landscapeast

Guidance on assessing the sensitivity of the landscape of the East of England

Part 2: Applying the guidance to other issues

Prepared for Landscape East by Land Use Consultants

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1 EAST OF ENGLAND LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY: ADDITIONAL PAPER – APPLYING THE GUIDANCE TO OTHER ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper responds to point 5.4 in the project brief. It provides advice on options for developing and refining the landscape sensitivity method set out in the Guidance Report, together with advice on how landscape sensitivity can be applied to other issues not dealt with in that report. The paper also includes advice to others on seeking to apply the East of England (EoE) Landscape Sensitivity method, and in undertaking landscape sensitivity studies.

Structure of this paper

1.2 The paper provides recommendations on:

- Using and refining the method
- Applying the sensitivity method in relation to other types of change

USING AND REFINING THE METHOD

Applying the method

1.3 The following sets out issues for consideration by those in developing or commissioning landscape sensitivity studies, in terms of how such work relates to this regional sensitivity method.

Scale of working

1.4 The method for assessing landscape sensitivity has been developed at the regional scale and is thus appropriate for informing broad regional decision-making. However, the principles underpinning the method apply at a wide range of different scales. Irrespective of scale, the key requirements are to understand the nature of the change and thorough assess the change scenario, as well as to identify what is important about the landscape and how elements of the landscape contribute to character. What will necessarily change is the type of baseline information on character that is used to feed into a sensitivity analysis as the basis for assessing types of change. It is essential to use the appropriate scale of landscape information for the appropriate level of decision making. Examples of possible sources of landscape information at the sub-regional level include:

- County scale Landscape Character Assessments
- County scale Historic Landscape Characterisation
- District Landscape Character Assessments
- Urban Surveys
- Conservation Area and Heritage Appraisals

- Perceptual data such as tranquillity/intrusion/dark skies mapping
- Landscape Change Information (e.g. Countryside Quality Counts)
- Site specific landscape survey information

Examples

1.5 If considering a type of change which may have very substantial landscape impacts, extending into adjacent regions across a wide area (e.g. wind turbine schemes), it may also be appropriate to have recourse to information in other relevant character area descriptions. At this scale of working the National Character Areas (NCA's) may be appropriate.

1.6 If considering a type of large scale change which has more 'site specific' landscape implications (e.g. a water resource infrastructure project such as a balancing reservoir or large scale Sustainable Drainage [SuDS]/attenuation scheme), it is often appropriate to look to information in local (County/District) Landscape Character Assessments to identify landscape attributes for assessment.

Designated landscape interests: Building in landscape values

1.7 The main guidance document discusses at paragraph 2.7 consideration of how people value landscape and landscape attributes in relation to landscape character sensitivity. In addition, in designated landscapes such as National Parks and AONBs and locally designated landscapes, the effects of change will also need to be considered in relation to particular landscape values underpinning the designation, which may vary, both due to the level of designation and as a result of the effect of change acting on the landscape. Current thinking suggests that:

- A valued landscape, whether nationally designated or not, does not automatically, and by definition, have high sensitivity;
- A landscape with high sensitivity does not automatically have no, or low capacity to accommodate change, and a landscape of low sensitivity does not automatically have high capacity to accept change;
- It is entirely possible for a valued landscape to have relatively low sensitivity to the particular type of development in question because of both the characteristics of the landscape itself and the nature of the development;
- It may also be the case that the reasons why value is attached to the designated landscape are not compromised by the particular form of change. Such a landscape may therefore have some capacity to accommodate change, especially if appropriate steps are taken in terms of siting, layout and design of the change or development in question.

1.8 Information about landscape value and special qualities of designated landscapes should be kept separate from assessments of landscape sensitivity and added in to final decision making processes as a free standing layer of information. The reasons why a landscape is designated or valued clearly

relate to character, and these 'special qualities' will often be relevant to a sensitivity study. This is discussed further below.

1.9 **Designated Landscape Interests:** The East of England contains important designated landscapes, The Broads and 4 AONBs – The Chilterns (part), Dedham Vale, Suffolk Coast and Heaths and Norfolk Coast. When the sensitivity method is applied, the effects of change may also need to be considered separately on the character, special qualities and integrity of any relevant designated landscape interest; this may include consideration of setting, although issues of setting (cultural, functional, visual) can apply to any landscape, irrespective of whether or not it is designated. It is recommended that when working at the regional level that the consistent baseline of the East of England (EoE) Landscape Framework is applied in the first instance and that effect on designated landscape interests is undertaken as a second stage, where required, providing a finer grain of analysis. In such cases the effect of change will need to be evaluated against the identified qualities and character of the designated landscape as usually set out in the relevant Management Plan or Landscape Character Assessment.

1.10 Analysis of the relevant landscape attributes in relation to landscape types or character areas should pick up or reference as appropriate other non landscape designations but which relate to understanding or expression of place and character (e.g. nature conservation designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and ancient woodland, heritage designations such as registered parks and gardens).

Local landscape values

1.11 In applying the sensitivity method at a sub regional level greater consideration will need to be given to the way the landscape is valued locally. This may include perceptual aspects such as tranquillity, special cultural associations, the influence and presence of other conservation interests or functional aspects of the landscape such as a role in providing setting or preventing the coalescence of settlements.

Building in stakeholder involvement

1.12 Landscape matters to people and therefore represents multiple values, both tangible and intangible, e.g. aesthetic and experiential aspects. At the regional scale the EoE Landscape Framework has been subject to validation by key communities of interest and provides an accepted evidence base. However, when applying the sensitivity method at a more local level it will be particular important to understand local values and perceptions of the landscape – what people consider important and the reasons why. This understanding may be gained, for example, through information contained in local landscape character assessments, or through other consultation processes.

Advice for others in seeking to apply the method

1.13 In developing and commissioning landscape sensitivity studies, the following general pointers are proposed:

- Ensure that sensitivity analysis is clearly based on an **understanding of landscape character** and an assessment of the change in terms of potential effects on character. Use and reference **available relevant**

information (relevant landscape typologies/landscape character assessments and landscape strategies).

- Sensitivity analysis should be targeted at and undertaken in relation to a **specific** type of change as opposed to analysis of sensitivity to change in general terms. This is because landscapes and their component landscape elements will be sensitive in **different ways** to **individual types of change**. Therefore the type of change and its effects on the landscape should be fully understood.
- Ensure the method and data sources are correct for the **scale** of the study.
- Where **visual sensitivities** are also considered, these should be clearly **separate** from those concerning landscape character.
- The analysis should be **clearly stated** and **explained**, with the method **transparent** and easy for **non landscape professionals** to follow.
- Information should be provided in a form that is easily accessible and informative on landscape sensitivity and **opportunities**.
- Where possible, judgements should be **strengthened** by **stakeholder views**.
- Landscape sensitivity judgements alone **cannot** inform landscape change positively. They should link to landscape characteristics/key positive landscape attributes and to guidance to **positively influence change**.
- Sensitivity judgements alone are **too blunt**. **Link them** to **positive** spatial design and management **guidance**, to focus change proactively and to deliver character / 'place-making' objectives.
- All sensitivity studies should be streamlined, avoiding use of data for its own sake. Data should be relevant - avoid over complexity or reliance on large amounts of data.
- Use a simple sensitivity scale (three point scales work well for strategic studies, with 'intermediate', e.g. five point scales, more applicable to smaller scale work, where the landscape issues are likely to be more complex). Sensitivity scales should **always** use **clearly defined** criteria.
- Strategic studies are most usefully developed at the **landscape type** (generic) rather than landscape character area (specific) level, whilst more local level or 'site specific' studies usefully work at the landscape character area level.

1.14 Ensure that landscape has a place in the decision making process e.g. considering the bigger picture (in relation to scenarios such as shoreline management and coastal defence, where wider landscape effects may be experienced).

‘Futureproofing’ – what functions do we want the future landscape to provide?

