Landscape Character Assessment for Lost Wetlands

Background to Natural England

Natural England is the government’s advisor on the natural environment. We provide practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England’s natural wealth for the benefit of everyone.

Our remit is to ensure sustainable stewardship of the land and sea so that people and nature can thrive. It is our responsibility to see that England’s rich natural environment can adapt and survive intact for future generations to enjoy.

NERC Act

Natural England was formally established on 01 October 2006 following the successful passage of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060016_en_1) through Parliament. We are an independent statutory Non-Departmental Public Body.

The NERC Act sets out Natural England's purpose: to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

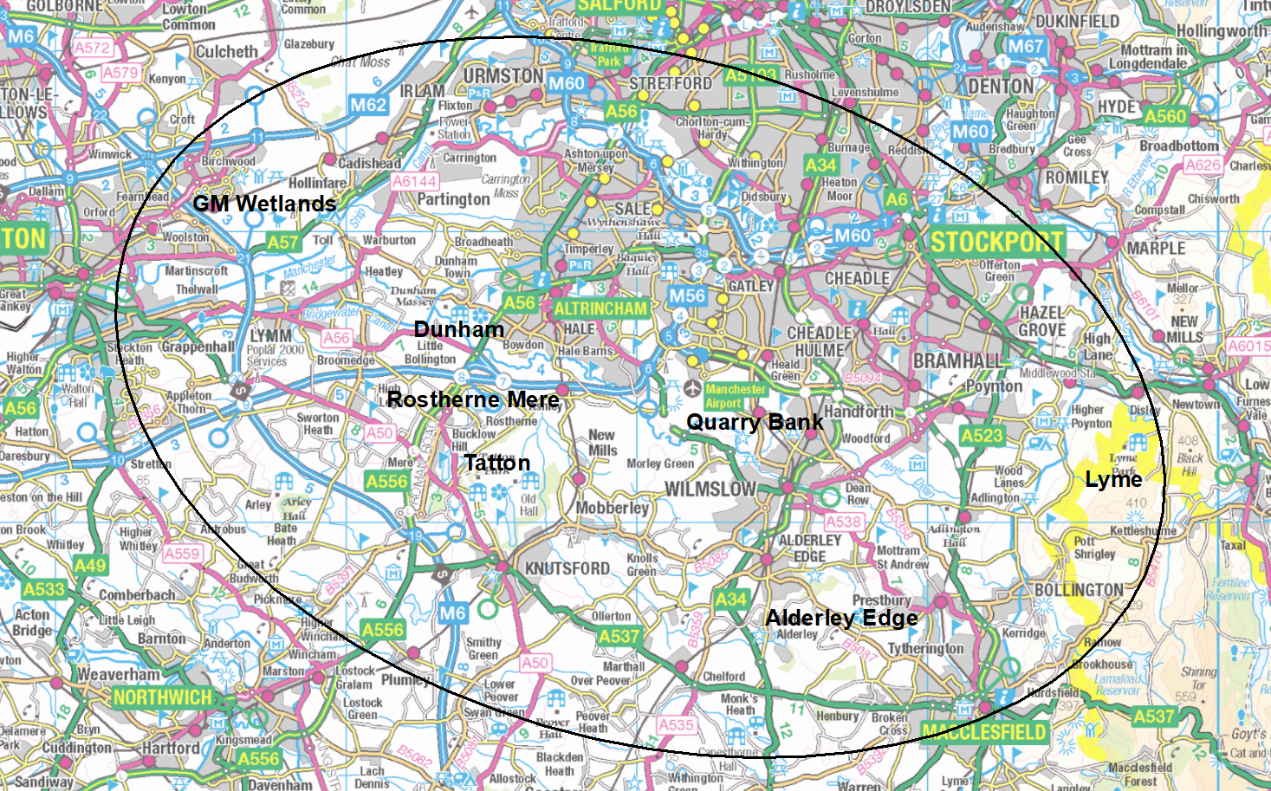
The Act states that this purpose includes:

* promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity
* conserving and enhancing the landscape
* securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
* promoting access to the countryside, open spaces and encouraging open air recreation; and
* contributing in other ways to social and economic wellbeing through management of the natural environment

Background to the Specific Work Area Relevant to this Purchase

Natural England wishes to commission a Landscape Character Assessment for ‘The Lost Wetlands’ to provide an understanding of the variety of landscapes within the specified project area and to record what is special and distinctive. The commission would provide the evidence to create a framework for future project work / wider work in the area in relation to landscape character.

