

WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

CHIPPING NORTON LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT 2009

APPENDIX D

METHODOLOGY

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

CONTEXT

1. The basis of the methodology for the landscape assessment has been the advice given in the Countryside Agency's *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*¹ (*Guidance*), and the subsequent *Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity*. Since the worksheet used for this and previous studies in West Oxfordshire had, as a basis, the landscape worksheet developed for assessing highways projects, the advice given in the Department for Transport's *Transport Analysis Guidance*² is also relevant. The *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*³ have also been consulted, though as the title suggests these are generally more relevant to impact assessments for specific developments.
2. This current assessment is nested within a number of larger scale assessments: principally, the *West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998) (WOLA)*, which, despite being produced earlier than the publication of the *Guidance*, followed the basic principles of dividing the District into character areas and types. This assessment was itself nested within the Countryside Agency's national Countryside Character map.
3. In 1999, BHWB carried out landscape assessments of three areas on the outskirts of Witney⁴ as part of the Local Plan preparation process. In this assessment, the methodology was described as follows:

In order to ensure that the comparison between the sites is done in a logical and consistent manner, the methodology for the landscape comparison is based on the DETR's New Approach to Appraisal (NATA), adapted to suit this commission and the type of development proposed.

and

The three sites have been compared in tabular form using methodology based on the DETR's New Approach to Appraisal (NATA), adapted to suit the type of development proposed. The method, as adapted for this commission, takes a number of features as follows:

- *Pattern of landscape: the scale of the landscape and degree of enclosure.*
- *Tranquillity: a subjective judgement, based on site observation, assessing elements such as a sense of seclusion and presence of visual detractors.*
- *Cultural: elements such as views of church spires and settings of listed buildings.*
- *Landcover: deals mainly with woodland and hedgerow cover.*
- *Visual: describes the potential visual impact, in particular for residential properties nearby.*
- *Access: describes public rights of way across site.*

¹ *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*, on behalf of Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, University of Sheffield/LUC 2002

² DfT TAG Unit 3.3.7: The Landscape Sub-Objective, Dec 2003, and DfT TAG Unit 3.3.6: The Environmental Capital Approach

³ *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, LI/IEMA, 2nd edition 2002

⁴ *Witney Landscape and Ecological Assessments*, BHWB, 1999

All the above features are then assessed for their importance (eg designated landscapes); rarity; substitutability (ie, whether they could be recreated); and potential impact of the proposed development. Possibilities for mitigation are also noted.

4. To ensure consistency, this same approach was used for the Witney Landscape Assessments (2007 study), which covered the surrounds of the whole town.
5. As stated in the introduction to this assessment, *this study also aims to provide the same approach to assessing the landscape as used for the surrounds of Witney (2007 study), for the sake of clarity, simplicity and consistency.*
6. The Settlement Edge Areas are based on those drawn up in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (WOLA), since the main purpose of this study is to update the findings of the WOLA Key Settlement work. In the WOLA these were divided largely on a geographic basis (ie, west of xx). These have occasionally been subdivided on a topographical basis in this more detailed study.

METHODOLOGY

7. As stated in the *Guidance*, *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.*
8. A number of definitions are given in the *Guidance*, which are helpful in understanding the approach of this study:

Approaches to making judgements that are focused on landscape character... 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 recognizable 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.

9. Since the purpose of this assessment is to assess the capability of the landscape to absorb development, the landscape condition is not specifically assessed; this is an element which would be particularly required if the purpose of the assessment were to produce landscape guidelines.

10. The *Guidance* also discusses visual sensitivity, as follows:

In a comprehensive study of landscape sensitivity account would ideally also be taken of the visual sensitivity of the landscape. This requires careful thinking about the way that people see the landscape. This depends on:

- *the probability of change in the landscape being highly visible, based particularly on the nature of the landform and the extent of tree cover both of which have a major bearing on visibility;*
- *the numbers of people likely to perceive any changes and their reasons for being in the landscape, for example as residents, as residents staying in the area, as travellers passing through, as visitors engaged in recreation or as people working there;*
- *the likelihood that change could be mitigated, without the mitigation measures in themselves having an adverse effect (for example, planting trees to screen development in an open, upland landscape could have as great an effect as the development itself).*

11. As advised in the *Guidance* and Topic Paper 6, the aim is to provide a consistency of approach which can be clearly understood. The worksheets in Appendix B are therefore set out in a clear and consistent way, as described and explained below.

