



Operational Guide: How to assess the Historic Landscape of Oxfordshire's capacity for new Woodland

A tool to aid the selection of appropriate new woodland sites in Oxfordshire from the perspective of its historic landscape, with an additional table suggesting a series of simple design adaptations to reduce the impact on historic landscape character.

This document sets out how to use the results of a study on the historic landscape's capacity for new woodland. Data from Oxfordshire were utilised, but the methodology outlined could be applied elsewhere. The study was conducted by Oxfordshire County Council as part of the Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (2012-2017), funded by Historic England. The aim of the study is to enable better judgements regarding the positioning of new woodland in relation to the historic landscape and the accompanying Data Table can be used to inform better site preparation, species selection, and layout. For further details about the research, including the identification of a need, the definition of a methodology, initial results, and the raw data, please consult the full report which has been archived on the Archaeology Data Service's (ADS) webpage.¹

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a broad-brush approach to landscape. It recognises that all parts of the landscape have historic value and that all parts of the landscape have seen the effects of human activity. It assigns all parts of the landscape to a landscape type (known as the HLC Type), dependent on shared current and previous characteristics or 'attributes'. Types include: Ancient Woodland, Planned Enclosure, Educational Facilities, and Industrial Estates. It records the characteristics of the landscape in a database and maps them using a Geographic Information System (GIS).² Containing information on aspects such as the rarity, age, and significance of the whole landscape, the resulting dataset can be used to assess capacity for change. One such change scenario might be new woodland creation.

Analysed Scenario: *The creation of new woodland with an area in excess of two hectares and comprised of mixed broadleaf tree species.*

What follows is a step-by-step guide of how to use the results of this study. For comprehensive use, it should be used in conjunction with the study report and the HLC report, both archived with the ADS.

*Please note, all judgements about capacity have been made by HLC Type and results, therefore, are not site-specific.

Step 1: Identify current HLC Type(s) present at a proposed site

Firstly, the current landscape or HLC Type(s) present on a site needs to be established. Whilst HLC projects are relatively new and up-to-date (the digitisation of Oxfordshire was completed in 2016),

¹ <https://doi.org/10.5284/1043765>

² For more information about HLC and the Oxfordshire project, please consult the full report available here: http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-2814-1/dissemination/Text_Files/Oxon_HLC_Full_Report.pdf.



this can be achieved by consulting the Historic Environment Record (HER) and requesting the HLC data for a site. In Oxfordshire this information can also be obtained by viewing the online interactive map available at bit.ly/oxonlandscape. Instructions on how to use this map can be found online at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape.

HLC projects, however, are not currently being updated so, as we move further away from their completion dates, it grows increasingly likely that landscape change has already occurred on a site. As time passes, therefore, it is recommended that the HLC Type present at a site is assessed by the applicant using recent aerial or satellite imagery or, preferably, a site visit and the definitions of HLC Types listed in the local HLC project.³

Step 2: Locate the corresponding HLC Type(s) in the Capacity for New Woodland Data table

When you have identified the HLC Type(s) on site, consult the Capacity for New Woodland Data Table and find the relevant data record(s).

For each HLC Type the following is recorded:

	HLC Type	Landscape type
Impacts	Effect on Legibility	How likely is the scenario to change the ability to read or see a landscape's history? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	Impact on Archaeological Remains	How likely is the scenario to disturb known or predicted archaeological remains? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	Impact on Historic Built Structures	How likely is the scenario to disturb historic built structures? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	Change in Landscape Character	How likely is the scenario to affect how the historic landscape contributes to the overall landscape? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	Effect on Semi-Natural Components	How likely is the scenario to disturb historically significant ecosystems or landforms? (Weighted Score -0.5 to -2)
	Effect on Amenity	How likely is the scenario to affect amenity activity? (Weighted Score -0.5 to -2)
	Impact Value	Sum of impact scores
	Significance Value	Sum of significance indicators identified during the course of the Oxfordshire HLC
	Capacity Value	Impact Value multiplied by Significance Value
	Capacity Category Rating	Capacity Values divided into quintiles
	Possible Adaptations	Twelve suggested possible adaptations to illustrate how capacity might be increased (each scored as 1)
	Adjusted Impact Value	Impact Value plus each applicable possible adaptation
	Adjusted Capacity Value	Adjusted Impact Value multiplied by Significance Value
	Adjusted Capacity Category Rating	Adjusted Capacity Values divided into quintiles

³ The Oxfordshire HLC Type Glossary can be downloaded here: http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-2814-1/dissemination/Text_Files/Oxon_HLC_Type_Glossary.pdf



Key things to note are the Capacity Category, which is ranked from Low (Category 1) to High (Category 5), Possible Adaptations, and Adjusted Capacity Category.

Capacity Category indicates the likely capacity of an HLC Type for new woodland: the lower the capacity the bigger the impact new woodland might have on historic landscape character. Conversely, HLC Types with the highest capacity could be viewed as the most appropriate parts of the landscape for new woodland.

Possible Adaptations are a selection of twelve possible modifications which could be applied to new woodland proposals to reduce the impact on historic landscape character. These are not an exhaustive list, but serve to illustrate just some of the ways in which new woodland proposals could be made more sensitive to the historic landscape. Possible Adaptations relate to the character of the HLC Type being considered.

Adjusted Capacity Category incorporates Possible Adaptations and illustrates how capacity could be improved.

**Whilst the Oxfordshire HLC project is current, Step 1 and Step 2 can be fulfilled by consulting the map layers created by this research. These are available online at bit.ly/oxonlandscape. Use the instructions on the project webpage⁴ to operate the layers and then left-click on the map to bring up the information in the table above.

Step 3: Consult additional site specific resources and professionals

This resource provides baseline evidence and should be used in conjunction with specialist advice from historic environment specialists. Applicants should contact the Historic Environment Record Officer to see whether any heritage assets have been identified at their proposed site and the Archaeological Officers for advice on archaeological potential. These specialists in Oxfordshire can be contacted by email at the following address: archaeology@oxfordshire.gov.uk. For those working elsewhere in the UK, contact details for Local Authority archaeologists can be found here: <https://www.algao.org.uk/membership>.

Step 4: Reduce the impact on the historic environment

With information from steps two and three, applicants are better equipped to identify sites for new woodland where the impact on the historic environment is likely to be lowest and those areas where the planting of trees might be most harmful. The twelve suggested Possible Adaptations can then be used to suggest ways in which new woodland can respect, maintain, or enhance the historic environment.

Using this tool can enable better informed new woodland planning and design: not only can applicants seek to reduce the impact on the historic environment they can also identify opportunities to enhance and restore it. From identifying the most appropriate sites to the species and position of individual trees, this tool promotes more sustainable development, a more resilient historic environment, and a healthier natural environment.

⁴ www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape