

**TOPIC PAPER 3:  
Landscape Character Assessment  
how stakeholders can help**

***An explanation of the nature of stakeholder involvement, methods of engagement, and pointers to good practice.***

**INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Stakeholders play a vital role in Landscape Character Assessment. Their involvement can produce a more informed assessment, greater ownership of applications, and establish valuable partnerships for future work.

1.2 In England, the Countryside Agency urges everyone involved in Landscape Character Assessment to find opportunities for stakeholder input. In Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage has an interest in such initiatives and, although the national programme of Landscape Character Assessment is complete, encouragement will be given to securing stakeholder involvement in future work.

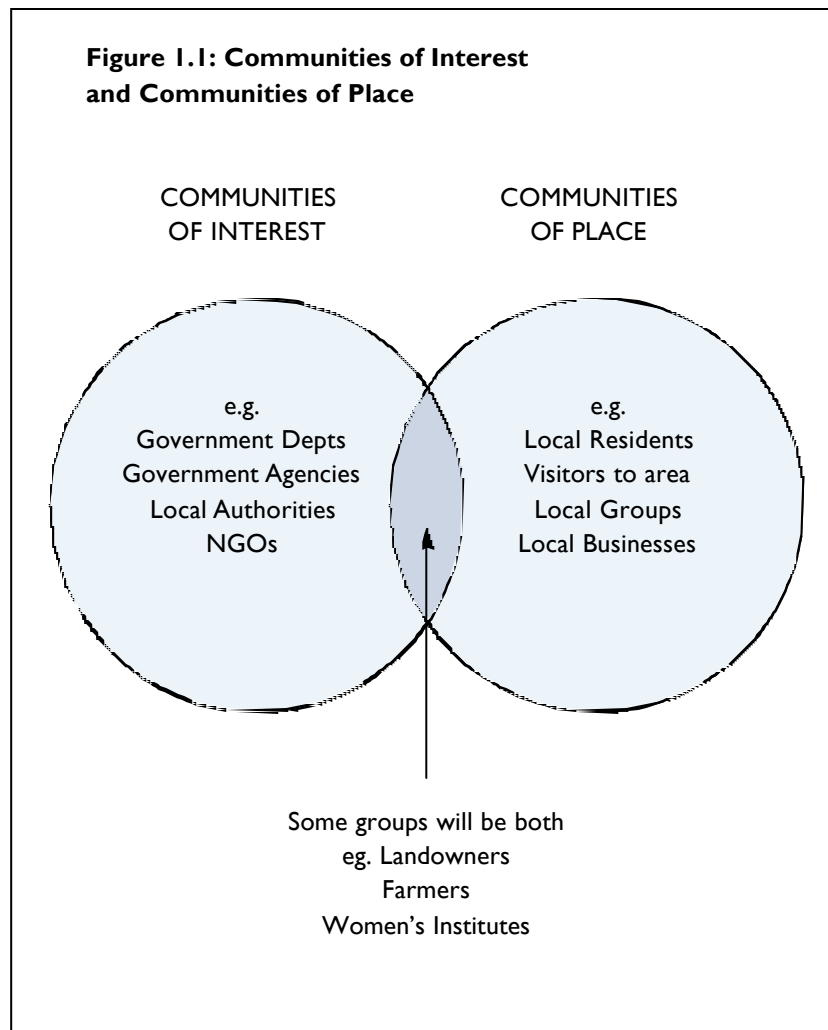
1.3 This paper, which accompanies the *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland* [1], explains the nature of stakeholder involvement, the methods of engagement, and provides pointers to good practice.

**WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS?**

1.4 The term 'stakeholder' describes the whole constituency of individuals and groups who have an interest in a subject or place. For landscape character, the range of stakeholders is wide and can be divided into two broad categories, both of whom should be involved (**Figure 1.1**).

**Communities of interest**

1.5 First, there are the many different groups who have an interest in the landscape, from a variety of different perspectives, and who might be thought of as communities of interest (**Box 1.1**). They can be divided broadly into government departments, government agencies, local authorities, and non- governmental organisations. Some have environmental or other specific interests, while others are involved in the various land uses that shape the landscape. They tend to have both national and more local interests and have a contribution to make to Landscape Character Assessment at all levels, whether it be a national initiative, a county or district assessment or a local project. At the very least such groups hold important base line information that will need to be drawn on at the outset of the study. Local interest groups, such as Women's Institutes, local history groups and amenity societies, will be able to contribute to local assessments alongside individuals who may be involved to represent local communities.



