

**Report to:** **Strategic Planning Committee**

**Date of Meeting:** Tuesday 27 November 2018

**Public Document:** Yes

**Exemption:** None



**Review date for release** The recommendation to committee seeks approval for consultation. It is envisaged that in early 2019 the Landscape Character Assessment, revised where appropriate, along with details of feedback from consultation will be presented back to Committee.

**Agenda item:** 14

**Subject:** **Landscape Character Assessment – Draft Report and Proposed Public Consultation**

**Purpose of report:** This report advises committee that we commissioned and have received from the consultancy firm of Fiona Fyfe Associates Ltd a proposed consultation draft of the - East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines - report. Committee are asked to endorse this draft document for public consultation.

**Recommendation:** **Strategic Planning Committee is recommended:**

- 1. To endorse the assessment and findings in the draft Landscape Character Assessment report; and**
- 2. Approve public consultation of this draft document to run for six weeks.**

**Reason for recommendation:** To gain endorsement for the draft Landscape Character Assessment and to also approve the document for public consultation in order to ensure feedback received can inform potential refinement and improvement of document content.

**Officer:** Ed Freeman, Service Lead – Strategic Planning and Development Management

**Financial implications:** No specific financial implications at this stage

**Legal implications:** The outcome of the consultation will ensure the Landscape Character Assessment identifies locally distinctive landscape features, characters and special qualities which will inform Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan preparation as well as cross-boundary issues and proposals which may have an impact on East Devon. There are no legal implications other than as set out in the report

**Equalities impact:** Low Impact  
Low Impact

<b>Risk:</b>	Low Risk  As endorsement is sought for consultation there is a low identified risk associated with this report.
<b>Links to background information:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are links to background documents in the actual <a href="#">Landscape Character Assessment</a></li> </ul>
<b>Link to Council Plan:</b>	The Landscape Character assessment has particular links to the council priority of “ <i>Developing an outstanding local environment</i> ” it does though address wider issues than ‘just’ the environment.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A Landscape Character Assessment seeks to characterise and describe features, landform and land uses that make up the landscape. Through having a thorough understanding of landscape character it becomes easier to plan and manage potential changes in a more consistent and robust manner.
- 1.2 This Landscape Character Assessment, **the draft document is appended to this report**, covers the whole of East Devon District, which specifically includes the whole of the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as well as the whole of the Blackdown Hills AONB. It should be noted that around 60% of the Blackdown Hills AONB falls in East Devon with the remainder, at District/Borough level, being in the local authority areas of Mid Devon, Taunton Deane and South Somerset.
- 1.3 This Landscape Character Assessment is not a brand new piece of work, rather it is an update of an assessment that was completed in 2008. The update responds to changes that have occurred, both in the landscape and also in approaches and methodology of assessment, since the original work was undertaken.
- 1.4 The Landscape Character Assessment is intended to have a wide range of end users – the list is not exhaustive but it includes planners, developers, farmers and foresters and land users and managers, those involved in conservation and more generally the public and local communities. The document therefore offers commentary, advice and recommendations relevant to these and other users and user groups.

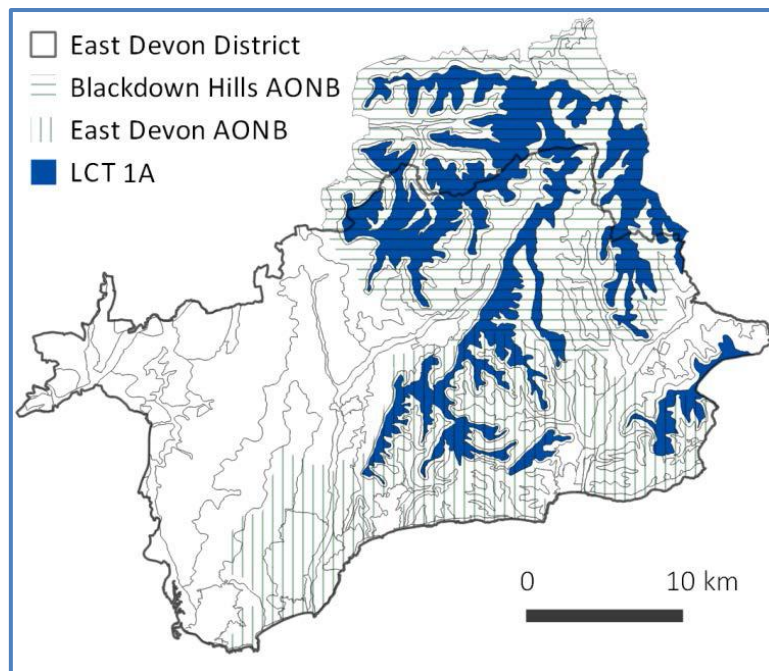
## 2. The form and structure of the assessment document

