4.4 ALSAGER PLAIN

Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping to undulating landform, with some localised variations
- Prominent road network comprising main roads and several minor roads
- Open medium scale pasture farmland. Boundaries are primarily a mixture of well maintained and intermittent hawthorn hedgerows, with post and wire infill
- Views are medium scale, except to the east and north where the Cloud and the Staffordshire Ridge are prominent features of the skyline
- Scattered field trees and hedgerow trees present. Established linear bands of vegetation along tributaries
- Trent and Mersey canal is an attractive feature
- Buildings range from older cheshire brick properties to a range of modern contemporary styles
- Mature woodland blocks around Lawton Hall and Rode Hall

CONGLETON LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT
4.4 ALSAGER PLAIN

LANDCOVER TYPES

Rolling Farmland
Agricultural farmland, predominantly pastoral with smaller areas under arable use. Fields are overall medium in scale and have an irregular pattern.

Urban Fringe Recreation
Golf Course to the south of Alsager.

Urban Fringe Industrial
Industrial works located at the urban fringe of Alsager.

Estate Farmland
Estate farmland defined by established blocks of mature woodland and well maintained hedgerows. (Lawton Hall)

LANDSCAPE QUALITY

The Alsager Plain is overall an ordinary quality landscape. This landscape is generally functional while not being particularly aesthetically attractive. Factors which contribute to the quality of this landscape include:

- insensitive management of the landscape, such as replacement of hedgerows with post and wire fencing, removal of trees from hedgerows and non-native planting;
- occasional mixed land uses of golf courses and pasture;
- ill-conceived development on Alsager’s rural/urban fringe, includes large farm sheds;
- exposed settlement edges encroaching physically and visually into the countryside; and
- fringes of industrial works impacting on surroundings.
EXISTING LANDSCAPE

The Alsager Plain is a small area located at the southern most extent of the Borough, along the boundary with Stoke on Trent, between Alsager and Kidsgrove. The eastern boundary is formed by the Mow Cop Fringe, The northern boundary by the Cheshire Plain and the western boundary by the Wheelock Rolling Plain. The landscape character of the area continues to the south and beyond the Borough boundary.

A combination of the topography and the presence of the surrounding urban settlements strongly influences the character of the landscape, although the area remains primarily rural. The topography is varied, ranging between gently sloping to undulating. In places more significant localised variations in landform occur, such as at Merelake. The area is predominantly formed on a combination of Triassic lower keuper marl and lower keuper siltiferous beds overlaid by various glacial materials such as boulder clay, sand and gravel and undifferentiated fluvo-glacial deposits. The area is also influenced by areas of middle coal measures and pebble beds to the southeast of Scholars Green where the land rises slightly towards the Staffordshire Ridge.

The Trent and Mersey canal is an attractive and popular feature of the landscape, winding through the area between Lawton-gate and Kidsgrove. Several listed buildings along the canal, contribute to the conservation value and character of the watercourse.

Generally the land is mostly for grazing dairy cattle. Field sizes tend to be small to medium in scale, with an irregular field pattern defined by a mixture of well maintained and intermittent hawthorn hedgerows, or post and wire/post and rail fencing. Hedgerow trees are generally present, along with some isolated field trees.

Tree cover within the area is variable. There are small, well established blocks and linear bands of woodland associated with waterbodies, brooks and tributaries such as Bratt's Wood, Slum Wood, Summer House Plantation and Mill Lane plantation. Much of the substantial mature woodland is associated with Lawton Hall and the perimeter of Rode Hall, which combine to evoke an estate character.

There has been considerable influence upon the landscape by man, with urban development much in evidence. There is a prominent main road network (A5011, A50 and A34) which converges at Alsager and Kidsgrove. Additionally there is a network of lesser winding roads, linking to the smaller settlement of Mount Pleasant as well as several isolated buildings. Railway lines run across the area in parallel to the Trent and Mersey canal. There is some urban extension into the area, most notably from industrial development adjacent to the railway line along the district boundary.

There is greater influence of the surrounding urban settlements than exists within the wider Cheshire Plain with Alsager, Kidsgrove or main roads evident throughout much of the area. Buildings are not particularly distinctive, ranging from some older Cheshire brick properties to a range of modern contemporary styles. Larger farm buildings, some of which are showing signs of neglect are often prominently located. Influences at Alsager include urban fringe uses such as golf courses and also non-native planting, in particular stands of lombardy poplars. Most views are middle distance, although in places longer distance views are available most notably towards Mow Cop and the Staffordshire Ridge.

Much of the landscape is fairly open and does not have any great sense of drama or distinctiveness. However, there is some sense of place attributable to the areas proximity to Mow Cop and the Staffordshire Ridge, which dominate the skyline of long distance views to the east and north. Main roads and other urban forms, tend to fragment the landscape. There are localised areas of better quality landscapes with a stronger sense of place/local distinctiveness. These include stretches of the canal, Lawton Hall and Saints Church. Although the majority of the land is open the area is subtly different from the Cheshire Plain, primarily due to the more varied topography and vegetation, giving rise to a slightly more intimate landscape.

DESIGNATIONS

Landscape designations within the Alsager Plain are as follows:

Statutory Designations
Conservation Area – Trent and Mersey Canal

Non Statutory Designations
SBI A – Lawton Woods includes ancient woodland
SBI B – Hall O'Lee Clough, Odd Rode/Church Lawton woodland
SBI C – Lawton Hall Lake, Church Lawton Ancient woodland – along tributaries located between Scholar Green and Lawton Hall. Woodland along tributaries and on hills to the west of Kidsgrove.
Park and Garden of Historic Interest – Lawton Hall

FORCES FOR CHANGE

The main issues and forces for change affecting this character area stem from development pressure and agricultural change.

• Recent urban developments have included new roads and housing. Recreational uses such as golf course have led to the loss of hedges. Additionally non-native planting has been detrimental to the areas character.
• Symptoms of agricultural change include neglected farmland, field enlargement, over mature hedgerow trees and replacement of hedges by fencing which is having an effect on the landscape.
• Development pressure on Lawton Hall.

Future Management

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

• Respect the conservation value of the vegetation corridors associated with the River Whalney and its tributaries. These drainage channels are distinguishing features of the landscape and are also of nature conservation value.
• Respect the conservation value of the Trent and Mersey 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 pockets of heath on the urban fringe of Alsager. Area of distinctive local character adds diversity to the landscape. Retain and maintain the heathland character.
• Resist planting new poplar or other non-indigenous woodlands. In some areas species have been planted for their aesthetic value which can not otherwise be found in the local area. This practice dilutes the impact of local distinctiveness and should be avoided.
• Restore and manage hedgerows as positive conservation features within the landscape. Continue to manage hedgerows, restoring gaps and planting new trees to promote this feature within the landscape.
• Promote further areas for nature conservation; disturbed or degraded land affected by industry provide an opportunity to develop new landscape features such as woodlands, wetlands or grasslands
• Restoration of woodland areas of Lawton hall Estate.