

1 METHOD STATEMENT

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The objective of the study is to inform decision-making on where and to what extent local and strategic gaps should be promoted through the LDF process, and how major development might be accommodated within the District without an unacceptable impact on landscape character in general, and the setting of outstanding assets.

1.1.2 The Council's brief is summarised as follows:

- Prepare an assessment of existing gaps and local landscape, based on landscape character and visual sensitivity;
- Review boundaries of Strategic and Local Gaps and make recommendations for amending boundaries where appropriate.
- Prepare an assessment of landscape sensitivity, based on i) landscape character and visual sensitivity; ii) landscape value; and iii) landscape capacity and the potential for built development (each to be judged on a points scale);
- Take into account opportunities for mitigating the effects of development on the landscape and for landscape restoration and recreational use;
- Produce concise and robust final report for use by officers, members, stakeholders and the public, to inform debate, and for use at Inquiry associated with the LDF process.

1.1.3 HDA interprets the Council's aims and objectives for the study into the following project stages:

Stage 1 Comprehensive desk-top assessment

- 1a Familiarisation visit, inception meeting and initiation of data studies;
- 1b Desk-top assessment to collate available data and define the landscape context for the study area;

Stage 2 Analysis

- 2a Landscape structure analysis (at 1:25,000 scale) to identify/refine the 'Areas of Search', based on those listed and mapped by the Council. Areas of Search include both possible locations for future development and/or Strategic and Local Gap designations
- 2b Field assessment to test/confirm landscape structure analysis and Strategic/Local Gap boundaries, and to inform character assessment;
- 2c Landscape characterisation within refined 'Areas of Search' to define and describe landscape character units;
- 2d Review of Strategic and Local Gap extent and boundaries;

Stage 3 Assessment

- 3a Assessment of the sensitivity of landscape character units;
- 3b Assessment of the landscape value of landscape character units;
- 3c Assessment of the capacity of landscape character units (product of sensitivity and value);

3d Make final recommendations concerning boundaries of Strategic and Local Gaps;

Stage 4 Reporting

4a Report and supporting plans, figures and tables (draft and final)

1.1.4 These project stages are explained in the following paragraphs. The stages will not necessarily be carried out in sequence as is suggested by the list. Some stages will be undertaken concurrently, and there will be cross-referencing between the stages to ensure consistency and a comprehensive iterative approach.

1.2 Stage 1: Comprehensive desk-top assessment

1.2.1 A preliminary familiarisation visit will be undertaken in conjunction with the inception meeting at the outset of the project.

1.2.2 HDA would carry out a comprehensive desk-top assessment that will identify for the whole study area, inter alia:

- Geology and soils;
- Topography;
- Land use (based on aerial photography);
- Regional landscape character areas;
- County landscape character types and areas, and associated guidelines;
- AONB boundary and character assessment, and management guidelines
- Historic landscape characterisation;
- Development plan designations including local landscape, nature conservation, and heritage designation;
- Key public rights of way (eg. long distance footpaths) and notable view points;
- Tranquil Area maps;
- Areas at risk of flooding.

1.2.3 The data will be analysed and set out in plans, tables, figures and text, as appropriate. The draft Area of Search will be mapped at 1:30,000 scale on A3 to facilitate the creation of a manageable package of information:

1.2.4 The desk-top assessment will be used to review the County landscape character assessment and to subdivide the County character areas into draft landscape character types/areas appropriate to the District scale (confirmed by field assessment). These will be mapped and a summary of the key characteristics of each prepared. This outline characterisation study will provide a context for the more detailed assessment to follow; it will **not** provide a comprehensive district-wide landscape character assessment.

