

Urban Landscape Study of the Tyne Gorge

Final Report - January 2003

Extract - Executive Summary

N.B. The full document is too large (about 96 MB) to place on the Council's web site. If you would like a copy on a CD-ROM, please contact us as below.

The Brief

The pace of change along the Tyne Gorge has accelerated in recent years, not least as a result of the Baltic and the Millennium Bridge. This has meant there is now a need for a study that can set the context for managing future change. The brief was developed by the commissioning partners - English Heritage, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council. The brief required the consultants to:

- define the geographical extent of the study area;
- analyse the historical development of the Gorge and its two settlements, Newcastle and Gateshead;
- undertake a visual analysis of the Gorge;
- indicate the importance of different areas of the Gorge;
- identify threats and opportunities within the Gorge;
- indicate principles for the protection and development of the Gorge in the future.

Approach to the Study

It is now widely accepted that protection of sense of place is an important part of decision making. Character appraisal is an invaluable tool in understanding and evaluating the significance of a place - it identifies the unique combination of features that make a place distinctive. Land Use Consultants (LUC) were instrumental in developing the technique of landscape character assessment, which provided the foundations for the first Countryside Commission guidance on the subject. Most recently LUC have produced, in association with the University of Sheffield, the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance on behalf of the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

This background in landscape character appraisal and assessment has informed LUC's more recent application of the method to townscape appraisal. The importance of assessing townscape character has recently been brought to light in Government Policy, for example through PPG1, PPG7 and PPG15, as well as through publications such as *By Design*, *Power of Place* and *Building in Context*.

Study Process

In response to the brief the study was divided into six discrete tasks. These are described below.

Task 1: Establishing the Wider Study Area: the purpose of this stage of the project was to set the limits for the wider study area, to ensure that the context of the Tyne Gorge was taken into account and to establish the zone within which new buildings in the Gorge could potentially be visible.

Task 2: Understanding the Shape of the Landscape: Within the wider study area underlying physical characteristics, such as geology, topography and hydrology were recorded. The physical data allowed broad types of landscape to be mapped across the wider study area. For example this shows how Newcastle lies on plateau coalfields while Gateshead sits on the edge of a landscape of higher rolling hills. Low lying coastal coalfields lie to the east and limestone hills lie away to the south-east.

Task 3: Pattern of Settlement: Physical factors influence the pattern of settlement. For example, the topography of the area indicates why the first bridging points of the Tyne were in the Gorge. The growth of the urban form was mapped, but this did not produce a true reflection of character of the settlements today. A map of re-developed areas was therefore produced which provides a truer picture of built influences on the character of the Gorge today. This section also explains how the first settlements of Newcastle and Gateshead were focussed along the water's edge, then moved back away from the riverside.

Task 4: Visual Analysis of the Gorge: The aim of this task was to identify key landmarks along the Gorge (both positive and negative) and to identify types of viewing experience around the Gorge. In planning for new development and landscape change it is crucial to know the location and nature of important viewcones so that they can be protected, or enhanced, in the future. Fourteen strategic or 'quintessential' views were identified and their viewcones plotted. An analysis of each view is provided in Chapter 4.

Task 5: Character Appraisal of the Gorge: The aim of this task was to classify the Gorge into areas of unique and distinctive character, to describe the historic evolution of each area, to articulate its character, to describe the visual environment and the role it plays in strategic views, to comment on quality and value, to comment on sensitivity, to identify threats to character and identify principles for accommodating new built development within the area. Twenty-three distinct areas were identified and their analyses are presented in Chapter 5.

Task 6: Broad Principles for the Siting and Design of New Development in the Tyne Gorge: This section fulfilled the final requirement of the brief, that is to provide guidance for the siting and design of new development in the Gorge as a whole. The guidance was divided into six topics: relationship to the public realm, access corridors leading into the Gorge, views to and from landmarks, opportunities for tall buildings, use of the waterfront and character area descriptions.

Outputs

One of the study outputs is a fully illustrated, desk-top published report in colour that is available in hard copy format as well as in digital format on CD. However, the outputs are not confined to this static report and an important part of our approach to this study is to provide an updateable and expandable resource. The data collated as part of the study was entered into a Geographical Information System (GIS) database which allows multiple data sets to be viewed in layers, to zoom in and out of particular areas and to explore relationships between different datasets in 3 dimensions.

The updateable and expandable capabilities of the GIS database means it can also be linked with additional information in the future. The GIS database includes topographical information and landscape types across the wider study area, both accurate to 1:50,000. It also includes more detailed topographical information, distribution of key landmarks, strategic views and their viewcones, the historic development of NewcastleGateshead, areas of re-development in NewcastleGateshead, character areas within the Gorge and its immediate setting, Conservation Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings all accurate to 1:10,000.

Potential Uses of the Assessment

It is envisaged that the outputs of the study will be used in a number of ways. For example, it is hoped that the report findings will be used by Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council to inform Supplementary Planning Guidance for the Gorge or other relevant conservation/ development studies. It is hoped that the two Councils and other relevant bodies, such as English Heritage and CABI, will find the report useful in reviewing planning applications, but equally it is hoped that developers will find it a useful background document to draw up proposals that respect sense of place. The report may also be used by residents of NewcastleGateshead as a basis for more local community initiatives such as 'Placecheck'.

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This extract document prepared 24 April 2008 for use on web site.