

# UNDERSTANDING PLACE

## Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice

*This is a consultation draft of a guidance document which English Heritage proposes to issue early in 2010. It will form part of a larger suite of existing and forthcoming guidance (see references in the text). Your comments are warmly invited: please return them to Sarah Prince ([sarah.prince@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:sarah.prince@english-heritage.org.uk)) by Mon 23 Nov 2009.*

### Contents

- 1 Introduction**
  - 1.1 The purpose of the document
  - 1.2 Legislation and policy
  - 1.3 Definition: what are Historic Area Assessments?
  - 1.4 Principles and purpose
  - 1.5 Approaches to the study of historic areas
  - 1.6 When should Historic Area Assessments be used?
  
- 2 Key issues**
  - 2.1 Drawing boundaries
  - 2.2 Defining character
  - 2.3 Clarifying historical and architectural development
  - 2.4 Assessing condition, integrity and vulnerability
  - 2.5 Assigning values
  - 2.6 Assessing significance
  
- 3 Levels of Historic Area Assessment**
  - 3.1 Selecting the right level of assessment
  - 3.2 Outline Assessments (Level 1)
  - 3.3 Rapid Assessments (Level 2)
  - 3.4 Detailed Assessments (Level 3)
  
- 4 Fieldwork, research and analysis**
  - 4.1 Personnel and equipment
  - 4.2 Preliminary research
  - 4.3 Fieldwork
  - 4.4 Documentary research
  - 4.5 Analysing field and documentary evidence
  - 4.6 Presentation of results
  - 4.7 Geographical Information Systems (GIS)
  - 4.8 Archiving
  - 4.9 Dissemination
  
- 5 Historic Area Assessments in action**
  - 5.1 Identifying needs and involving stakeholders
  - 5.2 Commissioning Historic Area Assessments
  - 5.3 Applying the findings

Appendix: case studies and sample field record sheets

Notes

Historic Area Assessment (HAA) forms one of a number of approaches to understanding the historic environment at area scale. The approach is intended to assist historic environment specialists, planners and others in evaluating the historic environment by understanding how the past is encapsulated in today's landscape, explaining why it has assumed its present form and distinguishing its more significant elements. This approach encourages a definition of the character of the area under review, and helps to address issues that may threaten to change that character. The Introduction sets out the principles underlying Historic Area Assessments and explains how they relate to, and in what respects they differ from, other approaches to the understanding of historic areas. Sections 2-5 explain how to carry out area assessments at varying levels of resolution, and will be most directly relevant to those undertaking or commissioning them. Three levels are defined and the methods and outcomes are illustrated by a series of case studies.

## I INTRODUCTION

### I.1 The purpose of the document

- I.1.1 England's rich and varied historic landscapes, both urban and rural, help to sustain communities, providing livelihoods for many and pleasure to millions, either as residents or visitors. Identifying and understanding their particular qualities, and what these add to our lives, is central to our engagement with our history and culture. This guidance document offers advice on how to undertake assessments of historic areas, for a number of purposes and in a number of circumstances, but always with the objective of defining and explaining the character of a place and understanding its significance.
- I.1.2 The guidance is intended to assist the following groups in commissioning and undertaking Historic Area Assessments (HAAs):
- historic environment consultants and contractors
  - local authority planners and historic environment specialists (a quick reference guide aimed particularly at these groups is also available [in preparation]: *Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments in a Planning and Development Context*)<sup>1</sup>
  - regeneration and housing market renewal partnerships
  - housing growth agencies
  - developers
  - owners of extensive heritage assets (e.g. historic estates)
  - local groups and communities

### I.2 Legislation and policy

- I.2.1 The recognition of historic areas in English planning law dates from the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, under which local authorities were granted powers to designate Conservation Areas. These powers were reaffirmed by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990, which requires local

planning authorities to identify areas of 'special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' and then to pay 'special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of those areas'. English Heritage's *Guidance on conservation area appraisals* (2006) explains how they relate to the Spatial Planning System (SPS) introduced by the 2004 Planning and Compensation Act. The SPS sets out a requirement for those proposing major developments to provide 'baseline evidence' on the nature of the area concerned so that the likely impact of the proposed changes can be judged.

1.2.2 The guidance presented here complements the forthcoming Planning Policy Statement 15, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, and the associated Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide, issued jointly by CLG and DCMS in consultation with English Heritage. In particular, Historic Area Assessments support the delivery of the following government policies aimed at integrating historic environment concerns within the wider planning process:

- HE1: Evidence base for plan-making
- HE3: Local planning approach
- HE4: Heritage assets and sustainable development
- HE6: Monitoring indicators.

Additionally, in certain circumstances an HAA (often on a small scale) may form a necessary or desirable component of evidence used to assess a proposal affecting an individual heritage asset, thereby supporting the following policies:

- HE8: Information requirements for validation of applications for consent affecting heritage assets
- HE11: Additional policy principles guiding the consideration of applications for development affecting the setting of a heritage asset.

1.2.3 This guidance also observes the general conservation philosophy set out in English Heritage's *Conservation Principles*.<sup>2</sup> It complements and expands upon previously published and forthcoming guidance on the following topics, all of which are (or will be) available via [www.english-heritage.org.uk/Publications](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/Publications):

- Conservation Area Appraisals<sup>3</sup>
- Low-Demand Housing and the Historic Environment<sup>4</sup>
- Townscape and Heritage Appraisals in Housing Market Renewal Areas<sup>5</sup>
- Characterisation for Masterplanning<sup>6</sup>
- Characterisation, design and development in spatial planning.<sup>7</sup>

Further information on the range of approaches to the understanding of places and historic areas can be found in an explanatory leaflet, *Understanding Place: An Introduction*.<sup>8</sup>

1.2.4 There is widespread acceptance that the historic environment is ubiquitous, not confined to a series of discrete 'monuments', and the Government's signing of the European Landscape Convention in 2006 has entrenched this recognition more firmly in Government policy. *Power of Place* (2000), published by English Heritage on behalf of the historic environment sector, stressed the positive

impact of local and 'ordinary' heritage – what might be termed the buildings and spaces in between 'monuments' – on the quality of people's lives and its central role in constructing local identity.

- 1.2.5 For some years, therefore, English Heritage policy has promoted the development of baseline evidence ahead of major development or regeneration initiatives.<sup>9</sup> Recent broad-ranging regional planning in the south-east of England – in the Thames Gateway, the M11 corridor and the Milton Keynes growth point – as part of the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan prompted high-level historic characterisation exercises as a means of identifying significant elements of the historic landscape to guide and inform the management of change and to satisfy the requirement for places that 'belong' in their proposed setting.<sup>10</sup> A comparable approach has been advocated with regard to government proposals for Eco Towns.
- 1.2.6 At a much more local level, the Government's Housing Market Renewal Initiative (Pathfinder) proposed radical change to address problems of low-demand housing in northern and midland cities. English Heritage's response urged – for example through the position statement on *Low Demand Housing* (2004)<sup>11</sup> – that the architectural and historic significance of target areas (many of them highly valued by the local community, despite suffering severe economic and environmental losses) needed to be assessed before redevelopment Masterplans were formulated in detail. By this means, it was argued, buildings or neighbourhoods of architectural merit or historic interest could be identified and become part of 'the solution'.
- 1.2.7 The ideal to be aimed for is fully inclusive evaluations of areas, assessing their archaeological potential together with the evidence of buildings and other features of the modern landscape. The ongoing process of Heritage Protection Reform seeks to underpin just such an integrated view of the historic environment, in which the setting and local context of individual 'heritage assets' will often require area-based evaluation.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3 Definition: what are Historic Area Assessments?

- 1.3.1 A number of methods, broadly grouped under the heading Historic Characterisation, are currently used to study and characterise historic areas (see 1.5.3). The present document describes an approach which shares aspects of these techniques but which has a number of distinctive ingredients and emphases. 'Historic Area Assessment' (HAA) is therefore used as a description of a method of studying historic landscapes of widely differing types for a wide variety of purposes, including education and academic study, but most often to inform the management of change. The principal focus of an HAA is generally on the historic built environment, encompassing both buildings themselves and the elements of the landscape – street and road patterns, boundaries, open spaces – that provide their setting, but it should also have regard to existing knowledge of buried or upstanding archaeological remains in the locality, especially where these have a bearing on the historic evolution of a place. While its raw materials are the individual features or building blocks of the landscape, an HAA must at some level engage with the place or area as a complex whole – as a web of relationships, even as an artefact. It differs from other forms of historic characterisation, which are essentially descriptive in

purpose, in its emphasis on understanding and explaining observed character, generally at a higher degree of resolution, and assessing significance.

- 1.3.2 An Historic Area Assessment is a useful method of understanding, within a short space of time, the heritage interest of a fairly small area or neighbourhood such as a small town, a suburb or a village. Covering the area methodically and combining this with an analysis of historic maps, one can gain a sense of how and why a place has come to look the way it does; of the relationship of buildings to open spaces; of residential areas to commercial or civic centres; the evolution of transport infrastructure; views in and out of confined spaces; building scale, type, materials, current use, etc. This approach encourages a definition of the strongest aspect of the character of the area under review, and helps to address issues that may threaten to change that character. Issues which have achieved prominence in recent years include the infilling of vacant sites, new development on large plots in residential suburbs (sometimes called 'garden-grabbing'), and the redundancy of particular building types. Out of an assessment of a particular area, more general planning issues concerning sustainability, density, high-quality design for new build, permeability, access, transport, the appearance of the public realm, the balance of the natural world with the built environment, and so on, will emerge.

## 1.4 Principles and purpose

- 1.4.1 We all live in an historic environment, whether in an ancient cathedral city, a rural landscape fashioned in the enclosure period, or a post-war suburban housing estate. Even a housing development built within the last few years may preserve in its boundaries, and sometimes in earthworks, trees or other features, vestiges of an historic landscape. The places where we live and work have been shaped by complex human forces acting on the natural environment, and our world is made up of innumerable unique and interlinked landscapes which tell the particular story of each locality.<sup>13</sup> England is renowned for containing great diversity within a relatively small country: heavily industrialised urban areas, historic market towns, vast suburbs surrounding our cities, farming landscapes, upland, lowland and the coast all exist within easy reach of one another. These broad contrasts are striking, but variety and unique character are present at more intimate local levels as well. Each village or town has a distinct regional identity, but it will also be special in itself, with a particular combination of local and regional features impressed upon the natural landscape. If we look more closely, the different parts of these settlements show a similar mixture of shared characteristics and particular variations. The character of a place, therefore, is a mixture of what places share with others and of what makes them distinct.
- 1.4.2 An understanding of the character of historic areas is important to us, whether as residents, visitors, planners or developers. What we see today is the result of a centuries-long process of evolution, a process dictated in part by changes in natural conditions but much more immediately and obviously by human effort, adding, adapting and replacing [illustration: a High Street?]. The landscape of historic areas is, therefore, a powerful expression of our culture and history, it shows how society has evolved, and its present form provides a focus around which communities define their identity.

1.4.3 Continuing change in the historic environment is as inevitable as the passing of time and its effect is to destroy some things irreplaceably. Often attention focuses on the threats to individual buildings, and these may indeed be valuable in their own right. Frequently, however, the grouping or association of a number of buildings or landscape features is at least as important – visually more appealing and intellectually more satisfying because it allows us to visualise the relationships between past activities or the structures of past societies. But if the inevitability of change is not in dispute, its direction can be controversial. Choices have to be made, and steering change for the benefit of present and future generations is something with which we should all be concerned. The question which must be addressed in the management of change is the value which we, as a society, place on our environment. In managing assets which collectively we consider to be most precious, we will seek change which will be most beneficial in retaining, reinforcing or enhancing significance. Placing a value on parts of our environment is, of course, a highly contentious and difficult process, for it can involve a plurality of views, some in direct conflict with one another.<sup>14</sup> But the process of assessing significance is informed by understanding, which allows us to see how and why parts of our environment are important, for different reasons and from a range of perspectives. Appreciation and enjoyment of the historic environment, no less than decision-making concerning its future, benefit from a sound understanding of what we have.

