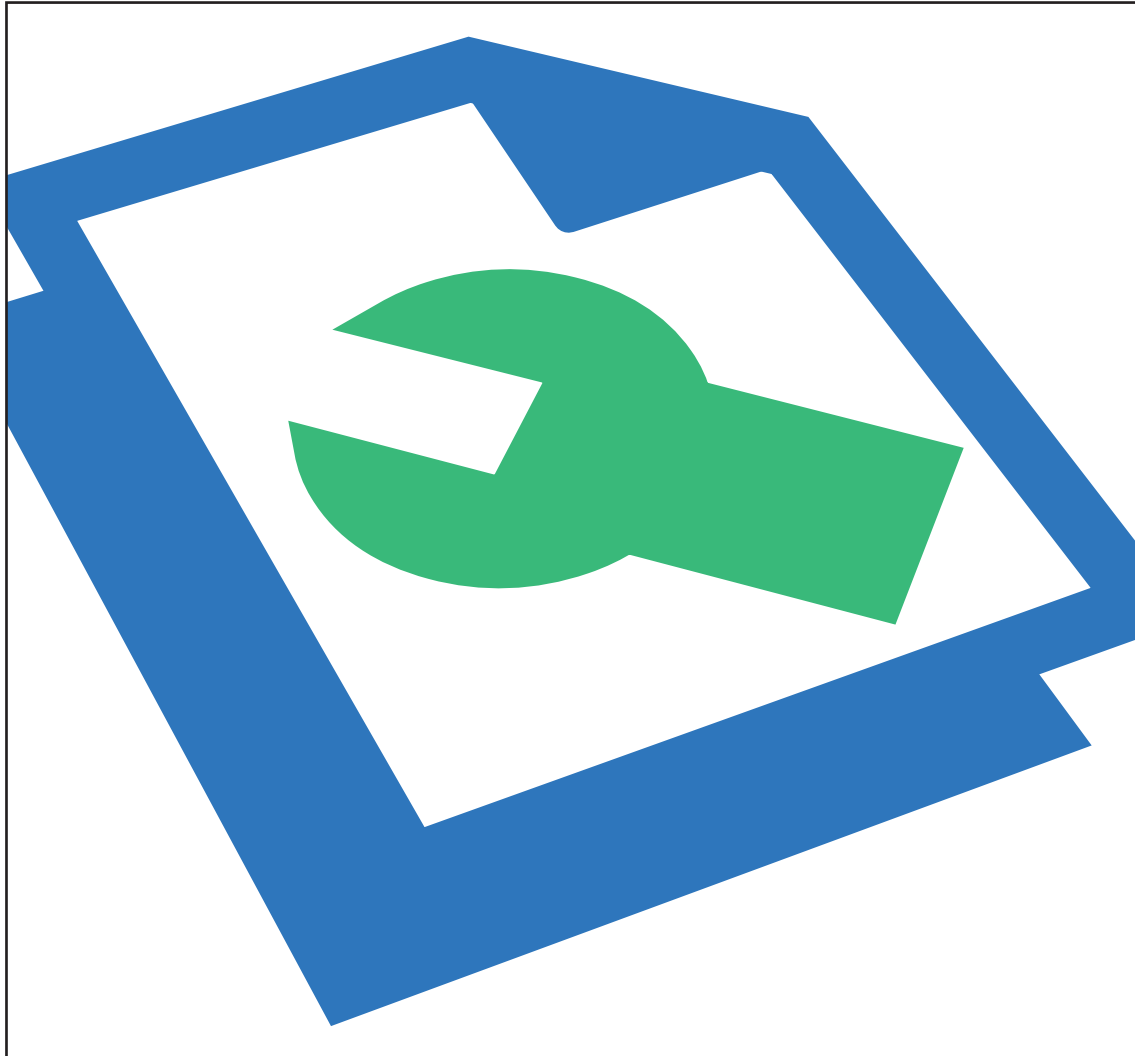


# CCN Workshop

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT  
AND ITS PLACE IN PLANNING POLICY**



## WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

28th January 2003 • 9.30am - 4.00pm

The Vintry Suite - London Chamber of Commerce and Industry



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The Countryside Character Network is an informal network, open to anyone who has an interest in Landscape Character Assessment and its applications. The CCN is supported by the Countryside Agency and is co-ordinated by Countryside.

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The Countryside Character Network is funded by The Countryside Agency and co-ordinated by Countryside





# Countryside Character Network Workshop

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND ITS PLACE IN PLANNING POLICY

### London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 28th January 2003

#### Chair :

Terry Robinson,  
Head Of Planning and  
Sustainable Development,  
The Countryside Agency

#### Countryside :

Jonathan Porter,  
Network Co-ordinator -  
jonathan@countryside.org

Gavin MacDonald,  
Network Administrator -  
gavin@countryside.org

- 9.30** Registration and Refreshments
- 10.00** Welcome and Introduction  
Chair : Terry Robinson,  
The Countryside Agency
- 10.05** "Overview: Landscape Character and its Relationship to Planning Policy - Current Issues and Opportunities"  
Dominic Watkins,  
Chris Blandford Associates
- 10.30** "Landscape Character as a County Planning Tool"  
Andrew Goode,  
Staffordshire County Council
- 10.55** Refreshments
- 11.15** "Using Landscape Character Assessment for Planning at a Local Level"  
Carolyn Cox,  
Warwickshire County Council
- 11.35** "Landscape Assessment for Onshore Wind Development: The North East of England Renewable Energy Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance"  
Dr John F Benson,  
University of Newcastle
- 12.00** Chaired Discussion
- 12.30** Lunch
- 2.00** "Landscape Character Meets Local Characters - The Key Role of Consultation"  
Jeff Bishop, BDOR Ltd
- 2.25** "Landscape Characterisation - Practical Applications for Nature Conservation Planning"  
Dr Roger Catchpole, English Nature
- 2.50** "Landscape Character, Planning Policy and the Design Stance"  
Karl Kropf, Roger Evans Associates
- 3.15** Chaired Plenary
- 4.00** Refreshments and Close



## Speakers

**Dominic Watkins,**  
**Chris Blandford Associates**  
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Dominic Watkins is a Senior Associate at Chris Blandford Associates, where he has particular responsibility for the firm's landscape planning, heritage management and planning policy research work. He has advised regional planning bodies, local authorities, Government departments and the Countryside Agency on issues relating to the incorporation of landscape character considerations into development plan policies.

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**Andrew Goode,**  
**Staffordshire County Council**  
andy.goode@staffordshire.gov.uk

Andrew Goode's qualifications and professional background are in Landscape Architecture and Environmental Science. He is Principal Landscape Architect within the Planning Department of Staffordshire County Council, responsible, within a Unit of Environmental Specialists, for advising on the landscape impact of minerals and waste operations and County Council developments. He has developed an appreciation of Landscape Character Assessment while preparing an Indicative Forestry Strategy for Staffordshire and has been closely involved both in the process of developing the character based approach to Landscape Policy within the Structure Plan, and since its adoption, in the day to day application of its principles in guiding landscape advice.

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**Carolyn Cox, Warwickshire County Council**  
carolyncox@warwickshire.gov.uk

Carolyn Cox is a member of the Design Division of the Landscape Institute and holds a post graduate diploma in Housing Studies from the University of Central England. She has predominantly worked in local government for the past fourteen years, particularly for urban centred authorities. She has utilised this multi-disciplinary background in design to focus on the development of landscape planning issues.

Carolyn took up her present post as a Landscape Assessment Officer at Warwickshire County Council in the summer of 1999. During this time she has worked closely with colleagues from Stratford-upon-Avon District Council in applying the landscape character methodology to a more local scale and to demonstrate how the data could be used as a decision support tool in the development planning process.

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**Dr John F Benson, University of Newcastle**  
j.f.benson@ncl.ac.uk

John Benson is an ecologist, landscape architect (science) and environmental planner with research interests and experience in environmental policy, planning, economics and management. His special interests are in environmental impact assessment and landscape reconstruction. He is currently carrying out Landscape Capacity Studies for Wind Energy Development in the Western Isles for the Western Isles Alternative & Renewable Energy Partnership and in North East England for the Government Office for the North East.

