An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management.

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Foreword

With reference to England, An Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment replaces Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (Scottish Natural Heritage and The Countryside Agency, 2004). In 2004 Topic Paper 6 provided an overview 'of current thinking about landscape sensitivity and capacity in terms of both the concepts involved and the practical techniques' that were being used at that time. The issues that have informed this Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment are no different from those that Topic Paper 6 was concerned with, that is: variation in approaches being applied; varied terminology being used; compatibility with Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment).

An Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment should assist in informing judgements and decisions concerning the planning and management of change. It will help to inform good practice, generate further continued discussion and encourage methods, techniques and skills relating to Landscape sensitivity assessment, and related topics to evolve.

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Part One: Introduction

1.1 Background – the need for an approach to landscape sensitivity assessment

Informed management of change is important. Our landscapes are valued by society, and the European Landscape Convention[1] (ELC) reminds us that we need to achieve 'sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity and the environment'. Landscapes contribute to sense of place and social wellbeing, and the natural and socio-cultural factors that shape our landscapes provide what are often termed ecosystem services. The natural factors, or assets (for example soils, hydrology, flora and fauna, geology/minerals), may also be referred to as 'natural capital' which are the elements of nature that produce value, or benefits, to people.

Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change arising from development types or land management practices, without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value – such as changes to valued attributes of baseline landscape character and the visual resource. Landscape sensitivity assessment is a process that assesses the resilience / robustness of landscape character and the visual resource – and what we value - to a defined change, or changes. It can help decision makers to understand likely changes and the nature of change should particular courses of action - the development / land management scenarios – be taken forward.

Land use planning and land management activities have a relatively long history of being informed by landscape sensitivity and capacity assessments commissioned to inform regional and local decision making. Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity, a discussion document, was published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage in 2004. Since then, good practice has evolved[2] and been informed by many studies and publications, including the third edition of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, (GLVIA 3)[3]. Practitioners therefore now require a consistent approach to assessments of landscape sensitivity to inform judgements concerning spatial planning (including master planning and site planning), and also land management. Landscape sensitivity assessment, underpinned by Landscape Character Assessment[4], can transparently inform strategic thinking concerning the location of new development, such as housing, renewable energy, overhead transmission lines, forestry, transport infrastructure, and recreational infrastructure etc.

[1] Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence, October 2000.

[2] This approach to landscape sensitivity assessment should not be used to imply that past assessments are invalid. They continue to provide useful evidence and advice to inform, for example, spatial planning.

[3] Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, Routledge.

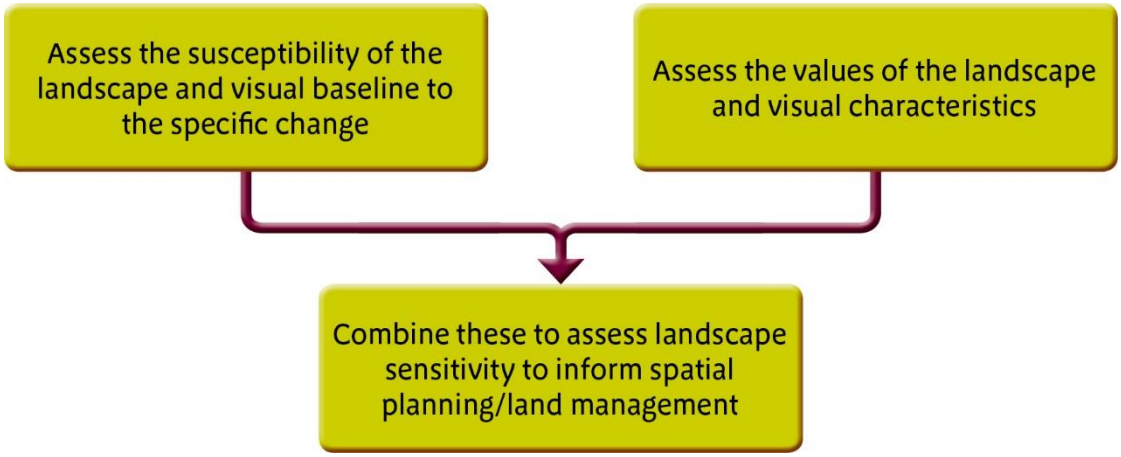
[4] Landscape sensitivity studies will use landscape character assessments as their baseline / evidence base, and thus will be informed by An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, 2014, Natural England, and An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment, 2012, Natural England.

This Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment, offers a generic process to **inform strategic spatial planning and land management.** Importantly a distinction needs to be drawn between this Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment and the assessment of 'sensitivity' as dealt with in GLVIA 3[5]:

- GLVIA is used for informing landscape impact and visual impact assessment (LVIA) concerning **a known development proposal for a specific site, often within the context of an Environmental Impact Assessment.** The consideration of landscape sensitivity and visual sensitivity assessment within an LVIA, together with the assessment of magnitude of change, informs judgements on significance of effects with regard to a specific development proposal
- an Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment should be used to inform strategic spatial planning and land management. It allows a more **strategic** assessment of landscape sensitivity, often across a very large area, with regard to the **principle** of a particular type of change scenario – information concerning potential developments or land management change may be limited

For both this Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment and GLVIA 3 **the basic process of sensitivity assessment is similar.** This Approach draws on the definition of sensitivity[6] as set out in GLVIA 3 where sensitivity is informed by judgements concerning landscape and visual susceptibility and value - refer to Figure 1 (informed by Figs. 3.5, 5.1, and 6.1 in GLVIA 3).

Figure 1 Assessing Landscape Sensitivity



In response to Landscape sensitivity assessment when applied to spatial planning and land management however the definitions of 'sensitivity' and 'susceptibility' in GLVIA 3 do need to be modified as follows -

[5] It should be noted that there is no suggestion here that GLVIA 3 should be modified in any way. GLVIA 3 and this approach to landscape sensitivity assessment serve different purposes.

[6] Sensitivity **-** A term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor. Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, Routledge. Page 158

Landscape Sensitivity Within the context of spatial planning and land management, landscape sensitivity is a term applied to landscape character and the associated visual resource, combining judgements of their susceptibility to the specific development type / development scenario or other change being considered together with the value(s) related to that landscape and visual resource. Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change arising from development types or land management practices, without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value.

Landscape Susceptibility Within the context of spatial planning and land management, landscape susceptibility is the degree to which a defined landscape and its associated visual qualities and attributes might respond to the specific development type / development scenario or other change without undue negative effects on landscape character and the visual resource.

Over the years there has been confusion concerning the use of the words 'sensitivity' and 'capacity'– often they have been used interchangeably. Sensitivity and capacity have different meanings. When dealing with an area's sensitivity the question relates to, 'to what'? When dealing with an area's landscape capacity[7] – perhaps to absorb a certain amount of development without unacceptable changes to landscape character – the question generally relates to, 'how much'? Importantly, a sensitivity study will identify areas of relative[8] sensitivity to particular development scenarios, and inform place based objectives and guidance and possibly decisions concerning environmental capacity - perhaps by way of what some might call a Landscape Capacity Assessment[9]. The latter might help decision makers to set more detailed objectives about the amount of acceptable change within a specified area, and therefore inform a more detailed strategy regarding desired amounts of development / change. However, notwithstanding this, it may be that the concept of capacity is too simplistic, when it comes to making complex decisions to inform objectives and guidance regarding place based planning, design, and management? When dealing with landscapes and change it is not easy to simply quantify exactly how much development a specific area can accommodate. Many important factors come into play, including professional judgement – informed by site visits. Part Three deals with using a Landscape sensitivity assessment to inform decisions.

Landscape sensitivity assessment should enable associated decision making to be sequential, transparent and auditable. A systematic and consistent approach can lend weight to the outcomes of the assessment.

1.2 The application of this approach

An Approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment applies to all the terrestrial and marine[10] areas within the scope of the ELC, but for convenience the term 'landscape' is used throughout this document.

[7] Here landscape capacity refers to the amount of specified development or change which a particular landscape and the associated visual resource is able to accommodate without undue negative effects on its character and qualities.

[8] i.e. relative to the other landscapes within the study area.

[9] This approach to landscape sensitivity assessment does not deal with how to carry out a landscape capacity assessment.

[10] The Marine Management Organisation is preparing a similar seascape sensitivity assessment approach for marine plan areas.

Landscape is defined as ' ... an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors'. The ELC covers 'natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas' and its scope includes 'land, inland water and marine areas' – including townscape and seascape. The ELC's aims are to promote landscape protection, management, and planning. Landscape sensitivity assessment is a flexible approach that can assist these aims, by informing decisions on where new development, and / or changes in land management, might be most appropriately directed / located from a landscape point of view. Whilst every planning application will need to be judged on its own merits, its suitability may be informed, in part, by an appropriate Landscape sensitivity assessment.

Landscape sensitivity assessment can be used to inform **strategies, plans, and policies** at a range of scales (from national / regional to local), **where information concerning potential developments or land management change may be limited,** but a range of scenarios will be put forward. A Landscape sensitivity assessment can be carried out across a broad area, or focus on defined areas of land or a series of sites[11] or corridors - for example when assessing routes for linear infrastructure such as roads or pipelines.

