

## High Leicestershire Landscape Character Area

### Key Characteristics

- Steep undulating hills
- High concentration of woodland
- Parkland areas with narrow gated roads
- Rural area with a mix of arable farming on lowlands and pasture on hillsides
- Scattering of traditional villages and hamlets through the area
- Encroachment of Leicester to the west of the area

### General Description

The predominantly rural character area comprises undulating fields with a mix of pasture on the higher sloping land and arable farming on the lower, flatter land. Fields are divided by well established hedgerows, with occasional mature hedgerow trees. A network of narrow country lanes, tracks and footpaths connect across the landscape interspersed by small thickets, copses and woodlands. Gated roads are a particular feature towards the northern areas around Lowesby, Baggrave and Quenby. Extensive views from the higher ground reveal a pattern of small attractive villages, hamlets and farm buildings set within an agricultural landscape with traditional churches acting as distinctive features of the settlements.

### Topography

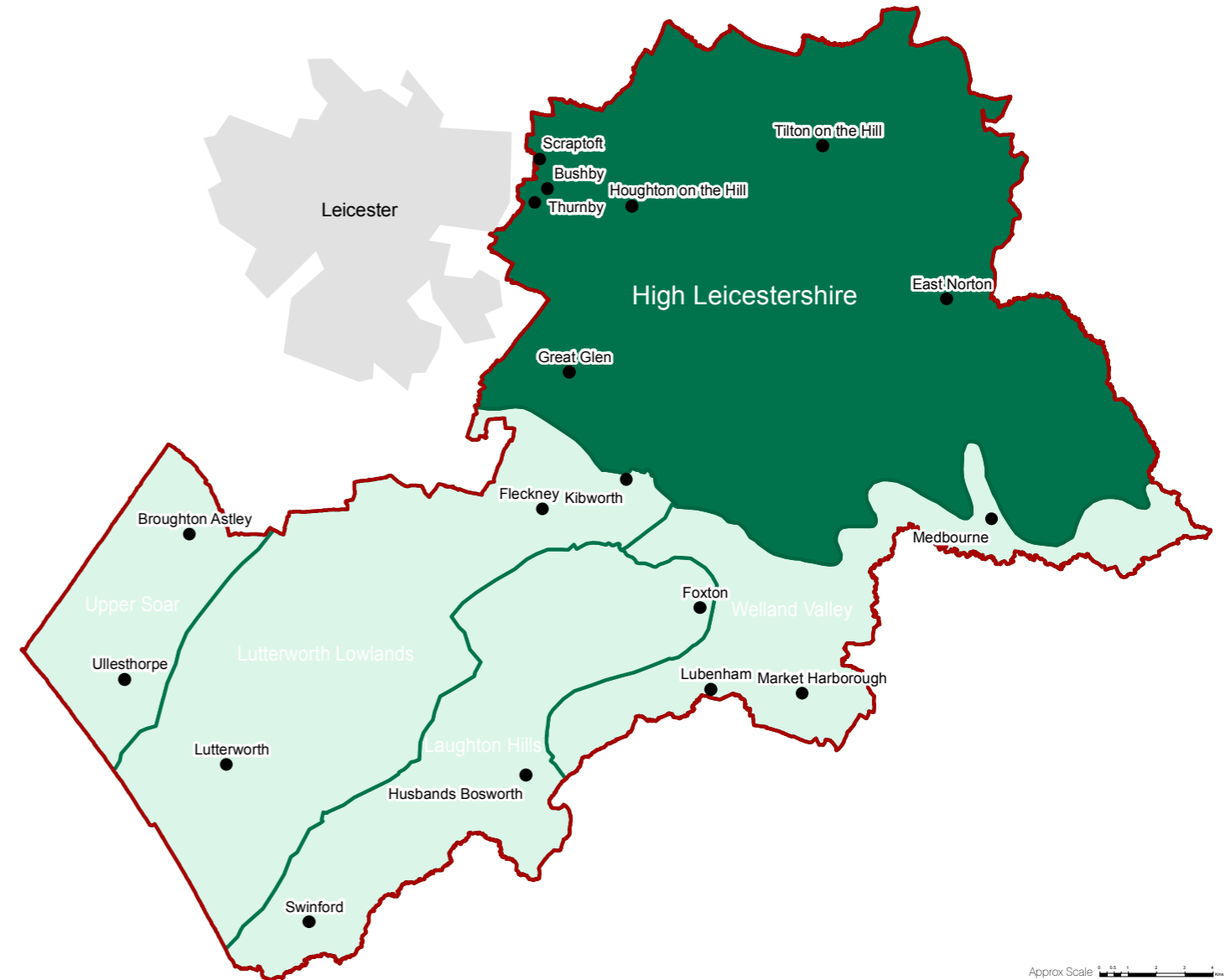
The topography of High Leicestershire is its most defining feature. The steeply sloping valleys and broad ridges were created by fluvio-glacial influences and water courses that flowed across the area. The central area of High Leicestershire reaches 210m AOD beside Tilton on the Hill, and falls to below 100m AOD along the western edge of Leicester. The topography generally radiates out and down from this high point adjacent to Tilton on the Hill into the valleys of the adjoining character areas and Leicester city.

