



The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project

This booklet summarises the work of the Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) project and provides general guidance for the sustainable management of historic landscapes.

The Cheshire HLC project was carried out by the Historic Environment Team of Cheshire County Council with funding from English Heritage. The HLC forms part of the Cheshire County Historic Environment Record and Merseyside Sites and Monuments Record.



Landscapes from the past to the present

The landscapes of Britain vary greatly. The natural elements of the land; geology, topography and soils form the basis of any landscape, but every landscape in Britain, even those which are 'wild' and remote, is a product of successive human actions on the land stretching back thousands of years. The results of these activities, such as building homes or places of work, farming the land, establishing route-ways or extracting minerals, may survive for hundreds, and in some instances, thousands of years. It is often the case that what has gone before, whether in a town or in the countryside, will influence the present and the future.

The Cheshire HLC project has examined the whole of Cheshire, together with Halton, Warrington and the Wirral. It has produced a picture of the entire landscape, including that which is most recent, and for the first time presents a comprehensive view of the sequence of changes that have contributed to the character of the landscape.

Recording the past and managing future change

It has long been recognised that protecting and enhancing the historic environment, whether it relates to historic buildings, landscape features or archaeological remains, must be founded on a sound evidence base. To understand any component of the historic environment it needs to be placed into a geographical and a historical context. With this aim in mind, English Heritage and local authorities have been working together to produce records of historic landscapes, in both town and country.

The **Cheshire Historic Towns Survey** provides information about the historical development and archaeological potential of many of the principal towns in the county. The Cheshire HLC project was established to complement the Historic Towns Survey by looking at the wider landscape outside the major towns.

The HLC project has systematically recorded landscape features, which relate to a long succession of land uses, from a range of maps and aerial photographs. This information has been recorded as a series of overlays on a modern map base, using a Geographical Information System (GIS). This computerised mapping allows areas to be analysed and described according to their historic character, and permits a variety of maps showing the different landscape types to be produced at various scales.

The comprehensive nature of HLC enables the development of a wide range of uses, such as for planning, countryside management, community projects and education.



Characterising the landscape

The landscape of the project area has been divided into twelve distinct character groups. Each group has been further sub-divided to reflect the differences in the character of the historic landscape within that group:

- Non-improved Land
- Water Bodies
- Woodland
- Settlement
- Ancient Fieldscapes
- Post Medieval Fieldscapes
- Twentieth Century Fieldscapes
- Industry
- Communications
- Recreation
- Ornamental
- Military

Photos
Above: Salt marsh at Parkgate
Left: Lindow Moss

Non-improved Land

A variety of landscapes have been categorised as non-improved land. They include: salt marshes, sand banks and dunes of estuarine and coastal areas; areas of peat (mosses); lowland heaths and upland moors, formed long ago by the intensity of farming and poor quality soils; and flashes, the depressions created by the subsidence caused by the extraction of brine during the nineteenth century.

Although these landscapes now tend to be viewed as 'marginal' or 'impoverished', they are of considerable importance as wildlife habitats and for the remains of past human activity which they contain. Such remains range from prehistoric settlements and burial places to more recent industrial workings, some of which survive as visual features within the landscape and add to the distinctiveness of an area. A range of organic remains, which provide significant information about changes in land use and the wider environment, are often preserved in the waterlogged deposits which commonly occur in coastal and estuarine areas, and mosses.



Water Bodies

The land around water bodies such as rivers and meres has been a focus for settlement since prehistory. The wider river floodplains may also contain the remains of archaeological sites sealed by the silts deposited by flood waters. The waterlogged nature of the ground around water bodies can lead to the preservation of a range of wooden structures and associated organic remains, often providing remarkable insights into the daily lives of past communities.

The creation of mill ponds and water channels to provide power for the processing of grain and for manufacturing purposes during the medieval and post-medieval periods had a profound effect on the natural flow of many stream courses. These features and the remaining mills survive as tangible reminders of our industrial heritage.

