A **Draft Landscape Character Assessment** (LCA) and an **Assessment of the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine and Solar PV Development** have been commissioned by Milton Keynes Council (MKC) as background technical documents for Plan:MK. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that Local Plans should, amongst other things, include strategic policies to deliver climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape (para 156).

**The LCA** provides a detailed review of the landscape character of the Borough and describes and evaluates Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within the Borough. It builds on the work undertaken for the draft assessment published by the Council in 2007. The 2007 LCA remained in its draft form mainly because it did not include views of the local residents and other stakeholders on the Borough’s landscape.

How will the LCA be used in Plan:MK? Plan:MK will review the current policy approach to landscape character as in Policy S11 (Areas of Attractive Landscape) in the MKLP. Government guidance direct local authorities away from using local landscape designations to protect landscape towardsa criteria based approach to the assessment of the impact of development on landscape character. The LCA provides the evidence by which development can be assessed.

**The Assessment of the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine and Solar PV Development** looks at the sensitivity of each LCT within the Borough to wind turbine and solar photovoltaic development and identifies where particular areas may have greater or less capacity to accommodate such development.

How will the Assessment be used in Plan:MK? This document will help MKC to address the requirement of paragraph 97 of the NPPF which advises local planning authorities to design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts. The NPPF also requires local planning authorities to consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources.

The draft Assessments were presented to ward councillors on 20 August 2015. Later these documents were the subject of an eight week public consultation from **September** to **November 2015. The documents were made available on-line to view and comment on. Information about the consultation was sent by email to a number of consultees including parish councils in Milton Keynes and those adjoining the borough’s boundary, all neighbouring local authorities as well as interest groups including the Parks Trust, Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, the Ramblers Association, renewable energy industry and many others.**

**During the consultation period a presentation on the draft assessments was given by a planning officer to** Newport Pagnell North & Hanslope Area Forum **at a meeting in Hanslope on 10 September.**

In total, ten organisations submitted comments on the draft Assessments during the consultation period (this number excludes any organisations that responded, but had no comments to make). **Appendix B of the draft documents includes all comments made during the consultation and how these influenced the final Assessments.**

The comments received by the Milton Keynes Parks Trust and other consultees highlighted, amongst other issues, an importance of the urban landscape and stressed that not including it in the LCA was a significant shortcoming.

MKC recognises that the urban landscape, and in particular the networks of linear parks and grid road corridors, make a significant contribution to the character of the city and the Borough. It is also accepted that the city’s linear parks often blend with the surrounding countryside creating a wider green network that provides multiple benefits both to the local and wider environment as well as to our economy.

However, in recognition of different development pressures that are experienced by the rural areas as opposed to the urban land it was decided that the current assessments should not include any in-depth analysis of the urban landscape and that the current LCA’s scope should be similar to the 2007 draft LCA.

The benefits and importance of the urban landscape as far as it is practicable will be considered through an open space assessment that is due to be produced as part of the evidence base for Plan:MK. Additionally, work is starting on a Green Infrastructure Study for Bucks and MK which will allow the linkages between the urban and rural landscapes to be identified and improvements identified.

What happens next? Both of the studies are now complete and ready to be published on the council’s website under the Evidence Base section in Planning Policy. All councillors, parish and town councils will be notified when the studies are available and a copy of this briefing note will be sent out with the alert emails to provide a brief overview of their content and application.