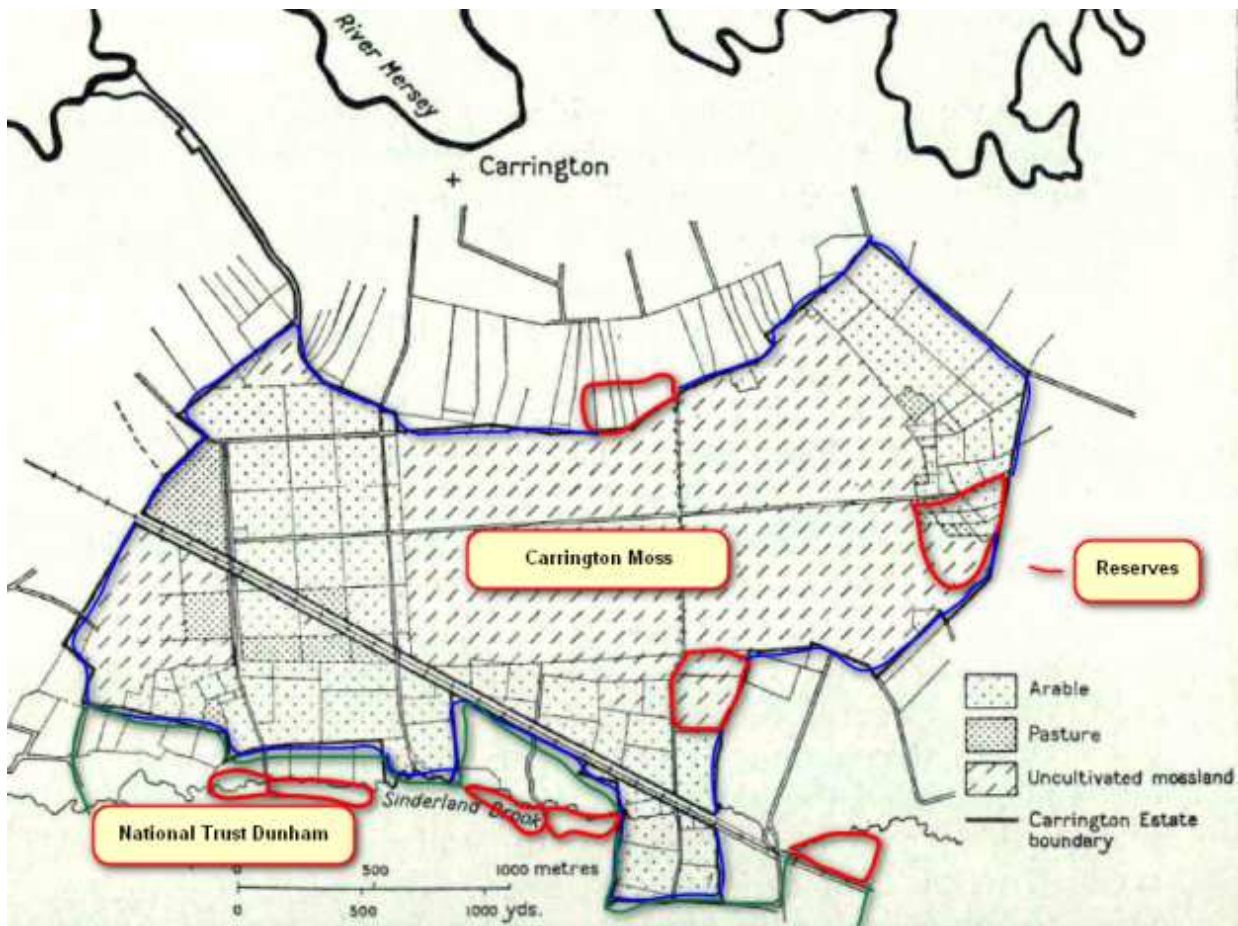


# Carrington Moss: A Short History



Carrington Moss 1888 with the remaining 2020 reserves shown in red.

Although no longer part of the Dunham Massey estate, Carrington Moss has long established ties to the estate and the Earls of Stamford, as well as being a diverse and important landscape for flora and fauna.

‘Carrington Moss was reclaimed late in the nineteenth century. The 1093 acres (442 hectares) were bought by Manchester Corporation in 1884 from the trustees of the late Earl of Stamford primarily as a site for the disposal of large quantities of refuse produced within that city. The conversion of mossland into agricultural land, although important, was a secondary aim. However, both in the amount of nightsoil sent from Manchester and in the reclamation of the moss for agricultural purposes, the scheme was a success. Indeed, it was so successful that in 1895 Manchester Corporation bought from Sir Humphrey de Trafford 2,500 acres (1012 hectares) of Chat Moss, Lancashire and, by a similar scheme of refuse disposal, the remaining uncultivated area of this moss was converted into agricultural land.’ (MOSSLAND RECLAMATION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY CHESHIRE by A. D. M. Phillips.)

Both Carrington Moss and the National Trust Dunham Massey estate are mostly tenanted farms. There are a small number of reserves each having their own particular features.

## The 19<sup>th</sup> Century:



Heather and peat cutting

### To put it more emotively:

**'In 1884, away to the north, hazy in the distance, a line of trees screened the quiet village of Carrington; the square tower of the church peeped above them. Eastward, still further away, were the tall Lombardy poplars of Ashton-on-Mersey, but between us and the trees stretched a level expanse of purple ling (a lowland heather), a grouse moor, well stocked, within seven miles of the centre of Manchester. Hundreds, nay thousands, living within a radius of a few miles hardly knew of its existence, and certainly did not consider it worthy of a visit. To us as schoolboys it was paradise; the dread of the keeper's stick or of a sudden drop into a bog-hole added a spice of adventure to our visits. Merciful accident, a matter of levels, carried the railway through a cutting at the edge of the Moss; only the smoke of passing trains was visible, whilst the scarcity of houses within sight detracted from the idea of any considerable population.**

**In the spring of 1894 the short-eared owls nested, probably for the last time, and a young bird was shot in the autumn. Carrington Moss was in transition; the last patch of heather had vanished, and almost the last covey of grouse rose from a field of cabbages. Commerce extends its rapacious arms, populations grow, massing in already congested areas, and nature, unhappy nature, suffers. Eight years before this date Manchester had purchased the moor, cleared the ling and heather, dug up the peat and moss litter, and changed everything. Fussy little locomotives dragged trains of trucks laden with moss litter over the quaking ground, and brought in return loads of refuse from the city; nature's rubbish, converted by natural change into useful fuel, was replaced by the discarded refuse of a teeming population, in its turn to suffer chemical change and become fertilising matter. Gangs of toilers cut and stacked the peats, others tipped in the apparently defiling filth; it was not a pleasant sight. Smoke, grime, and worse had replaced the bright bloom of heather and the sweet smell of fresh cut turf. Already crops were appearing on the marked-out fields, but the Moss was a moss no longer; it was an utterly lost-looking tip, a rubbish heap. Curlew, snipe, twite, viper, emperor, andromeda, and sundew had vanished; docks, nettles, ragwort, and weeds were springing everywhere. The larks and pipits remained, but the sparrow had appeared and the corn bunting found a spot worth colonising.'** (BIRD HAUNTS AND NATURE MEMORIES: MEMORIES OF A CHESHIRE MOOR by T. A. Coward.)



**Curlew and viper**

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**More recently, Industrialisation of the western moss took place from 1947–1952 when work was started on what would later become known as the Shell Site. The estate was leased in 1968 to Shell Chemicals, who in 1957 had purchased other industrial plant along the moss's northern edge.**

**2020 Currently much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century industrialisation has gone though several of the abandoned sites are beginning to have their own brands of flora and fauna.**

