

January 2009

AUDLEM

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

AND

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

AN ANNEX TO THE PARISH PLAN (2005)

This document has been produced by Audlem Planning Group (APG) for submission to Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council – Development Control Committee (DCC), following the completion of consultations with Audlem Parish residents. The community seeks the approval of the DCC that this document should be “a material consideration” in relation to planning applications affecting the parish.

Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council – Development Control Committee resolved on the 05th March 2009 that the contents of this document be endorsed; and be given due weight as a “material consideration” when planning applications in the parish of Audlem are considered.

CONTENTS

Foreword by the Chairman of the Parish Council	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Description of the Village within Settlement Boundaries	7
- The Three Conservation Areas – Central, Salford, Coxbank	7
- The Remaining Village Areas	12
- Affordable Housing and Local Employment	16
The Open Countryside of the Parish	17
- Overview – Geology – Trees and Land Quality – Ecology – Buildings – Farming and the Landscape – Parish Weight Restrictions – The Importance of Open Countryside for the Parish.	
Descriptions of Individual Areas	
- The Shropshire Union Canal	21
- Countryside South of the A525: Audlem Vale to Copthorne	22
Swanbach and Green Lane Bagley Lane and Kettle Lane	
- Countryside North of the A525: The River Weaver	25
Monks Lane and Longhill Lane	
Summary – Guidelines and Aspirations	28
Bibliography and References.....	32
Appendix – Statement of Community Involvement	33

FOREWORD BY RICHARD FURBER, CHAIRMAN OF AUDLEM PARISH COUNCIL

Three years ago I was delighted to write the foreword to Audlem's Parish Plan. The work outlined in that plan has continued with teams from the village working on a series of projects, large and small. One team, the Planning Group, has produced this excellent document which combines a Village Design Statement (VDS) with a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), both completed within the time-scale outlined in the Parish Plan.

The VDS defines in detail the village's built environment. This will help preserve the best of the heritage we are privileged to enjoy in Audlem and should help encourage sympathetic developments that will be important for the village's future but without damaging the character we so enjoy.

Recent years have seen the village enjoying outstanding success. We have won numerous awards at County, Regional and National level, so much so that Audlem is renowned as a village with an outstanding sense of community. Although that is the result of hard work by many in our community, in part it is also down to the village's size and character which are described so well in the following pages.

Similarly, the LCA describes the surrounding countryside, the gently rolling landscape that provides such fine views of Audlem, from the many footpaths and lanes that radiate from the village and supports our local agricultural industry. While there is never a guarantee of success with ever changing planning laws and Local Government Reorganisation taking us into the new unitary authority of Cheshire East on 1 April 2009, the Landscape Character Assessment could, in the future, be important in any debate about changes to the settlement boundary and other local planning issues.

This document and its detailed description of both the village and surrounding countryside is also an important historical document. Just as many in our generation are fascinated by old photographs and maps of the area; imagine the delight of members of the Audlem District History Society in the 22nd century as they read through surviving copies of this document.

Residents have been consulted on what you are about to read. A well attended exhibition in October 2008 gave local people the opportunity to comment on the draft documents while drafts have also been circulated in advance to many village societies for comment. This, I think, is important as it gives real authority to the final document which could help shape the future of Audlem for generations to come.

I congratulate the whole of the Planning group for their dedication in producing this report over the past three years. It has been a painstaking effort led by chairman David Latchford and secretary Greville Watts. It is a fascinating read and I commend it to you.

Richard Furber

Acknowledgements

This document has been researched and written by Audlem Planning Group whose members are:

Bill Campbell, Celia Bloor, Judy Evans, Shirley Firth, Chris King, Elaine King, Peter Morgan, David Latchford (Chair) and Greville Watts (Secretary). The Group wishes to record its heartfelt thanks to:

Cheshire Landscape Trust, particularly our mentor, John Gittins, for encouragement, much information and expert advice.

Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council (Avril Allman, Ruth Conley, Steven Knowles, Ruth Parry, Elizabeth Rodgers and Paul Urwin) for information on planning policy, conservation areas, tree protection and affordable housing.

The local farming community (particularly the Maughan and Lawrence families, Louise Young of the NFU Office and Cllr Rachel Bailey), for the illumination of current trends and practices.

Cheshire County Council (David Blackburn, Jan Gomulski and Rob Welch) for information on Areas of Special County Value and local highway weight limits.

Natural England (Andrew Miller) for clarification of the Agricultural Land Classification.

Campaign to Protect Rural England for their publication “Unlocking the Landscape”.

Audlem Parish Council for their support and a grant covering initial expenses.

Audlem Parish Plan Steering Group, particularly Bob Cartwright (Chair), for encouragement and use of the village website

Permissions to reproduce maps, photos etc, and acknowledgements of further funding contributions will be added at the time of publication of the illustrated version.

1. Introduction

1.1 Pevsner (Ref 5.2) described Audlem as “An exceptionally attractive village with the church right in the centre on a turfed eminence.” In a quite different vein, J M Richards, formerly editor of the *Architectural Review*, wrote (Ref 5.3), that “territorial planning ---- ought not to consist simply of those in authority taking decisions to which everyone else is expected to conform. We now see planning as a process, not an edict, and a process in which all – the planners and the planned-for – must take part if it is to be successful.” Our intention, therefore, is to describe the aesthetic, heritage and natural qualities of Audlem Parish and to recommend ways in which, helped by improved community participation, future development should enhance rather than prejudice the value of our surroundings.

1.2 This document is an annex to Audlem Parish Plan (Ref 7.3) and fulfils the action plans for medium- and long-term planning projects contained therein. The intention is to describe in more detail than was possible in the Parish Plan the character and valued features of the townscape and landscape, and to draft guidelines for future development.

1.3 Village Design Statements (VDS) were introduced in the 1990s, and Landscape Character Assessments (LCA) more recently, by the former Countryside Agency, now absorbed into Natural England. They are *not* about whether development should take place; that is a job for the Local Development Framework (LDF). However, both documents provide a context for new development, based on local character and sense of place. They form a recognized part of the planning system but need to be adopted by the local authority by means of a Supplementary Planning Document if effective influence is to be brought to bear on future planning decisions.

1.4 Nonetheless the planners have recognized that *all* communities should have a greater say in the planning process by means of a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which is part of the LDF (Ref 1.2). The SCI of Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council (CNBC) was adopted in May 2006. There is no space to give details here, but residents should be aware, for example, that with larger developments the local authority will encourage developers to undertake pre-development discussions with those affected. A “Statement of Local Engagement” by the developer will show how the local community has been consulted and where the proposals have been amended as a consequence. This procedure is evidently quite different from the circumstances in which Moseley’s Yard in the village centre was approved (2005) when there was no contact between the developer and the local community.

1.5 A new factor which should urge us to protect the attractiveness of Audlem is its incorporation into the Weaver Valley Regional Park. This is both a benefit and a challenge. The benefit comes potentially from an increased flow of visitors and new investment in amenities and employment. The challenge arises from managing this process so that physical development does not damage the charm and interest of the area.

1.6 The local authority planning policies referred to in this document are those of CNBC in their Adopted Replacement Local Plan 2011. While the Borough is due to be absorbed into the new Unitary Authority of Cheshire East in April 2009, it is expected that broadly similar policies will be adopted by the new administration.

1.7 The ways in which the local community has been involved in formulating this document are summarised in the appendix, “Statement of Community Involvement”.

1.8 At the time of issuing this document, the local authority’s reviews of the three conservation areas had not been completed. In particular, the boundaries of the central and canal area, permitted development rights, and the status of Coxbank are subject to change.

1.9 Finally, it should be remembered that this document is simply a record of the parish and the wishes of its residents at a point in time. Future developments, affecting buildings and landscape, will undoubtedly make factual revisions and changes to guidelines necessary from time to time. As with the Parish Plan, this document should be reviewed annually at the Village Meeting and any agreed changes kept in the records of the Parish Council. Certain village projects which have planning aspects are referred to only briefly here because they are the subject of ongoing development by other village working groups as part of the Parish Plan. These include a possible new sports hall, an improved children’s playground and a hydro-electric scheme on the canal.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE VILLAGE WITHIN SETTLEMENT BOUNDARIES

CENTRAL CONSERVATION AREA

2.1 “The Square” (actually triangular in shape) lies at the centre of the village at the intersection of the A525 and the A529. It is attractively dominated on the east side by the almost castle-like presence of the Grade I Listed 13th century church of St James the Great which stands high on a stone walled grass mound. The area containing the church and properties immediately to the north, bounded by Cheshire Street, Stafford Street and Churchfields, is believed to be the core of the early medieval village. Also distinctive are the recently renovated Lord Combermere public house and the Grade II Listed Crown Mews, a former hotel now converted into residential apartments. The south side of the triangle is formed by a row of 18th and 19th century properties, the ground floors of which are used for a variety of retail purposes, a precious commodity in a village the size of Audlem. At the centre of The Square is a Grade II Listed lamp standard commemorating a well known local doctor and erected in 1879. Also of interest is the simple shelter of stone pillar, pitched roof construction at pavement level beneath the church wall. This is again Grade II Listed and is known locally as The Butter Market, dating from 1733.

