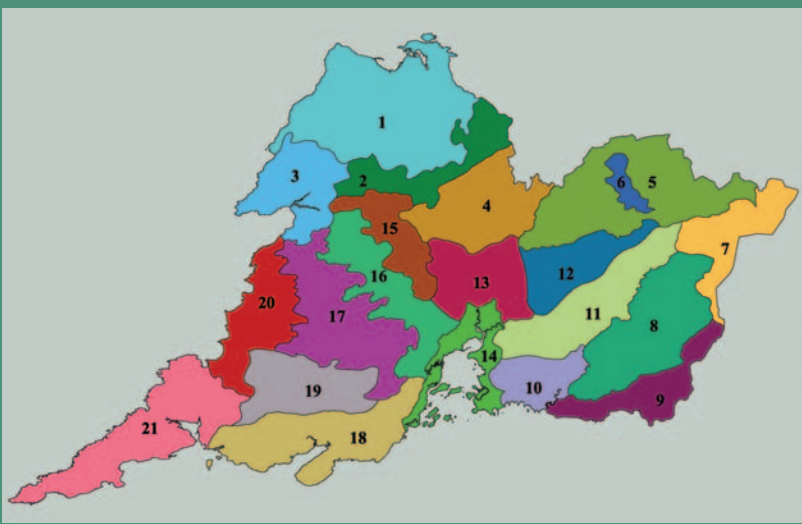
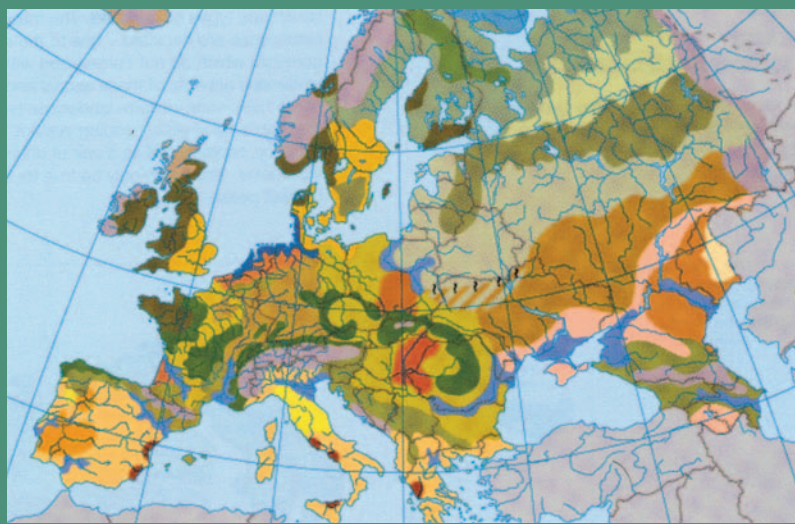


Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in Ireland: Baseline Audit and Evaluation



Sept 2006

*Prepared by
Julie Martin Associates
in Association with
Alison Farmer Associates*

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THE
HERITAGE
COUNCIL



Final Report to
The Heritage Council

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in Ireland: Baseline Audit and Evaluation

Sept 2006

*Prepared by
Julie Martin Associates
in Association with
Alison Farmer Associates*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In late 2005, the Heritage Council commissioned Julie Martin Associates, in association with Alison Farmer Associates, to prepare a *National Baseline Audit and Evaluation of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in Ireland*. The brief for the study was to inform the implementation of landscape character assessment (hereafter referred to as LCA) in Ireland; provide recommendations for full LCA coverage; review and compare LCA methodologies; assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing LCAs; provide an overview of good practice in other EU member states; inform national policy on landscape issues; and help ensure that LCA provides value for money. The final report was to provide recommendations for a consistent, improved LCA programme and methodology.

The study involved review and evaluation of the LCAs in the context of the original objectives of the LCA programme, as set out in the (then) Department of the Environment and Local Government consultation draft *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* (hereafter referred to as DoEHLG Draft Guidelines). The evaluation also considered how the LCA programme in Ireland measures up to good practice in LCA elsewhere in Europe. Telephone consultations, with those involved in the preparation and use of the LCAs and with a range of national bodies, explored the ways in which LCA has been applied, and the influence that it has had on decision-making in relation to development and management of the landscape in Ireland. Case studies of LCA elsewhere in Europe were also undertaken to identify any useful lessons and pitfalls.

Landscape Character Assessment: the Irish and European Context

Landscape character assessment is concerned with the whole landscape and not just with high quality or valued landscapes. The Planning and Development Act, 2000, introduced requirements for preservation of the character of the landscape and made statutory provision for areas of special amenity and landscape conservation areas. The DoEHLG issued draft *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, also in 2000, with aims of heightening awareness of landscape issues, guiding planners, and indicating specific requirements for development planning and control. The Guidelines set out concepts of landscape character, value and sensitivity and how these should be assessed, and suggested that the landscape character areas should be the *principal spatial framework for landscape policy*.

The Heritage Council has a clear landscape policy remit but is not a body that must be consulted on planning applications in areas of special amenity or other landscape interest under Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2000, and this limits its influence in relation to development impacts on the landscape. As early as 2000, a study undertaken for the Heritage Council recommended that LCA by planning authorities should be complemented by a 'top-down' national landscape characterisation. This proposal for a national landscape characterisation was included, *inter alia*, in the Heritage Council's landscape policy paper to government in 2002 but has never been progressed by Government.

In the interim, as of March 2002, Ireland has ratified the European Landscape Convention, which requires States to implement a range of actions in relation to landscape. An overview of good practice in LCA elsewhere stresses the importance of separating characterisation from judgements about the landscape, and indicates the preferred scope, process and outputs of LCA. Comparison of the DoEHLG draft Guidelines with good practice elsewhere suggests that there are a number of key differences of interpretation that need to be explored in this study.

Review of LCAs in Ireland and Their Application at Local Level

Nineteen out of 29 counties have completed LCAs of some sort five years after the publication by the DoEHLG of the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*; some other counties have work planned or ongoing. It is quite difficult

to obtain many of the LCAs in their full form, and access to the LCAs on the web is very limited. Roughly two-thirds of LCAs have been prepared by consultants (mainly landscape consultants), and one-third in-house (mainly by planners). The typical cost of an LCA prepared by consultants is in the range of 30,000 to 70,000.

In terms of process, approach and content, key findings were that:

- Mapping is generally schematic and not on an OS base.
- In only around a third of counties has extensive use been made of national GIS data sets.
- Only one LCA fully incorporated HLC into the assessment process.
- Only around a third of LCAs included stakeholder consultation as part of the process.
- Only around two-thirds of LCAs give a reliable and meaningful reflection of the principal variations in landscape character.
- There is considerable variation in the content and length of the LCAs.
- Less than half systematically consider forces for change affecting the landscape.
- There is significant variation in the way judgements about landscape change are presented.

Less than a third of LCAs make a clear distinction between characterisation and judgements, and landscape policy proposals are often not related to the landscape character areas (despite advice to this effect in the DoEHLG Guidelines). No Landscape Conservation Areas have been designated, but a few are under consideration. Few LCAs have been used for landscape management, probably reflecting a general lack of expertise and resources for landscape/ countryside management within county councils. There is consistency in classification across county boundaries in less than a fifth of cases. Only one LCA has given full consideration to seascapes, and none has included townscape assessment.

LCA has been applied for quite a wide range of purposes, but so far most relate to planning. Landscape capacity applications and land management applications are under-developed. LCAs are sometimes seen as too detailed for development planners and too superficial for development managers. SEA is potentially a key LCA application that merits further development by planning authorities.

Only around a quarter of consultees have found the draft DoEHLG Guidelines to be helpful; almost all felt that they should be re-written. Only around a third of those involved in preparation or use of the LCAs had had any LCA training. More than two-thirds of consultees considered that LCA was value for money and had influenced decision-making; however half felt that it had not met expectations, for a variety of reasons. There is perceived need for a national landscape classification within which the local authority LCAs can sit. There is generally low awareness of the requirements of the European Landscape Convention.

Use and Effectiveness of LCA at National Level

There are wide discrepancies in the degree to which relevant government bodies, development interests and others recognise landscape issues in their policies and advice. The planning side of Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), Fáilte Ireland, the Forest Service and Coillte all recognise landscape to varying degrees within their policies and advice. However, there is less recognition of landscape issues in the policies and advice of the heritage side of the DoEHLG, the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, the National Roads Authority and Teagasc, and surprisingly little in the Irish Wind Energy Association where the principal focus seems to be on visual as opposed to landscape issues.

Most government bodies and development interests have no in-house landscape skills or expertise, the only exception being the Forest Service. There are currently no courses on offer from universities or professional institutes in Ireland that cover LCA, hence no training opportunities.

Awareness of LCA varies from one body to another, planners within DoEHLG, Fáilte Ireland and the Forest Service being the most aware. However many other potential users of LCA – such as farm advisers within Teagasc – are wholly unfamiliar with it.

Views on the effectiveness of LCA are generally negative. The principal problems mentioned are incomplete coverage, inconsistency and inappropriate scale (too detailed or too general, depending on respondent). Some, especially An Taisce, highlight a lack of political will to take action on landscape issues. An Taisce also considers that LCA is seriously under-utilised in national and regional spatial planning, forestry, agri-environment and tourism. Several consultees take the view that LCA has potential but has been undermined by poor existing Guidelines and practice, which they fear are turning people away from landscape.

DoEHLG officers are aware that action is needed to integrate landscape within new statute, plans and guidelines, but have taken limited action yet. Most consultees would like the DoEHLG to take a much stronger lead on landscape issues. A consistent national LCA at a broader scale than the county LCAs is required to meet the needs of national users such as Fáilte Ireland and the Forest Service. Awareness raising and education in LCA and landscape issues generally is seen as essential. NGOs and professional institutes would like to see new Guidelines, creation of Landscape Conservation Areas and adequate landscape resourcing for local authorities and the Heritage Council. There is also a view, in some quarters at least, that HLC should be promoted as an essential input to LCA.

European Experience in LCA

There is a wealth of European experience to draw upon in any further development of LCA in Ireland. Nearly all western European countries have or will shortly have a national LCA system, regardless of whether or not they have signed the European Landscape Convention. Definitions of landscape, landscape character areas and landscape character types are converging across Europe and a European landscape typology and map is in preparation. Reasons for developing national LCA systems include the need for policy integration, monitoring, a shared spatial framework, and a consistent national approach.

Most national LCAs have been prepared as a ‘top-down’ exercise. ‘Bottom-up’ amalgamation of units is more difficult and the outputs are less useful for policy-making and awareness-raising. GIS offers new opportunities for LCA, not least because it facilitates objective characterisation.

The main applications for LCA are in land use planning and management, but there is also a growing range of innovative and successful uses aimed broadly at sustainability eg targeting agri-environment measures, facilitating rural development, marketing tourism and regional produce, regenerating degraded landscapes.

Few countries have fully standardised local authority level LCAs, but a common approach is nonetheless essential to LCA credibility and support. Good LCA guidelines and practitioner networks can help achieve a common approach. Landscape character and landscape planning and management issues often straddle administrative boundaries and borders. The Northern Ireland LCA may be a useful model for a national LCA in Ireland in terms of scale, content and cross-border consistency, and there is scope to integrate any national LCA coverage in Ireland with the emerging European landscape typology and map.

Key Issues and Recommendations

In the last ten years, Ireland has experienced unprecedented urbanisation and landscape fragmentation due to extensive new housing, major roads and other infrastructure projects. This has affected open countryside, villages and towns in all parts of the country, and the extent of the impacts is much greater than in other parts of Europe. There is related concern about the impacts of change on Ireland’s tourist economy, which generates almost 4% of GNP annually, because scenery is the single most important reason why people visit and holiday in Ireland.

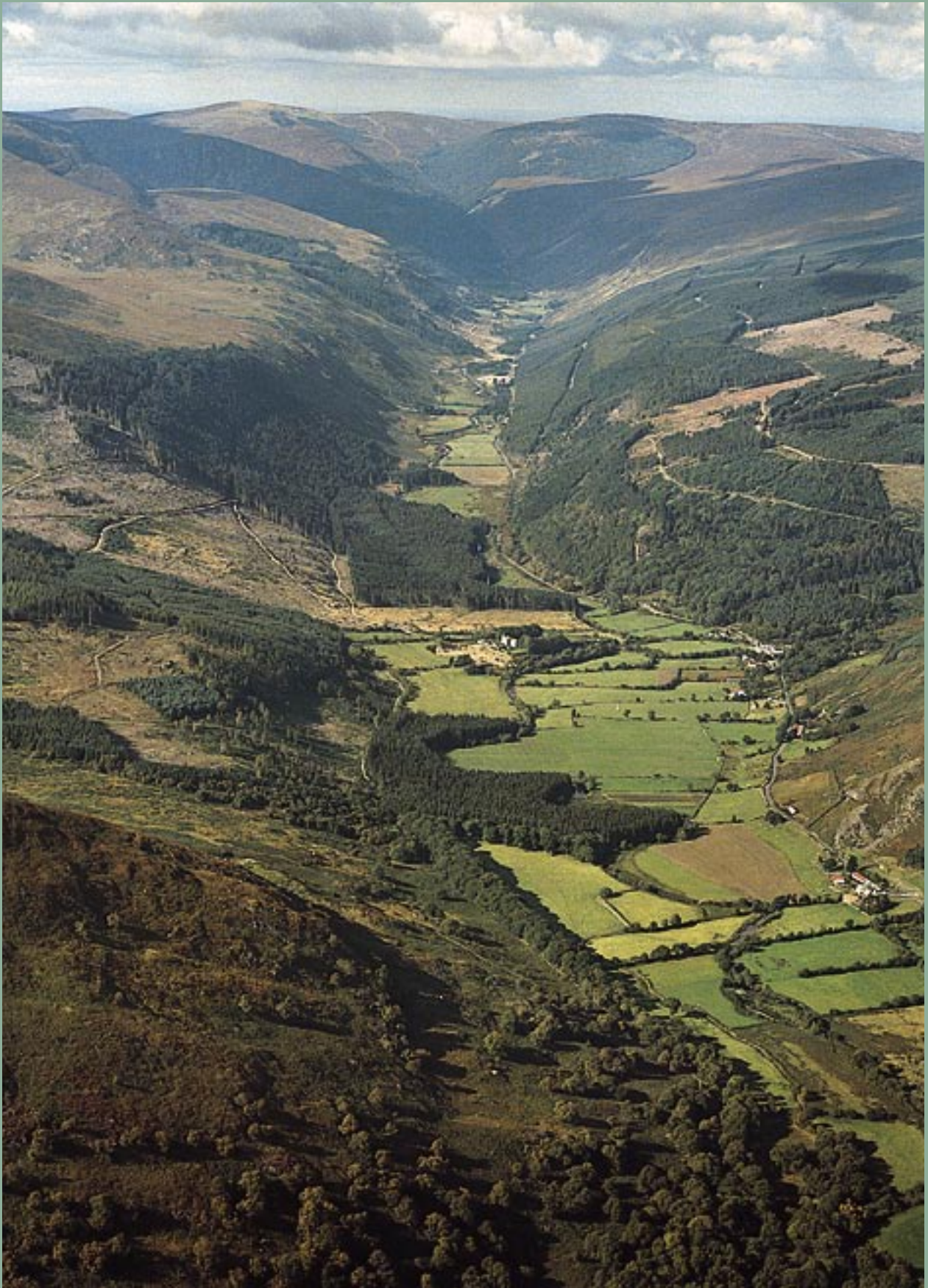
Although LCA has significant potential to help address these problems, it is evident it has got off to a relatively bad start in Ireland, partly because it is an inherently complex field, and partly because of fundamental issues associated with the consultation draft *Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment* issued by the DoEHLG in 2000. These are confusing, especially in relation to judgements, values and sensitivity, and seem to suggest unreasonable levels of constraint upon land use change and development, rather than providing the basis for fair and reasoned consideration and discussion of ‘what, where and how’ development or change may be acceptable within different landscape contexts. The outputs of local authority LCA in Ireland now need to be recast in a positive rather than a negative light.

National-level discussions on LCA and its effectiveness showed a mixture of frustration at the lack of consistent, national LCA coverage, and ignorance that any LCA work exists at all. In the absence of a national LCA map it is unlikely that government bodies or development interests will pay due regard to landscape character issues. Hence there is a need for a national LCA map, which would be a key tool in raising the profile of landscape issues in Ireland generally, helping Ireland to integrate landscape into a wider range of government policies and plans, and to meet its obligations under the European Landscape Convention. Ireland is almost the last remaining country in western Europe without a national LCA system. Such a system is now desperately needed.

The report sets out full and detailed recommendations in relation to a consistent, improved LCA programme and methodology for Ireland. These recommendations relate to statutory definitions of and responsibilities for landscape; national and regional planning policies and guidelines; a national landscape classification; new Guidelines on LCA; applications of LCA; promoting landscape awareness, appreciation and understanding; and future roles and resources. However, key recommendations, in summary, are that:

- ***The DoEHLG should confirm that it is the Government department responsible for taking a lead on landscape, and should issue a statement clarifying its responsibilities***, which should include reviewing and implementing landscape policy proposals put forward by the Heritage Council, providing an overview of planning casework that affects landscape interests, and implementing the European Landscape Convention. It should also ensure that landscape receives greater attention in future within the National Development Plan, Regional Planning Guidelines and the proposed new Critical National Infrastructure Bill. It should take the lead, nationally, on Landscape Conservation Area designations, to help with the urgent protection of Ireland’s finest landscapes and to ensure national consistency in their identification.
- ***A National Landscape Classification should be commissioned*** jointly by the Heritage Council and the DoEHLG. The scale of the classification should be tailored to the character of Irish landscapes, and designed especially to help in communicating and promoting awareness of Ireland’s landscapes. Landscape character areas (rather than types) should be the principal focus, because these best encompass the cultural aspects of landscape. The Northern Ireland LCA, which identifies 130 broad landscape character (identity) areas, may be a useful model, and if possible, similar, consistent, coverage should be extended to all Ireland. The classification should be widely promoted as a spatial framework for management of Ireland’s national heritage as a whole.
- ***New Guidelines on Landscape Character Assessment should be prepared*** jointly by the DoEHLG and the Heritage Council, as soon as possible. The new Guidelines should be firmly set in the context of the proposed National Landscape Classification. They should be much stronger and more prescriptive than past guidelines. They should have a definite focus on characterisation, highlighting the importance and value of all Irish landscapes, but should also contain advice on making judgements about the landscape. They should be aimed not just at planners but at a much wider audience, including farmers, foresters and other land managers, and developers. They should be accompanied by a full national programme of training in LCA, and by the development of innovative LCA applications at national, regional and local level, through a series of demonstration projects.

