

Leicester PUA Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study

for

Harborough District Council

September 2009

Final Report

Quality control

Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study

of

Leicester PUA

for

Harborough District Council

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Contents

- 0 Executive Summary
- 1 Introduction
- 2 Context
 - National Context*
 - County Council Context*
 - Local Context*
 - Other Landscape Character Assessments*
- 3 Landscape Character Assessment – Methodology
 - Briefing*
 - Project Administration*
 - Desk Based Stage*
 - Field Survey*
 - The characterisation process*
 - Boundaries*
 - Landscape Character Areas*
- 4 Landscape Character Assessment – Leicester PUA Sub Areas
 - Wistow Agricultural Parkland*
 - Leicester Fringes*
 - High Leicestershire – Central*
 - High Leicestershire - Estates*
- 5 Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Capacity
 - Methodology*

Figures

- Drawing 01 - Existing Landscape Character Assessments and Landscape Designations
- Drawing 02 – Local Landscape Character Areas
- Drawing 03 – Local Landscape Character Areas – Sensitivity
- Drawing 04 – Individual Land Parcels (Southern Area) – Capacity
- Drawing 05 – Individual Land Parcels (Northern Area) – Capacity

Appendices

- Appendix A – Extract from Harborough District Council Landscape Character Assessment
- Appendix B – Field Survey Form
- Appendix C – Capacity Appraisal Forms

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Landscape Partnership was commissioned in July 2009 to undertake the preparation of an outline Landscape Character Assessment and a Landscape Capacity Study for the rural areas of Harborough District in the vicinity of Leicester. The brief for the project required the following main outputs, which will be used to inform the Council's Core Strategy and other Local Development Documents, following the format of a previous study undertaken by The Landscape Partnership for Market Harborough:
- An assessment of the landscape character and sensitivity of the wider landscape within Harborough District around Leicester, building on work undertaken at a county, district and local level;
 - A detailed analysis of the sensitivity of land around the edge of Leicester, and to assess its capacity to accommodate future development, particularly residential
- 1.2 The assessment work has been undertaken in two stages. Stage One involved the identification of Landscape Character Areas within the whole of the study area and the key characteristics present. The areas identified are effectively 'sub areas' of the wider 'High Leicestershire' and 'Lutterworth Lowlands' Landscape Character Areas, which had already been identified at a County and District level. This stage does not constitute a fully detailed Landscape Character Assessment, but was sufficient to provide context, at an appropriate scale, for Stage Two.
- 1.3 Stage Two involved a more detailed consideration of the landscape sensitivity and landscape capacity of the study area. This was considered at a smaller scale of units based around individual fields, groups of fields or parcels of land. The assessment used a consistent method that evaluated the Land Parcels against a number of criteria, to test both the sensitivity of a unit and its capacity to accept development in the context of the character of the wider landscape within which they are situated. Stage Two considered areas that were closer to the periphery of the existing settlements, as this is where future growth is likely to be targeted i.e. land adjacent to Leicester and the nearby villages of Thurnby, Bushby and Scraftoft.
- 1.4 This study builds on work undertaken at both the national, county and district scale, as discussed in more detail in section 2 of this report.

2 Context

National Context

- 2.1 The process of landscape characterisation and assessment has been promoted at a national scale in England by the work of the Natural England (formerly Countryside Agency). In tandem with English Nature, parallel approaches were formulated and tested by the Countryside Agency during 1995-97 to derive, on the one hand, a series of Natural Area profiles for the whole of England and, on the other, Countryside Character profiles. While the Natural Area profiles highlighted the distinctive ecology of rural areas, the Countryside Character profiles analysed landscape character in fairly broad-brush terms via the assessment of physical influences, historic and cultural influences, buildings and settlement, land cover and changes in the landscape.
- 2.2 Through this process 159 Character Areas were formulated and published, as 'The Character of England: landscape, wildlife and natural features' (see Figure 1). The detailed descriptions for the areas are included within eight separate volumes with 'Volume 4: East Midlands' being the relevant volume for Harborough District and the fringes of Leicester.



Figure 1 – Countryside Character Areas – National Picture

- 2.3 This national character map defines Leicester as lying within or close to the following Character Areas (See Figure 2 and Drawing 01):
- Area 93 High Leicestershire
 - Area 94 Leicestershire Vales

