

# Experiencing Landscapes: capturing the *cultural services* and *experiential qualities* of landscape

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# Introduction

Natural England commission a range of reports from external contractors to provide evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties. The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England.

## Background

Natural England commissioned extensive qualitative social research to provide baseline evidence of the cultural services and experiential qualities that landscapes provide.

It is generally recognised that England's landscapes provide a range of 'services' which contribute to people's quality of life, including spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment.

A key aim was to understand whether such services correlate to particular landscape characteristics or particular landscape features. The detailed objectives for the study were to:

- Establish and refine evidence from national/regional public surveys and research through more focused work with the public in a selection of England's National Character Areas.
- Make judgements about whether and how the findings correlate to particular landscape characteristics and relate to particular landscape features.
- Make recommendations on whether the outcomes could provide a sufficiently

representative baseline that could be used either at national, regional or a National Character Area scale.

- Provide qualitative material that will aid in the updating of National Character Area descriptions and associated strategic objectives for the future.

It is envisaged that this research will be valuable in a number of ways, including:

- Informing policy making on the connections between people and landscapes and in the potential development of a cultural services 'indicator' in the wider monitoring of landscape change.
- Development of a broad typology of landscapes and the key cultural services they provide that can be applied and described in the updating of England's National Character Areas.
- Demonstrating the value of engaging with the public on their perceptions and aspirations for landscape, in line with the objectives of the European Landscape Convention.
- Provide practical evidence to Defra's National Ecosystem Assessment.

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**Keywords** - Landscape, cultural services, perceptions, experiential qualities, character

### Further information

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**Natural England**

**Experiencing Landscapes:  
Capturing the 'cultural services'  
and 'experiential qualities' of  
landscape**

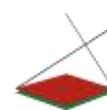
**Study Report  
July 2009**

**Report prepared for:**

**Natural England  
John Dower House  
Crescent Place  
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## Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
1. Introduction .....	11
1.1 Background .....	11
1.2 Objectives .....	11
1.3 Glossary of Terms .....	13
1.4 Structure of the Report .....	14
2. Study Structure and Methodology.....	15
2.1 Overview .....	15
2.2 Stage I – Literature Review .....	15
2.3 Stage II – Qualitative Research Methodology .....	15
3. Stage I Literature Review.....	19
3.1 Introduction .....	19
3.2 Summary of Findings .....	19
4. General Landscape Experience.....	22
4.1 Introduction .....	22
4.2 Interaction with the Landscape.....	22
4.3 The Portfolio Pyramid.....	25
4.4 Attitude Types .....	26
4.5 Variances in Perception .....	27
5. Cultural Services.....	31
5.1 Introduction .....	31
5.2 A Sense of History.....	32
5.3 Spiritual .....	34
5.4 Learning .....	35
5.5 Recreation: Leisure and Activities .....	36
5.6 Calm.....	37
5.7 A Sense of Place.....	39
5.8 Inspiration.....	40
5.9 Escapism.....	40
6. Features in the Landscape .....	42
6.1 Introduction .....	42
6.2 Overview .....	42
6.3 Hills, Mountains and Upland Areas .....	43
6.4 Water, Rivers, Streams and Coast .....	44
6.5 Woodland .....	45
6.6 Coast.....	48
6.7 Fields.....	48
6.8 Moorland .....	49
6.9 Bogs and Marshes .....	50
6.10 Grassland .....	51



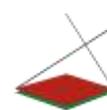
6.11	Villages .....	51
6.12	Hedges and Walls.....	52
7.	NCA-Specific Findings .....	53
7.1	Introduction .....	53
7.2	Devon Redlands.....	53
7.3	North Downs .....	55
7.4	Eden Valley .....	57
7.5	Yorkshire Wolds .....	59
7.6	Durham Magnesium Plateau.....	61
7.7	Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes .....	64
7.8	Exmoor.....	66
7.9	North Thames Basin.....	69
8.	Other Landscape Attitudes .....	72
8.1	Introduction .....	72
8.2	Variety and Simplicity .....	72
8.3	Naturalness v Man-made (built) and Man-made (management) .....	73
8.4	Openness v Enclosure .....	77
8.5	Perception of Quality and Condition .....	78
9.	Comparisons with Previous Research .....	81
9.1	Introduction .....	81
9.2	Comparisons with Previous Research.....	81
10.	Discussion of Findings .....	86
10.1	Introduction.....	86
10.2	Definitions.....	86
10.3	Cultural Services Delivered by Landscape .....	88
10.4	The Delivery of Cultural Services by Different Landscape Features.....	95
10.5	The Effect of Different Landscape Characteristics on the Delivery of Cultural Services.....	98
10.6	All Landscapes Matter .....	101
10.7	Understanding the NCAs – Why their Landscapes are Valued .....	101
10.8	The Cultural Services Associated with the Individual NCAs .....	102
10.9	Implications for the Roll-out of the Updated NCA Descriptions.....	104
11.	Issues for Further Study.....	109
11.1	Introduction.....	109
11.2	Potential Further Study Topics.....	109
11.3	Suggested Research Priorities .....	112

Annex A: Stage 1 Study Report – Literature Review

Annex B: Copies of the Qualitative Research Topic Guides

Annex C: Pen Portraits of the In-depth Interviews

Annex D: Perceived Performance of Features in developing Cultural Services



## Executive Summary

### Introduction

In preparation for the longer-term updating of England's 159 National Character Area (NCA) descriptions, Natural England commissioned this qualitative social research study to provide baseline evidence of the cultural services and experiential qualities that landscapes provide to society. England's landscapes provide a range of 'services' to people, including spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment. A key task of this work was to understand whether such services correlate to particular landscape characteristics or particular landscape features.

The study scope did not encompass any *economic valuation* of cultural services.

### Method

The study comprised two principal stages of work: i) a literature review and summary of existing national and regional research, evidence and public surveys; ii) an extensive programme of qualitative social research with representative groups of the public. The latter comprised 16 focus groups and extended creativity sessions, plus 16 in-depth interviews.

The qualitative social research was carried out in eight NCAs across England, covering seven Regions and a mix of landscape status (enhancing, diverging, maintained, neglected)<sup>1</sup>. Participants came from a mix of socio-economic groupings, gender and age groups, and included people living in, working in, or using the area concerned.

Eight cultural services were examined through the research:

- a sense of history (or heritage);
- a sense of place (identity, home);
- inspiration (stimulus);
- calm (relaxation, tranquillity);
- leisure and activities (recreation);
- spiritual;
- learning (education), and;
- escapism (getting away from it all).

These eight services do not comprise an official list but were adapted from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment to represent a wide scope of services that would offer a structure for capturing people's responses. For the purposes of this study, the term landscape is used instead of 'countryside', although it should be noted that respondents used both definitions interchangeably.

In this report the qualitative research findings are grouped into five sections: people's general landscape experiences; findings that are cultural service specific; findings relating to features in

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Status' is based upon the results of the Countryside Quality Counts assessment of landscape change between 1999-2003 for each National Character Area.



the landscape; issues that are specific to National Character Areas; and attitudes to other landscape issues such as 'variety and simplicity' and 'openness and enclosure'.

## **General Landscape Experiences**

Most of the focus groups and interviews started with a general discussion about landscape, where people's general attitudes towards landscape emerged. Although people may access the landscape with varying frequency, there were many common aspects of their landscape experiences.

People talked in a way that suggested a sense of ownership about the landscape; it provides places to find peace and solitude, as well as for exercise and activity. There was a strong sense that landscape provides escape, stress relief, and the opportunity for spending time with loved ones or for being alone. It provides physical sensation, such as sound (or silence) and 'the wind in your hair'. It has a life-affirming quality.

People's experiences varied in intensity, ranging from special places that deliver the heights of experience, to more mundane areas that still deliver day-to-day stress relief or the opportunity to touch base with nature.

People often had a portfolio of places they would access for different types of experience, including somewhere nearby and easily accessible (such as a local park or riverbank), and somewhere a bit further away but more varied (often a place with a combination of features, such as woodland, fields and a river). Within a character area there would often be special 'spots', the best places to go (such as a special wood, a headland or a high point). These were well known, very popular and contributed significantly towards people's 'sense of place'. People would also have secret places that few people knew about and that provided them with more solitude, or the opportunity for special activities such as bird watching.

The research found a range of different attitude types amongst people, showing differing levels of 'integration' or engagement with the landscape. They range from those who are more transactional (seeing it as something to obtain exercise or entertainment) to those who considered the landscape to be part of the fabric of their lives. The report later includes a set of user typologies.

The research also found some differences in the way people experience the landscape according to demographic factors (their age, physical capabilities and gender), situational factors (the composition of their visiting group, for example), their awareness or familiarity with the landscape, and their personal preferences (for structured or unstructured activity, for example).

## **Cultural Services**

Participants were asked to identify types of landscape, landscape features and emotions that they linked to each of the eight cultural services shown earlier. The outcomes of these discussions were necessarily complex, with the following providing some examples of the attitudes being expressed during the research:



- sense of history
  - not mentioned *spontaneously* in relation to built features, such as ruins or castles, but rather in its broader sense of the perceived 'permanence' of nature and how man has stood for centuries within it;
  - a sense of history and continuity was provided by places where people imagined many feet to have trod before. Geology or pre-history could inspire this too, through the presence of fossils in rocks;
  - a sense of history was given by built historic features and remains automatically and regardless of scale, so major structures like castles delivered this, but so too did old stone stiles, barns or bridges;
- spiritual
  - a deep-seated, harder-to-access value, often delivered in more solitary moments;
  - could be delivered by iconic wildlife, or a single feature tree, as well as by more traditional features such as burial mounds, standing stones, or churches. Also associated with water (still lakes or slow-moving streams and rivers) and with high places;
  - can be created by the weather, such as a dramatic shaft of light or particular colours;
- learning
  - an important facet of the landscape, especially for town dwellers. People wanted their children to learn from being in a 'natural' landscape, for example going on nature trails or activity courses;
  - sources of information, such as nature trail notice boards, could be important, as could seeing animals and plants in their natural habitats;
  - the achievement of climbing, or trekking a long distance, could teach you about endurance and your own capabilities;
- recreation (leisure and activities)
  - often linked to places where there is a lot to do, such as municipal parks or the beach; also with places that have easy access; places that have rocks, crags, or things to climb; as well as lanes, roads and pathways;
  - features delivering this service were often either very dramatic or very practical (from the cliff face to the tea shop);
  - often implied an organised or group activity;
- calm
  - was often about intimate space, or moments of stillness that could be afforded by being in woods or just 'watching clouds'. It did not need dynamic places (crashing waves or high cliffs);
  - a perception of remoteness could be important in delivering a sense of calm;
  - the 'innocence' of wildlife could produce this effect too (animals, or carpets of snowdrops);
- a sense of place
  - any feature or landscape (even iconic wildlife) could be considered to deliver a sense of place if it was local and distinctive to the area;
  - people were proud of such places, because of their history or because they defined the 'mood' of the local landscape;
  - the more homogenous the landscape of a character area the more sense of place it had. Areas that were disjointed or built-up had less of a sense of place;



- inspiration
  - in order to produce this cultural benefit, the landscape had to be either particularly beautiful, particularly dramatic, visceral, full of wildlife, romantic or powerful;
  - inspiration could also be very weather dependent;
- escapism
  - could be relatively easy to achieve, even in a very local landscape, although generally required a feeling of remoteness (especially the absence of people);
  - generally described in relation to stress and busy lives, but also the sense of escaping from being an adult and reverting to childhood;
  - sounds and peacefulness could be important for this service.

## Landscape Features

In the main, people processed landscape not by picking out individual features but, rather, by absorbing a combination of features within an experience or view. However, when prompted, people could relate to particular features.

The study looked at a pre-agreed list of twenty individual features in order to understand the services and benefits associated with them. It is not possible to detail the findings for all twenty within this summary – but the following are example findings:

- water
  - water, in its various forms, greatly enhanced people's landscape experience, often completing the beauty or tranquillity of a place;
  - the presence of water was often a focal point or a linking aspect that added symmetry to the landscape experience. It increased the effectiveness of that landscape in delivering many cultural benefits;
  - moving and still water delivered different benefits – moving, rushing water was exhilarating, with still water being peaceful. Water in a marshland was valued for its wildlife capacity;
  - the sound of water was often mentioned, the sound of a weir, the crashing of a wave or the babbling of a brook. Such experiences had a therapeutic aspect;
- woodland
  - woodlands were considered to be treasured places, and thought to be quintessentially British;
  - broadleaved woodlands were generally preferred to be within, especially for relaxing, magical moments; externally, they are key to the aesthetics/colours of a 'whole view';
  - coniferous woodlands were also valued, but more for recreation (such as horse riding, biking and long walks); from a distance they were seen to provide definition to slopes and mountainsides;
  - the enclosed atmosphere of woods was sometimes described as 'womb-like', and associated with childhood, achieving comforting and calming effects. It could be magical, but occasionally frightening;
- coast
  - an iconic place for many people, especially younger ones. Swimming and playing safely with families, of having fun, were important childhood memories;
  - coast walks were important to many people at fundamental points in their lives, soul-searching by staring at the sea;



- the coastline was thought to be a key facet of Britain, the island;

## Character Areas

Chapter 7 of this report takes the eight chosen character areas in turn and presents the findings of the research that arose in each. The findings are grouped together so that people's general attitudes towards the area, their perceptions of quality, 'condition' and threats, and the cultural services delivered by the area are examined in turn. There is also a discussion of people's responses to the existing character area descriptions for each area.

## Other Landscape Attitudes

Although not core objectives, the study was also tasked with examining people's responses on a number of peripheral landscape topics, namely:

- variety and simplicity
  - the ability to see patterns, different colours, layers of views, and boundaries was very important, so landscapes that are complex and well-punctuated with features are preferred to simple ones;
  - less-valued, wide, large, arable fields or featureless, flat landscapes can (on a large scale) be associated with simplicity or unity;
  - however, on a smaller scale, there were aspects of simplicity that were appreciated, such as a long stretch of sand, an expanse of wide open marsh with swaying reeds, or swathes of bluebells in a wood. Sometimes simplicity had amenity benefits, such as a long towpath for cycling, a large playing field, or a smooth bald hill for sledging;
- natural vs man-made
  - people perceived naturalness in different ways. The best landscape experiences were predominantly 'natural' ones, in the sense of being green and rural (although it was recognised that human activity had influenced these landscapes);
  - however, respondents often liked and needed the presence of some man-made features, especially for achieving a sense of history, for a feeling of community, or for providing accessibility to the landscape;
  - man-made features that blend in (such as old, historical buildings) were more acceptable. Villages with traditional building methods, old churches, or thatched roofs were considered part of the countryside experience, but modern housing estates and towns were not;
  - clearly 'naturalness' was a subjective term and both a well-trimmed hedgerow and a marshland habitat could be seen as natural;
  - attitudes to landscape management varied slightly by region;
- openness and enclosure
  - openness seemed to be valued more than enclosure and was a main contributor towards escapism. Enclosed environments could also be threatening for some people;
  - however, enclosure (such as woodland, deep-cut ways, high hedges) can create variety and structure to an experience, and contrast within a landscape experience can cause openness to be more impressive;
  - furthermore, such enclosure can be the **only** way locally to find peace and isolation because it can shield you from areas of population and from the noise of



- roads in a way that high open land cannot;
- quality and condition
  - respondents had limited ability to analyse the landscape around them in terms of quality and condition, but were generally very happy with the way the landscape looked and wanted it protected;
  - not only was it extremely difficult for them to grasp the concept of 'change' without being shown specific examples, but also quite poor-quality land could sometimes deliver valued benefits;
  - nevertheless, poor quality was understood in various ways, including the encroachment of man-made development, large areas of ugly brownfield wasteland, poor farming practices such as the removal of hedges, over-intensive arable farming, the general loss of wildlife habitats, even over-sanitisation (such as concrete paths in woodland);
  - improving quality was evidenced through better-kept hedges, more information signs at nature reserves or historic sites, or the returning of certain species of wildlife through better land management;
  - people were more able to judge the condition of built features than they were natural ones, so were aware of the preservation of historic monuments, crumbling drystone walls or scruffy farm buildings – the exception here was their ability to judge the cleanliness of beaches or coastline.

## Discussion of Issues

The penultimate chapter of this report brings together the various study findings and examines them in a wider context. For the purpose of this summary, we will highlight some of the main points.

A central finding is that the study has confirmed many long-held views on the importance of landscape to people and the wide range of services and benefits that it provides. Landscapes provide a wide range of interlinked cultural services, valued for their contribution to human well-being and quality of life.

But the study has also uncovered cultural services that have not hitherto appeared, and has suggested some important nuances to those that have. The eight cultural services used in this study provided a starting point, a prompt and framework for the discussions with participants – they were certainly never seen to be definitive. It is important to note that the study has found other services that are clearly delivered by the landscape – those of stress-relief, health and exercise, quality time, and relationships. There could also be a case for separating the two aspects of leisure and activities, with 'leisure' (the quiet enjoyment of the countryside) being very different from 'activities' (where there is strong emphasis on challenge and thrills and spills).

This study has helped bring greater understanding of the scope and detail of the individual cultural services offered by landscape – with the breadth of individual services possibly greater than has often been assumed in the past. For example, *sense of history* is often assumed to largely relate to people's influence on the landscape across millennia, but many see it in its broadest sense of the perceived permanence of nature, starting with geological evolution and pre-history – reminding people of their insignificance and the place of mankind within nature. Other nuances have been found that relate to *sense of place*.



This study has identified that cultural services and benefits are often seen as being delivered by the landscape as an entity. Furthermore, all landscapes deliver all the cultural services identified to a greater or lesser extent. People equally see cultural services being delivered by a combination of features within an experience or view – such as a winding lane and patchwork of fields. But participants were also able to distinguish the types of cultural service provided by different landscape features – some are 'big hitters' in terms of the range of cultural services that are delivered, including water, rivers and streams; the coast; mountains and hills; moorland; field systems and villages.

In terms of location, this study suggests that landscape features will deliver the same range of services regardless of where they are in the UK. However, the setting of individual features may affect how they are perceived and may also affect the level of service delivery; the perceived quality of the landscape may, in some instances, affect the level or intensity of service provision; and location (relative to centres of population) may also affect the nature and intensity of service provision.

A further question is whether there are any relationships between the amount of a feature or characteristic and the amount or intensity of the benefits it provides. Various examples from the research suggest that it would be unwise to infer a level of service delivery simply from the extent of different features present. It may be recalled that this has been a qualitative research study and it would be wholly inappropriate to apply quantitative analysis to the results at this stage.

This study has confirmed that 'all landscapes matter', reflecting a central tenet of the European Landscape Convention. As indicated by the portfolio pyramid explained in Section 4.3, people will, if they are able, seek out different types of landscape for different purposes and to fulfil different needs. Even local habitual landscapes matter to people, even if they are unremarkable.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Natural England is currently undertaking pilot work in preparation for the longer-term updating of England's 159 National Character Area (NCA) descriptions. It is also developing the way it assesses and monitors landscape character change across the NCAs and the functions and services that landscapes are providing to society. England's landscapes provide a range of tangible and less-tangible 'services' to people (provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting), that influence their quality of life. Cultural services include the non-material benefits that people obtain from landscapes – for example through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment.

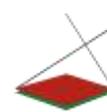
As an input to the monitoring of landscape quality, condition and change, Natural England required some baseline evidence of the broad types of cultural services and experiential qualities provided to people by landscapes. What qualities and services of landscapes do people associate with and why do these matter to people's quality of life? To this end, a qualitative social research study was commissioned and undertaken with representative groups of the public across eight National Character Areas in England. This report explains how the work was undertaken, reports the findings, and discusses their implications.

### 1.2 Objectives

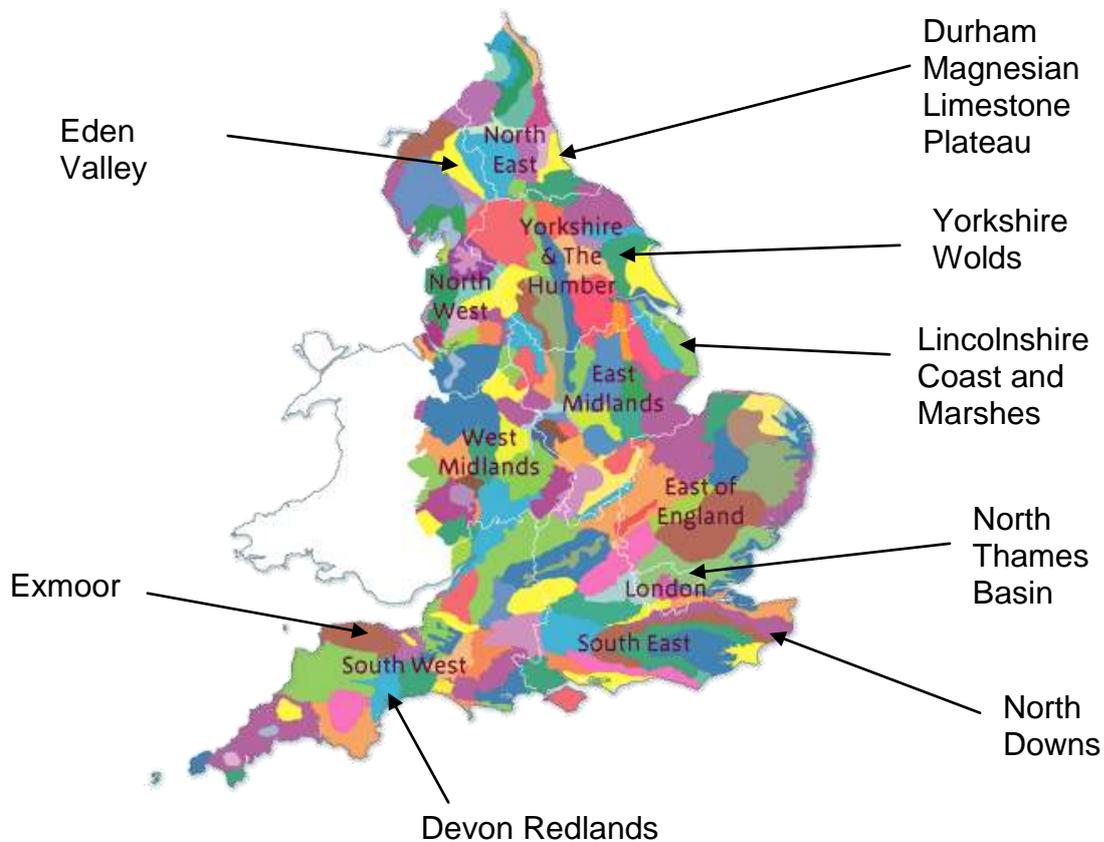
The main aim of this study was to research and capture the range of cultural services and experiential qualities that are provided by landscapes – and to identify how and why the public values them. To this end, the detailed objectives for the study were to:

- establish and refine evidence from national/regional public surveys and research through more focused work with the public in a selection of England's National Character Areas;
- make judgements about whether and how the findings correlate to particular landscape characteristics and relate to particular landscape features;
- make recommendations on whether the outcomes could provide a sufficiently representative baseline that could be used either at national, regional or a National Character Area scale, and;
- provide qualitative material that will aid in the updating of National Character Area descriptions and associated strategic objectives for the future.

There were eight selected National Character Areas, as shown overleaf.



National Character Area	Region	Area Status <sup>2</sup>
Yorkshire Wolds	Yorkshire	Enhancing
Eden Valley	North West	Diverging
Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau	North East	Enhancing
Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes	East Midlands	Diverging
Northern Thames Basin	East of England	Diverging
North Downs	South East	Maintained
Devon Redlands	South West	Neglected
Exmoor	South West	Maintained



The study scope did not encompass any *economic valuation* of the cultural services and experiential qualities provided by landscape and valued by the public.

<sup>2</sup> Based upon Countryside Quality Counts assessment of changes in landscape character of 159 National Character Areas from the period 1999-2003. Definitions of categories and evidence supporting findings can be found at [www.countryside-quality-counts.org.uk](http://www.countryside-quality-counts.org.uk)

### 1.3 Glossary of Terms

The specific language and definitions used to form a framework for understanding what should be considered under the broad term of landscape were set out in our submission. This encompasses:

- whole landscapes (ie. coherent tracts of landscape character);
- landscape features (physical elements in the landscape eg trees, walls, etc);
- perceptual qualities (including aesthetic qualities), and;
- the services provided by the landscape (see below).

For the purposes of this study, we have used the term 'landscape' throughout, although it should be noted that respondents used the words 'landscape', 'countryside' and 'natural area' or 'natural space' almost interchangeably. It would appear that their definition would be "land which is predominantly green or rural, outside of towns and cities, and having varying degrees of perceived naturalness." It may be noted that this interpretation by respondents can fit within the formal definition of landscape used in the European Landscape Convention,<sup>3</sup> although in this study there was a specific focus on the landscape of rural areas (see Box A).

#### Box A

##### The European Landscape Convention

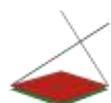
The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is the first international convention to focus specifically on landscape, and is dedicated exclusively to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It provides an international context for landscape. "The ELC is adopted and promoted by the Council for Europe. It is a Treaty and not an EU Directive. The Convention is binding on the states that sign it; it is drafted in a flexible manner allowing individual states to interpret it in their own way to achieve its overall aims. It therefore seeks to influence rather than direct. The ELC was signed by the UK Government on 24 February 2006, ratified on the 21 November 2006, and became binding on 1 March 2007. "In short, the Convention highlights the need to recognise landscape in law, to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscape, and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. It also encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, economic and social policies."

In the European Landscape Convention: "**landscape** means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". Thus landscape is a meeting ground between natural and cultural influences. It has both a physical and an emotional presence that reflects how as individuals and collectively we perceive it. This definition, and the European Landscape Convention as a whole, relate to all landscape - urban, peri-urban, rural, coastal, inland water and marine, from protected to degraded landscapes.

We researched and related people's responses to eight cultural services as follows:

- Sense of History (or heritage).
- Sense of Place (identity, home).
- Inspiration (stimulus).
- Calm (relaxation, tranquillity).
- Leisure and Activities (recreation).

<sup>3</sup> European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Strasbourg (2000)



- Spiritual.
- Learning (education).
- Escapism (getting away from it all).

These eight cultural services do not comprise an official list and they are adapted from those in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment<sup>4</sup>. They were felt to represent a wide scope of services that would offer a structure and a prompt for capturing people's responses.

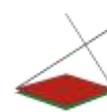
## 1.4 Structure of the Report

This report presents the key findings arising from the research. It has ten further chapters:

- **Chapter 2** explains the structure of the study and the methodologies used.
- **Chapter 3** contains a summary of the Stage I literature review.
- **Chapter 4** is the first of five chapters that presents the qualitative research findings. This chapter discusses the general experiences that people gain from landscapes.
- **Chapter 5** looks at cultural services in more detail, again drawing from the qualitative research.
- **Chapter 6** turns the focus on features in the landscape, examining the research findings from this perspective.
- **Chapter 7** presents the qualitative research findings that relate to each of the eight character areas included in the study.
- **Chapter 8** explores a number of subsidiary issues that Natural England asked the study team to consider as part of the qualitative research.
- **Chapter 9** looks at the findings in more detail, also relating them to previous research studies.
- **Chapter 10** stands back and reviews the findings of this study and seeks to identify the extent to which it has been able to answer the questions raised by the brief.
- **Chapter 11** makes recommendations for further research that arise from this study.

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<sup>4</sup> See Ecosystems and human well-being: a framework for assessment /Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2003); authors, Joseph Alcamo [et al.] ;contributing authors, Elena M. Bennett [et al.]



