



DAVENTRY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

CORE TASK 4:

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1.0 Introduction

Background

1.1 The Environment Partnership (TEP) Ltd was appointed by Daventry District Council in October 2016 to undertake a wide ranging landscape assessment of the District. The commission was arranged into six core tasks and these are outlined below.

- Core Task 1 – this involved a review and update of the existing evidence and landscape character assessment. The existing evidence comprises the Northamptonshire Environmental Character and Green Infrastructure Suite (2005); Daventry Infrastructure Studies – Green Infrastructure and Landscape Technical Report (2008) and the Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study (2009).
- Core Task 2 – this required the review of the Special Landscape Area (SLA) forming part of the saved Policy EN1 from the Local Plan (1997). As part of this core task, justification for the potential for a high quality landscape designation was required, including the definition of boundaries.
- Core Task 3 – based on the findings of core tasks 1 and 2, consideration was given as to whether any part of the District would be appropriate as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Core Task 4 – this part of the commission required consideration of the pressure for development to the fringes of Daventry and Northampton and the potential impact on land currently providing recreational space. Another aspect to cover was the smaller settlements near to the urban fringe and the potential harm to their character by urban expansion or coalescence.
- Core Task 5 – using the findings from the previous core tasks, appropriate wording for criteria based policy and policies against which to consider proposals affecting valued and sensitive landscapes was prepared.
- Core Task 6 – four potential site allocations to the fringes of Daventry were assessed in terms of their landscape capacity to accommodate change. This included considering factors such as landscape and visual quality and the scope for mitigation of any proposed development.

Core Task 4

1.2 Core Task 4 concerns the future policy approach to Daventry and Northampton fringe landscapes. The spatial strategy in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011 - 2031 (July 2016) focuses growth on Daventry and Northampton. This will mean development in and close to the fringe landscapes which have an important role as an attractive recreational resource for the neighbouring populations (whether as part of accessible land or enjoyed from other areas), as the setting to settlements, and through their general contribution to landscape character.

- 1.3 This part of the study considers the three principal roles that fringe landscapes perform, which are:
- Protecting the identity, character and setting of settlements;
 - Maintaining the open and green nature of areas; and
 - Contributing to recreational opportunities near the urban edge.

Current Local Plan Policy

- 1.4 At present, parts of the fringe landscape to the north of Northampton and surrounding Daventry are designated as 'Green Wedge', under the Daventry District Local Plan (1997) Saved Policy EN10, or as a 'Rural Access Area' under Saved Policy EN11. The extents of these designations are shown on Figures 4.1 and 4.2.
- 1.5 Saved Policy EN10 specifies that *'planning permission will not be granted for development in Green Wedges as identified on the Proposals Map unless it would not:*
- *Be discordant with the predominantly open/green nature of a Green Wedge by reason of appearance or use; or*
 - *Reduce the physical separation between settlements; or*
 - *Compromise agricultural or forestry operations, recreation use or wildlife value in a Green Wedge; or*
 - *Impair public access to a Green Wedge.'*
- 1.6 The supporting policy information explains that 'Green Wedges' are extensive areas of predominantly open and green spaces which are adjacent to large settlements, and act as a buffer between built-up areas, preventing coalescence and providing a setting for settlements and established landscape features. The current Local Plan states that the District Council considers that the greatest value of the 'Green Wedges' is as undeveloped land, which is available for recreation and or agriculture, as land which has ecological or landscape importance, and or as land providing separation between settlements. The open and undeveloped character of land also contributes to the identity of settlements and landscape features, which are considered important to sustain. With increased pressure for development on the edges of urban areas, the District Council considered it prudent within the plan period to protect this land from inappropriate development, and the District Council sought to enhance them and improve access to them. Policy EN10 was saved by a direction of the Secretary of State in 2007.
- 1.7 Saved Policy EN11 states that *'planning permission will not be granted for development on land in Rural Access Areas, as identified on the Proposals Map, unless it would:*
- *Not be discordant with the predominantly open/green nature and character of a Rural Access Area by reason of appearance or use; and*
 - *Not compromise the wildlife value of a Rural Access Area; and*
 - *Increase public access to a Rural Access Area, and secure land use management arrangements are made to sustain public access in tandem with the development's operational use.'*

