

Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document 2022

Huntingdonshire District Council | Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary
Planning Document 2022

Appendix 1 - Methodology for local communities to assess landscape and townscape character

16 Appendix 1

16.1 The following detailed methodology is intended to support parish councils and local community groups primarily when preparing a neighbourhood plan, however it can also be used by a wider range of people and for a wider range of purposes. The methodology consists of five key stages with the steps and outputs (the green boxes) within each stage summarised in Figure 16.1 and detailed over the next few pages. It also details the outputs that should be produced at the end of each stage as these will direct the next stage of work. The methodology provides flexibility so that depending on the scope and focus of the assessment, the depth and breadth of assessment at each step can be tailored to the individual project.

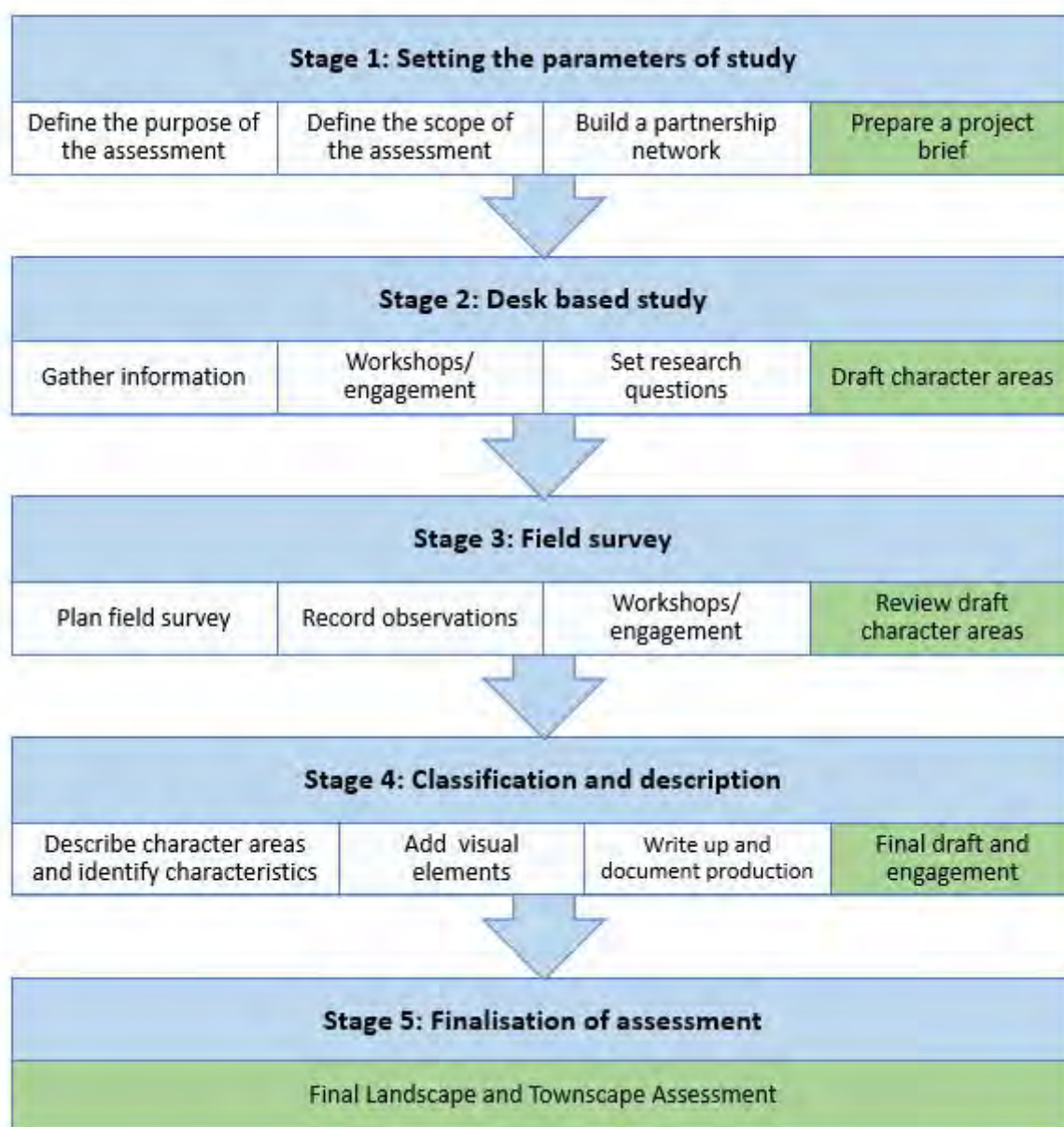


Figure 16.1 Summary of the key stages, steps and outputs of undertaking a landscape and townscape character

