



Stockton on Tees Borough Council

Stockton on Tees

Landscape Capacity Study

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Background

This report contains a Landscape Capacity Study for the areas identified within the Borough of Stockton on Tees Landscape Character Assessment Study (WYG, 2009). The Landscape Character Assessment categorizes the landscape character types of the rural and green wedge areas within the Borough. Landscape capacity refers to the 'degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character, or overall change of landscape character type' (Landscape Character Assessment Guidance, 2002). The findings of the Character Study and this report are intended to be used to inform the emerging Local Development Framework and inform the future development and enhancement of the Borough of Stockton, particularly with regards to the determination of future planning applications, spatial planning and land use within the Borough.

The study has been carried out in accordance with best practice guidance as set out by the Countryside Agency (now part of Natural England) and Scottish Natural Heritage (Landscape Character Assessment, Guidance for England and Scotland' 2002).

This report should be read in conjunction with the Landscape Character Assessment Study of the Borough of Stockton on Tees, WYG, 2009.



2.0 Scope of Works

2.1 Scope

Stockton on Tees Local Plan was adopted in June 1997 and remains the relevant development plan for the Borough. Amongst other topics the Local Plan includes several policies on landscape designations. Policy GP1, General Principles, stipulates that new development should have regard to sensitive landscapes and buildings and provide high quality landscaping.

The requirements for the Landscape Capacity Study have been set out within the brief provided by Stockton on Tees Borough Council. This report is to identify landscape strategy and guidance recommendations for the sensitivity/capacity of the areas identified as part of the Landscape Character Assessment and to assist with policy formulation. The Landscape Character Assessment is focused solely on green wedges and the areas lying outside the limits to development and does not cover other open space areas lying within the developed areas, which may also contribute to the landscape character of the Borough. In addition to the Green Wedges, the open space within Seal Sands has also been included as part of this assessment.

The Landscape Character Assessment is provided as a separate document.



3.0 Methodology

The methodology used in the preparation of the Landscape Character Assessment is based on nationally recommended guidance produced by The Countryside Agency 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' 2002 and Landscape Character Assessment Topic Papers 1-5. In addition, Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity has also been used as guidance for the preparation of the Capacity study.

3.1 Desk Study

In addition to the reference documentation utilised to inform the Landscape Character Assessment, Topic paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (Countryside Agency), was reviewed by the assessors to ensure the assessment process for each land use parcel was carried out in a comparable manner.

It is worth highlighting that where referred to in this Landscape Capacity Study, the following understanding of key terminology should be applied:

- Landscape Sensitivity: 'primarily the inherent sensitivity of the landscape itself, irrespective of the type of change that may be under consideration' and 'the sensitivity of the landscape resource (in terms of both character as a whole and the individual elements contributing to character); the visual sensitivity of the landscape' (Topic Paper 6);
- Landscape Capacity: 'the degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character, or overall change of landscape character type' (Landscape Character Assessment Guidance, 2002). Landscape Capacity 'reflects the inherent sensitivity of the landscape itself' and its 'sensitivity to the particular type of development', and 'the value attached to the landscape or specific elements' (Topic Paper 6); and
- Potential development: this can constitute any type of development from built development through to woodland planting and footpath maintenance or other changes in land use.

3.2 Consultation

Two stages of consultation regarding the Landscape Character Assessment have been carried out with Parish /Town Councils. The results of these are included within the Landscape Character Assessment



Report. At the second stage of consultation, in addition to consulting on the Character Assessment, consultation has been carried out regarding the Capacity Study. This is an important stage in the development of the Capacity Study as the study indicates long term management recommendations and potential development options within the landscape, an area that consultees will have differing opinions on.

3.3 Field Survey

The Capacity Study has been developed primarily from the results of the field assessment work carried out as part of the Landscape Character Assessment. The Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity for Change has been assessed by Chartered Landscape Architects that are experienced in this area of work with input where required from town planners experienced in policy making and open space assessment. This has allowed a uniform approach to be applied to the assessment of sensitivity across the Borough ensuring consistency and defensibility when used to inform the emerging Local Development Framework.

Once the Landscape Character Assessment survey for each land parcel was completed on site, a further survey, based on this information was carried out to provide an initial response to landscape capacity for change, recording a number of factors including:

- Landscape Character Sensitivity;
- Sensitivity of Individual Elements;
- Sensitivity of Aesthetic Aspects;
- Visual Sensitivity;
- Landscape Sensitivity;
- Value of Landscape; and
- Landscape Capacity.

The above factors were recorded on a five point scale of very high, high, medium, low and very low. The final aspect of the survey was to include an initial reaction to potential suitable development types to be considered within the area. The Assessment of sensitivity and capacity for each individual parcel of land can be found in Appendix B.



3.4 GIS Database

The results of the assessment have been managed within a Microsoft Access database linking to GIS to allow interactivity between the users and the results of the assessment. The advantage of this approach includes allowing variables within the assessment to be queried; statistical analysis to be carried out; viewing the character areas in the context of other spatial data; and the potential to make the landscape character information more widely available and updatable.

The data collected during the field survey has been fed into the Microsoft Access database in a systematic manner, in conjunction with data collected for the Character Assessment, to create a landscape sensitivity profile for each area. This has created a rich database of landscape information which can be used as a resource to aid the understanding of landscape patterns, support landscape planning decisions and inform future development.

Each individual land parcel identified as part of the Character Assessment has been assigned a unique numerical or text identification tag within the database.

