



[www.landuse.co.uk](http://www.landuse.co.uk)

# Historic England London Plan Review

## Project No. 3: Characterisation of London's historic environment

Draft Report  
Prepared by LUC  
August 2016



**Project Title:** London Plan Review, Project 3: Characterisation of London's historic environment

**Client:** Historic England

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
2.0	09/08/16	Final draft	LD; JA; KM; SMO	SMO	NJ
2.1	26/08/16	Final	SMO	SMO	NJ



[www.landuse.co.uk](http://www.landuse.co.uk)

## Historic England

## London Plan Review

### Project No. 3: Characterisation of London's historic environment

Draft Report  
Prepared by LUC  
June 2016

Planning & EIA  
Design  
Landscape Planning  
Landscape Management  
Ecology  
Mapping & Visualisation

LUC LONDON  
43 Chalton Street  
London  
NW1 1JD  
T +44 (0)20 7383 5784  
[london@landuse.co.uk](mailto:london@landuse.co.uk)

Offices also in:  
Bristol  
Glasgow  
Edinburgh



Land Use Consultants Ltd  
Registered in England  
Registered number: 2549296  
Registered Office:  
43 Chalton Street  
London NW1 1JD  
LUC uses 100% recycled paper

# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Study method</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 Characterisation in London</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4 Review of borough-wide characterisation studies</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5 Review of place-based characterisation studies</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>6 Case studies</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>7 Impact of characterisation studies</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>8 Towards best practice in characterisation</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>9 Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>123</b>
Project specification	123
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>127</b>
Survey questions	127
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>131</b>
Appraisal framework	131

## Tables

Table 4.1: Key definitions	20
Table 4.2: Approach to characterisation, by Borough	22
Table 4.3: Sample Local Plan / Core Strategy text	40
Table 4.4: Sample development management policy text	42
Table 7.1: Selected respondent quotes (LUC emphasis)	85
Table 7.2: Matrix illustrating uses of characterisation studies, by individual respondent (filtered to exclude respondents indicating either low levels of understanding)	87
Table 7.3: Respondent quotes – CAAs (LUC emphasis)	92

## Figures

Figure 3.1: Distribution	12
Figure 4.1: Stated purpose of characterisation studies	17
Figure 4.2: Stated purpose of borough-wide characterisation studies	18
Figure 4.3: Methods of characterisation	23
Figure 4.4: Method of characterisation	24
Figure 4.5: Kingston upon Thames - map illustrating house forms within a character area (LB Kingston upon Thames)	25
Figure 4.6: Hounslow – simple, single-tier typology used to good effect. Note key contextual information presented at the same resolution / format (LB Hounslow)	27
Figure 4.7: Barnet - example of street-based typology (Urban Practitioners / LB Barnet)	28
Figure 4.8: Sample hierarchical typology - Hillingdon (Urban Practitioners / LB Hillingdon)	29
Figure 4.9: Sample hierarchical typology (LB Haringey)	30
Figure 4.10: Newham's temporal typology. Broad on left; more specific on right. Secondary typologies discussed in text, but not mapped (LB Newham)	32
Figure 4.11: Components of character (Character wheel from Mayor's 'Character and Context' SPG)	34
Figure 4.12: Building height analysis (LB Camden)	35
Figure 4.13: Who is undertaking character studies?	37
Figure 4.14: Incorporation of character in Local Plan vision and objectives	38
Figure 4.15: Levels of policy integration (development management)	39
Figure 4.16: Level of DM policy integration	41
Figure 4.17: 'Metro-Land Centre' type, from LB Enfield character study (Urban Practitioners, 2011)	48
Figure 4.18: Merton - issues and guidance	52
Figure 4.19: Hounslow - character area assessments	53
Figure 4.20: Hounslow - borough-wide reconciliation of scoring to provide recommendations	54
Figure 5.1: Opportunity Areas with character studies in place, which have influenced Planning Frameworks	62
Figure 5.2: London Plan Opportunity Areas - character studies in place, by OA status (using GLA terminology)	63
Figure 5.3: Consideration of cross-boundary impacts and views (Borough, Bankside & London Bridge Characterisation Study)	64
Figure 5.4: Example of building and block level sensitivity appraisal (Drummond Street character area, Euston HAA)	65
Figure 7.1: Respondents' role	85
Figure 7.2: "Are you aware of your borough's characterisation study?"	85
Figure 7.3: Context in which respondents have used borough characterisation studies	86
Figure 7.4: Accessibility and application of characterisation studies	88
Figure 7.6: Understanding of policy links	89
Figure 7.5: Developers' use of characterisation studies	89
Figure 7.7: Effectiveness of characterisation studies in informing planning decisions	90
Figure 7.8: Opinions on effectiveness of characterisation studies in decision-making	91
Figure 7.9: Usefulness of Conservation Area Character Appraisals	92

Figure 8.1: Detailed heritage information at the character area level	99
Figure 8.2: Assigning components of character to GIS attributes?	102
Figure 8.3: Urban form-derived typology (Hillingdon)	104
Figure 8.4: Hybrid land use/urban form-based typology in use (Haringey)	104
Figure 8.5: Hounslow - assessment scores by character area	106
Figure 8.6: Example sensitivity map – outcome of integrated characterisation and sensitivity / capacity assessment for housing development	107
Figure 8.7: Indicative approach to combined character and sensitivity assessment	108
Figure 8.8: Streetscape photomontage (Waltham Forest)	109
Figure 8.9: Summary table of types and key characteristics (Waltham Forest)	109
Figure 8.10: Character area assessment and guidance (Merton)	110
Figure 8.11: Tower Hamlets' spatial vision - influenced by characterisation	111

# Executive summary

## Project aims

The study was commissioned by Historic England (HE) to investigate:

- How the historic environment is being assessed in London.
- Best practice reports and approaches characterising London's historic and built environment, as well as any weaknesses/missed opportunities.
- How such information is being integrated into the planning process, or could be integrated, with particular reference to linking local character and significance to strategic planning.

## Context

### Characterisation

Historic England's Corporate Plan 2015-18, and the accompanying Action Plan, undertake to help local authorities create 'planning policies that support constructive conservation as part of sustainable development'.

Characterisation is recognised as a key opportunity in helping to provide evidence for policy development, supporting asset-based data, and creating a platform from which authorities can understand the significance and sensitivity of their areas' heritage and townscape. HE has promoted character-based approaches in urban areas for some time (for example through the ['Understanding Historic Places'](#) series of guidance documents) – and substantial progress has been made in rolling out the approach, particularly in London.

### London Plan

The London Plan is supported by Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on *Character and Context*, which provides advice for Boroughs and practitioners on understanding character and producing a characterisation study.

The revision of the London Plan provides a key opportunity for HE to take stock of London Boroughs' progress in developing historic characterisation studies, their impact on local

policies and their efficacy in managing change in the historic environment.

## Method

Broadly, the research project comprised the following steps:

- Undertaking a systematic review of all completed and adopted borough-wide characterisation studies in place across London.
- Analysis of: the scope of studies; methods employed; understanding and integration of the historic environment; influence on planning policy.
- Judgements on the quality, usability and effectiveness of studies; working towards a view on best practice.
- Survey of boroughs with studies in place to gather anecdotal evidence on the influence of historic characterisation studies on development management.
- Synthesis of quantitative and qualitative results.

## Overview

### Extent of characterisation in London

#### *Borough-wide*

18 out of 33 boroughs have 'borough-wide' characterisation studies in place. The majority of these cover the entire borough, with four studies taking a more selective approach and excluding either non-urban areas (Redbridge) or areas deemed unlikely to experience significant change – generally Conservation Areas and Green Belt (Barnet; Camden; Harrow).

#### *Place-based*

A substantial number of place-based characterisation studies are also in place – most notably for 'Opportunity Areas' designated in the London Plan. Of the 38 Opportunity Areas, nine have comprehensive characterisation studies in place, with a further four benefitting from at

least some level of character-based evidence and analysis.

Richmond has adopted a unique 'village'-based approach, building on a strong base of community engagement to develop 'village plans'. At the time of writing, five (of 14) village plans were supported by 'Village Planning Guidance' SPG – providing a character-based planning framework to guide new development in some of Richmond's most sensitive places.

### Methods

Two broad approaches dominate the current suite of borough-wide studies: those based on a typological analysis – classifying land use, built form, townscape and historic origins; and, those taking a purely area or community-focussed approach, setting out the history and character at the local level. 14 studies applied a typological approach, often combined with the definition of local 'character areas' to add detail to the typological analysis. The remaining four studies define distinct geographical areas / communities and summarise key influences on character at this level.

There is considerable variation between studies in the scale and resolution of typologies and the discussion of influences on character, making reconciliation of cross-boundary issues potentially challenging.

Generally, the process of characterisation is quite 'inward-looking' – both within boroughs and character areas / typological units. This means that, often, opportunities to understand the contribution of historic character to the setting of key heritage assets outside the unit of analysis (e.g. in a different character area/type, or across the borough boundary) are missed.

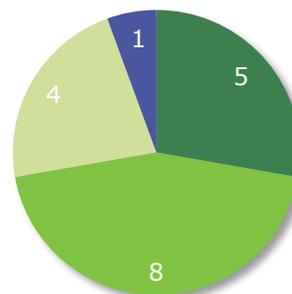
### Influence on planning policy

#### Local Plans

Of the 18 Local Plans reviewed, character features at some level across all of the relevant policy frameworks – although this varies considerably: from comprehensive inclusion in Core Strategy visions and objectives, and detailed development management policies; to references in supporting text.

(A summary of levels of integration with development management policy is provided in the chart adjacent. For the one plan that has no direct reference, it should be noted that the emerging Core Strategy draws on the relevant characterisation study, therefore it can be assumed that this will be addressed in the emerging DM policies.)

Level of integration in DM policies



- Excellent - specific reference to character and study in LP policy
- Good - specific reference to character in policy; study quoted as source in supporting text
- Low - character referred to in policy
- None

### Characterisation studies as tools for positive planning

The majority of characterisation studies were developed specifically as evidence to contribute to Local Plan production. However, they have the potential to perform a wider range of functions – which a few authorities have begun to explore. Hounslow, Kingston and Merton's studies take the next step in using characterisation information to understand the value and sensitivity of character areas, and their susceptibility to change. These types of approaches underline the value of characterisation as a basis for understanding what is important about an area, and the extent to which development could compromise this.

The remaining studies can generally be used by developers and planning officers in shaping or responding to development proposals, but they are often not sufficiently detailed (e.g. in terms of key characteristics or sensitivities) to function consistently in this regard.

## Conclusions

### Good news

- + **A good start:** Over half of London's Boroughs have characterisation studies in place. These are of good quality and are clearly influencing the development of local planning policy.  
As the first attempt at delivering any policy agenda or priority, the current suite of characterisation studies should be commended rather than criticised. In the round, they provide a valuable proof of concept that characterisation can deliver potentially powerful tools for strategic planning, design, assessment and decision-making.
- + **A menu of good practice:** while there is no single 'best practice' example, boroughs can draw on lessons from a wide range of approaches and techniques to scope a study that works for their area – and start to add value to characterisation through sensitivity / capacity studies.
- + **Mainstreaming:** characterisation is well embedded in London boroughs' thinking, and the benefits of a robust study are clear – and can be demonstrated to management and Elected Members – as a good value means of both understanding local sensitivities and developing appropriate policy.
- + **Application:** Anecdotal evidence suggests that development management officers are making use of characterisation studies in their work – and are generally receptive to the messages therein. However, survey respondents identified the need for clearer alignment with local and national policy frameworks (particularly where issues of harm to heritage significance could be invoked in planning applications).

### Missed opportunities

- **Prominence of heritage considerations:** in general, the historic environment is not perhaps as prominent a consideration as may have been expected. While the historical development of boroughs is universally discussed, the findings of that often comprehensive research are not always carried through to the local level in a useful, meaningful way. This inherently reduces the usefulness of studies as a resource for managing change.
- **Heritage values and significance:** understanding what assessments of (historic) character means in terms of planning is a key consideration for both authorities and prospective developers. Most studies include very useful 'key characteristics' and discussions of drivers of change – but equally, there is little consideration of what the character of a particular area means in planning terms. This is most noticeable in terms of the contribution to local character of the heritage value and significance of heritage assets and their settings – and also their value as historic places in their own right.  
  
Unfortunately, the lack of this type of information potentially reduces the usefulness of studies in terms of informing Strategic Environmental Assessment / Sustainability Appraisal and the design and assessment of development proposals.
- **Cross-boundary links:** at present, cross-boundary character and heritage issues are not dealt with consistently or effectively. This relates to areas of historic character with cross-boundary character and significance and dealing with the borough's place in London's history and development.

## Recommendations

In terms of delivering the actions recommended by this research, there is a key role for the Greater London Authority at the strategic level and Historic England in providing expert advice and support. Boroughs, as 'owners' and key users of characterisation studies, play a critical role in shaping developing practice, driving internal understanding and use of the information and its incorporation in policy.

A strong collaborative approach will be required to get the best of characterisation and optimise its contribution to the sustainable management of London's historic places.

- **1: Review and strengthen the Mayor's 'Character and Context' SPG.**

**Rationale:** the strategic and local contribution of heritage to character needs to be clear. Parallel research suggests that the London Plan and its associated guidance is often not a significant consideration for planning authorities. The SPG could, through an update, provide a lead on the value of the historic environment to London's character and how characterisation studies can evaluate this key element of character - while leaving authorities free to adopt the most appropriate method for local conditions.

In addition, this could provide an opportunity to provide a broad framework in which future, and revisions of existing, studies could contribute to a coherent London-wide overview of local and historic character.

- **2: Promotion of typological approaches to characterisation as offering the most flexible product and best value for money.**

**Rationale:** typological approaches have been demonstrated to offer the greatest flexibility in terms of both the information that can be presented, and the uses to which it can be put. The ability to develop sensitivity and capacity studies could be used as a key 'selling point' for these approaches – in line with the key findings of this report.

Along with Recommendation 1, this would help to promote a consistent London-wide approach that could add significant benefit in cross-boundary and London-wide analysis.

- **3: Enhancing the level of priority and value given to heritage assets and historic character in characterisation studies and their recommendations for managing change.**

**Rationale:** the influence of heritage is frequently under-played in descriptions of character in favour of urban design-related considerations. HE/GLA could consider promoting approaches that make use of the full range of heritage-related source data (especially HER information) and present clear information on heritage at the character area/place level to optimise usability.

Heritage is both a critical part of character and a key influence on the ways in which change occurs – in terms of acceptable future uses, physical patterns and opportunities to add value to regeneration. Outline guidance could reasonably be produced as an addendum to the 'Character and Context' SPG.

- **4: Prioritising cross-boundary cooperation and information-sharing.**

**Rationale:** Currently there is little read-across between studies, meaning that cross-boundary assets and places can be challenging to understand. This will also help to draw out issues of London-wide significance more effectively.

Studies need to recognise the connectivity of character and heritage – in terms of physical and historical links – and also the potential for change in different character areas/places, or outside the borough, to affect the character and significance of places and assets. Encouraging an integrated approach between boroughs can help to promote a common understanding of the value and sensitivity of the historic environment, and the contribution of historic character to the setting of assets and the value of London's places.

- **5: HE and GLA to facilitate 'sharing good practice' event(s) for London boroughs to enable information exchange and the development of a community of practice.**

**Rationale:** bringing practitioners together – potentially through a working group – facilitates discussion and learning in a low-cost, authority-led way. Helping to build connections between authorities may assist in promoting a more strategic view of characterisation and encourage cross-boundary cooperation.

There may be a role for private sector practitioners in terms of contributing knowledge and experience on method and approaches, but the needs of boroughs should lead the process. This could be delivered as an adjunct to the HE Characterisation Seminars (usually held in London in December).

- **6: GLA, with support from HE, to consider developing guidance on the use of characterisation data in developing sensitivity and capacity studies.**

**Rationale:** building on the outcomes of a pilot project, proposed in Recommendation 7 below, this would help to disseminate the relevant learning points and guide authorities in getting the most out of their data.

There is significant value for Historic England in supporting this process. Landscape sensitivity/capacity studies have become standard practice for authorities seeking to understand the levels of change (generally rural) areas can accommodate, arising from particular development types (particularly onshore wind farms). Experience indicates that having broad principles in place for understanding the key concepts, collecting appropriate evidence and undertaking a robust study is critical in ensuring consistency. [Natural England Topic Paper 6<sup>1</sup>](#) (soon to be replaced) does this for landscape sensitivity/capacity studies. Of particular relevance is the development of a consistent, coherent and usable evidence base for Strategic Environmental Assessment – a key area of underperformance with regard to the protection of the historic environment. National-level guidance could be provided as updates to HE guidance on Local Plan site allocations (Advice Note 3) and Historic Area Assessment.

- **7: Pilot project(s) that demonstrate the value of characterisation in informing sensitivity and capacity studies.**

**Rationale:** this would provide a proof-of-concept demonstration to authorities with borough-wide studies in place that there is a wider role for their data in adding value and subtlety to strategic planning – that does not require starting from scratch.

The outcomes of the pilot would then influence the development of guidance, as stated in Recommendation 6.

There would be substantial value in seeking to integrate this approach with the early stages of Local Plan evidence base development – for example influencing Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), in addition to SA/SEA (as indicated below).

- **8: Piloting the active use of characterisation spatial data in the appraisal of Local Plan land allocations and SA/SEA.**

**Rationale:** SA/SEA is widely regarded as under-performing in relation to understanding and assessing impacts on the historic environment. The evidence from this review suggests that characterisation is having little impact on the method or results of strategic assessments.

Authorities are highly risk-averse in terms of SA/SEA methodology selection, due to the need for assessments and land allocations to be 'Examination-proof' – but HE is increasingly dissatisfied with the traditional designations and proximity-based approach (which is arguably even less appropriate in London). Developing and testing alternative, proportionate methods could be a powerful way of HE shaping the debate in a positive manner – and potentially delivering much better outcomes for the historic environment at the most appropriate stage in the planning process.

- **9: HE and GLA to consider working with boroughs to raise the profile of characterisation as a tool for policymaking and development management.**

**Rationale:** currently, characterisation studies are principally viewed as Local Plan evidence base, rather than a tool for active planning and decision-making. For studies already in place, this is about optimising the return on authorities' investment; for boroughs looking to develop characterisation studies, this should help ensure appropriate scoping and commissioning.

---

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Commission (2004) *Landscape Character Assessment, guidance for England and Scotland: Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity*, Countryside Agency, Cheltenham.

# 1 Introduction

# 1 Introduction

## Project summary

- 1.1 This report examines the contribution of historic characterisation work commissioned by London's boroughs – much of which has been carried out since the last London Plan Review, and at a borough-wide scale. Understanding the role and utility of characterisation and the significance of London's historic environment in the context of the capital's wider townscape and landscape is considered to be an important part of the evidence base as the next London Plan is developed. It is also an essential framework for local planning and management of the historic environment.

## Background

- 1.2 The London Plan (legally called a Spatial Development Strategy) is currently the only regional plan in England, and provides the strategic planning framework for the future development of London over a 20 year period. The London Plan includes approximately 120 policies including a suite which influence the management of the historic environment.
- 1.3 Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP) were undertaken in 2014, with a revised Plan being adopted in March 2015. Following the publication of the FALP, the Mayor instructed a full review to take place. However a delay to this review will be caused by the Mayoral elections in May 2016. So the first stage of formal consultation is expected to take place in Spring 2017 which will provide an early indication of the direction of travel of the review. A full version of the revised Plan for consultation is expected in Autumn 2017.
- 1.4 The inspector's report on the FALP raised a number of questions about the capacity of London to accommodate all its growth within its existing built confines without placing unacceptable pressures on the city's communities and environment. *'The impact on increasing densities on townscapes [including the historic environment]... needs to be considered'* as well accessibility levels. The report notes that *'town centres are accessible locations but each has its own character which new development should respect'* and large sites should have regard to their surroundings. *'Meeting the pressing need for housing in London will require new, possibly innovative solutions but care must be taken not to damage its environment such that it becomes an unpleasant place to visit, live and work'*. Paragraphs 41, 42, 54 and 55 of the report are particularly relevant as context to this project.
- 1.5 Recently Historic England responded to the Outer London Commission consultations on issues relating to options for growth, barriers to delivery and regional governance. The six options for growth identified a number of potential scenarios, which included diverting additional development towards town centres, where access to public transport is good, through the renewal of suburbs and/or beyond London to the surrounding counties. The background reports paid no regard to the potential implications of these options for the management of the historic environment, nor did they recognise the role of characterisation studies to inform options for growth.
- 1.6 The timescale of the London Plan Review provides an opportunity for Historic England to commission a number of independent strategic reports. This project is commissioned to provide greater understanding of the coverage, quality and use of characterisation studies, as well as other relevant mechanisms, as a tool for plan-making and implementation, as part of the baseline from which to inform our approach to influencing the London Plan review/consultation process.

## Defining 'character'

- 1.7 For the purposes of this study, historic characterisation has been considered within the definition in Historic England's guidance '[Understanding Place Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice](#)' and in the context of the NPPF and NPPG policy and guidance. Historic character is analysed within a broad definition of character, based on that set out in the Mayor's 'Character and Context' SPG.

**Character** is created by the interplay of different elements, including the physical or built elements that make up the place, the cultural, social and economic factors which have combined to create identity, and the people associated with it through memories, association and activity.

- 1.8 The key consideration for this study is how effectively the historic dimension of character has been understood, recorded and applied.

# 2

## Study method

## 2 Study method

### Introduction

- 2.1 This section of the report details the process followed in developing the study.

### Desk review

- 2.2 The project team, in discussion with Historic England, gathered information on known characterisation studies in place. This was supplemented by a comprehensive trawl of borough websites to address information gaps and to collect up-to-date Local Plans and associated documents to contribute to the review.
- 2.3 The studies were then collated and stored in LUC's Information Management System for secure storage and rapid retrieval.

### Borough-wide character studies

- 2.4 Using the knowledge gained from the trawl process, authorities with borough-wide studies in place were targeted for review.
- 2.5 An assessment framework, included as Appendix 3, was established to inform a systematic review of:
- Borough characterisation studies;
  - Local Plan Core Strategies and Development Management policies;
  - Supplementary Planning Documents and associated material, where relevant.
- 2.6 Using an MS Excel spreadsheet, with pre-defined 'picklist' values wherever possible, the review provided both qualitative and quantitative information to inform analyses and support conclusions and recommendations.
- 2.7 The output spreadsheet accompanies this document in digital form, being too extensive for effective reproduction on paper.

### Place-based character studies

- 2.8 A similar process was undertaken for place-based studies, focussing principally on the London Plan Opportunity Areas.
- 2.9 These were reviewed against a lighter-touch assessment framework, in parallel with the relevant Opportunity Area Planning Framework (or similar policy vehicle) to gauge impact.

## Impact and effectiveness

### Introduction

- 2.10 The project as originally designed had intended to directly assess the impact and effectiveness of policies and characterisation studies in terms of influence on development proposals. However, the complexity and scale of sifting through 18 boroughs' case files to even begin to be able to select a sample of documents proved to be impractical within the available time and budget.
- 2.11 Instead, a model of direct engagement with borough planning officers was adopted to gather anecdotal evidence and opinion on the attitudes towards characterisation studies, their relationship with policy and the level of use/influence in development management.

## Survey of borough planning officers

### *Approach*

- 2.12 An online survey was selected as the most efficient means of reaching planning officers without causing undue disruption, or taking up too much of their valuable time. It was anticipated that a comparatively light-touch survey would be the most appropriate means of achieving this result.
- 2.13 Consequently, a relevant survey was designed by LUC, approved by HE and then circulated to HE's local authority contacts. Although a seemingly small detail, experience dictates that response rates to surveys are substantially enhanced when they are disseminated directly by the relevant public body. Emails from third parties are more easily dismissed, ignored or even screened out by junk mail filtering.

### *Survey design*

- 2.14 Striking a balance between useful detail, survey duration and complexity is particularly challenging. Increasingly, local authority officers in general, and planners in particular, are subject to a barrage of requests for information and participation in research projects – leading to consultation fatigue. Asking a bare minimum of questions was therefore held to be a priority, along with the use of 'intelligent' technical approaches that ensured respondents were only asked questions relevant to their experience, based on previous answers.
- 2.15 Similarly, the amount of free text entry by officers was kept to a minimum, utilising pre-defined answer choices – generally pick-lists and rating scales. The use of the latter allows a fair degree of detail to be captured without asking large numbers of questions, or necessitating complex answers from respondents. Although respondents were required to provide information on the authority they worked for, they had the option to provide their responses anonymously (although few actually chose to do so).
- 2.16 It was considered imperative to test the following:
- Extent of respondents knowledge of characterisation in their borough
  - Practical use of characterisation information, and in what context
  - Understanding of the links between their borough's character study and local/national planning policy
  - Opinions on the accessibility and usability of studies
  - Whether authorities are referring developers to character studies?
  - The ways in which character studies have helped planners in their work
  - Whether respondents had made use of any additional character-based guidance?
- 2.17 A full list of questions is included as Appendix 2.
- 2.18 Follow-up calls were placed to relevant boroughs as required.

# 3

## Characterisation in London

## 3 Characterisation in London

### Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter of the review outlines the framework within which characterisation studies are developed and applied.

### Policy context for characterisation

#### National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.2 The NPPF emphasises the importance of good design and the recognition of intrinsic character (para. 17), incorporating design quality and the range of considerations relating to wider [principally landscape] character. It also makes reference to the social aspects of a place and to the connections between people and places. It seeks to ensure that development is properly integrated with its environment and context, whether built, historic or natural (para. 61).
- 3.3 The NPPF states that, in their Local Plans, authorities should set out a *'positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment'* that takes into account:
- *'The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local **character and distinctiveness**; and*
  - *Opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the **character of a place.**'* (para. 126, LUC emphasis)
- 3.4 In determining applications, paragraph 131 requires authorities to take account of the *'desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness'*.
- 3.5 NPPG states that development should *'seek to promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, local man-made and natural heritage and culture, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation.'* *'Natural features and local heritage resources can help give shape to a development and integrate it into the wider area, reinforce and sustain local distinctiveness, reduce its impact on nature and contribute to a sense of place'* (Para. 26-007-20140306)
- 3.6 These provisions underline the importance of authorities having a strong understanding and appreciation of the role and value of the character of place in developing their plans and policies, and in managing and directing change.

3.7

#### London Plan

- 3.8 The London Plan includes a number of policies encouraging high quality design, specifically referring to the need to draw on positive elements of places to inform proposals.
- 3.9 The Mayor's SPG on 'Character and Context' – which provides the main guidance on borough-wide characterisation in London – is hooked into the plan by Policy 7.4: Local Character.

#### Local Plans

- 3.10 London borough's Local Plans are required to have regard to the NPPF and the London Plan.

## 'The state of the art'

### Borough-wide studies

- 3.11 Eighteen out of 33 London Boroughs (including the City) have borough-wide characterisation studies in place<sup>2</sup>. The majority of these studies cover the whole borough, with a small minority (4: Barnet; Camden; Harrow; Redbridge) taking a more selective approach and excluding either non-urban areas [Redbridge] or areas unlikely to be subject to significant change – namely Conservation Areas and, in the case of Harrow, Green Belt.
- 3.12 North London is particularly well-represented in the current corpus, and offers some interesting opportunities for analysis of cross-boundary issues and opportunities. Historic England has been active for some time in promoting the development of characterisation studies across London. The differential patterns of adoption may be worthy of further study to understand the reasoning for boroughs choosing to, or opting not to develop characterisation as a means of understanding local historic environments.

### Place-based studies

- 3.13 A significant number of sub-borough / place-based characterisation studies are also in place. Of the 38 'Opportunity Areas' identified in the current London Plan, nine have comprehensive characterisation studies in place, while a further four benefit from at least some level of character-based evidence and analysis.
- 3.14 Richmond alone has taken a strong 'bottom-up' approach, supporting the borough's development of 14 'village plans'. These plans, covering locally-recognised communities, provide the framework for locally-focussed partnership and delivery of authority services, priority actions and local planning decisions. At the time of writing, five of Richmond's villages have 'Village Planning Guidance' Supplementary Planning Documents in place, responding both to the desire of the community to have their concerns more effectively considered in planning decisions, and reflecting the need to conserve and enhance the character of these areas. These documents are particularly interesting as, in addition to taking a character-based approach to providing planning guidance, they integrate consideration of Conservation Areas and undesignated areas.
- 3.15 As depicted in Figure 3.1, a significant area of London is covered by at least one level of characterisation study, meaning that – at least in theory – good quality evidence to support design, assessment and the positive management of change is in place. In practice, as this chapter of the report will illustrate, the range of approaches taken to delivering these studies results in different levels of usability and likely utility for developers and decision-makers alike. However, this suite of documents provides a strong basis for expansion and improvement.
- 3.16 Place-based studies are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 of this report.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bromley's study was in early draft form at the time of writing and was not reviewed in detail. Barking and Dagenham has a Historic Environment Characterisation Study (Essex CC, 2011) in place, but it was not publicly available at the time of writing. A replacement 'Townscape Socio-Economic Characterisation' study has been commissioned (July 2016) to support the development of the borough's new Local Plan.

# Coverage of characterisation studies

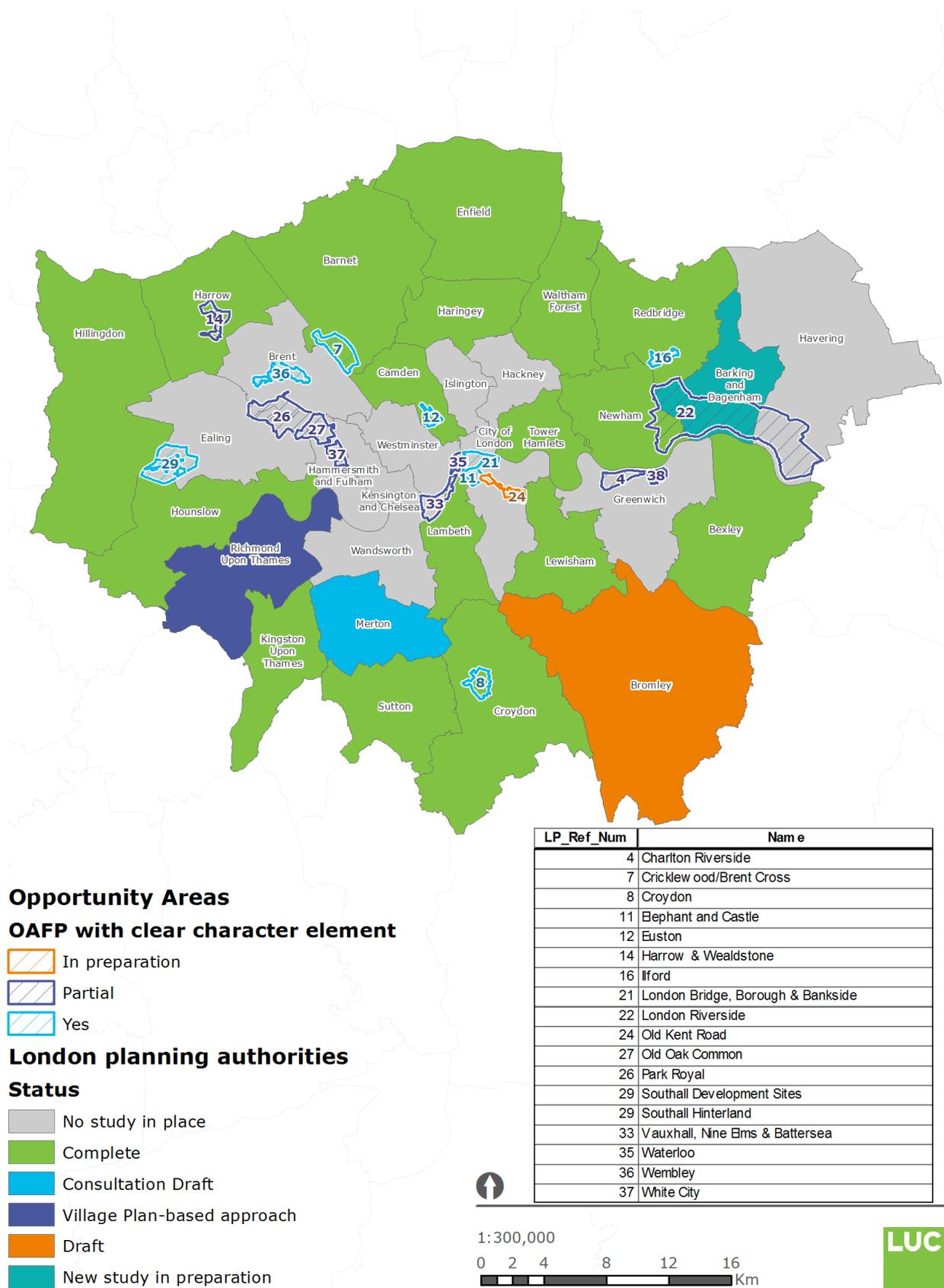


Figure 3.1: Distribution

# **4**

## **Review of borough-wide characterisation studies**

## 4 Review of borough-wide characterisation studies

### Introduction

- 4.1 This section of the report sets out the findings of a comprehensive review of characterisation studies in place across London's 32 Boroughs and the City of London.
- 4.2 Looking at a range of cross-cutting themes, it unpacks the range of ways in which character studies have been conceived, developed and delivered; drawing out conclusions on their:
- Function;
  - Utility;
  - Approach;
  - Links to planning policy;
  - Relationship to wider environmental considerations;
  - Quality
  - Consideration of the historic environment

### Scope and scale

#### *Borough-wide characterisation*

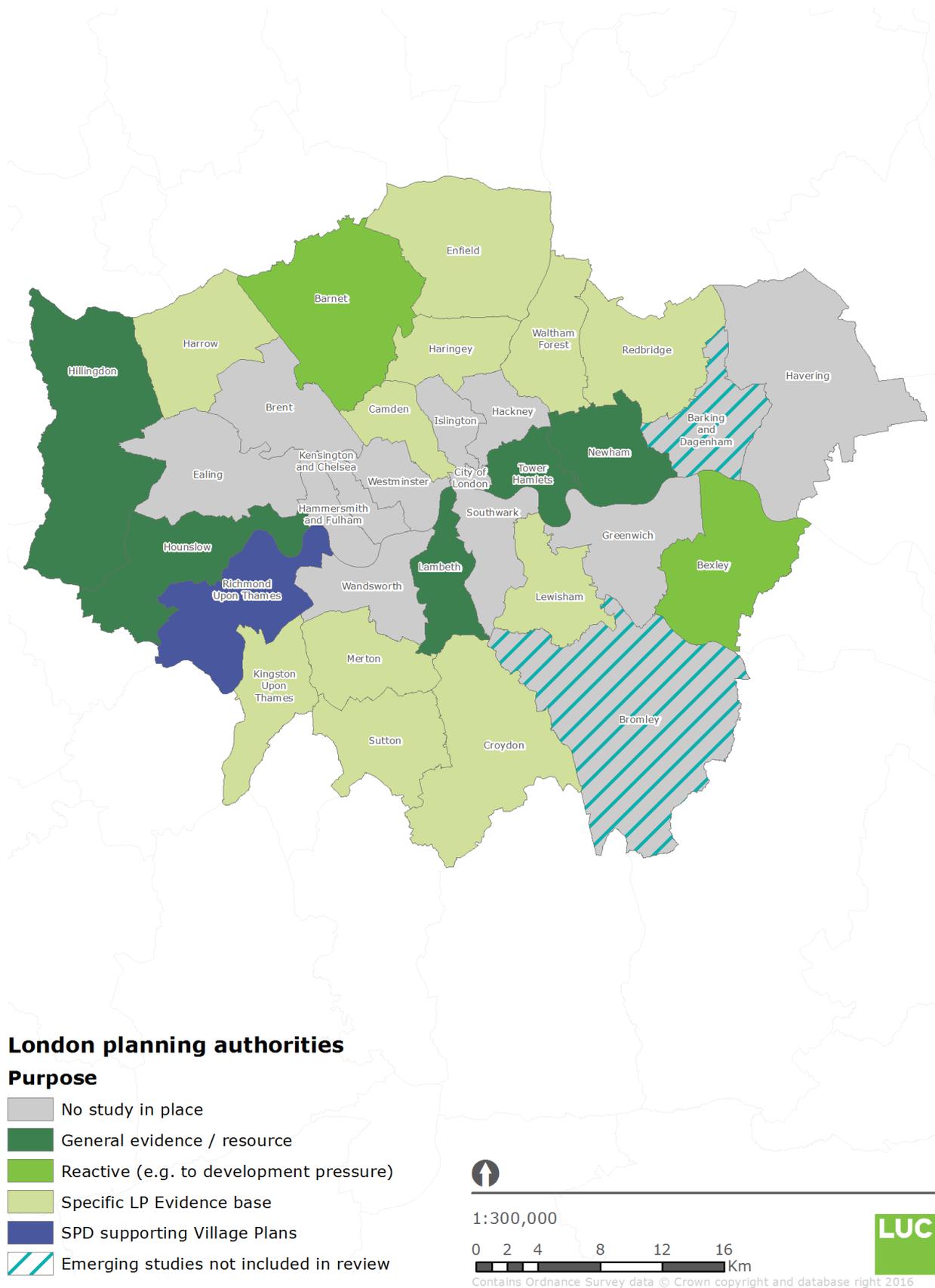
- 4.3 Of the 18 borough-wide characterisation studies in place, as noted above, these generally provide full coverage of the borough, enabling systematic and strategic analysis of the composition, character, period<sup>3</sup> and morphology of the urban environment.
- 4.4 The studies are generally fairly comprehensive in terms of consideration of influences on the character of the urban environment, including:
- Topography;
  - Land use;
  - Landscape (in outer boroughs, with areas of open land);
  - Historical development and heritage assets;
  - Block pattern and urban grain;
  - Density;
  - Building heights;
  - Architectural styles and townscape;
  - Green and open spaces;
  - Communications (including public transport accessibility); and
  - Social characteristics.
- 4.5 However, the level of emphasis placed on these, and other locally-specific factors, varies between individual studies as a consequence of local character and, potentially, the specialisms of the team

---

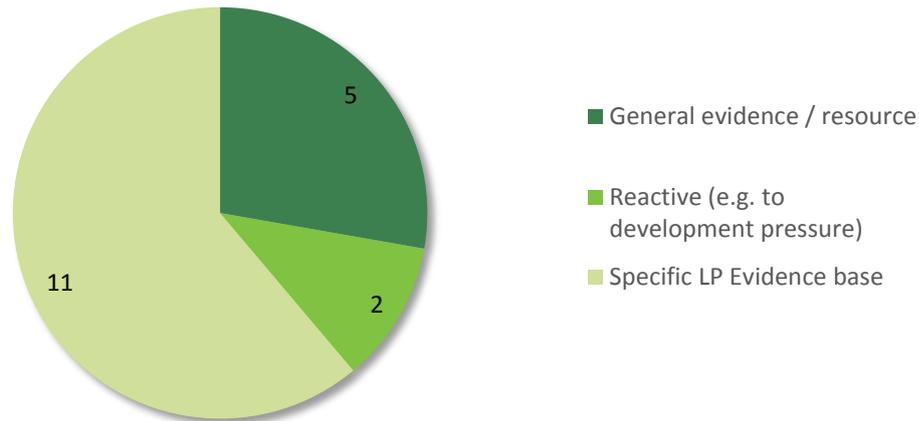
<sup>3</sup> Temporal information is often not systematically mapped in study documents, but can be discerned from the related character descriptions.

developing the study. (This is explored in more detail below, specifically with regard to the interpretation and recording of historical and heritage-related information.)

