

Condition of Landscape Character

Indicator

The percentage of landscape units (Land Cover Parcels) in which the condition has changed.

Status



The percentage of landscape units in which condition has changed is good, and remains constant (note that it has not been possible to update this indicator due to a lack of updated aerial photographs. An update will be provided as soon as new photographs become available).

Overview

This indicator is measured by re-assessing the landscape character condition scores for a sample of 6 Land Cover Parcels (LCPs) within each Landscape Type and comparing them with their baseline condition scores. (LCPs are the smallest units of landscape character. Landscape Types are a generic classification category for landscape, assigned to units that share the same types of landscape features – e.g. organic hedgerow pattern or continuous tree cover – in the same combination.)

Landscape condition is assessed by viewing aerial photographs and assigning scores to each LCP for each of 6 landscape indicators: field boundaries, enclosure pattern, tree cover pattern and character, land use and settlement pattern. Based on these total scores, parcels are then assigned to 'high', 'medium' or 'low' condition categories. During the reporting process, the selected parcels are reassessed and it is noted if their score changes sufficiently to move them up or down a condition category.

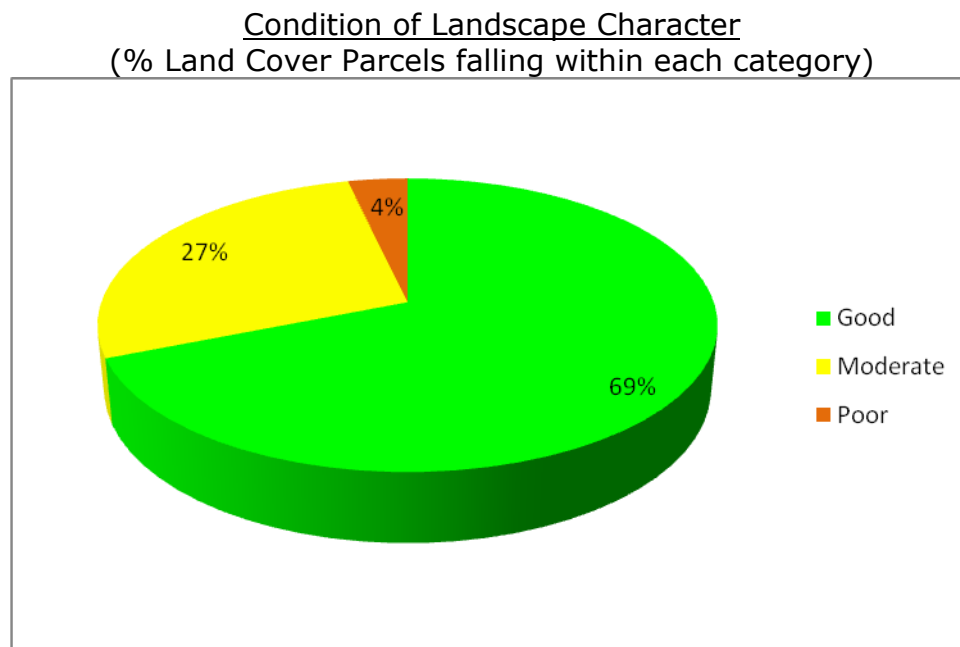
The baseline condition assessment was undertaken for the whole county (912 LCPs) in 2008 using the 2005 aerial photographs. The current assessment of the LCP sample set was undertaken in 2009 using the latest version of Google Earth (images dating from 2006-2007). **No re-assessment has been made in 2010** because it is unclear whether the GoogleEarth satellite imagery has been updated since the last assessment. However, the county aerial photographs, which are taken on a 5-year cycle, are being updated with a new flyover in summer 2010 and will be used for re-assessment of the LCP sample set for next year's reporting (May 2011).

However, it is important to note that change in the overall character of landscape is generally slow – gross changes may be observed when larger areas of land are lost to large-scale development but generally, landscape character is eroded gradually through loss of one or more features. For example loss of characteristic hedgerow oaks which tend not to be

maintained or replaced; a change in woodland character or cover and the tendency for new woodland to have geometric or regular outlines even in ancient landscapes; and an increased proportion of arable farming in landscapes with a characteristically mixed land use. As a result, this kind of 3-5 yearly monitoring cycle should be more than sufficient to observe trends in the landscape.

