



THE COUNTY DURHAM LANDSCAPE

Strategy

Making a difference where you live



FOREWORD

The landscape of County Durham is one of our greatest assets. It has evolved over centuries as our predecessors have shaped it to meet their needs. Change in the landscape is both inevitable and natural as we continually adapt it in response to new technologies and new economic, environmental and cultural forces.

In the decades ahead the changing European and global economy will pose new challenges for agriculture and the rural economy. Changing patterns of work, transport, housing and recreation will bring pressures for new development in the countryside. Climate change is likely to have a fundamental, if as yet uncertain, impact on our environment.

The County Durham Landscape Strategy sets out an agenda for managing change in the future to help us conserve what we value most about the landscape while allowing it to evolve to meet these new challenges.

I commend this document to all those who have an interest in the Durham landscape, and particularly those involved in planning, development, land management and regeneration work.

My thanks to all those who have been involved in its production.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Pendlebury". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Councillor Bob Pendlebury OBE

Cabinet member for Transport, Sustainability and Tourism

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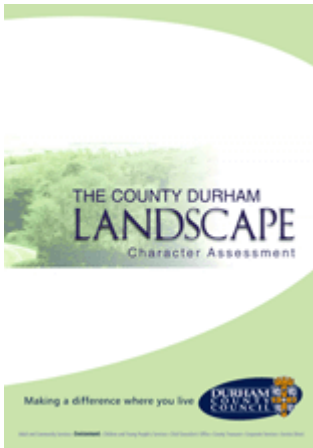
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Introduction

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The Landscape Strategy

This Landscape Strategy is a non-statutory plan which addresses issues that affect the varied landscapes of County Durham by setting out objectives for their conservation, restoration and enhancement. It is based on the County Durham Landscape Character Assessment.

The strategy is aimed at all those who have an interest in the Durham landscape, or who are involved in its management or development. It is intended that it will be adopted and used by a wide range of partners who will guide and facilitate its implementation. It was formally adopted by the County Council in April 2008.

Scope

The strategy covers all rural areas in the county and does not deal generally with urban landscapes. However the settled nature of much of the Durham landscape, is such that the inter-relationship between urban and rural areas is often very strong, and the strategy therefore touches upon some urban issues.

The strategy addresses some issues that are dealt with in other plans and strategies – development plans, local development frameworks, environmental strategies, biodiversity and geodiversity action plans. It also overlaps geographically with other area-based plans such as the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan and the Great North Forest Plan. It is intended that the strategy should complement these plans and its relationship with them is set out in the relevant sections.

Aims

The strategy has three main aims

- To conserve and enhance the character and diversity of the Durham Landscape.
- To make development and land management more sustainable by helping to ensure that they respect the character of the landscape and contribute towards wider environmental objectives.
- To support and complement other environmental strategies to help promote co-ordinated action on the environment.

Landscape character and diversity

The landscape is both a natural resource, on which we depend for our food and water, and a cultural resource that evokes feelings, memories, associations and attachments. Its beauty and diversity are important both to the quality of life of local communities and the economic prosperity of the region.

The landscape has evolved over thousands of years, reflecting the complex interaction of human activities and the physical and economic forces that have shaped their lives. In some landscapes change has been relatively slow and incremental in nature with each generation adding to, rather than removing, the evidence of their forbears.

This cultural continuity or 'time depth' is one of the most valued characteristics of the English countryside and is fundamental to the relationship many people have with the landscapes they cherish. Change in the landscape is inevitable and, indeed, necessary as we continue to adapt it in response to new technologies, and to new economic, environmental and cultural forces. In the decades ahead the changing European and global economy will pose new challenges for agriculture and the rural economy. Changing patterns of work, transport, housing and recreation will bring pressures for new development in the countryside. Climate change is likely to have a fundamental, if as yet uncertain, impact on our environment.

The diversity of the English landscape is one of its most unique characteristics and the distinctiveness of local landscapes makes an important contribution to our sense of place, our sense of community and cultural identity. Many of the changes we have seen over the last 50 years have been at the expense of local character and distinctiveness – whether by the loss of the characteristic landscape features that distinguish one place from another, or by the widespread use of building materials, design styles and standard detailing which have brought an increasing uniformity to both urban and rural landscapes. These changes have also had adverse impacts on other attributes that we value such as biodiversity and cultural heritage, or natural resources like soil and water. We have choices as to how we accommodate change in the future – allowing us to maintain or increase what we value most in the landscape while adapting it to our changing needs.

