



Nuneaton and Bedworth Land Use Designations Study Volume 2: Policy Recommendations

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**Nuneaton and Bedworth Land Use Designations Study
Volume 2: Policy Recommendations**

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Figure 2.1 Landscape Character Areas and Local Policy Designations

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Volume of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Land Use Designations Study provides recommendations for the application of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Landscape Character Assessment in the emerging Local Development Framework.
- 1.2 The existing Adopted Local Plan June 2006 (Local Plan) identifies three Areas of Restraint. Other land not designated as Green Belt or Area of Restraint is identified as Countryside. This study has reviewed the integrity of these designations to assess whether they are still needed and appropriate to be carried forward to the Local Development Framework. Guidance has been provided on the merits of continuing or no longer continuing with these designations based upon recommendations in National Planning Policy, best practice guidance and local circumstances.

2.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 This report assesses the merits of pursuing Area of Restraint (AOR) and Countryside designations within the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) and provides guidance on the amendment of their boundaries if considered for retention. The recommendations are based on national planning policies, local circumstances and review of best practice. A summary of relevant planning policy is provided and has been used to inform the policy recommendations.
- 2.2 There is an emphasis in national planning guidance (see Appendix 1.0) on ensuring that development is locally appropriate and respects the key characteristics of the landscape it is within, protecting or enhancing the local environment. This shift in approach will require developers to demonstrate that proposals in the countryside fit and enhance local distinctiveness regardless of whether the land is considered to be of high or low quality.

Function of Areas of Restraint

- 2.3 In the Local Plan 2006 Second Deposit inquiry, the Inspector expressed concern at the Council's approach to the application of Area of Restraint (AoR) policy, stating AOR policy was *tantamount to Green Belt policy by another name*. In his report he stated that there was a need to allow flexibility on this land to allow for medium to longer-term development needs. Part of the recommendation was that a landscape character assessment be carried out:

'identifying those areas, peripheral or within the urban areas/settlements which are of such visual and/or public amenity quality to the established settlements that they warrant protection, and those remaining areas which could be considered for long-term development needs on review of the local plan'.

Inspector's Report 2002, paragraph 7.69.

- 2.4 The Council then commissioned Entec to carry out the landscape character assessment and an analysis of AOR policy. In this study Entec argued that when carrying out the review of policy, landscape character assessment could not perform this role. Entec noted that landscape character assessment is not recognised as a process for assessing the suitability of land as a green buffer or other countryside development restraint policy. Entec also stated that a landscape character assessment could not fully address visual or public amenity quality. It considered that this would only be assessed through analysis of public access and gauging public opinion.
- 2.5 The Entec report then goes on to list the issues raised in the Inspector's report and the recommendations for policy within the review of AOR, (Table 2.1, page 6). The report concluded that only three AOR should be retained and suggested amendments to the wording of the policy.
- 2.6 Within this study the Council has asked for a review of these remaining AOR to determine whether they are still worthy of retention within the LDF. In carrying out this assessment it is important to note that Inspectors have repeatedly raised concerns over the AOR policy and the purpose of their designation in light of the need to consider longer-term development needs. In order to establish suitable

criteria for analysis of land designated AOR and other Countryside areas it is important to look at the functions AOR have delivered within each plan. This is summarised in Table 2.1 below.

TABLE 2.1: THE FUNCTIONS AOR HAVE DELIVERED WITHIN EACH PLAN PERIOD

Planning document	Functions
1981-1996 Warwickshire Structure Plan	Land is important for the structure of towns
1989-2001 Warwickshire Structure Plan Alterations	AOR should only be applied to certain areas that require special protection because of their contribution to the structure of towns such as river valleys and other vulnerable areas. AOR should only be used where the open nature of areas in and around towns is important to their proper structure and character. Justifications stated two functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect open wedges separating elements within urban areas; and • Prevent surrounding villages merging into towns.
NBBC Adopted Plan 1993	Seek to avoid unnecessary incursion into the countryside and other open areas. Other reasons to justify the area as AOR (although not stated as specific criteria) are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural land value; • Buffer between settlements or distinct parts of them; • As an attractive break from development; and • Amenity and nature conservation interests.
1996-2011 Structure Plan	Protect open space which contributes to the character and attractiveness of urban areas.
Amendments to policy following AOR policy review by Entec	The overriding intention of AOR is to protect their inherently open character because of the valuable contribution they make to the character and structure of the towns. The AOR is not intended to restrict all forms of development.

