Landscape Character Type 20:

Moorland Plateau
LANDSCAPE TYPE 20: MOORLAND PLATEAU.
Upland Cheshire

MP1: Shining Tor                  MP2: Shutlingsloe

Key Characteristics:

- Large-scale enclosed reverting and improved moor and unenclosed upland moor
- Dry stone walls
- Steep slopes rising above 280m AOD to 560m AOD
- Woodland is virtually absent
- Limited dispersed stone built farms and barns
- Upland streams
- Open, unrestricted views of the surrounding area
- Disused quarries

General Description:

This type refers to an upland area in eastern Cheshire mostly lying within the Peak District National Park where the dominant landscape character is provided by upland moor with steep slopes, minor streams and tributaries.
Visual Character:

This is a very large scale, open landscape with extensive views in all directions across undulating moor-land. Any boundaries are visually insignificant and comprise low wire fences or stone walls. There is a marked absence of trees. There are few individual features to attract the eye apart from small barns or distant farmsteads. From certain directions the angular summit of Shutlingsloe is very distinctive. Elsewhere a number of shallow incised valleys interrupt the otherwise flat or gently rolling plateau.

The telecommunication mast at Sutton Bank (outside the character area) provides a significant landmark in views westward. Otherwise the skyline is dominant with a strong simple profile unencumbered by structures or high vegetation.

Natural Influences:

The underlying geology relates directly to topography. At the lower level is Chatsworth grit, rising to millstone grit which forms much of the gritstone outcrops that are characteristic of this area, and at the higher altitude is Woodhead Hill sandstone and Pennine lower coal measures. This is overlain by large expanses of peat and patches of head (clay, silt, sand and gravel) and small patches of Devensian till on the lower elevations.

This character type is defined by upland topography, with steep slopes and high elevations ranging from c 280m to 560m AOD. Upland incised streams are a typical feature.

Soils are cambic stagnohumic gley soils which support purple moor grass and mat grass; rushes are dominant in many places with cotton grass and mosses on the wettest ground. Acid grassland and dwarf shrub heath and blanket mire form the major habitats, occupying the steeper and least fertile ground. Woodland cover is characteristically low.

The breeding of certain upland bird species is noted in this character type, for example the golden plover which needs space and low levels of human activity.

Cultural Influences:

This character type is characterised by a lack of obvious human activity – there are no signs of habitation such as buildings. However, the very nature of the type was the result of human activity in prehistory. The formation of moorland in upland Britain can be traced back to the Bronze Age when clearances for arable cultivation on the high ground followed by climatic deterioration led to the degradation of soil quality and slow accumulation of peat. Subsequently the character of the moor has been maintained through controlled burning and intensive sheep grazing.

The character area is likely to have once been part of the extensive Royal Forest of Macclesfield which effectively came to an end with the acquisition by Lord Derby in 1684 of all the grazing and pasture which he had previously rented.
Macclesfield was one of four large forests existing in Cheshire in the medieval period (Delamere, Mondrem and Wirral were the others). The medieval forest of Macclesfield covered a vast portion of Cheshire, considerably larger than the coniferous plantations that today are referred to as 'Macclesfield Forest'. The popular perception of a forest is that of an area densely covered with trees. However, in the medieval period, a forest was an area for hunting deer and beasts of the lesser warren; broad-leaved woodland was interspersed with farmland and even settlement in some areas. Forests were mainly owned by the Crown and they were subject to Forest Law which imposed restrictions upon land use and severely punished poaching.

Macclesfield Forest was important for sheep farming in the 16th century, with enclosure and settlement encouraged in order to increase revenue. By the 17th century a significant portion of the land up to 200m AOD had been enclosed and settled. After the mid-17th century, enclosure of the higher altitudes increased. Some of this enclosure was associated with coalmining, which had been taking place since the 16th century.

Associated with the Macclesfield Forest were a number of vaccaries or medieval cattle ranches. These were held directly by a lord who appointed staff to look after his herds. Hardy, stocky cattle were put out to pasture on the upland moor and brought down when they were to have young, to be sent to market or for slaughter. Vaccaries are known in only a few places in the country, including the Forest of Bowland in Lancashire. They were well adapted to the upland moor landscape, seeking locations in steep-sided valleys with access to extensive grazing.

