



**East Herts  
Local Development Framework**

# **Morphology and Place Shaping (MAPS)**

**A study of built form and urban design**

## **Project Plan**

**July 2011**

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# 1.0 Background and Purpose

## **Purpose**

- 1.1 This Project Plan sets out the methodology for undertaking a Morphology and Place Shaping Study (MAPS) for East Herts district; a piece of technical work that will inform the East Herts Local Development Framework (LDF) in respect of settlement-wide design. It is part of the proactive plan-making process that will shape the future of East Herts to 2031, by helping to ensure that all new development is appreciative of its context.
- 1.2 The purpose of the MAPS study is to establish a set of guiding design principles setting out how each identified settlement can positively accommodate future development. In short, it aims to adopt a settlement-wide approach to design.

## **What is Morphology and Place Shaping?**

- 1.3 Whilst slightly 'jargonistic', the terms morphology and place shaping accurately and succinctly describe the purpose of this study. The terms have also been used because the former is the means of achieving the latter. Indeed, one cannot successfully shape places until the morphology of the place has been examined and understood.
- 1.4 Morphology is the study of settlements and built form. It seeks to understand the structure and character of a place by examining the patterns of its component parts and the process of its development.
- 1.5 Place shaping is an aspect of planning that is specifically concerned with creating attractive, prosperous and safe communities; distinctive places of quality where people want to live, work and do business. It is about embedding design considerations into the planning process.

## **The Importance of Good Design**

- 1.6 Ensuring good design is rightly an increasingly important aspect of planning and plan-making. There is also a growing recognition that design is about the way neighbourhoods function as social environments and how they affect people's lives, rather than being a purely site-based concern.
- 1.7 Good design is about making places that are functional, durable, viable, good for people to use and reflect the importance of local character and distinctiveness<sup>1</sup>. Good design can be described as design that is appropriate to its context and makes the most of opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, planners should give the role of design in shaping overall urban form and the pattern of urban development much more attention.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.8 It is clear, therefore, that an understanding of context forms the basis of good design. The MAPS study provides that context on a settlement-wide scale by providing an evidential understanding of how a town functions, its character and how it should evolve.

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<sup>1</sup> Page 11, Making Design Policy Work (CABE, June 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Based on Paragraph 13, PPS3 (CLG, June 2010)

<sup>3</sup> Page 10, Making Design Policy Work (CABE, June 2005)

### **Localism and the LDF**

1.9 Local Development Frameworks (LDF) are the vehicle for spatial, as opposed to purely land-use, planning. The MAPS study helps to fulfil the following LDF objectives:

- Understanding how our towns and villages function as places;
- Identifying a vision for what we want our communities to be like in the future;
- Achieving that vision through delivering planned growth and managing change;
- Realizing sustainable development by balancing competing social, economic and environmental needs;
- Moving away from traditional land-use planning to a wider approach of managing the built environment; and,
- Encouraging good design and adopting a settlement-wide approach to design.

1.10 MAPS also re-enforces the new 'localism' agenda because not only is it based on an understanding of the unique context of a particular place, but because it seeks to find specific solutions to delivering growth and managing change.

### **MAPS and the Core Strategy**

1.11 East Herts Council is currently preparing its Core Strategy; the first and arguably most important Development Plan Document (DPD) in the East Herts LDF since it will set the overarching strategy and principles for development across East Herts.

1.12 Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation ran from 2<sup>nd</sup> September to 25<sup>th</sup> November 2010. Work is currently progressing on the preparation of the next stage of the Core Strategy called Preferred Options: essentially the draft document.

1.13 Given its strategic purpose, the fundamentals of design policy should be set out in the Core Strategy, including for example<sup>4</sup>;

- The need to follow a robust design process, clearly demonstrated in the Design and Access Statement submitted as part of the planning application;
- Basing proposals on a clear understanding of context, at every scale through the site, street, neighbourhood and settlement levels; and,
- The contribution of better design to achieving sustainable development objectives.

1.14 The Core Strategy should also consider the settlement in its wider context and consider the settlement as a whole when allocating land for development and deriving a vision for its future. A good Core Strategy needs to tell the story of the place. The story can be told by<sup>5</sup>:

- Explaining the important history, context and physical characteristics of the area;
- Talking about the people who live there;
- Describing how the area functions;
- Understanding the relationships that exist with the wider area;
- Understanding the opportunities a place offers.