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<b>Box 1.1: Communities of interest</b>	
<p><b>Government Departments</b> - <i>examples include:</i>                      Dept. Environment, Food &amp; Rural Affairs (England)                      Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Dept. (Scotland)</p>	<p><b>NGOs</b> - <i>examples include:</i>                      Royal Society for the Protection of Birds                      Royal Society for Nature Conservation                      Council for the Protection of Rural England                      Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland                      National Trust/ National Trust for Scotland                      National Farmers' Union                      National Farmers' Union of Scotland                      Country Land and Business Association (England)                      Scottish Landowners Federation                      Ramblers' Association                      Archaeological Trusts                      National Park Societies (England)                      Garden History Society                      The Civic Trust</p>
<p><b>Government Agencies</b> - <i>examples include:</i>                      Countryside Agency                      Scottish Natural Heritage                      English Nature                      English Heritage                      Historic Scotland                      Environment Agency                      Scottish Environmental Protection Agency                      Forestry Commission                      Farming and Rural Conservation Agency                      Highways Agency</p>	
<p><b>Local Authorities</b></p>	

**Communities of place**

1.6 Second, there are the individuals who live or work in a particular area, or visit it, who can be thought of as making up communities of place. In dealing with these stakeholders most projects have focused on local communities, mainly because they are the people who have the greatest 'stake' in their local environment but also because they are practically much easier to involve than the more transient populations of visitors. This guidance therefore focuses on local communities. It is important to recognise, though, that within any particular place there is no homogeneous community and different sets of people may have different values associated with the landscape. It is important that these different perspectives are heard and understood.

1.7 In reality, there is not a strict division between communities of interest and place. Many of those who are materially concerned in the welfare of the landscape - that is, those who own, use, manage and work in the landscape, such as farmers, large landowners and foresters - can belong to either category. Such groups have an important responsibility for, and ability to change, the landscape, and so are crucial to involve.

**Broad stakeholder representation**

1.8 The ideal is to involve a wide range of people (both communities of interest and of place), of sufficient number to gauge the variety of local perceptions. It may be necessary to invite two or three times as many people as you would like to involve, as typically less than half of those invited are able to participate. It can be helpful to think of stakeholder groupings (for example, local authorities, agencies, landowners, residents, recreational users, workers and environmental groups) and to target representatives from each sector, to try to ensure that a variety of perspectives are provided. It is also important to acknowledge which stakeholder groups you do not manage to involve and acknowledge this, rather than assume, for instance, that a parish council or community council represents the full range of residents in a locality.

**BENEFITS OF STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

1.9 Existing examples of stakeholder involvement in Landscape Character Assessment have indicated its considerable value:

- the process can help people to understand and be aware of the landscape, to celebrate its character and diversity, and to develop confidence in community action;
- valuable information may be contributed by stakeholders, which would not otherwise come to light;
- if stakeholders are involved in the process of reaching decisions about the landscape, they are more likely to be committed to the outcome;
- the process of participation can help to build consensus where previously none might have existed;
- involving stakeholders in Landscape Character Assessment can help to deliver resultant strategies (such as management plans for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Scenic Areas), which need a variety of people and organisations to implement the guidelines.

Ultimately, stakeholder participation makes environmental initiatives more efficient, approachable and sustainable [2]. In addition, stakeholder involvement accords with government requirements for local authorities to deliver community planning, cultural strategies and Best Value performance plans and indicators.

## RESOURCES NEEDED

I.10 Involving stakeholders takes some effort, but the benefits are worth it. The resources needed can vary considerably, and the following factors apply:

- time can restrict the extent to which stakeholders can become involved at a particular stage. However, stakeholders will remain involved if they feel the exercise is relevant to them;
- effective stakeholder participation work requires time, effort and skill on the part of the project organiser;
- people with facilitation skills need to be involved, to ensure that meetings and other activities make the most of everyone's contributions, and that there are opportunities for all participants' views to be heard and evaluated;
- time scales need to be realistic to ensure that stakeholder involvement can play a full part in assessments;
- those responsible for initiating assessments also need to adapt so that they are willing and able to embrace the input of stakeholders in an appropriate way.

It is important to find the best ways of involving stakeholders within the practical constraints that exist. In the long-term, the effort will be an investment for all the reasons set out in **para 1.9**, including saving time and improving quality later in the process.

## CHOOSING APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUES

I.11 A number of studies have investigated techniques for involving stakeholders in environmental activities. They include:

- the Countryside Agency's review of literature on *Participatory Action in the Countryside* [2];
- the former Department of the Environment's research on *Community Involvement in Planning and Development Processes* [3];
- the New Economics Foundation publication *Participation Works!* [4];
- the *Community Planning Handbook* [5];
- SNH's *Working with Communities* [6].

I.12 It is clear from these documents that methods vary widely, particularly in terms of the degree of influence of the stakeholders in relation to the professionals involved. Stakeholder involvement varies and ranges through:

- simply receiving information;
- being consulted;
- joint decision-making;
- joint action;
- independent stakeholder action.

### Traditional consultation techniques

I.13 Traditional means of involving people are generally one-way, in that professionals provide information and/or proposals and stakeholders respond by providing their views. In these techniques, tools such as exhibitions, leaflets and publications are used to provide the information and proposals, while public meetings, questionnaires and interview surveys are used to seek responses. The stakeholders are quite passive in this process and do not take an active part in developing ideas or proposals.

### Interactive methods

I.14 It is more rewarding and constructive for all concerned if stakeholders' participation is active. A wide range of more interactive methods exist which are geared to meaningful involvement of stakeholders and can be adapted for use in Landscape Character Assessment. They usually consist of some form of workshop, small group discussions, or focus group and often include some form of practical activity. Many are quite specific techniques, some of which have sprung up through efforts to engage people in the Local Agenda 21 process, and include Action Planning, Citizen's Juries, Village Design Statements, Envisioning, Imagine!, Local Sustainability Model and Planning for Real.

