Historic England

Understanding Place

Historic Area Assessments

Summary

This guidance explains how to undertake Historic Area Assessments (HAAs) in order to understand and explain the heritage interest of an area. HAAs help explain the character of a place and define its significance, providing a sound evidence base for the informed management of the historic environment. The approach is intended to assist historic environment specialists, planners, developers, local communities 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 highlighting its more significant elements.

HAAs typically give insights into how and why a place has come to look the way it does. They identify the range of landscapes and building types, their dates and forms, and relate them to the wider evolution of the area. The Introduction sets out the principles and benefits of assessment and explains how it relates to other approaches to the understanding of historic areas. Sections 2–4 explain the practical issues underlying HAAs and how to carry them out at various levels of resolution.

This guidance note supersedes the English Heritage guidance published in June 2010 and a companion document, *Understanding place: Historic Area Assessments in a planning and development context*.

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Front cover
Undertaking Historic Area Assessment in Ely, Cambridgeshire.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this document

1.1.1 England's rich and varied historic places and landscapes, both urban and rural, are a powerful expression of our culture and heritage – our sense of identity. The historic environment represents a resource that should be sustained for the benefit of present and future generations. Identifying and understanding its particular qualities, and what these add to our lives, is central to the sustainable management of the historic environment. The process of assessing significance is informed by understanding, which enables us to see how and why places are important, for different reasons and from a range of perspectives.

1.1.2 The term historic environment is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) as 'All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora'. (NPPF, annex 2: glossary). The term historic area is used in this document to refer to the study area of a Historic Area Assessment. Such an area can be a place, settlement, neighbourhood or landscape, whether designated or non-designated. It can be enclosed by physical, administrative or property boundaries (existing or historic) or defined simply for the purposes of study.

1.2 What: Historic Area Assessments defined

1.2.1 Historic Area Assessment (HAA) is a practical tool to understand and explain the heritage interest of an area. It was developed to help determine the character of an area, explain its significance and highlight issues that have the potential to change this character. Assessments have been undertaken in the anticipation of major redevelopment, in response to increasing development pressures and to encourage specific planning aims or underpin planning policy. But the method can be used for many purposes, including education and academic study, and its underlying principles can be extended to all parts of the historic environment.

1.2.2 The principle focus of an HAA is generally on the historic built environment. It will typically give insights into how and why a place has come to look the way it does; into the relationships of buildings to open spaces, street patterns and boundaries; views in and out of confined spaces; building scale, type, materials, current use, and other related factors. It should also illuminate an area's character, which can be derived from a subtle mixture of different elements, including characteristics that are shared with other places and aspects that are particular to that place.

1.2.3 The approach is applicable to a wide range of landscape types:

- small and medium-sized towns
- suburbs and substantial housing developments
- villages and hamlets
- historic town centres
- industrial quarters and ports
- historic estates
- areas of dispersed or rural settlements
- linear historic entities such as canals and railways

1.3 Who: the intended audience of this document

1.3.1 This guidance has been produced to assist those commissioning and undertaking HAAs, which may include:

- historic environment specialists
- planners
- developers and their agents
- regeneration agencies and other public bodies
- local groups and communities
- owners of extensive heritage assets (e.g. historic estates)

1.4 Why: practical application

1.4.1 HAA can offer a wide range of outcomes, depending on the level of assessment and purpose for which it has been undertaken. All assessments will provide an understanding of the historical development of an area and document its survival and significance. A HAA may help identify:

- the way in which the character of an area can be used to engender a sense of place which can provide a focus for regeneration
- areas which could accommodate substantial change or redevelopment
- areas suitable for adaptive re-use, and characteristics or features that schemes for re-use should aim to retain or respect
- areas where demolition would result in neighbourhoods losing their integrity and therefore becoming more vulnerable
- which parts of the historic fabric could be lost without reducing the significance of an area or building
- where heritage protection is strongest, and areas where new or revised designations may be needed
- assets suitable for local heritage listing
- the potential archaeological interest of an area, highlighting the scope for future desk-based assessment (DBA) and/or evaluation to enhance understanding of the nature and significance of the archaeological resource
- where grant-aid or other incentives could be targeted most beneficially
- indicate where more detailed or contextual research is needed

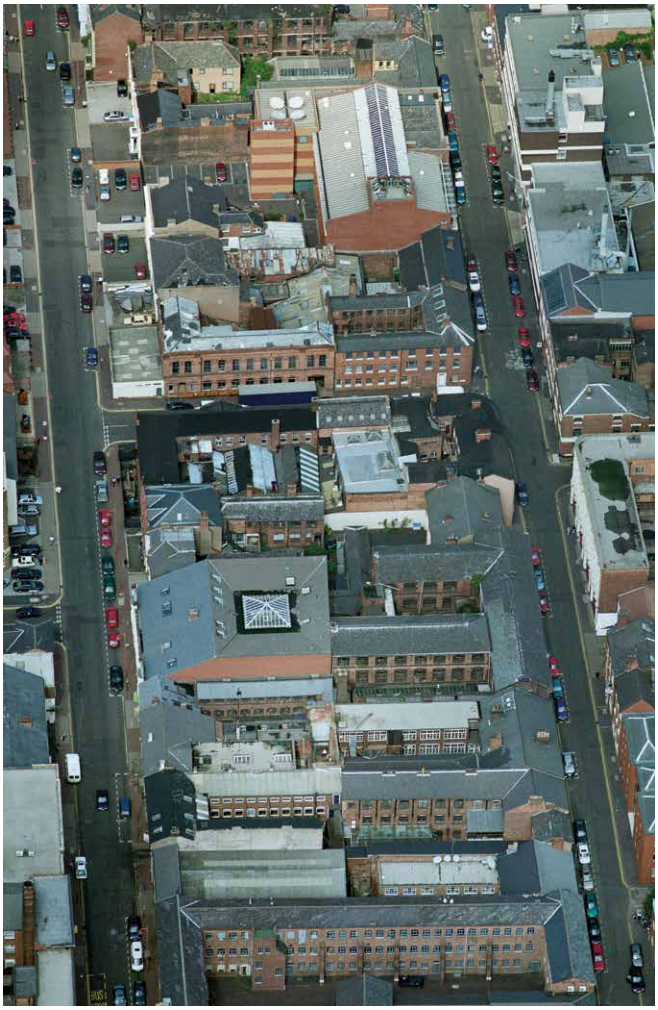

Figure 1: Birmingham Jewellery Quarter.
A detailed Assessment of Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter was undertaken by RCHME/English Heritage in partnership with Birmingham City Council in 1998-2001. The Birmingham Jewellery Quarter is an urban industrial area remarkable for its dense concentration of converted houses, factories and specialist buildings, forming a group of international significance. The HAA contributed to the consolidation of three conservation areas into a single conservation area, the listing of a further 120 buildings in the quarter and informed a design guide for the area, adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

1.5 How: characterising the historic environment

1.5.1 The study of the historic environment has produced a range of approaches to both rural and urban landscapes for particular purposes. Early examples of heritage assessments undertaken in anticipation of large-scale change focussed on the identification of individual buildings or sites. In recent decades a greater emphasis has been placed on the historic environment as a whole. The aim has been to define its broader character with a view to retention or the management of change. A number of methods have been developed, broadly grouped under the heading 'historic characterisation'. One of these is HAA and the other main types are:

- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC): high-level, typically covering a county or region; principally map-based and identifying historic land use and types; applicable to both rural and urban areas; describes historic landscape character, not focused on relative judgements of value; suitable for the strategic management of change, especially within spatial planning. 'Metropolitan HLC' employs the same methods but uses character types whose profile and scale better captures extensive urban development.

