

Appendix 1: Supporting document

for the
Lavenham Landscape Character Assessment

For Lavenham Parish Council

November 2015

Land and Sculpture Design Partnership
Octagon House, Water Run, Hitcham, Suffolk
lsdp@btinternet.com
Tel: 01449 740272

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1 Introduction

1.1 What is Landscape Character Assessment?

- 1.1.1 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and analysing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive and create a sense of place. It does this by mapping and describing the variations in physical, natural and cultural attributes and experiential characteristics that make one area distinctive from another. Landscape is a result of the interaction of the natural, physical components of the environment with the human element - historical and cultural land use and interventions. It is not just experienced visually, but through sounds, smells, memories and cultural associations.
- 1.1.2 LCA helps to inform, plan and manage change and can be useful when undertaken at a scale appropriate to local and neighbourhood plan-making. Landscape Character Assessment helps us to understand the ability of different landscape to withstand different types of development pressures and draw out the particular issues to which any future development should respond.
- 1.1.3 This landscape character assessment was completed in conjunction with a landscape sensitivity study. It is presented as a separate report but this character study forms the baseline information on which the sensitivity assessment was based.

1.2 What is the purpose of this report?

- 1.2.1 The Lavenham Character Assessment was been prepared by LSDP on behalf of Lavenham Parish Council in October/November 2015. It provides a parish-wide assessment of the character of the landscape around Lavenham. It does not include the built-up area of the village itself, instead focusing on the fringes of the village and the land parcels which about its boundaries. The study area for this assessment is presented in figure 1. The Character Assessment was prepared in advance of completion of a Landscape Sensitivity study, also by LSDP.

- 1.2.2 Both these linked studies form part of the evidence base behind the Lavenham Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). Their intention is to help manage future change within the parish. Change is currently focused on the proposed expansion of the village given its designation in the Babergh District Core Strategy as a 'Core Village'. (Policy CS2) The studies are intended as a tool to help the Parish and District council plan for future development and make decisions on planning applications. They aim to provide an evidence-based means of evaluating landscape character, value and sensitivity.
- 1.2.3 The NDP will carry significant weight as it has been prepared with regard to the National Planning Policy Framework as well as guidance set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance. The policies in the Plan conform to and develop the relevant policies in the Babergh District Core Strategy and associated documents.
- 1.2.4 However, situations may arise where there is conflict between the findings of the LCA and the objectives of other local planning policies. In these instances the consequences should be carefully considered and, should development achieve consent against such policies, the LCA should be used to steer the design, form, mitigation measures to achieve the best outcome in terms of landscape and visual effects. One vehicle for this would be a requirement for landscape and visual appraisal for individual proposals which can draw on the information provided in the LCA.

1.3 What are the aims and objectives?

- 1.3.1 Lavenham is a particularly well-preserved historic village with a diverse landscape setting, which is part of its essence and special character. The aim of this assessment is to identify and analyse the key attributes that contribute to the special character so they can be protected and, in so doing, help protect Lavenham's role as a major tourist destination.
- 1.3.2 The study has the following objectives:
- To use best practice methods to undertake a character study of the parish of Lavenham at a scale of 1:10,000.

- To define and describe the characteristics of each landscape character area (LCA) and set out its key landscape characteristics and visual attributes
- To provide guidance on the condition and value of each character area and highlight particular sensitivities
- evaluate the contribution of landscape settings to the Conservation Area and other historic features
- To identify particular pressures for development and suggest management policies for each LCA

1.4 Structure of the report

1.4.1 The rest of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2: Policy context supporting use of landscape character approach to spatial planning

Section 3: Framework for character study and approach taken in this study

Section 4: Approach and methodology

Section 5: Landscape Character Area descriptions

1.4.2 Also available is a landscape sensitivity study (Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Residential Development in Lavenham, 2015) produced to assess the sensitivity of each character area to different residential development scenarios. It aims to understand the ability of each character area to withstand development of various sizes, without undue adverse effects.

2 Policy Context and guidance

2.1 Relevant planning policies

2.1.1 The value of character assessments is recognized at every level of planning policy. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) recognizes that all landscape matter, ordinary landscapes have value as well as those with a formal designations (eg AONB or National Park). The ELC puts onus on local authorities to gain an understanding of landscape character and use it positively in spatial planning.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2012

2.1.2 This carried through in national planning policy in the NPPF which continued the movement towards preparation of plans informed by landscape character study rather than a reliance on locally defined areas of value. The NPPF states (paragraph 17) *'plans and decisions should take into account the different roles and character of different areas, and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'*. Also relevant is paragraph 170 which states *'where appropriate, landscape character assessment should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessment of landscape sensitivity'*

Local Planning context

2.1.3 Babergh District Council Core Strategy (adopted Feb 2014) contains multiple references to understanding and respecting landscape and historic character, and directly relates it to delivering sustainable development. Core strategy Objective 6 states:

Protect / conserve and enhance: local character; built, natural and historic environment including archaeology, biodiversity, landscape, townscape; shape & scale of communities; the quality and character of the countryside; and treasured views of the district