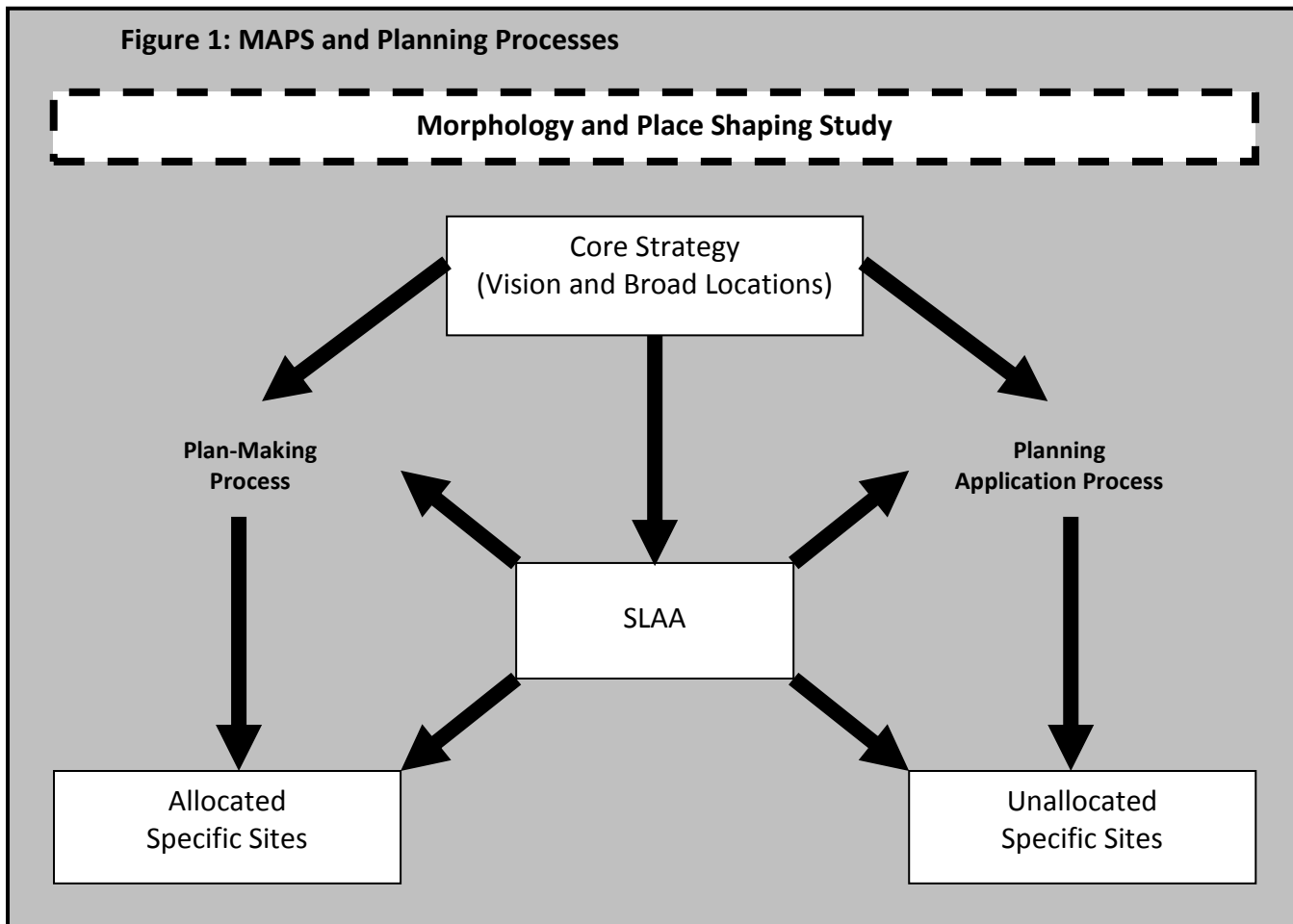
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<sup>4</sup> Page 13, Making Design Policy Work (CABE, 2005)

<sup>5</sup> Page 7, Planning for Places: Delivering Good Design Through Core Strategies (CABE, 2009)

## 2.0 Using the MAPS Study

- 2.1 As shown in Figure 1, the MAPS study will inform a number of inter-linked aspects of the plan-making process that sit across a number of different planning documents and processes.



- 2.2 By following an agreed methodology the MAPS study demonstrates a real and robust understanding of place that withstands scrutiny. It also embeds the principles of design, character and context into considerations about sustainable development.

### **Core Strategy**

- 2.3 The Core Strategy is the overarching and strategic planning document that will set the principles for development. It is therefore appropriate that the MAPS study feeds directly into the Core Strategy itself rather than simply another DPD or Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 2.4 The MAPS study will inform a number of inter-linked aspects of the plan-making process (as shown in Figure 1 above). It is therefore appropriate that the Core Strategy, which sets the strategic context for these subsidiary documents, includes the outcomes of morphology and place shaping technical work. In addition, whilst SPD are the appropriate documents for detailed and/or site specific design policy and guidance, they do not carry sufficient material weight given the policy setting role that place shaping needs to have, sitting at the centre of the East Herts LDF.

2.5 Indeed, from the evidence gathered to-date, maintaining and enhancing the character of East Herts is a key objective of the East Herts LDF. Whilst the Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation document already includes context maps for each of the five towns, the MAPS study takes this context work forward to the next stage and undertakes a more detailed assessment of landscape setting, townscape character, structure and function.

#### **Core Strategy: Visioning and Broad Locations**

2.6 The Core Strategy vision and key diagram form the starting point for future planning in East Herts. Together, they set out the key principles for how the district should develop as well as identifying the broad locations for development. The MAPS study will inform the key diagram and vision for East Herts in addition to supplementing the strategic objectives of the Core Strategy.

2.7 Because the MAPS study looks town-wide, it will enable broad locations for development to be assessed in their widest context rather than simply on a site basis, thus ensuring that the broad locations for development are truly sustainable.

#### **Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA)<sup>6</sup>**

2.8 The SLAA is a piece of ongoing technical work that will inform the LDF in respect of land supply and assist, as appropriate, in determining planning applications. In essence, the SLAA will be a report listing sites proposed for development that includes an assessment of the suitability, availability and achievability of each site for development.

2.9 A site is considered *suitable*<sup>7</sup> for development if it offers a suitable location for development and would contribute to the creation of sustainable, mixed communities. In considering suitability, policy restrictions, physical constraints, potential impacts of developing the site and the environmental conditions which would be experienced by prospective residents should all be considered. The MAPS study will contribute to the assessment of site suitability because it provides a robust and pre-agreed context framework that can be applied consistently.

#### **Allocated Specific Sites**

2.10 Through the LDF, specific sites will be allocated for development. The Site Allocations DPD will set out the Council's policy requirements, including type and mix of development and any on-site requirements, in respect of these specifically allocated sites. The purpose for allocating sites is to help deliver the Council's vision and planning objectives for East Herts. The MAPS study will provide evidence to ensure that allocated sites do not only comply with, but actually help deliver the vision.

