

THE GARDEN
HISTORY SOCIETY

Planning Conservation Advice Note 13

**Briefs for historic
landscape assessments**



GHS Head Office, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ

Tel: 020 7608 2409 Fax: 020 7490 2974 Email: conservation@gardenhistorysociety.org

www.gardenhistorysociety.org

The Planning Conservation Advice Notes (PCANs) listed below have been devised by the Garden History Society to advise those wishing to determine the impact upon historic designed landscape of specific proposals for change. This includes local planning authorities, potential developers, owners or other interested parties. These PCANs seek to inform on necessary background information and good conservation practice while at the same time encouraging critical evaluation of the likely type and extent of potential impact. Not all impact is adverse, change is not necessarily detrimental, and opportunities do exist both for development and, where adverse impact has been identified, for appropriate mitigation. Informed evaluation is essential however, if irreversible damage is to be avoided and change is to be implemented in a way that is sympathetic to the historic and visual value of designed landscape.

Titles List

PCAN 1: Change of Use (of landscape, and of principal and/or subsidiary buildings)

PCAN 2: Hotel and Leisure Development

PCAN 3: Extension of Educational/Institutional Establishments

PCAN 4: Executive Housing

PCAN 5: Golf

PCAN 6: Vehicle Parking and Access

PCAN 7: Treatment of Boundaries and Entrances

PCAN 8: Telecommunications Masts

PCAN 9: Development of Domestic Amenities

PCAN 10: CCTV and Lighting

PCAN 11: Development in the Setting of Historic Designed Landscape

PCAN 12: Evaluation of New Landscape Features

PCAN 13: Briefs for Historic Landscape Assessments

PCAN 14: Management Plans (including Statements of Significance)

Appendix 1: Lists of subsidiary development generated by particular types of change

Appendix 2: General Evaluation Checklist (All types development/all types landscape)

Appendix 3: Planning Context

Planning Conservation Advice Notes 1 to 12 deal with some of the most common types of change proposed in historic landscape or its setting. Notes 13 and 14 describe documentation required to evaluate and support proposals for such change. Appendices 1 to 3, which separate out specific aspects of proposals in note form for quick reference, may also be useful for evaluation of types of change not covered in PCANs 1 to 12.

Format

PCANs 1 to 12 are divided into the following sections:

Section 1.0: Introduction

Section 2.0: Information Needed to Evaluate the Impact of Proposals

Section 3.0: Further Information Needed

Section 4.0: Potential for Mitigation

Section 5.0: Watchpoints

Section 6.0: Unavoidable Development/Damage

Section 7.0: Application of Advice

Section 8.0: Planning Context

Section 9.0: Evaluation

Evaluation

Most sections follow a set format but Section 9.0 on evaluation differs between various PCANs.

PCANs 3; 6; 8; 9; 10; 11 have a flow chart evaluation questionnaire. This may assist planning officers in particular, both in assessment of proposals and in preparation of recommendations for committee – the advice shown in upper case and bold type being intended to inform particularly on the following:

- level of potential impact
- further input which may be needed from other professionals
- further information which may be required
- where condition or legal agreement would be required to avoid adverse impact

PCANs 1; 2; 7 have checklists of questions intended to:

- highlight other relevant evaluation tools
- highlight potential implications of proposals
- list questions relevant to evaluation of impact

PCANs 4; 5 have short checklists of questions intended to:

- direct evaluation to specific conservation advice in the relevant PCAN
- assist evaluation by highlighting potential implications of proposals

PCAN 12 seeks to assist evaluators by offering conservation advice for particular situations.

Current status of advice notes

These planning conservation advice notes may be amended following trialling or with the introduction of new legislation. Any comments, and suggestions for improvement would be welcomed by the Society and feedback on content, usefulness, layout etc. of the sections on evaluation (including flow-charts) would be particularly appreciated.

Acknowledgements

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There is a fundamental difference between a historic landscape assessment (HLA) and a historic landscape conservation management plan (CMP): an HLA explains the historical provenance of what survives on site and a CMP explains how the site may be repaired and conserved.

