



Judging Landscape Capacity

A Development Management Toolkit

Endorsed by Environment Heritage and Planning Portfolio Advisory Committee
16th October 2014

This document will form part of a Landscape Supplementary Planning Document as part of the emerging Cornwall Local Plan.

Introduction

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place, and is the setting for our lives. The Cornish landscape is unique, stunning, diverse, and a major economic asset which provides

- economic value - often becoming a central factor in attracting business and tourism,
- social and community value as an important part of people's lives, contributing to our sense of identity and well-being, and bringing enjoyment and inspiration
- environmental value as a home for wildlife and a cultural record of society's use of the land.

It is crucial that we understand what makes up the character of the landscape so when we consider how it might change, that change is for the better. Through landscape character assessment we can gain an understanding of what elements of the character are important and have value to help in the decision making process.

The 2004 Structure Plan under Policy 2 – Character Areas, Design & Environmental Protection recognised the need to protect and enhance the local distinctiveness of the natural and built environment through 26 Areas of Great Landscape Value. Whilst the emerging Local Plan does not contain a policy for AGLV it does under Policy 2 look to

‘Identify the value and sensitivity of all landscapes, understanding what is important to the character to allow them to be protected, enhanced and conserved’

This Toolkit (based upon a document written by Colette Holden Cornwall AONB Manager, revised in line with GLVIA3, 2013) provides a framework for making decisions relating to specific development proposals, to identify the landscape’s sensitivity to the proposed change, the value of the landscape within which the development is proposed, and whether the landscape has the capacity to accept the change without adverse impact.

The Cornwall Landscape Character Assessment - 2007

Cornwall’s Landscape Character Assessment is a tool that can help in the decision making process. It divides the landscape of Cornwall up into 40 areas with commonality (Landscape Character Areas or LCA). Each of these 40 individual LCAs has a separate description which outlines the key characteristics which make that landscape unique.

This information can help guide planners and developers to achieve high quality development which conserves and enhances local distinctiveness, is in the right place, and respects its surroundings and locale. Landscape Character Assessment cannot provide a definitive answer but it can help to

- assess land availability for a range of uses, including new development
- inform the siting and design of particular types of development such as housing, minerals, telecommunications and renewable energy
- provide information for Environmental Assessments of plans, policies and individual development proposals.

The 40 Character Areas in the 2007 Assessment do not describe the sensitivity, or the value of the landscape. Character and visual sensitivity will vary across a LCA, and will depend upon the development which is proposed. This Toolkit looks at the development specific effects on landscape character and views, and provides a framework for a judgement to be made as to the capacity of the landscape to accept the change created by the proposed development.

The mapping information for the 40 LCAs is available on the Landscape pages of the Council’s web site at [Cornwall Council interactive mapping](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/cornwall_landscape) (www.cornwall.gov.uk/cornwall_landscape)

Using Landscape Character Assessment in Development Management

Policy context for character assessment

Landscape characterisation creates an evidence base to be used as a tool for considering development proposals, which is now recognised and supported at the national and local policy level:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

This National document states as one of its 12 Core Principles that planning should *'take account of the different roles and character of different areas.....recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'*

'Permission should be refused for development of poor design, that fails to take opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area' paragraph 64

'Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes' paragraph 109

'Maintain the character of the undeveloped coast, protecting and enhancing its distinctive landscapes' paragraph 114

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Designated under the National Parks Act this designation seeks to protect and enhance the landscape whilst recognising the needs of the local community and economy. Government has confirmed that AONBs are equivalent to national parks in terms of their landscape quality, scenic beauty and their planning status.

Emerging Cornwall Local Plan

Policy 2

Maintain the special character of Cornwall, recognising all landscapes are important, in order to;

- a. Promote and enhance the special qualities that make up the diverse and locally distinctive landscapes of Cornwall;
- b. Identify the value and sensitivity of all landscapes, understanding what is important to the character to allow them to be protected, enhanced and conserved;
- c. Create resilient landscapes and sensitively accommodate investment and growth within Cornwall's unique landscape qualities, ensuring people continue to be drawn to Cornwall to visit and for a thriving healthy population to live and work;
- d. Protect the natural beauty of the AONB and undeveloped coast.

(as presented to Environment & Planning Portfolio Advisory Committee, October 2013)

Policy 23 – Natural Environment

Development proposals will need to sustain Cornwall's local distinctiveness and character and protect and enhance Cornwall's natural environment and assets according to their international, national and local significance through the following measures:

- Appropriate scale, mass and design which recognise and respect the distinctive and diverse, landscape character and coastline as being vital to the Cornwall's economy, whilst having regard for the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape asset, the potential for cumulative impact and the wish to maintain dark skies and tranquillity in areas that are relatively undisturbed as set out in the Cornwall Landscape Character Assessment and supported by the descriptions of the Areas Of Great Landscape Value (AGLV)
- Ensuring any proposals within the AONB or affecting its setting, conserves and enhances the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB, is appropriately located to address the AONB's sensitivity and capacity and delivers the objectives of the Cornwall and Tamar Valley AONB Management Plans

When to use Landscape Character Assessment in Development Management

The aim of this toolkit is to increase the capacity of development management officers to use the Landscape Character Assessment evidence base to inform decision making.

