

Herefordshire County

Landscape Character Assessment

Herefordshire Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

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User Guide

This User Guide is designed for applicants and developers to follow when considering a development proposal within Herefordshire (outside of Hereford City and the market towns) and for Development Managers within Herefordshire Council reviewing applications, to ensure landscape character is considered.

Applicants should follow the steps set out below before submitting a planning application in order to ensure that key characteristics, key landscape qualities and sensitivities and guidelines are considered at an early stage and taken into account in the planning and design of the proposed development.

Development proposals must demonstrate, as part of a planning application, how landscape character has influenced their siting, scale and design. Proposals which are likely to have a significant impact on the landscape and/or visual amenity will require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to be undertaken. For proposals which are not likely to result in significant effects on the landscape and/or visual amenity an informal landscape assessment can be undertaken.

Step 1a: What type of change is proposed? Review the general principles for landscape and development management in **Chapter 5** of the Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA).

Step 1b: Is the proposal in, or close to the edge of, the Malvern Hills AONB or the Wye Valley AONB? If yes, the appropriate AONB Management Plans should be consulted.

Step 2: Which landscape character type is the proposal in (refer to **Figure 5.1**)? If the proposal is close to the edge of two or more landscape character types all relevant profiles need to be consulted.

Step 3: Will any of the key characteristics (in the landscape character type profiles, **Chapter 6**) be affected by the proposal? If so, which ones and how?

Step 4: Will any of the key landscape qualities & sensitivities be affected by the proposal? If so, which ones and how?

Step 5: Will the proposal conflict with the management guidelines? Can the proposal and mitigation help implement the guidelines and contribute to objectives for conservation, enhancement or restoration? If so, which ones and how?

Step 6: If the answer is yes to any of the steps 3, 4 and 5, can the proposal be altered in any way to avoid adverse effects on key characteristics, key landscape qualities & sensitivities, or guidelines? If not, can adverse effects be reduced or offset? How?

Step 7: Use both the LCA and Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Strategy to inform the design process, address green blue infrastructure proposals and biodiversity net gain to achieve an optimum design proposal for planning consideration.

Checklist

Referring to the relevant landscape character type profile (**Chapter 7**) and the general principles of development management (**Chapter 6**), have you considered the following general prompts:

User Guide

- Does the proposal reinforce and enhance local distinctiveness and local landscape and/or settlement character?
- Does the proposal enhance the sense of place through careful design (including consideration of siting, massing, scale and materials)?
- Do proposals for new buildings respond to the existing topography?
- Does the choice of materials and colours for new buildings and structures reflect the landscape around them, as well as traditional building styles?
- Does the proposal protect and enhance key views within, to and from landscape character areas, including views to and from the Malvern Hills and Wye Valley AONBs?
- Does the proposal protect and enhance key views into, out of, and across settlements?
- Does the proposal retain existing vegetation and enhance with new planting?
- Does the proposal use existing roads and tracks for site access? Do new roads and tracks fit in with the landscape character and complement the pattern of existing road networks?
- Does the proposal improve access to the public rights of way network and/or open access land?
- Does the proposal include aspects of Green and Blue Infrastructure, integrated with biodiversity enhancement and high quality public open space where suitable?
- Does the proposal minimise effects on tranquillity relating to light pollution/dark skies?
- Have cumulative effects (including in-combination effects) with other existing or planned developments been considered?

Chapter 1

Introduction and Context

Background and purpose of the Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment

1.1 LUC was commissioned in June 2022 to develop the Natural Environment Evidence for Herefordshire Council, to support the delivery of the new Local Plan, providing a framework to guide sustainable development. The Local Plan will cover the period 2021-2041. LUC prepared updates to the Landscape Character Assessment; a review of the Open Space Assessment; a data analysis and mapping of Habitat and Species; and an updated Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy that ties the other three studies together.

1.2 This report contains a Landscape Character Assessment for Herefordshire Council, covering the whole county including areas within the Wye Valley AONB and Malvern Hills AONB. This study updates the 2009 landscape assessment, itself an update of the original 2004 assessment. The study area for the Landscape Character Assessment is shown in **Figure 1.1**.

1.3 The Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment provides a robust evidence base to underpin the review of the Local Plan and to assist in the local planning process. It is intended to both inform work on policy development and development management, guiding development that is sympathetic to local character and the qualities of the landscape. It can help inform locational policies for strategic development as well as appropriate design and mitigation, providing baseline evidence for more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). It can also provide a framework for more detailed landscape studies and sensitivity assessments.

1.4 Wider applications of the Landscape Character Assessment include land management, notably implementation of agri-environment schemes (including the new Environmental Land Management Scheme – ELMS), and land use change to achieve net zero, including opportunities for woodland creation. As stated above, the Landscape Character Assessment also feeds into the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

1.5 In summary, the document can be used to consider landscape character when considering any type of change. This includes opportunities for conserving existing character, strengthening, and enhancing character as well as opportunities to create new character.

The role of Landscape Character Assessment

1.6 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” (Natural England, 2014) **[See reference 1]**

1.7 Landscape character assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and place which gives an area a local identity. The ‘landscape wheel’ below illustrates how the different natural, cultural, and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to produce character. The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” (Natural England, October 2014).

1.8 Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area’s defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent character and qualities of Herefordshire’s landscape can continue to be appreciated. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape and help guide positive change that conserves, enhances, restores, or creates local character.

Figure A: The 'Landscape Wheel' (Natural England 2014)

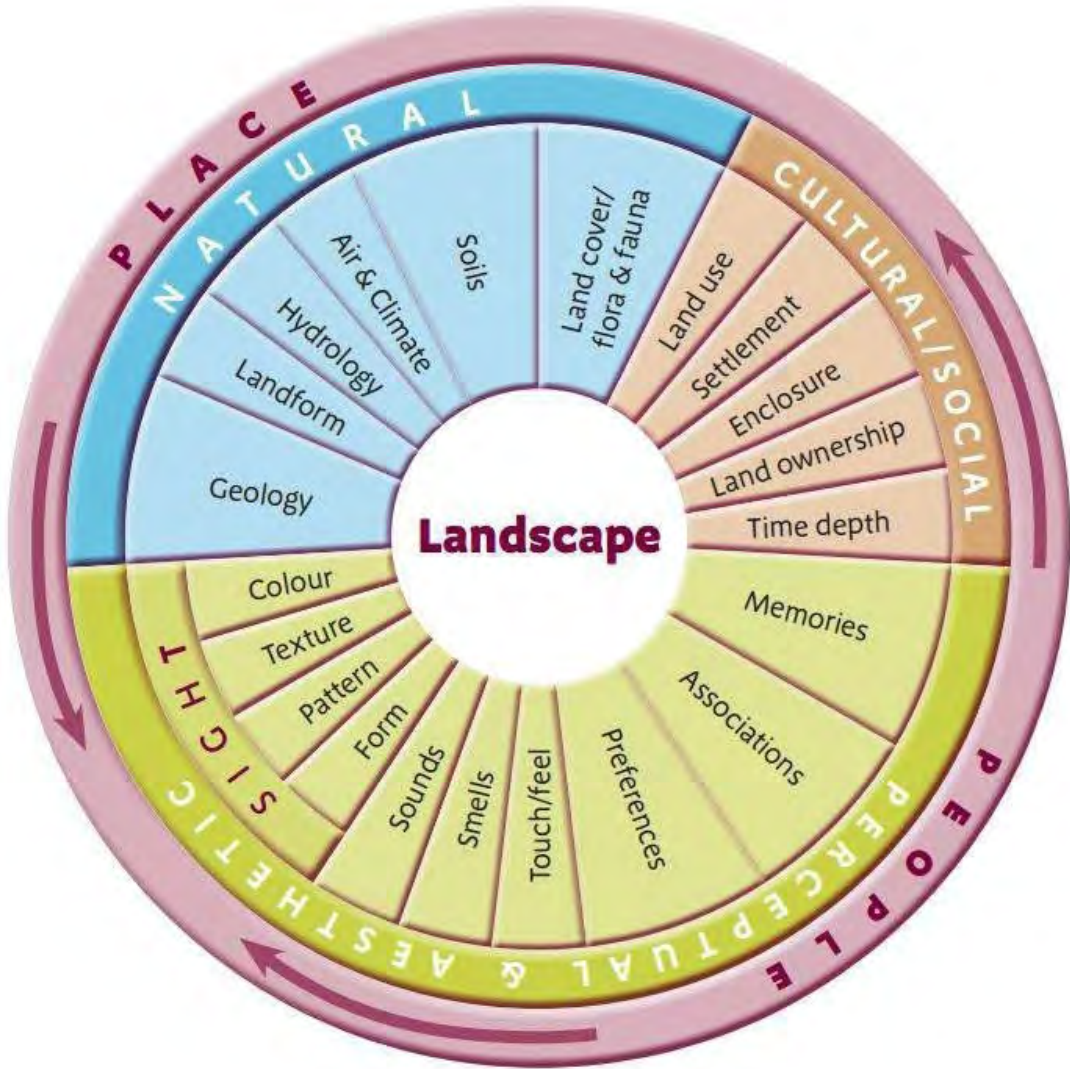
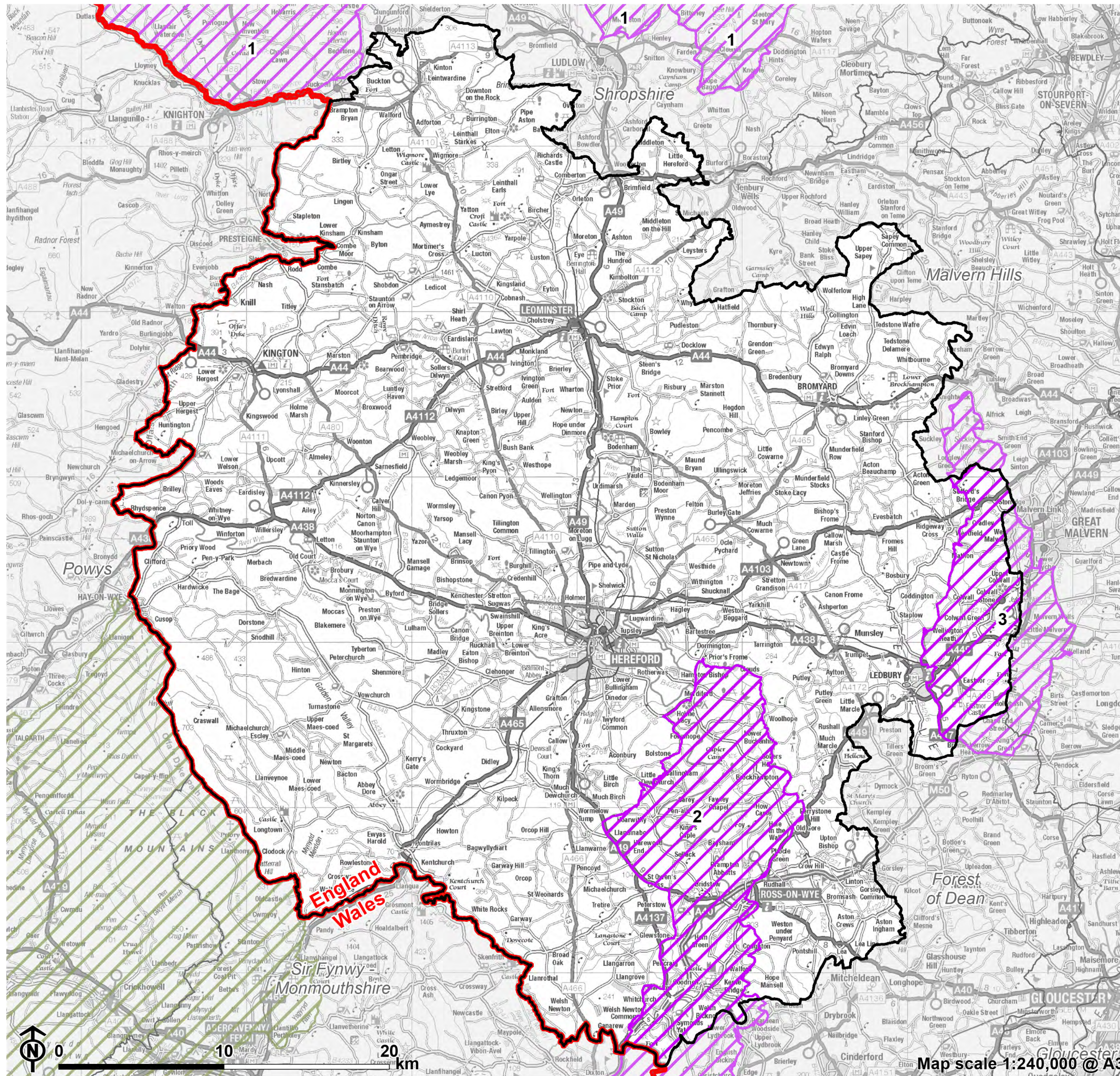


Figure 1.1: Study boundary and location



- Herefordshire boundary
- Neighboring Local Authority boundary
- Country border
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- 1. Shropshire Hills
- 2. Wye Valley
- 3. Malvern Hills
- Bannau Brycheiniog National Park



Source: Natural England, Ordnance Survey

Policy context

The European Landscape Convention

1.9 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The ELC definition of 'landscape' recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded, or outstanding:

"Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors."

1.10 The ELC puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing character of landscape. Specific measures promoted by the ELC of direct relevance to this study include:

- The identification and assessment of landscape; and
- Improved consideration of landscape in existing and future sectoral and spatial policy and regulation.

1.11 This Landscape Character Assessment builds on the 2009 Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment, and has regard for the Wye Valley AONB Landscape Management Zones, and landscape studies for adjacent authorities. This updated Landscape Character Assessment helps to reaffirm the importance of landscape, coordinate existing work and guide future work to protect, manage and plan the landscape.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

1.12 The revised NPPF, published in July 2021, states in paragraph 174 that:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.

1.13 The NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance which recognises the role that Landscape Character Assessment plays in helping to understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape. This assessment for Herefordshire provides evidence to help protect valued landscapes and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Herefordshire Core Strategy

1.14 Currently Policy LD1 in the adopted Herefordshire Core Strategy (2015) relates to landscape. This states that:

Development proposals should:

- demonstrate that character of the landscape and townscape has positively influenced the design, scale, nature and site selection, protection and enhancement of the setting of settlements and designated areas;
- conserve and enhance the natural, historic and scenic beauty of important landscapes and features, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, nationally and locally designated parks and gardens and conservation areas; through the protection of the area's character and by enabling appropriate uses, design and management;
- incorporate new landscape schemes and their management to ensure development integrates appropriately into its surroundings; and
- maintain and extend tree cover where important to amenity, through the retention of important trees, appropriate replacement of trees lost through development and new planting to support green infrastructure.

1.15 The policy is supported by the 2009 Landscape Character Assessment, Historic Landscape Characterisation and other landscape and townscape evidence base documents.

1.16 Herefordshire Council is currently setting out the Herefordshire Local Plan 2021-2041. The landscape policy will be revised to reflect this updated Landscape Character Assessment, national policy and guidance.