- *The Heritage Council should initiate a major national programme to promote landscape awareness and education, with the backing of the DoEHLG.* The programme should be targeted at senior decision-makers (eg Government policy staff, state body environmental managers, An Bord Pleanála, regional planning and tourism executives, county managers and industry representatives) and the wider public (eg community groups, county consultative fora, and university landscape and planning departments). Advice and input should be sought from a professional PR/ communications consultancy, and the programme should employ a variety of methods and communications media.
- ***The Heritage Council, the DoEHLG and Fáilte Ireland should work in close partnership to tackle the landscape issues raised in this report,*** and to implement its recommendations. Members of the partnership should have access to in-house landscape expertise ie one or more landscape advisers should be appointed. Government should allocate additional funding to the three bodies to reflect the importance of addressing landscape issues, to allow the recommendations made in this report to be implemented, and to indicate that real action is being taken in Ireland in relation to the European Landscape Convention.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief and Scope of Work

In October 2005, Julie Martin Associates, in association with Alison Farmer Associates, was commissioned by the Heritage Council to undertake a *National Baseline Audit and Evaluation of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in Ireland*. This report presents the draft findings of the audit and evaluation.

The brief for the study indicated that the outputs should inform the implementation of landscape character assessment (hereafter referred to as LCA) in Ireland; provide recommendations for full LCA coverage; review and compare LCA methodologies; assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing LCAs; provide an overview of good practice in other EU member states; inform national policy on landscape issues; and help ensure that LCA provides value for money.

Specific aims were to:

- provide up-to-date information on the scope and extent of the LCAs which have been prepared in Ireland;
- consider how LCA has (or has not) informed or influenced national policy and development objectives at a range of levels;
- review and compare the methods and costs of the different assessments;
- assess the experience of planning authorities in using the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*¹, with a view to informing any future guidelines;
- provide an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and degree of consistency of the Irish LCA programme to date;
- consider whether any useful lessons can be learned from LCA programmes and good practice elsewhere in Europe;
- provide recommendations for a consistent, improved LCA programme and methodology;
- ensure that the key findings are presented clearly and disseminated widely to key stakeholders.

1.2 Approach

The audit and evaluation was essentially a desk exercise. The LCAs and their effectiveness were reviewed and evaluated in the context of the original objectives of the LCA programme, as set out in the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* (op cit). The evaluation also considered how the LCA programme in Ireland measures up to good practice in LCA elsewhere in Europe. Telephone consultations explored the ways in which LCA has been applied, and the influence that it has had on decision-making in relation to development and management of the landscape in Ireland.

Key tasks were as follows. First, the study team began by compiling and reviewing all relevant background material on the introduction of LCA in Ireland. Initial contacts were made with all county councils in Ireland, as these are the bodies with primary responsibility for preparation of LCAs. The LCAs themselves were obtained and reviewed (or audited) in detail, using a review framework that had been agreed with the Heritage Council and the study Steering Group (see *Appendix 1* for composition of the Steering Group). The reviews were subsequently refined in light of telephone consultations with heritage officers, planning officers and consultants who had been involved in the preparation and use of the LCAs. The comments of consultees on a wide range of issues relating to the use and effectiveness of the LCAs were also recorded and analysed.

¹ Department of the Environment and Local Government (2000) *Landscape and Landscape Assessment: Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, Department of the Environment and Local Government, Dublin.

The second main task was to consult selected national bodies on the use and effectiveness of LCA. National consultees included representatives of professional planning and landscape institutes, government departments dealing with landscape issues in both a policy and regulatory capacity, land management agencies and interests, development agencies and interests, non-governmental organisations, and others such as universities and consultants with particular knowledge and/or understanding of landscape issues in Ireland. In each case, we explored awareness of LCA; relevance to the body's roles and responsibilities; applications and use of LCA if any; and views on future action needed on landscape issues in Ireland.

The final task was to collate and examine a number of case studies of LCA elsewhere in Europe, in an effort to identify any useful lessons and also any pitfalls to be avoided. The case studies included brief overviews of the key features of national LCA systems in different parts of the UK and in various other European countries. They also included case studies of LCA in practice at a more detailed level within certain countries, to illustrate LCA applications and capabilities, and ways of using LCA to promote understanding and awareness of landscape issues.

1.3 Structure of the Report

Having completed the research outlined above, we reviewed the key issues arising and developed recommendations for an improved programme of LCA in Ireland. The study findings and recommendations are structured as follows:

- *Section 2* examines the background to the study, reviewing legislation and planning guidelines on LCA; work on landscape issues by the Heritage Council; the requirements of the European Landscape Convention, which has been ratified by Ireland; and key concepts and definitions in LCA and historic landscape characterisation (HLC). This background informed the subsequent review and evaluation work.
- *Section 3* reviews and evaluates the LCAs and their application at the local level. It presents baseline information on the current status of LCA in Ireland, roughly five years after the introduction of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, and *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*. Each LCA is described and critically reviewed. Views on utility and effectiveness, from those most closely involved, are summarised.
- *Section 4* reviews and evaluates the LCAs at national level, considering the recognition of landscape issues and LCA in public and private sector policy, guidelines, planning for new development, and land management. Based mainly on information and views from national level consultees, this section explores the influence of landscape issues and LCA on decision-making.
- *Section 5* explores the degree to which LCA has been developed in other parts of Europe. It summarises selected national European systems and also indicates some of the ways in which LCA has been applied in other countries. It is intended to contribute ideas on how to develop an improved LCA system in Ireland and to indicate ways in which LCA might be used to tackle issues that occur in Ireland.
- *Section 6* draws out and summarises the key issues arising from the review, and presents detailed recommendations for improving the approach, scope and effectiveness of LCA in Ireland. It indicates specific actions that need to be taken to implement the recommendations, and which organisation(s) should be responsible.

2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (LCA): THE IRISH AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

2.1 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

Landscape character assessment (LCA) is generally regarded as a key tool for all those involved in influencing the landscape and landscape change. LCA is concerned primarily with the *character* of the whole landscape, not just with high quality or valued landscapes, although landscape quality and value become relevant when LCA is used to inform judgements about the implications of landscape change. An understanding of **landscape character** – defined as the distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse – is therefore the first and most important tool for landscape planning and management.

The process of LCA has been widely used throughout Europe since at least the early 1990s, and in the last five years LCA studies (LCAs) have been undertaken by the majority of county planning authorities in Ireland. This section briefly outlines the context and background to LCA in Ireland. It begins describing the place of LCA within Irish planning legislation and guidelines. It then touches on recent work on landscape issues undertaken by the Heritage Council. The requirements of the European Landscape Convention, ratified by Ireland in March 2002, are also summarised and are likely to become increasingly important in coming years. Finally, key concepts and definitions in LCA are summarised, drawing on both the Irish experience and good practice guidance in LCA from various European countries.

LCA is of particular relevance to Ireland at the present time, as the country has experienced unprecedented economic growth (and associated landscape changes) in recent years². In the period 1995-2004 the economy grew by an average of 7% per annum. Per capita gross domestic product is now 10% above that of the four big European economies and the second highest in the European Union (EU) behind Luxembourg. Most of the growth has taken place in industry and services, and agriculture, once the most important economic sector, is now in decline. Inevitably, these economic changes have enormous – existing and potential – implications for the Irish landscape.

2.2 The Planning and Development Act, 2000

The legislative background to LCA in Ireland can be found in the Planning and Development Act, 2000. The Act consolidated all previous Planning Acts (dating from 1963 onwards) and much of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations. The aim of the Act was to: “ensure that the planning system of the twenty-first century would be strategic in approach and imbued with an ethos of sustainable development and would deliver a performance of the highest quality”³.

The most relevant sections of the Act in relation to landscape are sections 9, 10, 202 and 204. The main landscape provisions contained within these sections are summarised in *Table 2.1* overleaf.

² www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ei.html#Econ

³ www.environ.ie/DOEI/DOEIPol.nsf/wyNavView/Planning

Table 2.1: Summary of the Landscape Provisions of the Planning and Development Act, 2000

Section 9 requires every planning authority to make a development plan every six years, having regard to the development plans of adjoining planning authorities and coordinating with the objectives in the plans of those authorities. The development plan should also be consistent with national plans, policies or strategies relating to planning and sustainable development.

Section 10 describes the content of development plans, indicating that they should include objectives for, *inter alia*:

*“(2) (e) the **preservation of the character of the landscape** [emphasis added] where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the planning authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest”.*

The meaning of the word ‘landscape’ is not defined in the Act.

Sections 202 to 204 make provision for designation by planning authorities of two different categories of special landscape.

The first is the **area of special amenity** (Section 202):

“(1) Where, in the opinion of the planning authority, by reason of—

(a) its outstanding natural beauty, or

(b) its special recreational value,

and having regard to any benefits for nature conservation, an area should be declared under this section to be an area of special amenity...”.

In areas of special amenity a planning authority may identify a need for the “*preservation or enhancement of the character or special features of the area*” and hence may apply additional development controls. In practice, areas of special amenity are interpreted very broadly and may have a range of names (see *Section 3* of this report). For planning applications within these areas there is also a requirement, under Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, for planning authorities to consult An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Fáilte Ireland and An Taisce.

The second category of special landscape is the **landscape conservation area** (LCA2) (Section 204):

“(1) A planning authority may, by order, for the purposes of the preservation of the landscape, designate any area or place within the functional area of the authority as a landscape conservation area”.

Within a landscape conservation area, (LCA2) exempted development may be brought within planning control. Under Section 4 of the Act, exempted development includes agricultural development; development by local authorities and statutory undertakers; woodland thinning, felling, replanting and infrastructure; and land reclamation.

Under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, planning authorities therefore have considerable duties and powers in relation to the landscape. To sum up:

- They have a duty to include, within the development plan, objectives for the preservation of the character of the landscape;
- They have powers to designate:
- areas of special amenity, within which development may be prevented or limited;
- landscape conservation areas, (LCA2) within which exempted development may be brought within planning control.

- Planning authorities are obliged to consult An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Fáilte Ireland and An Taisce on applications within areas of special amenity, but somewhat surprisingly, do not appear to be required to consult the DoELG or the Heritage Council⁴.

2.3 The Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines, 2000

At around the same time that the Planning and Development Act, 2000, came into force, consultation draft *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*⁵ were published by the (then) Department of Environment and Local Government (DoELG)⁶. The Guidelines were intended to help planning authorities understand their obligations in respect of landscape issues when preparing development plans, at a time of increasing development pressure and in the context of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the impending production of a National Spatial Strategy (NSS). It also appears that they were intended to assist possible ratification by the Irish government of the European Landscape Convention (see Section 2.5).

The Guidelines stress the need for a proactive view of how development and change can be accommodated in the landscape, and also highlight the need to assess *all* landscapes instead of focusing on just the ‘special’ ones. They also state in section 1.2 that *“It is Government policy that in deciding for or against development that the appropriateness of that development within the given landscape context be considered”*.

2.3.1 Aims of the Guidelines

In section 1.3 of the Guidelines, their specific aims are set out. These are to:

- heighten awareness of the importance of landscape issues in all aspects of physical planning;
- provide guidance to planners and others to show how landscape considerations should be dealt with;
- indicate specific requirements for development plans and for development control.

The text in this section goes on to state that:

“By proposing the same approach for each planning authority, there will be consistency nationwide in all authorities, ensuring compatibility of decision-making along boundaries between adjoining authorities. As a result of the process it is foreseen that in time a national map which will illustrate landscape character areas, values and sensitivity will result”.

Clearly, therefore, consistency of approach and a national landscape map were also important expectations. The Guidelines go on to indicate that the approach should also provide an input to regional planning policies, studies of development control, strategies for new forms of development, capacity studies, housing, roads, forestry, development on the urban edge, agri-environment schemes and the NSS.

2.3.2 Assessment approach set out in the Guidelines

The assessment approach proposed encompasses landscape character, landscape values and landscape sensitivity (hence the fact that the Guidelines are called landscape assessment guidelines, as opposed to landscape character assessment guidelines). In other words it embraces not only the relatively objective process of describing and analysing the character of the landscape, but also the more subjective process of making judgements about the landscape. Systematic consideration of these three aspects of landscape (character, values and sensitivity)⁷ is intended to form the basis for local authority landscape planning responses.

⁴ It is possible that these bodies were accidentally omitted during drafting of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001.

⁵ Department of the Environment and Local Government (2000) *Landscape and Landscape Assessment: Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, Department of the Environment and Local Government, Dublin.

⁶ Now the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG).

⁷ Further discussion of and definitions for these key concepts are provided in Section 2.6 below.

In assessing **landscape character**, the Guidelines propose the identification of physical units, visual units and image units. Physical units are based on landform and land cover (eg CORINE land cover mapping); visual units on limits of view, and image units on the perceived identity of a given area. In relation to **landscape value**, the Guidelines suggest that aesthetic, ecological, historical, socio-cultural, religious and mythological factors should be taken into account, and that consultation should be an important part of the assessment process. The presence of landscape values may result in **landscape sensitivity** and may constrain development and landscape change. It is proposed that in determining sensitivity, quality, integrity, distinctiveness, popularity, rarity, cultural meaning, sense of public ownership and social importance should be taken into account. Further details of techniques for undertaking each stage of the assessment are presented in appendices to the Guidelines.

2.3.3 How Irish planning authorities were intended to respond to the Guidelines

The Guidelines then outline, very briefly, how planning authorities were intended to respond to landscape issues in development planning and development control work. In relation to **development plans**, key points are that:

- At the earliest possible time within the review framework of the development plan, authorities should set in train the measures necessary to categorise their landscape according to the methods outlined in the Guidelines.
- Each plan should contain a general statement to the effect that landscape considerations will be an important factor in all land use policy for the area.
- The plan should map and describe character areas (together with associated values) and the degree of sensitivity associated with each character area or specific locations within that area.
- It should describe the authority's policy for each area and formulate appropriate objectives (in other words, the landscape character areas are to be seen as the principal spatial framework for landscape policy).
- Policies may range from conservation, which may be achieved through designation eg as Landscape Conservation Areas under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, to proactive encouragement of certain developments or activities.

In relation to **development control**, key points are that:

- In those decisions where landscape considerations are relevant, and this will be in the majority of cases, regard should be had to development plan policy and objectives for the particular landscape character, values and sensitivity.
- While such decisions will mainly relate to rural settings, developments on the interface between town and country may also have a profound effect on the landscape.
- Indeed settlements themselves should be regarded as part of the landscape eg where views outwards from a settlement may be of considerable importance in linking the settlement with its wider context.
- Authorities should consider prohibiting ribbon development, as far as possible, and should develop explicit conditions relating to design of buildings and other developments in particular landscape character areas.

Further discussion of the Guidelines and their effectiveness is presented in *Sections 3 and 4* of this report, where we assess the degree to which the Guidelines have met their intended aims, whether their approach is sound, and whether they have been implemented by planning authorities in the way that was intended.

It should be noted, however, that the Guidelines have never been revised, updated or issued in a final form. Although most planning authorities are aware of them, they remain a consultation draft with no formal status.

2.4 Recent Work on Landscape Issues by the Heritage Council

2.4.1 Heritage Council landscape remit

The Heritage Council has an explicit remit from Government to make proposals on landscape policy issues. Section 6 (1) of the *Heritage Act, 1995*, states that:

*“The functions of the Council shall be to propose policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage, including monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, **landscapes, seascapes** [emphasis added], wrecks, geology, heritage gardens and parks and inland waterways”.*

Landscape is defined as including “*areas, sites, vistas and features of significant scenic, archaeological, geological, historical, ecological or other scientific interest*” and seascape as meaning “*areas and sites of coastal water including estuaries, bays and lagoons of significant scenic, geological, ecological or other scientific interest*”. Both are clearly seen to be part of Ireland’s ‘national heritage’.

The Heritage Council also has a remit under the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001⁸, although in relation to landscape (as opposed to other heritage issues) this is somewhat more limited than might be expected. Under these regulations, the Heritage Council is a ‘prescribed authority’ (that is, a statutory consultee) for development plans, regional planning guidelines, and planning applications that may affect sites of historic or nature conservation interest. As noted above, it is *not*, however, a body that must be consulted on planning applications in areas of special amenity or other landscape interest under Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, and nor is the DoEHLG. This is a notable constraint upon the Heritage Council’s operations in relation to development impacts on the landscape.

2.4.2 Pilot study on landscape characterisation in County Clare

In this context, the Heritage Council, in partnership with Clare County Council, commissioned a *Pilot Study on Landscape Characterisation in County Clare*⁹ in 2000, at around the time the consultation draft *Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment* were issued.

This study was intended to investigate the feasibility of establishing a basic, consistent landscape characterisation for Ireland as a whole. Using desk study information and by overlaying and analysing a range of geographical information system (GIS) datasets (such as CORINE digital land cover mapping dataset) the landscape was subdivided into a number of landscape character types. In addition, an HLC was undertaken, at land parcel (ie field) scale, using a method based mainly on the Cornwall historic landscape character assessment¹⁰. This data formed a further layer in the GIS analysis and helped to ensure that historical and cultural aspects of landscape were properly reflected within the classification.