- Extensive Urban Survey (EUS): assesses smaller towns on a county-by-county basis, principally through an analysis of existing archaeological, topographical and historic sources; characterises the present-day urban environment; usually organised around the identification of areas of shared character; highlights areas of sensitivity to certain forms of change; contributes to spatial planning

1.5.2 HAAs are typically undertaken on a more limited scale, looking at defined urban areas or, perhaps, mixed landscapes of settlements and countryside. They are applicable to both designated and non-designated areas. One way in which HAA differs from some forms of historic characterisation is the weight accorded to field evidence and an emphasis on observed character. The intention is provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of both landscape and built form.

Case study: the Devon Historic Market and Coastal Towns Survey

The various methods of studying and characterising historic areas can operate at different scales and serve a range of purposes but they also share underlying principles and similarities of approach. For example, Conservation Area Appraisals and Extensive Urban Surveys (EUS) have elements in common with HAAs. EUS were launched in 1992 to cover all the smaller historic towns of England on a county-by-county basis. Initially focussed on below-ground archaeology and earlier periods, since 2000 they have expanded their role to characterise the historic environment of entire towns. As well as outlining how each place has developed towns are divided into sub units, Historic Urban Character Areas, using established characterisation types. Each area is assessed for archaeological potential and historic environment significance. As well as underpinning local management and interpretation, EUS are intended to inform policy and guide future research. The main output is digital, a GIS database held as part of the Historic Environment Record, but a report is also produced for each town. By 2016 surveys of over 30 counties had been completed, funded by English Heritage and latterly Historic England. One example is the Devon Historic Market and Coastal Town Survey, which recently completed studies of 17 historic towns across the county, prioritised because of their high levels of historical significance and archaeological potential and the immediacy of development pressures.

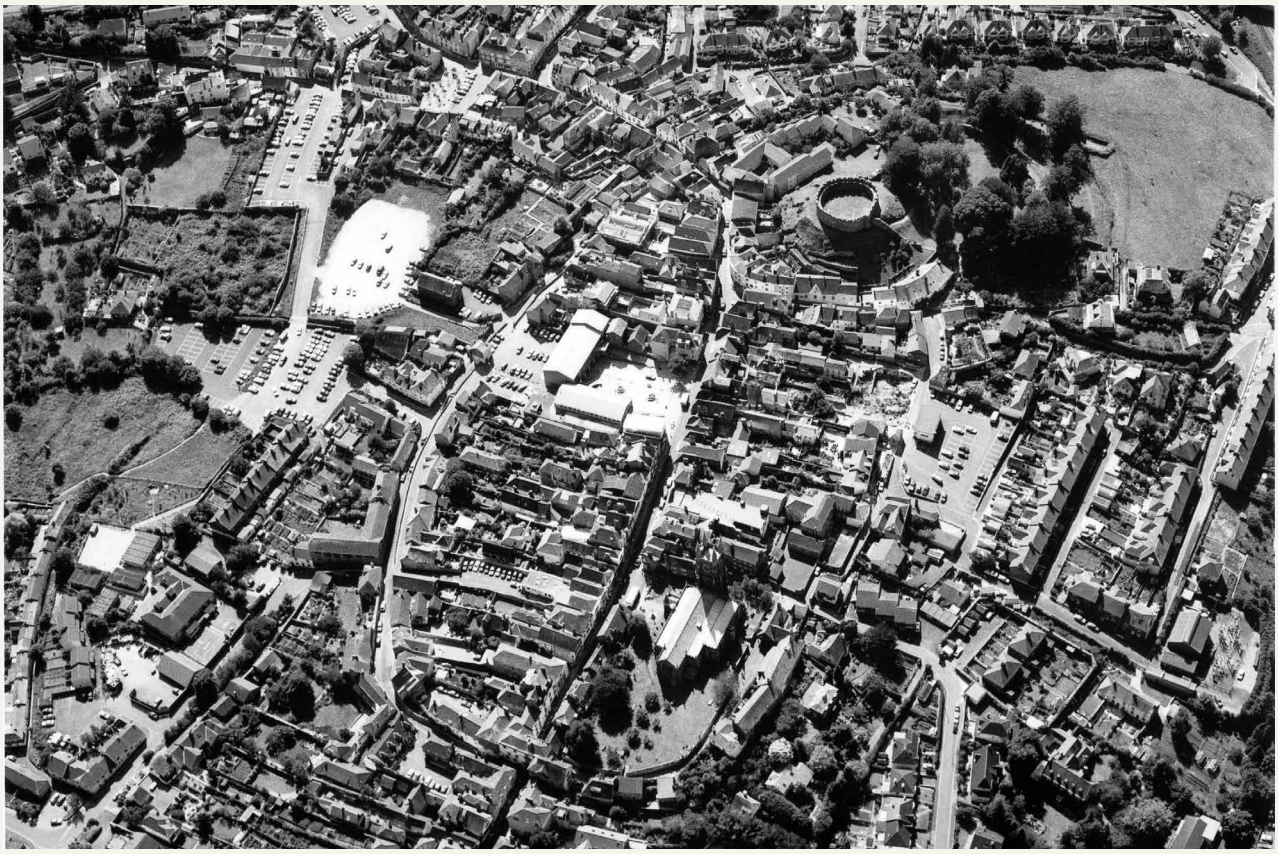

Figure 2: Totnes, Devon.
Aerial photographs can help to disentangle the relationship of elements in the urban landscape. Clearly visible is the outline of the Saxon burh (preserved in the oval circuit of lanes), burgage plots at right-angles to the High Street, the Norman ringwork, motte and bailey and medieval parish church.

Figure 3: Swaledale, North Yorkshire.
Agricultural landscapes demonstrate clearly the importance of a holistic approach to the historic environment. Land use, field systems and buildings are closely interlinked and make little sense in isolation.

1.6 When: the planning context

1.6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Local planning authorities are required to set out in their Local Plans a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. In developing their strategies they are obliged to identify specific opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets (a building monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having heritage interest and meriting consideration in planning decisions). Heritage assets can be nationally designated or identified by local planning authorities, including local heritage listing.

1.6.2 HAAs can augment the evidence base at various stages of the planning process, including:

- informing development plan strategy, policy and allocations (local plans, neighbourhood plans, and spatial development strategies)
- master plans, area action plans, asset management plans and similar schemes
- major redevelopment proposals, including growth areas and infrastructure projects
- conservation management plans (CMP) and equivalent tools for managing large sites, estates and open spaces
- listed building heritage partnership agreements
- heritage action zones (HAZs) and similar initiatives

1.6.3 The NPPF sets out objectives for sustainable development. HAAs can assist in their fulfilment in a number of ways:

- contributing to a robust evidence base for development plans (NPPF, paragraphs 126, 156, 157, 158, 169 and 170)
- providing a focus for community engagement in Local Plan making (NPPF, paragraph 155)
- assessing the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal, including development affecting the setting of a heritage asset (NPPF, paragraph 129)
- indicating where Article 4 Directions may be needed (NPPF, paragraphs 126 and 200)

1.6.4 HAAs can also contribute to the appraisal of England's more than 9,000 designated conservation areas, by enhancing the evidence base and helping to define or justify the special interest (NPPF, paragraphs 127 and 192). Methods of Conservation Area Appraisal (CCA) closely align with HAA methods, as set out in Historic England's Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management.

Case Study: Plaiters' Lea, Luton

A number of major new developments were proposed for Luton and the surrounding area in the early years of the 21st century but aspects of the historic environment in the region were known to be poorly understood. Of these, the legacy of the hat industry was deemed to be of particular importance in terms of its local associations and physical fabric. A district of Luton closely linked to the industry, known as Plaiters' Lea, had been designated a conservation area. But plans for the area, including the expansion of a shopping centre and the realignment of historic routeways, presented a threat to the setting of its buildings. An HAA was undertaken in 2010-1 to more fully understand the area, published as a report and subsequently as a book in the Informed Conservation series.

