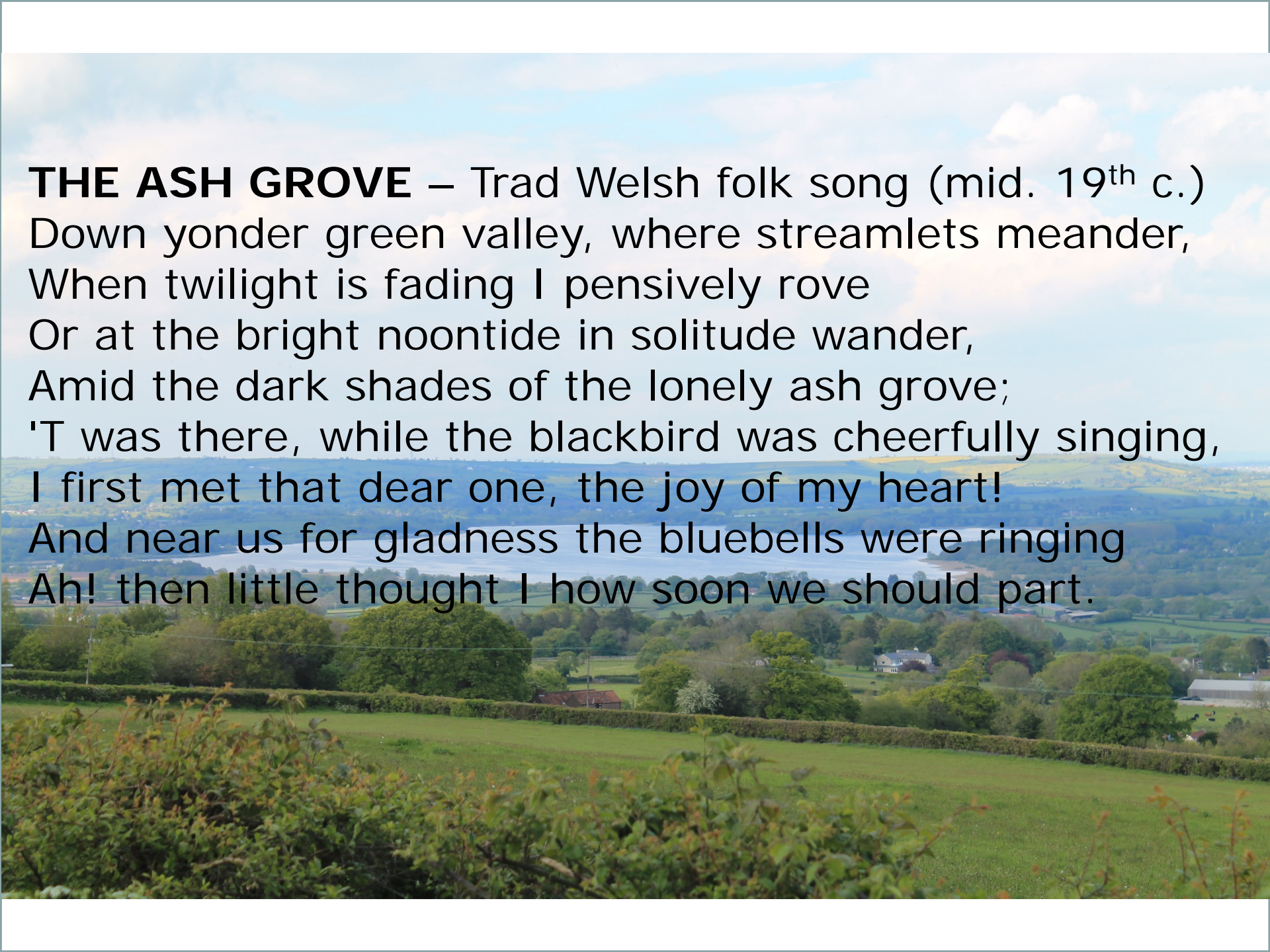


# LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT: INFORMING PLANNING, DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT



Healthy Plants, Healthy Places CPD, 14<sup>th</sup>  
June 2016, Landscape Institute , Kew  
Gardens

Christine Tudor CMLI, FRGS.



**THE ASH GROVE** – Trad Welsh folk song (mid. 19<sup>th</sup> c.)  
Down yonder green valley, where streamlets meander,  
When twilight is fading I pensively rove  
Or at the bright noontide in solitude wander,  
Amid the dark shades of the lonely ash grove;  
'T was there, while the blackbird was cheerfully singing,  
I first met that dear one, the joy of my heart!  
And near us for gladness the bluebells were ringing  
Ah! then little thought I how soon we should part.



**LINDEN LEA –** (Dorset - William Barnes 1801-86)

Within the woodlands, flow'ry gladed,  
By the oak trees' mossy moot,  
The shining grass blades, timber-shaded,  
.....Let other folk make money faster  
In the air of dark-room'd towns;  
I don't dread a peevish master,  
Though no man may heed my frowns.  
I be free to go abroad,  
Or take again my homeward road  
To where, for me, the apple tree  
Do lean down low in Linden Lea

-

# Background to Landscape Character Assessment



One of Natural England's predecessors, the Countryside Agency, had a long association with areas designated as being of national importance (National Parks and AONBs) – set up 51yrs ago in 1968.

IMPORTANTLY, it was also concerned about the active management of the wider countryside and its work highlighted the need for a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gave the countryside of England its character.

Following on from work in the 1980s the Countryside Commission and others developed the technique of landscape assessment – in 1993 Landscape Assessment Guidance was published. Over the years this work evolved to give us the best practice approach, **Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland**, (2002), which was replaced by “**An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment**” in 2014.



# The Countryside Character Programme, 1994. The process did not seek to prevent activities

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## THE COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER PROGRAMME

The English landscape has a character that is marked by its sheer diversity and mix. The moors and mountains, fields and farms, and the coasts, towns and woodlands all combine to produce a landscape that is sometimes splendid and sometimes sad. But it is always special to someone. It has a character that is peculiar to its locality. It has a sense of place.