## 1.5 Approaches to the study of historic areas

1.5.1 Change to the historic environment can affect individual heritage assets, or whole areas. The methods of recording sites and buildings and of assessing their significance have been developed to a high level of sophistication over recent decades.<sup>15</sup> Assessing the significance of historic areas is less well developed as a discipline, but this approach is now increasingly important, not only in response to change, whether rapid and planned or slow and incremental, but also as a means of actively establishing local identity and of giving voice to a range of views on what is of value. This guidance document seeks to describe an approach to the assessment of historic areas which can be used for a number of purposes. These may be reactive, in response to, and as an influence on, external proposals for change, or they may be proactive, making clear what is important and thereby enhancing understanding and enjoyment, while establishing the context for future change.

1.5.2 The developing study of historic areas has produced a number of distinct approaches in works on both rural and urban landscapes, each designed with particular purposes in mind [Illustration: Alnwick AP?].<sup>16</sup> By contrast early examples of heritage assessments undertaken in anticipation of large-scale change focused on the identification of individual buildings and sites of significance rather than on whole landscapes.<sup>17</sup> More recent responses have placed a much greater emphasis on defining the broader character of landscapes with a view to retaining, or managing the evolution of, this character. The main types of approach adopted are:

- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC): high-level, typically covering a whole county; principally map-based and highlighting historic land-use; descriptive 'value-free' presentation of data intended to provide an objective

tool for managing strategic change, especially in the early stages of the planning process; applicable to both rural and metropolitan landscapes.<sup>18</sup>

- Extensive Urban Survey (EUS): used to assess the urban archaeological resource, with a particular emphasis on buried archaeological remains and industrial archaeology; based principally on analysis of existing data sets (including Urban Archaeological Databases where they exist), historic maps and published sources; intended to highlight areas of sensitivity and assist in targeting future research.<sup>19</sup>
- Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA): addresses the particular needs of England's more than 9,000 designated conservation areas, explaining the rationale behind their selection and summarising their chief characteristics and significance; draws extensively on field observation and incorporates some form of Historic Area Assessment; involves the canvassing of local views; underpins policies to 'preserve and enhance'.<sup>20</sup>
- Historic Area Assessment (HAA): typically best adapted to whole settlements or parts of large ones; applicable to both designated and undesignated areas; makes extensive use of field evidence; sets out to explain as well as describe, and to assess significance; intended to guide decision-making at the small and medium scale.

1.5.3 This guidance on Historic Area Assessment therefore forms part of a spectrum of approaches to the historic environment at large. It complements our earlier advice on conservation areas, widening its application to the consideration of any historic area or place, whether intended to lead to designation or not, and providing a more detailed level of guidance on purpose and methods. It also describes an approach which, while sharing some of the same techniques – such as the study of historic maps – employed by HLC, places greater emphasis on observation of field evidence and the use of a range of documentary sources, allowing a much more detailed and nuanced analysis of both landscape and built forms.

## 1.6 When should Historic Area Assessments be undertaken?

Historic Area Assessments are applicable to a wide range of circumstances. Typically they are used to gain an overview of the characteristics and significance of small and medium-sized settlements, or parts of settlements such as a suburb, a neighbourhood, a substantial housing development or a country house estate. The approach can also make a valuable contribution to large-scale housing growth, regeneration and other spatial planning initiatives by selectively examining those parts of a wide area where the need for understanding is most acute. HAAs will frequently be requested as a response to specific proposals for change, but there is much to be said for undertaking assessments proactively.

- 1.6.1 Historic Area Assessments are applicable to a wide range of historic landscape types, especially
- small and medium-sized towns
  - suburbs

- o villages and hamlets
- o historic town centres and central business districts
- o industrial quarters
- o historic estates

1.6.2 The circumstances in which Historic Area Assessments might be called for vary widely, and recent years have seen the development of different levels of assessment designed to meet particular needs. They will be especially valuable in the context of:

- the formulation of Masterplans, Area Action Plans, Heritage Partnership Agreements, etc
- the early planning stages of Housing Growth Areas, Growth Points, Eco Towns and regeneration schemes (including Housing Market Renewal Initiatives)
- anticipated or proposed large-scale redevelopment, including major infrastructure projects
- anticipated designation of conservation areas
- proposals affecting an individual heritage asset the setting or local context of which requires further understanding.<sup>21</sup>

1.6.3 In some of the circumstances outlined above HAAs can be characterised as 'reactive', but where resources permit they can also (and often to advantage) be undertaken in more neutral circumstances, uninfluenced by specific development proposals [Manchester NQ illustration?]. Procuring an HAA at the earliest stages of planning, in the production, for example, of a Masterplan or Area Action Plan, will ensure that the findings relating to the significance of the historic environment can shape later, more detailed, stages of planning by providing a strong evidence base.

The Housing Market Renewal Initiative announced by Government in 2003 is a 15-year programme to regenerate substantial parts of Northern and Midland England where local economies have faltered, resulting in high levels of vacant housing and related social problems. Most of the target areas were dominated by 19th or 20th century housing; heritage designations were few and the value of the built environment was uncertain. But the scale of the proposed changes and the prospect of prompt implementation called for a quick response. English Heritage opted to test the value and significance of a number of areas and in the process to develop a methodology suitable for assessing similarly affected areas elsewhere. Anfield and Breckfield, an inner Liverpool suburb long beset by economic decline, was selected for rapid assessment. Other parts of Merseyside were examined more summarily to produce outline assessments (see separate text boxes on Anfield and on Wirral: Tranmere).

[Insert text box on Queenborough & Housing Growth]


- 1.6.4 A commonly used tool drawing together assessment and management is the Conservation Management Plan, most often applied to individual buildings or complexes, but also used in the conservation of historic areas such as parks. The production of such a plan often involves area assessment, and is designed to provide a level of understanding of a place's significance which will inform its long-term management.<sup>22</sup> The same principle underpins the production by local communities of Parish Plans, Village Design Statements, and Town Design Statements, which capture the values held by local people about their environment and can be used to steer change in directions which enhance the environment, both natural and historic.<sup>23</sup> Another tool that can be used to manage complex sites, particularly those in multiple ownership, is a Heritage Partnership Agreement (HPA). HPAs, which are most appropriate when a number of designated assets are involved, encourage a partnership between owners or occupants and the local planning authority, mainly concerning routine repair and maintenance to agreed standards. The existence of an HAA will highlight areas of significance not already recognised through designations, encouraging best practice in the management and use of the site. HPAs are purely voluntary agreements but this does not prevent them from extending to the production of an HAA providing the necessary resources can be found.

## 2 KEY ISSUES

This section develops approaches to the broad issues identified in the Introduction, offering guidance on the framing of Historic Area Assessments in ways that meet modern planning and heritage protection needs.



### 2.1 Drawing boundaries

- 2.1.1 In order to keep the HAA focused and manageable it is important that appropriate boundaries are set. Too large an area will entail considerable extra work and cost; too small an area may restrict the range of insights to be gained and may prevent them from being contextualised adequately.
- 2.1.2 Sometimes boundaries may be implicit in the proposals which prompt the assessment; at other times current administrative boundaries may be proposed. In either case the relevance of such boundaries should always be examined critically. Where the administrative boundaries are of recent creation  it is likely that the development of the area has been shaped much more profoundly by historic boundaries which are now defunct. Sometimes topography or patterns of landownership have exerted a more decisive influence on an area's development than any administrative boundaries. An initial task of the assessment will therefore be the validation of any boundaries that have been proposed and, where necessary, their modification. (Where Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) or Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) has already been undertaken this may provide a useful overview of the area or its wider context.)
- 2.1.3 In all cases it is nevertheless important that boundaries are treated as permeable. Areas do not develop in isolation, and thought must always be given to significant relationships with places and events outside the area selected.

## 2.2 Defining character

- 2.2.1 Areas may be chosen for assessment because they are already deemed to have a distinctive character worth preserving or enhancing – as for example when a Conservation Area Appraisal is undertaken. Others may be chosen precisely to determine whether or not this is the case. Depending on the size of the area it may be helpful to regard it as being made up of a series of ‘character areas’, each exhibiting markedly or subtly different characteristics. These variations may be the expression of different periods of history or different patterns of ownership, or they may reflect the operation of different socio-economic forces in the remote or recent past. Identifying these character areas, and describing their attributes, helps to sharpen our sense of the qualities that make places distinctive, and thus enhances our ability to safeguard distinctiveness when decisions affecting an area’s future are taken.
- 2.2.2 Character in the historic environment is a subtle compound of many different ingredients. To varying degrees it can be said to embrace sight, hearing, smell and touch, though it is the visual sense which generally dominates our impressions. The main visual characteristics of an area are intimately linked but may be summarised under the following broad headings:
- Natural landscape features: surface geology; relief; aspect; drainage; vegetation
  - Layout: parcel (field or plot) size, shape and land use; regularity and density of street pattern and other communications; positioning of buildings in relation to plots and sight-lines; building scale and density and their relationship to width of streets; size, frequency and formality of open spaces
  - Buildings: functional types; morphology, including plan-forms and roof shapes; architectural styles, features and motifs; prevalent building materials; colour palette
  - Other features: physical boundaries (walls, hedges, railings, etc); surfaces (roads, alleys, forecourts and yards, etc); street furniture; earthworks; planting (private and public).
- 2.2.3 These visual attributes are supplemented or modified by a range of others derived largely from sounds and smells, including such things as traffic noise and the smell of certain industrial processes or effluents. Both diurnal and seasonal variations in character may also be important: a busy commercial centre may fall silent outside office hours; winter views may be obscured by summer foliage; a sea front vibrant in summer may be battened down and deserted in winter. Most characteristics, whichever sense they appeal to, are subject to change over time, and the character of an area may therefore need to be assessed at more than one epoch in its history.
- 2.2.4 The definition of character in the historic environment requires sensitivity to the range of landscape, architectural, archaeological and other features listed above, though not all of them will weigh equally in the final analysis. In some areas there will be a high degree of uniformity of character; in others diversity may itself be a distinctive quality worth highlighting (together with its parameters). It will frequently be possible to divide character areas into a series of more subtly differentiated sub-areas. Definition should be as precise and inclusive as possible since it may be used as the basis for accepting or rejecting proposed changes to

the area or to individual buildings, and these changes may have the inadvertent effect of reinforcing identified characteristics whilst eroding any that have been overlooked. **[Photos showing different character resulting from piecemeal development (Jericho, Oxford) and uniform development (Anfield?)]**

- 2.2.5 Character areas imply the drawing of boundaries separating one area from another. These boundaries may be clear-cut in some places (for example where a large river or a railway embankment has impeded development) but soft-edged in others. If these subtleties cannot be expressed cartographically attention must be drawn to them in the written report. Boundaries should not be imposed artificially simply because the exercise appears to call for them.
- 2.2.6 The definition of character areas can be a useful exercise in its own right, codifying a disparate series of observations or giving an objective basis for instinctive feelings. It has the additional value for Historic Area Assessments, however, that it poses a series of fundamental questions:
- when did the area acquire its present dominant character?
  - what were the principal influences on the formation of its character?
  - why does the area differ from its neighbours?
  - why does the area's character differ from that of another area of ostensibly similar type (for example, two areas of working-class by-law housing)?

## 2.3 Clarifying historical and architectural development

- 2.3.1 Historic Area Assessments will be most effective when they are informed by an appropriate series of research questions. These will focus attention on what makes the area special, how it has acquired these characteristics and how it compares with other areas. The aim should be to identify and explain the patterns observed in the historic environment and to draw attention to the connections and contrasts between its various elements.
- 2.3.2 The aim should be to produce a narrative of the area's development in which the factors driving and constraining change are clearly identified and the varied form of the area is adequately explained. Different areas will raise different issues, but the following research questions will probably be found to be generally applicable and may help to shape the final report [the bulleted points below may be highlighted in a separate text box]:
- What are the earliest observable elements in the historic landscape? Did they, or other elements now lost, or topographical features, shape or constrain the subsequent development of the area? What is the likely below-ground archaeological potential of the area?
  - When and why did the area develop and what are the principal stages in its development?
  - What were the main drivers behind development? How was it organised or financed? Was an administrative framework or a particular pattern of ownership an influential factor and can the individuals or bodies responsible be identified? Did developing communications within the area or on its margins exert a significant influence on the area's evolution? What other changes outside the area shaped its development?

