GLVIA

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Third edition

Landscape Institute and
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ROUTLEDGE

Preface to the third edition

The third edition of the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* has been produced under the joint auspices of the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (IEMA), as co-authors of the guidance. The third edition supersedes earlier editions, and while aimed primarily at landscape professionals is written in such a way as to provide a flavour for those who are simply interested in the subject, as well as more detailed (but less prescriptive) guidance for the professional engaged in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments.

The third edition clearly recognises that many different pressures have changed and will continue to change landscapes that are familiar to many, whether at national or local community level, and the landscape professional will be of particular importance in bringing forward measured and responsible assessments to assist decision making.

This new edition takes into account recognition of the European Landscape Convention by the United Kingdom government, and subsequently by the devolved administrations, which raises the profile of this important subject and emphasises the role that landscape can play in our day-to-day lives.

It has been produced to reflect the expanded range of good practice that now exists, and to address some of the questions and uncertainties that have arisen from the second edition. It also gives greater recognition to sustainable development as a concept – something that has come further to the fore through government policy and guidance across the UK. However, while mentioning government policy and guidance (whether at the UK level or through the devolved administrations) the third edition seeks to avoid reflecting a specific point in time, recognising that legislative, statutory and policy contexts change so that guidance that is tied to contexts will quickly become dated and potentially out of step.

A clear objective has been to continue to encourage higher standards in the conduct of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments – something which the two previous editions of the guidelines, published in 1995 and 2002, have already helped to achieve.

The third edition attempts to be clearer on the use of terminology. The emphasis should be on the identification of likely significant environmental effects, including those that are positive and negative, direct and indirect, long, medium and short term, and reversible and irreversible, as well as cumulative effects. This edition encourages professionals to recognise this and assess accordingly.

The Landscape Institute is the recognised expert and professional body for landscape matters and this edition again acknowledges the holistic perspective that landscape

professionals take and the particularly valuable contribution they can make to Environmental Impact Assessment in general and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment in particular. As such the third edition stresses that it is important that landscape professionals are able to demonstrate high professional standards and that their work should offer exemplars of good practice. It is to be hoped that this edition will further reinforce the professional's skills base by providing sound, reliable and widely accepted advice, aimed at helping professionals to achieve quality and consistency in their approach to Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

This edition concentrates on principles and process. It does not provide a detailed or formulaic 'recipe' that can be followed in every situation – it remains the responsibility of the professional to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the task in hand. The aim has been to make the advice specific enough to meet the needs of UK practitioners but also to avoid too much detail about specific legislation which will make it of less value elsewhere.

Two areas where there has been considerable discussion and where we feel that we are moving forward are in exploring and providing better advice concerning assessing significance of effect, and in identifying and assessing cumulative effects. In both cases, debate will continue as these subjects evolve.

It is especially important (a) to note the need for proportionality, (b) to focus on likely significant adverse or positive effects, (c) to focus on what is likely to be important to the competent authority's decision and (d) to emphasise the importance of the scoping process in helping to achieve all of these.

As Chair of the GLVIA Advisory Panel which oversaw the production of this edition, I offer the most heartfelt thanks to Professor Carys Swanwick of the University of Sheffield, commissioned as the writer of the text, to Lesley Malone, Head of Knowledge Services at the Landscape Institute who co-ordinated the project, and to Josh Fothergill of IEMA. Carys is to be praised and very warmly congratulated, given the complexity of the task of balancing the sometimes competing needs and wishes of members, practices, government agencies and interested others, along with the views and input of the Advisory Panel. Producing this new edition has been challenging for all concerned but ultimately highly rewarding.

Government agencies have an important role throughout the LVIA process, particularly at the initial scoping stage and also in reviewing the final assessment. This guidance has been prepared following feedback from English Heritage, Natural Resources Wales (formerly the Countryside Council for Wales), Scottish Natural Heritage (Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba), Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Thanks are also due to all those who, whether as individuals or as representatives of organisations or agencies, have contributed, with sometimes widely varying opinions and suggestions, to the evolution of the third edition. This edition could not and therefore will not satisfy every interest and opinion, but the Advisory Panel considers that it moves the subject forward considerably from the second edition. Doubtless debate will continue and new questions and issues will arise as this edition is applied and tested in practice but, after all, that is how progress in a subject is made.

The Landscape Institute and IEMA consider it essential to remember that the third edition is a 'step along the way'. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, along with Environmental Impact Assessment more generally, evolves and will continue so to do with the role of the professional making professional judgements at the heart of the process.

Jeff Stevenson CMLI
Chair, GLVIA Advisory Panel

Chapter overview

- About this guidance
- When is LVIA carried out?
- Impacts, effects and significance
- Who is this guidance for?
- Organisation and structure of the guidance

About this guidance

1.1 **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity.** The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (and its predecessor the Institute of Environmental Assessment) have worked together since 1995 to publish guidance on LVIA. Two previous editions of these guidelines, published in 1995 and 2002, have been important in encouraging higher standards in the conduct of LVIA projects.

'Development' is used throughout this book to mean any proposal that results in a change to the landscape and/or visual environment.

1.2 This is the third edition of the guidance and replaces the earlier editions. The new version takes account of changes that have taken place since 2002, in particular:

- changes in the context in which LVIA takes place, including in the legal and regulatory regimes and in associated areas of practice;
- the much greater range of experience of applying LVIA and testing it through Public Inquiries and related legal processes, which has revealed the need for some issues to be clarified and for the guidance to be revised to take account of changing circumstances.

When is LVIA carried out?

1.3 LVIA may be carried out either formally, as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), or informally, as a contribution to the 'appraisal' of development proposals and planning applications. Both are important and the broad principles and the core of the approach is similar in each case.

assessed. This guidance generally distinguishes between the 'impact', defined as the action being taken, and the 'effect', defined as the change resulting from that action, and recommends that the terms should be used consistently in this way. The document itself does use both, using 'impact' where this is the term in common usage.

1.16 Other guidance and advice has recognised that practitioners may use the terms 'impact' and 'effect' interchangeably while still adhering to the Directive and Regulations.[1] This may also be true of the wider public who become involved in EIA. This guidance urges consistent use of the terms 'impact' and 'effect' in the ways that they are defined above but recognises that there may be circumstances where this is not appropriate, for example where other practitioners involved in an EIA are adopting a different convention. In this case the following principles should apply:

- The terms should be clearly defined at the outset.
- They should be used consistently with the same meaning throughout the assessment.
- 'Impact' should not be used to mean a combination of several effects.

1.17 The Directive is clear that the emphasis is on the identification of **likely significant** environmental effects. This should embrace all types of effect and includes, for example, those that are positive/beneficial and negative/adverse, direct and indirect, and long and short term, as well as cumulative effects. Identifying significant effects stresses the need for an approach that is in proportion to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of its likely effects. Judgement needs to be exercised at all stages in terms of the scale of investigation that is appropriate and proportional. This does not mean that effects should be ignored or their importance minimised but that the assessment should be tailored to the particular circumstances in each case. This applies to 'appraisals' of landscape and visual impacts outside the formal requirements of EIA as well as those that are part of a formal assessment.

Who is this guidance for?

