

An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment

October 2014

Christine Tudor, Natural England

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	5
Foreword	6

PART ONE AN INTRODUCTION to LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Introduction

1.1 Background – informed management of change	7
1.2 The Audience for this Approach	8
1.3 Why Landscape Character Assessment matters – what are the benefits of LCA and how can it be used?	10
1.4 Five Key Principles for Landscape Character Assessment	12
1.5 Carrying out a New Landscape Character Assessment – the process	14
1.6 Reviewing and Updating an Existing Landscape Character Assessment – the process	16
1.7 Outputs of a Landscape Character Assessment and Informing Judgements – the application of Landscape Character Assessment.	17

PART TWO THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The four steps of the Landscape Character Assessment process -

2.1 Define purpose and scope and preparation of the Brief	19
Introduction	
Defining Purpose	
The Scope of the Landscape Character Assessment	
Additional Matters to Consider	
Preparation of the Brief	
2.2 Desk Study	25
Introduction	
Information Gathering	
Analysing Information	
Involving People	
Developing a Draft Characterisation	
2.3 Field Study	35
Introduction	
Planning the Field survey	
Recording Field Survey information	
Reviewing Desk Study findings in the field	

Aesthetic & Perceptual / Experiential Factors
Involving People
Recording other observations to inform later decisions

2.4 Classification and Description of Landscape Character Types and Areas	44
Introduction	
Landscape Character Types and Areas	
Classification at different Scales	
Involving People	
Confirming Boundaries	
Naming Landscape Types and Areas	
Describing Landscape Character and Identifying Key Characteristics	
Mapping Landscape Character Types and/or Areas	
2.5 The Landscape Character Assessment – the output of the process	53

PART THREE TECHNICAL ANNEXES

1. Glossary of Terms	54
2. LANDMAP (Wales)	56



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment has been informed by: the very influential *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* published in 2002, prepared on behalf of the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage by Carys Swanwick, Department of Landscape University of Sheffield and Land Use Consultants; an unpublished working draft document *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England, Scotland & Wales*, prepared in 2011 for Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales by Carys Swanwick University of Sheffield and Land Use Consultants, and; *An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment* prepared for Natural England by LDA Design, and published in 2012 by Natural England. Thanks are extended to all those who contributed to the above documents.

First Version – October 2014

Second Version – Minor revisions made regarding Footnote 4 on page 7, and the Glossary on pages 54 and 55, March 2018.

FOREWORD

Landscape reflects the relationship between people and place, and the part it plays in forming the setting to our everyday lives. It is a product of the interaction of the natural and cultural components of our environment, and how they are understood and experienced by people. This Approach to Landscape Character Assessment follows a well-established process developed over many years. By setting down a robust, auditable and transparent baseline Landscape Character Assessment not only helps us to understand our landscapes, it also assists in informing judgements and decisions concerning the management of change.

The publication of this document should help to generate discussion and encourage methods, techniques and skills relating to Landscape Character Assessment evolve.

Any comments on this document should be forwarded to Christine Tudor
christine.tudor@naturalengland.org.uk

PART ONE AN INTRODUCTION to LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

1.1 Background - informed management of change

The European Landscape Convention (ELC)¹ definition of “landscape” is:

“ an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors.”

Our landscapes are extremely important to us, they are part of our cultural heritage. With sympathetic planning, design and management they offer an opportunity to provide a more harmonious link between man and the natural world, for the benefit of both. Sensitive, informed, and integrated approaches should help us all to conserve, enhance, restore and regenerate landscapes that are attractive, diverse and publically valued, showing that environmental, social and economic benefits can go hand in hand.

Over the centuries writers, artists, and others have described and enthused about our landscapes. They have linked them with the social and economic processes and practices of the period, successfully describing and articulating what it is that is special about our landscapes, whether urban, rural, or somewhere in between. Importantly, they illustrated what makes one landscape different from another. Appreciation and understanding of our landscapes has increased over time, latterly via qualitative and quantitative methods associated with the social and natural sciences and often prompted by the need and desire to record, understand, influence, and manage change.

One of Natural England’s predecessors, the Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission), had a long association with areas designated as being of national importance (ie. National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). However, it was also concerned about the active management of the wider countryside and its work highlighted the need for a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gave the countryside of England its’ character. So, following on from work in the 1980s the Countryside Commission and others developed the technique of landscape assessment – in 1993 Landscape Assessment Guidance² was published. From its’ outset, in the early 1990s, the “Countryside Character Programme” was designed “to be a framework for helping to incorporate the rich heritage of landscape diversity into present day decisions, not as a process that seeks to prevent activities.”³ It was envisaged that the Programme would have 4 main uses: to provide a landscape context; to guide policy development and help to target resources; to identify opportunities for local action, and; to provide a base for advice. Over the years this work evolved to give us the best practice approach, *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, (2002)*⁴, which has over the years helped to inform the management of change and deliver sustainable development.

¹ Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence, October 2000.

² Countryside Commission (1993) Landscape Assessment Guidance, CCP 423, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham.

³ Countryside Commission (1994) Countryside Character Programme Information, CCP 472, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham.

⁴ The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (CAX 84), the Countryside Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage, April 2002.

Our landscapes vary because of, amongst other variables, their underlying geology, soils, topography, land cover, hydrology, historic and cultural development, and climatic considerations. The combination of characteristics arising from these physical and socio economic influences, and their often complex interrelationships, makes one landscape different from another. **Landscape character**⁵ may be defined as a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements, or characteristics, in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. **Landscape Character Assessment** (LCA) is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive (Fig. 1. What is Landscape?). This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.

The Landscape Character Assessment process is used increasingly to inform urban, or townscape, assessments, and Seascape Character Assessments⁶. The scope of the ELC applies to natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas and includes land, inland water and marine areas. As the European Landscape Convention acknowledges, “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.”⁷. All landscapes matter to someone. By setting down a robust, auditable and transparent, baseline Landscape Character Assessment can not only help us to understand our landscapes, it can also assist in informing judgements and decisions concerning the management of change. The involvement of people in the process of LCA is key. Both communities of place and communities of interest must be engaged in LCA.

This Approach to Landscape Character Assessment follows on from the influential *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002).

1.2 The Audience for this Approach

Users of this Approach will include those who have interests in the terrestrial and / or marine environments i.e. inform those who:

- wish to commission a Landscape Character Assessment;
- need to carry out a Landscape Character Assessment;
- want to use a Landscape Character Assessment to inform decisions – for example concerning land use planning, development management, land management, design.

The user of this Approach might be:

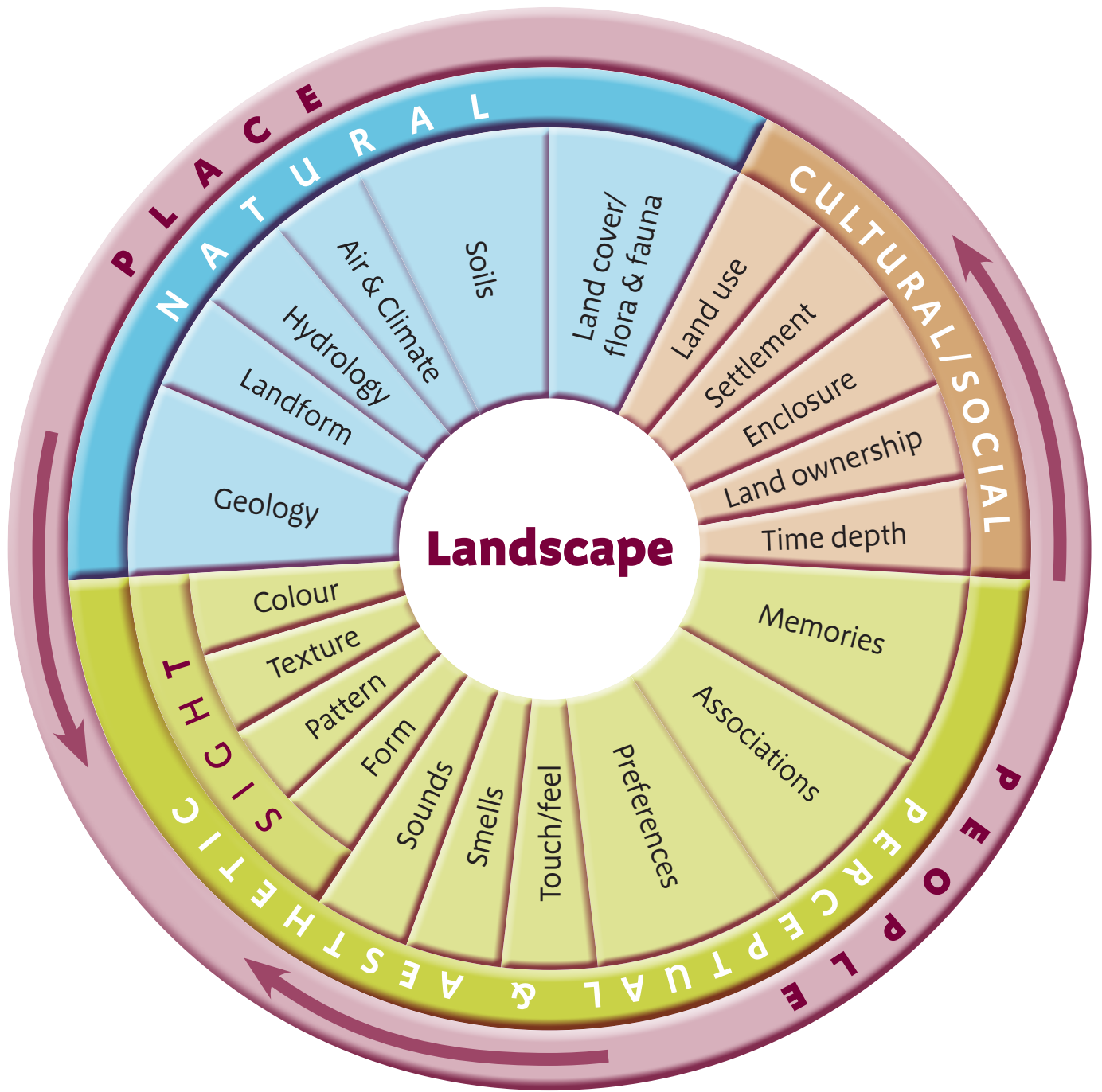
- a community group wanting to carry out a Local Landscape Character Assessment, to inform their community / parish plan for example;

⁵ A Glossary of Terms is provided at Annex 1.

⁶ Natural England (2012), An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment, Natural England Commissioned Report NECR 105, October 2012.

⁷ Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence October 2000.

Figure 1: What is landscape?



- an employee of a local authority, government agency, utility company (e.g. a landscape architect, planner, engineer, architect) wanting to carry out or commission a Landscape Character Assessment;
- a private practice;
- a developer;
- a land owner.

1.3 Why Landscape Character Assessment Matters – the management of change

Our landscapes have evolved over time and they will continue to evolve – change is a constant but outcomes vary. The management of change is essential to ensure that we achieve sustainable outcomes – social, environmental and economic. Decision makers need to understand the baseline and the implications of their decisions for that baseline. The process of Landscape Character Assessment has an important role to play in managing and guiding change.

A Landscape Character Assessment can, for example:

1. Describe a landscape with reference to the characteristics that combine to make a place distinctive
2. Give spatial reference to baseline information / evidence via mapped landscape character areas / types;
3. Inform understanding of key characteristics, sense of place, special qualities etc. that can then inform judgements – decision making - regarding, for example, development management and the siting, design, scale and massing of developments from housing developments and transport infrastructure to forests, woodlands, or renewable energy projects.
4. Assist with the monitoring of change.

Landscape Character Assessment can be used to inform: policy development; local, neighbourhood, community or parish plans, and place-making; green infrastructure plans and strategies; waterways strategies; design briefs; project design and masterplanning; landscape impact and visual impact assessments⁸ (often as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment); sensitivity and capacity studies; landscape designations including National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation etc.

Benefits of Landscape Character Assessment include, it can:

1. establish a robust evidence base linked to place;
2. provide baseline evidence at the appropriate scale to inform a range of decisions;

⁸ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, London: Routledge.

3. present a holistic approach to the whole geographic area, rather than focusing on special or protected sites or features;
4. form an agreed spatial framework of landscape character areas, or types, to which different policy options / applications and decisions can be applied;
5. integrate socio-cultural and natural considerations (for example landscape and ecosystem services) and provide an understanding of how a place is experienced, perceived and valued by people; and
6. identify the key characteristics that together create sense of place and the unique character of an area.

Some examples of where a Landscape Character Assessment can be used to inform decision making are listed below:

LOCAL AUTHORITY PLANS AND STRATEGIES

Local Plans – Place-Making etc.