Neighbourhood Development Plans

1.17 Just under 90% of parish councils have engaged in producing local level policies within their communities, and there are currently 82 adopted Neighbourhood Development Plans in Herefordshire. These are produced by town and parish councils and include detailed planning policies for their local

areas, including policies for the development and use of land. These are used by Herefordshire Council when determining planning applications.

Relationship to published landscape and related studies

1.18 Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail. The Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment is part of a hierarchy of landscape character assessment information cascading down from the national to the local level.

National level

1.19 At a national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA setting out information on landscape character, changes in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered (Natural England, 2014) [[See reference 2](#)].

1.20 Herefordshire has an interesting and complex landscape, as shown by the large number of NCAs covering the county, which is unusual in England. The eight NCAs wholly or partially in the county are:

- **NCA 98: Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills**, an undulating, tranquil rural area divided by the Clun and Teme valleys. The heads of the valleys are narrow and deeply incised, while the rivers are fast flowing and ecologically important.
- **NCA 99: Black Mountains and Golden Valley**, one of the most tranquil areas of England with few settlements and relatively little transport infrastructure. A strong border character, which creates a sense of

transition from the wild and remote upland plateau to the cultivated intimacy of lowland England.

- **NCA 100: Herefordshire Lowlands**, a gently undulating landscape with many river plains. Steep-sided cornstone hills rise from the river valleys, and are dominated by ancient woodland. The fertile soils lead to considerable commercial agriculture.
- **NCA 101: Herefordshire Plateau**, which rises abruptly from the Herefordshire Lowlands, is a rolling landform with small, narrow valleys. It is deeply rural and retains its sparsely populated character with hamlets, small manor houses and parklands.
- **NCA 102: Teme Valley** lies in the north-east of the county and comprises the undulating, deeply tranquil valley of the River Teme.
- **NCA 103: Malvern Hills** comprise a narrow ridge of rounded hills, rising above the Herefordshire Lowlands, with undulating swells and low wooded escarpments contrasting with the striking topography of the ridge. Much of the area lies within the Malvern Hills AONB.
- **NCA 104: South Herefordshire and Over Severn** contains the meandering Wye valley, designated as an AONB, and also contains sandstone hills with substantial areas of ancient woodland and parkland, in an agricultural landscape.
- **NCA 105: Forest of Dean and Lower Wye** in the south of the county contains the River Wye, and a mosaic of woodland and open ground which extends in the Forest of Dean.

1.21 National landscape character areas within and surrounding Herefordshire are illustrated on **Figure 1.2**.

Local level

1.22 The landscape character types and areas in adjacent local authority areas along the boundary of Herefordshire have been reviewed to inform this study. The landscape character type profiles in Chapter 7 note cross-boundary

relationships, in terms of landscape features (e.g. a range of hills which continue into neighbouring local authorities) and intervisibility (e.g. views to landscape features such as mountain / hill ranges within Bannau Brycheiniog National Park or the Shropshire Hills AONB).