- 1.8 The supporting policy information explains that Rural Access Areas are extensive areas of predominantly open and green spaces which are adjacent to large settlements. This land is described as not being as structurally important as Green Wedges, but this open countryside is also not required for development and afforded particular protection. Rural Access Areas are close to large urban populations and as the nearest countryside should be available for the public's appreciation and positive use. Within the plan period the District Council sought *'to encourage development that provides opportunities for diversifying land use whilst increasing and then sustaining the public use of such land, yet which is respectful of the open and green character of the urban fringes.'* Policy EN11 was saved by a direction of the Secretary of State in 2007.
- 1.9 In summary, Green Wedges and Rural Access Areas have many common characteristics and functions. Both are extensive, open, green areas close to large settlements to be afforded protection from development. The main differences in descriptions are that Green Wedges are to be available for recreational or agricultural use and of landscape or ecological value. Rural Access Areas should be available for public appreciation and positive use, but the option of being available for agricultural use, and ecological or landscape value do not appear in the policy discussion for Rural Access Areas.

Report Structure

- 1.10 **Section 2.0** sets out the approach or method used to assess the function of land at the fringes of Northampton and Daventry in relation to three principal roles listed at paragraph 1.3.
- 1.11 **Section 3.0** presents the findings of the desk-top and field assessment of land units at the North Northampton fringe, and **Section 4.0** presents the same information for the land units at the Daventry fringe.
- 1.12 **Section 5.0** summarises the recommendations resulting from the desk-top and field assessments in terms of future policy to protect the future role and function of the fringe landscapes. The report conclusions in Section 5.0 also give consideration to the future potential of designating Green Belt around Northampton to deal with the issue of coalescence and protection of settlement identity.

2.0 Method

- 2.1 The following sets out the approach to the review and assessment of the fringe areas in order to advise on the merit of designating areas to help protect settlement identity, character and setting; maintain the open and green nature of areas; and contribute to recreational opportunities at the urban edge.
- 2.2 There is no specific guidance or recognised method available for this type of review and assessment. However current guidance on landscape and visual impact assessment, landscape character assessment and landscape capacity assessment in the following publications has been taken into account in developing the approach set out below.
- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment's 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 2013 (GLVIA3);
 - Natural England's 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment', 2014; and
 - The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage's 'Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity', 2002.

Study Areas

Northampton Fringe (within Daventry District)

- 2.3 In relation to the northern fringe to Northampton, TEP has identified a study area for the review and assessment, which is shown on Figure 4.1. The proposed study area takes into account the extent of existing saved Local Plan policies (EN10: Green Wedges and EN11: Rural Access Areas), and also other planning designations, allocations and environmental constraints with the potential to control development.
- 2.4 The study area excludes the land at the northern edge of Northampton which has been allocated in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan, Part 1 (Adopted December 2014) as a Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE).
- 2.5 The study area includes the land at Boughton Park, which is designated a Conservation Area and is also part of a Registered Historic Park and Garden to the northwest of the village of Boughton. A small area of land to the western edge of Boughton and east of the A508 is currently designated as Green Wedge (Policy EN10). This Green Wedge also comprises part of the Registered Historic Park and Garden.
- 2.6 To the northwest of Northampton the study area extends beyond the existing Green Wedge and Rural Access Area designations to include land within the District (mainly within existing Special Landscape Areas, Saved Local Plan Policy EN1), with the potential to influence the setting of Chapel Brampton, Church Brampton, Lower Harlestone and Upper Harlestone, and their separation from Northampton.

- 2.7 To the northeast of Northampton the study area extends beyond the existing Green Wedge and Rural Access Area designations to include land between Moulton and the Northampton North SUE (N3) along the A43 Kettering Road, and the small village of Holcot (near Pitsford Water), approximately 3km to the north.

Daventry Fringe

- 2.8 In relation to the Daventry fringe, TEP has identified a study area for the review and assessment, which is shown on Figure 4.2. The proposed study area takes into account the extent of existing saved Local Plan policies (EN10: Green Wedges and EN11: Rural Access Areas), and also other planning designations, allocations and environmental constraints with the potential to control development.
- 2.9 The study area excludes the land to the north eastern edge of Daventry which has been allocated in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan, Part 1 (Adopted December 2014) as a Sustainable Urban Extension (D3 SUE).
- 2.10 To the northwest of Daventry the study area extends across land with the potential to influence the setting of Braunston, its separation from Daventry and extension into the countryside.
- 2.11 To the north of Daventry, the study area extends beyond the existing Rural Access Area designation to include land up to a minor road linking the A361 to Braunston.
- 2.12 The study area extends beyond the northern edge of Daventry across land with the potential to influence the setting of Welton and its separation from Daventry. It is bound to the west by the A361 and it extends 200m east of Welton Lane to its eastern edge.
- 2.13 To the northeast of Daventry, the study area extends east of the D3 SUE with the potential to influence the setting of Norton and its future separation from Daventry.
- 2.14 The study area includes an area of land to the south west of Daventry. The land is south of the A45 and land occupied by Malabar Farm. It is west of the A361 and east of the A425.
- 2.15 There is another area of land that has been considered to the south west of Daventry. This is north of the A425, east of Ashtree Farm and west of Staverton Sports Park.