# Purpose of characterisation studies



**Figure 4.1: Stated purpose of characterisation studies**



**Figure 4.2: Stated purpose of borough-wide characterisation studies**

## Purposes of characterisation studies

### Informing planning policy

- 4.6 To some extent, all the characterisation studies undertaken by London Boroughs were intended to inform planning policy at some level. As illustrated by Figure 4.2 above, a majority of borough-wide characterisation studies (11 out of 18) were specifically developed to provide evidence to contribute to Local Plan development. An additional five studies were intended to fulfil a wider evidential function for planning, incorporating both policy and development management functions.
- 4.7 Two studies, covering Barnet and Bexley respectively, were developed at least partly in response to specific development pressures. Barnet's study excludes 'Areas of Control' (Green Belt, Conservation Areas, and Metropolitan Open Land<sup>4</sup>) – focussing on areas experiencing high levels of principally residential development pressure. In all other respects, it is very similar to the majority of borough-wide studies. Bexley's study, however, is concerned mainly with understanding the suitability of neighbourhoods for higher density development and/or tall buildings.
- 4.8 The extent to which these studies have influenced policy is discussed in more detail below. It is, however, important to acknowledge at this stage the fact that these studies are principally conceived and delivered within a planning and regeneration milieu – rather than solely being the preserve of, for example, heritage or landscape professionals. In itself, this potentially helps to increase the likely readership and user base for the document. This closer relationship with planning automatically helps to counter some of the negative arguments traditionally levelled at landscape and historic landscape characterisation. Principally, this has related to the perception of such studies as 'solutions in search of a problem' and that, on occasion, they lack a clear function and end-user base.
- 4.9 While this in itself guarantees neither a better quality study nor that it will be used, it does ensure that studies are better-aligned with local development priorities, pressures and issues and are less likely to be perceived as purely academic documents. This is helpful in promoting sustainable

<sup>4</sup> The rationale for this is that the special character of these areas is already articulated in planning policy and therefore do not require further analysis.

development, by integrating environmental issues (including the historic environment) with social and economic issues (NPPF paras 7 and 8).

#### *Supplementary planning documents*

- 4.10 All 18 borough-wide characterisation studies are intended as stand-alone evidence documents. Some authorities have adopted a rather different approach, looking at place-specific character and incorporating study findings within Supplementary Planning Documents – ensuring that key messages are clearly translated and can be used to proactively influence the design of development. The Kingston upon Thames Residential Design SPD provides a good example, where the findings of a characterisation study both inform local policy responses and are highlighted as key source material for design and assessment of proposals – with robust links to design, heritage, regeneration, density and sustainability policies.
- 4.11 Place-based studies are reviewed in more detail in Chapter 5 of this report.

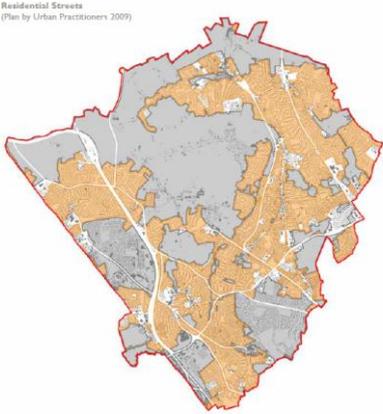
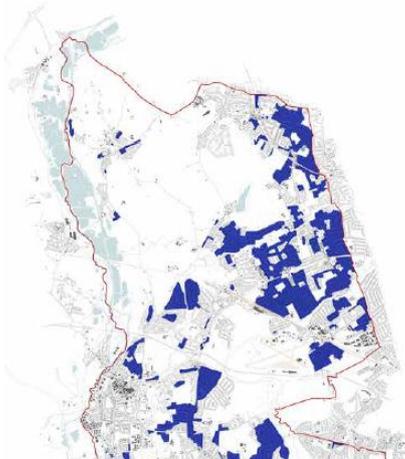
#### **Supporting designations and heritage management**

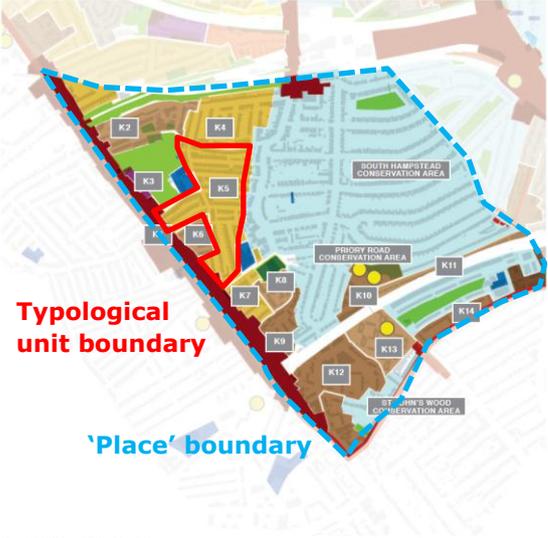
- 4.12 While the planning policy function of most characterisation studies takes primacy, they have significant potential to interact with and assist in the strategic management of heritage assets. The majority of studies include existing Conservation Areas (CAs), setting the wider context within which their special architectural or historical interest can be defined. Indeed, a number of studies go further, proposing the designation of new CAs to conserve and enhance key characteristics identified during the process (e.g. Redbridge, Elephant and Castle AAP, Tower Hamlets). Equally, omitting CAs means their heritage significance in a wider context is potentially missed.
- 4.13 Understanding and managing views is a key consideration across much of London, taking into account the London View Management Framework and the 'Protected Vistas' defined therein. Similarly, tall buildings are a key focus, both within studies and in terms of onward use for characterisation information. Ten studies have either direct links to, or have been used as key sources for, local tall buildings policy and guidance. Here, the emphasis has been on identifying areas within boroughs that have the capacity to accommodate new taller buildings, rather than taking a more holistic view of character as a key aspect of the setting of heritage assets. Indeed, setting is afforded little to no systematic consideration in any borough-wide study. This will be explored more fully in relation to wider heritage issues below; but at this point it is worth noting that the historic environment in general can be considered to be something of a weakness across much of the current corpus.

#### **Methods and approaches to borough-wide characterisation studies**

- 4.14 This section of the review unpacks the wide range of approaches taken to understanding character and delivering characterisation studies. The diversity of approaches evident across London illustrates some of the value of a bespoke, locally-specific approach – as well as raising a range of issues around consistency and the opportunities that may have been missed through the lack of a London-wide framework for delivery.

**Table 4.1: Key definitions**

Term	Definition	Example
<p>Typology</p>	<p>A system of classification applied to, in this case, urban fabric according to physical characteristics. Which characteristics are chosen, or given significant weight, may vary between practitioners but can include: architectural style, block pattern, period, use etc.</p>	<p>Samples are included below as Figure 4.8 and 4.9</p>
<p>Character type</p>	<p>The basic unit of characterisation. Types are generic, not generally geographically specific and can occur in more than one location within a study area. Types may be sub-divided to add detail and specificity.</p>	<p>An example of a type could be as generic as 'Residential Streets' (LB Enfield).</p>  <p>Residential Streets (Plan by Urban Practitioners 2009)</p> <p>Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey digital maps with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (C) Crown Copyright Licence No. London Borough of Barnet LA 10001/1074 Published 2009.</p> <p>Equally, more specific types such as "Metroland suburb" – depicted below in pictorial and map form - could be used (LB Hillingdon)</p>   <p>In either case, types are not geographically specific and occur in several different places within the same borough (and could have period or area-specific details that could be captured through the use of a</p>

Term	Definition	Example
<p>Character area</p>	<p>A single, unique geographical unit. In Landscape Character Assessment, character areas are of a single type.</p> <p>However, the term is used more loosely in London's characterisation studies, and is probably more accurately understood as a 'place' – a unique area, containing a number of types. They tend to be delineated based on locally recognisable community or place boundaries</p>	<p>further breakdown into sub-types)</p> <p>An example of a character area could be a specific urban block, or area of housing planned and built to a unified design (e.g. a particular housing estate)</p> <p>The map below illustrates individual typological units within a broad 'place' – in this instance, Kilburn in LB Camden</p>  <p><b>Typological unit boundary</b></p> <p><b>'Place' boundary</b></p> <p>Figure 5.9: Kilburn Context Analysis</p>

4.15 It is important to note that, because terminology is not always used consistently, care should be exercised in using characterisation studies – ensuring that a proper understanding of the internal terminology is obtained before comparing to wider work or applying in practical contexts.

**Table 4.2: Approach to characterisation, by Borough**

Borough	'Character Areas' only	Hybrid LCA <sup>5</sup> / urban character	Simple typology with place-based detail	Multi-level typology with place-based detail	Typology only
	<i>Studies that take a purely place or community-based approach, with discursive descriptions of character and do not apply a typology</i>  <i>For example 'Aldgate' or 'Shadwell' in Tower Hamlets</i>	<i>Studies combining urban and landscape characterisation</i>  <i>Enfield uses a typological approach that takes in both urban and rural land use and character. It is overlaid with place-based 'character areas'.</i>	<i>Studies breaking down character using generic character types, and describing local character in more detail at a place/community level.</i>	<i>Studies that use a multi-level typology, e.g. broad types ('residential') and more specific types ('Victorian Terrace') – overlain with place/community-based discussion and detail</i>	<i>Studies that apply only a typological approach, without place-specific area descriptions.</i>
Barnet					
Bexley	Strongly descriptive, with sketch maps				
Camden					
Croydon					
Enfield					
Haringey					
Harrow					
Hillingdon					
Hounslow					
Kingston upon Thames					
Lambeth	Sampled approach, 15 1:1250 map tiles analysed (of ~150)				
Lewisham					
Merton					
Newham					
Redbridge					
Sutton					
Tower Hamlets					
Waltham Forest					
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

Richmond is included on the map below for completeness, although the borough applied an approach based on its unique 'Village Plan' frameworks – this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> LCA: Landscape Character Assessment – applying a character-based approach to understanding the distinctiveness of landscapes. Generally only relevant to outer boroughs with areas of rural landscape.

# Methods applied



## London planning authorities

### Method

- Areas only - predominantly discursive
- Areas only - spatial
- Hybrid LCA / urban character
- Types / geographical areas
- Types / sub-types
- Types / sub-types + areas
- Village Plan-based approach
- Emerging studies not included in review

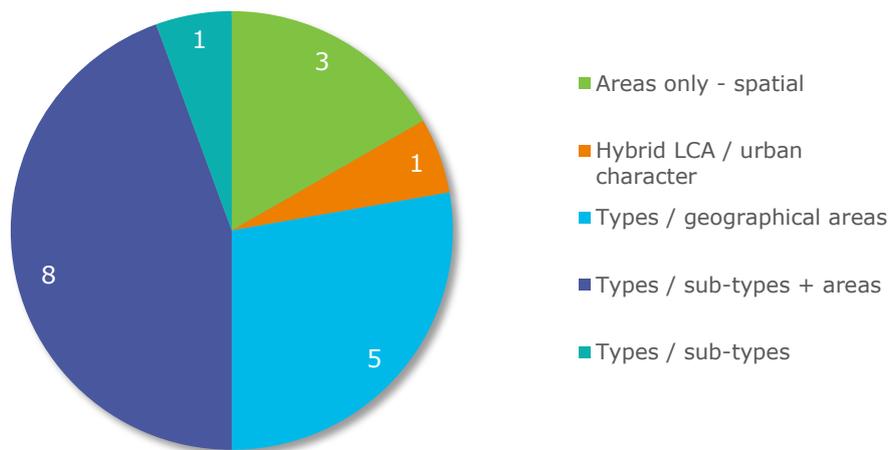


1:300,000



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2016

**Figure 4.3: Methods of characterisation**



**Figure 4.4: Method of characterisation**

### Spatial approaches

- 4.16 London's boroughs are highly diverse, ranging from authorities covering relatively small areas, with very dense populations and built environments, to low density, suburban boroughs with extensive areas of open, rural hinterland. Clearly a 'one-size-fits-all' solution to characterisation is difficult and, as for Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) at the national scale, could be viewed as stifling local innovation and direct responses to local environmental challenges and opportunities. On the other hand, within London, and with the prize of assisting strategic understanding and planning through the London Plan, as well as local policy and decision-making, strategic approaches and consistent parameters could be developed within which local initiatives could build. Indeed, this would be in common with current projects, funded by Defra and Historic England respectively, to unify Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) and Historic Seascape Characterisation (HSC) outputs at the national level.
- 4.17 Broadly, two broad approaches have been adopted for borough-wide studies. These can be summarised as follows:
- **Typological approaches**; used in 14 studies:
    - 10 using a generic typology, explained at a local level through geographical 'character areas' (generally geographically / socially identifiable 'places')
    - 3 using a detailed hierarchical typology of general types and detailed sub-types, also presented by 'place'
    - 1 using a hybrid Landscape Character Assessment(LCA) and urban characterisation approach, covering the rural hinterland and settlements respectively
  - **Area-based approaches** – no formal typology to record character; used in 4 studies:
    - studies defining geographically distinct areas and exploring character in a systematic manner, in two instances largely descriptive text rather than map-based.

### Role of technology

- 4.18 While characterisation is generally accepted as being heavily reliant on Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for digitising boundaries, recording attributes, manipulating and presenting typological spatial data, this appears to have been a secondary consideration. Indeed, the role of the typological data as a database to be queried and manipulated does not figure to any

significant degree in any of the characterisation studies reviewed. (For example, GIS datasets can be queried / analysed to determine the relative rarity of specific types – which may be particularly useful where they are understood to be locally distinctive or perhaps threatened at the London-wide scale.)

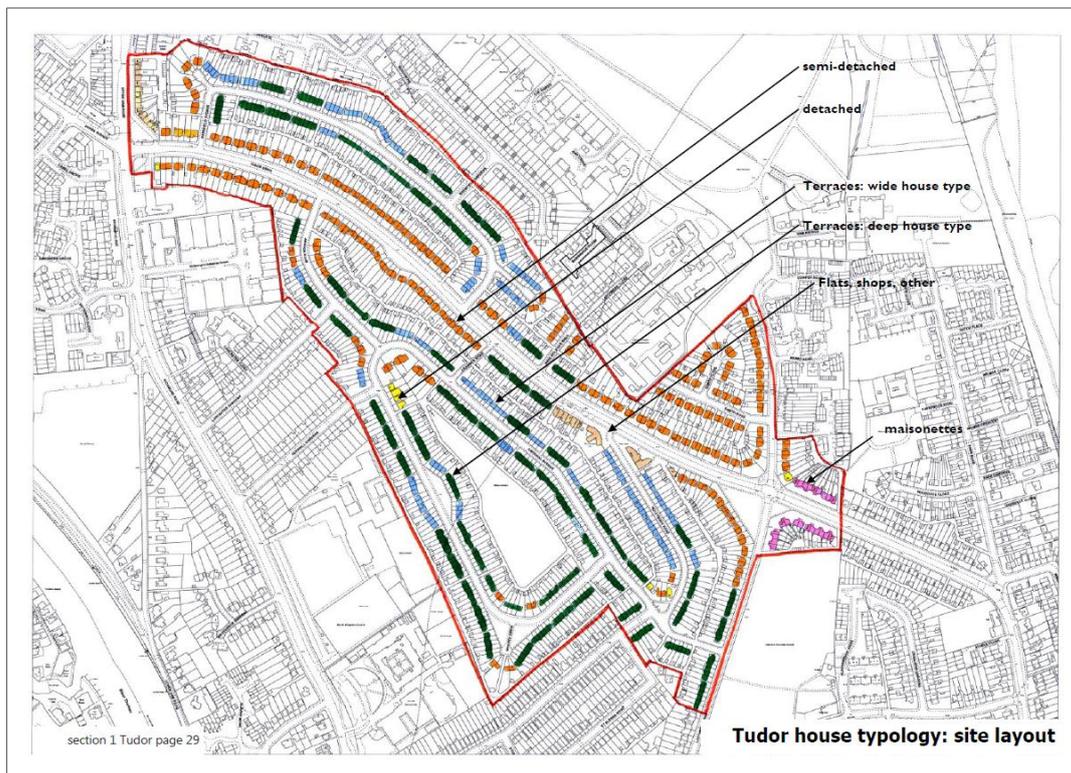
4.19 Clearly GIS has been employed to some degree in all studies – particularly those making use of typology – but this appears to have mainly been in relation to producing effective and attractive map outputs, rather than spatial or statistical analysis (for example of the distribution, relative rarity or intersection of particular types with valued heritage assets). Historic Landscape Characterisation outside London in particular has routinely explored the spatial statistics associated with character types (e.g. pre-C18 field systems, designed landscapes, prehistoric enclosures) drawing conclusions on relative rarity, distribution and relationships to aid in the discussion and understanding of significance, levels of threat and opportunities for enhancement. This is potentially an avenue worth exploring in future character studies in London, where the adopted methodology allows.

### Typological approaches

4.20 Broadly, the 14 studies using a typological approach fall into one of two categories, either:

- Single-tier typology; or
- Hierarchical typology – using types and sub-types.

4.21 The approaches adopted range from four types covering the entire borough (e.g. Kingston upon Thames), to hierarchies of types and sub-types running to upwards of 30 individual classes (e.g. Haringey).



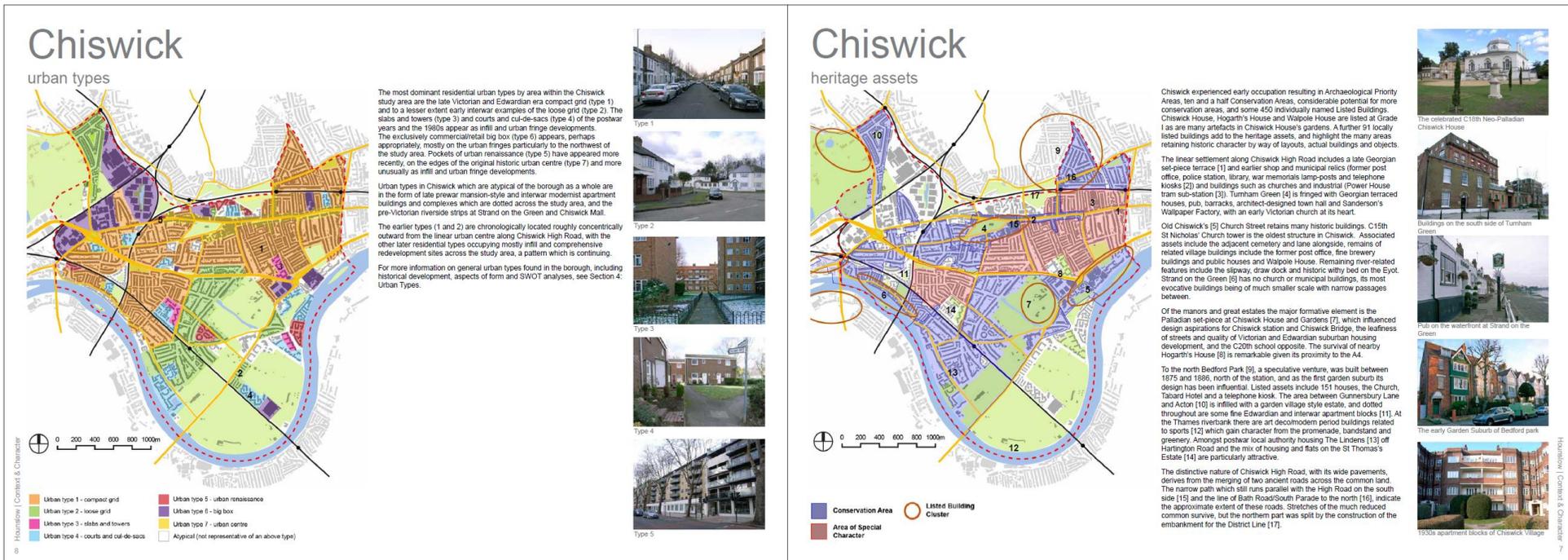
**Figure 4.5: Kingston upon Thames - map illustrating house forms within a character area (LB Kingston upon Thames)**

### *Single-tier typology*

- 4.22 In general, boroughs of more homogeneous suburban character have adopted a simpler approach to borough-wide typology. For example, Kingston's four types relate to very high-level land and settlement classification:
- Urban;
  - Inner suburban;
  - Outer suburban; and
  - Rural/open.
- 4.23 However, within this broad structure, far more detail is provided at the character area (place) level when required, right down to mapping house forms at the property, rather than block, level (as illustrated in Figure 4.5).
- 4.24 While this approach potentially reduces the overall utility of the typology, in that it limits the potential for wider spatial analysis, it does offer a flexible means of classifying the major influences on character, focussing more attention on the place-based assessment.
- 4.25 Similarly, Waltham Forest, as a relatively 'young' borough, has a comparatively short and simple developmental history – certainly when compared with the City or other inner boroughs. This is reflected in the seven-part typology based on residential periods and styles that dominate the area. However, like Kingston, very detailed character areas (defined at the block level) provide a snapshot of key issues, capturing the diversity that can exist within a seemingly homogeneous area. While the borough does face a range of challenges relating to intensification and increasing building heights in key areas, the majority of the character areas and recommendations focus on managing the smaller-scale incremental change that can be particularly damaging to character (especially through householder permitted development, reducing options for control).
- 4.26 Hounslow's approach adopts a seven-type framework that principally reflects street and block patterns rather than building type. These types are then mapped in detail and presented along with key contextual information at place and character area level, making this one of the most accessible and informative studies that builds on the borough-wide summaries in a meaningful manner. Croydon also adopts a single-tier typological approach – albeit with 20 types, reflecting the size and complexity of the borough's developmental phases.

### *Effectiveness*

- 4.27 Single-tier typologies can be seen as being effective for boroughs with relatively simple (at least compared with central London) development histories, with clear phasing of large areas of settlement. They represent a proportionate and accurate means of reflecting borough-wide character, and a useful framework for more detailed place-based analysis. Although more complex typologies could likely have been applied in the majority of examples outlined above (particularly Kingston), it is doubtful that this would have been any more effective in reaching appropriate conclusions. It could be argued that this focus on place-specific issues allows [likely] limited resources to be more effectively directed towards understanding the threats and opportunities influencing local character.



**Figure 4.6: Hounslow – simple, single-tier typology used to good effect. Note key contextual information presented at the same resolution / format (LB Hounslow)**

### Hierarchical typology

4.28 The majority of borough-wide studies apply a hierarchical approach to typology, working from the general to the specific.

4.29 For example, Harrow adopts a relatively high-level approach, analysing character at the borough level through the use of seven residential types:

- Pre- and post-war suburban;
- Inter-war estates;
- Linear;
- Utopian and social;
- Spacious;
- Bungalows and miscellaneous;
- Flats and maisonettes.

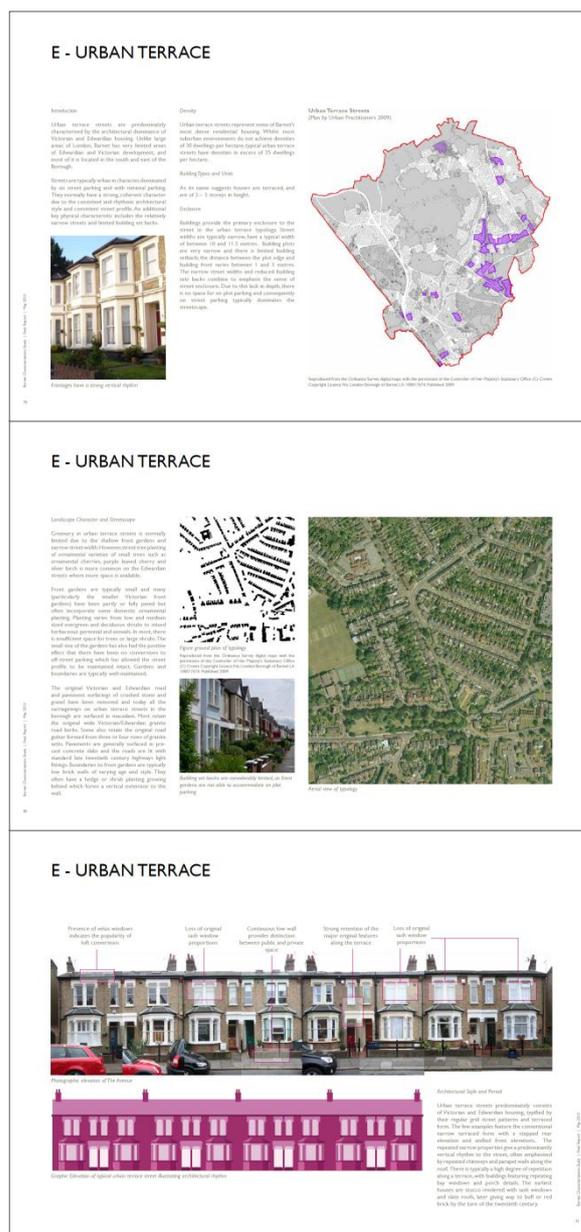
4.30 Unlike the previous examples, these seven types are unpacked into a number of sub-types, presented in detail at the individual type level, and drawn together in a strategic overview of the borough's character in relation to key pressures and opportunities (with particular emphasis on town centres and intensification areas). Again, this represents quite a focussed approach, looking at the areas of the borough likely to experience the most pressure for change and providing significant detail where required, making sense for the local context. Street layout is considered for each type, but house form and architectural style is the principal determinant of character.

4.31 Barnet's study, like Harrow, screens out areas of protection and of major change, defining five primary types – but in this case driven by street form and use:

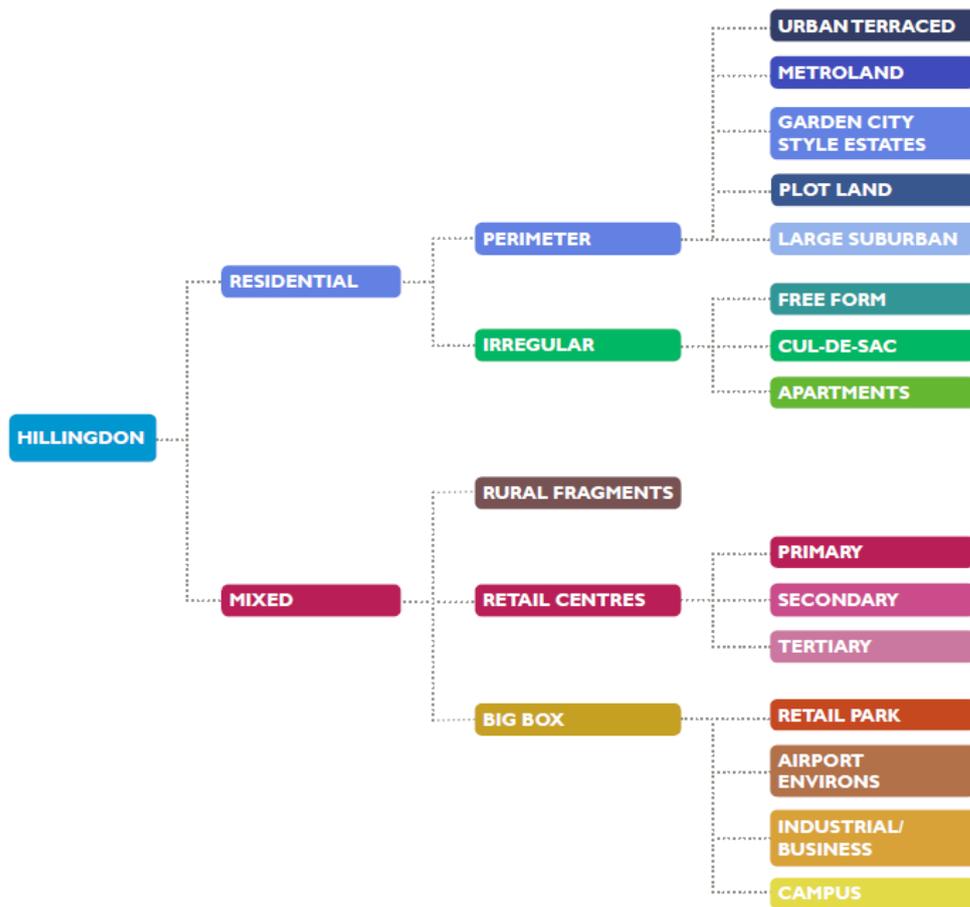
- 'Big Box' development;
- Campus development;
- Cores and town centres;
- Residential estates; and
- Residential streets, divided into secondary types:

- Linear rural;
- Suburban periphery;
- Suburban;
- Suburban terrace;
- Urban terrace;
- Flats.

4.32 This example is interesting as street morphology is understood and applied as a key influence on character. This is carried through to detailed analysis of ground plan typology, streetscapes and architectural rhythm (see Figure 4.7).



**Figure 4.7: Barnet - example of street-based typology (Urban Practitioners / LB Barnet)**



**Figure 4.8: Sample hierarchical typology - Hillingdon (Urban Practitioners / LB Hillingdon)**

# Character types

classification of character types

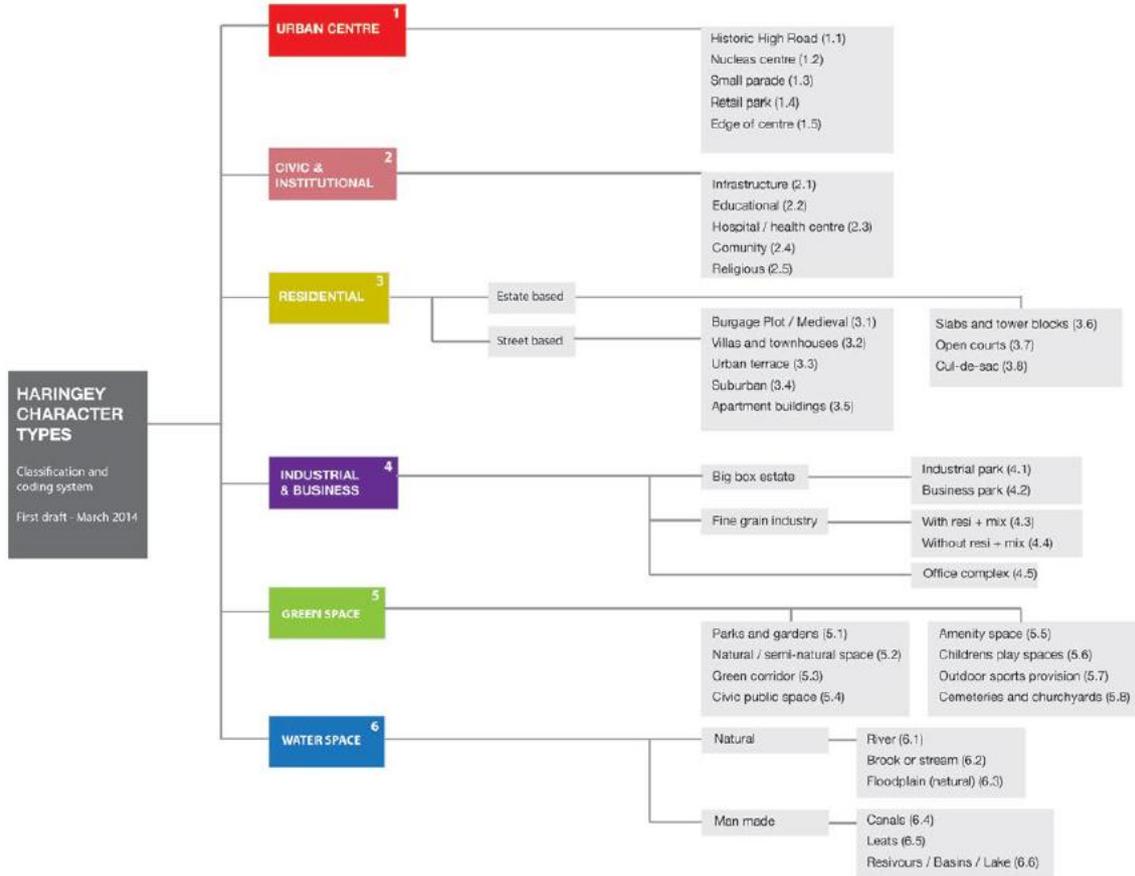


Figure 4.9: Sample hierarchical typology (LB Haringey)

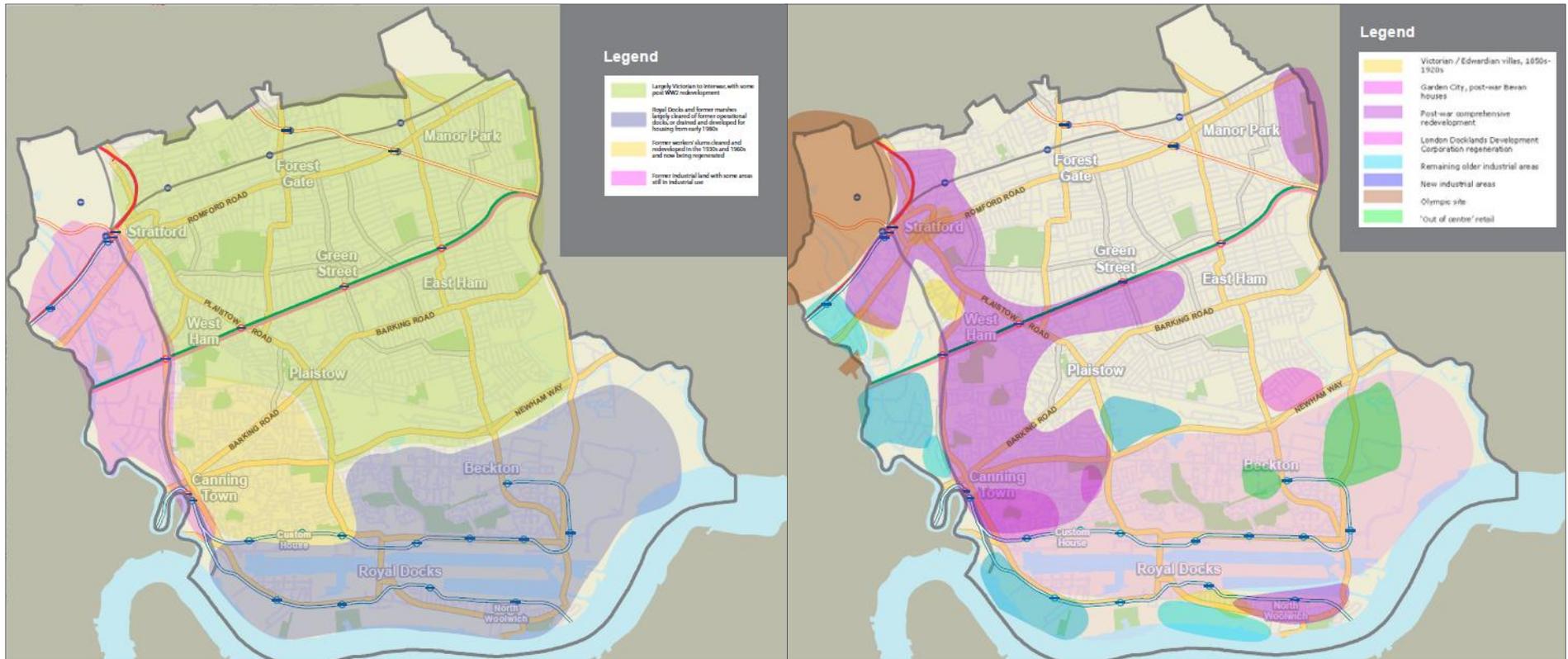
4.33 As Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9 above illustrate, there are many possible approaches to understanding character and developing appropriate local typologies. The key challenge for authorities and practitioners is ensuring that the typological approach selected is relevant, appropriate to the scale at which the study needs to be applied, and effectively reflects the scope and scale of challenges affecting the borough. Key differences include the greater emphasis on land use in Haringey's typology (Figure 4.9), which sets the framework of overarching types. Similarly, this typology includes greenspace and waterways – features that are frequently absent from characterisation studies across London.

4.34 Of the 14 studies that apply a typological approach to characterisation, all but one follow a land use / built form-based framework. Newham's typology, conversely, is developed from a temporal perspective; setting out the principal periods of the borough's development and defining key characteristics under each. The study initially defines four broad spatial zones of historical development, from which more detailed character areas are derived. The classification is as follows, and is depicted in Figure 4.10 below:

- Victorian, Edwardian;
- Garden City and Art Deco, early post-war and inter-war terraced;
- Post-war 1960s-70s;
- 1980s – mid-1990s; and
- Late 1990s to present day.

Each type is then considered against the following characteristics:

- Housing;
- Variants;
- Urban structure and legibility;
- Tall buildings;
- Local services; and
- Industrial development.



**Figure 4.10: Newham's temporal typology. Broad on left; more specific on right. Secondary typologies discussed in text, but not mapped (LB Newham)**

### *Effectiveness*

- 4.35 For the boroughs with nested typologies in place, these appear to be largely effective means of classifying and systematically approaching the urban area. They provide a clear and transparent means of understanding the process of assessment as they are generally well documented.
- 4.36 As is frequently the case with characterisation of all types, and at all scales, where 'character' stops and a more simplistic account of 'land use' begins can be debated. It should be noted that this is not necessarily an issue in itself – but that consistency is key.
- 4.37 Inevitably there are instances where typologies stray between character and land use; and indeed where anomalies can be observed (e.g. where a more specific type is included at the same level in the hierarchy as more general types). However, the purpose of this study is not to highlight supposed 'errors' – provided there is internal logic and consistency, this should not be viewed as a significant issue. Instead, the key issue for consideration in this regard is where there may be a desire to knit studies together across borough boundaries. Here, the scalability of characterisation as an approach provides a key strength, but it is likely that substantial work would be required to reconcile and homogenise typologies to both reflect the key types and periods of London's developments and retain local detail and specificity.
- 4.38 As a general observation, no study makes optimal use of their multi-level typologies. Given the effort of developing a complex typological approach, it might be expected that this would be applied in a manner that added value to the study – for example, facilitating higher-level analysis at the borough level, and drilling down at the character area / place level. However, this does not generally occur and could be seen, for larger or more complex boroughs in particular, as a potential missed opportunity.

### **Defining character areas**

- 4.39 To some extent, all but one of the borough-wide studies reviewed make use of some level of 'character areas' as units of analysis. Newham's temporal-typological approach, as outlined above, does not strictly define character areas as such.
- 4.40 These areas have been defined in a variety of ways, ranging from adopting political/administrative boundaries (e.g. council wards, as applied in Kingston; LDF 'sub-areas' in Merton) through 'fuzzy' and overlapping community/neighbourhood boundaries (widely applied, e.g. by Waltham Forest, Hillingdon, Haringey, Redbridge) to more consultative frameworks of 'place's developed in consultation with borough officers and, less frequently, local people.
- 4.41 Fundamentally though, 'character areas' in this context need only be coherent units of analysis that is derived from, or at least related to, the character of the urban environment. Clearly, where there is overlap with locally-recognised and understood boundaries, this is beneficial in terms of securing local buy-in – but the significant cost of meaningful community engagement is recognised as a potential constraint.
- 4.42 Community engagement can add considerable value and resolution to the understanding of local character. However, doing this properly can be expensive and time-consuming. Events and workshops need to be scheduled at times when a representative cross-section of society can participate (e.g. capturing the working population that are unavailable during office hours; enabling older people or people with small children to attend at convenient times); web-based engagement methods, although potentially reaching larger numbers of people, can be exclusive (i.e. restricting participation to people with the means, knowledge and time to access surveys etc.) and need to be carefully designed to capture the full range of knowledge and opinion. The cultural and socio-economic complexion of an area can strongly affect rates of participation – therefore 'knowing the audience' is critical. For most boroughs, this is likely to vary considerably from place to place – meaning that different modes of engagement may have to be prioritised in certain areas. In the current climate, securing this resource is likely to be challenging

### *Effectiveness*

- 4.43 The character areas defined across all of the studies that make use of them appear to hang together at a community and character level – although there will always be some level of local disagreement as to the shape and size of communities and places. As noted above, they mainly need to function as coherent units of analysis – which they do.

