



**CONGLETON
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
Part 3: Landscape Evaluation**

Congleton Town Council

CONGLETON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT Part 3: Landscape Evaluation

Prepared for:

Congleton Town Council

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Final Draft March 2020

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I Introduction

Background

- I.1 Congleton's varied landscapes, whether urban or rural, are one of its greatest assets, enhancing the quality of life of its residents and supporting social and economic development. They are described and classified in Parts 1 and 2 of the Congleton Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), and existing landscape, townscape and nature conservation designations are noted. Earlier landscape assessments have been primarily from the rural rather than urban perspective, which misses the townscapes and landscapes that local residents see, use and enjoy on an everyday basis within and around the settlement.
- I.2 Sizeable areas of green space or countryside of varying character close to or within the town are mapped in the Congleton LCA as 'Landscape Areas' while smaller areas within the town with notable features which contribute to sense of place are identified as 'Neighbourhood Landscape/Townscape Areas'. These vary from groups of built features and unbuilt land to more complex areas, and include both publicly accessible and private land. Their character is also varied.
- I.3 Key characteristics for each landscape character type and landscape character area are listed in Parts 1 and 2 - identifying what makes a particular area different from another. A number of landscape/townscape issues which will need further consideration for the future are also mentioned, though the list is not exhaustive.

Purpose of the evaluation

- I.4 The purpose of Part 3 of the assessment is to further assess and identify:
 - The landscapes that make the most significant contribution to Congleton's setting, sense of place, future sustainability, and the health and well-being of its residents;
 - Whether they would benefit from policies under the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan. to help sustain their special qualities and functions and manage necessary change.
- I.5 The assessment has looked at whether a landscape area or neighbourhood landscape/townscape area is already adequately protected through national policy or Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy policy.

Locally important landscape areas

- I.6 Congleton already has some landscapes that are important in the Cheshire East context. These have local landscape designations under the [Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy](#) which are non-statutory designations for areas that merit special attention because they are of particular value to local people and need to be safeguarded. They may also have particular issues and require a tailored approach. Their selection reflects the value that society places on specific areas. They need to be supported by evidence of their special features and qualities, why they are of local importance, and why they require additional protection or management. The support of the local community and other stakeholders also needs to be demonstrated.
- I.7 Local landscape designations are normally part of a district-wide local plan, but could also be part of a neighbourhood plan although they would confer a lower level of protection. Both district and neighbourhood plan designations lack specific statutory backing. However, there could also be positive benefits following on from the identification of 'special areas' as follows:
- Celebration - recognition and promotion of areas that have special importance, as this can make a positive contribution to the image of an area, benefitting tourism and the local economy;
 - Protection - raising awareness and understanding of those qualities that contribute to a sense of place, and local distinctiveness, and this can help to focus policy priorities and objectives. In turn this can influence the location of development, and help to protect areas where the anticipated type of change could be detrimental to those special qualities.
 - Management - identification of areas with particular values can help to focus efforts for positive management leading to increased public enjoyment and understanding of those areas.
- I.8 Different terms are used for local landscape designations - in Cheshire East the current term is Local Landscape Designation areas, referred to as LLDs. Any areas referred to under the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan would need a different term, such as 'locally important landscape areas'.
- I.9 There is no current guidance on local landscape designations for England, one reason for the current inconsistency in their use in district local plans, and the lack of information on their potential use in neighbourhood plans. The best current reference is Scottish Natural Heritage/Historic Environment Scotland's 2017 [Draft Guidance on Local Landscape Designations](#) which updates the 2006 [Guidance on Local Landscape Designations](#). A national [Review of Local Landscape Designations](#) (2006) stated that

“It is emphasised that the two approaches to landscape planning – character-based or landscape designations - are both compatible and complementary”.

- 1.10 Landscape character assessment describes all landscapes, whether degraded, ordinary or outstanding in terms of the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that together make one area different from another. The assessment can be at any scale, from the broad National Character Area scale, to the characteristics of an individual site. ‘Special’ landscapes that merit additional protection because of the value that people place on them may or may not coincide with character area boundaries - their value could depend on a strong uniform character or on the contrasts between different character areas.

2 Planning policy

National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1 The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) has been amended since the [Cheshire East Landscape Character Assessment](#) (LCA) was published in 2018 so references under section 1.10 of that report are updated below using the February 2019 version. The policies that are most relevant to the Congleton LCA are as follows:
- 2.2 Paragraph 9: *“Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area”.*
- 2.3 Paragraph 170: *“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*
- a) *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes ... (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
 - “b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;”*

Much hinges on what constitutes a ‘valued landscape’ and ‘identified quality’, the latter term being only added in 2019.

- 2.4 National Planning Policy Guidance states that:
- “Plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally-designated landscapes but also the wider countryside. Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their*

special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.”

Green Belt designation

- 2.5 Green Belts are national policy. Much of the countryside to the south and east of Congleton town is included in the Stoke/South Cheshire Green Belt within Cheshire East, which continues into Staffordshire Moorlands, as shown below. The aims of the Green Belt are stated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs 133 and 134. Paragraph 134 states that *“The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.*
- 2.6 Green Belt designation is not a landscape designation since the characteristics and qualities of the land are not relevant provided it serves the purpose above. Within the study area the Stoke/South Cheshire Green Belt overlaps with the Peak Fringe Local Landscape Designation area and policies applying to both are relevant.
- 2.7 The NPPF states in paragraph 141 that *“Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.”*. Landscape character, nature conservation and other assessments can provide guidance on appropriate ways of enhancing Green Belt land.
- 2.8 Green Belt designation is given substantial weight when determining planning applications for developments that could cause substantial harm, and would generally protect open countryside from residential or industrial development (unless the national interest of the proposal is considered to outweigh the benefits of the designation). However, there are many types of development that are generally considered acceptable provided the purpose of the designation is not permanently compromised, as set out in detail in NPPF in paragraphs 145 and 146. Some of these developments could adversely⁶ affect landscape character and quality, and whether a further level of protection is needed will depend on the particular qualities of an area.

Local Green Space designation

- 2.9 A provision that was brought in by the NPPF is the opportunity to designate Local Green Spaces through local and neighbourhood plans. Paragraphs 99-101 of the NPPF (2019) set out the criteria for designation. Once in place, Local Green Spaces have

the same restrictions as Green Belt. They cannot be used for 'extensive' areas of green space but no size limit is defined so they may be suitable for some larger areas.

National landscape designations

- 2.10 There are no national landscape designations within Congleton parish, but Congleton Park does have a site with national historic landscape importance as it is a Grade II site on Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. NPPF paragraph 194 states that:

"Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of: a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional."

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy

- 2.11 National Green Belt policy is repeated under Policy PG 3 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy together with a list of areas that were removed from Green Belt designation as part of the Strategy, none of which were near Congleton.
- 2.12 The Strategy also includes, under Policy PG4 'Safeguarded Land' between existing urban areas and the Green Belt, to be treated as 'Open Countryside' (i.e. outside the settlement boundary) under Policy PG6, but potentially available in the long term for development. There are no areas of Safeguarded Land near Congleton.
- 2.13 Natural and built landscapes in general, and Local Landscape Designation areas in particular, are covered by policy SE 4. The policy includes:

"Where development may affect a local or national designation a full understanding of the context, characteristics and significance should be provided and informed by the Cheshire East Landscape Character Assessment, Historic Landscape Assessment and the Local Landscape Designation Study. In Local Landscape Designation Areas, Cheshire East will seek to conserve and enhance the quality of the landscape and to protect it from development which is likely to have an adverse effect on its character and appearance".

The word 'protect' is not used for non-designated areas, which includes most of the landscape immediately next to Congleton.

Local landscape designation areas

- 2.14 Congleton previously has parts of two local landscape designation areas, the Areas of Special County Value under the former Cheshire County Council Structure Plan. These are shown below.

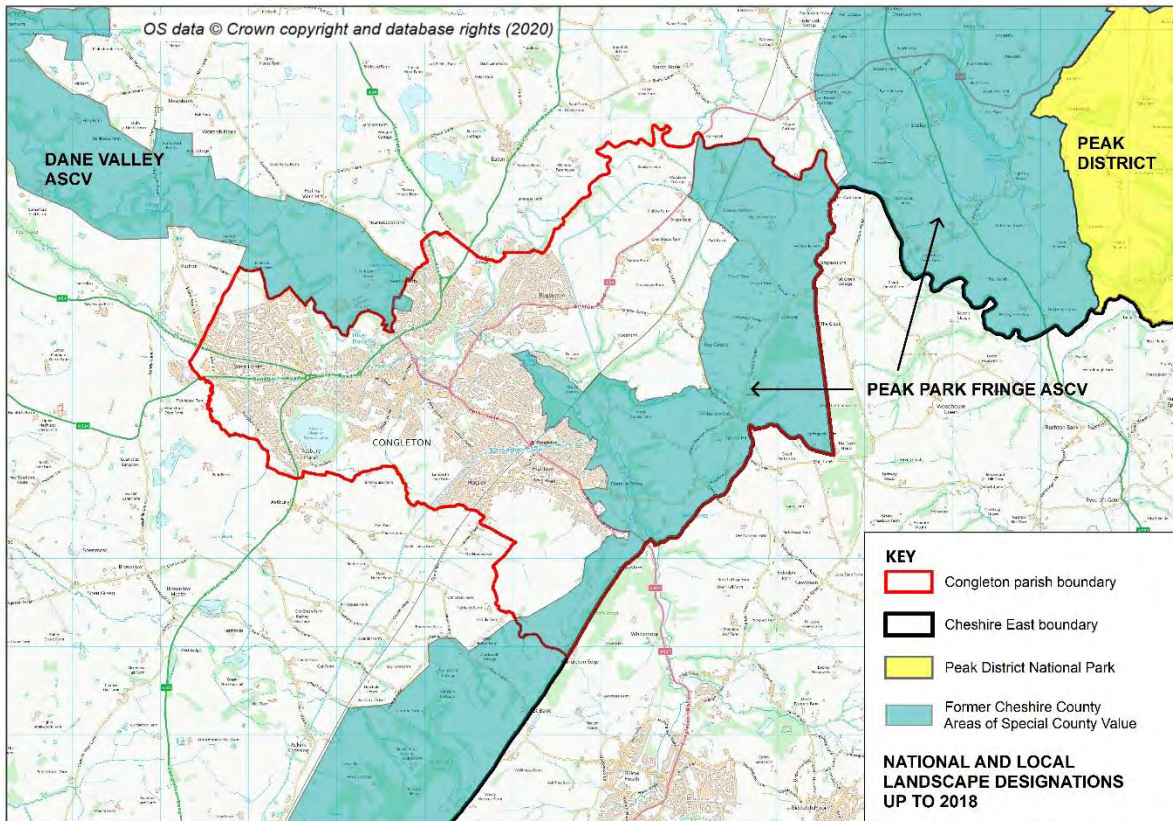


Figure 1: Landscape designations up to 2018

2.15 A review of the Areas of Special County Value (ASCVs) was carried out as part of the evidence base for Cheshire East’s Local Plan ([Local Landscape Designation Review LUC, 2018](#)). As a result, the Peak Park Fringe boundary was extended to cover all of the steep slopes below Congleton Edge, following the Cheshire East LCA character area 12d boundary. The Peak Park Fringe ASCV was renamed as the Peak Fringe Local Landscape Designation Area.

2.16 In the case of the former Dane Valley Area of Special County Value (ASCV), which reached up to the Congleton parish boundary, the following decisions were taken:

- To re-align it with the boundary of the Cheshire East LCA character area 10b (Upper Dane), which would have had minor effects near Congleton;
- To exclude the industrial warehouse on the outskirts of Congleton. However, the Steering Group then recommended that strategic site allocations were also excluded from any new Local Landscape Designation areas and as a result a much larger section (over 1.4 km²) of the former Dane Valley designation was removed, as shown below.