The purpose of a particular Landscape sensitivity assessment, and the associated scale of working, will be important since they will shape the study and influence various aspects of the approach to be taken to carry out the assessment, refer to Fig. 2. The scale of the assessment should ensure the outputs are fit for purpose.

1.3 The audience

Users of this approach will include those who have interests in the terrestrial and / or marine environments, who may need to:

- commission a landscape sensitivity assessment to inform a plan (for example a Local/Development Plan), policies, or a strategy
- carry out a landscape sensitivity assessment
- interrogate such an assessment
- utilise an assessment to inform decisions

When assessments are commissioned there should be an informed client[12], to write the project brief, to discuss the assessment as it progresses, and to carry out checks and balances regarding reporting.

Those carrying out a landscape sensitivity study are likely to be Landscape Architects, or suitably qualified landscape professionals. However, some aspects of a landscape sensitivity assessment may be undertaken by non-professionals such as community groups, or other organisations, who may carry out work in their local area to inform neighbourhood plans for example.

[11] Sites may be assessed as part of a review of candidate sites for a Local Development Plan.
[12] The client might be a local planning authority, or a landowner / developer, for example.

1.4 Two key principles for carrying out Landscape sensitivity assessments

The following Principles should be adhered to whatever the scope and methodology adapted in a Landscape Sensitivity Study:

1. **A Landscape sensitivity assessment should be as straightforward as possible –**

   - assessments need to be clear, concise, proportionate, and transparent. Conclusions should be easily understood by anyone - there is no desire for over complex and tortuous approaches. Documents that are over complex risk modification and / or dismissal by decision makers

   - for the sake of consistency, use appropriate definitions associated with good practice

2. **Landscape character, the visual resource[13], and value inform landscape sensitivity although differing circumstances will dictate the exact nature of the evidence gathered to inform the assessment – the approach is flexible to accommodate different situations (Fig.2.) -**

   - landscape sensitivity assessments can be undertaken at any scale, from neighbourhood, District, and County, to regional / national scale. The evidence base will reflect scale of working – Fig. 2

   - landscape sensitivity assessments can be carried out for any size of assessment unit[14], from a series of sites, defined land parcels or units, landscape character areas / types, through to regional scale units. The level of detail required will reflect the size of unit and the resources available. (It should be noted that the size of assessment unit is different from scale of working.)

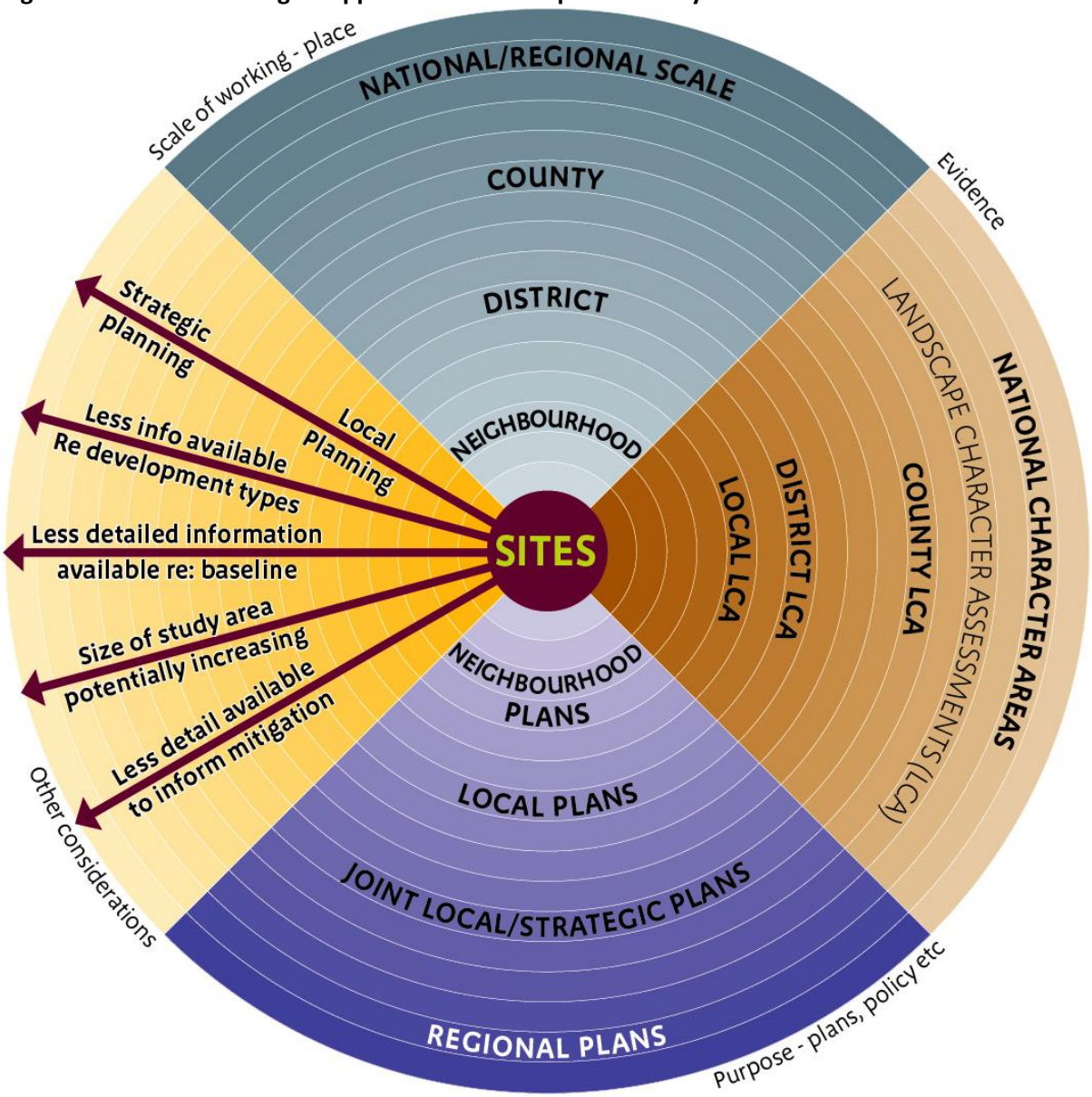
   - resources available (not least financial) and scale of working will influence evidence gathering, including community engagement

   - the nature and level of detail / information available concerning the potential development type(s) and scenarios to be assessed will vary and will inform the evidence base

[13] The visual resource includes views and the general visual amenity experienced, refer to page 21 etc., Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, Routledge.

[14] Assessment units are reporting units which may be Landscape Character Areas or Landscape Character Types, or subdivisions of either, depending upon the scale and purpose of the landscape sensitivity assessment. Some practitioners have referred to these as land parcels, or sensitivity parcels. They may be informed by desk and field study and will be areas of broadly similar characteristics.

Figure 2 Factors informing an approach to Landscape sensitivity assessment



Several sites, around a small settlement for example, may be the subject of a Landscape sensitivity assessment. But a site that is the subject of a planning application, where details of the development are known, may be the subject of a landscape impact and visual impact assessment – perhaps as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment – informed by GLVIA 3 (and therefore outside the scope of this 'Approach').

A development scenario or a range of development scenarios will be put forward to inform a landscape sensitivity assessment at, for example, regional/sub-regional/county/district/local level. There may be a range of scenarios associated with one development type (for example for housing, or renewable energy).

Part two: Landscape sensitivity assessment

2.1 The process of Landscape sensitivity assessment consists of four steps (refer to Fig. 3 which provides a summary of the process)

STEP 1 – Define the Purpose and Scope of the Landscape sensitivity assessment and Prepare the Brief.

STEP 2 - Gather Information to Inform the Landscape sensitivity assessment (desk study and field study).

Step 3 – Assess Landscape Sensitivity of the Assessment Units (desk study and field study).

Step 4 – Reporting.

