



The future of landscape characterisation and the future character of landscape  
a seminar at KSLA Stockholm, 3rd- 4th March 2014

# Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) & Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)

## **Conflicting, competing or complementary - the (un)necessary evils of disciplinary separation?**

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# Introduction

- Characterisation/character assessment is a widely-accepted way of looking at / working with landscape. It is encouraged by the European Landscape Convention (ELC) which speaks of ‘the character of landscape’ resulting from human/ nature action / interaction [slide (S)1]
- It is sometimes thought to be a straightforward, descriptive, easy, scientific, objective and repeatable process, but all of these assumptions can be challenged. The idea of landscape itself of course demands a very wide interpretation [S2]
- Alongside the ELC, there are two other relevant frameworks to take into account [S3] –
  - the Faro Convention with its transferable principles about the relationship between heritage (and by implications, landscape) and human rights and societal imperatives,, and
  - the SPB on Landscape, and the role of trans-domain landscape research and of landscape as a concept in broad areas of policy.



Landscape is: “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action & interaction of natural and/or human factors” (ELC, article 1)



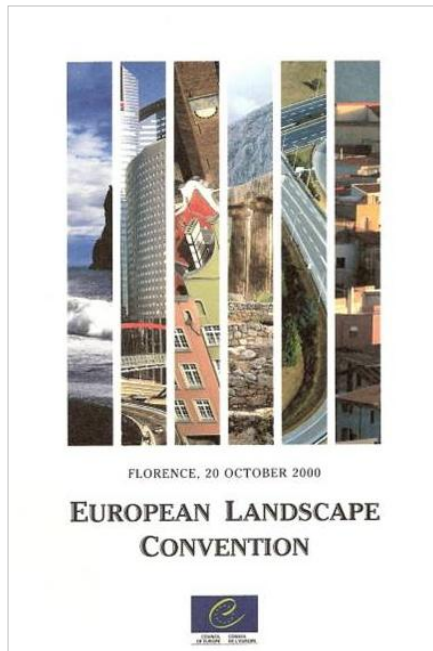


‘Landscape’, of course, is not to be interpreted to include only ‘scenery’, the natural environment, or even ‘cultural landscapes’, but:

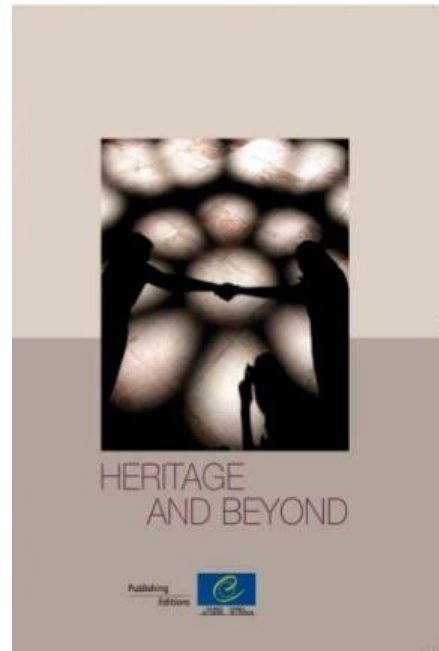
- the ideas and concepts in the ELC,
- everywhere and everyday as well as special areas,
- the frame of people’s daily lives,
- ‘an area, as perceived by people ...’
- dynamic, socially- and culturally-embedded,
- transcending nature v. Culture
- sense of place, identity

# Three framing devices

## Landscape, social challenges and inter-disciplinarity



European  
Landscape  
Convention  
C of E, 2000



The Faro Convention:  
The Value of Cultural  
Heritage for Society  
C of E, 2005



‘Landscape in a  
Changing World’  
Science Policy Briefing 41  
ESF/COST, 2010

## LCA/HLC etc in the UK

- Some parts of Europe have little or no tradition of LCA/HLC or similar approaches, and in other countries very different methods altogether are in use [S4]. But in the UK, England alone uses **two** methods (and other methods, more or less distinctive exist in in Wales - Landmap, HL registers, Scotland - Historic Landuse Assessment), not to mention the 'Living Landscapes' approach and at least two different approaches to seascapes [S5]
- Why? Does the question need asking?

# European 'families' of landscape assessment

LCA  
(UK; adopted  
elsewhere)

Atlas des  
Paysages (Fr,  
Wallonia),

HLC  
(UK)

Nordic  
approach

Landscape  
biography  
(NL)

Landschaftsbild'  
assessments  
(Germany, ?)

Historical  
geography  
(Flanders)

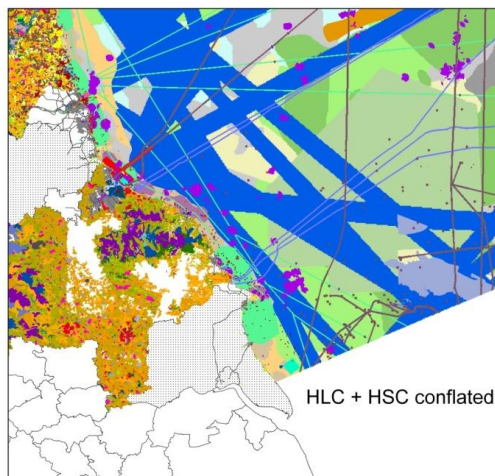
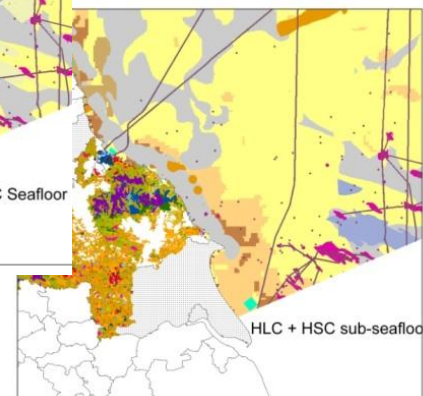
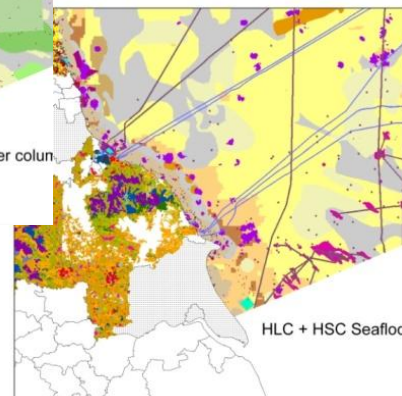
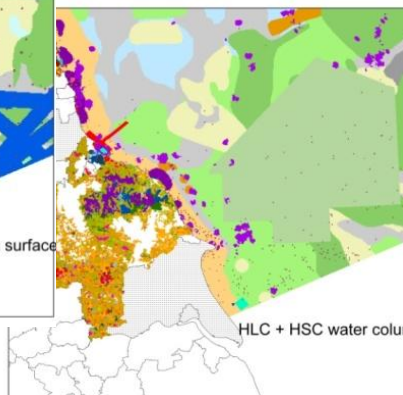
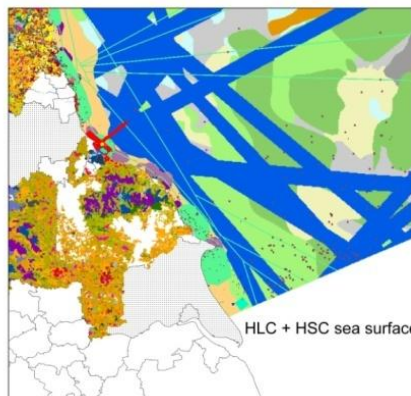
National  
character  
maps (eg  
Spain, Portugal)

'Integrated 'LCA (wished for?)



