

**Report to the Local Development
Framework Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: LDF-006-2009/10
Date of meeting: 11 March 2010

Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Epping Forest Landscape Studies

Responsible Officer: Ian White (01992 564066)

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the Landscape Character Assessment be noted by members as part of the evidence base for the Council's Core Strategy; and**
- (2) That the Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study be noted by members as part of the evidence base for the Council's Core Strategy.**

Executive Summary:

In April 2009, Epping Forest District Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake two Landscape Studies of the District to contribute to the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF). The two studies commissioned were a 'District-wide Landscape Character Assessment' and a 'Settlement-edge Landscape Sensitivity Assessment'.

The District-wide Landscape Character Assessment identifies and analyses the District's various landscapes in terms of their evolution, diversity, distinctiveness, sensitivity to change and management need. The Settlement-edge Landscape Sensitivity Assessment provides a more detailed understanding of sensitive landscape and environmental features around the edges of the twenty-two principal settlements within the District. This study also assesses how areas of similar landscape character and environmental features contribute to the structure, character and setting of the settlements.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure that full account is given to landscape character and sensitivity in policy formulation and planning decisions, both reports are recommended to the Council for use as part of the evidence base for informing the preparation of the Local Development Framework.

Other Options for Action:

Not to accept the reports as part of the LDF evidence base.

Report:

Introduction

1. In April 2009 the Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake two Landscape Studies of the District to provide a comprehensive assessment of its landscape types, and to analyse the sensitivity of the landscape around the principal settlements where new housing and employment land is likely to be located to meet the targets of the East of England Plan.
2. These documents will become part of the Council's technical evidence base to inform the Local Development Framework (LDF).

The District-wide Landscape Character Assessment

3. The overall aim of landscape planning, design and management should be to achieve 'sustainable landscapes' that are visually, ecologically and culturally as rich as possible to meet all of society's social, economic and environmental needs. Prepared through desk based research and field surveys, and then set out as a study report with accompanying 1:25000 scale mapping, the Landscape Character Assessment is intended to achieve this by giving a better understanding of the District's landscapes in terms of their diversity, distinctiveness, evolution, sensitivity to change and management need.
4. In terms of its methodology, the study is based on the *Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance For England and Scotland* (Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002), the latest published guidance, and also acknowledges current best practice. It addresses:
 - (a) the relatively objective process of landscape characterisation, which involves identifying, mapping classifying and describing 'landscape character'; and
 - (b) the more subjective process of evaluating such character to inform planning and land management decisions.
5. The study explains the importance of landscape character and describes the physical and historical influences on the landscape, identifying the key forces for change affecting landscape character today. It defines Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas within the District and describes them in their national and county context. A map of these Landscape Character Areas and their corresponding Landscape Character Types is available at Appendix A.
6. The study makes a series of recommendations:
 - (a) to inform Local Development Framework policies for protecting and enhancing landscape character;
 - (b) to provide a baseline and framework for monitoring landscape change;
 - (c) for further work to enhance the evidence base;
 - (d) on how the study can be used to raise the general awareness in the planning process of the importance of landscape character in contributing to the quality of life within the District;
 - (e) that a landscape character objective and criteria-based landscape character policy should be included in the Core Strategy; and

(f) that local character considerations should also be incorporated into design, nature conservation and heritage policies.

7. The study also proposes that the Council gives consideration to developing a framework for monitoring landscape change within the Landscape Character Areas. Finally, the study recommends that the Council works with Essex County Council and other partners to enhance the current character evidence base. Potential options to achieve this include Local Distinctiveness Studies, Landscape Design Guidance, Settlements Studies, Historic Environment Characterisation Studies, Area-based Regeneration Initiatives, Green Infrastructure Network Planning, Green Space Strategies and River Corridor Environmental Strategies. In building on the partnership approach to the preparation of Landscape Character Assessments in Essex, the study also advises that consideration is given to developing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the District.

Settlement-edge Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

8. Prepared through desk based research and field survey work and then set out as a study report with accompanying 1:10000 scale mapping, the Landscape Sensitivity Analysis was undertaken around the twenty-two 'principal' settlements within the District, to inform the appraisal of land allocations in the LDF. It also outlined the extent to which these areas of landscape contribute towards the purpose of including land within the Green Belt, and how they contribute now, and potentially in the future, towards Green Belt objectives.

9. In terms of its methodology, the study has been informed by the Countryside Agency's '*Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland: Topic Paper 6 – Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity*'. For consistency with neighbouring local authority areas, this methodology was based on the approach set out within the Harlow Area Landscape and Environment Study (also completed by CBA) and refined with discussions with officers.

10. The study differentiates between zones within the District that are more sensitive than others and a summary of the basic findings are located in Appendix B of this document. This is hardly a surprising conclusion, but it will be an important part of the evidence base to help to identify the most and least suitable sites for growth, and those requiring protection through current and future conservation techniques, as far as landscape impact is concerned. Any conclusions of this study should be read in conjunction with the District-wide Landscape Character Assessment.

Resource Implications:

£1.3 million is available for the production of the LDF between 2008/09-2011/12, including the preparation of the evidence base.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None relevant.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The use of these studies will help ensure that the unique landscape of the District is fully considered when preparing the LDF.

Consultation Undertaken:

No formal consultation. These are technical documents that will be used to inform the emerging LDF, and will be background papers when the Issues and Options Consultation for the Core Strategy is published.

Background Papers:

Epping Forest District Council Landscape Character Assessment, Chris Blandford Associates (January 2010).

Epping Forest District Council Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study, Chris Blandford Associates (January 2010).

