EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment
Incorporating the Peak District National Park and Lincolnshire Wolds AONB
Shaping the Region's Future Landscape

APRIL 2010

1. © Derbyshire County Council/M Williams
2. © Nottinghamshire County Council
3. © Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service/D Furlong
4. © J Watson
5. © Derbyshire County Council
6. © Derbyshire County Council
7. © J Watson
8. © Wash Esturary Strategy Group/A Lambert
9. © River Nene Regional Park/M Williams
10. © English Heritage/P Payne
11. © Leicestershire County Council
12. © River Nene Regional Park/M Williams

All images used in this report have been credited to the relevant organisation and/or individual as directed.

This document will support the work of the East Midlands Landscape Partnership. It was produced for Natural England's East Midlands Region with the support of the Project Steering Group and stakeholders by:

LDĀDESIGN

A Worton Rectory Park,
Oxford OX29 4SX
T +44 (0)1865 887 050
T +44 (0)1865 887 055

W www.lda-design.co.uk

LDA Design Consulting LLP, Registered No: OC307725
17 Minster Precincts, Peterborough PE1 1XX

FOREWORD

It is small wonder that the British virtually invented the science and nomenclature of geology, because there can be no other nation so small in size with such wide diversity of rocks, and, founded on those rocks, such wide diversity of landscape character types.

The East Midlands exhibit a rich rollercoaster of those characters from the gritstone moorland grandeur of the Peak District in the North-West, with its centrally exposed limestone plateau deeply incised by beautiful river valleys to expose fossils from a shallow equatorial sea, through the coalfields, southern magnesian limestone escarpments, Sherwood Forest, on to the Lincolnshire Edge and the rolling chalk landscapes of the Lincolnshire Wolds, down to fenlands and the Lincolnshire Coastal Marshes to reach the North Sea. In the Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire are some of the oldest rocks in England. There are remnants of ancient royal hunting forests at Sherwood and Rockingham and, in contrast, some of England's youngest woodlands planted, in part, across reclaimed coalfield landscapes in the National Forest. There are broad river valleys and floodplains associated with the Nene, Welland and the Trent, with in some cases land lying lower than, or barely higher than, the sea and rich peatlands sequestering carbon in these uncertain times.

Cities there may be, so too towns and growth areas, but the East Midlands remains at heart rural in character. This is heartland 'village' England, a place of champion landscapes, where heavily nucleated villages, huddled round their churches, gave way to open fields worked in common in strips before the harsh enclosures of rapidly expanding landed estates. Once the stronghold of the medieval sheep and wool industries, much of the East Midlands is now a vast arable agricultural machine, struggling to maintain its biodiversity and to reclaim wetlands. From this rural backdrop there burst forth the leather and textile industries, the coal industry, sand, gravel and limestone extraction, and the world's first factories in the Lower Derwent, now a World Heritage Site. Each is etched onto our landscapes.

I cannot commend enough the monumental achievement of the East Midlands Landscape Partnership to produce, using the latest techniques, a full Landscape Character Assessment for the whole region. This provides all of us with the authentic spatial framework within which we can plan initiatives and encourage regional and local decision-makers to ground their work and policy-making. There can now be no excuse for saying we were not aware of these or those landscape considerations. I encourage all of us and those we influence to cherish these varied landscapes, to plan within their grain, to use landscape as an integrating and place-shaping framework for planning services at different levels, and to recognise that, while change is a characteristic of landscape, we also should pass on to our successors the landscape legibility of our past.

Natural England Board Member

CONTENTS

THE EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the East Midlands Landscape Partnership, following recommendations made in a scoping study, commissioned the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment (EMRLCA). This is a new tier in the landscape character assessment hierarchy in England and the first regional assessment to not only provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of the region's landscape but to also include a seascape characterisation that identifies seascape character types. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the character of the East Midlands landscape and draws together information about the natural, historic and built environment to facilitate the protection, management and planning of the East Midlands Region.

The EMRLCA has been produced in consultation with stakeholders drawn from a wide range of statutory agencies, local authorities and other regional bodies and benefited from the input and guidance of a great number of committed individuals, as well as a full public consultation.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Landscape Character Assessment is the process by which areas of distinctive character are classified, mapped and described. The aim is to raise awareness of the landscape's diversity, local distinctiveness and sense of place, particularly in areas where landscape character is less well understood or appreciated, or under pressure for change, for example from settlement growth, new development or physical changes.

An important feature of the character assessment process is that, consistent with best practice guidance, it is objective and no judgment is made about the value or quality of landscape. In line with the European Landscape Convention, the EMRLCA recognises that all of the landscape matters and makes no distinction between areas of high scenic value and degraded landscape.

In this strategic regional level assessment, 'Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs)' are identified. These are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout the region. However, wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historic and current land uses and settlement patterns.

THE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT HIERARCHY

The regional level of assessment is a new tier in the assessment hierarchy in England and designed to add a regional layer to the 159 National Character Areas identified by Natural England[1] and provide a strategic context and framework for more detailed landscape assessments at the county, district and local scales that nest within the larger scale assessments.

1 *National Character Areas were mapped and described in the late 1990's, prior to the development of the National Landscape Typology.*

PRINCIPAL AIM AND APPLICATION

The principal aim of the EMRLCA is to put in place a consistent and robust landscape evidence base at a regional level that provides a common platform for future strategic, region wide landscape management. It will also ensure that holistic landscape considerations that extend beyond administrative boundaries inform and enable greater integration with and between other environmental themes and projects.

As well as establishing landscape as a spatial framework for decision making at the regional scale, it is intended that the EMRLCA will be taken forward into strategic spatial planning processes to ensure that the environmental baseline for the region informs the regional evidence base and subsequent policy framework.

The RLCTs provide a spatial framework for greater integration with other regional themes and issues such as identifying opportunities for habitat creation, woodland creation and management, informing green infrastructure strategies, the location of development, including renewable energy installations and identifying the role of landscape in the delivery of ecosystem services.

THE EMRLCA

The East Midlands region has a rich and diverse landscape as a result of the complex interplay of a wide range of physical and cultural influences and forces that have shaped and moulded the landscape.

Following a review of existing landscape and historic landscape character assessment across the region, the report examines the physical and cultural influences in order to provide a comprehensive assessment of the foundations of the East Midlands landscape.

The EMRLCA identifies 31 Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs), five of which cover the distinctive East Midlands seascape. The report presents non-technical descriptions of each RLCT as well as a review of the Forces for Change that are currently acting to change the landscape. In addition, the implications of these changes and suggested mechanisms to counter adverse impacts and promote positive change are also considered, under 'Shaping the Future Landscape'. The report, and accompanying photographs and GIS based Figures, provides an overview of the region's diverse landscape, to enthuse and inform anyone with an interest in the landscape and to inform strategic initiatives and decision making which may have an impact on the character and identity of the region.

