

## **WEPRE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022- 2027**

### **Site Information**

#### **1.1 Site details:**

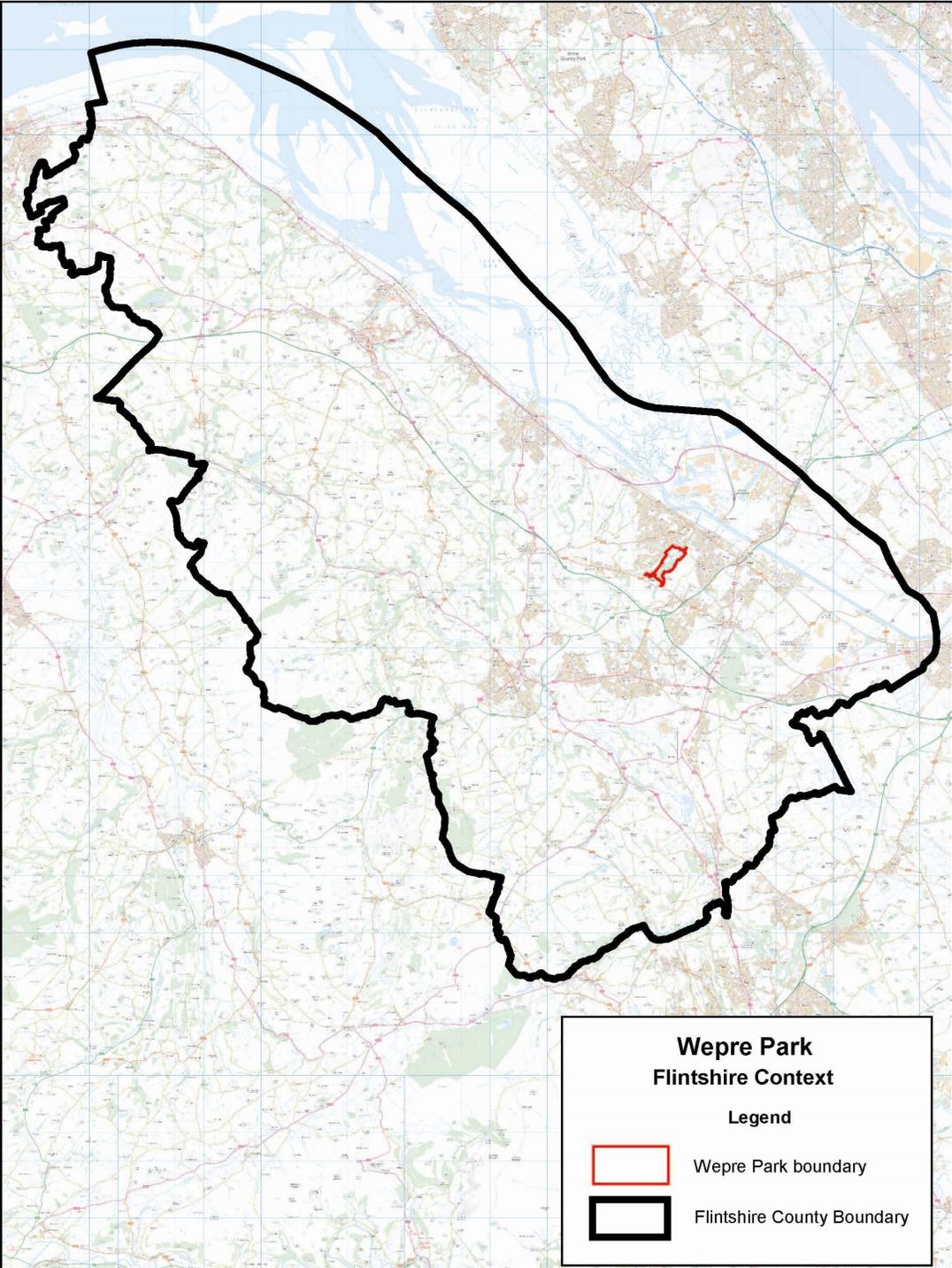
Wepre Park is a 66 hectare urban fringe country park situated in Connah's Quay, Flintshire, Wales. It is one of Flintshire County Council's major recreational sites and has long been a feature that defines Connah's Quay for local people.

The park is multi-functional, currently used for both informal and formal recreation, attracting around 200,000 visitors every year.

The park provides open access to the public. It is open 24 hrs to pedestrians, the car park opening times are dawn to dusk and the visitor centre opening hours are mainly office based during the week and until 3.30pm at weekends.

Beyond the boundaries of the park, there is open countryside to the south and the town of Connah's Quay to the north. With a present population approaching 17,500 (making the town the largest in Flintshire), Connah's Quay is a growing and thriving community within easy reach of Merseyside, Chester and the North Wales coastal resorts and inland towns and villages.