Land Units within the Study Areas

- 2.16 For the purposes of the review and assessment of fringe areas, the study areas have been divided into separate 'land units'. The land units were initially derived from a desk-based review of character assessment boundaries and geographical features. Land units also provide separation between particular settlements, for instance between the area Daventry and villages on the periphery such as Norton and Welton.
- 2.17 During subsequent field survey work both the study area and land units have been reviewed to ensure that they are appropriate for the purposes of the study, and refinements have been made. The land units within the study areas are also shown on Figures 4.1 and 4.2.

Review and Assessment of Land Units

- 2.18 The review and assessment of each land unit in the study area, comprises three parts:
- Desk-based Review;
 - Specific Land Unit Assessment; and
 - Recommendations.

Desk-based Review

- 2.19 The desk-based review presents factual information relevant to the consideration of whether land should be designated in the future to protect it from development, in order to fulfil the purposes set out in the current saved Local Plan Policies EN10 and EN11.
- 2.20 The desk-based review sets out a description of the land and information on:
- Relevant current planning designations or allocations and known environmental constraints;
 - The physical separation the land provides between settlements;
 - Existing public access and recreational routes; and
 - Relevant current planning applications or consents within the land unit or immediately adjacent.
- 2.21 The relevant current planning applications or consents within or adjacent to the land unit capture information at the time of the assessment, and it is noted that this aspect is subject to constant change. Not all planning consents or applications on land within and adjacent to the land units have been highlighted in the reporting. Planning applications or consents ancillary to an existing and clearly identifiable land use, such as a school or golf course, or relating to very small-scale development, have not been highlighted as these developments would not have a material effect on the baseline landscape. In addition where planning applications or consents are within allocated land, these generally have not been identified, as there would be a presumption in any case that this allocated land will be developed in the future.
- 2.22 As part of the desk-based review, a summary is provided of the key characteristics of the District Landscape Character Assessment's Landscape Character Types (updated as part of Core Task 1) that the land units are within. In addition reference is made to relevant additional characteristics identified for the specific Landscape Character Area (LCA) the land unit is in, and a relevant summary of the landscape strategy for the LCA is included. This summary information highlights the characteristic elements of the landscape, and the value and sensitivity of particular landscape elements.

2.23 Finally the desk-based review includes a summary of the sensitivity judgements taken from the 'Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study' (2009) and 'Daventry Infrastructure Studies: Green Infrastructure and Landscape Technical Report' (2009), where this is available for land within the land unit. These studies were undertaken by other consultants for the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation and River Nene Regional Park Community Interest Company respectively. The studies considered the sensitivity of the land to a major mixed-use urban extension in excess of 5ha, although the studies note that some assets could be sensitive to development of less than 5ha. Whilst this information was prepared some time ago, the sensitivity judgements on landscape and views, biodiversity, cultural heritage, and flooding and minerals, as well as the overall sensitivity judgement (which is provided in the report for Northampton) are useful indicators for this assessment of fringe landscapes. The desk-based review also provides relevant information on Green Infrastructure (GI) proposals derived from these two studies.

Specific Land Unit Assessment

2.24 As part of the study, site visits have been carried out by two Chartered Landscape Architects to each of the land units. Land has been surveyed from roads and public footpaths within and adjacent to the land units (including publically accessible viewpoints at settlement edges).

2.25 During the field survey the following considerations (derived from the review of the existing wording of the saved Local Plan policies EN10 and EN11) have been used to assess the land units:

- The appearance of the existing settlement edges as viewed from the land unit;
- The contribution the land makes to the setting or identity of the settlement, or other particular landscape features;
- The role the land unit plays in the perceived separation between settlements;
- The contribution the land unit makes to perceived openness and wider landscape character; and
- Notable views.

2.26 In addition, the assessment includes any other relevant considerations in relation to the specific land unit, such as the proximity of existing or future potential transport infrastructure (which could result in changes to the landscape).

2.27 Photographs have been taken to illustrate the assessment and selected photographs are included in the reporting.

Recommendations

2.28 The review and assessment concludes with a recommendation on the future designation of land within the land unit. The recommendation is explained with reference to the desk-top review and findings of the site assessment. For each land unit there is an accompanying plan to illustrate the recommendation made.

