

A place's past guides a healthier future

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This paper considers how the future of a place would be more sustainable if deliberately tied to the threads inherited from the past. Such linkage would support the endurance of the cultural meanings that the place's character, fabric and patterns embody and would also more easily gain the commitment of society to ensuring those meanings were known and respected when decisions were being made.

If a place's 'affordances', those properties of it, like fabric, character and meaning, that 'are both objectively real and psychologically significant' (Thompson 2013, 26) were taken into account in planning, we should expect improved individual and communal well-being. Those people who live, work or play within such a place, or who value it from a distance would have more satisfying, life-affirming and enjoyable experiences in a place whose past more actively informed its present and future, in the sense that decisions were clearly being taken that rested upon respect for the place's inherited qualities.

People appreciate places differently; indigenous communities and others develop different attachments to the same place and in those parts of the world without clearly defined indigenous communities ways of valuing will still be contested between different communities of place and interest. Values also change, often in response to the likelihood of alterations to a place (Herring 2013). A place may be 'any part of the historic environment, of any scale, that has a distinctive identity perceived by people' (English Heritage 2008, 72). Being dependent on perception, places may themselves be difficult to pin down to the degree of resolution that devices like Impact Assessment normally require.

One way that the affordances of a place may be assessed and evaluated is through heritage values, most understandably dragooned under those four set out in *Conservation Principles*, themselves derived in large part from the Burra Charter (ibid; Australia ICOMOS 1999). They comprehensively encapsulate how any society, group or individual anywhere might evaluate a place.

The pleasure obtained from a place informs its **Aesthetic value**, drawn from how people are stimulated sensually or intellectually by what they see or experience in the place. **Evidential value** comes from the place's potential to yield evidence from investigation and research that will increase people's understanding of the past, whether limited to the place itself or more generally, based on its type. Evidential value is often privileged by those working in the heritage sector as it accords most closely with their primary interests, but improved understanding also strengthens each of the three other ways of valuing. **Historical value** derives from how people make connections with past people, events or aspects of life via the place, through the processes of illustration and association, both of which increase the experiential pleasure gained from a place and from its intangible culture. Finally, **Communal value** develops from the meanings of a place for those people who relate to it through either collective experience or memory, and perhaps comes closest to addressing the 'affordances' mentioned above. It includes the symbolic, social and commemorative aspects of relationships with place (English Heritage 2008, 27-32).

In England heritage values are expected to be used ‘to prompt comprehensive thought about the range of inter-related values that may be attached to a place’ (English Heritage 2008, 27), usually in the context of careful consideration of the effects of a proposed change, such as in an impact assessment, or when developing an Historic Environment Action Plan or a Conservation Management Plan, or when looking more strategically at potential changes. It is expected that all values will be strengthened by knowledge about the place.

Historic England, the arm’s length government body that champions and protects the historic environment in its part of the UK, has for some time recognised the benefits for personal and societal well-being that derive from careful curation of place. In 2000, as English Heritage, it published an influential discussion document entitled **Power of Place** in recognition of the influence of the historic environment on senses of identity, belonging and purpose, each of which contribute to individual and communal well-being. It published **Conservation Principles** in 2008 and has more recently promoted the concept of **constructive conservation** (English Heritage 2013) which extends the requirement to find ways of managing the historic environment to support economic and social needs at the same time as nurturing the relationships that people have with place.

Heritage values and constructive conservation therefore underpin Historic England’s approaches to impact assessment. Paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG 2012) requires Heritage Impact Assessments from those intending to make changes to heritage assets – buildings, structures or monuments with heritage significance, whether they are designated or not. And as elsewhere in the world, Environmental Impact Assessments are prepared ahead of major developments, like infrastructure and renewable energy schemes, and these usually include archaeological, built heritage and landscape assessments.

Impact assessments make extensive use of mapping, spatially representing places, proposed changes, and strategies designed to counter negative aspects of those changes. The mapping used in impact assessment does not always make full use of spatial representations of current understanding of the origins and meanings of historic places, or the whole historic landscape, that which lies beyond and around and contains the familiar ‘historic assets’ (usually buildings, monuments or sites).

Landscape is defined in the European Landscape Convention as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’ (Council of Europe 2000). As such, all is landscape, the whole of a street, quarter, Montreal, Canada, the sea, the world, and all landscape is historic. All is humanised, whether physically altered or not, and so all places contain meaning and by extension value, all of which can be appreciated through one or more of the four ways of valuing introduced above. In terms of Impact Assessment it also means that the historic landscape and the values attributed to it cut across and so are of direct relevance to each of the other main strands: ecological, social, economic, etc. This means there will always be contestation between approaches as well as between communities of interest, as Impact Assessment anticipates and accommodates.