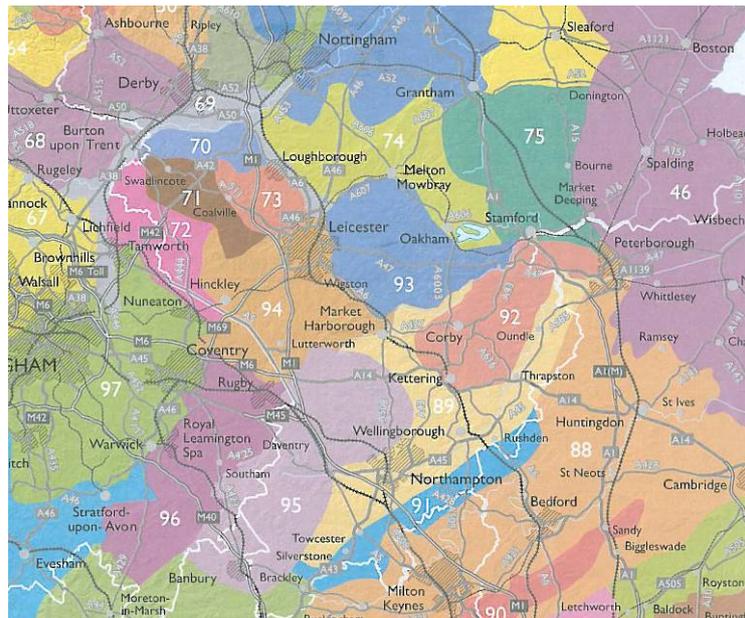


Figure 2 – Countryside Character Areas – Detail around Leicester

2.4 Current guidance on carrying out character work is provided in ‘Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland’ (2002). The approach is currently enshrined as a major planning tool in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7, 2004). PPS7 sets out some important overarching principles for raising the quality of life and the environment in rural areas, with the ‘continued protection of open countryside for the benefit of all.’ It sets out that sustainable patterns of development should focus development in or next to existing settlements, while also maximising the benefits of the urban fringe landscapes with leisure opportunities for the local population. In particular two of the Key Principles in PPS7 state:

iv), *‘New building in the open countryside away from settlements or outside areas allocated for development in development plans, should be strictly controlled; the Governments overall aim is to protect the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, the wealth of its natural resources and so it may be enjoyed by all.’* (our emphasis)

vi) *All development in rural areas should be well designed and inclusive, in keeping and scale with its location, and sensitive to the character of the countryside and the local distinctiveness.* (our emphasis)

County Council Context

2.5 The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996 to 2016 (adopted in 2005) embraced the concept of landscape character assessment through Strategy Policy 8 and paragraphs 2.40 - 2.42, with reference to PPS7. The Structure Plan also referred to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy, which was adopted as supplementary planning guidance and essentially defined the current county scale character areas. This Strategy is therefore of relevance to Harborough District. The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy identifies eighteen Landscape Character Areas (see Figure 3) within the whole of Leicestershire and Rutland, of which Leicester falls within or is close to the following Landscape Character Areas:

- High Leicestershire
- Lutterworth Lowlands
- Upper Soar

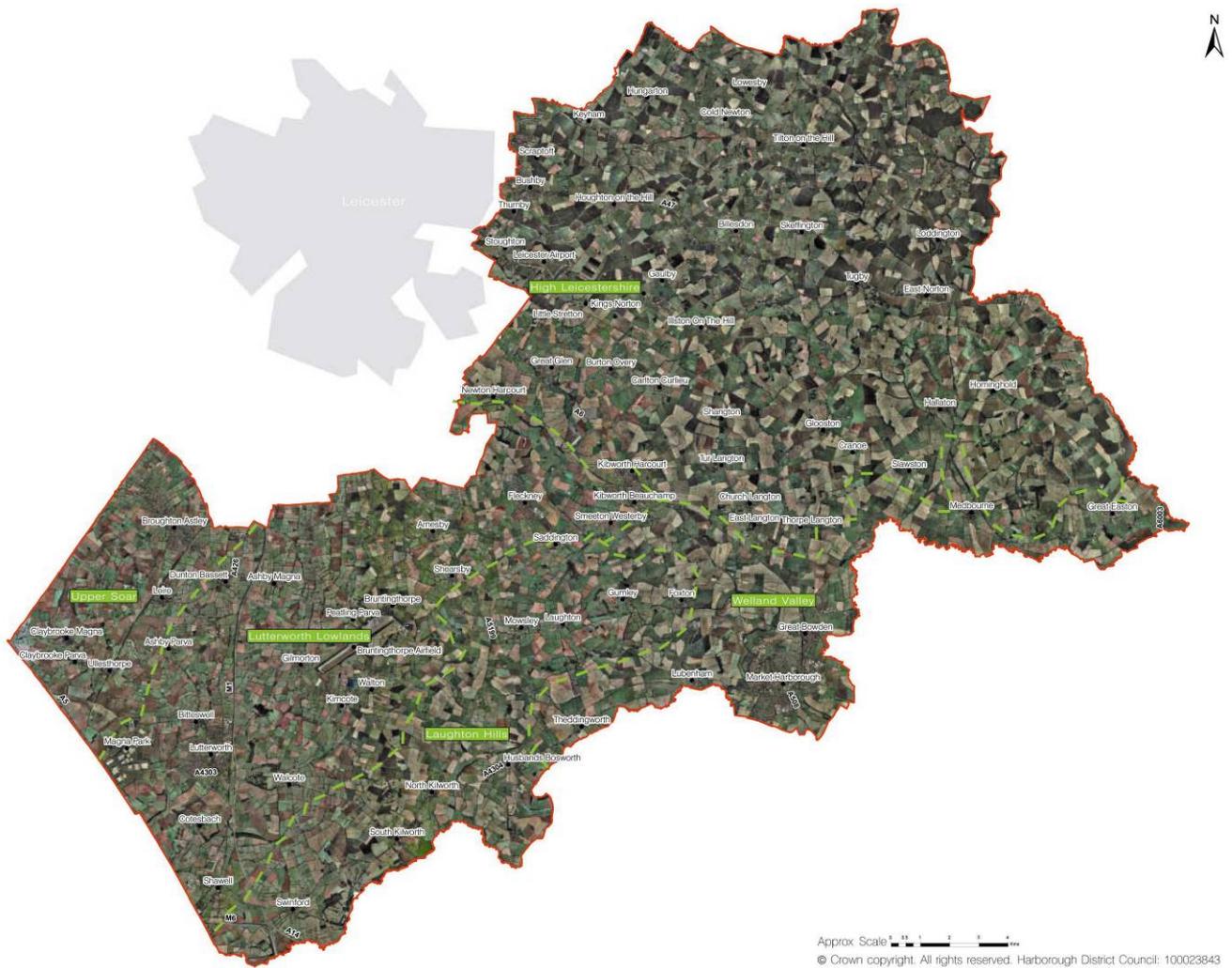


Figure 4 – Harborough District Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.7 Within the District Landscape Character Assessment, each Landscape Character Area is described and Key Characteristics are defined. The capacity of the landscape to accommodate change is then discussed and key issues facing the integrity of the character area are identified. The fringes of Leicester fall within the High Leicestershire and Lutterworth Lowlands Landscape Character Areas (see Appendix A for full Character Area descriptions).
- 2.8 Within the Harborough District Local Plan, as Adopted in April 2001, a large area of the open countryside within Harborough District is designated an Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside under saved Policy EV/4 (see Drawing 01). This area is intended to prevent proposals that would ‘adversely affect the character and appearance of the landscape’. In relation to Leicester, land to the east of the city is designated as an as Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside. This designation is on average approximately 3km east of the District boundary.
- 2.9 The Harborough District Local Plan also contains saved Policy EV/3, which relates to ‘Separation Areas’. These areas are designated to prevent coalescence of settlements (see Drawing 01). Within these areas, development that would ‘adversely affect the predominantly open character of the land’ or ‘result in a reduction in the existing open land separating the settlements concerned’ will not be permitted. Areas of land between Scraftoft and Thurnby/Bushby is covered by this designation.
- 2.10 Saved Policy EV/2 of the Harborough District Local Plan relates to ‘Green Wedges’. These areas are designated to protect the open and undeveloped character of land on the fringes of Leicester (see Drawing 01). This designation is derived from the Leicestershire Structure Plan, which designated 12 Green Wedges around Leicester. The purpose of Green Wedges is “not to seek to

restrict the growth of an urban area but to aim to ensure that, as urban development extends, open land is incorporated within it. The green wedges should remain open and undeveloped to prevent the coalescence of settlements on the fringe of Leicester and to retain links with the countryside. They lie outside the area covered by countryside policies". Two areas of Green Wedge fall within the study area, Leicester/Scraftoft and Thurnby/Leicester/Oadby.