- How is the area laid out (street pattern, size and distribution of plots, etc)? Did its layout evolve? How, when and why?
- What is the typical unit of development and what exceptions can be identified? Did the typical unit change over time? Were individual developments completed in accordance with initial intentions or were these modified or abandoned? Were the social, economic or other aspirations of developers and builders realised? Can the impact of building cycles or wider economic fluctuations be detected?
- What kinds of building (domestic, agricultural, commercial, industrial, etc) were built in the area? Were different building types or functions located in recognisable zones? Did this pattern change over time? What evidence is there for contemporary employment within the area? How important to residents was employment beyond the area's boundaries?
- What administrative buildings, churches and institutions were sited within the area? What services were provided (schools, shops, etc) and by whom? What provision was made for leisure (parks, recreation, etc) and by whom? How were these various amenities distributed within the area? To what extent did they render the area economically and culturally self-sufficient?
- What was the social character of the area? Did this change over time? When, how, and why? Is there variety within the area?
- What is the architectural character of the area? Which are the dominant buildings in the landscape? What is the range of building types? What range of forms occurs within a single building type? Which building materials were used? What changes in the nature of the building stock occurred over time? What explanations can be offered for any variety that exists? What type (or types) of landscape do the buildings help to form?
- Which individual buildings, groups of buildings or landscape features are important and why?
- How does this area compare with others nearby, or with comparable areas elsewhere? What reasons can be advanced to explain any differences? Which aspects of the area are representative of national trends and which may be regarded as typical of the region or locality? Which are distinctive or unique, and what reasons can be suggested for their occurrence?

2.3.3 HAAs will be most valuable when they not only reflect latest thinking on the development of historic landscapes but also provide new insights which take their study forward. The process of assessment is analytical: description forms a part of the method, but it is a means to an end. So the strength of any assessment will be directly linked to the degree to which the character of an area is understood in the context of wider patterns, both historical and geographical. It is important that an assessment should comment on whether a landscape is typical of a period or place or significantly different. This is not to imply that the typical is not significant: it can represent a social, economic, cultural or architectural development of great importance. The key to assessment is to make that link and to relate a particular area to wider patterns. It is quite possible that the study of an area for assessment purposes challenges received views about landscape development and about the relationship

between aspects of a landscape, but this can act as stimulus to refine the ways in which we understand the historic environment and approach its analysis.

## 2.4 Assessing condition, integrity and vulnerability

- 2.4.1 Observations on the general condition and integrity of an area give a sense of how robust or fragile the historic environment has become. They may also isolate particular areas of concern if further erosion of historic character is to be avoided: poor physical condition can be both a symptom and a cause of public disaffection with the environment. The resulting observations are likely to be non-technical and, where they touch on condition, should not be seen as a substitute for a full condition survey of individual buildings, where necessary. Understanding the ingredients of historic character also helps to determine the vulnerability of an area to change or, alternatively, its capacity to absorb significant change, or certain kinds of change, without substantial detriment.
- 2.4.2 The following questions may be helpful in exploring these issues:
- What is the overall condition of the historic environment? Does it vary within the area?
  - What has been lost (neighbourhoods, streets, significant buildings, landscape features, views, architectural details, etc)?
  - Which parts of the historic landscape retain a high degree of physical integrity and which have been extensively altered?
  - Do different building types display differential survival rates?
  - Which surviving neighbourhoods, buildings or features particularly reflect the historic character of the area? Which are in good condition or could be refurbished? Are these valued by local people or by a wider public?
  - What pressures for change, either active (e.g. redevelopment) or passive (e.g. neglect), can be identified in the area?
  - Which elements of the historic environment continue to fulfil the needs for which they were originally intended? Which are suitable for adaptive re-use? Which characteristics or features should schemes for re-use aim to retain or respect?
  - What would be the consequences for the historic environment of demolition of parts of the historic fabric? Would neighbourhoods lose their integrity and therefore become more vulnerable? Would individual buildings be stripped of significance?

## 2.5 Assigning values

- 2.5.1 Underlying the process of Historic Area Assessment are values. No assessment can fail to reflect the outlook or intention of the person or persons who undertook the exercise, however even-handed the approach attempts to be. This is not something which detracts from the method, but rather one that enhances the process, provided that the approaches and arguments are set out clearly for critical scrutiny.
- 2.5.2 Historic environment scholarship and professional practice reflect a set of values in which ideas of rarity, representativeness, authenticity and aesthetic appeal all figure prominently. These values are enshrined in the system of statutory

designations which seeks to protect the most important aspects of our heritage. Refined over many years but always capable of evolving, they command wide respect but they do not represent the whole spectrum of opinion touching the historic environment.

- 2.5.3 English Heritage promotes a values-based approach to significance (see also 4.5) as set out in *Conservation Principles*, which identifies four broad sets of values through which a site or place can be interpreted: evidential, historical, communal and aesthetic.<sup>24</sup> These broaden the way in which we assess significance, allowing 'local values' to be set alongside the academic and expert views which dominate our system of formal protection of special places.
- 2.5.4 Designation is the most obvious expression of the way in which we value landscapes and their constituent parts. Conservation areas, as previously described, identify areas of special interest, and listed buildings and scheduled monuments are afforded statutory protection because of their national significance. Many local authorities supplement these categories by the identification of further buildings for inclusion in a Local List, elevating them to the status of 'material considerations' in planning decisions, and can provide protection to areas through Supplementary Planning Documents. Village Design Statements are commonly adopted as such.
- 2.5.5 Designation does not amount to a comprehensive definition of the historic environment, but draws attention to those parts judged to be of special significance and requiring additional levels of protection. It should not be concluded that undesignated areas, or unregistered features within conservation areas, do not form significant parts of the historic environment; rather, it is the case that these aspects do not satisfy the strict criteria devised for management purposes.
- 2.5.6 The approach to area assessment must certainly take account of the importance ascribed to areas or components of areas as expressed in forms of designation, but it must also look beyond these special cases. The sum of an area's registered assets is not the same thing as its character or significance. Area assessment can cast the net more broadly to embrace other sets of values, which will lead to the identification of alternative layers of significance. The important role which an unlisted school [Liverpool school illustration?] has played in the life of a community and still plays in views of the area, allegiances to different churches or pubs, the informal uses of streets and open spaces, the enjoyment of eccentric features of a street scene – all these things represent a community's engagement with the wider historic environment and contribute to an area's particular character.
- 2.5.7 Capturing something of these local values through community participation can add depth to assessment and will complement the expert view represented by designation. Furthermore, it can heighten awareness at the local level of the distinctiveness and value of historic areas, and, by encouraging local engagement with planning issues, it can help to identify successful approaches to managing change. The exploration of these values might extend the methodology of area assessment, and it may not always be possible or appropriate, but it is a dimension which reflects wider concerns with the support of sustainable communities.<sup>25</sup>

2.5.8 Expressions of value may also be implicit in the present state of the historic environment, where they can be nurtured or, if they are negative, transformed by appropriate intervention or management. The following questions may help to bring the issues into focus:

- Which heritage assets are designated as being of special interest? Do any others meet the criteria for designation? Do existing designations accurately reflect the level of significance identified?
- Which heritage assets have local value and why?
- What value can be placed on any identified character areas? Are they of exceptional, high, moderate, low or negative value?
- Which areas, buildings or other features show signs of being valued by the community (or sections of it), and which do not? Why?

## 2.6 Assessing significance

2.6.1 English Heritage's *Conservation Principles* define significance as 'The sum of the cultural and natural heritage values of a place, often set out in a statement of significance'.<sup>26</sup> A range of values may combine to enhance the overall significance of a place or building, but sometimes values may be in conflict with one another, as for example when the derelict and vandalised condition of a run-down area (= diminished aesthetic value) fosters a public desire for it to be demolished (= negative communal value), even though its evidential and historical value remains high.

2.6.2 Significance attaches variably to individual heritage assets, but it is also inherent in ensembles ranging from small groups of buildings to neighbourhoods and places. Some types and degrees of significance are reflected in the existing designations (such as statutory and local listed buildings, scheduled monuments, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens, etc) though new information may prompt a re-examination of their appropriateness. Others (not necessarily negligible) are not formally acknowledged and must be assessed according to the four value types set out above (paragraph 2.5.3). In judging the significance of any given area or group of buildings it will be particularly helpful to consider how, and to what degree, the following criteria are met:

- **Rarity.** Does it exemplify a pattern or type seldom or never encountered elsewhere? It is often assumed that rarity is synonymous with historical importance and therefore high value, but it is important not to exaggerate rarity by magnifying differences and downplaying common characteristics.
- **Representativeness.** Is its character or type representative of important historical or architectural trends? Representativeness may be contrasted with rarity.
- **Aesthetic appeal.** Does it evoke positive feelings of worth by virtue of the quality (whether designed or artless) of its architecture or layout, the harmony or diversity of its forms and materials, or through its attractive physical condition?
- **Integrity.** Does it retain a sense of completeness and coherence? In an historic landscape with a high degree of integrity the functional and

hierarchical relationships between different elements of the landscape remain intelligible and nuanced, greatly enhancing its evidential value and often its aesthetic appeal.

- Associations. Is it associated with important historic events or people? Can those associations be verified? If they cannot they may still be of some significance: many places and buildings are valued for associations which are traditional rather than historically proven.

2.6.3 An assessment of significance is, inevitably, a comparative process, and for this reason it relies heavily upon the wider knowledge and experience of those making the assessment. It should aim to establish whether an area, or a building or other feature within it, is of local, regional, national or international significance. But the process may not stop here. A building of international significance (by virtue of an innovative, influential and essentially unaltered design, for example) may be situated in an area whose general characteristics are of merely local significance, but which contains several other buildings, and perhaps a park and a prehistoric earthwork, of either regional or national significance. Such multiple significances may be, to a large extent, isolated from one another, but they may also be interdependent, for example where the internationally significant building is a school purposely designed to serve an area of otherwise unremarkable social housing.

### 3 LEVELS OF HISTORIC AREA ASSESSMENT

The emergence of area assessment techniques in recent years has been accompanied by the adoption of a range of labels describing the approach. For example, the resulting documents have been variously termed 'area assessments', 'appraisals' and 'audits', or 'character assessments', 'appraisals' and 'studies', and according to the extent of their coverage and the degree of detail which they have sought to achieve they have been variously classified as 'intensive', 'extensive', 'rapid' and even 'whirlwind'. These often ill-defined and sometimes overlapping terms are a potential source of confusion. Accordingly this document advocates the stricter use of a more limited range of terms: Outline, Rapid and Detailed Area Assessments.

#### 3.1 Selecting the right level of assessment

- 3.1.1 The evolution, character and significance of an area can be assessed in a number of different ways. The choice of approach will depend on
- the planning or other circumstances prevailing at the time
  - an initial view of the nature and importance of the area under consideration
  - the resources available to accomplish the work.
- 3.1.2 Three levels of Historic Area Assessment are defined below – Outline (Level 1), Rapid (Level 2) and Detailed (Level 3). Each examines an area more intensively than the last, and yields more detailed information and conclusions in exchange for a greater input of time and other resources. Each level is ideally suited to particular circumstances and may be adopted in isolation. It may sometimes be appropriate to adopt different levels of assessment sequentially, however,

providing low-level coverage of a wide area while reserving the more intensive and time-consuming methods for where they are most needed.

- 3.1.3 There are circumstances in which more comprehensive research and investigation may be desirable or appropriate: the Survey of London, for example, examines London's historic environment area by area in considerably more detail than is required for a Detailed Assessment as set out below. But typically such approaches, though valuable in the long run, do not aim to inform decision-making within the lifetime of planning, development or regeneration initiatives. The intention of this guidance is not to imply that more comprehensive approaches to research are not worthwhile and valuable, but to focus attention on methods which yield sound analysis in return for a modest input of resources.
- 3.1.4 All assessments will, to varying degrees, deal selectively with what an area has to offer, devoting greater time to aspects which are considered more significant, more representative or more unusual than others. Sometimes, however, it will be preferable to concentrate attention more explicitly on particular aspects of the historic environment rather than to deal with its every manifestation, either as a way of extending the area that can be covered with a finite level of resource, or as a way of targeting resources most effectively. A selective approach may be appropriate when a particular aspect of the historic environment is under special threat. Equally it may be adopted where one or more themes or periods in an area's history, or one or more of its prevalent building types, are of special importance in shaping its development and character. Examples might include an area retaining an important corpus of early or vernacular buildings, one which has been dominated for many years by a single industry, or one which retains housing illustrating important changes in social policy. The selected topics will receive greater emphasis but it will remain important to link these to the wider development of the area. Clearly, if the assessment is framed too selectively it will not achieve the underlying purpose of understanding the area as a whole.