### Geology

The main geology grouping of High Leicestershire is Jurassic Lower Lias.

### Vegetation

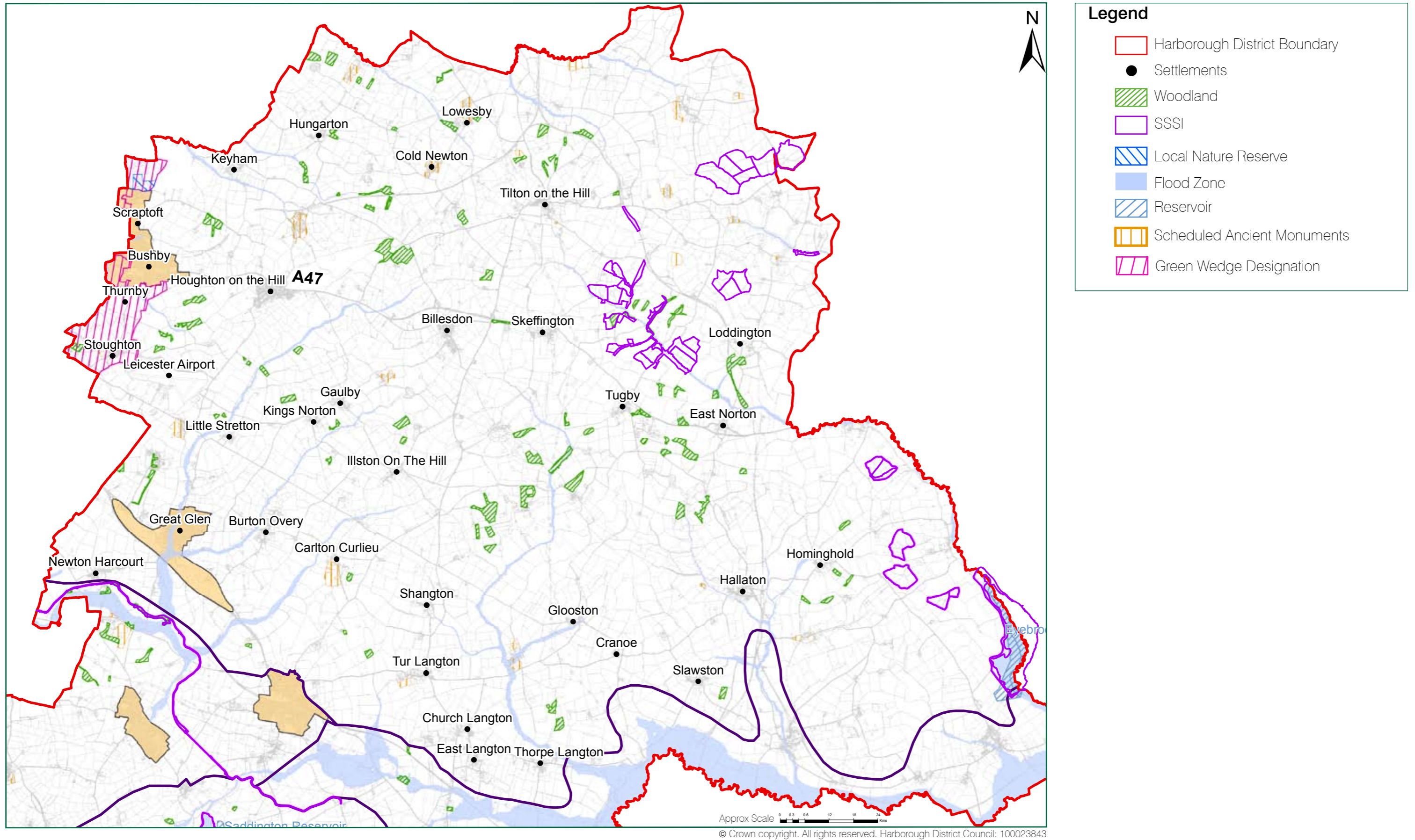
The numerous woodlands which stretch across the hills and valleys of High Leicestershire contribute to the character of the area with larger woodlands and scattered copses prominent across many of the ridges. Owston Woods is the largest of a number of areas of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) to the north east and is the largest area of woodland at 141 hectares; it is formed from the remains of the Leighfield Forest. Launde Big Wood, Launde Park Wood, Loddington Reddish, Tugby Wood and Tilton Wood, whilst not as large as Owston, are significant woodlands in the area. Woodlands comprise predominantly native species with oak and ash tree