Prehistoric sites, some of which have since been lost, are recorded in the upland moor. Typical features include cairns located on prominent hill rises and standing stones.

Quarrying is the most recent significant activity to take place in this character type. The place name Whetstone Ridge, identifies a former use for the excavated stone. These quarries have now fallen into disuse and peace has been restored to these remote locations.

**Issues affecting the Moorland Plateau landscape character type**

1. **Quality of blanket bog is often poor** as a result of historical over-grazing, accidental burning and high levels of air pollution – resulting in low species diversity and areas of bare peat.

2. **Grazing issues:** Inappropriate grazing management locally e.g. over-grazing, reduction in cattle grazing, decline in hefting as a result of over-wintering, decline in shepherding. There is a need to ensure a sustainable grazing regime for the moorland areas. This can be achieved by removing and reducing stock from the moorland areas. Under–grazing can lead to natural succession to scrub and woodland at inappropriate locations.
3. **Past drainage**: historic drainage measures leading to drying out of blanket bog and wet heath. There is a need to reduce the amount of water running off the moor.

4. **Climate Change**: warmer drier summers may lead to changes in water regime, spread of bracken if the peat dries out, effects on peat formation, increased fire risk

5. **Recreational disturbance** leading to localised vegetation damage and possible disturbance to breeding birds

6. **Disrepair of drystone walls**: stone walls are an important and distinctive landscape feature throughout this type. The standard of maintenance varies considerably across the area.
MP1: Shining Tor Character Area.
Including Oldgate Nick, Whetsone Ridge & Birchenough Hill

This character type follows the eastern county boundary from Oldgate Nick south as far as Allgreave and is wholly within the Peak Park. The varied and scenically dramatic landform results from the folding and faulting of gritstone and shale and subsequent dissection by water courses. This is an area of enclosed upland moor – large and regular planned post-medieval field patterns to the north, becoming more piecemeal and irregular in the south, which is indicative of enclosure by agreement. There is also an area of unenclosed moor on what is part of Axe Edge Moor, the greater part of which lies over the county boundary in Derbyshire. This field pattern is interrupted by concentrations of small fields that are associated with a small number of isolated farms. It is likely that the construction of the farms predates, or at the very latest coincides with, the enclosure of the moor.

Two major roads traverse the area, the A54 and the A537, and the traffic associated with these busy highways seems incongruous within the bleak moorland setting. The open and expansive nature of the landscape, with an almost complete absence of any screening elements, ensures that any moving traffic is visible over a wide area. The Cat and Fiddle public house, a familiar landmark to many motorists, is located just inside the county boundary at a location that enjoys a panoramic view of Cheshire. In the south of the character area the telecommunication mast at Croker Hill (outside the character area) provides a significant landmark in views westward. Otherwise the low skyline is dominant with a strong simple profile unencumbered by structures or high vegetation.

Along the area’s southern boundary there are views down into the very different landscape of the Dane Valley, part of the Wildboarclough Character Area which forms part of the adjoining Upland Footslopes landscape type. A similar situation prevails where views are available down into the Clough Brook Valley, also within the Wildboarclough Character Area. Here the tree-lined brook in the valley bottom and woodland blocks visible on the steep valley sides, provide a strong contrast with the virtually tree-less open moorland on the high ground. The summit of Shining Tor on the county boundary dominates the northern part of the character area. This elevated ridge offers extensive panoramic views in all directions. Distant views extend to the Manchester conurbation and further north along the Pennines. Lamaload Reservoir and its associated woodland are visible to the west, occupying lower ground within the Teggs Nose-Whaley Moor Character Area.

There is an even distribution of upland streams in steep sided valleys. Woodland cover is very low, as is expected in a moorland context. There is just one block in the area, which is the conifer Cumberland Plantation on the banks of the Cumberland Brook. There is a series of heath areas on the southern tip of the character area near Birchenough Hill.

