

PART ONE
LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

2.0 LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

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2.1 General

2.1.1 In line with the Brief, the purpose of the Landscape Assessment is to provide an up-to-date evidence base for the Wealden Local Plan which:

- Provides detailed Landscape Assessments of each site, including consideration of landscape and visual receptors, to inform the process of identifying suitable sites for allocation.
- Provides Landscape Assessments which form a sound basis for the consideration of the landscape sensitivity and capacity for development of the Sites and their surroundings.
- Assists the Council in developing site-specific policies for each potential site.
- Assists the Council in developing future planning policies and principles which seek to protect, conserve and enhance the District's landscapes, both designated and non-designated.
- Provides sufficient information to assist in the determination of planning applications and decision making in relation to protecting and enhancing the District's landscape in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance.

2.1.2 The methodology for undertaking the Landscape Assessment of the Sites within the areas identified for growth in the Wealden Local Plan is set out below. The approach is based on the principles provided by the following best practice guidance and relevant policy requirements:

- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014).
- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002).
- Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland: Topic Paper 6 – Techniques and Criteria for Judging Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity (Countryside Agency, 2002).
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (Landscape Institute/IEEMA, 3rd Edition, 2013).
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance.
- European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000).

- 2.1.3 The scale and level of Landscape Assessment undertaken is proportionate to the purpose of the study and the Site's location, characteristics and its setting within the wider landscape context. For sites in open countryside on the edge of a settlement, a full Landscape Assessment involving desk studies and site surveys was undertaken in line with the methodology described below. For small sites that are gardens of domestic properties, and sites within existing built up areas, a minimal Landscape Assessment involving desk studies only was undertaken. The level of Landscape Assessment is recorded in each case.
- 2.1.4 The methodology described below is generally consistent with the methodology for undertaking the Landscape Assessment of sites within the Hailsham and Polegate areas, undertaken by The Landscape Partnership.
- 2.1.5 The assessment process comprised the following key stages, which are described in more detail below:
- **Landscape Baseline** – comprising a desk-based assessment informed by previous studies, aerial photographs and OS maps; a site survey of each site and its wider landscape context; and an analysis of the landscape character and visual characteristics of a site and its context.
 - **Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity** – evaluation of the Site's sensitivity and capacity for accommodating development
 - **Outline Landscape Mitigation** – identification of key landscape constraints (qualities/features to be safeguarded) and potential landscape enhancement opportunities for development.

2.2 Landscape Baseline

Desk-based Assessment

- 2.2.1 The initial stage of the study involved a desk-based review of the following existing information in relation to each settlement/area and individual sites:
- Wealden Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, 2014).
 - East Sussex County Landscape Assessment (East Sussex County Council, 2010).

- Wealden Landscape Study: a Landscape Character Assessment and Development Option Evaluation Study to inform the preparation of the Core Strategy (East Sussex County Council, February 2009).
- High Weald AONB Management Plan (2014-19) and corresponding Geographic Information System (GIS) datasets - Meadows (Wildflower Grassland); Heathland; Historic Field Boundaries; Historic Routeways; Sandstone Outcrops; and Historic Farmsteads.
- Sussex Historic Landscape Characterisation (Dr. Nicola Bannister, 2010)
- Wealden Design Guide, Supplementary Planning Document (Wealden District Council, 2008)
- Latest available aerial imagery (Google/Bing)
- 1:25,000 and 1:10,000 scale Ordnance Survey digital mapping
- Planning, environmental and heritage designations and public rights of way GIS data. (Wealden District Council).

2.2.2 The above sources of information enabled a preliminary assessment of the landscape and visual factors that could influence the Site's potential for development. These include:

- Landscape character context of the Site (e.g. topography, vegetation, transport corridors, watercourses and waterbodies, field patterns, land use, environmental designations, etc.)
- Visual context of the Site (including its potential extent of visibility and identification of potential visual receptors with views of the Site).
- Landscape character of the Site itself (including key landscape features).
- Key statutory and non-statutory environmental and heritage designations.

2.2.3 This evidence was used to determine the approximate areas of land within which each existing site is theoretically visible - called the Site's Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI). This initial assessment was based upon review of contour data and existing landscape features and built development shown on OS maps and aerial imagery, which was then validated in the field.

2.2.4 Within this initial approximate ZVI, potential visual receptors were identified as part of the desk-based assessment, using OS maps and validated in the field. Visual receptors are 'individuals and/or defined groups of people who have the potential to be affected by a proposal' (GLVIA3).

2.2.5 The sensitivity of visual receptors was determined following the guidance within GLVIA3. Sensitivity is a result of the susceptibility of a receptor to the change in views and visual

amenity and the value attached to particular views. The following categories of visual receptors appropriate to the assessment were identified:

- **High Sensitivity** - people who live close by or whose attention is likely to be focused upon the landscape and on views. These include for example: residents of neighbouring properties; users of public footpaths, bridleways and byways including promoted walking and cycling routes; and visitors to heritage assets.
- **Medium Sensitivity** - people who travel through an area, such as users of roads or rail networks.
- **Low Sensitivity** – people undertaking outdoor activities that are not reliant upon visual amenity or a landscape experience, such as people taking part in formal sports activities.

