



## 1.1 Appointment and Brief

In February 2002 the Countryside Agency, in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council and Forest of Dean District Council, appointed Landscape Design Associates (LDA) to carry out a desk based landscape character assessment of the county of Gloucestershire and a full landscape character assessment of the Forest of Dean District.

The overall study consists of three separate reports, comprising the County Scoping Study, the Forest of Dean District Landscape Character Assessment and the Forest of Dean District Landscape Strategy.

This report represents the first full landscape character assessment of the district within the framework provided by the Gloucestershire County Landscape Typology and employs the most up-to-date methodologies for landscape character assessment.

## 1.2 The Scope and Context of the Study

The study area is shown on Figure 1. It includes the entire administrative district of the Forest of Dean. A separate townscape assessment has not been undertaken as part of this project, and the built up areas of the district are therefore, regarded as an integral part of the landscapes they occupy.

A future programme of townscape assessment would allow for further analysis of the distinctive character of the district's urban areas and major towns, and their capacity to accommodate change. This programme of work could supplement work already completed within the district as part of the Gloucestershire County Council Market Towns initiative.

The Forest of Dean District Landscape Character Assessment uses as a framework the emerging county landscape typology (Figure 2), which itself used, as a starting point, the Countryside Agency's Character Map of England, and the emerging National Landscape Typology for England. Wherever possible reference has also been made to earlier landscape character assessments carried out within the district, and in neighbouring county and district authorities and study areas.

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The assessment includes a description of the physical (geology, landform, drainage and soils), natural (trees, woodland and land cover) and cultural (archaeology, history, land use, enclosure patterns, settlement patterns and building styles) attributes of the landscape. Past and present perceptions of the area, including those of national and local artists, musicians and writers have also been explored to investigate the more subjective dimension of landscape character.

### **1.3 Parallel Projects and Surveys**

The Forest of Dean is currently the focus of a Countryside Agency national pilot Integrated Rural Development Project (IRD) project that aims to ensure effective protection and enhancement of the district's landscape and heritage, whilst promoting and supporting sustainable regeneration. The IRD project is being informed by a number of important studies and The Forest of Dean District Landscape Character Assessment has benefited from a number of these.

These projects are ongoing and the full results are, as yet, unavailable. Representatives of the various projects have, however, made an important contribution, through a series of formal and informal consultations, and further informed the appreciation of how the district's landscape is perceived, and key elements of its biodiversity and heritage. The various projects are introduced below. Details of these projects are also contained in Appendices 2 to 4.

#### *By Definition*

The By Definition Project is an important parallel study which aims to contribute the views of stakeholders and community groups across the Forest of Dean District, to a study whose working title is 'The Forest of Dean Landscape and Heritage Study'.

The By Definition team are employing a range of techniques to canvass stakeholder opinions in response to the central question 'What makes the Forest of Dean Special?' These techniques include:

- A photography project across all parishes
- A public survey through the use of a standard questionnaire

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- A range of arts based projects
  - A video survey in local schools

The project has provided a range of inputs into the landscape character assessment. At a technical level, the By Definition team have provided background information, photographs for inclusion within this report and advice on a number of specific issues where a high degree of local knowledge has been required.

In addition, the conclusions of the project, particularly the views and opinions expressed by the public in respect of landscape, have been incorporated into the relevant sections of the report, notably within Section 3.0, which discusses cultural perceptions of landscape.

Details of this project can be found in Appendix 2.

#### *Forest of Dean Biodiversity Project*

The Forest of Dean District Landscape Character Assessment has been informed by the Biodiversity Survey of the Forest of Dean. This survey is being carried out by the Gloucestershire County Wildlife Trust in partnership with English Nature, and on behalf of, the Countryside Agency. The Biodiversity project supports the wider Integrated Rural Development Project and will provide data necessary to securing the effective protection and enhancement of the district's natural heritage.

The project is at a relatively early stage and currently focused upon the retrieval of data and its incorporation into a series of GIS layers, details of which are provided in Appendix 3. At this stage, all available and relevant information has been fed into the characterisation process and used to inform both the area boundaries, and the supporting descriptions.

#### *Forest of Dean Archaeological Survey*

Although independent organisations such as the Dean Archaeological Group have previously undertaken a considerable amount of work in the district, there has been little large-scale systematic investigation of the district's archaeological potential. To address this, The Forest of Dean Archaeological Survey commenced in January 2002.

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This is a major long-term project funded by English Heritage, the Countryside Agency, the Forestry Commission and the County Council. The results of the survey will not be available for several years and therefore it has not been possible to incorporate the findings of the study into this assessment at this stage.

However, consultation with the project team has yielded a great deal of information about the evolution of the district's landscapes and Section 2.0 of this report has been agreed as an accurate summary of the historical evolution of the Forest of Dean. Further details of the survey can be found in Appendix 4.