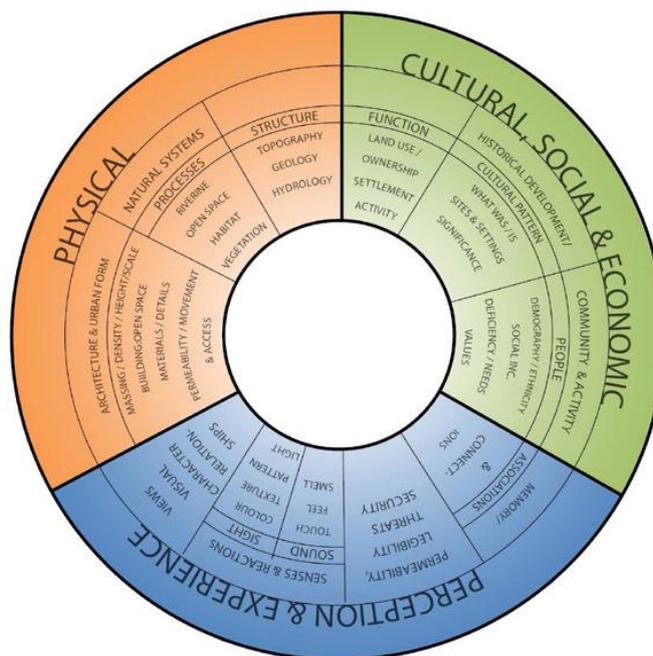
4.44 Ensuring consistency of terminology is potentially the biggest issue in relation to the definition and use of character area in this context. For outer boroughs, particularly where there is alignment with or even incorporation of Landscape Character Assessment, this is particularly important to avoid confusion – ‘character areas’ having a particular meaning in this context<sup>6</sup>, as defined in [Natural England guidance](#)<sup>7</sup>.

## Components of character

4.45 Character is an inherently complex construct, and its ingredients can vary substantially from place to place. Generally, borough-wide studies make use of a broadly similar baseline – and follow a consistent structure – to inform overarching interpretation of character.

4.46 Topics can be summarised as follows:

- Housing type and tenure;
- Social statistics and socio-economics (e.g. Indices of Multiple Deprivation; population density; qualifications of population);
- Public Transport Accessibility (PTAL);
- Transport and communications network;
- Open space;
- Land use;
- Historical evolution;
- Geology;
- Topography;
- Water bodies



**Figure 4.11: Components of character (Character wheel from Mayor's 'Character and Context' SPG)**

4.47 Other topics considered include: building heights, density, views, community identities and cultural heritage. These provide valuable context, and when explored in more detail at the character area level, bring the studies to life.

4.48 At the character area / place level, the emphasis placed on the various elements comprising local character varies considerably. Overall, there is a clear emphasis on urban design considerations, with most studies placing considerable weight on public realm, street character, building and block form. Given the necessary focus on conserving existing character and delivering enhancement through development, this is to be expected – and is likely to be valuable in ensuring that the guidance provided is applied. However, there are a range of subjects that are perhaps less well-developed.

<sup>6</sup> Particularly important where LCA is likely to be applied in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf)

## Key issues potentially under-represented

### Historic environment

- 4.49 Although summarised in all studies at the borough level, the influence of London's history and heritage assets is often underplayed. This is potentially a symptom of the process of breaking boroughs down into smaller units of analysis, where the overarching influence of heritage assets and wider patterns of historical development can become abstracted.
- 4.50 Many studies replicate the pattern of having a summary of historical development in the borough-wide baseline that is either developed as a stand-alone exercise or is not as well integrated in local-level analyses as it could be. Designated assets are generally mapped and listed, but what their presence means with regard to character, its future management and development opportunities/constraints is not always fully developed. It should be noted that no study appears to make explicit use of Historic Environment Record data to understand the wider distribution, nature and scale of the local historic environment. Similarly, the archaeological record of boroughs – to the extent that this has an effect on current character – is not widely discussed. Archaeological Priority Areas are sporadically mapped in studies despite being in place across all boroughs.
- 4.51 For example, although Tower Hamlets has some of the richest and most complex history of any borough – being located adjacent to the Roman and medieval centre of London, crossed by Roman roads and with a wealth of well-understood archaeological remains – the borough-wide summary in the LBTH *Urban Structure and Character Study* begins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From the outset, this diminishes the importance of ancient routes and patterns of activity in shaping the current form and character of the borough. However, the character area-level descriptions are more comprehensive and far better integrated – reinforcing the perception that borough-wide analysis is often a stand-alone, and slightly neglected, process. (This should not be taken as LBTH's study being identified as being of 'low quality' – simply an anomaly of structure, analysis and presentation.)
- 4.52 What is often absent is an understanding of how character and heritage significance interact, particularly outside designated areas. Four studies explicitly exclude Conservation Areas from consideration within the characterisation, while other designated assets frequently are not considered systematically – particularly Scheduled Monuments. While the rationale for excluding CAs is clear in that change is not always expected in these areas, legislation requires that LPAs pay 'special attention' to the 'desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance' of conservation areas<sup>8</sup>. Excluding them can somewhat erode their contribution to character and significance, including the role that surrounding areas can play as part of the setting of designated assets and the value of contrasts in terms of richness of character. It is worth noting that where CAs cover town centres it is especially useful to include them in the analysis of character as growth pressures will need to be sensitively handled.
- 4.53 The NPPF asks LPAs to set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment in their local plans, advising that they should take into account "opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place". Effective characterisation of the historic environment within borough-wide studies can assist with achieving this.
- Greenspace and waterways*
- 4.54 Only five studies include green spaces within their typologies. In many parts of London, these are important assets in

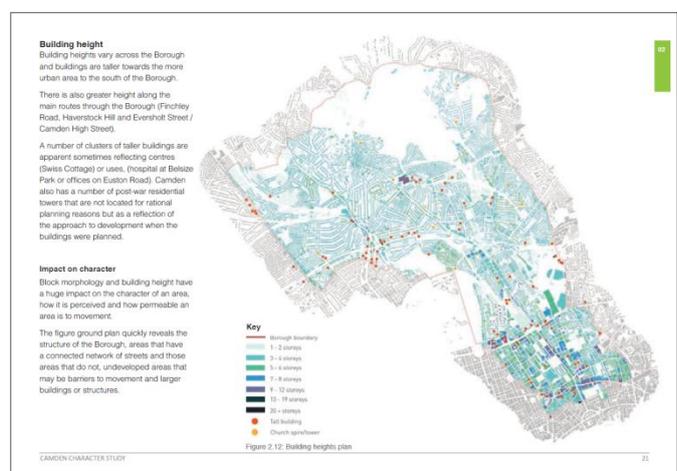


Figure 4.12: Building height analysis (LB Camden)

<sup>8</sup> Section 72, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as amended

their own right and have a very strong influence on the character and quality of neighbouring areas. While often considered in more detail at the character area/place level (in a further four studies), the influence of green spaces is potentially downplayed in studies that look only at residential areas.

- 4.55 For example, Waltham Forest and Haringey are separated by the Lea Valley and its extensive reservoir system. However, neither study draws out the heritage value and significance of these bodies of water, and their role in supporting public health in London. Similarly, the effect of the Lea Valley in separating Waltham Forest from east London – creating a physical and visual gap – is underplayed. While it is acknowledged that much of the borough ‘has its back’ to the Valley, it is a key opportunity and a significant part of the borough’s special qualities. Haringey’s study, conversely, takes a more holistic view of the influence and opportunities created by the Lea Valley and its influence on character (although the Navigation and reservoir’s value as heritage assets in their own right is not covered).
- 4.56 The exclusion of green spaces from typologies is, again, not necessarily a major problem in itself – provided that its influence is properly understood and recorded – but something that potentially influences the usefulness of characterisation data outputs at the borough or London-wide level. This could be particularly important in the context of sensitivity and capacity studies, drawing on characterisation data, as the influence of such spaces could be lost or rendered less visible through scoring systems that prioritise internal factors.

#### *Existing building heights*

- 4.57 The majority of studies (12<sup>9</sup>) do not systematically record or analyse the heights of existing buildings as part of the borough-wide character appraisal. Given the emphasis on understanding and managing the effects of tall buildings across London, this is perhaps surprising. In addition to managing impacts on longer views – including those designated in the London View Management Framework – impacts on local character and significance can be equally important. This can be particularly significant in boroughs (e.g. Waltham Forest and Sutton) that are almost entirely low-rise – in that tall development can be visible over far greater distances, and represent more of a contrast to the existing built environment.

#### **Emerging areas of interest**

##### *Community identity and cultural heritage*

- 4.58 Some studies, and Haringey, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets in particular, explored the cultural life and sensory factors influencing current character and the way that the borough’s places are experienced. For Haringey, this relates to the influence of White Hart Lane and the effect of Tottenham Hotspur home games on local culture and character; in Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets, this is more to do with diversity of communities and the positive effects on local character and identities.
- 4.59 Understandably, these influences are only touched on briefly – but offer a potentially interesting and more inclusive route to involving local people from all backgrounds in understanding and valuing character. Understanding how local people perceive and value their places is a key part of developing a complete picture of character and can contribute to heritage significance through communal values.

## Cross-boundary consistency

- 4.60 The characterisation studies currently in place across London are, in the main, strongly inward-looking. There is therefore very little read-across in terms of approach, typology, presentation or application of results. This can partly be explained by concurrent project development and delivery, and more significantly, the requirement to meet the specific needs and aspirations of borough Local Plan teams – generally the initial ‘customer’ for these studies.

---

<sup>9</sup> Camden, Haringey and Hounslow: deal with this at the strategic level; Newham: identified at type level; Hillingdon: clusters identified and mapped.

4.61 The differences between boroughs in terms of character and composition of the built environment have contributed to substantially different typologies, levels of detail and resolution of outputs. Unfortunately, this means that – for the majority of London – there is little realistic prospect of being able to reconcile the existing studies. This would yield little new information and, because of the differences in scale and scope of characterisation, would inevitably require substantial re-drawing of typological boundaries (to provide concordance in data scale and resolution) and re-coding of polygons (to provide typological consistency). In many ways, it would be simpler to begin afresh, setting clear data and digitising standards and a coherent typology from the outset.

**Role for ‘duty to cooperate’?**

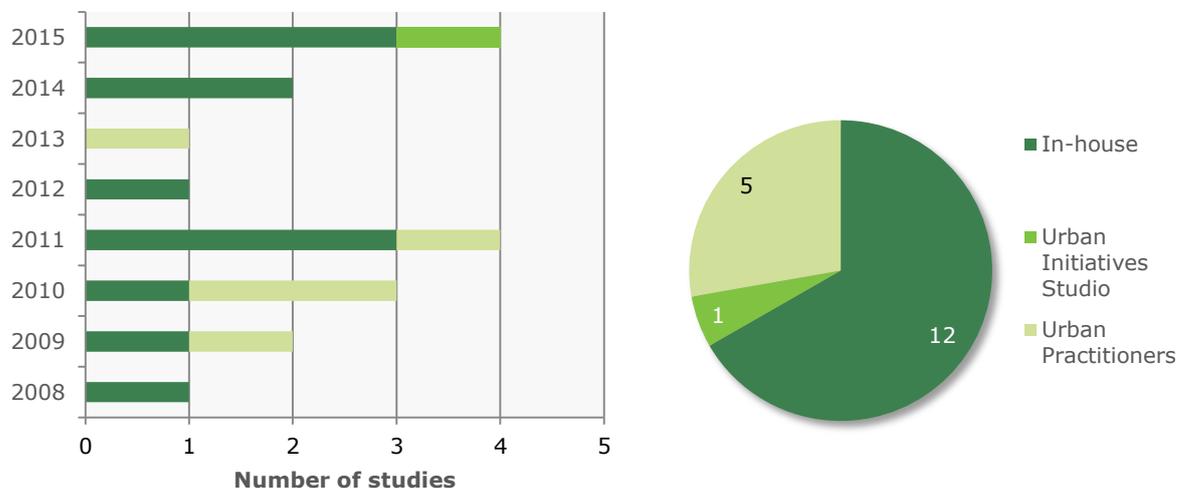
4.62 For future studies, there may be considerable merit in boroughs making use of ‘Duty to Cooperate’ meetings to raise and discuss shared approaches to character assessment and use in Local Plan production.

**Originators of character studies**

4.63 To date, the majority of character studies have been developed in-house by borough planning and urban design teams (illustrated in Figure 4.13 below). The influence of heritage specialists is less clearly recorded, but it appears that no studies have been led solely by local authority heritage specialists.

4.64 Allies and Morrison/Urban Practitioners have delivered five studies, and Urban Initiatives Studio undertaken a single study to date. While individual practitioners will always have a preferred approach, the influence of borough requirements / demands are clear across the outsourced studies, with substantial differences in typological and analysis approaches.

4.65 The earliest studies reviewed date from 2009 (Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets), with the majority of studies (10) pre-dating the Mayor’s SPG on *Character and Context*.

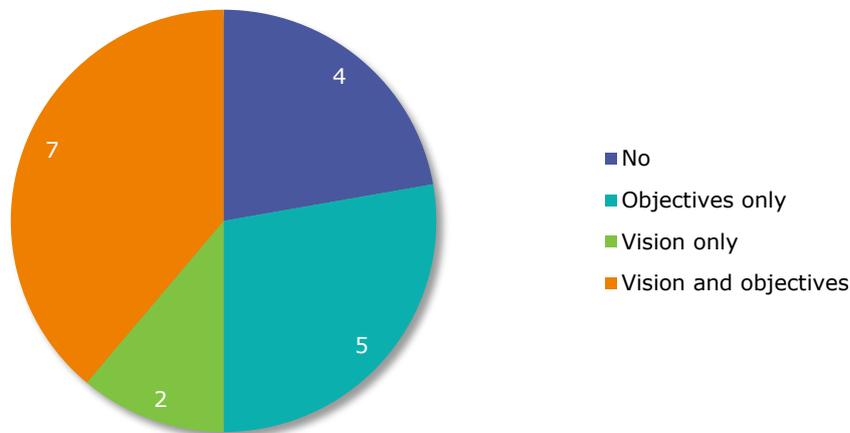


**Figure 4.13: Who is undertaking character studies?**

## Integration with planning policy and practice

### Local Plan vision and objectives

- 4.66 Across the 18 Local Plans reviewed, character is a welcome inclusion within all policy frameworks, if not always specifically forming part of the borough's vision for development.
- 4.67 The visions set for Local Plans are sometimes too high-level for character to feature effectively – but the level of incorporation of character as a concept, and characterisation-derived information, in Core Strategies and single volume Local Plans is encouraging.
- 4.68 Only four borough's adopted plans contained no reference at vision/objectives level to character or closely-related/synonymous concepts (e.g. distinctiveness). Where it is highlighted in the vision, but not carried through to more detailed objective, there is a potential concern that such references could be seen as 'warm words', but with little prospect of concrete action.



**Figure 4.14: Incorporation of character in Local Plan vision and objectives**

# Policy integration



**Figure 4.15: Levels of policy integration (development management)**

- 4.69 Conversely, even in plans where character is not included in the vision, good integration can still be achieved. For example, Barnet's Local Plan is strongly aligned with 'character-friendly' principles. The Core Strategy policy designed to 'protect and enhance Barnet's character to create high quality places' is well integrated, with explicit links across relevant Sustainable Community Strategy themes and Core Strategy objectives. The characterisation study itself is widely referenced throughout the Core Strategy, with attention drawn to its value as a 'key reference', and extensive explanations of its role in supporting text for policies on: character; placemaking; heritage; and, tall buildings. Key maps from the study, along with broad typology is included to support assertions with regard to the special qualities of the borough, are included.

**Table 4.3: Sample Local Plan / Core Strategy text**

**Sample text 1: Bexley Core Strategy 2012**

**"Vision for Bexley**

- Bexley will play its part in making London a sustainable place, whilst retaining the character of its towns and neighbourhoods and securing a strong, sustainable and cohesive community...
- Bexley's suburban identity will be protected, including its natural environment and historical features."

**"Core Strategy Spatial Objectives:...**

- 9: Create new built environments with the needs of people in mind, which are attractive, environmentally sustainable, accessible, safe, have their own distinctive identity but respect and enhance the historic and local character."

**Sample text 2: Barnet Local Plan Core Strategy DPD 2012**

*"High quality design also takes account of its surroundings and what is distinctive and valued about the local area. Feedback from Barnet residents on our Characterisation Study told us that the borough is considered distinctive as a place because of the sum of its constituent parts clustered around a network of 20 town centres and their suburbs. Most development in Barnet involves the replacement, extension or conversion of existing buildings so taking account of context and local character is particularly important. We will therefore expect the design of new buildings and places to respond to the local area and its defining characteristics and reinforce or create local distinctiveness."*

**Sample text 3: Hounslow Local Plan 2015-30**

**"Objective 4: Reinforcing character and context**

*To recognise the varied character of the borough's districts and seek to preserve and enhance their special qualities, heritage assets and overall townscape quality and appearance. Combine this with the promotion of well-designed development that meets the needs of 21st century urban living and contributes positively to the character of an area.*

*Policy CC1 Context and character*

*Policy CC2 Urban design and architecture*

*Policy CC3 Tall buildings*

*Policy CC4 Heritage*

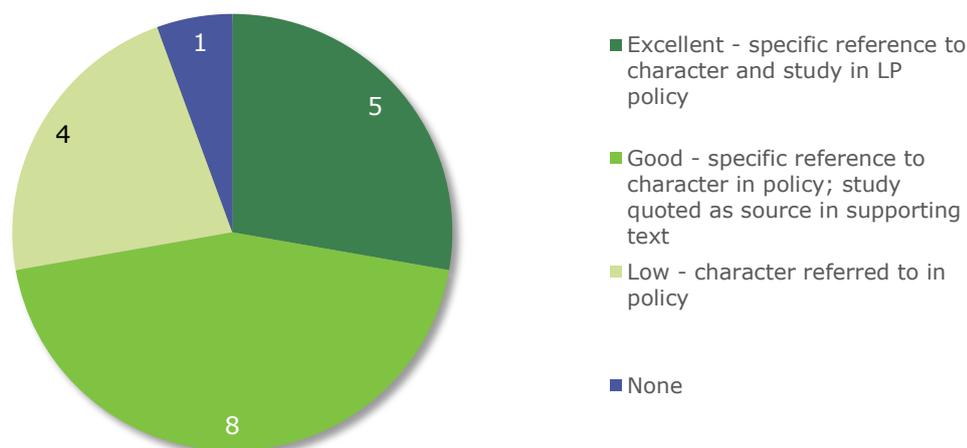
*Policy CC5 Advertisement panels, hoardings and structures"*

4.70 Ensuring that character is incorporated within policy frameworks at a strategic level, as well as being used and understood as part of the evidence base, is important. In addition to providing a critical 'hook' from which more detailed development management policies can hang, it is an important statement of intent from the local authority – confidently stating what makes their borough special, what benefits it brings to people and the economy and why it should be conserved and enhanced. It is particularly encouraging that outer boroughs such as Harrow and Barnet are explicitly recognising the value, character and significance of their extensive suburbs. Such areas are too often dismissed or overlooked in comparison with the longer and more varied development sequence of central London – but late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century planned growth, driven by successive phases of railway expansion, is as much part of London's story as more ancient history.

### Development management policies

4.71 The next step in the process for ensuring that character is considered effectively in decision-making is appropriate integration of characterisation studies and derived information with appropriately detailed development management policies.

4.72 A significant majority of Local Plans, as illustrated in Figure 4.16, contain either 'good' or 'excellent' levels of policy reference to local character. In five cases, these policies refer directly to the borough's characterisation study – ensuring that, as a minimum, it should be consulted by developers as part of the design and assessment process. (In the case of the plan with no direct references, it should be noted that this is a consequence of particularly old saved policies from the preceding UDP being retained, pending adoption of the replacement DM DPD. The relevant Core Strategy is suitably supportive of the character study.)



**Figure 4.16: Level of DM policy integration**

**Table 4.4: Sample development management policy text**

**Sample text 4: Kingston upon Thames Local Plan**

**Policy DM 10: Design Requirements for New Developments (including House Extensions)**

*Development proposals will be required to incorporate principles of good design.*

*The most essential elements identified as contributing to the **character and local distinctiveness** of a street or area which should be respected, maintained or enhanced include the following:*

- a. prevailing development typology, including housing types, sizes and occupancy*
- b. prevailing density of the surrounding area... [further factors derived from the character study]*

*The Borough's character and local context area is appraised in the Borough Character Study.*

**Sample text 5: Hounslow Local Plan**

**"Policy CC1: Context and character**

*We will expect development proposals to:*

*(f) Have due regard to the Urban Context and Character Study and demonstrate how the proposal:*

- i. Responds to the design recommendations for each character area and urban type within which their development proposal is located.*
- ii. Responds to the wider context and history of the area, its communities, its natural landscape and its urban structure, form and function.*
- iii. Conserves and takes opportunities to enhance particular features or qualities that contribute to an area's character, e.g. mature trees.*
- iv. Provides opportunities to help form a new character or improve the poor aspects of an existing character that could benefit from enhancement; and*
- v. Responds to any local architectural vernacular that contributes to an area's character, for example bay windows.*

**Policy CC4: Heritage**

*We will expect development proposals to: ...*

*(v) Conserve and enhance any strategic or local views identified in the Urban Context and Character Study and undertake a visual impact assessment to demonstrate no adverse impacts on the designated view or on views from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew World Heritage Site.*

*Supplementary Planning Documents*

- 4.73 Although not yet in place, Kingston upon Thames' Local Plan proposes that the key findings of the characterisation study will be translated into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to support the plan's housing design policy.
- 4.74 This would seem to be a potentially productive approach for authorities to pursue, providing focussed guidance on the key issues, opportunities and planning considerations required to deliver new development in areas of valued character.

*Effectiveness*

- 4.75 Clearly, the standard that Local Plans should be aiming for is a policy that both sets appropriate character-based tests and requires developers to have regard to the findings and recommendations of the relevant characterisation study. While incorporation within supporting

text is useful, and will undoubtedly assist in increasing usage of characterisation studies in decision-making, the lack of a clear policy requirement to use the study to:

- Understand the context of a site;
- Understand the values and heritage significance attached to the place;
- Inform the design process by requiring active responses to particular characteristics (e.g. urban grain, form, massing, heights, materials);
- Frame the impact assessment process; and
- Support relevant policy tests,

substantially weakens the position of both local character in general and the relevant character study in particular. Essentially, characterisation studies need to be framed in a manner that allows them to be material considerations for the purposes of planning, *and* be properly hooked in to Local Plan policies<sup>10</sup>.

- 4.76 It is clear that boroughs have taken substantial steps towards ensuring their character studies are relevant and have links to policy. However, there is some distance to travel in terms of ensuring both characterisation studies' suitability for use as policy and decision-making tools, and the local policy framework being suitably geared towards key local character issues.
- 4.77 To be truly effective as tools for planning, most of the current suite of characterisation studies is missing a range of information that could add substantial value – chiefly relating to the meaning of character-related information in planning terms. At present, only three studies (Hounslow, Merton and Kingston) take the characterisation data and begin to attach values and meaning to the results, allowing judgements on relative importance of key characteristics and qualities. [This is discussed further below.]

#### **Land allocations and Strategic Environmental Assessment / Sustainability Appraisal**

- 4.78 The most problematic component of Local Plans with regard to potential effects on heritage and character is the land allocations DPD. SEA / SA could be, and sometimes is, an effective and meaningful way of integrating the consideration of character into site selection and analysis of site capacity. However, this relies on clear information being available at this level so that likely significant impacts on heritage assets, or wider character, can be assessed.
- 4.79 Unfortunately, the 18 local plans reviewed revealed the total absence of meaningful incorporation and use of characterisation studies in the SA process for the current suite of land allocations in London. Although quoted as a source in eight out of 18 SA reports, the extent to which these studies were actively used is debatable. In two cases (Hounslow and Sutton<sup>11</sup>), reference to the study influenced the choice and framing of character-related SA objectives – but unfortunately characterisation itself remains invisible in terms of influencing either assessment methodologies or constraints datasets.
- 4.80 This is highly significant, as the potential value of characterisation as part of the evidence base for development planning is undermined when it is not applied in shaping that most spatial – and potentially harmful – element of the plan.

---

<sup>10</sup> The inspector on the Hounslow Local Plan examination (2014) agreed that the local plan policy could include a reference to 'special regard' being had to their characterisation study.

<sup>11</sup> Sutton's use of their study in SA is more comprehensive, influencing the baseline, framing of SA objectives and monitoring indicators.

## Conservation and management of the historic environment

- 4.81 As noted from 4.49 above, the historic environment and the historic dimension of urban character is dealt with inconsistently and, occasionally quite superficially, across the 18 borough-wide studies. While generally there is good quality information on the ways in which boroughs and their neighbourhoods have developed, the key assets in a given area and the presence of designations, interpretation of what this means in terms of planning and conservation decisions is very limited. Similarly, few studies take a systematic, strategic view of the characterisation data in terms of the value, significance or sensitivity of a given location to change.

### Heritage values and significance

- 4.82 NPPF's heritage policies are geared towards developing an understanding of the significance of heritage assets and historic places, and determining the level of harm experienced by that significance as a consequence of development.
- 4.83 This requirement, and the potential interaction with character, is not well developed in the current suite of characterisation studies – in line with a general lack of information on values and sensitivity. Hounslow, Kingston and Merton have taken the first valuable steps towards a systematic approach to this type of process, but without explicit consideration of heritage significance at the character area / place level. Indeed, the way in which many studies are structured – using large-scale character area / places as the main unit of analysis – precludes such an approach. A finer-grained spatial/typological unit is required to be able to make meaningful judgements.
- 4.84 With this information in place, this could open up opportunities for identifying character types or areas with strategic significance for the whole of London.

### Values

- 4.85 As heritage values have not been dealt with systematically, it is difficult to accurately judge the level to which this type of information can be extracted from characterisation studies. Even where it is present, it is not expressed in these terms. Historical and architectural / aesthetic information is clearly a key part of these studies – but the importance of these values is rarely drawn out. Similarly, although passing references are made to associations with events (e.g. the impact of the Blitz on the East End), historical figures and artistic endeavours, these threads are never pulled together.
- 4.86 As noted above, some studies – notably Haringey – have begun to explore the social and communal values attached to places, but this has not yet been approached in a systematic way. There are, however, potentially interesting opportunities for boroughs to work with their residents to unpack the diversity of cultural attitudes, values and associations that overlie and interact with a more academic understanding of character.
- 4.87 It is not anticipated that complex or extensive assessments would be required; instead a comparatively simple process of scoring appropriate units of analysis in against suitable metrics would enable boroughs to compare the relative importance of places – helping to prioritise conservation, enhancement or redevelopment. (Ideally, this would be on a 'high/medium/low' scale, as this is generally more transparent and less likely to generate perverse outcomes than numerical scores.)

### Significance

Again, systematic discussions of heritage significance are absent from character studies as currently scoped and delivered. This is unsurprising given that they are not explicitly framed as 'historic character' studies – although in practice historical processes and patterns, heritage assets and time-depth are what provide the urban environment with the bulk of its character. The analyses of townscape, its evolution, artistic and architectural merits within the studies exemplify certain aspects of significance. Many building 'types' are in effect historic building styles. Local identity is a key concern of all studies and this is inextricably tied up with historic character and significance. Thus, there is much relevant information concerning significance but the heritage values are not always expressed. As noted above, the units of analysis employed in arriving at conclusions and recommendations are generally too large to enable meaningful assignation of

ratings of relative significance. The NPPF's requirements with regard to significance relate principally to heritage assets, including conservation areas, but information on the significance of the historic environment in its widest sense is also required for plan-making (para 141) and an understanding of an area's defining characteristics is required to secure good design. (para 58)

### **Authenticity, integrity and condition**

- 4.88 Thirteen studies draw at least some level of conclusions and recommendations for the future management of the character areas defined therein.
- 4.89 Within this framework, there is a potential opportunity for more systematic analysis of the levels to which character areas / places and their key characteristics survive intact or, conversely, have been altered by whatever process. This could help authorities to narrow down which areas of their borough both embody key values and characteristics, and also represent the 'best' surviving examples of particular types. This could be particularly valuable in suburban areas where there may be very large areas of non-designated historic building stock that is ostensibly relatively similar – but could have experienced differential change as a consequence of local planning precedents or domestic trends (e.g. unsympathetic window replacement, extensions, garden parking).

#### *Heritage at Risk*

- 4.90 The above process could usefully tie in to the identification of heritage at risk – and potentially assist in the prioritisation of particular areas for conservation interventions or targeting enhancement through appropriate development.

## **Recording London's special qualities**

- 4.91 London's heritage and character varies enormously. From the Roman and medieval street patterns and ancient buildings of the City and the relic network of 'High Roads' that still form key routes today, to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century suburbs made possible by successive phases of railway and Underground expansion. All are significantly different – but all are distinctively a part of the rich and complex palimpsest that is London.
- 4.92 The distribution of borough-wide characterisation studies does, broadly, omit some of London's most famous townscapes and heritage assets – but nonetheless, key patterns of London's history and growth are highlighted, and sometimes underplayed, in a range of interesting ways. This study has particularly identified that the historic significance of communications and green space is generally overlooked in the current body of characterisation reports.

### **Communications**

#### *Waterways*

- 4.93 Essentially the reason for London's location during the Roman period, the Thames has had a major influence on the way the city has developed; driving industry, commerce and cultural links with the rest of Britain, the great port cities of northern Europe and the world beyond.
- 4.94 Although much of the iconic London waterfront lies within authority areas with no borough-wide characterisation study in place, it does run through, or form a boundary of, the following:
- **Bexley:**
    - discussed in terms of its role in the general physical influences and historical development of the borough; underplayed in terms of drift geology and current landform.
    - No character types/areas delineated, so cannot judge influence on 'characterisation'
  - **Newham:**
    - Influence on topography and geomorphology explored; almost absent from discussion of historical geography – despite extensive consideration of communication networks and the development of the Royal Docks. (Newham developed as an industrial area precisely because of its location adjacent to the Thames; this drove the development of railway connections – and bomb damage during WW2.) Study asserts that '*northern part* [of the

borough] *is most historic with intact buildings and street patterns*'. While this is true, the influence of the Thames on major historical processes, and its continuing influence on the character of the southern portion of the borough – particularly in terms of the vast, intact dock network (some of London's largest heritage assets), is perhaps underplayed.

- **Tower Hamlets:**

- Covered in the timeline of borough development, but as this begins in 1755 some of the early influence of the river is lost. Later influence on industrial development drawn out.
- Waterways highlighted as key element of urban structure, particularly on the Isle of Dogs
- Treated principally as edges / barriers and value of surviving docks as heritage assets in their own right – and a key influence, tying very modern development back to TH's past – is a little underplayed.

- **Lambeth:**

- Sampled approach to characterisation – no riverside grid squares selected.
- No borough-wide history, so influence of Thames largely missed.

- **Hounslow:**

- Covered in borough-wide history, with significance of bridging and fording points highlighted
- Spatial importance of the Thames as a key boundary drawn out in borough-wide summary, along with influence on topography.
- Principally considered as a barrier, rather than a route, in terms of movement and legibility – 'blue infrastructure' is considered as a key influence and drawn out in 'urban structure' diagrammatic representations of neighbourhoods
- Characterisation itself is principally concerned with broad urban form; therefore blue infrastructure is of limited influence. Discussed in much more detail at the neighbourhood level (e.g. Chiswick)

- **Kingston upon Thames:**

- Importance of Kingston as a key bridging point on the Thames acknowledged from the outset – but does not influence the definition of character types. Kingston town centre is omitted from the character areas studied reducing the opportunity to consider the relationship.
- Influence of the river on local character discussed at area level and its role in key views to the west (e.g. to Hampton Court)

4.95 For the majority of studies, the influence of the Thames as a driver of historical development and a key influence on the ways in which London has grown is, if not underestimated, then perhaps not expressed as clearly as may be desirable. Certainly, its influence on the development and delineation of character types and areas is limited and its role of linking boroughs and areas of the city is underplayed.

4.96 This is a fate shared by other major watercourses, for example the Lea Valley. While the Haringey study goes into some considerable detail in terms of the visual and character influences of the River Lee's floodplain, its industrial heritage and its role in providing valuable green infrastructure, Waltham Forest's study – on the other side of floodplain – barely acknowledges this major asset. Again, while the presence and habitat value of the extensive chain of reservoirs in the valley is acknowledged, their importance as heritage assets in their own right is missed. (This is generally true of London's historic reservoirs which can trace their origins back to the development of public health as a science and a major imperative for urban planning and infrastructure development.) The canal network is similarly underemphasised – although the boroughs where it is concentrated were not included in the study group. (Hounslow, however, emphasises the contribution of the Grand Union Canal to the character and distinctiveness of Brentford.)

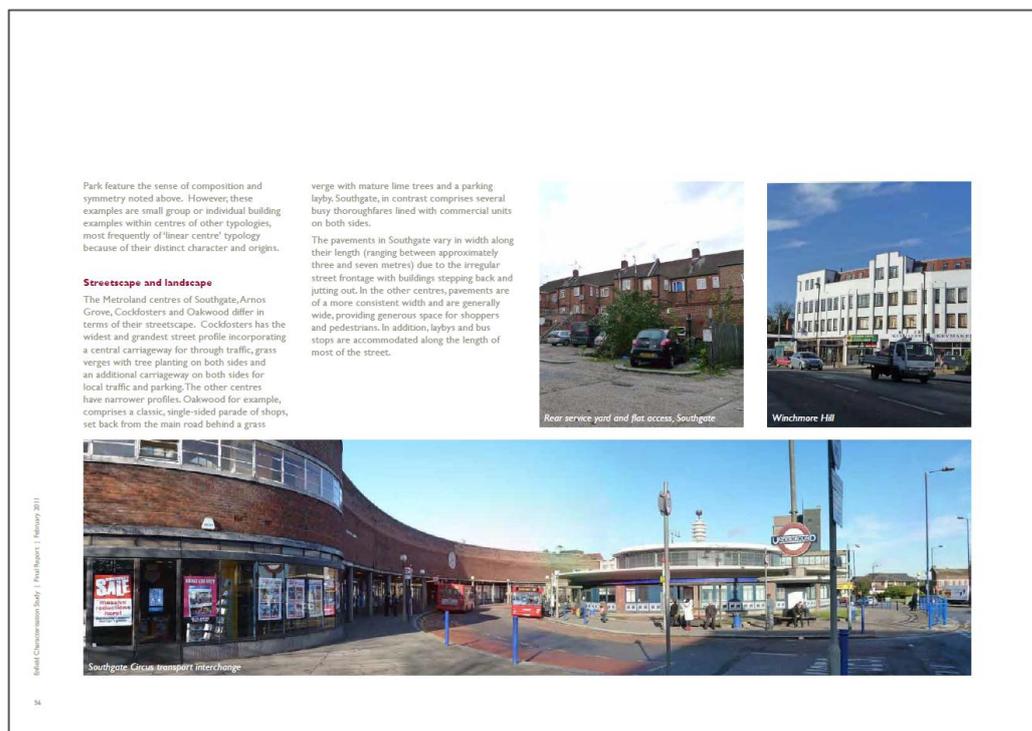
4.97 Admittedly, while the focus of most studies is *urban* character, the importance of green and blue spaces to the wider character and value of boroughs' historic environments is often underestimated. The importance of views of local townscape from waterways and green spaces is also often overlooked.

### *Roads*

- 4.98 London's road network can be considered to be a key part of the structure of its historic character – a major element of the 'skeleton' of infrastructure, on which the more intricate patterns of blocks, spaces and buildings provide the 'flesh'. Enfield's study draws out the role of historic routes particularly successfully in the borough-wide summary and maps the relevant development – but these influences recede in this and other studies at the type level, as the focus generally shifts to urban design considerations.
- 4.99 Where roads and streets have specific historic origins (e.g. Tottenham High Road, a medieval re-routing of Roman Ermine Street due to its flood-prone location), this is generally identified at a high level. However, historical development tends to be traced in term of block pattern and growth, rather than taking a more strategic view of how growth has occurred as a consequence of pre-existing or newly-formed routes. To a certain extent, this is an inevitable consequence of the map regression-type approach to understanding historic character – where changes and growth in block patterns is more easily identified and recorded, rather than necessarily starting with the history of routes.
- 4.100 The influence of typological approaches can also serve to underplay some of this historical significance as, for example, historic high streets are grouped together in a single type with descriptions focussing on commonality rather than individual histories or specific significance.

### *Railways*

- 4.101 London's stations, rail network and the Underground in particular are internationally-recognised icons of the city – and of Britain more generally. The network and its unique development history have played a major role in shaping the nature, location and scale of much of suburban London in particular. While perhaps less 'iconic' this heritage is an important part of 'what makes London special' – and is drawn out in substantial detail in relevant character studies. This is most notable in Harrow, where the development of the Metropolitan Line in particular was a key influence in the borough's expansion. The study provides a very useful history of the railway's expansion and allied housing development, forming the distinctive 'Metro-Land' suburbs. While perhaps not as immediately iconic as some of London's older heritage, the way that the city has expanded in successive waves, in response to developing technologies and capabilities, is as much part of its story – and arguably more relevant to the lives of a greater number of Londoners – as much of its widely recognised heritage.
- 4.102 The character studies for the relevant outer boroughs (Harrow, Barnet, Hillingdon and Enfield) have generally been successful in drawing out the value and significance of these urban landscapes, although their value to London as a whole is probably underestimated.



**Figure 4.17: 'Metro-Land Centre' type, from LB Enfield character study (Urban Practitioners, 2011)**

### Green and open spaces

- 4.103 London is widely recognised as one of the 'greenest' world cities, due to the scale and number of urban parks, gardens and open spaces spread throughout the capital. They are a fundamental influence on the character and quality of so much of the city's built environment. As such, they are frequently considered in borough-wide summaries. Curiously however, many of these spaces are specifically excluded from the typologies used in several studies. For example, the iconic Bloomsbury squares, Primrose Hill and Hampstead Heath are excluded from Camden's study (along with Conservation Areas and areas of major change), and this has a potentially diminishing effect on the way the influence of these spaces on neighbouring areas of urban fabric are recorded.
- 4.104 It is recognised that, for a number of studies, separate open space / green space audits and strategies were produced by authorities to guide the conservation and management of these assets. However, in terms of discussions of historic character this can unhelpfully reduce the significance and value these assets are afforded.

### Issues and opportunities

- 4.105 Characterisation inherently involves breaking an area down into coherent units with similar, recognisable qualities. Arguably, this process runs the risk of pulling the focus of practitioners away from the macro-scale influences on the history and character of boroughs – and London as a whole – down to the neighbourhood, street or even block level. Coupled with the way local authority boundaries have been drawn, the Thames in particular has been treated as more of a boundary than a thoroughfare and key link. Similarly, the relatively fine-grained nature of communication networks mean that they often form the boundaries between typological and area units, rather than being considered as determinants of character in their own right.
- 4.106 Green and blue spaces are frequently heritage assets in their own right, either being important designed elements of the cityscape, or being imbued with particular meaning, value or associations that have protected them from built development. While it is acknowledged that authorities have limited resources, and that inclusion of green spaces within a character study could be seen as duplication of effort. However, there is little commonality between such studies

and there is a risk that the heritage value of green spaces will be missed from both studies as a consequence.

