

Character assessment pro forma notes

Putting the pieces together



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1 Introduction

Many groups decide to undertake a character assessment of their local area to help inform and support the development of policies for their neighbourhood plan.

A key part of the character assessment preparation process is the identification and recording of the key characteristics of your local area. To help you with this exercise we have produced this character assessment pro forma and accompanying guidance notes. These can be used by you and your group to record these key features and characteristics in an objective and structured manner.

You are advised to read the [How to prepare a character assessment to support design policy](#) resource before you use this pro forma. The resource explains in further detail:

- what a character assessment is
- the benefits of completing a character assessment
- how to complete a character assessment
- how to use the character assessment within your neighbourhood plan.



CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PRO FORMA

Character Area..... Assessor(s)..... Date.....

Topography	Land Uses	Layout	Roads, streets, routes
Landscape setting / gradient of the local area (flat, sloping, valley, plateau, hilltop, etc)	Residential, Retail, Leisure and Recreation, Commercial, Employment, Community, etc	Relationship between buildings, spaces and routes, and how these elements are arranged in relation to each other. Building plots (wide narrow, long, short, etc)	Vehicular routes, pedestrian pathways, cycle paths, shared surfaces, rights of way, bridleways, alleyways, etc

Spaces	Buildings	Landmarks	Green and natural features
Parks, playing fields, allotments, cemeteries, village greens, car parks, market squares, etc	Building heights, arrangement (detached, semi-detached, terraced or apartments), materials, construction era, roof types, distinct / predominant architectural features, window types, condition, etc	Distinct and instantly recognisable local features (including buildings, statues and monuments, and other locally significant features of the local area, both built and natural)	Trees, hedgerows, streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, woodland, landscaped areas, etc

Streetscape	Views	Summary of Key defining characteristics / other observations
Lamp posts, benches and seating, street surfacing materials, signage, boundary treatments, etc	Important views in and out of the character area (record location of viewpoint, and direction and extent of view)	

2 Character category 1: Topography

Topography relates to the slope and the landscape setting of the area. Examples of differing topographies and landscape settings are shown below.

Flat



Valley



Sloping



Elevated / Hilltop



The topography of an area can be an important element of character. For example, a locality in an elevated location may benefit from views of the surrounding countryside that contribute to the area's character. Similarly, areas in a valley setting may get glimpses of the surrounding mountains / hillsides that can also influence the particular character of that area.



3 Character category 2: Land use

The **land use** of an area will directly influence the types of buildings that occupy it, how these are arranged, and the how they are used. Therefore, it is not surprising that areas of different land use usually feel different in character and appearance. Land uses most typically found within settlements include:

- residential
- offices and commercial
- shops, cafes, restaurants
- religious (churches, mosques, synagogues, cemeteries, etc.)
- community and leisure (schools, community centres, sports facilities, etc.)
- industrial (warehousing, workshops, storage and distribution depots, etc.)