The landscape strategy seeks to strike this balance, identifying priorities for conservation, restoration and enhancement in the landscape at the same time as establishing principles for development and management which will help to complement and enhance landscape character.

Conserving and enhancing the landscape

For most of the second half of the Twentieth Century the emphasis in landscape conservation was on the designation and protection of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). At a local level this approach was followed by local authorities in identifying important local landscapes – such as the Areas of High Landscape Value – often on the basis of their scenic qualities.

The widespread changes that have taken place in the countryside, often in areas outside of designated landscapes, have revealed weaknesses in this approach. Many of the forces for change, like agricultural intensification, have been beyond the scope of planning policy. Some landscapes outside of designated areas, often those close to where people live, and valued by them, have been poorly protected.

The need for a more comprehensive approach based on an understanding of the character and distinctiveness of all landscapes, led to the emergence of *landscape character assessment* which was developed during the 1980s by the Countryside Commission, now part of Natural England. Landscape character assessment involves mapping, classifying and describing the character of different rural landscapes and identifying the forces for change operating within them.



The County Durham Landscape Strategy follows this approach. It is based on the County Durham Landscape Character Assessment, and analyses the assets and attributes of the county's varied landscapes, the trends and pressures for change operating within them, and the aspirations of stakeholders for their future management.

It also contains spatial strategies which are based on landscape character rather than scenic value. These broadly indicate the kinds of action it is most appropriate to take in different local landscapes, whether that be conservation, restoration or enhancement or combinations of these. It is intended that these strategies will help to establish integrated objectives for development and land management in all of the county's diverse landscapes.



The European Landscape Convention

This “character-led” approach to landscape in the United Kingdom has been mirrored by developments in Europe. The European Landscape Convention, of which the UK is a signatory, defines landscape as ‘*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*’ It is based on the premise that landscape is universal: it occurs everywhere and everyone has a stake in it. The convention’s provisions cover all landscapes of whatever quality, whether rural or urban, built or natural. It aims to ensure the proper protection, management and planning of landscapes throughout Europe.

Natural England has worked with DEFRA and English Heritage to produce a framework for implementing the ELC in England, published in October 2007. This framework seeks to further strengthen the protection, management and planning of landscape in England by providing a structure for Action Plans of partners and stakeholders. It underpins a wide range of activities which, through public engagement and stakeholder involvement, will lead to wider understanding and appreciation, improved knowledge and care, as well as a sense of inspiration, well-being and connection between people and place. The Framework for Implementation in England is available to view on the Landscape Character network website at: www.landscapecharacter.org.uk



Sustainable Development and Land Management

The Landscape Strategy will contribute to the sustainability of new development by informing planning policies for developments like housing, minerals or wind energy. It can help us decide where new development should go and how it should be designed if it is to conserve what we value about our environment. The Strategy will be used in the preparation of emerging Local Development Frameworks and guidance on its use in planning applications will be contained within a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The framework of strategic objectives set out in the Strategy can help developers assess the impacts of their proposals through the Environmental Assessment process, and design them to be in keeping with the character of the locality. It can also help them develop proposals which contribute positively to the strategy for the area.

The landscape is affected as much by how it is managed as how it is developed. The Landscape Strategy will help inform the way land management initiatives and agri-environmental schemes - like Environmental Stewardship, the England Woodland Grant Scheme and the County Durham Hedgerow Partnership's Field Boundary Restoration Grant - are targeted. An understanding of landscape character, and the strategic objectives identified here for different landscapes, can also help inform the day-to-day decisions of individual land managers, farmers and foresters. Further guidance is provided in the [County Durham Landscape Guidelines](#).

Co-ordinated action on the environment

The character of the landscape, and the way it is perceived and used by people is heavily influenced by its geological and ecological characteristics, its cultural artefacts and associations, and its practical value as a physical resource. A strategy for the landscape must therefore have regard to all of these factors. The Landscape Strategy has been informed by a range of national, regional and local strategies and action plans dealing with other environmental resources - like biodiversity, geodiversity, cultural heritage, forestry, agriculture, water, soils and access. It is intended that it should complement these strategies and act as far as possible as a synthesis of them for the local landscape.