## 2. Study Structure and Methodology

### 2.1 Overview

The study comprised two principal stages of work:

- stage I
  - a review and summary of existing national and regional research, evidence and public surveys;
- stage II
  - an extensive programme of qualitative research with representative groups of the public;
  - followed by a comparative analysis of the qualitative research findings, together with an assessment of the transference and applicability of the pilot findings to all 159 National Character Areas or landscape types.

### 2.2 Stage I – Literature Review

The Stage I literature review was approached in two parts:

- a review of national, regional and local-level research, evidence and public surveys covering
  - the landscape and related countryside and countryside recreation sectors (including designated areas, National Trails, etc);
  - other environmental sectors and social attitudes work where landscape factors have been addressed;
- an assessment of the methodologies used in such studies and surveys, identifying learning points from these methodologies that could inform and fine-tune the methods to be deployed in this present study.

A small number of academic papers and other relevant literature reviews were also addressed in this Stage I work. In total, nearly 30 research reports and three papers were covered during the review.

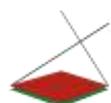
The findings from the review have been published separately (see the Stage I Study Report, attached as Appendix A to this report), with a brief summary provided in the following chapter.

### 2.3 Stage II – Qualitative Research Methodology

#### Overview

A substantial piece of qualitative research was conducted with members of the public who live or work in or close to the selected character areas, or who visit these areas. In outline, the qualitative research involved a multi-method programme, as follows:

- 12 general-public **focus groups** (eight people per group);



- four **extended creativity sessions** (ditto), and;
- 16 **post-experience in-depth interviews**, for example with families after they had walked and experienced a part of the landscape in question.

Each is described in more detail below.

The key objectives to be addressed by this qualitative research were to:

- provide some baseline representative evidence of the broad types of cultural services valued;
- identify the experiential qualities provided by landscapes that people associate with, and why they matter to their quality of life;
- to provide greater insight into the public's appreciation of cultural services and experiential qualities, and;
- to explore where commonalities exist between characteristics and services that are valued.

The methodology was chosen to ensure creativity, to obtain a general mapping of the current status of public perceptions, to ensure that bias was not introduced, and to obtain technical detail within a qualitative context – and all with a broad cross-section of the public.

### **Focus Groups and Extended Creativity Groups**

**The focus groups** were of a standard length of 1½ hours and were conducted with a snapshot of the local population, regardless of how directly engaged they were with the area's landscape. They included people who live or work inside or close to the area, who have visited the area, or who use the area in some other way.

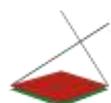
There were ten standard-length (1½ hour) focus groups, kept relatively homogenous in terms of socio-economic characteristics and age. At least one group was carried out in each of the Regions, plus additional groups in selected areas so that demographic differences could be explored. The topic guide for these group discussions is set out in Appendix B.

**The extended creativity groups** were longer than the focus groups (typically about 2½ hours) and included people who were more engaged with the landscape, were more expressive, or had more knowledge about the area (for example, people who used the area frequently for walking, cycling, or watching wildlife, or who worked intimately in the landscape).

There was one extended creativity group for each category of landscape status (maintained, enhancing, neglected, diverging) with two extended groups in the north of England and two in the south. These groups had a broad mix of ages and socio-economic types.

For all groups, people who claimed they were attitudinally 'against the landscape' were screened out at the recruitment stage, as they would have had difficulty in participating in the discussion. Otherwise, people who attended were a broad cross-section of local residents.

The groups were conducted in suitable venues, chosen to allow the respondents to feel at ease. A small financial incentive was paid to encourage attendance and to cover any costs (such as taxis or babysitting) that respondents might have incurred.



## Post-experience In-depth Interviews

In addition to the focus group research, a series of in-depth interviews was also carried out, two interviews in each character area. The reason for including in-depth interviews within the overall programme of work was:

- to look, in a 'prompted' way, at the specifics of a single landscape
  - the respondent was asked to consider particular characteristics prior to being interviewed;
- to sample specific target audiences who might not be adequately represented in the 'group' samples
  - younger family members such as teenagers, or children with their parents were included;
- to counter-balance any peer-pressure effects that might arise from the group discussions.

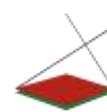
We recruited people and asked them to go to part of a character area and experience it by walking or doing some other recreational activity (in a locality of their choice). They were asked to do the following:

- be out for at least an hour and to cover some sort of contrasts within their walk/ride;
- take pictures with disposable cameras of positive/negative aspects of their experience, moments when they felt inspired or felt a sense of history etc;
- write a 'diary' of their experiences and what they valued, and;
- draw sketches and write verse, if appropriate.

An interview was conducted by the consultants a short time afterwards to discuss their tasks and to examine the other objectives of the research. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about this approach and happy to oblige. Again, they were financially incentivised to conduct the activity. The findings from these depth interviews have contributed to the main research findings. In addition there are individual pen portraits of these interviews that are contained in Appendix C.

## Qualitative Sample

The make up of the qualitative research sample was as shown overleaf:



Character Area	Region	Demographic	Method type
Yorkshire Wolds	Yorkshire	ABC1 Younger	FG & Depth
Eden Valley	North West	Mixed Age & SEG	ECG & Depth
		C2DE Older	FG & Depth
Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau	North East	Mixed Age & SEG	ECG & Depth
		ABC1 Older	FG & Depth
Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes	East Midlands	C2DE Younger	FG & Depth
		ABC1 Younger	FG & Depth
Northern Thames Basin	East of England	C2DE Older	FG & Depth
		ABC1 Younger	FG & Depth
North Downs	South East	C2DE Older	FG & Depth
		ABC1 Older	FG & Depth
Devon Redlands	South West	Mixed Age & SEG	ECG & Depth
		C2DE Younger	FG & Depth
Exmoor	South West	Mixed Age & SEG	ECG & Depth
		ABC1 Older	FG & Depth
		C2DE Younger	FG & Depth

Note: FG = focus group, ECG = extended creativity group, Depth = in-depth interview/discussion

There was an equal mix of socio-economic groupings<sup>5</sup> and gender across the eight character areas, with a mixture of people living in the area, working or using the area. We excluded landscape professionals and people who said they did not like the countryside or did not use/go there at all. Some town dwellers were included, but there were no urban inner-city dwellers.

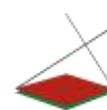
## Content

The research followed pre-agreed topic guide (see Appendix B) and included stimulus material such as:

- a list of generic features;
- a list of contrasting characteristics;
- thought bubbles for each cultural service;
- the character description for each area, and;
- a large bank of photography.

In the creative sessions, respondents constructed mood boards to represent how they felt about landscapes. This was an activity done in threes or fours, whereby people had a large piece of card (board) upon which to draw and stick photographs and labels representing different emotions or ‘moods’. They were asked to choose landscape elements from photos or descriptions that meant something to them, then attach an emotion or benefits to different sections of the boards depending on what they represented. For example, one group had a section of the board representing ‘relaxation’ with its associated photos, emotions and drawings and another representing ‘excitement’. These were analysed to see if there was any commonality between the landscapes or features that people chose to represent cultural services.

<sup>5</sup> The ‘ABC1’ classification refers in the main to professional, managerial and clerical occupations. Those in the ‘C2DE’ social groupings are predominantly in manual employment (skilled and unskilled), although the definition does include the unemployed and students.



### 3. Stage I Literature Review

#### 3.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the results that emerged from the Stage I literature review. The full review and references of research studies is available at Appendix A.

The review was based on a selection of research studies from the UK that have sought to understand public perceptions of landscape, and the 'cultural services' it delivers. This is a relatively unexplored area of research, which Natural England was keen to explore to inform its review of the National Character Areas of England, as well as in its wider landscape work, including the implementation of the European Landscape Convention and policies on engaging people in the natural environment.

#### 3.2 Summary of Findings

An overarching finding from the literature review is that most studies have focussed on 'whole landscapes', rather than component areas of distinctive landscape character. This is perhaps because the general public finds it difficult to distinguish between the different parts of the landscape, and tends to recognise a landscape as a sum of its component parts (ie. the different characteristics combined to form the landscapes they know). This view that people tend to respond to whole landscapes rather than their component parts has been reflected in research undertaken for Defra looking at landscape valuation<sup>6</sup>. The exception to this has been upland landscapes, and more specifically, moorlands (eg. Exmoor, Clwydian Range and Llantysilio Mountain), which are perhaps easier to define as separate entities in the wider landscapes to which they relate. In Chapter Nine of this report we discuss how this view of 'whole and parts' of the landscape, as perceived by people, may actually depend on the context in which they are asked to consider and offer views about the landscape.

The methods used to generate public thought on the values they attach to specific landscapes have largely focused on two broad techniques, discussed in more detail later in this report:

- a) questionnaires – including telephone surveys and face-face interviews;
- b) focus groups with a variety of techniques (eg the use of photographs to stimulate debate and answer set questions about what people 'like' and 'dislike' about different landscapes – as was used by the two LANDMAP studies<sup>7</sup>).

Although a variety of techniques were used within the two main methods identified above, the results generated similar results. The three key findings are:

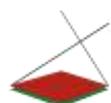
- the focus on perceptual qualities;
- identifying the precise uses of landscape that are valued, and;
- elements that contribute to sense of place.

These are explored further in the sections immediately below.

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<sup>6</sup> Swanwick, C. et al (2007) Scoping Study to Defra on Agricultural Landscape Valuation

<sup>7</sup> Wrexham County Borough Council and the Countryside Council for Wales (2003) *Wrexham LANDMAP*



Many of the responses generated by the qualitative research included the identification of the different perceptual qualities that people associate with particular landscapes. The main qualities identified across the studies reviewed, with some interesting patterns emerging are:

- Fourteen landscapes were associated with peace and quiet or tranquillity (which, taken as a whole, are also classed as a cultural service). See the Stage I Report in Appendix A for a breakdown of the positive and negative attributes of landscape that could be used to define tranquillity, based on the various consultations undertaken to inform Countryside Agency / CPRE's tranquillity mapping.
- Values attributed to a landscape's cultural heritage (also defined as a cultural service) included reference to a sense of community, way of life and links to past and present land uses including mining and livestock farming. These demonstrate the links people place on traditional industries and the sense of place of local communities.
- 'Scenic' and 'beautiful' are words commonly used to describe many of the landscapes. Other aesthetic qualities used to describe landscapes included 'colourful', 'attractive'.
- Many people perceived the different landscapes as being 'natural' or enabling one to be 'close to nature', although the word 'natural' can be used by people in a range of other senses. It is interesting that the use of the word 'natural' even applied to obviously man-made landscapes, including the China Clay area of Cornwall.
- Perhaps because many of the studies were looking at upland landscapes, common perceptual qualities cited by people included 'open', 'wild' and 'bleak'.

### Identifying the valued uses of landscape

Some studies prompted participants to describe valued uses of the landscape – the most common of which are the opportunities for outdoor recreation and exercise (identified for the Cumbria uplands, Kent Downs, Exmoor's moorlands and the North York Moors); for wider health and wellbeing (Scotland's 'wild' areas); and to visit 'lovely places' (Test Valley). The use of the word 'popular' in connection with Dartmoor (New Map, 1993) could also relate to its use for recreation – but may have negative connotations in terms of the experiential qualities of the landscape. Interestingly, this term was used by residents of Dartmoor, but not visitors, which could imply its negative sense.

The use of the land for farming and livestock rearing was valued by respondents to the studies in both Exmoor and Cumbria – both upland landscapes with strong associations with traditional hill farming.

The use of the term 'interesting' when members of the public are referring to a particular landscape came through the New Map pilot in the South West (1993). It would be important for this study to understand exactly what this term means when it is used to describe landscapes – ie. whether people are referring to how the diversity of different landscapes helps inform knowledge and understanding, or whether it is purely relating to their inherent enjoyment of a particular place "*it's an interesting landscape.*"



The appreciation of wildlife and nature was also commonly cited as a value attached to the different landscapes – eg the studies on Scotland's 'wild places', the Kent Downs, Shropshire Hills, the Cumbrian uplands, Exmoor's moorlands and the woodland of the North York Moors. In the latter, it is interesting that people specifically associated the woodlands of the North York Moors as being valuable for wildlife, as opposed to its moorland landscapes.

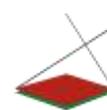
### **Elements that contribute to sense of place**

Some of the studies asked respondents to identify particular features that they felt were valued or key to a particular landscape's character (eg the limestone buildings of the Cotswolds, the chalk grasslands of the Kent Downs, the stone walls of the Cumbrian uplands). Whilst landscape features are clearly of key importance to delivering sense of place, which is a cultural service in its own right, in isolation, these individual features may not contribute to the experiential qualities of a particular landscape.

It should also be noted that the process of Landscape Character Assessment<sup>8</sup> often involves input from the public in identifying the key characteristics and valued landscape features of the landscape concerned. Therefore this study should potentially focus on the broader perceptual qualities and cultural services landscapes can deliver, rather than seeking to identify particular features people value, or associate with, in each particular landscape.

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<sup>8</sup> Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (2002), The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, CAX84



## 4. General Landscape Experience

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of five chapters that report and discuss the key findings that arise from the programme of qualitative research – the focus groups and interviews – that was carried out across the eight character areas.

Most of the focus groups and interviews started with a general discussion about landscape and, both during this and later sessions, people's general attitudes towards landscape emerged (spontaneously and in discussion) that indicate how respondents felt about landscape and why it is important to them. These attitudes showed that, although people may access the landscape with varying frequencies, there were many commonalities in how they felt they benefited from their experience of landscapes.

### 4.2 Interaction with the Landscape

People often talked about areas of countryside or coast in a way that suggested they had a sense of ownership about the landscape. It was considered to be an important characteristic of Britain for there to be green areas and varying types of landscape across the country. Areas of countryside or coast were regarded as places to find peace and solitude, as well as places to use for exercise and activity.

One of the predominant reasons for people saying they needed the 'natural' landscape was to escape their daily lives. Many said they wanted to achieve a sense of freedom, as if they currently felt 'trapped' in some way. Being in a 'natural' landscape gave them a release. Discussions about 'stress-relief' were prevalent, with people needing to 'get perspective' or just 'blow away the cobwebs'. This all indicated that the landscape experience was enabling people to re-gain balance in their lives from a mental health perspective.

*"Going out into the countryside is a great stress reliever. I don't have to worry about the kids or work or think about anything really."*

*"It is good for your physical health, your mental health, your soul. It is the difference between walking out here in the villages or down by the river and you are going to have a completely different result from walking down the high street."*

Time was another great issue, whereby the landscape experience allowed them to regain precious time with the family, or a partner, or even time 'for me'. In a pressured world they were able to find somewhere 'where time stands still', that provided 'togetherness', that was good for relationships and family bonding.

The physical sensation of the landscape experience was also key to the overall benefit achieved. The non-cerebral benefits of 'feeling a thrill', getting an adrenalin rush, hearing the tiniest of sounds, feeling the hairs on the back of the neck or the wind in your hair or just experiencing silence were regularly mentioned. It was as if they had a degree of 'sensory deprivation' in their everyday lives and the landscape allowed all the senses to be employed once more.



There was also mention of a life-affirming quality sometimes; often a 'lifting of the spirits' was mentioned, especially when gaining height was involved.

The experience of landscape varied in intensity depending on whether the place was particularly dramatic or beautiful or very close to a person's 'ideal'. However, respondents seemed able to gain some benefit from more mundane areas, which might be close to their homes and easy to access. Whilst perhaps not delivering the strength of a 'life affirming' experience, these ordinary stretches of naturalness still delivered day-to-day stress-relieving qualities.

For some people, their local special place could be easily accessed from their home, especially if they lived very rurally. In these cases, they often used this place continuously to 'touch base' with nature, whether physically or mentally, keeping close and in-tune with the land around them. This was particularly so with people who worked with the land, or who were not able to travel much. The ability to observe the seasons was important to people spending a lot of time in the landscape.

Otherwise, people often had a portfolio of places and (depending on the kind of person they were) they would access these for different types of experience.

For example, they often had somewhere close and easily accessible, which gave them 'a quick hit' – this might be a local park, or a regular dog walking route, or a quick walk along a river with a good path.

Then there would be somewhere that was a bit further away, but considered to be more varied, having a greater range of experience. This was often a place with a combination of features, such as woodland, fields, or a river. Other people might have a particular challenging walk they did in a certain mood, or a thinking place which suited another.

So, some people in the Lincolnshire Marshes NCA would go to the Wolds for height; some people in the Yorkshire Wolds would go to the Yorkshire Moors for wildness. Similarly, some people in the Devon Redlands went to Dartmoor, and those in the Eden Valley were likely to go to the Lake District.

Within a character area however, there would often be particular spots that were considered by many participants to be the best places to go, for example:

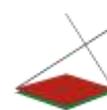
- special woods;
- a headland or cliffs;
- a high point;
- a beautiful drive;
- an 'estate' or park, and;
- a special beach or dunes.

Many of these were well-known by name, very popular and considered to be part of 'home'. They contributed significantly towards people's sense of place and there was usually a strong consensus that they were **the** local places to deliver certain experiences.

In addition to these places, some people would have more secret places, places that they felt few

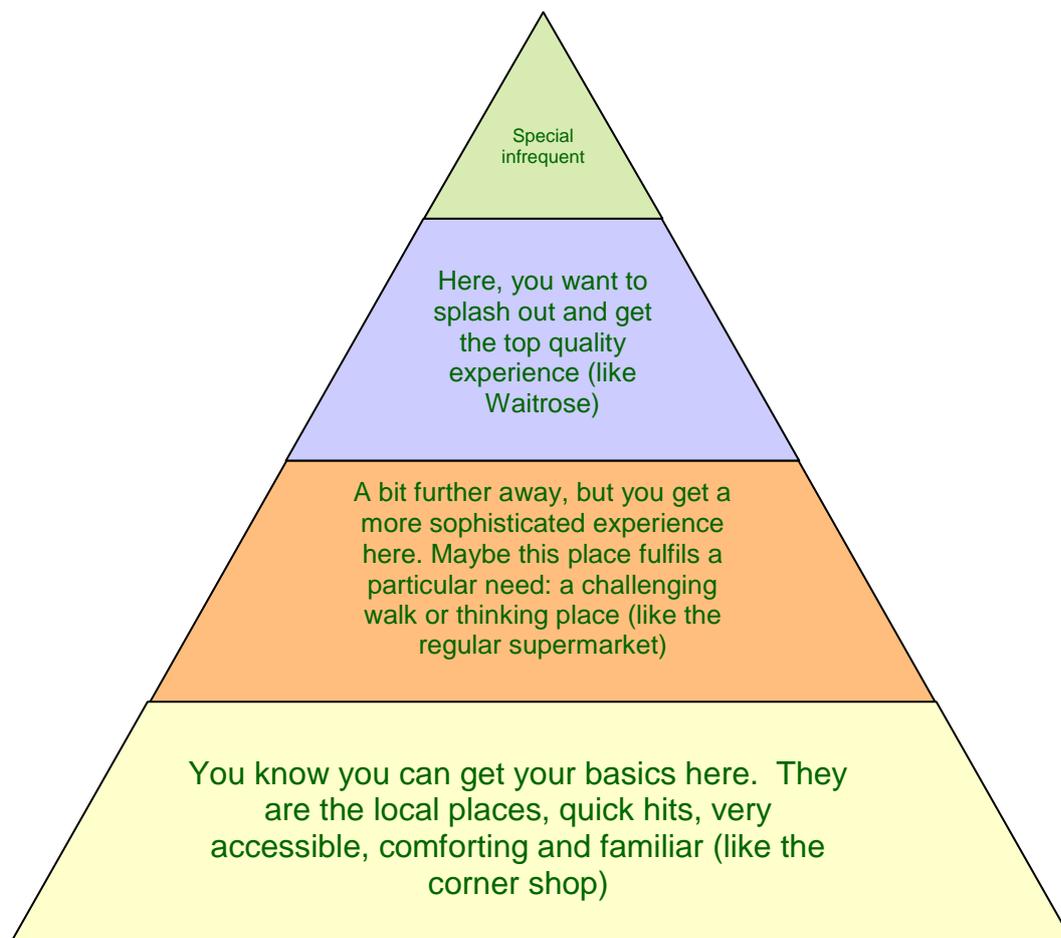


people knew about and that often provided them with more solitude, or that offered something particular, such as bird watching or moth trapping (as examples).



### 4.3 The Portfolio Pyramid

The previous discussion clearly suggests that people see different landscapes as varying in terms of the quality of the experience they get from them – many people were happy to go just to their local places, but most had a portfolio of places for different needs and moods. This portfolio of places is illustrated by the pyramid below, which shows that (much in the way that some people shop, with a corner shop, a mainstream supermarket, an upscale supermarket shop, and then a specialist delicatessen) people also had a range of landscapes that they used. However, it does relate more to people who chose their landscape experience rather than those who work with the land and are more integrated with their immediate 'catchment' landscape.



The base of the pyramid is where the basic 'quick hits' of landscape can be obtained, the feeling of being away, seeing grass, trees, some form of nature. For many people there is this 'first base' landscape experience nearby, which is much valued and quite often forms the mainstay of their usage. It may not have a lot of variety (or even a high aesthetic value) but it delivers something that gets people back to nature.

Next up the scale is somewhere with more variety, that is very good at delivering a challenge or openness. The 'Waitrose' experience might have a greater aesthetic quality, be more spectacular, or may involve a little more travel – but which really hits the spot in terms of indulging exactly what you need at that time (such as the perfect bluebell wood, or a great ridge walk). Many of the National Parks probably fall into this category, although they may be, for

some, the top of the pyramid.

Finally, and probably accessed much less often and by fewer people, are those sometimes magical places that deliver a once-in-a-lifetime experience, which 'blow your mind'.

#### 4.4 Attitude Types

The research also suggested that there was a range of different attitude types amongst those people who participated, showing differing levels of integration or engagement with the landscape. At one end of the spectrum are those who are more transactional with the landscape (they see it as something they use to obtain exercise or entertainment). At the other are people who thought the landscape was part of the fabric of their lives, whether they worked with it or attitudinally felt very in tune with it.

The following is an illustrative (not definitive) list of different attitudes people could have towards their landscape experience, which means they have different needs in terms of features and characteristics to be obtained from the landscape. The following attitude typologies were found and some people could inhabit more than one type, or move from one to the other as they grew older:

- Drive 'throughers': these people like to experience the landscape by car or sometimes cycle. They need lanes and places to stop and admire the view. Some are more 'racers' in open-top cars and some bring a picnic to 'park' and look at a view.

*"I like seeing countryside when travelling so I love lanes and roads. I love the natural views and natural beauty I can see from them, although I realise there are dangers."*

- Country sportsperson: these people indulge in country sports, such as hunting or stalking. They know about certain types of wildlife and land-management issues and their priority can be the sport and tradition.

*"I spend most of my spare time out on the hills with my gun. My social life is based around shooting so I get quite a lot from the area. It's a big part of my life."*

- Traditional working the land: these people have jobs using the land, such as farming. The landscape is meaningful to them from a revenue point of view, but they can also be extremely emotional about it because of their strong links to it.
- Naturalists: these people have a particular interest in wildlife: keen birdwatchers, moth trappers etc. They are motivated by finding natural habitats for their hobby.
- Walkers: as a general group of people they are interested in long walks. Some sub-groups exist, such as those who walk in groups, those who want paths and those who 'trek' versus hill walk. They are interested in aesthetics but also the health aspects.
- Dog walkers: habitual users of the landscape. They enjoy the fresh air but are quite pragmatic about the landscape they use and need/want.
- Fitness fans: are health walkers who mainly walk for fitness reasons, such as jogging etc.
- Off-roaders: these are people who are quite sporty and want to go off the beaten track, such as mountain bikers or extreme walkers. They want high cliffs or challenging landscapes which are isolated.



- Thrill seekers: who are looking for landscape to provide a thrill, eg; rock climbing, paragliding, canyoning, coasteering.
- Isolation addicts: people who are not necessarily in it for the sport or the thrill but they will go a long way just to 'be' in a very remote area, where it is important not to see anyone else.
- Town escapees: these are people who live in a built up area, whether a town or suburb, and they are looking for anywhere green that gives them a tonic from the built environment. Their main motivation is to seek somewhere rural as an antidote.
- Occasional explorers: these are people who don't use or go into the landscape very much but just occasionally they will venture out to see what's there. Their landscape experience is an enquiry rather than a strong commitment.
- Convenient park users: this is when a safe and easy green option is required, with car parking and perhaps something for the children to do – but it still feels semi-natural.
- Blue-collar villagers: they believe the landscape is part of their lives and important to protect in terms of a way of life, but it needs to provide them with a living and sometimes they admit to taking its 'aesthetic quality' for granted.
- Free range families: they want their children to be 'outdoorsy' and like them to experience the landscape in an unstructured way as part of their development.
- Artistic dreamers: they like to write or paint and need the landscape to deliver a setting for this in a romantic way.
- Tea-shop hunters: their relationship with the landscape is transitory and, once experienced, they need refreshment. They see the landscape as very nice, but almost prefer the villages and tea shops within it.

#### 4.5 Variances in Perception

The research findings in Chapters 5-8 that follow are aimed at an examination of the commonalities of view across different landscape types. Before embarking on that analysis we suggest that there are four categories of factors that can influence the way that people experience the landscape: demographic factors, situational factors, awareness factors and preference factors.

##### Demographic factors

###### Age

Participants varied slightly in their response to the landscape depending on their age and amassed experience. Younger people tended to be more interested in the active, recreational side of the landscape experience than they were in the more esoteric benefits. They were less interested in aesthetic qualities or the calming or tranquillity benefits of landscape. In contrast, those older participants with stressful jobs or more responsibility tended to appreciate escapism more. We also found that memories were important to people (the first time picking of blackberries, the first splash of water) and often people were trying to re-capture them in their landscape experience – older people had more memories.



## **Physical capabilities**

People's physical capabilities (whether determined by age, health or disability) also affected their preferences due to the scope of their experiences and their ability to indulge in activities. In addition, this influenced their degree of dependence on facilities and access services such as boardwalks, handrails, steps, slopes, car parking and toilets. If 'active', these factors sometimes still influenced people's choice of landscape, but did not seem to inhibit their enjoyment of the experience of the landscape or stop their need for seeking different landscape characteristics.

## **Gender**

Many perceptions of landscape experience apply across both genders, but there were some that varied, subtly at least, between females and males. A marked distinction between genders related to safety and security: this and other studies have shown that, not surprisingly, personal safety and security is sensed more by women – and this may affect the places, the times, and the circumstances in which they may go on their own or with young children. Very few males experienced such an inhibiting factors in their own experience of landscape.

Also, certain emotions in relation to the landscape were more acutely felt or expressed by women, and were more suppressed or less stated in men (such as feeling spiritual). This sometimes had an effect on the places, experiences and activities that females and males sought from the landscape. Men were sometimes more overtly inclined to seek more rational benefits – such as seeing history, gaining sport/exercise or learning. The propensity of women to be in the company of children when outside may influence their outlook on the potential of landscapes for factors such as play, stimulus, learning, as well as safety and danger – and this experience may influence many women's understanding and experience of landscapes beyond the time they have spent directly with children in the outdoors.

## **Situational factors**

As well as straightforward factors such as the time available for the experience and the effect of the seasons, other factors connected to the person's situation at the time of the experience were at play.

## **Group composition or social context**

Perceptions of a landscape varied depending on the situation to hand, for example the size of the group. The social context of people's landscape experience had an effect on how they related to that landscape – whether they experienced the landscape with family members, friends, colleagues, strangers (such as when children make spontaneous friends when playing), or whether they were mainly on their own. The social context at the time of the landscape experience influenced a person's mood, what they noticed and what they might discuss, all of which in turn may influence the cultural services they obtain at that time.

Often respondents with families were more interested in landscapes where there was an adventure and discovery aspect. They were also sometimes more interested in those where there were more amenities, good access and, possibly, more man-made features. Coastal landscapes were important for this group.



## **Perspective within the landscape**

Perceptions varied according to scale, so things might be more valued on a macro scale – seeing something from a distance rather than close up. People would say they didn't value being inside dense coniferous woodland but, from a distance, it helped to make the view more interesting. Perceptions could vary at any one time depending on how a landscape or landscape feature was processed visually or otherwise experienced. The level of intensity could vary if something was seen from a distance or from close up. The scale and context of one's actual place within the landscape could alter one's perception of the landscape. For example, feeling the 'vibes' from within woodland was very different to looking at the patterns that woodlands make on the side of a hill.

## **Awareness factors**

Whilst it was not considered to be important to understand a landscape in terms of geology, history etc, it was sometimes still the case that a greater level of information and knowledge about a place afforded people better services, especially with regard to a sense of history or learning. Knowing about a certain special wildlife habitat could make an experience better.

People's awareness and familiarity with a place affected their appreciation of 'a sense of place' but also, for reminiscing purposes, a high sense of familiarity could be important.

Awareness, in the sense of being in visitor or resident mode, was also important to how people perceived the landscape and whether the person had been born there or moved into the area. Whilst many of the cultural services were still felt by 'born and bred' there was a degree to which the landscape was more taken for granted if it had been where one had grown up.

## **Preference factors**

Related to section 4.4 above, certain attitudes types will have needs according to their preferences and so they will vary from the general population.

## **Structure and Function preferences**

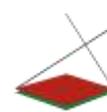
Many of the attitudes type fell into two camps relating to their preferences for either structured or unstructured activity. People needing more organised or formal experiences had more specific requirements of the landscape and how they wanted it to 'function' (eg if they need to use their car, surfboard or climbing ropes). People preferring a more informal experience were more likely to absorb the landscape in a more intuitive or organic way. Some people varied in these preferences depending on their mood at the time, whilst others were consistently structured or unstructured in the way they processed their landscape experience.

## **Specialism**

The degree to which people have a specialist interest or knowledge that they pursue outdoors influenced how they relate to particular landscapes and which cultural services that they ranked highly. So, for example, whether bird watching, shooting, painting or fishing, people's specialist activities were a key influence on the way they experienced the landscape and the locations and



the landscape types they sought out.



## 5. Cultural Services

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the second of five chapters that report and discuss the key findings that arise from the programme of qualitative research – the focus groups and interviews – that was carried out across the eight character areas.

As well as being revealed in general discussion, respondents were asked to specifically look at eight cultural services in a generic sense, regardless of the context of the character area. Those cultural services were:

- identity / sense of place / feelings of 'being at home';
- understanding of the past (cultural heritage values);
- inspiration;
- escapism / 'getting away from it all';
- relaxation / tranquillity / peace and quiet;
- spiritual values;
- learning and education, and;
- leisure and recreation.

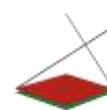
These eight cultural services do not comprise an official list and they are adapted from those in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. They were felt to represent a wide scope of services that would offer a structure and a prompt for capturing people's responses.

Participants were asked to try and identify types of landscape, landscape features and emotions that they linked to each service. This linkage was examined through speech, drawing, picking out photos and the like (see Appendix D for a perceived performance of the features in delivering cultural services).

The appendix shows each cultural service, as well as the features associated with it on a spectrum, mapping how well that feature performs in delivering that particular cultural service. It shows that features deliver different services to a greater or lesser extent, and that some features are good at delivering more services than others. This analysis represents the mainstream view, and needs to be taken in context as a qualitative mapping. It cannot, however, be considered as representing all views expressed in the discussions. Individual typologies would promote or demote certain features according to their specific, but more minority, interests.

Some of the cultural services were more or less recognised by all respondents, although a few services had several sub-components to them, which may merit separate treatment. For example, the earlier discussion on mental health benefits may not exactly fit into the list (although it is linked with 'calm and tranquillity') and may merit further examination. There were also valued benefits delivered to mankind (such as wildlife habitats and bio-diversity) but which did not necessarily deliver a direct service to respondents as individuals.

The following analysis works with the list of cultural service as mapped out above, although (in the light of the outcome of the research) a discussion on potential changes/amendments to these



has been included later in Chapter 10.

This section discusses the feedback obtained on these cultural services mostly in a generic sense. It touches on some of the trends in these services as they relate to particular character areas, and the degree to which the cultural services may be perceived to vary in proportion by character area is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

## 5.2 A Sense of History

In relation to specific 'built' features, such as ruins or castles, this cultural service was not mentioned spontaneously as a benefit derived from landscape. However, it was mentioned spontaneously in its broader sense of the perceived permanence of nature, and how man has stood for centuries within it.

When subsequently asked to analyse some of their landscape experiences, people often included an historic man-made structure as a focal point to 'a scene'. Most often, there would be the contrast between a mainly natural or green environment and a solitary ruin (or church) that would have most impact on them. This would remind them of man's place in the world, that mankind can build, but nature often takes over.

*"It's nice to stumble across historic remains and stuff. I like them if they are falling down, not if they are like, it's like a church that's still standing, that's not as fun."*

A sense of history and continuity was provided by places where people imagined many feet to have trod before, such as a drovers road, or a deep-cut path with high banks on either side. They imagined outcrops or vantage points where people would have gathered or met in iron-age times, for example.

*"People have sat and appreciated this view over and over, generation to generation"*

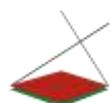
Geology or pre-history was also mentioned as important, examples being cliffs on the coast having constantly changed with the effect of the sea or the movement of land masses. The presence of fossils or crustaceans in rocks and cliffs brought a sense of wonder.

*"The chalk cliffs at Dover give a sense of the history of the earth - once being connected to Europe and how they were made from tiny crustaceans. How old the earth is and ever-changing"*

From more recent history, they also perceived an important role for such features as hedges, stone walls, or fields in the landscape to show how man had positively, in their minds, affected the landscape.

*"Because I just love it and quite happily go walking up there, but because the woodland is so old and mature, and the path, it looks like it has been there for a long time, it could well have been built a couple of days ago. But you wonder that a man or people have put their mark sympathetically throughout the natural woodland and you wonder who has put it in and who has trodden on that path before you and they've put it there for people in the future, creating a sense of history."*

It appeared that a sense of history was important purely from a learning and interest point of view, but also in reminding people of their 'insignificance' and for a sense of wonder and discovery.



*"Often if you are out walking, maybe in the week it could be empty, but its quite interesting to have a look round and read things like the grave stones about people that lived in the area hundreds of years ago, and also it is quiet and peaceful for thinking."*

A sense of history was given by built historic features and remains automatically and regardless of scale, so major structures like castles delivered this, but so too did old stone stiles, barns or bridges.

In the North Downs, ancient ways were important for delivering this benefit, including the Pilgrim's Way and the North Downs Way. There were also important historical features relating to Dover and World War II (also manifest in prominent war memorials).

Many of the character areas included in the research had stately homes and estates that were mentioned, as well as important industrial features that were part of the local heritage (lead mines in Cumbria, quarries in Durham, airfields in Lincolnshire and the gunpowder mills in the North Thames Basin).

The importance of standing stones and iron age forts was mentioned more strongly in the south west areas than elsewhere, whilst Roman and 'border' history (as well as railway architecture, bridges and stone walls) were important in the Eden Valley.

*"I think is some sort of burial mound.*

*To me, it's out in the open, it's quite historical and if I was there, I would stand and wonder what the hell had gone on, how people had shifted that much soil or earth, made these stone circles, I am fascinated by them so this burial mound just fascinates me."*

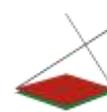
Whilst the Yorkshire Wolds was felt to have some important estates (Burton Agnes and Sledmere) – plus key monuments on high points – it wasn't felt to have as much history (in the classic sense) as some of the other areas. The North Thames Basin was considered to have a lot of hidden history that is relatively unknown.

A lot of history in the Devon Redlands was delivered by the architecture of the villages and the hedge banks and field patterns.

Generally speaking, many man-made features (such as industrial sites, an historical village, farms, lanes, hedges or walls) had a higher capacity to deliver 'a sense of history' than did more natural landscape features such as grassland or marshland. However, some natural features could deliver a sense of history if they were perceived to be strong and obvious examples of how geology had formed them (coast, cliffs, crags and Tors). Hills and mountains did deliver a sense of history in terms of 'iconic views' where people had stood there before, but they did not in themselves deliver a sense of history. Woodland, or rather individual trees could, however, since they could remind people of the time taken for them to grow.

*"I think old trees must have so much history and I could just look at them for hours, the old bark and the history. It is fascinating."*

There was a kind of 'soft' sense of history emanating from natural things that have stood for a long time, as well as a 'hard' history that comes from buildings or standing stones.



### 5.3 Spiritual

The sense of the spiritual was a deep-seated, harder-to-access value in the research. It was often delivered in more solitary moments when people felt surprised by something, or saw something very rare like iconic wildlife – a stag, a hare or a kingfisher – that could make them feel privileged to be in its presence.

Some people invested a lot of spirituality in trees. For example a single feature tree (such as a large oak in an area of flat pastureland, or in a valley bottom) was said to have majesty of its own. An especially large tree within woodland was said to have a character or be special. It was also felt special when a tree had survived on a piece of high land (or was growing out of wall on its own, or out of a crag).

Seeing such things could make people stop and think in a way that made them feel spiritual or 'connect' with some other presence. A spiritual feeling could also be delivered by more traditional features such as burial mounds, standing stones, or churches.

A feeling of being spiritual was also delivered when there was a greater sense of the 'earth' beneath you, such as when being high up looking down a valley, or from a really long, distant view ('endlessly into the horizon'). The openness and perceived closeness to the sky made people feel they transcended their day-to-day lives.

*"I feel minute when I'm up on the hills looking around and across to the sea. You feel like it has been made by God. Everyday there's something new."*

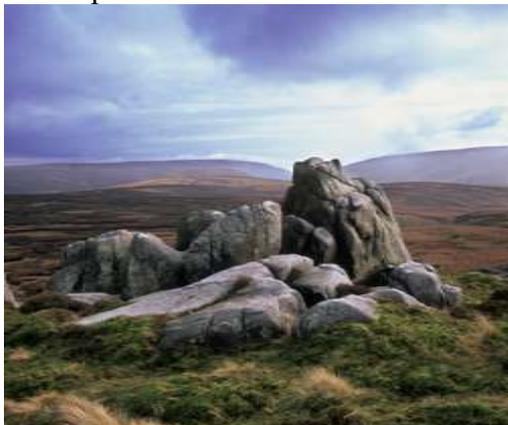
*"The hills are my salvation. I'm just transported..."*

Water and woodland seemed to have higher significance for delivering the 'spiritual', including still lakes or slow-moving streams and rivers.

*"I feel very spiritual by the water, the streams and the rivers. I just feel a connection - a connection with nature."*

*It is also a spiritual relationship and it's almost essential for me*

I feel spiritual here...



©Countryside Agency/Charlie Hedley 03-4383

*"A place to sit away from everyone and watch the clouds race by and think of nothing but private thoughts. Thoughts of past memories."*

*"On the top of mountains where you can get a sense of space and tranquillity and can see the vistas all around you"*

Features like villages, farms or stretches of grassland were less likely to have the 'spiritual' ascribed to them, although almost anything could gain more aesthetic significance if experienced within (for example) the context of a dramatic 'shaft of light' or particular colours provided by the weather. Often, spiritual feelings were linked to places with a high aesthetic quality.

Not every respondent type professed to gaining such benefits from the landscape, although it appeared more often amongst females. However, even quite 'tough' men or farmers would say that the seasons, or the way animals survive, made them feel spiritual.

The tendency towards spiritual feelings was slightly more prevalent in the south than in the northern character areas.

## 5.4 Learning

Learning was felt to be an important facet of the landscape, especially if people lived in a town. People wanted their children to learn from being in a 'natural' landscape, for example going on nature trails or activity courses such as 'bushcraft' courses. A few remembered doing this with their schools when they were young. In general, it was felt that there should be more community-style ways of educating people about the countryside, coast and wildlife.

*"I feel very lucky I was able to see the animals and wildlife and do tree rubbings as part of my school trips around here. I learnt so much about natural beauty – I feel so lucky I was able to learn about those things by seeing them."*

Many praised the diversification of some farmland towards education and recreational use. Learning from farms was mentioned as important for educating children about where food comes from.

*"And the kids can learn a lot by visiting farms and seeing what goes on, all growing up on them, because they learn a totally different way of life. They actually know where things come from, unlike some kids."*

Learning could be obtained from locations that had sources of information, such as nature trail notice boards, visitor attractions and historical attractions. General learning about nature and wildlife was also provided by seeing animals and plants in their natural habitats.

Some respondents thought that being in the midst of an unpopulated landscape, not seeing anyone else, could teach you to be more simple and pure as a person because of the opportunity for simply experiencing nature. Also, the achievement of climbing a hill or mountain, or trekking a long distance, could teach you about endurance and your own capabilities.

The learning cultural service often overlapped with a sense of history, and prompted thoughts about why previous generations did things, such as constructing a wall or choosing to put a religious place on a hilltop. Abandoned cottages could provoke a sense of enquiry, teasing the brain to work out why they had been abandoned.

*"Hadrian's Wall which, I think, judging by the picture, I think that is where it is and as that's the case and as you gave me, you learn a lot from this type of landscape, in the UK, that's the biggest boundary between two lands. And so from a kind of educational perspective, I can remember being a kid and jumping from one side and going Scotland, England, Scotland, England. That really kind of gave me the idea of the fact that even though it's actually not the geographical, the kind of political border now, historically it was the border and so that, to me, kind of was*



*like quite poignant to understanding how like political boundaries exist."*

This service could also be linked to 'leisure and recreation' – there was learning in the sense of discovery from rock pooling at the beach, for example, or learning how to swim. So coastal areas seemed to deliver a lot of learning for people. Also some built features, such as villages or industrial sites, seemed to be linked to high levels of learning and education. Parkland too was mentioned as being an important type of place for children's education.

Although farms were mentioned quite often as places for learning, fields, hedges and field systems were not felt to give much on the learning scale.

Learning was also registered by people in the sense of learning about yourself – how you coped in different situations in the landscape and how you related to different environments.

## **5.5 Recreation: Leisure and Activities**

This cultural service was more often linked to places where there is a lot to do, such as a municipal park or the beach. It was also associated with places that have easy access, places that have rocks, crags, or things to climb, as well as lanes, roads and pathways.

*"As a child on the beach I was fascinated by the surface of rocks and crags and how difficult they were to walk along and their different surfaces and textures. It was curiosity and wonder. I still do it as an adult – check out the rocks. It's a sense of wonder – it isn't man made. It's uncontrollable, it's alive – nature doing it's own thing."*

Depending on the type of landscape user concerned, features delivering this service were often very dramatic or very practical (from the cliff face to the tea shop).

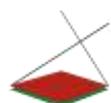
More man-made features were mentioned for this cultural service, although certain types of woodland were felt to be good for activities (such as coniferous forests for cycling).

Often the activities needed to be more in an organized place, especially for children.

*"The kids go to school and behind that is a farm. We went on a school trip and the farmers made these ponds. He renovated these natural ponds and dedicated these ponds to wildlife and probably because they weren't any good for growing things but he dedicated for the children."*

Of course, 'active' tended to imply doing a lot, so could often be associated with a group activity or a challenging environment like moorland. So it would tend to be associated with more dramatic landscapes, such as a steep-sided valley, a cliff, or (often) the coast.

*"A little more of an adventure, a sense of achievement."*





© Countryside Agency Photo: Ian Dalglish E1-0046

Coastal picture often chosen to represent leisure and recreation



© Countryside Agency Photo: Ian Dalglish E1-0046

Picture chosen for activity, rock-climbing, abseiling

The ‘leisure’ side of the ‘leisure and activity’ description could imply more sedate pastimes, involving ‘touring around villages’ for example (especially in the case of older people). Or, if people preferred driving in the landscape, country lanes were thought to be important.

## 5.6 Calm

This was considered to be an important cultural service and one that was sought out by people needing to find space and tranquillity. The type of landscape delivering this service would not necessarily need to be dramatic topographically, as calm was often about intimate space or moments of stillness that could be afforded by being inside a woodland area or just ‘watching clouds’. It did not need a very dynamic place in terms of crashing waves or high cliffs – more a ‘babbling brook’ or a quiet meadow.

*“Takes you away from any worries that you have because you’re there in that moment and looking at it and appreciating it”*

*“There’s just no one around for miles and miles. You’re totally on your own. You can hear the weir going. Yes. It’s brilliant. It’s just very peaceful and you do feel in solitude, if you like.”*

*“Open sort of expanse, you know, you’ve got the nice, small fields and everything and the moor and it’s sort of nice*

*when you see, you know, all the livestock and the sheep and it's just nice. Sort of fresh air up there."*

Peacefulness and a perception of remoteness could be important in delivering a sense of calm, as was (often) moments of stillness. Although people could feel calm after an activity in a more rugged place, they did not necessarily associate a rugged place with calm or the activity with calmness.

Calming places were less likely to be very dynamic with lots going on, but were more often uniform, pastoral places, often farmland. It was mainly a 'sitting and absorbing' moment, often where all the senses were heightened: feeling a warm breeze, or hearing gentle waves or a babbling brook. More gentle landscapes, often water and woodlands, had these cleansing, therapeutic benefits. The 'innocence' of wildlife (eg animals or the simplicity of a flower) could also produce this effect – such as carpets of snowdrops or bluebells.



© Countryside Agency - Photographer Ann Bath

Photograph associated with 'a sense of calm'



© Countryside Agency - Photographer John Morrison

*"Sitting on a grassy bank at the edge of a wood protected from the wind looking at a view which would include a river a small village and various colourful fields, browns and greens and yellows."*



© Countryside Agency/Charlie Hedley 03-1934

*“To sit and look at this view with a sense of openness”*

## 5.7 A Sense of Place

Any feature or landscape could be considered to deliver a sense of place if it was local and distinctive to the area, for example:

- Hadrian’s Wall in Eden Valley.
- Epping Forest in North Thames Basin.
- White Cliffs in the North Downs.

Even wildlife (a red squirrel in the Eden Valley, or rare orchid on the North Downs) could also deliver a sense of place.

People were proud of such places, they were often about something historical or defined the mood of the local landscape (the gentle rolling of the Wolds, or the flower-filled hedges in Devon, or the river in the Eden Valley).

Some of the character areas (as an entity) had less sense of place because of their disjointed or built-up nature. The more homogenous the landscape of an NCA overall, the more sense of place it had. Otherwise, if an NCA was not homogenous in landscape across its entirety, people tended to derive ‘sense of place’ from a much smaller catchment area, this was especially the case in the more ‘elongated’ NCAs where one edge could be a long way from the other.

If sense of place is related to a strong sense of identity, then some character areas had more than others. Exmoor, Yorkshire Wolds, Devon Redlands and the Eden Valley all had a strong sense of identity and, to a certain degree, this can be linked to having a quite distinctive landscape character. In other areas, identity could be more linked to a strong sense of ‘County’ rather than the landscape per se (such as ‘Kent’ in the North Downs).

Also, something could give a sense of place if it was important to a way of life, to employment or had historical connections (examples here include old airfields, old wartime buildings, a monument on a hill, and other local landmarks).

Sense of place could also be associated with the ability to look out somewhere, get perspective and a view (looking down into a valley over towns, villages, and even industry reminded people of their homes). Thus famous viewpoints and lookouts delivered a sense of place.

## 5.8 Inspiration

In order to produce this cultural benefit, the landscape had to be either:

- particularly beautiful, with a high aesthetic value;
- particularly dramatic, with contrasting heights and juxtapositions;
- visceral, open to the elements (especially the wind);
- full of wildlife, such as bluebells;
- romantic, or;
- powerful, with crashing waves, cliffs, or a stac.

It can also be very weather dependent.

*"Breath taking openness without end – variety of colour, vegetation and mix of nature/arable/physical/human. A typical British summers day – gently undulating hills quintessentially 'English' a green and pleasant land. Comforting/home. Fly on the wall. Not a beaten path."*

*"The shape of the coastline, what's round the next bend, the colour of the sea with the heron."*

*"Imaginative areas with different aspects, manmade/ruined surrounded by nature places you could imagine fairy stories or beautiful paintings of it. Pre-Raphaelite ladies lounging. Any area where you can escape and let it all draw you in. Wooded areas dappled sunlight, areas which look different in seasons and weather"*

## 5.9 Escapism

In a sense, escapism could be relatively easy to achieve, even just in a local 'green lung'.

*"Cedars Park is an informal open space in Waltham Cross – a big ancient park. We'd go every Sunday - It was an escape. It was my dad's only day off. We used to take our bikes and a picnic. You felt like you were miles from anywhere but you weren't – the A10 was right behind you. It was just time together in a nice place."*

However, a real sense of getting away required people to not see anyone else, not necessarily remote but providing a feeling of remoteness. It could also be derived from a more challenging landscape (the thrill at the edge of a cliff with the wind in your hair, for example).



*"Standing on a hill looking at the clouds and the sky and where they meeting on the horizon. You could be a million*

*miles from anywhere."*

Escaping was generally described as escaping stress or busy lives, but there could also be the sense of escaping, when free, from being an adult and reverting to childhood. Childhood memories often came from when people felt safe or happy, playing at the beach or in bluebell woods with their parents as security. These memories could be brought back by the landscape experience now.

Sounds and peacefulness could be important to the feeling of escape:



© Countryside Agency - Photographer John Morrison

*"Green fields, blue skies, hot sunny days, soft breeze, no sound except the birds singing, trees rushing and a babbling brook or river nearby that flows into a waterfall. Colourful flowers bobbing in the breeze, church bell striking in the distance"*

*"High-up looking down on the village/town. Peaceful, warm, colourful, open."*

## 6. Features in the Landscape

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter is the third of five chapters that report and discuss the key findings that arise from the programme of qualitative research – the focus groups and interviews – that was carried out across the eight character areas.

It examines the findings concerning individual features within the landscape.

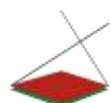
### 6.2 Overview

In the main, the way that people processed landscape was not to pick out individual features but, rather, they absorbed a combination of features within an experience or view. Although, when prompted, people could relate to particular features. Some ideal combinations that people discussed included rivers running through a valley with wooded slopes, or a feature tree in a field. On a smaller scale, the combination of a winding lane and a patchwork of fields, with flowers in hedgerows, would often be cited – as would paths through woodland with a stile and a variety of trees. Open moorland with heather, ponies and Tors was another regular example that contained a number of elements. A beach with cliffs and sand dunes would be another. Another 'classic' combination was being on top of an upland area, or being on the edge of a scarp with farmland below and small hamlets or villages in view. Depending on the length of time for an experience, the combinations were felt to be endless.

When talking about **personal** benefit, people thought in terms of the landscape around them that they could experience in 'one hit', either by seeing or walking it or otherwise processing it. Large, geologically-defined landscape areas (such as the Yorkshire Wolds) were discussed in terms of non-emotional benefits such as tourism policy. People would be much more specific and smaller scale when discussing their own emotional attachments to landscape.

This study has looked at a pre-agreed list of individual features as a way of understanding the services and benefits associated with them. This agreed list of features contained the following:

- trees (eg woodland, forest or 'feature' trees)
- boundaries (eg hedges and walls)
- fields
- industrial features (eg quarries, collieries)
- villages
- water (eg streams, rivers, lakes, sea)
- moorland
- bogs and marshes
- wildlife
- rocks and crags
- historic buildings or remains
- farms
- parkland
- coast
- hills
- mountains
- valleys
- lowland (eg. plains, fens, heath)
- lanes and roads
- grassland.



Some of these continually cropped up as being important no matter where in England they were and no matter what the landscape setting. For example, a large ancient oak had immense benefit for many people wherever it might occur, although the aesthetic quality of it and the degree of the experience could be stronger if it had the following contexts: a mountainous backdrop; being next to a river; or if it was the only example within an otherwise featureless landscape. It could be less of an experience if it was in a housing estate or next to a road.

The following analysis shows how certain features appear good at delivering benefits to people in terms of the perceptions of these people alone (their values, emotions, thoughts and beliefs)<sup>9</sup>.

### 6.3 Hills, Mountains and Upland Areas

The importance of height was frequently talked about as being integral to many important landscape experiences, especially the more exhilarating and rewarding moments of 'feeling on top of the world'. Openness was valued as an integral part of such an experience. Even the mainstream, whilst not so involved in climbing mountains, got benefit from seeing peaks from a distance – it gave them a sense of perspective.

The necessity for height was often mentioned for such cultural services as inspiration or getting away from it all because they were thought to go hand-in-hand with remoteness. It was less so for calmness or for learning, other than those benefits that come from the physical exercise of climbing.

*"A wide view so I could see lots of things, with a vista to feel 'uplifted'. On a hill."*

*"I enjoy the exhilaration of pushing yourself up the top and never knowing what you're going to see. You're completely on your own and you're just met with this amazing scenery, it kind of makes you feel very small. The views you can get when you're on the highest thing you can be on are just outstanding. You just can't see a road or a farm – everything's just rural... The thrill of being on the top and feeling like you're on top of the world... It can just be electrifying."*



© Countryside Agency - Photographer Tessa Burrey 03-6496

<sup>9</sup> We make no reference to non-people-based issues, such as conservation, unless it is where people expressed views, beliefs and values regarding conservation and other 'scientific' issues.

## 6.4 Water, Rivers, Streams and Coast

Water, in its various forms, greatly enhanced a landscape experience in people's minds. More often than not a water element was included in a person's **ideal** experience. It was an element that completed the beauty or tranquillity of a place. Moving and still water (lakes and waterfalls, for example) delivered different benefits – moving, rushing water was exhilarating, with still water being peaceful.

The water in a marshland was valued for its wildlife capacity.

Clearly, coastal stretches allowed access to look at the sea, which was extremely important for everyone for many reasons.

The presence of water was often a focal point or a linking aspect that added symmetry to the landscape experience. It increased the effectiveness of that landscape in delivering many of the cultural benefits, including recreation, calm/tranquillity, escape, spiritual feelings and inspiration.



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Often a river was chosen for accessibility as there might be a towpath or bridge associated with it. Rivers were valued for many reasons, but the opportunity for seeing much-valued wildlife, however rare (such as dippers, kingfishers or otters), was exciting.

The sound of water was important and often mentioned in discussion. Examples included the sound of a weir, the crashing of a wave or the babble of a brook. There was a therapeutic aspect to such experiences.

Sometimes, still water set off the magnitude of the surrounding landscape – a still lake at the bottom of a mountain, or a small tarn near the top of a mountain, under a crag.





© Countryside Agency - Photographer Rob Cousins

A flooded quarry improved the landscape in one case – in another a flooded field provided more bird life.

For those more in tune with the land, there was interest in the tiny natural ponds found in fields.

There was also interest (and some divided debate) about policies on dredging and the encouragement of wetlands (see the later marshes and management sections later).