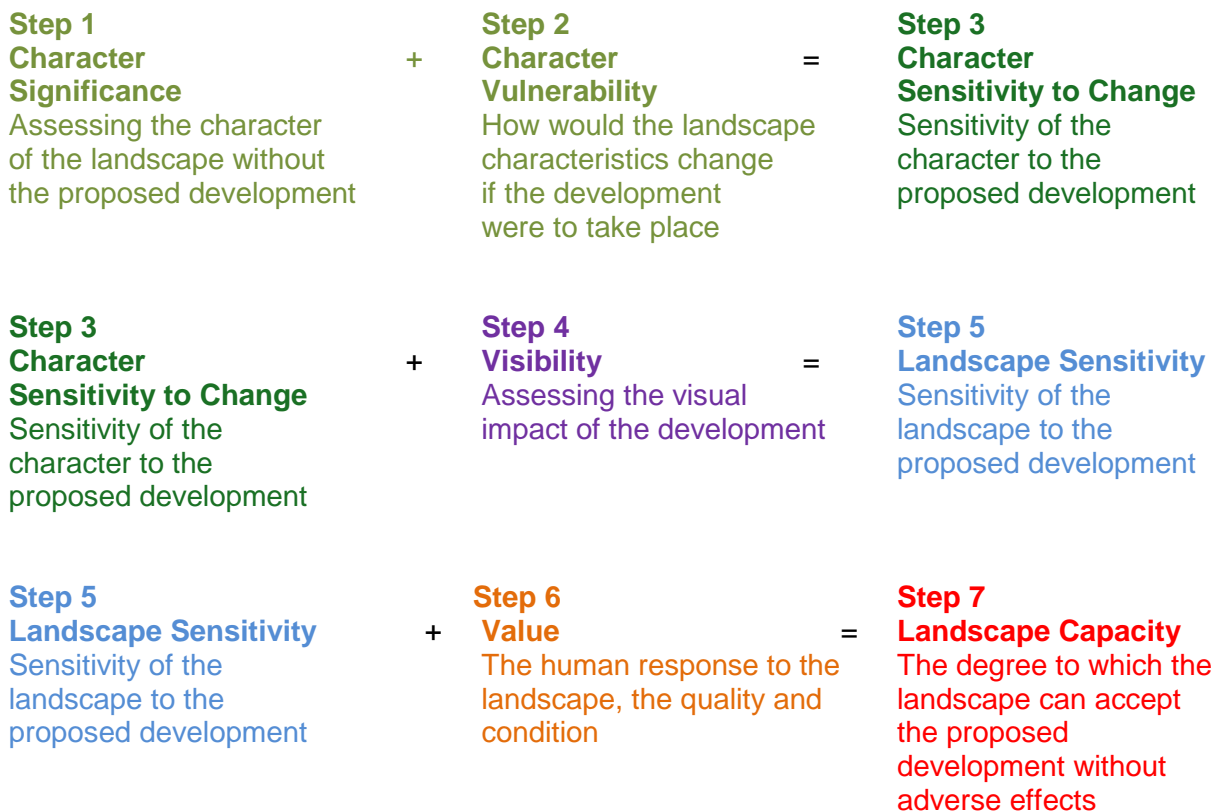
It is recognised that landscape will be one of many considerations in the determination of a planning application, and that the decision will be guided by national planning guidance and the Local Planning Authority's emerging policies. This toolkit provides a means to ensure that landscape character is addressed in an informed, and consistent manner in the determination of planning applications.

How is change accommodated?

The landscape character assessment information is intended to be used to guide change and support decision making. If through this process it is shown that a landscape has a low capacity to accommodate a certain kind of development, the landscape character information enables informed decisions to be made on changes in design at the pre-application stage or for conditions to be set at the recommendation stage.

Good design should be about sustainability and being in tune with the landscape. The landscape character information can also inform developers at the design stage in the process so that the design of developments can be improved to be more in harmony with the landscapes within which they sit.

Overview of the Toolkit methodology



Step 8 **Mitigation**

Ways to prevent, reduce, or offset the identified significant adverse landscape and visual effects of the development.

Consider mitigation throughout the design process, when landscape and visual effects are identified, and also for addressing effects which are identified as part of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

Assessment date :	Landscape Character Area number (s):
Planning application ref:	Location of development site :
Development type :	

STEP 1 Character Significance - Assess the character of the landscape without the proposed development

Desk study and site visit

Through a site visit and reference to the relevant [Landscape Character Area \(LCA\)](#)¹ description describe the contribution which the **undeveloped site** makes to character of the area. You may need to refer to more than one LCA where the site lies close to the boundary. Is the site representative of the character of the area, and what parts of the LCA are relevant to the site referring to the following headings from the LCA description?

1. 'Key Characteristics'
2. Topography and drainage – the land form and presence of water
3. Biodiversity – covering ecology and habitats
4. Land use / land cover – how is the land used
5. Field and woodland pattern – including contribution of individual trees
6. Transport pattern – including roads and PROW
7. Historic features – including cultural features
8. Aesthetic and sensory experience of the site and the wider landscape

Note the main points of character

¹ 2007 Landscape Character Assessment - Zoom in to locate the site, once you have your site click on the map, and use the hyperlink at the bottom of the page to bring up the relevant LCA description.

'Character Significance' criteria

Which of the following criteria best describes the existing character of the site and its setting?

No positive significance – The site and its setting do not positively contribute to the existing character or are having a current negative impact. Consider the potential through good design for the development to enhance the character and positively contribute to the local sense of place. (refer to Step 8).

Low character significance - The site and its setting make small contribution to the existing character by positively reflecting a small part of the relevant Landscape Character Area description(s).

Moderate character significance - The site and its setting makes a reasonable contribution to the existing character which is reflected in a number of elements and features present, or in one or more elements and features which contribute very strongly to the character.

High character significance -The site in its setting makes a good contribution to the existing character and many of the attributes fit closely to the Landscape Character Area description, where one or more features are key to character.

Record your reason for the criteria selected

Further reference

- Locate Landscape Character Area (LCA) information through [Cornwall Council interactive mapping](#) by zooming in to locate the site, clicking on the map, and using the hyperlink at the bottom of the page to bring up the relevant LCA description.
- For development applications for on shore wind and solar PV - An Assessment of the Landscape Sensitivity to On Shore Wind Energy & Large Scale Photovoltaic Development In Cornwall (2011 Land Use Consultants)
- [Cornwall Landscape Character Assessment Best Practice Guidance](#)
- [Historic Landscape Character](#)
- English Heritage guidance on landscape characterisation
- Ecological designations – Natural England, National Biodiversity Network, Cornwall Council's intranet mapping www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk

- Appendix 1 – Desk Survey
- Appendix 2 – Site visit - getting an overview

STEP 2 Character Vulnerability - Assess the degree of change

How would the character change if the development were to take place?

How will the proposed development affect both the individual elements which combine to create the existing character and the overall landscape character ?. What elements will be changed, and how ? (eg. feature trees removed; field sizes increased by hedge removal) Is the change positive or negative with respect to character?

Table 1 in Appendix 2 provides questions to prompt matters to be considered for each of the attributes of character.

