



Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Landscape and Visual

places greater emphasis on **distinction between landscape effects and visual effects**

emphasises this by **structuring the content** to have two separate chapters on these topics but set within overall description of common processes

inevitably leads to a degree of repetition but reduces confusion

Landscape effects relate to

- issues such as **protected landscapes**
- contribution of **landscape character**
- the way that change may affect
 - **individual components** of the landscape
 - **aesthetic or perceptual qualities**
 - character of the landscape in different areas

Visual effects relate to

- The area the development may be visible from;
- **people** who may experience views of the development;
- **places where they will be affected;**
- **nature of the views and visual amenity** at those points ;
- **changes in specific views.**

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Assessing Significance

- Greater emphasis on:
- need for **clear judgement and transparency** in the way that assessments are made.
- re-states what the EIA Directives require

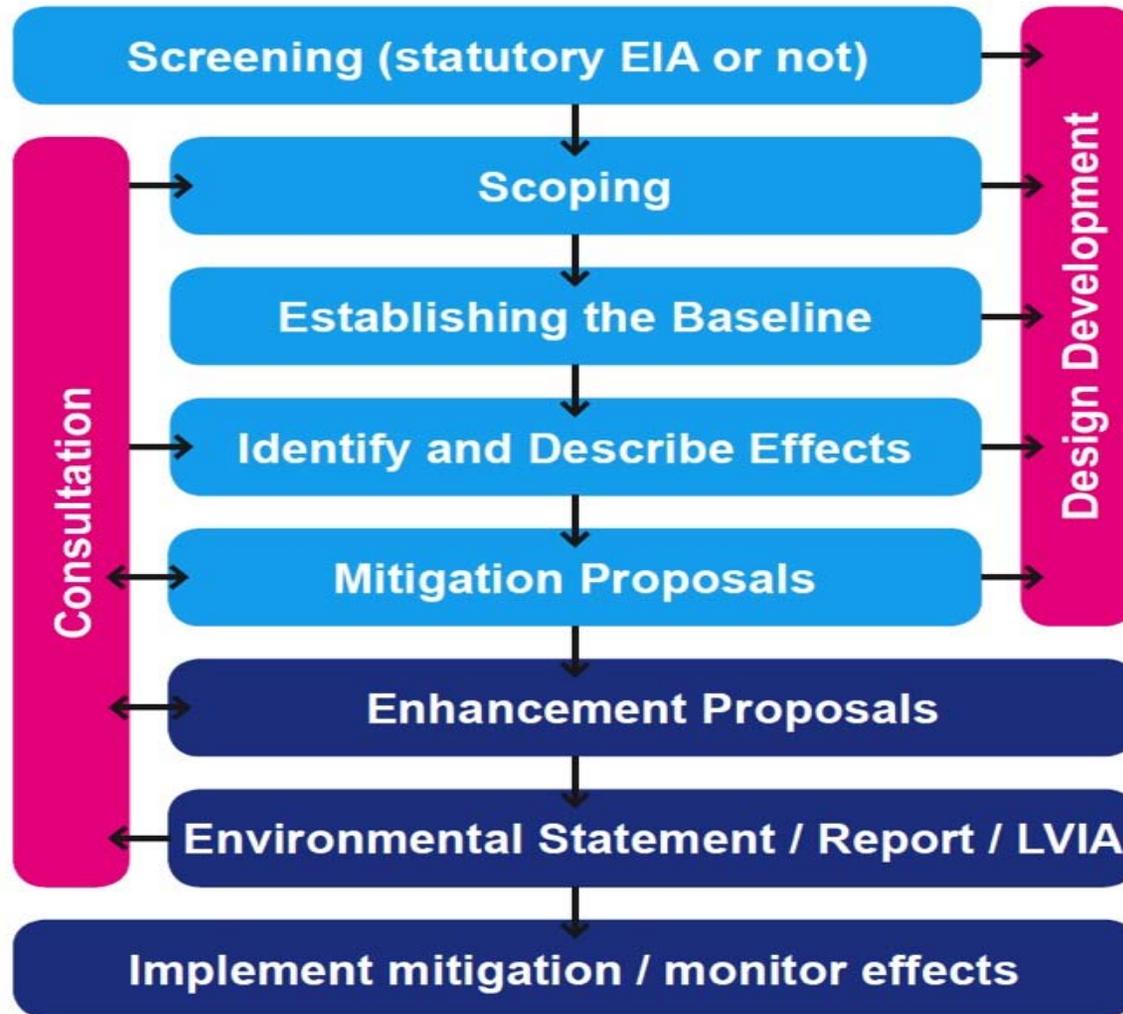
Assessing Significance

- Don't necessarily have to have scale of levels of significance; but.....
- **emphasis on giving priority to well argued narrative text;**
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- **tables and matrices may support (and not be basis for) conclusions.**

Proportionality

- work being proportional to scale and nature of development proposed (This is also required for AEE)
- particular emphasis on scoping stage
- requires dialogue with competent authority (District and Regional Councils) and other interested parties (with reference to resource plans)

Principles and Processes



Overall

- approach & methods, similar to 2ed
- with some tuning of certain sections
- attempt to align language more closely to Directive
- reinforcement of use of **effects** as distinct from **impacts**
 - define at the outset of each project and use consistently
- emphasis is on identification of **likely significant effects**

Scoping for LVIA

- Consider **separately** for
 - the landscape assessment
 - the visual assessment

Scoping for LVIA

- Consider for each (but **note that scoping can evolve as a project progresses**):
 - sources of information
 - extent of the study area(s)
 - effects that might occur
 - main receptors to be considered
 - extent and the appropriate level of detail for the baseline studies
 - methods to be used
 - approach to assessment of cumulative landscape and visual effects

Describing the project

- must **understand what is being proposed**
- **sufficient detail** to ensure that effects can be clearly identified
- **identify what elements or aspects** of the project might affect landscape or views and visual amenity
- identify the sources of effect leading to likely/potential significant effects

Mitigation measures

- EIA/LVIA can be an important **design tool**
- usually an **iterative** process
- assessment stages feed into the planning and design of the project
- **measures proposed to:**
 - **prevent/avoid**
 - **reduce**
 - **offset/remedy**
- To address significant adverse landscape and visual effects
 - common practice to use ‘compensate’ instead of ‘offset’.

Mitigation measures

- must **demonstrate that mitigation measures proposed are deliverable** in practice, including:
 - mitigation of adverse landscape and visual effects
 - proposed enhancement measures
- ideally include in a draft Environmental Management Plan.....
But enhancement proposals may not be mitigation...

Enhancement

- proposals that seek to improve the landscape resource and the visual amenity over and above the baseline condition
- an **integral part of the design of the development proposal**
- not an 'after-thought'!
- also, **not a requirement (of the Regulations)**
- Monitoring effect may be required

Assessing landscape effects

- consider how the proposal will affect
 - the **elements** that make up the landscape
 - the **aesthetic and perceptual** aspects of the landscape
 - its distinctive **character**
 - the **key characteristics** that contribute to its character

Baseline landscape studies

- appropriate to the context
- in line with current guidance and terminology for:
 - landscape character assessment
 - townscape character assessment
 - seascape character assessment
 - etc. ... as relevant
- condition of the landscape
- evidence of current pressures causing change

Baseline landscape studies

- the **cultural/historic landscape**:
 - **working with experts** if necessary
 - ensure cultural heritage features and relevant aspects of the historic landscape recorded
 - judgements on their contribution to the landscape, townscape or seascape
- BUT:
 - **effects** of development **on** historic aspects of the landscape **dealt with in the cultural heritage topic**
 - **not part of the landscape and visual topic**

Use of LCA

- decide at the outset what scale of character assessment information is needed and **critically review any relevant existing assessments**
 - their quality may vary
 - some may be dated
 - some may not be suited to the task in hand
-

Use of LCA

- **value of the landscape that may be affected should be established**
- part of the baseline description
- will inform judgements about the significance of the effects

Landscape value

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Landscape value

- review of existing landscape **designations the usual starting point**
 - but the **value attached to undesignated** landscapes also carefully considered
- **individual elements of the landscape may also be valued:**
 - for example, buildings, hedgerows, vintage trees...

