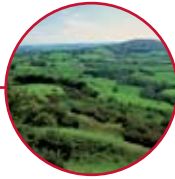


# What is Landscape Character?

Landscape character is 'a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one place different from another, rather than better or worse'. Put simply, it is what makes an area unique.



Particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, field patterns and human settlement create character. In turn, character makes each part of the landscape distinct and gives each its particular 'sense of place'.



Only by paying proper regard to the existing character of our landscapes can informed and responsible decisions be made regarding their management and future planning. Through understanding how places differ we can also ensure that future development is well situated, sensitive to its location and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives.



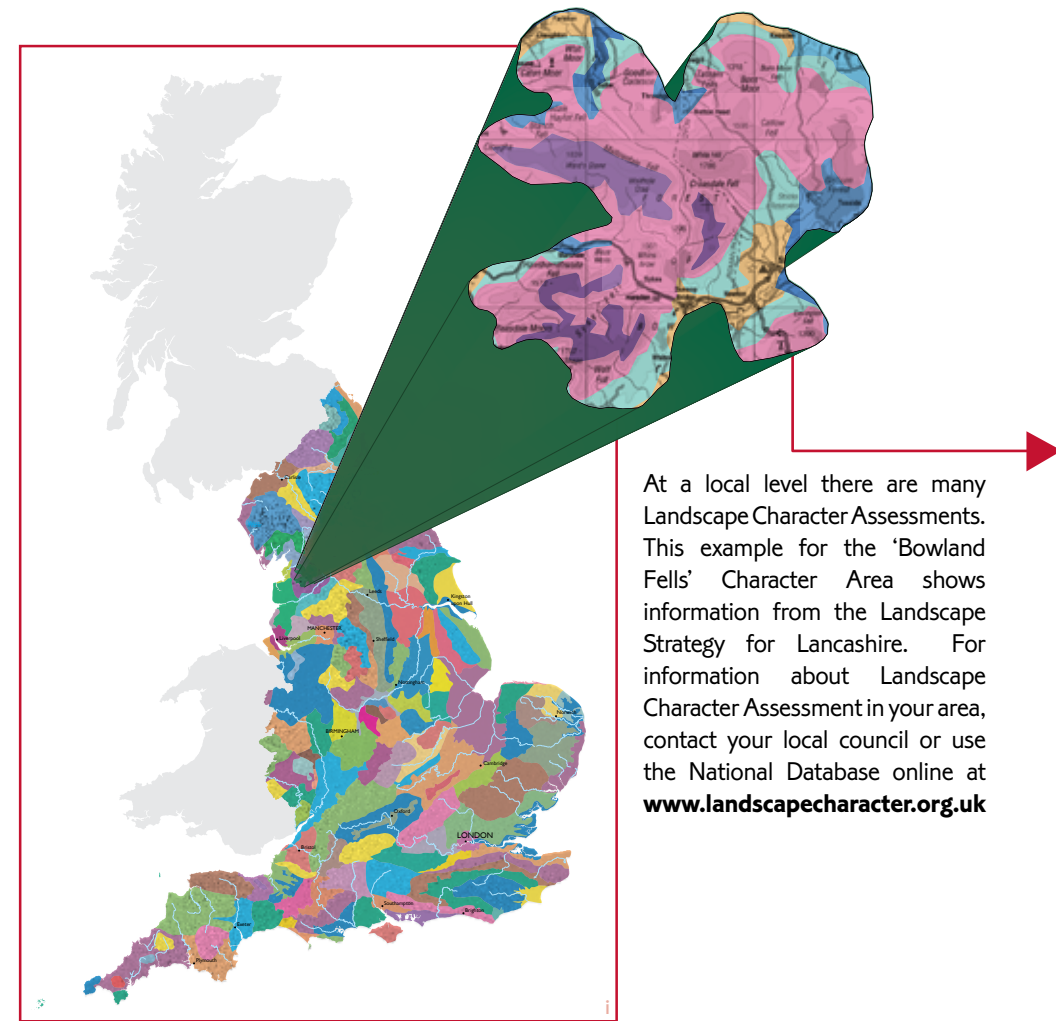
Landscape Character Assessment is an approach to understanding the differences between landscapes and can serve as a framework for decision-making. It is a way of 'unpacking' the landscape and understanding how its distinctive elements contribute to a sense of place.