The Countryside Commission is embarking on a major exercise to capture and express the character of the English landscape – the Countryside Character Programme.

We all need to understand the landscape. We need to discover how it has evolved to its present state, and how it might change in the future. We must explore the

reasons that make one area distinct from another. Why do the uplands of the north differ from those of the south west? Why are the patterns of fields and hedges in East Anglia so different from Cornwall?

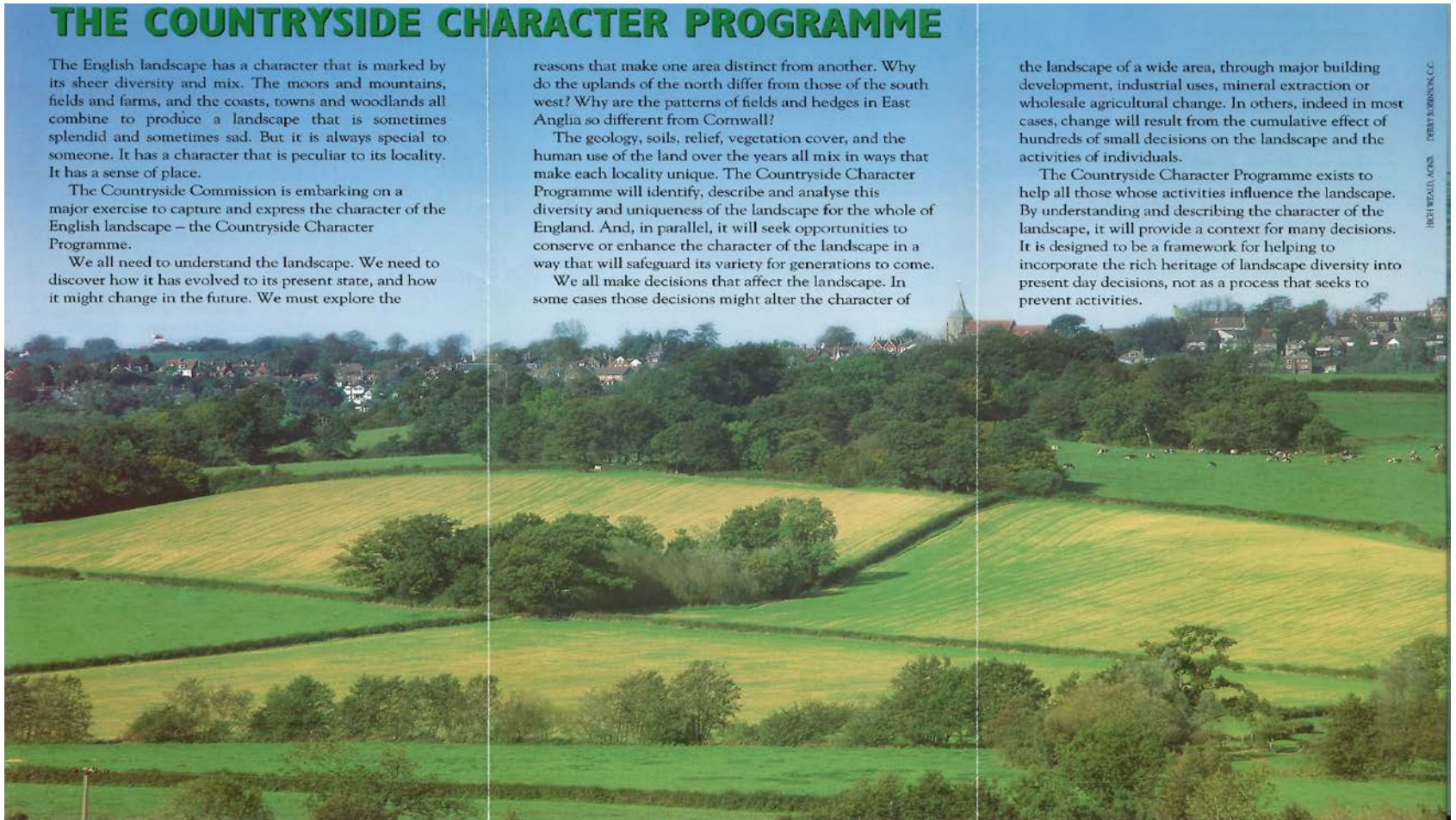
The geology, soils, relief, vegetation cover, and the human use of the land over the years all mix in ways that make each locality unique. The Countryside Character Programme will identify, describe and analyse this diversity and uniqueness of the landscape for the whole of England. And, in parallel, it will seek opportunities to conserve or enhance the character of the landscape in a way that will safeguard its variety for generations to come.

We all make decisions that affect the landscape. In some cases those decisions might alter the character of

the landscape of a wide area, through major building development, industrial uses, mineral extraction or wholesale agricultural change. In others, indeed in most cases, change will result from the cumulative effect of hundreds of small decisions on the landscape and the activities of individuals.

The Countryside Character Programme exists to help all those whose activities influence the landscape. By understanding and describing the character of the landscape, it will provide a context for many decisions. It is designed to be a framework for helping to incorporate the rich heritage of landscape diversity into present day decisions, not as a process that seeks to prevent activities.

HIGH WEAVER, AONS  
TERRY FORDSON, CC



# To: provide a landscape context; guide policy development; identify opportunities for local action; provide a base for advice.

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## OUTPUTS

The Countryside Character Programme is a continuing process of understanding the English landscape, with its diverse character and sense of place. It is not an exercise with a fixed end-point, but it does have three main outputs.

- **A map.** The Countryside Character Programme will be underpinned by a map, which defines areas of landscape with a coherent, individual and identifiable character.
- **Analytical landscape descriptions.** Each area defined by the map will be supported by an illustrated description and analysis of its landscape character, together with an understanding of the key forces for change. The map and analyses will be published in printed and digital form.
- **Landscape conservation strategies.** We will present a series of aspirations for the English landscape that, we hope, will command the support of many organisations and individuals. The strategies will identify the opportunities to conserve and enhance the evolving English landscape.

