Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Stakeholder Group Meeting

19th July 2016

Minutes of Meeting

Attendees:

Abi Tompkins (HLC Officer), Mark Connelly (Cotswolds AONB), Martin Small (Historic England), Peter Herring (Historic England), Roger Thomas (Historic England), Henry Oliver (North Wessex Downs AONB), Chris Kenneford (OCC), Elise Batelaan (OCC), Hugh Coddington (OCC), Nick Mottram (OCC), Richard Oram (OCC), Susan Lisk (OCC), Paul Smith (former OCC), Vicky Fletcher (OCC), David Radford (Oxford City), Sally Stradling (South Ox and Vale), Samantha Allen (South and Vale), Dan Carpenter (TVERC), Alex Godden (West Berks CC), Janice Bamsey (West Ox), & Tom Sunley (Wilts CC).
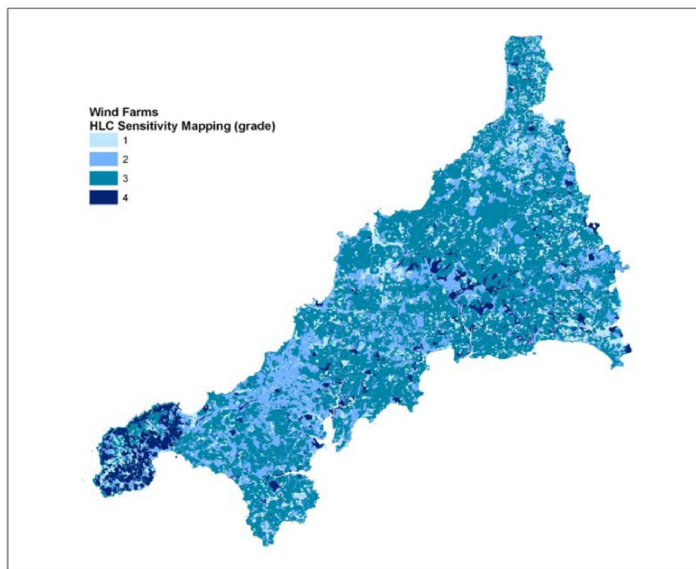
Apologies:

Neil Jackson (Chilterns AONB) & Maria Dopazo (Cherwell)

1) Introduction to HLC – Peter Herring
2) Oxfordshire HLC Progress Report – Abi Tompkins
3) Examples of how HLC data has been used – Abi Tompkins + Discussion
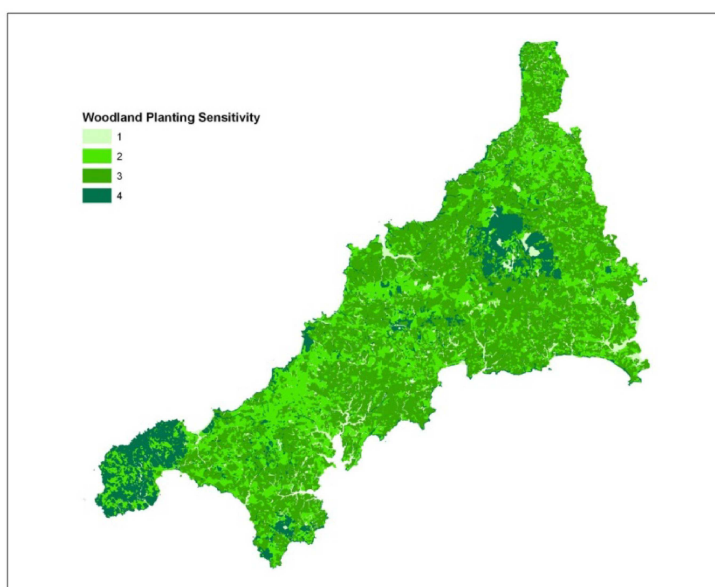4) Dissemination and Reporting – Discussion
5) Final Comments

1)Introduction to HLC (P. Herring)