1.0 Explanation

An HLA is produced in four stages :

- Collection of archive material
- Analysis and interpretation of archive material
- Historical site survey
- Correlation of archive and field evidence

1.1 Collection of archive material

- 1.1.1 The extent of research required for a site will depend on the purpose of the undertaking.
‘The site’ refers to the designed landscape at its greatest known extent.
- 1.1.2 A range of archive material will be studied in the preparation of an HLA report. Maps and plans are potentially the most useful primary source for determination of landscape changes, but historical analysis will also draw on estate accounts, letters of estate administration, diaries, memoranda books, sale contracts etc. Illustrations and printed sources such as sale catalogues, directories etc. can also provide valuable information on the site and on periods of change.
- 1.1.3 Details of changes of ownership and relevant family history should be included (major changes in design were frequently related to new ownership and the interests and contacts of individual family members could be significant factors in the choice and execution of new designs). Research should also extend to any buildings/structures on the site (including that of the main residence) and any architects, landscape architects or nurserymen known to have been employed on the site should be identified.
- 1.1.4 Collection of archive material is not necessarily dependent on either qualification or expertise, although for those not experienced in historical research, guidance in selection of material should be sought (the county record office or local studies library staff will usually assist). Where resources are limited, this can be a useful step towards a historic landscape assessment. Should this course be followed, it is essential that faithful reproduction (of maps, plans and illustrations) and transcription (documentary material) is made – the way in which plans were laid out or the provenance of a document is often critical to interpretation.
- 1.1.5 For detailed guidance on research of the history of all types of designed landscape, refer to: David Lambert, Peter Goodchild and Judith Roberts, *Researching a Garden's History: A Guide to Documentary and Published Sources*. The Landscape Design Trust (in association with the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies: Landscapes and Gardens, University of York), Surrey, 1995.

1.2 Analysis and interpretation of archive material

- 1.2.1 As the above publication (see 1.1.5) notes, in practice analysis and interpretation is invariably a continuous process as material is collected and collated. This process is useful to focus further study, particularly where time and resources are limited, e.g. by identifying areas (both physical areas and periods of time/phases of design) where information is scant and potential significance high.
- 1.2.2 Interpretation of all archive material from maps, through estate or civic accounts, to aerial photographs requires professional experience of both the material and the wider context of designed landscape history.
e.g. The landscape plan which is clearly in the hand of a professional.
The planting list which is remarkable in either date or content.

The change in emphasis or pace in entries in a memoranda book which reveals increased interest in particular areas of management.

Significant names (e.g. nurserymen or designers).

1.2.3 Similarly, detailed interpretation of particular types of archive material requires familiarity with the methods of their presentation – e.g. what is the meaning of a particular annotation on a map? Is a particular clause in a lease standard?

1.2.4 The extent of survival of archive material varies between sites. Even where detailed records were kept, these may have been lost, and survival of secondary archive material (such as sale particulars, newspaper reports etc.) is often even more subject to chance. Availability of records also varies (e.g. some are in private collections and inaccessible). In consequence, while a broad development history of a site may be presented with some confidence, at this stage detailed analysis and interpretation of particular areas or specific phases of design is often about ‘best fit’ of evidence and circumstance, and some gaps in knowledge will be inevitable.

1.2.5 The main aims of this part of an HLA are:

- to identify the potential areas in which remains of designed landscape may survive (i.e. what is the greatest known extent of the designed landscape).
- to achieve a broad understanding of chronology of development history of the designed landscape.
- to identify elements and areas which may be of particular significance (e.g. those which appear to have survived several phases of change).
- to focus historical site survey.*

*While it is clearly important not to pre-empt the findings of a site survey, some focus is required to allow best use to be made of time available. For example, a block of woodland on the periphery of a designed landscape, planted in an area known to have been under arable cultivation in (say) 1870 and where subsequent records indicate clear felling at regular intervals, would not have the same priority for detailed survey as woodland which had appeared on successive maps since 1725, when it was part of a formal grove with classical garden buildings. Similarly, close examination of brick bonds, sizes and colour variations in areas of a garden wall may be appropriate to confirm important changes suggested by archive evidence (e.g. extension or reduction in walled enclosures, alteration to openings in connection with new circulation patterns etc.) but would be much less relevant where no such change were suspected.

1.3 Historical site survey

1.3.1 An historical site survey will cover all aspects of a designed landscape from standing structures and planting to earthworks and parch marks.

