

# ***Landscape Character Assessment***

Guidance for England and Scotland







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# ***LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT***

## **GUIDANCE FOR ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND**

Prepared on behalf of  
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and  
Scottish Natural Heritage

by  
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## FOREWORD

The landscape determines the character of the British countryside and influences our daily life. However, landscape is not a static thing. It has always been changing and will continue to do so - in some places suddenly and dramatically, in others, gradually and subtly.

Most of us welcome progressive change, but do not want to see development running amok. We applaud new woodland to enhance the landscape, but know that planting and management must be sensitive to the locality. We can be excited by bold regeneration for places in need of improvement, but recognise that the new development must work around the best of the old, rather than sweep it away.

Policy makers and practitioners need techniques to identify what gives a locality its own sense of place and makes it different from other areas, and which conditions should be set for any new development and change. Landscape Character Assessment has been used for these purposes for many years now, especially in England and Scotland.

This document consolidates latest thinking on the subject and sets out updated advice. Policy makers and practitioners will continue to have to make tough decisions on development and change. We believe this document, and the topic papers which follow, can help inform those decisions, underpin planning policies, and ensure positive change in the landscape.

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PART I

# ***A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT***



*Promotional artwork for countryside character area 103 Malvern Hills.  
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Original artwork by Clive McWilliam.*

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT THIS GUIDANCE IS ABOUT

I.1 This guidance provides updated advice on Landscape Character Assessment, an important tool for all those involved in influencing the landscape. The guidance reflects how methods and techniques for Landscape Character Assessment have developed in recent years and builds upon interim guidance which was the subject of consultation in 1999 [1]. This new guidance has been prepared for England and Scotland, although aspects may have relevance to other parts of the British Isles (**para 2.2**).

I.2 This document sets out the full scope of activity potentially involved in a Landscape Character Assessment, but it may well be possible to undertake a more modest exercise that will still inform decision-making.

### WHO THE GUIDANCE IS AIMED AT

I.3 The guidance is aimed at all those individuals and organisations whose activities affect the landscape. Its main audience includes those involved in commissioning, carrying out, and using results from a Landscape Character Assessment, including practitioners in local authorities, government departments and agencies, development companies, utilities and private practice.

I.4 Other people and organisations may find the guidance of

value, but are likely to focus on the principles rather than the details, and the separate summary may be useful for this purpose. We envisage this audience including those people:

- who need to consider how Landscape Character Assessment can inform decision-making at central, regional, and local government level, and in the private and voluntary sectors;
- who influence the character of the landscape and need to know what such assessments mean for them, for example farmers, foresters, highway engineers and those responsible for development activity;
- who may become involved in Landscape Character Assessment because they are a stakeholder - that is, with a particular interest in the landscape which they wish to express.

I.5 The guidance has been organised to meet the needs of these different audiences. It has two parts:

- a basic guide to the approach and methods of Landscape Character Assessment (this document);
- a separate series of topic papers, which offer more detail on particular uses and policy contexts for Landscape Character Assessment. These topic papers will continue to be

issued to respond to the evolving needs of practitioners.

*Look at the 'Finding your way around' section at the end of this introduction to see which parts of the guidance meet your needs and to find out more about the contents of different sections.*

### THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

I.6 The need to incorporate landscape considerations into decision-making is not new, but has grown in importance as the emphasis on sustainable development has increased. The Government's Sustainable Development Strategy *A Better Quality of Life* [2], sets out the following definition of sustainable development:

"It means meeting four objectives at the same time in the UK and the world as a whole:

- social progress that recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment."

I.7 Landscape Character Assessment is a tool which can make a significant contribution to the objectives that relate to 'environmental protection' and 'prudent resource use' as corner-

stones of sustainable development. In England this is recognised in the Government's Rural White Paper [3], which endorses the use of Landscape Character Assessment as a way of informing decisions. In Scotland various elements of planning legislation now recognise the importance of landscape character, such as NPPG 14 [4]. In particular, Landscape Character Assessment can help in processes which:

- identify what environmental and cultural features are present in a locality;
- monitor change in the environment;
- understand a location's sensitivity to development and change;
- inform the conditions for any development and change.

1.8 For many years, and especially in the 1970s, the emphasis in dealing with landscape as a consideration in land use planning and management was on landscape evaluation - what makes one area 'better' than another. Landscape assessment emerged in the mid-80s as a tool to separate the classification and description of landscape character (i.e. what makes one area 'different' or 'distinct' from another) from landscape evaluation. During recent years yet more emphasis has been placed on the role of landscape character and the process has become described as Landscape Character Assessment to reflect this. In Scotland this term has been used to describe the national programme of assessment. The concept of landscape character is also central to the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character initiative and national framework of character areas in England.

1.9 This guidance defines Landscape Character Assessment as addressing both the **characterisation** process, involving identifying, mapping, classifying and describing landscape character; and the process of **making judgements** based on landscape character to inform a range of different decisions. This distinction is the most important principle of the approach and is stressed throughout this guidance.

1.10 Landscape Character Assessment is one of a growing number of tools which can be used in planning for sustainable development. Among the most relevant are those in which character assessment has a part to play alongside assessments of other environmental resources. Further details of this wider range of tools are contained in **Topic Paper 2**, which also briefly discusses where Landscape Character Assessment fits into these wider initiatives. It deals with:

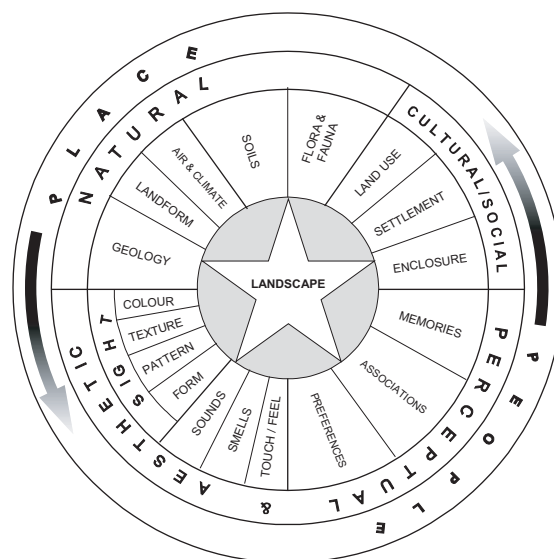
- Quality of Life Capital;

- Environmental Impact Assessment;
- Identification of landscape indicators;
- Natural Heritage Futures.

## WHY FOCUS ON LANDSCAPE ?

1.11 Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives. The term does not mean just special or designated landscapes and it does not only apply to the countryside. Landscape can mean a small patch of urban wasteland as much as a mountain range, and an urban park as much as an expanse of lowland plain. It results from the way that different components of our environment - both natural (the influences of geology, soils, climate, flora and fauna) and cultural (the historical and current impact of land use, settlement, enclosure and other human interventions) - interact together and are perceived by us (**Figure 1.1**). People's perceptions turn land into the concept of landscape. This is not

**Figure 1.1: What is landscape?**



just about visual perception, or how we see the land, but also how we hear, smell and feel our surroundings, and the feelings, memories or associations that they evoke. Landscape character, which is the pattern that arises from particular combinations of the different components, can provide a sense of place to our surroundings.

1.12 People value landscape for many different reasons, not all of them related to traditional concepts of aesthetics and beauty. It can provide habitats for wildlife and a cultural record of how people have lived on the land and harnessed its resources. Landscape can have social and community value, as an important part of people's day-to-day lives. It can contribute to a sense of identity, well-being, enjoyment and inspiration. It has economic value, providing the context for economic activity and often being a central factor in attracting business and tourism. Landscape Character Assessment has emerged as an appropriate way to look at landscape because it provides a structured approach to identifying character and distinctiveness as well as value.

## USES OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

1.13 Landscape Character Assessment recognises the fundamental role played by farming and forestry and by different forms of development in fashioning the landscape. Virtually the whole of the British landscape owes its character as much to the influence of these activities as to understanding the influences of geology, soils, landform, climate, and flora and fauna.

1.14 Landscape Character Assessment is not a tool designed to resist changes that may influence the landscape. Rather it is an aid to decision-making - a tool to help understand what the landscape is like today, how it came to be like that, and how it may change in the future. Its role is to help ensure that change and development does not undermine whatever is characteristic or valued about any particular landscape, and that ways of improving the character of a place can be considered. It can be a powerful tool to aid the planning, design and management of landscapes.

1.15 Landscape Character Assessment has been used in a wide range of situations throughout England, Scotland and further afield, and its role is likely to increase in the future. The main applications are summarised below to illustrate the range:

### Planning

- informing development plan policies at strategic (regional and structure plan) and local level;
- studies of development potential, for example to help in finding sites for new development, especially in or on the edge of towns, and in the wider countryside;
- informing the siting, spacing, scale, and design conditions for particular forms of development such as housing, minerals and wind energy;
- contributing to landscape capacity studies relating to the supply of land for housing, minerals, renewable energy or other land uses;
- providing an input to Environmental Assessment,

both at the level of plans and policies, and at the level of individual development proposals.

### Landscape conservation, management and enhancement

- providing a basis for the preparation of landscape management strategies;
- informing work on special areas, including identification of areas for designation, mapping of boundaries, justifications for special application of policies, justification for special treatment by designation, and input to management plans and other management initiatives;
- helping to guide land use change in positive and sustainable ways, for example programmes of woodland expansion, and new uses for disturbed and degraded land;
- informing the targeting of agri-environment schemes;
- contributing to wider environmental initiatives such as Local Agenda 21, Biodiversity Action Plans, State of the Environment Reports and, in Scotland, Natural Heritage Futures.

1.16 Examples of the use of Landscape Character Assessment in this range of applications can be found in **Chapters 8 and 9**. The growing importance of Landscape Character Assessment, particularly in the planning arena, is emphasised in several of the current series of Planning Policy Guidance notes issued by central government (PPGs in England, NPPGs in Scotland), and in the Government's Rural White Paper [3]. Key aspects of these references are summarised in **Box 1.1**.

### **Box 1.1: References to Landscape Character Assessment in Planning Policy Guidance**

#### **PPG 1 General Policy and Principles (England) 1997**

Annex A on the handling of design issues states that “Policies should be based on a proper assessment of the character of the surrounding built and natural environment, and should take account of the defining characteristics of each local area”.

#### **PPG 7 The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (England) (1997)**

Contains a specific section on the character of the countryside and makes reference to *The Character of England* map. It states that the character approach “should help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character. It can help ensure that development respects or enhances the distinctive character of the land and the built environment”.

#### **PPG 15 Planning and the Historic Environment (England) (1994)**

States that “The physical survivals of our past are to be valued and protected for their own sake, as a central part of our cultural heritage and our sense of national identity... Their presence adds to the quality of our lives, by enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene and sustaining the sense of local distinctiveness which is so important an aspect of the character and appearance of our towns, villages and countryside.”

It goes on to note that “in the countryside, the detailed patterns of fields and farms, of hedgerows and walls, and of hamlets and villages, are among the most highly valued aspects of our environment.” Registers of historic parks and gardens and of battlefields are referred to and work on the identification and components of the wider historic landscape are described. It notes that “The whole of the landscape, to varying degrees... is an archaeological and historic artefact... much of its value lies in its complexity, regional diversity and local distinctiveness”.

#### **NPPG 1 (Revised) The Planning System (Scotland) (2000)**

In this revised NPPG there is explicit reference to the character approach in relation to design in paragraphs 15-17 where it states “Development Plans should include broad design parameters based on a sound analysis of the character of an area.”

#### **NPPG 14 Natural Heritage (Scotland) (1998)**

In December 1998, the Scottish Office issued National Planning Policy Guideline 14 on the Natural Heritage. In its introduction, the NPPG stresses the complex nature of the natural heritage and the close links with Scotland’s culture and economy. It notes that “Natural heritage embraces the combination and interrelationship of landform, habitat, wildlife and landscape and their capacity to provide enjoyment and inspiration. It therefore encompasses both physical attributes and aesthetic values and, given the long interaction between human communities and the land in Scotland, has important cultural and economic dimensions.” Focusing on landscape protection and enhancement, the guidelines describe the wide variety of landscapes found in Scotland, and their role in shaping regional identities and contributing to the quality of life. The guidelines describe the interaction of the natural environment with buildings and other cultural features in creating identity and character. The NPPG makes explicit reference to Scottish Natural Heritage’s programme of landscape character assessments and notes that these now cover the whole of Scotland. It describes the use of these assessments in the planning process, highlighting their role in providing guidance on the capacity of the landscape to accommodate development, and informing policy development and development control processes. Turning to the ‘action required’ of planning authorities, NPPG 14 states that Structure Plans should “include policies for protecting and enhancing the character of landscapes of regional importance, including any areas of importance for their wild land character” and that Local Plans should “include policies for the conservation and/or enhancement of landscape character”.

/...contd.



## Box 1.1 (contd.)

**NPPG 18 Planning and the Historic Environment (Scotland) (1999)**

The relationship between historic buildings, cultural features and the natural environment can help give an area its particular identity and character. The spaces between buildings, the settings of historic buildings and areas, historic landscapes, urban parks, historic street patterns, historic battlefields and memorials are particularly significant in this respect.

**PAN 60 Planning for the Natural Heritage (Scotland) (2000)**

This Planning Advice Note furthers the statements made in NPPG 14 by stating that “Safeguarding and enhancing landscape character is an important planning objective.” It goes on to state how the national Landscape Character Assessment programme covers the whole of Scotland and how different planning authorities are making use of the information. “Planning authorities are finding landscape character assessment to be of value in informing development plan policies; preparing locational strategies for mineral extraction, renewable energy developments and forestry; determining environmental and settlement capacity; reviewing Green Belt boundaries; designing land renewal schemes; determining individual planning applications; and responding to Woodland Grant Scheme consultations.”

**Rural White Paper (England) (2000)**

Section 9.3 of the Government’s Rural White Paper *Our Countryside: The Future – A Fair Deal for Rural England* [2] deals with the importance of understanding, evaluating and protecting countryside diversity and character. In particular, it stresses the need to find ways of “ensuring that the valued features and attributes of the whole countryside are conserved and enhanced.” It cites this guidance as a means “to help those interested in carrying out character assessment at sub-regional level” using the national character map as a starting point and guide, and as a tool for local authorities “to seek ways to enrich the countryside as a whole...and maintain its distinctive local features.”

**RELATIONSHIP TO PREVIOUS GUIDANCE**

1.17 This advice supersedes several earlier documents that gave guidance on landscape assessment in England and Scotland, namely:

- *Landscape Assessment: a Countryside Commission approach.* Countryside Commission. CCD 18 (1987) [5]
- *Landscape Assessment: Principles and Practice.* Countryside Commission for Scotland. (1991) [6]
- *Assessment and conservation of landscape character: The Warwickshire Landscapes Project approach.* Countryside Commission. CCP332 (1991) [7]
- *Landscape Assessment Guidance.* Countryside Commission. CCP 423 (1993) [8]

- *Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance.* Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage (1999) [1]

All these documents served a purpose at different stages in the evolution of Landscape Character Assessment (see **Topic Paper 1**) but they are no longer up-to-date.

1.18 Since the last main guidance of 1993 there has been a major increase in Landscape Character Assessment work. *The Character of England* map [9], jointly published in England by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature, provides a national framework for more detailed assessments by local authorities and others. This framework has recently been strengthened by the development of a national landscape typology by

the Countryside Agency in collaboration with English Nature and English Heritage. Local authorities have been increasingly active, although the quality of Landscape Character Assessments varies considerably. In the same period the major Scottish national programme of Landscape Character Assessment has been completed, which involved all Scottish local authorities and some other organisations such as the Forestry Commission. The experience gained, and the lessons learnt from all this work, has informed this guidance. Further details of the national initiatives in England and Scotland, and their relevance to more detailed assessments about to start or be planned, are given in **Chapter 6** and **Topic Paper 1**.



## FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND

1.19 *If you are new to Landscape Character Assessment you should concentrate on this main document. After this introductory section it is divided into two parts. The first provides a basic practical guide to what Landscape Character Assessment means and how it is carried out. The second demonstrates the wide range of different uses for such an assessment. The contents of the two parts in more detail are shown in Box 1.2*

## NEED MORE INFORMATION ?

1.20 The references provide further information on various

aspects of Landscape Character Assessment. In addition, this guidance is accessible through the web pages of the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)<sup>1</sup>. Further case studies and topic papers will be added in future. In Scotland the full set of assessments produced through the national programme is published and available from Scottish Natural Heritage [10-38]. A **Countryside Character Network** has been established and provides a forum for exchanging experience on the use of Landscape Character Assessments<sup>2</sup>. Its newsletters and workshop reports provide a useful range of relevant

information. There is a less formalised Scottish network as well with the relevant local authority officers, which meets with the SNH Landscape Group with occasional seminars on landscape character assessment and applications under SNH's '**Sharing Good Practice**' programme. Also, the Countryside Agency is funding a small number of Landscape Character Assessments to show how Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken and applied at each level in the hierarchy, from regional to local, all with particular emphasis on stakeholder participation.

<sup>1</sup> View the guidance, and related topic papers, at [www.countryside.gov.uk/cci/guidance](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/cci/guidance) and [www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA](http://www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA)

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Countryside Character Network see the Countryside Agency's website at [www.countryside.gov.uk/cci/character\\_network](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/cci/character_network)  
For more detail on Landscape Character Assessment in Scotland, see the SNH website at [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

### Box 1.2: Organisation and content of main guidance

#### PART I A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

##### Chapter 1 Introduction

##### Chapter 2 Principles and process

Introduces the principles of the approach and gives an overview of the process. Identifies a series of key steps, which are then described in detail in the following chapters.

##### Chapter 3 Defining the scope (step 1)

Stresses the importance of establishing the scope of an assessment before embarking on the work and deals with issues such as purpose and aims, scale and level of detail, resources required, approaches to making judgements, and decisions about outputs from the work.

##### Chapter 4 Desk study (step 2)

Describes the important preparatory work that must be done before embarking on field survey, reviews sources of map information on a range of different topics, and describes the preparation of map overlays as a basis for preliminary identification of landscape types.

##### Chapter 5 Field survey (step 3)

Outlines the important contribution of field survey and ways of carrying out this work comprehensively and effectively.

/...contd.

Box 1.2 (contd.)

**Chapter 6 Classification and description (step 4)**

Looks at the principles and practice of landscape characterisation, including approaches to classification, consistency in terminology, dealing with boundaries and descriptions of character.

**Chapter 7 Making judgements based on landscape character**

Examines the way that Landscape Character Assessment can inform decisions and the range of approaches to making judgements about the landscape.

**PART 2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE**

**Chapter 8 Applications in planning**

Reviews the way that Landscape Character Assessment is being applied in work relating to the planning system, including development plan policies, studies of development potential, and design of new development.

**Chapter 9 Applications in landscape conservation and management**

Reviews the way that Landscape Character Assessment is being used in relation to the development of landscape management strategies, work on particular designated areas, and in guiding major landscape change, for example arising from woodland expansion or agricultural change.

**Topic Paper 1 Recent practice and the evolution of Landscape Character Assessment**

**Topic Paper 2 Links to other sustainability tools**

**Topic Paper 3 Landscape Character Assessment - how stakeholders can help**

**Forthcoming Papers**

***Available Summer/Autumn 2002***

**Topic Paper 4 Use of GIS and other computer methods**

**Topic Paper 5 Historic landscape characterisation**

**Topic Paper 6 Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity**

**Topic Paper 7 Development and new landscape character**

**Topic Paper 8 Landscape character and wind energy developments**

***Available early 2003***

**Topic Paper 9 Climate change and natural forces - the consequences for landscape character**

# CHAPTER 2

## PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS

### INTRODUCTION

2.1 This chapter sets out some of the key principles which underpin Landscape Character Assessment. It goes on to introduce the basic process which is used, identifying a series of steps which should be followed. The method which is described here and which is being widely used throughout the United Kingdom has emerged over a period of some 15 to 20 years. It has been continuously developed and refined in the light of experience and will no doubt continue to evolve in future. Aspects of the development of Landscape Character Assessment are described in **Topic Paper 1**.

2.2 The approach described here is common to both Scotland and England. Similar work is also carried out in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and although Wales has taken a different approach in its LANDMAP initiative, some of the principles set out here chime with practice in Wales. The examples used are drawn predominantly from Scotland and England, although reference is also made to work in Ireland.

2.3 Landscape Character Assessment offers a framework for techniques that can be used in combinations according to the situation, not least the resources

and funds available to carry out the work. The Agencies do not intend that this advice should be overly prescriptive - practitioners must have some flexibility to respond to local circumstance. The guidance is intended to establish some basic ground rules, describing the essence of the approach, clarifying some of the terminology, and pointing to good practice.

### KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE CURRENT APPROACH

2.4 Four key principles are central to the understanding and appropriate use of Landscape Character Assessment. They are:

- the emphasis placed on landscape character;
- the division between the process of characterisation and the making of judgements to inform decisions;
- the roles for both objectivity and subjectivity in the process;
- the potential for application at different scales.

### Emphasis on landscape character

2.5 Landscape Character Assessment is concerned primarily with **landscape character**, rather than with landscape quality or value. These latter factors are nevertheless still relevant when a Landscape Character Assessment is used to inform decisions, when judgements must be made about the implications of an assessment. An understanding of the concept of character is therefore vital.

#### Box 2:1: Words relating to landscape character

##### Character

A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.

##### Characteristics

Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to distinctive character.

##### Elements

Individual components which make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.

##### Features

Particularly prominent or eye-catching elements, like tree clumps, church towers, or wooded skylines.

##### Characterisation

The process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character.

**Landscape character** (see **Box 2.1** for relationship to other terms) is defined as a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently in a particular type of landscape. Particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, field patterns and human settlement create character. Character makes each part of the landscape distinct, and gives each its particular sense of place. Whether we value certain landscapes for their distinctiveness, or for other reasons, is a separate question.

2.6 Exploring and understanding the landscape character of any area requires systematic investigation of the many different factors that have helped to create and influence that location. They include geology and landform, the natural attributes of soils and the vegetation associated with them, and both the historical and current influences of human land use and settlement. The interactions between all these factors create the character of the landscape.

### Distinction between characterisation and the making of judgements

2.7 Landscape Character Assessment draws an important distinction between two stages:

- the relatively value-free process of **characterisation**;
- the subsequent making of **judgements** based on knowledge of landscape character.

The judgements made can then contribute to **informing** the decision-making processes - for example: should a particular development proposal be allowed to proceed (and with what conditions)? Or where would it be

appropriate to encourage land use change such as the planting of new woodland in an area?

2.8 **Characterisation:** The first stage embraces the practical steps involved in identifying areas of distinctive character, classifying and mapping them, and describing their character. It concentrates on making clear what makes one area different or distinctive from another. It normally results in the identification of one or both of the following:

- **Landscape character types:**

These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are **generic** in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement pattern. For example, chalk river valleys or rocky moorlands are recognisable and distinct landscape character types.

- **Landscape character areas:**

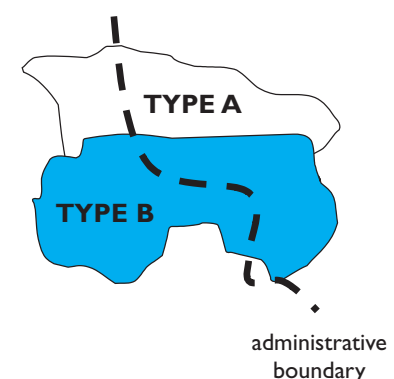
By comparison, these are single **unique** areas and are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. So, taking the chalk river example, the Itchen Valley, the Test Valley and the Avon Valley (all chalk rivers) would be separate landscape character areas, of the chalk river valley landscape character type. Each has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same chalk river valley type. This distinction is reflected in the naming of types and areas: landscape character types have generic names such as

moorland plateau and river valley, but landscape character areas take on the names of specific places. Looking at a Scottish example, in Dumfries and Galloway the narrow wooded valley landscape character type can be found. Within the area there are several individual landscape character areas of this type, each distinct and unique, such as the Esk Valley, the Urr Water, the Water of Kan, the Big Water of Fleet and the River Cree character units.

Landscape character areas and types rarely conform to administrative boundaries (**Figure 2.1**).

2.9 **The end product of characterisation** will usually be a map of landscape types and/or areas, together with relatively value-free descriptions of their character and identification of the key characteristics which are most important in creating this character. **'Forces for change'** or 'key issues' will often be identified as well, such as ongoing land use change and types of development pressures. The characterisation process is discussed in detail in **Chapter 6**.

**Figure 2.1: Landscape character areas/types and administrative boundaries**



**2.10 Making judgements:** This stage is based on the results of the characterisation process and involves making judgements about landscape character to inform particular decisions related to the type of application. Different types of judgement may need to be used to inform different types of decision (see **Chapter 7** for further information). Thus this stage may result in a range of different outputs, involving different types of judgement, each aimed at a particular need. These outputs may either:

- directly inform decisions about landscape through, for example, the preparation of planning policies, and strategies for the conservation and enhancement of landscape character; or
- feed into broader decision-making tools (such as Environmental Impact Assessment or Quality of Life Capital) and strategies (such as Regeneration Strategies or Woodland Strategies) where landscape is only one of a broad range of environmental issues under consideration.

### The role of objectivity and subjectivity

**2.11** There has been long-standing debate about the role of objectivity and subjectivity in dealing with landscape. The search for supposedly objective approaches has reflected a desire, in some quarters, to remove the element of personal judgement from the process. In Landscape Character Assessment it is accepted that there is a role for subjective inputs, but these must be made in a systematic and transparent way. The process of characterisation should be an objective process in the main, while making judgements to inform

decisions involves an element of subjectivity which can be clarified by using criteria agreed beforehand.

**2.12** Surveying the elements that make up a landscape, mapping and describing landscape types, which many might consider to be wholly objective matters, can still involve subjective judgements. This can only be avoided if the whole task were to be reduced to one of measuring attributes from maps and analysing the data quantitatively (but this approach would not tease out all aspects of character and sense of place). To illustrate this point, a surveyor could record that there are 20 hectares of woodland in a landscape as an objective fact; to then record that this woodland is a dominant feature or a key characteristic of the landscape necessarily introduces an element of subjectivity into the characterisation.

**2.13** Nevertheless, this is still a very different type of subjectivity to one which judges that one landscape is better than another in some way. The important thing is that everyone involved in the process, or in the use of an assessment, understands which elements of it are relatively objective and unlikely to be disputed, and which ones are more likely to be viewed differently by different stakeholders. There is also scope for a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to characterisation, each contributing their own judgements about variations in character.

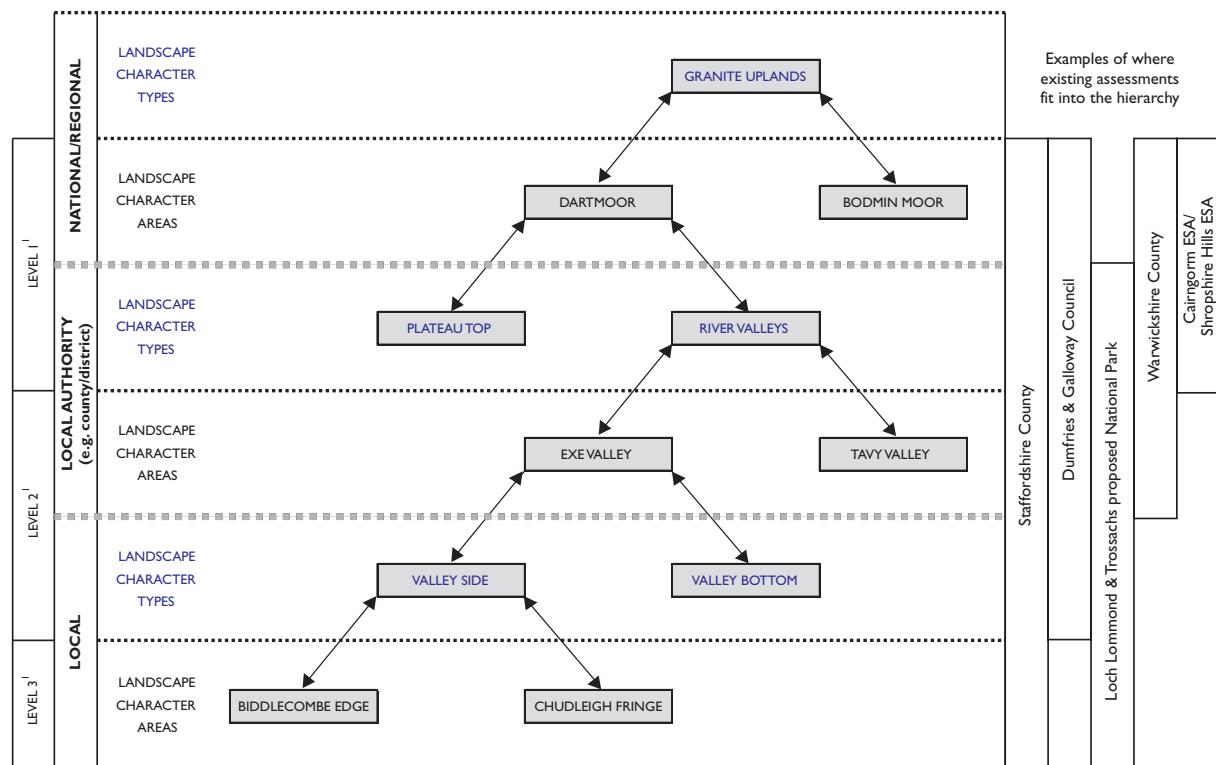
### Application at different scales

**2.14** Landscape Character Assessment can be applied at a number of different scales from the national or indeed European level to the parish level. Ideally assess-

ments at different scales should fit together as a nested series or a hierarchy of landscape character types and/or areas so that assessment at each level adds more detail to the one above. The analogy of Russian Dolls is often used to describe this hierarchical relationship, but the idea of a camera zooming in, from a distant broad view, to a detailed small-scale portrait, also makes the point (**Figures 2.2** and **2.3**). The three main levels at which Landscape Character Assessment are carried out are:

- **National and regional scale:** Work at this level is to a small scale (typically at 1:250,000) and may cover the whole of a country or a large region (as has been done for both England and Scotland) to identify broad patterns of variation in landscape character. These patterns result from the underlying geology and landform overlaid with the influence of broad ecological associations and key aspects of settlement and enclosure history. This results in the identification of distinct landscape types and areas at this broad scale, for example chalk downland or montane plateau, as well as the character areas where they occur, which are distinct geographical areas such as the South Downs or the Cairngorms.
- **Local authority scale:** Within these broad patterns of landscape character it is possible to identify a finer grain which can be mapped and described through Landscape Character Assessment applied at the county, district or unitary authority level in England or at

**Figure 2.2: The Landscape Character Assessment spatial hierarchy - an example of the relationship between the different levels [1]**



<sup>1</sup>Some practitioners use this parallel system in parts of England but it is not used in Scotland

the council area level in Scotland. The appropriate scale of working is normally 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale. This results in the definition of landscape types, which have unity of character due to particular combinations of landform and land cover; and a distinct pattern of elements. They might include river floodplains, plateau moorlands or enclosed farmland. Once again, character areas at this scale are the discrete geographical areas where each type occurs, conveying a sense of place.

