



**Landscape
Character
Network**

Issue 21 Winter 2006

News

CCN relaunches as Landscape Character Network

In this issue

Welcome to the Landscape Character Network,
Landscape Character Assessment
in the Republic of Ireland,
'Heritage Counts' towards landscape character



From the Editor

Welcome to issue 21 of the new-style LCN News: observant readers will have noticed that the name of the newsletter, and the network, has changed with this issue, from the Countryside Character Network to the Landscape Character Network (LCN). The change of name is accompanied by a dramatic redesign of the network newsletter and website. For more information about these changes, and about future LCN developments, see the feature article in this issue. This issue of LCN News also contains a feature on LCA in the Republic of Ireland, the first of a series of articles on LCA from a European perspective, and an opinion piece from Carys Swanwick, lead author of the 2002 LCA Guidance for England and Scotland. Please continue submitting ideas and articles to LCN News: your input is essential to its success (for information on submissions, please contact the LCN News editorial team).

Best regards

The Editor.

Cover image: Fens under snow, Holme Fen National Nature Reserve Cambridgeshire © English Nature / Peter Wakely

Contents Image ► Winter theme 'dead wood for invertebrates' Thorpe Wood, Peterborough © English Nature / Peter Wakely

News/comment header Image: Snow covered moorland, Yorkshire Dales National Park © English Nature / Paul Glendell



The Landscape Character Network is funded by The Countryside Agency Landscape, Access and Recreation division and co-ordinated by Countryside



www.landscapecharacter.org.uk

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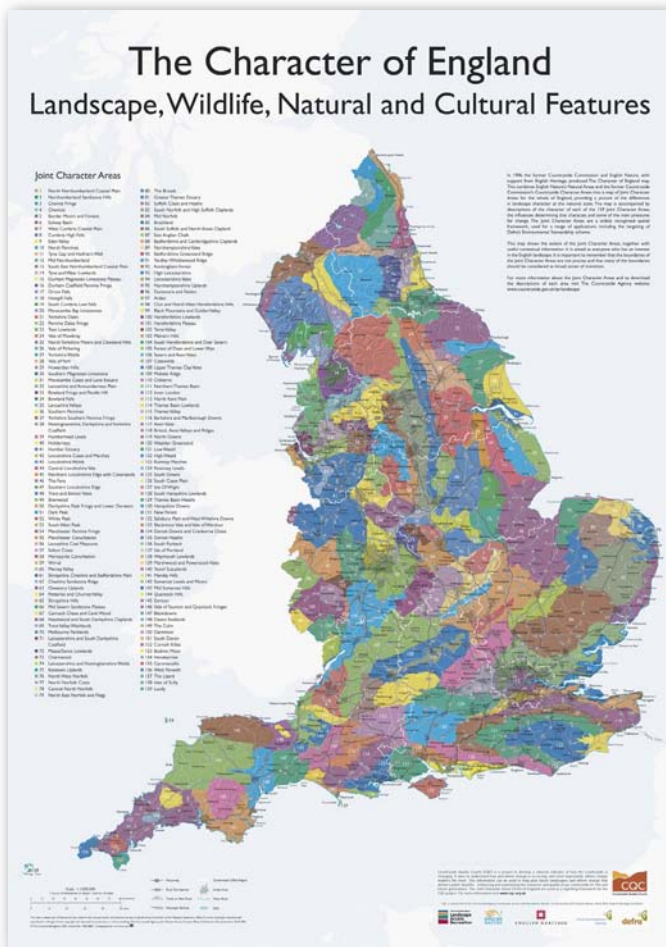
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Updated Character Area map of England



▲ The Character of England map © The Countryside Agency. Map Data © Crown Copyright.

The Countryside Agency has published an updated Joint Character Area (JCA) map of England, providing a picture of the differences in landscape character at the national scale. The map, which is available free-of-charge from Countryside Agency publications, shows the extent of the JCAs and their relationship with landform and major rivers, major cities and towns, transport infrastructure and Government Office regions.

The updated map develops the Character of England map, produced in 1996 by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature with support from English Heritage. The Character of England map combined English Nature's Natural Areas and the former Countryside Commission's Countryside Character Areas into a map of Joint Character Areas for the whole of England. It has never been reprinted, and as such the publication of the updated map is a great opportunity for all those with an interest in landscape to obtain an invaluable visual aid and reference.

The new map has been created as a timely reminder of the Countryside Character Initiative as the Countryside Agency, Rural Development Service and English Nature prepare for the creation of Natural England, and the important role the JCAs will play in the work of the new agency (though the term 'JCA' will probably be reviewed in the near future). Within Government, the JCAs are a widely recognised spatial framework and are currently used for a range of applications, including the targeting of Defra's Environmental Stewardship scheme. They are also used by the Countryside Quality Counts project as the spatial framework for reporting change in the English countryside.

For more information about the Joint Character Areas of England visit

www.countryside.gov.uk/lar/landscape

To order a free copy of the updated Joint Character Area map of England, visit the Countryside Agency publications webpages and quote reference CAX 191.

<http://www.countryside.gov.uk/Publications/Index.asp>

Countryside Quality Counts - Countryside Agency thanks consultees

The first round of the current Countryside Quality Counts (CQC) consultation is now complete, with over 250 individuals and organisations having made a contribution to the development of a national indicator of countryside change for the period 1998-2003. Andrew Baker of the Countryside Agency Landscape, Access and Recreation division has extended his thanks to all who have played a part in making the project a success:

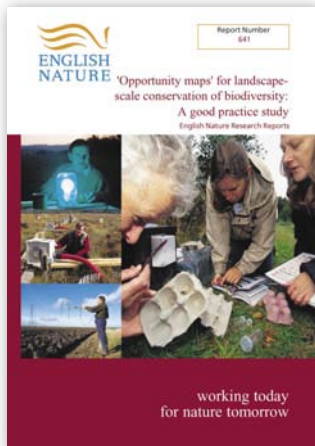
"The first round of consultation was hugely successful and a wealth of data has been generated. The Countryside Agency LAR division is very grateful for the time and effort that you have invested in the project: your local knowledge is essential for updating the national indicator of countryside change."

