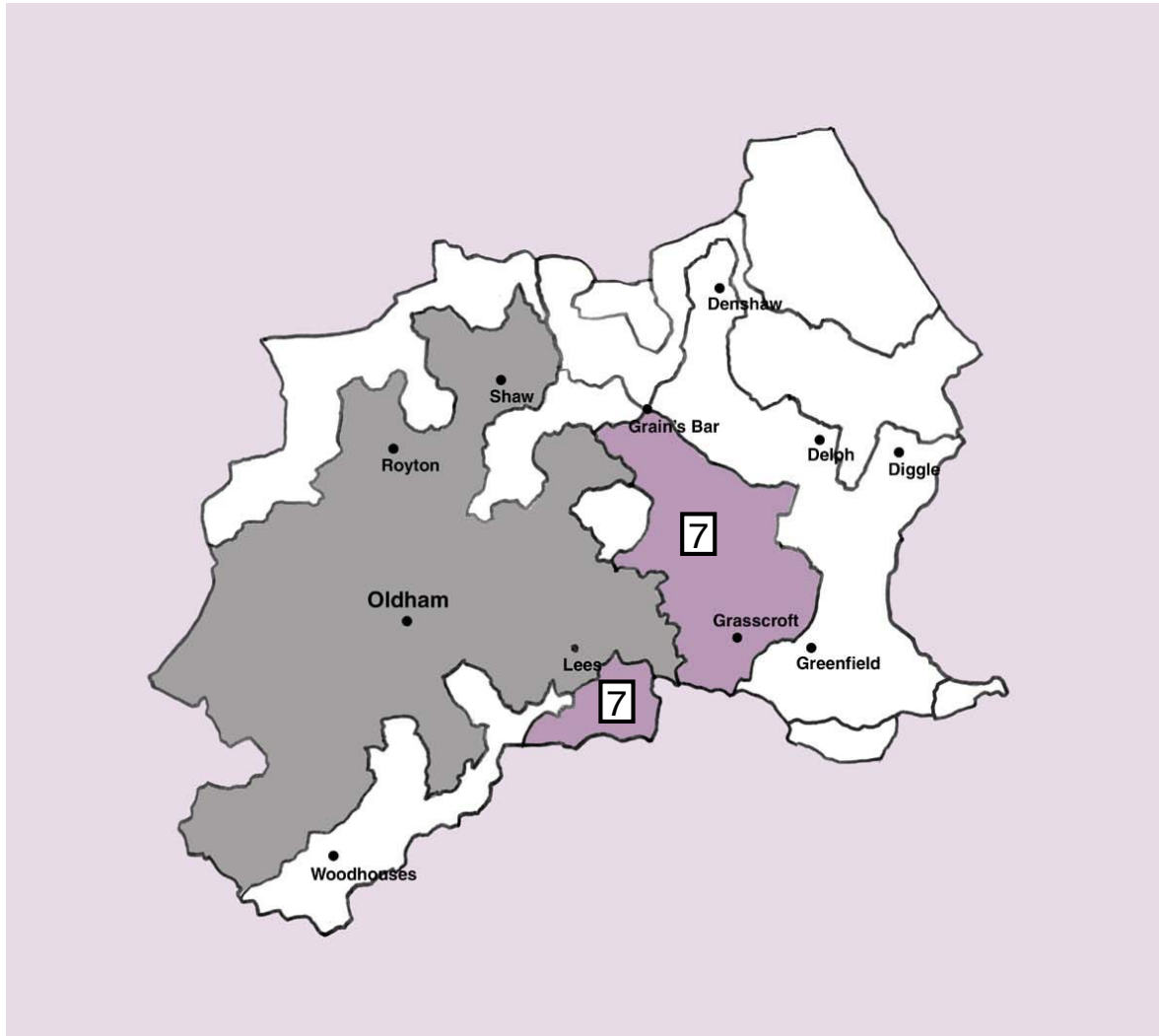
Principal Landscape Objective

5.75 To ensure that the visual and noise impact of the M60 corridor is reduced through the use of effective screen planting.