### Choosing the method

I.15 Many of these methods, or adaptations of them, may be suitable for use in Landscape Character Assessment, or new ways may be developed to meet specific circumstances (**Box 1.2**). The methods which might help at different scales of assessment and in different stages of the process are shown in **Box 1.3**, although this is a very simplified picture. A choice must be made, taking into account the aims of the exercise, the number of stakeholders involved, and the available time, skills and resources.

#### Box 1.2: Ways to involve stakeholders in Landscape Character Assessment

**Village Design Statements** are based on a partnership between local residents and the planning authority and may frequently develop from community views gained from workshops, questionnaires, public meetings, etc.

**Parish Maps** aim to set out why local people value 'their' place. This makes everyone an expert. A group of local people (any size) gathers information and makes a map which may take many forms, from knitted or written to filmed or performed. The process almost inevitably results in greater community awareness. Common Ground can advise on Parish Maps that have been produced.

**Local Heritage Initiative** is a grant scheme devised by the Countryside Agency to help local groups survey, assess and record what is special about their area, and to then take measures to protect, enhance and celebrate these aspects. There are plans to develop similar schemes for communities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Age to Age** is an approach which has been trialled in Mendip District and elsewhere. The older inhabitants of an area discuss their memories of a locality with local children. Such memories can encompass ways of life to evocations of place. The children then consider what kinds of positive change in their surroundings they would like to see through their lifetime.

**Imagine!** is a process based on 'Appreciative Inquiry' and has three phases. First, local stakeholders answer questions that seek to draw out the best of the past. Second, using this as a basis, stakeholders are invited to 'imagine' the changes they would like to see to achieve an ideal future, and the methods for achieving this. Third, based on the identification of steps that need to be taken, organisations and individuals are charged with taking individual projects forward.

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## Box 1.2 (Contd)

**Future Search** is a way for a community or organisation to create a shared vision for the future. It involves a large group of stakeholders, selected because they have power or information on a topic or are affected by the outcomes. Over two and a half days, they review the past, explore the present, create ideal future scenarios, identify a shared vision, and prepare action plans. The principle is that people are the experts in their own lives and there are facilitators but no other experts.

**Community Appraisal** is a survey of local residents (based on a questionnaire survey of households), undertaken by the community for the community and, arising from this, involves preparation of an action plan or list of recommendations for the future of the locality.

**Planning for Real**® is a type of community development tool which uses a large-scale model or map, onto which participants place suggestion cards expressing what they would like to see happen in their locality and where.

**Guided Visualisation** is the use of a script to take a group on an imaginary journey into the future. It has been used by Gloucestershire's Vision 21 and involves: setting the scene; a brief mapping exercise on current concerns and trends; following a facilitator's script on a 'day in the future', allowing participants to build up their own picture of the future; recording by individual participants of their imagined vision; leading to development of a collective vision and identification of actions.

**Local Sustainability Model** is a way for a community to assess its present position based on a simple 3 x 3 matrix. Its columns represent the three components of sustainability (natural environment, community and culture, and economy), and the rows their various states (robustness, stability and fragility). The community considers possible projects according to their affect on the matrix.

**Participatory Appraisals** is a methodology that can be applied to groups or whole communities to create a cycle of data gathering, reflection and learning. Ideally, participants first look at their perceptions of the current situation, identify barriers or gaps and, based on these, propose solutions or areas for change. The methods used are highly visual.

#### **Techniques that may be used as part of other methods or on their own**

**Questionnaires** are usually a one-way information gathering method which can include large scale door-to-door and postal questionnaires. Drafting requires care to ensure that questions are not 'leading' but to the point. Questions can seek both qualitative and quantitative responses. Those requiring statistical credibility require particularly careful preparation.

**Small-group Workshops** usually involve 8-15 people. It is a generic term covering a wide range of techniques for enabling people to discuss, evaluate, learn and plan how to influence their future. Focus Groups are a specific version of small-group workshops, bringing a more selective group of people together on a regular basis to discuss specific questions. The same questions are asked of different groups for comparative assessment. Focus group participants may sometimes be paid.

**Visioning conferences** can take a number of forms but bring together in one room a range of interests to determine areas of common interest and future aspirations (in this case for the landscape). They are facilitated by external experts but will be self-managed and often incorporate small working groups.

<b>Box 1.3: Methods of stakeholder involvement at different scales and stages of Landscape Character Assessment</b>		
<b>Scale of Project</b>	<b>Stage of Work</b>	
Local/Parish	<i>Characterisation</i> Parish Maps Village Design Statements Parish Landscape Statements Local Heritage Initiative	<i>Making judgements</i> Parish Maps Village Design Statements Parish Landscape Statements Age to Age Imagine Future Search
Local Authority (County or District)	Community Appraisals Workshops or Focus Groups Jigsaw Participatory Appraisal	Guided Visualisation Local Sustainability Model Visioning Conferences Future Search
National or Regional	Workshops or Focus Groups Questionnaires (verification) Participatory Appraisal	Visioning Conferences Future Search

1.16 Activities such as those outlined above can, if properly organised and facilitated, inform and empower people so they really can make a difference. This should be reinforced by ensuring that participants receive proper feedback of the results of their involvement.