Note how the character is changed by the development

'Character Vulnerability' criteria

Which of the following criteria best describes how the existing character will be altered by the proposed development?

No adverse change – the effects of the proposed development on the existing character will be neutral or beneficial. There is the opportunity through the pre application development of the design proposals to positively enhance the existing character (refer to Step 8).

Low character vulnerability - adverse effects on the character of the site and/or its setting will be small in magnitude ie. size, scale, limited duration and reversible, where there may be opportunities for positive enhancement works It is likely that through mitigation of construction and operational management practices that adverse effects on character can be reduced (refer to Step 8).

Moderate character vulnerability – the development will create adverse effects on one or more elements and features which contribute very strongly to the character of the site and its setting. Reduction of the effects on character through mitigation will be limited.

High character vulnerability – the character will be adversely affected across the whole or large parts of the site and/ or its setting, and it will not be possible to reduce the significant landscape effects through mitigation.

Record your reason for the criteria selected

Further reference

- LCA information through [Cornwall Council interactive mapping](#).
- [Historic Landscape Character](#)
- Step 8 – Mitigation
- Appendix 2 – Site Visit : Getting an overview

STEP 3 Character Sensitivity To Change - How sensitive the existing character is to the proposed change

The results of the previous ‘Character Significance’ and ‘Character Vulnerability’ assessments are combined in the matrix below to give a level of Character Sensitivity to the proposed development.

		Step 2 – Character Vulnerability		
		Low	Moderate	High
Step 1 – Character Significance	Low	L	LM	M
	Moderate	LM	M	MH
	High	M	MH	H

‘Character Sensitivity’ criteria

Which of the following criteria best describes how sensitive the existing character will be, to the types of change which will be created by the development?

Low character sensitivity - The site makes little contribution to the character of the area and/or is not significantly vulnerable to the proposed change. Restoration and or enhancement of the landscape through the development is likely to be possible. There is opportunity through pre application discussions to positively enhance the existing character. Where enhancement has not been considered in the case of a full application, and opportunities have been missed, amendments to the scheme should be requested. (refer to Step 8).

Low Moderate character sensitivity The character of the landscape is robust to the proposed change, or the site makes a small contribution to the character which is vulnerable to change,. There is the potential for mitigation measures to reduce adverse effects on the character either through pre-application discussions or as amendments to a full planning submission (refer to Step 8).

Moderate character sensitivity - The site makes a good contribution to character which will suffer an extent of adverse change due to the development proposed. The site has the potential for enhancement and/ or conservation of character. There is opportunity through pre application development of the design proposals to introduce mitigation measures to reduce adverse effects upon the character (refer to Step 8).

Moderate High character sensitivity - The site contributes much to the local distinctiveness and character of the area and will be vulnerable to change, needing conservation and management of the character attributes. It is unlikely that the adverse effects upon the character can be reduced through mitigation measures.

High character sensitivity - The site is typical of the area's character and the proposed change is likely to be detrimental to this with no potential for a reduction of the effects through mitigation measures

Record how the proposed development relates to the resulting criteria.

Further reference

- Appendix 3 – Making the assessment

STEP 4 Visibility – Assess the visual effects of the development

Describe the visibility of the proposed development through the following boxes, and use these to come to a conclusion on the potential visual effects created by the development.

Views from points of public access - Can the development be viewed from any settlement, rural housing, public footpaths, roads or areas of open access land?

Important views, sightlines and vistas - Will the development interrupt or block any significant view or vista from a point of vantage to a natural or manmade feature? (including views out to sea)

Visual merging of development - Will the development result in the visual merging either of two separate areas of built development within a settlement or the countryside or visual coalescence between two settlements or other development e.g. tall structures?

Screening - Will the change in the landscape be highly visible, based particularly on the nature of the landform and the extent of existing tree cover?

Numbers of people - Are significant numbers of people likely to perceive any changes e.g. as residents, visitors, people travelling through or engaged in recreation e.g. walking or as people working?

Invisibility and sight lines - Will the development interrupt any important lines of sight between features within the landscape, especially in designed landscapes

Visual influence and scale - Is the proposed development in scale with the surrounding landscape and other built features within it, does the development slot into the landscape in a non-intrusive way, or will it be highly visible with the landscape?

Cumulative impact - Are there other similar structures/ development within the visual setting of the development?

'Visual Sensitivity' criteria

Which of the following criteria best describes the visual effects created by the development?

No view of the development – the development would not be visible from any position within the surrounding landscape.

Low visual sensitivity- The development is only visible from a very small number of places, is not considered to be out of scale with the surrounding landscape, will be viewed by people considered to be of lower sensitivity to visual change, with likely potential for mitigation through pre application detailed design or amendment of the submitted application following the identification of residual visual effects (refer to Step 8).

Moderate visual sensitivity – The development will be partially visible; people viewing the development are more sensitive to the change in the view of the landscape, the nature and scale of the development is much greater with some potential for further mitigation measures to be built into the application design to reduce, or offset the visual effects, either through pre application discussions or amendments to the application proposal (refer to Step 8).

High visual sensitivity – The development is very visible from the landscape around the site, will be perceived by people considered to be of the highest sensitivity to visual changes in the landscape or by a significant number of people of a lower visual sensitivity, with little potential to mitigate the visual effects.

Record your reason for the criteria selected

Further reference

- Appendix 3 – Making the assessment
- Intranet mapping – vantage points, key attractions, scenic routes and PROW
- [Cornwall Council – Landscape Character Assessment](#)
- [Historic Landscape Character](#)
- www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk

STEP 5 Overall Landscape Sensitivity

The results of the previous 'Character Sensitivity' and 'Visual Sensitivity' assessments are combined in the matrix below to give five levels of **Overall Landscape Sensitivity**. The measurement of high, moderate or low, Overall Landscape Sensitivity is a measure of how sensitive the setting of the site is in terms of character and visual impact.

		Step 4 Visibility		
		Low	Moderate	High
Step 3 – Character Sensitivity to the Change	Low	L	LM	M
	Low Moderate	L	M	MH
	Moderate	LM	M	MH
	Moderate High	LM	M	H
	High	M	MH	H

Low Overall Landscape Sensitivity

The landscape has potential to be positively enhanced through the development, and or there will be little discernible landscape impact .. Any small changes in landscape character will not be strongly visually expressed.