2.2 Step 1 – Define purpose and scope of the Landscape sensitivity assessment and prepare the brief

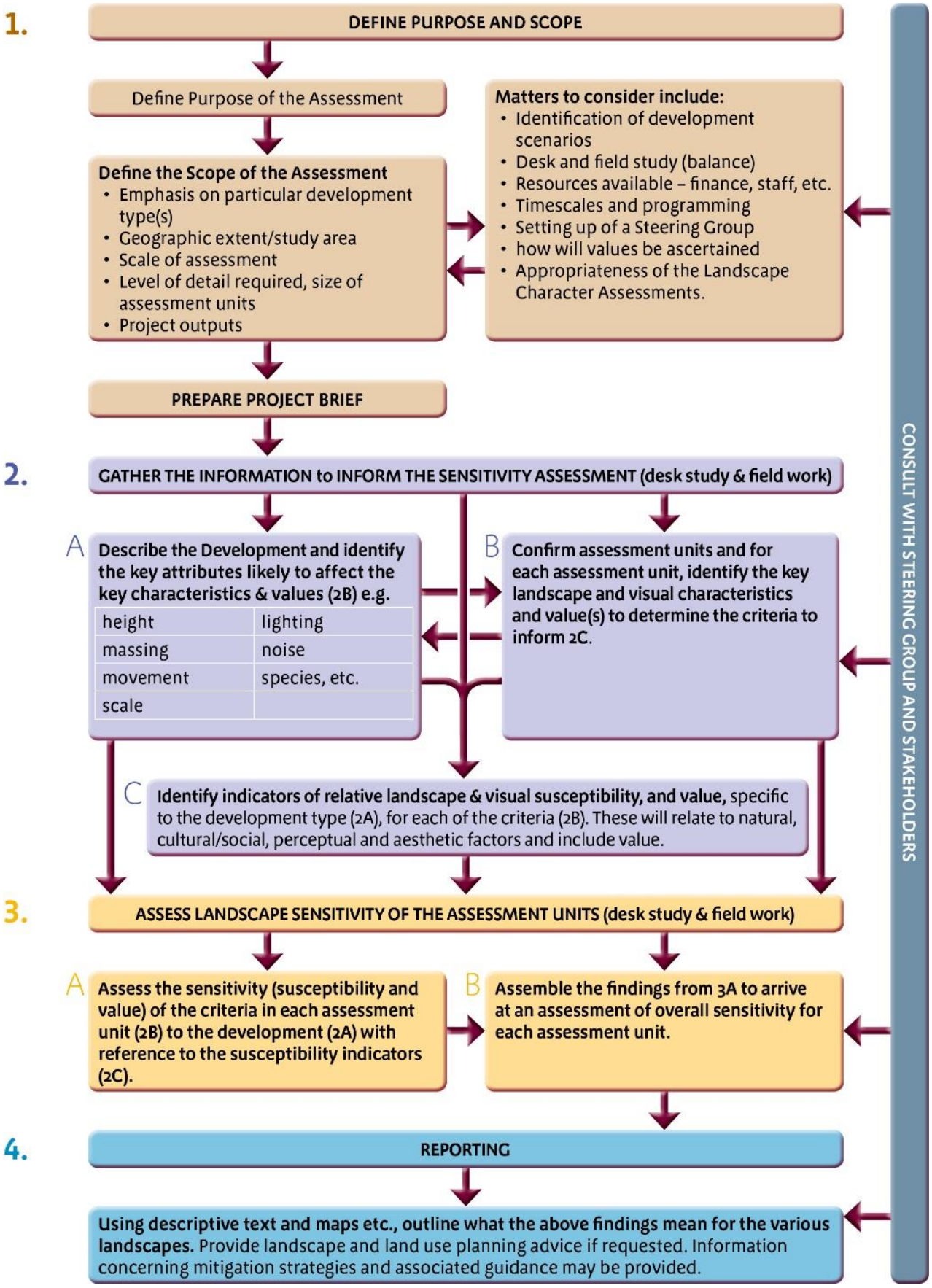
At the outset the client will need to consider setting up a Steering Group of interested parties. An early role for this Group will be to help to inform the all-important purpose and scope of the Landscape sensitivity assessment. Both will inform the brief for the project. The purpose of the assessment must be understood and clearly defined. This will influence the scope of the assessment including the scale at which it will be carried out, levels of detail, resources required (including skill sets), and stakeholder engagement[15] etc.

Purpose

- What are the anticipated uses – that is what need(s) will the assessment address across the prescribed area? Will the Landscape sensitivity assessment inform the location of: housing site allocations for a local plan / neighbourhood plan; renewable energy technologies (wind farms, solar farms, tidal barrages etc.); transport infrastructure; commercial forestry; tourism development at the coast; electricity transmission infrastructure; or mobile masts etc.? Is it intended that the study will go on to inform place based land use or landscape planning, design, and / or land management objectives or guidance, for example?
- How will the results / outcomes be used and by whom?
- How will the outputs be accessed (for example hard copy, GIS data layers, and / or website)?

[15] To what extent will there be community engagement, for example?

Figure 3 The process of Landscape sensitivity assessment



Scope

The range of subject matter that the Landscape sensitivity assessment is to deal with needs to be understood and reflected in the Project Brief -

- What is the emphasis of the study? Is the study to focus on several different types of development (for example wind farms, solar farms, static caravan development, mobile masts, electricity transmission lines), or is the focus on only one particular development type? Is the study intended to focus on a range of particular development scenarios, such as for example, different densities and heights of residential development, or perhaps different heights and layouts of wind turbines associated with several sizes of wind farms, or several species groupings and layouts of commercial forestry for example?
- What is the extent of the study area[16] – this may be further refined at Step 2? Is the study area a large geographic area, such as several county or district council areas or a National Park and its setting, a broad corridor, or smaller geographic areas adjacent to a town or city?
- What scale of assessment is required - a high level broad-brush study, or a more detailed study? If the study is broad-brush can National Character Areas, supplemented by information from other sources, be utilised to inform the baseline? Regarding other scales of study, are County, District and / or Local Landscape Assessments available to inform the baseline assessment units? Sensitivity, generally, varies across Landscape Character Areas BUT the scale of the study may require some generalisations to be made. If the study is broad-brush, then sensitivity findings / reporting may be generalised across the assessment units (even though it must be accepted that sensitivity to particular developments is likely to vary within Landscape Character Areas) – this may sometimes be referred to as 'overall sensitivity'. More detailed / local studies may require assessment of sensitivity to the development types / scenarios in question to respond to, and acknowledge that, sensitivity may vary across the assessment units / Landscape Character Areas within the study area.
- What level of detail is needed? What is the desired size of assessment units[17]? For example, are National Character Areas, County level Landscape Character Areas, District level Landscape Character Areas, or other assessment units to be utilised? Sometimes existing information may need to be supplemented by a more detailed Landscape Character Assessment to be carried out for the specific project in hand. To what extent is information on the visual resource (views, visual qualities etc.) required to inform the landscape sensitivity assessment?
- What are the desired project outputs? The outputs of the assessment will include the methodology followed, and the outputs of the Steps leading to the findings and recommendations. Explanatory and descriptive text will be required, perhaps to inform place based land use and landscape planning, design, or land management objectives and guidance. What level of detail will be required, for example concerning future guidance and tentative mitigation strategies? The conclusions regarding sensitivity should explain what they mean for the development types and landscapes in question. Will information be required about likely changes, and the nature of change if particular development / land management scenarios are pursued? What maps, GIS data, photographs, tables and other illustrative material are

[16] Some landscapes, such as nationally designated landscapes (e.g. National Parks, and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty), not least because of their high national value, may be sieved out of the ongoing study at this stage. Informed by professional judgement, areas are sometimes scoped out of a study, in order to focus limited assessment resources on other areas.

[17] It may be that the size of assessment units cannot be determined until Step 2 when site visits, as well as desk study, might inform associated thinking.

required? Good record keeping throughout will be essential. Information will need to be correctly recorded, and easily accessed by the client.

The project brief

- In addition to the above, and the development types and associated scenarios decided upon, the Brief will be determined by: the desired balance between desk study and field work; resources available for the work – for example finance, staff; timescales and programming; the possible need to set up a Steering Group, and / or a Stakeholder Reference Group (if not already in existence); to what extent will partner and / or community engagement be expected; the availability and scale of existing Landscape Character Assessments and a potential need to review them to check that they are fit for purpose - there may be a need to update these, but only where necessary for the assessment in hand[18]; the level of detail required concerning visual considerations; how values are to be captured; consideration of appropriate national and local policy context; skills and specialisms needed to carry out the Assessment
- the Brief may also identify the specific stages at which client approvals will be necessary, for for example regarding identification of criteria and susceptibility indicators
- the extent to which the Assessment may need to take additional account of other specific subject areas such as Historic Landscape Character[19], or perhaps Natural Capital, or Ecosystem Services will need to be outlined

2.3 Step 2 – Gather information to inform the Landscape sensitivity assessment (desk study and field study)

The susceptibility of landscape character and the visual resource, to the prescribed changes, combined with value, inform judgements regarding sensitivity (Fig. 1). Therefore three interrelated and iterative pieces of work – informed by the Brief –need to be carried out at Step 2 :

A. Describe the Development Type(s) and Scenarios to be considered - identify key attributes

B. Confirm Assessment Units and Establish and Review the landscape and visual baseline, and identify associated value(s)

C. Identify Indicators of Susceptibility to be used when Assessing Landscape and Visual Sensitivity to the Development Type(s)

A. Describe the Development Type(s) and Scenarios to be considered

Judgements concerning whether or not, or the degree to which, a defined area may be able to accommodate specified change(s) need to be informed by the likely interactions between the susceptibility of the resource - landscape and visual - and the attributes of the specified development scenario(s).

[18] Refer to 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', Natural England, 2014).
[19] Note that Historic Landscape Character should also have informed the appropriate Landscape Character Assessment baseline.

