

EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment
Incorporating the Peak District National Park and Lincolnshire Wolds AONB
Shaping the Region's Future Landscape





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L D A DESIGN

^A Worton Rectory Park,
Oxford OX29 4SX
^T +44 (0)1865 887 050
^T +44 (0)1865 887 055

^W www.lda-design.co.uk

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LDA Design Consulting LLP, Registered No: OC307725
17 Minster Precincts, Peterborough PE1 1XX



FOREWORD

It is small wonder that the British virtually invented the science and nomenclature of geology, because there can be no other nation so small in size with such wide diversity of rocks, and, founded on those rocks, such wide diversity of landscape character types.

The East Midlands exhibit a rich rollercoaster of those characters from the gritstone moorland grandeur of the Peak District in the North-West, with its centrally exposed limestone plateau deeply incised by beautiful river valleys to expose fossils from a shallow equatorial sea, through the coalfields, southern magnesian limestone escarpments, Sherwood Forest, on to the Lincolnshire Edge and the rolling chalk landscapes of the Lincolnshire Wolds, down to fenlands and the Lincolnshire Coastal Marshes to reach the North Sea. In the Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire are some of the oldest rocks in England. There are remnants of ancient royal hunting forests at Sherwood and Rockingham and, in contrast, some of England's youngest woodlands planted, in part, across reclaimed coalfield landscapes in the National Forest. There are broad river valleys and floodplains associated with the Nene, Welland and the Trent, with in some cases land lying lower than, or barely higher than, the sea and rich peatlands sequestering carbon in these uncertain times.

Cities there may be, so too towns and growth areas, but the East Midlands remains at heart rural in character. This is heartland 'village' England, a place of champion landscapes, where heavily nucleated villages, huddled round their churches, gave way to open fields worked in common in strips before the harsh enclosures of rapidly expanding landed estates. Once the stronghold of the medieval sheep and wool industries, much of the East Midlands is now a vast arable agricultural machine, struggling to maintain its biodiversity and to reclaim wetlands. From this rural backdrop there burst forth the leather and textile industries, the coal industry, sand, gravel and limestone extraction, and the world's first factories in the Lower Derwent, now a World Heritage Site. Each is etched onto our landscapes.

I cannot commend enough the monumental achievement of the East Midlands Landscape Partnership to produce, using the latest techniques, a full Landscape Character Assessment for the whole region. This provides all of us with the authentic spatial framework within which we can plan initiatives and encourage regional and local decision-makers to ground their work and policy-making. There can now be no excuse for saying we were not aware of these or those landscape considerations. I encourage all of us and those we influence to cherish these varied landscapes, to plan within their grain, to use landscape as an integrating and place-shaping framework for planning services at different levels, and to recognise that, while change is a characteristic of landscape, we also should pass on to our successors the landscape legibility of our past.

Natural England Board Member

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT 3

| | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 1.1 | Introduction | 5 |
| 1.2 | The Need for a Regional Landscape Character Assessment (EMRLCA) | 6 |
| 1.3 | Aims and Objectives of the EMRLCA | 7 |
| 1.4 | Contributing to a Bigger Vision | 8 |
| 1.5 | Approach and Methodology | 8 |

SECTION 2 EXISTING LANDSCAPE AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS 13

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 2.1 | Introduction | 15 |
| 2.2 | National Landscape Character | 16 |
| 2.3 | Revision of National Character Areas and the Setting of Strategic Objectives | 16 |
| 2.4 | National Historic Rural Settlement Analysis | 17 |
| 2.5 | County and District Scale Landscape Character Assessment | 17 |
| 2.6 | County and District Scale Historic Landscape Character Assessment | 19 |

SECTION 3 FOUNDATIONS OF THE EAST MIDLANDS LANDSCAPE 21

| | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----|
| 3.1 | Introduction | 23 |
| 3.2 | Physical Influences | 24 |
| 3.3 | Cultural Influences | 39 |
| 3.4 | Current and Future Landscape Change | 45 |
| 3.5 | Perception of Landscape | 63 |
| 3.6 | Socio Economic | 64 |

