Chapter 6: Current and Further Applications of HLC data

My points of reference
have changed.

From 'Navigating Polygonia' by Dr Romola Parish, Poet in Residence.

This chapter sets out the current applications of the Oxfordshire HLC and goes on to suggest other ways in which material could be used. It makes three specific recommendations for the project: further capacity modelling, the creation of Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCAs), and bespoke training workshops for different HLC end users.

6.1 Current Applications of HLC

During the course of the Oxfordshire HLC project various requests for data and material were made. Alongside these requests, case studies demonstrating how HLC data could be used were developed. Combined, these form the current applications of Oxfordshire HLC data.

6.1.1 Local Plans

HLC data can be used at a broad-scale to inform planned change. It is, therefore, an important tool for strategic planning and can form part of the evidence used to create Local Plans.

The Oxfordshire Local Plans produced by the five district councils are at various stages of completion. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 was completed in December 2016, prior to the completion of the HLC project. The Cherwell Local Plan was also completed ahead of the HLC project, in 2011; however, a current Partial Review, necessitated by the Unmet Housing Need in Oxford District, has incorporated HLC data as part of the evidence base. South and West Oxfordshire District Councils are nearing completion of their plans and Oxford City District completed its first consultation in August 2016. As of March 2017, all five district councils have been provided with HLC data to inform the development or any reviews of their Local Plans.

With regards to Local Plans, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states:

Policy 126. "Local planning authorities should take 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".

Policy 157. "Local Plans should…identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance". [1]

More generally, when determining planning applications, the NPPF states:

Policy 128. "Local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting"[2]

It is recommended that policies similar to those adopted in Stratford-on-Avon District (Warks) be included within Oxfordshire's Local Development Frameworks produced by the five districts:

Policy CS.13 Protecting Landscape and Natural Features
"Development should have regard to the distinctiveness and historic character of the District's different landscapes.

Development should protect and enhance landscape character and avoid detrimental effects on patterns and features which make significant contribution to the character of a settlement or area"

[1] National Planning Policy Framework. Department for Communities and Local Government. March 2012.
[2] Ibid

Policy CS.14 Protecting Heritage Features
"New development should be integrated within its historic context using evidence gained through historic characterisation, and the retention of heritage features secured through sensitive design and layout of development proposals".[3]

6.1.2 Oxford Green Belt Study

In May 2015, LUC (formerly Land Use Consultants) were commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council to undertake an assessment of the Oxford Green Belt. This study aimed to inform long-term growth options and Local Plans, so a request for HLC data was made. Although the Oxfordshire HLC project was incomplete, data from the green belt area had been completed and, because of the scale and strategic importance of the Green Belt Study, a decision was made to share HLC data. This data was used to assess landscape character and historic setting around the city of Oxford.

6.1.3 Neighbourhood Plans

The Localism Act of 2011 gave legal powers to local communities to create their own neighbourhood plans. These allow people to have more of a say in the development of their own communities. As with Local Plans, HLC and the understanding of historic development that it represents can be used to better inform planning and development decisions through the Neighbourhood Planning framework. As members of the public, individuals creating Neighbourhood Plans can request information from the HLC free-of-charge.

In April 2017, Benson residents were drawing up their Neighbourhood Plan and requested data from the HLC project. Data from the whole parish was provided as a series of maps and associated report. The maps showed the parish as it is today, in 1881, and in 1797. They also showed all the individual HLC records identified. A report for each HLC record was included.

Data can be supplied as shapefiles, but it is appreciated that many people creating Neighbourhood Plans may not have access to a GIS. Digital copies of HLC maps may, therefore, frequently be a more appropriate method of disseminating HLC data for this group of users.

6.1.4 Historic Environment Record Enquiries

Since January 2017, HLC data has been included with information sent out in response to Historic Environment Record (HER) enquiries. Enquiries made by members of the public incur no cost, whilst those made by consultants or organisations are charged in line with the HER fees.

Data shared includes shapefiles and associated database records for each HLC polygon identified within a specified geographic area. For data to be meaningful they must be used in conjunction with the Individual Historic Landscape Types report which can be downloaded from the Project Documentation section of the HLC webpage.

Examples of HLC data sent out in this manner include a 1km buffer around the village of South Leigh (public enquiry) and Wendlebury area (consultant).