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Figure 1.5: - High Leicestershire- Landscape Character Plan





Typical gated road of High Leicestershire near Lowesby

species dominating. There are also some mixed species woodlands and coniferous plantations associated with the 19th century sporting estates, with earlier manorial origins in the north of the character area around the villages of Lowesby, Baggrave and Quenby.

The mature hedgerows throughout High Leicestershire define, enforce and enclose the regular agricultural field pattern. Midland hawthorn predominates with ash and oak as the most common hedgerow species and they represent a key characteristic of the area. There are also some ancient hedgerows that are associated with the Parish boundaries. Most of the hedgerows are well maintained, particularly along side roads. Some of the enclosure hedgerows have fallen into decline with gaps forming along them whereas others contain occasional mature trees within their length.

Other areas of visually significant vegetation follow the numerous streams and brooks within the valleys. The dismantled railway to the east has created a wildlife corridor across High Leicestershire from south of Hallaton to beyond Marefield.

**Ecology**

A large number of Biological SSSIs are present in this region, mainly concentrated along its eastern fringe. Of these, Owston Woods, Launde Big Wood, Leighfield Forest, Allexton Wood and Eye Brook Valley Woods have been notified as they are representative of ancient semi-natural woodland that has developed on heavy clay soil. These are dominated by ash-elm and ash-maple communities with an area of ash-hazel-maple coppice present in Allexton Wood. Owston Woods is the largest continuous area of

ancient semi-natural woodland in Leicestershire (approximately 141 ha) and is one of only three sites in Leicestershire that supports purple small-reed (a local Biodiversity Action Plan species).

Other SSSIs in this area include Eye Brook Reservoir which is one of the more important wintering wildfowl sites in the East Midlands and the Chater Valley which supports neutral grassland and spring-fed marshes. Tilton Cutting SSSI has been notified due to its geological interest (exposures of marlstone rock bed). However, it also forms part of a disused railway line which is an important wildlife corridor through this area and is managed by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve.

A range of protected and notable flora/ fauna are likely to be present within this region such as bats, badgers, water vole, otter, white clawed crayfish, amphibians, reptiles and notable bird communities.

**Land Use**

High Leicestershire is a predominantly rural area that is used for agriculture, with a mix of arable farming in the lowlands and pasture on higher ground. The undulating topography and Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside (APAC) designation have prevented encroachment of development in the past leaving only small settlements scattered throughout the area with some more suburban developments to the west of the region, closer to Leicester city.

**Urban Influence / Settlement Pattern**

Throughout High Leicestershire there is a network of small villages, hamlets and farm buildings connected by narrow country lanes that are enclosed by mature hedgerows. A common feature within villages is the church tower which acts as a landmark on the approach to each village. Country lanes tend to run through the centre of the linear village settlements with small roads and tracks branching off to either side.