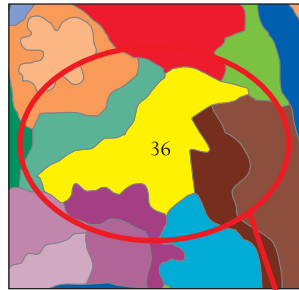
- **Local scale:** Sometimes it may be necessary or appropriate to carry out an assessment of a smaller area at 1:10,000 or even larger scales, such as

an individual parish, or an estate or farm, a country park or a proposed development site. At this local scale it is important to set the area firmly in the context of a wider character assessment, to show which landscape type/area it falls within. A detailed assessment may then either map landscape types and/or areas at an even finer scale, or add detail by mapping and describing the individual elements which contribute to the character of the area, such as hedges, arable fields and farm buildings. Local assessments may also consider the contribution made by the site to the character of the surrounding area as well as views into and out of it.

2.15 Assessments can also be carried out at intermediate levels between those noted above but the same general principles should apply:

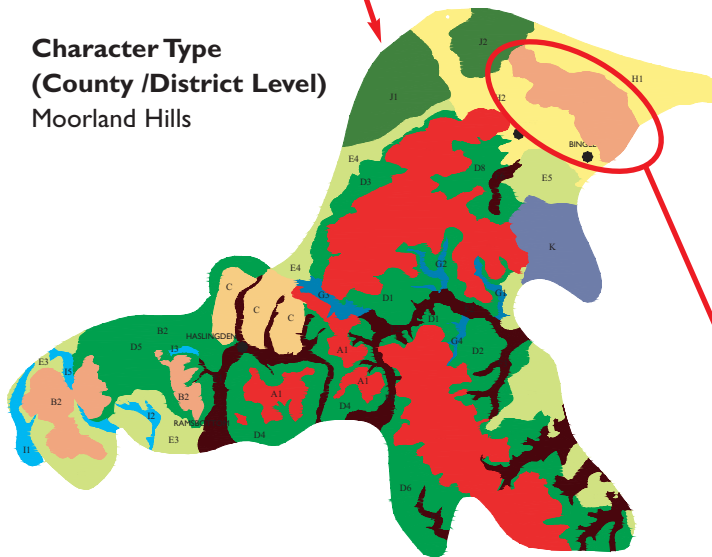
- there should be a clear distinction between landscape character types and landscape character areas whatever the scale (although at smaller scales it is often appropriate to deal only with local character areas);
- the assessment should relate to landscape character types and/or areas established at higher and lower order levels and should form a seamless connection with assessments on either side of administrative boundaries;
- the more local the scale, the greater the level of detail required.

**Figure 2.3: The Landscape Character Assessment spatial hierarchy - an example of the relationship between the different levels [2]**



**Character Area  
(National/Regional Level)**  
Joint Character Area 36 - The South Pennines  
(from *The Character of England*)

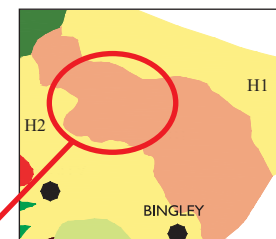
**Character Type  
(County /District Level)**  
Moorland Hills



**Character Types  
(County/District Level)**  
South Pennines Landscape

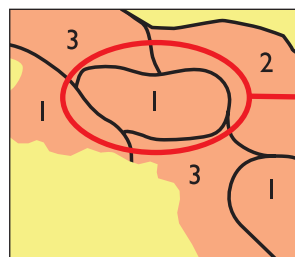


**Character Area  
(County /District Level)**  
Rombalds Hills



**Character Types (Hypothetical)  
(Local Level)**

1. High Moorland Tops
2. Grassy Moorland Fringes
3. Complex Moorland Mosaic

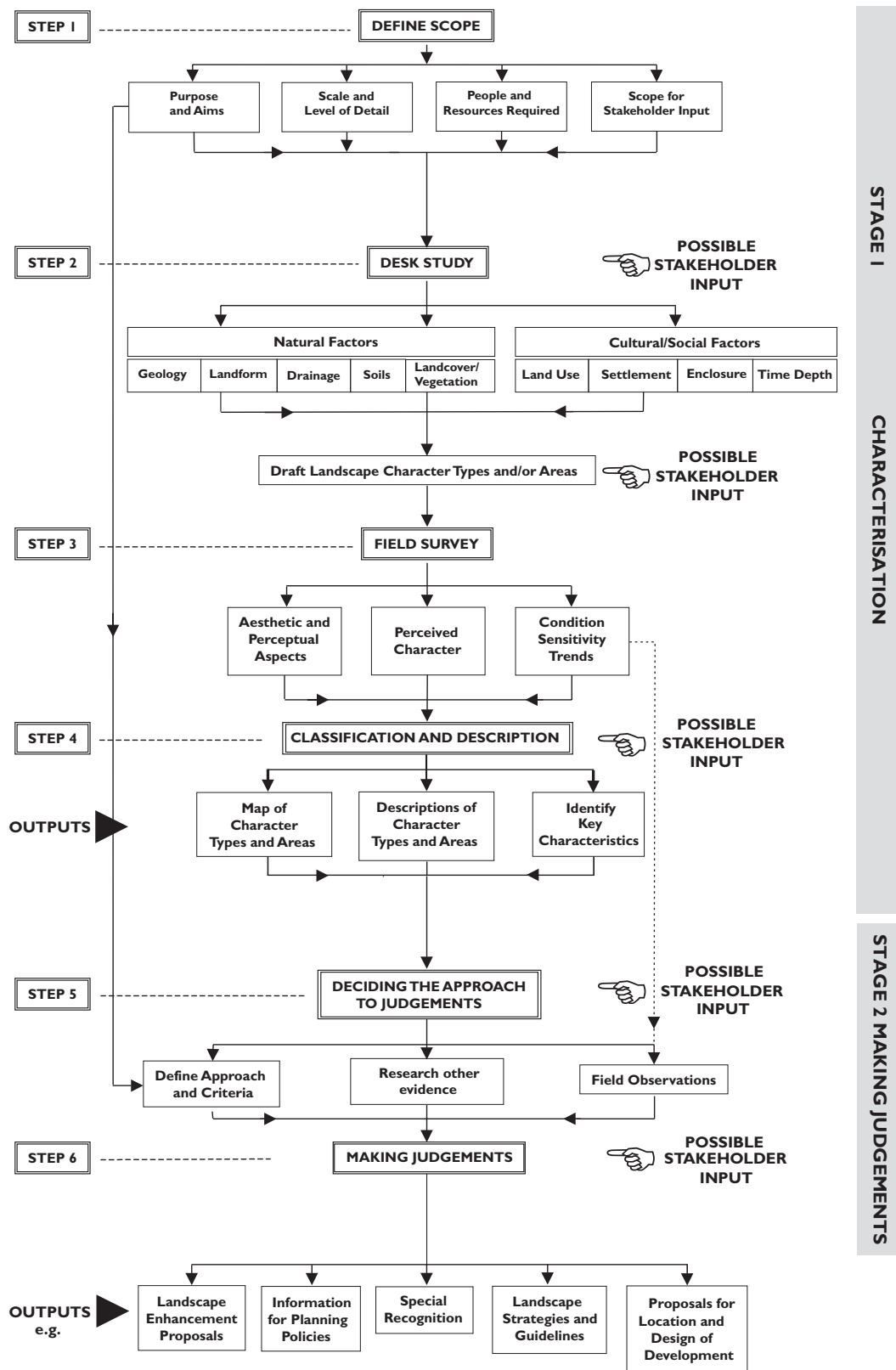


**Character Area  
(Hypothetical)  
(Local Level)**  
Rombalds Top

Source: Derived from LUC (1999) South Pennines Landscape Character Assessment. For SCOSPA, Bradford.



**Figure 2.4: Flow diagram of Landscape Character Assessment methodology**



Footnote: Stakeholder contributions may be possible at all stages.

The whole process may be iterative.



## Box 2.2: Main steps in Landscape Character Assessment

### STAGE 1: CHARACTERISATION

These are the practical steps involved in initiating a study, identifying areas of distinctive character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character:

- **Step 1: Defining the scope.** All Landscape Character Assessments need a clearly defined purpose. This will critically influence the scale and level of detail of the assessment, the resources required, those who should be involved in its preparation, and the types of judgement that are needed to inform decisions. As part of defining the scope, it is normally essential that a familiarisation visit is undertaken to allow those involved in commissioning or carrying out the assessment to learn more about the character of the location's landscape.
- **Step 2: Desk study.** This involves review of relevant background reports, other data and mapped information, and use of this information to develop a series of map overlays to assist in the identification of areas of common character (usually draft landscape character types and/or areas).
- **Step 3: Field survey.** Field data is collected in a rigorous way to test and refine the draft landscape character types/areas, to inform written descriptions of their character, to identify aesthetic and perceptual qualities which are unlikely to be evident from desk information, and to identify the current condition of landscape elements.
- **Step 4: Classification and description.** This step then refines and finalises the output of the characterisation process by classifying the landscape into landscape character types and/or areas and mapping their extent, based on all the information collected, followed by preparation of clear descriptions of their character. These descriptions will often recognise 'forces for change', such as key development pressures and trends in land management.

### STAGE 2: MAKING JUDGEMENTS

- **Step 5: Deciding the approach to judgements.** Further work is usually needed to decide on the approach to making the judgements that will be needed to meet the objectives of the assessment. This will require thought to be given to the overall approach, the criteria to be used and the information needed to support the judgements to be made. Decisions will be needed on the role to be played by the stakeholders. Sometimes, especially if judgements are needed about landscape value, it may be necessary to look for evidence about how others, such as artists and writers for example, have perceived the area. Additional field work may be necessary, especially when additional applications of the assessment only emerge after the original characterisation has been completed. Information from the field survey will need to be reviewed on topics such as the condition of landscape elements and features and the sensitivity of the landscape to change.
- **Step 6: Making judgements.** The nature of the judgements and the outputs that may result from the process will vary according to the purpose of the assessment (see **Chapter 7**). The main approaches to making judgements within the landscape assessment process are:
  - landscape strategies;
  - landscape guidelines;
  - attaching status to landscapes;
  - landscape capacity.

## SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS

2.16 The sequence of work involved in carrying out a Landscape Character Assessment is shown in **Figure 2.4**. This distinguishes between the relatively value-free stage of characterisation and the more value-laden stage of making judgements to inform decisions. There are six main steps in the process, each of which is described in detail in the chapters that follow. The steps are summarised in **Box 2.2**. It should be noted that in reality the steps relating to **desk study and field survey** should be iterative. The desk study must not be overly deterministic, recognising that there may be real landscape differences that are not obvious from mapped information. Equally field survey may highlight questions that need to be checked via desk study and therefore possibly require more than one stage of fieldwork to conclude the character areas identification.

2.17 Some assessments may stop after completion of Stage 1, the characterisation of the landscape, with the map and accompanying descriptions of character types and/or areas as the final product. This then stands as a neutral statement of the current character of the landscape. This can be used to raise awareness of the distinctiveness of the landscape and encourage appreciation of the differences between individual areas. Where the assessment has been undertaken to inform a particular decision or policy, however, the assessment will move on to make judgements about landscape character. Ultimately the decisions themselves lie beyond the Landscape Character Assessment

process and will be made by politicians, land managers and, ideally, a wide range of other stakeholders, on the basis of the information presented and the strength of the supporting argument.

## NEW EMPHASIS ON STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

2.18 To date the majority of Landscape Character Assessments have been prepared by professionals for use by professionals. But there is growing recognition of the need to find ways of involving the much wider constituency of people who have a particular concern, involvement or stake in the landscape. The term 'stakeholder' describes the whole range of individuals and groups who have an interest in the landscape. This may be through their direct involvement in management of the land, through their knowledge of and interest in a particular subject, or because they have an attachment to a particular place, as residents or visitors. This emphasis fits well with government requirements for local authorities to develop approaches to community planning, cultural strategies, and Best Value performance plans and indicators.

2.19 There is still some way to go in developing approaches to stakeholder involvement in Landscape Character Assessment and there are still relatively few practical examples of good practice. Much has still to be learnt about the most appropriate stage of such work for stakeholders to contribute - as **Figure 2.4** shows it is possible at virtually all stages. It may though be more practical and cost effective at some stages than others. There are real resource costs of achieving worthwhile stakeholder involvement. However,

the process should be seen as an investment, resulting in more informed assessments and greater ownership of the results and applications.

2.20 More detailed information about approaches to stakeholder involvement, some of the methods which may be used, and practical examples of these approaches, can be found in **Topic Paper 3**. Practitioners embarking on a Landscape Character Assessment are urged to review this material and consider how they can involve the full constituency of stakeholders in their work.

## THE OUTPUTS FROM AN ASSESSMENT

2.21 All Landscape Character Assessments must clearly state their purpose. They should make a clear separation between the outputs from the characterisation process, and the outputs associated with making judgements to meet particular needs. This may be achieved by producing two separate reports or two parts of the same report.

### Outputs from characterisation (Stage 1) should:

- summarise the brief and indicate the scope of the study, including the role played by stakeholders and the intended audience;
- explain the methodology followed;
- include a contextual description of the study area;
- indicate how the assessment fits with other Landscape Character Assessments at larger and smaller scales and in adjacent administrative or geographical areas;
- include a clear map or maps, at an appropriate scale, showing

the extent of the landscape character types and/or areas identified;

- include clear and accurate descriptions of the landscape character of each type and/or area identified, avoiding value judgements;
- include photographs and illustrations, as appropriate, to illustrate the character being described;
- identify the key characteristics of each landscape type and/or area i.e. those combinations of elements that make a particular contribution to creating distinctive character.

### **Outputs associated with making judgements (Stage 2) should:**

- make fully transparent the approach adopted to making judgements, including the specific criteria used;
- explain the reasons for adopting a particular approach to making judgements;
- state who made the judgements and the role played by stakeholders;
- ensure that the judgements made are clearly linked to the results of the characterisation.

## **GOOD PRACTICE POINTERS**

- Landscape Character Assessments should make a clear distinction between:
  - **characterisation**, which is relatively value-free and is concerned with identifying, classifying and describing areas of distinctive character; and
  - **making judgements** to inform particular decisions, which may use one or a combination of approaches depending on the purpose of the exercise.
- Determine the appropriate level in the hierarchy which will suit the application of the work and provide the right scale and level of detail of information. Relate the findings to other levels in the hierarchy where appropriate.
- All characterisation must make a clear distinction between landscape character types and landscape character areas.
- Make clear at all stages the extent to which judgement (professional, stakeholder, political etc) is being applied in the methods used.
- Ensure that some element of stakeholder involvement is included, with appropriate time and resources identified early in the whole exercise. Stakeholder involvement is especially important at the local level and in informing judgements based on landscape character.

# CHAPTER 3

## DEFINING THE SCOPE (STEP 1)

### ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

3.1 The scope of an assessment must be defined at the outset to ensure that the work is effective. The checklist of questions in **Box 3.1** should help those embarking on an assessment, or those reviewing or using an existing assessment, to give proper consideration to its scope.

### PURPOSE AND AIMS

3.2 Landscape Character Assessments are now being used for a wide range of purposes (**para 1.15**). It is essential that the ultimate purpose be known as this will influence many aspects of how the assessment is carried out and the results used and disseminated. An assessment may, however, be undertaken for one specific purpose, but then be used for a wider range of uses. In other cases the initial purpose may simply be to provide a baseline inventory and description of landscape character, and only later will the outcome be applied for particular purposes. This is why it is so important to separate (value-free) characterisation from subsequent evaluative aspects where judgements are made to inform decisions.

### SCALE AND LEVEL OF DETAIL

3.3 The purpose of the work will determine the scale and level of detail that is appropriate. For example, it would be entirely inappropriate to make detailed housing allocations on the basis of

#### Box 3.1: Questions to ask in defining the scope of an assessment

##### Purpose and aims

- What are the purpose and aims of the assessment?

##### Scale and level of detail

- How should this assessment relate to other assessments in the hierarchy?
- At what scale should the assessment be carried out?
- What level of detail is required to meet the aims?
- Should landscape character types and/or areas be identified?

##### Making judgements

- What judgements need to be made to inform the purpose of the assessment?

##### People, resources and timing

- Who are the stakeholders and how and when should they be involved?
- What skills are needed?
- To what extent should GIS be used?
- How will the assessment reflect seasonal differences?

##### Outputs

- What form of character description is required?
- Will the description of character be kept separate from subsequent judgements about landscape character (to inform decisions)?
- What form will the outputs take - report(s), CD Rom, video, interactive web site?
- How will the assessment be updated?

*The Character of England* map [9] or SNH Level 3 map, as these do not provide the level of detail required. Several issues need to be addressed when making decisions about the appropriate scale and level of detail for an assessment. Careful thought is required as these matters will have a major effect on

the resources required and the costs of such work.

### Relationship to existing assessments

3.4 All new assessments should be designed to fit within the frameworks provided by the national landscape character programmes of

the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage. They should be explicit about their relationship with any existing landscape assessments at higher and lower levels in the hierarchy that cover the same area. Care is also needed to ensure that landscape character types and areas, as appropriate, join up seamlessly with areas across administrative boundaries.

### Scale

3.5 National or regional assessments have been carried out at 1:250,000 scale in England, with emphasis on broad patterns rather than on detail. In Scotland, the Landscape Character Assessment programme was carried out typically at 1:50,000 scale, working with local authorities across the country. This scale of data, and sometimes 1:25,000 scale, is also normally used at the 'local authority' level (e.g. county or district) in England. Work at the 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 scales has helped to inform development plans, conservation and enhancement strategies, strategic land use planning and other similar initiatives in both England and Scotland. Where greater detail is required, because of particular issues e.g. in areas of development pressure or in the allocation of housing sites, then work is usually carried out at 1:10,000 scale. However, this is time consuming and resource intensive and should only be used where a detailed local perspective is essential.

### Level of detail

3.6 The purpose will also help to determine the amount of information needed. Some applications only require a general description of character at the level of **landscape character types**,

allowing generic strategies or guidelines to be developed. Others may require more specific detail, dealing with individual **landscape character areas**, or even with the extent, nature and distribution of individual elements if, for example, the assessment is to be used as a baseline for monitoring change or is part of a detailed assessment of development options.

## MAKING JUDGEMENTS

3.7 The purpose of the work will determine how judgements should be made about landscape character to inform different decisions. Those who will be using the results of the assessment should be involved in preparing the brief for it. For example, in determining planning policies or preparing strategies and guidelines, thought must be given to how judgements will be made about what is appropriate in each landscape type and/or area. These topics are discussed in more detail in **Chapter 7**.

## PEOPLE, RESOURCES AND TIMING

3.8 It is important to judge the people and skills needed and time required to complete the Landscape Character Assessment. Skills and time inputs, together with the scale and level of detail of the work, ultimately determine the cost of an assessment. Even a relatively modest Landscape Character Assessment, involving a limited range of professional and stakeholder inputs, and not making use of GIS technology, can help inform policy-making in many situations.

### Stakeholder involvement

3.9 In defining the scope of an assessment, decisions will be needed about the nature of stake-

holder participation (see **Topic Paper 3** for details), including:

- the range of stakeholders to be involved;
- the stage of work they will contribute to;
- the methods to be used to secure their participation.

### Skills needed

3.10 Landscape Character Assessment requires inputs from a number of specialist areas, including landscape history and archaeology, ecology, agriculture, forestry and planning. It is important that the bulk of the work is carried out by a core team with complementary skills, such as a landscape specialist and a planner. They can carry out the majority of the desk study and field survey and keep an overview of the process and the products. Specialist inputs from others can then be introduced as necessary. GIS skills are also increasingly important, as are facilitation skills to support stakeholder involvement.

3.11 Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are playing a growing part in Landscape Character Assessment as tools in the process. Access to hardware and software, and the availability of digital data sets relevant to landscape character, have both improved. This means that it will become more commonplace for the different steps in Landscape Character Assessment to be carried out, to varying degrees, using GIS. The use of computer technology will largely depend on the scale at which the work is being carried out, the skills and resources available, and how much of the baseline data is already available in digital form. It is particularly helpful in handling different layers of mapped information which

may be at different scales and interrogating these for interrelationships. GIS also has the advantages of:

- allowing high quality presentation of mapped information;
- linking to databases and therefore providing a system for data storage, retrieval and analysis;
- providing a flexible output that can be updated and refined as more information becomes available.

3.12 Use of GIS and methods of computer analysis should not, however, be at the expense of proper consideration of the perceptual and aesthetic factors which influence character. Nor should it distract from the need to engage stakeholders in meaningful ways. Use of computer technology, including GIS, is reviewed in more detail in **Topic Paper 4**.

### Seasons and timing

3.13 Landscape changes with the seasons, both in its physical appearance and how it is perceived. Assessments should, as far as possible, cover more than one season and, at the very least, should not normally be undertaken in the dead of winter when days are short and light conditions are often unsuitable for survey and photography. Where it is unavoidable that the field survey is carried out in mid-winter, verification in other seasons should ideally be undertaken.

### OUTPUTS

3.14 To date Landscape Character Assessments have largely been produced in paper report format accompanied by maps at the appro-

priate scale. Reports will continue to be important but there are now opportunities to produce assessments in a variety of other formats. These include publishing on websites, on CD Roms and possibly on videos, all of which have the potential to make them more lively and accessible to a wider audience. The target audiences for the assessment will be a critical factor in deciding how the results should be produced and disseminated.

**Topic Paper 4** discusses the options more fully.

3.15 Producing an assessment in digital form on the internet or CD Rom greatly improves the ability to update the outputs on a regular basis. This is particularly the case when the whole dataset that underpins the assessment is published in this way, rather than just the digital equivalent of the report. Where resources are limited, the Agencies would prefer to see assessments treated in this way, as open-ended datasets with multiple layers, to which further information can be added over time as and when more information is available. There may still be a place for more traditional reports but they can be expensive to produce and inflexible in terms of using, applying and updating information.

3.16 Whatever the form of the output from an assessment it is still important that the summary results of the characterisation process - essentially a map of character types and/or areas and descriptions of their character - are kept separate from outputs involving judgements about landscape character to inform particular decisions.

### Getting the brief right

3.17 Whether the work is to be carried out by consultants or in-house, it is important that there is a clear brief. The brief should describe the scope of the study as accurately as possible, to provide a common reference point for all concerned. It should specify the scale of the work and the level of detail required, the nature of the decisions the assessment is required to inform, and the nature and extent of stakeholder involvement, distinguishing between communities of interest and communities of place. A well-informed brief should also ensure that adequate resources are allocated for the task, either in terms of staff employed and supporting resources made available by public bodies, or number of person days allowed by consultants.

3.18 A preliminary field visit should be undertaken during the preparation of the brief, or at least in the very early stage of the assessment. This will allow those involved to become familiar with the nature of the landscape, to understand its geography and to gain a general impression of variations in character. Such a visit will make a brief more realistic, and can also assist in practical tasks such as designing tailored record sheets for use in the main field survey, ensuring that they are appropriate to the particular character of the landscape in question.

## **GOOD PRACTICE POINTERS**

In planning a Landscape Character Assessment consideration must be given to:

- the purpose and aims of the assessment;
- the scale and level of detail required;
- how judgements will be made to inform relevant decisions;
- the people, skills and resources required;
- the time available to undertake the task;
- the nature of the outputs needed.

All of these will in turn influence the cost of the exercise.



# CHAPTER 4

## DESK STUDY (STEP 2)

### INTRODUCTION

4.1 Desk study focuses on information gathering to provide the context for a Landscape Character Assessment. It involves the preparation of map overlays of different landscape factors as the basis for defining areas of common character which can then be checked in the field. The interaction between the desk study and field survey will be iterative, with the field survey highlighting questions that need to be informed by further desk study. The desk study stage focuses and informs the field survey and provides a crucial information base. Practitioners need to ensure that sufficient time is devoted to this work before starting detailed field work.

### INFORMATION GATHERING

4.2 Information that should be reviewed includes:

- past character descriptions of the area;
- designations and their distribution, for example:
  - landscape designations,
  - historic parks and gardens, and designed landscapes,
  - Conservation Areas,
  - scheduled monuments and listed buildings

- battlefields,
- SACs, SPAs, NNRs, SSSIs and non-statutory Wildlife Sites;
- literature on:
  - geology,
  - local architecture,
  - archaeology,
  - history and wildlife (including the relevant Natural Area Profiles, available from English Nature<sup>3</sup>; Biodiversity Action Plans; and the relevant Natural Heritage Prospectuses, to be called 'Natural Heritage Futures'<sup>4</sup>;
- relevant policies in public and formal documents such as:
  - statutory development plans,
  - countryside strategies,
  - forestry and woodland strategies,
  - tourism strategies.

It will also be important to review relevant Landscape Character Assessments including those covering the area but undertaken for a different purpose, those covering surrounding areas and, in England, the relevant descriptions of countryside character areas [39-46], and the national landscape typologies<sup>5</sup>, which provide the

framework for more local assessments.

### MAP ANALYSIS AND PREPARATION OF MAP OVERLAYS

4.3 Analysis of map and related information (**Box 4.1**) and aerial photographs, contributes to an understanding of the 'bird's eye' view of landscape and is essential in deciding how the different factors which shape the landscape come together and interact to create patterns of landscape character. As discussed in more detail below, map overlays ideally should encompass:

#### Natural factors

- geology;
- landform;
- river and drainage systems;
- soils;
- land cover (including semi-natural vegetation).

#### Cultural/social factors

- land use (including farm types);
- settlement pattern;
- patterns of field enclosure;
- 'time depth' - the historic dimension of the landscape.

4.4 Where resources are limited and time is short, the desk study may need to be limited to an

<sup>3</sup> More information on Natural Area Profiles is available from English Nature Local Teams. Local team addresses may be obtained via the English Nature website at [www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk) or by contacting the Enquiry Service on Tel: 01733 455100 or email at [enquiries@english-nature.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@english-nature.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> See [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk) for information on the national landscape character dataset and Natural Heritage Futures

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the national landscape typologies see [www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk) and [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)



**Box 4.1: Sources of information for desk study**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Potential Sources</b>
Geology	British Geological Survey Data (1:50,000 or 1:63,360)
Landform	Ordnance Survey Data (1:50,000 Land Ranger Map Series) (1:25,000 Pathfinder Map Series)
Soils	Soil Survey Data (1:250,000) Soil Survey Reports
Vegetation	Land Cover Map of Scotland Phase I Habitat Surveys Natural Area Profiles (England) Natural Heritage Futures (Scotland)
Trees/Woodland	Ordnance Survey Data (1:50,000 Land Ranger Map Series) Aerial Photographs Forestry Commission woodland inventory Ancient woodland inventories Historical data and maps
Land Use and enclosure/field patterns	Historical data and maps and Estate Plans Land Cover Map 2000 MAFF Agricultural Land Classification 2nd Land Utilisation Survey Aerial Photographs Ordnance Survey Data (1:25,000 Pathfinder Map Series)
Settlement Patterns	Historical data and maps Historical Landscape Character Studies Rural Settlement Atlas (England) [47] Ordnance Survey Data (1:50,000 Land Ranger Map Series)

**Notes**

1) The word data is used in this table, and in the following text to refer to both the published maps and digital data that may be available from the different sources.

2) Useful sources of historical information, including historical data and old aerial photographs, include: in England, local authority Sites and Monuments Records, about half of which also have Historic Landscape Characterisation information; English Heritage's Record Centre at Swindon (formerly the RCHME); the National Library of Scotland; the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS); and the Scottish National Archive.

assessment of geology, landform, land cover and settlement distribution. In these cases the opportunity should be taken to update and amplify the data collected, especially in terms of the historic dimension, when time and resources become available.

4.5 In preparing map overlays it is usually best to interpret the raw information to emphasise those aspects which are really influential in determining landscape character. For example, contours on Ordnance Survey (OS) data must be interpreted into landform units such as valleys, plateaus, scarps, rolling hills or mountain peaks, and land use categories should be derived from data about farm types or from land use or land cover surveys.

## Natural Factors

4.6 **Geological Information** is normally derived from data produced by the British Geological Survey (BGS), especially those covering drift deposits but also those dealing with solid geology. The national level data at 1:625,000 scale are appropriate for working at the national scale, while intermediate work should use the 1:50,000 (or 1:63,360) scale data and accompanying reports in the British Regional Geology series. For more detailed assessments, data are available for most of the country at 1:10,000 (or 1:10,560) scale. The BGS is constantly updating its survey information and should be contacted for the most up-to-date material. It holds good digital data for use on GIS. A clear understanding of the way in which different geological formations influenced the landscape will assist greatly in deriving a simplified map overlay of geology.

4.7 **Landform** is often one of the main influences on landscape character, especially in hill and upland areas. The basic source of information is OS data at 1:50,000, or sometimes 1:25,000 scale, which provide contour information.

There are several ways of analysing landform. The most common is to produce a coloured map of contour intervals, which helps to isolate the contour information from the other material on the maps, or in the digital data, and to bring out clearly the topographical variation in the area. Slope and aspect analysis can also assist with this type of analysis. If digital OS data is available then some form of computer analysis, for example, using a digital terrain model, can achieve the same results. If time permits stereoscopic study of aerial photographs can also be helpful in understanding landform.

4.8 **Rivers and drainage systems** also have an important part to play in shaping the landscape. The extent of original river floodplains can be determined from the areas of alluvium shown on maps produced by the British Geological Survey (BGS). Information about watercourses can be obtained from OS data, although for more complex matters, such as the definition of main rivers or levels of pollution, which may be relevant in detailed work, advice must be sought from the Environment Agency or the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.

4.9 Landform and drainage information can usefully be combined to reveal distinct topographical areas, such as rolling hills, plateaus, broad valleys, narrow valleys, or scarp slopes, which can then be mapped as **landform units**. They are often

closely related to the underlying geology and so these map overlays can sometimes be combined. These units define the physical 'skeleton' of the landscape while soils and vegetation provide the 'flesh' on the skeleton's bones.

4.10 **Soil types** can be derived from Soil Survey data, but these again usually require a considerable degree of interpretation to derive the relevant categories which are most important in influencing character. Other useful information can be gained from DEFRA's Agricultural Land Classification maps.