2.2 The Square has all the atmosphere of an attractive, bustling daily meeting place for village residents. It is marred by the presence of through traffic and parked vehicles but this is of course inevitable at this busy junction. However, the traffic and the ability to park probably in no small measure enable the shops to survive. A proposal some forty years ago to provide a by-pass was quashed, principally on economic grounds. [Local opposition to the by-pass gave birth to the Audlem and District Amenities Society - ADAS.] Other ideas, including the provision of traffic lights and providing a different coloured road surface (the latter to give a pedestrian feel but not actual pedestrianisation) have been aired in the past, but no measures of this kind are yet in existence.

2.3 The proliferation of traffic signs on the island around the central lamp standard is detrimental to the street scene and ways of reducing the number should be sought (see G1.6, page 28).

2.4 Apart from the elevated grassed churchyard and a fine copper beech in nearby Shropshire Street, The Square is devoid of trees or vegetation with the exception of an attractive raised bed of shrubs, small trees and flowers bordering the Lord Combermere car park, and a series of planted stone troughs, all of these provided and well tended by the ADAS Audlem in Bloom committee. Over the Christmas period ADAS also provides illuminated Christmas trees around The Square and along the adjoining streets, together with a central large tree, providing a much admired festive atmosphere at the hub of the village.

Cheshire Street

2.5 Cheshire Street leads off The Square in a northerly direction. A diverse range of houses and a few shops border the pavements. A courtyard within the former Crown Hotel, now apartments, is an enticing and well maintained feature. However the

opportunity to provide a similar feature within the former Lamb public house opposite, despite a proposal from the developer, supported by the village, was not approved. Further along Cheshire Street is the somewhat austere Public Hall (1904), beyond which is the entrance to the village car park, a modern medical centre and adjoining playing field, the latter providing a central site for many outdoor village activities. There is support in the village for the long-term redevelopment of this area to include a new sports hall, an enlarged medical centre, improved public toilets and, possibly, improved pedestrian access to the canal. Options are being canvassed by the Parish Plan Steering Committee (see A11, page 31).

2.6 Among other buildings worthy of note in Cheshire Street are the former police headquarters, now a private house, and the Grade II Listed Cemetery Chapels, these being set well back from the road behind impeccably maintained grounds containing mature trees (protected by preservation orders). On the other side, a row of old properties including Fox Cottage, the Butcher's shop and Smith House are interesting and characterful. Former shops, now private houses, have retained their display windows to the benefit of the street's character. Further north are a former Primitive Methodist Chapel of 1846-1871 (now the Scout and Guide Hall) and the former Primary School of 19th century origin which has recently and tastefully been converted into three houses while keeping the character of the building.

2.7 Again, Cheshire Street is marred by inevitable through traffic, and is usually restricted to a single lane by parked vehicles for a short length along one side.

Shropshire Street

2.8 Shropshire Street leads away from The Square in a westerly direction and is a continuation of the A525 through the village. An architecturally bereft building housing the local fire engine lies beyond the Lord Combermere car park. A very attractive mature copper beech (TPO T27) at the roadside dominates the view to the west. Until 2005, the good sized area of land on the right was occupied by an unattractive set of disused petrol pumps with a builder's yard and ramshackle workshops behind. On this site there is now a new development (Moseley's Yard) of three-storey terrace houses on the canal frontage, and apartments together with three shops on Shropshire Street. The largest of the latter is occupied by the Co-Op store transferred from across the road. This development has had a major impact on the appearance of the village centre, and to a lesser extent the adjoining canal, arguably more than any construction work in Audlem for a century or more. The subject of great contention within the village, the development has nonetheless won a quality award from the Local Authority Building Control Services. However, the opportunity was lost to increase the public space in the congested village centre and to create improved pedestrian access to the wharf (see also Ref 2.4).

2.9 The interesting character of the properties in The Square continues along the south side of the street. Noteworthy is Williams Newsagents with a traditional shop front and an attractive archway with a pavement of setts leading to properties at the rear. A substantial detached Victorian house (No 17) stands opposite the new development, adjacent to which is the large Methodist Chapel of traditional design with an attractive modern extension housing meeting rooms. There are fine cedars to the rear.

Alongside No 17 Shropshire Street is Old Vicarage Garden containing several large modern houses in spacious gardens with mature trees, some in TPO group A3. On the west side of Town Bridge, Yew Tree house and the mature oak trees on the other side of the road form an attractive framework for the view back into the Shropshire Street conservation area.

The Canal Wharf

2.10 The conservation area continues along the line of the canal to the north and south of the A525, and includes Moseley's Yard. The Bridge Inn, the three-storey Audlem Mill (now a canal shop with living accommodation above), the Shroppie Fly public house (part of which was formerly a canal warehouse) and the Lock Keeper's Cottage (Grade II Listed) are also within the conservation area, together with both sides of the canal between the Cottage and a short length on the south side of Audlem Town Bridge. No further changes are anticipated along the canal frontages, which are generally well maintained. The modern development of houses along the canal on the raised bank on the north side of Audlem Town Bridge is partially screened by trees and shrubbery, and that on the south side likewise.

2.11 The canal wharf is a great attraction to visitors as well as a popular meeting place for residents. While the most obvious charms lie in the buildings and the frequently passing boat traffic, there is much of value in the detailed construction, particularly the variety of brick and stone paviers along the towpath. In the shady section under Town Bridge, with its rushing water and intriguing views of the wharf below and the lock above, are brick "scorchers" laid on edge across the towpath for horses hooves to grip. Protecting the bridge corners are ancient rope-worn bumping irons.

Stafford Street and Adjoining Lanes

2.12 Leading east from The Square, Stafford Street is narrow and twisting. The heavy east-west traffic on A525 is tightly sandwiched between the walled church mound and the cottage properties opposite. For over 100 yards the larger goods vehicles approaching from opposite directions can neither readily pass each other nor see the other's approach. This leads to frequent congestion when one or the other vehicle has to back up. Pedestrians are afforded no protection by the negligible pavement on the south side which is regularly mounted by heavy vehicles. This is a severe longstanding problem discussed in the main Parish Plan (see also A8, page 30).

2.13 Aside from these issues of safety and congestion, Stafford Street and its adjoining narrow lanes are some of the most delightful in the village. On the first corner is the Old Priest House, a popular café, and next three charming white rendered terraced cottages which were saved from demolition by ADAS in 1976. Further on are the Post Office, former shops still with their display windows, the Grade II listed Ivy House and Holly House, and the listed Stafford House (No 28) with an attractive cast iron porch. There is a very small empty plot opposite Alma Cottage which has been the subject of several failed planning applications, but a garden infill house has recently been allowed a little further down the street.

2.14 At the junction of Stafford Street with Heathfield Road, School Lane turns south and then bends sharply right to join Stafford Street again alongside the Post Office.

Vicarage Lane continues at the bend to curve round and join Stafford Street alongside the Old Priest House. Both lanes are narrow, twisting and unsuitable for anything other than the lightest traffic.

2.15 This area is bordered by Audlem Brook along the east side and a small triangular Green leading to a humped bridge over the brook and access to field paths and Holmes Bank. This Green needs to be designated in the borough's planning map as a public recreational area protected by policy RT1 (see A9, page 30). Opposite the Green is Audlem Country Nursing Home, a Grade II* building dating back to about 1650, a grammar school until 1908 and then a mixed senior school until 1965. It is of brick construction, no doubt using locally fired bricks, with stone framed and mullioned windows, stone quoins and gables, and a clay tiled roof. Adjacent to the Old Grammar School is what is reputedly the smallest house in Audlem, and nearby is a converted blacksmith's forge, one of five which served the village, local farms and canal carriers in the days of horses.

2.16 Vicarage Lane beyond this point becomes a short steep hill affording an attractive view of the church at the top. The small garden area in front of the Nursing Home was, despite village opposition to the further loss of green space, recently given permission for additional residential care dwellings. Just uphill is the quite large BT telephone exchange, a very plain flat-roofed brick building set back from the road in a paved yard. On the steep bank on the other side of the lane is an important group of mature trees designated A3 on the TPO map. This wooded area is a great asset to the village, but is showing signs of neglect; some replanting appears to be necessary.

2.17 Half way along School Lane on the west side the original tithe barn with its oak beams has been incorporated within more recent residential development but retains considerable charm. The east side has been characterized by extensive private gardens. Applications for further housing development seem inevitable. The recent construction of a single large house here may indicate a planning preference which could avoid the destruction of the character of this area, though the house pushes the limits in occupying most of its plot. Certainly a dense or high rise development would be inappropriate because of poor road access and the need to avoid damage to the exceptional visual amenity.

2.18 The remaining narrow lane, running north from Stafford Street alongside Ivy House, is Churchfields. After passing a picturesque row of old garages/workshops, the lane widens before branching into no less than four narrow pedestrian alleyways serving the northern part of the village. This area is one of those minor delights of organic growth over the centuries. The six modern bungalows in the Close, built on the site of a 13th century pottery, contrast with nine older properties including what is thought to be the village's first Church of England charity school, now part of a private house. Two pairs of old whitewashed brick cottages at a right angle to each other, and a small grassed conservation area planted with shrubs and trees add to the interest of this quiet corner of the village. The grassed conservation area needs to be coloured green on the planning map and protected by policy RT1 (see A9, page 30).

SALFORD AND WOORE ROAD CONSERVATION AREA

2.19 This somewhat linear but varied residential area running along and adjacent to the Woore Road (A525) is separated from the core of the village by Audlem Brook and a strip of meadow land. The latter is afforded protection from development by its designation as “open countryside”, which helps Salford to retain its distinctiveness and individual character.