Developments or land management changes that may be the focus of a Landscape sensitivity assessment include –

- commercial scale wind farms
- domestic wind turbines
- solar photo-voltaic energy farms
- high voltage overhead power lines
- telecommunications masts
- forestry
- housing
- employment and commercial uses
- caravan parks/recreation development
- transport infrastructure

Each one of these development types will have a range of key attributes associated with it for example height, number (that is number of turbines or houses - not number of developments) size, density, massing, linearity, colour, movement, lighting, noise, species characteristics etc. Therefore hypothetical development scenarios will need to be described to identify these, as will any land management changes / interventions, depending upon the focus of the assessment. They will inform indicators of relative[20] susceptibility (2C), and be used to assess landscape sensitivity at Step 3.

B. Confirm Assessment Units and establish and review the landscape and visual baseline, and identify associated value(s)

If not decided upon at Step 1 the size of assessment units needs to be ascertained at Step 2B. Size will depend upon extent of the study area, the scale of the sensitivity assessment and the amount of detailed information available and required. For example, an assessment unit might be as large as a National Character Area or as small as a Landscape Character Area identified in a Local Landscape Character Assessment.

A landscape, together with its visual qualities, will be assessed with reference to some of the elements and features that make up that landscape[21], and their value(s) – these in effect become the assessment criteria. The likely impacts associated with the key attributes of the development type(s) will be assessed against these criteria at Stage 3A, to identify their sensitivity to the changes, and go on to inform the overall sensitivity of the landscapes of the assessment units to the development type(s) (3B).

For the study area, where possible utilise existing Landscape Character Assessments and describe the baseline[22] **focusing on the elements and features** - these may sometimes be regarded as key

[20] i.e. relative to the other landscapes within the study area.
[21] Often not all of the characteristics / elements and features will be relevant to a particular development type, or scenario. To avoid unnecessary work it will be important to focus on only the key characteristics / elements and features which are likely to be affected by the development type / other intervention.
[22] Larger scale studies, perhaps dealing with Landscape Character Areas at the county level, may require the baseline to be more fully described. But, smaller scale studies possibly utilising smaller assessment units, may only require relevant descriptions of the key characteristics.

characteristics[23] - **that are likely to be most affected by the defined development(s).** Avoid over complicating the assessment by describing the landscape(s) in detail – photographs, annotated photographs and sketches might be useful.

If an up to date Landscape Character Assessment, at the appropriate scale, is unavailable then it will be necessary to either update an existing Landscape Character Assessment or, carry out a new Landscape Character Assessment[24] proportionate to the sensitivity assessment being carried out.

1. Landscape Characteristics and Visual Characteristics – selection of criteria

Unique combinations of elements and features make our landscapes distinctive and unique – Fig. 4[25]. Depending on the focus of the assessment (for example wind farms, solar farms, housing, holiday development, commercial forestry) a list of criteria should be identified from the key characteristics of the landscape and visual baseline and may include reference to some of the following, for example –

Natural -

Landform

Land cover (flora and fauna etc.)

Hydrology

Cultural/Social -

Land use (agriculture, recreation, industry, settlement etc.)

Historic features and cultural heritage

Enclosure

Presence / Absence of built structures

Settlement

Aesthetic and Perceptual -

Scale and openness

Pattern

Tranquillity (movement, lighting, darkness, noise etc.)

Naturalness

Remoteness

Landscape Condition -

Intactness

[23] Concerning a National Park, or Area Outstanding Natural Beauty, it may be appropriate to refer to their Special Qualities as informed by its management plan.
[24] Natural England, 2014, An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment.
[25] Natural England, 2014, An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment.

State of repair

Visual Characteristics –

Skylines

Important or characteristic Views (perhaps including iconic features)

Landmarks and other focal points (for example geological features)

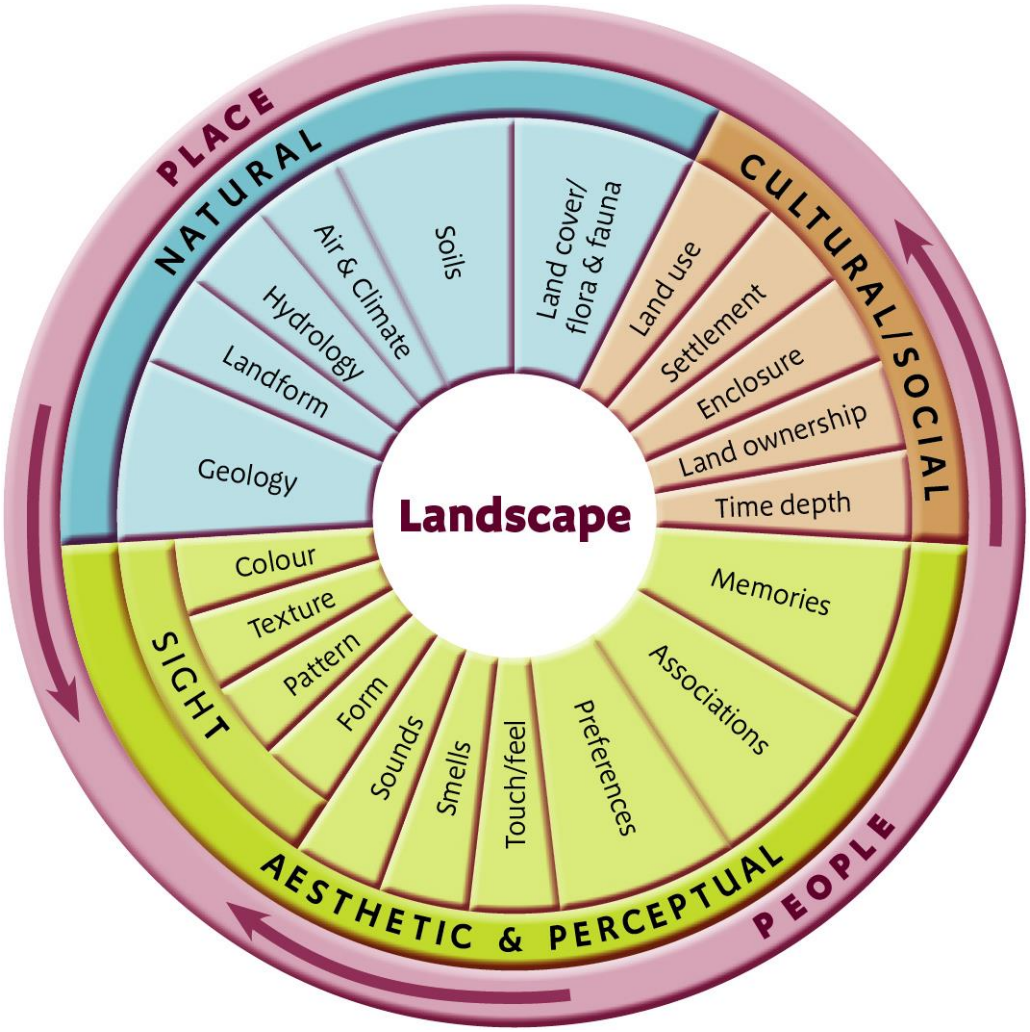
Intervisibility (for example between important places / sites)

Typical receptors

There may also be reference to distinctiveness, and / or rarity. Some of the above headings may be amalgamated and other criteria such as sense of place may also be referred to.

Assessors may find it useful to design some purpose made templates (including field survey sheets), with appropriate headings on which to record findings - refer to Annex 2 and 3.

Figure 4. What is landscape?



2. Value – selection of criteria

It is important that the value / values society places on our landscapes, and upon the elements / characteristics and the visual qualities that together create these diverse places, inform the Landscape sensitivity assessment.

The ELC acknowledges that, 'the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas;'[26]. Assignments of value will be completely independent of what is being assessed (unlike judgments concerning landscape and visual susceptibility).

The value(s) of landscapes[27] and their component parts can be ascertained qualitatively with reference to, for example:

a. Designations, which may be international, national (for example National Park, Area of Outstanding National Beauty, Site of Special Scientific Interest, Conservation Area, Listed Buildings), or local (refer to the Local Plan);

b. Their character and sense of place;

c. Valued attributes, such as topography, perceptual qualities, cultural and historic features and associations[28], biodiversity, Area of Outstanding Beauty / National Park special qualities etc.;

d. Community values;

e. Recreational value;

f. Intrinsic value.

The value of an area and / or the values of its' component parts (biodiversity, trees, historic and archaeological features, geomorphological, geological, and hydrological features etc.) may be informed by: national and / or local designations and referred to in associated literature – for example statutory plans, and; published Landscape Character Assessments[29].

Some locally valued landscapes may not be designated as such but may be the subject of Local Landscape Character Assessments, Local Distinctiveness studies and other community produced place based documents, community produced guidebooks, and guides for tourists for example. Historic Area Assessments[30] might be available for some areas. Lately, Public Participatory GIS tools have tried to capture an understanding of some locally valued places and landscapes.

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[26] Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence, October 2000.

[27] Refer also to Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, pages 80 – 85.

[28] See, for example, Historic England (2008), Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance.

[29] Importantly Landscape Character Assessments can integrate socio-cultural and natural considerations (for example landscape and ecosystem services) and provide an understanding of how a place is experienced, perceived and valued by people - Natural England, 2014, An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment.

[30] See Historic England, (2017), Understanding Place.

The valuation of ecosystem services (provisioning, regulatory, habitat and supporting services, and cultural services), for example as provided by green infrastructure, might also inform value and thus landscape sensitivity[31].

