

# SECTION 2

## EXISTING LANDSCAPE AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS





## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

A wide range of landscape character assessments and Historic Character Assessments have been undertaken within and covering the region. These demonstrate the great diversity of landscape character that exists from the national to the district scale of assessment.

At the national scale, the Character of England map and its supporting narrative, the National Landscape Typology and Rural Atlas of Settlement in England<sup>9</sup> provide a broad overview of the variations in landscape character that exist across the region.

At the more local level, several county, district and protected landscape assessments have been undertaken. Some character assessments were undertaken in the early 1990s at a time when the process of LCA was in its infancy. Others follow 2002 best practice guidance.

In addition, several Historic Character Assessments have been undertaken that further contribute to the appreciation of the variations that exist in historic character across the region. However, only one Biodiversity Character Assessment has been completed.

All available reports and supporting mapping have been used in the identification, mapping and description of RLCTs, with the intention of the regional assessment providing a framework for the more detailed assessments. It is also judged that the EMRLCA will act as a signpost to the suite of more detailed or specialist assessments. It will be necessary to refer to these other assessments when seeking to understand variations in landscape character at a more detailed scale or to inform local planning or decision making.

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<sup>9</sup> Brian K Roberts and Stuart Wrathmell, *An Atlas of Rural Settlement in England*. English Heritage, 2000.

## 2.2 NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The top tier in the assessment hierarchy in England is the Character of England map which provides a broad characterisation of the English landscape. The assessment identifies 159 National Character Areas (NCAs), 36 of which fall wholly or partially within the East Midlands Region. The distribution of National Character Areas within the region is illustrated in Figure 2. The character of these National Character Areas is described in Countryside Character Volume 4<sup>10</sup>.

The National Landscape Typology subdivides the framework of National Character Areas into discrete types of landscape, identified and plotted, based on similarities in their physical, biological and cultural character. The National Landscape Typology arose from GIS manipulation of various baseline datasets and was not subjected to testing in the field.

A total of 41 National Landscape Character Types (NLCTs) can be found within the region (excluding urban). The character of these NLCTs is described through combining definitive attributes of the landscape, summarised by a unique 3 letter code, with each of the three codes representative of Physiography, Landcover and Cultural Pattern.

Several NLCTs recur in several locations in the Region such as landscape type LLW (a summary of L = Lowlands (Physiography), L = Chalk and Limestone (Landcover) and W = Wetland / Waste, Unwooded (Cultural Pattern) which generally follow floodplain valleys. However, a number of others NLCTs, such as the landscape type UDA (a summary of U = Low Hills, D = Heath and Moorland, A = Wooded, Ancient Woods) (coincident with ancient Precambrian rock outcrops in Charnwood Forest) only occur once within the region.

The distribution of National Landscape Character Types is illustrated on Figure 2. For further details, including the National Landscape Typology Definitive Attributes, refer to Appendix 6.

## 2.3 REVISION OF NATIONAL CHARACTER AREAS AND THE SETTING OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Natural England is committed to using England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs) as the national spatial framework for monitoring landscape change and for guiding the delivery of its work regionally.

In summary, the role and purpose of NCAs is to provide a:

- national categorisation of the broad variation of landscape and ecological characteristics across England, providing context to regional and local characterisation;
- national framework and context for reporting on landscape change and the state of ecosystem services; and
- basis for setting strategic landscape objectives that provide some context to regional and local delivery and a 'desired outcome' against which landscape change can be judged.

Natural England is reviewing and updating the NCA descriptions, including changes to their structure, new elements such as thematic topic areas and data based facts, and summaries of recent landscape change. In addition, the key ecosystem functions of each character area are considered, highlighting the contribution the landscape is making to provisioning services, such as food production; regulating services, such as climate regulation; and cultural services which cover the experiential qualities of the landscape.

Strategic objectives, within a landscape context, for each of the NCAs are also being developed. Their principal purpose is to guide integrated, strategic delivery and enable a measure against desired outcomes for both landscape character and landscapes functions.

Phase 1 of the draft NCA description revision has examined eight pilot areas to provide a framework and reference for the update of the remaining NCAs. Interim strategic objectives for all NCAs have been prepared by the Natural England regions. Subject to the outcome of consultation on the draft NCA descriptions and objectives, it is anticipated that the NCA revision will be completed in 2011.

## 2.4 NATIONAL HISTORIC RURAL SETTLEMENT ANALYSIS

In 2002 English Heritage published a major study of rural settlement in England<sup>11</sup>, which together with its companion volume<sup>12</sup>, brings together a decade of research to define the varied character of England's rural settlement. The two studies plot the distribution of former land uses, such as cleared land, woodlands and open pastures as well as exploring the interaction of physical and cultural factors that underpin the variations that can be observed in rural settlement in England.