2.20 Although a very small community Salford had at one time a pub and a police house, both now dwelling houses. The most distinctive building is the Grade II Listed Baptist Chapel (1840), a small but elegant building which forms the focal point of the fine view across the meadow from Heathfield Road. A negative element arises from the numerous overhead telephone and electricity cables. The surrounding tight cluster of fourteen residential properties is served by a very narrow, curving lane which was the main road to Woore until the construction of the new bridge across Audlem Brook, possibly when the road was turnpiked in the late 18th century. The old road from Audlem into Salford crosses the brook on an attractive narrow arched bridge which has been damaged repeatedly by heavy vehicles, but which appears not to have any legal weight protection.

2.21 The remainder of this conservation area is strung out along Woore Road which is tortuous and narrow with dangerous bends unsuited to today’s heavy traffic. On the southern side are high banks and hedges, and on the northern a very narrow pavement with access drives to large detached houses in spacious gardens. The houses are late Victorian, Edwardian, converted farm houses and a few relatively modern properties.

2.22 On the southern side, off Sandy Lane, stand the ancient and half timbered Holmes Farm and Holmes Cottage, both the subject of recent sensitive restorations. The farm and the adjacent barn are Grade II Listed.

2.23 The final element of this conservation area is Mount Pleasant, a cul-de-sac leading from the northern side of Woore Road to two farms. Here there are several distinctive detached houses with good sized gardens, mature trees and shrubs. There are numerous tree preservation orders here and throughout the Salford and Woore Road area.

2.24 Despite the traffic difficulties arising from the narrowness of the lanes, it is the high banks and hedges, ancient trees, spacious gardens and sudden and unexpected changes of view to which this part of the village owes much of its character.

COXBANK CONSERVATION AREA

2.25 Coxbank comprises a small tightly knit and relatively isolated hamlet of dwellings, mainly cottage style in character, surrounded by pasture land approximately one mile south of Audlem village centre. It is built on a west facing slope, one field’s width away from the Shropshire Union Canal to the east, and bordered by Coxbank Brook in a steep wooded valley to the south-west. The origins of the hamlet are unclear, though the name Coxbank may derive from Cock’s Bank where cock fighting may have taken place. By contrast, Coxbank has a history of Primitive Methodism, the last service in the chapel taking place as late as 1991. The

chapel (1861) together with the adjoining school room was then converted into a private dwelling. The former Post Office at the centre of the hamlet has been replaced by a house in recent years.

2.26 Access to this small community is by two narrow roads off the Audlem to Market Drayton road (A529). From the centre of Coxbank, two lanes also lead to Kynsal Farm and to a footpath to the canal respectively. The lanes through Coxbank are all single carriageway and radiate from a central point at the former Post Office. An interesting footpath leads down to Coxbank Well.

2.27 With few exceptions, the dwellings within this community are of small scale proportions and of cottage character with gardens of differing size. The majority are detached or semi-detached, generally of brick and tile construction, and several are single storey. Some have rendered or white painted elevations. The older dwellings are of the mid to late nineteenth century, although one house on the west side is clearly older, being half timbered. In spite of the cottage character of this area, there are a surprising number of modern dwellings which, due to their scale and proportion, blend in well with the rest of the hamlet.

2.28 Overall, the configuration of the lanes is reminiscent of a community which has grown organically, and the absence of any straight roads has resulted in an informal and seemingly haphazardly arranged group of houses facing in different directions towards the surrounding countryside. Whilst there are few large trees within Coxbank, small scale foliage in the gardens enhances the country atmosphere. A denser tree belt along the south-west boundary of the built area provides protection and enclosure.

2.29 Coxbank provides a unique environment in which there are few opportunities, if any, for further development. However, should this be proposed, any future building should respect the small scale, informal character and a degree of eccentricity, which give Coxbank its charm and distinctiveness.

THE REMAINING VILLAGE AREAS

Audlem Village North of the Conservation Area

2.30 Access to this area from the village centre is via Cheshire Street (A529), and from the east of the village via Heathfield Road (off Stafford Street, A525). The 1875 OS map shows only sparse development – a handful of cottages and a few large houses. However in the second half of the twentieth century infill development and several housing estates progressively occupied almost all the available land which, as elsewhere in the village, is now tightly constrained by the settlement boundary. On the northern boundary is Little Heath, at one time recognizable as a separate community, but now linked by ribbon development to the main village. A few larger gardens within the settlement boundary afford the only possibility for further development, a matter discussed elsewhere in this survey.

2.31 With the exception of the estates centred on Broadways, the housing density is fairly low. This, together with mature trees, undulations in the land and views to open countryside, give a general appearance of a pleasantly leafy suburb. However, there are few houses of great architectural merit, and only one is listed (see below). There is a thin scattering of Tree Preservation Orders including tree groups at Little Heath and The Chancery (Heathfield Road).

Cheshire Street, Emberton Place and Daisy Bank

2.33 Walking north from No. 33 Cheshire Street (the conservation area boundary), there is an agreeable sense of space contrasting with the tightly built village centre. This is enhanced by mature trees, the two paddocks with Cheshire railings on the left (outside the settlement boundary), and on the right the wide entrance to Broadways flanked by bungalows in generous and well kept gardens. Adjacent to the paddocks and the public footpath towards Moss Hall, there are fine views over the Weaver Valley to the distant Peckforton Hills.

2.34 Beyond the bend, there is ribbon development on the left and Emberton Place (see below) on the right. On the left is a variety of properties of various dates and individual character, mainly set back from the road. The construction is principally of brick with tiled roofs and some rendering. Nos. 58 and 60 (semi-detached pair) have attractive asymmetrical curved porches.

2.35 Beyond this the ribbon development continues on the left as far as No. 88 where the settlement boundary is just short of Little Heath Farm. The properties are of interestingly varied character, well spaced and set back from the road behind gardens. They include bungalows and two-storey detached houses of varying dates. On the right is the wide turning into Heathfield Road alongside the triangular Little Heath green, well planted with trees and spring bulbs. In the early 20th century there was a large pond here. At the time of writing the barns at Little Heath Farm are being converted into dwellings, though this site is outside the settlement boundary.

Emberton Place (off Cheshire Street)

2.36 This is a spacious and well kept development (1982) of small bungalows and dormer bungalows, set back from the main road behind wide verges and with its own access roadways. The affordable sheltered and rental accommodation is controlled by Wulvern Housing and the community is managed from Thornton House in the centre. There is a pleasant air of tranquility, though the dwellings are plain. Although some trees have been planted and are maturing well, the spacious lawns would allow more trees and shrubs to enhance the area.

Daisy Bank (off Cheshire Street)

2.37 This is an attractively spacious and interesting cul-de-sac which falls into two parts. The part nearest to the main road contains modern detached bungalows, dormer bungalows and two-storey houses in large well kept gardens. At the end of the cul-de-sac are eleven pairs of semi-detached local authority-built houses, many now in private ownership. Simply but substantially constructed in brick they are typical of

their period (1949) but their arrangement well spaced in a loop around a central grassed area is pleasing.

Heathfield Road, Monks Lane and Mill Lane

2.38 Heathfield Road runs from the triangular green at Little Heath to the junction with Mill Lane, where it turns sharp right to join the Woore Road (Stafford Street, A525). On the north side of the green (now a cul-de-sac) there is a new development of eight houses – under construction at the time of writing – which replace a single large house, Witton Lodge, now demolished. Two affordable houses are included in line with Borough Policy RES.7. The road continues to the junction (left) with Monks Lane with four modern detached houses on the left and four houses on the right. All stand in large gardens with mature trees. Those on the left, including the Vicarage, have steeply pitched dormer roofs and a variety of timber, brick, stone and rendered claddings. The third on the right is the Grade II listed Rose Cottage, timber-framed with brick infill and a tiled roof, dating back to the seventeenth century.

2.39 Turning left along Monks Lane, there are just eight dwellings inside the settlement boundary, beyond which is an attractive view to Meadows Farm and open countryside. The three well-separated detached cottages on the left have early 19th century origins and character though they have been much extended in recent times.

2.40 On the next section of Heathfield Road, the right hand side is dominated by the modern low-rise flat-roofed primary school set in spacious grounds, including a sports field. On the left of Heathfield is an interesting assortment of dwellings of various ages and types, dating from the 19th century, some interestingly set at an angle to the road. Notable in this respect are No.56 (Elm Tree), an attractive 19th century cottage and, on the right hand side, the two semi-detached brick cottages (17 and 19) with attractive gothic windows end-on to the road. One of these, Hen Cottage, presumably takes its name from the previous road name, Hen Lane. Coachman's Cottage (38) is also a brick house of character.

2.41 At this point the road becomes a narrow, almost single-track, lane twisting downhill and without pavements. Two large houses in spacious gardens (The Chancery and The Paddock) are set uphill on the left, followed by a line of generally small bungalows down to the bowling green. The wide entrance to Hillary Drive, flanked by grass and flower beds, is on the right, followed by a sequence of fairly modern houses and bungalows as far as the sharp corner which is also the junction with the unmade Mill Lane and Salford. Most of the dwellings are well set back from the road.

2.42 Heathfield Road concludes with the short section in front of Taintree House (dates back to the 18th century but much altered) and three other more modern properties. The junction (steep ramp) with the A525 is awkward with limited visibility. In fact the whole of Heathfield Road, despite speed humps and a 20mph limit, has hazards for drivers and pedestrians, and can be very congested at school arrival and leaving times.