[3] Stratford upon Avon District Council. 2010. Stratford-on-Avon District Local Development Framework. Directions for Stratford-on-Avon District. Consultation Core Strategy. pp. 54-56. And see Wallace, B. 2010. Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. Warwickshire County Council p. 305 for a worked case study.

6.1.5 Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Description Units Update

As part of the update to the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study, a review of the Landscape Description Units (LDUs) which make up the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of the county was commissioned. This review was to take into consideration historic landscape character in the definition of discrete landscape units. For example, to distinguish between those fields created from former open fields and those created from former common pasture. It is anticipated that these different origins will affect the understanding, presentations, and management of current landscape characteristics.

This review and the data provided by the HLC are documented in Chapter 5, Case Study 2: The Integration and Correlation of the Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation and Landscape Character Assessment datasets.

6.1.6 Valued Landscapes

Two sets of values were created to better understand those landscape types which hold significance for the public and for the historic character of the current landscape of Oxfordshire. The first used the Conservation Principles to survey public opinion regarding the Aesthetic, Communal, and Historical value of each HLC type.[4] The second combined the Conservation Principle Values with information collected by the HLC project, such as rarity, date of origin, and trajectory of change, to assign a value of historic character significance.

These two sets of values can be used to better understand our landscape and its significance for the people who live and work in it. This information can be used to inform strategic planning decisions and landscape management schemes. It can also be used as the basis of specific change scenarios which aim to assess the capacity a landscape might have to accommodate certain types of change or development.

More information about these sets of values can be found in Chapter 5.1.7 High Value Landscapes.

6.1.7 Capacity Modelling

Using information collected on the significance of each historic landscape type, it was possible to model a landscape's capacity to accommodate a specific scenario. The scenario modelled was urban development on the edge of five of Oxfordshire's major settlements.

The methodology developed, which closely follows that under development by Historic England,[5] and the results of this study can be found in Chapter 5.3.

The purpose of this analysis was to demonstrate how HLC data can usefully be employed to better inform and manage various types of change within the landscape. The methodology used is type-based and not site specific. It is essential, therefore, that this information is used alongside data drawn from the individual sites under consideration – for example, data from the HER.

[4] The fourth Conservation Principle, Evidential Value, was assessed by the Archaeology Team, Oxfordshire County council as this value relates directly to the presence of archaeological remains and historic buildings.
[5] Herring, P. & McOmish, D. forthcoming. Using Historic Landscape Characterisation when assessing sensitivity to change. Historic England.

It would be possible to combine this type-based methodology with site specific data to create a more comprehensive map of capacity for change in the landscape. Time constraints have meant that this has not been possible within the course of the Oxfordshire HLC project, but if resources were made available, a county-wide model of historic landscape capacity for urban development and other change scenarios could be created. See Recommendations section, below.

The results of this analysis have been shared with the District Councils as an evidence base for their strategic planning.

6.1.8 Living Landscapes Project

An important part of the Oxfordshire HLC project from its outset was to provide data by which individuals, community groups, or academics could research and engage with the historic landscape. HLC data has been made freely available to members of the public and is accessible online.[6] However, without increasing awareness of the project, this data was unlikely to realise its full potential within the sphere of public research. To address this, a series of public projects were initiated, centred on a one-day event at The Oxfordshire Museum, Living Landscapes. This was held on 15th July 2017.

These projects included:

- The Oxfordshire HLC Poet in Residence, Dr Romola Parish
    - Romola created a short anthology, the Polygon Poems, which used HLC data to gain insights into hidden historic landscapes and how they have shaped our present. The poems capture the essence of HLC, the past in the present, and the comprehensiveness of landscapes.

- Drawing and Paintings by local artist Miranda Creswell
    - Miranda created two pieces of art on the subject of change in the landscape, one at Didcot and the other at Brize Norton airfield. These highlighted the dynamic and fluid nature of landscapes.

- Historic Landscape Walks
    - Three walks were created which lead people around the Oxfordshire Countryside, describing what the landscape looked like in the past, historic buildings, and archaeological remains. These walks can be found here.

- Our Oxfordshire Photography
    - This project invited members of the public to submit their photographs of the historic part of Oxfordshire which means the most to them. Photographs were accompanied by a brief story telling us why this place is so important.

- Post-it Poetry
    - Members of the public were invited to write short poems (no more than 30 words long) about parts of the county which connect them to the past.

