Landscape Planning Case Study from a study by LUC, 2012

ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE ANCIENT AND HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF SCOTLAND
HISTORIC SCOTLAND ALBA AOSMHOR
HLAmap SCOTLAND'S HISTORIC LAND USE

Introduction

HLA data (historic land use assessment mapping) provides a key source of information for practitioners undertaking characterisation studies such as Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs). It is also useful for landscape studies that include aspects of characterisation such as capacity studies, appraisals and visual impact assessments. HLA data can add significant practical and evidential value to the outcomes of studies. It can contribute to a more consistent appreciation of the contribution of historic landscapes to wider character.

In essence, all landscapes are historic but the perceptible time-depth varies significantly from place to place. This is dependent on the combination of influences that have acted on the area and the extent to which they have preserved, altered or erased legible traces of past use and management. Therefore, the extent to which a landscape can be considered to have 'historic character' is dependent on how the material remains of the past are understood and interpreted at a landscape scale. This is a fundamental aspect of landscape characterisation.

Using HLA data

This case study provides easy to follow guidance on how to use HLAmap to inform characterisation studies, by focusing on the landscape around Loch Watten near Wick, in Caithness. The potential applications are clear:

- HLA data records the present use of land, which plays a fundamental role in shaping character
- It assigns a historical and chronological origin to each landscape unit, providing information on time-depth and historic influences
- HLA data provides a landscape scale record of archaeological and other past (relict) landscapes
- It provides a ready-made backdrop against which to digitise LCAs

A key part of the process of LCA is to understand the way in which landscapes are perceived and experienced. HLA can provide useful insights into how people may respond to areas of the landscape with specific historic origins and cultural associations, and help explain the reasons behind this. It can also help to create links between local cultural values, which may have become disassociated from their historical origins and material remains of the past.

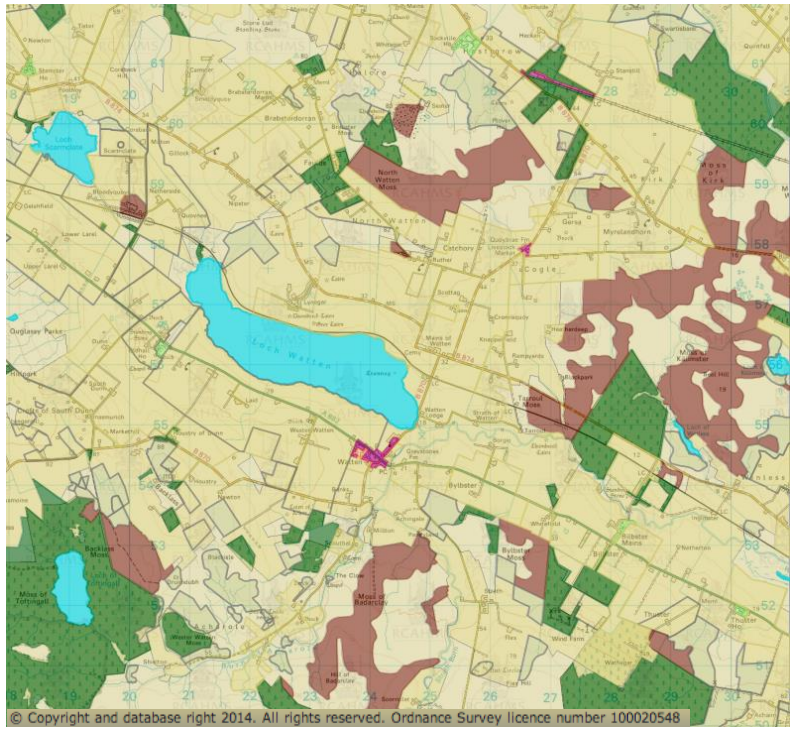
The view north-westwards from Wick towards Loch Watten and beyond. HLA notes the holdings that characterise this agricultural landscape, surrounded by the larger, planned rectilinear fields and farms which are more straightforward to identify.