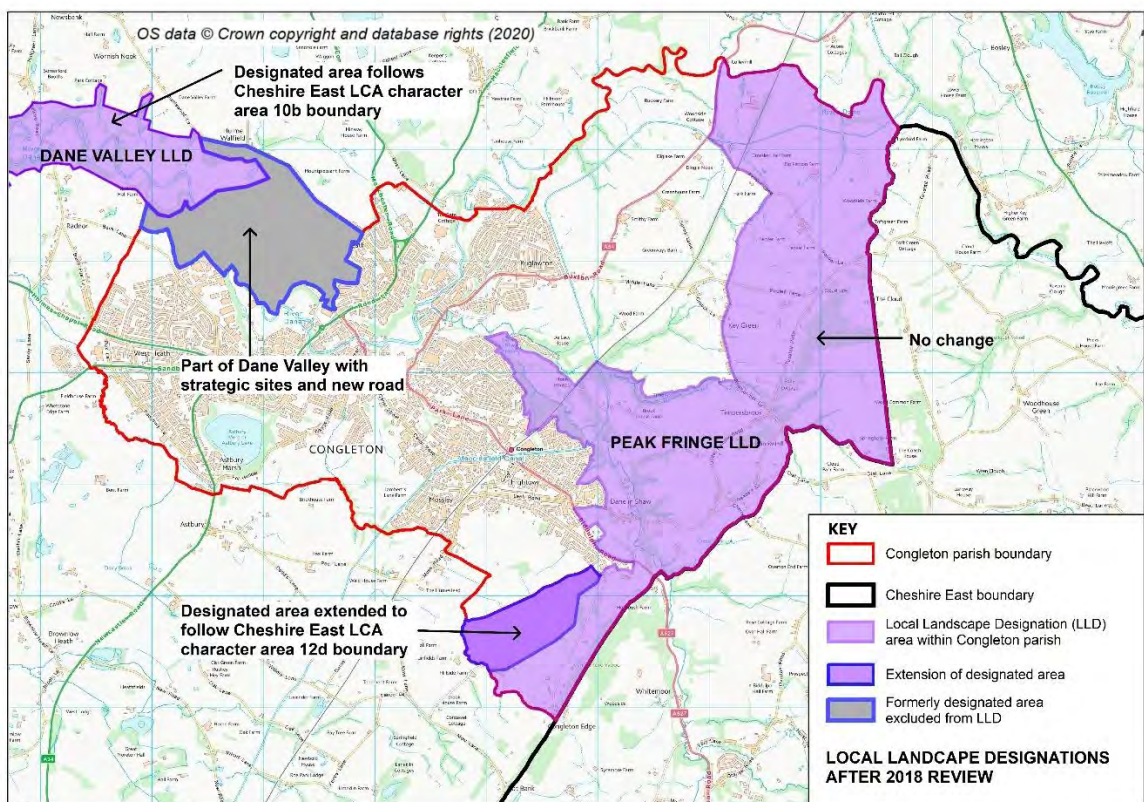


Figure 2: Current local landscape designations

2.17 The former Dane Valley ASCV was renamed as the Dane Valley Local Landscape Designation area. The designation history is relevant as the excluded area will still retain some of the special qualities for which the Dane Valley was previously designated. This area is outside the scope of the current study and would need to be reviewed separately.

Former Congleton Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment

2.18 Before the [Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment](#) (2008), the relevant assessment was Chris Blandford Associates' [Congleton Landscape Character Assessment](#) for the former Congleton Borough Council (1999). This was also a rural study, at a similar scale to the assessments that superseded it, and due to Congleton's growth, and the additional forces for change that apply now, it is no longer relevant as a source. However, it included recommendations for local landscape designation which are of some interest.

2.19 It refers to Areas of Significant Local Environmental Value (ASLEVs), which were designated under Congleton's Local Plan at the time. These encompassed a variety of qualities and features of landscape, archaeological, nature conservation, local amenity value, value as green gaps between settlement, and function as 'green wedges' adjacent to settlements. The ASLEVs around Congleton were:

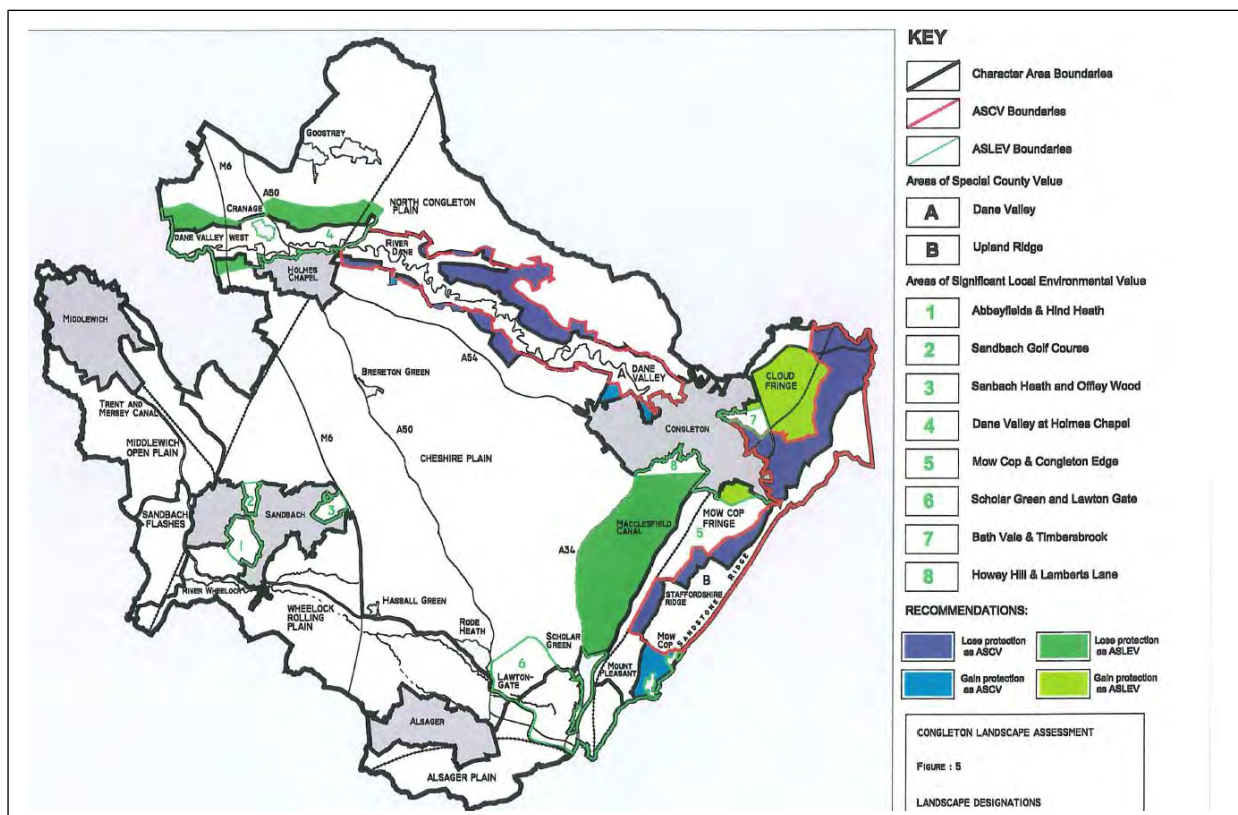
5 Mow Cop Fringe;

- 7 Bath Vale and Timbersbrook;
- 8 Howey Hill and Lamberts Lane.

Proposed ASLEVs were:

- Cloud Fringe - the area between Buglawton and the Cloud, coinciding with the Buglawton Hall character area in the Congleton Landscape Character Assessment;
- Congleton Moss.

2.20 Chapter 6 of the Landscape Character Assessment report included the complicated plan below showing these proposals and also proposals for extending the Dane Valley ASCV up to West Heath and the Forge Lane area.



2.21 The ASLEV designation was not carried forward in [Congleton Borough's Local Plan First Review Written Statement](#) which was adopted in 2005, and the recommendations were not implemented. However, a void was left in respect of protection of the former ASLEV areas around the town.

2.22 There is a question over whether existing policies in the Local Plan adequately protect valued and distinctive local landscape features, characteristics and qualities. The answer is probably that they do not, apart from the Conservation Areas, since a large

part of Congleton parish i.e. the neighbourhood plan area, has not been assessed from that perspective. The Congleton Neighbourhood Plan could help to fill that gap.

- 2.23 Green infrastructure (GI) is covered by Policy SE 6 in the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, which is a very broad strategy. 'Strategic green infrastructure' includes the River Dane corridor through Congleton, the Macclesfield Canal, public rights of way, cycle routes and greenways, country parks and estate parklands, the Peak Fringe, the Cloud, Congleton Edge and Mow Cop ridge, and ecological networks. The [Cheshire East Green Infrastructure Plan](#) (2019) highlights some of the issues identified in Parts 1 and 2 of the Congleton Landscape Character Assessment, such as the severance created by Mountbatten Way and the Link Road currently under construction, the lack of north-south linkages and the pinch points caused by high density industrial development, putting them in a wider context.
- 2.24 In the evaluation, areas that are part of identified Strategic GI are noted under SE6(a) and those that are part of other multifunctional GI networks, with reference to [Protecting and Enhancing Congleton's Natural Environment](#) (2017) and Congleton's rights of way, cycleway and other sustainable travel and recreational networks are noted under SE6(b).

Open Countryside

- 2.25 Due to the expansion of Congleton town, the draft [Site Allocations and Development Policies Document](#) (SADPD) shows a much extended settlement limit. The amount of Open Countryside that is not Green Belt or land with a Local Landscape Designation is already reduced, and will be further reduced, as shown below. These areas have limited protection. The settlement limit does, however, include within it some important unbuilt landscapes, or those where the unbuilt elements predominate.

