

National Character Area (NCA) profiles are being used in variety of ways by a number of organisations and groups. We have collated the following case studies to help others make the most of the information contained in the NCAs by sharing those experiences.

This document contains the following case studies:

1. [Community engagement](#)
2. [Land use planning](#)
3. [Guiding investment, grant applications and partnership working](#)
4. [Landscape planning](#)
5. [Education](#)

The Parish Council and residents of the village of Hunmanby on the edge of the Yorkshire Wolds have used the Yorkshire Wolds NCA profile to reinforce a strong sense of local identity, support an application for funding and bring local groups together with a common purpose.

Locally relevant

Hunmanby is a large agricultural village with a population of 3,500 and a busy main street with a variety of shops and services. It is located on the north-eastern escarpment of the Yorkshire Wolds, mid-way between Scarborough and Bridlington, three miles inland from the east coast. The village falls within the Scarborough District of North Yorkshire, but historically and geographically has closer ties with the East Riding and the Yorkshire Wolds. The village is much influenced by seaside Filey and seen by some to be becoming a suburb. The historic coaching inn has become rundown and there are plans to sell it for residential development. Public sector cutbacks have led to the closure of bus services, public toilets and the library. Residents had become concerned for the future of this distinctive village and in 2012 a group of local people began to think about what they could do.

Using the NCA profile to support community action

A couple of villagers attended a meeting in Driffield about a potential Yorkshire Wolds Landscape Partnership. They used the description in the Yorkshire Wolds NCA profile to prepare, but also discovered that Hunmanby was firmly within the Yorkshire Wolds Character Area, albeit on the very edge of the north-eastern escarpment.

“Residents have become very concerned for the future of the distinctive village they know and love. It was in this context that, in early 2012, a group of us began to think about what we could do.”

Nina Sheeran, Hunmanby Gateway Project Co-ordinator

Things began to fall into place. Despite being so near the coast, there is no evidence of the fishing industry or other coastal associations in Hunmanby. Instead it is clearly part of the Wolds. The older houses are built from chalk surrounded by large arable farms. Agricultural traffic rumbles through the village year round and wisps of straw cling to the pavements during the harvest months. Only in 1974 was the village separated administratively from the rest of the Wolds in the East Riding, to become part of the southernmost fringe of the new county of North Yorkshire.



At the Driffield meeting local representatives from Hunmanby obtained a larger A1 size map of the Yorkshire Wolds NCA and brought it back to the Parish Council. The map now sits on the wall of the Parish Room, showing the Parish as very much part of the Yorkshire Wolds as they arc in a crescent from Hunmanby in the north-east, westward and south to the Humber.

The map and recognition that the village lies within the Yorkshire Wolds has reinforced an already strong sense of identity within the parish leading to the formation of the Hunmanby Gateway Committee, which secured funding from LEADER Coast, Wolds, Wetlands and Waterways project to produce a village



centre map-board.

The community has written a heritage trail leaflet and the local 'Hunmanby in Bloom' group have created a boundary feature of a five-bar gate on the road coming into the village from Filey, proudly proclaiming Hunmanby as, 'the Gateway to the Wolds'. Residents and local businesses have given enthusiastic support.

In September 2013 the community held a successful 'heritage day', inviting renowned artist Peter Watson to exhibit his dramatic paintings and prints of modern Wolds agriculture. The group are working on further promotion of the village and a future North East Wolds Partnership.

"Now we're working on further promotion of the village and a future 'North East Wolds Partnership'. We're on the map!"

Nina Sheeran, Hunmanby Gateway Project Co-ordinator

Summary

- The community used the NCA profile to support their existing knowledge about their distinctive place, its natural position in the landscape and how it related to the surrounding area giving them confidence to make local decisions and take local action.
- The NCA profile provided evidence for the community to apply for external funding to further improve the village.
- Community groups had a common 'first-stop-shop' of information that brought them together with a common purpose.