3.0 Assessment of North Northampton Fringe

3.1 This section presents the findings of the desk-top review and field assessment of land along the northern edge of Northampton. The study area is divided into 11 land units as follows:

- NF1: Land to the south of Upper Harlestone;
- NF2: Land to the southeast of Lower Harlestone and south of Church Brampton;
- NF3: Land to the southeast of Church Brampton and south of Chapel Brampton;
- NF4: Land west of Boughton Park and Boughton;
- NF5: Land in Boughton Park between Boughton and Pitsford;
- NF6: Land to the east of Boughton;
- NF7: Land to the west of Moulton;
- NF8: Land to the southeast of Moulton;
- NF9: Land in Overstone Park to the south of Overstone;
- NF10: Land to the north of Overstone; and
- NF11: Land between Moulton and Holcot.

4.0 Assessment of Daventry Fringe

4.1 This section presents the findings of the desk-top review and field assessment of land around Daventry fringe. The study area is divided into 6 land units as follows:

- DA1: Land to the north west of Drayton Fields Industrial Estate
- DA2: Land between the northern edge of Daventry and Welton
- DA3: Land to the north and west of Norton
- DA4: Land including Stepnell Spinney
- DA5: Land east of Ashtree Farm

5.0 Summary and Conclusions

- 5.1 This section summarises the findings of the assessment of land on the fringe of North Northampton and Daventry, and provides a strategic view of the recommendations on designation.

Overall Recommendation on Future Designation

- 5.2 In carrying out this study it has been noted from the desk-based review and site assessment that the land currently designated as a 'Rural Access Area' (under Policy EN11) performs the same role in maintaining land of an open character as the land currently designated as 'Green Wedge' (under Policy EN10).
- 5.3 The review of policy noted that Rural Access Areas are described as being of 'lesser structural importance' in the policy discussion although the distinction between Green Wedges and Rural Access Areas appeared to be related to how land is used or valued rather than in relation to their roles in guiding development and protecting character.
- 5.4 In the future it is recommended that a single Green Wedge policy is used to protect land at the fringes from development. It is considered that this will provide greater clarity on the importance of protecting the predominantly open and green nature of this land. It is acknowledged that the functions of this land include its contribution to landscape character, the identity and setting of villages and other landscape features, preventing the coalescence of settlements, and providing recreational opportunities and a biodiversity resource close to urban edges.
- 5.5 Core Task 5 provides further guidance on the use of appropriate policy wording for criteria based policies against which to consider proposals affecting valued and sensitive landscapes, protection of settlement identity and coalescence.
- 5.6 The recommended extent of future Green Wedge designations is the result of consideration of the land units against criteria set out in 'Site Specific Assessment' in Chapter 2.0. The precise boundaries may be subject to further refinement by the District Council to take into account the definition of village confines for the emerging Part 2 Local Plan, as well as detailed site layouts on planning applications and appeals.

North Northampton Fringe

- 5.7 Figure 4.3 shows the land within the North Northampton fringe study area which is recommended to be designated as a 'Green Wedge' in the future to protect it from built development. The majority of land within the study area is included in this recommendation, and all the land in land units NF2, NF3, NF4, NF6, NF8, NF9 and NF10. This reflects the general importance of land within the Northampton Fringe study area in providing separation between the northern edge of Northampton and outlying village settlements. The land within the study area is predominantly intact and open farmland, which contributes to the identity, character and setting of settlements. As well as agricultural land the study area contains distinctive landscape features, such as woodland, parkland, and river and tributary valleys, which also make a particular contribution to the setting of nearby settlements. The degree of public access within the land units is varied, but the majority of land units provide recreational opportunity through direct access on Public Rights of Way which extend from the settlements. Where individual fields or land parcels are not accessible, they are appreciated from other rights of way adjacent or nearby and form part of the overall landscape, contributing to character.
- 5.8 The majority of land within land unit NF7 is recommended to be designated as a 'Green Wedge' in the future, although a small field at the southwest edge of Moulton has been excluded as it has full planning consent for 41 houses (Council ref. DA/2015/0944).
- 5.9 In relation to land units NF1, NF5 and NF11, the assessment recommends that parts of the land units are taken forward as part of a future 'Green Wedge' designation. In each case the land excluded from the recommendation is detached and remote from the northern edge of Northampton, and perceived as open countryside. In these locations the pressure for built development would be less and the presumption against development would be greater, akin to other areas of open countryside in Daventry District which are remote from main settlements.