1.18 The holistic perspective that landscape professionals take, coupled with the broad scope of their interests as embodied in the Landscape Institute's Royal Charter (Landscape Institute, 2008b) means that they make a particularly valuable contribution to EIA in general and to LVIA in particular, often playing leading or key roles in the multidisciplinary teams who carry out EIAs. It is important that they are able to demonstrate the highest professional standards and that their work should offer exemplars of good practice. While there has been continuous improvement in the standard and content of Environmental Statements – which are the documents resulting from the process of EIA – as experience has grown, there is still a clear need for sound, reliable and widely accepted advice on good practice for all aspects of EIA. Good practice in LVIA is key to this and also applies as much to 'appraisals' carried out informally as to contributions to the 'appraisal' of development proposals and planning applications.

1.19 As with the previous editions, this guidance is therefore aimed primarily at practitioners and is designed to help achieve quality and consistency of approach, to raise standards in this important area of professional work and so to ensure that change in the landscape is considered in an effective way that helps to achieve sustainable development

objectives. The intention is to encourage good practice and achieve greater consistency in the use of terminology and in overall approach.

1.20 The guidance concentrates on principles while also seeking to steer specific approaches where there is a general consensus on methods and techniques. It is not intended to be prescriptive, in that it does not provide a detailed 'recipe' that can be followed in every situation. It is always the primary responsibility of any landscape professional carrying out an assessment to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the particular circumstances.

1.21 Although aimed mainly at those carrying out LVIAs, the guidance should also be of value to others who have an interest in understanding more about the importance of landscape and visual amenity issues, about the role of LVIA and about the way that it is carried out. They may include:

- developers, members of professional development project teams and other organisations who own or manage land and may be involved in projects that have the potential to change the landscape and visual amenity;
- other professionals involved in assessing the consequences of change for other aspects of the environment;
- planners and others within local government and the government agencies who may be the recipients of reports on the consequences of change and development and be required to review them;
- politicians, amenity societies and the general public who may be involved in decisions about proposals for change and development;
- those providing education and training in LVIA as one of a range of tools and techniques contributing to landscape planning and design;
- students and others wishing to learn about the process of LVIA.

1.22 While written primarily in the context of the UK, it is recognised that previous editions of the guidance have also been used in other parts of the world. The aim has been to make the advice specific enough to meet the needs of UK practitioners while at the same time avoiding too much detail about particular legislation which will make it of less value elsewhere.

1.23 If this guidance is used beyond the UK, it will be important to remember that concepts and definitions vary and approaches must be tailored to local circumstances and legislation. There is a focus on the overall approach and methods rather than the specifics of their application in particular places or to particular types of development. More specific guidance may exist for certain types of development, such as roads for example, in which case account will need to be taken of both the general and the specific guidance.

Organisation and structure of the guidance

1.24 Given the different needs of the professional and the wider audiences the guidance is organised in two parts, as follows:

Summary advice on good practice

- LVIA may be carried out either formally, as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), or informally as a contribution to the 'appraisal' of development proposals and planning applications. Both are important and the broad principles and the core of the approach are similar in each case.
- Anyone involved in carrying out an LVIA, whether as part of an EIA or not, must ensure that they are fully familiar with the current legislation, Regulations and guidance documents that may be relevant to the specific case they are dealing with.
- This guidance recognises a clear distinction between the **impact**, as the action being taken, and the **effect**, being the result of that action, and recommends that the terms should be used consistently in this way. 'Impact' should not be used to mean a combination of several effects.
- The emphasis on **likely significant** effects stresses the need for an approach that is proportional to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of its likely effects. This applies to 'appraisals' of landscape and visual impacts outside the formal requirements of EIA as well as those that are part of a formal assessment.

2.9 This definition includes the meeting point of land and sea but also encompasses areas beyond the low water mark, and so includes both areas near to the shore and the open sea. Any assessment of the landscape and visual effects of change in marine and coastal environments should carefully consider the relationship between land and sea in coastal areas and also take account of possible requirements to consider the open sea.

Relationship to green infrastructure

2.10 Green infrastructure has come to the fore since the publication of the second edition of this guidance. It refers to networks of green spaces and watercourses and water bodies that connect rural areas, villages, towns and cities. Such networks are increasingly being planned, designed and managed to achieve multiple social, environmental and economic objectives. Green infrastructure is not separate from the landscape but is part of it and operates at what is sometimes referred to as the 'landscape scale'. It is generally concerned with sites and linking networks that are set within the wider context of the surrounding landscape or townscape. LVIA will often need to address the effects of proposed development on green infrastructure as well as the potential the development may offer to enhance it.

The importance of landscape

2.11 As the ELC makes clear, particular attention needs to be given to landscape because of the importance that is attached to it by individuals, communities and public bodies. Landscape is important because it provides:

- a shared resource which is important in its own right as a public good;
- an environment for flora and fauna;
- the setting for day to day lives – for living, working and recreation;
- opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment;
- a sense of place and a sense of history, which in turn can contribute to individual, local, national and European identity;
- continuity with the past through its relative permanence and its role in acting as a cultural record of the past;
- a source of memories and associations, which in turn may contribute to wellbeing;
- inspiration for learning, as well as for art and other forms of creativity.

2.12 In addition landscape provides economic benefits, both directly by providing an essential resource to support livelihoods, especially in agriculture, forestry and other land management activities, and in recreation and tourism, as well as indirectly through its now widely acknowledged benefits for health and wellbeing.

Landscape change and sustainable development

2.13 Landscape is not unchanging. Many different pressures have progressively altered familiar landscapes over time and will continue to do so in the future, creating new landscapes. Today many of these drivers of change arise from the requirement for development to meet the needs of a growing and changing population and economy.

Step 2: Combining the judgements

3.28 The next step is to combine the separate judgements on the individual criteria. The rationale for the overall judgement must be clear, demonstrating:

- how susceptibility to change and value together contribute to the sensitivity of the receptor;
- how judgements about scale, extent and duration contribute to the magnitude of the effects; and
- how the resulting judgements about sensitivity and magnitude are combined to inform judgements about overall significance of the effects.

3.29 Combining judgements should be as transparent as possible. It is common practice to arrive at judgements about the significance of effects simply by combining the judgements about the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of the effect. This can be useful but is also an oversimplification unless it is made clear how the judgements about sensitivity and magnitude have themselves been reached.

3.30 There are several possible approaches to combining judgements, including:

- **Sequential combination:** The judgements against individual criteria can be successively combined into a final judgement of the overall likely significance of the effect, with the rationale expressed in text and summarised by a table or matrix.
- **Overall profile:** The judgements against individual criteria can be arranged in a table to provide an overall profile of each identified effect. An overview of the distribution in the profile of the assessments for each criterion can then be used to make an informed overall judgement about the likely significance of the effect. This too should be expressed in text, supported by the table.

3.31 Both of these methods have been advocated by different EIA guidance documents and both can meet the requirements of the Regulations provided that the sequence of judgements is clearly explained and the logic can be traced. The approach adopted in an LVIA will often be influenced by the overall approach in an EIA and the EIA co-ordinator will often seek internal consistency within a project.