3.5 Reporting

The Landscape Character Areas and Landscape Units will be reviewed as part of the Capacity Study in order to identify basic principles for the long term management and enhancement/development of the area. This will incorporate, where relevant, proposals for the removal of existing incompatible landscape features. The reporting element of the capacity study is primarily the information contained within the Figure 5 which illustrates the results of the assessment.

3.6 Subsequent Use of Landscape Capacity Study

The contents of this study are intended for use by the Borough council to aid policy and strategy development and inform the decision making process, which underlies spatial planning. The study will therefore enable informed judgements to be made about both management and development and use of land in the land use parcels identified throughout the Borough. It must however be noted that this Landscape Capacity Study is not intended to be used in isolation from existing Planning Policy documents and should be used alongside existing resources when assessing planning applications.





Landscape Capacity Study

In addition, the study will aid production of regeneration briefs and guide the Council and its partner organisations and stakeholders with decisions affecting the way that land is used and managed.

We anticipate that the planning work will enable policies to be produced that will, inter alia:

- Enable assessment of development to be tailored to particular sensitivities;
- Support and enable sustainable and non-damaging development, rather than frustrate it;
- Reflect the national and regional framework and the emerging local vision for the area;
- Protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the varied landscape character within the Borough reflecting landscape sensitivity and promoting local distinctiveness; and
- Promote a high quality of design, taking account of site context and location.

It is understood that this document will not be viewed by the Council in isolation to determine applications but as a tool alongside other documents providing guidance (eg: SPD's, Green Infrastructure strategy etc) on the potential appropriateness of developments.

Where a development comes forward that is not in accordance with the study, then the developer may need to provide additional mitigation or justification on the merits of that particular development.



Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity

As described in section 3.0 an initial assessment of landscape sensitivity has been made as part of the site survey work. This has then been reviewed when completing the final site survey sheets as part of the desk based review work.

Landscape sensitivity has been assessed by grading the landscape on aspects such as sensitivity of individual elements, and aesthetic and visual sensitivity, in order to give an overall Landscape sensitivity for each area. Sensitivity has been measured as very high, high, medium, low or very low.

The landscape sensitivity may then be used within the planning process for determining the suitability of Landscape Units to accommodate potential development. Very high landscape sensitivity generally transposes to a very low landscape capacity although this may vary due to the unique landscape features and qualities of individual Landscape Units.

Landscape Capacity for the Borough is shown on Figure 5.

Of the nearly 200 Landscape Units identified within the Landscape Character Assessment a number of potential suitable development types have been recorded as part of the initial response to the land capacity. These are detailed in Appendix B and are tailored according to the individual Landscape Units themselves.

The development types should not be taken as a fixed prescriptive list of developments, moreover an initial response to suitable development types made by the assessor during the time of the site visit. It is recommended that any areas for development are thoroughly reviewed as the assessments that were made during the site visits may change significantly due to ongoing change, emerging research, and new development within the Borough.





Appendices



Appendix A – Report Conditions



REPORT CONDITIONS

Stockton on Tees Landscape Capacity Study

This report is produced solely for the benefit of Stockton on Tees Borough Council and no liability is accepted for any reliance placed on it by any other party unless specifically agreed in writing otherwise.

This report is prepared for the proposed uses stated in the report and should not be used in a different context without reference to WYG. In time improved practices, fresh information or amended legislation may necessitate a re-assessment. Opinions and information provided in this report are on the basis of WYG using due skill and care in the preparation of the report.

This report refers, within the limitations stated, to the environment of the site in the context of the surrounding area at the time of the inspections. Environmental conditions can vary and no warranty is given as to the possibility of changes in the environment of the site and surrounding area at differing times.

This report is limited to those aspects reported on, within the scope and limits agreed with the client under our appointment. It is necessarily restricted and no liability is accepted for any other aspect. It is based on the information sources indicated in the report. Some of the opinions are based on unconfirmed data and information and are presented as the best obtained within the scope for this report.

Reliance has been placed on the documents and information supplied to WYG by others but no independent verification of these has been made and no warranty is given on them. No liability is accepted or warranty given in relation to the performance, reliability, standing etc of any products, services, organisations or companies referred to in this report.

Whilst skill and care have been used, no investigative method can eliminate the possibility of obtaining partially imprecise, incomplete or not fully representative information. Any monitoring or survey work undertaken as part of the commission will have been subject to limitations, including for example timescale, seasonal and weather related conditions.

Although care is taken to select monitoring and survey periods that are typical of the environmental conditions being measured, within the overall reporting programme constraints, measured conditions may not be fully representative of the actual conditions. Any predictive or modelling work, undertaken as part of the commission will be subject to limitations including the representativeness of data used by the model and the assumptions inherent within the approach used. Actual environmental conditions are typically more complex and variable than the investigative, predictive and modelling approaches indicate in practice, and the output of such approaches cannot be relied upon as a comprehensive or accurate indicator of future conditions.

The potential influence of our assessment and report on other aspects of any development or future planning requires evaluation by other involved parties.

The performance of environmental protection measures and of buildings and other structures in relation to acoustics, vibration, noise mitigation and other environmental issues is influenced to a large extent by the degree to which the relevant environmental considerations are incorporated into the final design and specifications and the quality of workmanship and compliance with the specifications on site during construction. WYG accept no liability for issues with performance arising from such factors.



Appendix B – Landscape Sensitivity/Capacity Survey Sheets

Landscape Capacity Study