Using HLAmap

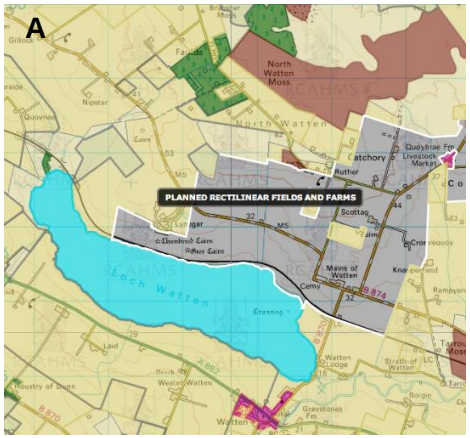
The website is specifically enabled for a landscape planning search. Choose 'Landscape and Strategic Planning' from the drop-down menu under Single View, at the top right of the map screen. Then find your area of study by zooming into the map. The scale needs to be 1:27,000 (noted at the bottom right of the screen). It is at this scale that the website reveals HLA data. You can zoom in further to see a smaller area more clearly, but the data doesn't change. As shown opposite, the whole dataset is revealed giving a general picture of today's land uses.

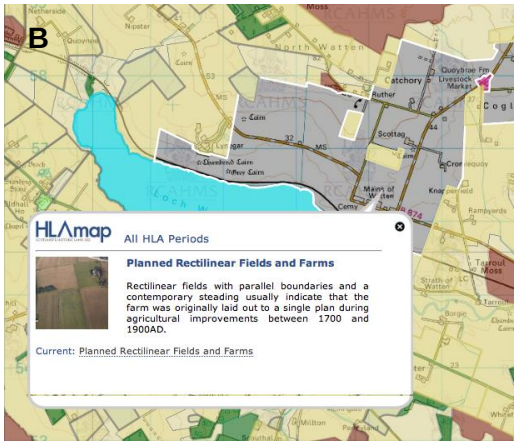
If you wish to see a wider area, use the zoom-out function in your browser's menu bar, (usually across the top of the screen). It may enable you to zoom-out several times, without affecting the HLA data view

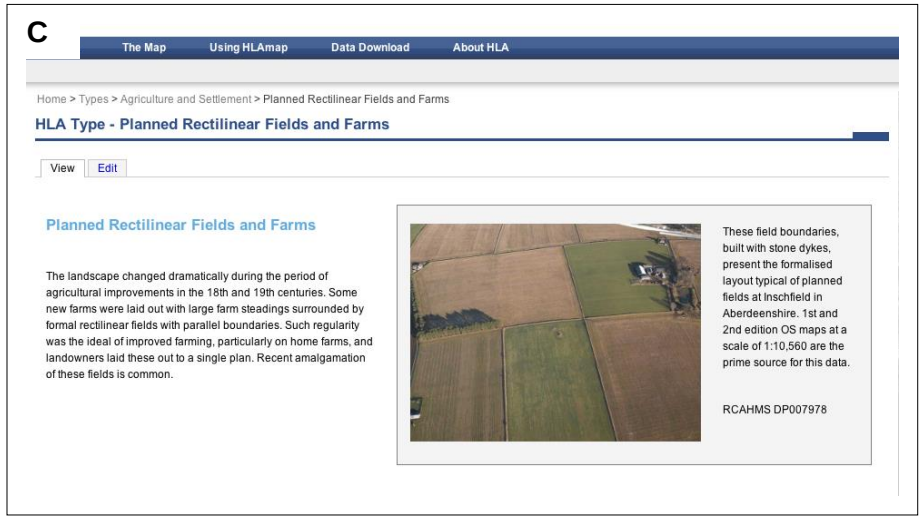
- The different colours reflect the twelve categories of land use that have been applied to the whole country.
- Pop-up boxes appear as the mouse is moved over the map [A]. Each box names the land use type that lies under the cursor. There are over 80 different types.
- Click on a highlighted type area and a brief description appears [B], or single click if the name pop-up box doesn't initially appear.
- Further detail about the land uses can be found by clicking on the titles below the image in the description boxes [C].



