



REVIEW of LOCAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Issues & Options consultation on the Development Control Policies DPD

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The protection of landscape in and around the main towns in Harrogate District has been a key component of local development plan policy over many years. The Harrogate District Local Plan (as saved) currently contains three main types of local landscape designations:

- Special Landscape Areas
- Green Wedges
- Amenity Open Space

1.2 The designation of these areas has played an important role in helping to protect the character and setting of the District's main settlements: Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon.

1.3 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to replace the existing system of Local Plans with new style Local Development Frameworks. In Harrogate District, the focus of work so far has been the preparation of the Core Strategy DPD, which sets the overall approach to planning across the area. A key element of the Core Strategy's vision for the District is that the built and natural environment should be protected and enhanced, reflecting the high priority given to caring for the environment in the Harrogate District Community Plan and the Council's own Strategic Plan.

1.4 Policy EQ2 of the Core Strategy identifies the measures that are considered necessary to help protect and enhance the environment and includes the following provisions:

'Where necessary, local landscape designations will be identified:

- *To protect the high quality of the landscape which is important to the setting of the towns of Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon*
- *To protect these 'green wedges' in Harrogate town which are an important part of its character and distinctiveness*
- *To protect appropriate green space within the main built up areas of Group A, B and C settlements listed in Policy SG2 of the Core Strategy'.*

1.5 Although the Government recognises that there are areas of landscape outside nationally designated areas that are particularly highly valued locally, current planning guidance contained in PPS7 requires local planning authorities when updating their development plans to rigorously review existing local landscape designations. In doing so, authorities are required to ensure that such designations are based on a formal and robust assessment of the landscape concerned.

1.6 The Borough Council has started work on a Development Control Policies Development Plan Document (DPD). This DPD will contain the detailed policies to guide and control development in a way that helps to protect the character and heritage of the District. As part of the preparatory work on this document, a comprehensive review of existing local landscape designations is being undertaken, as required by national policy guidance.

- 1.7 This report sets out the background and interim findings of the review. It relates to the first two types of local landscape designations referred to above, namely Special Landscape Areas and Green Wedges, but does not cover Amenity Open Space. In essence, the review seeks to determine:
- a) whether these two types of local landscape designations should be maintained as part of the development plan context for the District, and
 - b) if so, whether any boundary changes to the designations are justified.
- 1.8 This report represents 'work in progress' and is being published to assist the consultation on local landscape designations taking place between 18 January and 29 February 2008. It sets out the preliminary findings of the review, identifying:
- a) in relation to Special Landscape Areas, those areas considered to meet the criteria for designation, and those where the case for designation is less strong (including some potential extensions)
 - b) in relation to Green Wedges, a number of possible extensions to existing designations.
- 1.9 Views are sought on the interim findings of this study.

2.0 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Green Wedges

- 2.1 Policy C10 of the Harrogate and District Local Plan gives long term protection to a number of Green Wedges in Harrogate. These are areas of open land that have been identified as contributing to the character of the town because they are important in:
- a) Preventing the urban area becoming an undifferentiated built-up area within its overall boundaries;
 - b) Safeguarding the special character of the town as manifest in the system of open spaces which link the town centre with the open countryside; and
 - c) Affording public access and the potential for public access to extensive open spaces and ultimately the countryside beyond.
- 2.2 There are currently four Green Wedge designations – centred on Oakdale Valley, Pine Woods and Valley Gardens, Bilton Triangle and Hookstone Valley. Each of these areas has been re-assessed against the criteria for designations identified above. (The full text of Policy C10 of the Harrogate District Local Plan is set out in Appendix 1)
- 2.3 The approach to this part of the review is to demonstrate that the nature and character of the Green Wedges are worthy of designation and that they contribute to the character of Harrogate by providing and maintaining a system of open spaces which link the town centre to the countryside. This is based on judgements and evaluation made as part of the field survey work and desktop analysis and evaluates factors such as openness, topography, the nature of urban edges and vegetation and their importance to Harrogate.
- 2.4 Questions on how far Green Wedges are strategic in particular instances have been examined, what distance they should penetrate the urban areas, and the extent to which they should be seen as dividing urban neighbourhoods have also been an important consideration and has guided some of the outcomes of this review.

Special Landscape Areas

- 2.5 Policy C9 of the Harrogate District Local Plan designates a number of Special Landscape Areas which are considered to be important to the landscape setting of Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon. The criteria for designating these areas was that the landscape should be both:
- a) Important to the landscape setting of the settlement, and
 - b) Of high quality in its own right
- (The full text of Policy C9 of the Harrogate District Local Plan is set out in Appendix 2)

2.6 Each of the existing Special Landscape Area designations has been re-assessed against the original criteria for designation in the Harrogate District Local Plan. In doing so, the assessment has also been carried out in accordance with the latest best practice guidance on landscape evaluation and assessment. The work was carried out in three stages:

- Stage 1: A review of landscape sensitivity through site survey and fieldwork.
- Stage 2: The survey and evaluation of landscape factors of an area against other strands of guidance and criteria produced by the Countryside Commission.
- Stage 3: The use of the Harrogate District Landscape Character Assessment (2004) resulting in a formal and robust assessment of the qualities of the landscape concerned.