2.11 It is intended that Concept Statements will be prepared for many, if not all, of the housing allocations in the Site Allocations DPD. It is incompatible with the principles of sustainable development to release building land without a specification for the scheme to be developed on that land. It might be the right site, but without robust guidance there is no guarantee that development will result in the right scheme.

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<sup>6</sup> See also Strategic Land Availability Assessment: Project Plan, (East Herts Council, July 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 54, Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) (CLG, 2010)

- 2.12 The MAPS study ensures a robust and pre-agreed design context framework that can be applied consistently to each Concept Statement, giving added weight to the robustness of each individual Concept Statement.

**Unallocated Specific Sites**

- 2.13 Over the life of the Core Strategy, a number of unallocated sites will come forward for development. In determining planning applications on these sites, consideration will need to be given as to whether the site fulfils the objectives of the vision and is in a suitable broad location.
- 2.14 Again, the MAPS study will provide the evidence that will form the basis of any decision. Design consideration should also be demonstrated in the Design and Access Statement (DAS)<sup>8</sup> submitted as part of the planning application. This statement should ‘tell the design story’ of the scheme and demonstrate how the proposed design is the appropriate response to the particular context of the site.
- 2.15 By setting out the strategic design context through the MAPS study, much of the background work for preparing and determining planning applications will have been done. It will help ensure not only a robust and pre-agreed context framework, but also that every assessment is applied consistently. Such an approach is beneficial to those preparing planning applications and gives certainty to the development management process.

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<sup>8</sup> Required by DCLG Circular 01/2006 - Guidance on Changes to the Development Control

## 3.0 Methodology

### Overview of Methodology

- 3.1 The methodology for the MAPS study involves two key stages. The first is to undertake an assessment or evaluation of settlement character and form (i.e. morphology). The detailed methodology is set out in Section 4.0 of this report. The second stage applies the morphology information from Stage 1 to the settlements to give an analysis of how the settlement can positively accommodate future development (i.e. place shaping). The detailed methodology is set out in Section 5.0 of this report.
- 3.2 The work for both Stages involves a review of existing geographic information (using the Council's existing Geographic Information System (GIS) software) followed by additional survey fieldwork. Survey information will be supported by photographic evidence.
- 3.3 The geographic information upon which the MAPS study is based is explained under the relevant Stage in Sections 4.0 and 5.0, as appropriate, and includes for example existing environmental and heritage designations.

### Green Belt

- 3.4 It should be noted however, that the MAPS study does not consider Green Belt designation. The rationale for this approach is that Green Belt is a policy designation; the fundamental aim of which is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, whilst Green Belts often contain areas of attractive landscape, the quality of the landscape is not relevant to the inclusion of land within a Green Belt or to its continued protection.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.5 Notwithstanding this, whilst Green Belt considerations should not influence a design-based study, it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the role that Green Belt designation plays when looking at settlement-wide design. There are five purposes<sup>11</sup> to including land in Green Belts, and together, for those settlements within the Green Belt, they have fundamentally affected settlement design:
- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
  - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and,
  - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 3.6 It is anticipated that a separate Green Belt study will be undertaken for East Herts, although the findings from this study will inform that work as appropriate, particularly in respect of the character of historic towns.

### Extent of Study

- 3.7 Using the Issues and Options consultation document as its basis, the MAPS study will initially cover the following settlements. Should further settlements be identified for

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<sup>9</sup> Paragraph 1.4, Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts (PPG2), DCLG, 2001

<sup>10</sup> Paragraph 1.7, Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts (PPG2), DCLG, 2001

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 15, Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts (PPG2), DCLG, 2001