*“Yes, and water. I think people, I mean several people have chosen water here and I think because valleys and water, although they can be built along constant change, there’s always an everlasting feel to them because it’s natural. The ground has risen, if you like.”*

*“And, you know, if you see a lake, it’s not going to be disturbed. It can get poisoned or something like that but it’s always going to be there. It’s always going to be a lake. And there’s something to it where it’s not going to be changed. It’s going to be there for a prolonged period of time, which is why people are drawn to it.”*

Apart from the perceived continuity of a source of a river or the motion of the sea, on the whole water was less good at delivering a sense of history. Apart from learning a sport, rivers and lakes were not high on the learning cultural service scale either. A sense of place was achieved by the river in the Eden Valley (also the Lakes) and by areas of coast generally across the character areas but, on the whole, rivers and streams seemed to have a lower capacity to deliver a ‘sense of local identity’ than, say, moorland or a stretch of rolling hills.

## 6.5 Woodland

Woodlands were considered to be treasured places, used to greater or lesser degree but thought to be quintessentially British. Mixed woodlands were liked but broadleaved woodlands were generally the preferred type of woodland to be within, especially for relaxing, magical moments. Externally, deciduous woodlands were key to the aesthetics/colours of a ‘whole view’ (especially the colours in autumn). In addition, these delivered the ability to observe the seasons, a quality which enabled people to be in touch with the balance of nature, so they said.

*“As freaky as it sounds each tree has got a character. It gives me a lot of pleasure to name them or think of the age of a tree. In the forest are some quite huge trees that apparently are very old. At this time of year they’re all fresh –*



*it’s gorgeous.”*



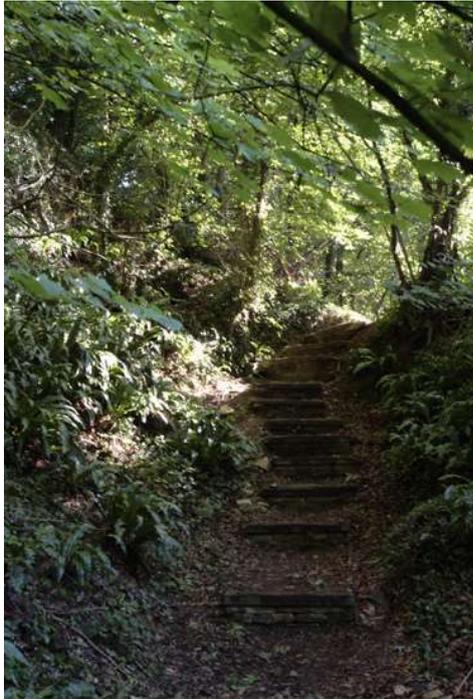
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Coniferous woodlands were also valued, but more for recreation (such as horse riding, biking and long walks) because of their defined tracks. From a distance, coniferous woods were seen to provide definition to slopes and mountainsides, providing they were in small shapes designed to complement the curves of the land. In some of the character areas they were also valued as a ‘productive’ activity, associated with the local identity of the place and people’s livelihoods.



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Another important association was with childhood, with the enclosed atmosphere being described as ‘womb-like’ by some. This led to woodland being a key place for comforting and calming effects to be achieved.



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*"Ashworth forest, which is quite near here, my kids and I have walked for the last 25 years for most weekends, we've cycled around it and walked dogs around it."*

*"I don't know. Maybe it's... I like being outside but I like the freedom of being amongst the trees and hearing the different sounds and the different animals."*

*"Yes. That's what's nice about it. It's so varied. Having different bits and suddenly you see little bits of light coming through."*

As a very intimate space, woodland was thought to make sound more obvious. There was also the magical nature of bluebells and folkloric aspects, such as stories of woodland elves and fairies – important associations for many people. On the whole, these feelings were positive but there were some people who found the 'dark' nature of woods frightening, especially lone females. This feeling varied depending on the density of the wood – more open woods were less frightening than thick woodland.

*"A dark woodland doesn't benefit anyone it need to be opened up and have a mosaic of different habitats."*

*"I have a phobia of fir tree woods. There are completely dead underneath. Natural woods but fir trees don't have bluebells. In natural woods you get dappled light."*

*"Old established woodland where there's a lot of space, whereas when, particularly when my part of the world in North Wales, it's all very packed in so you can't walk amongst the trees, they are just in rows."*

In a qualitative sense, woodlands delivered on many of the cultural services, being most important for calmness/tranquillity/peace/spiritualism (mainly broadleaved) and the leisure side of recreation (mixed and coniferous). It had less of a capacity to deliver inspiration, although sometimes 'special bluebell' woods and individual trees inspired poetry and painting. Generally, woodland was not associated with the highly active side of recreation (although still did so to a certain degree, especially coniferous woodland). Escapism was also thought to be high for woodland ('the ability to lose oneself'). A sense of history was not thought to be as strong for a whole woodland but could be really strong for an single ancient tree. Generally, woodland was a

'high performer' in delivering many of the cultural benefits.

## 6.6 Coast

The coast was an iconic place for many people, especially younger ones. The ability to swim and safely play with families was an important part of childhood memories. Walks along the coast seemed important to many people at fundamental points in their lives. Staring at the sea could be a soul-searching activity as well. At other times, it could just be 'fun'.

The coastline was thought to be a key facet of Britain, the island.

*"Okay. And there's no Wood in my line of vision. All there is the beach and the sea and then the cliffs and that's the interesting thing and when I think about where I'd like to go surfing now, it's really about me being in the place where I want to be, visually, as well as what I'm enjoying doing. And places where I am now, I love going to Lynmouth, which is the most stunning place, because you can paddle out into the sea and look back and all I can see is like the big, high cliffs, which are kind of looking back over at you."*

*"It's important to me because, like, I work and I run my own business and I, from time to time, have very high peaks of stress and then have very low troughs of kind of degrees of work and when I'm in the sea, none of that matters. It's gone. It's literally just me and there and kind of just get a chance to just kind of get rid of my thoughts and so that's kind of what that whole thing means to me."*

Most people felt they needed access to the coast, cliffs and beaches at various points in their lives. The coast seemed particularly influential in some of the character areas, in particular Durham MLP, Lincolnshire Coast and the North Downs (possibly also Exmoor) for being part of the character of the area. This was also true (but to a lesser degree) with Devon Redlands and the Yorkshire Wolds. The coast seemed not to be part of the character of the North Thames Basin, but this may be because the places where most respondents came from were to the west of the area.

## 6.7 Fields

Fields, field systems and their associated boundaries (see walls and hedges) were spontaneously and regularly mentioned as a key facet of the English landscape. The 'pastoral scene' was a comforting aspect of the countryside that indicated centuries of heritage in farming. It also made for a high aesthetic quality when looking at a patchwork of fields with different colours and the variety of the detail was considered quite inspirational, marking it out from urban and suburban areas.

The contribution of field systems towards the look of the land was considered worthy of protection. Different styles of fields were identified with one's local identity and they delivered a large sense of calm and tranquillity, as well as a sense of history and escapism. However, they were lower down the scale for activities because they were seen to be sometimes inaccessible, except for certain people who had horse riding access or who worked the land. Fields were more important as part of 'the whole view' than as something to interact with, unless it was your job.

On the whole, people had a preference for irregular-shaped and small fields, and were against large-scale arable fields with no (or indistinct) boundaries.





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A field system was valued even more if there was a vantage point from which to view it, such as an open top or headland. These fields tend to be valued even more when in a valley bottom or stretching out beyond some downland than if purely on flatter land, though they were still valued there too.

*"I don't particularly like open very flat land with very few hedges. I like hills and when there is no hedges and it is completely flat, I'm bored there it is boring landscape. I don't liked where there take the hedges out for farming you get these large expanses and there is nothing to draw the eye."*

*"Well fields are alright but there's nowhere to go, I am younger, and when we go out with my brother and sister we like to go and look around and find places to go and explore more than go around. It's nice to walk through where its open and you can see where you are going but sometimes it is nice to not know what's next, it's very shrubby or lots of trees so you don't know what's going to happen."*

## 6.8 Moorland

Areas of moorland were valued for their wildness and 'bleakness' but they were not always thought to be beautiful places by the majority of respondents. Some respondents stated that they felt too exposed within such landscapes, but thought that they fulfilled the role for a more exhilarating experience. Moorland could be more important for those living within it (eg Exmoor).

Generally, the sense of openness was considered to be the most important aspect of such landscapes. Heather, deer and rocky outcrops were features that contributed to the quality of the experience.

Some people thought that moorland was less easily accessible for convenient recreation than other types of landscapes – areas of heathland (eg in and around the New Forest) were more accessible. However, some moorland (for example in Dartmoor and heights such as Dunkery Beacon in Exmoor) had good 'parking places' to access famous Tors.

The majority of respondents perceived 'the moors' as being mainly un-wooded, large stretches

of flatter land that was difficult underfoot. Those living close to a moor would point out the benefits of the 'edges' of moors where the interest lay in wooded slopes and long open views.

*"Yes, wild places. Some places like Exmoor and as you go down over the edge of Dartmoor and towards like the west coast, as well, to the north west coast, where you can literally, in the summer you can drive over the top and it's like you're in Africa and suddenly it's like grassland and you're just like where's the giraffes? And it's literally just changing as you go over the cattle grid and then all of a sudden, you're in a different country."*

*"I the moors are more creepy if I was out there on my own. Miles away. The thought of being on my own. Those windy eerie place. Maybe it is me watching horror films. Not that it is ugly it is just the feeling of remoteness."*

In Exmoor, the moorland was extremely important for local identity and seemed to have a high amenity value, especially for walking and horse riding. In other NCAs, moorland was imagined to be quite wild and somewhere you go to 'stretch' yourself or where you are taken out of your comfort zone. Moorland seemed to be perceived to deliver quite an intense experience, and could be seen as 'inspiring' or 'spiritual', but was less likely to be 'calming' or 'historical' for the mainstream body of opinion. Moorlands were considered to be special landscapes that were perceived to be truly wild with little perceived management.

## 6.9 Bogs and Marshes

These were valued and considered to be important for birdwatchers and as a place to trap water and prevent flooding. A few people valued them for wider environmental reasons (peat bogs as 'carbon sinks', for example). On the whole, the mainstream felt that they did not deliver many of the cultural services on a widespread basis.

However, there were marshes that were nature reserves that were considered good places for learning because of wildlife signs and some marshes mentioned had boardwalks that made them more accessible and so could be used for leisure purposes. A few people mentioned being inspired by the sight and sound of large reed beds swaying in the wind. On the whole, they were thought to be places that were important to protect and exist, without necessarily having public access.

*"Unless, of course, I'm presuming, I'm not a big birdwatcher but I'm sure there's a big variety of birds on the marshes and bogs, which is really important."*

Marshes as a backdrop behind sand dunes were valued aesthetically in the Lincolnshire Marshes, and some marshes on the Exe Estuary were also mentioned as having links with schools' learning about biodiversity.

There were exceptions, of course, from people living on a marsh.

*"I love bogs and marshes. I do like it. I live on Romney Marsh and there are dragonflies and it is controlled on the marsh. I DO like it because it is flat. It is really calm and quiet because not many people know about it. It is not a natural thing it has been reclaimed. You have all the reed beds and it is lovely. You get a lot of wildlife. All those little things, little trees, they are lovely. Hawthorny things."*



## 6.10 Grassland

Grassland was regarded as flatland, which (on the whole) was not regarded as a highly interesting type of landscape. It was imagined to be featureless and like 'the Steppes' in Russia. However, if on higher ground such as the North Downs, it could be regarded as important for the openness of the view.

There was not a great deal of understanding of what grassland was (as opposed to fields). If people thought of it as a wild untouched meadow with wild flowers, then it was considered to be very beautiful and inspirational for painters.

*"I think if you travel in it as well, if you can't really see anything at the end of it, it is just like you are driving and driving and driving whereas if you can see hills and woods and things like that you want to know what's on the other side of it."*

## 6.11 Villages

Villages and rural buildings were generally considered to be an important part of the rural landscape. Villages and barns tended to remind people of an historic rural way of life that is important to them in terms of learning about man's past. Often the construction of cottages was talked about as being typical of the region, adding to people's sense of place.

Often a village provided a start and finish to a walk, or punctuated a drive through the countryside. A church or hill-top village could provide a focal point. Within a view it provided a sense of comfort, unless the person was an isolation seeker – if a tea-shop hunter villages were crucial!

*"No but if it was like old, not like a farm house that's fallen down, like an old building or, it's not very descript is it, an old church or castle that's fallen down, that's quite good to look at. I like that kind of thing. But yes, it's also nice to have village, like very small villages where there's just like a pub, a shop and a few houses, that's quite nice. Like especially if it's in the country, it's quite nice to break it up when you walk through somewhere."*

*"We all like the villages and the lanes and the sense of community and you need that for access to places, for cycling."*

*"Lavenham nearby in Suffolk. It feels untouched – it just lifts you, makes you feel really good. Makes you feel you want to live there. I love looking at old buildings. As a builder I get enjoyment out of seeing what people did hundreds of years ago. It makes you feel how people lived in the past"*

Villages were found to be very important for a sense of place, for history and for leisure. Escapism-wise they also delivered quite highly. They seemed to have less of a capacity to be calming, tranquil, spiritual or inspirational.

People in almost all the NCAs, except perhaps North Thames Basin and Durham MLP, related strongly to the need to keep villages and their way of life alive. This was most strongly felt in the Eden Valley, Devon Redlands and Exmoor and slightly less so in Yorkshire Wolds, Lincolnshire Coast and North Downs.



## 6.12 Hedges and Walls

The overall appeal of walls and hedges seemed to be wrapped up in the need to see field systems, patterns and farmland as part of the 'quintessential English' view. So they contribute greatly in terms of aesthetics of the 'whole view' at a micro level. The look of a specific hedge or wall can engender an interest in wildlife in terms of nesting birds or lichen on the stonework, but also (especially with stone walls) a sense of wonder that people had created them. They were felt to be important to protect and quite comforting or calming as part of a 'pastoral' scene.

They therefore delivered many cultural services, although perhaps less so for leisure and recreation as they can be perceived to inhibit access to fields – although people did mention them (mainly hedges) in the context of driving through country lanes.

*"I spoke earlier of my boulder wall and so I've picked it. The boulder wall. I mean, the guys that built that are long since dead and it's still standing and there's nobody there, it's quiet and- Hey, right, trees and walls. Down in Yarnworth, where I live, there's a little archway in the bottom of the wall with stones in and then to the side is a beech tree and when they built the wall, the tree was already there, so they built this archway so that the roots can push the stones out from the bottom, but nowadays, they would just cut the tree down and build the wall, wouldn't they?"*



## 7. NCA-Specific Findings

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter is the fourth of five chapters that report and discuss the key findings that arise from the programme of qualitative research – the focus groups and interviews – that was carried out across the eight character areas.

This particular chapter takes the eight character areas in turn and presents the findings of the research that arose in each, relating to:

- General attitudes towards the area.
- Perceptions of quality, 'condition' and threats.
- Cultural services.

The opportunity was taken through this research to examine the existing character-area descriptions and the extent to which people thought they were good at describing the area they knew. These findings are also presented here.

### 7.2 Devon Redlands

#### General Attitudes towards the Area

Respondents for the focus groups came mainly for the Ottery St Mary and Whimble areas but there were a few from the north of the area towards Cullompton and a few in the younger group from Exeter and Tiverton. The depth interviews were held near Tiverton and in the village of Whimble. Respondents were mainly 'born and bred' local people, with a few long-time incomers (ten years or more) and several who had been brought up locally, moved away and then returned later in life.

There was a strong affinity expressed towards the County of Devon and the variety of landscape within it, people particularly valuing having two coastlines (north and south in the County) and Dartmoor, with easy access to other types of spectacular landscape such as Exmoor and Cornwall nearby.

The other overriding spontaneous affinity was towards farmland, with rolling fields and hedges, with winding lanes and a 'rural' look. Devon villages and the way of life were also considered to be distinctive within the UK, but there was some concern about modernisation and 'gentrification' of villages.

Younger people were also pleased with the outdoors capacity of the region, such as coast-based sports, walking and cycling, not all of which are afforded from within the Devon Redlands NCA.

People did not recognise the Devon Redlands as a known area with a known boundary. They saw the territory as 'odd' with three different bits in their minds: north, south east and south west of the River Exe. With this sample there was very little affinity with the southwestern section of the NCA to the west of the River Exe, in the Dawlish area.

*"So you can go to the north coast if you want to go surfing or you can go to the south coast if you want to go fishing*



*or you want to go like flat water with like kids or whatever. You've got forestry, you've got hills. I went snowboarding two weeks ago up at Exmoor. Dug a big kicker, doing jumps, brilliant"*

## Attitudes towards the Character Description

Respondents related to the written character description, which was seen to be very good. People related to, and valued most strongly, the following bullets in the text:

- Winding lanes with high banks and flower-filled hedges.
- Fields of different shapes and sizes surrounded by Devon hedgebanks.
- Rural buildings with thatched roofs, some with compacted soil (cob) walls, and some with red building stone.

The red soil was not seen as the foremost characteristic but was still a secondary feature in people's minds. They did not seem to think it applied to the whole of the territory as shown. Respondents felt that the character of the villages could be made more of in the description and also that the rivers needed boosting as an important attribute.

## Perception of Quality, Condition and Threats

Respondents felt very lucky to live in such a beautiful area and thought that a number of threats were around mainly in the form of housing development east of Exeter and around the expansion of the airport. A new town called Cranbury planned on a flood plain was felt to merge some villages into one. This would cause the loss of village life, which was a general problem.

*"No to big new development"*

*"Yes, to allowing existing towns and villages to expand or evolve!"*

Cliff erosion was also mentioned as a threat to the coastline.

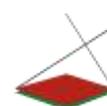
## Cultural Services

The character area was found to deliver those cultural services associated with farmland, fields and hedges, so quite a lot of history and a strong sense of place. The recreational side was mainly linked to the coastal areas, where water sports were practiced (people related to the Sidmouth area of coast outside of the area). The aesthetic quality of the undulating hills, lanes and hedgebanks were felt to be a good source of inspiration (poetry and painting).

The area wasn't felt to be strong on the calming or tranquillity qualities of woodland (though they do exist) or on the exhilarating aspects of inspiration associated with adrenalin or a thrill. The wilder elements of moorland (a real sense of remoteness) were accessed via Dartmoor that is not in the area.

Local villages were considered to be good places for recreation, in the sense of leisure and touring, with good access to facilities.

There also appeared to be quite an artistic facet of the nature in the area, which might indicate that the landscape inspires this (although some of the references are from landscapes outside of the NCA). Also, there were more attitudes expressed surrounding 'spiritualism' with the



influence of Glastonbury further north, but the idea of festivals, ley lines and Tors were also important for this NCA.

History did not seem to be in the forefront of people's minds, although the importance of the cultural heritage of the villages was mentioned frequently.

Opportunities for learning were available and mainly linked to the variety of leisure and activities available and from the influence of Exeter as a strong leader and influence on facilities.

### **Devon Redland Poems**

These poems were written by the in-depth interview respondents.

1.  
*Moorland stones and Craggy Ledges  
Red-soiled Fields and Flowery Hedges  
Rambling Streams and Woodland Glades  
Red sunsets as Daylight Fades  
Country Lanes and Pebbly Beaches  
Windy paths to faraway reaches  
Coastal walks that lead to heaven  
It's all in beautiful Devon.*

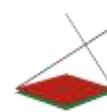
#### *2. The Oak Trees*

*The mighty oaks soaring high  
Majestic, timeless  
Enriching our landscape and providing a sense of continuity  
A true keystone in our heritage.  
We look with wonder at their strength and power  
Sitting so solidly within the landscape  
Gnarled branches, twisted bark  
Home to countless birds, animals, insects  
Shelter is offered to us all in a storm, protection from the elements.  
But ours is such a brief acknowledgment of their existence  
As we scurry past wrapped up in our own busy worlds  
For them, time ticks so very, very slowly  
We are small and quite insignificant  
and little realise that  
In their time, many more generations will pass by and gaze with awe.*

## **7.3 North Downs**

### **General Attitudes towards the Area**

Respondents in the focus groups were mainly from around the Ashford area and surrounding villages, with a few nearer to Dover. The depth interviews were with people from Farnham, Surrey and Faversham, Kent. The research is under-represented in the Surrey section, although there is only a very thin section of territory there that is within the NCA boundary.



The territory was considered to be very varied with a lot of choices of landscape, but there was little affinity between Surrey and Kent.

Respondents related strongly to their county (in this case Kent) but also to the North Downs area itself. They did not particularly relate to the boundary of the NCA, particularly the Surrey end and it was noted that significant areas of their local coastline were not included. Also, Romney Marsh seemed important to them. Hythe was frequently mentioned and a place called 'the Hatch'. Loseley Park in Surrey, and Alice Holt Woods were mentioned as important landscapes in Surrey.

The area was seen as a gentle and comforting place, the 'garden' of England and therefore well-maintained, with neat and tidy hedges. The Downs were valued for their openness and widespread views. Woodlands also featured strongly in people spontaneous comments. Whilst the area is regarded as having good countryside it was also considered to be quite populated and so there was a perception of it not being predominantly rural in the same way as, say, Devon.

*"It is sedate and subtle here in Kent, there is no WOW here. No mountains for example. We go to Devon and Lake District where it is more spectacular. Kent is more subdued and subtle."*

*"The coast is important to us down here especially in Kent."*

*"The chalk downs and the openness. It is quite unique."*

*"I would immediately say the widespread views and wildlife."*

## **Attitudes toward the Character Description**

Respondents related to a lot contained within the character description and had most affinity with the descriptions of:

- chalk downland
- grassland with (wildlife) orchids
- ancient woodlands
- drovers roads & Pilgrims Way.

Coastal elements were very important at Dover, as were orchards and field systems; hedges were not spotted on the description.

*"The coast is very diverse and they don't say much about it.  
Sands and shingle."*

*"Some of the fields are very, very chalky."*

## **Perceptions of Quality, Condition, Threats**

The main concerns were to do with large-scale farming and housing development. It was considered to be a very populated area, but good and valued natural areas are available. People were concerned about the preservation of wildlife and the management of woodlands. The South Downs was perceived to do 'management' better than the North Downs, whilst parts of Surrey were considered to be over-managed.

*"Up on the downs you have got orchids and possibly they don't want people knowing about it. Instead of wanting*



*to trash it if you told people they might look after it as a wild life area. We use the Downs all the time but there should be less pesticides damaging the area and less intensive farming. Because of that you'll get more wildlife."*

*"All the woodlands in Kent are suffering because they are not managed and they need more management. Certainly, the Sussex Downs are grazed more and there is much more proactive management."*

## Cultural Services

The area was seen to be a good place for leisure and recreation, in the form of walks and paths on the Downs with some gentle heights and upland areas. Woodlands featured strongly and so a sense of calm was delivered from these and from the farmland and hedges. Although not felt to be anywhere that was remote, there was tranquillity obtained from the coast as well as a sense of history from the Pilgrim routes and the Cliffs and various forts at Dover. There was also more of a sense of the Second World War here with monuments being particularly valued. The area was not necessarily as good at delivering intense escapism due to the large areas of population and the motorways, but some escapism was still achieved from green areas; there was a greater need for it than in a more predominantly rural area.

The floral nature of the landscape seemed to inspire people's imagination through the orchards and ideas of orchids on grasslands etc, but there was less of a 'thrill' factor that can be provided by more 'dramatic' landscapes.

*"It is good at delivering wide open spaces, good views and continuity of landscape. Large areas of chalk grassland."*

Spiritual feelings were not mentioned as being linked to this area and opportunities for learning were not mentioned frequently.

## 7.4 Eden Valley

### General Attitudes towards the Area

Respondents were mainly from rural villages, with a few from Penrith. They were mostly born and bred in the area (or 'bread and buttered' as one person put it). A few people had come in from the North East and one from Manchester about 10-12 years ago.

*"I think it's absolutely fabulous and I know how lucky with are, because for 6 years of my life I lived away, so I do know how very, very lucky we are. It's freedom, isn't it, in a way?"*

Most people thought the area had a high aesthetic quality but they did think that people either embraced it or they just ignored because 'beauty' is everywhere.

*"Like you were saying before, up at Howton Fell, you get up there and you can see right the way down to Ullswater and right the way down towards the fells at Tebay and you hear the skylarks and the grouse."*

Whilst they did have a strong sense of the Eden Valley they were clearly very influenced by the Lake District landscape and regularly talked about the 'fells' as part of their heritage.

*"Being a University graduate, I feel like I should come back here. I would actually love to stay here but there aren't the opportunities in Cumbria and especially the Eden Valley"*



*The landscape is part of my self identity. The scenery is beautiful, we go somewhere flat and I don't feel right there. I went to Denmark and I said where are the hills. Just seeing the mountains from a distance. I find it quite unsettling being away from the mountains."*

*"For me I was born and brought up in Glenridding and my father worked in the lead mine. It was just that is where I grew up in a terraced house with an outside loo. It is part of me the mountains and the lake is still there and it feels part of me. I remember someone saying what are you still doing here and I said what are you doing here he was from Birmingham. I hate flat land"*

## Attitudes towards the Character Description

Overall, the description was seen to be very good. People related to and valued most strongly:

- Valley between two sides.
- Boundaries of walls.
- The towns mentioned.
- River Eden.

They thought they wanted some other characteristics made more of, such as:

- The fertility of the land.
- More recent historic features (castles).
- Railway heritage, bridges, viaducts.
- The river itself.
- The Eden sandstone Gorge at Lazonby.
- Villages.
- Border history.
- The Beacon at Penrith.

## Perceptions of Quality, Condition, Threats

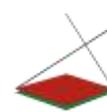
There appeared to be quite a high knowledge of and concern about 'management' issues, such as 'rewilding', the cost of maintaining stone walls, the reclamation of old mines, and the creation of wetlands.

There was a perception of a threat from tourism and, having seen some negative impacts in the Lake District (eg Ambleside), there was concern for Penrith. Most thought that the valley was somewhere people didn't know about and people thought they could be left alone if possible.

There was a concern about the loss of farming, about policies on forestry and river dredging. The removal of invasive Himalayan Balsam was seen as a positive move, whilst the removal of sweet chestnuts was not. More sensitive felling of conifers was felt to be a good, as was the attempt to improve the 'edges' of coniferous woodland by making them more irregular.

A few thought that there was not enough wildlife, for example hedgerow flowers and woodland flowers. Woodlands in the Eden Valley itself were not thought to be prominent features and there was discussion about whether more should be introduced. However, in the main, people thought it would change the character of the 'farmland' valley too much.

*"Everything changes but to say we are not going to have sheep. For someone to come in and say we are not going*



*to have it anymore. For generations and generations families have farmed the land and managed it and managed it very well. That's our heritage that what makes Cumbrian, Cumbrian."*

Housing development was thought to be quite well organised in towns and villages although there was some concern about retail and leisure development between Penrith and the motorway (whilst acknowledging the need for facilities with a wide catchment area of people needing access).

## **Cultural Services**

The area delivers many cultural benefits, it is calm and inspirational, though not dramatic. Sense of history was delivered to a strong degree with railway architecture, farming, stone walls, border castles etc. Leisure and recreation seemed less of a feature of the Valley itself but possibly because people used the Lakes and the Pennines for the more adventurous side of life.

A strong sense of place came from the history of the area through castles, villages and stone walls. People look to other areas for activities involving height or coast, so it can perform less well on delivering this cultural service. There are places delivering calm and tranquillity by the river and the valley itself. Woodland was not thought to be a pre-dominant feature.

The spiritual aspects of landscape did not come forth strongly here as people thought adjacent lakes, woodland and mountains delivered this benefit but they were delivered by the river, gorge and farmland to an extent.

The need for 'escape' did not seem so prevalent here as people thought the landscape was so integral to living there that they didn't need to get away from it all.