Low Moderate Overall Landscape Sensitivity

Small adverse changes in landscape character are unlikely to be strongly visually expressed. There is likely to be potential to mitigate the landscape and visual effects through the pre application development of the design, or through amendments to the submitted full planning application (refer to Step 8).

Moderate Overall Landscape Sensitivity

There will be some negative change in landscape character which will be visible, which may have the potential for mitigation of the landscape and visual effects through the pre application development of the design, or through amendments to the submitted full planning application (refer to Step 8)

Moderate High Overall Landscape Sensitivity

The development will result in a significant negative effect or change in landscape character that will be highly visible with unlikely potential for mitigation through changes to the design or amendments to the planning application.

High Overall Landscape Sensitivity

The development will result in significant negative effects on the landscape character that will be highly visible with no potential for mitigation, which would not in itself have an adverse impact upon visual amenity and landscape character.

Record how the proposed development relates to the resulting criteria.

Further reference

- Appendix 3 – Making the assessment

STEP 6 Landscape Value and Perception - Assessing the human response to landscape, the quality and condition

We value landscapes for their inherent interest, their contribution to local distinctiveness, sense of place, artistic inspiration and personal well being. Value can apply to areas of landscape as a whole, or to the individual elements, features and aesthetic or perceptual dimensions which contribute to the character of the landscape². Using the following value considerations describe the subjective human response to the qualities of the existing landscape, and how those may change with the introduction of the proposed development.

Landscape Quality

Considering both the wider landscape and the separate individual elements / features which together make the landscape character :

- does the landscape have integrity where it is perceived as a whole and not broken up by development which does not reflect the landscape character?
- will the development enhance the existing character adding value to the landscape?
- is the landscape well maintained, free from landscape detractors such as power lines?

- is the landscape in good condition?
- does the site lie in, or within the setting of a designated landscape?

Scenic quality

Does the site and surrounding landscape contain or offer views to valued landscape features or landmarks such as important trees church spires, lighthouses, engine houses?

Will the development remove a valued feature, interrupt or block any significant view from a vantage point to a natural or man made feature?

Does the landscape appeal to primarily but not wholly to the visual senses?

Has the visual quality of the landscape been described in guide books, or other literature?

Rarity

Does the landscape have a unique sense of place which is not commonly found at the local level across the Landscape Character Area, across Cornwall, or considered a good/rare example in national terms? What elements create this sense of place and will the development have an adverse effect upon them?

² Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ; Third Edition.

Representativeness

Does the area have particular features or elements of character which are considered particularly important examples eg. ancient field pattern of West Penwith?

Conservation interest

Does this area have any local historic or cultural association from the Historic Environment Record ? Is this area nationally designated for its historic value e.g. World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument?

Does the landscape associated with the development have any known national and local ecological designations? Are there important wildlife corridors, or habitats which would be adversely affected by the development?

Does the landscape associated with the development have indicators of value eg. trees, hedges and woodland?

Recreational value

Is the area used by the local community for recreation and appreciation of the natural environment?

Is there evidence that the landscape is valued for recreation and enjoyment, where the experience of the landscape is important?

Perceptual aspects

What is the perception of the character, is it natural and undeveloped?

Is the landscape valued for its perceptual qualities notably its peaceful tranquillity or wild exposed ruggedness?

Associations

Are there known historic associations with the landscape, is it considered an important context to a historic feature, or relates to important individuals such as writers and artists?

'Landscape Value' criteria

Which of the following criteria best describes the value of the existing landscape, and how the development may affect this ?

No positive value – There is potential for the landscape to be enhanced by the development as it is currently degraded, of poor scenic quality, and has no noted conservation interest. Enhancement of the value of the existing character may be feasible through the pre-application design of the development proposals (refer to Step 8).

Low landscape value – This landscape has no national or local designation, but none the less is valued by the local community and demonstrates landscape and visual characteristics which positively contribute to the area's sense of place.

Moderate landscape value – this landscape is considered to positively contribute to the local distinctiveness, and character of Cornwall; contains quality examples of key characteristics described within the LCA; the proposed development has the potential to adversely affect the aesthetic and perceptual qualities of the existing landscape.

High landscape value – the scale or nature of the development has the potential to create significant adverse effects on one, or a combination of the following factors;
land within, or forming the setting of an internationally or nationally designated landscape;
notable landscape associations with Cornish culture;
significant adverse effects upon a vantage point, views or vistas of recognised importance;
a rare example of particular elements or features of a landscape;

Record your reason for the criteria selected

Further reference

- Appendix 2 – Table 1 – Condition
- Appendix 3 – Making the assessment
- [Cornwall Council – Landscape Character Assessment](#)
- Intranet mapping – indicates landscape designations, vantage points, public rights of way etc.
- www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk
- [Historic Landscape Character](#)

STEP 7 Assessing Landscape Capacity

'Landscape capacity refers to the degree to which a particular landscape character type³ or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects upon its character, or the overall change of that landscape character type'.⁴

The results of the previous 'Overall Landscape Sensitivity' and 'Landscape Value' assessments are combined in the matrix below to give five levels of **Landscape Capacity**. Here the significance attached to each of these values is reversed, a 'high Overall Sensitivity and 'high' Landscape Value combine to give a rating of 'low' which describes a 'low' capacity for the landscape to accept the development and vice versa.

		Step 6 - Landscape Value		
		Low	Moderate	High
Step 5 - Overall Sensitivity	Low	H	MH	M
	Low Moderate	H	MH	M
	Moderate	MH	M	ML
	Moderate High	M	M	L
	High	ML	ML	L

High capacity - There will be little or no impact on the landscape through the development. There is potential for the development to positively enhance the landscape.

Moderate High capacity - There will be some negative change in landscape character. Through an iterative pre application design process there is the potential for significant landscape and visual effects to be avoided or reduced. In the determination of a full planning application landscape and visual effects may be reduced by mitigation measures introduced as amendments to the proposal (refer to Step 8).

Moderate capacity - There will be an extensive negative change in landscape character and visual amenity, with possible potential for mitigation measures to be embedded with the pre application design process or as amendments to a full application (refer to Step 8).