Area 7 Wharmton Undulating Uplands

Map 31: Wharmton Undulating Uplands

Overview

5.76 This open upland area sits between the urban fringe of Oldham and the settlements of the Tame Valley whilst providing long views out over the nearby urban areas. Scattered settlements and farmsteads are dispersed throughout the area and are linked by a network of narrow winding lanes. The area is predominantly farmland consisting of improved grassland managed for grazing and silage, although some areas are unmanaged and becoming rushy. These out-bye pastures are defined by a distinctive field pattern of gritstone walls. The farms of the area contain a significant number of horse paddocks whilst makeshift farm buildings associated with diversification are evident throughout the area.

Key Landscape Characteristics

- Open, upland landscape character created by the altitude, scarcity of trees and long views.
- A characteristic patchwork of upland pastures including small irregular fields and larger rectangular fields of moorland enclosure.

- A network of gritstone walls.
- Extensive network of footpaths and Public Rights of Way.
- Dispersed settlement pattern comprising scattered farmsteads.
- A network of narrow winding lanes connect the farmsteads and settlements.
- Distinctive vernacular architecture dominated by the millstone grit building stone.
- Frequent long views across the intersecting valleys.

Geology & Landform

5.77 The Wharmton Undulating Uplands are underlain by alternating geological layers of hard sandstone and softer shales. These rocks are mantled with a thin soil cover. At between 200 - 350 metres above sea level the rolling landscape of the Wharmton Undulating Uplands intersects the lower ground occupied by the urban areas of Oldham from the Tame and Sholver Valleys. It consists of a broad undulating terrace whose edges lead down to the adjacent valleys.

Nature Conservation

5.78 The remaining unimproved upland pastures are extremely valuable for nature conservation and, with the moorland, form an intimate part of the rich mosaic of upland habitats. Where parts of the out-bye land are still undrained moisture-loving plants thrive. The acidic grasslands of the upland pastures are critically important for the survival of several important bird species. Wet rushy pastures provide soft ground for birds such as curlew, redshank, lapwing and snipe.

Vegetation

5.79 The drier meadows support characteristic plants including lady's mantle, sneezewort and adder's-tongue. The damp pastures of the undrained out-bye land can provide a colourful display of yellow iris, pink ragged robin, purple marsh thistle and self heal.

Perception

5.80 The overriding perceptual feeling identified for this landscape area is that it is comfortable to be within and is visually interesting to the viewer. The area does not feel inaccessible or remote as there are generally views to settlements, farmsteads or roads reminding the viewer of the close proximity of human activity. It does however promote peaceful feelings in its more rural sections compared to a sense of busyness when the areas' roads, especially the route to High Moor Quarry is held within the scene. Overall this area can be classed as being pleasant to be within, with the exception of pylons and communication masts as negative elements distracting from this pleasant perception.

Land Use & Settlement

5.81 The land remains almost entirely grazed pasture. The land has traditionally been used as out-bye land for summer grazing. Today, the main farming type is sheep and cattle with occasional dairying. Horse paddocks are playing an increasingly important role. This wide undulating terrace is a domesticated landscape with scattered farmhouses, linked by a network of lanes. In addition small settlements comprising of short terraces of houses often in the middle of open countryside are a distinctive feature of the lower slopes.

Patterns & Features

5.82 The upland landscape, created by its altitude, long views and dispersed settlement presents a patchwork character of upland pasture. The pattern is typified by small irregular fields and larger rectangular fields represented by later phases of moorland enclosure.

Historic Features

5.83 The majority of the hillside farmhouses are built of gritstone and follow vernacular South Pennine building styles. The distinctive 'laithe houses' are a special feature of the hillsides. These are part house, sometimes including a weaving workshop,and part laithe (a barn providing stalls for cattle and a hayloft). The laithes can be recognised by their large arched doors built to allow access for a loaded haycart. The terraces may include a line of weavers cottages sometimes distinguished by their long rows of mullioned windows.