Performance

In the base line year (2005 aerial photograph set, assessed 2008) the percentage of landscape units (LCPs) in the high condition category was 69%, the percentage in the medium condition category was 27%, and the percentage in the poor condition category was 4%. (This is a countywide assessment, but excludes urban areas.) This means that current status of the landscape character in Worcestershire is good as illustrated in the pie chart below:



In 2009 a sample of 125 LCPs were chosen for reassessment. Six LCPs were selected from each Landscape Type (except for Wooded Forest for which there is only 1 LCP and Limestone Estatelands for which there are only 4 LCPs in the county). Parcels were chosen from both peri-urban and rural locations with the aim of giving a good cross-county distribution.

Based on the 2009 reassessment (which used Google Earth images dating from 2006-2007) there was *no change* noted in the condition of any of the parcels and therefore no units moved either up or down a condition category. This illustrates that, currently, the condition of landscape character – that is the characteristic field boundaries, enclosure pattern, tree cover pattern and character, land use and settlement pattern – is **good** and **stable**.

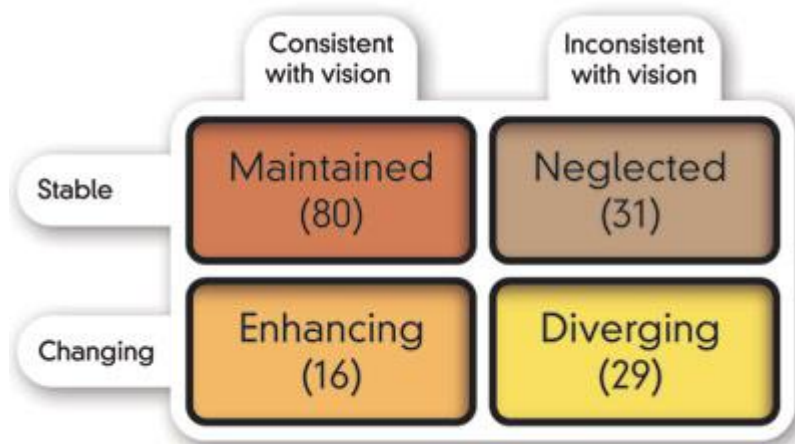
Geographical Context

At a county scale, many other local authorities have completed or are in the process of undertaking landscape character assessments. There are two phases to LCA:

- (1) classification and description and
- (2) analysis and evaluation.

Condition and sensitivity assessment form part of the second phase but as yet, other counties have not undertaken or published condition and sensitivity analyses. However, an established methodology exists and it will be interesting to compare the Worcestershire assessment with other counties' when they become available.

At a national scale, landscape condition is assessed using much larger units – Joint Character Areas (JCAs) – as part of the Countryside Quality Counts project <http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/>. This study, sponsored by Natural England, Defra and English Heritage, seeks to determine whether the scale and direction of change suggests that the character of JCAs has been maintained or enhanced, or alternatively whether current changes suggest that an area remains neglected, or is continuing to transform. The most recent matrix (a national summary) is for the period 1999-2003 and reads:



Source: <http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/results.html> [21/04/09]

For a more specific breakdown, the individual JCAs (Arden, Cotswolds, Herefordshire Plateau and Teme Valley, Malvern Hills, Severn and Avon Vales) that occur within or across Worcestershire have been assessed as follows:

- **JCA66 Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau** (corresponds with WCC RCA Kinver Sandlands and Wyre Forest Plateau)

Although development pressure has had an impact on the area, the changes in agriculture and woodland suggest that character is being maintained.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained Agriculture Semi-natural habitats River & coastal	Neglected Boundary features Historic features
Changing	Enhancing Trees & woodland	Diverging Settlement & development

<http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/jca/Consultation/OverallAssessment.aspx?CqcJcaID=65>

- **JCA97 Arden** (corresponds with WCC RCA Arden)

Changes in agriculture and pressure of development continue to transform the character of the area, although woodland character has been strengthened.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained	Neglected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Boundary features ◆ ▪ Semi-natural habitats ▪ Historic features ▪ River & coastal
Changing	Enhancing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trees & woodland ◆ 	Diverging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agriculture ◆ ▪ Settlement & development ◆

<http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/jca/Consultation/OverallAssessment.aspx?CqcJcaID=95>

- **JCA101 Herefordshire Plateau** (corresponds with WCC RCA Bromyard Plateau)

Although the nature of the agricultural landscape has continued to erode, the character of woodlands has been enhanced and development pressure has only been significant locally. The evidence therefore suggests character has probably been maintained.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained Settlement & development River & coastal	Neglected Boundary features Agriculture Semi-natural habitats Historic features
Changing	Enhancing Trees & woodland	Diverging

<http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/jca/Consultation/OverallAssessment.aspx?CqcJcaID=99>

- **JCA 102 Teme Valley** (corresponds with WCC RCA Teme Valley)