Some of the smaller hamlets and farms are connected by the narrow gated roads that run through the open parkland areas to the north of the character area.

Two major roads run through the centre of High Leicestershire character area, the A47 east to west from Leicester towards Peterborough and the B6047 north to south, from Melton Mowbray to Market Harborough.

Along the western edge of High Leicestershire the urban influence of Leicester city becomes far more apparent. Larger suburban centres that are more readily associated with Leicester city than the rural character of High Leicestershire are located in this area including Scraftoft, Bushby, Thurnby and Great Glen.

Green wedge designations and the proposed community woodland greenspace project aim to separate Leicester fringes from these villages.



Keyham Church





East Norton village

### Heritage

High Leicestershire is characterised by its pattern of small nucleated villages within large areas of agricultural land. It is clear that the landscape was settled and utilised earlier than the medieval period indicated by the Iron Age Burrough Hill Fort to the north of the character area as well as the Gartree Roman road, which is associated with a number of Romano-British settlements and villa sites within the area. However, it is the medieval and later use of the landscape that influenced its present character.

The isolated settlements and large open areas of agricultural land have developed from the medieval settlement pattern of a village centre with large open fields surrounding the village. There are large areas of ridge and furrow earthworks surrounding many of the villages which indicate the pattern and extent of earlier farming methods. It is a particular characteristic of High Leicestershire that enclosure of the fields occurred earlier than in the rest of the region around

the 15th and 16th centuries and this has affected the nature of the landscape.

There are a number of deserted medieval settlement sites as well as earthworks associated with shrinkage of settlements from the 15th century onwards, particularly to the north of the character area. Many of these sites are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments such as Ingarsby, Cold Newton and Noseley. These former or shrunken settlements often with surviving buried archaeological remains as well as ridge and furrow earthworks indicate that the landscape was made up of more isolated settlements than present day, but which became unviable.

There is a concentration of ancient woodland located to the east of the character area centred around Owston. This reflects the surviving remnants of what would have been large tracts of woodland covering the land prior to prehistoric and later forest clearance.

There are three Registered Parks and Gardens and these are all located in the western part of the character area. They comprise Quenby Hall, Lowersby Hall and Baggrave Hall of post medieval date. They are all large houses with parklands attached and are likely to be the sites of former manor houses or at least the centre of the manorial estates that historically supported the hunting sport that developed and was particularly popular in the 19th century. It is a common feature in the area to find these halls and parklands with villages or former villages adjacent and farmed land surrounding them.

In general there has been little modern development which has altered this settlement pattern in this character area.

### Capacity: Low to Medium

High Leicestershire is generally an attractive rural character area with small settlements, agriculture and woodland as its major features. The area would have a low capacity to accept any major developments in all but the western suburban areas, where the urban influence of Leicester city is exerted. In general, development should be avoided or minimised in High Leicestershire in all but its most western regions.

High Leicestershire's character would be adversely affected by the influence of any development, other than small scale developments, across the majority of the character area. Any development would need sensitive integration to prevent encroachment on the highly sensitive rural areas of the rest of High Leicestershire.

The western edge of High Leicestershire could accommodate development around the towns of Scraftoft, Bushby, Thurnby and Great Glen closer to the urban fringes of Leicester. In general the smaller settlements throughout High Leicestershire could accommodate little new development.

These areas to the west have the capacity to accommodate some residential and other development which is contiguous and connected to the existing urban area as long as the towns' natural and visual envelopes are maintained and it does not exert built influence over the rest of rural High Leicestershire.

### Key Issues

- Development may have an adverse impact on topography and landform which are key defining features of the landscape character of this area. The landscape is particularly vulnerable to negative landscape and visual impacts.
- Traditional features and form of smaller more rural and isolated villages may be particularly vulnerable to development pressure, even on a small scale.
- Inappropriate development may erode the defining characteristics of the landscape setting for smaller scattered villages across the landscape character area.
- Distinctive historic features and elements, which remain within the relatively intact landscape, may suffer adverse and irreversible impacts from inappropriate development.
- Important features and elements of the historic landscape, including parks and gardens, estates and mature hedgerows and woodlands may be threatened by development and prove impossible to replace or replicate once lost.
- Particular development pressures in the urban fringe and setting of the western edge of Leicester may impact on local landscape characteristics if design and mitigation measures are not integral to development planning.



