LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT – INFORMING and FACILITATING CHANGE
LISW CPD DAY

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www.naturalengland.org.uk
The need for informed Change …..

“Pomona loves the orchard,
And Liber loves the vine,
And Clough he loves an old façade
And an unspoilt skyline.
But the citizen wants gas-works
Electric wires on high
And light and drains and telephones
God help me – So do I!”

Peggy Pollard, leader of a notorious, yet beneficent secret society formed in 1927 called “Ferguson’s Gang” - it raised money for good Conservation causes. (Quote from “England and the Octopus” by Clough Williams-Ellis, 1975 ed’n. – 1st pub. 1928) See also ..

https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/who-were-fergusons-gang
Sylvia Crowe would approve of Landscape Character Assessment!!
On the dust jacket of Sylvia Crow’s book, *The Landscape of Power* (1958), it is indicated that she felt that the introduction of vast new structures into the landscape need not necessarily ruin it, and that she wanted more thoughtfulness among those who are responsible for their construction. In the book she shows that “giant buildings and their accessories can be incorporated in the landscape without destroying it – indeed, that given skilful design and sensitive siting they can in some circumstances enhance the natural scene.”

.. P 108 These landscape councillors would know the country in fact as well as on plan, and would be in a position to advise what effect proposed development would have, and how it could best be assimilated. Far from further clogging the wheels .... [this] would repay itself .... minimising the delays ...(STATED 60 YEARS AGO !!)
One of Natural England’s predecessors, the Countryside Agency, had a long association with areas designated as being of national importance (National Parks and AONBs) – set up 50yrs ago in 1968.

IMPORTANTLY, it was also concerned about the active management of the wider countryside and its work highlighted the need for a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gave the countryside of England its character.

Following on from work in the 1980s the Countryside Commission and others developed the technique of landscape assessment – in 1993 Landscape Assessment Guidance was published. Over the years this work evolved to give us the best practice approach, *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland*, (2002), which was replaced by “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” in 2014.
The Countryside Character Programme, 1994. The process did not seek “to prevent activities”.

THE COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER PROGRAMME

The English landscape has a character that is marked by its sheer diversity and mix. The moors and mountains, fields and farms, and the coasts, towns and woodlands all combine to produce a landscape that is sometimes splendid and sometimes said. But it is always special to someone. It has a character that is peculiar to its locality. It has a sense of place.

The Countryside Commission is embarking on a major exercise to capture and express the character of the English landscape – the Countryside Character Programme.

We all need to understand the landscape. We need to discover how it has evolved to its present state, and how it might change in the future. We must explore the reasons that make one area distinct from another. Why do the uplands of the north differ from those of the south west? Why are the patterns of fields and hedges in East Anglia so different from Cornwall?

The geology, soils, relief, vegetation cover, and the human use of the land over the years all mix in ways that make each locality unique. The Countryside Character Programme will identify, describe and analyse this diversity and uniqueness of the landscape for the whole of England. And, in parallel, it will seek opportunities to conserve or enhance the character of the landscape in a way that will safeguard its variety for generations to come.

We all make decisions that affect the landscape. In some cases those decisions might alter the character of the landscape of a wide area, through major building development, industrial uses, mineral extraction or wholesale agricultural change. In others, indeed in most cases, change will result from the cumulative effect of hundreds of small decisions on the landscape and the activities of individuals.

The Countryside Character Programme exists to help all those whose activities influence the landscape. By understanding and describing the character of the landscape, it will provide a context for many decisions. It is designed to be a framework for helping to incorporate the rich heritage of landscape diversity into present-day decisions, not as a process that seeks to prevent activities.
To: provide a landscape context; guide policy development; identify opportunities for local action; provide a base for advice.
The European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe) – signed by the UK Government in Feb. 2006.
The scope of the ELC includes land, inland water and marine areas.

Article 2 – Scope
Subject to the provisions contained in Article 15, this Convention applies to the entire territory of the Parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes.

Article 3 – Aims
The aims of this Convention are to promote landscape protection, management and planning, and to organise European co-operation on landscape issues.
The European Landscape Convention definition of landscape is – “.. an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.” The Scope of the ELC covers land, inland water and marine areas.

