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Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

Search for potential housing sites: Review of landscape sensitivity assessment

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Annex 1

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment and Settlement Analysis Methodology

August 2024

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Revision 4.0

YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

Methodology

Landscape sensitivity assessment

Landscapes can be described and understood in terms of their physical characteristics, their land uses, their ecological habitats, their heritage and also by the way they make us feel. The combinations of these different landscape characteristics and qualities contribute to our perceptions of local identity and sense of place. An assessment of landscape sensitivity seeks to identify the aspects of landscape character that we value so that we can measure their resilience to change. It is typically undertaken when there is a need to judge the potential effects that could result from a defined type of change and this study has been commissioned to consider the landscape sensitivity of a selection of specific sites in relation to residential development. It will be used by the YDNPA to understand the potential changes to the landscapes of the YDNP if development were to take place.

National guidance for landscape sensitivity assessment[1] explains that the process of sensitivity assessment requires an assessment of the susceptibility of landscape and visual character (the baseline) to a specific change (in this case residential development) in combination with an assessment of the values of the landscape and its visual characteristics.

The assessment provides a consistent, systematic score for the landscape and visual sensitivity of each of the assessed sites to residential development. It is a high level judgement which has been undertaken without detailed topographic data and which assumes a mix of residential development across the whole area of each site. It does not take account of the potential influence of design (ie. the layout and form of buildings and landscape) and assumes that the height and density of buildings would vary depending on whether the site has an urban or a rural context.

The landscape sensitivity assessment will guide and inform the YDNPA's strategic allocation of sites for new housing in the YDNP by helping to direct development to areas where it would be least damaging to valued landscapes. In general, sites with a relatively low landscape sensitivity score can be expected to accommodate housing development without the loss of valued landscape characteristics whereas those with a relatively high landscape sensitivity score would not.

The landscape sensitivity scores for each site can contribute to this decision-making process and identify opportunities and constraints for development, but they do not provide a direct judgement of suitability for development. This is because there are many other factors to consider including socio-economic benefits, vehicular access, drainage, provision of utilities (electricity, water, gas, sewerage) and archaeological or heritage constraints. It is also because the assessment does not take account of the influence of design and management, which may in some locations enable successful housing development in sites which are assessed as having relatively high landscape and visual sensitivity.

The study has been undertaken in two stages. The first stage (Dec 2021-March 2022) was a desk-top exercise which made reference to Ordnance Survey base mapping, aerial photography (Google Earth), the YDNP Landscape Character Assessment, historic maps, biodiversity and heritage designations and mapping of heritage assets provided by YDNPA. It was also informed by a selection of site photographs supplied by YDNPA. The first stage assessment was tested through fieldwork during June-July 2022, which led to some adjustment of the landscape sensitivity scores.

Judging landscape sensitivity

The criteria selected for judging landscape sensitivity are based on the attributes of landscape that are most likely to be affected by residential development. They take account of both 'landscape' and visual' characteristics and aspects of landscape value, including the special qualities of the YDNP. The five landscape sensitivity criteria are set

[1] An approach to landscape sensitivity assessment - to inform spatial planning and land management, June 2019, Christine Tudor, Natural England

out in Table 2 (page 6). For each criterion Table 2 also identifies indicators of relative susceptibility to the changes associated with residential development by describing how the landscape, visual, and value related criteria may be affected to a greater or lesser extent by the key attributes of residential development.

Using the criteria and susceptibility indicators in Table 2 as a constant reference, the landscape sensitivity of each site to residential development was assessed against each criterion on a five point scale (as shown in Table 1). The sensitivity scores reflect the degree to which the landscape of each site would be susceptible to change An overall sensitivity judgement is also included, recognising that some attributes or elements of the landscape may be more important in defining character than others and may be more sensitive.

Table 1 – Criteria for judging landscape and visual sensitivity

Sensitivity	Definition
High	Residential development would be very likely to give rise to significant adverse landscape and/or visual effects.
Moderate-high	Residential development would be very likely to give rise to adverse landscape and/or visual effects, and there is some potential for these to be significant.
Moderate	Residential development would be likely to give rise to some adverse landscape and/or visual effects, but these may be limited in extent.
Low-Moderate	Residential development may give rise to some minor adverse landscape and/or visual effects, but these would be unlikely to be significant.
Low	Residential development would be very unlikely to give rise to significant adverse landscape and/or visual effects.