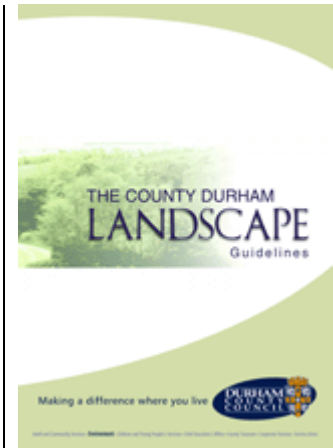
One of the principal mechanisms for delivering the Strategy will be through the development of Landscape-scale Partnerships. At the time of publication the County Durham Sustainability and Environment Partnership and Natural England, together with other partners in the North-east region, are exploring the potential of developing new long-term partnerships based on Natural Areas, the broad biogeographical zones underlying the County Character Areas identified in the Landscape Assessment.

A key task of these landscape-scale partnerships will be to develop action plans based on a common purpose and a shared vision of the future of the landscape. It is intended that these action plans will integrate environmental, economic and social goals and be delivered by a broad partnership of local authorities, government agencies, the voluntary and private sectors and community groups. They will provide a framework for the activity of partners in those landscapes and identify key tasks and projects for conserving and enhancing the environment and securing funding for their implementation.

The first of these partnerships – the East Durham Limestone Natural Area Partnership was launched in 2008.

For more information contact Durham County Council by email at **zmail_landscape@durham.gov.uk** or by post or telephone at:

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Methodology

Issues and objectives

The topic-based sections of the Strategy – Broad Issues, Land Management & Development – were produced through a process of desk-top study of published material followed by a series of structured workshops with a wide range of stakeholders facilitated by consultants The Planning Co-operative in 2003.

The character area-based sections of the strategy were based on an analysis of the assets and attributes of individual character areas including:

- Landscape Designations
- International Nature Conservation Designations
- National and Local Nature Conservation Designations
- Biodiversity Action plan Priority Habitats & Species
- Habitat networks
- Ancient Woodlands
- Earth Heritage Designations
- Archaeological sites & monuments
- Built Heritage designations
- Historic parks and Gardens
- Access, recreation & tourism
- Water resources
- Agricultural land classification

Trends and pressures affecting those assets and attributes were analysed along with any environmental initiatives, plans or strategies currently addressing them. Key issues and objectives and a series of strategy options were identified on that basis, and tested through a second series of more focussed stakeholder workshops.

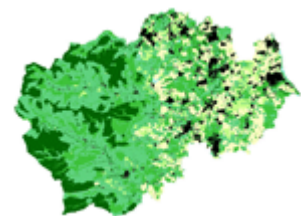
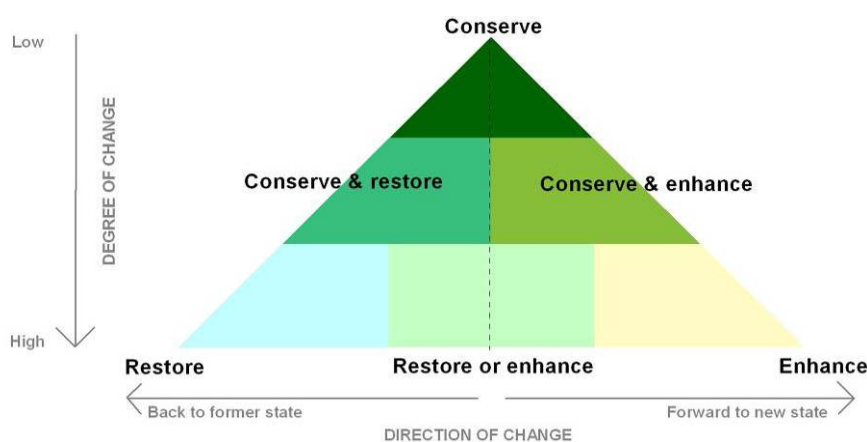
Spatial Strategies.

Spatial strategies were developed through an analysis of Local Landscape Types and Subtypes in the Landscape GIS Database, informed by the objectives and strategy options identified for the relevant County Character Areas. In some cases other information from the landscape database (such as the presence of a scheduled monument) would influence the strategy.

Each Landscape Description Unit (LDU) in the database was assigned one of six strategies: Conserve, Conserve & enhance, Conserve & restore, Restore, Restore or enhance, Enhance. This approach to strategy formulation was based on the understanding that the strategy should identify both the amount of change desirable in the landscape, and the broad direction that change should take.

In a landscape which has many valued attributes and which is in good condition, little change may be desirable and the appropriate strategy will be to **conserve** its existing character. In a landscape which has few valued attributes and/or is in poor condition, a higher degree of change may be desirable. The strategy adopted will depend on whether it is more appropriate to **restore** the landscape back to its former character or to **enhance** it by developing entirely new features or characteristics.