4.11 **Vegetation cover** relies on a variety of information sources which are sometimes difficult to simplify to an appropriate level of detail. A map overlay of vegetation cover will be important where semi-natural vegetation is extensive. Information sources include:

- **Phase I Habitat Surveys**, prepared by English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, County Councils and Wildlife Trusts, which are at 1:10,000 scale and sometimes may be too detailed for landscape characterisation. Wildlife Trusts may also be able to provide other ecological survey information.
- **Land Cover Map of Scotland**, prepared by the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, which is a 1:50,000 map derived from Aerial Photographic Interpretation, providing detailed information on land cover types.
- **Natural Area Profiles**, prepared by English Nature, which contain some mapped information about the distribution of habitats.

- **Land Cover Map 2000**, produced by the Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) as part of the Countryside Survey 2000, available in digital form from the CEH, Monkswood.
- **Natural Heritage Futures**, developed by SNH with a series of Prospectuses covering all biodiversity and landscape aspects of the 21 zones across Scotland, launched and published in March 2002 as Natural Heritage Futures, available from SNH publications and its website.

4.12 **Tree cover** information can be found in several sources. The Forestry Commission's *Inventory of Woodlands and Trees* (1995-ongoing) can be obtained in digital form from the Forestry Commission. This maps at 1:25,000 scale the extent and type of all woodlands over two hectares in England and Scotland, based on interpretation of OS data and aerial photographs and ground truthing within random sample squares. Ancient Woodland Inventories (obtainable from English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Wildlife Trusts) provide details of woodland origin. Alternatively OS 1:50,000 data provide basic information on types, areas and distribution of woodland and allow **woodland cover categories** (which in lowland areas may be combined with patterns of enclosure) to be interpreted and mapped. These might, for example, include categories such as 'sparsely wooded', 'many small woods and copses', or 'heavily wooded'. When more detailed information on tree cover is required, for example on field and hedgerow trees, aerial photographic

interpretation may be needed, using land cover analysis techniques. This is time-consuming, however, and only likely to be useful where a very detailed level of assessment is required.

### Cultural factors

4.13 The influence of human activity makes a major contribution to the character of the British landscape. There are three main dimensions to this:

- land use and management;
- the character of settlements and buildings;
- pattern and type of fields and enclosure.

4.14 The character of the British landscape is particularly influenced by the contemporary pattern of these factors, but the 'time-depth' dimension of the landscape is also very important. Virtually all landscape in Britain has been transformed by human activity and it is important to understand past patterns, the extent to which they have survived, and how different stages in history have contributed to the current landscape character.

4.15 Map information on **land use** can be obtained from a variety of sources including those listed under vegetation cover. Aerial photographs provide contemporary information but are time-consuming and expensive to interpret (although the Land Cover Map of Scotland provides information about land use which is already in map form, even though it is based on interpretation of aerial photographs). Remotely sensed information like the DEFRA/CEH Land Cover Map 2000 gives a detailed digital picture and is sufficiently accurate for intermediate studies and local studies. The 1941

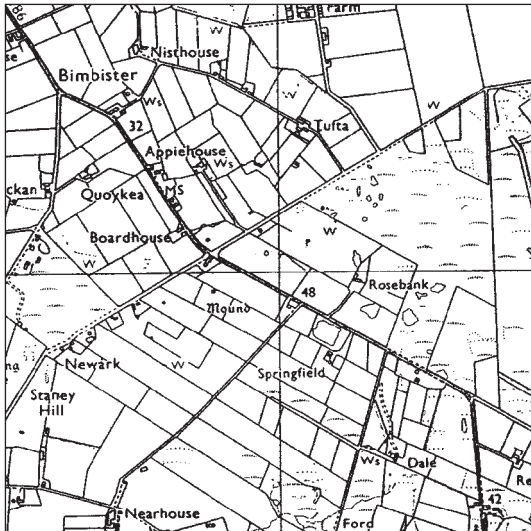
reports of Dudley Stamp's *Land Utilisation Survey of Britain* [48] give a pre-war picture of land use and can sometimes be used to indicate the land use of an area before the dramatic post-war changes in agriculture took place. Information from DEFRA Agricultural Census data are valuable for indicating current agricultural land use patterns.

4.16 **Settlement patterns** in England need to be seen in the context of the national framework prepared by Roberts and Wrathmell of Durham University, published as an Atlas (of England) in 2001 [47]. Locally, patterns can also be mapped from 1:50,000 OS data.

4.17 **Patterns of field enclosure** can be interpreted from 1:25,000 OS data and from aerial photographs, again using land cover analysis. Map analysis, however, only provides an understanding of the contemporary patterns of settlement and enclosure without the important 'time-depth' dimension of their historical origins.

4.18 Field systems and settlements are often intimately linked and together contribute to distinctive regional patterns in the landscape, notably the well-known division between ancient and planned landscapes in England [49]. In areas where a small holding economy existed, such as the North Pennines, Cornwall, or the crofting areas of Scotland, numerous small dwellings are linked with small field enclosures. Conversely, Parliamentary enclosures, often referred to as 'planned landscapes', are characterised by isolated farms, with a geometric pattern of fields and roads laid out by surveyors. All these linkages and patterns make

**Figure 4.1: Field patterns**

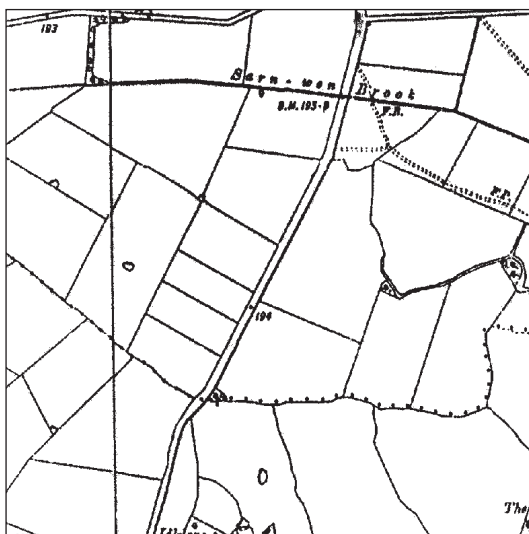


Crofters Field Pattern, Hannay, Orkney

(Source: 1:25,000 OS map)

Medieval Field Pattern, (Ancient Landscape) of irregular small fields or closes surrounded by thick hedgerows or wooded shaws, High Weald, East Sussex.

(Source: 1st Edition OS map).



Enclosure Field Pattern, (Planned Landscape), of grid-iron layout, nr. Haughton, Shropshire

(Source: 1st Edition OS map )

important contributions to landscape character (**Figure 4.1**).

### Understanding the historic dimension

4.19 To understand the ‘time-depth’ aspects of landscape requires expert analysis. The age of enclosures can be interpreted from field shape and pattern but only by a trained eye. In England, the method of Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) developed by English Heritage [50, 51] and, in Scotland, the method of Historic Landuse Assessment (HLA) developed by Historic Scotland and the RCAHMS [52], provide much greater understanding of the historic dimension of landscape character.

4.20 Historic Landscape (or Land Use) Characterisation is a freestanding GIS-based tool, separate from Landscape Character Assessment, for characterising the historic dimension of the landscape. It provides an historic landscape context to individual sites and monuments and links to broader landscape characterisation (**Figure 4.2**). It can take place either before, or in parallel with a Landscape Character Assessment, but increasingly the benefits of

integrating the two approaches together are being realised. A study which combines Landscape Character Assessment with a historic assessment using the approaches referred to above, is likely to be the most satisfactory. Further details of the current historic landscape characterisation initiatives in England and Scotland are contained in **Topic Paper 5**.

4.21 At present Historic Landscape Characterisation in England and Historic Landuse Assessment in Scotland, cover sizeable areas of both countries. Where they do exist they can make invaluable contributions to Landscape Character Assessments. Where they do not, the ‘time-depth’ dimension of landscape character will not be fully recognised or appreciated. Landscape historians, archaeologists or historical geographers may be able to provide a narrative contribution on the evolution of the landscape but this will fall short of the contribution of a full HLC/HLA. Ideally the gap should be filled by carrying out a full study but this may, due to practical constraints, have to come after the Landscape Character Assessment has been completed.

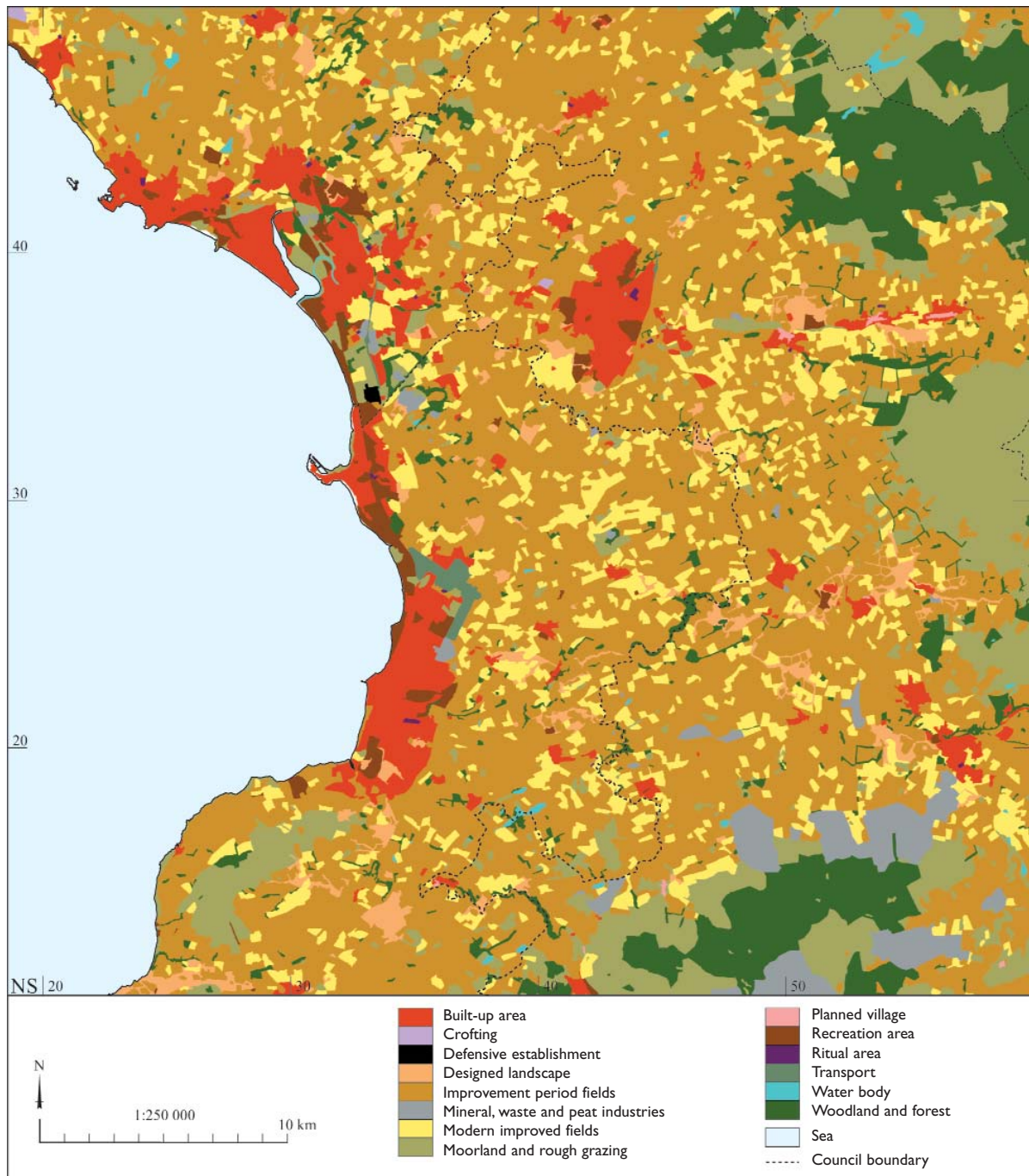
## COMBINING MAP OVERLAYS

4.22 Once finalised, the different map overlays (**Figure 4.3**) are combined to begin the process of identifying **areas of common character** to be tested and validated in the field. These overlays should suggest clear correlations between different factors and allow areas of potentially similar character to be identified. This work may be done manually and judged by eye, although increasingly GIS and other computerised methods of data handling are being used to help in the process.

4.23 The level of breakdown achieved at this stage will depend on the brief, the nature of the map information collected, and the character of the landscape itself. In some cases a pattern of draft landscape character types may be obvious and their subdivision into tentative character areas may be possible. In other cases no distinctive patterns may immediately emerge and the starting point for the field work will be a simple map of areas for survey that it is anticipated may have distinct character.



**Figure 4.2: Historic Landuse Assessment, Ayrshire**

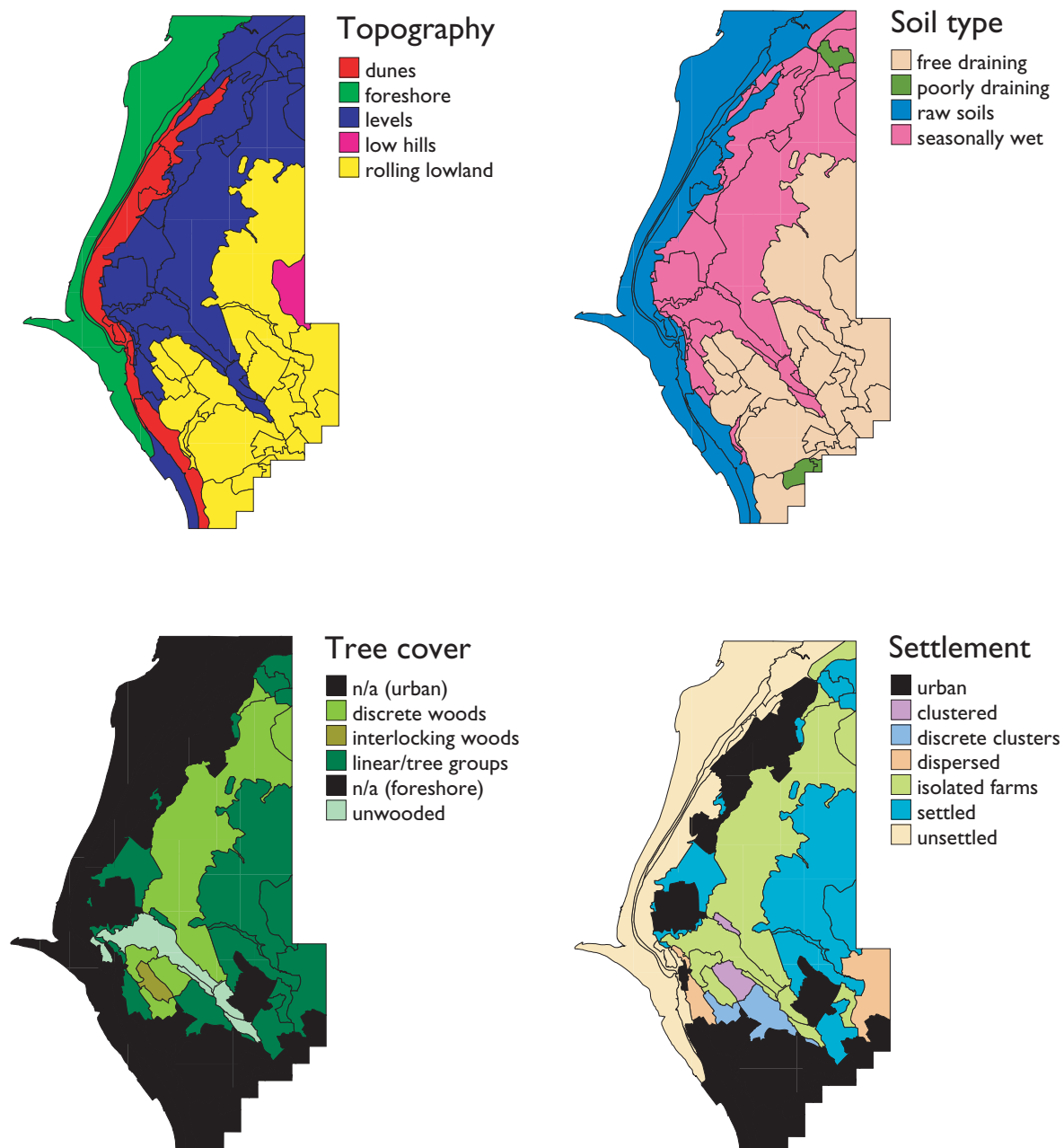


© Crown Copyright: RCAHMS; HS; OS.

The Historic Landuse Assessment of the central part of Ayrshire, highlighting the historic landuse categories into which the historic landuse types are grouped, and the modern changes (depicted in yellow) in the pattern of rectilinear improvement period fields.

Source: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) with the help of the West of Scotland Archaeological Services and the Joint Ayrshire Structure Plan Team (2001).

**Figure 4.3: Map overlays from Sefton Landscape Assessment**



Source: Warnock, S. and Parker, A. (1999) Sefton Landscape Assessment. Sefton Borough Council, Sefton.

## **GOOD PRACTICE POINTERS**

### **Importance of desk study**

Desk study should always be undertaken at the outset of a Landscape Character Assessment. Without it the subsequent field survey is likely to be unfocused and wasteful of resources. The aim should be to build up a database of background material and, critically, to create a series of map overlays covering, at a minimum, geology, landform, land cover and settlement pattern. Combining these map overlays should provide a basis for identifying areas of similar character (draft landscape character types and/or areas) which can subsequently be tested and amended in the field.

### **Use of GIS**

GIS can be very valuable in helping to amalgamate map overlays to identify draft landscape character types and/or areas and subsequently to amend and confirm these once field survey has been carried out. GIS has the advantages of being able to link to databases of information and of providing flexibility, allowing both data and outputs to be updated as new information comes to light.

### **Taking account of the historic dimension**

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) in England and Historic Landuse Assessment (HLA) in Scotland are separate freestanding methodologies for understanding the 'time-depth' dimension of landscape. These approaches provide a valuable addition to Landscape Character Assessment. Ideally they should be integrated with a Landscape Character Assessment to provide the historic dimension of the landscape. Alternatively they can be undertaken before, or in parallel to the Landscape Character Assessment in which case they can provide an invaluable input to the desk study. Where circumstances are such that a historic assessment must be undertaken subsequently, it will serve to amplify and strengthen an existing assessment.

### **Updating**

Where resources are limited, the Agencies suggest that assessments are treated as open-ended in order that further information can be added over time, as resources allow.



# CHAPTER 5

## FIELD SURVEY (STEP 3)

### INTRODUCTION

5.1 Field survey provides the important ground level view that shows how the landscape is seen by people. It can also identify key elements or features that are not apparent from the desk study, and it can help to record aesthetic and perceptual qualities of the area. For very large areas, there will be more reliance on desk study, combined with limited field survey, largely for verification purposes. When the area is small, more comprehensive field survey will usually be required. For assessments of local authority areas or equivalent, the aim should be to survey each of the areas identified in the desk study as likely to have homogeneous character - that is the draft landscape character types and/or areas.

### PLANNING THE FIELD SURVEY

5.2 Careful planning of the field survey is essential to ensure efficient use of time and resources. The aim should be to move through the study area, visiting all of the draft landscape character types and/or areas and recording a range of information about them. Routes should be planned to achieve this, and in each area around three points should be selected to give a representative view of the landscape. Each point should be publicly accessible and be firmly within the area in question. For example, it is often tempting to select high points or panoramic viewpoints because of the expansive views which they offer. Such

points often give views over several different types of landscape and so can confuse the survey, although they can be useful for orientation and to provide a general overview, and for verification and refinement of landscape character type or area boundaries.

5.3 Experience has shown that surveys are best carried out in pairs. This certainly helps with the practicalities of navigating and recording at the same time and encourages a consensus to be reached about reactions to the landscape. Ideal pairings for such work would be two landscape professionals, who will be used to taking a broad overview of the landscape, or one landscape professional working with an ecologist or an archaeologist or landscape historian, who will have specific knowledge of an aspect of the landscape. In a perfect world all three or more might work together.

### RECORDING INFORMATION IN THE FIELD

5.4 The purpose of detailed field survey is to collect as much information as is necessary to:

- describe the character;
- identify aesthetic and perceptual qualities;
- assist in final decisions about division into character types and areas;
- update and expand the database of desk study information;

- contribute to the process of making judgements about the future of the landscape.

5.5 Information should be recorded on a field record sheet designed specifically for the purpose. This encourages surveyors to make systematic observations and to record them in a consistent way. The contents of the **field survey sheet (Figure 5.1)** should normally include space for:

- a written description of the character observed at particular points or in certain areas;
- an annotated sketch;
- a checklist of landscape elements and their significance;
- a checklist of aesthetic and perceptual factors;
- space for observations about the condition, sensitivity and management needs of the landscape.

The space allowed for these may vary according to circumstances and record sheets must be individually tailored for each assessment.

5.6 A brief **written description** recorded in the field should capture the overall impression of landscape character. It should incorporate information about the elements that make up the landscape and the way that they interact together, and about the aesthetic and perceptual characteristics of the landscape. It is better to write too much, rather than too little at this stage, as these descriptions will be an invaluable

Figure 5.1: Example field survey sheets

## ERM LANDSCAPE TEAM-FIELD SURVEY FORM - Salisbury Plain Army Training Estate.

Viewpoint No: 5 (EAST)

Location: SIBBURY HILL  
[LOOKING SOUTH EAST]

Date: 14/02/01

Sketch: VIEW SOUTH EAST TO TIDWORTH.

Panoramic Photo Nos: FILM 2 - 19+10

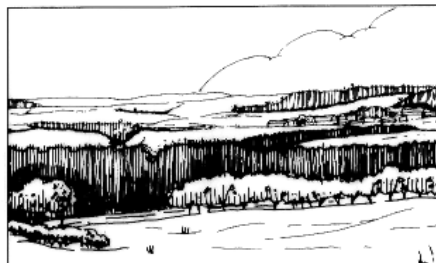
Landscape Character Type: WOODED CHALK DOWNLAND (4)

Landscape Character Area: PERHAM - MILSTON DOWN

Geology: UPPER CHALK FORMATION

## Topography:

flat	plain	dry valley
undulating	rolling lowland	deep gorge
rolling	plateau	broad valley
steep	scarp/ cliffs	narrow valley
vertical	hills	



## Dominant landcover and landscape elements:

<b>BUILDINGS:</b> farm buildings masts/ poles pylons industry settlement urban folies military	<b>HERITAGE:</b> vernacular buildings country house field systems prehistoric ritual hill top enclosure/ fort ecclesiastic monuments of war coppice	<b>FARMING:</b> walls fences hedges fields arable improved pasture rough grazing hedge banks orchard	<b>LANDCOVER:</b> designed parkland scrub marsh peat bog moor/ heath rough grassland water meadows grassland species rich grassland	<b>WOODLAND/ TREES:</b> deciduous woodland coniferous plantation mixed woodland shelterbelt hedge trees orchard clumps isolated trees	<b>Hydrology:</b> river stream reservoir dry valley winterbourne pond lake drainage ditch	<b>COMMUNICATIONS:</b> road track footpath lane railway military pylons communication masts
--	---	---	--	---	---	---

**Brief description:** (including main elements, features, attractors and detractors) GENTLE DOWNLAND TOPOGRAPHY DISSECTED BY NINE MILE RIVER CONTAINING SETTLEMENT. EXTENSIVE WOODLAND + SCRUB INTERSPERSED WITH OPEN AREAS OF PASTURE + ARABLE FARMING. HIGHTOP VIEWS. CONCENTRATIONS OF PREHISTORIC BARROWS ESP. ON NINE MILE RIVER. MILITARY INFRASTRUCTURE LESS CONSPICUOUS THAN ON RAIN. KEY LONG/ MIDDLE DISTANCE VIEWS TO TIDWORTH/ BEACON HILL. SENSE OF ENCLOSURE IN VALLEY.

**Key Characteristics/Distinctive Features and why they are important:** UNDULATING LANDFORM + BALANCE OF OPEN AND WOODED AREAS IMPORTANT TO CONTRASTING EXPERIENCE. LOCATION OF BARROWS INDICATES IMPORTANCE OF NINE MILE RIVER TO PREHISTORIC COMMUNITIES.

## Rarity:

NOT RARE. BARROWS + SETTING IMPORTANT FEATURE.

## Condition:

GOOD. EXISTING BALANCE OF WOODLAND TO OPEN AREAS MAINTAINED BY WOODLAND MANAGEMENT + FARMING.

## Visual Assessment Criteria:

<b>PATTERN (2 Dimensional):</b>	dominant	strong	broken	weak
<b>SCALE:</b>	intimate	small	medium	large
<b>TEXTURE:</b>	smooth	textured	rough	very rough
<b>COLOUR:</b>	monochrome	muted	colourful	garish
<b>COMPLEXITY:</b>	uniform	simple	diverse	complex
<b>REMOTENESS:</b>	wild	remote	vacant	active
<b>UNITY:</b>	unified	interrupted	fragmented	chaotic
<b>FORM (3 Dimensional):</b>	straight	angular	curved	sinuous
<b>ENCLOSURE:</b>	expansive	open	enclosed	constrained
<b>VISUAL DYNAMIC:</b>	sweeping	spreading	dispersed	channelled

## Perception:

<b>SECURITY:</b>	intimate	comfortable	safe	unsettling	threatening
<b>STIMULUS:</b>	monotonous	bland	interesting	challenging	inspiring
<b>TRANQUILLITY:</b>	inaccessible	remote	vacant	peaceful	busy
<b>PLEASURE:</b>	unpleasant	pleasant	attractive	beautiful	

Architecture: (Note condition/ quality) NOTES APPLY TO TIDWORTH

Local Materials - (stone type, colour/ texture etc, brick (colour/ size/ render) /

Combinations - (stone and brick patterns etc) /

Vernacular Style (window style/ roof pitch) /

Settlement Form (village greens, clustered, military, scattered)

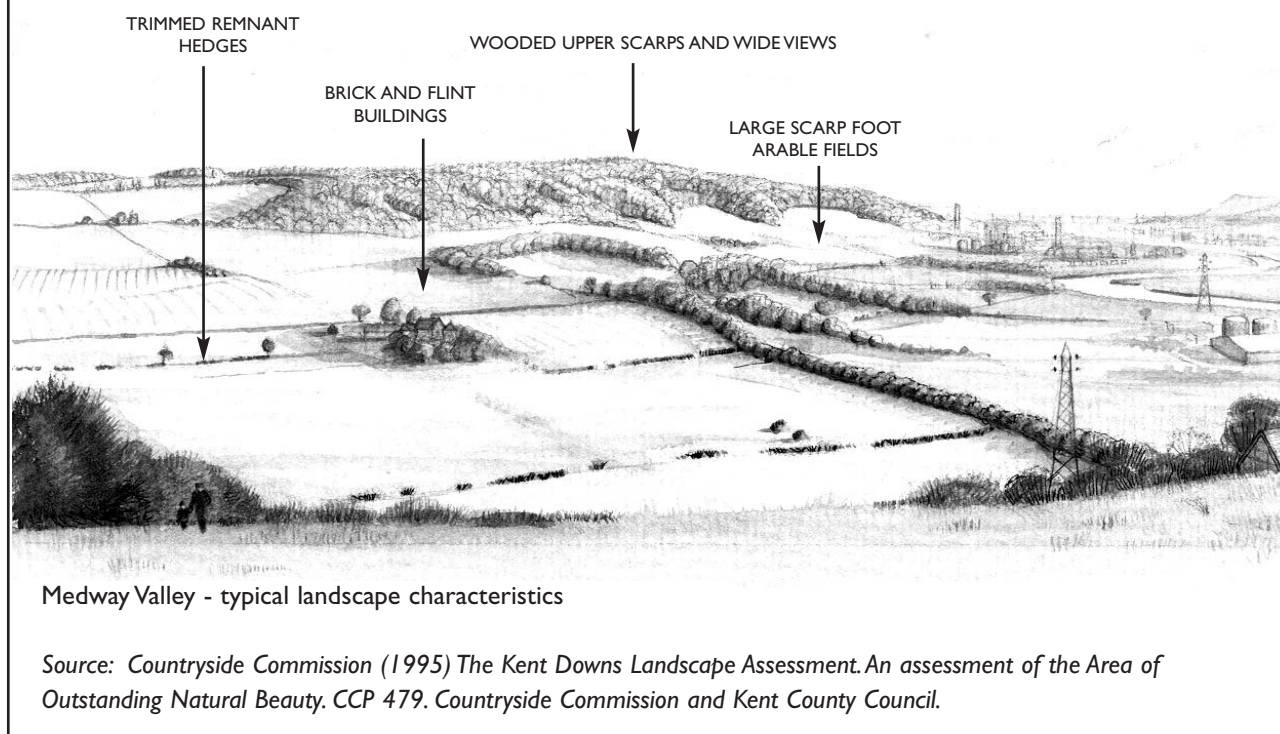
MODERN MILITARY DEVELOPMENT ON GRID PATTERN SURROUNDING HISTORIC (MEDIEVAL) CORE OF WINDING STREETS

Additional Comments: (Note evidence of pollution, erosion, bare or disturbed ground, condition of historic features, new planting, restoration work.

NO

Forms can be adapted to reflect the scale of work, level of detail and local names of features. For example, in Scotland the term 'narrow valley' might be replaced by 'glen' and 'lake' by 'loch'. The groupings may also vary between forms. If perceptual aspects are addressed, they should be developed with a full range of stakeholders.

Source: ERM (2001) Salisbury Plain Army Training Estate Landscape Character Assessment. For Defence Estates.

**Figure 5.2: Composite illustration**

source when preparing generalised descriptions for inclusion in final reports.

**5.7 Checklists**, which can be used for both landscape elements and aesthetic and perceptual factors, can be an important aide memoir for surveyors. They are simply a tool to encourage those who are carrying out the assessment to look carefully and rigorously at the landscape they are dealing with. They are certainly not a method of assessment in themselves and standard checklists should not generally be used as each situation is different. They can be very simple and selective, or they can be more complex, dealing for example with how conspicuous different elements are in the landscape.