Wepre Park is well located and can be accessed by road from the A55, by rail from the nearby Shotton station and also lies on the National Cycle Network Route 5. It is situated near the region's industrial centre, Deeside Industrial Park. The major part of Tata Steelworks lies on the town's border on the north bank of the River Dee.



**Wepre Park  
Flintshire Context**

**Legend**

 Wepre Park boundary  
 Flintshire County Boundary



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Environment Directorate,  
 Flintshire County Council,  
 County Hall, Mold,  
 Flintshire, CH7 6NF.  
 Director: Mr. Carl Longland

Scale 1:175,000 @ A4  
 OS Map SJ 2968 ●  
 Plotted 23/08/2012

## **1.2 Site description**

Wepre is the largest publicly owned country park within Flintshire.

The main features of the Country Park include the remains of Ewloe Castle, remnants of the former Wepre Hall garden, a visitor centre, café, toilets, car park, office and workshop, sports pitches & changing rooms, play area, skate park, angling pond and a network of footpaths throughout the site linking the main habitats of semi-natural ancient woodland, wetland, ponds, streams and grassland.

The majority of the site is mature woodland, either native broadleaf or conifer plantation is managed for a balance of wildlife conservation and informal recreation. Within the woodland there are ponds and clearings and the site is divided by Wepre Brook. The New Inn Brook flows into Wepre Brook at the southern end of the site.

## **1.3 Access**

The park has nine pedestrian access points onto the site distributed around the parks perimeter and is accessible from all sides and one vehicle access point through the main entrance off Wepre Drive into the site's car park.

- Wepre Drive, Connah's Quay, 4 entrances along the front of the park.
- Wepre Lane, Connah's Quay, 2 entrances, 2 kissing gate.
- Ewloe Castle, Access track, 1 entrance, kissing gate.
- Stamford Way, 1 entrance, kissing gate
- Killin's Lane, Shotton, 1 entrance, disabled kissing gate.

The pedestrian access points are accessible through kissing gates. Openings for pushchairs are left at the Killin's Lane entrance and lower Wepre Lane entrance.

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Flintshire County Council  
County Hall Raikes Lane  
Mold Flintshire CH7 6NF

Parc Gwepia  
Wapre Park

28-September-2022



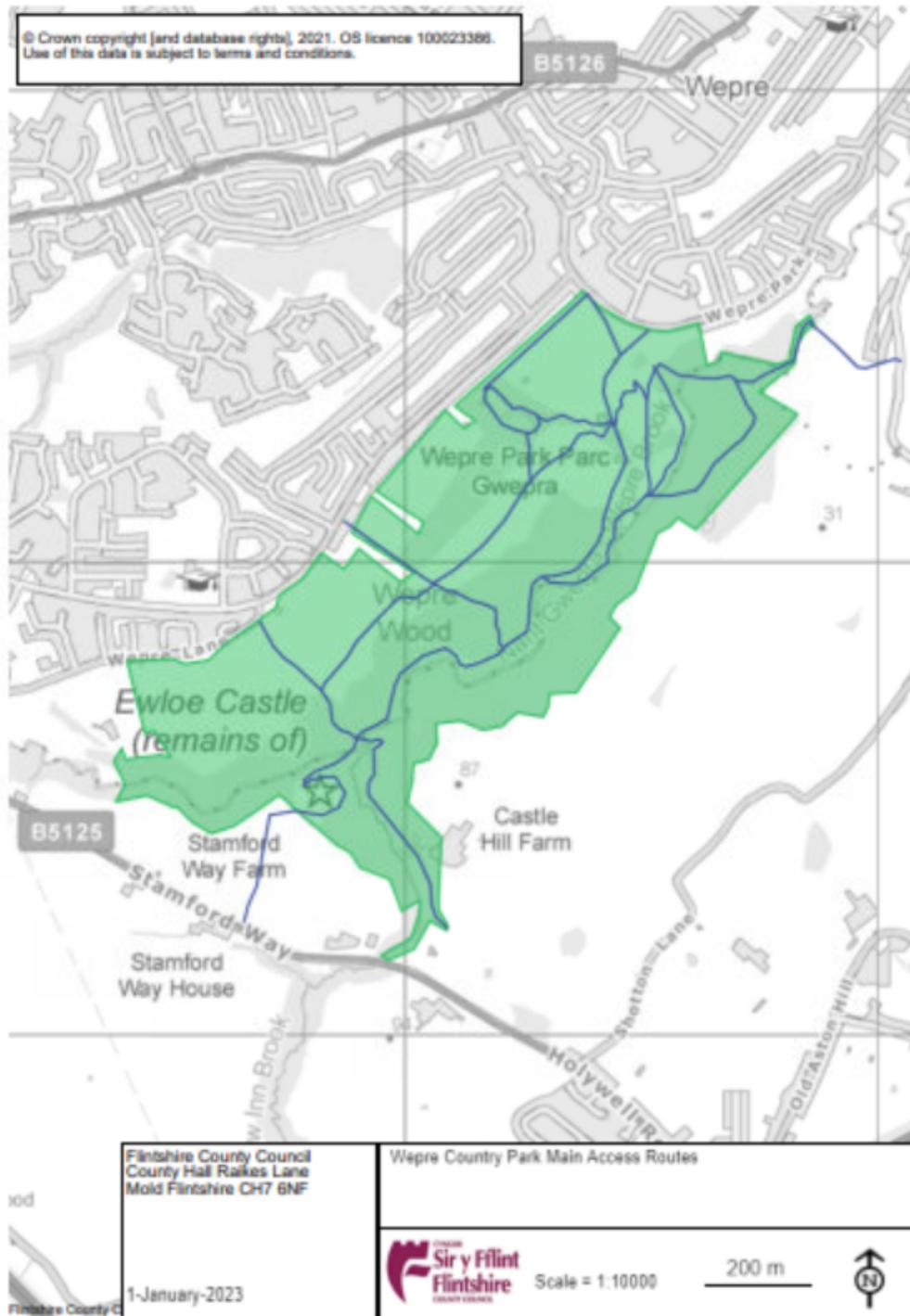
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500 m



