

# 11: Mapping Lancashire's historic landscape: the Lancashire Historic Landscape Characterisation programme

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**Abstract:** *This paper describes and evaluates the background, methodology and successful application of a historic landscape characterisation project undertaken between 1999 and 2000 in Lancashire (NW England). It begins with a description of the need and context for the project, from the perspective of English Heritage as a part of a national programme, from the viewpoint of Lancashire County Council who required the work to inform and underpin a county landscape strategy, and more generally as a critique of existing SMR systems. Some details of the project method will be briefly explored before moving on to outline the numerous applications of work. Finally, two new associated projects will be introduced, one as part of a Europe-wide project, which test and develop the characterisation approach at different scales but within the same broad objectives of improving understanding, communication and the management of the historic environment.*

## Identification of need – national context

Over the last ten years the historical dimension of the landscape has received increasing recognition in the United Kingdom and in mainland Europe. Both archaeology and history have been identified as important factors in assessing the value of areas of landscape (Countryside Commission 1987; 1993; 1996), and the concept of 'cultural landscapes' has been recognised in a number of European and British initiatives (Fairclough *et al.* 1999). In September 1991, the UK Government White Paper *This Common Inheritance* had invited English Heritage to prepare a list of landscapes of historic importance (English Heritage 1991), similar to its *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*. The intended purpose of this work was to define areas of landscape deemed to be more 'historic' and, therefore, more worthy of preservation than the surrounding areas. Subsequently English Heritage instigated a number of pilot projects to assess appropriate methodologies for identifying 'historic landscapes' (summarised in Fairclough *et al.* 1999).

The results led to the view that a more holistic approach to historic landscape assessment than that originally envisaged was appropriate, and a fuller understanding that the 'requirements for historic landscape conservation would not be met by a selective register' (Fairclough 1994 p.35). This more holistic approach would characterise all areas within the landscape with reference to agreed criteria, and not concentrate on the identification of key 'historic landscapes'. Further grading, in terms of the relative importance of different parts of the landscape, would only be undertaken to meet the needs of specific planning or conservation-led enquiries.

Such an approach, in which the whole of an area of landscape is assessed and characterised, is in line with methodologies of landscape assessment undertaken for non-historical reasons. The general purpose of these has been defined by the Countryside Agency (Countryside Commission 1993; 1998; Countryside Agency 1999) as



Fig.11.1: Lancashire.

assisting local authorities, landuse and conservation agencies and the private sector to:

- Understand how and why landscapes are important.
- Promote the appreciation of landscape issues.
- Successfully accommodate new development within the landscape.
- Guide and direct landscape change.

Since 1995, English local authorities in partnership with English Heritage have increasingly turned to historic landscape characterisation (HLC) as a tool for understanding and managing change within the cultural landscape. Historic landscape characterisation is a map-based technique, often using a Geographical Information System (GIS), designed to produce a generalised understanding of the historic and archaeological dimension of the present landscape. It is based on the appreciation that every aspect of the landscape has been influenced and, in many respects, physically shaped by human activities.

The end result is a tool for understanding the processes of change in the historic environment as a whole, for identifying what is vulnerable, and for maintaining diversity and distinctiveness in the local scene.

### **Identification of need – local context**

The primary information used for local decision-making concerning the historic environment is the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Such records are held by all County planning authorities in England, and by a number of unitary and district authorities. They additionally form part of a network of information that extends to the National Monuments Record (NMR) held by English Heritage. The importance of SMRs is highlighted by their use in underpinning the work of local authority archaeologists and other specialists whose primary work includes using the landuse planning system to protect the historic environment from development. These heritage managers, or ‘curators’, also use the SMR to promote enjoyment and understanding of the past, and they seek to use it to provide advice on a multitude of issues taking place beyond the English planning system. The latter includes changes effected by agriculture, forestry and natural forces.

