

BOROUGH PLAN BACKGROUND PAPER: Landscape Character

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

2015

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION	3
3. NATIONAL GUIDANCE.....	3
4. SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGIES.....	5
5. LOCAL STRATEGIES.....	7
6. EVIDENCE BASE	8
7. CONSULTATION RESPONSES.....	15
8. POLICY JUSTIFICATION.....	16
9. DELIVERING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES	17
Appendix 1: Map of Nuneaton and Bedworth’s Landscape Character Areas	19
Appendix 2: Summary of the Landscape Character Areas Key Characteristics to be Conserved, Enhanced, Restored or Created	20
Appendix 3: Evolution of Areas of Restraint and Countryside Policies	23

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out relevant international, national, regional, sub-regional and local policies and strategies, as well as providing a synopsis and recommendations of relevant evidence base documents to inform policy development on Landscape Character.

1.1 Landscape

The landscape has been shaped by thousands of years of physical and human interactions. This has resulted in a wide variety of landscapes across the country, from the upland hills to the lowlands, and from within our townscapes to the urban fringes. Landscape can mean a small patch of urban wasteland as much as it can a mountain range or an urban park or an expanse of lowland plain.

People value landscape for many different reasons, not all of them related to traditional concepts of aesthetics and beauty. Landscapes provide habitats for wildlife and a cultural record of how people have lived on the land and harnessed its resources. Landscapes also have a social and community value, as they contribute to a sense of identity, well-being, enjoyment and inspiration. Also, landscapes have an economic value by providing the context for economic activity and are often a central factor in attracting business and tourism.

1.2 What is Landscape Character Assessment?

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a tool that allows landscape character to be understood, explained and described in a transparent and robust way. It does this by mapping and describing the variations in physical, natural and cultural attributes and observed characteristics that make one area distinctive from another at a range of spatial scales. LCA also recognises how landscapes have changed over time, and acknowledges the changing influences of human activities and the impacts of economic development.

The overall aim of LCA and, subsequently, planning, design and management of landscapes, should be to achieve sustainable landscapes that are visually diverse, culturally rich and provide potential biodiversity opportunities, as well as being able to meet society's social, economic and environmental needs.

Natural England states that "By understanding how places differ we can also ensure that future development is well situated, sensitive to its location, and contributes to environmental, social and economic objectives"¹.

In terms of planning, LCA has many benefits, many of which can be applied to meet a wider range of aims and objectives:

¹ <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/englands/character/default.aspx>, obtained 02/07/2012

- To support the landscape policies within Nuneaton and Bedworth’s Borough Plan and thus help guide development;
- To enable an understanding and appreciation of the character and diversity of the landscape, both in its own right and as part of the national framework;
- To identify and describe the various Landscape Character Areas/Types and provide an understanding of their inherent characteristics;
- To inform and explain the process of LCA to interested professionals and members of the public;
- To provide an analysis of inherent character and current landscape condition in order to enable future identification and development of landscape related strategies and priorities;
- To enable detailed analysis of landscape character areas with a view to evaluating their sensitivity to change.

2. INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION

2.1 The European Landscape Convention

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and establishes the general legal principles by which national policies and international co-operation on landscape issues must be guided. It is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all dimensions of European landscape. The ELC became binding in the UK in March 2007.

The ELC defines a landscape as:

“An area perceived by people, whose [landscape] character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

In accepting the ELC’s principles and objectives, the Contracting Parties must undertake to protect, manage and/or plan their landscapes by adopting a range of measures. The United Kingdom has already put into practice many of the principles of the ELC. For example, the National Character Area Map and the use of landscape character assessment to inform local planning policies and decisions is now well established.

3. NATIONAL GUIDANCE

3.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The following elements of the NPPF are relevant to the Landscape Character policy. The table below indicates how the Council has taken account of these relevant elements in the Borough Plan.

Relevant NPPF requirement	NPPF sub requirement	Relationship with policy
Core Planning Principle:		The Landscape

Relevant NPPF requirement	NPPF sub requirement	Relationship with policy
Take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;		Character policy reflects the different role and character of distinct landscapes in the Borough.
109. The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:	protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;	The Landscape Character policy recognises the value of different landscapes and the need to protect or enhance the distinctive features of such landscapes, in particular where development takes place. There is a separate policy covering geological conservation and the Council relies on the NPPF in terms of soils and agricultural land classification.
113. Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to		The Landscape Character policy indicates that landscape character is a key feature to take into account when preparing a development proposal. It also sets out those areas where the landscape will be more or less able to accommodate growth that maintains the landscape character.

Relevant NPPF requirement	NPPF sub requirement	Relationship with policy
their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.		
114. Local planning authorities should:	maintain the character of the undeveloped coast, protecting and enhancing its distinctive landscapes, particularly in areas defined as Heritage Coast, and improve public access to and enjoyment of the coast.	There are no such features in Nuneaton and Bedworth.
Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.		There are no such designations in Nuneaton and Bedworth.

