



FACT SHEETS & GOOD PRACTICE NOTES

Number 4

FACT SHEET

Historic Landscape Characterisation

What is Historic Landscape Characterisation?

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) forms part of a national programme led by English Heritage.

HLC is a desk based method used to define and map the historic and archaeological dimension of the present day landscape.

The underlying philosophy behind HLC is that particular areas of present day landscape which display similar characteristics and attributes and have similar land use history can be allocated to a particular Historic Landscape Type. This Type can be mapped, described and compared to other Types in the landscape, allowing a deeper understanding of the contribution of historic land use patterns to present day landscape character.

HLC is concerned with “time depth” in the landscape. Time depth can be defined as the landscape changes associated with different eras which effect and change the landscape.. The HLC seeks to record previous episodes of land use which contribute to the character of landscape but which are not the dominant Historic Landscape Type. This helps to build up a picture of the complex interaction between people and place.

HLC is concerned with the totality of the present day landscape, not merely the special or the unique. As with any characterisation, it is relatively broad brush and is designed to be used at a landscape scale and to provide a greater understanding of the setting and context of individual places and sites.

Every part of the landscape has some form of historic character which may be affected by any given change differently. The HLC dataset is designed to be a “value neutral” dataset which analysis and records the historic and archaeological dimension of the whole landscape, rather than focusing on the special and the unique.

Does the AONB have its own Historic Landscape Characterisation?

Yes, between January 2008 and August 2009 the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) undertook its own Historic Landscape Characterisation funded by English Heritage.

The AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation exists as a dataset used within a Geographical Information System and a written report which is accessible from the HLC website. This dataset consists of 4337 parcels of land covering the whole AONB recorded in one GIS layer. Each of these parcels has an entry in an associated data table which contains a range of data. The most important elements are:

1. **Present day Historic Landscape Type** - this represents the most readily perceived historic landscape character present in the modern day landscape.
2. **Previous Historic Landscape Types** – evidence for older previous land uses which remain as fragments in today’s landscape.
3. **Other information** recorded for each parcel of land e.g. unique ID, place name evidence, boundary loss and gain, field size, time period, and source information.

Each Historic Landscape Type is supported by a detailed written description. These also contain distribution maps and pictorial examples.

Why should I use the Historic Landscape Characterisation?

The HLC is an evidence base on the historic character of the present day landscape which can be used to make better informed decisions which affect the landscape of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The HLC has a wide range of applications because it provides a comprehensive overview of the historic landscape of the AONB. It can be used to inform positive landscape management, to supplement information found in Landscape Character Assessments, to inform spatial planning decisions, and to aid partnership working learning and outreach.

How should the AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation be used?

HLC as a tool is not concerned with preserving the landscape unchanged or with recreating a particular point in the landscapes past. Rather it seeks to understand the contribution that past human activity and land use has made to present day landscape character so that any future change can respect local character and distinctiveness

The Historic Landscape Characterisation is not intended to be used in isolation and should be used alongside other datasets where appropriate. HLC focuses on one aspect of landscape, and should be consulted alongside other datasets to gain a holistic view of any given landscape. These other datasets include the county based Historic Environment Records. and the relevant Landscape Character Assessment. The AONB Landscape Character Assessment can be downloaded from www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk .

How do I find out more?

General guidance on Historic Landscape Characterisation can be found on the English Heritage website www.english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation. The English Heritage booklet on “Using Historic Landscape Characterisation” can also be downloaded from this webpage. Further details of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation and a downloadable version of the full project report can be found at www.historiclandscape.co.uk . More information on the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB can be found at www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk.

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