Stage 1: Landscape Sensitivity

2.7 A strategic level of assessment on site was carried out at this stage, which provided a broad-brush approach to draw out the key visual characteristics of the boundaries and their contextual setting. This was the criteria-free process of the assessment. The fieldwork involved looking at the influence of incongruous features that had an adverse impact on landscape character. It identified where pockets of lesser quality of land had developed either within or outside the boundary or where the landscape has been physically broken up by infrastructure and which has an impact on its ability to form a continuous extensive tract of land of quality.

2.8 The assessment made judgements on the physical and scenic relationships between land in the study area and adjoining land and was an informed assessment of the condition of the landscape features. Fieldwork was undertaken primarily from roads and lanes, and where reasonable key footpaths were walked. Where areas of land were inaccessible aerial photographs were used to support evaluation. The fieldwork was undertaken from May to July 2007.

2.9 A series of paper thematic working plans was produced and where appropriate raw data sets were synthesised. For example information on views (intervisibility), woodland cover and field patterns was drawn together to illustrate the distribution of landscape features. These plans along with the Harrogate District Landscape Character Assessment (used as a spatial framework) enabled primary judgements to be made on landscape sensitivity.

- 2.10 Three broad categories were defined and used to classify land within the study area based on the area's ability to provide 'high quality' landscape and a 'landscape setting' to the towns. The areas of land are shown on plans contained in Appendix 3. They indicate broad areas and are not intended to be absolutely fixed but rather to indicate an area of land to be considered in more detail after public consultation:

Dark Green Areas

High sensitivity. Landscape of the highest quality. These areas provide land of 'markedly superior' landscape quality. They contribute 'significantly' to the landscape setting of the town.

Dark Yellow Areas

Medium sensitivity. Very attractive landscape. These areas provide land of 'exceptionally high' landscape quality. They contribute 'distinctively' to the landscape setting of the town.

Light Yellow Areas – Landscape of Lower Sensitivity

Low sensitivity. Good landscape but tracts of the land are of ordinary quality. Some parts of land do not 'actively' contribute to the landscape setting of the town.

- 2.11 Where landscape character and quality was noted as changing gradually over a tract of land, pockets of lesser quality land often became more frequent. The boundary to a designated area has not been regarded as a sharp line between areas of differing quality. In most situations the detailed boundary is drawn along an easily identifiable feature in this transitional area and will be the subject of further review.
- 2.12 Infrastructure/incongruous features that can have an adverse impact on the quality of the landscape and its ability to form an extensive tract were sometimes noted to physically break up landscape. The extent to which an area was affected by such fragmentation depended on the nature of the fragmenting elements and their visibility and the number and quality of connections between fragmented areas. In some areas where fragmentation was not considered to be significant the land remains of the higher quality.
- 2.13 Often the landscape remained intact in terms of its inherent physical condition and quality but aspects such as tranquillity, relative wildness and enjoyment have been affected. Defining a detailed boundary (at the next stage) will include consideration of opportunities to mitigate incongruous features and also the need for a boundary to follow a clearly identifiable feature on the ground.

Stage 2:

Countryside Commission Landscape Character Analysis and Evaluation

- 2.14 In this part of the review the landscape qualities of each study area were described in specific terms. This was the criteria-based evaluation of the landscape based on detailed deskwork and fieldwork and was presented on an area-by-area basis in order to organise the material and facilitate analysis and present results. This was the descriptive objective part of the Study based on factual data and information currently available.
- 2.15 Each study area has been investigated by disaggregating the landscape of each unit into its principal characteristics guided by the '*Criteria for Evaluation of Local Landscape Quality*' based upon criteria for evaluating landscapes for designation from *Countryside Commission (1993) Landscape Assessment Guidance, CCP 423 Countryside Commission: Cheltenham*. This was to enable consistency in the survey in that all survey work was carried out to a common checklist backed up by field survey work to verify aspects on the site itself. The following landscape value criteria (tests) were used from the Countryside Commission assessment guidance:
- **Landscape as a resource:** A resource of at least local importance for reasons of rarity or representativeness.
 - **Scenic quality:** High scenic quality, with pleasing patterns and combinations of landscape features, and important aesthetic or intangible factors.
 - **Unspoilt character:** Generally unspoilt by large-scale, visually intrusive industry, mineral extraction or other inharmonious development.
 - **Sense of place:** Distinctive and common character, including topographic and visual unity and a clear sense of place.
 - **Conservation interests:** Notable conservation interests, such as features of historical, wildlife or architectural interest.
 - **Consensus:** Consensus of both professional and public opinion as its importance, for example as reflected through writings and paintings about the landscape.

2.16 Each of these tests has been rigorously applied and evidence compiled to support the appraisal.

2.17 Some areas may need a far more in-depth study where there is doubt, especially areas that are inaccessible or where there may be a need to draw upon the original basis for study including an audit trail of previous decisions and other specialist advice given at the time when the area was designated.

Stage 3: Harrogate District Landscape Character Assessment (2004)

2.18 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is heavily relied on as a means of achieving a more rigorous approach to the assessment and evaluation of landscapes. LCA identifies those specific landscape elements that require protection and why resulting in a formal and robust assessment of the qualities of the landscape concerned. The 'condition' of the features identified in the landscape character assessment provides a benchmark for determining the areas of landscape which are of high quality or otherwise.