2.43 The view from the bottom of Heathfield Road across the brook to Salford and the Baptist Chapel (see conservation area text) is one of the most satisfying in the village.

Broadways and Adjoining Estate Roads

2.44 Built mostly in the 1970s, this estate has no great variety of house designs and little variation in building materials. However, the marked rise and fall in the land is an attractive feature, and the small cul-de-sacs, particularly Sycamore Close, provide an attractive and relatively safe environment for children. There are also speed humps and a 20 mph limit, as in Heathfield Road. Open countryside and mature trees can be glimpsed from each end of Broadways, but the scope for planting larger trees to soften the building outlines on the estate is inhibited by the higher building density and small gardens.

2.45 Nonetheless there is mix of housing types: detached two-storey, bungalows including dormers, and terraced. The most recent and probably final addition in 2001 (Eaton Way and Cotton Mews) contains arguably more attractive designs. The bricks and roof tiles are standard but finials and an assortment of vernacular gable features add some life to the development. However, while recognizing the value of this latest contribution to housing needs, some may regret the loss of the two small paddocks on this site which formed a small green buffer between the modern housing and the historic conservation area around the church. A draft recommendation by the planning authority in 1997 to include the paddocks in the Conservation Area fell into abeyance and was not adopted.

Audlem Village West of the Conservation Area

Windmill Drive

2.46 Leading off Shropshire Street opposite the Bridge Inn, and bordering the east side of the canal above lock 12, is a housing development built in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Windmill Drive, Chapel Close and Telford Way comprise approximately 90 dwellings: two-storey detached houses and bungalows fairly uniformly constructed in red brick with concrete-tiled roofs. Some visual interest is afforded by the gently curving roadways over undulating ground, some angling of properties to the road and variations in the building line. Small but well kept gardens are pleasing. However there is little space for larger trees except along the outer edges of the estate where there are good views over Audlem Vale and the canal.

Whitchurch Road

2.47 From the parish boundary at the bridge over the River Weaver to the junction with Green Lane near the centre of the village, this road forms one of the four gateways to the village. At the western edge, the first houses included within the settlement boundary are the Weaver View affordable housing on the left entering the village and the development of modern bungalows (Holly Bank) on the right. Weaver View comprises 6 semi-detached bungalows and a terrace of 4 houses of unobtrusive design. Holly Bank has timbered gables above red brick with one or two large white conservatories prominent. The road then rises steeply into a wooded cutting with the housing either side generally well concealed, though a pair of semi-detached red brick cottages, dating from the railway era, is revealed close to the road. The former railway bridge which crossed the road here was demolished after the line was closed, leaving

only the abutment bases visible. Above on the right, but concealed from view, is the Heywoods Ridge housing development – large detached houses and bungalows – dating from the 1980s and built on the site of the former railway station.

2.48 This is an intriguing entry to the village but the pavement is, of necessity, very narrow and quite steep, causing problems for pedestrians, particularly those with children.

2.49 As the road levels out above the cutting it widens before narrowing again on the approach to the Green Lane junction. Despite the 30mph limit drivers tend to pick up speed here, so there might be scope for traffic calming measures.

2.50 On the right the first visible development is Copthorne Drive, partly a private road with some older properties, partly a cul-de-sac of functional semi-bungalows. The remaining properties on this side are mainly a mixture of large detached houses of possibly the 1950s era and semi-detached bungalows, all set back from the road behind uncluttered lawned gardens.

2.51 On the left of Whitchurch Road after the cutting the first visible property is a large villa dated 1876, set well back from the road. There is also a lodge-style cottage with fancy white gables. The development continues with 1960/70 bungalows and houses until the entrance to Moorsfield Drive is reached where a group of trees is covered by a TPO. The original development here consists of chalet bungalows, mostly with Velux roof lights. From the furthest end there are very fine views over the rolling countryside of the Weaver Valley. Moorsfield House, formerly a substantial detached house in more than an acre of elongated garden, has recently been demolished to allow the building of 8 new houses and bungalows. This new estate is known as Matthews Way

2.52 The remaining properties on the left approaching the Green Lane junction are partly obscured by fencing. They are followed by the Tollgate Drive development (1960/70) which is the last before the village centre and conservation area is reached. Little further development on the Whitchurch Road is likely as there are few obvious sites for infill, though permission for one additional house in a side garden at 9 Whitchurch Road has recently been granted.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

2.53 As in most Cheshire villages, house prices have risen to levels which place them beyond the means of almost all first time buyers. Emerging households within the parish, others with dependent relatives in the village, and young people working locally, often have to seek accommodation elsewhere. The provision of affordable (social) housing is therefore of some importance for the preservation of a mixed income community.

2.54 The parish has 58 affordable dwellings of which 40 (69%) are reserved for older people. The latter are mainly in the Emberton Place development, St James's Close and Weaver View (bungalows). The registered social landlords are Wulvern Housing (46 units), Beth Johnson Housing Group (10) and Dane Housing (2 in Crown Mews). All the dwellings are provided on subsidised rental terms except for the six flats in

Moseley's Yard and Crown Mews which are available on shared ownership terms. Two new shared ownership houses are due to become available in the planned development at 72 Heathfield Road.

2.55 No further suitable land is available within the village settlement boundaries but it should be noted that the two flats in Crown Mews were existing units sold to Dane Housing under an arrangement with the developer of Matthews Way. There could possibly be scope for further such provision of affordable housing without resorting to new build. The relevant CNBC policies on new building are RES.7 (affordable housing within settlement boundaries) and RES.8 (Rural Exceptions Policy allowing limited building outside but adjacent to the settlement boundary).

2.56 Affordable housing is not truly affordable if there are few employment opportunities within the locality for that primarily younger sector of our society who require it. If they have to travel to Crewe or elsewhere to find work, then the rising cost of transport will force them away from our community, which will reinforce a trend toward a structural imbalance within the age range of the parish. This has far reaching implications for the village and the environment, if the service providers for an ageing population have to travel in from outside. The retained fire service is another example that requires young, fit and local volunteers to make it viable.

2.57 In recent years the closure of three garages, two public houses, two banks, a building society and more recently, the commercial site of Moseley's Yard in the village centre, has, whilst increasing housing provision, gradually eroded employment opportunity. The rapid reduction in the number of viable working farms has likewise had a negative impact on employment.

2.58 In order to reduce this impact and try to retain some balance in the age structure of the population it is important that some form of employment provision is incorporated within the Parish Plan. It is noted that some villages have small commercial business units available to let. There should be a presumption that should suitable government funding or a willing private developer become available, and subject to a suitable site, that such a scheme should be given planning priority and every encouragement made to promote it (see A1, page 29).

3 THE OPEN COUNTRYSIDE OF THE PARISH

Overview

3.1 All land outside the settlement boundaries of the main village, Salford and Coxbank is classified by the planning authority as "Open Countryside", and is afforded some protection from non-agricultural development under CNBC Policy NE.2. In the cases of Salford and Coxbank the conservation area boundaries serve as settlement boundaries. About 90 per cent of the parish's 2,348 acres is in this category but only about 10 per cent of the dwellings are outside settlement boundaries. Cheshire County Council is in the process of assessing the landscape character of the county and in a draft consultation (Ref. 2.1) classified an enlarged Audlem area (all land south of Wybunbury) as "Lower Farms and Woods – LFW4". The key

characteristics of LFW are gently rolling topography, prominent hedgerow boundaries with standard trees, a mix of cattle and arable fields and horse paddocks, some woodland, a medium settlement density and large numbers of (small) bodies of water. The survey notes that “around Audlem the topography is more undulating, with tree-lined streams and field drains, small woodlands and copses. This area appears more verdant and enclosed, with a smaller scale.” We would add that the variety of landscapes, changing from north to south, and east to west, is also an appealing feature.

3.2 For ease of reference in the more detailed descriptions below we subdivide the parish landscape into three types:

Type A: Gently undulating farmland with fields in a wide range of sizes, usually enclosed by hedges including mature trees.

Type B: Stream and river valleys with steeper gradients and a greater density of trees. The rivers and streams concerned are principally the Weaver, Duckow, Audlem Brook and Coxbank Brook.

Type C: The canal corridor artificially embanked above or cut through the adjoining land.

3.3 Substantial remains of medieval townfields are to be found south of the A525 and extend up to half a mile from the village centre (County Historic Environment Record). The Tithe Map of 1840 is also a valuable record of the parish’s field system, some of which has changed little in over 160 years. Hedgerows removed since that time can sometimes be discerned by the presence of a line of mature trees in an otherwise open field. A good example is provided by the isolated oaks (TPO G6, T12 and T13) in the large open field west of canal lock 11 (parish footpath 26) which show that this field was once divided, into four parts according to the Tithe Map.

Geology

3.4 A brief summary of the underlying geology of the area may be found in the Parish History (Ref. 7.1, page 10). Our land consists mainly of glacial deposits of clay, sand and gravel, and the glacial sequence is well exposed in the Duckow and Weaver valleys. Along the south-west parish boundary (Coxbank Brook and River Duckow) there is some exposure of Triassic rocks and Jurassic mudstones containing fossils. Around Kinsey Heath and to the east of Audlem the glacial deposits are flat lying and produce a gently rolling surface. The Upper and Lower boulder clays are dark grey in colour, weathering to brown, and separated by the Middle Sand. The sandy nature of the deposits is indicated by the name Sandy Lane, and well displayed in the nearby Holmes Bank, just south of the village centre.

