

Introduction

A Strategy for Sustainable Management of Change.

Landscape Character Assessment is a way of describing and recording what makes a place distinctive or different, what is special about it. This is concerned primarily with landscape character, rather than with quality or value. These factors are nevertheless relevant when a landscape character assessment is used to inform decisions. It is vital that we understand the character of our landscape in order to manage change. Landscape character is an aid to decision making and not a process designed to resist change. We need to understand what the landscape is like today to ensure that change and development do not undermine local distinctiveness and sense of place. Character assessment is also used to determine what measures can be taken to enhance the landscape.

The National Landscape Character Assessment

This 2016 update is to bring the County Landscape Assessment in line with updates to the National Landscape Character Assessment.

NCA's in south east England and London

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Character area boundaries at national and county level follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision making framework for the natural environment.

East Sussex County incorporates all or parts of five of the NCAs:

The High Weald

The Low Weald

The South Downs

The Pevensey Levels

Romney Marsh

The National Ecosystem Assessment

A key feature of this update is the inclusion of the benefits and services that the landscape can provide as identified in the *National Ecosystem Assessment*.

National Ecosystem Assessment

The National Ecosystem Assessment has identified and evaluated the key services which the natural environment provides and these are broadly categorised as follows:

- Provisioning services (food, fibre and water supply)
- Regulating services (water purification, air quality maintenance and climate regulation)
- Cultural services (inspiration, education and wellbeing)

The European Landscape Convention

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is an international agreement which has been endorsed by 38 out of 47 Council of Europe Members including Britain in 2007. The ELC gives strength to recognition of landscapes in law and to integrate into all relevant policies. *“Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”* (Council of Europe 2000)

A key message in the convention is that *‘All Landscapes Matter’*.

Using Landscape Character Assessment to inform local policymaking and development management decisions is an established method of putting the principles set out in the ELC into practice. This approach encourages community engagement and should be used to inform Local and Neighbourhood plans.

Introduction

Objectives of the East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

- To identify the unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geological, cultural and economic activity that defines each county landscape character area.
- To provide a county-wide consistent landscape character assessment framework as a background for more detailed assessments.
- To identify problems and pressures for each character area, formulate a vision and provide landscape action priorities

Aims of 2016 review

The aim is to review each landscape character area in the county in the context of the social and economic benefits (ecosystem services) that the landscape provides. The strategy also identifies specific pressures for development and change for each area. The key ecosystem services are described for each character area and an evaluation of the current condition of the landscape and ecosystems. Suggestions for how these key services can be enhanced are outlined for each character area. This in turn informs the Landscape Management Guidance and suggestions for Managing Change into the future.

Note: The East Sussex landscape character areas which fall within the South Downs National Park Authority boundary have not been updated in this review. This is to avoid duplication with the South Downs Integrated Landscape Assessment. The East Sussex LCA character area descriptions for the downs are retained as these are still relevant.

South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment

Guidelines for Managing Landscape Change

These guidelines set out how the vision and strategy for each character area could be achieved. The section outlines which of the areas' key positive attributes would need to be taken into account in planning for new development. The guidelines provide a link back to the landscape character assessment and are intended to inform development planning decisions.

The concluding table 'Landscape Management Guidelines' summarises the management guidelines for each landscape character area taking into account the key attributes. Alongside this the multiple benefits (ecosystem services) that each character area can offer are set out. Opportunities to enhance

these through changes to landscape management are outlined.

Where relevant cross reference is made to other landscape management plans. Where areas overlap with the boundaries for the South Downs National Park or the High Weald AONB cross reference is made to the statutory management plans for these designated landscapes.

HWAONB: <http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/high-weald-aonb-management-plan-documents/1475-high-weald-management-plan-3rd-edition-2014-2019/file.html>

SDNP: [Partnership Management Plan](#)

The Woodland Trust manages some woodland in the County and can provide advice, guidance and grants for planting new woodlands and managing existing woods at [woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk). The Woodland Trust also has an initiative for the creation of hedges with trees.

The Forestry Commission manages areas of woodland and can provide grants for woodland planting, improvement and management at www.forestry.gov.uk/