The Lancashire (fig.11.1) Sites and Monuments Record contains information on the area’s 135 Scheduled Monuments (some of those deemed to be of national significance and hence protected by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979), 5,000 Listed Buildings, 185 Conservation Areas (discrete areas of built heritage significance, the character of which is preserved by more stringent planning controls) and 31 Registered Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. The record also includes over 20,000 sites of archaeological interest, comprising a range of site types from Bronze Age

burial mounds to Roman signal stations, and from documentary references to deserted medieval villages to the upstanding remains of Lancashire’s considerable industrial heritage. There are two major deficiencies of SMRs relevant to the need for a character-based study: inconsistency (or incompleteness) and the form in which data is held. Whilst the Lancashire SMR is very extensive, and indeed is one of the best of its type, it is by no means complete. For example, a straightforward mapping transcription exercise taking place between February and May 2001 added a further 4,000 sites to the record, mostly more recent heritage from the county’s towns. Above all, SMRs demonstrate the truism that ‘archaeology’ exists only where archaeologists look for it (fig.11.2)! Such a record of course can never be complete: to possess a register of all archaeological sites within an area is a physical, if not a philosophical impossibility.

A second deficiency of the Lancashire Sites and Monuments Record (and many others in England and Wales) is that the information it contains is largely point based: an artefact found here, or a medieval moated site located there. Even the area-based information held as part of the record, such as Conservation Areas or the extent of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, become point-specific when viewed at anything but a very localised scale, particularly so when looking from a sub-regional or broad strategic context. Given that no European landscape can lay claim to being untouched by human influence, it follows that all the areas between the sites held on the SMR, the field boundaries, field patterns, tracks, pathways and roads, woodland, settlements, buildings, and semi-natural resources, are individually historic and collectively also merit treatment as ‘archaeology’, as it is all part of the historic landscape.

Whilst the protection of individual historic or archaeological sites through legislation (Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979; Planning, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, Act 1990) and planning policy guidance (PPG 15, PPG 16) is well defined and understood, that for conserving the broader historic and cultural landscape is neither (Fairclough forthcoming). The primary mechanism for conserving historic landscape character is through the landscape policies contained within Local Authority Development Plans, whether County Structure Plans or District-Wide Local Plans. Herein lies the problem: the Sites and Monuments Record on its own is an inappropriate resource upon which to base the definition and understanding of the historic dimension to broad landscape character, and yet until recently it was often the only historic environment resource consulted in decision-making regarding landscape conservation and change.

Alongside this must be set the county council’s desire to prepare a new landscape strategy for Lancashire (Lancashire County Council 2000). This was to be based