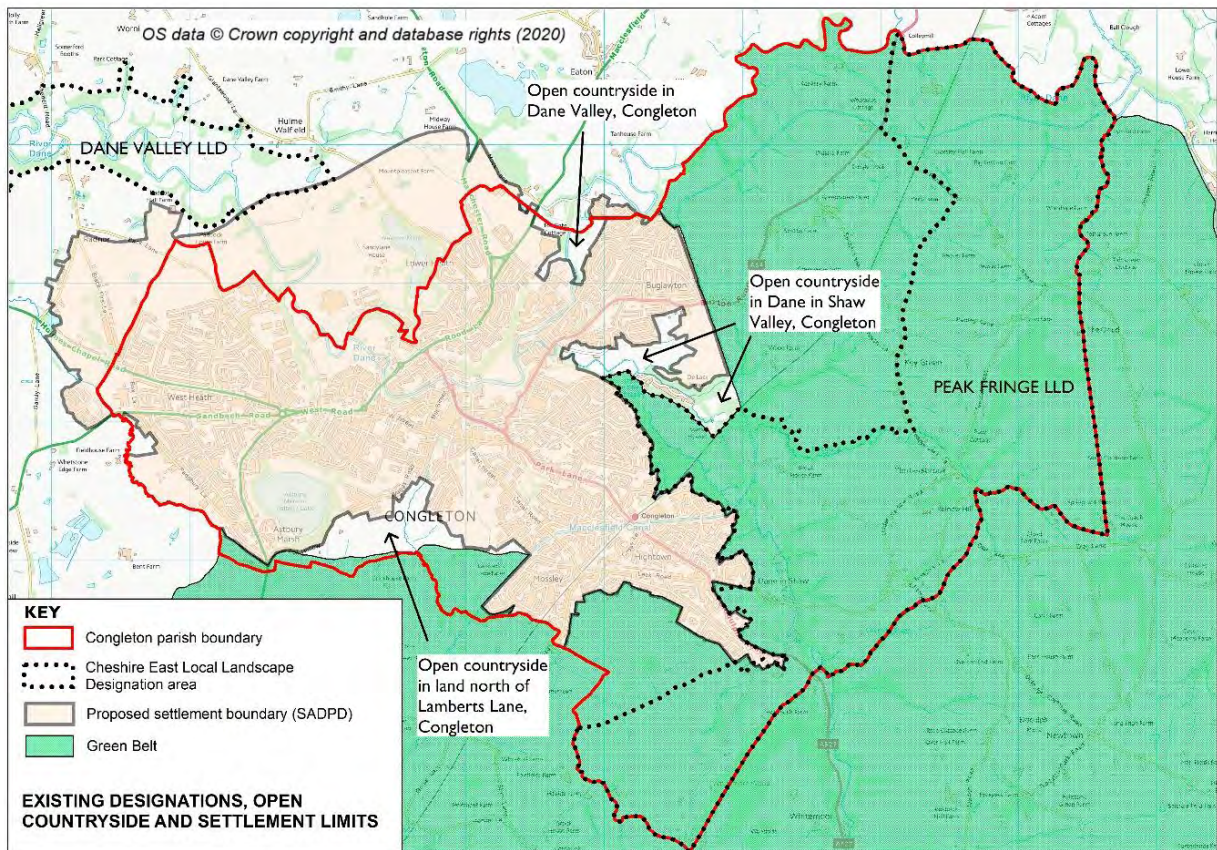


Figure 3: Open countryside, Green Belt and settlement limits

3 Assessment

- 3.1 Part I of the Congleton Landscape Character Assessment identified 6 ‘Landscape Areas’ which were sizeable areas of countryside or within the town where unbuilt land predominated. These areas within Congleton’s setting are shown on the plan below, together with a further area of open countryside to the east of Buglawton, centred on Buglawton Hall. Where the 7 areas are not already within Cheshire East Local Landscape Designation areas, they were considered to be areas of search for ‘locally important landscape areas’ or Local Green Spaces as part of the Congleton Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.2 Part I also identified a number of smaller ‘Neighbourhood Landscape/Townscape Areas’ within the settlement which make a local contribution to sense of place and local distinctiveness. These were assessed against the criteria for Local Green Spaces set out in the NPPF, paragraphs 99-100.

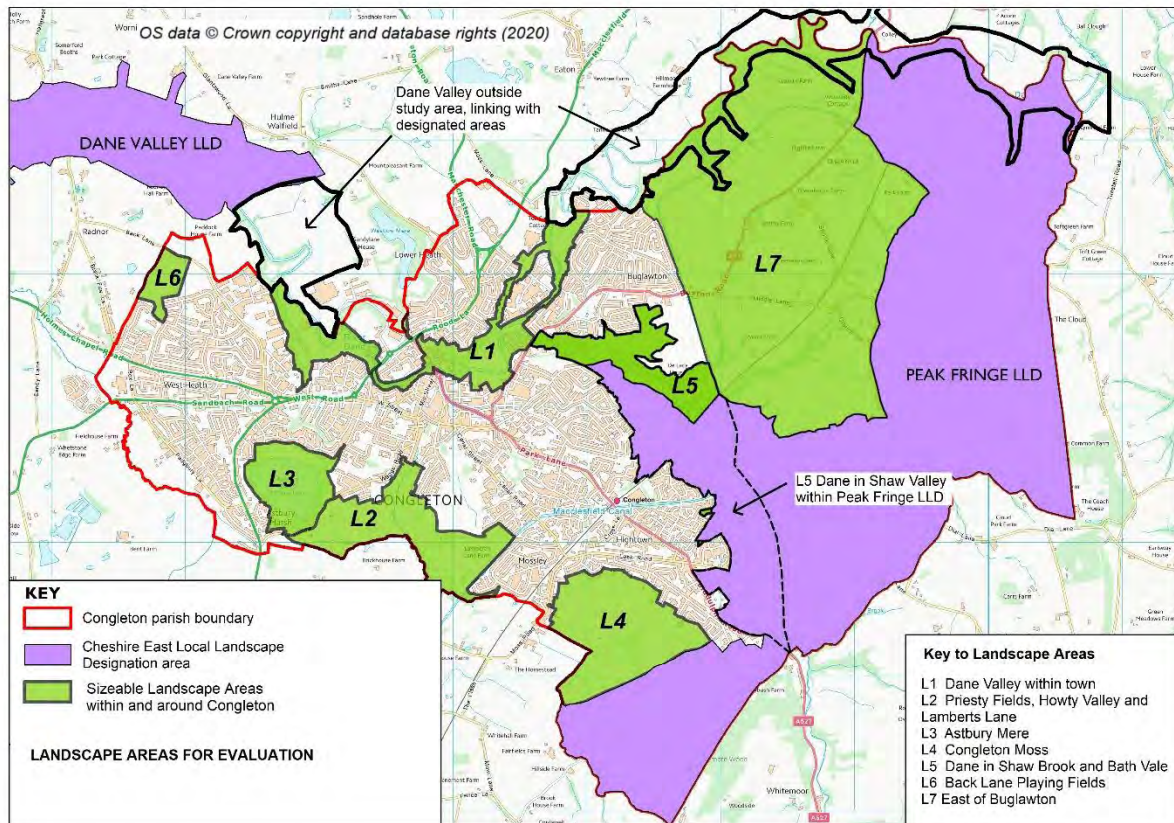


Figure 4: Landscape Areas for evaluation

Approach to evaluation

- 3.3 Reference is made to the [Cheshire East Local Landscape Designations Review \(2018\)](#), which superseded the earlier [Cheshire East: Local Landscape Designations study \(2013\)](#). The 2018 review was carried out in conjunction with the update to the former [Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment \(2008\)](#) which resulted in the publication of the [Cheshire East Landscape Character Assessment \(2018\)](#). All of these studies were concerned primarily with rural landscapes, leaving settlements blank. The Congleton Landscape Character Assessment takes a holistic approach and covers both built and unbuilt landscapes.
- 3.4 The evaluation follows the approach taken in the Cheshire East Local Landscape Designation Review and takes into account the following:
- Features and characteristics of special value for their contribution to setting, character and sustainability;
 - Extent and boundaries of the area;
 - Landscape character context;
- 3.5 The importance of the landscape is assessed against the criteria below:

- Local distinctiveness and sense of place;
- Natural and cultural character;
- Scenic and perceptual character;
- Access and enjoyment;
- Intactness/condition.

3.6 A further criterion, connectivity, was also added, with reference to the role of the landscape as part of a multifunctional green infrastructure network.

3.7 An initial judgement is made of whether the landscape has low, moderate or high importance in respect of each of the criteria. No overall assessment of importance is made as each landscape area has different values, characteristics and functions. The judgement of importance and relative merit is in the context of the study area. An initial overall vision for the future is also expressed but this is open to discussion.

3.8 The Scottish Natural Heritage/Historic Scotland guidance also recommends taking into account the following:

- Representativeness - to what extent the qualities of the landscape contribute to local identity and distinctiveness;
- Need - how far the identification might help with better protection, management or promotion of the area;
- Integrity - the coherence of the area;
- Support from the local community - this would need to be established through existing evidence and consultation. Key stakeholders include local residents, community organisations, local government, land managers and the wider public

3.9 The results of the evaluation are set out under 'Statements of Importance in Chapter 4.

The need for additional policy protection

3.10 The 'Landscape Areas' and 'Neighbourhood Landscape/Townscape Areas' identified in Part I of the Congleton Landscape Character Assessment were selected because they were considered to make a particular visual contribution to Congleton's landscape/townscape but the extent to which they were already protected or recognised through existing policies was not known. An initial sieving exercise was undertaken to assess this. Relevant policies are:

- Green Belt PG3
- Open Countryside PG6
- Biodiversity & Geodiversity SE3 (particularly priority habitat, SSSI and local wildlife site)

- Trees, Hedgerows & Woodland SE5 (particularly ancient woodland, dense hedgerow networks, and mature trees within settlement, often already with TPO)
- Strategic Green Infrastructure SE6 (a), part of local multifunctional green network SE6 (b) with overlap with policy CO1: Sustainable travel including rights of way.
- Heritage assets (designated include Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Registered park/garden) SE7(a (undesigned include ancient fieldscapes) SE7(b).

3.11 The results are shown in Table I below, with comments on the need for ‘celebration’, protection or management.

‘Landscape Areas’	PG3	PG6	SE3	SE5	SE6 (a)	SE6 (b)	SE7 (a)	SE 7(b)	Comments on need for celebration, protection or management
L1 Dane Valley (town) (64 ha)			x	x	x	x	x	x	Celebration, protection and management as a whole. Some parts have statutory protection and some may be suitable for LGS designation. Evaluate further
L2 Priestly Fields/Howty Valley/Lamberts Lane (60 ha)	Part	x	x	x		x		x	Celebration, protection and management as a whole. Strong GI networks and historic landscape. Evaluate further
L3 Astbury Mere (33 ha)			x	x		x			Already satisfactory under Country Park management. LGS could be an option despite size.
L4 Congleton Moss (70 ha)	x	x	Part			x		x	Management as a whole. Evaluate further
L5 Dane in Shaw Brook & Bath Vale (38 ha)		x	x	x	Part	x	?	x	Celebration, protection, management as a whole. Evaluate further
L6 Back Lane Playing Fields (10 ha)						x			Management for enhancement. Evaluate potential for LGS
L7 Countryside east of Buglawton (400 ha)	x	x	Part	Part	Part	x	x	x	Celebration. Unclear why not included in Peak Fringe LLD. Evaluate further.

Table I: Landscape Areas and Local Plan Policies

‘Neighbourhood landscape/townscape areas’	PG3	PG6	SE3	SE5	SE6 (a)	SE6 (b)	SE7 (a)	SE 7(b)	Comments on need for celebration, protection or management
N1 Astbury Mere northern edge			x			x			Managed as part of Astbury Mere Country Park. Evaluate potential for LGS
N2 Banky Fields to Marlfields						x		x	Protection, management. Part private land. Evaluate potential for LGS

'Neighbourhood landscape/townscape areas'	PG3	PG6	SE3	SE5	SE6 (a)	SE6 (b)	SE7 (a)	SE 7(b)	Comments on need for celebration, protection or management
N3 Biddulph Road/Leek Road				x			x	x	Celebration. Private land.
N4 Canal corridor	Part	Part	Part		x	x	x		Already satisfactory under Canal & River Trust management.
N5 Danesford frontage				x			x		Evaluate potential for LGS
N6 Howty Valley (town)			x	x		x		x	Celebration, protection and management as a whole together with rural section. Evaluate potential for LGS for part.
N7 Lawton Street Gardens						x	x		Celebration of accessible areas. Part private land. Evaluate potential for LGS for part.
N8 Mossley Hall				x			x	x	Private land
N9 Park Lane Ridge				x			x		Private land
N10 Stonehouse Green						x	x	x	Celebration, protection, management. Part of Howty Valley corridor. Part public/private. Evaluate potential for LGS.
N11 St John's Church and Old Buxton Road				x			x	x	Celebration. Evaluate potential for LGS for part.
N12 St Peter's Church to Highfield						x	x	x	Celebration, protection, management. Mixed ownership & accessibility. Evaluate potential for LGS
N13 Tower Hill water towers			Part	Part	x		x		Private land. On edge of River Dane strategic GI corridor - include with area L1.
N14 West Heath avenues				x		x			Celebration, management. Evaluate potential for LGS
N15 Westlow Mere			x			x			Private land. Area within Congleton Parish is part of a much larger area. Future LGS?

Table 2: Neighbourhood Landscape/Townscape Areas and existing Local Plan Policies

Local Green Space designation - initial assessment

3.12 A review was carried out to see whether some of the Landscape Areas and Neighbourhood Landscape/Townscape Areas might also meet the criteria for Local Green Space designation.

3.13 The table below provides an initial check against the criteria set out in paragraphs 99-100 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019. Each site must meet all of the criteria in the first 3 columns, highlighted in blue. In some cases, further investigation is needed to establish boundaries that would meet the criteria. In all cases, further justification to support the assessment of significance would be needed.

