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Planning to Maintain the Diversity of Derbyshire Landscapes



Image © Derbyshire County Council/Peak Pictures

Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent

Derbyshire has an amazing diversity of landscapes - from the open moors of the Peak District, to the industrial farmlands of the Coalfield and the lowland floodplains of the Trent Valley. Derbyshire County Council, supported by the Countryside Agency, is using Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) to develop planning policies that are responsive to the characteristics of all the landscapes in the county. These policies will help to manage change and positive development, enhance the quality and diversity of landscapes and enrich biodiversity across the whole of Derbyshire.

A detailed field survey has resulted in a rich database of visual and perceptual data and a record of the condition of the landscape, all of which was entered into a Geographical Information System (GIS). Photographs are being linked to the GIS, to provide council officers with rapid access to the view on-the-ground. It is being extended to include additional information such as the Historic Landscape Character study and aerial photography, helping everyone in understanding the evolution and diversity of Derbyshire landscapes. There is also a detailed description of the distinctive cultural and natural characteristics for each of the 39 Landscape Character Types identified in Derbyshire. This detailed planning resource provides a valuable landscape framework for spatial planning.

An Integrating Study

The LCA will guide and promote a number of aims:

- Landscape character and diversity: to maintain and enhance the overall quality and diversity of landscape character across the county, the distinctive sense of place and individual identity of each particular area.
- Managing change: to support and complement planning policies by helping to ensure that new development respects, and where practicable, contributes towards enhancing the local character and sense of place of the landscape.
- Ecological diversity: to support and complement the aims of the Biodiversity Action Plans for Derbyshire, enriching ecological diversity throughout the wider countryside and encouraging the sustainable management of Derbyshire's landscapes and habitats.
- Agricultural change: to inform the new agri-environment schemes administered by Defra, particularly the targeting of the Higher Level Scheme.
- Tourism and education: to be used as a potential resource in tourism and education.

Applications in Minerals Planning

Derbyshire has a long history of mineral extraction, stretching back to ancient lead mining in the White Peak and the recent rapid change across the coalfields. Due to the very nature and scale of mineral working, there is inevitably an impact on landscape character. Hence, modern demands for large scale mineral extraction require careful consideration of the location, nature and ongoing use of minerals sites - a challenge well suited to the application of LCA.

The Derbyshire LCA has been used to inform the production of the Trent Valley Supplementary Planning Guidance. The guidance will establish a framework of principles aimed at securing a preferred pattern of after-uses for sand and gravel sites. An understanding of landscape character has been used to provide after-use guidelines and priority habitats specific to each Landscape Character Type. This will help to ensure that the new landscapes will have a strong sense of place and will enrich the lives of those visiting and living in the Trent Valley.

Applications in Development and Planning

This has been the primary use of the project to date which has resulted in significant improvements to both the quality of the advice given to developers and the standard of development within the county. The

LCA has informed development briefs for large-scale strategic developments and has been highly successful in helping to articulate the landscape context of the county to incoming developers and consultants.

Management Guidelines and Biodiversity Opportunities

The LCA includes broad landscape management guidelines for each Landscape Character Type, aiming to maintain diversity and local distinctiveness. The study has also identified biodiversity opportunities across Derbyshire by linking priority habitats to each Landscape Character Type. This landscape-level view supports the aim of the Derbyshire Biodiversity Action Plan to enrich the biodiversity of the whole countryside.

Future Developments

At the present time, the LCA is being used to support the Derby & Derbyshire Joint Structure Plan Environment Policy 1: Landscape Character. With the imminent changes to the planning system, it is now intended to use the work to inform the new Regional Spatial Strategies and more particularly, the Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). High Peak Borough Council has recently secured funding from the Countryside Agency to look at translating the Derbyshire LCA into criteria-based planning policies and producing a Supplementary Planning Document.

The Derbyshire Landscape Character Assessment will continue to evolve, as new data becomes available and as landscapes continue to change. This ongoing work will continue to support and encourage holistic planning in the diverse landscapes of Derbyshire.



Image © Countryside

A field barn, characteristic of the Plateau Pastures in the White Peak

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This case study can be downloaded from the Countryside Character Network Website: www.ccnetwork.org.uk/pdfs/lca_casestudy4.pdf