- 2.7 The functions of AOR have undergone subtle changes. However the key themes which remains throughout Area of Restraint policy are:
- the preservation of open character; and
 - land makes a valuable contribution to the structure of the area.
- 2.8 The Inspector in the 2006 inquiry referred to the use of landscape character assessment to establish the importance of land. The landscape character assessment is useful in identifying what is special about areas of land and includes reference to the two themes considered to be central to AoR policy.
- 2.9 Paragraphs 2.3 to 2.8 provide a brief summary on the genesis of AOR policy which indicates that the primary reasons for its designation are the preservation of an open character and the importance land makes to the structure of towns. These are primarily landscape related elements reported within landscape character assessment and AOR could be considered as a local landscape designation.

- 2.10 PPS 7 identifies two tests that need to be applied to local landscape designations (which could also apply to AOR and Countryside) when deciding whether such designations should be carried forward within the LDF. These tests are:
- Can it be clearly demonstrated that criteria-based policy within the landscape character assessment cannot provide the necessary protection?
 - What requires extra protection and why?
- 2.11 The following text provides an assessment against these two tests, firstly for AOR and secondly for Countryside.
- 2.12 Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough currently has three Areas of Restraint identified within its Local Plan, which are landscapes that make an important contribution to the open character and appearance of the area.
- 2.13 The landscape character assessment carried out for the borough has assessed all landscapes. Each AOR is in one or more landscape character areas as listed in Table 2.2. Landscape strategy and guidelines for each area are also listed. The landscape character areas and local policy designations are illustrated on Figure 2.1.

TABLE 2.2: AOR in Landscape Character Areas

AOR	Character Area	Landscape Strategy	Landscape Guidelines
Generally between Galley Common and Hartshill;	12. Galley Common - Hills and Valleys Strength: Moderate to Strong Condition: Moderate	Conserve and Enhance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve wooded horizons interspersed with built form in views • Conserve the rural character of the area ensuring that new development does not increase the prominence of built form in the landscape • Any properties visible in the landscape should appear as loose clusters or single farmhouses associated with agricultural buildings rather than continuous lines of development • Conserve the rapid transition from urban to rural landscape • Retain farmland either side of Plough Hill Road to retain separation between Galley Common and Plough Hill
	11. Galley Common Hill and Robinson's End Valley Strength: Moderate Condition: Moderate	Enhance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance Whytell Pool and Meadows along Galley Common Brook • Retain farmland between Robinson's End and Ansley to retain separation between settlements • Ensure development does not become more prominent within the wider landscape to the north and south by ensuring it avoids the highest ground

AOR	Character Area	Landscape Strategy	Landscape Guidelines
Generally between Nuneaton and Hinckley (south of The Long Shoot, A47)	2. Anker Valley Estate Farmlands Strength: Moderate Condition: Moderate	Enhance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure distinction between Nuneaton and Hinckley is retained • Seek to reduce intervisibility between Hinckley and Nuneaton through reinforcing woodland planting along the River Anker and railway
Generally between Nuneaton/Weddington and Hartshill (west of Weddington Lane and north of Judkins Quarry).	1. Hartshill Ridge Strength: Moderate Condition: Poor	Enhance and Restore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain and enhance the wooded and rural character of Coventry Canal • Ensure built development is not visible on the ridgeline within the wider landscape • Retain the defined settlement edge to Camp Hill along the B4114 • Retain the rural character along the Coventry Canal and adjacent lanes and footpaths ensuring longer views remain across farmland to the north
	2. Anker Valley Estate Farmlands Strength: Moderate Condition: Moderate	Enhance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain and enhance the rural village edge to Weddington through ensuring development is filtered by woodland and trees and views to Weddington Church are maintained • Enhance wooded character of the discussed railway retaining selected views out across the countryside through management of woodland • Ensure any new development does not make urban edges more prominent within the landscape which would affect rural character

2.14 Character areas identify the key characteristics that make these areas special and assesses their relative landscape value based upon strength of character and landscape condition.

2.15 When applying the tests from PPS7 set out in paragraph 2.10 above, criteria-based policy can be derived from the landscape character assessment which conserves, enhances and restores special qualities in AOR. Therefore in accordance with PPS7 there is not a need to continue with the current designation. It is recommended that Policy ENV2 should not be carried forward within the LDF provided that there is a policy which relates to landscape character which makes direct reference to the guidance laid out within each landscape character description of the landscape character assessment.