## SCOPE

The Countryside Character Programme will be:

- **comprehensive,** covering the whole of the English landscape, apart from the centre of the larger towns and cities;
- **consistent,** using the same methods and approaches in all parts of the country;
- **descriptive,** identifying key characteristics of the present day landscape;
- **analytical,** asking how the landscape has evolved to its present state, and what trends might lead to change;
- **regional in perspective,** standing back to examine broad sweeps of landscape, and providing a base for further, more detailed landscape work;
- **contextual,** providing a framework for landscape policies, programmes and work on the ground;
- **visionary,** setting out aspirations for the landscape — of the Countryside Commission and a wide range of partners.

## USES

The Countryside Character Programme has four main uses.

- It will provide a landscape context. The analytical landscape descriptions, by identifying boundaries and key landscape characteristics, will provide information that simply does not exist on a national basis. The Countryside Character Programme is designed as a common framework for the Commission and a range of other organisations in their policy development, regulatory processes, and operational programmes. In this way, it should become an acknowledged starting point for work concerned with landscape conservation, planning and management, and many forms of environmental assessment.
- It will guide policy development and help to target resources. The policies and activities of many organisations affect the countryside but they are not generally geared directly to the needs of landscape character in any specific area. The Countryside Character Programme will provide a sound, consistent policy framework and an effective way of allocating resources.
- It will identify opportunities for local action. The Countryside Character Programme is not designed to operate at a local level itself, but it will stimulate ideas, which in turn will lead to local activity at county, district and parish levels.
- It will provide a base for Countryside Commission advice. The Commission offers advice on a range of topics, from broad national strategy to local management matters. The Countryside Character Programme will provide a structure and consistency to such advice.

The Countryside Character Programme is like a giant jigsaw of the whole country. It picks out and assembles the pieces to portray a picture of the countryside in a way that has not been attempted before.

Illustration: David Thompson.



# An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment & Seascape Character Assessment



## An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment

October 2014

Christine Tudor, Natural England

[www.gov.uk/natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/natural-england)



## An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment

First published 11 October 2012

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)



*“**Landscape** is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”*  
ELC def’n.

**Landscape Character** is a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. It is the pattern that arises from particular combinations of the different components – providing a sense of place.

An understanding of landscape character provides baseline evidence to inform land use planning, design and land management.

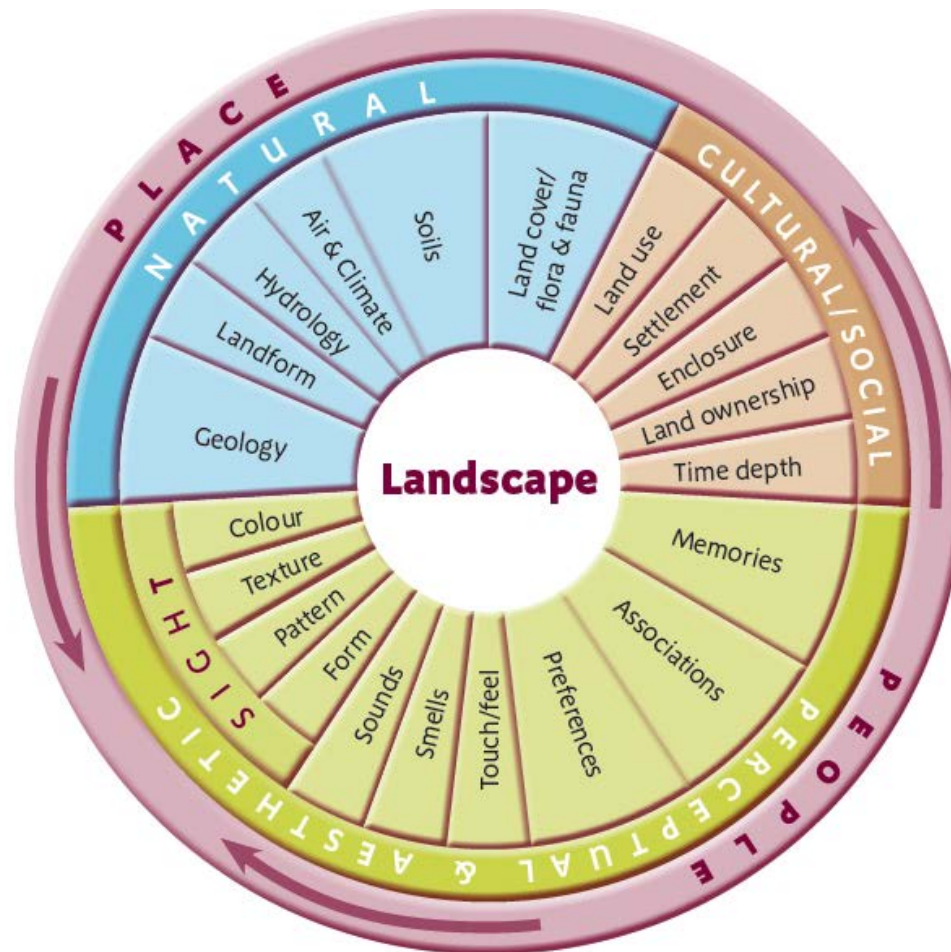


# Landscape Character Assessment .....



- “is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape”. Areas of common character are classified and described. (An Approach to LCA 2014);
- is the tool that is used to help us **understand** and articulate the character of the landscape
- helps to identify the features that give a locality its ‘**sense of place**’ and pinpoints what makes it different from neighbouring areas
- can be used to inform land use planning and design, landscape conservation and designation, and land management – thus helping us to **inform and manage change**
- can be carried out by **ANYONE** .. community, local authority, Landscape Architect etc., etc.
- can be carried out at **ANY scale** ... E.g. :250,000 (National Landscape Character Area – NCA) to 1:2,500 (site level)

