

Appendix 1: Study Methodology

Introduction

A1.2 The approach to this study followed best practice as promoted by Natural England (former Countryside Agency) in the *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002, as amended) and the methodology was developed in close cooperation with the client steering group. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used throughout the study as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data.

Stage 1 - Characterisation

Desk Study/Review

A1.3 The initial desk study reviewed the existing landscape character assessments that cover the Unitary Authority. The national framework provided by the Character of England Map (Joint Character Areas) and the National Landscape Typology (Landscape Character Types) set the overall context for the study while the Bedford County Landscape Character Assessment (LUC, 2007) set the local context for the study and the broad framework of landscape types. This hierarchy of assessment is shown in the table below.

Table 2.1: Classification Hierarchy

Scale: 1:250,000 National	Character Area: 90 Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge
1:50,000 County	Landscape Type: 6 Wooded Greensand Ridge
1:25,000 Unitary Authority	Character Area: 6B Mid Greensand Ridge

A1.4 Landscape character assessments in neighbouring counties and districts were also reviewed. The following table shows the adjoining local planning authority areas and the status of their landscape character assessments, where known.

Table 2.2: Local Character Context (as at January 2007)

Counties sharing a boundary with Bedfordshire				Districts/Unitary Authority's sharing a boundary with Bedfordshire			
County	LCA	Scale	Date	District/Borough	LCA	Scale	Date
Buckinghamshire	Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire (Part 1)	1:50,000	2001	Aylesbury Vale District	Yes	1:25,000	2008
Cambridgeshire	Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines		1993	Huntingdonshire District Landscape and Townscape Assessment	Yes	1:25,000	2004
				South Cambridgeshire	No		
Hertfordshire	Hertfordshire Character Assessment	1:10,000	2001	Landscape Character Assessment for Dacorum (SPG)	Yes	1:25,000	2004
				North Hertfordshire & Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment	Yes	1:25,000	2004
				Milton Keynes	Milton Keynes Landscape Character Study	1:25,000	2007

A1.5 The desk study also reviewed the physical and human influences that have shaped the landscape of Central Bedfordshire. Physical influences (natural factors) include geology, soils, landform, drainage, and land cover, and these have a strong influence on patterns of human occupation and activity. Research also covered cultural/social factors such as patterns of settlement and land use, enclosure, and socio-economic and cultural traditions and influences from pre-historic times to the present day and looked at current change in the landscape.

Draft Characterisation

- A1.6 The draft Unitary Authority-wide landscape classification assimilated and updated the existing landscape assessment covering the Unitary Authority (LUC draft) to refine boundaries within Central Bedfordshire at 1:25,000.
- A1.7 Overlays of information were produced using GIS mapping of geology, soils, landform, drainage, land cover, environmental designations, land use and historic landscape types/areas and analysis of this range of data layers covering both natural and cultural attributes of the landscape allowed us to develop a draft characterisation at the Unitary Authority scale for field testing.
- A1.8 The approach followed best practice as promoted by the Countryside Agency in the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) in maintaining a distinction between landscape types and character areas, and developing a hierarchical approach as follows:
- **Landscape Types** - which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. 'Clay Farmland' or 'Greensand Valley';
 - **Character Areas** - which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type, e.g. 'Cranfield to Stagsden Clay Farmland' or 'Flit Greensand Valley'.
- A1.9 For the purposes of the assessment emphasis was placed upon the definition and subdivision of the landscape at a scale of 1:25 000 and at the Landscape Character Area scale i.e. the identification of particular geographical areas of distinctive landscape.

Field Survey

- A1.10 The field survey was used to check draft classifications (as initially defined by the desk study), to identify additional character area subdivisions and define precise boundaries. The survey was rigorous and systematic using written observations, map annotations, and photographs. Standard survey checklists adapted to the needs of the study were used to ensure that landscape features and characteristics were recorded in a consistent and objective way. A copy of a field survey sheet for this assessment is included in **Appendix 1**. Photographs were used to record character, attributes and distinguishing features. For the purposes of this updated edition, additional field survey was targeted at areas of large scale change/ development guided by the steering group.
- A1.11 The field survey assessed and recorded each area in terms of its key characteristics and features as well as perceptual characteristics. It also assessed the current state of the elements and features of the landscape and evidence of forces for change which, when considered together, allowed guidelines for conservation, management and enhancement to be established.
- A1.12 The field survey provided:
- a brief description of landscape character;
 - a checklist of landscape elements and characteristics (e.g. landform, land use, land cover);
 - a checklist of settlement elements and characteristics (e.g. settlement form, landmarks, vernacular style and local materials);
 - a checklist of aesthetic and perceptual factors (e.g. pattern, scale, texture, colour, unity, remoteness, tranquillity); and
 - observations on strength of character, condition, sensitivity and management needs of landscape.