Analysis of the results of the first round of the consultation is now underway: this will be followed by a second round of consultation, commencing late April 2006, that will provide the opportunity to comment on the significance of any measured change.

LCN members are encouraged to visit the CQC website for the latest news and to view a map showing the level of coverage achieved (www.cqc.org.uk).



English Nature publish best practice study on 'opportunity' maps for the landscape scale conservation of biodiversity



In November 2005 English Nature published a best practice study exploring the emerging field of opportunity mapping for the landscape-scale conservation of biodiversity. 'Opportunity maps', sometimes described as 'nature maps' or 'ecological networks', are defined by the report as "broad-scale, strategic visions for change." They offer a spatially-based tool for identifying where environmental enhancement could or should be delivered in the future, using areas of

environmental value as a starting point. The report recommends opportunity maps as holistic approaches to improving biodiversity which will recognize other environmental interests, including landscape, the historic environment, access and resource protection.

The report, authored by Gavin Saunders of TerraFirma Consultancy and Alison Parfitt of Alison Parfitt Associates, summarises all known examples of such maps on a district, county or regional scale in England, some 40 projects in total, with references and links to resources. Peer review seminars with practitioners working in this field were held in March 2005 to exchange experience relating to process, methodology and communication issues involved in producing opportunity maps. The report endorses the use of appropriate Landscape Character Assessments as a spatial framework which will enable links to be made between biodiversity and landscape interests, and provide for the mapping of opportunity areas which span artificial administrative boundaries.

For more information about this study, see CCN News issue 19 (Summer 2005).

<http://www.landscapecharacter.org.uk/news-2005.html>

English Nature Research Reports Number 641: Best practice study - 'opportunity maps' for landscape-scale conservation of biodiversity is available as a hardcopy, free of charge, from English Nature Publications: on their search page, type '641' in the Catalogue code/Research Report number field. The Research Report, and its accompanying Research information note, are also available for download as PDF files.

http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/Pub_Search.asp

Environmental Stewardship - over a million hectares under agreement



Image © Nick Turner / Countryside Agency.

▲ Farmer and FWAG advisor, Compton Abdale in the Cotswolds AONB

In October 2005 Defra announced that applications for Environmental Stewardship agreements had topped one million hectares. At the time of writing (mid January 2006) there are 12,000 live agreements in place with farmers and other land managers under the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) schemes, with over 1,390,000 hectares under agreement.

Progress towards introducing the advanced Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme, which is targeted at conservation and enhancement of the environment, has been slower. The first HLS agreements will come into place in early 2006.

Environmental Stewardship provides the funding to farmers and other land managers in England who deliver effective environmental management on their land. It replaces all earlier agri-environment schemes, and its key objectives include the maintenance and enhancement of landscape quality and character. It has two tiers, and both the Entry and Higher levels emphasise the importance of Landscape Character: Defra, in discussion with other Government agencies, has outlined the key characteristics of the different parts of the English countryside within the 159 Joint Character Areas (JCAs) as defined by the Countryside Agency and English Nature. The JCAs are recommended as a framework for guiding the selection of options for the Entry Level Scheme, and they also guide the more specific, mandatory targets of the Higher Level Scheme.

For more information about Environmental Stewardship, visit the Defra website:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/es/default.htm>

Database of LCAs in England: Countryside Agency encourage the submission of records

The Database of Landscape Character Assessments in England is the most complete available resource describing the details, methodology and applications of Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) across England. The database has been established by the Countryside Agency and continues to be maintained and updated as a key resource of the Landscape Character Network.

The database aims to widen the use of assessments by providing a central resource with details of how to access locally held information. The database is accessible via the Landscape Character Network website, and includes an interactive map allowing users to search for LCAs by clicking on local government areas or Joint Character Areas.

The Countryside Agency wishes to ensure that all new LCAs are included in this database. The data for each LCA should be submitted by those who have completed or commissioned the study via an online tool on the Landscape Character Network website (see below).

To this end, The Countryside Agency recommends that the following text should be included in project briefs for Landscape Character Assessments by commissioning bodies:

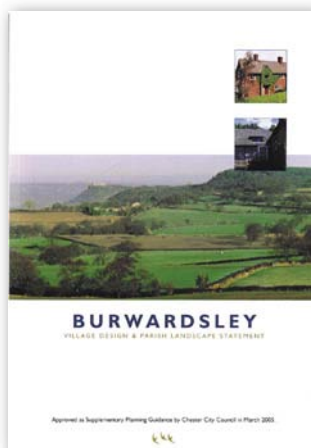
“A record describing the LCA should be completed in The Database of Landscape Character Assessments in England, which is accessible via the Landscape Character Network website. The database is structured into three main sections.

- Basic information about the LCA including the name, date, geographical extent and access details
- Summary of the LCA methodology
- Description of any existing or proposed applications of the LCA

Consultants will be required to complete at least the first two sections describing the basic information about the LCA and summary of the LCA methodology. A half day should be allocated to this task. The online collection tool can be found on the Landscape Character Network website (www.landscapecharacter.org.uk).”

A review of the The Database of Landscape Character Assessments in England will be carried out during spring 2006. If you would like to add or edit a record in the database visit www.landscapecharacter.org.uk or contact the LCN secretariat.

