

DETR'S ROLE IN ASSESSING COUNTRYSIDE CHANGE - DR ANDREW STOTT, DETR, BRISTOL

The English countryside is diverse, highly valued and changing. The Government's *Sustainable Development Strategy* confirms that the special natural and cultural characteristics of our landscapes are highly valued and must be retained. But, at the same time, the White Paper acknowledges that we are not aiming for a landscape frozen in time and we must allow for activities such as local enterprise, agriculture, forestry and renewable energy production, as well as meeting some of our housing needs in the countryside. Change must be well managed if we are to retain landscape character and protect wildlife - and good management requires good information.

Information is needed so that we can have a reasoned debate about our objectives for the countryside - so that we can evaluate the options and understand the consequences of our actions. Information is needed so that we can set meaningful and achievable targets. Information is needed so that we can assess progress and modify our actions and objectives. At the top level, the Sustainable Development Strategy proposes sets of 'headline' and 'core' indicators which will be used to chart our progress through this difficult terrain. But this is just the tip of the iceberg and is underpinned by requirements for a wide variety of information to improve our management of change in the countryside at the national, regional and local levels.

Over the last 10 years the Department has made a long term commitment to collecting information about the state of the countryside in the 1990 and 2000 'Countryside Surveys', and related projects, undertaken in collaboration with Natural Environment Research Council and others. The earlier surveys by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology in 1978 and 1984 were designed to be scientific surveys of land use and ecology. Since the Department's involvement there has been a drive to maximise the benefits for policy whilst retaining the scientific objectivity and invaluable time series. We want to continue this process and to encourage the widest possible use of the results whilst being fully aware of their limitations. Countryside Survey is a general purpose data collection exercise and provides a data resource for a wide range of policy applications.

Developing the Countryside Character approach as a tool for effective management of the countryside will help to deliver our objectives for sustainable development. Exploring the relationship between Countryside Survey 2000 and Countryside Character is a crucial step in developing this effectiveness and in maximising the benefits of Countryside Survey 2000. Character Area 'groups' can be used as a framework for the presentation of results of Countryside Survey in England. Further work is needed to explore how Countryside Survey and Countryside Character can be used together to assess changes in countryside quality.

Dr Andrew Stott is Head of the Scientific Advisers' Unit in DETR's Wildlife and Countryside Directorate (WACD). The Unit provides scientific advice in support of wildlife and countryside policy development and takes the lead on strategic research and long term monitoring sponsored by WACD, including Countryside Survey 2000.

The Unit is currently advising on the review of the Hedgerow Regulations, Access to Open Countryside, and Sustainable Development Indicators. Before joining DETR in 1993, Andrew Stott worked with the Environment Service in Northern Ireland, providing advice on agri-environment schemes and undertaking landscape assessments as part of a review of AONBs in the Province.

CONTINUITY & CHANGE: COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER AS A TOOL FOR MANAGING CHANGE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE - GREGOR HUTCHEON, CPRE

The diversity of the English landscape is a national asset. But landscape is not static - it is ever changing. Much of this change is inevitable, indeed desirable. But all too often the changes taking place in the countryside are eroding the special qualities that make landscapes distinctive. As well as change, we need continuity. We need to protect and enhance the qualities and diversity of the landscape that people value and make the countryside special. The countryside character approach potentially offers a useful tool to help ensure the continuity of the things we value and encourage the changes we desire.

Why does Landscape Matter?

Landscape, the beauty and diversity of the countryside, is something that matters a great deal to CPRE. Concern and passion for the landscape is often the prime motivation for our membership and local volunteers. Our recent campaigns on hedgerows, rural tranquillity, design, clutter and meadows have been among our most popular - locally and with the media. And survey after survey have confirmed that CPRE is not alone - landscape matters to many people from many walks of life.

The reasons why landscape matters are varied. For many, landscape is a source of inspiration and spiritual refreshment. Recent research has demonstrated that landscape also contributes to our overall health and well-being – a kind of ‘natural health service’. And landscape is also important culturally - as part of our heritage and national and local identity.

Landscape is also important economically. It contributes to the prosperity of the nation in a number of ways including:

- as a "direct employer" in managing and enhancing landscapes and habitats;
- as a "raw material" for economic activity - e.g. tourism, food processing;
- as a source of "competitive advantage" - e.g. branding of agricultural produce; and
- as an "economic driver" in which business leaders for some key growth sectors of the economy (e.g. knowledge based industries) repeatedly identify environmental quality as a major influence on locational decisions.

The Rural Landscape is under Threat

Of course, landscape is ever changing and evolving. But the recent scale, pace and type of landscape change risks undermining many of the qualities and attributes which make landscape important. These changes include:

- the shattering of rural tranquillity - an area of rural tranquillity almost the size of Wales has been lost since the 1960s;
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- urban sprawl - an area of countryside the size of London has been urbanised every decade since 1945; and
- insensitive farming practices - more than half our hedgerows have been lost since 1947.

Other issues that come high on the local agenda include poorly sited and designed development, countryside clutter such as advertising hoardings and intrusive telecommunications masts and unnecessary and inappropriate lighting. Each of these changes is contributing towards the gradual loss and erosion of landscape character and local distinctiveness.

Why is this the Case?

Landscape is under threat because it is under-valued. Too often those who take decisions about the future development and management of rural areas fail to recognise the importance of landscape issues. This lack of understanding stems from the fact that landscape issues lend themselves less easily to conventional methodologies or scientific techniques for assessing their importance. Their value lies as much in the emotions and feeling that people have for an area as in any independent assessment of landscape importance. Values that are hard to quantify.