The assessment aimed to provide the essential strategic detail in which to frame the redevelopment proposals and was written into the Draft Luton Local Plan 2011-2031 as part of the evidence base. The report was able to highlight the importance of the surviving fabric and to identify key issues that were affecting it, including demolition, insensitive alterations and deterioration. As a consequence, the local authority agreed to work with Historic England in ensuring adequate documentation of the area's heritage and, when possible, its enhancement. Thus the HAA served to underpin the value and role of the conservation area in the context of on-going redevelopment in the town centre.

Figure 4: Plaiters' Lea, Luton, Bedfordshire. The three-storey red-brick former hat factory at 40a Guildford Street (1901-05) is dwarfed by its neighbours – the white-painted neo-Jacobean factory at 40 Guildford street (1905), and the brown-brick and glass 'daylight' factory at 65-67 Bute Street (c1930). Changes in factory design were closely linked to changing methods and materials and are integral to the character of the area.

1.6.5 To fully understand the character of a place, expert and community views need to be brought together. Engagement with local communities is an essential part of the planning process. The NPPF outlines the importance of empowering communities to develop a shared vision for their community (NPPF, paragraph 183). The HAA approach can help communities working on Neighbourhood Plans to assess the character and significance of their areas in order to agree priorities for the future and promote sustainable development. Where a HAA is not practicable, alternative tools such as Placecheck can help engage local communities in understanding place.

1.6.6 HAAs can be reactive, responding to and influencing proposals for change; or proactive, highlighting significance while establishing the context for future change. Procuring an HAA at the earliest stages of planning, through contributing, for example, to local plan policy, will ensure that its findings can shape later, more detailed, stages of planning by providing a strong evidence base.

1.6.7 HAAs can assist local planning authorities and others to gather baseline evidence ahead of proposed development by:

- establish the sensitivities of a place to particular forms of change and its capacity to accommodate them
- defining opportunities for new development and inform its design
- establishing the heritage values of a place for different stakeholders
- identifying areas where heritage protection may be required
- managing and targeting resources.

1.6.8 The procurement, specification and project management of commissioned HAAs should comply with relevant professional standards and guidance. Historic England's guidance on the Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) is intended for those planning research and research and development (R&D) projects in the historic environment.

Figure 5: Addison's Oak, Sea Mills, Bristol.
The municipal estate at Sea Mills was begun under the 1919 Housing Act. The legislation, overseen by the Minister of Health Christopher Addison, had required local authorities to provide housing if needed. The politician attended a ceremony to launch the Bristol scheme in which a tree was planted in its central open space.

Case study: Sea Mills

Sea Mills is a fine example of an inter-war municipal garden suburb, planned by Bristol City Council in the aftermath of the First World War. Its interest and quality was recognised in 1981 when part of the estate was designated a conservation area. Concern about incremental change and future development led to the study of the estate, carried out by the Save Sea Mills Garden Suburb Group (members of the local community rather than professional historic environment professionals). Their aim was to persuade the local planning authority, Bristol City Council, to extend the conservation area and to make an Article 4 (2) Direction restricting permitted development rights. Two reports were produced by the group in 2007. The first, *The Definition and Characterisation of a Post-World War One Garden Suburb, with Particular Reference to Sea Mills Garden Suburb, Bristol* argued for the importance of the estate and provided a thorough analysis of its planning and historical context. A second report made the case for the extension of the conservation area boundary. The extension was approved in 2008 but work on the Article 4 (2) direction was not taken any further after the local authority determined that management could be ensured through existing enforcement powers and its policy framework. The reports by the Group were used to inform a revised conservation area character appraisal in 2011, undertaken by the Council. The case demonstrates the impact of a community-led assessment, which delivered an effective evidence base for formal decision making.

2 Key Issues

This section expands on the approaches outlined in the Introduction, offering guidance on the framing of HAAs in ways that meet planning and heritage protection needs.

2.1 Boundaries

2.1.1 In order to keep the HAA focused and manageable it is important to establish appropriate boundaries. Too large an area may entail considerable work and cost; too small an area may restrict the scope and contextual understanding of the study.

2.1.2 Boundaries may be implicit in the proposals that prompt the assessment. Alternatively current or historic administrative boundaries can be used. The relevance of proposed boundaries should be critically examined as underlying landforms or patterns of land ownership may have exerted a more decisive influence on an area's development than any administrative boundaries.

2.1.3 The boundaries defining character areas may be clear-cut in some places (where a river, railway embankment or other 'impermeable' barrier has impeded development, for example) but soft edged in other cases. Areas do not develop in isolation, and thought should always be given to significant relationships with places and events outside the study area.

Figure 6: Boston, Lincolnshire.
The Maud Foster Drain, cut through the fenland *c*1569 and today part of the larger Witham navigable drain system. Linear transport routes represent hard boundaries in the historic environment, strongly influencing the type and character of associated development.

2.2 Defining character

2.2.1 Areas may be chosen for assessment because they are already deemed to have a distinctive character; others may be chosen precisely to determine whether or not this is the case. If the area being assessed is considerable or if there is considerable variation in character, it may be helpful to further divide it into smaller units (*see* Section 2.3).

2.2.2 Character in the historic environment is a subtle compound of many different ingredients. The main visual characteristics of an area may be summarised under the following broad headings:

- topography and landscape elements, including relief and aspect
- layout: parcel (field or plot) size, shape and land use; regularity and density of street pattern; disposition of buildings in relation to plots, sight-lines and street width; building scale and density
- buildings: functional types; morphology, including plan-forms and roof shapes; architectural styles, features and motifs; prevalent building materials
- enclosure and definition of open spaces; linear routes (e.g. roads, waterways, railways); physical boundaries (e.g. walls, hedges, railings)
- designed landscapes: ornamental structures, earthworks, sculpture and water features; planting schemes (public and private); naturally occurring trees and vegetation; park furniture

2.2.3 Visual attributes are supplemented or modified by a range of other factors derived from movement, activity and the senses, including traffic (and traffic noise), the changing views opened up by moving through a landscape, and daily and seasonal variations. These aspects of the townscape can have a profound influence on the way we experience and value places. They are all subject to change over time, so it may be necessary to identify key stages in an area's development and define its character at each stage.

2.3 Character areas

2.3.1 In some areas there will be a high degree of uniformity of character; in other areas diversity may itself be a distinctive quality worth highlighting (together with its parameters) through secondary 'character areas'. Such variations may be the expression of different phases of development or of different patterns of ownership, or they may reflect the operation of different socio-economic forces. Identifying and describing these character areas enhances the evidence base of the assessment. With landscapes of particular complexity it may even be necessary to divide character areas into more subtly differentiated sub-areas.

Figure 7: Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland. The scale and density of the historic environment, and the degree to which we move and look freely within it or are restricted to prescribed routes and viewpoints, have a powerful impact on our sense of place.

2.4 Clarifying historical and architectural development

2.4.1 HAAs will be most effective when they are shaped by a series of research questions. These will focus attention on the characteristics that underlie historic interest, how it has acquired them and how it compares with other areas. The aim should be to identify and explain the observed patterns and to draw attention to the connections and contrasts between its various elements.

2.4.2 HAA offers a narrative of an area's development, clearly identifying the factors driving and constraining change, and adequately explaining the varied form of the area. Different areas will raise different issues, and the extent to which each point can be explored will depend on the level of survey adopted, but the following research questions may help to shape the final report:

- **What are the earliest observable elements** in the historic area? Did they, or other elements now lost, or topographical features, shape or constrain the subsequent development of the area? What is the potential archaeological interest of the area?

- **How 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 land 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, scale and distribution of open spaces, and other divisions)? 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 intentions modified or abandoned? Were the social, economic or other aspirations of developers and builders realised? Can the impact of building cycles or of wider economic fluctuations be detected?