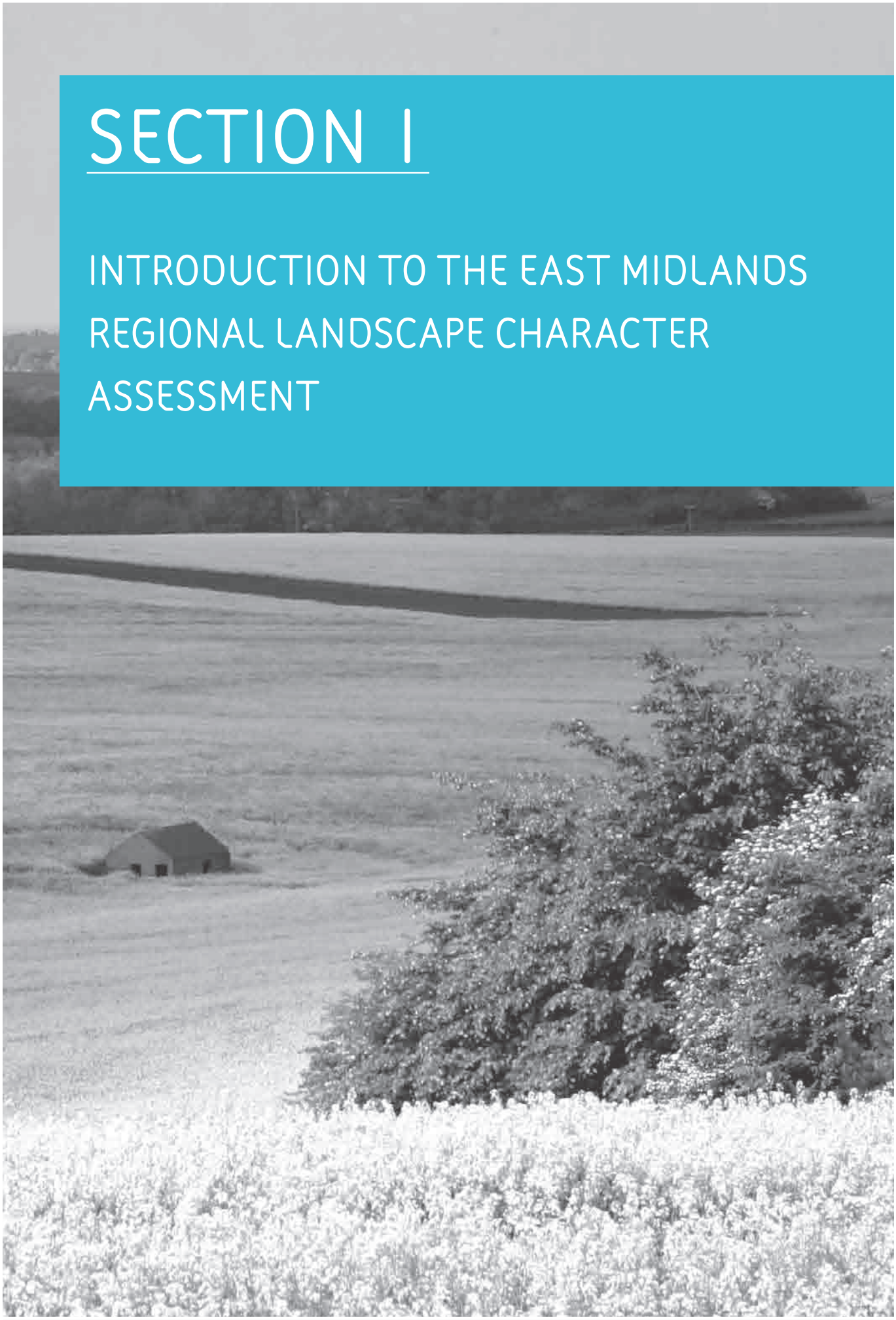
AN EVIDENCE BASE FOR REGIONAL LEVEL DECISION MAKING

The assessment has been designed to provide a strategic region-wide evidence base to help decision making on issues that will have implications for the landscape and wider environment. It acts as a signpost to more detailed Landscape Character Assessments, Historic Landscape Characterisations and other useful information sources, and provides a regional framework for future assessments which will inform planning policy or decisions about the location and design of future development.

By having in place a strong understanding of the character of the East Midlands Region, along with guidelines specifically designed to enhance the landscape for the benefit of all, positive decisions can be made with more certainty and confidence than ever before. The information contained in the EMRLCA will enable the East Midlands Region to direct positive change that will strengthen the sense of pride in, respect for, and appreciation of, the region's diverse landscapes.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



Oilseed Rape at Brinkhill , near Louth, Lincolnshire (© Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service/N Gurnhill)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Extending across approximately 16,400 km2, the Study Area for the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment (EMRLCA), illustrated on Figure 1, covers the Government Office Region of the East Midlands. It includes the administrative counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland, 30 district and borough authorities and the unitary authorities of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham.

The full geographic coverage of the Peak District National Park and Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have also been included within the Study Area, to ensure that the findings of the EMRLCA can be adopted and applied across the full extent of these designated areas. As a consequence, relevant parts of an additional ten district and unitary authorities are included in the Study Area, all of which lie within neighbouring Government Office Regions. The Study Area also includes areas of foreshore and open sea extending 15km from the shoreline.

The Study Area, noted for its agricultural productivity, recreational value, cultural associations and heritage, geodiversity and biodiversity assets, contains a diverse landscape resource. In very simple terms, the East Midlands Region marks the transition from the open sea, coastal salt marshes and low lying drained fenland farmlands of Lincolnshire to the upland moorland landscape of the Peak District. Between these two extremes lie a wide variety of Landscape Character Types, including limestone and chalk hills, ancient forested hills, productive rolling farmlands interspersed with rural villages, remote lowland heaths and areas noted for their rich mining heritage.

The EMRLCA provides an up-to-date description of the region's landscape character and describes the various forces that have created the landscape we see today. It goes on to review the forces that continue to change the landscape and suggests ways to secure positive landscape change in the future. The EMRLCA recognises that all landscapes matter, and in so doing, ensures that the broad measures set out in the European Landscape Convention (ELC) are recognised and available to be taken forward through the integration of landscape issues into decision making at all levels from national to local, and across a wide range of sectors, policies and strategies. The task of protecting, managing and planning the landscape is fundamental to ELC objectives, and needs to be applied in decisions and their delivery across the whole spectrum of society from government and its agencies, and local authorities, to the private sector and civil society in general. The range of decision making and opportunities for the EMRLCA to contribute to this process is set out in more detail in Section 1.3.

1.2 THE NEED FOR A REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

In Spring 2008, Natural England commissioned a review of the current situation with regard to how landscape issues were considered in the East Midlands. The study, published in December 2008[2], made several recommendations on how various bodies might take forward the regional landscape agenda, to ensure that landscape considerations are embedded in emerging regional structures.

A key recommendation was the need to revisit the regional landscape evidence base. The review acknowledged that whilst a significant number of landscape character assessments and historic landscape characterisations have been undertaken or are emerging, there was considerable variation in their aims, the methods adopted and the scale of assessment. As a consequence, it identified the need to develop a link between local coverage and national scale landscape character assessments. This strategic overview would have a range of uses and applications, but most significantly, would provide a solid basis on which to develop comprehensive region wide landscape studies and facilitate the gathering and analysis of landscape information across the region. It would also enable a more efficient flow of information between national, regional and local levels, provide a new strategic spatial framework for considering strategic themes and issues which could result in the delivery of combined environmental outcomes and a comprehensive approach to landscape **planning, protection** and **management** across the region.

Low lying coastal landscape , Lincolnshire (© J Watson)

Upland moorland landscape, Derbyshire (© Derbyshire County Council)

2 *The University of Sheffield and Countryscape. East Midlands Regional Landscape Scoping Study. Natural England, October 2008.*

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EMRLCA

Building on the recommendations of the East Midlands Regional Landscape Scoping Study, Natural England, with others, commissioned a project to carry out the first region wide landscape character assessment that also includes seascape characterisation, to be completed in England.

The EMRLCA will complement a range of studies and assessments undertaken in the region to help understand the environment of the East Midlands, and help realise the significant potential that the landscape has in contributing to the region's economy and the health and well being of its residents.

In brief, the aims of the EMRLCA are to:

- Implement the objectives of the European Landscape Convention (ELC), providing strategic guidelines for landscape protection, planning and management. These are defined by the ELC as:
  - **Protection** - action to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape
  - **Management** - action from a perspective of sustainable development to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes; and
  - **Planning** - strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscape
- Inform and underpin the regional spatial planning policy framework.
- Integrate with other regional strategies and initiatives.
- Help guide sustainable development decisions.
- Guide the production of Green Infrastructure Strategies.
- Inform environmental capacity studies that describe the ability of the environment to perform natural functions and accommodate the impact of human processes.
- Inform ecosystem services studies that assess the interaction of organisms, habitats, the natural environment and the supporting services they provide.
- Bring about greater integration with other key environmental themes such as geodiversity, biodiversity and historic landscape; and
- Promote the qualities and diversity of the region's landscape.

Critical to the success of the EMRLCA in meeting its aims will be its robustness and transparency. This is demonstrated through:

- The methodology that is adopted, and its ability to demonstrate adherence to best practice guidance;
- The breadth and accuracy of the data contributing to the baseline evidence base, including national scale datasets and assessments e.g. the National Character Area Assessment (NCA), National Landscape Typology (NLCT) and local landscape character assessments at county and district scale;
- The methods adopted for interrogating spatial and other data sources;
- The interpretation of existing landscape character, historic landscape character and seascape assessments, and the means by which these existing assessments have been incorporated into the EMRLCA;
- The conclusions that are drawn from consultations, baseline research and fieldwork;
- Communication of complex ideas and issues through the consistent use of accessible language, graphics, plans, maps and illustrative and interactive web based material; and
- The flexibility of the output to adapt and undergo regular reviews and updates.

1.4 CONTRIBUTING TO A BIGGER VISION

The EMRLCA is one of a number of assessments in the East Midlands that will promote a greater understanding of the natural, historic and built environment and also act as a stimulus for more sustainable modes of living, energy generation, food procurement, industry, use and management of natural resources, manufacture and commerce.

Government agencies, local planning authorities, voluntary organisations, private sector bodies and local communities should seek to use the findings of this and other assessments to meet the European Landscape Convention's aspiration for a landscape that:

- Is beautiful, rich and productive;
- Provides a basis for entrepreneurial business and sustainable communities; and
- Contributes to a positive regional identity and sense of pride and place.

1.5 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The approach adopted in the EMRLCA complements the National Countryside Character Approach developed by the former Countryside Agency (now Natural England). In particular, the assessment is based on the methodology set out in the 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland'[3].