Figure 1: Residential properties



Figure 2: Mixed-use: retail premises at ground level, with residential above

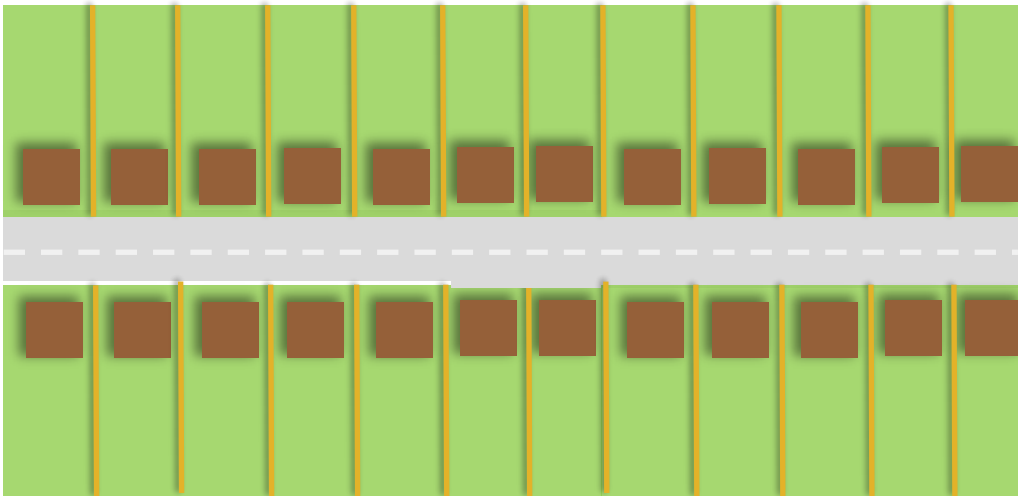


4 Character category 3: Layout

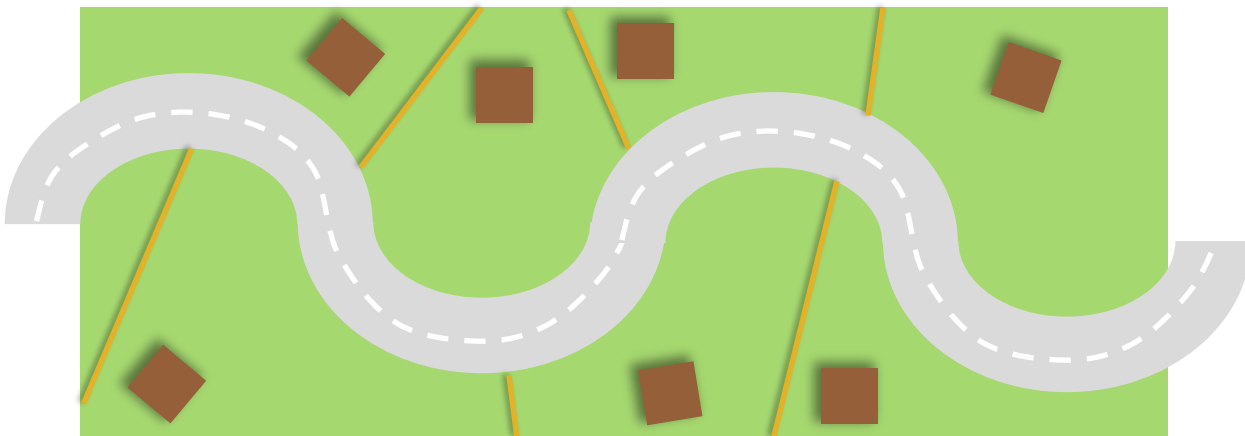
Layout relates to the arrangement of buildings in relation to the surrounding spaces and features (gardens, roads, pathways etc).

Below are two contrasting examples of different layouts, along with some basic sample descriptions of each.

Layout example 1: This layout can be described as linear, regular, buildings close to road, long and narrow plots, short front gardens, long back gardens, consistent building line.



Layout example 2: This layout can be described as winding, irregular, buildings set back from road, wide plots, large front gardens, small gardens, inconsistent building line.



The layout of buildings plays a critical part in shaping a particular area's character. For example, if you were to walk through both of the above examples, each would 'feel' and appear very different from the other.



5 Character category 4: Roads, streets and routes

Roads, streets and routes influence the manner in which people move within a settlement, and their layout, scale and appearance can heavily influence the character of an area. Types of routes that might be documented under this category include:

- traditional one-way streets and two-way streets
- narrow country lanes, wide, multi-lane roads
- pedestrianised streets (see Figure 3), alleyways
- shared-surface streets, cul-de-sacs
- railway lines
- rural walking trails
- cycle lanes
- footpaths (see Figure 4)
- pedestrian underpasses and overpasses
- canals and towpaths
- bridges



Figure 3: Pedestrianised streets have a much different character and 'feel' to those which are accessible to vehicles



Figure 4: This pedestrian footpath runs through the centre of this street, giving it a very distinct character



6 Character category 5: Spaces

Spaces include areas of openness, which are largely clear of buildings, trees and other structures. Examples of spaces commonly seen within settlements include:

- playing fields and recreation grounds
- children's play grounds
- cemeteries and graveyards
- public parks (see Figure 5)
- allotments
- car parks
- village, town and market squares, and other public spaces (see Figure 6)
- gaps between buildings, which allow for glimpses through to other areas within the settlement



Figure 5: Parks can enhance the character of an area, bringing openness and greenery to urban settings