Moderate Low capacity - The development will result in significant adverse effects, on the landscape character and visual amenity with limited potential for mitigation measures to avoid, reduce or remedy the remaining identified effects (refer to Step 8).

Low capacity - The development will result severe harm/destruction of landscape character which mitigation measures can not prevent, reduce or remedy.

Record how the proposed development relates to the resulting criteria.

³ Cornwall classifies its landscape through landscape character areas and not landscape character types

⁴ The Countryside Agency & Scottish Natural Heritage (2004) Topic Paper 6 – Techniques and Criteria for Judging landscape Capacity and Sensitivity.

STEP 8 Mitigation

Mitigation measures should be designed to prevent, reduce, remedy or offset any significant adverse landscape and visual effects associated with a development proposal, from the design stage, through construction, operation and to decommissioning. They should in themselves not result in negative landscape and visual effects but enable the development to respond to landscape character and visual amenity more positively.

This document can be used to

- inform pre application discussions where there is scope to suggest mitigation measures which can be further incorporated into the development's design
- highlight potentially significant landscape and visual effects which have not been prevented, reduced, or off set in the submitted full planning application.

Mitigation measures fall into three categories termed the 'mitigation heirachy'⁵ :

1. **Primary measures** – developed through an iterative design process, which have become integrated or embedded in the project design, where significant landscape and visual effects can be prevented or avoided through choices relating to site selection and the layout of the proposal.
2. **Standard construction and operational management practices** – for reducing identified environmental effects which can't be prevented or avoided at each stage of the development. These mitigation measures can be discussed pre-application/scoping and may include:
 - redesign / re-siting details of the development
 - creating new, or altering existing landforms; amending site levels
 - introducing planting which reflects the local landscape character
 - careful consideration of building form and massing
 - choice of building materials and finishes
 - reducing the effects of light pollution
3. **Secondary measures** – are designed to reduce adverse effects which were not built into the final development proposals, which can be identified through the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), however it is preferable that the LVIA be an iterative process developed in discussion with Cornwall Council to remove the need for secondary mitigation measures.

Where significant landscape and visual effects can't be avoided or markedly reduced then mitigation through offsetting, remedying, or compensating needs to be considered. This however should be considered as a last resort as in many cases it is not possible to replace elements which have been lost to development with new features of the same landscape, visual, ecological, or historic value.

Enhancement is a term which has been used through this document to highlight opportunities to improve the existing environment's landscape character and visual amenity as part of the design and siting of new development. This can be achieved through improved land management, restoration of habitat, natural and historic features.

Further reference

- Appendix 3 – Making the assessment

^{5 5} Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ; Third Edition

Landscape capacity assessment overview

Assessment date :	Landscape Character Area number (s):
Planning application ref: Development type :	Location of development site :

The following is a summary of the assessment of the landscape capacity to accept the above development, and is taken from the 'Development Management Toolkit - Assessing Landscape Capacity'

STEP 1 Character Significance - the character of the landscape without the proposed development

STEP 2 Character Vulnerability - how the character would change if the development were to take place?

STEP 3 Character Sensitivity To Change - how sensitive the existing character is to the proposed change

STEP 4 Visibility – the visual impact of the development

STEP 5 Overall Landscape Sensitivity

STEP 6 Value and perception - the human response to views, landscape quality and condition

STEP 7 Landscape Capacity

STEP 8 Mitigation

Appendix 1 - Desk Survey - Initial considerations and getting an overview

Obtaining the information

All of the Landscape Character Area descriptions (LCA) which cover the extent of the development site should be considered. The descriptive information will be held on the landscape pages of Cornwall Council' website:

www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/cornwalls-landscape/

Decisions at boundaries

Although the Character Areas are defined by mapped boundaries, in reality boundaries are sometimes not so clearly defined and different landscapes can grade into one another. Areas of land which sit on or close to a boundary, may exhibit characteristics of both adjacent Landscape Character Areas.

Where the development straddles the boundary of two or more Landscape Character Areas, there is likely to be distinct character differences and a separate assessment for each part of the site within a different character area may need to be undertaken.

Setting

The consideration of impact on land outside the immediate boundary of a proposed development site is necessary when assessing impact upon landscape character and visual impact. Taking a look at how a development may impact on its wider surroundings is essential as sites do not exist in isolation; rather they sit within the landscape and have a relationship with it.

There are two types of setting, Landscape Character Setting and Visual Setting and it is important they are considered separately. Landscapes which are of common character are often much larger than an area which can be viewed from a single vantage point eg Bodmin Moor is a large expanse of upland moorland with a common character, yet it is impossible to view all of Bodmin Moor from a single place.

For the above reason, it is not enough simply to consider the impact of the development on a site in its immediate visual setting. The impact of the development in the wider landscape context must also be assessed, and this may mean that a wider geographical area should be taken into account when assessing the impact on landscape character. Setting is explored in further detail in the assessment guidance (Appendix 3, Steps 1,2 and 3)

Pressures for change and condition

Information on Condition, and Pressures for Change is available within the LCA description. It is important to be aware of the condition of the landscape as described and the forces acting upon it in order to understand how this landscape has been changed and how it may change in the future. The condition description should indicate if this change is positive or negative. Development which acts as a force for change that will result in a deterioration of landscape condition is likely to be inappropriate; conversely development may have the potential to restore or enhance landscapes which are in degraded condition. More information can be gained at site visit stage about the condition of the landscape in that locality and this information considered as part of the value assessment.

Vision/ Objectives and Planning and Land Management Guidelines

The Character Area Vision and Objectives indicate the desired state of the landscape in this area. The CA Planning and Land Management Guidelines should set out steps which should be taken to achieve the desired state. Development which contradicts the guidelines may not be appropriate; similarly each development should seek to positively address some of the recommendations set out.

Appendix 2 - Site Visit: Getting an overview

Landscapes are made up of a combination of different elements or attributes. These attributes combine in different ways to make the landscape distinctive to a particular area. These attributes are described using the same headings, following the same format within each of the 40 Landscape Character Area descriptions. The different attributes described within each Landscape Character Area descriptions are outlined in **Table 1** below which also gives an overview of how these attributes relate to different aspects of a development.

