

**Market Harborough Landscape
Character Assessment and Landscape
Capacity Study**

Executive Summary

for

Harborough District Council

April 2009

Introduction

- 0.1 The Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study report was commissioned by Harborough District Council in December 2008. The report identifies landscape character sub-areas within the wider Welland Valley landscape character area around Market Harborough, Little Bowden and Great Bowden. It also provides a detailed analysis of the landscape capacity of land in and around the edge of Market Harborough, Little Bowden and Great Bowden 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, Market Harborough is located within close to Character Areas 89: Northamptonshire Vales, 93: High Leicestershire and 94: Leicestershire Vales. At a county level Market Harborough falls within the Welland Valley Landscape Character Area and is close to Laughton Hills, Lutterworth Lowlands and High Leicestershire. At the district level Market Harborough again falls within the Welland Valley Landscape Character Area and is close to the Laughton Hills, Lutterworth Lowlands, High Leicestershire and Upper Soar 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. These areas are designated to prevent coalescence of settlements.
- 0.4 The land immediately to the south of Market Harborough falls within Daventry District. Within the Northamptonshire County Structure Plan, and subsequently in the Daventry District Local Plan as Adopted in 1997, most of this land is designated as an Area of Special Landscape.

Landscape Character Assessment

- 0.5 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.
- 0.6 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 Market Harborough and the surrounding villages with the rural areas was considered. The field survey was carried out in January 2009, visiting all land identified within the study area boundary provided by Harborough District Council.
- 0.7 Landscape Character Assessment work identified eleven different Landscape Character Areas as follows:
- 1 Foxtton to Great Bowden Slopes
 - 2 Burnmill Farm Scarp Slopes
 - 3 Welland Valley North
 - 4 Lodge Farm Valley Slopes
 - 5 Clack Hill Ridge
 - 6 Jordan Valley Slopes (North and South)
 - 7 Jordan Valley Bottom

- 8 Welland Valley West
- 9 Mill Hill Undulating Claylands
- 10 Airfield Farm Plateau
- 11 Grand Union Canal Corridor

0.8 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.

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

1	Foxtton to Great Bowden Slopes	High Sensitivity
2	Burnmill Farm Scarp Slopes	High Sensitivity
3	Welland Valley North	Moderate/High Sensitivity
4	Lodge Farm Valley Slopes	Moderate/Low Sensitivity
5	Clack Hill Ridge	Moderate/Low Sensitivity
6	Jordan Valley Slopes (North and South)	Moderate/Low Sensitivity
7	Jordan Valley Bottom	Moderate/High Sensitivity
8	Welland Valley West	Moderate/High Sensitivity
9	Mill Hill Undulating Claylands	Moderate/High Sensitivity
10	Airfield Farm Plateau	Moderate/Low Sensitivity
11	Grand Union Canal Corridor	Moderate Sensitivity

Landscape Sensitivity and Landscape Capacity

0.10 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.

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

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

0.12 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

0.13 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.

0.14 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"

0.15 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 whereas in adjacent Northamptonshire, the designation Special Landscape Areas was used.

0.16 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.

0.17 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

0.18 A total of 45 different Land Parcels were assessed in this part of the study. The completed Land Parcel Sheets and associated Overall Capacity values identified areas with higher landscape capacity to accommodate new development. These include several small plots around the northern edge of Market Harborough and around Great Bowden. There are also isolated Land parcels to the east and south west of Market Harborough. However, should a larger, more comprehensive development area be required, the most suitable location in relative terms would appear to be to the south east of Market Harborough, extending the existing urban area along the valley slopes of the River Jordan.

0.19 Areas least suitable for development include the scarp slopes along the northern edge of Market Harborough, the top of hills located between Market Harborough and Lubenham to the west of the town, and prominent slopes to the south of the town, in Northamptonshire.