- 4.107 The majority of studies include good quality summaries of the history of the borough, but frequently the 'big picture' – in terms of how the borough relates to the rest of London – is downplayed. Consequently, from the picture that extant studies provides, it is sometimes difficult to determine the special qualities of boroughs' urban character. To a certain extent, this can reduce the potential for studies to act as advocacy documents for their local historic environment.
- 4.108 A key opportunity for future studies is therefore the identification – in broadly the same way as landscape character assessment or Conservation Areas Appraisal – of special qualities of both character areas and boroughs as a whole. This could substantially increase the value of characterisation studies as tools for conservation and planning decision-making.

## Social, economic and community considerations

- 4.109 The demography and levels of social deprivation / exclusion is considered by the majority of the studies as part of borough-wide consideration of factors influencing character and quality. However, social factors are rarely considered in detail with regard to specific areas or types – despite often having a strong influence on character. Similarly, the dynamism of London's communities has always been an important factor in developing and changing character. While historical immigration – for example the contribution of French Huguenot refugees in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries – is acknowledged, the distinctive contribution to current character of immigrant communities is generally lacking.
- 4.110 Some studies – notably Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest – make reference to the value and distinctiveness of the contribution of immigrant communities (e.g. the distinctive Bangladeshi influence on Spitalfields and Brick Lane in particular). Reuse and reinterpretation of the historic environment is critical in ensuring that built heritage continues to be relevant and is valued by current users.
- 4.111 An interesting example of innovation is visible in the Haringey study, which records the influence of White Hart Lane and the dynamic character of Spurs' match days on local character and experience. Capturing these sorts of social values – which are (to an extent) spatially and temporally-specific, and add much to local people's understanding and appreciation of place – is a valuable opportunity to capture the full range of meaning and associations acting on local character.
- 4.112 Engaging with local people to understand how they use, value and understand the historic environment is a key opportunity for characterisation studies in particular, that can prioritise communal and associative values in a way that asset-focussed studies cannot.

## Quality of characterisation studies

### Interpretation and presentation of urban historic character

- 4.113 In common with the Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Landscape Characterisation approaches, the focus of all the studies reviewed is very much the current character of the urban built environment. There are few instances where the interpretation or recording of character could be questioned. However, the emphasis of studies can vary substantially. Generally, heritage is one of many considerations that is, in many studies, subservient to more general urban design issues. While these are rarely at odds with heritage, a design-led approach can be problematic where the focus is principally on delivering 'enhancement' rather than a more comprehensive understanding of conservation needs and the values attached to places and assets.
- 4.114 Frequently, where typological approaches have been applied, these are concerned far more with land use rather than character. While there is strong commonality between the two, character is partly a product of current use – but past uses may also have an influence; but one that is largely absent from the studies in place. No studies give systematic consideration to the relict character

that is visible in parts of London's urban form. (For example, the characteristic 'reverse-S' form of medieval field systems is clearly preserved in the built form of a number of outer borough estates – but this is not discussed in detail. Similarly, where ancient block patterns are preserved by more recent development this influence tends to be lost in consideration of current use.

### **Translation into policy and tools for decision-making**

- 4.115 Thirteen out of the 18 studies reviewed had specific references to the conservation and enhancement of local character within relevant policy frameworks, and referred to the relevant character study as a source of information. This demonstrates that the considerable work already undertaken by London's boroughs has significant traction and is shaping planning policy in a positive manner.
- 4.116 However, the usability of the character studies as planning tools varies considerably. It should be noted that, as many studies were intended primarily to inform Local Plans, their usability as tools for practical planning appear not to have been prioritised.

### **Usability of outputs**

#### *Accessibility of information*

- 4.117 As noted above, 11 of the studies were produced specifically to inform Local Plans, and the evidence base role was clearly the primary consideration for the majority of studies. Out of the 18 documents reviewed, only two contain specific information on when and how the study is intended to be used by practitioners beyond the provision of evidence. (Fortunately, development plan policies and supporting text signpost the relevant study in 13 instances, ideally helping to increase access to and use of the information therein.)
- 4.118 Document structure and format is critical in ensuring that users can quickly, easily and effectively access the right information to inform the planning and management of change. It should be noted that most studies are consistently structured and this greatly aids intuitive usability – although this is no substitute for specific guidance.
- 4.119 In terms of actually applying the content of the majority of studies to understanding the effects of development or other change, this is comparatively challenging for the non-specialist due to the lack of specific information on the value, significance or sensitivity of character types and areas.

#### *Forces for change*

- 4.120 Three out of the 18 studies do not explicitly discuss pressures acting on local character at the area/type level at all. While there is some consideration in all studies of overarching pressures, for those with no spatially-specific information (e.g. Lambeth) it can be difficult to reconcile these high level discussions with conservation and enhancement needs on the ground.
- 4.121 Understanding the pressures acting on each type / area gives additional life to characterisation studies and allows them to function as a borough-wide tool for understanding and prioritising new policy or other interventions where the need arises. This systematic assessment also enables the user of the studies to understand the wider context within which their project or programme is operating, and therefore take cognisance of broad patterns of change and specific issues and opportunities.

#### *Management guidelines / recommendations*

- 4.122 The next logical step from understanding the pressures acting on character is setting out the interventions or ongoing management required to conserve and enhance that which is important about an area. Notwithstanding the relative lack of explicit consideration of significance, setting out the authority's aspirations for character in their district is a critical function of such studies – and is vital in providing users with a clear steer in terms of what will, and will not, be considered acceptable change.
- 4.123 The approach to providing this guidance is very mixed across the studies reviewed, with six studies not formally presenting any such information. The majority of studies focus on desirable urban design / public realm enhancement, rather than broader management recommendations. However, some of the best and most detailed examples of this – Redbridge and Newham – provide detailed recommendations, broken down thematically or by area respectively. Both studies pull out type/area level findings and recommendations, and discuss these in the context of

potential solutions: Newham provides a chapter on 'Design Cues' for each type, as well as responding to specific threats (e.g. tall buildings); Redbridge highlights type-specific issues, provides spatially-specific responses for each character area and solutions under a range of key themes. Merton's study, while providing slightly higher-level recommendations at area level, is particularly clear and easy to follow, as illustrated in Figure 4.18 below.

## 2 Mostyn Road Character Area

### Issues & Guidance



General streetscape view



Mostyn Road terrace



Modern Neo-Georgian semi-detached houses



Glimpsed view of the Flint Barn



Detached John Innes house behind Flint Barn



Mostyn Road bow shaped bay window

#### Issues

##### Public Realm:

- Loss of some front boundary.

##### Built Form:

- Infilled porches, disrupting terraces and design of semi-detached houses.
- Replacement UPVC windows not in keeping with original casement windows.
- Use of skylights on front façades and extensions into loft space changing hipped roofs into gable roofs.
- Most stonework in Mostyn Road has been painted white obscuring the original material.

#### Guidance

##### Public Realm:

- Reinstatement and/or retention of boundaries where possible.

##### Built Form:

- All alterations to properties to be informed by the original detailing and materials.
- Retain existing features where they exist and follow original glazing patterns when replacing windows.
- Place rooflights and solar panels on rear elevation and retain roof hip articulation.
- Removal of paint from stonework where possible to expose stone detailing.

11

Merton borough character study: 15 Merton Park Local Neighbourhood

Figure 4.18: Merton - issues and guidance

4.124 These studies stand out in terms of providing material which developers and authorities can easily access and work with in developing appropriate schemes that respond effectively to both conserving key characteristics and unlocking opportunities for enhancement. Many other studies, such as Barnet, Haringey and Hillingdon provide very useful overarching recommendations, the loss of the link with type/area/spatial locations can make this information harder to apply in a practical context.

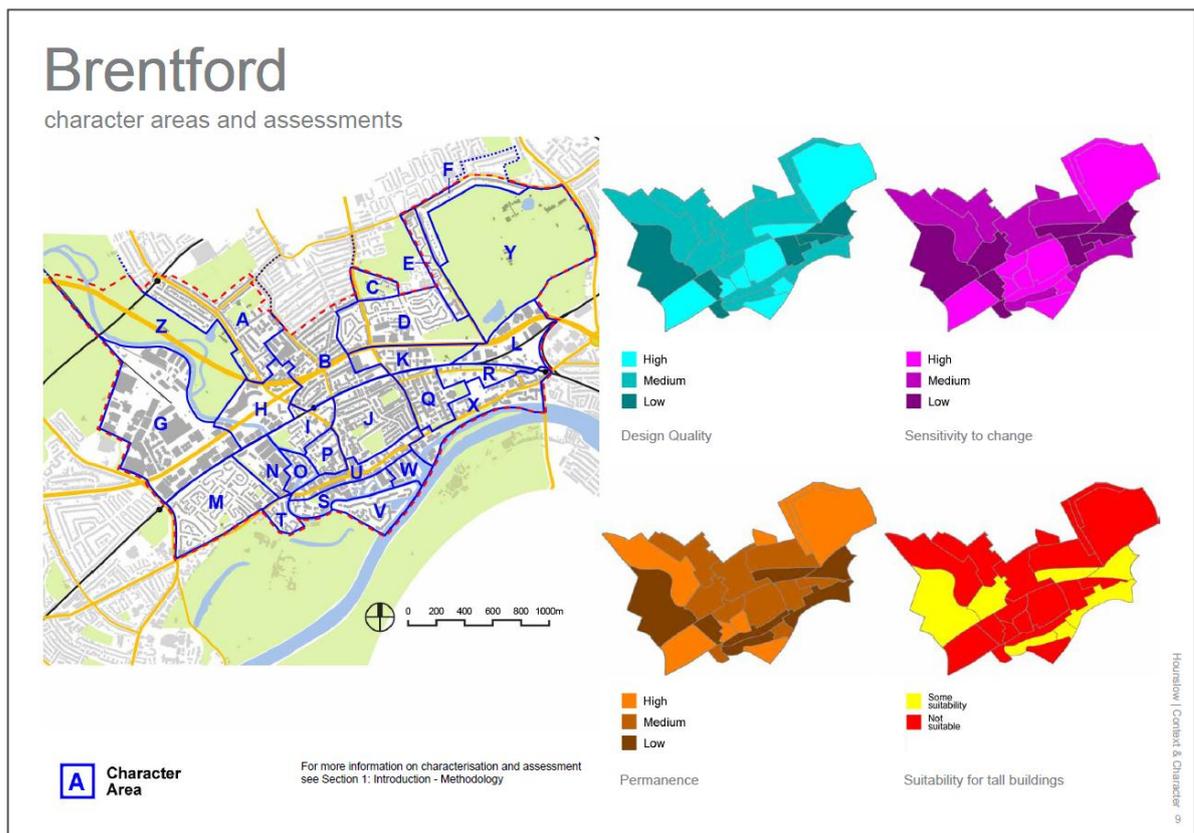
*Application in strategic planning*

4.125 Characterisation data is routinely used to feed into a wide range of planning studies and assessments – for example, landscape character information is widely applied in assessing the sensitivity and capacity of rural areas to accommodate change (often wind energy development).

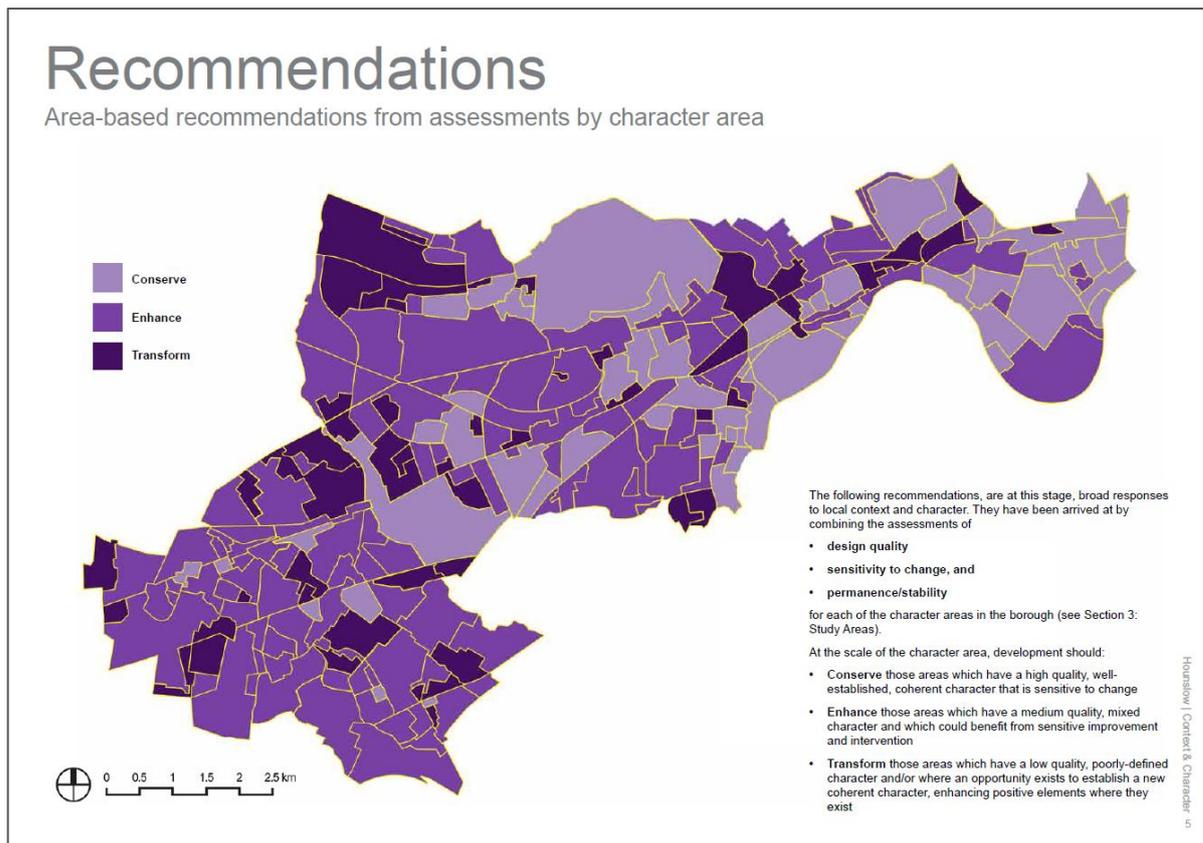
4.126 While only a few authorities have adopted this type of approach, the examples in place offer valuable insights into the potential of characterisation to contribute to strategic planning and management of particular issues.

4.127 Hounslow’s study provides perhaps the most comprehensive example of making wider use of the characterisation as a tool for understanding potential to accommodate change. Each character area with the authority’s 10 ‘study areas’/neighbourhoods was scored against the following metrics:

- Design quality;
- Sensitivity to change;
- Permanence/stability (i.e. levels of current pressure / actual change); and
- Suitability for tall buildings.



**Figure 4.19: Hounslow - character area assessments**



**Figure 4.20: Hounslow - borough-wide reconciliation of scoring to provide recommendations**

- 4.128 The methodology for assessment is provided, outlining the criteria and scoring system applied. The results of these assessments / scoring processes are depicted at the 'study area' level, and also brought together at the borough level to provide a complete picture of sensitivity / potential. Scores for design quality, sensitivity and permanence/stability are brought together to provide overarching recommendations of the priorities for each character area – whether they should be 'conserved', 'enhanced' or 'transformed', as depicted in Figure 4.20 above. For the authority and developers alike, information of this nature can provide important evidence for strategic planning of change, development and investment. (Although not undertaken in this case, these judgements could also provide valuable evidence to support community engagement, helping to verify analyses, understand communal values and align with local aspirations.)
- 4.129 It should, however, be noted that – in the main – the study works principally in two dimensions and deals with internal sensitivities rather than potential effects of development on heritage assets and character with intervisibility. (This is acknowledged in the study, highlighting the need for additional detailed, site-specific assessment particularly for tall buildings.)
- 4.130 Kingston upon Thames also undertook detailed appraisal and scoring at the character area level. While this provides a useful insight into the characteristics and performance against consistent metrics, this information is not mapped meaning that its usefulness in understanding the spatial implications – and opportunities – created by these judgements is difficult. From a methodological perspective, the ability to visually check the consistency of scoring and approach across the authority area is important.
- 4.131 As a major area of concern for London boroughs – and Historic England – tall buildings are an important factor in a number of studies. Indeed, Bexley's study is principally concerned with suitability for densification and tall buildings, rather than character per se. Five studies systematically record current building heights to provide a valuable baseline (Camden, Haringey, Hillingdon [clusters], Hounslow and Newham [at type level]). Ten studies exhibit some level of consideration of the effects of new tall buildings on existing character, with findings influencing

specific tall buildings/building heights papers (5) and, in two cases, Local Plan tall buildings policies<sup>12</sup>.

#### *Function as a tool for design and assessment*

- 4.132 As noted above, the majority of studies were conceived as evidence base studies for Local Plans. Consequently, the focus on usability for a wider audience has varied somewhat. While the majority of studies could be unpicked and applied reasonably successfully by specialist users, the lack of specific guidance on the following often makes practical application of the studies more difficult or at least less certain:
- What is *important* (rather than just characteristic), particularly in heritage terms;
  - How the findings / recommendations of studies relate to policy priorities and tests; and
  - How study content and findings should be applied in design and assessment.
- 4.133 From the planning authority perspective, such guidance would be useful in ensuring consistency of approach by developers – helping to align planning submissions with local priorities and providing consistent material to support the assessment of applications.
- 4.134 Because, as noted above, the current suite of studies take substantially different approaches to recording and highlighting the historic dimension of character, their usefulness in terms of positively managing the historic environment as a whole is perhaps diminished. This is unfortunate, as characterisation studies provide a key opportunity to explain and present the historic environment in a holistic manner.

## Review conclusions

### General

- 4.135 As a body of work, the borough-wide characterisation studies in place across London should be considered to be a 'good news story'.
- 4.136 Substantial investment of energy by Historic England in particular has been successful in securing coverage in over half of London's boroughs and, for the most part, these studies are robust and have fulfilled their primary purpose of informing development plans. While individual studies may have better approaches than others to particular elements of the process, virtually all provide a good baseline on which authorities can build. This is perhaps the key message for the Boroughs – that good work has been done, and that this creates opportunities for optimising their considerable investment. Once the core characterisation is in place undertaking more specific sensitivity and capacity work is comparatively straightforward but can add a lot of value. Similarly, updates to the data where change is known to have occurred, or for monitoring purposes, can be undertaken economically.

### Advice and guidance

- 4.137 As the Mayor's '*Character and Context*' SPG post-dates the majority (14) of the studies reviewed, its impact cannot readily be ascertained. Of the four studies published after the SPG, only one – Haringey – refers directly to the document in terms of policy relationships. This is, however, more reflective of the lead times involved in producing studies, rather than authors disregarding available guidance. Ideally, future updates to the guidance will include advice on applying characterisation data to sensitivity, capacity and other strategic planning studies to ensure that authorities are able to make best use of the available information.
- 4.138 There is no one 'best practice' study that could – or necessarily should – be used as a model across London. The current corpus clearly illustrates that locally-derived approaches, informed by the nature of the local environment, can be highly effective whether developed within the authority or by external consultants. By examining critically the content of the borough-wide

---

<sup>12</sup> Barnet's policy directly refers to the characterisation study as a key source; Hounslow's study is referred to in supporting text to the policy.

studies it is apparent that there is a need for the historic environment to be better integrated at local and strategic levels, with its positive contribution to character being more clearly identified. This suggests the need to ensure that updates of both the Mayor's SPD and borough-wide studies fully capitalise on this key element of London's character. The *'Character and Context'* SPG could also be revised in the light of this research to help future studies to adopt a shared, more consistent, approach to assist strategic as well as local understanding of London's character and to underline the importance of understanding the ways in which places are valued – a widespread omission in the current corpus.

### Methods and approaches to characterisation

- 4.139 As noted above, a 'one-size-fits-all' solution is unlikely to work well in London, even though some strategic parameters could potentially be established without stifling local approaches. Further, it is noted that instilling the strengths and benefits of a GIS-based typological approach – even at comparatively high level – is useful (as *'Character and Context'* does). Authorities without such data in place (e.g. Bexley, Lambeth and, to a lesser extent, Kingston, Tower Hamlets and Newham) potentially miss out on the benefits of the strategic overview that a typological approach can provide. Studies taking a discursive, area-based approach are likely to be more challenging to maintain and update, in that areas of change cannot easily be 'cut out' and replaced. Their value for monitoring and evaluation purposes is similarly diminished, as a precise record of 'what is where' does not exist.
- 4.140 While assembling a London-wide character map was clearly not part of the objectives informing the development of the current corpus, typology-based studies (i.e. based on the architectural and townscape form) are potentially easier to reconcile with neighbouring areas.
- 4.141 It is acknowledged that urban character is about more than heritage and the historic environment, and that urban design and public realm considerations are important. However, the historic dimension, and its value and importance, is often afforded a lower priority than may be required. This varies between and even within studies, where different elements of the historic environment may be under-represented or their contribution to current character underestimated. The focus on designated assets, partly as a consequence of available and easily accessible data, means that the role of heritage is often confined to the presence and influence of specific assets – rather than the true summation of historic character of an area. As no studies appear to have made use of Historic Environment Record data, assets of local/regional significance – or those not yet considered for designation – have not routinely been considered, thereby underestimating some of the significance of London's urban environment.
- 4.142 In addition to the borough-wide summaries of historical development, and distribution maps of heritage assets, taking a more detailed area-specific approach to heritage may be warranted – particularly for inner boroughs with complex histories. Tower Hamlets' study offers an interesting approach, where historical character and identity and heritage and townscape are considered in detail for each character area, leading to a fuller appreciation of its role in shaping current character and opportunities.

### Influencing policy and practice

- 4.143 The majority of studies have influenced – to a greater or lesser degree – the content and approach to character in Local Plan policies. This is an area where guidance (potentially the Mayor's SPG) and informal advice to authorities could be strengthened, ensuring that policies capture both the key local issues and embed characterisation studies as practical tools for planning, design and assessment.
- 4.144 Anecdotal evidence, captured through a survey of London Borough planning officers and discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 of this report, suggests that while awareness of these studies is reasonably good, their relationship to policy and practical application is substantially lower.
- 4.145 Given the amount of information officers are required to consider, it is perhaps unsurprising that documentation with no statutory weight and often poorly-developed links in policy is infrequently used. Arguably, in future, where characterisation studies are used to help answer questions around the capacity and sensitivity of urban areas to particular types of change, they could have a greater impact. Similarly, more effective consideration and capture of value-based information (particularly in relation to communal values and its relationship to heritage significance) could

help to raise the profile of locally important places and give communities a more effective voice in shaping decision-making in areas they treasure.

### **Managing the historic environment**

- 4.146 Arguably, this is not the core function of the current suite of characterisation studies as originally conceived – and is therefore not a strong element of any of the studies reviewed. In many areas, the decision to explicitly exclude Conservation Areas underlines the perception of these documents as being less about heritage and more about urban design.
- 4.147 No study takes the step of attempting to define the heritage significance of character types or areas. Given the detail in which the historic environment is sometimes considered this is, on balance, probably a good thing. While the objectivity of the characterisation process itself must remain unchanged, in order to provide an unbiased baseline, giving meaning to the data collected could reasonably be given greater priority – provided that the method for arriving at judgements is transparent and repeatable.

### **Identifying London's special qualities**

- 4.148 The inward-looking nature of borough-wide studies, and the inherently detail-focussed approach that characterisation can encourage appear to have discouraged much consideration of borough's character in its wider context. Indeed, while a few studies make references to cross-boundary issues, little meaningful consideration is given to these factors – which is understandable particularly in the context of resource and time constraints acting on project teams. Similarly – and potentially more important – because no consideration has been given to the significance of any elements of character at the local level (i.e. through collection of information on values and objectively assessing significance), there is no natural opportunity to look at this in a wider context. Consequently, it is difficult to draw out the elements of character that have potential London-wide significance. It should, however, be noted that few inner boroughs are represented in the study group, meaning that some of the 'big ticket' histories of London are absent. (However, Tower Hamlets, for instance, deals well with the influence of the Tower itself, historic docks and the influence of trades and historical immigration in and around Spitalfields and Whitechapel.)
- 4.149 One of London's key qualities is the diversity and distinctiveness of its communities. The way in which particular historical communities have shaped the built environment, and been influenced by the physical and social fabric of the city, is a key part of London's story. Capturing the communal values attached to and informed by places is potentially a valuable means of ensuring that interpretations of the historic environment remain relevant – and helping communities to engage with their heritage on a more level playing field. It is particularly encouraging to see authorities – most notably Tower Hamlets and Haringey – grappling with this issue. While there is inevitably a need for careful planning and sensitive handling of community engagement processes, this type of work has significant potential to help authorities gain a better understanding of communal values to inform more effective discussions of cultural significance.

# **5**

## **Review of place-based characterisation studies**

## 5 Review of place-based characterisation studies

### Introduction

- 5.1 The value of characterisation as a tool for understanding places and managing change has been promoted by Historic England since at least the early 2000s, building on rural Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) and Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) projects and later, site-specific studies developed with English Partnerships.
- 5.2 The pace and extent of change in London, coupled with a virtually unparalleled historic environment, makes it the ideal setting for the application of place-based characterisation to inform the planning and management of change.

### Scope of the review

- 5.3 It is recognised that the following chapter does not provide an exhaustive review of all place-based characterisation studies in place across London. Within the bounds of this commission, it was judged to be most appropriate to focus on studies of strategic significance to London as a whole. Clearly, a huge amount of valuable work has been undertaken by London Boroughs in producing Conservation Area Character Appraisals. However, as these studies are undertaken specifically to manage designated assets, which benefit from dedicated planning controls, these were felt to be less in need of examination within this research.
- 5.4 The review has therefore focussed on studies driven specifically by change proposed in the current London Plan.

### London Plan context

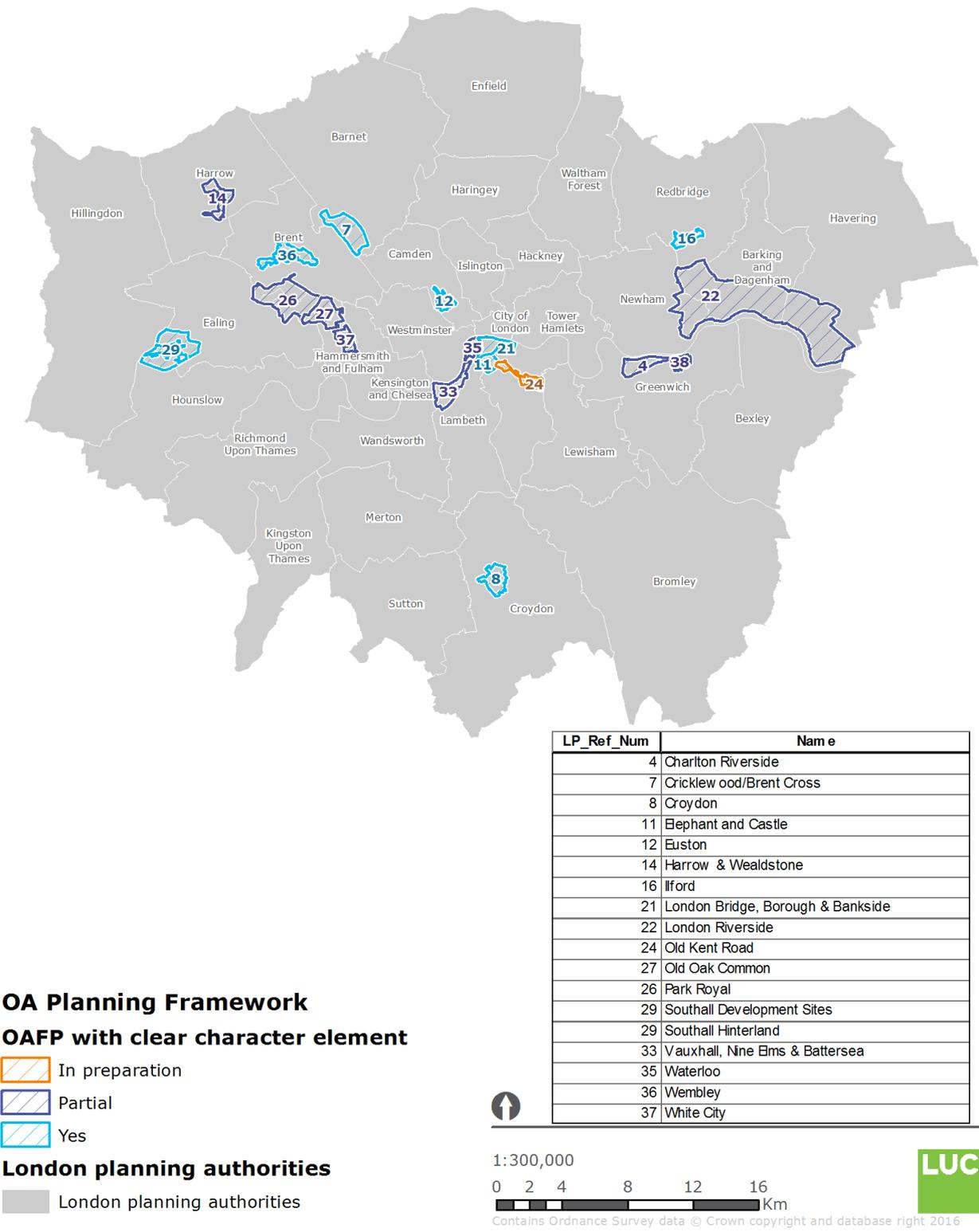
- 5.5 The Mayor issued guidance on the application of characterisation in London, as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the 2011 London Plan, in 2014. 'Character and Context' (MoL, 2014) is part of the London Plan Implementation Framework, designed to inform Boroughs' Local Plans and to assist in decision-making.
- 5.6 In parallel, the 'Opportunity Areas' defined in the London Plan identify areas of intensive, planned change. They are generally major sources of brownfield land with significant capacity and expectation for development – but, in many cases, also contain areas of substantial historic environment interest.

### Planning for change

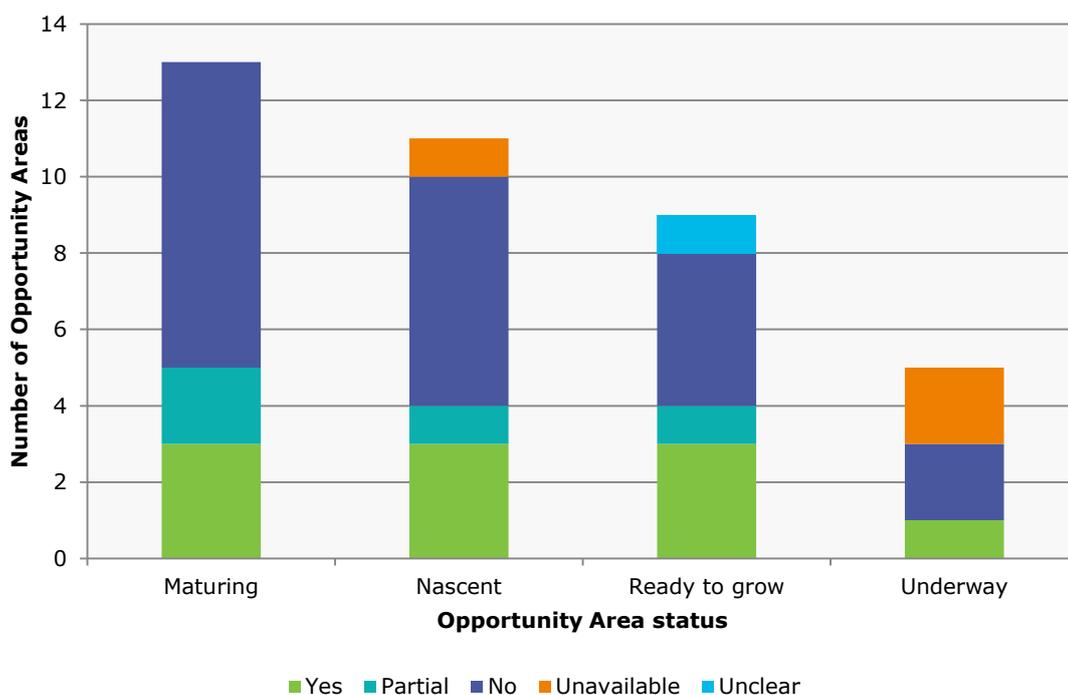
- 5.7 Because of the extensive, long-term nature of the changes planned for the 38 Opportunity Areas (OAs), some form of area-specific planning framework has been developed for each. These range from dedicated sections of the relevant development plan (e.g. Tottenham Court Road) and Area Action Plans (Euston) to masterplans and 'Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks' – almost a mini development plan for the relevant area.
- 5.8 While some OAs are comparatively tightly drawn (e.g. Tottenham Court Road, 19ha) others, such as London Riverside (>2km<sup>2</sup>), are very large indeed. Nevertheless, all require a carefully planned approach to understanding the existing environmental qualities as part of planning for change. A character-based approach has clear merits in both assisting in this understanding and making decisions on the nature and scale of change.

- 5.9 Of the 38 OAs, nine have specific character studies in place. A further four Opportunity Areas' planning frameworks have been informed by broadly similar approaches. These are illustrated in Figure 5.1 overleaf.

# Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks



**Figure 5.1: Opportunity Areas with character studies in place, which have influenced Planning Frameworks**



**Figure 5.2: London Plan Opportunity Areas - character studies in place, by OA status (using GLA terminology)**

## Character studies

### Approaches

- 5.10 Of the 14 studies reviewed in detail, the methods applied varied considerably. The majority of studies took a broadly geographical approach to defining character areas, divided by land use and/or distinctive places, rather than necessarily driven by cohesive visual character as such.
- 5.11 Unsurprisingly, given the nature and scale of many Opportunity Areas, typological approaches are rare. The Earl’s Court and West Kensington Character Area Analysis applies a residential typology to relevant areas of the OA, while Charlton Riverside’s Masterplan is supported by a detailed land use typology.
- 5.12 Six studies covering: Elephant & Castle; Euston; London Bridge, Borough & Bankside; Old Oak; and, Vauxhall, Nine Elms & Battersea, explicitly apply the Historic Area Assessment (HAA) technique, as set out in the ‘*Understanding Place*’ series of English Heritage publications. An ‘Extensive Urban Survey’, principally concerned with historic buildings, was conducted by EH for Old Kent Road, and was supplemented by community-based ‘walkaround’ surveys to better understand local attitudes, interests and values. Rather than undertaking a separate study, Waterloo OAPF is informed instead by the Conservation Area Character Appraisals for the five CAs that comprise much of the OA.
- 5.13 The remaining studies adopt a broadly similar approach, defining geographical character areas and describing the components of character in varying degrees of detail.

### Purpose

- 5.14 As principally development-focussed studies, the general tone and approach to place-based studies is necessarily quite different to the majority of borough-wide studies. In many ways, the imperative to understand the capacity of an area to accommodate change of a particular type or extent produces studies that are more focussed. This should not be taken as an assertion that such studies are inherently ‘better’ – but the more specific purpose can help to focus attention on what is important.

### 2.3.2 Heritage Assets

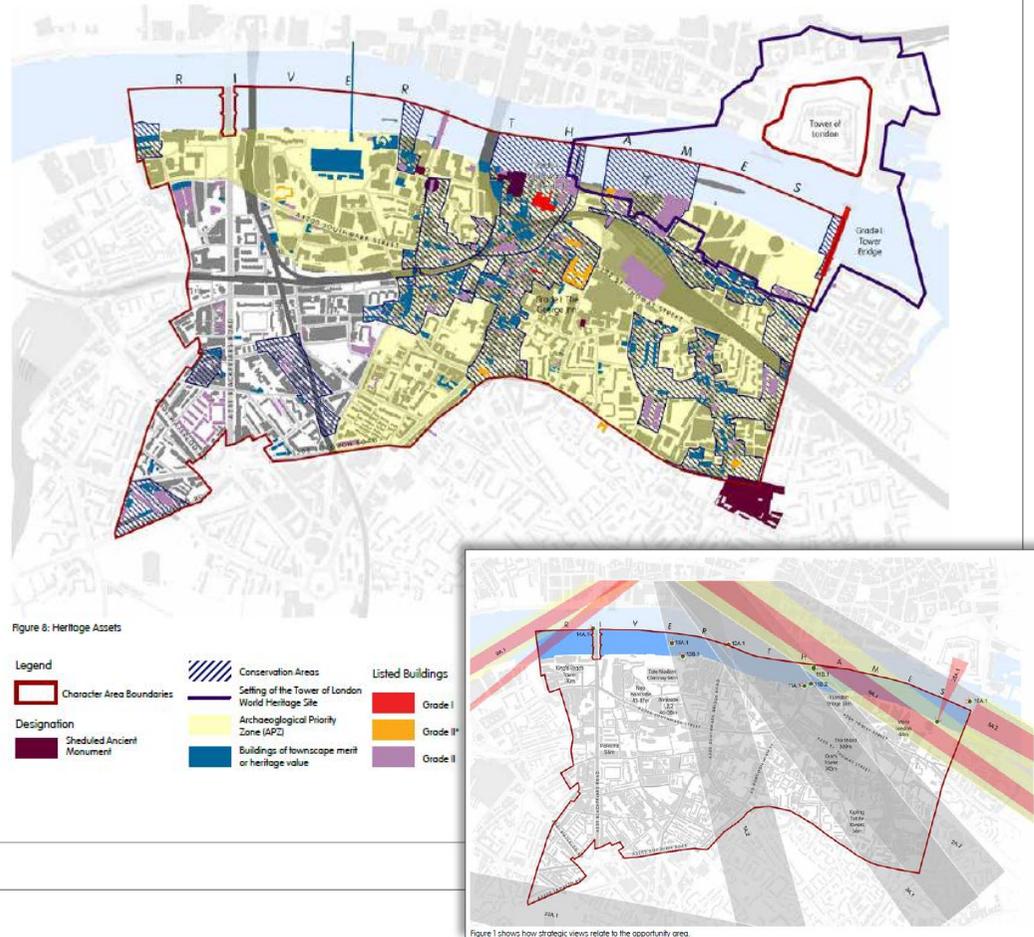
BBLB contains a wealth of notable buildings which help to inform an understanding of how the area has developed over time (Fig.8). Many of these heritage assets are listed or protected by national or local planning policy. There are five scheduled ancient monuments in the area. The sites of the Rose and Globe Theatres together with the remains of Winchester Palace are located in the centre of the area, close the River Thames. A Roman boat at New Guy's House, Bermondsey is recorded to the east of Borough High Street and the Bermondsey Abbey Buildings are located to the south of the area.

There are 12 conservation areas covering more than a quarter (27%) of the BBLB OA and 211 listed buildings and structures which comprise the following:

- 3 Grade I - buildings of exceptional national interest
  - o Tower Bridge
  - o Cathedral Church of St Saviour and St Mary Overie (Southwark Cathedral)
  - o The George Inn
- 11 Grade II\* - buildings of more than special interest
- 197 Grade II - buildings of special interest

In addition to buildings and structures which are formally listed, there are many buildings which fall outside of conservation areas but which are considered to be of townscape merit or heritage value. Within conservation areas, there are also buildings which are not listed but which contribute positively to the character of the area. These include fine examples of early Victorian houses, warehouses and offices for example.