1.3.2 Site survey requires professional expertise.

1.3.3 Site survey should be conducted with the benefit of information gained from archive research.

1.3.4 The main aims of this part of an HLA are:

- To support and supplement information gained by research (e.g. hypotheses concerning map annotation may be tested on site*)
- To confirm, where possible, the accuracy and status of archive information (e.g. site survey may allow distinction to be made between executed and unexecuted proposals)
- To understand the significance of design and designed features and elements in relation to topography
- To establish potential focal points and views which may lie beyond known boundaries of the historic landscape
- To establish the extent of designed landscape survival in any form – even if only as earthworks (and whether such areas extend beyond present day site boundaries)
- To establish the extent of survival of historic elements, features and areas of the designed landscape (the condition of historic elements, features and areas should also be assessed through visual inspection, and recorded)
- To establish present day site divisions

- To establish present day site layout (and in so doing, identify changes which have occurred since the last accurate survey – for many sites this will be the first edition OS map)

In addition an historical site survey should identify any aspect or element of a site which appears to conflict with archive evidence.

*Maps are usually the most comprehensive source of information but, even for the experienced practitioner, these often pose innumerable questions. For example:

- Is a straight line of trees evidence of a former entrance or avenue, or a relict field or road boundary? (examination of the form of surviving trees may inform)
- Are the differences in the extent of a lake, apparent between various maps, evidence of a significant new design or merely a representation of an extended period of low maintenance with consequent encroachment of carr or marshland? (surviving planting and/or earthwork remains of diggings may inform)
- Is the apparently unplanted section of an otherwise continuous boundary belt a reflection of an area where no external intrusion was anticipated (e.g continuous estate land), or a designed view or panorama (and if so, is the view into or out of the designed landscape), or may it be evidence of expansion or contraction of the designed landscape? (examination of site topography and potential view focus or panorama may inform)
- Can the block of woodland, which appears on a map of (say) 1750 but not on one of 1700, be confidently dated to the intervening period and identified as a new design feature, or is it an area formerly clear-felled at regular intervals with a change of management regime to selective felling, and could this be significant in terms of design? (Examination of form and size of surviving trees may inform.)

1.4 **Correlation of archive and field evidence**

- 1.4.1 Information from the first three stages is correlated to produce a chronological account of landscape changes to the present day. This final analysis forms the historic landscape assessment and should be undertaken by an appropriately qualified or experienced professional.
- 1.4.2 Correlation of archive and field evidence is required to establish the development history of the landscape up to the present day. Although this is distinct from the evaluation process which forms the first stage of a conservation management plan, it will examine the landscape today in the context of both time and space. See Section 3.0 below for suggested format and content.

2.0 **What type information should an HLA provide**

An HLA should aim:

- 2.1 To locate the site in national, regional and local contexts.
- 2.2 To identify the known boundaries of the designed landscape both in the present day and at its greatest known extent.
- 2.3 To provide a brief background history of the site before the first known date of inception of the designed landscape with particular reference to:
 - The situation before any ornamental landscape was laid out.
 - Existing features of the landscape which were incorporated within design.
- 2.4 To provide a chronological record of the history of the designed landscape up to the present day – divided into appropriate periods with particular reference to:
 - The status and use of the landscape in various periods of its history.
 - Main planned landscape changes.
 - Lesser planned changes which took place between main phases of planned change.
 - Why planned changes were made.
 - What unplanned changes have taken place.
 - The provenance and development history of structures, elements, features and areas which have existed in the landscape.

The following should be clearly explained:

 - The present layout of the landscape.
 - The provenance and development history of structures, elements, features and areas which survive in the landscape (together with preliminary assessment of condition).

- 2.5 To provide relevant additional information such as:
- A chronological list of site owners (including corporate owners or trustees of civic or institutional sites).
 - Any known nurserymen, contractors or designers (local, as well as national figures to be recorded).
 - Any important historical associations with the site (e.g. events or national figures).
 - Any significant documentation associated with the site.
- 2.6 To identify significant gaps in knowledge of a site (and in so doing indicate the reliability of information on which conclusions may be based).

3.0 Format and content

Given the huge variation between designed landscapes, it is undesirable to be too prescriptive regarding format and content, and the following is intended as a broad outline only.

3.1 Presentation

Good presentation can significantly reduce the time needed to absorb and evaluate the information an HLA contains. A presentation checklist may be invaluable to the compiler – it is all too easy to overlook basic information, such as the name of a site, or simple editorial points such as inclusion of a list of contents (see section 2.0 above).