As such, Landscape Character Assessment is a useful tool for engaging stakeholders in sustainable development. Communities, developers, farmers and land managers, landscape and planning professionals and others all have a role in identifying the characteristics that make a particular landscape unique, and using this understanding to plan and manage landscape change.



# England's Character Areas

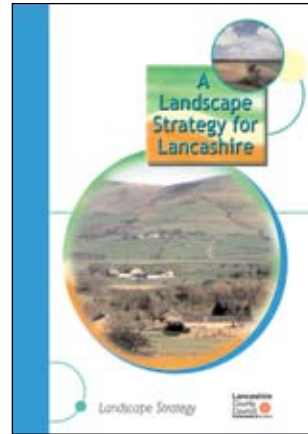


At a local level there are many Landscape Character Assessments. This example for the 'Bowland Fells' Character Area shows information from the Landscape Strategy for Lancashire. For information about Landscape Character Assessment in your area, contact your local council or use the National Database online at [www.landscapecharacter.org.uk](http://www.landscapecharacter.org.uk)

In England, 159 broad Character Areas have been mapped and described nationally. They describe landscape, wildlife, natural and cultural features and the differences in landscape character across the country. Local studies, such as in Lancashire, have assessed their landscapes in finer detail. The information is used to inform the planning and management of change across our countryside.

## A Landscape Strategy for Lancashire

Published by Lancashire County Council in 2001, the strategy helps stakeholders in Lancashire to understand how the present day landscape has been created. It also helps to guide landscape change so that it has a positive influence, reinforcing distinctive landscape character.



## Example Landscape Strategies

### Moorland Hills

- Generally found at lower elevations than the higher Moorland Plateaux.
- Steep cliffs create a distinctive and dramatic landscape, drained by fast flowing streams.
- Land cover is typically blanket bog, heather moor and acid grassland, with some large blocks of woodland.
- The open, exposed character of the hills creates a wild and windswept experience.
- Small, isolated hamlets and stone farmsteads (although rare) are focal points in the landscape. Fields in their vicinity are often enclosed by a network of stone walls.
- Upland habitats are of significant nature conservation value.
- Colours are generally muted, although the moorland vegetation creates striking seasonal effects.

#### Strategies include:

- Conserve the wealth of archaeological landscapes.
- Retain the characteristic pattern of gritstone walls.
- Improve the shape and structure of existing forestry plantations.

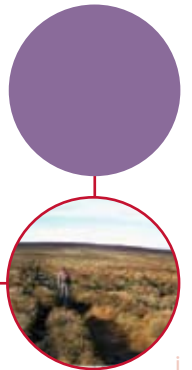


### Moorland Plateaux

- A level, or gently rolling landscape between 300 and 600 metres above sea level.
- Land cover is mainly blanket bog with few or no trees.
- Rock outcrops occur in some areas.
- A sense of elevation and openness, with uninterrupted views across vast areas of surrounding countryside.
- Also a sense of wilderness, remoteness and space, which is further strengthened by the dominance of sky.
- Colours tend to be muted, although in autumn heather moorland provides vivid expanses of colour.

#### Strategies include:

- Conserve the distinctive remote character of the open moor.
- Conserve the valuable mosaic of moorland habitats.
- Restore eroded areas of moorland where recreation has caused damage.



### Undulating Lowland Farmland

- Generally below 150m, this lowland landscape is cut by deep, wooded cloughs and gorges.
- The underlying geology is largely marked by heavy glacial deposits.
- Hedgerows predominate over stone walls.
- A well wooded landscape with many mixed farm woodlands, copses and hedgerow trees.
- Picturesque stone villages and a high density of farms and scattered cottages linked by a network of minor roads.










#### Strategies include:

- Conserve the distinctive rural hedgerow network.
- Conserve the distinctive settings to rural settlements.
- Enhance the wooded character of the lowland landscape.



# Designated Landscapes

## Designated and defined interests

-  National Park & The Broads
-  South Downs National Park (designated but not yet confirmed)
-  Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
-  Heritage Coast
-  Community Forest
-  National Trail
-  National Trail approved but not yet open
-  Regional boundary
-  County/Unitary Authority boundary



For over 50 years, England's finest countryside has been designated as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These landscapes are protected by law to ensure conservation and enhancement of their natural beauty - not just for the present, but also for future generations.

