

Chapter 1- INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT AND METHOD

Introduction

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) was developed between c1992-1994 and pioneered in Cornwall (Fairclough et al 1999, Herring 1998). It was devised for many reasons, but mainly because issues relating to landscape were a major gap in current archaeological resource management, and because it was proving impossible to expand the historic coverage to wider landscape assessment through point-based SMRs. Its use has spread since 1995 and 14 local authorities include a complete HLC in their SMRs. At any one time, between 5 and 10 county-wide projects are underway.

HLC is a key English Heritage programme (see eg Fairclough 2001, Fairclough et al 2002), currently (since October 2002) as part of EH's Characterisation Team. The Government in *A Force for Our Future* endorsed the approach as a leading method for managing change in the historic environment (DCMS/DETR 2001 p31). The principles of HLC are now being extended to other characterisation programmes, eg in towns, to regional HLC overviews and to other countries in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, for example through the EU Culture 2000 programme '*European Pathways to Cultural Landscapes*'.

After almost eight years of rapid evolution and experiment, however,

a healthy diversity of method had developed (eg Fairclough (ed) 1999, Dyson-Bruce 2002, Fairclough 2002a, Darlington 2002, Fairclough et al 2002). This was a lively topic for discussion at the second biennial HLC Seminar at the Society of Antiquaries, London in December 2000 and a national HLC Method Review was therefore commissioned by English Heritage to define current best practice.

Because it was evident that different elements of best practice reside in several projects, the Review was designed to identify both core practice and more local – or peripheral - methods in all the completed, current or fully planned projects. The aim was to produce guidelines and recommendations on future methodology, to be used both in areas new to HLC and in those where existing HLC was being updated. This report is a summary of that review. It is supported by a separate volume containing a new Template Project Design for EH-funded county-wide HLC. This template has been compiled using the review's recommendations; it draws on the very latest methods in use in current projects and is now the EH-preferred method.

Scope of the Method Review

Since 1994, when HLC was carried out in Cornwall, a national programme, funded jointly by EH and individual local authorities, has

developed involving 29 separate projects, usually covering whole counties and occasionally extending beyond county boundaries to cover areas such as AONBs. These 29 projects formed the basis of the Review: 16 complete, 7 in progress, and 6 on the verge of starting and with sufficiently defined method statements to be usefully included.



Sixteen completed projects formed the core of the review: Avon, Axholme, Cornwall, Cotswolds AONB (followed by the remainder of Gloucestershire), Hampshire, Herefordshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Peak District National Park followed by the remainder of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Somerset with Exmoor National Park, Suffolk and Surrey.

Seven projects in progress or planning were sufficiently advanced to be able to be assessed by the

Review: 4 in progress (Cumbria and Lake District NP, Devon and Dartmoor NP, Essex and Shropshire) and 3 in planning (Cheshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire). Work (Lynher Valley) on a “second generation” HLC for Cornwall was also considered.

Six projects at design stage had sufficiently advanced draft project designs to be considered: Buckinghamshire, Dorset, North Lincolnshire (ex Axholme), Northamptonshire, Staffordshire and Isle of Wight (IOW).

The Review’s Method

The Review was divided into two main tasks:

1. a global comparison of methods based on the analysis of freshly-collected data, and
2. an inter-project comparative testing of four selected project methods.

1. Global comparison of the methods

a) Data Collection

24 projects were sent a questionnaire, which gave the Review an opportunity to explore the methods used and the thought processes behind them. The main questionnaire headings were: *General structure of HLC; Information and data sources used; Interpretation; Immediate HLC use; Testing; Applications and Your assessment of HLC.* In some cases, individuals were contacted for further clarification, and gaps were filled from HLC Project Designs and Reports.

16 projects completed the questionnaire, though not all questions were always completed. Seven projects did not respond, usually because their method was identical to another project (eg Derbyshire) or because they were at too early a stage of planning (eg Buckinghamshire).

28 project designs and reports were consulted for more detailed information and to fill any gaps in the questionnaire (Aldred 2001, Bannister 2001, Barnatt et al 2000, Bishop 2002, CAU and LDA 1994, Croft et al 2001, Donachie and Hutcheson 2000, Ede with Darlington 2003, Ford 1999, Herring 1998, Hoyle 1999, Lambrick and Bramhill 1999, Miller 1997). Ten projects did not submit a project design or report for consultation, often for the same reasons as not submitting a questionnaire. The more important gaps (eg Herefordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire) were filled by visits. Discussions within the Steering Group were also particularly important in focussing ideas and the direction of the review, and providing a forum for discussing problems as they were encountered.

Some projects were visited during the Review, so that the project officer could gain hands on experience of other HLC methods and practice, and gain insights into how each methodology was created, and the thought processes that led to it. 6 projects were visited: Lancashire, Cornwall, Devon, Herefordshire, Peak District and Essex, and a further 3 projects connected with the development of the Somerset HLC were also consulted: Somerset, Hampshire

and Cotswolds. In addition, it can be assumed that these 9 fairly represent 6 linked projects (eg Gloucestershire linked to Cotswolds).

A workshop was organised at the Society of Antiquaries towards the end of the project on 22 March 2002. Interim conclusions were presented to provide a forum for debate and further input from practitioners. About 50 invited people attended the workshop, all HLC practitioners or those connected with a HLC project. Discussion focused on methods: the identification of common ground between most projects and the identification of methods that were considered useful even if not commonly adopted (periphery). The issues raised in discussion were incorporated into the Review.

b) Analysis

Because of the speed of HLC's development, comparison between projects needs to be calibrated against each method's position in that development. The evolution of one method to another was assessed by identifying which projects influenced others and in what ways; both positive and negative influences were assessed. Aspects of the evolution could be identified that influenced the future direction of the methodology, and a series of overlapping waves of methodological development were defined. The results of this stage are described in chapter 2.

Input and output mechanisms of HLC were assessed by analysis based on a categorisation of the methods drawn from the

evolutionary study. This was couched largely in terms of whether they used pre-defined classification or recorded attributes for later creation of types, and the way they approach time-depth. These categories, or “families”, are presented in chapter 3.

The main technique of analysis was based on comparing and contrasting details of the methodology against a number of Comparison Headings, subdivided into *class types*. As a result of this comparison, a definition of core, periphery and trends in the method were produced for each main heading: that is

- *core*, the parts common to most or all methods, well-established, tried and tested,
- *periphery*, the parts that were not common, but were diverse between methods, whether “old” approaches, or more recent, many of which will be absorbed into the core of future projects,
- *trend*, most recent developments and implied direction in the methods.

The conclusions to this analysis are summarised in chapter 4.

2. Inter-project comparisons

The methodologies of a few selected projects were also compared in more detail by inter-project testing. Four different project methods were applied by experienced practitioners of that method to the same test area, a 10x10 km sq in Surrey, where a full county HLC already existed. Some of the methods were also tested in each other's areas. In order to maximise the differences between methods to help comparison, the four methods chosen (Cornwall, Essex, Herefordshire and Lancashire) were selected to cover different stages of HLC evolution and indeed different assumptions about HLC. It was not expected that the results would be identical, and in the event the differences were extremely instructive, although not all explicable by virtue of different stages of development. The results were compared using key criteria such as methodological problems, functionality, comparability and HL character, and the conclusions are set out in chapter 5.