

Gardens Trust Training Handout: Condition Assessments

What is a Condition Assessment?

A Condition Assessment is a methodology for looking at a heritage asset and measuring whether and in what way it might be in good condition, poor condition, or perhaps at risk of decline.

Why might a Condition Assessment be needed?

Conservation Management Plans:

Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) are tools for developing informed management strategies for historic designed landscapes, helping to avoid ad hoc poorly informed decisions, management and development.

CMPs typically include research on a site's history, development and surviving state. To record a site's surviving state, condition assessments are carried out.

Countryside Stewardship funding:

The current scheme of funding for the historic environment from Natural England is called Countryside Stewardship, which includes a wide range of land management options, and capital grants, that help owners manage their parkland.

Countryside Stewardship applications and project monitoring require Condition Assessments.

Identifying Heritage At Risk

Heritage at Risk is a Historic England programme designed to protect and manage the historic environment, particularly by drawing attention to and constructively focussing on those sites that are deemed to be At Risk. It is based primarily on a Heritage at Risk Register, which is a record of sites that have been condition assessed and deemed to be At Risk. The assessment of parks and gardens starts with an appraisal of the condition and vulnerability of each registered landscape.

How might a Condition Assessment be formatted?

A Condition Assessment will typically look at:

- Effects of built development on the site and its setting
- Effects of built development on views to, from and within the site
- Condition of individual features
- Neglect
- Vulnerability caused by ownership, use, and environmental issues



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- Management, such as whether a Conservation Management Plan is guiding management, or whether there is evidence of appropriate maintenance
- Trend, ie whether the site is on a trajectory of decline or improvement

These will be marked on a scale, perhaps similar to:

- Optimal
- Fair (perhaps meaning there is vulnerability),
- Poor (poor condition or at risk but not in a way detrimental to significance)
- Very bad (poor condition or at risk in a way that is detrimental to significance)

What might a Condition Assessment be looking for?

- Built development within the site
- Built development in the setting of the site
- Views impacted by development
- Overgrown views
- Views that have trees planted or self-seeded in them
- Crumbling structures
- Silted lakes
- Overgrown canal edges
- Collapsing steps and terraces
- Missing or broken statuary and urns
- Unmanaged trees
- Loss of trees
- Flowerbeds that are underpopulated or excessively weedy
- Flooding
- Deteriorated paths and drives
- Abandoned or broken gates and gateways
- Ownership of a site that is split and incoherent
- Grass areas that have been allowed to turn to scrub
- Grass areas that have been ploughed for arable
- Poor maintenance (e.g. inadequate attention)
- Inappropriate maintenance (e.g. over-ornamentation of natural areas, or equally naturalization of historically formal parts)
- Unsympathetic use (e.g. formal garden used for large-scale sports)

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