

GETTING STARTED:

1. Visit the area you are going to assess.
2. Walk around the area and find a number of places to stand so you see it from different angles and perspectives.
3. If you are using the longer form, use the first page of the questionnaire to record your initial impression, including the differing importance of the features that contribute to the character of the place. Use the following pages to explore in more depth about each aspect of the environment.
4. Make short notes while you are in the place and take lots of photographs. You can expand on your notes when you write up your findings later on. The photographs will provide another useful reminder including details you may have overlooked at first inspection ... but have you taken enough?
5. You could use the 'Spirit of Place' box to note any features of the place that occur to you outside the prompts in the boxes provided.

FILLING IN THE FORMS: ANSWERS TO SOME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Do I need to put an answer in every box?

No. Use your judgment to decide whether a prompt is relevant to the area you are assessing.

For example, not all areas have water or street furniture as a significant feature.

How much should I write?

This depends in part on the complexity of the area being studied.

Remember that a short and focused assessment may provide a faster understanding of the area than a meticulous account of its history and recent planning history.

Should I repeat things I have written on the first page?

No. After filling in your initial impressions page use the subsequent forms to add detail rather than repeat what you have already recorded.

This may mean that you leave some boxes blank, but state if important features have been noted on the front page to give you a reminder later on.

Be confident ... you are describing your own experience of the place.

If you feel it is important that the buildings are old or have a distinctive appearance say it as you see it.

Base your comments on the evidence of what you see and record this.



USING THE TOOLKIT



WHAT IS THE SCORE?

After writing down our observations on the survey pages try giving a score to the importance for each feature you observed in terms of its positive or negative contribution to the area's character (as a simple rule, think does its presence or condition make the area better or worse as a place to be?)

You can give more than one score for an individual feature if you wish (see below).

Positive and negative scores

For example, if a particular building stands out as a landmark in the area, has locally distinctive materials and reminds you of the area's history you might state this in the 'buildings' survey boxes and give each observation a score of +4 or +5 for the particular building's contribution.

However, if that building has been vacant or neglected for a long time and is in a derelict condition that detracts from the appearance of the wider area, you could note this and provide a second correspondingly negative score.

Neutral scores

Some elements make a clear and positive contribution to the character of an area. In some instances it will be less clear if something makes a contribution, if at all.

A simple test to consider is if taken away or replaced what difference would it make.

If the answer to both questions is no, these features may be neutral or making only a slight contribution in either way.

In such cases it would be appropriate to note these features but to give them a score of 0 as neutral or in the range -1 to +1.

Using maps

Maps can help to illustrate and document the observations you record on your survey forms.

You can record the lines of particularly attractive views, positions of trees that make the area greener or add to the feeling of enclosure, the regularity of gaps between buildings or prevalence of particular materials or types and ages of buildings.-

SURVEY DETAILS	
YOUR NAME (OPTIONAL)	
STREET/BUILDING/ AREA NAME	
DATE	
TIME	
WEATHER	

1. INITIAL REACTION: What do you first see as making the most important contribution to the character of the area? Is the area's character defined by the public or private spaces, groups of buildings or particular views, the presence of particular materials or its trees and greenery? Do these reflect particular aspects of the area's history? Are less tangible features, such as the activity, noises and smells of the area significant? Please provide a few brief reasons for your choices.

FEATURES	COMMENTS	VALUE -5 TO +5
SPACES		
BUILDINGS		
VIEWS		
LIGHT/DARK		
SURFACES		
GREENERY & LANDSCAPE		
USES & ACTIVITY		
NOISES & SMELLS		
GENERAL COMMENTS		

2: SPACES: A 'space' is normally the gap between buildings and other features. They may be formally designed or develop informally over time. They may be enclosed by surrounding buildings, trees and foliage, have structure created by the alignment and spacing of surrounding buildings or property boundaries, and be narrow or wide and open. The character of areas can depend on their uses and vibrancy, as well as the choice of paving, kerbs, seating, telephone or post boxes or the presence of formal planting or other greenery.

