

a) The Broads Landscape Character Assessment

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 “Landscape character is defined as 'a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse'. Essentially, Landscape character is that which makes an area unique.

It is essential to consider this sense of place when making decisions about how to change, manage or restore landscapes. Only by paying proper regard to the existing character of a place can informed and responsible decisions be made, and sustainable future landscapes planned for. Through understanding how places differ we can also ensure that future development is well situated, sensitive to its location, and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives. Landscape Character Assessment is a tool which can help us achieve this goal.”¹

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The process of Landscape Character Assessment has evolved over the last decade to become an increasingly important tool in planning and decision-making. The work has a range of potential applications from a strategic level through to the production of detailed guidance. Production of a Landscape Character Assessment is part of the information gathering exercise recommended by Government as part of the Local Development Framework process.
- 2.2 The Countryside Agency produced a National framework in 1999 under the project title ‘The Countryside Character Initiative’. At County Level both Norfolk and Suffolk have subscribed to the Living Landscapes Project, which divides the counties into Landscape Description Units (or LDUs)². Suffolk County Council and most of the district councils in Norfolk have now all produced, or are in the process of producing, their own character assessments.

3.0 Development of an Assessment of The Broads

- 3.1 The Broads Authority identified the need to produce a Landscape Character Assessment in 2001. Given previously identified complexities of undertaking an assessment of the Broads, it was thought prudent to undertake a pilot study to gather information that would direct a Broads-wide study. The Landscape Partnership were commissioned by the Broads Authority to carry out this pilot Landscape

¹ Extracted from Countryside Character Network (www.ccnetwork.org.uk)

² The Project is a semi-independent arm of the University of Reading. Landscape Description Units or LDUs are created by overlaying a series of definitive attributes (soils, geology etc) in a prescribed way.

Character Assessment in a selected area of The Broads. The brief included the design of a methodology for the assessment process, which might then be used across the whole of the Broads. A final draft of this pilot work was received in January 2005.

- 3.2 The Authority subsequently undertook a review of the pilot project during 2005. Whilst the pilot assessment and methodology was considered to broadly fit the purpose, some refinements to the field survey and classification were proposed. Since the work was commissioned a range of new datasets had become available and other relevant character assessments were underway. The latest project, which involved the survey and assessment of the entire Broads area, was therefore adapted to take advantage of this.

4.0 The Broads Assessment in Context

- 4.1 The National framework produced in 1999 placed the entire Broads area within one character area (JCA 80). The boundaries of that area are rather wider than the Executive Area, for example, extending as far as North Walsham, Aylsham and Happisburgh to the north and encompassing the broadland villages in their entirety. Sub Areas for the National Character Areas were produced in 2005 but no subdivision was generated for the Broads Area.
- 4.2 At county scale, the Living Landscape Project provided little subdivision for the Broads area because the Landscape Description Units are generated from permanent landscape components. The physical and perceptual character of the Broads landscape is more influenced by factors subject to change, such as land use and management regimes. Subtle variations in land height can also be significant, potentially influencing agriculture and settlement. Activity in adjacent areas is also significant. This was usefully demonstrated by the pilot study in which a relatively homogenous block of land in terms of topography, geology, soils, settlement pattern, land cover and land use was subdivided into three different character areas following the field survey.

5.0 The Adopted Methodology

- 5.1 The Assessment to date has been produced in accordance with Countryside Agency guidance (2002) and Landscape Types and Character Areas have been generated which can be summarised as follows:
- *Landscape Types* are: distinct areas of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they could be found in different places and share a broadly similar range of attributes.

Landscape Character Areas are: single, unique geographical areas with their own identity.

5.2 Landscape Types and Areas can be produced at a range of scales. The work carried out at National and County level indicated the need to work at a scale sufficiently small and detailed enough to ensure the process would work in the Broads landscape. A 1: 25,000 map base has been used which is in line with other National Parks.

6.0 Desk based study

6.1 The following data was collated and overlaid to identify potential areas of common (and differing) character from which draft Character Types and Areas were formulated.

- *Topography*
In a fairly level landscape like The Broads, the range of contour bands typically used in Character Assessments are not particularly relevant. Subtle changes in The Broads landscape often relate to the slight variations in topography below the 5 metre contour line. To map these, in the absence of more detailed contour information, it has been necessary to utilise the Environment Agency's LIDAR data³. This was used to produce a map showing all land from the lowest lying up to 10 metres aOD which supplemented the O.S. contour information in lower lying areas.
- *Geology and Soils*
The Authority holds various Geology datasets at a scale of 1:50,000. The most useful of this information relates to drift geology in view of the influence it exerts on the soils of the area. This has been supplemented by the Soil Survey's 1:100,000 series county maps.
- *Land Use and Management*
The Authority's 1998 aerial photograph collection has been used to ascertain modern Land Use. The 2004 aerial photos became available during the course of this work but have not yet been utilised. The field survey work provided additional information.
- *Historic Land Use*
 - A separate project which has fed into this process is the Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) project. This is an English Heritage funded area-based study of how places have developed over time and how the past exists in today's landscape. The work for Norfolk is being carried out by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. Work on The Broads area (including

³ LIDAR refers to Light Detection and Ranging – an airborne mapping technique using laser to measure the distance between the aircraft and the ground.

the Suffolk part) has been completed with some data released early for use in this project.

- The Historical and Contemporary Site Descriptions volume of the Broadland Fen Resource Survey (Jo Parmenter, 1995) have also been particularly useful respect of the Fen Areas.
- The E-Map Explorer website has been used to provide easy access where reference to original mapped sources has been required.