# The “Landscape Wheel” – An Approach to LCA



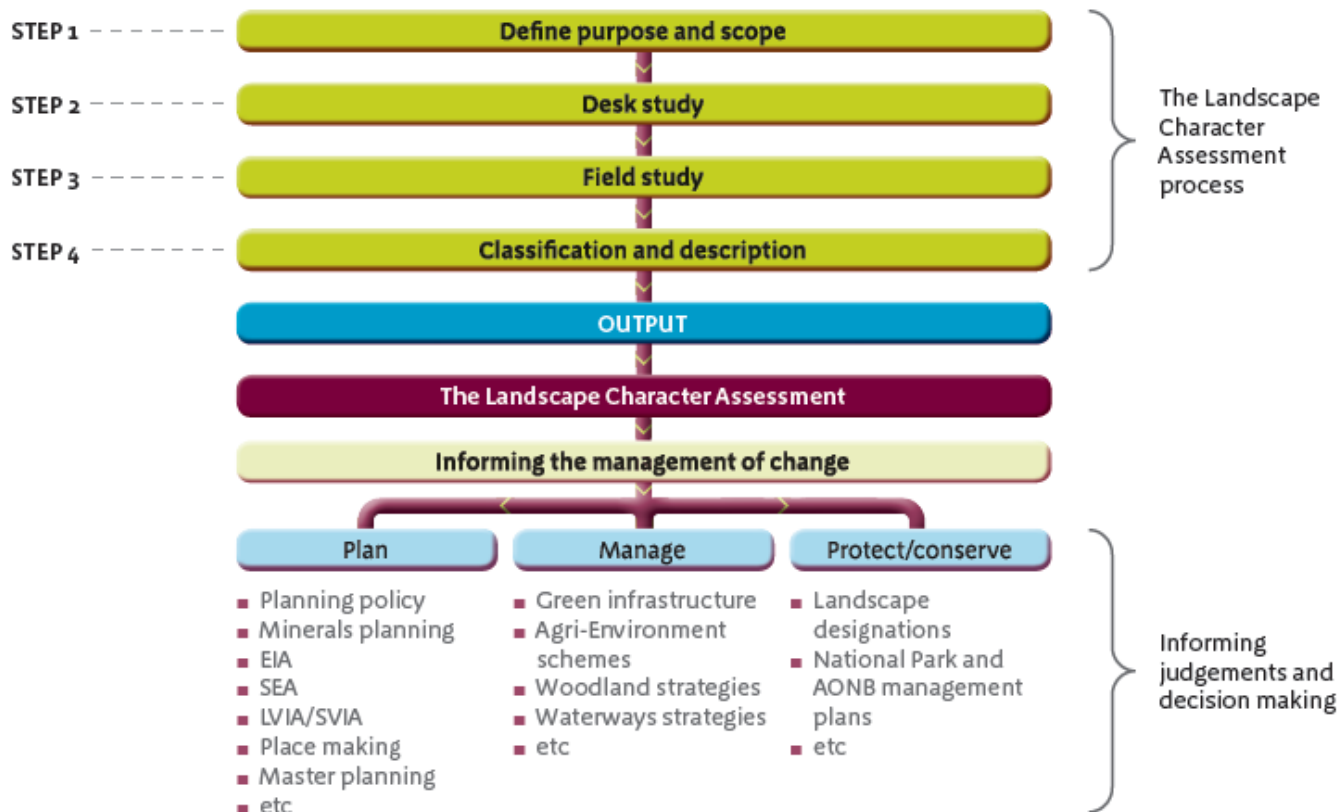


# LCA & Making Judgements .....

## .....these are 2 Separate Processes!

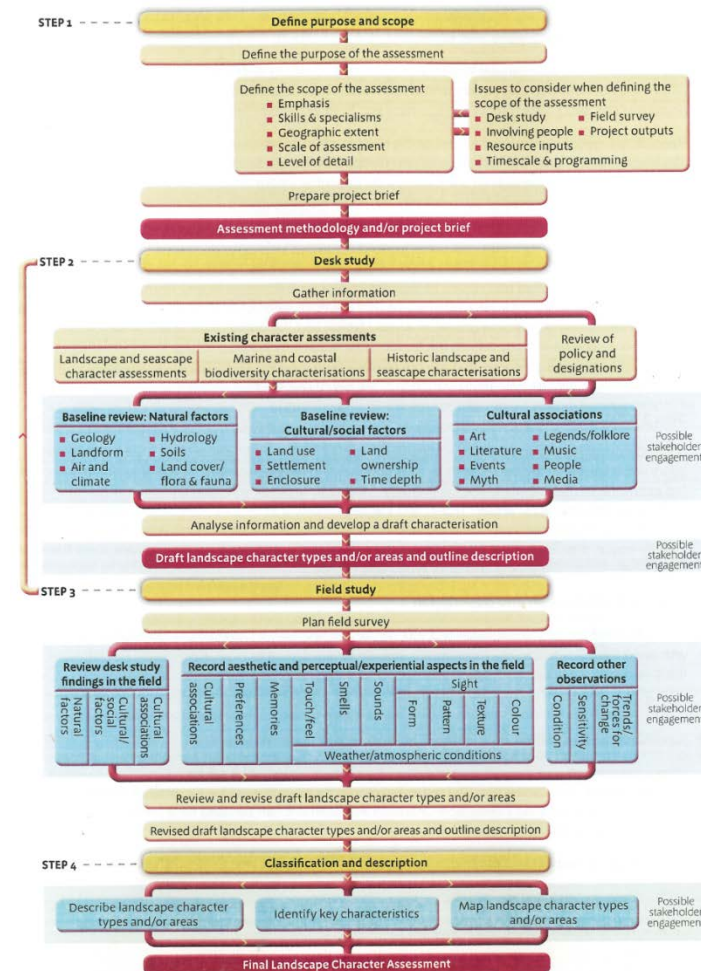


Figure 3: Landscape Character Assessment and making judgements



# LCA Process – An Approach to LCA .....

Figure 2: Landscape Character Assessment - the process





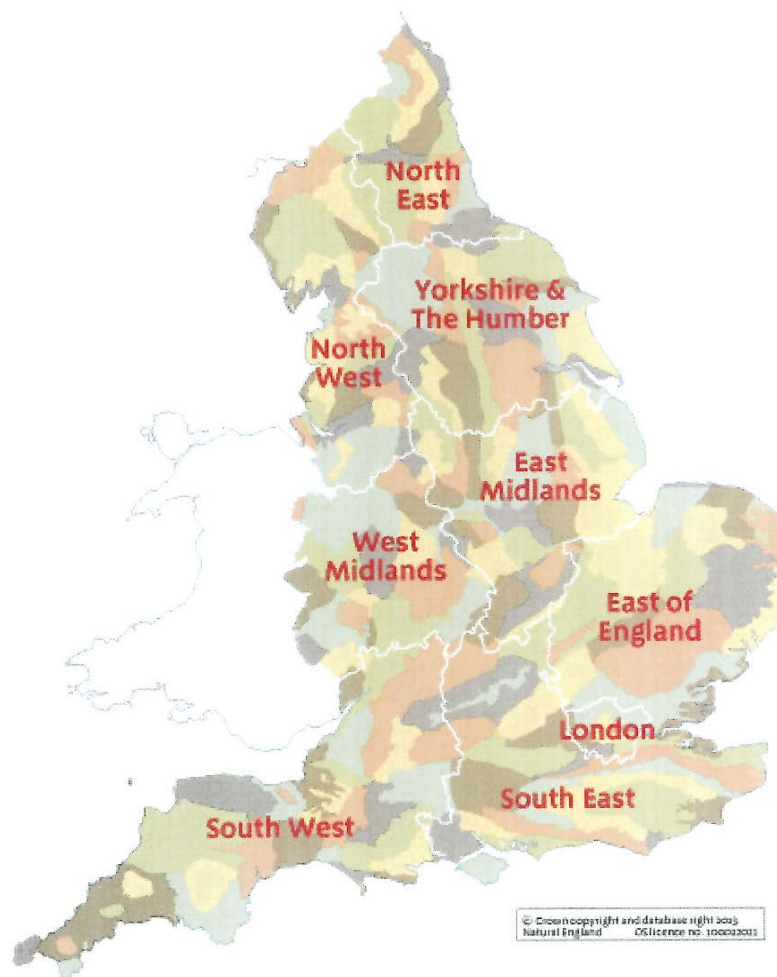
1. **Define Scope** – clearly define purpose of the LCA (this will influence the scale and the level of detail of the assessment, resources required etc.)
2. **Desk Study** – involves the review of relevant background reports, other data and mapped information, cultural info., literature (poetry..), art etc., and use of this info. to develop a series of map overlays to assist in the identification of areas of common character.
3. **Field Survey** – collect field data in a rigorous way: to further inform, test, and refine the draft landscape character types/areas; to inform written descriptions of their character; to identify aesthetic and perceptual qualities which are unlikely to be evident from desk info., and; to identify the current condition of landscape elements.
4. **Classification and Description** – refines and finalises the output of the characterisation process