The study also explored, through research and consultations, the form that a future LCA system in Ireland might take. It recommended a three-tier system, whereby a ‘top-down’ national landscape characterisation (NLC) would provide the framework for more detailed ‘bottom-up’ LCAs by planning authorities, and for the development of detailed, tailored LCA applications at local level.

It underlined the potential benefits of a consistent national system that could be used in policy, plan and programme formulation, strategic environmental assessment (SEA), EIA, targeting of funds, evaluation of the effectiveness of government spending, and monitoring of countryside change. At the same time, it highlighted the need for county LCAs with strong local ownership that would provide the basis for effective development planning and development

⁸ These interpret and give details of the way in which the Planning and Development Act, 2000, is to be implemented.

⁹ Environmental Resources Management and ERA-Maptec Ltd (2000) *Pilot Study on Landscape Characterisation in County Clare*, report to the Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

¹⁰ Herring, PC (1998) *Cornwall’s Historic Landscape: Presenting a Method for Historic Landscape Character Assessment*, Cornwall Archaeological Unit, Truro.

control. In partnership with others, it foresaw landscape issues being closely reflected in local strategy initiatives ranging from settlement capacity studies to strategies for rural regeneration, forestry and tourism development and marketing.

2.4.3 Heritage Council policy paper on landscape

Building on the findings of the Clare landscape pilot, the Heritage Council published, in 2002, a *Policy Paper on Ireland's Landscapes and the National Heritage*¹¹. The policy paper stresses the interdependence of the Irish people and their landscape. It seeks to allow people to harness the landscape for economic benefit whilst acknowledging that such benefits can only be sustained through an appreciation and awareness of the contribution of landscape to 'quality of life'. It envisages that decisions on landscape can only be taken from an informed and up-to-date base, and encourages improvement of landscape information and access to such information. Key priorities identified in the policy paper include:

- Adoption of a consistent and agreed methodology for landscape characterisation to allow effective monitoring of all policies which impact on landscape and seascape;
- An adequately-resourced central agency with responsibility for completing and maintaining a programme of national landscape characterisation to complement the work of planning authorities under the Planning and Development Act, 2000;
- Making landscape information from government departments, as well as the proposed new national landscape characterisation, accessible to all, with integration of information on the cultural and natural aspects of landscape;
- An emphasis on the significance of our landscapes at all levels of decision-making, not only in planning but also in other areas such as agriculture and forestry which receive significant Government and EU funding;
- An urgent review of legislation relating to the designation of national parks and protected landscapes, where practice in Ireland appears to be out of step with other parts of Europe;
- Recognition of landscape issues in the NDP and the NSS, especially regarding strengthening of links between urban and rural landscapes;
- The potential to complement work undertaken on landscape characterisation in the North of Ireland;
- The need to act on the above priorities to achieve the objectives of the European Landscape Convention, which has been ratified by the Irish Government (see *Section 2.5* below).

It can be seen from this review of the Heritage Council's remit, research and policy, that the Heritage Council, like the DoEHLG, which produced the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, has considerable expectations as to the usefulness of LCA in Ireland.

2.5 The European Landscape Convention (ELC)

In recent years landscape issues have slowly but steadily moved up the policy agenda across Europe. Perhaps the most significant development has been the European Landscape Convention¹². Adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in July 2000, and ratified by Ireland in March 2002, implementation of the Convention is intended to represent a step change in understanding and recognition of landscape issues.

¹¹ The Heritage Council (2002) *Policy Paper on Ireland's Landscapes and the National Heritage*, The Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

¹² Council of Europe (2000) *European Landscape Convention and Explanatory Report*, T-LAND (2000) 6, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

The Convention potentially has a number of significant implications¹³. First, signatories must recognise landscapes in law and establish policies aimed at their protection, management and planning. This is intended to raise the profile of landscape, formerly the ‘poor relation’ among environmental issues. Second, by giving this recognition and protection to *all* landscapes, the Convention formally acknowledges that it is no longer feasible to recognise and protect landscapes solely through a ‘special areas’ approach. Third, the Convention is intended to ‘democratise’ landscape by extending to the entire population the right to benefit from good quality landscapes and to influence future landscape change.

Through Article 6, the Convention specifically requires States to:

- **Increase awareness** among the civil society, private organisations, and public authorities of the value of landscapes, their role and changes to them;
- **Promote training**, namely:
 - training for specialists in landscape appraisal and operations;
 - multidisciplinary training for public and private sector professionals and associations in landscape policy, protection, management and planning;
 - training on landscape values and issues within school and university courses in the relevant subject areas;
- **Identify their landscapes**, analyse their characteristics and the forces for change affecting them, assess and take account of the landscape values of both interest groups and the general population;
- **Define quality objectives** for the landscapes assessed, after appropriate public consultation;
- **Introduce instruments** aimed at protecting, managing and/or planning the landscape, to put landscape policies into effect.

The way in which these requirements are met is left to the discretion of national governments, and it is generally envisaged that many of the requirements of the Convention can be met under existing legislation and policies, if sensitively applied to give due recognition and weight to landscape issues.

Nonetheless, under Article 10 of the Convention, the Council of Europe is to monitor the implementation of the Convention, reporting regularly on the work carried out and on the operation of the Convention to the Committee of Ministers¹⁴. Therefore it is important that progress should be made, and should be seen to be made, in the areas listed above.

2.6 Concepts and Definitions in LCA

Finally, before moving on to review the LCAs so far undertaken in Ireland, it is useful to examine, very briefly, current good practice in LCA, including key concepts and definitions, so that these are clearly understood in the commentary that follows. Historically, LCA has often suffered from misunderstandings about terminology and process, so it is particularly important to clarify these at the outset.

We summarise below the most important concepts and definitions that are in general usage. Our principal source is *the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland*¹⁵, which is generally regarded – across Europe – as the most comprehensive and reliable reference text on LCA approaches and methods, having been subject to wide-ranging consultation, and being based on extensive experience of LCA in Scotland and England since the late 1980s. The LCA process comprises two key stages: characterisation and making judgements, as follows.

¹³ Priore, R (2002) The European Landscape Convention and Its Progress, *Countryside Character Newsletter*, Issue 8.

¹⁴ Details of the monitoring procedure can be found at www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/environment/landscape/Presentation/7_Institutional_apparatus/index.asp#TopOfPage

¹⁵ Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency (2002) *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland*, Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Agency, Perth and Cheltenham or see www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/landscape/index.asp

2.6.1 Landscape characterisation

Landscape character is a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape. Particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, field patterns and human settlement create character. Character makes each part of the landscape distinct, and gives each its particular sense of place. *Whether we value certain landscapes for their distinctiveness, or for other reasons, is a separate question.*



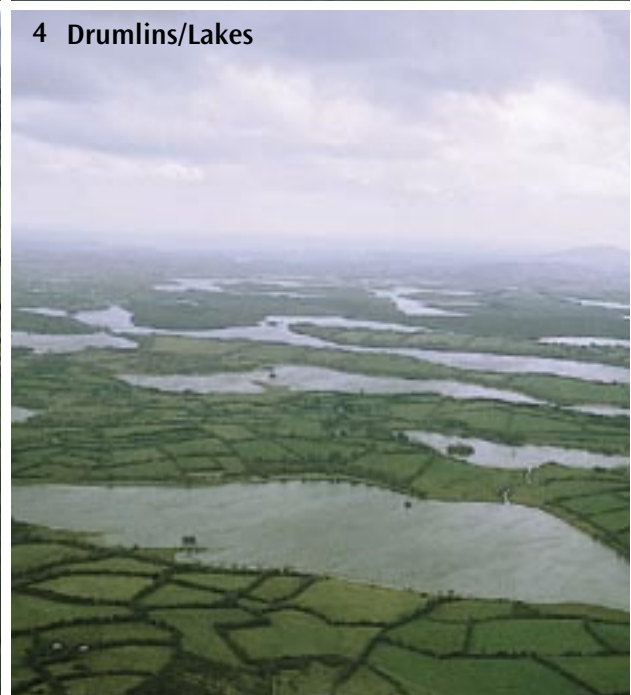
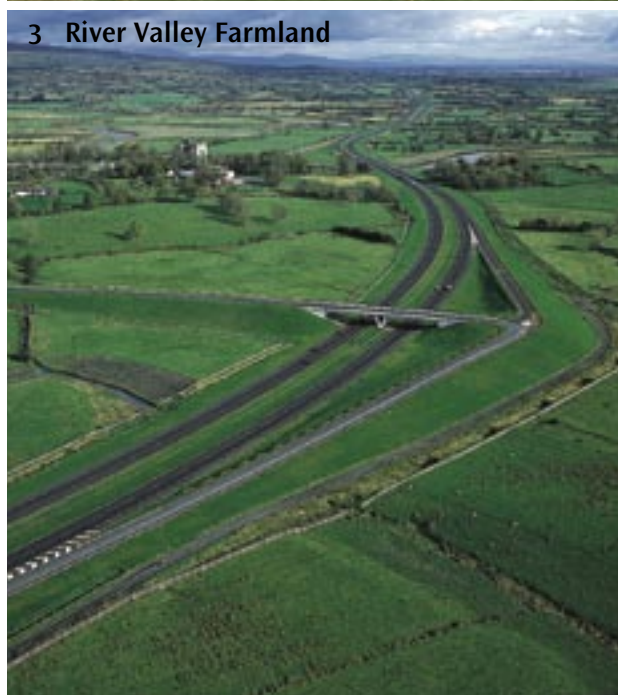
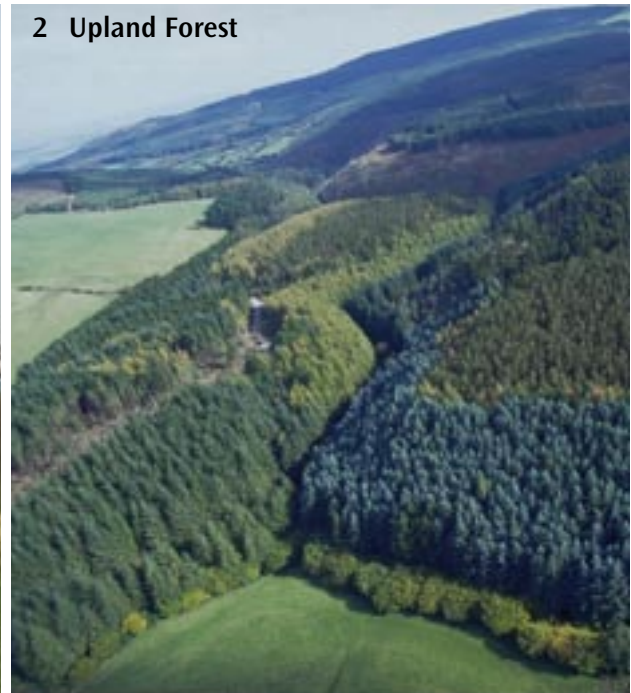
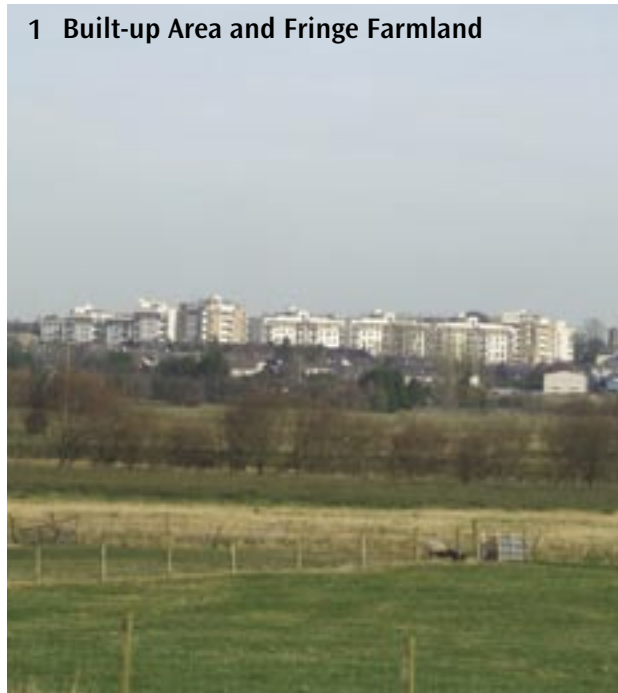
Increasingly, it is recognised that the assessment of landscape character should also encompass **coastal and seascape character**¹⁶, acknowledging the fact that the character of the coast and of marine areas affects the land and vice versa. Similarly, there are strong connections to the assessment of **townscape character** – essentially the same process as LCA but in an urban or urban fringe (peri-urban) context.



¹⁶ Countryside Council for Wales, Brady Shipman Martin and University College Dublin (2001) *Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment*, Marine Institute, Dublin or see www.ccw.gov.uk/Images_Client/Reports/ACF1676.pdf

Characterisation is the process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character. The areas of similar character may comprise either or both of:

- **Landscape character types** are distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas or different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, and historical land use and settlement pattern. For example, drumlins and mountain moorlands are recognisable and distinct landscape character types.



1. Courtesy of Bernie Guest

2. Courtesy of Coillte

3. Courtesy of Roadstone CRH

4. Courtesy of Mathew Stuart

- **Landscape character areas** are unique, geographically-specific areas of a particular landscape type. Each has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same type. This distinction is reflected in the naming of types and areas: landscape character types have generic names, but landscape character areas take on the names of specific places. Examples might be the south Wicklow Uplands or The Burren.

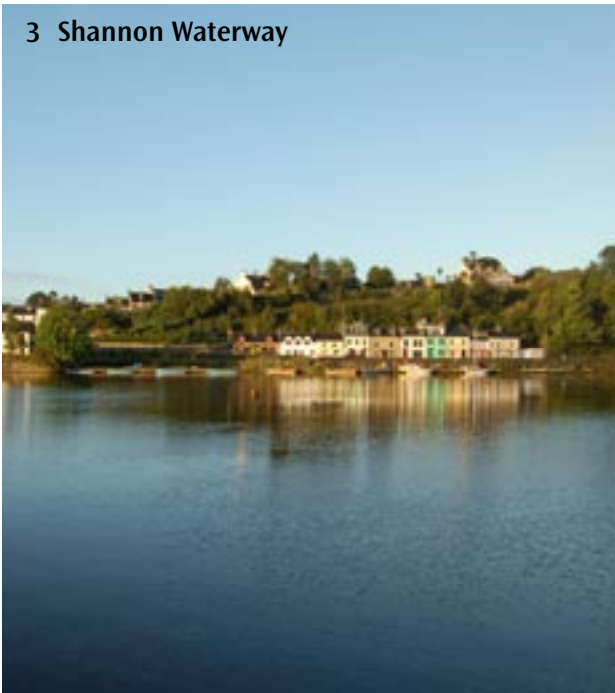
1 The Burren



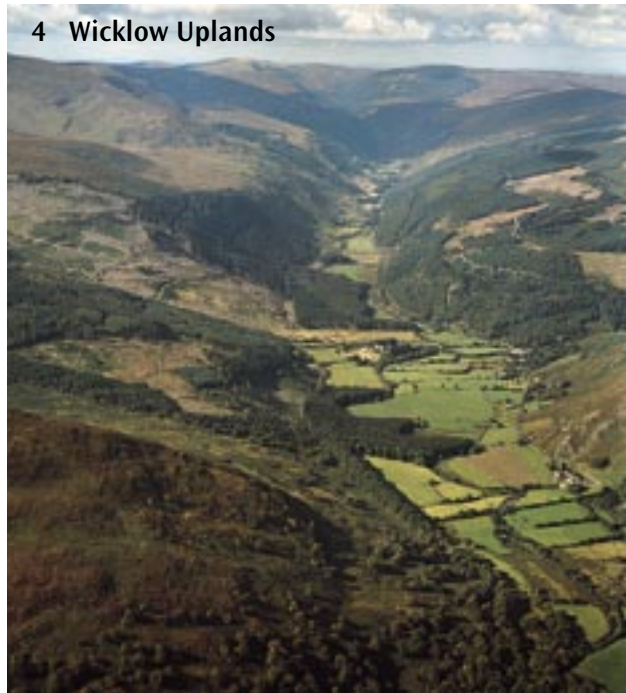
2 Innishmurry



3 Shannon Waterway



4 Wicklow Uplands



1. Courtesy of Brendan Dunford

2. Courtesy of Failte Ireland

3. Courtesy of Waterways Ireland

4. Courtesy of Wicklow Uplands Council

Historic landscape characterisation (HLC) is a tool for characterising the historic dimension of the landscape. It provides a historic landscape context and links to broader landscape characterisation. It can take place either before, or in parallel with, an LCA, but increasingly the benefits of integrating the two approaches are being realised. The use of HLC will provide much greater understanding of the historic dimension – or time-depth – of a landscape.

The end product of landscape characterisation will usually be a map of landscape types and/or areas, together with relatively value-free descriptions of their character, and details of the **key characteristics** that are most important in creating this character. Material on the physical and human influences that have shaped the landscape, as well as details of ongoing **forces for change**, should ideally also be presented, to assist understanding of how the landscape has evolved, and of the key issues that may affect it in future, including land use changes and development that may affect its character.

LCA can be applied at a number of **different scales** from the national (or indeed European) level to the townland level. Ideally, assessments at different scales should fit together as a nested series or a hierarchy, and should be consistent across administrative boundaries. National and regional scale (typically at 1:250,000) may cover the whole of a country or region to identify broad patterns of variation in landscape character. At local authority scale it is possible to identify a finer grain, that can be mapped and described through LCA at the county level for example, normally working at 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale. Local scale assessment of a smaller area such as an individual townland, farm, park or proposed development site can be undertaken at 1:10,000 or even larger scales. At this local level it is important to set the area firmly in the context of a wider character assessment.