1.3 Stage 2a: Landscape Structure Analysis

1.3.1 The objective of this stage of the analysis is to define the Areas of Search/Study

1.3.2 The aim of landscape structure analysis is to distil out the main elements which contribute to the character, structure and setting of the settlements, the Strategic and Local Gaps, and the AONB. This technique, in conjunction with local character assessment, is the basis for then identifying appropriate directions for growth, in landscape terms. If development is consistent with the setting and structure of the local settlement pattern and its landscape context, then the essential character of those settlements and the surrounding area will be retained. If future development is not consistent with that structure, then the relationship between the town or village and its setting will be damaged, and the landscape character of the Borough adversely affected.

1.3.3 HDA's Landscape Structure Analysis uses a 'sieve-mapping' technique, drawing on both the desk assessment and detailed field assessment.

Baseline 1 (OS mapping)	Sieve A (Local Plan)	Sieve B (Site survey)	Sieve C (variety of sources)	Sieve D (<i>Environment Agency and others</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topography • Extent of built development (settlement boundary) <p>Baseline 2 (published assessments/SPG)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape character assessment • Townscape assessment • Village/parish design statement/plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Plan designation incl. Landscape, Nature Conservation, Conservation Area, Listed park/garden, SAM and associated appraisals, design statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local topographical analysis • Land use • Nature of the settlement edge • Relationship with neighbouring town/village • Relationship with principal transport links • Local landscape /townscape character assessment and associated guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural associations • Locally valued features, eg landmark • Right of Way (greater than local significance) • Historic development of the settlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood plain • Proximity to land use which may limit devt. (noise, smell), eg. sewage works

1.3.4 The information will be mapped. The plans will illustrate HDA's analysis of the following factors, which will provide a robust justification for defining the Area of Study boundaries:

- Settlement form and setting;
- Settlement visual envelope and intervisibility;
- Setting of the districts 'outstanding assets' (AONB etc);
- Location/extent of major constraints to future development.

1.4 Stage 2b: Field assessment

- 1.4.1 A familiarisation visit will be made in conjunction with the inception meeting at the outset of the project.
- 1.4.2 Field assessment will underpin project stages 2, 4 and 5: the Landscape Structure Analysis, Landscape characterisation and Review of strategic and local gap boundaries. It will be carried out by two experienced Landscape Architects, overseen by the Project Director.
- 1.4.3 Field assessment will involve travelling throughout the Study Area recording variations in landscape character on field survey sheets and making a working photographic record. Within the Areas of Search, field survey sheets and map annotation will be used to record relevant information, likely to include (list is not exhaustive): local topography, existing land uses and vegetation structure, condition of landscape elements (trees, hedges etc), streams/ditches, character of the built edge of settlements, intervisibility between settlements, local landmarks and visual detractors, relationship with the AONB/coast, key views, character of transport corridors.
- 1.4.4 The location, date of field recording (sheets and photographs) will be noted.

1.5 Stage 2c: Local Landscape Characterisation

- 1.5.1 The aim of the local landscape character assessment is to identify landscape types and areas at an appropriate scale to understand the localised variation in character within the Areas of Search, with the objective of providing a framework for the assessment of sensitivity, value and capacity.
- 1.5.2 HDA will prepare a schedule of draft landscape character types (LCT - generic landscape units), based on information gathered through the familiarisation site visit, the desk-top assessment and county landscape character study. Each LCT will be identified by a code, which will be used as part of the field assessment to map the occurrence of LCTs within the Areas of Search. The characteristics of each LCT will be described and evaluated using field survey sheets, which will provide a record of the associated field assessment, together with photographs. The schedule of draft LCTs may be amended and/or added to during the field assessment phase, prior to the final list being confirmed.
- 1.5.3 Within the Areas of Search, and leading on from the LCT work, local landscape character areas (LCAs – unique areas related to a specific place) will be identified, described and mapped. It is anticipated that these LCAs (as opposed to the LCTs) would provide the framework for the later qualitative assessments.

1.6 Stage 2d: Review of Strategic and Local Gap boundaries

1.6.1 Each of the Strategic and Local Gaps that fall within of adjacent to the draft Study Areas identified in the Council's brief will be reviewed as part of this study. The objective is to test the extent to which every part of the designated gap fulfils its policy function, that is, prevents coalescence and contributes to the separate identity of settlements.