Other Landscape Character Assessments

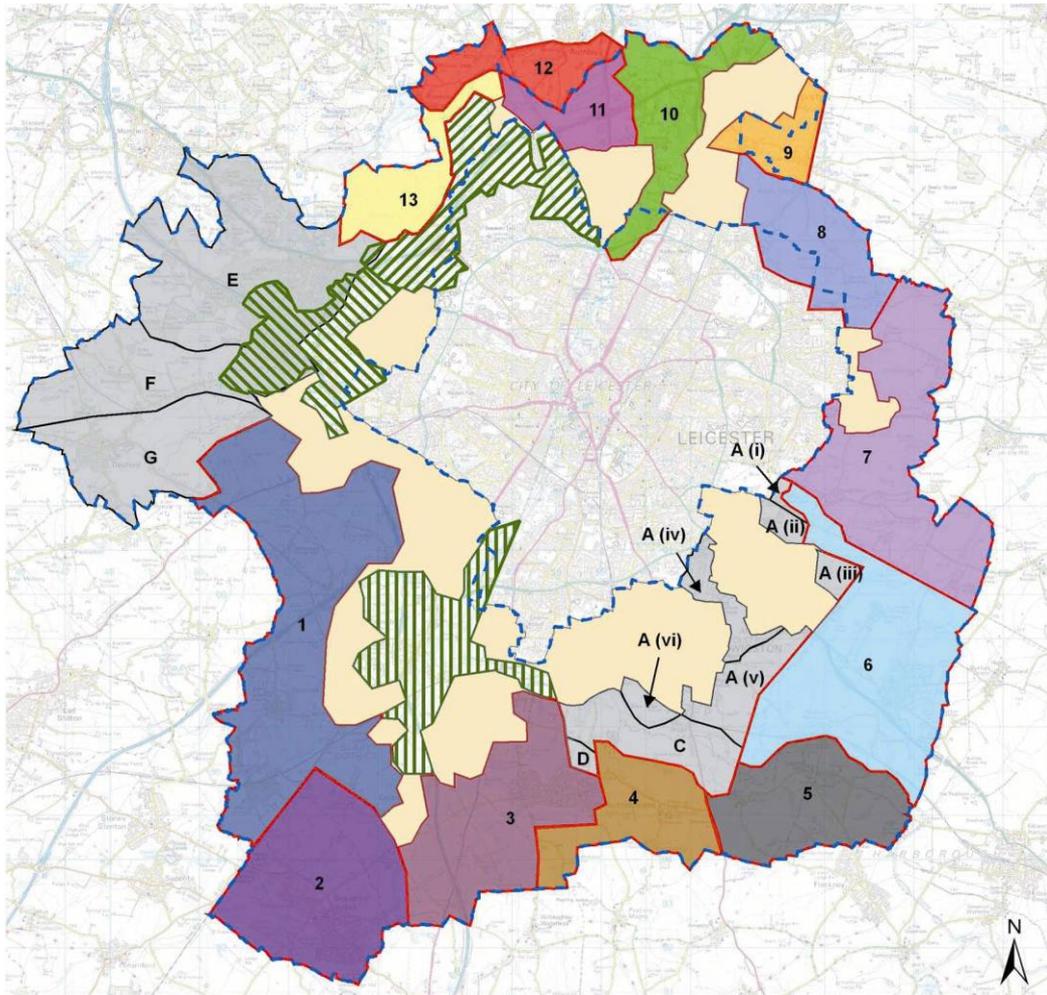
- 2.11 The Stepping Stones Project is a partnership set up to 'improve greenspace and make high quality green infrastructure accessible to all' in and around Leicester. The project is supported by the Local Authorities within and adjacent to the city of Leicester (see Figure 01 for extent of Stepping Stones Project in relation to Harborough District). Amongst other work undertaken by the Project, a Landscape Character Assessment has been produced for the fringes of Leicester. The study combines new Landscape Character Areas, identified by the Stepping Stones project, with existing Landscape Character Assessment work undertaken by both Oadby & Wigston Borough Council and Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (see Figure 5 below). The Stepping Stones Landscape Character Assessment, with the Oadby & Wigston Landscape Character Assessment, identifies 13 character areas and sub character areas adjacent to Harborough District (see Drawing 01), which are:

Oadby and Wigston

- A - Oadby and Wigston Vales
 - (i) Stoughton
 - (ii) Thurnby and Oadby Green Wedge
 - (iii) Oadby Grange
 - (iv) Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge
 - (v) Wigston East
 - (vi) Wigston South
- C – Sence Valley

Stepping Stones Project

- Foston Open Farmland
- Wistow and Newton Harcourt Agricultural Parkland
- Great Glen Agricultural Parkland
- Thurnby Wooded Slopes
- Barkby Plateau
- Watermead Country Park



© Stepping Stones

Figure 5 – Stepping Stones Landscape Character Areas

3 Landscape Character Assessment – Methodology

- 3.1 The methodology used 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.

Project Administration

- 3.2 The project was monitored throughout the contract period by officers within the LDF team at Harborough District Council. Monitoring included the use of the following:
- progress meetings
 - liaison by phone
 - work programme
 - correspondence - by letter, fax and e-mail

Desk Based Stage

- 3.3 The initial stage of the Landscape Character Assessment involved the assessment of the study area using the existing Harborough District Landscape Character Areas and Level 1 scale Landscape Description Units (LDUs). LDUs are distinct and relatively homogenous units of land, each defined by a series of definitive attributes, so called because they define the extent of each spatial unit. This is subdivision at a national/regional scale in accordance with the Joint Character Map of England combining both Landscape Character Regions and Natural Areas and is provided as a desk based analysis by the Countryside Agency as their National Typology. Level 1 LDUs provide a framework for analysis at a finer grain.

Field Survey

- 3.4 The field survey provides the opportunity to undertake a number of key tasks, including:
- incorporating the visual/aesthetic/perceptual dimension
 - recording the condition of the landscape, including both the ecological and cultural aspects
 - identifying and refining Character Areas boundaries
 - assessing any particular qualities, and/or problems in areas of particular pressure or sensitivity
 - note distinctive features, local materials , plant species etc.
- 3.5 The survey form was developed and designed to ensure that a structured, consistent recording of information was possible. Character and condition information is collected in distinct sections, in a mixture of guided responses as well in sections of free text to provide greater opportunity for description. The study area was systematically appraised by a survey team, who considered each group of fields within the potential development areas in turn. Field survey record sheets were used to record data. A sample of the two-page pro forma used is included as Appendix B. Additional notes and photographic records supplemented the use of forms. Both notes and photographs informed the process of drafting a description of and illustrating each character area in the final report.
- 3.6 Urban areas, as currently identified in the saved Policy HS/8 'Limits to Development', were not surveyed but the interface of these urban areas with rural areas has been considered. The field survey was carried out in August 2009, visiting all land identified within the study area boundary provided by Harborough District Council. The survey team consisted of a team of two Chartered Landscape Architects, who was responsible for drafting the text and defining the boundaries of each landscape character area surveyed. A moderation process was built in, to ensure consistency of appraisal across the study area.

