

Landscape Led Development: Protecting Dorset's Unique Character

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What is landscape?

A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.



Dorset's unique landscape

Dorset's diverse geology shapes its soils, habitats and patterns of land use across the county.

Key landscape types include chalk escarpments, open downlands, clay vales, Dorset heaths and river valleys.

The coast has a strong influence, including the internationally significant Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

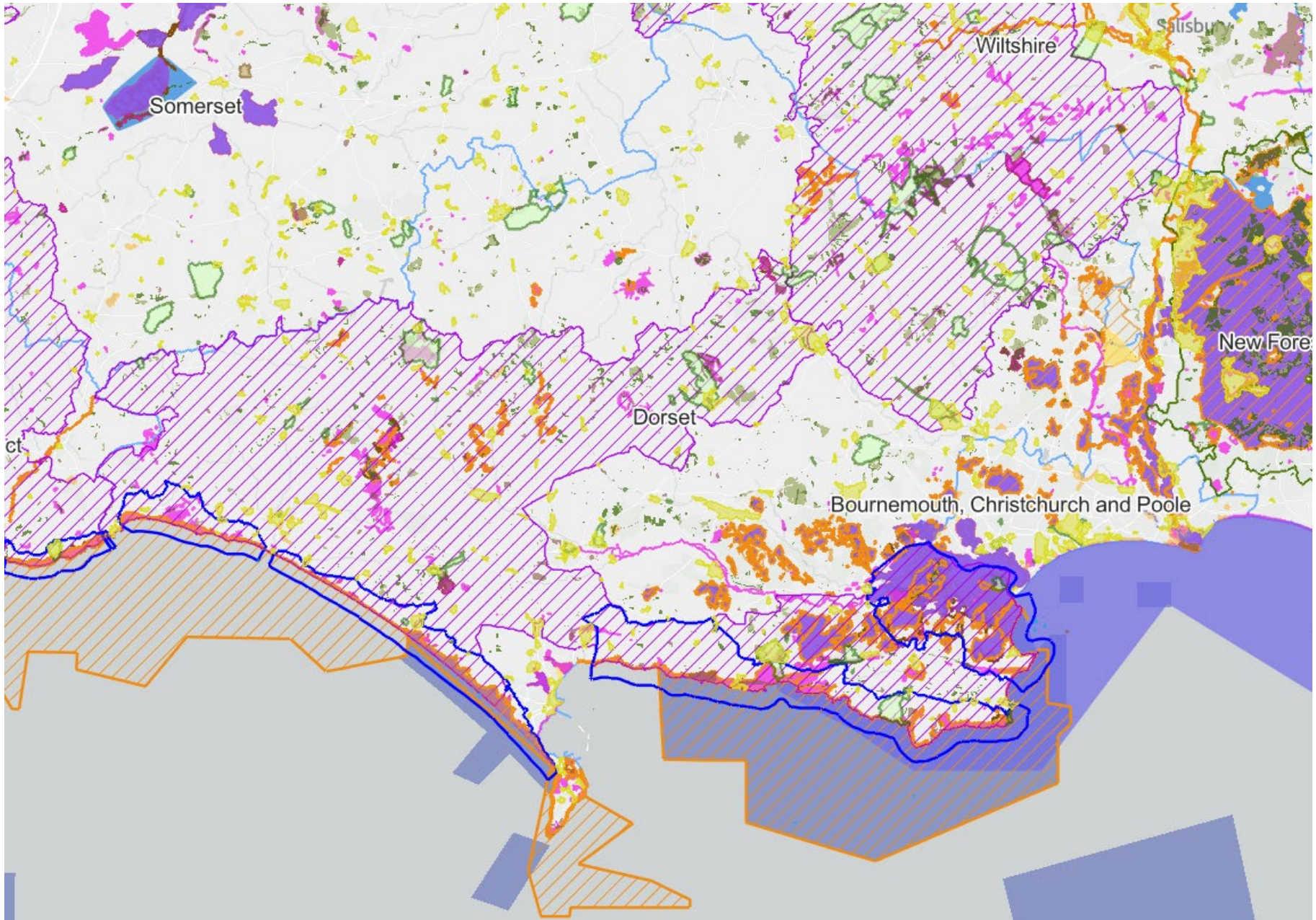
Dorset's rich heritage includes internationally important natural, historic and cultural sites.