3.14 Where land is already designated e.g. Conservation Area, Registered Park or Garden, whether Local Green Space designation would add further value needs to be considered. For all sites, the value to the community would need to be demonstrated. Land with no public access can be considered for designation if it otherwise meets the criteria. Demonstration of value to the local community is of primary importance.

3.15 The results of the review are shown in Table 3 below.

Potential LGS sites	No planning consent	Not allocated for development	Not extensive tract, local	Significant for beauty	Significant for history	Significant for recreation	Significant for tranquility	Significant for wildlife	Significant- other (connectivity)	Comments
L1 Dane Valley Congleton										Too complex, requires separate study
L3 Astbury Mere	x	x	?	x		x	x	x	x	Whilst large overall, at 33 ha, the Country Park is 16 ha as it does not include the water. The area is very well defined and enclosed, is within settlement limits, and has a common history.
L6 Back Lane Playing Fields	x	x	?			x			x	Links with green space outside study area
N1 Astbury Mere northern edge	x	x	x			x		x	x	Suitable
N2 Banky Fields to Marfields	x	x	x	x		x			x	Publicly accessible areas only?
N5 Danesford frontage	x	x	x	x	x	x				
N6 Howty Valley (town)	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	Part community-owned
N7 Lawton Street Gardens	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Publicly accessible areas only?
N10 Stonehouse Green	x	?	x		x				x	Needs further investigation
N11 St John's Church and Old Buxton Road	x	x	x	x	x					

Potential LGS sites	No planning consent	Not allocated for development	Not extensive tract, local	Significant for beauty	Significant for history	Significant for recreation	Significant for tranquility	Significant for wildlife	Significant- other (connectivity)	Comments
NI2 St Peter's Church to Highfield	x	?	x	x	x		x	x	x	Suitable but needs investigation
NI4 West Heath avenues	x	x	x	x					x	Ownership? Land adjoining the highway is subject to permitted development rights and may need to be utilised for highway works.
<i>NI5 Westlow Mere</i>	x	x	?	x			x	x	x	<i>Part outside study area</i>

Table 3: Review of suitability for Local Green Space designation

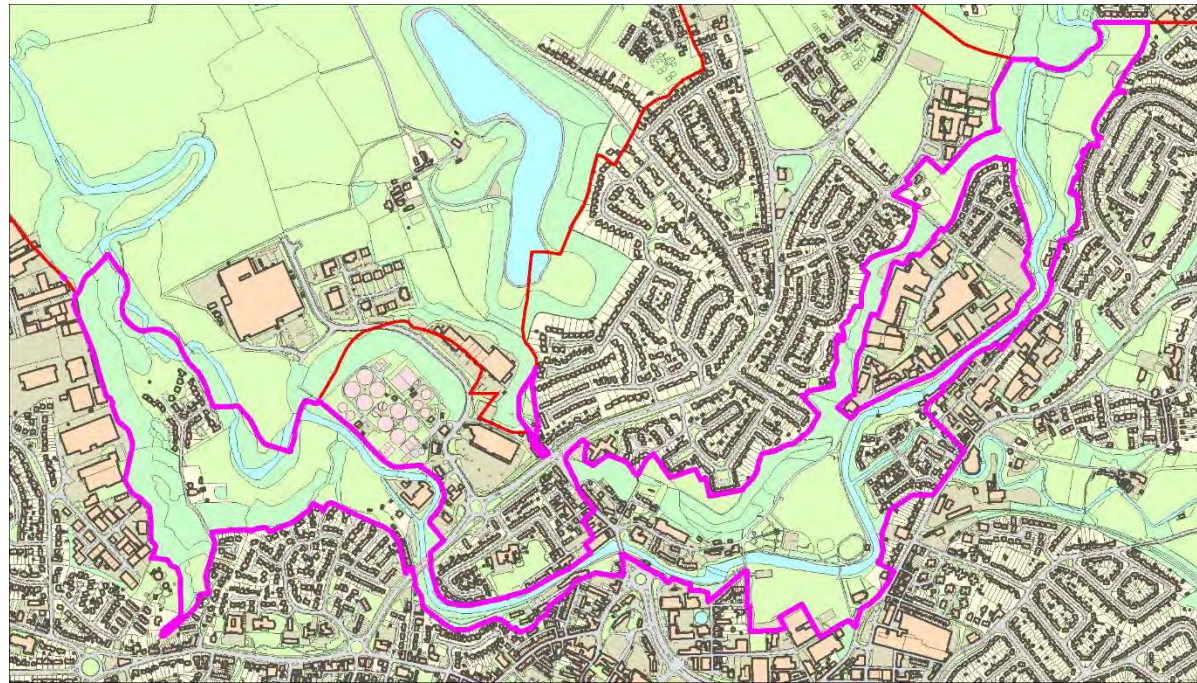
4 Draft statements of importance



View east towards the Cloud over the Howty Valley from Stony Lane, Priestly Fields (photo extract)

Dane Valley Congleton (Landscape Area L1)

Dane Valley Congleton: Statement of Importance



Summary

The section of the Dane Valley which passes through Congleton is a coherent natural landscape, but with a mixed cultural character. It links the rural parts of the corridor above and below the town. Its steep wooded slopes are characteristic of the Dane Valley above and below the town, and within it are visually very important. Historic mills and weirs are present along the valley bottom.

Special qualities of Dane Valley Congleton

- Key component of the town, whose development was greatly influenced by the water power provided by the river. The topography of the incised valley also influenced the way the town developed.
- River meanders in a partly natural channel through the town.
- Wooded escarpments are visible from the town centre, forming a backcloth to views, while these and other wooded slopes provide separation and screening between the more urban parts of the town and its suburbs, and also between suburbs.
- Congleton Park, designed by Edward Kemp, an eminent C19th landscape designer, is on the HE Register of Parks and Gardens, is of national importance

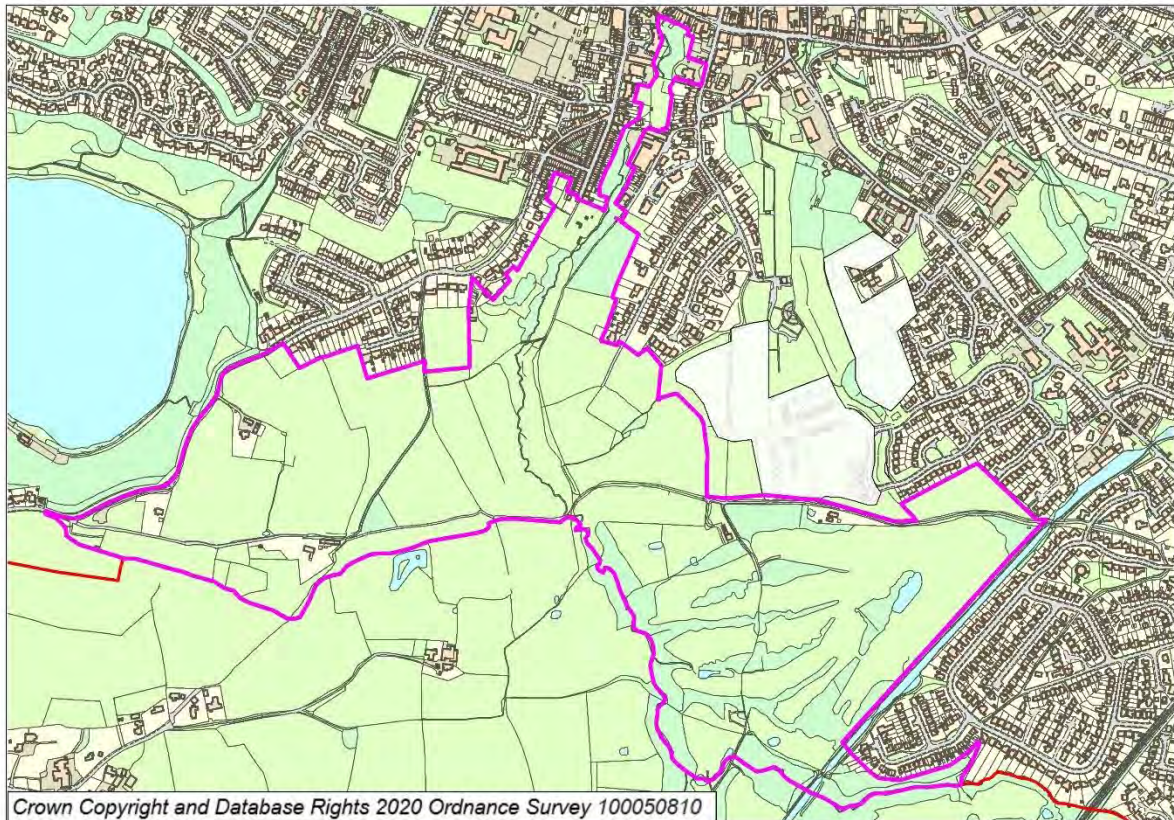
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Wood, a Local Wildlife Site, is semi-natural ancient woodland containing paths laid out as part of the overall Kemp design for Congleton Park. • There are many natural qualities and features along the valley despite the urban location, including the active presence of wildlife along a corridor which still retains some continuity with the upper and lower Dane Valley. • Mature woodland and riverside vegetation add enclosure and seasonal change. • Historic mill buildings are distributed along the valley bottom, together with other evidence of former industry dependent on water power. • Sense of enclosure and relative tranquillity conveyed by steep slopes, trees, the sight and sound of water and associated wildlife can be found along much of the valley despite the proximity to industry, roads and housing. 	
Extent of area	Approximately 64 ha. From Forge Wood to the north west of Congleton, to the north of Buglawton, close to Havannah, excluding modern industrial estates. The boundary has been drawn to meet the Dane in Shaw valley.
Landscape character context	Cheshire East LCA: Unclassified Congleton LCA: Urban Valley landscape character type, landscape character areas 2a (Dane Valley Town Centre, part of 2b (Dane Valley, Congleton Business Park), and 2c (Dane Valley, Lower Heath/Buglawton. 11 of Congleton's other character areas adjoin Dane Valley.

Criteria for significance	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	High. The town centre is oriented towards the valley, and towards the wooded escarpments. The valley defines Congleton, and holds much of its history and current economic basis.
Natural character	Moderate, locally high. Ancient woodlands, river partly in natural channel but modified with weirs etc to serve mills while a section was straightened in the C15th century following flooding. Some sections have natural vegetation.
Cultural character	High. The Victorian Congleton Park was restored in 2005 and is a popular destination, used for events and informal recreation as well as providing an off-road route from the town centre to Buglawton and Lower Heath. Some prominent listed buildings including St Stephen's Vicarage and historic mills.
Scenic and perceptual character	Low-high. Steep wooded slopes contrast with open grassland or confined corridors between industrial buildings and housing. They

	are visible from the town centre and many other parts of the settlement.
Access and enjoyment	Low-high. The valley bottom can be followed upstream from the Clayton Bypass to Havannah. Congleton Park is at the hub. Within the valley there is often a sense of enclosure, and a variety of contrasting experiences, from almost rural to highly urban, and from confined to open. Views tend to be limited by trees.
Intactness/condition	Low-high with scope to improve and enhance. This valley landscape is under pressure from adjoining land uses.
Connectivity	Moderate. Some sections have good linkage but the continuity is broken by main roads, and there are sections at Buglawton and west of the Clayton Bypass where there is no off-road access.
Vision	
A continuous linear landscape with abundant wildlife and recreational routes co-existing with urban uses and heritage, and maximising potential for climate change mitigation by making space for the river and associated floodplain, including conserving existing open space, achieved through coordinated long-term management of the corridor within the town.	