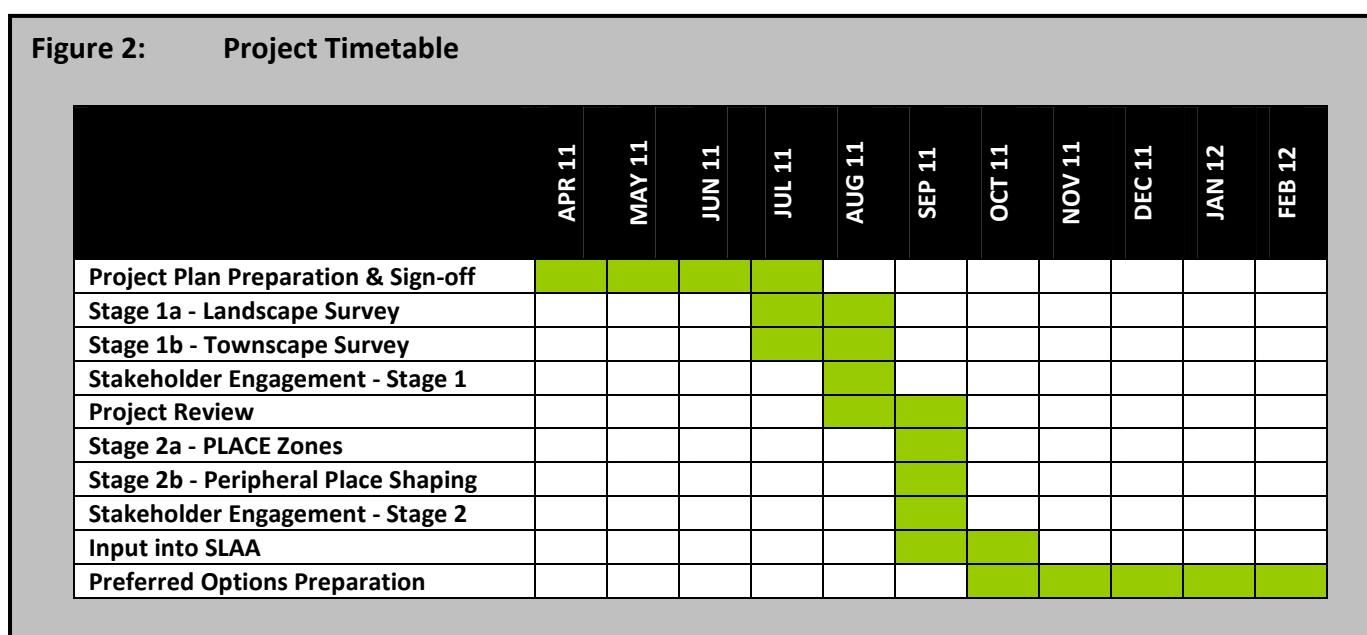


significant growth following the Issues and Options consultation, the study will be extended to cover those settlements.

- Bishop’s Stortford
- Buntingford
- Hertford
- Sawbridgeworth
- Ware

**Timeline and Resources**

3.8 This study will be undertaken using existing in-house resources within the Planning Policy Team. Figure 2 sets out the anticipated broad timetable for the completion of the MAPS study, with work being undertaken around other planning policy work commitments.



3.9 It is also proposed that a Quality Assurance Group (QAG) is set up consisting of specialist officers from the Council’s Development Control, Conservation and Landscape Services. Whilst these officers will not undertake any of the MAPS work, this group will review the outputs of the study as part of quality assurance.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

3.10 Following completion of Stage 1 - Morphology, it is proposed to engage with local district councillors, town councils and civic societies in the respective towns to get their feedback and impressions about the characterisation work.

3.11 It is envisaged that a MAPS working group will be established for each settlement. Each working group will be made up of two or three representatives from each organisation and will then provide feedback on Stage 2 - Place Shaping.

3.12 This engagement will ensure that the study is robust by obtaining valuable community feedback as to the character of the town and how it functions. The feedback will provide an important ‘reality-check’ to the study, although when engaging with community

representatives, it will be essential to be clear about both the objectives and limitations of the study and reiterate the role and purpose of the Core Strategy.

- 3.13 The findings of the study will also be subject to wider public consultation as part of the Core Strategy Preferred Options stage.

### **Risk Management**

- 3.14 As stated above, when engaging with community representatives, it will be essential to be clear about both the objectives and limitations of the MAPS study and reiterate the role and purpose of the Core Strategy, especially in respect of Stage 2 - Place Shaping. The MAPS study will simply inform decisions in the Core Strategy.
- 3.15 Any fieldwork undertaken as part of this study has the potential to pose a number of risks including contact with members of the public. However, these risks are not considered to be any greater than those risks usually associated with undertaking planning site visits or survey work. The fieldwork and surveys will be undertaken from public land and public rights of way. Copies of an explanatory letter should also be made available to inquisitive members of the public, as appropriate.
- 3.16 Survey work will be undertaken by car, on foot and possibly by bicycle, responding to the need to cover a large geographical area efficiently and effectively inline with the principles of undertaking an Outline Assessment. Appropriate safety clothing should be worn when cycling. Undertaking survey work is also subject to weather conditions and should not be carried out if there is a risk of bad weather such as heavy rain, fog, snow or ice. It is expected that the fieldwork will entail a substantial amount of walking and surveyors should be physically fit.

### **Outputs**

- 3.17 The main output will be a MAPS Report for each identified settlement. In addition, to fieldwork and survey information, each report will also make recommendations, presented as follows:
- A plan that identifies the townscape character zones (see Section 4.0) and the locations where development could be accommodated from a settlement-wide design perspective (see Section 5.0)
  - Summaries of each townscape character zone that describe the key features of each zone and any areas of opportunity (see Section 4.0)
  - Design-led principles for accommodating development including peripheral development and setting out how connectivity could be improved
- 3.18 Importantly, it should be noted that the MAPS study itself does not constitute planning policy nor necessarily represent the intentions of East Herts Council. Once completed, the MAPS Reports will form part of the evidence base for the East Herts LDF and will simply inform decisions in respect of settlement-wide design and shaping the future of East Herts to 2031.

## 4.0 Stage 1 - Morphology

- 4.1 Stage 1 assesses the character, form and functionality (i.e. morphology) of each identified settlement. Stage 1 looks at the settlement in its landscape context as well as its built environment or townscape.
- 4.2 The work for both aspects of Stage 1 involves a review of existing geographic information (using the Council's existing GIS software) followed by additional survey fieldwork. Survey information will be supported by photographic evidence.

### Landscape

- 4.3 A settlement is more than just the sum of its parts and understanding the totality of a place and its setting within its wider landscape is crucial in understanding the story of a settlement and its context. The following information will be collated and mapped:
- *Geography* - the location of the settlement within East Herts and the key transport routes (e.g. railway, primary roads, bus routes)
  - *Topography* - landform, land height, valleys and ridgelines, and views towards the settlement
  - *Green Infrastructure* - environmental assets including wildlife sites, key biodiversity areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), national and European important wildlife sites
  - *Rivers and flooding* - water-based environmental assets such as rivers, and areas of flood risk which may limit or restrict development opportunities
  - *Agricultural land classifications* - broad areas showing indicative classification of agricultural land (this information should not be used on a site specific basis)
  - *Key landscape features* - natural features including hedgerows and areas of woodland, and man-made features such as key buildings/structures in the landscape and views of such features
  - *Landscape Sensitivity* - an assessment of the ability of the landscape to accommodate built development, including landscape character (as set out in the East Herts Landscape Character Supplementary Planning Document) and the relationships at the urban/rural fringe (e.g. how the 'town meets the countryside' and any positive/negative boundary relationships)
  - *Landscape Capacity* - a subjective assessment that takes account of sensitivity and value judgements as to how much development could be accommodated in the landscape