Type 7a Urban Fringe Farmland

Map 32: Type 7a - Urban Fringe Farmland
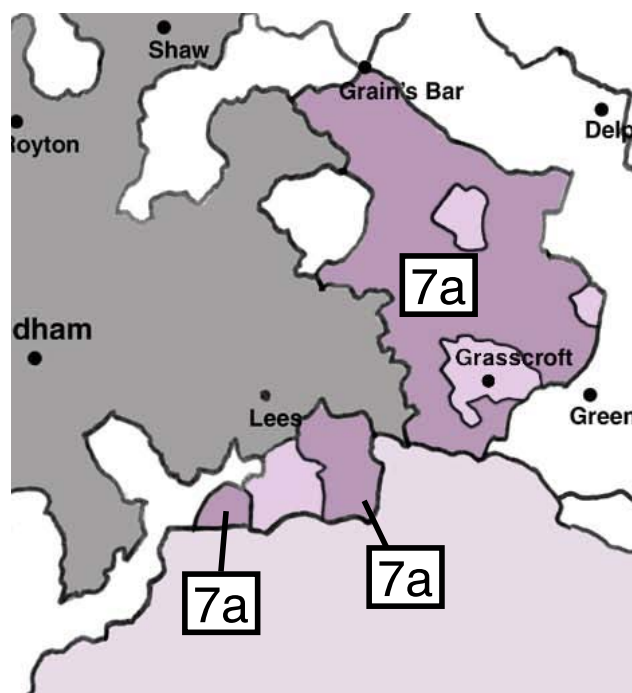
Key Features

- An open upland landscape character created by the altitude, scarcity of trees and long views.
- Frequent long views out over the urban settlements confined within the valleys below.
- A characteristic patchwork of upland pastures including small, irregular fields.
- Dispersed settlement pattern comprising scattered farmsteads sometimes in fairly close proximity.
- A network of narrow winding lanes connecting the farmsteads and settlements. Stone walls without grass verges often bound the lanes.

- A network of gritstone walls that create the field enclosures. The stone walls provide shelter and habitat for wildlife and are also of considerable historical/cultural interest.
- Wet pastures where agricultural land has not been drained.
- Noticeable presence of pylons and transmitters reducing the landscape's remote feel.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.84 Conserve the characteristic open landscape of out-bye pastures, dispersed settlement and narrow winding lanes.

Type 7b Recreational Land

Map 33: Type 7b - Recreational Land
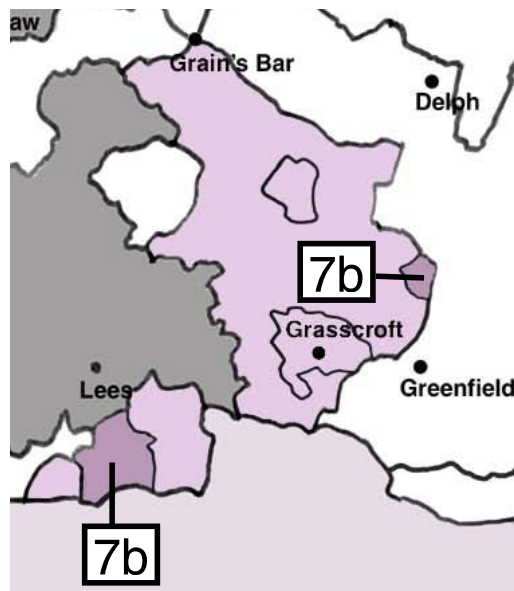
Key Features

- The Saddleworth Golf Course situated above the Tame Valley settlements of Dobcross and Uppermill.
- The Wildmoor Golf Course situated at Oldham's urban fringe above the Rocher Vale.
- Highly maintained amenity grassland of golf landscape on varied and rolling topography.
- Well established deciduous shelterbelt to golf courses including small pockets of structure planting to create definition to greens.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.85 To promote effective screening and new planting for existing recreational land in order to retain the characteristic open out-bye pasture landscape of the Wharmton Undulating Uplands.