There are many uses of the NCA profiles and you will find a series of case studies on our website www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/default.aspx

For further information contact:
ncaprofiles@naturalengland.org.uk

National Character Areas (NCAs) are now frequently used in the planning process, by public and private sector customers, and by our internal land use advisors in Natural England. NCAs are being used to inform Local Plan strategies and policies and as evidence in response to Sustainability Appraisal consultations for emerging Local Plans, Landscape and Visual Impacts Assessments and to inform local Landscape Character Assessments. Evidence about ecosystem services and the Statements of Environment Opportunity are helping to support green infrastructure initiatives and plans.

National policy

The acknowledged importance of landscape-scale conservation and enhancement in the planning system is evidenced by many references within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012). The NCA profiles provide an invaluable resource for understanding the wider landscape context and highlighting opportunities for enhancement of the natural environment. NCA boundaries follow the natural lines of the landscape. While this means they often overlap local authority or other administrative boundaries, they do provide a useful basis for facilitating cross-boundary working and good communication between neighbouring authorities and with other bodies.

The evidence and information contained in the NCA profiles is increasingly being used for a variety of purposes within the land use planning system.

NCAs in Local Plans

Local planning authorities must prepare a Local Plan which sets planning policies for a local authority area. These policies are used to positively judge the acceptability of planning proposals at a local level. NCAs provide both a strong environmental evidence base and a summary of integrated, sustainable opportunities for the future management of an area. Although not statutory documents, a number of local authorities are referring directly to NCAs and to the evidence within them as usefully informing and underpinning their Local Plans.

NCAs have been directly referenced in the draft Joint Core Strategy for Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury, providing a direct link between the evidence in the NCA and the statutory planning document:

Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury draft Joint Core Strategy: Policy S 6 – Landscape

4.64 Landscape character is a key component of the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe), which seeks to protect, manage and create landscapes, and is based on the premise that all landscapes are important. A key component in implementing the convention is the National Character Areas map of England, which sets out landscape character on a broad scale, with the principal areas in the JCS area being the Severn and Avon Vale (NCA106) and the Cotswolds (NCA107). National Character Area Profiles have been prepared by Natural England for both these areas and identify key features and enhancement opportunities.

Development will seek to protect landscape character for its own intrinsic beauty and for its benefit to the economic, environmental and social well-being.

NCA in the preparation of Environmental Impact Assessment and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments

The NCAs, along with local landscape documents, are being used in the preparation and analysis of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Landscape and Visual Impact assessments by planning consultants and local authorities to decide whether proposed developed is appropriate in the context of the surrounding landscape.

For example, Urban Wilderness consultancy recently made reference to the Lancashire Valleys NCA in the preparation of an EIA:

“We use the NE landscape character assessments in our landscape character appraisals for the suitability of development in a particular area. In this case, it’s a wind turbine project near the South Pennines.

Site baseline:

The study area is located on the eastern edge of National Character Area (NCA) 35 “Lancashire Valleys”, however, the character area changes to that of NCA 36 “Southern Pennines” a short distance east of the site. The change in character is determined by the obvious change in topography from lowland agriculture to upland fell. The study area should therefore be understood as being in a transitional character zone.

Assessment of impacts:

In this rural context, this landscape is one of relatively small land holdings (as described by the National Character Area 35 Assessment). An important consideration is whether this pattern will be undermined or even enhanced by the proposed turbine.”

Urban Wilderness, landscape architecture and master planning practice

NCA and Sustainability Appraisals

A sustainability appraisal is a systematic process that must be carried out during the preparation of a Local Plan. Its role is to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the emerging plan will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives. Due to the integrated nature of the NCA, and its focus on multi-functional and sustainable opportunities, NCAs are proving useful to those writing the Local Plan, those performing the Sustainability Appraisal and those who are consulted to comment on both these documents.

Natural England’s internal Land Use advisers ensure those writing Local Plans are aware of the relevant NCAs, and also use the NCAs to aid their responses to Sustainability Appraisal consultations:

“I have provided links to published NCAs within my responses to Sustainability Appraisal (SA) scoping consultations. NCAs provide useful baseline information for the setting of targets and development of SA objectives. Often SA objectives are rather generic and the information within the NCAs should assist LPAs identify more detailed/pertinent SA objectives and decision aiding questions. NCAs have recently been provided for Devizes’, Urchfont’s and South Tyneside’s Local Plan.”