## 1.4 Accessibility

There is disabled parking provision on site and the visitors centre has an accessible toilet. Access to the wider park is limited by the topography of the site and the presence of steps at a number of points on the path network. There is however access along the main track and into parts of the gardens.



## **1.5 Facilities**

The park has an excellent range of facilities including:

- A visitor's centre with café, toilets and education area
- Sports pitches including a football pitch and changing facilities
- Children's play area and skate park.
- Large car park
- A network of paths
- Fishing Pond

## **1.6 Designations**

### 1.6.1 Statutory Designations

Connahs Quay Ponds and Woodlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Deeside and Buckley Newt Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

In 2002 the majority of the site was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for populations of Great Crested Newt, assemblage of widespread amphibian species, and the matrix of semi-natural broad leaved woodland. The SSSI has also formed the basis for the designation of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for Great crested newt populations and Sessile oak woodland under the European Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

The Directive was set up to create a network of protected wildlife areas across the European Union known as Natura 2000. These sites are part of a range of measures aimed at conserving important or threatened habitats and species which are implemented in the UK under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

Natural Resources Wales have a duty to ensure that the SAC is managed favourably for conservation and that the habitats and species are not subject to deterioration or disturbance. In line with this the management and activities at Wepre Park are carried out in close consultation with NRW.

In addition the Local Authority has to ensure that projects undertaken within or adjacent to the SAC do not have a significant effect on the designated features namely great crested newt and the oak woodland. This assessment is a requirement (Regulation 61) under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

## Ewloe Castle Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)

The castle dates from around 1257 and was built by Llywelyn ap Grufford (Llywelyn the Last), the last great independent Prince of Gwynedd. The castle's proximity to the English Border makes it especially interesting given the political history and relationship between the King of England and the Welsh Princes during this period.

The castle was built as a deliberate statement of Welsh ownership of the disputed lands of East Wales, rather than as a fortress. This was one of the most contested regions in the English/Welsh conflict. Much of the castle's fabric survives including the distinctive central tower with its typically Welsh apsidal plan. The castle stands hidden within the woodland and appears today much as it may have done when it was referred to "built in the corner of the wood".

The castle was brought into public ownership in 2015 as part of the HLF project to facilitate greater access to the site

### 1.6.2 Non- Statutory designations

#### Wepre Gorge - Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Site (RIGS)

Wepre gorge is of regional geological/ geomorphological importance because it is an exceptional exposure of the Hollin Rock, a cliff up to 20m high which represents a widespread deltic sandstone body within the Flintshire coalfield. It has been designated a RIGS which is a non-statutory designation but represents the most important sites for geology and geomorphology outside statutorily protected *Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)*.

Other notable habitats within the site include ponds, streams, wetland and grassland. Wepre Park is an oasis for native birds, plants and animals including several rare and protected species.

Local geological sites have a number of benefits, including:

- providing protection for locally important geological sites;
- increasing public awareness, understanding and enjoyment of rocks, fossils, minerals and landscape;
- providing an environment for people to learn about their local geology;
- forming a focus for partnerships between local authorities, conservation organisations and local people;
- permitting positive management of the geological resource.

## Wepre Wood Wildlife Site (WS)

The semi-natural broadleaved woodland has been recognised for its wildlife value since 1985 when it was first designated a Wildlife Site. Other notable habitats within the site include ponds, streams, wetland and grassland.

The combination of woodland and associated habitats make Wepre Park an oasis for native birds, plants and animals including several rare and protected species. Apart from Great crested newts, this includes reptiles such as grass snake and mammals such as otter, bats and badger.

### **1.7 Habitats**

#### 1.7.1 Woodland

Wepre Park is predominately ancient, broadleaved woodland recognised nationally as an SSSI and of European significance through its SAC designation. The broadleaved woodland is the main feature in terms of the site's management and existing management agreements reflect this.