2.6.2 Making judgements about the landscape

LCA makes an important distinction between the relatively value-free process of characterisation and the subsequent **making of judgements** based on knowledge of landscape character. The main benefit of having an LCA is to help in the process of managing change in a particular place, and for this reason, most assessments will move on beyond the characterisation stage to making judgements. *It is crucial that it is recognised when this point is reached.* Usually it is appropriate for judgements on landscape change to fall within or comprise a separate assessment output, such as a housing capacity study, tourism marketing strategy or forest design guidance. The judgements made will depend upon the type of change that is being considered, and on who is making the judgements.

There has been long-standing debate about the role of **objectivity and subjectivity** in dealing with landscape. The search for supposedly objective approaches has reflected a desire, in some quarters, to remove the element of personal judgement from the process. In LCA the process of characterisation should be objective in the main, while making judgements to inform decisions involves an element of subjectivity that can be clarified by using criteria agreed beforehand. Any subjective inputs should be made in a systematic and transparent way and, in addition, should involve **stakeholder input**. This will help ensure that an appropriate range of views is taken into account, encourage ownership of the study, and ultimately facilitate the successful action on landscape issues.

In making judgements about the landscape, a further series of concepts and definitions comes into play:

- **Landscape quality (or condition)** is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements that make up the character in any one place.
- **Landscape value** is concerned with the relative importance that is attached to different landscapes. Highly valued landscapes may be recognised through designation or may simply be valued locally without any formal designation. Criteria or reasons why a landscape is valued may include its landscape quality, scenic beauty, rarity or representativeness, conservation interests, wildness, tranquillity, and cultural or historical associations. The existence of a consensus about importance, either nationally or locally, may also be relevant.
- **Landscape sensitivity** refers to the *inherent sensitivity to change of the landscape resource*, in terms of both its character as a whole and its individual elements, as well as the *visual sensitivity* of the landscape in terms of views, visibility, number and nature of viewers and scope to mitigate visual impact.

- **Landscape capacity** refers to the degree to which a particular landscape is able to accommodate change without significant effects on its character, or overall change of character. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of change being proposed. It should reflect the *inherent sensitivity* of the landscape itself, its *sensitivity to the particular type of development in question*, and the *values attached to the landscape* or elements within it.

Historically there has been considerable confusion between landscape sensitivity and landscape capacity. The latter two definitions are based on a recent topic paper that gave special consideration to these concepts and was subject to wide consultation¹⁷.

Judgements on the landscape can take a variety of forms, depending on the particular purposes for which the LCA is being used. The most common outputs¹⁸ are:

- **Landscape strategies** set out what change if any is thought to be desirable for a given landscape character area or type. Based on landscape condition, they may guide thinking on the desirability of maintaining existing landscape character, enhancing character, restoring some former landscape, or creating a new one.
- **Landscape guidelines** indicate the actions that may be required to maintain or enhance the key characteristics and distinctive character of an area. Guidelines may be produced in written and /or graphic form and may relate to specific landscape units, or to specific forms of change (eg agriculture, housing) or both. They may indicate opportunities for development or land use change as well as showing where and how such changes might adversely affect landscape character.
- **Special landscapes** may be appropriate where a tract of landscape is selected for special recognition, usually because it is highly valued for some or all of the reasons outlined above under landscape value. Judgements here should be based on clear, explicit criteria, and designation as a special landscape should not necessarily imply additional constraints on development.
- **Landscape capacity** studies are designed to help in decisions about the ability of a landscape to accommodate specific types of land use change or development. They should be based on an understanding of both sensitivity and values as outlined above, and may provide quite specific advice on where and how such change is appropriate.

In addition to the above, LCA is an important source of information for the related activity of **landscape and visual impact assessment**. The most comprehensive and widely used good practice guidance on this subject is the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*¹⁹ published by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and the Landscape Institute. This stresses that landscape impacts (that is impacts on the elements, character and quality of the landscape) should be assessed separately from visual effects (which relate to changes in views and visual amenity). LCA is considered to be an important source of information for landscape and visual impact assessment.

2.6.3 Comparison with the Irish Guidelines

Looking back at the concepts and definitions presented in the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* (see Section 2.3.2), we have considered whether there are any significant differences of interpretation, compared to the accepted concepts and definitions outlined in Sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.2 above. Key points are as follows:

- The Irish Guidelines accord with many of the accepted concepts and definitions, although they are relatively limited in their scope and detail.

¹⁷ Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency (2004) *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity*, Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Agency, Perth and Cheltenham, <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/landscape/LCATopicPaper.asp>

¹⁸ See Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency (2002) *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland*, Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Agency, Perth and Cheltenham, www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/landscape/index.asp for good practice examples.

¹⁹ Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and Landscape Institute (2002) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, second edition, E & FN Spon, London.

- The concept of landscape character is very similar, but the specific and separate reference to physical units, visual units and image units in the Guidelines is new and different.
- In relation to characterisation, the Irish Guidelines recognise the distinction between landscape character types and landscape character areas.
- However, it is fair to say that they do not make any strong distinction between the processes of characterisation and making judgements.
- In relation to landscape value, the definition put forward in the Irish Guidelines is broadly similar to accepted practice.
- However the definition of landscape sensitivity is very different from accepted practice. Sensitivity is not clearly distinguished from capacity and appears to be based almost entirely on landscape value.
- This is confusing and means that development and change in a given landscape could be constrained unnecessarily: a highly valued landscape is not necessarily sensitive to all forms of change and indeed could (theoretically at least) have a high capacity to accommodate certain forms of change.
- In terms of policy responses and actions (landscape strategies and guidelines etc) that can follow from LCA, the range of options outlined in the Irish Guidelines is very limited and poorly developed.

Clearly there are a number of significant issues here that need to be explored further within this research:

- Are physical units, visual units and image units meaningful and helpful?
- Have the differences between landscape character areas and landscape character types been grasped?
- Has the lack of separation between characterisation and making judgements led to any problems in the application and use of LCA?
- Has there been confusion between landscape value and landscape sensitivity?
- Has an overemphasis on landscape value led to an unnecessary degree of constraint on landscape change in some areas?
- Has it led to focus on only valued/sensitive landscapes rather than on the landscape as a whole?
- Have planning authorities properly understood the ways in which they can use and apply LCA?

2.7 Key Points from this Section

- LCA is concerned with the whole landscape and not just with high quality or valued landscapes.
- The Planning and Development Act, 2000, introduced requirements for preservation of the character of the landscape (although the meaning of the word ‘landscape’ was not defined) and made statutory provision for areas of special amenity and landscape conservation areas.
- In 2000, DoEHLG issued *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, with aims of heightening awareness of landscape issues, guiding planners, and indicating specific requirements for development planning and control.
- DoEHLG also hoped for consistency of approach and for a national landscape map.
- They indicated in the Guidelines a range of applications that they thought LCA should be used for, including not just local authority planning but capacity studies, roads, forestry, housing, agri-environment and the NSS.
- The Guidelines set out concepts of landscape character, value and sensitivity and how these should be assessed, and suggested that the landscape character areas should be the *principal spatial framework for landscape policy*.
- The Heritage Council has a clear landscape policy remit but is not a body that must be consulted on planning applications in areas of special amenity or other landscape interest under Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2000, and this limits its influence in relation to development impacts on the landscape.
- As early as 2000 a study undertaken for the Heritage Council recommended that LCA by planning authorities should be complemented by a ‘top-down’ national landscape characterisation.
- This proposal for a national landscape characterisation was included, *inter alia*, in the Heritage Council’s landscape policy paper to government in 2002 but has never been progressed by Government.
- In the interim, as of March 2002, Ireland has ratified the European Landscape Convention, which requires States to implement a range of actions in relation to landscape.
- An overview of good practice in LCA stresses the importance of separating characterisation from judgements about the landscape and indicates the preferred scope, process and outputs of LCA.
- cursory comparison of the DoEHLG Guidelines with good practice elsewhere suggests that there are a number of key differences of interpretation that need to be explored in this study.

3 REVIEW OF LCAS IN IRELAND AND THEIR APPLICATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

3.1 Approach to the Review

This section begins by collating factual baseline information about the 19 LCAs that have been prepared by county councils in Ireland to date. It provides an overview of their content, approach and application at local level, and presents comments on their utility and effectiveness from those most closely involved in their preparation and use. The scope of the review was agreed in advance with the Heritage Council and the study Steering Group, the overall intention being to collate information and feedback on lessons learnt.

A copy of the review form can be found in *Appendix 2*. It was used to compile information on content; process and methods; various specific questions and issues; applications; and outputs. Specific issues covered included use of the DoEHLG *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, use of GIS datasets, consistency of classification, information on forces for change, separation between characterisation and judgements, and stakeholder input (reflecting some of the issues raised in the last section).

The review form was completed initially as a desk exercise by studying the LCA reports and related materials. The LCAs were generally provided by the county councils. Some were supplied as original LCA documents, but others were only available as information incorporated into County Development Plans (in which case it was often difficult to establish the methodology and scope of the original LCA). Telephone consultations were then undertaken with those most closely involved in the preparation and use of the LCAs. These helped the study team to check and fill in any gaps in the review forms. They also provided comments on utility and effectiveness from those closest to the assessment process and outputs. *Appendix 3* is a copy of the checklist of questions put to consultees. Consultees were also invited to expand on any other issues that they considered to be relevant.

Where possible the Heritage Officer, relevant planner and consultant (if appropriate) were consulted for each county with an LCA. However, in reality, it was often difficult to get hold of individuals, and a number failed to return calls. 25 full consultations were carried out with 10 Heritage Officers, 11 planners and 4 consultants. A list of consultees is provided in *Appendix 4*.

Figure 3.1 overleaf shows the current extent and status of LCA coverage in Ireland. The key characteristics of each completed LCA are summarised, in tabular form, in *Table 3.1*. *Table 3.2* then presents a short written description of each of the LCAs that was reviewed, highlighting the principal differences and similarities. The remainder of this section gives a factual summary and analysis of both the review findings and, where appropriate, the comments that were made by consultees (see *Appendix 5* for a full listing of comments). Our own comments and evaluation are developed further in *Section 5*.

Figure 3.1: Map showing the location and spatial extent of each of the LCA studies

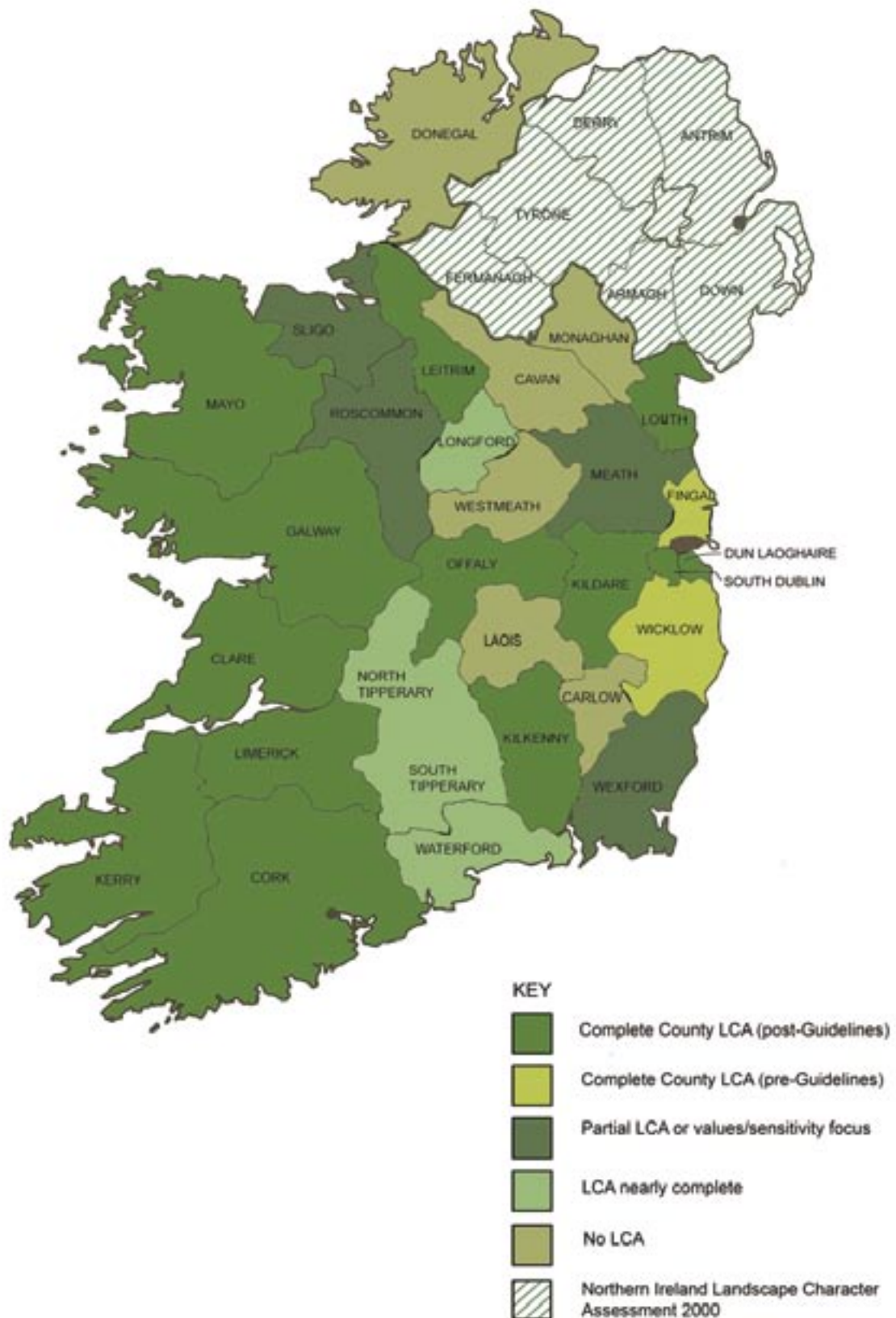


Table 3.1: Summary of the key characteristics of individual LCAs

LCA Characteristic	Clare	D Laoighaire	Cork	Fingal	Galway	Kerry	Kildare	Kilkenny	Leitrim	Limerick	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Offaly	Roscommon	Sligo	S Dublin	Wexford	Wicklow	Total Full	Total Partial	Total Absent
Full LCA document available	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●		●				●				●			
LCA available in development plan only				●						●		●	●				●					
Approximate cost of LCA (in 000) where known			30		76	70		27														
Landscape character areas identified	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●			●		●					
Landscape character types identified	●		●			●	●	●	●			●					●					
Unclear whether landscape units are character areas or types													●	●		●		●	●			
Clear and detailed method statement	■	■	■	○	▲	■	■	■	▲	○	■	■	○	○	▲	▲	○	○	■	9	4	6
Review of physical and human influences	■	○	▲	○	○	○	▲	▲	■	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	2	3	14
Written description of landscape units	■	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	■	▲	■	▲	▲	▲	▲	○	▲	○	▲	3	14	2
Review of forces for change	■	○	○	○	▲	○	○	○	■	○	■	○	○	○	▲	○	▲	○	▲	3	4	12
LCA focuses on character, not on landscape values/ sensitivity alone	■	■	■	▲	○	▲	▲	▲	▲	■	▲	▲	○	○	○	○	■	○	▲	5	8	6
Planning approach embraces landscape character ²⁰	▲	■	▲	■	○	▲	■		▲	■		▲	○	○	○	○	■	○	○	5	5	7

■	Full
▲	Partial
○	Absent

²⁰ Based on review of development plans (and their landscape policies) where available.

Table 3.2: Summary description of each of the LCAs

Clare:

Commissioned and funded by Heritage Council, undertaken by ERM Ireland, and completed in 2004. This LCA, one of the most comprehensive and detailed assessments to have been produced in Ireland, followed the Clare pilot study undertaken in 2000 (see *Section 2.4.2*). It is the only county LCA to adequately cover seascapes and integrate HLC into the LCA process. It has made good use of GIS data sets and used public consultation to inform the assessment. The character areas and types are clearly mapped and are described in detail. The LCA also includes a robust and evidenced-based analysis of the forces for change acting on each character area and also in relation to broad types of development. Each character area description concludes with detailed principles for landscape management. The LCA has led on to separate evaluation work on sensitivity and capacity.

Cork:

Commissioned by Cork County Council, undertaken by MosArt, and completed in 2003. This LCA provides a detailed breakdown of landscape character areas but provides no written descriptions of these areas. Landscape types are also identified and are more broad brush than the character areas. The landscape types are described in detail in a clear and easy-to-read format and in a way that captures the 'essence' of each type. The LCA makes good use of GIS data sets but has not involved public consultation. Forces for change have not been considered and the assessment contains no judgemental material. The LCA has not been taken forward and used in judgemental work to date, except in connection with specific planning applications.

Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown:

Commissioned by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, undertaken in-house, and completed in 2001. This LCA identifies landscape character areas and describes each, pulling out their distinctive characteristics followed by a recommended strategy. The strategies and policies clearly relate to each character area and provide transparent guidance on landscape change and initiatives to protect and enhance local character. This LCA did not make use of GIS data sets but nevertheless provides a good and robust analysis of landscape character and has informed policy.

Fingal:

Commissioned by Fingal County Council, undertaken in-house and in association with Brady Shipman and Martin, and completed in 1999. This LCA is only available as an extract from the Country Development Plan, and the assessment overall is not detailed and did not make use of GIS data sets. Landscape character areas are defined and described only briefly but these descriptions are followed by 'Principles for Development', which relate well to the character areas and set out useful guidance on future change and management. The landscape is also divided into landscape groups for policy purposes. The 'group' classification is confusing and the relationship between groups and character areas is not clear. The LCA has been taken forward to develop a siting and design guide.

