ROWELLIAN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING LTD

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

Terms of Reference

1. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is the process by which the effects of proposals upon the character of the receiving landscape and the enjoyment of that landscape by those who would view it are considered. It can be undertaken as part of a wider Environmental Impact Assessment, or as a standalone exercise.
2. A less formal Landscape and Visual Appraisal can also be undertaken, which considers the effects upon landscape and visual receptors in a more narrative manner and does not include a formal assessment of effects. This is normally undertaken as part of a collaborative design process, or for smaller schemes in less sensitive locations where a full assessment is not required.
3. The current national guidance is Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013). This methodology has been prepared in compliance with this guidance.

Scope of Assessment

4. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments are essentially two separate assessments within one document, as follows:

    - Landscape Impact Assessment assesses effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right.
    - Visual Impact Assessment assesses effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people.

5. In both cases, the scale of the assessment must be appropriate and proportional to the scale of the project that is being assessed.
6. Given the subjective nature of landscape and visual judgements, transparency is of critical importance to enable decision makers to follow and understand the process by which judgements have been arrived at. It is also important that assessments are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced landscape professionals.

Structure of Assessment

7. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments will be broadly structured as follows:

    - Introduction
    - Planning Policy and Guidance Context
    - Landscape Baseline
    - Visual Baseline
    - Description of the Proposals
    - Assessment of Landscape Effects
    - Assessment of Visual Effects
    - Cumulative Effects (EIA only)
    - Summary and Conclusion

8. In the case of Landscape and Visual Appraisals, the above structure will be simplified.

9. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment will be accompanied by a set of appendices that include relevant information such as maps, lists of detailed policies, photographs and photomontages.

PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE CONTEXT

10. This section will set out the policy context in which landscape and visual effects are being considered.

11. It will consider a range of published policy and guidance documents, including the following sources:

    - National planning policy for the relevant nation
    - Adopted Local Plan
    - Supplementary Planning Documents
    - Emerging Local Plan (where considered relevant)
    - National Landscape Management Plans
    - Adopted Neighbourhood Plan
    - National Planning Practice Guidance (England)
    - Supplementary Planning Guidance

12. For each type of document available, the relevant policies in each document will be listed or summarised.

LANDSCAPE BASELINE ASSESSMENT

Introduction

13. This section will present the relevant landscape baseline information gathered from desktop research and field survey. Its purpose is to identify the relevant landscape receptors of the proposals, and to assess their sensitivity.
14. Landscape receptors are defined by the Landscape Institute as:

    "Defined aspects of the landscape resource that have the potential to be affected by a proposal."

15. The published guidance further clarifies this as "*including the constituent elements of the landscape, its specific aesthetic and perceptual qualities and the character of the landscape in different areas."*

Study Area

16. A study area will be given, which represents the scale of the assessment. It will be represented as a radius drawn from the Site boundary. The size of the study area will be a professional judgement, informed by the type and size of the proposals, and the context of the Site. It will be proportional, representing the extent to which significant effects could potentially occur.

Data Sources

17. The baseline landscape assessment will draw upon a range of following publicly available information sources, including the following:
    - Ordnance Survey current and historic mapping
    - Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) online mapping
    - Local Plan policy maps and documents
    - Google Earth aerial imagery (current and historic)
    - Google Streetview imagery
    - Public Rights of Way Definitive Maps
    - Natural England's National Character Assessment
    - Published landscape character assessments

Description of the Site and its Wider Setting

18. The fieldwork will be summarised, in terms of the characterising elements of the Site and those of its wider landscape setting. This is essential in understanding the character of the Site itself, and how it relates to the landscape in which it occurs. It is likely that these characterising elements will form landscape receptors.

Topography

19. The topography of the Site and wider study area will be described, and in particular any topographical trends that influence the Site's relationship with its landscape setting.

Recreational Access

20. The accessibility of the Site will be described, along with any recreational routes and spaces open to the public within the Site's wider landscape setting. This can be a determinant in the value of a landscape.

Published Landscape Character Context

21. A summary will be given of the published character context of the Site, at national, regional and local scale as applicable. It will normally cover all character types and areas that fall within the study area.

22. For each scale and area, the following information will be summarised:

    - Broad description
    - Key characteristics
    - Landscape Strategy

23. For key characteristics, an appraisal will be undertaken as to which characteristics are representative of the Site and its landscape setting.

