

APPENDIX B: NPA DETAILED BASELINE REPORT METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) process is intended as a tool to assist with the iteration of scheme design and enable opportunities to avoid, reduce or mitigate against potential impacts on the landscape and visual context.

1.1.2 The purpose of the baseline assessment is to describe and evaluate the existing landscape and visual context of the study area and to reach judgements regarding the sensitivity of the receiving landscape

1.1.3 Key references, specifically relevant to highways projects, which have informed the methodology for landscape and visual baseline report include:

- Highways Agency (HA), Interim Advice Note 'Landscape and visual effects assessment' (IAN 135/10), November 2010. This replaces DMRB Volume 11 Section 2, Part 5 'Landscape Effects', in England;
- Highways Agency (HA), Interim Advice Note 125/15 'Environmental Assessment update';
- Department for Transport, Traffic Analysis Guidance (TAG) Unit A3 'Environmental Impact Appraisal', November 2014. Sections 1- Environmental Impact Appraisal, Section 5 – Environmental Capital Approach, 6 - Impacts on the Landscape and 7 –Impacts on Townscape;
- Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Volumes 5 (Section1), Volume 10 (Section 0) and Volume 11 (Sections 1, 2 and 3).

1.1.4 The approach adopted has also been adapted to follow more recent guidance set out in:

- 'Guidance for Landscape and Visual Assessment¹' (LI and IEMA 2013 3rd Ed.).
- 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' 2014², produced by Natural England.
- The selection of viewpoints and the taking of photographs for inclusion in the assessment and for the photomontage images will be undertaken with consideration of the Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/11 - Use of Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Assessment³.

¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. 3rd ed. Abingdon: Routledge

² An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014) Christine Tudor, Natural England

³ Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/11 – Use of Photography and Photomontage In Landscape Assessment, March 2011

- I.1.5 In particular, we have refined the IAN methodology to more closely reflect current thinking with specific updates to the approach including:
- Consideration of susceptibility and value in reaching judgements about sensitivity;
 - Preparing field character assessment forms as a record of the work used to inform the identification of Local Landscape Character Areas;
 - Consideration of the future baseline without improvement the scheme;
 - The identification and consideration of visual receptor groups, including static and sequential effects;
 - In addition, consideration will be given to cumulative impacts in the subsequent impact assessment.
- I.1.6 The approach therefore includes refinements to accommodate more recent good practice whilst maintaining the general highways major road scheme approach to ensure compatibility with other highway projects.
- I.1.7 The documents referenced above are not intended as a prescriptive set of rules or an exhaustive manual of techniques, but are accepted as establishing certain principles that help to achieve consistency, credibility and effectiveness in the landscape and visual impact assessment process.
- I.1.8 Landscape character is defined by Article I of the European Landscape Convention⁴, as “...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interpretation of natural and/or human factors” (2000). Landscape character therefore draws upon the distinct and recognisable patterns of elements in the landscape that give a locality its sense of place, and which makes it different from its neighbouring areas. Taken together these patterns of elements form a collective ‘landscape character area’ which can be used to define the locality. An evaluation of these character areas is made in the LVIA to identify the qualities, values and sensitivities, which could potentially be affected by the proposed development.
- I.1.9 Separately, visual considerations relate specifically to the views of a landscape afforded by people, in the context of the sensitivity of those views – influenced by a number of factors which may include location of the view, the susceptibility of the viewer to accommodate change, the extent of view, the existing duration of the view (is it static, transient, permanent or temporary and/or the popularity of the viewpoint location. Sensitivity also takes into account any values attached to views, such as might relate to cultural references.

⁴ Council of Europe 2000, *European Landscape Convention*.

I.1.10 The LVIA Baseline report summarises the findings of the first stage of the assessment process, leading to:

- **A baseline description** and evaluation of receptors: landscape and visual; and
- **Judgements** regarding the relative sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors.