Step 3: Judging the overall significance of the effects

3.32 The Regulations require that a final judgement is made about whether or not each effect is likely to be significant. There are no hard and fast rules about what effects should be deemed 'significant' but LVIAs should always distinguish clearly between what are considered to be the significant and non-significant effects. Some practitioners use the phrase 'not significant in EIA terms' to describe those effects considered to fall below a 'threshold' of significance but this can potentially confuse since the phrase has no specific meaning in relation to the EIA Regulations (IEMA, 2011b: 61).

3.33 It is not essential to establish a series of thresholds for different levels of significance of landscape and visual effects, provided that it is made clear whether or not they are considered significant. The final overall judgement of the likely significance of the

predicted landscape and visual effects is, however, often summarised in a series of categories of significance reflecting combinations of sensitivity and magnitude. These tend to vary from project to project but they should be appropriate to the nature, size and location of the proposed development and should as far as possible be consistent across the different topic areas in the EIA.

When drawing a distinction between levels of significance is required (beyond significant/not significant) a word scale for degrees of significance can be used (for example a four-point scale of major/moderate/minor/negligible). Descriptions should be provided for each of the categories to make clear what they mean, as well as a clear explanation of which categories are considered to be significant and which are not. It should also be made clear that effects not considered to be significant will not be completely disregarded. 3.34

In reporting on the significance of the identified effects the main aim should be to draw out the key issues and ensure that the significance of the effects and the scope for reducing any negative/adverse effects are properly understood by the public and the competent authority before it makes its decision. This requires clear and accessible explanations. The potential pitfalls are: 3.35

- over-reliance on matrices or tabular summaries of effects which may not be accompanied by clear narrative descriptions;
- failure to distinguish between the significant effects that are likely to influence the eventual decision and those of lesser concern;
- losing sight of the most glaringly obvious significant effects because of the complexity of the assessment.

To overcome these potential problems, there should be more emphasis on narrative text describing the landscape and visual effects and the judgements made about their significance. Provided it is well written, this is likely to be most helpful to non-experts in aiding understanding of the issues. It is also good practice to include a final statement summarising the significant effects. Tables and matrices should be used to support and summarise descriptive text, not to replace it. 3.36

Mitigation

Measures which are proposed to prevent, reduce and where possible offset any significant adverse effects (or to avoid, reduce and if possible remedy identified effects), including landscape and visual effects, should be described. The term 'mitigation' is commonly used to refer to these measures; however, it is not a term used in the EIA Regulations although it is used in some specific legislation, such as the Electricity Act 1989, and in guidance. Mitigation measures are not necessarily required in landscape appraisals carried out for projects not subject to EIA procedures, although some local authorities may request them and even if they do not it is nevertheless often helpful to think about ways of dealing with any negative effects identified. 3.37

As EIA practice has evolved the terminology used to refer to mitigation measures has been adapted; for example, it has become common practice to use the term 3.38

Chapter overview

- Scope
- Establishing the landscape baseline
- Predicting and describing landscape effects
- Assessing the significance of landscape effects
- Judging the overall significance of landscape effects

Scope

5.1 **An assessment of landscape effects deals with the effects of change and development on landscape as a resource.** The concern here is with how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape and its distinctive character. Scoping should try to identify the full range of possible effects. But discussion with the consenting authority and stakeholders during the scoping process may conclude that some effects are unlikely to be significant and therefore do not need to be considered further. All other possible effects must be considered in detail in the assessment process.

5.2 Scoping should also identify the **area of landscape** that needs to be covered in assessing landscape effects. This should be agreed with the competent authority, but it should also be recognised that it may change as the work progresses, for example as a result of fieldwork, or changes to the proposal. The study area should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around it which the proposed development may influence in a significant manner. This will usually be based on the extent of Landscape Character Areas likely to be significantly affected either directly or indirectly. However, it may also be based on the extent of the area from which the development is potentially visible, defined as the Zone of Theoretical Visibility, or a combination of the two.

See Chapter 6 for discussion of Zones of Theoretical Visibility.

Establishing the landscape baseline

5.3 Baseline studies for assessing landscape effects require a mix of desk study and fieldwork to identify and record the character of the landscape and the elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors which contribute to it. They should also deal with the value attached to the landscape (see Paragraph 5.19). The methods used should be appropriate to the context into which the development proposal will be introduced and in line with current guidance and terminology.

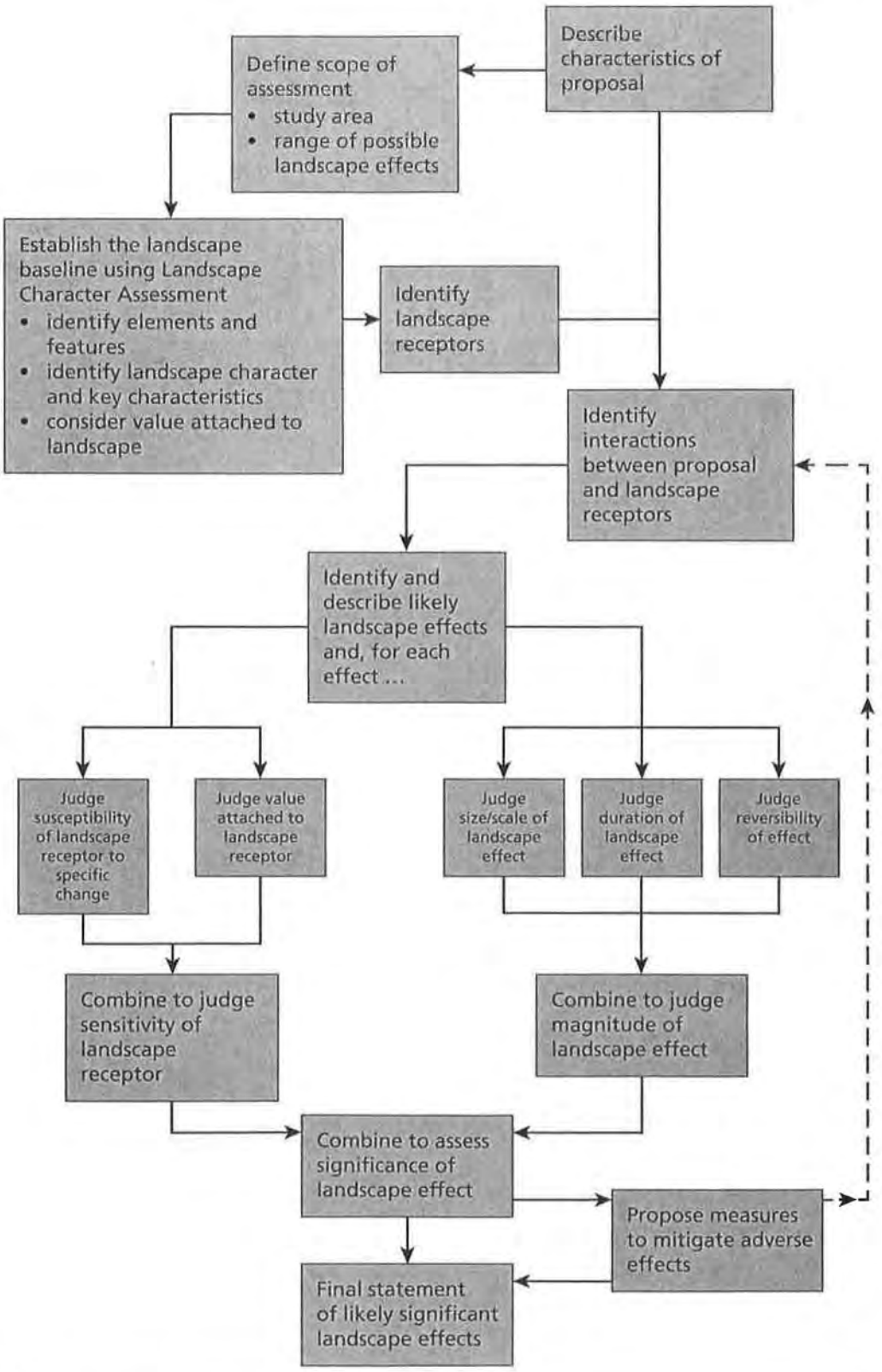

Figure 5.1 Steps in assessing landscape effects

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 undesignated 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.