3.2 Site Precis

For complex sites a site precis may be helpful. Where supplied this will usually cover no more than a single A4 sheet and will include:

- name of site
- location and grid reference
- present owner
- current site designations
- known landscape designers, artists, architects, nurserymen etc.
- known historic associations
- brief summary (1 x paragraph) of site's development history
- brief summary (1 x paragraph) on present use and condition

3.3.0 Early history of the landscape

Significant factors and events relating to the landscape prior to inception of ornamental design should be identified but are usually summarised in a comparatively brief section.

- 3.3.1 Examination of early history, particularly of country house estates, may be needed to explain surviving elements (e.g. earthworks and parchmarks, ditches, tracks and internal boundaries) and existing topography and features (e.g. ruins, woodland, mounts, water bodies etc.) of the designed landscape. Early ownership by church or state may highlight the (former) status of a landscape and together with information on former structures on a site (e.g. religious houses, hunting lodges or residences) may allow the likelihood of early landscaping/gardening activity and its probable location to be examined. Potential areas of archaeological significance may also be identified by such examination.

- 3.3.2 However, although the establishment of such features in the pre-history of a designed landscape is often important to understanding the rationale of later designs (e.g. the defence bastion incorporated as a viewing mount, or the extraction pit which formed the foundation of a later quarry garden), detailed explanation of the exact provenance in terms of date and context is not usually required. For a historic landscape assessment the aim for such pre-designed landscape history should be conciseness and brevity.

3.4.0 Chronological history of the designed landscape

Together with 3.5.0 below, this will form the major part of an historic landscape assessment.

- 3.4.1 A detailed chronological history of the landscape separated into periods of significant change will form the main part of this section.

- 3.4.2 The number of sub-sections and the type of information will depend upon the purpose for which the HLA is being undertaken and the findings of archive research and site survey.

In addition to explanation of the development history of the landscape as a whole, it may be necessary on some sites to separate out the chronological record of particular areas (e.g. walled gardens; pleasure grounds, airing courts etc.) or specific aspects (e.g. landscape management). For private landscapes, a section detailing history of ownership and significant changes to residences is usually included. For public grounds examination of the history of aspects such as Sport and Leisure Provision, or Access and Circulation, may be invaluable for consideration of repair and future changes within a CMP.

3.5.0 **The historic landscape today**

3.5.1 Information presented in this section may vary quite widely; depending on the purpose for which the HLA is being undertaken (see Section 5.0 below), as well as the findings of research and site survey (see also 2.4. above). Variation of content may also be ascribed to a general uncertainty as to how this section should appear in the HLA and in what way it differs from the remit of a CMP. In practice, the same information may form the basis for both reports; it is the way in which the information is used that differs between the two. Very simply, a historic landscape assessment explains what a site consists of, and a conservation management plan explores what could or should be done with it to meet conservation aims and ensure its continued survival.

For example,

An HLA may identify the remnants of a lime avenue on site, which archive evidence suggests was planted in 1740. The report may describe the original position, length and focus of the avenue and the disposition, size, form and numbers of specimens remaining, and may highlight their relationship to other features and elements surviving from the same period, but it will not attempt to judge their significance in the present day or to prescribe for their future.

The CMP will consider this information in the context of how such remnant does or could contribute to the landscape in its entirety. If the conclusion is reached that this phase of landscaping remains dominant across the site and is significant by virtue of e.g. its rarity, designer or historical association, comprehensive repair (i.e. phased replacement of the whole feature) may be recommended. Conversely, if it is concluded that the avenue was intentionally felled to make way for large-scale new landscape design and that these few trees survived because they provided a mature framework to, for example, a new pleasure ground, the recommendation is likely to be quite different.

3.5.2 This part of an HLA may usefully include identification of site ownership divisions (i.e. identification of areas of different ownership) and current site designations (e.g. conservation area; listed structure; SSSI etc.).

3.5.3 Various other types of information relating to the site in the present day may be included within or appended to an HLA e.g. a tree survey (see 4.6 below), archaeological report or ecological report.

3.6 **Appendices**

A range of reports and archive material may be included as appendices (see for example 3.5.3).

3.7 **Bibliography**

Full referencing of sources (maps, illustrations, printed and archival sources) with dates should be included (see 4.5: Housekeeping, below).

4.0 **Watchpoints**

4.1 The English Heritage or Cadw (in Wales) Register Entry of a historic landscape is a reliable guide, but it should not be viewed as a comprehensive description. Substantially more detail is required for a historic landscape assessment.

