5.0 Land Resources

5.1 Introduction

The prudent use of the finite resource of ‘land’ is a key component of sustainable development. The needs of urban development, agriculture and the provision of urban open space must be balanced with the protection of biodiversity and geodiversity (the variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, landforms and soils, along with the natural processes that shape the landscape). This chapter sets out the baseline and contextual information relating to land resources.

5.2 Context Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence Source</th>
<th>Key objectives and messages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)</td>
<td>The purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development. The ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Core planning principles:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Planning should proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value</td>
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<td>• There should be effective use of land by using brownfield land, providing it is not of high environmental value</td>
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<td>• Planning should encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in both urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (e.g. for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation or food production).</td>
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<td>NPPF sets out the principles for the protection of Green Belt land, and outlines what kind of development is considered appropriate and ‘not inappropriate’ in the Green Belt.</td>
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<td>NPPF sets out policies in relation to minerals – this is essential to ensure a supply for development but also to make best use of them to secure their long term conservation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Planning Practice Guidance</td>
<td>The planning system should proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs.</td>
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<td>Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lancashire Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2008-2020 (LCC)</td>
<td>Sets out a formal review of the entire waste management strategy, and presents new charges and actions to maintain the Partnerships performance in waste management activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Minerals and Waste Local Plan for Lancashire</td>
<td>The County Council is currently reviewing the adopted Minerals and Waste Local Plan (the adopted Core strategy and the adopted Site allocation and development management policies local plan).</td>
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<td>The Core Strategy (adopted 2009) is the strategic document for future minerals and waste development in Lancashire until 2021. It sets out:</td>
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<td>• The vision, aims and objectives of the Minerals and Waste Local Plan</td>
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<td>• The principles by which development will progress over the planned period</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contaminated Land Strategy, revised 2009, WLBC</td>
<td>Sets out the ways in which the council will deal with contaminated land within the Borough, including identification and remediation.</td>
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5.3 Current Baseline

Green Belt

Green Belts are designated to:
- Check urban sprawl
- Safeguard countryside and its uses
- Prevent neighbouring settlements from merging
- Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns and;
- Assist urban regeneration

West Lancashire has 34,470 hectares of Green Belt land, comprising 91% of its total area. Of all the local authorities in England, West Lancashire has the largest area of Green Belt\(^1\).

Chart 5.1  Green Belt in West Lancashire

\(^1\) (Source: Department for Communities and Local Government – Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics: England 2014/15)
**Agricultural land**

Agricultural land classification is a method for assessing the quality of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use within the planning system. Land is classified from Grade 1 to Grade 4 with Grades 1, 2 and 3 being the best quality. Charts 5.2a and 5.2b below show agricultural land classification in West Lancashire, and demonstrate that there is a significant amount of highest quality agricultural land in the Borough; indeed West Lancashire contains a very high percentage of the North West's Grade 1 land, meaning this is a regionally important resource, and raises cross-boundary planning issues in terms of protection of such land.

Chart 5.2a Agricultural Land - Grades 1, 2 and 3 in West Lancashire

Source: WLBC 2010 (DEFRA 2010)
Note: This map represents a generalised pattern of land classification grades and any enlargement of the scale of the map would be misleading. This map does not show subdivisions of Grade 3 which are normally mapped by more detailed survey work.

Details of the system of grading can be found in:

West Lancashire has the greatest proportion of agricultural land classified as Grade 1 out of all the Lancashire authorities, with 59% (20,390 hectares) of its land classified as Grade 1. This is a greater proportion than the rates of Lancashire, the North West and England.

Local Authority breakdown for key crops areas and livestock numbers on agricultural holdings

Number of agricultural holdings in 2013 = 406

Total farmed area

Table 5.1 Total farmed area in West Lancashire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total farmed area (ha)</th>
<th>% change 2010-13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24,590</td>
<td>22,478</td>
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</table>
**Farm Types**

Chart 5.4 Farm Types in West Lancashire – based on number of holdings.

(These figures relate to the Landscape Character Area referred to as the ‘Lancashire and Amounderness Plain’ which characterises the majority of the Borough.)

Large proportions of the West Lancashire farming sectors comprise cereals, general cropping and horticulture. The top grade farming land means that the area is a significant producer of field vegetables and crops under glass / plastic. The farming land allocated to fruit and vegetable production in West Lancashire represents 94% of the Lancashire total and 64% of the North West total, once again highlighting the significance of West Lancashire’s prime agricultural land.

**Agricultural employment**

Chart 5.5 Number of people employed in West Lancashire in agriculture

*Source: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: June Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture (2013)*
West Lancashire has a total of 2,299 people employed in agriculture, higher than all the other Lancashire authorities and indicates that the agricultural and horticultural businesses within West Lancashire are an important asset to the local economy and employment.

There is a growing interest in good quality, locally produced food products and Lancashire has long-established strengths in this area amongst both producers and retailers that source from local suppliers. A number of the salad growers in West Lancashire are large companies that have major contracts with the supermarkets and food processors. (These businesses, however, tend to have low public profiles since their names are not associated with their produce at the point of sale to the public). The long opening hours of the major supermarket chains mean that growers have to extend their business and quickly respond to just-in-time orders for dispatch to distribution depots across the country. Margins are extremely tight, therefore profits are obtained through very large volumes, product specialisation and in some cases innovation. There is the additional need to provide a range of seasonal products throughout the year. Growers are becoming ever larger, or work in co-operation, so that they can satisfy large orders with tight profit margins and tough supply criteria.

The most up-to-date figures relating to agricultural employment are the 2013 DEFRA food and farming statistics. The intensive land use farming in West Lancashire leads to the demand for regular and casual workers to supplement the numbers of farm owners and salaried managers. It is the only Lancashire authority with over 2,000 people classified as working in agriculture, and the only one with more regular and casual workers than farmers, their family and managers.

Examples of agricultural-based enterprises across Lancashire include:

- Flavourfresh Solfresh Group, a leading UK salad producer based in Banks
- Huntapac Produce Ltd, growers, packers and distributors of organic and conventional root vegetables, brassicas and salads, based in Tarleton. The fact that the company also has a major transport division emphasises the close links between the agriculture sector and other sectors such as transport and storage etc.
- Len Wright Salads in Tarleton, who grow in excess of 500 acres of salad crops that include celery and lettuce. Len Wright Salads source produce from a number of local growers to improve the company’s ability to respond effectively to the demands of the major supermarkets and food processors.
- Bryans Salads, suppliers of pre-packed salads and vegetables.

The propagation of plants is classified within the agriculture sector and the West Lancashire area is home to a number of sites that grow bedding and other plants under glass. These include:

- Lovania Nurseries Ltd - one of the UK's leading plant growers, wholesalers, and contract growers, producing over 65 million bedding, alpine, flowering and bulb pot plants each year. This long-established company operates from over 42 acres of glasshouses across a number of sites in the Tarleton area.
- Quantil near Ormskirk, offering an extensive range of plants and seeds.
- J & J Thompson and Sons (Hesketh Bank), a family run business specialising in the production and supply of pre-packed Radish and Bedding Plants for supermarket distribution.

Fiddler’s Farm (Rufford) is an example of a Lancashire agricultural business that has expanded into food processing which is a separate industrial activity that is actually classified within the manufacturing sector. Potatoes grown on the family farm are used to make a range of crisps.
Generally, the agricultural industry remains highly fragmented and most agricultural enterprises are small, family-owned concerns. The sector does, however, also support considerable employment in off-farm industries like auction marts, produce packaging, haulage, agricultural machinery manufacture and servicing, agro-chemicals and prepared animal feeds, and is the basis of local dairy processing and meat products sectors. In business terms, it is a fairly stable sector with both unusually low rates of new business formation compared with other industries and high business survival, though the long-term trend towards the consolidation of holdings is continuing.

**Farm-related diversification**

Farmer Ted’s Farm Park (Downholland) and Windmill Farm (near Burscough) are examples of agricultural based attractions in the borough focussed on children. Farmer Ted’s is described as ‘the countryside’s very own theme park’ and both venues offer a variety of activities which extend well beyond their agricultural origins – e.g. both offer indoor soft play, outdoor play areas and a café.

**Previously developed land**

Previously developed land (or brownfield land) is defined within the NPPF as land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure. The re-use or recycling of land has been a government priority for many years as it is seen as the most efficient use of the country’s valuable and finite land resource. There is also a motivation to redevelop those previously developed sites containing derelict buildings considered eyesores. Recent government focus has been on using brownfield land to boost residential development.

Policy SP1 of the West Lancashire Local Plan acknowledges the need to prioritise development (including employment and housing) on brownfield land for the additional benefit of protecting greenfield land. However it also recognises the fact that there is a diminishing supply of brownfield land in the Borough. Viability issues often act as a barrier. There are a number of physical constraints with brownfield sites that lead to abnormal costs for developers. This includes the challenges of decontamination (depending on previous use), the cost of demolition of existing buildings and infrastructure provision as well as the fact that the land in question may not be in a location of market demand for new housing. For example, sites may not be well-located in terms of transport accessibility or proximity to jobs and services and residential development may not be compatible with surrounding uses.

Sometimes overlooked is the fact that brownfield land can actually hold considerable ecological value. Groups such as the Invertebrate Conservation Trust have highlighted that brownfield sites have often been unused for many years, and have become richly populated with vegetation and biodiversity. As such, many of these sites have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Sites. Therefore their development may not necessarily be the most (environmentally) sustainable option.

Chart 5.6 overleaf shows the location of previously developed land (PDL, or brownfield land) within West Lancashire, as recorded on the National Land Use Database (NLUD) – a register of vacant and derelict brownfield sites. It shows that vacant land is predominately located within or around the settlements of West Lancashire, with concentrations in Ormskirk, Burscough and Skelmersdale.

