

Appendix 10 – Landscape Character

10.1 The landscape of Three Rivers is a complex mix of rural and urban areas, woodlands, wildlife habitats, farmland, water features and other landforms. Wildlife habitats such as meadows, woodlands, hedgerows, orchards and wetlands are valued landscape components and have their own special management requirements.

10.2 Three Rivers incorporates 546 hectares of the Chilterns National Landscape, an area of national landscape importance, generally made up of a mosaic of woodland, copses, enclosed pastures, arable fields, wooded and open heath and scattered farms and villages, overlying rolling hills and valleys. The parts of the National Landscape within the District consist largely of chalk streams, rivers, valleys and adjacent hillsides and woods.

10.3 As there will be increasing pressure for development across the District, it is important that all landscape, including the Chilterns National Landscape, is conserved and enhanced. The preferred policy approach ensures that the design of development proposals is sensitive enough to ensure that schemes make a positive contribution to the landscape.

Landscape Character

1) Chilterns National Landscape

The Chilterns National Landscape is a nationally important landscape designation, and development proposals are expected to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty within the area, its cultural significance and wildlife habitats.

There is a presumption against major development (10 dwellings or more, or greater than 0.5ha) in the National Landscape unless it can be demonstrated that there are exceptional circumstances and the development is in the public interest. Whether a development constitutes a ‘major development’ will be assessed on a site-by-site basis taking account of the nature and scale of the proposal and its relation to the local context and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes of the National Landscape designation. Planning permission will be granted for development within the Chilterns National Landscape only if the proposal:

- a) preserves and enhances the special qualities, distinctive character and natural features which contribute to the National Landscape;
- b) has regard to the National Landscape Management Plan, Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and technical notes by being of high-quality design which respects the natural beauty of the Chilterns and its traditional built character, and reinforces the sense of place and local character;
- c) avoids adverse impacts from individual proposals and any cumulative effects, unless these can be satisfactorily mitigated;

- d) does not harm important views into, out of or within the National Landscape; and
- e) submits landscape visual impact assessment where the development is within the National Landscape area or will likely affect its setting.

2) **Landscape Regions**

Proposals that have an impact on the distinctive landscape character in which they are set will be required to demonstrate that they have taken into consideration the key characteristics, attributes and sensitivities of the landscape typology in which the proposed development is to be located, together with the landscape guidelines set out in the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment for Three Rivers.

The Council will support proposals that:

- a) Lead to the removal or a reduction in the impact of existing structures and land uses that are detrimental to the visual quality of the landscape
 - b) Enhance public access and recreation opportunities without detriment to the landscape or wildlife
 - c) Contribute to the delivery of Green Infrastructure
 - d) Contribute to the measures identified in the Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy to strengthen, reinforce, safeguard, manage, improve, restore and reconstruct landscapes.
- 3) When considering proposals for development which may affect the management of an area or particular feature of the landscape, details of management proposals to protect and enhance the contribution of the site to the wider landscape will be required.

Reasoned Justification

10.4 Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB), as they have been known since their inception in 1949, have been elevated to National Landscapes to place them alongside their larger and more well-known counterpart National Parks, to highlight their equal place in the country's aims around health, wellbeing, sustainable public access, climate change and nature recovery.

10.5 New development should conserve and enhance the special character and natural beauty of the National Landscapes. Proposals should also protect the setting of the National Landscapes and safeguard views into and out of the area. The areas of the District within the Chilterns National Landscape are shown on the proposals map.

10.6 Hertfordshire County Council's Landscape Character Assessment identifies three landscape regions in Three Rivers (shown on the proposals map)

- The Chilterns Landscape Region (including parts of the Chilterns National Landscape)
- The Central River Valleys Landscape Region
- The South Hertfordshire Plateau

10.7 These landscape regions contain a variety of landscape character areas for which assessments have been produced identifying key characteristics and influences. A Landscape Strategy has been produced which includes suggestions for managing future change. Further details can be obtained from:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/landscape/landscape-character-assessment.aspx>

10.8 The Council will seek to ensure that development complements the surrounding local landscape of Three Rivers as identified in the current Local Character Assessments, through siting, layout, design, appearance and landscaping of development. When preparing applications consideration should be given to:

- The development pattern of the area, its historical and ecological qualities, tranquillity and sensitivity to change
- The pattern of woodlands, fields, hedgerows, trees, waterbodies, walls and other features
- The topography of the area.

10.9 Applicants are encouraged to refer to the Landscape Character Assessments for information in relation to these matters and the Council's Trees and Landscape Strategy.

10.10 For developments in or near the Chilterns National Landscape, the Council will have regard to the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and Supplementary Technical Notes on Chilterns building materials (flint, brick and roofing materials). These provide further information on acceptable design in the Chilterns National Landscape, the issues facing the area and the management actions required. These are available from:

<https://www.chilterns.org.uk/visit-chilterns/shop-chilterns/books-guides/>