1.23 Other local studies which are relevant to landscape character are listed in Data sources.

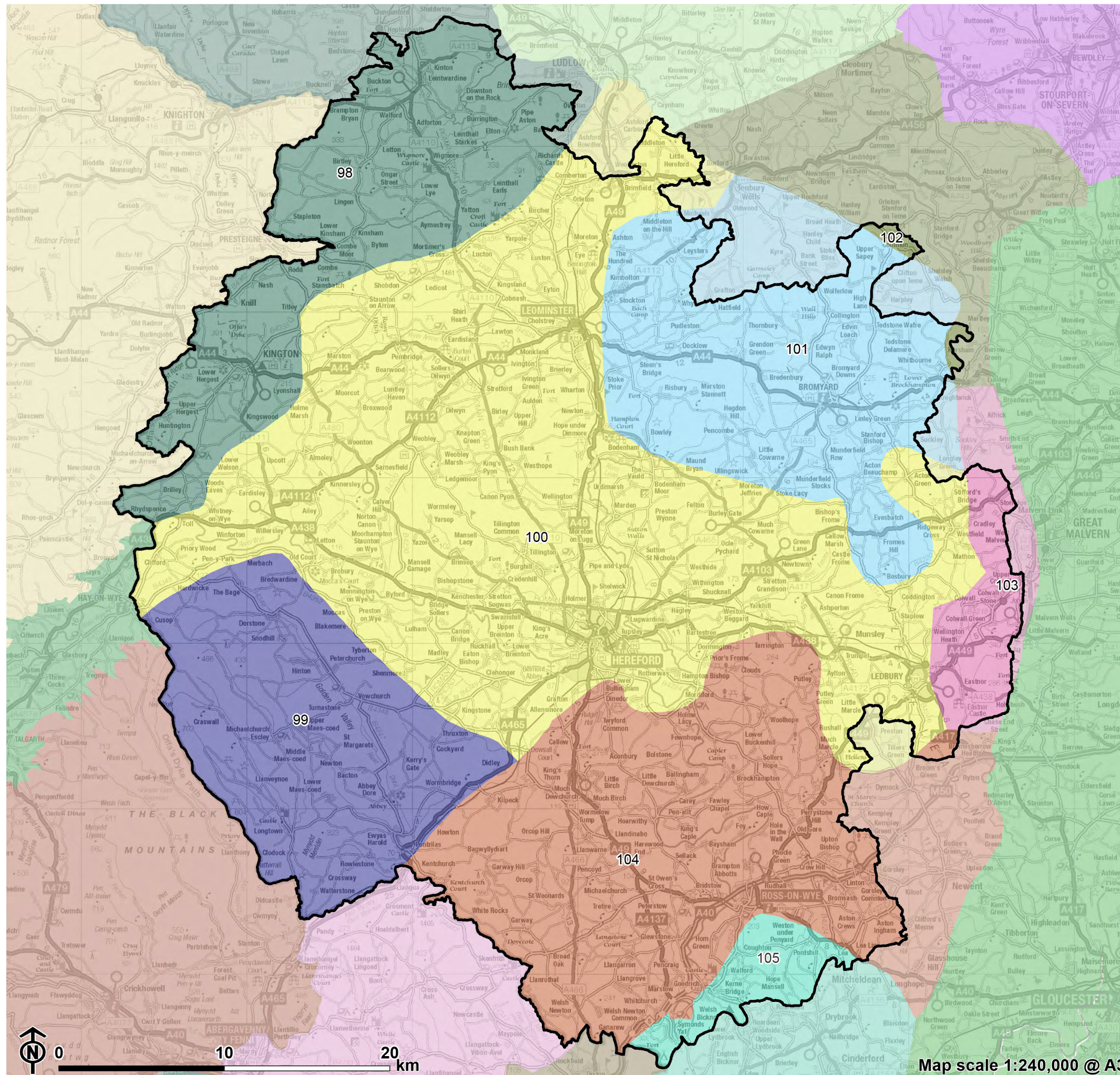
Wye Valley AONB and Malvern Hills AONB

1.24 Two AONBs extend into Herefordshire – the Malvern Hills AONB to the east of Ledbury in the south-east of the county, and the Wye Valley AONB to the south-east of Hereford, following the large meanders of the lower Wye. The nationally important landscapes in the AONBs which are within Herefordshire are included within this study.

1.25 Neither of the AONBs which extend into Herefordshire have published their own Landscape Character Assessments, although The Wye Valley AONB has set out a series of Landscape Management Zones in its management plan (Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee, 2021) [[See reference 3](#)].

1.26 Developers should use both the Herefordshire LCA and the AONB Management Plans in combination when considering potential development sites or land use change. The AONB Management Plans have additional landscape details, special qualities and associated guidance that should be used when assessing landscapes within Herefordshire that also fall within, or adjacent to, the AONBs. The AONB Management Plans are at a smaller scale than the Herefordshire LCA, and therefore provides greater detail to their specific areas. The AONB classifications nest within the larger scale of the Herefordshire LCA, in much the same way as the county-level LCA nests within the national classification.