Countryside

2.16 The Local Plan also identified land outside settlements not designated as Green Belt to be Countryside. Policy ENV3 is a general policy which seeks to conserve the rural character and limits the types and nature of development to appropriate to rural locations. The Countryside policy covers land where further development is considered unsustainable and includes the river valleys that extend from the wider countryside, penetrating the urban area. These often provide the nearest and most accessible countryside to urban residents.

2.17 Landscape features such as important river valleys have been described in the relevant landscape character area descriptions and reference made to ensure their conservation, enhancement or restoration as appropriate.

- 2.18 Characteristics are reported within the landscape character assessment such as river valleys and wooded countryside walks. Where these are considered important features they are included in descriptions and landscape guidelines as features to be conserved or enhanced.
- 2.19 The landscape character assessment provides guidance on the nature of development and how development should be designed to not impact on the remaining land within each landscape character area (LCA). Criteria-based policy would provide protection to this land ensuring development is of an appropriate nature. Accordingly it is recommended that Policy ENV3 is not carried forward within the LDF but is replaced with a landscape character derived policy.
- 2.20 Further protection to important areas of land would be provided if a policy related to Green Infrastructure based upon the Green Infrastructure (GI) Study for the Borough undertaken in 2009 is carried forward. Features of importance for public access into the countryside are noted in the GI Study. Policy related to GI and linked to the landscape character assessment could afford appropriate levels of protection to important aspects of land such as recreation and access presently noted in the functions of the Countryside designation without the need for the policy which could restrict the long-term development needs of the borough.
- Recommendations for policy in the LDF
- 2.21 The above text makes reference to the relevant information from the landscape character assessment that provides justification for protection of land in the designations. The text below describes the extent and nature of criteria-based policies derived from a landscape character assessment.
- 2.22 Within the LDF policies should make reference to plans and proposals having due regard for the local distinctiveness and key characteristics within each landscape character area. This approach will ensure all landscapes can be protected and enhanced throughout the lifetime of the LDF and that new development positively responds to its local context. Rather than just protecting the best landscapes within the Borough, this would support ideals within PPS1 for sustainable development that contributes to the economic development; protects and enhances the natural and historic environment, quality and character of the countryside; and ensures high quality development to support local communities.
- 2.23 Natural England (former Countryside Agency/Natural England) commissioned a number of pilot studies to demonstrate how the use of landscape character assessments could be successfully integrated into local development frameworks. This guidance was produced to aid planning authorities in drafting criteria-based policies using landscape character assessments as part of the evidence base. The pilot studies were undertaken for both West Sussex¹ and Shrewsbury and Atcham². Further recommendations of a similar nature have been provided in

¹ Criteria based landscape policies and guidance in local development documents: An approach in West Sussex. White Consultants: February 2006.

² Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study Phase 2, 2005

Essex³. This best practice has been used within this document to suggest how Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council can incorporate landscape into criteria-based policy and use landscape character assessment as a robust framework for such policies. This will ensure that the conservation and protection of all landscapes in the Borough is an integral part of local policy within the context of a shift in policy away from local landscape designations guided by information in PPS7.

Borough Plan

- 2.24 It is important to ensure that the vision provided for Nuneaton and Bedworth within the Borough Plan places emphasis on landscape to set out and emphasise its importance from the outset. The spatial vision should make reference to the importance of landscape in defining the quality of life for communities in the borough by 2026. This could be included within the vision statement either as an additional bullet to those already presented in the Consultation Draft on issues and options or by making minor amendments to bullet 5 to read:

‘the local distinctiveness of the landscape will improve and there will be improvements to biodiversity and the natural environment’

- 2.25 Nuneaton and Bedworth’s Borough Plan will include strategic objectives. The objectives should make reference to the importance of local distinctiveness within landscape. This could be through an individual objective which sets out the importance of the landscape with reference to the landscape character assessment; or landscape could be referenced as part of objectives relating to housing, employment and infrastructure.
- 2.26 More detailed policy to support strategic objectives should relate to the landscape qualities and distinctiveness identified within the Nuneaton and Bedworth Landscape Character Assessment. Such a policy could be worded as follows:

Nuneaton and Bedworth is predominantly an urban area although countryside surrounds the main urban areas of Nuneaton and Bedworth. The landscape is primarily farmland with subtle differences including wooded parkland; rolling arable and pasture farmland and woods; more open landscapes associated with river valleys; and urban fringe landscape important in retaining identity and separation between settlements.

