

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The methodology adopted is based upon the current Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) 3rd Edition 2013.

LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

A desktop study of landscape policies, designations, and published character appraisals has been undertaken and an independent appraisal made of the character and value of the proposed development site and surrounding landscape. In order to reach an understanding of the effects of development on a landscape the GLVIA considers three different key aspects or receptors of the landscape:

Elements: Individual elements within the landscape, which are quantifiable and include features such as hills, valleys, woods, trees, hedges and ponds;

Characteristics: Elements or combinations of elements that make a particular contribution to the character of the area i.e. Scenic quality, Tranquillity or Wildness;

Character: A combination of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement.

These elements combine to give an indication of the sensitivity of the landscape and its ability to accept change. In addition, the guidelines require that the landscape condition, value and quality are considered and weighed as part of this judgement. This is distinguished from visual receptors which, while sharing some of the same characteristics, have different contributing factors when considering sensitivity to change.

The following tables identify the key factors taken into consideration when assessing landscape value and quality. Landscape condition and historic development are more factual descriptions with less reliance on a subjective professional judgement. They are completed through a straightforward comparative description and reference to the site and its surrounds.

TABLE I

CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING LANDSCAPE QUALITY

Landscape Quality	Definition	Typical Example of Importance
Exceptional	-Strong landscape structure, characteristics, patterns, and/or clear urban grain identifiable with a historic period or event; -Appropriate management for land use and land cover and/or a well maintained urban environment of distinction; -Distinct features worthy of conservation, historic architectural grain; -Sense of place exceptional local distinctiveness; -No detracting features.	Internationally or nationally recognised. World Heritage Sites, National Parks, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; Townscape subject to listing or other protective measure identifying regional and local importance.
High	-Strong landscape structure, characteristic patterns and/or clear urban grain; -Appropriate management for land use and landcover, but potentially scope to improve; -Distinct features worthy conservation; -Sense of place; -Occasional detracting features.	Nationally, regionally recognised eg parts of National Park, AONB, all or great majority of AGLV; Conservation Area or Listed status.
Good	-Recognisable landscape structure and/or urban grain -Scope to improve management for land use and land cover; -Some features worthy of conservation; -Sense of place; -Some detracting features.	Nationally, regionally recognised eg localised areas within national Park, AONB, AGLV, Locally recognised e.g. all or great majority of Area of Local Landscape Importance. Townscape recognised as having particular quality and value.
Ordinary	-Distinguishable landscape structure, characteristics, patterns of landform and landcover often masked by land use; -Fractured urban grain with patterns of use difficult to distinguish; -Scope to improve management of vegetation; -Some features worthy of conservation -Some detracting features;	Locally recognised landscape without specific designation.
Poor	-Weak landscape structure, characteristic patterns of landform and landcover are missing, little or no recognisable urban grain; -Mixed land use evident; -Lack of management and intervention has resulted in degradation; -Frequent detracting features.	A landscape without note or one singled out as being degraded or requiring improvement.
Very Poor	-Degraded landscape structure, characteristic patterns and/or urban grain missing; -Mixed land use or dereliction dominates; -Lack of management/ intervention has resulted in degradation; -Extensive detracting features.	A Landscape likely to be singled out as needing intervention or regeneration.

TABLE 2

CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING LANDSCAPE VALUE

Landscape Value	Definition	Typical Example of Importance
High	-An iconic landscape or element(s) held in high regard both nationally, regionally and by the local community; -A landscape or element(s) widely used by both the local community and a broader visiting community; -Features of particular historical protected significance; - Landscape or space which defines or is closely associated with a community and its life and livelihood.	Nationally, regionally recognised eg parts of National Park, AONB, all or great majority of AGLV; Conservation or Listed status.
Good	-A landscape or element(s) recognised regionally and locally as important; -A landscape widely used by the local community; -Features or elements widely used or visited and held in association with the area or community.	Part of an AGLV
Moderate	- A landscape of local importance; -A landscape widely used by the local community; -A sense of place recognisable and associated with the local area.	Area of local landscape importance
Low	A landscape without particular noted significance; A landscape or elements infrequently used by the local community; A landscape which is not distinct and does not add to the overall context of the area.	

For the purposes of developing a baseline description, information previously published or otherwise in the public realm is studied and its relevance to the site in question considered. From this combination of desktop, document and field study an overall view of the character of the landscape is made with which to then assess the landscape sensitivity.

Landscape sensitivity is an assessment of the degree to which a particular landscape type or area can accommodate change arising from a particular development, without detrimental effects on its character. It will vary with;

- Existing land use.
- The pattern and scale of the landscape.
- Visual enclosure/openness of views, and distribution of visual receptors.
- The scope for mitigation, which would be in character with the existing landscape.
- The value placed on the landscape

Sensitivity to change is the analysis of the capacity of the landscape to accept change through the introduction or loss of new or existing features, based on the professional judgement of the quality and value or importance of the landscape. The sensitivity of landscape resource is defined by its existing land use, pattern and scale of the landscape, visual enclosure/openness of views, and distribution of visual receptors, the scope for mitigation, which would be in character with the existing landscape, and the value placed on the landscape.