Launch of first combined Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement



The value of community participation in helping to assess and manage the landscape has been highlighted in a study facilitated by the Cheshire Landscape Trust and The University of Salford, supported by Chester City Council and the Countryside Agency. Entitled the ‘Parish Landscape Statement Project’, the study sought to test the application of the Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

methodology at parish level, by working with local residents in two Cheshire parishes: Weaverham and Burwardsley. Three years since its inception, the project has now reached a positive conclusion with the publication of the first ever combined Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement for Burwardsley. Furthermore, the document has been approved by Chester City Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), thereby giving it legal standing in the statutory spatial planning system. (For more information, see CCN News 14.)

Furthermore, the document has been approved by Chester City Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), thereby giving it legal standing in the statutory spatial planning system.

The Burwardsley Village Design Statement is all about making local character count in new development, while the Parish Landscape Statement describes what makes Burwardsley distinctive. The aim of this combined resource is to encourage high quality development that is not only in the right place, but which respects and enhances its surroundings. It can also inform land management decisions that will help the economy, as well as sustain the environment. It is hoped that this national demonstration project, funded by the Countryside Agency, will show the way forward for local communities to play an active role in the future planning of their areas.

For more information contact John Gittins of the Cheshire Landscape Trust: cltoffice@tiscali.co.uk

The Burwardsley Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement is dedicated to George Bramall, the former co-ordinator of the Burwardsley Working Group, who died just prior to publication of the Statement. From start to finish, George was the driving force behind the document, providing a vision and ensuring its delivery through many hours of practical work. He will be greatly missed.

Image ► Urupukapuka, Bay of Islands, New Zealand.
© Stephen Cope



Reflections from the far side of the world

Carys Swanwick is a Professor of Landscape at the University of Sheffield. She has played a leading role in the development of approaches to Landscape Character Assessment over the last twenty years, and she was lead author of the 2002 LCA Guidance for England and Scotland.

I am writing this in Bay of Islands on the north east coast of New Zealand, looking out over a Pacific Ocean which is the clearest shade of azure blue and green that I think I have ever seen. I am in New Zealand for a three month sabbatical visit and there can be no more perfect place to meditate on landscape matters. Before I left the UK I spent most of the Christmas holiday writing up some research on interpretations of natural beauty. This initially prompted these reflections.

While researching natural beauty I came across (thanks to one of my research students) a book called ‘The Aesthetics of the Natural Environment’, written by Emily Brady, a philosopher at the University of Lancaster. Reading this I was pleased, and not a little surprised, to find that it deals with landscape character assessment, welcoming it as a useful step in thinking about landscape issues, but condemning it for neglecting the aesthetic dimensions of landscape. Initially I felt quite defensive about the work that many of us are involved in and then decided that this simply demonstrated a lack of knowledge on the part of the author.

But then I talked to my husband John about this same theme. He has shown a remarkable interest in my area of work recently – a result, among other things, of a flight in a hot air balloon over rural Northamptonshire in September. He started doing his own research on ideas about landscape, people and place and has been keeping a detailed journal of his thoughts ever since. Entirely without any guidance from me he found, courtesy of the internet, some professional landscape character assessments describing the parts of Leicestershire where he grew up. His response to them – turgid, uninspiring, and failing to capture the spirit of the place as I recall - reminded me of Emily Brady. Again I was defensive but I did begin to think there must be something in this.

Arriving in a strange landscape has confirmed that view. I have little if any knowledge (yet) of the New Zealand landscape. I don’t know about the geology and I can’t identify the plants. I have only just begun to find out about the complex history of the Maori peoples and their spiritual relationship with the landscape and the history of European immigrants and their intervention in the place. So my reaction to the Bay of Islands landscape before me has to be primarily an aesthetic one – I could not do justice to describing the character of this landscape without referring to the complex interplay of land and water, the sparkling colour of the sea, the luminous light, and the constant movement of boats over the water, to name just a few of the things I can see. Even if I was making a professional assessment I would have failed if I didn’t capture those dimensions of the landscape.

So maybe Emily Brady is right. Maybe in our desire to get away from the now unfashionable ideas about beauty and scenery, and to be as factual and scientific as possible in our descriptions of landscape, as befits a modern professional approach, we have forgotten that most people, without knowledge of what underlies character, react above all to the aesthetic aspects of the landscape. The LCA guidance clearly says that we should cover this in assessments to ensure that we really capture the spirit of the places we are dealing with. But I wonder how many of us succeed in that? Are we too willing to rely on what other people, like travel writers both ancient and modern, poets or authors, have written and feel unable to capture the aesthetic dimensions ourselves? Perhaps we should all go away and read our descriptions out loud to someone who knows the landscape and see if it paints the right picture for them. Well, it’s just a thought!





Welcome to the Landscape Character Network

“the LCN is an effective means of keeping up-to-date with developments in landscape character assessment”

Established by the Countryside Agency in 1999, the Countryside Character Network has grown to become an invaluable resource for anyone interested in Landscape Character Assessment. Now, after more than five years of success, it is being revitalised and re-launched as the ‘Landscape Character Network’.

What's in a name?

From ‘Countryside’ to ‘Landscape’ - the reason behind the name change is to better reflect the broader remit of the network, which aims to promote Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) as tool for understanding and managing all landscapes, including the relationship with town and seascape characterisation.

“The Countryside Agency recognises the increasing importance of Landscape Character Assessment as a tool for planning future landscapes,” says Rachael Mills, the new LCN lead at the Countryside Agency. “The name change clearly identifies the Landscape Character Network as the first port of call for information and good practice in this field. As such, we would like to thank LCN members for their continued support and enthusiasm, and encourage anyone with an interest in landscape to join the network and share their ideas.”

