

Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (for Environmental Impact Assessment / Environmental Statement)

Assessment Methodology

Overview

The methodology for Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (TVIA) is based on current best practice as set out in:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA 3) (Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013) and related documents
 - Townscape Character Assessment (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 05/2017 (Revised April 2018)); and
 - Visual Representation of Development Proposals (Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 06/2019).

GLVIA 3 states that this type of assessment provides a tool for identifying and assessing “*the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people’s views and visual amenity*” (Para. 1.1). The guidance emphasises the importance of carrying two interlinked elements in assessments; landscape (or townscape) as a resource; and, visual amenity, including views. The effects of both must be addressed in the assessment.

GLVIA3 presents guidance for a landscape-based approach to townscape describing ‘townscape’ as the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings and the relationships between them. It also advises that townscape assessments will likely require a good understanding of townscape, which may be from different disciplines stating that the nature of townscape requires a *particular understanding of a range of factors that together distinguish different parts of towns and cities*. The range of factors will vary depending on the nature of the place and urban environment to be assessed with some examples provided in the related Townscape Character Assessment guidance.

For EIA purposes a definition of the environmental effects to be considered in the TVIA is provided in GLVIA3 as below:

- **Townscape effects** relate to the predicted effects on the townscape as a resource. Townscape effects can be generated by a development’s effect upon the physical townscape, and its townscape character, fabric and quality. These include physical effects on townscape elements such as loss of trees or removal of structures. This also includes aesthetic, perceptual and experiential aspects of the urban environment, which may contribute to townscape character.
- **Visual effects** relate to the predicted change to the view and the related impacts on the visual amenity experienced by people – the visual receptors, (normally restricted to views from publicly accessible locations). A view is defined in GLVIA3 as a single sight or prospect

that can be seen from a particular place or location. The visual amenity is defined as the overall pleasantness of what people can see in their surroundings (GLVIA3 p158). Therefore, a view may have elements within it that change significantly, but the overall pleasantness could remain the same. Visual receptors typically include pedestrians, users of public rights of way/ recreational facilities and drivers and passengers of vehicles/ rail passengers.

Establishing the Baseline

Desk Based Studies

A preliminary desk study of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, historic mapping sources and imagery, townscape characterisation studies, aerial photography, and online street views is undertaken to establish how an area has developed over time and the physical components of the Site and its surroundings (including land use, topography, built form, accessibility and vegetation). This understanding of place is used to identify potential townscape and visual receptors.

A review of the development context is also carried out to establish whether there are other developments of similar scale under construction that should be included in the baseline.

Study Area

The study area for the townscape and visual assessment comprises the area within which there is potential for the Proposed Scheme to result in significant townscape or visual effects. The extent of the study area is established as part of the baseline appraisal. It is likely that the Proposed Scheme would be visible from some points beyond the study area but the effects of this would be so minor that detailed assessment is not warranted (as they would not be significant effects for the purposes of an EIA). This approach is supported by GLVIA3, which states that the scale of assessment should be appropriate and proportional to the nature of the development proposed.

The study area for the assessment includes both the Site and the surrounding wider townscape context. The townscape character assessment considers the Site at a local level, through the determination of local townscape character areas within a defined study area, and the identification of townscape features. The visual assessment considers the existing and potential views experienced within this defined study area, but it may also include other identified views that may be from locations beyond the study area, such as from vantage points around the city or town.

Testing the Extent of Visibility

The extent of the study area is informed by identifying the potential extent of visibility of a Proposed Scheme in the surrounding townscape. A field study is undertaken by the professional team which considers the existing enclosure of the Site by surrounding development, topography and mature vegetation. A series of tools are also used to establish the potential visibility with development in place. This can include:

- Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping assuming maximum building heights across the development area.

Developments under construction will be identified and included in the baseline, and where possible in testing of the extent of visibility of the Proposed Scheme.