- 2.19 The approved approach to assessing landscapes is set out in the *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment. Guidance for England and Scotland*. This guidance clearly distinguishes, as two separate stages, the characterisation and the evaluation of the landscape.
- 2.20 The priority given to landscape protection of Landscape Character in the Harrogate District Local Plan 2001 under Policy C2.
- 2.21 Landscape Character encompasses many aspects of the landscape, including:
- Landscape features such as landform, trees hedges, walls;
 - Landscape attributes such as landscape character, unspoilt appearance, tranquillity; and
 - Landscape processes (or how the landscape is managed to perpetuate its character and quality) such as farming and woodland management.
- 2.22 The above aspects are normally considered as part of the determination of applications for development and change of use, in accordance with the Harrogate District Landscape Character Assessment 2004. An important function of this document is to provide Supplementary Planning Guidance to Policy C2 and other policies of the Harrogate District Local Plan. The recognized importance of the landscape character of the District justifies its general protection. The Council already uses the Harrogate District Landscape Character Assessment SPG (2004) for development control purposes and will continue to use this assessment to ensure the continued protection and enhancement of the District's landscape character. The plan in Appendix 4 shows the boundaries of Landscape Character Areas relevant to this review.
- 2.23 In this part of the review the elements that form the landscape character of each area are extracted from the Harrogate District Landscape Character Assessment. The landscape elements are examined under the Policy and Countryside Commission 'tests' to assess where they meet with the designation criteria or where the evidence falls short.
- 2.24 'Landscape quality' is the first test and the land that fails to meet this test is specifically identified with reasons supporting this decision. The landscape quality test stresses the importance of an area being 'more than normal countryside' and 'offering a landscape of markedly superior landscape quality'. The precise determination of landscape quality is often a subjective matter but it must be taken into consideration that areas of high landscape quality are generally associated with a combination of features including a variety of landform, the presence of extensive tree and woodland cover, well managed farmland with distinctive patterns of field boundaries of either walls or hedgerows and the absence of detractors and other visually intrusive elements. 'Landscape setting' is the second test. The approach to assessing areas requires that not all land within the study area must necessarily satisfy both (the landscape quality and landscape setting) to the same extent but there should be a high degree of correlation and consistency when reviewing larger tracts of land. In other words a piecemeal approach to defining areas was also not encouraged where small pockets of land fail to meet the criteria that would produce a 'piecemeal' result.

2.25 This report identifies, describes and evaluates the key landscape character areas found in each study area. Seventeen separate Landscape Character Areas make up the whole extent of the study area and are listed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Landscape Character Areas

Area	Title
20	STAINBURN MOOR, LINDLEY MOOR AND SANDWITH MOOR
21	OAK BECK AND RESERVOIRS
22	MENWITH AND PENNY POT GRASSLAND
24	LOWER NIDDERDALE VALLEY NORTH WEST OF HARROGATE
45	WEST RIPON RIVERS LAVER AND SKELL CONFLUENCE
50	BREARTON AND NIDD ARABLE FARMLAND
52	NORTH KNARESBOROUGH IMPROVED GRASSLAND
53	NIDD GORGE
54	HARROGATE-KNARESBOROUGH CORRIDOR
56	PLOMPTON AND SOUTH KNARESBOROUGH ARABLE FARMLAND
57	CRIMPLE AND PARK BECK CORRIDOR
58	MIDDLE CRIMPLE VALLEY
59	HARLOW HILL
60	UPPER CRIMPLE VALLEY
65	SOUTH EAST HARROGATE FARMLAND
75	URE CORRIDOR RECREATION AREA
76	EAST OF RIPON FARMLAND

2.26 Landscape Character Areas specific to each Special Landscape Areas are listed in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Landscape Character Areas that make up the Study Area

Ref:	Special Landscape Area	Landscape Character Area
C9a	WARREN TOP - KNOX HILL, OAK BECK VALLEY TO THE NORTH WEST OF HARROGATE	24
C9b	NIDD GORGE	24,50,53,54,56
C9c	SCRIVEN PARK AND CONEY HEATH	52
C9d	CRIMPLE VALLEY	57,58,59,60,65
C9e	RUDDING PARK	Registered Historic Park and Garden
C9f	PINE WOODS AND VALLEY GARDENS	59
C9g	OAK BECK VALLEY TO THE WEST OF HARROGATE INCLUDING BIRK CRAG AND CARDALE WOOD	20,21,22,59
C9h	URE VALLEY	75,76
C9i	SKELL AND LAVER VALLEYS	45

- 2.27 The landscape character assessment provides a basic knowledge of the regional and local factors that make a special contribution to the character of the towns and their fringes. Assessment of landscape quality encompasses the appraisal of physical, aesthetic and intangible attributes including for example scenic quality, sense of place and representativeness. In reality, landscape is a continuum and character does not, in general, change abruptly. Therefore the boundaries to character areas do not represent precise boundaries but illustrate the general changes in character within the study area as a whole. The difference between character and quality is subtle but distinct: an area of land may be of strong character but poor landscape quality.
- 2.28 Measures and provisions available to achieve landscape management and enhancement initiatives for areas judged to fall short of designation will be considered at a later stage when issues relating to practicalities of land ownership, economies of scale, administration and funding can be fully addressed. Although noted these are not taken into account as to whether the land is worthy of designation or not. This would form part of the Final Study when defining actual boundaries in relation to landscape features on the ground in tandem with public consultation.
- 2.29 The brief for the Final Study requires that a number of questions are considered when making a recommendation for mitigation and enhancement. This section therefore explores the questions that might be raised at a later stage:
- Funding: Whether funding sources can continue to improve and enhance the quality of the landscape;
 - Management: Whether conservation and management of an area can be successfully achieved in its current form or whether changes are required to achieve added benefits;
 - Landscape change: Managing landscape change and factors which impose pressures for development are a key consideration of whether the designation should continue;
 - Would the management needs of the area be best addressed by Council or private measures;
 - Would improvements lead to markedly better management for the area, including a markedly better recreational experience and social wellbeing of communities; and
 - The requirement of the Council to produce strategic management plan and the empowerment of the Council to take appropriate action to conserve the landscape quality of the designated area.
- 2.30 In some instances land outside the study area, which has previously been excluded, is re-considered at this stage.

2.31 Further detailed work may be required as part of the Final Study, for example:

- Development control plans, planning information including local and national planning policy that affects each area may be considered;
- Detailed analysis in specific locations that will have to draw upon local and specialist advice might be necessary;
- Further assessment work may also take into consideration the emerging *North Yorkshire and former Cleveland Historic Landscape Characterisation Study 2005-2007*; and
- Further consultations may compare results with the Local Development Framework document *Provision for Open Space in connection with New Housing Development SPD*.

3.0. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

3.1 In this chapter the landscape qualities of the current Green Wedge and Special Landscape Area designations are reviewed in general terms to summarise elements that make up each area. Each existing designation, together with adjacent land, has been assessed against the criteria for designation identified within the previous chapter. Plans showing those areas recommended to remain designated, those areas recommended for further review and possible extensions to Green Wedges are shown in Appendix 5. The full analysis and evaluation of the existing designations is set out in Appendix 6 and 7.

Green Wedges

3.2 C10a Oakdale Valley

3.2.1 Analysis:

This is an extensive tract of open countryside comprising mostly the Oakdale Golf Course. The Harrogate Ringway footpath lies to the south and follows the densely wooded Oak Beck Valley. This woodland to the south is one of the most important of the town's woodlands, not least because it extends from open countryside into the heart of the town.

3.2.2 Evaluation:

The area provides for appropriate recreational facilities within easy reach of residents and access to the countryside through provision of the Ringway Footpath and the Oakdale Golf Course. The woodlands of the Oak Beck Valley provide clearly defined boundaries between the neighbourhoods of Jennyfields to the north and The Duchy Estate to the south

3.2.3 Recommendations:

Retain "Green Wedge" designation, and suggest boundary extension at Killinghill Moor, southwest of Jennyfields (Area A). The reason is to maintain and enhance access to the open land and ultimately the countryside beyond to provide informal recreation and to take account of the most recent expansion of the Jennyfields housing area.

3.3 C10b Pinewoods And Valley Gardens

3.3.1 Analysis:

The area is densely wooded and the Harlow Moor Woodland extends from open countryside to Valley Gardens in the heart of the town. There is an extensive footpath network that provides strategic links between the Valley Gardens and the Royal Horticultural Society Gardens at Harlow Carr.

3.3.2 Evaluation:

This area comprises a distinctive high quality landscape that not only makes an important contribution to the character and the quality of the built up areas but to the character of the town as a whole. The footpath links to Harlow Carr provide recreation benefits that contribute to the general well being of large areas of the town centre through its recreational, scenic and amenity value.

3.3.3 Recommendations:
Retain “Green Wedge” designation and suggest boundary extension south of the B6162 Otley Road (Area B). The reason is to prevent the area becoming one undifferentiated built up area and to promote enhanced separation between the neighbourhoods of The Duchy to the north and Harlow Hill to the south.

3.4 C10c Bilton Triangle

3.4.1 Analysis:
This is an extensive sweep of countryside and playing fields that penetrate deeply into the urban area of Harrogate from the northeast. Its inner end lies near the Stray. There is a good deal of public access via rights of way, and unofficial paths, over many parts of the open land. The main disused railway line which runs south-east north-west supports developing scrub and an area of scrub associated with the disturbed ground adjacent to Dragon Junction. An important site and has the opportunity to develop into high canopy woodland which would form a significant feature in the surrounding area.

3.4.2 Evaluation:
The open land is important in helping to define the shape of the town and the area provides a clearly defined boundary between the neighbourhoods of Bilton to the north and Starbeck and the Kingsley Drive area to the south. This is a very extensive area and also retains important views into and out of the town.

3.4.3 Recommendations:
Retain “Green Wedge” designation, and suggest boundary extension to the east (Area C). The reason is to allow for the provision of enhanced public access to the open land and the countryside beyond. The *Community Sports Regeneration Area Action Plan* as part of the emerging *Local Development Framework* allows for the provision of a new public park containing sports pitches and new areas of planting in this area in general.

3.5 C10d Hookstone Valley

3.5.1 Analysis:
The Hookstone Valley brings the open countryside of the Crimple Valley into the urban area on the south side of the town. This area is within easy walking distance of The Stray. There is existing pedestrian access along the north-eastern side of the wedge, and a recreational allocation for the former quarry and for the unused land closest alongside the course of the Hookstone Beck.