Two National Landscapes cover more than half of the county, recognising its exceptional scenic quality.

Its distinctive landscapes have inspired generations of writers and artists, helping to shape Dorset's cultural identity.

Unique planning challenges

- Over half of the county is within a nationally designated landscape – presumption against major development in the NPPF
- Large distribution of internationally designated habitats – NPPF presumption against any net increase in residential development within **400m** of an SAC/SPA under the Habitat Regs
- Green Belt covering large areas in south east Dorset around Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
- **Dorset's planning challenge is cumulative** - it is rarely one designation alone, but several overlapping constraints affecting the same places.

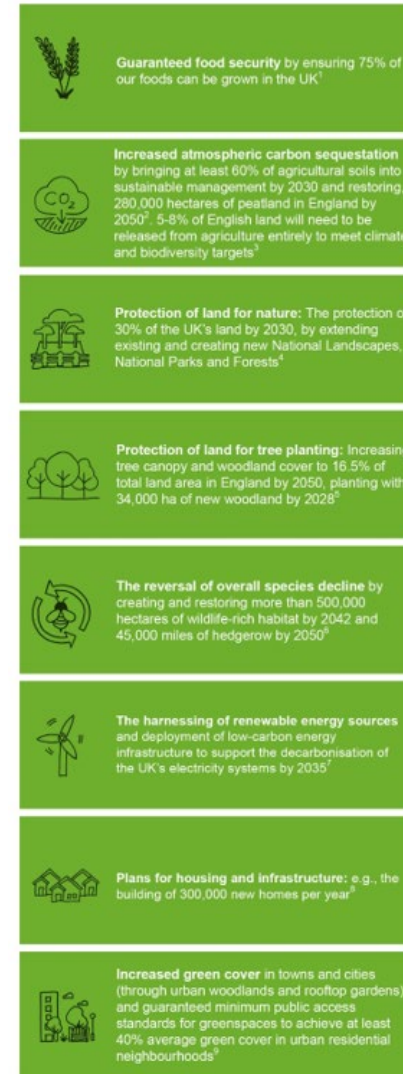










Why Landscape-Led Development Matters Now

- Increased housing targets
- Net zero infrastructure
- Solar/wind pressures
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Climate resilience
- Demand for multifunctional land use

The question is not whether landscapes will change, but how we manage that change positively.

"Our landscapes have evolved over time, and they will continue to evolve – change is a constant, but outcomes vary. The management of change is essential to ensure that we achieve sustainable outcomes – social, environmental and economic... The process of Landscape Character Assessment has an important role to play in managing and guiding change." **[An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment 2014].**



-  **Guaranteed food security** by ensuring 75% of our foods can be grown in the UK¹
-  **Increased atmospheric carbon sequestration** by bringing at least 60% of agricultural soils into sustainable management by 2030 and restoring 260,000 hectares of peatland in England by 2050². 5-8% of English land will need to be released from agriculture entirely to meet climate and biodiversity targets³
-  **Protection of land for nature:** The protection of 30% of the UK's land by 2030, by extending existing and creating new National Landscapes, National Parks and Forests⁴
-  **Protection of land for tree planting:** Increasing tree canopy and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area in England by 2050, planting with 34,000 ha of new woodland by 2028⁵
-  **The reversal of overall species decline** by creating and restoring more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat by 2042 and 45,000 miles of hedgerow by 2050⁶
-  **The harnessing of renewable energy sources** and deployment of low-carbon energy infrastructure to support the decarbonisation of the UK's electricity systems by 2035⁷
-  **Plans for housing and infrastructure:** e.g., the building of 300,000 new homes per year⁸
-  **Increased green cover** in towns and cities (through urban woodlands and rooftop gardens) and guaranteed minimum public access standards for greenspaces to achieve at least 40% average green cover in urban residential neighbourhoods⁹



Planning policy frameworks

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Local Plans
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

Key role

- Translates landscape evidence into decision-making rules
- Provides legal and policy weight

Key policy principles (England)

- Protect and enhance valued landscapes
- Recognise intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside
- Promote high-quality design
- Support nature recovery and multifunctional landscapes

Landscape-led Development

What are the core tools for landscape-led development?