4.2 The divisions of the chronological site history section of an HLA should not automatically follow the dates of available maps. While such dates may appear to offer a convenient 'cut off' and are undoubtedly significant in some instances (site-specific maps were often drawn up at periods of change – either of owner or of landscape), examination of all evidence may suggest more relevant and appropriate 'design phases'.

4.3 A historic landscape assessment should be up-to-date.

Where a site has undergone a recent succession of ownership changes, particularly where these are accompanied by a series of proposals for change, a historic landscape assessment may be passed from owner to owner without

updating. While the archive research element is unlikely to change unless new sources are identified or new methods of interpretation devised, site survey information (on both the site and its setting) may change radically.

- 4.4 As well as site survey information, any chronological development history of a site will draw on a range of archive material. Such material may be of variable reliability. A historic landscape assessment should indicate clearly those areas of interpretation and analysis where the history rests on hypotheses ('best fit') rather than reliably substantiated evidence.

4.5 **Report Presentation: Housekeeping**

- 4.5.1 Histories presented as sheets of continuous text are often difficult to absorb efficiently. All sections should be sequentially numbered for ease of reference. Pagination of the report is essential.
- 4.5.2 Significant information may be deduced from maps and plans, and care should be taken to ensure that hand-drawn copies of these are accurate and complete (details such as field names and acreages, cartouches and full map titles should be included). Where photocopies are used, these should be clear in all details and sufficient copies of the original should be produced to include in any subsequent distribution of a report – detail and clarity will be progressively lost if photocopies of photocopies are used. Where an original map or plan is coloured and a photocopy or hand-drawn copy is black and white, this should be clearly stated on the copy, together with explanation of any significant distinctions which colour on the original has been used to highlight (e.g. different coloured boundary delineation used to identify parcels of land in different ownerships). Titles, dates (exact where known, approximate where undated) and repository should be marked on each item and each should be given a figure number for ease of reference.
- 4.5.3 Any illustrations or photographs included should be clear (photocopies of photocopies should be avoided). Titles, dates (exact where known, approximate where item is undated) and repository should be marked on each item and each should be given a figure number for ease of reference.
- 4.5.4 Where copies of archive material (including maps, plans, illustrations and photographs) are included as an appendix, items should have a reference number, and a list of appendix contents, noting provenance and date of each item, should be provided.
- 4.6 Tree surveys included in a historic landscape assessment should be specific to the purpose – a tree pruned or managed for ornamental effect (e.g. a headed and twisted beech) may simply be assessed as 'of poor form' by a tree surveyor interested only in the amenity value of pure forms. Similarly, a group of limes remaining from an eighteenth century grove may be of real significance in historic landscape terms, but may be recorded by an amenity tree surveyor only as 'overmature'. A historic site survey may highlight the need for an appropriate and comprehensive historic tree survey to be conducted as part of a CMP.
- 4.7 Archaeological remains of designed landscapes may fall outside the expertise of a county archaeological department. Advice can be sought from archaeological units or university departments.

5.0 **Application of an HLA**

An HLA is a 'stand-alone' document which may be used in the following contexts:

5.1 **Planning Applications**

Planning authorities are required by law to consider the impact of any planning application which affects a site on the *English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*. This requirement extends to the setting of the registered site and authorities must seek the comments and advice of statutory consultees before determining such applications. Most counties have a policy in their structure plan which indicates that development which would have a significant or adverse impact on historic landscape will be resisted and similar policies may be contained in local plans. In addition, many authorities have identified further historic landscapes which are of local importance and which they will seek to protect from adverse development. Not all areas of the historic landscape are of equal sensitivity and importance, and development may be possible without damage. However, historical evaluation is necessary before appropriate sites can be identified and/or

potential damage assessed. An HLA is essential where major development is proposed on historic landscape and can be necessary even where development appears to be relatively minor.

Applicants for potential development who are unable to demonstrate that the historic landscape has been fully evaluated and understood, and that proposals respect and conserve important design elements and concepts are unlikely to receive the support of statutory consultees.

5.2 **Conservation Management Plans**

An HLA is the essential base for any conservation management plan relating to historic landscape.

5.3 **Grant Applications**

An HLA can be used to demonstrate the importance of the history of the site or of particular features, in grant applications or as the foundation of Heritage Lottery Fund bids.

5.4 **Public Presentation**

An HLA broadens understanding of the history of the landscape and, where the site is open to the public, can be used for site interpretation, guides and written histories.