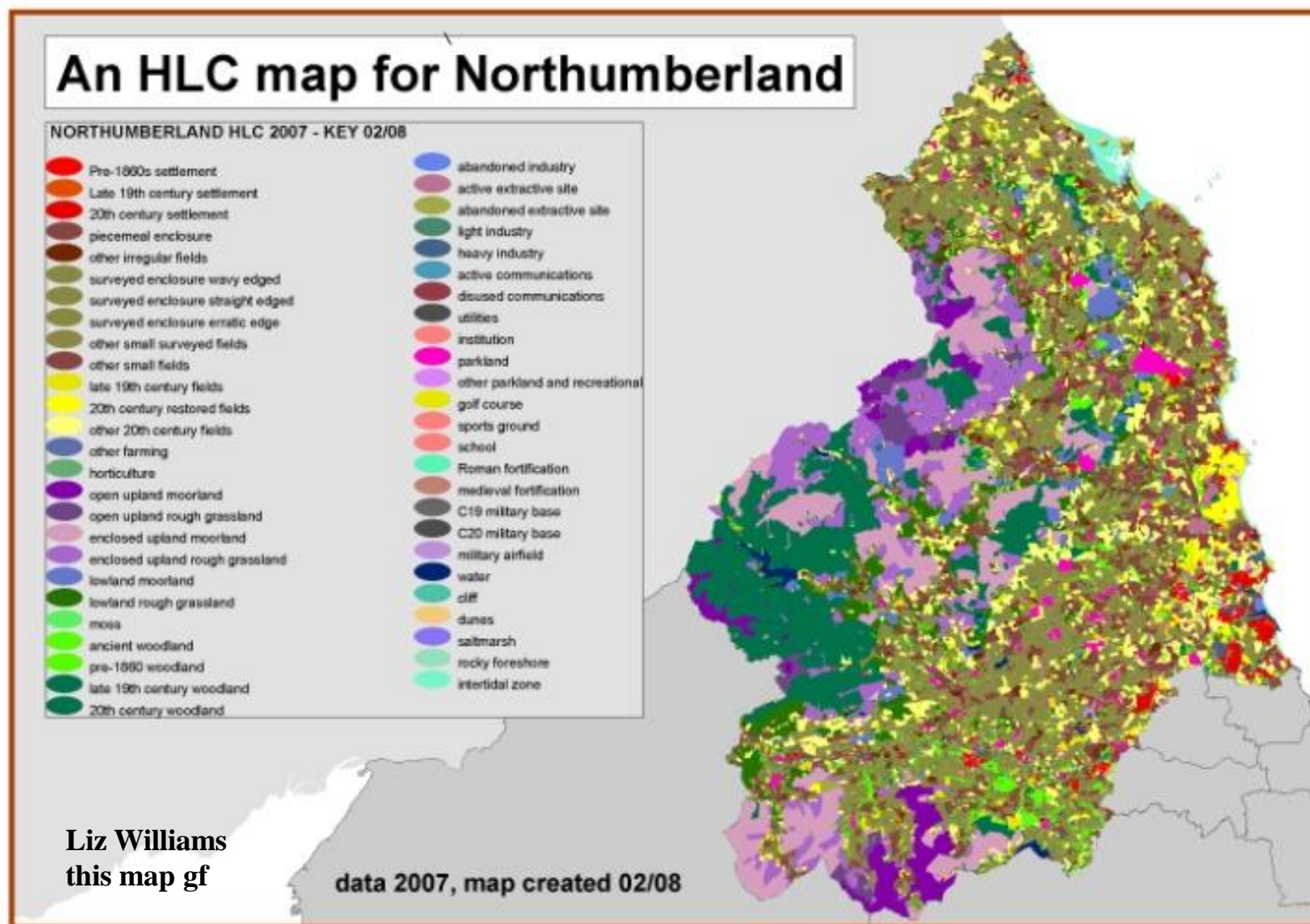
“... urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas” *ELC art 2*

## Historic Seascape Characterisation

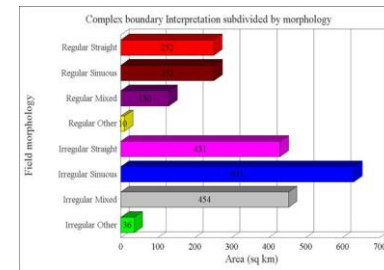
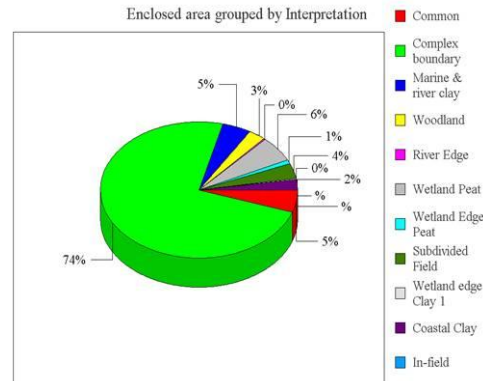




First, this is what HLC can look like (using just one map amongst many that can be drawn from the complex HLC GIS databases [S6 – 10])

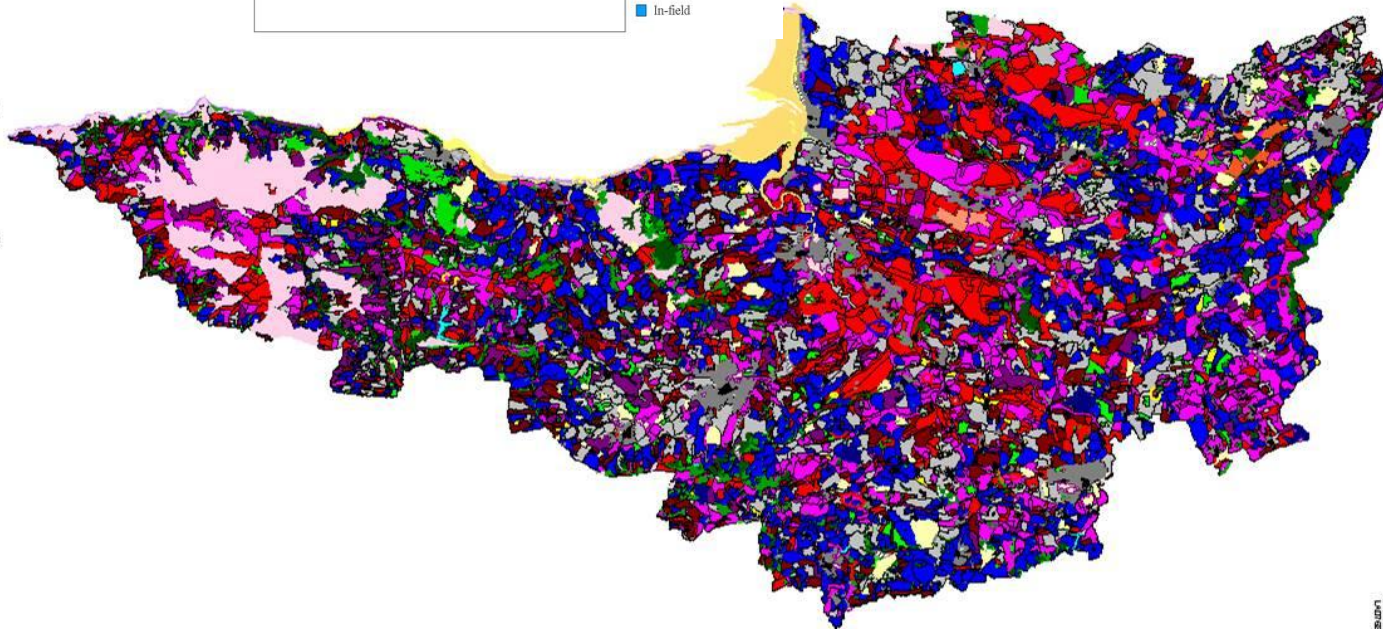


# Somerset and Exmoor HLC, interpretative maps



- 1.1 Regular Straight
- 1.2 Regular Simous
- 1.3 Regular Mixed
- 1.4 Regular Other
- 2.1 Irregular Straight
- 2.2 Irregular Simous
- 2.3 Irregular Mixed
- 2.4 Irregular Other

