

# LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT OF THE BOROUGH

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Keith Burrows
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Planning, Transportation and Recycling
<b>Officer Contact</b>	Charmian Baker – Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services
<b>Papers with report</b>	Hillingdon Landscape Character Assessment – <b>DUE TO SIZE COPIES ARE AVAILABLE FOR REFERENCE IN PARTY GROUP OFFICES ONLY</b>

## HEADLINE INFORMATION

<b>Summary</b>	<p>Land Use Consultants were commissioned to prepare a Landscape Character Assessment of the Borough in order to provide an evidence base to influence Hillingdon's local planning policies and development management decisions.</p> <p>The work included a public consultation event to ensure that the extensive local knowledge possessed by the voluntary groups in the Borough was included. Cabinet are asked to adopt the Landscape Character Assessment and authorise its publication on the Council's web site.</p>
<b>Contribution to our plans and strategies</b>	The Landscape Character Assessment will contribute to Part 2 of the emerging Hillingdon Local Plan, and to Service plans such as the Trees & Landscape Strategy.
<b>Financial Cost</b>	The report, which was commissioned at a cost of £19,670, was funded from a Government grant in respect of New Burdens under the European Habitats Directive. The Cabinet Member approved the expenditure in February 2011. The report will be placed on the Council's website and no further cost is anticipated.
<b>Relevant Policy Overview Committee</b>	Residents' and Environment Policy Overview Committee.
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	All

## RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet:

- 1. Approves the adoption of the Hillingdon Landscape Character Assessment.**
- 2. Authorises officers to publicise the report on the Council's website and to notify all groups having a particular interest in it, including those who participated in the public consultation event.**

## **INFORMATION**

### **Reasons for recommendation**

It is considered that the Landscape Character Assessment of this Borough will be very beneficial to inform countryside planning and management decisions and to form the basis of a Trees and Landscape Strategy. For example, the Government's preferred route for High Speed 2 would cross the Green Belt to the north and west of the Borough to the detriment of its landscape and ecology. In assisting the Council to mount a robust opposition to the proposal, and to secure the appropriate mitigation measures, should the proposal go ahead, an appraisal of the quality of the environment is essential. The Landscape Character Assessment will also be a valuable tool when appraising the landscape impacts of planning applications on the Green Belt and other areas of landscape quality.

### **Alternative options considered / risk management**

Cabinet could decide not to adopt the Landscape Character Assessment and not to make it available on the Council's website. In this case there would not be a strong evidence base to support local plan policies and development management decisions.

### **Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)**

None at this stage.

### **Supporting Information**

1. Hillingdon enjoys a very rich natural heritage, with considerable tracts of open landscape and attractive lakes and waterways, both natural and man-made, in the Colne Valley. About a third of the Borough has been designated as Green Belt. There are historic woodlands, open fields, agricultural land, flooded gravel pits, rivers and the Grand Union Canal. Environmentally sensitive areas include Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, one registered park on the Historic Parks and Gardens register and two Geological Sites of Regional Importance. Four areas are identified as 'natural signature areas' under Natural England's 'London's Natural Signatures Report'.
2. The purpose of the Assessment is to provide an evidence base for the character, function, and quality of the landscape within the Borough. It is anticipated that it will be used to influence local plan policies, decisions on planning applications which affect the Green Belt, and other areas of landscape character, and provide evidence for the Council's response to major infrastructure projects such as High Speed 2.
3. Following due process, Land Use Consultants were commissioned to carry out the work, and a public consultation event was carried out to ensure that the extensive local knowledge possessed by the voluntary groups in the Borough was included.
4. Prior to the Landscape Character Assessment, there was no single appraisal of the Borough's landscape character which mapped the quality, importance and rarity of these landscapes and habitats. This resulted in most development proposals being assessed on their individual merits, without an appreciation of their context. The new assessment will form an evidence base with which to deal with such proposals and will also be used to influence the Trees and Landscape Strategy which is required for the Borough. Recently the appraisal has been required to support the Council's position regarding the Government's preferred route for

High Speed 2, which would have a major impact on the Colne Valley in the northern part of the Borough.

5. The Landscape Character Assessment has been undertaken by a landscape consultancy which specialises in this field and which has prepared a similar evidence base for Buckinghamshire County Council, whose landscapes will be similarly compromised by the preferred route of High Speed 2.

