

- Urban Fringe Landscapes
- Sensitivity Study
- Development Planning

# Stratford Town's Urban Edge: A Pilot Study



A Landcover Parcel within the urban fringe to the southwest of Stratford, on the edge of three different landscape types: The Vale Orchard Belt, River Meadowlands and Terrace Farmlands

**S**tratford-on-Avon District is largely rural, covering an area of 979 square kilometres in South Warwickshire and with a population of over 113,000. The historic town of Stratford-upon-Avon is one of a ring of towns surrounding the Birmingham conurbation. The town is expected to experience continuing, albeit reducing, levels of economic and residential growth and development, but it is also recognised that the environment and heritage need to be protected from unnecessary harm.

The Local Plan sets out the District Council's policies and proposals for the development and use of land in Stratford-on-Avon District. The current Local Plan was adopted in 2000, but is currently in the process of being reviewed to reflect new circumstances, including a revision of the Warwickshire Structure Plan. The Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review (1996-2011) is at an advanced stage of preparation, and it is anticipated that it will be adopted by spring 2006. Within the new planning system, the Local Plan Review can be saved for a period of three years from adoption; therefore its policies could remain in force until spring 2009.

## Stratford Town's Urban Edge

The District Council recognises the importance of protecting the identity and distinctiveness of towns, villages and landscapes, and has actively promoted a landscape character based approach as a tool for making planning decisions. Stratford Town's Urban Edge: A Pilot Study<sup>1</sup> was carried out jointly by Warwickshire County Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council in conjunction with The Living Landscapes Project. Its purpose was to conduct a sensitivity analysis involving an assessment of the character of the landscape around the town. By beginning to understand the relationships between the factors that contribute to landscape character, it is possible to identify more effective ways of using it as a consideration in the planning process, including the identification of sites for development in the Local Plan Review (and subsequent reviews through the Local Development Framework process).

The study built on and refined the pioneering, county-wide character assessment undertaken by Warwickshire County Council in 1993<sup>2</sup>. The latter had identified areas of distinct landscape and townscape character around and within the town, resulting in four main character types:

- the River Meadowlands
- the Terrace Farmlands
- the Vale Orchard Belt
- the Feldon Parklands

Apart from the River Meadowlands, which are pastoral and largely unsettled, these landscapes have had a long history of settlement and cultivation. However there are differences and variations in landscape features such as field pattern and tree cover which are vulnerable to land use change. The sensitivity analysis measured the extent to which the countryside can accept change by looking at the fragility of the inherent pattern of the landscape (natural and cultural) and the degree of visibility that change might have within it.

### Use of Landscape Character Assessment in policy making

The results of the study have been used as the basis for policies and proposals affecting Stratford-upon-Avon in the Local Plan Review, which provide a framework for protecting landscape quality around the town and the character of the urban area itself.

Policy SUA.1 states that "in considering proposals for the development and use of land on the fringe of the urban area of Stratford-upon-Avon ... regard will be given to their potential impact on the distinguishing features of the defined Character Areas. Opportunities will be sought to manage and enhance landscape features in order to sustain them in the longer term."

An assessment of the town character was also carried out by Stratford-on-Avon District Council, leading to the

distinction of three main areas:

- the countryside surrounding the town
- the fringe features (mainly non-residential), both within and beyond the urban area
- the built up (mainly residential) areas

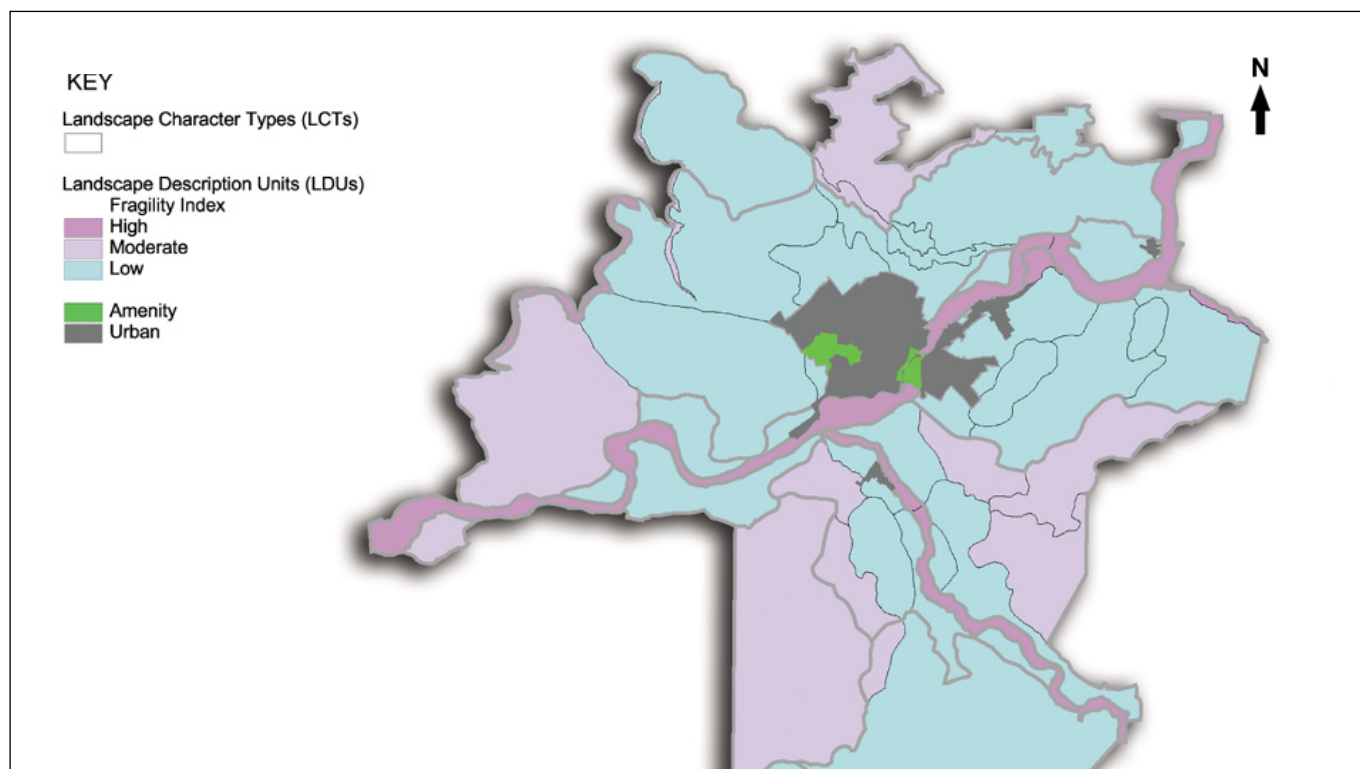
Policy SUA.2 (as Proposed to be Modified) states that "in considering proposals within the built-up area of the town, regard will be given to the existing components of the built form. Any proposed scheme should complement rather than conflict with the character of the area to which it relates."

### Conclusion

Landscape character has become an increasingly important consideration in the planning process in Stratford-on-Avon District, with the aim of providing "a structured and transparent means for using Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in the development planning process"<sup>1</sup>. LCA is being used to identify the most suitable sites for new development that will maintain the character of the urban, urban fringe and rural landscapes around Stratford-upon-Avon.

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Stratford town's urban edge a pilot study (republished June 2005) Warwickshire County Council
- <sup>2</sup> Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: 3 volumes (1993) Warwickshire County Council



Fragility of inherent character in Stratford town's urban edge, from Stratford Town's Urban Edge: A Pilot Study

For further information contact: Carolyn Cox, Warwickshire County Council. Tel: 01926 418643. E-mail: carolyncox@warwickshire.gov.uk

This case study can be downloaded from the Countryside Character Network Website: [www.ccnetwork.org.uk/pdfs/lca\\_casestudy6.pdf](http://www.ccnetwork.org.uk/pdfs/lca_casestudy6.pdf)