

Our approach to landscape and visual amenity

We know how much people value the places they live in and the views they see every day. We've worked closely with our design teams to avoid or reduce impacts on landscape character and views along the route wherever we can. We're committed to developing the project in a way that considers the environment as a whole, making sure any effects – including on visual amenity – are managed in a coordinated and thoughtful way.

One of our Environmental Sustainability Strategy objectives is to build a railway that:

‘responds to its surroundings, protects views and celebrates our heritage - through sensitive integration into the existing landscape, valuing our historic environment.’

The difference between landscape character and visual amenity is:

- Landscape and townscape character is how specific features and elements, such as the landform, buildings and vegetation combine to create a unique and recognisable geographic area. Townscape is focused specifically on urban areas.
- Visual amenity relates to the pleasantness of views people experience as part of their surroundings.

Amenity

We are carrying out detailed desk-based studies of published landscape and townscape character assessments at both national and local levels, referring to relevant policies and guidance published by the government. These studies are supported by site surveys to consider and verify the existing assessments, and to update our description of the landscape and townscape character associated with the EWR corridor in areas where change has occurred since the policies were published.

Understanding the character of an area is important as this enables the design teams to consider solutions appropriate to their surroundings, informing issues such as the horizontal and vertical alignments to achieve a good fit with the landscape. Our mitigation approach has also been informed by land use and the topography of the surrounding landscape.

This can impact requirements such as cut-and-fill and can support the efficient use of materials.

Surveys to understand the visual quality of an area, or the views people experience, are being identified through further desk-based work. People who experience similar views—such as local residents, people using public paths, workers in the area, or visitors—will be grouped together. These groups will help identify viewpoints that represent the views shared by each type of user.

These representative viewpoints are being visited by landscape architects, who have an understanding of the proposed project, to identify where there is likely to be a change to visual amenity and how substantial this change may be. Their findings will be reported for any viewpoints that are likely to be affected.

Although the design aims to avoid direct impacts on features of the landscape, some impacts are unavoidable. These may impact how the landscape is experienced and how views are perceived by people living, working or visiting an area. Where impacts arise, measures to mitigate the changes experienced will be provided.

Mitigating impacts

As we develop our proposals, we are identifying opportunities to protect and enhance landscape character and visual amenity.

This includes designing the project in a way that fits well within existing landscape features, avoiding the unnecessary removal of landscape features, protecting key views through the design and siting of railway buildings and other structures, and enhancing the landscape through additional planting or through high-quality public realm and landscape design.

Retaining, enhancing or replacing any landscape features affected by the proposed scheme is a key part of reducing impacts on landscape character. The environmental mitigation design has been developed by landscape architects working closely with the engineering and environmental teams through workshops and design meetings. This collaborative approach ensures that different, and sometimes competing, design requirements are properly considered and balanced, resulting in an efficient, coordinated and cohesive design.

Engagement and working with communities

We are speaking to local authorities and national bodies, such as Natural England, to ensure local knowledge of the landscape and the contributing features are understood. We are seeking their input into the selection of appropriate viewpoint locations that reflect important views within their local area.


Working with local people, including farmers and landowners, and through conversations and consultation, we are building a picture of locally important landscape features to be enhanced or protected, restored or replaced, and thereby reduce impacts on local people and their surroundings.

Get in touch

If you have any questions, please get in touch using the details below:

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