

Marton Moss

Major Open Land Study

February 2022

Revised Draft for Comments



Envision



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Revision Note

This Report was first published for comments as part of the Evidence and Policy Options stage of engagement on the Neighbourhood Plan in July 2020. Following consideration of the comments received at that stage and what land would be appropriate to propose as housing allocations in the Plan, revisions have been made to this Report. These relate to the proposed extent of two of the areas intended to be designated as Major Open Land in the Neighbourhood Plan:

- **Land bounded by Chapel Road, Yeadon Way, Progress Way and Cropper Road North**
- **Land off Sandy Lane and Worthington Road**

This Report as revised is now to be published at the Regulation 14 to allow any further comments to be made alongside the draft Neighbourhood Plan itself. It remains the case that no final decisions have yet been taken on any of the Plan's policies and site-specific proposals.

Introduction

1. A key aim of the Marton Moss Neighbourhood Forum is to produce a Neighbourhood Plan that safeguards the visual character of the Area; large tracts of open land make a crucial contribution to that appearance. In addition, these open tracts play an important functional role in supporting biodiversity, acting as part of the local ecological networks. It is also commonly accepted that open green spaces within otherwise built-up areas can play an important role in the physical and mental well-being of people living nearby and visitors to an area. It is therefore important to fully assess the characteristics of such land.

2. The Forum also aims to provide much needed community infrastructure and carefully control new development in the Area. By setting out the role played by major open land across the Moss in defining its character, this study can help inform how these development aims can be appropriately achieved through the Neighbourhood Plan without harming the overall appearance of the Moss. This report is consistent with and builds upon the Marton Moss Design Code work produced by consultants AECOM (2020).

3. This report assesses four extensive areas of open land; the proposed boundaries of these tracts are still not finalised in this revised version which takes account of two sites suggested for inclusion as housing allocations in the draft Plan. Also, some other land within the Neighbourhood Area that could qualify for designation may have been overlooked in this Study. The production of this report is not intended to be the final word on which land is recommended for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan as Major Open Land. Before the Plan is submitted to the Council there is an opportunity for local people and other interested parties to put forward other suggestions or to comment on the outcomes of this Study within the six weeks set aside from when this revised report is published. Comments can be made using the form available on the Forum's website www.martonmossforum.org. The Forum can also be contacted via enquiries@martonmossforum.org or on 07739 517630.

Background

4. Open pastoral land is a characteristic feature of Marton Moss today both in terms of large tracts and smaller plots. Fifty years ago, many of the smallholdings were used for intensive horticulture. Now very few of those market gardening businesses remain and nearly all the glasshouses have been removed. The Marton Moss Background Paper (2009) prepared for the Local Plan Core Strategy, includes a map, on page 20, which records, on the land now included in the Neighbourhood Area the distribution of 'glasshouse losses' (probably representing complete nursery businesses) between 1960 and 2006. During that time 26 holdings had been cleared of glasshouses; more have been lost since then.

5. The horticultural plots were typically about an acre (0.4 hectare) in size. Many of these plots are now occupied by single houses with the remainder of the land used as a garden. Some of the houses are the original horticultural residences others have been replaced with individual modern houses.

6. Whether traditional or modern, the single residences with large gardens contribute to the pastoral character of the Moss as does the main other activity that has taken over from horticulture – equestrian use. There are many plots of land across the Area that are used for horse stabling, exercise paddocks and grazing. Some of these are commercial ventures, but most are residents' hobby pursuits. However, again these plots tend to be quite small in extent.

7. The Design Code work [AECOM, 2020] that has been done for the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan fully recognises the significance of the existing buildings of the Moss in terms of their contribution to the overall appearance of the Area. That work also recommends how that character can be maintained through the appropriate introduction and design of new housing development. Furthermore, the Marton Moss Design Code recognises the key role that the major tracts of open land play in contributing to the pastoral character of the Area.

8. Although much of the open land across the Moss comprises small individual plots, some unused, there are several larger tracts of major open land which are typically made up of adjoining fields. These areas have been little or never used for intensive glasshouse market gardening and so constitute long standing open features in the local landscape with notable historic significance. This study will focus on the contribution these major tracts make to the character of the Area and what future role they could play in that regard.