But such difficulties are not insurmountable. The challenge is to raise awareness and appreciation of the ways in which landscape contributes to the quality of life of the nation. This means improving our collective understanding of landscape and why landscape matters and using this to win over hearts and minds to ensure that those who take decisions about the future development and management of the landscape appreciate its wider contribution to society and economy as a whole.

How can Countryside Character help to Deliver Continuity and Change?

Countryside character alone may not be able give landscape issues the profile they deserve and need, but it is a useful starting point. Using the character approach will improve our understanding of landscape issues. It will help us to develop a common language to describe and articulate the special qualities of the countryside. And it will also take us beyond the boundaries of specially designated areas to appreciate the wider countryside - the countryside that is often valued most by local people.

Armed with this new information and understanding we can begin to influence those who have an influence on the landscape and landscape change. This will be important in many different arenas. These include:

- the land use planning system - to inform decisions about the location, scale and design of development;
 - the design and delivery of land management and rural development schemes - to help direct their objectives and targets; and
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- in informing regional and rural strategies and programmes of the opportunities offered by a high quality rural landscape for the wider economy.

Critical to the success of this approach is ensuring that the issues we are concerned about are effectively articulated and understood. This means selling the message in a simple and attractive way. It means reaching a wide audience - local councillors and officers, business people as well as the wider public. It means ensuring that the products of character assessments are presented in a manner accessible to the various target audiences and that any subsequent landscape objectives are widely shared.

Local Landscapes for Local People

In particular, we need to develop ways of encouraging the participation and involvement of local people in determining the future of their local landscapes. The environmental capital approach is one way of involving local people in identifying what is important to them. While this is a new and potentially useful tool there are concerns that it is still largely unproven and not widely used. It is important, therefore, to remember the other tools that are already available and more widely used. For example, *Village Design Statements* are tremendously popular and have been highly successful in fostering local awareness of landscape issues and in influencing the quality of new development. Other local initiatives such as *Parish Maps* and *Planning for Real* exercises also offer opportunities for local participation in landscape issues.

Where next for Countryside Character?

The coming of age of the character approach could not be more timely. With a Rural White Paper in preparation, revised rural planning guidance expected soon and new forms of integrated rural support being implemented, the opportunities to use the character approach to ensure that landscape and countryside character take their proper place in decisions about future rural change abound. Lets grasp these opportunities and together ensure the protection and enhancement of the countryside so many care about.

Gregor Hutcheon is the Senior Rural Policy Officer for the national office of CPRE. He studied Geography at the University of Aberdeen, followed by a post-graduate degree in Rural Regional Resources Planning, again in Aberdeen. He moved to London in 1992 to take up a position as Rural Affairs Specialist for the consultants Ove Arup and Partners where he worked on a number of major development projects. He began working for CPRE in 1995 to help develop CPRE's position on economic and social issues in rural areas. He now has responsibility for CPRE's work on rural services, rural development and landscape issues, including countryside character.

COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER & AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING - FIONA GOUGH, FRCA

The Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) is responsible for a number of agri-environment (AE) schemes in England. These schemes offer payments to farmers and land managers to conserve and enhance land and features of environmental value through farming in an environmentally friendly fashion.

Some schemes operate within designated areas defined for their wildlife and landscape character *e.g.* Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), others such as the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme provide a menu of grants that are available throughout England. It is in the targeting of discretionary country wide schemes such as CS that the use of the countryside character framework has proved to be particularly valuable.

CS county targeting is a collaborative process whereby views on the key environmental features, their current condition, management needs and priority for action, are sought from a wide range of organisations with relevant interests within each county. The joint character areas provide an excellent strategic framework within which to gather this advice as they are based on areas of common landscape character rather than administrative boundaries.

While the countryside character (CC) approach encourages the consideration of the characteristic components of all areas of the country, the fixed CS budget does not enable all these to be addressed immediately. CS scheme targeting therefore involves partners in identifying the priorities to be tackled with the available budget in the coming year. These might be areas where urgent action is required to reverse trends that involve loss of character, or management that will enhance features that are critical to the distinctive character of an area.

The CS targets are set out in county targeting statements which:

- provide clear guidance to applicants as to which CS items are particularly important in their area and are a priority for scheme funding;
- provide a basis for project officer assessment and scoring of applications.

The countryside character areas also provide a framework within which AE scheme uptake can be analysed. FRCA's Geographic Information Unit can look at uptake of features by character area, and compare uptake with data on the extent and condition of the resource in that area. The match between need for restoration, scheme uptake and scheme targets can then be considered and fed into future scheme development and targeting.

Issues that arise from use of CC for targeting AE schemes include the following:

- From a national perspective the CC framework is ideal in providing a nationally consistent and defined structure within which to seek advice and present scheme targets, but there can be local issues such as how to address river valleys or community forests that can cut cross several character areas.
- In addition to wildlife and landscape, AE schemes are designed to address historic features and the provision of permissive access, does the framework lend itself equally well to defining targets for these aspects and is information likely to be forthcoming in this format.
- The CC approach identifies the importance of the characteristic features in all areas, however, with limited budgets AE schemes have to be selective and identify priorities. There can be tensions in these different uses of CC information.
- CC descriptions identify the current strengths and key features that define the character of an area and the trends affecting them, while ESAs seek to retain the farming activity that underpins the landscape, schemes such as CS offer potential to change landscapes. How well can CC descriptions indicate the need to preserve or to change landscapes.
- Currently CC helps identify targets and priorities in a qualitative fashion, but without quantitative information on the extent and condition of key features it is difficult to set targets in a way that can help with resource allocation or enable us easily to monitor the impact of our schemes.

