4.9 CLOUD FRINGE

Key Characteristics

- Broadly level landform, rising to the east with local undulations associated with tributaries of the River Dane
- Extensive woodland and scrub vegetation along brooks and tributaries of the River Dane. Narrow, valley landform and greater woodland cover along the River Dane
- Field boundaries are primarily maintained with hedges and hedgerow trees. However, these can be overgrown in places or fragmented with post and wire infill. Significant number of hedgerow trees
- Settlement pattern is dispersed; older buildings are generally sandstone, millstone grit or Cheshire brick
- Road network consists of minor country lanes
- The Cheshire Ring Canal walk is an attraction, running along the Macclesfield Canal
- Rural landscape predominantly used for cattle grazing
- Views are generally short to middle distance although to the east longer distance views are dominated by the Cloud
4.9 CLOUD FRINGE

LANDCOVER TYPES

Upland Slopes
Small to medium scale pasture farmland, influenced by the Staffordshire Peaks. Field pattern mostly irregular, with boundaries well defined by hedgerows with trees.

Lower lying pasture farmland
Medium to large scale field size and fewer hedgerow trees. Field pattern becoming irregular and ill defined where influenced by tributaries and more varied landform.

Woodland/scrub
The Dane-in-Shaw and Timbers Brook and their tributaries have belts of mature woodland along their course. On the steeper slopes are areas of grazed pasture, rough grassland and scrub.

River Dane Valley
Shallow valley comprises river meanders, fingers of deciduous woodland, pasture fields and grassland.

Dane-in-Shaw Recreational
Recreational development occurring at Congleton's urban fringe. Localised undulating landform has been utilised for golf course facilities.

LANDSCAPE QUALITY

The Cloud Peak Fringe is good quality. This is an attractive and pleasant agricultural landscape. The area has a reasonable distribution of semi-natural landscape features. Factors which contribute to the quality of this landscape include:

- managed agricultural farmland with a mixture of field boundaries and hedgerows;
- some sense of place associated with The Cloud;
- occasional mixture of land uses such as golf courses and pasture; and
- substantial mature vegetation.
4.9 CLOUD FRINGE

Existing Landscape

This character area is very much a transitional landscape located at the northeast of the Borough, below the Staffordshire Ridge to the east, along which the Cloud is the prominent summit. The River Dane defines the northern boundary with Congleton town to the west.

The landform is broadly level though at a slightly higher elevation than the Cheshire Plain. The majority of this area is formed on lower keeper marl overlaid with boulder clay. The land rises to the east, where the influence of harder millstone grit becomes greater. To the southwest there are significant local undulations, associated with tributaries of the River Dane which include the Dane-in-Shaw brook and Timbers brook. The drift geology in these areas is more varied and comprises undifferentiated fluvo-glacial deposits, glacial sand and gravel and alluvium deposits. The influence of the River Dane is limited to a narrow corridor, which extends along and across the borough boundary.

This is a rural landscape predominantly used for pasture. Field sizes are small to medium scale, becoming smaller towards the east, on the steeper slopes below The Cloud. Field pattern is irregular with hedge boundaries, primarily clipped hawthorn. In places hedges have become degraded and are replaced by post and wire fencing. In other areas hedges are mature and overgrown.

The overall tree coverage is substantial and throughout the area there are a significant number of hedgerow trees, which are primarily oak. In some of the larger fields are field trees, remnant from lost hedgerows. There are also scattered clumps of deciduous trees, which have established around field ponds. There is substantial vegetation associated with the River Dane tributaries. Linear fingers of deciduous woodland extend along these watercourses. Additionally there are areas of scrub along the rail embankment.

Settlement is dispersed; there are numerous scattered properties. Towards the east of the character area the influence of millstone grit and red sandstone as local building materials becomes apparent. There are old stone buildings under slate or clay-tile roofs, whose property boundaries are defined by stone walls. Further to the west are more cheshire brick buildings, with slate roofs. Some of the older properties, many former farmhouses, are now large residential dwellings. Congleton urban fringe influence includes a well-manicured golf course along the Dane-in-Shaw.

The transport network is similar to that within the Cheshire Plain. Main roads include the A54, extending northwards from the town of Congleton, and an unclassified road extending towards the Peaks. There are also several minor, winding roads in the area. Additionally the railway line to Macclesfield runs northeast from Hightown through the area. A viaduct carries the railway over the Dane-in-Shaw brook. Locally important recreational routes are footpaths running alongside or close to a dismantled railway line, which provides links with Mow Cop Trail and Staffordshire Way. Located further north, the Cheshire Ring Canal walk runs along the Macclesfield Canal.

Views are generally short or middle distance with hedgerows and hedgerow trees providing a significant degree of containment. The combination of undulating topography and vegetation along the brooks and tributaries enhance this sense of containment and effectively screens urban fringe housing developments at the edge of Congleton. Views to the east and northeast are across land rising to the Staffordshire Peak ridgeline, these views are dominated by views of the Cloud against the skyline. There are also notable longer distance views to the north, along the Staffordshire Peaks ridgeline to the Pennines beyond the Borough boundary.

This is a pleasant and attractive agricultural landscape. The landscape is unspoilt by intrusive urban development.

Designations

Landscape designations within the Cloud Peak Fringe are as follows:

Statutory Designations

- SSSI – Dane-in-Shaw Pasture, area of grassland to the south of the railway viaduct at Congleton urban fringe.
- Narrow belts of ancient woodland along River Dane and tributaries, perpendicular to Macclesfield canal.
- SAM – Crossley Bridge and Colleymill Bridge, Congleton
- Conservation Area – Macclesfield Canal

Non-Statutory Designations

- ASCV – covers part of the character area
- SBI A – Timbersbrook and Dane-in-Shaw tributaries which include belts of ancient woodland and grassland
- SBI B – Dane-in-Shaw tributaries which include woodland and grassland. Dane-in-Shaw Brook Meadows
- Park and Garden of Historic Interest – Buglawton Hall

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 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 and Pennines. Notable views towards the ridgeline are a feature of the area. 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 maintain a feature of the landscape. It is important to replant and manage mature trees to ensure the continuation of these characteristic areas.
- Protect important conservation areas. Woodland and grassland habitats along the River Dane tributaries and grassland at Congleton urban fringe 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.