Landscape Character Assessment

- Baseline landscape evidence

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

- Evaluates sensitivity of the landscape to specific types of change

Design Codes

- Provide clear, place-specific design expectations for development.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

- Assesses the effects of a specific development proposal

Landscape Character Assessment

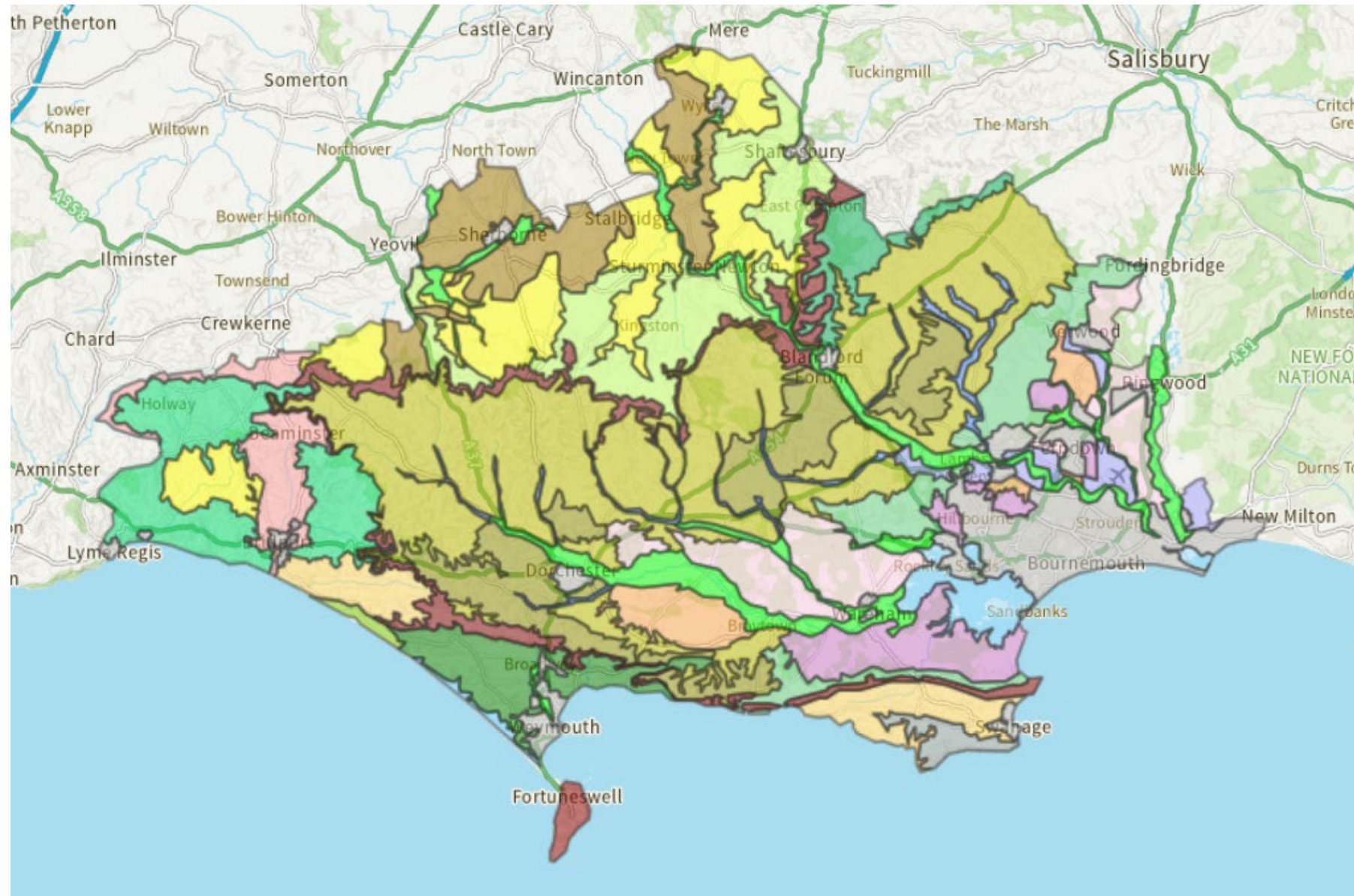
A baseline evidence tool describing the distinct combination of elements that define a landscape.

