

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Assessment aims to establish the following:

- a clear understanding of the site and its setting in landscape and visual terms, identifying its landscape character, quality, value and sensitivity.
- to understand the development proposals and mitigation measures in detail;
- to identify all potential direct and indirect impacts of the proposals upon the landscape resource (i.e. landscape elements and character);
- to identify impacts on visual receptors; and
- to conclude about the residual effects of the scheme.

1.2 The process follows a standard approach:

- establish the baseline conditions, i.e. the character, quality, value and sensitivity of the landscape resource (consisting of landscape fabric and landscape character) - and the type and potential sensitivity of visual receptors;
- predict the magnitude of change that the development would bring, allowing for mitigation measures, upon the landscape resource and visual receptors; and
- assess the significance of effect (or impact) that would occur by correlating the predicted magnitude of change with the quality / value of the landscape resource and sensitivity of visual receptor respectively.

1.3 As stated within the main text, the methodology for Landscape and Visual Assessment is based upon the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact

Assessment – prepared by The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment (1st Edition, 1995 & 2nd Edition, 2002) (“GLVIA”)

- 1.4 Landscape and visual matters are separate issues and are dealt with as such in this report. However, they are clearly interrelated. This assessment deals with general scenic quality within the landscape analysis, but separates views from specific viewpoints into the visual context. The methodologies for assessing both are outlined below.

2.0 Landscape Assessment

- 2.1 A landscape baseline is established by identifying, describing and classifying the landscape fabric of the site and the landscape character of the site and surrounding areas.

Landscape fabric

- 2.2 A system of classification is used in order to describe relative **sensitivity** of the various physical components that make up the landscape. A three level relative system of High, Medium and Low sensitivity has been employed, with High allowing recognition of exceptional circumstances where appropriate, and Low also capable of sub-division to account for a 'very low' category. The following definitions have been applied:

- *High*
Examples of landscape fabric that would be defined as having high sensitivity could be artefacts (e.g. dry stone walls) that are scarce at regional level or are locally distinctive / mature vegetation that is in good condition / regionally important footpaths or rights of way. (Exceptional sensitivity may apply in the case of unique or nationally scarce features or elements having particularly distinctive characteristics / mature vegetation with provenance (e.g. ancient woodland or feature parkland trees) / national trails or cycle routes)

- *Medium*
Examples of landscape fabric that would be defined as having medium sensitivity could include artefacts that are locally distinctive but commonplace / mature vegetation that is in moderate or poor condition or is readily replicated / locally important footpaths etc

- *Low*
Examples of landscape fabric that might be defined as having low sensitivity would include artefacts that are regionally or nationally ubiquitous and do not contribute to local distinctiveness / poorly maintained vegetation (e.g. gappy hedgerows). Elements with very low sensitivity would be those considered to detract from landscape character such obtrusive man-made artefacts (e.g. power lines)

Landscape character

2.3 Landscape characterisation is a process of subdividing the landscape into units of similar or shared characteristics that distinguish them from adjoining landscape units with different shared characteristics. Once these units have been identified they can be classified in terms of their relative quality and the relative degrees of value that are placed on them.

2.4 For impact assessment purposes a system of classification is required in order to be able to describe the relative levels of **quality** and **value**. A three level system of High, Medium and Low has again been employed, with High allowing recognition of exceptional circumstances where appropriate, and Low also capable of subdivision to account for a 'poor' category. The following definitions have been applied:

- *High*
Areas that exhibit a positive character with valued features that combine to give an experience of unity, richness and harmony. These are landscapes that may be considered to be of particular importance to conserve and which may be particularly sensitive to change if inappropriately dealt with. 'Exceptional' may be used to describe areas of very strong positive character that are highly valued by virtue of their scenic quality. The sensitivity of such landscapes to change is often recognised through protective designation as National Park or AONB.
- *Medium*
Areas that exhibit positive character but which may have some evidence of alteration to / degradation of / erosion of features resulting in areas of more mixed character.
- *Low*
Areas that are relatively bland or neutral in character with few notable or valued features and / or some evidence of alteration to / degradation of / erosion of features resulting in areas of more mixed character. 'Poor' may be used to describe areas that have been subject to substantial alteration / degradation / erosion of features resulting in generally negative character. Scope for positive enhancement frequently occurs.

2.5 The sensitivity of a landscape to change is reflected in the degree to which a landscape is able to accommodate change (due to a particular type of development) without adverse effects on its character. This may be influenced by a number of factors including general visibility (influenced by topography and vegetation etc.), scale (of the landscape and of the development), robustness of characteristic landscape elements etc. Landscapes vary in their capacity to accommodate different forms of development. Sensitivity is therefore not absolute but will vary according to the type of change under consideration. Sensitivity is not therefore described as part of the baseline, but is considered as part of the assessment of effects.

2.6 Once the baseline conditions are fully established the magnitude of change can be judged. The magnitude of change takes account of whether change is temporary or permanent and of any mitigation measures that have been incorporated into the proposals.