- **What is the range of building types**? Were different functions (domestic, agricultural, commercial, industrial and so on) located in recognisable zones? Did this pattern change over time? What historical evidence is there for employment within the area? 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, sports facilities and the like) and by whom? How were these various amenities distributed within the area?

- **What was the social and economic character of the area**? How did this change over time? Is there variety within the area? How important to residents was employment beyond the area's boundaries? To what extent did the provision of services and institutions render the area economically and culturally self-sufficient?

- **What is the architectural and landscape character of the area**? Which are its dominant components? Which building materials are apparent? What changes in the nature of the building stock occurred over time? What type (or types) of landscape do buildings and other features help to form? What is the role of open spaces, and of natural and designed landscape features, in determining character?

- **How does the area compare with others nearby**, or with comparable areas elsewhere? How can any differences be explained? 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 why?

Figure 8: Waterside, Ely, Cambridgeshire.
Almost any snapshot of the historic environment poses questions about how it assumed its present form and how it differs from comparable areas elsewhere.

2.4.3 When explaining variations within an area through sub or character areas it may be useful to apply the same research questions to each individual unit in order to draw out the ways in which they differ from one another.

2.5 Assessing condition, integrity and vulnerability

2.5.1 Understanding the ingredients of historic character helps to determine its sensitivity to particular forms of change and its capacity for accommodating them. Observations on the condition of individual heritage assets should not be seen as a substitute for a fuller investigation, where it is necessary.

2.5.2 The following questions may be helpful in exploring these issues:

- What is the overall condition of the historic area? Does it vary within the area?
- What has been lost (e.g. neighbourhoods, streets, significant buildings, distinctive landscape features, views, architectural details)?
- Which parts of the historic area retain a high degree of physical integrity and which have been extensively altered or fragmented?
- 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 can be identified in the area?
- Can the extent of vacant or at-risk properties be quantified?
- Which elements continue to fulfil the needs for which they were originally intended?
- What would be the consequences for the historic area of demolition of parts of the historic fabric? Would neighbourhoods lose their integrity or legibility? Would individual heritage assets lose their heritage interest? What is the potential impact on the archaeological resource?

Case study: Catterick Garrison, North Yorkshire

HAAs can be undertaken on a larget scale. For example, Historic England has studied Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire, a medium-sized town with a military and civilian population of over 15,000. It is the British Army's largest garrison, with plans for expansion by both the military and the local authority, but its built environment has been subject to little in the way of analysis and interpretation.

The garrison began life in 1914 as a temporary training camp. Made permanent in the 1920s, it has grown incrementally to encompass barracks, married quarters and civilian housing, a town centre and camp infrastructure. The HAA analyses the character of its built environment and the significance of its individual structures and areas, as well as noting its archaeological potential. For the purposes of the assessment the town has been divided into 23 character areas and each will be mapped to show the main development phases. The assessment benefits from new aerial photography to show the scale of the settlement and to capture its larger buildings and complexes. It is hoped that the HAA will inform new development, helping developers and planners to take account of the town's history, topography, building materials and dominant architectural styles. It also provides a permanent record of the development of a military town during the 20th century and beyond, enhancing our understanding of this important, but less well studied, subject area.

Figure 9: Catterick Garrison, North Yorkshire.
The large Sandhurst block at Somme Barracks.

2.6 Defining and evaluating significance

2.6.1 The NPPF defines significance as 'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting' (NPPF, annex 2: glossary).

2.6.2 Underlying the process of 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 that detracts from the method, but rather should be seen as enhancing the process, provided that the approaches and arguments are set out clearly for critical scrutiny.

2.6.3 Historic England promotes a values-based approach to significance as set out in Conservation Principles, which identifies four broad groups of values through which a site or place can be interpreted: evidential, historical, communal and aesthetic. Understanding and recognising the range of values ascribed to a heritage asset by the local community can broaden the way in which we define significance and complement the expert view represented, for example, by designation. Furthermore, it can heighten local awareness of the distinctiveness and value of historic areas, and, by encouraging community engagement with planning issues, it can help to identify successful approaches to managing change.

2.6.4 Designation is the most obvious expression of the way in which we value our historic environment and its constituent parts. Conservation areas, listed buildings and scheduled monuments are afforded statutory protection because of their special interest. Registered Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest, and Registered Battlefields are also considered designated heritage assets under the NPPF. HAAs may be able to contribute new research may underpin applications for new or revised designations. Research and photographs of listed buildings and other designated assets can be added to the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) through Enriching The List, a virtual volunteering project.

2.6.5 Local heritage listing is a means for a community and a local planning authority to identify non-designated heritage assets that are valued as distinctive elements of the local historic environment. Some local planning authorities have designated areas of special local character, designed to capture historically important areas that fail to meet the criteria for designating conservation areas. They enable the significance of a local heritage asset (in its own right and as a contributor to the local planning authority's wider strategic planning objectives), to be better taken into account in planning applications affecting the asset or its setting.

2.6.6 Local planning authorities can also protect the historic environment by the allocation of Archaeological Priority Areas or Zones, where there is significant known archaeological interest or particular potential for new discoveries. They inform the practical use of national guidelines and local planning policies for the recognition and conservation of archaeological interest.

2.6.7 While HAA should take account of the significance ascribed to heritage assets by forms of designation, it should also look beyond designated heritage assets. The NPPF states that 'the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application' (NPPF, paragraph 135). Non-designated heritage assets can form significant parts of the historic environment. A HAA can cast the net more broadly to embrace other sets of values, which will lead to the identification of additional layers of significance.

2.6.8 Significance can also be ascribed to areas and groups of heritage assets within the historic environment. Some types and degrees of significance are reflected in the existing designations. Other types and degrees of significance are not formally acknowledged and should be assessed according to the four value types set out above in Section 2.6.1. In judging the significance of any given area or group of heritage assets it will be helpful to consider how, and to what degree, the following criteria are met:

- Rarity: Does it exemplify a pattern or type seldom encountered elsewhere?
- Representativeness: Is its character or type representative of important historical or architectural trends?
- Aesthetic appeal: Does it derive value from the intrinsic visual quality of its architecture, design or layout, the harmony or diversity of its forms and materials, or through its setting?
- Integrity: Does it retain a sense of completeness and coherence? Integrity is most often used as a measure of single-phase survival, but some buildings and landscapes are valuable precisely because of their multiple layers, which can have considerable evidential value
- Associations: Is it associated with important historic events or people?

2.6.9 An assessment of relative significance is, inevitably, a comparative process, and for this reason it relies heavily on the analysis of a range of information, including the knowledge of local people. It should aim to establish whether an area, or a component of it, is of local, regional, national or international significance. Heritage assets, and the values attached to them, may overlap or be interdependent.

Figure 10: Cobden Street, Freeholders' Home Estate, Darlington, County Durham.
A well-preserved example of a back-plot, rustic-style house from the initial phase of suburban development.

Case study: Historic suburbs

HAAs have proved useful in exploring the value and significance of England's historic suburbs. The image evoked is often one of leafy streets of semi-detached or detached houses but the reality is considerable more diverse in character. Some suburbs have quite dense development, including large areas of bye-law housing from the period 1850 to 1914, while others are architecturally and socially varied and might have a layered history as a consequence of suburban encroachment on earlier settlements or piecemeal development and redevelopment. There are also large areas of public and private housing built in the inter- and post-war periods and planned urban extensions continue to be built today. Many suburbs are characterised by a degree of repetition (albeit with many variations on a theme) but their historical significance can be high. 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 assessment and Historic England has looked at a number, including two conjoined suburbs, Anfield and Breckfield, in Liverpool and an inner suburban district of Darlington, the Freeholders' Home Estate, Eastbourne. The approach has worked well in demonstrating the historical and architectural interest of such 'ordinary' landscapes and in encouraging informed management.