Plans and proposals should demonstrate that they conserve, enhance, restore or create a sense of place in such landscapes to respond positively to the landscape setting as described within the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Landscape Character Assessment and illustrated on Figures ## and ## (NBBC to state relevant figures). Such plans and proposals should incorporate justification to demonstrate how they:

- *Protect and enhance the key qualities described within each landscape character area which contribute to the landscape character of the Borough;*

³ Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment. Chris Blandford Associates: September 2006

- *Respect the key characteristics and local landscape and built form distinctiveness described for each landscape character area particularly the importance of land identified as rural;*
- *Conserve or enhance important and landmark views such as those along Hartshill Ridge into the wider countryside along Weddington Country Way and within the north western parts of the Borough ;*
- *Respect the nature of boundary features and field patterns particularly where they are reported as playing an important part in defining distinctiveness such as within Arbury Parklands, Bedworth Woodlands, and Keresley Newlands Ancient Arden;*
- *Conserve and enhance the balance and setting of development within the landscape ensuring it respects and enhances the rural character of land around Arbury Parklands; Galley Common Hills and Valleys; farmland close to Weddington Church and to the north of the M6 around Keresley Newlands Ancient Arden;*
- *Conserve, enhance or restore the nature and balance of land uses as described within each character area;*
- *Conserve areas of parkland important in defining landscape character around Arbury Parklands;*
- *Respect and enhance the river valleys and canals within the Borough which are often important for defining landscape character such as the River Sowe, River Anker, Breach Brook, Coventry Canal, Ashby-de-la Zouch Canal and Oxford Canal;*
- *Seek opportunities to improve or augment existing landscape features such as woodland, field ponds, hedgerows, meadows, wetlands and trees ensuring they are appropriate to local distinctiveness as described within each landscape character area;*
- *Conserve, enhance or improve the strength of character and landscape condition as described for each landscape character area; and*
- *Incorporate the recommended landscape strategy and guidelines for each landscape character area.*

2.27 The policy used in conjunction with the landscape character assessment would reinforce that new development and change respects, manages and enhances the important characteristics of landscape in the borough emphasising the balance between the urban and rural landscape and the importance of maintaining distinctiveness between Nuneaton, Bedworth and Bulkington.

Recommended Justification

2.28 The supporting text should explain the importance of protecting the landscape whilst ensuring the delivery of sustainable and high quality development; it should define the terms landscape character and local distinctiveness.

2.29 It should make reference to the European Landscape Convention (ELC) which came into effect in the UK in March 2007. It provides an international context for landscape and emphasises its importance alongside biodiversity and cultural heritage. The ELC definition is that:

'Landscape is an area as perceived by people whose character is the result of action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.'

- 2.30 It should refer to the character assessment explaining what is included. This could be worded as follows:

The Nuneaton and Bedworth Landscape Character Assessment identifies 13 landscape character areas in the Borough and is the evidence base which has informed the landscape character policy. It has taken reference from the landscapes' intrinsic qualities and made reference to the landscape surrounding the Borough.

Each landscape character description identifies the key characteristics which make each area distinctive, describing important features within the following topic areas:

- *Landform and hydrology;*
- *Land use;*
- *Landscape features;*
- *Built form and setting within the landscape and;*
- *Nature of views and any key landmark views.*

The descriptions provide guidance on the strength and condition of the landscape within each area and make recommendations on the conservation, enhancement, restoration or creation of landscape character through a series of landscape strategies and guidelines which are based upon the landscape's capacity to accommodate change.

- 2.31 For ease of reference it is recommended that the landscape character areas are listed accompanied by their relevant key characteristics to be conserved, enhanced, restored or created.

Hartshill Ridge

ENHANCE and RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the area's sense of place and distinctiveness by appropriately restoring the modified ridgeline and by interpreting the area's post industrial heritage for the benefit of the public.

Anker Valley Estate Farmlands

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving farmland contained by intact hedgerows and clusters of hedgerow trees; linear and copse woodlands and wooded streams; settlement edges appearing as clustered large villages rather than a wider single conurbation. Any change which made urban development more prominent would have a negative effect on the rural character.