# A Landscape Character Assessment



- A Landscape Character Assessment is the published document that arises from a LCA study. It is not a new designation or an additional layer of bureaucracy, nor is it a restriction on land use or development.
- A LCA is simply a document that includes descriptions and maps, that show variations in landscape character across a given area of study.
- Some LCA documents do go beyond description, and make recommendations. However the LCA process and the process of making judgements are separate processes.

# National Character Areas (NCAs)





# National Character Areas .....



- Describe the character of the Area e.g. see NCA 141 Mendip Hills (NOTE THE RELEVANCE OF “NATURAL CAPITAL” to Landscape Character i.e. the ELEMENTS and FEATURES – refer to the landscape wheel for example.)
- List Statements of Environmental Opportunity – with examples of how (eg. grassland restoration, working with landowners, enhancing access etc.)
- Provide key facts and data.
- Identify Landscape Change (eg. re. trees and woodlands, coasts and rivers etc.)
- Give an analysis showing the predicted impact of Statements of Environmental Opportunity on the “value” of nominated ecosystem services within this landscape.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles><sup>16</sup>

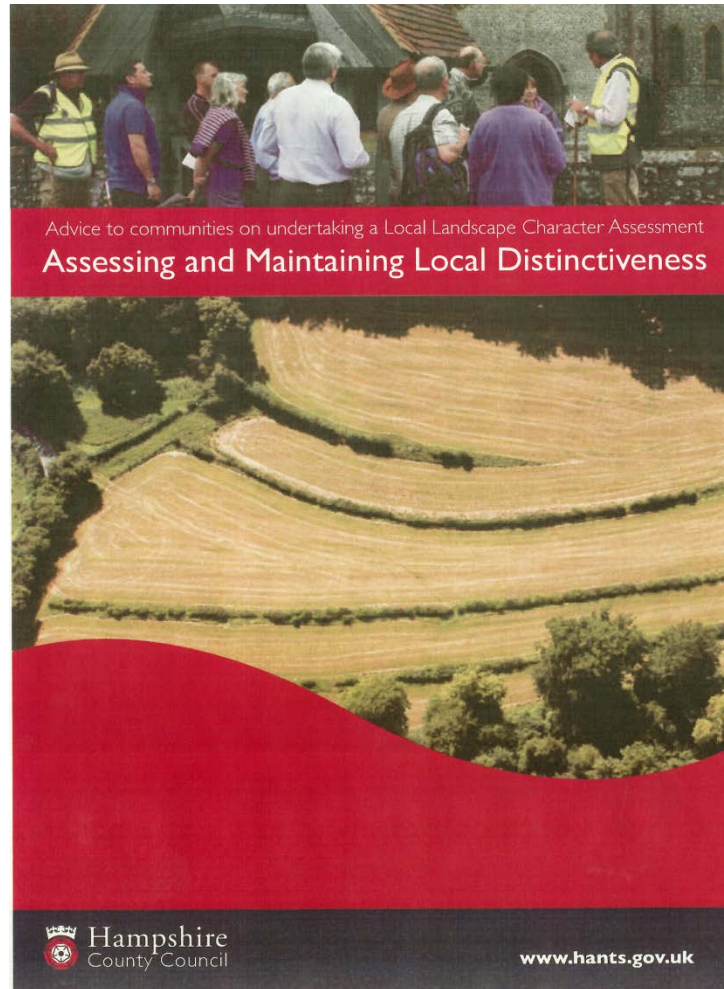
# Local Authority Landscape Character Assessments -