Type 7c Landscape in Transition
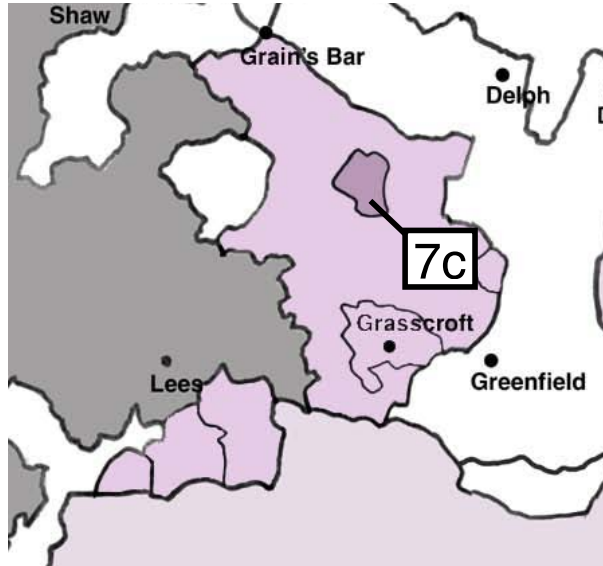
Key Features

- The High Moor Quarry with its dramatic topographical change nestled within the urban fringe farmland. The quarry is relatively well hidden within the natural topography of the area.
- Pylons and transmittors set on horizon dominate the views around the landscape and add to the areas feel of neglect and abandonment.
- Regular site traffic associated with quarry/tip land use adds visual disturbance and noise pollution to what is a quiet rural landscape setting.
- Dominant boundary treatment to quarry/tip open to wide views around the immediate vicinity. Urban style security fencing at entrance, combined with methane flare stack.

Principal Landscape Objective

5.86 The screening of the quarries during their working life and the eventual restoration within the surrounding open upland landscape.

6 Forces for Change

6.1   This assessment has illustrated that the borough is a dynamic landscape which has evolved and changed throughout history and will continue to do so. Over the last century this evolution has resulted in very visible changes in the form of new development. Changes in the structure of the local economy have also introduced subtle changes to the health and condition of the worked landscape, as farming practices change and landholdings move away from farming use.

6.2   This chapter identifies the main changes that have taken place during the last 100 years and highlights any significant trends, both positive and negative, that are likely to cause landscape change in the foreseeable future.

Agriculture and Land Management

6.3   Farming practice has had a major influence on Oldham's rural fringe landscape character. It was the testing conditions of the upland landscape that lead to the development of the dual economy of farming and textiles. This dual economy, along with the natural limitations of the land, has meant that farming has not grown to the same degree as in surrounding lowland areas. The close links between the industrial/urban and rural economy is one of the distinctive features of the area. In many respects, the valued landscapes and habitats that exist on the fringes are a direct by-product of past management practices. For example, mill ponds and the 'tight knit' development of the settled valleys near their source of power.

6.4   Since 1945 upland farming across Oldham has intensified to respond to agricultural policy, with a specialisation in cattle and sheep stock. The associated landscape impact of increased stock levels and improvements have lead to localised overgrazing, loss of heather cover and the drying out and erosion of blanket bog in moorland areas. The lack of landscape management, and in parts abandonment, has resulted in bracken invasion over hillsides and the deterioration of swards along with poor upkeep of landscape structures such as gritstone walls.

6.5   Diversification of traditional farming practices into uses such as haulage, storage, machinery repairs and recycling, to supplement farm incomes, are all contributing to a changing landscape. The sale and conversion of old farm buildings is also altering the visual character, as plots become domesticated with gardens fostering non-native plant species, urban style boundaries and children's play areas.

6.6   Additionally diversification has, in places, impacted on traditional field patterns and boundaries, for example horse-related uses and associated facilities such as stables and maneges.

Water & Drainage

6.7   Even though the upland South Pennine Moors and Moorland Fringe are perceived as wet, boggy places the visual presence of running water is not a dominant landscape feature. The active fast flowing streams are generally hidden from wider view in deeply incised valleys (Cloughs). These streams are unlikely to alter in character unless there is a significant change in land drainage techniques, or grazing on the moors.

6.8   Drainage of peat moorland can have an adverse environmental impact as carbon stored in the peat could be released. Ripping, or the digging of grips (drainage ditches) on the flat, upland moorland plateau is not likely to occur, however, due to the marginal nature of agriculture on the moors. Likewise improved drainage of pasture on the moorland fringe is unlikely as the marginal state of agriculture in these areas reduces the economic benefit of such work.