More recently the need for water for industry and a growing urban population led to the creation of reservoirs, most notably on the edge of the Peak District, where valleys could be dammed. Their considerable impact on the landscape can be appreciated to this day.

Woodland

The woodlands of the project area have been successively cleared since prehistory in order to create land for farming, industry and settlement. At the time of the Domesday Survey as much as 30% of Cheshire may have been woodland. Now only isolated pockets remain. They have often only survived because of centuries of careful management to maintain a sustainable supply of timber.

In the eighteenth century commercial plantations, often coniferous, were established on the many heaths and commons of the area, such as at Delamere. At the same time smaller woods and coverts were being created for the protection and breeding of game and foxes for field sports and hunting.

Woodlands have the potential to contain a variety of archaeological remains and historic landscape features associated with the management or exploitation of the woodland itself, such as, woodland boundary banks, saw pits, charcoal clamps and ancient coppice stools. Plantations may also contain features such as field boundaries and industrial sites associated with the previous land use.

*Photos clockwise from left to right:
Aerial view of Oakmere; Stretton Watermill; Marbury Mere;
Woodland at Broxton, Clint Hughes; Ancient Woodland at Thornton-le-Moors.*



Photos above
 Left: Great Budworth
 Right: 1940s MOD aerial photograph showing ridge
 and furrow in fields south of Bruera



Settlement

Chester and the towns of Nantwich, Middlewich, and Northwich grew from the forts and settlements established by the Romans. Other market centres, such as Audlem, Sandbach and Malpas along with many villages and hamlets were well established by the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066. The majority of these towns have continued to grow, prompted from the eighteenth century, by industrial development. Growth has been greatest around Warrington, Widnes and on the Wirral. New towns were established in the nineteenth century; Crewe was established by the Grand Junction Railway Company and Ellesmere Port grew from a port located at the junction of the Shropshire Union Canal and River Mersey. Throughout the twentieth century development around the major towns has accelerated considerably.

In the historic centres of many towns and villages the street system and the layout of the property boundaries provides a direct link with the settlement's early past. The existence of a variety of historic buildings adds significantly to the distinctive

character of a place. Buried archaeological remains within the historic core of villages and towns provide important information about the development of these settlements, and the activities and living conditions of the former inhabitants.

Ancient Fieldscapes

The earliest field systems were laid out in the prehistoric and Roman periods, remains of which are sometimes visible as earthworks or discovered during archaeological excavations. The surviving medieval field systems of the project area cover an area equivalent to nearly forty-six thousand football pitches, and ridge and furrow earthworks created by the medieval ploughs are common features in these fields.

Field boundaries are varied and include the dry stone walls of the Peak fringe and the sandstone walls of the Cheshire sandstone ridge. However the prominent boundary feature is the hedge, often found in combination with ditches, banks, fences and walls. These ancient field systems with their narrow, winding, lanes, thick species-rich hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees provide a very distinctive feeling of the traditional countryside.



Post Medieval Fieldscapes

From the late sixteenth century the countryside began to change with the introduction of new farming practices. Land which had been cultivated was turned over to pasture, as demand for milk and cheese increased from the growing urban population, leading to the 'fossilisation' of areas of ridge and furrow cultivation. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries regular field systems, often associated with straight roads, were laid out across many areas of the countryside. Some of these fields were created by landowners who wished to 'improve' marginal or traditionally unproductive land, while others were formally established by Acts of Parliament.

The new farming practices often required the rationalisation of existing land holdings. Field systems were reorganised; sometimes this would only require the removal of a few field boundaries, but in other areas the large estates, such as Combermere, would replace the medieval landscape with new regular field systems and estate farms (model farms) reflecting the new agricultural ethos.

Twentieth Century Fieldscapes

Throughout the twentieth century agriculture and farming practices have continued to change in response to technology and demand. More land has been brought back into arable and there has been an increase in mechanisation and intensification. The practicalities of modern farming techniques and machinery, coupled with the needs for greater efficiency, have led to the removal of field boundaries and the creation of large prairie like fields in some areas. However many of the field boundaries from earlier field systems survive and provide an important link with the former character of these areas.