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## Speakers (continued)

### **Jeff Bishop, BDOR Ltd**

[jeff.bishop@bdor.co.uk](mailto:jeff.bishop@bdor.co.uk)

Jeff Bishop is a Director of BDOR Limited. He trained and practiced as an architect before broadening out into other environmental issues, and especially into work on participation in environmental change. BDOR's work on rural design for the Countryside Agency, especially their development of Village Design Statements and Countryside Design Summaries, has been enormously influential (spreading into Town/Urban Design Statements and also Concept Statements) and, like all BDOR's work, is underpinned by a commitment to collaboration and participation. More recently Jeff has written the government guidance on participation in planning, building on his extensive practical and training experience of participation on all sorts of projects and plans.

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### **Dr Roger Catchpole, English Nature**

[roger.catchpole@english-nature.org.uk](mailto:roger.catchpole@english-nature.org.uk)

Prior to taking his current position as spatial ecologist for English Nature, Roger worked as a Conservation Officer for three and a half years in a busy local team where he was responsible for the management and protection of diverse range of statutory sites across lowland Derbyshire as well as providing a lead on species protection issues, implementation of the lowland Derbyshire LBAP, environmental impact assessment and woodland ecology for the team. This was preceded by a diverse employment history that includes local government, academia, forestry, agriculture and government agencies such as ADAS and what was then FRCA. In between these diverse employment opportunities he managed to read ecology at Leeds University and went on to research the implications of small population size on the evolution of marginal populations for which he was awarded a doctorate in 1995. After completing his doctoral studies he continued to do research at Leeds as part of a postdoctoral fellowship on how dispersal and patch destruction influence species persistence.

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### **Karl Kropf, Roger Evans Associates**

[kkropf@rogerevans.com](mailto:kkropf@rogerevans.com)

Karl Kropf is a Senior Associate with Roger Evans Associates where he is head of spatial planning and research. In his previous post at Stratford-on-Avon District Council he was involved in a number pilot studies integrating character assessment and design guidance, including the Stratford-on-Avon District Design Guide, of which he was principal author.

He initially studied landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, following which he undertook an MA in Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University. He subsequently completed a PhD by research in Urban Morphology focusing on the description and prescription of urban form.

He has extensive experience in settlement design and design guides for local authorities in the UK and abroad. His academic work on the theory and practice of using the built environment as a design resource is widely published and he is Associate Editor of the international journal 'Urban Morphology'.

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## List of Delegates

<b>Kay Adams</b>	Entec UK
<b>Miriam Addy</b>	OCA UK Limited
<b>Hayden Baugh</b>	Jones-South Staffordshire Council
<b>John F Benson</b>	The University of Newcastle
<b>Jonathan Billingsley</b>	The Landscape Partnership
<b>Jeff Bishop</b>	BDOR Ltd
<b>Michelle Bolger</b>	Liz Lake Associates
<b>Chris Bray</b>	Worcestershire County Council
<b>Judith Cantell</b>	Norfolk County Council
<b>Sue Carter</b>	Landscape Design Associates
<b>Roger Catchpole</b>	English Nature
<b>Fran Comyn</b>	Rochdale MBC
<b>Adam Cook</b>	
<b>Nigel Cowlin</b>	Maldon District Council
<b>Carolyn Cox</b>	Warwickshire County Council
<b>Gavin David</b>	RPS
<b>Clive Fagg</b>	Northumberland County Council
<b>Neil Featherstone</b>	Norfolk Coast Project
<b>Glynis Foster</b>	Derbyshire County Council
<b>Andrew Goode</b>	Staffordshire County Council
<b>Geoffrey Griffiths</b>	The University of Reading
<b>Marie Harding</b>	Three Rivers District Council
<b>David Hares</b>	David Hares Landscape Architecture
<b>Doug Harman</b>	Dorset County Council
<b>Julie Holloway</b>	DEFRA
<b>Paul Jobson</b>	Swindon Borough Council
<b>Garry King</b>	Wiltshire County Council
<b>Bettina Kirkham</b>	
<b>Karl Kropf</b>	Roger Evans Associates
<b>Helen Leitch</b>	North Herts District Council
<b>Jason Longhurst</b>	Northamptonshire County Council
<b>Stephen Lucas</b>	Lucas Land and Planning
<b>Gavin MacDonald</b>	Countryside



## List of Delegates (continued)

<b>Amanda Mathews</b>	Countryside Agency
<b>Nigel Mathews</b>	Cornwall County Council
<b>Art McCormack</b>	MosArt
<b>Helen Mullin</b>	Babtie Group
<b>Alison Myers</b>	Bedfordshire County Council
<b>Wendy Newman</b>	Land Use Consultants
<b>Jane Patton</b>	Herefordshire Council
<b>Elizabeth Payne</b>	Mendip Hills AONB Service
<b>Steve Pickles</b>	Oxford City Council
<b>Keith Porter</b>	English Nature
<b>Jonathan Porter</b>	Countryside
<b>Steve Preston</b>	English Nature
<b>Virginia Pullan</b>	East Sussex County Council
<b>Terry Robinson</b>	The Countryside Agency
<b>Alison Rood</b>	The Countryside Agency
<b>Sophie Spencer</b>	CPRE
<b>Linda Tartaglia-Kershaw</b>	Hampshire County Council
<b>Mike Tartaglia-Kershaw</b>	Fareham Borough Council
<b>Justin Thomson</b>	Macgregor Smith
<b>Lisa Toyne</b>	Derek Lovejoy Partnership
<b>Becky Treagus</b>	Northamptonshire County Council
<b>Dominic Watkins</b>	Chris Blandford Associates
<b>Malcolm Watt</b>	Cotswold District Council
<b>Colin White</b>	Chilterns AONB Office



## Landscape Character and its Relationship to Planning Policy - Current Issues and Opportunities

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**Dominic Watkins,**  
**Chris Blandford Associates**  
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Dominic Watkins is a Senior Associate at Chris Blandford Associates, where he has particular responsibility for the firm's landscape planning, heritage management and planning policy research work. He has advised regional planning bodies, local authorities, Government departments and the Countryside Agency on issues relating to the incorporation of landscape character considerations into development plan policies.

### Introduction

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A core objective of the Government's Green Paper on the reform of the planning system is that 'planning must be about accommodating change, not just resisting and stifling it'. This objective is central to current initiatives to help local authorities and communities ensure that new development in the countryside can be secured in ways that contribute to the full range of sustainability objectives, including the conservation and enhancement of landscape character.

Increasing demands for new housing, employment and transport development, etc., need to be accommodated in ways that not only protect sensitive locations in the countryside, but also strengthen local character and enhance the condition of the areas in which development is to take place. Now, more than ever before, local planning authorities need effective tools to help ensure that necessary developments in and around rural towns, smaller settlements and villages are sensitively designed and located to reflect local character.

Recognition of the benefits of a new approach to planning for new development in which decisions are informed by an understanding of the character and enhancement needs of all landscapes, while continuing to protect and enhance the best, has never been greater. This is known as the 'character approach' to planning. At its simplest level, the character approach is about improving our understanding of the different opportunities, constraints, and conditions of different places within which development is proposed. It is not a rigid methodology, but rather a flexible approach that is adaptable to suit application in a range of different situations and contexts.

The character approach attempts to treat different areas differently, respecting the character of individual places at a range of scales. Character is a combination of many things. Character is exemplified by style, image, locale, feeling, livability, connectedness, and sense of place. Poorly located and designed built development can threaten an area's character, distinctiveness and sense of place. The process of landscape character assessment seeks to define the different characters that coexist in an area and attempts to protect these by identifying landscape design and planning guidelines. The character approach reaches beyond preservation, to the goal of restoring character and upgrading the experience of places. The character approach needs to be applied in such a way as to protect and extend cherished aspects by redirecting new development into forms and designs that enhance character rather than weaken it.

Land use planning is reasonably effective at guiding the location of buildings and what functions they may serve, but is least successful at specifying their character, what they look like, how they function, and how they interact with existing development. Land use planning is an effective tool when used in conjunction with a clear vision of what is desired for a particular place. Without a clear idea of how a place should look and feel, it is impossible to expect individual decisions on piecemeal developments to result in coordinated, character-enhancing outcomes.

### Emergence of Landscape Character Assessment

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Landscape policy in the UK first emerged in the post-war years with the introduction of primary legislation to protect National Parks - the nation's 'crown jewels'. Subsequent legislation focussed on recognising and protecting 'second tier' areas of national landscape value - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

From the early 1970's onwards, attention shifted to the protection of landscapes of regional or local value through development plan policy designations such as 'Areas of Great Landscape Value' or 'Special Landscape Areas'. The focus of landscape policy at this time was on identifying what made one landscape 'better' than another, leading to the development of objective approaches for assessing the relative value or quality of landscapes using scientific/quantitative techniques involving the scoring of individual landscape elements/features.



## Landscape Character and its Relationship to Planning Policy - Current Issues and Opportunities (continued)

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By the mid-1980s, a new approach began to emerge based on identifying what made one landscape different or 'distinct' from another based on its character. This led to the development of 'landscape assessment' as a systematic tool for classifying and describing areas of similar character using both objective and subjective analysis. Landscape assessment was endorsed in successive guidelines published in 1987 and 1993 by the Countryside Commission, and resulted in a growing number of assessments being prepared by local authorities. The coverage and quality of these early landscape assessments was variable. Since the publication of the Character of England Map and descriptions in the late 1990's 'landscape character assessment', with its emphasis on integrated characterisation, historic landscapes, townscapes and stakeholder involvement, has been developed and refined as a process. This approach was endorsed in England and Scotland by new guidance published in 2002.

### Relationship of Landscape Character Assessment to Planning Policy

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Within this context, new ways of using landscape character assessment as a key tool for making land use planning more effective in delivering sustainable development objectives are being developed. The potential benefits of incorporating a strong character-based approach within development plans to inform planning decisions are increasingly being recognised.

PPG1 requires that 'policies should be based on a proper assessment of the character of the surrounding natural and built environment', and PPG7 advises that the character approach 'should help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character'. Since this advice was issued, many local authorities have developed landscape character assessments to guide change and inform the preparation of their development plans. This approach is helping to fill the policy vacuum in areas outside national and local landscape designations, and is proving to be robust at public inquiry.

The Government's support for the character approach to understanding, evaluating, and protecting countryside diversity and character was reaffirmed in the Rural White Paper. A key measure within the Rural White Paper is to encourage a more holistic approach to decisions about the development or protection of greenfield sites on agricultural land. Recent amendments to

PPG7 require local planning authorities to consider the full range of competing sustainability considerations, including the character of the landscape, in the allocation of land for development.

Increasingly, Regional Planning Guidance is requiring local authorities to develop strategies to allow the adoption of the character approach to their plan areas, and that their development plans and other strategies should seek to maintain and enhance the quality, diversity and local distinctiveness of landscape character areas.

Preparation of a comprehensive landscape character assessment of a plan area, undertaken in accordance with Countryside Agency best practice guidance, is a pre-requisite for an effective character-based approach to planning. The detailed understanding of the strength of character, quality, and sensitivity of the countryside, urban areas, and urban fringe landscapes provided by such assessments forms the starting point for informing policy advice on objectives, targets, and criteria to guide different types and scales of development to landscapes that can best accommodate such change. Character-based planning policies in development plans are needed to protect and enhance defined characteristics in the plan area, such as scenic quality, sense of remoteness, historic landscapes, sense of place (including local character of buildings and the settings of settlements), tranquillity, and undeveloped character. Three main approaches to formulating character-based landscape policies can be identified :

- i. a simple policy statement, requiring development proposals and land use allocations to respect the special character and qualities of the landscape and the features that contribute to this, accompanied by a character map and summary character descriptions within the explanatory supporting text in the development plan;
- ii. a simple policy statement as above, but in this approach more detailed character information is used to support the policy through the direct linking of the policy to a comprehensive landscape character assessment document adopted as supplementary planning guidance (SPG) ; and
- iii. a more prescriptive approach involving the provision of a strategy objective for each area (for example conservation, enhancement, or



## Landscape Character and its Relationship to Planning Policy - Current Issues and Opportunities (continued)

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restoration of existing character, or regeneration to a new character) based on a formal assessment of the relative quality and sensitivity of landscapes in the plan area (it is usual for the policy to include a set of broad criteria based on the key characteristic features that need to be considered in the decision-making process - this approach also requires the detailed landscape character information to be made available as SPG to support and amplify the policy).

Development plans need to include complementary landscape enhancement and compensation policies to encourage development needs to be met in ways that maximise opportunities for landscape enhancement and restoration, particularly in areas with a degraded character. This involves inclusion of policies seeking greater use of developer contributions secured through planning obligations as compensatory measures for adverse effects.

Positive design policies for built developments are also needed. Such policies should encourage high-quality applications, thereby helping protect and enhance local character and distinctiveness. The implementation of these design policies can benefit from SPG such as 'countryside design summaries' prepared by the local authorities for whole districts, or 'village design statements' produced by local communities for individual settlements.

### Applications of Landscape Character Assessment in Planning

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In responses to the need for new planning tools to assist in informing decision making about change in the landscape, a wide range of applications have been developed relevant to both strategic land use planning and development control. These include for example:

- input to strategic land allocation/development potential studies - e.g. assessing the sensitivity of landscapes to housing development, mineral extraction, windfarms and other renewable energy developments;
- input to site planning - e.g. by providing a landscape framework for masterplans and development briefs related to specific development plan proposal sites;
- support for policy designations - e.g. by identifying and clarifying the 'special characteristics' that local landscape policy designations seek to protect where local authorities wish to retain them in line with advice contained in PPG7;
- input to thematic and area-based regeneration strategies - e.g. assist in developing new visions for areas in need of fundamental environmental improvements such as former coalfield areas, and guiding new development/re-use of buildings in the countryside to support rural diversification initiatives.

### Role of Landscape Character Assessment in the Reformed Planning System

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With the reform of the planning system, it is important that the support for the character approach among local authorities, developers, and local communities built up over the last ten years or so is taken forward in the future. Landscape character assessment could have a potentially significant role to play in the context of the new plan hierarchy with its emphasis on spatial planning, criteria-based policies and community driven action plans. Key roles include:

- Input to identification of regional and sub-regional environmental protection and enhancement priorities within the new statutory Regional Spatial Strategies - e.g. landscape character assessment information can inform broad locational guidance within RSS for strategic development, and help set the agenda for sub-regional regeneration strategies.
- Landscape character assessments can help shape the area-wide, long-term visions and objectives within Local Development Frameworks by establishing clear strategies and, most importantly, underpinning interpretation of criteria-based landscape, countryside and/or building design development control policies.
- Inform the preparation of LDF Action Plans, such as detailed area masterplans, parish and village plans, design statements and site development briefs - the emphasis of landscape character assessment on stakeholder/community participation is a key benefit to the preparation and endorsement of these plans.



## **Landscape Character and its Relationship to Planning Policy - Current Issues and Opportunities (continued)**

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As part of the planning reforms, PPG7 is to be revised. Key issues for the review of PPG7 in relation to landscape character and planning policy include :

- Future role of local landscape designations - should PPG7 advocate that these be abandoned in favour of character-based policies or be retained?
- Support for the character approach - should revised PPG7 give stronger support to landscape character assessment as a planning tool in light of its increasing widespread use by local authorities?
- Integration with policies for the historic environment (PPG15) and nature conservation (PPG9) - should PPG7 promote a more integrated approach to the protection/enhancement of countryside features of historic, nature conservation and landscape importance?

### **Conclusions**

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Since its emergence in the last 10-15 years, landscape character assessment has developed into a useful planning tool; it has become increasingly widely understood by planners; and it is frequently used to inform strategic development potential studies and development control decisions. Where applied effectively, landscape character assessment can make a significant contribution to informing good choices about accommodating necessary land use change in ways that best contribute to local distinctiveness and sense of place. If it is to have an enhanced role in the reformed planning system, national Planning Policy Guidance must fully endorse landscape character assessment as a key land use planning tool for informing the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and associated Action Plans.



## Landscape Character as a County Planning Tool in Staffordshire

**Andrew Goode,**  
**Staffordshire County Council**  
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Andrew Goode's qualifications and professional background are in Landscape Architecture and Environmental Science. He is Principal Landscape Architect within the Planning Department of Staffordshire County Council, responsible, within a Unit of Environmental Specialists, for advising on the landscape impact of minerals and waste operations and County Council developments. He has developed an appreciation of Landscape Character Assessment while preparing an Indicative Forestry Strategy for Staffordshire and has been closely involved both in the process of developing the character based approach to Landscape Policy within the Structure Plan, and since its adoption, in the day to day application of its principles in guiding landscape advice.

