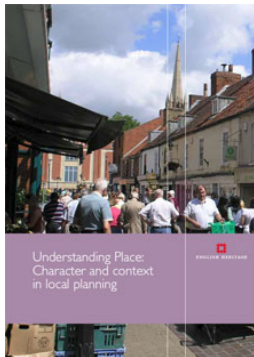




Historic England

Understanding Place: Character and context in local planning



On 1st April 2015 the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England changed its common name from English Heritage to Historic England. We are now re-branding all our documents.

Although this document refers to English Heritage, it is still the Commission's current advice and guidance and will in due course be re-branded as Historic England.

[Please see our website](#) for up to date contact information, and further advice.

We welcome feedback to help improve this document, which will be periodically revised. Please email comments to guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk

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Understanding Place: Character and context in local planning



ENGLISH HERITAGE

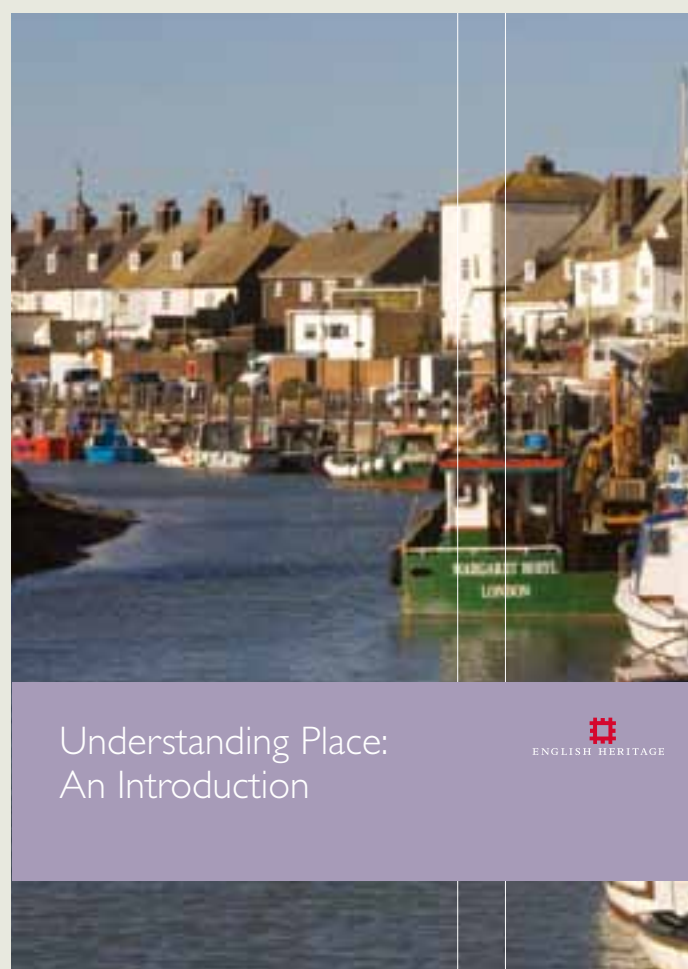


This document offers ideas for local authorities, councils and communities on the practical uses of historic characterisation within local and neighbourhood planning.

Twenty-two case studies have been chosen to show how the results of historic characterisation have been used singly and in combination, and in a wide variety of ways, to inform plan-making and development management. They will also be of interest to planners in the private sector, to developers and their agents, and to neighbourhood planning groups.

General guidance on historic characterisation can be found in *Understanding Place: An Introduction* (English Heritage, 2010).

Further information on historic characterisation is available at www.helm.org.uk



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WHAT IS HISTORIC CHARACTERISATION?

Historic characterisation is the term given to area-based ways of identifying and interpreting the historic dimension of present day townscape and landscape. It looks beyond individual heritage assets to the understanding of the overall character of a whole neighbourhood or area that is central to securing good quality, well designed and sustainable places.

The range of current approaches includes Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC), Historic Seascape Characterisation (HSC), urban historic characterisation [including the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS)], Historic Area Assessments, Conservation Area Appraisals and Conservation Management Plans.

“Understanding Place: An Introduction” summarises the benefits of the approach:

- the historic environment contributes everywhere to our sense of place;
- good quality places are important to society, especially for sustainable development;
- historic characterisation enables a user to establish values and significance, and to manage change;
- historic characterisation meets government policy objectives relating to place, neighbourhood and community.

Further information on values and managing change can be found in Conservation Principles [English Heritage 2008].

WHY USE HISTORIC CHARACTERISATION?

Historic characterisation assists in the delivery of both national planning policy and local community aspirations (see for example the range in the case studies from the A453 [cs5] through Lincoln [cs2] to Kinnerley [cs4]). It offers a broader and more inclusive approach than those used for designation-based control. Because it is area-based, historic characterisation can take into account all aspects of a place and thus provides a basis for an integrated approach to its planning and management (Lincoln [cs2], Rugeley [cs3] or Chester [cs16]). Because it can be undertaken at different scales and in ever-greater detail at successive planning and design stages, it can flexibly guide rural and urban development, from individual types of development as in the solar energy in Cornwall case study [cs6], through large growth area projects as in the Norwich case study [cs1] to inner city regeneration as in the Exeter [cs7] case study.

And because it is essentially about place, it can provide the basis for local planning that empowers communities and takes into account inherited character (Brierley Hill [cs15]). Characterisation reveals the patterns and connections within a place, spatially and through time, for example in relation to buildings and street patterns, and the views and perceptions of people, such as their experiences and memories. It also considers inter-relationships with other places.

WHO CAN USE HISTORIC CHARACTERISATION?

Historic characterisation is of use to all those involved in planning and designing, or assessing and managing change, in urban, rural, coastal and marine areas. It is especially useful for local authorities because of their key role in place-shaping and local planning (see for example the case studies from Lincoln [cs2], Sutton [cs18] and Southampton [cs20]). But historic characterisation is also relevant for any part of a local authority that influences the interaction of people with place, for example community engagement, housing, regeneration, conservation, environmental planning and management and cultural services (e.g. East Midlands [cs13], Buckinghamshire [cs22]). Historic characterisation is also of use to developers (see the Exeter case study [cs7]) as well as those who own and manage land (Basingstoke and Dean [cs14], HEATH in West Cornwall [cs12]). It can also be of interest and help to local groups and communities (Kinnerley [cs4], Oxford [cs19]).

THE EVOLVING PLANNING SYSTEM

The practice of historic characterisation has become established in the context of a changing planning system. It is a flexible approach and continues to evolve in response to specific requirements and developing practice. Its focus on the locally-distinctive aspects of the heritage, on place and on the multiple and varied ways in which communities and people 'see' and value their historic landscape is in line with the democratic and community spirit of the European Landscape Convention and readily lends itself to community-led planning.

Characterisation has become increasingly embedded in national planning policy guidance in recent years, not just within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and is also likely to offer a valuable contribution to neighbourhood planning. The adjacent text-box highlights the ways in which character was embedded in planning policy at the beginning of 2011.

USING THE PRODUCTS OF HISTORIC CHARACTERISATION

The many potential products of historic characterisation can be used at different scales, in support of different types of local development documents e.g. Core Strategies and Area Action Plans, and for a range of purposes from the large-scale or strategic (e.g. the Norwich [cs1] and Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure [cs22] case studies) to detailed schemes at the local level (Exeter [cs7], Sutton [cs18]). The complexity of the characterisation should also reflect the complexity and character of the place and the purpose of the project.

Characterisation does not provide a single solution, but an opportunity for planners, developers and communities to work together and plan using a single shared evidence base. Selection of an appropriate method and scale of historic characterisation is necessary to deliver desired outcomes, and its products and reports need to be used thoughtfully through an iterative process of interrogation and interpretation. Many historic characterisation results can be interrogated to respond to many different questions and analyses. In some cases, consideration of the more detailed information that sits within the GISs that underlie historic characterisation will be required. A high level historic characterisation will ideally be available for use at an early stage in the development plan process or project, but it is also useful later when determining applications and adjusting design.

It is likely that each project will need to develop its own methodology to meet its specific requirements and circumstances. This may occasionally require creating new historic characterisation, but will more often involve adapting the material of an existing historic characterisation.

Historic characterisation together with other characterisation techniques, including Landscape Character Assessment and townscape assessment and urban design analysis, offer a means to provide a well rounded and integrated understanding of a place that can be used in a wide variety of applications, such as large-scale and local planning, infrastructure (planning and design), masterplanning and design, development management and conservation area appraisal and management plans, and, increasingly, community engagement.

To give some more concrete examples, historic characterisation can:

- form an important part of the evidence base for development plans (Norwich [cs1], Lincoln [cs2], West Midlands farmsteads [cs8], the national Historic Seascape Characterisation programme [cs9], Sutton [cs18], Lichfield [cs21] and Chester [cs16]);
- support large-scale masterplanning exercises (Southampton [cs20], Norwich [cs1], Exeter [cs7], Brierley Hill [cs15]);
- provide a framework for assessing the sensitivity and capacity of areas to particular forms and extents of change and development (see Derbyshire, Defining Sensitivity [cs10], solar energy in Cornwall [cs6], Oxford [cs19]);
- support decision-making processes and options analysis such as Strategic Environmental Assessments, Sustainability Appraisals and Environmental Impact Assessments (e.g. A453 widening, Nottinghamshire [cs5], solar energy in Cornwall [cs6], the Aylesbury Landscape Character Assessment [cs11]);
- help to identify Green Infrastructure networks and opportunity areas and inform wider land management and conservation programmes (e.g. Buckinghamshire [cs22], or Aylesbury Vale conservation area management plans [cs17], East Midlands [cs13], HEATH in West Cornwall [cs12], Basingstoke and Dean [cs14]).

CHARACTER AND THE PLANNING SYSTEM

“The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development” which plays an economic, social and environmental role. (NPPF paras 6-7)

“Sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment.” (NPPF para 9)

Within the overarching roles that the planning system ought to play, a set of 12 core land-use planning principles should underpin plan-making and decision-taking: (including)

- “always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all...”
- “take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside...”
- “conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations”; (NPPF para 17)

“Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments: (including)

- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;
- respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials...” (NPPF para 58)

“Planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.” (NPPF para 60)

“Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving that

character and quality of an area and the way it functions.” (NPPF para 64)

“Local planning authorities should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of their historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or threats. In doing so, they should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. In developing this strategy, local planning authorities should take into account: (including)

- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.” (NPPF para 126)

“In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.” (NPPF para 131)

“Crucially, Local Plans should: (including)

- identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance; and
- contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.” (NPPF para 157)

“Each local planning authority should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate up-to-date and relevant evidence about economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area...” (NPPF para 158)

“Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character; and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity.” (NPPF para 170)

CASE STUDIES

Applications of historic characterisation are exemplified by the case study summaries presented here, but they are presented in more detail on the Historic Environment – Local Management (HELM) website, which includes an overview of the main lessons and uses of each case study. We are grateful to many local authorities for providing them. This is not a definitive set however; and English

Heritage wishes to encourage local authorities and other practitioners to put further case studies on the HELM website at www.helm.org.uk/casestudies.