Nuneaton Estate Farmlands

RESTORE and CREATE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing and restoring aspects of the landscape including riparian woodland along streams and rivers; wetlands and meadows; hedgerow trees; and remaining intact hedgerows. Positive change would include the restoration of fragmented hedgerows, planting of new woodlands and hedgerow trees and enhancement of the streams and River Anker. Retaining separation between Nuneaton and Hinckley is also important.

Bulkington Rolling Farmland

ENHANCE and RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the pattern of hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees with long views across rolling farmland

to wooded skylines. It is important to retain the appearance of Bulkington as a small clustered rising settlement. Change which reduces the prominence of built form would reinforce rural character. Other positive change includes reinforcing the wetland character along the River Anker through establishing and enhancing the characteristics such as wetland meadows and riparian woodland along the river.

Bulkington Village Farmlands

ENHANCE AND RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancements, including hedgerows and hedgerow trees, linear woodland along the railway and some streams and trees and scrub along settlement fringes. Positive change could include management and restoration of hedgerows and enhancement of linear woodlands. This area is sensitive to any changes which may reduce separation between Bulkington, Bedworth and Coventry.

Nuneaton and Bedworth Urban Fringes

ENHANCE and RESTORE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing and restoring features including canals; wetland meadows; and riparian tree planting; hedgerows; hedgerow trees; and woodland. This landscape provides separation between Nuneaton and Bedworth although the separation between the settlements is particularly constrained along the A444 around Griff.

Keresley Urban Fringe

RESTORE and CREATE – Emphasis should be placed on creating a sense of place and distinctiveness whilst retaining and restoring features such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees, woodland and wooded streams through new green infrastructure and restoration of existing landscape features to reinforce character and a sense of place. New planting could help to reduce the prominence of urban fringes. Change which enhances the wetlands along streams and rivers could provide a positive connection between each pocket of farmland.

Keresley Newlands Ancient Arden

CONSERVE and ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving and enhancing the small-scale pasture fields with intact mature hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees; wooded streams; field ponds; marshy grassland; linear belts of woodland; and blocks of ancient woodland. It is important to ensure that development does not become more prominent within the landscape. Where new development is visible it should appear as individual properties or small clusters filtered by trees and small-scale woodlands particularly close to settlement edges.

Bedworth Woodlands Rural Fringe

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the small-scale field pattern and retaining the frequency and density of hedgerow trees and hedgerows. Woodlands, ditches and remaining wooded field ponds are also important features that need to be retained. Changes in land management which restore hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and the former Arbury Canals particularly in the northern part of the character area, could have a positive influence on the distinctiveness of the landscape.

Arbury Parklands

CONSERVE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving and enhancing the rural and remote character. Any change would need to respect the parkland character

and distinctive vernacular of brick and timber farmhouses and agricultural buildings, maintaining the prominence of gate houses and lodges along the surrounding small rural roads. Any change which did not retain and reinforce wooded horizons or that made urban edges more prominent would weaken the pattern and character of the landscape. It is important to retain the rural wooded farmland setting to Arbury Hall Park and Garden.

Galley Common Hill and Robinson's End Valley

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing Whytell Pool and Meadows Local Wildlife Site, valley woodland, and field hedgerows. It is also important to ensure that new development does not become prominent within the landscape and the separation between Robinson's End and Ansley is retained

Galley Common Hills and Valleys

CONSERVE and ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on conserving and enhancing the undulating landform of low rounded hills; woodland on high ground; wooded streams; and frequent hedgerow trees. It is also important to ensure that development does not become prominent within the landscape and where visible appears as individual properties or small clusters along a village edge.

LCA 13: Whittleford Park and Bar Pool River Valley

ENHANCE – Emphasis should be placed on enhancing Whittleford Park and Bar Pool Valley and Nuneaton Common Local Wildlife Sites, valley woodland, wooded watercourses and the balance of meadows, woodland and wetlands. It is also important to ensure that development reflects the character of development on valley sides.

Existing Policy Recommendation Summary

- 2.32 In summary it is recommended that policies ENV2 and ENV3 are deleted and replaced with a policy which is focused on landscape character. This ensures, in accordance with PPS7, that all landscapes within the Borough are recognised and change will have a positive influence rather than just placing emphasis on those areas of land subject to specific designations. It is recommended that a Green Infrastructure policy also be included to promote protection to important areas for public access. This would address the inspector's comments in the previous Local Plan enquiry relating to public amenity and also would provide access for local communities to adjacent countryside.

