

Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines

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Introduction

The evolution of the landscape of the Cotswolds AONB is a result of the interaction of both natural forces and the activities of mankind. Landscape is dynamic and continues to change in response to the complex interaction of influences at the global, national, regional and local level. This process of change is inevitable and necessary.

Whilst change can sometimes erode landscape character, it can also bring about positive and beneficial effects through the restoration of lost or degraded landscapes, as well as the creation of new landscapes that will enhance and enrich landscape character. The way in which we respond to change will largely determine the future character of the Cotswolds AONB landscape.

The Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Strategy and Guidelines will provide a useful tool in the decision making process and allow the Cotswolds Conservation Board, together with a wide range of stakeholders, including local communities, to find new ways of delivering change and regeneration which conserves landscape character and promotes local distinctiveness. The aspiration is to achieve a balance between the desire to conserve, and where appropriate, re-instate the cherished landscape elements that have so long been associated with the Cotswolds, and at the same time promote and support a living, working landscape that is compatible with the principles of sustainable development.

The *Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment* provides the basis for this Landscape Strategy and Guidelines document. The character assessment describes the evolution of the landscape, and the character of the 19 landscape character types that have been identified within the AONB.

The *Landscape Strategy and Guidelines* presents a range of landscape strategies and guidelines for the 19 landscape character types to help manage change in a sustainable and positive way.

The objectives of the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines are:

- to identify the forces for change impacting on each of the 19 landscape character types and considers the implications of these changes on landscape character, with particular reference to the identified key characteristics
- to develop broad landscape strategies and guidelines to inform the decision making process and help manage change in a sustainable and positive manner;
- to provide a framework within which the Cotswolds Conservation Board and other stakeholders can review and add to the landscape strategy and guidelines, and identify opportunities for their involvement and long term delivery of the strategy;

How to use the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines

The *Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment* offers a comprehensive characterisation of the AONB's landscape that can assist in understanding and promoting the concept of local distinctiveness. The study also recognises the fundamental role that farming, forestry and other forms of development have played in fashioning the landscape and acknowledges that the landscape of the AONB owes its character as much to these influences as to those of geology, climate, flora and fauna.

By building on the findings of the character assessment, the *Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines* provides an overview of the forces for change that are influencing the landscape and has identified a series of landscape strategies and guidelines to help direct change in a positive and sustainable way. In very general terms, the *Landscape Strategy and Guidelines* should be seen as a tool to aid the planning, design and management of the AONB's diverse landscapes.

The landscape character assessment and landscape strategy reports are designed to act as a catalyst for positive landscape change by achieving the following objectives:

- to provide a description of the baseline landscape and to identify key features that contribute to local distinctiveness;
- to highlight the principal forces for change and the potential implications of change on landscape character;
- to provide guidance to help accommodate change in a positive way

The strategy, in particular, recognises the potential for landscape conservation, enhancement, restoration and creation, and on finding opportunities to strengthen distinctive character through the design and management of new and existing landscapes.

Uses of the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines

Whilst many planning and strategy documents contain clear guidance and specific policies related to landscape character, there is sometimes a lack of supporting guidance or advice on the practicalities of using information on landscape character as part of the planning and development control process.

There are often widely differing views and opinions amongst all sections of the community, on the uses, benefits, and potential applications of landscape character assessment. In addition, landscape character assessment is seen by many principally as a development control tool, the purpose of which is to resist forms of development. There is therefore a need for clear guidance on the range of potential uses and applications of the *Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment* and *Landscape Strategy* and these are considered below.

Planning

- Informing development plan policies at local level and informing policy at the national level
- Fulfilling the requirement of Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework which makes clear that in designated landscapes, including AONBs, the conservation of the landscape and scenic beauty has great weight with respect to planning issues.
- Assisting studies of development potential, for example to help identify sites for new development.
- Informing the siting, scale and design conditions for particular forms of development such as minerals and housing.
- Contributing to landscape capacity studies relating to the supply of land for housing, minerals or other land uses.
- Providing an input to Environmental Assessment at the level of plans and policies and in association with individual development proposals.
- Providing a framework and context for the production of more local landscape character assessments and Village Design Statements

Landscape Conservation, Management and Enhancement

- Providing a basis for the preparation of landscape management strategies.
- Helping guide landscape change in positive and sustainable ways, for example programmes of woodland expansion and identifying new uses for disturbed and degraded land.
- Informing the targeting of resources for land management and agri-environment schemes and evaluating the effectiveness of funding.

Section 85, CROW Act 2000

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires public bodies, including regional and local planning authorities, to have due regard to the purposes of designation in carrying out their functions. The Landscape Strategy and Guidelines will enable public bodies to deliver this duty

Implementing the Strategy

The *Landscape Character Assessment* and *Landscape Strategy and Guidelines* should be accessible to every authority and organisation involved in the planning, design and management of the AONB's landscape as it provides a common source of baseline information. Indeed by offering a common framework, the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines make it easier for an integrated approach to be adopted to manage and monitor landscape change in the AONB. The following section suggests the role and responsibilities of agencies likely to be involved in implementing the strategy and identifies how the study might be used

Government Agencies

- Help inform organisations such as Natural England, the Environment Agency, DEFRA, the Forestry Commission and Historic England in prioritising and targeting action through grants and funding initiatives.
- Support the National Character Area process and development of Strategic Environmental Opportunities by providing baseline landscape assessment data and identifying indicators for monitoring landscape change.

