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Guidance

Landscape and seascape character assessments

How to carry out and use landscape and seascape character assessments.

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From:

Natural England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>) and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs>)

Applies to:

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Landscape character assessments (LCAs)

Landscape character assessment ([LCA](#)) is the process of identifying and describing variation in character of the landscape. [LCA](#) documents identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive by mapping and describing character types and areas. They also show how the landscape is perceived, experienced and valued by people.

Who should prepare LCAs

LCAs can be done at any scale and prepared by:

- local councils
- planning departments
- community groups
- consultants
- developers
- private practices

- land owners

What LCAs are used for

You can prepare an LCA to inform a wide range of activities, such as:

- planning policies and decisions
- sensitivity and capacity studies
- land management plans
- landscape and visual impact assessments
- local council studies
- minerals planning
- place making
- green infrastructure
- agri-environment schemes
- forest and woodland strategies
- waterways strategies
- renewable energy
- national park management plans

LCAs are also useful for monitoring change across the landscape.

How to carry out an LCA

1. Define the purpose and scope of your LCA, eg the area it will cover, its scale, level of detail and resources available to carry out the work.
2. Conduct a desk study – collect, review and analyse data and documentation and speak to stakeholders involved with the landscape.
3. Conduct a field survey – test, refine and add to the outputs from the desk study, capturing aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities of the landscape.
4. Classify, map and describe the landscape's character areas, types and characteristics including geological, other physical and socio-cultural influences.

What to include

Capture the characteristics of the landscape including:

- topographic features
- flora and fauna
- land use
- sights, sounds, touch and smells
- cultural associations, history and memories

The completed LCA will be a document detailing the character of the landscape and an annotated map showing the character areas or types. You can also include photos, diagrams and survey results.

Using old LCAs

There may be an existing LCA for your area of interest. You can use, or update, an existing LCA but bear in mind its original purpose, age, scale and how much has changed since it was written. For example, a 10-year-old LCA for a small housing development would not be appropriate to inform a local council's tourism strategy.

Older LCAs can remain useful for monitoring change in the landscape.

Record keeping

Keep all the work that informed your [LCA](#) for future reference and make sure it's easily accessible.

Seascape character assessments

For coastal and marine landscapes, you can conduct a seascape character assessment ([SCA](#)).

There is often crossover so you can combine landscape and seascape character assessments if it's appropriate for your area of interest. Generally, you should carry out an [SCA](#) for areas seaward of the low water mark and an [LCA](#) for areas landward of the high water mark. You can use one or the other, or a combination for intertidal land.

What to include

As well as capturing the physical and perceptual characteristics required for an [LCA](#), you should also record:

- atmospheric conditions, eg climate
- human use of the coast and sea
- coastal features
- surface water features
- coastal processes
- sunken and buried characteristics

Find out more

Read more about character assessments in these Natural England publications including further detail, examples and advice.

- landscape character assessment (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types>)
- seascape character assessment (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seascape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-seascape-types>)

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Related content

- Landscape character assessments: identify and describe landscape types (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-landscape-types>)
- Seascape character assessments: identify and describe seascape types (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seascape-character-assessments-identify-and-describe-seascape-types>)
- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biodiversity-2020-a-strategy-for-england-s-wildlife-and-ecosystem-services>)
- Green finance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/green-finance>)
- Natural environment (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment>)

Explore the topic

- Landscape (<https://www.gov.uk/topic/planning-development/landscape>)