Galway:

Commissioned by Galway County Council, undertaken by WS Atkins, and completed in 2002. This LCA was undertaken primarily to determine the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape to accommodate forestry, wind farm and housing development. Although it used GIS data sets, the characterisation part of the LCA is only briefly set out, the character descriptions are limited, and the mapping of character areas is difficult to interpret and vague. This LCA has combined characterisation with judgements on the landscape. The two elements are difficult to distinguish, and it is unclear whether and how the characterisation informed the landscape sensitivity zoning.

Kerry:

Commissioned by Kerry County Council, undertaken by Colin Buchanan & Partners and Wardell Armstrong, and completed in May 2004. This LCA was undertaken primarily to identify different levels of landscape sensitivity across the county. This assessment followed the DoEHLG Guidelines more closely than any other assessment. It used GIS datasets and included consultation with the public and key stakeholders. The report identifies physical units (types) that are assessed in terms of sensitivity to development. It also identifies more broad-brush physical units. The descriptions of the physical and visual units are informative but not detailed. The LCA is broken down into five volumes - one for each electoral area. However the physical units do not match up across electoral boundaries. This LCA does not review forces for change and does not provide any detailed guidance or strategy resulting from the evaluation of sensitivity.

Kildare:

Commissioned by Kildare County Council, undertaken by CAAS Environmental Ltd, and completed in 2003. This LCA combines characterisation with judgements on sensitivity and capacity. It made use of GIS data sets and included stakeholder consultation, which provided information on landscape values. Landscape character areas are identified and described in some detail, although the descriptions relate to individual landscape components and these are not brought together to capture the 'essence' or distinctive characteristics of each area. More general landscapes types are also identified but not described. Judgements on sensitivity are based on the CORINE land cover mapping and do not relate to character areas or types. The LCA goes on to develop landscape policies in association with the landscape types only. No policy or guidance is prepared for character areas.

Kilkenny:

Commissioned by Kilkenny County Council, undertaken by CAAS Environmental Ltd, and completed in 2003. This LCA combines characterisation with judgements on sensitivity and capacity. It made use of GIS data and included stakeholder consultation, which helped refine landscape character areas and values. Landscape character areas are identified and described in some detail, although it is difficult to decipher the distinctive characteristics of each area. More general landscapes types are also identified but not described in detail. Judgements on sensitivity are based on the CORINE land cover mapping and do not relate to character areas or types. This approach determines if a landscape is degraded, robust, normal, sensitive or vulnerable, and is over-simplistic and open to challenge. The LCA goes on to develop landscape policy for landscape types, but no policies or guidance are prepared for the character areas.

Leitrim:

Commissioned by Leitrim County Council, undertaken by ERM Ireland, and completed in 2002. This LCA comprises a well-written and clearly set out detailed analysis of landscape character, identifying and describing both landscape character types and areas. It did not make use of GIS data sets but did include stakeholder consultation, which was used to refine character areas and develop a better understanding of forces for change. Clear and concise guidelines are set out for each character area. The LCA has been taken forward to inform a landscape capacity evaluation for forestry and wind farm development based on the landscape types.

Limerick:

Commissioned by Limerick County Council, undertaken in-house and completed between 2000 and 2005. This LCA is only available as an extract from the County Development Plan and identifies landscape character areas. The character area descriptions are clearly set out but are brief and lead on immediately to concise and well-presented landscape guidelines/policies, which directly relate to the special characteristics of each area and the need to conserve these qualities. This LCA did not include stakeholder consultation and it is not known if GIS data sets were used. Although relatively brief, this LCA provides a good basic understanding of the variety of character within the county and provides robust management and development objectives.

Louth:

Commissioned by Louth County Council, undertaken by a retired planner of the Council, and completed in 2002. This LCA presents a concise, clearly set-out and logical assessment and goes on to make judgements relating to landscape value and management objectives. Landscape character areas are identified and described in some detail, clearly defining the distinguishing elements of each area. The main forces for change acting on the landscape are also set out in detail. GIS data sets were used in the assessment but no stakeholder consultation was undertaken. The judgements on landscape value relate to each character area and are set out separately from the characterisation process. They lead to management objectives – conserve, restore, enhance and create.

Mayo:

Commissioned by Mayo County Council, undertaken by CAAS Environmental Ltd, and completed in 2002. This LCA combines characterisation with making judgements on sensitivity and capacity. A significant focus of the LCA is on the impact of development and on guidelines for landscape management. The LCA made use of GIS data and included stakeholder consultation, which helped refine landscape character areas and values. Landscape character areas are identified and described in some detail to give a reasonable understanding of character variations. More general landscape types are also identified and used as policy areas – each having its own set of landscape policies. A landscape sensitivity matrix for different types of development in different policy areas (or landscape type) is then presented. This is a rather formulaic approach that at the same time over-complex and simplistic in its conclusions. It is poorly related to the original characterisation.

Meath:

Commissioned by Meath County Council, undertaken in-house, and completed pre-2001. This LCA is only available as an extract from the County Development Plan. The purpose of this LCA was to define and protect areas of high amenity, and the depth of analysis is weak. The assessment muddles landscape character areas and types, defining a mixture of each, which does not adequately reflect the variety of landscapes found within the county, eg. the majority of the county is classified as 'rural and agriculture'. Associated written descriptions are very brief and not informative. Judgements relating to landscape sensitivity are also set out for each character area or type; however this information is again brief and over-simplistic. Overall this is a weak LCA in terms of method and analysis.

Offaly:

Commissioned by Offaly County Council, undertaken in-house, and completed in 2003. This LCA is only available as an extract from the County Development Plan and was prepared to ensure the preservation of the landscape, views and amenity of place. The LCA muddles landscape character areas and types, defining a mixture of both. The written descriptions are inadequate and do not correlate with the categories of landscape illustrated on associated plans. An analysis of the sensitivity of each character area is also provided, but this is selective and often moves into guidelines that are very general. Overall this LCA is weak in its method and analysis.

Roscommon:

Commissioned by Roscommon County Council, undertaken by Brady Shipman and Martin, and completed in 2002. This is not a county-wide LCA but focuses on a specific area called Lough Key, which is highly-valued and under pressure for tourism development. The LCA clearly identifies macro and micro landscape character areas, illustrating them on a plan, but no written description of the areas is provided. Conservation zones are also defined and are supported by written guidelines and policies. However, it is not clear how these relate to, or are informed by, the character areas. This is a useful study setting out a vision for the area, but its weakness lies in the lack of analysis and description of character, and in the poor correlation between character, judgement and subsequent strategy.

South Dublin:

Commissioned by South Dublin County Council, undertaken in-house, and completed in 2002. This LCA is only available as an extract from the County Development Plan. Although no GIS data was used and no stakeholder involvement was undertaken the assessment, it nevertheless clearly identifies logical and well-defined landscape character areas. The character descriptions are easy to follow and contain a reasonable level of detail. Associated with the descriptions is a set of strategy objectives that provides robust guidance on future development and landscape management and relates directly to character. This LCA does not include any judgements on sensitivity or capacity.

Sligo:

Commissioned by Sligo County Council, undertaken by CAAS Environmental Ltd, and completed in 1996. The purpose of this LCA was to help preserve the character and integrity of valued landscape features, and as such this it focuses almost exclusively on judgements and is not on characterisation. Landscape types are identified, that relate strongly to the CORINE land cover mapping, and no written descriptions of character are provided. This LCA does not adequately identify the varied landscape of the county and instead classifies the landscape into broad-brush sensitivity zones - vulnerable, sensitive, normal, robust and degraded. The majority of the countryside is considered to be 'normal'.

Wexford:

Commissioned by Wexford County Council, undertaken by CAAS Environmental Ltd, and completed in 1995-96. This LCA is only available as an extract of the County Development Plan and is not really a proper LCA but simply an evaluation of landscape sensitivity. No information is given on character areas/types and it is not clear if they were defined or described in the original assessment. Within the Development Plan the landscape is only categorised into vulnerable, sensitive, normal and robust landscapes and different landscape types are included in each.

Wicklow:

Commissioned by Wicklow County Council, undertaken in-house, and completed in 1999. This LCA combines characterisation and judgements on landscape sensitivity. The characterisation muddles landscape character areas and types, and defines a mixture of the two, which are mapped and described, although the key characteristics of each area are sometimes unclear. Despite this, the analysis provides an impression of the varied landscape character within the county. Forces for change and vulnerability are also identified and described in relation to each character area/type and this forms the basis for classifying the landscape into landscape control areas within associated policy. This results in a reasonable connection between character, judgement and policy. However, the document is not logically set out, eg it details the landscape control areas and associated policy before describing character.

3.2 Current Status of County LCAs

The majority of LCAs (17 out of 19) have been undertaken since 2000, in response to the Planning and Development Act, 2000 and the consultation draft *Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment* issued by the DoEHLG in June 2000. Most assessments have been undertaken on a county-wide basis with the exception of Roscommon where the assessment covers only part of the county²¹. All assessments have been commissioned by county councils, with the exception of the County Clare LCA, which was commissioned by the Heritage Council.

Tables 3.3-3.6 detail the extent of current LCA coverage in Ireland as of January 2006. They show that of the 29 counties (including the smaller counties derived from Dublin County ie Fingal, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin) 19 have completed assessments. However, only 15 of these can be considered to be full LCAs that comply with the Guidelines; the remaining four either do not cover the whole county (as in the case of Roscommon) or focus mainly on values and sensitivity rather than on character. Assessments in the latter category mainly predate the Guidelines. A further four counties have LCAs nearing completion; while seven have only just started or are still to undertake LCAs²².

Table 3.3: Counties with completed, full LCAs (in reverse date order)

County	Publication Date	Author(s)
Kerry	2004	Colin Buchanan & Partners and Wardell Armstrong
Clare	2004	ERM
Cork	2004	MosArt
Kildare	2003	CAAS
Kilkenny	2003	CAAS
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	2002	In-house
Leitrim	2002	ERM
Galway	2002	WS Atkins
Louth	2002	Retired Planner
Mayo	2002	CAAS
South Dublin	2002	In-house
Limerick	2000-2005	In-house
Offaly	Post 2000	In-house
Wicklow	1999	In-house
Fingal	Pre 1999	In-house and Brady Shipman Martin

Table 3.4: Counties with partial LCAs (LCAs covering only part of county or focus on values sensitivity, not character)

County	Publication Date	Author(s)
Roscommon	2002	Brady Shipman Martin
Meath	Pre 2001	Not known (presume in house)
Sligo	1996	CAAS
Wexford	1995/6	CAAS

²¹ There is also one example of a regional, cross-border assessment (the Breifne Mountains).

²² Meath has an LCA based on values and sensitivity but is now commissioning a full LCA from consultants. It therefore appears in both Tables 3.3 and 3.5 and is counted twice in this analysis.

Table 3.5: Counties with LCAs nearing completion but not available for review as part of this study

County	Stage Reached	Author(s)
Longford	On hold due to maternity leave	In-house
North Tipperary	Ongoing/nearly complete	ERM
South Tipperary	On hold - upland areas complete	Cunnane Stratton Reynolds
Waterford	Ongoing/nearly complete	MosArt

Table 3.6: Counties with no LCA

County	Current Position
Carlow	Planned for 2006 – awaiting results of this review
Cavan	Planned for 2006
Donegal	Planned for 2006 – awaiting results of this review
Laois	Recognise need but no immediate plans
Monaghan	Consultants appointed (ERM)
Meath	Currently tendering (LCA will replace existing assessment)
Westmeath	LCA begun in house in 2004 – delayed

Table 3.7 below presents an analysis of LCA availability and responsibility for LCA preparation. Unless otherwise specified all numbers/percentages are calculated out of the total of 19 full or partial LCAs.

Table 3.7: LCA availability and preparation

Topic/Issue	No of Assessments	% of Responses Obtained
LCA availability		
● Hard copy	8	42%
● CD	3	16%
● Web	1	5%
● As part of development plan on web	7	37%
Assessment preparation²³		
● By consultants	13	65%
● In-house/other	7	35%
Lead profession		
● Landscape architects	11	58%
● Planners	8	42%

²³ South Dublin was completed as a joint venture between the county planners and Brady, Shipman and Martin. It has therefore been counted twice.

This shows that most LCAs are available as hard copy only. The charge made for purchasing hard copies is based on the cost to print, bind and issue. A few of the most recent LCAs are available in digital format on CD, and one (Leitrim) is available on the web. It seems that copies of LCAs are rarely requested, although in many cases some of the LCA findings are within the County Development Plan and are readily available in that format. Our experience in compiling copies of LCAs for review suggests that one needs to be quite determined and persistent, in some cases at least, to obtain a copy of an LCA. In a few cases, it appears that the original LCA report has been lost and only the material in the development plan survives.

It can be seen that consultants have prepared just under two-thirds of LCAs, the vast majority having been undertaken by a relatively small number of consultants. Seven assessments have been prepared in-house. Landscape architects have led most LCAs, the remainder (just under half) being prepared by planners, generally where assessments have been undertaken in-house. In some cases these professions have been supported by other specialists in fields such as archaeology, GIS and ecology.

3.3 Commissioning an LCA

Despite requesting copies of LCA briefs, very few were provided. This may reflect the fact that many LCAs were completed some years ago and files have been archived. However, briefs were obtained for Counties Clare, Kildare and Meath. These span the main assessment period, Kildare having been a relatively early LCA, Clare a somewhat later one, and Meath one that has only recently been tendered. The objectives of each LCA appear to be a reflection of client needs and it seems that this in turn has influenced the content and emphasis of the LCA. The briefs are broadly similar, but also show a degree of variation. All the briefs require consultants to prepare a landscape characterisation at county level in accordance with the Guidelines, and to determine landscape value. Additional requirements of each of the LCAs are summarised in the table below.

Table 3.8 LCA Briefs: examples of their specific requirements

The **Clare** brief specifies that the assessment should cover seascapes as well as landscapes. It requires an overview of forces for change affecting the landscape, local stakeholder involvement in identifying key landscape characteristics and forces for change, and an assessment of the key issues and priorities affecting each landscape character type.

The **Kildare** brief requires consultants to prepare recommendations for development plan policy and objectives in relation to each landscape character area. It also requires recommendations on the location of wind farms, telecommunications, afforestation and peat extraction. Liaison with adjoining local authorities and consultation with key stakeholder groups is also required.

The **Meath** brief requires a review of forces for landscape change and landscape issues, a landscape sensitivity map for the county, a landscape policy map for the county and landscape objectives and policy recommendations.

It can be seen that the outputs requested in the Clare brief are very comprehensive but contain no requirement for direct inputs to the County Development Plan (even though the LCA is clearly intended to inform the development plan process). By contrast, the Kildare and Meath briefs relate strongly to the emerging development plan, requiring preparation of sensitivity and policy maps.

The cost of undertaking an LCA has varied from relatively modest, where work has been undertaken in-house for a small county, to in excess of €100,000 for an extensive LCA for a large county. Consultations would suggest that on average LCAs cost between €30,000 and €70,000.

The time taken to complete an LCA seems to have depended on the objectives of the LCA, the size of the county being assessed, and the extent to which stakeholder consultation on draft reports was undertaken. For example, the LCA for

the small county of Fingal took a number of months to complete, whereas larger counties such as Leitrim seem to have taken up to a year or more (including three to four months for data review and survey, three months for report writing and recording, and then considerable time for consultation on draft reports).

3.4 Process and Methods Used

Many LCAs do not contain full **method statements**. However it has been possible to determine, through consultations, that LCAs generally follow the same basic approach ie data gathering, desk study and fieldwork verification. All LCAs undertaken after the issue of the DoEHLG draft Guidelines in 2000 refer to the approach set out in the Guidelines. However, consultations revealed that none of the LCAs followed the Guidelines fully (Kerry being the LCA that came closest to doing so), especially in relation to the use of physical, visual and image units and in assessing landscape value and sensitivity. This is discussed further in *Section 3.10* below.

Many LCAs also made reference to the *Landscape Assessment Guidance* published by the Countryside Commission in 1993²⁴, *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland*²⁵ published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage in 2002, and the *Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment* INTERREG report of 2001²⁶. LCAs referring to these guidance documents included Clare, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, Leitrim, Louth, Roscommon and Wicklow.

The size of the landscape units defined, and the **scale** at which landscape character has been mapped, both vary considerably, depending on the size of the county and other factors. For example, in the large county of Cork, even the smallest units of assessment – the 76 landscape character areas – cover wide areas; whereas in South Dublin, the 12 landscape character areas are very small indeed, reflecting the small size of the local authority area. Final mapping also varies, a range of different mapping scales being used. Many LCAs do not give details of map scale and/or do not use an Ordnance Survey base but rather a schematic base, with information such as place names added to assist with general orientation.

Information sources used during the LCA vary from county to county. Broadly speaking, the following data sets were utilised: Ordnance Survey Ireland mapping, Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes in Ireland, geology, soils, forestry, site and monuments record, aerial photography, environmental designations, background literature and studies, CORINE land cover mapping, tourist attractions, walking routes. A number of LCAs (9 out of 19) made extensive use of the national GIS data sets which exist for Ireland – notably Mayo, Louth, Kilkenny, Kildare, Galway, Clare and Cork.

Only one out of the 19 LCAs reviewed, the County Clare LCA commissioned by the Heritage Council, fully incorporated **Historic Landscape Characterisation** (HLC) into the assessment process (as recommended in *Section 2.6.1*), although the majority of LCAs took some account of historical and cultural aspects of the landscape, for example through examination of the Record of Protected Structures and /or research into landscape values. In two of the counties we contacted, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Offaly, a county HLC has been initiated since completion of the LCA.

Only seven out of 19 LCAs included **stakeholder consultation** work as part of the process, examples being Kilkenny and Leitrim. However the purpose of this consultation varied from input into key characteristics and verification of character areas, through to understanding of forces for change, people's value of the landscape, and sensitivity to different types of development.