This is a quiet, remote part of the county with very little by way of modern intervention. Settlement is not a typical feature of this landscape type. The few farms and field barns that can be found in this character area are typically on the lower levels and stone built, as are the distinctive boundary features i.e. drystone walls.
Much of the character area is designated as SSSIs, with typically acidic grassland and dwarf shrub heath and blanket mire forming the major habitats and occupying the steeper and least fertile ground.

Whetstone Ridge, Dane Bower Hollow and Cut-thorn Hill are all included in the Leek Moors SSSI, which continues over the county boundary. The mire communities of Axe Edge support several uncommon breeding birds, including a large, regionally significant population of golden plover.

The northern portion of the character area, including Cats Tor and Shining Tor is part of the Goyt Valley SSSI. Part of the blanket mire around Shining Tor is dominated by hare’s-tail cottongrass, with bilberry, crowberry and a small amount of bog moss. In conjunction with Leek Moors this area is of importance for upland breeding birds – species such as the merlin and golden plover require large areas and are vulnerable to land use change and human activity. As such much of the area is designated a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive.

The area identified as Cuckoo Rocks is a large area of semi-improved acid grassland. Scattered across this grassland are large boulders, which were deposited by retreating glaciers.

A stone chimney which ventilated the Dane Bower colliery is a scheduled monument. The colliery was last worked in 1925 and the chimney is one of only nine ventilation chimneys in England. It stands in an area of rough grazing to the west of a disused quarry. Dane Bower was also the site of a searchlight battery in WWII.
MP2: Shutlingsloe Character Area.  
Including High Moor, Higher Barn & Higher Nabbs

The character type refers to an area of unenclosed moor to the south of Macclesfield Forest and lies partly within the Peak District National Park. It is an upland area with steep slopes and ranges from 330m to 506m AOD on the top of Shutlingsloe Hill, which is a prominent landform. A series of small streams occur in shallow valleys on the hillside. This character type is characterised by a lack of obvious human activity – there are no signs of habitation such as buildings.

The summit of Shutlingsloe dominates most of this character area with a distinctive landform that is recognisable from many of the surrounding character areas. This is the only obvious landmark in an expansive landscape of rolling moorland. When in flower purple patches of heather provide the only relief from the visually dominant acid grassland. The high elevation of this character area allows very distant views in all directions across a number of counties. The whole of Cheshire is visible in an extensive panoramic outlook that includes the Welsh Hills beyond the county’s western boundary and the power stations in the Mersey Valley to the north-west. To the north the high rise buildings of Manchester and Stockport are visible. In the south-west the communication mast at Croker Hill is the most obvious local feature as it is surrounded by rolling open ground. In the east distant views extend over the county boundary into the Derbyshire and Staffordshire Peak District. Immediately to the north the Macclesfield Forest Character Area is easily recognised. The dense plantations form a very obvious boundary where the sweep of the open moorland is terminated abruptly by the solid mass of conifers.

The area is bound to the east by the Peak Footslopes landscape type of the Wildboarclough Character Area and along this margin there are extensive views down into the valley of the Clough Brook. A number of woodlands are visible within the valley and the large conifer plantation at Yarnshaw Hill is particularly prominent. The substantial property of Crag Hall is also visible from this elevation, surrounded by woodland on the opposite side of the valley. Views extend across the valley to the rolling, large-scale moorland plateau of the Shining Tor Character Area. To the north east it is just possible to identify traffic moving along the A537 Macclesfield-Buxton Road, near the Cat and Fiddle public house, with the obvious high point of Shinning Tor beyond.

Characteristically this landscape type has low woodland cover, and there are just two small conifer wooded areas. Careful management, in particular grazing of the moor prevents the reversion to scrub and climax woodland vegetation. There is a small area of acid unimproved grassland surviving on Shutlingsloe Hill.

Evidence of prehistoric activity has been recorded in the area – in the 19th century two standing stones stood on Shutlingsloe, however, these have long since been removed. Shutlingsloe hill is surrounded by a curving dry-stone wall on monolithic foundations which may date from the medieval period. On the northern slopes of the hill summit are a number of small quarries. This prominent hill is given as one of six cattle pastures leased to Thomas Stanley in 1442 and was probably part of the vacaries at an earlier date.