I.2 Study Area and Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

I.2.1 The extent of the study area has been determined by establishing the anticipated visual envelope of the existing A30/A303 and consideration of the likely extent of potential road improvement route options. The ZTV is defined as the area in which the site and proposed scheme are potentially visible. To determine this field of visibility a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is calculated initially using specialist computer software. The ZTV was prepared in this instance using a 'digital terrain model' generated from a 'bare ground' model of topography (+/- 10m elevation) which did not take account of built form and vegetation. This initial extent of visibility was then checked and verified through site survey and consideration of visual barriers and the effects of distance, in order to develop a refined ZTV/ZVI and study area.

I.3 Landscape Planning Policy Context

I.3.1 Desk studies are undertaken to identify relevant landscape planning policies which may affect the proposed development site; these include formal designations, National Highways policy and local planning policy which are intended to protect landscape and visual aspects.

I.4 Baseline Conditions and Receptors

I.4.1 Desk studies are undertaken to review international, national or local landscape designations and existing landscape character assessments at a national and local administration level. Following verification by a site visit, and supported with Bespoke **Field Record Sheets** (See **Appendix 3**) identified local landscape character areas are described including reference to landscape pattern, land cover, cultural landscape matters, human interaction, tranquillity, specific landscape features, elements and the presence or absence of Blackdown Hills AONB special qualities. In addition to the designated AONB landscape, each local landscape character area is considered as a landscape receptor which may theoretically be

affected by proposed route options. At the next stage, if no effects can reasonably be anticipated, these receptors will be subsequently scoped out from further assessment.

I.4.2 Visual receptor groups are identified in the first instance by a review of the ZTV to determine groups of people who may experience common views within the study area, including the proposed development. Whilst it is acknowledged that every person will have an individual relationship with views towards the site, the assessment combines visual receptors into groups that may reasonably be expected to share common experiences with the landscape in order to form a manageable process of assessment. These typical groups are categorised as follows:

- Recreational users of public rights of way or accessible landscapes. E.g. Walkers, horse riders;
- Residents and visitors of/ to settlements;
- Road users;
- Visitors to specific viewpoints of recognised value;
- Visitors to tourist attractions of heritage assets valued for their visual setting.

I.4.3 Within an individual visual receptor group, people may experience a range of varying views towards the existing or proposed road. Where relevant therefore, groups have been further sub-divided so that the assessment relates to commonly-shared visual experiences, either through geographic or topographic consistency.

Specific viewpoints and representative viewpoints from publically accessible land have been selected for key visual receptor groups and their locations put forward for agreement with stakeholders, including the Local Planning Authority. For each viewpoint a description of the existing view and the context of the existing A30/A303 within the view, is provided.

I.5 Identification of visual receptor groups and selection of representative and specific Viewpoints

I.5.1 The ZTV has been appraised through desk study and field survey, and different receptor groups identified. A proportionate number of viewpoints has been selected from within the ZTV/identified study area, and verified during site visits, to illustrate the range of views afforded towards the existing A30/A303 and potential locations for road improvement options by different visual receptor groups. It is acknowledged however that visual receptor

groups are likely to experience a varying degree of exposure to views (duration and extent) and that a view from one location may be very different from another in close proximity. Such viewpoints, where selected, are intended to provide an illustration of a typical view. By contrast, specific viewpoints, such as panoramic vantage points or vistas of recognised value have been selected where relevant and considered as a specific visual receptor.