C. Identify indicators of susceptibility - to be used when assessing landscape and visual sensitivity to the development type(s)

Identify and develop brief descriptive indicators of relative susceptibility, for each of the **selected criteria within each assessment unit,** by describing how the landscape, visual, and value related criteria (Step 2B above), may be affected to a greater or lesser extent by the key attributes of the proposed development type(s) (Step 2A above).

The **sensitivity of the landscape** to the key attributes of the development scenario will be systematically assessed with reference to these indicators of relative susceptibility at Step 3.

Importantly, the identification of indicators of susceptibility needs to be specific to the particular study in question. **Every project will be unique because of the *key characteristics specific to the landscape* being scrutinised, and the *details associated with the specified change(s).*** So, as the landscape changes and the development types / land management scenarios change so will the indicators of susceptibility.

Some **examples** of indicators of landscape susceptibility that have been used in practice, for a range of development types are illustrated in Annex 2. – **these are not prescriptive, the landscape professional will need to select and agree their own criteria and derive associated indicators of susceptibility particular to the assessment in hand.**

The process should always be transparent, logical and easy to follow.

[31] Refer for example to: Natural England (2011), Experiencing Landscapes: Towards a judgement – making framework for 'cultural services' and 'experiential qualities'; Natural England (2015), Integrating people's values and cultural ecosystem services into the design of ecological networks and other landscape change proposals, and; Natural England (2016), Natural England Access to Evidence Information Note EIN022, Putting economic values on green infrastructure improvements.

2.4 Step 3 – Assess landscape sensitivity of the assessment units (desk study and field study)

The sensitivity of the landscapes of the assessment units (2B) should now be systematically assessed and informed by field work. Step 3, depending upon the size of assessment units, may consist of two related stages (refer to Annex 3):

A. Assess the sensitivity of the criteria associated with each assessment unit (2B) against the key attributes of the development scenario(s) (2A) with reference to the indicators of relative susceptibility identified at 2C.

   A five point scale[32] is often used to describe the 'levels' of sensitivity, for example:

   1. **Very High** 2. **High** 3. **Medium** 4. **Medium - Low** 5. **Low** or perhaps

   1. **High** 2. **High / Medium** 3. **Medium** 4. **Medium / Low** 5. **Low.**

   It will be necessary to provide definitions regarding the levels of sensitivity, in order to identify categories of landscape sensitivity within each assessment unit, noting that sensitivity has been informed by susceptibility AND value. For example, [33] :

   High – Landscape and / or visual characteristics of the assessment unit are very susceptible to change and / or its values are high or high / medium and it is unable to accommodate the relevant type of development without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are very low.

   High / Medium – Landscape and /or visual characteristics of the assessment unit are susceptible to change and / or its values are medium through to high. It may be able to accommodate the relevant type of development but only in limited situations without significant character change or adverse effects if defined in the relevant land parcel summary. Thresholds for significant change are low.

   Medium – Landscape and / or visual characteristics of the assessment unit are susceptible to change and / or its values are medium / low through to high / medium and / or it *may* have some potential to accommodate the relevant type of development in some *defined* situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are intermediate.

   Medium / Low – Landscape and / or visual characteristics of the assessment unit are resilient and of low susceptibility to change and / or its values are medium / low or low and it can accommodate the relevant type of development in many situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are high.

[32] Five bands are generally regarded as the minimum number. There might be more depending upon the size of assessment units, the complexity of the landscape etc.

[33] Example adapted from White Consultants (Dec. 2016) landscape sensitivity assessment for Stroud District Council, Table 1. The assessment was carried out to inform a review of the Local Plan, focusing on understanding the most appropriate locations for future housing and employment growth from a landscape perspective.

Low – Landscape and / or visual characteristics of the assessment unit are robust or degraded and are not susceptible to change and / or its values are low and it can accommodate the relevant type of development without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are very high.

It will be essential to test and review initial / draft findings in the field. Any relationships between assessment units should be recorded – for example intervisibility. Purpose made templates may be populated with information as the assessment proceeds – refer to Annex 2 and 3 for examples. Also, it will be important to discuss preliminary findings with the Steering Group as the work progresses.

B. Using information from 3A, assess and describe the overall sensitivity of each assessment unit to change associated with the development scenario(s) – refer to the example Annex 3.

It should be recognised that lines on maps are typically in reality zones of transition – they very rarely represent a sudden change in character for example.

2.5 Step 4 – Reporting

Reporting will be shaped by the Brief and informed by the findings from Step 3. Good record keeping throughout the project will aid reporting and provide an audit trail for the client. The report will need to provide a clearly reasoned narrative, explain its conclusions and recommendations, and indicate how the information should inform future decision making. Project outputs may include:

- the methodology followed, and the outputs of the Steps leading to the findings and recommendations
- maps, GIS data, and associated descriptive explanatory text and other illustrative material such as photographs. Sometimes colour coded maps can be a blunt tool, the narrative is all important. Areas may have places of greater or lesser sensitivity within them, and so explanations are important – limitations need to be acknowledged
- concise descriptive text which serves to reduce dependence on tables that are often colour coded, and sometimes give the wrong impression that sensitivity assessment may be very precise (this potential problem may increase if the colours are transferred to maps, but caveats can be added)
- location, siting and design prompts to inform future decisions, which may be generalised depending upon the scale of the study and size of assessment units
- information concerning opportunities for mitigation and possible mitigation strategies
- any caveats regarding how the information provided should be used

The report should be clearly structured and written in plain English.

Part three: Using a landscape sensitivity assessment to inform decisions – recommendations for land use planning, design and management

3.1 Application

Landscape sensitivity assessment can inform strategic landscape planning decisions, by contributing to the identification of opportunities and constraints / other considerations and going on to inform policy objectives, and guidance. Landscape management objectives may also be informed by such assessments. These will assist in informing the direction of land use and landscape change which should be plan led and may focus on landscape planning objectives and management objectives such as protect / conserve, accommodate, accept, and restructure (including enhance).

Once the Landscape sensitivity assessment has been completed it should be used for the purpose(s) set down in the Brief. With reference to the development type(s) stated in the Brief, it may be used to inform a range of options / policy objectives. Alongside other considerations it may go on to influence where, and how much, development or land management change might be located in the areas of lesser Landscape Sensitivity - without undesirable impacts and effects on landscape character and the visual resource – noting that a judgement on 'how much' cannot be based on landscape sensitivity alone. The outputs of these studies will need to be considered along with all the other factors that influence land use planning, design and management of specific places – see Fig. 5.

Following on from a Landscape sensitivity assessment, because the attention will now be on fewer areas as identified via the Assessment, there should be an opportunity to focus in on these areas and obtain more site specific information, not least informed by detailed site visits. Also there may be more information available concerning possible developments, or land management interventions. Cumulative impacts may need to be considered. These and other considerations identified on Fig. 5 below will inform place based planning design and management. The information produced should inform development and design briefs, including mitigation strategies such as advance planting, and assist the management of change.

Depending upon the level and context of decision making (national, regional, or local) generalisations may need to be made and caveats given when recommendations are drawn up.

Figure 5 Landscape sensitivity assessment and other considerations can inform place based decisions

Part four: Annexes

Annex 1. Glossary

Assessment unit Assessment units are reporting units which may be Landscape Character Areas or Landscape Character Types, or subdivisions of either, depending upon the scale and purpose of the Landscape sensitivity assessment. Some practitioners have referred to these as land parcels, or sensitivity parcels. They may be informed by desk and field study and will be areas of broadly similar characteristics.

Capacity – the maximum amount that something can contain ****

Ecosystem Services These are services provided by the natural environment, that benefit people. Some of these ecosystem services are well known, including food, fibre and fuel provision and the cultural services that provide benefits to people through recreation and cultural appreciation of nature. Other services provided by ecosystems are not so well known. These include the regulation of the climate, purification of the air and water, flood protection, soil formation and nutrient recycling.**

Elements Individual parts which make up the landscape, such as, for example, trees, hedges and buildings.**

Feature Particularly prominent or eye-catching elements in the landscape, such as tree clumps, church towers or wooded skylines OR a particular aspect of the project proposal.*

Key characteristics Those combinations of elements which are particularly important to the current character of the landscape and help to give an area its particularly distinctive sense of place.*

Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors ***

Landscape capacity refers to the amount of specified development or change which a particular landscape and the associated visual resource is able to accommodate without undue negative effects on its character and qualities.

Landscape character A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.*

Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) These are single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type.*

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) The process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape, and using this information to assist in managing change in the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive. The process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.*

Landscape Character Types (LCTs) These are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, and historical land use and settlement pattern, and perceptual and aesthetic attributes. *

Landscape management means action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes ***

Landscape planning means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes ***

Landscape policy means an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes ***

Landscape Sensitivity Within the context of spatial planning and land management, landscape sensitivity is a term applied to landscape character and the associated visual resource, combining judgements of their susceptibility to the specific development type / development scenario or other change being considered together with the value(s) related to that landscape and visual resource. Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change arising from development types or land management practices, without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value.