3.2 Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland

This guidance provides advice on methods and techniques for Landscape Character Assessment. It is considered to be an important tool for all those involved in influencing the landscape and in planning for sustainable development.

4. SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

4.1 Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines

The process of landscape assessment can be applied at various scales, from broader national and regional levels down to more detailed parish and site specific levels.

The Guidelines provide a comprehensive assessment of the Warwickshire landscape, resulting in a series of management strategies and landscape guidelines directing how and where landscapes need to be conserved and enhanced. The Guidelines are not about stifling development; they are about offering developers and landowners alternatives to integrate development and land management practices into the landscape by maintaining the landscape's variety, distinctive characteristics and key features, which together create a sense of place for people.

The Guidelines define Regional Character Areas (RCAs) as distinct landscapes, often very extensive, where common physical, historical, ecological and cultural associations impart a sense of unity to the landscape. Local Landscape Types are defined as having a unity of character due to particular combinations of landform and land-cover and a consistent pattern of characteristic features, such as river floodplains, wooded estate-lands and ancient farmlands².

The Guidelines identified a total of ten RCAs. However, only four can be truly associated with Warwickshire: Arden, Dunsmore, Avon Valley and Feldon. The others are more typically associated with surrounding counties.

In respect of Nuneaton and Bedworth, the majority of the Borough consists of the Arden Character Area. The remaining landscape consists of two RCAs considered to be on the fringes, Mease Lowlands and High Cross Plateau.

- Arden – Historic region of former wood pasture and heath characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern, ancient woodlands and mature hedgerow oaks. Within the Arden Character Area there are seven landscape types:
 - Ancient Arden
 - Arden pastures
 - Industrial Arden
 - Arden parklands
 - Wooded estate-lands
 - Arden river valleys
 - River valley wetlands

- Mease Lowlands – Relatively low lying rolling agricultural region which runs in a broad belt along the River Mease from the Trent Valley lowlands in the west to Market Bosworth in the east. Within this character area there is only one landscape type which falls within the Borough, Estate Farmlands, which is defined as a well ordered agricultural landscape characterised by large country estates and small game coverts.

² **Please Note:** Within the Landscape Character Assessment, undertaken by TEP, landscape character types are referred to as the regional landscape character areas set out in the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines i.e. Arden, Mease Lowlands, and High Cross Plateau. In this regard, a landscape character area within the TEP report is an individual discrete area of landscape which falls into a landscape character type.

- High Cross Plateau – Area of wide rolling ridges and valleys forming the south western section of the Leicestershire Wolds. This character area is sub-divided into two different landscape types:
 - Open plateau – a remote rural rolling landscape characterised by wide views and space;
 - Village farmlands – small scale mainly pastoral hedged landscape closely associated with village settlements around the plateau fringe.

The Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines are used in the Land Use Designations Study to provide management strategies for each character area in order to conserve and protect the positive characteristics of each character area.

5. LOCAL STRATEGIES

5.1 Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2007 - 2021

The Corporate Plan (CP) sets out how the Council's services and activities will support the Council's Sustainable Community Plan. The CP includes a vision, four aims, each supported by several priorities, and key targets.

For landscape character, the most relevant aim is aim 3: "To provide a pleasant environment for those living, working and visiting the Borough". The priorities are "to lead in environmental issues addressing climate change and protection of the environment".

5.2 Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council's Sustainable Community Plan: Shaping Our Future 2007 - 2021

The Sustainable Community Plan sets out a vision for partners to work together to tackle major issues such as transport, health, education, employment, housing and community safety.

Theme four, environment, is the most pertinent to landscape character and aims to "Have a high quality environment with increased biodiversity and a sustainable approach to waste and energy".

5.3 Emerging Borough Plan

In relation to landscape character the Draft Submission vision states that "By 2031 the communities of Nuneaton and Bedworth will experience:

- "A place to live and work, where the best of the past is conserved and enhanced; and local landscapes, biodiversity and the natural environment are improved through new green infrastructure projects."

The Draft Submission also sets out several strategic objectives. Relevant to this background paper is Objective 5:

To ensure that all new development and investment contributes to a significant improvement in infrastructure and facilities that serve the Borough. In particular:

a) A step change in public transport provision along a north south corridor to link Nuneaton and Bedworth to Atherstone and Hinckley in the north and Coventry, Warwick and Leamington in the south.

b) Improved access to existing facilities, particularly the Borough's 2 town centres and major leisure and community facilities (e.g. Bermuda, George Eliot Hospital, the Colleges and the Pingles and Bedworth Leisure Centres).

c) Retention and improvement of local shopping, health and other community facilities.

d) New development that integrates the required infrastructure and service provision to support it and where appropriate includes improvements to existing infrastructure and services. This includes:

- A Northern Distributor Road
- Connectivity improvements
- Education provision
- Leisure improvements
- Sustainability measures

e) A Green Infrastructure network of high quality, well connected, multi-functional open spaces, corridors and links that deliver benefits to the landscape, wildlife and the public in line with the priority projects identified from the Borough's 5 green infrastructure zones. Ensure that new development enhances and improves the quality and appearance of the urban area. In particular:

- Important open spaces, landscape character areas, historic and natural features are protected and enhanced.