The combination of characteristics arising from physical/natural and socio-economic factors, and their often complex interrelationships, makes one landscape different from another.

Landscape Character may be defined as “A distinct and recognizable pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse” (An Approach to LCA, 2014). It is the pattern that arises from particular combinations of the different components – providing a sense of place.
An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment & Seascape Character Assessment

An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment

October 2014

Christine Tudor, Natural England

An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment

First published 11 October 2012

www.naturalengland.org.uk
The “Landscape Wheel” – An Approach to LCA
The “Seascape Wheel” – An Approach to SCA
Landscape Character

The combination of characteristics arising from physical/natural and socio-economic factors, and their often complex interrelationships, makes one landscape different from another.

An understanding of landscape character provides baseline evidence to inform land use planning, design and land management.
“is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape”. Areas of common character are classified and described. (An Approach to LCA 2014);

is the tool that is used to help us understand and articulate the character of the landscape

helps to identify the features that give a locality its ‘sense of place’ and pinpoints what makes it different from neighbouring areas

can be used to inform land use planning and design, landscape conservation and designation, and land management – thus helping us to inform and manage change

can be carried out by ANYONE .. community, local authority, Landscape Architect etc., etc.

can be carried out at ANY scale ... E.g. :250,000 (National Landscape Character Area – NCA) to 1:2,500 (site level)
LCA Process – An Approach to LCA ........
National Character Areas ……(approx. 1:250,000)
National Character Areas ..... 

- Describe the character of the Area e.g. see NCA 112 Inner London http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5360729876070400?category=587130 (NOTE THE RELEVANCE OF “NATURAL CAPITAL” to Landscape Character i.e. the ELEMENTS and FEATURES – refer to the landscape wheel for example.)

- List Statements of Environmental Opportunity – with examples of how (eg. grassland restoration, working with landowners, enhancing access etc.)

- Provide key facts and data.

- Identify Landscape Change (eg. re. trees and woodlands, coasts and rivers etc.)

- Give an analysis showing the predicted impact of Statements of Environmental Opportunity on the “value” of nominated ecosystem services within this landscape.
Local Authority Landscape Character Assessments -

• These provide more detail than the NCAs and identify Landscape Character Areas and / types

• The general public and other stakeholders are usually involved in their preparation and they can inform the Local Plan

• For more info. see An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment on the gov. website

Local Communities can also prepare their own Local Landscape Character Assessment to inform decision making. See work carried out in Hampshire. See also Neighborhood Plans – e.g. Suffolk Coasts and Heaths work “Touching the Tide”, and Cranborne Chase AONB (more info. below).
LCA & Making Judgements ............
.............these are 2 Separate Processes!

Figure 3: Landscape Character Assessment and making judgements

STEP 1 - Define purpose and scope
STEP 2 - Desk study
STEP 3 - Field study
STEP 4 - Classification and description

OUTPUT

The Landscape Character Assessment

Informing the management of change

Plan
- Planning policy
- Minerals planning
- EIA
- SEA
- LVIA/SVIA
- Place making
- Master planning
- etc

Manage
- Green infrastructure
- Agri-Environment schemes
- Woodland strategies
- Waterways strategies
- etc

Protect/Conserve
- Landscape designations
- National Park and AONB management plans
- etc

Informing judgements and decision making
So applications of LCA/TCA include ……..

……….. landscape and land use planning strategies (e.g. Green Infrastructure Strategies and Waterspace Strategies)), neighbourhood plans, landscape/design guidelines, project design, designation related work, conservation appraisals, landscape sensitivity and capacity studies, landscape and visual impact assessments, land management plans, highways and railway planning and design, forestry and woodland planning and design etc.

Examples follow …….. LCA has a long pedigree regarding influencing change ……….. My presentation provides context for the following presentations by Tony, Sally, Ian, Jon, and Richard.
“In most British forests and woods, timber production is the prime use, and therefore integration of the crop into the countryside remains the main landscape responsibility.