**5.8 Annotated sketches** are also helpful components of field

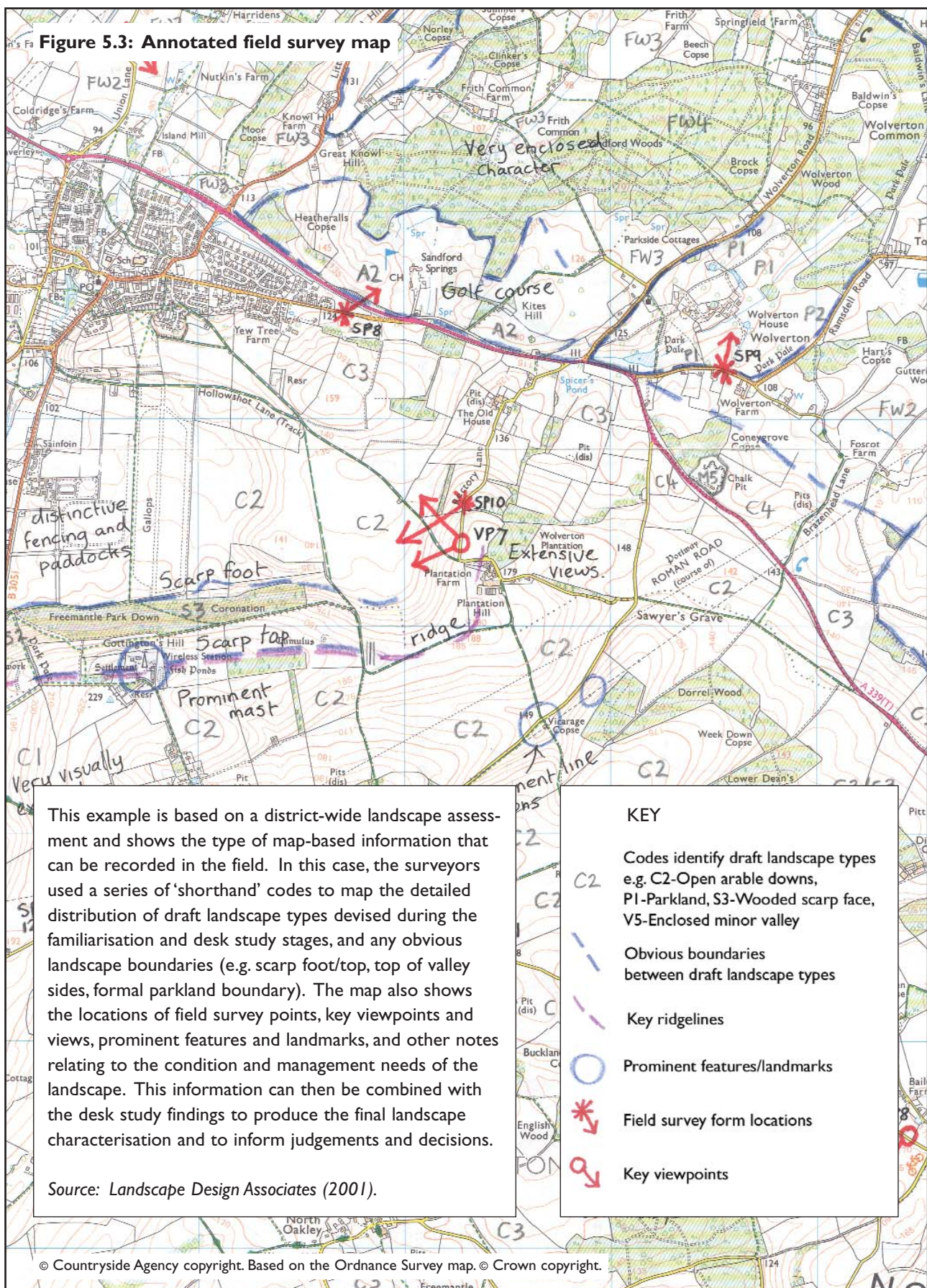
recording and are particularly useful for conveying information about exactly how different elements of the landscape interact together - for example, woodlands marking breaks of slope or hedges accentuating landform. They can also be used to create composite 'typical' sketches or drawings to illustrate descriptions of landscape character in final reports (**Figure 5.2**).

**5.9 Photographs** should be taken at each survey point and provide an important supplementary record and point of reference once the survey is completed. Use of a tripod, though more time consuming, will improve the quality of the photographs and make them more useful for both future reference and illustrative purposes. They should be numbered, annotated and referenced to maps of the routes taken and the points

surveyed. The aim should be to record the variations in character, not just the most scenic views, and to create a record of typical aspects of landscape character in an area. Detailed photographs of particular elements, such as stiles or dry stone walls or details of vernacular building styles, may also be useful.

**5.10** To supplement the formal field survey record it can also be helpful to produce an **annotated map** of the area. This is particularly important for detailed surveys of small areas, such as a parish or estate, where records of key features, views, boundary features, edges and other specific elements may be required. However, it can also help with larger scale surveys, for example at a district level, where it is useful to record more detailed or subtle variations in landscape character that may not





be evident from the desk study information and cannot easily be conveyed by the use of selected field survey forms alone. Surveyors can, therefore, annotate maps to show:

- refinements in the boundaries of draft landscape character types and areas, including more detailed variations in landscape character that should be reflected in the assessment;
- routes taken and the location of survey points and key viewpoints;
- prominent or notable features;
- any other information which is specific to a location but may be relevant to the survey as a whole, such as information relating to the condition of features and elements and the management needs of the landscape.

An example of an annotated field survey map used in a district-wide assessment is shown in **Figure 5.3**.

## DEALING WITH AESTHETIC AND PERCEPTUAL ASPECTS

5.11 Survey methods can deal relatively easily with recording the different elements that make up

landscape character and their relative significance. They can be incorporated into checklists of the type described above, and can be woven into factual, objective, written descriptions. It is important, however, to give equal attention to the more experiential aspects of the landscape covering aesthetic and perceptual dimensions of landscape character.

### Aesthetic aspects

5.12 Some of the more aesthetic aspects of landscape character can still be recorded in a rigorous and systematic, if not wholly objective or value-free, way. **Box 5.1** lists the range of aspects that might be covered here and the adjectives that might be used to describe them. This list is by no means comprehensive and some surveyors may wish to introduce a different and wider range of words to meet their needs. Such information can be recorded, using a suitable checklist, by incorporating suitable adjectives into written descriptions, and by ensuring that appropriate annotations are added to sketches or photographs. Aesthetic factors will be particularly important if the assessment is to be used to influence design decisions, such as the siting and design of new woodlands

for example. The Forestry Commission's guidelines on landscape assessment for use in Indicative Forestry Strategies [53] contains a descriptive vocabulary for use in describing some of these aesthetic aspects of landscape in a rigorous and standardised way (summarised in **Box 5.2**).

5.13 If more detail is required about aesthetic factors, perhaps to help in design, then separate notes can be made on the record sheets about matters such as balance, scale, colour, diversity, texture and so on. It is essential to indicate how specific landscape elements contribute to these aesthetic characteristics - for example, enclosure may result from the presence of woodlands or from landform, while unity in the landscape may come from the consistent use of building materials in features like walls and vernacular buildings.

### Perceptual aspects

5.14 Other aspects of landscape perception may be more subjective and responses to them might be more personal and coloured by the experience of the individual. Such factors include a sense of wildness, sense of security, the quality of light and perceptions of beauty or scenic attractiveness. There are also some factors that can be perceived or experienced by senses other than sight, such as noisiness or tranquillity and exposure to the elements. Judgements about all these, and other relevant perceptions, need to be incorporated into surveys in a transparent way, acknowledging the extent of subjectivity that is involved. Both checklists and written descriptions can be used to record responses in the field. It should be noted that even in these areas of perception, an element of objectivity can inform such judge-

#### Box 5.1: Aesthetic aspects of landscape character

<b>SCALE</b>	Intimate	Small	Large	Vast
<b>ENCLOSURE</b>	Tight	Enclosed	Open	Exposed
<b>DIVERSITY</b>	Uniform	Simple	Diverse	Complex
<b>TEXTURE</b>	Smooth	Textured	Rough	Very rough
<b>FORM</b>	Vertical	Sloping	Rolling	Horizontal
<b>LINE</b>	Straight	Angular	Curved	Sinuous
<b>COLOUR</b>	Monochrome	Muted	Colourful	Garish
<b>BALANCE</b>	Harmonious	Balanced	Discordant	Chaotic
<b>MOVEMENT</b>	Dead	Still	Calm	Busy
<b>PATTERN</b>	Random	Organised	Regular	Formal



### Box 5.2: Some of the aesthetic factors in Landscape Character Assessments

#### Balance and Proportion

The relative quantities of different elements within the view affect balance and proportion. Criteria such as a 1/3 to 2/3 relationship (rule of thirds) can be used to assess how well balanced the landscape is in aesthetic terms. Temporal effects should be considered. Proportions may change with the seasonal addition or loss of elements.

#### Scale

Here the overall scale of the landscape must be assessed once the factors that define it have been established. These include the degree of enclosure by landform or woodland and the main positions from which the landscape is viewed - scale increases with elevation and distance. Scale is closely related to balance, proportion and enclosure.

#### Enclosure

Where elements are arranged so that they enclose space, this has an effect on the overall composition so that the space and mass become as one. It also has a great effect on scale due to the interaction of the height of the enclosing elements and the distance between them.

#### Texture

This varies according to scale, but can be defined in relative terms as coarse, intermediate or fine. Texture is determined by crops, tree cover, size of trees, species, size of fields, etc. It is an important contributor to design unity and diversity, susceptible to change by addition or loss of elements.

#### Colour

This refers to the dominant colours of fields, woodlands, the built environment and other landscape elements. It includes any notable seasonal effects due to farming activity and seasonal change.

#### Diversity

This needs to be assessed in two ways. First, within the boundaries of the landscape type the minor variations of the landscape should be assessed to determine overall how uniform or diverse the landscape is. Second, the diversity of a typical composition should be evaluated. Additionally, trends for change should be borne in mind, that is whether the degree of diversity is increasing or decreasing.

#### Unity

The repetition of similar elements, balance and proportion, scale and enclosure, all contribute to unity. The degree to which contrasting elements disrupt a composition depends also on the context. For example a single quarry in the midst of an otherwise unified landscape pattern may cause a high degree of discontinuity.

#### Form

This term describes the shapes of fields, woods, of linear features, of landform. e.g. rectangular, curvilinear, rounded, flat, etc. It is a very important factor in defining ancient or planned landscapes. We pick out forms and shapes very quickly, often on slight evidence.

*Source: Based on Forest Authority England (1992) Forest Authority Guidelines on landscape assessment for Indicative Forestry Strategies. Unpublished draft, as in CCP 423, Countryside Commission.*

ments. Remoteness for example, which is an important dimension of wildness, can be assessed by measurements of accessibility and absence of settlement, while the Tranquil Areas Maps in England, available from the Council for the Protection of Rural England, are

based on the application of a range of criteria which can be measured. Any consensus views gained through the involvement of stakeholders can also play an important part in indicating the importance of these perceptions of landscape, which make such a key contribution

to character (see **Topic Paper 3**). Stakeholders will often have special knowledge about an area which will mean that their perceptions are influenced by particular associations which a landscape may have.

## CONTRIBUTION OF FIELD SURVEY TO MAKING JUDGEMENTS

5.15 The main period of fieldwork must also allow for the collection of information which may inform subsequent decisions. At a general level this is likely to require information on: the condition of features and elements within the landscape; evidence of change and the causes of change; and judgements about sensitivity, for example, in relation to land use change or new development. Other more specific requirements for survey information may flow from the specific purpose of the assessment.

## COVERING THE GROUND

5.16 Field survey must cover the ground in sufficient detail to allow well-informed decisions to be made about the identification of discrete landscape types and/or areas, and to provide the basis for meaningful descriptions and illustrations of character. Formal field recording should be carried out at each identified survey point - normally three in each discrete area identified, depending on its size. This is particularly important in the early stages of the survey when those involved are feeling their way and becoming familiar with the patterns in the landscape. When surveyors are more experienced it may be acceptable to complete one formal field record sheet for each discrete character type and/or area, based on a summative view gained by travelling through it.

## KEEPING APPROPRIATE RECORDS

5.17 Landscape Character Assessment is now being used in circumstances where the results are subject to public scrutiny and debate, such as public inquiries into special area designations, or into development plan policies and proposals. The results of an assessment must be robust enough to stand up to such scrutiny and the existence of comprehensive, accessible and consistent survey records plays an important part in this. Time and resources can inevitably limit the scale of field survey work. Within reason, however, it is better to have too much survey information than too little, provided that it is appropriate to the purpose of the work and the level of detail required, and that it is properly recorded in an accessible way.

## GOOD PRACTICE POINTERS

- Field survey is essential to: complement the desk study, verify and amend the draft landscape character types and/or areas, allow character to be clearly described, and provide information on characteristics which cannot be identified from desk study and on the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape; and to inform subsequent judgements and decisions.
- Surveys should be planned to ensure that all draft landscape character types and/or areas identified in the desk study are visited, generally seeking to achieve an average of three survey points in each.
- A field survey sheet should guide the collection of field data at each survey point. The survey sheet should be tailored to the specific study and should provide space for: a written description, a checklist of landscape elements and their significance, a checklist of aesthetic and perceptual factors, and space for observations about the sensitivity and management needs of the landscape.
- A full and robust record of the survey should be kept and should be as comprehensive, accessible and consistent as possible. Photographs should be an essential part of the field survey record.

# CHAPTER 6

## CLASSIFICATION

### AND DESCRIPTION (STEP 4)

#### PRINCIPLES OF LANDSCAPE CLASSIFICATION

6.1 This chapter describes the last step in the characterisation process, namely classifying and describing landscape character. It looks at:

- the principles and practice of landscape classification;
- terminology used, with the aim of encouraging greater consistency amongst practitioners;
- dealing with boundaries between landscape character types and areas;
- description of character.

6.2 Landscape classification is central to Landscape Character Assessment and is concerned with the process of dividing landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character, and grouping areas of similar character together. Classification can be carried out at any scale and so can provide information on the extent and distribution of different types and areas of landscape from the national to the local scale. Classification provides the central framework on which subsequent judgements about landscape character are based.

6.3 Classification requires the identification of patterns in the landscape, created by the way in which the natural and human influ-

ences on the landscape interact to create character. Methods of classification are simply ways of recognising and recording these patterns. Broadly, classification approaches take three forms, and there may be a variety of combinations of these:

- professional and/or stakeholder judgement about boundaries based on the manual manipulation of all data collected;
- use of GIS for the manipulation of map data and computer classification techniques to devise the classes of landscape character and the appropriate boundaries;
- use of GIS to assist in the manipulation and analysis of map data to help inform professional and/or stakeholder judgements about the boundaries of landscape classes.

#### APPROACHES TO CLASSIFICATION AT DIFFERENT SCALES

6.4 The approach adopted in a particular assessment exercise will depend on the level in the hierarchy at which the assessment is taking place and therefore the scale and level of detail required. The larger the scale the more reliance there is likely to be on computer techniques to help with data handling and the less the scope for comprehensive fieldwork or for significant stakeholder involvement.

#### Classification at the large (national/ regional) scale

6.5 Assessments which cover large areas, at the national or regional level, may be either: 'top-down', in that they consist of a quite broad, generalised characterisation based on identification of large-scale patterns of character which may then be characterised in more detail at the next level in the hierarchy (demonstrated by the Countryside Character initiative); or 'bottom-up' in that they are based on amalgamation of, and generalisation from, more detailed character types or areas identified at a lower level in the hierarchy (demonstrated by Scotland's national programme of Landscape Character Assessment).

6.6 Top down assessments tend, for practical reasons, to be predominantly desk-based exercises relying largely on map information. They are concerned with identifying broad regional patterns of character in the landscape resulting from particular combinations of geology, soils, topography and settlement and enclosure patterns. Maps of these attributes prepared in the desk study stage need to be overlaid and patterns identified so that areas of relatively homogeneous character can be mapped. This can be done manually, with patterns identified by eye, but at this scale maps in paper form can become unwieldy and manual analy-



sis difficult. In general it is also simply not practical to carry out comprehensive fieldwork at this scale although field survey can be used in a targeted way to add information to that available from maps.

6.7 The use of GIS combined with computer classification techniques can be particularly helpful at this scale, because of these difficulties. These tools allow different sets of map data to be combined, manipulated and correlated more easily and help to identify the large-scale patterns of landscape character. Examples of the types of techniques that can be used and of their practical application can be found in **Topic Paper 4**. Such techniques can either be used alone, or in combination with manual approaches. It is important to recognise, however, that work relying wholly on computer classification is rarely entirely satisfactory as it omits the critical contributions of both fieldwork and stakeholder involvement.

### Classification at the local authority scale

6.8 Landscape assessments at the intermediate scale, for example those covering local authority areas or special areas such as National Parks or other designated landscapes, need to be nested within the framework of any higher-level national or regional assessment which may already exist. For bottom-up approaches this happens automatically. For top-down approaches this means subdividing character types or areas identified at the higher level.

6.9 In work at this level division into landscape types and areas has, to date, been largely based on manual methods. Nevertheless, where resources allow, there are

now significant advantages in using GIS to manipulate the data derived from desk study and fieldwork. This approach to data handling should however still be combined with practitioner judgement to identify areas of distinct landscape character and to decide whether different areas are sufficiently similar to be grouped together as one landscape type. The skill in carrying out this type of classification is to be able to recognise consistent patterns of attributes from map overlays and to relate these to variations in character identified through field survey, and perhaps also by stakeholder input. At this scale there is generally less value in computer classification techniques as they are not well suited to analysing field data about landscape or to incorporating stakeholder views. They may be able to help with combining desk study map overlays but certainly cannot provide all the answers.

### Classification at the local level

6.10 At this scale, classification will normally be based on practitioner judgement drawing on manual handling using paper copies of map overlays and again, nesting the assessment within the hierarchy of other higher order assessments. GIS mapping can still play an important part, especially if detailed information on landscape elements and characteristics has been assembled for some other purpose, for example when undertaken as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment for a development proposal, but it may not be worth the effort of assembling digital data solely for the purposes of a local assessment. Stakeholders can play an important part in the characterisation process at this scale. They may be able to describe, either

graphically or in words, their perceptions of the boundaries between different character types and/or areas. Depending on the purpose of the study, these may become the final boundaries or may be used to modify and test those derived through professional judgement.

## TERMINOLOGY FOR CHARACTERISATION

6.11 As use of Landscape Character Assessment becomes more widespread, use of consistent terminology is increasingly important. Correct use of the terms **landscape character types** and **landscape character areas**, is particularly important, as is the differentiation between types and areas identified at different levels in the hierarchy (see **paras 2.14 - 2.15** and **Figures 2.2 - 2.3**).

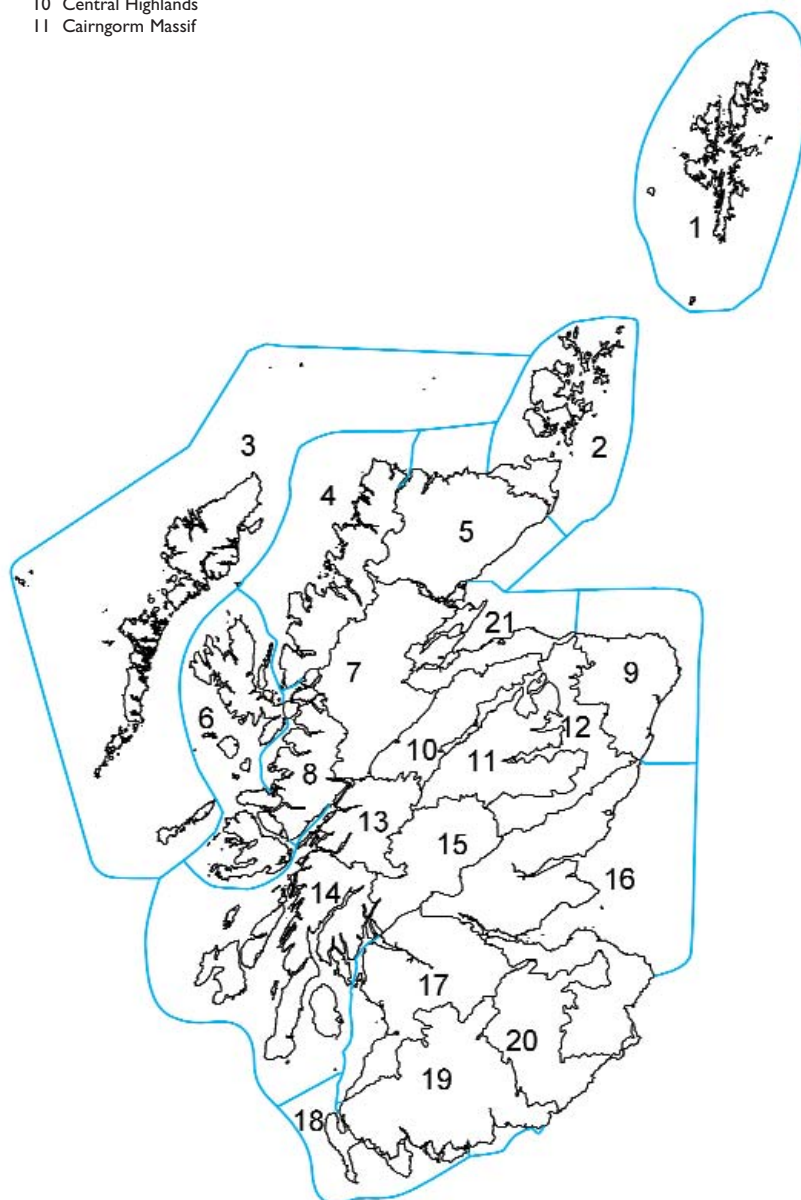
### Landscape character types

6.12 A single landscape type will have broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern in every area where it occurs. This does **not** mean that every area will be identical but rather that there is a **common pattern** which can be discerned both in the maps and in the field survey records. Landscape character types can be identified at each different level in the hierarchy of assessment.

6.13 At the national and regional level in England the work which preceded the Countryside Character initiative identifies **national/regional landscape types**, based on particular combinations of the underlying natural and cultural influences on the landscape and with broad generic names like gritstone

**Figure 6.1: Natural Heritage Futures (Scotland)**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 Shetland                                  | 12 North East Glens                          |
| 2 North Caithness and Orkney                | 13 Lochaber                                  |
| 3 Western Isles                             | 14 Argyll West and Islands                   |
| 4 North West Seaboard                       | 15 Breadalbane and East Argyll               |
| 5 The Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland | 16 Eastern Lowlands                          |
| 6 Western Seaboard                          | 17 West Central Belt                         |
| 7 Northern Highlands                        | 18 Wigtown Machairs and Outer Solway         |
| 8 Western Highlands                         | 19 Western Southern Uplands and Inner Solway |
| 9 North East Coastal Plain                  | 20 Border Hills                              |
| 10 Central Highlands                        | 21 Moray Firth                               |
| 11 Cairngorm Massif                         |  |



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Based on the Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright.

moorlands, or limestone uplands.

They have not yet been identified for the whole country but the Countryside Agency will be developing a top-level national classification of landscape character types based on consistent grouping of the countryside character areas of *The Character of England* map. This will be developed in partnership with practitioners in the English regions to ensure a consistent and robust approach.

6.14 In Scotland the national level is represented by **groups of landscape types** created by amalgamating the more detailed landscape types identified in the national Landscape Character Assessment programme which was carried out at the local authority level. Examples of these amalgamated generic types at the national level include the rocky moorlands of the Highlands and Islands, crofting landscapes, and drumlin lowlands.

6.15 In local authority and similar assessments, the emphasis is on the identification of smaller scale, more fine-grained **landscape character types** which represent more local patterns of character and contribute strongly to a more local 'sense of place'. In areas of moderate or high relief they are often based mainly on variations in landform, for example upland plateaus, or steep v-shaped valleys, or scarp slopes. In areas of low relief they are more likely to be determined by patterns of drainage (e.g. river corridors) land use, and field and settlement patterns. In England and Scotland it is important to realise that these landscape character types may either occur repeatedly in a study area, or occur in just one place. The Countryside Agency has produced a typology of

landscape types occurring within the countryside character areas by using GIS and other computer techniques to analyse a wide range of national datasets on landscape attributes, combined with analysis of Landscape Character

Assessments carried out in more detail for local authority areas and designated landscapes. In Scotland a national landscape typology has been derived by amalgamating landscape character types from the regional studies into a national landscape assessment map to form what is known as LCA Level 3 of the database.

### Landscape character areas

6.16 Landscape character areas are the unique individual geographical areas in which landscape types occur. They share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity. In the majority of cases there will be more landscape character areas than landscape character types, as some types will occur in more than one area.

6.17 If landscape assessments were to deal only with character areas they would certainly convey a real sense of identity and distinctiveness. The written descriptions would, however, become very repetitive since characteristics shared by each area of the same type would be described every time. The advantage of identifying both types and areas is that the shared generic characteristics can be described for types, leaving the description of areas to draw out the individually distinctive features, so avoiding repetition.

6.18 At the national level in England, the emphasis in *The Character of England* map has been

firmly on the identification and description of individual **countryside character areas**. These are discrete geographical areas identified by professional judgement, validated by consensus and informed by multivariate analysis of map information. Similar broad character areas (usually referred to as regional character areas) have been identified in some of the assessments in Scotland, such as Dumfries and Galloway, and Ayrshire. Here too the emphasis has been on the use of professional judgement and informed consensus, aided by the analysis of map information. Elsewhere in Scotland it is the Natural Heritage Futures which provide a comparable high-level national framework (**Figure 6.1**).

6.19 At the local authority level, **landscape character areas** are the individual areas where more detailed landscape character types occur. A comprehensive local landscape assessment should usually identify, map and describe both **landscape character types** and **landscape character areas** at a variety of levels locally, and show the relationship between the two, as in the National Forest example in **Figure 6.2**. In some cases, however, it may be decided that the distinctiveness of individual areas is such that the use of types is not helpful. As a result the assessment will be based only on individual areas. In other cases, especially if resources are limited, an assessment may deal only with landscape character types and not continue as far as dealing with individual landscape character areas.

### DEALING WITH BOUNDARIES

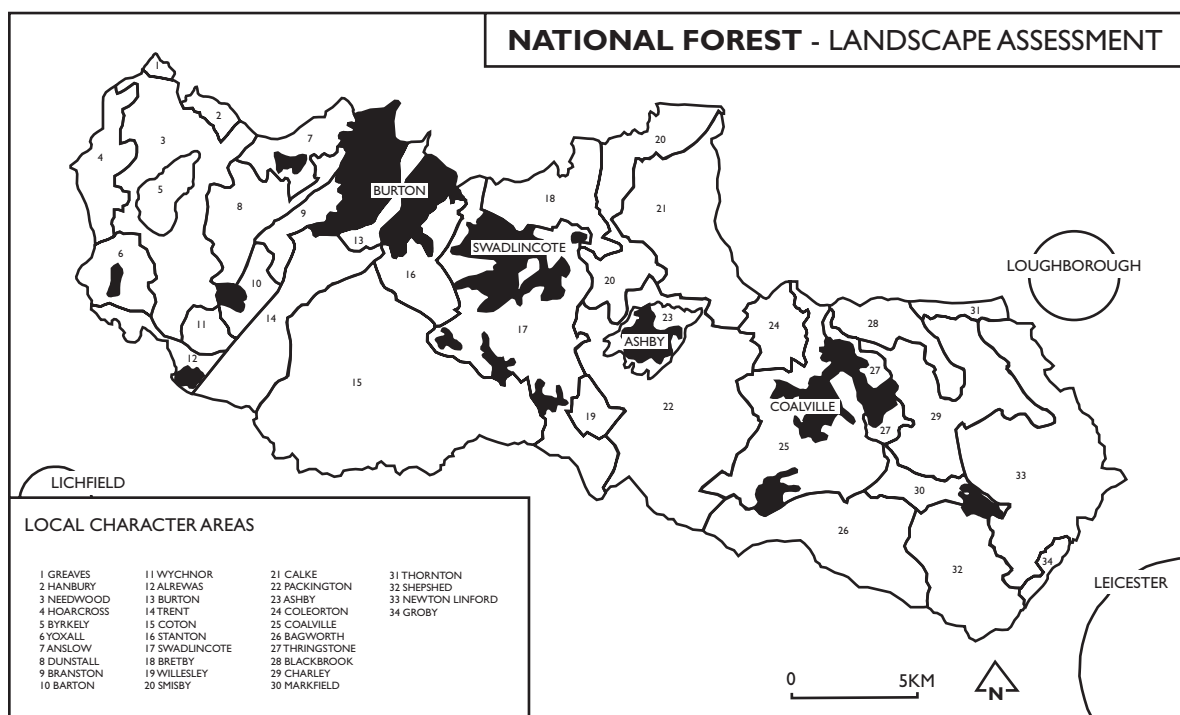
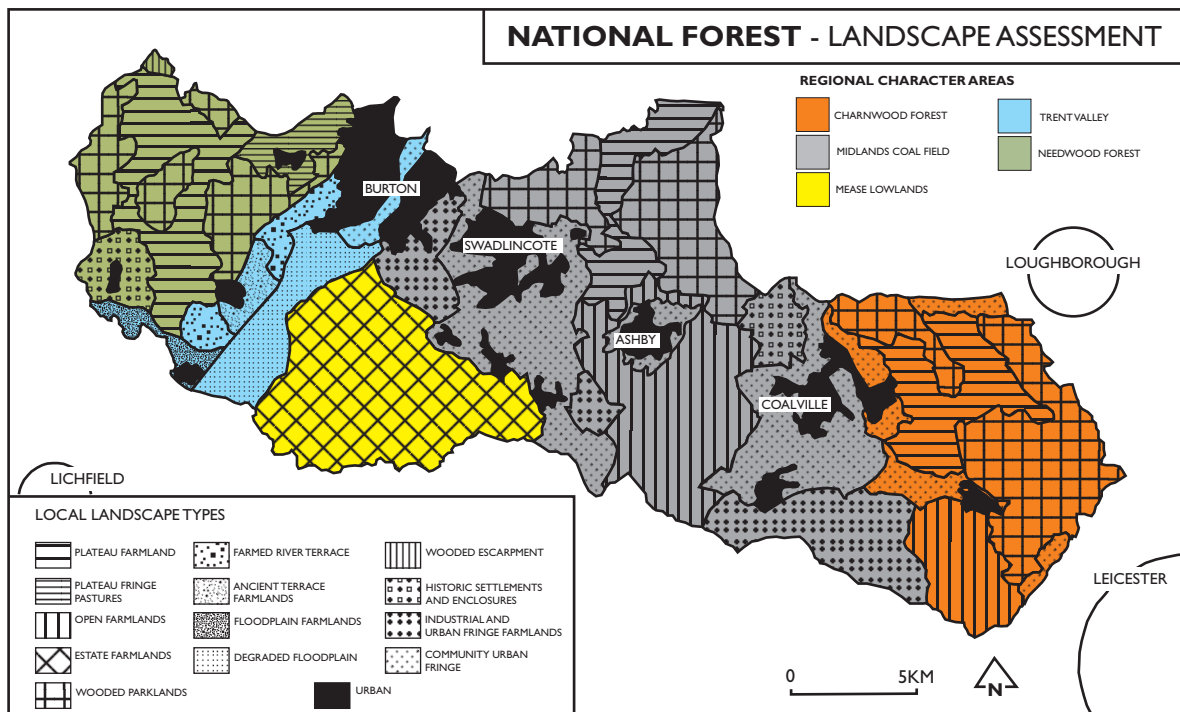
6.20 Boundaries are required around landscape character areas and types, although their precision

will vary with the scale and level of detail of the assessment. In reality, landscape is a continuum and character does not, in general, change abruptly. There are exceptions to this, for example, where a steep escarpment marks the division between an upland plateau and an adjacent vale (as in the scarp between the South Downs and the Low Weald, or between the North Pennines and the Vale of Eden). In these cases it may be quite easy to draw the boundary, although a decision will still be needed about whether to include the scarp in the plateau above or the vale below.