## Lutterworth Lowlands Landscape Character Area

### Key Characteristics

- Open and relatively flat, to gently rolling area
- Lack of large woodland areas
- Farming is predominantly grazing
- Scattering of small villages with larger settlements of Kibworth and Fleckney to the north and Lutterworth to the south
- Contains Bruntingthorpe Airfield
- The M1 and the A426 run through the area
- Contains Magna Park Distribution Park to the west of Lutterworth

### General Description

The Lutterworth Lowlands is an area of predominantly open, gently rolling pasture. Regular, medium sized fields are divided by mature hedgerows that appear to be declining in extent in places. There is little woodland of any significant size within the character area and where it does feature, it appears to be concentrated around the parkland estates towards the north of the area. The area is characterised by open views across the flatter expanses of the area. Lutterworth, in the south of the area, is the area's main town with the expanding villages of Fleckney and Kibworth towards the north east of the area.

### Topography

Overall, the topography of the Lutterworth Lowlands is flat to gently undulating. The only areas of significant incline are along the River Swift to the south of Lutterworth. The River Avon forms the southern boundary to the character area further to the south of Lutterworth. The gently rolling lie of the land undulates between 105 metres AOD along the river valleys to over 135 metres AOD at various high points through the region. While the gently undulating nature of the land presents an open landscape, the views over this area are not particularly distant.

### Geology

The main geology grouping of the Lutterworth Lowlands is Jurassic Middle Lias.

### Vegetation

Generally, the Lutterworth Lowlands character area lacks significant tree cover with only a scattering of small woodlands across the District. The parkland areas in the north tend to have localised denser tree cover and some wider woodland coverage associated with them, in particular Wistow in the north east and around Misterton and Cotesbach in the south. The predominant tree species in the area are oak and ash.

