Recharging the Power of Place

Valuing local significance

Contents

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Foreword

Places do not become old, they evolve. As the Government states in its vision for the future of the historic environment *A Force for our Future*: 'England's history is a gradual accumulation of movement and arrivals, new stories attaching themselves to old.'[1] This process of evolution is complex, driven and checked by the varied values and capabilities of the times. It is unpredictable. We cannot anticipate the technological or cultural shifts that will shape how we will perceive and use places in the future. It is also uneven. Think of how seaboard cities have risen to dizzy heights, only to suffer severe economic decline as new forms of transportation have sucked trade away from their ports.

The novelty of our modern era, however, is the extraordinary scale, pace and degree of change affecting our surroundings. At times, the net effect is a dramatic break with the past, epitomised by the sudden appearance of housing developments on greenfield sites that make no reference in their layout or design to the contours or context of their surroundings. A parallel trend is the appearance of near identical details, buildings and landscapes in different locations. The installation of high street store fronts leading to an homogenisation of our streets, or the standardised planting along dual carriageways, are examples of this 'dislocation' of places from their past.

Such changes also have huge impacts on people and communities – disconnecting people from the places around them as well as places from their past. This is reflected by the level of concern people continue to express about the loss of the local historic environment. Significantly, such concern tends not to be nostalgic longings to go back in time, but more immediate desires for historic things to be safeguarded because they continue to enhance the quality of life and relationship people have with the places around them today. The call is for decisions to be thought through – to be based upon a more sophisticated ambition than simply short-term economic return, and for changes to enrich rather than to impoverish life. As such, these concerns should lie at the heart of current debates about the 'liveability' of places, capturing public value, generating social energy and fostering a sense of community, civic pride and responsibility.

In terms of the historic environment, many policies and programmes have been developed to enable those things felt to be of social and cultural value to society to be identified and safeguarded. The notion of designating and protecting features, sites and buildings according to national criteria of excellence or rarity is perhaps the most important set of measures. Examples of other initiatives include the creation of conservation bodies, such as the National Trust, the establishment of amenity groups and local museums or the flourishing of literature that celebrates the distinctiveness of place. Although the mechanisms are different, both top-down legislation and

bottom-up responses are rooted in a shared understanding of the unique ways the historic environment enhances life.

Despite this shared understanding of the role and contribution of the historic environment, connecting expert and community values is a real challenge. The systems and processes we have in place to identify and protect our historic assets can fail to capture what it is that matters most to people. These are the challenges that many within the historic environment sector have begun to address and as this report demonstrates there is already a wealth of good practice on the ground – good practice which could have a wider relevance.

Key lessons are that there are no simple or prescribed answers. The most successful initiatives are those that understand communication and managing information to be fundamental tasks. For example, images are used to capture a thousand words. Subjective words are used to convey why a place matters to a certain group of people. Maps are used to pull together huge amounts of different information. In all such situations, the key task is to be clear about why something is considered important and to whom. Significance is established in relation to owners, visitors, specialists, the future prosperity of a particular area or the nation as a whole.

The methods described in this report are all about this process of collective evaluation. The skills needed to manage these processes are many and challenging. Negotiation, communication, facilitation, information, analysis: this is what those leading the field are becoming good at. This is working towards

democracy in action. What is particularly heartening from a historic environment perspective is that there need not be a hard and fast distinction between community and expert values. Both sets of views can be rooted back into a common appreciation of diversity, idiosyncrasy, depth of character, creative expression. When we look at the history of how particular places came to be protected, we can see that local initiative was very often the driving force. People have long understood the many benefits the historic environment brings to our lives and the ways in which it underlies so many other aspects of economic and social life.

A shared understanding of the implications of decisions affecting our inherited resources is at the heart of efforts to reveal and apply dimensions of local significance to the process of managing change. It is for this reason that the debate has so much to offer wider discussions about the liveability of places, sustainable development, well-being, localism and quality of life. Here, in the mapping of parishes, the enquiries by design, the statements of significance, people are testing techniques for creative decision-making about our shared resources. It is a stock of experience and innovation that the Government, local authorities and all those involved in the management of our shared heritage should be interested in.

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Introduction and Summary

This report has been commissioned by the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the National Trust and Heritage Link as part of their on-going work to promote innovative approaches to protecting the historic environment and local distinctiveness.

This report leads on from the historic environment sector's report *Power of Place: the future of the historic environment* (2000), the Government White Paper *The Historic Environment: a force for our future* (2001) and the 2003 consultation paper *Protecting our Historic Environment: making the system work better*. These all emphasise the need to take full measure of the local significance of the historic environment as a totality. To quote:

'*[T]he designation system does serve to reinforce the sense that the historic environment can be defined precisely, quantified even, in terms of formally listed buildings or scheduled monuments. These decisions are taken by central government on the advice of professionals within a framework of national criteria but do not always take account of other factors that might be of importance to the local community. … The Government wants to ensure that policy-making in this area takes proper account of this wider perception.*'
    The Historic Environment: a force for our future, p 30 (2001) DCMS/DTLR

'*The proposals in this paper are designed to ensure that we have a respected means of deciding what needs protecting which reflects not only the knowledge of experts but also the values of our diverse communities.*'
    Protecting our Historic Environment: making the system work better, p 2 (2003) DCMS

'*To succeed, our approach to the historic environment must stop being piecemeal – a token façade, an earthwork isolated in arable. As in the natural environment, the overall health of the habitat is as important as that of individual species.*'
    Power of Place, the future of the historic environment, p 5 (2000), English Heritage

This report focuses on the challenge of understanding and protecting the 'remarkable commonplace' as much as the precious and the rare. It examines the task of safeguarding those historic features that are not designated as exceptional but which matter because they bring profound meaning and benefit to all our lives. Its aim is to show why these features need to be valued, whether large or small, hidden or visible, built or melded in the landscape, and how we can best incorporate an understanding of their full significance into wider processes of policy and planning. In doing so, it consolidates and builds upon the growing body of innovative practice unfolding across England and the UK, much of which takes an integrated approach to evaluating, managing and enhancing the quality of our surroundings. It also highlights wider links to current debates about local quality of life, civic pride, localism, social energy and connecting communities with the people making the decisions on their behalf.

Some of the key lessons to emerge are that the historic environment has long

been valued by communities for its wider contribution to our quality of life but that if the true significance of this is to be reflected by policy and practice a collaborative effort is essential. Experts should seek to tap into the knowledge and enthusiasm of local communities to help develop a shared knowledge upon which decisions can be made. There are a range of tools that can not only help **engage communities** in a meaningful way but also connect expert and professional views with those of the community. These need to be shared and further developed, and **working cultures** necessary to make them work fostered within relevant professional and other fields.

Even with this knowledge, however, unless an **integrated approach** to the management of our surroundings is adopted through, for example, the use of **characterisation** tools, small decisions can combine to undermine the integrity, beauty and functioning of a place. This leaves people feeling disconnected from their surroundings as things that matter to them are lost. Lost too are opportunities for wider benefits such as safe access to public spaces, a sense of place, community identity and economic regeneration.

A further lesson is that protection alone is not enough, as much damage can arise through neglect – physical neglect as well as a failure to recognise the existence or value of a feature. We need to work towards a broad **duty to care** for the historic environment and to recognise the wider benefits it brings. All of this demands appropriate **skills** and **resources** at a national, regional and local level to ensure such an approach can be implemented.

Local Significance

'The world is a sum of its parts and all the parts are local.'[2]

This chapter provides the context for the discussion and recommendations that follow. It examines what is meant by the local significance of the historic environment and why its appreciation is fundamental to creating places that are animate with connections to the past and possibilities for the future.

The historic environment

The historic environment is all around us. It is the rare and the commonplace, the living and the manufactured, that above ground and below. Think of a view – a streetscape, a farmstead, an open moor, a city roundabout – and there will be features that have endured from the past, even if they lie hidden beneath the soil.

Evidence shows that people not only care about the historic environment but view it as a totality. According to a Mori poll conducted in 2003, nine out of ten people consider their area counts as heritage as much as stately homes.[4] Over a million people enjoyed Heritage Open Day in England in 2003, with some of the most popular destinations being unlisted buildings.

Designated places form one prized part of this totality and their special status is registered according to agreed national criteria. Their significance will also have a local dimension. A listed church may be a popular place for weddings, a stately home where family members once worked or a scheduled monument a focal point for a culturally diverse community.

Let the gaze travel and similar connections can be made to other, undesignated features in the historic environment, both large and small. A richer narrative unfolds: the patterns of fields, the breadth of alleyways, a set of worn-down steps, an orchard, the gates to a disused factory or name of a hospital wing can all resonate with, and be valued by, local people and people who visit or work in the area.

Dimensions of local significance

The historic environment tells us stories about the past. Places record technological change, cultural shifts, the limits set by the natural world upon human endeavours and inventions devised to resolve practical problems. Here is evidence of the making of places: dramatic interventions and slight change, innovation and endurance.