The countryside character map and character area analyses provide a valuable framework and information source within which to target agri-environment schemes, however this will be facilitated by the accumulation of more data on the extent and condition of the features that determine an area's character.

Fiona been associated with agri-environment schemes, in particular Countryside Stewardship, for the last eight years. Initially working on CS with the Countryside Commission in the north of England.. Followed by two years spent on secondment to MAFF's Conservation Management Division which is responsible for agri-environment scheme policy. Currently a policy adviser on agri-environment schemes with the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) which is an Executive Agency of the Ministry. FRCA's function is to assist government in the design, development and implementation of policies on the integration of farming and conservation, environmental protection and the rural economy

***THE ENGLAND FORESTRY STRATEGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER - GARETH PRICE, FORESTRY COMMISSION,
ENGLAND***

The England Forestry Strategy

In December 1998 Elliot Morley the Forestry Minister for England, launched the Government's first Forestry Strategy for England. The Strategy describes how the Government will deliver its forestry policies in England. It sets out the Government's priorities and programmes for woodlands and forests for the next 5 to 10 years. The Strategy is not prescriptive; it establishes a framework for the Government's support for forestry in England and will guide the targeting of the Government's resources in the future. It identifies two main aims:

- The sustainable management of our existing woods and forests
- A continued expansion of our woodland area to provide more benefits to society and environment

Both are likely to impact on landscape character to a greater or lesser degree. To explore this further we must look at the four key programmes on which the Strategy is built:

- *Forestry for Rural Development* – this covers forestry's contribution to the rural economy. The programme considers how both new woodlands and existing woodlands can be managed to deliver more benefits to local economies, by creating jobs in the forestry industry. This programme acknowledges the need for larger woods in certain circumstances as well as for management of existing ones. By focusing on the benefits to local economies and jobs it is likely to impact on the broader scale issues influencing the retention and management of landscape character in certain rural areas.
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 - *Forestry for Economic Regeneration* – this programme looks at the opportunities for woodlands to play a more strategic role in land-use planning through restoring former industrial land and creating a green setting for future urban and urban fringe development. The emphasis is on helping to heal the wounds of those areas blighted by industrial change and decline. It looks at how woodland can contribute to environmental, social and economic development and the provision of a new sustainable
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land-use. The creation of “new and improved” landscapes is therefore fundamental to this programme.

- *Forestry for Recreation, Access and Tourism* – this describes what can be done to promote more and better-quality public access to woodlands. The programme also looks at opportunities for woods and forests to be used for a wide range of recreational pursuits as well as supporting the tourist industry. New woodlands of sufficient scale to accommodate a range of recreational activities may be considered, as will how existing woodland may be enhanced and managed so as to optimise their recreation and access potential.
- *Forestry for the Environment and Conservation* – this programme covers the role that woodlands can play in conserving and enhancing the character of our environment and our cultural heritage, and in delivering the Government’s nature conservation, biodiversity and climate change objectives. Initial focus is on greater protection for Ancient and Semi Natural Woodlands, and seeking to reverse their further fragmentation through the creation of new native woodlands. Opportunities will also be taken to complement other Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans.

The Strategy promotes an integrated approach; many of the actions can contribute to more than one programme.

Priorities for woodland creation in the Strategy are identified as:

- larger woodlands (for greater benefit);
- woodlands on the urban fringe;
- restoration of former industrial land;
- reversing the fragmentation of ancient woodland.

Key changes to current woodland incentives are also identified:

- greater range of supplements targeted to national priorities;
- a range of supplements and incentive levels to reflect identified regional and local objectives and targets;
- the use of challenge funding and pilot schemes to encourage major initiatives and experimentation in new approaches.

Local Delivery

The *England Forestry Strategy* recognises the role of regional character and local distinctiveness in all aspects of its delivery. The challenge is to ensure that national and regional guidance is successfully interpreted into sensitive woodland schemes that can deliver a range of public benefits and still respect pattern and diversity where they are appropriate. Landscape assessments have two main functions (which need to remain distinct). The first is in contributing to broader decision making frameworks (ie in the development of strategies etc.) and the second is in the development of guidelines. For decision making, it is essential that assessments are robust, well conceived and

generally accepted. Successful guidelines are perhaps an even greater challenge. The Character Area approach and the Forestry Commission's Design Guidelines already provide the broad context for woodland design issues, the key (and difficulty) is in linking them together to reflect local character at the landscape type scale. They must find the line between being too broad (and therefore merely repeating national guidance) and being overly detailed and prescriptive and therefore too constraining. Only then can they be used in confidence for providing a "vision" which can be applied in confidence.

Gareth is based at the Forestry Commission's national office for England in Cambridge. He joined the Forestry Commission (FC) in 1990 as the Regional Landscape Architect for East England. In 1994 he became Landscape Architect for Forestry Authority England. He is currently Programme Manager for the England Forestry Strategy's Economic Regeneration Programme, while still retaining a national remit for forestry and landscape issues.

