

20 Landscape

20.1 Introduction

20.1.1 Landscape is formed by many factors, including the underlying soils, climate, habitats and human influence, both past and present. Planning policy provides an important framework within which to protect and manage change within landscape.

20.1.2 The rural landscape is of great significance to the character of East Herts. The district has a rich undulating landscape of open fields and parklands shaped by river valleys and arable plateaus. Woodland accounts for 9% of total land cover, half of which is classified as being ancient. Hedgerows are also an important feature throughout Hertfordshire, reflecting the historic enclosure of agricultural fields and defining land ownership boundaries. Many hedgerows throughout the district are ancient and are classified as Local Wildlife Sites. They are also key elements of green corridors, contributing towards wider ecological networks. The Council's Landscape Character Assessment has identified 63 landscape character areas that seek to capture the distinctiveness and variety of the local landscape.

20.2 Landscape Character

20.2.1 There is a diverse landscape character and settlement pattern in the district which is described in Council's Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (September 2007). The document provides a structured evaluation of these landscapes, a landscape strategy and guidelines for conserving and enhancing the character of each area. The document also provides a framework for assessing planning applications. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments should be submitted with planning applications detailing how the proposal takes into account the Landscape Character Assessment SPD; preserving valuable landscapes through appropriate mitigation and enhancement.

The Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (2007, or as amended) can be viewed and downloaded at: www.eastherts.gov.uk/landscapespd

Policy LAN1 Landscape Character

I. Development proposals must demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the district's landscape. On applications where there is a potential adverse impact on landscape character a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be provided to ensure that impacts, mitigation and enhancement opportunities are appropriately addressed.

II. In exceptional circumstances, where damage to landscape character is unavoidable and justified by other material considerations, appropriate mitigation measures will be sought.

III. Where an area is identified in the Council's Landscape Character Assessment this will be used to inform consideration of development proposals.

20.3 Landscaping

20.3.1 Landscape issues must be regarded as an integral part of the development process. Careful and early consideration of design issues and the provision of adequate landscape information can help to avoid delays at a later stage. In assessing the landscape implications of planning applications the site context, proposed layout, future uses and maintenance all need to be taken into account.

20.3.2 The Council will not permit schemes that result in the net loss of landscape features of visual and biodiversity value, and all opportunities for new planting and habitat creation should be fully explored. In exceptional circumstances, where development would result in the loss of landscape features, appropriate compensatory planting or habitat creation will be sought. In some cases replacement planting

should consist of mature plants. It is important that such planting schemes are monitored over time and action is taken to ensure agreed landscaping plans are fulfilled. Certain plants will be more suited to the physical conditions of the site and to the local landscape character than others. As a general rule locally native species are preferable. Along rivers and their associated buffer zones, only native species should be planted.

- 20.3.3 Trees and hedgerows form an important part of our environment and, in the delivery of sustainable development, the retention and planting of new trees and hedgerows is crucial. Trees contribute to the amenity of the landscape and townscape, add maturity to new developments, make places more attractive and help soften the built environment. They also contribute to storm-water management, provide shading and improve air quality.
- 20.3.4 Advice on existing trees and hedgerows, and new planting can be provided by relevant Council officers.
- 20.3.5 Some types of development would benefit from a Design Statement, while a detailed landscape and visual assessment may be needed for particularly prominent development proposals. Major proposals may be subject to formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures. Planning Officers can advise on when these are needed and at what stage.
- 20.3.6 The Council welcomes landscape design which incorporates principles of sustainability such as use of local materials, low energy consumption for construction and maintenance, local recycling of water through surfaces which increase the permeability of the ground, and good pedestrian/cycle links and facilities to reduce car use.

Policy LAN2 Landscaping

I. Development proposals must demonstrate how they will retain, protect and enhance existing landscape features which are of amenity and/or biodiversity value.

II. In exceptional circumstances, where losses are unavoidable and justified by other material considerations, compensatory planting or habitat creation will be sought either within or outside the development site.