

### 4.1 Assessment Methodology

The key elements of the method used in the study following the guidance set out in the Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002 is described below.

#### 4.1.1 Briefing and Familiarisation Tour

Following the award of the contract, an initial briefing meeting was held between North Hertfordshire District Council Planning Policy and Projects Team and key members of the project team to discuss the project brief and programme. A familiarisation tour of the study area followed to gain a flavour of the range of landscapes involved.

#### 4.1.2 Project Monitoring

The project was monitored throughout the contract period by members of the Planning Policy and Projects Team. Monitoring included the use of the following:

- Progress meeting
- Liaison by phone
- Work programme – consultant provided work plan identifying the main activities against the contract period
- Correspondence – by letter, fax and e-mail

### 4.2 Desk Study

The initial desk study was sub-contracted to Stephen Warnock, following guidance in the brief. This stage involved the division of the study area using The Living Landscape Project methodology into a number of Landscape Description Units or (LDU) identified at 1:25,000 scale. The following sets out the level of detail which was considered during the assessment process.

#### 4.2.1 Level 1

Sub-division at a national/regional scale in accordance with the Joint Character Map of England combining both Landscape Character Regions and Natural Areas. This information provides a framework for analysis at a finer grain: Levels 2 and 3.

#### 4.2.2 Level 2 : Physiography and Soils

The following topics were considered and a relevant category identified at 1:25,000 scale

##### **Topography**

Flat = F  
Low-lying = L  
Rolling/undulating = R  
Valley = V  
Sloping = S  
Upstanding/plateau = U

##### **Geology**

Fluvial-glacial and river drift = F  
Till (glacial drift) = T  
Clay = C  
Limestone/chalk = L  
Mixed = M

##### **Soils**

Sandy brown soils = S  
Brown free-draining soils = B  
Clay soils = C  
Gleyed (poorly draining) soils = G  
Mixed soils = M

The study area was divided into LDUs based on a combination of the above factors and a combined coding given, eg VLB denoting a limestone/chalk valley with brown free-draining soils.

#### 4.2.3 Level 2 : Cultural Pattern

The physiographic pattern, ie the way that man has utilised the land, also referred to as the 'cultural pattern' was then added using the following categories:

##### **Land Cover**

Urban = U  
Cropland = C  
Pastoral = P  
Rough = R

##### **Settlement Pattern**

Nucleated = N  
Clustered = C  
Dispersed = D  
Unsettled = R  
Meadow = M

### **Tree Cover**

Wooded = W  
Scrub = S  
Estate = P  
Unenclosed = U  
Secondary = S  
Open = O  
Other trees = T  
Trees and woods = A

### **Farm Type**

Large estates = E  
Large farms = F  
Small farms = S  
Unenclosed/common Land = U

### **4.2.4 Level 3 : Land Cover Coding (Scale 1:25,000)**

This information provided a further level of resolution and sub-division of the LDUs. The following categories were given:

### **Current Land Cover**

Urban = U  
Woodland = W  
Parkland = Pk  
Rough = R  
Disturbed = D  
Other = O

### **Historic Field Pattern**

Irregular = I  
Sub-regular = S  
Regular = R  
Geometric = G  
Unenclosed = U

### **Field Size**

Small = 1  
Small-medium = 2  
Medium-large = 3  
Large = 4

All the above data was collated as a series of overlays suitable for reading against a 1:25,000 scale OS base.

## **4.3 Field Study**

### **4.3.1 Fieldwork**

The fieldwork was carried out in two phases. The area to the west of the A1(M) was surveyed as Phase 1 over the period May-June 2002. The land to the east of the A1(M) - Phase 2, was surveyed during August-September 2002.

The survey team consisted of a team of two, including a landscape architect, who was responsible for drafting the text and defining the boundaries of each character area surveyed, and another landscape-related professional. A cross-referencing process was built-in, to ensure consistency of appraisal across both the study area and the previous studies for Southern Hertfordshire and St Albans District.

### **4.3.2 Recording**

Each LDU was systematically appraised by the survey team. Field survey record sheets were used to record data. A sample of the two-page pro-forma used is included in Appendix A. The form was updated from that used in previous studies in Hertfordshire to allow for greater transparency in the completion of the Evaluation Matrix. The use of forms was supplemented by additional notes and photographic records. Both notes and photographs informed the process of drafting a description of and illustrating each character area in the final report.