APPLICATION OF COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER IN MANAGING BIODIVERSITY - ALI BUCK, ENGLISH NATURE

Nature conservation is a wide and complex subject. The challenges facing English Nature, and the other statutory country agencies, revolve around how best to use limited resources to optimise benefits for wildlife and earth heritage features. Traditionally, we have always had to make choices in selecting the 'best' sites, or supporting work on endangered species against the tide of pressure to deliver more. This task is complicated by the sheer diversity of wildlife and geological interest, from the open sea to the uplands, and from the pristine semi-natural areas to the centre of cities. In the formative days of English Nature we sought a framework to help us better understand this diversity, and reflect the subtle regional and local differences. The Natural Areas approach provides a framework for describing and defining the character of wildlife and geological features.

We have been using the Natural Areas framework to describe the distribution and relative importance of a wide range of species, habitats and geological features since 1993. This work has given a national context to local features and thus helped to raise awareness of what is 'special' and needs particular emphasis in conservation plans. In 1995 the Biodiversity Action Plan provided the first national priorities supported by a wide constituency of conservation bodies. Delivery of these priorities depend upon local action and require a consistent way of breaking down the national targets to local areas. We have begun this process, using the Natural Areas framework, and are continuing to refine the breakdown of national targets in the light of feedback from local action plan groups.

Nature conservation is wider than simply BAP targets and we are continuing to characterise each Natural Area in terms of the nationally significant and locally important features. A keystone of the current development is the consideration of spatial pattern, or landscape. We recognise that simple statements of targets based upon area of habitat or numbers of individuals will not deliver a sustainable outcome. Wildlife sustainability depends upon ecosystem function, and this invariably operates at landscape scale. This is the point at which the Character Area work of the Countryside Agency and the biodiversity work of English Nature come together. The close relationship between these two approaches was recognised at the joint launch of the "Character of England: landscape, wildlife & natural features" when supporting statements for each Character Area highlighted the commonality of features. The time is now right to realise the full potential of this shared map and consider the management of countryside change in a truly integrated way.

Ali Buck has worked with the Nature Conservancy Council/Joint Nature Conservation Committee, specialising in the coastal and marine environment, and has also worked on the EC Habitats and Species Directive and its implementation in the UK. She is now based at English Nature's headquarters in Peterborough, developing EN's work on Natural Areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT : DELIVERY THROUGH THE AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS - PAUL PRIDMORE, BERRY BROS & HOLMES

Farming is a Primary Economic Activity

- the change from subsistence to a market economy.
- the low priority of agriculture in an industrialised nation with small land mass
- vulnerability to cheap imports and currency fluctuations.

But it is highly visible; the landscape derives from past and present market forces as much as it does from topography and climate.

- the priorities of a largely urban population; cheap food but an unchanging landscape?
- the particular importance of mixed farming systems to traditional landscapes.

The “Market” is no Longer

- a subsidy dependant industry; cheap food or sustainable rural economies?
- little UK political power or public transport.
- traditional landscape therefore at the mercy of EU politics.

CAP and WTO

- the impending enlargement of the Union and Agenda 2000
- small gesture to agri-environmental measures
- but threat of globalisation and the impact of US pressure through WTO.

The Current Crisis

- exports and high value of sterling
- collapse in prices
- is there a future for sheep and cattle in lowland England?
- prairie arable farming in the east

Effectiveness of Existing Grant Schemes

- do they really influence cropping patterns at a time of financial crisis?

The East Hampshire Experience.

- the vision; preservation of critical environmental capital and enhancement of a new landscape framework
- case study of a mixed farm
- the costs of enhancement to the farmer
- environmental costs of financial pressure on the farmer.

The Ongoing Hertfordshire Project

- the challenge of preserving a traditional landscape on the fringes of London
- how to maintain mixed farming systems on the County Estate.
- individual costs set against benefits to society

What does the Future Hold?

- bankrupt industry cannot deliver countryside protection, let alone enhancement
- can the reform of CAP, within WTO, direct subsidies to environmental measures, and do so throughout the Union?
- Must farmers become park keepers as the price of staying on the land?

Paul Pridmore comes from an old Rutland farming family and qualified as a Chartered Surveyor in 1974. He is the managing partner of Berry Bros & Holmes based in Kettering, Northamptonshire, and his principal professional work is concerned with the business of agriculture.

In recent years he has developed an interest in the role of agricultural business in the management and enhancement of the countryside and prepared the case study for the East Hampshire AONB Integrated Management Guidelines in 1998. Amongst his current work he is leading the Hertfordshire County Council Rural Estate environmental management Action Planning project. He was the President of the Rural Practice Division of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in 1997-8 and is still a hands-on farmer in his spare time.

THE CUMBRIA WOODLAND VISION - EDWARD MILLS

The Cumbria Woodland Forum

The “Cumbria Woodland Vision” began its life with discussions within the Cumbria Woodland Forum during 1996.

The formation of the Cumbria Woodland Forum and its working group developed as a result of the “Cumbria Broadleaves – Five Years Forward” meeting in 1996. The Forum is open to anyone who has an interest in woodlands in Cumbria.

Perceived Benefits and Purpose of the Vision

The rationale for a Strategy was as follows : -

- it would help in the scenario of increasingly discretionary funding
- increased competition for funds nationally
- increased importance of partnerships
- a need to identify trends, opportunities and threats due to diverse objectives

The functions of the strategy would be : -

- to enhance recognition of roles
- to identify and develop consensus and priorities
- to encourage the involvement of stakeholders
- to identify agreed practical means of achieving goals
- to influence the action plans of partners and other bodies
- to promote the benefits of woodland
- to monitor progress towards the vision

The benefits of the Strategy would be : -

- better integration between woodland management and planting and other local/national policies
- improvement in delivering national policies
- avoids duplication in effort and missed opportunities
- increased partnership working and co-ordination of advice
- strengthens bids for funding among stakeholders in development and implementation of woodland policies

Development of the Vision

The Vision’s development was guided by the regular meeting of a steering group of Forum members. The Forestry Commission took the chair.