6.9   Reservoirs are a dominant landscape feature in parts of the borough's Green Belt. They themselves are unlikely to change in extent but their use may change with greater demand for recreational usage (sailing, boarding, mountain biking). There is no foreseeable demand for new reservoirs in the area.

6.10 One foreseeable area for change is the altering of drainage to deliberately flood land to create environmental benefit such as wet pasture or open water, especially at former mill ponds. Any creation of wet pasture is considered not to significantly alter the landscape character of the area. Nor would the reformation of mill ponds if designed appropriately and used in a sensitive fashion e.g. for nature conservation, fishing, or other passive uses.

6.11 What appear to be greater extremes in British weather patterns require flood risk to be considered in relation to land use and development.   A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been carried out for the Greater Manchester area to assess flood risk issues both at the sub-regional level, and for the borough. The Environment Agency also produce Catchment Flood Management Plans for the river catchments. These look at flood risk, and recommend ways of managing flood risk over the next 50 to 100 years.

6.12   Flood mitigation measures can range from creating flood storage areas to 'hold' floodwater upstream of flood prone areas, to the use of sustainable drainage systems, such as wetland areas and retention ponds, to reduce run-off.

6.13 A potential change to the ribbons of woodland that snake along the river corridors, especially the Medlock and Tame Valleys is Phytophthora or Alder Root disease. This fatal disease of alder could lead to pockets of dead trees along the valleys. However, any gaps or breaks will ultimately be filled by the succession of other river trees such as willow, or poplar.

Pollution to Water and Air

6.14 Farm viability, as a result of changes in the agricultural economy, is having an impact on landscape character. This vulnerability is highlighted by reduced opportunities for dual employment and the demise of the local-producer retailer link. The future viability of farming practice hinges on re-establishing the traditional link between farmers and their local markets to re-invigorate the local producer-retailer economy.

6.15 Changes in agricultural practice are likely to continue, which in turn encourages farm owners to diversify to stay economically viable. This change should be recognised and managed to try and produce positive outcomes for the borough's landscape. Stewardship grants and payments for ecologically sound land management that contributes to improving landscape character should be further promoted.

6.16 In the mid-late nineteenth century Water Boards acquired large areas of the Pennine upland to build reservoirs to supply the ever-expanding valley settlements. Large and small water bodies are scattered across the whole upland area and are an important feature. Sadly, the vast landholdings controlled by the water companies, some completely closed to the public, resulted in depopulation and abandonment of some upland farmsteads.

6.17 It is anticipated that the effect of more positive policies of the water companies with regards conservation and recreation will be a positive force for future landscape change.

6.18 Industrial pollution, the by-product of a booming industrial age, has had a major impact on Oldham's landscape. Atmospheric pollution has affected both the appearance and structure of stone buildings, the network of gritstone walls and composition of vegetation. Fragile upland habitats have also been destroyed and threatened by acid rain. Industrial decline and improved pollution control legislation has improved, not only the health of local inhabitants, but the quality of the surrounding landscape. Heather cover has noticeably increased and habitat restoration projects are re-invigorating degraded vegetation cover.

6.19 Industrial pollution is expected to decline, although agricultural pollution such as nutrient enrichment and silage effluent may increase and still needs to be addressed. On balance, there has been a positive effect with habitat recovering and buildings not as dirty or soot ridden.

Recreation, Access and Tourism

6.20 The rural fringes and valley towns of the borough provide wonderful recreational opportunities, but the pressure on the landscape's condition is all too apparent. Extensive erosion of scars, heathland and blanket bogs in the upland areas are typical across the borough's landscape. Outdoor pursuits, such as off road biking and rallying, create their own landscape pressures which must be managed effectively to protect vulnerable habitats and archaeology.

6.21 Even casual informal recreation has resulted in subtle and incremental physical change with pressures for footpath improvements, signing and car parks creating a gradual 'domesticating' effect. This issue becomes even more significant with the introduction, in 2000, of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. It will be imperative that important sites are protected and appropriate management is carried out to ensure sensitive and low-key infrastructure is provided that respects the local setting.