- These provide more detail than the NCAs and identify Landscape Character Areas and / types
- The general public and other stakeholders are usually involved in their preparation and they can inform the Local Plan
- For more info. see [An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment](#) on the gov. website

Local Communities can also prepare their own Local Landscape Character Assessment to inform decision making. See work carried out in Hampshire. See also Neighborhood Plans – e.g. Suffolk Coasts and Heaths work “Touching the Tide”, and Cranborne Chase AONB (more info. below).

# Local Landscape Character Assessment -





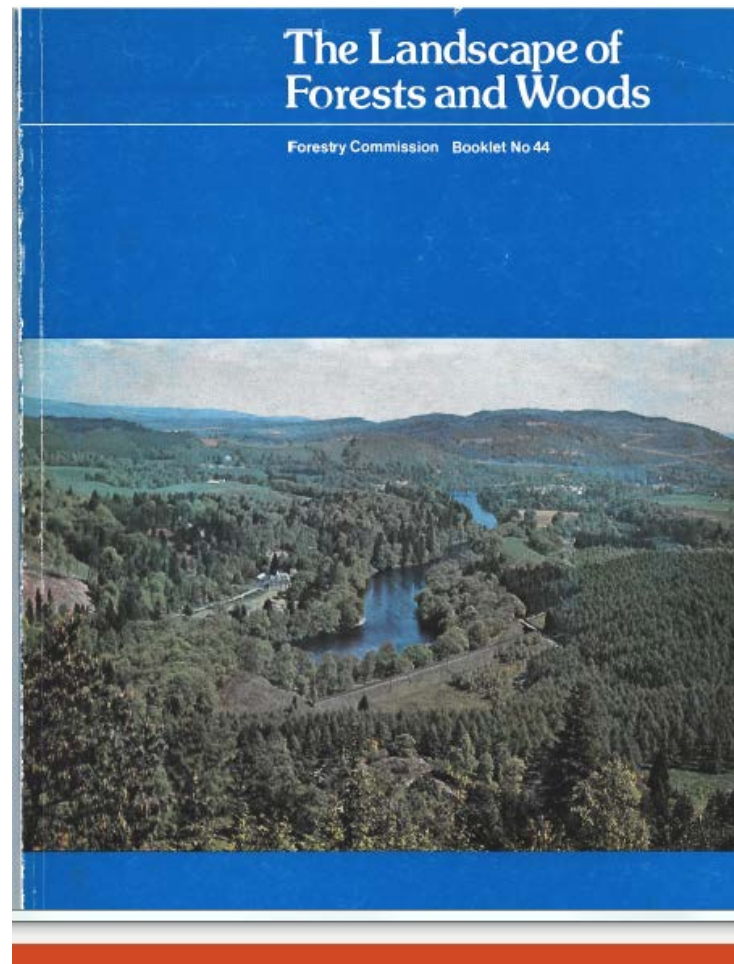


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## LCA has a long pedigree regarding influencing change

19

# The Landscape of Forests and Woods, Sylvia Crowe, Forestry Commission 1978.



# The Landscape of Forests and Woods, Sylvia Crowe, Forestry Commission 1978.



“In most British forests and woods, timber production is the prime use, and therefore integration of the crop into the countryside remains the main landscape responsibility.

**The basis of successful integration is to understand the character of the landscape**, and to carry out all forest operations in sympathy with it. To achieve this, there must be an appreciation of each type of landscape and of the qualities which distinguish it.” (1978)





Some of the worst patterning within the forest boundary is caused by straight rides and roads cutting across contoured ground. Those now seen are mostly in old plantations.



Line thinning or felling of rackways for cable cranes may produce an ugly visual effect. In both these examples the rigidity of the top planting line is even more unsightly than the rides.



From the outer view these rigid lines are most damaging when seen on a hillside, but remembering public access to forests the appearance from within must also be considered and a

Felling programmes present possibilities of either damaging the forest landscape, or of improving it. Improvement may be effected by using the opportunity to rectify ugly planting shapes or to open up new views.

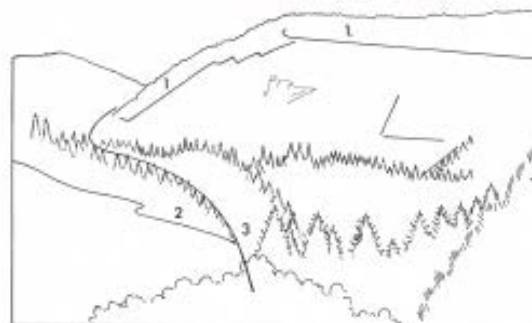
Interest within the forest can be greatly increased by the succession of open spaces revealed by felling and the often spectacular flush of wild flowers which appear as a result of the access of light. On the other hand, damage may be caused by destroying the canopy where it forms an essential part of the landscape, as for instance, on exposed skylines and by creating cleared areas whose shapes and/or size will disrupt the landscape.

Where selective felling is practical, no landscape problem arises. But in the case of clear felling, landscape consideration should be given to the siting, size and shape of the coupes.

#### ANALYSIS OF FELLINGS

In this case, the trees which have been retained clothe the profile (1) of the hill and emphasise the long valley (2). The natural growth has been conserved along the road (3).

