

# Oswestry Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study

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Final Report  
to  
Oswestry Borough Council/  
Shropshire Council

*May 2009*



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# PART 1

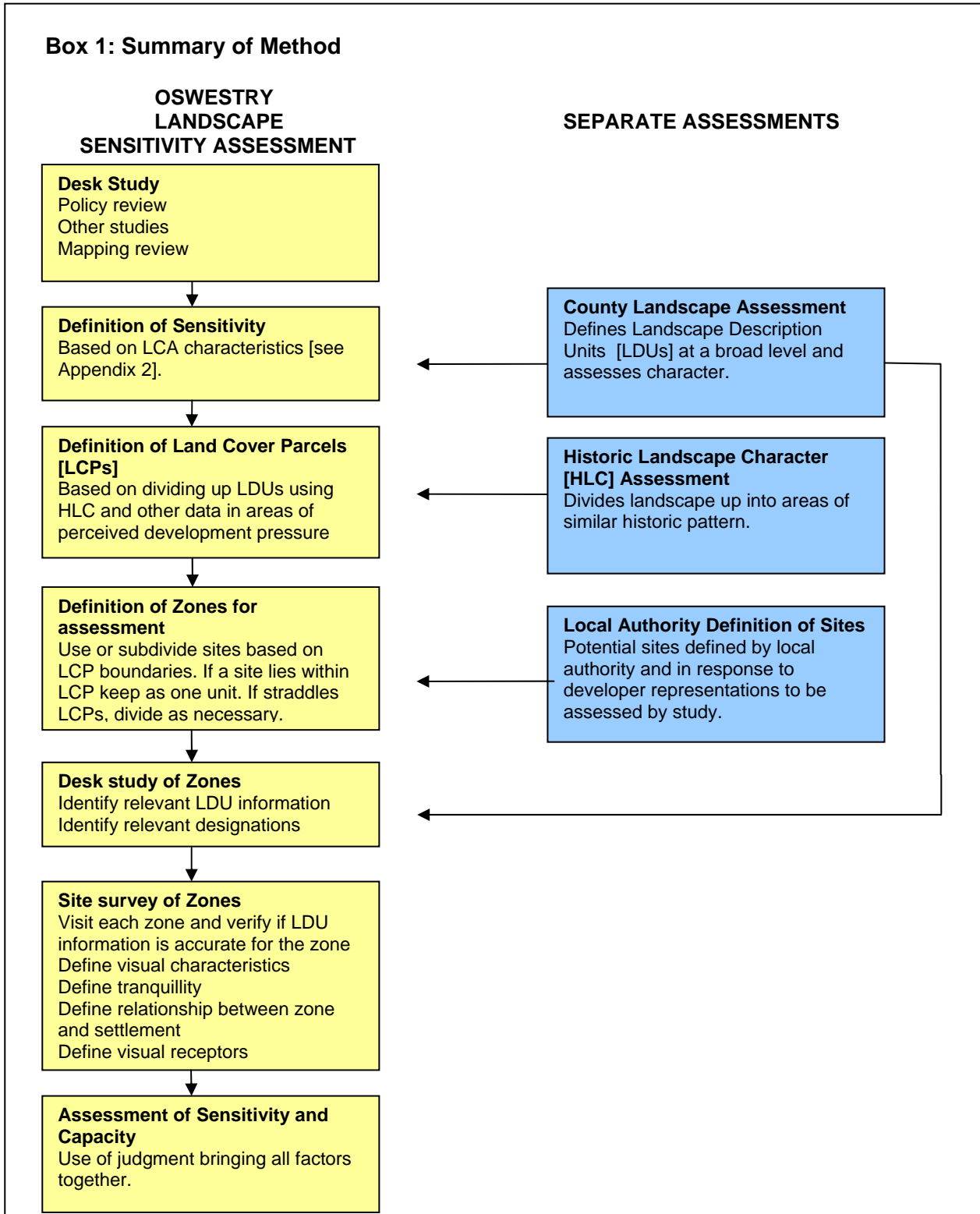
## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 White Consultants were appointed by Oswestry Borough Council in September 2008 to undertake a landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment for defined areas around Oswestry and other settlements in the borough. Prior to completion of the final report the borough became part of Shropshire Council (April 2009). The aim of the study is to complete the sensitivity study using the same method that has been developed in Shrewsbury and Atcham and other districts in Shropshire by members of the consultant team. Diacono Ltd have worked with White Consultants to deliver the project.
- 1.2 A county landscape character assessment has already been undertaken by Shropshire County Council and analysis of sensitivity has been made using a new method based on four aspects of inherent sensitivity-ecological, cultural, visibility and tranquillity.
- 1.3 This project works within this assessment, reviews the sensitivity devised at Landscape Description Unit level and assesses the capacity of the landscape to accommodate housing and employment development and to identify those landscapes that should be protected from development. The study is intended to form part of the evidence base which will inform the Local Development Framework site allocations.
- 1.2 The report is divided into two parts. In Part 1 we discuss the method [2.0] and briefly set out a summary of findings [3.0]. The sensitivity and capacity assessments for each identified zone are set out in Part 2 for the relevant settlements in alphabetical order.