6. For ease of reference, the document divides the Borough into landscape area types, character areas and sub-areas, according to its geology and other characteristics which determine the appearance of its landscape.

7. The Assessment identifies six landscape area types namely:

- Colne River Valley
- Ruislip Plateau
- Ruislip Plateau/Hayes Gravels
- Barnet Plateau
- Hayes Gravels
- Hounslow Gravels

8. The Ruislip Plateau covers most of the area north of the A40, the Hayes Gravels most of the area to the south, with Heathrow Airport being situated on the Hounslow Gravels. The Colne valley runs along the whole of the western boundary of the Borough while the Barnet Plateau covers a segment in the central area of the Borough, including Ickenham, Hillingdon and Yeading.

9. Each of the above areas is sub-divided into character areas, viz: floodplain; open valley sides; undulating farmland; wooded undulating farmland; clay golf; wooded valley; river corridor; clay plateau – aerodrome (Northolt); encapsulated farmland; gravel terrace recreation; open gravel terrace; and gravel terrace infrastructure (Heathrow).

10. Each of these character areas is, in turn, broken down into easily identifiable sub-areas and it is these which form the basis for the detailed analysis needed for development management purposes. For example, the Ruislip Plateau: undulating farmland character area is divided into C1 Hill End, C2 South Harefield and C3 New Years Green, whilst the Hayes Gravels: Open Gravel Terrace character area is broken down into K2 Harlington and K3 Cranford.

11. For each of these sub-areas there is a description of its location and boundaries and a landscape appraisal, drawing on geology; topography; hydrology; land use and settlement; biodiversity; historic environment; perceptual landscape; and identification of the relevant designations. Each sub-area begins with a summary page highlighting its key characteristics and concludes with a landscape evaluation and a list of visual sensitivities.

12. For completeness, the Assessment also briefly outlines a townscape classification (for example historic cores, retail centres, interwar suburbs, etc.) but provides little detail. If a townscape character appraisal were required, this would need to be the subject of a further study.

## **Financial Implications**

13. The Assessment was completed by the consultants in May 2012, at a cost of £19,670 contained within existing budgets. The Cabinet Member agreed the appointment of consultant and related expenditure in February 2011.

14. The Landscape Character Assessment, a weighty document comprising analysis, maps, diagrams, photographs and illustrations of all the landscape character areas in the Borough, and a brief outline of its townscape character, is to be placed on the Council's web site, rather than made available in hard copy. There are thus no financial implications for its publication.

## **EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES**

### **What will be the effect of the recommendation?**

The Landscape Character Assessment will provide a robust evidence base for decisions on development proposals affecting the extensive areas of open land in Hillingdon. In particular, there has been much concern from residents, amenity societies and national groups over the potential impact of the High Speed 2 route on the landscapes, habitats, waterways and lakes to the north and west of the Borough. The Council is continuing to provide a robust response on behalf of its residents and it is anticipated that this appraisal will be welcomed as a part of this defence. It could also assist in dealing with any future expansion plans for Heathrow airport which may arise and with planning applications likely to have a damaging effect on the Borough's Green Belt.

### **Consultation Carried Out or Required**

A successful public / stakeholder workshop was held in June 2011 to ensure that the considerable local knowledge possessed by local residents and voluntary groups was included at an early stage. The workshop generated meaningful involvement in validating boundaries, agreeing descriptions and inputting local detail and values into formulating and refining the landscape character area descriptions. The workshop included a series of carousel exercises and break out discussion groups to gain local information to guide the report in its early stages. The consultation was followed by a workshop evaluation, providing further opportunities for comments.

Over thirty people took part in the workshop, representing a range of interests. They included local Councillors, representatives from local community groups, local businesses and government bodies.

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Legal**

There is no statutory requirement on local planning authorities to carry out Landscape Character Assessments although such an assessment may be used to inform the Council's emerging Local Development Framework and Core Strategy.

In considering the consultation responses, decision makers must ensure there is a full consideration of all representations arising including those which do not accord with the officer recommendation. The decision maker must be satisfied that responses from the public are conscientiously taken into account.

## **Corporate Finance**

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial implications set out above, noting that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

## **Corporate Landlord**

Corporate Property and Construction supports the recommendations set out in the report.

## **Other Service Areas – Green Spaces**

Green Spaces fully supports the recommendation, as the Landscape Character Assessment will be a valuable tool in the management of the borough's green spaces.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL