

A1: Method of Approach

Introduction

The methodology adopted for the Test Valley landscape character assessment follows the guidance set out in *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland 2002*. The methodology however differs from that adopted by other Hampshire districts and boroughs by classifying the Borough into landscape character types which were then subdivided into landscape character areas, defined by their locally distinctive physical and cultural characteristics.

The main aspects of the approach were as follows:

- The Landscape Consultant acted as a co-ordinator, bringing together public perceptions of the landscape with landscape, ecological, historical and cultural assessments to determine and describe landscape types and landscape character areas, and set out broad management strategies.
- Discussions with the Social Research Consultant and the results of the initial focus groups were used to fine tune the methodology and help direct the form and presentation of the report. The landscape character assessment process focused on bringing public and professional views and expertise together to achieve better understanding of issues and the way forward.
- Production of a report which reflected the stakeholder process.
- Use of existing data to readdress the existing landscape types and character areas of the Test Valley. Fieldwork was used to check on critical or controversial areas to ensure that the new landscape types and character areas have been robustly defined.

Community Involvement

A full description of the methodology is contained in *Volume 3* of this Report.

The Project Brief acknowledged that there is a need to try and test new and alternative ways of finding out and recording what local people, unaffiliated to any organisations and interest groups, think of their local landscape, what they value and how they would like to see the future shaped. The project set out to trial a particular methodology which could be applied without the commitment of large resources.

The specific objectives of community and stakeholder involvement were:

- To record the perceptions and values that members of the local community attach to their landscape
- To use the process to encourage and develop links between rural and urban sectors of the community
- To help create a greater level of public understanding and awareness of issues affecting the landscape and those aspects that create the landscape character
- To involve the local community in determining the

most appropriate broad strategies and guidelines for the landscape, through land management and development policy and control

- To inform the Local Strategic Partnerships of environmental aspects of the Borough and County Community Strategies

Data Collection

Data collection was co-ordinated by the Landscape Consultant with each specialist gathering data and consulting in their own field. The Test Valley assessment was set in the context of the *Map of England, English Nature Natural Areas, National Landscape Typology, North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan* and *Landscape Character Assessment*, the *Hampshire Landscape Strategy*, *New Forest National Park boundary work* and local policy.

Key datasets for use in the analysis of landscape ecological patterns included Phase 1 Habitat Survey; Ancient Woodland Inventory; aerial photography - present and historical; Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation; Sites of Special Scientific Interest; and species distribution data. The data was loaded into a Geographical Information System to facilitate the analysis and describe ecological patterns in the landscape.

The historic data sources included the *Hampshire Historic Landscape Assessment (1999)*, *Hampshire Historic Towns Survey (1990)*, *Hampshire Village Survey (1994)*, *Hampshire Sites and Monuments Record*, printed and manuscript maps, historic records, published and unpublished documentary sources, aerial photographs, Local Record Offices and Local Studies Libraries.

Consultations were used to obtain information on the forces of change in the Borough, together with drawing information from the focus groups and other environmental forums.

Consultant Studies

The specialist studies were undertaken in advance of defining the landscape types and character areas.

- Desktop landscape studies into the geology, hydrology, topography, landscape pattern, soil types, vegetation cover and perceptions of the landscape.
- Desktop settlement study, using aerial photos, Conservation Area Technical Assessments, Village Design Statements, the Borough Local Plan and historical records, undertaken jointly by the Landscape Consultant and Historic Consultant to identify broad settlement types based on townscape and historical form. The accepted Hampshire historic landscape assessment methodology was employed and adapted to characterise the key townscapes.

The settlement pattern and character informed the definition of the Landscape Character Areas.

- Ecological review of the Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan and liaison with ecologists at TVBC, HCC and HCC Biological Information Centre to identify key ecological issues. The study analysed the pattern and distribution of habitats across the study area, using Phase 1 Habitat Survey, Ancient Woodland Inventory and aerial photography, in a Geographical Information System.
- A review of the existing Hampshire Historic Landscape Assessment to suit the more detailed district level focus. The methodology used for this study was comparable with that of the county-wide Hampshire Historic Landscape Assessment (1999) and in accordance with the methodology developed by English Heritage (Historic Landscape Characterisation – The State of the Art; Fairclough 1999). The study included updating information from the County Sites and Monuments record and a much more extensive and detailed use of historic maps in close liaison with Hampshire County Council's Historic Landscape Specialist; refinement of the historic landscape types and boundaries; clarification of the evidence for time-depth within the Test Valley landscape, and how the landscape has changed and the factors which influence this.

Forces of Change

The process of change in the Test Valley landscape is determined partly by rural forces of change such as farming practices, but also by the direct and indirect forces of change from urban growth (in terms of built form and population). The study addressed both these aspects at European, national, regional and local levels. The report includes a section outlining these key borough-wide forces of change, their existing and anticipated effect on the landscape and the effect of current and emerging national and European policy, strategy and directives on the Borough.

Field Surveys

In view of the extensive amount of fieldwork done already in the Test Valley (comprehensive existing data and the need to concentrate project resources in the assimilation of the public into the process), detailed field surveys were not undertaken. Field visits concentrated on project familiarisation, review of the draft classification and making photographic records.

Identification of Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas

The classification of Landscape Character Types was undertaken using the results of the consultants' studies and the focus group meetings, set within the context of the landscape character assessments for Hampshire and adjacent authorities. For each character type,

a brief description and list of key issues is provided, identifying the key dominant landscape, ecological and historical features that characterise the type.

Each Landscape Character Type was subsequently sub-divided into Landscape Character Areas, informed by public views (where public perception is critical in the local understanding of the landscape) and the results of the settlement assessment. For each landscape character area the report sets out the key characteristics, a location map, illustrative and characteristic photographs, descriptive text to cover the landscape description, settlement patterns, ecological characteristics, historic landscape character, perceptions of the landscape (informed mainly by the local community), a list of formative historical and modern influences, and a summary of significant threats and opportunities. This informed the identification of broad management strategies and guidelines embracing landscape, ecological and historical issues.

Identification of Strategies and Guidelines

A broad strategy with guidelines for land management and land use and development has been set out for each landscape character area. In addition, borough-wide guidelines are given where these issues are common to the whole area. The strategy and guidelines were based on maintaining the locally distinctive character and the most valued characteristics of the area, in the light of existing and potential forces for change. They seek to reflect the values of the local community, as expressed through the consultation process.

Report Output

The final report is contained within four volumes. *Volume 1: Landscape Character Assessment* is to be put forward for adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Volume 1 is supported by *Volume 2: Landscape Strategies and Guidelines*; *Volume 3: Report on Community and Stakeholder Involvement in the Landscape Character Assessment Process* and *Volume 4: Supporting Appendices*. Copies of these documents can be obtained from Test Valley Borough Council's website in pdf. format or seen in the local council offices and libraries.

Data Output

The Landscape Character Areas have been digitised at a 1:50,000 scale for use within a Geographical Information System (ESRI ArcView format). Accompanying metadata describes the LCA dataset. Each Landscape Character Area has attached data containing LCA and LCT codes and names.