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TORBAY COUNCIL LCA AND LSA REVIEW

REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT
Torbay Council
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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Methodology 2010-2023	1
2.1	Current landscape assessment guidance	1
2.2	Key changes to policy and approaches since 2010	4
3	Gap Analysis	9
3.1	Introduction	9
3.2	Limitations and omissions in the 2010 LCA	9
3.3	Key changes to the environmental baseline since 2010	10
3.4	Examples of recent approaches to landscape studies for other comparable LPAs	12
4	Key Requirements	15
5	Summary and recommended next steps	18

Document history

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1 INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this short report

- 1.1.1 This short report sets out the findings and recommendations from the January 2023 review of the existing landscape character and sensitivity studies covering the Torbay administrative area, namely the May 2010 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of Torbay and the associated landscape capacity and sensitivity work. The report accounts for the comments and feedback provided by Torbay Council on 21 February 2023 and has been expanded from the original January 2023 paper to provide broad recommendations for the brief for the commissioning of the new Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), to support the Local Plan.
- 1.1.2 This report details recommended steps to bring existing studies in line with current guidance, environmental baseline and best practice.

Structure of this report

- 1.1.3 This report contains the following sections:
- Methodology 2010-2023;
 - Gap analysis;
 - Summary of 2010 report and key requirements;
 - Summary and recommended next steps.

2 METHODOLOGY 2010-2023

2.1 Current landscape assessment guidance

- 2.1.1 The process and best practice of landscape character assessment has continually developed since the original Torbay LCA was undertaken.
- 2.1.2 Since 2010 the following guidance has been published, which together forms current thinking and industry good practice. The following guidance and publications informed the thinking in this report, and also informed the thinking in the application of the review criteria. A brief overview of each publication, where relevant, is also provided.
- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), 2013, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition ('GLVIA 3').

- Natural England, 2014, An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment¹.
- Natural England, 2019, An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management².
- Landscape Institute, 2021, TGN 02-21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations³.

2.1.3 GLVIA 3 is the established best practice guidance for landscape and visual impact assessment. It provides detailed guidance on determining landscape value and sensitivity and helped establish the common factors which contribute to landscape 'value':

- Designated landscapes;
- Landscape quality, condition and intactness;
- Rarity and distinctiveness;
- Conservation interests relevant to character (Ecological/natural heritage, geological or historical/cultural heritage);
- Recreational value;
- Experiential and perceptual qualities;
- Community values and access; and
- Cultural associations.

2.1.4 The 2014 Natural England guidance, '*An approach to Landscape Character Assessment*' explains why landscape character assessment matters. This document also states that in addition to providing a description of landscapes and their key characteristics, assessments should inform 'decision making' with regard to a wide range of local authority plans and strategies, land use planning and management and other plans and processes e.g. environmental impact assessment (EIA). The guidance lists five key principles for landscape assessment:

- Landscape is everywhere and all landscape and seascape has character;
- Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale;

¹ Tudor, C, Natural England, 2014. An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, NE579. Link [here](#)

² Tudor, C, Natural England, 2019, An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management, NE724. Link [here](#)

³ Landscape Institute, 2021, TGN 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value outside National Designations. Link [here](#)

- The process of Landscape Character Assessment should involve an understanding of how the landscape is perceived and experienced by people;
- A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications; and
- A Landscape Character Assessment can provide an integrating spatial framework – a multitude of variables come together to give us our distinctive landscapes.

- 2.1.5 Within these five principles is the understanding that a good landscape character assessment informs evidence-based decision making from integrated strategic and spatial frameworks to smaller scale place-based decisions. This is the approach that is being developed across Devon, with a county wide Landscape Character Assessment comprising of generic landscape character types (LCTs) and locally specific landscape character areas (LCAs), which are designed to be read together and form the strategic landscape framework for more granular landscape characterisation at local authority level.
- 2.1.6 The 2019 paper ‘An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment’ explains that landscape sensitivity studies will use landscape character assessments as their evidence base and are therefore informed by the 2014 An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment and the 2012 publication An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment. It further explains that, *“landscape sensitivity assessment, can transparently inform strategic thinking concerning the location of new development, such as housing...”*. This paper also set out an approach to assessment of sensitivity to specific change scenarios and with consideration to landscape value and the susceptibility of the landscape resource and its characteristics to a given change scenario. This approach broadly aligns with that in GLVIA3 and forms the current and widely accepted rationale for assessment of landscape sensitivity.
- 2.1.7 The 2021 LI Technical Guidance Note (TGN) ‘Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations’ builds on GLVIA 3 and the 2014 ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’ to provide greater detail on how best to assess landscape value. As part of an integrated approach to consideration of landscape it references aspects like green and blue infrastructure, ecosystems services and the potential of landscape to contribute to nature recovery and nature pathways, as indicators of value, in addition to more traditionally established criteria such as scenic quality, cultural association and rarity. Further information on this TGN is provided below under the heading, ‘Definition of landscape value’.
- 2.1.8 In addition to the guidance on landscape assessment published since the 2010 Torbay LCA and LCSA, also of relevance to the Torbay area is the An Approach to Seascape Sensitivity Assessment (MMO1204) published by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in December 2019. The 2019 report explains the approach to identifying and assessing sensitivity for offshore ‘Seascape Character Areas’ and inshore ‘Marine Character Areas’. The coastline within Torbay Council is located within the MMO Seascape Assessment for the South Marine Plan Areas MCA1: Lyme Bay (West). Other coastal LPAs in Devon have carried out more detailed seascape character studies, including North Devon, Torridge, Exmoor Coast and Plymouth City Council.