## **3.2 Outline assessments (Level 1) [Insert Wirral: Tranmere text box]**

- 3.2.1 Outline assessments are designed to be speedy and decisive. They will be most appropriate where a large area has to be assessed very quickly, or where the available information suggests that a more intensive assessment is not needed (for example, where the historic environment survives only fragmentarily). They may also be adopted as a preliminary scoping exercise where there is insufficient information to gauge the appropriate level of assessment or where, for example, a local planning authority wishes to anticipate future needs by acquiring baseline information. Outline Assessments are based on an historic map base supplemented by external field observation and for speed much of the area may be covered by car, not on foot. No systematic documentary research will be undertaken but a limited number of secondary sources may be referred to. Typically an area of several square kilometres will be examined in a day, and a short illustrated report can be quickly produced.
- 3.2.2 It may be felt that Outline Assessments are superficial and that they therefore require little skill or experience in those undertaking them. In fact they make heavy demands on the experience and judgment of the assessors, who must

make snap decisions without the support of extensive documentary information or the time to build up knowledge of the area more gradually.

### 3.2.3 An Outline Assessment will:

- set out the general character of an area, or of sub-areas within it, drawing attention to representative building types and periods
- identify any neighbourhoods, buildings or features of particular historic interest or significance
- identify which areas, if any, merit more detailed assessment, and which have been adequately served by the Outline Assessment.

## 3.3 Rapid Assessments (Level 2) [Insert Anfield text box]

3.3.1 Rapid assessments deliver prompt findings at a much greater level of detail than Outline Assessments and are most suitable when it can be judged in advance that the significance, complexity or integrity of an area is greater than could be dealt with adequately by an Outline Assessment. They are based on external observation (carried out on foot) of the whole of the area, sometimes supplemented by internal inspection of a small number of buildings. They rely upon extensive use of historic maps and directories, but the full range of primary sources will not be exploited systematically. Depending on the complexity of the evidence they can be undertaken for areas as large as several square kilometres in extent or for areas as small as a single street.

### 3.3.2 A Rapid Assessment will additionally:

- narrate the origins and evolution of the area, identifying the main drivers of change
- identify the range of building types, dates and forms and relate them to the wider evolution of the area
- offer a summation, at one or more epochs, of the historic environment
- distinguish, where appropriate, a series of character areas, and describe and explain the origins of their distinctive characteristics
- identify which areas, if any, merit more detailed assessment, and which have been adequately served by the Rapid Assessment.

## 3.4 Detailed Assessments (Level 3) [insert text box on BJQ survey]

3.4.1 Detailed assessments deliver prompt findings for relatively small, densely built-up areas where the complexity of the historic environment calls for greater scrutiny of the evidence embodied in individual buildings and sites. They are most likely to prove useful in areas such as historic town and village centres where many individual buildings are themselves the product of complex development needing to be unravelled before conclusions about type, date and form can safely be drawn. Unlike the less intensive forms of assessment described above, Detailed Assessments encourage the creation of individual building records offering an account (summary or otherwise) of a building's evolution, and these records may usefully be entered into a database or GIS for analysis. Whilst these records will often be derived purely from external observation, internal inspection will be desirable in some cases. Because the area is likely to be small it is probable that documentary sources will be exploited more fully. It is

important to stress, however, that the creation of a series of individual building records does not in itself constitute an area assessment; instead the particular histories of individual buildings and sites must be interpreted and synthesised to inform the wider understanding of the area's development.

3.4.2 A Detailed Assessment will additionally:

- provide individual records of either i) all buildings in the area or ii) selected buildings (for example, those originating within a defined date range)
- where practical, draw upon a wider range of internal evidence
- explore systematically the available primary documentary sources.

3.4.3 The following table sets out a range of planning circumstances or needs, the level of Historic Area Assessment likely to form an appropriate response, and the benefits likely to be delivered:

Circumstance (not an exhaustive list)	Level of assessment	Principal outcomes
1. Planned regeneration of a substantial area of undetermined heritage value	Outline (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a brief account of the area's development</li> <li>▪ differentiation of areas of high, medium or low heritage value</li> <li>▪ summary of characteristic and distinctive landscapes</li> <li>▪ identification of key buildings and/or features</li> <li>▪ an ability to assess the impact of existing proposals for change</li> <li>▪ the ability to steer or advise on new proposals affecting the retention of local character and significance</li> </ul>
2. Formulation of a Masterplan covering a small or medium-sized town	Outline (1)	<p>All the above, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ an overview of the development of the town</li> <li>▪ an indication of main character areas</li> </ul>
3. Proposed scheme for environmental improvements in an historic village	Rapid (2)	<p>All the above, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a systematic account of the area's development</li> <li>▪ descriptions of a series of character areas</li> <li>▪ an evidence base for formulating detailed policies for conservation and enhancement</li> <li>▪ a basis for targeting grant-aid effectively</li> <li>▪ grounds for new area or site-specific designations or alterations to existing ones</li> </ul>
4. Evidence of incremental damage and loss in an historic suburb		
5. Specific proposals for redeveloping part of a town's historic core	Detailed (3)	<p>All the above, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a comprehensive account of the area's development</li> <li>▪ detailed understanding of individual buildings and landscape features and</li> </ul>
6. Preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for (e.g.) a country		

house estate or university campus		<p>their significance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a basis for management policies</li> <li>▪ in appropriate circumstances, an indication that a Heritage Partnership Agreement would be beneficial</li> </ul>
-----------------------------------	--	--

## 4 FIELDWORK, RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

This section offers guidance on the fieldwork and historical research which, to varying degrees, form the core of all Historic Area Assessments. Those undertaking assessments will need to be alert to the full range of topics discussed below, but the extent to which they can be developed will vary considerably according to the chosen level of assessment.

### 4.1 Personnel and equipment

- 4.1.1 Ideally assessments will be carried out by a team of people combining complementary skills and experience in history, historical geography, architectural history, landscape history and archaeology, and familiarity with area assessment methodologies. Knowledge of the planning system, especially as it concerns the historic environment, will also be invaluable. In principle these qualities may be found in a single individual, but for health-and-safety reasons, and to ensure a diversity of knowledge and skills, a minimum of two individuals is advisable for fieldwork. HAAs can be undertaken by historic environment specialists within a local authority or by volunteers, but it will often be necessary or advantageous to employ specialist consultants.
- 4.1.2 Specialist equipment is not required. A conventional or digital camera is essential; if digital equipment is used it must be provided with sufficient memory for the demands of rapid survey work, which may generate several hundred photographs in a day. Those undertaking fieldwork will find it helpful to have a clipboard or weatherproof equivalent for note-taking and for keeping historic map extracts to hand. The preparation of a hand-out for distribution during fieldwork will help to allay any suspicions that may be aroused in the locality by unfamiliar individuals undertaking fieldwork, as well as acquainting interested members of the community with the nature and purpose of the assessment.

### 4.2 Preliminary research

- 4.2.1 Preliminary research lays the foundation for subsequent fieldwork, highlighting issues, areas or features requiring particular scrutiny in the field. Historic Environment Records (HERs) maintained by local authorities, and the English Heritage National Monuments Record (where records made by the former Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) and by English Heritage may be found) are essential starting points. Many HERs can be searched online via the Heritage Gateway website ([www.heritagegateway.org.uk](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk)), which also includes contact details for those which are not available online. The various satellite imagery sites will assist in preliminary examination of an area.
- 4.2.2 The local Historic Environment Record (HER; some still known by the older name of Sites and Monuments Record or SMR) will provide important information on what is already known about an area and the extent of any

designations. HERs vary in the scope of their holdings, but all currently have information on archaeological remains and finds, and most provide access to Urban Archaeological Databases and existing characterisation studies such as HLC and EUS where these exist. Increasingly they include information relating to the historic built environment. For areas in the care of The National Trust reference should be made to the NTSMR, Swindon (selected information accessible via the Archaeology Data Service).

- 4.2.3 Familiarity with existing published accounts of the area will also be useful, including, where available, the Victoria County History, inventory and thematic volumes of the RCHME and the Survey of London, and the *Buildings of England* (Pevsner) series. Extensive research in primary sources may be deferred until the field examination has been conducted, as this in turn allows for the more efficient targeting of source materials.
- 4.2.4 Before fieldwork begins, the historic map series should be assembled and the main lines of topographic development should be identified. Maps may also permit the provisional identification of 'units of development'. These are the parcels of land which are built on under the guidance or control of a single owner or developer. They can often be identified on maps by the conformity of roads or boundaries to a particular orientation or grid or because they are respected by later features. They may also be suggested by a unifying theme linking a number of place names or street names.

### 4.3 Fieldwork

- 4.3.1 The purpose of fieldwork is to refine understanding of the evolution of the area and to assess its character in more rounded ways than maps alone permit. Where maps provide the plan footprint of buildings and a limited range of other features, fieldwork observes them three-dimensionally. It helps to understand how the lie of the land influenced the process of development and it allows the sequence of changes to be plotted in more detail than can be done from periodic map editions. It is concerned with data-gathering, but it is also an analytical activity, and will be most effective when fully informed by the questions listed in the section above on Clarifying Historical and Architectural Development (2.3).
- 4.3.2 Fieldwork should aim to:
  - identify 'units of development' (see 4.2.3), confirming or rejecting those conjectured on the basis of map analysis, and identifying others from architectural or other observations (they may be suggested by a uniform style of building or recurrent motif, for example).
  - distinguish the typical 'build unit' (i.e. what was built in a single building campaign) in each unit of development, ranging from single buildings to whole streets. Units may be distinguished by structural breaks, by changes in architectural form, or by more subtle variations in detailing. Field evidence will often point to many more build units than can be identified from maps. The importance of identifying them is that they give a picture of the mechanics of development – the number of builders involved, the scale of their enterprise and the variety of architectural models adopted by them – factors which, cumulatively, are of great importance in forming the character of an area.

- establish building dates. Buildings can be dated approximately on the basis of their architectural style, plan-form, etc, and this approach will be essential wherever map evidence is lacking or where it is available only at long intervals. For older buildings great care is required, since most medieval or early post-medieval buildings, particularly in towns, have been re-fronted or otherwise extensively altered in subsequent centuries. Date-stones may give assistance, providing their authenticity can be corroborated and so long as they are correctly assigned in contexts of phased development. Dated street furniture (lamp standards, drain covers, etc) may also provide guidance, though the dates may relate to the laying out or subsequent improvement of streets rather than the construction date of nearby buildings.
- identify building function and use, both originally and subsequently. For many buildings – particularly those of the 19th and 20th centuries – the original function may be self-evident from external observation, though trade directories will often yield greater precision. Earlier buildings, and any that have undergone considerable change, may prove harder to interpret. The ways in which buildings were used can often be inferred from the occurrence of certain external features or attributes. In houses, for example, the positions of entrances, windows, chimneys and external plumbing, together with variations in the distribution of decorative detail, allow the uses of different parts of the building to be postulated.
- establish the range of types that occurs within a single functional category – for example, what sizes of house were built, what models (of grouping, position on plot, plan-form, style, etc) were adopted; are there any correlations between these variations and do they vary over time?
- identify evolutionary patterns in the building stock. Can trends be identified, such as the heightening of early houses to provide an additional storey, the replacement of traditional roofing materials, the abandonment of particular plan-forms and the emergence of others, etc?
- examine the social topography of the area – what kinds of site were favoured for different types of building or classes of house?
- consider the archaeological potential of the area
- explore the relationship between building type (or other landscape elements) and area character (see 2.2)
- assess the condition and integrity of the historic environment, and note any factors influencing its capacity to absorb change.