24. Where more than one character type or area falls within the study area, commentary will be given as to the extent to which each is represented by the Site and its setting.

25. Landscape Character Areas may form landscape receptors, but this will depend upon the scale of the proposals and the extent to which the Site and its setting represent this published character.

Designations

26. Any statutory or non-statutory designations that occur within the Site or its wider landscape setting will be identified. Only those designations relevant to the assessment of landscape and visual effects will be considered.

27. These will primarily relate to landscape designations at national or local level (e.g. National Landscapes or Areas of Special Landscape Quality), as well as designations relating to the condition and accessibility of a landscape such as Conservation Areas and Registered Common Land. Historic asset designations such as Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings may be considered, but only in the context of adding time depth to the landscape and not as receptors in their own right to avoid duplication with other technical disciplines.

Illustrative Viewpoints

28. Illustrative viewpoints may be used to effectively communicate specific or general character points. These may be presented as panoramic or single frame images.

Identification of Landscape Receptors

29. The landscape baseline section will conclude with a summary of the character of the Site and its landscape setting and the extent to which it represents the local and national published landscape character.

30. This appraisal will be used to define a list of the landscape receptors that will be taken forward in the assessment.

31. Landscape receptors can be specific physical elements, perceptual characteristics of the Site or its wider setting, or the combined character of geographic areas. The selection of receptors is a matter of professional judgement for each assessment, depending upon a range of factors including the size and character of the Site, the nature and scale of the development, and the presence of any relevant designations.

Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity

32. For each identified receptor, judgements will be made as to their susceptibility to the type of change proposed, and their relative value to society. These judgements will then be combined to derive an overall relative sensitivity score.

Assessment of landscape receptor susceptibility

33. Receptor susceptibility is defined 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 planning policies and strategies.

34. For receptors relating to specific landscape elements or perceptual qualities, this relates to the contribution that the element or quality makes to the prevailing landscape character (positively or negatively) and the extent to which the proposals have the potential to affect that contribution.

35. For receptors relating to the overall character of geographic areas, this relates to the existing condition of the landscape, and the potential for this to change as a result of the proposals.

36. Each receptor will be scored on a relative scale of Negligible to High, with justification given to enable results to be interrogated. Indicative criteria for each score for the two receptor types are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Susceptibility of Landscape Receptors

Score	Type	Definition
High	Element/Perceptual	Receptor makes a strong positive contribution to landscape character. Proposals will significantly reduce this contribution.
	Geographic	Highly intact landscape with very little ability to accommodate change that is not in keeping with its key qualities.
Medium	Element/Perceptual	Receptor makes a notable contribution to landscape character. Proposals will reduce this contribution.
	Geographic	Relatively intact landscape with some evidence of recent change. Some ability to accommodate further change without loss of character.
Low	Element/Perceptual	Receptor makes a minor or neutral contribution to landscape character. Proposals are unlikely to materially affect this contribution.
	Geographic	Landscape displays a high level of human activity, and the proposals will be in keeping with this activity.
Negligible	Element/Perceptual	Detracting influence that has a negative effect upon the landscape character. Proposals will reduce this negative effect.
	Geographic	Degraded landscape in which the proposals are likely to result in neutral or positive change.

Assessment of landscape receptor value

37. The value of landscape receptors is defined as the relative value that is attached to the receptor by society at large. The guidance notes[1] that a landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons, for example a landscape that is perceived to be 'untidy' by some may possess a high conservation value.

38. The clearest indicator of landscape value is designation, and landscapes can be designated at a national (e.g. National Landscapes) or local level (e.g. Special Landscape Areas). The guidance is clear, however, that there should not be an over-reliance on designations as the sole indicator of value[2]. In particular, some local authorities do not designate landscapes at a local level and there is therefore an onus to consider these landscapes under clearly stated and recognised criteria.

