VERSION 2 as at August 2023

# Position Statement

# **Landscape & Valued Landscape**

CPRE Issue

A landscape is the visible features of an area of land, its landforms, and how they integrate with natural or man-made features. A landscape includes the physical elements of geophysically defined landforms such as mountains, hills, water bodies such as rivers, lakes, ponds and the sea, living elements of land cover including indigenous vegetation, human elements including different forms of land use, buildings, and structures, and transitory elements such as lighting and weather conditions.

Combining both their physical origins and the cultural overlay of human presence, often created over millennia, landscapes reflect a living synthesis of people and place that is vital to local and national identity.

There are several definitions of what constitutes a landscape, depending on context. In common usage, however, a landscape refers to all the visible features of an area of land (usually rural). Conservation and enhancement for the public benefit of the [aesthetic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesthetic) appeal of landscape and its enjoyment by the public is fundamental to the objectives of CPRE, especially Designated Landscapes in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Valued Landscapes elsewhere.

Landscape character needs protection from harmful development. Development projecting above skylines and ridgelines can be especially harmful to landscape character and experience of the landscape.

Planning Guidance

 *Landscape Led Local Plan*

CPRE objectives as regards conservation and enhancement of local landscapes will be assisted if the Local Plan is Landscape Led. A Landscape Led Local Plan is one in which:

* policies are formulated putting landscape first and then people’s interaction with it, designed to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage,
* the Spatial Portrait is informed by the characteristics of the different landscapes as defined by the District Landscape Character Assessment and historic patterns of development,
* development proposals are informed by landscape character, reflecting the context and type of landscape in which the development is located,
* the design, layout and scale of proposals conserve the existing landscape features which contribute to the distinctive character, pattern and evolution of the landscape, and
* development proposal's safeguard the experiential and amenity qualities of the landscape

Within Designated Landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Local Plans will need to be Landscape Led in order to further the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the designated area. (In AONBs the statutory purpose is only to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated area, but this is taken to cover landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage)

Outside Designated Landscapes, CPRE Hampshire encourages all Districts (which do not consisting mainly of urban area) to adopt a Landscape Led approach to the Local Plan.

*Landscape Character*

Landscape character is what make an area unique, resulting from the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. Landscape character is the combination of distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements and features including , for example, the landform, historic landscape or ‘time depth’, and a variety of perceptual and aesthetic qualities.

It is important that development proposals are based on a meaningful understanding of the context and character of an area and those positive characteristics which define local distinctiveness. The use of standard design solutions and features can erode local distinctiveness in urban and rural areas. Landscape is therefore closely linked to design, and they need to be considered together. Also, the cumulative impact of development or land-use change can detrimentally affect landscape character.

Development proposals should be informed by the District and community-led/local landscape character assessments and appropriate site-based investigations. Local landscape character assessments may include Community, Parish or Village Design Statements and other community planning documents. However, references to these will not be a substitute for appropriate professional site based assessment and research.

Development proposals may need to be accompaniedby a Landscape Appraisal, proportionate to the size and likely impacts of the scheme. Landscape Appraisals should be carried out in accordance with the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* and successor documents. If the proposals require a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) then a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect will be required.

The design and layout of proposals should be consistent with local landscape character. Good design should avoid the need for screening which could appear incongruous in the landscape. Proposals should be designed to be complementary to their context and setting. The introduction of undesirable exotic plant species into the wider countryside and at the settlement edge as part of scheme planting proposals will be strongly resisted. The use of non-native plant species may be justifiable in some cases where there are clear reasons for this, for example, based on biodiversity or other ecosystem services functions.

There are many locations where designed landscapes, gardens and parkscapes exist within the towns, settlements and wider countryside, often associated with land holdings. These may be included on the *Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.* In addition, there are many other sites which are identified as being designed landscapes, but not included on the Historic England List

The gaps between settlements protect the individual character and identity of towns and villages. They retain the open nature and the physical and, either real or perceived, visual separation between settlements. The land at the edge of settlements often forms part of the historic setting of the settlement and can include areas which have cultural importance. Public Rights of way can often provide access to these areas and connections to the open landscape beyond.

