

Conwy County Borough Council

**Study to Identify
Areas of Landscape Value**

1 STUDY METHODOLOGY

1.1 The purpose of the study was to identify areas of the County Borough, which are of greatest landscape value in a Conwy County Borough Council context, with a view to giving them special protection within the Unitary Development Plan.

1.2 The study covered the whole of the Local Planning Authority area (i.e. that part of the County Borough outside the National Park) and was undertaken in two phases, initially focusing on the areas around the main urban areas and subsequently extending to cover the remaining area.

1.3 The basic approach of the study was to undertake a landscape analysis and evaluation of the countryside. The evaluation attempted to assess *landscape value* as a combination of the intrinsic physical characteristics of the landscape, its historical interest and ecological value, and its relationship with main urban areas and main villages. The criteria used for this evaluation remained constant, thereby enabling comparisons to be made between different landscape areas.

1.4 The study was led by a project officer who carried out both the desk and field work. The project officer reported regularly to a Project Management Team comprising representatives from all sections of the department (Asst. Director Forward Planning, Unitary Development Plan, Countryside, and Development Control). The role of the team was to provide guidance and feedback to the project officer, but particularly in the second stage of the project to scrutinise and endorse the evaluation results and provide quality control.

2 STAGE ONE: DATA GATHERING

2.1 The first task was to define units of landscape which would be surveyed and evaluated. These were termed Landscape Zones and were defined as areas of uniform landscape character (as defined by the Clwyd Landscape Assessment and similar information available in more limited form for the area of former Aberconwy) which were then further divided into manageable units according to local circumstances.

2.2 A number of sources of information were used to define the boundaries and gather information about each zone before any field survey work was commenced. These are:

- Settlement boundaries used were those in the Local Plans but amended to include built up areas which are technically outside settlement limits. Landscape Zones were only identified for those areas of the Local Planning Authority area outside the (amended) settlement limits.
- The Clwyd Landscape Assessment including the record sheets were used to identify the landscape character type for each zone. This information was available in more limited form for the area of former Aberconwy.
- Databases of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Ancient Woodland Sites, and potential Wildlife Sites were consulted to help identify areas of semi natural habitat likely to be of high ecological value.
- Provisional lists of Regionally Important Geological Sites identified sites of high geological interest.
Historical interest was identified by reference to the Register of Landscapes, Parks and

Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales and the schedules of Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings, and was supplemented by ad hoc and local knowledge.

- A primary measure of accessibility was the extent of the public right of way and minor road network, together with any areas of open access, though other factors (tradition of access, permissive pathways etc.) were also considered.
- Officers within the department (and elsewhere) with a long working knowledge of the area were invited to comment on the collated information and make comments.

2.3 The first stage of the field survey concentrated on confirming the landscape zones which had been proposed by the desk study. As a result, some boundaries were moved or new boundaries suggested in order to ensure that the final landscape zones within the study area were uniform in character, could be readily described, and were understandable and discernible on the ground.

2.4 Additional data was also gathered during this stage, in order to complement that gathered during the desk study. This data related principally to visual and obvious features such as miscellaneous landscape features, geological features, views and visibility etc.

2.5 The output at the end of the first stage was a series of maps showing the boundaries of the landscape zones and all relevant data which had been gathered for each. The maps were stored on a Geographical Information System linked to an Access database. One hundred and twenty three landscape zones were identified.

3 STAGE TWO: EVALUATION

3.1 The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a qualitative, comparative assessment of the landscape zones within the study. The following criteria about which information had been gathered during stage one were evaluated:

- Visual and scenic quality
- Sense of place
- Quality as example of landscape type
- Rarity
- Importance to settlement setting (when viewed from without)
- Views from the settlement
- Quality of geology and landforms
- Diversity of natural features/ecological value
- Historical interest
- Presence of noteworthy landscape features
- Accessibility

3.2 In order to make the evaluation consistent and comparable, a scoring system was used. For each criterion, a landscape zone could score 1, 2 or 3, giving a total possible score of between eleven and thirty three. The evaluation was partly carried out in the field, at the same time as information was being collected for stage one, and partly in the office using previously gathered data. It is important to remember that the scores are intended to allow for a qualitative comparison between landscape zones, and have no absolute value in themselves. To give an example, a zone which scores two for access, will have been evaluated as having a greater degree of public access than all zones scoring only one, but less than all zones scoring three. Further details of the scoring system are given the appendix.