3.5.2 Evaluation:
The valley, including the agricultural land within the “Green Wedge”, is an important element of the town character. This is a very distinct area that provides a clearly defined boundary between the neighbourhoods of Oatlands to the southwest and Woodlands to the northeast. The open space confers positive psychological benefits that contribute to the general well being of the public who come to Hornbeam Park for work, study or travel. The area is seen as an important ‘gateway’ to Harrogate for those arriving at Hornbeam Park.

- 3.5.3 Recommendations:
Retain “Green Wedge” and suggest boundary extension to include the Hookstone Wood (Area D). The recent expansion on the Yorkshire Showground site and the adjacent Sainsbury’s superstore development has affected the character of the area. The proposed boundary extension will safeguard the character of the town through maintaining and enhancing a more extensive link between the town centre and the open countryside.

Special Landscape Areas

3.6 C9a Warren Top – Knox Hill, Oak Beck Valley To The North West Of Harrogate

- 3.6.1 Analysis:
The landform is dominated by the river valleys of the Nidd to the northeast and Oak Beck to the south. The intervening area takes the form of a broad spur of higher ground above the surrounding valley bottom. In the southwest of the area the land rises rather more steeply in the form of a local spur or ridge to form Knox Hill. The woodlands associated with this feature serve to emphasise its prominence. There is a strong visual relationship and views into and out of the town from the Skipton Road and New Park area are particularly important. The area forms the main western horizon and affords views of open countryside from all main residential areas on the north western side of the town.
- 3.6.2 Evaluation:
This is a landscape resource of at least local importance for reasons of representativeness, bringing the countryside character right up to the edge of the town in terms of visual relationships. Grain Beck, which joins the Oak Beck from Killinghall to the northwest, via the northern end of the area, has carved a distinctive steep sided valley. The Oak Beck Valley helps to define the edge of town and possesses landscape quality in its own right. There is a regular pattern of relatively flat fields alongside the A59 north of Skipton Road that have a completely different character to the north and eastern parts of the area. Beyond these fields the land rises as a shallow slope up to a fairly level plateau that is exposed and visible from areas to the north, south, east and west. This part of the area is reasonably attractive countryside but not of exceptional quality. The hedgerows are clearly defining the fields and some more intimate field sizes in parts but they are not hedgerows and fields of high landscape quality.
- 3.6.3 Recommendations:
Retain as Special Landscape Area, but consider tract of land to the north of the A59 Skipton Road (Area 1) for further review.

3.7 C9b Nidd Gorge

3.7.1 Analysis:

Includes the eastern edge of the plateau of higher land on which Harrogate is situated. This area to the north and east of Harrogate includes Old Bilton, Bilton Hall, Bilton Beck and Birkham Wood which is bisected by the by-pass. This is a large-scale, broad valley with a flat floor that channels extensive views, which gradually evolve to the Nidd Gorge a well, wooded steep sided valley forming the western boundary of Knaresborough.

3.7.2 Evaluation:

The main feature which contributes to the high quality of the landscape in this area is the Nidd Gorge which is a dominant landform feature and the extensive areas of woodland associated with it, together with the landscape of small fields, hedgerows and hedgerow trees to the south of the Gorge. The Nidd Gorge landscape is a resource of at least local importance if not regional importance for reasons of rarity, a noteworthy geophysical feature closely associated with a historic settlement. Flat valley floor pastures lie on the inside of the meanders of the river between the built up area of the town and the river, forming part of the river landscape setting of the town. The pastures are also a component of the geophysical feature. The presence of the flat valley floor pastures, the nearby river and valley sides rising steeply above combine to create a strong sense of place and setting for the town. There is a pattern of relatively uninteresting flat fields to the east of Killinghall and the A61 Ripon Road, that have a completely different character to other parts of the area. Beyond these fields the land falls as a steep down to the Nidd valley. This part of the area is reasonably attractive countryside but not of exceptional quality. The hedgerows are clearly defining the fields and some more intimate field sizes in parts but they are not hedgerows of high landscape quality and the fields are denuded by various agricultural storage and other ancillary uses. Land to the north of Mill Farm Ripley is hidden below the horizon and it is only on the higher land to the east that substantial areas of Harrogate are revealed. The same applies to land south of Hill Top Farm, Nidd where substantial woodland visually separates Harrogate from this part of the Special Landscape Area. Land south of the A59 Harrogate Road Starbeck consists of the Harrogate Golf Course where the landscape features are well maintained but weak compared to elsewhere and as a result are not of exceptionally high quality.

3.7.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area, but consider four tracts of land for further review. The first is land to the east of the A61 Ripon Road Killinghall (Area 2); the second third is land north of Mill Farm Ripley (Area 3); the third is land is south of Hill top Farm (Area 4), Ripley and the final area of land is south of the A59 Harrogate Road Starbeck which includes the Gallow Hill area (Area 5).

3.8 C9c Scriven Park and Coney Heath

3.8.1 Analysis:

This is an area of attractive landscape by virtue of its distinctive woodland cover. Coney Garth and its associated woodlands is a prominent and distinctive landscape feature that contributes substantially to the setting of the village of Old Scriven and the northwestern fringes of Knaresborough.

3.8.2 Evaluation:

The Scriven Park and Coney Heath landscape with its veteran trees in a parkland setting is a resource of at least local importance for reasons of representativeness, bringing the pastoral character right up to the edge of Knaresborough. Although the town of Knaresborough remains largely hidden from view the almost continuous tree cover associated with Scriven Park provides an attractive setting to the edge of the town.

