

REPORT TITLE: UPDATE OF WCC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

08 DECEMBER 2021

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Russell Gordon-Smith for Built Environment

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WARD(S)/PARISH(ES): ALL

PURPOSE:

This report seeks Cabinet approval to commence the public consultation stage of the adoption of a Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (LCA SPD), which is a core landscape evidence base for planning and the existing and emerging Local Plan. This LCA SPD supports the Council Plan vision for a climate resilient district and the aim that *the natural and built environment is protected, maintained, sustained and enhanced*.

Landscape consultants The Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd, who have considerable experience in the area of undertaking Landscape Character Assessments, were commissioned to lead on the development of an LCA SPD for the Council covering the whole district except for the area that lies within the SDNP.

It is imperative that future development and changes in the landscape are managed coherently and without detriment on both the built and rural landscape. To this end the draft document will offer guidance to inform the policies in the adopted Local Plan which are currently used to determine planning applications and, in particular, policies CP7, CP15 and CP18-20 which deal with aspects of landscape character.

Following the adoption of the emerging Local Plan in 2024 a further refresh may be required to ensure the LCA SPD ties in with the Local Plan policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the proposed Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document, as set out within Appendix A.
2. Agree to the commencement of a six-week public consultation from 10th January 2022 to 21st February 2022 on the proposed Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document
3. Note that following the consultation a revised and final Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document is brought back to the March 2022 Cabinet meeting for adoption.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

1.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District

The adoption of a Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document seeks to clearly set out the council's requirements regarding the protection of our heritage and natural environment by safeguarding our district's extensive natural habitats and precious ecosystems through a comprehensive assessment of the character of the district outside of the South Downs National Park.

1.2 Living Well

In adopting a LCA SPD, the City Council will be setting out clear information including key issues relating to the numerous character areas within the district and how development would impact both the immediate and wider landscape. This is of valuable use to both developers seeking to build within Winchester District and council officers assessing the impact of proposed development.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The drafting of the proposed LCA SPD has already been funded through the Local Plan budget using both internal and external expertise. The recommended six-week public consultation will be undertaken in the same manner which will require the use of previously identified budget from the Local Plan to ensure that, following the consultation, comments are reflected in the document.

- 2.2 Subject to the findings of this consultation, and where comments are received which need to be addressed in a revised document, the LCA SPD will then be adopted. There will be no further additional financial burdens arising from its publication.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The adoption of the LCA SPD is intended to support the delivery of the Council's role of local planning authority and ensure its Local Plans (adopted and emerging) are current and relevant. Landscape Consultants, Terra Firma Consultancy, who have updated the LCA will be retained to undertake any further amendments following SPD consultation in order to ensure the LCA is taken through to publication by the same consultants
- 3.2 There are no procurement implications as a result of this report.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The public consultation exercise will be delivered from existing resources including the Strategic Planning Service and the Natural Environment and Recreation Team alongside the already commissioned landscape consultancy – The Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd. This will be funded from the Local Plan budget.
- 4.2 Should this LCA SPD be adopted, subject to any amendments post consultation, it will become a material consideration when planning applications are decided. Although landscape impact is already assessed as part of development applications, this LCA SPD provides a framework that captures development at all levels in the district of Winchester and, dependant on the scale of proposals assist developers in conducting a detailed assessment from which bespoke mitigations can be offered. This will assist officers in determining planning decisions.
- 4.3 This LCA SPD will only assist not add to the workload of officers.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This LCA SPD will affect all new developments, including those undertaken by the City Council. However, it is expected that the council would, as a responsible developer, want to mitigate its own impacts on the landscape in line with the Council Plan.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 The need for the LCA SPD already exists. The current LCA (published 2004) was adopted as a SPD and this updated document should have the same status so it carries the same weight when planning applications are decided.

- 6.2 The draft LCA SPD was delivered by The Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd based upon its experience of delivering similar documents in other local authority areas.
- 6.3 The draft as proposed in Appendix A is the final iteration after various meetings between The Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd, the Natural Environment and Recreation Team, Parish and Ward Councillors (11.8.21) Strategic Planning, Development Management and Cabinet members (21.9.21) which has helped refine the document to now be consulted on.
- 6.4 The report recommends that the proposed LCA SPD be subject to public consultation, comments considered by officers, amendments made as required, and the final version drawn up before returning to Cabinet for adoption. The consultation will be advertised on the WCC website with engagement on Citizen Space. Direct contact will also be made to those on the Local Plan database, Parish councils and the Town Forum. WCC comms will also be informed.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 This LCA SPD is a vital component in ensuring that the cumulative impact of development on the landscape is fully considered now and in the future. It provides developers with detailed information on the character of the landscape in and around their site, key issues to be mindful of and landscape features that must be considered and protected to ensure the landscape character is not adversely impacted significantly. It is an important document therefore in the determination of development proposals by the council.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

- 8.1 The City Council and specifically the Strategic Planning Service is familiar with conducting public consultations in such a way so that it does not lead to unlawful discrimination, whether directly or indirectly and in a manner which encourages equality of opportunity to consult by the relevant stakeholders and the public.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 Any comments that are submitted will be considered but must include people's name and contact details. The council will publish names and associated representations on its website, but it will not publish personal information such as telephone numbers, addresses or email addresses.
- 9.2 In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) information will only be kept for the necessary period of time required. The Council has an updated privacy policy which can be viewed on the website.