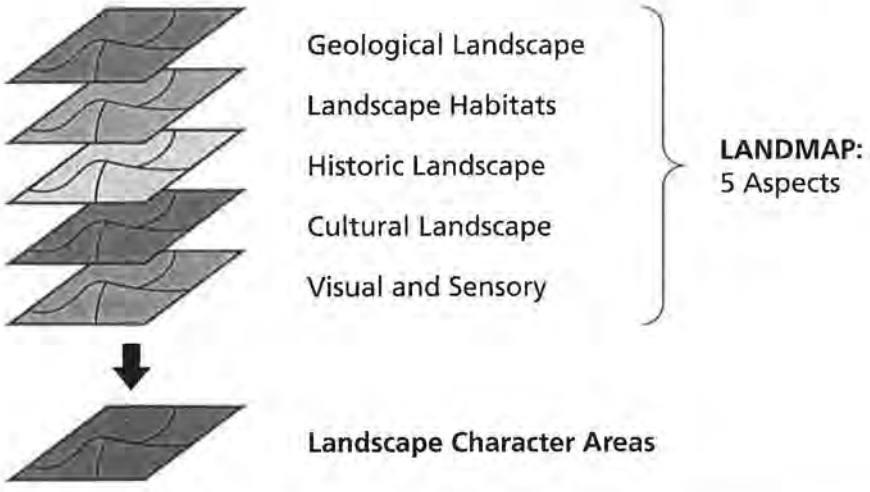

Figure 5.6 In Wales, landscape information is found in LANDMAP, providing data on five aspects of the landscape which can be combined (with other information) to define Landscape Character Areas

5.20 Information that will contribute to understanding value might include:

- information about areas recognised by statute such as (depending on jurisdiction) National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- information about Heritage Coasts, where relevant;
- local planning documents which may show the extent of and policies for local landscape designations;
- information on the status of individual or groups of features such as, for example, Conservation Areas, listed buildings, Tree Preservation Orders, important hedgerows, cultural heritage elements such as historic landscapes of various forms, archaeological sites of importance and other special historical or cultural heritage sites such as battlefields or historic gardens;
- art and literature, including tourism literature and promotional material such as postcards, which may indicate the value attached to the identity of particular areas (for example 'Constable Country' or specially promoted views);
- material on landscapes of local or community interest, such as local green spaces, village greens or allotments.

International and national designations

5.21 Internationally acclaimed landscapes may be recognised, for example as World Heritage Sites, and particular planning policies may apply to them. Nationally valued landscapes are recognised by designation, which have a formal statutory basis that varies in different parts of the UK. They include:

- **National Parks** in England, Wales and Scotland;
- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty** in England, Wales and Northern Ireland[2];
- **National Scenic Areas** in Scotland.

Figure 5.8 A listed building within a historic designed landscape

Across the UK there is also a variety of designations aimed at aspects of the historic environment (such as Conservation Areas and listed buildings) and non-statutory recognition of particular types of environment (such as Heritage Coasts). An LVIA should consider the implications of the full range of statutory and non-statutory designations and recognitions and consider what they may imply about landscape value. 5.22

The criteria and terms used in making statutory designations vary and may not always be explicitly stated. If a project subject to LVIA is in or near to one of them, it is important that the baseline study should seek to understand the basis for the designation and why the landscape is considered to be of value. Great care should be taken to understand what landscape designations mean in today's context. This means determining to what degree the criteria and factors used to support the case for designation are represented in the specific study area. 5.23

Desk study of relevant documents will often, although not always, provide information concerning the basis for designation. But sometimes, at the more local scale of an LVIA study area, it is possible that the landscape value of that specific area may be different from that suggested by the formal designation. Fieldwork should help to establish how the criteria for designation are expressed, or not, in the particular area in question. At the same time it should be recognised that every part of a designated area contributes to the whole in some way and care must be taken if considering areas in isolation. 5.24

Local landscape designations

In many parts of the UK local authorities identify locally valued landscapes and recognise them through local designations of various types (such as Special Landscape Areas or Areas of Great Landscape Value). They are then incorporated into planning documents along with accompanying planning policies that apply in those areas. As with national designations, the criteria that are used to identify them vary, and similar considerations apply. It is necessary to understand the reasons for the designation and to examine how the criteria relate to the particular area in question. Unfortunately many of these locally designated landscapes do not have good records of how they were selected, what criteria were used and how boundaries were drawn. This can make it difficult to get a clear picture of the relationship between the study area and the wider context of the designation. 5.25

Undesignated landscapes

The fact that an area of landscape is not designated either nationally or locally does not mean that it does not have any value. This is particularly so in areas of the UK where in recent years relevant national planning policy and advice has on the whole discouraged local designations unless it can be shown that other approaches would be inadequate. The European Landscape Convention promotes the need to take account of all landscapes, with less emphasis on the special and more recognition that ordinary landscapes also have their value, supported by the landscape character approach. 5.26

Where local designations are not in use a fresh approach may be needed. As a starting point reference to existing Landscape Character Assessments and associated planning policies and/or landscape strategies and guidelines may give an indication of which landscape types or areas, or individual elements or aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the landscape are particularly valued. A stated strategy of landscape conservation is usually a good indicator of this. 5.27

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)

In practice one option, or a combination of the first two options, is likely to be most effective. There are several key points to consider in deciding how to approach this: 5.29

- There cannot be a standard approach as circumstances will vary from place to place.
- Areas of landscape whose character is judged to be intact and in good condition, and where scenic quality, wildness or tranquillity, and natural or cultural heritage features make a particular contribution to the landscape, or where there are important associations, are likely to be highly valued.
- Many areas that will be subject to LVIA will be ordinary, everyday landscapes. In such areas some of the possible criteria may not apply and so there is likely to be greater emphasis on judging, for each landscape type or area, representation of typical character, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of the elements of the landscape. Scenic quality may also be relevant, and will need to reflect factors such as sense of place and aesthetic and perceptual qualities. Judgements may be needed about which particular components of the landscape contribute most to its value.