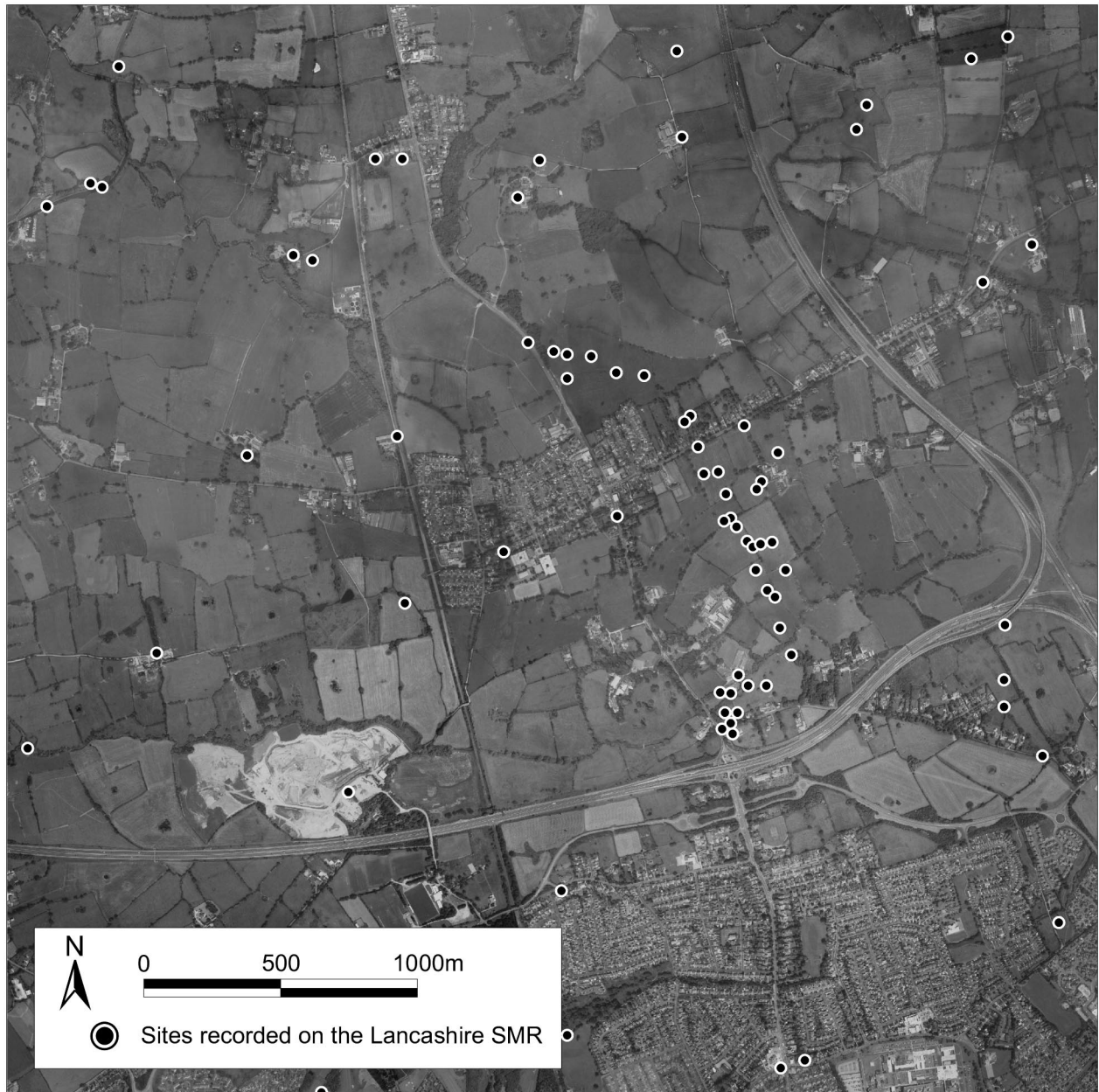


Fig.11.2: The line of the proposed Broughton Bypass shown as Sites and Monuments Record sites.

upon the Countryside Agency's established methodology for character assessment, which seeks first to describe the character of the landscape in terms of its natural resources, current landuse, aesthetic contribution, geology, topography and historic dimension, and then to create a framework for landscape change based upon a number of discrete landscape character areas. Each character area would be supported by descriptions identifying its defining attributes and by statements outlining acceptable limits for change in order that the overall character of the area can be maintained or enhanced. The landscape strategy would lead directly into policies within the forthcoming *Joint Lancashire Structure Plan* and hence into the land-use planning decision-making process. The strategy was also to be used for strategic management guidance outside of the planning system. The county council, therefore,

had a need for a complementary historic landscape characterisation to use alongside the more conventional, broader approach of landscape assessment, as well (as discussed above) to supplement the information held within the county sites and monuments record.

### Methodology

The Lancashire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project commenced in January 1999. The study area comprised the county of Lancashire and the two unitary authority areas of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Blackpool Borough Council. The work was carried out by the archaeology service of the county's Environment Directorate, supported by English Heritage. There was also additional work to extend the mapping to Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council (Merseyside) and

the area of Craven District Council outside the Yorkshire Dales National Park (North Yorkshire). The project was completed in October 2000.

The aim of the Lancashire project was ‘to characterise the distinctive historic dimension of today’s urban and rural environment in Lancashire’. To do this the project team assembled and integrated information on present landuse, land cover, physiography (land form, geology and soils) and visible evidence of human history in the landscape, the built and the semi-natural environment. Analysis of this information was structured by the grouping of historic and other environmental ‘attributes’ within a classification of Historic Landscape Characterisation Types of distinct and recognisable common character.

The distribution of historic landscape characterisation (HLC) types were mapped using the County Council GIS, with outputs of mapped data, supported by written descriptions of HLC types and the historical processes that they represent. In the final stage of the project the HLC types were reviewed against broader landscape characterisations which exist for Lancashire and opportunities for further assessment, including urban areas and individual Districts, were explored.