9. Local studies [Marton Moss Historic Characterisation Study, 2009; Blackpool's Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2019-2029, 2019] recognise the open character of the Area but very little of the open land is formally protected through planning policies. The football pitches off School Road and the adjoining St Nicholas School with its playground were designated as Playing Fields and Sports Grounds under Policy BH7 of the Blackpool Local Plan 2001-2016. This policy remains 'saved' so continues in force, at least for the time being, and is backed-up in general terms by Core Strategy Policy CS6 – Green Infrastructure. These formalised open areas are considered further in the Marton Moss Local Green Space Study (2020).

10. A key aspect to remember about open land is its human physiological and psychological significance. The ability to view and pass close to (particularly when walking, cycling or horse riding) open, undeveloped land particularly in or close to urban settings is widely recognised as having highly positive health and well-being benefits. Such places are often referred to as the 'Green Lungs' or 'Green Heart' of the local neighbourhood. Given that the Marton Moss Neighbourhood Plan will allow some limited development of the Area remaining open tracts of land will inevitably assume an even greater significance in this regard.

11. In respect of their wildlife significance, the major open tracts of land act as wildlife corridors, parts of the local ecological networks for grassland, wetland, and heath habitats. They are also associated with the coastal flood plain and grazing marsh priority habitat by virtue of the local drainage dykes and damp pasture which support the locally rare Common Meadow Rue plant on a site of Lancashire importance, along with amphibians and water loving mammals. Furthermore, the Midgeland Farm site is also significant for its perimeter tree belt – identified as a deciduous woodland priority habitat site. All in all, the major tracts of open land are both important existing features for wildlife and opportunities to improve biodiversity.

12. There are four extensive tracts of major open land at Marton Moss which currently have no specific planning policy protection and are considered in this report:

- Land at Midgeland Farm
- Land bounded by Chapel Road, Yeadon Way, Progress Way and Cropper Road North
- Land south of Ecclesgate Road
- Land off Sandy Lane and Worthington Road

Land at Midgeland Farm

13. There has been a 'Midgeland Farm' since at least the 16th century and that had extensive land associated with it. The land considered in this study is the much smaller area contained within Blackpool Borough, on the south eastern edge of the Neighbourhood Area and is situated close to the junction of two roads - School Road and Midgeland Road. The land mainly comprises three fields and amounts to approximately 11 hectares (about 27 acres) in total area – see map below.



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14. A small part of the site, close to Midgeland Road, is occupied by former farm buildings. Those structures that date from the early 19th century are locally listed but in a poor state of repair. The more recent buildings are in a better condition but are of little or no architectural merit. Nearly all the remaining land is underlaid with a former domestic refuse landfill tip. This has been capped by a layer of clay; the deposited material is monitored and treated for methane gas and water leachate emissions. Most of the open land is grazed or used for hay production.

15. Despite being used as a landfill site in the 1960s and 1970s the land retains its 'Modern Enclosure' appearance, with characteristic quite large regularly shaped fields, that it acquired sometime between 1841 and 1912, as indicated by historical maps. There is no evidence that the land has ever been used for intensive horticultural production

16. The land is bounded by quite high hedges fronting Midgeland Road and School Road as well as by a substantial belt of 'Modern Plantation' trees on the south east and south west sides, so is not readily visible from public roads despite being slightly elevated above them. Within the site the field boundaries are marked by maintained, modest height hedgerows, the north east protrusion of the site up to the boundary with Fylde Borough is however now not marked at all on the ground and instead forms a small part of a large field extending further eastwards. The site has a paved roadway but is closed to public access.

17. Because of its peripheral location and concealment from public views, this land is not prominent in the local landscape. However, if it is opened-up to public use as, say a community park, it would contribute much more significantly to the open, pastoral experience of living and visiting the Moss – see photographs below.