Sustainable Community Strategies

Local Economic Assessments and Economic Strategies

Renewable Energy Strategies

Minerals and Waste Strategies

Recreation and Tourism Strategies

Green Infrastructure Strategies

Waterways Strategies

Housing Strategies

Development Briefs, including design briefs

Plans / Strategies to Conserve Coastal Character (at the interface between land and sea)

LAND USE PLANNING / LAND MANAGEMENT

Marine Spatial Plans (Seascape Character Assessment will be especially important here)

Protected Area Management Plans (National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts)

Identification of special/designated area boundaries

Coastal and Estuary Management Plans

Biodiversity management, restoration and enhancement plans

Studies to inform an understanding of setting e.g. of nationally designated landscapes

Coastal Access route planning

OTHER PLANS AND PROCESSES

Scoping and screening opinions and pre-application discussions

Siting and design of new development (the developer, or his agent, may use Landscape Character Assessment to inform scheme design)

Environmental Impact Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Sustainability Appraisal

Landscape Impact and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

Sensitivity and Capacity Studies

Cumulative Impact Assessment

Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plans

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation responses

Coastal Defence and Management Plans

Shoreline Management Plans

European Landscape Convention Action Plans

1.4 Five Key Principles for Landscape Assessment

The following 5 Principles should be adhered to whatever the scope and methodology adapted in a Landscape Character Assessment:

1. Landscape is everywhere and all landscape and seascape has character;
2. Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale;
3. The process of Landscape Character Assessment should involve an understanding of how the landscape is perceived and experienced by people;
4. A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications;
5. A Landscape Character Assessment can provide an integrating spatial framework – a multitude of variables come together to give us our distinctive landscapes.

PRINCIPLE 1. LANDSCAPE IS EVERYWHERE AND ALL LANDSCAPE & SEASCAPE HAS CHARACTER.

The term landscape applies equally to natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. The European Landscape Convention⁹ applies to “land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes.” Approaches to Landscape Character Assessment and Seascape Character Assessment suggest a seamless approach to the character assessment of land and sea. Both follow a common approach, but each is tailored to the particular environment being assessed.

All landscapes have character. Landscape Character Assessment identifies and describes character. It is not concerned with what landscape makes one landscape better or worse than another.

PRINCIPLE 2. LANDSCAPE OCCURS AT ALL SCALES AND THE PROCESS OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT CAN BE UNDERTAKEN AT ANY SCALE.

The scales at which Landscape Character Assessments are carried out varies from the national to the local / site level. The three key levels at which such assessments are carried out are:

1. National and regional scale¹⁰, typically at 1:250,000 identifying broad patterns in the variation of landscape character – assessments at this scale often provide the context for more detailed assessments;
2. Local authority scale, applied at the county, unitary authority or district level, at 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 identifying landscape types and / areas – landscape character traverses administrative boundaries so care needs to be taken to ensure assessments on either side of administrative boundaries match up; and
3. Local scale or site level, at 1:10,000 or larger scales.

Assessments can also be carried out at any level in between, or below, these 3 key levels.

PRINCIPLE 3. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT SHOULD INVOLVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE LANDSCAPE IS PERCEIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE.

Peoples' social, economic and environmental needs are in part addressed by their relationship with the landscape around them, that contributes to their quality of life. People's perceptions, and experiences, of landscapes vary. In addition to responding to the visual qualities of landscapes, people also perceive landscapes through the senses of hearing, smell, touch and taste. Memory and association are also important. Awareness of the representation of landscapes in art, music and literature will also be of relevance. Values people place on their landscapes will vary for different reasons and they may reflect the services, or benefits, contributed by the landscape and / or its component parts.

PRINCIPLE 4. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROVIDES AN EVIDENCE BASE TO INFORM A RANGE OF DECISIONS AND APPLICATIONS.

⁹ Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence October 2000.

¹⁰ Refer, for example, to Natural England's work on National Character Areas for more information.

The end product of the Landscape Character Assessment process will be an assessment consisting of a classification and map of landscape character areas and / or types, with associated descriptions of their character, and identification of key characteristics. This evidence backed assessment can constitute an evidence base that can inform, and contribute to, decision making. For example, Landscape Character Assessments can inform: sensitivity and capacity studies and decisions concerning landscape and land use planning (forestry strategies, renewable energy etc.); Strategic Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes; landscape impact and visual impact assessment within or without an Environmental Impact Assessment; mitigation strategies.

PRINCIPLE 5. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT CAN PROVIDE AN INTEGRATING FRAMEWORK.

The Landscape Character Assessment process involves an understanding, of how a wide range of variables – both natural and socio-cultural (Fig. 1. What is Landscape?) – together contribute to place and sense of place. Because of the make-up of our Landscapes it is clear that they provide multifunctional benefits and services. An understanding of landscape can provide the context, or integrating spatial framework, for decision making regarding the environment. Place based decision making is important. Historic Landscape Character Assessments¹¹ can inform Landscape Character Assessments and contribute valuable information on the historic environment, but the former can also sit alongside a Landscape Character Assessment. Similarly, whilst information on biodiversity can inform a Landscape Character Assessment the assessment will not normally provide detailed data regarding biodiversity – this will be found elsewhere. All this information can refer to / relate to the same geographic area, or landscape.

From Fig. 1. What is Landscape?, it can be seen that ecosystem services¹² (supporting, provisioning, regulatory, and cultural) in part explain why our landscapes vary in character from place to place. The services perform a range of functions, for example woodlands and forests can have a hydrological function, soils facilitate plant growth, trees can provide shelter and influence micro-climates, plants in tandem with landform/topography, and sometimes water, can contribute to sense of place and give us the landscapes we all know and love. Landscape Character Assessment can help us to understand ecosystem goods and services and vice versa.

1.5 Carrying out a New Landscape Character Assessment

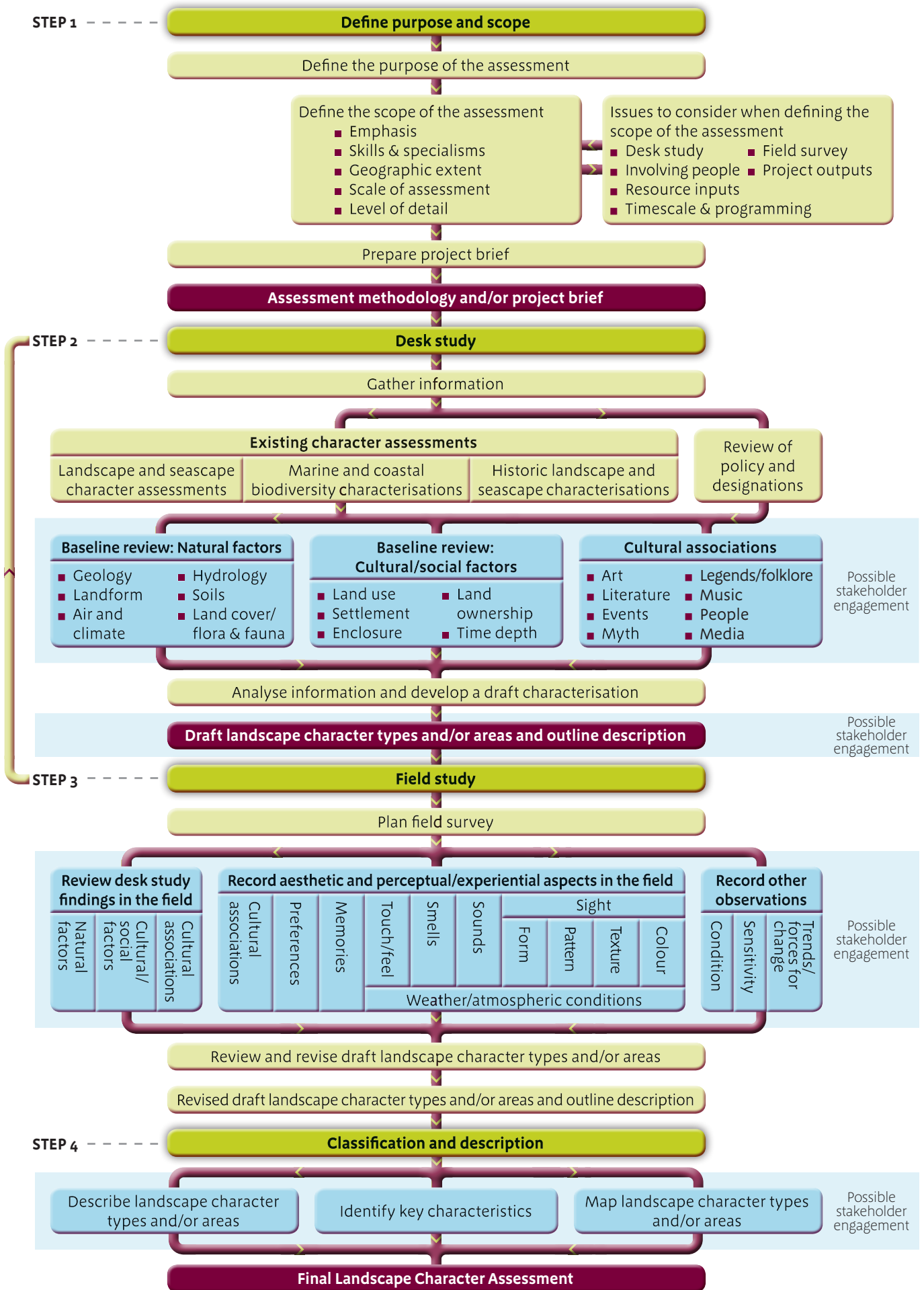
The process of carrying out a Landscape Character Assessment, outlined below (more detail is provided in Part 2), is the same as that set down in *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002)¹³. There are 4 main iterative steps in this process, Fig. 2. shows the process of Landscape Character Assessment and illustrates these steps. Fig. 3 Landscape Character Assessment and making judgements indicates the necessary separation between completion of the assessment proper and the use of the assessment to inform judgements and decisions.

¹¹ Refer to work by English Heritage, for example, on Historic Landscape Character Assessment.

¹² Refer to work on ecosystem goods and services, for example, by Defra, Natural England and others.

¹³ The Countryside Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002), *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland* (CAX 84), the Countryside Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage, April 2002.

Figure 2: Landscape Character Assessment - the process



Step 1 – Define the Purpose and Scope of the Assessment.

The purpose of the assessment must be understood and clearly defined. This will influence the scope of the assessment including the scale at which it will be carried out, levels of detail, resources required (including skill sets), stakeholder engagement etc. Both will inform the brief for the project.

Records are generally required as one of the outputs of an assessment and may be requested, and challenged, at a future date in relation to decisions that will have been informed by the assessment. Good record keeping throughout will therefore be essential. Information will need to be correctly recorded, and easily accessed by the client. The Field Survey records, for example, can provide an important resource to allow future updating of an assessment.

Step 2 – Desk Study.

This will involve collection and review of relevant background documents and spatial data. The analysis of data, and other forms of information, will allow the identification of draft areas of common character, the mapping of draft landscape character areas / types, and the preparation of associated draft descriptions. The desk study should not be too deterministic by acknowledging that there may well be aspects of landscape character that are not obvious from mapped or written texts (including GIS), and that these might only be identified through field survey or stakeholder engagement.

Step 3 – Field Survey.

A standardised Field Survey Sheet – specially prepared for the particular project – will be invaluable. Information will be collected in the field, in a rigorous and methodical way, to test and refine and add to (as appropriate) the outputs of the Desk Study - the draft areas of common character, the maps of draft landscape character areas / types, and the associated draft descriptions. Field work is essential to capture aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities of landscapes. Sometimes field survey might identify issues that need to be clarified by further desk study, and this then may require more than one field survey stage to draft the character types and / areas.

Step 4 – Classification and Description

The outputs of the characterisation process are further refined and finalised by classifying, mapping and describing landscape character areas and / or types. The character descriptions are informed by the desk study and field work which will, of course, include stakeholder engagement.

1.6 Reviewing and Updating an Existing Landscape Character Assessment

When considering carrying out a Landscape Character Assessment it will be appropriate to check whether, or not, any Landscape Character Assessments already exist for the area. A decision on whether or not an existing Landscape Character Assessment can be used for a particular task will be informed by considering:

1. Date carried out and methodology used;
2. Date and provenance of data;
3. The original purpose of the existing LCA;

4. Scale of the assessment and its appropriateness for the proposed use;
5. Whether, or not, and if so to what extent were stakeholders engaged in the assessment process;
6. Age of the assessment and amount of landscape change since its compilation;
7. The extent of cross-boundary join up at the edges of the study area;
8. Whether the original field survey work is available and can be updated;
9. Location – for example, if a coastal location is to be the focus of the assessment then it may be appropriate to also consider Seascape Character and Seascape Character Assessment which may not have been considered earlier;
10. Will particular aspects of landscape character require more scrutiny, or emphasis?

A review, or update, of an existing county or district Landscape Character Assessment, to ensure that it can continue to provide a robust baseline to inform future decisions concerning the planning, management and protection of our landscapes, may be informed by the 10. considerations outlined above.