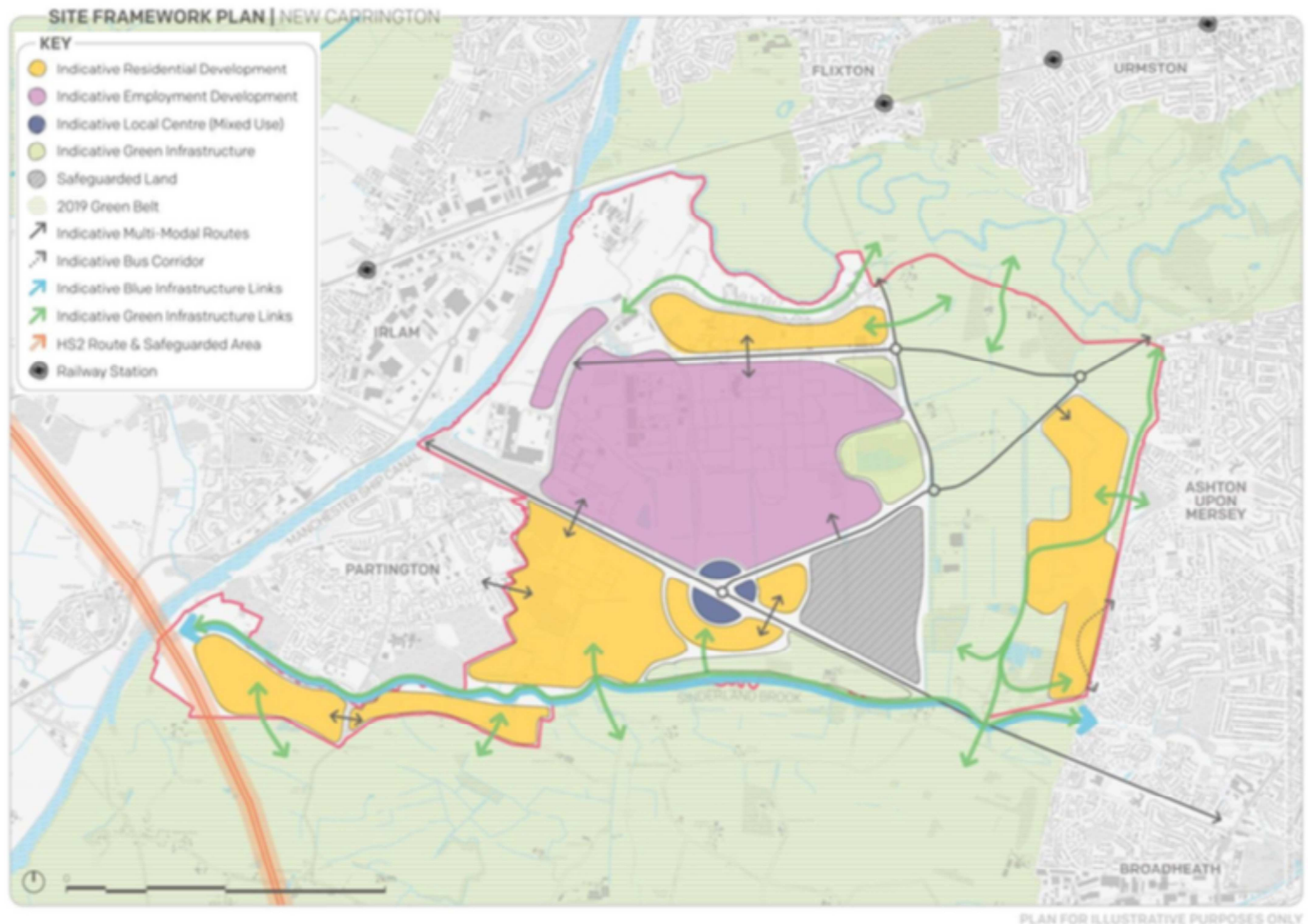
**With the development of the Manchester United training ground in 2000 an area of the moss was bunded (contained) so that the higher water level normal to the moss could be retained for a small reserve known as Birch Moss Covert adjacent Birch Road. The area was originally a pine plantation which burnt down in the 1980's. Birch, an early coloniser to any woods, started to appear. However in the open space, heather (probably the 'ling' referred to 100 years earlier above), also began to appear. Evidence of water voles has been found. Sphagnum moss also exist. Sphagnum moss, when dried, was used as a field dressing in WW1. The extremes of climate change are drying up the sphagnum moss here seen in 2017.**

**Conservation effort is required to support the covert and to support the Moss generally as one of the few green spaces available for access on the south west side of Manchester.**



## “The Future?”

Much of the industrialised part of the Moss has been vacated and the natural environment of the Moss has been left greatly degraded. The green parts of the Moss are also under threat from housing and commercial schemes and road developments (the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework).



However, this also brings some conservation opportunities. In response to the global Climate Crisis, planning laws are changing to require new developments to result in a “biodiversity net gain”, meaning that any environmental loss must be compensated for through provision of greater environmental benefits. Discussions are ongoing around mitigation of the impact of future development on the Moss: some exciting possibilities are the potential to expand and join up the remaining reserves into wildlife corridors that stretch across the Moss, and creation of more natural wetland and river features that can help reduce risk of flooding.

How attitudes have changed! when Carrington Moss and nearby Chat Moss were mainly used as grouse shooting moors, they were mostly thought of as “waste land”! We now know that they were an important part of the green lungs of the Greater Manchester area. Although Carrington Moss may never again be the wildlife “paradise” that Coward described in the nineteenth century, with careful planning and development it has the potential to be part of a better future in which the needs of both humans and nature are met in a more balanced and mutually beneficial way.”

Geoff Densham 26 July 2020