### Introduction

Prior to the current Structure Plan, Staffordshire maintained a landscape policy that related solely to protection of Special Landscape Areas. These were areas evaluated in the early 1970's as being of highest value based on the method used in the Coventry-Solihull-Warwickshire Sub-Regional Study (1971).

Staffordshire County Council, with Stoke on Trent city Council, were in the process of reviewing their joint Structure Plan when, in 1997, Government issued new planning guidance on the countryside, as PPG7. Specifically, PPG7 commends the use of the 'countryside character' approach, and requires planning authorities to look rigorously at their use of local landscape designations with a view to abandoning them in favour of a decision making system based on an understanding of countryside character. We were one of the first Structure Plan authorities to take account of this new guidance and this paper outlines the development of a character-based approach to Landscape Policy.

We were faced with the problem of how could we take the essentially broad brush descriptions of landscape character that the Character of England project provided and turn them into a tool that could be used by a development control officer to make decisions about a site-specific planning application. As there was no ready-made solution on hand we began to develop a method for producing that decision making tool,

with moral support and some financial assistance from the Countryside Agency's West Midlands Regional Office, and with very helpful assistance in brain-storming some issues of theory from landscape professionals within the Agency and in other counties and districts. The development of concepts of Landscape quality and sensitivity were central to the generation of a character-based Development Plan policy.

Using previous landscape character assessment work carried out in the earlier 1990's, the structure plan area was able to be divided up into about 275 Land Description Units. These are mapping units that are broadly homogenous with respect to their visual and ecological character and historical development. The Character Areas shown broadly on the Character of England map were able to have their boundaries defined more precisely and the Land Description Units were aggregated into 42 Landscape Character Types and 24 Sub-Types (Two examples of Landscape Character Types, Limestone Highlands and Alluvial Lowlands, are described and illustrated.)

Preparing a profile of the essential landscape character of each Type, in effect a description of that landscape when its character is most strongly expressed and its components in the best condition, enabled each LDU to be compared against that profile. We make no judgements as to whether an upland pastoral limestone landscape is in any way 'better' than a lowland river landscape, but within each type, there will be areas that are in good condition with their essential character strongly expressed, and others that are not. In this rather narrowly defined sense we can talk about the quality of a landscape without departing from the 'countryside character' approach.

In practice we had to look at three elements of landscape to make this comparison. They are:

- i) the representation, visual arrangement and condition of the characteristic components of the landscape;
- ii) the history of the human activities that have shaped it;
- iii) the extent to which semi-natural vegetation, characteristic of that landscape type, survives.

We don't dwell on the concept of quality. By using previous work on tranquillity mapping of the Structure Plan area, carried out on behalf of the CPRE, and assessing sensitivity to change of the different Land Description Units, Staffordshire has



## Landscape Character as a County Planning Tool in Staffordshire (continued)

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been able to redefine quality in terms of policy. The areas of highest quality attract the objective of 'active landscape conservation', followed by 'landscape maintenance', 'landscape enhancement', 'landscape restoration' and 'innovative landscape regeneration' for the areas of lowest quality.

The landscape policy in the latest Structure Plan is therefore soundly based on an understanding of the qualities of the countryside as required by PPG7. The method provides a test for development: to what extent will it contribute to the landscape objective for the area in which it is proposed? The mapping of sensitivity helps to indicate how restrictive or permissive detailed planning policies for that area should be. Finally, the method has identified those features that are most critical in determining the character and quality of that area: an assessment of the extent to which the development will impinge on those features helps us to determine the likely impact of that development on countryside character and quality, whether positive or negative. An example of how this approach has informed a planning consultation response to proposals for development in an area of highest quality, adjacent to the Peak District National Park, is used to illustrate the planning assessment process.

The method has been described in Supplementary Planning Guidance to our Structure Plan. There was some debate as to whether SPG was appropriate in the context of a Structure Plan, but the Panel overseeing our Plan's Examination in Public recommended its preparation and formal adoption. It has now been adopted.

### Conclusions

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Designation-based policies usually indicate that development will not be acceptable if it has an adverse impact on the qualities of the designated area: the test is therefore whether development would be damaging. Our character-based policy, on the other hand, asks whether development will make a positive contribution to the landscape policy objective appropriate to that area. There is no longer a presumption against development in some areas, but a requirement that development should respect and contribute to landscape character in all areas.



## Using Landscape Character Assessment for Planning at a Local Level

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**Carolyn Cox,**  
**Warwickshire County Council**  
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Carolyn Cox is a member of the Design Division of the Landscape Institute and holds a post graduate diploma in Housing Studies from the University of Central England. She has predominantly worked in local government for the past fourteen years, particularly for urban centred authorities. She has utilised this multi-disciplinary background in design to focus on the development of landscape planning issues.

Carolyn took up her present post as a Landscape Assessment Officer at Warwickshire County Council in the summer of 1999. During this time she has worked closely with colleagues from Stratford-upon-Avon District Council in applying the landscape character methodology to a more local scale and to demonstrate how the data could be used as a decision support tool in the development planning process.

### Introduction

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Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has been used in Warwickshire since the early 1990's to inform positive planning decisions and encourage the right kind of change and development. It is a robust and systematic methodology and is applied by our team and development control officers at both county and district level on a daily basis. There were initial fears that LCA would slow down the planning process. Experience now shows that where relevant training and expertise exists the use of the LCA methodology does not, in itself, cause delays. Colleagues in planning/development control cite a multiplicity of factors contributing to late responses by the County. As the 'message gets through' a small but steady number of applicants adhere to the 'Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines' in their initial submission. However, some applications continue to be submitted by parties who are either inexperienced in understanding and preparing Environmental Statements, or who have sought to manipulate data to suit their proposed scheme.

The Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines produced by the County Council and published in 1993, provides a character assessment of the whole County. The Guidelines remain a significant benchmark as the first to use the methodology to draw up comprehensive management guidance on

all aspects of the landscape. Although they highlight specific conservation and enhancement measures for each landscape type they were designed primarily as a land management tool and therefore are only of limited use for development planning (i.e. in deciding how best to accommodate change).

In recognition of this drawback, the County initiated a pilot study with Stratford-on-Avon District Council primarily because of their extensive work on character based design guidance including their Countryside Design Summary and District Design Guide.

### The pilot study

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Warwickshire County Council has carried out this pilot study in conjunction with The Living Landscapes Project. The Project is a partnership between local authorities, academic institutions and national government agencies, whose aim is to develop a GIS based decision support framework capable of linking national/regional policy objectives with county/district wide planning and land management activities. The evaluation methodology used in the pilot study has been developed by the Project and is currently being tested in a range of applications with a number of partners.

The building block of the landscape character framework is the Landscape Description Unit (LDU) - a discrete tract of land defined by a distinct pattern of physical, biological and cultural attributes. LDUs can be grouped into Landscape Character Types/Areas and although not referred to explicitly in the Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines, the existing countywide classification was produced using an earlier version of the characterisation process that is now used for deriving LDUs. In order to underpin the existing classification and to bring Warwickshire up-to-date with the rest of the Midlands, it has been decided to produce a Geographical Information System (GIS) based map for the whole county. As part of this exercise LDUs have been mapped for the area around Stratford in order to provide a robust spatial framework for evaluating the wider landscape setting of the town.

The pilot has also been working at a more detailed level of assessment beneath the LDU - that of the Land Cover Parcel (LCP). LCPs provide a finer grain of resolution at the sub-landscape level for assessing the 'condition' of the wider landscape.



## **Using Landscape Character Assessment for Planning at a Local Level (continued)**

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Each of the LDUs that abut the edge of town have been sub-divided into these smaller units, thus enabling specific parcels of land to be assessed for potential development/ enhancement.

The focus of the study has been to develop a methodology that 'plugs' this gap and to provide a strong landscape character input into the emerging Stratford-on-Avon Local Plan Review. The methodology is derived from the LDU and LCP mapping and is based on a desktop study supported by fieldwork to determine the fragility of the inherent character (i.e., cultural and ecological sensitivity combined), visual sensitivity and condition of the landscape. Such data has been entered into a series of matrices to help establish which of these landscapes are most sensitive to change. The other aspect of condition incorporated into the analysis is the extent to which 'alien' features (i.e. introduced features that are not characteristic of the wider landscape) cause a negative visual impact. Given the nature of the study, this part of the analysis has focused on assessing the degree to which the urban edge visually connects the town to the wider landscape. This has led to the creation of further sets of matrices designed to assess the complexity of the urban edge.

The study is in its final stages and we hope to make the information public in due course.