The concept of landscape accepts and encourages dispute and debate, recognising that the earliest European definitions as ‘Landskap’ revolved around the traditional or customary

arrangement of things in a land, 'the "things" themselves originally being the subjects dealt with at the assemblies of people at the gathering places called Things. Here, communities discussed disputed matters of common concern, or the "common things that matter", usually matters of rights to use land, whether commons or not' (Fairclough and Herring 2016, 190; and see Olwig 2013). An Impact Assessment is a formalised version of the gathering of knowledge and opinion that would be presented at a Thing, or at the Council Fires of the Mohawks at which those gathered recognised their responsibilities for place and for the life within it, as mentioned in her welcome to the Montreal conference by Chief Christine Zachary-Deom (see <http://www.kahnawakelonghouse.com/index.php?mid=1>).

In England current understanding of the historical basis of landscape is most systematically presented in the Historic England-led programme of historic landscape characterisation (HLC). Historic maps, aerial photographs and current historical understanding are the principal sources used to describe, interpret and categorise the attributes that make an area landscape, mostly those derived from past change. HLC or methods allied to it, have been used elsewhere in the world, including the Historic Landuse Assessment that covers the whole of Scotland and characterisations of parts of Wales, Ireland, mainland Europe and the USA (Herring 2012, 494).

HLC can be used in impact assessment when HLC polygons are considered in the same way that heritage assets like buildings and monuments are, being assessed and scored according to the scale of the proposal's predicted impacts (e.g. Highways Agency 2007). HLC can form a spatial framework for assessment of sensitivity to change that follows the broad principles of impact assessment, but may also be applied to development control or more strategic planning, the latter sometimes being beyond the formal planning process. Assessment of sensitivity (or capacity, or opportunity) starts from the appreciation, shared by the established practice of Impact Assessment, that landscape and places do not have an inherent vulnerability or sensitivity to all types of change (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2002).

In a four-stage process the still-developing Historic England method first considers all the ways a form of change, a scenario, might affect a place; its impacts or its effects, whether positive or negative. In stage 2, it assesses the vulnerability, capability or propensity of a place (whether it be a specific HLC area or a generic HLC type) by considering how the scenario's effects would impact upon the systematically recorded attributes upon which the characterisation was based. Then, in stage 3, it considers how much the vulnerability or capability that is established in stage 2 matters to society by assessing how significant, or how highly valued are those aspects of the place (area or type) that are vulnerable to the change. The four Conservation Principles ways of valuing (above) may be used in such modelling of significance. The final stage has the degree of sensitivity established through combination of the scores from stages 2 and 3: vulnerability or capacity, combined with significance or value.

Such sensitivity assessment may be presented in a narrative form or via scoring, whether numerical, or through well-established impact assessment grading terminology (such as large, moderate or slight adverse effects). Care is taken not to mechanically read off decisions from scores or grades, which are used rather as prompts to more thoughtful consideration in areas that score especially high or low in terms of sensitivity.

Sensitivity modelling may be undertaken for a particular place (a plot earmarked for change) or may be applied more generically to a region, enabling more strategic decisions to be framed by those responsible for planning or guiding change. Generic scenarios might include the direct and indirect effects of climate change and other environmental change, but more often involve change planned for economic, social and infrastructural reasons by states or their agencies, or by businesses. Sensitivity may also be modelled for other scenarios such as neglect, or even for carrying on with long-established ways of using a place (as an alternative to changes that some might regard as more beneficial, or better for well-being).

As sensitivity is scenario dependent, its modelling for HLC types in Cornwall, in SW Britain, scored vulnerabilities and significances (or values) differently in relation to three forms of renewable energy – wind turbines, solar farms with panels fixed to anchors and solar farms using driven stanchions. Scores displayed in the HLC's GIS inform more strategic thinking on what parts of Cornwall might be more or less appropriate for installations of each type of development. This was expressed as the level of risks and costs that a developer of such installations might expect to incur in different types of historic landscape: the risk of encountering significant below ground archaeological deposits and the costs involved in not developing where they lie or of adequately excavating and recording them in advance of the development (Cornwall Council 2010a; 2010b).