Many of the questions most often asked about the use of historic characterisation in local planning are addressed at the end of this guidance.

CASE STUDY I

Greater Norwich Growth Point Historic Characterisation

The Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP, the county and three districts) was developing a Joint Core Strategy for housing growth and jobs in an area where the Regional Spatial Strategy had identified a need for 21,000 new homes. The absence of a clear evidence base for historic character led to a rapid characterisation exercise undertaken in-house by two members of the Norfolk Conservation Team working in close collaboration with two members of the Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Team, who provided HLC and other data from the Historic Environment Record as well as mapping expertise and with advice from English Heritage.

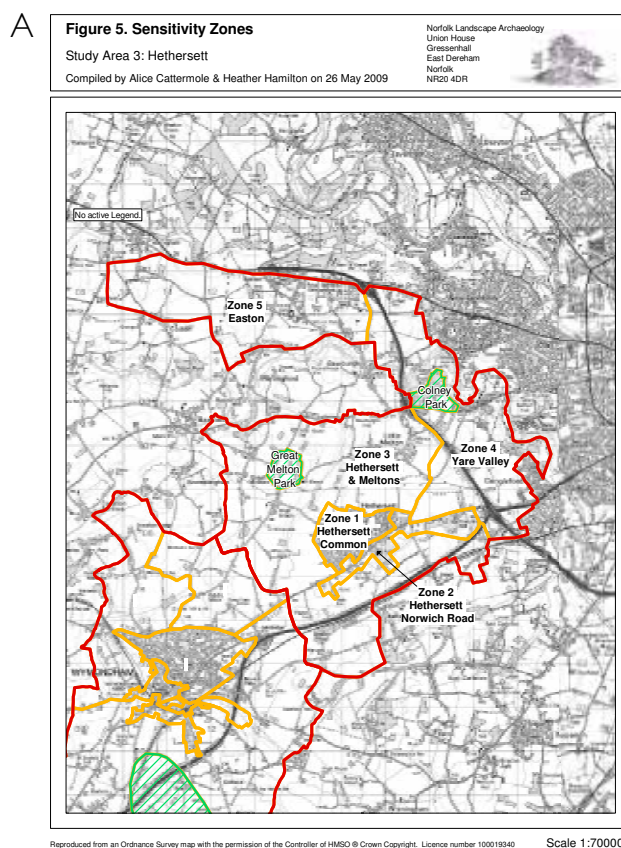
Budget and timescale restricted the work to areas identified in the Favoured Options for Growth Report, even though there would have been greater value if it had covered all of the Growth Point area. For each identified growth area the project undertook a rapid desk-based study of existing data to define historic character zones, confirmed by field visits and followed by desk-based assessment of the sensitivity of each location in its character zone context.

A report for each study area included a single page overview, a map of character zones and a summary for each zone identifying key characteristics (e.g. deserted villages, dispersed farmsteads, 16th/17th century timber-framed buildings, boundary loss etc.). A qualitative appraisal expanded on key aspects of the historic landscape, archaeology and built heritage surviving in the zone and commented on the impact of housing-related development. The summary concluded with an overall assessment of sensitivity for each character zone, with summary maps.

The report was generally well received and regarded as providing added value to the planning process. It raised awareness of characterisation as a Growth Area tool and took historic environment issues beyond the identification of listed buildings as dots on maps; the area focused approach was welcomed.

The timing of historic characterisation is crucial. The work was commissioned too late to influence strategic decisions in the single favoured option promoted by the Growth Point but it will be useful at masterplanning stage and to influence early choices about density, layout and site design. Ideally historic characterisation would be carried out not

A Example of sensitivity map for historic character: © Norfolk County Council



as a single operation, but at increasingly detailed levels of analysis as the planning/development process proceeds.

Carrying out the work in house drew on synergies between departments, long standing local knowledge, and awareness of local needs; in addition the work enhanced the skill base within the County Council, making it well placed to undertake similar characterisation work in the future.

<http://www.gndp.org.uk/resources/document-finder/?downloadIndex=H>

B The busy market and shops in Sincil Street Character Area.
© City of Lincoln Council



incorporated existing databases and assessments including an extensive Heritage Database and the Lincoln Archaeological Research Assessment (LARA).

Each area's historical development was identified using map regression, LARA, the Heritage Database and field survey. Urban form was characterised through surveys of buildings and streetscape as well as map analysis of block structure, enclosure, circulation patterns etc. Data on species and natural habitats in character areas were incorporated. Workshops were held with local community groups in a number of areas to include local people's views.

The characterisation as a key element of the local planning framework informs development management by the City of Lincoln Council and as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework it informs delivery of place-shaping in Lincoln. The main public outcome is a web based assessment of Lincoln's character. It is expected that significant financial savings will be produced in processing planning applications by the City of Lincoln Council. The assessment has already helped new developments have greater regard for local character and is also informing a review of Conservation Area Appraisals that could be used to help identify 'neighbourhoods' as a basis for local planning.

The website itself, funded by HLF, is designed to be used interactively on mobile phone as well as computers and it enables people to make their own comments on character areas. The characterisation information, especially the historical development of the current townscape, is thus being used to provide neighbourhood-based information for visitors and local people (including producing YouTube videos).

The characterisation has also been used to support work with local communities. Public engagement on character areas, including those with little 'perceived' historic character, has been used by council officers working with community groups as a good means of bringing local people together; helping people become more involved in their local environment and increasing community capacity.

www.heritageconnectlincoln.com (computers or mobile phones)

CASE STUDY 2

Lincoln Townscape Assessment

A project carried out by Lincoln City Council with English Heritage characterised the whole of Lincoln's inherited environment in order to inform future change. It developed a new methodology for characterisation of larger historic towns and cities like Lincoln defining distinctive 'character areas', each of which was street-surveyed and desk-researched.

The methodology provides a detailed and holistic description of character in a single document/website and combined techniques to (1) analyse the historical development of the current townscape, (2) characterise urban form, (3) characterise the natural environment, and (4) incorporate local people's views of character. It included a full scale townscape assessment and

CASE STUDY 3

Rugeley Historic Character Assessment

The Rugeley town centre Area Action Plan (AAP) provides a framework for encouraging new town centre retail development and wider regeneration by focusing on implementation, ensuring that development is of an appropriate scale, mix and quality and that it integrates local distinctiveness with the revitalisation of the urban fabric and a high quality public realm and serves to complement the Conservation Areas. In order to better understand the development and historic character of the town, a historic characterisation project built upon the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) undertaken by Staffordshire County Council as part of the English Heritage-funded national programme.

The results of the EUS and of a separate assessment of urban character were used to produce HUCAs - Historic Urban Character Areas - for the whole town, using modern and historic maps and aerial photographs to identify areas of similar character. A statement of significance was produced for each HUCA and this was evaluated based upon the Evidential, Historic, Aesthetic and Communal Values set out in Conservation Principles (English Heritage, April 2008). This informed recommendations for the future conservation and management of the historic environment of Rugeley.

During the AAP's consideration of different spatial options for the regeneration of the town centre, a set of urban design principles were drawn up to guide proposals for the urban fabric based on a historic environment analysis drawing on the EUS. The public realm enhancements and transport policies followed from this together with a practical assessment of the need for enhancement.

Significant time spent on public engagement during the development of the AAP will facilitate the consultation stage. The process and techniques of the AAP and information in the EUS are being used to provide a comprehensive picture of the historic environment within Cannock Chase and a sound evidence base for Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, a Design SPD, a Cannock Chase Local List and Historic Environment Character Assessments.

The Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan – Pre-Publication Draft, July 2010:

http://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?downloadID=1354

Staffordshire Extensive Urban Survey –

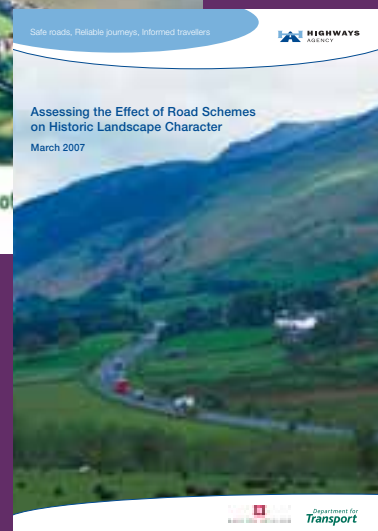
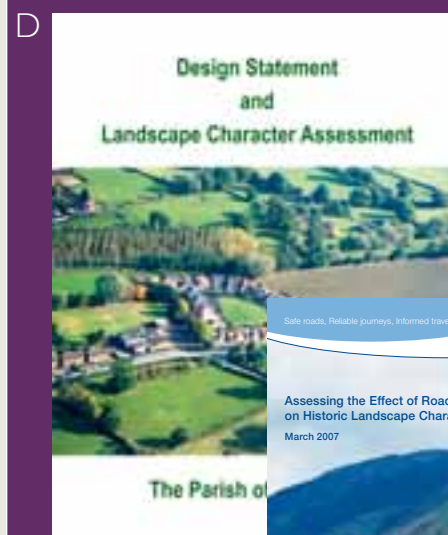
Rugeley Historic Character Assessment, April 2010:

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/eLand/HistoricEnvironment/Projects/urban/eushomepage.aspx>

C Historic Urban Character Areas. © Cannock Chase District Council (created by Lathams)

D Cover of Kinnerley report. © Kinnerley Parish Council

E Front cover of Highways Agency and English Heritage guidance. © Highways Agency



CASE STUDY 4

Kinnerley Parish Landscape Assessment

In 2005 the Kinnerley Parish Landscape Group sought advice from Shropshire County Council (now Shropshire Council) on undertaking a parish landscape assessment to support its Village Design Statement (VDS). The Council had already completed its HLC project and was completing its LCA and the Group was keen to utilise the results of this work to give their document greater planning weight.

The project was carried out over approximately 18 months by KPLG with training and support from the Council. A key part of the project involved developing a means of identifying local Character Areas using HLC and LCA data which a community could then assess through field survey.