SECTION 4 65
REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Group 1: Coast and Sea | 71 |
| Group 2: Fenland and Fenland Margins | 97 |
| Group 3: River Valley Floodplains | 119 |
| Group 4: Lowland Vales | 135 |
| Group 5: Village Farmlands | 149 |
| Group 6: Limestone Farmlands | 175 |
| Group 7: Chalk Wolds | 209 |
| Group 8: Clay Wolds | 227 |
| Group 9: Coalfields | 235 |
| Group 10: Woods and Forests | 245 |
| Group 11: Gritstone Moors and Fringes | 277 |

SECTION 5 305
SUMMARY OF FORCES FOR CHANGE

SECTION 6 315
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

| | | |
|-----|------------------|-----|
| 6.1 | Glossary | 317 |
| 6.2 | References | 322 |
| 6.3 | Acknowledgements | 325 |

SECTION 7 327
SUPPORTING FIGURES

SECTION 8 331
APPENDICES

THE EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the East Midlands Landscape Partnership, following recommendations made in a scoping study, commissioned the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment (EMRLCA). This is a new tier in the landscape character assessment hierarchy in England and the first regional assessment to not only provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of the region's landscape but to also include a seascape characterisation that identifies seascape character types. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the character of the East Midlands landscape and draws together information about the natural, historic and built environment to facilitate the protection, management and planning of the East Midlands Region.

The EMRLCA has been produced in consultation with stakeholders drawn from a wide range of statutory agencies, local authorities and other regional bodies and benefited from the input and guidance of a great number of committed individuals, as well as a full public consultation.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Landscape Character Assessment is the process by which areas of distinctive character are classified, mapped and described. The aim is to raise awareness of the landscape's diversity, local distinctiveness and sense of place, particularly in areas where landscape character is less well understood or appreciated, or under pressure for change, for example from settlement growth, new development or physical changes.

An important feature of the character assessment process is that, consistent with best practice guidance, it is objective and no judgment is made about the value or quality of landscape. In line with the European Landscape Convention, the EMRLCA recognises that all of the landscape matters and makes no distinction between areas of high scenic value and degraded landscape.

In this strategic regional level assessment, 'Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs)' are identified. These are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout the region. However, wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historic and current land uses and settlement patterns.

THE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT HIERARCHY

The regional level of assessment is a new tier in the assessment hierarchy in England and designed to add a regional layer to the 159 National Character Areas identified by Natural England¹ and provide a strategic context and framework for more detailed landscape assessments at the county, district and local scales that nest within the larger scale assessments.

¹ National Character Areas were mapped and described in the late 1990's, prior to the development of the National Landscape Typology.

PRINCIPAL AIM AND APPLICATION

The principal aim of the EMRLCA is to put in place a consistent and robust landscape evidence base at a regional level that provides a common platform for future strategic, region wide landscape management. It will also ensure that holistic landscape considerations that extend beyond administrative boundaries inform and enable greater integration with and between other environmental themes and projects.

As well as establishing landscape as a spatial framework for decision making at the regional scale, it is intended that the EMRLCA will be taken forward into strategic spatial planning processes to ensure that the environmental baseline for the region informs the regional evidence base and subsequent policy framework.

The RLCTs provide a spatial framework for greater integration with other regional themes and issues such as identifying opportunities for habitat creation, woodland creation and management, informing green infrastructure strategies, the location of development, including renewable energy installations and identifying the role of landscape in the delivery of ecosystem services.

THE EMRLCA

The East Midlands region has a rich and diverse landscape as a result of the complex interplay of a wide range of physical and cultural influences and forces that have shaped and moulded the landscape.

Following a review of existing landscape and historic landscape character assessment across the region, the report examines the physical and cultural influences in order to provide a comprehensive assessment of the foundations of the East Midlands landscape.

The EMRLCA identifies 31 Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs), five of which cover the distinctive East Midlands seascape. The report presents non-technical descriptions of each RLCT as well as a review of the Forces for Change that are currently acting to change the landscape. In addition, the implications of these changes and suggested mechanisms to counter adverse impacts and promote positive change are also considered, under 'Shaping the Future Landscape'. The report, and accompanying photographs and GIS based Figures, provides an overview of the region's diverse landscape, to enthuse and inform anyone with an interest in the landscape and to inform strategic initiatives and decision making which may have an impact on the character and identity of the region.