The basis of successful integration is to understand the character of the landscape, and to carry out all forest operations in sympathy with it. To achieve this, there must be an appreciation of each type of landscape and of the qualities which distinguish it.” (1978)

Landslides have characteristic topographical shapes, based on their underlying geology. The shapes vary from smooth and flowing, as in the agricultural areas of Britain.

In West Scotland the strongly angled cliffs contrast with the rounded domes. Water’s influence has added the next point to the heart of the composition.

A landscape of very strong form has led to an unsympathetic pattern of forestry imposed on it.

**ANALYSIS**

The landscape features which should be respected in afforestation in the area are the focal points of the hill 

(a) with its slightly splayed form, the west side of the hill to the hill 

(b) forming the focal hill, the gullies (3) which give articulation to the hillside and the fine grouping of the foreground trees (4).

**SOLUTION**

Plants and future felling structures should respect the unity of the focal hill (1) and the manor in which it grows out of the surrounding farmland. Planting should be extended with a more sympathetic upper planting line (2) as far as the gullies (3) to separate the unity of the focal hill and its lead up to the focal hill.

Individual groves should be encouraged in the gullies and the barriers strengthened at the lower edge of the plantation to tie the line into the valley woods.
CHAPTER 2  INTEGRATION WITH THE ENGLISH LOWLANDS

2.4 ANCIENT COUNTRYSIDE

Typical Devon ancient countryside

Key features for integration are:
- Irregular pattern of small fields
- Overgrown hedges and frequent hedgerow trees
- Abundant woodland cover from ancient and secondary woodland
- Undulating landform which can allow integration of earthworks.

Some integration principles

2.5 DOWNLAND

Typical downland landscape

Key features for integration are:
- Very little woodland or scrub, except on steep valley sides
- Large fields with low and inconspicuous boundaries of post and wire, intermittent hedges or walling
- Strong, undulating topography with wide views from hill and ridge tops.

Integration is largely a matter of good route alignment to fit the topography and the avoidance of roadside planting or conspicuous fencing which would emphasize the line of the road. Grading out of earthworks and restoration to agriculture must always be considered.
CHAPTER 3 INTEGRATION WITH THE ENGLISH UPLANDS

3.1 PRINCIPLE
- Although upland landscapes are very varied, the most common issues in integration are where the road crosses the grain of the landscape and where it runs on oldmowing ground, which is the subject of Pl 1, Ch 7.

3.2 KEY ISSUES
- Integration with the textures of upland pasture and moorland is essential. Many upland areas have an open character so the design emphasis should be on landform rather than planting.
- Upland roads also provide more scope for returning relatively steep sides slopes to grazing.
- Low-intensity farming coupled with steep slopes give more opportunities for dividing carriageways on a significant scale.
- Boundary treatment is particularly important and should either be in very light materials or match local details such as stone walls: see Pl 1, Ch 7.

3.3 CROSSING THE GRAIN
- Section A deals with the issues of integrating a road’s landform with existing landform where it crosses valleys or cuts through ridges. In areas of very varied upland topography, features such as viaducts and major cuttings are absorbed by the landscape whereas they would dominate it in the lowlands.

3.4 MATCHING LANDSCAPE PATTERN AND TEXTURE
- Key features for integration are:
  - our native woodland is uncommon and mass planting is likely to be both inappropriate and difficult to establish
  - roads crossing open moorland, where the only boundaries are roadside post-and-wire fences
  - in areas of drystone walling the strong pattern can be a key to integrating the road
  - upland grassland and moorland are broad sweeps of similar vegetation. A change in this pattern near the road would draw attention to it. Whenever possible earthworks should be returned to their previous land use so that similar management can reproduce this pattern. Stripped soils should be carefully stored to conserve seed sources of moorland and upland grasses: see Pl 2, Ch 13.

M6, Cumbria  The road is absorbed by the large scale of its upland setting

M6, Cumbria  The road is absorbed by the strong pattern of the drystone walls which draw the eye away from it
CHAPTER 3  ALIGNMENT AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPES

3.1 PRINCIPLE

Landscape parks, particularly those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, are special features of the English landscape and every effort should be made to retain their historic and landscape integrity.