Local guidance

- 2.1.9 The Devon Landscape Policy Group (DLPG) have prepared a Landscape Character Assessment Protocol, version 3 of which was prepared in April 2019. The protocol, *“is about*

helping Devon planning authorities ensure that existing landscape character assessment evidence base is up to date and consistent with neighbouring Devon authorities.”

2.2 Key changes to policy and approaches since 2010

2.2.1 This section expands on the overview of current landscape assessment guidance in section 2.1 and summarises the key changes and updates to landscape thinking, methodology and policy context since 2010, with respect to sensitivity, capacity, value and nature recovery, and with reference to recently published best practice examples of good quality landscape characterisation approaches.

Policy

National Planning Policy

2.2.2 One of the largest changes since the publication of the original LCA/LCSA has been to the National policy ‘landscape’, with the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Section 15 of the NPPF 2021 is headed ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’ and includes paragraph 174 which requires that:

- *“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*
 - a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, ... (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
 - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including ... trees and woodland;*
 - c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;..”*

2.2.3 Furthermore paragraphs 175 and 176 also note that:

- *“Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites” and that “great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.”, and that*
- *“The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.”*

2.2.4 The NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (Natural Environment, 2019) which recognises the role that Landscape Character Assessment plays in helping to understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape. The PPG explains the key issues in implementing policy to protect and enhance the natural environment, including local requirements, with respect to agricultural land, green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape.

- 2.2.5 The PPG reiterates that the NPPF, “*is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally-designated landscapes but also the wider countryside. Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary.*”⁴”

Local Planning Policy

- 2.2.6 There are also a number of existing and emerging Devon-wide strategies and guidance which are relevant including The Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)⁵, The Devon Carbon Plan⁶, Trees for Devon⁷ and the Devon Land Use Framework⁸.

Changes to approaches to landscape assessment

Sensitivity to what? Sensitivity and capacity

- 2.2.7 The approach to understanding landscape sensitivity has evolved greatly over the past decade, in particular there is now recognition that landscape ‘sensitivity’ should be considered with respect to a specific scenario, as opposed to a general or ‘inherent’ sensitivity. The idea of landscape ‘capacity’ is a somewhat misleading and now outdated term, as capacity can imply a kind of threshold for development, when this is seldom the case in reality. Potential environmental capacity also needs to be weighed up using a range of factors, and may also change over time with changes in policy direction, whereas landscape characteristics and associated sensitivities are much more fixed.
- 2.2.8 Sensitivity analysis supported by landscape guidance is nowadays considered a more robust and flexible evidence base for decision making than consideration of ‘capacity’. Sensitivity analysis is considered a broad-brush site planning and design tool, and the findings should be used to develop practical, locally relevant landscape guidance for identified landscape areas. In some situations development will not be able to be accommodated at all due to the sensitivity, fragility, functionality or value of the landscape, or due to a combination of all of these factors. In some instances a high landscape sensitivity area may be able to

⁴ Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (Natural Environment, 2019) Paragraph: 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721. The PPG can be found [here](#)

⁵ Under the 2021 Environment Act there is a requirement to produce a Devon LNRS, the LNRS provides a toolkit, guidance and funding for relevant parties to deliver a Nature Recovery Network. Details of the LNRS can be found [here](#).

⁶ The Devon Carbon Plan (DCP) was created by the Devon Climate Emergency (DCE) partners with the aim of reducing Devon’s emissions to net zero by 2050 at the latest. Details of the DCP can be found [here](#).

⁷ Trees for Devon is part of the Devon Local Nature Partnership and aims to protect, expand and restore woodland in Devon and to rec-connect woodlands to local communities and the local economy. Details of Trees for Devon can be found [here](#).

