

1.1 Appointment and Brief

In October 2006 Wiltshire County Council appointed LDA Design to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment of the Cotswold Water Park.

The findings of the Landscape Character Assessment will form part of a suite of baseline studies to inform a wider study that has been commissioned to undertake a Strategic Review of the Cotswold Water Park and develop a Masterplan and future Management Strategy for the area.

1.2 The Scope and Context of the Study

1.2.1 The Study Area

Figure 1 shows the extent of the Cotswold Water Park, with the current designated area identified by a red line. Beyond this, the blue line defines a functional boundary that encompasses the wider setting and area of influence of the Cotswold Water Park. As well as forming the boundary of the Strategic Review, the functional boundary also sets the limit of the Landscape Character Assessment study area.

The outcome of the Strategic Review will guide the process of determining any potential reconfiguration of the Cotswold Water Park boundary beyond the current designated area, and define the limit of an emerging masterplan that will address current and future issues, and the process of landscape change.

1.2.2 Related Studies

The Cotswold Water Park is predominantly located within the counties of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. However, with the identification of the functional boundary of the Park, a small area of Oxfordshire is now included, at the extreme eastern limit of the study area.

Recent Landscape Character Assessments have been undertaken by all of the local authorities that include land within the Cotswold Water Park. These comprise county level studies by Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire County Councils, and district level studies by North Wiltshire, Cotswold and West Oxfordshire Districts, and by Swindon Borough. These studies have been reviewed and their findings incorporated into this Landscape Character Assessment where appropriate.

1.2.3 Scope of Work

The landscape patterns evident today have evolved gradually through the interaction of physical and human forces. Both the Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessments include a description of the evolution of the landscape and review the physical (geology and soils, landform, hydrology, land cover,

woodland and trees), and human (archaeology, history, land use, enclosure patterns, settlement patterns and buildings styles) attributes of the landscape. Reference should therefore be made to these recently completed studies in respect of the wider physical and human context, including the set of supporting Figures that illustrate the baseline resource in respect of Geology, Landform, Land Cover, Heritage and Nature Conservation designations.

An appraisal of past and present perceptions, including those of national and local artists, musicians and writers did not form part of the brief for these broader county studies, and this limitation has been followed through for this study of the Cotswold Water Park.

The Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessments review the evolution of the landscape at a county and regional scale. To provide a more local context, however, a brief description of the historical and physical development of the Cotswold Water Park is included in this study, together with an overview of the principal issues in respect of the evolving landscape character of this unique and distinctive area.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to provide a Landscape Character Assessment specifically focused on the Cotswold Water Park. The findings will provide an up to date review of the landscape character of the study area at the current time and a baseline resource for other studies for the Water Park, including the Strategic Review.

The landscape character assessment has the following main objectives:

- to provide an assessment of the character, distinctiveness and qualities of the study area, and to identify and describe the component landscape character types and landscape character areas;
- to summarise the key characteristics associated with each landscape type to inform the principles in respect of landscape change; and
- to promote awareness of landscape character and the importance of landscape conservation, enhancement and restoration.

1.4 Approach and Methodology

Landscape characterisation is the practical process by which areas of distinctive character are classified, mapped and described. In this assessment landscape character types and landscape character areas have been identified.

The assessment has been completed in accordance with the most up-to-date Countryside Agency methodology¹ in respect of landscape character assessment. The main tasks were:

- a review of the various Landscape Character Areas within and immediately surrounding the Cotswold Water Park;
- familiarisation with the study area through reconnaissance, information gathering, GIS interrogation, and overlay mapping at 1:25,000 scale;
- site survey for landscape character types and landscape character areas; detailed mapping of landscape character types and landscape character areas to 1:25,000 scale, with final mapping in GIS at 1:25,000 scale; and
- report and digital map preparation.

1.5 Structure of the Report

This report presents up to date findings on the landscape character and key characteristics for the study area. It will provide a valuable source of information for those with an interest in the landscape of the Cotswold Water Park, and responsible for the land management and planning in the area.

Section 2, Review of Existing Landscape Character Assessments describes the national level of assessment to provide a context to the subsequent review of assessments that have been undertaken within the county and district authorities that extend across or are contiguous with the Cotswold Water Park. A comparison of the range of landscape character types and areas that have been identified within these various assessments are summarised in *Tables 1A* and *1B*.

Section 3, The Cotswold Water Park: an Introduction provides an overview of the physical context and historical development of the Water Park. It also considers the principal influences and issues faced by this distinctive landscape.

Section 4, Landscape Character Assessment Approach introduces the concept of Landscape Character Types and Areas for the study area, and issues regarding boundary delineation. The range of Character Types and Areas that have been identified within the Cotswold Water Park are set out in a Summary Table. In the **Section 5** that follows, the Landscape Character Types within the

study area are described, with a separate section allotted to each Type. Commencing with the key characteristics and the physical and human influences for each Landscape Character Type, the geographically unique Landscape Character Areas that occur within them are then described.

Section 6 of the report provides a **Glossary** of key terms and **Abbreviations**, followed by **Section 7, Core References** and **Section 8, Acknowledgements**.

¹ Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Wales, Countryside Agency and SNH, 2002