New Format, Same Substance

In this fast developing field, the LCN is an effective means of keeping up-to-date with developments in landscape character assessment and, importantly, its applications in landscape planning and management. Aside from the name change, the LCN website has been redesigned and re-structured to improve its effectiveness as the primary resource for sharing ideas and experience. Since its launch in 2002, the site has steadily grown to include a wide range of content, including LCA guidance and case studies, topic papers offering detail on specific aspects of the approach, workshop proceedings, a discussion forum and the National Database of LCAs, which can be searched to find out about local assessments.

The quarterly network newsletter, LCN News, has also been re-designed. It now includes comment from leading practitioners and articles on LCA from a European perspective, in addition to news stories and features submitted by network members. Current and back issues of the network newsletter are available for download on the website.

The LCN is continuing its programme of topical workshops to discuss wide-ranging issues connected with landscape character and LCA. The workshops target a cross-section of interested participants and include presentations of case studies by practitioners, as well as open and lively discussion. Future topics include ‘Renewable Energy in the Landscape’ and ‘The Character of Green Infrastructure’. Proceedings of previous events are available on the website.

Image ▲ Ploughing in Wylde Valley, Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.
© Countryside Agency/
Nick Smith



Image ► Monket House, Farndale West, looking across the Dale to Blakey Ridge, North Yorkshire Moors and Cleveland Hills.
@ Countryside Agency / Mike Kipling



Network History

The Countryside Character Network (the former name for the LCN) was established in 1999 as part of the Countryside Agency’s ‘Countryside Character Initiative’. The Initiative itself was set up in response to the need for a new approach to landscape assessment – an approach that would look at the whole of England’s countryside, rather than just specific designated areas, and provide a consistent national framework within which more detailed local landscape assessments would sit. This new approach led to the task of mapping the country into 159 separate, distinctive Joint Character Areas (JCAs). The features that define the landscape of each area have been recorded in individual descriptions that explain what makes one area different from another, and shows how that character has arisen and how it is changing.

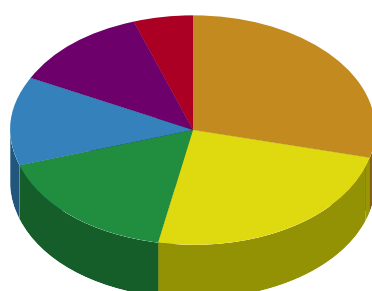
The LCA approach has gained recognition as a valuable framework for understanding local distinctiveness and using this to help inform decision-making. The need to consider landscape character has been endorsed by the Government in Planning Policy Statements and is one of the central aims of Environmental Stewardship. New applications of LCA have brought landscape and planning professionals together with communities, developers, land managers and many others; working on projects involving public participation, capacity and sensitivity studies, Local Development Frameworks, visioning future landscapes and much more besides.

The Network: Who Is Involved?

The Landscape Character Network is funded by the Countryside Agency Landscape, Access and Recreation (LAR) division and co-ordinated by Countryside. Membership of the LCN is free of charge and open to all. The network currently comprises over 700 members from a broad range of backgrounds, providing a hub of knowledge and expertise from the UK, Europe and around the world.

“The network clearly attracts practitioners in the field of LCA, but more broadly it’s open to anyone interested in the character or sense of place of their surroundings”, says Jonathan Porter, LCN co-ordinator and Technical Director of Countryside. “Some of the resources we provide are tailored towards people who use LCA as part of their day-to-day work; while others are designed for anybody wishing to learn about or discuss landscape issues local to themselves. Everybody is welcome!”

Currently, the make-up of the LCN membership is as follows:

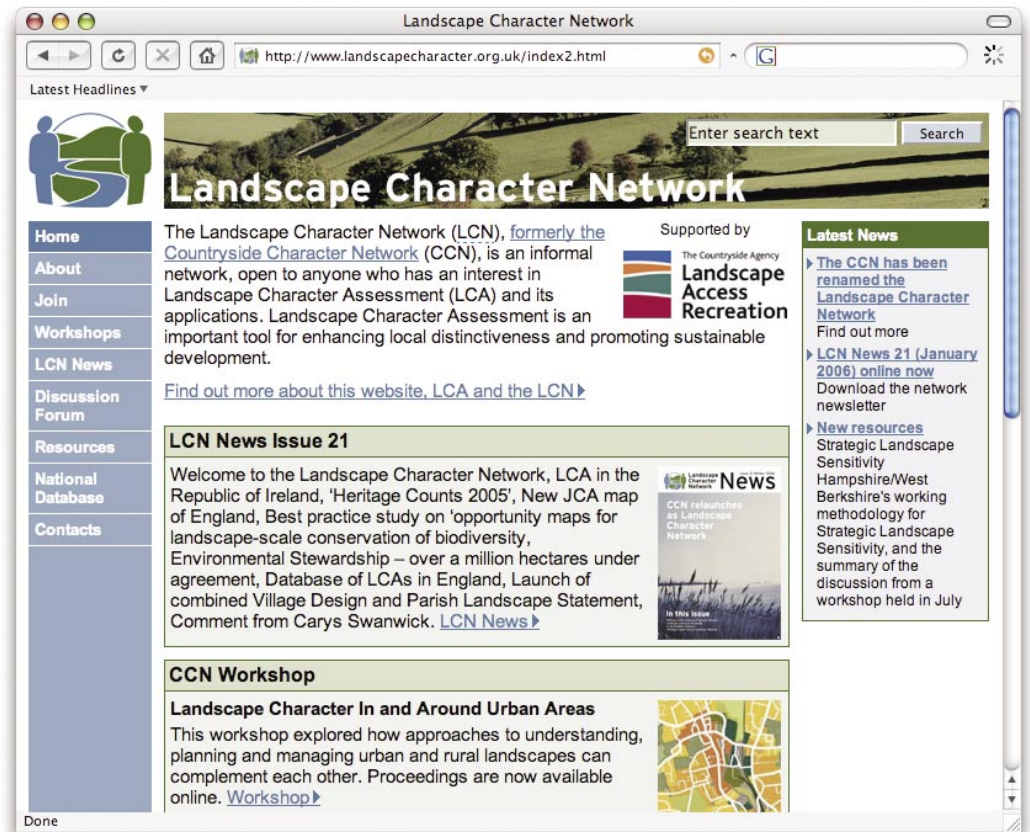


- Business (206)
- Local Government (174)
- Central Government / Government Agency (120)
- University (90)
- Private Interest / Community Groups / NGOs (87)
- National Parks / AONBs (36)