2.7 The degrees of magnitude of impact upon the landscape fabric are:

- *High:*
Permanent removal of or a significant change to the characteristics of the landscape element in question;
- *Medium*
Partial removal of or moderate changes to the characteristics of the landscape element in question. Also applies to complete removal that is mitigated through replacement.
- *Low*
Small scale changes to a landscape element or loss of /change to a small proportion of an extensive feature. Larger scale losses that are fully mitigated through provision of equivalent replacement features.

2.8 The degrees of magnitude of impact upon landscape character are:

- *High:*
Very obvious change in the balance of landscape characteristics over an extensive area; ranging to particularly intensive change (i.e. a dominating effect) over a more limited area;

- *Medium*
Perceptible changes in an extensive area which whilst notable do not alter the balance of the landscape characteristics; ranging to moderate changes in the localised area which whilst obvious do not fundamentally change local character;
- *Low*
Virtually imperceptible change in any components of the wider landscape with modest and unremarkable changes in the localised area.

2.9 Once quality and magnitude are classified the two are correlated to achieve an assessment of the significance of impact. This has been undertaken as shown in Figure 1 below. The overall significance is then stated in terms of:

- No Material effect
- Negligible effect
- Minor effect
- Moderate effect
- Major effect
- Substantial effect.

This terminology is adapted to omit the often used stand-alone category of 'Beneficial effect'. The reason for this is that determination of whether a landscape or visual effect is of benefit or harm is largely subjective and related to individual perceptions of the character of both the proposal and the receiving environment.

2.10 As magnitude and quality are both on sliding scales it is appropriate to sub-divide the High, Medium and Low categories to whichever degree most accurately evaluates any given situation, e.g. High to Medium, Very High, or even High to Medium/High are fully acceptable. This may in turn result in significance of, for example, Minor to Moderate. [Note that in relation to landscape fabric, *quality* of landscape resource on the 'x' axis should be substituted with *sensitivity* of landscape resource.]

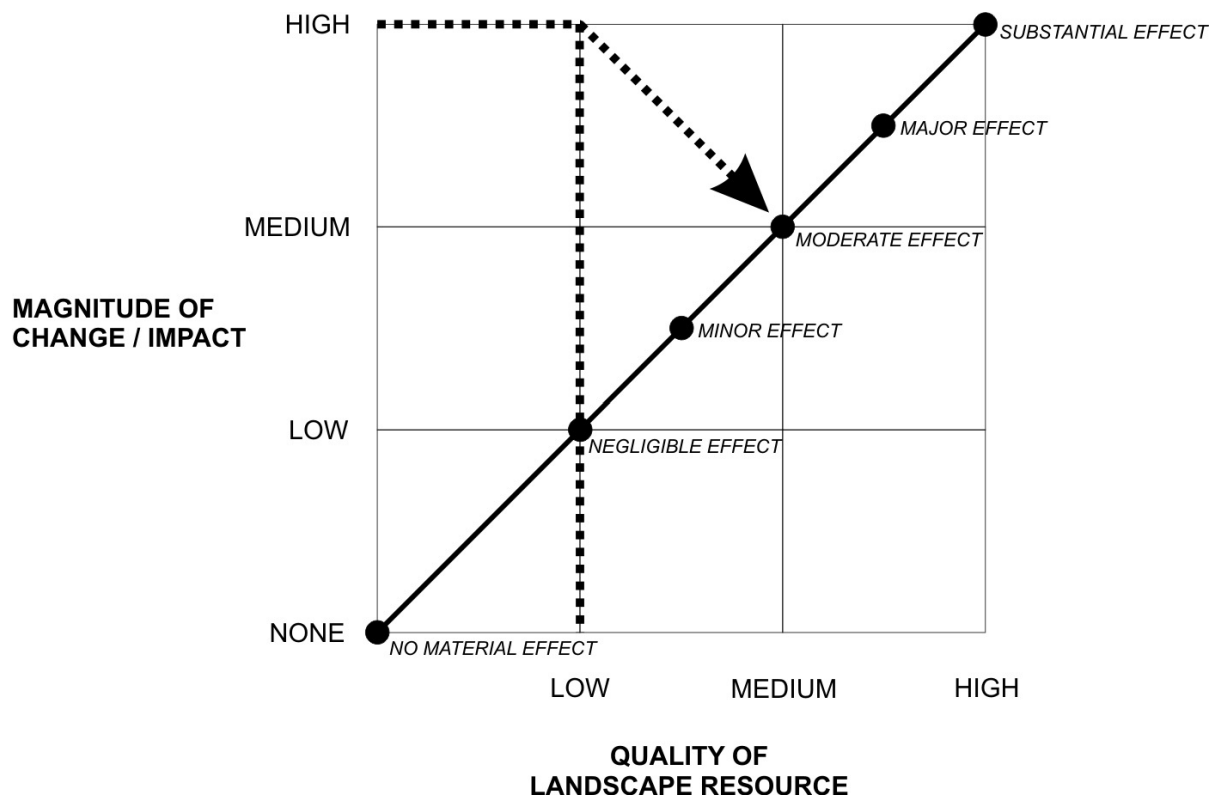


Figure 1

Example: A high magnitude of change on a low quality landscape results in an effect of moderate significance

3.0 Visual Assessment

3.1 The method of determining visual impacts is ostensibly the same as landscape impacts. The receptor sensitivity is identified, as is the magnitude of effect. These are then correlated to produce a significance of impact – see Figure 2 below.