3 Levels of assessment

3.1 Selecting the right level of assessment

3.1.1 Once an area has been selected for assessment the choice of approach will depend on:

- available time and resources
- an initial view of the scale, scope and significance of the area under consideration
- the planning context, including the potential impact of any development proposal

3.1.2 Three levels of 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 a more detailed understanding in exchange for a greater input of time and resources. A level can be applied to an entire area or different levels of assessment can be undertaken. Those commissioning HAAs can adapt the levels of assessment to the needs of the area and other prevailing circumstances.

3.1.3 It will often be necessary to prioritise resources by targeting those aspects of the historic environment which are most vulnerable to harm or loss, or where an enhanced understanding has the greatest potential to enhance or sustain significance. Equally it may be adopted where certain themes, periods or building types have been key in shaping the development and character of an area. Particular aspects should be set within 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)

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 a more intensive assessment is not deemed proportionate to likely levels of significance. They can 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.

3.2.2 Outline assessments are based on historic mapping, supplemented by external field observation, and for speed much of the area can be covered by car, rather than 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.

3.2.3 It may be felt that outline assessments are superficial and that they therefore require little skill or experience on the part of 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.

3.2.4 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 landscapes, and the main periods of development
- identify any neighbourhoods, buildings, landscapes or other features of particular historic interest or significance
- identify which areas or individual assets, if any, merit more detailed assessment

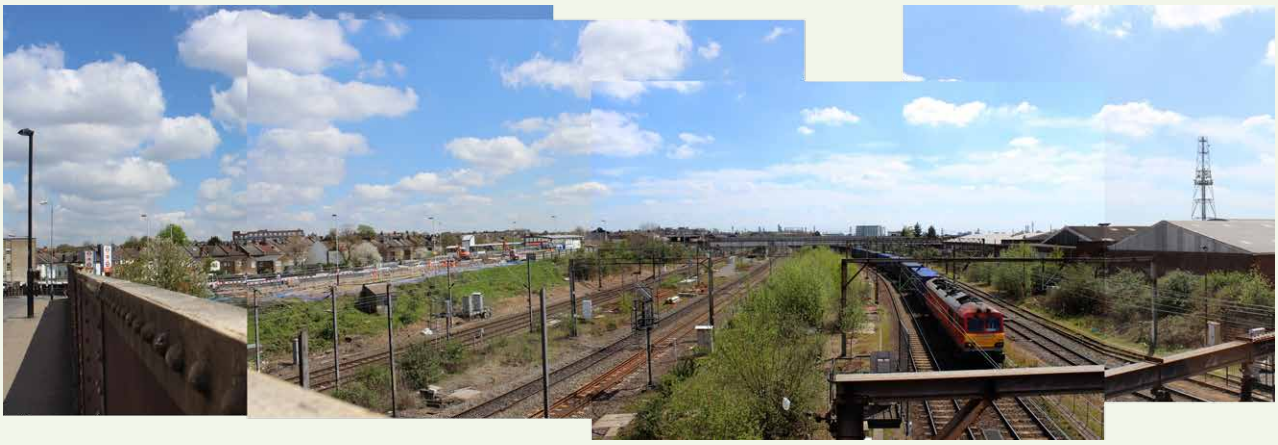

Figure 11: View south east from Old Oak Lane bridge over the Bakerloo Line.
Composite panoramas such as this can easily be assembled from site photographs.

Case study: Old Oak

An outline HAA of a linear expanse of west London, dominated by transport infrastructure and mainly industrial in character, was undertaken by English Heritage in 2013 in response to an emerging planning framework. The area includes the proposed site of the interchange between High Speed 2 (HS2) and the Elizabeth Line (formerly known as Crossrail) and the opportunity was taken to initiate a major regeneration site in the surrounding area. This will be overseen by a regeneration agency, acting as the local planning authority, established in 2015 as the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC).

The purpose of the assessment was to provide a snapshot of the character and appearance of a locality that would see considerable change. A number of sub areas were defined in the draft planning framework and for each the HAA identified the range of building types, their chronology and forms. The designated and undesignated heritage elements were identified and the potential for enhancement of the designation base was considered. The HAA also looked at designated heritage assets within a wider zone of visual iinfluence the settings of which may be affected by future development. The report was able to help guide local heritage designations and was adopted by the OPDC as a study to inform the draft Local Plan.

3.3 Rapid assessments (Level 2)

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 on 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 landscape and building types, their dates and forms, and relate them to the wider evolution of the area
- offer a summation, at one or more epochs, of the historic area
- distinguish, where appropriate, a series of character areas, and describe and explain the origins of their distinctive characteristics
- identify which areas or individual assets, if any, merit more detailed assessment

3.4 Detailed assessments (Level 3)

3.4.1 Detailed assessments deliver prompt findings for relatively small, densely built-up areas where the complexity of the historic environment calls for more intensive investigation. Detailed assessments 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 summarising a building's evolution; these records may be entered into a database or GIS for analysis. While these records will often be derived purely from external observation, internal inspection may enhance understanding. 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 should be interpreted and synthesised to inform the wider understanding of the area's development.

Figure 12: Anfield, Liverpool.
Rapid assessments can document the survival and significance of areas undergoing rapid change. A HAA of the conjoined suburbs of Anfield and Breckfield was undertaken prior to regeneration through the Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI). This view shows Anfield Stadium from Walton Breck Road; the boarded-up houses were demolished in 2007. The research was subsequently published as Ordinary Landscapes, Special Places: Anfield, Breckfield and the growth of Liverpool's suburbs.

3.4.2 A detailed assessment will additionally:

- provide individual records of all buildings and landscapes in the area, or a selection of them (for example, on the basis of a date range or building type)
- where practical, draw upon a wider range of internal evidence
- explore more fully the available primary documentary sources

3.5 Matching levels to circumstances

3.5.1 The following table sets out a selection of planning scenarios, the level of HAA likely to form an appropriate response, and the main outcomes:

Scenario	Level of assessment	Principal outcomes
1 Planned regeneration of a substantial area of undetermined heritage value	**Outline** (1)	▪ a brief account of the area's development ▪ differentiation of areas of high, medium or low heritage value ▪ summary of characteristic and distinctive landscapes ▪ identification of key buildings and/or features ▪ an ability to assess the impact of existing proposals for change ▪ the ability to steer or advise on new proposals affecting the retention of character and significance ▪ identification of sub-areas where a more detailed assessment is required
2 Formulation of a master plan covering a small or medium-sized town	**Outline** (1)	All of the above, plus: ▪ an overview of the development of the town ▪ an indication of main character areas
3 Proposed scheme for environmental improvements in a historic village	**Rapid** (2)	All of the above, plus: ▪ a systematic account of the area's development ▪ descriptions of a series of character areas ▪ an evidence base for formulating detailed policies for conservation and enhancement ▪ a basis for targeting grant-aid effectively ▪ grounds for new or revised designations
4 Evidence of incremental damage and loss in a historic suburb		
5 Specific proposals for redeveloping part of a town's historic core	**Detailed** (3)	All of the above, plus: ▪ a comprehensive account of the area's development ▪ detailed understanding of individual buildings and landscape features and their significance ▪ a basis for management policies ▪ an identification of opportunities/potential for a Heritage Partnership Agreement
6 Preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for (e.g.) a country house estate or university campus		

Figure 13: Charlotte Road, Shoreditch, London.
The former showroom of the furniture manufacturer E. Kahn & Co, glimpsed through the entrance to Mill Court. Relict signage can be a source of local character, while offering historical insights.