The main tasks in developing the EMRLCA comprised:

- Review of the various Landscape Character Assessments, within and immediately surrounding the East Midlands Region, including the National Countryside Character Assessment and National Landscape Typology. A schedule of existing landscape assessments used in the EMRLCA is presented in Appendix 1. National Countryside Character Areas and Types are illustrated on Figure 2. The distribution of county and district scale landscape character assessments is presented in Figure 3.
- Review of other landscape assessments, including Historic Landscape Characterisations, Historic Seascape Assessments and Biodiversity Character Assessments that exist within and surrounding the East Midlands Region. A schedule of existing assessments used in the EMRLCA is presented in Appendix 1. The distribution of Historic Landscape Characterisations is also presented on Figure 3 in addition the county and district landscape character assessments.
- Review of National Landscape and Coastal designations and World Heritage Sites. These are shown on Figure 4.
- Familiarisation with the Study Area through reconnaissance, information gathering, GIS interrogation and overlay mapping at 1:50,000 scale. A list of the core datasets used is attached as Appendix 2 and illustrated in a range of baseline figures (Figures 5-16).
- Background research into the physical and cultural attributes of the landscape and forces for change.
- Site survey including completion of field survey forms for Landscape Character Types and preparation of a digital photographic record. Field survey forms were completed on a lap-top computer and fed directly into a geo-referenced Access Database. A copy of materials used during field work is presented in Appendix 3.

3 *Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland. 2002.*

- Development of project methodology, based on established best practice guidance. The project flow diagram is presented in Appendix 4. Appendix 5 presents a flow diagram of the landscape character assessment process.
- Stakeholder workshop to engage key statutory and non statutory agencies in the assessment process and to obtain views on forces for change and appropriate landscape strategies. A list of workshop delegates is presented in Appendix 6.

1.5.2 INTEGRATION OF SEASCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

In recognition that a large extent of the eastern boundary of the East Midlands Region lies along the coast and that the open sea plays an important role in defining local identity, offshore areas have been included within the Study Area. By including seascapes, the EMRLCA accords with the European Landscape Convention (ELC) that includes marine areas within its definition of landscape.

In establishing the approach to assessing seascape character, reference is made to best practice guidance on Seascape Assessment (Countryside Council for Wales, 2001)[4] and Historic Seascape Characterisation (HSC) methods. However, it has been necessary to adapt these established methods to ensure a consistent, region wide, approach to identifying Landscape Character Types across both land and sea.

To establish the seaward extent of the Study Area, reference was made to best practice guidance on Seascape Assessment[5]. Guidance recommends that it is necessary to identify different Study Areas dependent on the scale of the assessment being undertaken. For the identification of regional seascape units, the guidance suggests that areas of sea should be assessed up to 15km offshore. The EMRLCA has followed this guidance and defined the outer limits of the Study Area by establishing a 15km buffer from the coastline of the East Midlands Region.

In defining and describing seascape character, the Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment defines seascape as including:

- Views from land to sea.
- Views from sea to land.
- Views along the coastline.
- The effect on landscape of the conjunction of sea and land.

Guidance on the Assessment of the Impact of Offshore Wind Farms[6] takes a similar approach and defines seascape as:

"the coastal landscape and adjoining areas of open water, including views from land to sea, from sea to land and along the coastline".

The guidance therefore recognises seascape as a discrete area within which there is shared intervisibility between land and sea and that every seascape has three components:

- an area of sea (seaward component);
- a length of coastline (coastline component); and
- an area of land (landward component).

It goes on to state that "Landscape starts at the coastline and includes all areas inland".

It is judged that the parameters for defining seascape units listed above are too narrowly focused on visual criteria and as such would be inconsistent with the definition of landscape endorsed in the ELC and the approach adopted to identify terrestrial Landscape Character Types in the EMRLCA.

Therefore, to ensure consistency with the best practice methods for the identification of Landscape Character Types and areas in England, the various physical and cultural influences that influence seascape character have also been considered in the assessment of marine areas. As for terrestrial landscape, physical and cultural influences on the character of marine areas are interrogated to

4,5 M Hill et.al. Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment. Countryside Council for Wales, March 2001.

6 Department of Trade and Industry, Guidance on the Assessment of the Impact of Offshore Wind farms: Seascape and Visual Impact Report

inform an understanding of visual, surface water, benthic (sea floor) and pelagic (water column) characteristics, that combine to create areas of unique seascape character.

In adopting this approach, additional datasets have been sourced for offshore areas, including geology, bathymetry, and industrial use of the sea and navigation routes. As with terrestrial landscape character assessment, these datasets have been analysed and overlain to identify areas of common character at the regional level of assessment.

There are currently no Historic Seascape Characterisations (HSCs) available within the Study Area. However, reference has been made to two pilot assessments of historic seascape character[7,8], in order to identify whether any aspects of the methodology adopted in HSC are applicable to the EMRLCA.

It is evident that the approach to HSC is based on the principles of terrestrial Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC). As with terrestrial HLC, which identifies Historic Landscape Types as polygons with similar historic character, HSC identifies equivalent historic seascape types through the analysis of a range of underlying baseline datasets. Considering the close relationship between historic and landscape characterisation, the various Historic Seascape Character Types identified in the two pilot HSC projects have been reviewed to assist in the classification of marine Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs). The scale at which Historic Seascape Types are identified is incongruous with the EMRLCA, marine RLCTs being more extensive in geographical coverage and character. However, the rationale for identifying and naming Historic Seascape Character Types has been influential in the identification of offshore RLCTs.

In summary, the EMRLCA adopts a holistic approach to landscape and seascape character assessment and considers inland, coastal and offshore areas as a mosaic of different Landscape Character Types, the identification of which has been derived through a combination of desk based assessment of relevant environmental datasets and, where practical, observations in the field. It should be noted that marine Landscape Character Types identified in the EMRLCA have not been subject to field work. However, it is recommended that future assessments of marine character should incorporate field work.

The EMRLCA is the first region-wide assessment to be undertaken that considers offshore areas as a component of the landscape. As such, the identification of offshore seascape character types in this assessment should be regarded as a pilot initiative for further testing and refinement. Throughout the remainder of the EMRLCA, areas of common character for offshore areas are referred to as Landscape Character Types.

1.5.3 APPROACH TO DEFINING BUILT UP AREAS

Built up areas, such as the region's cities, towns and larger villages are excluded from the regional landscape character assessment. For consistency, built up areas for this study have been defined as areas greater than 1 sq km on the 'Developed Land Use Areas' layer from Ordnance Survey OS Meridian mapping.

The 'Developed Land Use Area' data in OS Meridian is itself derived from OS Strategic map information and is defined as urban areas being greater than 0.5 sq km and constituting 'an area containing a concentration of buildings and other structures' in the OS Strategic User Guide

7 *England's Historic Seascapes – Scarborough to Hartlepool and Adjacent Marine Zone Historic Seascape Characterisation, Historic Environment Service (Projects) Cornwall County Council, 2007.*

8 *England's Historic Seascapes. Marine HLC Pilot Study: Southwold to Clacton. Oxford Archaeological Unit Ltd, 2007.*

Other, smaller built up areas, such as villages and hamlets, are regarded as an integral part of the wider rural landscape they occupy and are therefore not illustrated or defined as built up areas.

1.5.4 ASSESSMENT FLOW DIAGRAMS

A flow diagram of the assessment process is presented in Appendix 4. A more detailed flow diagram describing the processes in the refinement of the National Landscape Typology and production of Regional Landscape Character Types is presented in Appendix 5.

1.5.5 REPORT STRUCTURE

Section 1 provides a general introduction and overview of the methodology adopted in the EMRLCA. Section 2 presents a summary of existing landscape character assessments and historic landscape characterisations that have informed the EMRLCA. The distribution of National Landscape Character Types and areas is illustrated in Figure 2, and supplemented with a full description of National Landscape Typology descriptive attributes. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of local scale landscape character assessments and also Historic Landscape Characterisations across the region based on information provided by county and district councils in the region, English Heritage and Natural England.

Section 3 provides an overview of the principal physical and cultural influences that have shaped the region's landscape character. Important geological, cultural, historic and natural features are recorded, and their distribution across the region briefly described. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of national landscape designations across the region (including the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site). Figures 5 to 15 illustrate the distribution of key influences on landscape character. A socio economic overview is also presented and illustrated on Figure 16.

Section 4 describes Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs). RLCTs are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout the region. However, wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land uses and settlement patterns.

The description of RLCTs includes a review of baseline conditions under three main themes and includes the physical (geology and soils, landform, hydrology, land use and land cover, woodland and trees), cultural (buildings and settlement, heritage features, boundaries, communications, infrastructure and recreation) and perceptual (tranquillity, remoteness) attributes of the landscape that combine to create its unique character. Additional information is presented on landscape change and management, highlighting the key forces for change acting on the landscape and broad guidance on shaping the future landscape. A summary of the likely or potential forces for change on each of the RLCTs is presented in Section 5.