⁸ The Devon Land Use Framework (DLUF) is a current project (running to 30 June 2023) with the stated aim of bringing, ‘together a wide network of interested stakeholders and partner organisations across Devon to design, test, develop and review a Land Use Framework for Devon, in tandem with delivering significant improvements to the quality and accessibility of land use data sources’. Details of the DLUF can be found [here](#).

accommodate a quantum of sensitively designed and well-integrated development, whilst sometimes a much lower sensitivity, eroded landscape may fulfil an important visual or strategic/gap function, which would render development impossible in landscape and visual terms. In each case, it all comes back to context and what is most important to intrinsic character. This also identifies a need for clarity and calibration in landscape sensitivity assessment. Often the most useful parts of the analysis are the supporting narratives justifying the judgements made and the landscape guidance in itself, since these parts usually bring out the subtleties and variations in a sensitivity judgement which can otherwise appear rather blunt. They also give a robust indication of where and how a change scenario may or not be able to happen, as well as clear advice for decision makers and applicants as to what needs to be delivered to enable landscape led, sensitive and context integrated development.

- 2.2.9 Regardless of the approach, landscape guidance developed should be concise, relevant and clearly linked back to the baseline and evaluation – there must be a clear landscape rationale for what is proposed. This can be made even stronger if links can be made to wider green infrastructure, nature recovery or landscape scale objectives which have been drawn out in earlier analysis, as it also strengthens the case for landscape led approaches to planning and designing well integrated, responsible development.

Definition of landscape value

- 2.2.10 Landscape sensitivity is a function both of the value of a landscape/the landscape resource and the susceptibility or vulnerability of the landscape to change arising from a specific change scenario⁹.
- 2.2.11 The value of a landscape may reflect communal perception at a local, regional, national or international scale and may be informed by a number of factors including scenic beauty, tranquillity, wildness, cultural associations or other conservation or recreation interests. Although landscape value or importance is usually determined by reference to statutory or local planning policy designations, an absence of such designation does not automatically imply a lack of value as other factors, such as scarcity, may be considered relevant. The value or importance of landscape elements (e.g. hedgerows and woodland) is also considered. The European Landscape Convention¹⁰ (ELC) recognises that ordinary (undesignated) landscapes also have their value to the communities for whom they provide a resource in which to live, work and spend their leisure.
- 2.2.12 The understanding of landscape value and how this is assessed and captured has changed and evolved since 2010. Since 2010 there has been further recognition of the value that landscapes provide more widely in terms of essential goods and services, or ecosystem services, derived from the natural capital assets closely allied to key characteristics of the landscape. This has been recognised to a degree in the Landscape Institute's 2021 Technical Guidance Note '*Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations*', which cites a number of other layers to consider in an assessment of landscape value, including natural heritage and natural resources, nature recovery networks/nature-based networks, nature pathways and multi-functional green and blue infrastructure networks.

⁹ GLVIA3

¹⁰ Council of Europe (CoE), 2000, European Landscape Convention. Link [here](#)

Certainly links to these important areas need to be made for landscape studies and evidence bases to be appropriately future-proofed, resilient and integrated with other spatial planning evidence including Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). To this end, assessment criteria for landscape value should also consider:

- Landscape function: Level of landscape functionality, multi-functionality and resilience (linked to condition and quality but also considering green and blue infrastructure and natural capital assets, and associated opportunities for connectivity).
- Level of landscape change and restoration/enhancement potential and opportunity.