“if you have any ideas or suggestions for improving the LCN then please don’t hesitate to get in touch.”

Image ► Your new and improved LCN website



Your Network Needs You!

Says Jonathan Porter: “Looking ahead to the current phase of the network, we hope to bring you the most informative and current information on LCA from across the membership – and as always, we need your input in achieving this aim. News on projects and events, article proposals, topical discussion and other means of feedback are available through the new LCN website. Likewise, if you have any ideas or suggestions for improving the LCN then please don’t hesitate to get in touch.”

For more information, including details on joining the Landscape Character Network, visit the new website at: www.landscapecharacter.org.uk

IMPORTANT: the former website address will remain active in the short-term. However, we encourage you all to update your bookmarks and website links.

For enquiries about the network and/or Landscape Character Assessment contact:

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Background information on the Countryside Character Initiative is available on the Countryside Agency website at: www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/index.asp



Landscape Character Assessment in the Republic of Ireland

In the first of what will be a series of feature articles looking at Landscape Character Assessment from a European perspective, Helen Farrell and Ken Boyle of the Department of Planning & Environmental Management at Dublin Institute of Technology, and Krysia Rybaczuk of the Geography Department, Trinity College, University of Dublin, write here about the draft guidelines for Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland, with reference and comparison to the existing UK guidelines published in 2002 by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage. The paper covers the uses and users of Irish LCA, its history in Ireland and its current status.

Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland does not enjoy the same level of attention as in the UK, nor is it used as frequently or in such a variety of contexts. However, new guidelines are due to be issued and this article seeks to outline the Irish draft guidelines and highlight contrasts with the UK guidelines.

Landscape classification and assessment took an aesthetic approach when it first emerged in Ireland. Areas of scenic or visual importance in Ireland were first identified in a survey by An Foras Forbartha in 1977 (Cabot, 1977). The survey report presented a national overview of outstanding landscapes. These landscapes included natural and man-made features, such as settlements and field patterns. The report also referred to the protection of landscape quality, based on the vulnerability of the scenic resource (Cabot, 1977). The report went on to list various areas in the inventory. The records in Table 1.1 offer examples of specific areas included in the study. Many local councils in Ireland have also carried out a form of landscape assessment based on their own criteria. These often take the form of a scenic evaluation, in which areas are zoned according to their sensitivity to development.

Image ▲ 'A farm track in the northwest Burren, Co. Clare, with extensive limestone pavement in the background'.
© Helen Farrell



“Landscape classification and assessment took an aesthetic approach when it first emerged in Ireland.”

Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland today is described as a means of discerning the character of the landscape, based on landform and land cover. To this end, no value judgments are made about the landscape. Instead, sensitivity to different types of development is considered, based on physical features such as elevation, land use, and the presence and type of vegetation, structures and settlements. This information is intended to provide inputs into regional planning and development studies and strategies. It is expected to be included in county development plans and used in development control decision making.

The Department of the Environment in Ireland is currently finalising national guidelines on landscape Character Assessment. The draft guidelines state that the characteristics of the landscape and its landforms should be recorded and classified but that the aesthetic aspects of landscape should not be recorded. Later in the assessment, values (historical, cultural and religious) are considered. Using this information, it is intended that the landscape can then be assessed in terms of its ability to accommodate development, depending on its sensitivity to change and the suitability of any proposed development (Dept. of the Environment and Local Government, 2000). As an assessment method, it provides the means of classifying the landscape in as objective a way as possible and also offers an empirical basis for further study.

Site name	Comeragh Mountains	Burren
Landscape type	Extensive upland area	Karst, partially glaciated
Distinctive features	Glaciated high mountains with summit plateau at 700m. Deep corries and spectacular cliffs and mountain lakes. Lies between Rivers Nire and Suir. Botanical and geological interest	Horizontally bedded carboniferous limestone sometimes capped with shales (e.g. Slieve Elva). Bare limestone pavements with rock platforms, terraces and cliffs. Northern coastal region noticeably glaciated. Dry stone walling. Coastal cliffs and sand dunes. Outstanding botanical and entomological interest
Hazards	Infrastructure, modification of hill land	Afforestation, housing, recreational development

Table ► Areas of Scenic or Visual Importance (Cabot, 1977).

Landscape Character Assessment has been applied in a number of Irish counties, using the guidelines developed by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. Irish landscape character assessment does not include participatory methods and is aimed at a narrower cross-section of users than recommended in the UK guidelines, but is otherwise similar (Dept. of Environment and Local Government, 2000).

Landscape Character Assessment draft guidelines for Ireland were published by the Department of the Environment and Local Government in 2000. They recognise a need to assess landscapes systematically in order to protect and develop them. Landscape Character Assessment is not intended as a conservation tool in particular, and all landscapes, whether potentially valuable in habitat or conservation terms or not, are to be assessed in this way. The guidelines are intended for incorporation into planning practice, and are therefore aimed at assessors from the local authorities – most likely from the planning department. Specifically, the methodology is intended for use by GIS officers, landscape architects, geologists and geomorphologists, land use specialists, soil scientists and remote sensing experts.