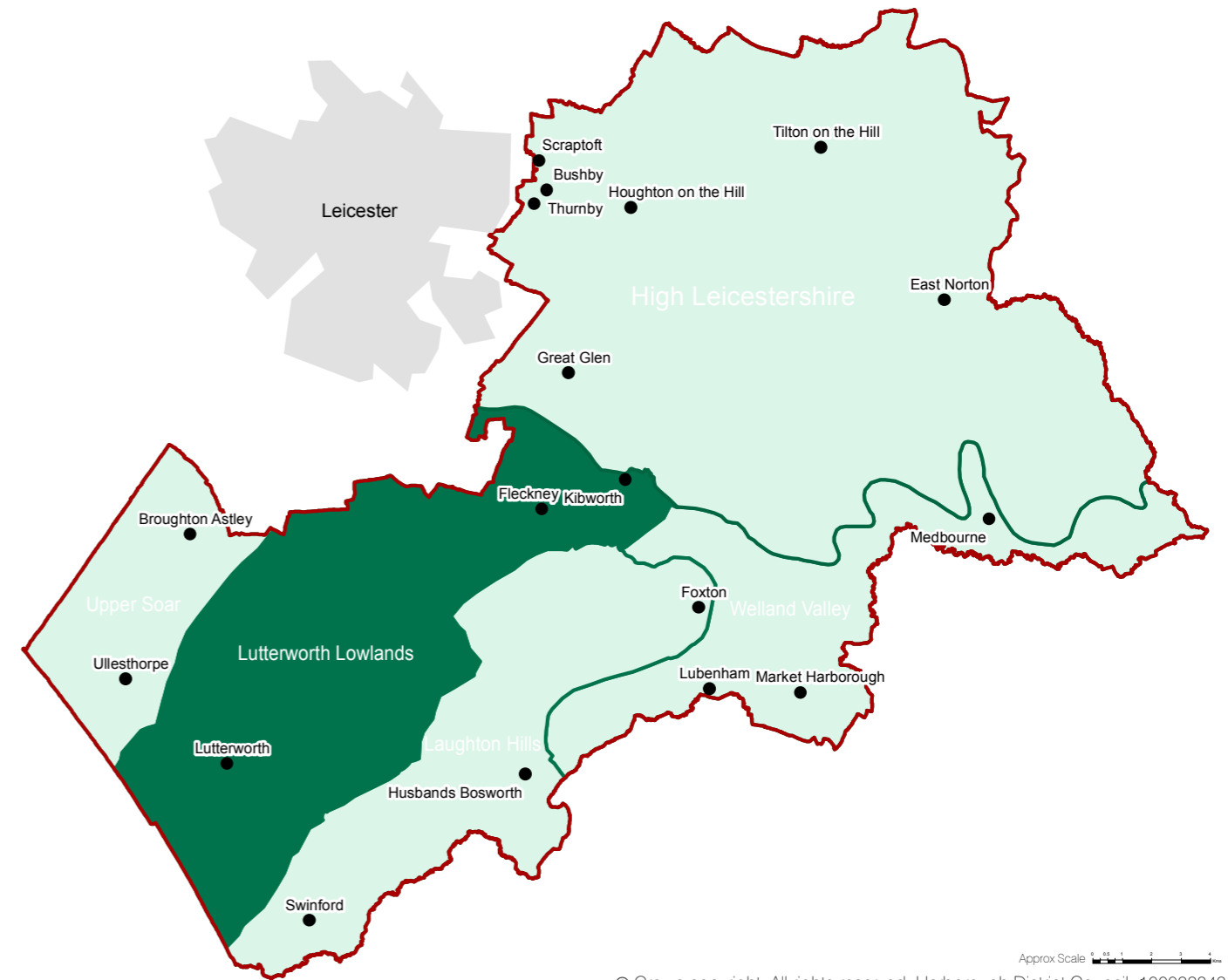
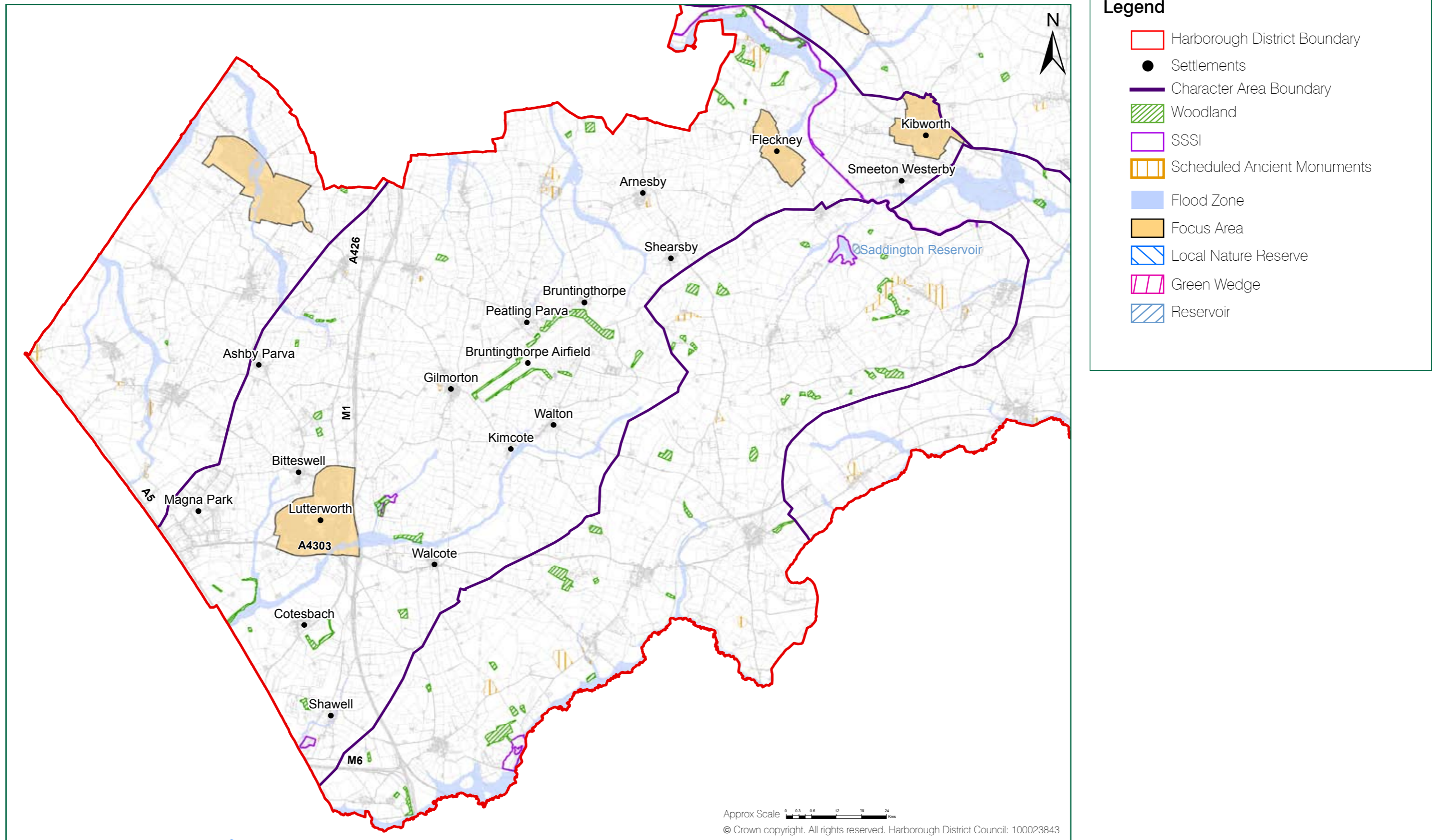