4.3.3 The manner in which fieldwork is conducted will vary according to the chosen level of Historic Area Assessment. Except when carrying out Outline Assessments it will be necessary to walk every street in the area and where possible (having regard to the rights and sensitivities of owners and occupants) to seek other vantage points, such as back-alleys, courtyards, etc, in order to gain information on the rears of buildings or other hidden parts. Internal inspection will generally form only a minor part of the assessment but even in a Rapid Assessment some public buildings may be quickly examined, and chance invitations to view other buildings may occur without the need for formal access

arrangements, allowing the fruits of external analysis to be confirmed or extended.

- 4.3.4 Not all streets or buildings will require the same amount of attention. Genuinely simple or repetitive features can be dealt with summarily. Large or complex buildings, and those which incorporate several phases of development, will generally require closer scrutiny.
- 4.3.5 Observations in the course of fieldwork should be recorded in notes and photographs. A pro-forma record sheet may help to maintain consistency in note-taking, but it should also allow space for 'free text'. An example, showing the kind of headings most likely to be useful, is reproduced as an appendix, but any assessment must respond to particular circumstances and needs.
- 4.3.6 Sufficient colour photographs should be taken to act as a visual notebook, including general views and, where appropriate, individual buildings, architectural details, inscriptions and other features of interest. It is vital, in view of the number of photographs which are likely to be taken, that a contemporaneous log of addresses or locations is generated in the field, so that subsequently the photographs can be identified correctly. Where the built environment is particularly dense a large-scale map, marked up in the field and cross-referenced to the photo-list and notes, will help to avoid confusion.
- 4.3.7 The balance of photographs and notes should be geared towards economy of effort: photographs obviate the need for extensive notes, but some evidence is not reliably captured by photography (especially in less than optimum light conditions) and this may call for more detailed note-taking. Record sheets are 'working records' and are not necessarily destined to be archived.

## 4.4 Documentary research

- 4.4.1 The range of documentary sources available for Historic Area Assessments is potentially vast and even in a Detailed Assessment it will only be practicable to sample some of these sources. One benefit of fieldwork is that it will help to identify representative areas and buildings, or areas and buildings of special significance, and this will help to target research efficiently. Sources can usefully be divided between those which can be reliably related to individual buildings or plots and those which typically yield more general information on the nature – often the economic make-up – of an area. In the first category the most widely available and easily assimilated sources are historic maps and trade directories, easily consulted at record offices, municipal archives and local studies libraries.
- 4.4.2 For HAAs the most useful **maps** are those at scales of 1:10,560 (six inches to one mile) or greater, though for periods when these are unavailable smaller-scale maps will still be of use. There are large-scale maps dating from the 18th or early 19th century for most English towns and cities, and many villages, and a few places enjoy the benefit of earlier maps. They were made for a wide variety of purposes, including estate management, conveyancing, agricultural enclosure, tithe apportionment, and national defence. The products of numerous, mostly independent surveyors, they will need to be assessed on their merits. They are of varying standards of accuracy and, perhaps more importantly, differ considerably in what they select for portrayal.
- 4.4.3 **Ordnance Survey maps** are much more uniform though practices and conventions varied over time.<sup>27</sup> Rich though the Ordnance Survey map series is,

it has defects. Maps at scales larger than 1:10,560 generally omit contour information, so that it is difficult to relate buildings and other features to local topography. In many places several decades elapsed between successive map editions, and here intervening maps from other sources will certainly be required.

- 4.4.4 An unrivalled map series, where available, is that produced by the Goad Insurance Co. from 1885 onwards. Restricted to areas of high insurance value such as commercial centres, docks and areas of concentrated industrial property, **Goad plans**, usually at a scale of 1:480, employ a complex symbology to render functions, building materials, number of storeys, power arrangements and many other details. Many Goad plans are held by record offices and local studies libraries.<sup>28</sup>
- 4.4.5 Maps can usefully be supplemented by **aerial photographs**, which were taken in large numbers from the 1940s onwards, and sometimes earlier (see, for example, the important Aerofilms archive, now part of the National Monuments Record). Vertical air photographs resemble maps but oblique photographs show building elevations and, especially in the form of stereo pairs, reveal something of the three-dimensional nature of the built environment. They are especially valuable for identifying ephemeral phenomena often disregarded by mapmakers but can also be used to examine industrial and other complexes where access is denied. The National Monuments Record holds the principal English collection of aerial photographs. Websites such as Google Earth, About My Place and Windows Live! Search are continually updated with new, high-resolution imagery and can reveal many details not available on any map.
- 4.4.6 **Trade directories** for the largest provincial towns existed in the 18th century and in the course of the 19th century they became available for every town and village in England, either as separate publications or as components of county-wide directories. Initially a guide to the principal tradesmen only, they grew to accommodate public functionaries and a growing proportion of private citizens, often (and most conveniently for HAAs) listed in the form of **street directories**, in which individuals' names are listed in the order in which their houses lined the streets. Sometimes these lists include house numbers, though care must be taken in case the street numbering has been revised subsequently. Generally speaking, directories appear earlier, are more comprehensive, and are easier to relate to existing buildings, in the larger towns and cities than they are in smaller towns and villages. Care needs to be exercised at all times, however, when using them. Directories were commercial productions and confine themselves to information deemed commercially useful. Accordingly they list only a proportion of the population – principally tradesmen and householders. The families of householders, and those lodging with them or living with them as servants, are generally omitted. Since they are a guide to selected *occupants*, street directories also make no reference to *unoccupied* premises, so the absence of a particular address cannot be taken as proof that it was not built. Finally, directories incorporate a bias in favour of the better-off; although the more comprehensive town directories list many working-class householders, some streets of a uniformly proletarian character were not afforded house-by-house listings. Online word-searchable directories can be consulted at [www.historicaldirectories.org.uk](http://www.historicaldirectories.org.uk).

- 4.4.7 **Building control plans** were required by local authorities to ensure conformity with local building bylaws, and were deposited by architects, builders or owners, whose names often appear on them. Larger towns and cities were generally the first to insist upon them, and in some they survive from the mid-19th century onwards (some have been transferred to monochrome microfilm with the sacrifice of much information embodied in colour). In others they have been destroyed or dispersed. Those that survive are now mostly in record offices and archives but some remain with local planning authorities. Building control plans were listed in registers, which provide an index to lost plans as well as those that survive. Registers were compiled in the order in which plans were received, with the result that identifying all the plans relating to a particular street or district can be a lengthy task unless the register entries have been digitised.
- 4.4.8 For an accurate picture of household structure, of the occupational structure of a street or area, and of patterns of social mobility, the decennial **census records** compiled between 1841 and 1911 (the latest currently available) will be most useful. They list everyone who slept at a given address on the night of the Census, and some households are therefore swollen by visitors (who are distinguished as such) whilst others are diminished by absences (which are not recorded). The amount of information captured by the Census is such that it will only be possible to sample it. One effective method is to identify streets or groups of houses (preferably surviving) of contrasting scale and form and to compare the occupations and household structures of the inhabitants, thus giving a social and economic dimension to the various types of house. The 1901 and 1911 censuses have been made available on-line by The National Archives; earlier census data can be consulted via a variety of subscription websites.
- 4.4.9 Collections of **old photographs**, often catalogued by street or district, are held by many local studies libraries, and represent an attractive and easily quarried resource. These and private collections often form the basis for publications. **Local newspapers** often provide accounts of the opening of significant buildings, especially public buildings, and may give detailed accounts of their architecture and use. For the relatively recent past **oral history** can be a valuable source of information, though its systematic exploitation can be a lengthy process.
- 4.4.10 A number of other record types are of enormous value in elaborating the initial findings of research and fieldwork, but they may be difficult to assimilate rapidly. For example, our understanding of earlier periods can be greatly enhanced by the use of **probate, estate, taxation and insurance records**, but these can be time-consuming to analyse and are often difficult to correlate with individual buildings. The same is true of **rate books**, which survive from the 18th century or even earlier in some towns, recording the assessment of property for local taxation and sometimes providing more detailed evidence of the nature of the properties assessed. Other important sources include **property deeds, local authority minute books, district surveyor's returns, sanitary reports**, and, if visiting The National Archives at Kew is a possibility, **IR58s** (the Board of Inland Revenue Valuation Office survey under the terms of the Finance Act, 1910). Sources of this kind may be exploited systematically and to good effect where time is relatively abundant, but in other circumstances the scope for using them may be limited.

## 4.5 Analysing field and documentary evidence

### Historic Area Assessments and Suburbs

Historic Area Assessments are increasingly used to explore the value and significance of England's many historic suburbs. Sometimes narrowly defined by preconceptions derived from the garden suburb movement and its forerunners, suburbs also comprehend many areas of denser housing development, including large areas of by-law housing from the period 1840-1914, and the huge swathes of both private and public housing built in the inter-war period. Most suburbs are characterised by a degree of repetition (albeit with many variations on familiar themes), but their historical significance (as the product of the first industrial society, and as the outcome of a peculiarly British social experiment) is immense. Typically they possess relatively sparse heritage designations; but their value as ensembles is high – and vulnerable to erosion. Suburbs are particularly suited to Outline and Rapid HAAs, and these techniques have consistently demonstrated that these outwardly 'ordinary' landscapes retain much of interest and merit careful management.

- 4.5.1 The process whereby the minutiae of field observation and documentary research are translated into a coherent account of an area's development and character is both vital and complex. It is also, to a large extent, concealed from view in the mind of the researcher. The following observations attempt to draw this process into open view.
- 4.5.2 Fundamentally analysis seeks to identify and explain significant patterns in the world around us. This involves sifting and sampling the available data in a variety of ways. It is important, for example, to know what types of building are represented in an area and which historic periods they represent, and to identify any trends which they appear to embody. When these trends have been identified one can begin to look for their origins and for the principal stages in their development: where, when and why did the trend first surface, how long did it persist, how far did it spread, and how did it evolve over time? Stages in the evolution of a trend can be helpfully amplified by examining a few exemplars in more detail. These might include the first occurrence of a type in the area, an example from the period in which it was commonest, and a late instance in which, perhaps, the beginnings of new trends can already be identified. Ideally exemplars will offer a combination of physical and documentary evidence, since this will generally permit the fullest understanding to be achieved, but this will not always be possible.
- 4.5.3 [This para might be an extended photo caption] An example of the process described above might take the following form. A rural area on the edge of a major provincial town was transformed in the 19th century by successive waves of housing development, beginning with the spacious villas of wealthy merchants and culminating in closely packed terraces of small houses for the upper echelons of the working class. The earliest villas are now known only from maps and documentary sources; whilst these clearly illustrate their generous scale, the social status of their occupants and their impact on the shape of later developments, more extensive or subtle insights are harder to achieve. Many of the later villas survive, however, and the documentary sources for them are

more extensive, allowing them to be dated accurately and their occupants to be identified from directories. Over time the scale and social status of new villas diminishes and there are also changes in their geographical distribution as some parts of the area lose their social pre-eminence. By selectively researching single villas and villa developments which illustrate changing scale, architectural style, plan-form, plot layout and distribution the surviving buildings can be correlated with particular social strata, allowing the historically changeable social contours of the area to be established with some precision. A similar process can be undertaken to explore the advent and evolution of the terraced house in the area.

- 4.5.4 For the period in which they are available historic maps may provide the easiest way of establishing a framework around which to fit the mass of available data. They show (provided they are detailed enough) what was there at a particular date, and what had appeared, as well as what had been removed, by the time the next map was prepared. Supplemented by observation and research they are a powerful ready-made tool for analysis. But maps represent snapshots in time and may cut across important longer-term trends, so the temptation to treat them as demarcating significant periods in the development of an area should be resisted.
- 4.5.5 A more effective way of presenting how areas change is in the form of a narrative, and this will always form an important component of an HAA. Narratives focus attention on causes and effects, influences and constraints, and should give to the physical manifestations of change a human texture and interest.

## 4.6 Presentation of results

- 4.6.1 Historic Area Assessments should present an overview of a specified portion of the historic environment, providing a reasoned and concise account of its origins and evolution, identifying the elements that survive from each period of its development, setting out its distinctive characteristics and offering observations on its condition and significance. They should enable planners, specialists in the historic environment and lay readers to judge which parts or features of an area are most significant or valuable and which are most vulnerable to change. They should also acknowledge which parts of the historic environment are heavily altered or degraded, and which are capable of absorbing – and indeed benefiting from – substantial change. In short they should make a good case, but a balanced one, for the merits of the historic environment.
- 4.6.2 The results should be presented in a way that reflects the breadth, complexity and intrinsic interest of the historical narrative, but also allows salient points to be assimilated rapidly by a wide range of users. Throughout, the emphasis should be on presenting the fruits of analysis and drawing out the main threads of the narrative, not on the amassing of detail for its own sake. The structure and content of reports will vary according to the particular nature of the area, the level of assessment undertaken and the specific requirements of stakeholders, but should normally include the following:
- A summary of the main findings.