The Irish methodology is a means of assessing “all that is visible” (Dept. of Environment and Local Government, 2000), although it is noted in the document that streetscapes and urban areas could not feasibly be assessed in this manner. The method is therefore confined to rural areas and the rural-urban fringe. It is emphasised in the guidelines that the technique is to be applied to “ordinary” landscapes, too, and not just those that are outstanding or exceptionally beautiful.

The need for landscape Character Assessment is explained in the Irish draft guidelines: they recognise that the landscape is changed by all developments, and therefore there is a need to be “respectful and creative” in the implementation of such projects. There is also a need to move away from ranking or grading the aesthetics of the landscape, to a more factual descriptive approach to assessment. The landscape is mentioned in terms of being a national asset for recreation and tourism, and also in providing a sense of place and belonging. Any alterations to these landscapes must therefore aim for sustainable development, impact minimisation and appropriate development only (Dept. of the Environment and Local Government, 2000). The guidelines are intended to heighten awareness of the importance of the landscape and to provide guidance to planners and to the producers of development plans. Planning law alone is no longer felt to be comprehensive enough to enable effective landscape management, conservation and development in Ireland.





Image ► Roadside hedgerows outside Newcastle village, in the south of Co. Tipperary.’
© Helen Farrell

Additionally, the production of these guidelines by central government will set a uniform method for all local authorities, meaning that there will be national compatibility of results. It is also hoped that a national level map of landscape character will be produced. The guidelines suggest that the methods can be used as part of a sustainability monitoring programme, particularly for housing and road development, forestry, urban fringe developments, agri-environmental schemes and in the context of the national spatial strategy (Dept. of the Environment and Local Government, 2000).

The UK Landscape Character Assessment methodology, meanwhile, is aimed at a broader audience than the Irish guidelines, incorporating central, regional and local levels of government, the private and voluntary sectors. The UK guidelines mention likely participants in the method as being farmers, foresters, highway engineers and other stakeholders – stakeholder participation is emphasised. This is not mentioned in the Irish guidelines. Specialists will also be drawn from a wider range of professions, specialisms and backgrounds.

The UK methodology is described as providing a means of assessing, in a structured way, the distinctiveness, character and value of the landscape as a tool for planning and an aid to decision making. It provides a means of identifying environmental and cultural features, monitoring change, understanding sensitivity to change and making informed recommendations on developments. This is a much broader remit than the Irish guidelines suggest, with more emphasis on conservation and monitoring change.

Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland appears to be aimed at the identification of zones’ suitability for development (Dept. of the Environment and Local Government, 2000), and is generally a less wide-ranging technique than LCA in the UK, which is intended to inform and enhance the planning and conservation process (Swanick, 2002). Irish government policy has also rarely considered the landscape, and on the few occasions when it has, the landscape has only been couched in terms of aesthetics and beauty (for example, Cabot, 1977). One of the benefits of the landscape Character Assessment method is its more objective and less value-based approach which considers all landscapes and not just those that are thought to be beautiful. The potential therefore exists to use the landscape Character Assessment guidelines in a broader way in Ireland, as an holistic conservation and policy tool, by using landscape character information to build up a picture of local conditions and environments.

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'Heritage Counts' towards landscape character

Steve Trow of English Heritage tells LCN News about Heritage Counts 2005, the annual state of the historic environment report, which focuses on rural heritage, and uses the Joint Character Areas for a series of spatial analyses of heritage data sets.

On 16th November 2005 English Heritage published Heritage Counts, the fourth annual state of the historic environment report, on behalf of the wider heritage sector. The 2005 report focussed on the heritage of the countryside and, in recognition of this, was launched jointly by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, and Jim Knight, Minister for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Biodiversity.

Referring to the landscape beauty of his South Dorset constituency in his launch speech, Jim Knight picked up the central theme of the report, when he referred to “the absolutely fundamental contribution which the historic environment makes to that beauty”. Tessa Jowell also stressed the need to ensure that natural and historic environment considerations are effectively integrated.

The Heritage Counts report looks at a wide range of historic environment issues in the countryside including the important contribution of HLF and agri-environment funding, the shortfall in craft skill provision, public access and the role of the National Parks and AONBs. The report also presents a series of spatial analyses of heritage data sets using the new core rural/urban definition, the new local authority rurality definition and the Joint Character Areas.