Priesty Fields, Howty Valley & Lamberts Lane (part of Landscape Area 2)

Priesty Fields, Howty Valley & Lamberts Lane: Statement of Importance



Summary

This area of countryside on the southern fringes of the town centre has a small scale, sometimes secretive, attractive landscape with recreational and historical value and occasional views south to Astbury Church and Mow Cop. Although it includes varying uses its topography and common past provide overall coherence. Its fields have always been close to Congleton town centre, with rare survival of some of the ancient fieldscapes which have elsewhere been built on. There is a network of rights of way and bridleways which includes historic and partly sunken lanes. Despite its proximity to the town, it is still possible to find in its natural surroundings a sense of tranquillity and escape. This area is much more than just a 'green wedge' - it helps to define the type of settlement that Congleton is and is therefore an essential part of its setting.

Special qualities of Priesty Fields, Howty Valley & Lamberts Lane

- Ancient routeways - Lamberts Lane, Stony Lane (part of route from Astbury Church to St Peter's Church Congleton - the Priesty Trail) and Waggs Road;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient field systems including a scarce remnant of Congleton’s Medieval Town Fields • Wooded valley of the Howty Brook, which rises on Congleton Moss and continues into the town centre; • Dense network of public rights of way including bridleways which connect with routes leading to open countryside and the upland edge; • Connects with Macclesfield Canal towpath and listed ‘snail bridge’ at Lamberts Lane crossing; • Evidence of C19th steam ploughing and hedgerow oaks from previous fieldscape preserved on golf course; • Howty Valley and adjoining land is a Local Wildlife Site. 	
Extent of area	<p>60 hectares within Congleton parish - the area could be extended to the south to include Brickhouse Farm and the other side of the Howty Valley (the parish boundary follows the brook).</p> <p>The boundary follows Waggs Road to the west, the settlement boundary and the northern edge of Lamberts Lane to the north, part of the canal boundary to the east.</p>
Landscape character context	<p>Cheshire East LCA: Classified as Lower Wooded Farmland landscape type but is more like Upper Wooded Farmland.</p> <p>Congleton LCA: Rural Lowland landscape type to the south of the small suburban areas of Waggs Road and Howey Hill.</p>

Criteria for importance	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	<p>High. Much of this area’s sense of place derives from its historic association with the town as it is a very short distance from the town centre to the point where the countryside begins. Lamberts Lane, Stony Lane and Waggs Road are ancient routes with sunken sections. The clough woodland of the Howty Valley is representative of Congleton’s setting at the confluence of small incised and wooded tributaries of the River Dane.</p>
Natural character	<p>Moderate-high. The Howty Brook, a Local Wildlife Site, is a minor watercourse that flows in an incised wooded valley from Congleton Moss to the town centre, culverted under the canal and railway. It forms the southern and western boundaries of Astbury golf course, with minor tributary valleys within the golf course. There is a network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Whilst planting on the golf course is generally unnatural in appearance, some older hedgerow trees have been retained, as well as ponds that were present on historic maps.</p>

Cultural character	High. The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation shows areas of Ancient Field systems and Medieval Town Fields. Lamberts Lane, of Roman or Anglo-Saxon origin, is part of a route, including Leek Road, connecting the Astbury area with upland pastures around the Bridestones. Regular ‘ridge and furrow’ earthworks from C19th steam ploughing can be discerned on the golf course where the cessation of cultivation in the mid C20th has preserved them. There is a strong sense of time depth in this area. The Priestly Hoard, hidden at the time of the Civil War in the C17th, was discovered in this area and together with the Moody Street Hoard is now in Congleton Museum.
Scenic & perceptual character	Moderate. The countryside is intimate and full of small-scale interest and with a varied topography which can sometimes allow long views - from the Howey Hill ridge and higher parts of Stony Lane to the Mossley water tower, Astbury Church spire and the folly on Mow Cop - and can elsewhere offer seclusion. The Priestly Trail, following the route taken by the priest when Astbury Church was the main church, linked with St Peter’s Church, evokes a sense of time depth, as do the sunken lanes.
Access and enjoyment	High. The network of rights of way is dense, providing opportunities for circular walks and is very well used. Historic routes link former farm steadings and the village of Astbury with the town, and with Astbury Mere Country Park and the Macclesfield canal corridor. Open countryside continues to the upland edge.
Intactness/condition	Moderate. The farmland shows signs of neglect, due to changes in land ownership and the threat of further development, although up to a point the neglect has been beneficial for nature conservation and visual interest. The extent of the area between Lamberts Lane and the town has been significantly reduced in recent years which increases the vulnerability of the remainder to urban fringe influences. Agricultural land is grade 2 and there is a mixture of pasture and arable land. Footpaths and pedestrian gates are generally well maintained
Connectivity	High. Good in all directions, although the effectiveness of the link with the cut-off greenspace around St Peter’s Church, following the course of a very minor watercourse through new housing, is uncertain.
Vision	
Conservation of the remaining landscape in this formerly much more extensive ‘green wedge’, and visual envelopes of ancient routes kept free of urban intrusion. Coordinated and holistic management planning which takes into account the value of the area to Congleton residents as well as the issues of suburbanisation of the landscape and the difficulties of continuing to farm in an urban fringe situation. Preservation of the green gap between Congleton and Astbury.	

Astbury Mere (Landscape Area L3)

Astbury Mere: Statement of Importance



Summary

As a former sand quarry, Astbury Mere is a relatively new landscape, which provides an escape from the surrounding town whilst lying largely within it. Astbury Mere Country Park opened to the public in 1991 but the last section of land around the mere was acquired in 2009. The mere itself is owned by the Stoke-on-Trent Angling Society and also used for water sports.

Special qualities of Astbury Mere and Country Park

- Large water body at its centre reflecting sky and surrounding woodland and conveying a sense of tranquillity;
- Enclosure and shelter by surrounding wooded embankments;
- Species rich grassland, hedgerows, woodland, marginal and aquatic habitats;
- Semi-rural character with views to countryside including Mow Cop hill and Astbury Church spire;
- Very accessible with circular walks around mere and connecting trail along bridleway/PROWs to north and east which includes community orchard;
- Opportunities for countryside activities, water sports, fishing, education, exercise.

Extent of area

This is an approximately circular area, 0.7 km across, with an area of approximately 33 hectares.

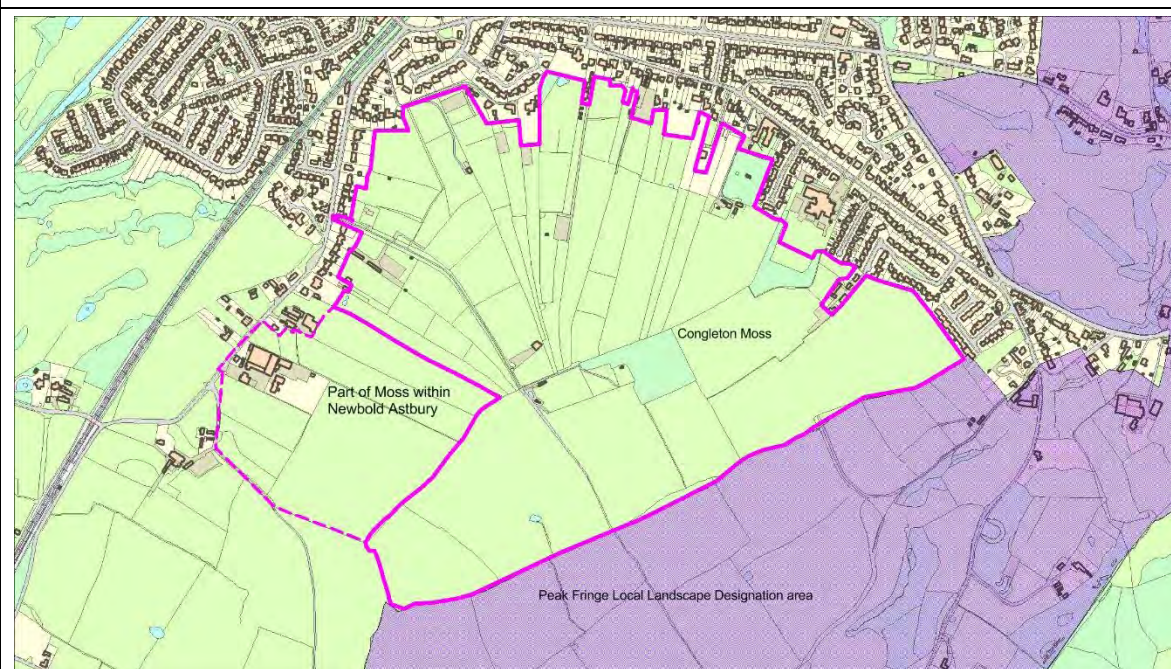
Landscape character context	Cheshire East LCA: Unclassified. Congleton LCA: Suburban landscape character type, Astbury Mere character area 3c, which also contains a housing estate within the former quarry. The area is surrounded by suburban housing apart from the south east where there is an important interface with the Priestly Fields, Howty Valley and Lamberts Lane area.
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Criteria for importance	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Moderate. Astbury Mere is a self-contained landscape, apart from the views to the iconic hill and ruin of Mow Cop to the south. Within the context of the town the landscape feels extensive and tranquil. Its landscape is still evolving.
Natural character	Moderate-high. Whilst the Astbury Mere landscape is man-made, over time it has softened to appear semi-natural. Habitat creation and ongoing management for nature conservation have enriched the former bare sand of the quarry. The high eastern skyline, on the edge of Banky Fields, shows the original ground level.
Cultural character	Low. This is a newly created landscape. The historic landscape features of the former low hill, known as Banky Fields and including a network of small fields and rights of way, have gone due to quarrying of 'Congleton Sand', a high-quality silica sand. Quarrying, prevalent in the wider area, was in this case very close to the town itself, and though unwelcome at the time is now part of its history. The Country Park was established with a large amount of public support after a battle to save the land from development.
Scenic and perceptual character	Moderate-high. The presence of a large reflective water body conveys a sense of tranquillity, and allows for an infinite range of scenic 'compositions' throughout the day and year. Mow Cop hill to the south is 'borrowed landscape' which adds to the scenery. The surrounding embankments provide shelter and reduce road noise.
Access and enjoyment	High. Astbury Mere is easily accessible and well used for informal recreation and events, with the visitor centre and café as a focus
Intactness/condition	High. The land is well managed by Cheshire East Countryside Management Service under the Astbury Mere Trust Ltd.
Connectivity	Moderate- high. The surrounding embankments reduce permeability but there are green infrastructure and recreational links with both town and country.
Vision	

Continuing development and management as a significant natural and recreational asset to Congleton, strengthening links to town centre and across Waggs Road to adjoining countryside, avoiding development which could affect the skyline of the perimeter banking so as to retain and strengthen the semi-rural experience.

Congleton Moss (Landscape Area L4)

Congleton Moss: Statement of Importance:



Summary

Congleton Moss, once an open expanse of bog and open water covering a larger area and linked to other marshy areas, is now drained farmland distinguished by its unusual enclosure pattern and history. It provides a large part of Mossley's setting.