Photos

Left: Large twentieth century fields, Clint Hughes

Right: Post medieval field systems of the Peak Fringe, Clint Hughes



Industry

Natural resources, a skilled labour force, good transport networks and well-positioned markets and ports were essential components for the development of the project area's industrial economy. A diverse range of established industries, such as coal mining, textile manufacture, stone quarrying and salt extraction exploited the technological innovations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and expanded rapidly. New industries, such as railway engineering, chemical manufacture, and petrochemical processing were also established.

Some of these industries have survived into the twenty first century; others declined. Changes in economic fortune and advances in technology can have long-lasting effects on communities and the landscape. All these industries have left distinctive marks on the landscape and influence local character, often in the form of the social fabric such as housing and other civic amenities, even when the original industrial site has gone.

Where redevelopment and regeneration schemes are proposed they should seek to incorporate the wider industrial character within these new developments. In this way the links with the past are maintained and traditional aspects of an area preserved within a revitalised setting.

Communications

The road network established by the Roman army almost two thousand years ago to link their military bases and towns still partially survives and forms a fundamental element of the modern road network. Civil engineering projects on a comparable scale did not take place until the building of the turnpikes and canals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the construction of the railways during the nineteenth century. The legacy of this work is immense. Associated with these networks are a range of structures with distinctive styles of architecture, creating a distinctive character.

Recreation

The majority of recreational landscapes date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and cover a wide range of facilities including public parks, golf courses, racecourses, zoos and camp sites. The landscaping involved in creating some of these facilities has had a considerable impact on the existing landscape. Large, open, green public spaces continue to be a vital amenity in urban areas and some of the historic public parks have been designated for their historic value and their contribution to the local character.



Ornamental

The first parks of the project area were established around the time of the Norman Conquest, to provide a secure environment for the breeding and hunting of deer. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the popularity of gardens grew and many new gardens were built in the style of those of Renaissance Italy. Although gardens of this date do not survive in their entirety within the project area, features such as walls, terraces and prospect mounds do. From the mid-seventeenth century a new style of garden was introduced into Britain, copying the Palladian gardens of France and based on very formal geometric patterns. The house would be the focal point of the design, surrounded by geometric flower beds outlined by low walls or clipped hedges.

In the mid-eighteenth century a new indigenous style developed reflecting changes in the aesthetic appreciation of landscape and the increasing numbers of professional designers, such as Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton. These ornamental parks were much more extensive than the preceding gardens and often involved extensive landscaping.

Some of the parks have been designated for their historic and landscape value. Ornamental parks not only contain structures and features specifically designed to enhance and highlight particular aspects of the landscape, but have the potential to preserve a variety of features relating to the previous use of the land, including deer park boundaries, field systems and settlement remains.

Military

The earliest evidence for human conflict is visible in the hillforts that line the Cheshire sandstone ridge. More extensive are the castles constructed in the centuries following the Norman Conquest. Often sizeable constructions, many medieval castles remain as evocative symbols of oppression and conflict. During the English Civil War in the seventeenth century a number of major battles and minor skirmishes were fought in Cheshire. The sites of two battles, the Battle of Nantwich (1644), and the Battle of Rowton Moor (1645) are viewed as important historic landscapes in their own right.

The defensive structures surviving from World War II provide a stark reminder of the dangers the nation faced at that time. Even more poignant, perhaps, are the command and control bunker which were constructed during the Cold War.

Photos

Left: Deer at Tatton Park, Gary Cross

Right: World War II pillbox, Chester



Protecting, preserving and enhancing historic landscapes

Statutory protection and material considerations

The following designations offer statutory protection to historic landscapes and their components:

- Scheduled Monuments
- Areas of Archaeological Importance
- Listed Buildings
- Conservation Areas

Elements of the historic landscape will also receive statutory protection if they lie within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Historic hedgerows are legally protected by the Hedgerow Regulations and certain mature trees by Tree Preservation Orders.