2.1.4 Policy CS15' Implementing Sustainable Development in Babergh' states new development must:

- i) respect the landscape, landscape features, streetscape / townscape, heritage assets, important spaces and historic views;*
- ii) make a positive contribution to the local character, shape and scale of the area*

2.1.5 This follows through in policy CS11 'Strategy for Development for Core and Hinterland Villages'. This states development must, to the satisfaction of the local planning authority, address the 'landscape, environmental and heritage characteristics of the village'. Section 3.3.3. 'Landscape and character' states 'future development must be managed to respect the key features and local distinctiveness. The approach cannot simply be that these areas should be "no go" areas for development (although this may be appropriate in some locations for some types of development)'.

Special Landscape Areas

- 2.1.6 The adopted Babergh Local Plan (2006) Saved Policies designates significant areas of the district's landscape as 'Special Landscape Areas' (policy CR04) which focus on the river valleys. Around Lavenham parish there are two areas of SLA - the attractive river valleys of the Brett in the east and the edge of the Stour Valley to the west. The more stringent requirements for development in the SLAs under the Local Plan designation are under threat however. The Core Strategy (2014) suggested the SLA designation may not be retained in the future and the ensuing Local Plan Designations Review in 2015 recommends abandoning the SLA designation altogether. This reflects the ongoing move in emphasis from evaluation of landscape quality to a characterization based process promoted by the NPPF.
- 2.1.7 The Designation Review quotes NPPF para 109. '*The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes*' but it then goes on to suggest '*The (SLA) designation is no longer necessary, as the Districts are now covered by an up to date landscape character appraisal, which incorporates specific guidance as to what constitutes local character.*' This appears to be a reference to the Suffolk LCA undertaken by Suffolk County Council. However, defining areas of higher value at a parish level would not be easy in a County level assessment undertaken at 1:50,000. The final decision has yet to be made on the future of the SLAs.

2.2 Landscape Character Framework

National and county level data

- 2.2.1 Nationally the framework for Landscape Character Assessment is published by Natural England under the 'National Character Areas' profiles which divide England into 159 areas. Each area is mapped and its unique set of characteristics described. It is a broad-brush approach and it covers physical characteristics, historic and cultural influences, environmental and ecological conditions, settlement patterns and the forces for change at work in the landscape.

- 2.2.2 This part of Suffolk is with NCA 86 ‘South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland’. This covers an area across four counties south of the A14 between Ipswich and Bury, as far south as Chelmsford in the south and Stevenage in the west. It describes an ancient landscape of wooded arable countryside where river valleys have dissected the clay plateau to create a gently undulating landform. Ancient irregular field patterns are discernable despite enlargement of farms and fields during the 20th century expressed through a complex network of old hedgerows, streams and woodland.
- LAV8: Clay Lane plateau LAV7: The Common
- 2.2.3 A further level of detail is available from Suffolk County Council’s Landscape Character Assessment (updated 2011). It describes 31 Landscape Character Units (LDUs) within Suffolk as a whole. The assessment describes two Landscape Character Types in the parish of Lavenham; Type 4: Ancient rolling farmlands and Type 18: Rolling Valley Farmlands, These are presented on figure 2. The types defined in this study and their boundaries were reviewed as part of this assessment.
- 2.2.4 This study further divided the landscape into 8 local character areas to provide a finer level of detail, sufficient to inform managing change at neighbourhood level. The table below shows how the landscape of the parish has been classified into the LCTs and LCAs at increasing levels of detail. The 8 character areas described in the study are listed below. The character areas were named after some local geographical feature or road name to help locate and describe the character area.
- 2.2.5 There are 4 valley side or valley bottom types and 4 plateau types:
- National character profile:**
- NCA 86 ‘South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland’
- Suffolk County Council character types :**
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| TYPE 4. Ancient rolling farmlands | TYPE 18: Rolling Valley Farmlands |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
- Lavenham Landscape character areas:**
- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| LAV2: Lavenham Wood | LAV1: Pits Meadow |
| LAV3: Bridge Street Road | LAV4: West Meadows |
| LAV5: Brights Drift | LAV6: Clay Hill |

3 Approach and methodology

3.1 Approach

- 3.1.1 The study was based on the accepted best practice method for landscape character assessment as set out by Natural England in the 2014 guidance document 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment'¹. It has both objective aspects, including identifying, mapping, and classifying character, as well as more subjective aspects which rely on professional judgment.
- 3.1.2 The study combined both desktop work and fieldwork, in an iterative process. It made extensive use of digital mapping. Digital mapping layers were systematically overlaid with one another, over an OS basemap, at a scale of approximately 1:10,000, to reveal areas of similarity or disparity. This was the first stage of defining the boundaries of the draft LCAs. This initially focused on the physical features of the landscape. Baseline attributes of relief, geology, soils, land-use and landcover tend to have boundaries which can be readily defined. Secondly, further mapping layers were overlaid which included the county level LCTs, and historical landscape information. The boundary lines are, therefore, drawn up primarily on the basis of physiographic attributes and to a lesser extent on cultural pattern and perceptual qualities.
- 3.1.3 The inner boundary of the character areas is to the 'Built up area' boundary, as defined in the 2006 Local Plan. Ideally a more up to date line representing the actual edge of the settlement would have been available as the 'built-up area' is somewhat out of date. This means that there are areas of settlement, some recent in origin, beyond the 'Built-up area' boundary. These are briefly described, but the focus of the character description remains on the rural land just beyond the residential land use.