The Group adopted a characterisation based approach from the outset, undertaking a GIS based desk study, using HLC and LCA supplied by the Council and aerial photographs and historic maps, to define and map local Character Areas within their parish. This mapping was the basis for field assessment of the ecological and visual character of each Character Area that developed and supported the Guidelines contained within the VDS. The Landscape Assessment itself was published alongside the VDS. Each Character Area has a description defining its topographical, ecological and historic character, supported by a photograph illustrating key attributes, together with extracts from digital vertical aerial photographs and transcriptions of the Tithe Award map.

The landscape assessment assisted the Parish Council in developing design guidelines within their VDS and provides information in a format that can be utilised by professional planners and landscape practitioners. Kinnerley Parish Council formally submitted the VDS and Landscape Assessment to the Local Planning Authority (then Oswestry Borough Council), who adopted some of the design guidelines as material considerations for relevant planning applications. The report was also accepted as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan.

Although the Kinnerley group was technologically able, the method they developed could be replicated in a more 'low-tech' way and the project clearly illustrates the value of using character based approaches to facilitate dialogue with community groups, helping them negotiate change. Its method could also be adapted to other forms of community-led character assessments (e.g. Conservation Area Appraisals etc.).

<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/environment.nsf/open/B0C5D9C79DEFB988025755A0069668F>

CASE STUDY 5

Highways and EIA – A453 Widening

Highways Agency guidance requires that historic landscape effects are considered as part of road schemes, in accordance with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, Volume 11, Section 3, Part 2. The A453 (M1 Junction 24 to A52 Nottingham) work was commissioned from the University of Leicester Archaeological Services by the Highways Agency in response to local concerns about the impact of the proposed offline route on the historic landscape, particularly the pre-enclosure landscape of Clifton Pastures and Barton Moor, an area now characterised by its open fields.

As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment, an assessment was undertaken of the visual impact of the proposals and the alternative routes on the area of historic landscape, in order to demonstrate why the preferred route is preferable. The assessment utilised the Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire HLCs and other material, such as historic maps and was undertaken following guidance set out in Assessing the Effect of Road Schemes on Historic Landscape Character (DfT/HA/EH March 2007), which complements the cultural heritage section of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges: <http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/nav.19605>

The work included localised updating of the existing evidence base, including the Nottinghamshire HLC, which was one of the first to be undertaken (1998 – 2000). A Landscape Character Assessment produced by the local community in February 2007 identified Clifton Pastures and Barton Moor as a survival of pre-enclosure field patterns, which was confirmed with reference to historic maps. The A453 work demonstrated that, without a major updating of the whole HLC dataset, it is difficult to update small areas.

<http://www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/22327.aspx>

CASE STUDY 6

Solar Power in Cornwall – Modelling Sensitivity

Many applications to establish multi-hectare, multi-megawatt arrays of Photovoltaic inverters were received by Cornwall Council in 2010, stimulated by a financial subsidy for facilities up to 5MW (typically c15ha). A tight deadline created significant pressure to obtain planning permission so the Council's Historic Environment Service developed a protocol for pre-application liaison with developers and the Council's Natural Resources team (determiners of

renewable energy planning applications). This included notification of heritage assets and HLC Types affected by the proposal, and any requirement for further information.

To help planners and developers plan strategically, the Council prepared a HLC-based map of Cornwall's sensitivity to solar installations, taking advice from English Heritage's Characterisation Team, then developing guidance on the use of HLC to assess sensitivity and capacity in relation to clearly defined scenarios.

The three stage assessment first considered the solar farm scenario's effects or impacts; then scored the vulnerability and positive potential of each HLC Type; and then scored how the HLC's significance established the degree to which vulnerability matters. Totalled sensitivity scores for HLC Types were displayed on GIS. Scoring tables ensured users had confidence in the assessment process.

Planners and developers recognise that more sensitive HLC Types are less likely to secure planning permission without time-consuming and costly further assessment such as geophysical survey (to better establish presence or absence of below-ground remains). The process therefore suggested avoidance of more sensitive HLC types (Rough Ground; Prehistoric Enclosures; Ornamental, etc) and preference for less sensitive ones (Reorganised and amalgamated Fields; Active Industrial, etc).

Such sensitivity mapping guides thoughtful planning at the strategic masterplanning stage and contextualises more detailed consideration of particular applications, including supporting re-design as necessary.

The method could also be used for modelling sensitivity to, and capacity for, other forms of renewable energy, such as wind turbines and biomass planting, and other large-scale change scenarios, such as urban growth, infrastructure and transport, afforestation or land use change.

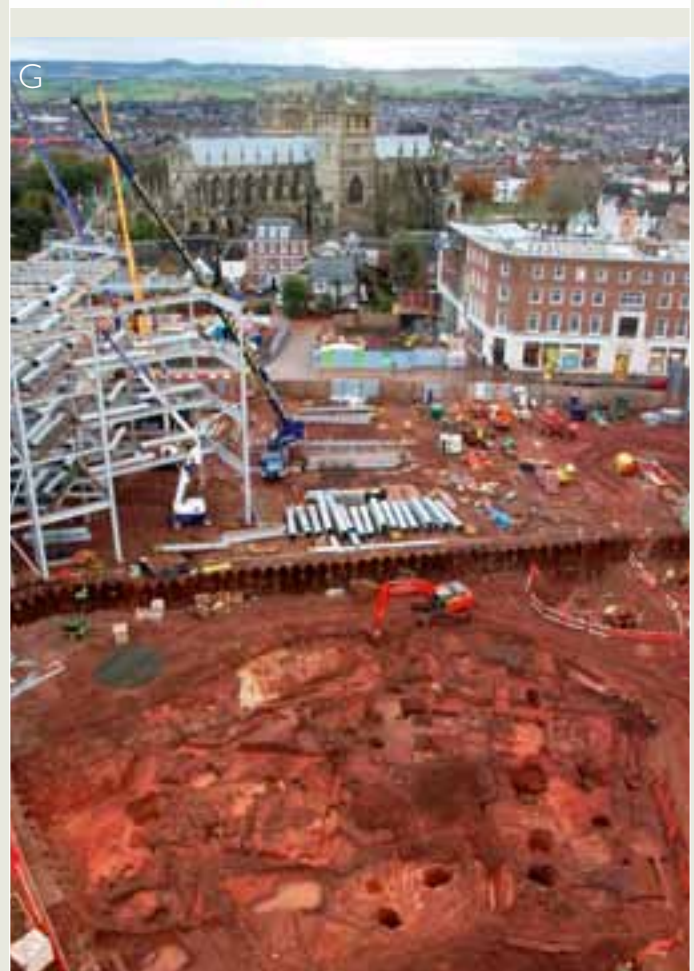
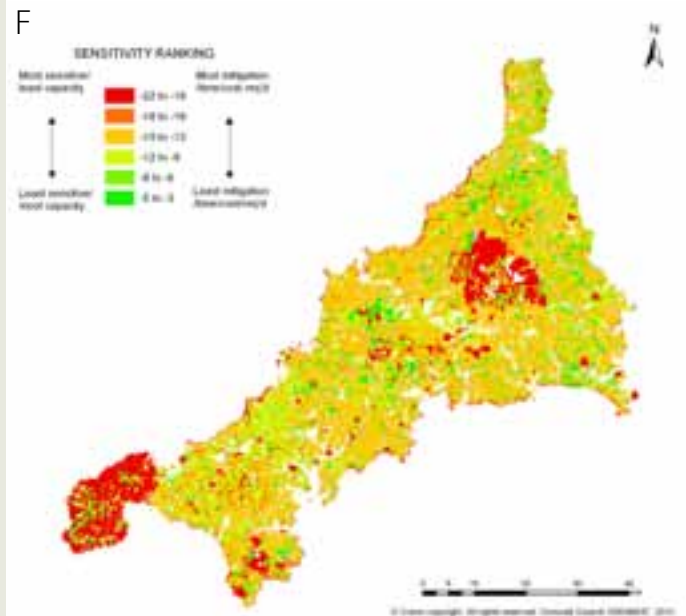
CASE STUDY 7

Exeter City Centre, Princesshay Redevelopment

The Princesshay area of Exeter city centre was redeveloped following significant World War Two bombing damage, but by the 1990s this development in turn was seen to need significant physical improvement. In order to understand and appreciate the value of the post-war plan and how this might inform a subsequent redevelopment exercise, a series of analytical studies of the site and its townscape context was carried out. These included conservation

F Sensitivity assessment for solar energy development.
© Cornwall Council

G Looking down at the Princesshay Redevelopment area, Exeter City Centre.
© Exeter City Council



area appraisal, studies of the significance of the post-war plan and architecture of the existing scheme and the formulation of a framework of urban design principles within which the architects could then work.

The process was led by a client partnership including English Heritage, CABE, Land Securities as developer and part land owner; and Exeter City Council as local planning authority and part land owner. The Conservation Studio, Turley Associates, Mervyn Miller and Jeremy Gould were commissioned to carry out the work. Chapman Taylor, Wilkinson Eyre and Panter Hudspith were the architects and Livingstone Eyre the landscape architects appointed to design a new scheme.

The approach ensured that all parties had a full understanding of the historic significance of the development site and its context and allowed consensus to be established on where and in what manner change to it could be accommodated. In particular it helped define the value of the existing post-war plan and architecture and affirmed (and re-affirmed) urban design principles which its successor should adhere to. Important below and above ground archaeology was retained and enhanced together with elements of post-war townscape whose value might otherwise have been overlooked. The townscape analysis also helped define discrete sub-areas within the site which could be reinforced by differing architectural treatments while still remaining faithful to a coherent overall character.

The main benefit of the approach adopted was to ensure that all partners proceeded collectively as one in the development of the project. This minimised disagreement and disruption to the design development process and helped generate an outcome satisfactory to all in the minimum possible time. Among lessons learnt are that the earliest participation of key stakeholders is essential and design should only take place once all necessary baseline information has been produced and agreed.

The conservation area appraisal was ultimately adopted formally by the Council. The approach taken with this project has helped inform and influence the development of other sites in the city and is currently being applied to the formulation of proposals for adjacent sites.

Princesshay – A Summary of the Redevelopment in Exeter's City Centre (April, 2008):
<http://www.exeter.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=11330>

CASE STUDY 8

West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project

The project aimed to respond to the need to understand and manage future change to historic farmsteads. Farm buildings are now a socio-economic as well as a heritage resource (English Heritage, Countryside Agency, 2006) – structural changes in the farming industry have hastened the redundancy of traditional farm buildings and removed entire farmsteads from agricultural production whilst social trends have led to growing demand in rural areas for new housing of many different types.