Inspiration came from looking up at the higher surrounding land and the changing colours and views creating by the fluctuating weather. The Eden River Gorge was felt to provide some dramatic qualities within the generally perceived gentleness of the valley.

## **7.5 Yorkshire Wolds**

### **General Attitudes towards the Area**

The sample was well spread across the area, with a good mix of long-timers and incomers. The area made sense geologically to people and people generally enjoyed the Wolds aesthetically. The sample more closely worked with the land than other areas and so felt strongly about it, but were keen not to 'romanticise' it too much. The older ABC1 group was more involved in country sports, similar to the Exmoor NCA. Younger people migrated more towards Bridlington ('Brid').

The openness of the Wolds was clearly valued and felt to be superior over neighbouring flat land further south towards Hull. Flamborough Head was a frequent local place of escape and seemed to have quite a high amenity value, whereas there was an impression that the hills of the Wolds were not widely accessible due to much being farm or estate land.

There was a strong affinity to 'monuments' and estate land. The non-commercialisation was valued as well as being not too 'popular'.



Openness was valued by most, but there was recognition that the area doesn't offer a lot of variety or the wildness of a moor or mountains. These were regularly accessed further north or by going to the Lake District. The attractiveness of the Cleveland Way and Scarborough (both outside the NCA) was regularly mentioned.

*"It's a bit too open here for me because I come from North Wales so I am used to mountains."*

*"Oh very lucky in this area specifically because we have got the start of the hills and the open as well, but we've also got the coast just a stones throw away."*

*"There's also not too many beaten paths around our area, it's relatively untouched isn't it, it isn't commercialised. Whereas some areas you go, the beautiful landscape but they've got everything there for everybody who wants to go there."*

## Attitudes towards the Character Descriptions

Participants had most affinity, from the descriptions, with:

- Gently rolling hills.
- Flamborough Head.
- High open views to the north and Humber.

Also distinctive, but not always positive, was arable farming with large fields. And, although the territory was felt to be quite well-defined, they wanted the 'perceived to be important' market towns included, especially Driffield and Malton.

Other features demonstrating folklore heritage were monuments and something called the 'Waggoners'.

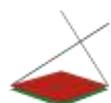
There is a possible need to make more of the 'historic parklands' aspect arising from Sledmere and Burton Agnes.

*"Ancient Green Lanes eg Woldgate. The old Roman Road from Bridlington to York. I imagine all the old travellers. It's a wide green-grassed lane from Sledmere down to Wetwang. There are cowslips cultivated from either side. Wide open views. Sometimes deer. It is peaceful, high skies, sense of history, of calm, of changing colours with the seasons"*

## Perceptions of Quality, Condition, Threats

Interestingly, there were not felt to be strong development concerns in this character area. Farming was felt to shape and characterise the landscape, although several felt that the destruction of hedges for larger fields needed to be better controlled. There was a feeling that the Wolds were in danger of becoming too featureless and, while this was partly driven by the perception of a lack of woodland, it was also felt to be due to farming. Although people thought that woodland was not characteristic of the area, they thought that a better balance could be struck with perhaps more 'copses' on the slopes to define the valleys better.

People were quite positive about farming on the Wolds, but there was some awareness of land down on the plain historically not being ideal for farming – floodplain land reclaimed in times gone by for farming when it shouldn't have been, according to a few.



Other threats came from human visitors, such as day-trippers from the cities and (as some people said) the visual impact of travelling communities. The peace and solitude of the Wolds was thought to be in danger by some people, who thought that more people means less quietness.

## **Cultural Services**

This area was perceived to be quite uniform and delivered a lot of peace and tranquillity. There was felt to be much scope for activities, especially at the coast, although the walking possibilities could be improved in the interior.

The openness of the area was valued for escapism and the ability to see for a long way on the top of the hills. However, some felt that there was too much openness because of the effect of arable farming taking over (rather than there being a more 'natural' openness).

A sense of history was less strong here, but there are important community monuments and country houses of note. The relative absence of stone walls, drovers roads and ancient ruins seemed to contribute to a lack of a sense of history and, although the market towns were felt to be historic, they weren't actually inside the NCA itself.

The Wolds were felt to be quite inspirational for poetry and painting, although some of this was driven by the presence of David Hockney living and painting there, a local celebrity.

## **7.6 Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau**

### **General Attitudes towards the Area**

The group discussions were held one night in Sunderland and the other in Peterlee, to cover different views. These groups both had many 'local' people, but only one who worked in the landscape – an early-retired gentleman who now trains gundogs. The younger group had a high proportion of dog walkers. A range of landscape use was evident, with a lot of walking, shooting, playing golf and some bird watching. A couple of older respondents rode horses when they were younger.

The favourite areas of this group tended to be those outside their local area and included the Lakes, Northumberland and Stonehenge. They were based on 'getting away', serenity, the lack of hustle and bustle, and representing something bigger than oneself or day-to-day life. Historical aspects were also important – a sense of heritage and time, and frequently linked to nostalgia or childhood memories.

There was great appreciation of the local area, particularly focussed upon the coastal landscape, although with little mention of the local inland areas. Other areas that were particularly appreciated were the coastal nature reserves and the reclaimed industrial sites that now offer green recreational space on an accessible, daily basis.

The character area as a whole was not viewed in its entirety as a recognised territory. The focus was primarily the coast and the immediate areas around where respondents live, which offers daily access. Beyond the NCA, respondents related mostly to the northern 'honeypots' of Northumberland (particularly the coast), the Yorkshire Moors and Dales, and the Lake District.



## Attitudes towards the Character Description

The key characteristics of the area were seen as:

- Low cliffs, bays, headlands with colliery waste on some beaches (most respondents seem to relate to the coastline and to the industrial heritage – a sense of pride in the history).
- Gently undulating plateau with steep denes.
- A few woodlands in the denes ('denes' as a term was well related to).
- Pony paddocks, sheds and allotments (viewed in a mixed light in that it is good that people are enjoying the outdoors, but they are not particularly aesthetic. This was not mentioned spontaneously but features in the 'day-to-day' interaction, particularly for dog walkers).

## Perceptions of Quality, Condition, Threats

There appears to be agreement that there has been much improvement of the coastline and old industrial features making the landscape more usable:

*"The coast gives a lot back to people –the smells-now that's its not a coal beach any more which it was not that many years ago. We can all remember when they were all black and everything. There has been a massive transformation over the past 10-15 years to turn what is basically unusable beaches into something...now the whole coast – they've spent a lot of money on marinas and things to make it pleasant to walk along."*

Specific positive mentions were made about reclaimed quarries, mines and slag heaps, which provide low or zero-cost access. The variety of landscape in the local area is appreciated – coast and countryside all within easy reach, and the variety of coastline representing wildlife (birds and seals), fishing and industry.

Ideas for more improvements were few. On the whole, respondents felt lucky to live in such an area and feel it is very underrated. Some suggestions were:

- More historical interpretation information in relation to old industrial sites.
- Litter (involvement of the schools / community in tackling the problem).
- Cleaner beaches (Sunderland in particular).
- More structured activities on the coast.

There is some concern about housing development and the spread of built up areas. Large new estates are felt to contribute to the loss of character villages in the area. There is also some regret about the reduced variety in farming, notably the reduction in dairy herds and selling off of homesteads.

## Cultural Services

The Durham MLP appears to deliver a very strong sense of place, of home. Respondents were largely born in the area, and their sense of home is most strongly related to the coast in its various forms and the industrial heritage.

*"Nobody's got what we've got ..."*

The area also delivers well on leisure and recreation, particularly provided by the coast with good facilities.

*"A naturally physical and fairly cheap outlet for the kids"*

The Cleadon Hills to the north, and the numerous denes, were specifically mentioned in relation to recreation, as are the reclaimed industrial sites eg old quarries. The area perhaps provides less well in terms of active or more 'extreme' recreation – it is associated more with regular gentle walks, playing on the beach, and admiring and learning about the local fauna and flora. Education about the old industry in the area is valued and is an area that could be further developed.

Learning and a sense of history are present, but appear less strong in this area. They mostly relate to the industrial heritage and people have to go further afield for the ancient historical ruins or castles that are perhaps more commonly associated with this cultural service.

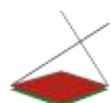
Other services such as calm and tranquillity, inspiration and getting away from it all appear to be delivered at a much lower level in this area. On a daily basis, the opportunity to access natural areas at first hand and to appreciate the changes in season do provide some sense of grounding, and the sea and boat activity has a soothing effect for some.

*"You're looking at something bigger than yourself. You're experiencing something close to serenity. When you look at a big view like that (the sea), it makes you feel as if you're there (the point of absolute calm)"*

However, these services do not appear to be provided on a widespread basis as people seemed not to perceive a great deal of woodland or talk about wide open spaces. There is a constant awareness of the level of built-up areas which may inhibit this, and respondents were more likely to refer to places outside their local area when discussing these services.

The Durham MLP does not seem to provide much in the way of spiritual fulfilment. Spiritual was often associated with the wonder of dramatic landscape formation, or ancient historical structures. Although history is present in the industrial form in this area, it is almost 'recent history' and does not give the same spiritual or inspirational value as the ancient remains of, for example, Hadrian's Wall, or the dramatic landscapes provided by the Lake District.

Respondents were conscious of taking their local area for granted, and felt that more could be done to enhance learning, particularly in relation to the industrial heritage.



## 7.7 Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes

### General Attitudes towards the Area

Many respondents had moved into the area rather than being 'born and bred', and some had returned as adults with a family, having left as teenagers. None worked in the landscape. The experiences varied from minimal interaction (those who mainly just drive through, perhaps enjoying views and short walks), to those who have moved into the area as a rural idyll for whom every day is a 'spiritual' experience, and / or they consider it a good place to bring up the kids giving them the freedom to cycle and play without supervision. They were mostly walkers to varying degrees. Those with younger children also used the beaches on weekends for a range of activities.

The geographic isolation of the area is valued:

*"It keeps its secrets very well. Part of being geographically isolated means that you can pretty much go to a stretch of beach and there won't be lots of people there; it won't be commercialised."*

The character area does not generally appear to be recognised within the boundaries as defined. Respondents tended to relate more to the coastal areas that are less commercially developed, omitting the towns and immediate areas around Skegness and Grimsby, for example. There is appreciation of the small village geography across the area, but less comfort in the extreme flat lands immediately behind the beaches. Respondents also tended to include the Wolds, which lie largely outside the area, and appreciated the undulations offered by these – going up from the flat lands lifts the spirits!

*"For me, Lincolnshire provides everything. Where I live is pretty bleak really but it's not far from the coast, but then you only have to drive 10 miles or so before you're in the Wolds ... it provides a variety of landscapes that are all within easy reach"*

### Attitudes towards the Character Descriptions

An assessment of the area descriptions shows that the key characteristics for people are:

- Areas of coast managed for wildlife (although the dunes were not widely mentioned spontaneously).
- A geographically isolated area (which is highly valued and the reason for individuals moving there).
- Land drained by numerous dykes, streams, rivers and ditches (although again these were not often mentioned spontaneously).
- Open, agricultural landscape (mentioned as characteristic of the area – although there was also reference to it being too open).

### Perceptions of Quality, Condition, Threats

Although woods are few and far between, they were referred to quite frequently. There were mixed views about the 'improved accessibility' provided by the Woodland Trust.

The area is considered to do less well in delivering activities for older / teen kids (there is apparently a big drug and drink problem). Generally, some commented on the lack of local



facilities.

Changes for the better include replacing the hedges and wildlife returning. On the downside, there were comments about:

- The increase in contract farming with a consequent lack of interest in the local environment and community.
- Sanitisation of the woods (wide tarmac paths and too many signs).
- House building.
- Shabby coastal areas / resorts.

## Cultural Services

The Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes do very well in delivering a sense of 'getting away from it all' and calm. The fact that it is relatively isolated with few major roads and is sparsely populated gives a sense of almost stepping back in time to a less stressful way of life.

*"My father comes to see me and says I live in a time capsule which is great!"*

The extent of coast and the clustering of tourist populations into a few resorts also means that beaches rarely have a lot of people.

*"If you don't want anybody, you don't have to go far to find that place"*

The area also performs well in terms of recreation and learning, where the safe environment allows children to enjoy the sort of freedom in childhood recalled by many adults. The variety of environments also offers lots of opportunity for informal learning. Wildlife is also important and ranges from foxes and badgers being fed in gardens, simply watching the rabbits and ducks on a local walk, to 'spotting' the more exotic bird species of the reserves.

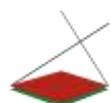
The sense of belonging is also well developed in this area, represented by the small, village communities and the extent to which people know and acknowledge each other.

The area is felt to provide a high level of spiritual feeling, again largely due to its relative isolation. The flat coast and marshes specifically produce strong emotions, even if they are not always positive or that comfortable.

*"Out towards the coast where it's very, very flat – I can see a sort of strange beauty in the reeds and the rushes but I always feel quite unsettled there- it's so flat, so barren; the wind whips across and to me, I don't find that a comforting landscape"*

History is perhaps less well represented in this area and had to be probed for. The ancient field systems and the history bound up within the marsh areas are good representations, but are less well known or appreciated.

Inspiration could be said to be provided by the area but at a lower level. For many respondents, the daily opportunity to 'commune with nature' is inspiration within itself, but the stronger emotions evoked by dramatic landscapes is missing, largely due to the lack of hills within the area.



## 7.8 Exmoor

### General Attitudes towards the Area

Respondents strongly related to the geographical scope of the area. However, they tended not to regard the western coastal strip as part of the NCA area or as part of Exmoor's identity. The focus groups' sample came mainly (but not exclusively) from the northern part of the area. Participants included several involved in the land in some way, and some of these had links to country sports in the area.

A distinct message from several participants was that the area's landscape gets taken for granted, although it is still very much appreciated. Several participants stated and agreed that they were guilty of taking the landscape for granted because they were 'in it' almost every day, but they realised it is an important part of their life, especially when they return after a visit away.

Several participants stated and agreed that the different parts of Exmoor's landscape make up 'a whole' which people identify with strongly.

*"I love all of Exmoor. You're free, it's still so unspoilt. It's so open, it has lots of plants. It's all wonderful. When you go away and come back, that's when you appreciate it. The hills are a test, going up and down, making you appreciate them."*

Many of the participants expressed a strong allegiance to Exmoor and its landscape, feeling that the combination of the people and the place gave the area and its residents a specific identity. Beyond Exmoor the main landscapes referred to were the local coast (although much of this was still in Exmoor and the NCA area) and the immediate hinterland, including the Quantock hills and the town of Taunton.

The outdoor activities and pursuits afforded by the Exmoor landscape are strongly appreciated and regarded as part of the essence of the place. The younger group felt that more should be done by public bodies to enable local teenagers to access and benefit from the outdoor opportunities and active pursuits.

Several participants expressed a sense of freedom afforded by the open hills and moorlands, in that these areas were accessible areas and gave a sense of freedom.

There was a strong consensus that Exmoor retained a restful nature and this was strongly appreciated. Participants regarded Exmoor as away from the bustle and the rat race. Even the younger group expressed this, although it was more prominent in comments amongst the older group.

### Attitudes towards the Character Description

There was most identification with the descriptions as follows:

- An area of high moorlands, dramatic valleys and steep wooded coast.
- Diverse upland.
- Broadleaved woodland.



- Deer.
- Villages in valley bottoms.
- Heather and grass moorlands.

*"Exmoor is a diverse upland landscape' and if you lose that diversity you've lost Exmoor."*

## Perception of Quality, Condition and Threats

To a great degree it was the perceived lack of change that was valued in the landscape. Overall it was regarded as a high-quality area with a high aesthetic value mainly consistent across the territory.

*"You can imagine going up on the moor and it hasn't changed in a hundred years - it hasn't got fences all over, there aren't A Roads going all over it. The lack of change is what's so amazing about Exmoor."*

Also, some recognised that it needed '*conserving not preserving*'.

Key threats to the landscape were expressed as increased traffic on the rural roads, speeding motorbikes at holiday times, the clutter from too many road signs, poor quality developments, and selective agricultural changes (see below).

There were also some concerns about changes in the coastal landscape.

*"The coastline around here is changing negatively. The coastline now – you look at it and it's not so natural. In one place the sand has been brought over from Wales. It's not so natural and we're trying to control it too much"*

There were both positive and negative effects expressed in relation to agriculture's influence on the landscape. Several participants from the older group noted that Exmoor had "real farmers" who worked long hours and were responsible for creating the landscape of Exmoor. Conversely, there was wide agreement that some new agricultural enterprises brought changes, especially "elephant grass" (for biomass energy) and extensive plastic sheeting, which were thought to be alien features in the Exmoor landscape.

Activities for young people needed to be promoted more and there was concern about the way of life changing due to commuters moving in.

There were some positive management activity mentioned such as stopping the destruction of hedges through grants and the removal of rhododendrons.

## Cultural Services

Participants' feedback suggests that Exmoor is seen as a highly distinct area with clear identity, offering a wide range of cultural services.

There appears to be a strong sense of place coming from the distinctive character of both the moorland itself and the landscape's diversity. This registered strongly with many participants and was closely linked to the area's identity.

The Exmoor moorland and the general character of the area appear to offer a strong sense of inspiration for many participants.



*"I know somebody who is paralysed who comes down here and she paints. Her carer takes her to Porlock or up on the moors and it inspires her to paint – she just loves it round here."*

Escapism and freedom from stress was a notable response to the Exmoor landscape by many participants.

*"It's pure escapism... You can walk out on the moors and time just stands still. If you see people you have time to stop and talk to them... The beauty of nature, a feeling you can really connect with nature, and leave work behind"*

Exmoor NCA also seems to strongly deliver on the more active and exhilarating side of leisure and recreation, whether from horse riding in the open landscape or from more outward-bound type leisure pursuits, and coastal recreation.

The open views and the general character of Exmoor offered a sense of calmness for several of the participants.

Several participants remarked that Exmoor offered a spiritual feeling for them. Elements of the landscape associated with spiritual benefits were cited as the sense of elevation, the historical features, flowing water, and wildlife.

Learning did not register with many participants, but it was strongly expressed by the few people who did feel they learnt directly about the natural world, the landscape and land management from experiencing the Exmoor landscape.

*"I feel very lucky I was able to see the animals and wildlife and do tree rubbings as part of my school trips around here. I learnt so much about natural beauty – I feel so lucky I was able to learn about those things by seeing them."*

A sense of history was noted as a cultural service, but only registered with a few participants. Aspects of the landscape offering a sense of history included the historic town of Dunster, ancient stones, barrows, and derelict iron workings.

## **Poetry inspired by the NCA**

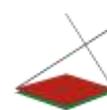
### ***Our walk***

*We walked around a punchbowl  
but we did not see a baby foal  
we saw lots of holly trees  
me Mum and Sami felt the breeze  
whilst me and Sami caught the leaves  
brackens starting to break down  
paths are green as green can be  
but one thing, there is no sea.*

### ***Exmoor Moorlands***

*Exmoor is beautiful in different ways like  
The bent over trees with the rustling leaves and  
The logos going down with a crash and a bang and  
The ponies running with clip-ety-clop over the heather and on their way.*

*Exmoor is noisy in different ways like  
The wind whistling in your ear and*



*The river swishing and swaying and running down as fast as it can and  
The birds flying everywhere making a racket.*

## 7.9 North Thames Basin

### General Attitudes towards the Area

The area is very disparate across its stretched West-East axis and it has several sub-areas. It was not regarded as a distinct recognised territory and even the character area description makes note that the NCA is an amalgam of four sub-areas. The focus groups' sample was mainly from the mid-west of the NCA.

There was an appreciation of the city-edge amenity generally. There was a strong realization across participants in both groups that the local landscape was a green-lung that offered opportunities and experiences away from the city and built up environment right next to it.

Several participants mentioned the ability to perceive a sense of remoteness and being 'away from it all' in parks, woods and fields, even though these places were still physically close to roads, settlements and infrastructure.

Local common wildlife was valued. Many participants in both groups valued the local wildlife such as deer, foxes and water birds, and regarded these as an important part of their experience of the landscape.

As stressed above, participants did not relate to the overall NCA but many did relate to more local areas around them or to local places that they visited. Many participants identified with the coastal part of the NCA as this was accessible and offered a nearby coastal experience.

Beyond the NCA the participants looked to London and to the whole of the UK – there were no major landscapes and NCAs that participants as a whole related to or were drawn to.

### Attitudes towards Character Description

Respondents seemed to relate mostly to the following elements:

- There is much woodland across the Hertfordshire Plateau and the Essex Wooded Hills and Ridges.
- Areas of wildlife importance within grasslands, heaths and fens add texture to the landscape.
- Mediaeval and later historic houses are key landmarks and features.
- Hertfordshire's large towns, the M25 and M1, railway lines, and electricity pylons are all prominent parts of the landscape.

The sense of appreciation of open landscape so close to a metropolis was palpable, suggesting that the following text in the character description is understated:

- It is an area where countryside and rural areas merge into the northern London suburbs.



## Perception of Quality, Condition and Threats

There was an expressed urge to protect what's left of the natural environment. Several participants across both groups suggested that the undeveloped landscape was particularly important in a situation so close to Greater London and that it needed safeguarding because of this.

*"You don't want it to become a place of ever extending development, getting engulfed by the vastness of London."*

Nonetheless there was recognition of positive change.

There was a recognition by participants, especially in the older group, that certain parts of the landscape, such as Lee Valley Park, reclaimed water features, waterways, walkways, and managed woodlands, had been improved and made an important positive contribution to the area.

In both groups it was recognized that the area is still subject to intense development pressure that can impact on many of the valued landscape experiences. There was a sense that the landscape is eroded at the edges, and impacted by infrastructure and pylons in concentrated places, but overall the integrity of the landscape still survives.

A few participants were concerned about the loss of woodland as there were currently many good examples.

There was a perceived threat from new road building and the effect of the M25, although some good practices were mentioned on the concealing of road bridges.

## Cultural Services

The NCA delivers quite well on all the cultural services listed for specific discussion, although they need seeking out.

Being able to use the local landscape to escape from the stress of work and pressures of life was a widely expressed view amongst the participants, and some people recognised the links to their physical health as well as mental health and wellbeing. The North Thames Basin landscape plays an important and valued role in providing this resource for people.

In particular there was a strong sense of history amongst the built environment and in woodlands and landscape features was well perceived by many participants in both groups.

*"I like Waltham Abbey for the history – the Abbey and many of the old pubs. It makes me feel proud."*

*"The woodlands are historic too – including Boadicea and the Battle of Epping Forest."*

This was a widely recognised benefit of the North Thames Basin landscape. Participants related to the opportunities offered by the landscape for both passive and for active leisure and recreation, and many stated this was a very important aspect of their life.

Sense of place and local identity was mentioned and implied by relatively few participants. The concept related to people's immediate local areas and not to the NCA area as a whole. Several



people referred to locally known viewpoints and open spaces, and these may help to create some local identity although not at the scale of the whole NCA area.

A few participants recognised that experiencing the area's landscape allowed them to understand elements of it more, such as the wildlife, the farmed landscape, the worth of hedges, and the historical significance of places.

*"We've learnt a lot about nature through walking, and about how things change through the seasons, and about the different crops."*

There appeared to be little true inspiration provided by the landscape of the North Thames Basin. People mentioned that they use and relate to the NTB landscape more for its other benefits, although most of them recognised that places such as Epping Forest and Lee Valley were important and had special qualities, although these locations were not mentioned as offering inspiration per se.

Spiritual benefits from the North Thames basin landscape hardly registered amongst the participants, although there were some implied references to spiritual benefits: the sense of being at one with yourself and the world, when experiencing certain places, such as tranquil woods and quiet water environments was stated by several participants.



## 8. Other Landscape Attitudes

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final one that reports and discusses the key findings that arise from the programme of qualitative research – the focus groups and interviews – that was carried out across the eight character areas.

The chapter contains a discussion of a number of issues that Natural England asked the study team to consider, namely:

- variety and simplicity
- naturalness v man-made (built) and man-made (management)
- openness v enclosure
- perception of quality and condition.

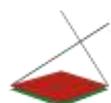
### 8.2 Variety and Simplicity

On the whole, variety and structure seemed to be valued more than simplicity as part of a whole landscape experience. The ability to see patterns, different colours, layers of views, and boundaries was very important, so it was important for the landscape to be well-punctuated with features. On a large scale, simplicity or 'unity of landscape' could be associated with wide large arable fields or featureless, flat landscapes that weren't highly valued. As a prevailing finding, variety as a characteristic in a landscape can make the landscape more valuable to people and can often help it perform better for services such as learning and discovery, inspiration etc. It appeared that simpler landscapes delivered such things with less intensity although unbridled 'openness' could be conducive to escapism and a sense of freedom.

On a smaller scale, there were aspects of simplicity that were appreciated, such as a long stretch of sand or a sand dune, wide open reeds swaying on a marsh, swathes of bluebells or snowdrops – these things had strong impact when in large quantities and close-up. This was also linked to unity within a feature (eg the repetition of something – a line of trees has a high aesthetic quality). Sometimes simplicity was valued for amenity benefits, such as a long towpath for cycling, a large playing field, or a smooth bald hill for sledging.

The cultural benefit of calm/tranquillity was often also more associated with a simpler experience. This might equate to a more uniform experience such as being in woodland or looking at a lake.

Most respondents seemed to want to experience variety in the sense of having a combination of features present in the landscape, so a valley bottom, then a hill, a wooded slope and a river were all important to the variety of the experience. Also, there was a prevalent choice of mixed woodland over woodland planted with the same trees, in rows.



### 8.3 Naturalness v Man-made (built) and Man-made (management)

The research shows that people related to 'perceived naturalness' in different ways. Mostly they see greenery or vegetation as natural and an essentially non-built-up environment. It is important for the landscape to be predominantly rural and for the main components to be 'countryside' ones.

The best or most preferred landscape experiences were those that were predominantly natural, in the sense of being green and predominantly rural. Generally, having non-built features in an experience was paramount amongst certain typologies (eg 'isolation seekers') and needed to be at the exclusion of man-made features. However, natural features mainly meant 'to do with nature' in their minds rather than something that exists (or would have existed) without the intervention of man. So fields and hedges are seen as mainly natural though, of course, people recognise that man has been involved in them. Woodland and moorland is seen as more natural and starts to be perceived as mostly 'wild'.

Areas of marsh, nature reserves or the tops of mountains are seen as totally 'wild' and perceived to be totally 'natural' in Natural England terms. However, in the majority of cases, people (when relating their landscape experiences) aren't talking about these kinds of areas.

*"And those places are like proper wild. No one does anything to them. And yet, they're kind of the way nature intended. Or the trees that are kind of half sideways from the wind and all that kind of stuff."*

*"We don't think of it, it doesn't come into your mind whether it is managed or not because it is just how we've always seen it."*

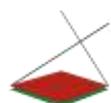
Many respondents, while wanting the landscape to be mainly 'green and countryside-like', often liked and needed the presence of some man-made features, especially for achieving a sense of history, for a feeling of community, or to provide accessibility to the landscape.

On the whole, man-made features were more acceptable within the landscape experience if they were historical old buildings that were perceived to blend in. So villages with traditional building methods, old churches, or thatched roofs were felt to be part of the 'the countryside experience', but modern housing estate and towns were not. But this does vary on the people typologies, so a 'tea-shop hunter' needs tea shops and a 'drive-througher' need roads, just as 'naturalists' need the sanctuaries for the particular type of wildlife they seek. Built man-made features on a smaller scale were also liked and thought to provide an element of discovery within a 'natural, mainly green' environment, such as coming across stone walls, stiles, old barns, old overgrown ruined cottage in the middle of nowhere,

*"Well, I think, primarily, what you'll find, I know we're not going for the Lake District yet, is dry stone walls fascinate people. The number of years ago that they were built and how they were built, where somebody was getting half a crown a day."*

*"Industry once it's finished becomes more appealing – like Beamish, rather than active industry ... the quaint industry."*

Other types of built man-made features that were considered important were solitary monuments or cairns on the top of hills, trig points or standing stones. Often the 'truly' inspiring encounters were when an ancient man-made feature was seen on its own in stark contrast to a mainly natural landscape.