1.17 There is plenty of evidence that communities of both interest and of place can relate to landscape concepts and can engage in active discussion about the future. Workshops or other participation events should be designed to be as informative and inspirational as possible. They should encourage all those present to understand what is distinct about the landscape and to appreciate their part in shaping it. The aim should be to encourage commitment to the joint endeavour of understanding and managing the character of the landscape, at the appropriate local or strategic scale.

**STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

1.18 Deciding in principle to involve stakeholders in Landscape Character Assessment is only the first step. Decisions must be made about which stage, or stages, of work they will participate in and how this will be achieved. Few assessments are likely to be able to achieve major stakeholder participation at all stages, but it is important to find the best ways of involving stakeholders within the available time and resources. Ideally, stakeholder involvement should occur during the characterisation stage and continue into the stage of making judgements.

**STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN CHARACTERISATION**

1.19 There are many opportunities for stakeholders of different types to contribute to this stage of an assessment. They may be able to contribute by:

- providing information, for example about wildlife, local history, events and associations;
- helping to identify areas of distinctive character, and determining their key characteristics and special qualities;
- giving views about what constitutes a key feature in the locality;

- testing and verifying professional characterisations.

More detailed suggestions on how different groups may contribute are given below.

## Communities of interest

### Consultation

I.20 Government departments, agencies, local authorities and voluntary groups have most commonly been involved in the characterisation stage of Landscape Character Assessment. Usually they are involved in early consultation which serves both to provide information and to seek views. Consultation may be in writing or by individual or group meetings. For example, agricultural organisations might be consulted to provide information, such as statistics and review reports, and comment, for example, on the nature of agricultural change.

### Steering groups

I.21 In most Landscape Character Assessments carried out by consultants, interest group involvement comes about mainly through the project steering group of the agencies and local authorities which initiate the work. These groups play an important part in agreeing the characterisation framework of landscape types and areas, but are not usually actively involved in the process. In the Scottish programme of assessments the steering groups always have wide membership and may include interest groups such as the Enterprise Agencies and Forestry Authority representatives, alongside local authorities who are always represented and usually make a financial contribution to the work.

### Direct involvement

I.22 There is less experience of direct involvement of these stakeholders in the characterisation process. An exception in England, is the preparation of Countryside Design Summaries (CDS) which are a form of district assessment that concentrates on the harmony between buildings, settlements and the landscape, and are related to the more local initiative of Village Design Statements (VDS). The CDS is usually prepared by the direct participation of planning officers from the local authorities concerned, who are asked to exercise their professional judgement to map areas of distinctive character which reflect the relationship between buildings and the landscape [see *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*, **Box 8.9**, for more information].

I.23 Similarly, the definition of countryside character areas for The Character of England map also made significant use of stakeholder input in the Countryside Agency's eight regions. Local authorities and other organisations all contributed, through a series of regional seminars, to definition of the character areas and to identification of key characteristics and forces for change.

## Communities of place

I.24 Careful thought needs to be given to the scale of work at which local communities are invited to participate. In general it is most practical for them to contribute either to parish or county/district assessments, simply because people are more likely to be familiar with the landscapes around where they live and work. At this scale, people may be able to contribute to identification of areas of distinctive character and the particular elements which contribute to that character. Many local communities may also hold detailed knowledge about the history of a landscape, about events, traditions, legends and stories associated with particular areas, or about cultural factors like the uses of land, local importance and special associations.

I.25 In choosing appropriate methods for participation (**Box 1.3**), a balance must be struck between the direct involvement of a relatively small group of community representatives and the more remote participation of a larger number of residents. Both approaches have been used in different types of project and each has advantages and disadvantages. Interactive processes are, however, most likely to succeed.

I.26 Examples of the direct involvement of local people in characterising the landscape include:

- the Parish Maps initiative [7];



- the Local Heritage Initiative<sup>1</sup> where professional facilitators assist local communities to explore and care for their landscape, as part of a wider investigation into what makes places special;
- 'Parish Landscape Statements', being piloted by the Cheshire Landscape Trust (**Box 1.4**).

1.27 At a larger scale, a number of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have involved local people in surveys of the character of the landscape. In the Kent Downs AONB, a 'jigsaw' project involved local communities in a photographic survey designed to identify characteristic features of the landscape. This has directly informed the management strategy for the area (**Box 1.5**). Similar methods of involving local people have been used in the Shropshire Hills AONB, Rockingham Forest and Wrekin District in England. In Scotland a weekend workshop held with the Sea Board

#### **Box 1.4: Parish Landscape Statements**

The Cheshire Landscape Trust is piloting 'Parish Landscapes Statements' to develop and test a methodology by which local people can produce a Landscape Character Assessment at a parish scale. The process will follow the approach recommended by the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance [1], and engage people in the characterisation and subsequent making of judgements about the landscape. The project will be driven by local people, with Trust staff acting as facilitators.

In addition to producing a more detailed landscape statement than a Village Design Statement includes, the project hopes to empower local people and allow them to inform local decision making. The report of the process will explain how the parish assessment fits into the hierarchy of wider Landscape Character Assessments, and how it might link to initiatives such as Village Design Statements and Parish Plans.

*Source: Cheshire Landscape Trust (2002)*

#### **Box 1.5: The Kent Downs Jigsaw Project - community participation in area management planning**

The Landscape Assessment of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was completed in 1995 and the Jigsaw Project followed, aiming to raise public awareness of the AONB and involve local people in formulating the management strategy.