This composite whole, this richness of evidence of past events, is of huge significance to life today and decisions about the future. The historic environment gives each place an evolved **character** – a distinctiveness that makes it possible to recognise it as 'somewhere in particular'.[5] As with meeting a person, this sense of character forms the basis of all other attachments, including the profoundly important feeling of **belonging**. Almost everyone recognises that just as they have a mother tongue, so there is a place that has pressed its idiosyncratic

Key point
People care about where they live, but what they care about is the whole of their historic environment, not just a series of individual sites and buildings.[3]

Key point
There are many reasons why the historic environment takes on a local significance.

geography into their imagination as home. People form strong attachments to places they have lived or worked in or visited.

People care about their local historic environment because it gives greater **depth** to places. It presents evidence of continued adaptations and social change that have taken place and inspires fresh perspectives upon what the future could hold. Take transportation – places are strung across by roads and canals, harbour ports and old tram yards, airfields and railways. These linkages continue to be driven by and direct the location of people and industry, shaping the rise and fall of local economies and defining the fabric of one place compared with another.

The historic environment is valued at the local level because it provides strong connections to particular events or people felt to be important. A war memorial, a former missionary school, a bridge over a gorge: such features can illuminate important stories about an area and generate a pride of place and sense of community. Historic features also forge links to distant places and people, offering

a basis for understanding cultural diversity today.

Function is important. Historic places are often valued because they continue to work well. They may provide shelter or a means to cross a river, a convivial place to do business or a useful space for storage, a sanctuary or a source of learning. They are especially valued if their functions would be technically difficult or prohibitively costly to replace, as is often the case.

Historic places, buildings and other features, whether designated as special or not, can embody a particular **quality** of design, materials, craftsmanship and ingenuity. Some details can be small, such as the wishes of a benefactor carved into a cattle trough or the elliptical cut of a window pane, and easily overlooked. Others seem larger than life, such as the sheer drop of a railway cutting, or length of a Medieval ditch. Historic or handwritten signs with their idiosyncratic lettering can be highly expressive.

The appreciation of human achievement and inventive use of materials connects to

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Dimensions of local significance of the historic environment

> defines the evolved and distinctive CHARACTER of a place
> supports the profoundly important feeling of BELONGING
> gives greater DEPTH of meaning to places
> provides CONNECTIONS to important events and people from the past
> delivers a valued FUNCTION
> embodies a cherished QUALITY of design, materials and craftsmanship
> represents an EFFICIENT use of resources
> is the source of a shared sense of enduring BEAUTY

a further reason why the historic environment is significant, namely that of the **efficient** use of resources. Why waste that which could find a new use? The story of the historic environment is one of reinvention – the spelling of place names shifting over generations, of farm houses being converted to inns, of roman paving recycled into a chapel, of woods becoming fields and then woods again. While such changes can be dramatic, it is rarely without some kind of recycling, whether in the use of materials or through a kind of physical knit between the new and old.

Yet another reason for valuing the local historic environment is that of **beauty**. A commentator recently noted that beauty is a word seldom used today.[6] Yet it is what people look for when they visit places of historic interest and hope to find at home. As with quality of design, it can be found in surprising places. Gate locks can be beautiful. Views can be beautiful. The form and fit of a town might seem beautiful when viewed from the surrounding hills. Redundant industrial infrastructure can have a beauty all of its own.

We can see how deeply these dimensions of the local historic environment matter when we consider how people respond to their decline and loss. What might at first be disregarded as nostalgic reactions are better understood as disappointed aspirations for the present and future. Things of worth are too frequently disregarded and future possibilities closed down without good reason.[7]

Valuing local significance

We can see that the historic environment provides the basis for a personal sense of place and belonging. As such, it immediately connects with current debates about the liveability of places and community cohesion. It is a record of cultural events and associations – a social memory – to which people can relate. It offers a depth of place that grounds life in meaningful ways and provides valued practical functions. It also embodies an inheritance of ideas, materials, skills, technological innovations, energy and creative vision to celebrate and conserve.

Understanding the local significance of the historic environment should underpin wider agendas such as creating and maintaining

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The value of the local historic environment registered as loss

> registering a DULLING down of local distinctiveness
> feeling ALIENATED from places
> a disorienting sense of ROOTLESSNESS
> important social and cultural connections SEVERED
> DISAPPEARANCE of familiar places and useful spaces
> the STANDARDISED manufacture of environments
> a WASTE of resources
> feeling DEPRESSED by the appearance of the new

a high quality environment, economic stability,[8] localism and social inclusion. In **social** terms, the historic environment shapes how we live our lives as individuals, households and communities. It represents a truly invaluable storehouse of information, knowledge and understanding about why people and places are like they are and offers insights into what they could become.

In **environmental** terms, the fabric of the historic environment comprises an incalculable mass of material and energy to be conserved and re-used with care. The landscape and form of settlements, the arrangement of infrastructure, the availability of land and buildings and the application of traditional knowledge and skills – this is the existing framework within which the strategic use of energy and resources should be planned. The historic environment also provides different landscapes and ecological habitats for flora and fauna. Think of the huge variety of cultivated landscapes, from drained fen edges in Norfolk to the grazed heights of the Peak District hills.

There is a very large body of research that demonstrates the great **economic** sense of conservation-led regeneration. As stated by the Government, 'policy-makers need

to regard the historic environment as a unique economic asset, a generator of wealth and jobs in both urban and rural areas.'[9] In terms of existing infrastructure, evidence shows that strength of character attracts people and businesses to an area. In creating new spaces, considerable savings can be made by incorporating existing designs, materials, infrastructure and layouts. There are lessons to be learned and ideas generated by using and reinterpreting existing design solutions, technologies and details. There are the very real cost advantages of marketing places to a public keenly aware of the value of the historic environment. And there is the ripple effect that reinvestment in a site or building can bring to an area as a whole.[10]

Missed opportunities

Despite the progress being made in increasing awareness about the historic environment since *Power of Place* and *A Force for our Future*, the historic environment remains largely misunderstood and under-valued. At a national level, the *State of the Historic Environment Report 2003* records distressing loss. This loss is echoed locally. Across England, community-based organisations are battling to save historic places of character

Multiple benefits of protecting the local historic environment

> enhancing the QUALITY OF LIFE for individuals and communities
> improving the LIVEABILITY of places
> bringing MEANING to localism
> contributing towards SUSTAINABLE resource use
> helping to maintain BIODIVERSITY

from insensitive and often irreversible changes.

Since 1947 England has lost more than half of its hedgerows – over 330,000 km – due to hedgerow removal and lack of management.[11] Similarly, over 7,000km of dry stone walls were lost between 1947 and 1985; of those left, 96% are in need of restoration.[12] In London, historic Smithfield Market is threatened with demolition and may be replaced by giant office blocks. More than 1,000 (3.6%) Grade I and II* Listed Buildings are at risk of loss through neglect and decay.[13] The total number of Listed Buildings at risk is much higher, as Grade I and II* account only for the top 8% of Listed Buildings.

It seems that despite the Government's commitments, the value and multiple roles of the local historic environment are not being registered. Opportunities are being missed that, once lost, are irretrievable. Remarkably, the Government intends to remove some of the few existing policy instruments which respond to local expressions of significance, such as through the proposed removal of local landscape designations from planning guidance (draft PPS7) in England.

There is another way – a way being pioneered by enlightened policy-makers and practitioners who recognise the value in assessing what we have before deciding what to change and in engaging communities in this process.

We need to understand the full potential of places in order to unlock unexpected solutions; make connections between things often held apart; and involve people because their knowledge, values and experiences are essential to making

informed and skilful decisions.

A conservation-led approach should encompass the historic environment as a whole whether designated or not. The aim should not be to reify the historic environment but to achieve an applied and precise understanding of the irreplaceable nature of the historic environment, its significance and the roles it plays in delivering social, economic and environmental goals. The challenge is considerable in areas of regeneration, as the case study from Clapton illustrates.

Without a suitable brief to guide development, recent changes made to the local built environment seem to detract from rather than enhance its character. The local planning authority has already given signals that future new riverside building heights and styles might be set by those of a minority of pre-existing unsympathetic block housing, rather than being guided by more traditional building scales, and informed by a larger vision of economic prosperity and quality of environment.

Another example is the fate of England's market towns. Recent research carried out by CPRE reveals how across England there has been a steady wearing away of the character of market towns in many rural areas. While the changes are often incremental, they combine to affect significantly the quality of life in such places and set limits on their futures. The loss of historic market squares to car parking is a common problem, as is the development of large scale retail outlets, or of new housing that makes little or no reference to existing buildings, styles, traditional street layouts or the surrounding landscape.[14]

There are similar problems in the wider countryside. A developer may convert a series of farmsteads without a clear understanding of why certain building designs were used, or of the relationship between buildings and their immediate setting. Agricultural land may gradually become denuded of hedgerows, headlands and other features that give the landscape its distinct appearance. Loss may be on a large scale. An inappropriately located telecommunications mast, retail store or

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Case study:
Clapton Lea riverside

The Clapton Lea Riverside area in Hackney, London, provides a useful illustration of a widespread problem: that of a failure to integrate heritage into future proposals for an area. This is a stretch of the Lea Navigation, an ancient trading artery, characterised by a range of waterside buildings and structures which bear witness to past communities and industries. They include large timber-frame warehouses, recently vacated, with their gantries cantilevering out over the water; cobbled walkways; an inland dockway, now filled-in; a small nineteenth century school or 'mission room' (latterly used as an engineering workshop); and a boarded-up Edwardian pub which local people are trying to save.

