



**Report for: Cabinet 1st October 2009
Planning Committee 7th October 2009**

Subject: Greater Nottingham Landscape Character Assessment

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Purpose of report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the publication of the Greater Nottingham Landscape Character Assessment. This report will show why the Assessment is needed; the methodology used in preparing it and discusses the Assessment's findings that are relevant to Gedling Borough.

Background

- 2 The 1997 "Countryside Appraisal: Nottinghamshire Landscape Guidelines" prepared by the County Council was used to inform preparation of the Gedling Borough Replacement Local Plan. The County's Appraisal identified 10 regional landscape character areas and sub-divided these into landscape types and also identified "areas least affected by change" as 'Mature Landscape Areas'. Policy ENV37 of the Local Plan precludes development that would have an adverse effect on Mature Landscape Areas.
- 3 Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (paragraphs 23 and 24) recognises the local importance of landscapes not protected under national designations (such as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). It allows Local Authorities to draft "criteria-based policies" and encourages a move away from "rigid local designations" (such as Mature Landscape Areas) that can have the effect of restricting sustainable development. Such policies should be backed by a robust evidence base, which utilises tools such as Landscape Character Assessments.
- 4 In accordance with PPS 7 and to inform work on the emerging Aligned Core Strategy, the County Council and the District Councils that make

up the Nottingham Core HMA¹ jointly commissioned consultants to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment. The purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment is to inform the production of the Local Development Frameworks and to aid future development control decisions on planning applications. It will also guide landscape enhancement actions to make best use of available resources.

- 5 The Assessment examines and categorises various features and characteristics of the landscape. It divides the area into broad landscape types and also drills down into more detailed landscape character areas. The Assessment identifies threats to landscape character and recommends ways to preserve and enhance local landscape distinctiveness.
- 6 The Assessment recognises that landscape is one of a multitude of different issues that need to be looked at when considering development proposals. Proposals should not be rejected simply because they are within an identified character area. The need for the proposal must be taken into account and using the recommendations of the Assessment it should be possible to allow appropriate development whilst also maintaining or enhancing the distinctiveness of the landscape.
- 7 It should be noted that all rural areas in Gedling Borough are within the Green Belt and therefore protected from inappropriate development by the policies contained in Planning Policy Guidance 2:Green Belt.

Methodology

- 8 The methodology for the Landscape Character Assessment comprised the following steps
 - Review and update the Countryside Appraisal (1997)
 - Promote awareness of Greater Nottingham's landscape
 - Use the method developed by Nottinghamshire County Council and ensure consistency with similar work by Derbyshire County Council
 - Identify and describe discrete areas of character
 - Assess the landscape condition, quality and significance of the areas
 - Consult with key stakeholders
 - Provide recommendations to protect, conserve, enhance or restore each area
 - Identify a range of key issues and provide a knowledge base to enable informed and justified landscape related decisions
 - Provide potential indicators to ensure effective monitoring through the Local Development Framework process

¹ Ashfield District Council, Broxtowe Borough Council, Erewash Borough Council, Gedling Borough Council, Nottingham City Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council. Erewash Borough Council is also covered by similar work being undertaken by Derbyshire County Council that has been incorporated into the Landscape Character Assessment.