Table 1: Landscape Attributes

Landscape Attributes	Aspects of development
<p>Geology and soils Geology defines the character of the landscape and the associated stone is often used in vernacular buildings and structures.</p> <p>This characteristic will be exhibited in cliffs, rocky outcrops, quarries, stone faced hedges and walls and buildings built of local stone</p>	<p>Materials design</p> <p>Are the materials used in keeping with local vernacular?</p> <p>Will local stone be used in the construction?</p> <p>www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk</p>
<p>Topography and drainage Topography influences the type of development that is possible.</p>	<p>Siting</p> <p>Is the development designed with land contours? Does the design minimise the visibility of the development within the landscape?</p> <p>Does the drainage/ SUDs plan for the development reflect characteristic patterns of rivers, streams and areas of standing water?</p>
<p>Biodiversity The main biodiversity action plan (BAP) habitats are described</p>	<p>Action for biodiversity</p> <p>Will semi-natural habitats be lost due to the development?</p> <p>Are Biodiversity Action Plan species and habitats are conserved as part of the development?</p> <p>How can the design best achieve creation and enhancement of habitats and species within the site?</p> <p>NB. The landscape character area descriptions will only give an overview of the biodiversity value of an area. It is important to refer to the Cornwall Wildlife</p>

	<p>Trust Biodiversity Best Practice Guidance for Planners⁶ and then if necessary to take further advice from Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Cornwall Council or Natural England</p> <p>www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk</p>
<p>Land use The information will describe the typical land use in human terms, usually connected to economic activity e.g. agriculture</p>	<p>Sympathetic Land Use Will land use as a result of the development and any mitigation measures be sympathetic with the land use as described, particularly traditional land uses?</p> <p>This information is best used with the Pressures for Change/ Condition information. Do any proposed changes to land use contribute to negative pressures for change or negative elements of condition as described? Historic Landscape Character</p>
<p>Land Cover Describes the visible nature of the land such as pasture or tree cover</p>	<p>Sympathetic land cover and visibility Will the development result in changes to the land cover as described and will this change be very visible within the landscape e.g. conifer planting in a treeless moorland landscape.</p> <p>Is there potential to change land cover for the benefit of the landscape to be more sympathetic to the land cover as described? e.g. by reversion from tarmac to more informal grass surfaces</p>
<p>Field pattern Landscape patterns such as the size and shape of fields or woodland and the type of field boundary e.g. granite Cornish hedge</p>	<p>Do boundaries that form part of the development reflect the landscape pattern in their layout, design and use of materials?</p> <p>Where the proposals including built structures do these disturb or change historical field and woodland pattern?</p> <p>Will the development result in removal of traditional field boundaries?</p> <p>Is there potential within the development to restore Cornish hedges in degraded condition or to build new hedges to restore a degraded field pattern?</p>

⁶ Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: Planning Good Practice Guidance for Cornwall', November 2007

	<p>Does the development respect the current scale of the field pattern? NB Ancient Field Patterns are an indication of possible important buried archaeological features and have historic importance in their own right. It is important to consult the Historic Landscape Character Assessment and the Cornwall Historic Environment Record (HER) and take further advice from Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Service or English Heritage.</p> <p>Historic Landscape Character www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk</p>
<p>Transport pattern The scale, direction, shape and construction materials of the roads and rights of way; how they relate to topography and a description of associated boundaries</p>	<p>Will the traditional transport pattern as described be changed e.g. roads widened or straightened?</p> <p>Will road furniture respect local distinctiveness in scale and materials, guarding against urbanisation in rural areas. e.g. restoration of a traditional fingerpost instead of a new plastic sign</p> <p>Are the boundary features associated with roads and rights of way development consistent with character, are of local vernacular materials, and in the case of Cornish hedges, use local stone and pattern e.g. The use of granite or slate stiles where appropriate instead of wooden gateways.</p> <p>If any part of the rights of way network form part of the development, can trackways and paths be maintained in their current character whilst avoiding urbanisation e.g. tarmacing?</p>
<p>Settlement pattern Settlement patterns such as the height, scale, massing and distribution of rural dwellings/ farmsteads/ hamlets/ villages.</p> <p>The space between built development is as much a part of settlement pattern as the buildings themselves. In rural areas this is usually agricultural land which leads to a close association of the settlement pattern attribute with</p>	<p>Will the development result in a change in the shape of the settlement? Does the development respect characteristic settlement density and guard against negative effects of cumulative development? Is the development consistent with the height, scale and shape of buildings characteristic of the area and the general scale of the landscape? Does the design and use of materials respect buildings of local character?</p>

<p>the field pattern attribute.</p>	<p>Would proposed built development fit with the characteristic distribution of dwellings in the area?</p>
<p>Historic features Historic features which enrich the landscape and cover large areas in places such as the World Heritage Sites [WHS].</p>	<p>Do proposals respect and protect historic features in their setting with consideration for the existence of field archaeology? NB The Landscape descriptions will only give an overview of the historic value of an area. It is important to consult the Historic Landscape Character Assessment and the Cornwall Sites and Monuments Record and take further advice from Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Service or English Heritage.</p> <p>Historic Landscape Character</p>
<p>Aesthetic and sensory This describes the way the landscape is experienced and the more subjective elements of landscape such as tranquillity, scenic beauty, sense of openness.</p>	<p>Will the tranquillity of the site be degraded maintained or enhanced by the development?</p> <p>Traffic movement, noise, construction impacts, visibility and excessive road infrastructure together with smells, materials, colour and texture are just some of the factors in the consideration of the aesthetic and sensory elements of the landscape.</p>
<p>Distinctive features Distinctive features e.g. Church towers help to make one landscape character area different from the other.</p>	<p>Will distinctive features of the landscape be conserved and enhanced in terms of their condition and their setting within the landscape, considering visibility and views. E.g. will new development block an iconic view of a distinctive feature from the edge of a settlement?</p>
<p>Condition The condition description is an important source of information that describes changes that have taken place that have had a landscape impact which can be explored on a site visit</p> <p>Condition indicates how well elements or features in the landscape, such as hedges or woodland, are managed, the health of the landscape in terms of its character, nature conservation value and the effects of existing built development such as housing and utilities structures.</p>	<p>Will the development contribute to negative trajectory of change in terms of the condition as described? i.e. Will it cause further degradation in landscape condition?</p> <p>Is there potential for the development to improve landscape condition?</p> <p>Will the development contribute to existing degrading development resulting in cumulative negative impact on landscape condition?</p>

