Landscape and Environment Study

Introduction

Anyone passing through Woodford along the main road in a car does not gain an accurate impression of the character of the place, its deep history, its rural nature, its beautiful landscapes, or its wildlife. Those of us who live, work or play here see more and this study explores these special characteristics of Woodford in detail.

Woodford is 5 kilometres west of a geological fault at Poynton, where the millstone grit of the Pennines dropped by 200 metres around 300 million years ago, during the Carboniferous Period on earth. As a result, the aspect is open and flat with height in the range 90 – 95 metres above sea level. The land slopes gently down to the east, affording excellent, unobstructed views of the Pennines from many locations in Woodford, which are very much treasured by residents and visitors.

The area was covered with glacial sediments as the glaciers of the last Ice Age retreated, forming the Cheshire Plain. The soils of Woodford consist mostly of clay, with pockets of sand, including running sand. Drainage is poor and in many areas the ground becomes water-logged and prone to flooding in wet weather.

Woodford lies on an aquifer consisting of ground water held in porous sandstones laid down 200 million years ago in the Triassic period, sand and marl (a crumbly mixture of clay and limestone). The aquifer is part of a series of deep basins throughout the UK, including the Cheshire Basin, which are important sources of ground water. The base of the Triassic sandstone layer varies from above sea level in outcrops at the surface, such as Alderley Edge, to deeper than 2,500 m below sea level in the centre of the Cheshire Basin. Environmental studies conducted on the former Woodford Aerodrome site indicate that the site lies on an aquifer consisting of permeable, solid sandstone and pebble beds with high capacity for water storage. Above this layers of sand and gravel hold some ground water, while extensive layers of clay are impermeable with very low capacity for water storage.

There have been major fluctuations in the climate on earth in its 4.5 billion year history. The early atmosphere was largely carbon dioxide with little or no oxygen. 2.7 billion years ago single celled organisms that were able to use this carbon dioxide and the energy from sunlight to grow by a process known as photosynthesis evolved on earth. The plants we see on earth today have evolved from these organisms and use this process. A by-product of photosynthesis is oxygen and so, with the arrival of photosynthesis on earth, carbon dioxide levels reduced and oxygen levels increased in the atmosphere. Although some simple animals have been found which can survive at very low oxygen levels, it is thought that increasing oxygen levels may have contributed to conditions which allowed the evolution of the great diversity of animal life and eventually humans, who are a very recent addition to life on earth in the massive timescales involved. During the relatively warm Carboniferous Period, 300 million years ago, before significant cooling of the climate and an Ice Age, plants grew and died at a great rate carbon dioxide reduced and atmospheric oxygen levels were the highest the earth has ever experienced. Layers of dead plants eventually became coal, oil or gas when compressed under subsequent layers. Coal measures dating back to the period are found to

the east of Woodford in neighbouring Poynton. Coal, oil and natural gas (fossil fuels) represent stores of carbon from plants which lived millions of years ago and burning it for energy releases carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere – an issue for the human contribution to climate change. An international panel of scientists has named the current epoch the Anthropocene period – the age in which human activity has become the dominant shaping force of the environment and the climate. It is believed that the impact of humanity will be detectable in sediments in rocks and the oceans millions of years in the future as radioactive elements, soot, and modern materials such as concrete and plastics.

After the Carboniferous Period, the climate on earth cooled and an Ice Age followed. From the end of that Ice Age 11,500 years ago, England became covered in increasingly dense forests of oak, hazel and birch, with some pine. When people began farming, the tree cover slowly began to give way to pasture and cultivated land. Under Anglo-Saxon kings, the forests still belonged to the landowners and their subjects but William I introduced "Forest Law", which claimed the woodlands as the hunting grounds of kings.

In the Middle Ages, Woodford was part of the royal hunting forest and in 1248, the manor of Woodford was one of several in the Barony of Stockport. In 1300 the forest stretched from Leek in the south to Marple in the north and was 10 miles wide along the western Pennines. Land was cleared and improved for agriculture in the late 13th century and a corn mill existed by 1296. In the 13th century, Woodford (known as Wideford or Wydeford) was a subordinate manor in Poynton held by the Stokeports. In 1355, land at Woodford was granted to the Davenport family. At this time Woodford was a hamlet on the edge of the Macclesfield Forest.