There was considerable variety in the **methods adopted for evaluation** and for determining the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape to accommodate development. Consultants' individual corporate styles were reflected

²⁴ Countryside Commission (1993) *Landscape Assessment Guidance*, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham.

²⁵ Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency (2002) *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland*, Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Agency, Perth and Cheltenham or see www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/Landscape/index.asp

²⁶ Countryside Council for Wales, Brady Shipman Martin and University College Dublin (2001) *Guide to Best Practice in Seascape Assessment*, Marine Institute, Dublin or see www.ccw.gov.uk/Images_Client/Reports/ACF1676.pdf

strongly in the presentation of descriptive text and even more so in the approaches adopted for landscape values and sensitivity (see *Section 3.2.6* below). The majority of assessments comprised one report, although some, such as Kilkenny, Kildare and Leitrim, have more than one volume, the latter volume(s) covering landscape values, sensitivity and policies or providing further information from consultations.

3.5 Approaches to Classification and Description

In at least two-thirds of the LCAs, the classification and description provided do appear to give a reliable and meaningful reflection of the principal variations in landscape character. However, the LCAs vary widely in the type of landscape classification system that is used. Many define landscape character areas (eg Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown), some have both character areas and types (eg Cork), and others define character units that in reality are a combination of areas and types (eg Wicklow). Further details are given below.

Table 3.9: Use of landscape character areas and landscape character types

Classification	No of Assessments	% of Responses Obtained
● Landscape character areas	6	32%
● Landscape character types	1	5%
● Both areas and types, separate	7	37%
● Both areas and types, mixed	3	16%
● Other	2	10%

While this allows the LCA to be tailored to local conditions and requirements, it may pose difficulties for wider use of the LCAs at regional or national level or where a development or land management issue straddles county boundaries. It is clear from the variety of landscape units defined that there is a lack of clarity about what is meant by character areas and character types. There also appears to be some confusion as to how they relate to the physical, visual and image units referred to in the Guidelines. In practice the latter types of unit are largely ignored, with character areas and/or types being the main focus of landscape mapping and description in each of the LCAs.

Where both character areas and types are identified, sometimes the character areas (as in Leitrim and Mayo) and sometimes the character types (as in Cork) may be written up in most detail. There is generally little clarity on the scale at which areas or types are defined, or the way in which they can work as a hierarchy, with a few exceptions – such as Wicklow, which illustrates the relationship between them in table form. The terminology and units often vary between, and sometimes within, LCAs.

The descriptions vary in length and style. Some comprise just a short paragraph (eg Limerick) while others present information under a series of headings (eg Clare and Kildare). These may include, for example, key characteristics, extent, geology and landform, land cover and ecology, historical and human influences, landscape condition and sensitivity, forces for change, principles for landscape management, and principles for built form. This represents an example of one consultant's style. That of another consultant may be very different, the headings including general description, land use, boundary determinates and critical landscape factors (including elevated vistas, slopes, prominent ridgelines, topography, low vegetation, and shelter vegetation). Many of the descriptions are supported by an overview map showing character area/type location, or by a thumbnail map, and a typical photograph is sometimes included.

3.6 LCA Content

There is considerable variation in the content, length and level of detail of the LCAs. This appears to be due to the timescale over which assessments have been undertaken, changing needs and emerging guidelines, different objectives, and individual consultant styles and approaches. In summary:

- Very few LCAs present information on the physical and human influences that have shaped the landscape (exceptions being Clare, Cork, Leitrim, Kildare and Kilkenny).
- The majority of LCAs (although not all) contain reasonable full or partial written descriptions of landscape character areas/types, good examples of full written descriptions being Leitrim and Louth.
- The nature and style of the description relates strongly to consultant corporate styles, as well as to which LCA methodology is most closely followed.
- Less than half of the LCAs explicitly consider the forces for change affecting the landscape or present some form of guidance (either principles for management or development) for specific landscape character areas or types.
- The majority of LCAs contain some form of evaluation or appraisal of landscape sensitivity or capacity.
- Most make specific reference to landscape policies, but these may not be directly related to the landscape character areas/types.

Although most reports share common elements, the way in which these elements are structured and presented is individual to each report. The reports that are most similar are those that were prepared by the same consultancy.

Information on forces for change is generally based on field observation, in some cases supplemented by input from consultations and from the client body. Less than half the assessments (seven out of 19) explicitly consider forces for change, and if they do it is often general and brief. Where forces for change are recorded, they are generally explored under topic headings eg forestry, wind farms, climate, population, agriculture, rural housing, infrastructure, tourism, natural resources. Examples include Louth and Leitrim. Some assessments set out the forces for change specifically for each landscape character area or type (in addition to or instead of the topic-based approach). Examples include Clare and Wicklow.

In relation to landscape values and sensitivity, a key point is that for around a third of LCAs (six out of 19), evaluative material is the principal LCA output, with relatively little attention being given to character as such. Examples of counties where this occurs are Galway, Meath and Offaly. By contrast, other LCAs such as Clare, Cork and Limerick, have a strong focus on character. For these counties, an approach based on landscape character also tends to be more fully embraced within planning policy in most cases.

The accessibility and usefulness of LCA information to those outside the planning and landscape professions appear to be extremely limited. Most assessments are weighty documents containing planning and landscape jargon. They often fail to clearly set out the methodology used, the objectives of assessment, or the meaning of technical terms. LCAs incorporated into development plans (eg South Dublin) are generally more accessible to those outside the planning and landscape professions, but inevitably are relatively brief in their coverage of landscape character and landscape issues. This means that the full baseline landscape information is not available to those who may wish to access and use it for other purposes, such as local design guidance or forest design planning.

3.7 Judgements Based on Landscape

There is significant variation in the way in which advice on future landscape change is presented. Such advice generally took one of four forms:

- landscape sensitivity zoning ie policy proposals on the relative sensitivity of different landscapes eg Wicklow, Offaly and Sligo (this is the most common approach);
- general guidance relating to land management and development in specific landscape character areas/types eg Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Limerick, Fingal, Louth, Leitrim and Clare;
- topic-based guidance eg on wind farms, which may lead on to specific policies for that particular form of change or development eg Leitrim, Clare, Galway;

- reference to appropriate strategies (conservation, enhancement, restoration) for different landscapes or landscape features eg Louth.

In assessments focusing on landscape sensitivity zoning, the reasoning behind the zoning policy was often weak and poorly articulated because the processes of characterisation and making judgements were not fully recorded or clearly separated. Approximately a third of the assessments overall (7 out of 19) made a clear separation between characterisation and judgements on landscape change.

In addition, landscape policy proposals were often relatively broad-brush and did not relate specifically to the landscape character areas/types (as was intended by the DoEHLG Guidelines). Examples are Kildare, Mayo and Kilkenny, which classify the landscape in detail but then develop policy proposals at a broader scale, the same policies applying to a number of different landscape character areas/types.

Perhaps surprisingly, there is no evidence that LCA has been used, as yet, as a basis for designation of Landscape Conservation Areas (LCA2) under Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000. No such areas have yet been designated in Ireland as of January 2006. However, we learned in consultations that Landscape Conservation Areas (LCA2) are being considered or planned in:

- Roscommon, in the vicinity of Lough Key;
- Kilkenny, where planners indicated that the LCA would inform the future boundaries of Landscape Conservation Areas;
- Dublin, where the city council proposes small Landscape Conservation Areas in an urban context at Phoenix Park, North Bull Island, the Botanic Gardens, and St Anne's Park.

3.8 Spatial Consistency and Extent of the LCAs

The study examined the consistency of LCA classification across administrative boundaries, and the extent to which the LCAs covered seascapes and urban areas.

Table 3.10: Spatial consistency and extent of the LCAs

Topic/Issue	No of Assessments	% of Responses Obtained
Classification consistent with adjoining LCAs²⁷		
● Poor	13	5%
● Moderate	7	29%
● Good	4	17%
Consideration of seascapes²⁸	5	38%
Consideration of urban areas	4	21%

It can be seen that landscape classification in most cases is inconsistent across local authority area boundaries. Where consistency does exist, it generally relates only to the classification itself. Character area/type names, descriptions and any associated guidance or policy still tend to vary considerably. The map in *Figure 3.2* shows the degree of consistency that exists across specific local authority boundaries; while *Figure 3.3* shows examples of relatively poor consistency (Kildare and Offaly) and relatively good consistency (Cork and Limerick).

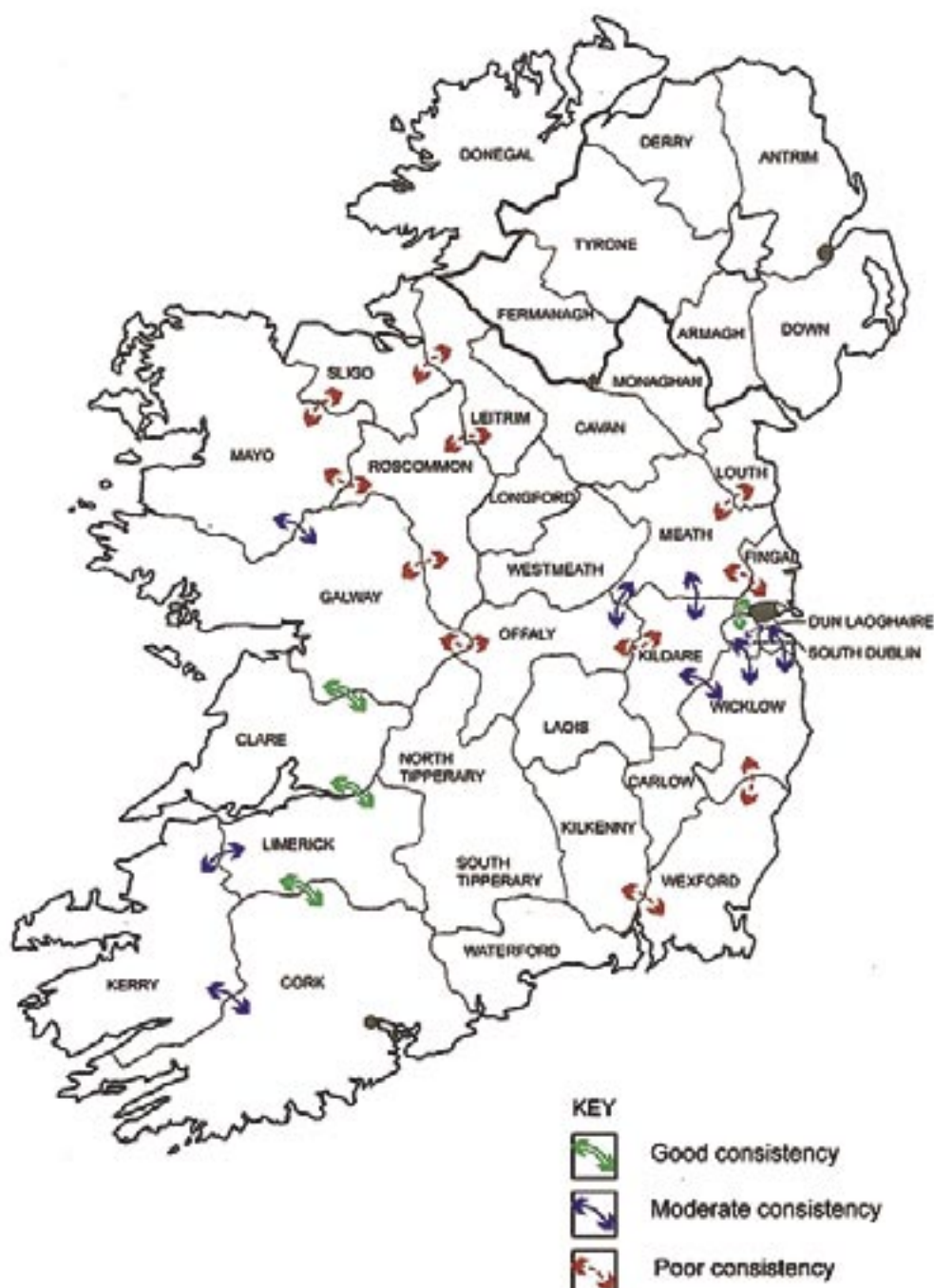
²⁷ There are 24 areas where existing LCA boundaries abut. Percentages are calculated out of 24.

²⁸ Seascape assessment is only relevant to 13 of the 19 counties with LCAs.

In terms of seascape assessment, which is relevant to 13 of the counties with LCAs, there are five examples where this is covered in the LCA to some degree. However, only in the County Clare LCA, commissioned by the Heritage Council, is a full description of each seascape character area provided.

None of the LCAs considered urban areas separately or in detail. Instead urban areas were usually either incorporated into the landscape classification as part of a character area/type, or ignored altogether. In a few cases urban areas were given token consideration and noted as a different landscape type or as open space within the urban fabric (especially on the outskirts of Dublin). Four LCAs were regarded as having given some consideration (albeit marginal) to urban areas.

Figure 3.2: Consistency of LCA classification across local authority boundaries



3.9 Applications of LCA by Local Authorities and Others

The range of LCA applications (based on information gained from the LCA document review and consultations) is summarised in *Table 3.10*. This demonstrates that the LCAs have been widely used in planning circles in Ireland, which is clearly due to the Planning and Development Act, 2000, and the issue by the DoEHLG of the consultation draft *Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment*, which encourage local authorities to undertake LCAs and prepare relevant landscape policies. All the LCAs reviewed have been incorporated into the County Development Plan to some degree. However, in many cases it is primarily the evaluative material that has been incorporated and used rather than the characterisation itself^{29,30}. A number of LCAs have also been incorporated into Local Area Plans and have influenced policy at this more local level.

It appears from the review of LCAs, development plans and consultations that more use is made of the LCAs for development planning than for development control (now generally referred to in Ireland as development management). Consultations suggest that forward planners prefer a broad-brush classification and a limited number of policy areas, while development management officers would prefer a more detailed classification and specific objectives or criteria in relation to landscape characteristics, values and sensitivities. Hence it appears that LCAs prepared to date may be too detailed for use in development plans, but not detailed enough for development management. Identification of special landscapes and/or landscape sensitivity zones is a common LCA application and it is often this that finds its way into the development plan to form the basis for policy.

LCAs have been used to inform capacity assessments for a range of developments, with the most common use being wind farm development, reflecting current pressures and trends. Some capacity assessment work has also been undertaken in relation to other forms of change, notably housing and forestry, as an input to development planning. However, capacity study work as a whole is relatively underdeveloped. Some assessments are used to tackle design issues through the development of siting and design guides (eg Fingal and Roscommon) and village design statements (eg Clare), but again this area may offer further potential.

Only a few LCAs have been used to develop wider county landscape strategies or plans for the management or monitoring of specific landscape features. This probably reflects the general lack of expertise and resources for landscape and countryside management within the county councils, most counties having a heritage officer, but few if any having access to landscape skills in-house. For similar reasons, there is little or no evidence of the use of LCA in forestry or agri-environment initiatives by the planning authority.

²⁹ Of the 17 development plans that we reviewed in the course of this study, only around five made full reference to landscape character. Another five made partial reference, and seven made no reference to landscape character at all.

³⁰ The fact that few county development plans refer to landscape character is confirmed by an unpublished study undertaken by Cronin Matthews Consultants for Fáilte Ireland, entitled *Analysis of Landscape and Amenity Policies within Ireland's County Development Plans*, September 2005.

Table 3.11: Applications of LCA by local authorities in Ireland

Possible LCA Applications	Clare	D. Laoghaire	Cork	Fingal	Galway	Kerry	Kildare	Kilkenny	Leitrim	Limerick	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Offaly	Roscommon	Sligo	S. Dublin	Wicklow	Wexford	Total applications
County Development Plan policies	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	19
Local Area Plan policies	•	•	•					•		•										7
Identification of special landscapes or landscape sensitivity zoning	•	•		•	•	•	•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•	•	15
Development management	•			•		•		•		•	•	•		•	•	•			•	11
Development capacity studies																				
• housing					•		•		•											3
• wind energy					•		•													7
• infrastructure					•		•	•				•								1
• minerals			•				•	•	•							•		•		1
• forestry	•						•		•											5
• bog and peat extraction					•		•													1
Design issues/ village design statements	•		•	•											•					4
Landscape strategy/ management/ monitoring	•	•							•		•						•	•		6
Forestry (felling/replanting strategies)																				0
Agri-environment																				0
Tourism/rural development	•								•						•					3
Strategic environmental assessment/ Environmental impact assessment	•											•								2
Other																				
• Heritage plan	•	•																		2
• Urban framework plan									•											1

A number of other specific applications are evident. In the fields of tourism and rural development there is a small but growing number of initiatives that draw on LCA as a resource, including tourism strategy work at Lough Key in Roscommon; the Breifne Mountains regional geo-tourism initiative, which used the Leitrim LCA; and the LEADER rural development strategy for County Clare with used the LCA for farm diversification.

Other uses include environmental impact assessment (EIA), strategic environmental assessment (SEA), heritage plans, and urban framework plans. LCA has considerable, although as yet largely untested, potential to help planning authorities in all these areas.

Perhaps one of the most promising future applications of LCA is for SEA of development plans, introduced in Ireland through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations, 2004, and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations, 2004. LCA is potentially a key tool for SEA because it can provide a strategic spatial framework for information on the baseline environment, and for assessing the environmental effects of plans and programmes. This important area of application should be further developed and tested by the planning authorities.

3.10 Looking Forward

Finally, the views of consultees on possible improvements and future developments in LCA were analysed in relation to the utility and need for updating of the DoEHLG Guidelines, the extent of training, whether LCA was value for money/ met expectations/ influenced decision-makers, and awareness of and familiarity with the requirements of the European Landscape Convention.

