

Landscape assessment encompasses appraisal of physical, aesthetic and intangible attributes including sense of place, rarity or representativeness, and unspoilt appearance. The combination of landscape elements (trees, hedgerows, woodlands, arable and pasture land, settlement and buildings, their architecture and fabric) and their arrangement give the different areas a unique sense of place, or 'character'. These aspects, together with scale and character of surrounding landscapes, patterns and scale of landform, landcover and built development, need to be taken into account when assessing landscape impact. Analysing and describing the landscape is called Landscape Character Assessment.

Landscape Character Assessment

This involves an appraisal of the characteristics of the landscape. It can be done on a national, regional, district, local or site scale. Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment has been produced by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

"Landscape Character is defined as a distinct recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently in a particular type of landscape."¹

There are a range of uses for Landscape Character Assessment in Planning, Landscape Conservation and Management, Landscape Change for Regeneration and wider environmental initiatives.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

As assessment of landscape character is an essential element of gathering baseline information for Landscape and Visual Impact assessments and should be conducted at a scale relevant to the development proposal and its landscape setting.



An assessment of landscape character enables an appraisal to be carried out to determine the sensitivity of the landscape to change, the extent of landscape and visual impact when development occurs, what is acceptable and what mitigation measures may be appropriate.

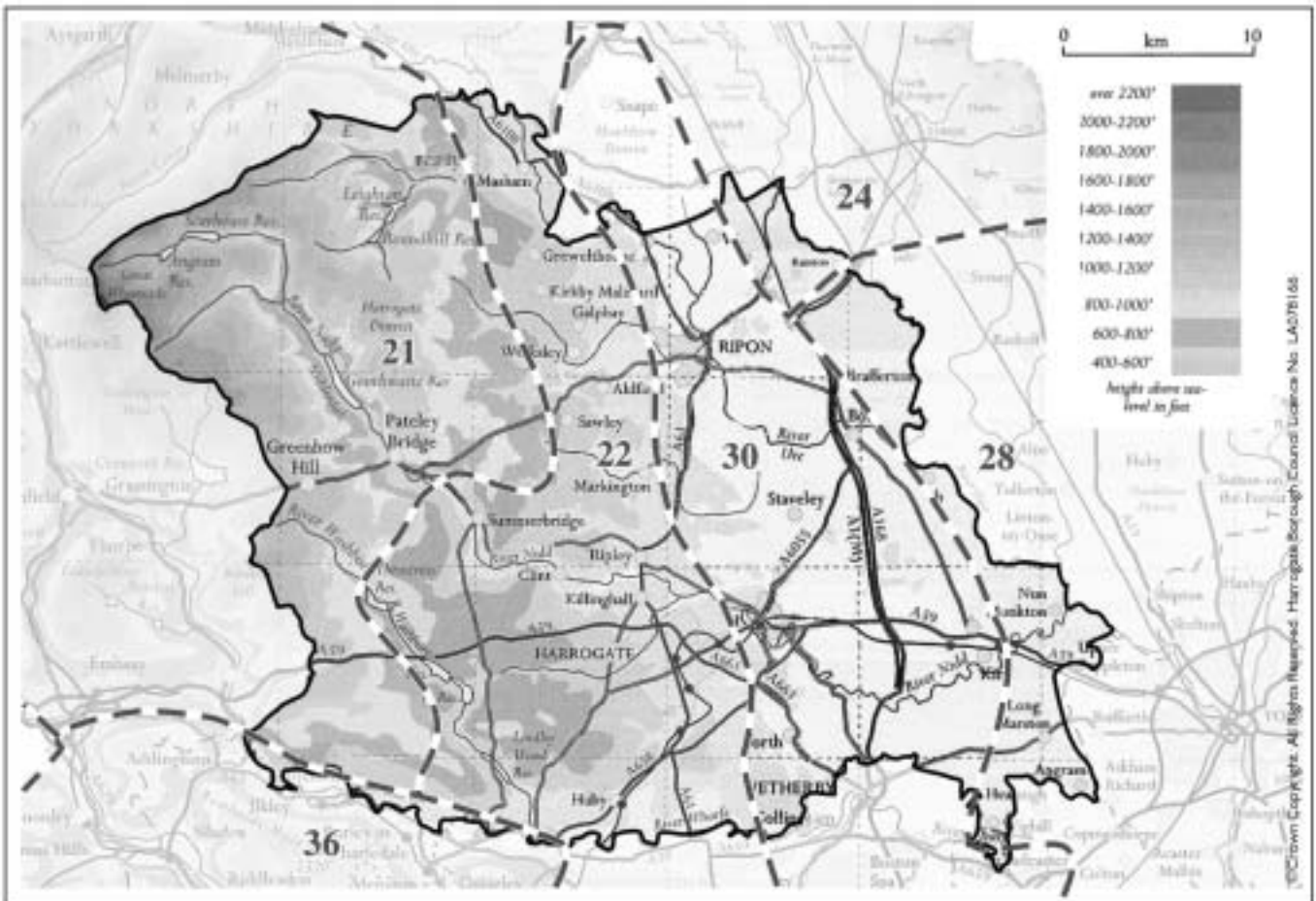
Landscape impact occurs as a result of changes in the fabric, character and quality of the landscape due development. Therefore landscape impact assessment is concerned with:

- direct impact on specific landscape elements;
- more subtle effects on the overall pattern of elements that gives rise to landscape character and regional and local distinctiveness;
- impacts upon acknowledged special interests or values such as designated landscapes, conservation sites and cultural associations.

Visual impact is a subset of landscape impact and relates solely to changes in views of the landscape and the effects of those changes on people. Visual impact assessment is concerned with:

- direct impact on views
- reaction of viewers who may be affected
- overall impact on visual amenity.

¹ Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 1999.



Landscape Character

The Countryside Agency has produced a Countryside Character Map for England which identifies broad areas of different Countryside Character. These are identified in The Character of England: landscape wildlife and natural features maps and publications prepared by the Countryside Commission in the early 1990s. The character map takes account of the physical landform and the effect of human activities on the natural world. Countryside Character. Volume 3: Yorkshire and the Humber covers Harrogate District. Four Countryside Character Areas cross Harrogate District. They are:

- **CCA21 Yorkshire Dales** - The eastern part of this character area covers a large part of the Nidderdale AONB in the western part of the district.
- **CCA22 Pennine Dales fringe** - This character area crosses the district north to south adjacent to the Yorkshire Dales character area.
- **CAA30 Southern magnesian limestone** - This character area also runs north to south across the centre of the district and is influenced by the magnesian limestone geology of two escarpments no more than a few miles wide.
- **CCA28 Vale of York** - The eastern most part of Harrogate district is part of the Vale of York character area which is low lying, generally flat or gently undulating.

Within the broad landscape character areas identified on the England map further subdivisions can be made at a regional and district level. This was first done for Harrogate in 1993 resulting in the Harrogate District Landscape Appraisal. Methodologies for landscape character assessment have moved on since then and the Harrogate District Landscape Appraisal is subject to review. In the meantime the Landscape Appraisal for Harrogate District is still in use but its limitations should be recognised.