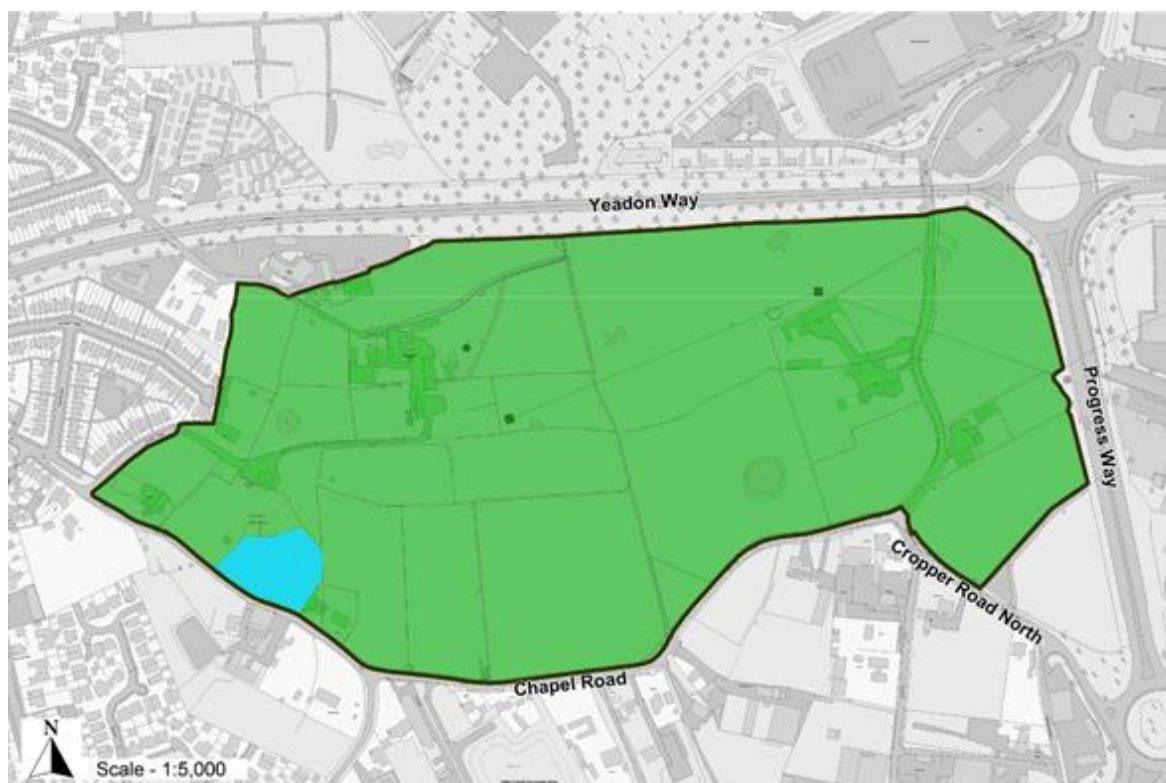
Photo 1: Midgeland Farm from Midgeland Road



Photo 2: Midgeland Farm – internal access road

Land bounded by Chapel Road, Yeadon Way, Progress Way and Cropper Road North

18. This tract of land is mainly situated between Chapel Road to the south and Yeadon Way to the north, at the eastern end a small part is sited between Chapel Road (where it has a north-south alignment) from its junction with Cropper Road North and east to Progress Way. The revised total area is about 21 hectares (approximately 52 acres) – see map below – this extent takes account of a site proposed to be excluded from the Major Open Land designation as shown in blue.



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19. Unlike much of the Moss, which is of Grade 2 agricultural quality, the soils in the north of the Neighbourhood Area, are of slightly poorer quality – Grade 3 – in fact probably 3a given the close proximity to the better land further south. The northern tract was however enclosed for agricultural use at an historically earlier stage than the remainder of the Moss. Classed as an area of ‘Ancient Enclosure’, it has been farmed from at least the Medieval period, but most probably also has associations with pre-historic and Roman settlement. This long duration of human use means it has high archaeological potential and its historic characterisation value has been rated as ‘Considerable’ [Marton Moss Historic Characterisation Study, 2009, page 42]

20. This tract retains the small, irregularly shaped field character of long enclosed land, with open dykes and a pond. It has been little used for intensive horticultural purposes. Today it comprises mainly pastoral hedge-bounded fields, however several of these towards the centre of the area support marshy grassland which has been little used for grazing for many years. Here there is also a locally rare plant species – the Common Meadow-rue – this is the only known occurrence within Blackpool, this habitat is protected for its biological heritage. This central part of the land is also transected by a dyke with water vole potential and a nearby pond which may support newts.

21. There are a few isolated houses served by Chapel Road and a couple of farmsteads in the vicinity of Whalley Lane to the north. One of these houses – a semi-detached dwelling, 1 Runnell Villa, and its associated grounds, is now proposed as a housing allocation in the draft Neighbourhood Plan but limited to two additional dwellings in the south east of the site. In the Site Options and Assessment Report (2020) this site (MM10) is described as “effectively screened from the wider landscape and its contribution to openness is considered to be limited” page 114. It is for this reason that the area (shown in blue on the map on the previous page) is proposed to be excluded from the tract to be designated as Major Open Land.