Pressures/forces for change	<p>Will the development contribute to any negative forces for change as described?</p> <p>www.cornwall-aonb.gov.uk www.tamarvalley.org.uk An Assessment of the Landscape Sensitivity to On Shore Wind Energy & Large Scale Photovoltaic Development In Cornwall (2011 Land Use Consultants)</p>
Planning and land management guidelines	<p>Does the development contribute to any of the planning and land management guidelines set out?</p> <p>Does the development contradict any of the guidelines?</p> <p>Does the development have the potential to contribute to the guidelines?</p>

Appendix 3 - Making the assessment

In order to make sound judgements on the sensitivity of the landscape and its capacity to absorb proposed changes, assessments must be made of the following factors:

- The Character Significance of the site and its setting in making a contribution to the wider landscape character (Step 1)
- The Character Vulnerability to the proposed change (Step 2)
- The Visibility of the proposed change within the landscape (Step 4)
- The Value of the landscape to the local community and society in general (Step 6)
- The Mitigation/ enhancement potential of the proposal (Step 8)

Step 1 Character significance

It is most important to assess the extent to which the development site and its setting, in an unaltered state are significant to the landscape character of the area. The significance assessment does not consider the development proposed, simply the current site and its relationship to the Landscape Character Assessment.

The Landscape Character Area information describes what is locally distinct in the site and setting of the development. It is important to consider to what level the site contributes to the character of the area as described within the Landscape Character Assessment. This is most easily achieved by breaking down the landscape into its individual components, or attributes. Each attribute is described in detail in the Landscape Character Assessment (also see Appendix 2, Table 1).

Variations in character will occur within a Character Area. Flexibility must be built in to allow for landscape attributes present within the site or site setting that are not described within the Character Assessment. Any other character attributes identified at site visit stage need to be recorded and then assessed for their vulnerability to the proposed development in Step 2.

It is very unlikely that the site and setting would not contribute to landscape character to some extent, particularly in a rural situation. However if for some reason the site and its setting did not contribute to character in any way, this would result in a 'none' value for significance. Sites and setting returning a 'none' value would be highly disturbed and degraded in terms of character and therefore would be also likely to have the most scope for enhancement. In the event of a 'none' value being recorded for significance, it would not be possible to assess vulnerability and take the next step in the process so it would be necessary to proceed to step 5 and undertake a mitigation/ enhancement potential assessment.

Character setting

As a guide, each attribute of character should be considered to its common extent. For example if a development was proposed within a landscape character area with a prehistoric field pattern, the impact of the development upon the field pattern should be assessed across the whole character area, or even a group of character areas which shared that attribute. The National Joint Character Areas which cover Cornwall at a larger, national scale can provide context in this instance. For example, 'The Cornish Killas' National Joint Character Area covers the slate killas which covers the extent of the slate geology of Cornwall.

Variation in character

Variations in character occur within character areas and some attributes vary more than others within each area. Areas of high biodiversity may occur in parts of a character area e.g. wooded valleys, but biodiverse habitat may be absent in other parts of the character area. The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Landscape Character Study 2005-2007 defines landscape character at a smaller scale level, with Landscape Description Units. These are the building blocks of the character areas and can assist in pinpointing these variations.

Distribution of character

As well as variations of a character attribute within a Character Area, it is also important to consider the spatial distribution of an attribute within a character area. For example, settlements are usually scattered throughout a character area but usually they are distributed throughout the area in a common way e.g. in a clustered pattern, evenly spaced. It is important to consider the space between attributes as much as the attribute itself and consider how new development can fit into and respect this distribution.

Unaltered settings

The setting of some historic sites may be little changed from the period when the land was first used by human beings. Largely unaltered settings for certain types of landscapes, particularly more ancient ones, may be rare survivals and especially vulnerable to modern intrusions.

Assessing setting in practice

The assessor should examine and familiarise with the character area description at desk study stage and if necessary also consider adjacent character areas, particularly if a proposed site is on or close to a character area boundary.

Step 2 Character vulnerability to the type of change

The next step brings the plans for the proposed development into the process in order to assess how likely the attributes of character present within the site and its setting would be to adversely change if the development were to take place. The assessor should consider the size (magnitude) of the change caused by the development and the area (extent) over which the change would happen across the site within its setting.

In completing Step 1 the relevant elements of character within the site and the setting should have been identified. The next step is to determine how vulnerable these aspects of character are to the proposed change, giving a 'High', 'Moderate', 'Low' or 'No Change' assessment. In assessing vulnerability we are assessing adverse change or harm to landscape character as a result of the development. If the change is deemed to be positive i.e. having enhancement benefits for landscape character, then an assessment of 'no change' should be recorded. It is important to consider both the immediate development site and the surrounding area (see Step 1 Significance above for guidance on setting).

As with significance, if a 'No Change' assessment is arrived at for vulnerability, the next step would be to assess the enhancement potential of the proposal at Step 8.

Step 3 Character Sensitivity to change

This judgement is based on the interaction between significance and vulnerability and is based on the strength of landscape character and the response of that character to the proposed development.

Landscape Character Sensitivity gives an indication of the representation of landscape character in the locality of the development site and how stable and robust that character is to the proposed change.

Step 4 Visibility Assessment

The visibility assessment is based on the nature of change and the interaction of the locality with visual elements of the landscape. When considering visibility, seasonal changes will need to be taken into account. For example if a site visit is carried out in summer a site could appear well screened but this may not be the case in winter when the trees have no canopy. The results tables suggest a series of questions to consider when assessing visibility based on the following:

Visual Setting

Consideration should be given to the impact of developments on wider visual setting. This consideration should extend to the effects of any necessary infrastructure (such as power transmission lines, access roads and signage) and to the individual as well as the cumulative impact of developments. Seasonal variations in visual impact should also be considered.

Factors which should be borne in mind when assessing the impact of developments upon visual setting are set out below. The list of considerations on visibility is by no means exhaustive and there is flexibility in terms of the potential weight attached to each. This allows the assessor to use professional judgement on the visibility assessment whilst recording assumptions made will still achieve transparency.