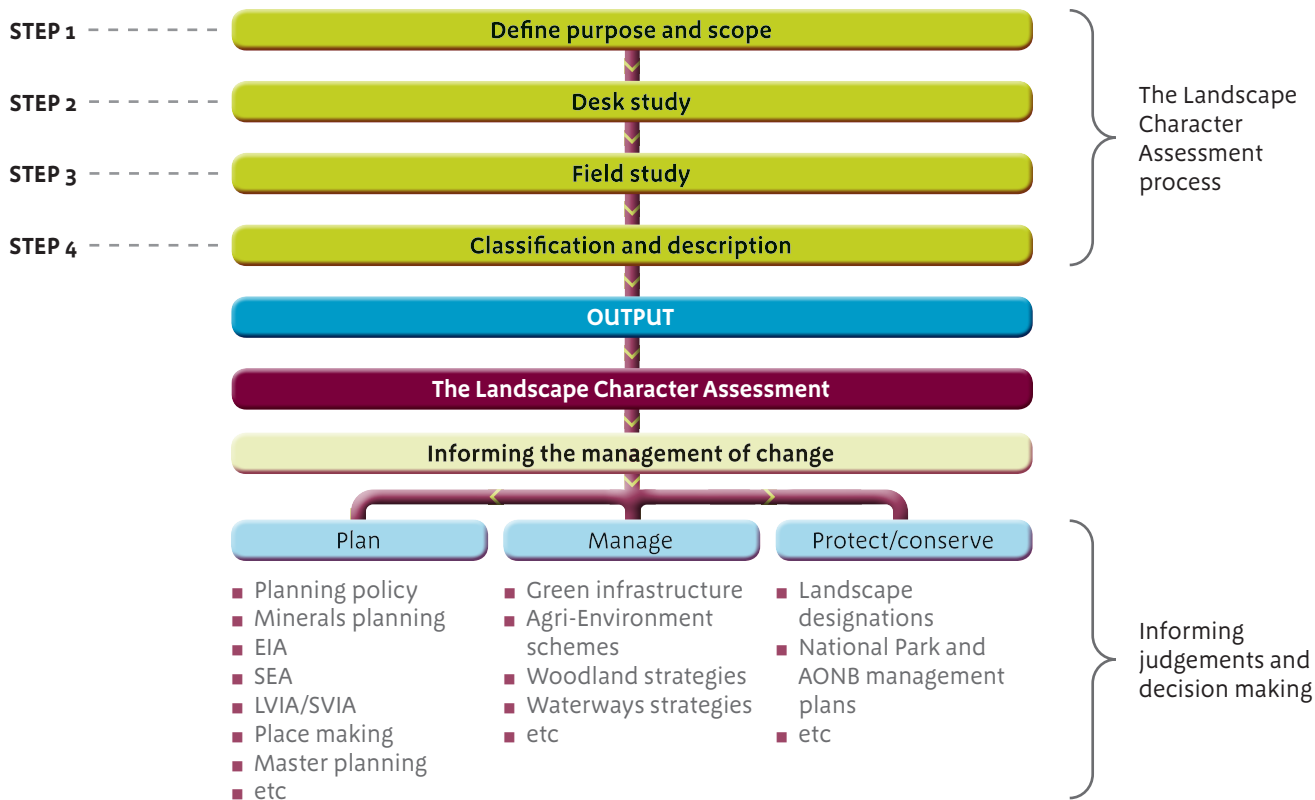
Not least if a Landscape Character Assessment pre-dates Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002), and / or it does not pay regard to significant stakeholder engagement then it might be necessary to carry out a new Landscape Character Assessment.

A Landscape Character Assessment will represent a snapshot in time and, depending upon drivers for change and rates of change, landscape character areas / types will need to be reviewed and updated as time progresses. Usefully, Landscape Character assessments can be used to monitor change.

1.7 Outputs of a Landscape Character Assessment and Informing Judgements – the application of Landscape Character Assessment

A Landscape Character Assessment concludes after characterisation of the landscape – the map(s) and accompanying descriptions of the character types and / or areas are the final product. This can then exist as a neutral baseline of the current character of the landscape. All Landscape Character Assessments should state their purpose and make a clear distinction between the outputs of the characterisation process, and any additional work (for example a sensitivity or capacity study, a landscape impact and visual impact assessment, or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan) and related follow-on decisions/recommendations associated with making judgements to inform specific actions. The latter exercise is separate from the former – refer to Fig. 3. Outputs from each might be dealt with in separate documents or combined in a single document.

Figure 3: Landscape Character Assessment and making judgements



PART TWO THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS – the detail

The four steps to the Landscape Character Assessment process – refer to Fig. 2.

2.1 STEP 1 - Define Purpose and Scope and preparation of the Brief

1. INTRODUCTION -

The purpose and scope of the Landscape Character Assessment will influence important decisions about:

1. The scale at which the study will be carried out and the level of detail entered into;
2. The extent to which the assessment will integrate other subject areas (e.g., Historic Landscape Characterisation¹⁴, Ecosystem Services¹⁵);
3. Whether it is appropriate to use, or adapt, existing Landscape Character Assessments;
4. How stakeholders will be involved;
5. The nature of outputs;
6. Who will carry out the Assessment (e.g. local community, local authority, consultants etc.), resources required and timescales;
7. The project plan and Brief.

2. DEFINING PURPOSE

The Purpose of the LCA will be informed by -

1. Anticipated end uses – i.e. need
2. How the results / outcomes will be used and by whom – i.e. the users
3. How the work will be accessed (e.g. hard copy, website)

3. THE SCOPE of the LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT will be shaped by –

EMPHASIS

Most assessments consider a broad range of characteristics in defining and mapping patterns of Landscape Character. Desired project outputs, and resources available (finance and skills etc.) will determine the emphasis of the study. Some end uses of a Landscape Character Assessment may require attention to be focused on particular aspects of a landscape – drawing upon and adding to information provided in existing assessments where appropriate. For example:

¹⁴ Refer to English Heritage, for example, for information on Historic Landscape Characterisation.

¹⁵ Refer to work by Defra, Natural England and others.

- Where an Assessment is being used to inform selection of sites for new housing development particular attention may be focused on vernacular settlement patterns, buildings, and materials;
- If an Assessment is to help to develop a renewable energy strategy more emphasis may be placed on ascertaining those characteristics and qualities of the landscape which may make a landscape more, or less, able to accommodate the development being considered.

SKILLS & SPECIALISMS REQUIRED

A core team consisting of a Landscape Architect, a landscape planner, and perhaps an ecologist and an archaeologist / landscape historian – depending upon the area and focus of the study - should be responsible for the main body of the work, but there may be additional inputs from other specialists as necessary. For example it can be useful for a GIS expert to be involved in some way, to inform data collection and project outputs. The core team should be responsible, for much of the desk and field study and an overview of the process and outputs. Depending upon its scale and its focus, the preparation of a Landscape Character Assessment may require information to be provided from a range of specialist areas which may include ecology, geomorphology, geology and soils, agriculture and forestry, land management, archaeology, historic landscapes, cultural heritage, urban design and planning.

Local community groups wanting to undertake a Local Landscape Character Assessment¹⁶ might find expertise locally.

GEOGRAPHIC EXTENT of the LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

The extent of the study area will need to be identified. A local authority will often wish to ensure a Landscape Character Assessment extends to the limits of its administrative area, however, because landscapes rarely respect administrative boundaries, some liaison will be needed with neighbouring authorities. Consideration of neighbouring assessments will be necessary. Ideally adjacent Landscape Character Assessments should knit together seamlessly. Not least visual relationships, and vistas, between landscapes on either side of administrative boundaries will need to be assessed. Sometimes where authorities are considering undertaking Landscape Character Assessments to inform local plan policies a joint approach might be beneficial?

Some Landscape Character Assessments might need to focus on a particular geographic area because their purpose is quite specific. For example, a character assessment might be used to inform renewable energy development, aggregate extraction, agri-environment projects, housing site allocation and design, protected area management plans etc. However, care should always be taken to ensure the study area includes neighbouring areas that might derive, and enjoy, benefits from adjacent landscapes in terms of visual qualities and landscape character. Sometimes a study area might be defined by a preliminary study to identify the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZVT).

In coastal locations there might be a need to consider characterising the marine environment too. Seascape Character Assessment is a process based on the well accepted process of Landscape Character Assessment¹⁷. The character assessment process provides a seamless approach to

¹⁶ Hampshire County Council has produced useful guidance, for local communities, on preparing Local Landscape Character Assessments.

¹⁷ Refer to Natural England (2012), An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment, Natural England Commissioned Report NECR 105 October 2012.

characterisation from land to sea. As a rough guide a Landscape Character Assessment might be expected to extend up to high water mark, and a Seascape Character Assessment might be used beyond the low water mark. Dependent upon the purpose and scope of the assessment a project in the intertidal zone might utilize either approach.

SCALE

A Landscape Character Assessment can be carried out at any scale from the national level down to the site level. In very general terms a national / regional assessment may be carried out at 1:250,000 scale, a county assessment at approximately 1:50,000 scale, and a district assessment at approximately 1:20,000 – 1:10,000 scale. A site level / project based assessment might be carried out at around 1:2,500 scale. The scale at which the assessment is carried out will be determined by its intended uses. Sometimes a more strategic national / regional Landscape Character Assessment might provide the context for a more detailed Landscape Character Assessment. For example, in England, National Character Areas¹⁸ might give strategic context to highways planning and design that will, in turn, require more detailed Landscape Character Assessment(s) at the route / site level.

The scale of the Landscape Character Assessment will influence the need for, and choice of, appropriate datasets and GIS layers.

LEVEL OF DETAIL

The purpose of the study will influence the level of detail that it will be necessary to provide for the end user(s). For example:

- Generic strategies or guidelines may only require a general description of character given by **landscape character types** (refer to Annex 1 Glossary of Terms), e.g. land management strategies or agri-environment funding;
- Predominantly subject based studies might require more detailed information from **landscape character areas**, e.g. renewable energy sensitivity studies - where strategy might be informed by landscape character and detailed visual considerations - and Village Design Statements, Townscape / Urban Character Assessments, and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- If an assessment is to be used as a baseline for monitoring change, or is to be part of a detailed assessment of development options - where the extent, nature and distribution of individual elements are important - a detailed Landscape Character Assessment may be appropriate.
- The production of design briefs may also require greater levels of detail and emphasis.

4. ADDITIONAL MATTERS to CONSIDER when SCOPING the APPROACH to LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

THE DESK STUDY

¹⁸ Refer to Natural England for information on the 159 National Character Areas in England, and the Marine Management Organisation has started to identify Seascape Character Areas around the English coast.

This provides the foundations for the assessment and the Landscape Character Assessment's purpose, geographic scope, scale, and level of detail, together with any necessary emphasis on particular aspects of the landscape, need to be understood. This will ensure that the Desk Study Stage is tailored to satisfy the desired outcomes of the assessment and enable the correct information to be assembled for analysis - thus avoiding the risk of information overload, or work that is either too detailed or too broad.

THE FIELD SURVEY

This is a key, and essential, part of the Landscape Character Assessment process. It can be resource intensive, but provides a unique opportunity to record and analyse the landscape out on site. The Field Survey needs to be carefully designed to meet the objectives of the project, and key matters to consider will include:

- The scale at which the work is carried out – local assessments (depending upon their purpose and geographical extent) may need more detailed survey work than strategic studies;
- The emphasis of the assessment - this might require the Field Survey to describe and analyse some aspects of the landscape in greater detail than others – for example if the assessment is to be used to inform a capacity study concerning forestry, or if it is to inform a housing, renewable energy, or Green Infrastructure strategy;
- The required outputs from the assessment – as well as written descriptions and maps, and copies of all Field Survey Sheets, these may include annotated sketches, and photographs.

The purpose and scope of the assessment will inform the planning of the field survey work, for example:

- Should the tailored Field Survey Form focus attention on some aspects of the landscape in greater detail – for example if the subject includes a hard rock quarry, should particular attention be paid to the quarry faces?
- Should field survey records be collated and included within the project outputs;
- Will specialist landscape skills or knowledge be needed for the field survey work – for example should there be a Gaelic, or Welsh speaker in the Team?
- The need to prepare an outline survey route, with potential survey points, and any requirements for access on foot, cycle, by boat, or onto private land, and any implications for time inputs.

For community led assessments, careful planning of the field survey and the production of standard Field Survey Sheets, should help to ensure participants follow a consistent approach.

INVOLVING PEOPLE

It is important to involve local communities in the planning, design and management of our environment. Stakeholder involvement in Landscape Character Assessment will add value to the assessment and increase the weight given to decisions based on it (e.g. policies and guidance). When considering involvement of people in the assessment process it is important to identify:

- The range of stakeholders to be involved – communities of interest and communities of place;
- The stage(s) of work they will contribute to;
- How they will be involved – true stakeholder engagement involves participation, not just consultation.