22. Elsewhere the tract extends to Eastbank Avenue where it presents an open frontage onto the western extremity of the area. There is a high voltage overhead electricity line with pylons in the north east of the area. Here there are the routes of public footpaths alongside Yeadon Way, to Whalley Lane and on to Eastbank Avenue however these are obstructed with only the Yeadon Way-Whalley Lane length passable with difficulty - see the Public Rights of Way Study report (2020) for details.

23. Although parts of this land have a disused, unkempt appearance it has a distinct rural charm that significantly contributes to the open character of the Neighbourhood Area – see the photographs below and overleaf. This is especially apparent as the land is open to public views from much of Chapel Road. In the wider context the land serves as a welcome open break in that beyond Yeadon Way to the north are extensive commercial uses at Mereside, whilst east of Progress Way is the Blackpool and Fylde Industrial Estate.



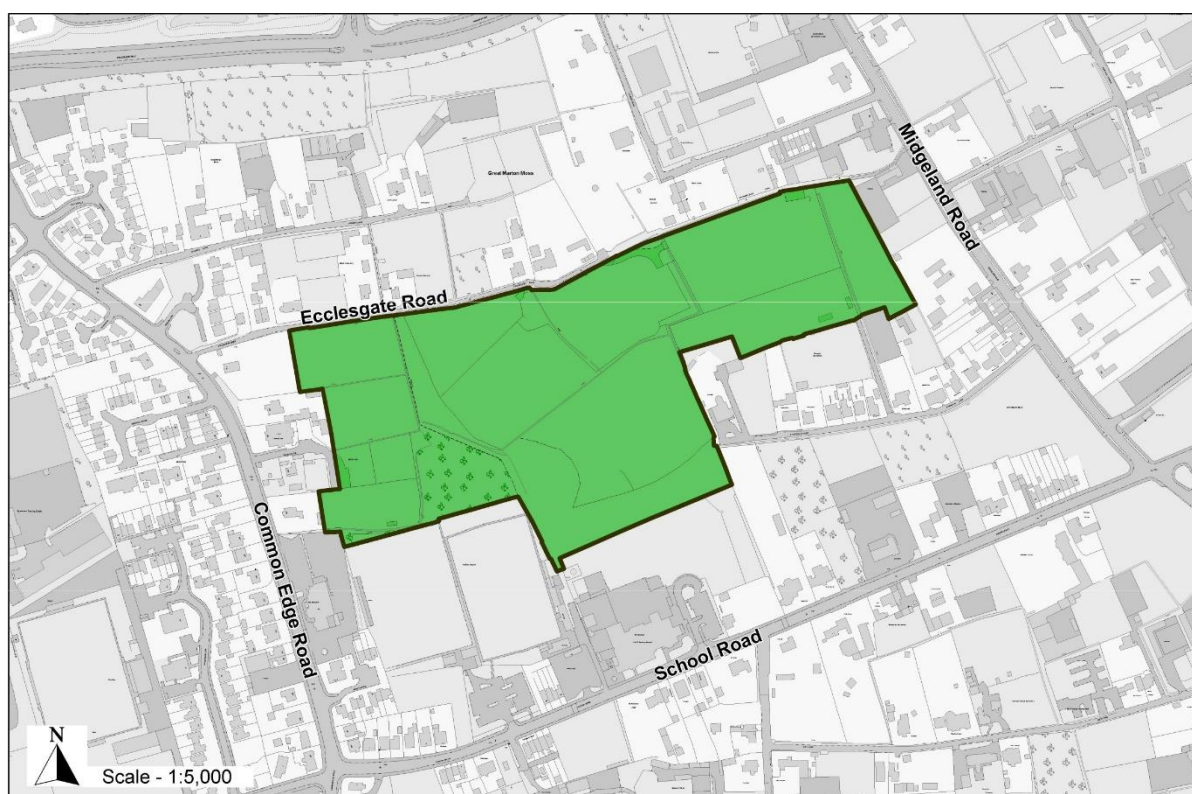
Photo 3: Looking east from Eastbank Terrace



Photo 4: Looking north west from Chapel Lane

Land south of Ecclesgate Road

24. This tract of open land extends to about 8 hectares (approximately 20 acres) and is situated between Ecclesgate Road, the rear of residential properties on St Nicholas Road and St Nicholas School which fronts School Road – see map below.



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25. The land is part of a wider area of 'Post-Medieval Piecemeal Enclosure', former mossland that was gradually claimed for cultivation following peat extraction mainly during the 18th century and divided into small holdings by the Clifton Estate in the 19th century. However, there is little evidence that this tract has been used for intensive horticultural purposes. The existing modest sized field pattern can be traced back to at least 1844. Aerial photographs dating back to the 1940s show the land used for pastoral purposes.