*"I've gone for woodland probably forest. When you are walking around you can find anything, something new, every place is different. I have also gone for villages because I still like a sense that there is still someone there, I like a sense of community. A church two pubs and a couple of houses. I've gone for wildlife in this country and there are different animals, I mean apart from Australia. Historic Building and Remains for me is the best of these because even though it is man-made it is stuff that has happen even before I was alive and so there is always a story there. A story that is true it has been built. Like Stonehenge and why have they done that. I like the history Why? There is a reason for it, there is always a reason."*



© Countryside Agency Photo: McCoy-Wynne 03-8397

Example of small-scale, man-made feature valued within a mainly 'perceived to be natural' context.

People were interested also in man-made features such as paths, drovers roads and the mark of agriculture on the landscape (as opposed to a 'built' feature). So the effect of man's management on the landscape was valued per se, as previously said pastureland, hedges etc.

*"You need to protect something by grazing, otherwise it would just go back to wild. It would all go back to forest. You have to have some farming. There is a farmer who has gone organic and it is wonderful out there now, there is a pond with ducks and chickens and cows and pigs and it is really a lovely assets for the village and of course the landscape has changed because of it. I think it is an asset."*



© Countryside Agency - Photographer John Tyler

Clearly 'naturalness' was a subjective term and many saw this as being a well-trimmed hedgerow as well as a natural marsh habitat. So they did question what 'naturalness' was ("*It depends how far back you go*"). On the whole they tended not to agree that going back before man's intervention meant something was more 'natural' ("*otherwise we would have to re-plant the trees that were everywhere before Roman times*"). This did not apply to industrial features that they felt had been cleverly re-naturalised, or some areas of wetland that had been re-created. However, the stopping of river dredging in order to improve wetlands at the detriment of grassland or fields was criticised. Respondents were quite reasonable in thinking that there was not a blanket approach to be had towards such issues – that that it depended on the context.

*"The two go hand in hand. Plus you've also got areas here which, without the land being managed, they would be uninhabitable. And as they're uninhabitable, people can't live there and they can't develop a living from it so it's a big kind of balance. For me, that was why I put moorland down rather than all of those because moorland really is an area which is managed by an independent body"*

Attitudes towards the level of management required in a landscape varied slightly by region, with the South Eastern respondents (NTB and North Downs) being more interested in managed places, with those from more wild areas (Lincolnshire/Eden) perceiving that they wanted less – although these were also areas that were very supportive of farming.

*"I think we are too densely populated and things are too small to have really wild areas. Not in this area (North Downs) we haven't got the land. The reason we like it because we have the orchards which brings in the birds and it would be stupid for us to think it is not managed."*

Perceptions of what 'wild' meant ranged from thinking that there would be no management to a very 'rugged' and isolate place (the latter being perceived to be naturally wild – moors etc). In the former case there was concern about leaving the landscape to go too wild because it was felt it would look too scruffy. Also, management (through grazing or coppicing, for example) was thought to be good for wild flowers on heathland or downland.

*"It can, it can take over and there's certain things that might take over, certain weeds that you don't want to take over and then, which would stifle, you know, like rare sort of plants and stuff"*

*"They are trying to get all the sheep off the fells because they want to return it to its natural state. But what they don't understand that its natural state is scrub, it'll just be heather and yes you might get a few natural grasses and*

*wild flowers and thousands of rabbits but it won't look pretty anymore."*

*"We've got, at the bottom of the farm where we are we've got this patch of, it's a strip isn't it down the bottom of the peaks, that is said to have scientific interest or something like that, and its been left and left and left, not worked or done anything, and it is just grass, it's nothing, I suppose it's just for the animals and the butterflies and whatever else, but it doesn't look appealing, it looks like a wasteland, and there just doesn't seem to be a lot of stuff there anymore."*

Respondents thought that a field pattern with hedges needed a lot of looking after, but moorland would not. So they wanted management where appropriate. If there were selected areas where it was necessary to let things go wild to encourage a certain type of wildlife then people trusted 'the authorities' to do this and they imagined it would not be too intrusive to their own enjoyment. Some would say: as long as the main 'ways' are protected for walkers. They also thought that people didn't need to be helped to have access to the truly wild places, that they should exist in essence for themselves. Such places would naturally be for the minority as only keen explorers would go there anyway, people thought.

*"It would be a shame if we lost the truly wild places."*

*"You need boundaries and walks, you need management".*

Some were a little defensive about trying to get back to 'indigenous' species because of the cost and effort involved:

*"If you are going to make everything indigenous that you would have to re-plant the length and breadth of this area. I mean even heather moorland, that has only come up since the trees went. In Maria woods they are trying to get rid of the Knotweed but they spend I don't know how much time and money and they are never going to get rid of it."*

At the other end of the scale, there was interest and appeal for many in 'estate-managed' land, although there were some dissenters of the 'Capability Brown' look (possibly more in the North). Parkland was valued as an easy convenient experience away from the town but perceived to be semi-natural.

*"We like a managed wilderness. We want it to be kept the way we want it to be If anyone goes down to Brock Hill (Kent). It is a park lack with woodland around it. It is still managed with paths but away from the path it is left to do what it is going to do. We take the kids there and it is pleasant you know what you are getting and I don't want to sanitize it but you do know you are going to see wildlife, have a walk around and be in the country but you can park your car safely. That is nicely managed but it would be wild but I wouldn't say it was gentle either."*

People chose a wilder, more rugged or more isolated landscape more when they wanted adventure, activity, discovery and solitude (often more male). Whereas the more comfortable landscapes (soft rolling hills, pastoral) were more seen as 'the norm' and delivered safety to many. Areas with high levels of management (lots of paths) were also convenient for families, children and people with disabilities.

It appeared that landscape with different proportions of man-made (built) to 'natural' or wilder characteristics delivered different cultural services to greater or lesser degree. So the more natural a landscape, the more escapism achieved or the more man-made features the more a sense of history was delivered. So where a landscape has a greater incidence of standing stones, stone walls or castles, it might be sensible to say that it is better at delivering a sense of history than ones with a lower incidence of such features.



## 8.4 Openness v Enclosure

On the whole, openness seemed to be valued more than enclosure for being a main contributor towards escapism.

*"If I'm out with the dogs and I want fresh air and freedom and everything like that, then I prefer the open landscapes"*

*"The emptiness of it - it's like that's how it was for thousands and thousands of years."*

*"We live away from anybody else so it's every day – just going out to the car and its open space."*

However, it was important to have contrast within a landscape experience to cause the openness to be more impressive, such as coming out of woods onto an edge with an amazing view.

*"It feels quite secluded and private but has the views as well".*

*"I like the woodland with its shade, then out into the bright open countryside. The wood is on a hill so it doesn't seem to be flat land. A child is riding a bike which suggests a bridleway or footpath – good for outdoor adventures such as walking, cycling, horse riding etc".*

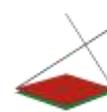
Openness and distance, seeing far-off horizons, was important for calmness and a feeling of 'man's place' in the world.

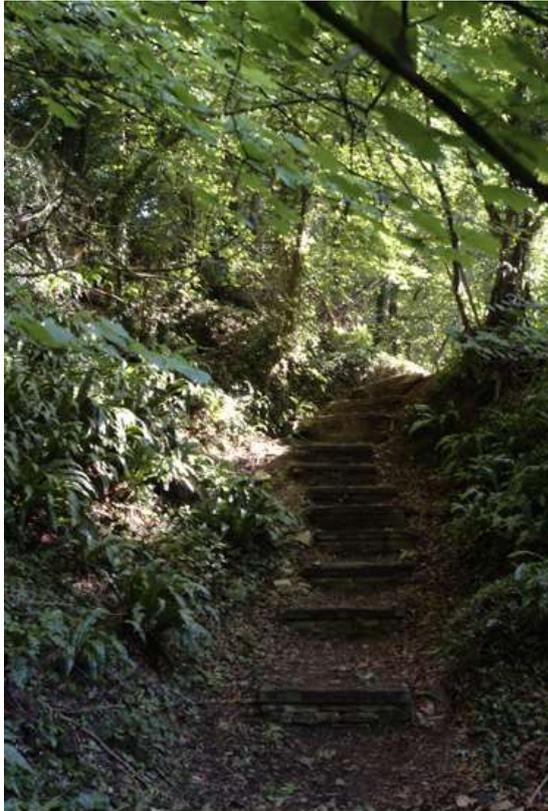
*"Like you were saying before, up at Howton Fell, you get up there and you can see right the way down to Ullswater and right the way down towards the fells at Tebay and you hear the skylarks and the grouse."*

The 'wow' factor of a high view can be the culmination of a landscape experience, being able to oversee the land from a distance (being able to see patterns in miniature).

Enclosure (such as woodland, deep-cut ways, or high hedges) created variety and structure to an experience. Here more contemplative emotions were produced and more magical senses were highlighted. Within woodland, comments were made about open woodland versus more dense woodland. The womb-like aspect was mentioned, and some people were just drawn to woodland.

*"It just does. If I feel like I want to escape on my own, I quite like being in an enclosed, little space like forests and woodland and stuff like that, I'm quite happy there."*





© Countryside Agency/ Photographer Jo Ward 06-183

Photo often chosen to represent enclosure (called 'womb-like'), magical place with 'secret' path and deep cutting made by man over the centuries.

There was a recognition that enclosure, such as woodland, can be the **only** way to locally find peace and isolation because it shields you from areas of population, from the noise of roads in a way that high open land would not (the North Thames Basin is relevant here).

*"Epping Forest as a child – it was a trip out, a family event. It was a place that felt massive – you lost your cares. You could run about, climb trees and you lost your shackles within reason. You felt miles from anywhere. The sense of freedom and being away from everything."*

Enclosed environments could also be threatening for some people (often lone females) whereas open environments meant you could see people coming from a long way off. With enclosure, some people perceived there to be less of a complete contrast to the indoors, or built environment, than open landscapes provide.

*"When I'm out in the country I feel just absolutely free, and wild. I feel enclosed indoors. Freedom of having fresh air, trees, breeze... away from cars and pollution. When you're outside it takes your mind off everything."*

## 8.5 Perception of Quality and Condition

As we have noted from the NCA-specific chapter, respondents have a limited ability to analyse the landscape around them in terms of quality and condition (in Natural England's terms). It was extremely difficult for respondents to grasp the concept of change without being shown specific examples and, sometimes, quite poor-quality land delivered benefits.

Participants could certainly understand the encroachment of man-made development or large areas of ugly wasteland, mainly brownfield areas: 'very scruffy and unused'. They can see the effect of poor farming practices such as removing hedges or when arable farming takes over too much. The over-sanitisation of some areas, such as concrete paths put in woodland was mentioned, but they also liked to access areas and appreciated 'boardwalks' in wet areas.

Often change would have to be quite extreme to be thought a problem, eg 'the rivers running dry!', all the walls and hedges falling down and not being repaired. There were some subtleties appreciated in the management of woodland so people noticed overgrown (and therefore inaccessible) woods, or en masse or insensitive tree felling. Newly-planted trees in regimented rows was a 'bug bear' for some.

Improvement is often regarded as better-kept hedges or more information signs at nature reserves or historic sites. Sometimes, however, it is felt to be manifest through the returning of certain species of wildlife through land management practices.

People were generally very happy with the way the landscape looked (apart from housing development) and wanted it protected: "we want them to look like they always looked!"

The main threat towards having the landscape 'look like it has always looked' was perceived to be housing development, but also changes in working patterns eg commuting and the perceived loss of village life. Other threats were often more to do with the built environment than the landscape around it (eg in shabby economically deprived towns, old redundant market towns, shabby seaside towns). On the positive side, there were some better examples of small housing developments built in-keeping and with local stone; small enclaves in villages, irregular housing shapes etc.

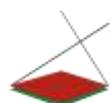
There was a concern about the loss of wildlife habitats generally, though not specifically. There was some concern about changes in the landscape due global warming (eg flooding and the loss of the seasons). Cliff erosion was also mentioned as a problem but not felt to be stoppable.

Again people were more able to judge the condition of built features (such as the preservation of historic monuments, crumbling drystone walls or scruffy farm buildings) rather than natural features. The exceptions to this were beaches or coastline, with people feeling able to judge 'cleanliness' here, although some of this is driven by reports on water quality.

Other observations on quality were to do with the 'atmosphere' of the landscape, including too much noise from traffic or trains, or too much light at night to see the stars.

Some people were able to comments on 'good' landscaping, including the hiding of roads, car parks with planting and high banks.

There were also some comments about the improved opportunities to visit nature reserves (and reclaimed industrial sites) either as attractions, or as places for wildlife. And, finally, farming sites where they've been 'diversifying' for the benefit of visitors.





## 9. Comparisons with Previous Research

### 9.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have set out the core findings that have arisen from the research. This current chapter looks at how this research compares with other research carried out on this topic (or similar ones).

### 9.2 Comparisons with Previous Research

This section looks at some main messages from the literature and former surveys on landscape perceptions, and compares them to the thrust of the findings in this project. The section does not look in fine detail at views of specific landscape types and cultural services contained in past surveys and compare them to findings in this survey – this is because the context for each survey inevitably influences its scope, its questions and its participants, making direct comparisons difficult. Thus the points below cover some of the key generic issues that arise across the literature and in past surveys, and consider them as they relate to this survey. While there are important nuances and points of detail to discuss, we have found nothing from the findings arising from this project that appear grossly at odds with the literature and with trends from past surveys of landscape perceptions.

#### Passive versus Active Experience of the Landscape

As noted in section three the Stage I report from this study (see Appendix A) some of the stimulus used in previous studies for obtaining people's views on landscape has been two-dimensional, for example by seeking reactions to photographs or computer-graphic images of landscape. The key concern here is that respondents are considering the landscape solely in a passive way, from what they select and are prompted by within the photographs or images. By contrast, if people are interviewed following an activity such as a walk, or at a specific location in the landscape, there can be concerns that the response is solely of an active nature, immediately relating to that activity and place, and not allowing the person to sufficiently reflect on their wider experiences of landscape.

This study has captured a wide range of comment and feedback from participants, and the nature of the comments suggests that they relate to both active and passive modes of experiencing the landscape. This is certainly the case in the focus groups, where individuals were relating to both modes of experience. Photographs of the area's key characteristics, and aerial photographs showing part of the NCA location were available for participants, but only as a selective stimulus and not as a prolonged focus for comment and discussion. The verbal prompts for feedback invited comments of both an active and a passive type.

In the extended creativity sessions there was more stimulus material and more small group discussion as part of the activity and the feedback. Again, there was no exclusive focus on either passive or active modes – as in the focus groups, people had opportunities to reflect on all their current and past experiences and activities that attuned them to the landscape.

The in-depth interviews did relate more to an active mode as they concerned the participants'



experiences from a specific walk. However, the interview questions not only asked about feedback from the walk experience, but also about the interviewees' general attitudes to landscape experiences. They also sought views on how the participants might have liked to experience the area of the walk in a different (mainly active) way, other than by walking.

### **Whole or Parts?**

We have raised the issue of the degree to which people perceive (and have been prompted by other surveys to perceive) the landscape as a whole or in more distinct parts.

The feedback from the focus groups in this study suggests that individual participants varied in their perspective, depending on the context and depending on the prompt or questions. But we found no key trend towards people automatically perceiving the landscape as a whole, or in distinct parts. At times a person's comments related to the collective features or characteristics, and at times they picked up on the detail of the landscape and related to particular features or characteristics.

In the depth interviews following people's walks, the responses related at times to the overall experience and the overall mood and character of the landscape, and at times to specific features that were observed or sensed during the walk.

Thus, because of the nature of the questions and prompts and the low-key use of photographs as stimulus, it is not felt that respondents in this study gave a bias towards either whole or parts of landscapes.

### **Residents/Visitors and Insiders/Outsiders**

*"The visitor's evaluation of the environment is essentially aesthetic. It is an outsider's view. The outsider judges by appearance, by some formal canon of beauty. A special effort is required to empathise with the lives and values of the inhabitants."*

Yi-Fu Tuan Topophilia<sup>10</sup>

There is the prospect that residents and visitors will vary in their perceptions of a particular landscape, which in turn may influence people's experience of the landscape and the cultural services they obtain from it. This general distinction amongst people is sometimes described as 'insiders and outsiders' in the literature. Key issues here include:

- People may take their home place for granted and do not see its special characteristics in a regional or a national context.
- People visiting an area may be more receptive to aspects of landscapes that they visit, because they are unfamiliar to them and receptive to features and characteristics that they find striking or different.
- Visitors may perceive a landscape in a more abstract way and not pick up on its functional aspects, whereas residents (especially those more connected to the land or land-based industries) may regard the local landscape as a more functional-based entity.

For all the focus groups, creativity groups and depth interviews, this study recruited participants who were predominantly resident in each of the respective NCA areas. There were a variety of

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<sup>10</sup> Tuan Y F (1974) Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values Prentice Hall



occupations amongst the participants so they were not skewed towards any main types of professions, activities or value systems. Where participants did not reside within the area they lived close to it and had some familiarity with it.

This study must be recognised as capturing the view of residents in the main, and thus the results should be registered with that in mind. However, the geographical scale of each NCA area means that the mode in which some participants responded varied between resident and visitor (or insider and outsider) although, in the main, people were still relating to a region that they identified with as their general home-landscape. Thus it should be noted that samples using greater proportions of visitors might yield different results to some of the issues explored by this study. However, we are confident that one of our main conclusions in relation to cultural services will be valid for any mix of resident/visitors sample – that people obtain locally-available cultural services from their own area and travel (near or far) to specific places elsewhere to obtain the particular cultural services of most interest to them, or that they might wish to discover. This is a simple yet important factor to register from this study.

### **Interpreting Catch-all Perceptions**

Many previous surveys report catch-all words and phrases used by people to express positive perceptions of a landscape. Such prominent terms especially include:

- Natural;
- Freedom;
- Peace;
- Beautiful;
- Attractive, and;
- Diverse.

Within this study we also found participants instinctively using such terms ('natural' and 'freedom' in particular). Our approach in the study was, where possible, to probe these terms to explore if they had further and deeper meaning to the participant – for example, 'freedom' from what, 'natural' in what particular way, or 'peaceful' in what sense? These terms appear to be resonant throughout many landscape perception studies, including this one, and thus it is important to recognise the qualities in some landscapes that evoke these reactions from people. However, on their own, they may not be precise enough to point to specific cultural services and experiences, which is why we attempted to probe them and qualify them wherever possible in this study.

### **Communities and Cultural Heritage as Part of the Landscape**

The role of people's past and current activities and livelihoods in an area is frequently perceived as part of the cultural heritage of landscapes, and an integral part of a landscape's character. Our study found similar views throughout the feedback received from participants – communities, settlements, key industries and activities were recognised as part of, not separate from the landscape. This emphasises the importance of recognising the human dimension of a landscape's character when considering how people experience it and derive services from it.



## Prospect-Refuge

Amongst seminal texts on landscape experience and landscape aesthetics there is much discussion on whether, and to what degree, the basic biological needs of humans (including safety, shelter, water supply and sustenance) influence people's perceptions of landscapes in an aesthetic sense, despite these elemental needs no longer being at the forefront of our concerns, especially in western society. One of the main assumed biological needs discussed by key references such as Appleton<sup>11</sup> and by Bourassa<sup>12</sup> is the 'prospect-refuge' theory, that is having the ability to survey the landscape while also being within reach of safety and security. It can be argued that the prospect-refuge concept is today translated into having views over the landscape from people's houses, farms, cars, or from services and amenities. Although not testing the prospect-refuge theory, this study found nothing to contradict the concept and some participants did link views and vantage points with an ability to retreat to comfort. Further issues that could be seen as relating to prospect-refuge concept are discussed in the following two subsections below.

### Safety and Perceptions of Personal Safety

Some studies report some respondents expressing concerns over personal safety when experiencing the landscape and visiting outdoor locations. These respondents select the location and the time of their outdoor activities in the landscape to avoid or minimise safety concerns, and this factor is significant in their experience of the landscape. Our study was not set up to directly capture views on personal safety and we did not record it as being a dominant issue across participants' feedback. However, some participants, notably some women, did register it as something that influenced and altered the circumstances in which they visit and experience the landscape.

*"I don't walk in isolated areas on my own, but I will go to those areas with the children." "When I felt isolated I wouldn't go as far as I would with the family because of the sense of isolation."*

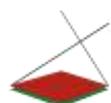
### How Influential are Services and Amenities in People's Experience of Landscape?

Some previous studies, found that the availability and the type of services can influence people's destination for visiting and experiencing the landscape. Thus factors like food and cafes, toilets, litter, and car parking, all amount to practical issues which dictate how and where many people experience the landscape, and this can be more of an influence on people's experience and where they choose to go than the nature of the landscape itself. Also, there may be key differences in visitors' and near-residents' perceptions here, with visitors from outside the area more dependent on such facilities. Our study was not structured to directly address the issue of services and amenities and their influence on people's destinations, behaviour and perceptions. We did not find that these issues were dominant amongst the participants' views. We did however capture some feedback that referred to the draw of services and amenities, including pubs and cafes, as people's gateway to experiencing the landscape. Information was also found to be important. However, the dominance of residents from the NCA area in the sample may have influenced the nature of this feedback.

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<sup>11</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*. London: John Wiley, 1975.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Bourassa, *The Aesthetics of Landscape*. London: Belhaven, 1991



## Relaxing and De-stressing

The ability to use the landscape for relaxation and to switch off from work pressures and daily routines was a major and significant message that this study captured in all the focus groups, creativity sessions and depth interviews. This response from people is common across the landscape literature and in other studies, and is even historically important, such as when American landscape architect and parks pioneer Frank Olmstead recommended setting up a National Parks system for people to “exercise the contemplative faculty”. Another take on this is the 2006 Dutch<sup>13</sup> study reviewed in Appendix A, which notes the importance of ‘being idle’ in the landscape. Our project’s results reinforce the common and unsurprising finding of the value of the landscape for relaxation, but we are struck by the degree of emphasis placed on this factor by the respondents, and by the frequency and extent to which ‘escape from stress’ has been voiced as the issue, more so than relaxation *per se*. We do not feel that the ‘de-stressing’ role of experiencing the landscape has been stated so frequently and strongly in previous studies.

## Quality Time

Although linked to relaxation, the study picked up a further, strongly emphasised point by participants – that of ‘quality time’. Thus many people referred to the ability to switch off and gain a closer rapport with friends or with family when walking, visiting or experiencing the landscape in some way. Many of these respondents also stated that the chance to experience quality family time, or slower time, was a challenge in today’s hectic lifestyles, and thus it was especially valued. The issue of ‘quality time’ is not a distinct finding in other studies we have reviewed, although it is picked up to a limited degree in The North East Green Spaces study<sup>14</sup>. We would suggest that it needs noting as a significant benefit from experiencing the landscape, and one that many people now recognise of having importance in their lives.

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<sup>13</sup> Farjon, H. et al for the Dutch Ministry: Milieu en Natuur Plan Bureau (2006 and onwards) Monitoring Programme of Perception and Appreciation of Landscapes in the Netherlands.

<sup>14</sup> Wood Holmes Group for Countryside Agency (2005) Countryside In and Around Towns – North East Greenspace



## 10. Discussion of Findings

### 10.1 Introduction

This penultimate chapter stands back and reviews the findings of this study and seeks to identify the extent to which it has been able to answer the questions raised by the brief. In doing so it goes back to first principles. It discusses:

- The definitions relating to landscape; cultural services and experiential qualities.
- The cultural services that landscapes deliver, as identified through this study.
- The delivery of cultural services by different landscape features.
- The effect of different landscape characteristics on the delivery of cultural services including those of landscape quality and condition.
- Whether, in the words of the European Landscape Convention, 'all landscapes matter'.
- What can be learnt from the individual NCAs in terms of what people value about their landscape and how they would describe it.
- The extent to which the different NCAs deliver different combinations of cultural services.
- What the above means for the role out of the updated National Character Area descriptions.

These are considered in turn below.

### 10.2 Definitions

#### The Meaning of Landscape

While the meaning of landscape is a huge topic in its own right, it is worth briefly reflecting on the definition of landscape and how perceptions of landscape affect the services or benefits that people derive from it.

As noted at the outset, the European Landscape Convention (ELC) defines landscape as "*an area as perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors.*"

This study has clearly demonstrated that people see the English landscape as the result of the interaction of natural and human factors but that these physical and cultural interactions alone do not define the services delivered or benefits felt – perceptions have a key role to play. Foremost amongst the factors that influence these perceptions are those of season (the colour of fields and leaves), weather (scudding clouds, a shaft of sunlight) and time of day (the setting sun) – all temporal factors. The term perception may also imply that landscape is experienced through sight alone but from this study it is clear that all the senses come into play:

- sound – the rustle of leaves a babbling brook, birdsong;
- smell – wild flowers, cut hay, the freshness of the air;
- feel – the nature of the surface: smooth, rutted or the feel of wind, rain or sunshine on the skin, and;
- taste – the taste of salt in the air and (although not explored through this study) the taste



of food and drink associated with particular landscapes and localities, such as the rhubarb of Wakefield.

As noted at the outset of this report, the sensation of the landscape experience is key to the overall services and benefits achieved. The non-cerebral benefits of 'feeling a thrill', getting an adrenalin rush, hearing the tiniest of sounds, feeling the hairs on the back of the neck or the wind in your hair, or just experiencing silence were regularly mentioned. It is as if modern life creates a degree of 'sensory deprivation' that can be unlocked through the experience of landscape.

## Cultural Services and Experiential Qualities

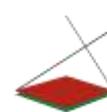
The study brief refers to both *cultural services* and *experiential qualities* provided by landscapes. At this point some further (concise) definitions are potentially helpful. In describing landscape, landscape professionals may refer to:

- *aesthetic qualities* (of the landscape): how we subjectively 'interpret' the form and arrangement of the landscape and its component parts, for example in terms of scale (small – vast), enclosure (enclosed – exposed), diversity (simple – complex), colour (muted – colourful), the manifestation of the overall 'view' or 'scene';
- *perceptual qualities* (of the landscape): personal, more subjective responses to the landscape coloured by the experience of the individual eg senses of tranquillity, exposure, wildness, remoteness, security, quality of light and perceptions of beauty or scenic attractiveness.

In turn, through the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), the term *environmental services* or *ecosystem services* was introduced. These can be defined as the wide range of valuable services or benefits to people provided by a healthy environment or landscape. An important group of these services is the cultural services. These are services that, while not necessarily required for human survival, are vital for quality of life and human well-being (detailed further below).

Last in this list of definitions is *experiential qualities*, another term used by landscape professionals that captures all aspects of how we experience landscapes and which therefore can be used as a 'catch all' for aesthetic and perceptual qualities and cultural services.

What has become clear from this study though, is that it is unhelpful to become too pedantic about terminology as there is much overlap. For instance, *perceptual qualities* can be seen both as an aspect of the landscape (such as tranquillity) and a service (quietness / calm) and can be described as an *experiential quality*. In this study and in this final chapter, therefore, we have focused on the cultural services or benefits provided by landscapes, making separate reference to aesthetic and perceptual qualities where this is helpful.