Views of heritage assets are also an important feature and contribute to an understanding of the area's character. Landmarks include the Grade I listed Southwark Cathedral, prominent on the skyline in views from the northern end of London Bridge, an ancient gateway to London. The Grade I listed Tower Bridge is an iconic landmark in its own right but also contributes to the setting of the Tower of London World Heritage Site. Together these assets form a distinct focus in views across the River Thames from the Queen's Walk and Potter's Field Park.



Bankside, Borough and London Bridge Characterisation Study

**Figure 5.3: Consideration of cross-boundary impacts and views (Borough, Bankside & London Bridge Characterisation Study)**

5.15 The studies are generally concerned with understanding the character within the Opportunity Areas, predominantly identifying what heritage assets need to be conserved – and which areas can support more extensive development. The very large scale development ambitions for many OAs is reflected in the wider-ranging consideration of heritage and potential impacts than is generally visible in borough-wide studies. For example, the Earl’s Court study deals most extensively with character, heritage assets and their settings outside the OA; similarly, the Bankside, Borough & London Bridge study recognises the importance of views to and from the OA and visual interactions with the Tower of London WHS and other key riverside assets (as illustrated in Figure 5.3 above).

*Tensions with NPPF*

5.16 There is arguably an inherent tension between the Opportunity Area approach and NPPF’s provisions with regard to heritage. The OA designation is specifically intended to accommodate major change, whereas NPPF requires that harm to heritage assets is avoided in both plans and decision-making. While undertaking characterisation is an important step in understanding how change can be accommodated, there is an underlying assumption that there will be wholesale change and that the opportunities for mitigation are – broadly – secondary to securing the necessary growth and development outcomes. (For example, as noted below, the Euston study identifies areas of high value that will essentially be razed by the HS2-led scheme.)



**Figure 5.4: Example of building and block level sensitivity appraisal (Drummond Street character area, Euston HAA)**

### Components of character

- 5.17 Most of the formal characterisation studies (as opposed to the four OAPFs that incorporate at least some level of character-based content) take a systematic view of understanding character in much the same way as their borough-wide equivalents – considering a range of factors from movement, structure and heritage to public transport accessibility. For those applying the HAA approach<sup>13</sup>, there is a far stronger emphasis on the area’s historical development and built form, examining the built environment in considerable detail at the study area level, and down to individual buildings at the character area level.
- 5.18 The level of detail in analysis in studies supporting OAPFs is generally greater than is encountered for borough-wide studies. This is unsurprising given the need for good quality and suitably detailed information to shape specific development proposals. There is a greater emphasis on the identification and conservation of locally/strategically important character, rather than simply describing the baseline.

### Assessment outcomes

- 5.19 Consideration of ‘forces for change’, as described for borough-wide studies, are not generally a major consideration for the place-based studies review – principally because the designation as an Opportunity Area is the prime mover for all subsequent change.
- 5.20 Despite the greater focus on importance, few studies set out explicit recommendations for managing the identified heritage interests and character, or for using heritage to act as a catalyst for change. To some extent, this is perhaps a pragmatic response to (but not a policy justification for) the fact that sometimes radical changes are a prerequisite of the Opportunity Area designation. For example:
- The Euston study sets out significant detail on the importance and sensitivity of the assets and character of each character area. However, proposals for future management are generally confined to opportunities for enhancement, rather than specific protection etc.
    - For example, Drummond Street, depicted in Figure 5.4 above, is clearly indicated as being of high heritage value and sensitivity – but is still likely to experience significant change as a consequence of the HS2-driven redevelopment of Euston station and its environs. Proposing management priorities in this context would clearly be challenging.
  - The Elephant and Castle study takes a more prescriptive approach, providing detailed and specific guidance for accommodating change in each character area. The specific qualities of each area are identified, along with issues to be addressed, and principles on land use, open space, design, movement and views are established to guide development.
    - The study proposes the designation of new Conservation Areas (Larcom Street and Elliot Row) and candidates for locally-listed buildings, based on the outcomes of the assessment of character and quality.
- 5.21 Again, it should be noted that these studies are essentially evidence base for the relevant Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks and, as such, are not specifically tasked with either proposing mitigation or securing compliance with national policy.

### Integration with planning frameworks

- 5.22 As with borough-wide characterisation studies, the key challenge is ensuring that the relevant information from the study is translated into both policies for conservation and enhancement of the historic environment, and spatial planning of change.
- 5.23 Of the 14 studies with a least some level of character-based information informing the relevant planning framework, there is clear evidence for six being well integrated and a historic character-based approach being adopted for the whole framework. A further five exhibit some level of

---

<sup>13</sup> London Bridge, Borough & Bankside; Park Royal and Old Oak Common; Vauxhall, Nine Elms and Battersea

influence on the planning framework (correlating with three 'partial' characterisation studies). At the time of writing, the Old Kent Road OAPF was not available for examination as the study was before Southwark Council for approval to issue for public consultation. The Earl's Court and West Kensington SPD does not adopt a directly character-based framework, but given that it covers a comparatively small area this would likely have been excessive and unwieldy. However, the extensive analysis developed in the characterisation of the surrounding area is applied to good effect in providing an understanding of wider sensitivities. With this exception however, the studies are – like their borough-wide counterparts – principally focussed on character and heritage assets within the OA, devoting less effort to understanding the surrounding historic environment and the likely effects thereon.

- 5.24 The planning frameworks for two areas, Vauxhall, Nine Elms & Battersea, and Woolwich, for which characterisation studies were undertaken, do not display as strong an influence on the relevant planning frameworks as the others. (However, it should be noted that a separate 'Nine Elms on the South Bank' Public Realm Design Guide has been developed which provides detailed guidance for each character area.)
- 5.25 Where the historic characterisation was applied, the level of impact of the characterisation studies in shaping the whole approach to OA planning is positive but limited in terms of conserving individual heritage assets rather than historic character . (It should, of course, be noted that no characterisation work was done for 24 of the 38 OAs.)

# 6

## Case studies

## 6 Case studies

### Introduction

- 6.1 This section of the report sets out four case studies, looking at the approaches taken to characterisation, the way this has been applied to Local Plans and the overall efficacy of the study.
- 6.2 They are not intended as top-to-bottom 'best practice' examples – but instead provide a good quality cross-section of the current corpus, highlighting different approaches and the most interesting and valuable examples of particular techniques.

# Hounslow: making characterisation data work harder

## Approach to characterisation

The study takes a cascading approach to the characterisation process. A network of 10 neighbourhood-based 'study areas' is divided into many local 'character areas'; a simple typological approach is then applied at this level. ['Study areas' are congruent with the 10 districts identified in the Local Plan.]

This provides an effective framework within which the character of each area can be understood, with short descriptions of each and clear mapping allowing users a good degree of certainty as to where relevant information applies.

A significant amount of detail is presented at the 'study area' level, meaning that the study is very accessible as a reference document and has considerable potential for use in the design and assessment of proposals.

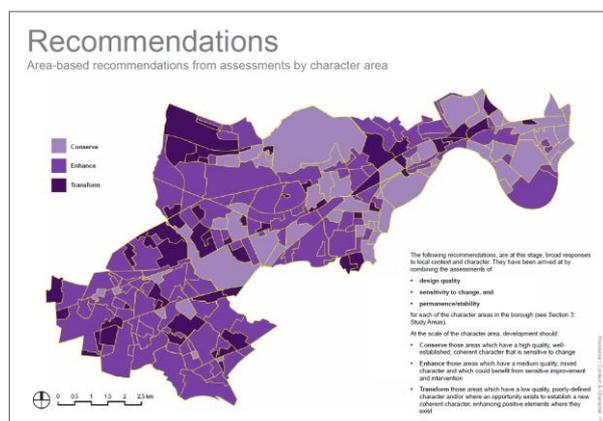
## Applying the outcomes

### Forces for change

While not presented as such, each 'study area' section contains a detailed analysis of current pressures. Each character area is assessed against four metrics: design quality; sensitivity to change; permanence; and, suitability for tall buildings – which perform a broadly similar function, albeit in a more systematic manner.

### Management guidance

No specific proposals or opportunities are set out at the 'study area' or character area level, potentially making it harder to understand what needs to be done at the local level to achieve



the borough-wide recommendations presented spatially in the final chapter of the document.

### Added value...

Where Hounslow's study really shines is the way in which detailed local characterisation information is used to provide a systematic, spatial approach to understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by the borough.

As noted above, each character area is scored against four key metrics. This information is presented at the 'study area' level, and also brought together at a strategic, borough-wide level – providing a very valuable overview of quality, sensitivity and suitability for tall buildings.

This information, unique amongst the current corpus, provides a strategic framework within which the borough's capacity to accommodate change can be understood.

## Policy integration

The characterisation study is well-integrated with the Local Plan, with the 'Character and Context' policy providing a direct hook to ensure that the study is used in decision-making.

The study appears to have had a wide-ranging influence on the Local Plan, illustrating that it has been used as more general evidence base – and not viewed as a niche heritage or design issue.

Historic character and heritage assets are considered very effectively throughout the study. This means that Hounslow's study is a more effective companion to specific historic environment policies and has greater capacity to add detail and value to proposals and decision-making.

## Usability of the study

### Strategic planning

The range of additional analyses undertaken as part of this study adds considerable utility in terms of strategic planning. Tall buildings were

a particular concern for the borough, and the study addresses suitability for new structures of this type, along with assessing sensitivity to change. This provides planners with a range of tools to deploy at the local and borough-wide level, adding subtlety to the search for potential land allocations and a strong, objective evidence base for specific tall buildings, heritage and place-making policies.

The depth of information provided on each 'study area' gives an excellent baseline for planners looking to better understand the area's social, environmental and historic character – including key assets, land uses, movement network etc. – all vital context for any decision on the type and scale of land allocations that may be appropriate. Similarly, the defining characteristics, typological information, descriptions and assessment scores provided for each detailed character area make it very easy to understand how a proposed allocation or opportunity will relate to its wider context.

### **Development management**

From the responses provided by Hounslow's officers, it is clear that the study is used in assessing applications – but this appears to vary considerably within the team.

Due to the factors listed above, it is a potentially powerful tool for officers to gain a quick, comparatively detailed understanding of any locality within the borough – essential in appraising any application for planning permission. While the study does not provide black and white guidance of heritage significance or values, the scoring criteria go a long way to providing useful insights on the sensitivity of the receiving townscape and the borough's priority for the area – in terms of the recommendations provided in the final chapter. There is a slight disconnect, in that the recommendations (as illustrated above) are only depicted spatially, with no detail on how the character area should be 'conserved', 'enhanced' or 'transformed'. [Areas identified for transformation are those with the lowest sensitivity to change – analyses that feed into the Local Plan spatial strategies.] This could slightly reduce its utility with regard to, for instance, smaller-scale applications where detail is key – rather than the larger-scale development for which key characteristics are more likely to be at stake.

## **Lessons for other boroughs?**

Hounslow's key lesson is the value that a well-planned and designed characterisation study can add to strategic planning. In many respects, of all studies in place at the time of writing, this is the current best practice example. It is well-rounded, marrying detailed, high-quality analysis with a strong focus on policy applications and outcomes.

The thinking that clearly went in to the development and delivery of the project is impressive. A clear focus for the study was established and an achievable, locally relevant set of criteria applied systematically – extracting maximum value from the characterisation and providing a wealth of local and strategic detail.

Although intended principally as an evidence base study, a good balance is struck between this and the development management function. Strong policy links are there to ensure that the study can be applied by both the authority and developers in order to ensure compliance. This ranges from a specific character and context policy, through housing design and density, to residential alterations.

It should be noted that the study is not perfect, and suffers somewhat from the common issue of generally limiting the understanding of the historic dimension of character to the historic evolution of places – rather than a more detailed consideration of the relationship between history, current character and heritage assets.

The approach to tall buildings, while welcome, does not appear to take into account the role that character areas play in forming the setting (and contributing to the significance of) major assets in close proximity. This inherently reduces some of the value of the sensitivity ratings. This is partially acknowledged in the study, where the requirement for additional detailed analysis for tall buildings is highlighted as a key requirement.

The issue of the setting of historic places as a component of character is one that the current suite of studies does not effectively tackle.

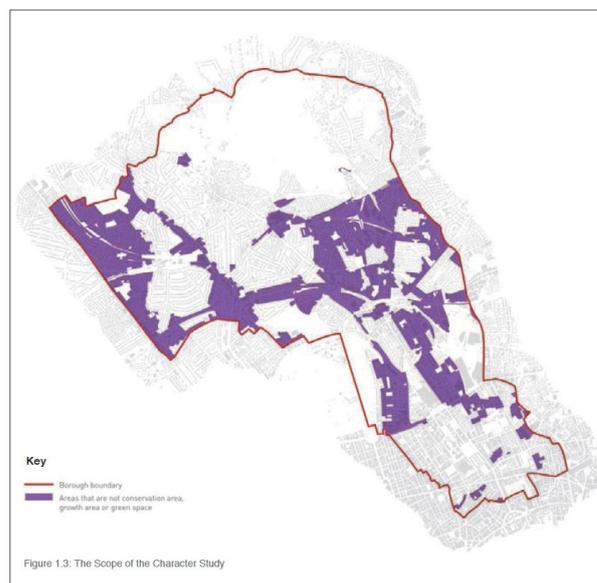
# Camden: taking a selective approach

## Approach to characterisation

Camden's study takes a highly selective approach to defining an appropriate study area for characterisation. As an inner borough with a rich and varied history, it is well-represented by Conservation Areas – which account for around 50% of the total land area. Similarly, it is an area of considerable dynamism, making space for significant areas of change, most notably the Euston Opportunity Area – driven by the proposed expansion of the station complex to facilitate HS2.

Despite its generally very dense urban matrix, the borough contains a large number of green spaces. CAs, Metropolitan Open Land and green space were therefore excluded from the characterisation. The rationale for these exclusions was based on the principle that areas already benefitting from significant legislative and policy protection were unlikely to be subject to major change; conversely, the Core Strategy Growth Areas, and London Plan Opportunity Areas were specifically intended to change. [A stand-alone characterisation study for the Euston Area Plan was already in place.] While the exclusion of CAs in residential areas on the grounds of little predicted change is reasonable, town centre CAs such as Camden Town or Kentish Town are likely to experience additional pressure and may have benefitted from consideration in parallel with their wider context.

This selective approach enabled Camden to focus on the 'bits in between' – where character is a key factor to consider in planning decisions, but benefitted from no additional protection.



In technical terms, the study adopts a detailed land use-based typology with an overlaid framework of 'fuzzy' neighbourhoods, further sub-divided into character areas.

## Applying the outcomes

### Forces for change

'Strengths and weaknesses' are defined for each character type, making it easy to quickly identify the key points that should guide decisions on conservation or change. At neighbourhood level, socio-economic issues, existing character and identity – along with priorities for retaining character and opportunities for change – are set out.

### Management guidance

Options focus on opportunities for improvement at the character area level, along with a rating on a three point scale relating to the level of opportunity (low, medium, high). The interventions proposed range from resisting further loss of front gardens and enhanced street tree provision, up to more radical proposals for infill development or careful restructuring.

The guidance provided is comparatively high level, with little specific detail. However it is easily sufficient for a developer to get quickly

and easily to the key issues and opportunities for their site and the immediate context.

This 'partial' approach does not however allow the interrelationships and potential sensitivities and significance of the borough's heritage to be understood as a whole. This includes the potential sensitivities of the settings of CAs and other heritage assets.

## Policy integration

Camden's study can be considered to be 'one to watch', as the Local Plan has recently been submitted for Examination.

The Local Plan explicitly states that the character study is intended to be used in parallel with the borough's Conservation Area Statements, Appraisals and Management Strategies. Monitoring the success of this fragmented approach will be valuable to determine whether it is an appropriate solution.

Character is generally well covered by the policy framework, with detailed criteria-based policies in place. The study itself is referred to in supporting text as a key source of information.

The lack of a direct policy hook for the study – particularly given that it has significant potential as a tool for development management – could be viewed as a missed opportunity. However, given that the Local Plan has not yet been adopted (and therefore the study is somewhat in limbo) this remains to be seen. Certainly DM officers are aware of the study but, because it does not directly relate to the current local policy framework, it is not yet being actively applied.

## Usability of the study

### Strategic planning

It could be assumed that, because of the fragmented coverage of this study, its utility for strategic planning would be reduced. While this is probably true to some extent – particularly as the influence of significant green spaces and historic areas on neighbouring character units can sometimes be downplayed – the study retains significant potential.

Although perhaps not as extensive or systematic as Hounslow, Camden's study does take significant steps towards adding value and meaning to the data gathered.

The detailed nature of the typology applied offers good opportunities to understand where

change can – or cannot – be accommodated. Similarly, through the explicit assessment and mapping of key opportunities for change, Camden is already taking a character-led approach to promoting positive change.

### Development management

The cascading approach to presenting information means that there is a certain amount of cross-referring between sections of the document for users (e.g. between type descriptions, neighbourhood introductory sections and specific character areas) – but this is facilitated by a clear, logical structure to the document.

As noted above, the absence of direct policy hooks to drive usage of the study could be viewed as a weakness, but it is referred to as a key source. Provided the policy framework passes through Examination unchanged, references in the supporting text – and good awareness amongst DM planners – should ensure that it is well used.

From the developer perspective, the inclusion of information on opportunities for change at a detailed local level is excellent in terms of identifying potentially favourable sites for development. Similarly, the extensive information on opportunities for wider enhancement could allow effective targeting of conservation gain to be delivered in parallel with development.

Key characteristics included at type level, along with the priorities for conservation/change at area level, and detailed area-specific information, enable the document to act as an effective baseline for planning development proposals. In terms of use in impact assessment, it is potentially harder work to pin down precisely what is important – rather than characteristic – about an area. However, the priorities for retaining character for each neighbourhood provides a reasonable starting point, if not a definitive steer.

## Lessons for other boroughs?

The principal lesson that Camden's study can provide is that characterisation can be effective when rolled out in a more selective manner – provided that there is a robust rationale for doing so, and appropriate safeguards in place for the remaining area.

This should be tempered with the caveat that, while areas can readily be excluded from a study, their influence on character should not

be. In Camden's case, the patchwork created by excluding greenspace and Conservation Areas sometimes creates a fragmented picture that perhaps slightly lacks a common thread. But, for the most part, it is very successful.

Selective approaches are not necessarily a quick fix or a route to save on the cost of studies – just a means by which a more focussed product can be delivered.

Historic England has stated that, while supportive of 'completing' the characterisation coverage of boroughs in this way (i.e. CAAs and historic characterisation for the bits in between), a unified study that could provide an understanding of the borough's character, significance and sensitivity as a whole would be very valuable. It would also help to avoid the internal 'cross-boundary issues' inherent in looking at different parts of the borough using different methods.

# Richmond: 'bottom-up' characterisation?

## Approach to characterisation

Richmond's approach to characterisation is strongly place-focussed, concentrating on key 'village plan' areas with a strong historic dimension and character-based sensitivities.

The borough is divided in 14 Village Plan areas, based on boundaries that a majority of respondents identified with in an extensive public consultation exercise. The plans reflect local priorities and concerns and represent a very interesting 'bottom-up' approach to guiding planning. (The SPDs are 'bottom-up' in the sense that the drivers for characterisation are local conditions). Of the 14 Village Plan areas, Supplementary Planning Documents have been produced for five of the most sensitive areas: Barnes, East Sheen, Kew, Mortlake, and Whitton & Heathfield. These are essentially discursive, area-based characterisation studies – albeit with stronger policy links. No typology is used, instead summary text, information on materials and, inconsistently, main characteristics are provided.

## Applying the outcomes

### Forces for change

The key pressures acting on the Village Plan areas are not always explicitly dealt with. (Threats and opportunities are listed in the Barnes, East Sheen and Mortlake SPDs, but not in the Kew or Whitton & Heathfield documents.) However, given the context of most areas of the borough, changes are likely to be comparatively small-scale by London standards. Specific threats, in terms of sites allocated in the Local Plan, are dealt with in detail.

It should be noted that a substantial proportion of the character areas are also Conservation Areas, for which CAAs are in place – providing substantial information on pressures and priorities.

### Management guidance

Where significant change is anticipated as a consequence of land allocations, detailed spatial information is accompanied by development principles for each site.

For other character areas and Conservation Areas, the information provided is weighted towards existing character – making it comparatively simple to determine what is locally important. Given the scale of the documents though, it may have been helpful to provide more detailed guidance to assist in the management of small-scale incremental change – which can be particularly pernicious in suburban areas where local precedents for unfavourable change can easily be set.

## Policy integration

As Supplementary Planning Documents, the Village Plan Guidance are a material consideration in planning decisions – but not part of the development plan itself. SPDs take forward a policy or policies in the development plan. In this case, the policies from the Core Strategy and Development Management DPD that are relevant are identified at the beginning of each Village Plan. SPDs are subject to a round of public consultation, potentially giving them more weight than evidence gathered in the preparation of the plan (e.g. borough-wide character studies) which generally are not subject to consultation.

Where other studies are 'just' part of the evidence base, or are suggested as key sources of information, these characterisation products have informed plan preparation and are more closely aligned to the statutory framework. As the Village Plans post-date the adopted Core Strategy, no direct policy hooks are in place. The borough is currently preparing a first draft (pre-publication) Local Plan for publication in summer 2016, which will incorporate more effective links, and allow the Village Plans to inform the statutory plan. In addition, it may also assist the borough in providing a consistent evidence base for Neighbourhood Plans.

## 8. Guidance for Inland Revenue Site

### Introduction

This site has been identified for inclusion within the Council's emerging Site Allocation Plan (SA Plan) for: 'mixed uses to include residential, including affordable units, employment, community and/or health uses'.

A full list of proposed SA Plan sites in Kew is set out in Appendix 2

### History

This former Inland Revenue sorting office was demolished in 2009 and had been vacant for several years previously. A planning application in 2009 for 111 flats with ancillary uses and care home was refused permission in 2009 and dismissed at appeal in 2010. Refusal reasons included excessive bulk, height and density.

### Context

**Policy**  
In planning terms, the previous use of the site did not fall into any specified Use Class. Constraints relating to the site include the currently poor Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) Level 1a and the site's risk to flooding in Flood Zone 2 'Medium Probability'.

### Spatial

This section will help to guide the design and layout of any future development on the site.

- The site has been cleared and is overgrown and surrounded by fencing.
- It appears to be in temporary use with part of the site laid out as a car park (in a reasonable condition) but there is a notice saying it is not in use as a car park for the National Archives (directing to visitor parking opposite) and access is restricted.
- Access and egress to the site is from the Bessant Drive roundabout.
- A line of trees follows the site boundary along the southern and eastern edge shielding the site from view.
- The site is located within an area of mixed-use, with a number of substantial buildings in the vicinity.
- The National Archives facilities are located immediately to the north of the site.
- The site is bound to the east by Kew Riverside Park / Strand Drive with a number of five storey flatted residential buildings situated along the River Thames.

- To the west the site boundary follows Bessant Drive beyond which lies terraced housing with a tree screen. The tree screen is an important feature in terms of providing 'amenity screening' between the retail park and the adjoining residential.
- To the south of the site is Kew Retail Park and flatted residential properties.

### Development principles

Development and design principles for the uses as set out in the SA Plan are based on past officer and inspector reports relating to planning applications for the site, as well as the need to deliver high quality design and reinforce the high quality character of the area.

- Delivers a high quality architecture and aesthetic which is anticipated to be a response to the adjacent residential plots (Kew Riverside) but also pay tribute to the historical character of Kew, drawing on high quality materials and achieving excellent design.
- The bulk, massing, height and density should respond to the established rhythm of the immediate residential context (Kew Riverside), being a maximum of five storeys.

- Should provide a suitable response and acknowledgement to the important National Archives building and surrounding grounds.
- Views from residential properties to the east and south should be considered and development should not have a detrimental impact on the visual amenity nor sunlight and daylight on the surrounding residential properties.
- There should be appropriate amenity space for the number of occupiers within the development site, including children's play space, and delivers areas of green and landscaped open space to enhance the biodiversity of the area.
- Provides an appropriate parking solution which minimises the impact on the locality and also manages and mitigates the impact of traffic on the local network and junctions.

### Inland Revenue Site



## Usability of the study

### Strategic planning

Clearly, these studies are intended to guide development at the local level rather than having a wider strategic function, certainly at the borough level.

However, the positive approach to managing the potential effects of land allocations within sensitive areas is forward-looking and valuable. The SPDs provide a very useful contextual introduction to the areas, and are logically structured and accessible. However, because information on threats and opportunities is inconsistently covered, and not drawn together at the level of the whole study area, their usability for strategic purposes is somewhat reduced.

### Development management

The SPDs are intended principally as development management tools. As such, where more extensive information on threats and opportunities is provided, this is particularly helpful in placing proposed development in context. This frequently relies on there being Conservation Area Appraisals in place, but for the non-designated character areas this can sometimes be a little thin.

While the documents are SPD, the lack of direct policy support undermines their likely weight in decision-making – although it is anticipated that the emerging Local Plan will contain the necessary policy links. Similarly, the additional weight afforded to SPD (over evidence base studies or other guidance) may help to address this to some extent.

For developers, the SPDs provide very useful information on character, materials and dominant features – making drawing design cues from the documents simple. Separate guidance on key features of the built environment, materials and detailing provide very clear information on how alterations should be designed, and the cues for new development to pick out. The development principles set out for allocated sites is particularly helpful, as this essentially provides a mini-brief for designers – and a checklist for DM officers dealing with pre-application discussions or submissions.

Echoing the comparatively small-scale changes predicted, the SPDs also contain guidance on shop fronts and residential forecourt parking – seemingly minor issues in the London-wide

context, but significant challenges for managing adverse effects on local character.

## Lessons for other boroughs?

Adopting the outcomes of characterisation studies as SPD provides some additional weight (if not actually forming part of the development plan) in planning decisions. Provided the policy links are there, and an appropriate level of information is provided, no impediment exists to the adoption of borough-wide studies as SPD. It is encouraging to see that character – in designated and non-designated areas alike – being recognised as a priority and dealt with in a light-touch, but effective manner. Information from the relevant CAAs is also incorporated effectively as CAs are treated as individual character areas and key characteristics are summarised. Broadly however, the discussion of heritage interests is very much focussed on the built form, materials and detailing – reflecting the types of (generally small-scale incremental) change expected for these areas. In this sense, the studies lack the overarching synthesis of historic character and historic environment of both the character areas and the study area as a whole.

However, Richmond's bottom-up approach would not be appropriate for many boroughs, given the greater pace and extent of change across much of London. It does, however, present an interesting example of local innovation driven by very particular pressures – namely the introduction of Village Plans as a means to reconnect with local people and their priorities. It is also a confident approach, based on a strong understanding of the key challenges to local character, and the mechanisms required to tackle them. In this respect, it is a particularly useful example of an authority recognising the potential of characterisation to help deal with very particular problems.

Like Camden, bringing together the various characterisation studies for the borough and producing an overarching synthesis of historic character, value and sensitivity would be very valuable. However, this would likely require significant additional work as only five of these SPDs are in place. Similarly, a more thorough understanding of the borough's heritage would be required to ensure that the context is properly understood and applied at both the local and borough-wide level.

The extensive community engagement involved in developing Richmond's 'village plans' also

offers a useful model for authorities seeking to involve local people in the planning process. While this was a broad-based process, looking at a wide range of issues, the community-focussed approach offers a significant opportunity to integrate discussions of heritage sensitivity and significance with people's aspirations for their area.

The additional legitimacy afforded to SPD developed through substantive community engagement should not be overlooked.

# Enfield: spanning the urban/rural divide

## Approach to characterisation

Enfield was selected for two reasons: firstly, it incorporates both landscape and urban characterisation, setting it apart from the rest of the sample ground; and, secondly, it represents a good example of the single most dominant approach applied across the existing corpus. While the majority of studies (12) were delivered in-house, of the six that were contracted out, five were undertaken by Allies and Morrison/Urban Practitioners using the same broad approach.

The approach is very robust, and is adjusted to suit local conditions – particularly with regard to the complexity of typology.

As an outer borough, Enfield has a comparatively large area of semi-rural hinterland. Therefore a unified LCA/urban characterisation approach was adopted to capture the very different aspects of character in a single study. A typological approach, divided into three broad classes (urban, urban greenspace and rural greenspace), captures borough-wide information on the development, character and pressures acting on each type. A series of 'places' with overlapping boundaries is defined. These overlie the typology and enables the presentation of locally-specific detail on issues and opportunities. 'Places' are grouped within six broad areas of Enfield, with more detailed character summaries for each place.

## Applying the outcomes

### Forces for change

Key issues are presented at both the type and broad area level, allowing generic issues to be dealt with in a borough-wide framework, and specific issues to be explored in more detail.

### Management guidance

'Implications' are presented for each type, addressing the issues identified. Key issues and implications are presented thematically at the broad area, addressing the most significant problems and opportunities.

## Policy integration

The character study post-dates the adopted Core Strategy, but appears to have had a positive influence on the emerging Local Plan – at least from the consultation document published in late 2015.

The preceding characterisation study, undertaken in 2008, had a good level of influence on the Core Strategy and is directly hooked into built environment policy and referred to in supporting text throughout the plan. There is no reason to assume that this will be any different for the emerging Local Plan – with a likely wider range of influence, given its broader focus.

## Usability of the study

### Strategic planning

The logical, cascading presentation of information means that it is easy to get to grips with the broad patterns of development and issues affecting character in the borough. Collation of information at the broad area level is particularly helpful in determining how places link together and share issues and opportunities. The strongly spatial nature of the document also makes information more easily accessible.

However, because this very useful information is not brought together or analysed systematically at the borough level, there is potentially a slight missed opportunity. The strategic overview function of the study could also benefit from more systematic recording and presentation of pressures and sensitivities (cf. Hounslow) – but it is recognised that this was not part of the commission.

### Development management

As for Camden, there is a certain amount of inevitable cross-referring between types and places required to get the full picture – but this is a minor consideration and does significantly reduce the potential for duplication across the document.

It is recognised that this study was intended principally as part of the evidence base for plan-making. However, its utility for development management is slightly affected by the lack of

direct local specificity (i.e. character area/place level) in the issues/opportunities identified. The implications picked out are often relatively generic and they sometimes lack spatial specificity (unless key streets or assets are explicitly named), making application less straightforward.

Similarly, the typology does not identify key characteristics for each type, making application to impact assessment more challenging. The information is generally there, but because this requires interpretation of text there is more room for disagreement.

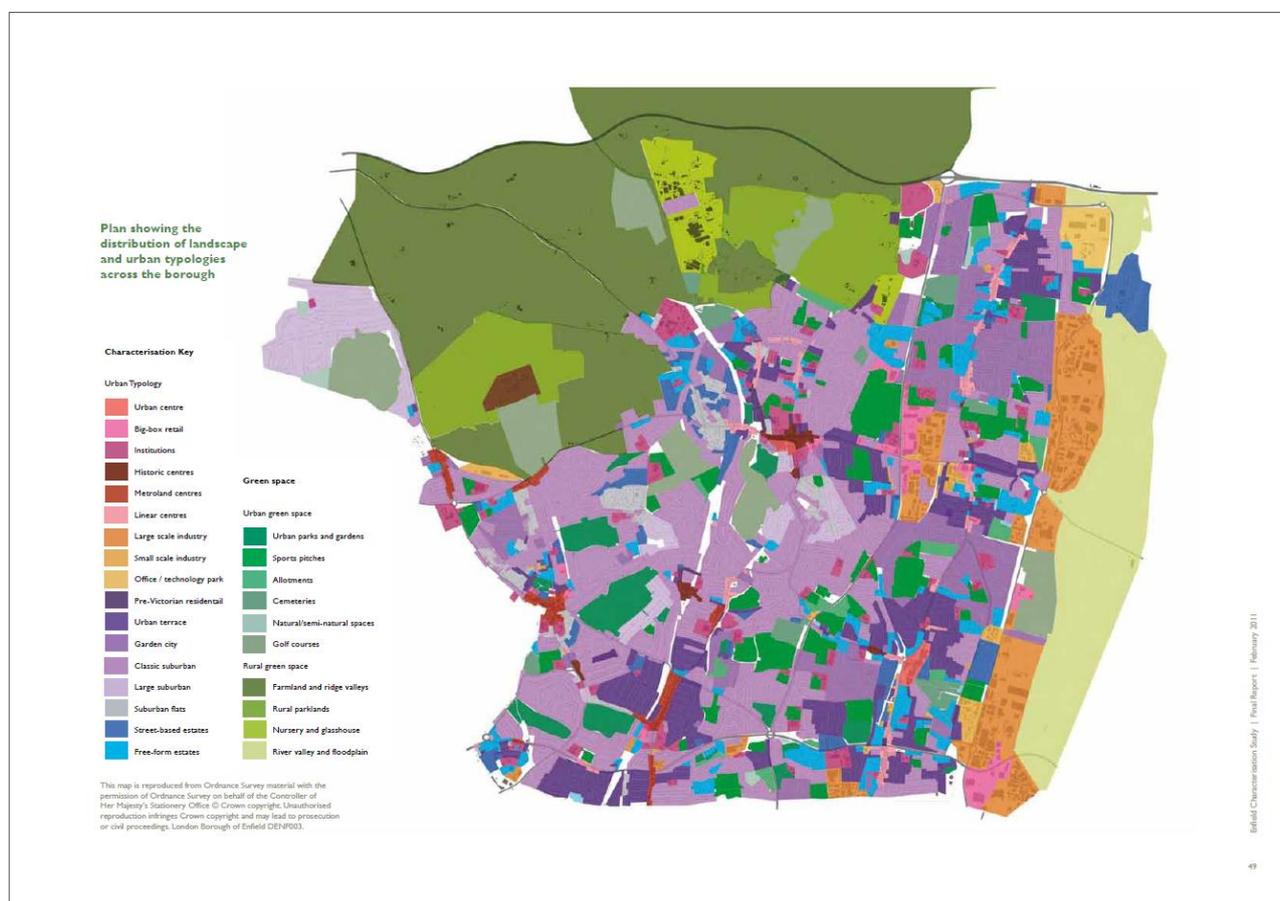
## Lessons for other boroughs?

The key lesson from Enfield's experience is the value of an integrated approach to character – unifying landscape and urban studies to good effect. The study is particularly effective at bridging this divide, providing useful information for managing the Green Belt and preventing encroachment from development.

Again, this is a fine example of an authority adapting characterisation to address specific local issues. It would be interesting to see characterisation applied more systematically to Green Belt issues – but NPPF 'five purposes' leave little space for subtlety or innovation.

This study also provides more information on issues of London-wide significance than some of its counterparts. It is particularly strong on the history and significance of 'Metro-land' suburbs and the varying styles adopted by the railway companies and allied housing developers. Similarly, it highlights the 'Garden City' style suburbs and the use of Arts and Crafts pseudo-vernacular to create high quality places. However, the value of the Lee Valley reservoirs is dealt with principally in relation to their biodiversity, rather than heritage and public health history values.

The study is also rather better than others at interpreting and including green space within the typology and consideration of character.



# **7**

## **Impact of characterisation studies**

## 7 Impact of characterisation studies

### Introduction

- 7.1 It was originally anticipated that this section of the research would comprise an evaluation of planning authority casework, to determine the levels to which borough-wide characterisation studies in particular were influencing planning decisions. In developing options to deliver this work, it quickly became apparent that this simply was not feasible within the budget available for the project. The technical approach originally proposed necessitated far greater commonality between Boroughs' online planning systems – and the ability to apply map-based queries. Unfortunately, upon testing this approach it became apparent that search functions were not suitably precise to allow efficient and effective selection of relevant casework.
- 7.2 It was therefore determined that a direct consultation approach, gathering anecdotal evidence from planning authorities of their use and understanding of characterisation products, was the most effective means of addressing this information gap.

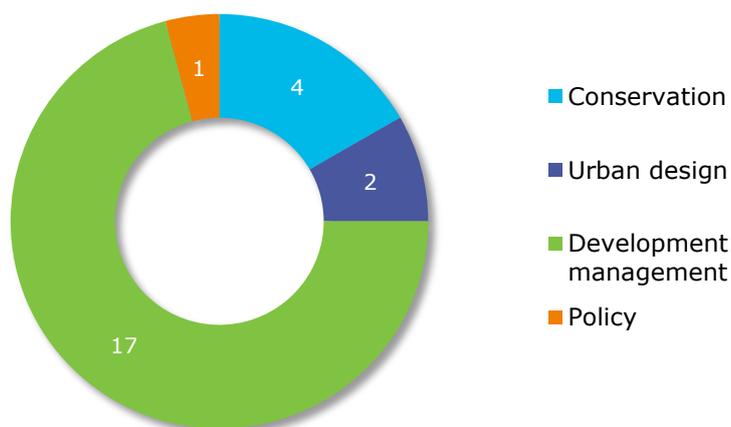
### Method

- 7.3 The study method is set out from 2.10 above.

### Background

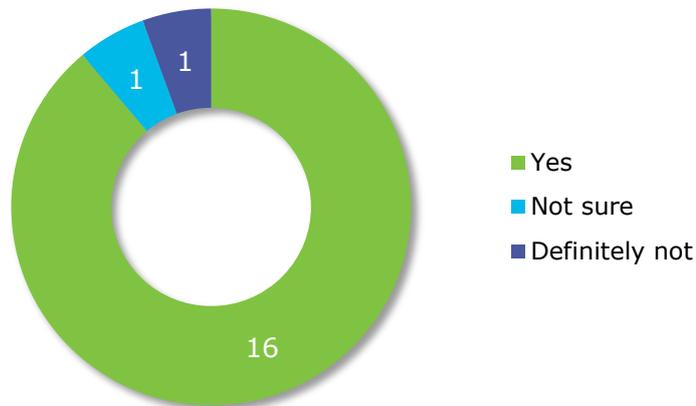
#### Sample group

- 7.4 25 respondents started the survey, with 21 of these providing usable responses. The pool of respondents was drawn from across 13 boroughs, three of which had no borough-wide study in place at the time of writing.
- 7.5 As intended, the majority of respondents were from a development management background as illustrated by Figure 7.1.



## Figure 7.1: Respondents' role

### Awareness of characterisation studies



### Figure 7.2: "Are you aware of your borough's characterisation study?"

- 7.6 As Figure 7.2 illustrates, awareness among the respondent group was generally good, with only one respondent definitively unaware of their borough study. (In defence of this particular respondent, their authority's study was in draft at the time of writing and was therefore unlikely to be available to development management staff.) The respondent that was unsure works in an authority with a well-established and high quality characterisation study – and is distinct from colleagues from the same authority that appeared highly knowledgeable. While this hints at differences in experience and training within authorities it is encouraging that respondents are clearly providing open and honest answers.
- 7.7 Because respondents were asked to select their authority from a pick-list; where respondents indicated they worked for an authority with no borough-wide characterisation in place they skipped directly to questions on place-based character studies to avoid irrelevant questions. While there was a good level of awareness and engagement with the studies among many planners Table 7.1 gives a sample of some who were less engaged.