26. The Post-Medieval Piecemeal Enclosure part of the Neighbourhood Area is described as '*a particularly distinctive landscape character and has resulted in piecemeal development resulting in a leafy, enclosed landscape with considerable local distinctiveness*' and its historic significance is rated as 'Exceptional' [Marton Moss Historic Characterisation Study, 2009, page 43]

27. Much of the land today is used for grazing although most of the eastern side was formed into a surface water attenuation basin in 2017 by United Utilities. This structure is a grassed-over hollow when dry. The land immediately behind the school is used as an informal publicly used open space with mown pathways along with shrub and low tree vegetation – see photograph below. There is a north-south aligned public footpath connecting School Road with Ecclesgate Road, plus an informal path connecting to The Shovels public house. This part of the land is considered further in the Marton Moss Local Green Space Study (2020).



Photo 5: Informal open space at the rear of St Nicholas School

28. The remainder of the tract is much more open in appearance and greatly contributes to the open character of the local area – see photograph overleaf. In addition to the public footpath from School Road, Ecclesgate Road is also a public right of way through to Midgeland Road and this allows expansive views across the open tract. Apart from the attenuation basin most of the remaining land is owned by Blackpool Council.



Photo 6: From Ecclesgate Road to School Road footpath, looking east

Land off Sandy Lane and Worthington Road

29. Sandy Lane and Worthington Road are narrow unadopted cul-de-sac accessways with considerable rural charm that are or become east-west aligned to face an extensive tract of open land made up of numerous modest sized fields with an overall revised area of about 10 hectares (just under 25 acres) with the addition of land to the rear of Division Lane shown edged in green on the map below.



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30. The whole tract is part of the 'Post-Medieval Piecemeal Enclosure' and so has the same exceptional historic character as the land south of Ecclesgate Road. This land has not been used extensively for intensive (glasshouse) market gardening. The existing field pattern can be traced back to at least the 1840s and the land has probably been used continuously ever since for open cultivation and grazing purposes. The tract is open to view from the cul-de-sac ends of Sandy Lane and Worthington Road. There are well used public rights of way to the south of Sandy Lane connecting with Division Lane but unfortunately the public footpath linking with Worthington Road is partly obstructed and difficult to use – for more details see the Public Rights of Way Study report (2020).

31. At the eastern extremity of the land is a well-used bridleway linking Division Lane to Midgeland Road which again provides views into the open tract. Here land southwards to the Division Lane frontage is also of open character however it was suggested as a housing site (MM29) and as such was considered in the Site Options and Assessment Report (2020). That concluded "Development of the northern part of the site would result in an uncharacteristic extension into open land and has the potential [if developed for housing] to adversely impact the rural character of the neighbourhood area" page 248. It is therefore proposed that only the southern half of the site should be allocated for housing in the Neighbourhood Plan and the remainder (as edged in green on the map on the previous page) be included in the intended Major Open Land designation. Taken as whole tract from Sandy Lane and Worthington Road eastwards this attractive land makes a very considerable contribution to the open character of the Neighbourhood Area – see photographs below and overleaf.



Photo 7: Looking north west from Midgeland Road to Division Lane bridleway



Photo 8: Looking north east from footpath south of Sandy Lane

Conclusion and Recommendations

32. The well-researched landscape history of Marton Moss [Marton Moss Historic Characterisation Study, 2009] clearly shows that these four major tracts of open land have long existed in their present form and retain many of the features characteristic of their agricultural past. As recognised in the Marton Moss Design Code [AECOM, 2020] three of the tracts currently make a significant contribution to the pastoral character of the Neighbourhood Area and the other land, at Midgeland Farm, will do so if opened-up to community use. This is a significance that will increase in the future both in appearance and psychological terms as new development is sensitively introduced on other nearby smaller plots. Furthermore, each of the tracts are important as wildlife corridors in the local ecological networks that can support priority habitats and overall offer opportunities for improving biodiversity. So, all four tracts are worthy of being retained as open land and are recommended for the following designations in the Neighbourhood Plan:

- Safeguarded as Major Open Land:
 - Land bounded by Chapel Road, Yeadon Way, Progress Way and Cropper Road North
 - Land south of Ecclesgate Road
 - Land off Sandy Lane and Worthington Road
- Proposed as a community park:
 - Land at Midgeland Farm