There are two non-statutory registers concerning historic landscapes which local authorities are required by central government to consider when determining planning applications and strategies that may affect them.

These are:

- English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens
- English Heritage Register of Historic Battlefields

In addition, there are other non-statutory lists and registers which record natural and historic environment features and are material considerations in the planning process. Details of these can be obtained from the relevant local authorities.



Photos
Left: Infield mature tree
Right: Hedgelaying at Cotebrook



Management initiatives

Sustainable management, or conservation, of historic landscapes and their components, must be based on a sound understanding of their significance.

It is important that for all matters concerning conservation of the natural and historic environment that specialist advice is sought. Guidance can be provided by English Heritage, Natural England, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), and the relevant local authority Natural and Historic Environment professionals.

To ensure the long-term survival of historic features in the rural environment it is important to develop conservation methods which can be integrated into the day-to-day management of the land, whether a farm, forest or estate.

Likewise in the urban environment, conservation will depend on the current use of the land and associated structures, and the practicalities of formulating design and regeneration solutions which incorporate and, where possible, utilise historic features.

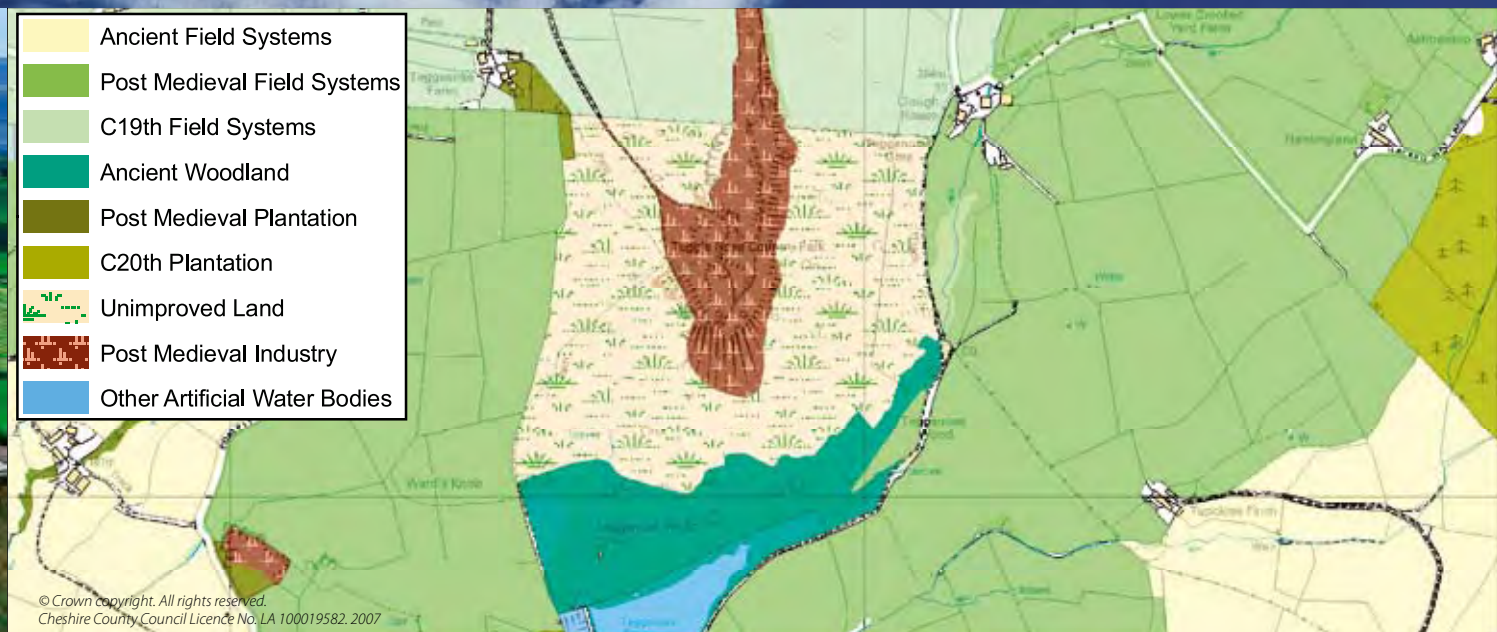
Recommended actions in addition to any statutory controls

