

Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment: Methodology

ASSESSMENT APPROACH AND PROCESS

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) will assess two related but separate topics during construction and operation:

- Landscape is defined as *“An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”*; Landscapes can be both rural and urban and therefore any reference to townscape falls under the overall landscape heading. Landscape character is defined as *“A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another”*; and
- Views and visual amenity are defined as the *“Overall enjoyment of a particular area, surroundings, or views in terms of people's activities - living, recreating, travelling through, visiting, or working.”*

There are four key stages (derived from LA107 and GLVIA3) when carrying out assessments of the effects of a development on landscape as a resource and people's views and their visual amenity. These are listed below:

- Establishment of the baseline conditions: the landscape character and visual context of the receiving environment and the sensitivity to change of these resources;
- Contributions to the iterative process of design & mitigation based on understanding the nature, form and features of the Proposed Development;
- An evaluation of the magnitude of change likely to result from the Proposed Development, both during construction and at completion on visual amenity and the landscape resource, and;
- An assessment of the significance of landscape and visual effects considering the sensitivity of resources and the magnitude of change.

In broad terms, the assessment of the likely significant effects is informed by:

- the sensitivity of the landscape as a resource (susceptibility of a landscape character area to changes combined with its value) and the magnitude of change of the development on the landscape (scale, extent, duration, reversibility); and
- the sensitivity of people (susceptibility of people in a particular situation to changes in a view combined with value of the view experienced) and the magnitude of change of the development (scale, extent, duration, reversibility).

ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER EFFECTS

Analysis of landscape effects

The significance of effect is determined by considering the sensitivity of the landscape and the magnitude of the change anticipated. Further detail of the key stages of assessment are described below.

Landscape value

Value contributes to understanding the overall sensitivity of a landscape. This means the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society, bearing in mind that a landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons. Landscape value is frequently addressed by reference to international, national, regional and local designations. An absence of a formal designation does not, however, determine that an area is necessarily of low value; factors such as quality, accessibility, recreational value, associations and local scarcity can render areas as valued landscapes. Landscape value levels and correlating typical descriptions, criteria or key indicators are listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Landscape Value

Landscape value level	Typical description / criteria / key indicators
High	Landscapes of high national importance containing distinctive features. Landscapes designated of high value including national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), local authority designated or recognised as of high value, registered parks and gardens and other landscapes with a strong sense of place, visual aesthetic or scenic quality.
Medium	Well maintained landscapes generally in good condition. May have some scenic qualities and include some/occasional detracting features although these do not dominate. May include some local footpaths and/or other recreational routes and/or recreational facilities such as country parks.
Low	Landscapes with little sense of place and/or poorly maintained and/or in poor condition and/or influenced detrimentally to a large extent by existing infrastructure or other detracting human interventions.

Susceptibility to change

Susceptibility has been defined in GLIVA on page 88, paragraph 5.4 as:

“The ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and / or the achievement of landscape policies and strategies.”

A high value landscape should not, by definition, infer that it has a high susceptibility to future change. Similarly, a landscape expressing low value does not automatically have a lower susceptibility to change.

Susceptibility to change is therefore likely to reflect the type and nature of the proposed development.

Landscape sensitivity

The sensitivity of the landscape is derived through professional judgement by combining its value with its susceptibility. LA107 provides a table which demonstrates criteria and typical descriptions of landscape sensitivity that have been adopted for the purpose of this assessment, as outlined below in **Table**

Table 2 – Landscape sensitivity

Rating	Criteria
Very High	Landscape of very high international/ national importance and rarity or value with no or very limited ability to accommodate change without substantial loss/gain (i.e. national parks, internationally acclaimed landscapes – UNESCO World Heritage Sites)
High	Landscape of high national importance containing distinctive features/ elements with limited ability to accommodate change without incurring substantial loss/gain (i.e. designated areas, areas of strong sense of place – registered parks and gardens, country parks).
Medium	Landscapes of local or regional recognition of importance able to accommodate some change (i.e. features worthy of conservation, some sense of place or value through use/ perception).
Low	Local landscape areas or receptors of low to medium importance with ability to accommodate change (i.e. non-designated or designated areas of local recognition or areas of little sense of place).
Negligible	Landscapes of very low importance and rarity; able to accommodate change.

Magnitude of change

Magnitude of change combines judgements about the size and scale of the Proposed Scheme, its geographical extent, whether the effects would be reversible or irreversible and whether short or long term in duration. This also includes considerations such as loss of and severance or modification to key landscape components (woodland, hedgerows, boundaries landform, and culturally significant structures) and evaluation of the extent to which the Proposed Scheme would emerge as a new component in the landscape or change the balance between components that currently constitute baseline character. The magnitude of change of the development and the subsequent effect can be either Adverse or Beneficial. Definitions associated with the magnitude of change are listed below within **Table** (taken from LA 107 Table 3.24).

Table 3 – Landscape magnitude of change

Rating		Criteria
Major	Adverse	Total loss or large scale damage to existing landscape character or distinctive features or elements; and/or addition of new uncharacteristic, conspicuous features or elements (i.e. road infrastructure).
	Beneficial	Large scale improvement of landscape character to features and elements; and/or addition of new distinctive features or elements, or removal of conspicuous road infrastructure elements.
Moderate	Adverse	Partial loss or noticeable damage to existing landscape character or distinctive features or elements; and/or addition of new uncharacteristic, noticeable features or elements (i.e. road infrastructure).
	Beneficial	Partial or noticeable improvement of landscape character by restoration of existing features or elements; or addition of new characteristic features or elements or removal of noticeable features or elements.
Minor	Adverse	Slight loss or damage to existing landscape character of one (maybe more) key features and elements; and/or addition of new uncharacteristic features and elements.
	Beneficial	Slight improvement of landscape character by the restoration of one (maybe more) key existing features and elements; and/or the addition of new characteristic features.
Negligible	Adverse	Very minor loss, damage or alteration to existing landscape character of one or more features and elements.
	Beneficial	Very minor noticeable improvement of character by the restoration of one or more existing features and elements.
No Change		No noticeable loss, damage or alteration to character or features and/or elements.

ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS

Visual effects are changes in the composition and character of views available to people in the area affected by the Proposed Scheme. People who experience these effects may be living or working in the area, enjoying recreational activities or simply passing through. The assessment considers the overall consequence of the effects on the pleasantness of the view or outlook that people enjoy and their general visual amenity.

Visual effects can include changes to:

- The content and character of views; and
- General visual amenity.

To establish the degree of change anticipated as a result of the Proposed Scheme, it is important to understand the baseline situation in terms of the availability of views experienced by people within the local area and their visual amenity.

View value

Judging the value of each view is part of the process of determining the sensitivity of visual receptors. A high value view could be indicated by planning designations or heritage assets as well as other indicators such as coverage within guidebooks or tourist maps, the provision of visitor facilities or references in literature. The typical descriptors for value are set out in **Table** .

Table 4 – View Value

View value level	Typical description / criteria / key indicators
High	A view of a landscape of high value. A view identified as of value on an OS or other map, or in a guidebook, or signposted on site. A designed view related to a designated heritage asset.
Medium	A view of a landscape of medium value. A view where adverse elements may form noticeable parts of its composition.
Low	A view of a landscape of low value. An undistinguished view and/or where adverse elements form clearly apparent or dominant parts of its composition.

Susceptibility to change

The susceptibility of different visual receptors to changes in views and visual amenity is mainly a function of the primary activity of people experiencing the view at a location. This helps to determine the extent to which their attention or interest is likely to be focused on the view. For example, a user of a recreational trail, using a Public Right of Way for the enjoyment of the scenery is considered to be of higher susceptibility than someone at their place of work.

Visual sensitivity

The visual sensitivity of receptors is derived by professional judgement based on the value of the view and susceptibility of the receptor. LA 107 Table 3.41: Visual sensitivity (susceptibility and value) sets out typical descriptions of visual sensitivity that have been adopted for this assessment, as outlined below in **Table** .

Table 5 – Visual sensitivity

Rating	Typical descriptions
Very High	Static views from and of major tourist attractions; Views from and of very important national/ international landscape, cultural/historical sites (e.g. National Parks, UNESCO World Heritage sites);

	Receptors engaged in specific activities for enjoyment of dark skies.
High sensitivity	Views by users of nationally important PRoW/ Recreational trails (e.g. national trails, long distance footpaths); Views by users of public open spaces for enjoyment of the countryside (e.g. country parks); Static views from dense residential areas, longer transient views from designated public open space, recreational areas; Views from and of rare designated landscape of national importance.
Medium sensitivity	Static views from less populated residential areas, schools and other institutional buildings and their outdoor areas; Views by outdoor workers; Transient views from local/ regional areas such as public open space, scenic roads, railways or waterways, users of local/regional designated tourist routes of moderate importance; Views from and of landscapes of regional importance.
Low sensitivity	Views by users of main roads or passengers in public transport on main arterial routes; Views by indoor workers; Views by users of recreational/ formal sports facilities where the landscape is secondary to enjoyment of the sport; Views by users of local public open spaces of limited importance with limited variety or distinctiveness
Negligible	Quick transient views such as from fast moving vehicles; Views from industrial area, land awaiting re-development; Views from landscape of no importance with no variety or distinctiveness.

Magnitude of change

Magnitude of change combines judgements about size and scale of impact of the development, geographical extent, whether reversible or irreversible and whether short or long term in duration. Magnitude of change considers the scale and nature of change within the view, taking into consideration its duration, distance from the viewer, direction, the receptor's speed of movement, screening (both proposed or removal of existing vegetation) and primary embedded mitigation measures. **Table** describes the magnitude of change ratings for carrying out the visual effects section of the assessment, as taken from LA 107 Table 3.43.

Table 6 - Visual magnitude of change

Rating	Typical descriptions
Major	The Proposed Scheme, or a part of it, would become the dominant feature or focal point of the view.
Moderate	The Proposed Scheme, or a part of it, would form a noticeable feature or element of the view which is readily apparent to the receptor.

Minor	The Proposed Scheme, or a part of it, would be perceptible but not alter the overall balance of features and elements that comprise the existing view.
Negligible	Only a very small part of the Proposed Scheme would be discernible, or being at such a distance it would form a barely noticeable feature or element of the view.
No Change	No part of the Proposed Scheme, activity associated with it, is discernible.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

The significance level attributed to each effect has been assessed based on the sensitivity of the affected receptor(s) and the predicted magnitude of change arising from the Proposed Scheme. The sensitivity of the affected receptor is assessed on a scale of very high, high, medium, low and negligible, and the magnitude of change is assessed on a scale of major, moderate, minor, negligible and no change.

An indication of the interactions between sensitivity and magnitude of change and the likely resulting significance of effects are outlined in **Table** which reflects the table presented in LA104, Table 3.8.1 Significance Matrix.

Table 7 – Significance of effect matrix

		Magnitude of change				
		No Change	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major
Sensitivity	Very High	Neutral	Slight	Moderate to Large	Large to Very Large	Very Large
	High	Neutral	Slight	Slight to Moderate	Moderate to Large	Large to Very Large
	Medium	Neutral	Neutral to Slight	Slight	Moderate	Moderate to Large
	Low	Neutral	Neutral to Slight	Neutral to Slight	Slight	Slight to Moderate
	Negligible	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral to Slight	Neutral to Slight	Slight