The Davenports originally lived in Old Hall in Old Hall Lane which is now Old Hall Farm. The date is uncertain but it was known to be there in 1370, much of the original building having been destroyed by fire. The Davenports built New Hall further down the lane in 1630. Their initials and Coat of Arms appear above the entrance. It was used by the family until it was purchased by AV Roe company in 1924.

Woodford was in the middle of a densely wooded area and, as the name implies, there was a ford where the footpath now crosses the River Dean near to Old Hall Farm, providing a route to Macclesfield.

In the 19th century, in addition to agriculture, many residents in Woodford were engaged in trade and industry. There was a blacksmith, a brick maker and a calico printing mill. Silk weaving was a domestic industry carried on in a number of homes, including some of the old cottages which remain in Woodford today.

In 1837, the Dean Water calico printing mill was built where Wilmslow Road crosses the River Dean. Deanwater House (now the Deanwater Hotel) was built as the manager's house and cottages for the workforce were built in Kingstreet, the name formerly referred to this hamlet, rather than the road. The mill closed in 1848 and burnt down in 1851. 172 people were employed at the mill, of which half lived in the parish of Woodford.

Christ Church was built in 1841, a primary school was built in 1847 at the instigation of the Bromley-Davenport family and in 1922 the Davenport Estate was sold off in lots by auction to farmers and small holders.

The Davenport Arms, known locally as the Thief's Neck carries the Davenport Coat of Arms which includes an image of a felon with a rope around his neck. In a Scrap Book of Woodford 1953, members of the WI and friends reported that old inhabitants could recall the current Davenport Arms being built to replace an earlier one which was a thatched building destroyed by fire.

Woodford Aerodrome is a major landmark. The airfield was created from farmland by AV Roe during late 1924. In the mid-1930s several new buildings were erected prior to the start of the Second World War. Planes manufactured there include Avro Ansons, Lancasters, Vulcan nuclear bombers, civil airliners and the Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft. From 1968 to 2000 an annual air show was held at the Aerodrome, organised by the Royal Air Forces Association. In 1989, 3000 people were employed on the site, but in 2012 BAE Systems closed the site with the loss of the remaining 630 jobs. The site has been purchased by Harrow Estates and the buildings have been demolished to make way for houses. The Avro Heritage Museum has been created on site with an excellent display, including a static Vulcan.

Woodford War Memorial Community Centre was built in 1953 on a 4 acre plot on Chester Road as a memorial to those who lost their lives during World War II. The money was raised by interest free loans from members of the community and fund raising activities. Now under the custodianship of the Charities Commission the premises and operation are covered by a constitution, with daily running organised by a committee of volunteers. The roof shape was designed with acoustics for amateur dramatics in mind and, while it is generally acknowledged that the building is not a thing of beauty, the facility is precious to the community.

Farms, small holdings, lanes, hedgerows, trees and old cottages, intermingled with more recent development and roads, reflect the long history of a settlement at Woodford contributing to the landscape character. Farm fields and lanes in Woodford are bordered by species rich native hedgerows and mature native trees, especially oaks, many of which are 200 to 400 years old.

District boundaries have changed over time. In 1866 Woodford was part of the parish of Prestbury, in Macclesfield. In 1939 it was incorporated into the district of Hazel Grove & Bramhall, which included the hamlet of Moor End and in 1974 it became part of the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport.

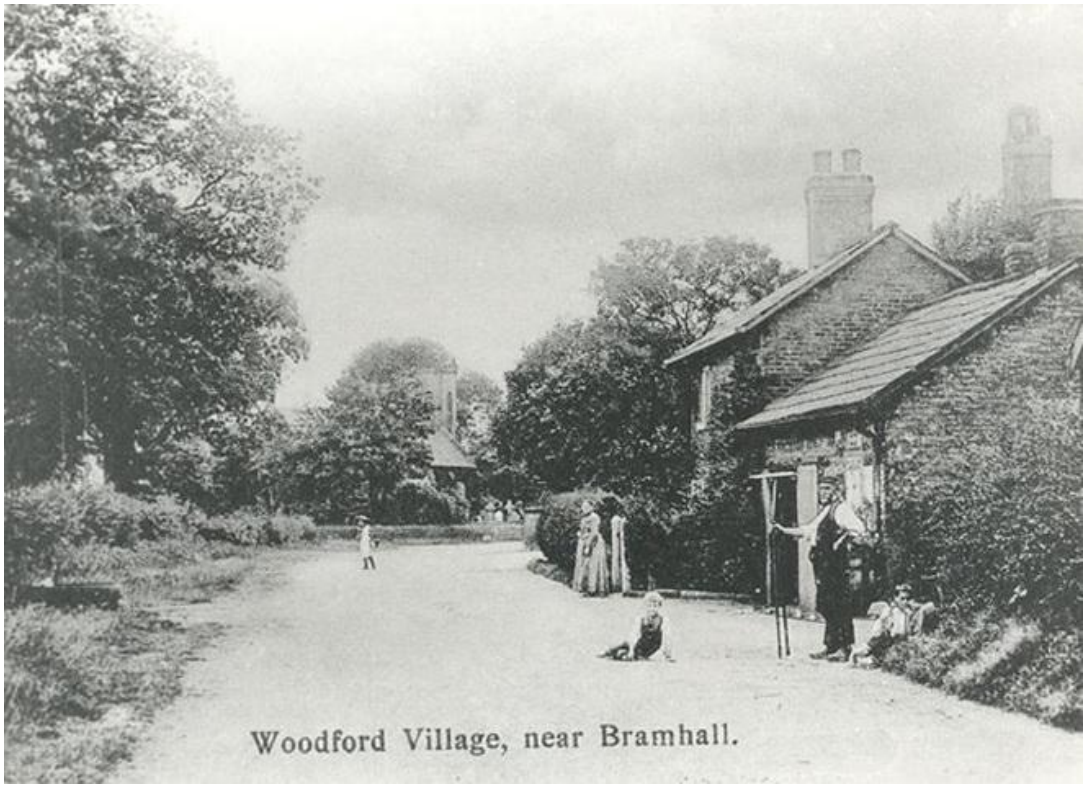
The population of Woodford was around 300-400 in the 19th Century, with a marked increase over the last 100 years. Census data show that the population was 430 in 1851, 392 in 1861, 304 in 1901, 801 in 1931, and 1,211 in 2011. The electoral register in 2014 included 1,157 people in Woodford. The number of dwellings has increased with the population. According to census data, in 1861 there were 83 dwellings (9 unoccupied) in Woodford compared 610 dwellings in the Woodford Neighbourhood Area in 2015, as calculated by the WNF management committee.

In the present day, the Neighbourhood Area occupies approximately 1,140 acres. It is predominantly agricultural land which, together with a small amount of recreational land, comprises 885 acres, representing 78% of the area. The built environment (domestic and commercial curtilage and roads) comprises 255 acres representing 22% of the area.

The analysis of the Woodford residents' questionnaire revealed that an overwhelming majority of 276 respondents (92%) considered the rural location to be one of the good things about living in Woodford and 83% said that they wanted enhanced protection of the landscape and positive management of the varied local wildlife. Over 60% cited the rural environment as a reason for choosing Woodford as a place to live in the first place. From comments received it was also clear that the Green Belt and Woodford's open, green rural environment and views are highly valued.

This Landscape and Environment study by resident volunteers aims to complement professional studies including a Heritage and Character Assessment by AECOM and a Habitat Distinctiveness Assessment by Cheshire Wildlife Trust, in order to catalogue, describe and protect the features of Woodford so highly valued by its residents.

Robert MacFarlane, in a bestselling book entitled Landmarks, which explores the links between language and landscape, stated "Once landscape goes undescribed and therefore unregarded it becomes vulnerable to unwise or improper action." He quotes the American essayist and farmer Wendell Berry, who wrote, "People exploit what they merely conclude to be of value but they defend what they love and to defend what we love we need a particularising language, for we love what we particularly know."



Chester Road, Woodford in 1904