2.2.6 The study area for the desk-based assessment broadly comprised the Site itself and the surrounding area up to approximately 1-2km from the Site boundary (depending on its likely approximate ZVI).

Site Survey

2.2.7 Where a full Landscape Assessment is required, a landscape and visual survey of the Site (together with a survey by car and/or foot of the surrounding area from which the Site was visible) was undertaken by an experienced assessor between August and October 2016. Access was arranged in advance with the landowner for most sites. However, where the Site could be easily viewed from publically accessible points (e.g. roads and public rights of way), it was not necessary to enter the Site itself.

2.2.8 The Site visit was recorded using a structured survey sheet, annotated plans and photographs. The survey sheet recorded the following information:

- The topography of the Site and its context.
- Landscape elements within the Site and their condition.
- Openness and enclosure of the Site.
- The field pattern of the Site and its context.
- Sense of tranquillity/remoteness experienced from within the Site.
- The relationship of the Site to the existing settlement.
- Visibility of the Site in its surrounding landscape context and key views from/into the Site.

2.2.9 Photographs were also taken to illustrate typical views into and out of the Site. The photographs were taken using a Panasonic Lumix GX7 digital camera with a Lumix G Vario 14-42mm zoom lens.

2.2.10 The surveys also validated, and where necessary refined, the initial ZVI defined by the desk-based assessment. Consideration was also given to potential variations in visibility when vegetation is not in leaf. The surveys also validated the visual receptors identified during the initial desk-based assessment.

Landscape Character and Visual Analysis

2.2.11 Based on the information gathered by the desk-based assessments as verified by the Site visits and taking into account additional information recorded during site visits, an analysis of the landscape character and visual context was undertaken. This involved:

- Description of the Site and its location in relation to the respective settlement, which is illustrated on a **Site Locations Plan**.
- Analysis and description of the Site's landscape character context (e.g. patterns of watercourses/waterbodies, woodland, land cover, historic field boundaries, designated historic assets and/or other heritage features, biodiversity designations, designated landscapes, etc.), which are illustrated on a **Landscape and Visual Context Plan**.
- Analysis and description of the Site's visual context (including its approximate Zone of Visual Influence and key views from visual receptors), illustrated on a **Landscape and Visual Context Plan**.
- Analysis and description of the Site's landscape character and key features, illustrated on a **Site Analysis Plan** (such as hedgerows, existing trees and shrubs, grassland and arable land where present) and illustrated by photographs on a **Photograph Sheet**.

2.3 Landscape Sensitivity, Value and Capacity Evaluation

2.3.1 The evaluation of landscape sensitivity, value and capacity of the Site was undertaken in two stages.

2.3.2 The first stage comprised a review of the contextual landscape sensitivity, value and capacity of the Landscape Setting Area within which the Site is located, as evaluated by the Wealden Landscape & Settlement Character Assessment (CBA, 2014) study. This provides the context for the Site-specific assessment in the second stage.

- 2.3.3 The second stage comprised evaluation of the landscape sensitivity, value and capacity of the Site itself. The evaluation criteria closely followed those used in the Wealden Landscape & Settlement Character Assessment (CBA, 2014) study, adapted to suit the purpose of this site-specific assessment methodology.
- 2.3.4 Details of the landscape evaluation criteria are provided in **Appendix A**.
- 2.3.5 Where a site did not fall within the original study area for the Wealden Landscape & Settlement Character Assessment (CBA, 2014), only the second stage of evaluation for the Site was undertaken. Where there were significant variations in landscape sensitivity across a site, these are identified in the assessment (particularly in the case of larger sites).

2.4 Outline Landscape Mitigation

Key Landscape Constraints (Qualities/Features to be Safeguarded)

- 2.4.1 Informed by the desk-based assessments, site surveys and analysis, the key landscape constraints for development of each site were identified. These constraints relate to the landscape qualities and features that are desirable to safeguard and be integrated into the development of a site. These recommendations are set out as target notes and referenced on the Site **Analysis Plan**.

Potential Landscape Enhancement Opportunities

- 2.4.2 Potential opportunities for landscape enhancements that may be delivered in conjunction with development of a site were also identified. These recommendations are set out as target notes and referenced on the Site **Analysis Plan**.

2.5 Limitations

- 2.5.1 It should be noted that the assessment and recommendations are provided for general guidance only. The assessment is focussed on identifying the key constraints and opportunities for development of the Sites to a level commensurate with the purpose of the Study as defined in 2.1.1. It is not intended to be a detailed landscape survey and assessment of each site. Development proposals for an individual site would need to be informed by a detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and a detailed Landscape Strategy which develop the recommendations. In addition, it should be noted that other site constraints (such as ecology,

archaeology, accessibility, and land ownership/availability and ground conditions for example) may also need to be considered in determining the suitability of a site for development.

- 2.5.2 Where restricted access to sites within the timescales of the study prevented a whole or part of a site survey being undertaken, this is recorded.