### Table 7.1: Selected respondent quotes (LUC emphasis)

*"The characterisation study per se in my experience **is not used greatly in DM in the Borough** - indeed I am minded to say rarely but much of its content has been **exemplarily pulled through into Local Plan documents and SPD** so in that sense informs decision-making"*

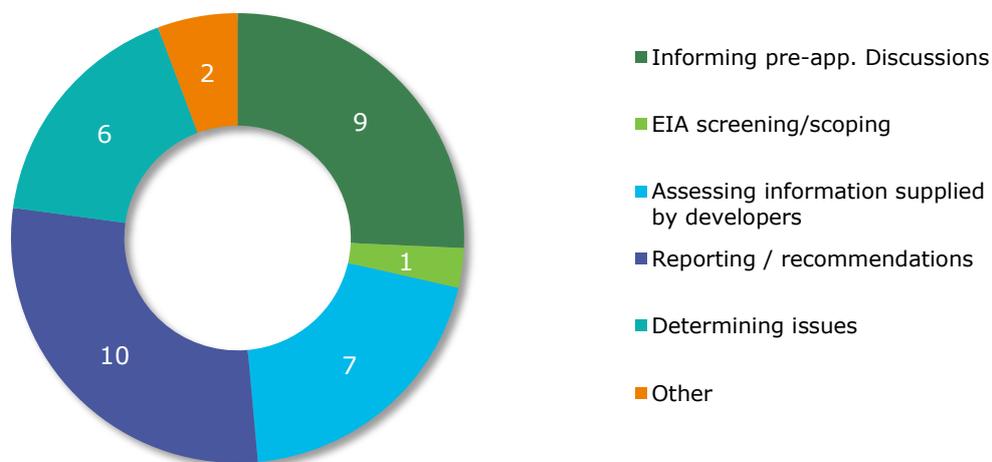
*"It hasn't really been used, except by objectors"*

*"It was produced by policy with **little DM input**, and seems quite divorced from the Local Plan process. Limited engagement"*

### Context of use

- 7.8 Respondents were asked in which ways they had made use of their borough's characterisation study; their responses are illustrated in Figure 7.3
- 7.9 Table 7.2 illustrates the range of uses individual respondents have made of characterisation studies. While some respondents appear not to have made use of the studies in practical contexts, the majority have applied the study in up to five different ways and at least two on

average. This suggests that, where respondents are aware of the study, they are seeking to apply it wherever relevant. This is particularly encouraging, as this suggests that studies are seen as a useful resource with the potential to add value.



**Figure 7.3: Context in which respondents have used thorough characterisation studies**

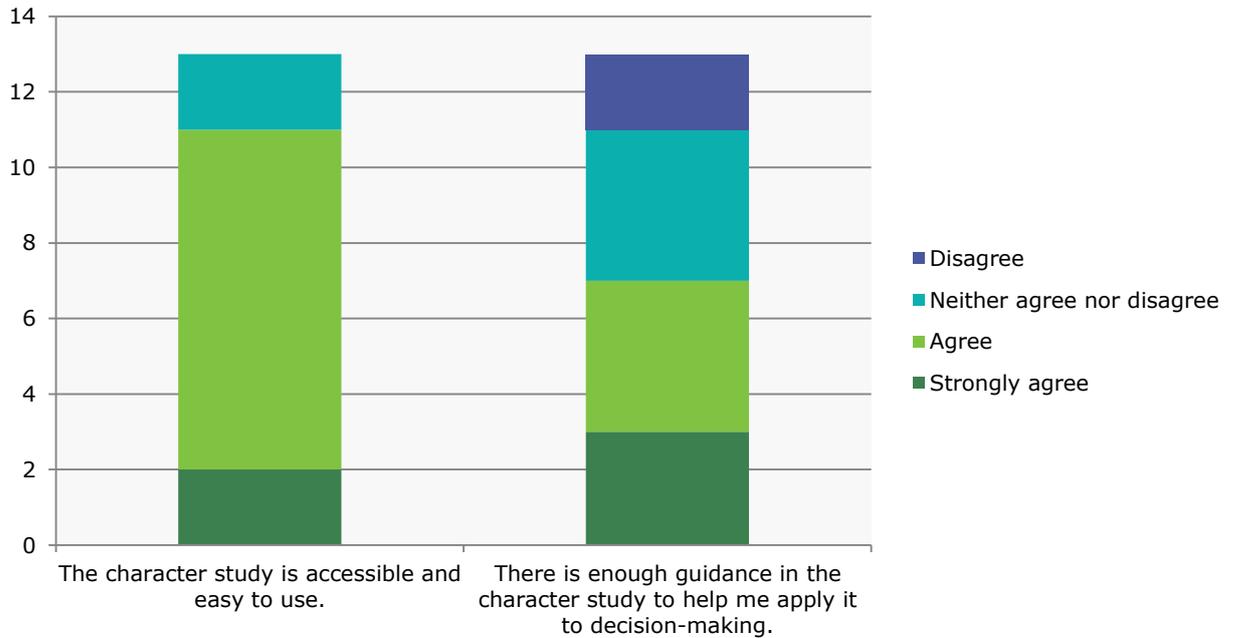
**Table 7.2: Matrix illustrating uses of characterisation studies, by individual respondent (filtered to exclude respondents indicating either low levels of understanding)**

ID	Informing pre-app. Discussions	EIA screening/scoping	Assessing information supplied by developers	Reporting / recommendations	Determining issues	Other
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
Total	9	1	7	10	6	2

### Accessibility of documentation

7.10 Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed with statements around the accessibility of their borough's characterisation study, and whether it contained enough information to allow them to apply it to their work.

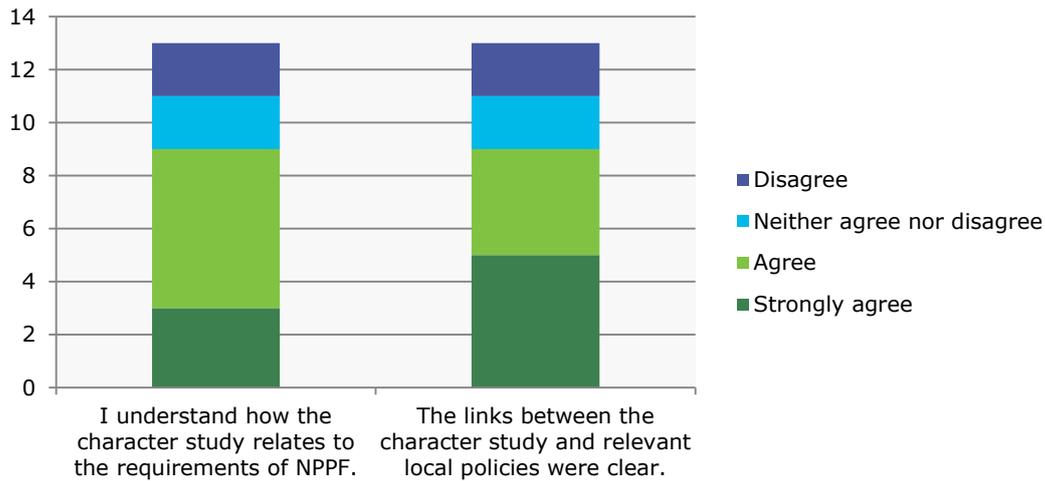
7.11 While a significant majority believed that their borough's study was accessible and easy to use, they were less certain that sufficient guidance was available within the document to enable its application in decision-making. Interestingly, there were discrepancies in opinion between respondents from the same authority – with slightly higher numbers rating the same study as having sufficient guidance on application.



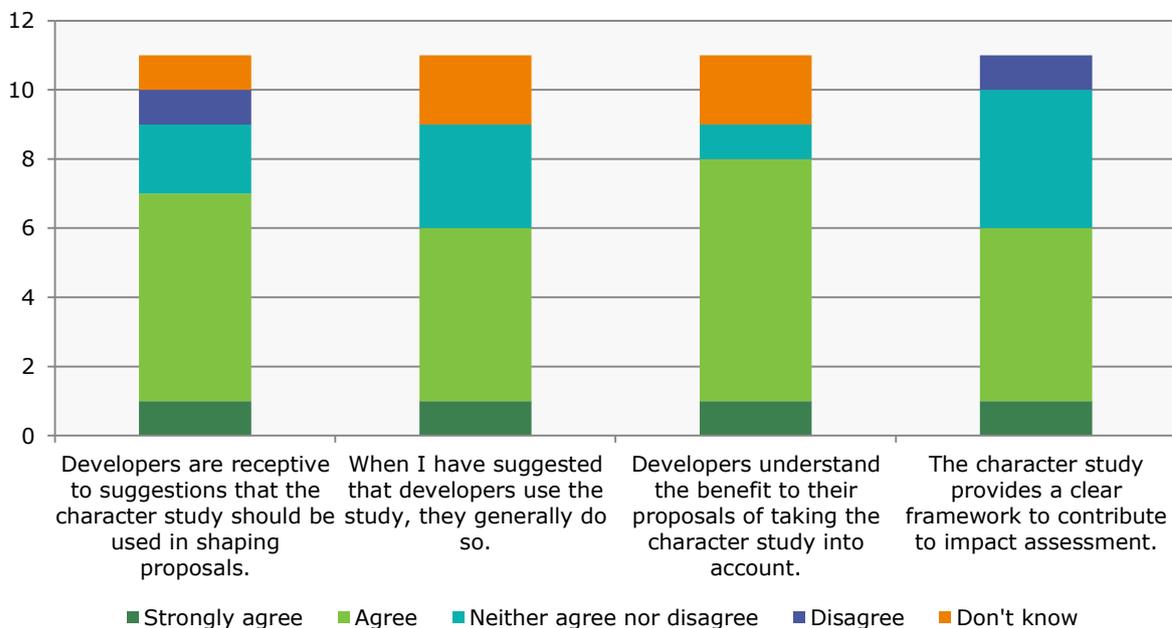
**Figure 7.4: Accessibility and application of characterisation studies**

## Links with policy

- 7.12 Testing respondents' understanding of the links between characterisation studies and the practical aspects of development management was critical. The majority appeared confident that they had a good appreciation of how their borough's study related to both national and, in particular, local policy.
- 7.13 The two respondents that disagreed work in an authority with a well-established characterisation study that is also well integrated with local planning policy (specific references to study in relevant Local Plan policies). While it is imprudent to place too much weight on this, again this could hint at differences in training – or simply experience in dealing with character and heritage issues in casework.



**Figure 7.6: Understanding of policy links**



**Figure 7.5: Developers' use of characterisation studies**

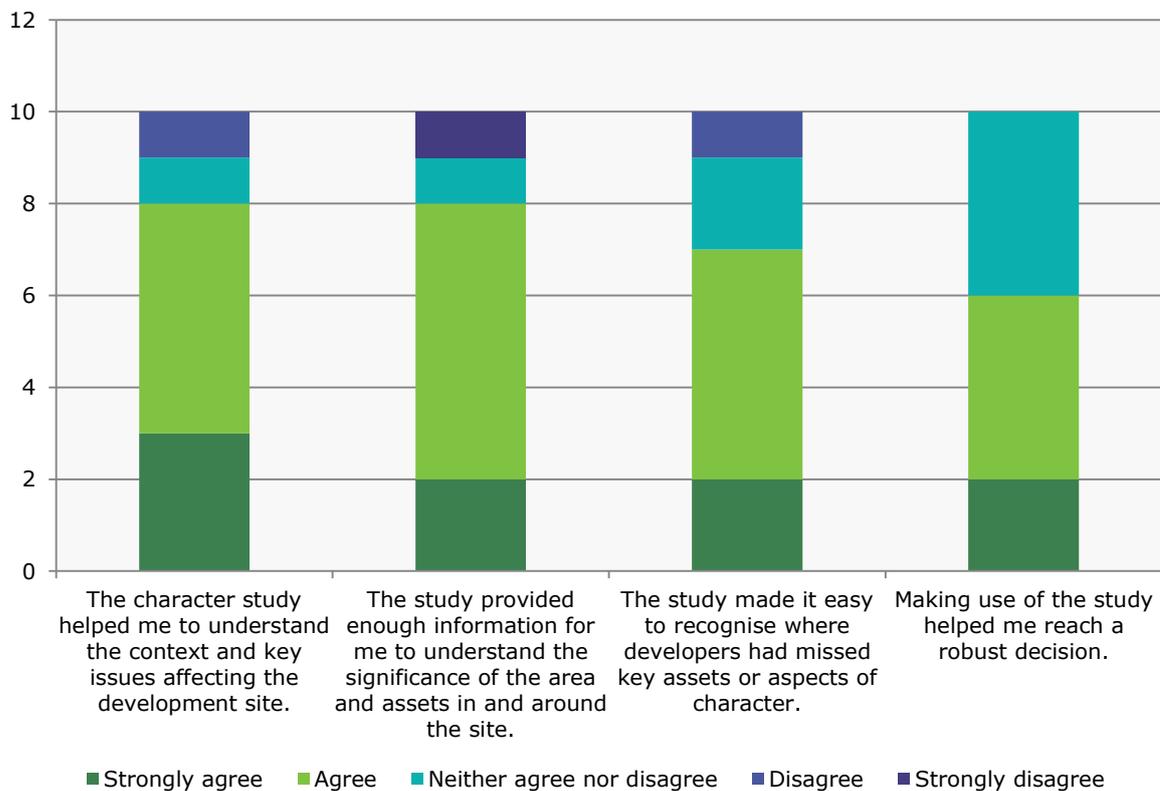
## Applying characterisation information in development management

### Informing developers' submissions

- 7.14 Front-loading the planning process and prioritising pre-application consultation – particularly where significant sensitivities are identified – is a national priority.
- 7.15 Understanding how characterisation studies are applied in this context, and whether officers recommend developers make use of the information, is therefore crucial.
- 7.16 Figure 7.5 overleaf illustrates respondents' answers. Over half of respondents believe that developers are generally receptive to making use of characterisation studies (although one respondent actively disagreed). Slightly fewer respondents indicated that developers had definitively made use of characterisation studies when asked to do so.
- 7.17 Over 70% of respondents agreed that developers were aware of the value that using characterisation studies could add to their proposals – although fewer are convinced that character studies provide an effective framework for assessing the impact of proposals.

### Assessing developers' submissions

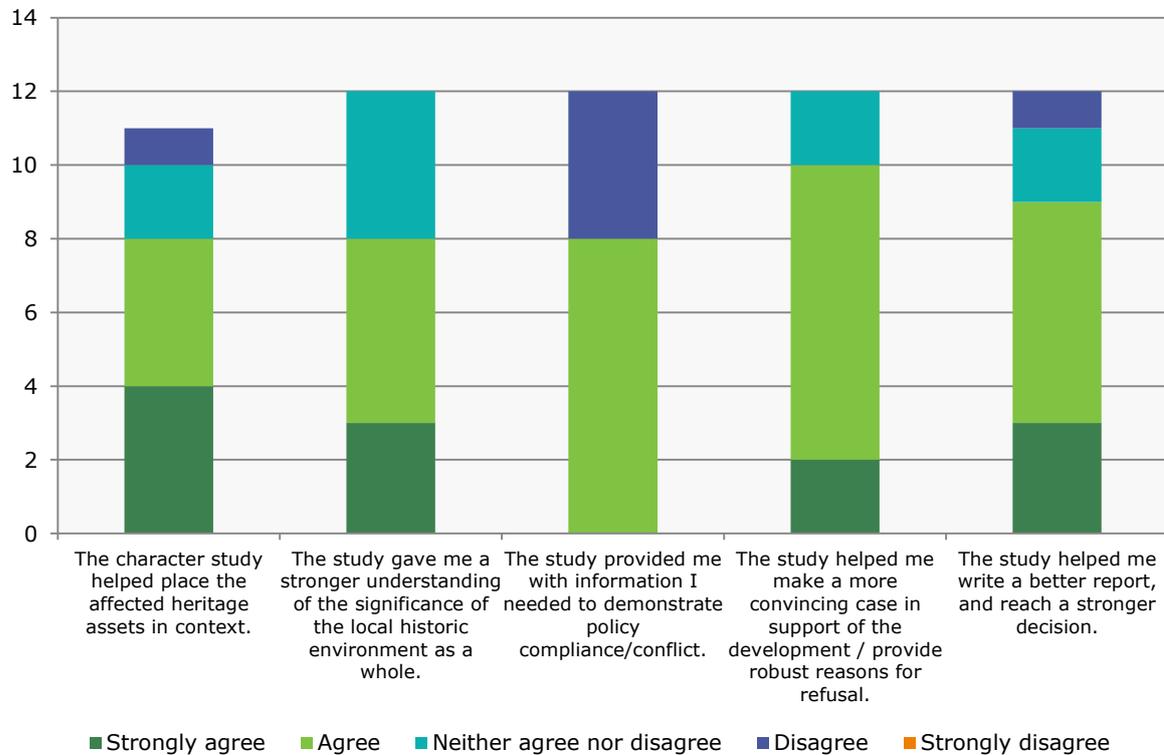
- 7.18 Officers were asked to rate how effective they felt characterisation studies were in helping them assess the material provided by developers in support of applications for planning permission.



**Figure 7.7: Effectiveness of characterisation studies in informing planning decisions**

## Effectiveness in contributing to decision-making

7.19 Respondents were asked a series of questions to test their opinions on how effective characterisation studies are in supporting assessment of planning applications and decision-making.



**Figure 7.8: Opinions on effectiveness of characterisation studies in decision-making**

7.20 Answers indicate that around two-thirds of respondents have positive opinions on the effectiveness of characterisation studies in terms of:

- Informing wider understanding of the context for development;
- Understanding of the significance of the historic environment;
- Contributing to assessment of proposals and determining issues; and
- Reaching robust decisions.

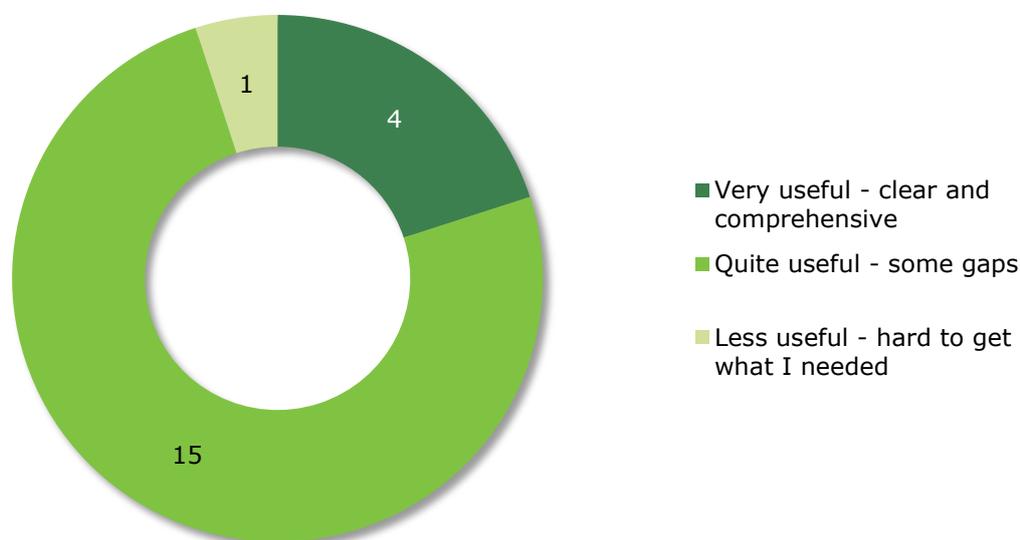
7.21 Where respondents were less convinced was in relation to demonstrating policy compliance/conflict of development proposals. Four respondents disagreed, despite working in authorities with ostensibly strong characterisation studies with good policy links.

7.22 This, coupled with correlations across previous answers, reinforces the interpretation of an emerging implementation gap: where good quality studies and policy links are not supported by appropriate training and guidance in the use and application of the information.

7.23 While this is undoubtedly an area where further study would be beneficial, this should not entirely overshadow the fact that the majority of respondents are both making active use of, and are – generally – highly supportive of characterisation studies as a tool for planning. It is particularly encouraging that respondents value the contribution the studies make to decision-making.

## Use of place-based characterisation studies

- 7.24 All respondents (including those from authorities with no borough-wide study in place) were asked whether they had experience of using place-based characterisation studies.
- 7.25 21 respondents indicated that they had made use of Conservation Area Character Appraisals in their work; four also stated that they have made use of the following character-based information:
- “HE/sector guidance” – interpreted as relating to Historic England guidance
  - “Local Plan ...derived in significant part from the Borough characterisation study”
  - “Wembley Masterplan Area, South Kilburn Masterplan Area, Old Oak and Park Royal Planning Framework”
  - “Village Plans, Public Space Design Guide, site briefs”
- 7.26 Respondents were asked to provide feedback on how useful they found the place-based studies. Figure 7.9 illustrates their answers in relation to Conservation Area Character Appraisals.



**Figure 7.9: Usefulness of Conservation Area Character Appraisals**

- 7.27 The overwhelming perception was that, while they added some value, there were some issues that hampered their application.

**Table 7.3: Respondent quotes – CAAs (LUC emphasis)**

*Although most of the information is available on the Character Appraisal, sometimes specific advice for Locally Listed Buildings or particular **information for Listed Buildings is missing.***

*As Conservation Areas tend to change over time, the **appraisals often become out of date within a couple of years**, so some changes to the area which is important may not be covered*

***As soon as these documents are published they become out of date** - any changes on the ground can have an effect on the character of the area, which is not reflected in the document.*

*Not enough advice re **what type of development may or may not be acceptable.** Generally quite good*

*Some gaps - comprehensive photographic survey as an appendix would be useful; sometimes not comprehensive enough to give planning officers clear guidance on particular aspects of a CA*

*The appraisals were carried out a number of years ago in some areas therefore at times they **need updating** to reflect the current condition and/or recent development.*

*The conservation area appraisals were **not thorough enough to be useful***

*too much repetition which can lead to claims you're being contradictory. the more precise you are the more likely developers will say that if something's not mentioned it isn't special/protected*

*Very good at informing decisions/ discussions over the design of schemes. However some slightly **dated, failing to account for NPPF** and often fail to recognise the limits of control that Council may exercise over certain forms of development.*

- 7.28 Respondents' main issue related to the fact that, to be of most use, studies need to be updated frequently to remain relevant. While this is undoubtedly true, it is important to recognise that the sheer number of Conservation Areas in London – particularly in inner boroughs (e.g. around half of Camden's total land area lies with Conservation Areas) – the scale of the task and its cost implications cannot be overlooked. That said, ensuring compliance with the current national policy framework is an imperative if such documents are to be taken seriously and remain useable.
- 7.29 The point relating to providing information on the acceptability of particular types of development is an interesting and frequently-raised one. Clearly, officers' aspiration is understandable, as this would be helpful information in any context. However doing so could create unintended consequences through both shifting the focus away from the character and significance of the asset towards a 'check-list' approach and potentially undermining the role of the development plan. Instead, the priority should be providing enough information to understand what is significant within the Conservation Area, the priorities for management and enhancement and the types of change that are likely to be unacceptable (i.e. likely to compromise the special architectural or historic interest and character). Historic England's Advice Note 1 'Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management' (Feb 2016) provides up-to-date advice on this.

## Conclusions

- 7.30 It appears that, broadly, characterisation studies are respected sources of information and are making a positive contribution to development management planners' work and – critically – decisions. It is particularly encouraging to see that officers are both using the studies, and that they feel they add value to reporting and the strength of decisions.
- 7.31 The key areas of contention – albeit at encouragingly low levels – appear to be in terms of strength of links to policy and certainty in terms of the importance of areas' characteristics. This confirms the findings of the review of borough-wide studies, which indicated that just over a quarter of studies have relatively poor links to policy. It should be noted that some of the more critical respondents actually have access to some of the best studies, with the best-developed policy links. This could link in to the training issues alluded to below or, at least to some extent, unrealistic expectations of how far even the best characterisation study can take users towards a decision.
- 7.32 The fairly stark differences of opinion between officers from the same authority raise some interesting questions. While there will always be discrepancies between individuals, the systemic differences across answer profiles suggest that officers may have substantially different levels of understanding and potentially experience in using characterisation studies. Given the quality and high level of policy integration of the study in question, differences in training may account for attitudinal differences. Avoiding 'implementation gaps' is imperative for any policy product, ensuring that the effort and resources expended on delivering a quality output is optimised.
- 7.33 Assuring development management officers that characterisation studies – both borough-wide and place-based – are up-to-date and reflect the reality 'on the ground' is also likely to be a

consideration going forward. Confidence in Conservation Area Appraisals as a whole appears to be significantly undermined by a wide-ranging perception that they are frequently out-of-date – and in one case, perceived to be inherently dated as soon as they are published. While this is true to an extent, the architectural and historical interest within Conservation Areas does not change particularly quickly – meaning that the key information on what is important, and therefore needs protection, should remain usable. Ideally, the full suite of evidence and policy underpinning a Local Plan would be reviewed in each cycle. It is, however, acknowledged that this may not be realistic. The modular nature of many characterisation studies – particularly those based on typological approaches – means that character areas or locations of known change, can readily be edited. As authorities inevitably move towards web-based development plans, accomplishing this type of update while keeping costs to a minimum should be more easily accomplished.

## Discussion

- 7.34 As originally planned as part of this study, a systematic review of casework to objectively examine the application of borough-wide characterisation studies would be beneficial. It is likely that this would add most value as part of a wider-ranging review of the implementation of NPPF and local heritage policies.
- 7.35 Previous projects under English Heritage’s national research programme began to examine some of the issues affecting the performance of heritage policies and tools for design and assessment. As these were generally quite tightly focussed (e.g. LUC’s work on the impacts of larger-scale housing development) and necessarily mainly qualitative in nature, a more extensive quantitative study could add significant value. The evidence that this could provide to Historic England – and the wider sector – on the understanding and application of policy and decision-support tools, along with the resource and training available to support implementation, could be invaluable.

# 8

## Towards best practice in characterisation

## 8 Towards best practice in characterisation

### Introduction

- 8.1 There is no single exemplar approach to characterisation in London. Instead, there are a range of approaches in place from which quality elements can be 'cherry-picked' to enable practitioners to develop a locally-appropriate bespoke approach.
- 8.2 This section of the report identifies good practice examples for each key component of a good characterisation study, and suggests additions to the approach that could add value.

### Availability of guidance

- 8.3 The Mayor's 'Character and Context' SPG provides an excellent starting point for boroughs seeking to develop characterisation studies. However, this guidance is principally theoretical rather than technical. The wealth of information available in HE's suite of 'Understanding Place' and HLC series helps to fill some of this gap.
- 8.4 There is potentially an argument for unifying this information in an updated document – particularly given the need to reflect significantly improved GIS software and techniques, and the value of web-based presentation and dissemination techniques. Although evaluating this guidance is beyond the scope of this commission, a wide-ranging review of the full suite of characterisation guidance is recommended.

### Understanding of character

- 8.5 A key area for improvement identified in several borough-wide studies was the balance between aspects of character – with the influence of heritage frequently being underestimated. While this will vary considerably between authority areas, and indeed between character areas, it is clear that supplementing borough-wide summaries by the addition of area-specific historic information is very helpful. This provides both immediate contextual information and draws attention more effectively to the key contribution of heritage assets to local character, as well as making documents more accessible for users.

CHARACTERISATION

**BOW**

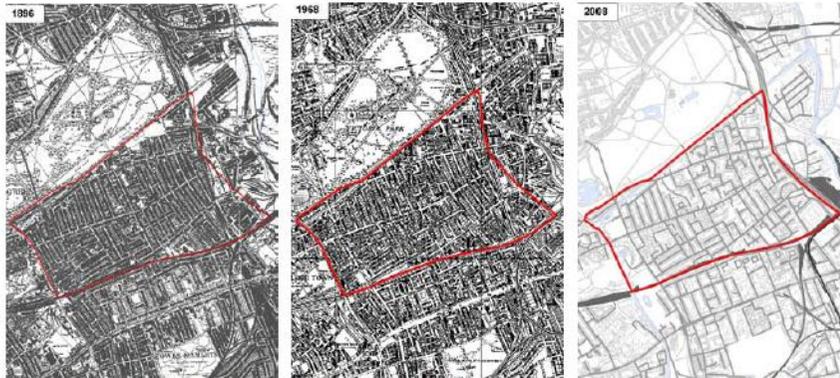
historical character & identity

The hamlet of Bow dates back almost a thousand years. Founded in 1110 by Queen Matilda, the wife of Henry I, its name is believed to have come from its arched bridge,

By Tudor times, Bow was a thriving village. According to the 1548 Chantry Certificate, "it stood on a great thoroughfare with much people there inhabiting".

Even up to the 1800s the small hamlet of Bow was surrounded by cornfields, pastures and meadows. The 19th century however brought a massive increase in its population (from about 2,000 in 1801 to 42,000 in 1901), and the construction of a number of significant factories producing rubber, soap and matches. The Bryant and May factory which produced matches, was the scene of the famous Match Girls Strike of 1888.

Social investment in the area seems to be a common theme running through Bow at this time. A few years later it was also the centre of the early-20th-century women's suffrage movement, their printing works being situated on Old Ford Road. The famous Roman Road Market was also founded in 1843 as a general market for the poverty-stricken newcomers in the middle of last century. The market always thrived on its reputation for offering a huge variety of goods at keen prices. In its 1960s heyday, it was one of the most fashionable and popular markets in London, offering a slice of modern fashion and culture.



Crown Copyright. All Rights reserved. London Borough of Tower Hamlets 100019288 2009

80 1896 1968 2008

heritage & townscape

Roman Road runs east-west through Bow and is an important link to the City. Bow has a busy town centre which, along with the lively Roman Road Market, forms the heart of Bow. The partly pedestrianised market on the east end of Roman Road sells a variety of food, clothing, crafts, books and antiques. The buildings along much of Roman Road consist of low-rise two- to three-storey mixed-use buildings, with small shops on the ground floor. Notable buildings in the area include the Grade II listed Passmore Edwards Public Library and the St Paul and St Stephens Church (Listed Ecclesiastical Grade C). Roman Road lies within the Roman Road, Medway and Driffield Road conservation areas. Other conservation areas include Regent's Canal, Fairfield Road and Victoria Park conservation areas.

The architectural styles in the neighbouring residential side streets off Roman Road are varied and include Victorian terraced housing, post-war housing estates, historic warehouses and modern developments. Generally much of the Victorian terrace housing is located in the west of Bow, while most of the housing estates are located in the east.

The three bridges leading into Victoria Park – Bonner Hall Bridge (over Regent's Canal), Three Colt Bridge and Parnell Road Bridge (both over the Hertford Union Canal) – are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.



Roman Road Market

Crown Copyright. All Rights reserved. London Borough of Tower Hamlets 100019288 2009

Figure 8.1: Detailed heritage information at the character area level

- 8.6 Tower Hamlets, Haringey and Hounslow's studies offer useful examples, presenting summaries of heritage and townscape, for each character area.
- 8.7 Croydon's study takes a somewhat similar, but less detailed, approach providing a summary timeline for the development of each character area, and a map depicting these key periods.
- 8.8 The appropriate level of information to be provided will vary between boroughs as a consequence of different character and historic environments. However, for users of these documents – particularly developers or third parties that may not benefit from officers' detailed local knowledge – having sufficient detail in place at the character area level substantially increases the usability of the document, and provides a more rounded understanding of character. At present, the information drawn together for the introductory sections of borough-wide studies (particularly the 'historical development of the borough' sections) are not always used to best effect, and their influence on detailed analysis and interpretation is often difficult to discern.

### Components of character

- 8.9 It is acknowledged that the key determinants of character vary across study areas. However, to ensure balance between the relatively standard list of issues considered, it may be helpful for practitioners to consider using checklists to help ensure consistency. As often applied in Historic Area Assessment, a checklist-based approach to ensuring that all relevant aspects of character are considered for each character area – and in defining 'key characteristics' – may be helpful in maintaining an appropriate balance.
- 8.10 Emerging practice pulls together a very broad suite of influences as part of the borough-wide analysis, including:
- Geology;
  - Topography;
  - Water bodies;
  - Historical evolution;
  - Landscape / townscape/block pattern/grain;
  - Heritage assets;
    - Ideally, including an assessment of their significance, and its contribution to character
  - Open space / green infrastructure;
  - Housing type and tenure;
  - Social statistics and socio-economics (e.g. Indices of Multiple Deprivation; population density; qualifications of population; demographics);
  - Public Transport Accessibility (PTAL);
  - Transport and communications network;
  - Land use;
  - Heights of existing buildings.
- 8.11 While this is undoubtedly useful, this review highlighted some imbalance in the way that this range of factors was considered at character area level.
- 8.12 It is therefore recommended that, where possible, authorities seek to present a useful level of detail at the character area level – particularly where this is strongly related to the key characteristics of an area. Such additions would greatly increase the usability of character-based information for developers and development management planners. This audience in particular needs to be able to refer quickly and easily to site/neighbourhood-specific information, and get to grips with what is important in a robust, repeatable manner.
- 8.13 This is likely to be a comparatively low cost addition to most characterisation study briefs, as it is principally about repackaging information that should already have been collected for the borough-wide analysis. Similarly, for studies already in place, this could be a relatively tightly-bounded 'upgrade' to existing work, giving more meaning and specificity to the characterisation.

## Methodologies

- 8.14 Characterisation is a necessarily broad church, with authorities and individual practitioners applying a range of techniques and methods. Constraining this diversity is unlikely to be desirable. However, there is some potential for minimum standards for particular approaches that may help to secure a measure of consistency between studies.
- 8.15 Clearly, the methodology selected can play a substantial role in the eventual cost and onward utility of the study, with authorities likely to have to make difficult decisions around where to draw the line. Nevertheless, the selection of the most appropriate approach should be guided by the nature, scale and complexity of the borough's urban character. Generally, typological approaches confer a wider range of benefits to authorities and, potentially, other users – particularly in terms of applying the data to sensitivity and capacity studies, informing options for growth and identifying areas / types of historic urban fabric that is worthy of conservation and active management. Although more descriptive area-based approaches can work very well, and provide rich information, the robustness, scalability and wider applications of typology-based data informs the following recommendations.

### Typological approaches

#### *Benefits*

- 8.16 Generally, a typological approach to basic characterisation offers a range of benefits to authorities, practitioners and to eventual users of both the paper study and the data itself. These can be summarised as follows:
- Robust, flexible GIS data:
    - Can be derived from OS or OpenStreetMap data, potentially enabling cost reductions where this is an issue
    - Can readily be developed using free / cost-effective open source GIS software
    - Capable of internal and external validation at local and borough-wide scales
    - Inherently scalable and can support multiple layers of information (e.g. broad / specific types; land use; period; values)
    - Can be used with a wide range of other data (designated assets, HER data, LCA, HLC, green infrastructure, socioeconomic data etc.) to ensure key characteristics are effectively captured
    - Can support unlimited layers of information (e.g. multi-level typology, period, values etc.)
    - Easy to edit during study; easy to update in future
  - Valuable alternative approach to analysis and presentation of recommendations.
    - General type-level information on pressures, forces for change and guidance for management can be a useful way of breaking down the amount of information that needs to be presented at character area level.  
For example, the approach applied in Waltham Forest, Barnet and Enfield provides a useful model.
  - Potential certainty for users of the study in terms of exactly where their site / area of interest fits within the wider framework of urban character.
  - Provides an objective basis and vital resource for a range of analyses, judgements and added value information. For example:
    - Quantitative analysis of relative rarity of types;
    - Comparative analysis of quality / sensitivity scores across the borough;
  - Potential costs savings through adjacent boroughs [with substantive commonality of character] sharing studies:
    - Developing a common typology and sharing the costs of desk-based research, interpretation, digitisation, field confirmation and editing could be an attractive model, attracting economies of scale.
    - Results can then be presented, interpreted and applied as boroughs see fit, with no need to necessarily produce shared documentation.

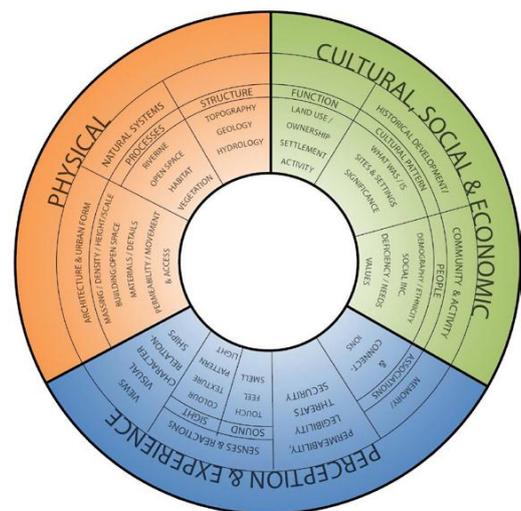
*Issues to consider*

8.17 Where authorities choose to adopt a typological approach, there are a number of factors they should consider before embarking on developing the framework. Ideally, this should happen during the process of desk-based research, rather than beforehand, to ensure that key factors influencing character can be properly considered. For example:

- Complexity of the local character vs. size of the study area:
  - Could a tiered typology be required, or add value, to analyses?  
For example, there may be several different forms and/or periods of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> suburban development, or a number of different periods of historic docks, that could be worth considering separately depending on their individual pressures or conservation needs – but can be considered as a broad type for the purposes of borough-wide analysis.  
Care might be required where a tiered typology is specified for a particularly large borough – this could add significant time/cost to the project programme.
  - Typology could be designed to tessellate with rural Historic Landscape Character or Landscape Character Assessment data.
- Capability of typology to capture key elements of character:
  - Many typologies blur the lines between character and land use. The more detailed the typology, the more likely this is to occur.  
*There is no inherent problem with a land use-based typology – provided that is the main determinant of character. It is important to be clear what the typology actually records and depicts and how it should be interpreted at borough-wide and area levels. Figure 8.3 and Figure 8.4 illustrate an urban form-based, and a hybrid urban form and land use-based typology respectively – demonstrating that different approaches can be effective.*

*Equally, there is no reason why individual aspects of character cannot be recorded as separate attributes in a GIS dataset (as suggested in Figure 8.2). Historic, social and cultural character could all be recorded, allowing a more systematic approach to the different values attached to places.*

- Is the detail in the types of character, or in the places they create?  
If the latter, a greater number of character areas may be required. (Types are generic and can occur in more than one location; areas are unique.)
- Dealing with ‘transition zones’ between areas of strong character:
  - A typological approach, based in GIS, necessarily deals in hard boundaries. Character can be more fluid, changing gradually from one distinctive type to another, by way of areas of mixed or dynamic character.  
*Authorities may wish to consider defining separate types to capture these transition zones, bearing in mind the need for them to work effectively with the rest of the typology. A more proportionate response is perhaps to deal with these ‘fuzzy’ boundaries in detail at the character area level – drawing out the diversity within the place as part of ‘key characteristics’*



**Figure 8.2: Assigning components of character to GIS attributes?**

defining boundaries is important to ensure transparency.

- Optimising onward use of characterisation data:
  - In scoping and designing the data framework for typology-based characterisation, it is important that authorities do not limit their options unnecessarily.
  - Collecting data at an appropriate scale/resolution/precision to facilitate a range of uses is important. Broadly, authorities should ensure that data is digitised to work with base mapping at scales no less than 1:2,500 in built-up areas and 1:10,000 in rural areas<sup>14</sup>. This should ensure an appropriate resolution down to block level, and time savings where appropriate in open country.
  - Setting clear digitising standards to ensure consistency.
- Consistency of terminology:
  - It is crucial that users understand what is meant by specific, technical terms such as 'character type', 'typology' or 'character area'. Defining these clearly at the start of the process, and giving examples, ensures that everyone has a common understanding. While there is a common lexicon, derived from landscape character assessment, there is no barrier to using locally-specific terms where these are felt to make more sense – provided there is a clear rationale and guidance for users.
  - However, for the avoidance of doubt '**typology**' should only ever be used to refer to the whole system of character classification (literally, a classification according to general form; and the study and interpretation of types.). Individual units of classification are therefore **types**, not 'typologies'.