In 1997, a consultant was commissioned to analyse the multitude of policies that had any bearing on woodland management and establishment in the county. This study of plans, policies and strategies brought together a large amount of information and when it was available, it became apparent that the proposed chapter on policy would be too large. It was decided that it should be these areas where the effort should now be channelled.

It was agreed that it was important to obtain local knowledge of how to increase woodland cover and where it could most appropriately be

accommodated, rather than concentrate on the strategic level which would inevitably impose its own guidance and limitations when practical opportunities presented themselves.

Cumbria Countryside Character Workshops

It was decided that it might be possible to set up a series of working groups based on the then quite new but already commonly accepted countryside character areas.

Therefore, small working groups were set up for each of the 12 character area. Armed with the countryside character area statements, the groups met on an entirely voluntary basis, to answer a series of questions and develop areas where opportunities or conflicts might arise.

This exercise was completed by early 1998 and resulted in a series of 12 statements about each character area, the opportunities that had been identified to achieve the vision and the challenges to be addressed. These statements were known as Local Woodland Vision Statements. Members of the steering group then set about writing the text of the document, which included the local woodland vision statements.

The aim of the vision is "... to provide an overall vision for the future. It covers the management of our existing woodlands and looks at how the amount of woodland in the county could be increased".

The Vision was launched in January 1999 by Sir Chris Bonnington.

Implementing the Vision

The Vision was written not as a prescriptive document but very much to be used as tool. It could be seen as a type of decision support system. The Vision statements are meant to be used as a resource – to encourage managers and owners to think about their options and when making decisions, to consider the opportunities or conflicts for that particular area, especially in terms of landscape issues.

The document is also an educational tool as well as the means by which potential woodland sites could be identified. The Vision was widely distributed. Each member of the Forum undertook to do what it could to pursue its implementation. Local authorities and consultant foresters were encouraged to use it in every day work when in discussion with landowners and others.

The Forum working group is now working, through various sub-groups linked to English Forestry Strategy programmes, to develop the local woodland visions on a rolling programme of work; these are currently attempting to prioritise what are the most important aspects of each local woodland vision and which character areas should take priority.

Edward Mills has been Project Manager for Cumbria Broadleaves for three years and was previously woodland advisor for a further 18 months. He started his career with the Nature Conservancy Council and has since worked for a number of voluntary organisations concerned with advising farmers and landowners on broadleaved woodland management and establishment. He estimates that he has advised over 800

landowners during his career to date! He is the current chairman of the Cumbria Woodland Forum and of the Wood Education Programme Advisory Council. Edward is a Member of The Institute of Chartered Foresters.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND FORESTRY IN DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY - RICHARD HOWE, FORESTRY COMMISSION, SCOTLAND

Landscape Assessment, Dumfries and Galloway 1994

Objectives:

- Description and analysis of landscape.
- Pressures and opportunities for landscape change.
- Assess sensitivity of landscapes to change.
- Guidelines on how change can be accommodated.
- Guidelines for conservation, enhancement, restructuring of landscape.

Features:

- Two stage – assessment - guidance / policy.
- Practical product.
- Partnership project.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

- Good robust analysis.
- Comprehensible, limited categories.
- Involvement of some of the main interests in partnership.
- Leading to a specialist report on forestry.

Weaknesses.

- Consultants had little knowledge of the area.
- Difficulties in working to a disparate steering group.
- “Preservation” tendency.
- No public involvement.
- Landowning interests not included.

Forests and Landscape in Dumfries and Galloway

- High proportion of single purpose forestry, >25% land use.
- Rapid rate of change, 1950 - 1990.
- Ideal area for productive forestry.
- Public concern about amount and (historical) nature of forestry.
- Forestry is the main mechanism for landscape change.
- Background of CAP / falling agri-values / also the increased importance of biodiversity and pressure group interest.

Sources of Advice on Land use Change to Forestry.

- FC Guidelines and the UK Forestry Standard.
- Indicative Forestry Strategy IFS. Structure Plan.
- Landscape assessment.

These led to the development of :

- *Design Guidance Forests and Woodland* based on the assessment and guidelines.
 - *Forestry Framework* “planning for real.”
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Conclusions

The assessment:

⇒ simple and robust.

The formulation of guidance:

⇒ must involve all interest groups in consensus building exercise, and avoid trying to resolve 100% of the issue.

Adoption of policy:

⇒ careful consideration of the status of the final report, build in a review period.

Approach:

⇒ avoid a “preservation approach”, and work to secure benefits from landscape change.

Richard graduated in forestry from Bangor in 1977 and then did the post-graduate course in landscape architecture at Sheffield University. He started work in Glasgow on inner city renewal and later moved on to rural planning, mainly woodland and landscape issues, in both Norfolk and Devon. In 1989 he joined the Forestry Commission and after working on forest design in both Scotland and Wales spent 6 years as Conservator for South West Scotland. In 1999 Richard was appointed to FC HQ in Edinburgh to work in International Cooperation.

