West Berkshire Historic Landscape Character Sensitivity

The Assessment Methodology

Introduction

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a GIS based tool for understanding the historic and archaeological dimension of our present day landscape. All of the unitary authority of West Berkshire was assessed, with land parcels being identified and classified into HLC types according to their modern character. The polygons were digitally mapped, with a variety of attributes about the landscape being recorded in a table, including broad HLC group, period of origin, morphology, previous land-uses and the sources for these interpretations.

The database produced by the HLC project can be queried and analysed to answer many questions: for example, how much of West Berkshire is currently wooded, what was the former extent of recorded downland, or what were the various types of land enclosure in the District. Another application carried out in 2006 was a broad brush assessment of the **sensitivity** of the historic landscape character, to inform strategic planning and management. The methodology of this assessment is described below.

Assigning Sensitivity

The area in hectares covered by each current HLC Type in West Berkshire was extracted from the HLC database. These values were then put into an Excel spreadsheet and the percentage of the District covered by that type was calculated. This enabled an assessment of the contribution of each HLC Type to the present character of the district. HLC project work has demonstrated however that certain HLC Types (e.g. *ancient woodlands, medieval settlements, pre-18th century field systems*) covered a greater extent in the past than is now represented in the modern landscape. The amount of land previously covered by these HLC Types was also extracted from the database and the proportions of that type surviving in the modern landscape and that lost were calculated in the spreadsheet. This was in order to better understand the significance of HLC Types that may only be patchily represented in the modern landscape.

Each HLC Type was then allocated a score to represent its Significance. This took into account the contribution of the Type to the landscape, both modern and previous, and a professional judgement of the importance and interest of the HLC Type, e.g. *ancient woodlands* being seen as more significant for historic landscape character than *land restored following gravel extraction*. Significance values ranged from 1 - **low significance**, to 3 - **high significance**.

The susceptibility to damage of each HLC Type was termed Fragility. This was taken to be an indicator of how much effort would be required to entirely destroy a Type. Each HLC Type was given a score from 1 - **low fragility**, to 3 - **high fragility**.

A Sensitivity rating for each HLC Type was then generated by calculating the product of the *Significance* value and the *Fragility* value. The values created by this process were equated to the differing levels of sensitivity inferred by the colour-coded sensitivity matrix as shown below: 1 = **low sensitivity**, 2 = **low-medium sensitivity**, 3 & 4 = **medium sensitivity**, 6 = **medium-high sensitivity** and 9 = **high sensitivity**.

Significance →	3	3	6	9
	2	2	4	6
	1	1	2	3
		1	2	3
		Fragility →		

The HLC Sensitivity Scoring Matrix

Colours shown are those used in the production of Sensitivity maps

A refinement to the methodology was made for HLC Types representing large-scale change of the agricultural landscape since the Second World War, ie *amalgamated fields*, *reorganised fields* and *new fields*. In cases where elements of previous land-uses were preserved, these HLC types had their Significance and Fragility values altered to reflect the fact that they represent interesting palimpsest landscapes. They may therefore present opportunities for landscape restoration, or sympathetic management which can prevent further erosion and loss of these earlier features. A similar approach was taken for *golf courses* on former *designed landscapes* which were also given higher Sensitivity values.

For two types of woodland, *plantations* and *secondary woodland*, Significance was felt to be diminished where there was evidence that the land had not been previously wooded, so in these cases overall Sensitivity was decreased.

Sensitivity Values by HLC Current Type

The table below shows the Significance, Fragility and combined Sensitivity values assigned to each of the HLC Current Types in West Berkshire. Where the Previous HLC Types had a relict influence on the Current Type's scoring, this is also included.

HLC Classifications		Scoring Significance x Fragility = Sensitivity		
HLC Group	HLC type	Significance	Fragility	Sensitivity
civic	hospital	2	2	4
civic	landfill	1	1	1
civic	school/college	1	2	2
civic	utilities	1	1	1
communication	canal & rail corridor	2	1	2
communication	major roads	1	1	1
communication	railway	2	1	2
communication	ridgeway	3	2	6
enclosures and farming	C19th replanned fields	2	3	6
enclosures and farming	amalgamated fields	2	1	2
enclosures and farming	am. fields relict assarts	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	am. fields relict enc meadows	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	am. fields relict parliamentary fields	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	am. fields relict pre-C18th irregular fields	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	am. fields relict pre-C18th regular fields	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	assarted enclosures	3	3	9
enclosures and farming	enclosed meadows	3	3	9
enclosures and farming	gallops	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	industrial farming concern	1	1	1
enclosures and farming	market gardens	1	1	1
enclosures and farming	new field	2	1	2
enclosures and farming	new field relict ancient woods	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	new field relict secondary woods	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	new field relict water meadows	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	paddocks	1	2	2
enclosures and farming	parliamentary fields	3	3	9
enclosures and farming	post-parliamentary enclosures	2	3	6
enclosures and farming	pre-C18th irregular fields	3	3	9
enclosures and farming	pre-C18th regular fields	3	3	9
enclosures and farming	pre-C18th sinuous fields	3	3	9

HLC Classifications		Scoring Significance x Fragility = Sensitivity		
HLC Group	**HLC type**	**Significance**	**Fragility**	**Sensitivity**
enclosures and farming	reorganised fields	2	1	2
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict C19th replanned	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict assarts	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict designed landscape	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict enc meadows	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict parliamentary fields	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict post-parliamentary fields	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict pre-C18th irregular fields	2	2	4
enclosures and farming	reorg. fields relict pre-C18th regular fields	2	2	4
industrial and commercial	business parks	1	1	1
industrial and commercial	industrial area	1	1	1
industrial and commercial	mineral extraction	2	1	2
industrial and commercial	retail complexes	1	1	1
military	military establishment	2	2	4
open land	commons & greens	3	3	9
open land	downland	3	3	9
open land	marsh	2	2	4
open land	meadow	3	3	9
open land	rough grazing	1	1	1
other	managed cultural asset	3	3	9
other	religious community	1	2	2
other	restored land	1	1	1
other	wasteland	1	1	1
parkland	designed landscape	3	2	6
recreation	golf course	1	1	1
recreation	golf course relict parkland	2	2	4
recreation	other leisure facilities	2	1	2
recreation	parks and sports facilities	2	2	4
recreation	racecourse	2	1	2
settlement	C18th settlement	3	2	6
settlement	C19th settlement	3	2	6
settlement	allotment gardens	2	2	4
settlement	cemetery	2	1	2
settlement	historic settlement	3	2	6
settlement	interwar settlement	3	2	6
settlement	recent settlement growth	2	1	2

HLC Classifications		Scoring Significance x Fragility = Sensitivity		
HLC Group	HLC type	Significance	Fragility	Sensitivity
water and water management	flooded gravel pits	2	2	4
water and water management	reservoir	1	1	1
water and water management	watercress beds	1	1	1
woodland	ancient woodland	3	3	9
woodland	old secondary woodland	3	3	9
woodland	plantations	2	2	4
woodland	plantations not previously wooded	1	2	2
woodland	recent secondary woodland	2	3	6
woodland	secondary wood not previously wooded	1	3	3
woodland	replanted ancient woodland	2	3	6

For more information on the HLC project or the Sensitivity Assessment, please contact the archaeology service.

Archaeology Service
West Berkshire Council
Market Street
Newbury
RG14 5LD

Tel 01635 519805
Fax 01635 519811

Email archaeology@westberks.gov.uk
Web www.westberks.gov.uk/archaeology