• ***Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes***

- ***Landscape quality (condition)*** a measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements;
- ***Scenic quality***: the term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses);
- ***Rarity***: the presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare landscape character type;
- ***Representativeness***: whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples;
- ***Conservation interests***: The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in their own right;
- ***Recreation value***: Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important;
- ***Perceptual aspects***: A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity;
- ***Associations***: Some landscapes are associated with particular people, artists, writers or events in history that contribute to perceptions of natural beauty of the area.
- *Based on: Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002)*

Predicting landscape effects

- identify components of the landscape likely to be affected: the **'landscape receptors'** (individual elements, features, characteristics etc.)
- consider **interactions between them and the different components of the development**

Predicting landscape effects

- make **informed professional judgements** about:
 - whether the landscape effects are likely to be **positive or negative (or in some cases neutral)**
- the **criteria used clearly stated** e.g.
 - degree of fit with existing character
 - positive contribution by virtue of good design

Assessing visual effects

- deals with the effects of change and development on the **views available to people and their visual amenity**
 - will **reflect changes in or loss of elements or introduction of new ones**
 - **how will people's surroundings be affected by changes in content and character of views?**
 - **residential and recreational amenity**

The visual baseline

- identify the **people** within the ZTV who will be affected by the changes in views and visual amenity:
 - residents, at home or going to and from
 - users of public open space, rights of way
 - visitors to attractions, leisure facilities
 - people at work, school, shopping
 - people travelling on road, rail, waterway

The visual baseline

- **viewpoints** may be:
 - **representative** of the experience of different types of visual receptor
 - **specific** viewpoints – key or classic views
 - **illustrative** viewpoints – to demonstrate a particular effect or issue
 - may also need to cover **sequential** views

The visual baseline

- should cover as wide a range of situations as is **reasonable** and necessary to explain the likely significant effects
- emphasis always on **proportionality** in relation to the scale and nature of the proposal

The visual baseline

- **details** of viewpoint locations should be accurately mapped and catalogued
- record the direction and angle included in the view
- sufficient information so someone else can return to the location and record the same view

Predicting visual effects

- consider
 - **different sources of visual effects**
 - the **principal visual receptors** that might be affected
- **systematic identification** of likely visual effects
- consider
 - **seasonal** differences in effects
 - **filtering or screening of views**

Step wise approach to judging significance

Step 1: Assess against agreed criteria – be consistent

Consider each effect in terms of

• **sensitivity** of the receptor made up of judgements about:

- **susceptibility** of the receptor to the type of change arising from the specific proposal; and
- **value** attached to the receptor;

• **magnitude** of the effect made up of judgements about:

- **size and scale** of the effect - for example is there complete loss of a particular element of the landscape or a minor change;
- **geographical extent** of the area that will be affected;
- **duration** of the effect and its **reversibility**.

• Consideration of all these criteria should feed into a comprehensive assessment of significance.