The process of historic landscape characterisation is relatively straightforward. It begins with the systematic identification and description of historic attributes in the contemporary rural and urban landscape. These attributes include all aspects of the natural and built environment that have been shaped by human activity in the past – the distribution of woodland and other semi-natural habitats, the form of fields and their boundaries, the lines of roads, streets and pathways, and the disposition of buildings in the towns, villages and countryside. Thus for the whole of the county the following attributes were examined:

- current landuse
- field shape
- field size
- field groups
- boundary types
- shape and disposition of paths/lanes/roads
- shape and type of woodland
- shape and type of water
- distribution and types of buildings
- contour/geology/soils
- place-names
- settlement pattern
- previous fieldwork
- c.1850 mapping (Ordnance Survey First Edition 6 inch)
- enclosure awards and other historical information
- and Sites and Monuments Record data

This structured data gathering exercise was followed by the analysis and identification of historic environment

character types which shared distinct groupings of attributes. For example, an area possessing a pattern of small, irregular fields, dissected by winding lanes and footpaths, associated with known medieval settlements, place and field names, and shown to be in existence prior to the earliest comprehensive map evidence may have been allocated to the *Ancient Enclosure* (ie pre AD1600) historic landscape characterisation type. The resulting mapping is hierarchical and includes the following entry level historic landscape characterisation types (pl.11.1):

- Ancient (pre-AD1600) Enclosure
- Post-Medieval (AD1600-1850) Enclosure
- Modern (post- AD1850) Enclosure
- Ancient and Post-Medieval (pre-AD1850) Woodland
- Modern Woodland
- Ancient and Post-Medieval Settlement
- Modern Settlement
- Ancient and Post-Medieval Industry
- Modern Industry
- Ancient and Post-Medieval Ornamental land
- Modern Ornamental land
- Modern Recreational land
- Modern Military
- Modern Communications
- Moorland
- Reverted Moorland
- Lowland Moss and Grassland/Scrub
- Water
- Coastal Rough Ground
- Salt marsh
- Dunes
- Sand and Mudflats

A note of caution should be added here: the historic landscape characterisation project was primarily desk-based and originally time-limited to 18 months. It was not a historic landscape survey programme, but one which identified broad historic landscape character. As such a detailed survey will find attributes of both the medieval and 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape within an area of say, Post-Medieval Enclosure, but the broad character of that area will be one which was either created, or substantially changed, during the period AD1600–1850. The same definition and caveat is applicable to all the other historic landscape characterisation types.

Once the basic mapping was complete it was possible to produce a map of Lancashire showing those areas which are essentially medieval or earlier in character and which survive today (pl.11.2). Alternatively, areas of ancient woodland, ancient industry or historic settlement can be picked out and compared with their more recent counterparts. Ornamental parks and gardens, areas of moorland which were once in agricultural production, or even Lancashire’s distinctive urban heritage of mills and terraced industrial workers housing have all been mapped.

Because the work was carried out using a GIS it has been possible to query the map in a large number of different ways. For example, all those areas of Lancashire which were brought into agricultural use over the last 2,000 years from the sea, from upland moor or from lowland moor have been identified (pl.11.3). Alternatively, former medieval parkland, woodland or medieval open strip fields may be highlighted. In addition, measures of time-depth were incorporated into the project in order to identify the changes which have taken place within the landscape over the past 150 years. This allows, amongst other things, the broad measurement of field boundary loss (since 1850; pl.11.4) and the mapping of patterns of destruction, loss and survival of the principal features of earlier landuse. The potential for combinations of enquiries made of the dataset, and with others, such as the Sites and Monuments Record is endless. Perhaps most importantly, for the first time it is possible to set Lancashire's individual historic attributes, its buildings, sites and monuments, within a broad framework of historic landscape character, and to measure the impact of future proposals upon the whole of the historic environment.

