

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Third edition

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of Environmental Management
& Assessment

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5.17 Where new landscape surveys are required, either of the whole study area or of the site and its immediate surroundings, they should follow recommended methods and up-to-date guidance. Survey information may be recorded in a variety of ways but good records are essential. This is especially so in LVIA as the landscape baseline may eventually be used in a public inquiry where other parties could request access to field records.

5.18 Evidence about change in the landscape, including in its condition, is an important part of the baseline. The condition of the different landscape types and/or areas and their constituent parts should be recorded, and any evidence of current pressures causing change in the landscape documented, drawing on previous reports and data sources as well as field records.

Establishing the value of the landscape

5.19 As part of the baseline description the value of the potentially affected landscape should be established. This means the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society, bearing in mind that a landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons. Considering value at the baseline stage will inform later judgements about the significance of effects. Value can apply to areas of landscape as a whole, or to the individual elements, features and aesthetic or perceptual dimensions which contribute to the character of the landscape. LANDMAP in Wales, for example, evaluates each area for each of its five aspects or layers. Landscapes or their component parts may be valued at the community, local, national or international levels. A review of existing landscape designations is usually the starting point in understanding landscape value, but the value attached to undesigned landscapes also needs to be carefully considered and individual elements of the landscape – such as trees, buildings or hedgerows – may also have value. All need to be considered where relevant.

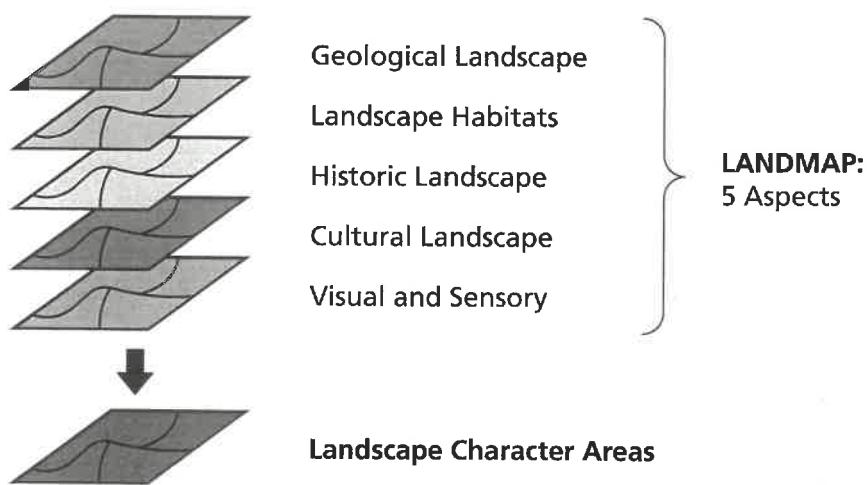


Figure 5.6 In Wales, landscape information is found in LANDMAP, providing data on five aspects of the landscape which can be combined (with other information) to define Landscape Character Areas

5.28 In cases where there is no existing evidence to indicate landscape value, and where scoping discussions suggest that it is appropriate, value should be determined as part of the baseline study through new survey and analysis. This requires definition of the criteria and factors that are considered to confer value on a landscape or on its components. There are a number of possible options:

- Draw on a list of those factors that are generally agreed to influence value (see Box 5.1). They need to be interpreted to reflect the particular legislative and policy context prevailing in particular places. The list is not comprehensive and other factors may be considered important in specific areas.
- Draw up a list of criteria and factors specific to the individual project and landscape context.
- Apply a form of the ecosystem services approach, although this is a cross-cutting and integrating approach and is likely to encroach on other themes or topics in the EIA. Although there is interest in this approach, experience of using it in EIA is limited, although it is under active consideration (IEMA, 2012a).

Box 5.1

Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes

- **Landscape quality (condition):** A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
- **Scenic quality:** The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses).
- **Rarity:** The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.
- **Representativeness:** Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.
- **Conservation interests:** The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in their own right.
- **Recreation value:** Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.
- **Perceptual aspects:** A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity.
- **Associations:** Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

Based on Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002)

6 Assessment of visual effects

in which case this will supplement and form part of the normal LVIA for a project. Some of the principles set out here for dealing with visual effects may help in such assessments but there are specific requirements in residential amenity assessment.

The viewpoints to be used in an assessment of visual effects should be selected initially through discussions with the competent authority and other interested parties at the scoping stage. But selection should also be informed by the ZTV analysis, by fieldwork, and by desk research on access and recreation, including footpaths, bridleways and public access land, tourism including popular vantage points, and distribution of population.