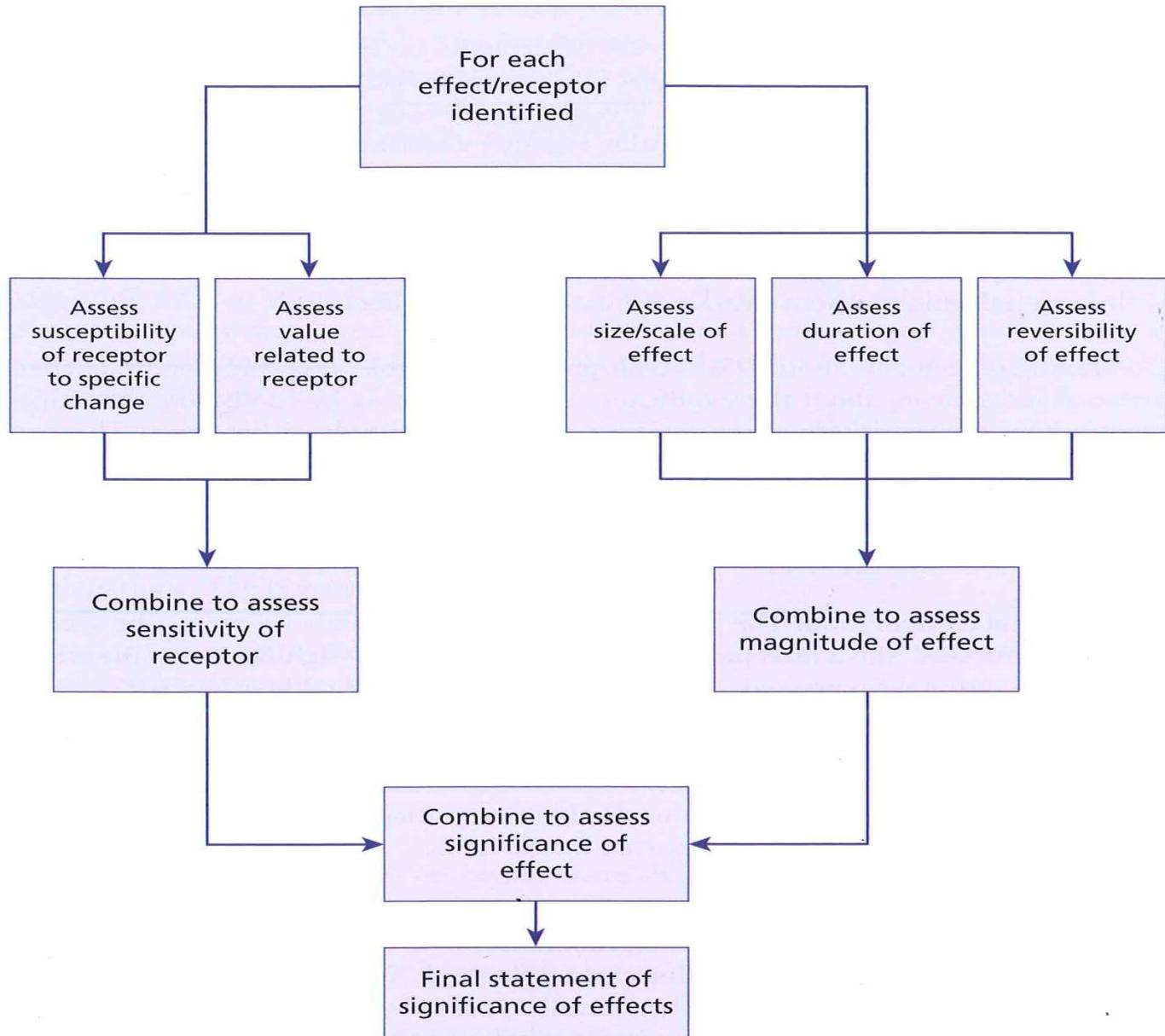
Step wise approach to judging significance