It is important to note that the criteria for judging landscape and visual sensitivity set out in Table 1 are on a relative scale which is applied within the context of a national park landscape that is inherently highly sensitive to development.

The judgement is based on transparent professional analysis rather than a mechanical process of addition. This enables the assessment to highlight any particularly sensitive landscape features or qualities, and factors that would need to be taken into account should the site be developed.

This is a high level assessment and the overall landscape sensitivity scores apply to the whole of the site that has been submitted for assessment. However, it does take some account of the scope to mitigate potential adverse landscape and visual impacts of development, as follows:

- Where relevant, the narrative within the assessment tables incorporates advice on how the design and/or layout of development schemes could mitigate potential adverse landscape and visual impacts and the sensitivity scores take account of this mitigation potential
- The overall landscape sensitivity scores for some sites are marked with an asterisk* to indicate that a carefully designed layout that focuses built development on part of the site would reduce the risk of adverse landscape and visual effects and would reduce the overall sensitivity score (which is based on the whole site assessment).

Maps are indicative. Please note that there is a discrepancy between the mapping of the potential housing sites and the OS base because the site boundaries were digitised at a more detailed scale.

Table 2 - Landscape and visual sensitivity assessment criteria

Physical and natural character

This criterion considers landform, land cover and landscape elements in relation to the scale of potential development, with particular reference to the Special Qualities of the YDNP that relate to natural beauty and wildlife (e.g. dales with distinctive stepped profiles; spectacular waterfalls; significant glacial/post glacial features; flower-rich hay meadows and pastures; broadleaf woodland/ancient woodland). It considers possible impacts of development on the scale, coherence, condition and intactness of the physical landscape, as well as the presence/absence of natural heritage designations and the extent to which the area is representative of distinctive landscape character. Areas with a smooth or relatively flat topography are likely to be less sensitive to development than areas with more distinct landform features. In addition, areas with a relatively uniform landscape pattern and few natural features will be less sensitive to development than areas with a higher density of natural features which could be vulnerable to loss from development. Areas designated for their natural heritage or which are considered to be exemplars, representative of distinctive or rare landscape characteristics or features are likely to be more vulnerable to development than landscapes with a relatively nondescript character.

Lower sensitivity →				*Higher sensitivity*
Site landscape is degraded and detracts from local landscape character – e.g. land cover has been largely lost and any landscape features are fragmented and/or in poor condition and would not be degraded by development. Landform itself is of low sensitivity to development i.e. simple, smooth or flat landforms. No direct contribution to YDNP Special Qualities (distinctive natural beauty and wildlife features).		Site landscape has some limited characteristics that contribute to local landscape character – e.g. the landscape has reasonable hedgerow boundaries but is indistinctive in terms of landform or land cover. It may be a typical example of a locally commonplace landscape type. Some indirect contribution to YDNP Special Qualities (distinctive natural beauty and wildlife features). Scope to integrate carefully designed development.		Site landscape makes a strong contribution to local landscape character – e.g. it has a distinctive landform, an intact, natural landscape with hedgerows, trees and other features of interest, such as ponds or watercourses which could be damaged by development. Strong landform features such as slopes, scarps and valleys are likely to be more sensitive to development. Direct contribution to YDNP Special Qualities (distinctive natural beauty and wildlife features).

Settlement form and setting

This considers the extent to which development would contribute to the identity and distinctiveness of a settlement, in terms of the important landscape elements and features that structure the way it is perceived – e.g. gateway views; views to distinctive local features and landmarks; and longer contextual views which express the specific relationship between settlement and its surrounding landscape. It also considers the character of settlement edges, the presence and role of boundary features and the extent to which development on the site would relate to settlement form and pattern, including possible contribution to a perceived gap between settlements (the loss of which would increase coalescence).