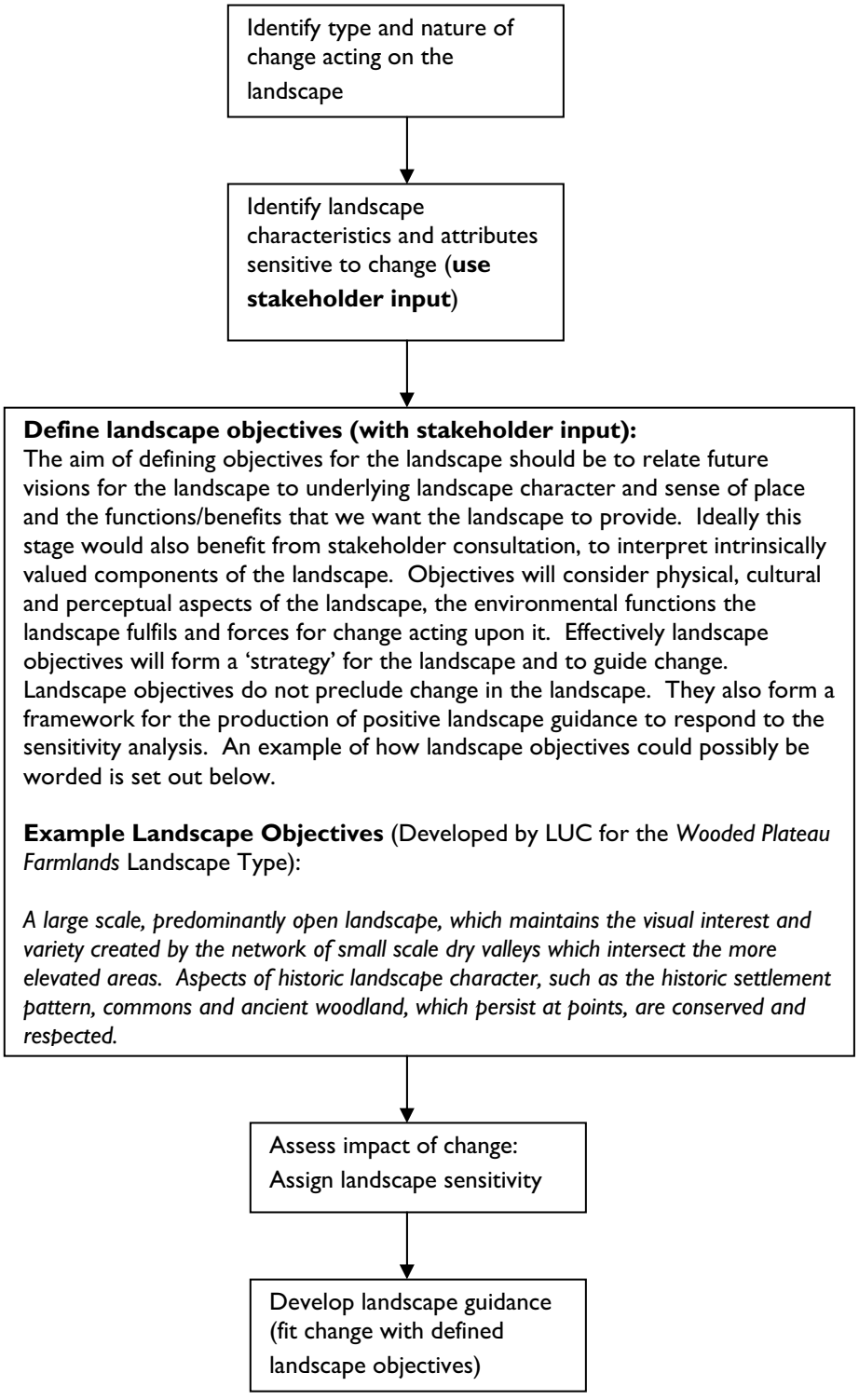
1.15 The method developed in the Guidance Report sets out a pragmatic approach to assessing landscape sensitivity based on available information at the time of writing (2010-2011). It is intended that the method developed for the EoE Landscape Framework can be adapted and refined over time, to take advantage of new thinking and availability of additional information. For example whilst at present use is made of the key characteristics within the EoE Landscape Framework typology descriptions (which paint a useful and sufficiently detailed picture of landscape characteristics, and by implication sensitivities) it is the intention of Landscape East to develop landscape objectives for the landscape types (with appropriate consultation). These could usefully be used with the sensitivity method to refine and focus guidance in relation to change scenarios in the landscape. Development of such a vision or strategy and supporting landscape objectives, that is to identify the functions of the landscape and ‘what we want’ from it, will be important in adding value to the method and seeking to focus specific changes positively (e.g. in terms of how they contribute to such objectives, if this is measurable or whether there are any conflicts). Landscape is a dynamic and ever changing medium, and it will be important to have an agreed vision (which has ideally been **consulted on**) to direct and focus such change. This approach is also consistent with the aims and intent of the European Landscape Convention (ELC).