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2 The NLUD database has not been updated for several years and therefore does not give an accurate picture of the current situation.
Residential Development on Previously Developed Land

Table 5.2 Net greenfield and brownfield housing land supply at 31 March each year

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% brownfield</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% greenfield</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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</table>

In 2015/16 there were 268 housing completions, of which 149 (55.6%) were on previously developed land. The proportion of net residual housing land supply (sites currently with planning permission) in the Borough on brownfield land is 56% (1326 of 2377 units). The extant supply includes four greenfield sites, allocated in the Local Plan, which provide a total of 787 units (Whalleys, Findon, Chequer Lane & Guinea Hall Avenue). This illustrates that the proportion of new dwellings to be built on brownfield land remains above the Local Plan target, and that where greenfield land is developed, the majority of it is likely to be through sites allocated in the Local Plan.

The development of further greenfield, allocated sites such as Grove Farm (300 dwellings) and Yew Tree Farm (500+ dwellings) is likely to lessen the proportion of future residential development in the Borough on brownfield land. The target of 30% of completions on brownfield land over the Local Plan period as a whole (i.e. by 2027) reflects the diminishing supply of deliverable brownfield land and takes into account the large greenfield housing allocations in the Local Plan.
### Employment Development on Previously Developed Land

Table 5.3 Employment floorspace completed on PDL land in West Lancashire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Floorspace completed (net)</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Floorspace completed (net)</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>4900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of floorspace completed on PDL</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Source:** WLBC 2016

### Coal Mining – Development risk

The legacy of former mine workings in the area was highlighted in 2015, when the Coal Authority published development risk plans and specific risk plans that included a set for West Lancashire district. These plans show high and low risk areas, specific risks and surface coal resources in the Borough.

- **The High Risk Area** (15% of the coalfield area) is where coal mining risks are present at shallow depth which are likely to affect new development.
- **The Low Risk Area** (85% of the coalfield) is where past coal mining activity has taken place at sufficient depth that it poses low risk to new development

This information helps determine the need to submit a coal mining risk assessment for a site.

The coal mining specific risk plan identifies 8 specific coal mining risks:

- mine entries with potential zone of influence
- past surface hazards
- past shallow coal mine workings
- mine gas
- probable shallow coal mine workings
- geological features (fissures and break lines)
- workable coal seam outcrops
- surface (opencast) mining

The surface coal resource plan shows the areas of surface coal resources where extraction of the coal can be carried out by surface mining methods.
West Lancashire: Coal Mining Risk Area Plan, Coal Authority (2016)
**Recycled waste**

Over the past few years, West Lancashire has reduced the amount of household waste being sent to landfill by increasing the proportion of waste sent for re-use, recycling or composting. West Lancashire’s performance is above those rates of England and Lancashire, and has improved more sharply since 2005. In 2009/10, 46% of household waste was sent for re-use, recycling or composting, ranking West Lancashire fifth out of the 12 Lancashire districts.

Chart 5.7  Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting, Lancashire districts

West Lancashire households generate less residual household waste than the national average. In 2014/15, the annual amount per household (517.5 kg) was below the England average (558kg). This also represented a reduction in the amount of residual household waste generated.

In 2014/15, 45.3% of waste in West Lancashire was recycled or composted, placing the Borough 137th out of 326 English authorities\(^3\).

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\(^3\) [www.sita.co.uk/waste-as-a-resource/recycling-in-the-uk](http://www.sita.co.uk/waste-as-a-resource/recycling-in-the-uk)
5.4 Likely future baseline

- The large agricultural ‘industry’ within West Lancashire will continue to form a major demand on land resources, particularly in those areas where agricultural land is classified as grades 1, 2 or 3 (i.e. most of the Borough).
- With the impacts of climate change and the increased demand for locally sourced produce, demands on the quality and availability of agricultural land will only increase.
- Climate change may affect agriculture in several ways — productivity (quantity and quality of crops), agricultural practices, environmental effects (drainage, erosion) and rural space (loss of land). Temperature rise may mean that crops traditionally suited to the south, can be grown in the local area — enabling expansion of crop types and potentially providing new business.
- Agriculture and horticulture will continue to be a significant employer within West Lancashire.

5.5 Local Plan Issues

- The Borough has a significant amount of agricultural and horticultural land and businesses associated with this. These play a significant role in the local economy and should be protected and promoted.
- The way this sector operates is changing somewhat with a trend towards the establishment of packing/processing facilities on site to add value to the product.
- There remains a significant number of vacant and previously developed land in West Lancs that should be prioritised for development. An accurate picture of where this is and further details will not be available until the Brownfield Land Register has been established.
- Recent years have seen less development on PDL — presumably due to the release of a number of large greenbelt sites in the last few years.
- By contrast, the percentage of employment floorspace developed on PDL has been increasing in recent years and is consistently above 90%.
- The high proportion of Green Belt land in the Borough constrains the amount of land available for further development. This will produce future conflict between Green Belt policy and the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- The volume of household waste produced has decreased slightly in recent years and recycling rates have increased. Policy should encourage this trend.
- The Borough has a significant asset in the amount of most fertile agricultural land — this should be protected for the purposes of food security.
- At the same time, these areas of agricultural land may be threatened by the effects of climate change — e.g. flooding.

5.6 Data Limitations

The availability of soil and land related data is limited, and it does not provide trends. Data on contaminated land has also been difficult to find. Much information is unavailable at ward level and so cannot show differences between different areas of the Borough. The NLUD database is several years out of date.