- 2.1 The bulk of the Landscape Character Assessment as based around 18 different landscape character types that are identified, categorised and found in East Devon. For example area type 1A is defined as “*Open Inland Planned Plateaux*” and the assessment advises that

*“This LCT occurs in the eastern half of the Study Area, and contains some of the highest land. It comprises a series of elevated fingers of land which are flat or gently undulating. The boundaries of the LCT are generally clearly marked by the transition to steep scarp slopes below (LCT 2A). This is a relatively simple landscape, with*

*strong horizontal elements: flat horizons, straight roads and regular field boundaries.....”*

- 2.2 The map reproduced below, taken from the assessment, defines the extent of this 1A character type. For this and the other 17 defined landscape character types the assessment describes the key characteristics that define and establish the landscape type, what past and current potential forces or factors exist that have or may produce changes (these are changes potentially for the worse, though could be for the better) and what changes may arise in the future. For each landscape character type the assessment also identifies a strategy for managing potential forces for change along with more detailed guidelines.



- 2.3 For a complete picture of all document content, and specifically all area types, the Landscape Character Assessment should be read in its entirety.

### 3. Commissioning of the Landscape Character Assessment and work to date

- 3.1 This Landscape Character Assessment was jointly commissioned by:

- East Devon District Council;
- Devon County Council;
- The Blackdown Hills AONB partnership; and
- The East Devon AONB partnership.

The consultancy team was led by Fiona Fyfe Associates Ltd. The work has and will continue to be partnership based.

- 3.2 Extensive fieldwork and research by the consultants has led to production of the very high quality document. There has been ongoing review of the emerging and evolving work that has been undertaken by an officer steering group drawn from the commissioning partners. As part of the document preparation there was a workshop in early summer 2018, in

Honiton, at which invited participants, drawn from a wide range of interest groups, were able to share their expertise to inform the work.

#### **4. Proposed public consultation and report completion**

- 4.1 Having now arrived at a draft document the next stage is proposed public consultation. Subject to committee approval the intention is that public consultation will run for six weeks. Any individual or organisation will be able to submit comments on the draft. We do not plan to ask specific questions in the consultation exercise or to provide a consultation form for respondents to fill in. Rather we will invite and welcome written comments on the document in any form or format that respondents consider appropriate.
- 4.2 The proposed consultation will be a joint exercise with joint 'ownership' by all of the commissioning partners though it will be coordinated and managed by officers of East Devon District Council. It will be for each of the commissioning bodies to ultimately determine if and in what manner they approve or adopt the final document.
- 4.3 In respect of approval by East Devon District Council the expectation, following consideration of feedback from consultation, is that officers will recommend that Strategic Planning Committee formally endorse the Landscape Character Assessment and approve its use and application in respect of works and proposals, specifically determining planning applications. This would extend to matters or considerations outside of the District boundary where there are cross-boundary issues or where proposals outside of East Devon could impact on the District.
- 4.4 On the basis of the above commentary the following timetable and programme of future work is envisaged:
- **Public consultation** – to run from Monday 29 October 2018 to mid-night on Monday 11 December 2018.
  - **Publication of comments received** – in December 2018/January 2019 comments received will be published on the East Devon District Council website.
  - **Officer consideration of responses received** – from December 2018 through to early February 2019 the officer steering group and consultant will consider comments received.
  - **Redrafting of the Landscape Character Assessment** - in February 2019 the consultant will amend the assessment in response to comments received.
  - **Recommendation for Landscape Character Assessment adoption** – it is proposed that a report will be presented to Strategic Planning Committee on 26 March 2019 recommending approval of the final report.

## **5. Potential for approval by other local authorities**

- 5.1 It is noted earlier in this report that the Landscape Character Assessment covers the whole of the Blackdown Hills AONB and this includes, therefore, land that falls in the local authority areas of Mid Devon District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and South Somerset District Council, as well as Somerset County Council (and Devon County Council). These other authorities will be invited to make comment on the document at consultation and any observations made will be taken into account in potential document revision.
- 5.2 These separate local authorities (and any other organisation) may choose to formally endorse, adopt or give weight to the document in their working or they may conclude that this is inappropriate. Notwithstanding what position is taken by these other local authorities the key consideration is that it is envisaged that the Blackdown Hills AONB partnership will endorse the document. It will, therefore, inform their thinking and comments on works or proposals that are in or which could affect all or any parts of the Blackdown Hills AONB regardless of which local authority area or areas any works or proposals fall within.