The Lost Wetlands area encompasses a heavily modified urban landscape to the north, with fragmented moss lands and waterbodies, through to the drained peatlands of the south which was once a mosaic of wetland habitats. South Manchester and North Cheshire were once dominated by wetlands and rivers now lost to industrialisation and agricultural intensification, leading to modified rivers systems and drained wetlands. The Study Area Boundary is shown in the image below.



Landscape Character Assessment is the tool used to identify the special character that gives a landscape its sense of place and through this understanding, inform planning and management of future change. It recognises that all landscapes matter, not only designated areas, whether rural or urban. It is supported by Government and published by Natural England.

The following 5 Principles should be adhered to during the production of the Landscape Character Assessment:

1. Landscape is everywhere and all landscape and seascape have character;
2. Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale;
3. The process of Landscape Character Assessment should involve an understanding of how the landscape is perceived and experienced by people;
4. A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications; and
5. A Landscape Character Assessment can provide an integrating spatial framework – a multitude of variables come together to give us our distinctive landscapes.

It is Natural England’s intention through this contract to employ a suitably qualified and experienced consultant to undertake specified steps regarding Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014[[1]](#footnote-1)).

Accessibility

As a public body, any product that is published within the public domain must comply with the accessibility legislation. Please ensure that where the product is to be published, reference is made to the following requirement which can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-accessible-documents>.

Requirement

The aim of the Landscape Character Assessment for the Lost Wetlands project is to provide Natural England with a detailed understanding of the landscape within the study area to identify its key landscape sensitivities. Landscape Character Assessment is not about preserving landscapes as they currently are – it is about identifying the evidence to allow change but ensuring that the change captures the character of the place/s and provides guidance on where interventions could harm any real landscape sensitivities ie. by undermining the existing character of the Landscape where this is integral to its sense of place.

The Landscape Character Assessment should follow the methodology as set out in Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014) – Figure 2 within the guidance document shows the process in graphical format.

The methodology sets out the process of characterisation, starting with describing different types of landscape. Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are generic and may be found in more than one location within the study area. An understanding of the types of landscape which occur can help to plan for their future management. Given the nature and scale of the study area, this level of classification may be relatively simple or may be considered too detailed. The decision of whether to use this part of the classification of the landscape should be determined through the desk-based and field work.

Landscape Character Types (if they are deemed appropriate) are then divided into Landscape Character Areas (LCA’s). Alternatively, the study area could be divided into LCAs, and LCTs avoided altogether. LCAs are unique areas of landscape, which are locally distinctive and would be recognisable to both resident and visitor alike. This process identifies the individual characteristics of each LCA allowing the key features to be identified, and then decisions can be taken about their conservation and enhancement as appropriate through the project initiatives. The study can then be used to look at how an understanding of the different character areas can help shape and direct initiatives of the project.

It is our intention through this contract to employ a suitably qualified and experienced Landscape Consultant to assist in:

* A familiarisation stage including a site visit and gathering background data from the client team;
* A desk study stage where digital data and background documents are reviewed and Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas are defined in draft, as appropriate;
* Confirming the draft boundary for the Landscape Character Assessment based on evidence ascertained during the desk study stage.
* A field study where the draft Landscape Character Types / Landscape Character Areas (as appropriate) are verified in the field; and
* A write-up phase where the written classifications and descriptions for Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas (as appropriate) are set out.

Detailed Specification

All technical terms referred to in this specification are used with the meaning attached to them in Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014).

The Landscape Character Assessments for Lavenham[[2]](#footnote-2), Wirral[[3]](#footnote-3), and Stockport[[4]](#footnote-4) provide an indication of the level of technical detail that will be required in undertaking equivalent work for the Lost Wetlands Landscape Character Assessment project.

Advice will be requested on discrete tasks as and when required, as described in greater detail below.

A good existing knowledge of the area will be advantageous but is not essential.

Step 1 Detailed Method Statement

Prepare a detailed method statement, setting out;

* In broad terms how the assessment will be carried out to fulfil each of the steps set out in this specification and regarding Natural England’s Guidance document with reference to the project timetable in table 1 above. Consideration should be given to time efficiencies that may be possible within the project, including progressing steps in parallel;
* Technologies and approaches that will be applied throughout the project; and
* Existing and potential new evidence sources.