- An introduction setting out the level of assessment (see Section 3) and its purpose, when it was carried out and by and for whom, the boundaries of the area covered and any other limitations or constraints.
  - An illustrated narrative, divided as appropriate to the area and describing its historical evolution, highlighting evidence for lost and vestigial landscapes and buildings, identifying the principal extant building types and open spaces, their chronology, architectural form and social context, and other elements of the landscape.
  - Observations on the present condition and character of the area, and the extent to which it retains elements of demonstrable historical significance or amenity value, including an indication of any existing designations.
  - An assessment of the potential for further research.
  - Recommendations, if appropriate, for the management of the historic environment or for designations (local lists, statutory lists, scheduling, conservation areas, etc).
  - Supporting maps.
  - References for all quoted material.
  - A list of published and other sources consulted.
- 4.6.3 Rapid and Detailed Assessments, as well as providing progressively more detail under the headings listed in 4.6.2, may also include:
- Descriptions of a series of character areas, forming the basis for a finer-grained analysis of condition, integrity, significance and vulnerability to change.
  - Descriptions or analyses of individual buildings or other features of importance.
  - An evocation of the historic environment at one or more appropriate epochs.
- 4.6.4 The appearance of the resulting document and the extent of any associated archive will vary considerably from one level of assessment to another. For Outline Assessments a simple annotated map and a small selection of photographs may suffice to illustrate the report, whereas a Detailed Assessment is likely to include a full series of historic maps, historic plans of individual buildings and developments, measured or interpretive drawings of representative or unusual buildings and numerous photographs, both modern and historic.

## 4.7 Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

- 4.7.1 In recent years GIS has emerged as a powerful tool for managing the historic environment. Individual site co-ordinates (point data), or areas (known as polygons) ranging from a few square metres to many square kilometres, can be input to a GIS system and linked to supporting reference material, which can then be interrogated spatially alongside other data sets. The extent to which Historic Area Assessments are integrated with GIS will depend upon the availability to key stakeholders of the necessary software and upon the level of assessment undertaken.

- 4.7.2 GIS can facilitate the analysis of data but it is not a medium for presenting the full range of analytical insights. Whilst an HAA may have as one of its objectives the population of a GIS, its full potential will be realised only if raw data is also analysed and worked up in the form of a narrative and discursive written report. The curation of GIS data (as with all digital data) poses particular challenges if long-term survival and accessibility are to be guaranteed.

## 4.8 Archiving

- 4.8.1 The normal place of deposit for an Historic Area Assessment and its associated archive will be the relevant Historic Environment Record. Advice should be sought at an early stage as to the forms of data (hard copy or digital) which the HER can accept.
- 4.8.2 The principal outcome of an HAA is an overview of the area, providing a context within which the particular value or significance of individual buildings or other features is apparent. This will normally be presented in the form of a report (see Dissemination, below), of which at least one hard copy should be deposited.
- 4.8.3 All levels of assessment will result in the taking of photographs – often in large numbers – both as *aides-memoire* and as a record of what was observed. These are likely to depict a mixture of individual buildings, groups of buildings and general views such as street scenes. Some photographs may be discarded once the work has been concluded, but a selection of them is likely to form a valuable record of the appearance of an area at a particular point in time. For this reason it will be preferable if the photographs are not dispersed to a site-by-site cataloguing system. Given the diverse nature of the images the most appropriate way of storing photographic prints is likely to be in the form of project files, arranged by sub-area, street or individual building as appropriate. Negatives or digital image files (and meta-data) should be catalogued in such a way as to identify them as a set.
- 4.8.4 Some HAAs will be supported by a greater or lesser number of records (written or drawn) of individual buildings, which are likely to have been selected for their representative or illustrative value, though in Outline and Rapid HAAs there may be few if any formal site records of this kind. Where they exist they should also be archived (for further details see *Understanding historic buildings: a guide to good recording practice*).

## 4.9 Dissemination

- 4.9.1 Historic Area Assessments are about the places where people live and work and there will usually be a lively local interest in the outcome. Many places will be of broader appeal. Making the results of the assessment widely known encourages debate and stimulates appreciation of the area's history and landscape, as well as providing an evidence-base for decision-makers. The commonest way of doing this will be through the medium of a published or web-based report, but additional or alternative methods – a book, a leaflet or broadsheet summarising findings in an accessible way, a local exhibition or talk – may be invaluable.
- 4.9.2 The assessment should be circulated to all stakeholders at the earliest opportunity, with the option for them to offer comments and corrections

before it is finalised. Dissemination in the form of hard copy should be supplemented by circulation of a digital version – preferably in a compressed file format such as PDF – to enable rapid transmission when required.

- 4.9.3 The historical research and other observations contained in HAAs will remain valuable after the immediate needs for which they have been requested have been met. In addition to the copy archived with the relevant Historic Environment Record, therefore, it is good practice to make copies available to the local studies library and any other suitable local repository, such as a record office or museum.

## 5 HISTORIC AREA ASSESSMENTS IN ACTION

This section aims to assist those involved in specifying and commissioning Historic Area Assessments and sets out the benefits that can follow when the resulting findings are applied systematically to the formulation of planning policy and heritage protection.

### 5.1 Identifying needs and involving stakeholders

- 5.1.1 Historic Area Assessments are intended to provide prompt results, and so, where only a small commitment of time and other resources is involved, they can generally be achieved without much formal planning. More detailed or complex assessments, or those involving a greater number of interested parties ('stakeholders') or having a high profile locally, will benefit from a more formal approach to agreeing needs, objectives, roles and responsibilities, and to managing the timetable and budget in ways that allow plans to be revised in the light of new discoveries. For such projects English Heritage uses the Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) guidelines, and the same approach will be a requirement for work considered by English Heritage for grant-aid.<sup>29</sup>
- 5.1.2 The form which an Historic Area Assessment takes should be influenced by the needs it proposes to address, the urgency of those needs, and those whom it seeks to benefit (stakeholders). Most HAAs will aim to produce:
- a sound basis (the 'evidence base') for informed decision-making in planning, regeneration and conservation
  - greater public awareness and better stewardship of the area's historic environment
- 5.1.3 In order to achieve these aims the following objectives are likely to be set:
- enhanced understanding of the nature, origins and development of the historic environment
  - awareness of the current condition and character of the historic environment
  - sound understanding of the significance of the area as a whole and of its main component parts
- 5.1.4 Where the motive for undertaking the assessment is to anticipate major change, timing will be crucial. Clearly the earlier in the planning process that the assessment is carried out, the more time there will be to incorporate representations from the major stakeholders, and the more useful the

document will be in informing decisions before any major changes take place. Where time is very short, a speedier type of assessment may still be able to deliver useful conclusions, but public bodies have a duty to ensure that the time needed for necessary research and consultation is not unreasonably curtailed.

- 5.1.5 Stakeholders will normally include the local planning authority, housing associations, residents' associations and other community groups, the local civic society or equivalent, English Heritage and the relevant national amenity societies. In certain circumstances they may include other government agencies (such as CABI and Regional Development Agencies), Housing Market Renewal partnerships, regeneration companies and private developers. For some stakeholders HAAs will form only one part of a larger strategy for an area, which may embrace economic regeneration, housing provision, environmental improvements or tourism. One or more stakeholders will generally define the brief for the assessment, and the results should be shared with them as soon as possible.

## 5.2 Commissioning Historic Area Assessments

- 5.2.1 No single method of putting the work out to tender prevails, but the main stages in the process are likely to be as follows.
- 5.2.2 The commissioning body should identify its own needs, both short-term and longer-term. It is also advisable to consider whether economies or other benefits might accrue from partnerships with other organisations having similar or overlapping needs. If these needs cannot be met by the client's own staff resource the client will then invite a number of consultants to tender for the work. The invitation will be accompanied by a brief stating clearly the
- purpose and scope of the work
  - boundary of the assessment
  - proposed methodology (see Levels of Historic Area Assessment, Section 3, above)
  - required outcomes (usually a number of hard copies of a report and a digital copy; sometimes other products as well)
  - criteria for selecting contractors (these should include the experience and track record of contributors)
  - arrangements for monitoring and sign-off
  - timetable for completion
  - need for a health and safety risk assessment
  - arrangements for stakeholder consultation and/or community consultation (usually one or two public meetings)
  - deadline for tenders to be received.
- 5.2.3 The cost of an Historic Area Assessment will vary considerably according to
- the size of the area and the level of assessment proposed
  - the density and complexity of its historic environment
  - the knowledge and experience of those undertaking the work, including their familiarity with the area itself, with the available research materials and with area assessment techniques

- the precise form in which the results are presented.
- 5.2.4 On the basis of the brief, and calculating the costs of professional time, travel and production costs, the consultants will return a tender response to the client, together with a proposed project design reflecting their own knowledge and experience.
- 5.2.5 Based on the responses received (and when appropriate on interviews as well) the client will select the consultant to appoint on the basis of value for money and relevant expertise.
- 5.2.6 Regular review point meetings will be scheduled to ensure that the work proceeds according to plan and that any unforeseen problems are identified at the earliest possible stage.
- 5.2.7 Where specialists – in community consultation, for example – are engaged in addition to a principal contractor it is particularly important to establish good communications between the various contributors.
- 5.2.8 When the work is at an advanced stage the consultant will submit draft copies of the report to the client and stakeholders for comment.
- 5.2.9 The consultant will complete the work in the light of comments received and submit the requisite number of copies to the client.
- 5.2.10 Unless other arrangements have been made with the consultant it will be the client's responsibility to disseminate the finished work to the appropriate stakeholders and to make suitable arrangements for archiving and public access.

### 5.3 Applying the findings

- 5.3.1 Historic Area Assessments are a vital and practical tool for the informed management of the historic environment. The information will be of most use to local planning authorities, government agencies, regeneration agencies, commercial developers and others confronted with the need to formulate proposals or make decisions concerning new development, regeneration and ongoing programmes of environmental improvement or maintenance, or when anticipating change in the longer term. HAAs also support strategic planning, helping to identify priorities and objectives. This reduces the pressure on local planning authorities to respond to each planning application in isolation; it also reduces the risk that development proposals will be delayed (and costs increased) by unsuspected obstacles.
- 5.3.2 [Place in bold type or text box] An Area Assessment will:
  - provide a deeper understanding of the historical development of an area
  - document the survival and significance of its stock of historic buildings and structures, its open spaces, and other landscape features, and provide a clearer sense of the area's archaeological potential
  - identify and describe 'character areas', assess their relative historic and architectural importance, and provide an evidence base for the retention of distinctive character
  - highlight where heritage protection (in the form of listed buildings, scheduled monuments and conservation areas) is strongest, and where it is weakest and may need strengthening through new or revised designations.

- identify assets suitable for inclusion in a Local List, giving them the status of a 'material consideration' when planning decisions are determined
- indicate where more detailed or more broadly based research would be beneficial by drawing attention to little understood or undervalued areas or themes
- suggest where grant-aid or other incentives may be targeted most beneficially
- draw attention to those areas where heritage-led regeneration would be the most appropriate response, those that could accommodate more substantial change and those suitable for wholesale redevelopment
- inform the production and implementation of Masterplans, Local Development Frameworks, Area Action Plans, Strategic Planning Frameworks or Supplementary Planning Documents
- help to improve public awareness and encourage stewardship of the historic environment.