Figure 1.9: - Lutterworth Lowlands- Landscape Character Plan





Looking north along the M1

Other areas of significant vegetation are around the Bruntingthorpe Airfield which has densely planted boundaries giving a locally wooded feel which serves to screen views. Locally visually significant vegetation also runs along dismantled railway lines to the south of Lutterworth and to the west of the M1 giving the impression of well wooded corridors through the character area. There are groupings of vegetation along the tributary streams of the Swift and the Soar. The hedgerows of the Lutterworth Lowlands are mature and well established, yet appear to be in decline due to a lack of ongoing management. Occasional hedgerow trees frequent the field boundaries and there are isolated instances of spinneys and copses in the area.

**Ecology**

The three SSSIs present in this area all support wetland habitats.

Cave's Inn Pits SSSI in the south of the area is one of the best remaining areas of neutral marsh in Leicestershire, while Misterton Marshes SSSI is one of the largest remaining blocks of unimproved wetland habitat in Leicestershire.

The Kilby-Foxton Canal SSSI which runs through the north-eastern part of this area supports a well developed and diverse assemblage of plants including a range of pondweeds as well as swamp, tall fen and emergent communities. A significant roost of Daubenton's bats is also present in one of the canal tunnels in this area. This watercourse is likely to support a range of bird species as well as small mammals possibly including water vole.

White clawed crayfish are known to be present in watercourses in this area, while other protected/notable fauna such as water vole, otter, badger, bats, notable bird species, reptiles and amphibians are also likely to be present.

**Land Use**

The Lutterworth Lowlands is predominantly an area of rural farmland split into two catchment areas. The southern half of the area's rivers and streams are tributaries which serve the River Swift and those in the northern section serve the River Soar. Farming is mixed but mainly pasture, with post enclosure farms scattered across the area. The Lutterworth Lowlands serves a mix of settlements ranging from small villages to an established town at Lutterworth. The Bruntingthorpe Airfield is of local importance although well concealed in the landscape. Magna Park, a 124.8 hectare Distribution Park is located to the west of Lutterworth.

**Urban Influence/ Settlement Pattern**

There is an even spread of established villages and farms throughout the area with two larger villages in the north, Kibworth and Fleckney, and the town of Lutterworth to the south. Lutterworth is the urban centre of the area, and has expanded in recent years mainly through piecemeal residential developments. The traditional church spires/ towers of the region are evident in the more traditional villages around the airfield. The villages have also seen a mix of newer modern residential developments predominantly on their peripheries.

