

Historic Environment and Landscape Character

Policy CS 19

Historic Environment and Landscape Character

In order to ensure that the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District is conserved and enhanced, the natural, cultural, and functional components of its character will be considered as a whole. In adopting this holistic approach, particular regard will be given to:

- a) The sensitivity of the area to change.
- b) Ensuring that new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.
- c) The conservation and, where appropriate, enhancement of heritage assets and their settings (including those designations identified in Box 1).
- d) Accessibility to and participation in the historic environment by the local community.

Proposals for development should be informed by and respond to:

- a) The distinctive character areas and key characteristics identified in relevant landscape character assessments including Historic Landscape Characterisation for West Berkshire and Historic Environment Character Zoning for West Berkshire.
- b) Features identified in various settlement character studies including Quality Design - West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document, the Newbury Historic Character Study, Conservation Area Appraisals and community planning documents which have been adopted by the Council such as Parish Plans and Town and Village Design Statements.
- c) The nature of and the potential for heritage assets identified through the Historic Environment Record for West Berkshire and the extent of their significance.

5.131 One of the key issues facing West Berkshire is the conservation and enhancement of the distinctive local character of both the natural and built environment. The high quality diverse landscape character with its rich cultural and natural heritage contributes to the enjoyment and overall quality of life of everyone in the District. Using this as a positive tool in accommodating necessary change is an important element of the Core Strategy.

Donnington Castle



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5.132 The character of the landscape⁽⁹³⁾ in West Berkshire is defined by historic processes that have shaped and formed the landscapes that exist today. Having an understanding of these processes and the way the historic environment of the District has influenced settlement patterns and the sense of place of particular areas, is essential when accommodating future development. The conservation, protection and enhancement of the District's historic environment (including individual heritage assets and their settings, in a manner appropriate to their significance), is therefore a key aim of the policy.

Box 1

Historic environment designations in West Berkshire

- 52 Conservation Areas
- Approximately 1900 Listed Buildings
- Approximately 90 Scheduled Monuments
- 12 Historic Parks and Gardens - 3 of which, Aldermaston Court, Sandford Priory and Shaw House, are currently on the English Heritage Register of 'Heritage at Risk'
- 1 Registered Battlefield, Newbury 1 (1643) - currently on the English Heritage Register of 'Heritage at Risk'
- Over 5000 other heritage assets recorded in the Historic Environment Record

5.133 Conserving and enhancing the distinctive landscape character of the District is given considerable weight in line with national policy. Landscape character varies and a suitable approach to development in one part of the District may therefore not be acceptable in another part.

5.134 74% of the District is part of the North Wessex Downs AONB which adjoins the Chilterns AONB along the River Thames, the District boundary, before sweeping south, encircling Newbury to encompass the northern reaches of the rolling chalk hills of the Hampshire Downs. The AONB is characterised by the quality of its chalk landscape which ranges from remote open downland, dramatic skyline escarpments, contrasting wooded downland, and the small scale intimate settled river valleys of the Lambourn and Pang.

5.135 Outside the AONB, the River Kennet, from Newbury to Reading, lies within a distinctive broad corridor of an open lowland landscape characterised by a variety of wetland habitats including wet meadow, reed bed, and flooded gravel workings. Further south there are small areas of remnant heath with the Ministry of Defence also occupying large tracts of land at Aldermaston and Burghfield.

5.136 Settlements are a key component of the landscape, and in West Berkshire most settlements can trace their origins back over many millennia. A variety of rural settlement forms can be seen from the nucleated patterns common on the chalk downs, to the more dispersed patterns found in the southern part of the District. A key feature of even the larger settlements is the way in which few have coalesced in recent times, and so the blurring of the physical distinction between places has largely been avoided.

5.137 It is essential that new development should help sustain and/or create landscapes with a strong sense of place and local identity and this is another key element of the policy. The policy will protect and enhance this diversity and local distinctiveness through the use of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) rather than through the use of local landscape designations. This provides the framework for informed decisions to be made as to whether different landscapes should evolve by:

93 For the purposes of this policy the Council has used the European Landscape Convention definition of landscape "An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors." (Council of Europe 2000). It applies to all landscapes, towns and villages, as well as open countryside; and ordinary or even degraded landscapes, as well as those that are afforded protection. The ELC was signed by the UK Government in February 2006 and became binding from March 2007.

- Conserving the existing and historic character;
- Enhancing existing character by introducing new features into the landscape;
- Strengthening or restoring a previous character; or
- Creating a new character when a sense of place and local distinctiveness have been eroded or lost.

5.138 There are a number of relevant landscape assessments covering the District, including the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Character Assessment, the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment and the Newbury District Landscape Assessment⁽⁹⁴⁾. LCA is particularly valuable when looking at landscape sensitivity, whether that be the inherent sensitivity of the landscape itself, or its sensitivity to a particular type of change.



5.139 In addition, Historic Landscape Characterisation⁽⁹⁵⁾ and Historic Environment Character Zoning⁽⁹⁶⁾ will be used by the Council to inform and support planning decisions. At a more detailed level, these will be supplemented by the use of relevant settlement character studies, including the Newbury Historic Character Study⁽⁹⁷⁾, and adopted Conservation Area Appraisals. The Council is currently undertaking a programme of Conservation Area Reviews, through the production of Conservation Area Appraisals. These will be formally adopted and published by the Council to support the policies contained within this Core Strategy and other subsequent DPDs. The Council also intends to compile a 'local list' of heritage assets across the District which will be used to support and inform policies.

5.140 It is essential that as the landscape evolves in a holistic way it also reflects the value that the public places on it. The Council actively encourages the production of non-statutory community planning documents such as Town and Village Design Statements and Parish Plans and where they have been adopted or endorsed by the Council will use them to inform and support the policies contained within this Core Strategy and other subsequent DPDs.

5.141 Successful conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and landscape character of the District can only be achieved through partnership and co-operation. To this end the Council will work with the heritage sector to produce a Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP). This will provide a strategic view of the historic environment resource in the District, identify key issues and opportunities and produce a targeted action plan. By promoting a multi-agency approach to the management of the historic environment, it aims to increase public understanding and enjoyment and promote local community participation in the management of the historic environment.

Delivery and Monitoring

The Council will deliver this policy through a variety of mechanisms, but primarily through more detailed policies contained in the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD, the development management process, as a partner in the production of the West Berkshire Historic Environment Action Plan and by actively supporting the West Berkshire Heritage Forum as a mechanism for engaging communities and interest groups.

94 see [Landscape Character Assessment](#) available at www.westberks.gov.uk

95 [Historic Landscape Characterisation](#) available at www.westberks.gov.uk

96 [Historic Environment Character Zoning](#) available at www.westberks.gov.uk

97 [Newbury Historic Character Study](#) available at www.westberks.gov.uk

5 Core Policies

The number of Listed Buildings, Battlefields, and Historic Parks and Gardens at risk, together with the number of Conservation Areas with an up to date Conservation Area Appraisal, will be reported in the AMR.