## **Landscape Assessment for Onshore Wind Development: The North East of England Renewable Energy Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance**

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John Benson is an ecologist, landscape architect (science) and environmental planner with research interests and experience in environmental policy, planning, economics and management. His special interests are in environmental impact assessment and landscape reconstruction. He is currently carrying out Landscape Capacity Studies for Wind Energy Development in the Western Isles for the Western Isles Alternative & Renewable Energy Partnership and in North East England for the Government Office for the North East.

### **Introduction**

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A landscape capacity assessment is being prepared to feed into a regional GIS for a renewable energy strategy for North East England. The capacity study is based on the use of countryside character areas and the national landscape typology. The capacity study and strategy will then feed into revised regional planning guidance and are also intended to provide base-line data and a range of tools for ready incorporation into the development control process, other emerging development plans and policies for windfarm development.

### **Background**

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Generating electricity using wind power has the potential to reduce the amount of electricity from fossil fuel power stations but there are opposing voices that argue that the contribution is insignificant and is outweighed by the costs (Country Guardian, website). Such costs include environmental impacts, especially damage to landscape and visual resources and values (Benson et al, 2002; Scott & Benson, 2002). The UK has one of the windiest climates in Europe but the windiest places are generally the most valued landscapes. The general implications of Government targets are that some 2000-2500 large new turbines (1.5 MW) will be required on-shore in the UK by 2010, compared to the 800 plus small turbines that exist at present. A very rapid improvement in project permitting will be required during the next 7-8 years, representing at least a threefold increase and involving larger and taller (and therefore more visible and potentially more controversial) turbines searching for homes in potentially more problematic sites (assuming the easiest sites have been developed first).

### **Policy Processes and Responses**

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The policy processes and responses to the perceived problems of local opposition vary. For example, the Government is requiring the English regions to set strategic renewable targets for 2010 (eg Blandford Associates, 2000). These targets are then expected to cascade down into regional planning guidance, structure and local plans, including the allocation of sites in development plans, and finally to influence planning (development control) decisions. The intention is to create a more favourable permitting climate than prevails at present and to avoid or reduce the need for "end-of-pipe" conflict resolution.

### **Landscape Assessment for Onshore Wind Development**

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Agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) are investing in landscape capacity studies that approach the issue not from the point of view of target setting based on demand, but rather by using ideas based around notions of natural capital, in order to determine the capacity of the landscape to accept change. Three SNH national pilot projects to assess landscape capacity for windfarms (Argyll & Bute, Moray & N & E Highland, and the Western Isles) are complete or in progress (the latter by ourselves). Further areas of current development are Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA), including for example SEA studies of windfarm capacity in Spain and Ireland (MosArt Associates, 2000) and CIA of windfarm capacity in East Yorkshire and in Scotland (Piper, 2001). There are important parallels between SEA and capacity studies.

We believe that the assessment of capacity should be based first on landscape character only (which is largely but not wholly value-free), with the landscape values of stakeholders to be considered and added as a separate and distinct layer later. There are no a priori reasons for including or excluding areas from a capacity study. For example, a non-designated area may have a greater landscape sensitivity to a wind turbine or a windfarm than a statutory designated area, and we suggest it is important not to sieve out at an early stage all statutory landscape designation areas, as is sometimes done, leaving only non-designated areas. Similarly, whilst a wind energy resource assessment may suggest a reduction in a study area boundary, the technology and economics of wind energy generation is changing so that it could



## Landscape Assessment for Onshore Wind Development: The North East of England Renewable Energy Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance (continued)

be short-sighted to exclude areas that are currently too windy or not windy enough. Again, wind speeds can be added later as and if such information is available.

Whilst our capacity assessments contain reference to experiential values, and stakeholder values, it is more properly through structure plans, the development plan system, development control, Environmental Impact Assessment and so on that evaluation and valuation are examined.

### The North East of England Renewable Energy Strategy

Our current study in the North East combines elements of landscape capacity and target setting. Our approach is structured around the latest Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage guidance (CA-SNH, 2002) and the best practice guidelines contained in LI-IEMA (2002), as well as on the detailed methodology developed for our current project in the Western Isles. Established guidance for impact assessment (LI-IEMA, 2002) makes a distinction between landscape effects and visual effects, the latter being considered a specific subset of the former. [Quote is in italics] **“Landscape effects derive from changes in the physical landscape which may give rise to changes in its character and how this is experienced. This may in turn affect the perceived value ascribed to the landscape. ... Visual effects relate to the changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people’s responses to the changes, and to the overall effects with respect to visual amenity”** (LI-IEMA, 2002). We make the same distinction. Visual effects (viewsheds, Zones of Theoretical Visibility and so on) are being calculated using GIS by our partners at the Centre for Environmental Spatial Analysis, Northumbria University. They are also responsible for the regional GIS.

It should be stressed again that the initial capacity assessments we make are unrelated to any Government or other targets or policies or any existing statutory landscape values or designations. That is, we assess capacity of landscape character areas and sub-areas based entirely on a combination of character, carefully defined criteria (SNH, 2001) and robust definitions of capacity. However, the capacity information will then be used, alongside a wide range of other data, to explore, test and examine a range of scenarios. These will include assessments of existing

windfarms, the feasibility and implications of low, medium and high targets, and the implications beyond 2010 when targets of 20% are being discussed.

The North East of England Renewable Energy Strategy has a much wider remit than on-shore wind energy. However, other renewables, and off-shore windfarms, are unlikely to make such large contributions that the development pressures for on-shore windfarm development will decline dramatically, at least up to 2010.

### Regional Planning Policy

Once the Renewable Energy Strategy is complete, it will be for the relevant authorities to feed the results, after evaluation, into revised regional planning guidance and then into other development plans. Whilst the Strategy is being developed by the Government Office for the North East through a strategy group that contains representation from a wide range of statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, it would be naïve to imagine that the strategy will prove uncontroversial. A key point, however, is that landscape character assessment provides a key building block upon which such controversies can be examined, debated and perhaps resolved.

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## **Landscape Assessment for Onshore Wind Development: The North East of England Renewable Energy Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance (continued)**

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## Landscape Character Meets Local Characters - The Key Role of Consultation

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Jeff Bishop is a Director of BDOR Limited. He trained and practiced as an architect before broadening out into other environmental issues, and especially into work on participation in environmental change. BDOR's work on rural design for the Countryside Agency, especially their development of Village Design Statements and Countryside Design Summaries, has been enormously influential (spreading into Town/Urban Design Statements and also Concept Statements) and, like all BDOR's work, is underpinned by a commitment to collaboration and participation. More recently Jeff has written the government guidance on participation in planning, building on his extensive practical and training experience of participation on all sorts of projects and plans.

### Introduction

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Only a few years ago, the idea of professionals asking amateurs (ie. local people) for their views on local landscape character would have been laughable. And then it became clear that a failure to understand local values and to engage people in changes in their own environments was a surefire way to guarantee resistance, create delay and ensure 'anywhere' design.

Now, not only do we know better and have learned to value local people's genuine input to environmental change, but the right to be consulted is enshrined in just about every bit of guidance one can find. Which is not the same as saying that we know how to do it, and the flood of consultation failures by unskilled professionals shows little sign of abating.

### Summary

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Of course, everybody knows that landscape character is such an abstract and remote concept that it would be a complete waste of time asking those who live in an area how they characterise it (and its sub-areas), what they think of it and how those considerations might help to shape what development happens where. This is a task for trained professionals and, anyway, all you ever get from local people is parochialism, nimbyism and "I know what I like" responses - so why bother to ask them?

Well, if there were some research results on nimbyism (there aren't but we have endless anecdotes), they would undoubtedly show that a very large part of people's negative reaction to change is not about change as such but about their feelings of total powerlessness over that change. It's also well-known (and there is research on this) that if you use creative ways to draw out people's knowledge and views of their local landscapes - in every sense using their 'language' - then they are rational, articulate, committed and positive.

If one can find the right approaches and provide people with a genuine say in local environmental change, then they will play a strong and constructive role. What's more this is not about passing the buck from professional to lay person but about finding ways of engaging people collaboratively on level terms, valuing the professional outsider as much as the committed local resident.

Sadly, and despite this potential, the experienced reality of consultation work is still too often negative: 'we weren't involved early enough', 'nobody really listened', 'our views were ignored' and so forth. Add to this the fact that consultation is now 'required' by government on just about everything that moves, and one can understand the very recent phenomenon of 'consultation fatigue'.