1.6.2 The structure, character and effectiveness of each of the Gaps will be described, based on the results of the Landscape Structure Analysis and landscape characterisation. Where appropriate, a comparative assessment will be made to subdivide the designated gap area into compartments (which may or may not correspond with LCAs).

1.6.3 The gap compartment analysis will be mapped, and draft recommendations concerning revisions to the boundary made accordingly. The conclusions of the gap review will feed into the Stage 3 assessment.

1.7 Stage 3: Assessment

1.7.1 The assessment of the capacity of each LCA for future development will be based on a series of judgements. The different aspects will be judged on a verbal scale, either of three points (high, medium, low), or of five points (eg. very high, high, medium, low, very low). The three point scale is relatively simple to use, but a five point scale allows greater differentiation between areas. The decision as to whether a three or five point scale is used will be agreed with the Council at the outset of the project. HDA suggest that a five-point scale is likely to be required in order to achieve the necessary distinction between areas to inform decision-making concerning where future development may be appropriate.

1.8 Stage 3a: Landscape sensitivity

1.8.1 The sensitivity of each LCA will be assessed using the following matrix. Both landscape and visual factors will be taken into consideration. Each factor (horizontal axis/column) is sub-divided to reflect the value scale.

LCA	Inherent Landscape Qualities (intactness and condition)	Contribution to distinctive settlement setting	Inconsistency with existing settlement form / pattern	Contribution to rurality of surrounding landscape	Contribution to separation between settlements	Sensitivity	Final Assessment Landscape Sensitivity
	low high					1-5 Negligible 6-10 Slight 11-15 Moderate 16-20 Substantial 21-25 Major	
	5 10 15 20 25						

1.8.2 The relative sensitivity of each LCA will be mapped.

1.9 Stage 3b: Landscape value

1.9.1 The landscape value of each LCA will be assessed using the following matrix. Each factor (horizontal axis/column) is sub-divided to reflect the value scale.

LCA	Landscape Designation	Other Designation (nature conservation, heritage, amenity, including flood zone)	Contribution to setting of 'outstanding assets' (eg. AONB, the undeveloped coast etc)	Special cultural/historic associations	Perceptual aspects (eg. scenic beauty, tranquillity, wildness)	Landscape Value 1-5 Negligible 6-10 Slight 11-15 Moderate 16-20 Substantial 21-25 Major 5 10 15 20 25	Overall Assessment Landscape Value
	low high						

1.9.2 The relative landscape value of each LCA will be mapped.

1.10 Stage 3c: Landscape Capacity

1.10.1 Landscape capacity refers to the degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character; or overall change of landscape type. It reflects the inherent sensitivity of the landscape itself, and its sensitivity to the development in question; and the value attached to the landscape, or to specific elements within it.

1.10.2 The results of the landscape sensitivity and landscape value assessments will be combined to give an overall judgement relating to landscape capacity as follows:

Combining Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Value to give Landscape Capacity

		Landscape Value				
		Major	Substantial	Moderate	Slight	Negligible
Landscape Sensitivity	Major	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible / low	Low	Low / medium
	Substantial	Negligible	Negligible / low	Low	Low / Medium	Medium
	Moderate	Negligible / Low	Low	Medium	Medium / high	High / medium
	Slight	Low	Low / medium	Medium /high	High	High / Very high/
	Negligible	Low / medium	Medium	High / medium	High / Very high/	Very high

1.10.3 The relative landscape capacity of each LCA will be assessed and mapped.

1.11 Stage 3d: Recommendations

1.11.1 Once the assessment stage is complete (Stage 3), draft recommendations relating to the Strategic and Local Gap boundaries will be reviewed and confirmed.

1.12 Reporting

- 1.12.1 The methodology, baseline information, analysis and assessment will be set out in a concise report, supported by plans, figures and schedules. A draft report will be prepared for review by the Borough Council, followed by a final report.