Definition of landscape susceptibility

2.2.13 Tudor/Natural England¹¹ (2019) define landscape susceptibility as follows:

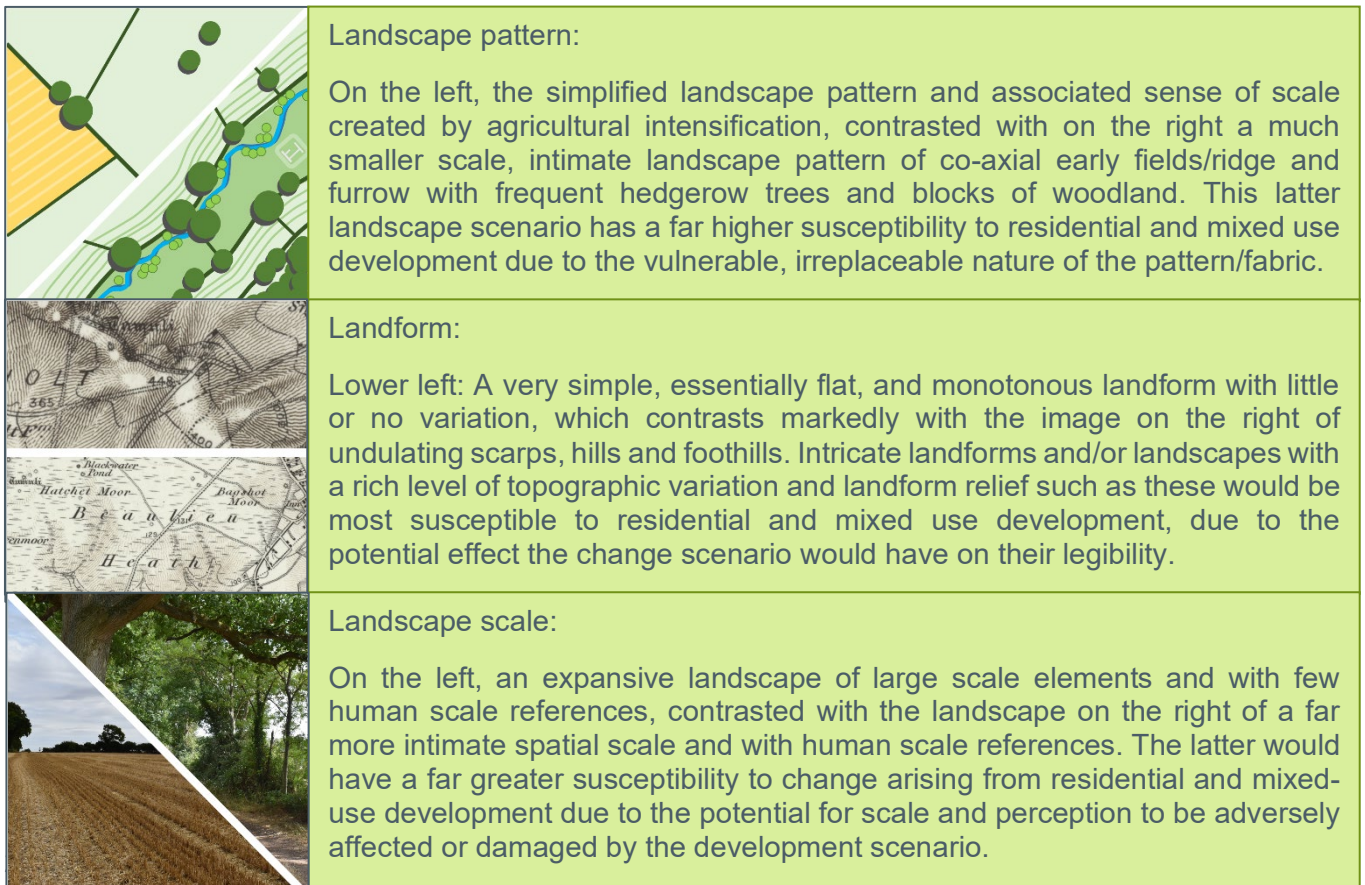
'Landscape susceptibility is the degree to which a defined landscape and its associated visual qualities and attributes might respond to the specific development type / development scenario or other change without undue negative effects on landscape character and the visual resource'.

2.2.14 Different landscape attributes can be susceptible in different ways to different change scenarios.

2.2.15 Some high-level illustrations of why certain landscape attributes and variations within them are more or less susceptible to residential and mixed-use development are shown in Figure 2.1.

¹¹ Tudor, C, Natural England, 2019, An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – to inform spatial planning and land management, NE724. Link [here](#)

Figure 2.1: Some illustrations of relatively higher and lower landscape susceptibility to residential and mixed-use development¹²



Environmental drivers for the change in approach

Legislation

- 2.2.17 Updates to environmental legislation and best practice now increasingly link landscape character assessment with nature recovery policies and spatial planning concepts and design approaches such as rewilding, green infrastructure, biodiversity net gain (BNG) and how to link evidence with local plans and conservation and restoration schemes. Much has also changed within the global and UK policy 'landscape' since 2010, including the global declaration of the Climate Emergency and the ecological crisis and the associated emphasis on landscape resilience and landscape and nature recovery in the UK Environment Act 2021.
- 2.2.18 The UK Environment Act 2021 also sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world. The Act requires local authorities to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), which Devon is already doing, to help deliver nature recovery. The Act also aims to facilitate funding for trees and woodland to meet the government's overall target to treble

¹² Historic map images on this page reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland, [CC-BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Other images in Figure 2.1 are © Stephenson Halliday.

current woodland creation rates. All of these requirements will have implications for landscape character, pointing to a clear need for an integrated approach to landscape evaluation and to development of landscape guidance and recommendations.

Climate change and other forces for change acting on landscapes

- 2.2.19 The understanding of climate change and how it will impact the landscape and land use has progressed since 2010. The new Landscape Study needs to consider the key potential pressures and trends associated with climate change (in addition to other forms of change acting on the landscape), including how this will potentially impact landscape character, land use and sensitivities, as well as in relation to opportunities and needs for conservation, restoration, adaptation and creation of new character, and broad consideration of potential residential and renewable energy development.
- 2.2.20 There will be a need to link the evidence from the landscape assessment to the Local Plan and identify policies and plans which not only relate to consideration and protection of the landscape but which also respond to the pressures for housing development, employment and commercial development, renewable energy, mineral extraction and waste management, transport and communication networks and tourism.

3 GAP ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 A gap analysis is required to identify what needs to be included and what needs to be updated for a new Torbay landscape character assessment, to reflect changes in planning policy, landscape assessment methodology, best practice and guidance since 2010; as well as changes to the environmental baseline, along with other elements that could usefully be considered for inclusion in a new Landscape Study. This section has informed the development of high-level recommendations in the next section, to inform the development of the brief for the new Landscape Study.