Step 2: Combining the judgements - consistency

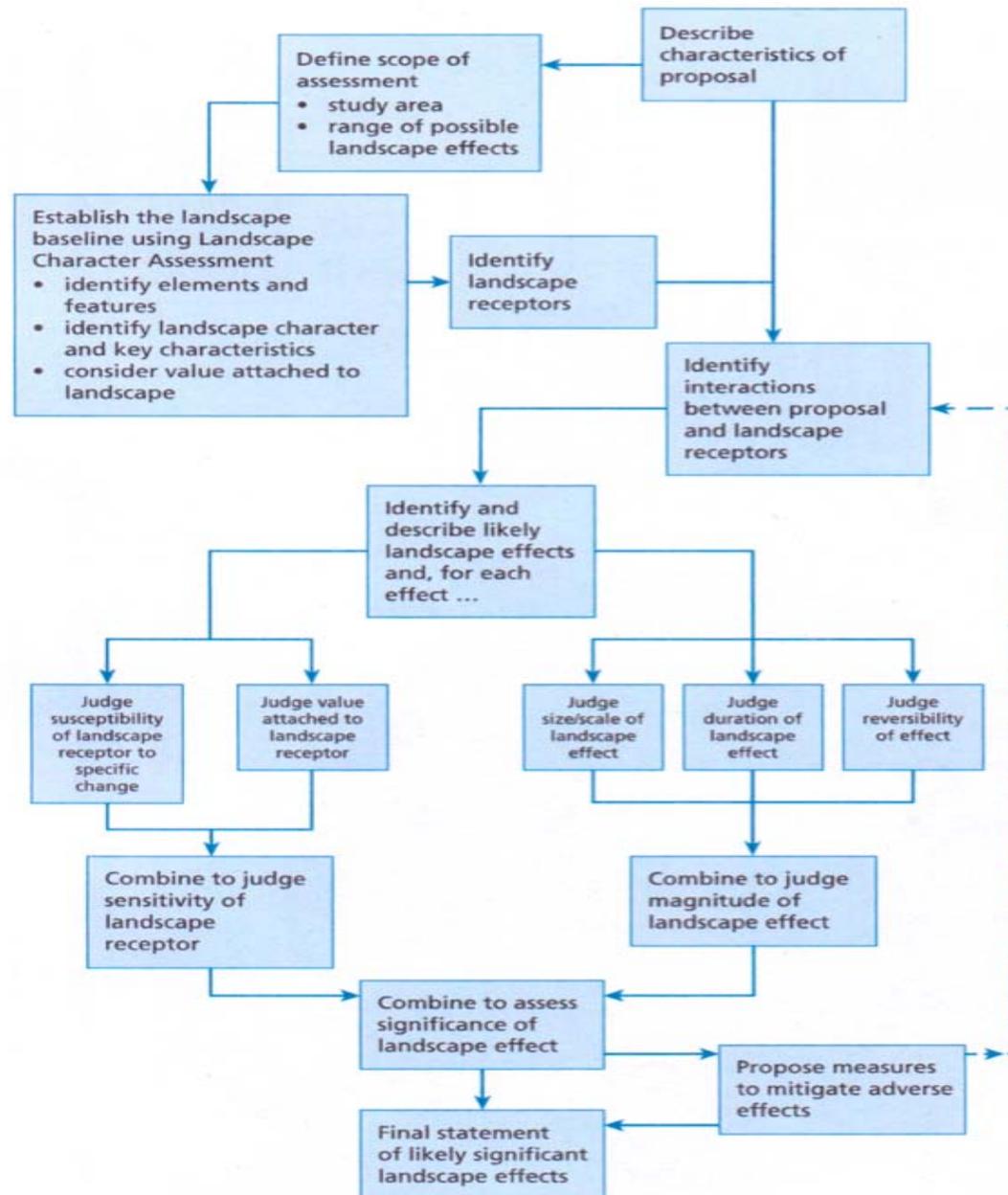
- combine the separate judgements on the individual criteria. The rationale for the overall judgement must be clear, demonstrating:
 - how susceptibility to change and value together contribute to the sensitivity of the receptor; and
 - how judgements about scale, extent and duration contribute to the magnitude of the effects; and
 - how the resulting judgements about sensitivity and magnitude are combined to inform judgements about overall significance of the effects.

Step wise approach to judging significance

- combining judgements should be as **transparent** as possible – show your thinking even if in Appendices
- **no hard and fast rules** about what effects should be deemed ‘significant’ – **professional judgement**
- LVIAAs should always **distinguish clearly between what are considered to be the ‘significant’ and ‘not significant’ effects**



Flowchart for assessing landscape effects



Susceptibility to change

“ability of the landscape receptor.... to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievements of landscape planning policies and strategies” (GLVIA3 paragraph 5.40)

- **Existing sensitivity and capacity studies** which deal with the same general type of development **may provide useful preliminary background information**
- **Not a substitute for the individual assessment of susceptibility of specific receptors to change arising from the specific development proposal**
- **Susceptibility should be considered as part of the assessment of effects** not as part of the baseline - it is specific to both the landscape in question and the specific nature of the development proposal