As the assessment of significance included 'amenity and community value', a proxy for Conservation Principles' Communal value (see above), this approach included weighting for attributes that contribute to affordances and thus individual and community well-being and health. As the importance of landscape for maintaining well-being becomes better understood it may be expected that the weighting of such attributes might be increased in future similar exercises. Ways of ensuring that all communities of interest have a role to play in sensitivity assessment will also continue to be developed.

Ideally sensitivity modelling is used strategically, upstream of detailed proposals for development. For example, renewable energy providers in Cornwall can now get a better idea of risks ahead of preparing initial proposals.

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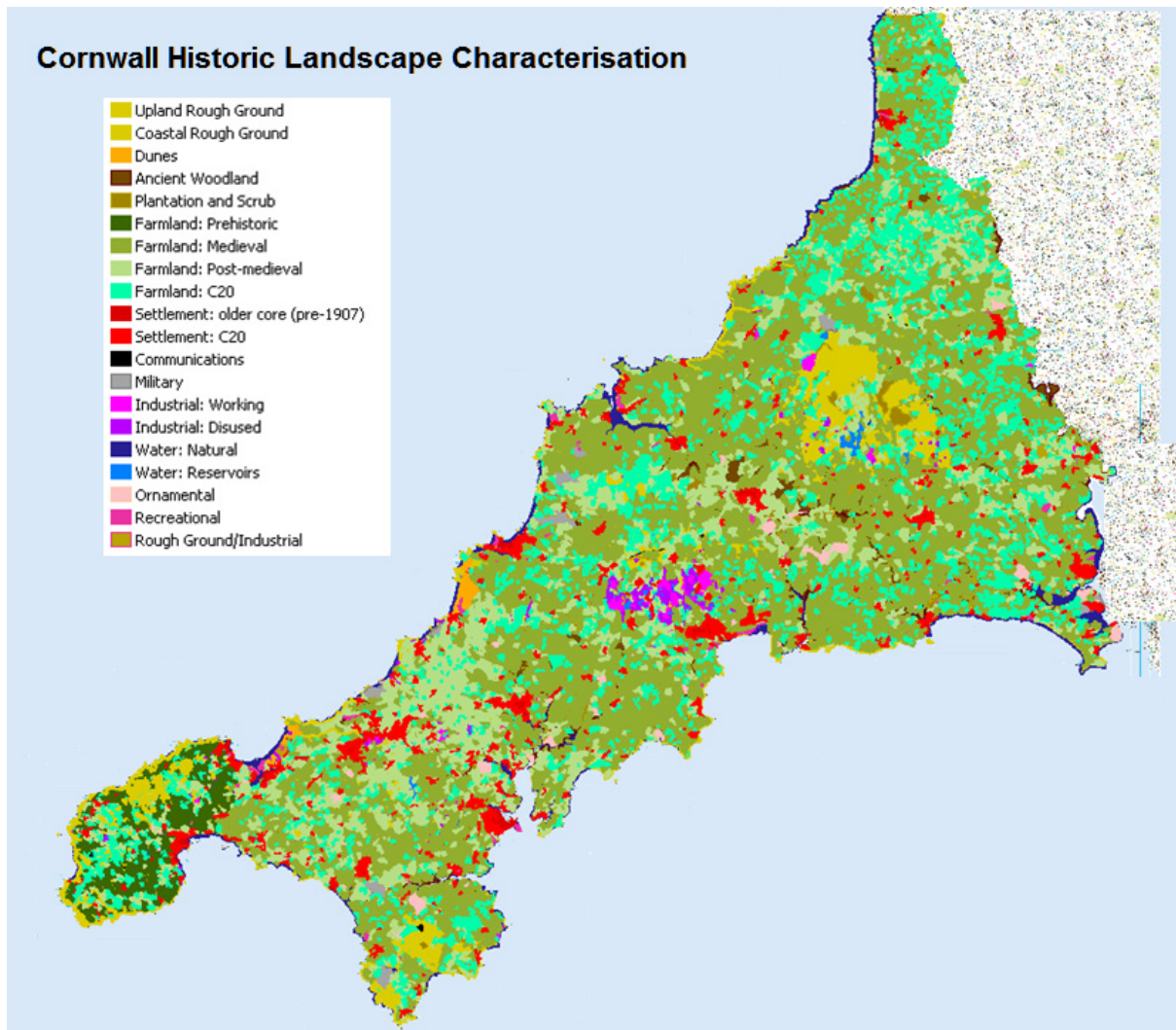


Fig 1 Historic Landscape Characterisation of Cornwall, a framework of current understanding, through which the past and future can be debated and designed (Copyright Historic Environment Record, Cornwall Council)