3.2 Limitations and omissions in the 2010 LCA

- 3.2.1 The original 2010 LCA appears to be robustly produced. However, as discussed above, much has changed in relation to landscape assessment thinking since it was published. The original study also has little or no focus on townscape and seascape character considerations.
- 3.2.2 Part 1 of the 2010 LCA provides a good historical overview of the physical, geological and human history of the landscape which explains how the Torbay landscape evolved. Part 1 also explains clearly how the separate landscape types have been identified. There are also good, if brief, descriptions of the identified landscape types and their key characteristics. Part 1 appears to be well thought through and evidenced.
- 3.2.3 Part 2 of the 2010 LCA focuses on Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity, undertaken with reference to the landscape character types identified in Part 1. However, an initial overview of Part 2 of the study indicates that the sensitivity study focuses on inherent sensitivity of the landscape rather than sensitivities of the landscape and its attributes to specific development scenarios which may affect Torbay's administrative area (creating an opportunity for Torbay Council in a new landscape assessment to consider likely development and change

scenarios most relevant to their area and for which policy and development management guidance could be most effectively targeted). It is also in need of updating as the concept of landscape capacity no longer fits well with current thinking in relation to landscape sensitivity, as discussed earlier in this report.

- 3.2.4 The use of matrices and single short paragraphs on capacity and management strategy also constrains the overall sensitivity and capacity judgements, and the level of detailed narrative and justification within them. The use of matrices is now slightly outdated and can provide judgements with thin evidential backing. More use of text and narrative professional judgement to describe the landscape character and sensitivity may be more appropriate. The sensitivity analysis would also need to discuss landscape value and landscape susceptibility to the specific change scenario, in line with current guidance.
- 3.2.5 Outside of the of tick box matrices there is also limited reference in the study to designated landscapes and the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in particular, as well as the special qualities of this which influence and underpin landscape character.
- 3.2.6 Although the 2010 LCA is broadly robust and well-presented there are some omissions which could be addressed in a new Landscape Character Assessment. For instance the 2010 LCA:
- Makes no reference at all to seascape; however the 2019 character study of the South Devon AONB, which overlaps areas in the south of the Torbay authority, does include references to seascape, as do the recent character studies undertaken for other authorities within Devon. Any future landscape character assessment of the area should also include some consideration of seascape, as and where relevant.
 - Has limited content relating to ‘national or local policy review’ and does not link in with policy aims. Any future landscape character assessment should include policy review including alignment with the most recent iteration of the NPPF.
 - With respect to the section above on landscape value, an exercise in assessing ‘valued’ local landscapes and how these are defined could also be beneficial to establish new boundaries and areas of local landscape designations (and detail where these have changed from previous local Areas of Great Landscape Value [AGLV]) and how they specifically would link in with local plans and nature recovery/green infrastructure objectives.
 - Specifically, a new landscape character assessment should link the document into the Devon LNRS and identify suitable landscapes within Torbay which could benefit the LNRS, as part of an integrated, outcome-based approach to evidence and decision making to guide the spatial plan in future.

3.3 Key changes to the environmental baseline since 2010

- 3.3.1 The following factors should be considered in the update of the landscape baseline in a new Landscape Study and in the consideration and justification of any re-drawing of LCA boundaries. The approach to such a boundary review exercise should however be proportionate to the scale of the study and cognisant of the fact that LCA boundaries are in

reality zones of transition, rather than the hard lines which the polygons on an LCA map can often imply.

2021 Torbay Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

3.3.2 In 2021 Torbay Council undertook a Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) to identify potential sites for housing, employment or economic development. The HELAA has been used to inform the Local Plan Update. The aim was to identify as many sites as possible, including those with significant constraints, and assess their suitability using a 'Traffic Light System'. The HELAA 'strongly suggests' there is insufficient land to meet future housing requirements, and therefore other options need to be considered.

3.3.3 'Amber Sites' were identified as having significant constraints including landscape, environmental or infrastructure issues.

Landscape wide interventions since 2010

The Cirl Bunting Project

3.3.4 A Natural England, RSPB and Devon and Cornwall Farming Community project aiming to protect and increase the number of cirl bunting pairs within the county of Devon, via encouraging landowners, in particular coastal farmers, to promote sympathetic land management and habitat creation suitable for the cirl bunting. The partnership has identified core areas to help conserve the cirl bunting, such as the RSPB Labrador Bay nature reserve.

3.3.5 A result of this project would be to increase areas of weedy stubble fields (in the winter), unimproved grassland and hedgerows and increasing the area of land occupied by traditionally-managed coastal farms. Ideally new housing development should be kept away from these areas.

The Devon Environment Foundation

3.3.6 The Devon Environment Foundation is currently supporting a number of projects including landscape regeneration schemes aiming to conserve and restore natural habitats, particularly from larger-scale mechanical and chemical farming; river restoration schemes; and marine conservation, including a Torbay Seabed Regeneration project.