Of all these historic landmarks, only the mission room is afforded statutory protection by being listed as Grade II. Other historic buildings, spaces and features remain relatively neglected and vulnerable to demolition and disposal. This is despite the very lively connections that exist between the different features – between the stone of the school house and the hefty sets under-foot, the street names referring to distant trading places, the pockets of green set against the backdrop of Walthamstow's rustling marshes – and the overall strength of character of this urban quarter.

The area needs revitalisation. There is an acute shortage of play areas and vandalism is widespread. Unemployment is high. Transport links need improving and the streets remain unsafe at night. These and other issues have been identified by neighbourhood groups and associations and fed into wider regeneration agendas. These groups have identified through consultation and research the positive contribution the local historic environment could play in delivering safer streets, attractive play areas, new employment opportunities, and a more ecologically rich environment. Such resourceful initiatives could put Clapton Riverside on the map and engender a shared sense of pride in both the area's vibrant past and potentially exciting future.[15]

Instead, the local historic environment seems to have been lost from sight, suspended somewhere between the past and the present. It is neither seen as sufficiently 'historic' to be worthy of protection nor sufficiently immediate to be of relevance to neighbourhood renewal. The one building that is listed remains disused, unattached as it is from any wider vision for the revitalisation of the area that could help inform a sensitive strategy for its reuse. A similar situation exists for locally listed buildings.

farm diversification proposal, can utterly destroy the visual appearance and tranquillity of a whole parish.[16]

The net effect for so many areas is 'death by a thousand cuts' – the gradual erosion of the distinctiveness of an area, loss of what people love about it and closing down of viable alternatives for strengthening its distinctive character.

Across the country we can see a dualism between special places and an 'unremarkable rest' playing out in the landscape. Pockets of protected woodland sit isolated within a denuded agricultural landscape. There is often a sudden disjuncture between the quality of street furniture within a conservation area and that found outside it. In an inner city area, a listed church might be hard to reach safely on foot and be blighted by a large office block development.

Why is this the case?

Why are places 'struggling to maintain their integrity'?[17] Why are people's views and concerns not being registered? Why is our shared understanding of the irreplaceable value of the historic environment not being translated into imaginative strategies for managing change?

There are several root problems. The first is that the historic environment is often framed within people's minds and within aspects of legislation as something separate from the rest of its surroundings. While it is absolutely essential to be able to discern between different components and prioritise those that merit special protection, this fragmented approach fails to recognise the importance of looking at the historic environment as a totality. What is needed is

a comprehensive approach that recognises the way in which the historic environment contributes towards the overall character, functioning and quality of place.

The second problem, linked to the first, is that the historic environment is often assumed to be the **preserve of trained specialists**. Such professional expertise is invaluable, but it needs to be combined with local knowledge and ideas. This requires collaboration with a wide range of people who live and work in an area in order to develop a shared understanding of the significance of the historic environment as a part of the meaning and functioning of place. To achieve this we need a shared vocabulary and methods which articulate value and significance in ways that work for both specialists and local people.

A third relates to the **reactive nature of decision-making**. The fate of a particular site is often decided without reference to its wider local significance and in response to proposed changes. Instead, a pro-active evaluation of the significance of a site, in relation to its setting, the character and history of an area and its future potential, should guide decisions.

The problems described above result in part from the relatively **low value** decision makers can ascribe to the historic environment – a fourth root problem. Research shows that the capabilities of local authorities to deliver measures necessary to protect the local historic environment are uneven and in many cases limited by inappropriate organisational structures. To quote an example from the English Heritage report *Heritage under Pressure*:[18] 'Archaeology and building conservation might be together or separated or staff may be scattered across

several departments. Conservation staff may be one or two steps removed from the planning departments and the members they need to advise.' What is needed are creative working cultures that enable people at all levels to develop innovative solutions in conversation with others.

The fifth root issue concerns **resources.** While creative working cultures do not necessarily require additional resources or automatically arise from increasing resources, there does need to be an adequate level of funding available to support key posts and services. Net expenditure on historic environment conservation has declined by 8% in real terms over the last five years.[19] One result of resource limits has been cuts to key posts. One in five local planning authorities does not have a conservation officer.[20] Another has been an inability to take up partnership opportunities and promote innovative practice. For instance, between half and two-thirds of all local authorities have no specialised information systems to support their conservation work on historic buildings and areas. For many local authorities, the challenge is to run to stand still.

Key areas for action

How can we move towards a situation where the local significance of the historic environment is registered as integral to a comprehensive, collaborative and pro-active approach towards managing change? What steps are needed to achieve the vision of conservation-led development? How can we most effectively identify and evaluate significance, and incorporate it into wider processes of decision-making? How can we capture what it is that matters most to local people?

The foundation must be creative **working cultures** and political will. Only if people have the support, skills and incentives to think in innovative ways will it be possible to develop imaginative alternatives. The next essential step is providing opportunities for decision makers to engage with people who have the knowledge and insights to reveal the full significance of the historic environment. What does it mean to the local community? How was it built and maintained? How is it used by residents and visitors? What potential lies in its fabric? Values, knowledge, information, ideas all need to be explored and registered as the basis for developing a sound understanding of the potential and needs of places.

Local knowledge about the historic environment needs to feed into a rigorous understanding of the overall character of an area and how it would be best managed – a process described as area **characterisation**. In this way, the local significance of the historic environment can be examined in relation to and simultaneously with a whole range of other issues and programmes, including health, education, management of the public realm, the quality of the natural environment and cultural strategies for an area.

What follows is **integration**. The aim is to develop strategic frameworks for planning, management and land use decisions that set out in clear terms the evolved character of an area, the value of its historic environment and, crucially, how the local historic environment should be taken on board and enhanced as a means to deliver a broad range of policy goals. These issues are examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

Key point

Recognising the historic environment as a totality has profound implications for the way we identify and evaluate significance.[21]

Good Practice

'Everything rests upon sound knowledge and understanding.'[22]

The previous chapter demonstrated that the inevitable changes to our surroundings are most likely to benefit society when they are based upon an understanding of the local significance of places. This approach represents a creative mindset that allows for connections to be made between things that have endured from the past and aspirations for the future, and between expert and public views.

This chapter looks at the practicalities of implementing such an approach, examining the working cultures needed to support three inter-locking areas of action, namely, community engagement, area characterisation and integrating findings into policy and service delivery. In each case, examples are used to illustrate wider trends in good practice and as a contribution to the growing body of knowledge and experience in this area.

Working cultures

Creative team work

As noted in the Introduction, the importance of taking a creative approach to protecting and enhancing the historic environment has been registered by the Government. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and English Heritage also emphasise the need for innovation, highlighting a range of skills that are integral to effective practice.[23] As noted in the English Heritage report *Heritage Under Pressure*, clear guidance on the importance, quality of provision and outcomes of local authority conservation services are required alongside the creation of skills strategies.[24]

Underlying these recommendations is the call for creative team work. Understanding and safeguarding the value of the local historic environment relies upon joined up thinking and working across local authority departments and with other partners. Hampshire County Council is at the forefront of developing new ways of delivering strategic goals through teamwork. *Investors in People* is used as the basis for maintaining a creative working environment where staff can develop new processes of problem solving and partnerships. The result is a steady stream of initiatives aimed at involving a wide range of organisations and communities in delivering good practice on the ground.

Managing information

The Test Valley case study illustrates the importance of being able to successfully generate and manage useful information. This includes: identifying what information needs to be gathered; assembling information from different sources; organising, analysing and interpreting the findings; and communicating lessons learnt. As noted in the Government's White Paper *The Historic Environment: a force for the future*, 'for all organisations concerned with the historic environment, a solid evidence base for policy making is essential.'[25] Developing a sound evidence base is also a requirement in the preparation of Local Development Frameworks.

It also shows the *central* importance of developing shared information bases. At the national level, English Heritage publishes an annual State of the Historic Environment Report as an important resource for decision makers. Across the country, a variety of information resources are being promoted and put on-line for public access. These include: Sites and Monuments Records (SMR's); Historic Environment Records; local lists and lists of buildings at risk; the findings of surveys and outputs from characterisation work; and general history about an area, including oral histories. These are often linked with other useful sites developed by local societies, agencies and promotional bodies such as visitor information centres.

Projects, such as that being pursued by

Case study:
Test Valley Community Landscape Project

An example of what can be achieved through joined up working is the Test Valley Community Landscape Project. The aim of this project is to carry out a landscape character assessment of the Test Valley area that can be used to inform future planning and land management strategies. Previous research by Council staff into attitudes towards environmental issues amongst hard to reach groups in rural areas revealed that many people felt detached from the land that surrounded them, knew little about how it was managed and felt almost no responsibility towards its care. Unless project officers actively sought out the views of such groups, the assessment would not address the views of a real cross-section of the community.