6.21 More commonly however, the character of the landscape will change gradually rather than suddenly. While landscape character may be clearly defined and distinctive in the centre of a character type or area, there may be transitions at the edges where the influences of land cover, land use, settlement and field pattern may be less consistent. The character of the landscape in these transition areas is no less important, but may be more difficult to tie down precisely and in these cases, drawing a firm line as a boundary on a map may suggest a much more obvious change than is really apparent on the ground.

6.22 It has often been suggested that in such circumstances it would be more appropriate to use some form of indicative boundary to depict the change from one area to another. *The Character of England* work, for example, shows broad belts of transition in the more detailed reports [39-46] rather than precise lines. This can be technically quite difficult to achieve and in more detailed assessments it is usually better simply to incorpo-

**Figure 6.2: National Forest - hierarchy in practice**



Source: LUC (1992) New Forest Landscape Assessment: A Summary Report. Unpublished report to the New National Forest Office.

rate a statement in maps and reports to indicate the status and meaning of boundary lines, and their limitations.

## NAMING LANDSCAPE TYPES AND AREAS

6.23 Whatever the scale at which an assessment is carried out, the resulting landscape character types and areas should be named, for both ease of identification and reference. Occasionally, if the classification into types is particularly detailed or complex, codes made up of letters and numbers may be used but names are more descriptive and meaningful to people.

6.24 For **landscape character types** it is usual to use a two or three word name which reflects the dominant influences on landscape character, usually using words related to geology, landform, land cover and settlement. Types defined at the national level are more likely to have names that combine geological and landform terms, using names like **Limestone Uplands, Upland Glens, Lowland Loch Basins, Clay Vales, Rocky Moorlands, or Drumlin Lowlands**. At the more local level, types are often named by combinations of landform and land cover, and sometimes settlement, using names like **plateau farmland, farmed strath, wooded scarp, knock and lochan, small farms and crofts, or urban fringe farmland**. In all cases the aim is to find a name which conveys some sense of what the character of the landscape is like (**Box 6.1**).

6.25 **Landscape character areas** are unique and are therefore given names that are geographically specific, but may also refer to the

landscape type. The geographically specific name is often based on a place name or established locality. Stakeholder involvement in the naming of areas should be encouraged to secure a greater sense of identity and ownership and to ensure that established local names are used. At the national level names are often taken from well-known hill ranges like **The Trossachs** or the **South Downs**, or from historic forest areas like the **New Forest, Charnwood** or **Rothiemurchus**. Alternatively the names of counties, districts or adjacent cities may be used, as in **Leicestershire and Derbyshire Coalfield** or **Northamptonshire Uplands**. Local assessments should generally name character areas after local place names,

villages or parishes. The example of the National Forest Assessment (**Figure 6.2**) shows the use of names for landscape character types and areas at the national/regional and local levels.

## DESCRIBING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

6.26 Once character types and areas have been identified and mapped, they must be described in a way which captures the essence of their character. This usually involves a written description, accompanied by appropriate illustrations. This will be the main source of information about the nature of the landscape.

### Box 6.1: Words to use in naming landscape types

Geology	Landform	Land cover	Settlement
Limestone	Plateau	Moorland	Urban Fringe
Sandstone	Valley	Heathland	Industrial
Chalk	Upland	Woodland	Settled
Clay	Scarp	Parkland	Urban
Granite	Vale	Pasture	Village
Alluvial	Coastal	Arable	Remote
	Estuary	Farmland	
	Floodplain	Meadow	
	River Terrace	Fen	
	Downland	Marshland	
	Rolling		
	Hill		
	Cliff		
	Mountain		

Words from any of these lists, or indeed other appropriate words not in these lists, should be combined to reflect the dominant influences on landscape character. For example, Limestone Plateau Farmland, or Granite Scarp Woodland, or Alluvial Floodplain Pasture, or Urban Fringe Farmland.

Source: *Expansion of Countryside Commission (1993) Landscape Assessment Guidance. Countryside Commission, Cheltenham CCP423.*



## **Box 6.2: Different types of landscape description**

### **An objective, factual description**

The characteristic stepped profile of the stepped basalt landscape is formed by the differential erosion of successive lava flows... Successive basalt steps rise on to flat or tilted tablelands, each one defined by sheer basalt cliffs, most clearly seen on Eigg but also evident on Canna and the Morvern and Ardnamurchan Peninsulas. Successive cliffs are separated by gently sloping terraces; where weathering has been more intense the steps have become indistinct and the hills' sides appear riven with ridges.

The tablelands or terraces are covered by bracken and grass swards and, where not over grazed, by heather. The friable surfaces have been weathered into base-rich soils which support extensive forest plantations and which often obscure the unique land form. These soils have accumulated in the wider glens, where there is a lush community of trees, plantations and pockets of farmland. Broadleaf woodlands line the steeper slopes, often comprising thick hazel scrub as well as oak and ash. Scattered crofts or settlements occur in the less exposed glens, often sheltering within the lee of basalt cliffs. Gentle lower slopes provide suitable ground for pastures, often enclosed by dry stone dykes.

*Source: Environmental Resources Management (1998) Lochaber: landscape character assessment. No 97, Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh.*

### **A subjective, personal description**

A huge panorama was spread out below me. On the far edge of it, the hills beyond the valley rippled upwards towards the sky. The lower slopes were wooded, with a variety of trees that offered every shade of green and russet; in the valley itself a tiny village straggles down the middle, accompanied by a faithful River, while oceans of golden corn and lavender-fields flowed serenely by, stopping every few hundred yards to turn themselves into a patchwork quilt. And the light and shade which governed the whole picture combined in a no less harmonious pattern.

*Source: Levin, B. (1987) In Hannibal's Footsteps. Hodder and Stoughton, London.*

### **A balanced description combining objective and subjective elements**

The steeply sloping valley sides are characterised by a great diversity of features. The stepped profile formed by the alternating shales, sandstone and limestone of the Yoredale series is often visible... A network of regular stone walls imposes a strong pattern on the land form, and farms and settlements spread high up the valley sides. Field trees follow the walls, and clumps of sycamore mark the positions of buildings... Higher up, field sizes increase, the grazing becomes rougher, and the skyline is formed by the moorland fringe, appearing green in the summer, tinged with purple in the autumn, and olive-gold or almost white as the grasses wither in the winter. These landscapes are complex and diverse. There is always something to catch the eye, and there are rich patterns and textures at many different levels - the textures and colours of flowers carpeting the meadows, the patterns of the stone walls and the varying shades of the fields on the valley side. There is a strong sense of historical continuity and of the maintenance of traditional land management.

*Source: Countryside Commission (1991) The North Pennines Landscape. Countryside Commission, Cheltenham CCP318.*

## Written descriptions

6.27 Writing a good description of landscape character is a skilled job. The description should draw on the information recorded during the field survey but may have to generalise from this, as well as being more complete and polished in presentation. The aim should be to describe the overall character of the landscape, with reference to geology, landform, land cover, land use, settlement and enclosure, and to draw out the way that these factors interact together and are perceived. It can be helpful to imagine that you are describing the landscape to someone who cannot see it.

6.28 Descriptions often have to strike a balance between factual statements about the components which make up the landscape, and more evocative statements about its character. This balance may vary according to the purpose of the work. For example, an appreciation of a landscape which sets out to demonstrate what is special about it, should be more evocative, seeking to capture special qualities and making more reference to aesthetic qualities and perception. In contrast, if an assessment is to inform planning policy, a more straightforward factual description is required. **Box 6.2** illustrates different styles of description.

6.29 Care must be used in selecting descriptive words. Subjective value judgements should be avoided and a distinction drawn between adjectives which seek to convey the aesthetic qualities of a landscape (**Box 5.1**) and those which deal with personal perceptions or values. So, words like bland, beautiful, attractive, degraded and ordinary should generally not be used since such judgements

### Box 6.3: Examples of key characteristics at different scales in the hierarchy

#### The Character of England map Eden Valley (countryside character area)

- Broad river valley landscapes of productive mixed farmland with local variations in topography, scale and landcover.
- Productive improved pasture and arable land with large farms in the low lying areas.
- Less intensively managed rolling hills or hilly pasture with lowland heath, intersected by numerous gills, in the foothills of the North Pennines.
- Settlements have strong distinctive character. Red sandstone is the dominant building material and a unifying feature. Limestone is found on the margins of the area.
- Important transport corridor for the Settle-Carlisle railway line, the M6 motorway, A66 trunk road and west coast mainline.

#### Fife Landscape Character Assessment (Scottish region) February 1998

*David Tyldesley and Associates*

##### C10 Lowland Loch Basins (landscape type)

- The flat, relatively low-lying landform with strong horizontal links.
- The open large scale, regular, tended pattern of fields.
- The regular distribution of steadings and plantations/tree groups/shelter belts and small settlements.
- The diverse, calm, settled and (away from the motorway and main roads) the quiet and balanced character.
- The presence of wildlife on and around the lochs and birds overhead in flight.

#### Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment May 1996

*Scott Wilson Resource Consultants*

##### Porchester South (landscape character area - urban)

- A large concentration of older, interwar suburban housing with a grid street pattern and block structure, allowing good permeability.
- Lack of variety in built form, homogeneous character.
- Public open space provision mostly outside the urban area next to the coastline and not very accessible.
- No coastal character in residential area despite the proximity of the coast.

tend to be very subjective and ‘in the eye of the beholder’. Accuracy in written expression is important, avoiding contradictions such as ‘isolated farm buildings are frequent’ and ensuring that phrases like ‘nucleated settlement’ or ‘linear settlement’ are used appropriately. Consistency in use of terms is also an important factor in landscape description. Landscapes of similar character occur in different parts of Britain and ideally they should be described consistently in each area. This is difficult to achieve because Landscape Character Assessments are carried out by different people in different places. Reference, however, should be made to other assessments, and to the national frameworks of *The Character of England* map and associated character area descriptions [39-46] and the Natural Heritage Futures in Scotland, to provide context.

6.30 Description of field patterns illustrates the point. Landscape descriptions, especially of lowland agricultural areas, often make reference to field size and pattern, but usually in the context of the local area. So, for example, fields might be described as large in one area of the country when in reality they are quite small compared with, say, the typical scale in East Anglia. The meaning of such a term in an assessment should be defined (for example, large fields means those over 10 hectares). To assist with this the Countryside Agency will be working with others to prepare an explanation of commonly used descriptive terms (incorporating regional names) for particular landscape elements.

6.31 In many cases, especially where the emphasis is on landscape celebration, landscape descriptions can be enlivened and illuminated by

#### **Box 6.4: Use of historical information in landscape description**

The report of the Cornwall Historic Landscape Characterisation project shows how the historical information was used to enrich the landscape descriptions in the parallel landscape assessment of the whole County of Cornwall. The example used is the inland Culm Plateau. Without historic information the landscape might have been described as “small to medium scale field pattern with some areas of large fields. Land is sparsely populated with scattered isolated farmsteads”. With input from Historic Landscape Characterisation the report shows that a much fuller description is possible. The same landscape would be described as “small to medium scale field pattern, comprising mostly Anciently Enclosed Land, although a large number of these fields have been amalgamated to form larger units in the twentieth century. There are some pockets of Recently Enclosed Land which indicate the loss of rough ground or wetland areas. This area is sparsely populated with scattered isolated farmsteads. Buildings generally consist of small symmetrical cottages with sash windows, typical of around 1840 when areas of this landscape were enclosed or earlier boundaries altered”.

*Source: Cornwall County Council (1996) Cornwall Landscape Assessment 1994. Landscape Design Associates and Cornwall Archaeological Unit.*

illustrating how the landscape has been described in art, literature, music and other media. For example, photographs and paintings can be used as illustrations and quotations can be inserted, helping to show patterns and consistency in descriptions over time. Topographical writers of both past and present can be particularly instructive, while television is increasingly influential in the creation of landscape image and association. Quotes from descriptions by stakeholders can also be important in demonstrating what an area means to local people and to visitors.

#### **Identifying key characteristics**

6.32 Landscape descriptions should be accompanied by a separate list which summarises the key characteristics of each landscape character type and/or area. Key

characteristics are those combinations of elements which help give an area its distinct sense of place. They tend in many cases to be ‘positive’ characteristics but they may also, in some cases, be ‘negative’ features which nevertheless are important to the current character of the landscape. If the key characteristics which are identified were to change or be lost there would be significant consequences for the current character of the landscape. These would usually be negative but sometimes positive where some characteristics currently have a negative influence on the character (e.g. the effects of a busy road corridor). Key characteristics should therefore be the prime targets for monitoring change and for identifying landscape indicators.

6.33 Key characteristics are presented as short statements



which encapsulate the key aspects of character. They usually encompass the interaction of landform, land cover, semi-natural vegetation, field pattern, aspects of settlement and aesthetic characteristics like open skies, long views, or a strong sense of enclosure. They must be identified and described carefully as they are likely to become a major reference point in making decisions about the future of the landscape. It is vital that they are appropriate to the scale and nature of the assessment. In a large scale or local authority assessment, for example, they should be genuinely characteristic of a whole landscape type or area rather than being strictly local in occurrence. The smaller the scale and the greater the level of detail in the assessment, the more detailed and specific the key characteristics are likely to be (**Box 6.3**).

### The value of the historical perspective

6.34 Landscape descriptions should usually include an historical perspective on the way in which the character which is apparent today has evolved. This requires a good understanding of the interplay between the natural factors which influence character and the human influences which shape it over time. Where there has been an Historic Landscape Characterisation or Historic Landuse Assessment, the results can help to provide this 'time-depth' dimension to landscape description. Such information greatly enriches the written descriptions of landscape character, as illustrated by **Box 6.4**.

6.35 Information on recent history can also be used to inform descriptions of 'forces for change', namely issues and pressures affect-

ing the landscape and its key features. These might include various types of development, trends in land management and woodland expansion programmes, and natural forces such as flooding and climate change. Knowledge of these factors will often be gained by observation in the field and discussions with stakeholders, as well as through background research.

## CHARACTERISATION IN PRACTICE

6.36 These principles of characterisation have been put into practice, to varying degrees, in Landscape Character Assessments at a variety of scales in both England and Scotland. Further details of the various country initiatives are contained in **Boxes 6.5 and 6.6**.

6.37 In **England** the Countryside Agency advocates adoption of the hierarchical approach to Landscape Character Assessment and use of *The Character of England* map and associated character area descriptions as a framework for local authority and more detailed local assessments. This will allow the national map of character areas to provide a framework for reporting to Government. It enables a bottom-up flow of information on landscape character and landscape change to inform regional planning guidance, regional strategies and the work of the Regional Development Agencies, and to assist in devising regional and national priorities for a broad range of policy matters, for example, agri-environment scheme targeting. Where earlier landscape character assessments are not reported within this framework they may need to be re-visited in the future, as resources permit, so

that they do. The Countryside Agency will consider grant aiding local authorities to achieve this.

6.38 In **Scotland** the main emphasis has been on the local authority level through the national programme of Landscape Character Assessment, which began in 1994. Since then the whole of Scotland has been covered and 29 assessments have been completed, identifying 366 local landscape character types and nearly 4,000 individual local character areas. The aims of this work were: to develop an inventory of the landscapes of Scotland, to provide a context for SNH and others' casework, to provide information for a wide range of people involved in development plans and land use policies, and to inform national policy. The results of the programme have been used to create a national digital dataset of landscape character types linked to a database of the key characteristics for each type and the main forces for change.

6.39 Scotland is fortunate to already have complete coverage of the country at a reasonably detailed level in a published series of reports and to have a GIS database<sup>6</sup>, which together are a rich source of information about the Scottish landscape. At the national level government departments, agencies and other organisations can use the high level information, together with the framework of the Natural Heritage Futures, to deal with strategic land use and development issues which may influence landscape character.

6.40 Local authorities in Scotland have a valuable resource in the

<sup>6</sup> This database is now available to all staff in Area offices and is being further refined for external access via the SNH website for March 2002

reports of the national programme and many are making use of them for a variety of applications, but particularly in landscape capacity studies for various types of development pressure. They are important also in providing a starting point for more detailed assessments of particular areas, where specific issues arise. SNH is actively promoting use of this resource, providing advice and guidance on how the assessments should be used, and taking a lead in new developments in this area.

### From characterisation to judgement

6.41 It is possible that a Landscape Character Assessment could stop at the characterisation stage. The resulting map of landscape types and/or areas, and the accompanying descriptions of character, would then stand as a neutral, relatively value-free summary of the current character of the landscape. In this form it could help to raise awareness of the distinctive character of an area and to encourage appreciation of variations in this character.

It could play a role in education, information and promotion, helping people to understand and appreciate the landscape around them. Beyond this, if an assessment is to play a part in informing decision-making, an approach to making judgments based on character must be developed. This is the subject of the next chapter.

#### Box 6.5: National initiatives in England

In 1996 the former Countryside Commission and English Nature, with support from English Heritage, produced *The Character of England* map [9]. This combines English Nature's Natural Areas and the former Countryside Commission's countryside character areas into a map of joint character areas for the whole of England (**Figure 6.3**) providing a picture of the different landscape character at the national scale. The map is accompanied by descriptions of the character of each of the 159 landscape character areas, the influences determining that character, and some of the main pressures for change in each area. Eight regional volumes containing these descriptions were launched in December 1998 [39-46]. The National Map and the descriptions together provide the top tier of the hierarchy of assessment in England but deal only with character areas at this scale and do not address landscape types. Their main purpose is to provide the necessary broad framework for more detailed assessment at lower levels in the hierarchy. In 2001 the Countryside Agency subsequently developed a national typology of landscapes that fits within the framework of character areas.

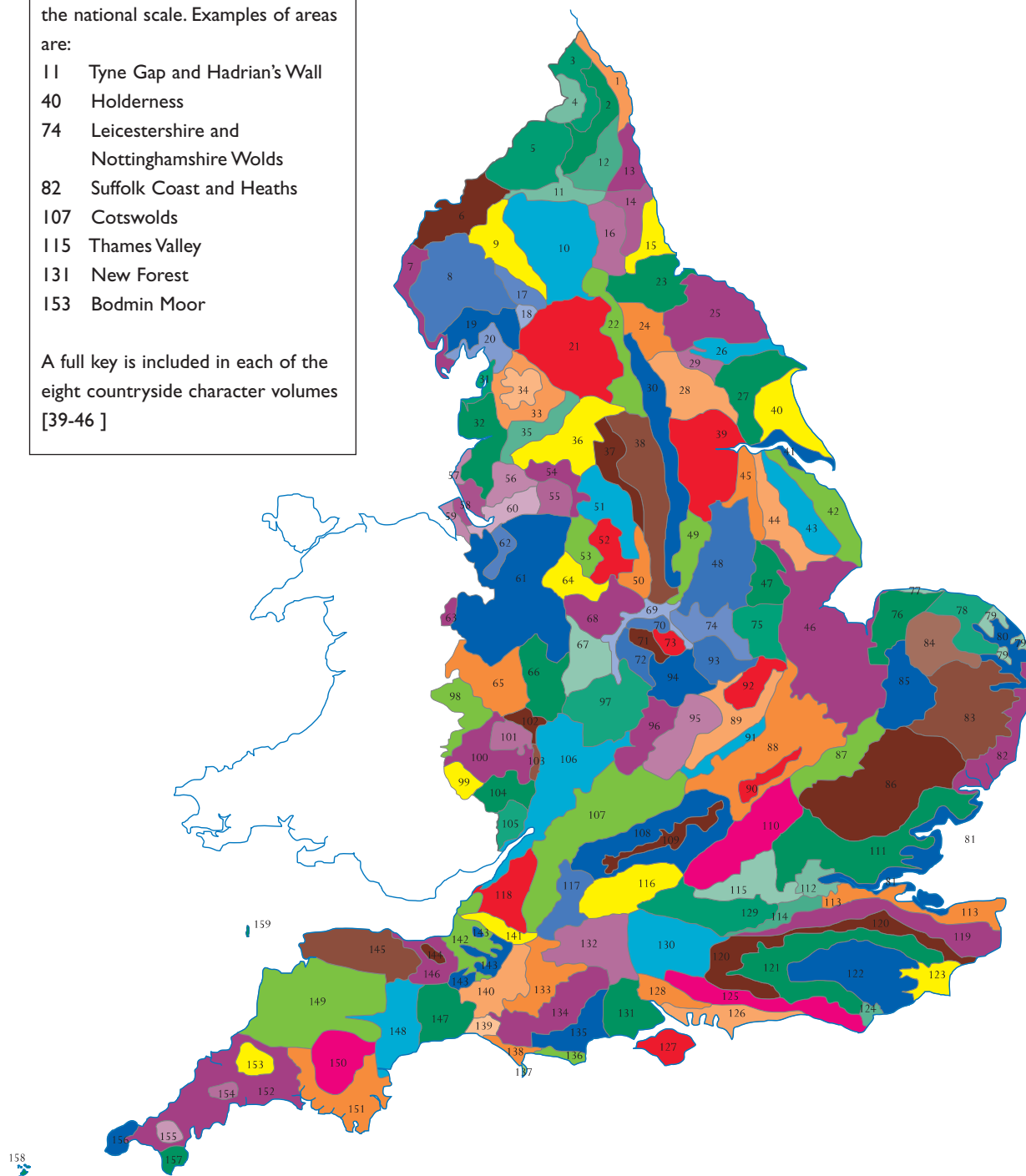
At the intermediate level, many counties and some District Councils have prepared assessments describing more detailed variations in the character of their areas at 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale, and the former Countryside Commission published assessments of all the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England. There is some variation in the approach in these assessments, because they have been prepared at different stages in the evolution of landscape character assessment methods, often by different practitioners working to different briefs. Nevertheless all of them identify landscape character types, and some also identify character areas. Many of these assessments preceded publication of the National Map and so do not make use of this national framework. A growing number, however, do use the national set of countryside character areas as a basis for more detailed assessment and the Countryside Agency wishes all future assessments to fit within this framework.

**Figure 6.3: The Character of England map**

The Character of England map divides England into 159 character areas, providing a picture of the diversity of landscape character at the national scale. Examples of areas are:

- 11 Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall
- 40 Holderness
- 74 Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds
- 82 Suffolk Coast and Heaths
- 107 Cotswolds
- 115 Thames Valley
- 131 New Forest
- 153 Bodmin Moor

A full key is included in each of the eight countryside character volumes [39-46]

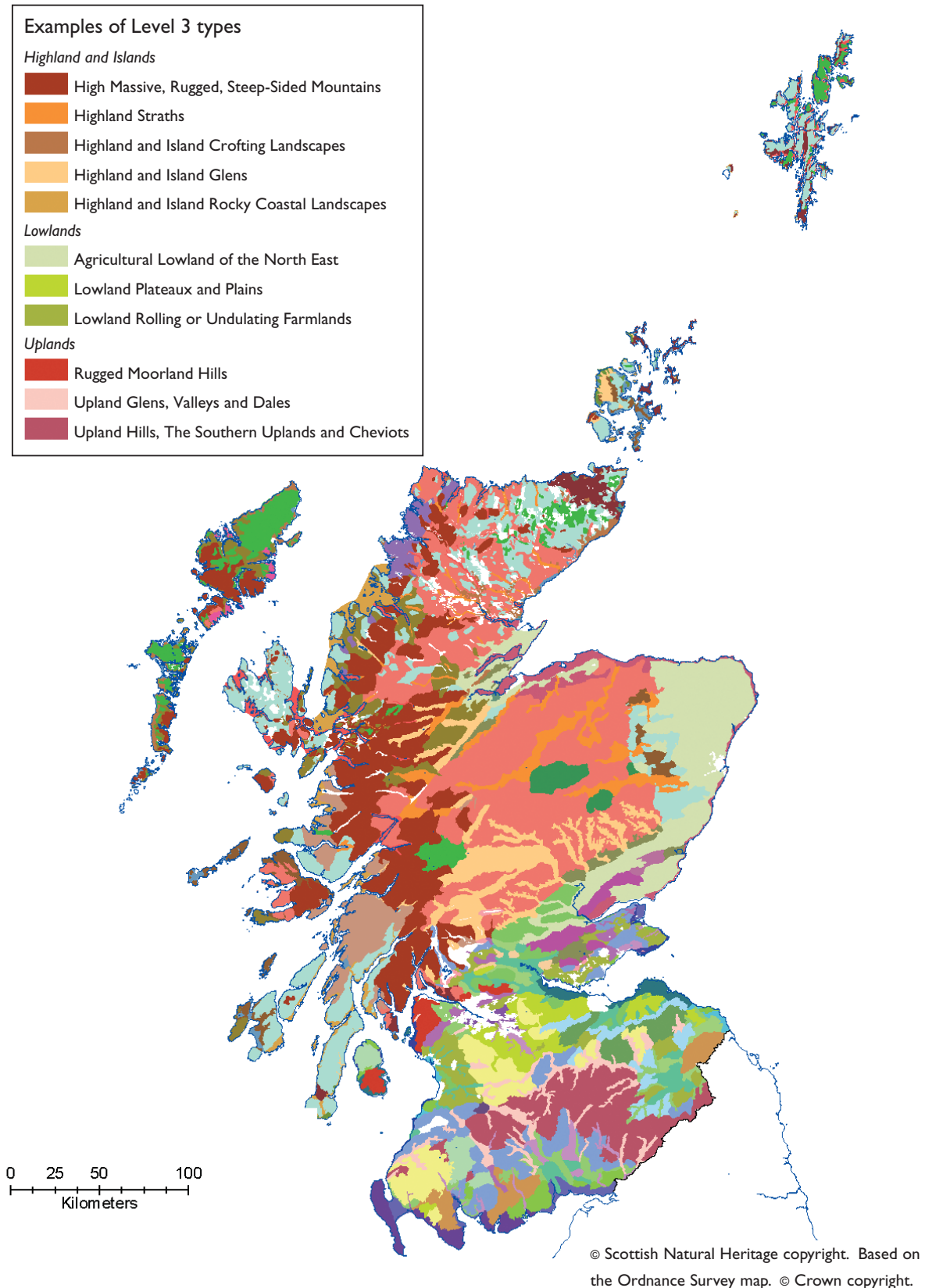


© Countryside Agency copyright.

Based on the Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright.

Lead consultants - Chris Blandford Associates

**Figure 6.4: Scotland - Level 3 landscape character types**



### Box 6.6 National initiatives in Scotland

Scottish Natural Heritage has completed a comprehensive national programme of Landscape Character Assessment. A total of 29 separate regional studies have been carried out, in partnership with local authorities and other organisations [10-38]. Together, these assessments document the rich variety of Scotland's landscape. The studies cover all of the local authority areas in Scotland, together with a number of other areas, including some districts, the countryside around some towns, and special areas such as Loch Lomond and The Trossachs which is due to be designated a National Park in 2002.

The individual assessments describe the landscape mostly at 1:50,000 scale, identifying over 3,600 individual landscape character areas, grouped into 366 landscape character types. Subsequently these landscape types have been grouped together on the basis of similarities in their key characteristics, into a hierarchy. The initial 366 Level 1 types have been grouped firstly into 106 Level 2 landscape types, and then these have been further grouped to create 52 Level 3 types (**Figure 6.4**). This hierarchy allows the character of the landscape to be examined at a number of different scales, from the broad national level, to the regional level, and sometimes down to the local level.

In Scotland, the Natural Heritage Futures programme provides a comparable broad strategic framework to the Countryside Character Map (*Character of England*). There are 21 areas defined on the basis of biogeographical and landscape character information (**Figure 6.1**).

## GOOD PRACTICE POINTERS

### Landscape classification

- Landscape classification is a key part of characterisation and is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character and grouping areas of similar character together.
- Landscape classification can be undertaken at **any scale** and requires the identification of patterns in the landscape, created by the way in which the natural and human influences interact to create character in the landscape.
- **Approaches to classification** range from the use of GIS and computer classification techniques (most appropriate at the large scale) to the manual overlaying of maps combined with professional and stakeholder judgement about where the boundaries between areas of different character lie. The key concern of the Agencies is that whatever techniques are used, they are consistent and rigorous, provide information that can be updated, and have the ability to take account of qualitative field survey information and stakeholder perceptions in appropriate ways.

/...contd.

### Good Practice Pointers (contd.)

#### Landscape character types and landscape character areas

- In all classification it must be clear whether landscape character types and/or landscape character areas are being identified. **Landscape character types** are generic types which possess broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern in every area where they occur, while **landscape character areas** are the unique individual geographical areas in which landscape types occur. They share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but also have their own particular identity.
- **Landscape character types and areas need to be named.** The Agencies suggest using descriptive names rather than numbers, as these are more meaningful to people and help engender sense of place. Types will have generic names often based on topography and land use e.g. *drumlin lowlands* while character areas should have names that are geographically specific, but may also refer to the landscape type in which they lie e.g. *Northamptonshire Uplands*. Stakeholders should be involved in the naming of character areas to ensure a greater sense of identity and ownership.

#### Written descriptions

- Written descriptions of landscape character need to strike the appropriate balance between factual statements about the components which make up the landscape and more evocative statements about its character. In particular:
  - descriptive words should avoid value-laden judgements, for example, words such as beautiful, bland, attractive, degraded or ordinary;
  - descriptive terms must be accurate e.g. descriptions such as 'nucleated settlement' and 'linear settlement' must be applied correctly;
  - descriptive terms must be consistent and, if necessary, defined e.g. it must be clear what is meant by large fields or small fields - is this relative to the locality or the national perspective?
  - where a celebration of the landscape is required, reference to other media can bring the description alive e.g. inclusion of other writings, quotes, pictures and music which illustrate how the landscape has been perceived and celebrated through the ages.
- Written descriptions should be accompanied by a separate list of the **key characteristics** of each landscape type and/or area. Key characteristics are those aspects of character which give an area its distinct sense of place. They are rarely single landscape elements but are short statements that capture key aspects of the character of the landscape. The descriptions may also include an account of the **forces for change** affecting the landscape.

# CHAPTER 7

## MAKING JUDGEMENTS BASED ON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### INTRODUCTION

7.1 The use of Landscape Character Assessment in making judgements is a fast-moving scene amongst practitioners. This chapter sets out some main principles on the subject. **Topic Paper 6, *Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity***, will be issued in the Summer of 2002 to address one of the key areas where practitioners need to make judgements on this topic.