The characterisation process

- 3.7 Following on from the desk study and fieldwork coherent Landscape Character Areas were identified, against the wider LDU framework. For most people, landscape is strongly associated with place and Character Areas can provide an appropriate vehicle for presenting countryside information to a public audience. In this study four Character Areas were identified to form the main units of the landscape in the vicinity of Leicester, subdividing the broader High Leicestershire and Lutterworth Lowlands Character Areas identified in the previous District-wide study. Aspects of each sub area are also reflected in the character areas statements in section 4.

Boundaries

- 3.8 It should be recognised that although the drawing of boundary lines on a plan is an inevitable part of the process, this does not always mean that landscape character is dramatically different to either side of each and every line. Landscape character can suddenly change, e.g. at the interface of an historic parkland, at the foot of a steep scarp slope or at a settlement edge, but often there is a more gradual transition. In such cases the boundary line marks more a watershed of character, where the balance of the defining elements has shifted from one landscape type to another.
- 3.9 It should also be appreciated when viewing the GIS version of the landscape character areas, that the lines are digitised against a 1:10,000 base and at a scale of accuracy of c.1:2,500. This level of detail can infer that a decision has been made about which side of a road a change in landscape character occurs or whether one particular house is included in an area or not. In practice a reasonable decision has been made on the basis of the available OS data, existing boundary information and the fieldwork data and survey sheets, but will be subject to change over time and cannot in every instance be regarded as definitive, but rather as indicative of a transition.

Landscape Character Areas

- 3.10 Landscape Character Areas have been defined using the survey data from the fieldwork. The Landscape Character Areas are identified on a series of maps both as hard copy plans and digitally using GIS (ArcView 9.3). The Landscape Character Areas are as follows (see Drawing 02):
- 1 Wistow Agricultural Parkland
 - 2 Leicester Fringes
 - 3 High Leicestershire - Central
 - 4 High Leicestershire - Estates
- 3.11 For each of the identified Landscape Character Areas, a brief description has been prepared and the key characteristics identified (see Section 4). These form the context the next stage of work, relating to Landscape Capacity, as described in Section 5.
- 3.12 As part of the description of the Character Areas, a 'Condition and Strength of Character Matrix' has been included. In order to assess any landscape's potential ability to adapt to change without losing its intrinsic character, it is necessary to analyse the functional integrity or condition of the landscape and compare this with the strength of character as demonstrated by the more permanent or robust elements of the landscape. Landscape condition is determined from an evaluation of the relative state (poor/moderate/good) of elements within the landscape that are subject to change, such as survival of hedgerows, extent and impact of built development. Strength of character is determined from an evaluation of the impact of relatively stable factors, such as landform, pattern of land cover, the continuity of an historic pattern, the degree of visibility and its rarity.
- 3.13 Six factors were considered for condition and six different factors were considered for strength of character in relation to each area (see matrix for any area). Each factor was evaluated in the field, with a record made on the survey sheet against a three-point scale and entered in the matrix table. Values for the factors on each axis were then aggregated and a majority total applied.

3.14 The resulting intersection on the matrix derived 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', see Figure 6

Condition	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		Strength of Character		

below. Once this primary strategy is established, an approximation of the sensitivity of the landscape can also be applied (see Drawing 03), based on the five colour codings from high to low sensitivity indicated below.

Figure 6 - Landscape Strategy Matrix

	=	High Sensitivity
	=	Moderate / High Sensitivity
	=	Moderate Sensitivity
	=	Moderate / Low Sensitivity
	=	Low Sensitivity

4 Landscape Character Assessment – Leicester PUA Landscape Character Areas

Landscape Character Areas are shown on Drawing 02.

4.1 Wistow Agricultural Parkland

Location

This area is located to the south east of Leicester, running along the Grand Union Canal and River Sence, from the District boundary in the west towards Kibworth Harcourt in the east.

Key Characteristics

- Relatively flat, with localised undulations
- Part of the broad valley of the River Sence
- Predominantly pastoral farmland, grazed by sheep and cattle, with occasional hay crops
- Parkland feel with large mature parkland trees in fields and hedgerows
- Narrow, undulating roads, often with cattle grids or other traffic management features
- Strong hedgerows with a mix of species, including elm, hazel and hawthorn
- Belts of tall poplars associated with banks of the Grand Union Canal
- Vernacular stone buildings with slate roofs
- Well used for informal recreation, with good footpath network
- Brick hump back bridges associated with River and Canal

Distinctive Features

- The Grand Union Canal
- River Sence
- Wistow Hall and church
- Estate hurdle fencing around Wistow Hall
- Medieval deserted village of Wystowe with associated ridge and furrow
- Wistow Rural Centre and Maize Maze