Engaging people (not just those awful things 'stakeholders') in landscape character work is inevitably going to pose a greater challenge than engaging them in the plans for that bit of land at the end of their road: the latter is immediate geographically and in real time, it is (sort of) understandable, and people have experience of the type of design variations that are possible. And, what's more, even if only through protest, people feel they can make a difference at the local site level.

So how do we engage people in that apparently vague and irrelevant thing 'landscape character'? If you expect a simple answer to emerge, then this session will be the chance to doze, because you won't get one. The presentation will draw on lots of different recent experiences to hint at ways forward, but it really will be some time before anyone can offer definitive guidance. And don't believe anyone who says they have 'the answer' or know 'the method'; that's the participation equivalent of speculative housing!



## Landscape Character Meets Local Characters - The Key Role of Consultation (continued)

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### Text of Presentation

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#### 1. WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH!

Asking people to get involved is a waste because:

- Locals are all nimbies
- Locals are far too subjective
- Locals won't miss Corrie
- Locals don't know anything
- Professionals know best
- Landscape character is far too esoteric
- Participation causes delay and costs a fortune
- Members are there to decide

#### 2. BUT WHERE THERE'S MUCK THERE'S BRASS

So can we find some 'brass' amongst this 'muck'?

- Nimbyism is mainly a response to powerlessness
- Professionals know some things, not everything
- So are professionals really objective?
- Anyway, what's wrong with subjectivity?
- Change the 'language' and landscape character means a lot
- Local people have enormous depths of knowledge
- Members decide on the basis of local views
- (Missing Corrie and time/costs come later!)

#### 3. BUT WHY BOTHER?

What benefits can good participation deliver?

- Introduce local knowledge
- Introduce wider knowledge (ie. both!)
- Prevent (or resolve) conflicts - early
- Speed the overall timetable
- Use resources effectively, maybe save
- Changed feelings of 'ownership', so increased acceptability
- Build mutual confidence, skills and trust (for the future)
- . . . and a BETTER ASSESSMENT
- Oh, by the way, you have to!

#### 4. SO WHAT GOES WRONG?

If more is happening but so much still fails, why?

- 'Amateurs' do it (.... or PR people!)
- Starting too late
- Limiting the scope for change
- All 'ingredients' no 'recipes'
- Parallel process, inconsistent
- No 'induction'
- Poor methods
- Going through the motions
- It's boring! (rather watch Corrie!)



## Landscape Character Meets Local Characters - The Key Role of Consultation (continued)

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### 5. AND WHAT MIGHT MAKE THINGS GO RIGHT?

Based on well-proven practice (now in national guidance) :

- Overall approach, properly designed, explicitly managed
- Integrate consultation into the overall process
- Start from 'day one' and keep going
- Define and manage the 'scope'
- Two-way information management and exchange
- Be widely inclusive, in particular with 'hard to reach'
- Opportunities to engage in depth and breadth
- A diversity of methods and techniques
- Build towards a consensus-based result

### 6. PROVE IT!

Are there some successful examples to point to?

- We've not done Landscape Character work but . . .
- Durham LCA
- Then other related examples from:
  - Village Design Statements
  - Countryside Design Statements
  - Concept Statements
  - Management Plans (for AONBs, SACs etc.)
  - Local Plans
  - Transport and Waste Strategies
  - Environmental arts

### 7. SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

- Contact skilled people
- Use good guidance\*
- Don't reinvent wheels
- Develop in-house skills
- Plan ahead and resource properly
- Focus more on getting people in
- Be creative at all stages
- Evaluate, learn and get better

\* The LCA guidance is pretty good!



## Landscape Characterisation - Practical Applications for Nature Conservation Planning

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Prior to taking his current position as spatial ecologist for English Nature, Roger worked as a Conservation Officer for three and a half years in a busy local team where he was responsible for the management and protection of diverse range of statutory sites across lowland Derbyshire as well as providing a lead on species protection issues, implementation of the lowland Derbyshire LBAP, environmental impact assessment and woodland ecology for the team. This was preceded by a diverse employment history that includes local government, academia, forestry, agriculture and government agencies such as ADAS and what was then FRCA. In between these diverse employment opportunities he managed to read ecology at Leeds University and went on to research the implications of small population size on the evolution of marginal populations for which he was awarded a doctorate in 1995. After completing his doctoral studies he continued to do research at Leeds as part of a postdoctoral fellowship on how dispersal and patch destruction influenced species persistence.

### **Introduction**

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Since its formation in 1991, English Nature has been developing approaches to the integrated conservation of natural features across whole landscapes. This has been based on the recognition that effective conservation delivery needs to do more than just create and maintain a network of protected areas. This is because such areas are inextricably linked with their surrounding landscape and cannot be separated from this context which often has a direct effect on the 'health' of the special features that are present for which the sites were originally protected. Another reason for this shift in emphasis has been a desire to try and provide a focus for the wider appreciation of natural features. It was hoped that by providing a 'sense of place', communities would be encouraged to become more engaged with their local environment and that this would lead to shared benefits for both wildlife and the communities themselves.

One of the first visible products of this thinking became apparent with the publication of Natural Areas in 1993. Its stated aim was to "find ways of helping people broaden and deepen their interest

in nature conservation in practical, creative ways, and to provide a framework for setting objectives for nature conservation" (English Nature 1994). In order to do this, it was necessary to determine where the similarities and differences in landscape features actually occurred which was something that had been occupying the minds of botanists for some considerable time as can be seen from the work of W.H. Coleman who first suggested the use of 'natural areas' in 1848 as a way of recording and classifying the distribution of plants in Britain (McIntosh 1985). The broad biogeographic zones that resulted from this exercise were based on a variety of information sources that included both physical and biological features. Although it provided a more coherent framework for the setting of nature conservation objectives, in comparison with administrative areas, it did not find resonance with many local communities because of the large scale of the zones that in some cases stretched across several counties. A fuller account of the history and application of the Natural Areas approach can be found in Porter (2003).

Around the same time, what was then the Countryside Commission, was developing a system for defining zones of regional character that were based on the cultural and historic dimensions of landscapes. Comparison with the Natural Area framework in the southwest of England suggested that there were commonalities and this led to the production of the Joint Character Map for England in 1996. The map was supported by integrated statements for each area that summarised the key landscape, wildlife and natural features that were present but lacked the detailed objective setting that was associated with Natural Area profiles. Part of the work that was undertaken in relation to this project by the Countryside Commission and subsequently refined by the Countryside Agency, related to the objective definition of smaller geographic areas that were hierarchically nested within the larger Joint Character Areas. These were used to define boundaries for the Character Areas and have subsequently become known as Landscape Description Units (LDUs) (ENTEC 2001). These units have been defined through the use of a Geographic Information System and are represented by a series of contiguous map objects that enables a range of other information to be incorporated and analysed within a common, spatially referenced framework across the whole of England. This provided a readily accessible



## **Landscape Characterisation - Practical Applications for Nature Conservation Planning (continued)**

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source of landscape information that could be viewed on any computer with the right software. The Living Landscapes Project, the University of Reading in association with Steve Warnock and several local authorities, has been developing the approach at a finer scale over the past few years, which most recently has been partly funded by English Nature. This work has enabled English Nature to gain a better appreciation of the importance of the physical attributes that influence not only biodiversity but also the landscape and cultural heritage of an area.

The use of the Landscape Description Unit framework is of considerable interest to English Nature for the same reasons that Natural Areas were first developed. One of the strengths of the approach is the hierarchical nature of the classification that allows information to be aggregated at a range of different scales within a consistent framework. Objective setting and ecological processes do not occur at any one scale which means that an ability to represent spatial information in a flexible and integrated manner is very important. Clearly the needs of a local biodiversity action plan will not be the same as a regional Government Office in terms of how environmental information is interpreted or objects actually set. This ability is also of importance to the internal work of English Nature because, as an organisation, we are responsible for delivering conservation action across a range of different scales from a single farm field to the whole of England. The representation of information and the delivery of targets at scales that are environmentally coherent but also meaningful to central government and local communities has not been a trivial task or one that has yet been completed. The task is one that we believe could be well served by the use of a multiscale hierarchical system of discrete landscape classification such as the one exemplified by the Living Landscapes Project approach.