6. EVIDENCE BASE

6.1 Land Use Designations Study, Stage 1, Volume 1: Landscape Character Assessment

6.1.1 Purpose of the Landscape Character Assessment

The main objectives of this study are to:

- Draw together baseline information on landscape character and Historic Landscape Characterisation to ensure total and consistent coverage across the Borough;
- To assess and describe the landscape character of the Borough;
- Provide a comprehensive appraisal of landscape character and quality; and
- Establish landscape sensitivity and capacity to accommodate change particularly focused around new development.

6.1.2 Landscape Context

The study provides an overview of the physical factors which have an important influence on the Borough's landscape. The Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines was also used to inform the landscape character and management strategies for the Borough's landscape.

6.1.3 Landform

The Borough generally comprises low-lying land to the east and higher elevations to the northwest. The landform is gently undulating throughout much of the east rising to gentle ridges and falling to broad shallow valleys. The lowest land is situated in the centre of Nuneaton. This area is generally between 85m - 100m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).

The higher elevations of approximately 160m AOD can be found west of Nuneaton, near Ansley. Landform comprises steeper undulations in the north of the Borough around Galley Common. At Hartshill, the ridge is a distinctive feature and provides a sharp contrast to more lower-lying farmland in the valley of the River Anker. Hartshill reaches an elevation of approximately 140m AOD, whereas the valley of the River Anker is approximately 90m AOD.

6.1.4 Agriculture Land Classification

The majority of the Borough is classified Grade 3 (good/moderate) agricultural land. This includes large areas of land to the north, east and west of Nuneaton and Bedworth.

There are areas of Grade 2 (very good) agricultural land to the north of Weddington in Nuneaton, land to the east of Nuneaton and to the east and west of Bulkington.

Land between Nuneaton and Bedworth, extending east and west of the A444, is classified as Grade 4 (poor) agricultural land. A smaller section of land to the east of Bedworth, extending from the Leisure Centre southwards to Hawkesbury is also classified Grade 4 agriculture land.

The towns of Nuneaton and Bedworth are classified as urban land.

6.1.5 Landscape Strength of Character

The landscape's strength of character is judged as either being strong, moderate or weak:

- Strong character - Defined as a consistent distribution of distinctive characteristics such as hills, river floodplain, and woodland. These characteristics combine to create a strongly distinctive sense of place. Minor changes in land use or land cover would not necessarily detrimentally influence character.
- Moderate character – Defined when distinctive characteristics are consistent throughout the area although their distribution is less obvious or less frequent. The landscape still has a recognisable and distinctive character although it could be altered or weakened through minor changes in land use or land cover.
- Weak Character - Defined when there are numerous influences present, none of which are overriding or consistent across the landscape, although there may be features and patterns present which can help to define character. These features often show signs of alteration or decline. Even minor changes in land use or land cover could have a marked influence on the character of the area.

6.1.6 Landscape Condition

A landscape's condition is judged as either being good, moderate or poor:

- Good Condition — Features are well managed and are almost always intact and of consistent quality. There is little evidence of loss or decline in the condition of features.
- Moderate Condition — Features are mostly well managed although in places there is evidence of decline in management and loss of features such as some fragmented hedgerows or dilapidated walls.
- Poor Condition — Few features are intact or well managed. Loss or decline of features is frequent. Boundaries such as hedgerows are rarely intact and other boundaries are often of variable style and condition. Such elements combine to give an untidy or disjointed appearance to the landscape.

Once the strength and condition of the landscape has been assessed, landscape guidelines are suggested for each character area. These are based on guidelines to conserve and protect the positive characteristics of the area and recommendations on how to enhance and restore aspects of the landscape in order to strengthen landscape character and reduce the influences of features which detract from landscape quality and condition.

Following on from this assessment, a landscape strategy matrix can be devised to form the basis for guiding landscape judgements and management recommendations for each character area. This in turn identifies areas of landscape with higher or lesser landscape values and can be used to create a landscape hierarchy.

Landscapes with a weak strength of character and are in poor condition are likely to benefit from development whereas landscapes with a strong strength

of character and are in good condition are unlikely to benefit from development.

The landscape strategy categories used in this assessment are:

Conserve: where the landscape quality is considered to be good (due to good condition and strong character) and there should be an emphasis on protecting or safeguarding the key features and characteristics of the landscape in their present form.

Enhance: emphasis should be to improve existing features which may not be currently well-managed or where existing features are of good quality but could be of greater benefit if improved. This may include improvements to landscape management practices or the introduction or removal of elements or features in order to strengthen character and/or improve perceived condition.