I.6 Criteria for determining landscape and visual sensitivity

Landscape Sensitivity

- I.6.1 Landscape sensitivity is determined by consideration of both the **susceptibility** to change and the **value** placed on the landscape resource, as follows.
- I.6.2 **Value** of a landscape receptor depends on a variety of considerations including international, national or local designation, its contribution to a community or its cultural significance e.g. landscapes reflected through literature, poetry, art etc.
- I.6.3 In this instance due regard has been given to consideration of the presence of the special qualities that underpin the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation in evaluating local landscape character areas and this part of the AONB, as a whole. These are set out below and their presence or absence has been considered in the evaluation process and these findings have been separately recorded on field survey forms and reported in the main text.
- I.6.4 The special qualities and distinctive characteristics of the Blackdown Hills are summarised in the AONB Management Plan:
- Landscape quality
 - Scenic Quality
 - Relative wildness
 - Relative tranquillity
 - Natural heritage features
- I.6.5 The following special qualities require protection, conservation and enhancement if the AONB is to retain its character and status among England's finest landscapes:

Natural Beauty	Special qualities (including distinctive characteristics and key features)
Landscape quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A managed landscape sculpted and maintained by the stewardship of generations of those who work the land • Undeveloped skyline of the northern scarp slope is a prominent feature in views from the Vale of Taunton and beyond • Rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected semi-natural habitats; a patchwork of woodland, heathland, meadow and mire linked by hedgerows • Clear, unpolluted streams that meander down the valleys to feed the Yarty, Otter, Culm rivers • Ancient and veteran trees in hedgerows, fields and woodland • A settled landscape with a strong sense of time-depth containing farms and small scattered villages well related to the landscape
Scenic quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The elevation and long, panoramic views out from the Blackdown Hills create a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and transport corridors • Unspoilt, panoramic views across flat-topped plateau and straight undisturbed ridge tops and over hidden valleys • A well-wooded pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of hedges and hedgerow trees • Pattern of regular, large-scale enclosure fields on the plateau contrasts with the smaller, curving medieval fields on the valley slopes • Majestic avenues of beech trees along northern ridges • Long straight roads across the plateau with verges and low, neat hedges give way to narrow, enclosed, high-hedged winding lanes in the valleys • Wellington Monument is a key landscape feature identifying the Blackdown Hills over a very wide area in all directions
Relative wildness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of remoteness enhanced by the exposure of the plateau and more intimate extensive woodland of the upper slopes and hidden valleys • Wide open spaces provide exposure to the elements; big sky, windswept places, contrasts of sunlight and shadow
Relative tranquillity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of high tranquillity spared many of the intrusions of modern life • Places to enjoy natural sounds; the melody of the song thrush and skylark, the call of buzzards • Dark night-time star-filled skies contrasting with the light pollution of the surrounding towns
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the finest, most extensive Greensand plateau in Britain; a distinctive landform that contrasts with the surrounding lowlands to the east, north and west • The presence of straight, uninterrupted ridges are evident as a visual backdrop over a wide area • Distinctive springline mires located around the upper slopes of the valleys • The varied landscape supports a rich assemblage of wildlife including many species of bats, butterflies and meadow flowers • Ancient, species-rich hedges with many hedgerow trees and flower-rich banks; colourful displays of primrose and bluebells in spring • A network of ancient semi-natural woodland linked by hedgerows support the dormouse population
Cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well preserved buildings in the local vernacular – chert, cob and thatch – are an important element of the landscape • Hillforts are prominent features on the ends of the plateau ridges • Mining remains from the once internationally significant whetstone industry • Three World War Two airfields and their associated buildings are found on the high, flat land of the plateau • A community with a strong sense of place closely linked to the land and its management, with a particularly strong tradition of hedge laying • A landscape that has inspired artists from the early 20th century Camden Town Group to the Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers of today

(extract from Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 – 2019).

1.6.6 **Susceptibility** of landscape receptors is defined as “the ability of the landscape receptor... to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation”⁵ (LI and IEMA 2013: 88-9).

1.6.7 The level of **sensitivity** of the landscape receptor is determined through professional judgement in balancing together the value described and the susceptibility to change. Sensitivity is recorded on a verbal scale of High, Medium and Low

1.6.8 Set criteria are not necessarily provided for the determination of overall levels of sensitivity since GLVIA3 (para 5.46, p90) recognises that:

⁵ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*. 3rd ed. Abingdon: Routledge

“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 internationally, nationally or locally important landscape to have relatively low susceptibility to change resulting from a 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.