3.3.7 Elements of the scheme have similar aims to the Cirl Bunting Project in restoring natural habitats from larger-scale farming; and again efforts should be made to protect such areas and this could be done via the Local Plan, and/or through recognition where appropriate in key valued landscape characteristics in the baseline parts of a new Landscape Study.

Life on the Edge

3.3.8 The project covers the coastline in South Devon, and includes the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust. The aim of the project is to restore invertebrates and plants along the South Devon coastline via restoring wildflower cliff-tops and carefully managing scrub mosaic landscapes and green hedgerow networks.

Landscape and environmental baseline changes

3.3.9 It is important to consider the changes to the landscape and environmental baseline since the preparation of the 2010 LCA. An understanding of current and recent landscape change is useful in shaping future landscape strategies and management guidelines for the relevant

character areas, as well as consideration of boundary review, noting the observations in paragraph 3.3.1 above. It will also enable a more integrated, outcome orientated approach to the new assessment, aligned with other related evidence base studies such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy – a joined up evidence base.

3.3.10 General landscape pressures and forces for change within the county include:

- Farming, food production and continued intensification (In this context the World Wide Fund for Nature's 'Triple Challenge' of seeking to balance food security, biodiversity and climate resilience is of relevance to consideration of rural landscape character, landscape change and strategic recommendations or objectives for landscapes);
- Coastal defences, erosion, flood defences and strategies pursued in Shoreline Management Plans;
- Urban fringe and need for housing development – consideration of settlement fringe character, gateways and urban/rural landscape interface (where appropriate this could include specific aspects of townscape which have particular reference to the LCA, without going into the detail of townscape character assessment which is a separate, finer grain piece of analysis, albeit reflecting the same basic principles and approach. In this context it may be appropriate to include more detailed reference to built landmarks, key views and aspects of settlement materiality and form which influence character;
- Tourism and infrastructure, including holiday/ caravan parks, any intensification, landscape pressures and landscape integration; and
- Pressure on rivers, estuaries and marinas.

3.4 Examples of recent approaches to landscape studies for other comparable LPAs

3.4.1 A scoping exercise was undertaken in relation to other comparable landscape studies including for LPAs in similar contexts (coastal towns and landscapes adjacent to and intervisible with nationally designated landscape interests). The purpose of this exercise was to identify good quality examples of LCA which meet current best practice and guidelines and which Torbay Council may wish to consult to understand their own requirements.

Scarborough Borough Landscape Study

Overview

3.4.2 The Scarborough Borough Landscape Study (2013) is a two-tier landscape study (LCA and supporting Landscape Sensitivity Study) in a context not dissimilar to that of Torbay in that it contains a coastal area and seascape, a rural setting and towns where topographic features can constrain physical growth. In addition parts of the borough are coincident with designated landscape areas including nationally designated landscape interests - the North York Moors National Park - and other landscape relevant designations, namely the North Yorkshire and Cleveland Heritage Coast. The study can be accessed [here](#).

3.4.3 The study is in two volumes. Volume 1 is a borough wide landscape character assessment, undertaken at 1:25,000 scale, of the rural landscapes of the borough, to inform landscape

planning policy in the Scarborough Borough Local Plan. It provides key information for use by both developers/their consultants and council officers in helping to make decisions on appropriate location, scale and design of new development. It is also available to the wider public, providing a framework for more detailed studies of local landscape character. Volume 1 also provides the top tier landscape framework for the more detailed application of the landscape characterisation in the landscape sensitivity study in Volume 2.

Relevance to the Torbay context

- 3.4.4 The study is a strategic rather than detailed landscape study, and was produced in two tiers or spatial scales. It focusses on the rural landscapes of the borough, with more detailed consideration of the urban-rural fringe landscapes provided in Volume 2: Landscape Sensitivity Study. Character area boundaries usually represent 'zones of transition'. In considering change within any one-character area it is therefore often useful to consider potential effects on adjacent areas.
- 3.4.5 Volume 2 is a landscape sensitivity study, undertaken at 1:10,000 scale, in relation to potential housing allocations to the principal settlement fringes. It informs future direction of growth, in landscape and visual terms, in the plan period. It assesses the sensitivity of the landscape and its component landscape attributes (based on understanding of the key landscape characteristics in the LCA) to a specific change scenario, namely residential development and is therefore also of relevance to Torbay in this context.
- 3.4.6 Both Volumes are aimed specifically at the council's forward planners in planning future direction of growth, and council officers in seeking better landscape outcomes from planning applications as they come forward. They are intended to be used by developers and their consultants to help plan development which is likely to be more appropriate in landscape and visual terms. Volume 2 considers not only the sensitivity of the landscape of the allocation sites but also provides commentary on the sensitivity of specific landscape features within them. It therefore provides a useful high-level framework for site feasibility studies and landscape/visual baseline evidence for master planning, and for future landscape and visual impact assessments in relation to any planning applications which may come forward on these sites.