## APPENDIX: SAMPLE FIELD RECORD SHEETS

The following sample field record sheets, or pro-formas, may be found useful in conducting the fieldwork for an HAA. The format can be used either in paper form or in digital format, for example as structured fields in a GPS (global positioning system) enabled data-logger, from which entered data can be downloaded directly into a database. The benefits of using a pro-forma include the following:

- speedier data collection, achieved by pre-printing repetitive elements or setting out a range of terms which can be quickly selected in the field
- greater consistency in the data collected, especially where the work is shared by a number of individuals
- adherence to standard terms, making for greater comparability of data and easier inputting into a database

In order to expedite the collection of field data the headings of the pro-forma consist principally of those best completed in the field, either from direct observation, or through reconciling field evidence with the limited range of map and other sources which can be carried conveniently during fieldwork (these may include one or more large-scale map editions, extracts from an historic street directory and a print-out of existing designations). These headings are supplemented by a small number of standard identifiers – address, Ordnance Survey grid reference, etc – and cross-references to photographs, ensuring that the subject of the data cannot later be mistaken.

A pro-forma that attempts to anticipate every eventuality, by eliminating the need to do more than tick boxes or circle terms, will necessarily be long and complex, and may ultimately defeat the object of saving time in the field. Generally it is better to leave between one-third and one-half of the sheet free for a longhand summary and sketches (they can be continued on the reverse if necessary).

Two sample record sheets, each with the same headings, are appended here to illustrate contrasting applications. One is used in a manner which will be familiar to many to note details of a single building; the other takes a group of suburban streets as its 'unit of record'. The format is therefore flexible enough to allow assessment at a

variety of resolutions, depending on the level of HAA adopted, the interest or complexity of the historic environment, and the time available.

The structure of the record sheet illustrated here should not be regarded as fixed but as a general guide. It should be adjusted where necessary to suit local conditions, the particular needs of the assessment or the structure of a database into which findings are to be input. The best results will be obtained when some thought is devoted to establishing what headings will be most appropriate in any given case before fieldwork begins. In the field it is worth considering what will be adequately documented by the accompanying photographs, and limiting written descriptions accordingly. On completion it is advisable to process the results (for example, in producing a written synthesis) as quickly as possible. While pro-formas such as these can form the basis of brief but useful records in their own right, the production of an Historic Area Assessment depends upon collating, contextualising and synthesising the information they contain.

The following notes explain the intention behind some of the pro-forma headings:

- Provisional survey No. Generated sequentially in the field, and cross-referenced simultaneously to marked-up maps and photo log-sheets.
- OS national grid reference. Derived from a modern OS map or GPS. An 8-figure reference is normally the minimum requirement for buildings. For small buildings or features a 10-figure reference is preferable.
- District and County/Unitary Authority. In Greater London these are replaced by London Borough.
- Designations. The main historic environment designations are given, but natural environment or other designations can be added if appropriate.
- Photograph Nos. A separate log should be generated in the field, cross-referenced to Provisional survey No.
- HER No. or other identifier. It is helpful to record (either before or after fieldwork) existing records in the Historic Environment Record, the National Monuments Record, or other depository.
- Building/monument type and Category. Best restricted to an agreed range of standard terms, as defined in the NMR *Thesaurus*.
- Historic integrity. This is a measure of how completely or intelligibly the dominant phase or phases of the historic environment survive. Integrity is high when numerous individual features remain, when the patterns of road layout, plot boundaries, etc, with which they are associated, are also present and legible, and when subsequent intrusions or additions are few in number and small in scale. Integrity is low when the surviving elements of the historic environment are few in number, isolated, much altered, deprived of their historic setting or otherwise heavily degraded.
- Value of further investigation. An estimate of how much more would be gained from undertaking more detailed investigation (such as internal inspection) or research. Must take account of the subject's likely significance and its claims over comparable examples.

[NB. For the two pro-formas, see the separate PDF files: 'HAA blank record sheet - filled in for area' and 'HAA blank record sheet - filled in for building']

## CASE STUDIES

[These are to be incorporated at specified points in the main text]

### **Queenborough and Rushenden, Kent (Thames Gateway) [photo: Nissen houses]**

This Historic Area Assessment<sup>30</sup> was undertaken for the South-East Region of English Heritage in order to inform development proposals at Queenborough and its neighbouring residential suburb Rushenden. Situated on the Isle of Sheppey off the north Kent coast, Queenborough and Rushenden are likely to see considerable housing growth and other changes in coming years as part of the regeneration of the Thames Gateway. A master-plan is being formulated in accordance with the Development Framework for Queenborough and the Swale Borough Local Plan.

The Queenborough study sets out the story of this small town's development, highlighting the significant buildings, sites and areas. Its principal aim is to inform the debate about the future of Queenborough and Rushenden. The document is intended for all those – master-planners, policy-makers, regeneration agencies, local authority conservation officers, planners, developers and their architects – who stand to benefit from a deeper understanding of the area's history and character. It is also intended to be of use to the local community and to all who have an interest in the town and its future. By highlighting significant, sensitive and designated areas, the report can be used as a planning tool to manage change within the historic environment, and to urge that investment in historic assets contributes directly to the wider benefits of regeneration. The concluding part looks at the impact of new areas of development on the most sensitive parts of the town; it is hoped that this conservation element may help in considering options for renewal.

Rumney Design Associates refer to the Queenborough Historic Area Appraisal in their master-plan for the town, proposing for example that the grain of the historic landscape, which is powerfully influenced by such features as passages linking the High Street with the creek, should be reflected in the areas of proposed new development. English Heritage continues to comment on aspects of the developing masterplan, particularly the scale of proposed new creekside development, and the importance of linking the residential suburb of Rushenden with Queenborough rather than further isolating it.

### **Wirral, Tranmere, Merseyside**

The Wirral: Tranmere outline assessment was carried out by English Heritage staff in 2004 as part of an internal exercise designed to provide information about the historic environment of areas scheduled for clearance under the Government's Housing Market Renewal Initiative. A team of two staff, using a pro-forma as a check list, made an inspection of the area, made up of a number of discrete blocks of housing within a wider zone. Inspection took less than half a day, with halts in each block for note-taking and photography. 'Windscreen' survey of the wider area provided historical and architectural context and allowed a relative assessment of the general condition of housing within the study blocks. The extent to which the historic environment had remained substantially intact was assessed through comparison between the area today and as represented (newly completed) on an early 20th-century Ordnance Survey map.

A report, taking a day to write and to integrate with scanned illustrations, provided a very brief account of the historic development of the wider area, described

each area in turn as it survived at the time of survey, and drew conclusions about the significance of different elements of the environment, pointing variously to typicality, unusual variations, and salient characteristics. Recommendations were made relating to the degree to which proposed demolition would represent a serious loss to the historic environment, judged in broad, sub-regional terms.

### **Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool [photo: Tancred Rd?]**

The conjoined suburbs of Anfield and Breckfield – just a small part of Liverpool and Merseyside targeted for Housing Market Renewal in 2003 – were selected for a Rapid Assessment both to explore the intrinsic interest of the area and to test the validity of the HAA approach. The resulting report traced the historical evolution of the area from semi-rural villa community to densely built-up residential suburb, and also highlighted the main alterations that occurred after 1900 once the area's dominant character was established. It placed the suburb in the wider context of Liverpool's expansion, identified the drivers of change, revealed the impact of changing architectural fashions and planning regulations, and showed how the community's needs were expressed in its commercial and institutional buildings. The report<sup>31</sup> also presented an analysis of the varying character of the area, drawing particular attention to streets and neighbourhoods where the integrity of the historic landscape was high and retention might therefore be desirable.

Some recent decisions affecting Anfield and Breckfield have adversely affected its historic character, but others have responded to indications contained in the report. The approaches adopted here and elsewhere formed part of English Heritage's policy of encouraging HMRI partnerships to acknowledge the potential value of the historic environment as a focus for local identity and a basis for heritage-led regeneration. They also provided templates for the generic advice prepared by English Heritage for all HMRI Partnerships (EH policy guidance note 'Low Demand Housing and the Historic Environment'). Assessments by consultants, such as North Staffordshire (Conservation Studio) and Oldham-Rochdale (Derek Latham Assocs), are now routinely requested. The research on Anfield and Breckfield was subsequently published as *Ordinary Landscapes, Special Places: Anfield, Breckfield and the growth of Liverpool's suburbs* (2008), which includes a chapter aimed at stimulating greater awareness of what communities can achieve by looking at their own environment.

### **Birmingham Jewellery Quarter**

A Detailed Assessment of Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter was undertaken by RCHME/English Heritage in partnership with Birmingham City Council in 1998-2001.

The Jewellery Quarter is an exceptionally complete historic industrial quarter of international importance covering an area of 94 hectares (230 acres) approximately 15 minutes' walk north and north-west of Birmingham's Victoria Square. It originated in the late 18th century as a planned development of brick townhouses and surrounding villas built for the town's professionals, landowning classes and industrialists. By the early 19th century the character of the area had changed with the construction of smaller houses and workshops turning out a wide range of small metal items. Within 50 years a few larger factories, small-to-middling scale jewellery factories and workers' housing had been added to the mix. The second half of the 19th century witnessed the rapid expansion of the jewellery trade in the area and culminated in the densely built cluster of jewellery-related and metal-working buildings and former houses we see today.

During the 1990s the area came under increasing development pressures, particularly for the conversion of former workshops and factories into inner-city apartments, resulting in a requirement for an assessment of the character of the quarter to inform its protection and future management. An Outline Assessment confirmed that the area was of considerable architectural and historical significance, but, owing to the built-up street frontages and difficulties ascertaining the degree of survival of rear workshops, it quickly became apparent that a Detailed Assessment would be necessary to obtain a sufficiently full understanding of its development and character. The results of the Outline Assessment were combined with further documentary research and analysis of newly-commissioned aerial photography to select 50 of the best preserved buildings of varying type and date for external and internal investigation. This was accompanied by further research into the industrial processes, specialist machinery and the underlying economic basis of the quarter. It emerged as an area of exceptional significance not just in visual terms but as a unique survival of a historic working industrial quarter operating in the same buildings, and in many cases using the same processes and machinery as it did over 150 years ago.

The Detailed assessment had a number of outcomes. Following public consultation in 2000 three separate conservation areas were consolidated into a single conservation area encompassing the whole quarter. The public consultation was accompanied by a major exhibition and the publication by English Heritage of an accessible guide to the area.<sup>32</sup> In 2002 English Heritage published a fuller account of the area including an analysis of its significance in a national and international context.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently a further 120 buildings in the quarter were statutorily listed as of special architectural and historical interest and in 2005 Birmingham City Council published (as Supplementary Planning Guidance) a design guide for the area. These measures were accompanied by the adoption of planning policies which have been successful in protecting the unique character of the quarter and its fragile manufacturing and craft base whilst permitting controlled new development on its periphery.

### **Harmondsworth, London Borough of Hillingdon**

English Heritage commissioned Pre-Construct Archaeology to carry out an assessment of Harmondsworth (London borough of Hillingdon) and its immediate surroundings in anticipation of large-scale developments. The most prominent of these was the requirement for a third runway at Heathrow Airport, although no planning applications had been received at the time that the assessment was carried out. The assessment covered both the built environment and buried archaeological remains in considerable detail. The built environment component of the survey identified features and buildings of architectural or historic interest within the existing conservation area, and fragments of historic landscape, buildings and features within the wider study area, revealing an historic connection between structures and landscape. It demonstrated that the character and importance of many of the buildings is enhanced by or dependent upon their location, and that the level of historic survival was unusually high for a village settlement relatively close to London, retaining evidence of both its rural character and its historic reliance on agriculture. The report<sup>34</sup> identified and assessed such archaeological remains as might be damaged or lost through construction and other works associated with any possible redevelopment of the site. The study recommended that some buildings were assessed further to establish whether they should be listed or locally listed. No new conservation area extensions or designations were recommended.

The Harmondsworth assessment was helpful to advisors within English Heritage, providing evidence of the impact on the historic environment that would result from the proposals for a third runway at Heathrow Airport. The study was also used by the Diocese of London to assist them in preparing a case against the destruction of the village of Harmondsworth by the new runway, as originally planned. The revised proposal is for an altered alignment of the runway that now preserves the village; a victory for the Diocese and the village residents. The study has been presented to the Department of Transport to provide baseline information for those considering the impact of the proposed third runway on the historic environment.