RESOURCE INPUTS

Whatever the scale, or complexity, of the assessment it is necessary to ascertain the skills and people required to complete the project. Depending upon the nature of the project there will need to be stakeholder engagement and appropriate resources will need to be allocated to ensure this is carried out properly. If the work is to be carried out in-house or by a consultant these matters, along with timescales, will influence the cost of the work. A parish or community led assessment can provide a very valuable input to decision making at very little cost.

Data and information sourcing will require consideration early on in the project. If the evidence base and outputs are to be shared, for example via the internet, then data will need to be obtained on the understanding that it is shareable with relevant organisations and the public. Failure to pay regard to licences etc. could cause problems in using the assessment and its valuable baseline information.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

The outputs from the Landscape Character Assessment will be shaped by its purpose, how it will be accessed, and its use(s) –

- Technical requirements need to be understood – e.g. ensuring and specifying outputs are compatible with the client's / end user's GIS and IT system;
- A non-technical summary may be useful;
- Will paper copies of the work be required along with electronic documents and/or interactive web based documents?

TIMESCALE and PROGRAMMING

These will be influenced by –

- The size of the project – geographic area and detail required;
- Availability of existing Landscape Character Assessments and whether they can be utilized – are they fit for purpose;
- Availability of data and other information (literature and art etc.) to inform the desk study;
- Time of year, daylight, weather, seasonal variation regarding appearance of the landscape, sea state (if a Seascape Character Assessment is being carried out) and any implications for the field survey and design of Field Survey Sheet;
- Liaison with an Advisory Group / Steering Group;
- Anticipated stakeholder engagement;

- Requirements for formal consultation at various stages of the project (if applicable);
- The relationship of the study with other work that may inform / be informed by the assessment.

All the above will inform the preparation of the Brief.

5. PREPARATION of the BRIEF

Regardless of the scale of assessment, and whether or not the Landscape Character Assessment is to be carried out by a local community group, by an in-house team - within a local authority for example - or by consultants it is necessary to produce a Brief for the production of the Assessment. this should be influenced by:

1. The purpose, scope, and scale of the assessment;
2. Resources available – in terms of personnel and finance available – e.g. the resources and time allowed for Field Survey should be realistic;
3. Time scales e.g. when does the Assessment need to be completed by;
4. A preliminary site visit.

Content of the Brief should include reference to:

1. Purpose(s) of the Assessment and associated aims and objectives;
2. The limits / extent of the geographic area to be looked at – the study area;
3. Scope of the Assessment;
4. Scale of the Assessment and levels of detail expected;
5. Time scale of the study;
6. The methodology to be followed i.e. the Approach to Landscape Character Assessment and / or the Approach to Seascape Character Assessment;
7. Will the focus of the study be Landscape Character Areas and / or Landscape Character Types (this will be determined by the purpose of the study and possibly by resources available e.g. budget);
8. The need to ensure join up with adjacent Landscape Character Assessments (of the same scale) and – if possible – the need to relate to other Landscape Character Assessments vertically i.e. at a larger or smaller scale (e.g. National Character Assessments);
9. Necessary and expected Stakeholder engagement to be carried out (e.g. how and when) – communities of place and communities of interest, with acknowledgement of who will lead this (e.g. client or contractor);

10. Background documents / other forms of information that may inform the assessment (e.g. earlier Landscape Character Assessments, Historic Landscape Character Assessments, key literary publications and works of art, specific GIS data sets) in addition to others that will be found during the Assessment process;
11. A requirement to illustrate the assessment with good quality photographs and other illustrations, including sketches;
12. Will the client's GIS Team (if applicable) work with the appointed consultant, and help to provide information;
13. Information concerning data sourcing, supply, ownership, quality assurance etc.
14. The need to design appropriate field survey sheets, and keep all completed field survey records (e.g. field survey sheets and annotated sketches) and any other information produced during the study and deliver to the client – including all GIS files etc. – the Landscape Character Assessment process must be auditable and transparent;
15. The need to ensure any computer programmes associated with the Landscape Character Assessment process are delivered to the client, to ensure the client can easily update the Assessment as necessary at a later date;
16. The nature of expected deliverables needs to be set down, for example: is the final Landscape Character Assessment to be placed on a website and is it to be interactive; will all the background data / information be made available to users of the website (assuming there are no problems with licences); will a summary document be required?
17. A general requirement that the document should be as concise as possible and in plain English. Concerning level of detail expected etc., how many pages of text should there be approx. re. each Landscape Character Area?
18. Copyright of the work should rest with the client.

It is always useful to look at Briefs previously prepared by others, e.g. perhaps by Local Authorities - some are available on various local authority websites (but note their purpose and scale etc.).

2.2 STEP 2 – Desk Study

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Desk Study stage:

1. based on the purpose, scope and scale of the assessment, information is gathered to provide the context and evidence base to inform the development of the Landscape Character Assessment;
2. stakeholders, including local people, should be engaged in the project to inform the evidence gathering and to obtain buy-in;
3. evidence is collated, analysed and presented on all of the variables that together combine to create landscape character – natural and socio-cultural influences are identified along with how these interact and are understood;

4. draft areas of common character, with associated boundaries, are defined – ready to be assessed and modified / confirmed in the field;
5. the information gathering process may involve the use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) for the collation, management, analysis and presentation of layers of digital data;
6. smaller or local assessments, or those undertaken by a local community, may collect and handle data and other information manually;
7. it important that books and other reference materials, such as aerial photographs for example, are accessed along with data sources – they should not be excluded from the Desk Study
8. descriptions, or representations, of the landscape in art, literature, music and the media should be researched and reviewed – all can inform an understanding of place and sense of place.

Appropriate time should be allocated to the Desk Study before commencement of detailed field work. The Desk Study and the Field Study will be iterative. The former will focus and inform the Field Study, and the Field Study will highlight questions that need to be answered by further Desk study.

2. INFORMATION GATHERING

Information to be looked at will be determined by the scope, purpose and location of the Landscape Character Assessment -

- Before work commences compile a checklist of information required¹⁹, along with information sources – this can form an appendix to the study and will be useful when the study is updated in the future;
- Assessments for a development site, or a parish or village, will require more detailed information than a county assessment;
- The complexity of a landscape will dictate the level of detail required – a townscape / urban assessment will require information at the street / building level;
- At the coast a Landscape Character Assessment and Seascape Character Assessment may be needed so information concerning the terrestrial and marine environments will be required;
- Be aware that some data may only be available at one scale and therefore this needs to be used at the scale at which it was created;
- Assessments on the border with Wales will need to utilize LANDMAP (a GIS-based landscape information resource), the formally adopted approach for landscape assessments in Wales – refer to Annex 2. LANDMAP can provide information for the Desk Study stage of the sequential process of Landscape Character Assessment.

¹⁹ Generally, information should be available from the relevant country agencies.

1. Existing Character Assessments

Identify where the proposed study fits within the vertical hierarchy of existing assessments of greater, or lesser detail, and horizontally with adjacent assessments.

Examples include the English National Character Areas, the Regional Landscape Character Areas in Wales, county level Landscape Character Assessments - including the suite of Scottish Landscape Character Assessments - district level assessments, and local landscape character assessments. Also, where available, Landscape Character Assessments undertaken for specific reasons such as those carried out for a National Park, or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a water course or an area of forest should be utilised. Some assessments will be carried out for administrative areas, others will not, but the process of Landscape Character Assessment should help to ensure consistency of description etc. across boundaries.

Seascape Character Assessments are increasingly available for some areas, at the national / regional scale²⁰, and the county level²¹, and for other areas e.g. the Dover Straits²².

Landscape Character Assessments can also be informed by Historic Landscape Character Assessments and Historic Seascape Character Assessments²³.

2. Policy Background

Policies, other statements, and evidence, in public documents such as statutory development plans, strategies and associated documents may be informative. They may indicate the dynamic nature of the landscape and forces for change. (Landscape Character Assessment can, in turn, help to inform the revision of these documents by contributing to decisions regarding the nature and direction of change etc.).

3. Designations

Designations include those relating to landscape, historic environment, marine environment, biodiversity and geodiversity. A review of designations, within and adjacent to the area of study, will be needed. It will be important to ascertain reasons for the designation and any special qualities (for example concerning an AONB). Relevant information will be available in citations, management plans, and designation histories.

For local assessments information may be required on Listed Buildings, and Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and on SSSIs and notable species etc.

²⁰ For England refer to the Marine Management Organisation.

²¹ Refer to Dorset County Council, and Hampshire County Council for example.

²² Refer to Kent County Council.

²³ For England refer to English Heritage for information concerning Historic Landscape and Historic Seascape Character Assessments.

4. Collating Baseline Information on Natural and Socio-Cultural Considerations, and Cultural Associations

Natural and Socio-Cultural considerations, and Cultural associations likely to be looked at as part of the Desk Study, are listed in Table 1. The headings are informed by Fig. 1. What is Landscape? – and they are related to the information and data sources noted in the rest of this section. Much information will be available on-line from central and local government bodies, Ordnance Survey and research organisations. However it is important that non-electronic information is sourced too.

3. ANALYSING INFORMATION

The Desk Study can produce many layers of information, and raw data, which will need interpretation to inform understanding about what defines landscape character. It will be useful to:

- Concentrate on the elements, features and other factors that inform, or create, character rather than describing data for its own sake – e.g. interpretation of contour information can produce landform units such as valleys, plateaus, scarp slopes, and rolling hills which can all start to explain the character of the landscape;
- Amalgamate detailed geological information to derive manageable units of geological features or rock types which clearly influence character;
- Utilise Historic Landscape Characterisation / Landuse Assessment (HLC / HLA) to help to determine key field patterns, and associated dates, which will inform the draft characterisation, more detailed information in the HLC / HLA will also inform the description stage of the assessment process
- Consider analysis / interpretation of the landscape in art, literature and music to understand landscape context and sense of place, and thus inform the draft characterisation.

NATURAL FACTORS

Geological information can be obtained from:

- British Geological Survey (BGS) – drift deposits and solid geology

National level information @ 1:625,000 scale is suitable for work at national scale

Intermediate work should use the 1:50,000 scale information and accompanying reports in the British Regional Geology Series.

More detailed assessments may use information available for most of the country at 1:10,000 scale.

Most data is available digitally, this can inform a simplified map overlay of geology to show how different geological formations will have influenced the landscape, to aid understanding of: processes that have influenced topography, and: the solid rock and drift deposits which influence land form, soils, vegetation, drainage, building materials etc.

Table 1: Factors likely to be considered at the Desk Study stage

Landscape	Desk study
Natural factors	
Geology	Geology (solid and drift)
Landform	Landform/topography
	Geomorphology
Hydrology	Rivers and drainage
	Water quality and water flows
Air and climate	Climate
	Microclimate
	Patterns of weather
Soils	Soils
	Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)
Land cover/flora and fauna	Habitats/biodiversity
	Land cover
	Vegetation cover
	Tree cover - forest/woodland etc
Cultural/Social factors	
Land use (and management)	Land cover
	Agricultural land use
Settlement	Settlement patterns
	Building types and styles
	Materials
Enclosure	Pattern and type of field enclosure (rural)
	Urban morphology
Land ownership	Land ownership and tenure
Time depth	Archaeology and the historic dimension
Cultural associations	
Art, literature, descriptive writings, music, myth/legend/folklore, people, events and associations	Obtained through desk review
Perceptual and aesthetic factors (largely ascertained via field study)	
Memories	Obtained via stakeholder engagement
Associations	
Perceptions	Some aesthetic factors might be identified as part of the desk study e.g. sense of wildness, remoteness and tranquility
Touch/feel	Identified largely via field survey
Smells/sounds	
Sight	

Landform and geomorphology –

These are important influences on landscape character. The key source of information is the Ordnance Survey (Panorama Data). This provides contour information and is at 1:50,000, scale or sometimes 1:25,000 scale. However there is a wide range of OS maps available. There are many ways of analysing landform. One way is to produce a map of contour intervals and set out thresholds, for example, showing all land over a certain height. This will show patterns of topographical variation in the area. Slope and aspect analysis can also add useful information. A digital terrain model can also be usefully produced. This analysis can also help to identify important geomorphological features. Digital data must be informed by an understanding of geological and geomorphological processes (for example British Geological Society reports). Books on local geography, geology and geomorphology may be informative too.

Hydrology –

Rivers and drainage systems shape the land and inform landscape character.

- For the extent of original river floodplains see areas of alluvium on British Geological Survey maps.
- Areas at risk of flooding under different scenarios can be seen on digitally available Environment Agency (England) Flood Maps.
- Information concerning watercourses can be obtained from Ordnance Survey (OS) maps. But for more detailed information concerning drainage basins, the definition of main rivers, hydrology, water quality, and pollution levels etc., advice should be sought from the Environment Agency.

Landform and drainage can be viewed together to reveal distinct topographical areas, such as rolling hills, plateaus, broad valleys, scarp slopes, which can be mapped as landform units. They are often closely related to underlying geology, and sometimes to glacial drift – e.g. drumlins. Such units can define the physical ‘skeleton’ of the landscape, while soils and vegetation provide the ‘flesh’ on the bones.