Green and blue corridors are areas or linear features which connect habitat and wildlife populations and can provide opportunities for walking and cycling, and also facilitate the movement of wildlife. Green and blue corridors are an essential component of the National Park’s GI and can provide benefits for people and wildlife at both the landscape scale and more local scale.

Model Policy

*1. Development proposals will only be permitted where they conserve and enhance landscape character by demonstrating that:*

 *a) They are informed by landscape character, reflecting the context and type of landscape in which the development is located;*

 *b) The design, layout and scale of proposals conserve and enhance existing landscape character features which contribute to the distinctive character, pattern and evolution of the landscape;*

 *c) They will safeguard the experiential and amenity qualities of the landscape; and*

 *d) Where planting is considered appropriate, it is consistent with local character, enhances biodiversity, contributes to the delivery of GI and uses native species, unless there are appropriate and justified reasons to select non-native species.*

*2. Where development proposals are within designed landscapes, or the setting of designed landscapes, (including historic parkscapes and those on the Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens) they should be based on a demonstrable understanding of the design principles of the landscape and should be complementary to it.*

*3. The settlement pattern and individual identity of settlements and the integrity of predominantly open and undeveloped land between settlements will not be undermined.*

*4. Green and blue corridors will be safeguarded. Development proposals should identify and take opportunities to create and connect green and blue corridors.*

*5. The restoration of landscapes where features have been lost or degraded will be supported where it contributes positively to landscape character.*

Valued Landscape

NPPF 2021 paragraph 174(a) requires that the planning system and decisions should *contribute to and enhance the natural landscape by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.* In interpreting this provision, it is now accepted by the Court and Inspectors on appeal that classification as a Valued Landscape indicates development should be restricted on the basis that the social and economic benefit of development would be significantly outweighed by the environmental harm caused, and that this is a material consideration in planning decisions.

A Valued Landscape is a tract of countryside outside a Designated Landscape which shows "demonstrable attributes beyond the ordinary" when considering matters such as landscape character and condition, scenic quality, recreational value, tranquillity, dark skies, conservation and cultural interest.

The NPPF wording indicates that all Valued Landscapes need to be identified in new Local Plans if they are to gain the protection afforded by paragraph 174, and this view has been supported by an Inspector on appeal. LPAs need to be urged to identify all Valued Landscapes within the District (outside the National Parks and AONBs) for inclusion in emerging Local Plans, which may otherwise be found not to be Sound at Examination. A starting point will be areas designated as Areas of Special Landscape Quality, or similar, in Local Plans of the early 1990s.

Also, it is important that Local Plans have a policy requiring a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of proposed development which might have a significant adverse impact on a Valued Landscape.

More detail on the background to Valued Landscapes and their place in plan-making and decisions-making is set out in a separate CPRE Hampshire *Briefing Note - Defining Valued Landscapes.* This discusses the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GVLIA) published by the Landscape Institute.

Official assessment as to whether a landscape is a Valued Landscape is a matter for the LPA, but there have been cases where CPRE Hampshire has needed to make a preliminary assessment, notably where large housing development is being suggested. In doing this it is important for CPRE to concentrate on its acknowledged areas of knowledge and expertise. This is unlikely to cover all the criteria in the GVLIA, but this not critical where the purpose is to prompt the LPA to carry out its own, fuller, assessment.