This regional project carried out by a consortium of English Heritage, Advantage West Midlands (the former RDA), and county and unitary authorities' historic environment teams, Forum Heritage Services and the University of Sheffield used a character-based approach to understand how historic farmsteads contribute to both local landscape character and the economy. It created a spatial database that decision-makers and applicants can use to guide future rural change.

All historic farmsteads were mapped and their historic character identified by using late nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps. The result was compared to current maps to measure survival and change and then analysed against other material, notably HLC and socio-economic data derived from postcode analysis and elsewhere. The types and patterns of current use for all farmsteads were determined, including agricultural use, residential use, commercial use and professional home-based working. Reports were prepared at county, regional and National Character Area levels. The present day role of historic farmsteads in the West Midlands' economy was assessed and planning tools developed to inform planning, land management and economic development.

Character-based approaches provide a highly cost-effective means to understand a large and highly varied resource, providing a framework for future work including planning guidance. Stakeholder engagement throughout the project was important in gathering different views and identifying shared issues, and to encourage the practical application of the project's outputs at the earliest stage.

The results will:

- inform and shape local planning and delivery, including the policy approach to rural areas, supplementary

planning documents, and development management processes;

- contribute to targeting Environmental Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes and land management programmes;
- assist in local economic assessments and regeneration strategies;
- inform community and area based planning initiatives and the preparation of local lists and augment local authority Historic Environment Records.

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas/characterisation/West-Midlands-Farmsteads-Landscapes-Project/>

CASE STUDY 9

Historic Seascape Characterisation

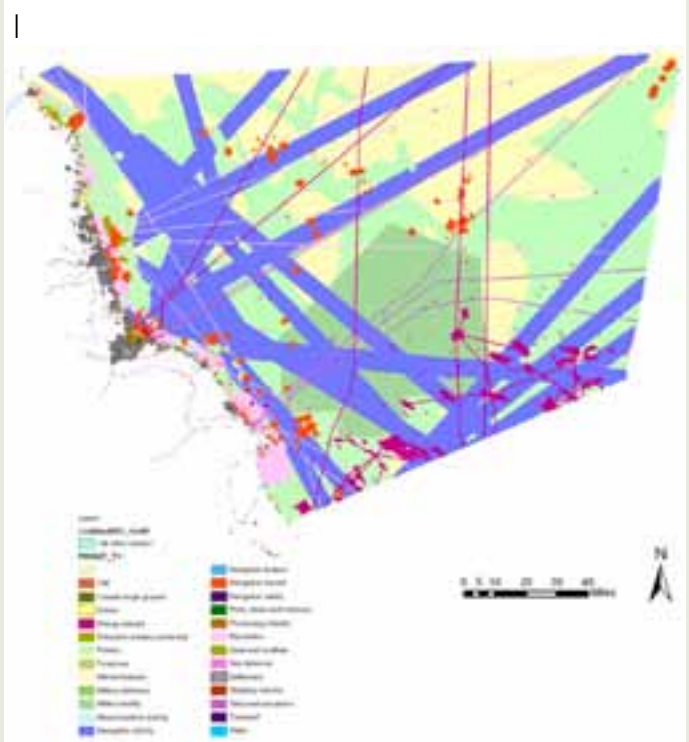
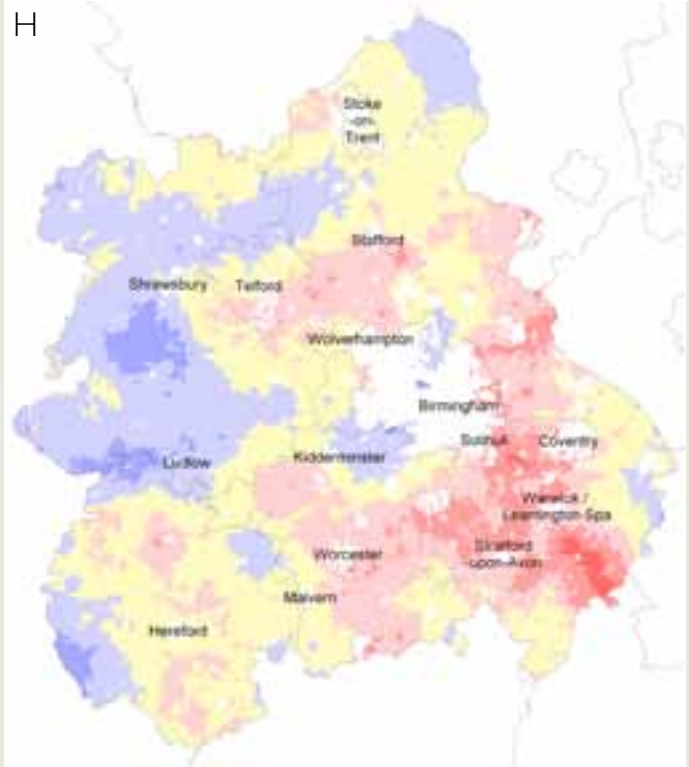
This programme commissioned by English Heritage through the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund with many stakeholders and local authority partners demonstrated the practicality and value of English Heritage's method of Historic Seascape Characterisation (HSC). It covers five large areas of sea constituting c60% of England's water prioritised for their high level of development pressure. It produced a comprehensive GIS database with related texts and visual material, based on four 'layers' of seascape (from sea surface, down through the water column to the seabed and its underlying deposits) all of which possess various types of historic character.

The HSC method:

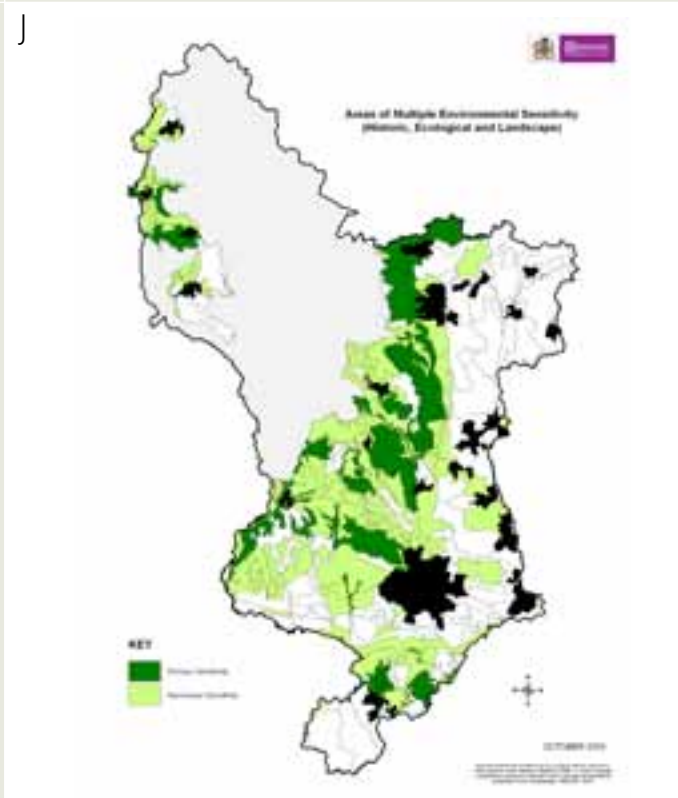
- adapts the principles of historic characterisation to the marine and coastal context;
- creates a seamless connection to HLC and LCA on land;
- fills major gaps in understanding of the marine historic environment;
- has created skilled capacity among its practitioners (including SeaZone, Oxford Archaeology, Cornwall Historic Environment Service, University of Newcastle and others);
- has clarity and consistency;
- has fitness for purpose across a range of applications;
- provides comprehensible descriptions and imagery for non-specialists and the public;
- explains historic processes as well as present day character;
- creates a useable tool for marine spatial planning in the new context of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, notably as a contribution at an appropriate scale to Marine Plans;

H Distributions of Company Registered Offices occupying historic farmsteads. Highest concentrations (red) of this type of use are concentrated in areas of economic mass, but not exclusively so.
© English Heritage

I Conflated mapping of all four layers of the historic seascape character of England's north east coast and seas.
© English Heritage



J Primary and secondary areas of Environmental Sensitivity (Historic, Ecological and Landscape).
© Derbyshire County Council



- creates information that has direct relevance to the European Landscape Convention, which covers sea as well as land.

The project's texts and imagery facilitate engagement by planners and the wider public, and their cultural narratives are accessible to public use. The HSC method has also influenced the seascape assessment element of the East Midlands Landscape Character Assessment and of Natural England/SNH's Seascape Character Assessment Project. www.english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation

Project Report to be freely available on the ADS website: <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/seascapes> And from English Heritage's Characterisation Team and Marine Planning Unit.

CASE STUDY 10

Defining Sensitivity in Derbyshire

Derbyshire County Council has developed a methodology for reviewing and recasting existing environmental data (historic, ecological and landscape character) within a landscape spatial framework. There was a need to improve the ability to manage and deliver the most appropriate environmental objectives in those geographic areas where environmental outcomes across all disciplines (landscape, ecology and the historic environment) are likely to be greatest.

The project demonstrates that landscape characterisation offers a spatial framework for analysing other data sets and enables a more holistic view to be taken.

A methodology was developed to identify areas of high environmental value described as "Areas of Multiple Environmental Sensitivity" in a GIS context to produce a new landscape character framework. The assessment used the Derbyshire LCA, its HLC and its Historic Environment Record, along with collated data relating to known habitat and species information,

Landscapes identified as being of highest environmental value are areas where landscape character remains intact visually and structurally, with strong historic and cultural identity, and containing many widespread semi-natural habitats with associated linkages appropriate to the character of the area.

The "primary" sensitive areas (those with high environmental values in all three categories, heritage, landscape and ecology) were mapped to inform relevant decision making at a strategic level. "Secondary" sensitive areas were those with high values in two categories.

This has helped to inform targeting of Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme funding, identification of key strategic Green Infrastructure assets (directing green infrastructure to less sensitive areas with conservation and enhancement in the primary and secondary areas of local sensitivity). It also identified potential for housing growth within the Housing Market Areas (flagging up the most sensitive locations and steering development potentially toward less environmentally sensitive areas). It also creates a framework for future monitoring.

CASE STUDY 11

Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment

A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was carried out for the District and County councils by Jacobs to form a part of Aylesbury Vale's evidence base for its Local Development Framework and subsequently in the application of new planning policies and to inform numerous landscape, biodiversity and land management activities in other spheres.