Case study: South Shoreditch

South Shoreditch lies to the north of the City of London and has been subject to intense development pressures for many years. In 2003 English Heritage, the London Borough of Hackney and the Greater London Authority began exploring co-ordinated planning approaches to ensure that economic growth, regeneration and transport improvements were balanced with a proper consideration of the special character of the area and its buildings. A conservation area had been in existence since 1991 but it was felt that additional planning and conservation powers might be required for the sustainable management of change. A detailed assessment of the area was undertaken by English Heritage in 2004 with the aim of providing a strong evidence base, setting out the character of the area and identifying buildings of historic or architectural interest. The assessment resulted in a small number of designations and its findings helped to frame new conservation policies which in turn informed the South Shoreditch Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), issued in 2006. The SPD provided guidance relating to the protection of plot patterns and historic street layouts, as well as the prevailing scale, form and materials of the buildings in the area; aspects of the area's character that the HAA had been able to draw out. Since its completion the HAA has contributed to putting the area's character at the heart of its successful regeneration.

4 Fieldwork, research and analysis

This section offers guidance on the fieldwork and historical research that, to varying degrees, forms the core of all HAAs. 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 combining complementary skills in history, historical geography, architectural history, landscape history and archaeology, and familiarity with area assessment methodologies. For health and safety reasons, a minimum of two individuals is advisable for fieldwork. HAAs can be undertaken by volunteers, but it will often be advantageous for historic environment specialists to provide support and training.

4.1.2 Specialist equipment is not required, but a digital camera is essential. Cameras should be capable of taking pictures of adequate resolution and be provided with sufficient memory for the demands of rapid survey work, which may generate several hundred photographs in a day. For detailed assessments, access to a GIS may be required (*see* Section 4.7). In certain circumstances, the use of drones (remotely-piloted aircraft systems) may provide a cost-effective method of providing oblique aerial photography from specific viewpoints.

4.1.3 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, or a dictation device. Alternatively, a hand-held GPS (global positioning system) device can be used for note-taking, enabling records to be downloaded directly to a database or GIS. A leaflet for handing out during fieldwork can be used to inform members of the public.

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 planning authorities and the Historic England Archive are essential starting points. Many HERs can be searched online via the Heritage Gateway website. An online search of the National Heritage List for England will help to identify designated heritage assets. Online satellite imagery will also assist in preliminary examination of an area.

4.2.2 The local Historic Environment Record (HER) 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 have information on archaeological sites and finds and most provide access to Urban Archaeological Databases (UADs) and characterisation studies. Increasingly most include information relating to the historic built environment. This information is usually held in a database with a GIS.

4.2.3 Published accounts of the area will also be useful, including the Victoria County History, inventory and thematic volumes of the former Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) and the Survey of London (some of which are available from the British History website), as well as the Buildings of England (Pevsner) series. Architectural and trade journals, useful for certain building types and periods, can be consulted in the British Architectural Library. Increasing amounts of historical information is available on the internet although such sources may need to be used with caution if lacking references etc.

4.2.4 Before fieldwork begins, the historic map series should be assembled and the main lines of topographic development identified (*see* Section 4.4.3). Modern mapping in paper or digital form should also be acquired for annotation in the field, if possible incorporating designation information and other relevant data.

4.3 Fieldwork

4.3.1 Fieldwork refines an understanding of the evolution of the area and its character in more rounded ways than maps satellite imagery or desk-based analysis permit. It helps to understand how the lie of the land influenced the process of development and enables the sequence of changes to be plotted in more detail than can be done from periodic map editions. Fieldwork is an analytical activity, and will be most effective when fully informed by the questions listed above in Clarifying Historical and Architectural Development (Section 2.4).

4.3.2 Fieldwork should aim to:

- Establish or confirm the dates of key buildings and other features. Where map evidence or other information is lacking buildings can be dated approximately on the basis of their architectural style, plan-form and other design features. For older buildings great care is required, as most medieval or early post-medieval buildings, particularly in towns, have been re-fronted or otherwise extensively altered in subsequent centuries.

- Identify the function and use, historical and current, of buildings and of green or open spaces. For many buildings – particularly those of the 19th and 20th centuries – the original function may be self-evident from external observation. For industrial, institutional or military complexes no longer in original use it may be difficult to establish functions without additional research. Earlier buildings, and those that have undergone considerable change, may prove harder to interpret although functions can often be inferred from certain external features or attributes. For example, variations in decorative detail, window forms and positions of chimneys etc, will often suggest the uses of different parts of the building (*see* Understanding Historic Buildings). The study of open spaces and landscapes will similarly reveal patterns of changing use over time.

- Identify 'units of development' or 'build units'. Units of development are the parcels of land that are developed under the guidance or control of a single owner or developer. They can often be inferred from maps by the conformity of roads or boundaries to a particular orientation or grid, by street names or because they are respected by later features. In the field they can be observed by, for example, a uniform style of building or landscaping, or a recurrent motif. Units of development are often composed of smaller 'build units' (i.e. the product of a single building campaign). These may be distinguished by structural breaks, by changes in architectural form, or by more subtle variations in detailing. They can give a picture of the mechanics of development that is impossible to obtain from maps but shapes the character of an area. For designed landscapes it will be similarly important to distinguish what was laid out, planted and built in each stage of development.

- Identify evolutionary patterns in the building stock or other landscape elements. Can trends be identified, such as notable shifts in change of use or piecemeal modifications to buildings? For example, the heightening of early houses to provide an additional storey, the front extension of houses for shops, the replacement of building materials, the personalisation of repetitive housing units or alterations in housing density.

- Explore the social character of the area. Where different areas or kinds of site favoured for different types of development or classes of house? Has this changed over time?

- Explore the relationship between landscape elements and area character (*see* Section 2.2) Has one had a significant impact on the other and, if so, how?

- Consider the potential archaeological interest of the area below ground and, particularly in open areas, in the form of surface evidence. What is its relationship to features and patterns in the wider landscape?

- Define or confirm the character areas boundaries.

- Assess the condition and integrity of the historic area, and note any factors influencing its capacity to absorb change.

Figure 14: The Freeholders' Home Estate, Eastbourne, Darlington, County Durham.
How areas change over time can often be succinctly illustrated with maps. Here the modern mapping of a historic suburb has been adapted to show the extent of the initial mid-19th century development, the relationship of the modern plot layout to the original scheme and the locations of post-war redevelopment.

4.3.3 The amount of fieldwork will vary according to the level of assessment. Except when carrying out outline assessments it will usually be necessary to walk every street in the area and where possible to seek other vantage points 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 some public buildings may be quickly examined, and chance invitations to view other buildings may occur. It is always important to have regard to the rights and sensitivities of owners and occupants.

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 landscapes, and those that incorporate several phases of development, will generally require closer scrutiny and may require formal access arrangements.

4.3.5 Observations in the course of fieldwork should be recorded in notes and photographs. Information can be captured on a pro forma record sheet or as datasets in a GIS, preferably with space for 'free text' to allow for additional comments.

4.3.6 Photographs should include general views, individual heritage assets and other features of interest. Photographing address information (street signs, house names etc), keeping a log of locations, or associating pictures with GIS data will help to identify individual sites within a large number of photographs. Where the built environment is particularly dense, marking up a large-scale map will help to avoid confusion.

Case Study: Norbiton and Borough Road area, Kingston upon Thames

HAAs are well suited to assessing places for their heritage significance and more specifically for their potential for different kinds of designation at national or local level. Examples of this type of work include two studies done for the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames by the Drury McPherson Partnership. In 2012 a group of streets in a suburban district of the borough, sometimes referred to as 'Norbiton village', were looked at in terms of their intrinsic architectural quality and townscape value. In 2015 this was followed by a similar assessment of a residential area in the vicinity of Kingston Hill. These were outline, high-level assessments based on site visits and selective research and were able to draw upon the familiarity of the Partnership staff with the locality. The unpublished reports that were produced included an historical overview and drew out variations in the character of each study area. Preliminary recommendations were made about whether either area met the criteria for designation as a conservation area or, alternatively, had sufficient distinctiveness and coherence to be considered as a local area of special character. Suggestions were also made about individual sites and their possible national interest or potential for inclusion on the local list of 'buildings of townscape merit'.