1.16 Landscape objectives are also currently being developed for all of England’s National Landscape Character Areas including those in the East of England, and as such this future approach in the East of England will be consistent with landscape thinking at the national level.

1.17 A summary of this ‘futureproofed’ method which accommodates such future developments, is set out in the box overleaf. The main stages are summarised only, as they are already covered in detail in the Guidance Report. The box overleaf therefore makes specific reference to development of objectives and to stakeholder input, and where these stages would occur.

Summary: Futureproofing the sensitivity method

(This describes how landscape objectives are developed, and how these and stakeholder input fit within the wider process. Refer to full description of the method in the Guidance Report)



OTHER ISSUES LIKELY TO AFFECT THE LANDSCAPE OF THE EAST OF ENGLAND

1.18 From knowledge of the region's landscape and past, present and potential future changes acting on them, and from consultation with the Client Commissioning Group, these are likely to include the following in addition to large scale settlement, supporting infrastructure provision and renewable energy infrastructure:

- Wider environmental change, specifically environmental phenomena such as climate change (associated implications may include drought, sea level rise and saline ingress, wind erosion, fire and flooding).

- Landscape design and management responses to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Relevant topic areas could include shoreline and coastal management plans and green infrastructure planning (which can also form mitigation for large scale growth). It should be recognised that, whilst green infrastructure planning responds to place making and landscape character, design for climate change adaptation versus character may sometimes be in potential conflict.

- Green infrastructure may also encompass 'non constructed' forms of renewable energy supply e.g. biomass/short rotation coppice, and 'Super SuDS' (Sustainable Drainage Systems). It is however recognised that these may be more localised in effect/in terms of decision making as opposed to regional.

- Super pylons – again it is recognised that these may be localised as opposed to regional in terms of effect and decision making. Given the anticipated scale of such structures (65-70m), issues are likely to be similar to those in relation to wind turbines.

- Water resource developments such as reservoirs.

- High speed cross country rail links.

Applying the existing method to these other issues

1.19 The existing method can be readily used on a number of these forces for change. Where change is of a more 'local nature' and in relation to sub regional/local decision making, it will be appropriate to have recourse to more local/'small scale' landscape information, and a more detailed scale of analysis, although the principles set out in the method will still apply, as described above.

1.20 The change phenomenon which is perhaps slightly 'at odds' with interpreting landscape character and sense of place as a basis for positively focussing change, is climate change. This is partly because it is largely an 'unknown quantity', in terms of scale and nature of effect. It is also likely to dictate different approaches to landscape and spatial strategies and defining landscape objectives. For example climate change adapted landscape strategies may not necessarily be 'just' to conserve and enhance but may also increasingly recognise the need to create new character in response to its effects, or in

adaptation to effects. This relates back to an understanding of landscape functions or 'what we want the landscape to provide' for example in terms of water storage/infiltration or shelter/shading. In this case an understanding of landscape characteristics as a basis for sensitivity analysis and supporting guidance, may need more open or lateral interpretation. Such an approach may include recognising and conserving the landscape's 'skeleton' if not its 'finer details' which are more likely to change, or whose conservation may be unrealistic. This could be done by interpreting high level valued characteristics, form or broad physical attributes such as landform and topography, hydrology, or skyline character created by woodland in general, with less emphasis on specific species, for example. Alternatively, it could involve considering scale, proportion, composition, pattern and texture and using/interpreting these as references. For example, the vulnerability of beech woodland may necessitate use of other native species of similar stature, visual quality and longevity or similar species/soil association, but with better long term climate change survival prospects.

1.21 It should also be recognised that guidance in response to climate change may well have wider implications in terms of spatial strategies pursued, and that there is likely to be need for a joined up approach to sensitivity analysis in relation to adjacent landscape types or character areas, with consideration of 'knock on' effects of strategies pursued.

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