Based broadly on the LCA approach, it also utilised the Buckinghamshire HLC and Historic Environment Record data, and carried out a Biodiversity Assessment employing ecological designations and Buckinghamshire's Integrated Habitat Survey, thus producing a more holistic and integrated LCA and a stronger more robust evidence base than a more conventional LCA would. The completed character assessment considered landscape components in great detail and forms a vital evidence base for the Local Development Framework and a reference for other planning related matters, such as development management.

The Assessment is being used to:

- assess local landscape designations;
- help define planning policies;
- inform large-scale planning applications and development management;
- support masterplanning and design.

<http://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/planning-building/planning-policy/avldf-framework/avldf-evidence-base/environment-evidence/av-lca-may2008/>

CASE STUDY 12

West Cornwall HEATH Project

HEATH was a large-scale land management project to improve the understanding and management of rough grazing land in west Cornwall, its name encapsulating its main strands - Heathland, Environment, Agriculture, Tourism and Heritage. A major driving issue was the effect of a decline in traditional grazing on vegetation communities leading to loss of habitats and the visibility of archaeological remains, significant changes to historic landscape character and the effect of these changes on public enjoyment in areas with very large numbers of tourists.

K The Vale of Aylesbury Landscape towards the Chiltern Ridge.
© David Green

L Heathland – Prehistoric standing stone on Watch Croft with Carn Galva in the background.
© Graeme Kirkham

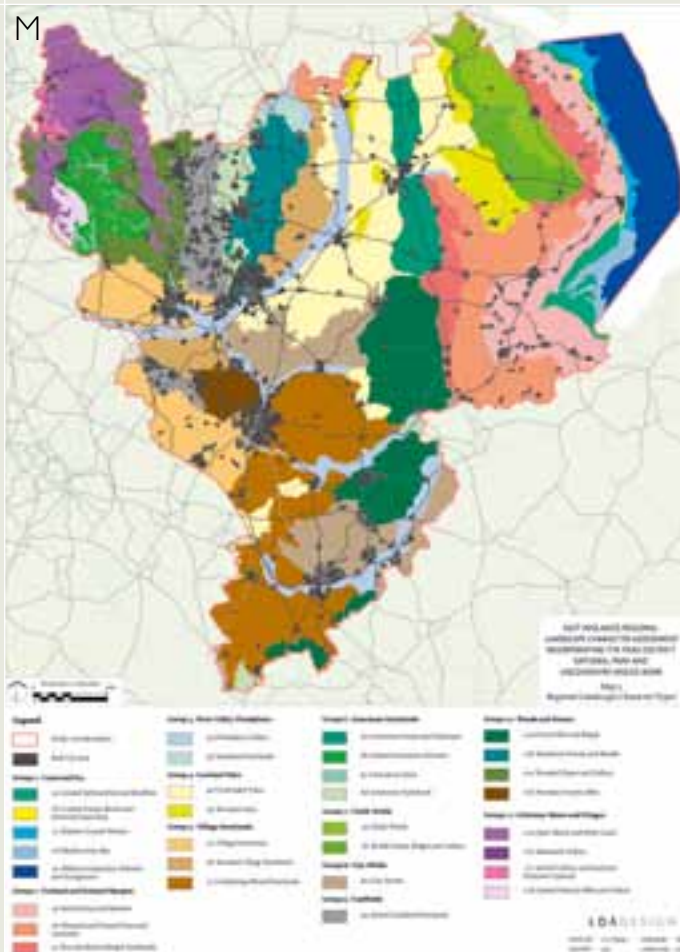
K



L



M Regional Landscape Types in the East Midlands.
© Natural England



Numerous outreach events, aimed at immediate stakeholders and the wider public helped to raise the profile of rough ground. The larger scale assessments enabled the use of HLC, and the collation of HLC and Historic Environment Record interpretation, increased interest among stakeholders, and maximised the sharing of expertise and issues across different interest groups and disciplines.

The best practice derived through the project is applicable (with adjustment to local circumstances) to a range of upland areas in Britain.

CASE STUDY 13 East Midlands Landscape Character Assessment

A new tier in the landscape character assessment hierarchy in England was created by LDA Design for the East Midlands Landscape Partnership, a consortium of agencies, NGOs, Peak District National Park, AONBs and all county councils. It combined HLC, LCA and other data including seascape material into a consistent and robust GIS-based interactive landscape evidence base. The work of the Partnership including the regional LCA, received a Commendation from the 2010 UK ELC Awards judging panel.

The assessment provides a common platform for future strategic landscape management and establishes landscape as a spatial framework for decision making at the sub-national level. It provides an evidence base for local planning and acts as a signpost to more detailed Landscape Character Assessments, Historic Landscape Characterisations and other useful information sources.

The project consortium funded by HLF and Interreg budgets included local authorities, national agencies, NGOs and partners in parallel European projects in Wales, Netherlands and France.

An existing pilot county HLC was used as a starting point but greatly refined to incorporate more time depth, and combined with other detailed sources such as place-names, Tithe Maps and archaeological material to create stronger understanding of past and long-term trajectories of change. Detailed review of best management practice for the historic environment was also carried out and desktop management assessments of the historic environment for more than 50 areas provide landowners and managers with detailed information as a basis for improved management.

The framework includes identification of 26 land and 5 marine generic Regional Landscape Character Types that provide a consistent and comparable context for planning decisions at more local level. Such decisions, include identifying opportunities for habitat creation and management, informing green infrastructure strategies, locating and designing new development, informing the definition of 'Woodland Opportunity Maps' and strengthening the place of landscape and heritage in the delivery of ecosystem services. Non technical descriptions of each type were prepared and assessments made of both current 'Forces for Change' and suggested mechanisms for 'Shaping the Future Landscape'.

www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/east_midlands/ourwork/characterassessment.aspx

CASE STUDY 14

Basingstoke and Dean Traditional Farmsteads Supplementary Planning Document

The Borough Council wished to reflect in formal planning documents the results of a pilot characterisation project and its thinking on how to apply this to planning applications and decisions via planning guidance on diversification and reuse of farm buildings.

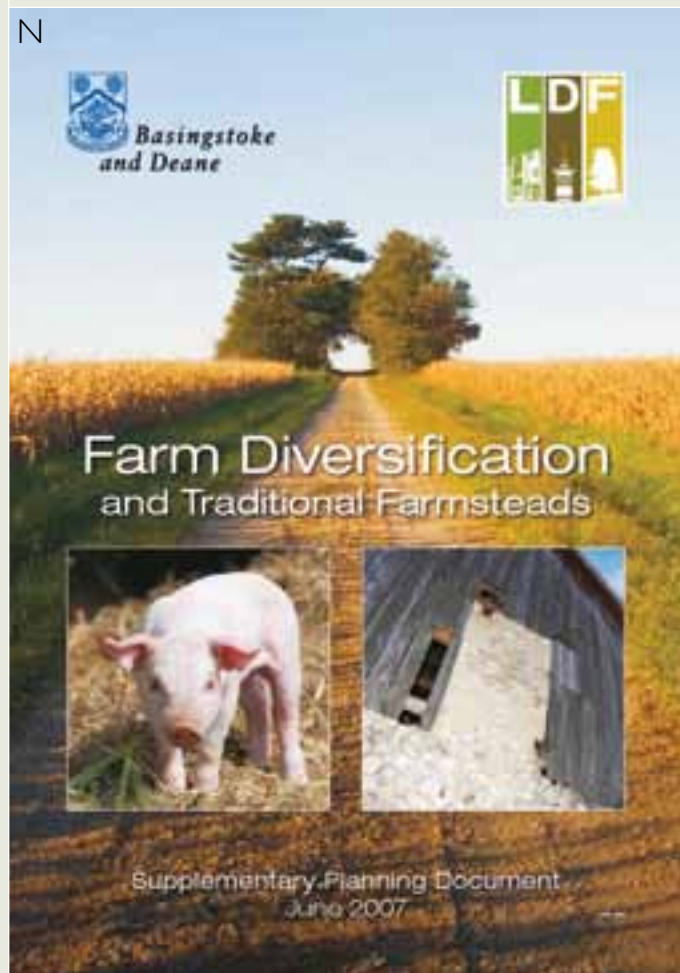
Key officers from Forward Planning and Conservation in the local authority (with help from English Heritage's Characterisation Team and Forum Heritage Services) produced a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that used the results of the Hampshire Historic Farmstead Characterisation Project, a pilot (undertaken by Forum Heritage Services) that rapidly mapped historic farmsteads across the county from late nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps, and compared this dataset to current maps in order to measure the levels of survival and the degree to which historic farmsteads have retained their traditional character. The resulting data was subject to analysis, including against Historic Landscape Characterisation and the local authority's own landscape character areas.

The diversification aspects of the SPD focused on planning considerations and diversification and scheme types. The characterisation focused on enabling planners and applicants to understand the character of farmsteads (through a definition of traditional farmsteads, of traditional farmstead types and the rural landscape in the local authority area, within its broader context) and an assessment framework that uses this understanding.

The work served to take forward research on historic farmsteads and their buildings at a national level which has highlighted the importance of piloting and developing new tools based on character and context that will:

- 1 contribute to consistent, positive and forward-looking tools for local planning and land management;
- 2 take account of local character and the issues driving forward change;
- 3 enable users at the earliest possible stage to identify key issues and opportunities and the capacity for change at an area as well as a site-based level;
- 4 inform initial scheme development and pre-application discussions;

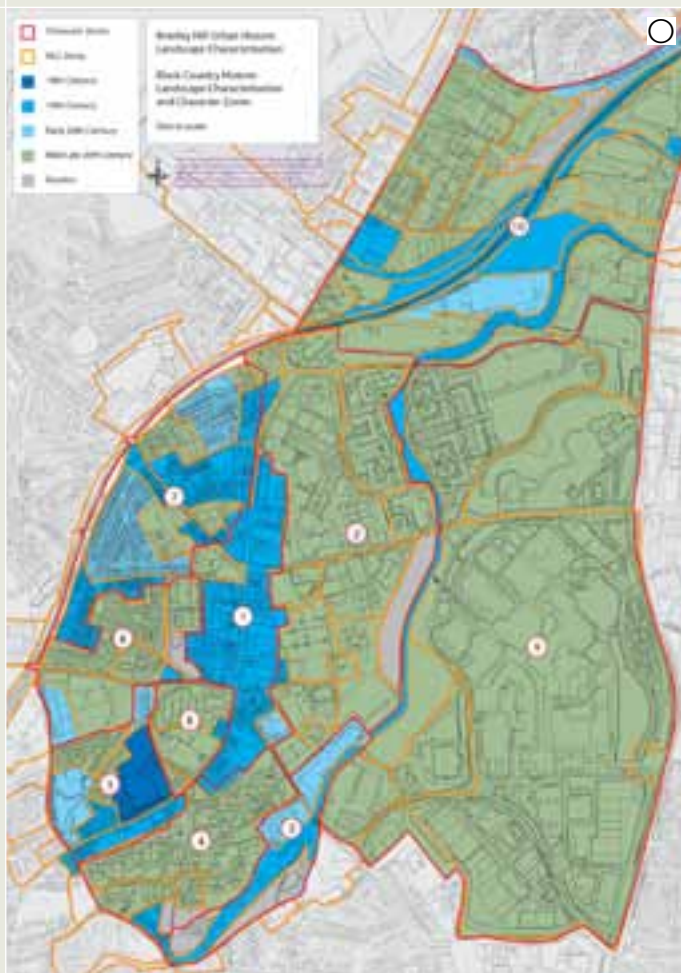
N Front cover of Farm
Diversification and Traditional
Farmsteads SPD.
© Basingstoke and Deane
Borough Council