### Applications, benefits and uses

The mapping of the historic landscape characteristic types has only recently been completed, and there remains an amount of refinement to be carried out, but already the list of applications is growing longer, including:

- Input into the Lancashire Landscape Strategy and Development Plan Policy.
- Strategic and local landuse planning.
- Woodland planting proposals.
- Input into agri-environment schemes and targets (Countryside Stewardship).
- Development control:
  - Guidelines for the historic landscape's capacity for change without undue loss of significance or erosion of character.
  - Assessment of the impact of proposals on the 'setting' of individual landscape components such as sites and buildings.
  - Tailoring of archaeological projects (briefs and specifications).
- Predictive modelling for archaeological sites in areas where none are recorded in the SMR.
- Advice on the removal or replacement of hedgerows and other field boundaries.
- Monitoring landscape change.
- Targeting future archaeological work.
- Input into other non-statutory strategies (eg the Forest of Bowland Action Plan; the South Pennine Heritage Strategy).

Some of these are further discussed below.

### The Lancashire Landscape Strategy

One of the principal aims of the historic landscape characterisation was to enrich the new *Landscape*

*Strategy* for Lancashire that was being planned at the same time (Lancashire County Council 2000). This strategy was to be in two parts, the first a rigorous but non-judgmental character assessment for the county, and the second an indicative appraisal of the direction of future landscape change. The character assessment would take into consideration not just the historic dimension to landscape, but also its ecological and natural form, its geology, hydrology and topographic character, its current landuse and its aesthetic qualities (pl.11.5). The historic landscape characterisation project and the landscape assessment were carried out in parallel and their relationship is shown below (fig.11.3).

In terms of application the historic landscape characterisation work informed and underpinned the character assessment in a number of ways. Firstly, it acted as a guide to the identification of the landscape assessment areas and types. Some categories, for example urban historic landscape characterisation types, were transferred unchanged to become landscape assessment types, whilst on other occasions, landscape assessment types were defined or modified in the light of historic landscape characterisation mapping. A good example of the latter is an area to the east of the town of Preston. Here, the line of the M6 motorway had unconsciously dictated the character assessment mapping, particularly to the north and south of the town. The boundary was false as the motorway was constructed at the limits of the town as it existed in 1958 and has subsequently acted as a barrier to further urban expansion. A better subdivision between the two character assessment areas was provided by the historic landscape characterisation mapping which had identified the boundary, which survives to this day, further west than the motorway, between Ancient Enclosure and later enclosed land. The character assessment mapping was accordingly modified.

The historic landscape characterisation work also resulted in a far greater understanding of the historic processes which have led to the current landscape, and this was reflected both in the depth of description supplied in the final *Landscape Strategy Report* and in the higher profile given to the historic attributes of the countryside. It was also apparent in the descriptions of aspects of landscape usually perceived as 'natural', such as saltmarsh or upland peat moor, where the guiding hand of humans was recognised and explained.

Finally, the historic landscape characterisation work allowed key historic environmental features to be identified in each character area within the landscape strategy, providing a strategic context for conservation. For example, the Enclosed Uplands type includes the 'Network of gritstone walls and historic tracks [that] reinforces the landscape pattern and provides evidence of the extent of upland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries' and 'Blanket bog

[which] crowns the high summits, providing both landscape diversity, biodiversity and an important archaeological resource', amongst its key environmental features. Consequently, the strategy for the type undertakes to:

- 'Conserve the distinctive high altitude field enclosures;
- Conserve landscape features associated with historic mineral working;
- Conserve the distinctive historic settlement pattern;
- Enhance abandoned quarry sites for nature conservation, recreation and heritage purposes.'

Whilst the strategy on its own is aspirational, acting as a good practice guide for landscape change managers, it is given teeth by its link to a policy in the *Replacement Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001–2016* (draft deposit edition, [www.lancashire2016.com.uk](http://www.lancashire2016.com.uk)) against which all applications for development are to be measured. The draft policy, untested as yet by public or central government consultation, is shown below:

#### Policy 1 urban and rural landscapes

Development must be appropriate to the landscape character of the area, and will contribute to the conservation, enhancement, or restoration of, or the creation of appropriate new features in, the landscape type in which it occurs. Proposals will be assessed in relation to:

- a) Local distinctiveness
- b) The condition of the landscape
- c) Visual intrusion
- d) The layout and scale of buildings and designed spaces
- e) The quality and character of the built fabric
- f) Public access and community value
- g) Historic patterns and attributes of the landscape
- h) Landscape biodiversity and ecological networks
- i) Semi-natural habitats characteristic of the landscape type
- j) Remoteness and tranquillity
- k) Noise and light pollution

The *Landscape Strategy*, (and further supplementary planning guidance based upon it, such as perhaps the historic landscape characterisation itself), forms the template against which the policy will be implemented and in this way consideration of the historic dimension of the countryside and townscape is ensured in all development proposals. If new proposals are unable to demonstrate that they are appropriate, or that there is no overriding consideration why they should not comply with the plan, then permission to proceed will be refused.