### 10.3 Cultural Services Delivered by Landscape

#### Choice of Cultural Services for this Study

As has been discussed before, within this study we researched and related people’s responses to eight cultural services:

- Sense of History (or heritage).
- Sense of Place (identity, home).
- Inspiration (stimulus).
- Calm (relaxation, tranquillity).
- Leisure and Activities (recreation).
- Spiritual.
- Learning (education).
- Escapism (getting away from it all).

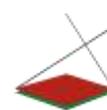
The purpose of this list of services was to provide a starting point, prompt and framework for the discussions with participants. It was certainly never seen as a definitive list and was based on a review of both the cultural services identified through the MA (as attached to the study brief) and the results of past studies in the UK into the benefits provided by England’s landscape.

Table 10.1, which shows the evolution of this list of services from that in the MA, shows the list of services used in this study is both shorter and partially different to that in the MA, as the MA:

- has an international outlook, including perspectives more relevant to the developing world;
- includes some services that are potentially duplicatory in a UK context, and;
- does not include some services that have been identified as important in past research in England, such as Calm and Escapism.

**Table 10.1: Comparison of the MA cultural services and those used in this study**

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA)		Services used in this study
Service	MA definition	
Cultural diversity	The diversity of <i>landscapes</i> is one factor influencing the diversity of cultures	X
Spiritual and religious values	Many religions attach spiritual and religious values to <i>landscapes</i> or their components	Spiritual
Knowledge systems	<i>Landscapes</i> influence the types of knowledge (traditional and formal) developed by different cultures	Learning / education
Educational values	<i>Landscapes</i> and their components and processes provide the basis for both formal and informal education in many societies	
Inspiration	<i>Landscapes</i> provide a rich source of inspiration for art, folklore, national symbols, architecture and advertising	Inspiration / stimulus
Aesthetic values	Many people find beauty or aesthetic values in <i>landscapes</i> , as reflected in the support for parks and scenic drives	X (see below)



Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA)		Services used in this study
Service	MA definition	
Social relations	<i>Landscapes</i> influence the types of social relations that are established in particular cultures. Fishing societies, for example, differ in their social relations to nomadic tribes	X
Sense of place	Many people value the ‘sense of place’ that is associated with recognised features of their environment	Sense of place
Cultural heritage values	Many societies place high value on the maintenance of historically important landscapes and landscape features	Sense of history
Recreation and ecotourism	People often choose where to spend their leisure time based on the character of the <i>landscape</i>	Leisure and activities
		Calm
		Escapism

In this list, an interesting service is that of Aesthetics. Clearly beautiful landscapes is a service delivered in plentiful quantities across much of England, but at the outset of this study it was felt that this might be a difficult service to tease out and distinguish from a purely descriptive term. This is something that is picked up below.

### The Cultural Services delivered by Landscape

Through this study, the original list of cultural services proved a good starting point and many of the responses neatly fitted under these headings. But, in addition, the study findings indicated other services that are clearly delivered by the landscape – those of Stress relief, Health and exercise, Quality time, and Relationships. This full range of services identified by people through this study is summarised in Table 10.2.

**Table 10.2: Services delivered by landscapes as identified through this study**

Service	Overall range of service as expressed by participants
<b>Sense of history (or heritage)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encountering human artefacts and features (including those with cultural, spiritual, and industrial functions) which provide a sense of history;</li> <li>• Encountering natural and landscape features which provide a sense of history;</li> <li>• Perceiving the history and vintage of a whole landscape;</li> <li>• Perceiving a sense of continuity through time, either from natural features such as woodlands, or man-made features and artefacts;</li> <li>• Feeling one amongst many through history (the essence of mankind) eg when at a vantage point, or an unchanged popular place, or sacred location;</li> <li>• Making your mark in the landscape now, amongst past and future generations linked to that landscape.</li> </ul>

Service	Overall range of service as expressed by participants
<p><b>Sense of place (identity, home)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central to your own identity eg. “<i>The landscape is part of my self-identity</i>” (Eden Valley);</li> <li>• Feeling connected to a place because of some individual or combination of characteristics and features in that landscape;</li> <li>• Relating to a landscape’s features and characteristics because you live in the area or have a sense of belonging there;</li> <li>• Sensing a landscape’s distinctive characteristics, whether or not you live or feel you belong there.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Inspiration (stimulus)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensing inspiration because of the perceived quality of the landscape;</li> <li>• Sensing inspiration because of particular characteristics or features of the landscape are striking or have some personal meaning;</li> <li>• Sensing inspiration because of one’s particular location within the landscape eg elevated, enclosed, dramatic views;</li> <li>• Sensing inspiration because of one’s activity within the landscape;</li> <li>• Feeling inspired to artistic activity because of features or characteristics of the landscape;</li> <li>• Prompted to undertake a specific activity because of what the landscape affords;</li> <li>• Perceiving an emotional response, such as invigoration, awe, excitement, anxiety, risk, danger, adventure, because of the character of the landscape or certain features in it eg, one’s response to a dark woodland, an open moorland, the lack of light pollution;</li> <li>• Discovering new experiences and new aspects of nature and the world not previously encountered (linked to education and learning);</li> <li>• Sensory stimulus: experiencing and learning about different tastes, smells, textures, noises (linked to education and learning).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Calm (relaxation, tranquillity)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling calm or relaxed because of the tranquillity of the landscape;</li> <li>• Feeling calm or relaxed due to the setting and experience of the landscape, whether or not it is tranquil;</li> <li>• Feeling switched-off from one’s normal activities (linked to stress relief);</li> <li>• Slowing down physically or mentally because of what is afforded by the landscape experience (linked to quality time);</li> <li>• Feeling calm or relaxed because of the sensory experience of the landscape, especially lack of noise;</li> <li>• Feeling calm or relaxed because of the undeveloped or undisturbed character of the landscape;</li> <li>• Feeling a sense of comfort.</li> </ul>

Service	Overall range of service as expressed by participants
<b>Leisure and activities (recreation)</b>	<p>This relates to many other services in that leisure and recreation is often integral to the activity that helps provide other cultural services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking passive leisure or recreation (from painting to rambling, watching wildlife to pottering on the beach);</li> <li>• Undertaking active leisure or recreation (from rock climbing to canoeing, mountain biking to horse riding);</li> <li>• Undertaking a specialist activity or pastime;</li> <li>• Undertaking challenges / pursuing adventure.</li> </ul>
<b>Spiritual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceiving one's place in the world;</li> <li>• Perceiving one's place amongst the scale of nature and the landscape;</li> <li>• Recognising the otherness of nature;</li> <li>• Feeling humbled in the presence of nature and the landscape;</li> <li>• Perceiving a place or feature of the landscape as sacred or mystical;</li> <li>• Perceiving a religious experience due to one's situation and experience in the landscape;</li> <li>• Sensing a God or Creator in the wider scheme of things;</li> <li>• Life-affirming feelings or a raising of the spirits from experiencing a landscape.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning (education)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning about the natural forces and elements of the landscape eg soils, hedgerows, wildlife, natural processes, geology, history, ecology;</li> <li>• Learning about the human forces and elements present in the landscape;</li> <li>• Learning about activities, industries, crafts and skills currently or previously relevant to that landscape;</li> <li>• Learning and understanding about oneself eg. one's mental and physical response to different environments; understanding one's strength and limits in challenging environments; pursuing challenges;</li> <li>• Learning to lead life differently, more simply;</li> <li>• Discovering new experiences and new aspects of nature and the world not previously encountered (linked to Inspiration (stimulus));</li> <li>• Sensory learning: experiencing and learning about different tastes, smells, textures, noises (linked to inspiration and stimulus).</li> </ul>
<b>Escapism (getting away from it all)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of release and freedom;</li> <li>• The ability to lose oneself (metaphorically);</li> <li>• Different experiences from the norm afforded by the landscape, which can have different emotional responses, from calmness to invigoration (linked to inspiration and stimulus);</li> <li>• A switch off from work, daily pressures and routines, afforded by the landscape (linked to stress relief);</li> <li>• Feeling free of noise, development and intrusion (linked to calm, relaxation and tranquillity).</li> </ul>

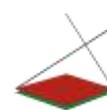
Service	Overall range of service as expressed by participants
<b>Stress relief</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A switch off from work environment and work pressures which relieves stress;</li> <li>• A switch off from daily pressures and routines which relieves stress;</li> <li>• A distraction from a current or inherent stress in one’s life;</li> <li>• Regaining a balance and sense of perspective.</li> </ul>
<b>Health and exercise</b>	<p>This is closely related to aspects of stress relief but also relates to people’s desire for healthy lifestyles and exercise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving physical health in attractive surroundings;</li> <li>• Using local accessible landscapes for physical activity and healthy exercise;</li> <li>• ‘feeling better’ the cleansing affect of the natural environment.</li> </ul>
<b>Quality time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time standing still – regaining time;</li> <li>• Quality time for personal experience, contemplation, discovery, activity;</li> <li>• Quality time with family;</li> <li>• Quality time with friends;</li> <li>• Sensing time through the day and through the seasons.</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of togetherness with family or friends;</li> <li>• Sharing experiences with family or friends, and new friends;</li> <li>• Having a different context for conversation and experience with family and friends;</li> <li>• Activities with like-minded friends;</li> <li>• Activities with people who share a specialist interest;</li> <li>• Potential to make new friends and contacts, including from other backgrounds.</li> </ul>

There can be no ideal categorisation for these services. There is inevitably overlap and merging amongst the headings, such as between ‘spiritual’/ ‘calm’/ ‘tranquillity’, between ‘learning’ and a ‘sense of history’ and between ‘health’ and ‘leisure’. There could be a case for using different or fine-tuned headings to those identified above or indeed merging some headings.

Nevertheless, the list does capture the feedback from participants and the overall findings of this study, although points that might be considered are:

**How one service can be a catalyst for another service:** for instance ‘escapism’ is an important service and can be experienced as a consequence of the experience associated with other services – so one can experience tranquillity or have a strong recreational experience and the result is still ‘escapism’. In turn, escapism is directly linked to the spontaneous need for ‘balance’ as a means of stress relief, suggesting there is often a continuum between services.

**How perceptual qualities may also be cultural services:** a classic example of this is tranquillity which is both a perceptual quality of landscape acting as a catalyst for a number of different services (as noted above) and is a service in its own right.



**How the aesthetic quality of the landscape may also be a cultural service:** likewise, the aesthetic qualities of landscape can be a catalyst for other services and a service in their own right. For example, the aesthetic quality of the undulating hills, lanes and hedge banks of the Devon Redlands were felt to be a source of inspiration for poetry and painting while the marshes that provide a backdrop to the sand dunes of the Lincolnshire Coast were valued for their own particular aesthetic. But this dual role of aesthetics is potentially best illustrated by woodlands and field systems. Deciduous woodlands are seen as an important part of the aesthetic of landscapes – colouring the view through the seasons. This in turn provides people with the ability to observe the seasons and “*feel in touch with the balance of nature.*” In the case of field systems they were seen to add to the aesthetic of landscape creating a patchwork of colours that offered both inspiration and a sense of place.

It is also significant that people felt that the landscape does not have to be beautiful for them to benefit from it. However, sometimes the intensity of the experience will be better when it has a higher aesthetic quality. Also, some of the cultural services seem, from this study, to be more dependent on having high aesthetic values than others, such as being inspired.

**Leisure and activities:** finally, there could be a case for separating the two aspects of this service with leisure (the quiet enjoyment of the countryside) being very different from activities where there is strong emphasis on challenge and thrills and spills.

All of the above are, however, a potential distraction from the central point that landscapes provide a wide range of interlinked cultural services, valued for their contribution to human well-being and quality of life.

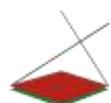
### **Confirming Previous Views – a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Perspective**

This study has confirmed many long-held views on the importance of landscape to people and the wide range of services and benefits that it provides.

What is also clear is that the role of landscape in the developed and highly pressured environment of 21<sup>st</sup>-century England is potentially rather different to that in the developing world – and yet there continue to be strong similarities. Differences are evident at two levels:

- (a) by comparing the list of cultural services identified by the MA with the final list identified through this study; and
- (b) by comparing the MA definitions of individual services with the perspective offered by participants in this study.

In the developing world landscapes and the environment are seen as shaping the range of social relations and the diversity of cultures. Here interactions with the landscape are one of functional necessity. This was equally true in England in past generations and is still evident in strongly agricultural communities and in places where remnants of primary industry such as game, fisheries, and quarrying still apply. But in England today rural landscapes are more commonly seen as offering a refuge from the pressures of modern life, an opportunity for time to stand still, for contemplation, a re-balancing, stress relief and a window on more healthy lifestyles. Yet landscapes also provide a common touch-stone across all cultures – a source of inspiration and wonder, spiritual connection, a sense of place and identity, making us part of an historical



continuum. Perhaps more striking is that this study has demonstrated that in 21<sup>st</sup>-century England, landscapes do support social relations but perhaps in a rather different way to that anticipated by the Millennium Assessment – experiencing landscapes can help reinforce bonds within families and between partners, or even create time for “*me*” and space for discovering different facets of oneself.



## Some Observations on the Cultural Services Identified through this Study

This study has helped bring greater understanding of the scope and detail of the individual cultural services offered by landscape. What is clear though, is that the breadth of individual services is potentially greater than has often been assumed in the past. As just two examples:

- *Sense of history:* It is often assumed that this service largely relates to people's influence on the landscape across millennia but many see it in its broadest sense of the perceived permanence of nature, starting with geological evolution and pre-history – reminding people of their insignificance and the place of mankind within nature. Equally, landscape was seen as providing a oneness with past generations, as in the case of vantage points, cliffs or outcrops where people would have gathered or met over thousands of years. There was a sense of both 'soft history' emanating from natural things and 'hard history' associated with mankind's influence over the landscape. Landscapes were seen as providing a sense of heritage "*that belongs to me*".
- *Sense of place:* Sense of place is engendered, as identified by the MA, by recognised features in the environment. Sense of place can operate at many scales from the national to the very local. It is defined by the distribution of distinctive features across the landscape, such as the flower-filled hedge banks of the Devon Redlands. In some cases these features can be very small indeed – such as the red squirrels of the Eden Valley or the rare orchids of the North Downs. Sense of place can also be defined by unique iconic places, such as the White Cliffs of Dover of the North Downs or Epping Forest in the North Thames Basin that have a particularly intense sense of place. But sense of place is also about defining a sense of one's own identity – "*I feel it quite unsettling being away from the mountains.*" Even in an unexceptional agricultural landscape in North Thames Basin, one of the study interviewees said: "*We wouldn't want it changed – it's part of our lives. You feel quite an ownership of the area.*" The landscape's strong links with people's identity were also evident elsewhere, for example: "*Exmoor landscape is part of my life*". Another Exmoor participant passionately remarked: "*I would fight to save this place.*"

### 10.4 The Delivery of Cultural Services by Different Landscape Features

This study has identified that cultural services and benefits are often seen as being delivered by the landscape as an entity – this is certainly the case for Stress release, Health, Quality time and Relationships. Indeed all landscapes will deliver all the cultural services identified to a greater or lesser extent (see section 10.8 below). People equally see cultural services being delivered by a combination of features within an experience or view – such as a winding lane and patchwork of fields or a river running through a valley with wooded slopes. Nevertheless, when asked, participants were also able to distinguish the types of cultural service provided by different landscape features. This is summarised in Table 10.3 overleaf and set out in Chapter 6. This table gives a qualitative indication of how different features 'perform' in people's experience of the landscape through the cultural services. Blank cells should not be taken as implying that the service is not relevant, just that it is being delivered at a lower level than that associated with other features.

What Table 10.3 identifies is that there are clearly some landscape features that are 'big hitters' in terms of the range of cultural services that are delivered. These include water, rivers and



streams; the coast; mountains and hills; moorland; field systems and villages. Clearly not all these features are present in all the NCAs reviewed but where present they make a major contribution to service delivery.

**Table 10.3: The delivery of cultural services by different landscape features**

Feature	History	Place	Inspiration	Calm	Leisure/ activities	Spiritual	Learning	Escape
Water, rivers streams	Low	Medium	High	High	High	High	Medium	High
Bogs & Marshes	Low		Low		Medium	Low	Medium	
Coast	Medium	High <sup>(5)</sup>	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	High
Mountains & Hills	Medium	Low	High	Medium	High	High	Low	High
Moorland	Low	High	High	Low	Medium	High	Low	High
Grassland <sup>(7)</sup>	Low		Low		Low	Low		
Woodland & Trees	Medium <sup>(3)</sup>	Medium	High <sup>(4)</sup>	High	High <sup>(2)</sup>	High	Medium	High
Field Systems	High <sup>(6)</sup>	High	Medium	High	Low	Low	Low	High
Hedges, walls, lanes	High	High	Low	High	Medium <sup>(1)</sup>	Medium <sup>(9)</sup>	High <sup>(1)</sup>	
Villages	High	High	Low	Medium <sup>(8)</sup>	High	Low	High	Medium

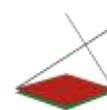
Notes:

- (1) Relates to lanes
- (2) With active recreation most strongly associated with coniferous woodland
- (3) A sense of history is strongly associated with ancient trees but less so with whole woodlands
- (4) Woodlands are strongly associated with folklore and legend but less so with other forms of inspiration
- (5) The coast is thought of as a key facet of Britain as well as central to those Character Areas which have a coast
- (6) Exemplifying the heritage of farming
- (7) The term grassland was not well understood
- (8) In terms of providing a sense of comfort
- (9) A sense of wonder at man's place in the grand scheme of things

As might be expected, different features offer different perspectives on the same service. So, a sense of calm is a strong emotion associated with a babbling brook or a bluebell wood whilst in a village this would manifest as a sense of comfort. Equally, different types of woodland offer different types of recreation with broadleaf woodlands associated with wandering and enjoying wildlife and coniferous woodlands more strongly associated with active sports.

The delivery of services by different features also emphasises temporal effects. So, the coast may interchangeably offer calm (a glistening sea) or inspiration (crashing waves) depending on the weather. This analysis also helps tease out the differences between perceptual qualities that are a catalyst for other cultural services. The tranquillity of moorland is a case in point. Moorlands are potentially some of the largest remaining areas of tranquillity (absence of intrusive noise) in England. Yet this very tranquillity and the huge open expanse of moorland are more likely to instil feelings of inspiration, spirituality and escapism than that of calm.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In some previous studies research has shown that open moorlands can be regarded by some as austere environments, and for some people they can prompt a sense of anxiety.



Another potentially surprising observation is that moorland again, offering the largest area of open access land in England under the CRow Act 2000, is seen as less accessible for convenient recreation than other areas of landscape more accessible by car. Here the greater concern is ease of access rather than the 'right to roam'.

### **Is the Delivery of Cultural Services Influenced by the Location and Extent of the Landscape Features Concerned?**

**Location:** from this study it appears that landscape features will deliver the same range of services regardless of where they are in the UK. A large old oak tree will provide some sense of history regardless of location. Nevertheless, there are three related issues that need to be taken into account:

- The setting of individual features may affect how they are perceived and in turn may affect the level of service delivery. Taking the example of the ancient tree further, it is likely to have greater value in providing a sense of history if it is part of a larger set piece, perhaps as part of a deer park or within a well-known view.
- Closely related to this, the perceived quality of the landscape may, in some instances, affect the level or intensity of service provision, as discussed further below.
- Location relative to centres of population may also affect the nature and intensity of service provision. As one example, in the case of the North Downs, although offering upland expanses, there was a view that the area did not offer the same level of escapism as other more remote upland areas because of the nearness of large centres of population but on the other hand, it potentially filled a greater need when compared to more remote rural areas.

**Quantity / extent of a feature:** a further consideration is whether there are any relationships between the amount of a feature or characteristic and the amount or intensity of the benefits it provides? There is no one formula, as the examples below show:

- **Context:** a small woodland, even in a busy and developed urban fringe area, can offer an intense experience and provide a range of services that can also be provided in the same amount by much larger tracts of woodlands elsewhere. So, in this instance, the service delivery is based much more on context rather than scale.
- **Diversity and choice:** large amounts of a feature or characteristic may provide a range of choices for people, in relation to the feature itself and in relation to the services derived from the feature. For example, Exmoor has many tracts of moorland, but these differ in their wildlife, the nature of their views, their topography, their distance from road noise intrusion, their walking and recreation opportunities. Thus the issue here is much more about the choice of services offered by the extent of the feature.
- **Personal preference:** people may live close to areas with large quantities of a feature, but not be drawn to that feature or the services associated with it. For example, people may live close to lakes but not enjoy bird watching, sailing, water sports, waterside

walking and the like, whereas other people may travel long distances to the area because of these opportunities.

- **Age and lifestyle differences:** a family may live in an area with a marked degree of tranquillity. This may be greatly valued by some members of the family, perhaps the parents, but not deemed important by others, perhaps teenagers, because of their interests at that particular time of their life.

Together these examples suggest that it would be unwise to infer a level of service delivery simply from the extent of different features present. This has been qualitative research and it would be wholly inappropriate to apply quantitative analysis to the results at this stage.

## 10.5 The Effect of Different Landscape Characteristics on the Delivery of Cultural Services

### Landscape Aesthetics and Service Delivery

This chapter has already considered the relationship between landscape aesthetics and services delivery. Below participants’ preferences for different types of landscape aesthetics and their potential effects on service delivery are summarised based on the findings of this study, looking specifically at:

- variety v simplicity;
- naturalness v man-made / managed, and;
- openness v enclosure.

**Table 10.4: Landscape aesthetics and service delivery**

Desired landscapes	Effects on service delivery
<b>Variety v simplicity</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety is favoured and generally more highly valued than simplicity.</li> <li>• Variety is associated with being able to see patterns in a landscape punctuated by different features.</li> <li>• Large-scale, flat arable landscapes are generally not favoured.<sup>16</sup></li> <li>• But simplicity is appreciated at the small-scale as in the sweep of sand or sand dunes or swathes of bluebells where the impact relates to their large extent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety helps landscapes perform better in the delivery of services such as learning, discovery and inspiration.</li> <li>• Calm/tranquillity is often more associated with simple expanses.</li> </ul>
<b>Naturalness v Man-made / managed</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preferred landscapes are those that are ‘green’ and predominantly rural.</li> <li>• Accepted that the English landscape is a cultural and largely managed landscape, with management needed to stop the countryside ‘becoming scruffy’.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of built elements is required for isolation seekers. Semi-natural habitats are required for naturalists.</li> <li>• The more wild and natural the landscape the greater the feeling of escapism.</li> <li>• Man-made features are associated with a</li> </ul>

<sup>16</sup> Note: This study did not include NCAs typically associated with the enclosure landscapes of the Midlands and Fens where these characteristics may be prevalent but, because familiar, **may** also be favoured

Desired landscapes	Effects on service delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally realised that there was a balance to be struck between keeping landscapes managed and accessible but not manicured.</li> <li>• Human influences such as field patterns.<sup>17</sup> field boundaries, paths and drovers roads are much enjoyed.</li> <li>• Built features can add to the scene when old or ‘blended in’ – stone walls, styles, old barns solitary monuments and cairns.</li> <li>• There is strong support for estate-managed landscapes and parkland.</li> </ul>	<p>sense of history, community, accessibility, aesthetics and sense of place while small man-made features can add to a sense of discovery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ancient man-made features and solitary monuments, especially in wild locations, add to spirituality and inspiration.</li> <li>• Wilder, rugged and more isolated landscapes encourage adventure, activity, discovery and solitude.</li> <li>• Soft rolling pastoral landscapes are seen as ‘safe’ and where a dense rights of way network offers easy access are attractive to families.</li> </ul>
Openness v Enclosure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contrast between openness and enclosure is highly valued. Openness is more impressive where set-off by enclosure – coming out of a woodland to a dramatic view.</li> <li>• A high view can be the culmination of a landscape experience – seeing the landscape below laid out in miniature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness and long views are associated with escapism.</li> <li>• Openness and distance – seeing far-off horizons are important for calmness and seeing man’s place in the landscape.</li> <li>• Enclosure may be threatening as in a dense woodland.</li> </ul>

These observations combined with those on the cultural services associated with individual features helps build up a picture of how we respond to and appreciate landscape.

### Landscape Condition and Quality

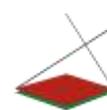
A further consideration is that of landscape condition and quality and their effects on service delivery – concepts that people find it difficult to relate to (see section 8.5 above).

Participants in the study tended to accept the landscape as it appears to them now. Where they expressed views, they implied a resistance to change, perhaps fearing it would be for the worse. Few people were able to cast back or forward, and consider differences in the landscape in the past or the future. It was as if ‘now’ was the only reference point. Where people related to other landscapes beyond the NCA in question, they did not compare these for condition or quality, the comparisons related to the nature of cultural services provided.

**Change** was tangible to people in the form of development or extreme contrasts, such as new housing, practices such as extensive poly tunnels and rivers running dry but more gradual changes could pass unnoticed. Equally **improvement** in the landscape could be a challenging concept, perhaps partly because cultural services were delivered from all parts of the landscape, even from places with unremarkable quality.

Where people did sense **improvement** in the landscape, this mainly related to aspects such as new tree planting, hedgerow replacement, and creation of wildlife areas. In one or two areas there had been more dramatic landscape restoration as in the reclamation of mineral workings in

<sup>17</sup> In this study the small and varied field patterns of ancient landscapes were strongly favoured over large rectilinear field patterns but see note above.



the North Thames Basin and the restoration of the Durham coastline from mining activity. These were seen as both a general improvement to the landscape and changes that resulted in more cultural services for people.

### **Factors potentially influencing people's response to change**

**Is change isolated or widespread, subtle or striking?** While some participants did observe isolated changes and some noticed subtle changes in the landscape that were important to them (but might not have been more widely felt) the more striking changes and the more extensive developments did get noticed.

**Are people affected by the change?** People will be more inclined to be content, or be concerned, depending on the effect of any change on them or people that they know. In addition, for some changes, the consequences may be indirect, diffuse, or still to be evident, thus people may not be sure about the change.

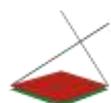
**Can people influence the change?** Whether people can or have tried to influence the change (successfully or not) may condition their view on the change and their understanding of the change.

**Condition:** While people might be able to note the condition of individual features in the landscape, the condition of the landscape as a whole was a much harder concept to grasp and therefore people found it difficult to say how 'condition' might affect the provision of cultural services. People found it easiest to comment on the condition of built development and features, such as historic buildings and stone walls, although in the case of old buildings derelict features were often welcomed as part of the landscape, with decay reflecting the passing of time. Where condition was noted in relation to natural features such as woodlands and hedgerows people generally felt there was a level of appropriate management to strive for.

**Quality:** Quality is an equally difficult concept to explain although people clearly have preferences in landscapes they wish to visit, as evident in the Portfolio pyramid (see section 4.3). These preferences are potentially driven by a combination of different interpretations of quality:

- visual quality – which from this study appears to be related to diverse mosaic landscapes with vantage points, a strong rural feel, and a contrast between openness and enclosure;
- perceptual quality – where the sense of quality may come through more readily in terms of lack of noise, degree of tranquillity (lack of development, intrusion and noise), and lack of light pollution, and;
- quality of cultural services – where influencing factors may include factors such as lack of noise (providing calmness, escapism etc) intense experience of woodland (providing stress-relief, escapism, quality time etc) extensive views, very good opportunities for rock climbing etc.