4 STAGE THREE: PROPOSED AREAS OF LANDSCAPE VALUE

4.1 Following the completion of the evaluation, the project team met to consider which zones should be recommended for designation as Areas of Landscape Value. The recommendation decided upon was that all landscape zones with an evaluation score of 19 or above should become Areas of Landscape Value, while those with a score of 18 or below should not be so designated. The reasons for this are as follows:

- The areas of landscape of the highest value in the Local Planning Authority area would be protected through the designation.
- The designation would not be applied so extensively as to present constraints on development except where the landscape value is indisputable.
- Selecting this as a cut off value results in fairly large sweeps of both designated and non designated zones. A higher cut off value would have resulted in a more intricate mosaic of designated and non designated land; a lower cut off value would have resulted in very little land remaining undesignated.

5 STAGE FOUR: VERIFICATION

5.1 Once zones to be included within and excluded from the Areas of Landscape Value had been agreed, the boundaries of the Areas of Landscape Value were double-checked to ensure that no inconsistencies had crept in. This was done both as a paper exercise and in the field where necessary. The Project Management Team could therefore be confident that the best possible boundaries had been drawn to the Areas of Landscape Value.

5.2 Since this is a stand alone study for a specific purpose, it has not been possible to dovetail with work carried out by neighbouring Planning Authorities. However, they were invited to comment at a draft stage before the boundaries of the Areas of Landscape Value were finalised.

5.3 The following data are available as a result of the study:

- A series of digitised maps showing the boundaries of each landscape zone which has been evaluated. Some of the criteria by which the zones were evaluated are held on other layers within the GIS system, or the data may exist only in paper form.

Background Paper 2 – Areas of Landscape Value

- A photographic record of each zone, to give a visual representation of the landscape under consideration. The photographs are filed with the zone record sheets, or are stored digitally (first traditional and later digital photography was used during the study). These photographs may be consulted in the planning office by prior arrangement.
- A completed record and evaluation sheet for each zone. Read together with the mapped data, this shows all the information which underpins the evaluation score for each criterion under consideration, the scores ascribed and their sum, as well as a brief description of the zone. A series of key maps identifying the zones has been produced to enable the sheets to be used without referring to the original data.
- A map showing the proposed Areas of Landscape Value (score 19 and above).

APPENDIX

The scoring system for evaluation purposes - a further explanation of its use.

The score for each criterion used to evaluate the zones was based on an assessment of the effect of that particular criterion on the zone, rather than an absolute numerical value. This is because landscape zones are of varying size, so applying absolute numbers to the evaluation criteria would give a bias towards smaller zones receiving lower scores. The only exception to this was that rarity was evaluated according to absolute values as this was considered the more logical approach. For example, when considering the *Presence of Noteworthy Landscape Features* the evaluation sought to judge whether such features were present in sufficient numbers to ‘flavour’ the landscape (score 3), or whether there were some features but insufficient in number to ‘flavour’ the landscape (score 2) or there were few or no landscape features (score 1).

A comprehensive explanation of the scoring system and what lies behind it is given below:

- **VISUAL AND SCENIC QUALITY**

This is primarily a subjective criterion. Questions to ask oneself are:

Is it attractive? Does it inspire? Can you imagine it on a postcard?

Scoring

Highly Scenic	3
Attractive	2
Little scenic value	1

- **SENSE OF PLACE**

Similarly subjective, this is not to be confused with scenic quality, but is intended to be a measure of distinctiveness. Questions to ask:

Can I readily tell where I am, or could I be in one of a hundred places? At the extremes, the sight, sound and smell of the sea, or the view of a famous town like Conwy score three, while enclosed farmland with no particular views scores one.