#### Other applications

Many of the applications for historic landscape characterisation will be based within the overall framework of the *Landscape Strategy*. For example the range, quantity and type of schemes supported by Common Agricultural Policy-related agri-environment grant aid (through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme) will be informed and directed by the landscape character area in which they fall. However, the historic landscape characterisation will also be used in its own right as a guide to strategic issues of landscape change: for example, the selection of areas suitable for extensive tree planting as part of proposed new woodland in East Lancashire. Here, the location of new tree planting will be guided by the historic landscape characterisation 'assorted' enclosed land subtype (that is, the medieval and later creation of fields from piecemeal clearance of woodland), thus ensuring a natural landscape compatibility with areas of former woodland.

This short paper cannot explore all the current or planned applications of historic landscape characterisation, but perhaps one of the most challenging areas of development will be the interaction and relationship between the historic landscape characterisation data-set and the Sites and Monuments Record. Each historic landscape characterisation type and sub-type is to be informed by a Sites and Monuments Record profile – that is a summary of all the sites which fall within the separate historic landscape characterisation areas. Clearly the quantities, date, form and type of sites found within areas of Post-Medieval Enclosure derived from lowland moss reclamation would be different from those recorded within areas of Ancient Woodland. Consequently, the research techniques required to discover and understand sites in those separate areas may also be different and may be tested when triggered by development proposals or research interests. Such tailoring will extend to the project briefs for archaeological assessment which will therefore be much more responsive to the needs of the area and better targeted to the type, function and likely date of the archaeological potential within it.

Furthermore, because fieldwork and documentary research varies significantly across the county it should be possible to extrapolate from well-studied areas of an historic landscape characterisation type to areas of the same type where the Sites and Monuments Record is unforthcoming. Thus, even where the Sites and Monuments Record is silent an area may be anticipated to contain a certain proportion of differing site types (and forms and periods) through association with more comprehensively studied areas of the historic landscape characterisation type. Much remains to be tested in terms of site prediction, but the Historic Landscape Characterisation project has provided an area-based framework for such analysis to take place.