Additional retentions to enhance the landscape would have been an extension (1) to give depth to the profile and to leave a scatter of natural growth near the rock outcrops (2). The coupe could be shaped in sympathy with the line of the hill (3).





Introduction & Summary

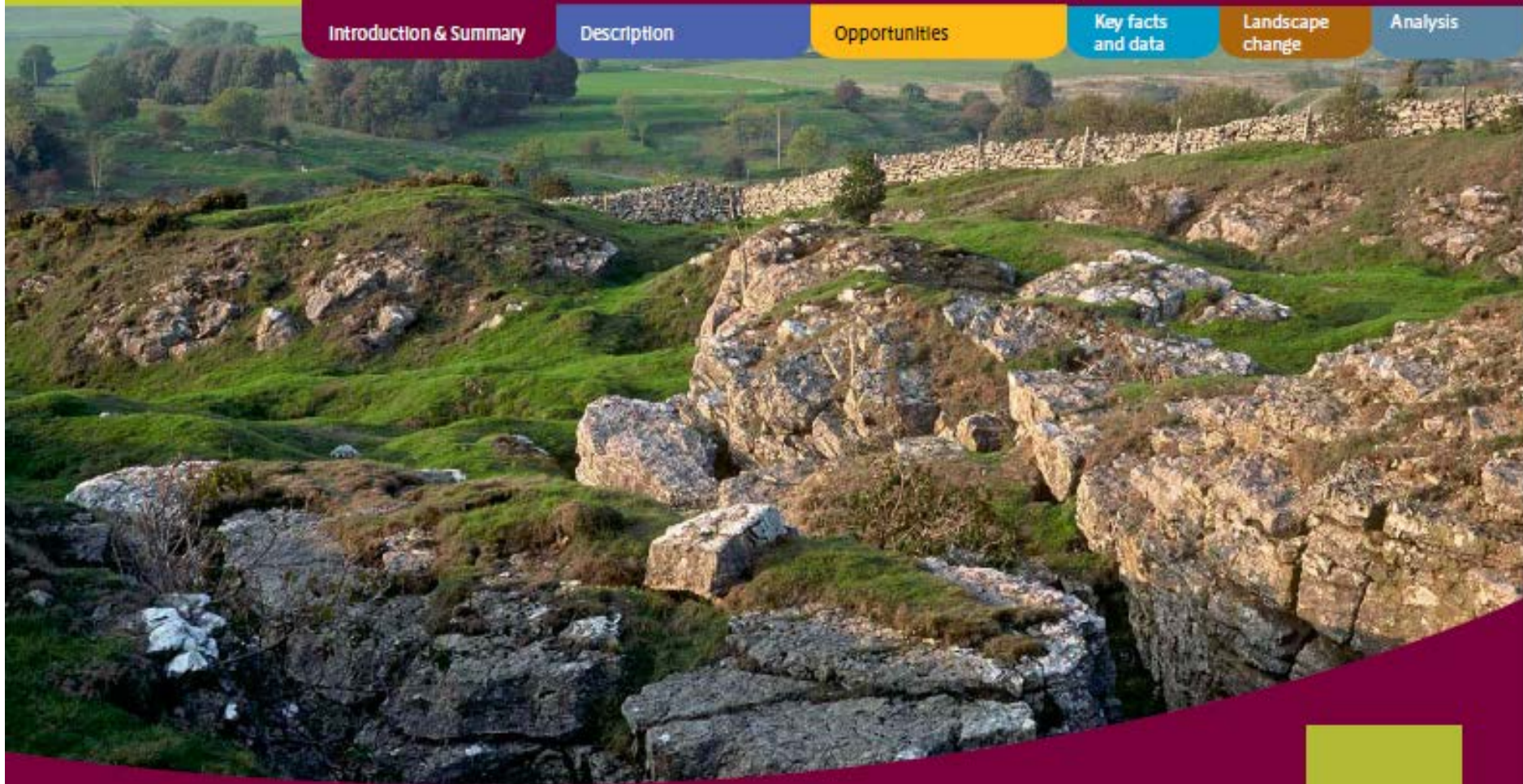
Description

Opportunities

Key facts  
and data

Landscape  
change

Analysis



[www.gov.uk/natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/natural-england)



Toggle full screen

1

Next »



[Home](#) › [National Character Areas](#)

## NCA Profile:141. Mendip Hills (NE416)

This record was published by Natural England on 20 March 2013.

[General publications](#)[National Character Areas](#)

The striking landform of the Mendip Hills rises abruptly from the flat landscape of the Somerset Levels and Moors to the south. This Carboniferous Limestone ridge, with its more weather-resistant sandstone peaks, illustrates the classic features of a karst landscape, the result of the response of the soluble limestone to water and weathering, creating surface features, complex underground cave and river systems, gorges, dry valleys, surface depressions, swallets, sink holes and fast-flowing springs. Such natural features have interacted with human influences to result in complex ritual, industrial and agricultural landscapes extending from the prehistoric period to modern times.

[Further information](#)



- **Biodiversity:** Two thousand hectares of the area is designated as SSSI, 7 per cent of the NCA area, and there are four SAC and 2 NNRs within the NCA. Ash woodland (e.g. Asham Wood and Ebbor Gorge) and calcareous grasslands are internationally designated as well as sites for greater horseshoe bats.)

## **STATEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITY No. 3 – e.g.**

- Protecting and managing the ash woodlands which make up the majority of ancient semi-natural woodlands on the Mendip Hills to maximise benefit for the landscape and wildlife, and encouraging research and field trials for appropriate best alternatives to ash, in the face of extensive chalara ash die-back in Mendip woodlands.