- HLC has over 20 years history; starting in the early 1990s in Cornwall (1994). At a county level, it is now nearing completion, with Oxfordshire completing the coverage of England.
- The next phase is the national programme which will knit together all the county projects into one England-wide product.
- `Characterisation… raises awareness that the whole landscape is historic… all has historic value and all [parts] should be involved when considering a sustainable future.' Core principles of HLC:
  o Present not past – a spatial framework of current historic understanding, through which the past can be debated and the future better planned for
  o Landscapes not sites – all places have historic character and should be managed accordingly
  o Semi-natural features as well as built environments – hedges, woodlands, lakes all inform character of landscape
  o Characterisation as interpretation – accepts that landscapes can be contested
  o HLC does not ascribe a particular expert view but encourages multiple ways of evaluating landscape – embracing different points of view, values, scenarios.

- o   Landscapes are dynamic and created by change – provides better understanding to make more informed judgements about future change.
- Where HLC data can be/has been used:
  - o   Inform Landscape Character Assessments
  - o   Upstream spatial planning (assessing sensitivity; informing strategy, and policy), including Neighbourhood Plans
  - o   Master-planning
  - o   Starting point for more detailed character studies and research
  - o   Contextualising HERs and all other research
  - o   Public engagement and participation
  - o   Land management
  - o   Historic Environment Countryside Advice
  - o   Partnership building
  - o   Historic Environment Action Plans (HEAPs)
- Example – Cornwall's sensitivity to specific scenarios:
  - o   Tall Structures

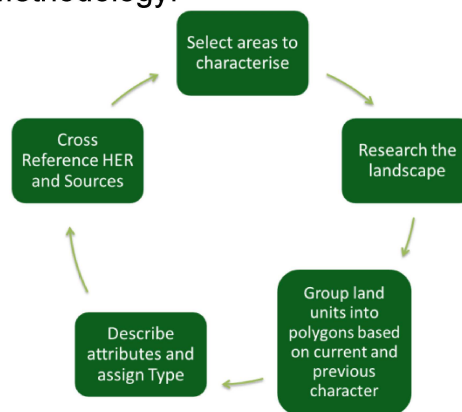
  - o   Woodland Plantations

- What has HLC done?
  - Helped change attitudes to change – now less defensive and more intelligent about it
  - Provided a spatial framework for action planning, eg HEAPs
  - Mapped historic understanding at a scale and in a language that enables closer working with key partners – like natural environmentalists, planners, academics, local community groups
  - Created a spatially organised research framework – stimulates secondary investigation; extending identification and understanding
  - Its predictive qualities increases the volume of archaeological investigation

2) Oxfordshire HLC Progress Report (A. Tompkins)

- Stage 2 – Digitisation. Methodology:

  - 94.5% of the County has been digitised – 12,268 polygons digitised
    - Each polygon is characterised into one of 15 Broad Types and then into one of over 100 HLC Types, further attributes describing the character are then added along with information on any previous HLC Types

- o The AONB HLC projects from North Wessex Downs and the Chilterns have been integrated and the Cotswolds has been updated
  - o A thematic map layer has been created which shows the Broad Types and the Historic Landscape Types
  - o Work has begun on the integration of Oxford City
    - ▪ The City's HLC was completed in 2014 and needs integrating into the county to ensure consistency of character and grain
  - o Recording uses HBSMR database which links to the HER
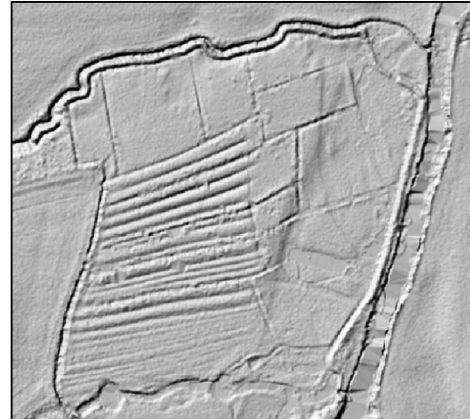