The project therefore broke down into a series of stages, the first being to develop a methodology for engaging people and developing a shared understanding and awareness of the issues affecting the landscape. This outreach work was highly innovative in its drive to explore issues with people on their terms and included a team member with excellent social research skills. It yielded a great deal of information about how people perceived and used the land, and provided a useful opportunity to share information about wider social and environmental issues. The second stage allowed findings from these discussions to be presented back to participants and objectives for the future management of the area to be explored. People also had a chance to reflect upon how participating in the assessment process had influenced their relationship with the landscape within which they lived.

The feedback was impressive. Many people felt that the process had been positive, triggering them to get involved in the future in other community initiatives. For the project officers, their comments unlocked problems associated with public participation exercises and highlighted the need to further improve communication and research skills. The process delivered important information that would significantly improve future management plans as well as point towards positive steps to take regarding access to the countryside, health and education programmes.

Buckinghamshire County Council, are unfolding across the country enabling new information to be added to a shared body of knowledge that is multi-purpose. This knowledge can be used to guide planning decisions, as well as management agreements for designated sites and other areas such as conservation areas. It can be used to inform wider economic and cultural strategies for different areas and inform the preparation of local development frameworks. It can also catalyse and combine with local initiatives on the ground, such as exhibitions in public libraries, local research programmes carried out by amenity societies and campaign groups, school based projects and a flourishing of cultural events.

Innovative partnerships

The management of the local historic environment rests upon its owners working in partnership with government bodies, agencies, communities and others and within a framework of clear regulation,

Key point

Developing and implementing policies and good practice can only be achieved through partnership.

Case study:
Buckinghamshire County Council Historic Environment Database

One good example of managing information about the historic environment is work underway at Buckinghamshire County Council. Here the strategic plan is for information known about the local historic environment to be gathered together in a coherent way and made publicly accessible to the widest possible audience. So far, Heritage Lottery Funding has been secured to share digital data held by the existing Sites and Monuments Record with a wide range of audiences. At a later date, information from other sources, such as Historic Landscape Characterisation work, is to be added to help create an on-line and publicly accessible Historic Environment Record.[26]

Case study:
Building Preservation Trusts

One inspiring example of innovative partnership is the support local authorities can give to Building Preservation Trusts. Building Preservation Trusts are community based charities set up with technical and financial support from the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF). Their raison d'être is to regenerate the historic built environment, in most cases by finding a new use for a building. This is done with help not only from the AHF but also local and regional government, regeneration agencies and other funding sources.

Take, for instance, the work carried out by the Royal Leamington Spa Building Preservation Trust – one of 750 Trusts across the country that together complete 20 to 30 projects each year. Founded in 1995, it has successfully acquired and restored what had originally been Smart's Imperial Sulphurous Medicinal Fount and Ladies Marble Baths located along Clements Street. In this case, as in most, the reuse of the neglected buildings has helped revitalise the wider area by creating new facilities and jobs and by improving the environment as a whole.

policy and where appropriate, public funding. Management agreements and other forms of guidance, such as design guides and development briefs, are used to direct change. Other tools and initiatives, such as publicity leaflets, awareness raising campaigns and exhibitions, are used to encourage people to care for their local historic environment in certain ways or to hear their views and experiences.

Decision makers draw upon networks of specialists to develop robust proposals, including experts from English Heritage, conservation practitioners and research consultants. Some local strategic partnerships, which comprise people from a range of sectors, are intimately involved in different ways in the delivery of conservation policies and specific programmes. Tourist boards, the media, education providers and libraries are all involved in some way or other in interpreting and shaping the local historic environment. The work of Building Preservation Trusts demonstrates what can be achieved through partnership, as the case study shows.

Engagement

Reasons to promote engagement

One reason to engage with local communities is simply to ensure that the historic environment is enjoyed and appreciated to the full. The achievements of the Civic Trust's Heritage Open Days illustrate how people from all walks of life value the opportunity to explore historic places that they might otherwise never get to experience. The growing number of places opened as a result of local community initiative is inspiring, as is the number of people who visit these places.

So, too, is the remarkable range of spaces to see many of which do not fit into conventional notions of heritage buildings.

A second reason is to explain to people what the fate of an area is likely to be and proposed changes that might affect their lives. Something as simple as changing the mowing regimes for a piece of public grassland or coppicing a hedgerow might raise questions and concerns in the minds of local residents who use the space for recreation or dog walking. Larger decisions, such as the redevelopment of a disused airfield or reasons for demolishing a factory, need to be communicated and negotiated as such places will have played some kind of significant role, good or bad, in the lives of local residents.

A third reason is to engender support for a new initiative or to change the ways in which people use a space. There may be a need to encourage visitors to respect the fragility of an archaeological site or tranquillity of a cathedral. The aim could be to create a publication or web site that promotes an area. Vandalism of an historic canal could be combated in partnership with local schools and youth groups.

The fourth reason, explored in greater detail below, is to initiate a dialogue with people about an area and what could happen in the future. As one local authority commentator noted, 'Heritage Open Days engender a sense of civic pride and unleash a wealth of local talent and knowledge that is much appreciated.'[27] This unleashing of talent and knowledge is central to safeguarding the local historic environment and all that it offers and can bring wider benefits to the community too.

Reaching people

Engaging people calls for a keen awareness of who needs to be reached, how they might best like to receive and comment upon information and contribute their knowledge, understanding and skills, and how to feed back ideas or decisions that arise. Not everyone feels comfortable expressing their views in official terminology or recognises familiar aspects of their area as historic, as demonstrated by the Test Valley Project. Public meetings, specialist committees and other conventional ways of creating public debate are important techniques for engagement, but they can marginalise some social groups and individuals who feel uncomfortable or intimidated by their format and tone.

Reaching people and facilitating communication requires specialist skills and experience. There is a large and exciting network of organisations and practitioners, many of whom work closely with local and regional arts and voluntary networks. Their role in developing sensitive and inclusive means of engaging different social groups is of enormous value. A good example is the Association of Heritage Interpretation, which operates as an umbrella organisation for community practitioners in the field.

There are also national, regional and local organisations dedicated to promoting community involvement in discussions about the fate of their area, such as the Architecture Centres Network. This is a growing network, with centres across the country including in Wakefield, Derby, Liverpool, London and Newcastle.

What successful initiatives reveal is the incredible enthusiasm people have for exploring where they live – a sustained and instinctive interest which policy and decision makers need to respect and upon which dialogue about the future can be built.

Key point

It is essential to engage with people from their perspective by building on activities already taking place and working with people skilled in communication and community development.

Case study:
Architecture Centre Network

Each Architecture Centre works to raise awareness of the local historic environment in highly resourceful and original ways. These include, for example, commissioned art work, exhibitions and installations, collaborations with the local media and outreach work in schools and colleges. The focus of such work is highly varied. It might be the quality of streetscapes, the history of public sculptures, the stories of old place names or future of school playgrounds. In each case, the aim is to build upon people's natural curiosity about where they live in positive ways. Take, for example, the 'Building Memories' project co-ordinated out by The Building Exploratory in Hackney which involved pupils from local schools in creating a map of Newington Green complete with a timeline of the history of changes that have taken place in the area.

Faciliating dialogue

There are a large number of ways to engage people and facilitate dialogue about the local historic environment. The Local Heritage Initiative (LHI), a national grant scheme run by The Countryside Agency, helps local groups investigate, explain and care for their local historic environment, traditions and culture. An example of a project is the creation with grant aid from the LHI of heritage trails in Bingham, Nottinghamshire. Work carried out by the local association includes surveys of the area, the production of leaflets and maps and a series of guided trails that open up and make accessible the area's rich history. Some of the tools

and techniques used by LHI and other similar projects are listed below.

These tools allow for the interpretation of places: a process of establishing the meaning of a place to people through communication. Two particular interpretation techniques worth considering are statements of significance and parish maps.

Statements of significance are essentially descriptions of why a building, feature or place is considered important. One valid use is by a conservation officer to explain to an owner that their building is listed on account of its architecturally significant ceilings. For the owner, the building's main

Key point

Once engaged, people need real and meaningful opportunities to express and exchange ideas and experiences.

Ways to facilitate dialogue

> 'alphabets' of local distinctiveness
> appraisals of local lists of listed buildings, designated areas and special features
> art installations
> award schemes
> commissioned writing
> community design events
> competitions
> cultural events and festivals
> exhibitions and demonstrations
> leaflets and postcards with opportunities for feedback
> mapping exercises
> parish maps
> research tools such as questionnaires and focus groups
> road shows and public stalls
> statements of significance
> talks and workshops
> video soap box
> visitor's books
> themed walks
> web sites and on-line discussions
> work with the local media such as newspaper supplements

significance might lie elsewhere – in, perhaps, the expansive gardens and sense of privacy. A visitor to the area might consider the façade significant as it represents what they see as the typical style of the town.