Landscape Susceptibility Within the context of spatial planning and land management, landscape susceptibility is the degree to which a defined landscape and its associated visual qualities and attributes might respond to the specific development type / development scenario or other change without undue negative effects on landscape character and the visual resource.

Landscape value The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.*

Overall sensitivity A term applied when landscape sensitivity reporting is generalised across the assessment unit (even though it must be accepted that such sensitivity to particular developments is likely to vary within the assessment unit).

Sensitive – quick to detect, respond to, or be affected by slight changes or influences ****

Susceptible – likely to be influenced or harmed by a particular thing ****

Special Qualities A term often used in relation to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty taken to mean qualities relating to wildlife and cultural heritage, in addition to qualities relating to natural beauty. Usually defined in the management plan for the area.

Strategic Forming part of a long term plan to achieve a specific purpose ****

SOURCES:

* Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition, Routledge.

** Defra 'An introductory guide to valuing Ecosystem services' (2007).

*** Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence, Oct 2000.

**** Oxford University Press (2005), Compact Oxford English Dictionary.

Annex 2. Examples of landscape & visual criteria and associated indicators of landscape and visual susceptibility, and value criteria

The following criteria and indicators of higher or lower susceptibility are **examples only** and relate to wind energy, field scale solar photovoltaics, overhead lines, mobile masts, static caravans / chalet parks and extensions, and housing and employment development. The first five examples are largely informed by a landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment carried out in north Wales[34]. They usefully show how across one study area – Anglesey, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park - the indicators of susceptibility will importantly vary depending upon the development type focused upon. The sixth example, regarding housing and employment development, is largely taken from a landscape and visual sensitivity assessment for Shropshire[35]. ***Criteria and indicators will always be dependent upon the landscapes of the study area, and the development scenario(s) being considered, and therefore they must always be specifically tailored to the project.***

Sometimes not all of the characteristics / elements and features (the criteria) in an area will be relevant to a particular development type, or scenario, so to avoid unnecessary work it will be important to focus on only the key characteristics / elements and features which are likely to be affected by the development type / scenario / other intervention. These indicators chosen to inform the Assessment may also be determined by the size of the assessment units.

Example 1.

Wind Energy Development - Anglesey, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park

Landscape & visual criteria with indicators of landscape & visual susceptibility, and value criteria.

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Landscape		
Scale	- Intimate and small scale landscapes - Small scale field systems - Human scale elements	- Vast or large scale landscapes
Landform	- Rugged hills - Irregular or complex landform - Narrow valleys and ridges - Distinctive landform features	- Simple featureless landform - Convex landform - Plateaux - Flat and uniform landform

[34] Adapted from Gillespies, 2014, Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment. Report to Isle of Anglesey Council, Gwynedd Council and Snowdonia National Park. In 2015 this piece of work won the Landscape Institute Award for Strategic Landscape Planning.

[35] Gillespies, 2018, Shropshire Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Assessment, for Shropshire Council to inform selection of suitable sites for allocation in the Local Plan Review.

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Landcover (Note – Biodiversity could perhaps feature more here.)	- Complex or irregular landscape - Rocky uplands - Open hillsides - Field pattern / mosaic - Valleys - Water	- Simple, regular or uniform landscape - Developed land, derelict or waste ground - Open upland pasture - Upland moorland - Forestry - Lowland farmland
Man-made influences	- Infrequent / no residential built form - Dispersed settlement / sparsely settled / unpopulated areas - Presence of historic buildings / structures or settlement	- Major infrastructure (transport / communications / utility infrastructure / wind turbines) - Modern day industrial development - Large / concentrated urban / modern settlements - Commercial forestry
Aesthetic, perceptual and experiental		
Scenic Quality and Character	- High scenic quality (that is National Park / AONB / Heritage Coast) - Strong sense of place	- Low scenic quality (that is industrial areas) - Weak sense of place
Remoteness / Tranquillity	- Remote; tranquil; wild; spiritual; attractive; peaceful - Physically or perceptually remote, peaceful or tranquil	- Threatening; unattractive; noisy; settled - Close to visible signs of human activity and development
Visual		
Skylines and settings	- Prominent skylines - Distinctive skylines - Uninterrupted / undeveloped skylines - Presence of distinctive / sensitive landscape features such as historic landmarks	- Less prominent skylines - Existing vertical features (modern development) - Existing built development
Movement	- Rare	- Constant or frequent access - Busy
Visibility, Key views, Vistas and Typical Receptors (both within and outside of each assessment unit	- Landscapes which are open or exposed with far reaching views - Densely populated - Views from scenic routes, well-known landmarks, or views from visitor viewpoints	- Landscapes which are confined, contained or enclosed with few inward or outward views - Sparsely populated or inaccessible - Neighbouring landscapes of lower sensitivity

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
/ Landscape Character Area)	- Views into or out, especially from high ground - Neighbouring landscapes of higher sensitivity, especially internationally and nationally designated landscapes - Contributes to wider landscape - Distinctive or complex backdrops - Landscapes important to the settings / approaches / gateways to designated landscapes - Strong association with adjacent LCAs	- Contributes little to wider landscape - Large scale simple back drops - Weak association with adjacent LCAs -
Views to and from Important Landscape and Cultural Heritage Features (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)	- Strong association with landscape - Intervisibility between sites	- Weak association with landscape - Little intervisibility between sites -
Value		
Landscape Value	- National Park, AONB, Heritage Coast, - Regional and local designations - Related published documentation (tourist information), art and literature - Historic Environment ○ World Heritage Site, Registered Historic Landscape, Registered Park and Garden, visually prominent Sites and Monuments (SAMs) such as hillforts and castles which are also visitor attractions. - Biodiversity and geodiversity designations - Local community values	
Visual Value	- Criteria will include iconic views, views related to designated landscape related features, regionally / locally valued views,	

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
	and views valued by the local community.	
Mitigation Potential		

Example 2.

Field-scale solar photovoltaic energy - Anglesey, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park

Landscape & visual criteria with indicators of landscape & visual susceptibility, and value criteria.

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Landscape		
Field Pattern, Scale and Enclosure	- Small scale fields - Mosaic of complex / rugged / irregular field patterns - Intimate landscapes - Ancient field patterns - Field boundaries characterised by a large proportion of well managed low hedgerows, fences and / or walls.	- Large scale fields - Simple / regular / uniform field pattern - A large proportion of unmanaged / high hedgerows / field boundaries
Landform	- Rugged hills - Steep landform - Irregular or complex landform - Narrow valleys and ridges - Distinctive landform features	- Convex or flat landscapes - Expansive lowland landscapes - Uniform landform - Featureless landscapes
Landcover (Note – Biodiversity could perhaps feature more here.)	- Natural /semi-natural landcover (for example moorland) - Open pastures - Pastoral fields - Large areas of semi-natural woodland - Parkland landscapes	- Large scale arable fields (low grade) - Previously developed / green field sites
Man-made influences	- Absence of modern development	- Major infrastructure (transport / communications / utility infrastructure / industrial elements)

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
	- Infrequent / no residential built form - Dispersed settlement / sparsely settled / un-populated areas - Presence of small scale historic / vernacular settlement / buildings / structures	- Modern day industrial development - Large / concentrated urban / modern settlements - 'Developed' character - Presence of roads and tracks in the landscape -
Aesthetic, perceptual and experiental		
Scenic Quality and Character	- High scenic quality (that is National Park / AONB / Heritage coast) - Strong sense of place	- Low scenic quality (that is industrial areas) - Weak sense of place
Remoteness / Tranquillity	- Remote; tranquil; wild; spiritual; attractive; peaceful - Physically or perceptually remote, peaceful or tranquil	- Threatening; unattractive; noisy; settled - Close to visible signs of human activity and development
Visual		
Visibility, Key views, Vistas and Typical Receptors (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)	- Landscapes which are open or exposed with far reaching views - Sparse woodland / tree cover - Field systems bounded by fences / managed hedgerows / stone walls / no field boundaries - Strong intervisibility with sensitive landscapes (such as neighbouring landscapes of higher sensitivity, especially internationally and nationally designated landscapes) - Forms an important part of a view from sensitive viewpoints (such as views from scenic routes, well known landmarks, or promoted viewpoints)	- Landscapes which are confined, contained or enclosed with few inward or outward views - Little inter-visibility with adjacent sensitive landscapes or viewpoints - Fields bounded with intact hedgerows / overgrown hedgerows / hedgebanks / hedgerows with trees - The presence of woodland blocks and belts - Sparsely populated
Value		
Landscape Value	- National Park, AONB, Heritage Coast, - Regional and local designations	

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
	- Related published documentation (tourist information), art and literature - Historic Environment ○ World Heritage Site, Registered Historic Landscape, Registered Park and Garden, visually prominent Sites and Monuments (SAMs) such as hillforts and castles frequently visited by tourists. - Biodiversity and geodiversity designations - Local community values	
Visual Value	- Criteria will include iconic views, views related to designated landscape related features, regionally / locally valued views, and views valued by the local community.	
Mitigation Potential		

Example 3.

400kV overhead line development - Anglesey, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park

Landscape & visual criteria with indicators of landscape & visual susceptibility, and value criteria.