- 4.4 Fieldwork will be undertaken through a landscape survey to corroborate information identified through the desk-top survey and to undertake a preliminary landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment. A visual survey will be undertaken and information will be recorded on a standard Assessment Pro-forma (attached at Appendix A). The use of a standard Pro-forma ensures that the information will be recorded consistently. Information will also be recorded on OS base maps and photographs taken.
- 4.5 The assessment of landscape sensitivity and capacity is the standard approach for assessing how landscapes can best accommodate development, although the techniques are still evolving. Definitions as used by Natural England<sup>12</sup> are set out in Figure 3. A key point to note is that both assessments should be undertaken in the context of the particular type of development proposed. Thus, the MAPS study considers the impact of built development, (e.g. houses, commercial buildings and accompanying roads and land uses) as opposed to development such as renewable energy schemes (e.g. wind turbines, biomass crops).

### Figure 3: Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity

- Landscape sensitivity - ability of the landscape to accommodate particular types of change or development, including landscape character sensitivity and visual sensitivity
- Landscape capacity - a subjective assessment of how much development could be accommodated in the landscape. This is based on landscape sensitivity but includes a judgement of landscape value including ecological and heritage designations

*From Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland - Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (The Countryside Agency & Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002)*

- 4.6 It should be noted that an assessment of landscape sensitivity and capacity is a piece of technical work in its own right. The landscape sensitivity and capacity work undertaken as part of the MAPS study is intended to be a supplement to, and not replacement for detailed landscape sensitivity and capacity work. Indeed, it is an initial assessment undertaken in the context of the wider MAPS study and seeks to contribute to the understanding of the settlement in its landscape context. Importantly, this work will assess landscape locations as opposed to specific sites.
- 4.7 Providing that a standard methodology is used, such work is considered robust and offers a more than adequate framework for assessing sensitivity and making clear judgements about capacity. For clarity, Figure 4 (below) sets out the definitions of the criteria used in the Landscape Survey pro-forma in Appendix A. Although the survey form may appear complex, it is a checklist that simply sets out the criteria that need to be considered.
- 4.8 The assessment of landscape capacity is based on a judgement of sensitivity and value. There are five categories of capacity:
- No Capacity: Landscapes of such high sensitivity that development is likely to be precluded
  - Low Capacity: Landscapes unlikely to absorb development without unacceptable adverse effects

Continued on page 14

<sup>12</sup> Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland - Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (The Countryside Agency & Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002)

## Figure 4: Landscape Survey Criteria

### Sensitivity Criteria

- **Land Cover** - Combination of land use and vegetation. Pasture is considered to have the greatest ecological value than arable, due to the intense farming methods used and application of chemicals. The ecological value of woodland can vary from a coniferous plantation (low) to deciduous ancient woodland.
- **Enclosure** - Sense of enclosure of the landscape including scale and boundary treatment. Small scale landscapes tend to be more historic and managed without machinery.
- **Continuity** - The 'age' and level of disturbance of the landscape. Ancient or unsettled landscapes are less likely to be disturbed and are more susceptible and sensitive to change.
- **Pattern** - A unified landscape is less likely to have been modified over time than a variable or mixed landscape that has undergone a number of changes in land use or boundary treatment.
- **Land Form** - Essentially the topography or shape of the landscape. Sloping sites or sites on a ridge are more sensitive to change.
- **Tree Cover** - Landscapes with trees may be more sensitive to change, although trees can form effective boundaries that screen development making such sites less sensitive to development.
- **Views** - The visibility of the landscape to people including from dwellings, roads, railways, footpaths and public spaces. Takes into account short and long views, in and out of the landscape. Views can vary seasonally and is dependent on how the landscape is used and accessed.

### Sensitivity Notes

- **Prominence** - Related to views, land cover and land form, prominence is concerned with the visibility of the site in the landscape. A site could be prominent, even if there are limited views, or vice-versa.
- **Land use** - The current use of the land including any amenity uses such as allotments, playing fields etc
- **Settlement** - The pattern and type of any neighbouring settlement and populations
- **Boundary** - Description of the treatment of the settlement boundary including its completeness
- **Access** - The degree of public access to the landscape
- **Mitigation** - Measures to reduce, remedy or compensate for any adverse landscape and visual effects

### Sensitivity Scoring

- The sum of the multiplication of the sensitivity criteria against the sensitivity score resulting in a total sensitivity score out of 21: 7-11 = low, 12-16 = moderate, 17-21 = high. The higher the score, the more vulnerable the landscape is to change.

### Value Criteria

- **Ecology** - The presence of any ecological designations e.g. Wildlife Sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- **Heritage** - The presence of any heritage designations e.g. Scheduled Monuments and Areas of Archaeological Significance.
- **Tranquillity** - A subjective assessment of the experience of being in the landscape including noise. Tranquillity is also related to enclosure: for example, a small-scale intimate landscape can still be tranquil despite the presence of background noise.

### Value Scoring

- The sum of the multiplication of the value criteria against the value score resulting in a total value score out of 9: 3-4 = low, 5-7 = moderate, 8-9 = high.

### Landscape Capacity Scoring (see matrix)

- The degree to which a landscape is able to accommodate change without unacceptable adverse effects on its character. NB: capacity will vary depending according to the nature and type of development.