Figure 15: Borough Road, Kingston upon Thames. One of the benefits of the HAA approach is that hitherto unrecognised features of interest may be brought to light. This air raid refuge and canteen block of 1939-40, surmounted by the 1941 addition of a fire watcher's post (1941) was part of a 'key point' factory, essential to war time production. Identified by the Borough Road assessment, it was later listed at Grade II.

4.4 Documentary research

4.4.1 It is likely that the preliminary research will need to be supplemented by documentary research after fieldwork to answer questions and enhance interpretation of the initial findings. The range of documentary sources available for HAAs is potentially vast, and even in a detailed assessment it will only be practicable to sample some of these sources.

4.4.2 For HAAs the most useful **maps** are those at scales of 1:10,560 (six inches to one mile) or greater, although for periods when these are unavailable smaller-scale maps will still be of use. Large-scale maps dating from the 18th or early 19th century exist for most English towns and cities, and for many villages, and a few places have earlier maps. They were made for a wide variety of purposes and will need to be assessed on their individual merits.

4.4.3 **Ordnance Survey (OS) maps** (ideally obtained as part of the preliminary research) are much more uniform in coverage and accuracy, although practices and conventions varied over time. However, OS maps may not always provide the desired information; maps at scales larger than 1:10,000 generally omit contour information and in many places several decades elapsed between successive editions.

4.4.4 An unrivalled map series, where available, is that produced by the Goad Insurance Company 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 indicate functions, building materials, number of storeys, power arrangements and numerous other details. Many Goad plans are held by record offices and local studies libraries and are increasingly available as GIS datasets.

4.4.5 **Aerial photographs**, taken in large numbers from the 1940s onwards, and sometimes earlier (see, for example, the Aerofilms collection), represent an important visual source. 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 and for phasing rapid growth or development. The Historic England Archive holds the principal English collection of aerial photographs. Online satellite imagery can reveal details not available on mapping.

4.4.6 **Trade directories** for the largest provincial towns existed in the 18th century and over 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 premises lined the streets. Directories were commercial productions and accordingly focus on tradesmen and householders. A selection of text-searchable directories can be consulted through the University of Leicester's Special Collections Online, while hard copy sets may be available at record offices and local studies libraries.

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 require them and in some towns they survive from the mid-19th century onwards. Surviving plans, some transferred to microfilm, are now mostly in record offices and archives although 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 and identifying all the plans relating to a particular street or district can be a lengthy task unless the entries have been digitised.

4.4.8 The detailed **census records** compiled every decade between 1841 and 1911 (the latest currently available) provide a detailed picture of the social and occupational structure of a street or area and of patterns of social mobility. Census returns can be sampled by identifying streets or groups of houses (preferably survivinag) of contrasting scale and form and to compare the occupations and household structures of the inhabitants. Census data can be consulted via a variety of subscription websites and record offices.

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. Historic images are increasingly available online, but permission will normally be required for reproduction. **Local newspapers** often provide accounts of significant buildings and developments. The British Newspaper Archive comprises a large online collection of digitised newspaper pages. For the relatively recent past, oral history can be a valuable source of information.

4.4.10 For more detailed assessments, **other record types** can elaborate the initial findings of research and fieldwork. Our understanding of earlier periods can be greatly enhanced by the use of probate, estate, taxation and insurance records, although these are often difficult to correlate with individual buildings. The same is true of rate books, which record the assessment of property for local taxation. Other important sources include property deeds, local authority minute books, district surveyor's returns, sanitary reports and, if visiting The National Archives is a possibility, IR58s (the Board of Inland Revenue Valuation Office survey under the terms of the Finance Act, 1910).

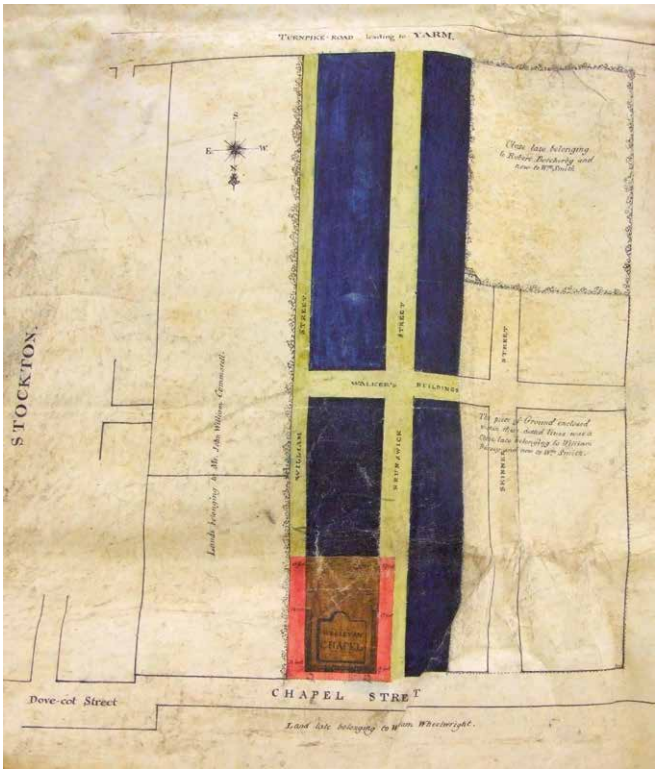

Figure 16: Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham. This 1824 plan, from the deeds for the Brunswick Methodist Chapel, not only confirms the existence of the chapel, but provides information on the laying out of a new suburb in neighbouring streets.

4.5 Analysing field and documentary evidence

4.5.1 The translation of field observation and documentary research into a coherent account of an area's development and character is both crucial and complex. Analysis seeks to identify and explain significant patterns by sifting and sampling available data in a variety of ways. An analysis of key building types, for example, might seek to identify the origins and key stages in the development of a particular type, any trends it appears to embody and its geographical spread.

4.5.2 For the period in which they are available, historic maps provide a powerful tool for analysis, supplemented by observation and research. But historic 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.

4.6 Presentation of results

4.6.1 HAAs present an overview of a specified portion of the historic environment, providing a reasoned and concise account of its origins and evolution, identifying surviving elements from each period of its development, setting out its distinctive characteristics and offering observations on its condition and significance. They should enable readers to judge which parts or features of an area are most significant and which are most vulnerable to change.

4.6.2 An essential 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 texture and interest to the physical manifestations of change.

4.6.3 The results should be presented in a way that reflects the complexity of the subject matter, while remaining concise and accessible to a range of users. The emphasis should be on presenting the fruits of analysis and the drawing out of 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 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, the extent to which it retains elements of demonstrable historical significance or amenity value and an indication of any existing designations
- An assessment of the potential for further research
- Recommendations, if appropriate, for management or for new or revised designations
- Supporting maps, including, where helpful, purpose-drawn maps charting development or highlighting key elements of the historic area
- References for all cited material, including illustrations
- A list of published and other sources consulted
- The date of compilation, and principal contributors

4.6.4 HAAs can 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
- Accounts of key heritage assets
- A summary account of the area as existing at one or more appropriate epochs

4.6.5 The appearance of the resulting document will vary according to level. 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 series of historic maps, historic plans of individual buildings and developments and numerous photographs, both modern and historic.