Consistent with best practice and the methodology set out in the 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland', written descriptions of RLCTs avoid value-laden terminology, for example 'beautiful', 'bland', 'attractive' and 'degraded'. In this way, the descriptions can help to raise awareness of all types of landscape and encourage appreciation of variations in character and local distinctiveness across the region, regardless of subjective judgements of value or quality. Nevertheless, subjective judgements are required in relation to identifying the aesthetic and perceptual attributes of the landscape, and also in the guidance on 'Shaping the Future Landscape' in relation to

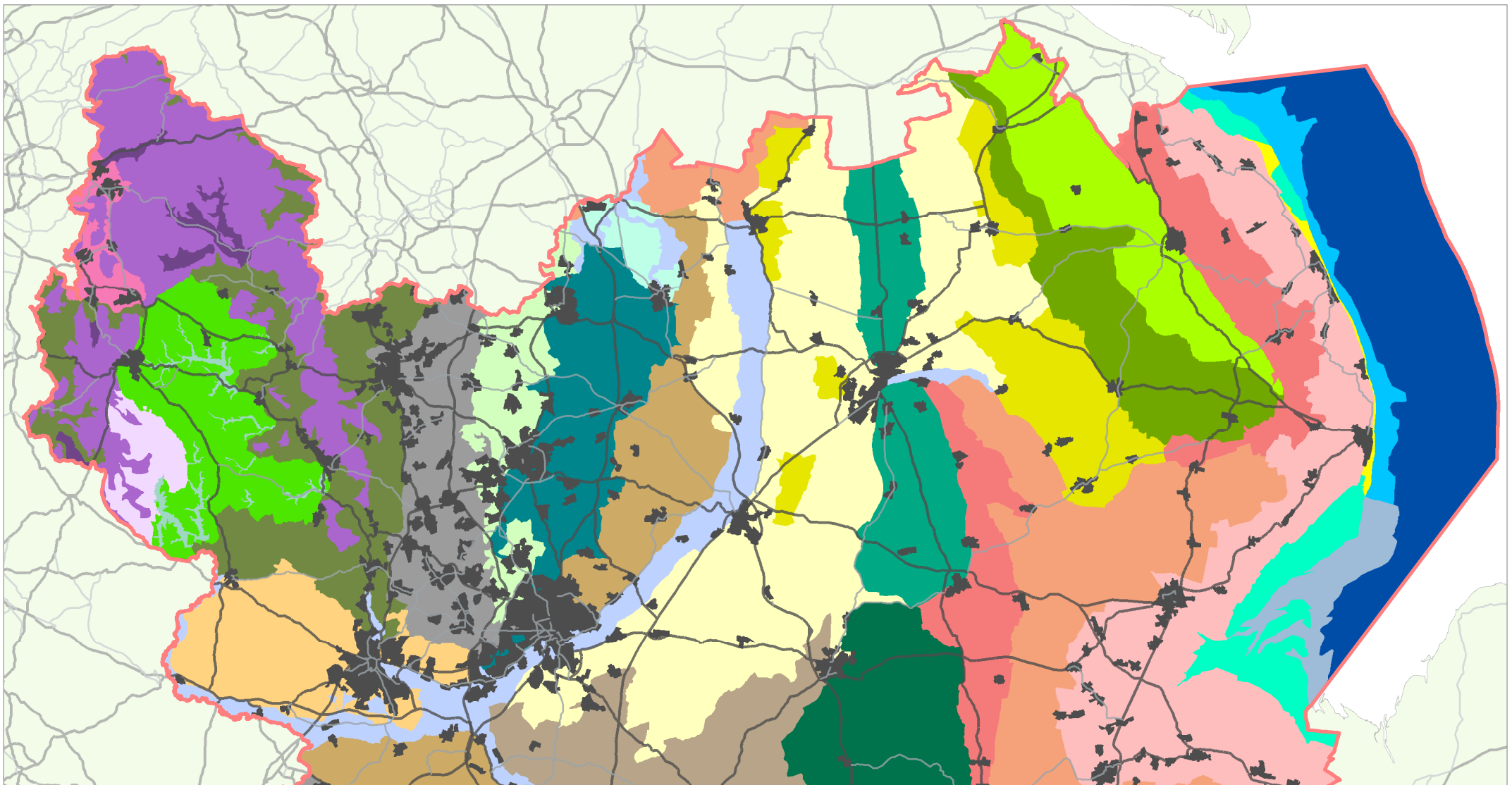
the identified Forces for Change. However, these subjective findings are based on informed professional judgement by a consistent team of qualified landscape practitioners.

With regard to the landscape character assessment hierarchy, the EMRLCA presents a new strategic regional tier, below National Character Areas and the National Landscape Typology, and above county and district scale landscape character assessments. A diagram of the new hierarchical framework is presented at the end of Section 2.

A map of Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs) is presented on Figure 17. A map illustrating the relationship between the Regional Landscape Character Types and National Character Areas is presented on Figure 18.

Additional information is presented in Section 6 and includes a glossary of key terms used in the assessment process, reference materials, and list of Steering Group members, stakeholders and other consultees who have made valuable contributions to the development of the EMRLCA.

All figures are presented in Section 7, illustrating physical and human influences over the Regional Landscape Character Types.



EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT INCORPORATING THE PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AND LINCOLNSHIRE WOLDS AONB

Map 1
Regional Landscape Character Types

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Built Up Area

Group 1: Coast and Sea

- 1a: Coastal Saltmarshes and Mudflats
- 1b: Coastal Dunes, Beach and Intertidal Sand Flats
- 1c: Shallow Coastal Waters
- 1d: Shallow Inlet Bay
- 1e: Offshore Industries, Fisheries and Navigations

Group 2: Fenland and Fenland Margins

- 2a: Settled Fens and Marshes
- 2b: Planned and Drained Fens and Carrlands
- 2c: Fen and Marsh Margin Farmlands

Group 3: River Valley Floodplains

- 3a: Floodplain Valleys
- 3b: Sandland Farmlands

Group 4: Lowland Vales

- 4a: Unwooded Vales
- 4b: Wooded Vales

Group 5: Village Farmlands

- 5a: Village Farmlands
- 5b: Wooded Village Farmlands
- 5c: Undulating Mixed Farmlands

Group 6: Limestone Farmlands

- 6a: Limestone Scarps and Dipslopes
- 6b: Upland Limestone Pastures
- 6c: Limestone Dales
- 6d: Limestone Farmlands

Group 7: Chalk Wolds

- 7a: Chalk Wolds
- 7b: Wolds Scarps, Ridges and Valleys

Group 8: Clay Wolds

- 8a: Clay Wolds

Group 9: Coalfields

- 9a: Settled Coalfield Farmlands

Group 10: Woods and Forests

- 10a: Forest Hills and Ridges
- 10b: Sandstone Forests and Heaths
- 10c: Wooded Slopes and Valleys
- 10d: Forested Ancient Hills

Group 11: Gritstone Moors and Fringes

- 11a: Open Moors and Inbye Land
- 11b: Moorland Valleys
- 11c: Settled Valleys and Enclosed Gritstone Uplands
- 11d: Upland Pastoral Hills and Valleys

LDĀDESIGN

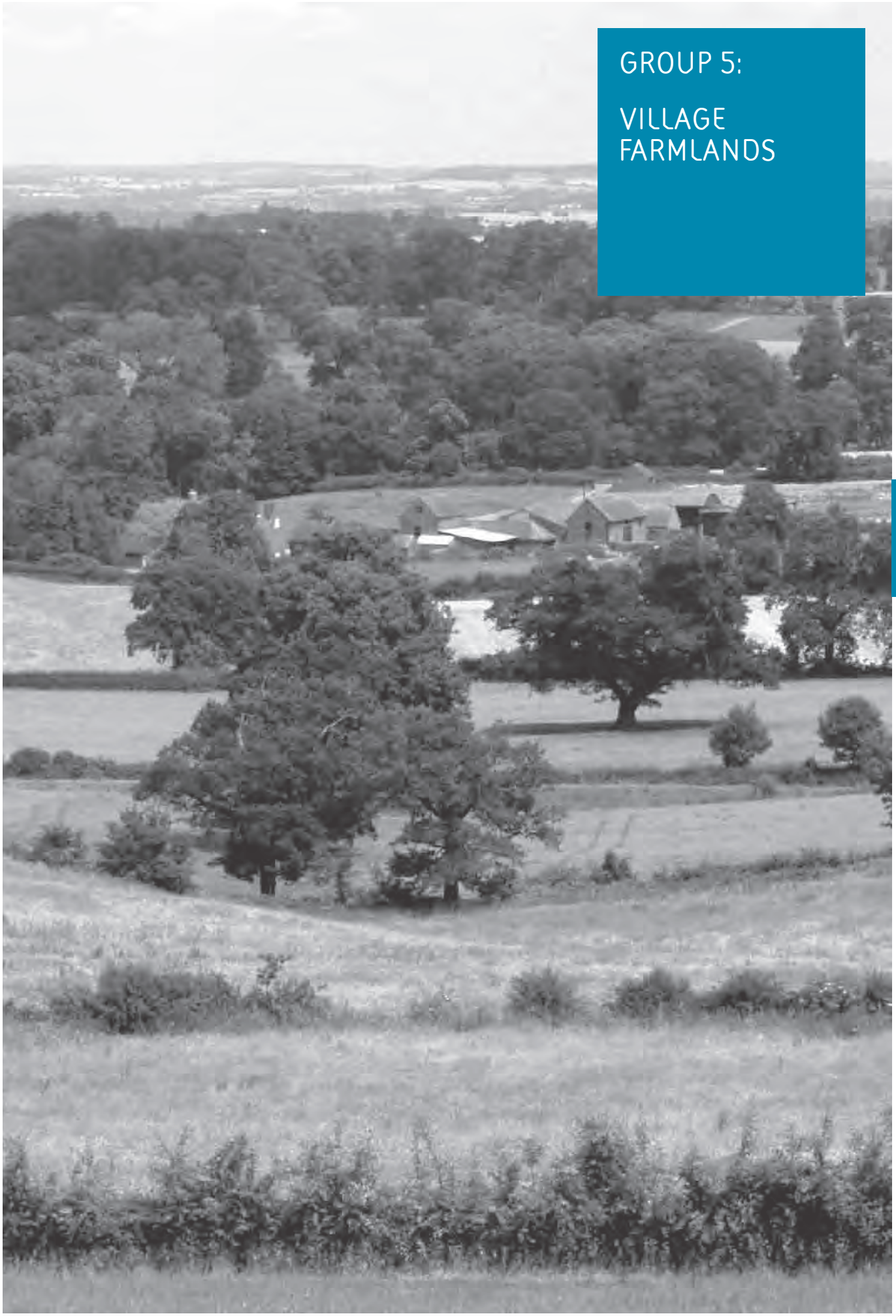
DWG.NO	2757/Map 1	CHECKED	IH
DRAWN	CM	APPROVED	SC

