4.7 DANE VALLEY

Key Characteristics

- Flat/gently undulating river valley, with steep wooded slopes and meadows in the valley bottom
- Predominantly pasture with some arable farming on more fertile gently sloping ground
- Meandering watercourse lined with mature vegetation
- Poorly defined field pattern without clearly defined boundaries with the exception of clipped hedgerows along country lanes and tracks
- Areas of parkland landscape on upper valley slopes associated with isolated larger country houses
- Isolated mature trees with lower branches browsed by grazing stock
- Limited access along narrow country lanes and farm access tracks
- Short to middle distance views controlled by mature vegetation along the valley
- Dispersed settlement pattern of isolated forms, halls and villages; buildings predominantly red brick under slate
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LANDCOVER TYPES

Valley farmland
Pasture meadows predominate along the valley bottom, are medium scale, often poorly defined. Other incidental use includes arable land on more fertile soils, and grazing on land near Congleton urban fringe.

Woodland corridor
Mature deciduous woodland, primarily oak-ash on the steeper slopes. Ribbons of woodland/scrub are along tributaries, whilst clumps of willow and alder punctuate the lower river banks.

Parkland Edge
Located along the edge of the Dane Valley is parkland landscape associated with country houses, including Somerford Booth Hall and Twemlow Hall. This landscape type comprises mature woodland blocks, field trees and pasture.

LANDSCAPE QUALITY
The Dane Valley is of very good quality. This is an attractive rural landscape, with some sense of place associated with the River Dane. Factors which contribute to the quality of this landscape include:

- Abundant woodland cover along tributaries associated with the valley corridor;
- Solitary buildings, including halls and farmhouses are located on upper valley slopes and surrounded by mature vegetation
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Existing Landscape

The Dane Valley cuts through the Cheshire Plain between Holmes Chapel and Congleton. This linear landscape feature separates the Cheshire Plain to the south from the North Congleton Plain to the north. The valley is approximately 1-2km in width and lies some 20-30m lower than the surrounding landscape. The combination of landform and river corridor vegetation makes this area distinct from the surrounding broadly level plains either side.

The River Dane is one of the few rivers to make a significant impression on the Cheshire Plain. Its floodplain comprises lush meadows and pasture fields contained by bluff slopes, the steepest of which are clothed in mature deciduous woodland, much of which is ancient in origin. The floodplain gently undulates as the river sinuously meanders along the broad valley floor. River terraces indicate successive periods of erosion and fluctuating water levels. More recent localised erosion along the course of the river has formed low river cliffs, exposing sandy alluvial soils. The underlying geology is middle keuper marl overlaid with alluvium and undifferentiated river terrace deposits on the valley bottom and boulder clay along valley sides.

The extensive riparian vegetation forms well-established ribbons of deciduous woodland/crook. Along the banks of the river clumps of willow and alder are prominent and limit vistas along the valley to short/medium distance views. The steeper valley slopes are predominantly occupied by oak-ash woodland and isolated areas of parkland landscape associated with country houses such as Hulme Waffield, Old Hall and Somerford Booth Hall. Pasture meadows contain field trees, noticeably mature limes with grazed lower branches. The landscape is generally richer and more intimate than elsewhere within the Borough. Numerous hedgerow trees, predominantly mature oaks, are evident. However, some are showing signs of over maturity.

The Dane Valley is a rural landscape, primarily used for pasture, although some more fertile land is being used for arable farming. Fields are poorly defined and are medium scale and irregular, often with timber post and rail field boundaries. There is some urban fringe influences, associated with isolated dwellings along the river including horse paddocks and industrial development on the edge of Congleton. Wildlife is significant within the valley, associated with the river corridor, woodlands and areas of grassland.

Settlement is sparse within the valley and includes isolated farms, halls and residential properties. Buildings tend to be constructed in Cheshire brick under slate or clay-tile roofs. There are very few roads within the character area, which adds to the sense of remoteness. Two cross the valley at Radnor Bridge and Twemlow Green. Other than these minor roads, access is restricted to dead end tracks which link individual properties to the wider road network of the Cheshire and North Congleton Plains.

The river valley is not widely visible from the surrounding landscape, due to its relative narrowness and containment within the local landscape. Views are either clear over it or constrained by trees along the top of valley sides. The most obvious visible elements when viewed from the periphery of the valley, are the river and the upper halves of mature trees running along the valley bottom. Views are contained within the valley by a combination of landform and vegetation cover. Built elements within views include minor roads, power lines and isolated properties, although these are not particularly intrusive.

This is an attractive, pleasant rural landscape of small to medium scale. The appeal of this landscape lies in its unspoilt and harmonious nature. The gentle flow of the river and mature landscape elements evoke a sense of continuity and balance. The intimate character of the valley is reinforced by birdsong and the presence of grazing stock complements the peaceful scene.

DESIGNATIONS

Landscape designations within the Dane Valley are as follows:

**Statutory**
- SSSI – The valley is designated a SSSI from Radnor Bridge to Swettenham Brook including a biological SBI at Holly Banks.

**Non Statutory**
- ASCV 1996 – occupies the of the whole of character area
- SBI A - River Dane corridor and tributaries which include belts of ancient woodland and grassland
- Ancient woodlands along river corridor and tributaries have SBI status A and B
- CWT reserves east of Swettenham.

Issues and forces for change

The main issues and forces for change which are currently affecting this character area are as follow:

- Reductions in agricultural intensity resulting in under grazing or poor management.
- Visitor pressure.
- Development along urban fringe such as Congleton Business Park.

Future Management

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

- Protect the important nature conservation of the Dane Valley.
- The valley corridor is of high biodiversity, sustaining important wildlife habitats and a valuable landscape feature. The valley's aesthetic and ecological value should be respected in any management or maintenance works.
- The enclosed introspective nature of the valley, is a feature of the character area. Avoid new insensitive developments which encroach upon the existing character of the Dane Valley.
- Enhance this recreational resource by promoting improved access for walkers, cyclists and equestrians. A strategy for recreation should be established, and would be required to address safety issues.
- Manage blocks of woodland. It is important to replant and manage mature woodland to ensure the continuation of these characteristic features.