3.2 Relative sensitivity of visual receptors is determined and classified as follows:

- *High*
Strategic recreational footpaths, areas or rights of way; important landscape features with physical, cultural or historic attributes; principal views from residential buildings; views from beauty spots and picnic areas;
- *Medium*
Other footpaths and open spaces; secondary, oblique or distant views from residential buildings; views from institutional buildings (hospitals, schools etc); pedestrians and cyclists travelling on public roads.
- *Low*
Views from industrial or commercial buildings or areas; views experienced by people engaged in active sport / recreation; drivers and passengers of vehicles; views from primarily functional main roads; and views from trains.

3.3 The classification of the magnitudes of visual effect are:

- *High:*
The majority of viewers affected / major changes in the character, make-up and balance of the view;
- *Medium*
Many viewers affected / moderate changes in the nature of the view;
- *Low*
Few viewers affected / minor change in the nature of the view.

In considering the magnitude of visual effects, a commentary is provided to justify the reasoning for the magnitude criterion selected. This in turn will influence the significance of the effect. Such factors considered may include, for example, the potential for weather conditions to restrict views, the principle aspect of the viewpoints/viewers, the proportion of any particular view affected, the potential for

the development to attract the eye or to become a focal point in the view to the detracting/benefit of competing visual elements.

- 3.4 The degrees of sensitivity and magnitude can again be sub-divided to represent most accurately the position on the sliding scale. Whether impacts are beneficial or adverse is again judgmental based upon individual perceptions of the development and its appropriateness in its particular setting.

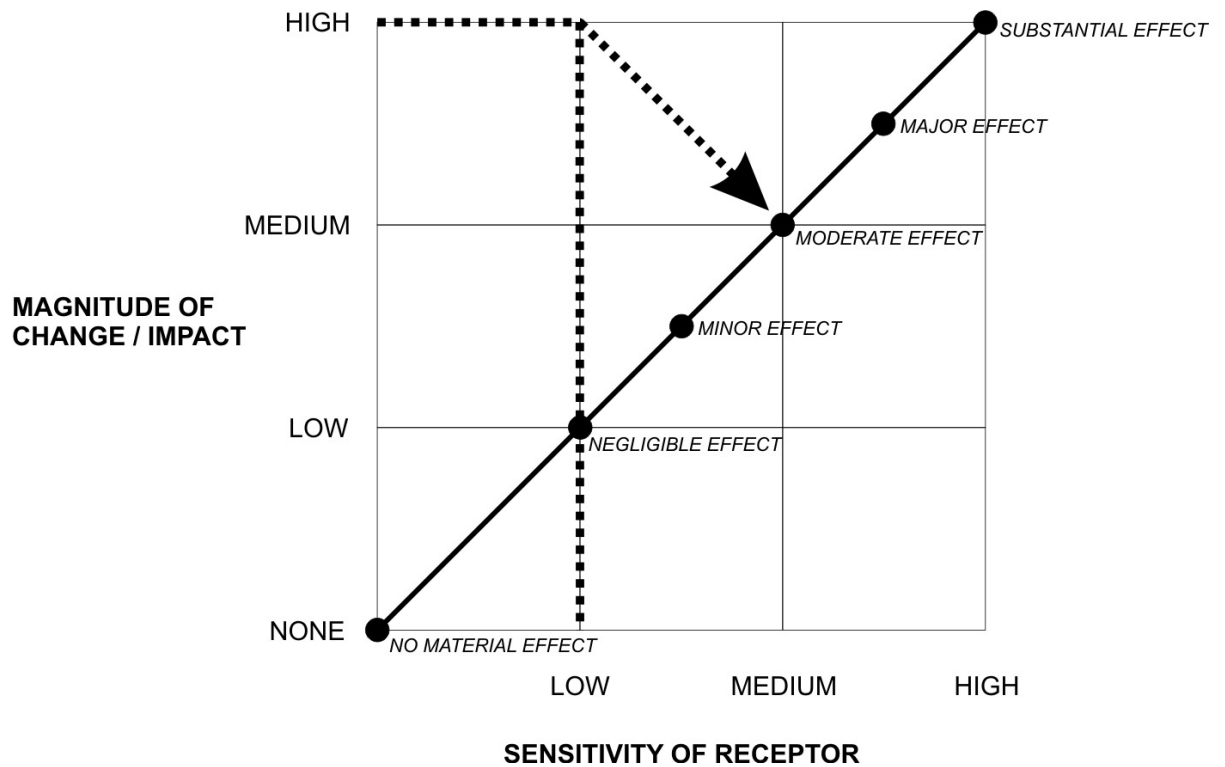


Figure 2

Example: A high magnitude of change on a low sensitivity receptor results in an effect of moderate significance