## 2.0 METHOD

- 2.1 This study is a technical exercise and the report uses a number of technical terms for precision and as a means for reaching conclusions on sensitivity and capacity. These terms are defined in the Glossary in **Appendix 1**. We have taken into consideration Countryside Agency 'Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity [2004]'. **Sensitivity** is taken to mean the sensitivity of the landscape itself, irrespective of the type of change which may be under consideration. It is a combination of the sensitivity of the landscape resource [including its historical and ecological features and elements] and the visual sensitivity of the landscape [such as views and visibility]. For the purposes of this study it also includes landscape value [including designations]. **Capacity** is taken to mean the ability of a landscape to accommodate different amounts of change for a development of a specific type.
- 2.2 Key tasks are explained in more detail:  
*Definition of Sensitivity*
- 2.3 The Shropshire County Council landscape character assessment is at a broad scale identifying landscape description units [LDUs] and ascribing characteristics. For each of these units

the team has carried out an assessment of intrinsic sensitivity. These are divided into ecological sensitivity and cultural sensitivity (see Figures A1 and Figure A2 in Appendix 3), visual sensitivity and tranquillity. The latter two aspects are not referred to further in this report because the more detailed visibility and tranquillity assessments related to each specific area supercede them. The County landscape assessment provides the background to the detailed analysis of sensitivity and capacity that is the subject of this Borough Council study. Box 1 shows a summary of the process undertaken which is then further explained in the text.



*Defining Land Cover Parcels:*

- 2.4 In areas where potential sites are put forward by the local authority for assessment land cover parcels (LCPs) are derived. These are discrete areas of land nested within a larger LDU reflecting variations in the physical character of the land. Bounded by roads, railways, watercourses and parish boundaries, these units define areas with similar patterns and land use, field pattern and tree cover. They provide the finer grain of resolution necessary for assessment. They are derived from Historic Landscape Character [HLC], previous studies, aerial photos and mapping.

*Defining sites for assessment:*

- 2.5 Sites are based on the candidate sites put forward by the local authority for assessment. If these lie within LCPs they are usually kept as one unit unless they are very large with differing characteristics or relationship with the settlement edge. However, where they cross LCP boundaries they are subdivided to reflect the different characteristics of each LCP. The numbering reflects this sub division with the first number indicating the identified site, and the second the relevant LCP in which it lies. The areas identified are set out in **Figure 1**.

*Desk study of sites:*

- 2.6 LDU sensitivity information is abstracted from the LDU assessment- cultural, ecological and visual sensitivity [see **Appendix 2**]. Ecological and historic designations are identified which further refine each area's sensitivity. The functional relationship of the area with the adjoining settlement is assessed including its role as a green wedge or for recreation/access etc.

*Site Survey of sites:*

- 2.7 The LDU sensitivities are verified for each site. Because of the size of the LDUs there will often be variations in both characteristics and sensitivity within them. In terms of this more detailed study, each site is assessed to check whether its sensitivities do correspond to the broader level assessment. It is worth noting that at the county scale of the assessment some of the LDUs in Oswestry including both built form and adjacent green space were classified as urban and were not, therefore, attributed a sensitivity value.
- 2.8 Other relevant factors are then recorded including:
- Function of area
  - Presence of water
  - Visual characteristics
  - Tranquillity
  - Functional and visual relationship of the site with its surroundings and the settlement.
  - Description of settlement edge- is it a positive or negative edge to the settlement?



- Definition of sensitive receptors within and outside the area.
- Potential for improvement of the settlement edge and for overall mitigation.

These are further explained in **Part 2**.

2.9 Bringing all the information together, an overall analysis of each site's sensitivity is made. Judgments are not based on a mathematical adding up of factors, positive or negative. Some factors will be more important than others in different sites. For instance, the function of an area in separating settlements may be considered very important and make it sensitive to development even if it is of limited inherent landscape value. A justification is given as to why it is considered that an area has a particular sensitivity. The calibration of the sensitivity is as follows:

- Low- key characteristics of landscape are robust and/or are of relatively low intrinsic value as a landscape resource.
- Medium-low- key characteristics of landscape are resilient to change and/or are of limited intrinsic value as a landscape resource.
- Medium- key characteristics of landscape are susceptible to change and have value as a landscape resource.
- High-Medium- key characteristics of landscape are vulnerable to change and/or have high value as a landscape resource.
- High- key characteristics of landscape are very vulnerable to change and/or have significant value as a landscape resource.