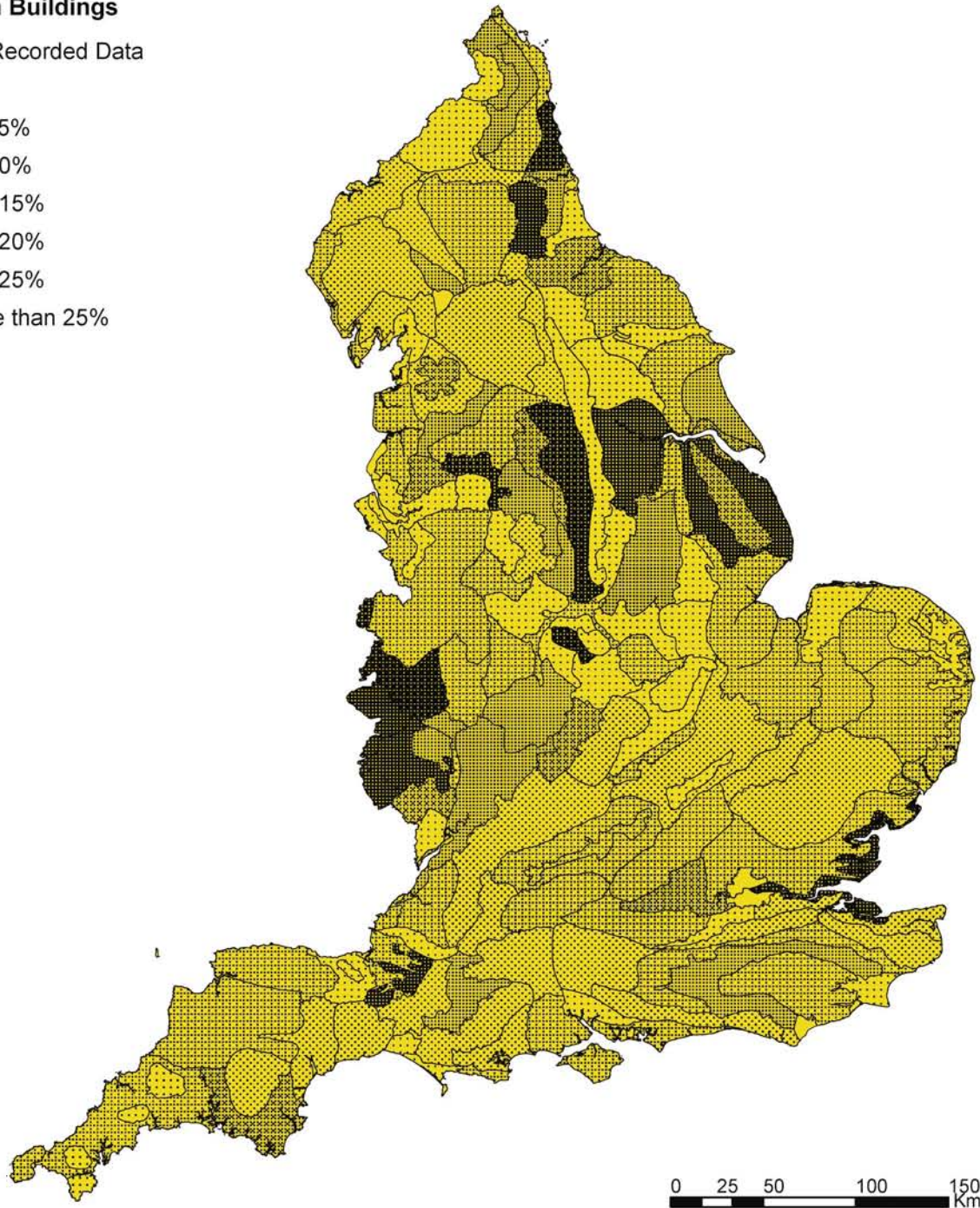
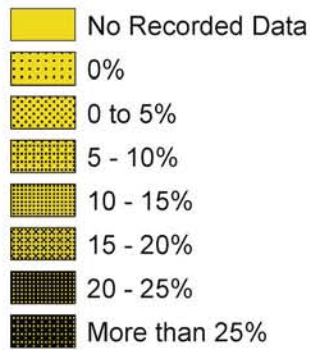
Although heritage considerations were taken into account by the initial Character Area mapping exercise during the 1990's, the complexity of heritage datasets and the difficulties of manipulating this data spatially, significantly limited the contribution it could make to the process. The analyses performed for Heritage Counts therefore represent the first significant opportunity to systematically examine historic environment data in terms of the Joint Character Areas at a national scale.

Image ▲ Croxley Great Barn, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, taken for the Images of England project.



Map 1: Proportion of Farm Buildings List Entries Showing Structural Failure Analysed by Countryside Character Area

% of Farm Buildings

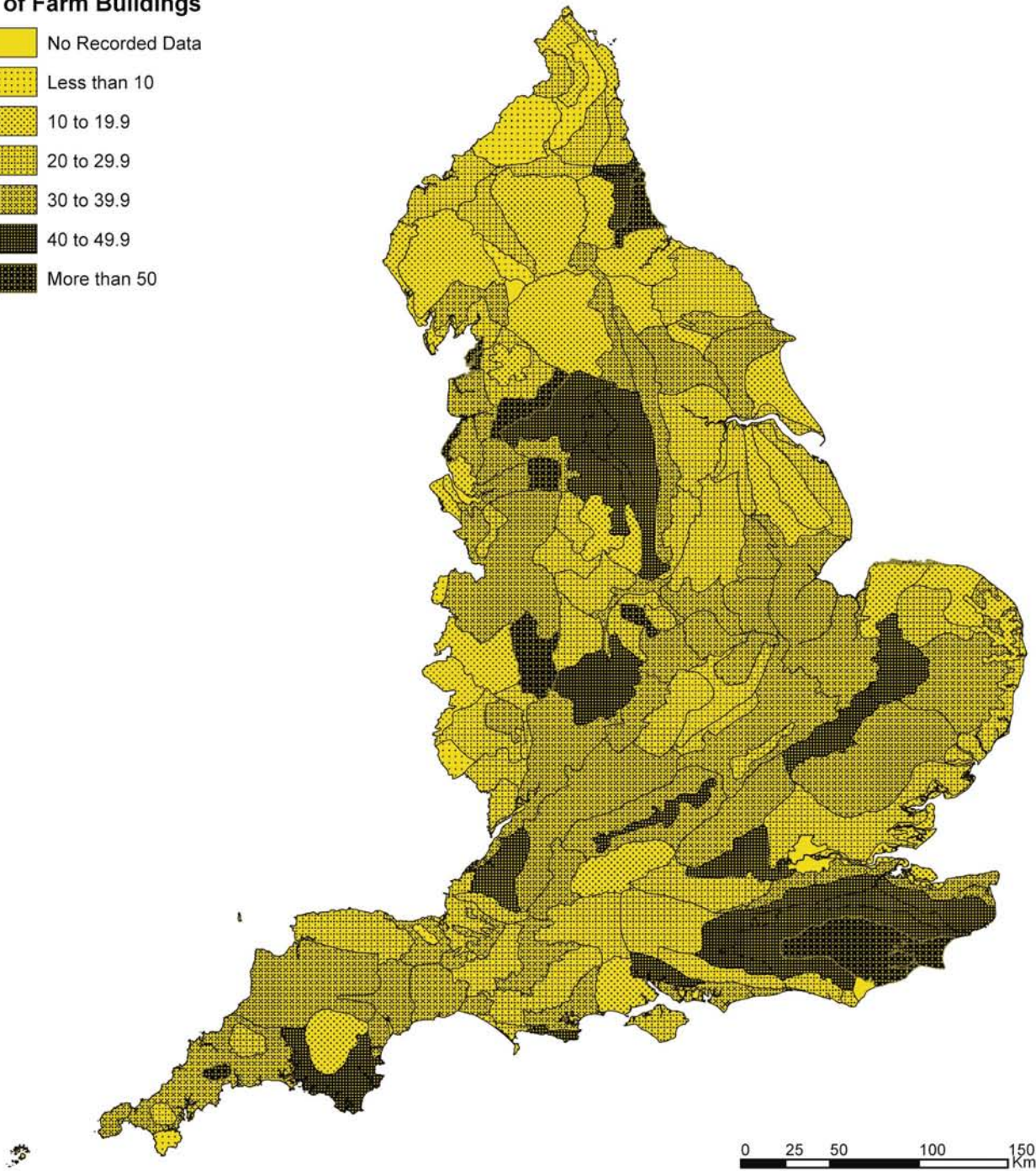
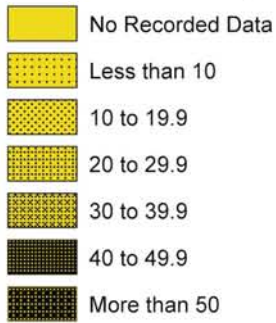