However the historical landscape can be read and interpreted from the tree species planted during the Victorian period. In particular, the presence of conifer species and the single species plantations are important components of the landscape quality of the park.

There is scope to sustainably exploit the high quality timber present whilst encouraging the regeneration of the native woodland. Retention of landscape features and the historically significant trees is also fundamental to the woodland management, as is the encouragement of public access and quiet enjoyment of the woodland.

Following the purchase of the estate by Connah's Quay U.D.C. there was very little management of the woodland until the late 1950's. At this time there was an extensive programme of felling and replanting with commercial species under a woodland dedication scheme. The woodland has been managed under Better Woodland for Wales Scheme which provides a platform to manage the woodland in a sustainable way taking into consideration socio-economic and environmental issues.

In 2021 adjacent fields to Wepre Park were incorporated under the management of the service and was planted with 5,000 trees.

#### 1.7.2 Ponds

Rosy pond ( 0.5 ha )

The largest pond in the park, managed under lease for angling by Connah's Quay Angling Club.

The Marginal vegetation is sparse, largely restricted to grass and coppice willow. At the west end there is an area excluded from fishing. Yellow flag iris and duckweed are

present here. The pond is a major breeding site for the common toad, which spawns here in large numbers.

#### Three tier pond

These are three linked ponds fed by the spring which formerly provided water for Wepre Hall. The ponds have high water quality and there is evidence of good invertebrate populations.

The ponds are relatively shallow and overlooked by many trees, so consequently have abundant leaf litter. All three newt species are recorded in this pond.

#### Brewery pond

This is a large pond with a good mix of vegetation. Although in the woodland, the pond area is relatively clear of trees. The overflow drains under the paths into New Inn Brook. All three newt species are recorded in these ponds.

#### Taylor's Wood ponds

Four ponds, and several temporary ponds are found in this area of woodland. The largest (known as Taylor's Pond), runs up to the eastern park boundary. There is good vegetation cover with yellow flag, reed mace present. The newt population here declined in recent years due to the introduction of fish. In 1995, the pond was drained and in excess of 100 fish, predominantly carp removed. This has resulted in a recorded increase in the great crested newt population

New Pond was created in 1989, and is situated north of Taylor's pond. It is screened by hawthorn and trees on three sides, and with an open aspect to the east.

There is a good newt population, and several species of damselfly and dragonfly present.

There are two small ponds, probably old coal holes between the two main ponds. Despite its unhealthy appearance, the pond supports a good population of damselflies, especially large red damselfly. Surface vegetation consists entirely of duckweed. There are several depressions in the woodland which retain water over winter and dry up in the summer. The most significant of these is a small area close to the woodland edge which supports a reasonable newt population. This is well screened but tends to be overshadowed by trees.

### 1.7.3 Streams

Wepre Brook flows through the centre of the park, flowing into the river Dee at Connah's Quay through the Wepre Gutter. The River Dee is also designated as an SSSI and SAC primarily for migratory fish such as Atlantic salmon but also for otter.

The catchment for the brook (and New Inn Brook) reaches to Northop, Buckley and Alltami - where the stream is known as Alltami Brook. The stream is shallow, fast flowing in a well defined channel with little associated vegetation. The exception to this is the area above the dam. At this point the stream regularly floods in winter and there is a level area dominated by horsetail, comfrey, valerian, willow and alder. This area

contains some Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed. These are pulled every year and the population kept under control.

The stream is known to support a population of bullheads and minnows above the dam. Trout and eel have been reported below the dam. Through frequent stream surveys with school groups a good range of invertebrates has been observed, notably fresh water shrimp, caddisfly and stonefly. Two pairs of dippers are recorded as breeding within the park on Wepre Brook and kingfishers are known to nest just outside the park boundary. Otter have been recorded along Wepre brook and there has been past evidence of water vole but no recent records.

The stream level and flow fluctuates throughout the year. There is a rapid response to any period of heavy rainfall which can change a placid water course into a powerful current overnight.

#### Tufa Deposits

The tufa deposits are an unusual habitat. The presence in the woodland of actively depositing tufa should be retained and damage to the habitat avoided. This has been managed successfully in the past by restricting access and minimising work in the areas. This policy should be continued and the tufa areas monitored.

The wet areas are characterised by pendulous sedge and marsh marigold. The trickling of lime rich water over the soil results in the deposition of tufa. This supports a range of invertebrate species, particularly caddisfly and midge which utilise the tufa for larval cases. This is an unusual habitat in the area and nationally.

#### 1.7.4 Meadows

There are four main areas cut as meadows in the park, and two areas cut as woodland clearings. The meadows are cut once per year, late August, and the cuttings removed.

##### Dell Meadow

The largest area, with meadow foxtail, cock's foot and Yorkshire fog grasses. Flowering species include southern marsh orchid, yellow rattle, yarrow, pignut and clover.