John King Lead Adviser, Land Use Operations, Natural England

NCA's in minerals planning

Mineral site restoration provides a unique opportunity to help redress the loss of biodiversity and changes in landscape character by creating new habitats and restoring land for nature on a landscape scale. Relevant NCA's are being used by Mineral Planning Authorities in helping achieve a landscape scale approach to restoration. They are also useful to consultees when considering proposed mineral restoration plans, and are also used by Natural England planning advisers for this purpose.

"The NCA's have been valuable in providing advice to Planning Authorities on their Mineral Plans.

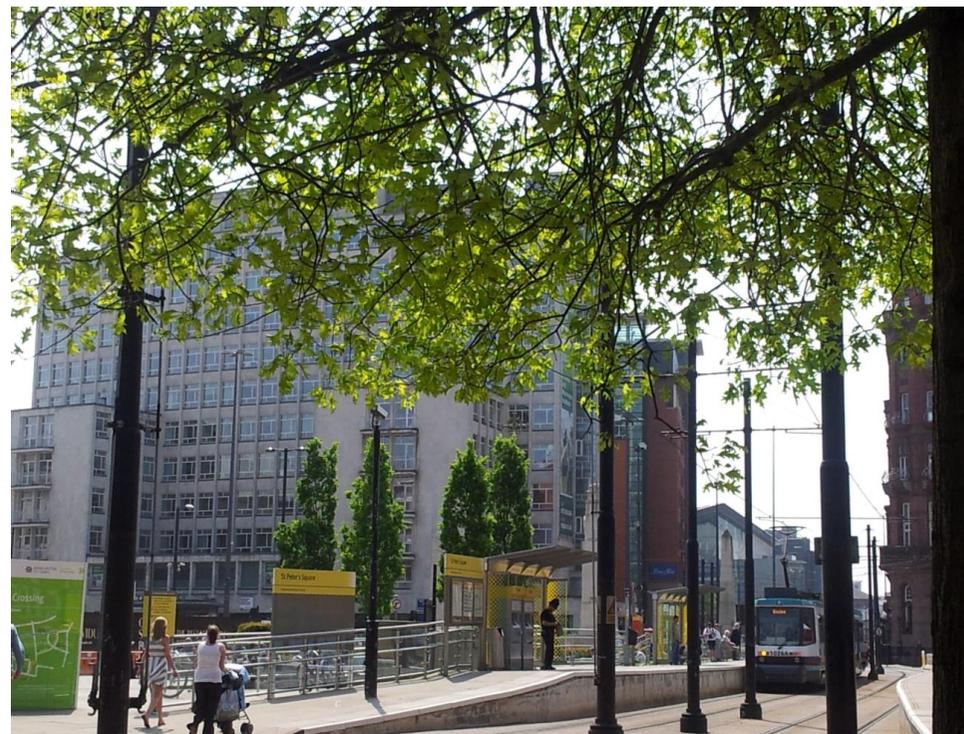
The indicative habitat creation potential for each NCA has helped aid strategic thinking on policy formation for Minerals Plans. Natural England partners such as the RSPB have also highlighted the opportunities presented in the NCA's to guide biodiversity led restoration following mineral extraction."

Sally Maguire, Lead Adviser, Land Use Operations, Natural England

Summary

These are just some examples of the uses of NCA's in the planning system; however, there are many other potential uses covering a diverse range of opportunities, such as;

- Evidence based support for green infrastructure initiatives.
- Habitat expansion and biodiversity off-setting proposals.
- Accessible greenspace creation.
- The conservation and enhancement of ecosystem services in a landscape.
- And simply to aid those writing reports, drafting policy documents or commenting on planning applications.



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Pennine Prospects, the Southern Pennines Regeneration Company, whose boundary area is very closely aligned with the Southern Pennines National Character Area (NCA), uses the profile on a number of levels;

- At a strategic level, as the basis for the development of the South Pennines Local Nature Partnership and to underpin the Watershed Landscape Project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- To develop on the ground projects and programmes, such as the South Pennines twite recovery project with RSPB.
- As a resource and tool for communication, for example in developing the annual South Pennines Walk and Ride Festival.