- 9 A two-stage approach to the identification of landscape types has been taken in developing the Assessment. Firstly, broad regional areas of similar physical features, ground type and settlement pattern were identified. Secondly, smaller areas of common characteristics were identified.
- 10 The results were then mapped to show the location of areas with similar landscape forms that could be grouped together in Policy Zones. These Policy Zones formed the basis for the field visits and the recommendations of the Assessment.
- 11 Field visits were undertaken to refine the boundaries of the Policy Areas and provide information on the 'strength of character' and 'landscape condition' of each Policy Zone.
- 12 The '**strength of character**' of a Policy Zone takes account of:-
- The sense of place;
 - The distinctiveness of the pattern of features;
 - The quantity of distinctive features; and
 - Historic patterns of features and features that may have declined.
- 15 The 'strength of character' is judged as being strong, moderate or weak. An area of 'strong character' is defined as having a consistent distribution of distinctive features combining to create a sense of place. Minor changes could be accommodated without negatively affecting the character of the area. An example would be where there are areas of hills or extensively wooded areas. An area of 'moderate character' would have distinctive characteristics of a less obvious nature or a less frequent distribution. An example would be where the agricultural land has fewer features but settlements do not contribute to the sense of place. Areas of 'weak character' can be defined as having a number of features but lack an overriding influence on the sense of place. Weak areas would also suffer from features being altered or eroded.
- 16 '**Landscape condition**' considers the state of the features and whether they are intact or not. Judgements have been made as to how the identified characteristics have a positive influence on the landscape.
- 17 A landscape in good condition will be well managed and will usually be fully intact. There will be little or no loss or decline in the presence or quality of features. Where features have been removed, replacements will also be how a high quality and in a good condition. Landscapes of moderate condition will mostly be well managed though there will be evidence of decline or loss. For example a hedgerow may be fragmented or a wall dilapidated. A poor landscape will have few intact features and will suffer from frequent examples of loss or decline.

Findings

- 18 To produce an overall assessment, the condition and strength of character of each Policy Zone has been plotted on the matrix. This also generates a recommendation as to potential actions that could be put in place through future policy and followed through with decisions on planning applications.

Landscape Condition	<i>Good</i>	Moderate (Enhance)	Moderate-Good (Conserve and Enhance)	Good (Conserve)
	<i>Moderate</i>	Poor-Moderate (Enhance and Restore)	Moderate (Enhance)	Moderate-Good (Conserve and Enhance)
	<i>Poor</i>	Poor (Restore/Create)	Poor-Moderate (Enhance and Restore)	Moderate (Enhance)
		<i>Poor</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Strong</i>
Strength of Landscape Character				

Table 1.1 – Landscape quality and associated landscape strategy matrix

- 19 The recommendations can be summarised as follows:
- Conserve – safeguard key features in their present form and location.
 - Enhance – improve current features where not well managed or where greater benefit could be accrued.
 - Restore – focus should be on repairing or re-establishing features that have been lost or are in decline.
 - Create – where the original landscape pattern is no longer evident new landscapes should be formed.
- 20 An appendix is attached to this report setting out the various Policy Zones that affect Gedling Borough. The appendix also provides a summary of the recommended actions for each Zone.

Conclusions

- 21 The Landscape Character Assessment shows that there are four broad areas within the Borough. These are as follows:
- Around Linby and Papplewick
 - The A60 and A614 Corridors
 - The Woodborough – Lambley Dumbles Area
 - The Trent Valley

- 22 The Landscape Character Assessment makes recommendations regarding the features of each Policy Zone and how these can be protected. There are a number of consistent themes that run through the recommendations. These are
- Hedgerows – appropriate enhancement or protection of hedgerows in each Policy Zone reflecting the distinct nature in each.
 - Woodlands – appropriate enhancement or protection of wooded areas in each Policy Zone reflecting the distinct nature in each.
 - Heath Land – appropriate creation or protection of heath land in certain Policy Zones reflecting the distinct nature in each.
 - Complementary development – new development that it is in keeping with the existing pattern and style of buildings.
 - Distinctive features – distinctive features may need to be enhanced or protected. These include watercourses, the pattern of field boundaries and country lanes.
- 23 The recommendations of the Landscape Character Assessment will be used to inform the policies in the emerging Local Development Framework relating to the Policy Zones and to landscapes in general. The detailed recommendations will be used to assess planning applications for development in those areas to ensure that they firstly do not damage the unique character of a Policy Zone and that secondly that they actively enhance the Policy Zone.
- 24 The Assessment could also be used to guide any future management plans and it is possible that work could be undertaken to establish a forum for Gedling Borough Council and Landowners to work together to develop management plans that reflect the character of the Policy Zones.
- 25 The full document will be available on the website via the Supporting Studies and Publications page of the Planning Policy Section (<http://www.gedling.gov.uk/index/pe-home/pe-lp-home/pe-lp-localdevel/pe-lp-evbase-documents.htm>).

Recommendations

- 25 It is RECOMMENDED that members note the contents of this report and agree to take the findings into account when formulating future policy.