Restore: emphasis should be on repairing or re-establishing features that have been lost or are in a state of severe decline.

Create: where the landscape quality is poor (due to poor condition and weak character) and the original landscape pattern is no longer evident. In such places there is potential to re-create landscape features appropriate to the area to form new and different landscapes. An example of this is a landscape which has been heavily influenced by quarrying and industry, where field pattern and features are no longer evident and the land form is markedly altered through changes such as new mounding or large water-bodies which prevent the re-creation or restoration of the former landscape character.

6.1.7 Capacity assessment

Landscape capacity (or sensitivity) refers to the degree to which a landscape can accommodate change without detrimental effects on its character. This varies with:

- Existing land use;
- The pattern and scale of the landscape;
- Visual enclosure, openness of views, and distribution of visual receptors;
- The value placed on a landscape;
- Extent, type and nature of vegetation present within the area.

Rather than set out sensitivity and capacity for character areas either on a relative scale or by reference to 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' development types, this study considers the key features within landscape character areas and identified the important characteristics that should be protected and where possible enhanced or increased. In this way capacity to accommodate change is addressed by highlighting key characteristics.

It is important to note that the Study considers that *all landscapes in Nuneaton and Bedworth have the potential to accommodate some form of change provided it is in keeping with each area's key and valued characteristics*. This means that some areas will have a high capacity to accommodate changes of

various kinds whereas other areas will have relatively low capacity related to a more limited degree of change³.

The approach requires users of the information to exercise judgement in respect of decision-making regarding potential development and change. It allows flexibility and for decisions to be made over periods of time and as the landscape and different influences on it change. The characteristics of each landscape character area can be used as evidence on which to base decisions and also monitor change.

6.1.8 Key Points from the Study

The Study identifies thirteen landscape character areas (LCAs). It summarises each of the LCA's relevant key characteristics and what should be conserved, enhanced, restored or created. (Further details can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.)

It is worth noting that of the 13 LCAs, only Arbury Parklands LCA is considered to have a high landscape quality (strong strength of character and good landscape condition), where the emphasis should be on protecting or safeguarding the key features and characteristics of the landscape in their present form. However, it should also be noted that that these assessments were carried out across large areas. Consequently, more site specific appraisals may find some areas within Arbury Parklands LCA that are not of such high quality. Similarly, in areas considered to be of lesser landscape value there may be pockets of landscape that are of a high landscape value.

6.2 Land Use Designations Study, Stage 1, Volume 2: Policy Recommendations

This report assesses the merits of continuing with Area of Restraint (AoR) and Countryside designations that form part of the Adopted Local Plan 2006. It also provides guidance on the amendment of their boundaries if considered for retention. The recommendations are based on national planning policies at the time the study was prepared (prior to the NPPF), local circumstances and a review of best practice.

6.2.1 Areas of Restraint (AoR)

The Study reviews the AoR policy (ENV2) to determine whether it is appropriate to take forward. The Study highlights that a number of Inspectors have raised concerns about the AoR policy, For example, in terms of the purpose of the designation in light of the need to consider longer-term development needs.

Although the AoR has undergone several amendments since the policy first appeared in the 1984 Warwickshire Structure Plan (see Appendix 3), the Study notes that two key functions of the policy have remained throughout:

- the preservation of open character; and

³ **Please Note.** Mitigation is less likely to be achievable/sympathetic to existing high quality landscapes and more successful where the landscape is of a poorer quality character. The reasoning for this is that well designed development could integrate positive change into lower quality landscapes and seek to restore key features.

- land that makes a valuable contribution to the structure of the area.

When deciding whether to take landscape designations forward (such as the AoR and Countryside policies), the Study makes reference to PPS 7. This identifies two tests that need to be applied to local landscape designations. These tests are:

- Can it be clearly demonstrated that criteria-based policy within the landscape character assessment cannot provide the necessary protection?
- What requires extra protection and why?

When applying the tests from PPS7, the Study states that a criteria-based policy can be derived from the landscape character assessment which conserves, enhances and restores special qualities in the AoR. Therefore in accordance with PPS7, the Study considers that there is no identifiable need to continue with the current AoR designation.

6.2.2 Rural and Urban Countryside

The Study also reviews the Countryside policy (ENV3) to determine whether it is appropriate to take the policy forward. ENV3 designates land outside the built up urban settlement and Green Belt as Countryside. It is a general policy to conserve the rural character and limits the types and nature of development appropriate to rural locations, where further development is considered unsustainable.

The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) records the landscape characteristics of the areas designated by ENV3. Where such characteristics are considered to be important features they are included in descriptions and landscape guidelines as features to be conserved or enhanced, such as river valleys and wooded countryside walks.

The Landscape Character Assessment provides guidance on the nature of development and how development should be sensitively designed. The Study recommends that a criteria-based policy would provide appropriate protection to areas designated by ENV3. Additionally, the report considers that further protection to important areas of land, such as recreation and access, could be provided with a policy related to Green Infrastructure.