From Wistow Road, east of Wistow Hall, looking north west

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
S1 Impact of landform*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/ Prominent
S2 Impact of landcover*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/ Prominent
S3 Historic pattern*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/ Prominent
S4 Tranquillity	Discordant	Moderate	Tranquil
S5 Distinctiveness/rarity	Frequent	Unusual	Unique/ rare
S6 Visual unity	Incoherent	Coherent	Unified
Totals * Prime character categories if tie	0	0	6
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD
C1 Landcover Change	Widespread	Localised	Insignificant
C2 Age Structure of Tree Cover*	Over mature	Mature or young	Mixed
C3 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival*	Relic	Scattered	Widespread/ Linked
C4 Management of semi-natural habitats	Poor	Not obvious	Good
C5 Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges)	Declining/Relic	Interrupted	Intact
C6 Impact of built development*	High	Moderate	Low
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	0	1	5

MATRIX	Condition	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
		Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
		Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
			Weak	Moderate	Strong
			Strength of Character		



From Wistow Road, looking south west at Wistow Hall



From Newton Lane, west of Newton Harcourt, looking east

4.2 Leicester Fringes

Location

This area is located around the eastern fringe of Leicester, outside of the Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside. The District boundary forms the western extent of the LCA.

Key Characteristics

- Strongly undulating landform with pattern of narrow soft ridges and valleys and localised plateaux
- Mixed agricultural farmland
- Localised areas of historic parkland associated with large halls and houses
- Influence by close proximity to urban Leicester
- Villages largely historically located along ridge lines and hill tops. Some larger areas of modern infill and expansion
- Hedgerows medium to low with some hedgerow trees mainly ash
- Several streams and rivers, often originating from springs on lower slopes in valleys
- Several visually intrusive developments such as Leicester Grammar School, Oadby Lodge Farm and Houghton Lodge Farm

Distinctive Features

- Gartree Road Roman Road (part of the *Via Devana* from Chester to Colchester)
- Leicester Airport and associate stretches of disused runway remaining from the origins of the airfield as RAF Leicester East in the 1940s
- Church of St Giles and deserted Medieval Village of Stretton Magna
- Stretton Hall
- Stackley House
- Disused railway from Scraftoft towards Marefield
- Stoughton church



Gartree Road, looking south west at Church of St Giles and deserted Medieval Village of Stretton Magna

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
S1 Impact of landform* S2 Impact of landcover* S3 Historic pattern* S4 Tranquillity S5 Distinctiveness/rarity S6 Visual unity	Insignificant Insignificant Insignificant Discordant Frequent Incoherent	Apparent Apparent Apparent Moderate Unusual Coherent	Dominant/ Prominent Dominant/ Prominent Dominant/ Prominent Tranquil Unique/rare Unified
Totals * Prime character categories if tie	1	4	1
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD
C1 Landcover Change C2 Age Structure of Tree Cover* C3 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival* C4 Management of semi-natural habitats C5 Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges) C6 Impact of built development*	Widespread Over mature Relic Poor Declining/Relic High	Localised Mature or young Scattered Not obvious Interrupted Moderate	Insignificant Mixed Widespread/ Linked Good Intact Low
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	0	5	1

MATRIX

Condition	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		Strength of Character		



From Gartree Road, looking north east towards Leicester Airport



From Stoughton Road looking north east towards Bushby

4.3 High Leicestershire - Central

Location

High Leicestershire – Central is located to the east of Leicester. It forms a band running north – south through Harborough District.

Key Characteristics

- Strongly undulating landform with narrow soft ridges and valleys
- Mixed agricultural farmland
- Areas of historic parkland associated with large halls and houses
- Several deserted medieval villages e.g. Carlton Curlieu, Frisby, Ingarsby, Quenby and Cold Newton (deserted due to enclosure)
- Small historic villages largely located along ridge lines – limited modern infill
- Hedgerows medium to low with some hedgerow trees mainly ash and oak
- Numerous streams and rivers, often originating from springs
- Buildings within Conservation Areas generally red brick/white painted with slate/thatch roofs
- Churches and historic halls mixture of limestone and/or sandstone

Distinctive Features

- Quenby Hall
- Ingarsby Old Hall
- Disused railway from Scraptoft towards Marefield
- Deserted medieval villages of Carlton Curlieu, Frisby, Ingarsby, Quenby and Cold Newton
- Gartree Road Roman Road (part of the *Via Devana* from Chester to Colchester)



From road between Burton Overy and Carlton Curlieu, looking north west

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
S1 Impact of landform*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/ Prominent
S2 Impact of landcover*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/ Prominent
S3 Historic pattern*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/ Prominent
S4 Tranquillity	Discordant	Moderate	Tranquil
S5 Distinctiveness/rarity	Frequent	Unusual	Unique/rare
S6 Visual unity	Incoherent	Coherent	Unified
Totals * Prime character categories if tie	1	0	5
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD
C1 Landcover Change	Widespread	Localised	Insignificant
C2 Age Structure of Tree Cover*	Over mature	Mature or young	Mixed
C3 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival*	Relic	Scattered	Widespread/ Linked
C4 Management of semi-natural habitats	Poor	Not obvious	Good
C5 Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges)	Declining/Relic	Interrupted	Intact
C6 Impact of built development*	High	Moderate	Low
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	0	1	5

MATRIX	Condition	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
		Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
		Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
			Weak	Moderate	Strong
			Strength of Character		



From Gartree Road, south east of Little Stretton, looking along route of Roman Road (now byway)



Properties and Church on Main Street, Burton Overy

4.4 High Leicestershire - Estates

Location

This area is located to the east of Leicester. It forms a band running north – south through Harborough District, up to the edge of the wider study area.

