

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

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8.1 General

8.1.1 This section sets out the consultant's recommendations to the commissioning authorities for their consideration and action as appropriate.

8.1.2 Recommendations are provided for the application of the Landscape Character Assessment in relation to Local Development Framework policies for protecting and enhancing landscape character, and an outline framework for monitoring landscape change. Recommendations for further work required to enhance the evidence base on the landscape and settlement character of the Study Area are also included.

8.2 Key Applications of the Landscape Character Assessments

8.2.1 It is intended that the Landscape Character Assessments of Braintree District, Brentwood Borough, Chelmsford Borough, Maldon District and Uttlesford District can be used by all those with an interest in landscape planning, design and management within the Study Area.

8.2.2 In line with the aims and objectives set out in Section 1.2, the principal recommended application of the Landscape Character Assessments is in relation to the local authority planning process. Practical uses of the Landscape Character Assessments in this regard include:

- Raising the general awareness in the planning process of the importance of landscape character in contributing to quality of life within the Study Area by recognising:
 - * both the differences and similarities between places
 - * what gives different places their special local identity and distinctiveness
 - * the need to protect and enhance special and valued characteristics
 - * that development needs to be sympathetic to these special qualities
 - * the need to actively improve the quality of places through good design.
- Informing the formulation of character-based landscape policies in the Local Development Framework.
- Providing the spatial framework for considering the landscape character implications of options for different scales and patterns of strategic development in the Local Development Framework.
- Informing development control decisions about proposals for built development and other forms of land use change.
- Informing the Strategic Environmental Assessment and evidence base of the Local Development Frameworks of the impact of new development on landscape character.
- Providing a framework for more detailed studies to enhance the evidence base, and for the targeting of landscape enhancements in concert with development schemes.
- Informing design guidance to promote higher quality landscape design.
- Providing a baseline for monitoring the impact of new development on landscape character and quality.

- 8.2.3 Planners, developers, architects, urban designers, landscape architects and other professionals may also find the characterisation information and guidelines useful as a reference source for informing the site masterplanning and building design process for specific development schemes. Other applications of the Landscape Character Assessments include its use by those involved in the targeting and delivery of environmental land management schemes - e.g. Environmental Stewardship advisers, landowners and managers. Local communities and other stakeholders may also find the Study useful as a basis for guiding their responses to consultations by the local planning authorities on plans, strategies and planning applications that may have significant implications for their local landscapes.

8.3 Incorporating Landscape Character into Local Development Frameworks

Key Issues to be Addressed by LDF Policies

- 8.3.1 The landscape planning policy framework in the Study Area was outlined in Section 1.4. In summary, the focus of the current national and emerging regional planning policy framework in relation to the protection and enhancement of landscape character can be summarised as:

- Sustainable development is the overarching objective and priority.
- Landscape character, settlement character and local distinctiveness should be taken into consideration in development.
- Landscape character should inform but not constrain development.
- The countryside is to be protected for its own sake but development that supports the rural economy should be considered.
- Core policies need to be clear, concise and criteria-based.
- A strong evidence base is required to support policies and any Supplementary Planning Documents.
- Local landscape designations and green wedges/strategic gaps, where these are to be retained, need justification based on a formal and robust assessment.
- Design policy is an important means for achieving landscape character objectives.

- 8.3.2 The range of issues affecting landscape character in the Study Area was identified in Section 2.4. The key issues in relation to planning can be summarised as follows:

- *Built development* – expansion of suburban character and pattern; use of standardised housing designs/inappropriate building methods/materials/details that ignore local vernacular; expansion of industrial, leisure and retail developments on settlement edges; pressure on open character of countryside gaps.
- *Infrastructure* - loss of tranquillity from road and development growth/widespread lighting; increase in power lines, telecommunication masts and associated buildings.
- *Small-scale and incremental change* - gentrification, suburbanisation and extension of rural settlements, dwellings and gardens; planting of exotic species, urban style fencing and lighting; loss of locally distinctive features such as walls, fences, signs, etc; increased car use/erosion of narrow lanes/adverse impact on landscape and settlement character/obtrusive road signage and traffic calming measures.
- *Settlements in their landscape settings* - relationship between settlement core and landscape severed by settlement expansion; new development unsympathetic to original settlement pattern and relationship with landscape; poor relationships between settlement and landscape/key views/landmarks/other landscape features.
- *Recreation and tourism* – access infrastructure; horse-related developments, golf courses.

- *Climate change* – reducing the causes of climate change through energy conservation/efficiency and increased use of renewable energy sources; adapting to the consequences of climate change in relation to flood risk and sea level rise.