Table 3.12: Analysis of future issues from consultations with Heritage Officers, planners and consultants

Topic/Issue	% of Relevant People Interviewed		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
DoEHLG Guidelines considered helpful	24	56	20
Need to update DoEHLG draft guidelines	76	4	20
Had training in LCA	32	68	-
LCA was value for money	70	30	-
LCA met expectations	40	50	10
LCA influenced decision- making	76	16	8
Aware of ELC	79	21	-
Familiar with requirements of ELC	21	79	-

It can be seen that the majority of those consulted did not consider the Guidelines to be helpful. Those that did find them helpful found them so for characterisation but not for making judgements. This may explain why assessments based on the Guidelines do not follow the Guidelines fully, as explained earlier. A significant number of consultees (20%) were not sufficiently familiar with the Guidelines to provide a view.

Despite the fact that some consultees found the Guidelines helpful, almost all felt that they should be rewritten and improved. Most people felt that the guidelines should be simplified, recommend a clear step-by-step process and be illustrated with case studies and examples of best practice.

In relation to training, around a third of consultees had had some form of training in LCA – generally those who had prepared the LCAs. However the remaining two-thirds – generally those who had *used* the LCAs – had had little or no training in the LCA process or in its appropriate use, capabilities or applications. Training in the application of LCA would generally be welcomed, and this may be an important area for improvement. In particular, there seems to be a need for training on how LCA can help planners to make informed judgements on the specific ability of different landscapes to accommodate different forms of development.

Although a significant number of positive views were expressed regarding the strengths of the LCA process, 50% of consultees (mainly those within local authorities rather than consultants) expressed dissatisfaction that the LCA did not meet their needs. The reasons why assessments have not/do not meet expectations include:

- The LCA contained either too much detail or not enough.
- The LCA did not provide enough information on habitats and cultural heritage.
- The assessment did not go far enough in terms of evaluation and policy input.
- There were unrealistic expectations that led to disappointment (because people did not understand the LCA process).
- There was bad press associated with LCA in one county (Leitrim) where councillors did not adopt the LCA, and this had a knock-on effect on others.
- There is no national typology or classification within which the local authority LCAs can sit.

Overall, there appears to be strong support for LCAs and their use in decision-making, and this is reflected in the variety of uses to which LCAs have been put. Nonetheless, there remains a number of counties where consultees consider that the LCA has had limited or no influence on decision-making. These include: Cork (characterisation only and not taken forward to evaluation yet), South Dublin, Offaly and Sligo.

Although there is generally good awareness that Ireland has ratified the European Landscape Convention (in March 2002), 79% of consultees were not familiar with the requirements of the Convention. This would suggest that although there is good general awareness, few of those consulted are using the Convention regularly or see its relevance to their current work.

3.11 Key Points from this Section

- 19 out of 29 counties have completed LCAs of some sort five years after the publication by the DoEHLG of the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*.
- Some other counties have work planned or ongoing.
- It is quite difficult to obtain many of the LCAs in their full form, and access to the LCAs on the web is very limited.
- Roughly two-thirds of LCAs have been prepared by consultants (mainly landscape consultants), and one-third in-house (mainly by planners).
- The typical cost of an LCA prepared by consultants is in the range of €30,000 to €70,000.
- Mapping is generally schematic and not on an OS base.
- In only around a third of counties has extensive use been made of national GIS data sets.
- Only one LCA fully incorporated HLC into the assessment process.
- Only around a third of LCAs included stakeholder consultation as part of the process.
- Only around two-thirds of LCAs give a reliable and meaningful reflection of the principal variations in landscape character, and many confuse landscape character areas and types.
- There is considerable variation in the content and length of the LCAs.
- Less than half systematically consider forces for change affecting the landscape.
- There is significant variation in the way judgements about landscape change are presented.
- Less than a third of LCAs make a clear distinction between characterisation and judgements.
- Landscape policy proposals are often unrelated to the landscape character areas (despite advice to this effect in the DoEHLG Guidelines).
- No Landscape Conservation Areas (LCA2) have been designated, but a few are under consideration.
- Few LCAs have been used for landscape management, probably reflecting a general lack of expertise and resources for landscape/ countryside management within county councils.
- There is consistency in classification across county boundaries in less than a fifth of cases.
- Only one LCA has given full consideration to seascapes, and none has included townscape assessment.
- LCA has been applied for quite a wide range of purposes, but so far most relate to planning.
- Landscape capacity applications and land management applications are under-developed.
- LCAs are sometimes seen as too detailed for development planners and too superficial for development managers.
- SEA is potentially a key LCA application that merits further development by planning authorities.
- Only around a quarter of consultees have found the DoEHLG Guidelines to be helpful.
- Almost all felt that the DoEHLG Guidelines should be re-written.
- Only around a third of those involved in preparation or use of the LCAs had had any LCA training.
- More than two-thirds of consultees considered that LCA was value for money and had influenced decision-making.
- However half felt that it had not met expectations, for a variety of reasons.
- There is perceived need for a national landscape classification within which the local authority LCAs can sit.
- There is generally low awareness of the requirements of the European Landscape Convention.

4 USE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF LCA AT NATIONAL LEVEL

4.1 Approach

As well as examining the LCAs themselves and their preparation and use at local level, the study looked more widely at the effectiveness of LCA at national level through review of relevant documentation (from the web and as hard copy) and discussions with a range of national level interest groups. The organisations approached were:

Government departments and agencies dealing with landscape issues in a policy, regulatory and/or land management capacity namely:

- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources
- Fáilte Ireland
- Forest Service, Department of Agriculture and Food
- Coillte, Irish State Forestry Company
- Teagasc, Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority;

A selection of development interests in fields where landscape issues are likely to be of concern, namely:

- National Roads Authority
- Bord Na Mona
- Irish Wind Energy Association;

Non-governmental organisations:

- An Taisce
- Landscape Alliance Ireland;

Professional landscape and planning institutes:

- Irish Planning Institute
- Irish Landscape Institute;

Others:

- universities and selected consultants with wide LCA experience.

The approach was to identify a representative of each interest group, collate and review any policy or advisory material that the organisation may have prepared that touches on or deals with landscape issues, and then contact the organisation's representative by telephone for an informal discussion of landscape issues and LCA. We endeavoured to contact as many relevant organisations as possible within the time available, but inevitably there were others that we either did not have time to contact or could not reach.

A full list of those 21 individuals with whom discussions were held can be found in *Appendix 4*. The views expressed were, of course, those of the individuals concerned and do not necessarily represent the formal views of their employers.

The scope of the discussion varied according to the roles and responsibilities of the organisations concerned, but generally the discussion covered:

- Individual's remit in relation to landscape issues;
- Organisation's landscape policy, advice and resources;
- Awareness of DoEHLG draft *Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment*;
- Awareness and use of LCA work by county councils;
- Understanding of the potential of LCA/ LCA applications to help meet needs;
- Effectiveness of the Guidelines and of the LCAs themselves;
- Scope to improve LCA, and how improvements could be achieved;
- Scope to improve awareness and action on landscape issues generally; and
- Awareness of the European Landscape Convention and its requirements.

The findings of this national level review are summarised in *Table 4.1* and then examined further under headings of policy, advice and resources; awareness of LCA and LCA applications; effectiveness of LCA and the degree to which it influences decision-making; and finally scope for improvements and action on LCA and landscape issues generally, in the context of the European Landscape Convention.

4.2 Landscape Policy, Advice and Resources

Table 4.1 reveals that there are wide discrepancies in the degree to which government and other bodies recognise landscape issues in their policy and advice, and also significant variations in their access to landscape skills and resources.

Review of available documentation suggests that the planning side of the DoEHLG is aware of its landscape responsibilities, which are repeatedly referred to in planning guidelines and elsewhere. However on the heritage side (ie Heritage Policy and National Parks and Wildlife) it seems that landscape issues and interests in the wider countryside, are not formally acknowledged to the same degree. For example, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) website³¹ refers to Ireland's natural heritage as "an integral part of our national inheritance that forms part of our sense of identity, providing resources of social, educational, recreational and aesthetic value". However, when going on to set out the responsibilities of the NPWS, the website states that the Service "manages the Irish State's nature conservation responsibilities under National and European law and is charged with the conservation of a range of ecosystems and populations of flora and fauna in Ireland", ie there is no mention of landscape. Similarly, the Heritage Policy Section deals with gardens and designed landscapes, but not with wider issues of landscape or historic landscape character.

This may, in part, reflect a lack of clarity in the statutory definition of heritage. While it is evident from the Heritage Act, 1995, that heritage encompasses landscape and seascape (in relation to the role of the Heritage Council), the extent to which the heritage remit of the DoEHLG extends to include landscape seems to be much less clear.

³¹ See www.npws.ie/

Table 4.1: Use and effectiveness of LCA at national level

Organisation	Landscape Policy, Advice and Resources	Awareness of LCA and Its Applications	Effectiveness of LCA	Scope for Improvements and Action
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)	Landscape and townscape issues generally are referred to in a number of existing and forthcoming DoEHLG planning policies and guidelines ³² . There are two draft planning guidelines referring to LCA: Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment; and Guidelines on Wind Energy Development ³³ . In addition the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines ³⁴ refer to landscape, with passing reference to LCA in a footnote in an appendix. On the heritage side of the DoEHLG (within Heritage Policy and National Parks and Wildlife) there seems to be little if any published reference to landscape/landscape character issues in the wider countryside, reflecting a focus on historic environment and biodiversity designations. DoEHLG's Statement of Strategy 2005-2007 ³⁵ contains no reference to landscape (despite many references to environment and heritage)	Planning inspectors within DoEHLG are generally very aware of LCA. Their main interest lies in seeing how LCA information is processed into development plans, and ensuring that landscape policies are capable of implementation by planning authorities. Landscape is addressed primarily as a local rather than a national issue. Staff working on the heritage side (ie within Heritage Policy and National Parks and Wildlife) appear less aware of LCA, although they may deal with landscape issues in other ways. For example, the Heritage Policy Section is preparing a survey of gardens and designed landscapes, while the National Parks and Wildlife Service deals on a day-to-day basis with landscape issues in the course of managing National Parks	Hard to comment. Some perception among planning inspectors that LCAs show too many small landscape units that are not helpful for policy-making. Wind farm developers are believed to take account of LCA	Landscape/LCA should be reflected in regional planning guidelines, the new National Development Plan 2007-2013 and the Critical National Infrastructure Bill, currently in preparation. Interest in seeing more use made of Landscape Conservation Areas. Increasingly landscape is seen as an important tourism asset that needs to be protected. Need to update the Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines (pending results of this study). Coherent thinking on the implementation of the European Landscape Convention is also needed
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources	Only relevant policy or guidance documentation relates to impacts of marine aquaculture ³⁶ . This refers to LCA. No specialist landscape expertise	Generally little or no awareness of LCA and its applications among those we spoke to, who included those responsible for Integrated Coastal Zone Management, Foreshore Administration, Aquaculture Licensing and Mining	Insufficient experience to comment	Insufficient experience to comment

³² Including the NSS (2002) and draft Development Plan Guidelines and draft Development Management Guidelines, currently in preparation.

³³ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2003) *Wind Energy Development: Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin. Final version due for publication in early 2006.

³⁴ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2005) *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin.

³⁵ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2005) *Statement of Strategy 2005-2007*, Government of Ireland, Dublin.

³⁶ Environmental Resources Management (2001) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Marine Aquaculture*, Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, Dublin.

Organisation	Landscape Policy, Advice and Resources	Awareness of LCA and Its Applications	Effectiveness of LCA	Scope for Improvements and Action
Fáilte Ireland	Nothing as such but growing recognition of landscape as a tourism asset. 2004 Visitor Attitudes Survey ³⁷ shows that for visitors from outside Britain and Ireland, scenery is the single most important reason for their visit, culture/history and unspoilt environment coming just behind.	Fáilte Ireland staff responsible for planning consultations are aware of LCA and had hoped it would help in their work. Regional tourism authorities are much less aware	LCA started well but promised more than it has delivered. Main issue is lack of uniformity throughout the country, which has tended to discredit the system. That said, Fáilte Ireland has a great need for LCA outputs, not only for use in planning casework, but also, perhaps more importantly, as marketing intelligence to help differentiate and promote the more subtle, pastoral landscapes	Local authorities are unlikely to be able to deliver landscape information at an appropriate scale for marketing use by Fáilte Ireland. Scale of Northern Ireland LCA is more useful, especially for international marketing. In addition, Fáilte Ireland is commissioning a contract on Scenic Landscapes, to create a GIS database of designated scenic landscapes and explore the potential for introduction of a standardised designation system
Forest Service, Department of Agriculture and Food	Long awareness of landscape issues, which are given considerable attention in the National Forest Standard ³⁸ and especially in the Forestry and Landscape Guidelines ³⁹ . In-house landscape architect. Most foresters receive landscape training (focuses on visual aspects)	Very aware. Use the LCAs together with the National Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes ⁴⁰ and in-house landscape sensitivity mapping (based on factors such as elevation) to help appraise applications for grant aid	Do not find the county LCAs very helpful because they are hard to get hold of, focus on character and do not give enough information on landscape importance. In addition, different consultants use different approaches, the mapping is often poor, and the results do not match up across county boundaries. Many assessments rely on CORINE land cover mapping, the resolution of which is poor	DEHLG needs to demonstrate stronger commitment on landscape issues. Main requirement is for a proper, evaluative, national inventory of landscapes that is standardised across the country. On a practical level, better use should be made of soils data from Teagasc and orthophotos from the Ordnance Survey. Outputs should all be on GIS. Ideally there should also be hard copy large-scale mapping (1:50,000 at least) for use in more detailed work
Coillte, Irish State Forestry Company	In-house forest design policy ⁴¹ and forest restructuring guidelines take landscape into account. All foresters have received landscape training	Some awareness – know the LCAs have been done but have not seen or used outputs. Nonetheless, forest design approaches reflect landscape character and sensitivity – use same landscape sensitivity mapping as Forest Service (1500 landscape units across the land holding) and apply special approaches to sensitive landscapes	Insufficient experience to comment	Nationally there is no real awareness of landscape issues. Therefore key needs are for promotion of and education in landscape issues generally, aimed at opinion-makers (senior management in government and local authorities)

³⁷ www.fair.ie/visitor_attitudes

³⁸ Forest Service and Department of the Marine and Natural Resources (2000) *Irish National Forest Standard*, Forest Service and Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, Johnstown Castle Estate.

³⁹ Forest Service and Department of the Marine and Natural Resources (2000) *Forestry and the Landscape Guidelines*, Forest Service and Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, Johnstown Castle Estate.

⁴⁰ An Foras Forbartha (1977) *Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes in Ireland*, An Foras Forbartha, Dublin.

⁴¹ www.coillte.ie/managing_our_forests/policies_plans/des.htm

Organisation	Landscape Policy, Advice and Resources	Awareness of LCA and Its Applications	Effectiveness of LCA	Scope for Improvements and Action
Teagasc, Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority	No reference to landscape in policy material on web, which tends to interpret heritage as biodiversity and historic environment, but not landscape. No specialist landscape expertise in-house. However some work has been undertaken to put a value on the farm landscape and on the benefits of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) for landscape quality ⁴² . This recommends the development of more regional-specific REPS guidelines based on landscape character types	Notwithstanding the research study mentioned left, there appears to be little or no awareness of LCA. Teagasc's countryside management specialist is not aware of Teagasc's (several hundred) advisers using the existing county LCAs in their work. Landscape is not specifically considered in the preparation of REPS farm plans, and does not determine how land is managed	Insufficient experience to comment	Insufficient experience to comment
National Roads Authority	Two key documents refer to landscape. The first is guidance on EIA of national road schemes ⁴³ and the second a draft guide to landscape treatments for national road schemes ⁴⁴ . NRA has no specialist landscape expertise	Seemingly very little awareness of LCA. Neither of the documents mentioned left appears to make any mention of LCA. The draft guide to landscape treatments for national road schemes refers to the European Landscape Convention in several places, without apparently recognising that LCA is a key component of the Convention. The document focuses mainly on landscape treatments to mitigate biodiversity impacts	Insufficient experience to comment	Insufficient experience to comment
Bord Na Mona	According to policy on the web, Bord Na Mona has responsibility for creation of future landscapes on former peatlands, and may also prepare planning applications for developments such as wind farms	Not really familiar with LCA. Those responsible for the company's landholding have not used LCA. Reasons are long timescale for creation of future landscapes and the fact that most are not very visible or accessible	Insufficient experience to comment	Insufficient experience to comment

⁴² www.teagasc.ie/publications/2004/20041103/paper02.htm

⁴³ National Roads Authority (2004) *Environmental Impact Assessment of National Road Schemes – A Practical Guide*, National Roads Authority, Dublin.

⁴⁴ National Roads Authority (unpublished draft) *A Guide to Landscape Treatments for National Road Schemes in Ireland*, National Roads Authority, Dublin.