- *Woodland Cover*

The modern Ordnance Survey Map provided a guide to extent and indication of type of woodland. The HLC project supplied a digital map of carr woodland over 150 years old. A map of Ancient Woodland (as defined by Natural England) in and around the Broads area was extracted from the government's MAGIC mapping website. Aerial photographs and the field Survey both supplemented the map-based data.

- *Settlement*

Settlement form and size was ascertained from the modern Ordnance Survey map and reference to historic mapping sources through the E map Explorer website provided information on change.

6.2 Other Research

- Research carried out by Dr Tom Williamson, University of East Anglia, commissioned by the Authority, has been used to inform the sites and features of note section for each character area. This research has also contributed to the Historic Landscape Characterisation Project.
- A range of printed sources have been used throughout the process (see bibliography). Further material specific to the individual character areas such as management plans and parish histories have been referenced on the character area sheets.
- Artistic and Literary Influences have also been recorded for each area. Sources for these are also listed in the bibliography and on individual Local Character Area sheets.

7.0 Field Survey

7.1 Prior to the start of the survey work to the entire Broads area, the field survey sheet used in the pilot exercise along with five others were examined and two of these were trialled in the field.

7.2 A revised survey sheet (Appendix 1) was produced and was itself was further refined following another field trial. Suffolk County Council provided some helpful feedback on their own survey sheet, which informed the revised design. The resulting survey sheet was designed to do the following:

- separate into an initial section, all definitive information best in filled at the desk stage rather than more haphazardly in the field. This then served to inform the field survey;
- record any Broads-specific features omitted from standard survey sheets;
- increase the visual, sensory and perceptual aspects that were logged and
- record observations on condition (other than ecological)

7.3 Survey work was carried out between October 05 and March 06 by a pairing of Landscape Architect and Heritage and Landscape Officer. A scoping day was undertaken to give an overall feel of the entire area ahead of fieldwork. Much of the subsequent survey work was carried out on foot. Public access in some areas was quite limited and if access could not be easily arranged, or was not possible, greater reliance had to be placed on aerial photographs. Extensive photographic records were made during the survey and photographs and field survey sheets were then electronically stored.

7.4 This field work provided valuable information on condition, visual and perceptual aspects of landscape. On completion, the draft Local Character Areas were finalised.

8.0 Classification

8.1 Types and Areas

The draft work has produced 12 generic Types and 31 Character Areas. The scale of the survey work has influenced the terminology used, therefore the 31 Character Areas have been termed 'Local Character Areas'.

8.2 The work has been concentrated within the boundaries of the Broads Executive Area although neither Character Areas nor Types fit neatly within those boundaries. All land within the Executive Area has been assigned a 'Type'. On the map-based information that will be ultimately be produced, it is proposed to indicate the full extent of the landscape types even though they may extend outside the Broads Authority boundary. Where Character Areas are perceived to extend outside the Broads boundary, this has been identified in the text and will ultimately be indicated on the maps that are produced. Similarly where areas exist within the Broads' boundaries that have more in common with neighbouring district's areas, these have been identified and the character work undertaken by the neighbouring district has been referenced in the text.

8.3 Boundaries between one Local Character Area and another have rarely proven clear cut on the ground and boundaries should be seen only as marking areas of transition. A river forms the boundary between two Local Character Areas on a number of occasions and in

those instances has been regarded as part of both Local Character Areas.

8.4 The formation of the boundaries between one Local Character Area and another have been influenced by a range of factors including:

- The main transitions between silty-clay and peat soils along the river valleys have tended to produce boundaries e.g on the Yare between Strumpshaw and Buckenham and Rockland and Claxton. In these instances the boundary follows an embankment.
- Scale has been important in other areas. The small-scale nature of the upper river valleys has tended to produce distinct Local Character Areas. At Wroxham, the railway bridge has formed a boundary and the road bridge at Wayford, Smallburgh another.
- Visual Impacts have separated other areas such as Norton and Haddiscoe Marshes from Wheatacre and Burgh St Peter Marshes. The former is subject to greater impacts from the settlements at Reedham and St Olaves and the large pylons crossing the marsh. In that instance the dismantled railway line has formed the boundary between the two although in fact the transition is more gradual.
- Attempts have been also made to maintain recognisable distinct cultural entities such as Haddiscoe Island as individual character areas.

8.5 Production of written and map based information as a result of the process has been prepared in a draft format in order that it can be consulted on prior to completion of this stage of the project. It comprises:

- Map bases that show the boundaries of the Local Character Areas
- A schedule of Draft Landscape types which lists the following:
 - A Summary of their Key Characteristics (which will be developed)
 - Any Sub-Types identified
 - Examples of these Types
 - Forces for Change – (which will be developed)
- A series of A3 sheets that describe the Local Character Areas

8.6 *Local Character Area sheets*

The Countryside Agency's guidance is clear on the importance of Key Characteristics. For smaller scale, more detailed assessments, they should be more detailed and specific as they may be used for monitoring purposes or something against which development proposals can be tested. Each of the sheets therefore draws out these key characteristics under a series of headings. In addition, for each Character Area the following information has been logged:-:

- GPS Survey point.
- Relevant Landscape Types
- Description of boundaries
- Area Designations applying
- Character Description Text
- Sites and features of note
- A statement on condition
- Any Forces for Change identified
- Literary and Artistic Associations where identified
- Additional Bibliography – specific to each area

9.0 Next Steps

- 9.1 Validation and expert input forms an important part of the character assessment process. This will be achieved over the next few months through a series of consultation exercises with individuals who have had a long standing involvement with the process and other experts in their fields.
- 9.2 Once feedback has been received and incorporated into the study it will be necessary to project plan the next stages of the process. These are likely to include:
- Local consultations
 - Web development work
 - The completion of a GIS project
 - Production of guidance notes
 - Drafting of landscape policy

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