Lower sensitivity →				*Higher sensitivity*
Site landscape detracts from the distinctive character of the settlement or does little to contribute positively to settlement identity and distinctiveness. Site is strongly associated with an existing settlement and would not, if developed, be perceived as an extension of the settlement into the countryside. An exposed settlement edge with no landscape features to integrate the settlement/rural fringe will be less sensitive and may offer opportunities for development to enhance the settlement edge and integration.		Site landscape makes a limited positive contribution to the distinctive character and form of the settlement, but does not contribute directly to key gateway or longer contextual views or to views to distinctive local features/landmarks. Development would be perceived as settlement advancement into the countryside but would not represent a step-change in settlement form. It would not cross a distinctive boundary feature. It would not have a strong effect on the perception of separate settlements.		Site landscape contributes to the distinctive character of the settlement, either as valued undeveloped land within the settlement or because it is important in relation to its setting for key gateway or longer contextual views or for views to distinctive local features/landmarks. Development would have a poor relationship with existing settlement form, crossing a boundary feature and/or extending into an area with a distinctly different landscape – e.g. beyond a ridge crest or into a valley. Site landscape is important in the perception of a gap between distinct settlements; a well-integrated settlement edge by virtue of landscape structure or landform variation will be more sensitive.

Views and recreational experience

This takes into consideration the visual character of the site and the extent to which development would be visible, including the extent of openness or enclosure, skyline character, the degree to which the landscape contributes to views from sensitive viewpoint locations and/or whether development would intrude on sensitive views. Locations such as tourist attractions, promoted viewpoints and national trails will be more sensitive to development than local footpaths. Locations used for recreation, such as country parks or local public green space, are more sensitive than passing views from rights of way, and private views have less sensitivity than public viewpoints. Visually prominent landscapes which are inter-visible with adjacent landscapes are likely to be more sensitive to development than areas that are visually contained and less widely visible. Distinctive and/or undeveloped skylines, or skylines with landmark features are likely to be more sensitive to development.

Lower sensitivity → *Higher sensitivity*

Site landscape is enclosed and well screened from public or private view, is not visually prominent in the landscape and does not form a visually distinctive or important undeveloped skyline.	Site landscape is semi-enclosed and is likely to have some inter-visibility with surrounding areas. There may be some visually distinctive or important undeveloped skylines. Site landscape makes some positive contribution to local views from public rights of way, but little intrusion on public views from the wider landscape.	Site landscape is open, visually prominent in the wider landscape and/or forms a visually distinctive skyline or an important undeveloped skyline. There is clear visibility from sensitive receptor locations where the undeveloped character of the landscape contributes to the quality of the view.

Perceptual qualities

This considers perceptual qualities, including scenic value, intact rural character, sense of remoteness and tranquillity. The criterion also considers the degree a site may contribute to key perceptual features noted as contributing to the distinctive landscape of each landscape character area in the YDNP LCA. Landscapes that are relatively remote or tranquil (landscapes with a lack of human activity or disturbance, or landscapes with perceived naturalness and traditional rural feel) tend to have higher levels of sensitivity to development compared to landscapes that contain signs of modern development or those with a high level of human disturbance/activity. High scenic value and dark night skies also increase sensitivity in relation to this criterion.

Lower sensitivity → *Higher sensitivity*

Site landscape has a disturbed landscape, strongly influenced by development/activity/ intrusion.	Site landscape has scenic qualities and/or some rural character, separation or isolation, but with some distinct intrusive elements – e.g. road noise or an abandoned character resulting from a lack of management.	A highly tranquil and scenic site landscape with relatively dark skies and a natural and/ or traditional rural character which lacks intrusive elements. It contributes to the distinctive perceptual features of local YDNP landscapes.

Cultural and historical associations

This considers the extent to which the landscape has 'time-depth' – a sense of being a historic landscape, with particular reference to the Special Qualities of the YDNP that relate to historic and cultural heritage (e.g. the stone built field barns that are part of traditional pastoral landscapes; prominent archaeological landscapes in the form of strip lynchets and prehistoric field systems; ancient and historic parklands; remnant sites of former industrial landscapes; and conservation areas which define historic settlements with distinctive traditional architecture and/or the Settle-Carlisle Railway line. This part of the assessment considers historical associations in relation to landscape character and is not a heritage assessment. Landscapes with strong and visible historic and cultural heritage are more likely to be sensitive to development than those with limited time depth.