Surveys

An observational urban survey is undertaken by appropriately qualified and experienced professionals at Turley. The urban survey records the Site and surrounding context's townscape

features and confirms the visual receptors identified in the desk study. The urban survey involves travelling throughout the study area and producing a working photographic record of the area.

The urban survey establishes the key characteristics of the local context and townscape character, including the associated elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors,. The approximate visibility of the Site is established by the walkover survey, which considers the area within the study area from which the Site is currently visible and the key visual receptors within this area (i.e. groups of people within this area who experience (or may experience) views of the Proposed Scheme). A series of Representative Views experienced by these visual receptors is also identified.

Baseline Photography

Baseline photographic surveys are undertaken, by the professional team during the urban survey to record views from readily accessible public viewpoints and capture images that typify the local character or important townscape features. Photographs included in the baseline assessment are presented with the intention of aiding the understanding of the descriptive text and to illustrate context. Where accurate visualisation representations (AVR) have been prepared the baseline photography is in accordance with the Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19 to the visualisation type and level stated and a separate methodology for that photography is provided by the appointed visualisation consultant

Consultation

The scope and methodology of the assessment is agreed either independently with the local planning authority (LPA) or as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping procedure. This includes identification of the townscape character receptors, visual receptors and representative views.

Identifying Townscape Receptors and Sensitivity to Change

The sensitivity of townscape receptors relates to the value attached to that receptor and the susceptibility of the receptor to the type of change or development proposed.

The key townscape receptors (townscape character areas, townscape features or townscape characteristics) with potential to be affected by the Proposed Scheme are identified and a judgement is made on the value of each of these receptors. This judgement is made based on the approach set out in GLVIA3 and as described below.

Representative views are identified to reflect townscape character and to inform the townscape assessment.

The value of each of the identified townscape receptors is assessed with reference to the following criteria and the definitions of level of value set out in **Table 1**:

- Any designations or policies (both national and local), which may be present; and,
- The presence or absence of other attributes, which contribute to townscape value, such as condition, aesthetic quality, distinctive views, rarity, representativeness, urban morphology, conservation interests, recreation value, perceptual aspects or associations e.g. with writers, artists, notable architects or historic events.

Table 1: Value of Townscape Receptors

Value	Typical Level of Designation/ Rarity	Attributes
High	International, National, Regional	Townscape of notable character with unique or place-defining features and elements. Clearly coherent townscape character, with legible urban structure, a strong sense of architectural character and quality, and widespread use of high-quality materials. Minimal detracting elements and townscape features typically in good condition. High presence of good quality public realm or open space that contributes positively to the experience and usability of the townscape. No or limited potential for substitution.
Medium	Regional, Local	Townscape of some character, which is attractive, but with limited unique or place-defining features and elements. Recognisable urban structure with some variety in architectural quality and materials. Some detracting elements and variety in the condition of townscape features. Some presence of public realm or open space that makes a moderate contribution to the experience and usability of the townscape. Some potential for substitution.
Low	Local	Townscape of little scenic value or importance. Could include ordinary/commonplace or unremarkable areas of townscape. Disjointed urban structure and character or areas of coherent townscape that are commonplace and not locally distinctive. Presence of dominant detracting elements and townscape features in poor or declining condition. Areas that are vehicle focussed or dominated by industrial or commercial uses. Considerable potential for substitution.

A range in criteria may be given to a townscape receptor depending on the combination of attributes (present or absent), and/or the level of designations present. For example, if there are a number of highly significant listed buildings but in an area of mixed townscape quality and condition then the value may be given a high to medium value.

GLVIA3 defines susceptibility as *“the ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the Proposed Development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies”* (Ref: 7.9 Para. 5.40).