Cotswolds Conservation Board/Local Authorities

- Guiding and implementing the development control process including the preparation of development briefs and contributions to evidence at public inquiry.
- Consideration of landscape issues in planning policy development.
- Framework for development capacity studies and for the analysis of the landscape setting of towns and villages.
- Basis for developing more detailed local landscape character assessments and townscape assessments.
- Help improve awareness of landscape issues through promotion and interpretation.

Land Owners and Land Managers

- Help guide landowners and managers to inform decisions on land management issues and long term planning.
- Target funds to achieve optimal landscape benefits and provide a benchmark for monitoring future landscape change.

Developers

- Help promote the benefits of high quality distinctive environments as a setting for new developments and the value of reflecting local identity by using distinctive elements and features of landscape character as a model for the layout and design of new developments.

Community Groups, Parish Councils, Local Interest Groups, Voluntary Organisations

- Input to local projects and initiatives such as Neighbourhood Plans and Village Design Statements,
- Help improve pride in local distinctiveness and awareness in landscape issues generally;
- Help identify opportunities for community action;
- Assist local communities in securing funding for environmental restoration or enhancement projects.

Educational Establishments and Research Organisations

- Promoting an understanding of landscape character and the influence of landscape change.
- A basis for long-term research projects such as monitoring landscape change

Taking a Positive Approach to Change: Guiding Principles

The following section draws together the main strategies identified for each of the 19 landscape character types in the landscape strategy and guidelines.

Recognise and Enhance Local Distinctiveness

The Landscape Character Assessment identifies and records the patterns, features and elements of the various landscape character types and areas that contribute to making one landscape different from another. It is these factors that contribute to defining local distinctiveness.

The *Landscape Strategy and Guidelines* identifies both the wider and local forces for change that threaten to erode local distinctiveness and reduce the inherent variety expressed by the AONB's landscapes. The strategy aims to counteract this by offering the means by which landscape change might be managed to reinforce the contrasts in landscape character identified in the landscape character assessment. This obviously has significant implications for landscape design and management and the following underlying principles should be adopted

- Avoid a standardised approach to design by using the Landscape Character Assessment and strategy to inform the process of negotiation between planning officers and developers. For example, officers might identify specific criteria and landscape considerations that a specific development should take account of prior to approval. The success of a proposal can subsequently be assessed on the basis of these criteria and considerations.
- Planning authorities should be proactive and specify to developers how their proposals can be designed to reflect and enhance local landscape character. Officers might outline elements and characteristic features that should be considered for enhancement, restoration or conservation etc.
- Planning authorities should, where appropriate, encourage developers to use local building materials, building styles, native species and other characteristic features and elements of a particular landscape to strengthen local distinctiveness.
- Developers and agents for change should be encouraged to adopt creative solutions and identify the means by which development might be successfully integrated into the existing landscape character. Consideration should be given to the scale of development, layout and relationship to existing development and field patterns. This might apply to built development as well as new woodland planting for example.
- Planning authorities should consider the cumulative impact of small-scale changes and incremental changes as a result of one-off developments

Adopt a Positive Approach to Landscape Change

The strategy offers a key tool in the delivery of the European Landscape Convention. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is the first international convention to focus specifically on landscape. Created by the Council of Europe, the convention promotes landscape protection, management and planning, and European co-operation on landscape issues.

Signed by the UK Government in February 2006, the ELC became binding from March 2007. It applies to all landscapes, towns and villages, as well as open countryside; the coast and inland areas; and ordinary or even degraded landscapes, as well as those that are afforded protection.

The ELC defines landscape as:

“An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”
(Council of Europe 2000)

It highlights the importance of developing landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes, and establishing procedures for the general public and other stakeholders to participate in policy creation and implementation.

Natural England is leading the implementation of the ELC in England and has worked with Defra and Historic England to produce the European Landscape Convention: A Framework for Implementation in England.

This framework seeks to further strengthen the protection, management and planning of England's landscapes, by providing a structure for action plans that will be prepared by any interested partners and stakeholders. It underpins a wide range of activities which, through public engagement and stakeholder involvement, will lead to a wider understanding and appreciation of landscapes, improved knowledge and care, as well as a sense of inspiration, well-being and connection between people and place.