AN EVIDENCE BASE FOR REGIONAL LEVEL DECISION MAKING

The assessment has been designed to provide a strategic region-wide evidence base to help decision making on issues that will have implications for the landscape and wider environment. It acts as a signpost to more detailed Landscape Character Assessments, Historic Landscape Characterisations and other useful information sources, and provides a regional framework for future assessments which will inform planning policy or decisions about the location and design of future development.

By having in place a strong understanding of the character of the East Midlands Region, along with guidelines specifically designed to enhance the landscape for the benefit of all, positive decisions can be made with more certainty and confidence than ever before. The information contained in the EMRLCA will enable the East Midlands Region to direct positive change that will strengthen the sense of pride in, respect for, and appreciation of, the region's diverse landscapes.

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION TO THE EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



1.1 INTRODUCTION

Extending across approximately 16,400 km², the Study Area for the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment (EMRLCA), illustrated on Figure 1, covers the Government Office Region of the East Midlands. It includes the administrative counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland, 30 district and borough authorities and the unitary authorities of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham.

The full geographic coverage of the Peak District National Park and Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have also been included within the Study Area, to ensure that the findings of the EMRLCA can be adopted and applied across the full extent of these designated areas. As a consequence, relevant parts of an additional ten district and unitary authorities are included in the Study Area, all of which lie within neighbouring Government Office Regions. The Study Area also includes areas of foreshore and open sea extending 15km from the shoreline.

The Study Area, noted for its agricultural productivity, recreational value, cultural associations and heritage, geodiversity and biodiversity assets, contains a diverse landscape resource. In very simple terms, the East Midlands Region marks the transition from the open sea, coastal salt marshes and low lying drained fenland farmlands of Lincolnshire to the upland moorland landscape of the Peak District. Between these two extremes lie a wide variety of Landscape Character Types, including limestone and chalk hills, ancient forested hills, productive rolling farmlands interspersed with rural villages, remote lowland heaths and areas noted for their rich mining heritage.

The EMRLCA provides an up-to-date description of the region's landscape character and describes the various forces that have created the landscape we see today. It goes on to review the forces that continue to change the landscape and suggests ways to secure positive landscape change in the future. The EMRLCA recognises that all landscapes matter, and in so doing, ensures that the broad measures set out in the European Landscape Convention (ELC) are recognised and available to be taken forward through the integration of landscape issues into decision making at all levels from national to local, and across a wide range of sectors, policies and strategies. The task of protecting, managing and planning the landscape is fundamental to ELC objectives, and needs to be applied in decisions and their delivery across the whole spectrum of society from government and its agencies, and local authorities, to the private sector and civil society in general. The range of decision making and opportunities for the EMRLCA to contribute to this process is set out in more detail in Section 1.3.

1.2 THE NEED FOR A REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

In Spring 2008, Natural England commissioned a review of the current situation with regard to how landscape issues were considered in the East Midlands. The study, published in December 2008², made several recommendations on how various bodies might take forward the regional landscape agenda, to ensure that landscape considerations are embedded in emerging regional structures.

A key recommendation was the need to revisit the regional landscape evidence base. The review acknowledged that whilst a significant number of landscape character assessments and historic landscape characterisations have been undertaken or are emerging, there was considerable variation in their aims, the methods adopted and the scale of assessment. As a consequence, it identified the need to develop a link between local coverage and national scale landscape character assessments. This strategic overview would have a range of uses and applications, but most significantly, would provide a solid basis on which to develop comprehensive region wide landscape studies and facilitate the gathering and analysis of landscape information across the region. It would also enable a more efficient flow of information between national, regional and local levels, provide a new strategic spatial framework for considering strategic themes and issues which could result in the delivery of combined environmental outcomes and a comprehensive approach to landscape **planning, protection** and **management** across the region.



Low lying coastal landscape, Lincolnshire (© J Watson)



Upland moorland landscape, Derbyshire (© Derbyshire County Council)

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EMRLCA

Building on the recommendations of the East Midlands Regional Landscape Scoping Study, Natural England, with others, commissioned a project to carry out the first region wide landscape character assessment that also includes seascape characterisation, to be completed in England.

The EMRLCA will complement a range of studies and assessments undertaken in the region to help understand the environment of the East Midlands, and help realise the significant potential that the landscape has in contributing to the region's economy and the health and well being of its residents.