Trees and Land Quality

3.5 Although distant ground level views might suggest that the parish is fairly well wooded, maps and aerial photographs show that the mature trees are confined very largely to hedgerows, along stream and river valleys, and the canal. Plantations and field copses are scarce. Many old hedgerows, however, are species-rich and important for wildlife.

3.6 The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) provides a method for assessing the quality (productiveness) of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use within the planning system. It helps to underpin the principles of sustainable development. The ALC classifies land into 5 grades, with Grade 3 subdivided into 3a and 3b. The data for Audlem parish lack detail and the only available map indicates a mix of Grade 2 (very good) and Grade 3 (good to moderate). The work to subdivide Grade 3 in this area has apparently not been done. Local planning Policy NE.12 contains a presumption that Grades 1, 2 and 3a will not be permitted to be developed (for non-agricultural uses) unless there are specified overriding considerations.

Ecology

3.7 While this document does not require a detailed natural history survey, the important amenity of the countryside is not confined to an appreciation of its topography. The Parish History (Ref. 7.1, pages 130/138) contains a useful survey but it is now over ten years old. When we read there that “Buzzards occasionally wander over from Wales---“, whereas now buzzards are seen daily over almost all the fields and woodland around the village, we realize there is a need for an update. Traces of otters have recently been found along the canal and the Weaver. The village lacks a Natural History Society but perhaps a few of our naturalists could fill the gap. What is needed, perhaps, is an indication of places of special biodiversity, any rarer or protected plants or animals, and a short list of the commoner trees and hedgerow species. Suggestions for further work will be found in A13, page 31, and in Ref. 2.4.

Buildings in Open Countryside

3.8 The buildings outside the main village settlement are almost as diverse as those within it. However, it is those related to agriculture which are perhaps the most interesting and worthy of preservation. The brick-built Cheshire farmhouse with its barns arranged around the adjacent yard remains an important, perhaps iconic image in our landscape. Some such buildings are passing into non-farming ownership, and even those remaining as active farms may need to be adapted to changing agriculture. Extensions and modernizations should respect the character and vernacular features of the earlier building and should blend agreeably with their surroundings. Reasonable protection against unsuitable development is provided by the borough’s adopted policies in the Natural Environment and Built Environment sections of the Local Plan 2011.

3.9 The widespread conversion of barns to residential use has proved controversial in relation to landscape character and dispersion of population to small car-dependent communities. However a consensus has emerged which recognizes that in the absence of an agricultural use for such buildings, it is better that they should be employed for some other purpose than allowed to decay and eventually fall down. Borough policies NE.15 and NE.16 give adequate protection against unsympathetic adaptation. In particular, residential use will only be permitted if it can be shown that commercial, industrial or recreational alternatives are not viable. Demolition followed by rebuilding is not allowed and the character and general appearance of the buildings must be retained. English Heritage has published a guide to good practice (see Ref. 5.4).

Farming and the Landscape

3.10 The relationship between farming and landscape is self-evident, indeed, the effects of the underlying geology excepted, almost all of our landscape is man-made. Since at latest the beginning of the 19th century the parish has been predominately dairy farming land with generally small hedge-enclosed fields. In the 1960s there were 31 dairy farms operational in the parish (source: Lawrence family, Meadows Farm). Contractions and amalgamations within the industry generally have seen this fall to about half a dozen commercial milk producers using parish land. There are now fewer dairy herds but they are larger and production is more intensive. The remaining land is given over to forage crops and the raising of young stock. Pigs, chickens etc have so far made their appearance only in small numbers. The winter grazing of sheep continues and numbers have temporarily increased due to movement restrictions resulting from Bluetongue disease. Biofuel and biomass (energy) crops are not yet to be seen but there is little suitable land and small fields do not readily lend themselves to such new developments.

3.11 The most significant cause of parish landscape change in recent decades (since the Fifties) has been the enlargement of fields through hedgerow removal, to accommodate the increasing size of tractors and associated farm machinery. Government policy via MAFF grants for hedge removal and drainage during the late Sixties and Seventies resulted in small fields being amalgamated. Hedges were ripped out and pits drained and filled. Although the parish is fortunate in still having many small fields left, in comparison with its neighbours, it was by no means left unscathed by the expansion of agricultural production during this period, as a glance at most pre Second World War maps will reveal.

3.12 As to the relationship between farming, wildlife and biodiversity, there must always be a trade-off against efficient food production. Audlem has only one organic (Soil Association standards) farm – Meadows Farm. However, at least three other farms work to DEFRA's Stewardship Scheme at Entry or Higher Level. In return for additional farm payments, wildlife, biodiversity and landscape enhancement are encouraged by good practice in relation to hedges (height and restricted frequency of cutting), application of fertilizer (restricted along river courses), tree planting and maintenance of natural field margins.

3.13 Another impact on landscape could result from farm diversification into sporting and leisure activities. Fishing ponds have already made an appearance (Moss Hall) and a 200-berth canal marina (planning application P08/1239) has been approved. The site is one mile north of the village on the west side of the canal with road access from Coole Lane. It is just outside the parish boundary.

Parish Weight Restrictions

3.14 There are two types of weight restrictions: those to protect weak bridges etc which are mandatory for all vehicles, and environmental weight restrictions which permit access only. There is one mandatory weight limit on the former railway bridge at Coxbank which is signed at 18T. The environmental weight restrictions of 7.5T are on:

Longhill Lane from A525 to A529.
Bagley Lane from A529 to Kettle Lane
Wood Orchard Lane from Bagley Lane to Paddock Lane
Bunsley Bank from Longhill Lane to Monks Lane
Monks Lane from Longhill Lane to Heathfield Road
Woolfall Lane from Longhill Lane to Monks Lane.

The narrow bridge in Salford does not appear to be protected and this is referred to in the Guidelines section.

The Importance of Open Countryside for the Parish

3.15 The relatively unspoiled open countryside of the parish is important for the following reasons:

1. The good network of public footpaths and quiet lanes (extending some 16 miles within the parish boundaries and with links much further afield) provide a much appreciated amenity for residents and our many visitors. There are also fine viewpoints from higher ground. Cyclists, walkers and boaters make an important contribution to the local economy by using the shops, cafes and pubs. Audlem has established an attractive reputation in this respect, which is likely to be enhanced as its location within the Weaver Valley Regional Park becomes established.
2. Though the contribution of farming to the local economy and employment has decreased in recent decades, the continuation of farming is essential if the attractive and historic character of the landscape is to be preserved. (See earlier section: "Farming and the Landscape"). Food security issues may also, before long, dictate the retention of farmland rather than its use for building.
3. The identity of Audlem and its individuality would be diminished if green land separating it from the adjoining settlements were to be built over. The gaps are now quite small between Audlem and Buerton to the east and Hankelow to the north.

DESCRIPTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AREAS

The Shropshire Union Canal

3.16 The Audlem section of the canal runs in a south-north direction with a length of just over 2.5 miles within the parish boundaries. It passes some one hundred yards from the village centre. Designed by Thomas Telford and incorporating a flight of fifteen locks, the line of the canal pays scant regard to the geographical contours of the surrounding land. Man-made embankments provide its elevated character with far-reaching country views over Cheshire and Shropshire farmland. The length within the village settlement boundary, essentially the wharf, is described under the Central Conservation Area (page 9).

3.17 Proceeding from lock 13 and the Grade II listed lock keeper's cottage in a northerly direction, the vista broadens and the first fine view to the north is over undulating farmland to the half timbered Grade I listed Moss Hall (1616). The low-lying field in the foreground was a marshy lake in the era before the canal was built. Then between locks 14 and 15 there is an attractively sheltered wooded cutting below which views on both sides open out to reveal the Weaver Valley. On the left immediately below the bottom lock is a former stable building, now residential, of character contemporary with the canal and situated on a winding hole (turning place for boats). On the opposite bank is Moss Hall's fine range of traditional brick barns which have planning permission for conversion into dwellings. The river Weaver flows through a tunnel under the canal some 350 yards further on. The long view to the west is over rolling farmland with woodland on the far bank of the Weaver. To the north and north-west the river meanders through a flood plain bordered by steeply rising fields, a fine view framed by mature larches on the canal embankment. Interest has recently been added to this view by the creation of fishing ponds with islands in the low-lying meadow beside the river. With woodland, canal, river, ponds and undulating farmland in close proximity, this is an excellent spot for bird watching. The parish boundary is about one third of a mile further on along the canal, but beyond, at Bennett's Bridge (No 80), a footpath east takes the walker again to the northern boundary of the parish at Hankelow Mill (see below).

3.18 Returning to the wharf and proceeding in a southerly direction, the canal beyond Audlem Town road bridge is for a short distance in a cutting and on top of the eastern embankment are houses built in the late 1970s (see Windmill Drive, page 15). By contrast on the west side the land falls away, again affording distant views over the countryside. Proceeding further south along the towpath, the canal is raised up above a valley (Audlem Vale) through which there is footpath from the canal to the east side of the village. The canal then climbs through more intimate surroundings with low banks, trees (scots pine are prominent) and foliage on either side. At lock 10 a steeply wooded gully running south-east carries a small stream draining the Wood Orchard Lane area and this is designated a site of local importance for nature conservation (policy NE.8).