##### North End Rosy Wood

This small area is managed as a meadow area but is primarily used as a rough grass buffer between the woodland and the playing fields.

##### Taylor's Wood, (0.1 ha)

This is a clearing on the eastern boundary. Initially dense growth of nettles and rosebay willow herb were recorded. On the shorter areas, bird's foot trefoil, ground ivy and speedwell's have been found. There is a conflict with cutting for flora and management for great crested newt populations as this site is very close to Taylor's Pond. Management here needs to take the great crested newt population into account.

##### Red Rock Clearing

Sycamore and birch have been cleared from here to widen the meadow and reinstate a view up the valley to Ewloe Castle and down the valley towards Frodsham. A bench has been installed at this point. The meadow has a good show of spring flora.

#### Education Area Meadow

A medium sized meadow containing yellow rattle.

#### 1.8.1 European Protected Species

The key species that need to be considered as integral to management are those protected under European legislation (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010) which for this site are great crested newt, otter and all bat species. For these protected species apart from being an offence to deliberately kill or cause significant disturbance, it is also an offence if breeding sites or resting places are damaged or destroyed. Management needs to consider the presence of European protected species and follow good practice guidance to avoid committing an offence. In some cases management practices may need to be modified or rescheduled to a less sensitive time of year, and where this is not possible or adequate then operators may need to apply for a licence to remain within the law. Most activities will be able to continue without the need for a licence through the following of good practice guidance

Management within Wepre Park is undertaken using standard method statements where European protected species are a potential issue. The Better Woodlands for Wales management plan also incorporates management statements for great crested newts and bats.

#### 1.8.2 Other Protected species

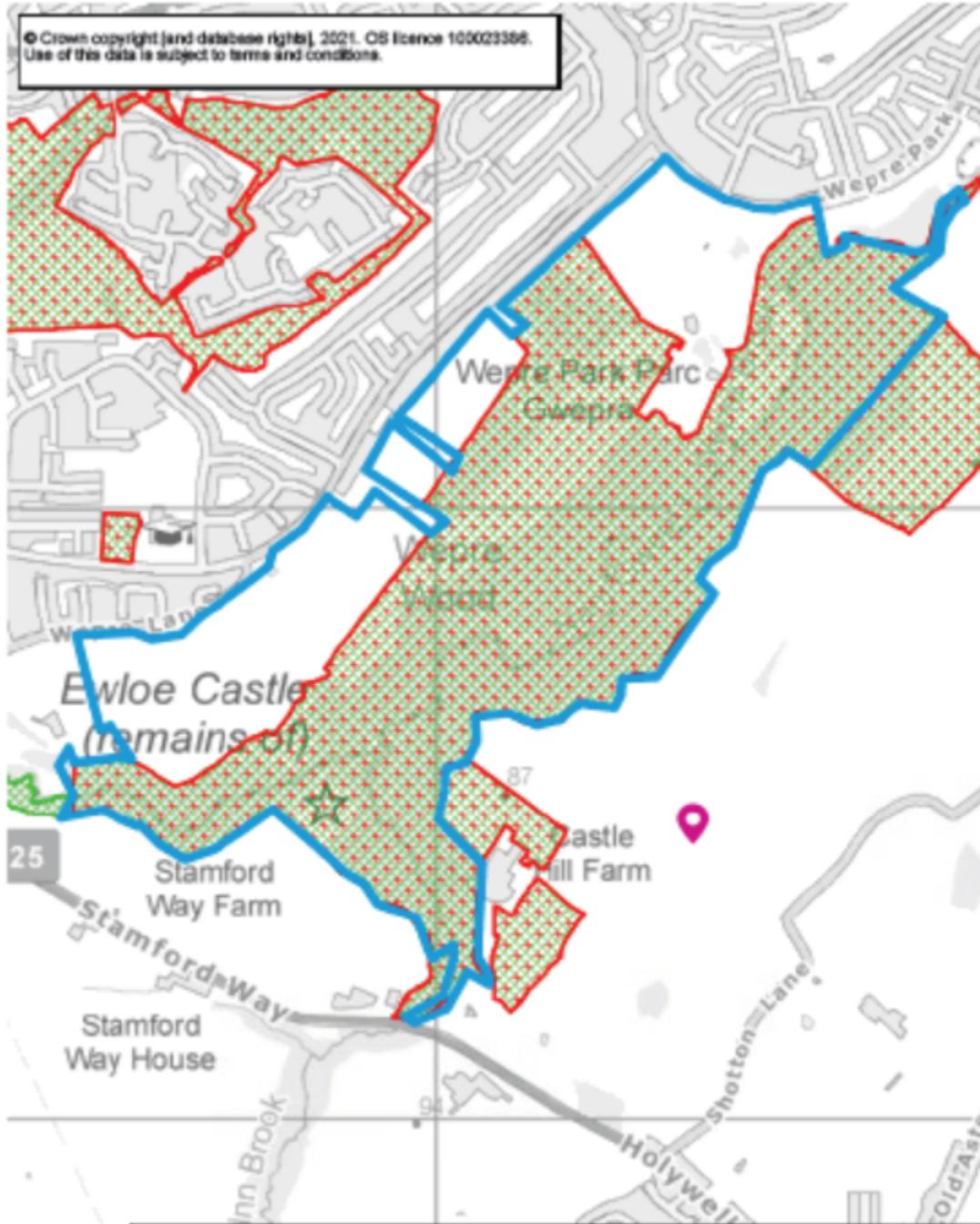
Badgers are protected under the protection of Badgers Act 1992 and it is an offence to destroy or damage a sett or any part of it. Work in close proximity to badger setts are carried out using best practice guidance.