## **4.4 Literature Review**

In parallel with the desk study and fieldwork a literature review was carried out. This provided background information and informed the process of defining character areas. The methodology specification in the contract documents provided an important list of suggested sources. This was supplemented by other source materials, including documents identified through stakeholder involvement, see Bibliography in Appendix B.

### 4.5 Draft Landscape Character Areas

Draft Landscape Character Areas were defined, using a combination of the results derived from the desk study and survey data from the fieldwork. This was an iterative process involving the identification of those LDUs which were character areas in their own right and those which required aggregating or subdivision on the basis of consistent landscape characteristics identified during the survey process

LDUs had been identified from consideration of the physical characteristics of landform, geology and soils. When considered on the ground the boundaries to the LDUs often did not follow obvious physical features such as the edge of a road or a woodland. During the survey process it was considered that LDU boundaries should be adjusted to follow boundaries or edges, which could be seen as being more defensible during any future planning process undertaken by the Local Authority. Under certain circumstances there was no physical boundary on the ground or in close proximity and it was then considered appropriate for a boundary to follow a contour line or a break of slope. These boundaries are identified on the Landscape Character Areas plan by a separate notation.

The assessment process leads to the placing of lines on a plan defining the boundaries to Landscape Character Areas. In certain circumstances the lines follow clearly defined changes in the appearance and character of a landscape on either side of this line, eg around the edge of a settlement. However, there is often a much subtler transition in the landscape between boundaries and elements of one landscape character area seep into an adjacent character area. In these circumstances the boundary line marks a zone of transition where the balance of defining characteristics has moved from one area to another.

When considering the boundaries of the Character Areas, as illustrated on the GIS version of this document it should be noted that boundaries have been recorded at a scale of 1:2,000 matched against a 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey base. Working at this level of detail, decisions have been made about the practical consideration of locating a boundary on a plan say in relation to which side of a property or road that boundary may lie on. These decisions rely on a combination of available OS data and field assessment but

will inevitably be subject to review and potential change in the long term. Consequently the Character Area boundaries should not be regarded as definitive, but as representing the best judgement on matters of a transitory quality.

### 4.6 Stakeholder Involvement

An important part of the landscape character assessment was the involvement of the local community. The details and outcomes of the process are set out more fully in a supplementary report. The key elements involved are set out below:

#### 4.6.1 Tier A – Community of Interest

This group included an extensive list of authorities and societies with a professional, statutory or local interest in the process, including most of those that had been involved in similar previous studies. Those who registered an interest in receiving further information were then sent draft area boundaries, with outline supporting text and invited to a meeting on 31 July 2002 for the Phase 1 areas west of the A1(M) and on 13 November 2002 for the Phase 2 areas east of the A1(M) held at North Hertfordshire District Council Offices. At these meetings attendees received a presentation on the background to landscape character assessment and details of the process underway. Attendees were also given the opportunity to discuss their views and to make suggestions on the draft information previously circulated. Other information was made available on request. The main contribution made by this category of stakeholders was to rigorously review and challenge the suggested area boundaries and to provide detailed information to populate the Character Area statements.

#### 4.6.2 Tier B – Community of Place

Views of the local community were sought via the Hertfordshire Citizens Panel. The Citizens Panel is a strictly representative cross-section of the community who have agreed to participate in a number of sampling processes. The consultation process has been co-ordinated by Hertfordshire County Council. Contributors' responses to each of the character areas will be analysed and a summary provided by Hertfordshire County Council.

### 4.7 Report Format

Following the receipt of inputs from stakeholders and the continuing literature review, the landscape character descriptions were developed into a final form. A consistent pattern was used to describe each Character Area taking the form of a nominal four to five pages of text and illustrations as set out below:

The text for the report was also provided as an Access database, to enable the GIS map data to be made interactive with the text. The data described above was delivered to the client in both hard copy and on CD-rom.

#### 4.7.1 Location

- Location – brief geographical description.
- Landscape character – summary statement of the area
- Key characteristics – main elements defining the character
- Distinctive features – individual features of note

Each Character Area is illustrated by a diagrammatic location plan and photographs of the area. (To be provided at a later date). The Character Areas are also identified on a map. This was done digitally as an ArcView 3.2 project set against a 1:10,000 scale OS base, at a resolution of 1:2000 scale. Some of the Character Areas identified were further sub-divided to show a finer level of resolution.