Stage 1: Setting the parameters of study

This stage consists of the following steps:

- Define the purpose of the assessment
- Define the scope of the project
- Build a partnership network

At the end of this stage, the following output should be delivered:

- Prepare a project brief

Step 1: Define the purpose of the assessment

- 16.2** Having a clear direction and aim for the assessment is fundamental for it to run smoothly. It is a good idea to start this process with a group of core individuals who will be the key people carrying out and managing the assessment. A consensus can be reached with varying thoughts and opinions considered.
- 16.3** In setting a purpose, consider what the assessment is seeking to achieve. For example, is it to support landscape and design policies for a neighbourhood plan, or is it looking particularly at heritage assets or landscape?
- 16.4** From this, consider what other supporting documents or documents that the assessment could complement. These could include:
- The local planning authority's development plan including the local plan or area action plans
 - Any development management documents or supplementary planning documents/ guidance
 - Conservation area statements and assessments
 - Any neighbouring parish/town council neighbourhood plans
 - Other parish council projects or parish plans
- 16.5** Identifying these will help set the context to the study and offer a guide to what documentation is already available that can be utilised to save time and resources.
- 16.6** It is important to keep in mind that your assessment should be looking to guide future development proposals in your settlement in much greater detail than policies in the Local Plan.

Step 2: Define the scope of the project

- 16.7** Once the purpose and wider context of the assessment is known, define the scope of the assessment. To do this, within the core group tasked with producing the assessment, consider the following questions as early as possible in the process:
- What is the emphasis of the assessment?
 - What skills and specialisms are available to those undertaking the assessment?
 - What will the geographic extent be?
 - What level of detail is sought?
 - Will further assistance be needed?
 - What information has already been published?

- 16.8** It is important to be realistic at this stage. Practical elements like what resources, timescales and people power are available and needed should be considered. This is key to do as early in the process as possible to ensure the project runs smoothly and that volunteers do not get fatigued with the process or take on too much work. It is also an opportunity to recruit people to the project if people power is identified as being an issue.
- 16.9** There is not a set amount of time that can or should be spent on any of the stages or steps within this methodology as this will vary group to group and project to project. It is most important that the evidence is robust and the assessment thorough.
- 16.10** Taking into consideration the local resources and scale of the assessment, a rough timeline of when to achieve certain milestones should be devised. This is to ensure the project has an end date and stays to a reasonable time. If the document is being prepared as part of a neighbourhood plan, then there may be some outside pressure in terms of timelines to get aspects of the assessment done, these should be considered here too. If forming part of a neighbourhood plan evidence base, additional considerations around consultation events and what aspects of the neighbourhood plan the assessment will feed into should also be taken into account so that the undertaking of the assessment is placed within its full context and to avoid unnecessary delays.

Step 3: Build a partnership network

- 16.11** Following the identification of parameters to the assessment and its scope, links with local community networks will need to be made as early as possible. Often the most important groups will be your parish council or your local residents' or community association. You should discuss the assessment process with these groups and ensure they are committed to taking the project forward. A diverse range of groups should also be included to accurately reflect the whole community. The wider you consult, the broader your support will be. The best way to ensure everyone is aware of the project is a leaflet drop to every home and put information on any local websites/ social media platforms. Groups within a community to involve can include:

- Local residents
- Farmers and landowners
- Local businesses
- Local churches and faith groups
- Local environmental organisations
- Local sports clubs and interest groups
- Neighbourhood watch groups
- The Local Authority

Output: Prepare a project brief

At this stage, a project brief should be prepared. This should be a document setting out what the purpose and scope of the assessment will be. It should also include what resources, budget and projected timescales are required.

This document should be circulated to all those involved in the project. A brief bulletin or note on any parish or village website or in a parish newsletter could be published setting out the key points and timelines for the rest of the community.