Nesting Birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and it is an offence, to: intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst it is in use or being built and to intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird. As with other protected species best practice guidance is followed.

#### 1.8.3 Species of Biodiversity Importance (s42 list)

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, all public bodies have a duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity. In conjunction with this the Welsh Government have produced a list of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance in Wales under Section 42 NERC (hereafter referred to as the S42 list). The S42 list includes all of the habitats and species on the 2007 UKBAP list which actually occur in Wales.

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Parc Gwepia ardaloedd ACA a SoDDGA  
Wepre Park SAC and SSSI areas

28-September-2022



Scale = 1:8308.440

200 m



## **1.8 Tree survey**

The woodlands at Wepre are surveyed regularly for H&S as part of the management of the site, including ash dieback and other diseases.

## **1.9 The Old Hall Gardens**

The main periods of influence upon the grounds would have been under the direction of Edward Jones (1788 to 1865) and John Rowden Freme (1865 to 1920). Landscape and garden design philosophies and styles between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries evolved quite considerably, not least during the Victorian age when plant hunting expeditions brought back exotic plants from distant parts of the world, the science of horticulture became established and made these plants more openly available to the public; writing on landscape and garden design spread ideas which responded to art and social attitudes at a time when Britain was at the centre of the industrial revolution; with the rise of wealthy industrialists who wished to express their wealth in the creation of new homes, parks and gardens.

The management of these areas has been minimal over the years, but in 2012-16 a HLF project carried out an extensive restoration. A herb garden and fernery have been added to the garden area during the period of the last management plan.