6.2.3 Recommendations

The Study recommends:

- 1 Both the AoR and Countryside policies are not carried forward, as they could restrict the long-term development needs of the Borough.
- 2 Additional bullet points in relation to landscape character to be inserted in the Local Plan's vision and objectives.
- 3 LDF policies should make reference to plans and proposals having due regard for the local distinctiveness and key characteristics within each landscape character area, particularly to its Landscape Strategy, in order to determine the appropriate management strategy, to ensure new development positively responds to its local context.

- 4 A landscape character policy, setting out a general overview policy supported by a series of detailed bullet points is suggested. The general overview policy states:

Nuneaton and Bedworth is predominantly an urban area although countryside surrounds the main urban areas of Nuneaton and Bedworth. The landscape is primarily farmland with subtle differences including wooded parkland; rolling arable and pasture farmland and woods; more open landscapes associated with river valleys; and urban fringe landscape important in retaining identity and separation between settlements.

Plans and proposals should demonstrate that they conserve, enhance, restore or create a sense of place in such landscapes to respond positively to the landscape setting as described within the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Landscape Character Assessment.

6.3 Land Use Designations Study, Stage 1, Volume 3, Site Selection and Analysis

This Study builds on the Coventry Joint Green Belt Study (JGBS), assessing how the area of constraint and countryside parcels perform against the five purposes of the Green Belt. The Study also identifies the likely constraints to development including reference to the landscape character assessment and the landscape's capacity to accommodate change.

The Study found that only one parcel, NB10, was considered to perform strongly against the five purposes of the Green Belt. This area of land is also important in providing separation between Hinckley and Nuneaton.

The Study also points out that land to the south of NB10, NB8a, does not perform highly against the Green Belt purposes. Indeed the JGBS recommends NB8a to be considered for further detailed assessment. Consequently, the Study concludes that if NB8a was developed, NB10 would not be connected to other areas of Green Belt and would appear as an anomaly. The Study therefore recommends that NB10 will be better served by a landscape character policy that would ensure its protection but enable flexibility for the future.

Additionally, in assessing the parcels, the Study identifies several areas of land important for retaining separation between settlements. Development in such areas are considered unsustainable, as it would risk Ansley and Hinckley and Bosworth merging with the borough, as well as merging several distinct settlements within the Borough. The areas important for retaining separation between settlements are identified in the relevant assessment tables in Section 6 and by figure 3.

6.4 Land Use Designations Study, Stage 2, Individual Site Assessment

This Study involves a landscape and visual appraisal of Potential Development Areas (PDAs) across the Borough. The Study informs the selection process for identifying land allocations within the Borough Plan. The appraisal resulted in a judgement on whether the PDA or land parcel had capacity to accommodate development, either as housing or employment.

7. CONSULTATION RESPONSES

7.1 Issues and Options 2009

Consultation on Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council's Core Strategy Issues and Options took place between the 8th June to 14th August 2009. This document noted that one of the key issues facing the Borough is that that future growth outside the urban area will potentially impact on sensitive landscapes and biodiversity.

Nonetheless, some respondents considered that not all land outside the urban area is sensitive to development and therefore development would not necessarily harm the landscape or reduce biodiversity. Still, there was strong feeling that development should not be allowed in sensitive landscape areas where there would be significant risk to species and their habitats.

7.2 Preferred Options 2013

The Preferred Options Consultation lasted for eight weeks between 5/07/2013 and 30/08/2013. The policy aims to protect and enhance valued landscape areas in the Borough by ensuring that development proposals take account of the local landscape characteristics. However, regardless of the policy's intent, a number of stakeholders felt the policy could be improved if their issues were addressed. These issues are summarised below.

Issues raised by consultation:

- There was misunderstanding about landscape character and proposed strategies, such as "Why are we (the Council) proposing development sites where the strategy is to conserve or restore and create".
- The policy should not be so restrictive as to require the restoration of all current or historic landscape features, such as fragmented hedgerows that have limited ecological significance. It was felt that emphasis should be placed on restoring the main features.
- The National Planning Policy Framework protects land outside the existing urban area.

The Consultation did not raise any significant issues. The concerns that were brought up have been addressed by some rewording and reordering of the text.

8. POLICY JUSTIFICATION

The justification for the Landscape Character policy and removal of the designations of Area of Restraint and Countryside is summarised below.

The landscape character policy will provide sufficient level of protection to valued landscapes without being overly restrictive and inflexible to future needs of the Borough.

Landscape guidelines will ensure development can conserve the best of a given landscape by restoring the landscapes strength of character and improving the landscape's quality and condition, thereby retaining/enhancing its key characteristics and distinctiveness. Moreover the landscape hierarchy will ensure the best of the Borough's landscapes are conserved and lesser valued landscapes will be significantly improved.