Key role: Understanding “what is there”

- Provides a spatial framework for planning decisions
- Establishes landscape character types/areas

Why it matters

- Ensures development responds to local distinctiveness
- Supports evidence-based policy making
- Forms the foundation for other landscape evidence:
 - Landscape sensitivity assessments
 - Design guidance



Landscape Character Assessment Example

Key Sensitivities and Valued Features

- The contrast between the open valley landform in the south (LCA 5b) and more enclosed areas of incised slopes in the north (LCA 5b) contributes to the landscape pattern, character of views and sense of place.
- Areas of woodland (notably in the south of the LCT), including Postlebury Wood (SSSI), provide habitat connectivity and visual contrast with the more open character elsewhere within the LCT.
- Areas of small-scale historic field pattern in the south of the LCT (LCA 5b), divided by mature hedgerows, occasional ditches and tree-lined tributary streams, contribute to a sense of place and time depth.
- Large country houses set in parkland (within Registered Parks and Gardens) provide a formal element to the landscape as well as time depth. Areas of wood pasture and parkland provide unique habitat and contribute to the landscape pattern.
- Areas of riparian woodland and floodplain grazing marsh surrounding the River Frome (in the north of the LCT) contribute contrast to the landscape pattern and provide habitat connectivity.
- The historic settlement pattern of small towns and villages, associated with the historic mills along the River Frome, contribute to time depth and the character of views.
- The network of PRoWs that emanates from the settlement edge of Frome (including the East Mendip Way), adds to the recreational value of the LCT.
- The wooded and elevated character of the Wooded Greensand Ridge (LCT 7) to the south-east of this LCT, provides a contrasting backcloth to the more open gentle valley landform and patchwork of agricultural fields within the LCT, contributing to a sense of place in the south of the LCT (LCA 5b).
- Wide and distant views across most of the LCT, particularly from the valley sides and elevated landform beyond the LCT, are focused overlooking the course of the river, contributing to a sense of place. Views from the adjacent wooded escarpment within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape contribute to “unspoilt and panoramic views” that are a special quality of the National Landscape.

Development Management

- Respect and conserve historic features within the LCT, including the remains of Witham Priory and Devil's Bed and Bolster (both Scheduled Monuments)
- Avoid development of a vertical scale which competes with key views towards the rising skylines formed by the wooded escarpment of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape to the east.
- Consider the sensitive siting and design of renewable energy developments (particularly solar farms) and associated electricity infrastructure. Avoid degradation of smaller scale and more irregular field patterns predominantly found within the south of the LCT (LCA 5b) that may result from introduction of solar arrays.
- Conserve the rural character of the panoramic views across the LCT that are experienced from, and a special quality of, the Cranborne Chase National Landscape.
- Manage recreational use around settlements to avoid footpath erosion. Increase and improve signage, ensuring appropriate maintenance, to improve visitor experience.
- Should further settlement expansion of Frome occur, ensure development is sympathetic to the character of the rural landscape and landscape proposals help to screen and filter views towards the settlement edge.
- Conserve the distinct settlement pattern of small historic villages located along the River Frome. New development should use locally-appropriate materials (such as grey, buff and cream limestones, and orange and buff clay tiles) that respect and enhance local distinctiveness and the traditional character of the area.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

What it is

An assessment that evaluates how sensitive a landscape is to specific types of change.