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Landscape		
Scale	- Intimate and small scale landscapes - Small scale field systems - Human scale elements	- Vast or large scale landscapes

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Landform	- Dramatic / rugged uplands - Irregular or complex landform - Distinctive landform features	- Simple featureless landform - Convex landform - Flat and uniform landform - Valleys and low rolling hills
Landcover (Note – Biodiversity could perhaps feature more here.)	- Rocky uplands - Complex, irregular or intimate landscape - Field pattern / mosaic - Many scattered field and hedgerow trees	- Simple, regular or uniform landscape - Developed land, derelict or waste ground - Commercial forestry - Lowland farmland
Man-made influences	- Infrequent / no residential built form - -Dispersed settlement / sparsely settled / unpopulated areas - Presence of historic buildings / structures or settlement	- Major infrastructure (transport / communications / utility infrastructure) - Modern day industrial development - Large / concentrated urban / modern settlements - Commercial forestry
Settlement Pattern	- Dense dispersed settlement pattern - Historic settlements	- Urban - Villages - Clustered settlement
Aesthetic, perceptual and experiental		
Condition	- Good condition	- Poor condition
Scenic Quality and Character	- High scenic quality (that is National Park / AONB / Heritage coast) - Strong sense of place	- Low scenic quality (that is industrial areas) - Weak sense of place
Remoteness / Tranquillity	- Remote; tranquil; wild; spiritual; attractive; peaceful - Physically or perceptually remote, peaceful or tranquil	- Threatening; unattractive; noisy; settled - Close to visible signs of human activity and development
Visual		
Skylines and settings	- Prominent skylines - Distinctive skylines / backdrops - Uninterrupted / undeveloped skylines - Presence of distinctive / sensitive landscape features such as historic landmarks	- Less prominent skylines - Existing vertical features (modern development) - Existing built development

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Visibility, Key views, Vistas and Typical Receptors (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)	- Landscapes which are open or exposed with far reaching views - Densely populated - Views from scenic routes, well-known landmarks, or views from visitor viewpoints - Intervisibility with adjacent landscapes in particular with - Neighbouring landscapes of higher sensitivity, especially internationally designated landscapes - Contributes to appreciation of wider landscape - Distinctive or complex backdrops - Landscapes important to the settings / approaches / gateways to designated landscapes - Strong association with adjacent LCAs	- Landscapes which are confined, contained or enclosed with few inward or outward views - Sparsely populated - Neighbouring landscapes of lower sensitivity - Contributes little to wider landscape - Large scale simple back drops - Weak association with adjacent LCAs
Views to and from Important Landscape and Cultural Heritage Features (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)	- Strong association with landscape - Intervisibility between sites	- Weak association with landscape - Little intervisibility between sites
Value		
Landscape Value	- National Park, AONB, Heritage Coast, - Regional and local designations - Related published documentation (tourist information), art and literature - Historic Environment ○ World Heritage Site, Registered Historic Landscape, Registered Park and Garden, visually prominent Sites and	

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
	Monuments (SAMs) such as hillforts and castles frequently visited by tourists. - Biodiversity and geodiversity designations - Local community values	
Visual Value	- Criteria will include iconic views, views related to designated landscape related features, regionally / locally valued views, and views valued by the local community.	
Mitigation Potential		

Example 4.

Mobile Mast Development - Anglesey, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park

Landscape & visual criteria with indicators of landscape & visual susceptibility, and value criteria.

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Landscape		
Landform	- Dramatic / rugged hills / upland - Irregular or complex landform - Narrow valleys and ridges - Distinctive landform features	- Simple featureless landform - Convex landform - Plateaux - Flat and uniform landform - Valleys and low rolling hills
Landcover (Note – Biodiversity could perhaps feature more here.)	- Small scale field pattern / mosaic - Complex, irregular or intimate landscape - Barren / rocky upland - Water / intertidal / dunes / dune slack / coastal land	- Medium scale field pattern of rural landcover - Developed land, derelict or waste ground - Commercial forestry - Lowland farmland - Frequent woodland / tree belts
Man-made influences	- Infrequent / no residential built form - Dispersed settlement / sparsely settled / unpopulated areas - Presence of historic buildings / structures or settlement	- Major infrastructure (transport / communications / utility infrastructure / wind turbines) - Modern day industrial development - Large / concentrated urban / modern settlements - Commercial forestry
Aesthetic, perceptual and experiental		
Scenic Quality and Character	- High scenic quality (that is National Park / AONB / Heritage Coast) - Strong sense of place	- Low scenic quality (that is industrial areas) - Weak sense of place
Remoteness / Tranquillity	- Remote; tranquil; wild; spiritual; attractive; peaceful - Physically or perceptually remote, peaceful or tranquil	- Threatening; unattractive; noisy; settled - Close to visible signs of human activity and development
Visual		
Skylines and settings	- Prominent skylines - Distinctive skylines / backdrops	- Less prominent skylines

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
	- Uninterrupted / undeveloped skylines - Presence of distinctive / sensitive landscape features such as historic landmarks	- Existing vertical features (modern development) - Existing built development -
Visibility, Key views, Vistas and Typical Receptors (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)	- Landscapes which are open or exposed with far reaching views - Densely populated - Views from scenic routes, well-known landmarks, or views from visitor viewpoints - Views into or out, especially from high ground - Neighbouring landscapes of higher sensitivity, especially internationally and nationally designated landscapes - Contributes to wider landscape - Distinctive or complex backdrops - Landscapes important to the settings / approaches / gateways to designated landscapes - Strong association with adjacent LCAs	- Landscapes which are confined, contained or enclosed with few inward or outward views - Sparsely populated or inaccessible - Neighbouring landscapes of lower sensitivity - Contributes little to wider landscape - Large scale simple back drops - Weak association with adjacent LCAs
Views to and from Important Landscape and Cultural Heritage Features (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)	- Strong association with landscape - Intervisibility between sites	- Weak association with landscape - Little intervisibility between sites
Value		
Landscape Value	- National Park, AONB, Heritage Coast, - Regional and local designations - Related published documentation (tourist information), art and literature - Historic Environment	

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
	○ World Heritage Site, Registered Historic Landscape, Registered Park and Garden, visually prominent Sites and Monuments (SAMs) such as hillforts and castles frequently visited by tourists. - Biodiversity and geodiversity designations - Local community values	
Visual Value	- Criteria will include iconic views, views related to designated landscape related features, regionally / locally valued views, and views valued by the local community.	
Mitigation Potential		

Example 5.

Static caravan / chalet parks and extensions - Anglesey, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park

Landscape & visual criteria with indicators of landscape & visual susceptibility, and value criteria.

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Landscape		
Landform	- Rugged hills - Irregular or complex landform - Narrow valleys and ridges - Distinctive landform features	- Simple featureless landform - Flatter and more uniform landform
Landcover (Note – Biodiversity could perhaps feature more here.)	- Small / intimate scale field pattern / mosaic - Complex / irregular / diverse landscapes - Strong pattern / texture - Intact landscape - Ancient woodland - Upland moorland - Upland grazing - Barren / rocky upland - Water / intertidal / dunes / dune slack / coastal land	- Medium scale field pattern of rural landcover - Developed land, derelict or waste ground - Commercial forestry - Lowland farmland
Man-made influences	- Infrequent / no residential built form - Dispersed settlement / sparsely settled / unpopulated areas - Presence of historic buildings / structures or settlement	- Major infrastructure (transport / communications / utility infrastructure / wind turbines) - Modern day industrial development - Large / concentrated urban / modern settlements - Commercial forestry
Aesthetic, perceptual and experiental		
Scenic Quality and Character	- High scenic quality (for example National Park / AONB / Heritage coast) - Strong sense of place	- Low scenic quality (for example industrial areas) - Weak sense of place -
Remoteness / Tranquillity	- Remote; tranquil; wild; spiritual; attractive; peaceful - Few obvious man-made features	- Threatening; unattractive; noisy; settled - Extensive visual and auditory intrusions

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
		- Notable presence of modern / large scale development and infrastructure ((industrial areas, large modern urban settlements etc.)
Visual		
Visibility, Key Views, Vistas and Typical Receptors (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)	- Very open, exposed landscapes - Landscapes with extensive intervisibility and little screening or filtering of views - Landscapes which are visible from designated viewpoints in protected landscapes - Prominent visual landmarks and / or topographic features such as distinct elevated ridge lines	- Landscape with a strong sense of enclosure - Landscapes which are contained and strongly visually filtered - Very little or no intervisibility from designated viewpoints in protected landscapes - No prominent landmarks or topographic features
Value		
Landscape Value	- National Park, AONB, Heritage Coast, - Regional and local designations - Related published documentation (tourist information), art and literature - Historic Environment ○ World Heritage Site, Registered Historic Landscape, Registered Park and Garden, visually prominent Sites and Monuments (SAMs) such as hillforts and castles frequently visited by tourists. - Biodiversity and geodiversity designations - Local community values	
Visual Value	Criteria will include iconic views, views related to designated landscape related features, regionally / locally valued views, and views valued by the local community.	