Currently only a single scale of classification at 1:250 000 is available for the whole of England but in some areas this has been augmented by a finer sub-division, partly through English Nature funding, to a scale of approximately 1:50 000. To date the finer classification has only been completed for six counties, most of which are located in the West Midlands. While landscape assessments are available at a similar scale for most counties, the methodologies are not

standardised which means that comparisons across large areas that might be needed for say, regional spatial planning purposes are problematic and generally compromised by a lack of consistency at finer scales. This will be an important consideration if it is decided that the finer scale approach that was previously touched upon is to be extended across the whole of England. In terms of practical applications, English Nature has used the framework to demonstrate the delivery of strategic biodiversity action planning, the identification of important areas for rare plant assemblages, setting boundaries for an HLF application and potential adjustments to the National Sheep Envelope.

The future of conservation planning and landscape characterisation undoubtedly looks bright but further exploration of how such integrated frameworks can be utilised in practical ways is still needed. It would be easy to view them as a panacea but they do not replace the need to have current information on the extent of semi-natural habitats in a given area or a functioning Local Record Centre that supports the development control and development planning processes. They also provide no substitute for the detailed and spatially explicit, ecological analyses that are required to deliver functioning, sustainable landscapes that not only meet the needs of wildlife but also the communities that depend on them for inward investment and an improved quality of life. For example, the ways in which specific landscape elements, that are important in maintaining healthy ecological communities, are changing needs to be quantified and monitored on a regular basis to determine how land use is influencing the wider environment. Another area for consideration would seem to be how more objective, easily repeated and cost effective methods of landscape classification can be developed so that landscape change can be accommodated and quantified at regular intervals. This would avoid the risk of fossilising landscapes that can occur when such approaches are viewed as the end of a journey rather than the beginning. In this respect, the conservation of any given landscape character in a particular location needs to be placed in a dynamic context, not least because of the potential impacts of climate change, especially when considering semi-natural systems that are now so intimately associated with high density human populations that occur throughout Western Europe. The production of a single, fixed classification without



## **Landscape Characterisation - Practical Applications for Nature Conservation Planning (continued)**

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any commitment to regular revision risks fossilisation and stagnation. This can place considerable obstacles in the path of delivering effective nature conservation action but will also have economic consequences. What landscape characterisation does provide, however, is an environmentally realistic framework for the expression of a range of information that is an undoubted improvement on the administrative boundaries that are currently used as it allows heritage interest thinking to go beyond traditional 'bunkers'.

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## Landscape Character, Planning Policy and the Design Stance

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Karl Kropf is a Senior Associate with Roger Evans Associates where he is head of spatial planning and research. In his previous post at Stratford-on-Avon District Council he was involved in a number pilot studies integrating character assessment and design guidance, including the Stratford-on-Avon District Design Guide, of which he was principal author.

He initially studied landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, following which he undertook an MA in Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University. He subsequently completed a PhD by research in Urban Morphology focusing on the description and prescription of urban form.

He has extensive experience in settlement design and design guides for local authorities in the UK and abroad. His academic work on the theory and practice of using the built environment as a design resource is widely published and he is Associate Editor of the international journal 'Urban Morphology'.

### Planning and design

Design is a planning policy issue - it is firmly embedded in national planning policy statements, notably PPG 1, PPG 3, the 2001 Green Paper and Sustainable Communities - Delivering Through Planning (Carmona, Punter and Chapman, 2002). Planning is also a form of design. Decisions about the location of development are in themselves 'design' decisions at the scale of a region or town and have implications for design at lower levels of resolution - street layout, position and orientation of buildings etc.

### The design stance

At its root, design involves the need to accommodate current needs within the current social and economic structures.

At the same time, design relies on ready-mades - on established ideas and solutions to common needs and requirements.

There is always a degree of tension between these two - ready-made or received solutions do not always satisfy current requirements.

Agriculture is a good example. The changing circumstances - markets, means of distribution to end users, disease, - have led to a crisis in agriculture forcing people to re-examine 'traditional' ways of farming and the physical structures that accommodate them.

Housing is another example. Changing demographics, household structure, employment structures and attitudes and desires toward social relations and living circumstances have created a crisis in housing. The 'need' for more housing is coming up against the desire to retain the character and qualities of the countryside. Received forms of residential development are not able to resolve the conflict.

The design stance is an imperative, a frame of mind imposed by an unavoidable task - the need to alter the environment in order to survive and satisfy a vast range of needs and desires, both of individuals and groups.

The stance is induced when you start thinking about solving a problem, say, deciding that you need more space in your house or flat, perhaps because a relative needs to move in for some reason. What do you need to do? What is necessary in order to get from a position of having too little space to having enough? Even if you ask someone else to do it, he or she will need to ask questions. What is the existing situation? What is important to keep? How much space do you need? Where does it need to go? What do you want it to look like?

The simplest way to deal with the situation is to use a solution that someone else has already worked out. Look at a house like yours with an extension and do the same.

But what if the relative moving in is unable to walk? A standard solution may not suit your needs. You need to articulate your needs and identify specific aims, objectives and requirements. Those aims, objectives and requirements then get translated into design principles - general statements about what is to be achieved. You and your relative may have the conviction, for example, that the space should be naturally heated and ventilated. If you are not going to spend enormous amounts of time and money rethinking every detail, you will again need to look around for specific design ideas or solutions, pulling together ready-made components that will serve your purposes.



## Landscape Character, Planning Policy and the Design Stance (continued)

### Landscape character and the design stance

Looking at the question of design at the scale of the countryside, the same basic elements are involved.

- What is the existing situation?
- What is important in the existing situation?
- What need or requirement are you seeking to satisfy?
- What are your aims and objectives?
- What are the corresponding design principles?
- What specific design ideas achieve the aims and principles?

So where does landscape character assessment and planning policy fit into this sequence?

existing situation	-	landscape character assessment (amongst other forms of appraisal)
evaluation	-	Quality of Life assessment
needs and requirements	-	planning policy/ aims and objectives individual/corporate goals
design principles	-	design approach or 'school' planning policy/design guidance
design ideas	-	received solutions design innovation

To the designer, landscape character assessment provides three principle things.

- a suggestion of what is important to consider in looking at an existing situation
- a means of describing that situation in terms of those important features
- a palate of elements and materials that might be incorporated into design

The first point is an important one because it indicates that landscape character assessment is not neutral when it comes to design. In focusing on particular features in the existing situation it implies those are worth looking at and taking into account in design. Character assessment is not necessary in order to carry out a design. It is possible to ignore most of the features assessments highlight. Undertaking a character assessment assumes the landscape is important

and its character is an important consideration in design, the default position being that existing character should be retained.

Put the other way around, why would anyone commit the significant resources necessary to undertake landscape character assessment and write policies making reference to it if landscape character was not deemed to be important?

Thus, if landscape character assessment is used in understanding the existing situation, it tends to become part of the aims and objectives and design principles by default.

To get more effective policies and better designs, the interests, concerns and motivations for taking a character-based approach should be clearly and explicitly articulated. Their expression can then be taken by designers as explicit aims, objectives and design principles.

It hardly needs stating at this point that the notion of importance is highly charged. For whom and for what reasons is the landscape important and which aspects of the landscape matter?

To say the landscape in general is important cannot generate useful policies nor lead to designs that successfully incorporate landscape character. Without an expression of what is important, either everything or nothing will be considered so.

From the design stance, and in aid of writing clear, effective policy, the landscape needs to be evaluated - value placed on specific aspects or features. Ideally the evaluation involves the wider community, as promoted by the Countryside Agency through such initiatives as the Quality of Life Capital approach.

Again policies will likely be more effective and designs more satisfactory if the value placed on aspects and elements of the landscape are clearly and explicitly stated.

But while landscape character assessment may, on the one hand, have an implicit design dimension, on the other hand it does not, as it stands, provide specific design ideas. At this point it is useful to make a distinction that is relevant to both character assessment and design. The character of the landscape and elements within is a matter of both individual objects and particular associates and arrangements of objects. Character is not fully articulated merely by key features but by key features located in particular relations to each other, whether buildings and fields making up a



## **Landscape Character, Planning Policy and the Design Stance** (continued)

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farmstead or the centre, fringe features and surrounding farmsteads and villages making up a town in the landscape.

To be most useful to designers, policies and design guidance should articulate both constituent materials and features AND typical associations and arrangements. Those arrangements are, in effect, design ideas. Distinguishing between materials and arrangements helps those ideas remain flexible and allow for reinterpretation and reinvigoration. New materials or features can be put into typical arrangements and typical features can be put into new arrangements.