***USING CHARACTER ASSESSMENT TO GUIDE LANDSCAPE
MANAGEMENT WITHIN A NATIONAL PARK - RHODRI THOMAS, PEAK
DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY***

The Development of Landscape Assessment in the Peak District

Landscape characterisation in some form has played an important role in national park management for a long time. This paper draws on examples from the Peak District. Both the 1978 and the existing 1989 Peak District National Park Plan, for example, identify 5 broad landscape types based on landscape assessments carried out in the 1970s, with land management policies relating to these. The identification of these landscape types has also been influenced by things such as the requirement for National Park Authorities to produce a Section 3 (“Moor and Heath”) Map, and the landscape categories specified in this legislation. The following landscape types are recognised in the existing Peak District National Park Plan:

- Gritstone Plateaux
- Gritstone Valleys and Slopes
- Valleys with Reservoirs
- Limestone Plateau
- Limestone Dales

Whilst such classifications have been very valuable management tools, they have largely been derived from an assessment of the existing landscape from a visual perspective. Any reflection of the geology, historical development of the landscape, current or historical ecology of the area or socio-economic factors has been largely (though not completely) incidental to the existing broad visual characteristics of each landscape type. More recently the development of the joint character map by the Countryside Commission (now Countryside Agency) and English Nature, and the further use of similar approaches, enables some refinement by identifying those features which make the landscape and wildlife of each character area so distinctive in a national context. The Peak District is fortunate in this respect, in that the area of the national park largely coincides with that of three Countryside Character/Natural Areas- the White Peak, Dark Peak and South-west Peak.

In the Peak District the concept of locally distinctive areas is being further refined by the National Park Authority. Extrapolating from historical maps the Archaeology Service, for example, has produced a series of historic landscape maps showing the nature of the landscape at intervals from 1650 onwards. This starts to give us a much better picture not only of the individual elements making up today’s landscape, but also why they are there. Other work, such as historical research and ecological survey of the lead mine orefield in the White Peak, is beginning to identify distinctive landscape, archaeological and ecological characteristics between different parts of the orefield, and giving us greater understanding of how this industry has affected the woodland resource of the area.

The Use of Landscape Character Assessment for Managing Change

Landscape characterisation can help identify the types of features or landscape elements which are of importance in contributing to the local distinctiveness of a particular area. The drystone walls of the White Peak plateau, the

network of dewponds, small villages with traditional limestone buildings, linear shelterbelts and the lines of lead mine hummocks and hollows are all highly characteristic features which together combine to make the area so distinctive. However 300 years ago the landscape would have looked very different. Today's Peak District landscapes are primarily the result of different layers of human activity, themselves underpinned and determined by the area's climate, geology and geomorphology. They represent a snapshot in time and whilst landscape characterisation can help identify and recognise the importance of past influences on the landscape, there is also a danger that it might encourage "fossilisation" of a particular type of landscape. Three further important steps are needed to help overcome this tendency:-

1. Some form of value judgement is required to decide which characteristic features are desirable and which are undesirable. There therefore needs to be some assessment of the aesthetic, economic, historical and nature conservation merit of different elements of the landscape.
2. The application of landscape characterisation needs to recognise that new elements in the landscape, which may not feature in an assessment of the existing landscape, may nevertheless contribute positively to local distinctiveness and diversity. The tendency towards preservation and perpetuation of the existing landscape, rather than encouraging landscape evolution, needs to be avoided.
3. It should also be borne in mind that landscape characterisation over a relatively large area can mask important variation within areas.

In the Peak District national and local landscape characterisation is being used as a basis for production of the local Biodiversity Action Plan (based on Natural Areas rather than administrative boundaries), for targeting of agri-environment schemes, for responses to planning, for predictive modelling of past landscapes and for influencing landscape management policy and practice on the ground. By identifying the important features of a particular area, and recognising the need for flexibility in applying this approach, we can ensure that the best elements of today's landscapes are conserved for future generations and that current economic activities and land management policies compliment these. In this way we can care for a truly living and evolving landscape.

Rhodri Thomas works for the Peak District National Park Authority as Ecology Service Manager, providing nature conservation advice on all aspects of the Authority's activities including ecological surveys, site evaluation, Section 3 Map review and advice on planning, agri-environment, forestry and policy issues. He is currently part of a small team drafting the National Park Management Plan, and sits on the Landscape Conservation Forum which promotes an integrated approach to archaeological and ecological conservation locally. Prior to joining the National Park in 1987 Rhodri worked for the Nature Conservancy Council (now English Nature) notifying SSSIs throughout Norfolk, and before that for the Gwent Wildlife Trust.

***MONITORING LANDSCAPE CHANGE IN THE SUSSEX DOWNS -
MARTIN BEATON, SUSSEX DOWNS CONSERVATION BOARD***

This talk will stress:

- that understanding the landscape resources that you have is fundamental to planning effective action.
- that a sound landscape assessment together with the wider ecological, historic and cultural view of the landscape are the basis for an effective statement about the landscape qualities of the area, and the basis of effective communication with the public, local authorities and public bodies.
- that communicating ideas on landscape to non-landscape professions is problematic and effective training is needed for field staff and simple forms of communication, such as drawn landscape guidelines can greatly assist communication.
- that whilst these tools are essential to arguing for and achieving landscape change, effective monitoring of the landscape change is essential to:
 - assess the impact of existing countryside policies
 - assess the effectiveness of the landscape assessments and guidelines themselves
 - continue to refine landscape objectives

We are continuing to compile land use data to assess overall landscape change within the Sussex Downs and in particular the impact of the agricultural policy and of the South Downs ESA scheme which is being delivered by our own staff and FRCA to the South Downs landscape objectives.