8.18 In terms of current best practice, the typological approaches applied in Hillingdon, Lewisham, Barnet and Enfield (combined LCA) by Allies and Morrison/Urban Practitioners are probably the most sophisticated (example included as Figure 8.3). While analysis of character is presented only at the detailed type level, these multi-level approaches could in theory be used to undertake more strategic analyses. Haringey's hybrid urban form/land use-derived typology (see Figure 8.4) is another interesting example, providing detailed block-level interpretation.

### Character areas

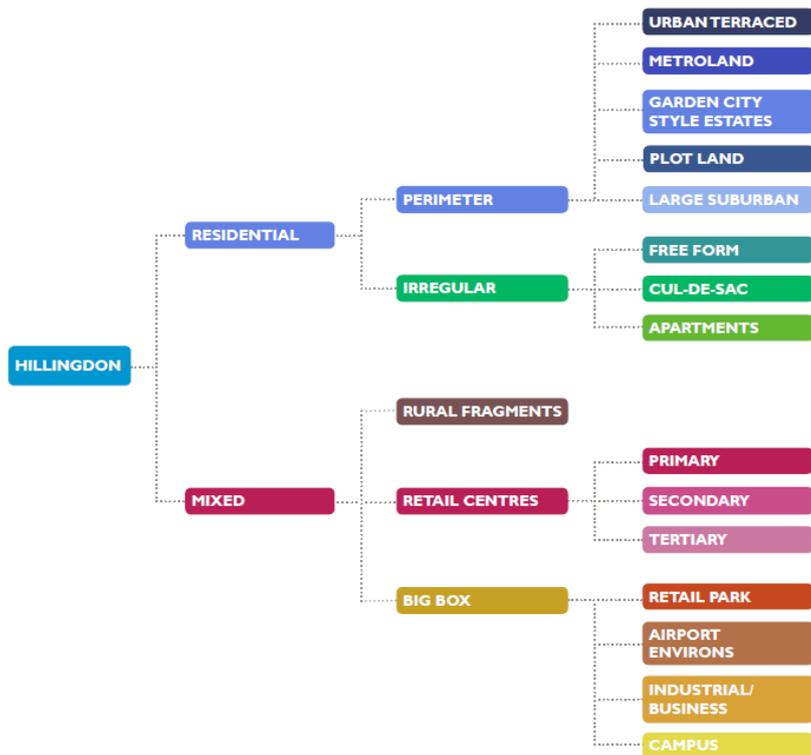
8.19 The Mayor's SPG contains valuable guidance on the role of character areas, and issues to consider in their definition. In addition, it is potentially important for authorities to consider the ways in which the areas are likely to be used, and whether 'hard' or 'fuzzy' boundaries are appropriate. It is recognised that some authorities have opted to structure their studies based on pre-existing boundaries (e.g. Richmond's 'Village Plans' or LDF 'sub-areas' used by Merton), that are necessarily fixed – but may struggle with areas of transitional character on their edges.

8.20 Testing community recognition of character area / place boundaries may also be helpful – particularly where there is an appetite to gather information on communal values.

8.21 In terms of best practice, the granularity of character areas necessarily varies in line with borough size, density of settlement and community identities. Strictly, to accord with wider understanding of characterisation, boundaries should be driven principally by character – delineating areas of common, unique characteristics. However, in the interests of usability in the urban and particularly the planning context, more locally-recognisable / community-based boundaries have substantial merit. With this in mind, many studies have opted to represent character areas as 'places' – which is both more accurate and probably more accessible to the general user.

---

<sup>14</sup> OS data is recorded at 1:1,250 in urban centres, 1:2,500 in smaller towns and 1:10,000 in rural areas.



**Figure 8.3: Urban form-derived typology (Hillingdon)**

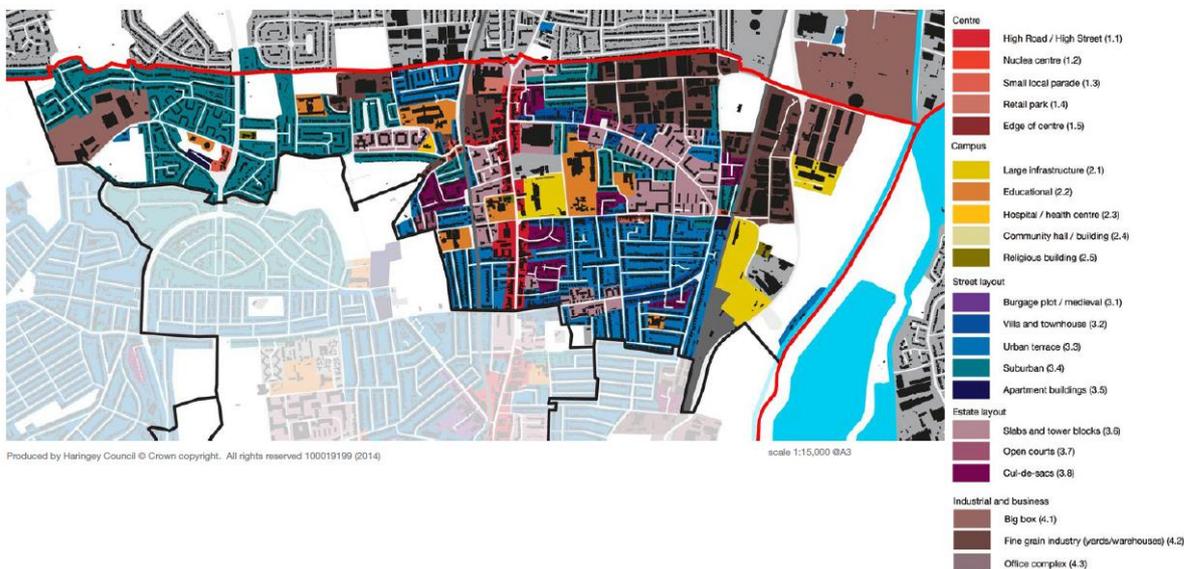
Haringey urban character study

67

February 2015

## North Tottenham / Northumberland Park

character typologies



**Figure 8.4: Hybrid land use/urban form-based typology in use (Haringey)**

## Taking the next step – adding value to characterisation

### Stakeholder and community engagement

- 8.22 It should be noted that the Mayor's SPG already highlights the value of engaging with communities when trying to understand their places. It is acknowledged that meaningful engagement is potentially costly, and needs to be carefully planned and managed in order to:
- Properly identify appropriate community structures to act as sources of information, legitimacy and, where necessary, brokers/intermediaries;
  - Clearly articulate the benefits of participation – particularly where there may be lower levels of engagement with culture and heritage:
    - Stressing the importance of communal values and contemporary reinterpretation of heritage as a missing link in London's story.
    - Highlighting the importance of ensuring community values and perceptions are properly understood – so that they can be better-reflected in forward planning and decision-making.
    - 'People make places'
  - Be a two-way learning experience: for local people to learn about an area's past; for the project team to learn about its present; and, for the borough to have the right information to plan effectively for its future.
  - Put all participants on an equal footing. Perceptions of heritage as an elite interest, needing expert knowledge to participate, are pernicious and need to be actively broken down to stimulate engagement. Careful 'branding' of engagement activities can therefore be helpful in optimising participation. Making this about people and places, rather than 'heritage' or 'character' is a good first step.
  - Engage at the right time. People find it much easier to participate when they have something to respond to. Although early engagement is often a laudable ambition, it can be intimidating for prospective participants to be confronted with 'blank canvases'. Workshops should ideally provide sufficient information to tell the broad story of the place, clearly identifying the questions/gaps that local knowledge will be important in helping address.
  - Respect what participants feel to be important. While there will likely be a level of crossover with other heritage values, local responses are often based in more practical considerations – which can affect how other values are perceived.
- 8.23 Few current studies benefitted from extensive community engagement, but important first steps were taken by Haringey in particular, engaging with local people's perceptions and experiences of their places. Richmond, because of its basis in 'Villages' is the strongest on community engagement.

### Added value analysis

- 8.24 Maintaining the objectivity of the characterisation process is a priority. However, using that information to develop appropriate policy responses will often require analysis and judgements on, for example:
- Heritage values and significance
  - Experiential and perceptual factors
  - Social and economic factors
  - Environmental and/or design quality
  - Sensitivity to change
- 8.25 It is important to note that such analyses can be conducted on an ad hoc basis after the main data collection phase – meaning that costs can be spread over financial years or developed in response to particular threats or opportunities. For Local Plans, information on quality, values and significance could add substantial value in terms of identifying areas with the capacity to support more extensive change. Similarly, this work could help go a long way to developing the

baseline for the 'positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment' required by paragraph 126 of NPPF – and area in which many Local Plans perhaps lack ambition.

8.26 Hounslow's characterisation study provides probably the best example of applied characterisation data in London, although the measures applied may not be appropriate or desirable for all authorities. This type of scoring affords authorities the opportunity to understand pressures at both a local level and borough-wide – providing the opportunity to make more effective strategic decisions. Care is, however, required to ensure that metrics are clear and suitably comprehensive (i.e. taking into account all relevant aspects of character and the contribution of the character

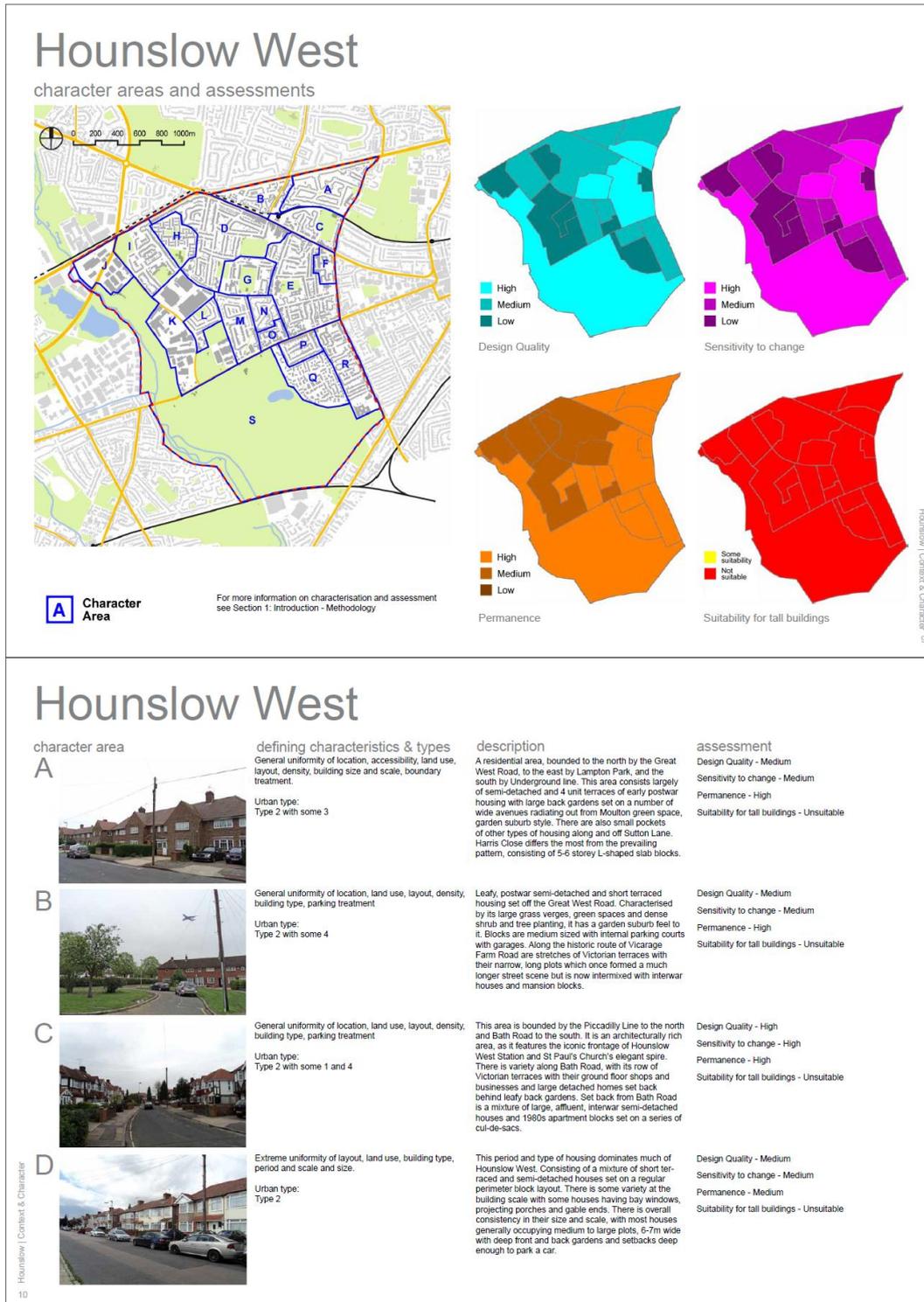
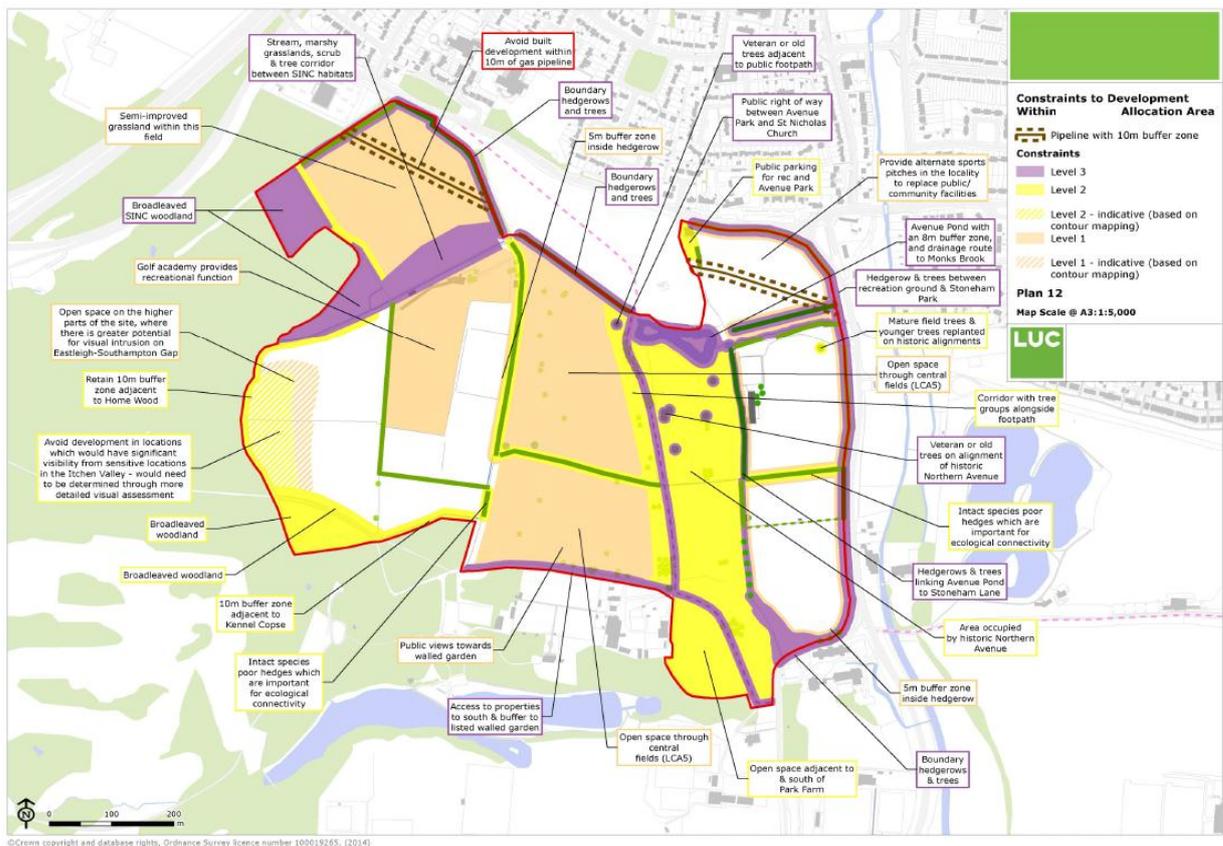


Figure 8.5: Hounslow - assessment scores by character area

area to the setting of heritage assets) and any approach to weighting or aggregation cannot create perverse results.

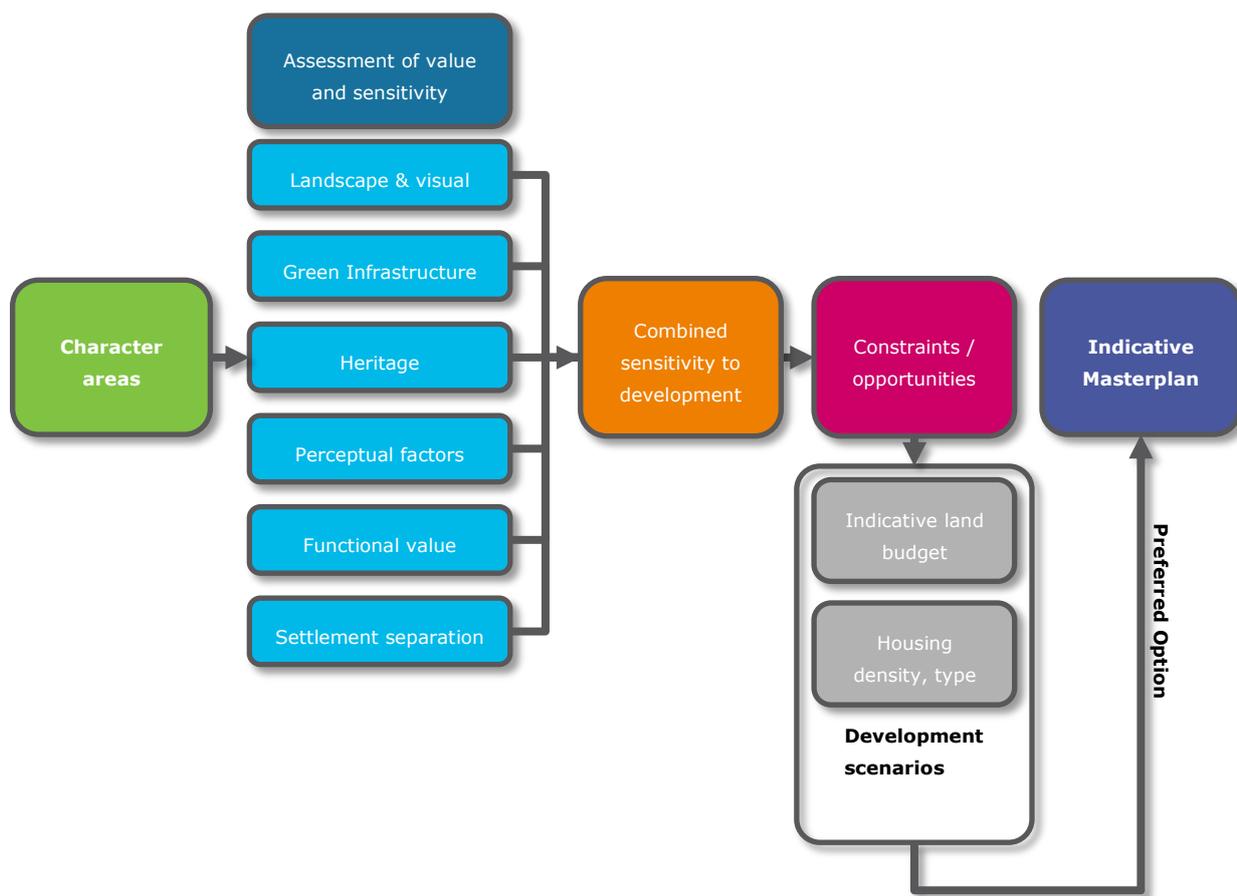
### Opportunities

8.27 Characterisation as an approach also creates a natural opportunity to bring together other types of spatial information and analyses to provide a holistic understanding of environmental character, value and sensitivity – particularly at a site-specific level. Historic places, for example designed landscapes, are often highly valued for their ecological value and the range of 'ecosystem services'<sup>15</sup> they can provide to communities. Taking an integrated approach to understanding the full suite of environmental interests acting on an area can help to underline the connections between cultural and natural heritage, the benefits accrued by society and the economy and how places are experienced. Increasingly, local authorities are recognising the value of integrated approaches to understanding the likely impacts of land allocations and in helping to shape sensitive masterplans. Figure 8.6 and Figure 8.7 illustrate recent integrated character and sensitivity assessment conducted by LUC for Hampshire County Council.



**Figure 8.6: Example sensitivity map – outcome of integrated characterisation and sensitivity / capacity assessment for housing development**

<sup>15</sup> In essence, the benefits provided to people by the environment – for example, flood and local climate attenuation, wild foods, heritage and aesthetic experiences.



**Figure 8.7: Indicative approach to combined character and sensitivity assessment**

## Outputs

- 8.28 The majority of studies contain good quality research and analysis – but what makes the best examples particularly effective is the way in which this information is presented. Well-structured, clear and concise reports make what can be quite complex information more accessible and easier to apply.
- 8.29 Studies that apply both a typological and area-based approach have an inherent advantage, in that this structure enables a substantial reduction in duplication of information at the character area level. For example, Waltham Forest, Barnet, Hillingdon and Enfield have very similar structures – having been prepared by the same consultancy – that works particularly well. It presents information logically, working from the general to the specific and avoiding repetition effectively. Descriptions are particularly concise and are well summarised in key characteristics. As illustrated in Figure 8.9 below, Waltham Forest’s study provides a useful summary table of type characteristics and very useful streetscape photomontages for each type (Figure 8.8).

# Overview of characteristics

Typology	Photo	Description	Key characteristics	Density	Grain	Parking	Strengths	Weaknesses	Detail
Victorian		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Narrow houses, typically developed in long terraces to form regular perimeter blocks</li> <li>Typically two storey</li> <li>Principally located in the southern half of the borough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong vertical rhythm</li> <li>L-shaped plan form</li> <li>Elegant detailing and decoration with limited range of materials</li> </ul>	65 dph 300 lph		Typically on-street. The width of a standard plot effectively ensures that there is almost one space per house along the street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong grid format – permeable and legible</li> <li>Good provision of on-street parking</li> <li>Attractive detailing</li> <li>Strong composition, robust enough to withstand many modifications</li> <li>Adaptable building form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medium density – perhaps not high enough now to make efficient use of land in south of borough</li> <li>Owner modifications can weaken the attractiveness of the group, particularly replacement windows and render/paint</li> </ul>	
Edwardian		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relatively narrow plots, typically terraced but also as smaller groupings to form perimeter blocks</li> <li>Typically located in the eastern and northern parts of the borough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong vertical rhythm</li> <li>Ebullient detailing with strong external timber-work</li> </ul>	60-65 dph 300 lph		Typically on street as per Victorian housing, although some larger gardens have been converted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong grid format – permeable and legible</li> <li>Good provision of on-street parking</li> <li>Attractive bold detailing</li> <li>Generally associated with more affluent areas of the borough</li> <li>Adaptable building form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wider and deeper front gardens more susceptible to conversion to parking</li> <li>Bold detailing and elaborate external features more susceptible to change/loss</li> </ul>	
Warner		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Narrow plot terraced houses forming perimeter blocks</li> <li>Notable for the half-house type of flats in a terraced format</li> <li>Principally found in the Walthamstow area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attractive detailing on even the most humble buildings</li> <li>Attention paid to the overall layout of streets to achieve a strong composition</li> </ul>	83 dph 255 lph		Typically on street. The half house establishes a parking ratio of approximately 0.5 spaces per dwelling due to the nature of the design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High density format in terraced form</li> <li>Access to private outdoor space for all</li> <li>Supports mix of flats and terraced houses in one street</li> <li>Strong sense of composition enriches character of street and block supporting legibility</li> <li>Front garden plays key role in supporting street greenery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parking ratio limited in the case of half-houses</li> <li>Overall composition and attention to detail makes the terraces more susceptible to impact from changes such as infill development or owner-modifications</li> </ul>	
Garden City		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wider format cottage-style houses in short terraces forming perimeter blocks</li> <li>Larger plots and greater sense of openness</li> <li>Key examples include the later Warner housing around Perstyn Avenue and the Friday Hill Estate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cottage style with more horizontal emphasis to the buildings</li> <li>Deeper front gardens lends a more open feel to the streets</li> </ul>	33 dph 165 lph		Mixture of on-street parking and gardens which have been converted to accommodate parking spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High proportion of private and public green space accommodated</li> <li>Simple composition</li> <li>Significant variety and flexibility in block and plot dimensions</li> <li>Simple but elegant detailing on better examples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very low density form</li> <li>Loss of original windows and doors</li> <li>Larger front gardens frequently converted to parking</li> <li>Loft conversions can remove the hipped roof, changing the character of the street</li> <li>Later examples by the public sector tend to have weaker design and be more cheaply built.</li> </ul>	

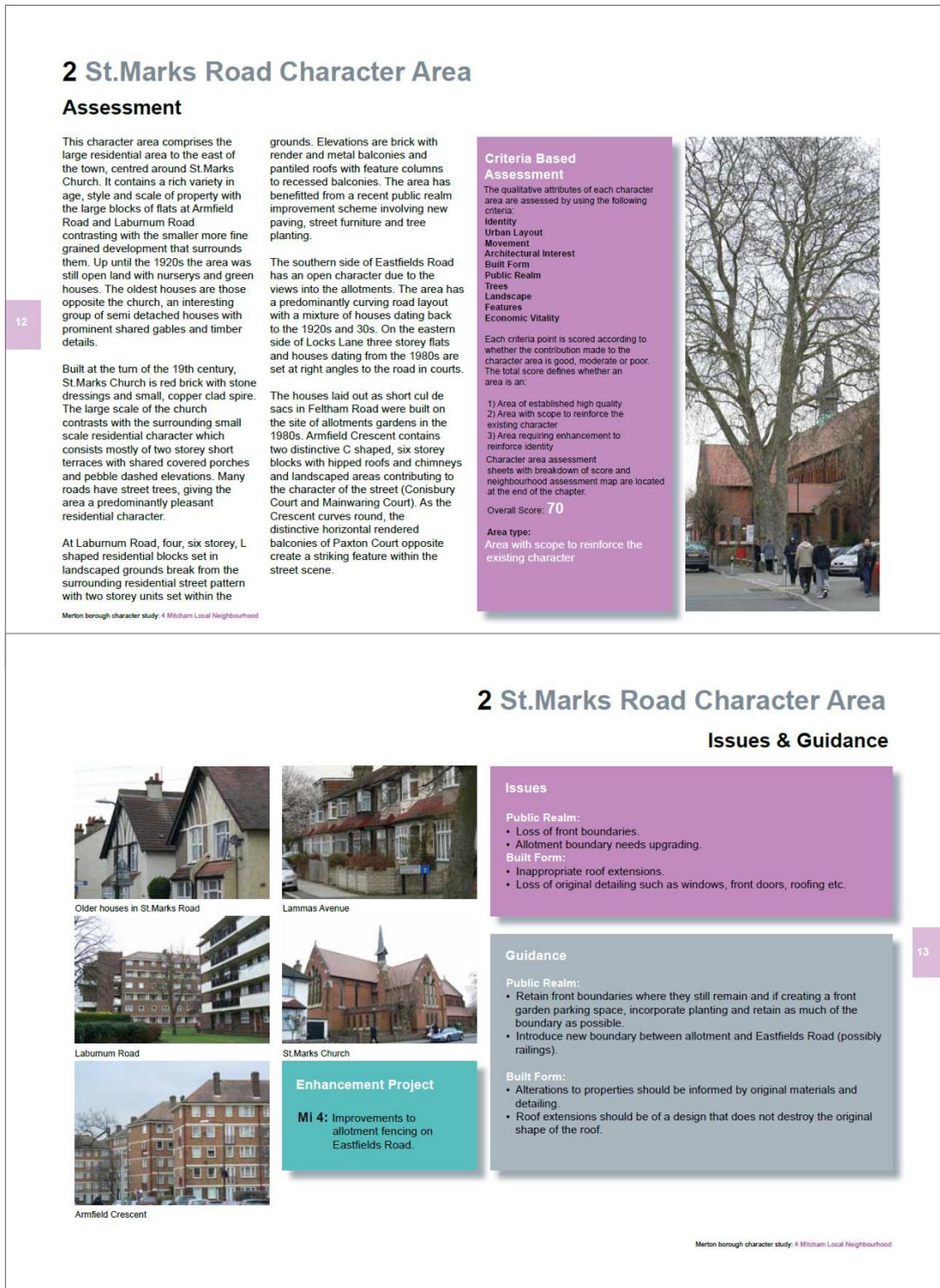
48 Waltham Forest Characterisation Study | Final Report | July 2009

Figure 8.9: Summary table of types and key characteristics (Waltham Forest)



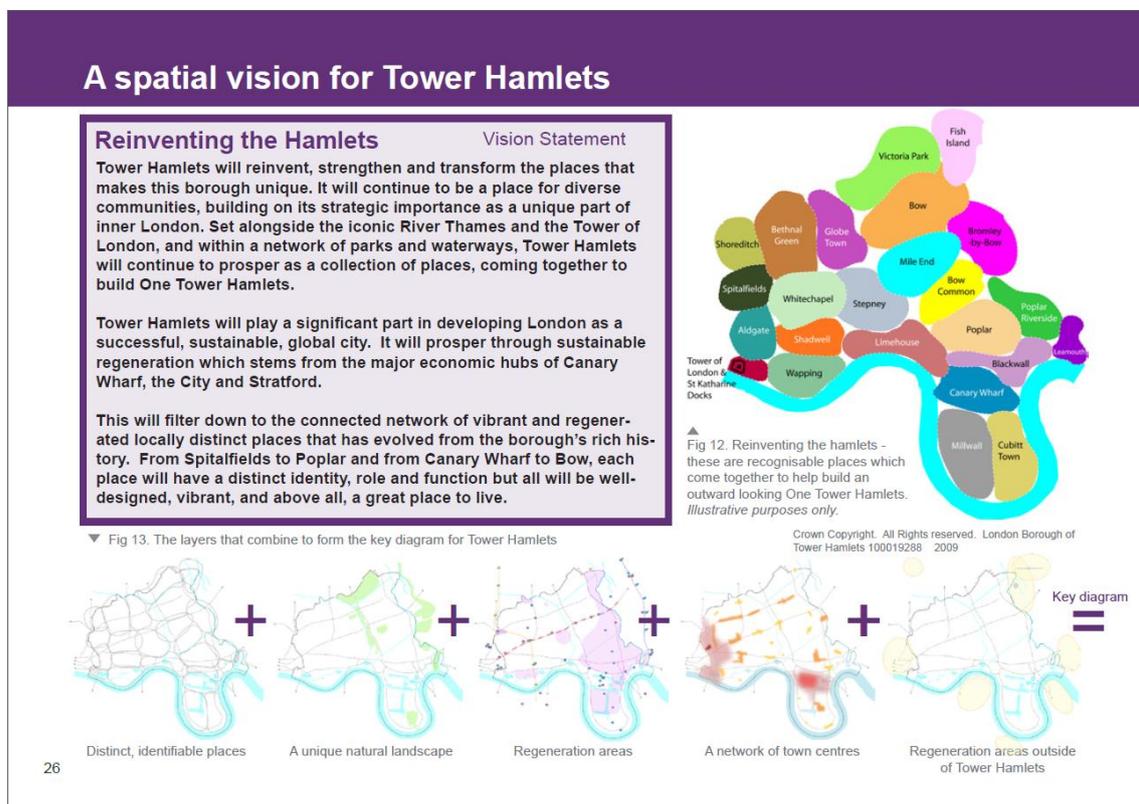
Figure 8.8: Streetscape photomontage (Waltham Forest)

- 8.30 At the character area level, Tower Hamlets' study presents perhaps the richest information on character and influences, making the document very usable in understanding the context of a place or development site. Unfortunately, as this is not matched with management recommendations, this loses some of its potential impact.
- 8.31 Camden offers a good example of balancing neighbourhood detail with priorities for retaining existing character and opportunities for enhancement. Merton's study, illustrated in Figure 8.10, offers an excellent example of concision in terms of issues, guidance and enhancement proposals.



## Integration with policy

- 8.32 The litmus test for characterisation studies, particularly those explicitly developed as part of the evidence base for Local Plans, is the level to which they have influenced policy and spatial strategy.
- 8.33 Hounslow and Lewisham currently enjoy the highest level of integration in terms of direct references and policy links – influencing Core Strategy vision, aims and objectives, strategic and development management policies – and therefore offer the most comprehensive model in terms of best practice. Another, slightly different, approach was taken by Tower Hamlets, illustrated in Figure 8.11. While the characterisation study is not directly referred to in policy<sup>16</sup>, its influence in terms of shaping the spatial strategy and the authority’s response to the character and heritage of the ‘Hamlets’ (places) is very clear – and well-understood by planning officers.
- 8.34 A best practice approach therefore straddles the two models above, ensuring a strong influence on the shape and content of the plan itself, and providing a powerful tool for design and assessment with appropriate policy hooks.



**Figure 8.11: Tower Hamlets' spatial vision - influenced by characterisation**

- 8.35 Across the board, the policy hooks in place to refer developers to characterisation studies could be stronger – although it is acknowledged that the majority of studies were intended principally as evidence base documents. Ideally, authorities commissioning studies in future will consider the value of this dual role.
- 8.36 For authorities with studies already in place, a proportionate and useful third way could be taking the good work already done and using it to inform SPD. This would be a powerful and cost-effective way of making the most of existing information to inform proportionate sensitivity assessments and translate this into area-specific criteria for assessment. Piloting this approach with a partner authority could be a useful proof of concept – as well as a potential lever to

<sup>16</sup> Quoted as key evidence base

encourage additional authorities to recognise the value in characterisation studies as a whole. (It is likely, however, that more area-based and discursive studies would need some additional work to provide a baseline against which a consistent sensitivity assessment could be carried out. While overall sensitivity ratings for character areas could be useful, slightly finer-grained information is likely to be more usable in terms of strategic planning.)

- 8.37 This type of information could help to provide greater subtlety for planners in looking to find suitable areas for development, targeting sensitivity assessments in relation to key types of change (e.g. tall buildings, housing, infrastructure). Critically, detailed characterisation data could also be productively used in the SA/SEA of Local Plan land allocations – currently a key area of concern in relation to effective assessment of impacts on the historic environment.

# 9

## Conclusions and recommendations

## 9 Conclusions and recommendations

### Introduction

#### Study terms of reference

- How the historic environment is being assessed in London.
- Best practice reports and approaches characterising London's historic and built environment, as well as any weaknesses/missed opportunities.
- How such information is being integrated into the planning process, or could be integrated, with particular reference to linking local character and significance to strategic planning.

9.1 These are to be achieved through the following objectives:

- Gain an understanding of the scope and content of borough characterisation reports.
- Examine the utility and application of characterisation tools as an evidence base for planning at all levels and stages.
- Capture at a strategic level an understanding of the bigger picture from this collective resource identifying issues and challenges for London and its historic environment.

9.2 Identify and measure the effectiveness of how the appraisal and management of London's heritage assets are addressed at local level.

### How the historic environment is being assessed in London

#### Conclusions

9.3 It is clear from the research undertaken as part of this study that London's boroughs are applying a range of character-based approaches to understanding their areas' qualities, issues and opportunities. While the historic environment is considered in all of the studies reviewed, there is substantial variation in the:

- Source material consulted
- Depth of analysis applied
- Scale / resolution of analysis of heritage interests
- The extent to which heritage interests influence assessments of character
- Priority given to the heritage dimension in terms of management and enhancement.

9.4 There will necessarily be variation in all of these factors, given the disparate nature of London's historic environment. However, a number of studies have a stronger urban design focus, at the expense of some valuable heritage-related detail. While the practitioners that produced the studies doubtless had a strong understanding of how boroughs and their constituent parts developed, this understanding is not always presented at a level where it can add optimal value for users.

9.5 Some of this issue could readily be addressed by relatively minor changes to the way documents are put together – following, for example, Tower Hamlets' approach of placing historic and contextual information at the character area level. Currently the reliance on borough-wide summaries for presentation of historic information can reduce the

effectiveness of this information at the neighbourhood and site level – precisely where developers and development management officers can benefit from support.

- 9.6 Anecdotal evidence suggests that development management officers are making use of characterisation studies in their work – and are generally receptive to the messages therein. A need for better (or more likely, clearer) alignment with local policy frameworks, and ensuring that studies are targeted towards DM users could add value, along with clear:
- Information on value and significance (i.e. what should be taken into account in planning decisions)
  - Information on sensitivity to key development types
  - Priorities for management and enhancement (useful in determining the value added / potential conservation gain delivered by development)
  - Links between character and the setting of key assets, where appropriate
- 9.7 As the first attempt at delivering any policy agenda or priority, the current suite of characterisation studies should be commended rather than criticised. In the round, they provide a valuable proof of concept that characterisation can deliver potentially powerful tools for strategic planning, design and assessment and decision-making. Where studies identify key characteristics and management priorities – as the majority do – this information can readily be used to shape proposals and assess their effects. In general, however, additional information is required to enable both boroughs and developers to do this effectively and consistently. (For most boroughs with studies in place, the cost of producing a one or two-page guide to applying characterisation information in this way would be marginal – but could convey substantial benefits.)
- 9.8 While studies are generally good at drawing out key aspects of local character, they are rather less effective at identifying and exploring issues of cross-boundary and London-wide significance. The inherently introspective and detail-focussed approach that characterisation can encourage is potentially an issue, diminishing the more strategic view that is required to draw out the relevant patterns and associations.
- 9.9 As part of this project, the feasibility of pulling together borough-wide studies into a single dataset was investigated at a conceptual level. Unfortunately, it is too late to seek to use borough-wide studies to develop a consistent London-wide characterisation product. The range of approaches adopted, and the variety of scales and resolutions of data capture means that there is little consistency across boundaries. This material would, however, prove to be useful baseline for any attempt to develop a coherent London-scale product – but for the effort likely to be involved in ‘cleaning’ the existing datasets, reconciling boundary issues and bringing highly disparate data into a single typological framework, starting again from first principles would likely be the most effective option. This would enable the commissioning body to set appropriate standards, define an appropriate typology and retain control of data management – which would be critical, given the likely scale and complexity of the dataset generated.

### Recommendations

- 9.10 The following could add value to current studies and help to improve the specification and delivery of future work.

#### **1: Review and strengthen the Mayor’s ‘Character and Context’ SPG.**

**Rationale:** the strategic and local contribution of heritage to character needs to be clear. Parallel research suggests that the London Plan and its associated guidance is often not a significant consideration for planning authorities. The SPG could, through an update, provide a lead on the value of the historic environment to London’s character and how characterisation studies can evaluate this key element of character - while leaving authorities free to adopt the most appropriate method for local conditions.

In addition, this could provide an opportunity to provide a broad framework in which future, and revisions of existing, studies could contribute to a coherent London-wide overview of local and historic character.

## **2: 'Soft' promotion of typological approaches to characterisation as offering the most flexible product and best value for money.**

**Rationale:** typological approaches have been demonstrated to offer the greatest flexibility in terms of both the information that can be presented, and the uses to which it can be put. The ability to develop sensitivity and capacity studies could be used as a key 'selling point' for these approaches – in line with the key findings of this report.

Along with Recommendation 1, this would help to promote a consistent London-wide approach that could add significant benefit in cross-boundary and London-wide analysis.