Special qualities of Congleton Moss

- Locally rare remnant moss with areas of peat soils
- Radial enclosure pattern with linear 'moss rooms' narrowing towards centre
- Lack of hedgerows but intermittent trees along plot boundaries, and areas of regeneration of birch, alder and oak on uncultivated or ungrazed land
- Sense of space and tranquillity
- Views south east to the wooded ridge of Congleton Edge
- Local place names evoking historic influence of mossland

Extent of area	Approximately 70 hectares of open land within Congleton parish, but to the south west it also extends into Newbold Astbury parish.
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Landscape character context	Cheshire East LCA: Mossland landscape character type (LCT), Congleton Moss landscape character area. Congleton LCA: Rural Lowlands landscape character type, Congleton Moss landscape character area.
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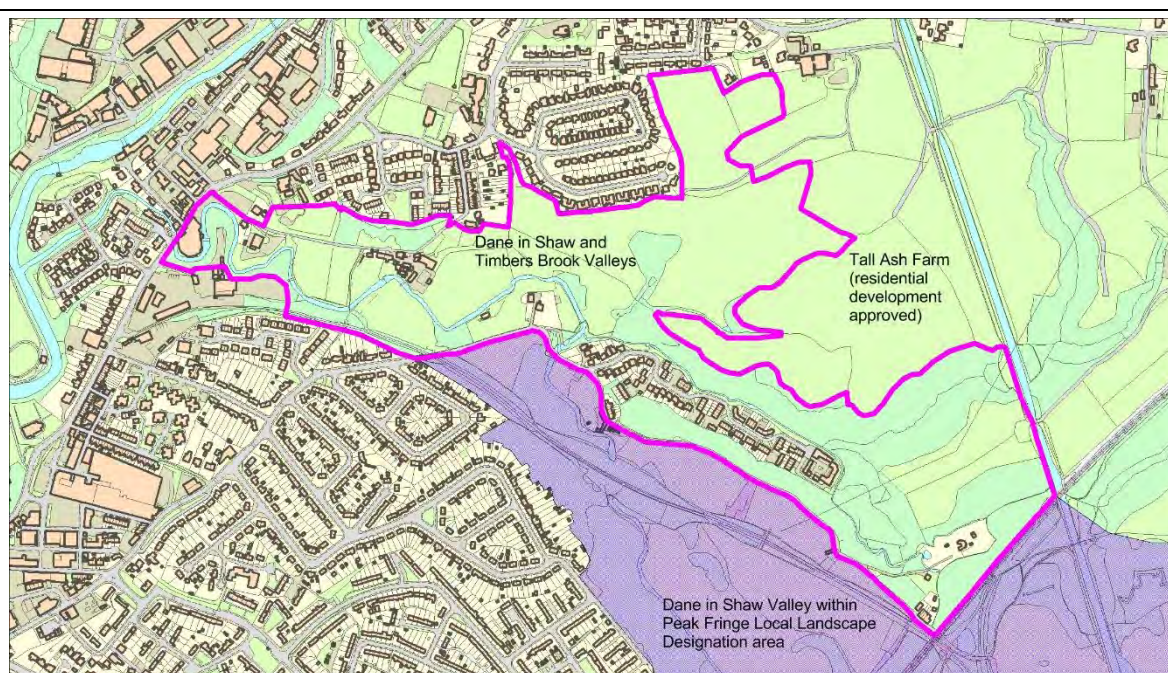
Criteria for significance	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	High. The enclosure pattern is a good and relatively rare example of subdivision of a large area of lowland raised bog in the Shropshire/Cheshire/Staffordshire mosses and meres area, and is unique in Congleton parish. The adjacent suburb, Mossley, has many place names evoking the wider moss that once existed.
Natural character	Low-moderate. Congleton Moss began as a glacial lake and developed into a lowland raised bog from which several watercourses flowed - the Howty, the Dare (now culverted, but it followed a course between Canal Road and Park Lane to the Dane), Loach Brook, and a tributary of the Dane in Shaw Brook. It has subsequently lost much of its natural character.
Cultural character	High. The tapered 'moss rooms' date from the late C18th when the common land of the moss was divided up to give owners equal shares of better and poorer quality peat. Drains may have followed some boundaries. A drainage scheme was constructed in the 1920s to facilitate development, and peat cutting ceased.
Scenic and perceptual character	Moderate. Congleton Moss is an expansive flat area with some long views but otherwise interrupted by areas of woodland, peripheral development, or filtered by trees on moss room boundaries.
Access and enjoyment	Low-moderate. Peripheral houses, gardens and outbuildings can be seen from the PROWs crossing the moss but their importance reduces quickly with distance. There is a sense of relative tranquillity once away from the town. The manicured cricket ground appears out of place but is only seen from close quarters.
Intactness/condition	Low. The moss was once divided into about 43 narrow strips, and over time many have been amalgamated to form more useable parcels of land, but the general pattern remains. The south eastern part of the moss has larger more regular fields. Drainage has allowed agricultural use, but has not benefitted nature conservation. Over time the amount of woodland is likely to increase unless efforts are made to remove it to re-wet the peat.
Connectivity	Low. The moss is isolated from other natural areas of its kind and is only crossed by one right of way.

Vision

Conservation, or proactive rewetting of the moss where feasible, under a coordinated long-term plan which has been agreed by land owners, for climatic change mitigation, nature conservation and landscape benefits.

Dane in Shaw Brook & Bath Vale (part of Landscape Area L5)

Dane in Shaw Brook and Bath Vale: Statement of Importance



Summary

The area outlined contains the confluence of the Dane in Shaw Brook with Timbers Brook. Downstream from the confluence the watercourse is known locally as Tommy's Brook, and upstream the Timbers Brook valley is known as Bath Vale. This is an area of small pastoral fields and steep wooded slopes. It is a highly vulnerable area between the Peak Fringe Local Landscape Designation (LLD) area and the town, an important link which needs protection. Its coherence is a result of its valley character and enclosure and so it is more than just a 'green wedge'.

Special qualities of Dane in Shaw Brook & Bath Vale

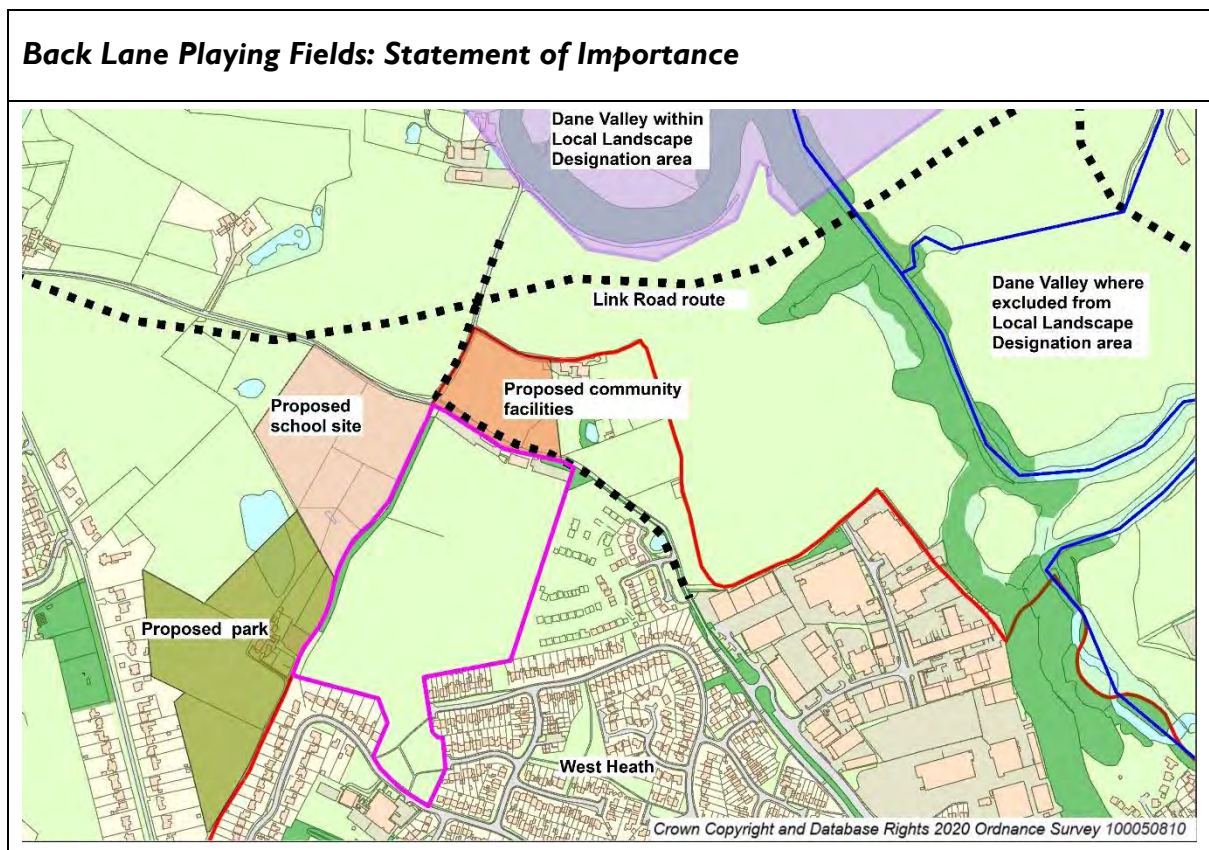
- Small scale landform including steep wooded valley sides and farmed valley bottom;
- Dane in Shaw Brook and Timbers Brook in semi-natural channels, modified to provide water power to silk mills

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow historic routes - Brookhouse Lane and Tommy's Lane • Location of former silk mills; • Links with River Dane Valley - a major green infrastructure corridor; • High degree of connectivity with recreational routes to Biddulph Valley Way (leading to Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire), Macclesfield Canal (leading to Kidsgrove and Stockport), Timbersbrook and Upland Edge countryside and Peak District; • Generally, highly enclosed but panoramic views from eastern edge to The Cloud; • Macclesfield Canal on eastern boundary is a Conservation Area 	
Extent of area	Approximately 37.5 hectares, narrow to the west and widening to the east.
Landscape character context	Cheshire East LCA: Higher Wooded Farmland landscape character type, Buglawton landscape character area. Congleton LCA: Rural Lowlands area 4b which includes part of the Peak Fringe Local Landscape Designation (LLD) area which extends to the Upland Edge. The valley currently effectively separates the suburb of Buglawton from the Bromley Farm suburb and it also separates Buglawton from town centre areas.

Criteria for importance	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	High. There is a strong sense of place partly due to enclosure by natural topography and embankments, and retention of some of the pasture and traditional buildings. The valleys typify the historic character of the town as a small settlement within countryside, with industry and some housing dispersed along valleys.
Natural character	Moderate-high. Whilst the valleys have been significantly modified by past industry, railways and canal, they still retain natural features including the watercourses and ancient woodland in Bath Vale. There is a perception of naturalness.
Cultural character	Moderate. The valleys contained a number of silk mills dependent on water power of which only Davenshaw Mill on Buxton Road survives. The former mill and later industries at Bath Vale, on a narrow linear site constrained by steep slopes with ancient woodland, has been replaced by housing on the same footprint.
Scenic and perceptual character	Moderate. Small scale enclosed landscape with much visual interest which leads from a very urban part of Congleton to a more extensive rural landscape, offering a sense of escapism.

Access and enjoyment	High. The area is accessible on foot or cycle, leading to a network of routes including within the existing Peak Fringe Local Landscape Designation area. Footpaths offer varied views of the area with key views at the western entrance from Buxton Road, and the entrance to Brookhouse Lane. The varied topography and the contrasts between town and country heighten the experience.
Intactness/condition	Moderate, locally low. There has been some loss of character due to insensitive development or uses on the periphery.
Connectivity	Moderate-high. Good green infrastructure network, but steep wooded slopes and brook constrain routes in and out. The Biddulph Valley Way is a key route.
Vision	
A strengthened landscape which connects functionally and visually with the Dane Valley and the town but retains its semi-rural character and links to the wider countryside, achieved through a holistic approach to management of the Dane in Shaw Brook and Timbers Brook area as a whole, whether designated or undesignated land.	

Back Lane Playing Fields (Landscape Area L6)



This is an extensive area of open space within West Heath which formerly continued into open countryside on 3 sides. It is being retained in the north Congleton development with a changing role.

Special qualities of Back Lane Playing Fields

- Wide, open, publicly accessible space contrasting with extensive areas of residential development to the south;
- Former farmland, with belt of trees on western boundary containing a public right of way connecting the Black Firs area of West Heath and Somerford to open countryside, the Dane Valley (with Local Landscape Designation), Radnor Bridge and a network of minor roads;
- Accessible sports field in formerly tranquil location;
- Attractive local greenspace to south with many trees and views to open space.