[6] The online map can be accesed at bit.ly/oxonlandscape and the project archive is available from https://data.gov.uk/publisher/oxfordshire-county-council and the Archaeology Data Service.

6.2 Further Applications of HLC

6.2.1 Historic Landscape Character Areas

HLC could be used to create Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCAs). These consolidate data held within an HLC into more generalised but geographically specific areas. This allows the complex type-based HLC dataset to be reworked to define separate geographic areas, each with their own distinct historic character.

HLCAs can be created for the following reasons:

- To allow assessment of the historic dimension of the landscape
- To create distinct areas which are more readily recognisable by local people
- To aid in the creation of Historic Environment Action Plans and other landscape management tools.
- To inform Natural England's Countryside Stewardship designations

Each HLCA should reflect a unique and locally distinctive part of the landscape, with its own particular characteristics and historical trajectory. Once identified, each HLCA should be accompanied by a description which outlines the main characteristics, historical and archaeological features, and historic trajectories of the landscape.

These areas allow better understanding of locally important landscapes and features, those which typify and contribute to the distinct character of an area. A more nuanced understanding of what makes an area distinctive will allow the creation of more appropriate strategic development frameworks and landscape management schemes.

The North Wessex Downs AONB, using its own HLC dataset, has identified and described 28 distinct HLCAs. The AONB's HLC was integrated into the Oxfordshire HLC and their methodology for defining HLCAs could be applied to the rest of the county.[7]

6.2.1.1 Historic Environment Action Plans

HLCAs can form one framework for Historic Environment Action Plans (HEAPs); HLC Types can form another. HEAPs set out SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Resourced, and Time-bound) actions which address key threats to the historic environment and opportunities within it. These actions derive from the significance, condition, and forces for change identified in each HLCA and recommends responses to conserve and enhance the special characteristics of each distinct area or each HLC Type.[8]

HEAPs were first devised in Cornwall in 2002 as a direct equivalent of the Biodiversity Action Plan and a model process for creating them was set out by English Heritage in 2004.[9] They have been created for large areas, like the whole of the Isle of Wight or West Berkshire, or for protected landscapes like the Isle of Axholme, Cranborne Chase and East Devon AONBs. In Cornwall they have

[7] Rouse, E. 2013. North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Historic Landscape Character Areas. Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy.
[8] Rouse, E. 2011. Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Historic Environment Action Plans. Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy.
[9] Herring, P. & Preston-Jones, A. 2003. Bodmin Moor Rough Ground HEAP. Cornwall County Council & English Heritage; Clark et al. 2004. Using Historic Landscape Characterisation. English Heritage & Lancashire County Council. p. 54.

also been drawn up for historic landscape types like upland rough ground and lowland marshes and in the Isle of Wight for asset types like historic trackways. A HEAP may be created by anybody with an interest in an area, a type of landscape, or an on-going issue.

Creation of a HEAP begins with the refinement of any existing characterisation of the area or HLC Type, identifying and assessing positive and negative effects of on-going change, preparing assessments and statements of significance of assets or attributes likely to be affected, identifying objectives and then developing an action plan to achieve these. To be most effective the HEAP is integrated with other related plans, such as Management Plans, including those of AONBs. They can also be integrated into Neighbourhood and Local Plans and Design Frameworks, providing key evidence for planning policy and strategy and landscape management. They can also be used to encourage engagement and promote ownership of the historic environment by local people and as a tool for research.

Other HEAPs include:

- Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, 2011
- West Berkshire, 2011[10]
- East Devon, 2015[11]
- Isle of Wight, 2008[12]
- Cornwall, 2002[13]

6.2.2 Extensive Urban Survey

HLC data could provide a valuable resource for an Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) of Oxfordshire and indeed an EUS for the county was commenced but then placed on hold to await the results of the HLC project. The HLC's data on the expansion of urban areas during the 20th century and early 21st century will be particularly useful to an EUS. Conversely, the broad-brush approach of HLCs, particularly in regards to historic urban cores, mean that an EUS will greatly enhance our knowledge of these settlements and aid in the definition of discrete urban zones.

6.2.3 Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England

The Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE) was developed by Natural England with the assistance of Historic England and local authority HERs. SHINE is a single, national dataset of historic environment features which could benefit from management within the Environmental Stewardship scheme. The dataset shows applicants to the Environmental Stewardship scheme where historic environment features on their holdings lie with the intention that more features will be cared for and managed appropriately. Traditionally, the SHINE dataset has used data from local HERs, however, HLC data could be used to complement and enhance this information. HER data typically relates to specific monuments or features, whereas HLC data is concerned with whole landscapes. Historic landscapes identified by HLC are significant heritage assets which would also benefit from management under the SHINE and Environmental Stewardship scheme.