6.18

Viewpoints selected for inclusion in the assessment and for illustration of the visual effects fall broadly into three groups:

6.19

1. **representative viewpoints**, selected to represent the experience of different types of visual receptor, where larger numbers of viewpoints cannot all be included individually and where the significant effects are unlikely to differ – for example, certain points may be chosen to represent the views of users of particular public footpaths and bridleways;
2. **specific viewpoints**, chosen because they are key and sometimes promoted viewpoints within the landscape, including for example specific local visitor attractions, viewpoints in areas of particularly noteworthy visual and/or recreational amenity such as landscapes with statutory landscape designations, or viewpoints with particular cultural landscape associations;
3. **illustrative viewpoints**, chosen specifically to demonstrate a particular effect or specific issues, which might, for example, be the restricted visibility at certain locations.

The selection of the final viewpoints used for the assessment should take account of a range of factors, including:

6.20

- the accessibility to the public;
- the potential number and sensitivity of viewers who may be affected;
- the viewing direction, distance (i.e. short-, medium- and long-distance views) and elevation;
- the nature of the viewing experience (for example static views, views from settlements and views from sequential points along routes);
- the view type (for example panoramas, vistas and glimpses);
- the potential for cumulative views of the proposed development in conjunction with other developments.

Issues relating to the cumulative effects of proposals are covered in Chapter 7.

The viewpoints used need to cover as wide a range of situations as is possible, reasonable and necessary to cover the likely significant effects. It is not possible to give specific guidance on the appropriate number of viewpoints since this depends on the context, the nature of the proposal and the range and location of visual receptors. The

6.21

Part 2 Principles, processes and presentation

emphasis must always be on proportionality in relation to the scale and nature of the development proposal and its likely significant effects, and on agreement with the competent authority and consultation bodies.

6.22 In addition to fixed views, the viewpoints should also, as far as possible, cover important sequential views along key routes and transport corridors. Viewpoints should cover both near and more distant views, though not so distant as to be meaningless, unless it is useful to demonstrate the influence of distance. And they should cover the full range of different types of people who may be affected. The detailed location of each viewpoint should be carefully considered and should be as typical or representative as possible of the view likely to be experienced there. The details of viewpoint locations should be accurately mapped and catalogued and the direction and area covered by the view recorded. The information should be sufficient for someone else to return to the exact location and record the same view.

6.23 At each agreed viewpoint baseline photographs should be taken to record the existing views. The Landscape Institute has published separate technical guidance on photography and photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Landscape Institute, 2011), which should be consulted when taking baseline photographs. Additional useful information is also available from other sources.²

Combining the baseline information

6.24 The completed visual baseline should focus on information that will help to identify significant visual effects. Visual receptors, viewpoints and views that have been

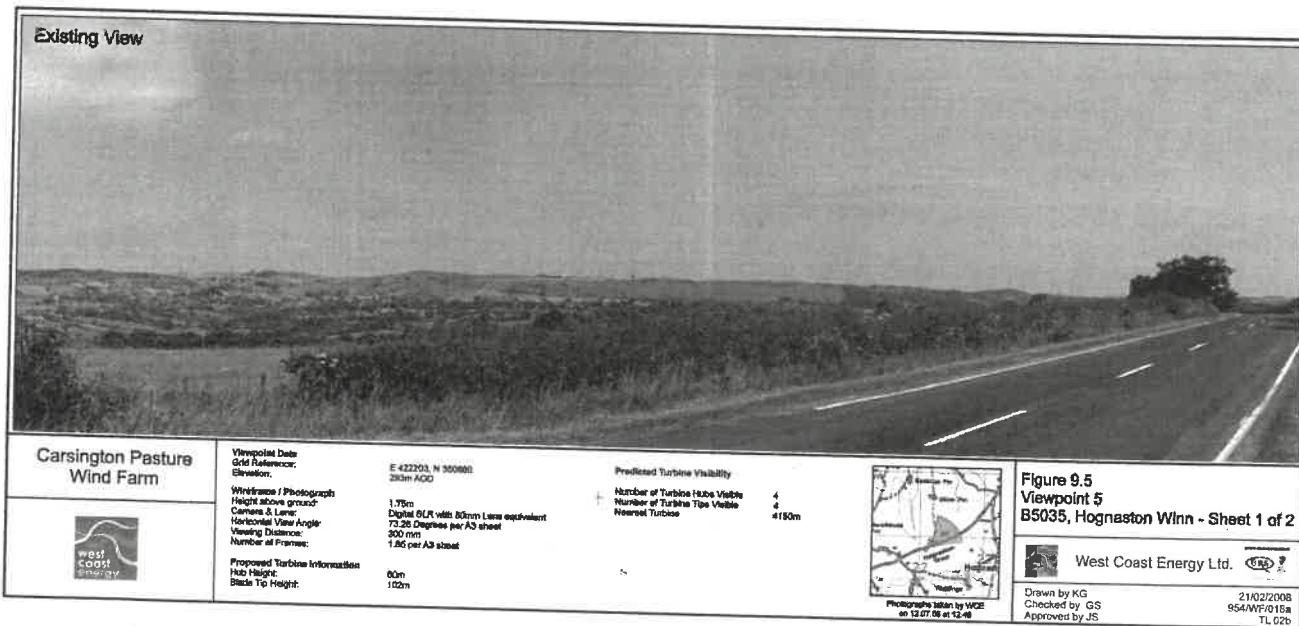


Figure 6.9 The details of viewpoint locations should be accurately mapped and catalogued and the direction and area covered by the view recorded