Extent of area	A small area, approximately 10 ha including small greenspace to south off Longdown Road.
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Landscape character context	Cheshire East LCA: Not classified Congleton LCA: Suburban landscape character type, West Heath landscape character area.
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Criteria for significance

Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Low. Potential for development of vegetation reflecting local soils.
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Natural character	Low. Extensive area of mown grass, some trees, and linear belt of trees with unmanaged vegetation.
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Cultural character	Low. Internal field boundaries removed.
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Scenic and perceptual character	Low-moderate. Formerly pleasant views across and out from public right of way, and sense of space will be more limited after development has occurred. Traffic noise from the Link Road, and new development will greatly reduce tranquillity.
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Access and enjoyment	Moderate, or high for those exercising or taking part in sports activities.
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Intactness/condition	Moderate or high for its purpose as green space primarily for sport.
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Connectivity	Moderate but undergoing change.
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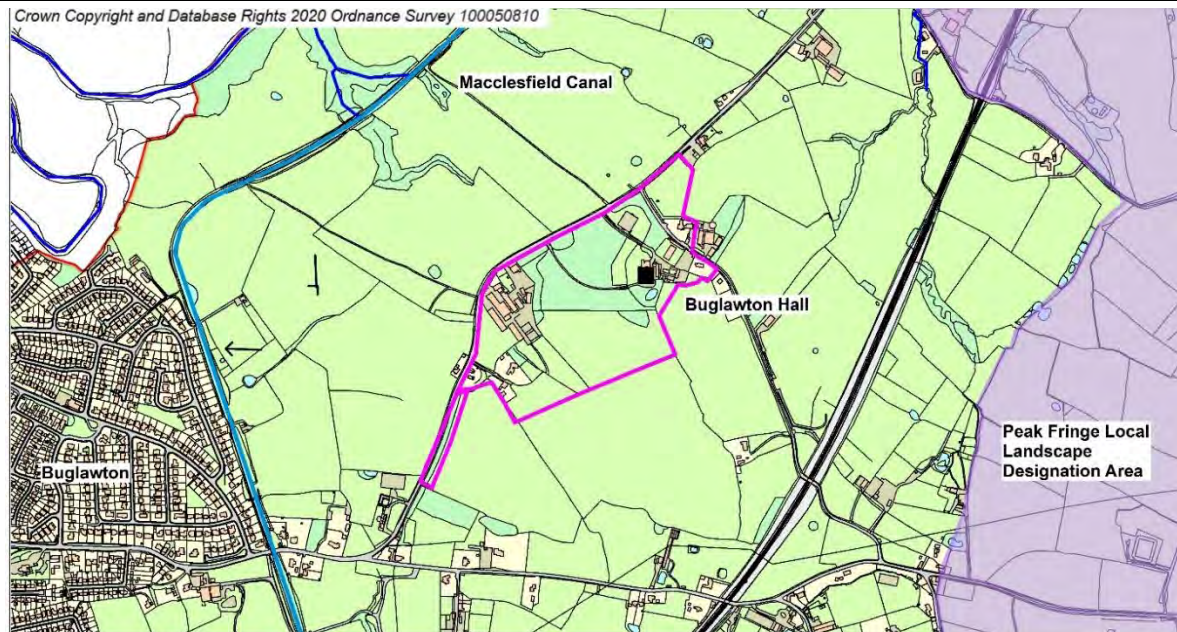
Vision

The North Congleton Masterplan visualises future development as a ‘village green’ which seems appropriate. It can be linked to the adjoining proposed park which is to be

developed partly as a nature reserve. The existing connecting to the River Dane Valley needs to be retained and strengthened as a natural corridor through new development, including ensuring that the barrier of the new Link Road is overcome as far as possible.

Buglawton Hall Parkland (part of Landscape Area L7)

Buglawton Hall Parkland: Statement of Importance



This small area is focused on a hall and remnant historic designed landscape.

Special qualities of Buglawton Hall Parkland

- Set on a knoll sloping gently to north, west and south, the group of buildings and mature trees is the dominant landscape feature between the Cloud and the suburb of Buglawton.
- Buglawton Hall is a Grade 2 listed mansion with castellated roof and part stuccoed exterior. It dates from the late C18th or early C19th, but is on the site of an older Elizabethan house and earlier manor.
- The small park is a remnant of a much larger area of parkland that extended to the south, but what remains is largely intact.
- To the south, a line of beech trees to the east of Buxton Road is a notable feature, although becoming over-mature.
- Surrounded by open farmland with relatively few hedgerows, much of which was part of the park or estate.
- Undesignated and little-known heritage asset, unique in the study area.

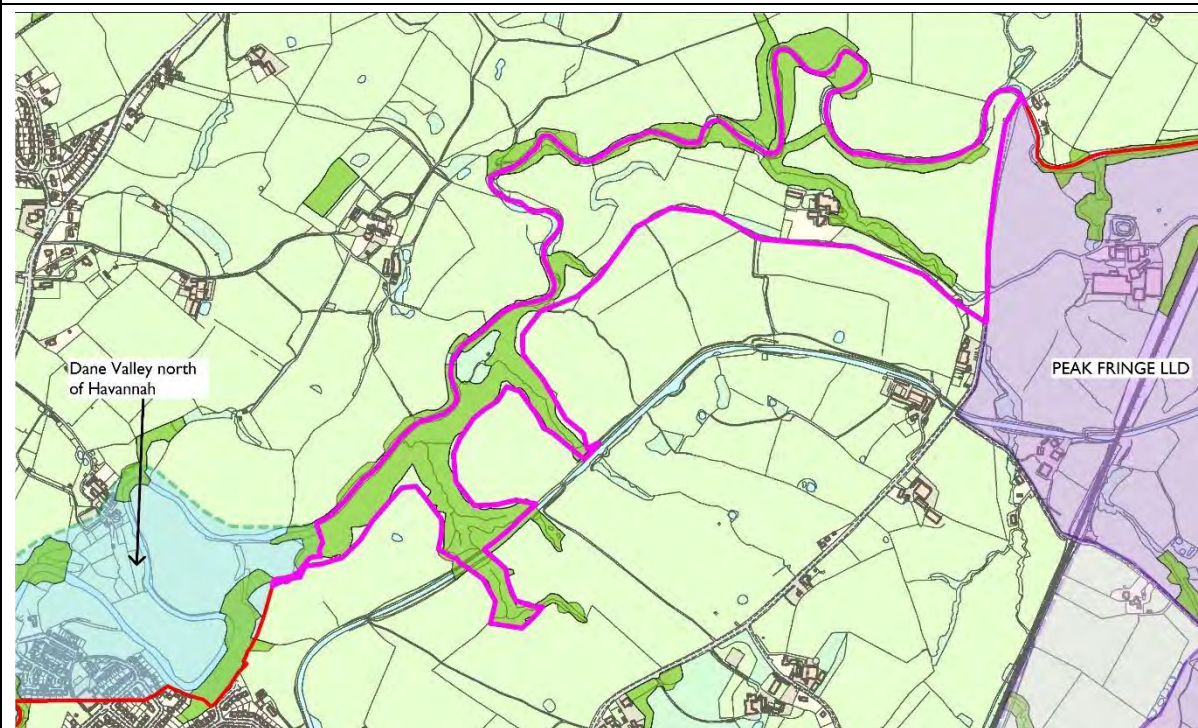
Extent of area	A small area, approximately 15.5 ha including hall, remaining parkland, farm steading and land with groups of mature trees and avenue. It includes associated areas. This is one part of Landscape Area 7, and Dane Valley, Havannah to Colley Mill Bridge is another
Landscape character context	Cheshire East LCA: Higher Wooded Farmland landscape character type (LCT), Buglawton landscape character area Congleton LCA: Rural lowlands LCT, Buglawton Hall landscape character area.

Criteria for significance	
Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Moderate. This is the only area of historic designed parkland remaining in the parish of Congleton
Natural character	Moderate. Parkland/wood pasture with mature trees is a priority habitat but it is not known if it has been surveyed. It is likely the park was enclosed from pasture in the late C18th/early C19th and may be more species-rich than the farmed landscape around.
Cultural character	Moderate-high. This is a cultural landscape, designed to increase the status of the owner. It has some distinctive buildings in stone, stucco and brick. Old maps show areas without hedges and a scattering of parkland trees to the north west of the Buxton Road, of which two clumps of trees remain. The Cheshire Gardens Trust report of 2010 describes it as follows. “The grounds consist of a small parkland 2) a garden on the north, west and south sides of the Hall, and 3) the former pleasure grounds, part of which became a walled kitchen garden. Two driveways lead uphill through open parkland which is bordered by woodland containing many old limes, beech and oak. The garden along the Hall’s west façade affords wide views. It is separated from the parkland by a 4’-5’ high retaining wall which follows the knoll’s contour line around the Hall. This wall is shown on the tithe map. ...Some time after 1908 a more formal garden was laid out...Layout and workmanship of pavings, steps and stone walling echo the Arts and Crafts style...” It was reported that the kitchen garden was enclosed with high stone walls on the east and south, with 2 large greenhouses remaining.
Scenic and perceptual character	Moderate. The Hall and surrounding trees are situated on a slightly domed area of land surrounded by farmland that is generally open, allowing some longer views. The Hall itself is 2 storeys high and is hidden in most views by the trees. Together the buildings and trees are the dominant feature locally. There are views from the beech avenue along Buxton Road to the Cloud.

Access and enjoyment	Low. As the area is private, there is limited public benefit, other than from local roads and the main line railway.
Intactness/condition	Moderate -high. Although the site was used as a residential school for many years, the Cheshire Gardens Trust visited in 2006 and reported that the layout had “ <i>changed remarkably little since that shown on the tithe map of 1836-41 and OS maps of 1875 and 1910</i> ”. The main change has been a new school building, constructed in 2009. School closure may put the landscape at risk.
Connectivity	Low. Few hedgerows, no off-road routes.
Vision	
New uses for the hall and designed landscape with heritage researched and sustained appropriately, with policy protection for landscape as well as hall.	

Dane Valley, Havannah to Colley Mill Bridge (part of Landscape Area L7)

Dane Valley, Havannah to Colley Mill Bridge: Statement of Importance



This area forms the southern part of the River Dane Valley, a quiet rural area with ancient woodlands. The river is followed by the parish boundary, except for a section of the river near Havannah that is within Eaton parish. It links with the Peak Fringe area.

Special qualities of Dane Valley, Havannah to Colley Mill Bridge

- Tranquil part of the Dane Valley north east of Buglawton;
- Contains ancient escarpment and clough woodlands with SSSI;
- Viewed from Macclesfield Canal and Dane Valley Way (outside study area);
- Associated with ancient fieldscapes - potential for boundary to be extended to include more of them;
- Major green infrastructure corridor, connecting also with Macclesfield Canal.

Extent of area	Approximately 30 ha
Landscape character context	Cheshire East LCA: Higher Wooded Farmland landscape character type (LCT), Buglawton landscape character area Congleton LCA: Rural lowlands LCT, Dane Valley Congleton to Bosley and a small part of Buglawton Hall landscape character areas.

Criteria for significance

Local distinctiveness and sense of place	Moderate. The area is part of the River Dane corridor which is the key landscape feature within Congleton.
Natural character	High. The river is in its natural channel and woodlands are of high value.
Cultural character	Moderate-high. The area includes ancient woodland and ancient fieldscapes, and connects with the Macclesfield Canal, a Conservation area.
Scenic and perceptual character	Moderate. A little-known part of the Dane Valley, but rural and tranquil. The woodlands are a barrier to views north and south.
Access and enjoyment	Moderate. Viewed and accessed from the canal towpath and rights of way.
Intactness/condition	High
Connectivity	High (green infrastructure), low (access).

Vision

Integrated and coordinated management of the Dane Valley across administrative boundaries to ensure that this landscape is conserved and enhanced.