Individual components of the landscape, including particular landscape features, and notable aesthetic or perceptual qualities can be judged on their importance in their own right, including whether or not they can realistically be replaced. They can also be judged on their contribution to the overall character and value of the wider landscape. For example, an ancient hedgerow may have high value in its own right but also be important because it is part of a hedgerow pattern that contributes significantly to landscape character. 5.30

Assessment of the value attached to the landscape should be carried out within a clearly recorded and transparent framework so that decision making is clear. Fieldwork can either be combined with the Landscape Character Assessment work, as described above, or be carried out at a later stage. Field observations supporting the assessment should be clearly recorded using appropriate record sheets, and records should as far as possible be retained in an accessible form for future reference. If there is reliance on previous assessments, for example carried out by a local authority as part of a wider Landscape Character Assessment or landscape management strategy, this must be made clear and such information should be treated in a critically reflective way. 5.31

A role for consultation

In making the assessment of landscape value it is important where possible to draw on information and opinions from consultees. Consultation bodies will usually give an expert view as well as providing relevant existing information. Consultations with local people or groups who use the landscape in different ways may, where practicable, also suggest the range of values that people attach to the landscape. Scoping discussions with the competent authority should help to determine the reasonable extent of such consultation. 5.32

5.36 All effects that are considered likely to take place should be described as fully as possible:

- Effects on individual components of the landscape, such as loss of trees or buildings for example, or addition of new elements, should be identified and mapped (and if appropriate and helpful quantified by measuring the change).
- Changes in landscape character or quality/condition in particular places need to be described as fully as possible and illustrated by maps and images that make clear, as accurately as possible, what is likely to happen.

Good, clear and concise description of the effects that are identified is key to helping a wide range of people understand what may happen if the proposed change or development takes place.

5.37 One of the more challenging issues is deciding whether the landscape effects should be categorised as positive or negative. It is also possible for effects to be neutral in their consequences for the landscape. An informed professional judgement should be made about this and the criteria used in reaching the judgement should be clearly stated. They might include, but should not be restricted to:

- the degree to which the proposal fits with existing character;
- the contribution to the landscape that the development may make in its own right, usually by virtue of good design, even if it is in contrast to existing character.

The importance of perceptions of landscape is emphasised by the European Landscape Convention, and others may of course hold different opinions on whether the effects are positive or negative, but this is not a reason to avoid making this judgement, which will ultimately be weighed against the opinions of others in the decision-making process.

Assessing the significance of landscape effects

5.38 The landscape effects that have been identified should be assessed to determine their significance, based on the principles described in Paragraphs 3.23–3.36. Judging the significance of landscape effects requires methodical consideration of each effect identified and, for each one, assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and the magnitude of the effect on the landscape.

Sensitivity of the landscape receptors

5.39 Landscape receptors need to be assessed firstly in terms of their **sensitivity**, combining judgements of their susceptibility to the type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape. In LVIA sensitivity is similar to the concept of landscape sensitivity used in the wider arena of landscape planning, but it is not the same as it is specific to the particular project or development that is being proposed and to the location in question.

Susceptibility to change

5.40 This means the ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element

and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.

5.41 The assessment may take place in situations where there are existing landscape sensitivity and capacity studies, which have become increasingly common. They may deal with the general type of development that is proposed, in which case they may provide useful preliminary background information for the assessment. But they cannot provide a substitute for the individual assessment of the susceptibility of the receptors in relation to change arising from the specific development proposal.

5.42 Some of these existing assessments may deal with what has been called 'intrinsic' or 'inherent' sensitivity, without reference to a specific type of development. These cannot reliably inform assessment of the susceptibility to change since they are carried out without reference to any particular type of development and so do not relate to the specific development proposed. Since landscape effects in LVIA are particular to both the specific landscape in question and the specific nature of the proposed development, the assessment of susceptibility must be tailored to the project. It should not be recorded as part of the landscape baseline but should be considered as part of the assessment of effects.

5.43 Judgements about the susceptibility of landscape receptors to change should be recorded on a verbal scale (for example high, medium or low), but the basis for this must be clear, and linked back to evidence from the baseline study.

Value of the landscape receptor

5.44 The baseline study will have established the value attached to the landscape receptors (see Paragraphs 5.19–5.31), covering:

- the value of the Landscape Character Types or Areas that may be affected, based on review of any designations at both national and local levels, and, where there are no designations, judgements based on criteria that can be used to establish landscape value;
- the value of individual contributors to landscape character, especially the key characteristics, which may include individual elements of the landscape, particular landscape features, notable aesthetic, perceptual or experiential qualities, and combinations of these contributors.

5.45 The value of the landscape receptors will to some degree reflect landscape designations and the level of importance which they signify, although there should not be over-reliance on designations as the sole indicator of value. Assessments should reflect:

- internationally valued landscapes recognised as World Heritage Sites;
- nationally valued landscapes (National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Scenic Areas or other equivalent areas);
- locally valued landscapes, for example local authority landscape designations or, where these do not exist, landscapes assessed as being of equivalent value using clearly stated and recognised criteria;
- landscapes that are not nationally or locally designated, or judged to be of equivalent

value using clearly stated and recognised criteria, but are nevertheless valued at a community level.

5.46 There can be complex relationships between the value attached to landscape receptors and their susceptibility to change which are especially important when considering change within or close to designated landscapes. For example:

- An internationally, nationally or locally valued landscape does not automatically, or by definition, have high susceptibility to all types of change.
- It is possible for an internationally, nationally or locally important landscape to have relatively low susceptibility to change resulting from the particular type of development in question, by virtue of both the characteristics of the landscape and the nature of the proposal.
- The particular type of change or development proposed may not compromise the specific basis for the value attached to the landscape.

5.47 Landscapes that are nationally designated (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales and their equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland) will be accorded the highest value in the assessment. If the area affected by the proposal is on the margin of or adjacent to such a designated area, thought may be given to the extent to which it demonstrates the characteristics and qualities that led to the designation of the area. Boundaries are very important in defining the extent of designated areas, but they often follow convenient physical features and as a result there may be land outside the boundary that meets the designation criteria and land inside that does not. Similar principles apply to locally designated landscapes but here the difficulty may be that the characteristics or qualities that provided the basis for their designation are not always clearly set down.

Magnitude of landscape effects

5.48 Each effect on landscape receptors needs to be assessed in terms of its **size or scale**, the **geographical extent** of the area influenced, and its **duration and reversibility**.

Size or scale

5.49 Judgements are needed about the size or scale of change in the landscape that is likely to be experienced as a result of each effect. This should be described, and also categorised on a verbal scale that distinguishes the amount of change but is not overly complex. For example, the effect of both loss and addition of new features may be judged as major, moderate, minor or none, or other equivalent words. The judgements should, for example, take account of:

- the extent of existing landscape elements that will be lost, the proportion of the total extent that this represents and the contribution of that element to the character of the landscape – in some cases this may be quantified;
- the degree to which aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the landscape are altered either by removal of existing components of the landscape or by addition of new ones – for example, removal of hedges may change a small-scale, intimate landscape into a large-scale, open one, or introduction of new buildings or tall structures may alter open skylines;

- whether the effect changes the key characteristics of the landscape, which are critical to its distinctive character.