Judgements on the susceptibility to change of each of the identified townscape receptors are made based on the scale set out in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Susceptibility to Change of Townscape Receptors

Susceptibility to change	Description
High	Townscape receptor ¹ would be unlikely to accommodate the type of development proposed without unacceptable negative consequences for the maintenance of the baseline townscape character and/or the achievement of townscape planning policies and strategies. Townscape receptor has little or no relationship to the type of development proposed and/or would be difficult to replace or substitute if lost e.g. veteran trees, historic or unique buildings and parkland. Characteristics of the townscape, which contribute to the townscape character are highly sensitive and would be fundamentally altered by the type of development proposed.
Medium	Townscape receptor would be compromised by the type of development proposed and/or the achievement of townscape planning policies and strategies would be compromised. Townscape receptor has some relationship to the type of development proposed and/or could be partially replaced or substituted if lost. Townscape receptor is moderately sensitive and characteristics of the receptor would be altered by the type of development proposed. The general townscape character would remain but would be weakened by the type of development proposed.
Low	Townscape receptor would be likely to accommodate the type of development proposed without unacceptable negative consequences for the maintenance of the baseline townscape character and/or the achievement of townscape planning policies and strategies. Townscape receptor has a close relationship to the type of development proposed and could be easily replaced or substituted if lost. Townscape receptor is of low sensitivity and characteristics of the townscape would not be significantly altered by the type of development proposed. The general townscape character is resilient to change.

A judgement on the overall sensitivity of each townscape receptor (ranging from High to Negligible) is made. This is based on the combined evaluation of susceptibility and value attached to the receptor, together with informed professional judgement and guidance provided in GLVIA3. For example, a townscape receptor that has a High Sensitivity is likely to have a High Value and a High Susceptibility to change, a townscape receptor that has a Low Sensitivity is likely to have a Low Value and a Low Susceptibility to change.

Identifying Visual Receptors and Sensitivity to Change

The sensitivity of the visual receptor comprises a judgement on the value attached to the views and an assessment of the susceptibility of each receptor to the type of change proposed.

The baseline visual appraisal establishes the area in which the Site, and Proposed Development, may be visible; the different groups of people who may experience the views of the development (defined as visual receptors); and the nature of these views. These factors interrelate, but for the purpose of the assessment are dealt with in that order.

In most visual assessments, unless specifically requested by the LPA, visual receptors are restricted to groups of people in publicly accessible places, and their experience of views/viewing experience. Normally, views from private residential properties are not included within the visual impact assessment as there is no 'right to a view' for residents of private properties. However, if the scale and/or proximity of a development has the potential to be so overbearing or dominating that it

¹ Includes townscape character areas, townscape elements or features and particular aesthetic or perceptual aspects of the townscape.

could result in significant changes to the residential visual amenity of residents then the assessment includes consideration of potential visual effects on residents of nearby properties

Representative views are identified to reflect typical views experienced by the visual receptor in order to inform the visual assessment.

A judgement on the value attached to the views is made with reference to the following criteria and the definitions of value set out in **Table 3**.

- Planning designations e.g. Designated Views or Protected Vistas identified in local or regional planning policy;
- Other designations relating to townscape features or heritage assets e.g. key views identified in conservation area appraisals or recorded in list entries for statutorily listed buildings or registered parks and gardens of special historic interest; and,
- Indicators of the value attached to views by visitors e.g. views identified in guidebooks or on tourist maps, official viewpoints (often with sign boards and interpretive material) or views referenced in literature or art.

Table 3: Value attached to views

Value	Typical level of designation / Rarity	Attributes
High	International, National, Regional,	View or views experienced by the receptor identified or protected at international, national or regional level recognised through designation or planning documents. View or views experienced by the receptors having a designed relationship with wider townscape features of high importance, and/or having a high aesthetic/scenic quality.
Medium	Regional, Local	View or views experienced by the receptor that are identified or protected at local level e.g. identified in local planning policy or guidance. May also include views experienced by the receptors which are undesignated, but value perhaps expressed through non-official publications or its contribution to enjoyment of the significance of a heritage asset or public open space, or have some aesthetic quality.
Low	Local	The view or views experienced by the receptors is/are not related to designated, or non-designated, heritage assets, or a planning designation; and/or mentioned in guidebooks or on tourist maps; and/or referenced in art and literature. Typical or unremarkable view or views that contribute positively to the visual amenity experienced by the receptor.

The assessment of susceptibility of visual receptors is based on the approach set out in para 6.32 of GLVIA3, which states:

‘the susceptibility of different visual receptors to changes in views and visual amenity is mainly a function of:

- *The occupation or activity of people experiencing the view at particular locations: and,*
- *The extent to which their attention or interest may therefore be focussed on the views and the visual amenity they experience at particular locations’.*

Judgements on the susceptibility of a visual receptor to change are broadly based on the descriptions of susceptibility set out in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Susceptibility to Change of Visual Receptors

Susceptibility	Description
High	Receptors for whom the view and visual amenity is of high importance to the experience or activity, including: people engaged in outdoor recreation whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the townscape and on particular views e.g. waymarked walks through the townscape; and visitors to heritage assets or other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience.
Medium	Receptors for whom the view and visual amenity is of moderate importance to the experience or activity, including: travellers on most road or rail routes.
Low	Receptors for whom the view and visual amenity is of low importance to the experience or activity, including: people engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the townscape; and, people at their place of work whose attention may be focussed on their work, not on their surroundings, and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life.

A judgement on the overall sensitivity of each visual receptor (ranging from High to Negligible) is made. This is based on the combined evaluation of susceptibility and value attached to the receptor, together with informed professional judgement and guidance provided in GLVIA3. For example, a visual receptor that has a High Sensitivity is likely to have a High Value and a High Susceptibility to change, a visual receptor that has a Low Sensitivity is likely to have a Low Value and a Low Susceptibility to change.

Assessing Significance of Effect

Assessment of Townscape Effects

The assessment of townscape effects considers the sensitivity of the townscape receptor and the magnitude of change. The level of effect is then concluded as major, moderate, minor or negligible, and professional judgement is used to determine whether the effect is Significant.

Magnitude of Change on Townscape Receptors

The magnitude of change considers the size or scale, the geographical extent and the duration and reversibility of the change. Judgements on the magnitude of townscape effect are broadly based on the descriptions of magnitude set out in **Table 5**.

Consideration is also given to the type of effect in terms of whether it is Adverse, Beneficial or Neutral. GLVIA3 states that an informed professional judgement should be made about whether the landscape/townscape effects should be categorised as positive or negative (or in some cases neutral), with the criteria used in reaching this judgement clearly stated. Therefore, a judgement is made on the nature of the overall effect which is based on the following terms:

- **Adverse:** overall harm to townscape character/feature.

- **Beneficial:** overall improvement to townscape character/feature.
- **Neutral:** no overall harm or improvement to townscape character/feature (likely to be the result of a combination of both adverse and beneficial effects or very small changes).

Table 5: Defining Magnitude of Change – Townscape Receptors

Magnitude of Change	Definition
Large	Substantial change to all or most of the key characteristics of a townscape receptor and/or addition of major new elements and townscape features. Changes would substantially alter the character of a large area.
Medium	Partial change to some of the key characteristics of a townscape receptor and/or addition of new elements, which would be notable features. Changes would result in a large change to the character of a small area or a noticeable change to a larger area.
Small	Limited or localised change to common characteristics of a townscape receptor and/or addition of new elements or features in keeping with the existing character. Changes would result in a small change to the character of a large area or a noticeable change to a small area. Also includes temporary and/or reversible changes of larger scale or extent.
Negligible	No, or barely discernible, change to townscape receptor

Assessment of Visual Effects

The assessment of visual effects considers the sensitivity of the visual receptor and the magnitude of change. The level of effect is then concluded as major, moderate, minor or negligible and professional judgement is used to determine whether the effect is Significant.