### **References**

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Carmona, M. Punter J. Champan, D. (2002)  
From design policy to design quality.  
Thomas Telford, London.



## Report from the morning discussion session and afternoon plenary

NB. Where a response or a comment is made by one of the appointed speakers, they will be identified.

### Morning Question and Answer session

Q: Are the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines were being made more specific?

A: (Carolyn Cox) Inevitably they are more proscriptive. Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines are very general and are designed to operate at a county level, so when considering matters at a local level they must be adapted. There is a need to tailor guidelines to specific types of development. The example presented relates to residential development.

Q: How does the mapping of areas of high landscape quality in Staffordshire relate to the existing Cannock Chase AONB?

A: (Andy Goode) The process has confirmed that this is an area of high landscape quality. The process also revealed that there were a lot of lowland areas of a high quality, for example meadowlands, which had been missed by the designation.

Q: There are two contrasting perceptions of Landscape Character Assessment as it applies to planning policy, namely:

1. To prohibit development and fossilize the past,
2. To look to and plan future landscapes.

Which perception is supported by the Staffordshire example?

A: (Andy Goode) Prior to the Landscape Character Assessment, landscape designation in Staffordshire had divided the landscape into areas in which development was prohibited and areas that were open to development. Present thinking means that all areas are now open to development providing the correct criteria are met. There are no areas in that county where development is prohibited.

Q: How has the Staffordshire project been received by politicians. Do they have the vision to accept future landscapes?

A: (Andy Goode) Politicians have generally received the project well and have been persuaded that a new approach was needed.

There have been problems with the way it has been received by Parish Councils in areas that have formerly been within local landscape designations.

The meeting heard that regional Countryside Agency Officers have had to repeatedly stress that Landscape Character is not about designations and is not meant to be used to prohibit or hinder decisions and development.

It was observed that a key benefit of LCA is integration across sectors. To promote such integration there is a need to demonstrate that Landscape Character is a tool to identify opportunities and not a restraint.

The meeting heard that Northamptonshire County Council are shortly to launch an integrated study which addresses this point.

Q: If it is accepted that there is no chance of enhancement when siting wind turbines, can Landscape Character Assessment also be used to assess for landscape compensation, and where should this compensation be located?

A: (John Benson) Some developers have invested money in local communities.

A: (Dominic Watkins) Provided it is a policy requirement of the local authority, compensation will be offered.

The meeting heard that the Countryside Agency's planning policy statement 'Planning Tomorrow's Countryside' (2000) stated that "The planning process should deliver overall net gain", but it was difficult to provide examples of this. It was observed that there are people who find wind turbines an enhancement to the landscape, but that in other instances the Countryside Agency refers to 'mitigation' rather than compensation, for instance, exchanging overhead power cables for wind turbines.

The meeting heard that there had been problems with mitigation in particular instances as it applies to the siting and development of wind turbines in Cornwall, and that pressure from Europe in particular had led to refusals to expand or re-power wind farms. It was observed that one wind turbine in a landscape might be considered an interesting or enhancing feature, but that where there were several they have a detrimental effect.

(John Benson) There is an alternative view, that many people would celebrate the utilisation of a



## Report from the morning discussion session and afternoon plenary (continued)

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natural and sustainable resource in the landscape such as wind turbines. This is a different aesthetic to purely visual concerns.

(Dominic Watkins) The detrimental effect of wind turbines on landscapes is a matter of scale of development rather than the introduction of incongruous elements.

It was observed that individual instances of incongruous features may degrade the landscape, but large concentrations of wind turbines on one site, as is practiced in parts of the United States, would be more localised and would be easier to compensate for or mitigate.

The meeting heard the comment that it was important to ensure that siting of wind turbines is led by landscape and not by piecemeal economic concerns. It is important to get this correct now as the demand for wind turbines increases.

(Karl Kropf) One onus on LCA is to integrate historical aspects in the landscape to illustrate the evolution of the landscape over time. LCA should provide a framework for ongoing negotiation and discussion, and inform the debate between professional judgment and values. This debate will be ongoing.

Q: In conserving landscapes in Staffordshire that have been designated as being of a high quality and protected from development, was there not the risk that by avoiding developing in such landscapes they might miss out on possibly positive changes?

A: (Andy Goode) Staffordshire County Council is expected to conserve high quality landscapes, and improve low quality ones. There was more interest in the 'middle band' of intermediate landscapes, where there is the possibility for enhancement.

Q: Concerning the North East study on the siting of wind turbines, has the economic value of beautiful landscapes to the local community been considered as well as the economic benefits of development?

A: (John Benson) This had not been considered in the current study. The siting of these developments will generally be economically driven, but it is very difficult to evaluate the economic impact of wind turbines on landscapes as there are many intangible factors to consider, such as the economic value of landscapes.

The comment was made that what was needed was a broader theory of aesthetics that involves knowledge and understanding. The meeting heard that studies conducted in Eire had identified positive impacts of wind turbine development on the landscape. These developments can be sculptural in form and are often perceived as intriguing by the public. The point was reinforced that landscape planners should not automatically assume these developments will be detrimental. The meeting heard that studies in Scotland had proved that wind turbines can be attractive to tourists.

It was observed that Landscape Architects can assess the size of the impact which will be made by a development, but it must be accepted that there will be many differing views regarding whether it has a positive or negative impact.

The meeting heard that Landscape Character Assessment can be the best tool for engaging communities and informing them about the balances and choices. The meeting heard that Hampshire is making an overt link between LCA and community strategy through a new planning agenda.

It was observed that local knowledge should never be underestimated. What is needed is a framework for them to understand LCA. Technical language is a barrier to this, and the style of presentation of an LCA is critical.

The meeting heard that engaging communities often uncovers plurality of subjective values. Translating this into sensible, operational policy is the challenge that faces planners.

### Afternoon Plenary

The workshop was asked whether or not they believed LCA slows or speeds the planning process. This is a concern of central government.

The response was heard that what mattered more was the quality of the decision, and that LCA is a tool which facilitates making better informed decision. It was felt that the emphasis should be on procedure, and that while there is the possibility that LCA may slow down the front end of the planning process it can also speed things during the Development Control phase.

The meeting heard that comment that LCA has been of assistance to strategic planning, as it gives a framework for planners. It was felt that



## Report from the morning discussion session and afternoon plenary (continued)

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Development Control planners may lack the specialist knowledge to fully understand LCA, and that the provision of decision support tools and software could improve the speed and quality of development control decisions.

The meeting heard concern about how planning decisions are made. It was felt that different bodies of elected members on Planning Committees may not be making decisions in the same way, and that there are real problems with educating members about the LCA and the planning process: for instance, there will be enormous learning curves after a change in administration. It was felt also that members felt proprietorial over their control of the planning process, and would react negatively against any move to distance them from it. However, given these concerns and with central Government stating that 80% of decisions should be made at planning officer level, should there not be a greater degree of delegation? It was also felt that consultation at the local level was of paramount importance.

(Jeff Bishop) If members are part of the planning process from the outset, then real savings will be shown later as members will more fully understand what is involved.

It was felt that simply expressed guidance was a key to this, and that existing documents are often overly complex. The meeting was asked to provide examples of simplicity in this regard.

(Karl Kropf) Stratford District Council's design guide is a positive example of this. This document, which builds on the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines, was produced in conjunction with stakeholders and elected members. It uses everyday language to deal simply and directly with its subject.

(Jeff Bishop) Regarding the speeding up of the planning process, the onus should lie with the applicant or developer to demonstrate that they have considered Landscape Character in detail.

It was felt that many existing local planning policies are unsatisfactory, some of them making reference to Supplementary Planning Guidance notes which do not yet exist. Local authorities should be more proscriptive and challenging to developers, requiring them to demonstrate that they have addressed these concerns.

(Andy Goode) Developers will often take on Supplementary Planning Guidance and return the same words in their applications.

It was suggested that planning applications contain a form setting out unambiguous questions relating to Landscape Character, and require that the developer sign a declaration confirming that they have fulfilled the necessary assessment and consultation criteria.

It was heard that detailed local and district level assessments, in conjunction with a county-wide planning policy and education and consultation among stakeholders, as in the case of Hampshire, leads to better quality planning decisions being made. In response to this applicants and developers are increasingly aware of what is expected of them and this is leading to more streamlined applications.