3.19 On reaching road bridge 76 at Bagley Lane the scenery changes again where the canal runs along the top of a high embankment, affording panoramic views on either side and also towards the hamlet of Coxbank. There is also a dramatic view down the staircase of locks from this bridge. A short way south, alongside the top lock of the flight, is a former lock keeper's cottage and a farm driveway from the canal leads to Coxbank. Continuing south again, the surroundings change considerably as the canal moves through banks of trees whose branches join overhead to form a shady canopy. On reaching bridge 74 the aspect becomes more open again with views over rolling farmland on both sides as the canal progresses towards Adderley in Shropshire.

3.20 The much admired village of Audlem owes a great deal to the canal which attracts visitors in large numbers whether they come by canal or road, and its continued preservation and the natural beauty of its setting is considered of utmost importance in the context of this document. The village community and British Waterways make a good deal of effort to maintain the attractiveness of the canal, including tree and bulb planting and the provision of information boards on canal history and local facilities. However, the intention of BW to discontinue long-term

moorings between locks could lead to a loss of business in the village and a less interesting scene in the winter when there are few boats passing through.

Countryside South of the A525

3.21 About half of the parish countryside is in this area, the larger part east of the canal. This is predominantly Type A landscape, with Type B (see page 18) confined to Audlem Brook skirting south of the village, and in the south-west corner of the parish along Coxbank Brook and the River Duckow. As in the canal towpath tour above, the countryside is best described in terms of walks along lanes and public footpaths.

Audlem Vale to Cophorne

3.22 One of the most attractive scenic footpaths, although of relatively short distance, is that from the junction of Sandy Lane with the Woore Road, across Holmes Bank, along the Vale of Audlem, crossing the canal to the Market Drayton road (Green Lane) and following the footpath up to Cophorne.

3.23 Sandy Lane is aptly named having been until comparatively recently a sand surfaced farm track giving access to Bath Farm, Sandy Lane Farm, Fields Farm and an agricultural contractor's business. Continuing up the lane and crossing the stile at the corner of Sandy Lane and Bath Lane, the public footpath crosses the field to Holmes Bank and then follows the hedgerow down to Audlem Brook and the village green by the former Old Grammar School.

3.24 The views from Holmes Bank towards the village are particularly interesting. The 13th century parish church, standing as it does on a high mound in the centre of the village, dominates this scene and the village is framed by ancient lime, beech and other mature trees. On top of Holmes Bank is a fine cattle pond with a bed of Great Reedmace and rich in fish and insect life.

3.25 The footpath then follows the brook through the Vale of Audlem to the canal. The name Holmes Bank is perhaps derived from the Anglo Saxon "Holme" or water meadow, an area of land deliberately flooded each year to increase grass growth. There are a number of springs discharging from higher ground and the footpath, at stream level, can sometimes become waterlogged and difficult to negotiate. The collapse of some banks and trees under flood conditions and the trampling of cattle have also caused the brook to become silted to the detriment of fish and insect life. The walk through the Vale is nevertheless very attractive at any time of year. The land on either side of the brook from Woore Road Bridge to the junction with the River Weaver is designated as a flood plain.

3.26 Taking the few stone steps up to the canal towpath we are in an area already described in paragraph 3.18. The footpath west continues on the other side of the canal. Once over the lock gate and the stile we are in a meadow leading down to Green Lane. The isolated oak trees in the middle of this field have already been mentioned above in the Overview. In the lower part of the meadow is an area of reed bed and marshy ground with plant and wildlife interest. Crossing the narrow wooden

bridge over the brook to Green Lane, the footpath continues to Copthorne on the opposite side.

Swanbach and Green Lane

3.27 Turning south from near Audlem Bridge over the River Weaver, on the western edge of the parish, Mill Lane takes us to Swanbach Mill, now a private house but last worked as a mill in 1918. Audlem Brook fed the mill pond which could extend back as far as Green Lane in wet weather. But perhaps because of water shortages at times, another mill lead came all the way from a weir on the River Duckow near where it is joined by Coxbank Brook at Heywood Lane. There is some evidence that the fields between the mill and the Weaver and Duckow rivers were farmed as water meadows at one time.

3.28 From the bend in Mill Lane just beyond the mill a footpath runs parallel to the Weaver, then alongside the tributary Duckow, rising onto higher ground and continuing to Heywood Lane, just outside the parish boundary. This is a fine walk, though on wet and heavy ground it can be hard going in winter.

3.29 Green Lane (A529) leaves the Whitchurch Road (A525) in a southerly direction some 100 yards from the village centre and leads to Adderley and Market Drayton. Until 1947 a tollgate house stood at this junction but was sadly demolished to allow road widening. Its site is now a grass verge behind which there is a group of pine trees with a large Austrian Pine dominating the corner. A very fine tall holly hedge here stands on a cob foundation. As the road descends into the valley there are a series of detached and semi-detached cottage style dwellings of brick and tile on this side of the road, somewhat elevated above road level from which there are fine views over pastureland and individual large trees bordered by the canal. On the east side the hedge line contains a series of large oak trees spaced at regular intervals down to the bottom of the valley. Many of these trees are affected by ivy growth which should be severed or chemically treated if the life of the trees is to be prolonged (see A4, page 30).

3.30 At the bottom of the dip, where Green Lane crosses Audlem Brook (Grey's Bridge), beech hedges are an attractive feature, in particular those bordering a meadow on the west side. The Lane now rises towards Swanbach and at the crest of the hill are two farmhouses of age and character. On the right Swanbach Grange has had its barns converted into several modern dwellings and garages surrounded by a large area of driveways and recreational land edged with post and rail fencing. This has changed the character of the area which could, however, be improved by tree planting. On the left the timber framed 17th century Swanbach Farm is also having its fine barns to the rear converted to residential use. A group of small cottage style properties at the junction with Bagley Lane completes the settlement. Notable is "Tis Buts House" (1865) – see Ref. 7.1, page 91 – with an interesting patterned brick frontage, and on the corner of Bagley Lane a former shop, abandoned for many years, but now being restored as a dwelling. The parish and county boundary lies a few hundred yards further along Green Lane after the remains of the former railway bridge, Bridge Farm and the junction with Heywood Lane, and a single track lane to Coxbank.

3.31 There is fine rolling countryside both sides of Green Lane, seldom noticed by the speeding traffic on the narrow and twisting A529. This is not a comfortable road for walkers or cyclists and the pedestrian footpath is very narrow or non-existent. Nonetheless the road is designated as part of a Sustrans cycle route from Coxbank to Wettenhall.

Bagley Lane and Kettle Lane

3.32 The remaining open countryside in the southern half of the parish lies to the east of the canal and is bounded on the east by Kettle Lane and the beginning of Woodhouse Lane. The east-west Bagley Lane roughly bisects this area but most of the public access and popular walking and cycling routes are north of this lane. Two further lanes, Wood Orchard Lane and Paddock Lane, as well as the farm track from the former to Sandy lane, provide a varied network of leisure routes popular in all seasons because they are essentially dry. Away from the immediate vicinity of the canal and Audlem Vale, this is Type A landscape (see para. 3.2) with open views in all directions across gently undulating agricultural land. Fields of grazing cows are interspersed with arable, mainly maize and wheat.

3.33 There are many fine mature oak trees both in the hedgerows and in the fields. Damson trees are also common in the hedgerows, a relic from the dyeing industry. Holly has grown into small trees. The hedges are a good mixture, mainly hawthorn but with a variety of other species such as honeysuckle and hops. In places the tree canopy stretches across the road. There are no pavements but grass verges and drainage ditches. Cheshire CC signposts, milestones and railings are still in position although some are hidden in hedges.

3.34 Most of the built development blends unobtrusively with the countryside though telephone and power cables can strike a jarring note. Houses are either detached cottage, detached villa style or semi-detached. The majority are made of local handmade red brick with tile roofs and casement windows. There is often a decorative row of bricks under the eaves. Some of the Georgian style have slate roofs and sash windows. There is a continuous range of ages from late 18th century to the present day. One or two from each decade could probably be found. None are more than two stories high and extensions to the houses are generally in keeping with the original. Usually residences are well spaced out with fields in between each one.

Countryside North of the A525

3.35 This land surrounds the main village on the west, north and east. All three types of landscape are in evidence but the canal corridor – Type C – has already been described (pages 21/22).

The River Weaver

3.36 An attractive view of the Weaver Valley is found looking north from Audlem Bridge on the A525. This is on the western parish boundary. The tree-lined river meanders through flood meadows which are used for grazing. Steeply rising land on either side contains some arable fields. (A spectacular higher level view of the valley

may be found on Moorsfield Avenue a short distance from the village centre.) There is no public access to these meadows, though at the northern end there is a footpath from Moss Hall canal bridge which crosses the river between the canal aqueduct and the old railway bridge. The river at several points is very overgrown with dense bankside vegetation in summer. There are also many overhanging and fallen trees, and there is dense woodland on the west bank as the river nears the canal. This unfrequented valley is an undoubtedly a haven for wildlife and plants preferring wet habitats.