HLAmap extract for Loch Watten, showing 'All HLA Periods' of land use

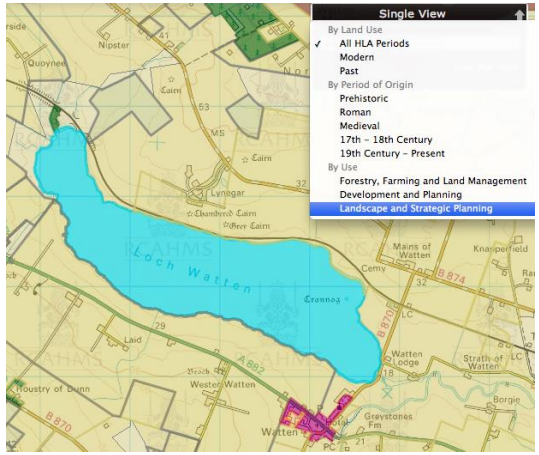






Other options in HLAmap

- You can look at a period or general phase from the same drop-down menu. The 'Past' view may be of interest, highlighting areas where medieval or earlier land uses still survive, thereby influencing the character of the landscape.
- There is also the option to select 'Dual Map View' and compare the data for different time spans.
- And it is possible to move (pan) the map at any time to see areas around your study zone.
- For those with GIS software, you can download HLA data and query it even further.



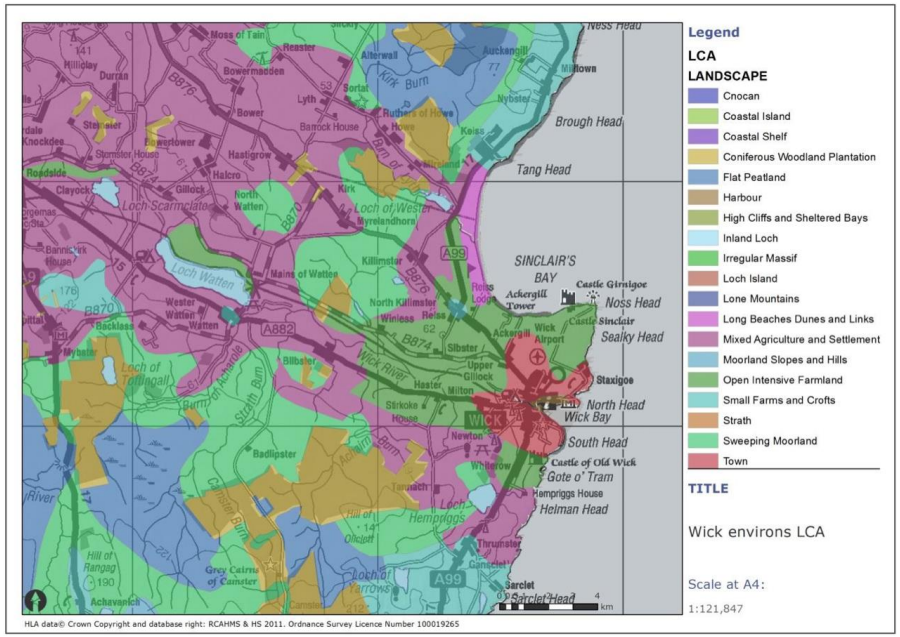
Using various HLAmap views, practitioners can quickly understand the level of time-depth in the landscape, highlighting where additional effort to understand the wider cultural values attached to these places may be desirable. When downloaded and used in its GIS form HLA data is an even more effective tool.

The landscape west of Wick

The existing landscape character assessment for this area identifies open intensive farming in the environs of Wick itself, with areas of sweeping moorland and mixed agriculture and settlement beyond.