In these circumstances, CPRE Hampshire has concentrated on assessing:

* landscape character and physical distinctiveness, and
* public experience of the landscape from public rights of way and access land

Accompanied by photographs, to evidence the assessment

An example is set out below (photographs not included)

Land east of the A31 at Neatham Down, Alton

Land east of the A31 at Neatham Down, Alton ("the Site") is being considered for a new settlement of 600 dwellings

CPRE Hampshire has now had the opportunity to make an assessment of this area in the context of a NPPF Valued Landscape on which development is restricted in accordance with national guidance. This assessment has regard to:

* Hampshire Integrated Landscape Character Assessment ("HILCA")
* East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment ("EHLCA)
* a study of criteria used by Inspectors on appeal in deciding whether appeal sites are "valued" landscapes
* our own observations

*Assessment of landscape character and physical distinctiveness:-*

The area being considered is north of Neatham Down and Golden Chair Farm, some 1.5 kilometres from the centre of Alton. The Site extends north westwards for a distance of some 600 metres. It is within an open downland part of LCA 3f - Wey Valley in HILCA and is a chalk outlier on the western edge of LCA 6C - Worldham Greensand Terrace in EHCLA.

The Site is within a landscape to the east of the A31 consisting of a tract of chalk outliers extending over some 2.5 kilometres running north east to south west which form the western edge of the Worldham Greensand Terrace LCA and the eastern side of the Wey Valley opposite the town of Alton. These outliers include Copt Hill and Neatham Down, extending over to the west of the A31 at Windmill Hill.

The landscape consists of large fields of mainly arable land bounded by hedgerows with small areas of woodland. It is very open and rolling landscape with long vistas across Alton to the elevated chalk plateau which rises steeply behind the town and runs parallel along the opposite side of the Wey Valley, and long vistas to the south east and south towards the South Downs National Park at East Worldham and Selborne.

The A31 runs north east/south west between the chalk outliers, with the B3004 (Cakers Lane) to the south of Neatham Down leading eastwards away from the A31 to East Worldham and Kingsley. To the north of the B3004 the Hangers Way trail also leads eastwards from the A31 around the lower part of the southern slope of Neatham Down to East Worldham. A footpath runs north west from East Worldham across the eastern slope of Neatham Down to Copt Hill and then to the A31.

In a field immediately adjacent to B3004, on the northern side, is a solar farm.

This landscape is one of great natural beauty and is essentially peaceful and tranquil, little disturbed by the A31 or the town of Alton which are largely hidden by hedgerows and woodland. It is entirely undeveloped, other than the solar farm mentioned

This tract of landscape is within the Wooded Downland Area of Special Landscape Quality as proposed in a Report by RPS Watson to East Hampshire District Council dated 8 December 1994, based on its scarcity value, scenic quality, unspoilt character and sense of place. This assessment is as valid today as it was in 1994

*Assessment of public experience of the landscape:-*

This open tract of landscape is experienced by the public from the A3 (mainly in winter when the hedgerows lining the road are devoid of leaves), from Cakers Lane, form the Hangers Way, from the footpath leading to Copt Hill, and across the A31 from public vantage points in Alton, notably Windmill Hill

Views are drawn to the chalk outliers of Neatham Down, Windmill Hill and Copt Hill (where visible), but the arable fields and hedgerows leading up to the outliers are very much part of the overall impact of natural beauty. Wide open views as described above are experienced from parts of the Hangers Way and the footpath leading to Copt Hill.

The landscape provides a high degree of tranquillity (in its widest sense) despite the presence of the A31 and the solar farm north of Cakers Lane. It has a sense of place which is quite separate from that of the town of Alton, from which in large part it is separated by the A31.

The Site itself is visible from the footpath leading to Copt Hill which borders two sides of the site.

Accordingly, taking account of:-

* the scenic quality and unspoilt character of this undeveloped tract of landscape of great natural beauty, with its open views and strong sense of tranquillity,
* the high quality of the public experience of this landscape,
* the significant contribution to the landscape character areas identified in HILCA and EHLCA

CPRE Hampshire considers this tract of landscape, which includes the Site, is an NPPF Valued Landscape to which NPPF 2019 paragraph 174(a) applies.

Note

In considering the wording of individual policies in Local Plans, it is important to bear in mind that Local Plans must be looked at as a whole. This means, for example, that policies for the protection of landscape must be applied when considering each and every planning application; and accordingly, there is generally no need for other policies to refer specifically to landscape matters.