- Stages 3 & 4 - Analysis and Reporting
  - o Analysis:
    - ▪ Frequency and Distribution of Types - allows assessment of landscape significance. Is a landscape rare or common? Does it have local, regional or national importance?
    - ▪ Trajectories of change – are certain types decreasing or in danger of disappearing altogether? Is this significant? Alternatively, which landscape types are increasing and what are the impacts of this?
    - ▪ Time-slice maps – showing landscape character in the medieval, post-medieval, and modern periods. Highlights patterns of change and enduring historic landscapes.
    - ▪ Case studies (initial thoughts):
      - • Comparing the AONBs and the rest of the county – are there discernible differences or similarities in the trajectories of landscapes with different designations? How to the challenges from these different areas compare?
      - • Ancient Enclosure preservation – where are these found? How old are they? Why have they been preserved and how might they best be managed?
      - • Oxford rural fringe - how has it changed? What is its capacity to change?

3) Examples of how HLC data has been used (A. Tompkins)

- Milton Keynes Growth Areas
  - o D. Green, as part of the Bucks HLC project, assessed preservation of the historical landscape, presence of historic buildings and archaeological sites, and the aesthetic setting to offer an impact score for each of the potential development areas around Milton Keynes – this was only possible by assessing the frequency and distribution of HLC Types across the county and the trajectory of change around Milton Keynes. This allowed him to assess the significance and the sensitivity of the landscape in specific areas around the city.
- Landscape change in the Salisbury Plain Training Area
  - o T. Sunley, as part of the Wilts HLC project, assessed whether military activity was the biggest threat to historic landscape of the SPTA. His analysis showed

that whilst the military has unquestionable expanded its presence on the plain, fields and enclosed land has actually had a big impact upon the character of the plain, an area which is one of the UK's last remaining open downlands.
- An example of where it could be used in Oxon – Chimney Preserved Open Field

   o The only observed example of a preserved open field system in the county…

- (T. Sunley) HLC data used to explore Royal forests and parkland in Wiltshire – their preservation and their sensitivity
- (A. Godden) HLC data used extensively within planning, for woodland plantation schemes, informs the Minerals and Waste plans, feeds into Neighbourhood Plans, and is used for community outreach projects
- M. Connelly also emphasised community aspect of people using the data to explore their own landscapes. Intends to use HLC as part of their `Cotswolds at 50' project which will look at change over the last 50 years.
- H. Oliver said they have also used the data for woodland planting schemes and discussed how it could be used to review settlement boundaries to better inform planning process.

- Future use of HLC:

   o V. Fletcher – to update Landscape Character Assessment
   o S. Stradling – interested in use within planning for S. Oxon and the Vale
   o E. Batelaan – applications within new mineral site assessments

4) Dissemination and Reporting (discussion)

- General comments:
   o report couched in lay terms so understandable to all
   o accessible GIS layer with an identify link to individual records/layer table
   o dissemination of layer and records could be via various methods
      ▪ interactive website – publically accessible, but difficult to manage or control
      ▪ shared GIS layer with associated table distributed using OCC internal system or directly with Districts/AONBs
      ▪ Wiltshire exports records much in the same way as HER
   o Important to include a `how to use' guide/toolkit with final report
   o Discussions about updating the database

- Currently no funding for this and, as it stands, this will be a `snap-shot'
- Appreciation that this is not ideal and open to discuss suggestions.

5) Final Comments

- It will not be possible to share raw data or GIS Layers until Stage 3 is complete. This is because, without the analysis phase, it will not be possible to asses significance or sensitivity of HLC types and, therefore, of specific landscapes.
- Next Stakeholder Group Meeting will be at the end of Stage 3 – c. Jan 2017
- Please contact Abi Tompkins re these minutes, for further information, or to discuss the analysis stage. abi.tompkins@oxfordshire.gov.uk