Shropshire Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Study

Overview

- 3.4.7 The Shropshire Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Study (2018) is a landscape and visual sensitivity study which specifically focussed on settlements within Shropshire to inform the selection of potential housing and employment sites for allocation through the council's Local Plan Review. Therefore, although it is not a full Landscape Character Assessment, it is an example of a study providing a robust evidence base and applying information in the LCA to support the existing Local Plan policy, which seeks to protect landscape character and visual amenity in Shropshire through the development management process.
- 3.4.8 The study builds on the landscape assessment work presented in the 2006 Shropshire Landscape Typology, and takes account of the changes in thinking and best practice with respect to landscape assessment. The study can be accessed [here](#) and the summary [here](#).

Relevance to the Torbay context

- 3.4.9 The study is a recent example of work for an LPA which required an assessment undertaken of landscape sensitivity of different sites with specific reference to housing and employment allocations.
- 3.4.10 Each individual settlement or 'parcel' was assessed in clearly defined terms of landscape and visual sensitivity, and a sensitivity rating given for each parcel with respect to landscape and visual amenity for both housing and employment development. The final report presents clearly understandable assessment narratives and supporting graphics that present conclusions simply and clearly, and linking back to the underlying landscape evidence.

A Landscape Character Assessment for South Hams and West Devon

Overview

- 3.4.11 The Landscape Character Assessment for South Hams and West Devon (2018) is intended to provide context for policies and proposals within the [then] emerging Joint Local Plan, inform the determination of planning applications, and the management of future change so that it is in sympathy with local variations in landscape character in order to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the rural area. The study can be found [here](#).

Relevance to the Torbay context

- 3.4.12 The study covers a neighbouring authority and includes landscape within the South Devon AONB, and has been designed as an evidence base which would help develop and refine management plans and special qualities to take account of the landscape setting of the AONB. The study has specifically been prepared to complement the landscape assessment framework followed by all Devon local authorities.
- 3.4.13 The landscape character types within the assessment were based on earlier landscape assessment work and at a scale of 1:25,000, however boundaries have been adjusted to reflect changes in the environment, modern understanding of landscape capacity and sensitivity and to more accurately reflect cross-boundary (administrative area) locations i.e. to ensure the character assessment across the different authorities within Devon is consistent.

South Downs Landscape Character Assessment

Overview

- 3.4.14 The South Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2020) has been produced in a highly accessible format due to its availability via an interactive and web-based platform as a fully digital report based on an ESRI StoryMap, as well as traditional paper or PDF format. The study can be accessed [here](#).

Relevance to the Torbay context

- 3.4.15 The new Torbay Landscape Study should have good accessibility for the local community to maximise its use by the widest range of audiences.

- 3.4.16 The interactive platform in the South Downs study is easy to use, a function of the intuitive quality of ESRI StoryMaps, and provides a host of visual images and informative text, including traditional landscape character descriptions but also an evaluation of landscapes based on 'ecosystem services', sensitivity, change, management objectives and landscape guidelines. Where relevant objectives and guidelines also provide direct links to relevant Local Plan policies, strategies, previous or neighbouring landscape character studies, plus other documents if relevant.

Suffolk, South Norfolk & North Essex Seascape Character Assessment

Overview

- 3.4.17 A 2018 Seascape Character Assessment which is similar to a traditional Landscape Character Assessment, but with the purpose of bringing the description of the marine environment in line with terrestrial areas; and therefore providing relevant information for decision makers to consider effects on seascapes and landscapes in an integrated manner. The study explains how the seascape assessment fits into the hierarchy of wider national, regional and local character assessment. The study can be accessed [here](#).

Relevance to the Torbay context

- 3.4.18 The new Torbay Landscape Study should include a section on Seascape Character Assessment, particularly where the seascape interacts with the landscape, and the transitional nature between the two.

4 KEY REQUIREMENTS

- 4.1.1 The following requirements have been set out in order that a future Landscape Study can be as useful as possible and have the widest application in spatial planning and decision making processes.

Purpose and intended use

- 4.1.2 The intended purpose of the Landscape Study needs to be clearly established at the outset as this will shape the design of all aspects of the new study. This is essential since it will dictate all other parts of the approach, including scale of the study, datasets used, level of detail, evaluative approach, the type and level of detail in the guidance and recommendations.

Scale of study and relationship to characterisation hierarchy

- 4.1.3 Landscape character assessments can be undertaken at different scales of granularity and should be appropriate for the scale of decision making for which they are intended. Further fine grain landscape assessment may be necessary for very site specific and local decision making. For instance, a local authority level study is typically undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000 and is therefore appropriate for strategic scale or landscape scale decision making, albeit that the principles within it may be applied to finer grain analysis and/or design studies. Settlement fringe type landscape sensitivity studies are typically developed at 1:10,000 scale and are appropriate for decision making at the cluster of sites scale or masterplanning /allocation sites level, and so on.