The Method Statement is to be produced and agreed in liaison with Natural England.

Step 2 Desk Study

Collate and review the existing evidence base (in liaison with Natural England). This will provide the context and evidence to inform the development of the Landscape Character Assessment, to enable the identification of draft Landscape Character Areas / Landscape Character Types and the foundation of draft text descriptions. An initial list of the types of evidence that are likely to be relevant is at Appendix D. The consultant may also wish to explore other relevant evidence sources.

The desk study will include:

* Gathering information by identifying and reviewing evidence from the extant evidence sources covering the Study Area Boundary, including Landscape Character Assessments, Local Planning Policy documents, any local designations (landscape, biodiversity, historic environment, and any others) and any other variables (natural and socio-cultural) which combine to form the landscape character of the area, including any references in publicly accessible literature, music and/or the visual arts which include the area;
* An assessment of the existing National Character Assessments (NCA’s) covering the Study Area, in relation to their suitability for forming the basis of the subsequent evaluation. Examine the relevant parts of the Statements of Environmental Opportunity, as well as the Landscape Opportunities for the profile(s) which relate to this area, as the context for the draft Landscape Character Areas / Landscape Character Types.
* Producing a range of relevant background maps of the area showing the range of features which contribute to landscape character. A full list of factors likely to be considered at this stage is included as Table 1 on page 29 of Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014);
* Reviewing these sources to build up the evidence base for the assessment of the landscape, using them to plan the field study;
* Development of draft Landscape Character Areas / Landscape Character Types, by identifying areas with common character. Draft LCT’s could be identified at this stage, and tested in the field study to determine their value and whether or not they are necessary in the final assessment;
* A presentation to Natural England of initial findings, including the findings from the review of the extant evidence base, identifying any gaps and making recommendations for further evidence requirements.
* Reviewing and refining the draft boundary for the Landscape Character Assessment in liaison with Natural England once all the other desk-based work has been completed.

Step 3 Field Study

Using Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014), develop a methodology for planning, undertaking and recording a detailed assessment of the draft character types / areas of the agreed evaluation area.

Using the methodology developed and the information collected in the desk study, undertake a detailed field study. The purpose of the field survey is to collect information systematically and consistently to;

* Describe each identified draft character type/area;
* Identify and capture the cultural, visual, aesthetic and perceptual qualities of each landscape character area (and/or landscape character type). Note, these may not be evident from the Desk study alone and could require additional investigation as part of the field study);
* Assist in the final classification of the study area into character types and areas, refining the boundaries of each where both classifications are being used (and providing the evidence as to whether landscape character types are a useful and necessary part of the study); and
* Assist in the refinement of the draft boundary for the Landscape Character Assessment if necessary.

Information should be recorded on a Field Survey Sheet designed specifically for the purpose this Landscape Character Assessment and should reflect the guidance detailed in 2.3 STEP 3 – Field Study of Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014) and related considerations include written descriptions, checklists, annotated sketches, photographs and annotated maps.

This will seek to review, validate and expand on the results of the initial desk research. It will also identify additional relevant features and flesh out details, such as the presence of non-designated local features of interest eg. visible archaeological features, distinctive wildlife or relevant cultural associations within the area and consider how it has been shaped. The field study should look specifically at its natural influences, cultural evolution and nature conservation value as well as evaluating factors which can only be accurately assessed in the field (such as landscape condition, degree of impact of incongruous features and fragmentation).

Other factors to be considered during the field study are that the survey should:

* Observe how natural and cultural factors, described and mapped in the Desk Study stage, appear and are experienced on the ground;
* Observe how the various factors interact;
* Confirm or modify the Desk Study findings;
* Highlight factors that are more or less important than initially identified and considered in the Desk Study – perhaps resulting in draft boundary for the Landscape Character Assessment adjustment and revised classification; and
* Define and justify boundaries in the field – always consider boundaries ‘on the ground’ and whether they create character units that make sense.

Step 4 Classification and Description of Landscape Character Types and Areas

The output at the conclusion of Step 4 will be the submission to Natural England of a report which sets out a Landscape Character Assessment for the Lost Wetlands study area which contains the final classification and description of Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas (if using), and explains / includes:

* A final boundary for the Landscape Character Assessment;
* Name, description and details of each of the identified Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas (if being used);
* Mapping of the Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas (if being used) to show their locations and the extent of each area (including its boundary); and
* Links to the evidence used.

