

THE EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the East Midlands Landscape Partnership, following recommendations made in a scoping study, commissioned the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment (EMRLCA). This is a new tier in the landscape character assessment hierarchy in England and the first regional assessment to not only provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of the region's landscape but to also include a seascape characterisation that identifies seascape character types. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the character of the East Midlands landscape and draws together information about the natural, historic and built environment to facilitate the protection, management and planning of the East Midlands Region.

The EMRLCA has been produced in consultation with stakeholders drawn from a wide range of statutory agencies, local authorities and other regional bodies and benefited from the input and guidance of a great number of committed individuals, as well as a full public consultation.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Landscape Character Assessment is the process by which areas of distinctive character are classified, mapped and described. The aim is to raise awareness of the landscape's diversity, local distinctiveness and sense of place, particularly in areas where landscape character is less well understood or appreciated, or under pressure for change, for example from settlement growth, new development or physical changes.

An important feature of the character assessment process is that, consistent with best practice guidance, it is objective and no judgment is made about the value or quality of landscape. In line with the European Landscape Convention, the EMRLCA recognises that all of the landscape matters and makes no distinction between areas of high scenic value and degraded landscape.

In this strategic regional level assessment, 'Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs)' are identified. These are generic in nature in that they may occur in different localities throughout the region. However, wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historic and current land uses and settlement patterns.

THE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT HIERARCHY

The regional level of assessment is a new tier in the assessment hierarchy in England and designed to add a regional layer to the 159 National Character Areas identified by Natural England¹ and provide a strategic context and framework for more detailed landscape assessments at the county, district and local scales that nest within the larger scale assessments.

¹ National Character Areas were mapped and described in the late 1990's, prior to the development of the National Landscape Typology.

PRINCIPAL AIM AND APPLICATION

The principal aim of the EMRLCA is to put in place a consistent and robust landscape evidence base at a regional level that provides a common platform for future strategic, region wide landscape management. It will also ensure that holistic landscape considerations that extend beyond administrative boundaries inform and enable greater integration with and between other environmental themes and projects.

As well as establishing landscape as a spatial framework for decision making at the regional scale, it is intended that the EMRLCA will be taken forward into strategic spatial planning processes to ensure that the environmental baseline for the region informs the regional evidence base and subsequent policy framework.

The RLCTs provide a spatial framework for greater integration with other regional themes and issues such as identifying opportunities for habitat creation, woodland creation and management, informing green infrastructure strategies, the location of development, including renewable energy installations and identifying the role of landscape in the delivery of ecosystem services.

THE EMRLCA

The East Midlands region has a rich and diverse landscape as a result of the complex interplay of a wide range of physical and cultural influences and forces that have shaped and moulded the landscape.

Following a review of existing landscape and historic landscape character assessment across the region, the report examines the physical and cultural influences in order to provide a comprehensive assessment of the foundations of the East Midlands landscape.

The EMRLCA identifies 31 Regional Landscape Character Types (RLCTs), five of which cover the distinctive East Midlands seascape. The report presents non-technical descriptions of each RLCT as well as a review of the Forces for Change that are currently acting to change the landscape. In addition, the implications of these changes and suggested mechanisms to counter adverse impacts and promote positive change are also considered, under 'Shaping the Future Landscape'. The report, and accompanying photographs and GIS based Figures, provides an overview of the region's diverse landscape, to enthuse and inform anyone with an interest in the landscape and to inform strategic initiatives and decision making which may have an impact on the character and identity of the region.

AN EVIDENCE BASE FOR REGIONAL LEVEL DECISION MAKING

The assessment has been designed to provide a strategic region-wide evidence base to help decision making on issues that will have implications for the landscape and wider environment. It acts as a signpost to more detailed Landscape Character Assessments, Historic Landscape Characterisations and other useful information sources, and provides a regional framework for future assessments which will inform planning policy or decisions about the location and design of future development.

By having in place a strong understanding of the character of the East Midlands Region, along with guidelines specifically designed to enhance the landscape for the benefit of all, positive decisions can be made with more certainty and confidence than ever before. The information contained in the EMRLCA will enable the East Midlands Region to direct positive change that will strengthen the sense of pride in, respect for, and appreciation of, the region's diverse landscapes.