2.10 A capacity rating is then defined for both housing and employment uses. This is based on the sensitivity of a zone and the likely magnitude of effect and character of proposed development. Housing is taken to be around 8m high ranging from individual houses through to larger estate developments. Employment is taken to mean offices or commercial premises of a similar grain and character to that which has been developed on the south eastern fringes of Oswestry. This includes medium scale industrial or commercial uses such as use classes B1 and B2 with a floor plan of around 600m<sup>2</sup> to 4500m<sup>2</sup> in size and associated storage and car parking. The minimum depth of buildings would typically be expected to be around 20m and heights may exceed 8m. The capacity for small scale employment built form where the floor plan and height is similar to housing and with low key environmental impact such as noise, dust etc and limited signage/storage etc within the B1 use class could, in some cases, be considered in the same way as housing capacity to the local planning authority's discretion. An example may be small scale craft units or offices. It will be a matter of judgement depending on the character and location of the proposals and the site.

2.11 Capacity for housing and employment will differ. For instance, because of the smaller individual unit size of houses these can be put on steeper slopes and in finer grain landscapes than medium scale employment. The calibration of the capacity is as follows:

- High- thresholds for significant change are very high and much of the area can be developed.
- High-medium- thresholds for significant change are high and the area is able to accommodate a significant proportion for development.
- Medium- thresholds for change are intermediate with some ability to accommodate development in some parts.
- Medium-low- thresholds for change are low and development can be accommodated only in limited situations.
- Low- thresholds for change are very low and the area is unable to accommodate development without significant adverse effects.

### 3.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Overall, the study has found that there is capacity for housing and employment around Oswestry and in some of the other settlements.
- 4.2 Areas of higher sensitivity and lower capacity have tended to be those of intrinsically higher value, those in open countryside not closely associated with a settlement, acting as setting to conservation areas or listed buildings, in valley corridors, in floodplains, on steep or prominent slopes or those forming gaps between settlements. There is a need to protect in particular the landscapes of the valley bottoms and maintain green fingers of open space penetrating into settlements to maintain the quality of life for residents. Some sites assessed form an important visual setting to parts of a settlement and act as recreational and wildlife corridors and reservoirs.
- 4.3 Some settlement edges, usually consisting of housing estates, present an unattractive boundary with the countryside. In these cases, and combined with where the landscape itself has lower intrinsic sensitivity, the opportunity is taken to recommend a higher capacity for development. This is with the proviso that the development itself will present a positive edge with significant planting in order to integrate and enhance the landscape. This is best achieved by a design or development brief including landscape, nature conservation and urban design/settlement edge objectives.
- 4.4 The landscape sensitivities and capacities of each site are summarised in Table 1 and are shown in **Figures 1-3**.
- 4.5 In summary, for housing there is high landscape capacity on two sites in Oswestry and St Martins. High/medium landscape capacity for housing is found in 14 sites- in Maesbury Marsh [2], Oswestry [2], St Martins [3] and Whittington [3] and one each in Gobowen, Kinnerley, Llanymynech and Rhoswel. There is some capacity potentially in a further 29 sites which have medium capacity in Gobowen, Kinnerley, Morda, Maesbury Marsh, Oswestry, Pant, St Martins, Trefonen, West Felton, Weston Rhyn and Whittington. Some of these areas should only be considered for development in the longer term due to their current prominence and where advance planting is suggested if thought appropriate. Most sites [63%] are considered areas of constraint with low or medium/low capacity.
- 4.6 In summary, for employment use there are no sites of high or high/medium capacity. Medium landscape capacity exists on two sites in Oswestry. Low/medium landscape capacity for employment is found in 5 sites- in St Martins [3], Oswestry and Gobowen. The scale of development in St Martins would need to be carefully controlled. Most sites [94%] are considered areas of constraint with low capacity.
- 4.7 It is recommended that these findings are taken into consideration in the preparation of the Local Development Framework and allocation of sites for housing and employment development.