Key Characteristics

- Strongly undulating landform with some narrow valleys and some localised hills
- Large areas of intact parkland and historic estates e.g. Noseley and Rolleston
- Mature and young avenues of trees associated with estates
- Mosaic of parkland, large woodland and mixed farmland, with some large arable fields to edges
- Some localised visual intrusion from pylons and aerial masts
- Narrow gated lanes providing a private feel
- Generally tranquil and remote feel

Distinctive Features

- Rolleston Hall
- Noseley Hall
- Localised cliffs north of Billesden



From Coplow Lane, north of Billesden, looking east

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
S1 Impact of landform*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/Prominent
S2 Impact of landcover*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/Prominent
S3 Historic pattern*	Insignificant	Apparent	Dominant/Prominent
S4 Tranquillity	Discordant	Moderate	Tranquil
S5 Distinctiveness/rarity	Frequent	Unusual	Unique/rare
S6 Visual unity	Incoherent	Coherent	Unified
Totals * Prime character categories if tie	0	2	4
CONDITION	POOR	MODERATE	GOOD
C1 Landcover Change	Widespread	Localised	Insignificant
C2 Age Structure of Tree Cover*	Over mature	Mature or young	Mixed
C3 Extent of semi-natural habitat survival*	Relic	Scattered	Widespread/ Linked
C4 Management of semi-natural habitats	Poor	Not obvious	Good
C5 Survival of cultural pattern (fields and hedges)	Declining/Relic	Interrupted	Intact
C6 Impact of built development*	High	Moderate	Low
Totals * Prime condition categories if tie	0	3	3

MATRIX

Condition	Good	Strengthen and reinforce	Conserve and strengthen	Safeguard and manage
	Moderate	Improve and reinforce	Improve and conserve	Conserve and restore
	Poor	Reconstruct	Improve and restore	Restore condition to maintain character
		Weak	Moderate	Strong
		Strength of Character		



From minor road between Rolleston Hall and Skeffington, looking north east

From The Avenue, north of Noseley Hall, looking north east

5 Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Capacity

- 5.1 The methodology to assess the capacity of the landscape to accommodate development, while respecting its character, is based on 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.
- 5.2 The methodology developed for this study adopts the following premise that:
“existing landscape features + visual sensitivity = Overall Landscape Sensitivity”
- 5.3 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 Leicester.
- 5.4 The criteria were grouped into primary factors (representing features that are more permanent in the landscape, such as landform) and secondary factors (representing features that are of a more temporary or transient nature).
- 5.5 The following criteria have been selected to reflect existing landscape features:
- slope analysis (primary)
 - vegetation enclosure (primary)
 - the complexity and scale of the landscape (secondary)
 - the condition of the landscape (secondary)
- 5.6 The following criteria have been selected to reflect visual sensitivity:
- openness to public view (secondary)
 - openness to private views (secondary)
 - relationship with existing urban built form (primary)
 - prevention of coalescence (primary)
 - scope to mitigate the development (primary)
- 5.7 It is recognised that Topic Paper 6 makes reference to a wider range of factors within what is termed Landscape Character Sensitivity. However, in the context of this assessment it is assumed that these topics are covered elsewhere by the District Council e.g. nature conservation and cultural heritage features. It is considered that for the purpose of this assessment the main relevant existing landscape and visual factors are addressed in the above categories.
- 5.8 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”
- 5.9 In the absence of any specific stakeholder consultation, the landscape value of the land parcels was assessed by considering proximity to landscape designations. In Harborough District this takes the form of the Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside (Policy EV/4). In addition the designated Green Wedges (Policy EV/2) have been included in the assessment of landscape value. Whilst these are not strictly landscape designations, consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Options has suggested that local people value these designations. The purpose of the designation also relates to the open and undeveloped nature of green spaces. Separation Areas (Policy EV/3) have not been included in the assessment as a measure of landscape value as this designation is primarily intended to prevent coalescence of settlements, which is reflected separately in the coalescence criteria. This approach is consistent with the approach applied to the Landscape Capacity Study undertaken for Market Harborough.

- 5.10 To effectively assess the landscape capacity of a site, an assumption is made as to the form that the potential development will take. For the purposes of this study it is assumed that development will include in the main 2-3 storey residential development. Employment areas will comprise 2-3 storey buildings. It is not anticipated that there will be any taller structures in the assessment unless otherwise stated in the detailed Land Parcel Sheets.
- 5.11 Each site was assessed against the criteria noted above, using a 5-point scale from A to E (guided by a definitions/descriptions that have been devised for this particular study to reflect local characteristics). These definitions are contained in Table A below.
- 5.12 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. Parcels with an overall higher score are considered to be relatively less sensitive to change and to also have a relatively higher capacity. The total score is then allocated an Overall Capacity value by using the following range. The bandings between categories have been defined 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
- 5.13 It should be emphasized that no absolute conclusion should be drawn from the numerical totals. The influence of individual criteria in a given Land Parcel and in the context of the wider Landscape Character should also be given due consideration. There may be individual criteria, particularly where they are primary criteria and in the 'E' category, where it is possible that development may be incompatible unless it can be effectively mitigated. It is important that the overall spread and balance of the profiles is fully considered rather than just the total Landscape Capacity value. In other words, each proposal will still need to be considered on its merits. To aid these considerations a commentary of the key points has been provided for each land parcel.