8.3.3 In order to most effectively address these issues, it is recommended that the commissioning authorities use this Landscape Character Assessment to underpin a character-based approach to landscape protection and enhancement in their Core Strategies. This is consistent with approaches by other authorities in England where criteria-based landscape character policies, with supporting guidance, are replacing the traditional reliance on Local Landscape Designations where these are considered to be too blunt an instrument for delivering sustainable development in landscape terms. The following approaches to incorporating landscape character within the respective Core Strategy documents are recommended based on existing and emerging best practice from Staffordshire¹ and West Sussex².

Incorporating Landscape Character into the Vision

8.3.4 It is recommended that the role of landscape in contributing to quality of life should be incorporated into the Core Strategy's Vision. For example:

'The [District/Borough] will be a place where distinctive and valued natural and historic landscapes and the built environment will be protected and enhanced over time, contributing to a high quality of life.'

Incorporating Character Objectives

8.3.5 It is recommended that a landscape character objective be included in the Core Strategy. This could be drafted as:

'To protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the varied landscape character within the [District/Borough] reflecting landscape sensitivity and promoting local distinctiveness.'

8.3.6 In addition, it is recommended that a settlement character objective should also be included in the Core Strategy. This could be drafted as:

'To protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the locally distinctive and historic character of the urban and rural settlements and their settings within the [District/Borough] and to retain the separation between settlements.'

8.3.7 To support the above character objectives, it is recommended that a design objective is also included, such as:

'To promote high quality design and a rigorous design process that embodies sustainable development and management principles, takes full account of site and context, respects and enhances the character of the area, and provides for inclusive access.'

¹ Planning for Landscape Change - an Introduction and User's Guide to Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Plan 1996-2011 (Staffordshire County Council, 1999).

² Countryside Agency Demonstration Project - Criteria-based Landscape Policies and Guidance in Local Development Documents : an Approach in West Sussex, Report No.1 Policies (White Consultants, February 2006)

Drafting Core Policies and Supporting Text

- 8.3.8 It is recommended that a criteria-based landscape character policy is included in each local authority's core strategy as a replacement for/in preference to Local Landscape Designations. The Policy should include reference to the following main components:
- Landscape character and local distinctiveness to be protected, conserved and, where possible, enhanced.
 - Proposals for development to take into account the key characteristics, local distinctiveness and the sensitivities to change of the relevant Landscape Character Areas identified by this Landscape Character Assessment.
 - Development to be permitted where it can protect, conserve and enhance:
 - * landscape character and local distinctiveness of the area (including its historical, biodiversity and cultural character and its tranquillity)
 - * the distinctive setting of, and relationship between, settlement and buildings and the landscape including important views
 - * the function of watercourses, woodland, trees, field boundaries, vegetation and other landscape features as ecological corridors
 - * the special qualities of rivers, waterways, wetlands and their surroundings
 - * the topography of the area including sensitive skylines, hillsides and geological features.
- 8.3.9 The policy needs to be drafted to reflect the predominant landscape character of the respective District/Borough as required – such as emphasising the particular character and sensitivities of coastal landscapes in Maldon District for example.
- 8.3.10 It is recommended that the supporting text for the landscape character policy should include reference to the following:
- Landscape character is of fundamental importance to the quality of life for communities in all areas.
 - High priority to be afforded to the protection, conservation and enhancement of landscape character in delivering sustainable development in line with Government policy.
 - A clear definition of landscape character and local distinctiveness.
 - The intended preparation of a joint Supplementary Planning Document (if appropriate) to provide guidance on how the overall character of each Landscape Character Area identified in the Landscape Character Assessment can be protected, conserved and enhanced.
 - Other existing character studies (e.g. the Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation Study) and proposed studies that provide part of the evidence base for landscape and settlement character.
 - Well-designed, high quality new development within rural areas that helps sustain and/or create landscapes with a strong sense of place and local identity to be encouraged.
 - Encouragement for landscape enhancement schemes, submission of landscape design statement with planning applications and provision of landscape-scale management plans/strategies.
- 8.3.11 The character of settlements within the Study Area is also of importance to the quality of life. Subject to provision of an appropriate evidence base being available (see Section 8.5 for details), a criteria-based settlement character policy is recommended - either in combination with the landscape character policy or as a separate policy. The formulation of a settlement character policy should include reference to the following main components:

- Settlement character and local distinctiveness to be protected, conserved and, where possible, enhanced.
- Proposals for development within and/or on the edge of settlements to take into account settlement character including its distinct identity, historic core pattern, setting and, in appropriate places, separation from adjacent settlements.
- Development to be permitted, provided that settlement character is protected, conserved and, where possible, enhanced.