4.1.4 Regardless of the scale at which the study is developed, there should be a clear and legible relationship to the wider landscape characterisation hierarchy in which it sits – National, County etc. The new Landscape Study should be clear about its position in the hierarchy of landscape assessments and how it fits in with county-wide and district landscape evidence bases and policy making decisions.

4.1.5 The approach to the new Landscape Study should also take into account the draft paper, ‘An approach to future updates of shared Devon-wide Landscape Character Assessments’.

A locally supported study

4.1.6 Local stakeholder input to the development of the Landscape Study, whether from local government and technical stakeholders and local communities of place, is invaluable in providing local detail, validation and support for the study, as well as guiding consideration of landscape value. It should also take place early enough for the stakeholder engagement process to meaningfully influence outcomes and so that it is a truly collaborative process. Against this as part of a proportionate approach should be recognised the resource intensive nature of engagement, as well as the potential for engagement fatigue. It may therefore be possible to align engagement on the development of the new Landscape Study with other Local Plan consultation processes.

Potential foci of the updated parts of the study and of the landscape evaluation and applications of the work

4.1.7 Below is an initial review of Torbay LCAs (based on the Devon-wide LCTs) likely to be the potential target of change in the context of the HELAA, depending on option sites eventually taken forward. This provides an initial list of LCAs which may be subject to updated key characteristics, evaluation and which may be the focus for potential boundary review.

Torbay Landscape Character Area	Reasoning
Rolling Farmland 1A Barton	Amber in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
Rolling Farmland 1E Upper Cockington	Amber in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
Rolling Farmland 1F Stanton Barton	Amber in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
Rolling Farmland 1H Ocombe Cross	Amber in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
Rolling Farmland 1J Blagdons	Red in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
Rolling Farmland 1M West Yalberton	Red in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries

Torbay Landscape Character Area	Reasoning
Rolling Farmland 1N East Yalberton	Amber in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
Rolling Farmland 1P South Glampton and Lupton	Amber in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
Level Farmland 2A Brixham/ Churston Farmland	Amber and Red in HELAA – could it be developed and if so would this impact key characteristics and impact boundaries
All Type 4 Low Lying Coast & Beach areas	Need inclusion of seascape and transitional character, due to potential coastal erosion and infrastructure pressures
All Type 7 Cliffs	Need inclusion of seascape and transitional character, due to potential coastal erosion and infrastructure pressures

- 4.1.8 Due to the changes in landscape assessment methodology over the last decade, and in particular how sensitivity, value and susceptibility to specific types of change are established, as discussed above, the previous 2010 judgements on landscape sensitivity within Torbay should be revisited, and with reference to a defined and agreed change scenario/scenarios. Taking all of the factors which contribute to landscape value as relevant, a narrative reasoned professional judgement should be recorded for the discussion of landscape value in relation to the relevant and identified landscape character areas. Allied to detailed discussion of the susceptibility of the landscape and its key positive attributes or key characteristics to specific change, this forms the basis for a professional judgement as to the sensitivity of the landscape to the change in question. This would enable the landscape evaluation to align with current guidance.

Clear and accessible presentation

- 4.1.9 It is now a requirement for all public bodies to provide accessible websites and web publications, taking account of the Accessibility Regulations, 2018 and associated guidelines. The use of downloadable documents is discouraged and web content is preferred. Graphic design needs to be mindful of various requirements including for colour-blindness, and photos/illustrations need to be accompanied by alternative text that describes what the picture shows for screen readers used by the visually impaired ('alt' text). These considerations also apply to downloadable reports where these are still used, as does the use of clear concise plain English.
- 4.1.10 Future LCA updates provide opportunities to make data more accessible for all, consistent across boundaries and easier to find, with transparent evidence and judgements behind the data also accessible to all. Subject to available resources this could also include options for designing and hosting the Landscape Study via an interactive reporting and presentation platform such as an ESRI Storymap.

Other useful considerations

- 4.1.11 The LCA could include a supplementary paper assessing the Amber Sites from the HELAA from a specific landscape and visual amenity perspective and the appropriateness, or not, of housing development on the sites which can be linked to the Local Plan.
- 4.1.12 The LCA could identify locally protected areas, where traditional and natural habitats are being conserved or restored (e.g. from the Life on the Edge and Cirl Bunting projects, and from The Devon Environment Foundation) and provide these areas an extra level of protection via the Local Plan, linked to relevant landscape guidance and objectives in the Landscape Study.

5 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

- 5.1.1 The following next steps are recommended to follow on from this report:
- Develop a draft brief for a new integrated Landscape Study, reflecting the recommendations and analysis above. This should include collaboration with the AONB Unit, Devon County Council and the adjacent local authorities to ensure a joined up approach and stakeholder buy in at the outset, and as the study develops.
 - Market testing of the draft brief in order to refine it in the context of scope and parameters, and to understand likely cost in order to agree budget with council members prior to going out to tender.