#### 4.7.2 Assessment

##### **Physical influences**

- Geology and soils
- Topography – including degree of slope and altitude range
- Hydrology
- Land cover and land use
- Vegetation and wildlife

##### **Historic and cultural influences**

- Field pattern and field size
- Transport pattern
- Settlement and built form

### 4.7.3 Evaluation

- Visual and sensory perception
- Rarity and distinctiveness
- Visual impact of built development
- Accessibility
- Community views
- Landscape and related designations
- Condition and robustness matrix

The evaluation process required that detailed professional judgement was given to the following criteria.

**Visual and sensory perception.** This included views to, from and within an area, the scale of elements, sense of enclosure, visual unity and noise/tranquillity. Information was largely gleaned during the field survey process and recorded on the survey sheets.

**Rarity and distinctiveness.** Rarity was assessed after consideration of the frequency of the landscape type within North Hertfordshire. Distinctiveness relates to those particular landscape characteristics or features that help distinguish one landscape Character Area from another and make it special. This may have referred to individual features or the overall character. The entry for rarity and distinctiveness was added later in the report process when an overview of the whole study area was available.

**Visual impact of built development.** This identified the magnitude and extent of the impact of built features on local landscape character including settlements, roads, railways, etc. Data was gathered during the field survey and presented on the survey sheets.

**Accessibility.** A qualitative assessment of the number lengths of rights of way, areas of publicly accessible land and the presence of associated recreational activities.

**Community views.** Views of the local community have been sought by HCC and a summary will be incorporated into the final report.

**Condition and Robustness matrix.** See section 4.8 below.

**Landscape and related designations.** Relevant designations were collated from NHDC, HCC, English Nature and English Heritage. These include:

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Landscape Conservation Areas (LC)
- Historic Parks and Gardens on the English Heritage Register (GD)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments (visible features) (SAM)

### 4.7.4 Guidelines

A general strategy and list of area-specific guidelines for managing change is included for each Character Area.

## 4.8 Analysing Landscape Change

In order to assess any landscape's potential ability to adapt to change without losing its intrinsic character, it is necessary to analyse the condition of the landscape and balance this against the strength of character (Robustness) as demonstrated by the more permanent elements of the landscape. Landscape condition is determined from an evaluation of the relative state (poor/moderate/good) of elements within the landscape which are subject to change, such as landuse, survival of hedgerows, extent and impact of built development. Robustness is determined from an evaluation of the impact of relatively stable factors, such as landform and land cover, the apparent continuity of an historic pattern, the degree of visibility of and within the area and its distinctiveness or rarity.

Seven factors were considered for each Character Area (see 'Condition and robustness matrix' for any Character Area). Each was evaluated in the field and an entry made on the survey sheet. They were then considered against a three-point scale (poor, moderate and good for Condition, weak, moderate and strong for Robustness) and entered in the matrix table. Values for the factors on each axis were then aggregated and a majority total applied. The resulting intersection on the matrix determined the general strategy for each Character Area (see last page of each character area description).

This evaluation via matrix enables a general guideline to be determined. Once this primary assessment has been established, specific guidelines can be formulated that will address issues within each Character Area, with a view to improving both condition and strength of character as necessary, to reinforce distinctiveness and to promote appropriate long term management.

### 5.1 Introduction

Previous landscape character assessment undertaken by the Landscape Partnership for HCC to the south of the District included Character Areas overlapping the District boundary. The numbers given to those Character Areas (34, 37, 133) have been retained to avoid potential for confusion.

A further three Character Areas, again identified by The Landscape Partnership who assessed landscape character in East Hertfordshire are included at the rear of this document by kind permission. These Character Areas lie across the District boundary. The description format is comparable to that for the NHDC study and these areas are shown on the Landscape Character Areas plan.

New Character Areas identified by the NHDC and SBC assessment have been numbered sequentially from 200. (NB Numbers 206 and 207 have not been used). The numbering of the Character Areas runs generally from south to north for those to the west of the A1(M) and from west to east for those to the east of the motorway.

Some boundaries to Character Areas, especially those to the north and northeast have been drawn to provisional boundary lines where it is clear from site survey that the Character Area extends significantly into the neighbouring county. In these instances and after discussion with neighbouring authorities, it has been noted that boundaries will be considered in further detail by those authorities at an appropriate time.

Where Character Areas extend beyond the District boundaries the descriptions cover the general character of the whole area but detailed description relates only to those parts within or overlapping the NHDC boundary.