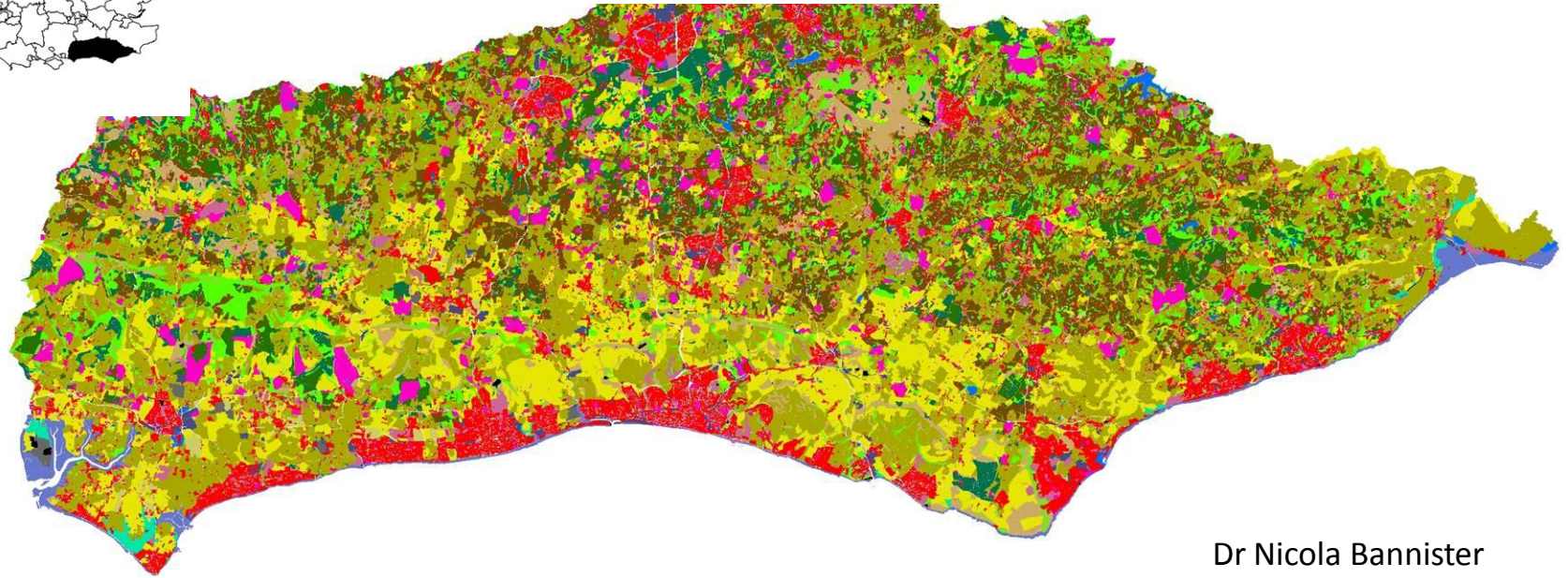
- Semi natural ancient wood
- Re-planted ancient wood
- Conifer plantation
- Dediduous wood
- Unenclosed pasture
- Outcrop & scree
- Sand, sand & shingle, dunes
- Mud flats
- Saltings
- Pre 1839/40 extent
- Post 1839/40 extent
- Caravan\_Park
- Orchard
- Historic landscape park
- Golf courses
- Sports fields/areas
- Race courses
- Water treatment
- Industrial complexes
- Stone quarry
- Coal pits/mines
- Peat extraction
- Harbour
- Water bodies
- Military
- Boundaries of park (mediev
- Other non-topographic bou
- Causeway/relict floodbanks
- Small islands in Levels & M



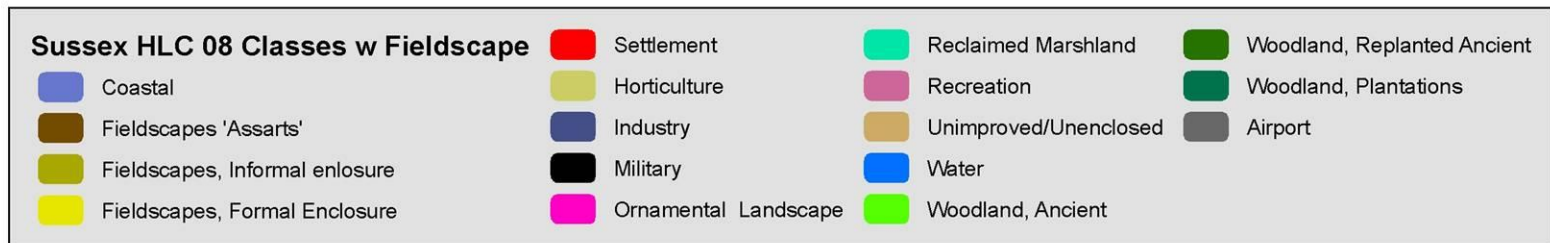
© Crown copyright, all rights reserved  
Landscape 2011