Geographical extent

The geographical area over which the landscape effects will be felt must also be considered. This is distinct from the size or scale of the effect – there may for example be moderate loss of landscape elements over a large geographical area, or a major addition affecting a very localised area. The extent of the effects will vary widely depending on the nature of the proposal and there can be no hard and fast rules about what categories to use. In general effects may have an influence at the following scales, although this will vary according to the nature of the project and not all may be relevant on every occasion: 5.50

- at the **site** level, within the development site itself;
- at the level of the **immediate setting** of the site;
- at the scale of the **landscape type or character area** within which the proposal lies;
- on a **larger scale**, influencing several landscape types or character areas.

Duration and reversibility of the landscape effects

These are separate but linked considerations. Duration can usually be simply judged on a scale such as short term, medium term or long term, where, for example, short term might be zero to five years, medium term five to ten years and long term ten to twenty-five years. There is no fixed rule on these definitions and so in each case it must be made clear how the categories are defined and the reasons for this. 5.51

Reversibility is a judgement about the prospects and the practicality of the particular effect being reversed in, for example, a generation. This can be a very important issue – for example, while some forms of development, like housing, can be considered permanent, others, such as wind energy developments, are often argued to be reversible since they have a limited life and could eventually be removed and/or the land reinstated. Mineral workings, for example, may be partially reversible in that the landscape can be restored to something similar to, but not the same as, the original. If duration is included in an assessment of the effects, the assumptions behind the judgement must be made clear. Duration and reversibility can sometimes usefully be considered together, so that a temporary or partially reversible effect is linked to definition of how long that effect will last. 5.52

Judging the overall significance of landscape effects

To draw final conclusions about significance, the separate judgements about the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and the magnitude of the landscape effects need to be combined to allow a final judgement to be made about whether each effect is significant or not, as required by the Regulations, following the principles set out in Chapter 3. The rationale for the overall judgement must be clear, demonstrating how the assessments of sensitivity and magnitude have been linked in determining the overall significance of each effect. 5.53

Significance can only be defined in relation to each development and its specific location. It is for each assessment to determine how the judgements about the landscape receptors and landscape effects should be combined to arrive at significance and to 5.54

explain how the conclusions have been derived. There may also be a need to adopt a consistent approach across all the EIA topic areas and the EIA co-ordinator will need to be involved in the decisions on suitable approaches.

5.55 As indicated in Chapter 3 (see Paragraph 3.30) there are two main approaches to combining the individual judgements made under the different contributing criteria (although there may also be others):

1. They can be sequentially combined: susceptibility to change and value can be combined into an assessment of sensitivity for each receptor, and size/scale, geographical extent and duration and reversibility can be combined into an assessment of magnitude for each effect. Magnitude and sensitivity can then be combined to assess overall significance.
2. All the judgements against the individual criteria can be arranged in a table to provide an overall profile of each identified effect. An overview can then be taken of the distribution of the judgements for each criterion to make an informed professional assessment of the overall significance of each effect.

5.56 There are no hard and fast rules about what makes a significant effect, and there cannot be a standard approach since circumstances vary with the location and landscape context and with the type of proposal. At opposite ends of a spectrum it is reasonable to say that:

- major loss or irreversible negative effects, over an extensive area, on elements and/or aesthetic and perceptual aspects that are key to the character of nationally valued landscapes are likely to be of the greatest significance;
- reversible negative effects of short duration, over a restricted area, on elements and/or aesthetic and perceptual aspects that contribute to but are not key

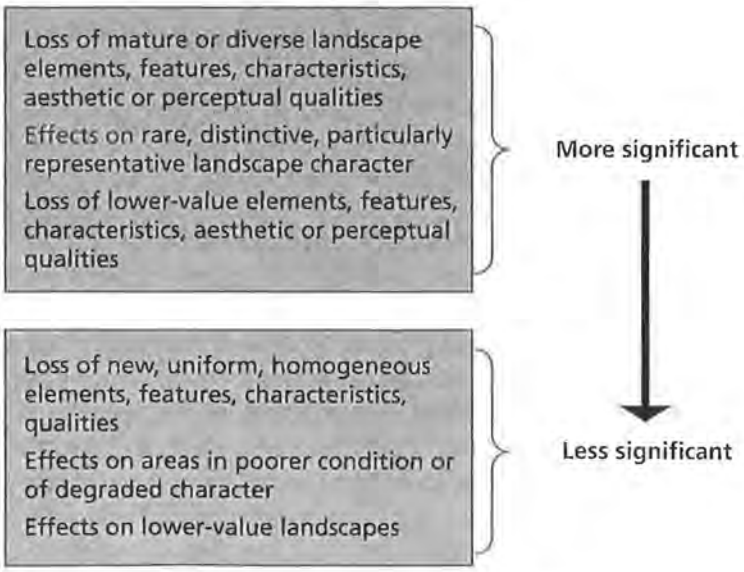

Figure 5.10 Scale of significance

characteristics of the character of landscapes of community value are likely to be of the least significance and may, depending on the circumstances, be judged as not significant;

- where assessments of significance place landscape effects between these extremes, judgements must be made about whether or not they are significant, with full explanations of why these conclusions have been reached.

Where landscape effects are judged to be significant and adverse, proposals for preventing/avoiding, reducing, or offsetting or compensating for them (referred to as mitigation) should be described. The significant landscape effects remaining after mitigation should be summarised as the final step in the process. 5.57

Further detail on mitigation is provided in Paragraphs 4.21–4.43.

Summary advice on good practice

- An assessment of landscape effects should consider how the proposal will affect the elements that make up the landscape, its aesthetic and perceptual aspects, its distinctive character and the key characteristics that contribute to this.
- Scoping should try to identify the range of possible landscape effects to be considered, but a decision can be made, in discussion with the competent authority, whether any are not likely to be significant and therefore do not need to be considered further.
- Scoping should also identify the area of landscape that needs to be covered in assessing landscape effects. The study area should include the site itself and the extent of the wider landscape around it which it is likely that the proposed development may influence. This will normally be based on the extent of Landscape Character Areas likely to be significantly affected either directly or indirectly, but the Zone of Theoretical Visibility developed as part of the assessment of visual effects (see Chapter 6) may also inform the decision.
- Baseline landscape studies should be appropriate to the context into which the development proposal will be introduced and in line with current guidance and terminology for Landscape Character Assessment, townscape character assessment and seascape character assessment, as relevant.
- Baseline studies for LVIA should ensure that, working with experts if necessary, cultural heritage features and relevant aspects of the historic landscape are recorded and judgements made about their contribution to the landscape, townscape or seascape. Assessment of the effects of development on historic aspects of the landscape must, however, be dealt with in the cultural heritage topic of an EIA and not as part of the landscape and visual topic.
- The first step in preparing the landscape baseline should be to review any relevant existing assessments that may be available. Existing assessments must be reviewed

critically as their quality may vary, some may be dated and some may not be suited to the task in hand.