Source: Ordnance Survey

X:\JOBS\2757_East Midlands Reg\Gis\Projects\Update_March10\2757_Map1.mxd

GROUP 5:

VILLAGE FARMLANDS



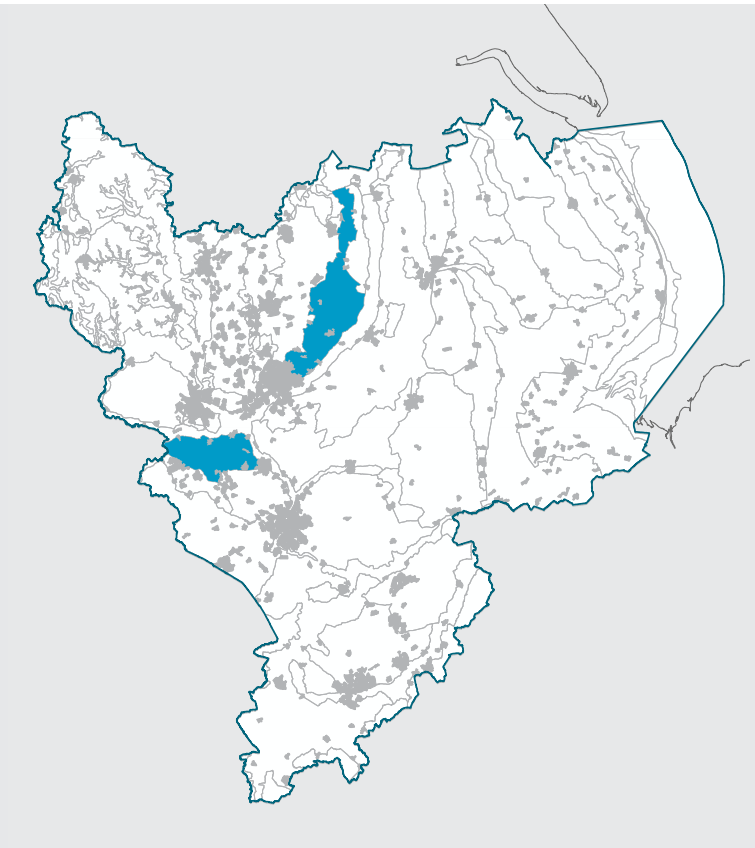
GROUP 5
PAGES 149-174

Rolling landform and frequent woodland and hedgerow trees are characteristic of the Village Farmlands (© Derbyshire County Council)

5B:

WOODED VILLAGE FARMLANDS

Prominent woodland on hills and valley sides (© Derbyshire County Council)



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Varied topography, ranging from gently undulating farmlands to rolling hills, becks and steep sided valleys, locally known as 'Dumbles';
- Scattered farm woodlands, ancient woodlands on prominent hills and tree lined valleys contribute to a well wooded character;
- Well maintained pattern of hedged fields enclosing pasture and arable fields, with evidence of decline close to urban areas;
- Sparsely settled, with traditional pattern of farms and small rural villages linked by quiet country lanes; and
- Strong sense of landscape history.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The Wooded Village Farmlands Landscape Character Type is characterised by productive and well wooded rolling farmlands and valleys over Triassic, Permian and Carboniferous geology, with localised influences arising from harder bands of rock and alluvial flats fringing rivers and streams.

The base-rich soils that can be easily improved are widely used for arable cropping, but areas, on the less well drained clays and along alluvial flood plains, are often characterised by verdant improved pastures grazed by cattle. Only limited remnants of semi natural vegetation remain in the agricultural landscape. However, broadleaved woodlands, copses and occasional meadows and unimproved grasslands in parkland are important, as are areas of connective habitats such as species rich grasslands, hedgerows and river corridors.

The landscape also has a relatively intact historic character, with sinuous hedgerow patterns and winding rural lanes evocative of medieval land management. Country houses also exert a strong, albeit localised influence on the landscape, with landscaped parks particularly prominent in the vicinity of Melbourne. Their influence can also be seen in the wider landscape in the form of game coverts, small scale plantations and estate farms.

The landscape, whilst not particularly tranquil, retains a quiet, rural character that appears to have changed little over recent decades. Some areas, notably those close to larger towns, are showing signs of decline, as are hedgerow networks in areas where there is an intensification of arable production.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Although the Wooded Village Farmlands is underlain by a range of bedrocks it is principally associated with a broad belt of Triassic mudstone, siltstone and sandstone that extends northwards to the Humberhead levels in South Yorkshire and southwards into the West Midlands. Localised areas of Carboniferous sandstones and Coal Measures are also evident. However, their extent is more limited and it is the continuity of land cover and land use that creates a visually cohesive landscape.

The outcrops of Carboniferous Limestone and Millstone Grit that occur in the vicinity of Melbourne, together with the Sherwood Sandstone to the west, have a localised impact on landscape character with a distinctive dip and scarp topography with the sandstone beds forming pronounced dip slopes. The most widely recognised limestone outcrop is at Breedon Hill. Here the limestone has been extensively quarried. The church located at the top of the hill has survived and continues to command the local skyline. A further large quarry, Cloud Hill, is located nearby at Breedon Cloud. Other extensive outcrops of limestone occur around Ticknall and Calke Abbey and were also quarried.

Melbourne Parklands from Breedon Hill (© Martin Banham, Natural England)

The underlying Triassic bedrock generally gives rise to low rolling topography. However, where alternating bands of harder and softer rock formations occur, a much more varied and undulating landform is evident. There are also only limited superficial deposits of till and gravel terraces across the landscape. Elsewhere in the region, these deposits soften landform features and create more gently undulating landscape. As such, relief features tend to be more dramatic than elsewhere over Triassic geology.

Although the Mercia Mudstone lowland areas to the north of Nottingham offer limited geodiversity interest there are good geological exposure potential in a brick quarry at Dorkett Hill near Nottingham. In contrast, the Carboniferous Limestone and Millstone Grit of the Melbourne area and Sherwood Sandstone to the west offer much greater potential for geodiversity interest as several working and abandoned quarries present good geological exposures. There are also some natural exposures and the sandstone is well displayed in buildings. Geomorphological features are also evident including a fossil Triassic inselberg at Breedon Hill. In view of the range of geodiversity and geomorphological features, it is important that practices are in place for their care, maintenance and management, and the promotion of their educational and interpretational interest,.

The impervious nature of the underlying geology has meant that the landscape has become heavily dissected by streams, which tend to occupy well defined valleys. Many of the valleys are floored by narrow alluvial floodplains, creating a flat floodplain fringed by steep valley sides. Valleys are particularly deeply incised bordering juvenile streams and gradually soften as they enter lower lying areas. Of particular local interest are the small, narrow ravines, often tributaries of the larger streams and rivers. These occur to the north of Nottingham and are known locally as Dumbles and Becks. Dumbles can be up to 10m deep and contain miniature waterfalls where harder bands of rock over softer strata have resisted erosion. Steep sided valleys are also evident close to Melbourne, although their topography is obscured by large reservoirs, created by damming of rivers, notably the two major reservoirs of Foremark and Staunton Harrold.