8.3.12 It is recommended that the supporting text for the settlement character policy should include reference to the following:

- Settlement pattern of separate settlements with intervening countryside is highly valued by local communities.
- Retaining the separate identity, character and the visual and functional amenity of settlements and preventing coalescence is a key objective.
- The intended preparation/facilitation of studies to contribute to the evidence base for the preparation of a joint Supplementary Planning Document (if appropriate) to provide guidance on how the overall character of towns and villages within the Study Area can be protected, conserved and enhanced.
- Studies include Urban Archaeological Surveys, Conservation Area Appraisals, Settlement-Edge Studies, and Local Distinctiveness Studies, and Town/Village Design Statements and Parish Plans developed by local communities.
- Encouragement for landscape enhancement schemes, submission of landscape design statements with planning applications and provision of landscape-scale management plans/strategies.

8.3.13 Based on the advice set out in paragraphs 8.3.8 to 8.3.12 above, a recommended draft policy for consistent use across all the local authorities' Core Strategies is included as Appendix F.

Incorporating Landscape Character into Other Core Policies

8.3.14 To support the above landscape/settlement character policies, it is recommended that local character considerations should also be incorporated into the following policies:

- *Design Policy* - to include reference to character, local distinctiveness, design process and use of design statements.
- *Nature Conservation Policy* - to include reference to European, national and locally designated wildlife sites, meeting BAP targets in ways that reinforce local landscape character, etc.
- *Heritage Policy* - to include reference to listed buildings, Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments, etc.

Developing a Joint Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Document

8.3.15 Building on the partnership approach to the preparation of the Landscape Character Assessments, it is recommended that consideration is given to developing a joint Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford. The aims of this 'Landscape Character SPD' would be to:

- Develop a co-ordinated approach or 'toolkit' for using the Landscape Character Assessment and other characterisation information to inform criteria-based planning policies and guidance in Local Development Documents (LDDs).

- Make the link between planning policy work and landscape management guidance for landowners and managers.
- Promote consistent approaches to development control practice by the five local planning authorities.

8.3.16 This approach would help integrate development planning with conservation and land management, in line with the requirements of PPS12³.

8.3.17 The purpose of the SPD would be to support the core and development control policies in the respective LDDs, and should therefore have a direct correlation with these policies. As advised by PPS12, the SPD should be relatively concise and criteria and process-based, without being over prescriptive. It should provide the link between the Landscape Character Assessments that form the evidence base, and the LDD policies. Subject to development of appropriate evidence bases (see Section 8.4), it is recommended that the Landscape Character SPD could incorporate Settlement Character and Design issues, or be complemented by separate SPDs addressing such issues. Examples of this type of SPD include High Peak Borough Council's Landscape Character SPD⁴.

8.4 Monitoring Landscape Change

8.4.1 In order to measure the effectiveness of planning policies in protecting, conserving and enhancing landscape character, quality and local distinctiveness, it is recommended that the local planning authorities give consideration to developing a framework for monitoring landscape change within the Landscape Character Areas identified by this Study. An outline of a possible monitoring framework is set out below as a starting point for consideration and further development as appropriate.

Defining Landscape Change

8.4.2 Policies and proposals can affect landscape in two basic ways:

- by impacting on *landscape character* – the subtle cumulative effects of often small-scale and incremental development over time on the underlying characteristics that affect sense of a place and contribute to local identity and distinctiveness;
- by impacting on *landscape quality* – typically through abrupt changes of development that either enhance or cause the loss or deterioration in landscape features that are of particular value.

8.4.3 In both cases, it is often changes related to the intangible attributes of landscape character (e.g. scale, pattern, texture, enclosure, visual stimuli, sense of tranquillity, etc), rather than physical elements, that most affect quality and character. This makes monitoring landscape change problematic. In relation to the first type of change, it is recommended that the local planning authorities jointly commission a project to devise a methodology for monitoring and measuring the impact of small-scale and incremental change on landscape character. Current work in West Sussex being led by the Chichester Harbour AONB Unit may offer some useful guidance in this respect.

³ PPS12 Local Development Frameworks (ODPM, 2004).

⁴ High Peak Borough Local Development Framework : Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Document SPD5 (High Peak Borough Council, Adopted March 2006).

Developing Monitoring Objectives

- 8.4.4 Taking into account the suggested components of the landscape and settlement character policy in Section 8.3, the overall objective is to monitor the effectiveness of policies and proposals in protecting, conserving and enhancing elements that contribute to the character, quality and local distinctiveness of landscapes and settlements within the Study Area. This should use the relevant strategy objectives for each Landscape Character Area set out in Sections 3.0 to 7.0 of this report as the basis against which to monitor change.