- It is essential to decide at the outset what scale of character assessment information is needed to provide a basis for the LVIA and then to judge the value of existing assessments against this.
- Existing assessments may need to be reviewed and interpreted to adapt them for use in LVIA, and fieldwork should check the applicability of the assessment throughout the study area and refine it where necessary.
- 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.
- Evidence about change in the landscape is an important part of the baseline. The condition of the landscape and any evidence of current pressures causing change in the landscape should be documented.
- The value of the landscape that may be affected should be established as part of the baseline description. This will inform judgements about the significance of the effects.
- A review of existing landscape designations is usually the starting point in understanding landscape value, but the value attached to undesignated landscapes also needs to be carefully considered and individual elements of the landscape – such as trees, buildings or hedgerows – may also be valued.
- A landscape baseline report should set out the findings of the baseline work. It should be clear, well structured, accessible and supported by appropriate illustrations. The aim should be to describe the landscape as it is at the time but also to consider, if possible, what it may be like in the future, without the proposal.
- To identify and describe the landscape effects the components of the landscape that are likely to be affected by the scheme, often referred to as the 'landscape receptors', should be identified and interactions between them and the different components of the development considered, covering all the types of effect required by the Regulations.
- The effects identified at the scoping stage should all be reviewed in the light of the additional information obtained through consultation, baseline study and iterative development of the scheme design. They should be amended as appropriate and new ones may also be identified.
- An informed professional judgement should be made about whether the landscape effects should be categorised as positive or negative (or in some cases neutral), with the criteria used in reaching this judgement clearly stated.
- The landscape effects must be assessed to determine their significance, based on the principles described in Chapter 3. Judging the significance of landscape effects requires methodical consideration of each effect that has been identified, its magnitude and the sensitivity of the landscape receptor affected.
- To draw final conclusions about significance the separate judgements about sensitivity and magnitude need to be combined into different categories of significance, following the principles set out in Chapter 3.

- The rationale for the overall judgement must be clear, demonstrating how the judgements about the landscape receptor and the effect have been linked in determining overall significance.
- A clear step-by-step process of making judgements should allow the identification of significant effects to be as transparent as possible, provided that the effects are identified and described accurately, the basis of the judgements at each stage is explained and the effects are clearly reported, with good text to explain them and summary tables to support the text.
- Final judgements must be made about which landscape effects are significant, as required by the Regulations. There are no hard and fast rules about what makes a significant effect, and there cannot be a standard approach since circumstances vary with the location and landscape context and with the type of proposal.
- Where landscape effects are judged to be significant and adverse, proposals made for preventing/avoiding, reducing, or offsetting or compensating for them (referred to as mitigation) should be described. The significant landscape effects remaining after mitigation should then be summarised as the final step in the process.

6.25 The potential extent to which the site of the proposed development is visible from surrounding areas (the ZTV), the chosen viewpoints, the types of visual receptor affected and the nature and direction of views can all be combined in well-designed plans. Existing views should be illustrated by photographs or sketches with annotations added to emphasise any particularly important components of each view and to help viewers understand what they are looking at. It is important to include technical information about the photography used to record the baseline, including camera details, date and time of photography and weather conditions.

Predicting and describing visual effects

6.26 Preparation of the visual baseline is followed by the systematic identification of likely effects on the potential visual receptors. Considering the different sources of visual effects alongside the principal visual receptors that might be affected, perhaps by means of a table, will assist in the initial identification of likely significant effects for further study. Changes in views and visual amenity may arise from built or engineered forms and/or from soft landscape elements of the development. Increasingly, attention is being paid to the visual effects of offshore developments on what may be perceived to be valued coastal views.

6.27 In order to assist in description and comparison of the effects on views it can be helpful to consider a range of issues, which might include, but are not restricted to:

- the nature of the view of the development, for example a full or partial view or only a glimpse;
- the proportion of the development or particular features that would be visible (such as full, most, small part, none);
- the distance of the viewpoint from the development and whether the viewer would focus on the development due to its scale and proximity or whether the development would be only a small, minor element in a panoramic view;
- whether the view is stationary or transient or one of a sequence of views, as from a footpath or moving vehicle;
- the nature of the changes, which must be judged individually for each project, but may include, for example, changes in the existing skyline profile, creation of a new visual focus in the view, introduction of new man-made objects, changes in visual simplicity or complexity, alteration of visual scale, and change to the degree of visual enclosure.

6.28 Consideration should be given to the seasonal differences in effects arising from the varying degree of screening and/or filtering of views by vegetation that will apply in summer and winter. Assessments may need to be provided for both the winter season, with least leaf cover and therefore minimum screening, and for fuller screening in summer conditions. Discussion with the competent authority will help to determine whether the emphasis should be on the maximum visibility scenario of the winter condition of vegetation, or whether both summer and winter conditions should be used. The timing of the assessment work and the project programme will also influence the practicality of covering more than one season.

As with landscape effects an informed professional judgement should be made as to whether the visual effects can be described as positive or negative (or in some cases neutral) in their consequences for views and visual amenity. This will need to be based on a judgement about whether the changes will affect the quality of the visual experience for those groups of people who will see the changes, given the nature of the existing views. 6.29

Methods of communicating visual effects are covered in Chapter 8.

Assessing the significance of visual effects

The visual effects that have been identified must be assessed to determine their significance, based on the principles described in Paragraphs 3.23–3.36. As with landscape effects, this requires methodical consideration of each effect identified and, for each one, assessment of the nature of the visual receptors and the nature of the effect on views and visual amenity. 6.30

Sensitivity of visual receptors

It is important to remember at the outset that visual receptors are all people. Each visual receptor, meaning the particular person or group of people likely to be affected at a specific viewpoint, should be assessed in terms of both their susceptibility to change in views and visual amenity and also the value attached to particular views. 6.31

Susceptibility of visual receptors to change

The susceptibility of different visual receptors to changes in views and visual amenity is mainly a function of: 6.32

- the occupation or activity of people experiencing the view at particular locations; and
- the extent to which their attention or interest may therefore be focused on the views and the visual amenity they experience at particular locations.

The visual receptors most susceptible to change are generally likely to include: 6.33

- residents at home (but see Paragraph 6.36);
- people, whether residents or visitors, who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the landscape and on particular views;
- visitors to heritage assets, or to other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;
- communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area.

Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes tend to fall into an intermediate category of moderate susceptibility to change. Where travel involves recognised scenic routes awareness of views is likely to be particularly high.

6.34 Visual receptors likely to be less sensitive to change include:

- people engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape;
- people at their place of work whose attention may be focused on their work or activity, not on their surroundings, and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life (although there may on occasion be cases where views are an important contributor to the setting and to the quality of working life).

6.35 This division is not black and white and in reality there will be a gradation in susceptibility to change. Each project needs to consider the nature of the groups of people who will be affected and the extent to which their attention is likely to be focused on views and visual amenity. Judgements about the susceptibility of visual receptors to change should be recorded on a verbal scale (for example high, medium or low) but the basis for this must be clear, and linked back to evidence from the baseline study.

6.36 The issue of whether residents should be included as visual receptors and residential properties as private viewpoints has been discussed in Paragraph 6.17. If discussion with the competent authority suggests that they should be covered in the assessment of visual effects it will be important to recognise that residents may be particularly susceptible to changes in their visual amenity – residents at home, especially using rooms normally occupied in waking or daylight hours, are likely to experience views for longer than those briefly passing through an area. The combined effects on a number of residents in an area may also be considered, by aggregating properties within a settlement, as a way of assessing the effect on the community as a whole. Care must, however, be taken first to ensure that this really does represent the whole community and second to avoid any double counting of the effects.