[1] Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition, page 157
[2] ibid, paragraph 5.45

39. When assessing the value of landscape-scale receptors, it is important to use a common set of criteria to enable the results to be interrogated. The following criteria are set out in the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations, and are considered the most up-to-date and relevant:

    - Natural heritage
    - Cultural heritage
    - Landscape condition
    - Associations
    - Distinctiveness
    - Recreational
    - Perceptual (scenic)
    - Perceptual (wildness and tranquillity)

40. Each receptor will be scored on a relative scale of Negligible to High, with justification given to enable results to be interrogated. Indicative criteria for each score for the two receptor types are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Value of Landscape Receptors

Score	Type	Definition
High	Element/Perceptual	Key characteristics or special qualities of designated landscapes.
	Geographic	Designated landscapes and the settings of nationally designated landscapes.
Medium	Element/Perceptual	Key characteristics of landscapes, or contributors to the stated value criteria.
	Geographic	Landscapes that represent a number of the stated value criteria and are representative of the published character.
Low	Element/Perceptual	Receptors that make a minor or neutral contribution to landscape value.
	Geographic	Landscapes that represent few of the stated value criteria and display a high level of human activity.
Negligible	Element/Perceptual	Detracting influences within landscapes, which reduce its overall value.
	Geographic	Degraded landscapes that are not valued by society at large.

Assessment of landscape receptor sensitivity

41. To derive an overall sensitivity score for each receptor, the judgements of susceptibility and value are combined.

42. As a general rule, scores will be combined as set out within Table 3 below, although in certain circumstances professional judgement will be applied. Where this is the case, the reasons for doing so will be clearly set out.

Table 3: Assessment of Landscape Receptor Sensitivity

		Susceptibility			
		High	**Medium**	**Low**	**Negligible**
Value	**High**	High	Medium/ High	Medium	Low/ Medium
	Medium	Medium/ High	Medium	Low/ Medium	Low
	Low	Medium	Low/ Medium	Low	Negligible
	Negligible	Low/ Medium	Low	Negligible	Negligible

43. The results of the sensitivity assessment will be summarised in a table at the end of the chapter for ease of interpretation and comparison.

VISUAL BASELINE ASSESSMENT

Introduction

44. This section will summarise the results of the deskwork and fieldwork to identify the visual receptors of the proposals, and to assess their relative sensitivity.
45. Visual receptors are defined as:

    "Individuals and/or defined groups of people who have the potential to be affected by a proposal."

Identifying Visual Receptors

46. The baseline topography of the study area will be considered alongside the maximum height of the proposals to derive a zone of theoretical visibility of the proposals.

47. Public routes (e.g. public highways and Public Rights of Way) and public spaces (e.g. public parks and Open Access Land) will then be visited as part of the field survey and where it is judged that the proposals may be visible, a photographic viewpoint or a series of viewpoints will be taken.

48. The occupants of private dwellings may also be considered as visual receptors, and this will be a matter of professional judgement for each individual assessment.

49. Viewpoint locations may be agreed in advance with the Local Planning Authority.

Photographic Viewpoints

50. Viewpoints are used to assess the effects upon visual receptors, and they are generally taken from the location at which the proposals would be most clearly visible to the receptor, to represent the worst-case scenario.

51. In cases where the receptor location cannot be accessed, for example private residences, reverse viewpoints may be used which view the receptor location from the Site, or viewpoints from public locations which show the receptor and Site in context.

52. Viewpoints can comprise three types[3]:

    - Representative viewpoints, which represent the experiences of different types of visual receptor.
    - Specific viewpoints, which represent key and sometimes promoted viewpoints within the landscape.
    - Illustrative viewpoints, which demonstrate a particular effect or specific issues, for example the screening effect of vegetation or structures within a landscape.

[3] Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition, paragraph 6.19

53. Fieldwork will generally only be undertaken when visibility is good or very good, to ensure that the Site is readily visible in long range views.

54. Images will be captured using a digital SLR camera with a 35mm focal distance, to best simulate the experience of the human eye. Viewpoints will be taken as overlapping panoramic images.

55. Viewpoints will be presented as framed panoramic images that comply with the relevant Visualisation Type as set out in Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19[4], depending upon the type of assessment being undertaken. Where Type 3 and Type 4 Visualisations are used, then comparative 'before and after' images will be presented.

56. For each viewpoint, the relevant visual receptor or receptors will be identified.

Assessment of Visual Receptor Sensitivity

57. The sensitivity of visual receptors will be derived from judgements of the susceptibility of each receptor to the type of change proposed, and the value attached to their visual experience.

58. The baseline sensitivity of a receptor will not only consider the composition of the view, but also the nature of the receptor's activity when they are experiencing it, for example a view from an office window is generally less sensitive than one taken whilst undertaking recreational walking in the countryside.

Assessment of visual receptor susceptibility

59. The susceptibility of visual receptors primarily relates to the occupation or activity of people experiencing the view at particular locations, and the extent to which their attention or interest may be focussed on the view and the visual amenity that they experience. For example, those experiencing a view from an office window whilst at work are generally less sensitive than those experiencing a view whilst undertaking recreational walking in the countryside. Where residents at home are scoped into an assessment, they are considered to be highly susceptible to change.

60. Using the viewpoints, each receptor will be considered and judgements made of their relative susceptibility to change on a scale of High to Negligible. An indicative framework for these judgements is presented in Table 4 below.

[4] LI TGN 06/19: Visual Representation of Development Proposals

Table 4: Susceptibility of Visual Receptors

Score	Definition
High	Receptors undertaking an activity in which visual amenity is of prime importance. Examples include recreational users of the countryside and residents at home where clear primary views of the Site are possible.
Medium	Receptors undertaking an activity in which visual amenity is a consideration, but there are mitigating factors. Examples include the users of rural lanes, those engaging in recreational activities such as golf or non-powered watersports, and residents at home where primary views are not possible.
Low	Receptors undertaking an activity where visual amenity is a minor consideration. Examples include users of busy public highways and those engaged in outdoor sports where there is little focus on the surroundings.
Negligible	Receptors undertaking an activity where there is little focus upon the setting, for example those at work or users of dual carriageways and motorways.

Assessment of Visual Receptor Value

61. Judgements will be made as to the value placed upon the views experienced by receptors by society at large. This can be, for example, by designation or cultural association. Typical examples of highly valued views are those from celebrated routes such as National Trails, those from heritage assets such as Registered Parks and Gardens, or those that have been celebrated in art or literature.

62. Using the viewpoints as well as the desktop research findings, each receptor will be considered and judgements made of their relative susceptibility to change on a scale of High to Negligible. An indicative framework for these judgements is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Value of Visual Receptors

Score	Definition
High	Views that are highly valued by society. Examples include views within designated landscapes where detracting features are largely absent, views from promoted routes such as National Trails or Long Distance Recreational Routes, or culturally recognised views.
Medium	Views to which society is likely to attribute some value. Examples include views of relatively intact countryside or historic townscapes.
Low	Views that are not particularly valued by society because of the presence of detracting elements. Examples include views containing modern settlement or busy roads.
Negligible	Views that are not valued at all by society. These are likely to be dominated by detracting features such as industrial areas or unrestored mineral workings.

Assessment of visual receptor sensitivity

63. To derive an overall sensitivity score for each receptor, the judgements of susceptibility and value are combined.

64. As a general rule, scores will be combined as set out within Table 6 below, although in certain circumstances professional judgement will be applied. Where this is the case, the reasons for doing so will be clearly set out.

Table 6: Assessment of Visual Receptor Sensitivity

		Susceptibility			
		High	**Medium**	**Low**	**Negligible**
Value	**High**	High	Medium/ High	Medium	Low/ Medium
	Medium	Medium/ High	Medium	Low/ Medium	Low
	Low	Medium	Low/ Medium	Low	Negligible
	Negligible	Low/ Medium	Low	Negligible	Negligible

65. The results of the sensitivity assessment will be summarised in a table at the end of the chapter for ease of interpretation and comparison.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSALS

66. This section will comprise a description of the proposals, supported with plans and drawings where possible.

67. The description will focus on those aspects of the proposals that are likely to influence their impact upon landscape character and visual amenity, for example layout, form, height, external finishes, access and green infrastructure.

68. In the case of outline planning applications with matters held in reserve, it will be made clear which aspects of the scheme are submitted detail and which are illustrative at submission stage.

69. Embodied landscape and visual mitigation measures will be highlighted, such as areas of tree and shrub planting or ground remodelling to reduce the visibility of new development or the use of naturalistic finishes and green roofs to reduce the prominence of new structures.

ASSESSMENTS OF LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

Introduction

70. These sections will judge the effects of the proposals upon the identified landscape and visual receptors respectively, with a view to identifying significant effects.