Stage 2: Desk based study

This stage consists of the following steps:

- Gather information
- Workshops/ engagement
- Set research questions

At the end of this stage, the following output should be delivered:

- Draft landscape and townscape character areas

Step 1: Gather information

16.12 It is important that plenty of time is dedicated to this stage. Do not rush this part of the process as having a thorough understanding of the documented local area and context in addition to the local knowledge available is crucial when going into the field work stage. It also adds robustness to the conclusions of the assessment. A wide range of resources can be used at this stage to provide both high level and detailed level assessments of the area, including:

- Maps
- Historical and geographical texts and records
- Local libraries and archives
- Local knowledge
- Photographs
- Parish/ Town Council records
- Church records and institutional records
- Planning permissions and history
- Other landscape and townscape studies
- Conservation area statements and assessments
- Building types from the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD

16.13 It is important to get the local community involved at this stage. Ask for resources, there may be members of the community who have private collections of old OS maps, photos and memoirs that can provide added value and insight into the meaning and direction of how the area has evolved over time. The more involvement there is from the local community, a better understanding of what is needed in the area and what is important to the local community can be achieved thus adding extra value to the assessment. Try to cross check information from individuals to enhance accuracy.

16.14 The data and information gathered at this stage is useful in developing an initial understanding of the form and character of the settlement, its relationship with the immediate landscape edge and the wider landscape setting.

Step 2: Workshops/ engagement

16.15 While data is being collected, it is useful at this stage to set up workshops, perhaps in the community centre or village hall. Treat this as an opportunity to get all individuals working on the assessment together and look at what has changed within the area and spark discussion and insight to how and why the landscape and townscape has evolved over time and where it might be heading. Refer to any information that has been collected to date and maybe identify areas where further research would be beneficial.

16.16 At these workshops, it would be useful to split the group into several smaller groups for discussion and thought mapping. Each group could have a large-scale map of the area (mapping services are available from HDC upon request) and annotate it using post-it notes, highlighters etc. to identify the indicative character areas, key changes and record ideas. To get the discussion going aspects to consider can include:

- What are the key landscape features?
- What shape and direction has the settlement developed in?
- What traditional industries are there?
- How can character areas be distinguished?
- What are the key buildings and styles?
- What drivers and pressures has the settlement and surrounding landscape faced over time and how have they shaped them?
- What can be done to manage these drivers and pressures? For example, what planning, conservation, landscape management and enhancement priorities are there?

16.17 The gathering information step and workshops should now be starting to highlight what character areas are present in the settlement. These can be broad areas outlined on a map, with bullet points of key features and characteristics. To assist in separating character areas, you can use the identified building types in the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD as a starting point.

Step 3: Set research questions

16.18 Afterwards, consider what research questions could be set to assist in further directing research and field study. This will also help in ensuring that the aims of the project are met and helps guide the assessment by bringing meaning to the findings as the information gathered can be shaped to answer specific questions. When creating these research questions consider what information has already been collected and what further information will be needed through the field survey. Consider how these questions and the information gained can be categorised and analysed.

16.19 It is recommended the assessment takes a holistic look assessing the following strands and how they relate to one another:

- Natural environment
- Built environment
- Cultural assets and perceptions

16.20 Consider what themes you wish to assess within each of these, for example within the landscape strand you can assess character, form, function, setting, topography and vegetation. For the buildings strand you can assess materials, layout, scale, density, form, integral green space, screening and land use. For the cultural assets and perceptions strand you can assess views, accessibility and permeability, heritage assets, cultural and social assets. These are suggestions to help you get started; there may be more you wish to research or specific ones depending on the nature, scope and purpose of the assessment.

16.21 The workshop should provide some direction on these research questions. However when they have been drafted, it may be worthwhile holding an additional workshop so that the whole group and or wider community can review them before going out on field surveys. It also keeps the local community involved in the process and shows their input is shaping the assessment.

16.22 To assist in assessing these strands and themes, a series of example research questions have been devised in the below table. These can be adapted and added to depending on the focus and scope of each assessment.

Landscape

- How does the area relate to the wider countryside? Has it features in common with the surrounding landscape?
- Is the area part of a larger landscape feature such as a ridge or field pattern that is characteristic of the wider area?
- What is the current use of the area?
- What function does the area serve in the wider landscape? For example, is it part of the countryside setting of a built-up area, or does it bring views of the countryside landscape into a settlement?

Topography

- Is the area situated within a distinct topographical feature such as a river valley or hill?
- Is the area flat, sloping or undulating?
- Are there any permanent or seasonal watercourses or ponds within or on the boundaries of the area?
- How does the topography affect the area's sense of enclosure or openness?
- Can the whole area be seen as one entity or are there parts of it hidden behind higher land or built structures?

Vegetation

- Are there individual trees within the area which make a significant contribution to the appearance of the locality?
- Are there indications of historic planting such as historic hedgerows, specimen trees or formal planting?
- Does existing vegetation include locally characteristic, native species?
- What natural habitats are provided by existing vegetation?

Townscape

- Is it contained within well-defined boundaries?
- What is the current use of the area?
- What function does the area serve in the wider townscape? For example, is it part of an area of similar developments or does it provide a contrast?

Structures

- If the screening includes walls or fencing, is it typical of the landscape and/ or townscape character area? is it important to the area's historic character?
- What examples of green space or public space are there? How do they sit within the townscape?
- Are there any individual structures which stand out as significantly contributing or detracting from the character of the area?
- What contribution do these make to the landscape or townscape? Do they enhance or detract from its quality and character?
- How do the height, materials, style and uses of nearby buildings relate to the area?
- Do nearby buildings and structures display features that are typical of the townscape character area?
- Is there a clear pattern or structure to the surrounding buildings and streets?

Views and vistas

- Does the area provide an interesting or significant skyline?
- Do the views to/ from the area include heritage assets whose setting needs to be safeguarded?
- Does the area terminate a view or vista within the townscape?

Accessibility and permeability

- What physical access links the area to existing facilities and communities? Are there any obstacles which hinder access?
- What level of physical connectivity does the landscape and/or townscape character area benefit from?
- What physical access connections does the site or area currently have?

Historical, cultural and social assets

- Do vehicles, moving or parked, have an impact on the ambience of the area?
- What are the activity levels like in the area? Is the area busy? Are there clusters of particular activities?
- Is the area associated with particular cultural uses? For example, does it contain a museum or cemetery?
- Are there features which may provoke memories? For example, does the area include an old school or hospital?
- Are there any known associations with famous people or events?
- Is the area of high archaeological potential?
- Are there known designated or non-designated heritage assets within the area? How do these contribute to the character of the area?

Light and noise

- What are the existing levels of artificial illumination in the area?

Output: Draft landscape and townscape character areas

Following the desk based research and community engagement, a list of draft landscape and townscape character areas should have been identified with a list of key characteristics and features. These can be loosely drawn on a map. These areas can then be tested and assessed further during the field survey. You may find that some boundaries need to be changed, additional character areas identified, or some should have sub-character areas whereby they share similar characteristics/ features but are also distinct.

Stage 3: Field survey

This stage consists of the following steps:

- Plan the field survey
- Record observations
- Workshops/ engagement

At the end of this stage, the following output should be delivered:

- Review draft landscape and townscape character areas

Step 1: Plan the field survey

16.23 Following the identification of the draft landscape and townscape character areas and research questions, planning the field survey to assess these needs to be undertaken. When planning the field survey, consider the following:

- Where and how far will the survey go?
- How long do you expect it to take?
- How many people will do this?
- Providing guidance on how and what to assess to ensure consistency in the conclusions made if going out in several groups
- Taking photos and drawing on maps

16.24 It is useful to go out on site visits in at least pairs. This allows for discussion and different insights to be identified. It also allows for greater discussion after the field surveys on what was seen and experienced.

Step 2: Record observations

16.25 To record information and observations, you can use the field survey template on the next page as a guide to the survey. This will help to provide more consistency between assessments if done by multiple groups of people. It has scope to be adapted to the specific requirements of the study, particularly if there is a strong local knowledge base or if additional information comes to light.

16.26 In addition to completing the field survey form, ensure that photographs and possibly sketches are made throughout. These can be used later in the final document.



Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Character Area Assessment Field Survey

The assessor should be familiar with any survey guidance and follow any relevant health and safety guidance. Remember to take photos and maps to assist in the identification and assessment process.

Character Area:

Assessor(s):

Date of survey:

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT STRAND

Think about the character, form, function and setting of the local landscape, how it interacts with the edge of the townscape and with the wider landscape setting, topography and vegetation.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT STRAND

Think about the structures, materials, layout, scale, density, form, green spaces, screening and land uses within the townscape.

CULTURAL ASSETS AND PERCEPTIONS STRAND

Think about the views into and out of the settlement, the accessibility and movability within the built form and what historic, cultural and social assets there are.

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16.27 Once out on the field survey, keep the following in mind (in addition to the research questions):

- How do design features create a broader sense of place?
- Are there certain streets/areas that have a different design and feel about them that make them distinct from other streets/ areas?
- How do the landscape and townscape edges respond to each other and has this impacted the location and direction of development?
- Are there particular areas that can be improved? Start to think about design principles or what development proposals should seek to do to conserve or enhance an area.

16.28 In terms of analysing information, consider how hard copies of field surveys will be stored and who can access these to enable them to be referred to later. Also consider how they will be analysed and by whom. When starting to analyse the observations, it may be useful to start identifying key themes or categorise by strand so trends across the character areas can be more easily identified. Think about how coding and using different colours can be used to illustrate similarities and differences more easily. These findings should also be recorded electronically to enable them to be shared easily with group members.