**Table 1 Oswestry sites landscape sensitivity and capacity**

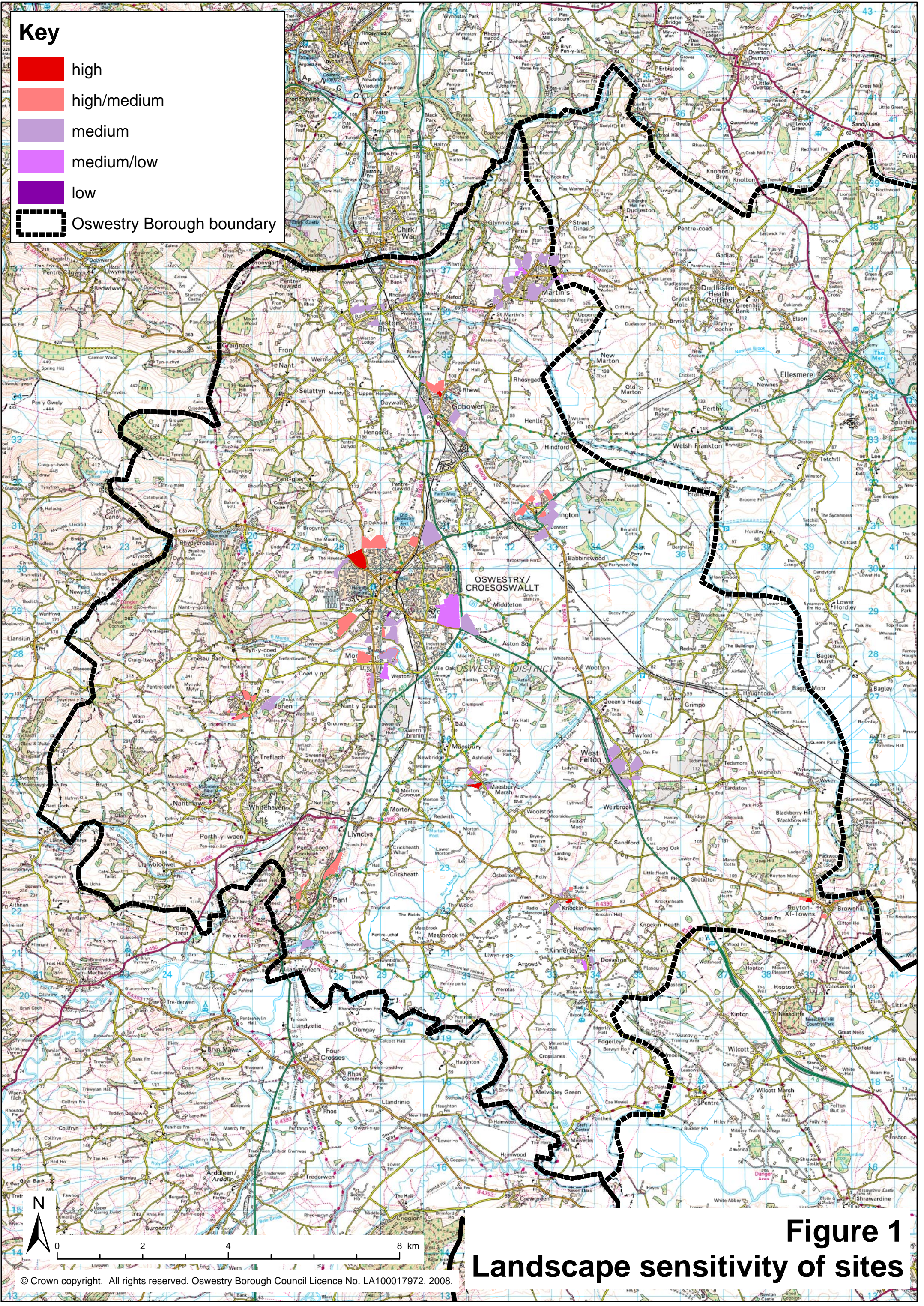
Site No	Settlement	Site Sensitivity	Capacity for Housing	Capacity for Employment
OWG3-132	Gobowen	medium	high/medium	medium/low
OWG4-126	Gobowen	high/medium	low	low
OWG4-128	Gobowen	high	low	low
OWG4-151	Gobowen	high/medium	low	low
OWG7-129	Gobowen	medium	medium/low	low
OWG8-129	Gobowen	medium	medium	low
OWG9-203	Gobowen	medium	low	low
OWK1-119	Kinnerley	medium/low	medium	low
OWK2-232	Kinnerley	medium	high/medium	low
OWK5-119	Kinnerley	medium	medium/low	low
OWK7-232	Kinnerley	medium	medium/low	low
OWKK1-125	Knockin	medium	medium/low	low
OWKK2-122	Knockin	medium	medium/low	low
OWKK3-124	Knockin	high	low	low
OWKK4-125	Knockin	high/medium	low	low
OWKK5-122	Knockin	high/medium	low	low
OWLLM1-72	Llanymynech	medium	medium/low	low
OWLLM2-72	Llanymynech	medium	high/medium	low
OWM2-185	Morda	high/medium	low	low
OWM4-193a	Morda	medium	low	low
OWM4-193b	Morda	medium	medium/low	low
OWM4-194	Morda	high/medium	low	low
OWM6-184	Morda	medium	low	low
OWM7-193	Morda	medium/low	medium	low
OWM9-193	Morda	medium/low	medium	low
OWMM1-162	Maesbury Marsh	high/medium	low	low
OWMM2-162	Maesbury Marsh	medium/low	high/medium	low
OWMM3-162	Maesbury Marsh	medium	medium	low
OWMM4-79	Maesbury Marsh	high	low	low
OWMM4-162	Maesbury Marsh	high	low	low
OWMM5-78	Maesbury Marsh	medium/low	high/medium	low
OWMM6-162	Maesbury Marsh	high/medium	low	low
OWMM8-162	Maesbury Marsh	medium	low	low
OWMM9-78	Maesbury Marsh	medium	low	low
OWMM10-78	Maesbury Marsh	medium	low	low
OWO1-26	Oswestry	high/medium	low	low
OWO3-195	Oswestry	high	low	low
OWO3-196	Oswestry	high	low	low
OWO4-190	Oswestry	high/medium	low	low
OWO5-198	Oswestry	medium	medium	low
OWO6-161	Oswestry	medium/low	high/medium	medium
OWO6-235	Oswestry	medium/low	high/medium	low
OWO8-25	Oswestry	medium	medium	low
OWO8-26	Oswestry	medium	medium	low
OWO10-22	Oswestry	medium	medium/low	low
OWO11-26	Oswestry	medium	medium/low	low
OWO11-236	Oswestry	low	high	low
OWO12-30	Oswestry	high/medium	low	low
OWO15-161	Oswestry	medium	medium/low	medium/low
OWO16-26	Oswestry	medium	medium/low	low
OWO18-41	Oswestry	medium	medium/low	medium
OWO21-189	Oswestry	high/medium	low	low

