

Conserving Significance Introduction to Identifying Values

Background

"The landscape is perhaps one of the more fragile and ephemeral pieces of western art. More so than a picture or a building, for its inhabitants border country between ornament and utility where a lawn can so easily become a hayfield, a shrubbery a jungle, and a tree a piece of firewood. It can only survive where there is a temperate zone of vigilance, judgement and imagination and where a keen sense of tradition prevails." Tait, AA *The Landscape Garden in Scotland 1735-1835* (1990)

Thinking about what principles we should adopt when considering conservation and development of such landscapes we need to bear in mind these issues of 'vigilance, judgement and imagination' but not base this on a rigidity and determination to hold landscapes moribund and unable to respond to change, appropriately approached.

English Heritage (now Historic England) published *Conservation Principles* in 2008, aimed at wide use not just by its staff but also by wider constituencies such as local authority conservation officers, consultants and amenity groups. It gives a framework to underpin consistent and transparent decision-making. This handout is based on the methodology proposed by this document.

In March 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to set out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. In relation to the historic environment, the NPPF confirmed the importance of significance within the planning system and thus reaffirmed its crucial role in effective conservation work.

Basic Concepts

Conservation: The process of managing change to a **significant** place in its setting in ways that will best sustain its **heritage values**, while recognising opportunities to reveal or reinforce those values for present and future generations.

Conservation Principles – the overarching framework for careful and considered management.

Values – these describe the aspects or qualities of worth or importance that a place may have.

These principles and values are then used to lay out processes for *assessing the heritage significance* of a place and *managing change to significant places*.

The NPPF defines *significance* as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest.

Note that *significance* derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

Significance vs Importance

- Significance is the term for all the heritage values of a place.
- Importance is the weight that should be given to those heritage values.

Conservation Principles (Historic England)

Principle 1 The historic environment is a shared resource

The historic environment reflects the cumulation of our human activity; beliefs, traditions, and, particularly for landscapes, taste, plant introductions, social and political history.

Principle 2 Everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment

Whilst there are of course specialists required, we need to enthuse others and increase understanding and education in order that conservation is sustained.

Principle 3 Understanding the significance of places is vital

In understanding what is important about a place, we can make better judgements and decisions on its future.

Principle 4 Significant places should be managed to sustain their values

Once the values and consequently the significance of a place are understood, conservation management can contribute to ensuring that change is managed to look after these aspects for future generations.

Principle 5 Decisions about change must be reasonable, transparent and consistent

Base decisions on clear (often expert) information and advice, *proportional* to the significance and potential impact at stake.

Principle 6 Documenting and learning from decisions is essential

We know the benefits of this for landscapes, eg in being able to track changes in the landscapes we study as someone has recorded it, having education resources available, making the history of a site publicly accessible – this also ties in well with ensuring information makes it on to the Historic Environment records and P&G UK database.

National Planning Policy Framework

NPPF 12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

NPPF 126 – local planning authorities 'should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance.'

NPPF 126 – 'local planning authorities should take into account: ... the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;'

NPPF 128 – ‘In determining applications, local planning authorities should require applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum, the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes or has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.’

NPPF 129 – ‘Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal.’

NPPF 131 – ‘In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of: the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;’

NPPF 132 – ‘When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.’

NPPF 133 – ‘Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss,’

NPPF 134 – ‘Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.’

NPPF 135 – ‘The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.’

NPPF 141 – ‘Local planning authorities should make information about the significance of the historic environment gathered as part of plan-making or development management publicly accessible. They should also require

developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible.'

Heritage Values

These values can be applied to the landscape as a whole, and to its constituent parts.

The sum of these values applied to a place indicates its significance. These are the *cultural heritage values*. (There are also ecological and biodiversity values, *natural heritage values* – not considered here but, for example, very important for agencies such as Natural England). The words in square brackets give simpler terms as an alternative to those used in *Conservation Principles* as an aid to understanding, but these are not the 'formal' terms used for values.

Evidential value [Research]

Historical value [Narrative]

- Illustrative
- Associative

Aesthetic value [Emotion]

- Design
- Artistic
- Fortuitous

Communal value [Togetherness]

- Commemorative and symbolic
- Social
- Spiritual

Sum of all these = Significance

Evidential [Research] value

The potential of a place to yield *new* evidence about past human activity. Many heritage assets still hold hitherto unrealised evidence – they have evidential or archaeological value.

Ask: where in this place might there be evidence yet to be discovered or recorded that is of research value?

Historical [Narrative] value

Ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.

Whereas evidential value lies in the primary physical evidence that a place can yield for research purposes, historical value lies in the potential to tell stories about the past, or evoke a sense of what it might have been like to live in the past, for example. It tends to be illustrative or associative.

Ask: what story does this place tell? What activity or incident does it demonstrate or explain more about?’

Associative value arises from association with a notable person, event, or movement because being at the place where something momentous happened can increase understanding of it. Many buildings and landscapes are associated with people, literature, art, music or film, for example.

Illustrative value has the power to demonstrate some historical point, to narrate an historical story or to evoke the past.

Aesthetic [Emotional] values

Ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place, or the power of a place to evoke emotional response in people that enriches the human experience.

Ask: what does this place make people feel? What is it that is designed or highlighted to evoke an emotional response?

These values can be the seemingly **fortuitous** outcome of the way in which a place has evolved and been used over time. For example, the seemingly organic form of an urban or rural landscape or an harmonious, expressive or dramatic quality in the juxtaposition of buildings and spaces.

They can be the result of the conscious **design**, primarily the qualities generated by the design of a building, park or garden, often including its place in its setting.