Table A

Criteria group	Criteria	Measurement of criteria	Comments
Existing Landscape Features	Slope analysis	<p>A= Plateau</p> <p>B= Rolling /undulating landform providing some enclosure</p> <p>C= Tributary valleys/lower valley slopes/gentle side slopes</p> <p>D= Elevated landforms, plateau edge, ridges</p> <p>E= Prominent steep slopes on valley sides</p>	
	Enclosure by vegetation	<p>A= Enclosed by mature vegetation – extensive treebelts/woodland</p> <p>B= Semi-enclosed by vegetation - moderate woodland cover, good quality tall hedgerows/ hedgerows with hedgerow trees</p> <p>C= Fragmented vegetation - scattered small woodlands, fragmented shelterbelts and/or hedgerows</p> <p>D= Limited/poor hedges (with no trees) and/or isolated copses</p> <p>E= Largely open with minimal vegetation</p>	
	Complexity/ Scale	<p>A= Extensive simple landscape with single land uses</p> <p>B= Large scale landscape with limited land use and variety</p> <p>C= Large or medium scale landscape with variations in pattern, texture and scale</p> <p>D= Small or medium scale landscape with a variety in pattern, texture and scale</p> <p>E= Intimate and organic landscape with a richness in pattern, texture and scale</p>	
	Landscape Character Quality/ Condition	<p>A= Area of weak character in a poor condition</p> <p>B= Area of weak character in a moderate condition or of a moderate character in a weak condition</p> <p>C= Area of weak character in a good condition or of a moderate character in a moderate condition or of a strong character in a poor condition</p> <p>D= Area of moderate character in a good condition or of a strong character in a moderate condition</p> <p>E= Area of strong character in a good condition</p>	

Criteria group	Criteria	Measurement of criteria	Comments
Visual Factors	Openness to public view	A= Site is well contained from public views B= Site is generally well contained from public views C= Site is partially contained from public views D= Site is moderately open to public views E= Site is very open to public views	Public views will include views from Roads, Rights of Way and public open space. The evaluation considers a summer and winter evaluation. However due to the time of the study the winter evaluation was estimated based on the character of the vegetation. This criteria is also considered in association with 'Scope to mitigate the development' criteria. Score will depend on the extent of the visibility from all the site perimeters and the rights of way through site.
	Openness to private view	A= Site is well contained from private views B= Site is generally well contained from private views C= Site is partially contained from private views D= Site is moderately open to private views E= Site is very open to private views	This relates to private views from residential properties. The evaluation considers a summer and winter evaluation. However due to the time of the study the winter evaluation was estimated based on the character of the vegetation. This criteria is also considered in association with 'Scope to mitigate the development' criteria. The score will depend on the extent of the visibility from all the site perimeters.
	Relationship with existing urban built form	A= Location where built development will form a natural extension of an adjacent part of urban fabric B= Location where built development will form some close associations with the existing parts of urban fabric C= Location where built development will form some moderate associations with existing urban fabric D= Location where built development will only form some limited associations with the existing urban fabric due to major obstacles E= Location where development will be isolated from and not form any relationship with existing urban fabric	

Criteria group	Criteria	Measurement of criteria	Comments
	Prevention of coalescence	<p>A= Development would not compromise any separation</p> <p>B= Development would have slight impact on separation</p> <p>C= Development would have moderate impact on separation</p> <p>D= Development would significantly compromise separation</p> <p>E= Development would cause complete coalescence</p>	
Potential Landscape Features	Scope to mitigate the development	<p>A= Good scope to provide mitigation in the short to medium term in harmony with existing landscape pattern</p> <p>B= Good scope to provide mitigation in the medium term and in keeping with existing landscape pattern</p> <p>C= Moderate scope to provide mitigation in the medium term broadly in keeping with existing landscape pattern</p> <p>D= Limited scope to provide adequate mitigation in keeping with the existing landscape in the medium term</p> <p>E= Very limited scope to provide adequate mitigation in the medium to long term</p>	This is an assessment based on landscape character, aesthetic factors - scale, enclosure, pattern, movement – overall visibility of site and consideration of existing viewpoints
Landscape Value	Local Landscape Designations	<p>A= Location where built development will have no impact</p> <p>B= Location where built development will have slight impact</p> <p>C= Location where built development will have moderate impact</p> <p>D= Location where built development is adjacent to designated area, and /or will have high impact</p> <p>E= Location fully within a designated area of landscape value</p>	This criteria is used as a proxy for Landscape Value in the absence of specific stakeholder consultation, and includes consideration of local landscape designations (Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside, Green Wedges)