133 parish-based co-ordinators took photos expressing what made their environment special or of anything that threatened local character. The photos were mounted at workshops, to produce over 800 'parish pages' recording life in the Downs. A second set was used to create a photomontage for each parish in the shape of its outline, with the three key issues affecting the area listed alongside. An overall 'jigsaw' map of the AONB was unveiled towards the end of 1997.

The analysis of the parish pages has since fed directly into the Kent Downs AONB management strategy (which is now complete), and into AONB seminars held with over eighty organisations and individuals, highlighting priority issues to be tackled across the area. The Jigsaw parish pages have subsequently been used by a number of partners and the AONB unit to initiate and inform delivery of projects on the ground. For example, the Darent Valley traffic and visitor management project was based on a cluster of villages highlighting the problem of traffic and visitor pressure on their Jigsaw pages.

Updating of the Jigsaw project is now an issue as part of the statutory Management Plan review. The aim is to carry out a participation project which reflects Jigsaw but without the same time scale or resource commitment, and ideally focusing on a particular target group, perhaps young people, to find out what is really important to them.

*Source: Kent County Council (2002)*

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Local Heritage Initiative, see [www.lhi.org.uk](http://www.lhi.org.uk)

Communities in Easter Ross has explored similar issues. More recently, an innovative partnership between Suffolk's Women's Institutes and local authorities has resulted in the Suffolk Millennium Challenge Landscape Recording Project, which is surveying and assessing changes in the county's landscape (**Box 1.6**).

### Questionnaires

1.28 Questionnaire surveys can sometimes help to provide the views of individuals and can be used both to verify, and to add to professional work, on characterising the landscape. The drawback of this method is that it does not allow for the dialogue and interaction between people that are a feature of more interactive methods. However, questionnaires can often be the most manageable approach when dealing with larger scale landscape work, for example, at the county or regional level, and can permit relatively large numbers of people to contribute. Hertfordshire, for example, has used questionnaires to allow people to comment, provide information on local character, and provide a cross check on the professional characterisation (**Box 1.7**).

#### **Box 1.6: Suffolk Millennium Challenge Landscape Recording Project**

A partnership between planning authorities and Women's Institutes in Suffolk has devised a way of mapping and monitoring landscape change over time. Over 150 local WI groups each 'adopted' a one kilometre square of land and recorded its character through maps and photos during 1999. Analysis of the squares revealed three main indicators for landscape change (i.e. linear and point features, plus land use). Results are reported in *Suffolk's Environment...towards sustainable development*, a document published jointly by the planning authorities. Re-surveying of all 156 squares will occur every five years to discover overall trends. However, due to local enthusiasm, a rolling programme of annual interim surveys is already underway. Results will feed in to future landscape assessments.

The significance of the work is that it:

- establishes the distinctiveness of Suffolk's varied landscape, supplementing the Countryside Agency's Character Areas;
- provides supporting evidence for countryside protection policies;
- increases public awareness of the distinctiveness of their local landscape and the pressures affecting it, thereby contributing to Local Agenda 21 aims;
- demonstrates the effectiveness of partnerships, successfully combining voluntary resources with the expertise available from local authorities;
- provides a clear methodology of monitoring change that could be applied consistently elsewhere.

Source: *Suffolk Coastal District Council (2002)*

#### **Box 1.7: The use of questionnaires for community involvement in Hertfordshire**

Since 1997 Hertfordshire has been using questionnaires as a way of involving communities of place. These are sent out in parallel with the main assessment and, depending on the size of the study area, go either to all residents or to a representative sample.

The questionnaires incorporate two main questions. In one, respondents are asked to mark on an OS map extract areas of landscape that they consider to be 'distinctive' (this term is broadly defined). In the other they are given an opportunity to describe these areas at some length.

Responses yield information about perceived area boundaries, community preferences, key features to illustrate and, subject to the skills of the respondents, expert advice. Respondents' own wording can sometimes be adopted for area descriptions and the list of respondents is useful for a range of follow-up work, such as helping with countryside management initiatives.

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**Box 1.7 (Contd)**

Key benefits of this consistent approach are that it is representative, yields results, and can be used at different scales. Typically outputs will support and enrich the professional assessment, but they also lead to small but significant changes to the grouping of sub-areas. Although fairly demanding of time for analysis of responses, the approach is also not that expensive.

Source: Hertfordshire County Council (2002)

**Regional perceptions**

I.29 In the pilot study of the New Map of England [8] studies on public perception of landscape character were carried out in parallel with the professional work on characterising the landscape at the regional scale. Six of the regional character areas in South West England were used as sample areas. Both residents and visitors to the area were involved in a number of exercises that included drawing lines around areas of distinctive character, identifying characteristic elements and pinpointing the nature of change. These studies suggested that the concept of character at the large scale does mean something to people and that they are able to identify areas of distinctive character, and to identify the same sort of distinguishing characteristics that are recognised by professionals.

I.30 All these examples indicate that it is entirely feasible to involve both interested parties and local communities in the process of characterising the landscape.

**STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN MAKING JUDGEMENTS**

I.31 It is important to actively involve stakeholders in making judgements about the possible future directions for the landscape, especially at the more local level. It is local communities of interest and place who have most to gain (or lose) by the decisions reached, and their involvement is needed to devise ways forward and to ensure ownership of the necessary actions. This requires a new role for professionals, providing information, designing frameworks for participation, producing information which inspires, and facilitating stakeholder participation.

I.32 In addition to helping to achieve consensus, stakeholders can assist in making judgements by:

- identifying what in particular they value in the landscape and why;
- providing views on change in the landscape and its effects;
- engaging in the development of visions or scenarios for the future of the landscape, or by responding to them;
- helping to devise mechanisms for bringing about change and participating in implementing them.

**Communities of interest****Consultation/steering groups**

I.33 Communities of interest, especially those who have direct influence over the landscape (e.g. farmers and foresters) need to agree with the principles established if the proposals are to have any prospect of real success. To date this has been largely achieved through:

- representation on the project steering group;
- formal consultation on draft proposals.

**Direct involvement**

I.34 However, stakeholders should play a more active part in making judgements about preferred options for the future through participative workshops, and similar approaches involving all interested parties, to see if agreement can be reached on future directions. Such workshops need to:

- be expertly facilitated;

- have adequate information available in advance to allow for informed discussion;
- allow for adequate time to fully examine the possibilities, if necessary with more than one session.

I.35 The Warwickshire Landscape project provides a good example of a participative approach to inform decisions. In this project many different groups with an interest in the landscape of Warwickshire - including farmers and forestry groups, planners and highway engineers - met in a series of workshops to discuss current issues affecting the landscape of the county and to contribute to the development of landscape guidelines. This helped to ensure that the guidelines would be of practical use and capable of implementation.

### Communities of place

I.36 It is even more important to involve communities of place in making judgements about the landscape than it is to involve them in characterisation. People have a keen interest in what happens to their surroundings and want to have a say in what happens to it. Some may be farmers or landowners and have a direct influence over the future of the landscape, but the majority will simply see it as part of their home or work environment, and enjoy it in their leisure time.

I.37 Many different methods of participation can be used to involve people in decisions about the future of the landscape. Facilitated workshops will help people to decide what is important to them about the landscape and to discuss the nature of change. Overcoming fear of change, so it can be considered positively, can be a significant step for some. The Quality of Life Capital<sup>2</sup> method of evaluation has been used in recent work as a way of getting local people to think about what matters to them in their local environment and why. In Loch Tummel, Scotland, local people contributed to a Landscape Character Assessment on the Loch Tummel National Scenic Area by addressing this question. It made a significant contribution to the professional work on the project and has led, three years on, to the community taking the lead in co-ordinating the production of a management strategy (**Box 1.8**).

#### **Box 1.8: Stakeholder involvement in the Landscape Character Assessment of Loch Tummel**

The Loch Tummel National Scenic Area [NSA] Landscape Character Assessment was one of the first Landscape Character Assessments in Scotland to include an element of community involvement. The limited extent of the NSA, and its small population, together with the importance of developing a consensus for future management, meant that the study provided an ideal opportunity to explore the use of participation within the assessment process. Two rounds of open workshops were held during the course of the study. The first was held at the outset of the assessment and was used as a means of explaining the purpose and scope of the work, discussing how people perceived, valued and used the local countryside, and the nature of changes they had noticed or anticipated in the future. Their comments informed the assessment and classification, adding particular insights into the qualities of the landscape. They also fed into the identification of key issues, especially highlighting agriculture's vulnerability to socio-economic change and the consequent impacts on landscape.

One of the key benefits of the exercise was establishing a sound basis for work on management guidelines. A second workshop was held a few months after the first to confirm key issues with local people and to explore ways in which these could be addressed. Following this, and the wide distribution of the LCA report, a meeting of relevant agencies, representative bodies and the local planning authority was called by a local group representing the community, The Tummel Area Conservation & Development Group (TACDG) to discuss the next steps. The strength of community interest was such that shortly afterwards, and with some encouragement and grant aid from SNH, the community decided to take the lead in co-ordinating the production of a management strategy for the Loch Tummel NSA. Community facilitators have been appointed to carry out a phased consultation. They will contact all members of the local community and organisations, facilitate discussion groups, and produce the initial draft integrated management strategy in summer 2002.

Source: LUC (1998) *Loch Tummel National Scenic Area*, Scottish Natural Heritage, Edinburgh; SNH / TACDG (2002).

<sup>2</sup> For more information see [www.qualityoflifecapital.org](http://www.qualityoflifecapital.org)

### Attitudes to change

1.38 Attitudes to change in the landscape can be addressed in a number of ways. Techniques like 'Age to Age' (**Box 1.2**) will provide another perspective on change by allowing members of older generations to convey to children what the landscape was like at an earlier time. In turn, children can be asked about what changes they would like to see happen in the area they know during their lifetime. Past change can be addressed both by individual questionnaires to provide quantitative information, or by workshop or focus group discussions to provide a more qualitative view. Future prospects for change can be addressed in similar ways, or by discussion of alternative scenarios or futures for the landscape.