<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/planning/localplan/spd/Farm+Diversification+and+Traditional+Farmsteads+SPD.htm>

www.helm.org.uk/farmbuildings

○ Character Zones from the Brierley Hill Urban Historic Landscape Characterisation.
© Dudley MBC,
The Conservation Studio



CASE STUDY 15

Brierley Hill Urban Historic Landscape Characterisation

The creation of a new Strategic Centre for Dudley Metropolitan Borough at Brierley Hill/Merry Hill led to the recognition of the need for an Area Action Plan (AAP) to effectively guide the creation of a new town centre. A vital part of the evidence base was recognised to be a full understanding of the opportunities and constraints offered by the historic environment of the area with the ambition of assisting in “place making” and creating a unified urban form that married old and new, namely the historic High Street and the 20th-century shopping complex at Merry Hill.

The AAP was delivered as part of the Local Development Framework and so involved a very varied mix of local stakeholders and cross-departmental working in the local authority. The Conservation Studio was commissioned by the Council to undertake an urban HLC.

An Extensive Survey of the entire area led to a broad level characterisation, and then more detailed survey identified particular heritage assets. Designation opportunities (statutory/local list) and areas of special interest that might warrant conservation area designation were identified. Further more detailed surveys were then undertaken to the level of a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Brierley Hill High Street and environs to inform its designation.

Main outcomes include the conservation area designation centred on the High Street, the unexpected identification of a further area of special townscape to the west of this (Adelaide Street Triangle), as well as up-to-date designation data (Statutory/local list/Archaeological Priority Areas) for heritage assets across the wider area. The urban HLC was used as baseline data by urban designers concerned with place-making, land allocations and the Implementation Strategy for the AAP. The information facilitated the planning and design process by working with the grain of the historic built environment, identifying potential conflicts and managing out or mitigating them through informed dialogue between conservation and other professionals. The urban HLC has also been used in support of a wider community engagement project ‘Brierley Hillness’.

A Glass Quarter Supplementary Planning Document has been informed by an urban HLC study. Similar work is underway in house for the Stourbridge and Halesowen AAPs and Historic Characterisation to varying levels of intensity is ongoing linked to the Black Country Joint Core Strategy and forthcoming Borough wide Development Strategy.

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/environment--planning/planning/historic-environment/historic-landscape-characterisation-hlc/brierley-hill-urban-historic-landscape-charac>

CASE STUDY 16

Chester City Centre Characterisation

Cheshire West and Chester Council (with Chester Civic Trust and English Heritage in advisory roles) commissioned Taylor Young to help with the production of a historic characterisation of Chester's centre and approaches. This was intended to be as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework and to inform future land-use and conservation policy.

The project's approach was simple. The study area was divided into 116 sub-areas grouped into 16 Character Areas. Rapid fieldwork (all in December 2010) completed proforma for each sub-area to capture their overall character, with further proforma for specific for un-listed buildings and structures of merit. Eight of the Character Areas (the inner areas) were selected for a more detailed level of analysis. The proforma and methodology followed English Heritage's guidance on Historic Area Assessment (2010). The proforma were completed by hand, maps and plans were annotated and extensive photography was taken. "Merit" buildings and key detractors were initially identified on site and later mapped.

Finally a character area assessment (critical, positive, neutral or negative) and general character statement was made for each of the 116 sub-areas, and reports were written for each of the 16 character areas, drawing on historical research and a desktop review of studies and policy documents as well as the fieldwork results. The reports included sections on historical development, urban form, townscape and landscape analysis and land-use. For the inner areas brief policy guidance and design principle recommendations were also provided. The reports were well illustrated with historic mapping, analysis plans and photographs.

The project has produced extensive and objective assessment of existing character, accurately described across a wide and varied study area in addition to the full data in spreadsheet and GIS form and an extensive photographic record for the local authority.

The outcomes were the 16 Character Area Assessments, available in hard copy and downloadable form; in due course they will be publicly available and developers and applicants will be expected to refer to them at design stage. Development Management officers will also refer to the reports and use them to inform planning recommendations. The Buildings and Structures of Merit identified also form a potential short-list for a Local List.

P Extract from the Chester townscape analysis.
© Taylor Young



The report has been endorsed by Council members and it will be invaluable in designing for change, influencing design, assessing planning applications and formulating planning policy.

http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/planning_and_building_control/spatial_planning/local_development_framework/ldf_evidence_base/chester_characterisation_study.aspx



CASE STUDY 17

Aylesbury Vale Conservation Area Management Plans

Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) has 120 individual conservation areas, and managing these is a substantial task. The project aimed to produce a strategy for all the conservation areas based on identifying and understanding the elements of the historic environment which make significant contributions to local character and distinctiveness both for the district as whole and for specific areas. The project was designed to see if a generic Conservation Areas Management Plan could be produced, including a Model Strategy for a wider regional and potentially national audience together with a district wide Strategy for AVDC.

A large steering group was formed of local, county and national stakeholders and advisers, and Forum Heritage Services were appointed as consultants, whilst AHC consultants undertook two management plans in 2008 as test beds.

The project rapidly assessed a large and diverse area in a short time period (ten weeks). As much information as possible about the district was gathered through desk-top study; this was supplemented by focused site visits and field work to inform selection of a sample settlement survey which would

provide the foundation for a series of themes throughout the district. A document review revealed conservation area designation documents and appraisals together with information on materials – a thatching advisory guide, building materials advice note. It also advocated a method which could be used for other local authorities with a large number of conservation areas.

The efficacy of a District Wide Strategy was tested against two management plans for Haddenham and Newton Longville produced independently in 2008. The use of characterisation in the District Wide Strategy pulls together a series of threads to enable statements to be made about the character and local distinctiveness of a given area. Similar issues affect many conservation areas and a district wide strategy can be an efficient way of integrating good stewardship of the historic environment into the planning system. It can help give weight to conservation area appraisals which form the background papers for LDF documents.

One key outcome is a framework for quickly and effectively ascertaining the issues affecting the character and appearance of a conservation area. Using the methodology it is possible to identify priorities and tailor resources and policy development towards them. At a basic level the strategies can be used to formulate best

R Report cover for Understanding Sutton's Local Distinctiveness.
© London Borough of Sutton

S Oxford, George Street to Broad Street – meeting of roads and meeting of town and gown.
© Oxford City Council

practice when dealing with day to day issues such as Buildings at Risk or implementing Article 4 Directions.

<http://www.aylesburyvalcdc.gov.uk/environment/conservation-listed-buildings/aylesbury-vale-district-wide-strategy/>

CASE STUDY 18

Understanding Sutton's Local Distinctiveness: Characterisation and the Evidence Base

The project was designed by the London Borough of Sutton to allow it to meet London Plan housing targets in a manner most appropriate to maintain its existing distinctive characteristics. It therefore needed to create an evidence base to support Core Strategy policies and supplementary planning guidance on Urban Design.

Characterisation tools were used in order to understand the factors which have created the distinctive suburban character of Sutton including an assessment of the geology, archaeology, topography, historic development, movement patterns, townscape and landscape character and quality and local palette of materials. In addition an appraisal of density and setting was undertaken using the Mayor of London's Matrix as a starting point, in order to understand the complexities of density and impact that this has on the character and appearance of the Borough.

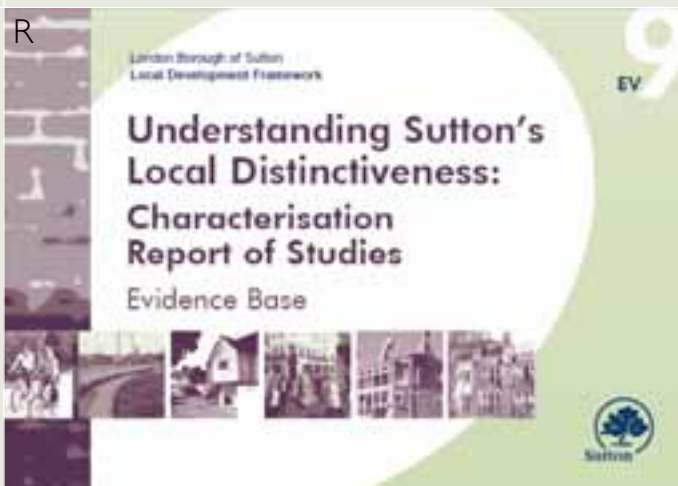
The results have been used to help justify a locally specific policy regarding urban design and density as set out in the Core Strategy adopted in 2009 and the Site Development Policies Development Plan Document. They have also helped as evidence for the Urban Design SPD and as a baseline to set the context for more detailed character work as part of Council planning briefs. They have also been used to help assess the appropriateness of planning applications.

<http://www.sutton.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=3399&p=0>

CASE STUDY 19

Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit

A project by Oxford City Council, Oxford Preservation Trust and English Heritage to assist the identification of key elements that contribute to an area's character (urban or rural), not necessarily limited to conservation areas. It establishes a robust methodology for use by professionals and, importantly, the wider community, in better understanding significant parts of the historic environment. The community empowerment element contributes to a more effective dialogue in the management of change and is consistent with the current 'localism' agenda.



A structured questionnaire was supported by guidance notes providing assistance with terminology. The contribution a feature makes to the character of an area was scored using a two-stage system (capturing initial and final reactions).

'It has been used in collaborative exercises with local communities and stakeholders including the Jericho and Beauchamp Lane Conservation Areas Area Appraisals. These reveal how the local community values the place, what elements it considers detracts from the quality of the place and what opportunities there are for enhancement. It has helped to articulate these values. The toolkit forms part of the Heritage Plan for Oxford and as such it will contribute to monitoring.