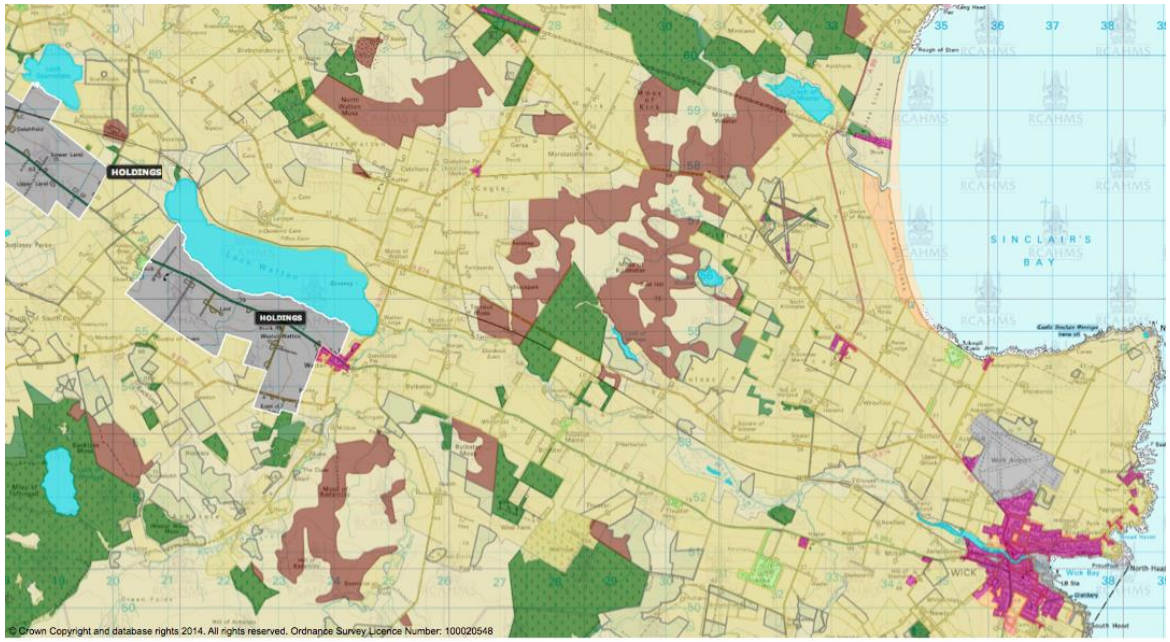
However, a look at the results of an HLA search gives subtly different perspectives on the Wick area to that of the LCA. It provides a major opportunity to better understand the historic environment of the study area at a truly landscape scale, rather than attempting to extrapolate a history of the landscape by reviewing data relating to individual archaeological / historic sites for specific areas.

The whole landscape coverage of HLA lends itself to a more integrated approach to describing the character of individual areas.



HLA data reveals a slightly more nuanced pattern than the LCA:

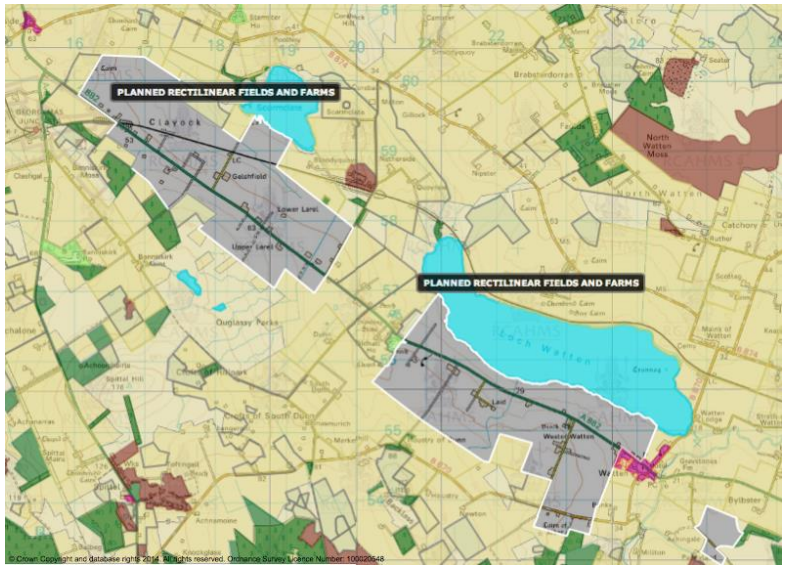
- Post-improvement agriculture and settlement dominates the landscape with areas of woodland and forestry, rough grazing and peat cuttings.
- However, the area of 20th century holdings south of Loch Watten has a significantly different historic character to the majority of the Landscape Character Type (LCT) 'mixed agriculture and settlement'. Here there is an intricate field pattern, uniform house type and a relatively dense settlement pattern (for rural Caithness).
- As you move the cursor over the map the full extent of these holdings becomes apparent, stretching from beyond Loch Scarmclate (top left) to beyond Watten (at the centre of the map extract).