3.8.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area.

3.9 C9d Crimple Valley

3.9.1 Analysis:

The Special Landscape Area covers a large section of the southern fringes of Harrogate and consists of a shallow valley through which the Crimple Beck flows on its meandering course to meet the River Nidd. The whole valley is well wooded along its length. The area in general has a very strong landscape structure and preserved landscape consistency. The distinctiveness of the Crimple Beck corridor is a result of landform and large areas of woodland. There is little built form in the area itself except for several scattered individual farmsteads and houses built in local sandstone with stone slate or blue slate roofs.

3.9.2 Evaluation:

The area is extremely attractive in landscape terms. The distinctiveness of the Crimple Beck corridor is a result of landform and large areas of woodland. Hillfoot Lane winds across the valley side with sporadic development along the road. There are steep slopes, small irregular fields divided by mature hedgerows and distinctive trees. This area is seen extensively from the west. The broad open valley provides excellent views with a high degree of intervisibility between the urban fringe of Harrogate and the surrounding countryside. The land east of the A658 Southern Bypass near to Follifoot is often below the horizon and it is only on the higher land closer to the bypass that substantial areas of Harrogate are revealed and in this area in general the traffic noise from the bypass impacts on the otherwise unspoilt character of the area. Land to the south of the Yorkshire Showground has a different character from surrounding areas where recent development of the Sainsbury's superstore adjoining the Showground to the north has impacted upon the area. The Yorkshire Showground and its visual prominence has a markedly adverse effect on the character of Crimple Valley as a whole. Land to the east of Leeds Road at Spacey Houses has basically rectangular fields that do not have particular characteristics which distinguish them from fields elsewhere. The fact that they have hedgerows and a certain degree of slope

down to the Hookstone Beck does not give them special quality. The beck itself is quite an attractive feature but on its southern side the landscape characteristics differ. Land south of Tatefield Hall at North Rigton is hidden below the horizon and it is only on the higher land to the northeast that substantial areas of Harrogate are revealed. There is a dense pattern of field boundaries throughout the survey area with the exception of the area immediately either side of the B6162 Otley Road, where the fields are relatively larger with more regular field boundaries. These fields are not areas of high landscape quality.

3.9.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area, but consider five tracts of land for further review. The first is land east of the A658 Harrogate-Knaresborough Southern bypass (Area 6); the second is land south of the Yorkshire Showground Harrogate (Area 7); the third is land east of the A61 Leeds Road, Spacey Houses (Area 8); the fourth is land south of Tatefield Hall, North Rigton (Area 9); and finally land to either side of Otley Road Harrogate (Area 10).

3.10 C9e Rudding Park

3.10.1 Analysis:

Rudding Park occupies the eastern end of the broad spur known as Follifoot Ridge. The summit of the spur on which Rudding Park lies, is broad and generally flat, though at the eastern end a small tributary stream of the River Crimple dissects it.

3.10.2 Evaluation:

The Rudding Park Estate landscape is a resource of at least local importance, if not national rarity that owes its worthiness to the fact that it is a large estate whose land management practices have retained large amounts of unspoilt farmland and woodland. The estate represents a particularly important and unique part of the urban fringe landscape and as such represents a particularly important component of the towns landscape setting.

3.10.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area

3.11 C9f Pine Woods and Valley Gardens

3.11.1 Analysis:

The area is densely wooded and the Harlow Moor Woodland is one of the most important of the town's woodlands, not least because it extends from open countryside into the heart of the town. The area is important to the rural setting of Harrogate and Valley Gardens and provides recreation facilities and opportunities including Oakdale Golf Club, the Pinewoods and Cardale Caravan Park.

3.11.2 Evaluation:

This area comprises a distinctive high quality landscape which stretches into the heart of the town that not only makes an important contribution to the character and the quality of the built up areas but to the character and setting of the town as a whole. The existing edge of the town between Harlow Carr Gardens and Otley Road is closely associated with a subtle break of slope.

The wooded character of the town fringe coinciding with the horizon forms a distinctive edge, which at the same time effectively prevents intrusion of the built up area into the countryside. A collection of basically rectangular fields lie to the north east of the area that do not have particular characteristics that distinguish them from fields elsewhere.

3.11.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area, but consider tract of land south east of Birk Crag (Area 11) Harlow Carr for further review.

3.12 C9g Oak Beck Valley to the west of Harrogate including Birk Crag and Cardale Wood

3.12.1 Analysis:

The small-scale valley landscape of Scargill Beck and Oak Beck runs through the area south-west to north-east. The Oak Beck Valley running SW-NE across the survey area has fairly gentle slopes on the northwest side but steep bluffs and crags including Birk Crag to the southeast. The steeper and more difficult slopes on the south east side of the Beck are densely wooded.

