APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

APPENDIX 1: ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The method for undertaking the landscape character assessment follows the current accepted method promoted by the Countryside Agency as set out in the document *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002). The process for undertaking an assessment involves five main stages, described below, namely:

- Data Collation

- Characterisation

- Field survey

- Evaluation

- Consultation

The county-wide assessment has been prepared within the framework of the Countryside Agency and English Nature's Countryside Character Initiative as shown on the *Character of England Map* and it also considers the context provided by the Agency's *National Landscape Typology.*

The assessment also takes into account the existing landscape character assessments at district/AONB scale covering areas within Wiltshire and of the assessments for adjacent counties and districts. To produce an coherent integrated framework for the county-wide assessment it was necessary to thoroughly review the assessments already in place within the county so that the process of assessment was undertaken in three phases:

Phase 1: Desk top study – review of LCA in Wiltshire

Phase 2: Additional desk and field work for areas covered by existing LCAs

Phase 3: Additional desk and field work for areas with gaps in coverage

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was used throughout the study as the tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data.

DATA COLLATION

National Landscape Character Context

The national landscape context comprises the Countryside Character Areas identified by the Character of England Map, plus the National Landscape Typology.

The diverse landscape of Wiltshire is represented by eleven Countryside Character Areas (**Figure 3**). These are listed below with a brief summary of their location and extent within Wiltshire and of their landscape character. The county-wide classification nests within this framework.

108 Upper Thames Clay Vales: covering a substantial area of the north of the county surrounding Swindon, this is a broad lowland landscape of gently undulating farmland with areas of contrasting character – ranging from enclosed pastures to wet valley bottoms to settled arable areas.

109 Midvale Ridge: covering a small section of Wiltshire at the far north east of the county, the wooded limestone ridge gives rise to steep side hills rising above the adjacent low-lying Clay Vales.

107 Cotswolds: forming a band running down the northern section of the west side of the county this dramatic scarp landscape has predominantly arable land use and large woodland blocks divided by small, narrow valleys.

117 Avon Vales: a broad band of land occurring in the west of the county from Malmesbury in the north to the outskirts of Warminster to the south, this is an undulating clay vale with a mix of arable and pastoral land.

116 Berkshire and Marlborough Downs: covering a large area of chalk uplands in the northern half of the county, to the east, this is an elevated landscape encompassing broad expanses of rolling chalk downland characterised by intensive arable farming and limited woodland cover.

129 Thames Basin Heaths: a very small section of the county (in the east) is characterised by the Thames Basin Heaths – a heavily populated landscape of diverse character unified by heathland and coniferous forestry.

133 Blackmoor Vale and the Vale of Wardour: part of this larger area extends into the southwest of Wiltshire, covering the Vale of Wardour and areas around Stourhead and Crockerton. This mosaic landscape comprises mixed farmland, undulating clay vales with many trees.

132 Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs: covering the majority of the southern half of the county this is a large scale open rolling chalk plateau dominated by extensive arable fields.

131 Hampshire Downs: an area mainly within Hampshire only a small part extending into the east of Wiltshire, this is an area of rolling downland with prominent scarps, hilltops, and valleys, with an open character and strong sense of exposure.

134 Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase: covering an area to the south of Wiltshire and extending into Dorset, this a rolling chalk landscape (mainly under arable production) with dramatic escarpments and steep-sided valleys.

131 New Forest: covering a small area at southeast of the county this is a complex landscape comprising broadleaved and coniferous woodland, wood-pasture, heath, grassland and farmland.

The National Landscape Typology

The National Landscape Typology divides England into a number of generic landscape character types based on the combination of physiography (underlying structure and physical form of the land surface), ground type (relating to the nature of the land surface)

and culture (relating to the structural component of the cultural landscape – historic pattern of settlement and land use).

The types within Wiltshire have been mapped (**Figure 2**) and used, along with the Countryside Character Areas as a framework to test existing landscape character assessments and to form a basis for assessing those areas without any form of assessment within the county.

Scoping study of existing assessments

Within Wiltshire there are four local authorities; Kennet, West Wiltshire, North Wiltshire and Salisbury District Councils and Swindon Borough Council Unitary Authority. Of these Kennet, Swindon and North Wiltshire have produced landscape character assessments. The assessment maps for the Districts both within and surrounding Wiltshire are shown on **Figures 4** and **5**. Of note on **Figure 4** map is a small area to the south east of the county which forms part of the New Forest National Park, which has been included in a Landscape Character Assessment for the New Forest District Council.

A number of other bodies have produced landscape character assessments which cover parts of Wiltshire. These are for the three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the Cotswolds, the North Wessex Downs and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs (see **Figure 6**) and the Salisbury Plain Training Area (see **Figure 7**). The assessments for surrounding counties are shown on **Figure 8**.

The assessments were analysed in detail and the key points arising from this were:

- Almost all the county was covered by existing (or under preparation) assessments with two gaps, one to the west and one to the south east of the county.

- Most of the studies focused at character area level and are at 1:25,000 scale.