Landscape attribute	Justification for selection
Open plateau contrasting with well-wooded scarp slopes and wooded valleys with parkland in the east.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The area contains woodland of high conservation value; of the 4,034 ha of woodland or 13.3 per cent of the NCA, 963 ha is ancient woodland.</li> <li>The wooded scarp slopes in the west particularly add to the landscape character of the AONB.</li> <li>Internationally important woodlands, for example Asham Wood in the east Mendips or Ebbor Gorge, Rodney Stoke and Cheddar Wood within the Mendip Woods SAC designation as a Tilio-Acerion forest (ash, elm and lime woodlands) feature with ground rich in flora including lily-of-the-valley, columbine, Solomon's-seal and purple gromwell.</li> <li>Rodney Stoke and Ebbor Gorge are designated National Nature Reserves.</li> <li>Greater horseshoe bats benefit from the combination of natural caves, woodland, hedgerows and grazing; they are internationally recognised through SAC designations.</li> <li>In the east, large parks around country houses or smaller parks around manor and gentry houses and even the larger rectories, for example at Nunney, are a feature.</li> </ul>
Contrasting field patterns and land use between east and west Mendip landscapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Character of the 18th-century open sheepwalks remains in the west of the NCA.</li> <li>A more open landscape of rectilinear medium sized pasture fields of 18th century enclosure, bounded by grey limestone drystone walls dominates the centre and west of the area.</li> <li>The deeper soils of the plateau are generally more intensively farmed as either arable or grass leys.</li> <li>Sheep rearing predominates on the small irregular fields and the remnant sheepwalks of the escarpments.</li> <li>An area of high quality agricultural land, the Strawberry Belt, has been used for intensive horticulture.</li> <li>The eastern Mendips consist of a more complex landscape of wooded valleys and agricultural land on the intervening ridges. Hedgerows of varying height and frequency of hedgerow trees enclose much of the improved pasture used for dairy cattle.</li> </ul>

# MENDIP Landscape Character Assessment 1997



- 22 years old ....., not up to date !
- Thus no mention of Ash dieback !



# Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024



## **Supporting** services include ..

- - Wildlife / biodiversity

There are 27 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) covering 2721 ha, 3 Special Area of Conservation (SAC), 1 Special Protection Area (SPA), and 2 National Nature Reserves within the Mendip Hills AONB. Ash woodland and calcareous grasslands are internationally designated, and also sites for greater horseshoe bats.

## **Issues** include ...

3.7.15 Typical Mendip species being ash, ash dieback (Chalara) is affecting Mendip woodlands and the risk is significant this will require landowners and managers to share information and monitor impact.

# BUT .... Maintaining Landscape Character and Biodiversity (importance of cultural heritage etc.)?



Is there more to add ??

More info. is needed to guide ancient and secondary woodland management – management plans?

**ALSO what about ash trees outside of the nationally important woodlands?? (a generally neglected area?)**

Ash trees are very significant to the wider landscape on Mendip!

- Skyline trees
- Hedgerow trees
- Roadside trees
- Single trees in fields and also garden trees.

**Appropriate management plans are needed.**

RESOURCES ???????????

























## Assessing and addressing the impacts of ash dieback on UK woodlands and trees of conservation importance (Phase 2)

First published 30 April 2014

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)



This record was published by Natural England on 30 April 2014.

Conservation site managers

Natural England Commissioned Reports

Parks, woodlands, trees and deadwood

Ash dieback (or 'Chalara'), is the fungal tree disease which is increasingly affecting ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees in the UK. Ash trees are important for biodiversity and ash dieback could affect biodiversity with consequences for species conservation through to impacts on woodland ecosystem health. Deciding how to manage woodlands infected by ash dieback that also conserves biodiversity is an important issue.

This report assesses the potential ecological impact of ash dieback on UK woodlands and species and investigates possible woodland management options which might ameliorate the problems caused by ash dieback. This is the second phase of the work. Phase 1 is published by JNCC see [The potential ecological impact of ash dieback in the UK](#).

The work has been jointly funded by Defra, Department of the Environment Northern Ireland, Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage and Natural Resources Wales.

Natural England Commissioned Report NECR151

### Assessing and addressing the impacts of ash dieback on UK woodlands and trees of conservation importance (Phase 2)

First published 30 April 2014

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)



## NECR 151 – Summary findings for the 15 case studies – see page 138 - 139



The recommended management actions are not radical. On the whole they focus on maintaining woodland cover and adjusting the relative mix and abundance of species already growing on the site. In some cases this means carrying out relatively intense management interventions (as recommended for Hang Wood), or continuing the current management regime but with slight changes (as recommended for Roudsea Wood). However, for most sites local site factors mean that interventions, different from those currently applied, are needed to achieve these relatively small changes in species composition / abundance. For example interventions such as preventing browsing, thinning, and planting, rather than relying on natural regeneration are needed. For some sites, however, carrying out these interventions may not be practical, e.g. Coed y Cilau, and non-intervention may still be the best option.

**Woodland and tree management in the wake of  
Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*):  
Experience from Continental Europe**



Denmark, France, Germany, Lithuania,  
Luxembourg, Sweden and Switzerland.

JOE ALSOP - Churchill Fellow 2014

WINSTON  
CHURCHILL  
MEMORIAL  
TRUST



## Joe Alsop report – extract from conclusion (modified.) .. Read main report.



- For Ash dominated woodlands in the UK ... the more diverse an ecosystem, the more resilient it is to invasive pests and diseases (Kennedy *et al* 2002).
- As possibly the most unique of the UK's canopy forming native broadleaved trees (Mitchell *et al* 2014a) and one which is already bearing an increased ecological burden due to the loss of *Ulmus* sp, *F. excelsior* must not be forsaken.
- .. in habitats where it is a key species, adapting current mmt. practices and adopting new ones is the best option to counter the loss of forest conditions and help preserve ecosystem integrity (Ellison *et al* 2005 & Loo 2009). Within these sites, any endeavours towards mitigating against the likely loss of Ash will require the input of substantial time and monetary resources. Managers should plan now how to ensure habitat continuity and make ecosystems more robust, species diverse and resilient.

# USERS OF LCA include -



- Land managers
- Communities
- Natural England
- Forestry Commission
- Highways England
- Environment Agency
- Historic England – Historic Characterisation
- Local Authorities
- Central Government
- Planners, Landscape Architects, Engineers, Architects etc.

END