It is important to classify and describe the landscape and to make the distinction between Landscape Character Types, if being used (which are generic in nature) and Landscape Character Areas (which are unique individual geographical areas in which landscapes occur). The Landscape Character Area descriptions should be written in an accessible narrative style to assist in building understanding and connection to the landscape, whereas the Landscape Character Type descriptions (if being used) can be more technical in nature and aimed at providing detailed information to guide landscape interventions, including project / conservation work or other project aims. The text will include how the landscape character contributes to the sense of place and patterns of local distinctiveness, and this will form part of the description of each of the character areas.

Given the extent of the study area, a scale of 1:10,000 should be used for analysis and mapping. The list of maps required for the report is to be agreed in advance with the Natural England contract manager and all maps are to be produced in GIS.

The report will need to be presented to Natural England in draft for further comment and possible amendment.

Steering Arrangements

A timetable of meetings will be agreed with Natural England which the Consultant will be required to attend. This will include an initial inception meeting with Natural England (via MS Teams) to discuss and agree contractual arrangements and then a second meeting to discuss and agree technical matters with specific reference to Step 2.

A further meeting with Natural England will be held for the Consultant to present the initial findings of Step 2 for discussion and agreement before the field study is undertaken. The number and timing of further meetings is to be proposed by the consultant and agreed with Natural England. Natural England will supply relevant documents and background information and will discuss the latest developments and any relevant issues.

Expertise and Skills Required

The Consultant must provide an overall Project Manager, together with a named senior member of staff to act as lead consultant. For the avoidance of doubt, we are aware that an individual team member may be capable of leading several tasks or providing more than one service.

To cover the range of work required, we are looking for an organisation with multi-disciplinary skills, including a core team consisting of a Landscape Architect, a Landscape Planner and perhaps a Landscape Manager with experience in the field of landscape survey and assessment. Database design and management, GIS and cartography skills are essential. The core team may involve a combination of staff, although we expect all staff to be professionally qualified as they will be responsible for much of the desk and field study and an overview of the process and outputs.

In addition to the necessary technical skills, the following generic skills will be required for all elements of the work:

* Excellent written skills;
* Excellent inter-personal and presentational skills,
* The ability to meet tight deadlines whilst maintaining high quality outputs;
* A flexible approach to meet a varied and fluctuating workload and respond to organisational change;
* An awareness of the nature of Natural England’s work;
* The ability to establish good working relationships with Natural England staff; and
* Experience of working with public sector bodies.

High standards are expected overall, but particularly in the following respects:

* Landscape assessment and evaluation;
* Use of innovative approaches;
* The appropriate use of evidence is critical. The quality of evidence should be examined in every instance. In some cases, it may be necessary to refer to evidence of lower quality, but this should always be made explicit. Professional opinion is a necessary component of this work, but should always be identified as such;
* Evidence and sources of information should be referenced to an academic standard. Where conclusions are presented, the evidence which supports them must be cited; and
* Good use of English is essential. All work should be written in language that is easy to understand by a wide range of audiences while maintaining accuracy.

Information should be verified, and consultants should have a high degree of confidence in any statements made or it should be explicitly stated where there is uncertainty.

Sustainability

The successful consultant is expected to pursue sustainability in their operations, thereby ensuring Natural England is not contracting with a supplier whose operational outputs run contrary to Natural England’s objectives. The successful consultant will need to approach the project with a focus on the entire life cycle of the project. The successful consultant is likely to be able to provide a copy of their environmental policy and any environmental accreditation schemes such as ISO 14001 or EMAS which they have been awarded or are working towards.

* Operational Sustainability - Explain to Natural England what your organisation is doing to incorporate sustainability within its operations. This may include any details you are able to provide in relation to steps you may be taking to reduce your carbon footprint.
* Environmental Management - Detail what you will do to assess the environmental impact of completing this project and provide mitigations. Examples may include operational measures to reduce emissions and noise impacts, efficient energy use, efficient use of raw materials and minimisation of waste where possible.
* Biosecurity - Plant and animal diseases, pests and invasive non- native species (INNS) can be spread between and within sites by visitors. Consultants must take adequate biosecurity precautions to ensure that the risk of spreading disease, pests and INNS is minimised i.e. vehicles, equipment and clothes (particularly boots) must be clean before entering a site, and cleaned again before leaving. Vehicles, equipment and clothes must be free of loose mud and plant debris and, as far as possible, free of water

These basic precautions should be carried out as a matter of routine, but some sites may require additional biosecurity measures (for example disinfection where there is a danger of transferring crayfish plague between waters). The consultant must demonstrate an understanding of biosecurity risks in general, and of the good practice measures that will minimise risks from any specific threats they are informed of.