Figure 1.2: National Character Areas



- Herefordshire boundary
- 98. Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills
- 99. Black Mountains and Golden Valley
- 100. Herefordshire Lowlands
- 101. Herefordshire Plateau
- 102. Teme Valley
- 103. Malvern Hills
- 104. South Herefordshire and Over Severn
- 105. Forest of Dean and Lower Wye

Source: Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Ordnance Survey

Chapter 2

Method

Approach

2.1 This Landscape Character Assessment follows the method promoted by Natural England through ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’ (2014) [See reference 4], which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it.

Process of Assessment

2.2 The process for undertaking the study involved the following key stages:

- Inception meeting;
- Review and baseline data collection/collation of mapped data in GIS;
- Desk-based classification of the landscape into landscape character types, including overview field survey;
- Field survey to refine boundaries, check/identify key characteristics, collect aesthetic/perceptual information, take photographs and observe forces for change; and
- Draft and final reporting.

2.3 The initial desk-based stage involved the collation of a wide range of up-to-date mapped information to ‘sense-check’ the existing landscape classifications and to update the baseline. Designations relating to cultural heritage, nature conservation and landscape were checked for any changes since the original LCA. Data used within the report, including data collated in the GIS database is shown in **Appendix B**.

2.4 Classification is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable, and consistent character and grouping areas of similar character together.

2.5 The original LCA (2009) identified 23 small-scale Landscape Description Units. These were individual, unique areas with their own identity and character. The Landscape Description Units were then grouped together to form larger Landscape Character Types. Larger broad descriptive areas were defined as Sub-regional Character Areas.

2.6 This new Landscape Character Assessment follows the updated recommendations of Natural England and divides the county into Landscape Character Types (LCT). Natural England promotes the idea that LCTs should be based on the identification of patterns in the landscape resulting from the interaction of natural and socio-cultural factors. These are landscapes with a consistent, homogeneous character, sharing common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, or human influences. Although not identical they share a common pattern of elements.

2.7 A total of 14 LCTs were defined for Herefordshire, and further commentary on the updated boundaries for the LCA is provided in Table 5.1 The LCT names are updated to use terminology that is both more descriptive and specific than the existing classification, while at the same time rationalising its geographic complexity. The presentation of the LCA is also updated to include clearer mapping on a 1:25,000 OS base, a range of representative photographs, text descriptions covering natural, cultural and perceptual influences, and more relevant landscape and development management guidelines.

Stakeholder engagement

2.8 The draft Landscape Character Assessment was circulated to relevant internal stakeholders at Herefordshire Council. The draft classification for the Landscape Character Assessment was shared with officers at the Wye Valley and Malvern Hills AONBs.

Outputs

2.9 The Landscape Character Assessment is presented by Landscape Character Type (LCT) in **Chapter 7**. The 14 LCT profiles are structured as follows:

- A location map which shows the extent of the LCT and its relationship with other LCTS, followed by a summary paragraph explaining its defining landscape character and location;
- Representative photographs of the LCT;
- Key characteristics in bullet point format, providing a description of the character of the LCT;
- A description of the natural influences on the landscape including designated habitats;
- A description of the most significant cultural influences in the landscape including designated cultural heritage assets;
- A description of the most significant perceptual and aesthetic influences in the landscape;
- An evaluation comprising:
 - Landscape qualities – the landscape features and qualities that are particularly valued for their contribution to landscape character i.e. if any one of these attributes ceased to exist it would change the character to the detriment of the landscape;
 - Forces for change acting on the landscape;
 - An overall landscape strategy to guide the future direction of the landscape based on opportunities for conservation, restoration, enhancement, and creation; and
 - Guidelines on how the strategy can be achieved to ensure future change respects local character. The guidelines can be considered as part of development management, for example guiding mitigation or

enhancement or influencing wider land management decisions for the rural environment.