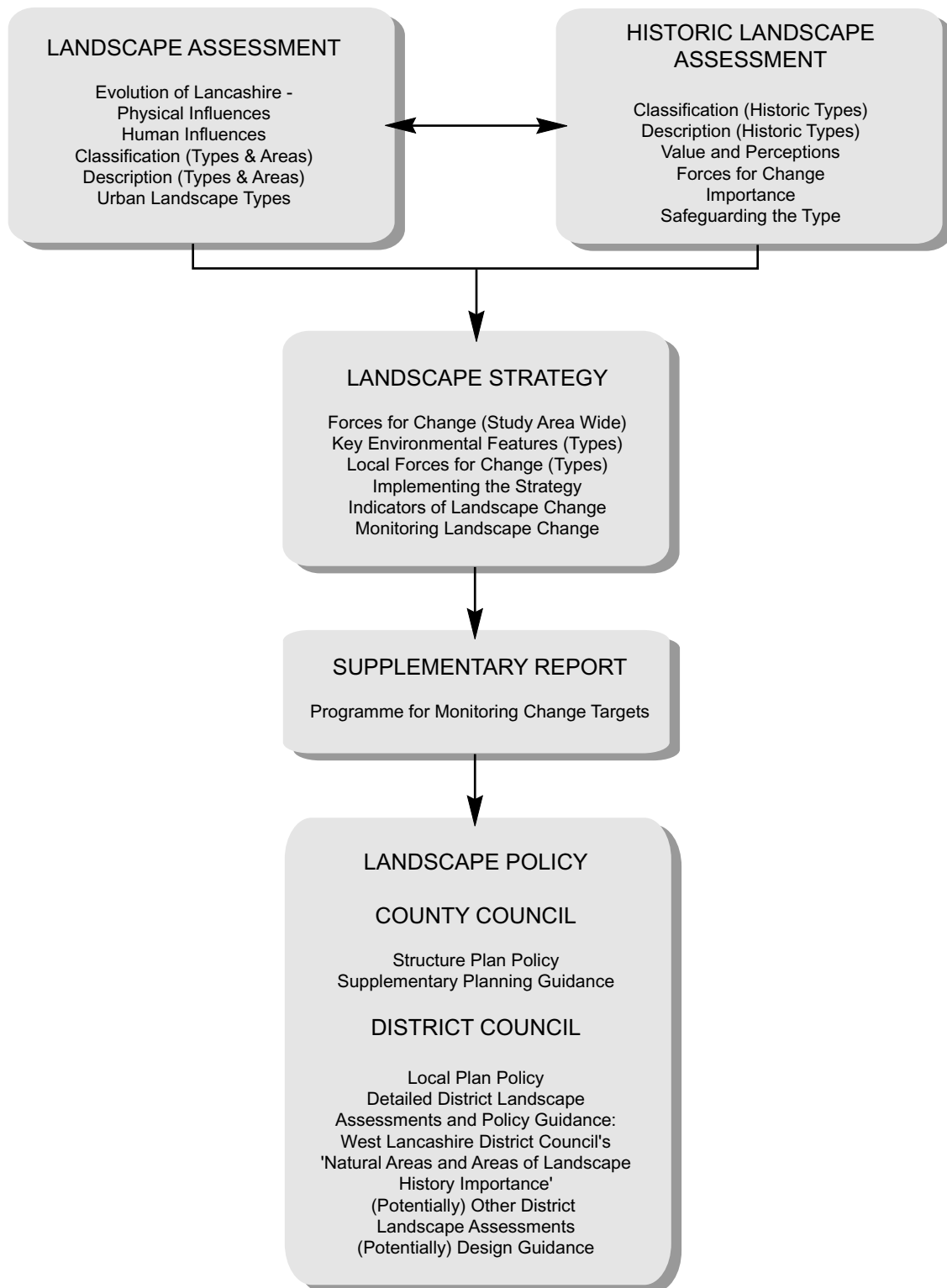


Fig.11.3: Relationship between the Historic Landscape Characterisation and the Lancashire Landscape Character assessment and strategy.

### The Way Forward

Use of the Historic Landscape Characterisation project data is still in its infancy and there remain many areas of application to be explored. In Lancashire, this will be done through two new projects: a Bowland and Lune Cultural Landscape Project and the Lancashire Extensive Urban Survey Project, both supported by English Heritage.

The Bowland and Lune Valley project covers the Forest of Bowland and the lower Lune valley. It is part of an EU funded Culture 2000 partnership entitled 'Pathways to the Cultural Landscape' (see Ermischer this volume) that involves 12 projects in 10 different countries (fig.11.4). Its main aim is to illustrate the diversity of European cultural landscapes, but also to emphasise what they have in

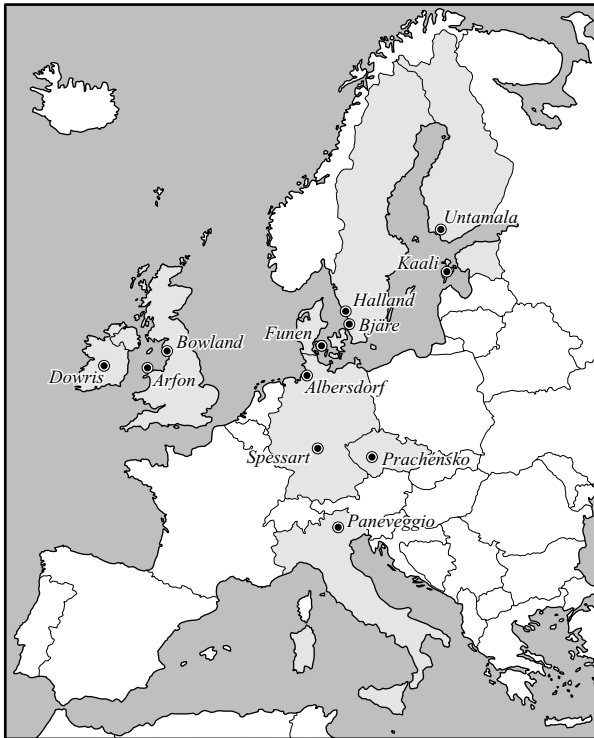


Fig.11.4: Map showing the location of the EU Pathways Projects.