7.2 The main value of having a Landscape Character Assessment is to help in the process of managing change in a particular place. All sorts of change will shape future landscapes, and by applying this tool in an appropriate way, alongside other tools, we can help to ensure that such changes make a 'positive' contribution.

7.3 For this reason, most assessments will usually move beyond the characterisation stage to the stage of making judgements to inform particular decisions. Making judgements as part of an assessment should not concentrate only on the maintenance of existing character. This may be one part of the judgements made. The focus should be on ensuring that land use change or development proposals are planned and designed to achieve an appropriate relationship (and most often a 'fit') with their surroundings, and wherever possible contribute to enhancement of the landscape, in

some cases by creating a new character.

7.4 Judgements based on landscape character need to take account of several factors. Most importantly it is vital to decide who is going to be involved in making the judgements. For practical reasons some assessments may still rely mainly on judgements made by professionals. It is nevertheless important to involve stakeholders in this part of the process if the judgements are to command wide support and are to be as fully informed as possible. Many different stakeholder groups need to be given opportunities to contribute, especially:

- those who manage the land, especially farmers and foresters;
- local residents and community groups;
- other users of the land, including visitors and those who take part in recreational activities.

7.5 An historical perspective is important to help understand the way in which a landscape has evolved over time to take on its present character, and how both natural forces and human intervention have contributed to its evolution. With such understanding, decisions about future change can be placed in an historical context and ideas about, for example, restoration of some earlier historic character can be

well-informed and based on a sound historical rationale (see **Topic Paper 5**).

### WHAT TYPES OF JUDGEMENTS ?

7.6 Ways of making judgements based on character will vary depending upon the particular issue that is being addressed. This in turn will reflect the purpose of the assessment and the type of judgements that are required. As set out in **Chapter 2 (para 2.10)**, these judgements will either:

- be specifically related to decision-making based on landscape character; or
- be designed to contribute to wider environmental decision-making tools where landscape is only one of several topics to be addressed.

7.7 A number of such environmental and sustainability decision-making tools now exist. Some, like Environmental Impact Assessment and landscape capacity studies, are well established. Others, like the Natural Heritage Futures programme (used in Scotland), and Quality of Life Capital (in England) are newer and still emerging. Landscape Character Assessment links to these tools in different ways. **Topic Paper 2** provides information about these tools. It particularly highlights the way that



these tools and initiatives can be informed by Landscape Character Assessment.

## MAIN CONSIDERATIONS IN MAKING JUDGEMENTS

7.8 Approaches to making judgements that are focused on landscape character, as distinct from these broader environmental tools, have continued to evolve particularly over the last ten years as practitioners have gained more experience in the practical application of techniques. These approaches are generally based on one or more of the following considerations, namely the character, quality (condition of features), value of the landscape, and its sensitivity to change. These terms need to be understood if there is to be consistency in approaches taken. The definitions recommended by the Agencies are as follows:

- **Landscape character** means the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and how these are perceived by people. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement. It creates the particular sense of place of different areas of the landscape.
- **Landscape quality (or condition)** is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.
- **Landscape value** is concerned with the relative value that is

attached to different landscapes. In a policy context the usual basis for recognising certain highly valued landscapes is through the application of a local or national landscape designation. Yet a landscape may be valued by different communities of interest for many different reasons without any formal designation, recognising, for example, perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness; special cultural associations; the influence and presence of other conservation interests; or the existence of a consensus about importance, either nationally or locally.

- **Landscape capacity** refers to the degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character, or overall change of landscape character type. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of change being proposed.

7.9 In deciding on the approach to making judgements there must be a clear rationale which is explained to the assessment's users. This will help make the assessment and its application more robust and accountable.

## DEFINING OBJECTIVES

7.10 The rationale for judgements will need to establish the balance between the following objectives for landscape types and areas:

- **Conservation and maintenance** of existing character;
- **Enhancement** of existing character through the introduction of new elements and features or different management of existing ones;

- **Restoration** of character, where this is appropriate to current land use activities and stakeholders' preferences, and is economically viable through either public or private money or a mix of both;
- **Creation** of or accelerating change towards a new character; or
- **Some combination of these options**, especially where regeneration activity is occurring, involving much development and change.

7.11 Developing such a rationale will require careful thought about the overall character and key characteristics of the landscape today, and the dynamics of the landscape, in terms of recent change, current trends and future forces. This will help to determine both the desirability and practicability of maintaining current character.

## APPROACHES TO MAKING JUDGEMENTS

7.12 The approach taken to making judgements will usually vary depending on the particular applications for which the assessment is to be used. One of the following four approaches is usually adopted.

### i. Landscape strategies

7.13 A Landscape Character Assessment may lead to a strategy for the landscape based on what change, if any, is thought to be desirable for a particular landscape character type (or area) as a whole. The judgements underpinning such strategies need to be transparent but not overly complex, and will usually relate in some way to the objectives set out in **para 7.10**. To ensure they are widely owned and can be implemented, they should be devised and tested through stakeholder involvement where possible.



7.14 To date, practitioners have used landscape strategies to guide thinking on the desirability of: maintaining the existing landscape character; enhancing character; restoring some former landscape, or creating a new one.

7.15 When used in the field of planning policy, for example as a basis for structure or local plan policies, the strategy approach may be used to indicate the preferred approach for each policy zone within the plan and to provide a basis for landscape and development policies. In other circumstances, aspects of landscape value (**paras 7.21 - 7.23**) may help to identify areas for some form of landscape status or designation.

## ii. Landscape guidelines

7.16 A Landscape Character Assessment will normally identify the character of an area and those factors that are particularly important in creating that character, usually referred to as key characteristics. If the distinctive character of a certain landscape is to be maintained, the assumption must be that its positive key characteristics should be protected from adverse change and, conversely, that the effects of negative characteristics will be overcome by some form of enhancement. This assumption provides the basis for judgements about the actions necessary to achieve this (**Box 7.1**).

7.17 Field survey should identify the physical state of individual elements and features, and, in combination with consultation and additional research, should indicate the probability of future change, and its nature and direction (trends or 'forces for change'). Considering all this information together should then reveal opportunities either to

**Box 7.1: Steps in developing landscape guidelines**

**Review from field survey**

- key characteristics of the landscape;
- current state of landscape - condition of features and elements and overall intactness;
- evidence of landscape change and of its consequences.

**Identify by research and consultation**

- trends in land use that may cause future change;
- potential development pressures.

**Predict**

- consequences of land use trends and development pressures for the landscape;
- effects of predicted change on key characteristics, both negative and positive.

**Define**

- threats to key characteristics as a result of adverse consequences of change;
- opportunities for enhancement where scope for beneficial change;
- guidelines on intervention required for different land uses to counter threats and realise opportunities;
- priorities for action and methods of implementation.

It is often helpful to prepare guidelines at several different levels - for the whole of a study area where they are common, for each landscape character type and for individual landscape character areas where there are specific requirements for action.

prevent those changes which may have adverse consequences for landscape character, or to maximise opportunities for enhancement. This requires careful thought about the importance attached to characteristic features and about the likelihood of either 'positive' or 'negative' change.

7.18 This type of analysis usually results in the drawing up of **landscape guidelines** to indicate the actions required to ensure that distinctive character is maintained or, if appropriate, enhanced. This approach has been adopted in the majority of published assessments

in England and Scotland. Such guidelines are often produced in written form, and are sub-divided according to both the landscape type in question and the main pressures likely to result in landscape change, namely agriculture, forestry, settlement and built development, mineral working, tourism and recreation, and infrastructure (**Box 7.2**).

7.19 Guidelines can also be presented graphically. This is particularly useful when dealing with design issues. In the Sussex Downs AONB graphic guidelines are available in a loose-leaf folder designed

### Box 7.2: Example of landscape guidelines

#### **Fife Landscape Character Assessment** **Landscape character type: Lowland Dens**

##### **Agriculture**

- Encourage maintenance of the relatively small-scale irregular field pattern.
- Where land is taken out of arable use encourage permanent woodland planting.
- Improving grasslands and drainage schemes could disturb the characteristic land cover and vegetation patterns and adversely affect the contours and textures of the landscape and its ecological value.

##### **Forestry**

- Encourage the planting of broadleaved trees along the river and burns to link existing woodlands and other habitats and to reinforce the semi-natural patterns of drainage and riparian vegetation and habitats.
- Encourage new planting to enhance the interlinking of new woodlands to existing plantations and semi-natural woodlands on the hills and in the lowlands.

##### **Settlement and built development**

- Concentrate new built development in the form of well landscaped extensions to existing settlements well-related to landform and of a scale appropriate to the size of the settlement.
- Encourage the use of existing building styles and materials such as grey stone with grey or dark blue slate-like roofs.

##### **Mineral workings**

- Mineral extraction in this landscape type would be inappropriate owing to its potentially adverse effects on the character of the landscape and the potential for the workings to be conspicuous bearing in mind that any effective, large-scale screening measures themselves would be inappropriate features.

##### **Other development and structures in the landscape**

- Avoid locating any high or bulky new structures in this landscape type or, where essential, they should be subject to rigorous landscape and visual impact assessment and should be sited carefully and designed to minimise their impact.

Source: David Tyldesley and Associates (1999) *Fife Landscape Character Assessment*, Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh.

to assist in communicating ideas to farmers and land managers (**Figure 7.1**). The Skye and Lochalsh character assessment in Scotland has also taken a highly graphic approach to both the descriptions of landscape character and to the guidelines (**Figure 7.2**).

7.20 As guidelines are designed to influence the way in which landscapes are managed it is highly desirable that the many stakeholders involved in day-to-day

management are actively involved in the process. This will help to ensure that the guidelines are based on a good understanding of 'real world' land uses and land management practices, and that there will be a good prospect that they can be practically implemented.

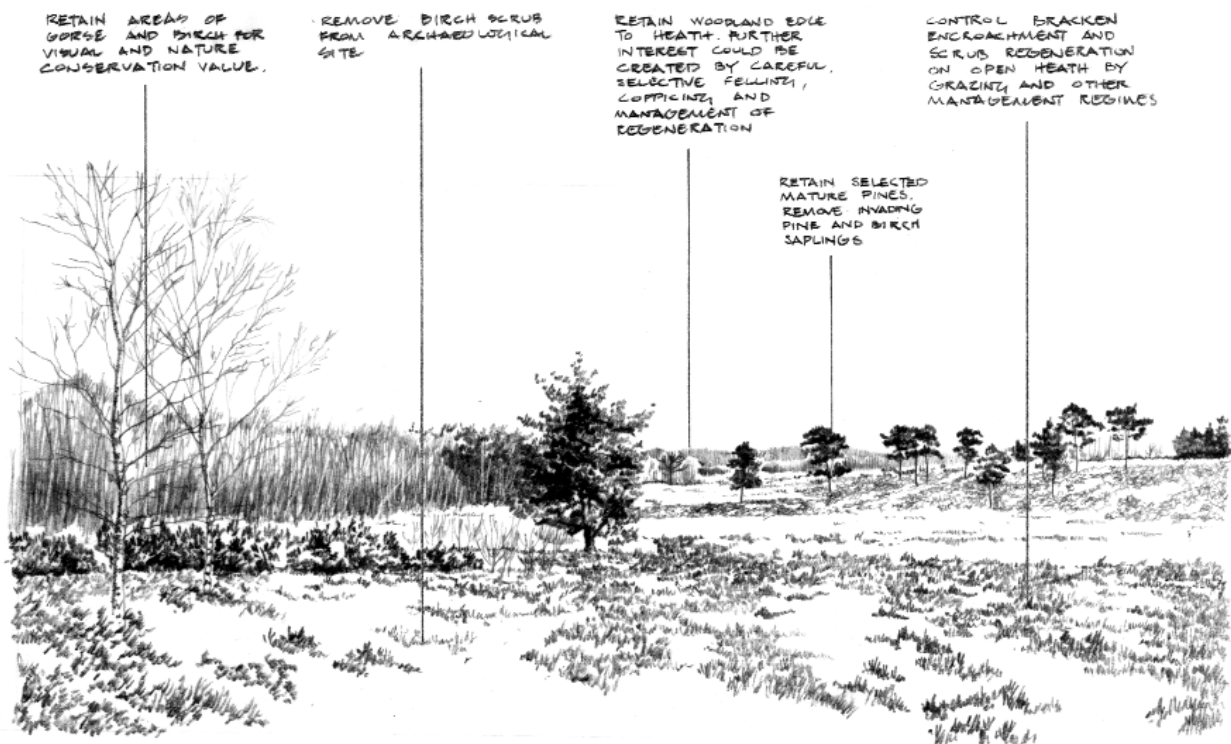
#### **iii. Attaching status to landscapes**

7.21 Where a tract of landscape is selected for special recognition, judgements need to be based on a

range of different considerations. National landscape designations in England and Scotland are based on criteria that encompass much more than landscape alone. The key considerations are:

- **natural beauty:** encompasses flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features and is the term that has been used in defining AONBs and National Parks in England;

**Fig 7.1 Sussex Downs AONB Landscape Design Guidelines**



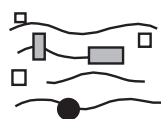
Source: Landscape Design Associates (1997) *Sussex Downs AONB Landscape Design Guidelines*. Countryside Commission and Sussex Downs Conservation Board, Cheltenham.

**Figure 7.2: Skye and Lochalsh landscape guidelines**

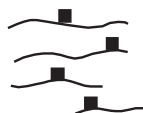
### Rocky moorland landscape character type

- The introduction of **numerous elements** within this landscape character type often results in visual confusion, due to the difficulty in creating any kind of order and sense of relationship between elements upon a variable landform; each element, even if part of a collective group, tends to have a different relationship with the landscape.

As a result of this landscape having no distinct pattern or edges, new elements can often appear most appropriate where they either have a **direct relationship to a specific landscape characteristic**, or are **concentrated and ordered as a group**, although the latter may collectively create a dominant focus, contrasting to the undifferentiated character of this landscape.



confusion of  
collective  
elements



related to a  
common  
characteristic



distinct order and  
relationship of  
elements



dispersed elements  
can appear as  
sprawl, affecting  
entire area



concentration  
allows retention of  
surrounding open  
space

Source: Stanton, C. (1996) *Skye and Lochalsh Landscape Assessment*. No 71. Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh.

- **recreational opportunity:** opportunities afforded for open-air recreation, having regard both to landscape character and position in relation to centres of population. (Also used in defining National Parks in England);
- **natural beauty and amenity:** a composite term, used in the founding legislation of SNH contained with The Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991. The Act defines the natural heritage as including the physical elements of flora, fauna, geology, physiographic features and natural beauty and amenity. This combination of terms covers the physical landscape, but also the less tangible aspects such as remoteness or tranquillity, and aspects of landscape experience which appeal to senses other than sight, such as the sound or smell of the sea.

7.22 In considering natural beauty and amenity, and in any other situation which requires that a landscape be identified as requiring special attention, judgements must be based at least in part on the concept of **landscape value (para 7.8)**. This refers to the relative value or importance that stakeholders attach to different landscapes and their reasons for valuing them. The reasons may be set out according to a range of more detailed criteria that may include the following:

- **landscape quality:** the intactness of the landscape and the condition of features and elements (**para 7.8**);
- **scenic quality:** the term that is used to describe landscapes which appeal primarily to the visual senses;
- **rarity:** the presence of rare features and elements in the

landscape, or the presence of a rare landscape character type;

- **representativeness:** whether the landscape contains a particular character, and/or features and elements, which is felt by stakeholders to be worthy of representing;
- **conservation interests:** the presence of features of particular wildlife, earth science or archaeological, historical and cultural interest can add to the value of a landscape as well as having value in their own right;
- **wildness:** the presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place;
- **associations** with particular people, artists, writers, or other media, or events in history.

There may often be a consensus of opinion about the value of an area encompassing one or more of these criteria, which can be traced over time from the views expressed by different stakeholders.

**7.23 Tranquillity:** In addition to these landscape-related criteria there is another criterion, 'tranquillity', that is a composite feature related to low levels of built development, traffic, noise and artificial lighting. Authors of Landscape Character Assessments must state their criteria for 'low levels' clearly and should also consider whether one or more of the factors needs to be addressed individually, rather than in combination. Policy makers and practitioners may find it useful to refer to the Tranquil Areas maps [54]. Tranquil area mapping is currently underway in Scotland, as is the identification of core wild land areas.

7.24 The full range of criteria set out above may be used to identify valued landscapes that merit some form of designation or recognition. They can be used, either individually or in combination, to assist the definition of nationally important areas throughout England and Scotland. These include National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Scenic Areas, and equivalent areas.

7.25 The criteria of 'natural beauty', 'recreational opportunity' and 'natural beauty and amenity' can be the starting points for selecting the broad area of search for designation or recognition of special areas. The criteria listed in **paras 7.22 and 7.23** could be used to provide a supporting statement about why a particular area is valued. Boundaries can then be determined by assessing the character and quality of the landscapes within the area of search to determine whether or not they should be included (see **Chapter 9** for further detail).

#### iv. Landscape capacity

7.26 Many Landscape Character Assessments will be used to help in decisions about the ability of an area to accommodate change, either as a result of new development, or some other form of land use change, such as the introduction of new features, or major change in land cover such as new woodland planting. In these circumstances judgements must be based on an understanding of the ability of the landscape to accommodate change without significant effects on its character. Criteria for what constitutes significant change need to be identified in planning policies or landscape strategies, and will usually be informed by potential effects on character and/or particular features and elements.

## GOOD PRACTICE POINTERS

- It is particularly important to find ways of involving stakeholders in this part of the process if the judgements made are to command wide support.
- The approach taken to making judgements based on character will vary depending upon the issue being addressed and must be designed to meet the particular circumstances.
- Some approaches to making judgements are an integral part of the Landscape Character Assessment process. Others are wider environmental evaluation processes to which Landscape Character Assessment can make a valuable contribution.
- There must be a clear rationale behind the approach to making judgements, which will help to determine the eventual outcome. This will require careful thought about the overall character and key characteristics of the landscape, its history and origins, and the opportunities that may exist to create new landscapes to meet the emerging social, economic and environmental needs of stakeholders.
- It is particularly important that:
  - the reasons for adopting a particular approach to making judgements are made clear;
  - the approach (or combination of approaches) used must be clearly explained and transparent;
  - the extent and nature of stakeholder involvement should be made clear.



PART 2

# ***LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE***



*Stob Coire nan Lochan and the Three Sisters, Glencoe by Graham Buchanan-Dunlop for The National Trust for Scotland.*

*The management plan for this property covers detailed consideration of landscape character.*



# CHAPTER 8

## APPLICATIONS IN PLANNING

### LANDSCAPE CHANGE AND PLANNING

8.1 The classification and description of landscape character types should be a factual and objective process. The results can be used in a range of situations. The process of making judgements and producing guidelines will, on the other hand, require an approach tailored to particular circumstances.

8.2 Many different factors contribute to change in the landscape. They are as diverse as climate change, severe weather events like floods and droughts, built development, and changing land management, among others. The balance between the different factors varies in different parts of the country. There can be little doubt, however, that in some areas built development is one of the most significant causes of change. Most forms of built development are subject to planning controls and both planning policies and the implementation of these policies through development control can have a significant influence on the evolution of the landscape. Landscape Character Assessment can make a valuable contribution to the formulation of planning policies, to development control activities, to the allocation of land for development, and to processes such as environmental assessment. (See **Box 8.1** for discussion of research into this link in Scotland). The use of Landscape Character Assessment in the planning sector is the focus of this chapter.

### DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

8.3 In addressing landscape issues, development plans in England and Scotland have traditionally concentrated on policies for the protection of:

- nationally designated landscapes like National Parks in England

and now in Scotland, as well as AONBs in England and National Scenic Areas in Scotland;

- locally designated areas, usually either Areas of Great/High Landscape Value or Special Landscape Areas;
- individual landscape features, with trees the most frequently mentioned.

#### **Box 8.1: The use of Landscape Character Assessment in development plans**

A study in Scotland has investigated the links between Landscape Character Assessment and development planning. A range of development plans in both England and Scotland has been reviewed to assess how they use character-based approaches and how they incorporate the findings of Landscape Character Assessments in planning policies. The work demonstrated that in Scotland there is a high level of awareness of, and respect for, SNH's programme of Landscape Character Assessment. The report states that the planners contacted "all believe it has been directly or indirectly influential in the development planning and development control processes, raising awareness and understanding; the differences are, essentially of degree, emphasis, timing, scale, detail and prescription".

The major constraint on use of Landscape Character Assessment is thought to be the scale of the work and the lack of prescription. The descriptions of character are thought to be particularly helpful, the guidelines generally less so. The majority of those authorities consulted will refer to the assessment in their development plans, two-thirds of them in policies and one-third in supporting text, but only one authority has dropped landscape designations in favour of a character-based approach.

The study has led to clear recognition that there is a stage between the assessment and the development plan process "in which the content of the Landscape Character Assessment needs to be expanded and specific issues need to be addressed in more detail".

*Source: David Tyldesley Associates (1999) The Use of Landscape Character Assessments in Development Plans. Report to Scottish Natural Heritage.*

8.4 It is likely that policies for nationally designated areas will continue to receive the major emphasis in development plans in both England and Scotland. Approaches to local landscape designations are more varied and are largely determined by current government policy as set down in relevant planning policy guidance. In England, PPG 7 [55] advises that these local designations carry less weight than national designations and that development plans should not apply the same policies to them. It also indicates that local planning authorities should only maintain or extend local designations where it is believed that normal planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection, in which case plans must make clear what exactly it is that requires extra protection and why. When reviewing development plans, authorities are urged to “rigorously consider the function and justification of existing local countryside designations” and to ensure that they are “soundly based on a formal assessment of the qualities of the countryside”. In Scotland NPPG 14 [4] indicates that local designations continue to have an important role to play in development plans and the issue of local designations is being reviewed in association with a review of national designations.

8.5 PPG 7 indicates that “The priority now is to find new ways of enriching the quality of the whole of the countryside whilst accommodating appropriate development, in order to complement the protection which designations offer”. Landscape Character Assessment has a major role to play in this process. Neither the Countryside Agency nor SNH currently promote approaches

based on character as an alternative to local landscape or countryside designations. Rather it is seen as complementary. It can be used both within such designated areas and outside them, to inform individual planning and management decisions, and to help identify the conditions for development and change.

8.6 In recent years, nevertheless, and partly in response to PPG 7 in England and NPPG 14 in Scotland, the balance has begun to shift away from policies for locally designated areas towards an emphasis on maintaining and enhancing the distinctive character everywhere. National landscape designations will undoubtedly still continue to be the focus for development plan policies but, in future, policies based on landscape character are likely to emerge alongside those based on local designations, in regional, structure and local plans. Where local designations continue to be used it is likely that there will be growing emphasis on the role of Landscape Character Assessment in defining and justifying these areas, in order to meet the requirement for “formal assessment of the qualities of the countryside” [55].

8.7 If local designations are to be supplemented by, and in England gradually give way to, an approach based on character, ways must be found of linking landscape policies to landscape character. The most straightforward approach is a policy that simply requires that development is in keeping with the character of the landscape and maintains its distinctiveness, as in the example of the Ayrshire Structure Plan policy (**Box 8.2**). Such a policy must be accompanied by some form of character map, with descriptions of the landscape

types and areas embraced by the plan, and guidance on the implications of these for development. In Scotland, for example, Ayrshire has a Joint Structure Plan Committee that has pursued a character-based approach. Here a map of eight simplified ‘regional character areas’ is included in the Structure Plan, amalgamating the original 26 landscape types identified in the

### **Box 8.2: A character-based planning policy**

#### **Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 1999**

##### **Policy E1**

“The quality of Ayrshire’s landscape and its distinctive local characteristics shall be maintained and enhanced. In providing for new development, particular care shall be taken to conserve those features that contribute to local distinctiveness including:

- A. The setting of settlements and buildings within the landscape.
- B. The patterns of woodland, fields, hedgerows and tree features.
- C. The special qualities of rivers, estuaries and coasts.
- D. Historic landscapes; and
- E. Skylines and hill features, including prominent views.

Local plans shall seek to protect and enhance landscape character and criteria should be established for the assessment of the sensitivity of local landscape types to different categories of development”.

Source: (as above).

Council's area-wide Landscape Character Assessment. In England, the Forest of Dean District-wide Local Plan included descriptions of landscape types identified in the Landscape Character Assessment of the District in the supporting text of the plan, to be read in conjunction with the policy on landscape character.

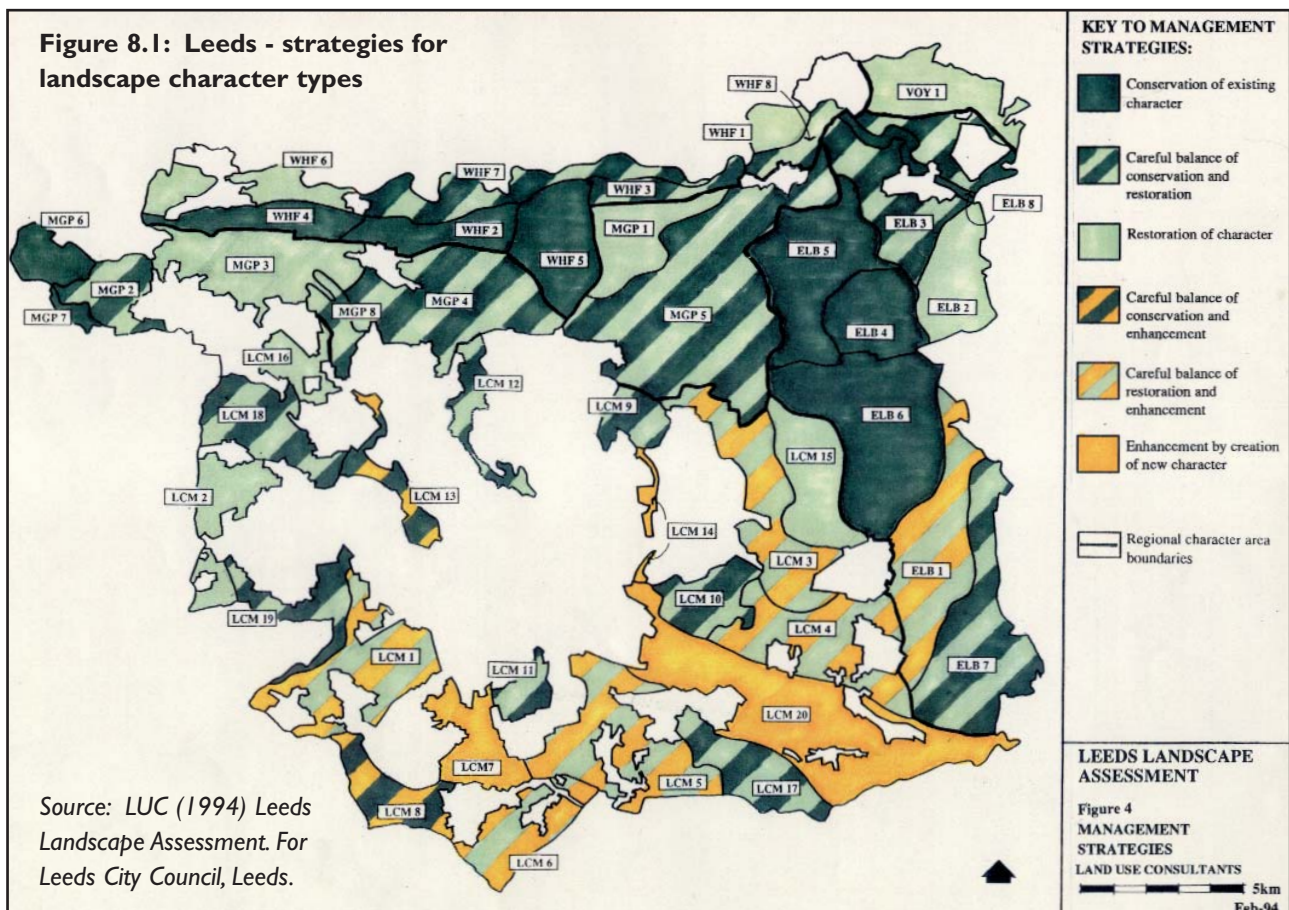
8.8 An alternative approach is that the Landscape Character Assessment document itself may be adopted as supplementary planning guidance, in which case the inclusion in the assessment of carefully thought out guidelines dealing with the role of settlement and built development in the landscape will then provide supporting information to assist in development control.

8.9 Some local planning authorities have developed more prescriptive, map-based policies which make use of the landscape quality and strategies approach to making judgements, as outlined in **Chapter 7**. In the Hambleton District Local Plan, for example, three different policies towards development were devised, linked to the strategies of conservation, restoration and enhancement which were attached to different landscape character areas identified in the district-wide Landscape Character Assessment. The map of these strategy areas became the basis for the plan policies and for implementation through development control.

8.10 In this approach character areas that are judged to require a strategy of conservation, or conser-

vation and restoration, are often found to accord well with previously defined local designations. In the Landscape Character Assessment of the area covered by Leeds City Council, for example, these areas were found to coincide broadly with the existing Special Landscape Area in all but one case (**Figure 8.1**). The strategy-based approach can be much more flexible than the use of designations and, when combined with landscape guidelines, can give more guidance on what forms of development may be acceptable in different areas.

8.11 This approach to developing planning policies based on character has been taken further in counties in the Midlands of England, notably in Staffordshire (**Box 8.3**). Judgements about landscape quality and sensitivity are here combined

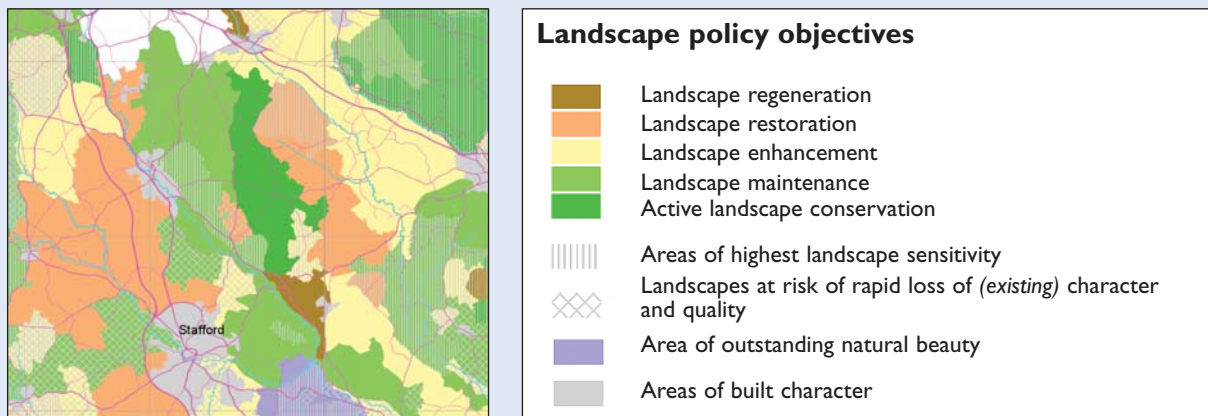


### Box 8.3: Staffordshire approach to developing planning landscape policies

Staffordshire County Council has carried out a comprehensive Landscape Character Assessment of the County with particular emphasis on its application in developing structure plan policies, but also for many other important applications. The assessment uses *The Character of England* framework as a starting point for describing character, then develops a finer grain description and classification of landscape character. The assessment adopts a hierarchical approach to defining landscape character types but ultimately uses the smallest units of landscape character areas, here referred to as 'Land Description Units' (LDUs), as the basis for further judgements and decision-making. LDUs are defined as the largest homogeneous map units sharing a similar pattern of physical, biological and historical components.