There have been some problems associated with the size of the document and its need for access to IT; these may present problems for some in the community and as a result a simpler version was created to facilitate wider community usage.

<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/CharacterAppraisalToolkit.htm>

CASE STUDY 20

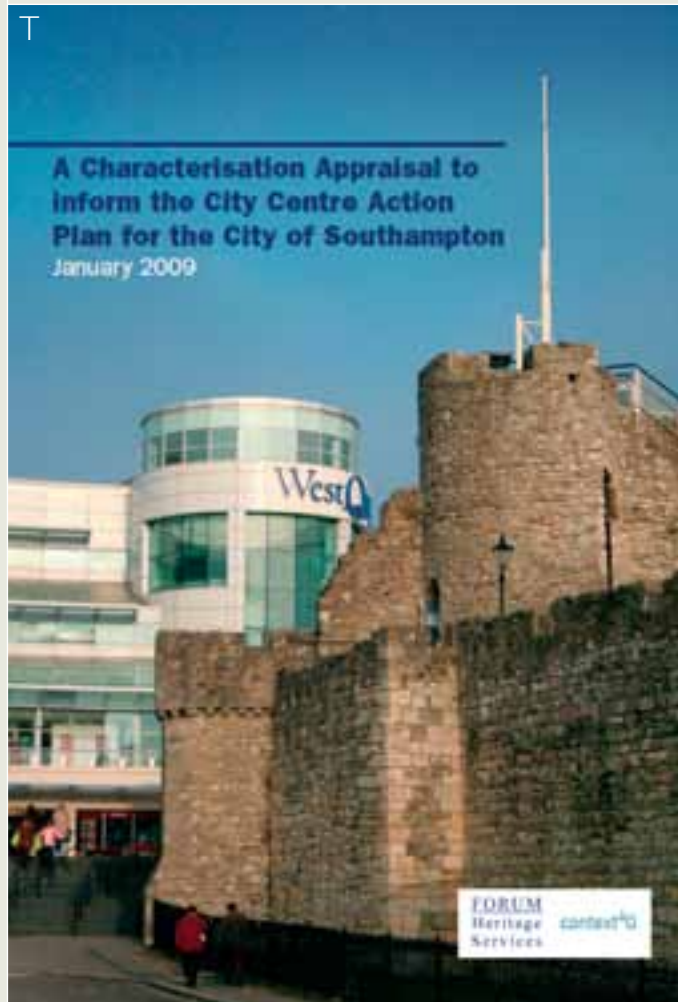
Southampton City Centre Action Plan – Characterisation Appraisal

The Southampton Characterisation Appraisal was undertaken by consultants 'Forum Heritage Services' and 'Context 4D' with conservation, planning, design and economic development teams of the City Council, local stakeholders and English Heritage help. It aimed to provide an evidence base for the City Centre Action Plan, the selection of allocations and the Core Strategy, and to influence the Council's design guides for new city centre development areas and future masterplanning.

The project sought to:

- enable value judgements to be made leading to a robust spatial analysis in line with national guidance and Conservation Principles;
- establish sensitivity values of areas to enable assessment of the capacity of the city centre to accommodate development while reinforcing local character and avoiding harm to the significant characteristics of areas;
- provide the necessary base-line information to enable the identification of areas where change could be accommodated or may be desirable and set out broad principles for development;

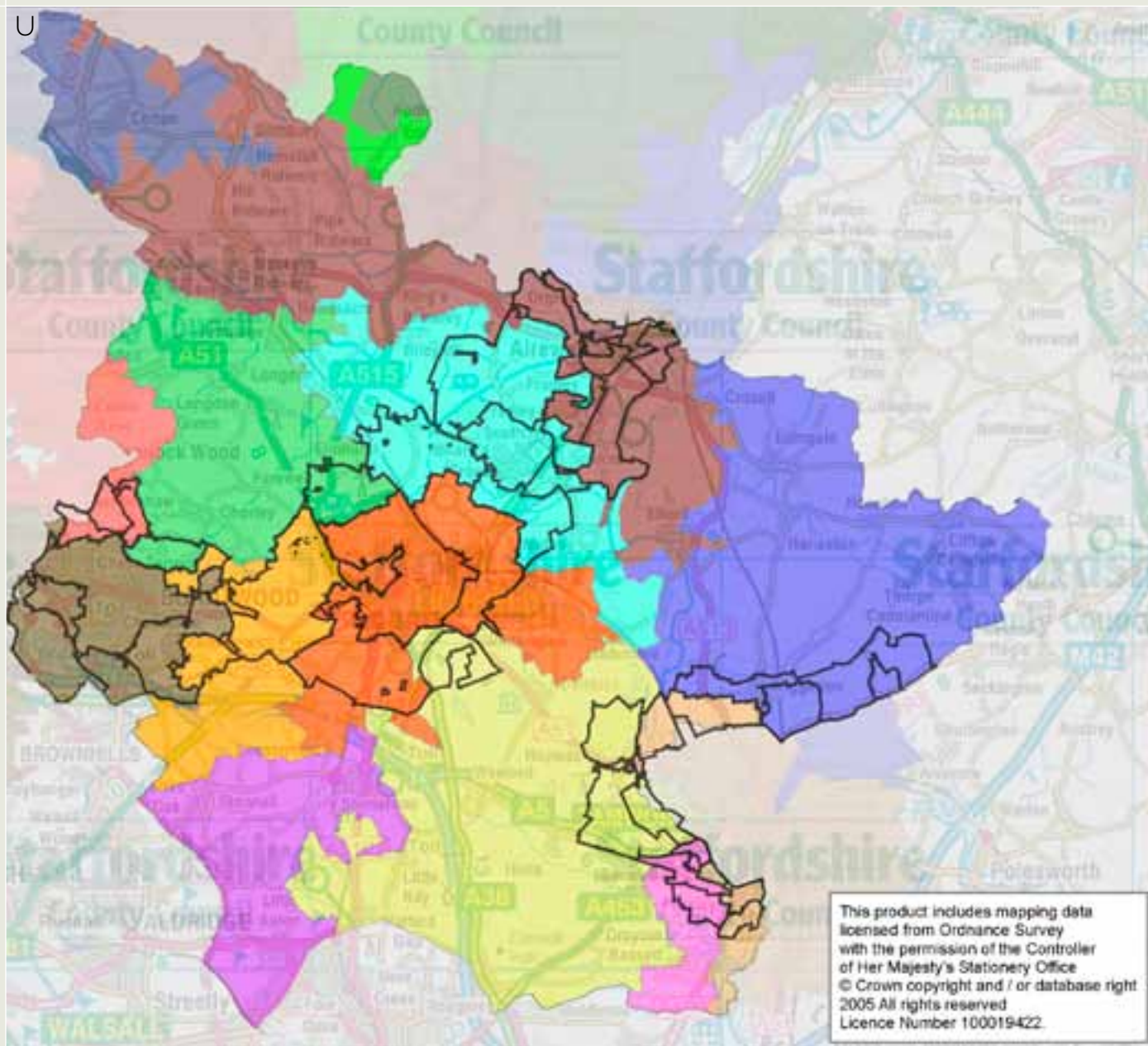
T Front cover of the Southampton City Centre Area Action Plan Characterisation Appraisal.
© Bob Edwards, James Webb and Richard Guise



- clearly define areas where the heritage of the City is of significant value and vulnerable to change and highlight special management actions.

Using historic characterisation and townscape analysis, 43 character areas were identified and analysed with significance identified in each character area as part of the assessment of heritage assets. The structure of each character area analysis follows the townscape analysis criteria set out in By Design, but also seeks to utilise Conservation Principles, History in the View techniques and a matrix approach to assessing sensitivity. A character area framework was also identified for a more intensive Conservation Area Appraisal of the Old Town area which in turn will inform a Conservation Area Management Plan.

U Lichfield District Historic Character Areas (HECAs) and Historic Character Zones (HECZs) © Staffordshire County Council and OS



The City Council Planning Control team is using the character appraisal to inform decisions. It has been used as the key evidence base for the Public Inquiry on the Southampton City Core strategy, although its primary use will be for the Action Plan and the work will influence the City Council's design guides for new city centre development areas and future masterplanning and decision-making for development management.

<http://www.southampton.gov.uk/s-environment/policy/developmentframework/backgrounddocuments/characterisation-appraisal.aspx>



Historic Environment Character Assessment



Final Report for
Lichfield District Council
February 2009

Staffordshire
County Council

www.staffordshire.gov.uk

CASE STUDY 21

Historic Environment Character Assessment for Lichfield District

The project was carried out with English Heritage help by the County and District Council to provide an overview of the historic environment for inclusion as part of the evidence base for a Local Development Framework. This included examining the likely effects of preferred housing options and directions of growth around settlements.

The project used the Staffordshire HLC along with the historic and archaeological data in the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record to identify areas of similar character and origins. These areas resulted in the creation, at the most detailed level, of Historic

Environment Character Zones which were then assessed to establish the likely impact of medium to large-scale development upon the historic environment and historic character. This evaluation was based upon a method established by Essex County Council and scored zones against a series of criteria – Survival, Potential, Documentation, Diversity, Group Association, Amenity Value and Sensitivity to Change. For each Zone the cumulative score was expressed as High, Moderate and Low. Written historic environment summaries were also prepared.

The assessment clarified which aspects of the historic environment might be negatively impacted by medium to large-scale development within the three project areas and informed further discussions with historic environment professionals. The scoring system allowed the District's planners to identify those areas with greater historic environment potential. The information fed into the Sustainability Appraisal of the different broad directions of growth and sites both in and around the settlements.

Other assessments have been carried out in Staffordshire using the same methods. They incorporate new material (e.g. on historic farmsteads) when it has become available, and where appropriate new methods (e.g. Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) and the heritage values set out in Conservation Principles).

http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=1014&pageNumber=10

CASE STUDY 22

Green Infrastructure in Buckinghamshire

Buckinghamshire is facing significant housing growth over the next 20 years which will need to be accompanied by 'green growth'. Existing green spaces, including the historic ones, will need to be protected and enhanced and new spaces created to ensure that all residents and visitors have access to high quality Green Infrastructure (GI). The Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Consortium was therefore established in 2007 to provide the county with a lead body for strategic GI planning and delivery. Its 22 partners comprise local authorities, non-government agencies and countryside and community related organisations

Buckinghamshire County Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake a countywide technical study of accessible strategic GI provision

W Ridge and furrow in the parish of Chilton, Buckinghamshire (Vale of Aylesbury).
© David Green



in Buckinghamshire. This led to production of the Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, 2009, a key reference document for professionals involved in GI development and management and planning that provides a strategic level approach to GI that will link, guide and underpin the production of local Green Infrastructure Plans and Greenspace Strategies.