One might tentatively suggest from this research therefore that those landscapes that deliver the greatest range and intensity of services are those that are 'beautiful', diverse, rural in character and tranquil. But this would be to take far too simplistic a view. Looking at Table 10.5, Exmoor, which as a National Park is judged to be a very high quality landscape, clearly is very important for a range of cultural services but so are the Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes with



their very distinctive but undesignated landscape. Equally, the North Downs, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) fair rather worse on service delivery than the Devon Redlands which are a much valued but again undesignated landscape. All this suggests that there are many factors at play in influencing the delivery of cultural services and quality is a difficult and elusive concept to pin down.

## 10.6 All Landscapes Matter

While there may be issues in defining quality, this study has confirmed that 'all landscapes matter', reflecting a central tenet of the European Landscape Convention and Natural England's landscape policy principle. As indicated by the portfolio pyramid explained in section 4.3, people will, if they are able, seek out different types of landscape for different purposes and to fulfil different needs. At the base of this pyramid are the local habitual landscapes that matter to people (see section 4.2), even if they are unremarkable:

- offering easy access, relaxation and stress relief **close to home**;
- enabling them to keep **in tune with the landscape** around them, especially for those unable to travel much;
- providing a **link with nature**, and;
- **providing for basic needs** and well-being.

Local landscapes were seen as providing some of people's needs for cultural services, with more specialist needs or more intense experiences sought from elsewhere. These local landscapes assume particular importance for those with restricted mobility because of their health, lack of mobility, or lack of transport. Although we found very few such people in our samples of participants, the Diversity Review has highlighted the importance of this issue. In such situations the local landscape is proportionately of much greater importance to people's well-being and is almost their exclusive landscape experience for much of the time. For all these reasons, regardless of the quality and the precise characteristics of local landscapes, people clearly recognise that such places benefit their own well-being. These findings give strong support to the current policy emphasis on the development of Green Infrastructure.

Equally this study has identified the importance of retaining a wide diversity of landscapes with different combinations of landscape characteristics and features catering for different needs, moods and interests. This may mean travelling further in some cases than others but the total complement of landscapes and their associated characteristics permits different people's 'portfolio pyramid' to be met.

It is also instructive to note that, although many people could distinguish the component parts of landscapes (especially distinct features), many of these same people also commented that different parts create a whole greater than the sum of its parts which helps confirm identity and a wider distinctive character. This emphasises that the landscape works as a fusion of its parts, with all parts having a role to play.

## 10.7 Understanding the NCAs – Why their Landscapes are Valued

Exploration of people's views on the landscapes of the eight pilot National Character Areas, set



out in Chapter 7, will be of particular value in updating the character area descriptions, which is programmed to be undertaken over the coming two years. In particular, the findings are helpful in understanding:

- **Whether people relate to the current character area descriptions – does it capture ‘their landscape’?** In the main the groups within each of the NCAs related to the existing character descriptions, suggesting that they continue to provide a useful basis for the updating of the character descriptions.
- **Whether the character area is recognised as a distinct tract of landscape:** This is important to the extent that in the update of the character area descriptions, consideration is being given to whether, in some cases, the descriptions should recognise distinct sub-areas. From this study it is clear that it is the long thin Character Areas that are seen as least cohesive in having a recognisable and shared character – in this case the North Downs and the North Thames Basin. In these cases, while participants could not relate to the whole NCA, they did relate to their local landscape. Even in more apparently ‘cohesive’ landscapes, such as the Devon Redlands, there was little affinity with the character area boundary, with participants seeing the territory as odd and within which they recognised three distinct areas: north, south east and south west. On the other hand, there was much greater affinity with areas with a clearly defined geographical boundary such as the Eden Valley and Exmoor. Even in these cases though, the landscape is seen as a continuum with residents of the Eden Valley seeing the surrounding Lake District fells as part of ‘their’ landscape.
- **Identifying the characteristics to which people most strongly relate:** This study is helpful in identifying the most valued landscape characteristics of each area and potentially provides the starting point for the development of Landscape Quality Objectives (or similar) for each NCA as required under the European Landscape Convention. As stated in the ELC (Article 6 Part D) “*once a particular landscape has been identified and described, (as recommended in Article 6C) and once people (the general public and relevant interests) have been consulted on what is valued and important, the LQO can be defined.*” The purpose of the LQOs is to set out clearly what objectives are being pursued for any landscape.
- **Identifying the issues or forces for change acting on the landscapes of the National Character Areas:** Understanding these forces for change may be another driver in the development of the LQOs. This study has helped identify what are the current perceived forces for changes within each NCA both positive and negative with development pressure and growth being the key concerns on the south east and the south west. Interestingly there was very little spontaneous mention of the potential implications of climate change on the landscapes of England, although there was concern about flooding generally, coastal erosion along the coast of the Devon Redlands and the growth of Miscanthus as an energy crop within Exmoor.

## 10.8 The Cultural Services Associated with the Individual NCAs

As has been identified previously, cultural services are provided both by ‘whole’ landscapes and by their component parts. Here, based on the descriptions in Chapter 7, a tentative summary analysis is provided of the cultural services offered by the eight pilot National Character Areas, set out in Table 10.5 overleaf. This is a qualitative assessment (not a quantitative measurement)



and is subject to the attitudes of the groups in the ‘sub-area’ of the NCA covered by this study. However, it shows some indication that NCAs can vary in what they provide to the public as sampled in this study and this could be worthy of further investigation.

**Table 10.5: Tentative summary assessment of the cultural services provided by individual NCAs**

Area	History	Place	Inspiration	Calm	Leisure/ Activities	Spiritual	Learning	Escape
Wolds	Medium	High	Medium	High	High	High	Low	High
NTB	High	Low	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Exmoor	Medium	High	High	High	High	High	Medium	High
Lincs	Low	High	Low	High	High	High	High	High
DMLP	Low	High	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Medium
Eden	High	High	High	High	Low*	Medium	Low	Medium
Downs	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Devon	Medium	High	High	Medium	High	High	High	Medium

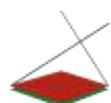
\* Leisure and activity were strongly associated with NCAs adjacent to Eden

The NCAs that seem to provide cultural services more comprehensively are the Yorkshire Wolds, Exmoor, Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes and Devon Redlands. The Eden Valley would also fall into this category except that most of its residents make use of the surrounding Fells (of the Pennines and Lake District) for their leisure and recreation and regarded escapism as less necessary in a home area that was so appreciated for its landscape quality and tranquillity. Interestingly, the services that vary the least across the pilot NCAs are ‘sense of place’ and ‘leisure and activities’ – people seem to find these strongly in most of the NCAs, regardless of what their landscape is like. Only the North Thames Basin and the North Downs seemed to deliver a lower sense of place but this, as already mentioned, relates not so much to the character of the landscape as the lack of perceived coherence of the character areas as a whole as a result of their long sinuous nature.

In contrast, NCAs seem to differ greatly as to whether they deliver the service of feeling ‘spiritual’. For example, the North Thames Basin, North Downs and Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau seem to provide this service least. This may relate to their more developed nature and, in the case of the first two, proximity to very large centres of population. Conversely those NCAs triggering a spiritual response are those that include higher ground with the ability to see distant views (for example, the Yorkshire Wolds, Exmoor and Devon Redlands). The exception here is the Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes, where it is the isolation of the landscape that encourages a spiritual response.

It is difficult to know what accounts for the variation within ‘learning’: the two most ‘urban’ areas appear to do quite well, possibly because these areas have more visitor attractions that provide ‘structured’ learning (ie. things to learn about), whilst the ‘wilder’ areas deliver learning in a less structured way (ie. learning about ones own capabilities)<sup>18</sup>. Although the Lincolnshire Coast was seen to be relatively ‘wild’, it performed well for learning because it is also perceived to be safe for children to be in whereas, perhaps, more upland areas are not.

<sup>18</sup> The table mostly relates to the capacity for structured learning.



No NCA was perceived to be poorly-performing on calmness/relaxation but those that do best are those perceived to be more natural and less built-up. The slight exception is the North Downs which, although perceived as more built up, had woodlands which compensated in two respects – helping to screen out surrounding development and providing a strong calming value in their own right. Still, this research clearly suggests that people can find places of calm within any landscape.

In contrast, the ability to find inspiration does appear to be more dependent upon the surrounding landscape, with perhaps the more obviously beautiful or varied landscapes performing better. A sense of history seems to vary, depending on the amount of perceived-to-be 'proper' history, such as ruins and castles, or Roman or Iron Age remains. It would be interesting to tally this with the actual number of historic features available to visit, or with how proactive the tourism authorities are locally.

It should be recognised that the nature of the sample (predominantly people resident within each NCA) may affect these results. Visitors to an area might express a different view when talking about that area to residents for some of the services. For example, some families with children visiting Exmoor may attach real significance to learning, in that they encounter environments which are less familiar to them and so absorb much from the experience, likewise, some visitors to Eden Valley may appreciate it for a sense of calm, in contrast to the area in which they live.

## **10.9 Implications for the Roll-out of the Updated NCA Descriptions**

In short, this study has helped an understanding of the cultural services delivered by landscapes and the landscape features and characteristics that may contribute to this service delivery.

Clearly this study can directly inform the update of the eight Pilot National Character Areas confirming key characteristics; most valued landscape characteristics; forces for change and the cultural services delivered. But can it assist in the role out of the updated Character Area descriptions?

### **1) Identification of sub-areas, valued characteristics, and LQOs**

These cannot be inferred from the results of the eight Pilot Areas as they will be unique to that NCA. However, this study may be able to indicate the best and most cost-effective methods of gaining similar information for all other NCAs in the future, potentially adopting a web-based approach.

### **2) Identification of the cultural services**

The question is has this research done enough to allow the identification of the cultural services associated with each of the remaining 151 National Character Areas? Inferring the cultural services of these Character Areas from a sample of eight is challenging. From this research there would potentially be two ways of starting this process:

- a) inferring cultural services from the features present in the landscape, and;
- b) placing the eight pilot Character Areas within a framework of national landscape typologies and then, within each typology, inferring the delivery of cultural services by reference to the Pilot Character Area(s) falling within that typology.



Looking at these options in turn:

- a) Inferring cultural services from the features present in the landscape:** this study has identified the cultural services associated with different landscape features. Nevertheless, this study has equally identified that it would be unwise to rely solely on the presence of individual features to imply associated cultural services for the individual NCAs as there are many other influences that come into play, not least:
- landscape as a fusion of its parts;
  - landscape aesthetics and perceptual qualities (particularly those of tranquillity and intrusion);
  - the location of the NCA, both in relation to large centres of population (as in the case of the North Downs and North Thames Basin in this study) and in relation to adjacent NCAs (for example the influence of the adjacent fells on the cultural services associated with the Eden Valley);
  - the interplay between different services, with one service acting as the stimulus for another service;
  - the differing perceptions and needs of residents and visitors, and ;
  - the exact context of the respective feature. For example, is a veteran tree isolated as a potential landmark or dispersed amongst other woodland? People may perceive this feature differently according to its setting and context.

For all these reasons we suspect that this way forward would need to be used carefully. Nevertheless, the research does provide useful pointers to the range of factors that may need to be considered in relation to the delivery of cultural services.

- b) Using the framework of a national landscape typology:** the alternative approach is to place the Pilot NCAs within the framework of a national typology. Currently there are two potential national frameworks that could be used to guide this approach:
- *the Fine-grained landscape typologies* developed in 2005 by Professor Carys Swanwick and Julie Martin at the time of the launch of Environmental Stewardship (see Figure 10.1 overleaf), and;
  - *the Agricultural landscape typologies* from Professor Carys Swanwick and Professor Nick Hanley (2007) *Scoping Study on Agricultural Landscape Valuation*. A report to Defra (see Figure 10.2 overleaf).

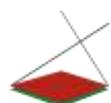
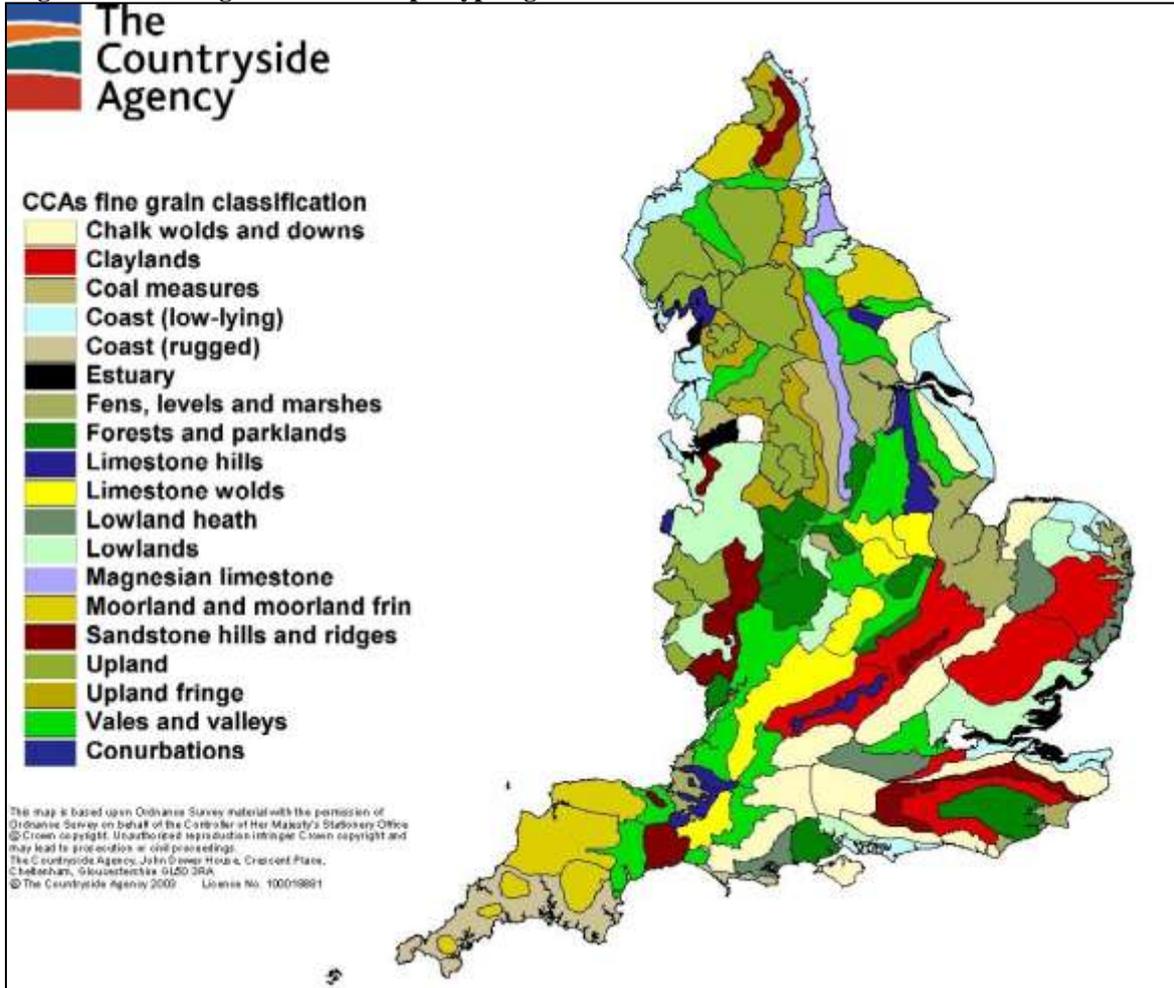
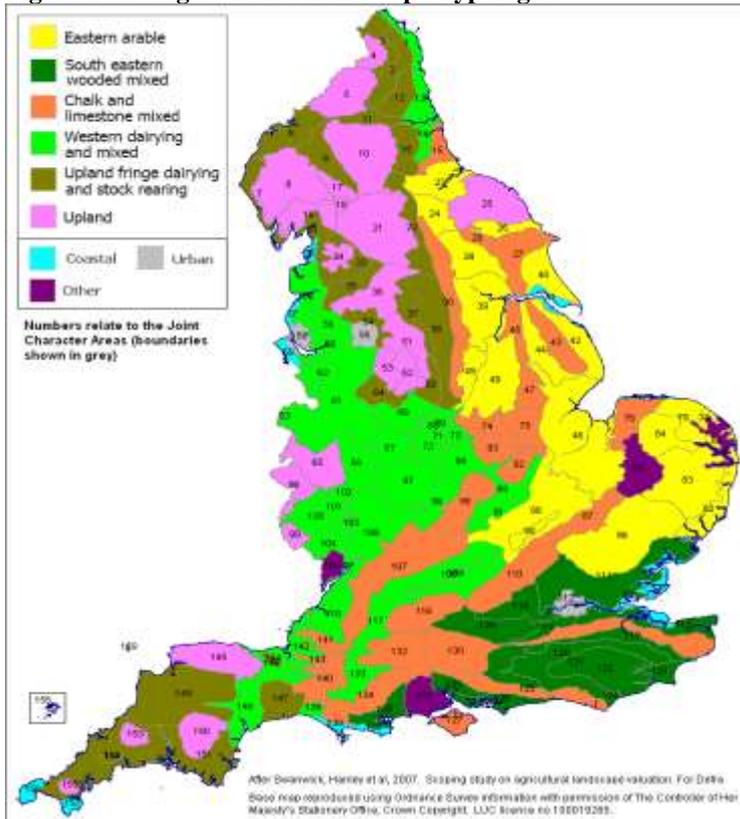


Figure 10.1: Fine-grained Landscape Typologies



**Figure 10.2: Agricultural Landscape Typologies**



The table below places the eight Pilot Character Areas within these two different typologies.

**Table 10.6: The location of the eight Pilot NCAs relative to the two landscape typologies**

Fine-grained Landscapes Lexicon	Relevant pilot NCAs	Agricultural landscape types	Relevant pilot NCAs
Chalk wolds and downs	27 Yorkshire Wolds	Upland agricultural landscapes	9. Eden Valley
	119 North Downs		145 Exmoor
Claylands		Upland fringe and dairy stock rearing	
Coal measures		Western dairy and mixed agriculture	148 Devon Redlands
Coast (low lying)	42 Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes	Coastal areas	
Coast (rugged)		Chalk and limestone mixed agricultural landscapes	15 Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau
			27 Yorkshire Wolds
			119 North Downs
Estuary		South eastern wooded and mixed agricultural landscapes	111 Northern Thames Basin
Fens, levels and marshes		Eastern arable agricultural landscapes	42 Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes
Forests and parklands		Other	
Limestone hills	15 Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau	Urban	

Limestone wolds			
Lowland heath			
Lowlands	111 Northern Thames Basin		
Magnesian limestone			
Moorland and moorland fringe	145 Exmoor		
Sandstone hills and ridges			
Upland			
Upland fringe	9 Eden Valley		
Vales and valleys	148 Devon Redlands		
Conurbations			

These two typologies have been drawn up for different purposes. In both cases they represent groupings of NCAs and therefore can provide a framework for individual NCAs as suggested here. As is evident, the Agricultural typologies offer a much cruder classification of England’s landscapes than the Fine-grained typologies do.

The thought that lies behind this approach is that like landscapes should, in theory, potentially provide generally the same range of cultural service and thus the Pilot NCAs could act as a reasonable proxy for the cultural services provided by other NCAs falling within the same landscape typology.

It is convenient for the purposes of testing the suggested approach, that at least one Pilot NCA falls within each of the main Agricultural landscape typologies (the right hand column of the above table) with two (Exmoor and the Eden Valley) falling within the Upland Agricultural Landscapes and three (the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau, Yorkshire Wolds and North Downs) falling within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscapes. Nevertheless what is evident from Table 10.5 is that these groupings of NCAs do not deliver the same combinations of cultural services, although there is much greater correlation between the Upland NCAs than the chalk and limestone NCAs. This suggests that the framework provided by the Agricultural landscape typologies is just too crude for these purposes. There may however be a case for taking forward further sampling based on the fine-grained classification with ideally two Character Areas tested within each typology. If this approach were developed further consideration will need to be given to:

- what might be the most cost effective approach, based on the findings of this research for eliciting information on the cultural services delivered by a further sample of NCAs;
- how and whether it is appropriate to also capture the views of people who live outside the specific NCA to which the survey refers;
- whether to take account of mapped information on perceptual qualities, in particular tranquillity and intrusion, in interpreting the role out of the cultural services across all NCAs – for example, these might largely explain the differences between the services associated with the North Downs and the Yorkshire Wolds, and;
- given the findings of this study, there can now be more confidence about the scope of the cultural services to seek feedback on from people in quantitative or qualitative surveys.

## 11. Issues for Further Study

### 11.1 Introduction

From the outset of this study it was recognized that, although extensive in nature, the programme of qualitative social research was very exploratory. As we have already seen, previous research had revealed that there were experiential qualities associated with different landscape types (and with features within the landscape) but the extent to which they could be mapped onto each other was, at the time, not known.

So, although this study has been able to provide a clear indication of people's perceptions, there are a number of areas where we believe that further research might usefully contribute to a greater understanding.

This final chapter sets out the areas that the study team believes could be explored in greater depth. It also raises a number of issues that could be addressed for the first time.

### 11.2 Potential Further Study Topics

#### People

The present study aimed to obtain the views of a broad cross-section of the population who lived in or near the eight character areas that formed the focus of the research. But it was not possible to incorporate everyone, and there are a small number of key audiences who might be addressed in any future work.

The first population type not addressed in any detail in this study was the 'visitor'. We do have some very good findings that relate to people who visit nearby landscapes and also some indications about 'pinnacle' landscapes that attract these people over great distances. But this research was not able to address people who live more remotely from the landscapes in question.

A specific target for future research should be those who visit landscapes remote from where they live, perhaps explicitly targeting town and city dwellers.

#### Landscapes

The eight pilot character areas that formed the focus of this research were carefully chosen by Natural England to represent different types of landscape, different landscape condition and, of course, to represent a cross-section of the regions of England.

But it was not possible to accommodate all landscape types. This, together with the discussion about landscape typologies in the previous chapter, suggests that there are certain issues that might benefit from further examination in the future.

The first issue concerns the coast. Whilst many of the eight character areas in this study included an element of coastal landscape, because the focus was on a wide range of features it was not possible to examine the specific issues relating to coastal areas in anything other than a



limited way. Even the little examination that was undertaken suggests that people's perceptions of the coast, and the experiences that coastal areas deliver, can be different in nature and scale to other (rural) landscapes. It is also the case that the interaction between people and seascapes was not examined in this study.

There would seem to be a strong case for a similar study to the present one which examines coastal areas in more detail. A specific task would be to map perceptions and experiential qualities onto coastal features and seascapes.

There are other landscape types missing completely from the current study, as Table 10.6 in the previous chapter has shown. Examples include anything properly mountainous or an upland area, as well as Fens, and such 'enclosure' landscapes as found in central England. Whilst it is true that many previous studies have examined mountainous/upland areas, particularly in national parks, no previous attempt has been made to map experiential qualities onto the specific features that exist in these areas.

There might be a case for undertaking some similar work in other area types as shown in the two landscape typologies, such as mountainous/upland areas, mapping perceptions and experiential qualities onto the features that exist there.

The final issue concerns urban landscapes. Some preliminary research has already been undertaken into urban green spaces but the previous studies<sup>19</sup> were somewhat limited in scope. This present study looked at the fringe landscape around one urban area but it seems that the complexity of urban landscapes, not necessarily just green spaces within urban landscapes, is an area yet to be addressed.

Although outside the scope of the present review and update of NCAs, the extent to which urban landscapes deliver experiential benefits is an extensive area for further examination in the future.

## **Landscape Quality**

Another finding from this research was that landscape condition and quality was not easily identifiable by members of the public. Although this was not a key focus for this study and, as such, was not given high priority, we feel that this subject would need to be more pro-actively researched to develop results that could be considered definitive. Such research would need to give respondents tangible examples and potential strategy avenues from which to express a view. Do people notice examples of poor condition and appreciate examples of good condition? What do they want done about it? Are they really simply satisfied with what's there? Can they perceive change?

There would seem to be a case for a similar study to the present one which examines landscape quality and condition in more detail.

## **Features**

As has been noted already earlier in this report, this present research did not examine every single type of feature that exists within the English landscape. Given, however, that the most

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<sup>19</sup> Attitudes to Greenspace in the North East, WoodHolmes Group for Countryside Agency 2005; What do people want from their greenspace? for Natural England, 2008



common features were included in this research there does not seem to be a case for further work that examines other features, unless they are particularly important to any individual character area.

However, a key finding from the present study has been that any landscape (even the mundane or ordinary) does seem to deliver experiences that are valued by members of the public. People seem to be able to seek out features in the landscape that deliver emotional or spiritual experiences to them. This may be because the eight landscapes that were examined had sufficient variety and complexity to provide such opportunities to people. There may be landscapes, particularly those that are poor in certain features or that have a strong sense of uniformity, where this might not be the case (at least not to the majority). Certainly, present research cannot say whether people living in or near such landscapes do derive similar benefits from them. This could be covered within the research suggested in the Landscape section of this chapter above.

### **Cultural Services of NCAs**

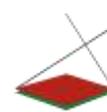
This research has identified that different landscapes and features do deliver different cultural services. It has also begun to identify (from a qualitative perspective) the services that are provided to a greater or lesser degree by the pilot NCAs. However, there is more work to be done here on whether specific NCAs can be said to be better or worse at delivering cultural services, possibly making connections with how much of a characteristic or landscape feature is present. Whilst this point has begun to be addressed in the discussion on typologies presented in the previous chapter, this research could test a number of theories such as whether high land always delivers a great deal of 'inspiration' or whether woodland always delivers 'calm'. We can see a case for a combination of more work:

- in the 8 pilot NCAs, themselves;
- in some 'matching' NCAs to test out these theories;
- in some NCAs with landscapes that were unrepresented (such as 'predominantly' marshy or flat land), and;
- in landscapes that (for example) are without much woodland or which have few opportunities to gain height.

### **Mental Health and Therapeutic Benefits of the Landscape**

We have been struck by the extent and emphatic nature of the feedback relating to quality time, relationships and de-stressing.

These important quality-of-life issues take the benefits from the landscape well beyond the notion of relaxation. They indicate a very significant tonic that society is seeking from the landscape and the outdoor environment. It may be challenging to probe these issues further, but it may pay to do so, as they would appear important issues for Natural England's interests and worthy of more emphasis in the policy agenda on landscape and the natural environment.



## **National, Cultural and Ethnicity Differences in Landscape Perception**

People from different cultural backgrounds, different countries and different ethnic origins may not interpret values and meanings in a landscape in the way that home residents from Britain do. Values and meanings within landscapes can be very culturally dependent, and especially shaped by cultural preferences, and by an affinity for a place's history. These points have come out in past work on landscape perceptions, for example in Yi-Fu Tuan's classic text "Topophilia, A study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes and Values". The Millennium Ecosystem assessment's categories of landscape services are more focussed on developing world perspectives, and the European Landscape Convention presents an important new context for landscape policy. It may be worth Natural England collaborating with partner bodies to explore and understand these national, cultural and ethnic distinctions in services from the landscape.

## **Links to Other Policy Agendas in Natural England**

The reference point for this study has been 'landscape' and the work has been tailored accordingly. However, it is evident that much of the feedback obtained from people may partially at least apply to other factors in the natural environment that are intertwined with landscape. Given this possible wider applicability of some of the study findings, we suggest that the work is worth discussing across other policy areas within Natural England, perhaps especially relating to:

- health;
- access;
- designated landscapes;
- urban fringe;
- benefits of the natural environment, and;
- historic landscapes.

### **11.3 Suggested Research Priorities**

Finally we would suggest that, in a time of limited budgets, the priorities for further research should be focussed in three areas, which are (in priority):

- extending the scope of this present study to cover all the missing (fine-grained or agricultural) landscape types identified in Chapter 10;
- an examination of cultural services associated with urban landscapes, and;
- a more detailed examination of change, condition and quality.