1.6.9 In this case, adapted IAN 135/10 criteria have been used for describing the overall sensitivity of the landscape receptors and these are as follows:

Table LC.1 –The sensitivity of the landscape

Sensitivity	Typical Descriptors and Examples
High	<p>Local Landscape Character Areas within the Blackdown Hills AONB landscape which by nature of their character would mostly be unable to accommodate change of the type proposed. Typically these would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of high quality with distinctive landscape elements and features making a positive contribution to character and sense of place. • Nationally designated with identified AONB special landscape qualities that underpin such value, present throughout. • Containing areas of recognised special value through use, perception or historic and cultural associations. • Likely to contain many features and elements that cannot be avoided and are rare and could not be replaced and including tranquil areas/dark skies with no or very few intrusive influences.
Medium	<p>Local Landscape Character Areas within or alongside the Blackdown Hills AONB landscape which by nature of their character would be able to partly accommodate change of the type proposed. Typically these would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprised of commonplace elements and features creating generally unremarkable character but with some sense of place.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationally designated with identified AONB special landscape qualities that underpin such value, present intermittently. • Containing some features of value through use, perception or historic and cultural associations. • Likely to contain some features and elements that could not be avoided nor replaced and including areas of moderate tranquillity and with limited existing intrusive influences.
Low	<p>Local Landscape Character Areas within or alongside the Blackdown Hills AONB landscape which by nature of their character would be able to accommodate change of the type proposed. Typically these would be;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprised of some features and elements that are discordant, derelict or in decline, resulting in indistinct character with little or no sense of place. • Nationally designated, but with few identified special landscape qualities that underpin such value, present or only very localised. • Containing few, if any, features of value through use, perception or historic and cultural associations. • Likely to contain few, if any, features and elements that could not be replaced and where tranquillity is low and there are some notable intrusive influences.

Visual Sensitivity

1.6.10 As with Landscape sensitivity, visual sensitivity is determined by consideration of both the **susceptibility** to change and the **value** placed on the view or visual resource.

1.6.11 The **Value** of a view experienced by a receptor group, or its visual amenity depends on a variety of considerations including international, national or local designation/recognition, its contribution to the visual amenity of a community or its cultural significance e.g. views recognised through the arts etc.

1.6.12 The **Susceptibility** of visual receptors is considered to be a “*function of 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*”⁶ (LI and IEMA 2013: 113).

⁶ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*. 3rd ed. Abingdon: Routledge

- I.6.13 Value and Susceptibility are considered together to provide a reasoned judgement on the overall level of **sensitivity** of the visual context and views from the visual receptor group. This is set out on a verbal scale of High, Medium, Low and Negligible. Higher sensitivity is more likely to occur with increasing value and/or susceptibility to change. Lower sensitivity is more likely to occur with reduced value and/or susceptibility to change.
- I.6.14 The adapted IAN 135/10 criteria used for describing the overall sensitivity of the visual receptor groups in this instance are as follows

Table V.1 –The sensitivity of visual receptor groups

Sensitivity	Typical Descriptors and Examples
High	Likely to be views gained by residents, communities, users of public rights of Way or visitors to recreational facilities (including National Trust or other access land) or to heritage assets at valued viewpoints within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, who are focussed on the landscape and enjoyment of the countryside.
Medium	Likely to be views gained by outdoor workers, users of scenic roads, laybys, railways or designated tourist routes within a moderate quality area of landscape within or outside an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with some existing landscape elements of quality.
Low	Likely to be views gained by people engaged in outdoor sport or from indoors, at their place of work within a moderate quality landscape with some existing landscape elements of quality, where the activity and purpose is not related to the view. Or views experienced by travellers on other main roads or on public transport within a moderate quality landscape, inside or outside the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with some landscape elements of lower quality.