12. The left hand columns of the worksheet describe the features present in the landscape. This is the objective factual part of the assessment, with no value judgement attached.

13. The worksheet first describes the **landscape features** of each area:

- Landform: the topography.
- Land use: type of farming or other land use such as playing fields, presence of built development.
- Vegetation cover: principally woods/trees/hedges.
- Pattern: principally regular or irregular field pattern.
- Scale: principally size of fields, designation relating to sizes found within the West Oxfordshire landscape rather than nationally.
- Sense of enclosure: degree of enclosure from topography and/or woods/trees/hedges.

14. The **visual features** follow:

- **Intervisibility:** the extent to which the area can be seen from elsewhere, and views out.
- **Connectivity with wider landscape:** the extent to which the area is read as part of the wider landscape.
- **Key views out and in:** views to and from landmark features
- **Relationship with settlement:** visual/physical relationship with settlement.

15. **Cultural associations** in the worksheet describe historic elements which can be seen in the landscape, and therefore contribute in an obvious way to its character.

16. The **tranquillity** element describes the presence or otherwise of manmade features which may introduce noise, light and movement into the landscape.

17. **Access** describes the amount and type of public access to the area at present.

18. For completeness, the worksheet also includes the County Council's bioband score for the area, and records the presence or otherwise of the County's Conservation Target Areas.

19. Following the description of the features, the columns to the right assess these features against a number of criteria.

20. The **importance** of the area includes a record of any designations attached to it, a factual record, and also a more subjective assessment of the value of the area both locally and at a District level. This equates to the *Value* assessment in Topic Paper 6:

the value attached to each landscape...will reflect:

- *national designations based on landscape value;*
- *other judgements about value based either on a 'Quality of Life Assessment', or on consideration of a range of appropriate criteria relating to landscape value.*

21. TAG Unit 3.3.7 gives the following guidance on importance:

how important is this feature/attribute and at what level, for example, high, medium, or low and at national/regional/local level. For example, an individual tree or group of trees may be of very high importance at the local level, both in folklore and as a landscape element framing views of the skyline, but do not figure at a regional or national level. In answering this question, qualitative judgements must be made, but not just about landscape quality in isolation.

22. A national designation such as AONB clearly denotes a landscape of national value, but there are likely to be undesignated landscapes which are nevertheless of more local value. The worksheet assesses the importance of each of the rows (landscape features, visual features, cultural associations, tranquillity and access) as high/medium/low, and states whether this is local, district or national.

23. The **rarity** of each element records whether the element is typical of the landscape of the District. As noted in TAG Unit 3.3.7, *rarity should be interpreted as to whether the*

landscape features/attributes being evaluated prior to impact appraisal are commonplace to the locality or scarce.

24. The **replaceability** column assesses whether the element could be replaced if development were to take place. TAG Unit 3.3.7 uses the term substitution, and gives the following definition:

Substitution should be interpreted as the replacement of features lost with an acceptable and appropriate substitute, that is, something that provides the same benefits. In the case of landscape the feasibility of substitution of features should be considered on a site-specific basis, that is, is there suitable land available locally to recreate the features being lost or affected.

[Substitution] addresses whether landscape features/attributes and their constituent elements are replaceable or not within a given time frame, normally a nominal 100 years. Some elements, however, such as mature trees, would take considerably longer to replace. It may be impossible to replace a rare feature or element within the locality within any conceivable time frame – no other suitable site for lowland heath, for example. Conversely, landscape pattern might be replicated locally through the creation of new hedgerows within 10 to 15 years. Cultural landscapes are irreplaceable per se, although some features of these landscapes are more significant than others and some attributes may be replaceable.

25. The **sensitivity** column assesses the degree of impact development would be likely to have on each of the features described (landscape features, visual features, cultural associations, tranquillity and access), on a three point scale of high/medium/low.

26. Topic Paper 6 gives the following advice in the assessment of landscape sensitivity:

Judging landscape character sensitivity requires professional judgement about the degree to which the landscape in question is robust, in that it is able to accommodate change without adverse impacts on character. This means making decisions about whether or not significant characteristic elements of the landscape will be liable to loss through disturbance, whether or not they could easily be restored, and whether important aesthetic aspects of character will be liable to change. Equally, consideration must be given to the addition of new elements, which may also have a significant influence on character.

27. The final column, **mitigation**, describes the level of mitigation that would be necessary if development were to take place in the area, and the effect that this would have on each of the features. In some cases where the landscape and visual constraints are considered to be so strong that development is not considered suitable, no mitigation is suggested.