- Highlight the importance of historic landscapes and their components in all forms of strategic planning documents, such as Parish Plans, Local Development Frameworks and Regional Spatial Strategies.
- Undertake assessments of an area and its immediate surroundings where redevelopment or changes in land use are proposed, in order to avoid, mitigate and compensate any potential damage to wildlife, historic landscape features and buildings, and buried archaeological and palaeoenvironmental remains.
- Pursue active management of historic landscapes and their components in rural areas through the Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Schemes and the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Schemes.



- Undertake any landscaping work in a sensitive manner to enhance existing features.
- Use locally derived species of trees and traditional schemes of planting in the design of new plantations, so as to complement and enhance existing landscape features.
- Retain and maintain existing field boundaries. Older hedgerows are likely to contain a rich variety of plant species and are important for biodiversity. Any restoration of field boundaries should reflect the surrounding field system.
- Plant trees in hedgerows in order to replace over mature specimens and maintain an important element of landscape character.
- Retain mature in-field trees, which may provide indications of former field boundaries or parkland. Such trees are important for biodiversity; as a link with past land use and; as an element of landscape character.
- Retain the remains of former farming practices, such as ridge and furrow earthworks and marl pits, which provide a direct indication of historic agricultural practices, and are often of ecological value.

Photos
Left: Anderton Boat Lift
Right: View towards Harthill, Clint Hughes



- Promote good quality building design for all new developments, which respect and enhance the layout of the adjacent settlement and enhance the traditional building styles of the locality. For example, developments which would significantly increase the nucleation in an area of dispersed settlement should be resisted.
- Ensure that building work to historic structures, including repairs, does not detract from the existing design.
- Retain and utilise, wherever possible, former industrial structures and landscape features within redevelopment schemes. Consider the impact of a development on the surrounding buildings and structures, especially the wider social fabric such as housing, associated with an industrial site.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the buried archaeological heritage and how these remains have contributed to the present day landscape.
- Promote historic landscapes and their components as a cultural resource, whether as a focus for community-based environmental projects or as visitor attractions.
- Foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the historic environment through education and increase awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of the whole historic environment.

Photos

Above left: Field systems in Wincle, Clint Hughes

Above right: Historic Landscape Character map of Teggs Nose Country Park

Left: Interpretation panel at Maiden Castle



Useful resources

Historic Environment Team of Cheshire County Council

Further information on the Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation project as well as the historic environment of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington is available via the Team's web site at www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology or email archaeology@cheshire.gov.uk

Merseyside Archaeological Service

Further information on the Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project as well as the historic environment of Merseyside is available via the Service's web site at www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk



Revealing Cheshire's Past

Revealing Cheshire's Past is a project that helps people to find out more about the archaeology of Cheshire, through a website, public access database, travelling exhibitions and fact sheets. To find out more visit www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology and follow the links to Revealing Cheshire's Past.

Natural England

A range of illustrated leaflets providing guidance on the management of the historic environment in the countryside has been produced by English Heritage in association with Natural England, the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and can be found at www.naturalengland.org.uk

English Heritage

Further information on the national programme of Historic Landscape, Seascape and Urban Characterisation can be found on English Heritage's website www.english-heritage.org.uk

Also available on the English Heritage web site is

Using Historic Landscape Characterisation by J. Clark, J. Darlington & G. Fairclough. This publication illustrates some of the best examples of how HLC is being used in planning and countryside management.



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Above: Map of Cheshire showing Historic Landscape Character groups
This publication is printed on environmentally friendly paper.
G10021 Designed by Cheshire County Council Communications, Graphic Design 01244 973197



ENGLISH HERITAGE



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