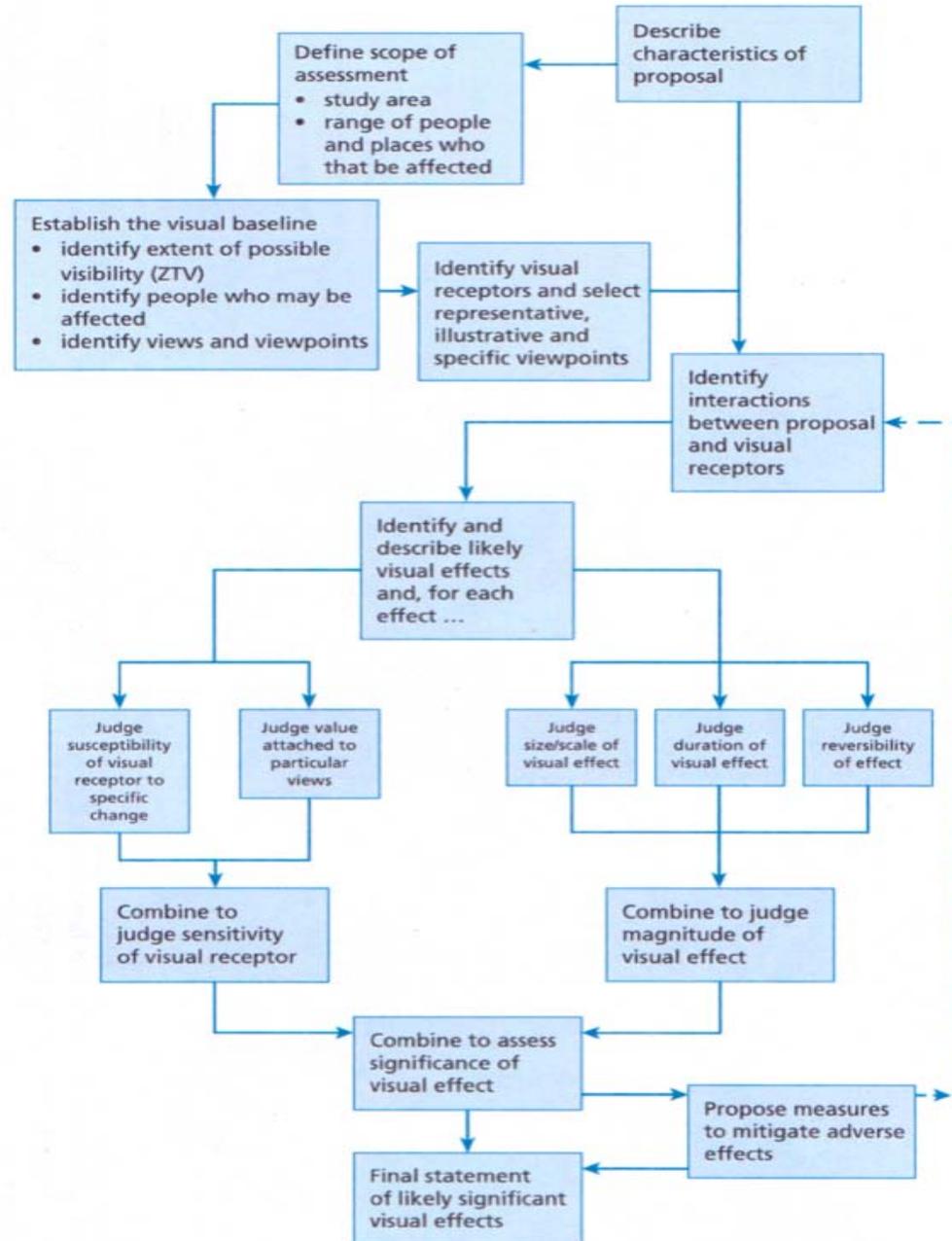
Value of receptors

- relationship between value of landscape receptors and susceptibility to change is important - **sensitivity**
- **designation** of valued landscapes does **not automatically mean high susceptibility** to all types of change
- there may be lower susceptibility to change because of particular characteristics of the landscape and the specific nature of the proposal
- specific change may not compromise the specific basis for the value attached to the landscape
- **look at cases on their merits** – especially near boundaries

Significant landscape effects

- **No hard and fast rules** about what makes a significant landscape effect
- **no standard approach** because circumstances vary with location, landscape context and type of proposal – **professional judgement**
- spectrum of significance – at extremes:
 - major loss or irreversible negative effects, over an extensive area, on elements and/or aesthetic and perceptual aspects that are key to the character of nationally valued landscapes likely to be most significant
 - reversible negative effects of short duration, over a restricted area on elements and/or aesthetic and perceptual aspects that contribute to but are not key characteristics of landscapes of community value are likely to be least significant