Key role

Builds on LCA but moves from description → evaluation

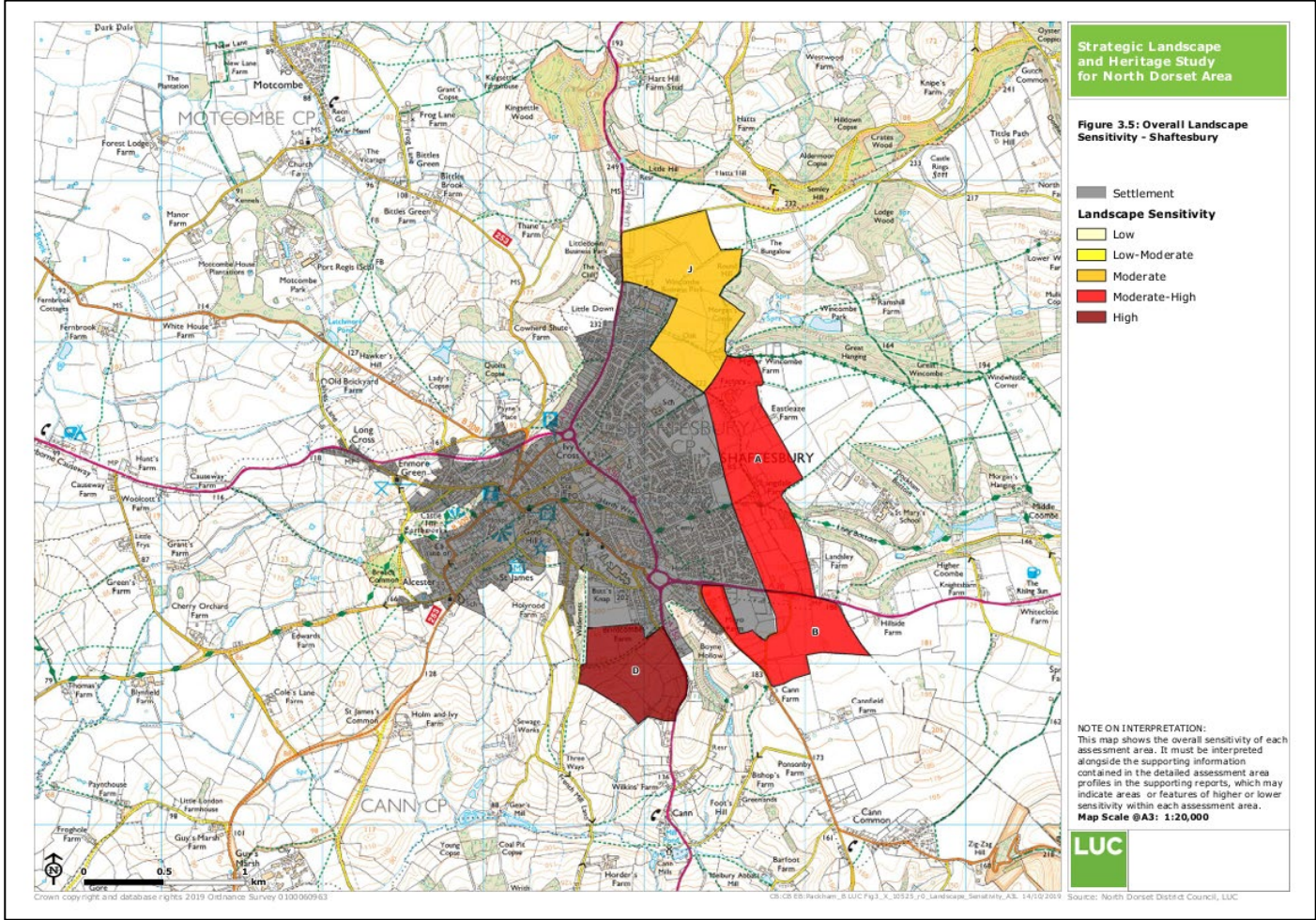
Outputs:

- Sensitivity ratings (low–high)
- Constraints and opportunities
- Development guidance

Why it matters

Informs:

- Site allocation in Local Plans
- Decision-making for planning applications



Landscape sensitivity assessment

Landscape character context

This assessment area falls within the Shaftesbury Greensand Ridges Landscape Character Area. It is adjacent to the Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The assessment area comprises the land between Salisbury Road (A30) and Higher Blandford Road.

Assessment criterion	Description	Sensitivity score
Physical character (including topography and scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively flat, elevated topography with height of the land ranging between 185m and 195m AOD. Fields are small to medium sized and irregular in shape. Field boundaries are defined by relatively low-cut hedgerows, creating the perception of a more open, large-scale area. 	M
Natural character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land use is mixed arable and pasture agriculture, enclosed by low-cut hedgerows containing some mature trees. Fields within the assessment area are predominantly arable with some small areas used for pasture and equestrian use. 	L-M
Historic landscape character (please see separate heritage assessment for asset-based information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is one grade II listed farmhouse building in the north of the area on the A30. The HLC identifies most fields to be planned or regular enclosure of post-medieval date, although fields in the far south are identified to be other regular 19th century enclosure. 	L-M
Form, density and setting of existing development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assessment area is primarily undeveloped, except for isolated residential properties along New Lane. The area is separated from existing settlement by the A30 and B3081, with the roads containing the existing development. The area provides rural setting for some residential properties along the A30 and the B3081. 	M-H
Views and visual character including skylines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relatively low-cut hedgerows enable long-distance views to the south and east towards the Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB. Mature hedgerow trees, residential properties on the settlement edge and a small-scale overhead power line mark the skyline. Topographical features such as hills to the south of the assessment area including Melbury Hill are prominent. The settlement edge to the north and north-west is visually prominent from much of the assessment area. 	M-H
Perceptual and experiential qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The area has a rural and isolated feel in the south, although in the north there is more association with existing settlement. Traffic along the A30 is visible and vehicles on the A30 and B3081 produce notable traffic noise. 	M

Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity

L	L-M	M	M-H	H
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Landscape sensitivity is increased by the rural setting the area provides to existing settlement, open character with extensive undeveloped views to the south (including views to the AONB), frequent hedgerows with mature trees and the rural and isolated perceptual qualities of this area. Landscape sensitivity is reduced by the relatively flat topography and lack of designated habitats. Overall the assessment area has **moderate-high** landscape sensitivity.

Design Guides and Codes

What they are

Documents that provide clear, place-specific design expectations for development.

Key role

Guide:

- Layout
- Scale and massing
- Green infrastructure
- Materials



Why they matter

Move from strategy → delivery

Ensure development:

- Integrates with landscape structure
- Reinforces character rather than eroding it

Provide clarity to developers and decision-makers

Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

Role

Assesses the effects of a specific development proposal

What it adds

Moves from strategic → site-specific

An iterative process between assessors and designers, with proposals modified to reduce negative landscape impacts.

Why include it

It is a key development management tool for landscape

Demonstrates how proposals respond to:

- LCA
- Sensitivity findings
- Policy

Landscape Character Assessment

- Baseline landscape evidence

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

- Evaluates sensitivity of the landscape to specific types of change

Design Codes

- Provide clear, place-specific design expectations for development.

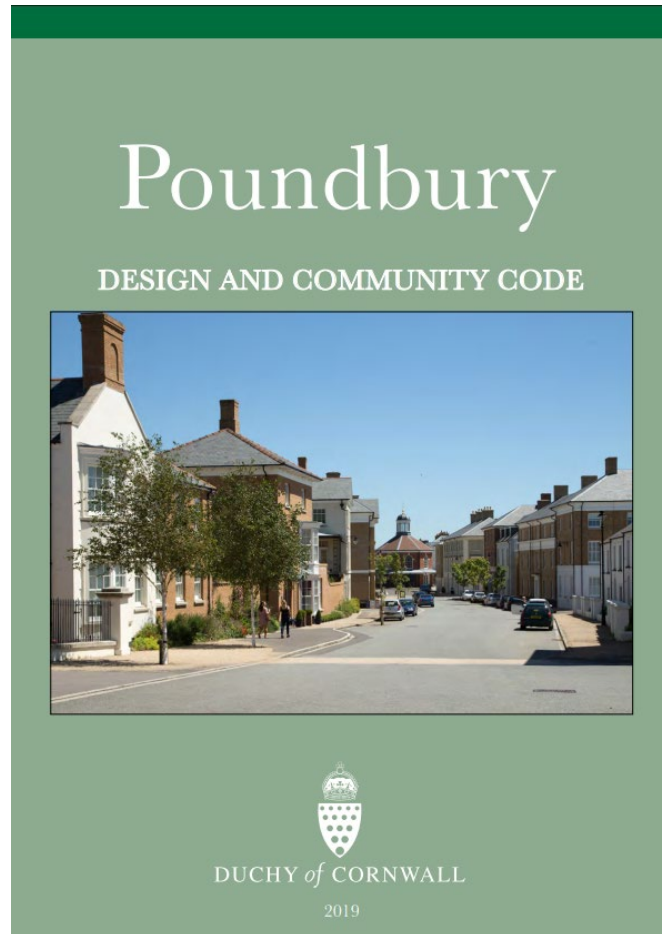
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

- Assesses the effects of a specific development proposal

Landscape-responsive vs landscape-neutral design

Landscape-led design	Landscape-neutral design
Responds to topography	Levelled platforms
Retains landscape structure	Removes existing features
Strong settlement edge	Sprawling edge
Place-specific materials	Generic house types
Green Infrastructure-led layout	Green Infrastructure added later
Walkable mixed use	Car-dependent

Examples of landscape led development



Examples of landscape led development



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Reflection

Core principles for landscape-led development

Development should:

- Respond to the existing landscape context
- Be shaped by place, not imposed on it

Key outcomes

- A stronger sense of place
- More resilient landscapes
- Better integration of nature recovery, climate adaptation, and green infrastructure
- Less conflict at the planning stage



Thank you



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