Site No	Settlement	Site Sensitivity	Capacity for Housing	Capacity for Employment
OWP2-177	Pant	high/medium	low	low
OWP3-179	Pant	high/medium	low	low
OWP3-183	Pant	high/medium	low	low
OWP4-176	Pant	high/medium	low	low
OWP5-177	Pant	high/medium	medium/low	low
OWP6-177	Pant	high/medium	low	low
OWP7-183	Pant	medium	medium	low
OWP10-63	Pant	high/medium	low	low
OWR3-142	Rhoswiel (Weston Rhyn)	medium	high/medium	low
OWRXT1-109	Ruyton-XI-Towns	high/medium	low	low
OWRXT2-106	Ruyton-XI-Towns	high/medium	low	low
OWRXT2-109	Ruyton-XI-Towns	high/medium	low	low
OWRXT3-107	Ruyton XI Towns	high/medium	low	low
OWRXT4-109	Ruyton-XI-Towns	high	low	low
OWRXT5-109	Ruyton XI Towns	medium	low	low
OWSM1-155	St Martins	medium	low	low
OWSM2-149	St Martins	medium/low	high/medium	low
OWSM2-155	St Martins	medium	medium	low
OWSM3-155	St Martins	medium/low	high/medium	medium/low
OWSM4-149	St Martins	medium/low	high	low
OWSM4-155	St Martins	medium	medium	low
OWSM5-155	St Martins	medium	medium	medium/low
OWSM6-155	St Martins	medium	medium	medium/low
OWSM7-155	St Martins	medium	medium/low	low
OWSM8-155	St Martins	medium	medium/low	low
OWSM9-155	St Martins	medium	medium/low	low
OWSM10-155	St Martins	medium	low	low
OWSM11-149	St Martins	medium/low	high/medium	low
OWSM11-155	St Martins	medium	medium	low
OWSM12-155	St Martins	medium	low	low
OWSM13-155	St Martins	medium/low	medium	low
OWSM14-155	St Martins	medium	medium/low	low
OWSM15-149	St Martins	medium	medium	low
OWSM15-155	St Martins	medium	medium	low
OWSM16-155	St Martins	medium	medium	low
OWSM17-155	St Martins	medium	medium/low	low
OWSM18-155	St Martins	medium	medium/low	low
OWSM19-155	St Martins	medium	medium/low	low
OWTN1-86	Trefonen	high/medium	low	low
OWTN2-189	Trefonen	high/medium	medium/low	low
OWTN3-189	Trefonen	high/medium	low	low
OWTN4-86	Trefonen	medium	low	low
OWTN5-86	Trefonen	medium	low	low
OWTN6-85	Trefonen	medium	medium	low
OWTN7-86	Trefonen	medium	medium	low
OWTN8-81	Trefonen	medium	medium	low
OWTN9-81	Trefonen	medium/low	medium	low
OWTN10-85	Trefonen	high/medium	low	low
OWWF1-171	West Felton	medium	medium/low	low
OWWF2-90	West Felton	medium	medium	low
OWWF5-92	West Felton	medium	medium	low
OWWF6-168	West Felton	medium	low	low
OWWF8-90	West Felton	medium	medium/low	low

Site No	Settlement	Site Sensitivity	Capacity for Housing	Capacity for Employment
OWWF9-92	West Felton	medium/low	medium	low
OWWF14-90	West Felton	medium/low	medium	low
OWWR1-208	Weston Rhyn	medium	medium/low	low
OWWR2-143	Weston Rhyn	medium	medium/low	low
OWWR4-143	Weston Rhyn	medium	medium	low
OWWR5-202	Weston Rhyn	medium	medium/low	low
OWWR6-137	Weston Rhyn	medium	medium	low
OWWT4-223	Whittington	medium/low	high/medium	low
OWWT8-228	Whittington	high/medium	low	low
OWWT9-227	Whittington	medium	medium/low	low
OWWT9-228	Whittington	medium	medium/low	low
OWWT10-226	Whittington	high/medium	low	low
OWWT11-223	Whittington	medium	medium	low
OWWT12-227	Whittington	high/medium	medium/low	low
OWWT13-228	Whittington	medium	high/medium	low
OWWT14-227	Whittington	high/medium	low	low
OWWT16-227	Whittington	medium	low	low
OWWT17-45	Whittington	medium	high/medium	low