- 3.1.4 In the rural areas it was decided to align the boundaries of the character areas along physical features, as far as possible, such as field boundaries. The result was that the LCA helped define 'land parcels' that could form the basis the residential sensitivity study which used a land parcel approach. For this reason, and because there is often a transition zone between one character and another, on the ground, it should not necessarily be expected that landscape character abruptly changes at each boundary. When considering areas near to a boundary the character description and guidelines for both areas may be relevant.
- 3.1.5 Field work then took place to see how far the draft areas made sense on the ground and to add a visual dimension such as noting key views, identifying landmarks, distinctive features, or hedgerow species. Perceptual information, such as tranquility and aesthetic aspects, were recorded as well as judgments about condition and the robustness of the prevailing character. Any particular sensitivities or potential pressures were recorded.
- 3.1.6 To ensure an objective, systematic and consistent approach the field notes for each LCA were recorded on a survey form, which collected responses to a list of given factors. Photographs were also taken, for use as an 'aide memoir' for the final writing up stage and to illustrate the report.
- 3.1.7 The final character areas were then drawn up and the descriptions of each area were written. Finally, evaluations of the landscapes' condition and value were added. These constitute a move from objective recording to a more subjective process of professional judgments.

Landscape value

- 3.1.8 Landscape value was derived from a combination of factors, including visual factors. Higher value was attributed with:
- Presence of any landscape or historical policy or designations, including:
 - Special Landscape Area policy
 - Conservation Area
 - Settings for listed buildings
 - Settings for designated features such as ancient woodland
 - Part of key views out from the historic core

¹ Tudor, Christine, Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment

- Part of other valued views with the 'defined views' study on which residents were consulted in 2015.
- Recreational routes – footpaths, long distance routes, byways etc

3.1.9 There was not scope to include ecological value at this time so ecological designations were not included.

Landscape condition

3.1.10 Landscape condition is determined from an evaluation of the state that the landscape's components are in and the overall visual effect of whether the landscape is being managed appropriately. The starting point is the land itself, along with a time-depth aspect considering the extent to which historic features have survived over time, such as trees, hedgerows or other characteristic boundary treatments. The integrity of the landscape gives an idea as to how adaptable and robust it is and to what degree it is vulnerable to change.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 The methodology used in this report aims to be objective and robust. Geographic Information System (GIS) was used throughout the assessment as the tool for analyzing and presenting data.

3.2.2 Each step in the study process is set out below:

1) Preliminary/ desktop stage:

- Assemble base plans and aerial mapping
- Review existing LCA information at national and county level
- Research physical attributes and obtain mapped datasets including:
 - Topography
 - Geology and soils
 - Landcover and landuse
 - Trees and woodland
 - Settlement
 - Heritage assets

- Historic landscape character areas (Suffolk HLC)
- Research landscape designations / heritage designations
- Research historical landscape character

2) Draft mapping stage:

- Use desk study information, aerial photographs and mapped data set layers, including County LCA boundaries, to develop draft landscape character areas.
- Map draft areas at 1:10,000 and begin to assemble notes on key characteristics.

3) Fieldwork stage:

- Time spent in the field checking physical attributes
- Assess additional perceptual attributes including:
 - Scale and enclosure
 - Field boundaries
 - Texture and pattern
 - Sense of tranquility
 - Movement
 - Building styles
 - Landmarks
- Make notes on condition and robustness of character
- Identify any local sensitivities or potential development pressures
- Test draft boundaries on the ground and amend as necessary.
- Photographs to illustrate characteristics in each area

3) Final characterisation and evaluation stage

- Finalise boundaries of the character areas
- Evaluate landscape condition and strength of character.
- Consider guidance on the management of the landscape character areas

4) Preparation of the Study Report

- Write up description for each LCA under set headings and present site photographs
- Present character areas at 1:10,000.

3.2.3 Information is presented in the character descriptions as follows:

Attribute type:	Location
Physical landscape	Topography
	Geology and soils
	Landcover/Landuse
	Trees and woodland cover
Cultural and social	Scale and enclosure
	Historic/time depth
	Settlement, road network and relationship with village
	Perceptual experience/tranquillity
	Recreation/rights of way
Perceptual and aesthetic	Visual experience and views in/out & intervisibility
	Tranquillity
Other attributes	Indicators of value and rights of way
	Condition and strength of character

3.2.4 The eight character descriptions are presented in the main body of the Landscape Character Assessment.