# HLC, more recent, more detailed, for Sussex, 2008



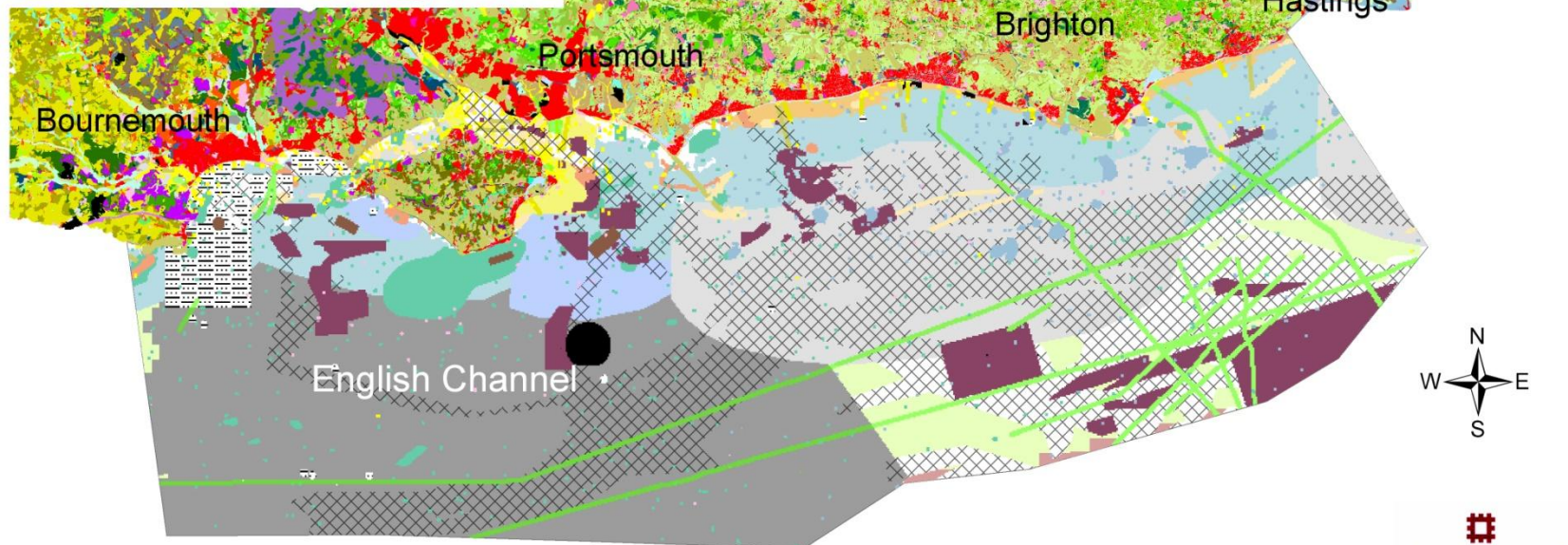
Dr Nicola Bannister



GF March 8 from HLC by Nicola Bannister



# Historic Landscape & Seascape Characterisation for Southern England



## HLC Legend

Cliffs & beaches	Designed Landscapes, Cemeteries
Mudflats	Recreation: golf, racecourses, et al
Salt marsh	Settlement
Shingle & dunes	Extractive industry
Communications	Manufacturing & processing industry
Reclaimed salt marshland	Other industry
Reclaimed fresh marshland	Downland
Ancient (assart-type) fields	Wooded-over common
Formal enclosure	Ancient Woodland
Informal enclosure	Plantations
Market Gardens, Allotments, Nurseries	Regenerated woodland
Orchards	Replanted early woods
Vineyards	Ponds, Reservoirs



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## HSC Legend

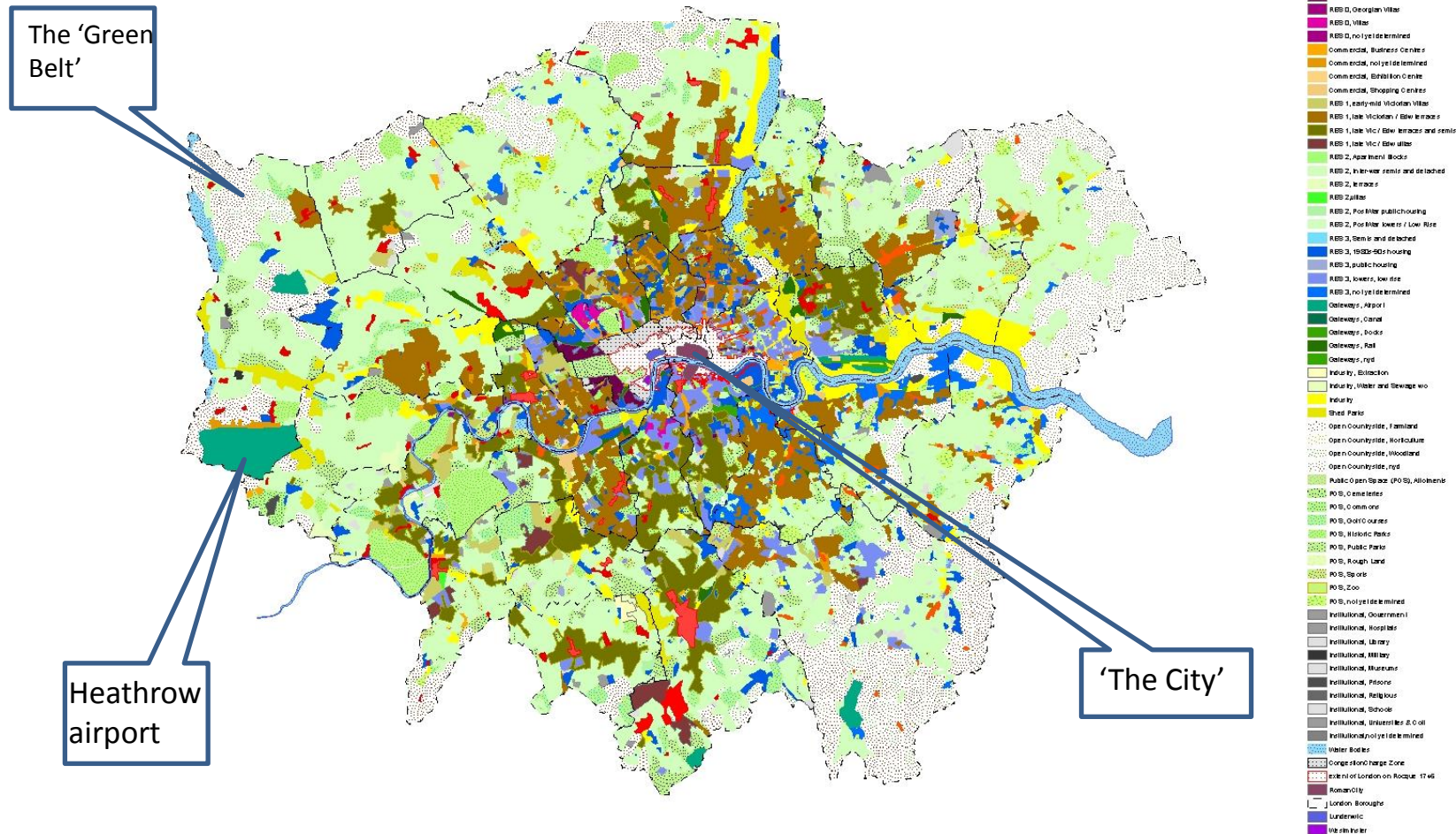
Palaeochannel	Submarine power cable
Mudflats	Oil & gas extraction
Sand banks	Oil & gas pipeline
Coarse sediment plains	Oil & gas licence area
Recreational dive area	Aggregate dredging
Shipping industry, commercial shipping route	Quarrying
Ports, docks, harbour, quays, ferries	Military Ordnance dumping
Maritime safety, buoyage	Military practice area
shellfish dredging & farming	Spoil and waste dumping
Fishing: trawling, nets, etc	Industrial production
Drying & submerged hazards, shoals	

0 10 20 40 60 80 100 km



“... **urban** and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas” *ELC art 2*  
A First New View of Greater London.

# GREATER LONDON



Produced September 2006 by EH Characterisation Team and GLSMR



ENGLISH HERITAGE

CP2006/74/E

# Why are there these two methods?

- In part it arises from the specific programmatic and operational reason for creating the HLC method from in 1993-94 [S11]
- Also, it reflects:
- Disciplinary perspectives (often reduced to only a negative issues of silos, but separation can also provide positive benefits, e.g. of focus and clarity, unambiguity, and so on) [S12].
- Ideology - why do 'we' seek to understand landscape? What is our goal – landscape protection (circular, inward looking – landscape research is justified by protecting its own resource / data?)? Nature / environmental protection? To create an arena for participation *per se* (process).
- Pragmatics - we all work in different university departments or government agencies, our research and professional landscape is a dispersed landscape .....

➤ But 'landscape' knows none of these boundaries, and so there is a need to be interdisciplinary, as we all say. 'Landscape cannot be disciplined' in Barbara Bender's famous formulation. It also cannot be closed - the perception, and understanding, of landscape cannot be fixed or reach interpretative closure.