## National Parks

National Parks are extensive areas each with their own managing authority to conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities.

There are currently eight National Parks in England plus the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, which has equivalent status. These nine areas account for 8% of England's land area.

National Parks provide their 110 million annual visitors with the opportunity to explore some of England's most dramatic and remote landscapes. The parks are living and working landscapes with an increasing focus on supporting the communities and economic activity which underpin their wild beauty.



## Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

There are 36 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), covering about 15% of England. The smallest is the Isles of Scilly, a mere 16 sq km; the largest is the Cotswolds totaling 2,038 sq km.

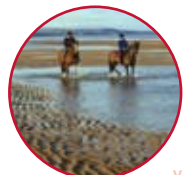
AONBs are designated solely for their landscape qualities for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty (which includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries). There are local AONB partnerships in all AONBs, which are dedicated to the conservation of these nationally important areas.



## Heritage Coasts

33% (1,057km) of scenic English coastline is conserved as Heritage Coasts. These special coastlines are managed so that their natural beauty is conserved and, where appropriate, the accessibility for visitors is improved.

The first Heritage Coast to be defined was the famous white chalk cliffs of Beachy Head in Sussex, the latest being the Durham Coast. Now much of our coastline, like the sheer cliffs of Flamborough Head and Bempton, with their huge seabird colonies, is protected as part of our coastal heritage.



# Forces for Change

Our landscapes are dynamic. Their character is a result of the process of change over time.

For thousands of years, our landscapes have been evolving. Humans have always had basic needs for shelter, food and energy. This interaction with the natural environment has formed today's diverse landscapes.

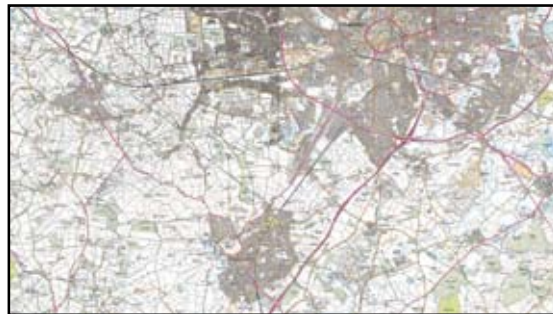
Globally, the pace and scale of change is increasing. The way we use, manage and develop rural and urban land is changing. We have become much more aware of the consequences of our decisions on the appearance of our landscapes, their function and biodiversity. Some positive, some negative.

A complex and interrelated range of environmental, economic and social 'forces for change' influence the function and character of today's evolving landscapes. Some are caused by natural forces, such as climate change; others through human development and the changing demands of society.

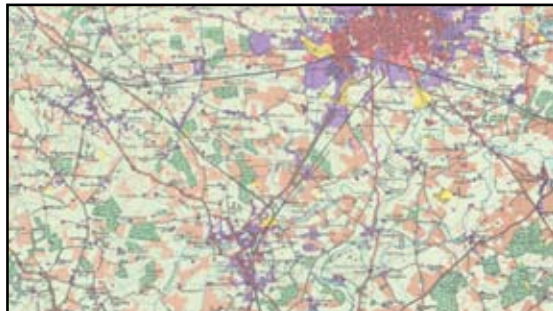
We all have a part to play in influencing how our landscapes should evolve and what they can provide. To do this we need to make decisions about the future we desire.

## Centuries of Change

Maps of the Kenilworth and Stoneleigh landscape - from Victorian times to the present day



Early 21st Century



Mid 20th Century



Late 19th Century

There are many different forces for change acting on the landscape. Some of the most recognisable forces are listed below:



## Change in the Countryside: 1990-1998



- Between 1990 and 1998: 42% of our landscapes (65/156) were either stable or showed changes in elements that were consistent with existing character area descriptions.
- In 26% of our landscapes (14/156) the changes were marked and inconsistent with descriptions.
- In 32% of our landscapes (50/156) the changes were inconsistent but of less significance for overall character.

	Number of Character Areas	% of Character Areas
Marked change inconsistent with character	41	26%
Some change inconsistent with character	50	32%
Some or limited change consistent with character	65	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100%</b>

The information shown here has been taken from the Countryside Quality Counts (CQC) project - a study to develop a national indicator of how the countryside is changing. For more information visit [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)