Value attached to views

6.37 Judgements should also be made about the value attached to the views experienced. This should take account of:

- recognition of the value attached to particular views, for example in relation to heritage assets, or through planning designations;
- indicators of the value attached to views by visitors, for example through appearances in guidebooks or on tourist maps, provision of facilities for their enjoyment (such as parking places, sign boards and interpretive material) and references to them in literature or art (for example 'Ruskin's View' over Lunedale, or the view from the Cob in Porthmadog over Traeth Mawr to Snowdonia which features in well-known Welsh paintings, and the 'Queen's View' in Scotland).

Magnitude of the visual effects

Each of the visual effects identified needs to be evaluated in terms of its **size or scale**, the **geographical extent** of the area influenced, and its **duration and reversibility**. 6.38

Size or scale

Judging the magnitude of the visual effects identified needs to take account of: 6.39

- the scale of the change in the view with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition, including the proportion of the view occupied by the proposed development;
- the degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape with the existing or remaining landscape elements and characteristics in terms of form, scale and mass, line, height, colour and texture;
- the nature of the view of the proposed development, in terms of the relative amount of time over which it will be experienced and whether views will be full, partial or glimpses.

Geographical extent

The geographical extent of a visual effect will vary with different viewpoints and is likely to reflect: 6.40

- the angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor;
- the distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development;
- the extent of the area over which the changes would be visible.

Duration and reversibility of visual effects

As with landscape effects these are separate but linked considerations. Similar categories should be used, such as short term, medium term or long term, provided that their meaning is clearly stated with clear criteria for the lengths of time encompassed in each case. Similar considerations related to reversibility apply, as set out in Paragraph 5.52. 6.41

Judging the overall significance of visual effects

To draw final conclusions about significance the separate judgements about the sensitivity of the visual receptors and the magnitude of the visual effects need to be combined, to allow a final judgement about whether each effect is significant or not, as required by the Regulations, following the general principles set out in Chapter 3, and also in Chapter 5 in relation to landscape effects. Significance of visual effects is not absolute and can only be defined in relation to each development and its specific location. It is for each assessment to determine the approach and if necessary to adopt a consistent approach across all the EIA topic areas. 6.42

As indicated in Chapter 3, there are two main approaches to combining the individual judgements made under the criteria (although there may also be others): 6.43

1. They can be sequentially combined into assessments of sensitivity for each receptor and magnitude for each effect. Sensitivity and magnitude can then be combined to assess overall significance.

2. They can be arranged in a table to provide an overall profile of each identified effect. An overview can then be taken of the distribution of the assessments for each criterion to make an informed professional judgement about the overall assessment of the significance of the effect.

6.44 There are no hard and fast rules about what makes a significant effect, and there cannot be a standard approach since circumstances vary with the location and context and with the type of proposal. In making a judgement about the significance of visual effects the following points should be noted:

- Effects on people who are particularly sensitive to changes in views and visual amenity are more likely to be significant.
- Effects on people at recognised and important viewpoints or from recognised scenic routes are more likely to be significant.
- Large-scale changes which introduce new, non-characteristic or discordant or intrusive elements into the view are more likely to be significant than small changes or changes involving features already present within the view.

6.45 Where visual effects are judged to be significant and adverse, proposals for preventing/avoiding, reducing, or offsetting or compensating for them (referred to as mitigation) should be described. The significant visual effects remaining after mitigation should be summarised as the final step in the process.

Further details on mitigation is provided in Paragraphs 4.21–4.43.

Summary advice on good practice

- An assessment of visual effects deals with the effects of change and development on the views available to people and their visual amenity.
- Scoping should identify the area that needs to be covered in assessing visual effects, the range of people who may be affected by these effects and the related viewpoints in the study area that will need to be examined.
- The study area should be agreed with the competent authority at the outset and should cover the area from which the proposed development will potentially be visible. The emphasis must be on a reasonable approach which is proportional to the scale and nature of the proposed development.
- Baseline studies for visual effects should establish, in more detail than is possible in the scoping stage, the area in which the development may be visible, the different groups of people who may experience views of the development, the viewpoints where they will be affected and the nature of the views at those points.
- These factors are all interrelated and need to be considered in an integrated way rather than as a series of separate steps.

- Interrelationships with the cultural heritage topic area need to be borne in mind when developing the visual baseline and identifying visual effects. Specialist input from cultural heritage professionals is likely to be required to interpret the range of relevant cultural heritage studies that may help to identify important viewpoints.
- Areas of land from which the proposed development may potentially be visible must be identified and mapped at the outset of the assessment of visual effects.
- Digitally mapped areas of visibility should be referred to as the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), making clear that the area so defined only shows land from which the proposal may **theoretically** be visible.
- Many factors other than terrain will influence actual as opposed to theoretical visibility. Site surveys are essential to provide an accurate baseline assessment of visibility.
- Both ZTV mapping and site survey should assume that the observer eye height is some 1.5 to 1.7 metres above ground level, based on the midpoint of average heights for men and women.
- For some types of development the visual effects of lighting may be an issue. In these cases it may be important to carry out night-time 'darkness' surveys of the existing conditions in order to assess the potential effects of lighting.
- The baseline studies must identify the people within the area who will be affected by the changes in views and visual amenity – usually referred to as 'visual receptors' – and the viewpoints from which the proposal will actually be seen.
- In cases where it is appropriate to consider private viewpoints from residential properties the scope of such an assessment should be agreed with the competent authority. Visual effects assessment may sometimes be carried out as part of residential amenity assessments, in which case this will supplement the normal LVIA for a project.
- The viewpoints to be used should be selected in part through discussions with the competent authority and other interested parties, initially at the scoping stage but also informed by the ZTV analysis, by fieldwork and by desk research on access and recreation.
- Viewpoints selected for inclusion in the assessment and for illustration of the visual effects may be chosen as representative viewpoints, specific viewpoints or illustrative viewpoints, and should cover as wide a range of situations as is reasonable and necessary to cover the likely significant effects. The emphasis must always be on proportionality in relation to the scale and nature of the development proposal.
- 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.
- The Landscape Institute's technical guidance on photography and photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be consulted when taking baseline photographs.
- The completed visual baseline should focus on information that will help to identify significant visual effects. A baseline report may combine all the key information about

visual receptors, viewpoints and views, using text, maps and annotated photographs and sketches.

- Consideration of the different sources of visual effects alongside the principal visual receptors that might be affected should allow systematic identification of likely visual effects.
- An informed professional judgement should be made about whether the visual effects should be categorised as positive or negative (or in some cases neutral), with the criteria used in reaching this judgement clearly stated.
- The visual effects that have been identified must be assessed to determine their significance, based on the principles described in Chapter 3. This requires methodical consideration of each effect identified and, for each one, assessment of the sensitivity of the visual receptor and the magnitude of the effect on views and visual amenity.
- Final judgements must be made about which visual effects are significant, as required by the Regulations. There are no hard and fast rules about what makes a significant effect, and there cannot be a standard approach since circumstances vary with the location and context and with the type of proposal.
- Where visual effects are judged to be significant and adverse, proposals for preventing/avoiding, reducing, or offsetting or compensating for them (referred to as mitigation) should be described. The significant visual effects remaining after mitigation should be summarised as the final step in the process.