➤ The implications of the ELC's words 'perceived by people' point the same ways – when did all people ever agree on anything? It is an area where academics and professional discourse and practice reflect landscape itself in its guise of universal commons, shared resource and community, unlike land owned by no-one but everybody.

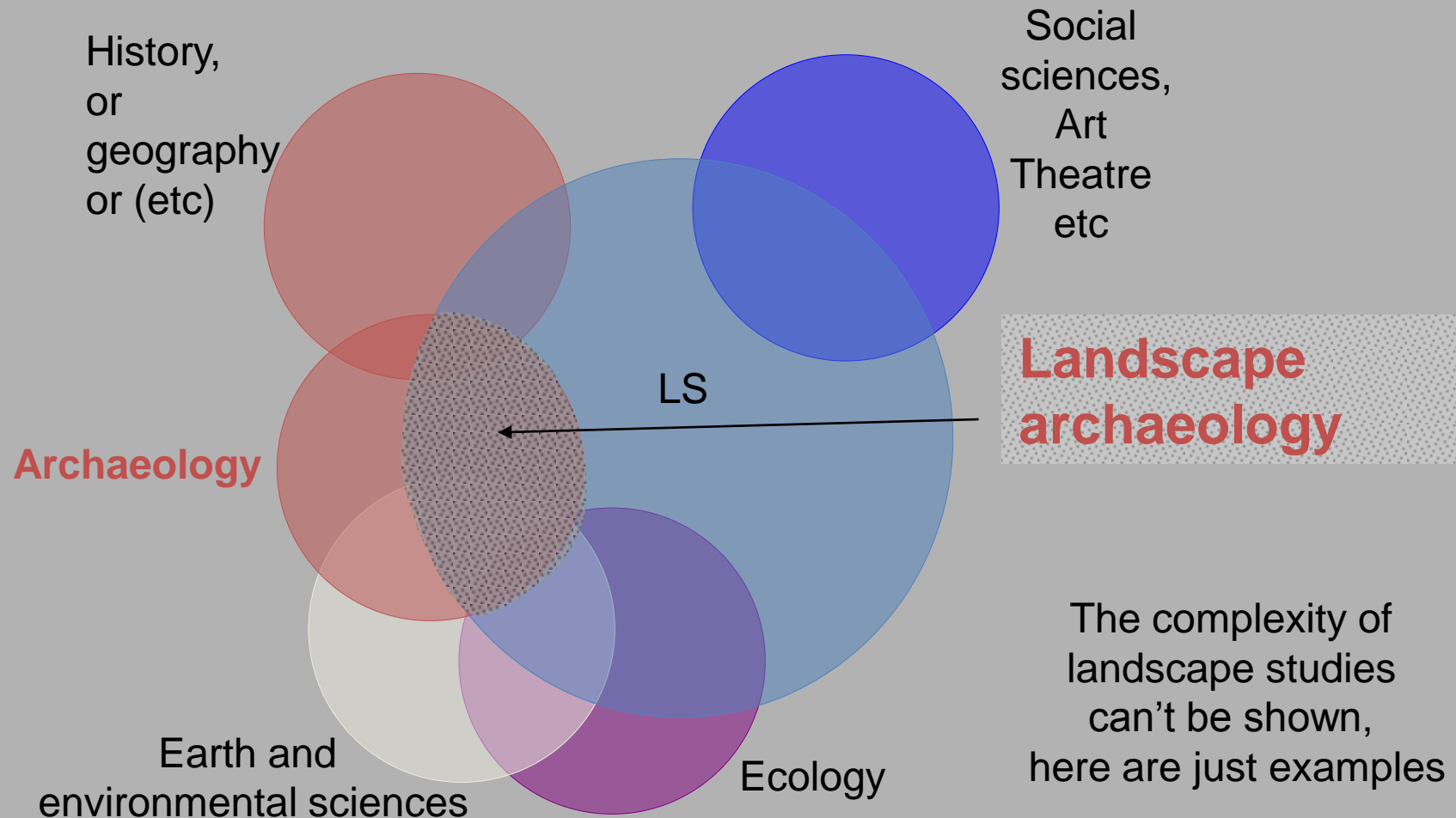


1993-94 - HLC was developed, for practical heritage management reasons, because

- Heritage management lacked a landscape dimension
- Landscape planning and management had a very weak historic dimension
- Spatial planning lacked both dimensions



# An incomplete map of landscape archaeology's context in Landscape Studies (LS)

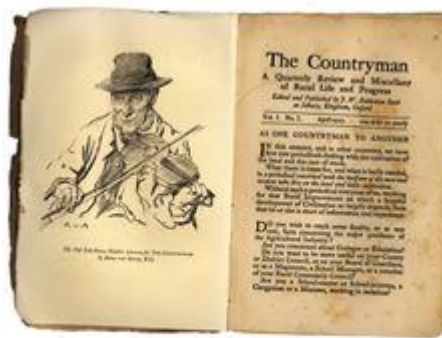


# Beyond the academy

- The concept of landscape has escaped into a wider popular world in the past 2 or 3 decades – we constantly hear about the ‘political landscape’, the ‘research landscape’, and most of all the marketing and use of landscape.
- Marketing (branding) and the spread of the word landscape [S13]. In the UK, after a long history of ‘lifestyle’ magazines with names referring to the country, there is now a magazine called ‘Landscape’, with the same sort of content, but with added materialism and commodification, which is a sign that another definition, among a new community, has accreted to the word landscape. The OED definition is now even more misleading.
- It is now a familiar recognition has for that the detective story genre frequently promotes (it always has) sense of place, and there is now very conscious drawing upon the landscape for such inspiration (and in this case, also to build identity [S14] and in art [S15])



The evolution  
of words and  
public  
attitudes;  
each is of its  
time



The first Countryman, published April 1927. It contained 88 pages, plus covers of which 13 pages were at ten shillings per year.



Exhibit 3. Since the 1970s



### Exhibit 1

Founded 1897  
'Girls with pearls',  
not property and  
real estate

### Exhibit 2

Founded 1927,  
The voice of the  
British countryside



### Exhibit 4

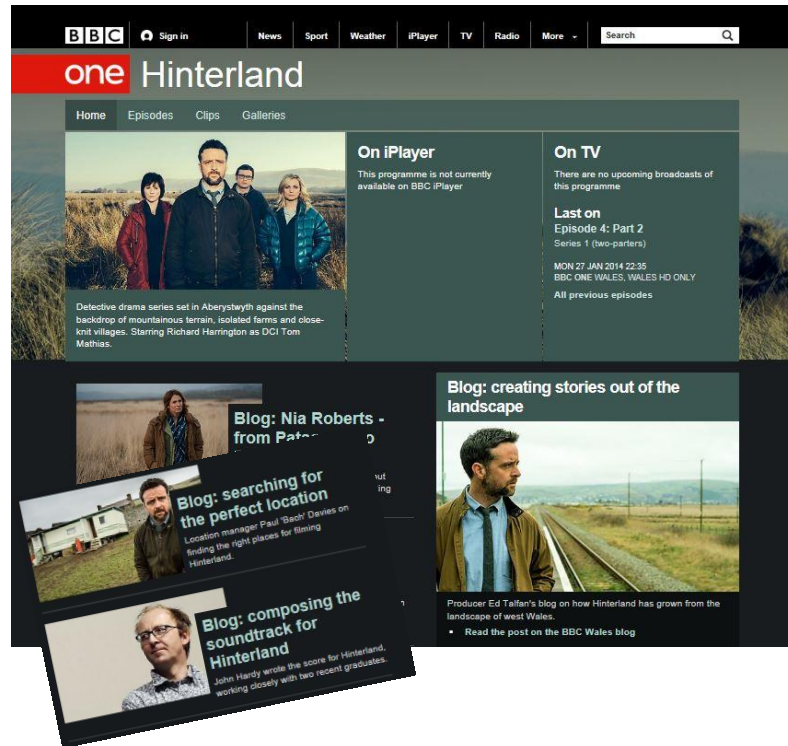
Started 2012



**The OED definition of  
'landscape' is now even more  
misleading**

# “creating stories out of the landscape”

## The BBC Wales series : Hinterland (‘Y Gwyll’) (2013):



“Every nation needs a detective show to call its own. Wales bizarrely didn't have one so we wanted to put that right with Hinterland. .... All four stories were really grown out of the landscape.... (and ) grown out of things we discovered around there.” -