3.12.2 Evaluation:

The Oak Beck Valley landscape is a resource of at least local importance if not regional importance for reasons of rarity, a noteworthy geophysical feature the steep bluffs and crags that form Birk Crag with its associated woodland. The area remains unspoilt. The valleys have largely remained undeveloped and are for the most part agricultural land and woodland. The steep and more intractable slopes are almost entirely wooded. The Oakdale Golf Course retains a semi-rural character through its small scattered copses of trees with the exception of some of the small belts that are mainly coniferous and its intense management practices in parts. The area is important to the rural setting of Harrogate, Birk Crag and Harlow Carr and provides recreation facilities and opportunities. Land around Otley Road is clearly open countryside, consisting mostly of fields or woodland, individual trees and shelter belts, but the landform is uninteresting. Part is flat and part is a gentle inclined plane. The field pattern is very regimented with a dominance of straight lines. A collection of basically rectangular fields lie to the south east of the area that does not have particular characteristics that distinguishes them from fields elsewhere.

3.12.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area, but consider three tracts of land for further review. The first is land to either side of the B6162 Otley Road (Area 10), Harrogate; the second is land southeast of Birk Crag (Area 11); the final area is land at Oakdale Golf Course (Area 12).

3.13 C9h Ure Valley

3.13.1 Analysis:

The area lies mostly to the north of the confluence of the Rivers Ure and Skell. The River Ure and its associated grassland help to define the edge of the city at this point and the land is an important prominent visual feature on the east side of Ripon.

3.13.2 Evaluation:

The land has special qualities and forms an important setting to the City. There are distinctive trees, including riverside vegetation and views are possible of woodland rising above the east bank of the Ure. The combination of features including the riverside setting, the grassland meadows and the riverside vegetation endow the area with a strong sense of place. Although the bypass forms an urban edge parts of land make up the remaining pastoral landscape between the edge of the town and the bypass for example land north of Rotary Way. Areas to the north at Ure Bank have special landscape qualities as there are distinctive river meadows and prominent trees, this landscape extends further north providing visual links to Little Studley. Land to the west of Sharow Hall is hidden behind woodland on the east bank of the river and it is only on the open land to the south that substantial areas of Ripon and views of the Minster are revealed. Land west of Grange Farm at Bridge Hewick is clearly open countryside, consisting of large open fields or, but the landform is uninteresting and the hedgerows are scarce with little woodland cover.

3.13.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area, but consider four tracts of land for further review. The first is land at Little Studley (Area 13); the second is land north of Rotary Way Area 14); the third is land west of Sharow Hall (Area 15); the final area is land west of Grange Farm at Bridge Hewick (Area 16).

3.14 C9i Skell and Laver Valleys

3.14.1 Analysis:

This area is characterised by the way in which the River Laver threads its way through the landscape, with associated small valley-floor pastures enclosed by mature tree belts, hedgerow trees and dense riverside vegetation. A significant belt of mature riverside woodland runs along the River Laver creating a physical and visual barrier to the surrounding countryside. This riverside woodland extends up the Studley Road and is one of the components contributing to an attractive entrance to Ripon. Trees and shrubs rise up the valley slopes providing further enclosure and separation.

3.14.2 Evaluation:

The Laver Valley landscape with its steep slopes and flat, generally pastoral floor is a resource of at least local importance for reasons of representativeness, bringing the Dales character right up to the edge of Ripon. The valley is also important in shaping urban form especially as the River Skell penetrates the city. The valley floor pastures are of high scenic quality, forming an integral part of the Laver Valley with its overall strongly rural, tranquil and mature character. The small field north of the River Laver at Bishopton penetrates the urban area and has a particular landscape significance as an open slope that provides the landscape setting for the river. The River Laver and its mature riverside trees are an important local nature conservation interest. There is a Quarry at Hell Wath which is a designated SINIC. This riverside woodland extends up the river and is one of the components contributing to an attractive entrance to Ripon. Trees and shrubs rise up the valley slopes towards Whitcliffe providing further enclosure and separation.

Occasional veteran trees punctuate the open fields at Whitcliffe all combine to create a unique pastoral landscape and a strong sense of place.

3.14.3 Recommendations:

Retain as Special Landscape Area, but consider four tracts of land for further review. The first is land west of Whitcliffe Hall (Area 17); the second is land east of Masterman Crag (Area 18), Hell Wath; the third is land south of Borrage Lane (Area 19), Borrage Green; and the final area of land is east of Paddy Wood at Bishopton (Area 20).

4.0 **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 The designation of Green Wedges and Special Landscape Areas has played an important role in helping to protect the character and setting of the District's main settlements. This report sets out the interim finding of the review as to:

- a) Whether these two types of local landscape designations should be maintained as part of the development plan context for the District, and
- b) If so, whether any boundary changes to the designations are justified.

Green Wedges

4.2 The interaction between Harrogate's expanding urban areas and the adjoining rural landscape over the years has enabled the preservation of the Green Wedges that extend from the surrounding countryside into the built up area. These wedges include streams, small valleys and woodlands forming areas of attractive landscape often with the benefit of a degree of public access. As such these areas have served to shape and mould the form of the urban area itself and have come to represent highly valued local amenities.

4.3 The interim findings of this review are that the existing Green Wedges remain an important policy tool in protecting and enhancing the special character of Harrogate town. The allocation of Green Wedges can deliver sustainable and desirable planning outcomes for the reasons set out below:

- They provide clearly defined urban-rural boundaries;
- Neighbourhoods are given separate identity and local distinctiveness;
- Green open space confers psychological benefits that contribute to general well-being;
- They provide space for appropriate recreational facilities within easy reach of residents and improvements in access to countryside areas where they might otherwise not exist;
- The retention and enhancement of biodiversity is possible. They help preserve, promote and protect wildlife corridors. They can facilitate the positive and appropriate management of land and this can improve and preserve landscape character;
- They retain important views into and out of the town;
- Sustainable development principles are promoted, where the public are not required to travel long distances to find recreational, scenic or amenity resources; and
- They can help to control and shape the growth of the urban area in a way that is sympathetic to the character of the town.