Significance is thus established in relation to someone or some firm idea, such as agreed criteria for listing and scheduling. As such, statements of significance always need to acknowledge their authorship and reference points. Whose views are being expressed? What

information was used? Such questions might at first appear challenging, unsettling as they do the notion of a definitive description of why a place matters. They are, however, necessary steps to reaching a clear and accountable consensus about the distinct and important features and qualities of a place, as illustrated by the remarkable success of parish maps, a community-based initiative.

Making a parish map has often provided a springboard to other action. In West

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Case study:
Parish maps

Parish mapping is a technique developed by the organisation Common Ground. As its name suggests, it involves a local community working together to create a map of its parish or neighbourhood. In the words of the organisers, the maps 'aim to encourage communities to chart the familiar things which they value in their own surroundings, and give active expression to their affection for the everyday and commonplace, whether in town or country'.[28]

Spurred on by this simple goal, a much more intricate process unfolds, as has been shown by the work carried out in West Sussex. In 1998, staff members of the West Sussex County Records Office launched the Parish Maps project, which aimed to create a series of maps for the millennium. Today, over 100 have been completed drawing upon the efforts of over 2,000 volunteers. It is a big community project and one which has brought about a range of unexpected benefits. Many people have found it a deeply enjoyable and convivial process. As one participant reported, 'It changed my life in this village. I am sorry the map is finished, but we are going to do more projects in the future.'[29]

The effect of dwelling details, establishing the human impact upon a piece of the natural world, talking with others about the past and the future and establishing what to register all cultivate a deep pride about a place and active interest in its future. The place is rendered special and whole in an expressive and accurate way. The ordinary and ugly can be quite as important as the spectacular and beautiful. The process can also be democratic as it calls for fair representation across the community. Just as with the Test Valley, organisers are required to contact all residents and explain in accessible terms the scope and nature of the mapping exercise. It also prompts discussions about the nature of the community. Whose views are being expressed? Should less attractive features be included?

Sussex, many groups have chosen not to disband but go on to develop other projects, such as oral history recording, creating village heritage trails or creating local societies. The maps are also being gathered together and interpreted by the County Council in order to identify trends and particular issues facing communities across the area. In other words, they are being valued as a rigorous form of landscape assessment and an expression of community aspiration.

Validating engagement

This issue of what happens following engagement and interpretation projects, in terms of lessons learnt and ensuring the best use of information gathered, is of great importance. The aim of most initiatives is to widen debate, to include the broadest possible range of people and places. They can provide the democratic foundation for more detailed characterisation work and the development of specific proposals for action.

Yet, a dilemma remains. Such initiatives yield a richness of information in such forms as personal memories, photographs, hand drawn sketches or comments left in a visitors' book. However, because of subjective content and varied presentation, there is a tendency to see such findings as somehow immiscible with that gathered from more formal consultation mechanisms, such as questionnaires and surveys.

This represents a serious loss. Opportunities to deepen our understanding of the nature of places and their possible futures are disregarded. As important, people's enthusiasm for participating in future initiatives can also dissipate if their views and contributions go unregistered. It is also an

unnecessary loss for, as explored below, techniques exist to assimilate and apply different types of information in robust and rigorous ways.

Area characterisation

Capturing value

Area characterisation describes a range of tools used to combine local community perspectives on an area with other sources of information to develop a clear overview of its evolved character. This information is then used to develop principles and specific proposals to help manage change in positive ways. Many of the techniques used in area characterisation overlap with those used to engage and facilitate debate at the local level. Others overlap with more semi-statutory procedures, such the appraisal of Conservation Areas or local lists. All draw upon professional expertise and can help inform statutory decision-making, as explored below.

Take Village Design Statements as one example. This initiative was developed by the Countryside Agency to provide a robust way for communities to help determine the character and future of their village. As set out in current planning guidance, statements can 'offer a framework for engaging local communities in constructive debate about ensuring that new development in their area fits its surroundings and is in keeping with local character.'[30] Their use is advocated in the draft planning policy statement *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*[31] which will eventually replace this guidance.

The uptake of Village Design Statements has been impressive. The range of issues

Key point

Engagement needs to be validated as the necessary and intrinsically democratic basis for enriching the quality of decision-making about the local historic environment.

Key point

Engagement provides the foundation for inclusive debate about the meaning of the local historic environment to people's lives. Area characterisation is the next step and needs to be promoted as the way to combine local views with professional expertise in order to develop strategies for managing change.

Key point

A long tradition of community consultation and environmental evaluation techniques has been used to develop a range of highly innovative area characterisation tools.

tackled is very broad, and includes aspects of historic significance alongside others such as transportation, housing provision, wildlife conservation and access to green space. In Kent, for example, many communities have used the methodology as way of communicating to planners and developers building design details that would strengthen rather than undermine local distinctiveness within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Other area characterisation tools are used for larger scale analysis, such as the Historic Landscape Characterisation developed by English Heritage and Landscape Character Assessment developed by the Countryside Agency. Some apply to particular types of landscapes and settlements, such as Town and Village Design Statements and Conservation Area appraisals. Some have a more general application, such the Enquiry by Design methodology endorsed by the Prince's Foundation and English Partnerships (see below).[32] Others are specifically designed to be steered by

non-experts, such as the Placecheck method devised by the Urban Design Group. Characterisation can also be project- rather than area- based, for example, applying to a particular development proposal as part of an environmental impact assessment.[33]

There is also a wide range of organisations that work to co-ordinate projects, including: local authority teams; specialist consultants and environmental design professionals; organisations providing independent advice, such as Planning Aid and the Civic Trust; local amenity groups and societies, such as CPRE's branches and district groups; agencies, such as English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and CABE; and university based research groups (see *Useful Contacts* at the end of this report).

Expanding knowledge base

Although the focus, scope and scale of area characterisation tools varies, each tends to follow a common set of stages.

Key point

Area characterisation is an iterative process that draws upon different sources of information to generate findings that require review over time.

Area characterisation tools

> Historic Landscape Characterisation
> Landscape Character Assessment
> Natural Areas
> Conservation Area appraisals
> Town Design Statements
> Market Towns Health check
> Village Design Statements
> Neighbourhood regeneration appraisals
> Area appraisals e.g. Conservation Area Appraisals
> Development design tools e.g. Enquiry by Design
> Farm audits
> Community design tools e.g. Planning for Real and Placecheck

These are to gather information from a wide range of sources, to analyse this information according to clear criteria, to assess the implications of the findings – to ask 'so what?' – and to disseminate findings.

Countryside character assessment provides a useful way to see how these stages fit together. At the outset, the focus of the project will be identified. In some cases, the prompt will be a particular proposal, such as to assess the suitability of an area for landfill, to improve access to rural footpaths or to decide upon the boundaries for a designated area. A wide range of people will need to be consulted during the first phase and in many cases tools for engagement will be used to reach those people who might not otherwise volunteer their points of view. There will be desktop gathering of information and data as well as site surveys.

The material then requires analysis and evaluation in order to develop a characterisation of the area. This is a complex task as it will be in a variety of forms, including written and visual material, technical data and personal observations. On the basis of this area characterisation, decisions will be made about what steps to take next. The task may be to investigate a particular issue in greater depth. Area characterisation might also yield clear principles against which proposed developments can be assessed. The Countryside Agency's guidance on character assessment demonstrates the variety of possible outcomes and applications.

Great skill is needed to find ways to present the findings. In all cases, some kind of report is made publicly available that reflects upon the outcome of the assessment in the light of its original aims.

Examples of potential uses for Landscape Character Assessments

> information and awareness raising

Planning
> informing development plans and studies of development potential
> informing decisions about the nature, location and design of developments
> supporting and informing the development of policy
> contributing to landscape capacity studies
> contributing to Environmental Impact Assessments

Landscape conservation and management
> providing the basis for landscape management strategies
> helping to guide land use changes, agri-environment programmes and wider environmental schemes

Other outputs might include development guidelines, design guides or visual summaries of the character of areas available as on-line maps for local communities and developers to browse. In Cornwall, landscape characterisation has been used to help generate an exciting Heritage and Cultural Strategy for the county. There is also scope for partnering with other organisations such as schools, tourist boards and local libraries to further disseminate information gathered and prompt new action.

As the above illustrates, area characterisation becomes an iterative process. Lessons learnt from one initiative are communicated and form the basis for further discussion. Maps can prompt new perspectives, pointing towards alternative uses for places or ways to connect different strands of conservation and land management work. As the knowledge base about an area deepens, so it

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Case study: Enquiry by Design

Enquiry by Design is a collaborative process developed by the Prince's Foundation based upon a process of characterisation that is used to determine the direction and parameters of change for a proposed site. A core team of trained facilitators, including skilled design professionals and trained communicators, begins by consulting the local authority, would-be developers, landowners of sites in and around the area and other local interest groups on their hopes and concerns about the proposed development and future of the area.

Representatives are convened to work together intensively over 5-7 days to create an initial briefing which sets out the requirements for new development and growth. The number of participants can vary from a couple of dozen to several hundred. What is critical is that all key stakeholders and decision makers are there to present their views, explore ideas and reach a consensus.