HLAmap extract for the landscape west of Wick, with Loch Watten to the left (above).

Viewing the past land uses in the area (shown opposite) reveals strong influences on the present environment. The Loch Watten 20th century holdings are shown to preserve an 18th/19th century planned field pattern, which is still legible in today's landscape.

From a landscape character perspective the 20th century holdings with their specific field and housing pattern, which preserves the outlines of the 18th/19th century planned fields, would clearly warrant identification as an LCT. This assessment is reinforced when comparisons are made – areas of small farms and holdings were captured by the LCA study in other areas around Wick.



HLAmap extract showing some of the areas established as holdings after the 1st World War on the south side of Loch Watten. Previously these had been laid out as planned rectilinear fields and farms (left).

HLA and landscape studies

Landscape character assessments can clearly benefit from using HLA data. The extent to which HLA current/past land use types can be translated into Landscape Character Types/Areas, capacity studies, appraisals and visual impact assessments is dependent on the scale of the study and the level of detail required.

As the case study here has shown, HLA can contribute to landscape studies by:

- recording the present use of land, which plays a fundamental role in shaping character.
- assigning a historical and chronological origin to each landscape unit, providing information on time-depth and historic influences.
- providing a landscape scale record of archaeological and other past (relict) landscapes.
- supplying a ready-made backdrop against which to digitise LCAs.

A key part of the process of LCA is to understand the way in which landscapes are perceived and experienced. HLA can provide useful insights into how people may respond to areas of the landscape with specific historic origins and cultural associations, and help explain the reasons behind this. It can also help to create links between local cultural values, which may have become disassociated from their historical origins and material remains of the past.

HLA data can also be very usefully applied to informing judgments on landscape sensitivity, quality and values. Landscape capacity studies, designation reviews, and landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIAs) use baseline characterisations (LCAs). The application of HLA data can be illuminating when used alongside an existing assessment or when developing revised or more detailed character assessments.

Useful aspects of HLA data

The following can be quite pertinent when making aesthetic judgments:

- a sense of scale, such as that provided by very large planned field systems
- a sense of enclosure, as in the case of highly sub-divided crofting landscapes or designed views in policy woodlands
- landscape diversity, such as intricate patterns of past (relict) land use
- texture, as in upstanding rig-and-furrow
- landscape form and grain, such as post-medieval head dykes creating stark divisions between infields and rough grazings

All can provide a sense of time-depth in the landscape.

There are also other considerations that HLA data may help to inform. They include:

- Understanding the wider effects of potential changes to the landscape – could the value and understanding of historic landscapes be affected by the key forces identified?
- Landscape sensitivity – for example, the presence of extensive past (relict) landscapes, particularly archaeological types, will make landscapes inherently sensitive.
- Understanding the quality of landscapes – HLA types can provide an indication of current and past management regimes and inform inferences on likely pressures and future management, while the presence of only a few relict types could indicate a highly modified landscape.
- Understanding wider values attached to landscapes by identifying historic landscapes that may have wider local or regional cultural meaning – these should be explored through the LCA consultation process.

HLA data is clearly relevant to landscape studies. It is a very valuable baseline source of information, providing a factual basis on which to base interpretations of perceptions of time-depth and character. This can be used in its own right and to inform the process of character assessment.

This version was produced in January 2014, corrections July 2014