



TOPIC PAPER 2: Links to other sustainability tools

How Landscape Character Assessment can inform a range of other sustainability tools, and how these tools can, in turn, inform decisions on conserving and enhancing landscape character.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Landscape Character Assessment can inform a range of other sustainability tools and methodologies. Equally these other tools may assist in reaching decisions concerning the conservation and enhancement of landscape character.

1.2 The other sustainability tools that are touched upon in this paper are:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Identification of landscape indicators
- The Quality of Life (QoL) Capital approach (England)
- Natural Heritage Futures (Scotland)

1.3 Both EIA and landscape indicators are used in England and Scotland, while QoL Capital is a key sustainability tool being developed in England. In Scotland, Natural Heritage Futures are an emerging sustainability tool. Further separate guidance on emerging tools in Scotland, including capacity studies, may be available at a later date from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1.4 Landscape Character Assessment is entirely separate from Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). EIA is a key tool that has been formally in use since the introduction of EC Directive 85/337 in 1985 in both England and Scotland. It is the process of compiling, evaluating and presenting all the significant environmental effects of a proposed development in order to assist the local planning authority in considering and determining the planning application. An EIA should provide a description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development, including population, flora and fauna, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, including the architectural and archaeological heritage, the landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. The impacts on these and their significance are then assessed.

1.5 The outputs from Landscape Character Assessment make an important contribution to EIA. They can provide the baseline description of the landscape as a resource and can contribute to an assessment of the likely impact on that resource were the development to proceed. The methods which should be followed in undertaking a Landscape Character Assessment as part of an EIA are not described further here as they are covered separately in guidance produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment [1].

IDENTIFYING INDICATORS AND MONITORING CHANGE

1.6 There is now great interest in the development of environmental indicators to monitor trends. At the national level, landscape character has been particularly difficult to summarise in national indicators, as there is such variation in character across Britain. The Countryside Agency is currently researching the development of national indicators of 'change in countryside character' and 'countryside quality' in partnership with DEFRA, English Nature and English Heritage, making use of a wide range of digital land use change data. It is undoubtedly easier to identify indicators to reflect change in landscape character at the more local level. Nevertheless, the selection of such indicators needs to be treated with considerable care.

Selection of indicators

1.7 Indicators need to provide a good indication of change in character; have resonance (i.e. capture public attention); be capable of measurement; and use meaningful data that is either easily available or capable of being easily collected. This is easier said than done!

1.8 Key landscape characteristics represent the essential character of individual landscape character areas and types but they are usually too general to act as indicators in their own right. Instead, specific features or attributes need to

be selected from the key characteristics. These need to be:

- central to the distinctive character of the landscape character type or area;
- liable to experience change either in extent or in their condition;
- capable of measuring the key landscape objectives or targets for individual character types / areas.

1.9 Other factors that need to be taken into account in the identification of landscape indicators are:

- they need to be defined precisely. For example, desired trends in skyline woodlands may be different to those for valley bottom woodlands;
- the desired direction of change of the chosen indicators must be known. For individual features the desired direction of change may be different depending on the landscape character area. For example, in one area an increase in woodland cover may be desirable while in another area it may not;
- stakeholders should be involved in the choice of indicators to ensure that they have resonance;
- chosen indicators must match available data sets and/or must be capable of monitoring by stakeholders - this makes it all the more important that stakeholders agree with the indicators chosen.

1.10 Where it is impractical to monitor change across a whole landscape character type or area, sample areas should be identified. These might be grid squares, or parishes or other suitable units eg land description units.

1.11 In summary, to enable monitoring of landscape change, new Landscape Character Assessments should consider:

- identifying one or more key indicators for each landscape character type or area;
- ensuring that these key indicators can measure the main objectives for the landscape character type /area;
- involving stakeholders in the identification of indicators, to ensure that they have resonance;
- choosing indicators which can be monitored by local stakeholders where existing data sets are not available.

QUALITY OF LIFE (QoL) CAPITAL

What is it?

1.12. Quality of Life (QoL) Capital is a decision-support tool for maximising environmental, economic and social BENEFITS as part of any land use planning or other management decision. It has been developed by the conservation agencies in England (Countryside Agency, English Heritage, English Nature, and the Environment Agency) over the last five years, initially under the name of Environmental Capital and latterly under the name of Quality of Life Capital to reflect its applicability to broader sustainability concerns.

Relationship to Landscape Character Assessment

1.13 QoL Capital links to Landscape Character Assessment in two key respects:

- First, QoL Capital provides one way of evaluating the future of an area in a fully integrated way. It can therefore be applied to assist decisions on the future of the landscape of an area, although as a fully integrated evaluation framework, it is best applied to situations where landscape is being considered as part of a wider appraisal, considering environmental, economic and social concerns.
- Second, Landscape Character Assessment can inform a QoL Capital exercise by indicating the benefits that individual features or areas provide in creating sense of place.

1.14 QoL Capital has yet to be formalised within the planning process, but a range of practitioners are starting to use its main principles in their work and government advice on the planning system may reflect this as it is up-dated. The Transport White Paper [2] recommends the approach in its appraisal section, and the Rural White Paper [3] also mentions it.

Advantages of the approach

1.15 The main advantages of the QoL Capital approach in informing decisions about the future of areas and places is that it:

- provides a *systematic and transparent* evaluation framework for all scales of decision-making, from the national to the local;
- *integrates environmental, social and economic issues*;
- emphasises *improvement of quality of life* rather than acceptance of the status quo;
- *values the common place* (which can be so important in creating local identity) as well as the unusual and rare;
- *facilitates participation*, linking different professional judgements and enabling different stakeholder inputs;
- *works with other tools and processes* such as Environmental Impact Assessment and community planning;
- *systematises* existing good practice.