71. For ease of reference, a summary will be given at the start of each section of the respective sensitivity of each receptor.

Magnitude of Effect upon Receptors

72. For each landscape and visual receptor, the magnitude of effect as a result of the proposals will be judged and scored on a relative scale of Large to Negligible. It will also be identified whether the change is adverse, beneficial or neutral.

73. There are a number of factors that will be considered in the judgement of magnitude of effect upon each receptor. These include the size or scale of the effect, its geographical extent and its duration and reversibility.

74. The magnitude of effect may be considered in terms of the long-term effects of the proposals, or at other time points such as during the construction stage. This is a matter of professional judgement and may be influenced by scoping discussions with the Local Planning Authority, especially in the case of schemes requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment.

75. Indicative frameworks for the judgement of magnitude of landscape and visual effects respectively are presented in Tables 7 and 8 below.

Table 7: Magnitude of Effect upon Landscape Receptors

Score	Type	Definition
Large	Element/Perceptual	Fundamental and permanent change to the extent to which this receptor influences landscape character.
	Geographic	Fundamental change to the character of this landscape, with the proposals now forming a permanent and defining element.
Medium	Element/Perceptual	Perceptible change to the extent to which this receptor influences landscape character.
	Geographic	Perceptible change within this landscape, with the proposals forming a notable characteristic.
Small	Element/Perceptual	Minor change to the extent to which this receptor influences the prevailing landscape character.
	Geographic	Minor alteration of the character of the landscape, and generally in keeping with the existing character.
Negligible	Element/Perceptual	Barely perceptible level of change to this element or characteristic and the contribution it makes to wider character.
	Geographic	Barely perceptible alteration to the existing character of this landscape.

Table 8: Magnitude of Effect upon Visual Receptors

Score	Definition
Large	Fundamental alteration to the view, with the proposals permanently forming a dominant element.
Medium	Notable alteration to the view, with the proposals forming a prominent element.
Small	Minor alteration to the view, with relatively little change to the overall composition.
Negligible	Barely perceptible change to the view.

Assessment of Overall Effect Significance

76. To derive an overall significance of effect for each receptor, the magnitude of effect score will be compared with the baseline sensitivity score.

77. Effect significance will be judged on a relative scale of Major to Negligible, using the framework presented in Table 9 below. The ultimate score will be a matter of professional judgement, but explanation will be given where scoring differs from Table 9.

Table 9: Assessment of Overall Effect Significance

		Magnitude of effect			
		Large	**Medium**	**Small**	**Negligible**
Sensitivity	**High**	Major	Major/ Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/ Minor
	Medium	Major/ Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/ Minor	Minor
	Low	Moderate	Moderate/ Minor	Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Moderate/ Minor	Minor	Negligible	Negligible

78. Effects of Major/Moderate and greater significance are considered to be 'significant' effects.

79. Each section will conclude with a table summarising the overall results of each assessment.

ASSESSMENT OF CUMULATIVE EFFECTS (EIA ONLY)

Introduction

80. When landscape and visual effects are being considered as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the cumulative effect of the proposals along with other relevant schemes should be considered, as this can also give rise to significant effects.

Scoping of Cumulative Schemes

81. As a general rule, any scheme within the study area that has either planning permission or a validated planning application has the potential to act cumulatively with the proposals.

82. It is likely that a list of potential cumulative schemes will be agreed with the Local Planning Authority as part of the EIA scoping process. These will then be considered from a landscape and visual perspective, utilising the collected baseline information to identify relevant schemes to be 'scoped in' to the assessments of cumulative landscape and visual effects.

83. Schemes have the potential to result in cumulative landscape effects when they occur within the same perceptible landscape, and in combination they have the potential to alter the characteristics of that landscape to a greater extent than either individual proposal.

84. Schemes have the potential to result in cumulative visual effects when they can either be seen in combination from public locations, or they can be seen sequentially by members of the public moving through a landscape such that their visual amenity could be more significantly affected.

Assessment of Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

85. The assessments of cumulative landscape and visual effects will consider each receptor in turn and provide a judgement as to whether the proposals in combination will result in an alteration of any of the assessment scores.

86. Should any scores require alteration then this will be reported, along with any consequent effects upon the overall significance of effect upon each receptor, and particularly if any of these effects are considered to be significant for EIA purposes.