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility: higher susceptibility	Indicators of susceptibility: lower susceptibility
Mitigation Potential		

Example 6.

Housing and employment development with regard to 66 settlement study areas in SHROPSHIRE

2 – 3 storey properties (<0.5ha) and small scale commercial development (office, warehouse or light industrial) around 14m tall (>1ha)

Indicative landscape and visual criteria with indicators of landscape & visual susceptibility, and indicative landscape and visual value criteria.

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility
Landscape	
Landform	Open, highly prominent and distinctive or intricate and complex landforms with sharp changes in level are more likely to be susceptible to change arising from development than flat and indistinct landforms. This criteria also considers whether potential development would interrupt the relationship between distinctive landform features such as escarpments, or prominent hills or open plains. In some locations development would affect skyline character.
Landscape pattern / landcover / scale	Landscapes with a small scale, complex and intricate landscape pattern arising from landcover elements including settlement, field pattern or vegetation cover are more likely to be susceptible to change arising from larger scale development than landscapes with a simple landcover pattern. Landscapes enclosed by buildings, trees and woodlands can offer more opportunity to accommodate development without affecting landscape character.
Intactness of field boundaries	Considers the scale and integrity of field boundaries whether hedgerows, stone walls or fences. Intact field boundaries can help screen development but can also be susceptible to loss or degradation from development. Historic hedgerows are particularly susceptible to loss.
Sense of Place / rural quality	Landscapes with a strong and positive rural character in good condition and with features worthy of conservation, will be more susceptible to change because of the potential impact on their legibility and upon features and combinations of elements which may be difficult to replace. This applies to landscapes with semi-natural habitats and valued natural features such as woodland and hedgerows with good connectivity.
Tranquility	Landscapes with a strong sense of tranquility will be more susceptible to development as this is likely to introduce disturbance and loss of this valued rural quality.
Settlement pattern and the	This considers the overall settlement pattern within the Sensitivity Parcel and the nature of any settlement edge, that is whether it is positive or negative, smooth, linear

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility
nature of any adjoining settlement edge	or indented. Importantly it considers whether potential development would integrate with the general settlement form/ pattern and how it may affect the character of the existing settlement edge and its functioning relationship with the surrounding countryside.
Visual	
General visibility/ types of views/ intervisibility/ relationship to Shropshire Hills AONB/ and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal and Ironbridge World Heritage Sites	The likelihood of a development being visible depends on the scale of the development, the landform in which the development is sited and the screening opportunities afforded by the land cover, particularly buildings, trees and woodlands. Landscapes which are visually contained with limited inward and outward views are likely to be less susceptible than open landscapes with extensive inward and outward views. The visual relationship of the Sensitivity Parcel with any existing settlement edges and whether there are any visual detractors which may reduce its susceptibility influences whether new development is likely to be well accommodated into its surroundings. Intervisibility between Sensitivity Parcels is also important. A landscape with a high degree of intervisibility with/ or forming a backdrop to nearby areas of acknowledged landscape sensitivity such as the Shropshire Hills AONB and the World Heritage Sites are more susceptible to development as they are unique and irreplaceable. Similarly a landscape located on approaches/ gateways to these sensitive landscapes are more susceptible to development.
Skylines and other focal points	Skylines are susceptible to development as they are generally widely visible with features on them typically being seen in relief against a light sky. Undeveloped rural skylines are particularly susceptible as are attractive skylines which form a backdrop to settlement. The presence of distinctive or historic landscape features such as hilltop monuments, church spires/ towers or historic villages also increases susceptibility. Sensitivity Parcels may form part of, or may have a strong visual link to a distinctive skyline.
Scenic Quality	Landscapes with a high scenic quality and higher concentration of special qualities and/ or which form the setting to such landscapes will have a high susceptibility. This is because of the potential for loss or disturbance to their integrity and scenic value compared to landscapes which are strongly influenced by intrusive manmade structures and human activity.
Typical receptors	This is a function of the occupation or activity of people experiencing a view at a particular location, and therefore the extent to which their attention or interest may be focussed on the views and the visual amenity they experience. The most susceptible receptors are residents, communities, people engaged in outdoor recreation where the landscape is part of the experience, visitors to landscape whose interest is focussed on natural and built heritage assets and users of scenic routes. Each location brings with it certain expectations. Transport users (particularly of high speed roads) are usually considered less susceptible receptors, unless the road is considered to be a scenic route or important gateway.
The level of access and relative numbers of people likely to be affected	The greater the number of sensitive visual receptors in an area, the more susceptible the area will be to change from development. This includes receptors within the Sensitivity Parcel and also includes receptors that may lie further away but in locations which have direct and open views towards the Sensitivity Parcel (such as views from elevated hill forts/ trig points etc.)

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility
The nature, composition and characteristics of the existing views experienced	Landscapes of attractive scenery, character, quality, integrity, strong sense of place and local distinctiveness will typically be more susceptible to development than less scenic areas. This includes landscapes that are designated for their natural beauty, but also areas of undesignated landscape, including areas that are scenic and have strong character.
Landscape value	
Strength of landscape character / quality and condition	Landscapes with a strong and positive character in good condition and with features worthy of conservation, will be more susceptible to change because of the potential impact on their legibility and upon features and combinations of elements which may be difficult to replace.
Rarity	Landscapes which are commonplace are less likely to be valued than landscapes which are unique or rare as these are often irreplaceable.
Geological, topographical and geomorphological value	This considers the shape and scale of the land and the extent that there may be distinctive and valued geological, topographical or hydrological features. Such features may be distinctive in their own right or may have influenced the creation of areas of distinctive and valued landscape character.
Historic landscape value	The extent to which a landscape displays historic continuity and time depth – reflected in the presence of nationally or internationally designated historic landscape components and their settings. May also be a reflection of artistic or literary references. Also whether a landscape is important to the setting and identity of designated landscapes and heritage assets.
Natural value	Landscapes with a strong and positive character in good condition and with features worthy of conservation, will be more susceptible to change because of the potential impact on their legibility and upon features and combinations of elements which may be difficult to replace. This applies to landscapes with semi-natural habitats and valued natural features such as woodland and hedgerows with good connectivity.
Recreational value	The extent to which the experience of the landscape makes an important contribution to the recreational use and enjoyment of an area. Indicators include the presence of such features as nature reserves, country parks, allotments, outdoor sports facilities, public rights of way, green infrastructure corridors, scenic routes and promoted viewpoints. Also includes recognised scenic or promoted tourist routes (as shown on latest Philips Road Atlas of Britain).
Scenic and other aesthetic and perceptual and experiential qualities	Defined by the presence of distinctive, dramatic or striking patterns of landform or land cover, or by strong aesthetic response to qualities such as rural character (traditional land uses with few human influences), perceived naturalness, sense of remoteness or tranquility and dark skies.
Visual value	
Iconic Views	Highly valued views of national or international importance which are important in relation to the special qualities of a designated landscape, the cultural associations of which are widely recognised in art, literature or other media. Views of very high scenic

Criteria	Indicators of susceptibility
	quality including those which are known historically for their picturesque and landscape beauty and are widely held in high regard.
Views related to designated landscapes and landscape related features	Views from tourist routes, national trails, and other recognised visitor destinations or attractions. Views which are important in relation to the special qualities of a designated landscape or which are identified in specific studies of views. Views to, from and within the setting of designated landscapes, historic and cultural sites and views recorded as important in relation to heritage assets (as recorded in the relevant citations accompanying the designation and taking account of Historic England's guidance on the setting of heritage assets).
Regionally / locally valued views	Views which are identified in the local plan and/ or of regional or particular local importance including views from regionally and locally promoted trails. Views which appear on an Ordnance Survey, tourist map or within guide books.
Views valued by the community	Views from locations where there is provision of facilities for their enjoyment, such as parking and interpretation. Views which are locally well known, well-frequented and/ or promoted as a beauty spot / visitor destination and may have significant cultural associations.

Annex 3. Assessing Landscape Sensitivity to a particular type of development XXXX for assessment unit XXXXX - example only

Landscape Sensitivity To Specific Change XXXXXXXXXX – Example only

Name of assessment unit / Landscape Character Area – XXXXXXXXXX – location – date etc.

Criteria	**Higher susceptibility (informed by indicators)**	Sensitivity					**Lower susceptibility (informed by indicators)**	**Notes** – record the change /effect(s) etc.
		H	**HM**	**M**	**ML**	**L**		
Landscape								
Scale								
Landform								
Landcover (including biodiversity)								
Man-made influences								
Aesthetic, perceptual and experiential								
Scenic Quality and Character								
Remoteness / Tranquillity								
Visual								
Skylines and settings								
Movement								
Visibility, Key views, Vistas and Typical Receptors (both within and outside of each								

assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)								
Views to and from important Landscape and Cultural Heritage Features (both within and outside of each assessment unit / Landscape Character Area)								
Value								
Landscape Value								
Visual Value								
Mitigation Potential								
Overall Landscape Sensitivity (landscape, visual and value) of the assessment unit / Landscape Character Area.								
Additional comments to inform reporting ?								

Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings.

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