Where

The Southern Pennines is a landscape of large-scale sweeping moorlands, pastures enclosed by drystone walls, and gritstone settlements contained within narrow valleys. As part of the Pennine ridge of hills it lies between the Peak District National Park and Yorkshire Dales National Park, but has its own distinctive identity. It is administered by a number of different local authorities. This makes “landscape-scale working” in the area especially important to ensure a collective approach to the wide-reaching opportunities for biodiversity and society are recognised, managed and enhanced.

Who

Pennine Prospects is a non-profit organisation and company bringing together a partnership of six local authorities, private sector, membership organisations such as the NFU and the National Trust, Natural England and voluntary sector umbrella organisations. It acts as a champion for the area and co-ordinates regeneration activity to conserve and enhance landscape and heritage, while improving opportunities for local communities and visitors.



What

Pennine Prospects is using the data contained within the NCA profile, especially the Statements of Environmental Opportunity, to support existing and evolving work including;

- The development of a woodland creation and management strategy for the Southern Pennines, working alongside the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust to produce a woodland opportunity plan for the Southern Pennines.
- Pennine Prospect's Heritage Lottery Funded 'Watershed Landscape Project', to promote the significance of the landscape, its rich heritage and its underlying geology to the area's cultural identity.
- A Local Nature Partnership application on behalf of a wider South Pennines Partnership.
- Species recovery initiatives, such as the twite recovery project with the RSPB.
- Working alongside utility companies and other bodies and conservation bodies like Moors for the Future, to focus investment and deliver more for the local environment and local communities.

"A single landscape bisected by administrative boundaries needs a strong champion. The National Character Area Profile is an invaluable document for the South Pennines articulating what makes this landscape unique, valuable and cherished. It is an accurate descriptive baseline; that provides a platform for partnership working around species or habitat recovery projects; the development of a green economy and connecting people to the natural environment."

Pam Warhurst CBE, Chair of Pennine Prospects

Summary

This is just one example of the uses of NCA profiles in developing partnership working, attracting funding and inward investment, and stimulating landscape scale projects; however, there are many other potential uses covering a diverse range of opportunities, such as;

- Applying to a range of grant awarding bodies.
- Introducing local businesses and Local Enterprise Partnerships to the benefits derived, often free of charge, from the natural environment.
- Engaging local communities in taking action at a local level.
- Providing a 'first-stop-shop' of information that can bring a diverse range of organisations together with a common purpose.