5 Recommendations

Neighbourhood Landscape/Townscape Areas

5.1 Parts 1 and 2 of the Congleton Landscape Character Assessment identified areas and groups of features of varying size which make a notable contribution to local character, sense of place and local distinctiveness. The following areas have been identified as potentially meeting the criteria for Local Green Space designation:

- Dane Valley sites - several locations within it (not assessed as part of this study);
- Back Lane Playing Fields (Landscape Area L6);
- Astbury Mere Country Park (Landscape Area L3);
- Astbury Mere northern edge (of former quarry);
- Banky Fields to Marlfields;
- Danesford frontage (former West House gardens);
- Howty Valley (Congleton) - only part protected by Conservation Area;
- Lawton Street Gardens - already protected by Conservation Area;
- St John's Church and surroundings (boundary to be identified);
- St Peter's Church to Highfield - requires further study, only part protected by Conservation Area;
- West Heath avenues - more information needed on Highways role;
- Westlow Mere - largest part is outside study area, coordinate with Hulme Walfield Parish.

5.2 There are many more sites within the study area that would also meet the criteria for Local Green Space designation although they are of lesser prominence in the townscape. It is therefore recommended that the sites above are considered further as part of a wider Local Green Space study.

Locally important landscape areas

Parts 1 and 2 identified and described the sizeable areas of unbuilt or partly built landscape in and around the town which are important to its setting and for the health and well-being of its residents. Part 3 has evaluated them further, and it is considered that the while all have some merit and are worthy of further acknowledgment and celebration, the need for further policy and management protection varies.

5.3 The following areas have a range of special qualities that are important for Congleton, and at the same time they are also more than the sum of their parts. Some provide essential setting for the town, and are inseparable from its sense of place.

- A. Dane Valley Congleton - all of Landscape Area LI identified in Parts 1 & 2 plus the knoll with the water towers on it. This is a major green infrastructure

corridor, a prominent landscape feature within the town, and part of Congleton's identity;

- B. Priesty Fields, Howty Valley and Lamberts Lane - Landscape Area L2, which has a unique relationship with the town centre and is an essential part of its setting. The Howty Valley within the town has been added, reaching Bridge Street, and connecting a Local Wildlife Site with the open countryside;
- C. Congleton Moss - all of Landscape Area L4, which has a rare and distinctive enclosure pattern and history, and potential for contributing to climatic change mitigation;
- D. Dane in Shaw Brook and Bath Vale (a small part of Landscape Area L5, connecting with the Dane Valley, and an inseparable part of a larger landscape area, most of which is already within the Peak Park Local Landscape Designation area. It has an important role in maintaining Congleton's form and setting;
- E. Buglawton Hall Parkland - a small part of Landscape Area L7 with a listed hall and an undesignated historic designed landscape, unique in the study area.
- F. Dane Valley, Havannah to Colley Mill Bridge - the northern part of Landscape Area 7 with ancient woodland and ancient fieldscapes, connecting the valley within the town to the upland edge.

5.4 The areas below also met the criteria for Local Green Space designation, which may be more appropriate since in both cases recreation is an important function.

- L3 Astbury Mere Country Park (Local Green Space designation may be appropriate);
- L6 Back Lane Playing Fields (Local Green Space designation may be appropriate, although the changing context needs to be taken into account).

5.5 The large area of countryside East of Buglawton was evaluated, and two smaller areas were considered to be locally important - Buglawton Hall Parkland and the Dane Valley between Havannah and Colley Mill Bridge, as described above, but there were also some areas of high quality landscape on the edges of the existing Peak Fringe Local Landscape Designation area, characterised by small ancient fields, and in some areas small cloughs with ancient woodland. These were not a coherent landscape area in themselves, but an extension of the footslopes below the gritstone ridge.

5.6 The proposed 'locally important landscape areas' are shown on the plan below.

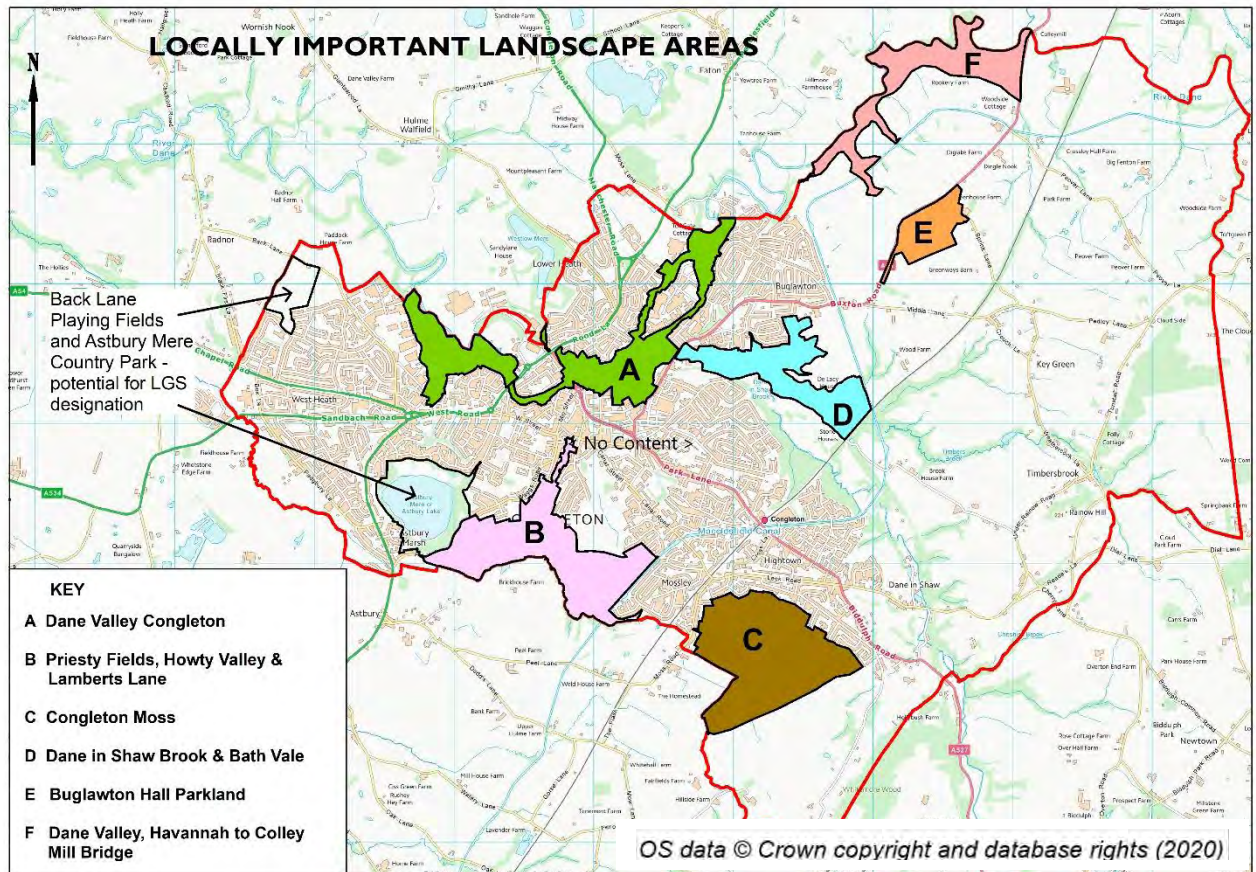


Figure 5: Locally important landscape areas

- 5.7 Most of the larger areas of landscape, and some of the smaller ones, have a strategic role both as multifunctional green infrastructure which connects one area with another, and also as a framework for the town. This is shown on the plan below, which also includes the areas adjoining the Peak Fringe Local Landscape Designation area.
- 5.8 The most critical area is to the north west of the town, where the continuity of the Dane Valley, on a section which was once part of an Area of Special County Value, is being disrupted by construction for roads, industry and housing. The areas where landscape features need to be continued and strengthened are also shown below.

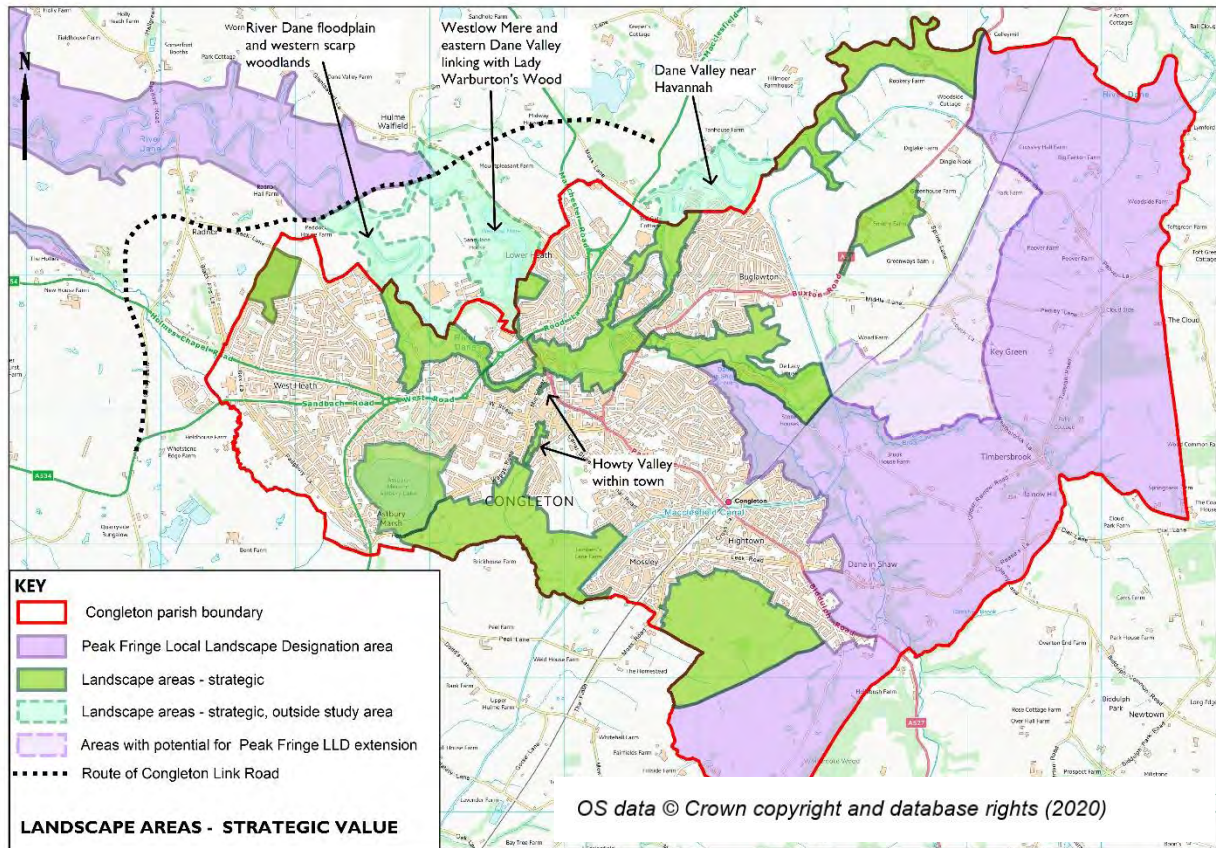


Figure 6: Landscape areas - strategic value

Future changes

- 5.9 Sand quarrying had a significant impact on Congleton’s landscape in the late C20th and two active sand quarries beyond the parish boundary may one day also be connected with the town. These are Bent Farm Quarry near Astbury to the south west, and Eaton Quarry to the north. The speed and scale of change around the town of Congleton due to quarrying and construction is significant. Climate change will also bring impacts such as more frequent flooding, while actions to mitigate the effects, or adapt to them, could involve changes in agricultural land use, new tree planting and an increase in renewable energy infrastructure.
- 5.10 It is particularly important in view of these and other changes to ensure that the key landscapes that still contribute to sense of place and quality of life in Congleton are celebrated, protected where necessary, and sustained into the future through appropriate management.

6 References

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