[10] The West Berkshire Historic Environment Action Plan, West Berkshire Heritage Forum. 2011.
[11] Rouse, E. 2015. East Devon AONB Historic Environment Action Plans Project Report. Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy.
[12] Isle of Wight Historic Environment Action Plan. Isle of Wight County archaeology and Historic Environment Service. 2008.
[13] Herring, P. & Preston-Jones, A. 2003.

6.2.4 Conservation Areas

Historic England recommends the use of HLC data in the appraisal of Conservation Areas. This data contributes to understanding of current and past land use, local character zones, survival of historic features, and archaeological potential, all of which can be used to designate and assess Conservation Areas.[14]

In Rugby District, Warwickshire HLC data was successfully used to make recommendations where HLC data contributed to the understanding of the historic area and where Conservation Area boundaries could be changed to better reflect the historic landscape.[15]

It is, therefore, suggested that the Oxfordshire HLC dataset is consulted during the appraisal process of Conservation Areas in the county.

6.2.5 Landscape Architecture

The body of knowledge created by landscape archaeology projects such as Historic Landscape Characterisation has a wealth to contribute to the discipline of landscape architecture. As Fairclough put it, "Landscape Archaeology tells stories, Landscape Architecture paints pictures".[16]

HLC data documents the processes which have created landscapes, essential for those managing landscapes and managing change within landscapes. Data can be used to understand change in the past and in the present and to design change in the future. It has particular potential in the field of urban design and planning – both on green and brown-field sites.

Information about the past, both in the past and surviving in the present, can be used to place and shape development in the county. For example, historic land divisions which characterised an area could be maintained by the careful design of developments, using historic boundaries rather than imposing rigid grids to define the new development.

6.2.6 Development Control

Through its integration into the Oxfordshire HER HBSMR database, HLC data is available to the county's planning archaeologists for use in development control work. HLC records from individual development areas can be used to contextualise HER records and to better understand the wider historic landscape. Where no HER records exist in a development area, HLC data can provide information about possible impacts. Data can also be used to suggest appropriate conditions for archaeological appraisals and mitigation works.

In addition, the report on each HLC type can be used to understand the potential effect of a proposed development and, therefore, improve decision making. For example, where an HLC type is rare or declining rapidly in the county, the impact of its development may be high and of some significance. This information can also flag where there is the potential for an area's character to be changed if the landscape type were removed.

[14] Historic England. 2016. Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management. Historic England Advice Note 1.
[15] Wallace, B. 2010. Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. Warwickshire County Council.
[16] Fairclough, G. 2011. A Prospect of Time. In Bell,S., Herlin, I. & Stiles, R. (eds.) Exploring the Boundaries of Landscape Architecture. pp. 83-114

6.2.7 Partnership Working

Relationships with those other organisations and sectors with an interest in devising sustainable futures for England's environment and landscape depend on being able to communicate about current understanding of how a place developed and thus a more historically grounded view of its potential future. HLC facilitates working with such partners, including other environmentalist organisations, and especially those whose data is also arranged spatially as areas displayed and analysed via GIS. They often find that HLC is in a form and language they can engage with, the types being akin to geological, soil or habitat types, for example, and at a level they can understand, being a generalised interpretation of current understanding.

6.2.8 Community Engagement

Also benefitting from that easy access to historical understanding are communities and individuals with an interest in particular aspects of place and the historic environment, whether their interest is based on interest in a place's past or on concern about its future.

6.3 Recommendations

Whilst a significant amount has been achieved within the course of the current project, there is still more which can be done to realise the full potential of the Oxfordshire HLC. It is a valuable tool for use within the planning process and will provide a key component of future advice given within the county, by those engaged with both planning and conservation strategy or policy. By expanding capacity modelling, developing Historic Landscape Character Areas, and offering training the HLC dataset can be made more robust, more useful, and more usable. It can feed into established systems of advice, offering an additional and different perspective on the historic environment to complement existing sources of information.

This section sets out three recommendations for the Oxfordshire HLC: two areas of further work on the dataset and training.