The outputs can be startlingly positive and unforeseen. A recent project, run by the Prince's Foundation and English Partnerships, looked at the fate of a large site owned by the Ministry of Defence within the town of Aldershot. The Enquiry by Design produced a series of original and highly creative proposals, including recommendations on how to use historic settlement patterns and buildings both to raise the quality of new build development and to stitch the site more closely into the wider fabric of the town. And while the resources needed to sponsor the workshop were considerable, the clients all agreed that it represented a very significant saving of ultimate costs, as desired outcomes were developed and approved by key decision makers in a matter of a week rather than the estimated nine to fifteen month period more typically expected for this sort of planning process.

Enquiry by Design can thus be used to produce a specific development brief or more generally to feed into the development of a Local Plan.

becomes possible to make informed decisions about the most appropriate location for new development, its form, nature, scale and design, and for areas to be managed with greater sensitivity. And as the environment changes and new issues arise, characterisations are revisited and reviewed.

Informing strategies for planning and development

Landscape character assessments can be used for a variety of purposes and at a range of different stages for information and awareness raising, planning, and landscape conservation, management and enhancement.

A key issue for all approaches to characterisation is timing and making clear to participants the parameters of the exercise. It is important that characterisation work is carried out to provide the context for decisions rather than as a reaction to particular proposals. Timescales need to allow for local communities and other stakeholders to understand the issues, gather and prepare material and participate where appropriate in decision-making.

In promoting the usefulness of the Enquiry by Design technique, the then Minister for Housing and Planning emphasised 'the importance of developing innovative ways to involve local people in planning exercises and above all in thinking creatively.' He continued: 'This is the key to better planning and the design of sustainable developments.'[34]

He is right. Characterisation techniques such as Enquiry by Design represent a very sound investment of energy and

resources. The process is goal driven. Key stakeholders are identified and consulted. The principles that guide decisions are made clear. Local views are borne in mind alongside a very wide and rich range of information.

Most importantly, examining all relevant issues in an integrated way delivers qualitatively different kinds of decisions. The historic environment is advocated for and assessed alongside other priorities. This simultaneous analysis of different requirements and information allows for highly creative solutions to be discovered, tested and validated as part of a focused and innovative way of making decisions.

Integration

Joined up planning

Information and insights learnt from characterisation processes can be utilised in local planning, community strategies and the proposed new Local Development Frameworks. So, for example, Landscape Character Assessments are used to inform local plans, as in South Oxfordshire. Village and Town Design statements can be used as Supplementary Planning Guidance.[35] Knowledge gained can contribute to the preparation of development briefs or generate information and evidence against which a particular development proposal can be assessed.

There is a large body of detailed material that demonstrates the value of heritage or conservation-led regeneration, including the English Heritage report *The Heritage Dividend*, the DCMS/DTLR White Paper *A Force for our Future*, the findings of the Prince's Foundation's *Regeneration*

Through Heritage programme, recommendations from the Civic Trust's Regeneration Unit and other reports looking at specific kinds of historic environments, such as CABE's research into the potential for revitalising England's sea-side towns.[36]

Still wider, there are the stories of cities where cultural heritage has been at the centre of long-term visions of urban renewal. Liverpool is a good example of a place where the historic environment is understood to be the basis of a vibrant future, with its recently secured status as City of Culture signalling the inherent strength of such a strategy. As the Chairman of English Heritage noted,

'Liverpool's historic environment is a unique asset that can help provide a sustainable future for the city as it continues to change and develop.'[37]

Unlocking management issues

The case study of the Land Management Information System (LaMIS) in Hampshire demonstrates how a web-based resource can be developed to provide a range of advice and information to farmers and landowners on land-management, including how to manage land in a way that takes account of the landscape. AONB appraisals can also be used as an opportunity to communicate with landowners the reasons why they are

Key point

Sound knowledge and understanding of the local historic environment helps create sustainable land use management projects and programmes.

Case study:
Hampshire LaMIS Project

An inspiring example of how characterisation can improve land management is the Land Management Information System (LaMIS) Project co-ordinated by Hampshire County Council on behalf of the Countryside Agency, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Association of National Park Authorities and a wide range of other bodies.

The project aims to provide a map-based resource on the internet to assist farmers and land managers in decision-making and farm planning, particularly the preparation of their farm plans, business plans and agri-environment grant applications. To achieve this it has three components: an information base, including map-based data, interpretative information, advice and guidelines; software tools to assist in whole-farm planning; and an information exchange that allows farmers to share information with public bodies and the wider community, including online transactions for funding or regulatory purposes.

The project is geared towards meeting the business needs of farmers. At the same time, it enables county staff to show farmers how their land is part of a wider landscape, and how they can take advantage of various programmes aimed at enhancing landscape character and biodiversity. It also means farmers are equipped with information and advice that allows them to make a positive case to planners if they seek to develop buildings or land in new ways. Rather than being a characterisation tool in its own right, LaMIS is about disseminating and interpreting information of all kinds that the land manager cannot always access but that is necessary to make informed decisions.

being asked to manage their land in a particular way. In a similar way, Conservation Area appraisals offer vehicles for sharing with people who live and work in a Conservation Area why it is considered special and for taking on board their concerns and positive ideas for better management both within the Conservation Area and beyond.

Strengthening integration

Integrating sound knowledge and understanding about the local significance of the historic environment into wider processes of decision-making about planning and management makes unassailable good sense.

There is the advantage of the bigger picture. The historic environment underpins the liveability of places and makes a fundamentally important contribution to people's quality of life. It makes sense for decision makers to be alert to the ways in which people and places interact, and to be able to explore the extent to which proposed changes to the historic environment could help meet wider social needs.

There is the advantage of the long view. Looking back to see how places have evolved helps reveal both those features that are integral to their character and what future uses and functions could emerge. Above all, it makes sense to use the ideas and information gathered through wider public consultation to help unlock and explore the viability of different alternatives.

Yet, the status of the local historic environment and its links to conservation, planning, rural regeneration and

community strategies remains unclear. Core information resources, such as Sites and Monuments Records, are still not statutory requirements. How to link aspirations expressed in community strategies, Local Development Frameworks and local characterisation together is uncertain. How landscape characterisation and farm audits could inform each other and the implementation of the Entry Level payments needs clarification, as do the ways in which the future Integrated Agency will be able to inform future policies that relate to the local historic environment.

Key point

To achieve the desired integration of the local significance of the historic environment into wider processes of decision-making, the links between different statutory requirements and guidance relating to conservation, community strategies and the reformed planning system need to be clarified and strengthened.

Lessons and Recommendations

'Let us build on such devices'[38]

This chapter sets out key lessons learnt from this review and action needed to realise the full value and potential of the local historic environment to people's lives and the liveability of places.

Validate engagement

One of the most important lessons from this review is that the historic environment has always been a shared concern. A second lesson is that all heritage has a local dimension. For centuries, people have celebrated the distinct character of places and sought to protect historic features that give depth, meaning and practical ease to life. What people continue to lament is the disposal of or damage to such heritage without acknowledging its significance to the quality of life and the liveability of places and future potential.

Understanding the local significance of the historic environment is by definition a collaborative endeavor. Decision makers rely upon the knowledge and enthusiasm of local communities to reveal the value of the historic environment to people's lives, how best to protect and enhance it and the ways in which it can support wider social, economic and environmental objectives. There is a need to develop a common language in relation to the historic environment, which specialists and local communities understand. Engagement with communities needs be validated as the foundation for creating a shared knowledge base upon which decisions can be made.

> The heritage sector should work with the Government and other relevant bodies to validate the role of public engagement in caring for, and maximising benefits from, the local historic environment.

> The heritage sector, Government and other interested organisations should carry out research into the economic and social value of independent enabling bodies such as architecture centres and Planning Aid and the feasibility of extending their provision more widely.

> Heritage Link should continue to work with the Government, English Heritage, CABE and other relevant bodies to promote good practice in the field of local community engagement and to demonstrate the social and economic value of such work.

> The Government should work with the heritage sector and experts on community engagement to draw up guidance on how community engagement on the local historic environment should inform Community Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and Regional Spatial Strategies. The Government should avoid weakening those measures, such as local landscape designations, that already exist.

> The Government should include in future legislation the requirement to make available to owners and the wider community at the earliest possible date constructive information concerning the implications of their asset being designated, including potential benefits of designation and sources of specialist advice.

> Local authorities and national funding bodies, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, should recognise and encourage existing networks of organisations and specialist consultants to support and promote community engagement initiatives, including arts and environmental-based projects.

> Local authorities should carry out projects to raise awareness where appropriate of designated places, local lists and buildings at risk as part of wider programmes to celebrate the local historic environment.

> Local authorities should identify ways to include the local community's perspective in information made available to visitors about the historic environment of an area.

Promote area characterisation

Just as the strength of character of a place is built up from many component parts, so it can suffer from 'a death by a thousand cuts'. Small decisions combine to undermine the integrity, beauty and functioning of a place, leaving people feeling disconnected from their surroundings as things that matter to them are lost. Lost, too, are potential benefits, such as safe access to public spaces, a sense of community identity and opportunities for economic regeneration and diversification.