*Note: The site number is a combination of candidate site number [eg OWWT17] and land cover parcel number [eg 45]*

# FIGURES



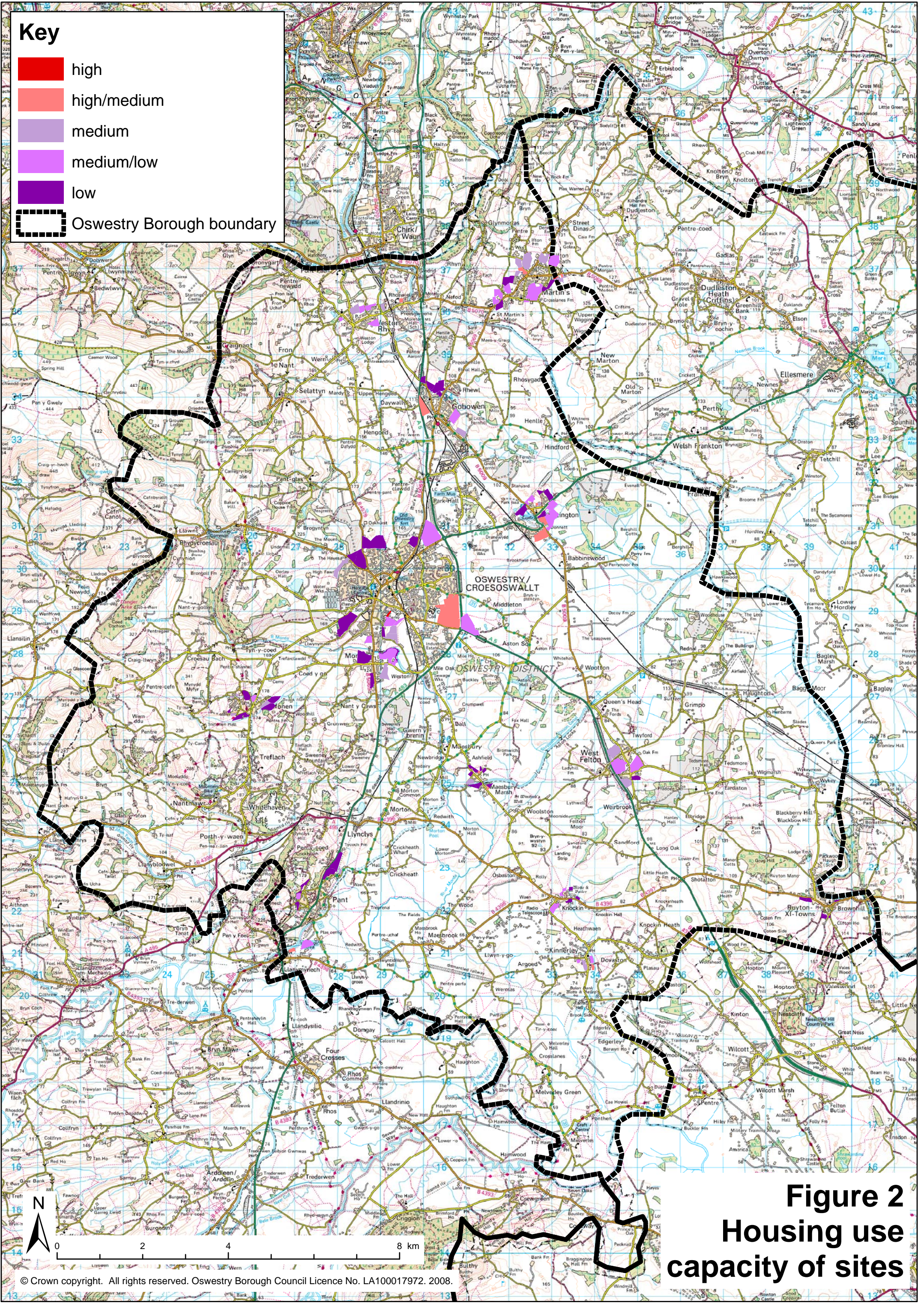
**Key**

- high
- high/medium
- medium
- medium/low
- low
- Oswestry Borough boundary

**Figure 1**  
**Landscape sensitivity of sites**

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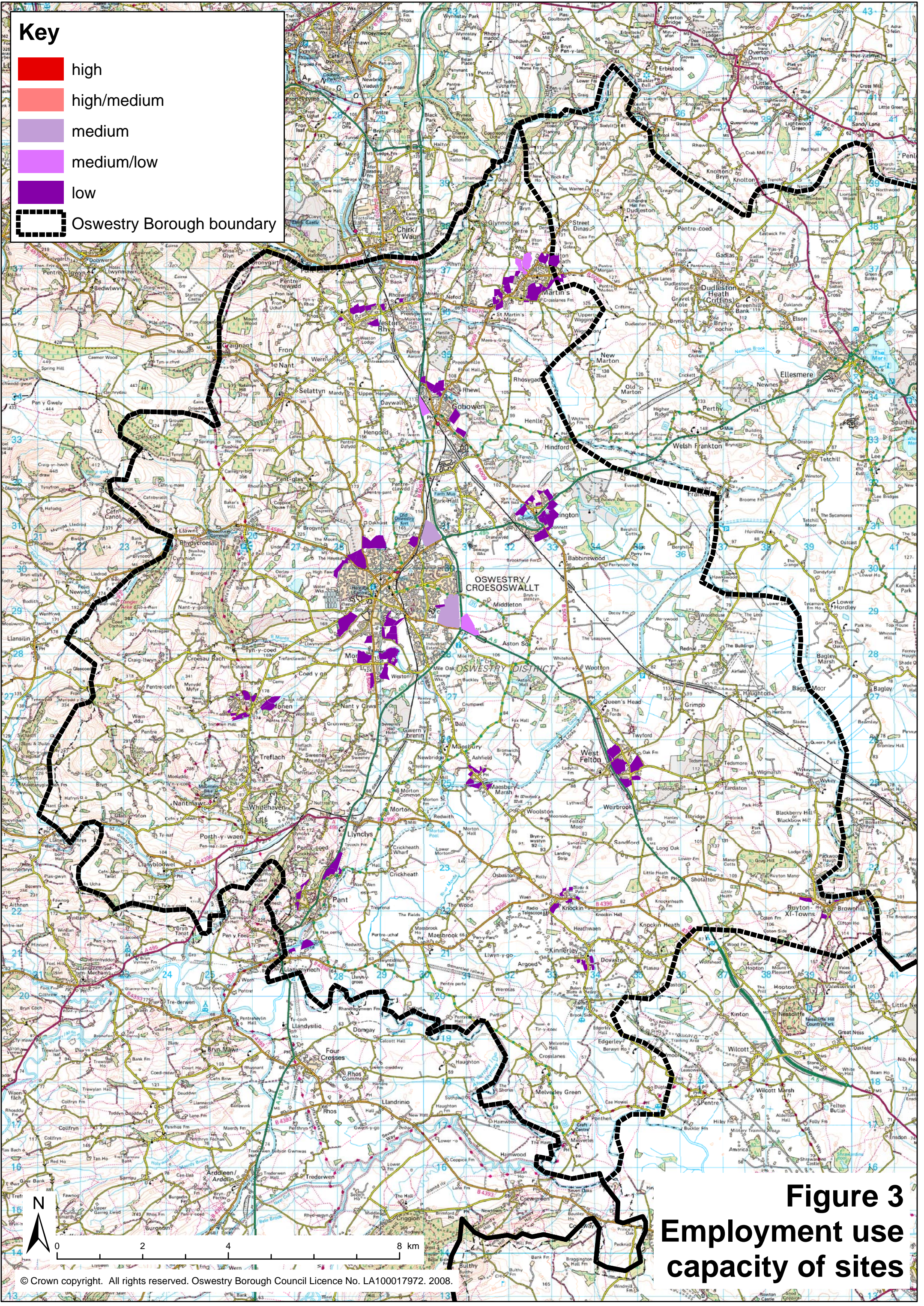


**Key**

- high
- high/medium
- medium
- medium/low
- low
- Oswestry Borough boundary

**Figure 2**  
**Housing use**  
**capacity of sites**

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**Figure 3**  
**Employment use**  
**capacity of sites**

# PART 2

## **4.0 ZONE SENSITIVITIES AND CAPACITIES**

- 4.1 The sensitivity and capacity of each zone is set out on the following pages. Below, an explanation of the purpose of each section is set out. The definition of specific terms can be found in the Glossary in **Appendix 1**. It is important to note that the zones are in alphabetical order according to their numbers, not in settlement order. So, for instance, the zone in Morda numbered OWM9-193 comes before zones in Maesbury Marsh numbered OWMM1-162 onwards.

### **Zone Sensitivity and Capacity Summary**

- 4.2 This section summarises the overall landscape sensitivity and the capacity of the zone for housing uses.