The study has indicated that only 2,650 ha (3%) of chalk grassland survives within the South Downs ESA scheme. The scheme has encouraged an additional 12,307 ha of grassland in the downs and has improved the management of a significant number of chalk grassland sites. However, we believe that further targeting of the scheme could deliver better landscape and ecological benefits and the combined analysis of land-use, ecological and soil data is revealing how targeting might be refined.

We have completed an assessment on the tranquillity of the landscape of the Sussex Downs which formed an important additional attribute to landscape quality.

As part of a separate study with the Environment Agency we are also looking at implementing and monitoring landscape change in river valleys within the AONB. This study is increasingly focusing on the implications of land use and landscape change as a consequence of removal

Martin Beaton is an ecologist and landscape architect, and the Chief Officer of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board. The Board, which is responsible for managing the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, has successfully been established as a national experiment to examine mechanisms for improving the management of AONBs. The landscape assessment, landscape report and landscape guidelines

*prepared by the Board, won the Landscape Institute awards in 1997 in three categories
- Planning, Management and Communication.*

MANAGING CHANGE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE : THE ROLE OF COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER - DISCUSSION SESSIONS

The morning and afternoon sessions were followed by open discussions, chaired in the morning by Richard Lloyd (Countryside Agency) and in the afternoon by Professor Carys Swanick (Sheffield University). Comments and questions were invited from all participants.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW OF COUNTRYSIDE CHANGE

- ***The DETR's Role in Assessing Countryside Change (Dr Andrew Stott);***
- ***A CPRE Perspective on Countryside Change (Gregor Hutcheon).***

How does work done by local authorities relate to the DETR's Countryside Survey 2000? - The DETR's Countryside Survey provides a national overview, applying a standardised approach across the whole country. The issue is how activities at a local level can help to develop an accurate national statistic. The Countryside Survey offers GIS data for landscape character area and natural areas work.

What is the purpose of the 'environmental zones' shown in the presentation on the DETR's Countryside Survey - They are included as a summary for presentation purposes only and are not a designation.

DEFINING OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS FOR CHANGE AT NATIONAL LEVEL

- ***Countryside Character & Agri-Environment Funding (Fiona Gough, FRCA);***
- ***How Landscape Character may Influence the England Forestry Strategy (Gareth Price, Forestry Commission);***
- ***Application of Countryside Character in Managing Biodiversity (Ali Buck, English Nature).***

Since Indicative Forestry Strategies have been dropped and given the new national forestry strategy, is it still appropriate for local authorities to adopt local forestry strategies? - Talk to the Forestry Commission's regional offices, where the conservators are interpreting the national priorities at a regional level. There is a general trend towards the regional delivery of land management programmes eg agri-environment schemes.

The landscape is a product of continuous social and economic change. There is still a need to identify and co-ordinate targets at a local level, but who should take the lead and would the agencies be prepared to accept this lead? - This is the longstanding debate over whether a top-down or bottom-up approach is best - the FRCA takes account of the views of counties in deciding on priorities for funding, but must also address national targets/priorities; it aims to work in partnership with local people, but there is no precise mechanism for achieving this. The Countryside Agency has a new contract to address the issue of providing landscape character assessment information at the local level. The aim is to use existing landscape character assessments and national data and identify where there are gaps in the availability of information. It should then be possible to identify targets which will be meaningful locally.

Can the landscape character approach assist in developing targets for land management funding through the recommendations proposed in national and regional landscape strategies? - Yes, but there is not yet consistent landscape character assessment coverage at district level; the Countryside Agency is to assist in funding landscape character assessments at county level and is planning to let a contract soon to explore options for stakeholder participation eg Durham pilot scheme.

Sustainability assessment and monitoring are increasingly adopting a GIS-based approach, but this creates problems for users as information has a value and there is an incentive to hoard and sell it - The information has been privatised and some institutions rely on this to survive commercially, but in future this may be re-evaluated.

Assessments of biodiversity and landscape character don't necessarily correlate well as they may have different objectives. For instance, are we aiming to conserve, maintain or re-create past landscapes/habitats and how can we integrate planning for landscape and biodiversity effectively at a national level? - The overall objective is to maintain diversity. Landscape character will change, but there are elements of that character/qualities which we may wish to conserve as change progresses. There is also a need to reach a wider public - people often appreciate visual landscape character first and its inherent biodiversity second, but biodiversity makes a crucial contribution to the visual character; the two are interdependent. The Countryside Council for Wales' LANDMAP project combines visual, biodiversity and cultural aspects and has proved to be a useful planning tool. The local authority ownership of the project incorporates socio-economic aspects.

There is a need to balance an interest in landscape change against a commitment to conserving inherent landscape character, which is not constantly changing.

DEFINING OBJECTIVES AND DELIVERING CHANGE AT LOCAL LEVEL

- ***Environmental Enhancement - Delivery through the Agricultural Business (Paul Pridmore, Berry, Bros & Holmes);***
- ***The Cumbria Woodland Vision (Edward Mills, Cumbria Broadleaves);***
- ***Landscape Character and Forestry in Dumfries & Galloway (Richard Howe, Forestry Commission);***
- ***Using Character to Guide Landscape Management within a National Park (Rhodri Thomas, Peak District National Park);***
- ***Monitoring Landscape Change in the Sussex Downs (Martin Beaton, Sussex Downs Conservation Board).***

LANDMAP requires each component landscape assessment to be undertaken on a GIS basis, giving a consistent, updatable basis for obtaining and disseminating information.