A key challenge identified in the report is the need to take an integrated approach to the management of our surroundings through the use of area characterisation tools. The historic environment needs to be looked at together with economic, cultural, social and environmental objectives. Only then can imaginative strategies for managing change be developed that reinforce positive connections between different policy spheres.

> The heritage sector should work with the Government, statutory agencies and bodies such as CABE and The Prince's Foundation to promote best practice in the field of characterisation.

> The Government should allocate English Heritage and the future Integrated Agency the remit and resources to advise local authorities on how best to develop and utilise landscape characterisation, Town Design Statements, Village Design Statements and other characterisation tools.

> The Government should commission research to consolidate evidence on the multiple benefits of carrying out work on area characterisation as the context for land use planning and land management decisions. A particular emphasis of the research should be the practical application of characterisation in policy, decision-making and practice.

> The Government, in its review of PPG15 and 16 and forthcoming heritage policy statements, should provide a clear national policy framework to support and encourage

the use of landscape character assessment in development plans and in planning and management decisions.

> The Government should ensure that the future Integrated Agency has the remit and resources to extend the work currently carried out by the Countryside Agency to promote landscape characterisation.

> Local authorities should place information gathered from characterisation work on-line as part of their Historic Environment Records.

> Local authorities should extend the brief of Conservation Area appraisals to include identifying ways in which the local historic environment could contribute towards delivering goals identified in Community Strategies.

Strengthen integration

Evidence points towards the need to cultivate a duty to care towards the historic environment to ensure that it becomes fully acknowledged and integrated into wider processes of decision-making. Much harm occurs through neglect or a failure to recognise its existence or value to the local community and society as a whole, in the first place. While regulation can protect designated heritage assets from wilful damage, it cannot prevent harm arising through neglect. Such a duty would help promote a more responsible, co-ordinated and positive approach.

A strong statement and clear guidance from the Government on how local significance should be taken into account will be vital if the Government's aspirations,

as expressed in *A Force for our Future* (paragraph 3.16), for ensuring local policy and decision-making takes account of community perceptions, are to become a reality. The proposal to downgrade the status of local designations in planning as suggested in draft Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) would make achieving this aspiration more difficult.

> The heritage sector should work with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), statutory agencies, and other organisations, such as CABE and The Prince's Foundation, to develop an approach equivalent in rigour to the Landscape Character Assessment methodology that could be used to inform land-use planning, development and management in urban areas. This methodology would be recommended to be included in Supplementary Planning Guidance, as is the case with Town and Village Design Statements.

> English Heritage should work with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the new Integrated Agency to ensure that the local historic environment and tools to assess its significance are bound into modernising the delivery of sustainable agriculture and forestry.

> The Government should consider introducing a duty of care requiring local authorities and other public bodies to take positive action to protect and enhance the historic environment.

> The Government, statutory agencies and advisory and local authority representative bodies should work together to develop guidance on appropriate models of teamwork and

joint working needed to secure effective management and protection of historic environments and hence deliver a 'duty to care'.

> The ODPM, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and English Heritage should work with the heritage sector to identify ways to strengthen protection for Locally Listed buildings.

> The Government, in its review of Planning Policy Guidance, particularly PPG1, 15 and 16 and forthcoming heritage policy statements, should provide a clear set of principles to promote a conservation-based approach to planning and development. This should include an explicit recognition of the value of the historic environment whether designated or not and of identifying and taking into account local significance in policy and practice.

> The Government should make clear the range of characterisation tools that should or may be adopted as or incorporated in Supplementary Planning Guidance.

> The ODPM and the DCMS should provide clear guidance on how information on the local historic environment should be incorporated into Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks and the delivery of local authorities' 'well-being' duty.

> The Government, in its review of PPGs 15 and 16, heritage policy and other appropriate statements should clearly state how the local significance of buildings, sites and landscapes (regardless of whether locally, nationally

or statutorily listed or designated) should be taken into account in the preparation of local development documents and Community Strategies.

> DEFRA should clarify how area characterisation can be integrated with farm audits to inform the assessment of entry and higher level funding for agricultural land.

Resources

As this report, and others, have shown, a conservation-led approach need not be restricted to specially designated areas or areas in need of regeneration, but can lead to more informed decisions about the way areas should be managed, planned, protected and developed. It can act as a catalyst for community engagement and responsible action and be a vital factor in securing areas' long-term prosperity and well-being.

This conservation-led approach should be endorsed where possible within new legislation and working cultures necessary to support creative decision-making and working practices should be promoted widely. Strategic assessment, monitoring and allocation of resources needed at national, regional and local level are vital to ensure that this positive approach can be implemented. This includes maintaining appropriate levels of funding for training, staff, service delivery and information technology.

> The Heritage Lottery Fund should recognise the success and continuing relevance of the Local Heritage Initiative and provide support to similar schemes in future.

> Advisory bodies, including English Heritage, CABE and the Countryside Agency, should work together with the Improvement and Development Agency to devise a co-ordinated strategy for the provision of training and advice to enable local authority personnel to evaluate, protect and improve the local historic environment effectively.

> The Government should take steps to ensure that the full range of specialist conservation advice currently provided by county councils continues to be available in future whether within county councils, sub-regional teams or in some other form.

> The Government should take steps to ensure there is no net loss of conservation staff as a result of the planning reforms and should deliver targeted increases in resources to remedy the shortfall of posts key to delivering good practice at district, county and regional level.

> The Government, regional planning bodies, regional historic forums, county, unitary and district councils should work together to secure arrangements at the appropriate scale, that make full use of and where possible complement and enhance existing capacity for conservation.

> The Government should make the provision of Sites and Monument Records and Historic Environment Records a statutory requirement at the earliest opportunity.

> The Government should make available targeted resources to enable all local authorities to achieve a necessary level of competence in information technology, including Geographic Information Systems, within a specified time-frame.

> The Government should make available necessary funding to allow for innovation in the development of team work and integrated policy development within local authorities.

> Local authorities should review their working practices, job descriptions and structures to support creative team work in planning and other services.

> Local authorities should identify key skill deficits and explore ways to use programmes such as Investors in People alongside other forms of training and job development to enhance in-house skills in communication and managing information.

Useful Information

Useful publications

*Building Sustainable Communities:
developing the skills we need,* Commission
for Architecture and the Built Environment,
2003

Heritage Counts 2003, English Heritage,
2003

Heritage Under Pressure, English Heritage,
2003

Lie of the Land, Campaign to Protect of
Rural England, 2003

*Protecting the Historic Environment:
making the system work better,*
Department for Culture, Media and Sport,
2003

*Power of Place: the future of the historic
environment,* English Heritage, 2000

Sustainable Urban Extensions, The
Prince's Foundation, 2000

*The Historic Environment: a force for our
future,* Department for Culture, Media and
Sport/Department for Transport, Local
Government and the Regions, 2001

*Town Design Statements: how and why to
produce them,*Countryside Agency, 2003

Valuing Our Environment, The National
Trust, 2001

Landscape Character Assessment, The
Countryside Agency, 2002

Useful contacts

Architecture Centre Network
The Architecture Centre Network
coordinates, supports and advances the
work of architecture and related centres.
The ACN seeks to secure greater
knowledge, access, participation and
influence, at all levels, in the creation of an
excellent built environment for all and
maintains this is an essential cultural and
civilizing element in an inclusive society.

70 Cowcross Street
London EC1M 6EJ
Tel: 0207 336 7378
Website: www.architecturecentre.net

Architectural Heritage Fund
The Architectural Heritage Fund is a
registered charity founded in 1976 to
promote the conservation of historic
buildings in the UK. It provides advice,
information and financial assistance in the
form of grants and low interest loans for
projects undertaken by building
preservation trusts and other charities
throughout the UK.

Clareville House
26-27 Oxendon Street
London SW1Y 4EL
Tel: 020 7925 0199
Fax: 020 7930 0295
Email: ahf@ahfund.org.uk
Website: www.ahfund.org.uk

Archaeology Data Service (ADS)
The ADS supports research, learning and
teaching with high quality and dependable
digital resources. It does this by preserving
digital data in the long term, and by
promoting and disseminating a broad
range of data in archaeology. It promotes
good practice in the use of digital data in
archaeology, provides technical advice to

the research community, and supports the deployment of digital technologies.

Department of Archaeology
University of York
King's Manor
York YO1 7EP
Tel: 01904 433954
Fax: 01904 433939

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
The Campaign to Protect Rural England is a national charity dedicated to promoting the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England and encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

128 Southwark Street
London SE1 0SW
Tel: 020 7981 2800
Fax: 020 7981 2899
Email: info@cpre.org.uk
Website: www.cpre.org.uk

Civic Trust
Britain's leading charity devoted to enhancing the quality of life in Britain's cities, towns and villages.