### **LDU context**

- 4.3 The LDU (landscape description unit) is the broad area of landscape with common characteristics in which the zone is located. This has been defined as part of the Shropshire landscape assessment and more information is available in the appendix. The LDU is described in terms of landform and land cover amongst other factors and these are set out on the form. The cultural, ecological and visual sensitivity are also defined. Because of the size of the LDUs there will often be variations in both characteristics and sensitivity within them. In terms of this more detailed study, each zone is assessed to check whether its characteristics and sensitivities do correspond to the broader level assessment. If there are differences this does not mean to say that the overall LDU judgment is incorrect as it applies to a much broader area and defines the dominant characteristics of that area. It still acts as a relevant context to the zone.

### **Biodiversity**

- 4.4 Nature conservation designations are listed in this section and comments made as to the specific features. Designations can indicate that the area is sensitive.

### **Historic**

- 4.5 Historic conservation designations are listed in this section and comments made as to the specific features. Designations can indicate that the area is sensitive.

### **Function of area**

- 4.6 The main functions and land uses of the zone are listed with any additional comments necessary. The diversity, or variety, of uses is commented on ie are the uses generally few and simple or many and diverse? Simple land use can indicate strong consistency of character of either positive or negative nature. Diversity can indicate a rich, varied landscape which might be affected adversely by large-scale development but in which sensitive small-scale development may be able to be accommodated.

### **Water**

- 4.7 The presence of water is noted and commented upon. Water bodies such as streams or ponds can be sensitive and valuable features.

### **Skyline**

- 4.8 The prominence and importance of any skyline in the zone is noted and its complexity described. Skylines are sensitive features as they are generally widely visible and any feature on them is brought out in relief against a light sky. Varied skylines can be more attractive and valued although they may be able to accommodate small-scale change. Simple skylines may be less attractive although maybe the

more sensitive to any change as it may be more noticeable. As a general rule, all development should avoid breaking the skyline.

#### **Key views**

- 4.9 Key views are those views from publicly accessible places [which are used regularly or to enjoy scenic quality] towards features of interest. Generally, these are sensitive to change and development. Any landmarks in the zone or visible from the zone are noted. Any detractors, or unsightly features, are also noted.

#### **Intervisibility**

- 4.10 The degree to which the zone is visible to the surrounding area is noted through site observation i.e. a visit to the zone. Any views of key features visible or key places within the zone are also recorded. If the area has high intervisibility it is likely to be more sensitive to development than if it is hidden.

#### **Tranquillity**

- 4.11 Tranquillity is broken down into the noise sources within an area, the number of views of development and the presence of people. Views of development are defined by the amount that can be seen using, where appropriate the arc of view of development possible ie 180, 270 or 360 degrees. The more and louder the noise sources, the less the tranquillity. The more the views of development or the number of people, also the less the tranquillity. Tranquillity is a valuable commodity, particularly in areas accessible to larger settlements, and contributes to sensitivity.

#### **Functional relationship of area**

- 4.12 The relationship of the zone with the adjacent settlement, if relevant, with the wider landscape and with an adjacent assessed zone in terms of function is recorded. The function can range from land use such as agriculture through to the nature conservation function e.g. as a wildlife corridor. Some zones may be interdependent with others and change in one may affect all adversely.

#### **Visual relationship of area**

- 4.13 The relationship of the zone with the adjacent settlement, if relevant, with the wider landscape and with an adjacent assessed zone in terms of visual connection is recorded. Some areas can be important to the settlement in terms of providing a setting. Other areas can provide a visual link out into the wider landscape. These links can be important and make an area more sensitive to change.

#### **Are adjacent assessed areas mutually reliant?**

- 4.14 Some zones may be interdependent with others and change in one may affect all adversely.

#### **Settlement edge**

- 4.15 The age of the settlement edge is defined as either being pre- 20th-century or more recent 20 to 21st century. Often, where the older core of a settlement meets an open area it is likely to be more sensitive than a later development. The nature of the edge is recorded i.e. whether it is positive or negative and its form noted i.e. whether it is smooth, linear or indented. The latter tends to be more attractive and is often symptomatic of an older edge. It can be more sensitive towards proposed development than a linear, bland edge or an edge with detractors.

#### **Receptors and sensitivity**

- 4.16 Receptors are people in a variety of different situations who can experience views within an area and who may be affected by change

or development. Receptors can include urban or rural residents, users of public footpaths, roads, rail or cycleways. Those residents within a settlement [even a small village] are classified as 'urban', while those outside the settlement are classified as 'rural' for simplicity. Some receptors are more sensitive than others. The same person driving a delivery van for work may be less sensitive to a view than when he or she is looking out of their living-room window or taking a walk in the countryside. The more the number of sensitive receptors in an area, the more sensitive the area will be to change or development.

#### **Potential for improvement of settlement edge and overall mitigation**

- 4.17 If an existing settlement edge has a number of detractors or a poor relationship with the adjacent landscape there may be opportunity for improvement. This improvement can either take the form of mitigation such as woodland planting or screening. It could also mean that further development may be desirable provided it was carried out in a sensitive manner and provided a positive edge itself. Where such opportunities exist a comment is made. If no such opportunity exists, this is stated as a 'no' or a dash.