### Active decision-making

1.39 These methods allow people to express views on the changes which may affect a landscape in the future but do not necessarily involve them actively in decisions about the future. Techniques can be used to involve communities of place more directly in forming ideas about the way in which an area should evolve. These approaches are likely to be most effective when dealing with local assessments, at the parish or district level, or for a particular area around a town. At this scale, the people involved are likely to have reasonable knowledge of both the area and the issues facing it, and so should be able to make a real contribution to debate about the future. However, it is important that those involved at this level are made aware of the context of any discussion, including planning decisions that have already been made.

1.40 Examples are now coming forward where stakeholders are taking the lead in making judgements about the future of landscapes. The most widespread example in England and Wales is the preparation of Village Design Statements<sup>3</sup> (**Box 1.9**). Here members of village communities work together to assess the village setting, the nature of buildings in their village, and to provide guidance on how approved development should be designed to fit within the village fabric. Experience from these demonstrates that people can make a real contribution to thinking about the future of their environment. This involvement is now being taken into the wider landscape through the pioneering work of the Cheshire Landscape Trust (**Box 1.4**) and examples such as the Wychwood Project, Oxfordshire, and work currently being undertaken through the Local Heritage Initiative.

#### Box 1.9: Village Design Statements

Village Design Statements (VDS) are prepared by local people. Their purpose is to influence how planned development is carried out so that it is in harmony with its setting and makes a positive contribution to the local environment. This is sought by providing a context for new development, based on local character and sense of place.

Village Design Statements seek to:

- describe the distinctive character of the village and the surrounding countryside;
- show how character can be identified at three levels:
  - the landscape setting of the village
  - the shape of the settlement
  - the nature of the buildings themselves
- draw up design principles based on the distinctive local character;
- work in partnership with the local planning authority in the context of existing local planning policy, and to influence future policies.

To date 386 communities have started VDSs (a doubling over the past 3 years) and 101 have been completed. 87 have been successfully adopted by local planning authorities as Supplementary Planning Guidance, an eight-fold increase in the same period.

VDSs are also being piloted in north east Scotland by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland. The first pilot, for the village of Tarland in Aberdeenshire, is nearing completion. Lessons learnt from this will help to inform two further pilots planned for 2002.

Source: Countryside Agency/Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (2002)

<sup>3</sup> For more information see [www.countryside.gov.uk/villagedesign](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/villagedesign)

## PRACTICAL POINTERS

I.41 A great deal of practical advice on how to plan and undertake stakeholder involvement is included in publications such as those mentioned in **para 1.11**, and is as relevant to Landscape Character Assessment as to other environmental or planning activities. However, a recent report prepared for the Countryside Agency, in association with the Landscape Character Assessment for Tendring District Council (**Box 1.10**), sets out better practice specifically in relation to Landscape Character Assessment. It identifies several practical points that can help the process (**Box 1.11**).

### **Box 1.10: Stakeholder participation in Tendring District - 'Towards Better Practice'**

Stakeholder involvement formed an integral part of the Tendring Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), undertaken for the District Council in 2001. The Tendring District LCA had a limited budget and a restricted timescale that was linked to the local plan review. It was recognised that these constraints are common across many district authorities and therefore the aim should be to find the best way of making use of limited resources. The stakeholder participation work undertaken for Tendring District Council was therefore not 'best practice', such as in securing the most widespread representative involvement, but towards 'better practice' in making the best use of limited resources.

The workshops were held as half day events with an invited audience at three locations throughout the district (evening, afternoon and Saturday am). Key aspects included:

- working with the Essex Rural Community Council as facilitators;
- running fast moving participative workshops based around a series of exercises designed to be enjoyable as well as elucidating key information on "what matters and why".

The events yielded a wealth of information that contributed greatly to the study:

- providing local insight to the descriptions of landscape character areas, and highlighting the local importance of perceptual aspects;
- refining character area boundaries in line with local perceptions;
- suggesting appropriate character area names with local resonance;
- indicating local perceptions of landscape change, and helping to set locally relevant management aims.

The workshops were well-received by participants - 97% wished to see similar events in the future, and to continue to engage with the subject at a local level, such as through Village Design Statements.

*Source: Land Use Consultants (2002) Stakeholder Participation in Landscape Character Assessment: Towards Better Practice. Prepared for the Countryside Agency.*

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

I.42 The roles of both stakeholders and professionals are essential and complementary for high quality Landscape Character Assessments. The involvement of stakeholders in the process is still a developing area and will evolve as further examples of initiatives emerge. For example, the Countryside Agency is now working with Oxfordshire County Council to trial the development of a participatory strategy for stakeholders in developing Landscape Character Assessment. A report on this will be available in 2003. In the future, the web pages of the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage will showcase projects that demonstrate 'good practice' techniques, and the definite benefits of stakeholder involvement.



**Box 1.11: Pointers Towards Better Practice****General**

- **A partnership approach** and division of responsibilities works well e.g. involving the District Council, Rural Community Council and landscape consultants;
- The client, or ultimate user of the results, should be actively involved in the participatory process to give the study legitimacy and credibility;
- Involve both **communities of interest** and **communities of place**;
- It can be most productive to hold the event **half-way through** the Landscape Character Assessment process, so that consultants have a good understanding of the area but are able to incorporate participants' comments;
- Good stakeholder participation **requires resources**, especially time to prepare and to assimilate results. This must be taken into account when preparing budgets and agreeing contract lengths.