Additionally, areas of land important for retaining separation between settlements will ensure sustainable development can take place across the Borough without the risk of merging with settlements within the Borough and across its boundary.

Furthermore, the Land Use Designations Study shows that there is no longer any need to take forward the Area of Restraint and Countryside policies, as these have been proven to be too restrictive. The landscape character policy, alongside the green infrastructure policy, will provide the necessary level of landscape protection without excessively restrictive land use designations.

8.1 Landscape Character Policy

General Principle

Major development proposals must demonstrate how they will conserve, enhance, restore or create a sense of place and respond positively to the landscape setting in which the development proposal is located. Developers will take account of the Land Use Designation Study and landscape guidelines when preparing their landscape strategy.

Key Characteristics and Distinctiveness

Major development proposals must demonstrate that they are in balance with the setting of the local landscape, respect the key characteristics and distinctiveness of that landscape and, in particular, show how the proposal will:

- Conserve or enhance important landmark views,
- Conserve, enhance or create boundary features and field patterns,
- Conserve and, where necessary, enhance the strength of character and landscape condition and
- Where relevant, retain land important for separation between settlements.

Landscape Hierarchy

Major development proposals will take account of the landscape strategy set out in the Landscape Character Assessment. Outside of the urban area

developers must show they have sequentially considered development opportunities in areas of least landscape value first prior to any development proposals being permitted in higher value landscape character areas. The areas of search will follow the landscape hierarchy in the order set out below:

- a. restore and create,
- b. enhance and restore,
- c. enhance,
- d. conserve and enhance,
- e. conserve.

9. DELIVERING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES

9.1 Policy Delivery Mechanisms

The policies will be delivered by:

- Working with developers, English Heritage, Warwickshire County Council's Archaeological Information and Advice team and others to ensure that landscape character is taken into account when planning and designing new development;
- Using the Landscape Designations Study as evidence to ensure that this policy is implemented;
- Maintaining a five year housing land supply will ensure the Borough's valued landscapes will be protected.

