

## Historic England - Historic Landscape Characterisation

<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/methods/characterisation/historic-landscape-characterisation>

### Guiding principles for HLC

- The present-day landscape is the main object, though characterisation of that will require understanding and representation of a place's history. Landscape in an intensively occupied, used and experienced place like Britain is more about history than geography: its most important characteristic is its time-depth; the appreciation that change and earlier landscapes exist in the present landscape
- Not only is the historic landscape itself the product of change, but continuing change, whether rapid or gradual and incremental, is a key part of its character. Characterisation recognises that landscape is and always has been dynamic and that society and its decision makers are most often involved in the careful management of change rather than preservation in the face of it
- HLC-based research and understanding are concerned with area not point data
- HLC itself provides a valuable context for understanding individual heritage assets
- Semi-natural features (woodland, rough ground, hedges etc.) are as much a part of landscape character as archaeological features; in Britain, where all parts have been affected by the actions of people, bio-diversity and aspects of 'wild' topography (like scree, cliffs and marshes) are cultural phenomena. The value of habitats, communities and species is increased, not diminished, by acknowledgement of their historical meaning.
- HLC does not attach an expert's ascription of significance or value, recognising that these are not immutable. The ways that the heritage sector and wider society appreciate aspects of landscape, or certain HLC Types, have already changed considerably since HLC was first developed in Cornwall in 1993
- All aspects of the landscape, no matter how modern or fragmentary, are treated as part of historic landscape character. HLC does not concentrate on areas that might be considered more important by archaeologists, landscape historians, or planners, or indeed by developers, government departments or local communities. The aim is to ensure that the whole of a region is treated even-handedly, that there are no unregarded white bits on an HLC map and that all users can have confidence that the material is of consistent quality
- It is possible and desirable to use the records of a place's attributes that HLC contains in its database and that have informed assignment of places to HLC Types to prepare statements of significance and to model degrees of sensitivity to particular change scenarios
- Characterisation is designed to be a spatial framework that can accommodate people's views, enabling collective and public perceptions of landscape to sit alongside more expert views
- Users of HLC need to be confident that it is reasonable and robust material, so the process of characterisation is transparent, with clearly articulated records of data sources and methods used
- For the same reason, HLC maps and text have been made to be jargon free and easily accessible to users. Most HLC results are integrated into other environmental management records, most often HERs.