The underlying geology gives rise to fertile, slightly acidic loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage. Once improved, these are particularly well suited to arable cultivation, and as such this is the predominant land use. Areas of less fertile and permeable soils are also evident, giving rise to pastoral land uses.

Agricultural improvement and intensive farming has limited the retention of semi-natural habitats, although localised areas of species rich meadows and rushy riverside pastures are evident. The most prominent semi natural habitat is broadleaved woodland, which is an important component of the landscape, adding significantly to nature conservation interest in an otherwise intensively managed agricultural landscape. Woodlands are typically deciduous or mixed and are generally small to medium size. Of particular importance is the wide distribution of ancient woodlands, often prominently sited on hilltops and rising land. Parklands and estate copses and coverts further add to the well-wooded character of the landscape, as do the many willow lined streams and hedgerow trees. The nature conservation value of ancient woodlands and parkland habitats is evident in the widespread designation of these features as SSSIs.

As with other agricultural areas in the lowlands, hedgerows, hedgerow trees, riparian habitats and pollarded willows along streams are important as corridors between remnant woodlands and unimproved grasslands. However, across wide areas, and notably areas of intensive arable production, hedgerows are gappy, low and heavily clipped with few hedgerow trees. Hedgerows tend to be better maintained and form continuous habitat networks across steeper landform and on estate farmlands.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Scattered evidence of prehistoric occupation in the Wooded Village Farmlands is suggestive of activity spreading out from the major river valleys. Clearance of woodland for settlement and farming would have been more widespread during the Iron Age and Roman periods. However, it was during the mid to late Saxon period that settlements became consolidated and the framework of the current landscape established.

Place names give some indication of the origins of settlement with derivations suggestive of both Saxon and Nordic influences. Many place names refer to woodland or woodland clearance, and some to the north east of Nottingham also mention animals, possibly relating to the responsibilities some communities had to pasturing royal herds.

Whilst being sparsely settled, villages appear to have been located beside watercourses to take advantage of better drained soils. These would have been surrounded by open fields and beyond these would have been blocks of woodland, often forming grazing for neighbouring communities to share. Traces of these earlier landscape patterns are evident in the irregular patterning of field boundaries, of winding country lanes and remnant ancient woodlands along parish boundaries. Indeed, at Laxton an almost complete picture of the medieval landscape survives, with the castle, manorial earthworks, fishponds, open strip fields and riverside meadows being a tangible link to a once more common scene.

Other than in the vicinity of Laxton, post medieval enclosure of the landscape was widespread, and it is to this period, and notably the later 18th and early 19th centuries that the geometric patterns of straight enclosure roads and hedgerows can be dated. Despite this, ancient boundaries and divisions can still be observed, notably in the intricate and organic boundaries of parishes and winding lanes. The late 18th and 19th centuries also saw the establishment of new farms in the rural landscape, and rebuilding of humble stud and mud or timber cottages in villages with brick.

Areas of parkland were enclosed during the medieval period to provide the sport for the nobility, often taking in areas of woodland, but also containing land for grazing and sometimes cultivation. Remnants of these medieval parklands are widespread in the Wooded Village Farmlands Landscape. For example, three parks were created close to the Archbishop of York's estate at Southwell, at Hexgreave, Norwood and Newpark. In the centuries following enclosure, many areas were converted to farmland or reduced in scale. However, others prospered and were modified to form fashionable parklands surrounding a country residence.

A notable concentration of impressive parks is evident close to Melbourne. During the Saxon period the area was a major ecclesiastic centre for the kingdom of Mercia and later monasteries were established at Calke, Repton and Gresley which had extensive parks in the surrounding area. Following the dissolution, these formed the basis for large private estates.

Recent decades have seen relatively little change in the rural landscape. However, as with some other areas in the region, increasing reversion to arable farming and decline in hedgerow networks, as well as the introduction of new crops such as oilseed rape has had an impact on local landscape character and perceptions of landscape condition. As with other rural landscapes in the region, major infrastructure such as the M1 has also had an effect on local landscape character.

Wooded Village Farmlands near Kedleston, (© P Clarke, Natural England)

AESTHETIC AND PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES

Undulating landform, mixed agricultural land use and relatively high levels of woodland cover creates a strong sense of visual unity across the landscape, with features such as Breedon Hill, large designed parklands and reservoirs south of Melbourne providing areas of local interest that are well integrated by a generally high level of tree cover.

Where field patterns remain intact, and local villages have seen limited late 20th century growth and development, the landscape retains a strong historic character, with tangible evidence of land use and settlement stretching back into the medieval period. Of particular significance are the ancient woodlands, organic field patterns and winding rural lanes between long established villages and hamlets. Set within this overall framework are sites of significant historic interest such as the medieval village of Laxton and designed parklands which display evidence of early emparkment, ecclesiastic origins and later fashions in architecture and landscape design.

Undulating landform and woodlands generally combine to create visual containment and sense of enclosure. Despite this, some panoramic and extensive views are possible from elevated locations where views are uninterrupted by intervening vegetation.

The landscape has a strong agricultural character, with wide areas retaining a sense of rural tranquillity and intactness, notably where ancient hedgerow patterns, woodlands and winding rural lanes have seen little modernisation. In some areas, and notably on the fringes of towns, or where agricultural regimes are shifting towards intensive arable production, gappy hedgerows and peri-urban land uses creates a sense that landscape quality is declining.

LANDSCAPE CHANGE AND MANAGEMENT

BUILT DEVELOPMENT

Forces for Change

Villages within the Wooded Village Farmlands have seen limited growth and development. However, large scale modern mixed-use development is evident on the fringes of larger towns, such as Swadlincote and Loughborough, creating visual intrusion and resulting in the loss of surrounding countryside.

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should be to manage the growth of larger settlements, ensuring development is appropriate in terms of design and scale, and consider the visual impact of any new development. Specific mechanisms include best practice innovative architectural designs and planning solutions, and planting of trees, helping to integrate new development into the landscape. Care should also be taken to prevent coalescence, ensuring separation is maintained between the urban fringe and surrounding settlements.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Forces for Change

Localised road improvements are evident in the road network, especially near larger settlements and around the East Midlands Airport, where existing routes are being straightened and widened to accommodate increased levels of traffic. This has an urbanising effect and brings a degree of standardisation to the countryside.

If the potential expansion of the footprint of the East Midlands airport goes ahead, this will have significant effects on the landscape including the extended transport infrastructure, and noise and lighting associated with increased aircraft movements. There will also be an adverse effect on the tranquillity of the surrounding area.

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should be to manage road improvements, ensuring improvements provide positive environmental and landscape enhancements and maintain the character of the rural road network. Measures may include grassland, hedgerows and tree planting along road verges to enhance character and increase the occurrence of semi-natural habitats.

With regard to the potential extension of the East Midlands airport, the aim should be to mitigate for the visual effects of the development through innovative and sensitively designed buildings and associated structures and off site woodland planting that is appropriate to the character of the area.

AGRICULTURE AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Forces for Change

There is marked evidence of agricultural intensification, accompanied by a move towards arable production. This has resulted in the loss or damage of many typical landscape features, including traditional field boundaries and areas of ridge and furrow, contributing to a more homogenous landscape. The loss of pasture is particularly evident along the various rivers and streams which traverse the countryside.

Areas of parkland are also a feature of this landscape, contributing to the variety of land use and land cover. However, not all of the parkland is well managed and areas of pasture and woodland have been lost to increasing agricultural intensification.

In some locations energy crops, in particular Miscanthus and Short Rotation Coppice, are being cultivated to meet renewable energy targets. These fast growing and tall crops can radically change the appearance of the landscape. There is also a requirement for storage and processing facilities, which along with other new agricultural buildings, can reduce the sense of remoteness in rural areas and cause visual intrusion.

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should be to protect existing rural landscape features, whilst encouraging positive management of those features lost or under threat. The restoration of hedgerows should be given priority, along with an increase in pasture, creating a stronger and more mixed pattern of land use. This will be particularly beneficial along watercourses, enhancing their visibility and creating a more integrated habitat network.

The aim should also be to manage parklands, ensuring their reinstatement and sustained contribution to landscape character and diversity. However, care should be taken to ensure that enhancements do not conflict with their original design and layout.

In relation to energy crops, new structures should be located away from visually prominent locations, and close to existing settlement and infrastructure. Although the introduction of energy crops will be more difficult to manage, grant applications to Natural England or the Forestry Commission may require an assessment of landscape and visual impacts.

FORESTRY AND WOODLAND

Forces for Change

Woodland is a significant component of this landscape, particularly in the south western section of the Landscape Type , which lies within The National Forest, and new woodland planting would be generally appropriate, increasing the overall woodland coverage in the Region. However, any new woodland planting should be carefully sited as to avoid disrupting long-distance views and the sense of openness where it exists.

