

REPORTS & REVIEWS

Landscape character assessment and its place in planning policy

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◉ A line drawing illustrating the local character of the Staffordshire countryside.

Image: Staffordshire County Council

“Landscape character assessments will only be effective when more county and local level assessments are used as a link in the planning process”

THIS COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER Network workshop chaired by Terry Robinson of the Countryside Agency follows a decade of landscape character assessment (LCA) work. The workshop focused on the link between LCA practice and planning, aiming to bring it further into play within the planning process.

As an exploration of the professional experiences of those involved with employing LCA techniques, the workshop provided insight into a whole range of issues: landscape architect Dominic Watkins from Chris Blanford Associates provided a framework for the day by outlining the statute basis of LCA; Andrew Goode at Staffordshire County Council confirmed the breakaway from traditional landscape planning designations, while explaining the use of descriptive and evaluation-based interpretations of LCA guidance in Staffordshire. This was taken forward by landscape architect Carolyn Cox from Warwickshire County Council who illustrated landscape assessment in Warwickshire, where common references for aligning research are being sought, suggesting the need for further development of geographical information systems for landscape assessment at county level.

In a view from the northeast, science-based landscape architect and ecologist Dr John Benson of the University of Newcastle described the working methodologies which are being developed to form a character-based approach to the planning of windfarms. Architect and facilitator Jeff Bishop of BDOR detailed the challenges, benefits and practice in successfully

involving public stakeholders, emphasising the need for employing trained facilitators and giving prior training to consultees. The scientific techniques for detailing the extent and ease to which empiric data may be accessed to determine biodiversity, such as the flora and fauna of a place, were discussed by ecologist Dr Roger Catchpole of English Nature. The final talk by landscape architect Dr Karl Kropf from Roger Evans Associates examined work involving urban landscape assessment and the benefits of instilling a landscape character based genius loci into design masterplanning for towns.

The ensuing discussion considered the lack of county and local level landscape assessment evidence for use as Supplementary Planning Guidance. It also considered the need to provide support for LCA, including the importance and value of urban landscape assessment. LCA is at one level purely analytical. It will therefore be effective only where more county and local level landscape assessments are used as a link for the positive planning and design of tomorrow's landscapes.

Adam Cook

For more information on the Countryside Character Initiative visit the following websites:

◁www.countryside.gov.uk/cc▷ or
◁www.snh.org.uk/strategy/LCA▷

For more information on the Countryside Character Network visit the website: ◁www.ccnetwork.org.uk▷