6.22 The farmed fringes, valleys and industrial valley bottoms have seen a concentration of recreational activities through restoration and improvements. The Medlock Valley serves as an important green lung reaching into the heart of Manchester and out to the Pennines. Its industrial and cultural heritage also attracts visitors. Such initiatives help reduce pressure on the fragile upland areas. In a similar vein Oldham's country parks such as Tandle Hill and Chadderton Hall Park could be increasingly promoted to attract people rather than heading to the more sensitive upland landscapes.

6.23 Further expansion of the local tourism economy is considered a likely future force for change. This could have a positive landscape impact, for example, farm diversification into tourism could play an important role in sustaining the local economy, maintaining

agricultural viability and supporting traditional land management methods. It is important that any tourism expansion is based around existing traditional attractions, and not on inappropriate development of the wrong scale or theme.

Mineral Extraction and Tipping

6.24 Many small quarries and pits have been worked throughout the South Pennines, providing stone for use in local buildings and the network of stonewalls, as well as peat and coal extraction as a source of fuel. The cultural influence, as well as the effect on the visual landscape, is immense and contributes to the understanding of landscape evolution around the borough.

6.25 Disused quarries lie around settlements within the borough. Some have benefited from formal restoration schemes but most have regenerated naturally giving them a range of habitats. Foreseeable pressures on these areas of ecological interest include licensed tipping, fly tipping and active recreation such as mountain biking, off road motorbikes and paint balling.

New Development

6.26 As part of the 'backbone of England' the South Pennines is the only area not to have National Park or AONB status and as such is often under greater pressure from development. Material considerations associated with Green Belt policy provides some 'development sprawl' protection, as implemented by the local planning authority. It is not intended to provide any landscape habitat or species protection.

6.27 There continues to be a national drive for increased housing provision and this puts continued pressure on rural areas and Green Belts. In Oldham the highly distinct rural-urban divide means that housing on the edge of a development can look inappropriate when viewed from part of the borough's Green Belt. The Council has adopted a Supplementary Planning Document on Urban Design which offers guidance on the design of new development.

Energy, Telecommunications and Power Lines

6.28 Oldham lies at a relatively high altitude in comparison with the rest of Greater Manchester. With its close allegiance with the high moorland landscape, the area offers great potential for harnessing renewable wind energy. Pressure for wind farms across the South Pennine Moors and bordering areas must draw a response that strikes a fair balance between economic benefit, adaptation to climate change and the protection and reinforcement of key landscape features.

Change of Building Use

6.29 The combined effects of changes in the agricultural economy and development pressures, have had an effect of gradually and subtly altering the landscape character around Oldham, as for other parts of the South Pennines. As farming has become less profitable many of the smaller holdings have been converted to domestic living and bought by people who commute to neighbouring towns and cities. This alters the visual appearance of properties, including their curtilages, and puts increased 'commuter' pressures on local roads. Local authorities are then under greater pressure to improve

rural road networks, but this can often have the effect of introducing an urban character and further eroding the distinctive contrast between the industrial/urban and the wild/rural.

Environmental Agenda

6.30 Recent years have seen a growing priority for environmental objectives, so that political commitment and appropriate funding back land uses such as biodiversity, archaeology and woodland cover.

6.31 Greater Manchester's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), for which Oldham MBC is a key partner, includes habitat and species action plans and provides valuable recognition beyond statutory protection. Habitat Action Plans that are closely related to landscape character include: acid grassland, canals, marsh/marshy grassland, mossland, neutral grassland, ponds and lodges and upland oak woodland. The borough's own local BAP includes 18 Habitat & Species Action Plans. (See chapter 4 - Evolution of Oldham's Landscape.)

6.32 Designation of the Special Protection Area (SPA) for the South Pennines and the successful bid to the European LIFE Programme for the production of an Integrated Management Strategy and Conservation Action Plan (IMSACAP) have been positive forces for change. (IMSACAP is currently under review by Pennine Prospects).