A professional judgement is reached taking into account the factors and criteria outlined previously above and a level of sensitivity is assigned to a landscape or sub area as appropriate.

The sensitivity to change has been categorised as follows:

TABLE 3

CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Landscape	High	Medium	Low
Landscape designation	A landscape of distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes. Includes national or regionally designated landscapes e.g. Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), National Scenic Area. Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes on the National Register	A landscape of moderately valued characteristics. Including local landscape designations.	A landscape of relative unimportance, the nature of which is tolerant to substantial change. No landscape designation.
Landscape resource	Important landscape resources or landscapes of particularly distinctive character and therefore likely to be subject to national designation or otherwise with high values to the public. Is vulnerable to minor changes.	Moderately valued characteristics reasonably tolerant of change.	Relatively unimportant/ immature or damaged landscapes tolerant of substantial change.
Scale and enclosure	Small intimate landscape.	Medium scale landscape.	Large scale open landscape.
Landform and topography	Mountainous or large dominating hills and valleys. Intimate small-scale landscapes defined through easily identifiable elements in the immediate landscape.	Rolling landform with small hills and valleys. Some intimacy and human scale through landscape elements such as hedgerows and woodland copses.	Large scale open landscape. Little intimacy or human scale, few character elements or features.
Settlement	Organic land cover pattern	A gradation between High and Low	Grid like linear land cover pattern
Landmarks and visible built structures	Landscape with symbolic or important features	A gradation between High and Low	Landscape with no recognised individual features or elements
Remoteness and tranquility	Remote location, little evidence of human activity	A gradation between High and Low	Highly developed countryside areas with continuous evidence of human activity
Landscape Quality and Value	A landscape of exceptional or high quality and/or high value.	A landscape of good or ordinary quality and /or good or moderate value	A landscape of low or poor quality and value

On considering the magnitude of landscape change, in the evaluation of the effects it is helpful to rank or quantify individual effects within a series of levels or categories, indicating a gradation from high to low. On this basis, Table 4 provides the criteria used to assess the magnitude of change:

TABLE 4

CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE (LANDSCAPE)

Magnitude of change	Beneficial	Adverse
High	Major positive alteration to significant elements or features or the removal of substantial elements or features perceived as a negative or detracting influence. The alteration of a landscape to substantially increase both the landscape value and quality and complement acknowledged aspirations and objectives. A change which is not balanced against other negative introductions or other adverse alterations to the landscape.	Total loss of or major alteration to key valued elements, features and characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements considered to be prominent and totally uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Would cause a high quality landscape to be permanently changed and its quality diminished.
Medium	A positive alteration to landscape elements or features which increases both landscape value and quality. The removal of elements or features which are perceived as negative or detracting features. A change which is not balanced against other adverse alterations to the landscape.	Partial loss of or alteration to one or more key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that may be prominent but not substantially uncharacteristic when set within the attributes of the receiving landscape. Would be out of scale with the landscape and leave an adverse impact over a landscape of quality.
Low	A change which introduces elements, features or characteristics which are of positive benefit to the landscape character and improve value and quality. The removal of negative elements or detracting features. A change which may result from a combination of both beneficial and adverse changes to the landscape.	Minor loss or alteration to one or more key elements, features, characteristics of the baseline or introduction of elements that may be prominent but may not be uncharacteristic when set within the receiving landscape. May not fit into the scale and landform.
Negligible	A minor change which is not uncharacteristic and maintains the quality and value of the landscape.	A minor change which is not uncharacteristic and maintains the quality and value of the landscape.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS

The significance of visual effects is assessed by taking into consideration the sensitivity and importance of the receptor and the nature, scale or magnitude, visual susceptibility and duration or reversibility of the change or effect.

Landscape impacts can be described as being adverse or beneficial depending on whether the changes described add or remove a value or elements/features recognised as of particular value to the receiving landscape. In certain circumstances the change to the landscape may be substantial but the character and quality of the landscape remains unaffected. Such a situation may arise within an urban environment where the nature of the environment leads to an expectation for the land which includes change and development. It may be appropriate in such a situation to attribute a neutral effect where it can be demonstrated that the changes will have little consequence over the character of the landscape.

The assessment of impact for landscape effects is the result of the sensitivity of a receptor being considered alongside the magnitude of change anticipated for each receptor, this is summarised through the table below:

TABLE 5

SUMMARY TABLE TO DETERMINE LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

Sensitivity		Magnitude of Change			
		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
	High	substantial	moderate-substantial	moderate	slight
	Medium	moderate-substantial	moderate	slight-moderate	negligible
	Low	moderate	slight-moderate	slight	negligible

VISUAL EFFECTS

The assessment of visual effects describes the changes in the character of the available views resulting from the development and the changes in the visual amenity of the visual receptor.