FEATURES	COMMENTS	VALUE -5 TO +5
FORMAL/INFORMAL SPACES		
GAPS BETWEEN BUILDINGS		
MEANS OF ENCLOSURE		
BUILDING PLOTS		
WIDE/OPEN SPACES		
NARROW/ENCLOSED SPACES		
WINDING/STRAIGHT SPACES		
RELATIONSHIP OF THE SPACE TO BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES		
USES & ACTIVITY		
PAVING MATERIALS		
STREET FURNITURE		
IMPACT OF VEHICLES & TRAFFIC		
USABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY OF THE SPACE		

<p>3. BUILDINGS: Do buildings make an important contribution to the character of the area and if so what features are significant to their contribution? Do buildings reflect an important period in the area's history and is this reflected in their past or current use? Do buildings share a uniform scale and size, or is there a high degree of variation that is visually attractive? Are the buildings very old or do they form a single development with shared or similar architectural detailing? Do styles of windows, doors or other features add to the visual interest of the buildings, reflect their origins and use, or form part of a designed scheme? What condition are the buildings in? Have changes increased or reduced their interest, or have they lost important features?</p>		
FEATURES	COMMENTS	VALUE -5 TO +5
CONTRIBUTION OF THE BUILDINGS TO THE SPACE		
SIZE/SCALE		
AGE		
MATERIALS		
WINDOWS		
DOORS		
ROOFS/CHIMMNEYS /GABLES		
USES (PAST & PRESENT)		
CAN YOU TELL IF THE BUILDING HAS BEEN ALTERES		
CONDITION		

4. VIEWS: Are there views of interest and distinction? Is a view well known because of a historical event, painting, prose or poetry, or is it popular with local residents as a part of a public place? Are views glimpsed through gaps between buildings, channelled by lines of trees or buildings, or open and expansive? Does the shape of a street create a series of views, or is a single viewing point particularly important? What features of the view contribute to its interest? Does a landmark, such as a building or group of trees, form a focal point? Does the view include an attractive frontage or roofscape? Is the view urban or rural in character? Do background features like the city's rural setting contribute to the view's attractiveness?

FEATURES	COMMENTS	VALUE -5 TO +5
HISTORIC/POPULAR VIEWS		
FORM OF VIEW: SHORT OR LONG, UNFOLDING, GLIMPSED, CHANELLED OR WIDE & OPEN		
FOCAL POINTS		
STREETSCAPE		
ROOFSCAPE		
URBAN/RURAL VIEWS		
VIEWS OUT OF THE SPACE		

5 LANDSCAPE: What landscape features contribute to the area's character and how do they affect it? Do hedgerows or grass verges create a rural feel or do street trees provide a leafy suburban character. What hard surfaces are present, are they attractively designed or do they use materials that are out of keeping with the area? Does their maintenance affect their contribution? Is a river or canal a significant feature in the area? Does it have scenic or wildlife value?

FEATURES	COMMENTS	VALUE -5 TO +5
LEAFY &/OR GREEN IMAGE		
HARD URBAN LANDSCAPE		
PUBLIC/PRIVATE GREENERY		
DOES WATER FORM A FEATURE OF THE AREA		
TOPOGRAPHY		

6 AMBIENCE: Many less tangible features, such as activity, changes in light during the day, shadows and reflections affect reaction to an area. How does the area change between day and night? Do dark corners or alleyways feel unsafe at night time? What smells and noises are you aware of and is the area busy or tranquil? What affect, if any, does vehicle traffic have on character?

FEATURES	COMMENTS	VALUE -5 TO +5
ACTIVITIES		
LEVEL OF ACTIVITY		
TRAFFIC		
DARK, SHADY, LIGHT. AIRY		
DAY & NIGHT		
SMELLS		
NOISES		

7. FINAL REACTION: Take a moment to consider the notes and scores that you made, in your initial reactions survey sheet and the subsequent pages. Are there any features that you would now rate as having a greater positive or negative value, or are there particular aspects of these features that you would highlight as having a high significance to the character of the area? Try ranking the features in order of their relative importance in forming the area's character and appearance.

FEATURES	COMMENTS	VALUE -5 TO +5
BUILDINGS	1.	
SPACES	2.	
LONG/SHORT VIEWS	3.	
LIGHT/DARK	4.	
SURFACES	5.	
GREENERY & LANDSCAPE FEATURES	6.	
NOISE, SMELL, TRAFFIC	7.	

8. SPIRIT OF PLACE: Having undertaken the survey and scoring now try to sum up the character of the area in a few brief sentences, picking out the most significant positive and negative features of its character and appearance.