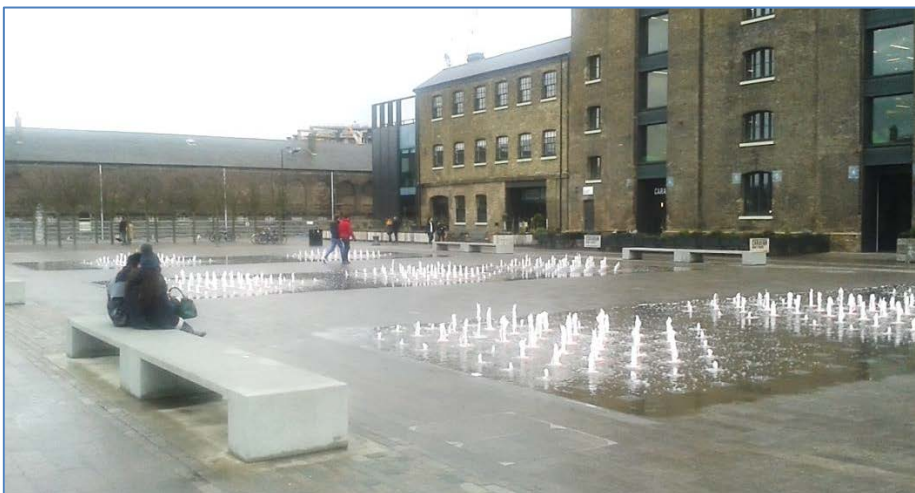


Figure 6: Public spaces can enhance the setting of landmark buildings and contribute to the character of the local area



7 Character category 6: Buildings

Buildings and their appearance are a key component of any settlement's character. When documenting the appearance of local buildings and their influence on local character, it is important to pay attention to the following:

- building form, shape, and scale
- relationship to neighbouring buildings (terraced, detached, semi-detached)
- predominant materials, roof type, distinct features and details
- construction era and age of buildings / architectural style
- signs of alterations and condition of buildings

Below are two contrasting building types, along with some basic sample descriptions of each.





Figure 7: Modern apartment building

Building form, shape and scale:

7 storey apartment building with a setback upper storey and a distinct curved frontage.

Predominant materials:

- predominantly red brick
- timber cladding on upper storey frontage
- grey aluminium doors and window frames

Roof type: Flat roof with overhang

Distinct features and details:

- Floor-to-ceiling windows facing onto balcony



Figure 8: Residential terraced properties

Building form, shape and scale:

2 storey terraced building with narrow frontages.

Predominant materials:

- brown London stock brick
- slate roof
- painted timber windows and doors

Roof type: Pitched roof

Distinct features and details:

- chimneys
- decorative lintels, window and door surrounds, sash windows
- shallow porches



8 Character category 7: Landmarks

Landmarks function as iconic and distinctive features within a settlement, and contribute significantly to an area's unique character. They are often meeting places or points of reference within a settlement, their distinct appearance making them instantly recognisable to all.

Landmarks come in all shapes and sizes – there is no hard and fast rule regarding what can be considered a landmark. They can take the form of:

- a distinct or prominent building (e.g. church, town hall, pub – see Figures 9 and 10)
- a structure (e.g. water wheel, bridge, windmill, water tower, gasholder)
- public art, sculpture, statue or monument (see Figure 11)
- a natural feature (e.g. pond, large / ancient trees)
- an historic monument or feature (e.g. castle ruins, stone marker, remnants of settlement walls); or
- a distinct streetscape feature (decorative telephone box, bus shelter, well).



Figure 9: This pub is considered a local landmark due to its distinctive appearance and its role as meeting place for many in the local community



Figure 10: This attractive building, with its standout thatched roof, is a key landmark within its village setting



