

**Leicester PUA Landscape Character  
Assessment and Landscape Capacity  
Study**

**Executive Summary**

for

Harborough District Council

**September 2009**

**Final Report**



## ***Introduction***

- 0.1 The Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study report was commissioned by Harborough District Council in July 2009. The report identifies landscape character sub-areas within the wider High Leicestershire and Lutterworth Lowlands landscape character areas in the vicinity of Leicester. It also provides a detailed analysis of the landscape capacity of land in and around the edge of Leicester and the nearby villages of Thurnby, Bushby and Scraftoft, with a view to assessing the potential suitability to accommodate future development, particularly residential.

## ***Context***

- 0.2 This study builds on work undertaken at both the national, county and district scale. At a national level, Leicester is located within close to Character Areas 93: High Leicestershire and 94: Leicestershire Vales. At a county level this part of Leicester falls within High Leicestershire and the Lutterworth Lowlands Landscape Character Areas and is close to the Upper Soar. At the district level this part of Leicester falls within or close to the same Landscape Character Areas.
- 0.3 As well as the context of existing Landscape Character Assessments, the Harborough District Local Plan, as Adopted in April 2001, designated a large area of the open countryside as an 'Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside' under saved Policy EV/4. This area is intended to prevent proposals that would 'adversely affect the character and appearance of the landscape'. The Harborough District Local Plan also contains saved Policy EV/3, which relates to Separation Areas, and saved Policy EV/2, which relates to 'Green Wedges'. These areas are designated to prevent coalescence of settlements and provide open space within built up areas.

## ***Landscape Character Assessment***

- 0.4 The methodology used for the Landscape Character Assessment is based on the national guidance found in 'Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland' (2002) and the other associated Topic Papers. The precise approach was also determined to meet the requirements of Harborough District Council in the development of their Local Development Documents.
- 0.5 The Landscape Character Assessment involved a desk based assessment of the study area using the existing Harborough District Landscape Character Areas together with Landscape Description Units (LDUs), a desk based national data set from the Countryside Agency. This was followed by a field survey to refine boundaries, identify key features, record landscape condition and incorporate the visual/aesthetic/perceptual dimension. Urban areas, as currently identified in the saved Policy HS/8 'Limits to Development', were not surveyed but the interface of Leicester and the surrounding villages with the rural areas was considered. The field survey was carried out in August 2009, visiting all land identified within the study area boundary provided by Harborough District Council.
- 0.6 Landscape Character Assessment work identified four different Landscape Character Areas as follows:
- 1 Wistow Agricultural Parkland
  - 2 Leicester Fringes
  - 3 High Leicestershire - Central
  - 4 High Leicestershire - Estates
- 0.7 For each of the identified Landscape Character Areas, a brief description has been prepared and the key characteristics identified. These form the context for the next stage of work, relating to Landscape Capacity. As part of the description of the Character Areas, a 'Condition and Strength of Character Matrix' is included. This can has been used to assess any landscape's potential ability to adapt to change without losing its intrinsic character, by analysing the condition of the landscape compared with its strength of character. The result derives the general strategy for each Landscape Character Area. For example where a landscape area is assessed overall as in good 'condition' but only moderate 'strength of character' the strategy will be to 'conserve and

strengthen'. Once this primary strategy is established, an approximation of the sensitivity of the landscape can also be applied.

0.8 The sensitivity of each of the Landscape Character Areas has been identified as follows:

1	Wistow Agricultural Parkland	High Sensitivity
2	Leicester Fringes	Moderate Sensitivity
3	High Leicestershire – Central	High Sensitivity
4	High Leicestershire – Estates	High Sensitivity

### ***Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Capacity***

0.9 The methodology to assess the capacity of the landscape to accommodate development, while respecting its character, is developed from the guidance in Topic Paper 6 – 'Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity'. This paper forms part of the Countryside Agency and Scottish Heritage 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland'. Topic Paper 6 also reflects the thinking in the publication 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' 2002.

0.10 The methodology developed for this study adopts the premise that:

*"existing landscape features + visual sensitivity = Overall Landscape Sensitivity"*

0.11 A number of criteria have been selected to identify both existing landscape features and visual sensitivities. These criteria reflect both the national guidance in Topic Paper 6 and the particular circumstances for the rural landscape around Market Harborough. The criteria selected to reflect existing landscape features are:

- slope analysis
- vegetation enclosure
- complexity and scale of the landscape
- condition of the landscape.

The criteria selected to reflect visual sensitivity are:

- openness to public view
- openness to private views
- relationship with existing urban built form
- prevention of coalescence
- scope to mitigate development

0.12 The scale of landscape units used for the sensitivity and capacity study was reduced from the LCA work with smaller scale 'Land Parcels' being assessed. These included single or multiple groups of field units with similar characteristics. This process enabled a more detailed consideration of capacity.

0.13 The Overall Landscape Sensitivity provides an evaluation of the sensitivity of a Land Parcel in broad strategic terms. In order to assess the Overall Landscape Capacity of a Land Parcel, 'landscape value' was added to the equation, as follows.

*"Overall Landscape Sensitivity + Landscape Value = Overall Landscape Capacity"*

0.14 In the absence of any specific stakeholder consultation, the landscape value of the Land Parcels was assessed by considering proximity to existing landscape designations. In Harborough District the Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside designation was used, as was the Green Wedge designation. The Separation Area designation was not included in the consideration of landscape value since this relates to coalescence which is covered in separate criteria.

- 0.15 To effectively assess the landscape capacity of a site, an assumption was made as to the form that the potential development will take. For the purposes of this study it is assumed that development would include in the main 2-3 storey residential development. Employment areas will comprise 2-3 storey buildings. It was not anticipated that there would be any taller structures unless otherwise stated in the detailed Land Parcel Sheets.
- 0.16 Each Land Parcel identified during fieldwork was assessed against the criteria noted above, using a 5-point scale. The criteria were then scored, with 5 points being awarded to A's (the most suitable for development) and 1 point to E's (the least suitable for development). The scores were totalled for each Land Parcel to provide both a Landscape Sensitivity Profile and a Landscape Capacity Profile. The total score was then allocated an Overall Capacity value by using the following range, based on the range of scores achieved in the study area.
- 15 – 19 = Low Landscape Capacity
  - 20 – 24 = Medium Low Landscape Capacity
  - 25 – 29 = Medium Landscape Capacity
  - 30 – 34 = Medium High Landscape Capacity
  - 35 – 39 = High Landscape Capacity
- 0.17 A total of 29 different Land Parcels were assessed in this part of the study. The completed Land Parcel Sheets and associated Overall Capacity values identified areas with relatively higher landscape capacity to accommodate new development. These included a number of Parcels of land south east of Oadby and in close proximity to the recent residential development in the former Stretton Hall estate, enclosed Land Parcels to the north east of Thurnby and Land Parcels to the north of Scraptoft.
- 0.18 Areas least suitable for development include the steep slopes to the south of Thurnby and Bushby, and small Parcels of land between Scraptoft and Leicester.