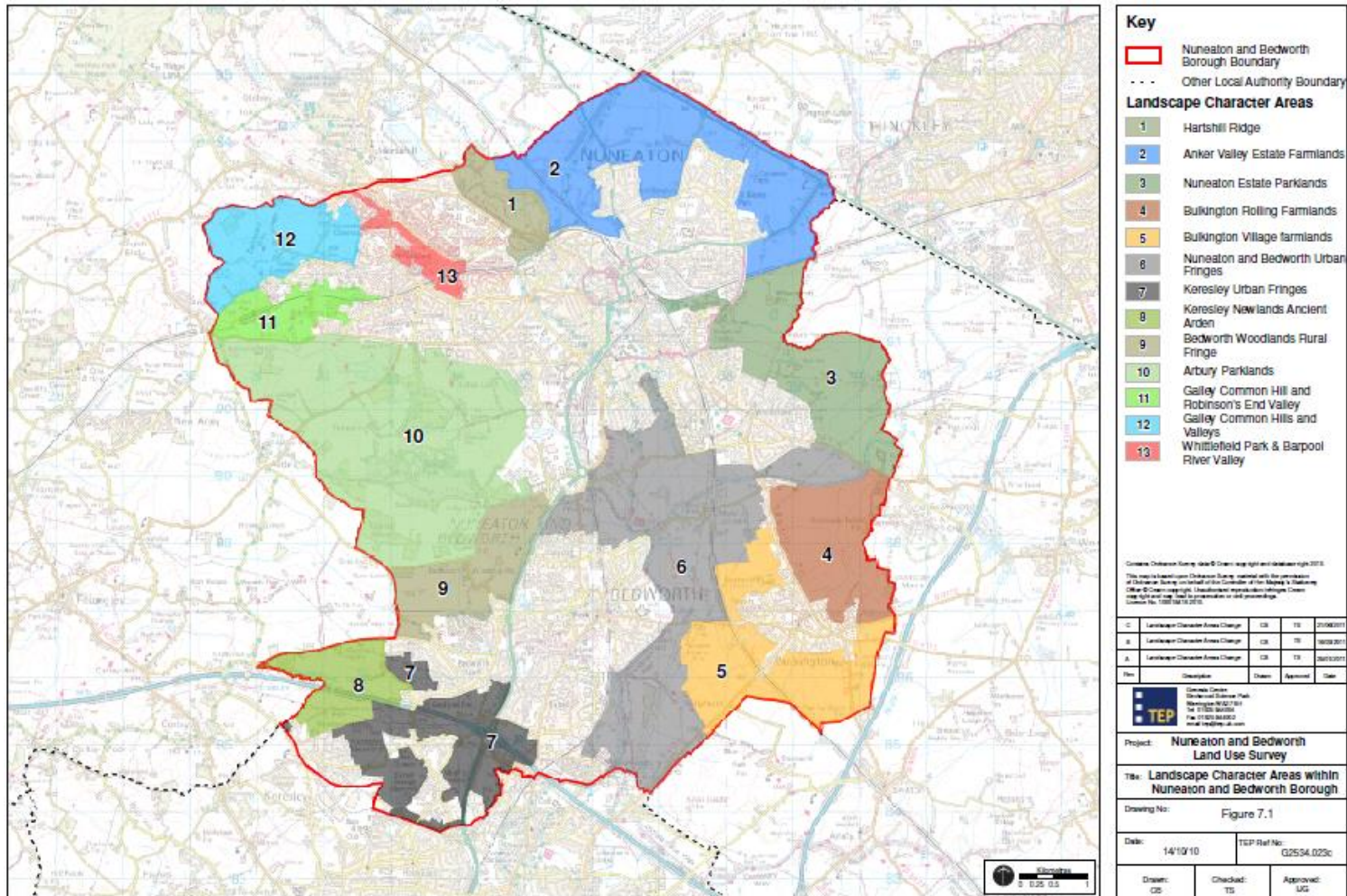
9.2 Monitoring

The Council will monitor losses of highly valued landscape character areas through its Annual Monitoring Report and maintain a minimum five year housing land supply.

Indicator	Target
Development given planning permission in highly valued landscape areas.	0%
Maintain five year housing land supply	Maintain a minimum of 5 years housing land supply.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Map of Nuneaton and Bedworth's Landscape Character Areas



Appendix 2: Summary of the Landscape Character Areas Key Characteristics to be Conserved, Enhanced, Restored or Created

LCA 1: Hartshill Ridge

ENHANCE and RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the area’s sense of place and distinctiveness by appropriately restoring the modified ridgeline and by interpreting the area’s post industrial heritage for the benefit of the public.

LCA 2: Anker Valley Estate Farmlands

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving farmland contained by intact hedgerows and clusters of hedgerow trees; linear and copse woodlands and wooded streams; settlement edges appearing as clustered large villages rather than a wider single conurbation. Any change which made urban development more prominent would have a negative effect on the rural character.

LCA 3: Nuneaton Estate Farmlands

RESTORE and CREATE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing and restoring aspects of the landscape including riparian woodland along streams and rivers; wetlands and meadows; hedgerow trees and remaining intact hedgerows. Positive change would include the restoration of fragmented hedgerows, planting of new woodlands and hedgerow trees and enhancement of the streams and River Anker. Retaining separation between Nuneaton and Hinckley is also important.

LCA 4: Bulkington Rolling Farmland

ENHANCE and RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the pattern of hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees with long views across rolling farmland to wooded skylines. It is important to retain the appearance of Bulkington as a small clustered rising settlement. Change which reduces the prominence of built form would reinforce rural character. Other positive change would include reinforcing the wetland character along the River Anker through establishing and enhancing characteristics such as wetland meadows and riparian woodland along the river.

LCA 5: Bulkington Village Farmlands

ENHANCE AND RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on landscape enhancement including hedgerows and hedgerow trees, linear woodland along the railway and some streams and trees and scrub along settlement fringes. Positive change could include management and restoration of hedgerows and enhancement of linear woodlands. This area is sensitive to any changes which may reduce separation between Bulkington, Bedworth and Coventry.

LCA 6: Nuneaton and Bedworth Urban Fringes

ENHANCE and RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing and restoring features including canals; wetland meadows; riparian tree planting; hedgerows; hedgerow trees; and woodland. This landscape provides separation between Nuneaton and Bedworth although the separation between the settlements is particularly constrained along the A444 around Griff.

LCA 7: Keresley Urban Fringe

RESTORE and CREATE – Emphasis should be placed on creating a sense of place and distinctiveness whilst retaining and restoring features such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees, woodland and wooded streams through new green infrastructure to reinforce character and a sense of place. New planting could help to reduce the prominence of urban fringes. Change which enhances the wetlands along streams and rivers could provide a positive connection between each pocket of farmland.

LCA 8: Keresley Newlands Ancient Arden

CONSERVE and ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving and enhancing the small-scale pasture fields with intact mature hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, wooded streams; field ponds; marshy grassland; linear belts of woodland; and blocks of ancient woodland. It is important to ensure that development does not become more prominent within the landscape and where visible appears as individual properties or small clusters filtered by trees and small scale woodlands particularly close to settlement edges.

LCA 9: Bedworth Woodlands Rural Fringe

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the small-scale field pattern and retaining the frequency and density of hedgerow trees and hedgerows. Woodlands, ditches and remaining wooded field ponds are also important features that need to be retained. Changes in land management which restored hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and the former Arbury Canals particularly in the northern part of the character area, could have a positive influence on the distinctiveness of the landscape.

LCA 10: Arbury Parklands

CONSERVE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving and enhancing the rural and remote character. Change would need to respect the parkland character and distinctive vernacular of brick and timber farmhouses and agricultural buildings, and also to maintain the prominence of gate houses and lodges along the surrounding small rural roads. Any change which did not retain and reinforce wooded horizons or that made urban edges more prominent would weaken the pattern and character of the landscape. It is important to retain the rural wooded farmland setting to Arbury Hall Park and Garden.