In brief, the aims of the EMRLCA are to:

- Implement the objectives of the European Landscape Convention (ELC), providing strategic guidelines for landscape protection, planning and management. These are defined by the ELC as:
 - **Protection** - action to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape
 - **Management** - action from a perspective of sustainable development to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes; and
 - **Planning** - strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscape
 - Inform and underpin the regional spatial planning policy framework.
 - Integrate with other regional strategies and initiatives.
 - Help guide sustainable development decisions.
 - Guide the production of Green Infrastructure Strategies.
 - Inform environmental capacity studies that describe the ability of the environment to perform natural functions and accommodate the impact of human processes.
 - Inform ecosystem services studies that assess the interaction of organisms, habitats, the natural environment and the supporting services they provide.
 - Bring about greater integration with other key environmental themes such as geodiversity, biodiversity and historic landscape; and
 - Promote the qualities and diversity of the region's landscape.
- Critical to the success of the EMRLCA in meeting its aims will be its robustness and transparency. This is demonstrated through:
- The methodology that is adopted, and its ability to demonstrate adherence to best practice guidance;
 - The breadth and accuracy of the data contributing to the baseline evidence base, including national scale datasets and assessments e.g. the National Character Area Assessment (NCA), National Landscape Typology (NLCT) and local landscape character assessments at county and district scale;
 - The methods adopted for interrogating spatial and other data sources;
 - The interpretation of existing landscape character, historic landscape character and seascape assessments, and the means by which these existing assessments have been incorporated into the EMRLCA;
 - The conclusions that are drawn from consultations, baseline research and fieldwork;
 - Communication of complex ideas and issues through the consistent use of accessible language, graphics, plans, maps and illustrative and interactive web based material; and
 - The flexibility of the output to adapt and undergo regular reviews and updates.

1.4 CONTRIBUTING TO A BIGGER VISION

The EMRLCA is one of a number of assessments in the East Midlands that will promote a greater understanding of the natural, historic and built environment and also act as a stimulus for more sustainable modes of living, energy generation, food procurement, industry, use and management of natural resources, manufacture and commerce.

Government agencies, local planning authorities, voluntary organisations, private sector bodies and local communities should seek to use the findings of this and other assessments to meet the European Landscape Convention's aspiration for a landscape that:

- Is beautiful, rich and productive;
- Provides a basis for entrepreneurial business and sustainable communities; and
- Contributes to a positive regional identity and sense of pride and place.

1.5 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The approach adopted in the EMRLCA complements the National Countryside Character Approach developed by the former Countryside Agency (now Natural England). In particular, the assessment is based on the methodology set out in the 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland'³.

The main tasks in developing the EMRLCA comprised:

- Review of the various Landscape Character Assessments, within and immediately surrounding the East Midlands Region, including the National Countryside Character Assessment and National Landscape Typology. A schedule of existing landscape assessments used in the EMRLCA is presented in Appendix 1. National Countryside Character Areas and Types are illustrated on Figure 2. The distribution of county and district scale landscape character assessments is presented in Figure 3.
- Review of other landscape assessments, including Historic Landscape Characterisations, Historic Seascape Assessments and Biodiversity Character Assessments that exist within and surrounding the East Midlands Region. A schedule of existing assessments used in the EMRLCA is presented in Appendix 1. The distribution of Historic Landscape Characterisations is also presented on Figure 3 in addition the county and district landscape character assessments.
- Review of National Landscape and Coastal designations and World Heritage Sites. These are shown on Figure 4.
- Familiarisation with the Study Area through reconnaissance, information gathering, GIS interrogation and overlay mapping at 1:50,000 scale. A list of the core datasets used is attached as Appendix 2 and illustrated in a range of baseline figures (Figures 5-16).
- Background research into the physical and cultural attributes of the landscape and forces for change.
- Site survey including completion of field survey forms for Landscape Character Types and preparation of a digital photographic record. Field survey forms were completed on a lap-top computer and fed directly into a geo-referenced Access Database. A copy of materials used during field work is presented in Appendix 3.

- Development of project methodology, based on established best practice guidance. The project flow diagram is presented in Appendix 4. Appendix 5 presents a flow diagram of the landscape character assessment process.
- Stakeholder workshop to engage key statutory and non statutory agencies in the assessment process and to obtain views on forces for change and appropriate landscape strategies. A list of workshop delegates is presented in Appendix 6.