Is the trend towards organic farming likely to help conserve traditional landscape features such as barns? - Organic farming is not necessarily less intensive or more mixed; animals are a pre-requisite for organic fertiliser and the agricultural economy is now so skewed away from stock (and the labour/infrastructure it involves) that a return to stock farming is unlikely. However, there is scope to consider how value can be added to local farm products in the UK eg Sussex lamb.

Would a landscape assessment which is to be used for assessing capacity for increasing woodland cover look similar to one to be used for assessing capacity for new housing?

- The assessment should stand alone as a value-free statement; its use for decision-making can be separate and may often require a finer scale of analysis which is tailored to suit specific objectives.

Can landscape character assessments really address landscape character at a local level in sufficient detail to influence planning decisions for sustainable development? -

They are one of many tools for practitioner to use, but many local authorities don't have in-house landscape expertise and need direct support from other agencies. There is a need to build partnerships at a local level to obtain information, pool resources, appoint consultants *etc.* The national agencies are interested in the national picture and the Character Map of England was never intended to be used for detailed application to policies at the local level. This can only be achieved by landscape assessments at the county or district level and the Countryside Agency is starting to offer funding to encourage landscape assessment work in local authorities which don't yet have an adequate characterisation. The Agency is currently undertaking a review of existing character assessments, with a view to identifying local authorities which should be targeted for such grant aid.

Landscape change often happens in unpredictable ways. How prescriptive should landscape guidelines be? is it better to keep guidelines vague to allow the landscape to develop, or should they be more prescriptive and reduce options? -

Guidelines should include a set of objectives which cover both preservation and acceptable change to allow room for innovation and give people an incentive to use the documents. They should be phrased as fairly open objectives, so that there is room for manoeuvre, but with sufficient actual guidance to be meaningful in a policy context.

There were calls for a stronger PPG7 (and more support for landscape character assessment from the DETR) so that planning authorities can be informed by a wealth of landscape advice - The best way forward is to form partnerships between counties and their districts *eg* Hampshire.

Resources are a key issue for many local authorities wishing to undertake characterisation work. Consideration of most types of land use change requires a relatively detailed level of assessment and problems are compounded by the current trends towards greater stakeholder involvement (as per the new Landscape Character Assessment Guidance) - Some consultation work can be funded through landfill tax, particularly if the project is 'sold' as being part of an overall package including implementation.

OVERVIEW AND RESPONSE (Dr Andrew Stott, DETR)

Overview

- The landscape is under threat because it is undervalued - countryside character provides a language, but not a currency?
 - Countryside character provides a consistent framework, but more quantitative information is required for targeting agri-environmental schemes - it must be designed to inform objectives without being a straight-jacket.
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- Countryside character provides guidance for accommodating new woodland which is sympathetic to diversity, pattern and function, but there is a need to apply it effectively at a local level.
- Natural Areas provide a framework for delivering Biodiversity Action Plans, as well as a landscape perspective for habitat restoration.
- There is a debate about how far top down approaches can be effective at the local level and how far bottom up approaches can influence regional/national activities and there is also discussion about continuity and change - the need to welcome change must be balanced by a need to conserve the essential distinctive characteristics of the countryside.
- How can we sustain the countryside when the enterprise on which it depends is in crisis - and when there is no mechanism for delivery?
- How can we develop a forward vision which is not prescriptive, but is a resource for supporting decision-making at a local scale?
- Consensus building has a valuable role to play in promoting the benefits of change.
- We need to think positively about new landscape character, retaining the parts that matter without clinging to a traditional view.
- Technology provides new opportunities for assessing landscape change and making forward projections.
- There is a contrast between the Welsh LANDMAP project and the characterisation approach in England, where the structure of national agencies has led to a less 'joined-up' process.

Key Points Arising from the Workshop

- There is **widespread support** for countryside character, which provides a common language, a consistent framework and scope for integrating diverse issues.
 - At a national level, countryside character is descriptive and qualitative; it will benefit from **'added value' in the form of quantification, a sense of direction and a strong sense of purpose**. This vision can be an 'add-on' to the characterisation process itself.
 - There are some **important scale issues to consider**, including the potential for aggregation of landscape units to give a national picture and disaggregation to provide finer detail at a local scale (the bottom-up approach)
 - The increasing range of data available will lead to more calls for **improved access and usability of information**.
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- At a local level there is a need to **build consensus for a vision which is not a prescriptive blueprint** for landscape character, but a structured approach to positive landscape change. A selective approach will avoid the preservation mind-set while conserving inherent character.
- **Communication is important** and projects will benefit from simple presentation.
- **Technology is moving fast and can assist** - but requires support and guidance if it is to be an effective tool *eg* LANDMAP.

Personal Comments

- The process still **requires clear indicators of landscape change** to inform Ministers and gain their support.
 - The countryside character approach provides a useful policy framework, but there are **still questions over whether it can deliver landscape change in an effective way**. There may be opportunities to recommend the character approach in the review of PPG 9 (nature conservation).
 - There are **calls for more resources** from DETR to support the process.
 - **Success requires joined-up government**, with effective support from MAFF/DETR for the emerging RDAs, the Countryside Agency, English Nature and local authorities.
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