### **Rievaulx, North Yorkshire [photo: Abbey and house]**

Rievaulx, a village in the picturesque valley of Ryedale on the edge of the North York Moors, is famous for its ruined Cistercian abbey, which became in the 18th century the focal point for a notable landscape garden (Rievaulx Terrace) on the estate of a nearby country house, Duncombe Park. It is also well known to industrial archaeologists as the site of an important 16th-century water-powered iron-smelting furnace. Vernacular houses of the 17th and 18th centuries and a medieval church or *capella ante portis*, restored by Temple Moore in 1906, add further interest to the small settlement. Both the Abbey (English Heritage) and Rievaulx Terrace (National Trust) have long been important visitor attractions but the wider interest of the landscape, and the important historical links between its main elements, were not apparent to the casual visitor, who was also obliged to drive along narrow lanes between two adjacent sites for want of other communication.

The objective of the study, part of a linked series exploring key elements of the Ryedale landscape as part of the Can-Do consortium of English Heritage, the North York Moors National Park and other partners, was to extend understanding of the landscape at large by probing neglected aspects and focusing particularly on interrelationships between the various elements. Given the complexity of the individual monuments, ranging from much altered 17th-century longhouses to the abbey ruins themselves, the study inevitably relied heavily on a range of earlier work, including researches over many years by Gerry McDonnell, a systematic investigation of the housing by the RCHME in the 1980s, and a recent published account of the architectural development of Rievaulx Abbey. Additional architectural and archaeological fieldwork focused on testing and extending existing understanding and did not involve the production of formal records of individual structures and features.

The resulting overview of the development of the landscape was synthesised for lay consumption in an attractive broadsheet, for distribution at visitor attractions, tourist information centres and other outlets in the locality. Using a mixture of field and documentary evidence this explains the various features visible in the landscape, adding interest to a visit and providing reasons to explore local lanes and footpaths more fully, turning the eye away from the monument in isolation and towards its wider context.

### **Berwick-upon-Tweed**

Berwick has long been recognised as an historic border town of great distinction, important for its medieval and Elizabethan ramparts, such buildings as its Commonwealth-era Church, early 18th-century Barracks and Governor's House, the mid-18th-century Town Hall and a streetscape composed largely of 18th and early-19th-century houses. Many of the house fronts conceal earlier fabric, much of which has never been fully investigated, and the complex morphology of the town remains to

a great extent unexplored. Two satellite settlements, Tweedmouth and Spittal, which now form suburbs of Berwick, have distinctive histories in which fishing, coal mining and other industries bulk large. They have a less demonstrative character, and are not well represented in the statutory lists. All three settlements have Conservation Areas. By national standards the economy of the area has not performed well in recent decades and growing levels of out-migration by young people have caused mounting concern.

By 2005 Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal stood on the brink of major change, originating partly in the regeneration efforts of the local authority and its regional partners, and partly in growing commercial interest in the development of waterfront sites. It was important therefore to assess the character and significance of the local historic environment, and to identify any gaps in knowledge, before development and regeneration plans were further advanced.

The initial assessment by English Heritage took the form of rapid fieldwork conducted by two investigators over four days and ranging across the whole of the three settlements as they existed c1920 (for speed, outlying areas overwhelmingly of later date were not inspected). The fieldwork was supplemented by limited research in documentary sources – principally maps. The resulting report,<sup>35</sup> which was completed in about six weeks, identified the main lines of historical and architectural development, the forces helping to shape particular areas, and the resulting architectural and landscape character. The content of the report largely comprised accounts of twenty 'historic character areas', which provide a key to understanding the diversity and distinctiveness which lie at the heart of Berwick's appeal. Each area account was divided into sections covering topography, historical development, architectural and landscape character, condition and landscape integrity.

The assessment was made available to Master-planners (commissioned by the local planning authority) in the early stages of their work. It also provided context and much relevant information for two Conservation Area Appraisals (Berwick and Tweedmouth) and management plans for all three of Berwick's conservation areas. It was eagerly taken up by the Berwick-upon-Tweed Civic Society as offering a new angle on the town's heritage, particularly with its attention to areas hitherto considered by many to have negligible heritage value. The overview which it provided underpinned further research resulting in a publication, *Berwick-upon-Tweed: three places, two nations, one town* (2009). Further outcomes have been the establishment of a local building recording group, harnessing the enthusiasm of local residents who are keen to learn and apply skills in researching historic buildings in Berwick, and a reassessment of statutory designations.

### **South Shoreditch [photo: AP?]**

South Shoreditch lies at the heart of what is known in London development contexts as the 'City fringe', the future of which is a major public policy issue for Londoners. English Heritage, in partnership with the London Borough of Hackney and the Greater London Authority, has explored co-ordinated approaches to planning in South Shoreditch. To inform the debate English Heritage carried out a detailed assessment of the area, whose dominant and distinctive character derives from its history as a major centre of the furniture trade from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th. The assessment traced the development of the area, identifying workshops, showrooms and other buildings of historic or architectural interest.

The assessment resulted in a small number of fresh designations and, importantly, the information helped to frame new conservation policies which now

underpin the South Shoreditch Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The assessment identified a number of buildings of either local significance or townscape merit that contribute to the overall quality of the area. The South Shoreditch SPD provides detailed guidance for conservation and design issues affecting these buildings, and seeks to protect plot patterns, historic street layout and local views. It includes criteria relating to the design quality of materials, scale and relationship to context – issues which had been identified in the assessment. The SPD aims to achieve a balance between high-quality, large-scale development on the edge of the City areas, whilst ensuring that development within conservation areas reflects the prevailing scale, character and form of the furniture trade's architectural legacy. As the resulting publication in English Heritage's 'Informed Conservation' series put it, these policies aim to 'ensure that these areas retain the essential character that makes them such attractive places in which to live and work.'<sup>36</sup>

### **Pool, Cornwall**

Pool is located between Redruth and Camborne in Cornwall. It was long an important centre in the Cornish tin-mining industry, but the last working mine closed in the late 1990s. Alan Baxter has been involved in a series of projects at Pool, developing a thorough understanding of the area's history and character in order to produce a strategy for its heritage-led regeneration. The culmination of this work has been a Masterplan which draws on local typologies, patterns of development and movement to enable a major new mixed-use development, for which Baxter's have also prepared an Environmental Impact Assessment. This impact assessment considers in detail the proposals and their effect on the heritage of the area, suggesting ways in which adverse impacts can be minimised by appropriate design.

Of particular concern in assessing the proposals of the Masterplan was the need to ensure that the new development safeguards the authenticity of what is a sensitive site. It is not only adjacent to a large, Grade II\* listed former mining complex but is also on the fringe of the Cornish and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. Because this designation is founded in the quality of the area's historic landscape it was necessary to develop a close engagement with the history and character of the area: not just its buildings, but the ways in which they relate to each other and the streetscape, and the relationship between buildings and the natural landscape. In particular, a number of suggestions have been made for ways in which established views that include historic buildings (and which could be affected by the development) can be maintained and enhanced.

## NOTES

1.1.1

<sup>1</sup> *Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments in a Planning and Development Context* (English Heritage, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> *Conservation Principles: policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment* (English Heritage, 2008, or via [www.english-heritage.org.uk/Publications](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/Publications)).

<sup>3</sup> *Guidance on conservation area appraisals* (English Heritage, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> *Low Demand Housing and the Historic Environment* (English Heritage, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> *Character and Identity: Townscape and Heritage Appraisals in Housing Market Renewal Areas* (English Heritage & CABE, 2008); Adam Menuge, *Ordinary Landscapes, Special Places: Anfield, Breckfield and the growth of Liverpool's suburbs* (English Heritage, 2008), especially chapter 7: 'Understanding Historic Suburbs'.

<sup>6</sup> *Capitalising on the inherited landscape: an introduction to historic characterisation for masterplanning* (Homes & Communities Agency and English Heritage, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> *Characterisation and Spatial Planning* (English Heritage, forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> *Understanding Place: Historic Characterisation for Planning and Development* (English Heritage, forthcoming; draft available at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/Characterisation>).

<sup>9</sup> Clark, J, Darlington, F and Fairclough G, *Using Historic Landscape Characterisation* (English Heritage and Lancashire County Council, 2004); [www.english-heritage.org.uk/Characterisation](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/Characterisation).

<sup>10</sup> *Conservation Bulletin*, 47 (Characterisation special issue), Winter 2004-5; Steve Bee *et al.*, *Growing Places: Heritage and a Sustainable Future for the Thames Gateway* (English Heritage, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> *Low Demand Housing and the Historic Environment* (English Heritage, 2005); Adam Menuge & Simon Taylor, 'Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool: A rapid area assessment of the built environment' (English Heritage, Architectural Investigation Report B/006/2004).

<sup>12</sup> See [www.english-heritage.org.uk/HeritageProtection](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/HeritageProtection) for up-to-date information on Heritage Protection Reform.

<sup>13</sup> The European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000) gives the following definition: 'a "Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (Article 1 (a)).

<sup>14</sup> *Conservation Principles*, 27-32.

<sup>15</sup> For recent guidance on recording, see the companion publications *Understanding historic buildings: a guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage, 2006), *Understanding Historic Buildings: policy and guidance for local planning authorities* (English Heritage, 2008) and *Understanding the Archaeology of Landscapes: A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, W G Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London, 1955); M R G Conzen, *Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town-plan analysis* (London, 1960) ; and H J Dyos, *Victorian Suburb: a study of the growth of Camberwell* (Leicester, 1961).

<sup>17</sup> See for example RCHME, *Peterborough New Town: A Survey of the Antiquities in the Areas of Development* (London, 1969) and various RCHME surveys in advance of the radical changes wrought by Urban Development Corporations in the late 1980s.

<sup>18</sup> English Heritage guidance on the application of characterisation techniques to urban landscapes is in preparation.

<sup>19</sup> R M Thomas, 'Mapping the Towns: English Heritage's urban survey and characterisation programme', *Landscapes*, 7 (1), 68-92.

<sup>20</sup> *Guidance on conservation area appraisals* (English Heritage, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> See guidance on setting (English Heritage, forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> *Conservation Plans for Historic Places* (Heritage Lottery Fund, 1998); *Conservation Management Plans* (Heritage Lottery Fund, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> *Village Design: Making local character count in new development* (Parts 1 and 2) (Countryside Commission, 1996); *Parish Plans* (Countryside Agency, 2003). *Town Design Statements: Why and how to produce them* (Countryside Agency, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> *Conservation Principles*, 27-32.

<sup>25</sup> For an example of community-led area assessment see Peter Guillery *et al.*, 'South Acton: Housing Histories: an historic environment characterisation study' (English Heritage, Architectural Investigation Reports and Papers B/0011/2005). Part of the English Heritage strategy for regeneration in Berwick-upon-Tweed (see Case Study) is the establishment of a local recording group which, over time, can increase knowledge and awareness of the town's buildings and thus allow local values to be represented in future decision-making.

<sup>26</sup> *Conservation Principles*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> For Ordnance Survey mapping conventions, and for details of map scales and editions, see Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey Maps: a concise guide for historians* (2nd edn, London, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> For coverage of Goad plans, see Gwyn Rowley, *British Fire Insurance Plans* (Old Hatfield: Chas. E Goad Ltd, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers Guide* (English Heritage, 2006); [www.english-heritage.org.uk/morphe](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/morphe).

<sup>30</sup> Susie Barson *et al.*, *Queenborough, Isle of Sheppey, Kent: Historic Area Appraisal* (English Heritage Research Dept Report Series 39/2006).

<sup>31</sup> Adam Menuge & Simon Taylor, 'Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool: A rapid area assessment of the built environment' (English Heritage, Architectural Investigation Report Series B/006/2004).

<sup>32</sup> John Cattell & Bob Hawkins, *The Birmingham Jewellery Quarter: An Introduction and Guide* (English Heritage, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> John Cattell, Sheila Ely & Barry Jones, *The Birmingham Jewellery Quarter: An Architectural Survey of the Manufactories* (English Heritage, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> 'An Archaeological and Historic Environment Characterisation Study of Hamondsworth and its Environs' (unpublished report, Pre-Construct Archaeology for English Heritage, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Adam Menuge & Matthew Withey, 'Berwick-upon-Tweed, Tweedmouth and Spittal: Rapid Character Assessment' (English Heritage, Architectural Investigation Division Report Series B/013/2005).

<sup>36</sup> Joanna Smith & Ray Rogers, *Behind the Veneer: The South Shoreditch Furniture Trade and its Buildings* (English Heritage, 2006).