Soil Types –

Information can be obtained from:

- Soil Survey data – the information will need interpretation to derive the categories which are most important to influencing landscape character.
- LandIS – this is an internet-based soil map ‘Soilscapes’ developed by the Soil Survey and Land Research Centre (SSLRC) for England and Wales.
- Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) maps from Defra (England) – useful information at a coarse scale.

Land Cover / Flora and Fauna –

There is a variety of information sources – some are difficult to simplify to an appropriate level of detail – these include:

- Phase 1 Habitat Surveys - for example they are prepared by Natural England, Local Authorities and Wildlife Trusts. They are available at 1:10,000 scale and may require simplification for landscape characterisation at a larger scale. Wildlife Trusts might also be able to provide other ecological survey information.
- Land Cover Map 2010, produced by Defra and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, using data from the Countryside Survey 2007.
- Tree cover information can be obtained from a variety of sources. The Inventory of Woodlands and Trees (1995 - ongoing) can be obtained in digital form from the Forestry Commission. Maps at 1:25,000 scale show the extent and type of all woodlands over 2 Ha in England, for example – based on interpretation of OS data and aerial photographs and ground truthing within random sample squares. This data set is being updated and will be replaced by the National Forest Inventory. Ancient Woodland Inventories provide details of woodland origin (from Natural England, for example, and the Wildlife Trusts).

In addition OS maps, air photographs and satellite imagery provide basic information on land cover, including types, areas and distribution of woodland – allowing woodland cover categories to be mapped and interpreted. These might, for example, include categories such as ‘sparsely wooded’, ‘many small woods and copses’, or ‘heavily wooded’.

Air and Climate –

Information on air quality and climate may be obtained from local authorities, the Meteorological Office etc. Air, climate, weather and exposure may inform character, and in some specific areas micro-climates may be evident.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

People’s engagement with the natural environment, and the associated interrelationships over time – to satisfy the basic human needs for food, shelter and warmth - give us the landscapes we see today. Human activity influences our landscapes and their distinguishing characteristics most notably by: land use and land management; the nature of settlements and buildings; pattern and type of fields, and enclosure; land ownership and tenure.

Land Use and Land Management –

It is important to understand past land use, management, and associated settlement patterns, including the extent to which they have survived, and how different stages in history have contributed to the character of today’s landscapes and sense of place. To this end Historic Landscape Characterisation (and its marine counterpart Historic Seascape Characterisation) can inform Landscape Character Assessment by providing information on the historic dimension of the present day landscape or townscape within a given area. Concerning current land uses, mapped information can be obtained from a variety of sources including those listed under vegetation cover (above). Aerial photographs and satellite imagery provide contemporary information but are sometimes time-consuming and expensive to interpret. The level of detail provided by aerial photographs may be

useful for a community producing a Local Landscape Character Assessment. Remotely sensed information such as the Defra/CEH Land Cover Map 2010 gives a detailed digital picture and is sufficiently accurate for intermediate studies and local studies. Defra/WAG Agricultural Census data is valuable for indicating current land use patterns. Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) and Historic Land Use Assessment (HLA) both contain relevant information on land use.

Settlement Patterns –

In England settlement patterns need to be seen within the context of the national framework prepared by Roberts and Wrathmell in their Atlas of Rural Settlement²⁴. Locally, patterns can be mapped from OS maps.

Pattern and Type of Fields, and Enclosure –

Patterns of field enclosure can be interpreted from 1:25,000 OS maps and from aerial photographs. Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) and Historic Land Use Assessment (HLA) information will also provide information on patterns of enclosure. This information will need to be supplemented by field survey to provide relevant related information on the nature, structure, and condition of boundaries – walls, hedges, ditches.

Field systems and settlement patterns are often intimately linked and together contribute to distinctive local and regional patterns in the landscape. In areas where a smallholding economy existed, such as the North Pennines, or Cornwall, many small dwellings are linked with small field enclosures – indicating ancient origins. Conversely, fields arising from Parliamentary enclosures, often referred to as ‘planned landscapes’, are characterised by isolated farms with a geometric pattern of - often larger - fields and roads planned by surveyors. These linkages and patterns, sometimes superimposed on earlier field patterns, make important contributions to landscape (and often townscape) character.

Land Ownership and Tenure –

These can both contribute to landscape character, especially at the local scale. For example, large areas held and managed as one estate for several generations will often create a unified – sometimes designed - landscape with a distinct identity that differs from similar land held and managed by individuals as many smallholdings. An understanding of past and present patterns of ownership and tenure can help to explain contemporary landscape character. Information may be obtained from HM Land Registry.

Time Depth –

Analysis of contemporary OS maps may provide an understanding of current patterns of settlement and enclosure without the important ‘time- depth’ dimension of their origins, therefore, historic maps should also be reviewed and interpreted. Archaeological information and Historic Landscape Character Assessments available from English Heritage (for example) will provide information on time-depth.

²⁴ Roberts, B. K. and Wrathmell, S. (2000) An Atlas of Rural Settlement in England. English Heritage, London.

CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

These may include and relate to art, literature, events, myth, music, people, media, legends and folklore. Research to review wider cultural associations can be undertaken at this Desk Study stage. A review of any descriptive and travel writings may be useful too. Our understanding and experiences of landscape character can be informed by the landscape's associations with people or events, or how it has inspired or been represented in art, literature, or music for example. Associations made with a landscape can relate to an individual's own experiences, memories and history, whilst some cultural associations may operate at a community or national level. Sourcing and obtaining information related to cultural associations can be time consuming, so at the outset time allocations for this element of the Desk Study will need to be considered. Sources of local histories can be very useful, and early engagement of local individuals and groups can provide invaluable insight into the more personal, subjective associations that individuals and communities have with their landscapes.

4. INVOLVING PEOPLE in the Desk Study

Before any draft documents are issued, involvement of stakeholders in the Desk Study can help to widen ownership of the Landscape Character Assessment early on in the process, and provide publicity for the assessment and its future applications. People's links with, and perceptions of, place are very important. The preparation of a draft characterisation can involve people in the process of preparing or reviewing a Landscape Character Assessment. Sometimes a local community may be carrying out the Landscape Character Assessment. A draft classification map showing landscape character types and landscape character areas can be a useful prompt for people to engage in the Landscape Character Assessment process, and contribute information and their views.

- Large scale assessments such as national, regional, and county / unitary authority assessments – The convening of a Steering Group meeting of key people, with an interest in landscape and related matters, can be useful during this Desk Study stage. The Group can inform information gathering, and work on distinctiveness etc.
- Local scale assessments – These can involve local people and visitors who have an attachment to a particular place. A workshop can be set up to discuss their area in detail, for example to:
 - Identify boundaries
 - Suggest locally recognised names for character areas
 - Confirm characteristics and character
 - Provide key information on local experience, perceptions and associations.

This can be an important source of information, helping to make the Landscape Character Assessment more robust, and indicating where further desk study research might be required.

- There are resource implications for involving people at this stage. Sometimes it will not be practical or feasible to reach all groups who live, work, or have an attachment to a place. But it may be possible to involve representatives – local councillors and members of local interest groups (e.g. civic society, local history and wildlife groups). At the local scale, at the parish or settlement level, it is expected that the local community would be actively involved

in commissioning, contributing or undertaking the assessment (as in Hampshire where the County Council has produced guidance on Local Landscape Character Assessment).

- When involving people in Landscape Character Assessment consideration may be given to the use of the presentation and visualisation tools that a GIS may provide – maps, diagrams, 3D visualisations and interactive maps can allow people to visually engage with the process.

5. DEVELOPING A DRAFT CHARACTERISATION

1. Process

The layers of natural, socio-cultural, and perceptual information should be analysed and viewed together to identify common themes and patterns, and produce a mapped draft classification of landscape character areas and or types. Often it can be useful to identify and map the physical building blocks of the landscape first (i.e. geology, landform and physical features, rivers and drainage systems). This information can then be overlain by mapped patterns of land cover, land use, enclosure and settlement. Where an England – Wales cross border Landscape Character Assessment is being carried out this exercise can be partly informed by using the various aspects of LANDMAP.

GIS allows different sets of spatial data to be combined, manipulated and correlated to identify common patterns of elements, features and key characteristics²⁵ that inform landscape character. However, this practice can also be undertaken manually. The process needs to be transparent and auditable so that any subsequent decisions made on the classification of landscape character types and/or landscape character areas²⁶, and boundaries between them can be understood and justified. The level of classification achieved at this stage will depend on the brief, scale of the study, the nature of baseline information and the character (and complexity) of the landscape itself. Sometimes a pattern of draft landscape character types may be obvious and their subdivision into tentative character areas may be possible. At other times no distinctive patterns may be evident and the starting point for the field work will be a simple map of areas for survey where distinctive character may be anticipated.

2. Defining Draft Boundaries

Boundaries are needed around landscape character areas and types, however boundaries are rarely precise and generally represent zones of transition. The precision of the boundaries will vary with the scale and level of the assessment. Broader scale assessments tend to define wide and imprecise boundaries, e.g. assessments at the national / regional level @ 1:250,000 scale. Detailed, district and local assessments often link boundaries to specific features in the landscape, e.g. @ 1:25,000 or 1:10,000 scale, but even at this scale the boundary line may mark a zone of transition. Exceptions to this may occur in an urban area where building types may be a strong determinant of character.

- Mapped boundaries may suggest that there is a sharp change from one landscape to another, generally however, on site it can be seen that a boundary line represents a zone of transition from one landscape to another - character rarely changes abruptly. An exception

²⁵ Refer to Glossary of Terms, Annex 1.

²⁶ Landscape character types and landscape character areas are described more fully under Step 4.

may be, for example, where a scarp slope separates an upland plateau and an adjacent valley floodplain. Here it might be relatively easy to draw a boundary but a decision would need to be made about whether to include the scarp with the plateau above, with the valley floodplain below, or as a separate landscape character type in its own right.

- The determination of boundaries needs to be consistent. For example, when defining river valleys, a decision will be needed as to whether the river valley character type should encompass the whole valley including the valley side or just the valley floor (i.e. should the boundary be drawn at the top or the bottom of the valley slope). Similarly concerning upland areas, should upland areas just contain the upland summits, or the whole upland unit to the base of the slopes?
- When producing maps and reports it is important to add statements to record the reasoning behind the locations of boundary lines, and the limitations of the boundaries – this will be an important output of the assessment. Sometimes it might be possible to define character types / areas where edges overlap, or by drawing wider boundary zones on maps to indicate areas of transition. Whichever course of action is followed, it is important that any judgements in the future, based on the assessment, recognise the nature of such transitions – hence the need to record and keep the reasoning behind choices of boundary lines.
- As boundaries are further refined during the Field Study Stage, and informed by stakeholder engagement, the information concerning the drafting of boundaries recorded at the Desk Study stage can be added to and updated, and retained. Once the Landscape Character Assessment is published it may be necessary to refer to this information to justify boundaries to a wider audience (e.g. at public inquiry). The information will also be useful when the assessment is updated in the future.

3. Linking with the Field Study

The outputs of the Desk Study stage will be a draft classification map showing draft character areas and / or types (depending upon the brief) and written physical and socio-cultural information, including information on cultural associations. These will inform the Field Study, which will in turn inform the Classification and Description stage of the Landscape Character Assessment process.

2.3 STEP 3 – Field Study

1. INTRODUCTION

Field Study is an essential part of the Landscape Character Assessment process:

1. it presents the opportunity to observe and understand how all the factors identified as part of the Desk Study interact and are perceived and experienced, to give us landscapes of distinct character;
2. it enables the identification of other factors that are not evident from the Desk Study and the chance to record aesthetic and perceptual aspects;
3. the approach to the study will depend upon the purpose, scope, and desired outputs of the Landscape Character Assessment – it is essential that the survey is specifically designed to meet the objectives of the project;

4. although there is now a range of digital information available that might aid Field Survey (such as street level views etc.), its possible usage should not be regarded as a substitute for undertaking field work and being in, and experiencing, the landscape directly;
5. information is recorded out in the field but this will be further synthesised and analysed in the 'office' to develop draft descriptions and refine associated draft characterisation maps

2. PLANNING THE FIELD SURVEY

Careful planning is important to ensure efficient use of time and resources, and the following should be taken into account to tailor the survey to the purpose of the assessment.

1. Scale and level of detail required –

- Detailed assessments will require more detailed survey work than strategic level studies.
- The complexity of the landscape will affect the time needed to carry out the survey (e.g. in urban areas landscape / townscape character can change from street to street).

2. Skills of the field surveyors –

- Those considering specific aspects of the landscape often require specialist skills.
- Surveys are usually best carried out in pairs, but this is not always possible. Surveyors may need to work alone, but they must aim to work with their colleagues from the outset to calibrate their thinking and judgements in the field (Field Survey Sheets will be useful here) before undertaking the Field Survey independently. To maintain consistency work should be reviewed at regular intervals. Working in pairs can help with the practicalities of navigating and recording at the same time and encourages a consensus to be reached about reactions to the landscape.
- Often surveyors may be Landscape Architects / landscape specialists but the team may also usefully include an ecologist, archaeologist, landscape historian, architect, and a land manager for example. A multi-disciplinary team can bring many benefits, and sometimes a knowledge of languages such as Welsh and Gaelic may be useful to identify key cultural factors. There will be considerable advantages gained by involving people with local knowledge.
- If the assessment is being undertaken by a local community then they will be best placed to carry out the survey work.

3. Need to cover the ground efficiently –

Field Survey must cover the ground in sufficient detail to allow well informed decisions to be made about the identification of discrete landscape types and / areas, and to provide the information for meaningful descriptions of character and confirmation of definition of boundaries.

- The aim should be to move through the study area systematically, visiting all the draft landscape character types and / areas and recording information about them.

- Planning the survey will require decisions to be made on how the ground should be covered, by car, boat, cycle and / or by foot. Sufficient flexibility in the programme will be required to respond to opportunities arising.
- Formal field recording should be carried out at each identified survey point (up to 3 in each discrete area).
- The purpose of the assessment may demand the collection of information to inform specific future decisions, requiring Field Survey Sheets to be designed for this purpose and criteria on which to make judgements. Information, and judgements, may thus be needed on:
 - the condition of features / characteristics within the landscape;
 - evidence of change and causes of change;
 - sensitivity, for example in relation to new development or land use change.

4. Timing –

The physical appearance of landscapes changes with the seasons, this influences people's perceptions and experiences.

- If possible Field Survey should span more than one season and should not normally be undertaken in mid-winter, when days are short and light conditions are often unsuitable for survey work.
- There is an exception to the above, this is when surveys are being carried out to inform Landscape Impact Assessment and Visual impact Assessment (LVIA) when a worst case scenario (leaves off trees etc.) is usually required for assessing impacts.
- Some flexibility in the programme is needed to allow rescheduling of survey work in response to poor weather conditions.

5. Updating an existing Landscape Character Assessment -

- The availability of information from existing assessment(s) will be relevant and appropriate additional field survey will need to be identified – allowing effort to be focused..
- Field Survey requirements may also be shaped by the intended use of the revised assessment and the decisions it is intended to inform (e.g. a new emphasis on woodland expansion or settlement expansion).

3. RECORDING FIELD SURVEY INFORMATION

Information should be recorded on a Field Survey Sheet designed specifically for the purpose of the particular Landscape Character Assessment being carried out. The Form should reflect the purpose(s) of the assessment, the scale of the work and level of detail required, and use local terminology for features etc. The information should be stored to enable scrutiny at a later stage. The results of a Landscape Character Assessment often form part of an evidence base, for example for a development plan and its policies and allocations, or the baseline for a Landscape Impact and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of a proposed development. The information is therefore used in circumstances where the results are subject to public scrutiny and debate, such as at public inquiries or examinations in public. It must be robust to

stand up to scrutiny and the existence of comprehensive, accessible survey records plays an important part in this.

The purpose of a detailed field survey is to collect information systematically and consistently to:

- Describe character;
- Identify cultural, visual, aesthetic and perceptual qualities (that will not be evident from the Desk study alone);
- Assist decisions classification into character types and areas;
- Assist decisions about boundaries and where they lie;
- Update and expand the Desk Study information
- If required, contribute to the process of making judgements about the future of the landscape (e.g. concerning land management strategies, the location and extent of future development, or land restoration).

The information should be stored, to allow scrutiny at a later stage – the sheets will be a valuable part of any audit trail.

1. Designing a Field Survey / Record Sheet and related considerations –

Field Survey Sheets may be paper (easy to use in the field) or a mobile device such as a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) might be used. The latter can hold a digital version of the Field Survey Form, and record data electronically. Information then collected can be uploaded to a digital database linked to a Global Positioning System (GPS). Mobile devices can also give access to digital maps and underlying information in the field.

The Field Survey Sheet should include:

1. Information on location (grid reference), date, time and weather conditions and name of surveyor;
2. Viewpoint number and information concerning photographs taken at that point;
3. Information on geology, topography drainage etc.;
4. A checklist of landscape elements / features / characteristics with notes about their importance in the landscape e.g. buildings, historic / pre-historic features, farming practices, land cover, hydrology, communications etc.;
5. A checklist of aesthetic and perceptual factors and space for recording experiential qualities e.g. visual criteria such as pattern, scale, texture, colour, complexity, enclosure etc.;
6. A written description of the characteristics and key characteristics and landscape character observed at specific locations, or in particular areas;
7. Information on where, why and how boundaries between landscape character areas / types are being refined / defined in the field;

8. An annotated sketch, if useful / required
9. Depending on the purpose of the study, space for observations about the condition, sensitivity and management needs of the landscape – the criteria to inform making judgements on these matters will have been agreed in advance specifically for the purpose of the study.

Related considerations include written descriptions, checklists, annotated sketches, photographs and annotated maps -

Written descriptions: -

- should capture the overall impression of landscape character for each type or area;
- should incorporate information about the characteristics that make up the landscape - and the way that they interact together – and about the aesthetic and perceptual characteristics of the landscape;
- will provide the main source of information (along with information from the Desk Study) for the write up of the final descriptions of the landscape character areas / types.

Checklists: -

- can be developed from the Desk Study findings and provide rigour;
- can be used for landscape elements, features, key characteristics and aesthetic and perceptual factors etc.;
- can prompt questions regarding, for example, how conspicuous different elements are in the landscape.

Annotated Sketches:-

- provide an opportunity to record the visual dynamics of a place or view;
- are a useful component of field recording, they can illustrate how different elements of the landscape interact – e.g. woodlands marking breaks of slope or ditches paralleling hedgerows;
- are a form of visual analysis, selectively recording key elements and features that characterise the area showing how they visually relate to each other (conversely a photograph records everything);
- can be used to create composite ‘typical’ sketches or drawings to illustrate views, streetscapes and landscape character descriptions, for example, in final reports;
- and photographs have continuing relevance.

Photographs:-

- are essential to the Field Survey record;

- should be taken at each survey point, they should be numbered, and their location recorded and referenced on Field Survey Sheets and on maps of routes taken and points surveyed;
- can be catalogued and their locations recorded by using a GPS;
- and their locations can be viewed in GIS as a mapped layer, however a backup record of photographs and locations should be retained in hard copy;
- can inform the writing of the Character Area descriptions and will be included with the project outputs;
- should aim to record the variations in character, and not just the most scenic views, to create a record of typical aspects of landscape character in an area;
- can usefully show detail of particular elements e.g. stone walls, vernacular building styles, parkland trees, water features.

Annotated maps:–

- can supplement the Field Survey Record;
- are particularly useful for detailed surveys of small areas, such as a parish or an estate, where a record of specific elements (e.g. specimen trees) , key features such as boundaries (e.g. a ditch and bank, or stone or brick walls) and other characteristics may be required;
- can be used to inform larger scale surveys, at a district level for example, where more detailed or subtle variations in landscape character – not evident from the Desk Study – can be illustrated;
- can be marked up to show
 1. refinements in boundaries of draft landscape character types and areas and more detailed variations in landscape character that should be reflected in the assessment
 2. routes taken, the location of survey points, photograph locations and key viewpoints;
 3. prominent and notable elements and features
 4. any other information which is location specific, but also of relevance to the survey as a whole, such as condition of elements and features and any management needs.

2. Undertaking the Survey

- Follow a systematic approach to ensure the whole area is covered and that sufficient records are made at all survey points.

- Before undertaking the more detailed Field Survey, carry out a rapid orientation field survey to consider all landscape character types and areas (as drafted at the Desk Study Stage) and understand how they relate to each other.
- Consider at least 3 Field Survey points in each discrete area identified, depending on its size.
- Detailed recording at survey points is important in the early stages of the survey when those involved are feeling their way and becoming familiar with patterns in the landscape and visual assessment criteria generally.
- Sometimes, when surveyors are experienced, it might be possible to complete one formal Field Survey Sheet for each discrete character type and / or area, based on a summative view gained by travelling through each.
- Each survey point should be publically accessible and be firmly within the area in question.
- Do not only concentrate on character within the landscape character type or area, also consider its relationship to the surrounding landscapes – looking in and out. Part of the character of any landscape is its relationship with the landscapes / seascapes that surround it, e.g. cliffs and downland forming a backdrop to, and views over, a marine expanse, or a scarp slope providing the backdrop to, and views over, a lowland vale. Therefore consider intervisibility with other landscapes and the role of landscapes in providing a setting or context. This is particularly important when considering change or sensitivity, when a change within one landscape character area can often have a significant effect on an adjacent landscape and the associated visual resource and its qualities.
- High points, or panoramic viewpoints, often provide views over several different types of landscape and can be useful for orientation and provide an overview.

4. REVIEWING DESK STUDY FINDINGS IN THE FIELD

This important exercise provides the opportunity to:

- Observe how natural and cultural factors, described and mapped in the Desk Study stage, appear and are experienced on the ground;
- Observe how the various factors interact;
- Confirm the Desk Study findings (if appropriate);
- Highlight factors that are more or less important than initially identified and considered in the Desk Study – perhaps resulting in draft boundary adjustment and revised classification.
- Define and justify boundaries in the field by reviewing all draft boundaries identified as part of the Desk Study – always consider boundaries ‘on the ground’ and whether they create character units that make sense.

It will be helpful to take paper copies of maps and notes, prepared as part of the Desk study, out on site. Whilst out on site, notes should be taken to record where further Desk Study is required, to

answer questions arising from the Field Survey – the Field Study and Desk Study stages are iterative.

5. AESTHETIC & PERCEPTUAL / EXPERIENTIAL FACTORS

Desk based research cannot usually identify aesthetic, perceptual / experiential factors (Fig. 1), hence Field Survey is essential. These dimensions of landscape character are as important as the more tangible elements and characteristics that also inform landscape character. All need to be woven into factual, objective, written descriptions of landscape character.

1. Aesthetic Factors –

These factors can be recorded in a rigorous and systematic manner using professionally informed judgements. Factors that might be considered – along with their associated descriptions - would include scale, enclosure, diversity, texture, form, line, colour, balance, movement and pattern e.g. -

Scale – Intimate? Small? Large? Vast?

Enclosure – Tight? Enclosed? Open? Exposed?

Diversity – Uniform? Simple? Diverse? Complex?

Texture – Smooth? Textured? Rough? Very rough?

Form – Vertical? Sloping? Rolling? Horizontal?

Line – Straight? Angular? Curved? Sinuous?

Colour – Monochrome? Muted? Colourful? Garish?

Balance – Harmonious? Balanced? Discordant? Chaotic?

Movement – Dead? Still? Calm? Busy?

Pattern – Random? Organised? Regular? Formal?

This list is not exhaustive and surveyors might introduce other words to meet their needs. Perhaps to words may be used to reflect the local dialect too. Such information can be recorded via a checklist on a Field Survey Sheet, and by incorporating suitably descriptive text into written descriptions, and annotated sketches and photographs.

It will be especially important to identify factors such as scale, colour, texture, pattern, diversity etc. if the assessment is to be used to inform design decisions concerning, for example, the design and siting of new woodlands/forestry or built development. It is important to indicate how specific landscape elements and features contribute to these aesthetic characteristics. For example, “enclosure” may result from the presence of woodlands or from landform, or from particular buildings, whilst “unity” may arise from the consistent use of building materials in walls and vernacular architecture.

2. Perceptual / Experiential Factors

People’s responses to landscapes are subjective, they are personal and influenced by the experiences of the individual. Factors include wildness, security, light quality, beauty, and scenic attractiveness, and some can be perceived / experienced by senses other than sight, such as smell / scent, tranquillity, noise, and exposure to the elements (wind and rain for example). Field Survey is

important for recording such perceptual information and this should be incorporated into the Field Survey Sheets, using professionally informed judgements – acknowledging the extent of subjectivity that is involved. Associated checklists and written descriptions will be helpful when Step 4 of the characterisation process is carried out. Stakeholder involvement, however, can also provide valuable information to help to inform and understand perceptual factors regarding, for example, security, stimuli, tranquillity, movement, naturalness, and noise. Associated descriptions might be –

Security – Safe? Unsettling? Disturbing? Threatening?

Stimuli – Monotonous? Interesting? Challenging? Inspiring?

Tranquillity – Still? to Very busy?

Movement – Tranquil ? to Vibrant?

Naturalness – Natural? Tamed? Managed? Artificial?

Noise – Quiet? Distant? Intermittent? Loud?