In taking a positive approach to landscape change, developers, planning authorities and Government agencies should consider the following:

- Use key environmental features to assist the development control process. Development, which is assessed as having potential to have a significant effect on key features, may be a candidate for refusal or require stringent planning conditions that ensure important features are not lost.
- Use the landscape strategy as a baseline for Environmental Impact Assessments of developments. The impact of development on key features and landscape character should be assessed and where impacts are found to occur, scheme modification or mitigation measures should be required to remove or reduce the impact of development.
- Priority should be given to protecting key features. Wherever possible, opportunities to introduce new features should be identified to compensate for loss or degradation elsewhere. This might include ensuring that where a particular habitat or area of planting is lost as a result of development, habitat creation or planting is undertaken at a suitable location close by.
- Ensure that change is appropriate to landscape character. Proposals should only be pursued that are appropriate for each landscape type and the features and characteristics that define local distinctiveness. Perceptual aspects such as tranquillity, remoteness and wilderness should also be considered.
- Developers should be encouraged to consider adopting creative design solutions to conserving or enhancing local landscape character. The character assessment and strategy can provide a blueprint for new development and provide a model for

creating landscape and restoring habitats. This is particularly important where brownfield sites offer no features on which new development can refer to.

- Consider the effects of small-scale development on landscape character. Incremental changes can gradually erode landscape character and local distinctiveness if the wider context of a development or land management initiative is not considered. The landscape character assessment and strategy highlights key characteristics such as distinctive field patterns, features and settlement patterns that are particularly susceptible to incremental change. However, the strategy may also identify the means by which such developments may be successfully incorporated into the landscape and indeed enhance particular characteristics

Building Bridges: A Coordinated Approach to Landscape Resources

A wide range of factors and forces for change, influence the character, condition and sensitivity of the AONB's landscape character. To counter, control and guide these forces for change, numerous strategies have been identified, many of which have implications for a diverse range of disciplines, organisations and communities. It is essential that landscape issues are tackled in an integrated way and interested parties and community groups engaged in order that their thoughts and aspirations are assessed, consensus reached and particular roles and responsibilities identified and agreed. There is also a need to share and co-ordinate information, in order to minimise costs and reduce the risk of duplication of work

The Cotswolds Conservation Board and associated Local Authorities are committed to an integrated approach and the findings of the strategy will be combined with the results from a wide range of parallel studies and initiatives.

Monitoring Landscape Change in the Future

Monitoring the rate of landscape and environmental change enables planning officers and those responsible for implementing the strategy to assess the practical effectiveness of existing policy, initiatives and management, and help modify policy and management regimes in the light of actual trends.

The information arising from a programme of monitoring rates and patterns of landscape change can be used for a variety of purposes including decision making in the development control process, and the identification of priorities and targets for funding and enhancement initiatives. The Landscape Strategy and Guidelines has been used to identify a range of indicators within the Conservation Board's State of the Cotswolds report to assist in the monitoring of landscape change whether this is deemed to be positive or negative.

It is important that the responsibilities for recording and monitoring change are established at an early stage. It is likely that a range of agencies and organisations will be required to monitor change as indicators vary from elements of the built environment, the extent of particular habitats, and the survival rate of particular heritage features. Wherever possible, communities should be engaged in the monitoring process.

Conclusion

The *Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines* sets out a series of ideas and initiatives to help ensure that change and development respects landscape character, and that key features are conserved and enhanced

The Strategy also provides the framework for further action and it is hoped that through a process of continued collaboration, and the input of parallel projects, the strategies presented here, can be translated into firm commitments which can be supported and delivered through the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan as well as through Development Plans of the Local Authorities and Agri-environment Schemes

Ultimately, the intention is that the Strategy provides a tool in the decision making process and assist the Conservation Board together with other agencies, developers and local communities, in finding new ways of delivering change and regeneration, whilst conserving and enhancing landscape character and promoting local distinctiveness

How to Use the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines for the Cotswolds AONB

Landscape Strategies and Guidelines been identified for each of the AONB's 19 landscape character types.

Guidelines for each landscape type include consideration of the following:

- **Key Features.** These are the features of the landscape that make the most important contribution to the character of the landscape. The notes are based on the key characteristics identified in the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment but also explain why they are important. Key features are specific and do not necessarily occur in each of the landscape types or component landscape character areas. It is anticipated that the Key Features identified for each of the landscape types will be the focus of conservation and enhancement initiatives in the future, and that their protection will normally be sought.
- **Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity.** For each of the landscape types, a brief assessment of sensitivity to change is presented. Where relevant, a discussion of the landscape's capacity to successfully accommodate change is also discussed.
- **Local Forces for Change.** These are the forces that have been assessed as being of greatest significance in each of the nineteen landscape types. They represent a refinement of the generic forces for change that have been identified for the AONB as a whole.
- **Landscape Implications.** The same or similar forces for change may apply across a number of landscape types. However, the implications of change on each landscape may be very different as a result of their contrasting character, the nature of their key environmental features and their sensitivity or capacity to accommodate change.
- **Landscape Strategies and Guidelines.** This section presents strategies for each of the landscape types based on the key environmental features and consideration of the implications of each of the local forces for change.

Where a particular site or area falls close to the boundary line of a landscape type, it is recommended that the characteristics and strategies for each of the adjacent landscape types are taken into consideration