- 4.4 It is concluded therefore, that Green Wedges offer an appropriate level of protection for the local environment and quality of life in Harrogate. Survey work undertaken so far indicates that all of the existing Green Wedge designations should be taken forward as local landscape designations in the emerging Local Development Framework, these comprise:
- C10a Oakdale Valley
 - C10b Pine Woods and Valley Gardens
 - C10c Bilton Triangle
 - C10d Hookstone Valley
- 4.5 Survey work has also identified a number of potential extensions to the Green Wedges designations, taking account of possible future housing and other forms of development currently being considered as part of the LDF process. These are defined as *Areas for Extension* on the Plans included in Appendix 5 and are as follows:
- a) Oakdale Valley, Killinghall Moor, southwest of Jennyfields
 - b) Pine Woods and Valley Gardens, south of B6161 Otley Road
 - c) Bilton Triangle
 - d) Hookstone Valley, South of the Yorkshire Showground

Special Landscape Areas

- 4.6 The presence of areas of high landscape quality on the urban edges of Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon contributes positively to the character of these settlements and their approaches. These Special Landscape Areas include mostly the surrounding river valleys that have remained substantially undeveloped. Not only do the higher edges of the valleys define the urban areas themselves but substantial tracts of the lower valleys and in particular the opposing valley sides are visually exposed and prominent in relation to large areas of the urban fringe. The Special Landscape Areas also include small streams and smaller tributary valleys with large areas of woodland forming areas of highly attractive landscape.
- 4.7 Substantial woodland cover occurs in the fringes of the built-up areas and in the adjacent rural landscape. As such these woodland areas have served to shape and mould the form of the settlement edges. Views of the towns from the surrounding countryside are mostly woodlands or trees that are often the dominant element in the composition. This interaction between the already expanding town and the adjoining rural landscape is that the landscape of the urban fringe is of a high quality in its own right. Built up areas often extend to the very edge of the town and yet views remain largely unspoilt because of the close proximity of trees and woodland areas.
- 4.8 Special Landscape Areas have been identified because of they make an important contribution to the landscape setting of Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon and where the landscape is demonstrated to be of high quality where they have intrinsic value in their own right. This does not require uniform character and variety and diversity are often an important component of scenic quality. Diversity is the overall most obvious characteristic of any piece of landscape found on the Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon fringe areas. Harrogate in common with a number of other counties such as Kent, Leicestershire and Wiltshire which have designated Special Landscape Areas.

4.9 In general terms, it is considered that Special Landscape Areas should continue to be identified as a means of protecting the special character of the Districts main settlements for the following reasons:

- The areas covered by such designations comprise of truly high quality landscape that is also particularly important to the landscape setting of three historic settlements in the District, Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon.
- The combination of these two qualities (high quality and importance to landscape setting) form tracts of countryside that should be protected to preserve the locally distinct character of these three historic settlements.
- The high quality of the countryside around these towns is an important natural, recreational and accessible resource for the local communities and visitors to Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon. It contributes significantly to the quality of life enjoyed by the local population.

4.10 Development within these Special Landscape Areas is much more likely to have a harmful impact on the landscape setting and character of these settlements than development outside them. They represent protected areas which should guide the long term development of the main settlements.

4.11 A criteria based policy alone, without designations on the Proposals Map would not give clear and sufficient protection to these areas by virtue of the uncertainty over what areas should or should not be protected. This could lead to piecemeal adverse impacts culminating in loss of overall character.

4.12 The interim findings of the review suggest that some areas fall short of the Council's criteria for Special Landscape Areas. These areas are shown on plans contained in Appendix 5 and are collectively defined as *Areas for Further Review*. These areas are as follows:

- 1 Land north of the A59 Skipton Road, Killinghall
- 2 Land east of the A61 Ripon Road, Killinghall
- 3 Land north of Mill Farm, Ripley
- 4 Land south of Hill Top Farm, Nidd
- 5 Land south of the A59 Harrogate Road, Starbeck, Knaresborough
- 6 Land east of the A658 Harrogate – Knaresborough Southern Bypass, Follifoot
- 7 Land south of the Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate

- 8 Land east of the A61 Leeds Road, Spacey Houses, Harrogate
- 9 Land south of Tatefield Hall, North Rigton
- 10 Land to either side of the B6162 Otley Road, Harrogate
- 11 Land southeast of Birk Crag, Harlow Carr, Harrogate
- 12 Land at Oakdale Golf Course, Harrogate
- 13 Land at Little Studley, Ripon
- 14 Land north of Rotary Way, Ripon
- 15 Land west of Sharow Hall, Sharow, Ripon
- 16 Land west of Grange Farm, Bridge Hewick
- 17 Land west of Whitcliffe Hall, Littlethorpe
- 18 Land east of Masterman Crag, Hell Wath, Ripon
- 19 Land south of Borrage Lane, Borrage Green Ripon
- 20 Land east of Paddy Wood, Bishopton, Ripon