6. INVOLVING PEOPLE in the Field Study

Considerations –

- For other than community-led Local Landscape Character Assessments etc., opportunities for wider stakeholder involvement in field survey may be limited - the area will need to be surveyed in a consistent and systematic way to inform descriptions and any subsequent decisions.
- Involvement of a wider audience in field survey can have significant resource implications.
- Opportunities for stakeholders can include:
 1. a jointly held field survey orientation day, which can be held jointly with the client group and field assessors, to involve travelling around the area and drawing upon local knowledge;
 2. a field survey training day - for areas where there is an active volunteer group - to recruit locally knowledgeable people to undertake surveys of specific areas;
 3. involvement of local people, such as amateur photographers to record key features and views.
- When a draft characterisation has been developed a timely stakeholder event should enable people to view maps and photographs of areas that they are familiar with, and facilitate recording of information on character, perceptions, and experiential matters as well as on local views and values. Consensus of opinion, obtained through stakeholder involvement, can highlight the importance of perceptions of landscapes, and contribute to the understanding of people's feelings about their local landscape – about their local places.
- Stakeholders will often have special knowledge about an area which may be influenced by particular associations that a landscape may have. Such information should be appropriately attributed in the assessment outputs, for example, for each landscape character area or type a section could be included in the written description to record the perceptions of local stakeholders (cross referenced to who was involved and how the information was obtained).

7. RECORDING OTHER OBSERVATIONS to INFORM LATER DECISIONS

Depending upon the purpose and scope of the assessment, the Field Survey can provide an opportunity to record information needed to inform future decisions, such as information about landscape condition, landscape sensitivity, and / or forces for change (i.e. trends). The quality / condition (refer to Glossary of Terms Annex 1) of the landscape character types and / or areas, and the condition of elements and features that contribute to character should be recorded. Elements and features that are sensitive, or vulnerable, to changes of whatever kind should also be noted. This exercise can identify elements and features that are in decline, or under threat, and add to commentaries aimed at identifying and describing the evolution of landscape character.

2.4 STEP 4 – Classification and Description of Landscape Character Types and Areas

1. INTRODUCTION

This fourth stage of the landscape character assessment process deals with the final classification and description of landscape character types and areas, and explains: the difference between landscape character types and landscape character areas, and their use; classification at different scales; involvement of people; boundary confirmation; naming landscape character types and areas; how to describe landscape character; mapping landscape character types and / or areas.

Landscape classification:

1. will be informed by work carried out at Steps 1, 2, and 3 and it divides landscapes into areas of distinct, recognisable, and consistent character, and groups areas of similar character together;
2. can be carried out at any scale, and can thus provide information on the extent and distribution of different landscape character types and areas from national to local scale;
3. provides the spatially referenced framework on which landscape character descriptions, and follow on judgements about future policy development, design strategies, or land management etc. may be based;
4. requires the identification of patterns in the landscape resulting from the interaction of natural and socio-cultural factors (refer to Step 2 and 3 for more information) to create landscape character;
5. can be partly based on the manual analysis of paper maps and overlays, or Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can be used to assemble and analyse the wide range of digital data available;
6. in addition to the above, should also draw on professional and stakeholder knowledge and judgements, and other non-digital sources of information such as literature, art, and field survey – professional judgement is key to establishing the importance of different influences on landscape character;
7. requires a consistent, rigorous, transparent and auditable approach that will be made available to the client and other users.

2. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES and AREAS

Important to the process of Landscape Character Assessment, and therefore to classifying and describing the landscape, is the distinction between **landscape character types** and **landscape character areas**. These terms need to be used correctly and the differentiation between types and areas, identified at different levels in the hierarchy from national to local, needs to be understood.

1. Landscape Character Types:

- are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character;
- are generic in nature – they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country and will share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historic land use and settlement pattern (this does not mean that every area within a particular type will be identical, but rather, that there is a common pattern which can be discerned in maps and in the fields survey records);
- may occur repeatedly in a study area, or occur in just one place;
- can be identified at each level in the hierarchy of assessment;
- can provide a good spatially referenced framework for analysing change (many influences and pressures affect areas with similar character in similar ways);
- when analysed, can provide a foundation upon which to develop planning and / or landscape management strategies.

2. Landscape Character Areas:

- are the unique individual geographical areas in which landscape types occur;
- share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type, but have their own particular identity;
- can often be more readily recognised and identified by non-specialists – sense of place is often important to local people and visitors for example;
- may often be more prevalent than landscape character types, because some types will occur in more than one area;
- can be identified at each level in the hierarchy of assessment;
- can provide a good spatially referenced framework from where patterns of local distinctiveness, and factors influencing sense of place, can be drawn;
- can be used to develop tailored policies and strategies, that reflect the characteristics that make a given landscape different or special.

Most landscape character assessments identify both landscape character types and landscape character areas. The generic characteristics of a particular landscape can be described for a landscape character type, then the uniquely distinctive features can be drawn out to inform description of landscape character areas. In this way the landscape character assessment can convey a real sense of identity and distinctiveness without unnecessary repetition. Sometimes, however, the distinctiveness of individual areas will suggest that the use of types is not helpful and

that the assessment should focus only on individual areas. Conversely, especially if resources are limited, an assessment may only deal with landscape character types and not go on to deal with individual landscape character areas, but it should be understood that this will limit subsequent use of the landscape character assessment.

3. CLASSIFICATION at DIFFERENT SCALES

The landscape character assessment exercise, and how it is approached, will be dependent upon the scale and level of detail required and this will influence the level in the national-local hierarchy at which it is being carried out.

1. Classification at the 'Broad' Scale – national / regional scale.

1. A new assessment carried out for a large area, perhaps at the national or regional level or for a large local authority, might draw on landscape character types identified and mapped at a more detailed scale. However, where this is the case, caution is needed especially where there is a requirement to combine and reconcile landscape character assessments carried out at different times, at different scales and with perhaps different information (e.g. old data sets, data of a different provenance etc.). There might also be significant inconsistencies, or differences, at boundaries or gaps between assessments.
2. With an emphasis on broad patterns rather than upon detail national or regional assessments are generally carried out at 1:250,000 scale, although some regional studies are carried out at 1:50,000 scale. Boundaries tend to represent very wide zones of transition.
3. Assessments at this scale inevitably involve a degree of generalisation which limits their use at the more local scale, however they can be very useful for strategic purposes, and they can provide the context and starting point for more detailed landscape character assessments.
4. New large scale assessments, concerned with identifying broad regional patterns of character in the landscape resulting from particular combinations of geology, soils, topography, settlement, and enclosure patterns, often tend to be predominantly desk-based exercises – for practical reasons – relying largely on map based information.
5. GIS can be used to compare data layers for each of the selected attributes, allowing patterns to be identified manually and areas of relatively homogeneous character to be mapped. Advanced GIS analysis may also be used to automatically identify patterns - based on features or characteristics - to inform the classification process. Considered selection of attributes is needed. The outputs of such analysis should not be regarded as a substitute for professional judgement.

2. Classification at the Intermediate Scale – county or district / National Park / Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

1. Assessments at this Intermediate Scale, for example those for local authority areas, National Parks, and AONBs, should sit within the context of any existing higher level national / regional assessment. They can also draw upon information from Landscape Character Assessments carried out at a more detailed level (see point 1 under 'Broad' Scale above).
2. These assessments are usually carried out at 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale. Sometimes 1:25,000 is used where local authority areas are small, where only part of an area is being

assessed, or where more precise boundaries are required to inform policy. This scale may also be appropriate when dealing with the urban fringe, and where an element of townscape analysis is included.

3. Where a higher level assessment exists, the Landscape Character Assessment should use national / regional character areas as a starting point, adding detail, refining and subdividing as appropriate. More detailed analysis of higher level character types / areas can sometimes result in actual, or perceived, anomalies, in terms of boundary definition and the presence of locally important influences on landscape character. It is important to note the reasons for any differences between assessments, where appropriate ensuring that these are reflected in any future revisions of the national / regional assessment. However, it must be understood that boundary differences between broad scale and intermediate scale assessments are likely to arise because boundaries drawn at the former scale can in reality be several miles wide – they are much less precise than more detailed assessments.
 4. Where an assessment draws upon a more detailed landscape character assessment, landscape types and areas are amalgamated at the scale appropriate to the new classification. This may mean that similar character types are grouped (e.g. 'open moorland' and 'forested moorland' grouped into a new 'moorland' landscape character type), or that contrasting landscape character types within a broader landscape unit are combined (e.g. 'broad coastal plain' and 'incised coastal valleys' are grouped into a new 'coastal plain with valleys' landscape character type). It may also be necessary to step back from the more precise boundaries identified in more detailed assessments to broader and less well defined zones of transition.
 5. GIS has increased in importance, aiding the assembly, analysis and manipulation of data derived from desk and field study. However, these processes should still be informed by professional judgement, to identify areas of distinct landscape character and to decide whether different areas are sufficiently similar to be grouped together as one landscape type, for example. The skill in carrying out this type of classification is to be able to recognise and describe consistent patterns of attributes, from map overlays and other information, and to relate these to variations in character identified through field survey, and stakeholder engagement.
3. Classification at the Local and Site Scale
1. Where greater detail is required a Landscape Character Assessment may be carried out at a more detailed level, such as 1:10,000, e.g. to inform:
 - a. the scale, layout, and design of new development such as housing;
 - b. assessment of a particularly complex landscape / townscape;
 - c. place based decision making – e.g. Local Landscape Character Assessments are increasingly being undertaken by local community groups;
 - d. the Landscape Impact and Visual Impact Assessment associated with an Environmental Impact Assessment of a particular development.
 2. Depending upon the geographic extent of the assessment this level of assessment can be particularly resource intensive. Most assessments at this scale will need to be undertaken from scratch, but they should be compatible with existing broader scale assessments.

3. Classification at this scale will normally be based upon practitioner and stakeholder judgements based on analysis of map overlays etc., and accord with assessments at the intermediate and broad scales.
4. GIS may be utilised, but it important to avoid a rigid and computer driven approach at this level. Sense of place and patterns of local distinctiveness will be important when identifying, and describing, character at this scale.

4. INVOLVING PEOPLE

Involving stakeholders in the final stages of an assessment, as well as earlier on in the process, can help to ensure that the identification, mapping, naming of landscape types and areas, and description of landscape character reflect wider knowledge, experience and perceptions of the landscape. It will also ensure that outputs are fit for the audience that will eventually use the assessment. The scale and purpose of the assessment will influence who to involve in this stage of the assessment.

1. Where stakeholder engagement has occurred in earlier stages of the process, the same groups and individuals should be involved in the preparation of the final outputs and they should be shown how information previously submitted has been used.
2. For **national / regional scale projects**, suitable stakeholders to represent commissioning and partner organisations, and representatives of other bodies with an interest in landscape – communities of interest - will be relatively easy to identify, however it may be more difficult to involve communities of place because of the focus on the larger scale landscape. Limited involvement at local level may be viewed as tokenistic.
3. At the **local authority level**, identifying and involving stakeholders may be more straightforward, this may be because many organisations are used to working at this scale. These bodies with an interest in the landscape can make a valuable contribution to the classification process and their involvement can help to build understanding and ownership of the Landscape Character Assessment before it is finalised. Meaningful involvement of local communities at this scale can demand significant resources if not handled well – large amounts of information can be generated which will need to be collated, evaluated and fed into the assessment process. Sometimes an achievable approach might be to hold targeted discussions, or workshops, across a local authority area. At the very least, the commissioning organisation should widely publicise consultation on the draft Landscape Character Assessment.
4. At the more **local scale** local people can play a very important role in the characterisation process – communities of place. Not least, they will be able to discuss their views on the draft boundaries between different character types and / areas, and inform final boundaries. Also they can provide valuable input to the final naming of landscape types and areas – using names that reflect the locality and the local dialect for example.

5. CONFIRMING BOUNDARIES

The Desk and Field Study stages will have identified boundaries for landscape character types and / areas. At this Classification stage these will need to be confirmed, drawn up and / digitised at the appropriate scale to be viewed and utilised. (It should be noted that boundaries defined at 1:250,000 or 1:50,000 scale, for national / regional and local authority assessments, cannot be precise / exact if viewing at a much more detailed scale is attempted.)

6. NAMING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES and AREAS

Regardless of scale of assessment the resultant types and areas should be named. Names can be descriptive and are often meaningful to local people – particularly those which reflect local terms and local place names. Sometimes, when classification into types and areas is detailed or complex, names may be supplemented with codes made up of letters and numbers.

1. Naming Landscape Character Types

- a. Use a two or three word name which reflects the dominant influences on landscape character – often words relating to geology, landform, land cover and settlement, are used, together with more descriptive terms such as large, remote, smooth or broad etc.
- b. Types defined at national / regional levels are more likely to have names that combine geological and landform terms, e.g. limestone uplands, clay vales, rocky moorlands, chalk downland.
- c. Local level types are often named by combining landform, land cover and settlement related terms e.g. plateau farmland, wooded valley / clough, small farms, urban fringe farmland – the aim should be to find a name which conveys some sense of what the character of the landscape is like.
- d. While there can be advantages in maintaining the consistent use of terms across the country, this should not be at the expense of selecting names which reflect local variations in character, or which make use of local terms (reflecting a particular language or dialect etc.).