6.33 New tree planting, implemented through various strategies and initiatives and backed by government policy commitment, will also have an enormous positive impact on the landscape. As new tree planting matures over the next 10-20 years we will see expanding woodland provision and woodland settings to the borough's settlements.

6.34 However new tree planting will require careful design and locating to ensure it is a positive feature rather than a negative one. Good design and development control will prevent inappropriate species, or monoculture woodland being planted. The siting of new plantations are also key. Generally the climatic conditions on the moorland plateau will restrict economical woodland planting. However on the Moorland Fringe it is foreseeable that large forestry could be undertaken. Apart from the change in ecological character, tree planting on the fringe can 'break' the clean, tree sweeping hill lines that are an important landscape element within the borough and could affect the open panoramic views characteristic of this area.

7 Conclusion

Overview

7.1 The rural landscape of the borough is an environment dominated by the Pennine Moorland, notably Saddleworth Moor to the east. The tradition of cattle and sheep grazing has left a countryside dissected by dry stone walls, although many are in a poor state of repair. Wooded river valleys of the Medlock, Irk and Tame, run through the borough between farmsteads and village settlements. Disused quarries, reservoirs, lodges and canals are frequent within the borough's landscape and serve as a legacy of Oldham's industrial past. These make an important contribution to biodiversity by providing valuable semi-natural wildlife habitats. Vegetation cover is generally 'wild' consisting of a mosaic of heathland, acid grassland and marshy grassland, although many urban/rural fringes are becoming more domesticated as land use and agricultural practice change.

Significance of Oldham borough's landscape

7.2 The significance of the borough's landscape can be summarised under the following headings:

A unique rural and urban contrast

7.3 The millstone grit ridge of the South Pennines is a distinctive landform and dominating feature bordering the town of Oldham. For large parts of northern England it serves as an enduring backdrop to everyday life. The close relationship and contrast between the wild uplands and urban areas is a special feature that has few comparisons elsewhere in England. The close proximity to settlement means that there is great opportunity for accessing and enjoying the landscape. However, such openness and accessibility comes at a cost as the landscape is susceptible to more visitor pressures. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act is likely to increase visitor pressures through increased use.

Cultural significance

7.4 The special nature and quality of the Pennine landscape, whilst not historically fitting into conventional perceptions of scenic quality and natural beauty, has been recognised for its cultural significance through the designation of the 'South Pennines Heritage Area'. This non-statutory designation is an important step in securing the dramatic wild upland setting, to preserve the habitat and amenity for future generations. Such important cultural landscapes are being given increasing recognition and designation throughout Europe.

Internationally important habitats and species

7.5 The national importance of the mosaic of upland habitats comprising heather covered moors, blanket bog and acidic grassland has been given recognition by the designation of South Pennine Moors SSSI. The presence of hay meadows, damp pastures, mill ponds and oak woodlands also provide important habitats of special significance. The international importance of the Moorland habitats for breeding birds has also earned recognition as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area for Conservation (SAC).

7.6   Today the Pennines and its urban centres are showing positive signs of regenerating the economy and environment of the region. Major improvements in river water quality and continued reduction in atmospheric pollution is re-invigorating the quality of the land. Positive management and planning policy is also beginning to recognise and appreciate the importance of landscape character for the benefit of biodiversity, visual amenity landscape quality and economic gain. In short the borough's different landscape areas provide an attractive backdrop to live near and visit.

7.7   Like many other Pennine towns and boroughs, the borough has a unique relationship with the Moors landscape. This relationship is characterised by a sharp division in landscape character between the edge of urban settlement and the upland moors. However this unique character is vulnerable to land use changes and inappropriate development blurring the formerly distinct edges.

7.8   With the influence of the Pennine Moors so strong, it is the cultural living landscape, represented by its people, that reinforce the special link between people and place. As less people work in rural jobs, the understanding of how the land and the landscape has evolved to serve the community is lost. What might appear as minor landscape features, such as sunken lanes or building foundations, could be important historical features such as turnpikes or water mills. It is important that the protection, enhancement and interpretation of the landscape are considered alongside measures that re-invigorate the economy. Only in this way will the borough balance its wonderful landscape with economic development and secure successful regeneration.