Magnitude of Change on Visual Receptors

The magnitude of change considers the size or scale, the geographical extent and the duration and reversibility of the change. Judgements on the magnitude of visual effect are broadly based on the descriptions of magnitude set out in **Table 6**.

The assessment of the magnitude of change on visual receptors takes into account the following factors:

- type and relative numbers of people, and their occupation or activity.
- nature and characteristics of the location within the townscape and proximity to the Site.
- nature, composition and characteristics of the views (including directions).
- elements which may interrupt, filter or otherwise influence the views.
- seasonal changes in the view.

As per the townscape assessment, consideration is then given to the Type of Effect in terms of whether it is Adverse, Beneficial or Neutral as follows.

- **Adverse:** overall harm to the character and appearance of the view, and the viewing experience.
- **Beneficial:** overall improvement to the character and appearance of the view, and the viewing experience.
- **Neutral:** no overall harm or improvement to the character and appearance of the view, and the viewing experience (likely to be the result of a combination of both adverse and beneficial effects or very small changes).

Table 6: Defining Magnitude of Change – Visual Receptors

Magnitude of Change	Definition
Large	Substantial change to the key characteristics of a view and/or addition of major new elements, which would be prominent features. Changes would substantially alter the character and appearance of the view experienced by the receptor.
Medium	Partial change to some of the key characteristics of the view and/or addition of new elements, which would be notable features. Changes would result in a large change to the character and appearance of a small part of the view or a noticeable change to a larger part of the view experienced by the receptor.
Small	Limited or localised change to a view and/or addition of new elements, which would be noticeable features but largely in keeping with the existing character and appearance of the view. Changes would result in a small change to the character and appearance of a large part of the view or a noticeable change to a small part of the view. Also includes temporary and/or reversible changes of larger scale or extent within the view experienced by the receptor.
Negligible	No, or barely discernible, change to the view experienced by the receptor.

Determining the Level of Effect

The level of effect is determined by combining the magnitude of change due to the Proposed Development and the evaluation of the sensitivity of the affected receptor. The level of effect is determined using professional judgement and **Table 7** is used as a tool to assist with this process. For each effect, a judgement is made on whether the effect is '*beneficial*' or '*adverse*' or '*neutral*'.

Table 7: Matrix to Support Determining the Level of Effect

		Sensitivity			
		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Magnitude	Large	Major	Moderate to Major	Minor to Moderate	Negligible

	Medium	Moderate to Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Small	Minor to Moderate	Minor	Negligible to Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

The following terms have been used to define the level of the effects identified and these can be 'beneficial' or 'adverse' or 'neutral':

- **Major effect:** where the Proposed Scheme is likely to cause a considerable change from the baseline conditions and the receptor has limited adaptability, tolerance or recoverability, or is of the highest sensitivity;
- **Moderate effect:** where the Proposed Scheme is likely to cause either a considerable change from the baseline conditions at a receptor, which has a degree of adaptability, tolerance or recoverability, or a less than considerable change at a receptor that has limited adaptability, tolerance or recoverability;
- **Minor effect:** where the Proposed Scheme is likely to cause a small, but noticeable change from the baseline conditions on a receptor, which has limited adaptability, tolerance or recoverability or is of the highest sensitivity; or where the Proposed Scheme is likely to cause a considerable change from the baseline conditions at a receptor, which can adapt, is tolerant of the change, or/and can recover from the change; and
- **Negligible:** where the Proposed Scheme is unlikely to cause a noticeable change at a receptor, despite its level of sensitivity, or there is a considerable change at a receptor, which is not sensitive to a change.

The duration of the effect has been assessed as either 'short-term', 'medium-term' or 'long-term'. Short-term is up to 2 years, medium-term is between 2 and 10 years and long-term is greater than 10 years.

Determining Significance

For each effect, a statement has been made as to whether the level of effect is '**Significant**' or '**Not Significant**' for the purposes of this EIA. This determination has been based on professional judgement, as informed by relevant guidance/legislation where applicable. Normally effects that are moderate or above would be considered significant.