



The countryside charity
Hampshire

VERSION 3 as at October 2026

Position Statement

Landscape & Natural Beauty

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 appeal of landscape and its enjoyment by the public is fundamental to the objectives of CPRE, especially Designated Landscapes in National Parks and National Landscapes and, elsewhere, landscapes which are out of the ordinary

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 landscape character, natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage,



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- the Spatial Portrait is informed by the characteristics of the different landscapes as portrayed in area Landscape Character Assessment and historic patterns of development,
- development proposals are informed by landscape character and natural beauty, 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 National Landscapes) Local Plans will need to be Landscape Led to further the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the designated area. (In National Landscapes the statutory purpose is only to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated area, but this is accepted as including wildlife and cultural heritage)

Outside Designated Landscapes, CPRE Hampshire encourages all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) - excluding those covering mainly urban areas - to adopt a Landscape Led approach to the Local Plan.

Landscape character and natural beauty

In the context of the overall environmental objective to protect and enhance our natural environment (paragraph17(c)), NPPF 2026 Chapter 19 Policy N2.1(a) provides that development proposals should consider the environmental qualities of land proposed for development, including...landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, and identify opportunities for those qualities to be conserved

Accordingly, landscape character and natural beauty of the countryside are material considerations in deciding all planning application,

Landscape character is what makes an area unique, resulting from the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. It 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.



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The term natural beauty is longstanding and is accepted to include landscape quality, scenic quality, relative tranquillity, along with the influence of natural heritage features (flora, fauna, geological and physiographical) and cultural heritage on the perception of the natural beauty of the countryside.

Landscape quality is a measure of the physical state or condition of the landscape. Scenic quality is the extent to which the landscape appeals to the senses, (primarily, but not only, the visual senses).

So, it is important that development proposals are based on a meaningful understanding of the landscape character and natural beauty of the area. Development proposals should be informed by LPA led area landscape character assessments and appropriate site-based investigations. These may be supplemented by local landscape character assessments within 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 accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact assessment (LVIA), proportionate to the size and likely impacts of the scheme. These 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 an LVIA undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect will be required.

The use of standard design solutions and features can erode landscape character and natural beauty. Conservation is therefore closely linked to design, and they need to be considered together. The design and layout of proposals should be consistent with local landscape character and the characteristics which define natural beauty.

In this context NPPF Policy N2.1 (d) provides that development proposals should conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual, historic or nature conservation value (such as established trees and hedgerows) where possible; and use appropriate landscaping to help create well designed places and integrate the development into its surroundings.

Landscaping will not be appropriate if it involves 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 should be strongly resisted, although the use of non-native plant species may be justifiable in some cases where there



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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. All these need to be protected.

The cumulative impact of development or land-use change can detrimentally affect landscape character and natural beauty, and the gaps between settlements protect the individual character and identity of towns and villages. They retain the open nature and the physical and visual separation between settlements.

The land on 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 facilitate the movement of wildlife. They provide benefits for people and wildlife at both the landscape scale and more local scale.

Sites and Areas of Importance for Landscape

The above briefing and model policy applies to all landscape, but the NPPF additionally sets out to conserve sites and areas of importance for their landscape

In terms of Plan-Making

Policies N1.1 & N1.1a states that Local Plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment by using relevant evidence to set out locally designated sites and areas of importance for their landscape. This provides national support for designating sites and areas of importance for landscape in a Local Plan. Then, following Policy N1.1b the Local Plan should also identify opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of such sites and areas. An assessment of the importance of landscape should form part of the scoping of the issues to be covered by a new local plan.

What are areas of importance for landscape? There is no definition in the Glossary, but the reference to "landscape in the plan area" in Policy N1.1a shows that such landscapes cannot



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be confined to Protected Landscapes as many plan areas do not have any Protected Landscape, and Protected Landscape have separate policies for landscape protection.

To be "important" such landscapes must be out of the ordinary in terms of landscape character and natural beauty. The assessment of the merits of an area should be robust and based on sound criteria. A good starting point is the Landscape Institute's criteria for assessing landscape value which has been accepted by planning inspectors at appeal as an appropriate methodology.

A number of local planning authorities have commissioned landscape assessments of their area, and some may have policy designations which recognise the out of the ordinary landscape quality of particular areas. These should be drawn upon in considering the landscape importance of an area. Where there is other available relevant evidence assessing landscapes as out of the ordinary, such as appeal decisions or formal landscape value assessments, this should also be drawn on.

The Local Plan will need to include appropriate a policy to conserve and enhance sites and areas of importance for landscape. Major development will not usually be appropriate in such landscapes and should be steered away from these landscapes to utilise land of least environmental value, as per Policy N1.1c.

In terms of decision-making

Where there is an adopted Local Plan prepared according to the 2026 NPPF then policies for conservation and enhancement of local sites or areas of importance for landscape will carry considerable weight in deciding development proposals located within them.

In any event, the considerations referred to above as to landscape character and natural beauty (NPPF Policies N2.1a & N2.1d) will necessarily carry greater weight where development proposals involve a site or area of importance for landscape. Again, existing evidence assessing sites or areas of landscape as out of the ordinary, such as appeal decisions or formal landscape value assessments, will be relevant

Model Policy

NPPF Policy PM2 advises that local plans should set out a positive vision and strategy which...conserves and improves the environment. In the context of landscape and natural beauty the following policy provides a model:



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1. Development proposals will be permitted where they are informed by landscape character, reflecting the context and type of landscape in which the development is located and;

a) the design, layout and scale of proposals conserve and enhance existing features of landscape character and natural beauty which contribute to the distinctive character, pattern and evolution of the landscape, and

b) they conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual, historic or nature conservation value, and

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. Development proposals will only be permitted within a site or area of importance for landscape where landscape character and natural beauty are conserved and, where possible, enhanced.

3. 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.

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

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

6. The restoration of landscapes where features have been lost or degraded will be supported where it contributes positively to landscape character and natural beauty.