Classification and Description

- A1.13 Having reviewed the desk research findings, field maps and field record sheets the various classifications were finalised and the descriptions compiled in accordance with the guidelines in the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002).
- A1.14 **A note on boundary lines:** The precision of boundaries drawn around landscape character areas and types varies with the scale and level of detail of an assessment. The Central Bedfordshire assessment has been mapped at the scale of 1:25,000, which means that it is suitable for use at this scale.

A1.15 In reality landscape character rarely changes abruptly and the boundaries indicated in the assessment therefore sometimes represent zones of transition in character relating to changes in topography, geology soils, cultural patterns, land use etc. rather than marked changes on the ground. In practice boundaries of this nature have been drawn to follow physical or mappable features such as roads, lanes or field boundaries which provide 'best fit', for example the boundary between 4B: *Lower Ivel Clay Valley* and 4C: *Upper Ivel Clay Valley* which largely follows field boundaries.

Stage 2 – Evaluation

Approach to Judgements

- A1.16 The approach to making judgements was determined by the need to meet the objectives of the assessment:
- to inform planning policy for Central Bedfordshire;
 - to provide a context for individual planning applications; and
 - to provide land management guidance.
- A1.17 The approach has been informed by current best practice and in particular the new approaches being developed for identifying landscape sensitivity and capacity being promoted through the Countryside Agency's Topic Paper 6⁶.
- A1.18 Information on the current state of the elements and features of the landscape and of **forces for change** was collated and noted as past change and current and future change. This identified the main factors that are affecting the landscape or are likely to do so in future in order to determine appropriate guidelines for managing change to help ensure that local character is conserved and enhanced. Information from the desk study, fieldwork and from consultation was used to determine the forces for change.
- A1.19 The **key sensitivities** for each landscape area were determined, these are key positive landscape attributes that contribute to character and are considered to be vulnerable to change. Sensitivity was considered in terms of landscape character and of visual sensitivity. A professional judgement used to define the key landscape and visual sensitivities. This considers features which are fundamental to the landscape character, as opposed to a specific type of change, with detailed sensitivity ratings. This is considered the correct approach for the scale of this assessment.
- A1.20 A **landscape strategy** was also prepared for each character area. These are based on consideration of the character and of condition of the landscape and the forces for change. Strength of character is determined by judging how distinct and recognisable the pattern of elements is that defines the character of the landscape. This includes the combination of physical and cultural attributes and the sense of place that they evoke. Condition is determined by the intactness and condition of the elements of the landscape. The strength of character and condition are summarised in the landscape strategies for each character area.
- A1.21 For each character area the overall strategy is presented and any particular management needs for specific elements are identified. These are developed further in the guidelines. The aim is not just to give a blunt prescription for the whole area, but also to identify the specific features to which the strategy applies. They set out broad principles to manage and direct landscape change for example in order to protect the highest quality and most sensitive landscapes from adverse change and to encourage positive change in weak or degraded landscapes. The strategy objectives are combinations of different aims ranging from preserving the current landscape (conservation) in the areas of strong character and good condition to encouraging positive change (creation) in the landscapes of weak character and poor condition or a landscape undergoing planned change. There will be scope to create new landscapes through the landscape and urban design process, in response to an identified need, particularly in the context of urban extension or an innovative approach to land restoration. The guidelines also take account of relevant /

⁶ Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2004) Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland - Topic Paper 6: *Techniques for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity*.

parallel green infrastructure and biodiversity initiatives, particularly at the landscape scale, to ensure that these are considered in ways most responsive to character.

- A1.22 For each character area a set of **guidelines** has been developed based upon the changes identified. The guidelines indicate the actions required, with reference to the overall landscape objective in order to ensure that distinctive character is maintained. To fulfil the objectives of the study and aid ease of reference the guidelines have been divided into those of **landscape management** and those specifically relating to **development**. Landscape management guidelines relate to conservation, enhancement or creation of appropriate physical or soft landscape features intrinsic to an area's character. Development guidelines are intended to guide the form, scale, siting and appearance of development in the landscape, with reference to appropriate materials, details, massing and consideration of views and topographic features and the relationship to existing development patterns, as appropriate.