The approach used to identify, analyse and interpret GI in this Strategy conforms to the nationally recognised approach and is consistent with that used in neighbouring counties. A GIS-based approach was therefore adopted and HLC was used at a variety of levels to inform the analysis of the historic environment resources and access to these.

Historic environment opportunity areas were divided into seven themes (e.g. historic woodlands, designed landscapes) cross-indexed against the five GI functions of biodiversity, accessible greenspace, access routes

and historic environment. Through this process the GI Strategy has successfully identified where heritage assets, and an understanding of the wider historic environment, can contribute to GI provision and help provide locally distinctive responses. For example an area of potential for woodland restoration can be identified at Whaddon Chase whilst at Quarrendon Leas (Aylesbury) a scheduled ancient monument has been shown to fulfil a key GI deficit.

The strategy is backed by a three-year action plan identifying a range of strategic level projects for partnership support and delivery. Along with a suite of other key documents it will act as part of the evidence base required for informing the preparation of masterplans, planning decisions and for the preparation of Local Delivery Plans.

http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/strategic_planning/green_infrastructure.page

Case Study	Primary and other Applications
1. Greater Norwich Growth Point Historic Characterisation	Local Planning , Development Management, Masterplanning and Design
2. Lincoln Townscape Assessment	Development Management , Local Planning, Masterplanning and Design, Conservation Areas, Community Engagement
3. Rugeley Historic Character Assessment	Local Planning , Development Management, Masterplanning and Design, Conservation Areas, Community Engagement
4. Kinnerley Parish Landscape Assessment	Community Engagement , Local Planning, Development Management, Masterplanning and Design, Conservation Areas
5. Highways and EIA - A453 Widening	Infrastructure
6. Solar power in Cornwall: modelling sensitivity	Infrastructure , Development Management
7 Exeter City Centre, Princesshay Redevelopment	Masterplanning and Design , Development Management
8. West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project	Large-scale Planning , Local Planning, Development Management, Masterplanning and Design
9. Historic Seascape Characterisation	Large-scale Planning , Local Planning, Marine Planning
10. Defining Sensitivity in Derbyshire	Large-scale Planning , Local Planning, Infrastructure
11. Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment	Local Planning , Development Management, Masterplanning and Design
12. West Cornwall HEATH project	Large scale Planning , Local Planning, Land-use Management
13. East Midlands Landscape Character Assessment	Large-scale Planning , Local Planning, Infrastructure
14. Basingstoke and Dean Traditional Farmsteads Supplementary Planning Document	Local Planning , Development Management, Masterplanning and Design
15. Brierley Hill Urban Historic Landscape Characterisation	Conservation Areas , Local Planning, Development Management, Masterplanning and Design, Community Engagement
16. Chester City Centre Characterisation	Local Planning , Development Management, Masterplanning and Design, Conservation Areas
17. Aylesbury Vale Conservation Area Management Plans	Conservation Areas , Local Planning, Development Management
18. Understanding Sutton's Local Distinctiveness – Characterisation and the Evidence Base	Local Planning , Conservation Areas
19. Oxford Character assessment Toolkit	Community Engagement , Local Planning, Conservation Areas
20. Southampton City Centre Action Plan – Characterisation Appraisal	Local Planning , Development Management, Masterplanning and Design, Conservation Areas
21. Historic Environment Character Assessment for Lichfield District	Local Planning , Development Management, Infrastructure, Masterplanning and Design
22. Green Infrastructure in Buckinghamshire	Green Infrastructure , Local Planning, Development Management, Masterplanning and Design

Table 1: Applications of Historic Characterisation: Summary of Case Studies (For more information see the HELM website)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I. The value of historic characterisation work

What is the value of historic characterisation for local communities and neighbourhoods?

Characterisation looks at the quality of everywhere, rather than focusing on specific features or assets. It describes and interprets character, encouraging communities to take pride in their local area and decide the future they wish to see for it. By allowing for a multitude of viewpoints it can potentially be very democratic. Its easily understood material can be used for many different purposes and is a non-technical means to help people to identify desired development and judge the effect of proposed changes. Examples are provided in the case studies from Rugeley [cs3], Kinnerley [cs4], Lincoln [cs2] and Oxford [cs19] among others.

What is its value for large scale and local planning?

Historic characterisation creates evidence bases that support many planning policy documents and decisions (see, for example, the Norwich [cs1] case study, and those from Lincoln [cs2] and for the West Midlands farmsteads [cs8]). It helps planners understand the character of specific places and enables them to be more proactive, identifying appropriate opportunities for change and appropriate enhancement, including guiding the location and form of new development. It also provides material to inform the sustainability appraisal of plans and policies.

What is its value for development management, infrastructure schemes and masterplanning?

Characterisation can be used effectively in pre-application discussions, for example during the scoping stage of EIAs (see the A453 Nottinghamshire case study [cs5]). It can provide information ahead of masterplanning and design stages (see the Exeter [cs7], Sutton [cs18] and Brierley Hill [cs15] case studies for examples), enabling carefully considered frameworks for change to be drafted that improve decision-making throughout the subsequent development.

2. Benefiting from historic characterisation

How do I use the products of historic characterisation?

Characterisations are descriptive, interpretative, flexible and adaptable and can be used for different purposes, such as to inform further assessment work or sensitivity studies, and can assist with making decisions on specific sites. Historic characterisations can also be integrated with other

existing studies such as Landscape Character Assessments. Value judgements are not built into characterisations, but can be made by users such as the community at appropriate stages of specific projects.

How can I use historic characterisation to encourage development that supports local character?

The mapping and its supporting texts and the query-able database can be used to establish how the particular historic character of the area under consideration has been established by aspects such as periods of development, functions, forms, materials, scale, etc (all do this but see for example the Chester [cs16] or Lincoln [cs2] case studies). It can help consideration of how such aspects help distinguish an area from its immediate neighbours. This understanding can be used to review proposed development and to set guidelines for future proposals.

How can I use historic characterisation to establish where a particular form of change is most appropriately located?

Sensitivity assessment of specific types of development would use historic characterisation as the spatial framework within which to assess the vulnerability of an area or a landscape type to the likely effects or impacts of a certain form of change. This, along with assessment of the place's significance, may then guide decisions on whether to proceed or how to adjust the location, scale and design of such change. Many of the case studies exemplify this, notably solar energy in Cornwall [cs6], the national Historic Seascape Characterisation programme [cs9], Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment [cs11], Derbyshire [cs10].

Can the results be understood by everyone?

Characterisation studies are largely visual and map-based, making it relatively easy to be understood by everyone. Accompanying interpretative texts are also carefully written to be understandable to a range of users. Use of interactive tools through the internet allows more people to access and use the material for a variety of purposes from planning change to local research and tourism (e.g. Lincoln [cs2], HEATH in West Cornwall [cs12]).

How do I ensure that historic characterisation results are used?

For users to have confidence in its outputs, early engagement with all people, organisations and groups with

an interest in the issue under consideration, including local authority planners, is essential. Value judgements about significance are not 'hard-wired' into characterisation but is 'neutral' at this stage, thereby deferring judgements to be made at a later date, when they are needed, and with the involvement of all relevant parts of the community. All parties in a planning debate can use characterisation as an evidence base; it is not only an instrument for protection but for good design and change as well. A characterisation (and its use) should also be transparent, with all assumptions, sources and interpretations set out clearly. It is helpful to tie characterisation work into wider planning policy, for example as evidence for a Development Plan Document, or to inform advice in Supplementary Planning Documents. Good publicity and promotion of the study will also assist with its distribution and use.

How do I get the most out of an historic characterisation – how do I develop confidence in its use?

Be creative – recognise that characterisation does not offer ready made answers, but a better framework for integrated and democratic plan-making and decision taking. Take opportunities to actively and positively promote the qualities of characterisation, emphasising the benefits it can offer. Existing characterisation products will be defined in part by the aims, timing, resource and data constraints that existed when they were created, so plan carefully to produce material in a timely way, usually very early in the development process, and at a scale and to a standard that meets the needs of the situation. When necessary, take time to enhance or deepen a characterisation, or combine it with other information or material, to make it fitter for its new purpose. Be aware that historic characterisation can be used in the planning process in ways that complement other sources of understanding (and vice versa), such as that derived from the local Historic Environment Record or other types of landscape character assessment (e.g. Derbyshire [cs10], Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment [cs11], Lichfield [cs21]).

3. Practical Issues

How do I get hold of historic characterisation?

Many completed examples of historic characterisation are held by local authority Historic Environment Records and conservation departments who should be consulted first when commissioning characterisation projects or seeking to apply existing material. Others (especially those commissioned in a development context from consultants) are also available in planning departments, some will be accessible on local authority websites and

some will be linked to LDF documents. The results of characterisation projects are usually in a form that can be adjusted to serve the needs of subsequent users, sometimes by framing more detailed and targeted analysis (see A453 case study).

How do I scope a potential historic characterisation study?

Applications are most effective when customised to the needs of specific projects. Work back from anticipated outputs, and involve all interested parties (e.g. local authority, landowners, developers, communities and statutory bodies like English Heritage) in the design and application of the exercise. Determine the area, timescales, methods and techniques and be guided by successful, previous work in similar situations; the case studies here and on the HELM website may help.

Is the use of historic characterisation costly?

Costs will vary greatly according to the scale and detail required to satisfy the application's needs, and especially if there is not an adequate historic characterisation already in place. It may take a few hours or days or several weeks. However, developers and planners appreciate that time and effort spent in using characterisation to make better focussed initial and strategic decisions usually saves all parties considerable time and resources in the long run.

Do I need specialist training and expertise?

Again this varies, but historic characterisation will normally require input from those with a reasonable understanding of landscape history, archaeology, urban morphology and townscape analysis; archaeologists with their training in time depth and spatial understanding, will often be good co-ordinators of characterisation teams, and a reasonable level of GIS expertise will also be required. Carrying out characterisation work "in-house" for a local authority has the benefit of increasing skills amongst staff and capitalising on existing conservation skills.

How can I ensure that any newly prepared historic characterisation material is made available for others to use?

To continually improve understanding of the historic environment and to expand the available evidence base for decision-making, copies of historic characterisations (including the GIS raw material) should be deposited with the relevant Historic Environment Record and, wherever possible made available on the internet.

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