The central idea of QoL Capital

1.16 The central idea that underpins QoL Capital is that THINGS (features, sites, areas, landscapes) produce benefits. It is these benefits that matter for quality of life. And it is these benefits that we should strive to maintain, improve or replace if they are damaged or lost.

1.17 Thinking in terms of the benefits that THINGS (including landscapes and landscape features) provide, helps us understand WHY they matter for sustainability and, in the case of landscape character, WHY and/or how they contribute to sense of place. For example, woodland may provide a wide range of benefits including acting as a carbon sink and providing a recreational resource. Specifically in relation to sense of place, they may provide enclosure or skyline features. Articulating the reasons why an area or thing matters helps inform how it should be managed for sustainability.

The key stages in the Quality of Life Capital approach

1.18 The key stages in the QoL Capital approach are as follows:

Step A: Define the Purpose: The purpose will dictate the area to be considered, the types of benefits that need to be identified, who should be involved in the process, and the detail of the study.

Step B: Areas/Features: The purpose should imply which areas and /or features need to be studied or characterised. It is at this stage that Landscape Character Assessment, especially where it takes the form of an integrated characterisation, may make an important contribution to the overall QoL Capital approach, indicating the key characteristics of the area and why and how these contribute to sense of place.

Step C: Identification of benefits: The BENEFITS provided by the landscapes / features / areas are then identified.

Step D: Evaluation: Evaluation of the benefits is undertaken according to a consistent evaluation framework that asks the following questions of each identified benefit:

- Who does the benefit matter to, why, and at what scale (eg national, regional local)?
- How important is the benefit at that scale?
- Do we have enough of it?
- What (if anything) could make up for any loss or damage to the benefit- is it substitutable?

Step E: Identifying management aims: From the evaluation, clear management aims should emerge to ensure that Quality of Life is enhanced:

- for substitutable benefits - the greater the importance and the less there is of the benefit, the higher the priority to create more (in quality and quantity) than has been lost;

- for non-substitutable benefits - the greater the importance and the less there is of the benefit, the higher the priority to protect it from adverse change and to seek enhancement.

1.19 In the evaluation, the question 'do we have enough?' is important, in that it focuses attention on those sustainability benefits that are in decline in quality and/or quantity, seeking positive gain rather than just maintenance of the status quo.

Uses of QoL Capital

1.20 In this context the QoL Capital approach is particularly valuable in helping to reach decisions where it is important to see landscape character alongside other sustainability concerns. In particular:

- where it is important to understand how different aspects of sustainability interact to develop integrated management objectives;
- where it is important to give equal attention to different aspects of sustainability - for example in option evaluation or in the review of alternative scenarios;
- where there is stakeholder involvement and the concerns of different stakeholders need to be seen side by side;
- where targets and indicators are being identified. The question WHY a feature matters for local character can help identify meaningful indicators;
- where a systematic and transparent framework is required to identify compensation and enhancement measures in the face of change (e.g. in the case of major development proposals) especially where there may be 'trading' between different concerns;
- in conflict resolution where conservation and enhancement of landscape character needs to be seen alongside other interests. This is particularly relevant to management planning.

NATURAL HERITAGE FUTURES

1.21 Natural Heritage Futures is a framework that has been developed by Scottish Natural Heritage for putting sustainable development into practice [4]. As part of the framework, Scotland has been divided into 21 areas each with its own identity resulting from the interaction of geology, landform, landscape, wildlife, land use - and hence are affected by distinct issues.

1.22 For each area a vision has been developed for the sustainable use of the local natural heritage and the action required to achieve it. These visions reflect the important interactions between environmental quality and economic and social well-being. In turn these sustainability visions will be used to inform SNH's inputs to plans and strategies for various sectors and geographical areas including Development Plans, Community Planning, Indicative Forestry Strategies, Access, Tourism and Renewable Energy Strategies, local and national Biodiversity Action Plans, integrated Catchment Management, Integrated Coastal Zone Management, and National Park Plans.

1.23 It is argued by SNH that action to support social, economic and environmental objectives needs to take account of how they interact. However, to give social, economic and environmental objectives equal weight underplays our dependence on soundly functioning ecosystems. Due weight therefore needs to be accorded to the long-term stewardship of this aspect of the environment in cases where there is a perceived conflict between environmental and other objectives. Sustainable development therefore requires integrated and flexible patterns of governance which respects the distinctive environment of different character areas.

1.24 Further advice on the use of sustainability tools in Scotland and their interaction with Landscape Character Assessment, may be provided by SNH in the future.

REFERENCES

- [1] Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment (2002) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Second Edition*. E&FN Spon, London.
- [2] Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1998) *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*. Transport White Paper. Stationery Office, London.
- [3] Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (2000) *Our Countryside: The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England*. Rural White Paper. Stationery Office, London.
- [4] Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) *Natural Heritage Futures: An Overview*. Scottish Natural Heritage, Battleby.



The full *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland* and related topic papers can be viewed and downloaded from www.countryside.gov.uk/cc/guidance and www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA

Free copies of the guidance are also available from:

Countryside Agency Publications
Tel: 0870 1206466
Fax: 0870 1206467
Email: countryside@twoten.press.net

Scottish Natural Heritage
Tel: 0131 446 2400
Fax: 0131 446 2405
Email: carolyn.dunnett@snh.gov.uk