The M1 motorway runs north to south parallel with the A426 and divides the character area towards the west, passing Lutterworth. The motorway acts as a significant barrier across the landscape in visual, noise and connectivity terms. A series of bridges along the M1 and A426 connect the otherwise separated segments and provide continued links along the A4303/A4304 towards Market Harborough and other local routes. A network of minor roads runs through the Lutterworth Lowlands connecting the larger settlements with the spread of villages and farms scattered across the area. Traffic noise generated by the larger roads is locally intrusive.

Other significant developments within the area include Magna Park Distribution Park; a locally visually prominent warehousing and distribution centre to the west of Lutterworth, along the A5. The current layout is relatively successfully screened by woodland planting around the boundary. To the north east around Dunton Bassett sand and gravel extraction occurs in the generally open and flat landscape. There is also a large quarry near Shawell.

**Heritage**

There are a number of villages in this character area and three larger settlements comprising Kibworth, Fleckney and Lutterworth. There are a number of Scheduled sites in this area which are related to moated sites. These sites indicate wealthy residences of the 13th and 14th centuries and are often attached to the edges of settlement or former settlements. The pattern of isolated scattered farmsteads located within large areas of open landscape is a particular pattern of this character area and is in contrast to those farmsteads which cling to the edges of settlements in the east of Harborough District.

Lutterworth itself is thought to be of Saxon origin being a favourable settlement due to its proximity to the River Swift. In the 1200s it was granted a charter to have a market and it is from this trade and market origins that Lutterworth has developed. Its prosperity as a town developed further as it provided an ideal



Roundabout on the edge of Lutterworth



stopping point on the way to Oxford and London. The Great Central Railway was relatively late in coming to the town by 1899, and so the town missed out on earlier industrial prosperity, in particular Victorian development. However, it did undertake some textile weaving and hosiery manufacture.

Bruntingthorpe Airfield was constructed in the 1940s and originally used as a satellite to North Luffenham. It was used briefly by Frank Whittle who developed the jet engine but the site was handed over to the United States Air Force in the 1950s. In the early 1960's, the M1 was constructed which runs north/south through the character area. More recent development has taken place in the town of Kibworth, Fleckney and Lutterworth as well as a large distribution estate known as Magna Park which is located to the west of Lutterworth and the M1.

### **Capacity: Medium to High**

The Lutterworth Lowlands character area represents a changing landscape with many recent developments around the fringes of existing settlements. Expansion due to new development areas may mean that the area is under threat of losing some of its rural characteristics. The area has some limited capacity to accommodate localised development in particular around the larger settlements but the more rural parts of the area towards the north would not be appropriate, nor would the farmland south of Bruntingthorpe Airfield.

The Lutterworth Lowlands character area has the capacity to accommodate further residential development. Lutterworth, Fleckney and Kibworth in particular have the capacity and infrastructure in place to allow for further development, within and adjacent to their current urban envelopes. The smaller villages of the area have much lower capacity and would need to be considered on a case by case basis.

### **Key Issues**

- Given the degree of change already experienced in the landscape character area further development proposals should be carefully assessed to avoid additional adverse or irreversible change to the remaining landscape character.
- Landscape character is relatively open, with a lack of enclosing landscape elements, such as mature woodlands and hedgerows. Any new development should take account of longer distance visual impacts on the landscape setting.
- There is a general lack of vegetation cover across the character area where both mature woodlands and hedgerows have been previously lost. Remaining vegetation cover therefore needs adequate protection against detrimental impacts and supplementary planting where opportunities arise.
- The northern part of the landscape character area contains existing larger settlements such as Kibworth and Fleckney, which may be able to accommodate development within their natural landscape envelopes, as long as care is taken to minimise impacts on the immediate landscape setting.
- Elsewhere, the southern parts of the landscape character area contain fewer and smaller settlements, with the exception of Lutterworth. Any development, even small scale should preserve remaining landscape features and mitigate against adverse impacts in the wider landscape.



Magna Park viewed from southern edge of Lutterworth

