

Landscape: beyond the view



A simple guide to understanding the forces and influences that shape our landscapes and their character

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Introduction

Landscape reflects the relationship between people and place. The interaction of natural components and cultural patterns creates the rich diversity of England's landscapes, with their own distinctive features and sense of place.

Landscape is a human concept and as such encompasses how we view the land; how we hear, smell and feel our surroundings; and the feelings, memories or associations that they evoke. In short, people's perceptions turn land into landscape.

Landscapes are not static; their constant evolution is a result of changing natural processes, as well as the changing needs of our society. Only by understanding landscapes can we manage change that benefits current and future generations.

Landscapes are relevant to everyone: from the broad patchwork of distinctive places that contribute to our national identity, to the local landscapes in which we live, work and play. While this booklet is not intended as a detailed assessment of the English landscape, it gives an insight into the patterns and trends that shape this invaluable resource.

The booklet includes an overview of 'what is landscape?' and landscape character; an explanation of how the different Landscape Character Areas fit together at the national level; a summary of the forces for change; as well as illustrative scenarios of how the choices we make today could impact on our future.

Ultimately, the challenge is to balance the needs of our society with the need to conserve wildlife, maintain natural resources and enhance local distinctiveness. By understanding the forces that shape our landscape, we can help to protect what is valued, while drawing upon its resources to improve the quality of people's lives – both now and in the future.

Now is the time for everyone to get involved in shaping the landscapes of tomorrow.

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The roman numerals by the side of images refer to the picture credits on page 23.

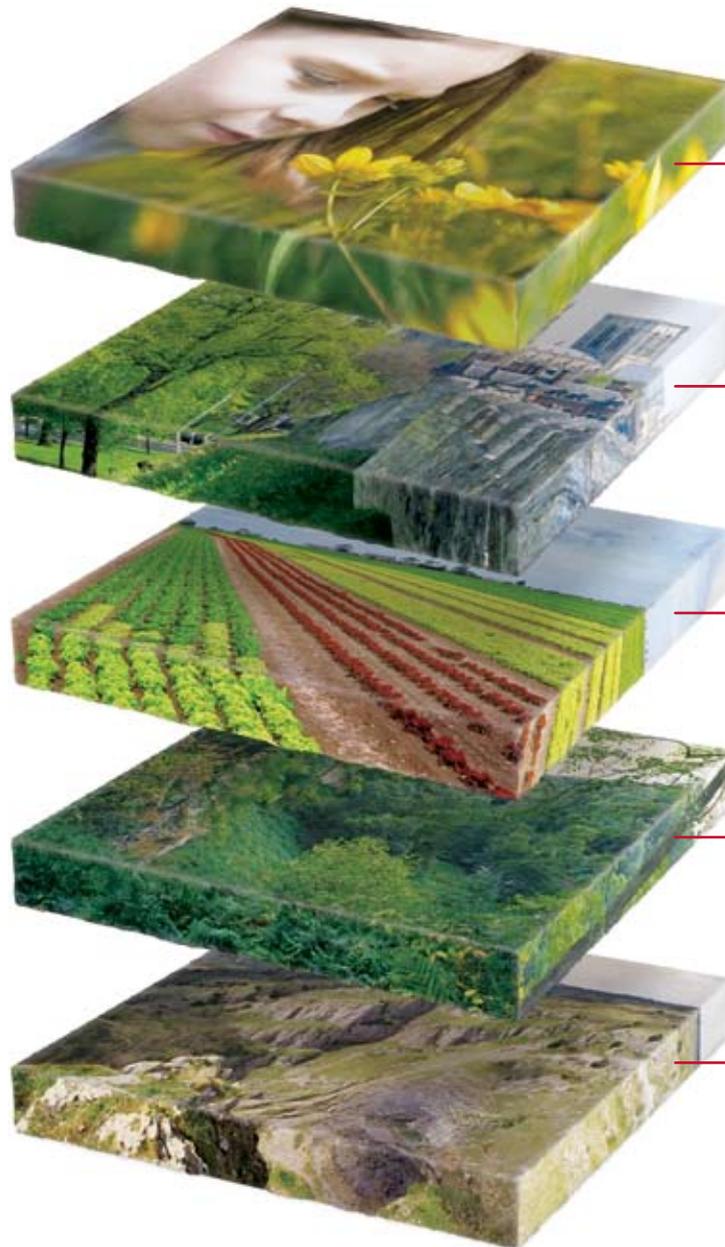


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What is Landscape?



Experience

Landscape is more than just 'the view'. It is about the relationship between people, place and nature. It is the ever-changing backdrop to our daily lives. It can mean a small patch of urban wasteland as much as a mountain range, and an urban park as much as a lowland plain.

Landscape results from the way that different components of our environment – both natural and cultural – interact together and are perceived by us. People value landscape for many different reasons. It is therefore important to understand what the landscape is like today, how it came to be like that and how it may change in the future.

Landscape is more than the sum of physical features that make up our environment. How we perceive the landscape can have an important influence on how we use or value its character and resources.



History

Virtually all landscapes in England have been shaped by human activity throughout history. It is therefore important to understand past patterns, the extent to which they have survived and how different stages in history have contributed to the character of today's landscape.



Land Use

Land use includes all of the various uses that people make of the landscape, such as settlement, farming and field enclosure, energy production and forestry. The character of the English landscape is particularly influenced by the present-day pattern of these features, as well as their historical legacy.



Wildlife

The variety of plants and animals in the English landscape (known as 'biodiversity') has been shaped over thousands of years by a complex set of social, historical and economic factors, all operating against the physical backdrop of the landscape itself. The types and abundance of wildlife can play a significant role in shaping the character - and in some cases the function - of each particular landscape.



Natural Form

Natural form includes geology, landform, river and drainage systems, soils and vegetation cover. The shape of the land, or landform, is often the main influence on the character of the landscape, especially in upland areas. Rivers and drainage systems also have an important part to play in shaping the landscape, while geology, soils and vegetation cover can determine the 'usefulness' of the land for agriculture, settlement and other functions.



The Landscape of Life

Our landscape provides for our needs as well as nature's. Our activities influence and shape its appearance and function.



Recreation and Health

Whether you're out for a gentle stroll, a trip to the beach or a run across the fells – the landscape can help you to stay healthy and in touch with nature.

Wildlife and Biodiversity

We can make the landscape more accommodating to wildlife by improving and connecting habitats, and ensuring that land use and development offers benefits for both people and nature.

Education and Experience

The landscape provides limitless opportunities to learn more about the world – from the obvious changes that come with each season, to the more subtle 'sense of place' that makes each landscape unique.

Farming, Forestry and Food

Farming and forestry have shaped the landscape over thousands of years - cultivating the land creates patterns and textures that contribute to the character of each landscape.

Natural Resources

The landscape provides essential resources, such as water, shelter and fuel. The availability of natural resources, and the way in which we use and maintain them, helps to shape the function and character of the landscape.

Transport and Infrastructure

Transport and other infrastructure networks are intrinsic to the character and pattern of our landscape - whether they are natural features such as rivers, or human-made routeways such as roads, railway lines and canals.

Settlement

Throughout history, the location of settlements has been determined by the opportunities afforded by the landscape. As settlements develop, they in turn influence the character of the landscape through local architecture, building materials, the pattern of streets and other infrastructure.

Local Distinctiveness

By understanding the features that combine to make each landscape distinct, we can help to ensure that future development meets the needs of local people while respecting the special character of a place.

History

The landscape is a living record of how we change and develop as a society. Historic features from field patterns to ancient monuments provide valuable historical insight that can be used to inform our planning of the future.