Sensitivity	High	Mod	Low	No
	Mod	High	Mod	Low
	Low	Very High	High	Mod
Capacity		Low	Mod	High
		Value		

Definitions based on: 'Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study Report' (North Hertfordshire District Council, Nov 2006) and Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (The Landscape Institute & IEMA, 2002, Spon Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)

- Moderate Capacity: Landscape may be able to accommodate development of an appropriate type and scale although proposals must include sufficient mitigation to ensure that any net adverse landscape impacts are balanced by potential gain
- High Capacity: Taking into account potential mitigation, the appropriate scale and design of development could be accommodated without compromising unacceptably the value or character of the landscape
- Very High Capacity: Taking into account potential mitigation there are likely to be no net unacceptable adverse impacts on the landscape character and value and may even be potential to improve landscape value

### **Townscape**

4.9 Following an appreciation of the settlement in its landscape setting, the existing townscape or built-form needs to be understood. The following information will be collated and mapped:

- *Settlement evolution* - how the settlement has grown and developed over time highlighting key phases of development in the history of the settlement
- *Existing land use* - land use information from Hertfordshire County Council grouped into the following five broad categories: residential, commercial, community, recreation, and transport and utilities
- *Heritage assets* - including listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, tree preservation orders (TPO), historic parks and gardens, and areas of archaeological significance (AAS)
- *Landmark buildings* - locally important buildings and structures within the town or the wider townscape due to their architectural style and/or presence. Such buildings can make either a positive or a negative contribution to the townscape; the latter providing an opportunity!
- *Accessibility to key services* - accessibility information provided by Hertfordshire County Council based on access to five key services (primary schools, secondary schools, hospitals, GP surgeries, retail areas, employment areas) using passenger transport
- *Connectivity* - identifying the key functions of areas and how they are connected and related to other areas of the town; and how these may be improved
- *Network of routes* - showing the network of routes and connections including roads and public footpaths and key transport nodes where key routes and transport services intersect; and how these may be used to access and integrate new developments
- *Built-form mapping* - the framework of blocks and plots that make up the settlement (e.g. Figure-Ground diagrams) and how these vary across the settlement and can influence new patterns of development

4.10 Fieldwork will be undertaken to survey the built environment or townscape of each settlement. This will entail undertaking townscape characterisation work to identify different character areas or zones within each settlement.

4.11 In undertaking the Townscape Survey an Outline Assessment approach will be followed, as advocated by English Heritage<sup>13</sup>. Outline Assessments are the ideal approach where large geographical areas need to be assessed (see Figure 5). The outline approach will also be used because this study will look at the whole town and not just focus on its historic cores or conservation areas.

#### **Figure 5: Outline Assessment**

An Outline Assessment will:

- Set out the general character of an area, or of sub-area within it, drawing attention to representative building types and landscapes, and the main periods of development;
- Identify any neighbourhoods, buildings, landscapes or other periods of particular historic interest or significance;
- And identify which areas, if any, merit more detailed assessment, and which have been adequately served by the Outline Assessment.

*From Understanding Place - Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice (English Heritage, 2010)*

4.12 Indeed, this study will not supplant work undertaken as part of the conservation area appraisals; although there are obvious synergies. Co-ordination, where appropriate, will help avoid unnecessary duplication although it should be stressed that the purpose of townscape characterisations (and therefore the level of detail) is different from detailed conservation area characterisation that focuses much more on the history of the area and on specific historic buildings. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that the outputs of this study will sit alongside conservation area character statements to inform development proposals.

4.13 A visual survey will be undertaken and information will be recorded on a standard Assessment Pro-forma (attached at Appendix B). The use of a standard Pro-forma ensures that the information will be recorded consistently. The survey will be based on the Aspects of Development Form as set out in 'By Design'<sup>14</sup> which identifies the different components of the built environment. The components are summarised as follows and explained in greater detail in Figure 6 (below):

- Layout: urban structure and grain (including framework of routes and arrangement of plots)
- Landscape (including character and appearance of land)
- Mix (including range of uses)
- Scale: density, height and massing (including impact of views and vistas and the three dimensional expression of buildings)
- Appearance: details and materials (including building techniques and decoration, texture, colour and pattern)

<sup>13</sup> 'Understanding Place - Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice' (English Heritage, 2010)

<sup>14</sup> Page 16, By Design - Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice (DETR/CABE, 2000)

4.14 The survey form will also be used to identify urban design opportunities. The following information will be collated:

- Location, name and address
- Description e.g. current use, types of buildings etc
- Relationship to surroundings especially in terms of connectivity
- Justification of why the particular urban design opportunity exists
- Opportunities setting out how redevelopment could improve the character and vitality of the area

### **Figure 6: Aspects of Built Form**

#### **Layout: urban structure and urban grain**

Urban structure is the framework of routes and spaces that connect locally and more widely, and the way developments, routes and open spaces relate to one other. The layout provides the basic plan on which all other aspects of the form and uses of a development depend. The pattern of the arrangement of street blocks, plots and their buildings in a settlement. The degree to which an area's pattern of blocks and plot subdivisions is respectively small and frequent (fine grain), or large and infrequent (coarse grain).

#### **Mix**

The range of uses in an area such as residential, retail, industrial or open space. It is also about how an area is used by people.

#### **Scale: density, height and massing**

Scale is the size of a building in relation to its surroundings, or the size of parts of a building or its details, particularly in relation to the size of a person. Density is the amount of development on a given piece of land. Density influences the intensity of development, and in combination with the mix of uses can affect a place's vitality and viability. The density of a development can be expressed in a number of ways. This could be in terms of plot ratio (particularly for commercial developments), number of dwellings, or the number of habitable rooms (for residential developments). Height determines the impact of development on views, vistas and skylines. Height can be expressed in terms of the number of floors; height of parapet or ridge; overall height; any of these in combination; a ratio of building height to street or space width; height relative to particular landmarks or background buildings; or strategic views. Massing is the combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings in relation to other buildings and spaces. Massing is the three-dimensional expression of the amount of development on a given piece of land.