1.5.2 INTEGRATION OF SEASCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

In recognition that a large extent of the eastern boundary of the East Midlands Region lies along the coast and that the open sea plays an important role in defining local identity, offshore areas have been included within the Study Area. By including seascapes, the EMRLCA accords with the European Landscape Convention (ELC) that includes marine areas within its definition of landscape.

In establishing the approach to assessing seascape character, reference is made to best practice guidance on Seascape Assessment (Countryside Council for Wales, 2001)⁴ and Historic Seascape Characterisation (HSC) methods. However, it has been necessary to adapt these established methods to ensure a consistent, region wide, approach to identifying Landscape Character Types across both land and sea.

To establish the seaward extent of the Study Area, reference was made to best practice guidance on Seascape Assessment⁵. Guidance recommends that it is necessary to identify different Study Areas dependent on the scale of the assessment being undertaken. For the identification of regional seascape units, the guidance suggests that areas of sea should be assessed up to 15km offshore. The EMRLCA has followed this guidance and defined the outer limits of the Study Area by establishing a 15km buffer from the coastline of the East Midlands Region.

In defining and describing seascape character, the Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment defines seascape as including:

- Views from land to sea.
- Views from sea to land.
- Views along the coastline.
- The effect on landscape of the conjunction of sea and land.

Guidance on the Assessment of the Impact of Offshore Wind Farms⁶ takes a similar approach and defines seascape as:

“the coastal landscape and adjoining areas of open water, including views from land to sea, from sea to land and along the coastline”.

The guidance therefore recognises seascape as a discrete area within which there is shared intervisibility between land and sea and that every seascape has three components:

- an area of sea (seaward component);
- a length of coastline (coastline component); and
- an area of land (landward component).

It goes on to state that “Landscape starts at the coastline and includes all areas inland”.

It is judged that the parameters for defining seascape units listed above are too narrowly focused on visual criteria and as such would be inconsistent with the definition of landscape endorsed in the ELC and the approach adopted to identify terrestrial Landscape Character Types in the EMRLCA.

Therefore, to ensure consistency with the best practice methods for the identification of Landscape Character Types and areas in England, the various physical and cultural influences that influence seascape character have also been considered in the assessment of marine areas. As for terrestrial landscape, physical and cultural influences on the character of marine areas are interrogated to

^{4,5} M Hill et.al. *Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment*. Countryside Council for Wales, March 2001.

⁶ Department of Trade and Industry, *Guidance on the Assessment of the Impact of Offshore Wind farms: Seascape and Visual Impact Report*

inform an understanding of visual, surface water, benthic (sea floor) and pelagic (water column) characteristics, that combine to create areas of unique seascape character.

In adopting this approach, additional datasets have been sourced for offshore areas, including geology, bathymetry, and industrial use of the sea and navigation routes. As with terrestrial landscape character assessment, these datasets have been analysed and overlain to identify areas of common character at the regional level of assessment.

There are currently no Historic Seascape Characterisations (HSCs) available within the Study Area. However, reference has been made to two pilot assessments of historic seascape character^{7,8}, in order to identify whether any aspects of the methodology adopted in HSC are applicable to the EMRLCA.

It is evident that the approach to HSC is based on the principles of terrestrial Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC). As with terrestrial HLC, which identifies Historic Landscape Types as polygons with similar historic character, HSC identifies equivalent historic seascape types through the analysis of a range of underlying baseline datasets. Considering the close relationship between historic and landscape characterisation, the various Historic Seascape Character Types identified in the two pilot HSC projects have been reviewed to assist in the classification of marine Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs). The scale at which Historic Seascape Types are identified is incongruous with the EMRLCA, marine RLCTs being more extensive in geographical coverage and character. However, the rationale for identifying and naming Historic Seascape Character Types has been influential in the identification of offshore RLCTs.

In summary, the EMRLCA adopts a holistic approach to landscape and seascape character assessment and considers inland, coastal and offshore areas as a mosaic of different Landscape Character Types, the identification of which has been derived through a combination of desk based assessment of relevant environmental datasets and, where practical, observations in the field. It should be noted that marine Landscape Character Types identified in the EMRLCA have not been subject to field work. However, it is recommended that future assessments of marine character should incorporate field work.

