4.10 MOW COP FRINGE

Key Characteristics

- Transitional landscape, between the Staffordshire Ridge and the Cheshire Plain
- Relatively open featureless landscape rising towards the Mow Cop and Staffordshire Ridge
- Rural landscape predominantly used for grazing dairy cattle or hay/silage production
- Medium scale field pattern is generally irregular and defined by a mixture of well maintained, intermittent or overgrown hedgerows
- Fewer hedgerow trees are found compared to the wider Cheshire Plain
- Settlement pattern is dispersed with few sizeable settlements. Older buildings are primarily constructed with cheshire brick. There are also several examples of sandstone buildings as well as some modern contemporary forms
- Areas of parkland to the south near the Macclesfield Canal, notably Ramsdell Hall
- The Stafford to Macclesfield rail line and the Macclesfield Canal cut across nearly all the country lanes in the area and bridge crossings are a particular feature
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LANDCOVER TYPES

Pasture farmland
The area is extensively used for agriculture, predominantly for pasture. Fields have an irregular field pattern and are overall medium in scale.

Congleton Fringe Farming
Linear pasture enclosures converging on peatland at Congleton Moss. Distinct field pattern emphasised in places by remnant hedgerow trees.

Urban Fringe Recreational
Astbury Golf Course lies between the railway line and Macclesfield Canal and extends into the Cheshire Plain.

Macclesfield Canal Corridor
The Macclesfield Canal is an important cultural and recreation corridor and is generally of greater interest than surrounding areas. This corridor contains areas of parkland, listed buildings and many interesting features such as sandstone bridge crossings.

LANDSCAPE QUALITY
The Mow Cop Fringe is ordinary quality. This is a pleasant agricultural landscape, dominated by the Staffordshire Ridge. The area has a reasonable distribution of semi-natural landscape features. Factors which contribute to the quality of this landscape include:

- managed farmland with a mixture of well maintained, intermittent or overgrown hedgerows replaced in many areas with post and wire;
- some sense of place associated with Mow Cop;
- occasional mixture of land uses such as golf courses and pasture; and
- substantial mature vegetation.
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Existing Landscape

This character area is very much a transitional landscape located between the Staffordshire Ridge and the Cheshire Plain. The area is defined to the north by the urban edge of Congleton, to the east by the steeper slopes of the Staffordshire Ridge, to the west by the Macclesfield Canal and to the south by the Alsager Plain.

The topography in this area is relatively indistinct, although the rising ground towards Mow Cop is more impressive and affords longer distance views to the west. The majority of the area is formed on lower keuper marl with areas of middle coal measures, keuper sandstone and pebble beds immediately to the east of Scholars Green. This is generally overlaid with thinner glacial deposits of boulder clay than the wider Cheshire Plain. There is also an area of peat to the south of Hightown at Congleton Moss.

This is a rural landscape predominantly used as grazing for dairy cattle, hay/straw production with occasional horse grazing. Fields are generally medium in scale, mostly defined by a mixture of well maintained, intermittent or overgrown hawthorn hedgerows. Hedgerow trees are primarily oak and tend to be sparser than exist within the wider Cheshire Plain. In places hedgerows have become overgrown and individual hedgerow trees are less dominant. The landscape has a more intimate sense of scale at these locations due to the increased degree of containment afforded by field boundaries. Field ponds are present in this area, however, they tend to be more scattered than elsewhere on the wider Cheshire Plain.

Settlement is dispersed with scattered isolated properties throughout and a limited number of smaller settlements. There has been some urban spread in to the area from Congleton at Mossley. Older buildings are primarily constructed from cheshire brick, though more modern buildings in contemporary materials are also evident. There are several listed building located along the canal and a number of sandstone buildings are located on the higher ground, possibly a reflection of the underlying deposits of sandstone. There is a greater incidence of estate character at the southern end of the area, notably Ramsdell Hall. This estate has a distinct parkland character comprising mature free-standing field trees, sandstone boundary walls, iron railings and woodland blocks. To the north of the area, there are recreational influences at Congleton's urban fringe, including a golf course.

The transport network comprises several winding country lanes, generally following the slope of the land. The Macclesfield Canal and Stafford to Macclesfield railway line run parallel to each other along the length of the character area.

This is a relatively open and featureless landscape. There is however some variation, dependent upon the degree of localised containment by landform and vegetation. There are views to the east over rising ground to the Staffordshire Ridge, with Mow Cop forming the focal point against the skyline. Views to the west are middle to long distance across the Cheshire Plain. The canal is an attractive feature within the landscape, the listed buildings and areas of parkland along its length locally elevate the landscape character and quality of the area.

Designations

Landscape designations within the Mow Cop Fringe as follows:

Statutory Designation
- Conservation area – Macclesfield Canal
- Non-Statutory Designation
  - Either ASCV or ASLEV designations cover the whole of the character area.
  - Site Of Biological Interest (Grade B) – Odd Rode; narrow belts of ancient woodland, along tributaries
  - Site Of Biological Interest (Grade C) – narrow belts of ancient woodland and grassland along tributaries & areas of peatland at Congleton Moss

Forces for Change

The main issues and forces for change affecting this character area are mainly concerned with recreational pressure and some agricultural change

- Neglect of farmland is minimal, however there is some degradation of hedgerows.
- Recreational influences at Congleton urban fringe and increasing visitor pressure along country lanes, the canal and recreational footpaths.

Future Management

The aim of the following guidelines is to outline the most appropriate management and conservation strategies, which ensure that the character is conserved, restored or enhanced.

- Retain open views towards Staffordshire Ridge. Notable views are towards Mow Cop. Careful consideration should be given to the location of new developments to ensure that these views are maintained.
- Continue to maintain hedge, hedgerow trees and field trees as positive conservation features within the landscape. Restore and manage hedgerows to maintain the existing age and species diversity, ensuring hedgerows remain a feature of the landscape. It is important to replant and manage mature trees to ensure the continuation of these characteristic areas.
- Protect conservation areas. Woodland and grassland habitats along tributaries are of importance for nature conservation and are valuable landscape features. Both their aesthetic and ecological value should be respected in any management or maintenance work.
- Continue to manage existing blocks of woodland by replacing ageing trees. Manage woodlands to maintain the existing age and species diversity, ensuring that this feature continues to be a prominent characteristic of estate land.
- Respect the conservation value of the Macclesfield Canal. The canal is a distinguishing feature of the landscape. Continue to maintain and manage this resource avoiding new development along its course.
- Conserve small pocket of heath at Congleton Moss. Area of distinctive local character adds diversity to the landscape. Retain and maintain character.