#### **Appearance: details and materials**

The craftsmanship, building techniques, decoration, styles and lighting of a building or structure. This includes all building elements such as openings and bays; entrances and colonnades; balconies and roofscape; and the rhythm of the façade. Materials include the texture, colour, pattern and durability of materials, and how they are used. The richness of a building lies in its use of materials which contribute to the attractiveness of its appearance and the character of an area.

#### **Landscape**

The character and appearance of land, including its shape, form, ecology, natural features, colours and elements, and the way these components combine. This includes all open space, including its planting, boundaries and treatment.

*From Definitions from 'By Design - Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice' (page 16, DETR/CABE, 2000) and quoted verbatim except for density that has been included in scale, and mix; the definition of which has been elucidated upon.*



## 5.0 Stage 2 - Place Shaping

- 5.1 Utilising the morphology information from Stage 1, Stage 2 will apply it to the settlements to give an analysis of how the settlement can positively evolve and accommodate future development (i.e. place shaping). There are two aspects to Stage 2 - Place Shaping.
- 5.2 The first relates to the existing built-up area and seeks to broadly characterise the settlement into its component parts, providing guidance on how the existing town could accommodate development, including suggesting urban design opportunities.
- 5.3 The second aspect provides guidance in respect of how development could be accommodated on the periphery of the settlement. It is considered that this aspect of the MAPS study will be the most sensitive in that it will entail the Council producing information in respect of the design of peripheral greenfield and Green Belt locations. It will be essential, therefore, to be clear about both the objectives and limitations of the study.
- 5.4 Indeed, the MAPS study will be crucial in protecting peripheral greenfield and Green Belt locations because it seeks to provide design information as to how development can be accommodated positively in and around the town. Importantly, the MAPS study will not determine whether a location should come forward for development. Instead, subject to the amount of the development required in each settlement, the MAPS study will provide guidance on which locations should come forward for development from a design perspective. Thus, it seeks to ensure that any developed is well integrated and enhances the character of the existing settlement.

### **Urban Place Shaping**

- 5.5 Using the survey information, a number of character areas or townscape zones will be identified. The purpose of identifying these zones is two-fold. Firstly, they help to understand how the town has evolved, in order to appreciate the present situation and context. Secondly, by understanding the context, they form part of the place shaping agenda to identify areas of opportunity setting out what each area of the town will be like in the future.
- 5.6 This will include identifying any key locations that, from an urban design perspective, would benefit from redevelopment, for example, locations that are not considered to make a positive contribution to the area in urban design or townscape terms. Any regeneration or redevelopment must be to enhance the vitality of the area. The purpose of this work is not to undertake a thorough analysis of every possible site within the settlement (that is the function of the Housing Capacity Assessment<sup>15</sup>). Furthermore, it should be stressed that the identification of such locations is not an indication of either their suitability for redevelopment in planning or planning policy terms or an indication that the landowner is seeking redevelopment.
- 5.7 Whilst it is acknowledged that every town is unique in its appearance and character, when looking at the settlement as a whole there are common features shared by the towns in East Herts, reflecting the way that our market towns have evolved over the centuries. Reflecting the principles of settlement morphology, the townscape zones will not simply be

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<sup>15</sup> East Herts Housing Capacity Assessment (Entec, 2007) available to view at [www.eastherts.gov.uk/technicalstudies](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/technicalstudies)

defined by appearance and building form. Rather, the following five standard zones have been identified and these will be applied to areas within each settlement based on the areas' particular function and character:

- **Peripheral Commercial Zone**
- **Living / Suburban Zone**
- **Access Corridor Zone**
- **Core Commercial Zone**
- **Edge of Centre Zone**

5.8 These zones have been created for the purposes of this study, although they are considered robust to apply to other areas. It is however acknowledged that non-market towns (e.g. cities, urban areas, New Towns) will have a different evolution and history and the identification of different zones may be applicable. The key and standard components of the zones are set out below:

- *Peripheral Commercial Zone* - Commercial areas on the periphery of the settlement, often forming gateways to the town. Likely to have large-scale plots for retail, industrial, office, and utility use that cannot be accommodated within the centre of the town. Noticeably different from the peripheral suburban areas since they include trip generators e.g. supermarkets and retail warehouses, depots etc.
- *Living / Suburban Zone* - The main residential areas of the town, built to house the increasing population and dating mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day. Such areas may encompass a variety of housing styles and tenures but are predominately in single residential use, whether on the periphery of the town or in more inner locations.
- *Access Corridor Zone* - Main linear access routes that penetrate the town. Corridors of mixed uses that connect the main residential areas of the town (e.g. Living / Suburban Zone) with the town's commercial activities (e.g. Core Commercial Zone). Even where residential uses predominate in the Access Zone, they have a distinctly different and more vibrant feel than the more suburban areas (e.g. Living / Suburban Zone).
- *Core Commercial Zone* - The town centre and commercial and historic core of the town. A mix of commercial uses including offices, although predominately retail focused. Reflecting the market town character, in East Herts this zone may be quite small with limited opportunities for development in the future.
- *Edge of Centre Zone* - A transition zone between the commercial core and the suburban residential areas. A mixed area, which, in terms of residential uses, includes historic residential plots as well as recent flatted redevelopments on former industrial sites. Ancillary commercial and utility uses to the town centre may also be present such as supermarkets and passenger transport interchanges.

