

Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document 2022

Huntingdonshire District Council | Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary
Planning Document 2022

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Document Information

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Summary: The document sets out descriptions of the nine landscape character areas throughout Huntingdonshire. It also provides descriptions of the townscape character areas in the spatial planning areas and key service centres identified in Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036. It provides guidance on consideration of landscape and townscape character issues during preparation of a planning application. It is also intended to support the preparation of neighbourhood plans through provision of information on landscape and townscape characteristics and questions to ask that may guide assessment of other villages and their surrounding landscape.

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Document availability: The Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document can be seen on the Council's website. Copies can be downloaded from the website. A hard copy may be seen at Customer Services Reception, Huntingdonshire District Council, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon. This office is normally open from 8:45 to 17:00 Mondays to Thursdays and 8:45 to 16:00 on Fridays, however, an appointment may be necessary depending on access restrictions in place.

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1 Introduction

Purpose of this SPD

- 1.1** This Supplementary Planning Document is intended to support delivery of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 by:
- providing information on the existing landscape character of the district
 - providing information on the existing townscape character of the settlements in the spatial planning areas and key service centres identified in the Local Plan
 - helping developers in their submission of planning applications by providing guidance on landscape and townscape issues to be considered as part of any development proposal to guide the location and integration of new development within the existing landscape and townscape
 - encouraging comprehensive consideration of landscape and townscape issues and their interrelationship with development
 - informing neighbourhood plan preparation.
- 1.2** Application of the guidance in this SPD aims to contribute to a variety of benefits:
- the conservation and enhancement of the landscape's distinctive qualities
 - promotion of a sense of place and local distinctiveness
 - minimisation of the impact of new development on the surrounding area through successful integration
 - enhancement of the sustainability of new development
 - promotion of opportunities for enhancement, creation or linking of habitats
 - provision of the strategic context for preparation of more detailed local assessments of landscape and townscape character in support of neighbourhood plans.
- 1.3** This SPD serves two primary purposes:
1. to guide preparation and consideration of planning applications to enhance the quality of new development within Huntingdonshire; and
 2. to provide a methodology for neighbourhood planning groups to produce their own landscape and townscape assessments to support policies within neighbourhood plans.
- 1.4** This SPD provides guidance on how landscape and townscape issues should be considered as an integral part of the design and development process. It should be read in conjunction with the following documents to promote high quality development that makes a positive contribution to landscape character and local distinctiveness:
- Huntingdonshire [Design Guide SPD](#) which provides detailed guidance on the design of buildings and spaces
 - Huntingdonshire [Tree Strategy 2020-2030 and 10 year Action Plan](#)
 - any [Conservation Area Character Statements](#) for the area of interest.
- 1.5** Following adoption it will form a material planning consideration in determination of planning applications and appeals. It will guide the consideration of planning applications relating to landscape and townscape providing greater transparency in the decision making process.
- 1.6** This revised Landscape and Townscape SPD is accompanied by an [interactive map](#). This will aid the interpretation and implementation of the guidance throughout the assessment and provide further opportunities to engage with designations and character areas. This can help inform planning applications and neighbourhood plan preparations.

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Policy Context

- 1.7** In 2001 Landscape Design Associates were appointed to undertake a Landscape and Townscape Assessment of Huntingdonshire to provide a description and analysis of the landscape of the district, the typical building types found throughout Huntingdonshire and the townscape of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives, Ramsey and Godmanchester. This assessment drew on information in the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines which were adopted by the Council as supplementary planning guidance in 1991. It was prepared in response to a growing recognition of the value of landscape and townscape assessment as a basis for the effective planning and management of our towns and countryside. The use of such assessments to identify the special character of the natural and built environment of a locality provides a valuable starting point for preparation of development proposals which contribute to conserving and enhancing locally distinctive features. Following consultation the assessment was published as a supplementary planning document in June 2007 to give it greater weight in the determination of planning applications.
- 1.8** The original Landscape and Townscape SPD (2007) was prepared under a significantly different national and local planning policy context. This SPD is shaped by the requirements of the NPPF (2021) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). Following adoption of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (2019) assessments have been reconsidered and updated where appropriate and additional assessments have been carried out in a manner consistent with the original approach where necessary.
- 1.9** The [development plan for Huntingdonshire](#) as at February 2022 comprises:
- Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036;
 - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan (2021); and
 - All 'Made' Neighbourhood Plans.
- 1.10** The Local Plan to 2036 includes policies which require the specialised guidance of the Landscape and Townscape SPD in order to aid decision making and to implement the policies successfully. This guidance is required to support the wildlife, habitat, cultural and historical values of defined character areas and particular environments so that developments respond positively to their landscape and townscape context. The Local Plan policies of most relevance to this revised SPD are:
- LP3 – Green Infrastructure
 - LP10 – The Countryside
 - LP11 - Design Context
 - LP22 - Local Services and Community Facilities
 - LP30 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity
 - LP34 - Heritage Assets and their settings
 - LP35 - Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
- 1.11** Legislative changes including the passing of the Localism Act 2011 now allows parish and town councils to produce neighbourhood plans which, once 'made', become part of the district's statutory development plan. The intention of this form of plan-making is to give communities more power in the planning system to shape their local area. This revised Landscape and Townscape SPD is aimed at being a useful resource at the neighbourhood plan level. The guidance and defined landscape and townscape areas provide support to those with the intention of protecting important local landscapes and townscape features in their neighbourhood plan policies. Often these features of a community are of high priority to preserve and or enhance in neighbourhood plans. This SPD can thus be used by neighbourhood planning groups to help shape the vision, aims and policies of their neighbourhood plan. If required, it can form the starting point for a further detailed landscape and townscape assessment focusing on the specific neighbourhood area and its immediate surrounding context.
- 1.12** This SPD will supersede the 2007 Landscape and Townscape SPD and form part of the suite of planning guides and SPDs already adopted by the Council to aid planning decisions:

- Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017)
- Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD (2017)
- Wind Energy Development in Huntingdonshire SPD (2014)
- Developer Contributions SPD (2011) (or successor document)
- Developer Contributions: Updated Costs 2019/20

Landscape Character

- 1.13** Landscape character can be defined as the distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that make one area different from another. The approach encompasses physical landscape factors such as geology and ecology, cultural factors such as archaeology and settlement patterns, and perceptual factors such as tranquillity. Landscape character areas reflect a unique combination of these factors in a discrete geographical area; this local distinctiveness contributes to the special character and sense of place of a community or area.
- 1.14** A landscape character area assessment identifies and describes variations in the character of the landscape recognising the combination of factors that make an individual landscape distinctive. Not all areas within a landscape character area exhibit all the characteristics of that area and it is common for some parts to have few distinctive features often due to changes in land use. The proximity of the built environment often affects the condition of the landscape, particularly on the edges of the built environment where pressures are greatest.
- 1.15** The [Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines](#) provide advice on the siting and design of new development within the county and describe ways in which richer and more diverse landscapes can be created. They include practical examples of a range of landscape management and improvement proposals and illustrate how people can contribute towards the process of landscape protection and enhancement. All references to this document are taken from the pdf of the document available on [Cambridgeshire County Council's website](#). Nine landscape character areas are identified across the county of which five fall within Huntingdonshire: the Western Claylands, Fenlands, Grafham Water, the Great Ouse Valley and the Nene Valley. The Guidelines conclude that development should 'reflect local landscape character particularly in the treatment of edges of developments, through the choice of appropriate native species, the pattern of woodland/ copses/ hedgerows, the use of landform and the avoidance of harsh lines and the use of local materials for walls and building'.
- 1.16** The Landscape Character Areas Assessment built upon national and Cambridgeshire level assessments and was completed in accordance with good practice guidance published by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England). Broadly this approach involved:
- a desk study to develop a series of overlay maps indicating areas of landscape with common characteristics
 - field surveys to test and refine the initial conclusions on landscape character and complement them with subjective responses to the landscape
 - bringing the information together to classify the landscape into discrete character areas
 - considering the pressures and changes influencing each character area
- 1.17** A more refined assessment of Huntingdonshire's landscape character sitting under that for the whole county has identified some variations worthy of distinction at the local level. As a result some of the county level character areas have been subdivided resulting in nine district level landscape character areas being identified as:
- The Fens
 - Fen Margin
 - Central Claylands
 - Great Ouse Valley

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- South East Claylands
- Northern Wolds
- Grafham Water
- Southern Wolds
- Nene Valley

1.18 In some instances the boundaries between individual landscape character areas are clearly defined and easily recognisable on the ground. For example, the boundary between the Fens and the Fen Margin landscape character areas is clearly defined by a marked change in topography and visual enclosure. In other locations, such as the boundaries between the Northern Wolds and the Central Claylands, the change in the landscape is more gradual and the boundaries are less distinct. In these instances the boundaries should be considered as transitional and consideration given to the characteristics of each relevant area. A detailed description of each area is presented in the next chapter.

Townscape Character

1.19 Townscape is defined by the Landscape Institute as 'the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings, the relationships between them, the different types of urban open spaces, including green spaces and the relationships between buildings and open spaces'. Townscape character identifies the distinct and recognisable pattern of features that occur consistently in a particular area. Townscape character areas vary significantly in size but each has a distinct and recognisable identity. These provide a basis for promoting the integration of sensitively designed buildings and spaces which reflect the distinctive traits of the surrounding area.

1.20 The Townscape Character Areas Assessment considers the urban structure and urban character of the district's spatial planning areas and key service centres. Broadly this approach involved:

- a desk study to develop an initial understanding of the form and character of the settlements allowing initial mapping of key features and character area boundaries
- field surveys to gather detailed information on building types, street patterns, key buildings, memorable places, vegetation, building materials and colours to test and refine the initial conclusions
- combining this information to describe the urban structure and character through plans, photographs and written descriptions
- identification of the key factors any development proposals should consider within each townscape character area reflecting their planning, conservation and enhancement priorities.

1.21 The previous Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD only contained townscape assessments for Huntingdon, Godmanchester, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey. To further support the Local Plan's development strategy assessments have been added for other settlements within the spatial planning areas and for the key service centres. The methodology for undertaking these additional settlements is outlined in the next chapter. Based on this, detailed guidance has been produced for neighbourhood planning groups in Appendix 1.

1.22 Townscape constantly evolves. Consequently townscape character areas change and boundaries may alter over time as development occurs, particularly in areas of major change. Some of the sites allocated in Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 are intended to reinforce this evolution as local priorities change. An example of this is HU5 Edison Bell Way which reflects the evolution of a derelict former industrial area to a mixed use area of residential and retail properties.