

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Third edition

Landscape Institute and
Institute of Environmental
Management & Assessment

ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT
ASSESSMENT

5.36 All effects that are considered likely to take place should be described as fully as possible:

- Effects on individual components of the landscape, such as loss of trees or buildings for example, or addition of new elements, should be identified and mapped (and if appropriate and helpful quantified by measuring the change).
- Changes in landscape character or quality/condition in particular places need to be described as fully as possible and illustrated by maps and images that make clear, as accurately as possible, what is likely to happen.

Good, clear and concise description of the effects that are identified is key to helping a wide range of people understand what may happen if the proposed change or development takes place.

5.37 One of the more challenging issues is deciding whether the landscape effects should be categorised as positive or negative. It is also possible for effects to be neutral in their consequences for the landscape. An informed professional judgement should be made about this and the criteria used in reaching the judgement should be clearly stated. They might include, but should not be restricted to:

- the degree to which the proposal fits with existing character;
- the contribution to the landscape that the development may make in its own right, usually by virtue of good design, even if it is in contrast to existing character.

The importance of perceptions of landscape is emphasised by the European Landscape Convention, and others may of course hold different opinions on whether the effects are positive or negative, but this is not a reason to avoid making this judgement, which will ultimately be weighed against the opinions of others in the decision-making process.

Assessing the significance of landscape effects

5.38 The landscape effects that have been identified should be assessed to determine their significance, based on the principles described in Paragraphs 3.23–3.36. Judging the significance of landscape effects requires methodical consideration of each effect identified and, for each one, assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and the magnitude of the effect on the landscape.

Sensitivity of the landscape receptors

5.39 Landscape receptors need to be assessed firstly in terms of their **sensitivity**, combining judgements of their susceptibility to the type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape. In LVIA sensitivity is similar to the concept of landscape sensitivity used in the wider arena of landscape planning, but it is not the same as it is specific to the particular project or development that is being proposed and to the location in question.

Susceptibility to change

5.40 This means the ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element

and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) 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.

The assessment may take place in situations where there are existing landscape sensitivity and capacity studies, which have become increasingly common. They may deal with the general type of development that is proposed, in which case they may provide useful preliminary background information for the assessment. But they cannot provide a substitute for the individual assessment of the susceptibility of the receptors in relation to change arising from the specific development proposal. 5.41

Some of these existing assessments may deal with what has been called ‘intrinsic’ or ‘inherent’ sensitivity, without reference to a specific type of development. These cannot reliably inform assessment of the susceptibility to change since they are carried out without reference to any particular type of development and so do not relate to the specific development proposed. Since landscape effects in LVIA are particular to both the specific landscape in question and the specific nature of the proposed development, the assessment of susceptibility must be tailored to the project. It should not be recorded as part of the landscape baseline but should be considered as part of the assessment of effects. 5.42

Judgements about the susceptibility of landscape receptors to change should be recorded on a verbal scale (for example high, medium or low), but the basis for this must be clear, and linked back to evidence from the baseline study. 5.43

Value of the landscape receptor

The baseline study will have established the value attached to the landscape receptors (see Paragraphs 5.19–5.31), covering: 5.44

- the value of the Landscape Character Types or Areas that may be affected, based on review of any designations at both national and local levels, and, where there are no designations, judgements based on criteria that can be used to establish landscape value;
- the value of individual contributors to landscape character, especially the key characteristics, which may include individual elements of the landscape, particular landscape features, notable aesthetic, perceptual or experiential qualities, and combinations of these contributors.

The value of the landscape receptors will to some degree reflect landscape designations and the level of importance which they signify, although there should not be over-reliance on designations as the sole indicator of value. Assessments should reflect: 5.45

- internationally valued landscapes recognised as World Heritage Sites;
- nationally valued landscapes (National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Scenic Areas or other equivalent areas);
- locally valued landscapes, for example local authority landscape designations or, where these do not exist, landscapes assessed as being of equivalent value using clearly stated and recognised criteria;
- landscapes that are not nationally or locally designated, or judged to be of equivalent

value using clearly stated and recognised criteria, but are nevertheless valued at a community level.

- 5.46 There can be complex relationships between the value attached to landscape receptors and their susceptibility to change which are especially important when considering change within or close to designated landscapes. For example:
- An internationally, nationally or locally valued landscape does not automatically, or by definition, have high susceptibility to all types of change.
 - It is possible for an internationally, nationally or locally important landscape to have relatively low susceptibility to change resulting from the particular type of development in question, by virtue of both the characteristics of the landscape and the nature of the proposal.
 - The particular type of change or development proposed may not compromise the specific basis for the value attached to the landscape.
- 5.47 Landscapes that are nationally designated (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales and their equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland) will be accorded the highest value in the assessment. If the area affected by the proposal is on the margin of or adjacent to such a designated area, thought may be given to the extent to which it demonstrates the characteristics and qualities that led to the designation of the area. Boundaries are very important in defining the extent of designated areas, but they often follow convenient physical features and as a result there may be land outside the boundary that meets the designation criteria and land inside that does not. Similar principles apply to locally designated landscapes but here the difficulty may be that the characteristics or qualities that provided the basis for their designation are not always clearly set down.

Magnitude of landscape effects

- 5.48 Each effect on landscape receptors needs to be assessed in terms of its **size or scale**, the **geographical extent** of the area influenced, and its **duration and reversibility**.

Size or scale

- 5.49 Judgements are needed about the size or scale of change in the landscape that is likely to be experienced as a result of each effect. This should be described, and also categorised on a verbal scale that distinguishes the amount of change but is not overly complex. For example, the effect of both loss and addition of new features may be judged as major, moderate, minor or none, or other equivalent words. The judgements should, for example, take account of:
- the extent of existing landscape elements that will be lost, the proportion of the total extent that this represents and the contribution of that element to the character of the landscape – in some cases this may be quantified;
 - the degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the landscape are altered either by removal of existing components of the landscape or by addition of new ones – for example, removal of hedges may change a small-scale, intimate landscape into a large-scale, open one, or introduction of new buildings or tall structures may alter open skylines;