- There were some discrepancies in determining the boundaries from study to study most notably in the chalk river valleys where, for instance in the Wylye Chalk River Valley and Ebble Chalk River Valley areas in Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire AONB the boundaries followed the skyline at the tops of the steep valley sides while in the Kennet District assessment the boundaries of the Kennet Valley and Salisbury Avon Valley character areas lay lower down the valley sides without following the dry tributary valleys to the skyline. The overarching county-wide assessment needed to have a consistent approach to boundaries.

- Some character area/types (such as the Chalk Escarpments in the Cranborne Chase study and many of the landscape types in the Salisbury Plain Training Area Assessment) were so small in scale that they were not likely to be appropriate for inclusion as separate units in a county-wide study.

- Naming varied in the studies but most followed the division of generic types and location specific areas.

- There were considerable variations in the form of assessment descriptions and further work was needed to form a consistent level of information across the county.

- Evaluations varied widely in scope and generally did not detail strength of character, condition, and/or sensitivity, or, in half the assessments, forces for change, so that

further work in these areas was needed to make a uniform assessment over the whole county.

- The data and photographs from the existing assessments were available for re-use in the county study.

Baseline Data

A review was also undertaken of baseline environmental factors and a county-wide classification was developed from "first principles" to test the classification emerging from the review of existing assessments.

This involved the collation and mapping of a wide range of existing information on the characteristics of Wiltshire from a variety of sources including baseline maps of geology, topography, soils and hydrology; schedules of designated and protected areas and features; and a review of technical literature including Environment Agency information, English Nature's Natural Area Profiles etc. It also included collation of information relating to the 'perceptual' characteristics of the landscape, such as literary references or as a source of artistic inspiration.

The analysis of existing landscape character assessments pointed to gaps in data on various aspects of the landscape of the county due to the different purposes and emphasis of the various assessments. Further desk study was undertaken to bring the coverage of the county to a consistent level.

CHARACTERISATION

The draft assessment was arrived at through mapping all the areas and types at 1:50,000 scale and using these along with the characteristics and other information in the existing assessments, the national landscape character framework, the neighbouring district and county level assessments and the baseline information such as geology, topography, and hydrography to group areas and types together thus forming the new classification. For the purposes of this county-wide assessment emphasis has been placed upon the definition and subdivision of the landscape at a scale of 1:50,000 and at the Landscape Type scale.

Appendix 2 of this report is a table showing the derivation of the new types and areas from those in the existing assessments. The approach follows best practice as promoted by the Countryside Agency in the *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and* Scotland (2002) in maintaining a distinction between landscape types and character areas, and developing a hierarchical approach as follows:

- **Landscape Types** - which are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. Chalk River Valley.

- **Character Areas** - which are single and unique, discrete geographical areas of the landscape type, e.g. 'Kennet Chalk River Valley'.

The study specifically **excluded** an analysis of the area within development limits. Therefore, although the smaller villages *were* considered as a part of a wider landscape context and character, no specific townscape or urban character assessments were undertaken of the more built-up areas such as Swindon, Chippenham, Trowbridge or Salisbury.

SURVEY

A field survey was undertaken to appraise the draft characterisation. There were two stages of fieldwork, one for phase 2 (areas covered by existing assessments) and a further one for phase 3 (gaps in coverage). However after the completion of phase 2 the North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment was completed and became available to feed into the county-wide assessment so that the phase 3 work included areas that were covered by this assessment.

Field work was required to:

- confirm the draft boundaries

- confirm fit with new classification

- confirm descriptions

- gather evaluation data

- ensure photographic coverage of the entire county.

Boundaries

Fieldwork was undertaken to ensure that the new boundaries were treated consistently throughout the county. Work was focussed on areas requiring clarification/confirmation in particular:

- Different approaches to boundaries for areas in the each type in existing assessments (e.g. of chalk river valleys).

- Fit of new draft boundaries to areas already partly defined by existing assessments.

- Fit of boundaries in existing assessments which were based on administrative boundaries (e.g. edge of AONB) – were these the best definitions of the areas in the context of the county-wide assessment?

New classification

The new classification was verified by field survey concentrating on key areas:

- Confirming that character areas that were made up of a number of areas in an existing assessment (e.g. *Marlborough Downs*, *Salisbury Plains East*) formed a coherent single unit in the county context.

- Confirming that the overall pattern of landscape types and character areas was appropriate at the county scale.

- Resolving specific queries e.g. should the *Vale of Pewsey* be in a separate *Greensand Vale* landscape type rather than in the *Greensand Terraces*.

Descriptions

A rapid verification of descriptions in the existing assessments was made by fieldwork, identifying any changes and inconsistencies. This focused chiefly on the landscape types but also ensured that local variations were covered consistently in character areas descriptions.

A systematic and rigorous approach was adopted for the survey, with information recorded on 1:50,000 scale maps and a field record sheet. A comprehensive photo record was also made.

Evaluation data

The form of evaluation data in the existing assessments varied widely and field work for evaluation was required in particular on:

- Forces for change in Kennet District, Swindon Borough and Salisbury Plain Training Area.

- Quality/condition in most areas.

In addition these aspects needed to be verified for consistency throughout the county.