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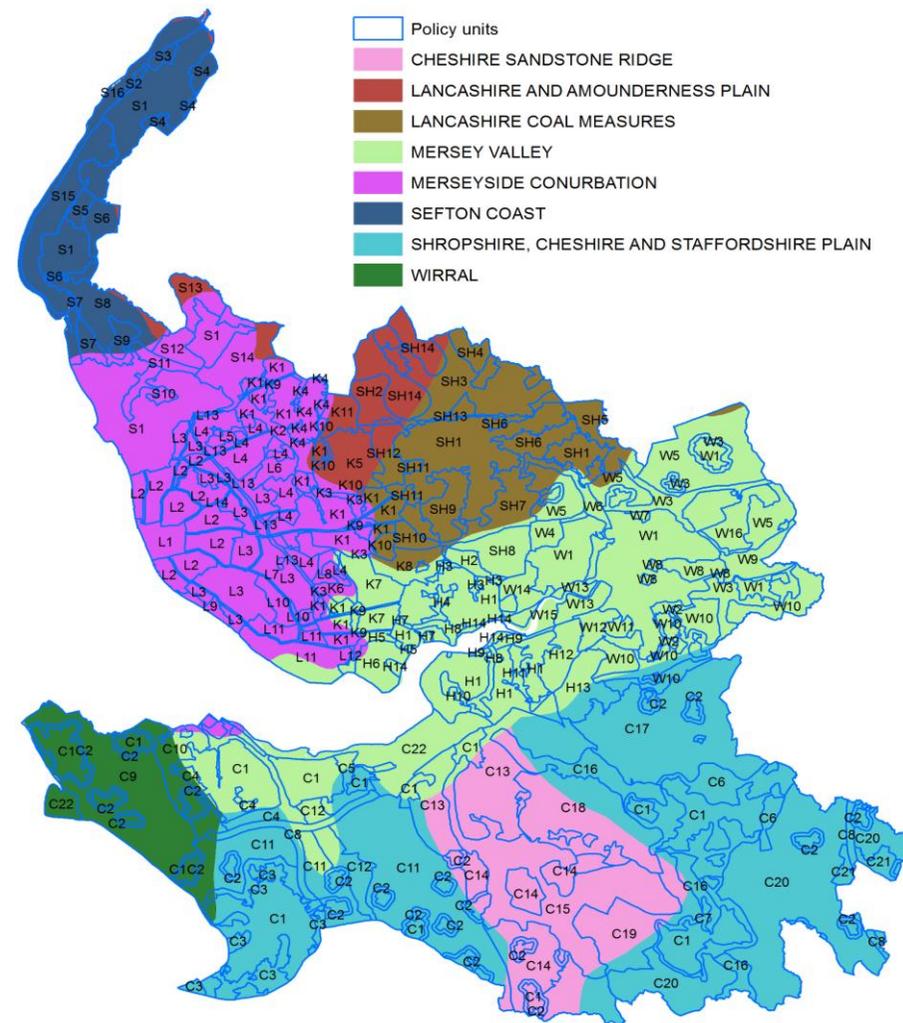
The Mersey Forest is a Community Forest, an expanding network of woodland and green space extending across more than 1,300 square kilometres of Cheshire and Merseyside. The development and management of the forest is guided by a management plan and the information from eight National Character Area (NCA) profiles was used in the updating of the Mersey Forest Plan during 2013.

Informing and influencing the Management Plan

The information contained in the NCA profiles was one of the sources used in the updating of the Mersey Forest Plan, providing high level support and context for an overarching forest-wide policy on culture, heritage and landscape. It was also used to develop the locally specific spatial policies within the plan. The status of Community Forest is recognised within the National Planning Policy Framework and, as such, the Management Plan can be a material consideration in land use planning. The boundaries of the Mersey Forest’s locally-specific, spatial policy areas were aligned to match the NCA boundaries, where possible, to ensure evidence supported the policies. This approach provides clear, ‘joined-up’ thinking for partners and stakeholders, and mutual support for the opportunities and policies in both documents.

The plan and policies

There are 20 policies within the Management Plan that apply across the whole forest area, set out under the headings ‘Who’, ‘What’, ‘How’, and ‘Why’. The broad messages from the NCAs are embedded within Policy 20 of the plan: The supporting text for this policy also makes specific reference to the eight NCAs that cover the forest area.



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The Mersey Forest Plan 2013 policy units (and numbered policies) in relation to the National Character Areas

Policy 20 Culture, heritage and landscape:

We will work towards a new culture around trees and woodlands, and their usefulness to society. This will include engaging communities by integrating landscape, heritage, and the arts into the design, planting and management of trees and woodlands.

In addition to the forest-wide policies there are numerous locally-specific spatial policies set out under the heading 'Where'. These policies are read in conjunction with the overarching forest-wide policies. For these policies the Mersey Forest wanted an approach that was consistent across their large area. The first stage was to create some spatial policy units that were based on their 2001 planting strategy map polygons, which were developed from an early Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) undertaken in 1993 to inform the original Mersey Forest Plan. This was revised to fit better with local authority boundaries, NCAs, and to extend into new areas that were not part of the original Mersey Forest. The resulting units provided the basis for creating the locally-specific spatial policies for each local authority to engage with.

The 'Key facts and data' for each NCA were useful in providing compelling evidence and framing the context for the policy wording and indicative woodland cover targets that accompany each policy unit. LCA and biodiversity and woodland cover datasets provided further detail.