3.37 The fine view of the valley from the canal between Moss Hall and the aqueduct has already been described, but on the northern parish boundary at Hankelow Mill there is a further opportunity to experience the delights of this river. From the west the Mill may be approached from Bennett's Bridge (No 80) on the canal, and from the east via Mill Lane (Corbrook) or the footpath across the fields from Nantwich Road (A529) just north of Little Heath. The latter crosses two meadows, the first of which is partially flooded in winter, before descending into a wooded gully which drains the land around Ropebank Farm. The third field contains a pronounced summit from which there is a panoramic view over the Weaver Valley towards the distant Peckforton Hills. Swing gates have recently replaced stiles on this path to the benefit of the less agile. The approach from Corbrook down Mill Lane offers a complete contrast because this steep stream valley is densely wooded and a special delight in spring with abundant flowering before the summer woodland canopy shuts out the light. The mainly 18th century Hankelow Mill buildings – now residential but working as a mill until 1972 – have, together with the weir, mill pond and sluices been immaculately restored by the current owners. With the addition of the developing riverside gardens (private), this spot is a star attraction on a number of circular walks.

Monks Lane and Longhill Lane

3.38 East of the A529 (Nantwich Road) is mainly Type A landscape except for the (Type B) valley of Audlem Brook which roughly bisects the area. There is also a lake in a formerly extensive area of Moss in the north-east corner of the parish at Woolfall.

3.29 The western end of Monks Lane is a good starting point for a series of circular walks. Leaving the village settlement boundary just before Meadows Farm to the right, the fine driveway left at the sharp bend takes us to a large farm, The Parkes, and a footpath skirting the rear of the Corbrook Estate. The Parkes is owned by the Heler family whose large dairy herd supplies some of the milk required by their cheese factory a few miles north at Hatherton. Here the fields are large and many hedgerows have been replaced by post and rail fencing which gives the landscape a more open aspect. Cheshire railings, unusually incorporating an original swing gate, accompany the farm driveway and some welcome new tree planting is evident nearby. Corbrook Estate, set in 11 acres of grounds, now provides homes and accommodation for older people. The original building, a large and fine period house of 1903, is now the Care Home, and recently completed detached additional buildings to the rear provide apartments and cottage style accommodation. All are blended in the same Edwardian style and the appearance of a traditional country estate is maintained. However, several mature trees have been lost to gales in recent years and there is scope for additional planting which could enhance the gardens without shutting off views.

3.40 A short distance further along Monks Lane, Mill Lane bridleway turns off to the right, offering a short but very pleasant walk back to Heathfield Road and the village centre. A short distance down the bridleway on the left stood Audlem Old Mill, of ancient origin, which had ceased milling by 1907. Though all trace of the buildings has now disappeared, depressions in the ground still reveal the location of the mill pond and the track of the mill lead coming 1100 yards from Audlem Brook higher up at Bunsley Bank. An earlier head of water is revealed by the marshy depression in the field between Meadows Farm and Monks Lane. Further interesting details may be found on this and other mills in Ref. 7.2. The charming views across the valley of the brook from the farm gateway at the top of the bridleway merit special mention. These grazing and hay meadows have been farmed organically by the Lawrence family since 1967, resulting in a great diversity of plants and wildlife.

3.41 Monks Lane continues in a fairly straight line until the junction with the narrow twisting lane (right) to Bunsley Bank which comprises a small cluster of farms. Here there is a short leafy bridleway, delightfully called Sparrowy Spout Lane, along the brook to Longhill Lane and the western parish boundary. The name probably stems from the spring by the side of the brook half way along.

3.42 In the far north-east corner of the parish lies Woolfall on Longhill Lane, a scattered collection of farms and cottages, set in a former peat bog, a relic of the last ice age. Blackwater Moss was for some years used as a municipal rubbish dump (since closed) but has now been registered as a common and is administered by Audlem Parish Council. At Woolfall Farm a substantial lake attracts considerable numbers of wildfowl.

3.43 Proceeding south along Longhill Lane, only the properties on the west side are in Audlem Parish. They are few in number and generally former cottages now much enlarged for modern family life. A sandpit a short distance north-west of the turning to Buerton (Windmill Lane) is used for car breaking and was previously a waste dump. However, it is well screened from view by banks and high fencing. An application to build houses on this site was dismissed on appeal several years ago.

3.44 The lane crosses Audlem Brook at Jubilee Bridge (1898), with a Caravan Club site on the right, and climbs to Raven's Bank with wide views, particularly to the east over rolling farmland. Smallholding diversification is to be found here, with pigs and deer. The remainder of Longhill Lane through Moblake and Chapel End to the Woore Road is in Buerton Parish.

3.45 This picture of the northern area of the parish is completed by a description of the footpath from Salford and Mount Pleasant (see Salford Conservation area) to Gorsecroft Farm and the cricket ground, situated between Raven's Bank and Bunsley Bank. A footpath from Salford (No 24) crosses two meadows to join the farm track (No 7) from Mount Pleasant to Gorsecroft Farm. From this higher ground there are extensive views over well-farmed land, mainly pasture but some arable. Gorsecroft Farm also has a dairy unit. Two sizeable field ponds are notable on this route, probably former marl pits and both with overhanging trees. They are important survivors of the once much more numerous field ponds, many of which have been filled in or become clogged with vegetation.

SUMMARY – GUIDELINES (G) AND ASPIRATIONS (A)

In summarising this document we have chosen to list some of the conclusions as “guidelines” and others as “aspirations”. Briefly, guidelines are principally planning preferences which are in line with the adopted policies of the local authority. Aspirations refer to aspects of planning which may be more debatable, or to things beyond the scope of the planning system.

G1. The Built Environment

The charm and character of the village lie in its townscapes rather than its individual buildings, though some “marker” buildings contribute to an architectural richness. The community does not favour too prescriptive an approach to future development, recognizing that much of what we now value is the result of “happy accidents” and small-scale organic development over a long period in which there were few planning controls.

Nonetheless some principles and guidelines should serve to avoid damage to the heritage and the amenity of residents and visitors; relevant CNBC policies are cited:

G1.1 The historic layout of property boundaries and winding thoroughfares should be preserved (BE.1, BE.7).

G1.2 A good mix of commercial and residential use should be maintained in the central village area and every effort made to prevent the loss of commercial premises (E.7, S.13).

G1.3 Subtle variations in density of occupation are as important as the variety in building styles. The loss of gardens to housing infill should be strictly controlled and CNBC’s Supplementary Planning Document, “Development on Backland and Gardens” (Ref. 1.3), could be helpful. Views along streets, between buildings and to open countryside should also be respected (BE.1 and SPD cited above).

G1.4 The height and mass of any new or altered buildings should not dominate their surroundings. Building materials and architectural detailing should be compatible with other buildings in the vicinity, particularly in the conservation areas (BE.2, BE.7), where quality in design and materials must be a priority.

G1.5 Any need for additional housing would best be met by small-scale developments with individual character. A large new estate, especially one uniform in its house designs and building materials, could severely damage the character and upset the balance of the village. While the sustainability of the village would benefit from additional affordable (social) housing and employment, the opportunity should be sought to meet some of these needs through the sensitive conversion of existing buildings (BE.1, BE.2, RES.4, RES.7, E.5).

G1.6 There is a need to protect the street scene by ensuring that the numbers of traffic signs, advertisements etc do not exceed what may be necessary to meet the requirements of safety and commercial viability (BE.8).

G1.7 In addition to its importance as a legacy of transport history and a major leisure amenity, the canal and the visitors it attracts are vital to the sustainability of the village. Any development in the canal corridor should not be allowed to damage heritage or scenic amenity and should broadly be confined to water-related activities (NE.11, RT.8).

G2. Open Countryside

G2.1 The restricted development permitted in open countryside is covered generally by Policy NE.2. The conversion of barns etc to residential use is governed by Policy NE.16, but attention is drawn also to the guide to good practice published by English Heritage (Ref. 5.4). If new development requires exceptionally the sacrifice of green land outside settlement boundaries, then the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) of the area concerned should be taken into account (Policy NE.12), in addition to any considerations of scenic and amenity value. If the ALC is not well documented, then an appropriate soil survey should be undertaken. Green gaps should be preserved between Audlem and adjoining villages.

G2.2 To protect wildlife, particularly nesting birds, field hedges should not be cut between March and July. Except where overhanging growth could cause a nuisance on lanes and paths, hedges should only be cut every two to three years, and a height of at least 1.5 metres should generally be maintained. After cross-field footpaths have been ploughed they must be reinstated within 14 days. Further details on the correct maintenance of hedges and footpaths may be found in the DEFRA Cross Compliance Guidance GAEC 15 and GAEC 8.

ASPIRATIONS

A1 **Employment** – In the interests of sustainability and a mixed-age community, any future expansion of the village should be for mixed use. Employment, on a scale and of a type compatible with rural surroundings, should be given equal weighting with affordable housing.

A2 The following area should be considered for designation as an **Area of Special County Value** (ASCV): The Weaver Valley north of Audlem Bridge and downstream as far as Hankelow Mill, combined with the canal corridor from lock 13 north to Moss Hall aqueduct. The protection from development provided by Policy NE.3 would then be applicable, though Policy NE.11 also provides some protection for river and canal corridors.

A3 **The public footpaths** in the parish should be maintained to provide reasonable access in all seasons. Some paths, particularly Audlem Vale No 26, require drainage works and/or board walks for accessibility in all but dry seasons. Swing gates should continue to replace stiles in the more popular walks close to the village (RT.9). Walkers are reminded to respect the fields crossed by footpaths. They should avoid straying from the line of the path, particularly to protect crops, including grass for hay or silage. Dogs should be kept under close control especially when farm animals are present; dog fouling can cause illness in farm animals as well as humans.