Chapter overview

- Scope and definitions
- What should cumulative effects include?
- Types of cumulative effect
- Assessing cumulative landscape effects
- Assessing cumulative visual effects
- Mitigating cumulative effects

Scope and definitions

7.1 Assessment of cumulative effects is required both by the EIA and the SEA Directives and by the associated Regulations. Cumulative effects have been defined in a broad generic sense as 'impacts that result from incremental changes caused by other past, present or reasonably foreseeable actions together with the project' (Hyder, 1999: 7).

7.2 Cumulative landscape and visual effects must be considered in LVIA when it is carried out as part of EIA. The 2002 edition of these guidelines defined cumulative landscape and visual effects as those that:

result from additional changes to the landscape or visual amenity caused by the proposed development in conjunction with other developments (associated with or separate to it), or actions that occurred in the past, present or are likely to occur in the foreseeable future.

(Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2002: 85)

7.3 Since this definition was published there has been particular emphasis on exploring the cumulative effects of wind farm development. This results both from the number of such schemes requiring assessment and the potentially high level of visibility of these tall structures, which means that cumulative visual effects in particular may be more likely. In Scotland considerable effort has been devoted to addressing definitions and interpretations of cumulative landscape and visual effects specifically in relation to wind farms and the resulting guidance has been used widely, and not only in Scotland. This defines:

- **cumulative effects** as 'the additional changes caused by a proposed development in conjunction with other similar developments or as the combined effect of a set of developments, taken together' (SNH, 2012: 4);
- **cumulative landscape effects** as effects that 'can impact on either the physical fabric or character of the landscape, or any special values attached to it' (SNH, 2012: 10);
- **cumulative visual effects** as effects that can be caused by combined visibility, which 'occurs where the observer is able to see two or more developments from one viewpoint' and/or sequential effects which 'occur when the observer has to move to another viewpoint to see different developments' (SNH, 2012: 11).

7.4 This is an evolving area of practice that is relevant to all forms of development and land use change, not only to wind farms. It is not appropriate to prescribe the approach

only if they cover the specific type of development included in the cumulative effects assessment and the specific location in question;

- the value attached to the receptor under consideration, reflecting in particular its designation status, including internationally recognised and nationally designated landscapes, locally designated landscapes and other valued components of the landscape;
- the size or scale of the cumulative landscape effects identified;
- the extent of the geographical area covered by the cumulative landscape effects identified;
- the duration of the cumulative landscape effects, including the timescales relating to both the project being assessed and the other projects being considered, and the extent to which the cumulative effects may be considered reversible.

The most significant cumulative landscape effects are likely to be those that would give rise to changes in the landscape character of the study area of such an extent as to have major effects on its key characteristics and even, in some cases, to transform it into a different landscape type. This may be the case where the project being considered itself tips the balance through its additional effects. The emphasis must always remain on the main project being assessed and how or whether it adds to or combines with the others being considered to create a significant cumulative effect.

7.28

Assessing cumulative visual effects

Cumulative visual effects are the effects on views and visual amenity enjoyed by people, which may result either from adding the effects of the project being assessed to the effects of the other projects on the baseline conditions or from their combined effect. This may result from changes in the content and character of the views experienced in particular places due to introduction of new elements or removal of or damage to existing ones.

7.29

Defining a study area

The study area for identifying potential cumulative visual effects may be defined by creating ZTVs (see Paragraphs 6.8–6.12) for each project that has been identified for inclusion. In theory, in those areas where the ZTVs overlap, people at identified viewpoints may be able to see one or more of the developments and will therefore potentially experience cumulative visual effects. Actual visibility does, however, depend upon a variety of factors, which can include topography, aspect, tree cover, buildings or other visual obstructions, elevation, direction and distance of view, and weather and light conditions.

7.30

The initial study area may include all the overlapping ZTVs of all the relevant projects. This approach has been particularly important in assessing wind farms, which can be visible over considerable distances (see Figures 7.1A and 7.1B), and so the study areas for cumulative effects can be very extensive. This may not necessarily be the case for other types of development.

7.31

The distance between the visual receptors or viewpoints and the various projects does influence the magnitude of the cumulative visual effects and so feeds into judgements

7.32