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Map 2: Proportion of Farm Buildings List Entries Converted Analysed by Countryside Character Area

% of Farm Buildings



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Image ► Tiler repairing a barn roof © English Heritage



“The analyses performed for Heritage Counts therefore represent the first significant opportunity to systematically examine historic environment data in terms of the Joint Character Areas at a national scale.”

Among the analyses presented is new data on the state of the historic farm building stock deriving from a survey carried out by the University of Gloucestershire on behalf of English Heritage and the Countryside Agency. This project included an assessment, based on photographic evidence for over 9000 principal listed working farm buildings (i.e. outbuildings rather than farm houses), of the extent of visible dereliction amongst them (see Map 1) and the frequency of their conversion to new uses (see Map 2). It demonstrated that, at the national level, 31% of buildings have been converted to new uses with the majority changing to residential use. Only 3% had been converted to non-residential use, despite government planning guidance promoting alternative uses. In some character areas the rates of conversion were considerably higher (exceeding 50% in the High Weald and Romney Marshes and on the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau). Nationally, 7% of the remaining unconverted buildings were visibly in disrepair, suggesting a far greater proportion will be experiencing other less obvious structural problems. There was considerable variability between character areas, with more than 25% of unconverted buildings showing visible signs of dereliction in the Shropshire Hills, the Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire Coalfield and the South East Northumberland Coastal Plain.

Another important analysis published in Heritage Counts 2005 examined the initial extent and scale of loss of historic parkland over the course of the 20th century. This work was carried out by the Rural Development Service and Countryside Agency in collaboration with English Heritage and involved revisiting a dataset originally compiled during the initial Character Area mapping exercise of the 1990's. This work had involved digitising the boundaries of areas recorded by the Ordnance Survey as parkland and associated woodland on the 1918 and 1995 OS editions. Current GIS capability now permits a far more sophisticated analytical exercise than was possible a decade ago. As a result, it is now possible to calculate - at least provisionally - the extent of core parkland and associated woodland in 1918 within each character area. The period immediately following the First World War is generally considered to be the apogee of parkland development in England. The new analysis confirms the major influence of parkland on countryside character in the south east of England, the Cotswolds, the Chilterns and the High Weald. It also captures the extent of subsequent attrition, demonstrating that around half of the total area mapped as parkland in 1918 was subsequently lost to development, agricultural intensification and, latterly, golf-course construction by the turn of the century. In some character areas up to 70% of the parkland originally mapped now appears to have been lost.

The potential limitations of this dataset must be recognised. The Ordnance Survey appears to have mapped only core areas of parkland and what experts and the public today recognise as designed landscape is likely to be more extensive than the mapped depiction. Nevertheless, the work does serve to illustrate the broad pattern of erosion and survival for a landscape type which is important both in terms of its historic significance and its association with Biodiversity Action Plan priority wood pasture habitat. It has also served to stimulate additional inter-agency research proposals to refine the data and its interpretation.

One key feature of this work is its potential to contribute to the Countryside Quality Counts (CQC) project (see CCN News Issue 19). Although the first phase of this project recognised the significance of the heritage dimension for contributing to its holistic analysis of landscape change, no adequate data were available to permit its integration within the developing indicator. The new Heritage Counts analyses, together with an enhanced historic environment input to the revised Joint Character Area descriptions, provided by English Heritage, should begin to redress this imbalance. As a result, it is anticipated that the historic dimension of landscapes will become more influential in future iterations of the CQC indicator.



◀ *Heritage Counts* is available from the English Heritage Customer Services Department on 0870 333 1181 or e-mail: customers@english-heritage.org.uk
It can also be downloaded from: www.heritagecounts.org.uk

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