5.9 Notwithstanding the above, it is acknowledged that identifying boundaries on a map is always a contentious issue and it is important that a robust approach using the Survey Pro-

forma is adopted (see Appendix B). Furthermore, it should be clear as to why one particular street falls within one particular area and not another.

- 5.10 The PLACE zones will be identified from the built environment survey and validated against the desk-top information to ensure that areas are not considered in isolation but within the wider context. The identification of separate zones will build on work already undertaken as part of the Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation as well as previous work including the Hertford Conservation Area Character Statement and the Bishop's Stortford Town Study that identified environmental zones in parts of the town.
- 5.11 A series of PLACE Zone summaries will provide more detailed descriptions of the specific characteristics of these areas within each settlement. However, these summary descriptions of the zones will not be a detailed account nor will they be prescriptive in terms of built-form and design. Such information would not be appropriate for inclusion in the Core Strategy and should be included in a detailed design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Instead the summaries should seek to capture the flavour and atmosphere of the area to inform the principles of design and development in each identified settlement. These summaries will also help inform the design and integration of new areas for development.

#### **Peripheral Place Shaping**

- 5.12 Using the information collated in Stage 1 - Morphology, the MAPS study then looks at how development could be accommodated on the periphery of the settlement. This will entail an appreciation of both the landscape setting and the relationship of the location to the adjacent existing built-up area.
- 5.13 The purpose of undertaking this technical work is to identify in settlement-wide design terms those locations that are and are not suitable for peripheral development. It should be noted, that the MAPS study is based on the assumption that greenfield land will be required to meet some of East Herts development requirements to 2031.
- 5.14 Many peripheral locations will also be designated as Green Belt. As explained in Section 3.0, Green Belt is a policy designation and it is envisaged that a separate Green Belt study will be undertaken to determine from a Green Belt perspective which areas, if any, should be released from the Green Belt.
- 5.15 It should be stressed however, that the identification of an area within the MAPS study is not an indication of its suitability for development in planning or planning policy terms or an indication that the landowner is seeking to bring it forward for development. Indeed, whether an area comes forward for development is a policy decision to be made through public consultation and the preparation of the LDF. The MAPS study simply informs that process by providing technical evidence as to which locations (if any) are most suitable from a settlement-wide design perspective.
- 5.16 Using the morphology information from Stage 1, locations will be assessed in broad design terms. The purpose of this work is not to provide detailed designs for actual sites but rather, provide information as to whether locations are suitable for development in principle. A series of design principles for accommodating peripheral development will also be established.

## 6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The ultimate aim of the MAPS study is to provide a sound analysis in respect of settlement design as part of the evidence base of the East Herts LDF, so as to inform planning decisions about how each town should evolve to 2031. Such information will assist landowners and developers, the community, and planning officers and councillors, as to how a site can contribute to the wider design of the town and help deliver the vision for that town. Specifically, it will inform the visioning and broad locations of the Core Strategy, the SLAA technical work and the Site Allocations DPD.
- 6.2 As set out in Section 3.0, the main output will be a MAPS Report for each identified settlement. In addition to fieldwork and survey information, each report will also make recommendations, presented as follows:
- A plan that identifies the townscape character zones and the locations where development could be accommodated from a settlement-wide design perspective
  - Summaries of each townscape character zone that describe the key features of each zone and any areas of opportunity
  - Design-led principles for accommodating development including peripheral development and setting out how connectivity could be improved
- 6.3 Importantly, it should be stressed that the MAPS study itself does not constitute planning policy nor necessarily represent the intentions of East Herts Council. Once completed, the MAPS Reports will form part of the evidence base for the East Herts LDF and will simply inform decisions in respect of settlement-wide design and shaping the future of East Herts to 2031. Decisions about which locations should be developed will be made through public consultation and the preparation of the LDF.

## **Appendix A: Landscape Standard Assessment Pro-forma**



# Landscape Survey Pro-forma

LCA Area:  
Evaluation:  
Key Characteristics:

Settlement:  
Area:  
OS Grid Ref:  
Size:

Sensitivity	Low	Mod	High	Notes			
	1	2	3				
Land Cover	Arable	Wooded	Pasture				
Enclosure	Open	Moderate	Very				
Continuity	Planned	Pastoral	Unsettled				
Pattern	Varied	V / U	Uniform				
Land Form	Flat	Undulating	Sloping				
Tree Cover	Large	Small	Open				
Views	Few	Moderate	Many				
Short In				Land Use			
Short Out				Settlement			
Long In				Boundary			
Long Out				Access			
Prominence				Mitigation			
Total					L: 7-11	M: 12-16	H: 17-21

Value	Low	Mod	High	Notes			
	1	2	3				
Ecology	National	Local	None				
Heritage	National	Local	None				
Tranquillity	Very	Moderate	Un-tranquil				
Total					L: 3-4	M: 5-7	H: 8-9

Sensitivity	High	Mod	Low	No
	Mod	High	Mod	Low
	Low	Very High	High	Mod
Capacity	Low	Mod	High	
	Value			

Photos:

Assessor:  
Date:

## **Appendix B: Townscape Standard Assessment Pro-forma**



# Townscape Survey Pro-forma

**Policy Designations:**

**Settlement:**  
**Street/Area:**

**Layout:**

**Mix:**

**Scale:**

**Appearance:**

**Landscape:**

**Other observations:**

Location	Description	Relationship	Justification	Opportunities

MAPS Zones	
Peripheral Commercial	
Living / Suburban	
Access Corridor	
Core Commercial	
Edge of Centre	

**Photos:**

**Assessor:**  
**Date:**