Flowchart for assessing visual effects



Susceptibility to change

- depends on occupation or activity and extent to which attention focused on views and visual amenity
- **most susceptible visual receptors** include
 - **residents** at home
 - **people engaged in outdoor recreation whose interest is likely to be focused on landscape and views**
 - **visitors to the heritage assets or other attractions where views are important to the experience**

Susceptibility to change

- Those less likely to be focused on the landscape and views include
 - people engaged in outdoor sport or recreation not involving appreciation of views of the landscape
 - people at places of work where setting is not important to quality of working life
- **Travellers on road rail or other routes tend to fall into an intermediate category depending on whether travel involves recognised scenic routes**

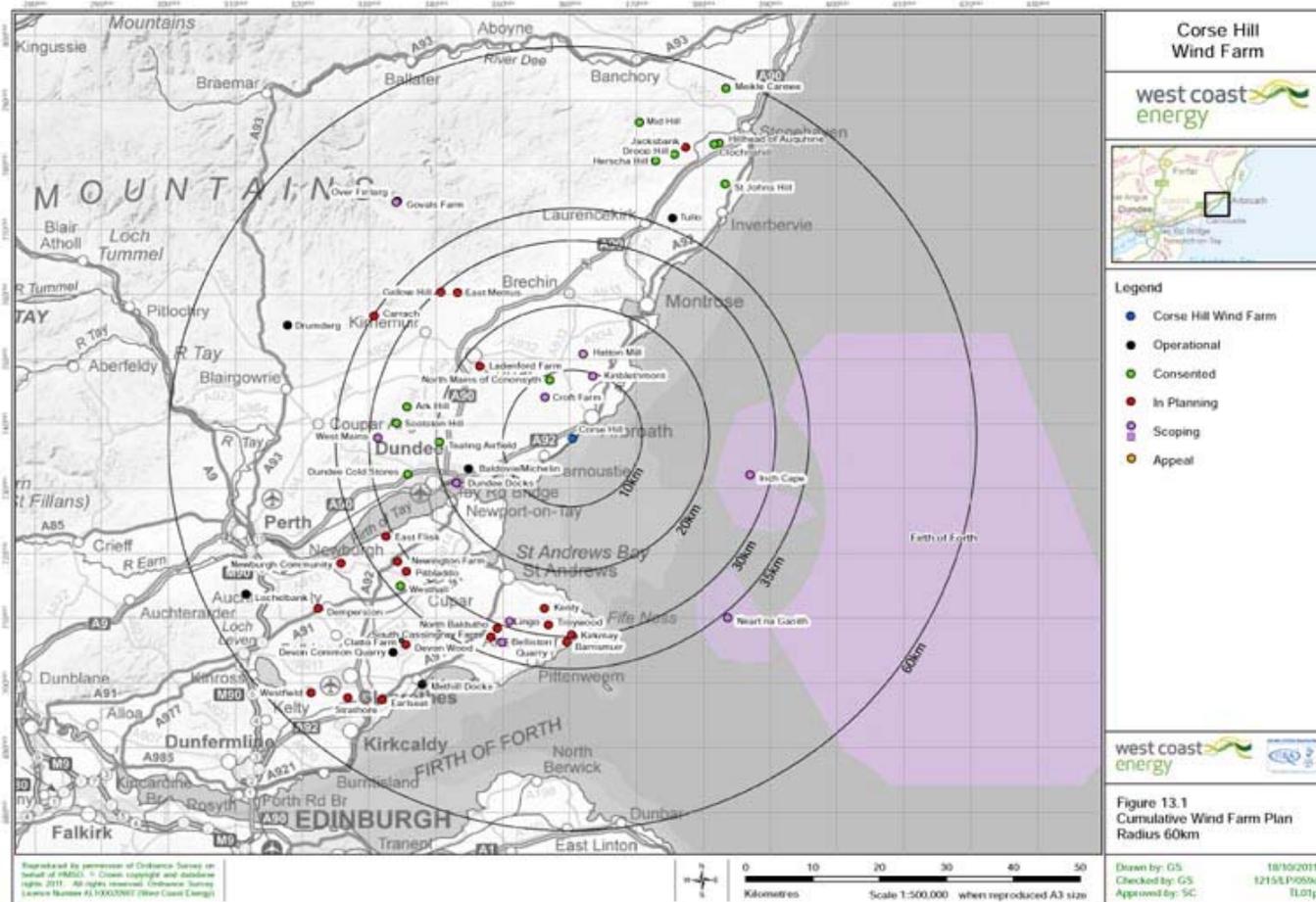
Value attached to views

- **value may be attached to certain views** that are experienced
- some may be **specifically recognised**, for example in relation to heritage assets, or through planning designations
- **value may also be indicated by appearance in guidebooks or on tourist maps, by provision of facilities and references in literature or art**

Significant visual effects

- Again no standard approach to which effects are significant – **each case on merit**
 - effects on people who are particularly sensitive to changes in views and visual amenity are more likely to be significant
 - effects on people at recognised and important viewpoints or from recognised scenic routes are more likely to be significant
 - large-scale changes which introduce new, non-characteristic or discordant or intrusive elements into the view are more likely to be significant

Assessing Cumulative Effects (an evolving area of practice)



SNH influence

- focus on cumulative effects of wind farms
- SNH 2012 guidance defines:
 - **cumulative effects** as *'the **additional changes** caused by a proposed development **in conjunction** with other similar developments **or** as the **combined effect** of a set of developments, taken together'*

SNH influence

- SNH 2012 guidance defines:
 - **cumulative landscape effects** as effects that *‘can impact on either the physical fabric or character of the landscape, or any special values attached to it’.....*
 - **but is this additional or combined or both?**

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Proportionality again

- keep the task **reasonable** and **in proportion** to the nature of the project under consideration
- **common sense** & **judgement** about what is appropriate and proportionate
- be able to **justify** the approach taken
- the **emphasis in EIA is on likely significant** effects rather than on comprehensive cataloguing of every conceivable effect that might occur

Two key questions

- what **types** of cumulative effect should be considered