## **3: Enhancing the level of priority and value given to heritage assets and historic character in characterisation studies and their recommendations for managing change.**

**Rationale:** the influence of heritage is frequently under-played in descriptions of character in favour of urban design-related considerations. HE/GLA could consider promoting approaches that make use of the full range of heritage-related source data (especially HER information) and present clear information on heritage at the character area/place level to optimise usability.

Heritage is both a critical part of character and a key influence on the ways in which change occurs – in terms of acceptable future uses, physical patterns and opportunities to add value to regeneration.

Outline guidance could reasonably be produced as an addendum to the 'Character and Context' SPG.

## **4: Prioritising cross-boundary cooperation and information-sharing.**

**Rationale:** Currently there is little read-across between studies, meaning that cross-boundary assets and places can be challenging to understand. This will also help to draw out issues of London-wide significance more effectively.

Studies need to recognise the connectivity of character and heritage – in terms of physical and historical links – and also the potential for change in different character areas/places, or outside the borough, to affect the character and significance of places and assets. Encouraging an integrated approach between boroughs can help to promote a common understanding of the value and sensitivity of the historic environment, and the contribution of historic character to the setting of assets and the value of London's places.

## Best practice approaches

### Conclusions

- 9.11 There is no single 'best practice example' of borough-wide characterisation – but this is potentially a good thing. A wide range of approaches have been tested, providing many good examples from which authorities and practitioners can draw to develop locally appropriate and flexible solutions.
- 9.12 A key strength of characterisation is its inherent scalability and flexibility. The combined character types/areas approach delivers an optimal combination of local detail, strategic overview and potential for additional analysis (e.g. value and sensitivity). This can be deployed in a range of ways and scales: whether looking at the borough as a whole, taking a selective approach in responding to particular challenges or even at a site-specific level.
- 9.13 Borough-wide studies would be the ideal, providing a coherent picture of character across the whole study area, enabling a range of strategic analyses and informing effective,

sensitive planning. More focussed models, targeted on areas of potential change or responding to particular threats/opportunities, can also be shown to be effective on planning as well as cost grounds. Drawing on this research, authorities may now be able to take a more discerning approach to specifying, planning and delivery of characterisation studies.

- 9.14 A key factor that authorities should consider in scoping and specifying characterisation studies is to ensure that they are 'future-proof' and will not constrain further use and analysis that could add considerable value. For example, where a borough opts to scope out 'areas of significant protection' (e.g. Green Belt, Conservation Area) and 'areas of significant change' (e.g. Opportunity Areas, major allocations), the approach and methods used could reasonably be extended to cover these areas when budgets and Local Plan cycles allow. Similarly, where authorities anticipate the need for more detailed place-based characterisation – for example in supporting the delivery of Opportunity Areas or Area Action Plans – there is considerable value in ensuring that these products nest effectively within any borough-wide characterisation. This could help to deliver expanded coverage for authorities using a selective approach to borough-wide characterisation, as well as ensuring consistency in findings and recommendations.
- 9.15 In terms of promoting a best-practice approach, the Mayor's '*Character and Context*' SPG provides, as noted above, good conceptual guidance and advice but could provide clearer advice with respect to the contribution of the historic environment as a key component of character. However, there may be some merit in helping authorities to share knowledge and advice on factors not currently covered in guidance, including:
- Scoping cost-effective studies.
  - Developing a set of key principles that all characterisation studies should include and achieve, regardless of scale and complexity, to help provide a level of consistency in approach, practice and deliverability.
  - Articulating the benefits of borough-wide characterisation to management and Elected Members as a key component of Local Plan evidence base, and as a positive tool for strategic planning and policy development.
  - Project managing contracted-out characterisation studies.
  - Information-sharing and cooperation on using characterisation as a planning tool (particularly in relation to sensitivity and capacity studies);
    - Issues and opportunities encountered in Local Plan processes and Examination;

## Recommendations

### **5: HE and GLA to facilitate 'sharing good practice' event(s) for London boroughs to enable information exchange and the development of a community of practice.**

- **Rationale:** bringing practitioners together – potentially through a working group – facilitates discussion and learning in a low-cost, authority-led way. Helping to build connections between authorities may assist in promoting a more strategic view of characterisation and encourage cross-boundary cooperation. There may be a role for private sector practitioners in terms of contributing knowledge and experience on method and approaches, but the needs of boroughs should lead the process. This could be delivered as an adjunct to the HE Characterisation Seminars (usually held in London in December).

### **6: GLA, with support from HE, to consider developing guidance on the use of characterisation data in developing sensitivity and capacity studies.**

- **Rationale:** building on the outcomes of a pilot project, proposed in Recommendation 7 below, this would help to disseminate the relevant learning points and guide authorities in getting the most out of their data.

There is significant value for Historic England in supporting this process. Landscape sensitivity/capacity studies have become standard practice for authorities seeking to understand the levels of change (generally rural) areas can accommodate, arising from particular development types (particularly onshore wind farms). Experience indicates that having broad principles in place for understanding the key concepts, collecting appropriate evidence and undertaking a robust study is critical in ensuring consistency. [Natural England Topic Paper 6](#)<sup>17</sup> (soon to be replaced) does this for landscape sensitivity/capacity studies. Of particular relevance is the development of a consistent, coherent and usable evidence base for Strategic Environmental Assessment – a key area of underperformance with regard to the protection of the historic environment.

National-level guidance could be provided as updates to HE guidance on Local Plan site allocations (Advice Note 3) and Historic Area Assessment.

## Integration with the planning process

### Conclusions

- 9.16 Ensuring that the outcomes of characterisation studies are incorporated within the planning process is *the* key mechanism for ensuring that; firstly, authorities realise best value for their investment; and, secondly, authorities deliver an effective, positive approach to conservation and enhancement for areas of important historic character. Unless studies demonstrably influence the ways in which local authorities are thinking about and managing historic places, they arguably are not being used optimally.
- 9.17 While integration with policy – in terms of references to characterisation studies either within policy or supporting text – is reasonable across the existing corpus, there is far less evidence of the content of studies directly influencing the wider spatial strategy and land allocations. As borough-wide characterisation becomes more effectively embedded in the thinking of Local Plan teams, a greater level of influence may evolve naturally. However, there is a potentially important role for HE or the GLA in clearly articulating the benefits of this part of the process to planning authorities. This is not explicitly covered in current guidance, and providing a clear steer on options and approaches for accomplishing this could be valuable. While there may not be a suitable ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach that works across London, there is merit in raising the profile of characterisation studies as policy tools as well as evidence. (If implemented, the guidance developed through Recommendation 6 and 7 may help to provide a soft driver for more active use in policy.) There may also be some value in considering a supported pilot project with a borough.
- 9.18 Another key area where the use of characterisation data could add substantial value is in the SA/SEA of Local Plans – particularly in relation to land allocations for development. Again, this is an area where the current crop of studies appears to have been under-used. It is likely that some pilot work will be required to test approaches to using characterisation data in developing SA/SEA baseline, assessment objectives and direct use in assessment (i.e. as part of the spatial data package used in reviewing the constraints acting on a particular site).
- 9.19 As noted above, where boroughs have characterisation studies in place, Development Management officers appear to be making some use of the available guidance. Again, there are some issues in terms of honing the information contained within studies to ensure that they are easy for developers and DM officers to get to key information quickly, easily and consistently. The latter point is important to ensure that all users are working on the same assumptions and a shared understanding both of what is important, and how

---

<sup>17</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Commission (2004) *Landscape Character Assessment, guidance for England and Scotland: Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity*, Countryside Agency, Cheltenham.

those aspects of character should be conserved. The ideal situation would be the framing of a heritage and character policy that effectively 'hooks' the key characteristics and management priorities for each character area into criteria for decision-making – thereby ensuring studies are used by all parties and character-related considerations are applied wherever relevant.

## Recommendations

- **7: Pilot project(s) that demonstrate the value of characterisation in informing sensitivity and capacity studies.**

- **Rationale:** this would provide a proof-of-concept demonstration to authorities with borough-wide studies in place that there is a wider role for their data in adding value and subtlety to strategic planning – that does not require starting from scratch. The outcomes of the pilot would then influence the development of guidance, as stated in Recommendation 6. There would be substantial value in seeking to integrate this approach with the early stages of Local Plan evidence base development – for example influencing Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), in addition to SA/SEA (as indicated below).

- **8: Piloting the active use of characterisation spatial data in the appraisal of Local Plan land allocations and SA/SEA.**

- **Rationale:** SA/SEA is widely regarded as under-performing in relation to understanding and assessing impacts on the historic environment. The evidence from this review suggests that characterisation is having little impact on the method or results of strategic assessments.

Authorities are highly risk-averse in terms of SA/SEA methodology selection, due to the need for assessments and land allocations to be 'Examination-proof' – but HE is increasingly dissatisfied with the traditional designations and proximity-based approach (which is arguably even less appropriate in London). Developing and testing alternative, proportionate methods could be a powerful way of HE shaping the debate in a positive manner – and potentially delivering much better outcomes for the historic environment at the most appropriate stage in the planning process.

- **9: HE and GLA to consider working with boroughs to raise the profile of characterisation as a tool for policymaking and development management.**

- **Rationale:** currently, characterisation studies are principally viewed as Local Plan evidence base, rather than a tool for active planning and decision-making. For studies already in place, this is about optimising the return on authorities' investment; for boroughs looking to develop characterisation studies, this should help ensure appropriate scoping and commissioning.

## Discussion

- 9.20 As an approach to understanding the historic environment, and its contribution to the quality and value of place, characterisation has already evolved considerably over its comparatively short lifespan. Just as LCA took time to mature and become very effectively embedded in (generally rural) planning authorities' arsenal of policy tools and techniques, with increasing maturity there is no conceptual barrier to urban characterisation acquiring a similar status. A good characterisation study can smooth the path for 'sound' local plans as part of the evidence base and help promote a positive strategy for the historic environment (NPPF, para 126).
- 9.21 Instead, the barriers are likely to be chiefly resource-related. As a comparatively niche product, requiring a range of specialist skills, urban characterisation can easily appear to be an expensive luxury – a 'nice to have' in a sea of other studies with more pressing

statutory or national policy drivers. Therefore an intelligent approach to securing the buy-in of senior planners / Heads of Service and Elected Members will be required. As noted above, the fact that the London Plan itself has not perhaps had the impact that might have been expected on patterns of policy and decision-making<sup>18</sup>, suggests that more active engagement is required to boost the status and role of the Plan's heritage policies and an updated edition of the '*Character and Context*' SPG. Historic England has a key role to play in promoting the historic dimension of character, as a positive, strategic and local resource for planning and managing change sensitively in London. The GLA and local planning authorities are in a position to implement best practice through their plans and decision-making. The Design Council/CABE may also be able to assist in requiring consistent consideration of historic character in the design review processes..

- 9.22 The London Plan review provides a key opportunity to consider how historic character can be integrated effectively and the GLA is best-placed to lead – through revisions and addenda to the SPG, through awareness-raising work and through consideration of how historic character is understood and factored into the assessments of capacity of different parts of London.

---

<sup>18</sup> ARUP, for Historic England, (2016) *Evaluation of London Plan Heritage Policies*.

# Appendix 1

## Project specification

## Aim and objectives

The principal aims of the characterisation audit project are to identify:

- How the historic environment is being assessed in London.
- Best practice reports and approaches characterising London's historic and built environment, as well as any weaknesses/missed opportunities.
- How such information is being integrated into the planning process, or could be integrated, with particular reference to linking local character and significance to strategic planning.

These are to be achieved through the following objectives:

- Gain an understanding of the scope and content of borough characterisation reports.
- Examine the utility and application of characterisation tools as an evidence base for planning at all levels and stages.
- Capture at a strategic level an understanding of the bigger picture from this collective resource identifying issues and challenges for London and its historic environment.
- Identify and measure the effectiveness of how the appraisal and management of London's heritage assets are addressed at local level.

## Business case

Heritage 2020 sets out how heritage organisations will work together to benefit the historic environment. It is coordinated on behalf of the whole sector by the Historic Environment Forum.

The Historic England Action Plan 2015-2018 forms HE's contribution to Heritage 2020. The Historic England Action Plan details how the organisation will deliver the objectives of their Corporate Plan and provides an estimate of the resource needed. The Principal Corporate Objective for this work is:

### **Corporate Objective 3.1**

***Help national government, local authorities and local communities create planning policies that support constructive conservation as part of sustainable development.***

#### *3.1.1. Influence local planning policies to support constructive conservation as part of sustainable development*

Local planning policies provide the key framework for individual planning decisions. From local to neighbourhood plans, Historic England has a statutory role in advising local authorities on how to produce creative and effective policies that protect and make the most of heritage. Our local teams advise on around 2,000 local and neighbourhood plans and associated documents each year, supporting local authorities, neighbourhood forums, communities and other partners on the development and application of evidence-based planning policies that deliver sustainable management of the historic environment at the local level. From the early evidence gathering stages to appearing at examinations in public, Historic England provides input in priority places at all points. Our priority will be to provide advice to local planning authorities, other planning bodies and local communities on how best to create policies which support sustainable conservation. We will also support neighbourhood planning through advocacy, training and toolkits.

### **Outcomes –**

- *Local Plans will have positive and realistic policies for the local historic environment.* [NB This should be understood to include the London Plan]

- *Local communities will be supported in caring for and enhancing their historic environment through neighbourhood plans.*

The need for a full review of the London Plan in 2017 and the election of a new Mayor for London in 2016 means the timeframe for Historic England to positively influence the management of the historic environment in London is limited and must be commenced now. Early dialogue and convincing evidence will help ensure that our advice is positively received and can shape policy development rather than being seen to react negatively to the developing London Plan.

The London Plan is the country's only regional spatial plan. It sets long term targets for growth in jobs and housing, and contains policies for the management of economic, social and environmental matters. The proposed project will therefore support Historic England in influencing the way heritage issues are managed in line with national policy. The project will also help forge a positive dialogue with the GLA and the new Mayor, and assist them in addressing the need for sustainable growth to sustain and enhance heritage assets and inform a positive strategy for the historic environment. It will establish best practice in characterisation in London and reveal how characterisation and other relevant tools can both identify and assist in resolving the important questions

## Scope of the project brief

The scope of the work is aimed particularly at establishing the value of borough-wide characterisation studies. Where these are not in place there may be other good historic characterisation work, especially in the form of conservation area appraisals (CAAs), or other area-based studies and a view is given about the adequacy of this coverage.

### Characterisation of London's Historic Environment

In order to make the case for the historic environment as a key consideration its value and significance needs to be readily understood at local and strategic levels. This piece of research will:

- Provide information on each of the London boroughs' and the City of London characterisation reports; identify where these exist, and any gaps where they do not. Is there any consistency in approaches used and is there potential to stitch 'character studies' across administrative boundaries? These reports may be broad-based, integrating the historic environment with other strands such as landscape and topography, general townscape, land use, economic and social issues. They may also only address the historic environment (examples of both are the Enfield Characterisation study 2011, which draws on their earlier Historic Study (2008)).
- Assess the quality of the reports, and their scope. What can these characterisation studies reveal that cannot be understood by considering individual heritage assets? E.g. patterns, typologies. Does integrating consideration of the historic environment with other considerations e.g. risk of flooding or local views assist in making the case for heritage? Where boroughs border the Thames, how is the River and its contribution to the setting and significance of London's historic environment characterised? (These are examples of issues – a broad assessment of the reports is required).
- Identify best practice – where are the best examples? Are they regularly updated? Is there an example of characterisation reporting which should be a template? Are there additional aspects that could be usefully included e.g. using different data sets, or scales of analysis (local/sub-regional). At least four case studies should be examined and presented, preferably from different parts of London.

- Establish how characterisation is being used to inform local plan visions and objectives, detailed policies and site allocations, including policy for tall buildings and design. Has characterisation been integrated into Strategic Environmental Assessment of plans and strategies? Are there opportunities to use this material more? The case studies selected under point 3 should be examined, or this point otherwise illustrated if the studies are too recently published.
- Address London-wide characterisation themes and challenges.
  - a) Based on the borough characterisation reports, are there broader patterns or themes which acquire greater significance viewed in a London-wide context? Eg. the heritage assets along strategic routes, strategic patterns in grain and typologies of the wider built environment that taken together have particular value for London.
  - b) Drawing on conclusions from the studies, what are the key strategic challenges for London and its historic environment? How can these be addressed strategically to ensure London's historic environment is properly valued and therefore sustained?

## **Appendix 2**

### Survey questions



## Characterisation in London

### Introduction

As a world city that has evolved over the course of almost 2,000 years, London's historic environment is unique, rich and varied. This continued dynamism, which in part makes London such a special place, can also represent a substantial threat to highly valued heritage assets and historic character.

Historic England has encouraged London's boroughs to use character assessment, in a range of forms, as a tool for understanding the character and significance of London's places. We are now trying to assess how successful this process has been, understanding which boroughs have character studies in place, the level of integration with planning policy and the impact they are - or are not - having on planning processes and outcomes.

This survey is intended to understand the level of knowledge and use of character studies in development management across London. Its results will contribute to Historic England's thinking on and responses to the London Plan review.



## Characterisation in London

### About you

**1. Please tell us a bit about yourself**  
**(all contributions will be anonymised)**

Name

Email address

**\* 2. Role**

**\* 3. Planning authority**



Historic England

## Characterisation in London

### Borough-wide character studies in place

We understand that your authority has a character study in place that covers the whole of the borough.

Please be aware that different authorities call these documents different things, including: 'Historic Character Study'; 'Townscape Character Study'; 'Urban Character Assessment'; 'Local Distinctiveness Study' - but these are all broadly similar in terms of content and function.

For simplicity 'characterisation study' is used throughout the remainder of this survey.

**4. Are you aware of your borough's characterisation study?**



Historic England

## Characterisation in London

### Borough-wide studies - awareness and understanding

**5. You indicated that you are aware of your borough's characterisation study.**

**Using the following scale, how would you rate your understanding of the study's purpose, and role in supporting decision-making?**

	<b>High:</b>	<b>Medium:</b>	<b>Low:</b>	
	I know what the study is for and how it relates to local policy.	I am aware of the study, but am unsure how it relates to policy.	I know of the study, but I don't know much about it.	Don't know
Please rate your understanding of the study's purpose and role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**6. Have you made active use of the characterisation study in your work?**



Historic England

**Characterisation in London**

Borough-wide studies - use and usefulness

**7. Thinking of the times that you have used the characterisation study, to what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
I understand how the character study relates to the requirements of NPPF.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The links between the character study and relevant local policies were clear.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The character study is accessible and easy to use.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is enough guidance in the character study to help me apply it to decision-making.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

**8. In which, if any, of the following ways have you made use of your Borough's characterisation study?**

**Please select all the relevant options.**

- Informing pre-application discussions
- Informing the screening/scoping of EIA
- Appraisal of supporting information supplied by developers
- Recommendations and report-writing
- Contributing to determining issues
- Other (please specify)



Historic England

Characterisation in London

Borough-wide studies - pre-application

**9. You indicated that you have made use of the characterisation study to inform pre-application consultation (either discussions or EIA scoping).**

**Based on your experiences, to what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Developers are receptive to suggestions that the character study should be used in shaping proposals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I have suggested that developers use the study, they generally do so.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developers understand the benefit to their proposals of taking the character study into account.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The character study provides a clear framework to contribute to impact assessment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Historic England

**Characterisation in London**

Borough-wide - use in appraising developers' submissions

**10. Thinking of times that you have made use of your borough's character study in assessing the material submitted by developers in support of planning applications.**

To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
The character study helped me to understand the context and key issues affecting the development site.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study provided enough information for me to understand the significance of the area and assets in and around the site.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study made it easy to recognise where developers had missed key assets or aspects of character.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making use of the study helped me reach a robust decision.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Historic England

**Characterisation in London**

Borough wide - use in report-writing

**11. Thinking of times that you have made use of the character study in writing reports on planning applications, either making recommendations to Members or reaching delegated decisions.**

To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
The character study helped place the affected heritage assets in context.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study gave me a stronger understanding of the significance of the local historic environment as a whole.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study provided me with information I needed to demonstrate policy compliance/conflict.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study helped me make a more convincing case in support of the development / provide robust reasons for refusal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The study helped me write a better report, and reach a stronger decision.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## Characterisation in London

### Place-based characterisation

Character-based approaches are used across a range of other policy, advice and guidance - and we would like to know how aware you are of these products, and how much use you make of them.

Conservation Area Character Appraisals are the most widespread example, but other Supplementary Planning Guidance (e.g. masterplans or development frameworks) may be based on character-related information. For example, several Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks (OAPFs) apply a character-based approach.

**12. Which, if any, of the following types of advice and guidance have you made use of?**

- I don't think I've used any character-based studies or guidance.*
- Conservation Area Character Appraisal
- Please give details below of any other documents you think might be relevant



## Characterisation in London

### Place-based characterisation

**13. In response to our previous question, you indicated that you have used the types of study listed below in your work.**

**Thinking of the times that you have used them, how useful did you find the information they provided?**

*(\* not all OAPF or AAPs character-based; \*\*Richmond-upon-Thames only)*

	Very useful - clear and comprehensive	Quite useful - some gaps	Less useful - hard to get what I needed	Not useful at all
Conservation Area Character Appraisal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Please give details below of any other documents you think might be relevant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please could you describe why you think this was?



## Characterisation in London

Thank you!

Thank you very much for taking the time to contribute to this survey.

Your contributions will help to ensure that Historic England has the best possible evidence to inform our contributions to the London Plan process - and are better-able to provide the support and guidance required to London's planning authorities.

For further information on this project, and Historic England's research to inform our contributions to the London Plan review, please contact Katharine Fletcher.

[Katharine.Fletcher@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:Katharine.Fletcher@HistoricEngland.org.uk)

## **Appendix 3**

### List of characterisation studies

LPA	Date	Link
Barnet	2010	<a href="https://www.barnet.gov.uk/citizen-home/planning-conservation-and-building-control/planning-policies-and-further-information/ldf-evidence-and-supporting-documents/characterisation-study.html">https://www.barnet.gov.uk/citizen-home/planning-conservation-and-building-control/planning-policies-and-further-information/ldf-evidence-and-supporting-documents/characterisation-study.html</a>
Bexley	2011	<a href="http://www.bexley.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=8889&amp;p=0">http://www.bexley.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=8889&amp;p=0</a>
Camden	2015	<a href="http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/cms-service/stream/asset/?asset_id=3350908&amp;">http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/cms-service/stream/asset/?asset_id=3350908&amp;</a>
Croydon	2015	<a href="https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloads/BoroughCharacter_20150921.pdf">https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloads/BoroughCharacter_20150921.pdf</a>
Enfield	2011	<a href="https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/planning/planning-policy/development-management-document/planning-policy-information-enfield-characterisation-study-parts-1-4-february-2011.pdf">https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/planning/planning-policy/development-management-document/planning-policy-information-enfield-characterisation-study-parts-1-4-february-2011.pdf</a> <a href="https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/planning/planning-policy/development-management-document/planning-policy-information-enfield-characterisation-study-parts-5-6-february-2011.pdf">https://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/planning/planning-policy/development-management-document/planning-policy-information-enfield-characterisation-study-parts-5-6-february-2011.pdf</a>
Haringey	2015	<a href="http://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/01_introduction.pdf">http://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/01_introduction.pdf</a>
Harrow	2010	<a href="http://www.harrow.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1290/characterisation_study">http://www.harrow.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1290/characterisation_study</a>
Hillingdon	2013	<a href="https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/30628/Townscape-Character-Study-Nov-2013/pdf/Townscape_Character_Study_on_web_low_res.pdf">https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media/30628/Townscape-Character-Study-Nov-2013/pdf/Townscape_Character_Study_on_web_low_res.pdf</a>
Hounslow	2014	<a href="http://www.hounslow.gov.uk/context_and_character_study">http://www.hounslow.gov.uk/context_and_character_study</a>
Kingston upon Thames	2011	<a href="https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B97hjZaOBdeSfmZqQWVyV0dCaVF3Q0p1Y3I3RThWbFVySDRaViRJMkqzWEk1RU5TZmxiSGM&amp;usp=sharing#list&amp;format=.pdf">https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B97hjZaOBdeSfmZqQWVyV0dCaVF3Q0p1Y3I3RThWbFVySDRaViRJMkqzWEk1RU5TZmxiSGM&amp;usp=sharing#list&amp;format=.pdf</a>
Lambeth	2012	<a href="http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/EB08_13_Lambeth_%20Local_Distinctiveness_2012.pdf">http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/EB08_13_Lambeth_%20Local_Distinctiveness_2012.pdf</a>
Lewisham	2010	<a href="https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myserVICES/planning/policy/Documents/LewishamBoroughWideCharacterStudyP1.pdf">https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myserVICES/planning/policy/Documents/LewishamBoroughWideCharacterStudyP1.pdf</a>
Merton	2015	<a href="http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/designandconservation/bcs.htm">http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/designandconservation/bcs.htm</a>
Newham	2011	<a href="https://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Environment%20and%20planning/NewhamCharacter%20Study_August%202011%5B1%5D.pdf">https://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Environment%20and%20planning/NewhamCharacter%20Study_August%202011%5B1%5D.pdf</a>
Redbridge	2014	<a href="https://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/planning_land_and_buildings/planning_policy_regeneration/ldoc.ashx?docid=58ba9d27-beda-4b59-81c4-cf220f93d85b&amp;version=-1">https://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/planning_land_and_buildings/planning_policy_regeneration/ldoc.ashx?docid=58ba9d27-beda-4b59-81c4-cf220f93d85b&amp;version=-1</a>
Tower Hamlets	2009	<a href="#">Urban Structure and Characterisation Study pages 1-51</a> <a href="#">Urban Structure and Characterisation Study pages 52-63</a> <a href="#">Urban Structure and Characterisation Study pages 64-75</a> <a href="#">Urban Structure and Characterisation Study pages 76-87</a> <a href="#">Urban Structure and Characterisation Study pages 88-101</a> <a href="#">Urban Structure and Characterisation Study pages 102-109</a>
Waltham Forest	2009	Front page/Contents: <a href="https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-contents-2.pdf">https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-contents-2.pdf</a> Part 1: <a href="https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-intro-3.pdf">https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-intro-3.pdf</a> Part 2 Borough-wide context: <a href="http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/wf-characterisation-study-part-two.pdf">http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/wf-characterisation-study-part-two.pdf</a> Part 3 Typologies: <a href="https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-part-three.pdf">https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-part-three.pdf</a> Part 4 Conclusions and recommendations: <a href="https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-part-">https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-part-</a>

LPA	Date	Link
		<a href="#">four.pdf</a> Appendix: <a href="https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-appendix.pdf">https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/wf-characterisation-study-appendix.pdf</a>
Sutton	2008	<a href="https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B5I397zoXtVQS29mcEFkanV3SkE&amp;usp=drive_web&amp;tid=0B5I397zoXtVQNHpDTzlieHJxT2c">https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B5I397zoXtVQS29mcEFkanV3SkE&amp;usp=drive_web&amp;tid=0B5I397zoXtVQNHpDTzlieHJxT2c</a>

### Opportunity Area Planning Frameworks

<a href="#">4 Charlton Riverside</a>
<a href="#">8 Croydon</a>
<a href="#">10 Earls Court &amp; West Kensington</a>
<a href="#">11 Elephant &amp; Castle</a>
<a href="#">12 Euston</a>
<a href="#">21 London Bridge, Borough &amp; Bankside</a>
<a href="#">24 Old Kent Road</a>
<a href="#">26 Park Royal</a>
<a href="#">27 Old Oak Common</a>
<a href="#">29 Southall</a>
<a href="#">33 Vauxhall, Nine Elms, Battersea</a>
<a href="#">35 Waterloo</a>
<a href="#">36 Wembley</a>
<a href="#">38 Woolwich</a>

# Appendix 4

## Appraisal framework

LPA	Who?	Date	Status	Method		Relict?	Method notes	Using characterisation information			Policy integration				Usability as a tool for understanding local area				Links to wider historic environment				Comments	London-wide significance?					
				Purpose	Approach			Method	Forces for change?	Management guidelines?	Building heights	Use notes	Vision/objectives	HE policy?	Other policy?	Policy integration - effective?	Policy notes	SA	Utility - guidance	Utility - wider links	Utility notes	Cross-boundary			Wider HE issues	Tall buildings	HE notes		
Barnet	Urban Practitioners	2010 Complete	2010 Complete	Reactive (e.g. to development pressure)	Selective	Types / sub-types + areas	Considered in borough overview, but not developed in detail at the character area level	Study area defines 'areas of protection' (CA, Green Belt) and 'areas of growth' that are subject either to restrictions - or significant change - that would render the findings of the study policy obsolete	Thematic discussion of findings and key issues at borough-wide level; no consideration of planning issues specific to character areas or types	Not at type / character area level	No	No	Core Strategy: Character-specific policy: Tying in placemaking, heritage, character and tall buildings DM policies: highlighted as a key source from the outset; IN01: Protecting Barnet's character and amenity (development proposals should be based on an understanding of local characteristics) - study ref'd as key source; Useful ref. for Tall Buildings policy	Direct: incl in 'useful references' for HE and CA policies	Excellent - specific reference to character and study in LP policy	Referenced but no clear evidence of use / incorporation; May have influenced SA objectives in HE - but quite general ('local distinctiveness and sense of place' - rather than character per se)	No	Unclear how the study is meant to be applied	Clear links to consideration of tall buildings, but not especially well integrated with policy.	No	No direct mention of other heritage assets	Ref'd in Tall Buildings policy	No mention of Conservation Areas in study - exclusion from study gives an imbalanced evidence base (and presupposes that CA boundaries are the most natural boundaries for character areas - which they may not be); No direct mention of other heritage assets						
Bexley	In-house	2011 Complete	2011 Complete	Reactive (e.g. to development pressure)	Borough-wide	Areas only - predominantly discrete	Historical development and archaeology covered, but very high level	Not a true 'characterisation' as such - more of a high density development / Tall Buildings study if not a short instrument.	Study principally concerned with identification of tall buildings - so not a particularly balanced view.	Unclear how the study could be applied systematically. High level 'yes/no' judgements for geographical areas for suitability for designation / tall buildings something of a short instrument.	No	No	Lacking strong policy basis	Low - character referred to in policy	Given the relatively specific function of the document, it is not widely referenced or considered in the Core Strategy	No	Unclear how the study is meant to be applied	Character and context included in comparatively strong emerging LP policies - but no direct reference to study as a relevant source or consideration	Structure, format and very locally-specific information lend itself to comparatively easy use; lack of policy hooks a potential barrier	No	Duplicate sets out to explore Camden's connections with neighbouring boroughs - despite uneven words, this doesn't really happen to any meaningful extent	No	Not generally concerned with heritage as a key consideration - not linked to heritage policies and with comparatively little heritage-related information	A key part of the study's focus	Not really a characterisation study within the meaning of this project - more a capacity/feasibility study for designation/tall buildings - but with comparatively little heritage information included.	Difficult to discern from this study, given its divergence from the 'historic character' model.			
Camden	Urban Initiatives Studio	2015 Complete	2015 Complete	Specific LP Evidence base	Selective	Types / sub-types + areas	Borough-wide historic summary fairly brief/high level; Archaeology and historical development sections for each area, but not really given much consideration in relation to character. (Mapped for each area, with specific notes etc added)	Highly fragmented, as only covers areas not in Conservation Areas (which account for almost 50% of the borough) or identified as 'Growth Areas' in the Core Strategy. However, introductory analysis done at borough-wide level	Opportunities for improvement provided on a low/medium/high scale at each sub-area/type level	Not specifically - mainly concerned with opportunities for improvement	Yes	No	Study post-dates adopted Development Policies (DPS) Included in supporting text of emerging Local Plan	Good - specific reference to character in policy; study quoted as source in supporting text	Character and context included in comparatively strong emerging LP policies - but no direct reference to study as a relevant source or consideration	No	No specific guidance	Structure lends itself to relatively easy use; useful summaries of key influences - useful historical development and precise of residential character	No	Duplicate sets out to explore Camden's connections with neighbouring boroughs - despite uneven words, this doesn't really happen to any meaningful extent	No	Although historical development sections are helpful, there is little discussion of heritage assets or significance of places	No	An interesting, focused approach with useful and locally specific information on need for enhancement. Little historical specificity, and perhaps let down a bit by not having sufficient policy hooks to ensure it is used by developers / DM planners.					
Croydon	In-house	2015 Complete	2015 Complete	Specific LP Evidence base	Borough-wide	Types / geographical areas	Brief historical development section for each geographical area; most character is not considered in detail	Borough is divided into 12 'places' with slightly overlapping boundaries; typology - although used consistently for each place - isn't described as such.	No	No	No	No	Links through urban design and placemaking	Good - specific reference to character in policy; study quoted as source in supporting text	Historic environment considerations well distributed through LP, but study less HE focused	Yes	Referenced to, but no direct evidence of use in assessment	Structure lends itself to relatively easy use; useful summaries of key influences - useful historical development and precise of residential character	No	Referenced to, but no direct evidence of use in assessment	No specific guidance	No	Referenced to, but no direct evidence of use in assessment	No	Referenced to, but no direct evidence of use in assessment	No	Referenced to, but no direct evidence of use in assessment	Highlighting value and interest of early 20th century 'Metroland' centres (connected with the construction of the Piccadilly Line; strong architectural styles of stations (Elder, quiet, brick-based Modernism; Overground; neo-Georgian);	
Enfield	Urban Practitioners	2011 Complete	2011 Complete	Specific LP Evidence base	Borough-wide	Hybrid LCA / urban character	Not considered in detail	LCA for rural areas; urban characterisation for built-up areas.	Issues and opportunities defined for each character area	Issues and implications set out for character areas	No	No	Referenced in CS policy on built environment	Good - specific reference to character in policy; study quoted as source in supporting text	More landscape / built environment focused than heritage	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Historical account of 'early landscape context' particularly poor on early history, contains several classic canons vis a vis Neolithic and Neolithic (communities, not supported by evidence health infrastructure, Chingford reservoirs later than Watlington chain, but nonetheless important - 'hard' infrastructure providing major features of character, and significant biodiversity value	London as a 'sporting city' - influence of other stadia not really fully developed, but a major influence on large parts of the city. Football stadia particularly linked to community identities and - sometimes - local heritage (about sometimes embodied by relocations, e.g. Arsenal not actually in Woolwich since the early 20th century...)				
Haringey	In-house	2015 Complete	2015 Complete	Specific LP Evidence base	Borough-wide	Types / sub-types + areas	Pulls together - but does not really integrate - a wide range of factors influencing character. Borough-wide characterisation mainly focussing on land use - not character. Neighbourhood level sections very useful: - Good historic mapping - but just includes, not actually interpreted - Timeline presentation has potential - but obvious issues of scale / detail - Areas of historic character/importance described in bullet-points - but not mapped - Detailed summaries of urban design influences (top / movement / heights) - but again frustrating as quite a lot of non-spatial detail, therefore reliant on knowing street names etc. - Very concerned with building heights. - 'Socio-economic and cultural character' - interesting potential, but really just use again (cultural character has a lot of potential, but again because of lack of spatial detail, falls down a little) - 'Heritage and culture' mapping gives period information at the block level; really useful information, but hard to use effectively! Again, really quite interesting information on the 'social life' of the neighbourhood (e.g. influence of White Hart Lane, and effect of Spurs match days on communities, business etc.) - but frustratingly non-spatial	Visual and experiential maps are good fun, and bring the study to life - but the process would really need to be repeated in relation to any proposed development etc. to get the most out of it	Neighbourhood character map is probably most useful, coupled with the period map	General recommendations' - including importance and role of undesignated heritage assets - but not spatial and generally too high level to have much impact	Yes	No	SWOT analysis for each neighbourhood - heading in the right direction but not fully developed	Disappointing, as policy coverage otherwise very good - and reference to the study would have helped to broaden out the plan's HE focus.	Referenced to, but no direct evidence of use in assessment	Green spaces missing from topography - missing that an important aspect of historic character is omitted	Links to view framework - but very high level and not really concerned with setting	Really interesting approach to 'social life' of the borough (e.g. influence of White Hart Lane and the effects - both positive and negative - of Spurs on the area) - but isn't quite fully developed enough to be really useful. However, has a lot of potential - particularly for capturing community identity / intangibles.	Tottenham, Wembley, Olympic Park, White City (now all but gone...), Stamford Bridge etc. - influence of need for ever-increasing size etc.?										
Harrow	In-house	2010 Complete	2010 Complete	Specific LP Evidence base	Selective	Types / sub-types + areas	Conservation areas excluded	Detailed summary of influences; type descriptions	Heritage considerations' provided for each type; Area summaries give architectural and urban form information	Opportunities for enhancement at area level, but no specific identification of threats	No	No	Character a key consideration in the Core Strategy - although a comparatively strong landscape emphasis; Good links in terms of preserving 'Metroland' heritage and character	Section in CS1 devoted to local character	Study referred to in supporting text for DM policies; design DM7: Heritage Assets - prepared to be considered in line with character appraisals	Good - specific reference to character in policy; study quoted as source in supporting text	No	No specific guidance re. how the study should be used in the planning process	Excludes Conservation Areas - but borough-wide summaries of development, heritage assets, archaeology etc. very useful	No	Explicitly excludes CAs; other assets considered in more detail as part of historical summaries	No	Frustrating lack of graphics makes an otherwise very competent study considerably less useful and accessible	Metroland' suburbs - identified in the Local Plan as being a significant element of Harrow's character - Does its existence and urban form fit railway/underground. Study contains a very useful chronology of railway development in the borough; links to phases of suburban development					



LPA	Who?	Date	Status	Method				Using characterisation information				Policy integration				Usability as a tool for understanding local area				Links to wider historic environment				Comments	London-wide significance?	
				Purpose	Approach	Method	Relict?	Method notes	Forces for change?	Management guidelines?	Building heights	Use notes	Vision/objectives	HE policy?	Other policy?	Policy integration - effective?	Policy notes	SA	Utility - guidance	Utility - wider links	Utility notes	Cross-boundary	Wider HE issues			Tall buildings
Sutton	In-house		2008 Complete	Specific LP Evidence base	Borough-wide	Types / geographical areas	No	<p>Typology driven by house type and urban form - only town/district centres are identified separately.</p> <p>Also includes quite a broad landscape character assessment (but this is more of a land use typology than based on character per se.)</p> <p>Interesting, as contains an assessment of landscape / townscape quality for each unit (although a map depicting the individual units on their own is not provided, so difficult to determine the basis for their delineation - assumed blocks of specific types).</p> <p>Discussed at the type level, but not for the town centres (closest character - related back to the Mayor's density matrix)</p>	Discussed at the type level, but not for the town centres (closest character areas?)	No	No	No	<p>The study itself does not appear to have a specific end-use, beyond providing evidence for the Local Plan. Although the quality assessment provides some insight into which areas are likely to be most important, because reasons are not provided this is potentially a bit of a 'black box' exercise - making applying this information to decision-making challenging. Similarly, although it could be used to target investment / regeneration, there is so little information on what is wrong with the areas that this would be difficult.</p>	Objectives	Yes: well-integrated across the policy framework	Well integrated with whole development plan	Good - specific reference to character in policy; study quoted as source in supporting text	<p>Used in baselining; character included in Built and Historic Environment SA objectives; characterisation study used in setting indicators</p>	No	No	<p>Study appears to chiefly have been intended to provide evidence for the Local Plan - therefore primary users were LP team</p>	No	Well-integrated with council thinking on Conservation Areas and their settings	Some read-across into Tall Buildings paper (but as undertaken by third party, influence is limited)	One of the few examples with meaningful influence on SA	





**LUC**

[www.landuse.co.uk](http://www.landuse.co.uk)