16.29 At this point, the additional information and insights from the field survey will start to answer the research questions previously identified in combination with any previously gathered data. Further analysis of the results should be undertaken to tie in with the desk based study and conclude:

- what the key features and characteristics of the area is
- the interaction and relationships between the landscape, landscape edge and townscape
- how the area has changed over time

16.30 You may be able to start developing ideas on design principles and guiding principles for future development. These could be identified as 'development proposals should' principles whereby a proposal made within that character area should demonstrate how it responds to those principles.

Step 3: Workshops/ engagement

16.31 At these workshops, discuss the findings of the field surveys. Here it would be useful to have already categorised the findings into strands and themes to aid more structured, focused discussions. These workshops are an opportunity for wider discussion and thought generation on what drivers and pressures have shaped the landscape and townscape of the settlement, what sort of policies can be pursued in a neighbourhood plan, and if further survey or secondary data research is required to fill in any gaps. It also keeps the group and wider community actively involved in the process and checking whether the assessment is answering the scope and purpose first defined. From here the final character areas should be becoming more set.

Output: Review draft landscape and townscape character areas

The additional information gained from the field survey should spark a review of the original list of landscape and townscape areas. The field survey may have highlighted the boundaries of some of these should be changed. It may be apparent that some character areas should be merged or split up, or there may even be some sub character areas identified within character areas. There may be need for further secondary research.

Stage 4: Classification and description

This stage consists of the following steps:

- Describe character areas and identify their key characteristics
- Add visual elements
- Write up and document production

At the end of this stage, the following output should be delivered:

- Final draft and engagement

Step 1: Describe character areas and identify their key characteristics

16.32 Following the desk based study and the field survey, the final set of character areas should be identified alongside a description of what they are and a list of each of their key characteristics. Here you need to flesh out the information with the evidence from the secondary research and field survey to draw together a full draft of text to put in the final assessment.

16.33 To structure the text within each character area, you could split the text into the three strands and include subheadings relating to the themes assessed. If you are seeking to identify development management principles or 'development proposals should' principles, these may form a nice conclusion to the character area. These can be a series of bullet points that can be used to guide planning proposals and support neighbourhood plan policies, opportunity areas or site allocations. This will provide applicants/ agents/ landowners/ developers with a sound starting point from which to shape development proposals on a site and understand its relationship to its setting and locally distinctive features. These are beneficial for successful integration of a development scheme into the surrounding landscape and/ or townscape. It also provides a link between the assessment and any neighbourhood plan policies which can then be used to implement these principles.

Step 2: Add visual elements

16.34 Following the written text of each character area, adding some graphics and visuals is a key part to bringing the assessment to life and illustrating the characteristics that define them. These visuals can include:

- Character area maps
- Historic maps
- Photographs taken from the field survey and historic photographs
- Illustrations and diagrams of architecture, townscape or views
- Aerial photograph with key views indicated, landmarks, key roads etc.

16.35 Deciding on what visual aids are most appropriate is something to discuss as a group and may be dependent on the skills and resources available. In any assessment, photographs and a map of character areas must be provided in order for readers to engage and best use the assessment.

16.36 These graphics and visuals should tie in with the supporting text and help to bolster the assessment. For example, if a character area had an example of Tudor architecture and a historic market town layout, then a photograph of the market square and an example building from the period would be appropriate.

Step 3: Write up and document production

16.37 Once the draft text and visuals have been put together, final edits and polishing of the document need to be undertaken. It is a good idea to have a dedicated proof-reader in the group, possibly someone who has not undertaken any of the written aspects. This approach will highlight anything that does not quite make sense or flow well and ensure consistency in the level of detail, terminology and formatting throughout.

Output: Final draft and engagement

The key output here is the final draft version of the assessment. Having a final consultation on this final draft is optional but it may be a good idea to have a final engagement opportunity with the local community, particularly if there are any aspects of the assessment that the group feel could be bolstered.

Stage 5: Finalisation of assessment

This stage, the final output is:

- Final Landscape and Townscape Assessment

Output: Final Landscape and Townscape Assessment

Following the final edits, polishing and any engagement felt necessary, you will have a final Landscape and Townscape Assessment of your settlement. Well done for getting to this stage, don't forget to celebrate this milestone!

This document can now form part of a local evidence base for a neighbourhood plan, be of local interest and be used in the shaping of development proposals and policies in the local area.