In moving from landscape character to the judgements required in practical applications, the Staffordshire work has adopted a highly structured approach which is clearly set out in supplementary planning guidance. LDUs are used as the framework and in each unit judgements are made, based on fieldwork, about landscape quality and landscape sensitivity. Separate maps showing landscape quality and sensitivity are then combined, to define a series of landscape policy zones linked to a structure plan policy (see Policy NC2). This landscape character and quality assessment has now been formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan 1996 - 2011.

#### Staffordshire Landscape Policy Zones (part of map)



#### Policy NC2: Landscape Protection and Restoration

Development should be informed by and be sympathetic to landscape character and quality and should contribute, as appropriate, to the regeneration, restoration, enhancement, maintenance or active conservation of the landscape likely to be affected. Proposals with landscape and visual implications will be assessed having regard to the extent to which they would:

- (a) cause unacceptable visual harm;
- (b) introduce (or conversely remove) incongruous landscape elements;
- (c) cause the disturbance or loss of (or conversely help to maintain):
  - (i) landscape elements that contribute to local distinctiveness;
  - (ii) historic elements that contribute significantly to landscape character and quality, such as field, settlement or road patterns;
  - (iii) semi-natural vegetation which is characteristic of that landscape type;
  - (iv) the visual condition of landscape elements;
  - (v) tranquillity.

Source: Staffordshire County Council (2001): *Planning for Landscape Change - Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan 1996-2011*.



to create a map of Landscape Policy Zones linked to an accompanying policy on development. In this case the strategy approach is framed in five policy objectives, namely:

- innovative landscape regeneration;
- landscape restoration;
- landscape enhancement;
- landscape maintenance;
- active landscape conservation.

## STUDIES OF DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

8.12 The results of Landscape Character Assessment can make an important contribution, alongside other environmental considerations, to identifying areas with potential for new built development. This is becoming particularly important in considering the location and design of new housing. A broad overview can be taken initially at the regional planning scale, where *The Character of England* descriptions and landscape typology can provide a starting point in identifying areas of search in England and the more aggregated levels of the national programme of assessments in Scotland can play a similar role there. The Regional Development Agencies in England are being urged to adopt this approach in their planning for the future.

8.13 At the local authority level, studies of development potential need to be based on detailed local Landscape Character Assessments. Judgements made on the basis of concepts such as landscape value, and condition of landscape elements, and the policy zones that result, can help identify areas considered suitable for some forms of development. Where areas are earmarked for development and regeneration there should be a

clear link between the development and provision of enhancements, while the design of the development should be informed by the local character.

8.14 In Scotland, Landscape Character Assessment has already played an important role in examining the capacity of some areas to accept new built development, contributing significantly to structure and local plans. SNH has worked in partnership with many local authorities to devise approaches to identifying the capacity of the landscape to accommodate change being brought about by various types of development pressure (**Boxes 8.4 and 8.5**). In England, housing developers themselves have used Landscape Character Assessments to help find a location for a new settlement, such as in the East Midlands. Elsewhere in the UK, a major study of Belfast City Region has used Landscape Character Assessment to assess the capacity of different areas to accommodate development (**Box 8.6**).

### Expansion of settlements at the urban edge

8.15 Pressures for new development are usually focused around existing settlements. Planning considerations relating to transport and sustainability issues all point to a preference for locating new development either in existing urban areas or on the edge of towns and cities. Given that opportunities within existing urban areas will inevitably be increasingly limited, there will be growing pressures on the edges of existing settlements. Many of these areas around towns and cities will be covered by Green Belt policies which will have a strong influence on what and how development

takes place. Careful characterisation of the landscape, allied with appropriate frameworks for making judgments, can help here by providing a close examination of the character of urban fringe areas and their potential to accommodate development. There are a number of recent examples of the use of Landscape Character Assessments in these urban fringe areas.

8.16 Historic cities can pose particular challenges when it comes to identifying areas for potential expansion. This is because the landscape setting of such cities is often an important contributor to their special character. Greater York Council has assessed the character of the countryside around the historic City of York and used this as a framework for assessing a large number of potential housing sites, including land within the Green Belt. Hampshire County Council, together with several partner organisations, including statutory government agencies, commissioned a comprehensive character appraisal of Winchester City and its setting to inform both a methodology for the future appraisal of historic cities and as an input to a major study to review the future of the City, being conducted by the City Council and using the Quality of Life Capital approach (**Box 8.7**). The use of Landscape Character Assessment in evaluating the development capacity of settlements in Scotland was pioneered in work on the historic town of St Andrews and further developed in work on the areas around the historic City of Stirling and the wider area covered by Stirling Council (**Box 8.5**).

8.17 Studies on the edge of towns can make use of the approaches to making judgments that have been

### Box 8.4: Perth Landscape Capacity Study

In preparing the Perth Structure Plan, Perth & Kinross Council were aware that the area was continuing to experience high levels of population growth and consequent pressure for new development. The Council also recognised that the area was sensitive to changes in the landscape. Officers from the Council and SNH were

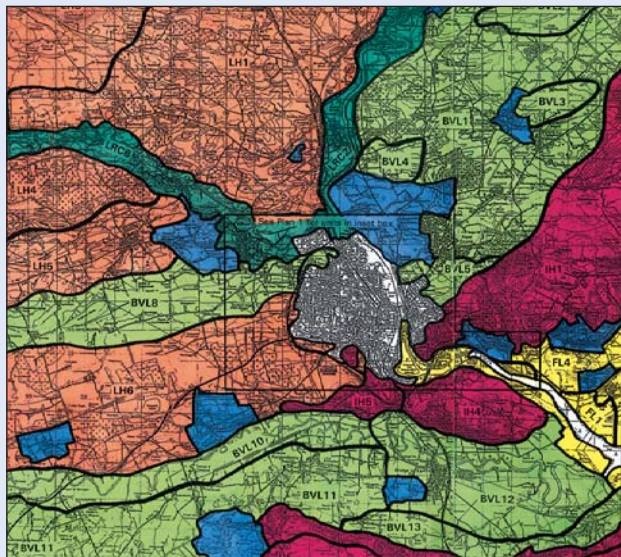


Figure 1. Landscape character types and units in the study area

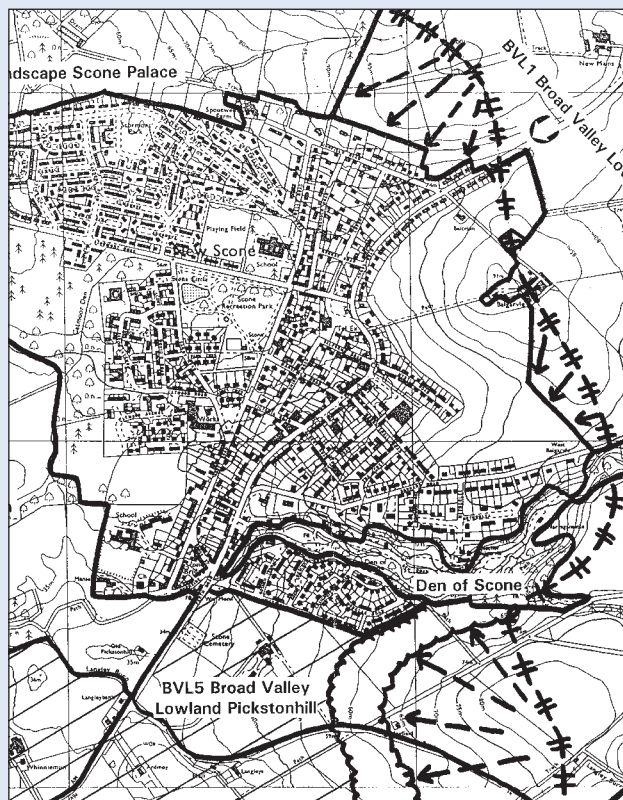


Figure 2. Example settlement - New Scone

involved in developing methods for landscape capacity assessment both in fieldwork and assessment processes to inform the locational strategy of the development plan.

The capacity of the landscapes around Perth and 17 other settlements in the Local Plan area were assessed for their potential to accommodate further built development in the form of small or larger scale expansion and to investigate the potential locations and capacity for a new settlement within the Local Plan area. The justification for a Green Belt for Perth was also examined in a second phase of this study.

The study area contained six regional landscape character types shown in Figure 1. These were subdivided into a series of units and sub-units for assessment in relation to each of the settlements, and to assess the landscape capacity to accommodate a new settlement in addition to one already under consideration.

The assessment concluded that:

- the landscapes around Perth have limited capacity to accommodate further urban expansion if the setting and character of the city is to be sustained;
- there is scope for substantial new development at four settlements, and for small-scale expansion in four other smaller ones;
- nine other settlements have effectively reached their capacity to accommodate development in landscape and visual terms;
- there is scope to accommodate a new settlement in one landscape character sub-unit;
- some sub-units could accommodate a new village but not of the size necessary to make it viable and sustainable in respect of other considerations.

Source: Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report (2001) Report No. F99LH24A

Contractor: David Tyldesley Associates



### **Box 8.5: Using capacity studies to inform the new Structure Plan for Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils**

Clackmannanshire Council and Stirling Council are preparing a new Structure Plan which will set the strategic framework for new developments up to 2016. It has been estimated that there may be a requirement for about 4,000 - 6,000 houses in the area of Stirling Council and a further 1,100 in the area of Clackmannanshire Council.

To assist in preparation of the Structure Plan, and in developing a strategy to meet such needs while sustaining the landscape qualities and characteristics which make the area unique and special, Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned separate detailed landscape character assessments for each of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire Council areas. The studies were managed jointly by SNH and the relevant council.

Both areas had already been subject to landscape character assessments at a scale of 1:50,000, as part of the Scottish National LCA Programme. The detailed studies aimed to develop and refine these assessments for certain specified areas which had been identified as potential locations for development. This required refinement and detailed application of the landscape types and areas identified in the original assessments to suit the more detailed level of working. The work then focused on whether or not, in the specified locations, new developments would conflict with landscape character in a way that could not be effectively or appropriately mitigated, and sought to identify areas suitable for accommodating small-scale growth and those suitable for major settlement expansion.

Judgements about capacity were derived from the key characteristics and features of the landscape character types present in the areas, under five criteria:

- Landscape as a resource examined potential effects on key aspects of land form, land cover, settlement patterns and other land uses, point and linear features;
- Landscape experience considered effects on the aesthetic and perceptual aspects such as scale, openness, diversity, form and pattern;
- Visual effects reviewed impacts on views, approaches and skylines and the overall conspicuousness (or conspicuity) of potential developments;
- Other important effects reviewed any potential impacts on particular features of importance such as designed landscapes or other cultural or historical features;
- Mitigation considered whether there was scope to reduce the effects of development by appropriate mitigation.

These criteria were applied in a systematic way, using a simple three point graphical scale to express the relative significance of the potential effects, to specific locations and areas where developments might be feasible within the defined areas of search. Finally, guidelines were developed to demonstrate the design principles that should be applied in areas identified as suitable for development. From this work, a description was produced for each settlement which covered, in a standard format: the relationship of the settlement to the landscape; views and viewpoints; local pressures for change; sensitivity to change; and options for change. Each analysis was accompanied by a plan showing: opportunities for sensitive expansion; locations for mitigation measures; and important landscape features and views.

*Sources: David Tyldesley Associates (1999) Stirling Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study, Report to Stirling Council and Scottish Natural Heritage; David Tyldesley Associates (1998) Clackmannanshire Local Plan - Settlement Landscape Capacity Studies, Report to Clackmannanshire Council and Scottish Natural Heritage.*

outlined in **Chapter 7**. The landscape strategy, guidelines and capacity approaches are likely to be particularly useful. When individual sites or small local areas are being assessed, however, it may also be necessary to incorporate a more detailed landscape and visual appraisal of the site. This might include factors such as views to and from the site, visually prominent landscape features and landmarks, skylines and so on. When dealing with historic towns and cities their

interface with the surrounding countryside merits special attention, including factors such as:

- the importance of the landscape setting to the town and the relationship between the two, including the presence of any apparently 'natural' limits to development;
- the relationship of gateways, ring roads and other access routes to the form of the settlement and to the landscape setting;

- the nature of views from the surrounding area to key landmarks, such as cathedrals and castles.

8.18 At the urban edge, the focus of Landscape Character Assessment is on the open land around the town, including green corridors penetrating into it, and on the interface with the built-up area. Analysis of the different relationships between the two may be required in order to characterise

#### **Box 8.6: Belfast City Region Landscape Character Assessment - capacity to accommodate development**

In 1997 a Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken for Belfast City Region (BCR). It was particularly valuable in helping to develop a strategic framework for guiding the location of new development and identifying opportunities to strengthen and enhance landscape character and quality. The assessment is being used in a positive way, not only to protect sensitive landscapes, but as a way of accommodating change and facilitating the regeneration of local economies. The assessment:

- identifies a number of landscape character areas and records their principal characteristics and landscape quality;
- defines the landscape sensitivity of the character areas based on character, condition, context and special value;
- pays particular attention to a detailed visual analysis and to the character, quality and relative sensitivity of different urban fringe landscapes;
- establishes opportunities for new development and principles for its siting and design, suggesting the pattern, form and scale which it might take in order to reinforce and enhance landscape character.

In summary, the Landscape Character Assessment is intended to build an understanding of the striking variations in landscape character across the BCR and to describe how the design of new buildings and the management of the countryside can help to conserve landscape diversity and (in many instances) bolster its capacity to accommodate further development. This requires a pro-active approach. Areas under pressure for development have a particular need for strong design to counteract the tendency for homogenisation and to ensure that development reinforces local landscape quality and diversity. Encouraging high quality design is therefore seen to be a priority and implies:

- providing clearer guidance and advice to planners and developers on the siting, design and layout of developments in different settlements and landscape types;
- a more integrated and locally-based approach to design and planning in which opportunities for conservation;
- environmental enhancement and landscape management are considered in parallel with opportunities for development.

Source: ERM (1997) *Belfast City Region Landscape Character Assessment*. Belfast City Region.

the landscape in an appropriate way and judge its capacity to accommodate development.

### Links with urban characterisation

8.19 Recent studies have also incorporated characterisation of the urban area itself. For example, in the case of Fareham Borough Council in Hampshire, the character assessment of the Borough, which encompassed the major built up areas, formed an important part of the Local Plan review [56]. Since then, the written descriptions of character and the identification of key characteristics have been used as part of the development control process to assess whether proposed development conforms with the general character of the area in which the development is proposed and whether it would adversely affect key characteristics. This evidence has been supported at public inquiry.

8.20 Urban characterisation is, however, quite different from Landscape Character Assessment as it deals predominantly with the built environment. It is a form of townscape assessment or urban morphology analysis. Although important in their own right, these techniques are not considered further in this guidance, although **Topic Paper 7** sets out some pointers on this subject.

### DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

8.21 Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, makes it clear that applications must conform to the development plan. Thus it is important that policies relating to

landscape character are included in development plans. Once this is achieved it is important that the design of new proposals for development are informed by policies for landscape character and often they will need to achieve appropriate fit within the landscape. Development control will then need to be informed by the issues relating to landscape character and development.

8.22 The ‘acceptability’ of a development proposal will often be based on whether or not it is judged to have an adverse impact on the area’s character. For example, the emerging Hart District Local Plan [57] contains a policy that states:

*“Within the landscape character areas...development will be permitted if it does not adversely affect the particular character of the landscape, and is in accordance with other policies of this plan.”*

Where local planning authorities use this approach, they need to set out criteria to judge whether the change and development will be deemed to be adverse. Such criteria will need to be based on particular elements and/or characteristics of the area’s character which are judged to be sensitive to particular forms of development.

The advantages of such a policy and criteria are that:

- development has to be in accord with the character of the area;
- developers know what to do to gain planning permission;
- development control staff know what details they are looking for in applications;

- higher quality development is the result.

### Design of new development

#### 8.23 Landscape Character

Assessments which aim to influence the design of new development often conclude with landscape guidelines which cover issues such as:

- the form and location of settlements and their relationship to the landscape;
- the nature of characteristic buildings, including materials, height and form, and detailing;
- particular local features which might add distinctiveness to new development.

8.24 The aim of design guidance should be to ensure that essential change is sympathetic to the character of the landscape and where possible enhances it. In some situations it could also identify what changes might be possible to the area’s character, an issue addressed in **Topic Paper 7**. It should not exclude innovative design which still respects character, but neither should it be so vague as to be meaningless. Guidance may be given on the siting, scale, form, massing, and use of space of new development as well as on the details of its design, including colour and use of materials. In the light of such guidance, development briefs and concept statements for sites can then indicate how the key landscape characteristics need to be maintained and how schemes can ensure the best possible fit with their landscape setting. Conditions attached to planning permissions can further assist in ensuring appropriate design to reflect landscape character.

### Box 8.7: Winchester City and its Setting Study (1998)

The principal aims of this study were to:

- identify the landscape/townscape characteristics and attributes of the historic city and its setting, and the contribution they make to the special character and sense of place;
- identify and delineate the boundary of the historic setting to Winchester;
- examine the existing pressures on each defined character area and how the foreseeable pressures on the City and its environment interact;
- define those characteristics which are essential to the historic fabric of the City and its setting and approaches, and its relationship to the wider countryside;
- identify possible mitigation measures to reduce the effects of development.

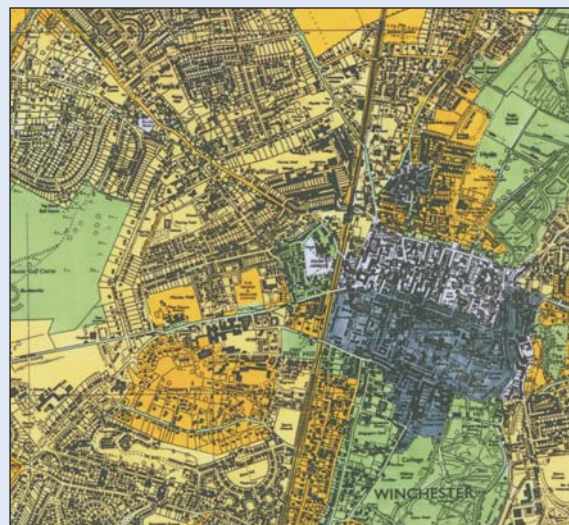
It was proposed that these results would then inform (a) a separate study being undertaken by Winchester City Council on the 'Future of Winchester' and its environmental capacity and (b) a future methodology for appraising historic cathedral cities and their setting.

The approach adopted involved:

- initial reconnaissance of the area to define the scope of the study and area of search;
- integrated characterisation which took account of the historic evolution of the city, as well as present-day landscape/townscape character and ecological attributes. Field surveys were undertaken by experts independently but a joint steering group provided an integrated approach to characterisation and mapping of boundaries;
- a civic perception workshop involving an invited list of delegates (50) including representatives of key local organisations who contributed to specific themes: built heritage and urban spaces; historic landscape; place and people; nature conservation; and industry and archaeology. This workshop highlighted the need to develop opportunities for greater public participation in this type of work;
- identification of landscape types and landscape and townscape character areas. Although the landscape and townscape areas are generally physically distinct there are areas where they borrow from each other e.g. where green wedges feed into the city centre;
- classification of landscape and townscape character areas according to their area of influence and relative significance within the City and its wider landscape setting. The following broad categories were identified:
  - visually cohesive historic cores;
  - visually fragmented historic cores;
  - landscape and townscape distinctive to Winchester and its setting;
  - landscape and townscape supportive to Winchester and its setting;
  - other connective areas of landscape and townscape within Winchester and its setting.

All these categories are considered important within the context of Winchester. It is these categories which have been fed into the broader capacity study of Winchester which has adopted the Quality of Life Capital approach to appraise future scenarios.

Source: Hampshire County Council et al (1998) *Winchester City and its Setting Study, Stage 1 Report*. Landscape Design Associates, Peterborough.



Areas of influence

8.25 In England the Countryside Agency has developed complementary techniques, alongside Landscape Character Assessment, for assessing the character of the built environment and its relationship to the landscape through its Design in the Countryside Programme which covers Countryside Design Summaries (CDS), Village Design Statements (VDS), and Town Design Statements (TDS). It is desirable for a Landscape Character Assessment and a Countryside Design Summary to be prepared in parallel or in close sequence, for the same area, as in North Lincolnshire Unitary Authority and Stratford-on-Avon District (**Box 8.8**), with the CDS concentrating on buildings and settlements in the landscape. Following this approach it is important that the different emphasis of the Landscape Character Assessment and the CDS is understood, and that the outputs are complementary and not contradictory. A single set of character types and areas should be common to both.

### Development control

8.26 In development control, landscape character is only one of many factors to be considered in reaching decisions about applications for planning permission. A Landscape Character Assessment, referred to in a development plan or available as supplementary planning guidance, together with suitably worded policies on landscape character, and informed by other work such as a Countryside Design Summary or Village Design Statement, will be of considerable help in ensuring that decisions are as informed as possible. Development control officers should contribute to the brief for any Landscape Character

Assessment and should be involved in discussions about the proposed uses of an assessment for development control purposes. They are important stakeholders who should contribute to the making of judgments about character, ideally by being part of a project steering group.

8.27 The final decision about the acceptability of new development is generally taken by local authority members, advised by officers. If Landscape Character Assessment is to play a major role in improving these decisions, it is vital that members themselves develop an understanding of the importance of character and the way that it can be influenced by different forms of development. While detailed understanding of the technicalities of Landscape Character Assessment is not necessary, an appreciation of its role, importance and implications will be invaluable. This can be encouraged by information, advice and training for members. Not all decisions will be made by local authorities, but by the Secretary of State or planning inspectors, who will also consider advice about the importance of character.

### INPUTS TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.28 Many forms of development are the subject of Environmental Impact Assessment under the provisions of the EU Directives and the UK government regulations which put them into effect. Assessing the landscape and visual impact of development proposals is one of the main components of these procedures and there is separate guidance, produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment [58], on how this part

of the work should be carried out.

8.29 Landscape Character Assessment makes a significant contribution to that part of the procedure concerned with assessing the impact of a development on landscape as a resource. It will, for example, help to indicate:

- the type of landscape within which the proposal lies;
- the consequences (both benefits and disbenefits) of not proceeding with a development, or only making minimal change;
- the scope for additional mitigation measures where, with good design, a development which is acceptable, can be visually and environmentally enhanced.

Proper application of these procedures within an EIA framework, at all relevant stages of project development, can do a great deal to bring about development which is sensitive to its landscape context.

8.30 This approach has special relevance to highway schemes and other transport infrastructure development proposals. These may be instituted either at the strategic level as part of multi-modal and road-based studies or at the local level by local authorities under their five year Local Transport Plans. The process of landscape characterisation will be important in examining the regional, sub-regional and local scale impact on the landscape arising from proposals for all or part of major transport corridors, whether the proposals transect or are aligned within one or more character areas or character types.

8.31 In England, the *Guidance on the Methodology for Multi-Modal Studies* (GOMMMS) [59] sets out detailed



### Box 8.8: Stratford-on-Avon District - Countryside Design Summary, District Design Guide

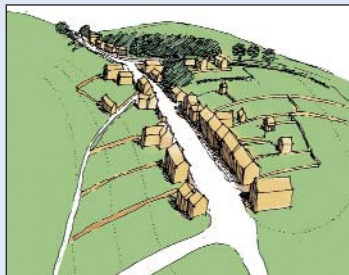
Stratford-on-Avon District Council has produced a three-part package of design guidance that complements the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines and comprises:

- Countryside Design Summary (CDS) - two A1 posters including a character map and outlining key design principles;
- District Design Guide - a document that incorporates and expands upon the CDS, providing more comprehensive general descriptions and design principles;
- Village Design Statements - produced by local communities, providing detailed information about their specific settlements.

The CDS divides the district into five main character areas, each of which was further divided into sub-areas to account for local differences. These character areas and their description were drawn up on the basis of the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines with the character areas responding in broad outline to those identified in the Character of England map. The CDS made slight changes to the names and boundaries of the Guideline's original character areas, in response to local perceptions and a more deliberate focus on settlement location, structure and predominant building materials.

The CDS and the more detailed District Design Guide set out general design principles that promote using settlements themselves as a design resource to maintain and enhance the distinctive local character of each area. The principles derive from an understanding of the historical processes that have created the District's villages and buildings. In particular they consider:

#### 1. Settlement position and form



Hilltop or ridgetop settlements tend to extend along ridgelines and plateaux, and secondarily downward along main routes.

Hillside or hill terrace settlements tend to extend parallel to the contour lines of the hillside. Secondarily they tend to extend downward along the main routes.



#### 2. Skyline, views and edge character

#### 3. Internal characteristics of settlements (eg street pattern, plot pattern, individual plots, buildings, details and materials).

A core body of concepts and methods used in putting together the CDS and the District Design Guide came from the field of urban morphology, which is concerned with the process of formation, structure and character of human settlements. It became clear in combining urban morphological analysis and the character-based approach to landscape assessment that the two share several common concepts and methods. Both take a similar approach to different areas of the environment, one predominantly planted the other predominantly built. Taken together they form a complementary view of the broader human environment and a useful tool for management and design guidance.

Sources: Warwickshire County Council (1993) *Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines*. Countryside Commission, Cheltenham. Stratford-on-Avon District Council (1999) *Countryside Design Summary for Stratford-on-Avon District*; Stratford-on-Avon District Council (2001) *Stratford-on-Avon District Design Guide*. Both published by Stratford-on-Avon District Council.



advice on the appraisal techniques for each of the Government's objectives for transport.

The equivalent in Scotland produced by the Scottish Executive Roads Directorate is known as STAGS (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance System). GOMMMS and STAGS build upon the methodology in the *Guidance on a New Approach to Appraisal* (GNATA) [60]. In October 2001, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions issued supplementary guidance on *Accumulating Environmental Impacts* [61]. This document comes into effect immediately and provides clearer guidance on the procedure to be adopted to derive an overall assessment score when an option affects a number of key environmental resources.

### **Establishing landscape criteria for other forms of development**

8.32 Different forms of development are now using a character-based approach to inform their proposals, not only housing and transport but also the wind energy and telecommunications sectors. For example, areas subject to proposals from any of these sectors can benefit from information from a Landscape Character Assessment, especially incorporating information on:

- the proximity of important sites and features;
- intrinsic landscape patterns and perceived characteristics;
- the potential visual influence of the developments;
- the likely influence of the proposed development on the locality's character and sense of place.

The issue of wind energy development is discussed further in relation to landscape character in **Topic Paper 8**.

# CHAPTER 9

## APPLICATIONS IN LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

### INTRODUCTION

#### 9.1 Landscape Character

Assessment can be used to inform policies for landscape conservation and management. Traditionally the focus has been on the designation of special areas of landscape, and on their appropriate management. Outside these areas there has been growing emphasis on devising strategies and guidelines to help to conserve and enhance character in the wider landscape. This has also involved the use of Landscape Character Assessment to influence decisions about land use change, such as the planned increase in the extent of woodland in the landscape, and interventions through mechanisms such as agri-environment schemes. Landowners and managers can sometimes see such approaches as lacking appreciation of the real world of land market economics and the practical decisions which they are faced with. It is therefore important that these stakeholders should be actively involved, along with others, in discussions about appropriate strategies and guidelines.

### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

9.2 Many local authorities prepare Landscape Character Assessments to assist in the development of non-statutory countryside strategies or specific landscape strategies. Other initiatives like Indicative Forestry Strategies can also be

informed by this tool. These exercises generally rely on analysis of key characteristics, understanding of the pressures causing landscape change, and the drawing up of landscape guidelines. Some studies develop these guidelines within strategies or objectives for individual landscape character types or areas, of the type described in **Chapter 7**.

9.3 Establishing a clear link between key characteristics, analysis of change and landscape guidelines is particularly important and is best achieved by the involvement of a range of stakeholders, especially those representing land management interests. There are many examples of Landscape Character Assessments being used in this way. In Scotland all the assessments which have formed part of the national programme, contain an analysis of the issues facing the landscape, and develop guidelines for conservation or enhancement which are not highly prescriptive but which indicate actions required. This approach has been used in the Council area assessments (**Box 9.1**) where it is common to prepare guidelines for each landscape character type, and in some smaller-scale applications (**Box 9.2**).

9.4 In England many counties have prepared landscape guidelines. In the Warwickshire Landscape Assessment, strategies and guide-

lines were prepared for landscape character types in each of the countryside character areas within the county, helped by a series of workshops involving all the main stakeholders with an interest in the Warwickshire countryside. A project officer was subsequently employed to facilitate implementation of the guidelines by working with stakeholders, including local parishes. This exercise encouraged discussion and interpretation of the landscape guidelines at the local level.

### SPECIAL AREAS - IDENTIFICATION AND BOUNDARIES

9.5 Designation of areas of landscape deemed to be of special **landscape value** has, for many years, been the key plank of landscape conservation and management. National Parks and AONBs in England and National Scenic Areas in Scotland, have played an important role in planning policy and development control, as well as in conserving, managing and enhancing the landscape. In England, the first step in the designation of nationally important landscapes has been to choose the broad area of special landscape and then to define an appropriate administrative boundary that encapsulates areas of appropriate character. In principle broad character areas, equivalent to those now shown in *The Character of England* map, which did not exist

### **Box 9.1: Landscape Character Assessment of Fife**

The Landscape Character Assessment of the area covered by Fife Council was commissioned jointly by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Council itself, working in partnership. It forms part of the Scottish national programme of Landscape Character Assessment and is designed to assist in ensuring that decisions that may affect the Fife landscape will help contribute to its sustainability and enhancement. The report focuses on landscape issues in the area and has the following main aims and objectives, which are broadly similar to those for the national programme as a whole:

- to classify and describe the landscape, identifying the landscape character types which occur in Fife and place them in their national context, integrating the assessment with those already carried out for parts of the area and for adjacent areas;
- to identify the forces or pressures for change in the landscape which may affect its distinctive character;
- to assess the sensitivity of the landscape to change and identify which areas have the greatest and least capacity to accommodate development and land use change;
- to recommend guidelines for the conservation/enhancement of the different landscape types and identify opportunities for these activities and priorities for specific landscape initiatives;
- to provide a useful working tool for planners, landscape architects, ecologists, land managers, developers and others who may contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape;
- to provide a baseline for Fife Council's Crushed Rock Strategy.