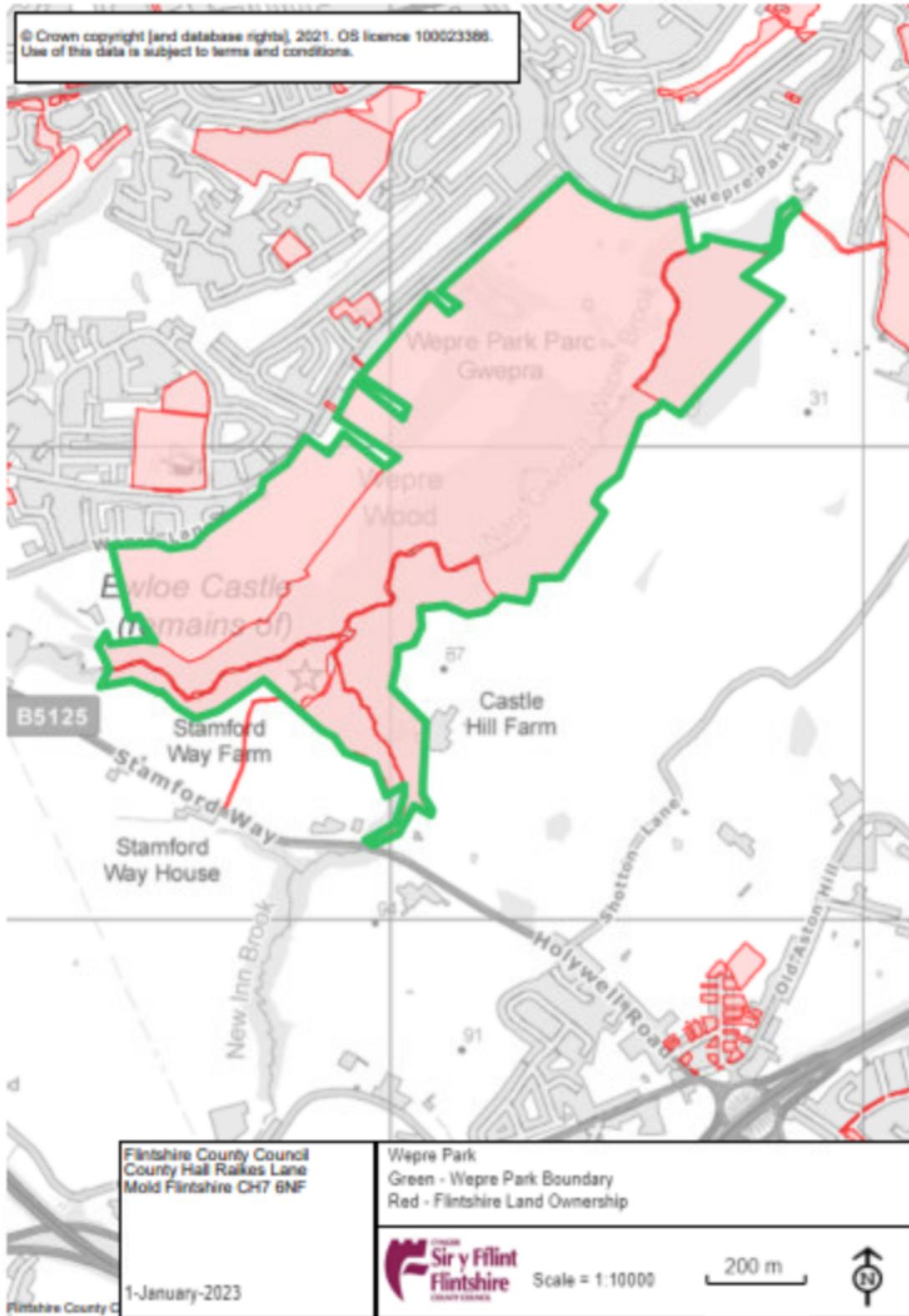
## **1.10 Geology**

Wepre gorge is of regional geological/geomorphological importance because it is an exceptional exposure of the Hollin Rock which represents a widespread deltic sandstone body within the Flintshire coalfield. The Hollin rock at Wepre is a spectacular exposure with a cliff up to 20m high which has been designated a Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)

## **1.11 Ownership**

The park is owned by Flintshire County Council

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Wepre Park  
Green - Wepre Park Boundary  
Red - Flintshire Land Ownership



Scale = 1:10000

200 m



1-January-2023

## **1.12 Buildings**

On site there are currently a number of buildings including;

Sports pavilion and changing facilities- These are managed by leisure services who have recently secured funding to upgrade the sports pitches and improve the facilities in the pavilion. These will provide the local community with much needed football and sports facilities and will provide park users with another toilet block.

Visitors Centre – incorporating a café, office space (including the historic cellar from the original Old Hall). The café is leased out to private businesses.

Ranger compound consisting of offices and storage

The spring shed above Brewery pond is evidence of past land use associated with Castle Brewery and was where spring water was extracted. The building is in a derelict state and has the potential to convert to a habitat building – providing added biodiversity interest.

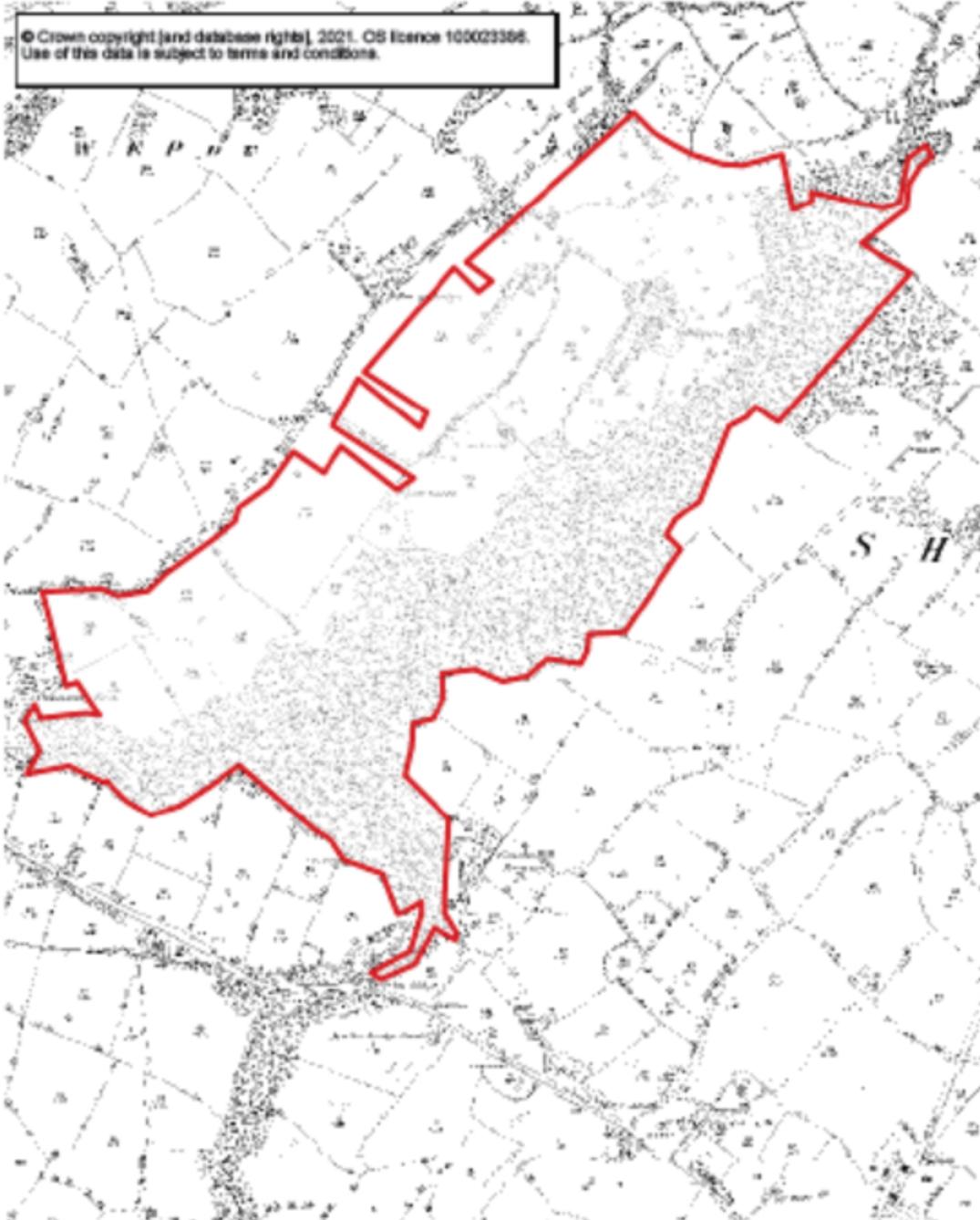
## **2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The site is recorded as woodland in the Domesday Book. At this time the woodland belonged to St. Werburgh's Abbey, Chester and was 1 1/2 miles long and 3/4 mile wide - roughly its present size.