3.2 KEY ISSUES

- The character of a landscape park is often given by specially designed vistas and elevated viewpoints, which may extend for considerable distances outside the park itself.
- Many parks have been changed by modern development, but essential features like avenues and follies remain.
- Understanding their present and potential contribution to the existing landscape is a key part of good design.
- Relationships between buildings, structures, tree groups, man-made and natural topography, are often subtle and complex, and they require detailed visual analysis.
- Many parks are on sites of long occupation and continuity of vegetation cover, so their archaeological and nature conservation interests can be high.

3.3 VISUAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL RELATIONSHIPS OF A LANDSCAPE PARK

Typical visual relationships. Many parklands formerly covered a larger area and part of the parkland pattern lies beyond the present boundary. This needs to be reflected in route alignment and landscape proposals.

DECEMBER 1992

3.4 MINIMISING IMPACT

Alignment to avoid the park completely is the best option, as advocated for all historic landscapes, see Ch 2. Where this is not possible the maximum use must be made of the site's topography and surroundings to minimise visual intrusion and severance.

False cutting (see Part 1, Ch 4, where Studbury Park is illustrated) has been widely used to maintain historic views and vistas. It is essential that parkland character is maintained up to the edge of the cutting by off-site planting if necessary and by avoiding the skyline when fencing is used.

Poor practice: M20, Chilston Park  The road disrupts the visual relationships of the park.
CASE STUDY 3

DETAILED DESIGN GUIDELINES IN RELATION TO LANDSCAPE TYPE: Upland Wales

In its design guide roads in Upland areas the Welsh Office has stated landscape character areas, identified using CDG (Countrywide Characterisation, 1997) with the particular character of active roads and produced very specific design details. This approach works well in areas of distinctive landscape character with a long history of use of particular roadside features. It could well be transferred, for instance, to the Cotswolds or parts of the Pennines. However, as discussed in case study 12, roads are not always dominated by the character of the adjacent area. In hilly or wooded areas with complex patterns of old roads there are often subtle changes in verge width, type of hedge, species and positions, both details etc. which make an approach based on standard details of little use. In this case a statement of general principles, such as those in the Good Roads Code, is often more appropriate.
Informing Neighbourhood Plans – landscape, townscape, seascape (3 recent examples by AECOM).
LCA 4: Glastonbury Industrial Fringe - West

Key Characteristics

- Characterised by a collection of commercial, retail, leisure and recreation uses, although these are not generally mixed.
- Sits within the low-lying land forming the urban fringe of Glastonbury, where the landscape changes abruptly to open moorland.
- The industrial estates are lined with dense vegetation and mature trees both on the boundaries and within internal blocks and are therefore highly enclosed.
- The Redback Mill within the Morlands Enterprise Park forms the physical entrance to the settlement of Glastonbury from the south.
- Abandoned and derelict industrial buildings in the south reduce the quality of the area.
- The visual experience and quality of the area is enhanced by clear views of Weavoll Hill to the east.
- Properties adjacent to Northwood Bridge have a rural character and are built in the style of the local vernacular including stone walls, colourful render and low rooflines.
Portland & Looe Heritage and Character Assessments -

The Portland Plan
A Neighbourhood Plan for Portland, Dorset

Heritage and Character Study Information

General, Heritage and Character Study, Natural & Built Environment

Please Note: we are currently awaiting receipt of the final draft version of the study from AECOM. As soon as this is received, further details will be available via this website.

Major Study Confirms Portland’s Unique Character

https://www.portslandplan.org.uk/2017/03/27/heritage-character-study-information/ 12/04/2018

Looe Neighbourhood Plan

DO YOU WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED?

As it’s a plan made by local people, we want all to get involved in shaping our future.

1. Help decide what should be in the plan by being part of walkthroughs, drop-in sessions, exhibitions and surveys.
2. Please use the website to add your comments, questions, the area and needs.
3. Talk about the Plan with friends and neighbours — spread the word!
4. Contribute your ideas and suggestions.
5. Comment on the draft plan below before it goes out for consultation and get involved on the Portland Facebook page or email
6. Volunteering practical help to create the Plan, there is information on volunteering opportunities.
7. Launch a working party that focuses on one particular topic.