The landscape classification for Fife was undertaken at a finer grain than the larger scale assessments that are more typical of SNH's national programme, reflecting its application at the local level. Landscape types were defined on a 1:25,000 map base and presented in summary on the less detailed 1:50,000 base. 19 landscape types were defined across the study area, and these were subsequently subdivided into 115 individual landscape character units or areas, defined to reflect recognisable and identifiable local character. Landform and topography were the dominant influences on the definition of landscape types (e.g. uplands, hills, basins, and coastal areas), though 'designed landscapes' were identified as a landscape type in their own right. The assessment also puts this detailed work into the wider context by referring to five regional landscape character areas and three national landscapes types.

The Fife landscape assessment, like most others in the Scottish national programme, does not seek to evaluate the landscape or to identify areas that are perceived to be of greater value than others. Landscape Guidelines are used to provide non-prescriptive recommendations, advice and comment to aid future management of the landscape. Guidance is also given on how the assessment may be used in respect of project-related landscape and visual impact assessment. The guidelines deal with each landscape type individually and in each case cover agriculture, forestry, settlements and built development, recreation, tourism and access, other developments and structures and mineral working. Overall recommendations for action and future initiatives are also made and include:

- a historic landscape study and a more detailed study of Gardens and Designed Landscapes;
- a review of landscape designations;
- work on coastal management strategies and countryside recreation and access;
- a proposed vision for the future of the lowland hills and valleys;
- a proposal to develop landscape management plans for the upland slopes and Volcanic Hills;
- a landscape strategy and Green Belt proposal for St Andrews;
- an overview of landscape capacity for mineral workings.

*Source: David Tyldesley Associates (1999) Fife landscape character assessment, No. 113, Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh.*

**Box 9.2: Landscape Character Assessment of Mar Lodge Estate for management plan purposes**

On 1 July 1995, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) acquired the 77,500 acre Mar Lodge Estate which forms part of the core area of the Cairngorms Working Party Study Area. The international and national importance of the Cairngorms is recognised by a variety of existing and prospective scenic, nature conservation and geomorphologic designations throughout the area. The Estate also contributes to the recreational importance of the area, where a wide range of countryside experiences are available, from challenging winter sports in a hostile mountain environment to easily visited, scenic locations in the surrounding straths and glens. In the same year, 1995, the National Trust for Scotland commissioned an assessment of the landscape character of the Estate. The study forms part of the national programme of Landscape Character Assessment in Scotland, but is unusual in that it is at a greater level of detail than the other studies in the programme as it focuses on a specific land area, in single ownership, and is designed to inform and shape the content of the Estate Management Plan.

The detailed objectives of the assessment in terms of management were to:

- provide information about different landscape character areas for use by land managers and to inform the Management Plan;
- to consider the likely pressures and opportunities for landscape change within the Estate and to assess the sensitivity of particular landscape character areas to such change;
- to develop guidelines indicating how landscape character may be conserved enhanced or restructured as appropriate;
- to provide guidance on how various types of land-use change might best be accommodated within the different landscape character areas identified.

The assessment recognises that while some types of landscape change may have a detrimental effect on character, others may offer opportunities for enhancement or for increasing the diversity of the landscape. The study establishes a strategy of conserving and enhancing existing landscape diversity and the elements and attributes which contribute to the distinctiveness of the Estate landscape. Specific guidelines cover native woodland restoration, management of plantations, conservation and enhancement of wild land quality, treatment of derelict buildings, moorland management and deer management.

*Source: Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership (1996) Mar Lodge Landscape Assessment. No. 79. Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh.*

when most National Parks were designated, can be selected on the basis of their special value measured against a series of criteria of the type listed in **paras 7.21 - 7.23**. These criteria are indicative only. Such criteria can also provide the basis for a statement about why a particular area is valued, and such comments can be found in many landscape assessments of AONBs in England and in the descriptions contained in *Scotland's Scenic Heritage* for the National Scenic Areas in Scotland [62].

**9.6** Once a broad area has been selected for national designation or recognition, a map of landscape character at the local level can help to define detailed boundaries. For example, it may be that certain landscape character types are considered appropriate for inclusion in the area, while others are not. A map of landscape types can, in these circumstances, make the task of boundary definition relatively straightforward. Character and value are separate concepts so character area boundaries may coincide with designation boundaries but they do not have

to, and in many instances do not. There are often other, completely different criteria, for a variety of environmental, social or political reasons, that are also used to select boundaries of such areas.

**9.7** Once defined, more detailed Landscape Character Assessments may be undertaken to meet particular objectives. In England, the Countryside Agency has initiated assessments for all AONBs with the aim of providing a statement about their particular landscape value, and raising awareness of their special qualities. These assessments also

provide the starting point for management proposals, although more detailed work may be required for this purpose. In the Sussex Downs AONB, for example, there is a suite of separate assessment reports, each fulfilling a different function (**Box 9.3**).

## GUIDING WOODLAND EXPANSION

9.8 Woodland expansion is now an important government policy commitment, and Landscape Character Assessments have an important role to play in guiding this change. The Forestry Commission's UK Forestry Standard [63] and both the England [64] and Scottish Forestry Strategies [65] make particular

mention of the role of character in helping to guide decisions about the location and design of new woodland. In England it is anticipated that regional planning will increasingly take on board strategies for woodland expansion and the countryside character areas will be an important first step in their development. Major forestry and woodland initiatives, like the Community Forests and the National Forest in England, and the Central Scotland Forest, have made significant use of Landscape Character Assessment to indicate where there is greatest potential for woodland planting and where expansion is undesirable in terms of landscape character. A number of these initiatives have involved

stakeholder input to the forestry strategies that have flowed from the Landscape Character Assessments, such as that devised for the National Forest (**Box 9.4**). Another example is in Ayrshire, where an Indicative Forestry Strategy based on the area's Landscape Character Assessment is being developed with industry and community as partners. A range of relevant stakeholders, especially those directly involved in managing forests and woodlands, have been consulted on the development of these strategies and guidelines.

9.9 Judgements by professionals and stakeholders, based on information on the character of the landscape and its capacity to

### Box 9.3: A suite of documents: Sussex Downs AONB

From a single landscape character assessment and follow-up research, a suite of documents has been produced for the Sussex Down AONB to serve different purposes.

- The Landscape of the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty CCP 495 (1996) is one of the Countryside Agency's series of publications on the landscapes of the AONBs of England. This is first and foremost a celebration in words and pictures of the character of the AONB. Its purpose is to capture the special qualities of the Sussex Downs, identify how the landscape has come to be as it is, what the special characteristics are of the various landscape types which together make up the whole picture, how the landscape relates to the ecology of the area and the pattern of human settlement, and how the landscape has been perceived by writers and artists.
- A Landscape Assessment of the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (1996) is a technical landscape assessment report which describes the key landscape types and sensitivities to change and focuses on the Management Guidelines applicable to each. It has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. It is primarily aimed at planning officers and all those who have influence over the future of the AONB.
- The Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Design Guidelines provide practical advice, primarily aimed at land managers (farmers and foresters), of what they can do to maintain and enhance the special character of the area. Guidelines are presented in easily assimilated graphic form showing the existing situation and preferred situation for each landscape type. The Guidance is in loose-leaf form so that relevant sheets can be copied for individual landowners.

Sources: Landscape Design Associates (1996) *The Landscape of the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*. Countryside Commission and Sussex Downs Conservation Board, Cheltenham CCP 495; Landscape Design Associates (1996) *A Landscape Assessment of the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*. Countryside Commission and Sussex Downs Conservation Board, Cheltenham; Landscape Design Associates (1997) *The Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Design Guidelines*. Countryside Commission and Sussex Downs Conservation Board, Cheltenham.

#### Box 9.4: Landscape Character Assessment and stakeholder input in the National Forest

The original Landscape Character Assessment for the National Forest was central to the development of the Forestry Strategy. The consultation on the Strategy provided the opportunity for comment on the descriptive assessment and on the Forward Strategy for forestry creation based on the assessment. Consultation techniques included:

- written responses to the full Strategy (220 replies);
- 1300 questionnaires returned by the general public from 18,000 distributed summary documents of the Strategy;
- extensive media coverage - press, radio, and production of a video for loan to outside groups;
- 30 talks to specialist stakeholder groups;
- 6 public meetings and 6 day-long manned displays in local shopping centres;
- watercolours commissioned to depict the changes in rural and coalfield landscapes over a 50-year period, for use in talks and exhibitions;
- community views sought by interviewing six groups from within a typical coalfield village and an urban settlement from within the Forest.

*Source: Information supplied by the National Forest.*

accommodate change, will provide a starting point in deciding where significant new woodland may be appropriate. Character types and areas which include a strategy for enhancement potentially provide the greatest opportunities for new woodland planting. More detailed guidelines relating to woodland potential can then be combined with the Forestry Commission's own guidelines on woodland design [66] to indicate how planting which is sensitive to its landscape context can be achieved.

9.10 There are now many examples of this sort of application:

- the Cumbria Woodlands Forum has used the national countryside character areas to show in an accessible, graphic form, how the woodland area of the county could be increased;
- in Staffordshire the county landscape assessment has informed an Indicative Forestry Strategy for the county, showing the scope for different levels of

planting in each landscape character area on a Woodland Opportunities Map;

- in East Sussex the county landscape assessment has formed the basis of a county-wide Woodland and Tree Strategy;
- in Scotland Landscape Character Assessments have been used to help develop Local Forestry Frameworks, with two in Dumfries and Galloway and one in the Cairngorms. A further Framework for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs - soon to be Scotland's first National Park - is currently being prepared.

9.11 The existing Landscape Character Assessment in Dumfries and Galloway has also been used to develop the Forestry Commission Strategic Plan for the area. In addition, a partnership between the Council, Forestry Commission and SNH has produced forestry and woodland design guidance [67] for particular landscape character types

in Dumfries and Galloway which are potential areas for woodland expansion, as a reference for farmers and landowners applying for Woodland Grants Schemes (Figure 9.1).

9.12 In the Culm area of the South West of England, a combination of existing landscape assessments have been used to take a strategic view of the location, type and extent of woodland planting that would be appropriate within what has now become defined as the South West Forest Project. Here woodland planting is being promoted as a method of halting rapid agricultural economic decline, through developing alternative land uses and stimulating a wood-based economy.

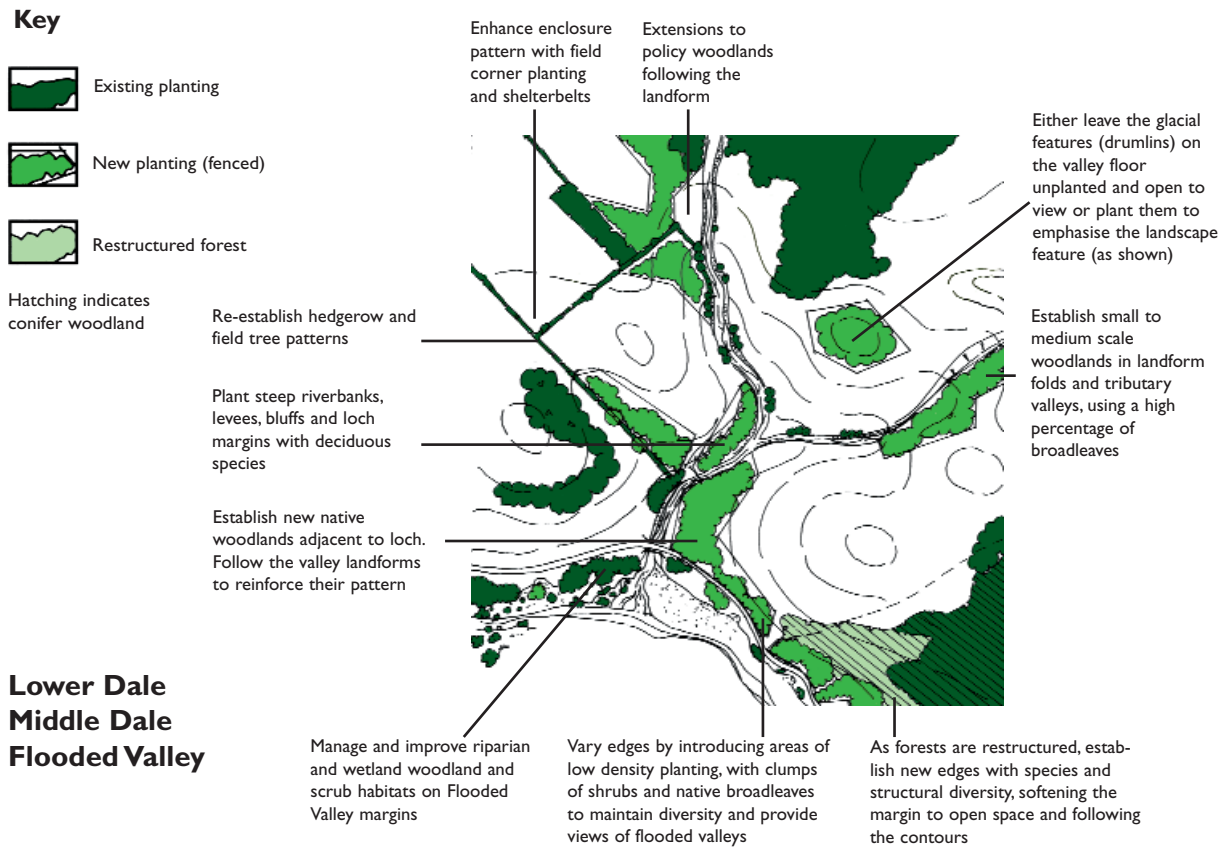
## AGRICULTURE AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### Agri-environment schemes

9.13 Landscape Character Assessment is an invaluable tool in devising and targeting agri-environment



**Figure 9.1: Landscape Design Guidance for Forests and Woodlands in Dumfries and Galloway**



Source: ERM (1998) *Landscape Design Guidance for Forests and Woodlands in Dumfries and Galloway*. Forestry Commission, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Scottish Natural Heritage.

ment schemes. It has already played an important role in the operation of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), where assessments have been undertaken for each ESA to help guide the prescriptions (based on an analysis of the key characteristics and their quality), and to provide a basis for monitoring. In Scotland SNH provided the Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Division with a landscape character monitoring framework for the ESAs to be applied together with biological and archaeological monitoring over a ten year period to assess the effects of grant uptake on the countryside of the ESAs. The

Countryside Agency has been working on a character-based approach that could guide targeting of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS).

9.14 Landscape Character Assessment can also be an important tool in making the case for agri-environment support. In the Isles of Scilly a combined landscape and historic landscape character assessment was undertaken on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall to make a case for the Islands to be considered as a Countryside Stewardship Scheme Special Project Area and to devise the appropriate prescriptions, based on the identifi-

cation of key characteristics and their condition [68]. In the case of the High Weald, the existing Landscape Character Assessment for the AONB [69] was a central building block in a separate study which highlighted the need for integrated rural support to maintain the unique character of the area in the face of acute agricultural decline. Based on this case, the High Weald is now another of the Countryside Agency's Land Management Initiatives (LMIs) (Box 9.5).

### Product and place

9.15 Another key role for Landscape Character Assessment

which is rapidly coming to the fore, is in developing the concept of product and place i.e. the linking of land-based production to a particular locality. This can have a strong two-way benefit:

- for local producers, linking their product (e.g. food and drink, woodland produce) to a particular locality can help engender product identity, creating enhanced marketing opportunities and sales;
- for the environment, with the right promotion (through media such as local product directories), the selective purchasing of local products by consumers can help boost the local rural economy and thus the maintenance of the landscape.

9.16 Both regional and more local Landscape Character Assessments, especially when conducted with stakeholder input, can help reinforce local identity and strengthen the links between the

landscape and its economy. They can identify local symbols of place, which can be used in product labelling and marketing and, with careful promotion, can encourage consumers to 'buy in' to those landscapes that they wish to support.

### LANDSCAPE CHANGE FOR REGENERATION

9.17 The current character of the landscape should not be a barrier to the creation of new landscapes. Where a Landscape Character Assessment indicates that a strategy of enhancement or regeneration is appropriate for a particular landscape type or area, this signals scope for significant change to the landscape, often by creation of a new landscape character to suit new circumstances. In many respects, landscapes with degraded features and elements offer greatest scope for positive change to improve the local environment and people's quality of life.

9.18 Landscape Character Assessment can play a key role in identifying areas of the countryside which offer potential for creative approaches to landscape renewal. They can involve restoration of valued character where it has been lost, and investment in creating new landscapes elsewhere. Schemes like the Central Scotland Forest, Highland Birchwoods Project, Isle of Rum Management Plan, the National Forest and the Community Forests are all good examples of large-scale initiatives to improve and regenerate extensive tracts of landscape. New wetlands and fenland restoration are other examples of how extensive land use change can be a focus for new activity in the countryside and at the urban edge. All have been informed by Landscape Character Assessments, helping to guide landscape change where it will be of greatest benefit, and influencing design matters.

9.19 Many of the most significant opportunities for restoration and creation of landscape occur around the fringes of urban areas. These are also often the areas under greatest pressure for development and subject to more rapid rates of change. Character in these areas may be difficult to pin down because it is usually dominated by built-up areas of different types. Stakeholder involvement can be of particular merit in indicating where and what people value most in their local environment and in highlighting those landscape characteristics which local people would wish to see incorporated into proposals for enhancement and development.

#### Box 9.5: The High Weald Land Management Initiative and stakeholder involvement

The High Weald Land Management Initiative was set up in 2000 to help farms, other rural businesses and rural communities to find sustainable ways of diversifying to maintain the distinctive environment, rural economy and local communities. Before the Initiative was launched, the landscape character of the High Weald was explored in a series of workshops involving local stakeholders, including the farming community. A strong consensus emerged that the key characteristic of the High Weald landscape is its distinctive mosaic of interlocking woodlands, linear wooded features and small fields. This helped the groups to establish and agree environmental targets for the LMI. These targets included ones for hedgerows, new woodland planting, hedgerow trees, field edges, arable headlands, unimproved permanent pasture, ponds and streams. The targets will be firmed up in 2002.

Source: *High Weald Land Management Initiative and the High Weald AONB Unit (2001)*.



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# ***MAKING SENSE OF PLACE***

## ***Landscape Character Assessment***

Summary Guidance for England and Scotland



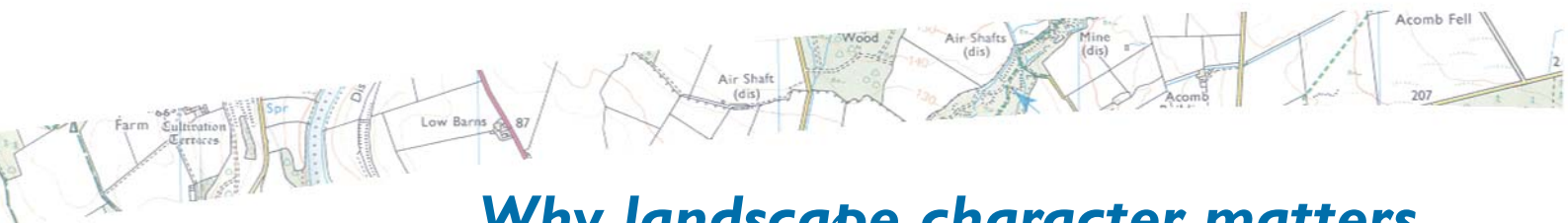


# MAKING SENSE OF PLACE

People can welcome development if it is well designed and contributes to quality of life. Policy makers and practitioners need ways of achieving this, and Landscape Character Assessment is one of the key techniques.

Landscape Character Assessment tells you what makes a place distinctive. You can use this information to achieve high quality development that is not only in the right place, but which respects and enhances its surroundings. It can also inform land management decisions that will help the economy, as well as sustain the environment.

To help decision-makers and practitioners make best use of Landscape Character Assessment, the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage have joined forces to produce new guidance. This is a summary of the full document, which is available free from the sources listed on the back of this pamphlet.



## Why landscape character matters



Landscape - the setting for our lives

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It is the setting for our lives. It can mean a patch of local green space as much as a mountain range.

Landscape has:

- *economic value*, providing the setting for economic activity and often becoming a central factor in attracting business and tourism...
- *social and community value*, as an important part of people's lives, contributing to our sense of identity and well-being, and bringing enjoyment and inspiration...
- *environmental value*, as a home for wildlife and a cultural record of society's use of the land...

...so it is crucial that we understand the character of the landscape when we consider how it might change - so that any change is for the better.



# So what is Landscape Character Assessment?

It's a tool for identifying the features that give a locality its 'sense of place' and pinpointing what makes it different from its neighbouring areas.

Landscape Character Assessment provides a framework for describing an area in a systematic way. It lets different interest groups make better judgements by knowing what's present and what is distinct, so any change can respect local character, or add to it, and even change it if that is what's desired.

The Character of England map provides a national framework for the more detailed assessments carried out by local authorities and others. The major Scottish national programme of Landscape Character Assessment is also now complete, involving all Scottish local authorities and organisations such as the Forestry Commission.



Landscape Design Associates

*A Landscape Character Assessment of land surrounding settlements can help plan for future development in a way that will respect their distinctive character and landscape setting.*







# How Landscape Character Assessment helps deliver sustainable development

The Government's Sustainable Development Strategy, *A Better Quality of Life*, gives the following definition of sustainable development:

"It means meeting four objectives at the same time in the UK and the world as a whole:

- social progress that recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment."

Landscape Character Assessment helps to address two of these objectives - 'effective environmental protection' and 'prudent natural resource use'. In particular, it can help:

- identify the environmental and cultural features in a locality;
- monitor change in the environment;
- understand a location's sensitivity to development and change;
- set the conditions for any development and change.



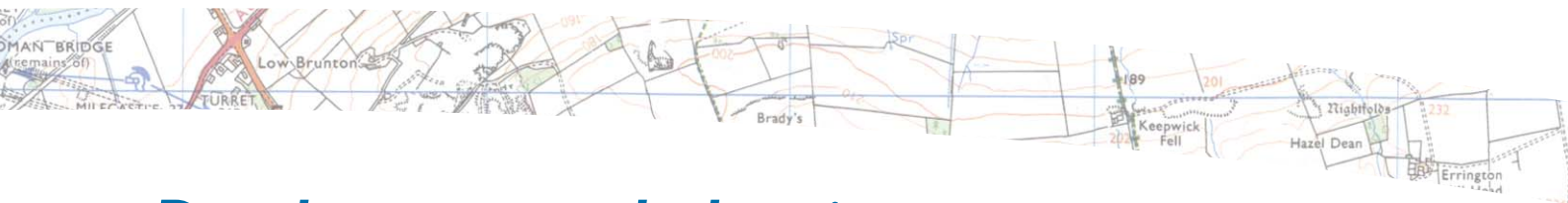
Jon Snow/Courtesy Agency

*Landscape Character Assessment can help to find the best sites for telecommunications infrastructure.*



Hart District Council

*New housing at Elvetham Heath, Fleet, Hampshire. The developers and the District Council used local landscape character analysis to help guide the detailed design brief for a complex site.*



## Development and planning

Landscape Character Assessment can help:

- decide policies in development plans;
- inform the siting and design of particular types of development, such as housing, minerals, telecommunications and wind energy;
- assess land availability for a range of uses, including new development;
- provide information for Environmental Assessments of plans, policies and individual development proposals.



Acety Miller/Compass Agency

*Management proposals for areas worked by industry can be informed by Landscape Character Assessment.*

## Land management

Landscape Character Assessment can help:

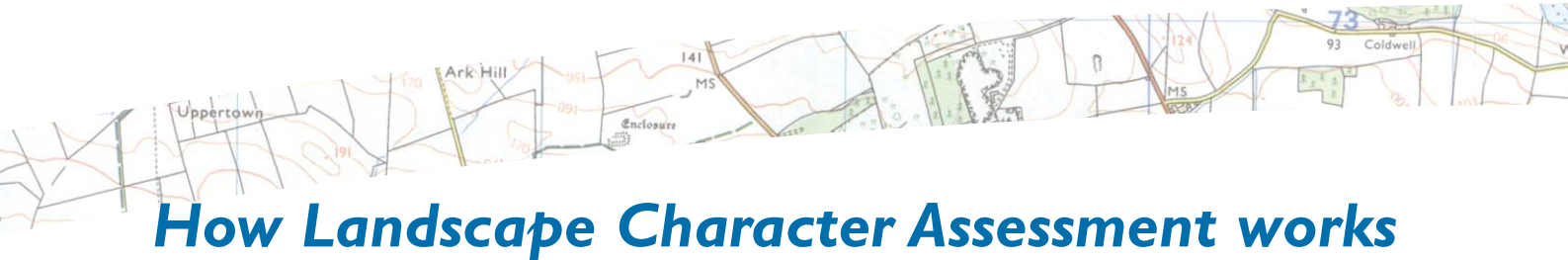
- inform programmes for environmental enhancement, such as woodland expansion, or the regeneration of towns and villages;
- the targeting of agri-environment schemes;
- contribute to wider environmental initiatives such as Local Agenda 21, State of the Environment Reports and, in Scotland, Natural Heritage Futures.



Land Use Consultants

*Preparation of a Local Forestry and Woodland Framework for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park has included a review of Landscape Character Assessment guidelines for the area. Restructuring of forestry in the foreground will create a more diverse woodland landscape.*





Landscape Character Assessment comprises two stages - characterisation, and then making judgements.

### Characterisation

The characterisation stage defines the scope of the assessment, involves a desk study and field survey, and then a description of the landscape, dividing it into areas of common character, mapping them and describing their character and key issues.

### Making judgements

Land management decisions ultimately lie with society - owners, politicians, land managers, local communities and many other stakeholders. But their decisions will be sounder if they are based on information assembled through the Landscape Character Assessment process.

Involving these stakeholders in Landscape Character Assessments will be a sound investment. It will produce results that are better informed and which encourage greater involvement in their use for determining better development and land management decisions.



Simon Wainwright/County Council Agency

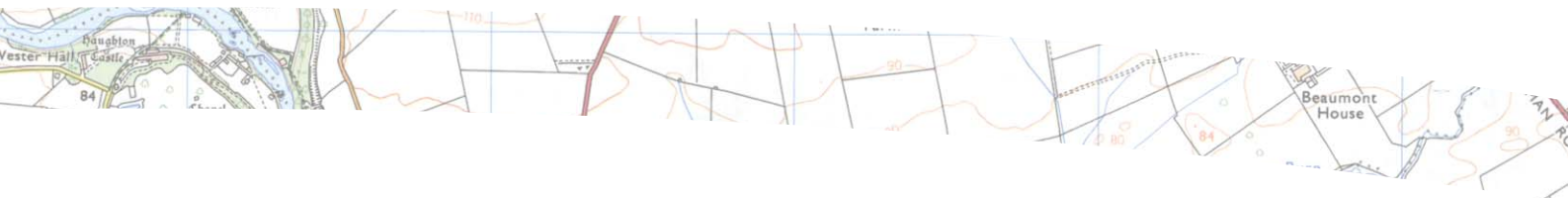
Landscape Character Assessment can help target agri-environment funds, by highlighting key landscape characteristics that need maintaining and enhancing.

## Using Landscape Character Assessment at the right scale

Landscape Character Assessments can be carried out at three main levels:

- *National and regional scale* to identify broad differences in landscape character across the whole of a country or region;
- *Local authority scale* to identify landscape character at the county, district or unitary authority level in England, or at the council area level in Scotland;
- *Local scale* to describe the landscape character of smaller areas: an individual parish, perhaps, or a large farm estate, a country park or a proposed development site.

Assessments at different scales should fit seamlessly together, providing the context for assessments at lower levels or adding more detail to assessments above.



## Why Landscape Character Assessment is important...

*“The recognition of fifteen distinct Landscape Character Areas in Hart’s emerging Local Plan is playing a key role in encouraging new developments to respect the District’s underlying local character and diversity in their location, layout, design and management. Furthermore, it is helping to reinforce that often elusive quality of ‘sense of place’ throughout the District.”*

**David Simpson**, Leader of Hart District Council

*“The landscape does not respect administrative boundaries. It was therefore important, in our area of joint planning, to establish a consistent context that would be used by the eight constituent councils. A Landscape Character Assessment provided this, and was an important early task in preparing the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Structure Plan.”*

**Vincent Goodstadt**, Structure Plan Manager, The Glasgow and Clyde Valley Joint Structure Plan Committee

*“Working with grassroots community groups has demonstrated to me the importance of engaging local people in Landscape Character Assessment. By participating they contribute their local expertise, whilst gaining confidence and understanding. Partnership working produces effective results, which can help to secure a sound future for local landscapes.”*

**John Gittens** - Cheshire Landscape Trust



Suffolk Coastal District Council

Stakeholder involvement can produce a more informed assessment, greater ownership of applications, and establish valuable partnerships for future work. Here, Women’s Institute groups and planning authorities are working together in Suffolk to record local landscape character and monitor landscape change.

# Want to find out more?

The full *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*, and related topic papers, can be viewed and downloaded from [www.countryside.gov.uk/cc/guidance](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/cc/guidance) and [www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA](http://www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA)

Free copies of the guidance are also available from:

Countryside Agency Publications  
Tel: 0870 1206466  
Fax: 0870 1206467  
Email: [countryside@twoten.press.net](mailto:countryside@twoten.press.net)

Scottish Natural Heritage  
Tel: 0131 446 2400  
Fax: 0131 446 2405  
Email: [carolyn.dunnett@snh.gov.uk](mailto:carolyn.dunnett@snh.gov.uk)

Available April 2002:

*Topic Paper 1*      *Recent practice and the evolution of Landscape Character Assessment*  
*Topic Paper 2*      *Links to other sustainability tools*  
*Topic Paper 3*      *Landscape Character Assessment - how stakeholders can help*

Available Summer/Autumn 2002:

*Topic Paper 4*      *Use of GIS and other computer methods*  
*Topic Paper 5*      *Historic landscape characterisation*  
*Topic Paper 6*      *Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity*  
*Topic Paper 7*      *Development and new landscape character*  
*Topic Paper 8*      *Landscape character and wind energy developments*

Available early 2003:

*Topic Paper 9*      *Climate change and natural forces - the consequences for landscape character*

Eight regional volumes on Countryside Character are also available from the Countryside Agency, as is The Character of England map. In Scotland, the full set of assessments produced through the national programme can be obtained from Scottish Natural Heritage.



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