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

Policy GU4 of the Corporate Plan highlights the need for the Council to develop a Local Development Framework (LDF). Adding these documents to the Council's LDF evidence base will therefore contribute towards the soundness of the LDF.

Equality and Diversity:

This is a technical study that will be used to inform the LDF. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be required for the LDF at a later date.

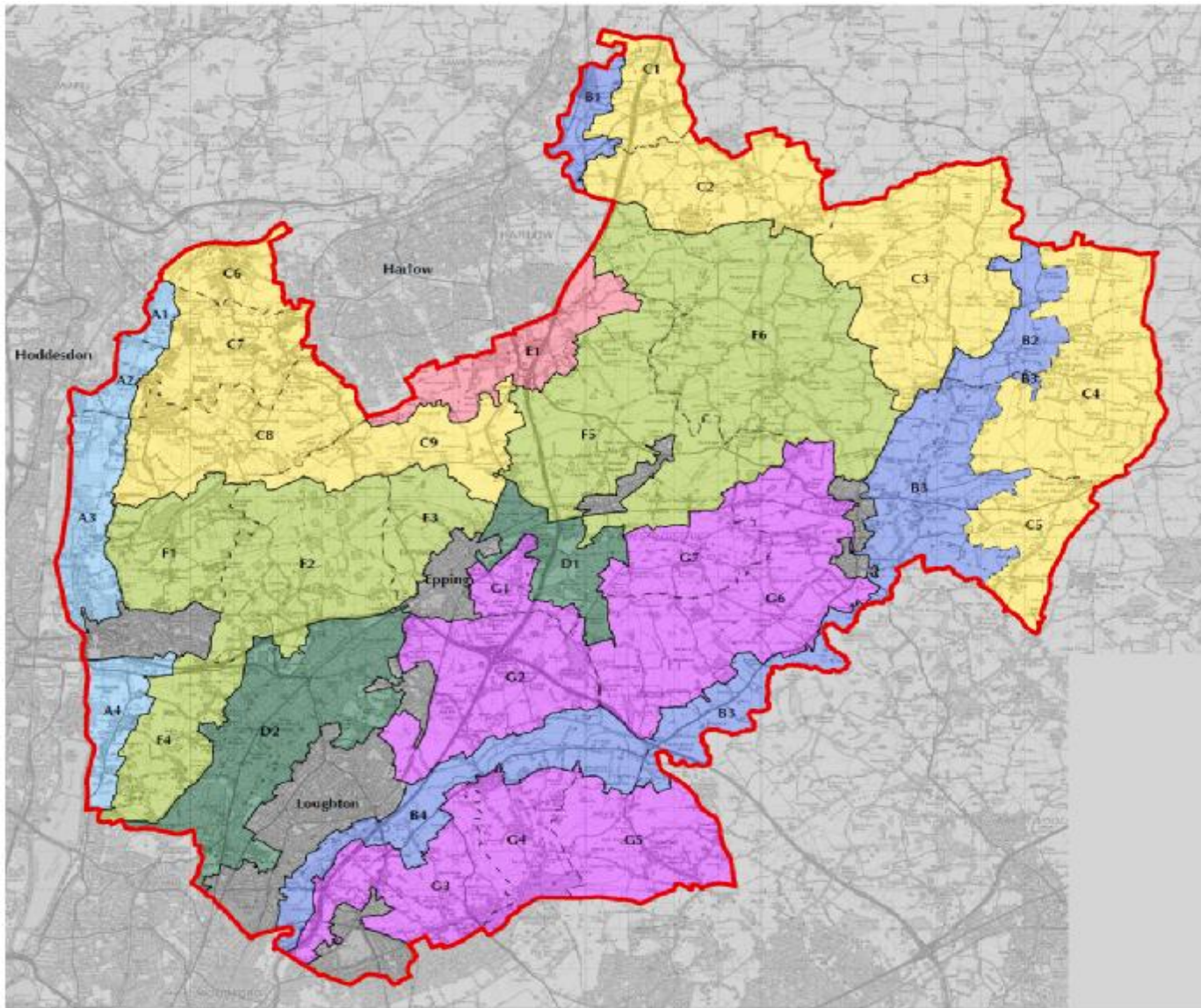
Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
None Relevant.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
None Relevant.

APPENDIX A - EPPING FOREST LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES AND AREAS



KEY

Epping Forest Landscape Character Types and Areas

- A River Valley Floodplain:
Flooded Gravel Pits and Marshes
A1 Rye Meads
A2 Nazeing Mead
A3 Lea Valley Marshes
A4 Ramney Marsh
- B River Valley
B1 River Start
B2 Upper Roding
B3 Middle Roding
B4 Lower Roding
- C Farmland Plateau
C1 Sheering
C2 Matching
C3 Abbes
C4 Willingale
C5 Nine Ashes
C6 Roydon
C7 Roydon Hamlet
C8 Bumble's Green
C9 Epping Green
- D Wooded Ridges
D1 Lower Forest to Beachet Wood Ridge
D2 Epping Forest Ridge
- E Farmland Ridges
E1 Jack's Hatch to Church Langley
- F Ridges and Valleys
F1 Holyfield
F2 Upshire
F3 Cobbin's Bridge
F4 Lippits and Daws Hills
F5 North Weald
F6 Magdalen Laver and Moreton
- G Wooded Ridges and Valleys
G1 Coopersale
G2 Theydon Garnon
G3 Chigwell
G4 Lambourne
G5 Stapleford Abbots
G6 Stapleford Tawney and Stanford Rivers
G7 Toot Hill
- Urban
- Study Area