For landscapes which have some valued attributes but which are in poor condition the appropriate strategy may be to **conserve & restore**, or **conserve & enhance** their character. For landscapes with few valued attributes where either restoration or enhancement might be equally appropriate, a strategy of **restore or enhance** might be adopted.



Landscape Spatial Strategy

Examples:

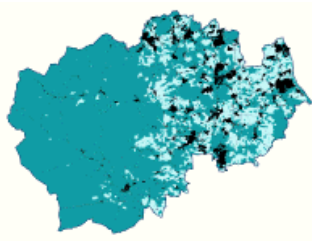
<i>Local type</i>	<i>Subtype</i>	<i>Strategy</i>
Lowland woods	Ancient woods	Conserve
Lowland woods	Modified ancient woods	Conserve & restore
Lowland woods	Plantation	Conserve & enhance
Plain farmland: open arable	Modern field system	Enhance
Plain farmland: open pasture	Old enclosure	Restore or enhance
Coastal arable	Open	Restore

These strategies give only a broad indication of the extent and direction of change that might be desirable. More detailed guidance on the kind of change appropriate to different landscape types is given in the Landscape Guidelines.

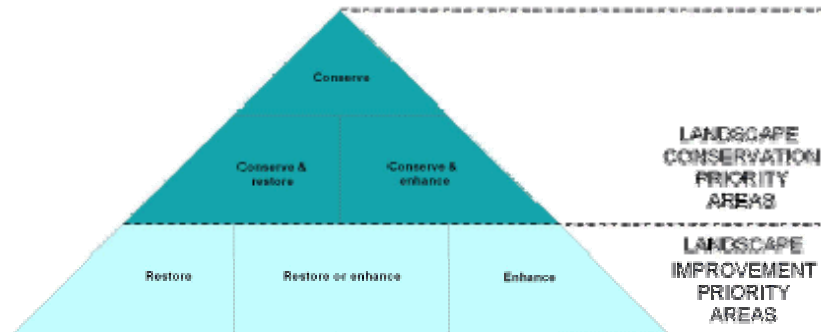
Landscape Conservation and Improvement Priority Areas

Spatial Strategies can also be used to identify broader *Landscape Conservation Priority Areas* and *Landscape Improvement Priority Areas*. While there may be scope for conservation and improvement in all landscapes in varying degrees, the distinction between those where the emphasis is on conservation and those where the emphasis is on improvement can be useful for landscape planning.

Those landscapes with strategies of conserve, conserve & restore and conserve & enhance are identified as *Landscape Conservation Priority Areas* and those with strategies of restore, restore or enhance, and enhance are identified as *Landscape Improvement Priority Areas*



Landscape Conservation and Improvement Priority Areas



Consultation

The Strategy was published as a consultation draft in 2004 on the Durham County Council website. Feedback from the consultation process was taken into account in preparing the final document, as were changes in relevant published policies or strategies as well as information on landscape change emerging from the Countryside Quality Counts initiative (www.cqc.org.uk).



How to use this document

Format

The strategy has been written to be viewed and used primarily through the County Council's website - www.durham.gov.uk/durhamlandscape - and is also printed in a limited number of hard copies as a loose-leaf folder. Map data can be viewed online in an interactive GIS, alongside other environmental data, on the website. The [County Durham Landscape Assessment 2008](#) and [County Durham Landscape Guidelines](#) are available on the same site.

The remainder of this document is structured as follows:

Broad Issues deals with over-arching issues and cross-cutting themes like climate change and biodiversity.

Land management deals with issues arising out of, or affecting, land management activities.

Development deals with issues arising out of, or affecting, new development.

County Character Areas contains analysis of the assets and attributes of County Character Areas, the trends and pressures affecting them, key issues for action, strategic objectives and spatial strategies.

The **Maps** section at the back of the document contains maps showing environmental assets and attributes, the Spatial Strategy, Landscape Conservation and Improvement Priority Areas and the Woodland Strategy.

Periodic review

This version of the County Durham Landscape Strategy was formally adopted by the County Council in April 2008. The Strategy will be updated periodically to ensure that its content is accurate and reflects changes in the landscape, changes in the policy environment, and emerging issues. Check that your version is the most up-to-date by visiting the website or contacting the County Council's Landscape Section.

Feedback

You can let us know your views on the contents of the landscape strategy, or on landscape issues that you consider to be important, by email at:

zmail_landscape@durham.gov.uk or by post / telephone at:

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