Communal [Togetherness] values

The meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It relates to places where the events of the past have brought people together to create or reinforce community.

Note that communal value is not the same as community value.

Communal value derives from all the other meanings that people assign to a place. It is often expressed in a sense of belonging and can have a profound effect on local identity, and it is here that we touch on intangible and living heritage. EH sub-divides this into the commemorative, social and spiritual which can be helpful.

Commemorative and symbolic values reflect the meanings that people draw from the place. These might be overt or they might need interpretation.

Perhaps an obvious use in the landscape is that of the creation of memorial gardens, symbolising a significant event. For example: the 7th July 2005 memorial to the London bombings which has created an area in Hyde Park with an atmosphere of its own. Also, North Stoneham war memorial shrine in Hampshire, magnificently restored in 2010.

Social value – places that people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and cohesion. For example, urban parks

and gardens. Historic public parks were built as statements of civic pride originally and continue to provide a sense of place, fostering community spirit and enabling social interaction. Flexible and highly adaptable, they have the potential to meet the changing demands of modern society and they are accessible to all. Used by millions on a regular basis – over 296 million visits per year by all sectors of the community. For example, Red Cross Garden in Bankside – recreated Octavia Hill garden re-opened in 2006. Careful re-introduction of a May Day festival with maypole dancing, as was known to have taken place in Octavia's day, has fully established a much-loved annual local community event. These events have come to reflect an important sense of identity, place and continuity in the Garden.

Spiritual value - Whilst churches and buildings of worship may seem the obvious example, spirituality in the designed landscape can also derive from symbolism and use of the landscape. For example, the remains of Quarr Abbey, Isle of Wight, are incorporated into part of a wider historic parkland estate. And of course cemeteries hold spiritual and commemorative values for many, and are an important category of designed landscape.

Remember:

Assessing significance is an art, not a science.

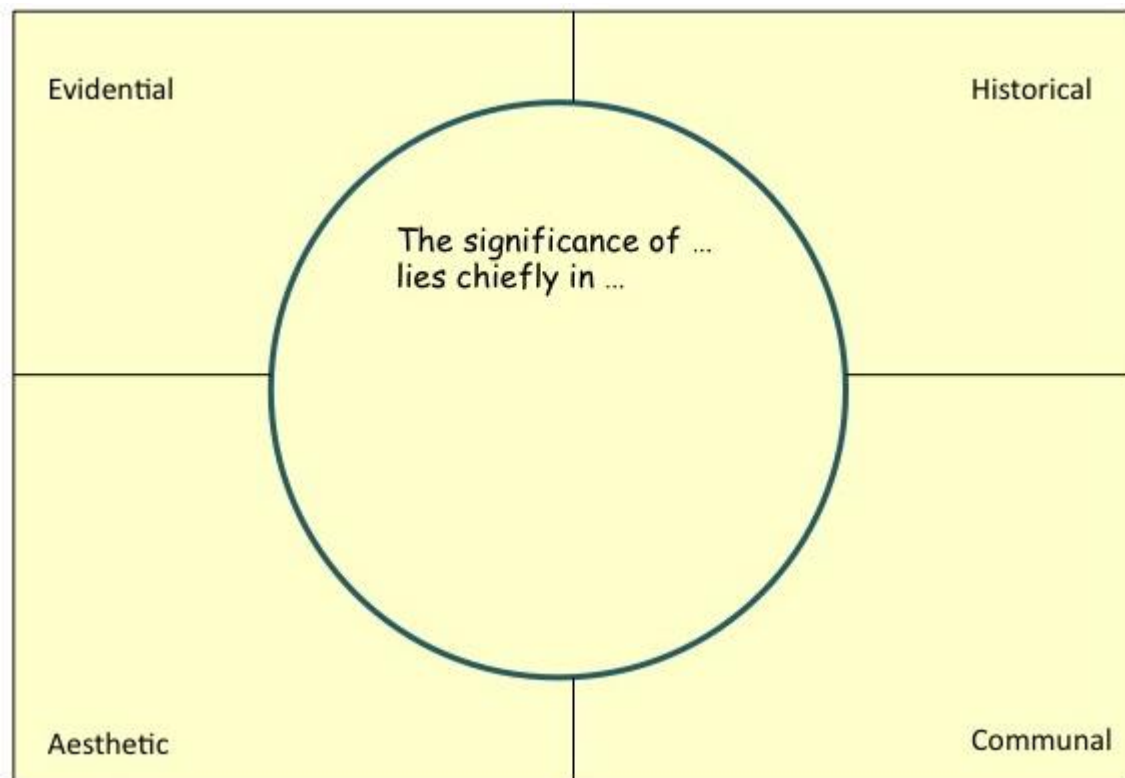
Values Toolkit to help

Feature	Evidential	Historical	Aesthetic	Communal
Fieldtree Park				
Northern park				
Lake				
Temple				
Kitchen Garden				
View to tower				

Filling this table in with notes, drawing on knowledge and research of the site, can provide the basis of the information suitable to turn into a narrative.

The assessment can be done on the place as a whole, character areas, individual features and views. You can work through each section methodically but there may well be boxes that you leave blank as of course not every value will be demonstrated by every feature or area of a landscape.

You could also use the circular 'palette' below to help you. You will need one palette for each asset as a whole, feature or area that you consider.



Further Reading

Conservation Principles – Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment English Heritage 2008

[you might wish to focus on the section on values in particular]

National Planning Policy Framework Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012

[focus on section 12 on Conserving and enhancing the historic environment]

Further copies of this handout, and associated training materials, are available at the Historic Landscape Project's Resource Hub, at

<http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/>

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