Green Belt Designation

- 5.10 Consideration has been given to the merit and feasibility of a Green Belt designation around Northampton to protect land from development.
- 5.11 The advantages of employing a Green Belt designation on land at the northern fringe of Northampton would be the additional weight this would carry as a nationally recognised planning designation, supported by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that:

'The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.'

- 5.12 Paragraphs 87 and 88 of the NPPF clearly set out that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and that substantial weight should be given to any harm. Inappropriate development should only be approved in very special circumstances, and very special circumstances will only exist where the potential harm to the Green Belt or any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 5.13 Paragraph 80 of the NPPF sets out the five purposes of Green Belt, which are:
- *'to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
 - *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
 - *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
 - *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
 - *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.'*
- 5.14 There is no stipulation in the NPPF that each or any part of a Green Belt designation must fulfil all of the purposes. If the North Northampton fringe was designated Green Belt, generally it would conform with these purposes. The protection of this land to the north of Northampton would check the unrestricted sprawl of Northampton, assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict land. Due to their geographical positions there is no risk of the towns of Daventry and Northampton merging into one another. However, Green Belt land to the north of Northampton would prevent further merging of Northampton with the outlying villages in Daventry District. The land does not form part of the setting of or contribute to the special character of any historic towns. However designating this land as Green Belt would preserve the setting and special character of the villages, the majority of which have a Conservation Area at their centre, and all of which contain Listed Buildings.
- 5.15 However the NPPF is also clear at Paragraph 82 that the general extent of Green Belts is already established and that new Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances. Paragraph 82 provides the example of an exceptional circumstance as when planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or major urban extensions.
- 5.16 Paragraph 82 of the NPPF specifies that if proposing new Green Belt, local planning authorities should:
- *'demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;*
 - *set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;*
 - *show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;*
 - *demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and*
 - *show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.'*

- 5.17 The combination of Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) allocated in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and future road schemes which are currently being planned, could be deemed to be a major change in circumstances, such that an exception exists for the open land on the northern edge of Northampton.
- 5.18 The Council would need to assemble evidence to demonstrate that the current 'Green Wedge' and 'Rural Access Area' Local Plan designations have not been effective in protecting land from built development over the plan period. The Council also would need to show how a Green Belt designation would help to meet other objectives in the NPPF.
- 5.19 A potential Green Belt designation could not take place in Daventry in isolation. It would have to be considered on a strategic scale involving other Northamptonshire authorities and would require cooperation between authorities to assemble a strategic evidence base.
- 5.20 In summary, it is considered that a Green Belt designation would provide better protection to the fringe landscape at the northern edge of Northampton, compared with a future 'Green Wedge' local plan designation. It is feasible that the planned growth and road schemes within and adjacent to this land could be deemed to be an exceptional circumstance by the Planning Inspectorate. However, the Council would need to allocate resources to assembling further evidence with reference to Paragraph 82 of the NPPF, and with the cooperation of neighbouring local planning authorities.

Daventry Fringe

- 5.21 Figure 4.4 shows the land within the Daventry fringe study area which is recommended to be designated as a 'green wedge' in the future to protect it from built development. The majority of land within the proposed land units is included in this recommendation, and all the land in land units DA1, DA2, DA4 and DA5. This reflects the general importance of land within the Daventry Fringe study area in providing separation between the edges of Daventry and outlying villages. The land within the study area is predominantly intact and open farmland, which contributes to the identity, character and setting of settlements. As well as agricultural land the study area contains distinctive landscape features, such as woodland, parkland, and river and tributary valleys, which also make a particular contribution to the setting of nearby settlements. The degree of public access within the land units is varied, but the majority of land units provide recreational opportunity through direct access on Public Rights of Way which extend from the settlements. Where individual fields or land parcels are not accessible, they are appreciated from other rights of way adjacent or nearby and form part of the overall landscape, contributing to character.

- 5.22 In relation to DA3, the assessment recommends that part of the land unit is taken forward as part of a future 'Green Wedge' designation. The land excluded from the recommendation is detached and remote from the eastern edge of Daventry, and perceived as open countryside. In these locations the pressure for built development would be less and the presumption against development would be greater, akin to other areas of open countryside in Daventry District which are remote from main settlements.

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FIGURES

- Figure 4.1 – Northampton Fringe Study Area**
- Figure 4.2 – Daventry Fringe Study Area**
- Figure 4.3 - Northampton Fringe Recommendation**
- Figure 4.4 - Daventry Fringe Recommendation**



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