LCA 11: Galley Common Hill and Robinson's End Valley

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing Whytell Pool and Meadows Local Wildlife Site, valley woodland, and field hedgerows. It is also important to ensure that new development does not become prominent within

the landscape and the separation between Robinson's End and Ansley is retained

LCA 12: Galley Common Hills and Valleys

CONSERVE and ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving and enhancing the undulating landform of low rounded hills; woodland on high ground; wooded streams; and frequent hedgerow trees. It is also important to ensure that development does not become prominent within the landscape and where visible appears as individual properties or small clusters along a village edge.

LCA 13: Whittleford Park and Bar Pool River Valley

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing Whittleford Park and Bar Pool Valley and Nuneaton Common Local Wildlife Sites, valley woodland, wooded watercourses and the balance of meadows, woodland and wetlands. It is also important to ensure that development reflects the character of development on valley sides.

Appendix 3: Evolution of Areas of Restraint and Countryside Policies

Areas of Restraint

This policy emerged out of the **Warwickshire County Council Structure Plan Review: Written Statement (October 1984)**, which states in **Policy E.1:**

Outside the Green Belt and the general locations for development identified in this Plan there will be a general presumption against development that would change the open *character* of the following 'Areas of Restraint':-

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough:

- (1) Generally between Galley Common and Hartshill
- (2) Generally between Nuneaton and Hinckley
- (3) Bar Pool Valley, Nuneaton
- (4) Wem Valley, Nuneaton

This Policy was carried over into the Approved WCC Structure Plan (Sept 1987: Written Statement) without amendments.

The Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996 – 2011 again rephrased the policy to state that:

Local plans should include policies to protect the open space which contributes to the character and attractiveness of urban areas. Areas of Restraint within or adjoining the built-up areas of towns will be identified in Local Plans, **Policy ER.6 Protection of Open Space**

The word "structure" is no longer part of the policy and the word "*attractiveness*" is included in its stead, which is in many ways is an ambiguous word.

The reasoned justification goes on to state that (8.6.1) Policy ER.6 seeks to enable local plans to protect those open spaces that have a fundamental role in making urban areas attractive places to live, visit and invest.

In focusing (8.6.2) most development on the existing towns (Policy GD.3) there is a risk of 'town-cramming' which would undermine the attractiveness of towns as places to live, work and visit. Local plans should include policies to reduce this risk. One mechanism for so doing is to designate 'Areas of Restraint' to provide long-term protection for key areas of open land within or adjacent to towns.

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council Policy Local Plan 1993

The Area of Restraint policy first emerged in the Borough in 1993.

Policy E5 states that:

Non Green Belt land in the following locations (as defined on the Proposals Map) is designated as an 'Area of Restraint' where planning permission will not normally be granted for development that would change the general character:

- 1) Generally between Galley Common and Hartshill
- 2) Generally between Nuneaton and Hinckley
- 3) Bar Pool Valley, Nuneaton
- 4) Wem Valley, Nuneaton
- 5) Anker Valley, Nuneaton,
- 6) Attleborough Fields, Nuneaton
- 7) Land at Weddington, Nuneaton
- 8) West of Blackhorse Road, Bedworth
- 9) East of the A444, Bedworth Bypass
- 10) Bedworth Heath/Woodlands
- 11) North and East of Judkins Quarry
- 12) Land at Grove Lane, Keresley

Nuneaton & Bedworth Adopted Local Plan July 2006

The policy has evolved to where the criterion is now part of the main policy:

In Areas of Restraint, as defined on the Proposals Map, development will only be permitted where development would not adversely affect the open character or appearance of the area, taking into account any possible cumulative effects.

Within the RJ it states that "The overriding intention of AoR is to protect their inherently open character because of the valuable contribution they make to the **character and structure of the towns.**

Countryside Policy

The countryside policy, Env3, emerged during the Local Plan Modifications as a consequence of the Area of Restraint policy assessment undertaken by Entec. Those areas assessed by Entec which did not meet the necessary criteria for AoR status were put forward for countryside designation.

In the Inspector's report he states that "Apart from the textual differences, the reality is that the principal distinction between the underlying intentions of the two policies is that Env2 applies to countryside which is to be protected well beyond the period of this plan, whereas the rest of the countryside, excluding Breen Belt, may be reviewed in subsequent plan periods"⁴.

The Inspector also states in his report that "The purpose of the LCA was, amongst other things, to assist planners in their decision-making process, both when considering individual planning applications and when identifying,

⁴ The Planning Inspectorate N&BBC *Report of a Public Inquiry into Objections to the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Local Plan Proposed Modifications 2005*, 7.5

at a strategic level, if land use change or development should occur and, if so, where”⁵

⁵ *ibid*, 7.14.