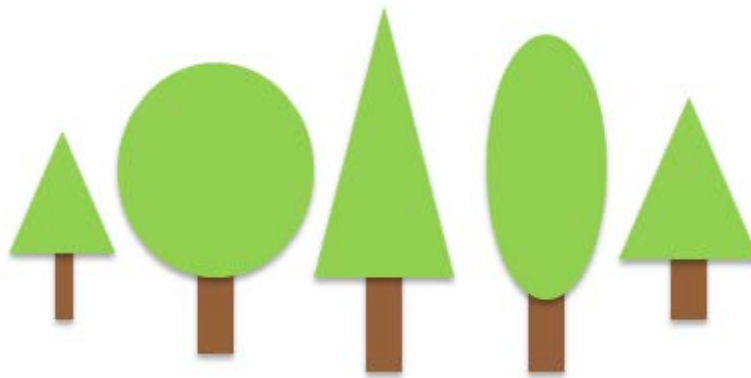
Figure 11: Many towns and villages have war memorials which act as local landmarks



9 Character category 8: Green and natural features

Green and natural features typically play a positive role in shaping the character of settlements, softening the impact of built development, and providing a welcome contrast to areas of hard landscaping, buildings and other structures.

Trees and woodland



Hedgerows and private planting



Lakes and Ponds



Rivers and streams



10 Character category 9: Streetscape

Streetscape relates to those smaller scale features found within settlements which, by way of their distinct appearance, add to the character of an area's streets and public spaces. The following are some features that might be considered under 'Streetscape':

- lamp posts
- public seating (see Figure 12)
- boundary treatments (walls, railings, fencing, etc - see Figure 13)
- street surfacing materials (cobblestones, granite, etc)
- flower pots / public planting
- street signage (see Figure 14)
- bins and bollards (see Figures 15 and 16)
- public art / street art / murals





Figure 12: Distinctive street seating and surfacing



Figure 13: Boundary treatments built with local materials add to the character of an area



Figure 14: Bespoke street signage adds character to an area



Figure 15: This type of bollard can only be found in the City of London and adds to the unique character of this area



Figure 16: Even bins can be locally distinct and make a positive contribution to the character of an area



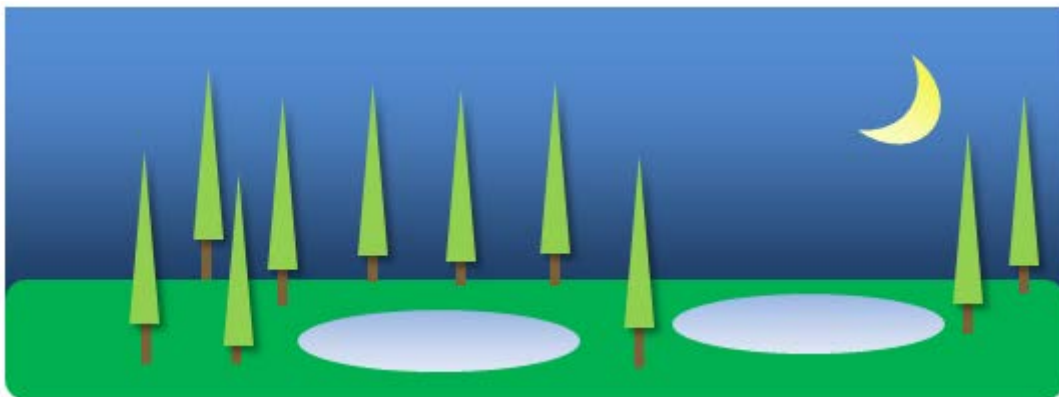
11 Character category 10: Views

Views relate to key views either within a settlement, out of a settlement towards the surrounding landscape, or into a settlement from the surrounding area. These three view types are illustrated below.

Into a settlement from surrounding area



Out of a settlement towards the wider surroundings



Internal views from within a settlement



Views can be short or long (i.e. from a distance or close-up), glimpsed through narrow gaps, framed by other features (buildings, trees, etc) or wide-open and expansive.

Views identified within the character assessment should meet the following criteria:

1. be valued by the majority of the local community
2. be from a publically accessible location, where all people can enjoy the view.

It is not usually appropriate to identify specific views from an individual's private property.

When identifying key views in your local area, you should be seeking those iconic local views – the kind of views you might expect to see on a postcard of the local area. Typical key views include those views of local landmark buildings or particularly picturesque views of the surrounding landscape.



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Contact:

Planning Aid England
Royal Town Planning Institute
41 Botolph Lane
London EC3R 8DL
Tel. 020 3206 1880
E-mail: info@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

For further information please visit rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid

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