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should therefore be to plan for new woodlands, ensuring new planting schemes take full advantage of opportunities to enhance nature conservation and recreation, whilst respecting the pattern and scale of the landscape. Small to medium broadleaved woodlands are likely to be most appropriate, linked with existing semi-natural woodland by improvements to hedgerows and riparian habitats along streams and rivers. Such proposals should be undertaken in collaboration with the Forestry Commission and local landowners, and financial support may be available through the English Woodland Grant Scheme.

For those areas in the Wooded Village Farmlands that lie within The National Forest, design guidance for woodland creation should be in accordance with the National Forest Strategy, 2004-14 that has been consulted on and endorsed at the national level. Much of the area coincides with the 'Wooded Parkland' landscape type identified in The National Forest Strategy and which confirms that there is limited scope for large-scale planting. Here, the aim should be to establish small to medium sized mixed broadleaved woods that respect the historic landscape character, together with farm woods and estate forestry, with some commercial plantations away from the parkland settings.

TOURISM AND LEISURE

Forces for Change

Several large landscape parks and country houses are popular tourist attractions, along with The National Forest, Foremark and Staunton Harold reservoirs in Leicestershire, and numerous publicly accessible woodlands. Some of these sites experience considerable visitor pressure and many sites include infrastructure such as car parks, picnic spots, and viewpoints. This can result in the damage, loss and fragmentation of natural features, while visitor facilities can create visual intrusions and reduce the sense of tranquillity.

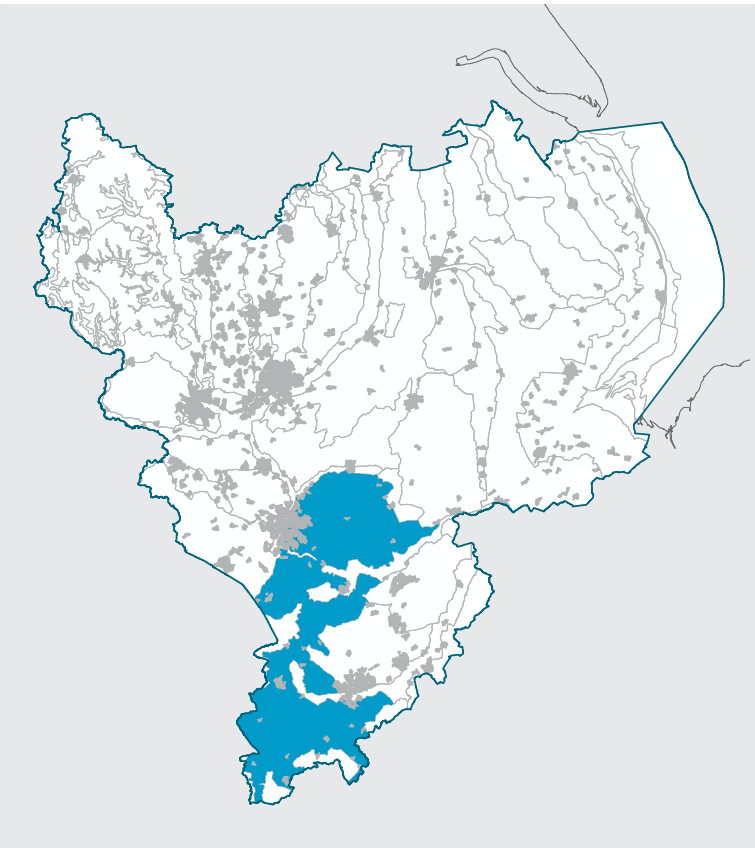
Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should be to protect the distinctive character of the landscape and consider the visual and environmental impact of any new or extended visitor facilities. The management of public access should also be encouraged, helping to conserve the quiet, peaceful character of the area whilst enhancing the parks, houses, reservoirs and woodland as recreational and educational resources.

5C:

UNDULATING MIXED FARMLANDS

Undulating Mixed Farmlands
(© Ken Johnston, Natural England)



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Varied landform of broad rolling ridges, steep sided valleys, rounded hills and undulating lowlands;
- Well treed character arising from abundant hedgerow trees, copses and woodlands;
- Upland areas mark a major watershed in Middle England and are the source of major rivers;
- Mixed farming regime with mainly arable land uses on hills and ridges and in fertile lowlands; intact hedgerow networks generally associated with pastoral land uses;
- Sparse settlement patterns with limited modern development; widespread use of local limestone and ironstone in vernacular buildings and churches;
- Network of quiet country lanes linking rural communities;
- Remote, rural and sometimes empty character; and
- Frequent and prominent ridge and furrow and evidence of deserted or shrunken medieval settlements.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The Undulating Mixed Farmlands Landscape Character Type forms an extensive landscape stretching from the Oxfordshire and Warwickshire borders, through Northamptonshire and into the heart of Leicestershire. Despite its scale, varied underlying geology and complex draining patterns that have created a landscape of hills, ridges and valleys, the landscape has a strong visual unity.

Of particular importance to creating this visual unity is the undulating nature of the landform, interspersed with relatively high hills and ridges, a mixed agricultural regime and areas of permanent pasture preserving widespread ridge and furrow, occasional woodlands and spinneys, and a network of well treed hedgerows. The dispersed pattern of villages and farms, and widespread use of the local ironstone rich geology in churches, vernacular buildings and country houses is also significant in contributing to local identity and sense of place.

The rural landscape retains a tranquil and sometimes empty character, particularly where there is limited influence from neighbouring villages and farms, and where winding country lanes and roads have seen little improvement. Landscape condition is generally good, notably where hedgerow networks are well maintained and contain frequent hedgerow trees. Wide areas also have a historic character, with only limited evidence of change and development from recent decades.

Leicester Wolds near Whissendine (© Martin Banham, Natural England)

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

A complex series of geological formations underlies the Undulating Mixed Farmlands landscape, influencing localised patterns of landform, land cover and land use. Lias geology predominates, with Scunthorpe Mudstone, Charmouth Mudstone, Marlstone Rock Whitby Mudstone and Northampton Sand Formations being particularly widespread. At higher elevations, the ironstone-rich Jurassic Marlstone Rock Formation caps several hilltops which often create distinctive elevated ridges and hills generally above 200m AOD, such as Eydon Hill and Burrough Hill. A thick mantle of till is also evident across the landscape, notably in areas forming the catchment of the Tove and Sence and across all but the most elevated areas of High Leicestershire.

The geodiversity interest and potential of this landscape type is varied. Within the Scunthorpe Mudstone there are many thin beds of limestone many of which are distinct and can be found in ploughed fields. They have been locally used for building stone. In the ironstone areas of the Marlstone and Northampton Sand there are many former quarries preserved as RIGS and the stone is readily visible in local buildings. The varied topography offers potential for the conservation of geomorphological sites. In view of the range of geological and geomorphological features, it is important that practices are in place for their care, maintenance and management, and the promotion of their educational and interpretational interest.

Landform features are closely linked to the nature of the underlying geology. High, often steep sided scarps tend to be associated with ironstone bearing rocks, separating sometimes wide flat ridge tops and broad rounded hills. More gently undulating landform features are evident across lower elevations where the Whitby Mudstone forms the predominant bedrock. Wide areas are also cloaked in thick deposits of glacial till which further soften landform features. Many of the steep slopes capped by ironstone have been subjected to landslides with some showing evidence of recent movement but all having the potential for catastrophic movements, with or without man's interference.

The upland areas of the Undulating Mixed Farmlands mark a major watershed between many of Middle England's river systems. Indeed, the village of Bruntingthorpe, in Leicestershire, marks the point where tributaries of Thames, Nene, Welland, Great Ouse and Trent can all be identified in a small geographic area.

Slowly permeable and slightly acid loamy and clayey soils are predominant across the landscape, and despite great consistency in the nature of the soils, a mixed agricultural regime is evident; the distribution of arable and pasture largely dictated by variations in landform. On steeper slopes and wetter areas bordering streams and rivers, improved and semi-improved pastures are prevalent, with particularly steep slopes marked by remnant areas of woodland or unimproved species rich grassland. On gently undulating and sloping land, cereal cultivation is notable. Localised outcroppings of the Marlstone Rock and Northampton Sand Formations give rise to free draining acidic soils which are particularly well suited to arable farming. However, whilst arable cultivation is evident, steep sloping land has tended to lead to the retention of acid grassland, scrub and woodland.

The agricultural landscape is punctuated by numerous small deciduous woodlands and spinneys and whilst these are generally not extensive, they are often prominent features when occupying steep slopes or elevated hills and ridges. Several ancient woodlands are also notable, providing significant local wildlife interest in an otherwise agricultural landscape. The notable concentration of ancient woodlands that comprises Leighfield Forest marks the remnants of the medieval royal hunting area of the Forest of Rutland.

Hedgerows and hedgerow trees also contribute to the well treed character of the landscape. In areas of intensive arable production, hedgerows can be low and trees intermittent, particularly where they mark later periods of enclosure. However, elsewhere the hedge cover is generally very good, and contributes significantly to the perception of a well maintained agricultural landscape. Sinuous hedgerows marking ancient boundaries are particularly rich. Indeed, in a landscape with relatively low semi-natural vegetation cover, trees and hedgerows provide important refuges and connective habitats for wildlife.