Although development pressure is significant locally, the character of the farmed and wooded landscape has been maintained, although a decline in the area of woodland management may be a cause for concern in the long term. Given the general neglect of features associated with boundary, historic, semi-natural and river elements, the overall assessment is one of neglect.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained Trees & woodland Agriculture	Neglected Boundary features Semi-natural habitats Historic features River & coastal
Changing	Enhancing	Diverging Settlement & development

<http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/jca/Consultation/OverallAssessment.aspx?CqcJcaID=100>

- **JCA 103 Malvern Hills** (corresponds with WCC RCA Malvern and Abberley Hills)

The character of the agricultural landscape has been maintained, and development pressure is limited, so that overall the character of the area has been maintained. There has also been some strengthening of woodland character, although neglect of boundary elements may be a cause of concern.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained Agriculture Settlement & development Historic features	Neglected Boundary features River & coastal
Changing	Enhancing Trees & woodland Semi-natural habitats	Diverging

<http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/jca/Consultation/OverallAssessment.aspx?CqcJcaID=101>

- **JCA 106 Severn and Avon Vales** (corresponds with WCC RCA Mid Worcestershire Forest, Vale of Evesham, Vale of Gloucester, North West Gloucestershire Sandlands)

Although the character of the woodland resource appears to have been strengthened, the changes in agriculture and the pressure of development continue to transform the area. Riverine, boundary and historic elements also show signs of neglect.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained Semi-natural habitats	Neglected Boundary features Historic features River & coastal
Changing	Enhancing Trees & woodland	Diverging Agriculture Settlement & development

<http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/jca/Consultation/OverallAssessment.aspx?CqcJcaID=104>

- **JCA 107 Cotswolds** (corresponds with WCC RCAs Cotswolds and Bredon Hill)

Changes in the agricultural landscape, largely as a result of the ESA, appear to have strengthened the resource considerably. Woodland character is also stronger. While development pressure is transforming the JCA locally, the overall character has been maintained or probably enhanced.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained Boundary features Settlement & development Historic features	Neglected
Changing	Enhancing Trees & woodland Agriculture Semi-natural habitats	Diverging

<http://countryside-quality-counts.org.uk/jca/Consultation/OverallAssessment.aspx?CqcJcaID=105>

See Appendix for comparative location maps of JCAs and RCAs.

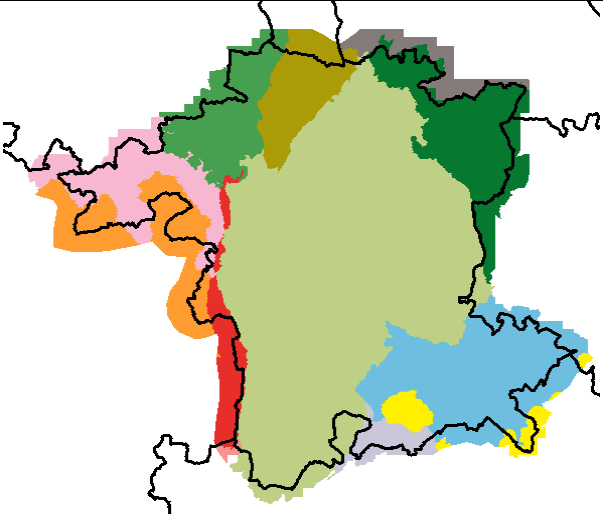


Actions

Wherever possible, opportunities should be sought to strengthen landscape character by ensuring that land management activities and new development take into account the characteristic features of the landscapes in which they take place. Extensive information and advice about the distinctive character of the Landscape Types found in Worcestershire is available through our website (see below). All LSP partners should be aware of this work and should apply it accordingly when/if their activities will potentially impact on the landscape character and promote/share this knowledge with others where appropriate.

Further Information

More information about the landscape character of Worcestershire, including full access to the database, methodology and documentation is available from the Landscapes of Worcestershire website, at: www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lca

Appendix

Regional Character Areas (WCC)	Joint Character Areas (Natural England) (Now renamed National Character Areas)
	
<p> Regional Character Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arden Birmingham Conurbation Bromyard Plateau Cotswolds and Bredon Hill Kinver Sandlands Malvern and Abberley Hills Mid Worcestershire Forests North West Gloucestershire Sa Vale of Gloucester Teme Valley Vale of Evesham Wvre Forest Plateau 	<p>66 Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau 97 Arden 101 Herefordshire Plateau 102 Teme Valley 103 Malvern Hills 106 Severn & Avon Vales 107 Cotswolds</p>
<p>http://gis.worcestershire.gov.uk/website/lca/viewer.htm</p>	<p>http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/englands/character/areas/westmidlands.aspx</p>