A4 A brief survey of the **mature trees** in the parish has indicated the need for extensive work to improve the health and longevity of existing specimens and to undertake new planting to fill gaps created by loss to gales and disease. Many trees are adversely affected by ivy growth which needs to be severed close to the roots. There is also a need to check the accuracy of the TPO maps; the parish council should approach the local authority to obtain a complete set together with the relevant schedules. The role of the parish tree warden should be enhanced by restoring links to the local authority and Cheshire Landscape Trust who can provide advice and assistance. Additional volunteer labour should also be sought in the local community.

A5 **The narrow bridge at Salford** needs to be clearly signed from both sides as unsuitable for heavy vehicles.

A6 **Historic roadside and canalside artefacts** - further work is needed to compile an inventory of such items as mileposts, Cheshire Railings, telephone boxes, lamps and pumps which are of historical interest and contribute of the character of the parish.

A7 **Allotments** – The lack of this facility has become increasingly evident as the average size of private gardens has diminished. At least 40 residents have indicated their wish to have an allotment. Following a well attended inaugural meeting, an Association is being formed to work with the parish council and the local authority to try to find suitable land. Two prospective sites have been identified. Affiliation to the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners will be sought.

A8 Current efforts to reduce long-distance **heavy traffic** through the village, particularly on the A525 east-west route, should continue as a matter of urgency, and the assistance of all relevant authorities is actively sought. This should be helped by the recent agreement that the road will, by 31 March 2009, be removed from the Primary Route network.

A9 The completion of the local authority's current reviews of **conservation areas** and their boundaries, and the issue of revised maps, are eagerly awaited (BE.7). Suggestions have been made by the village for the addition of certain buildings to the Local List. Two public green spaces in the central conservation area – the Green between Audlem Brook and Vicarage Lane, and the grassed nature reserve area off Churchfields – need to be designated by the local authority as of recreational and amenity value and protected by Policy RT.1. A possible revision of conservation area boundaries along the canal is also under consideration by the local authority and a speedy resolution of this issue is urged. The village has suggested that the whole of the canal and its banks from lock 11 north to the winding hole below (bottom) lock 15 should be designated a conservation area.

A10 Audlem's new status as the southern gateway to the Weaver Valley Regional Park could lead to more visitors and a demand for **car parking** in excess of the village's current capacity. Contingency plans for overflow parking, within walking distance of the village centre, need to be considered. However, an increase in the capacity of the present car park could be obtained by marking all the individual spaces.

A11 **Health and Leisure** – A parish working group is developing proposals for a new sports hall to the rear of the existing public hall. Separate proposals for an improved medical centre nearby could possibly become linked with this as an initiative in preventive medicine. Further improvements to the adjacent children’s playground and improved pedestrian access to the canal across the football field are also being discussed as part of the possible redevelopment of this area. Again, there is discussion of this in the Weaver Valley Regional Park document (Ref. 2.4).

A12 **Energy and Sustainability** – A study of a micro-hydro electricity scheme at Audlem locks has been carried out by consultants with support from British Waterways and village activists. The project is considered feasible and total costs are estimated to be in the region of £165,000. The power output would be 125,000/175,000 kWh/year, sufficient for about 40 to 50 houses.

A13 **Ecology and Biodiversity** – There is a need for a survey of the parish. This should probably remain a parish responsibility to be conducted by volunteers, but professional assistance may be available from Cheshire Landscape Trust, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and others. We could usefully start with a hedgerow survey. Hedgerows, ponds, arable field margins and woodland should be retained wherever possible, and the creation of new habitats would be welcome. Stream quality should be monitored since there is some current concern about the pollution of streams by septic tanks and, possibly, farm emissions. Some farmers working to DEFRA’s Environmental Stewardship Scheme are already committed to higher standards of environmental protection. There is much support for all this work in the study carried out by the Weaver Valley Regional Park team (Ref. 2.4).

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

The following have, directly or indirectly, informed the writing of this document.

1. Borough of Crewe and Nantwich

- 1.1 Adopted Replacement Local plan 2011 (as amended).
- 1.2 Local Development Framework – Adopted Statement of Community Involvement
- 1.3 Development on Backland and Gardens – Supplementary Planning Document

2. Cheshire County Council

- 2.1 Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment – Consultation Draft November 2007
- 2.2 County Historic Environment Record (Maps)
- 2.3 Cheshire Historic Towns Survey – Audlem – Archeological Assessment and Strategy (with English Heritage)
- 2.4 Weaver Valley Regional Park – Focus Area Proposals for Audlem, August 2008

3. Cheshire Landscape Trust

- “In a Nutshell” guidance notes for compiling Village Design Statements and Landscape Character Assessments.

4. Government Publications

- 4.1 Planning Policy Statement 7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
- 4.2 Planning Policy Statement 3 – Housing

5. Buildings

- 5.1 Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture (1974) – R W Brunskill
- 5.2 The Buildings of England – Cheshire (1971) – N Pevsner and E Hubbard
- 5.3 The Castles on the Ground – The Anatomy of Suburbia (1973) – J M Richards
- 5.4 The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A Guide to Good Practice. English Heritage (2006)
- 5.5 The Future for Farm Buildings (1988) – Gillian Darley

6. Landscape

- 6.1 The Making of the English Landscape (1955) – W G Hoskins
- 6.2 Hedgerow History – Ecology, History and Landscape Character (2006) – G Barnes and T Williamson - Windgather Press.
- 6.3 Ancient Trees: Living Landscapes (2005) – Richard Muir – Tempus Publishing

7. Audlem Parish

- 7.1 Audlem – The History of a Cheshire Parish and its Five Townships (1997) – Frank Latham and the Local History Group
- 7.2 A History of Mills in Audlem (1980) – C B Marshall and G Meredith
- 7.3 Landscape Changes in Audlem since 1840 – Field Class Report by F M Price (1983).

8. Local Distinctiveness

- 8.1 Real England: The Battle against the Bland (2008) – Paul Kingsnorth
- 8.2 England in Particular (2006) – Sue Clifford and Angela King

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

An Appendix to Audlem Village Design Statement (VDS) and Landscape Character Assessment (LCA).

The guidelines and aspirations in this document are the result of discussions within the local community, and with external advisers, which started during the formulation of the Parish Plan in 2005 (see Parish Plan pages 16-19). Initially, two public meetings with workshop sessions on planning aspects identified the main concerns of the community, as well as some of the individuals who could make a contribution to ongoing discussions. These meetings were followed by a questionnaire to all households, the majority feedback from which indicated that further residential development should be small in scale, largely through infill, with the emphasis on affordable rather than market-priced housing. There was also strong support for protecting the character and local distinctiveness of the village, and a major concern about the volume of road traffic, particularly long distance heavy vehicles on the unsuitable East-West route.

Following the publication of the Parish Plan, Audlem Planning Group (APG) – with initially five then progressively expanded to nine members – was formed to develop the VDS and LCA in detail. The membership represents a spread of age, experience and interests, and through common membership provides links with the Parish Council, the Amenities Society (ADAS) and the Parish Plan Steering Group. APG met 18 times between January 2006 and October 2008. Notes on all meetings were distributed to those actively involved. The general community was kept informed of progress by means of reports to the annual village meetings and to the parish council; occasional news items were placed on the Audlem website. An indication of the external advice received by APG may be found in the Acknowledgements of the main VDS/LCA document.

A further input to the document arose from discussions with the parish council and the local authority over the review of the central conservation area (November 2007) and the community's response to the borough's Core Strategy consultation (December 2007).

Finally, a further round of consultation with the community was held by means of:

- a) circulation of the draft document to all the main village organisations, with requests for comments,
- b) a public exhibition of APG's work in the Scout and Guide Hall on 18 October 2008,
- c) distribution of a Residents' Comments Form (see blank attached) to the individuals who attended the exhibition.

Audlem Parish Council, at their meeting on 1 September 2008, gave the draft document their full support subject to two minor textual amendments. Subsequently,

letters of full support and approval were received from Audlem and District Amenities Society, Probus Club, the History Society, St James' Primary School, the Baptist Church and the Medical Practice. The Women's Institute sent comments from individual members and made it known that they were generally supportive of the document. Our Member of Parliament, Stephen O'Brien, wrote to say that he had read the document with great interest and he congratulated the village for producing such a well documented statement.

Approximately 150 people attended the exhibition which had been advertised on posters, on the Audlem website and in the local press. The exhibition featured modern and historical maps, drawings, photographs, enlarged sample pages from the draft document and reference publications listed in the Bibliography. There was also a continuous projection of parish photographs, a children's art competition on the theme of "My Village" and a photo recognition competition for adults. The whole engendered some very lively and constructive discussions and 52 individuals completed Residents' Comments Forms. There was unanimous support for the VDS and LCA and some helpful comments have been taken into account in the final drafting.

AUDLEM VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT AND
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Draft, August 2008

Public Exhibition 18.10.08

RESIDENTS' COMMENTS FORM

I/We have read the draft/attended the exhibition (please delete as appropriate)
and (please tick one box only):

Fully support the document and its recommendations.

Generally support the document though minor alterations are suggested below.

Cannot support the document in its present form. My/our reservations are outlined
below.

COMMENTS

(Please continue overleaf if necessary)

Signed _____

Address: _____

Tel./Email: _____