*Ed Talfa, the producer of Hinterland.*

“... to record as much music as possible from real live sources .... to find a musical world that could equal the extraordinary landscapes, characters and stories of west Wales” - *John Hardy, composer/musician*



## What are the aims?

Does landscape ever need protection? Is it really fragile?  
Should it be kept in a glass-house and kept safe?





# How to use LCA / HLC?



a vitreous metaphor:

Using landscape

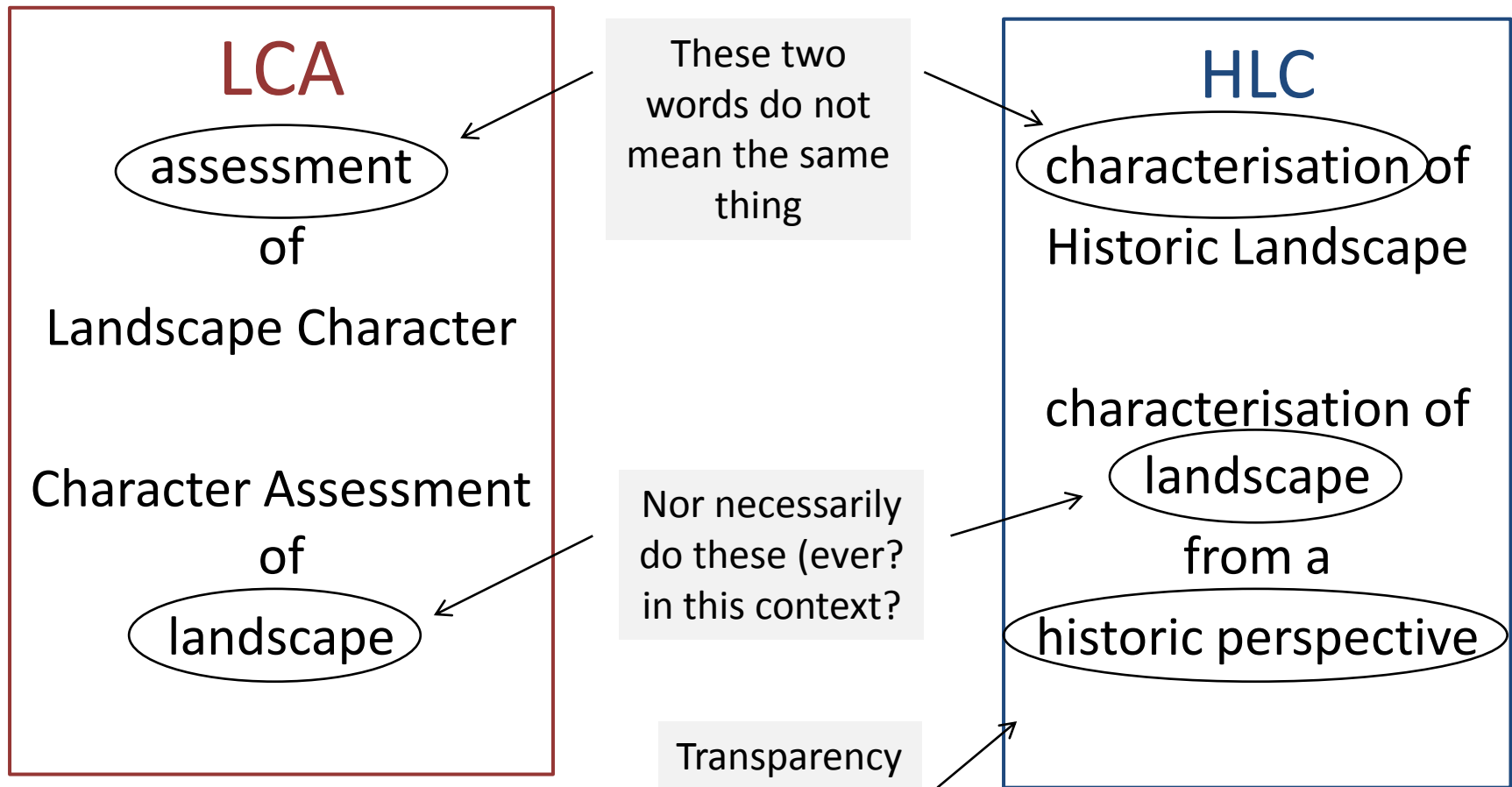
- a) as a **lens**, to inform other policies (flooding, energy, food security)
- b) to reflect society, like a **mirror** (landscape grows from our actions and our attitudes)
- c) as a **window**, to show things to us , to teach and inform, to reveal (identity, belonging)

# Comparing LCA, HLC in England

[SL15-18]

- The two main approaches in use in England share many common aspects, and in both cases the principles behind the methods have wider application than their particular nationally-led programmes. Both owe their commonest forms (and commonest scale) to the requirements of management institutions (EH and the Countryside Agency/English Nature)
- At the same time there are significant differences.
- LCA was invented from the late 1980s, reaching more or less its present form in the mid 90s; an early stimulus for its development was the need to justify more strongly (or at least transparently and exhaustively) the designation of new AONBs.
- HLC was developed from about 1994-95. It follows a tradition of landscape archaeology and history that goes back to Hoskins in the 1950s and further, but which had not greatly influenced landscape management policy. HLC was designed to bring landscape into the field of cultural heritage management and to align heritage more closely with landscape assessment, which gave insufficient focus on the past in the present.

# The relationship and meaning of words



One of these methods, therefore, assesses (i.e. 'values', identifies the significance of) an apparently holistic construct called 'landscape character,' the other characterises (describes, interprets etc) one key aspect of landscape termed for convenience 'historic'.

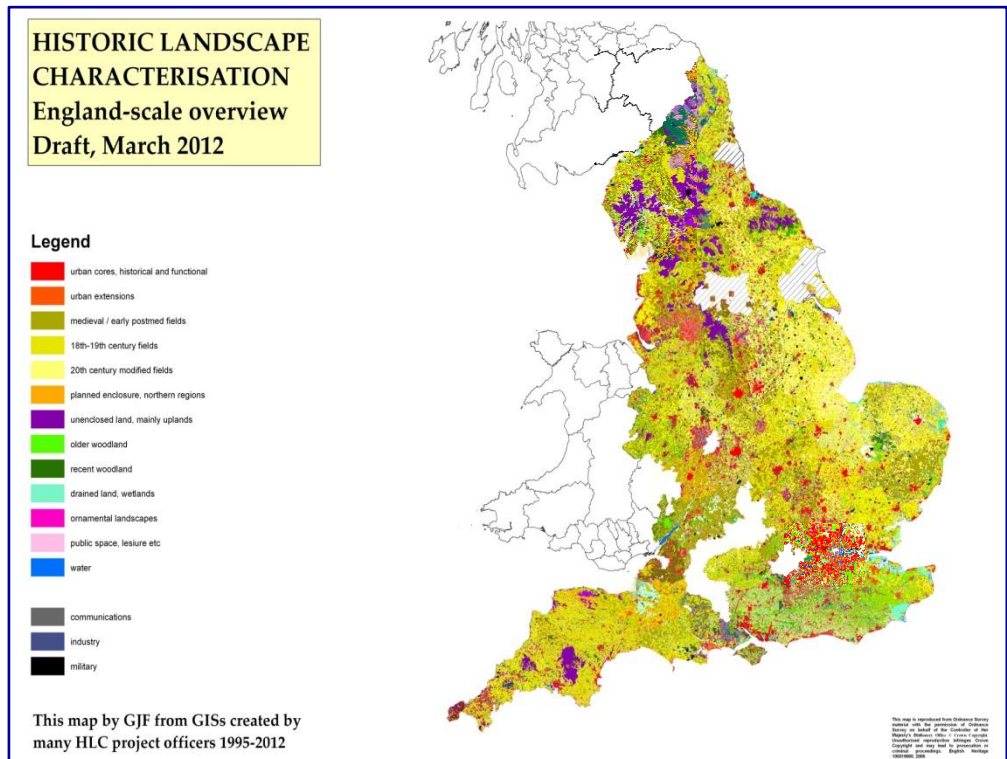
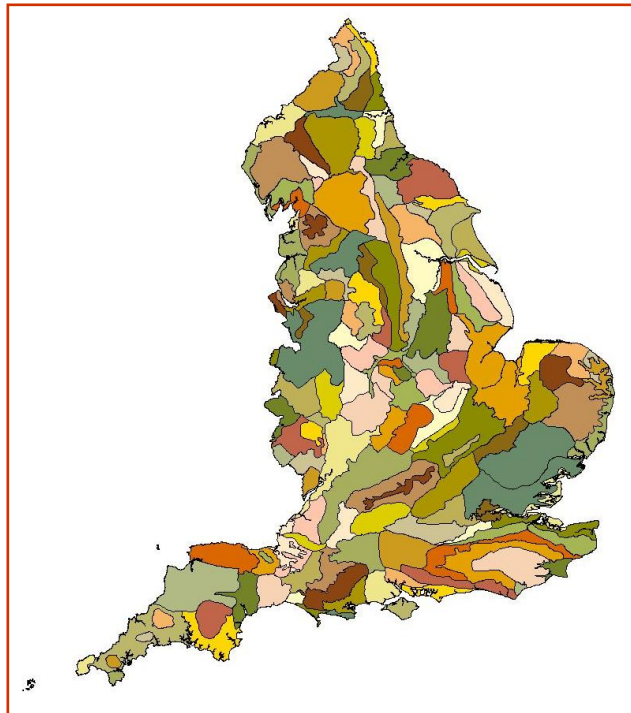


# Similarities

LCA and HLC :

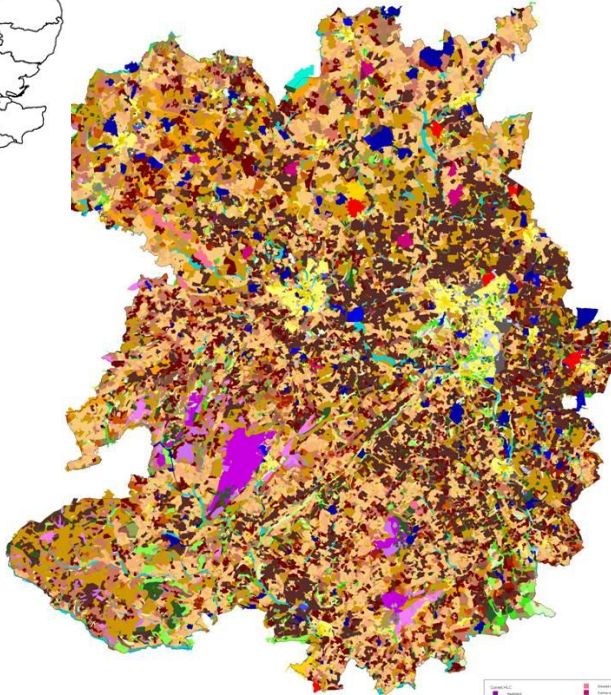
- both seek comprehensive coverage: everywhere has historic landscape character;
- both use to one degree or another use maps and spatial depictions;
- both started out and largely remain expert-led techniques;
- both are works of synthesis and interpretation not data presentation
- both, therefore, stand a basically subjective foundation, as is appropriate for landscape, although mitigated by transparency of method and (hopefully) repeatability.
- both are first and foremost designed to be practical tools for us in planning, environmental policy, heritage etc.

# LCA Areas and HLC Types compared at national scale



**Landscape Character Assessment**  
mainly topographical-visual, based on **areas**

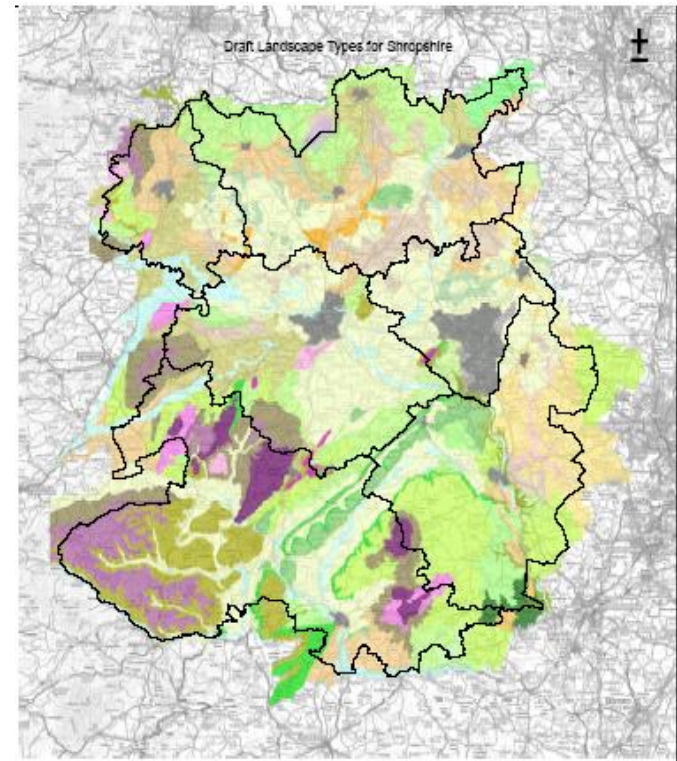
**Historic Landscape Characterisation**  
highly simplified, mainly historical, based on **types**



Shropshire  
COUNTY COUNCIL

[illegible]

# LCA



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Shropshire  
County Council



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The map displays the following land use categories in the legend:

- Open moors
- Moorland fells & ridges
- Moorland slopes & cloghs
- Enclosed grassland upland
- Densely enclosed grassland upland
- Slopes & valleys with woodland
- Reservoir valleys with woodland
- Upland fells & slopes
- Upland drier
- Upland plateau pastures
- Upland valley farmland
- Grassland valley farmland
- Enclosed
- Village farmland on steep ridges
- Upland pastures
- Upper valley pastures
- Valley pastures with industry
- Valley farmland with villages
- Riverside meadows
- Urban

The map also includes a scale bar (0 to 5 km) and a north arrow.

# LCA

[illegible]

## HLC

# Different

- LCA treats landscape in an apparently comprehensive way, without indicating its ideological / disciplinary / interpretative filters, and may give the impression of seeing landscape as a simple straightforward concept;
- HLC is apparently more narrow, but is explicit about its starting point, the historic dimension of present day landscape, which could be said to be so fundamental to both present and likely future landscape that it is less narrow than it appears

# Complementary

- LCA and HLC are complementary, and their outputs are ideally used in tandem. HLC can use LCA to enter into landscape design debates, but with its finer detail it can connect LCA to concepts of locality and place. HLC types can create Character Areas, and they can also illustrate and enhance Character Area descriptions. HLC adds an urban dimension that LCA very often overlooks or understates, and (perhaps paradoxically) HLC equally gives more room to taking into account recent landscape change; HLC has a more nuanced view of change, whilst LCA appears to subscribe to the notion of traditional, essential landscape character.
- LCA Character Areas, particularly at national level, provide a higher scale context for the more detailed HLC types (alongside other national or regional spatial frameworks).
- HLC is more specialised and technical, but one of its aims is to raise consciousness and awareness. LCA outputs are simpler and more accessible to wide audiences without mediation. But in principle, both LCA and HLC can be used to tell accessible stories and / or to capture stories from 'landscape-users' and 'consumers', whether local or not .



## LCA

## HLC

## SCOPE, INTERESTS &amp; FOCUS

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Experiential, primarily visual | 1. Cognitive and visual;                   |
| 2. Mainly present day and recent  | 2. The past, but the past in the present;  |
| 3. A focus on nature              | 3. Human agency and time, therefore change |
| 4. Scenery. Countryside           | 4. As much urban as rural                  |
| 5. The 'what' not the 'why'       | 5. The 'why' (and 'who') before the what.  |

## DISCIPLINARY ASSUMPTIONS AND GIVENS

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Arguably an environmental approach,                                 | 1. Cultural, human, social factors dominant.             |
| 2. Physicality and materiality   | 2. Material remains driving narrative and representation |
| 3. Relatively static in space and time                                 | 3. Change (loss / creation), impermanence                |
| 4. Tendency to determinism and 'naturalisation' of landscape character | 4. Cognition ( hidden and imagined as well)              |
| 5. Protective stances  | 5. Protective and (' <i>laissez faire</i> ') stances     |

## SCALE, 'GRAIN', RESOLUTION - ATTITUDE TO PLACE OR LOCALITY

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. AREAS (usually large, unique, discrete, heterogeneous).                   | 1. TYPES (repeating, mainly homogenous) (areas can be created later).        |
| 2. Essentially homogenising  | 2. Essentially diversifying  |
| 3. Scale: mainly regions or districts (higher than public place perception?) | 3. Scale: relatable to locality and place, closer to scales of belonging?    |
| 4. Generalised, but supports complex descriptions, expandable later,         | 4. Detailed spatially and in classification (archaeologists say too general) |
| 5. Intervening types, but highly generalised (topography and land-cover)     | 5. Scaleable (simplification upwards; deepening by further classification)   |

## IDEOLOGY; STANDPOINT AND PARTICIPATION

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Strategic, accessible to public use and input   | 1. Strategic and potentially local;  |
| 2. Could be forward-looking re desing and planning, but protective, conservationist (countryside and nature) origins                 | 2. aims to foster historically-informed acceptance of change and creation but often misused as a tool of site protection but         |
| 3. Mainly expert-led, communities of practice and interest not of place, attempts at wider participation, observation not embodiment | 3. Mainly expert-led, communities of practice and interest not of place, attempts at wider participation, observation not embodiment |

# Why did we invent HLC instead of simply making LCA more interdisciplinary?

An LCA that is properly inclusive of history/archaeology (if that were possible) would have been merely multi-disciplinary, not interdisciplinary

As with landscape in general, the key word is 'inter-'. Interaction requires two or more discrete approaches, not internalised discourse within a single viewpoint.

'Landscape' by its very character opens itself to different perspectives. HLC for example does not study past landscape (or even historic landscape) – rather, it studies landscape from a historically-informed (or an archaeologists', or a historians') *perspective*. Geologists, for example, cultural geographers, ecologists, economists or sociologists will all have distinctive perspectives and thus interpretations (and all have been known to say that LCA and HLC understate the importance of *their* subject). It is important to know them all, individually, before integrating them.

**Landscape is not as an object of study, but a way/ ways of seeing.**

# At what stage in landscape characterisation should we be inter-disciplinary?

Disciplines are distinguished one from another by their subject matter, but perhaps most importantly (especially with landscape, which is shared by so many disciplines) by their data, their methods and (most importantly of all) their fundamental but often unexamined attitudes and assumptions which affects interpretation and use of results.

I suggest that it is most effective to be interdisciplinary at three stages, one preliminary, two much later in the process -

- a) **Scoping stage – deciding objectives, purpose, overlaps and differences**
- b) **Interpretative stages** – (i.e. not at data collection or even analysis stage where disciplinary differences are strong and unavoidable (approaches to quantification/qualitative methods, for example, tension between humanities and sciences)
- c) **Conflicting / challenging stages**, when results being to be compared and forward steps taken; here most can be learnt, through tension and cooperation, from exchange and compromise.

**The creation of LCAs and HLCs fits between stage a) and b)**

We might perhaps consider whether ‘being [or becoming] interdisciplinary’ in landscape characterisation might ‘simply’ mean pursuing your own approaches with the awareness that there are other ways, and with an intention of future integration or, better still, co-ordinated uses.



# If I were starting over with HLC?

- I would still keep HLC distinct from LCA, but would strengthen interpretative integration and joint after-use and application; and I would encourage compatible assessments from the perspectives of other key landscape disciplines which are presently on the margins of LCA/HLC, using different 'languages'
- HLC needs to be more fine-grained to allow work at local scale, but also to achieve higher level synthesis
- It needs greater sense of 'embodiment' and experiential engagement, and much more non-expert involvement (whilst maintaining an expert view)
- But what of LCA? A next generation of LCA methods might usefully adopt some of the more detailed, locally-focussed dimensions and culturally-responsive aspects of HLC, and consider the greater and more nuanced use of 'types'.

So, in effect, HLC needs to become a little more like LCA and vice versa, LCA could learn from HLC.

# Are we ready to integrate HLC and LCA into a single method?

- In my view, no.
- Separation gives benefits of focus (and further evolution).
- We have scarcely begun properly to integrate at the level of results and application, so that methodological (data-analytical) integration is a step too far.
- LCA and HLC are already integrated (and thus complementary) at several levels, notably philosophy, to the extent that they share the types/area approach, a common view of landscape as concept, and a strong focus of spatiality and application.
- Yet even together they offer a limited range of approaches to landscape, and 'full' integration would create a misleading impression of completeness, risking closing the door on other ways of approaching landscape character, most of which are hardly barely explored yet in the practical, policy-focussed way that LCA and HLC are used.

tack för du att lyssnade, thanks for listening



Our problem is not that two separate disciplinary-defined methods (perspectives) is too many, but that we do not have enough perspectives. We need *more* diversity and *more* plurality in order to do justice landscape's own diversity and disciplinary range.



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