#### *Other Studies*

Two further assessments have made a significant contribution to the landscape character assessment. The CEH Land Cover Map 2000 illustrates the distribution of particular habitats and land use types across the district, and the Gloucestershire Historic Landscape Character Assessment reveals how the present landscape is a palimpsest of landscapes which are a consequence of a number of historic processes. The findings of these independent studies were made available at an early stage of assessment and were invaluable in the mapping of landscape character types and landscape character areas.

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## 1.4 Purpose of the District Landscape Character Assessment

This landscape assessment adopts an holistic approach and considers the Forest of Dean as a mosaic of different landscape types and character areas, each with particular characteristics and subject to particular forces for change. The overall aim of this assessment is to provide a detailed understanding of the district's landscapes, the forces that have shaped them in the past and those that continue to shape them. This understanding will inform a series of strategies to help direct future management of the landscape.

The landscape character assessment has four main objectives:

- to provide an assessment of the cultural and natural heritage resources which have shaped the landscapes of the Forest of Dean;
- to identify and describe the district's component landscape character types and landscape character areas; and
- to summarise the key characteristics associated with each landscape type to provide the principles to guide landscape change.

The assessment also fulfils a wider remit by:

- helping to test and demonstrate the Countryside Agency's new landscape character assessment guidance;
- providing a basis on which to advise Gloucestershire County Council about the resource implications for extending the Forest of Dean District Character Assessment methodology across the rest of the county; and
- helping to promote awareness of landscape character in the district and the importance of landscape conservation and enhancement.

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## 1.5 Approach and Methodology

The study has been completed in accordance with the most up-to-date methods of landscape character assessment . The main tasks were:

- familiarisation with the study area through information gathering, GIS interrogation, overlay mapping and compilation of field survey forms (a list of the core data sets used is attached as Appendix 1);
- background research into the physical and cultural attributes of the landscape and ongoing forces for change and development pressures;
- site survey including completion of field survey forms for landscape character types and landscape character areas, mapping of landscape character types and landscape character areas and preparation of a photographic record;
- consultation with stakeholders to assist the team in understanding local perceptions of landscape character;
- incorporation of the results of all relevant existing and parallel studies from the Forest of Dean; and
- report and digital map preparation.

Characterisation is the practical process by which areas of distinctive character are classified, mapped and described. In this assessment landscape character types and landscape character areas have been identified. Landscape character types are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, landform, drainage patterns, vegetation, and historical land use and settlement pattern. By comparison landscape character areas are single, unique areas and are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type.

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For example, the Unwooded Vale landscape character type is characterised by gently rolling, intimate agricultural landscapes on extensive drift deposits. Within this type, areas of distinct character may be identified such as The Leadon Vale and Severn Vale. Whilst these are unique and geographically discrete, they share characteristics of the broader type to which they belong.

An important feature of the assessment is that it is objective; no judgment of a particular landscape's value or quality is made. However, particular attention is given to identifying characteristics that are distinctive, rare or special.

## **1.6 Structure of the Report**

Further to detailed analysis of the district's geology, landform and the evolution of patterns of land cover, land use and settlement, this report presents up to date findings on landscape character, diversity, and key characteristics. It will provide an invaluable source of information for all those with an interest in the Forest of Dean landscape and those responsible for land management and planning in the district.

The landscape patterns evident today have evolved gradually over thousands of years both through natural and human forces. Section 2 describes the principal influences that have shaped the landscape in the district in recognition of this. Important geological, cultural, historic and natural features are recorded and their distribution across the district is described.

Section 3 introduces some of the principal associations the district has with poets, writers, artists and musicians identifying those whose work has been significantly influenced by the district's landscapes.

Section 4 presents a review of landscape character across the district, and a classification of landscape character types and landscape character areas. Particular attention is given to characteristics that are distinctive, rare or special although an important feature of the approach adopted is the recognition that all landscapes matter and not just those which are designated or are regarded as being of higher quality than others. Written descriptions avoid value-laden terminology such as beautiful, bland, attractive and degraded. In this way, the descriptions can help to raise awareness of an area's

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distinctiveness and encourage appreciation of variations in character across the district.

For each landscape character type a descriptions of key characteristics, physical and human influences, and buildings and settlements have been prepared. It is important to acknowledge that it is only through a detailed understanding of landscape character, and characteristics such as landscape scale, public perceptions, geology, habitats, field and settlement patterns, historic land use patterns and vernacular building styles, that guidance on how the landscape may be able to accommodate future change can be prepared.

The report concludes with a glossary of key terms, and a list of core references. The acknowledgements section identifies members of the steering group, and stakeholders and individuals who made a valuable contribution to the study.