Scoring

Strong sense of place	3
Some sense of place	2
Little sense of place	1

- **QUALITY OF LANDSCAPE TYPE**

This evaluation is based on the Clwyd Landscape Assessment and landscape character descriptions for the former Aberconwy which describe the characteristics of each broad landscape type. Individual zones match these characteristics more or less closely depending on a variety of factors, and it is this match which this evaluation is attempting to assess. For example, a degraded, suburban landscape may still match a landscape character type closely enough to be able to be ascribed to it, but is nevertheless not a good example of the type. In other cases the landscape in a zone may be fairly untypical and so would score three one or two but not three.

Scoring

Good example of landscape type	3
Landscape type clearly discernible, but with some atypical/degraded elements	2
Small number of characteristics of landscape type remaining	1

- **RARITY**

Some landscape types occur more frequently within the County Borough than others. This evaluation is again based on the landscape character assessments and gives a measure of the rarity of the landscape character type to which a particular landscape zone has been ascribed.

Scoring

Only example of the landscape character type in the County Borough	3
Several examples of the landscape character type in the County Borough	2
Many examples	1

- **IMPORTANCE TO SETTLEMENT SETTING**

This is intended to be a measure of the importance of the landscape zone to any adjoining settlements. For example, the setting of a historic town when viewed from a public viewpoint at a distance may be entirely dependent on the land in between remaining in a particular condition, whereas where views of a town are obscured by land form or vegetation cover, the intervening landscape does not contribute to the settlement setting. Only settlements defined as main villages or urban areas were considered under this criterion.

Scoring

Important to settlement setting	3
Contributes to settlement setting	2
Insignificant to settlement setting	1

- **VISUAL IMPORTANCE**

This is intended to be a measure of the importance of the landscape zone when viewed from an adjoining settlement. A zone scores three if its presence is strongly felt within the settlement, and should score one if it is unseen/of little note from within the settlement. Only settlements defined as main villages or urban areas were considered under this criterion.

Scoring

Visually important	3
Of some visual importance	2
Little visual importance	1

- **QUALITY OF GEOLOGY AND LAND FORMS**

A measure of the presence and frequency of geological features such that distinctive and dramatic rock formations, cliffs, erratics, other glacial features, scarps etc. score three; where such features do not occur or are masked by land use, score one. The presence of a Regionally important Geological Site raises the score by at least one.

Scoring

Distinctive geological features	3
Some evidence of geology and landforms	2
Limited evidence of geology and landforms	1

- **DIVERSITY OF NATURAL FEATURES/ECOLOGICAL VALUE**

This evaluation addresses those features which contribute to the ecological value (*biodiversity*) of the zone using data such as Databases of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Ancient Woodland Sites and potential Wildlife Sites.

Scoring

Extensive wildlife interest	3
Some wildlife interest	2
Little wildlife interest	1

• **HISTORICAL INTEREST**

While using all available data (Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales and the schedules of Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings, supplemented by ad hoc and local knowledge), the evaluation itself is somewhat subjective in assessing the significance of these data and scoring zones as being of high or moderate historical significance.

Scoring

High level of historical interest	3
Some historical interest	2
Little evidence of historical interest	1

• **PRESENCE OF NOTEWORTHY LANDSCAPE FEATURES**

This is an evaluation based on the presence/absence of individual features of note, which could be historical, physical or natural, but which are not significant enough to be picked up by the other criteria. They are therefore likely only to be noticed in the field, as they are unlikely to be mapped or to appear on any lists. Examples include ancient trees or hedgerows, old farm buildings, traditional field gates, gate posts and stiles, and small scale features such as small stream valleys and ponds. The evaluation seeks to judge whether such features are present in sufficient numbers to ‘flavour’ the landscape (score 3), or whether there are some features but insufficient in number to ‘flavour’ the landscape (score 2) or there are few or no landscape features (score 1).

Scoring

Many landscape features	3
Some landscape features	2
Few such landscape features	1

- **ACCESSIBILITY**

Scoring is above all be a measure of the amount of de facto public access through the zone. Scoring is based on the density/total estimated length of public rights of way, plus any additional permissive or traditional routes, with also a consideration of whether there is forestry, mountain, moorland or common land to which the public have a right or tradition of access.

Scoring

High level of public access	3
Moderate level of public access	2
Little or no public access	1