

### 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. A set of guidelines is also provided for each area that will help to guide appropriate development within the Character Area. Where Character Areas extend outside of North Hertfordshire, the guidelines only apply to land within North Hertfordshire.

### **Analysing Landscape Change**

- 4.8** 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, which is also called "Strength of Character" in other assessments in Hertfordshire, 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. These 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.

### 4.9 Landscape Sensitivity, Value and Capacity Sensitivity

In order to identify the suitability of each Character Area to accommodate development, the inherent landscape sensitivities for each Character Area were determined. These are key landscape attributes, features and characteristics that contribute to character and would be potentially sensitive to any type of development. Sensitivity was considered in terms of both landscape character and visual sensitivity. A professional judgement was used to define the key landscape character and visual sensitivities and develop an overall summary of the level of sensitivity for each character area on a three point scale of High, Moderate and Low. In some Character Areas, where there is variation in sensitivity across the Character Area, a range of sensitivities has been given e.g. Moderate to High or Low to Moderate

The following provides a basis for determining the sensitivity judgements. A majority of the factors under each category would need to apply to a Landscape Character Area to fall within that category.

#### High Sensitivity:

- Key features/characteristics are currently or likely to be adversely affected by future change
- Change would be likely to have an adverse impact on landscape character
- A highly valued landscape or containing highly valued components
- A landscape in good condition/of high quality, with characteristics or elements that make a strong positive contribution to landscape character
- A landscape containing landscape characteristics/elements that would be irreplaceable or difficult to replace
- A landscape that is highly visible both internally and from surrounding landscapes
- A landscape which demonstrates a unified character
- A landscape with no or few detractors

#### Moderate Sensitivity:

- Some key features/characteristics that make up the landscape are likely to be affected by future change
- Change may have an adverse impact on the landscape character
- A moderately valued landscape or containing moderately valued elements
- A landscape in moderate condition whose characteristics or elements make some positive contribution to wider landscape character
- A landscape containing landscape characteristics/elements that are likely to be replaceable to some extent
- A landscape that is partially visible both internally and from surrounding landscapes
- A landscape that retains a coherent character
- A landscape with few or moderate number of detractor

#### Low Sensitivity:

- Key features/characteristics that make up the landscape are unlikely to be adversely affected by introduction of new development/change
- Change is unlikely to have an adverse impact on landscape character overall
- A landscape of limited/low value
- A landscape in poor or declining condition whose characteristics or elements do not contribute positively to wider landscape character
- A landscape in need of restoration and development
- A landscape containing landscape characteristics/elements that are likely to be easily replaceable
- A fragmented or disjointed landscape
- A landscape with widespread or high number of detractors

#### Value

The value placed on a landscape can be measured based on designations and a range of other criteria, including public consensus. Consultation with the local community in relation to landscape value has not formed part of this study. However, a range of other factors can be used as indicators of the value that may be attributed to a Character Area. Natural England prepared a consultation document entitled 'Guidance for assessing

landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England'. Appendix 1 of the consultation document included detailed criteria for assessing Natural Beauty. These are very similar to those identified in Natural England's document 'Topic Paper 6: Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity'. Some 27 Natural Beauty criteria are included in the Natural England report and these have been applied to each of the North Hertfordshire Landscape Character Area units. In the context of this study it was not possible to assess some indicators (NB21 and NB25-27), either in the field or as a desk-based study, as this was outside the scope of this study. Where the LCAs extend over the district boundary only that part of the area within NHDC has been included in the assessment. The criteria used are as follows:

- Landscape Quality
  - NB1 - Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout
  - NB2 - Landscape elements are in good condition
  - NB3 - Incongruous elements are not present to a significant degree, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence or are temporary in nature
- Scenic quality
  - NB4 - Landscape character lends a clear and recognisable sense of place
  - NB5 - Landform shows a strong sense of scale and contrast
  - NB6 - There are striking landform types or coastal configurations
  - NB7 - Landcover and vegetation types form an appealing pattern or composition in relation to each other and/or to landform
  - NB8 - Strong aesthetic qualities, reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest
  - NB9 - Memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks
- Relative wildness
  - NB10 - Relatively few roads or other transport routes

- NB11 - Distant from or perceived as distant from significant habitation
- NB12 - Extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation
- NB13 - Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and no overt industrial or urban influences
- NB14 - Open, exposed to the elements and expansive in character
- NB15 - Absence or apparent absence of active human intervention
- Relative tranquillity
  - NB16 - Presence and/or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars at night, stream, sea, natural sounds and similar influences
  - NB17 - Presence and/or perceptions of traffic noise, large numbers of people, urban development, overhead light pollution, low flying aircraft, power lines and similar influences
- Natural heritage features
  - NB18 - Visible expression of geology in distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
  - NB19 - Presence of striking or memorable geo-morphological features
  - NB20 - Presence of wildlife and/or habitats that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
- Cultural heritage features
  - NB22 - Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
  - NB23 - Presence of visible archaeological remains, parkland and/or designed landscapes that provide striking features in the landscape
  - NB24 - Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape

Application of the above indicators for each of the existing Landscape Character

Areas in North Hertfordshire District has been assessed on the basis of a range from 1- 5 where:

1= Very poor representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

2= Poor representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

3= Moderate representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

4= Good representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

5= Very good representation of the indicator for natural beauty/landscape value

The entry for each criterion is therefore given a corresponding numerical score of 1-5, based on the above. These are then totalled to give an overall score for each LCA. The approach resulted in a potential score range from 22- 110. However, the actual scores attained ranged between 40 and 87. This resulted in the following bandings for natural beauty/landscape value:

40 – 49 = Low natural beauty/landscape value

50 – 59 = Moderate low natural beauty/landscape value

60 – 68 = Moderate natural beauty/landscape value

69 – 78 = Moderate high natural beauty/landscape value

79 – 87 = High natural beauty/landscape value

The place in the above bandings was used as a measure of landscape value in the Landscape Character Areas in North Hertfordshire. This was done in the absence of data on community views and influencing the value by designations. A separate study has been produced for North Hertfordshire District Council detailing the Natural Beauty scoring for each Landscape Character Area.

### Capacity

After a consideration and description of the inherent sensitivity and value of each character area, the capacity of each Landscape Character Area to accommodate different forms of

development was identified. Capacity can be understood as the opposite of sensitivity while also allowing for value as a moderating factor. Therefore e.g. a high sensitivity landscape would be likely to have a low capacity; however the level of capacity will vary with the type of development concerned. The following categories of development were considered,

- Large urban extensions and new settlements (>5ha)
- Smaller urban extensions (<5ha)
- Major transport developments/improvements
- Commercial/warehouse estates
- Individual large/bulky buildings
- Large scale open uses (e.g. car storage)
- Mineral extraction/waste disposal
- Incremental small scale development
- Utilities developments (e.g. masts, pylons, wind turbines)

For each form of development, the inherent landscape sensitivities and value were considered. A professional judgement was then made as to the capacity of the landscape to accommodate the form of development, on a three point scale of High, Moderate and Low. In some Character Areas, where there is variation in capacity across the Character Area, a range of capacities has been given with the prevalent sensitivity stated first e.g. Moderate to High or Low to Moderate.