The assessment process mirrors that of landscape effects in that it requires the collation of baseline information relating to the nature and type of views and the receptors which will receive them. This information is collected through a combination of measures including site work, photographic recording (refer to the methodology for photographic images for viewpoints below) and computer modeling technologies. The resulting picture of visual influence can be described as the Zone of Theoretical Visibility, describing all the points from which the development may be visible. As with landscape effects, visual impacts are determined by considering the magnitude and nature of change as set against the sensitivity of the receptor.

Judgement about the value of the view take in to account recognition of heritage and planning designations, and any value attached through appearance in tourist information, literature and art.

TABLE 6 CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING VISUAL QUALITY

View Quality	Description
High	Iconic views or skylines which are individual character elements in their own right. Protected views through Supplementary Planning Guidance or development framework. View mentioned in the listing for a conservation area, listed building or scheduled monument as being important with regard to its setting. Wide panoramic distant views of a valued landscape(s).
Moderate	Views with strong and distinctive features. Uninterrupted views. Views over a landscape of recognised character and quality
Poor	Restricted views or views over a landscape of low value and quality.

The assessment of sensitivity of each visual receptor combines judgements on the susceptibility of the receptor to the Proposed Development and the value attributed to the receptor. The susceptibility of people to changes in views is related to their activity when experiencing the view and the extent to which their interest is focussed on the views and the visual amenity. Judgement on both the value of the views and the viewers susceptibility to change in the view are used to judge sensitivity of the receptor, which has been determined as high, medium or low.

TABLE 7 CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING VISUAL SENSITIVITY

Receptor Sensitivity	Description
High	Occupiers of residential properties within 1km of the proposed development Users of outdoor recreational facilities, including public rights of way, whose attention may be focused on the landscape Elevated panoramic viewpoints Communities where the development results in changes in the landscape setting or valued views enjoyed by the community
Medium	Occupiers of residential properties over 1km from the development People engaged in outdoor recreation where enjoyment of the landscape is incidental rather than the main interest People travelling through the landscape where the views involved are transient and sporadic but have a special significance in either the journey or the expression of the landscape or community being visited.
Low	People at their place of work, Industrial facilities. People travelling through the landscape in cars, trains or other transport such that the speed and nature of the views involved are short lived and have no special significance

The magnitude of change to the view will depend on numerous factors including the extent and nature of the current view, the distance to the proposed development, the time of year and whether other elements intervene in the view such as vegetation or moving traffic. To assist this process the level of change is graded between Large and Negligible and is described below:

TABLE 8 CRITERIA FOR DESCRIBING MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE (VISUAL)

Magnitude	Examples
High	The development would result in a prominent change to the existing view and would change the quality of the view. The development would be easily noticed by the observer. The development may break the skyline or form some other substantial change to the view.
Medium	The development would result in a noticeable change in the existing view that may change the character and quality of the view. The change would be readily noticed by the observer but would not dominate the view.
Low	The development would result in a perceptible change in the existing view but this would not affect its character or quality. The development will appear as a small element in the wider landscape which may be missed by the casual observer. The view may be at such a distance as to reduce the appearance of the development.
Negligible	Only a small part of the development will be discernible and this may be for only part of the year or be a filtered view. The view may be at such a distance as to render the change virtually indiscernible without aid or reference. The quality and character of the view will remain unchanged.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS

The significance of visual effects is assessed by taking into consideration the sensitivity and importance of the receptor and the nature, scale or magnitude, visual susceptibility and duration or reversibility of the change or effect.

The summary of effects can be expressed as an adverse or beneficial effect depending on the assessor's view regarding the nature and quality of the existing view and how this will be changed. In some circumstances the change may be described as a neutral change if the expectation of the viewer or the fundamental nature and characteristics of a view appear unaffected.

On assessing the magnitude of impact, more weight is usually given to changes in the view or visual amenity which are greater in scale and visible over a wide area. Distance from the viewer to the impact change is also factored in to give an overall score for magnitude or impact.

The significance of visual effects is expressed through the table below:

TABLE 9 SUMMARY TABLE TO DETERMINE VISUAL EFFECTS

		Magnitude of Change			
		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Sensitivity	High	substantial	moderate-substantial	moderate	slight
	Medium	moderate-substantial	moderate	slight-moderate	negligible
	Low	moderate	slight-moderate	slight	negligible

It is considered that a score of moderate-substantial adverse or above represents a significant impact for visual assessment.

METHODOLOGY FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES FOR VIEWPOINTS

Photographs taken to represent views within the visual appraisal are taken using the following formats and standards:

Panoramic images need to represent the eye's view and are used for views wider than approx. 40 degrees.

These are taken using:

- APS-C mirrorless camera with a short zoom lens
 - Aperture => F8
 - ISO 200-400
 - Focal length 31 degrees approx.
 - Manual exposure
 - Manual focus

This provides a consistent group of images that are then manually 'stitched' together using Photoshop to give a view representative of the human eye. All shots are taken in portrait format at eye level and the camera is panned horizontally to ensure minimum distortion and cropping in the final image.

If images are printed they should be printed at a high enough resolution to allow detail to be visible at normal viewing distance; 300-500mm for A4/A3 and on a quality of paper that will cause any bleeding of the fine detail.