common as part of Europe. The project is in two parts. Firstly, the different European cultural landscapes are linked together through common leaflets and folders, a shared Website, a major publication, six seminars, two exchanges per project, and educational work. The seminars will be used to target problems, issues and the exchange of ideas and experiences.

Secondly, each national project will explore its local landscape. In the case of Lancashire, the Bowland and Lune area is one which is little understood but has considerable potential. More specifically, it can use the county-wide historic landscape characterisation as a springboard for more detailed work within the broad framework provided by the European project. The principal aim of the national project will be to 'extend and test the historic landscape characterisation methodology'. This will be achieved through six objectives:

- Objective 1: Extend the historic landscape characterisation to identify more local attributes and scales.
- Objective 2: Test the historic landscape characterisation as a tool for identifying and expressing intangible cultural landscape attributes (such as local perceptions, folklore, attitudes and associations).
- Objective 3: Test and extend the historic landscape characterisation methodology to incorporate community participation and views.
- Objective 4: Explore the management potential of historic landscape characterisation, with particular reference to the development of sustainable and

effective input into agricultural incentive schemes and schemes for rural diversification.

- Objective 5: Identify further research uses for the historic landscape characterisation, such as time depth, settlement pattern and site prediction.
- Objective 6: Identify and develop a dialogue between the historic landscape characterisation information and that held within other data-sets, in particular the Sites and Monuments Record.

Work will primarily include detailed historic landscape characterisation in those areas, the evaluation of local cultural landscape value, management recommendations, the identification of appropriate sites for promotion and the establishment of three cultural trails (two physical and one virtual).

A second, and increasingly important area in which the historic landscape characterisation methodology will be used and tested is that of the urban historic environment. An Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) Project – an English Heritage programme designed to provide information on the urban archaeological resource for use in spatial planning and management – commenced in Lancashire in 2000. This will, for the first time in the EUS programme, expand the EUS approach by transferring the historic landscape characterisation methodology from the broad landscape to twenty-nine individual towns. The project will involve the mapping of urban character types and will use this to draw together separate aspects of the built and buried heritage. As with historic landscape characterisation the work involves the definition of urban character types sharing common attributes (in this case building types, street plans, building mass, nodes, barriers, edges and voids, roads, paths and boundaries, materials, period and function), followed by an assessment of importance in terms of rarity, time depth, completeness and the potential forces for change. Once completed it will be a means by which the historic dimension to townscape can be mapped and evaluated, and brought into the planning process as a powerful tool for managing change.

Neither the Extensive Urban Survey Project nor the Culture 2000 Bowland project is being viewed as separate from the historic landscape characterisation work; instead they form nested data-sets in which a greater resolution of detail may be acquired. By way of a conclusion, herein lies one of the keys to the role of characterisation: it is not put forward as a replacement to conventional approaches to historic landscape, nor is it an exercise to be carried out at only one prescribed scale. Detailed traditional surveys will continue to be necessary to understand landscape change in the same way that the collection and input of point information to the Sites and Monuments Record is necessary. Instead characterisation is a different way in which to view landscape, at whatever scale. As such it is an increasingly useful, flexible and necessary tool for those



involved in understanding and managing cultural landscape change.

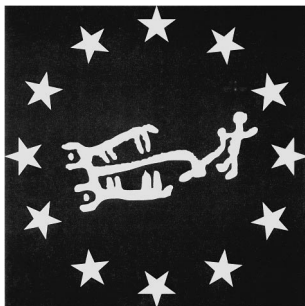
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European Pathways to Cultural Landscapes