## 2.5 COUNTY AND DISTRICT SCALE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

County and district scale landscape character assessments have been undertaken for several years by local authorities to inform a range of planning and decision making functions. They provide an assessment of landscape character at a more refined scale than nationally available assessments, and as such, present information that is more applicable to local decision making and engagement with local communities, which are often consulted in the assessment process.

The methods adopted for undertaking these assessments are varied, depending on when the assessment was carried out, at what scale, and for what purpose. Since 2002, and the publication of best practice guidance for landscape character assessment, there has been greater consistency in the approaches to these assessments, notably

because of the identification of an assessment hierarchy and the requirement to consider existing and neighbouring assessments in the process of identifying new Landscape Character Types or Areas. However, some disparity in the outputs is evident across the region.

Within the East Midlands, county and district assessments, as well as those undertaken for The National Forest, Lincolnshire Wolds AONB and Peak District National Park, provide full geographic coverage of LCAs across the region. Details of LCAs undertaken within the region are presented in Appendix 1 and their distribution illustrated on Figure 3.

Following the publication of the 2002 guidance, Derbyshire County Council was the first county in the region to produce an LCA, comprising 'The Landscape Character of Derbyshire', 2003. Rutland County Council produced an LCA in the same year. More recent county assessments comprise the comprehensive suite of documents that form the Northamptonshire Environmental Character Assessment that incorporates the integrated parallel assessments for Current Landscape, Historic Landscape and Biodiversity Character, and associated Strategy and Guidelines, and an interrelated Green Infrastructure Strategy (2005). The Peak District National Park finalised its Landscape Character Assessment in 2008 followed by a Landscape Strategy in 2009 and Nottinghamshire County Council updated its earlier 1998 'Countryside Appraisal' and published the Nottinghamshire Landscape Character Assessment in 2010.

A wide range of district assessments nests below the tier of county assessments and provide a further level of detail in the hierarchy of landscape character assessments that covers the region.

11 Brian K Roberts and Stuart Wrathmell, *Region and Place – A Study of English Rural Settlement*. English Heritage. 2002.

12 Brian K Roberts and Stuart Wrathmell, *An Atlas of Rural Settlement in England*. English Heritage. 2000.

A detailed review of the majority of these assessments was undertaken as part of the East Midlands Regional Landscape Scoping Study and is therefore not repeated in this assessment.

The EMRLCA provides a framework for future revisions to existing landscape character assessments in the region or new assessments that may be forthcoming.

POSITION IN NATIONAL HIERARCHY	EXAMPLE IN EAST MIDLANDS REGION	LEVEL IN HIERARCHY
National Landscape Character Area (NLCA)	Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire Coalfield	National
National Landscape Character Type (NLCT)	Intermediate, Other Heavy Land Coalfields	
National Landscape Character Type (NLCT)	Intermediate, other heavy land coalfields	Regional
Regional Landscape Character Type (RLCT)	Settled Coalfield Farmlands	
County/District Landscape Character Area	Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Coalfields	Local Authority
County/District Landscape Character Types	Coalfield Village Farmlands and Coalfield Estatelands	
Local Landscape Character Area	The Grassmoor Coalfield Village Farmlands	Local (example)
Local Landscape Character Type	Shallow Coalfield Valley	

## 2.6 COUNTY AND DISTRICT SCALE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a tool for assessing and describing the historic dimension of the landscape. HLC classifies the landscape into Historic Landscape Character Types based on a desk based review of documentary resources, maps and GIS data and identifies time depth in the existing landscape by observing patterns of land use, field morphology and other diagnostic features.

HLC is generally undertaken for individual counties as part of an ongoing national programme supported by English Heritage. Its core method<sup>13</sup> is continually developing through adaptation to changing perceptions and technologies, and in response to regional and local conditions and concerns.

HLCs provide an important evidence base and framework of interpretation and understanding that can be used for informing decisions that have the potential to have an impact on landscape and landscape history, such as planning applications. Other forms of change, such as that which occurs through land management, can also be informed by HLC. HLCs also provide a framework for informing detailed research programmes on landscape evolution or studies that seek to plot or predict the survival of archaeological remains in various types of landscape. By drawing out the cultural dimension in the present landscape, HLCs can be expected to increasingly contribute to the definition and discussion of sense of place and the recognition of the degree to which individual and communal identities are formed by and feed into that sense of place. HLCs also have an important role in informing Landscape Character Assessments, providing a useful interpretation of field morphology and time depth which is not always immediately apparent.

Nationally, the HLC programme is approximately two-thirds complete. Within the East Midlands, several counties have undertaken HLCs which are either complete or are ongoing. Details of Historic Landscape Characterisations undertaken within the East Midlands Region are presented in Appendix 1 and their distribution illustrated on Figure 3.

A diagram of the hierarchical framework of landscape character assessment, including the new regional assessment, is provided below.

<sup>13</sup> Oscar Aldred and Graham Fairclough, *Historic Landscape Characterisation: taking stock of the method*. English Heritage and Somerset County Council, 2003.