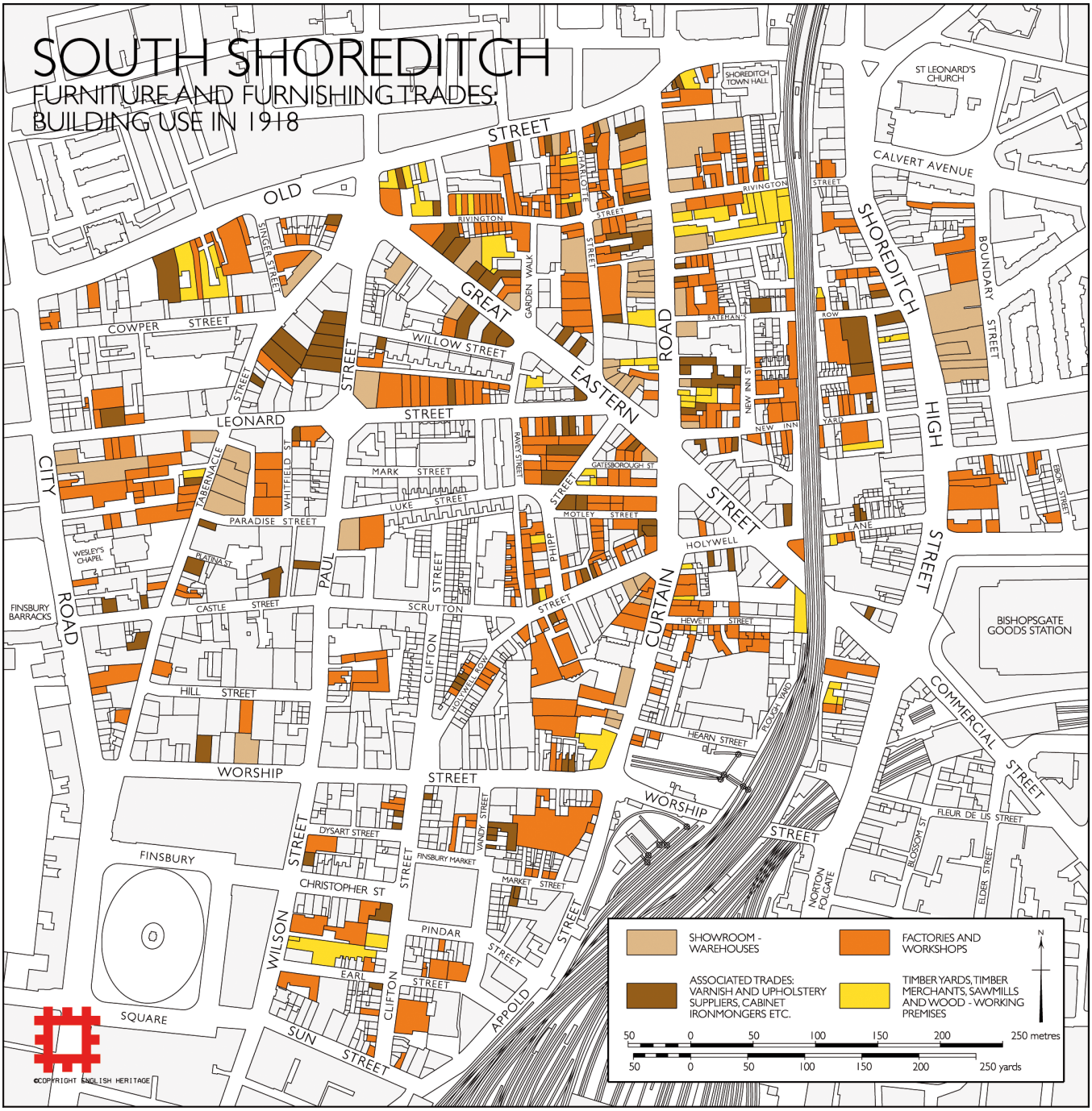

Figure 17: South Shoreditch, London Borough of Hackney.
Mapping the distribution of building functions or types can be an effective way of explaining variations in physical character in a detailed assessment.

4.7 Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

4.7.1 GIS is a powerful tool for analysing, managing and visualising the historic environment. Individual site co-ordinates (point data), linear features and 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 datasets.

4.7.2 The extent to which HAAs are integrated with GIS will depend upon the availability to key stakeholders of the necessary software and upon the level of assessment undertaken. In recent years GIS has become increasingly available in the form of free, open-source GIS software, but the value of any platform will depend on its functionality and compatibility. Geospatial datasets should be capable of being imported into other GIS systems (so that HAA datasets can be integrated into larger-scale characterisation or planning studies, for example) and curated in a digital archive.

4.7.3 GIS can facilitate the analysis of data but it is not a medium for presenting the full range of analytical insights. While a HAA may have as one of its objectives the population of a GIS, its full potential will be realised only if raw data are also analysed and worked up in the form of a narrative and discursive written report.

4.8 Dissemination

4.8.1 A HAA will typically be presented in the form of a report. By circulating a draft to stakeholders in advance, their comments and corrections can be incorporated into the final version. A digital version – preferably in PDF format – can be easily disseminated electronically and viewed onscreen but it may be useful to print a limited number of hard copies.

4.8.2 HAAs are about the places where people live and work, and there will usually be a lively local interest in the outcome. Many places will attract broader attention. Making the results of the assessment widely known encourages debate and stimulates appreciation of the area's history and landscape, and additional or alterative outcomes besides reports – a book, leaflet, website posting, social media, local exhibition or talk – will find new audiences.

4.8.3 HAAs will remain valuable after the immediate needs for which they have been commissioned have been met. A copy should be deposited with the relevant Historic Environment Record for public access. It is also good practice to make copies available to the local studies library, record office or museum. . Wider circulation can be achieved by entering project details on OASIS (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations), where reports can be uploaded and made accessible via the Archaeology Data Service Library.

4.9 Archiving

4.9.1 Any archive generated by the HAA should be deposited in an archival repository that has suitable arrangements for its long-term preservation and public access. This may be the relevant record office, museums service, local studies library or local history centre. They will be able to advise on acceptable formats (hard copy and/or digital).

4.9.2 All levels of assessment will result in the taking of many photographs, forming a valuable record of an area and its features 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 but catalogued and stored in such a way as to identify them as a set, arranged by sub-area, street or building as appropriate. Attaching metadata, including locational information, date of photograph and keywords, to digital photographs will enhance their archival accessibility.

4.9.3 Records (written or drawn) of individual heritage assets should also be archived. For further details see Understanding Historic Buildings and Understanding the Archaeology of Landscapes.

Figure 18: Isle of Grain, Hoo Peninsula, Kent.
This view of the marshes and the industrial landscape of Grain, dominated by the power station (demolished in 2015-6), captures something of the historically layered character of the Hoo Peninsula.

Case study: Hoo Peninsula, Kent

The Hoo Peninsula in Kent is mainly rural and coastal in character, with a landscape shaped over centuries by land reclamation, farming, trade, military usage and industrial activity. Sometimes wrongly perceived as a marginal place lacking in historical interest, it lies in the Thames estuary just 30 miles east of London and in recent years it has been subject to strong regional growth pressures. In response to likely change, English Heritage undertook a multi-disciplinary research project at landscape scale between 2009 and 2012 to provide an improved understanding of the archaeology, history and character of the peninsula. The project drew on a range of research techniques including aerial survey, buildings survey, historic landscape, seascape and routeway characterisation, farmstead characterisation and a palaeoenvironmental review. A HAA was also undertaken, looking at the buildings and landscape of the peninsula at outline level. The results were presented in a series of research reports on individual parishes, summarising their development and highlighting their historical and architectural interest. The findings of the wider project were presented in various forms and drawn together in two documents, an integrated report, Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape Project and a popular publication in the Informed Conservation series, The Hoo Peninsula Landscape (2015). In this instance the HAA methodology was able to contribute an overview of the built environment to a more widely conceived landscape analysis.

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6 Glossary

ADS	Archaeology Data Service
CAA	Conservation Area Appraisal
CMP	Conservation Management Plan
DBA	Desk-based Assessment
EUS	Extensive Urban Survey
GIS	Geographical Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HAA	Historic Area Assessment
HAZ	Heritage Action Zone
HER	Historic Environment Record
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation
HMRI	Housing Market Renewal Initiative
MoRPHE	Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations
OS	Ordnance Survey
RCHME	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
UAD	Urban Archaeological Database

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