



# Operational Guide: How to assess the Historic Landscape of Oxfordshire's capacity for Urban Development

*A tool to aid the selection of appropriate urban development sites in Oxfordshire from the perspective of its historic landscape.*

This document sets out how to use the results of a study on the historic landscape's capacity for urban development. 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 urban development in relation to the historic landscape. 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of a need, the definition of a methodology, initial results, and the raw data, please consult the full report which has been archived on the Archaeology Data Service's (ADS) webpage.<sup>1</sup>

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).<sup>2</sup> 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 urban development.

***Analysed Scenario:*** *Large-scale urban development in Oxfordshire. The scenario includes: housing, commercial sites, educational, religious, and health facilities, and supporting infrastructure.*

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), 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

<sup>1</sup> <https://doi.org/10.5284/1043765>

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-2814-1/dissemination/Text_Files/Oxon_HLC_Full_Report.pdf).



map available at [bit.ly/oxonlandscape](http://bit.ly/oxonlandscape). Instructions on how to use this map can be found online at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape](http://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.<sup>3</sup>

## Step 2: Locate the corresponding HLC Type(s) in the Capacity for Urban Development Data table

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

For each HLC Type the following is recorded:

	HLC Type	Landscape type
Impacts	<b>Effect on Legibility</b>	How likely is the scenario to change the ability to read or see a landscape's history? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	<b>Impact on Archaeological Remains</b>	How likely is the scenario to disturb known or predicted archaeological remains? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	<b>Impact on Historic Built Structures</b>	How likely is the scenario to disturb historic built structures? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	<b>Change in Landscape Character</b>	How likely is the scenario to affect how the historic landscape contributes to the overall landscape? (Weighted Score -1 to -4)
	<b>Effect on Semi-Natural Components</b>	How likely is the scenario to disturb historically significant ecosystems or landforms? (Weighted Score -0.5 to -2)
	<b>Effect on Amenity</b>	How likely is the scenario to affect amenity activity? (Weighted Score -0.5 to -2)
	<b>Impact Value</b>	Sum of impact scores
	<b>Significance Value</b>	Sum of significance indicators identified during the course of the Oxfordshire HLC
	<b>Capacity Value</b>	Impact Value multiplied by Significance Value
	<b>Capacity Category Rating</b>	Capacity Values divided into quintiles

The key field to note is the Capacity Category.

Capacity Category indicates the likely capacity of an HLC Type for urban development: the lower the capacity the bigger the impact urban development 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 urban development.

\*\*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](http://bit.ly/oxonlandscape). Use the

<sup>3</sup> 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](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-2814-1/dissemination/Text_Files/Oxon_HLC_Type_Glossary.pdf)



instructions on the project webpage<sup>4</sup> 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](mailto: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 urban development where the impact on the historic environment is likely to be lowest and those areas where development might be most harmful. This tool, therefore, promotes more sustainable development and a more resilient historic environment.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/historiclandscape)