6.3.1 Further Work on the Oxfordshire HLC

6.3.1.1 Capacity Modelling

Preliminary work on capacity modelling has indicated the potential contribution this data can make to strategic planning and policy. A case study was conducted which looked at the capacity of the historic landscape to accommodate the scenario of large-scale urban development on the fringe of five major settlements in Oxfordshire. The results of this study showed landscape types where development was likely to have the greatest impact on historic character.

Three recommendations are made as a result of this study:

1. **The expansion of the capacity for urban development study to all parts of Oxfordshire**
   The five case studies of Banbury, Chipping Norton, Oxford, Wallingford, and Wantage have illustrated the potential of this approach for other parts of the county. At a Stakeholder Group Meeting for the HLC project on March 20th 2017, the desire to expand this study across Oxfordshire was expressed by a number of individuals present. The results of this study would provide a key evidence base for Local Development Frameworks which are

under pressure to find suitable locations for housing and other developments across the county.

To expand this survey to the whole county would require the assessment of the remaining HLC Types not covered by the case study. The impact of urban development on each of the remaining HLC Types would need to be determined and mapped. This information could then be shared with relevant local planning authorities.

2. **The development of a site-specific methodology**
   Currently, capacity modelling is type-specific; the sensitivity value assigned is based on the historic landscape type and not any consideration of individual sites. Consequently, capacity modelling must be used in conjunction with other data which provides more information on particular parts of the landscape, for example HER data. This 'first stage' could, therefore, be built upon and expanded to produce a model for the whole county which combines type-specific values weighted by site-specific data.

   By merging the HLC capacity modelling data with site-specific data in a GIS, information from individual sites could be incorporated in the assignation of a sensitivity value. This would identify those sites in the landscape which would be particularly vulnerable to specific change scenarios and those which might have greater capacity for change.

   The results of this could be shared with all local planning authorities to aid in their strategic planning and policy.

3. **The modelling of additional change scenarios**
   At this time only one change scenario has been modelled, large-scale urban development, but it is suggested that other scenarios are considered to reflect common developments and contributors to landscape change in Oxfordshire. The identification of sites suitable for woodland plantations, agricultural intensification or deep ploughing, major infrastructure projects, or mineral and waste sites, for example, would all benefit from this information.

   It is suggested that the HLC Stakeholder Group identify key areas where this information would be advantageous and that these form the basis of additional change scenarios.

6.3.1.2 Historic Landscape Character Areas

Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCAs) will have many uses and can form one of the frameworks for Historic Environment Action Plans (HEAPs) which set out proactive plans for the county's historic environment and address key threats to it. A methodology to create HLCAs has been developed and applied to the North Wessex Downs AONB HLC and it would be possible to use a similar method across the whole county. The Oxfordshire HLC integrated the AONB's HLC data and has close parallels to this dataset; the AONB's method for defining HLCAs, therefore, could be applied to the rest of the county.

An Oxfordshire HLCA would be the first step towards creating HEAPs for the county and for the HLCAs and HLC Types within it. HEAPs have been completed in Cornwall, Lincolnshire, Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs, West Berkshire, East Devon, the Isle of Wight, and the Limestone Landscapes of East Durham and are at various stages of preparation in Worcestershire, Warwickshire, and the North Wessex Downs.

6.3.2 Training

The Oxfordshire HLC is a large and complex dataset with many applications, to fully realise its potential it is recommended that a series of training workshops is held for key users. These would include, but are not limited to, members of the following teams/user groups:

- County Council:
  - Planning Regulation
    - Minerals and Waste Policy
    - Archaeology (see below)
  - Policy and Strategy
  - Environment and Resource Efficiency
  - Localities Policies and Programmes
- District Councils:
  - Planning Policy
  - Development Management
  - Design and Conservation
  - Archaeology (Oxford District)
- Local Communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans

Workshops would be tailored to the requirements of each user group and would include an introduction to HLC, its applications, familiarisation with the map resource and linked database, and worked examples specific to each group. The aim of the workshops would be to equip each attendee with the information to go away and use HLC data independently in their day-to-day work. South Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse District Councils have already expressed an interest in participating in these workshops, recognising the valuable contribution this data can make to their planning and conservation processes.

Given the particular benefit of HLC data for Development Control Archaeologists, it is suggested that a tailored workshop be offered for those working with the County Council (this could be extended to include the City Archaeologist). This would focus on how HLC data can be used to enhance and broaden the advice currently provided by the archaeological service.