The EMRLCA is the first region-wide assessment to be undertaken that considers offshore areas as a component of the landscape. As such, the identification of offshore seascape character types in this assessment should be regarded as a pilot initiative for further testing and refinement. Throughout the remainder of the EMRLCA, areas of common character for offshore areas are referred to as Landscape Character Types.

1.5.3 APPROACH TO DEFINING BUILT UP AREAS

Built up areas, such as the region's cities, towns and larger villages are excluded from the regional landscape character assessment. For consistency, built up areas for this study have been defined as areas greater than 1 sq km on the 'Developed Land Use Areas' layer from Ordnance Survey OS Meridian mapping.

The 'Developed Land Use Area' data in OS Meridian is itself derived from OS Strategic map information and is defined as urban areas being greater than 0.5 sq km and constituting 'an area containing a concentration of buildings and other structures' in the OS Strategic User Guide

⁷ *England's Historic Seascapes – Scarborough to Hartlepool and Adjacent Marine Zone Historic Seascape Characterisation, Historic Environment Service (Projects) Cornwall County Council, 2007.*

⁸ *England's Historic Seascapes. Marine HLC Pilot Study: Southwold to Clacton. Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd, 2007.*

Other, smaller built up areas, such as villages and hamlets, are regarded as an integral part of the wider rural landscape they occupy and are therefore not illustrated or defined as built up areas.

1.5.4 ASSESSMENT FLOW DIAGRAMS

A flow diagram of the assessment process is presented in Appendix 4. A more detailed flow diagram describing the processes in the refinement of the National Landscape Typology and production of Regional Landscape Character Types is presented in Appendix 5.

1.5.5 REPORT STRUCTURE

Section 1 provides a general introduction and overview of the methodology adopted in the EMRLCA. Section 2 presents a summary of existing landscape character assessments and historic landscape characterisations that have informed the EMRLCA. The distribution of National Landscape Character Types and areas is illustrated in Figure 2, and supplemented with a full description of National Landscape Typology descriptive attributes. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of local scale landscape character assessments and also Historic Landscape Characterisations across the region based on information provided by county and district councils in the region, English Heritage and Natural England.

Section 3 provides an overview of the principal physical and cultural influences that have shaped the region's landscape character. Important geological, cultural, historic and natural features are recorded, and their distribution across the region briefly described. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of national landscape designations across the region (including the Derwent Valley

Mills World Heritage Site). Figures 5 to 15 illustrate the distribution of key influences on landscape character. A socio economic overview is also presented and illustrated on Figure 16.

Section 4 describes Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs). RLCTs are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout the region. However, wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land uses and settlement patterns.

The description of RLCTs includes a review of baseline conditions under three main themes and includes the physical (geology and soils, landform, hydrology, land use and land cover, woodland and trees), cultural (buildings and settlement, heritage features, boundaries, communications, infrastructure and recreation) and perceptual (tranquillity, remoteness) attributes of the landscape that combine to create its unique character. Additional information is presented on landscape change and management, highlighting the key forces for change acting on the landscape and broad guidance on shaping the future landscape. A summary of the likely or potential forces for change on each of the RLCTs is presented in Section 5.

Consistent with best practice and the methodology set out in the 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland', written descriptions of RLCTs avoid value-laden terminology, for example 'beautiful', 'bland', 'attractive' and 'degraded'. In this way, the descriptions can help to raise awareness of all types of landscape and encourage appreciation of variations in character and local distinctiveness across the region, regardless of subjective judgements of value or quality. Nevertheless, subjective judgements are required in relation to identifying the aesthetic and perceptual attributes of the landscape, and also in the guidance on 'Shaping the Future Landscape' in relation to

the identified Forces for Change. However, these subjective findings are based on informed professional judgement by a consistent team of qualified landscape practitioners.

With regard to the landscape character assessment hierarchy, the EMRLCA presents a new strategic regional tier, below National Character Areas and the National Landscape Typology, and above county and district scale landscape character assessments. A diagram of the new hierarchical framework is presented at the end of Section 2.

A map of Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs) is presented on Figure 17. A map illustrating the relationship between the Regional Landscape Character Types and National Character Areas is presented on Figure 18.

Additional information is presented in Section 6 and includes a glossary of key terms used in the assessment process, reference materials, and list of Steering Group members, stakeholders and other consultees who have made valuable contributions to the development of the EMRLCA.

All figures are presented in Section 7, illustrating physical and human influences over the Regional Landscape Character Types.