A note on boundary lines: The precision of boundaries drawn around landscape character areas and types varies with the scale and level of detail of the assessment. This assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:50,000 which means that it is suitable for use at this scale. In reality landscape character rarely changes abruptly and the boundaries indicated in the Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment therefore sometimes represent zones of transition in character relating to changes in topography, geology soils, cultural patterns, land use etc. rather than marked changes on the ground. In practice boundaries of this nature have frequently been drawn to follow physical or mappable features such as roads, lanes or field boundaries which provide 'best fit'.

A note on character areas: Character Types and Areas and have been mapped at a scale of 1:50,000 and are suitable for use at this scale. Landscape types have generic characteristics which apply to all the areas within them. Character areas share these characteristics with other areas of the same landscape type but have a particular 'sense of place'. Therefore landscape types defined and described in this report have distinct patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern etc. which contribute to their particular character. However, it is important to be aware that character areas are not homogeneous and that there is variation within them, for example an area of parkland found within a character area would have different characteristics to, say, an adjoining pastoral field but the character area overall may be unified by the presence of a number of parklands set within pastoral fields or a distinctive landform.

EVALUATION

Introduction

There is no current accepted methodology for evaluating Landscape Character. As the Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland states *'The use of Landscape Character Assessment in making judgements is a fast-moving scene amongst practitioners'*. The evaluation undertaken as part of the Wiltshire LCA followed current best practice and is set out below.

The approach to evaluation was robust and consistent across the county with a structured approach using the draft landscape types as a framework to make judgements about landscape character, quality and management needs. As well as drawing on the existing assessments and the fieldwork (to confirm these and bring the information to a consistent

level) the wider policy context, and, in particular, documents produced since the assessments were carried out, such as the AONB management plans, were used to ensure that the evaluation is up to date in considering the current and future Wiltshire landscape.

The purposes of the Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment Evaluation are to provide the basis for strategic landscape planning and management and assist in the development control process by providing a more informed response to development proposals affecting the landscape. In order to achieve these aims the evaluation developed judgements on:

> (i)   positive landscape features of significance
>
> (ii)   forces for change
>
> (iii)   the condition and strength of character of the landscape
>
> (iv)   inherent landscape sensitivities
>
> (v)   an overall guiding landscape strategy
>
> (vi)   recommendations for broad management objectives

The logic, terminology (as set out by the Countryside Agency guidance, where possible) and rationale behind the evaluation in the assessment are set out below.

The judgements draw on the following:

Forces for change: These are both positive and negative forces for change that are known to or have potential to act on the landscape, including agricultural management issues, policy and development pressures

Condition: A description of how the condition and intactness of the different components create a perception of the overall condition of the landscape. It is defined on a three-point sale of poor, moderate or good.

Strength of Character: A description of how the combination of individual components and their contribution to landscape character. It is connected to distinctiveness and landscape integrity. Strength of character is determined by judging how distinct and recognisable the pattern of elements is that defines the character of the landscape. This includes the combination of physical and cultural attributes and the sense of place that they evoke. It is defined on a three-point scale of weak, moderate or strong.

Landscape Strategy: The following table is used to determine an overall landscape strategy for the landscape type. It is based on a consideration of strength of character and condition.

	Weak	moderate	strong
Good	Strengthen	**Conserve and Strengthen**	**Conserve**
declining	Strengthen and Enhance	**Conserve and Enhance**	**Conserve and Restore**
poor	Creation	Restore and Enhance	Restore

CONDITION

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

The strategy is presented for the landscape type as a whole and identifies any particular management needs for specific elements. These are developed further in the management objectives. The aim is not just to give a blunt prescription for the whole area, but to identify the specific features to which the strategy applies. The aim is to set out broad principles to manage and direct landscape change for example in order to protect the highest quality and most sensitive landscapes from adverse change and to encourage positive change in weak or degraded landscapes. The strategy objectives are combinations of different aims ranging from preserving the current landscape (conservation) in the areas of strong character and good condition to encouraging positive change (creation) in the landscapes of weak character and poor condition. These are illustrated in the box below.

Landscape Strategies

Conserve: Landscapes of strong character in good condition and therefore judged to be of high quality where emphasis should be on conservation of existing character and of particular features that contribute to this character. The aim should be to continue the current management regime/adopt best practice approaches. Great care will need to be taken in the introduction of new characteristics.

Enhance/restore: Landscape character is strong/positive but becoming weakened and individual features may have suffered decline or damage. Within these landscapes the emphasis should be on restoring elements that have been lost or declined and on enhancing character. This may include improvements to landscape management practices and the introduction of positive new elements or features.

Create: Landscape character is weak and is not highly valued and its condition is declining/poor. Here the objective is to form a new and different landscape or accelerate change towards a new character with positive benefits for people and the environment. This should be proactive rather than reactive and it may be appropriate to develop plans or strategies in consultation with stakeholders to determine appropriate new character.

Broad Management Objectives: For each landscape type a set of broad management objectives has been developed, taking into consideration the forces for change, to ensure that distinctive character is conserved and enhanced.