If you have any of your time to spare, volunteer to be on the Neighbourhood Plan Team to help create the version of the Plan.

Please get in touch using the form below:

Name:
Email:
Message:

https://www.futurelooe.town/getinvolved.php 12/04/2018
Managing Change

The character of Looe described above is the result of a range of interactions between natural and human processes. This evolution is supported by the section on historical development, which describes how the structure and character of the area has changed over time. Together this provides a baseline against which change can be monitored and managed.

The evolution of the landscape will continue and therefore the management of change is essential to ensure that sustainable social, environmental and economic outcomes are achieved. This section therefore considers various factors which may influence change and informs the policies set out in the Malvern neighbourhood plan.

Positive aspects of character

There are a number of positive aspects of character which should be sustained, restored or enhanced. These relate to general description of qualities which need to be retained or reflected in new development.

- The survival of historic buildings of traditional architecture and local vernacular detailing, which contributes to a strong sense of place;
- The survival of medieval topography and layout, especially West Looe Hill and Fore Street;
- The survival of post medieval buildings including timber-frame examples, especially in the commercial core of East Looe;
- The survival of buildings that illustrate the trading and fishing past of Looe;
- Mid-19th century buildings including the quay, the harbour, the seawall, the Cliffside developments, the purely commercial buildings on Butler Quay, the warehouses and pier at the estuary mouth;
- Municipal buildings including the old and new Harleth, St Mary’s and St Nicholas Church;
- Landscape setting of the town within a steep sided river valley;
- East Looe beach, Banjo Pier and the various promenades connect the urban townscapes to the waterfront;
- Mixed use regeneration of the harbour including unified, contemporary architecture provides identity to the harbour and diverges to the town centre;
- High provision of mature trees and vegetation above the settlement boundary which contributes to an overall nevy character;
- Many shops in East Looe are independent and therefore locally distinctive and provide strong active frontage to the street;
- The East Looe river divides the centre of the town from north to south;
- High concentration of community facilities including RNLI, Looe Coastguard Station, Looe Community Fire Station;
- The south west coast path provides recreational opportunity across the landscape for Looe and surrounding communities.
LOOE HERITAGE AND CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Character Assessment

Key Characteristics

Looe is a picturesque village in Cornwall, England, known for its historic and cultural significance. The key characteristics of Looe are as follows:

- **Historic Setting:** The village has a rich history dating back to the 16th century, with many historic buildings and structures.
- **Cultural Importance:** Looe is a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors for its historic sites, beaches, and natural beauty.
- **Natural Environment:** The village is surrounded by beautiful scenery, including sandy beaches and lush green landscapes.
- **Arts and Culture:** Looe is known for its traditional arts and crafts, as well as its annual festival, which celebrates local culture and traditions.
- **Community Engagement:** The village has a strong sense of community, with local organizations and events that bring people together.

As a result of these key characteristics, Looe has been designated as a Conservation Area, recognizing its unique heritage and cultural value.
“Landscape professionals have worked with many local authorities throughout the UK to support the ELC through Landscape Character Assessments. These, in turn, are used to inform GI strategies and projects that address the factors that make each place special.”

“Local distinctiveness
GI assets that engage local communities and which relate to landscape character and heritage can enhance the local sense of place and foster community spirit. They can be a catalyst for regeneration and community ownership and can stimulate job Opportunities by attracting investment and tourism.”

NOTE includes GOOD CASE STUDIES …
Useful links …

USERS OF LCA/TCA/SCA include -

- Communities
- Natural England
- Forestry Commission
- Highways England
- Department for Transport (see DMRB etc.)
- HS2
- Environment Agency (note Kew to Chelsea – R. Thames)
- Historic England – works alongside Historic Characterisation
- Marine Management Organisation
- Local Authorities
- Planners, Landscape Architects, Engineers, Architects etc.


END