Winchester House
259-269 Old Marylebone Road
London NW1 5RA
Tel: 020 7170 4299
Fax: 020 7170 4298
Website: www.civictrust.org.uk

Civic Trust – Northern Office
The View
Gostins Building
32-36 Hanover Street
Liverpool L1 4LN
Tel: 0151 709 1969
Fax: 0151 709 2022

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)
CABE works to improve the quality of the places and spaces we design and develop. It is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

The Tower Building
11 York Road
London SE1 7NX
Tel: 020 7960 2400
Fax: 020 7960 2444
Email: enquiries@cabe.org.uk
Website: www.cabe.org.uk

Common Ground
Common Ground is internationally recognised for playing a unique role in the arts and environmental fields, distinguished by the linking of nature with culture, focussing upon the positive investment people can make in their own localities, championing popular democratic involvement, and inspiring celebration as a starting point for action to improve the quality of our everyday places.

Gold Hill House
21 High Street
Shaftesbury
Dorset SP7 8JE
Tel: 01747 850820
Fax: 01747 850821
Website: www.commonground.org.uk

Council of British Archaeologists (CBA)
The CBA is the principal UK-wide non-governmental organisation that promotes knowledge, appreciation and care of the historic environment for the benefit of present and future generations. It also

hosts the Historic Environment Information Resources Network (HEIRNET).

111 Walmgate
York YO1 9WA
Tel: 07904 671 417
Fax: 01904 671 384
Website: www.britarch.ac.uk

Countryside Agency

The Countryside Agency is the statutory champion and watchdog working to make the quality of life better for people in the countryside and the quality of the countryside better for everyone. It is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Head Office
John Dower House
Crescent Place
Cheltenham GL50 3RA
Tel: 01242 533 311
Email: info@countryside.gov.uk
Website: www.countyside.gov.uk

English Heritage

English Heritage is the Government's statutory adviser on the historic environment. It is an Executive Non-departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and works closely with the ODPM and DEFRA. It works in partnership with central government departments, local authorities, voluntary bodies and the private sector to conserve and enhance the historic environment, broaden public access to the heritage and increase people's understanding of the past.

23 Saville Row
London W1S 2ET
Tel: 020 7973 3000
Website: www.english-heritage.org.uk

National Monument Record enquiries

Tel: 01793 414 600
Fax: 01793 414 606

Heritage Link

Established in 2002, Heritage Link brings together voluntary organisations in the heritage sector, united by their common interests in the historic environment. It aims to influence policy, underpin advocacy and increase capacity by providing a forum for members to formulate and promote policy on core issues and by providing a network for sharing information to support members in their work. Heritage Link represents a wide spectrum of interest groups ranging from the National Trust, Council for British Archaeology, CPRE and the Civic Trust to smaller more specialised bodies and has an estimated combined membership of nearly 4 million.

89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TP
Email: mail@heritagelink.org.uk
Website: www.britarch.ac.uk/heritagelink/

Institute of Field Archaeologists

The IFA is the professional organisation for archaeologists in the UK. It promotes professional standards and ethics for conserving, managing, understanding and promoting enjoyment of the heritage. The website contains valuable information for archaeologists, students and purchasers of archaeological services.

SHES
Whiteknights, University of Reading
PO Box 227
Reading RG6 6AB
Tel: 0118 931 6446
Fax: 0118 931 6448
Email: administrator@archaeologists.net
Website: www.archaeologists.net

Institute of Historic Building Conservation

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional institute that represents conservation professionals in the public and private sectors in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It has approximately 1,360 members, divided between 15 branches. It works to establish the highest standards of conservation practice to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment.

Website: www.ihbc.org.uk
The national website lists contact details of regional branches.

National Trust

The National Trust is a charity with over 3 million members that works to conserve and protect the coastline, countryside and buildings of England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the benefit of the nation. It cares for over 248,000 hectares of beautiful countryside, plus almost 600 miles of coastline and more than 200 buildings and gardens of outstanding interest and importance.

36 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AS
Tel: 020 7447 6411
Fax: 020 7222 5097
Email:
policy&campaigns@nationaltrust.org.uk
Website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Prince's Foundation

The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment is an educational charity established by The Prince of Wales to teach and demonstrate in practice those principles of traditional urban design and architecture which put people and the communities of which they are part at the centre of the design process.

19-22 Charlotte Road
London EC2A 3SG
Tel: 020 7613 8500
Fax: 020 7613 8599
Email: enquiry@princes-foundation.org
Website: www.princes-foundation.org

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)

SPAB was founded by William Morris in 1877 to counteract the highly destructive 'restoration' of medieval buildings being practiced by many Victorian architects. Today it is the largest, oldest and most technically expert pressure group fighting to save old buildings from decay, demolition and damage.

37 Spital Square
London E1 6DY
Tel: 020 7377 1644
Fax: 020 7247 5296
Email: info@spab.org.uk
Website: www.spab.org.uk

Theatres Trust

The Theatres Trust is a national body whose purpose is to promote the better protection of theatres. As well as considering planning applications relating to theatre buildings, the Trust provides help and advice on planning and design matters, campaigns on behalf of theatres, and works to foster a general interest in theatre architecture.

22 Charing Cross Road
London WC2H 0QL
Tel: 020 7836 8591
Fax: 020 7836 3302
Email: info@theatrestrust.org.uk
Website: www.theatrestrust.org.uk

Endnotes

1   *The Historic Environment: a force for our future*, p 7, DCMS/DTLR, 2001

2   Sheila Fell quoted in *From place to PLACE,* Common Ground, 1996

3   *Power of Place: the future of the historic environment,* p 1, 2000

4   *Heritage Counts,* English Heritage, 2003

5   See the Common Ground website for further information on their *England In Particular* campaign that celebrates local distinctiveness.

6   The architect Will Alsop quoted in *Re-urbanism,* Urban Initiatives, 2002

7   As the historian Raphael Samuel noted in his book *Theatres of Memory*, 'heritage and conservation could be seen as "growing points in the national culture" rather than dismissed as standing for entropy or statis.'

8   *The Historic Environment: a force for our future*, p 9, DCMS/DTLR, 2001

9   *The Historic Environment: a force for our future*, p 45, DCMS/DTLR, 2001

10 *Heritage Counts*, p 8, English Heritage, 2003

11 Hedgerows policy position statement, CPRE, 2003 based on surveys by Hunting Surveys and consultants, 1986 and Barr et al report to the DoE 1991

12 *The Condition of England's Dry Stone Walls,* Countryside Commission, 1996

13 *Heritage Counts: The State of England's Historic Environment,* English Heritage, 2003

14 CPRE market towns survey, 2004

15 Interview with members of Hackney Society, Riverside Association and Neighborhood renewal steering group

16 See the *Lie of the Land* report, 2003, produced by CPRE for further evidence of character loss across England

17 Places, people and parish maps Sue Clifford in *From place to PLACE*, Common Ground, 1996

18 *Heritage Under Pressure*, English Heritage, 2003

19 *Heritage Under Pressure,* English Heritage, 2003

20 Oxford Brookes research

21 *Power of Place*, p 1, 2000

22 *Power of Place*, p 1, 2000

23 *Building Sustainable Communities: developing the skills we need*, p 4, CABE, 2003

24 *Key findings of Heritage Under Pressure,* English Heritage, 2003

25 *The Historic Environment: a force for our future*, p 14, DCMS, 2001

26 Similar HLF funded outreach work is underway in other county councils, such as Essex, Somerset and Cheshire

27 Rod Shaw from Mole Valley District Council quoted in *Heritage Open Day Events Directory,* Civic Trust, 2003

28 *From place to PLACE,* Common Ground, 1996

29 *Mapping the Millennium: the West Sussex Millennium Parish Maps Project,* West Sussex County Council, 2002. This booklet brings together examples of maps that celebrate people's local surroundings

30 Planning Guidance Note 7: *The Countryside: environmental quality and economic and social development,* ODPM, 1997

31 Draft Planning Policy Statement 7, ODPM, 2003

32 *The Community Planning Handbook* (2000) by Nick Wates is a useful directory of tools to support characterisation work at the community level and is available from the Prince's Foundation

33 Environmental Impact Assessment is a formal requirement for some types of major development under European Legislation

34 *Sustainable Urban Extensions: planned through design,* 2000. Produced jointly by The Prince's Foundation, English Partnerships, the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and CPRE

35 *Town Design Statements: why and how to produce them*, The Countryside Agency, 2003

36 *Shifting Sands: design and the changing image of English sea-side towns,* CABE, 2003

37 *The Historic Environment of Liverpool,* Newsletter Issue 1, 2003

38 *Local knowledge and the reconstitution of democracy* by Robin Grove-White in *From place to PLACE,* Common Ground, 1996

Campaign to Protect
Rural England

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. We promote positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside to ensure change values its natural and built environment. Our Patron is Her Majesty The Queen. We have 59,000 supporters, a branch in every county, nine regional groups, over 200 local groups and a national office in central London. Membership is open to all. Formed in 1926, CPRE is a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning. Our President is Sir Max Hastings.

128 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SW
Tel: 020 7981 2800 *Fax*: 020 7981 2899
Email: info@cpre.org.uk *Website*: www.cpre.org.uk

CPRE is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England, number 4302973. Registered charity number: 1089685

HERITAGE LINK

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89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP
Email: mail@heritagelink.org.uk *Website*: www.britarch.ac.uk/heritagelink/

THE NATIONAL TRUST

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