**Workshop Preparation**

Thorough planning, organisation and preparation is essential:

- Use existing data bases held by local councils where possible to select participants. In addition, it is more efficient for the council/client to issue invitations and book venues, freeing up consultants to plan the event. Rural Community Councils and, in Scotland, community councils, may also be able to provide contacts, knowledge of good venues, and help with workshop preparation. Many local authorities have Community Development sections which can advise further on contacting communities of interest/place, or hold Citizen Panel lists of potential participants.
- Ensure invitation letters are sent out in good time - participants typically need three weeks' notice;
- Provide sufficient briefing information to participants - clearly explain the context, aims and how the work will be used. A list of key themes/questions will help people to come prepared for the event;
- Choose venues with a good geographical spread so that all participants have a chance of attending one;
- Ensure venues can provide drinks, black-out and sufficient tables and chairs, have good acoustics and are accessible. Village/school halls are often appropriate venues;
- Hold events at different times of the day and week to secure a range of participants;
- Plan a full briefing meeting with all facilitators before the workshops.

**Workshop Structure [for example workshop plan see Box 1.12]**

- Ensure there are plenty of **well-briefed facilitators** - ideally, a minimum of 1 facilitator to every 7/8 participants. Rural Community Councils can provide a bank of trained facilitators to complement practitioners, as well as providing expertise in participation techniques;
- Encourage the funding/client body to be present at workshops to indicate commitment to the project and assist in Question and Answer sessions;
- Events should strike the right balance - informative, inspirational. Tight facilitation gives the best results;
- Include a clear introductory presentation to set the scene so that participants learn something from the day, as well as contribute;
- Active participatory techniques are most meaningful and should be favoured;
- Use a combination of written and spoken responses from participants to allow everyone to comment. Ensure all views are heard and valued;
- Thank participants and explain how their work will feed into the process. Later provide feedback (e.g. a summary of the exercise and its outcome) and mention any opportunities for further involvement. Also evaluate the process, noting what worked well and how the exercise could be improved if repeated.

Source: Based on Land Use Consultants (2002) *Stakeholder Participation in Landscape Character Assessment: Towards Better Practice* (For the Countryside Agency).

**Box I.12: Example workshop plan**

The workshop plan is one particular example of how an event can be carried out, based on recent good practice in Tendring District. However, it is not intended to be prescriptive - timescales and activities will vary according to the particular set of circumstances.

Time	Activity	Purpose
4.00 <i>(to catch afternoon and evening participants)</i>	Registration, refreshments and warm up (20 mins)  <i>(participants record on wall charts where they live/work; why they chose to live there; where they would take visitors for a day out to experience the district, etc)</i>	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide focus for people as they arrive;</li> <li>• record contact details;</li> <li>• allocate participants to tables in mixed groups;</li> <li>• encourage participants to identify with district &amp; each other;</li> <li>• stimulate initial thoughts on participants' 'use' of landscape;</li> <li>• help to break the ice &amp; energise the room;</li> <li>• prepare participants for main part of workshop.</li> </ul>
4.20	Welcome/introduction by independent chair e.g. Council member/Rural Community Council (5 mins)	To establish project credibility and link project to local authority.
4.25	Presentation about Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (20 mins)	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain LCA in local, regional &amp; national context;</li> <li>• provide key definitions, purpose and benefits;</li> <li>• show how LCA will be used;</li> <li>• explain what is expected from the workshop.</li> </ul>
4.45	Carousel (40 mins)  <i>(groups record comments on flipcharts around the room on different landscape topics, moving onto the next after 5 mins)</i>	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collect information;</li> <li>• generate information that all present can see and share;</li> <li>• creates liveliness and enthusiasm for subject.</li> </ul>
5.25	Character maps (20 mins)  <i>(groups facilitated around tables to review initial LCA output)</i>	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gain participants' opinions on landscape character areas identified by the assessment;</li> <li>• apply local knowledge and perceptions to draft boundaries;</li> <li>• review/suggest appropriate character area names to ensure they will have local resonance.</li> </ul>

/Contd...



Box 1.12 (contd.)

Time	Activity	Purpose
5.45	Visioning (45 mins) <i>(groups facilitated through series of questions)</i>	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify current forces for change in the landscape - threats and opportunities;</li> <li>• capture perceptions;</li> <li>• identify opportunities from different points of view;</li> <li>• hear what users of the landscape think;</li> <li>• explore how participants would like things to be in 20 years time (towards developing a management strategy).</li> </ul>
6.30	Summary, thanks and goodbye (15 mins)	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• summarise outcomes rather than have each group feedback their vision;</li> <li>• tell participants how their contribution will be taken forward (e.g. to inform Local Plan);</li> <li>• reveal opportunities for follow up e.g. preparation of Village Design Statement;</li> <li>• collect workshop evaluation;</li> <li>• signpost further sources of information;</li> <li>• receive final questions and comments.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Land Use Consultants (2002) *Stakeholder Participation in Landscape Character Assessment: Towards Better Practice*. Prepared for the Countryside Agency.

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The full *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland* and related topic papers can be viewed and downloaded from [www.countryside.gov.uk/cc/guidance](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/cc/guidance) and [www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA](http://www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA).

Free copies of the guidance are also available from:

Countryside Agency Publications  
Tel: 0870 1206466  
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