Rolling landform with well treed character (© River Nene Regional Park/M Williams)

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

The thickly wooded uplands and intractable soils across the deposits of till would have been marginal to early agriculture, and settlement of the landscape would have gravitated towards the river valleys, particularly where the overburden had been eroded to expose freer draining gravels. Despite this, evidence of later prehistoric communities can be found across the more elevated hills; sites such as Borough Hill and Burrough Hill, both now country parks, are the sites of large hillforts, located to take advantage of their prominent locations with commanding views across wide areas.

The main evidence for early settlement and farming in the landscape is in the form of Saxon and Scandinavian place names. Their wide distribution suggests that the landscape was less densely settled than more fertile areas elsewhere in the vicinity during the late Saxon and early medieval periods, although as pressure on land increased, it appears that up to the mid 14th century wide areas were being cleared of woodland to establish new nucleated villages surrounded by open fields in ridge and furrow cultivation. It is also to this period

of settlement expansion and prosperity that many village churches date.

From the mid 14th century, the landscape saw widespread depopulation, largely as a result of the limited quality of the soils for cereal cultivation and the actions of landlords who could see greater profits in the reversion of land to grazing for vast flocks of sheep. Today, the landscape displays widespread evidence of this period, with deserted and shrunken villages located throughout the area and the ridges and furrows of former open fields preserved beneath areas of permanent pasture. In some cases villages were not entirely abandoned, but declined to leave just one or two farms where once there was a thriving community.

From the Tudor period, the landscape was also increasingly being enclosed, quick growing thorn hedges being used to demarcate boundaries and divide up the landscape. This continued until the widespread Parliamentary enclosure of the remaining open land in late 18th and early 19th centuries resulting in a complex patchwork pattern of fields overlying much older field systems.

The growing wealth of landowners, particularly from the Tudor period, led to further developments in the landscape. Churches were embellished and many villages saw the construction of substantial stone cottages, often utilising the distinctive iron-rich Northampton Sand and Marlstone geology.

Wealthy landowners also established grand residences and parks. Many had earlier origins as hunting enclosures for the nobility. However, others were created on newly enclosed lands and sometimes preserve the remains of abandoned villages and their open fields beneath areas of parkland such as at Baggrave and Lowesby.

Whilst several early houses remain largely intact, as at Ashby St. Ledgers and Canons Ashby, others such as Althorp House was substantially remodelled, mainly in the 18th century, to reflect the growing fortunes and taste of the owners. Again, as with vernacular cottages in the villages, stone was sourced locally, and as such these fine houses provide a tangible link to the underlying geological framework and have strong visual unity with their surroundings.

Although the industrial age saw the construction of canals and railways, the landscape was largely agricultural and there was only limited expansion of settlements or rebuilding in brick and tile. The 20th century saw relatively little change in the rural landscape although as with some other areas in the region, a decline in hedgerow networks and the consolidation of fields to form large parcels of land for intensive arable farming has had a notable effect. Some localised influences have also occurred as a result of modern infill and village edge development and major infrastructure, such as communications masts on more elevated hilltops.

Leicestershire near Uppingham (© Martin Banham, Natural England)

AESTHETIC AND PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES

There is considerable variety across the Undulating Mixed Farmlands landscape. Exposed and elevated areas provide wide sweeping panoramas across neighbouring lowlands, with nearby hills and ridges punctuating the skyline. Elsewhere, and notably along valleys or below steep scarp slopes, the landform obscures middle and long distance views to create a more intimate and enclosed landscape. Despite these contrasting visual characteristics, the landscape has a strong visual unity, largely arising from the mixed agricultural regime, widespread ridge and furrow and generally well maintained hedgerow networks. Whilst areas of woodland are limited, the landscape also has a well treed character, which further contributes to it being perceived as being in generally good condition.

Where hedgerow patterns have seen little fragmentation and local villages have seen limited late 20th century growth and development, the landscape retains a strong historic character, with tangible evidence of land use and settlement stretching back into the medieval period. Of particular significance are the quiet winding rural lanes between long established villages, hummocky landform associated with ridge and furrow farming and other medieval features such as deserted or shrunken villages and manorial complexes preserved beneath areas of permanent pasture.

Vernacular architecture, particularly where the locally sourced Marlstone and Northampton Sand Formations have been used, also provides visual unity in the landscape. This is further enhanced by older churches and large country houses which also display the use of these ironstones with their distinctive warm brown colour.

The landscape has a strong agricultural character. Despite widespread settlement, and the local influence of large towns such as Daventry and major transport infrastructure routes, large areas possess an empty and tranquil character.

LANDSCAPE CHANGE AND MANAGEMENT

BUILT DEVELOPMENT

Forces for Change

The Undulating Mixed Farmlands have seen limited late 20th century growth and development and many areas remain remote and rural. However, modern mixed-use development is evident on the fringes of larger settlements such as Leicester, Northampton and Daventry and in and around those villages closest to the main towns. This creates visual intrusion and extends the urban fringe. Further expansion of Northampton and Daventry can be anticipated as these lie within the MKSM Growth Area. Similarly, Leicester forms part of the 6Cs Growth Point although at present, the main directions of growth are proposed to the north and west of Leicester, and outside of the Undulating Mixed Farmlands. These areas are likely to experience considerable development pressure and high levels of growth with mixed use development on the fringes of the urban areas.

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should be to protect the character of the countryside and consider the visual impact of any new development included areas of large scale mixed use development associated with the identified Growth Areas. Specific mechanisms include best practice innovative architectural design and planning solutions, and planting of new trees and woodland, helping to integrate new development into the landscape. Care should also be taken to prevent coalescence, ensuring separation is maintained between the urban fringe and surrounding settlements. The findings and guidance of Landscape Character and Historic Landscape Assessments will together provide tools to inform the development of major urban extensions around the main settlements of Northampton, Daventry and Leicester.

Many villages would benefit from Village Design Statements, guiding the design and scale of new development, and ensuring it is appropriate to the existing vernacular styles and building materials. As well as Village and Town Design Statements, Conservation Area Appraisals can also be important tools. There should also be a place for the use of innovative architectural solutions that utilise eco-friendly and high quality design.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Forces for Change

Localised road improvements are evident in the road network in order to better connect isolated villages with larger towns and cities. This has an urbanising effect and brings a degree of standardisation to the landscape.

The aim should be to manage road improvements, maintaining the existing character of the rural road network, whilst having regard to user and safety requirements. Any road improvements should be carefully planned and designed to provide positive environmental and landscape enhancements and strengthen prevailing character. This may include grassland, hedgerows and trees along road verges to enhance character and increase the occurrence of semi-natural habitats.

ENERGY PROVISION

Forces for Change

Although not currently characteristic of the Undulating Mixed Farmland Landscape Character Type, the more elevated areas face pressure for wind farm development, including the potential for cumulative impacts. Such development can create prominent landmarks and reduce the sense of remoteness and isolation.

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should be to protect the character of the landscape by appropriately siting and designing new wind farm installations, and also considering any potential cumulative effects. There is potential for strategic regional and sub regional level guidance on commercial wind energy schemes, informed by the EMRLCA and other studies. In addition, planning guidance should be produced at the county and/or district level where necessary, establishing the most appropriate sites for development and setting out the criteria against which new applications will be assessed.

AGRICULTURE AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Forces for Change

While the rural landscape retains a mixed land-use, with areas of pasture and arable, there is evidence of agricultural intensification, resulting in the loss or damage of many typical landscape features. This includes loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees and damage to areas of ridge and furrow. There is also a proliferation of new large scale agricultural buildings, reflecting the loss of smallholdings and the general increase in farm size.

Leicestershire near Twyford (© Martin Banham, Natural England)

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should be to protect the structure and unity of the landscape and consider the impact of any new structures and changes to farming practices. New large scale agricultural buildings should be carefully sited, away from visually prominent locations and amongst existing buildings where possible. Specific design guidance for farmsteads may be appropriate, establishing the criteria for new development. Consideration should also be given to the management of those features lost or under threat. In particular the restoration of hedgerows should be given priority, creating a stronger pattern of land use and reinforcing the well-treed character.

FORESTRY AND WOODLAND

Forces for Change

Woodland cover and type varies dramatically across the landscape, with generally more woodland within upland areas, and a range of broadleaved, conifer and mixed plantations. New woodland planting should therefore be considered at a county level, reflecting local variations. However, opportunities exist to use new tree planting and small-scale woodland as screening of new residential and agricultural development and to link existing woodlands.

Shaping the Future Landscape

The aim should therefore be to manage existing trees and woodland, including the protection of ancient semi natural woodlands including measures to reduce their fragmentation. In addition new tree planting should be encouraged to ensure a varied age structure and creation of woodland edge habitats to enhance their landscape and biodiversity character.