Please therefore provide details of your policies/procedures regarding transport. Please explain how your organisation goes about minimising the environmental impact of transport in delivery, particularly emphasising any aspects that could be relevant to the delivery of this contract. This could include the transport distances of materials, promoting green travel plans to site for employees, car sharing, use of minibuses, use of cleaner fuels for transport etc.

Outputs and Contract Management

An indicative timescale for the project is below;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Key milestones |  | Date |
| Inception meeting (allow two hours duration) between project manager and the supplier | Meeting |  |
| Draft Method Statement submitted to Natural England | Key Milestone |  |
| Meeting to update on progress on gathering evidence. | Update |  |
| Field study | Key Milestone |  |
| Identifying proposed LCTs and LCAs (as appropriate) | Key Milestone |  |
| Natural England to review and approve draft outputs | Key milestone |  |
| Submission of final report | Key Milestone |  |
| Contract completion. | Key milestone |  |

The following specific outputs will be required:

* Detailed method statement;
* Report of the Landscape Character Assessment
* GIS mapping of all the LCTs/LCAs identified as for use as shape files as defined in 2.4 STEP 4 – Classification and Description of Landscape Character Types and Areas within Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014, specifically point 8 - MAPPING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES and / or AREAS.

All outputs must be in accordance with the ‘Specification’ as set out above and with Natural England’s guidance document (An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014).

All reports and maps submitted under this contract are to be emailed to Natural England as draft documents for review and approval. All reports must have page numbers, paragraph numbers and a date. Failure to include these will render any report unsatisfactory. Any spreadsheet data supplied should be MS Excel compatible. Any graphs, figures or maps should be provided in digital format such as pinpoint, or an ASCII or similar. Any GIS output should be in MapInfo or ESRI format or preferably both.

Relationship Management

The following paragraphs define how the relationship between Natural England and the Consultant will be structured and managed during the term of the Agreement.

The Consultant’s Project Manager responsibilities shall include but not be limited to:

* Liaison with Natural England Contract Manager on all aspects of the Service;
* Monitoring the delivery of the Services to the Service Levels and reporting any Service Failure to Natural England;
* Attending a review meeting(s) with Natural England as agreed which will include the review of service performance and progress, and other liaison meetings as required; and
* Planning and implementing remedial actions when necessary.

The Consultant will advise on and agree with Natural England in writing any change to the Project Team.

The Consultant shall liaise with Natural England on any changes to be made to the Service whilst undertaking authorised Service enhancements.

Amendments to the provisions of the Agreement must be approved by Natural England in accordance with the Change Control Procedure defined in a schedule of the contract.

The Consultant shall provide:

* All necessary hardware and software to meet the needs of the project;
* All testing to ensure the services meet Natural England’s requirements; and
* Accommodation, office equipment as required

Supporting Documentation

Tender submissions should include the following:

* Risk Assessments
* Lone working practices
* Research Methodologies
* Health & safety Policies/certificates
* Environment Policies
* VAT registration number
* Public Liability Insurance
* Professional Indemnity Insurance
* Licenses
* CV’s
* Past Work
* Sustainable Procurement Practices

Travel and Subsistence

(Rates should include travel and subsistence; this information is for guidance).

All Travel and Subsistence should be in line with the Travel and Subsistence Policy. Claims should always be supported by valid receipts for audit purposes and must not exceed any of the stated rates below. Should the stated rated be exceeded, Natural England reserve the right to reimburse only up to the stated rate.

1. [landscape-character-assessment.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691184/landscape-character-assessment.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Lavenham-NP-LCA.pdf (babergh.gov.uk)](https://www.babergh.gov.uk/assets/Neighbourhood-Planning/Lavenham-NP-LCA.pdf) – note this example does not identify Landscape Character Types, but does follow the Approach to Landscape Character Assessment by dividing the study area into Landscape Character Areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Wirral Landscape Character Assessment 2019 | wirral.gov.uk](https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/local-planning-evidence-and-research-report-35) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Stockport Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Sensitivity Study](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/live-iag-static-assets/pdf/LDF/Evidence/Stockport+Landscape+Character+Assessment+2018.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)