At the southern end of the park, within easy walking distance of Connah's Quay are the remains of Ewloe Castle, which was originally built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and extended in 1257 by the Welsh Princes during the borderland struggles with Edward I. The castle is a unique Welsh design and was built as a deliberate statement to the English, rather than a fort. The castle is under the guardianship of CADW and is a scheduled ancient monument.

The castle and keep are accessible, as is the popular climb through the walls to the remains of the wall walk. The castle was built by the native Welsh of the area during the borderland struggles with Edward I, and his campaigns to occupy and conquer the Welsh kingdom. For many local people, it represents their Welsh roots in a part of Wales that is heavily anglicised.

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Parc Gwepia Map Hanesyddol 1869 - 1895  
Wepre Park Historical Map 1869 - 1895

28-September-2022



Scale = 1:8308.440

200 m



Flintshire South

The settlement history of the area is obscure until 1770/1776, when Wepre Hall was built, but there is strong evidence for at least two major residences on the same site going back to the Doomsday Book. In the 18th century, formal grounds and gardens were laid out and later extended around 1880. It was at this time that many of the exotic trees associated with the park were planted and the estate extended to some 30 hectares/700 acres. This includes some of the farms that are adjacent to the current park and much of the residential area that is Connah's Quay.

In 1919 the Wepre Hall estate was broken up. The outlying farms were sold and the central portion of the hall and woodlands sold to a developer. In the early 1940's the land was again sold, this time to Connah's Quay Urban District Council.

Following the war the house was used for council housing; the greenhouses and barn eventually became the Council's Parks and Gardens depot and few changes were made.

The old golf course was previously a sand quarry. When this ceased work it was used for domestic refuse landfill. In order to screen this, stands of beech were planted in 1958. At the same time, much of the woodland was felled and replanted with conifer or more commercial species.

In 1960 Wepre Hall was demolished due to its poor state of repair. In the late 1970's approximately 6.25 ha of woodland was compulsory purchased from Killin's Farm. The first management and land use plan was agreed in 1981 and from this time the site has been managed as a country park. It became a SSSI in 2002 for its population of Great Crested Newt, its assemblage of widespread amphibian species and for its semi-natural broad-leaved woodland.

In its heyday, the Estate had greenhouses, stables, two estate cottages, an estate office, a joinery, an annexed billiard room, a fishing lake, boiler rooms, a hydroelectric water-wheel, fountains, formal gardens, formal gates and a drive including a gatehouse, tree-lined avenue and pleasure gardens. It was a significant parcel of land that included most of the area now covered by the centre of Connah's Quay, including the Civic Centre and swimming pool.

Today, the park still retains the landscaping patterns from the 18th and 19th century, as well as the pleasure gardens and several interesting features such as a ha-ha, pet cemetery, the Rosie fishing pool and sections of the walls and remains of prior buildings of the estate.

There are a few surviving local people who remember the Hall and the family that owned it. They can recall the balls and other local traditional events that were held there such as the Easter Sunday walk to Ewloe Castle which, organised by local people continues today on Good Friday every year. They also remember the woodlands when they were managed as an estate rather than an area of open public access.

The existing visitor centre stands on the site of what once was a Saxon dwelling in the 7th century and which later became the site of the Georgian Wepre Hall. The remnants of the Hall's former walled garden remain, as do the original cellars of the Hall beneath the visitor centre. These are used for educational visits to the Park today.