Lower sensitivity → *Higher sensitivity*

Site landscape has limited cultural or historical influence or associations. It does not contribute to landscape patterns or features that have historic value.	Site landscape with visible historic elements or cultural associations which has some historic character, but which is not part of a wider historic landscape; or a site with little historic character but which forms part of an area that does have some historic character.	Site landscape with a strong, intrinsic historic character that is not diminished by modern human influence. Direct contribution to YDNP Special Qualities (historic and cultural heritage features)

Settlement Analysis

Study scope and objectives

This report provides a 'whole settlement analysis', which describes the wider landscape setting of each settlement, together with an analysis of key approaches, landmarks and views. It identifies the important landscape elements and features that structure the way each settlement is perceived and which merit conservation in relation to future landscape change, including built development. The analysis incorporates and extends a similar study undertaken for 8 settlements as part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) Landscape Character Assessment[1]. The landscape setting for each settlement is deliberately not shown as a definitive 'boundary' because it is based on subjective judgement and because the extent of important views will inevitably vary with changing weather and seasonal conditions.

Relationship to the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

YDNPA is producing a new Local Plan that will need to release additional land for new build housing developments. It will do so either by specifically identifying larger sites (5 dwellings or more) within and on the edge of towns and villages across the National Park. A process to scope out candidate sites took place in 2021, including a public 'call for sites'. This yielded 139 sites for consideration.

This report builds upon the work of a landscape sensitivity assessment[2] produced earlier this year. The landscape sensitivity assessment looked at 139 potential development sites and gave each a rating according to the likely effects of residential development upon the landscape. The National Park Authority used this report to help carry out an initial sift of the 139 sites.

Sites that were assessed as having High or Moderate-High landscape sensitivity (38 in total) were dismissed because the landscape sensitivity assessment concluded that these sites would give rise to significant adverse impacts. Sites that were assessed as having Moderate, Low-Moderate or Low landscape sensitivity (54 in total) can be considered further because the landscape sensitivity assessment concluded that these sites would not give rise to significant adverse impacts.

The landscape sensitivity assessment gave the remaining 47 sites an 'intermediate' rating denoted with an asterisk. This indicates that a carefully designed layout which focuses built development on part of the site only would reduce the risk of adverse landscape and visual effects and so, in turn, would reduce the overall sensitivity score. As a result, these sites can be considered further subject to having their site extents reduced to reflect partial suitability for development. In three cases this resulted in a significant enough reduction in the developable area available that these sites will fall to be considered as small-scale 'rounding off' plots (see below), rather than as larger-scale potential housing site allocations. This leaves 44 'asterisk sites' that can also be considered further, although the majority of these are rated as Moderate-high* (33), meaning that appropriate reductions and site area and other mitigation measures must be adopted in order to avoid significant adverse landscape impacts.

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1 Sheils Flynn on behalf of YDNPA, 2020, Yorkshire Dales National Park Landscape Character Assessment

2 Sheils Flynn on behalf of YDNPA, March 2022, Search for potential housing sites: landscape sensitivity assessment

In total 98 sites remain under consideration as potential housing site allocations following the landscape sensitivity assessment. The whole settlement assessment focuses on 18 towns and villages where the majority (75) of these sites are concentrated and where the impact of multiple potential sites being developed together are most likely to occur. These are incorporated into the mapping and analysis of the whole settlement assessments.

The Local Plan will also allow some smaller sites (4 or less dwellings) to come forward for development in the form of infill and 'rounding off' plots (including some that were initially considered as larger sites but had their extents reduced following the landscape sensitivity assessment). These sites have not been considered in detail as part of the landscape sensitivity assessment or settlement analysis, although the YDNPA's response to future development proposals for such sites will be influenced by the conclusions of the landscape sensitivity studies.

The Settlement Analysis will inform the Local Plan site allocation process. The mapping for each settlement shows the potential allocation sites, together with areas of important open space. Its objective is to provide a balanced judgement of the opportunities and constraints for development and green infrastructure enhancement in each of the 18 settlements assessed.

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