 - only those of **projects of the same type** as the main project under consideration?
 - or **include other types of development in the vicinity?**
- what **past, present or future** proposals should be considered, either for the same or different types of development?
- these questions not of course specific to LVIA

Timescale of proposals

- **baseline** for landscape and visual effects assessment includes **existing schemes** and those **in construction** however.....consented?
- **baseline** for **cumulative landscape and visual effects** should include those schemes **and** schemes **in the development and consenting process**, including:
 - schemes with planning **consent**
 - schemes that are the subject of a **valid planning application** that has not yet been determined.

Timescale of proposals

- Schemes at the pre-planning or 'scoping stage' not generally considered
- lack of certainty, but ...
 - there may be occasions where such schemes are included if the competent authority or consultation bodies consider it necessary

Cumulative landscape and visual effects – common issues

- **use same approach** to assessing significance as for main assessment
- make sure **emphasis always remains on main project**
 - whether it adds to or combines with others to create a significant cumulative effect

Identifying significant effects

- High levels of significance may arise from cumulative visual effects related to:
 - where projects may not be particularly significant when viewed individually, but the **overall combined** cumulative effect on a viewer at a particular viewpoint may be more significant

- And finally ...

Presentation of LVIA

- **presentation techniques must be carefully chosen and appropriately applied**
- approach to presentation and the level of sophistication required in the illustration of change should be **discussed and agreed with the competent authority**
- **effort required** to produce appropriate illustrative material, especially visualisations, **must be kept in proportion** to the nature of the proposed development.

Presentation of LVIA

- text should be **comprehensive** but also **concise and to the point**
- written in **plain and easy to understand language**
- **impartial and dispassionate**
- **present information and reasoning accurately and in a balanced way**
- **make clear where statements are based on the author's judgment**

Presentation of LVIA

- choosing the right approach to figures and visualisations requires careful consideration
 - **clear figures**
 - **visuals appropriate to the type and scale of the project**
- photomontage must be **technically accurate**
 - to a degree appropriate to the nature of the project
 - reflecting discussions with the competent authority
- photomontages must **meet appropriate standards**
 - Landscape Institute's advice note (and any amendments)
 - reflect other relevant guidance (e.g. SNH)