Developing Monitoring Targets

- 8.4.5 In line with the suggested policy approach, the target against which the monitoring should be carried out is for development to have no net significant adverse affect on the character or quality of landscape character as described in the relevant Landscape Character Area descriptions, and wherever possible development should contribute positively by enhancing landscape character through high quality and innovative design.

Developing Monitoring Indicators

- 8.4.6 The Countryside Agency⁵ advise that specific features or attributes need to be selected from the key characteristics of individual Landscape Character Areas to act as indicators for monitoring changes within different areas. In relation to this Study, the criteria for selection of features or attributes as indicators include that they must be:

- central to the distinctive character of the individual Landscape Character Areas;
- liable to experience change either in extent or in their condition;
- capable of being measured against the key objectives for individual Landscape Character Areas and the overall monitoring target.

- 8.4.7 The selection of indicators also needs to consider the following:

- they need to be defined precisely in terms of desired trends;
- the desired direction of change (target) of the chosen indicator must be known;
- where possible, local stakeholders should be involved in the choice of indicators, particularly where there participation is needed to collect information to monitor changes.

- 8.4.8 Taking the above considerations into account, suggested indicators for monitoring changes to individual Landscape Character Areas include:

- change in the extent of existing characteristic elements in the landscape;
- change in the condition of existing characteristic elements in the landscape;
- change in the extent and form of new elements in the landscape;

⁵ Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland : Topic Paper 2 – Links to Other Sustainability Tools (Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002).

- change in the degree of key factors affecting landscape experience/sense of place (tranquillity/disturbance) and social benefits/well-being (access to wildlife, public open space);
- alteration and loss of vernacular buildings and other structures that contribute local distinctiveness.

8.4.9 In addition, suggested process indicators for monitoring landscape change could include:

- change in the coverage of landscape enhancement schemes;
- change in the number of landscape design statements submitted with planning applications;
- change in the coverage of completed landscape-scale management plans/strategies.

8.4.10 It is acknowledged that assembling data for monitoring landscape change against these indicators can potentially be a resource intensive process. As a minimum, it is recommended that the three process indicators set out in paragraph 8.4.9 are used to monitor the impact of the recommended policy set out in Appendix F.

8.5 Enhancing the Character Evidence Base

8.5.1 This Landscape Character Assessment provides information to help understand the distinctive character of landscapes within the Study Area, and it is expected that the evidence base will be treated as a material consideration in planning decisions. A variety of other character-based studies are needed to more fully inform the LDF policies and any SPDs. It is therefore recommended that, over time, the authorities work together with Essex County Council and other key partners to enhance the current character evidence base within the framework provided by this Landscape Character Assessment.

8.5.2 Options for enhancing the evidence base in relation to the character of the landscape (and settlements) within the Study Area include:

- **Local Distinctiveness Studies** – these should complement and significantly expand upon the content of this Landscape Character Assessment to provide comprehensive illustrated information and analysis of distinctive settlement forms/patterns, building styles and materials, and countryside signage/furniture.
- **Landscape Design Guidance** – to promote sensitive and high quality landscape design, by providing guidance on how the settings of new development can be carried out in accordance with the design policies of the Local Development Framework in order to help retain local distinctiveness.
- **Settlement Studies** – including for example Townscape Character Assessments, urban archaeological surveys, settlement-edge studies, Conservation Area Character Appraisals, Town and Village Design Statements, and Parish Plans.
- **Local Landscape Studies** - more detailed assessments of landscape character at the local scale, undertaken to inform place-specific planning, design and management issues.
- **Historic Environment Characterisation Studies** - detailed integrated assessments of built heritage, historic landscape features and archaeological potential on a character area basis (in conjunction with Essex County Council).

- ***Area-based Regeneration Initiatives*** – detailed character appraisal studies to inform and underpin masterplans and design frameworks for the renewal and reuse of brownfield sites around settlement edges.
- ***Green Infrastructure Network Plans*** – long-term plans to establish networks of multi-functional green infrastructure sites, corridors and areas within the countryside in and around the District's/Borough's main settlements in concert with expansion proposals.
- ***Green Space Strategies*** – detailed strategies for delivering high quality parks and other public open spaces, based on PPG17⁶ open space audits and need assessments, prepared in line with CABE Space guidance⁷.
- ***River Corridor Environmental Strategies*** – including a coherent vision, objectives and an action plan for the long-term conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of key river corridors within the Study Area.

⁶ PPG17 - Open Space, Sport and Recreation (HMSO, 2002).

⁷ Green Space Strategies - a Good Practice Guide (CABE Space, Undated).