Views from points of public access

Can the development be viewed from any settlement, rural housing, public footpaths, roads or areas of open access land? The rest of the assessment on visibility should be based on the careful consideration of points of public access from which the development may be able to be seen, once completed and distance views should be considered.

Important views, sightlines and vistas

Will the development interrupt or block any significant view from a point of vantage to a natural or man made feature (including views out to sea)

Visual merging of development

Will the development result in

- the visual merging either of two separate areas of built development within a settlement or the countryside
- visual coalescence between two settlements
- visual merging of any other kind of development e.g. tall structures into a single view.

Visual merging/ coalescence has a relationship to cumulative development (see below)

Screening

Will the change in the landscape be highly visible, based particularly on the nature of the landform and the extent of existing tree cover? Will the development break the skyline when viewed from areas of public access?

Numbers of people

Are significant numbers of people likely to perceive any changes e.g. as residents,

visitors, people travelling through or engaged in recreation e.g. walking or as people working?

Visual dominance and scale

Developments vary widely in their type, size and extent, from a small section of new Cornish hedge to a large housing development or a wind farm. The planner must consider if the new introduction will dominate that landscape and whether the proposed scale of development respects the scale of the landscape and features within the landscape. The settlement pattern and field pattern attributes within the Character Area description can assist in this judgement. Where an historic feature (such as an engine house or a church tower) is the most visually dominant feature in the surrounding landscape, adjacent construction which could compete for that dominance (such as a mobile phone mast) may be inappropriate. Equally if the field pattern is of a small scale, a large structure such of a wind turbine would be out of scale.

Invisibility and sight lines

Intervisibility of built or natural landscape features should be considered. For example certain archaeological or historic landscape features were intended to be seen from other historic sites and designed/ estate landscapes invariably involve key vistas, prospects, panoramas and sight-lines, or the use of topography to add drama. Developments should respect this intervisibility and development which interrupts or obscures this intervisibility may be inappropriate.

Vistas and views

Views are usually taken from a point of human vantage such as from the edge of a settlement or from a footpath cresting the brow of a hill. They extend to a focus point or feature of interest. These focus points can be man made such as an engine house or monument, or they can be natural such as a granite tor or river estuary. In Cornwall, views to the sea are very important to reinforce the County's coastal character.

When assessing visual setting these important views and vistas should be carefully considered and development which interrupts or entirely blocks a view may not be appropriate.

Cumulative impact

Cumulative impact is basically answers the question are there other similar structures within the visual setting of the development? Cumulative effects can be described and assessed from static viewpoints, and as sequential effects as you move through the landscape.

Similar structures will mean structures of similar size, shape and scale for example wind turbines, telegraph poles and telecommunications masts may be classed as 'similar structures' as they are all tall vertical structures. Generally cumulative impact is negative where the development is considered a detractor in terms of character as further development/ structures will compound and add to that impact. In other words existing development should not be a reason to add further development.

Step 5 Landscape Sensitivity

This element is described under Appendix 3 – Making the assessment

This is an intermediate judgement made that combines Landscape Sensitivity to the Type of Change with Visibility, the visual response of the landscape to the type of change, building up an extra layer of detail.

This is an intermediate judgement which enables the officer to assess the interaction

between the visibility of the proposed change and landscape character sensitivity to the proposed change.

Step 6 Value Assessment

Value needs to be considered not just for the site, but also for the site within its landscape setting, in order to try to bring the human response to the landscapes into the assessment.

Human response is partly what turns land into the concept of landscape; therefore it's important to consider if current human responses to the landscape in question are positive ones, and to include this in making the decision on the appropriateness of the development. Landscape quality can also be linked to landscape value on the assumption that well maintained and well looked after areas are valued more than landscapes which are in poor condition and have become degraded.

There should not be overreliance on designations as the sole indicator of value.⁷

The set of suggested questions is by no means exhaustive and there is flexibility in terms of the potential weight attached to each consideration. Value is much more subjective than the other assessments and local knowledge of the assessor could be of great benefit when assessing landscape value, provided that any extra information used to assess value is recorded as part of the process.

Step 7 Landscape Capacity

The capacity judgement combines Overall Sensitivity with the Value placed upon that landscape by society and community. Sensitivity judgements tend to be reasonably objective and value free. However it is necessary to consider human responses to the landscape, how people value the landscape and landscape quality as part of the decision making process. These aspects are considered in making the final judgement on capacity. Landscape Capacity refers to the degree to which a particular landscape character is able to accommodate the development without significant effects on its character or overall change.

The significance of a locality in terms of local landscape character (i.e. the contribution which the locality makes to landscape character) is likely to be inherent and will not change if a different development is proposed. Vulnerability and visibility will change according to the type of development that is proposed. To a certain extent, the value attached to a landscape is inherent, although the degree to which that value is compromised will change according to the type of development proposed and the officer will need to pay regard to this when making a capacity assessment.

Step 8 Mitigation/ Enhancement potential

Mitigation measures need to be considered throughout the design process and for each stage of the development through construction, operation and decommissioning (where appropriate). This step can be used to examine how identified impacts on landscape character can be avoided altogether or to what extent they could be mitigated. Landscape mitigation should be designed to suit the existing landscape character and the needs of the locality, respecting and building on local landscape distinctiveness and helping to address any relevant existing issues in the landscape (enhancement).

⁷ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ; Third Edition

Appendix 2 - Table 1 describes some of the issues which may need to be considered during the design and mitigation process.

This step can also be used to set out how the development will enhance the landscape in the following situations where the :

- landscape is degraded/ in poor condition and currently makes no positive contribution to landscape character
- development is of such a nature that no adverse impacts on landscape character could be identified

Using this Toolkit as part of pre-application discussions will highlight sensitive and vulnerable elements of the character where mitigation measures need to be considered to ideally avoid, or reduce adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity. These can then be integrated into the scheme before the application is submitted for determination.

When using the Toolkit to assess the capacity of the landscape as part of the determination of a full planning application the assessment process will still highlight the sensitive and vulnerable character and visual elements of the landscape, and a judgement can be reached as to whether the proposed mitigation measures (if any) are sufficient to reduce or offset the adverse significant effects, or whether amendments need to be made to the scheme.