2. Naming Landscape Character Areas

- a. Landscape Character Areas are unique and are given names that are geographically specific – based on a place name or established locality - but they may also refer to the landscape type.
- b. At the national / regional level names are often taken from well-known topographic features such as the South Downs, or from forest areas such as the New Forest. The names of counties, districts or adjacent cities may also be used.
- c. Local assessments should name character areas after local place names, villages and parishes. It is important to capture sense of place in landscape character assessments and the involvement of local stakeholders in the naming of areas is key to ensure established local names are used, to secure ownership and the maintenance of local identity and place.

7. DESCRIBING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER and IDENTIFYING KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Describing Landscape Character -

1. Once identified and mapped, character types and areas need to be described in a way which captures the essence of their character. Description usually includes: a written description – the main source of information about the nature of the landscape; appropriate illustrations

(maps, photographs, annotated sketches), and; summaries / lists defining key characteristics.

2. Emphasis and balance of descriptive text and summary information should reflect the purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment. For example, where the assessment -
 - has a specific application / purpose, e.g. considering the sensitivity of the landscape to a particular type of development, the description may be shorter and focused around an analysis of the landscape's key characteristics, especially those relating to its ability to absorb the type of development being considered;
 - is to provide a robust evidence base to inform a range of policy or management initiatives there may be a need for a rounded description of the landscape, and a comprehensive analysis of its key characteristics;
 - is to celebrate the landscape, emphasis may be on longer and more detailed descriptions, drawing on information showing how the landscape has been described in art, literature and music.
3. Similarly, balance will also be needed between factual statements about the components that make up the landscape, and the more evocative statements about its character. The purpose of the work will inform whether the emphasis is on the former or the latter. For example text which aims to demonstrate what is special about a particular landscape should be more evocative, identifying and perhaps celebrating special qualities whilst making reference to aesthetic qualities, views and perceptions. Alternatively, if an assessment is to inform planning policy a more factual description may be needed
4. Written descriptions
 - a. Information recorded during the Desk and Field Study will be used, with the aim of describing the overall character of the landscape with reference to geology, geomorphology, landform, land cover, land use, settlement, enclosure etc., drawing out the way that these factors interact and are generally perceived.
 - b. Landscape descriptions can be enriched by, and should usually include, an historical perspective on the way in which the current landscape character has evolved over time. An understanding of the interplay between the natural factors which influence landscape character and the human / socio-cultural factors which shape it over time will be necessary, and this can be informed by an existing Historic Landscape Character Assessment, or Historic Land Use Assessment, which can help to provide 'time depth' – this will have been obtained at the Desk Study Stage..
 - c. Information on the geodiversity, and biodiversity etc. should also be woven into descriptions, focusing on the contribution that these factors make to the character of the landscape in question.
 - d. Descriptions can include attributed views and opinions of stakeholders, and these should be clearly identified within the text.
 - e. Where a thematic approach has been followed an overview should be included, which describes how the full range of factors (Table 1) combine to influence landscape character.

- f. Choice of descriptive words will need careful thought – e.g. choice of adjectives that convey the aesthetic qualities of a landscape, those which deal with personal perceptions or values etc.
 - g. Consistent use of terminology is important. For example landscapes of similar character occur in different parts of the country, and ideally they should be described consistently in each area. In practice this is often difficult to achieve because Landscape Character Assessments are carried out by different people in different places. New Assessments should make reference to other available adjacent Assessments at the same scale, and at larger and smaller scales, and in different administrative or geographic areas etc. It can also be useful to define some terms used because, for example, a “large field” in one area may not be regarded as a “large field” in another area (e.g. a “large” field is a field over 10 Ha).
5. Landscape descriptions, especially when the emphasis is on celebrating the landscape, should where possible also be informed by how the landscape has been described / portrayed in art, photography, literature, music and other media - by the current generation and previous generations. Paintings and photographs can be used to illustrate written descriptions, and quotations from poetry can also be inserted. Both can show depth of feeling about a particular landscape and consistency of description over time. Quotes and sketches from descriptions by local stakeholders can also be used, and will be important in illustrating what an area means to local people and visitors.

Identifying Key Characteristics -

1. Key characteristics are those combinations of elements which help to give an area its distinctive sense of place. If these characteristics change, or are lost, there would be significant consequences for the current character of the landscape. Key characteristics are particularly important in the development of planning and management policies. They are important for monitoring change and can provide a useful reference point against which landscape change can be assessed. They can be used as indicators to inform thinking about whether and how the landscape is changing and whether, or not, particular policies – for example - are effective and having the desired effect on landscape character.
 2. Landscape descriptions should be accompanied by a separate list summarising the key characteristics of each landscape character type and / or area. Key characteristics are described in short statements which encapsulate the key aspects of character, usually including the interaction of landform, land cover, semi-natural vegetation, field pattern, aspects of settlement and aesthetic characteristics such as open skies, or a strong sense of enclosure etc. Robust identification and description is important, because the key characteristics are likely to become a major reference point – and perhaps determining factor – in making decisions about the future of the landscape (e.g. regarding development management). They should be appropriate to the scale and nature of the assessment. In a large scale or local authority assessment, for example, they should be genuinely characteristic of the whole landscape character type or area, rather than being strictly local in occurrence. More detailed and specific key characteristics will be associated with more local assessments which are smaller in scale and provide greater levels of detail.
8. MAPPING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES and / or AREAS

Preparing Maps -

- Hand drawn, or digitally produced, maps are an important output from a Landscape Character Assessment, and are often the first point of reference for users of the assessment.
- Clear and legible maps illustrating character types and / or areas should show boundaries overlying an OS base, at an appropriate scale, to allow geographic reference and identification. Colour coded keys and labels should be used to differentiate between landscape character types and areas.
- A scale bar and north point should be shown on all maps.
- Sometimes maps will need to be provided at A3. They should be supplemented either with additional fold out maps on an OS base, at the appropriate scale, or with an appropriately scaled digital map.

Preparing GIS Data

- Attributed GI data sets of landscape character types and / areas are now often provided, along with maps and a written report, as part of a Landscape Character Assessment. GIS datasets may be one of the most important outputs, allowing a wide range of users to access and use landscape character information (e.g. developers and their consultants when dealing with a potential development site). It is important to utilize the expertise of a GIS expert.
- GIS data should always be created in a topologically correct way, all polygonal (area) datasets should exclude overlaps and gaps. Lines and points should be 'snapped' wherever possible and should not overlap. 'Snapping' is usually undertaken automatically while digitising but additional checks should also be undertaken at the end of the project, before handing over the data, to ensure the quality of the digital product.
- The scale of the digitisation needs to be relevant to the base mapping and study area, and scale and scope of the assessment. Statements of accuracy are needed, to note the scale at which the boundaries have been mapped and digitised and therefore the scale at which they should be used.
- Metadata – data about data – should be created for the GIS outputs of an assessment. When a GIS is created, either within the file itself or in an accompanying document it is important to record information on -
 1. Source(s) of data
 2. When the data was created
 3. Who created the data
 4. Why the data was created (e.g. the project name)
 5. The scale at which the data has been captured
 6. Whether there are any restrictions or conditions associated with use of the data.

This allows data to be shared between users and ensures that it is used appropriately. Concerning Landscape Character Assessment related data, it is likely that the data will be used for a wide range of subsequent projects so the data should include enough information for any user to understand it and its provenance. (The INSPIRE Directive was transposed into UK law in December 2009. It establishes an infrastructure for spatial information in the European Union.)

- Where appropriate, thematic baseline maps can also be presented as part of the final Landscape Character Assessment, illustrating key natural and cultural elements and features (maps of geology, landform, soils, settlement patterns historic landscape etc.). The datasets will have specific user licences which will need to be adhered to. In many cases this will require formal acknowledgement on graphic outputs. Licences will dictate what additional data can be handed over with project outputs.

2.5 The Landscape Character Assessment – the output of the above process

The completed Landscape Character Assessment should (depending upon the brief):

1. summarise the project brief that informed the assessment process, and describe the purpose and scope of the study, including the role played by stakeholders and the intended audience;
2. explain the methodology followed;
3. include a contextual description of the study area;
4. indicate how the assessment fits with other landscape, seascape and/or townscape character assessments at the same and/or different scales and in adjacent administrative or geographic areas;
5. include a map(s) at an appropriate scale showing the extent of the landscape character types and/or areas identified;
6. include clear and accurate descriptions of the character of each landscape character type and/or area identified – avoiding value laden terminology;
7. include photographs, diagrams, and sketches as appropriate, to illustrate the character being described; and
8. identify key characteristics for each landscape character type and/or area, in order to capture the combination of elements that make a particular contribution to creating distinctive character.

Once produced, signed off, and approved (for example, by an appropriate committee) the Landscape Character Assessment should be able to be used for the purpose(s) for which it was intended – Fig. 2. Depending upon its original aims and objectives the Assessment should be capable of informing decisions and judgements concerning the planning, management, and protection / conservation of our environment.

PART THREE TECHNICAL ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Glossary of Terms

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

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

Classification* Is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character and grouping areas of similar character together.

Ecosystem Services – These are services provided by the natural environment, that benefit people. Some of these ecosystem services are well known including food, fibre and fuel provision and the cultural services that provide benefits to people through recreation and cultural appreciation of nature. Other services provided by ecosystems are not so well known. These include the regulation of the climate, purification of the air and water, flood protection, soil formation and nutrient recycling. (Defra (2007) An introductory guide to valuing Ecosystem services.)

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

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

Key Characteristics*** Those combinations of elements which are particularly important to the current character of the landscape and help to give an area its particularly distinctive sense of place.

Landscape Capacity** The degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without unacceptable adverse effects on its character. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of the change being proposed.

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

Landscape Character Areas* These are single **unique** areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each will have its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same type.

Landscape Character Assessment – This is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.

Landscape Character Types* These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are **generic** in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use, and settlement pattern.

Landscape Quality (or condition) ** is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.

Landscape Value** The relative value or importance attached to a landscape (often as a basis for designation or recognition), which expresses national or local consensus, because of its quality, special qualities including perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues.

Sensitivity *** A term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor.

Susceptibility *** The ability of a defined landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences.

Sources:

* The Countryside Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (CAX 84), the Countryside Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage, April 2002.

** The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2002), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition, London: Spon Press.

*** Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, London: Routledge.

Definitions from the European Landscape Convention, Florence 20th October 2000

Landscape - an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

Landscape policy - an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes.

Landscape quality objective - for a specific landscape, the formulation by the competent public authorities of the aspirations of the public with regard to the landscape features of their surroundings.

Landscape protection - actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity.

Landscape management - action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.

Landscape planning - strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.

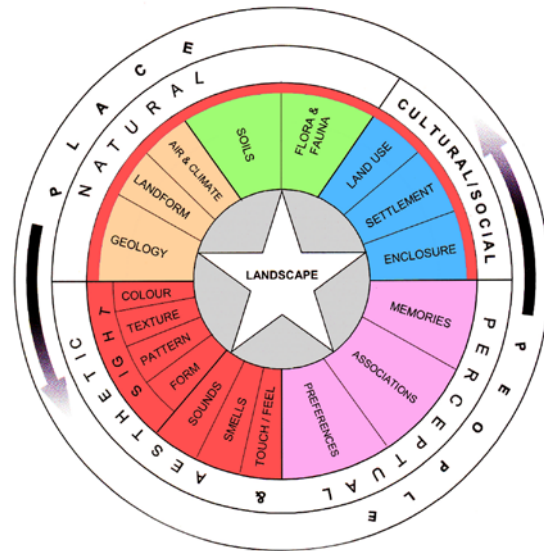
ANNEX 2 – LANDMAP (Wales)

LANDMAP is the formally adopted approach for landscape assessments in Wales and is advocated by the Welsh Government. It is a complete, all-Wales GIS-based landscape information resource where characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded as 5 themed spatial layers as follows:

1. Geological Landscape
2. Landscape Habitats
3. Visual & Sensory
4. Historic Landscape
5. Cultural Landscape.

From the unique perspective of each layer:

- Geographically discrete areas are identified and mapped by their landscape qualities and characteristics.
- Accompanying survey records document those qualities and characteristics in addition to management recommendations and criteria-based evaluations.



Though some terminology differs to LCA, the colour-coded LCA wheel shows how the LANDMAP layers relate to LCA and therefore where they feed information into the sequential LCA process at the Desk Study Stage.

LANDMAP information, guidance, interactive GIS map and GIS data downloads can be accessed from the Natural Resources Wales website.



Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

Catalogue Code: NE579

ISBN: 978-78367-141-0

Should an alternative format of this publication be required, please contact our enquiries line for more information: 0845 600 3078 or email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

www.gov.uk/natural-england

This publication is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence v3.0 for public sector information. You are encouraged to use, and reuse, information subject to certain conditions.

For details of the licence visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Natural England photographs are only available for non commercial purposes. If any other information such as maps or data cannot be used commercially this will be made clear within the note [report/publication].

© Natural England 2014