The NCAs were a useful tool in developing both our Forest-wide and locally specific spatial policies. They provided a broad framework and context in which we could nest our policies. They will also provide the contextual framework for ongoing delivery of The Mersey Forest, helping us to get "more from trees".

Dr Susannah Gill
The Mersey Forest Team

Summary

- Providing high-level support and context for landscape-scale planning and policy formation.
- Helping to direct locally-specific spatial planning, design and decision making.
- Making supporting facts and data readily accessible.

The link between the high level Statements of Environmental Opportunity within the NCAs and the local level policies is demonstrated by the following example:

Mersey Valley NCA profile

SEO 2: Promote the Mersey Valley's historic environment and landscape character and positively integrate the environmental resource with industry and development, providing greenspace within existing and new development, to further the benefits provided by a healthy natural environment, as a framework for habitat restoration and for public amenity.

More from trees: The Mersey Forest Plan. 2014. Example of a locally specific spatial policy:

W4: Omega development and around

Increase planting density, so that woodland provides part of a wider green infrastructure and habitat setting for new development, screening the motorway, and providing strategic green links to Bold Forest Park in St. Helens. Restore and plant hedges and hedgerow trees. Ensure development retains and integrates landscape features such as trees, woodland, ponds and rare flora.

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'More from Trees: The Mersey Forest Plan, 2014' can be found at: www.merseyforest.org.uk/plan

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The National Character Area profiles can provide a valuable resource for education; providing information, different perspectives and approaches to assessing and managing our environment and resources and services.

How are the profiles being used?

The University of Gloucester uses National Character Area profile *106 Severn and Avon Vales* as a core source document in its Sustainable Environments Masters course. The information contained within the profile is critical to one of the assessments on the 'Applied Ecology and Conservation' module. Students adopt the role of an environmental consultant and undertake a critique of past and current management of the environment, as well as suggesting possible future management objectives.

Using the profiles as evidence

National Character Area profile *106 Severn and Avon Vales* is used to set out the various aspects and challenges of landscape-scale conservation. The focus of the assessment is Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Coombe Hill Nature Reserve, north of Gloucester on the banks of the River Severn. The Course Leader, Chris Short, has found the profile particularly useful in setting out the context for the Severn Vale. Coombe Hill has a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which is currently in favourable condition, but also areas of wet meadow that were de-registered as SSSI but are now under positive environmental management. It is also close to the Ashleworth Ham SSSI and Chacley Meadows SSSI that make up the Severn Hams; all within the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Severn Vale Living Landscape project.

In the assessment the students are required to offer guidance to the site manager when the reserve management plan is updated. The students offer advice on three areas; the impact of climate change, landscape-scale management and the opportunities for community involvement on the reserve.

"The students really value the landscape-specific content of the NCA 106 profile that they can relate to Coombe Hill Reserve and to the national and international literature that they study on the course. In addition the NCA both summarises the data and acts as a conduit to further data sources."

Chris Short, Course Leader Sustainable Environments at the University of Gloucestershire





National Character Areas as sources of information

The National Character Area profile brings together a wide range of material that the students need to consider, namely the;

- Landscape features and key characteristics.
- Links to other National Character Areas (taking an ecosystems approach).
- Current activity and ecosystem services.
- Key data and the sources for these data.
- Evidence of landscape change.
- Analysis of ecosystems and landscape.

Specifically during the field trip to Coombe Hill the students use the four Statements of Environmental Opportunity as a means of summarising the current and future management on the reserve and surrounding landscape. From this point they are asked how changes might occur and which individuals and organisations might need to be involved and how this could happen. There is potential for the analysis section to be critiqued within the assessment through use of data collected during the field trip and supplementary evidence gathered during the assessment.

For further information contact:

Contact the National Character Area team
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Chris Short, Course Leader Sustainable Environments Masters,
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“The NCA really helps the students to focus on how the management of the reserve, as part of a landscape scale initiative, might need to change so that it fits in to current thinking on connectivity and ecological networks and therefore places the reserve within the wider landscape and the neighbouring communities”.

Chris Short, Course Leader Sustainable Environments at the University of Gloucestershire