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Financial Exposure <i>The delivery of the consultation will be from existing staff resources.</i>		
Exposure to challenge <i>That the findings of the LCA SPD consultation will be subject to legal challenge.</i>	Natural Environment and Recreation Team will work with Strategic Planning and Legal Teams to ensure that the consultation process is legally compliant and robust.	
Innovation N/A	N/A	N/A
Reputation <i>That failure to adopt a new LCA SPD could lead to the importance of landscape matters in the decision making process for development proposals reducing over time</i>	The Winchester district remains an attractive place to live and work and this will be supported by the LCA SPD in maintaining high environmental standards for the future. It also takes a proportionate approach determined by the scale of development proposed.	In adopting an LCA SPD Winchester will be one of the few authorities that has ensured its updated LCA is re-adopted
Achievement of outcome N/A	N/A	N/A
Property N/A	N/A	N/A
Community Support <i>That the development sector does not support the adoption of the LCA SPD.</i>	The public consultation process will allow officers to understand and consider the various stakeholder interests and responses and these can be addressed as appropriate in the final	To work with stakeholders to assist in the delivery of a workable LCA SPD which still delivers an assessment of the district's landscape character following the methodology guidelines

	document. These will need to be considered before any final decision is made regarding adoption of the LCA SPD.	published by Natural England in 2014
Timescales N/A	N/A	N/A
Project capacity <i>That staff capacity is insufficient to deliver the consultation and final document for adoption in a timely fashion.</i>	Sufficient resources to be provided by Strategic Planning, Natural Environment and Recreation and the commissioned landscape consultancy	
Other N/A	N/A	N/A

11 **MEETINGS**

- 11.1 The LCA was discussed at the 24.11.21 Local Plan Advisory Group (LPAG) meeting. The following outcomes were agreed:

A full copy of the LCA to be sent electronically to members of LPAG

All parishes and Town Forum to be notified following acceptance at Cabinet that a consultation period would be starting on 10th January 2022.

- 11.2 It was confirmed to LPAG that the update of the LCA was not just a desktop exercise. Terra Firma Consultancy undertook numerous site visits. This is stated within the LCA (page 6).

12 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Background

- 12.1 The City of Winchester currently has an adopted Landscape Character Assessment (2004) which is used frequently in providing detailed landscape responses to planning applications and in supporting the local plan with landscape sensitivity assessments of the allocated sites (SHELAA). Although still a sound document it now needs to reflect changes in the landscape as a result of the implementation of the Major Development Areas and the creation of the South Downs National Park.
- 12.2 The proposed draft as set out in Appendix A, is the culmination of Terra Firma's work supported by The Natural Environment and Recreation Team, Development Management, Strategic Planning and relevant Cabinet

members in an effort to ensure that the LCA SPD will provide sound landscape character evidence to support both the existing and emerging Local Plan and development management in their assessment of planning applications, appeals and enforcement cases.

Details of Proposal

- 12.3 A Landscape Character Assessment is a document which is used to inform policy development, as well as decision making, including local, neighbourhood, community or parish plans, and place-making documents. It contains information and guidance on green infrastructure plans and strategies, waterways strategies, design briefs, project design and master planning, landscape impact and visual impact assessments (often as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment). It can assist with sensitivity and capacity studies, too and landscape designations including National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 12.4 The LCA is in need of updating as the current version, although still a sound and well used document, does not take into account changes in the district's landscape which have occurred over the last 17 years that affects character such as the Major Development Areas (MDAs), renewable energy developments (e.g., solar farms and the creation of the SDNP. These must be reflected in the updated LCA and where necessary character areas amended.
- 12.5 The proposed LCA SPD will provide supporting evidence and documentation for both the new Local Plan and for use in providing planning responses and determination of development proposals being considered under the existing plan.
- 12.6 The proposed LCA SPD supplements Local Plan policies CP7, CP15 and CP18-20 and is intended to provide developers and planners with an understanding of the landscape character areas and types within the district in order that landscape impacts can be comprehensively assessed and mitigated for if necessary. It adopts a practical and proportionate approach, which doesn't present unnecessary burdens that may delay the planning application decision making process. Indeed, it should help to facilitate timely decision making
- 12.7 It is designed to be a document which is easily understandable for both developers and planning officers and which complements the current planning process and Local Plan policies that deal with landscape character. The LCA SPD will potentially need to be updated when the new Local Plan is adopted
- 12.8 The methodology being used to update the Landscape Character Assessment is the October 2014 methodology developed by Natural England – [An approach to Landscape Character Assessment so is consistent with national guidance.](#)

12.9 All developments within the district must review and assess the LCA SPD as part of their submissions.

12.10 Where a development is found to have a significant effect on the landscape character then it will only be permitted if suitable and sufficient mitigation is provided as part of the development proposal.

Next steps

12.11 A six-week public consultation on the LCA SPD will take place following approval from Cabinet. Any comments that are received as part of the public consultation (10th January 2022 to 21st February 2022) will be considered and the draft LCA SPD amended accordingly. Cabinet will be asked to consider the final version of the LCA SPD for adoption as a supplementary planning document at its March meeting.

Conclusion

12.12 It is considered that the LCA SPD builds on the policies in the adopted Local Plan and provides a robust approach intended to mitigate pressures on changes to the landscape character arising from future developments and will also help to support the development of policies in the new plan.

13 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

13.1 The option of updating the existing Landscape Character Assessment but not affording it the additional planning weight that a SPD would provide was an option considered. This was rejected as LCAs are vital in informing planning decisions and more weight can be given to a new document which has been through the SPD process before being formally adopted by the council.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

The following provides a short glossary of acronyms used in this report:

LCA SPD	Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document. The planning document being proposed for public consultation.
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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

- [Current Landscape Character Assessment \(2004\)](#)

Other Background Documents:

- None

APPENDICES:

- Appendix A Proposed Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (2021)