Organisation	Landscape Policy, Advice and Resources	Awareness of LCA and Its Applications	Effectiveness of LCA	Scope for Improvements and Action
Irish Wind Energy Association	The IWEA website ⁴⁵ presents wind energy best practice guidelines and suggested policy wording on wind energy for inclusion in County Development Plans. These documents are undated, but it is interesting to note that both refer to visual impact and make no reference at all to landscape impact	IWEA council member who works for a wind farm developer and operator had no knowledge of LCA and confirmed that EIAs generally focus on visual not landscape impacts. However, any County Development Plan policies on wind farms in the landscape would be taken into account	Insufficient experience to comment	Insufficient experience to comment
An Taisce	An Taisce does not prepare policies of its own but focuses on ensuring implementation of national policy. It submits comments on guidelines produced by DoEHLG and is a prescribed authority ie statutory consultee on County Development Plans and planning applications in areas of special amenity (see <i>Section 2.2</i> above). It is the only NGO that has this function, but has almost no resources with which to do the work. Extensive experience of landscape issues	Very aware. Promoting measures to implement the European Landscape Convention	LCAs undertaken to date are generally weak, superficial and vague. Local authorities are almost entirely negligent in taking landscape issues into account in development management and only a limited number of major planning applications/ EIAs refer to LCA. Local authority staff have little understanding of landscape issues and there is no political will to address them because of vested landowner interests. There is little or no evidence of use of LCA in national or regional spatial planning, forestry or agri-environment. Forest Service landscape vetting of grant aid applications is ineffective – major landscape impacts from new forestry are still ongoing. There are already clear signs that tourism in the west of Ireland is in decline because key asset – landscape – has been spoilt. An Taisce considers that landscape assessment and protection in Ireland is among the worst in Europe, and is currently preparing a complaint to the Council of Europe re non-implementation of European Landscape Convention	A strong lead on landscape issues is needed from DoEHLG. DoEHLG is responsible for implementation of the European Landscape Convention and major, multi-strand action is required to ensure implementation. DoEHLG should issue proper LCA Guidelines, ensure designation of Landscape Conservation Areas, and provide adequate resources for local authorities and Heritage Council to address landscape issues in development planning and development management

⁴⁵ www.iwea.com/publications/

Organisation	Landscape Policy, Advice and Resources	Awareness of LCA and Its Applications	Effectiveness of LCA	Scope for Improvements and Action
Landscape Alliance Ireland	No policy as such but Alliance is run by landscape professionals, objective being to promote landscape quality in Ireland through fora, networking, submissions to government and research	Very aware of the principles but detailed involvement more limited	LCA helps to provide language and raise awareness, but no evidence that it has made a difference on ground. Currently very basic and woolly, LCA has not yet been taken far enough. It is seen simply as an add-on to development plans. There is a risk that people will be turned away by this ineffectiveness	Changed mindset among decision-makers is required if landscape is to be taken seriously. Landscape Alliance Ireland view is that community should be dictating future shape and character of the landscape. This means emphasis on workshops and training at local level, better resourcing within local authorities and preparation of character 'pattern books' for each local area
Irish Planning Institute	No formal policy or advice as such to members on LCA.; not currently high on agenda. No training offered at present, but IPI is a major CPD provider and would organise training if final LCA Guidelines were put in place	Most planners in local authorities have some awareness	Limited impact at present but considerable potential. Strength of LCA is as a rationale/platform for review of landscape-related policies. Weakness is terminology, which is difficult and confusing	Planners need DoEHLG to recommend a common approach, timescale and methodology that is simple, easy to understand and meaningful to the public
Irish Landscape Institute	No formal policy or advice as such to members on LCA. ILI involved in some LCA seminars when Guidelines first proposed	Most members are aware of LCA but not all will have direct experience of preparing or using LCAs. It is used to some degree in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and in landscape planning studies. There is significant criticism of DoEHLG Guidelines within the profession	Limited impact at present. LCAs vary enormously and may result in vague/loose policies. In-house work often lacks rigour. LCA needs to be integrated into the whole development plan to inform capacity for change. Landscape sensitivity varies according to the type of development under consideration and should not be applied in a general (ie blanket) way. Landscape is a big resource for most counties but does not have a profile	Landscape must become a mainstream issue within DoEHLG and elsewhere but needs careful marketing so not seen as too complex. It is a useful mechanism for dealing with development issues and engaging the public. New Guidelines presenting a rational approach to landscape issues would be helpful. Would welcome a strategic assessment at national level to provide context for local assessments. Education for public and councillors is critical
University College Dublin School of Archaeology	No policy as such, but provider of research on historic landscape characterisation (HLC) and archaeological landscapes in Ireland	Good awareness, especially of HLC and its relationship to LCA. LCA considered meaningless without HLC input	DoEHLG Guidelines are unhelpful and half-hearted. This has created a climate of scepticism to LCA. Potential of LCA remains untapped	Promote HLC as an input to LCA, using townland scale assessment at county level, land parcel scale assessment in areas with particular issues. In parallel with characterisation, designations (both landscape and historic landscape) are essential in current political climate

Organisation	Landscape Policy, Advice and Resources	Awareness of LCA and Its Applications	Effectiveness of LCA	Scope for Improvements and Action
CAAS (Environmental Services) Ltd	No policy as such, but provider of LCA and landscape and visual impact assessment	Excellent	LCA not well known or regarded, especially by councillors who would like to limit it. DoEHLG Guidelines are flawed because they do not differentiate between characterisation and judgements. Sensitivity is not universal but depends on the type of change envisaged	Guidelines should be re-written, setting out a standard way to characterise the landscape, stopping at that. Should be complemented by proactive, visionary planning for future change and development. A standardised regional or national approach should be developed, to counter the problem of adverse reaction to LCA at county level from councillors
MosArt	No policy as such, but provider of LCA and landscape research in relation to forestry and wind energy. Also widely involved in landscape and visual impact assessment and in landscape training for foresters at University College Dublin. However, note that LCA does not seem to be covered in landscape degree courses at University College Dublin	Excellent	Local authorities are confused and need more guidance and training. Guidelines need to be re-written. Would benefit from illustrations and case studies and separation of characterisation and making judgements. Weakest part of Guidelines is appendices. Approaches to determining sensitivity are too formulaic. In EIA little notice is taken of LCA or indeed of landscape impacts as opposed to visual eg roads projects	Updating of Guidelines to include a standard methodology and national landscape typology. National conference to increase awareness of LCA. Better use of Ireland's huge GIS resource. Better training

Amongst other state bodies, landscape is recognised to varying degrees. There is strong recognition of landscape within Fáilte Ireland, the Forest Service and Coillte; moderate recognition within the National Roads Authority (NRA); and more limited recognition within the DCMNR, Teagasc and Bord Na Mona. Although the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment was not among the consultees (because we could identify no-one with responsibility for landscape), review of its *Sustainable Development Strategy*⁴⁶ revealed no mention of landscape.

Private development interests such as the Irish Wind Energy Association also appear to pay relatively scant regard to landscape, perhaps surprisingly given that DoEHLG has prepared draft *Guidelines on Wind Energy Development* that refer to Landscape. The association's principal interest appears to be in visual issues despite the fact that the draft wind energy guidelines refer to the impacts on different landscape types.

Landscape – but not necessarily LCA – is generally quite high up the agenda with landscape NGOs, the Landscape Institute and consultants. Although these bodies tend not to have formal policy themselves, they do offer sources of landscape expertise. This is important because the majority of state bodies and development interests – with the exception of the Forest Service – have no access to in-house landscape expertise or training. There do not appear to be any courses presently on offer from either professional institutes or universities that cover LCA.

4.3 Awareness of LCA and LCA Applications

Awareness of LCA and LCA applications varies from good to nil. Among DoEHLG officers there is generally good awareness, at least on the planning side (as might be expected). However, there is probably more limited understanding of the range of LCA applications, and it seems that LCA is regarded more as a local rather than a national issue. There is much lower awareness of LCA within DCMNR, except among those dealing with marine aquaculture. Although there is some appreciation that seascape assessment may be important and relevant in future, for example in coastal zone management and in the assessment of offshore wind energy projects, to date the concept is not used or applied at all.

In the tourism field, some officers at Fáilte Ireland are very aware of and have had high expectations of LCA, expecting it to be of use in planning consultations and in marketing. At regional level, within the regional tourism authorities, there is a lower level of awareness, but also a growing recognition that Ireland's high quality scenic landscapes are essential to the sector's resource base. Interestingly, a similar recognition is apparent in rural development circles, with the Irish LEADER Support Unit placing a strong emphasis on landscape and landscape character in its newsletters and projects⁴⁷.

While Forest Service staff appear very aware of LCA, this awareness does not seem to extend very far within Coillte or Teagasc. In the case of Teagasc it seems that LCA is not yet used by its many farm advisers within the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS), although a recent research study recommended that REPS should embrace landscape character concepts⁴⁸. The same low awareness apparently also applies to the NRA (which, despite obviously being aware of the European Landscape Convention and its requirements, makes no mention of LCA within its guidance documents) and to other development interests (Bord Na Mona and the Irish Wind Energy Association). This generally low awareness probably reflects the fact that county LCA coverage is still incomplete and relatively difficult to access – it is not a consistent, nationally available dataset.

Unsurprisingly, much higher levels of awareness are found within the landscape NGOs, professional institutes and consultants – although detailed knowledge of LCA and its applications is still limited in many cases, primarily due to lack of day-to-day contact and experience.

⁴⁶ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2003) *Sustainable Development Strategy 2003-2005*, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Dublin.

⁴⁷ See www.islu.ie/

⁴⁸ See www.teagasc.ie/publications/2004/20041103/paper02.htm

4.4 Effectiveness of LCA

There are very strong – and usually negative – views on the effectiveness of LCA from many of those who feel qualified to comment. DoEHLG staff are generally neutral (awaiting the findings of this study) but consider that wind farm developers do take account of LCA as a result of the draft *Guidelines for Wind Energy Development* (note that contact with the Irish Wind Energy Association does not confirm this view). Fáilte Ireland considers LCA to be ineffective due to lack of uniformity throughout the country, which has tended to discredit the system. In addition, it considers that the scale and presentation of county council LCAs is not useful for marketing purposes. The Forest Service likewise is very frustrated with the incompleteness and inconsistency of county LCAs and the generally poor quality of mapping that they provide. National consistency in the identification of valued landscapes is seen as being particularly important.

The NGOs, especially An Taisce, are even more forceful in their criticism, referring to LCA as weak, superficial and vague. The organisation takes the view that many local authorities pay lip-service only to landscape issues, and that LCA is largely ignored in decision-making even on major developments in the countryside. It quotes as an example a recent wind farm proposal in Glencar in County Leitrim where an appeal to An Bord Pleanála to overturn planning consent has failed, despite clear indications in the LCA and County Development Plan that a wind farm would be unacceptable in this location for landscape reasons⁴⁹. An Taisce believes that the problem relates partly to lack of landscape expertise within local authorities and partly to lack of political will among councillors. Furthermore, An Taisce notes that LCA has had little or no influence on national or regional spatial planning⁵⁰, forestry, agri-environment or tourism, and that Ireland's record on landscape assessment and protection is among the worst in Europe. All these comments should carry considerable weight, as An Taisce is a prescribed authority (statutory consultee) for development plans and for areas of special amenity, under Articles 13 and 28 respectively of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 and hence has a unique overview of the position relating to development in the landscape.

The Landscape Alliance Ireland, the Irish Planning Institute and the Irish Landscape Institute representatives have more measured views on effectiveness, indicating that LCA has considerable potential but has simply not been taken far enough yet. They are, however concerned about weaknesses in the existing DoEHLG Guidelines and in existing LCA practice, which they fear are turning people away from LCA. Key concerns relate to lack of effective stakeholder involvement, terminology, and lack of rigour. University staff and consultants are more forthright, especially in their criticism of the Guidelines, which they believe have created a “climate of scepticism” towards LCA – especially because they do not distinguish clearly between characterisation and making judgements, and seem to imply blanket constraint on development.

4.5 Scope for Improvements and Action

Officers at the DoEHLG are clearly aware that landscape and LCA need to be given a higher profile in initiatives such as regional planning guidelines, the new National Development Plan 2007-2013 and the Critical National Infrastructure Bill that is currently being drafted, although no indication was given of how this should be achieved. There is also interest in seeing more use made of the Landscape Conservation Area provisions of Section 104 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, which as we saw in *Section 3.7*, have hardly been used at all. There is a recognition that the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* need to be thoroughly reviewed (pending the results of this study). Coherent thinking on implementation of the European Landscape Convention is also required – something that An Taisce argues very forcefully for.

⁴⁹ The inspector's report on this case is not available yet, but examination of a number of recent significant decisions from the An Bord Pleanála website (on overhead lines, a wind farm and a major residential development) reveals that in two out of three cases, the Inspector did refer to the LCA, but that in each case the developments were permitted. This is inconclusive but tends to support the view expressed by An Taisce.

⁵⁰ To check this point, we reviewed a small sample of three sets of regional planning guidelines and found little or no reference to landscape, and none to LCA.

Officers of other state bodies commenting on the scope for improvements and action (Fáilte Ireland and the Forest Service) consider that local authorities are unlikely ever to be able to deliver the type of LCA coverage that they require in their day-to-day work. In the case of Fáilte Ireland, a consistent national LCA of similar scale to that which exists in Northern Ireland (see *Section 5*) would be welcomed. There is also interest, within Fáilte Ireland, in the development of a standardised system for designation of scenic landscapes across Ireland. In the case of the Forest Service there is a particular interest in a national overview of landscape importance and value, to update and replace the An Foras Forbartha *Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes in Ireland*⁵¹, as well as in more detailed, reliable characterisation accompanied by large-scale mapping.

Certain other organisations – notably Coillte, Landscape Alliance Ireland and the Irish Landscape Institute – see a very strong need to raise awareness of landscape issues among decision-makers and opinion-formers (senior management in government and local authorities), paralleled by workshops and training at local level for members of the public and especially for councillors. In addition, there is a view that landscape should be a key component within environmental education, and should be promoted via the mass media eg through television series on landscape understanding and interpretation. This is an area in which the Heritage Council has already begun to work, through its Heritage in Schools Scheme⁵².

Representatives of a number of organisations (An Taisce, Irish Planning Institute, Irish Landscape Institute) particularly stress the need for DoEHLG to give a much stronger lead on landscape issues than in the past. Specific actions recommended here include revision and formal issue of the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* to present a simple, meaningful, common approach to LCA; designation of Landscape Conservation Areas; adequate resourcing for local authorities and the Heritage Council on landscape issues; and preparation of a strategic LCA at national or regional level.

Those involved in LCA at a practical level (universities and consultants) point to the need to promote HLC as an essential input to LCA; the need to update the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* to include a standard method and a national typology or classification; and the need to make better use of Ireland's huge GIS resource. Like the organisations mentioned above, there is a very clear view among these consultees that a regional or national LCA for Ireland should be developed.

⁵¹ An Foras Forbartha (1977) *Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes in Ireland*, An Foras Forbartha, Dublin.

⁵² See www.heritagecouncil.ie/education/index.html

4.6 Key Points from this Section

- There are wide discrepancies in the degree to which relevant government bodies, development interests and others recognise landscape issues in their policies and advice.
- The planning side of DoEHLG, Fáilte Ireland, the Forest Service and Coillte all recognise landscape to varying degrees within their policies and advice.
- There is less recognition of landscape issues in the policies and advice of the heritage side of the DoEHLG, of the DCMNR, the NRA and Teagasc, and surprisingly little in the Irish Wind Energy Association, where the principal focus seems to be on visual as opposed to landscape issues.
- Most government bodies and development interests have no in-house landscape skills or expertise, the only exception being the Forest Service.
- There are currently no courses on offer from universities or professional institutes in Ireland that cover LCA, hence no training opportunities.
- Awareness of LCA varies from one body to another, planners within DoEHLG, Fáilte Ireland and the Forest Service being the most aware.
- However many other potential users of LCA, such as farm advisers within Teagasc, are wholly unfamiliar with it.
- Views on the effectiveness of LCA are generally negative.
- The principal problems mentioned are incomplete coverage, inconsistency and inappropriate scale (too detailed or too general, depending on respondent).
- Some, especially An Taisce, highlight a lack of political will to take action on landscape issues.
- An Taisce also considers that LCA is seriously under-utilised in national and regional spatial planning, forestry, agri-environment and tourism.
- Several consultees take the view that LCA has potential but has been undermined by poor existing Guidelines and practice, which they fear are turning people away from landscape.
- DoEHLG officers are aware that action is needed to integrate landscape within new statute, plans and guidelines, but have taken limited action yet.
- Most consultees would like the DoEHLG to take a much stronger lead on landscape issues.
- A consistent national LCA at a broader scale than the county LCAs is required to meet the needs of national users such as Fáilte Ireland and the Forest Service.
- Awareness raising and education in LCA and landscape issues generally is seen as essential.
- NGOs and professional institutes would like to see new Guidelines, creation of Landscape Conservation Areas and adequate landscape resourcing for local authorities and the Heritage Council.
- There is also a view, in some quarters at least, that HLC should be promoted as an essential input to LCA.

5 EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE IN LCA

5.1 Approach

This section gives an overview of the extent and way in which LCA has been developed in other parts of Europe, and of how it is being used, in an effort to place the Irish experience in context. The overview is based on the consultants' experience of and involvement in LCA in the various parts of the UK and on desk study of materials describing recent LCA practice throughout Europe, notably the recently published reports of the EU Accompanying Measures Project *European Landscape Character Assessment Initiative (ELCAI)*^{53,54}. This is the main source of information unless otherwise indicated. Web references to further information are also provided, where available.

The section begins by describing, very briefly, the scope of the ELCAI project. It then presents, for ten western European countries, where the LCA system is relatively well documented, a brief description of any national LCA system;

details of regional and/or local LCA systems if known; and an indication of the types of LCA applications in that country if known. This is followed by comments and discussion of possible lessons for the development and application of LCA in Ireland.

5.2 The ELCAI Project, 2005

The overall objective of the ELCAI project was to review the state-of-the-art of LCA techniques among the 14 participating countries (which included Ireland) and to analyse the role of policies and stakeholders at various levels. The project reports present national LCA case studies and explore the potential to develop a European Landscape Typology and Map (LANMAP2) that would be consistent, where possible, with national LCAs.

The ELCAI report indicates that nearly all western and indeed many eastern European countries have LCA systems of some sort. Eleven out of the 14 countries that participated in ELCAI were deemed to have national landscape classifications and/or typologies. The exceptions were Ireland, France and Denmark, although in fact both France and Denmark have now begun work towards the establishment of national landscape classifications. There appears to be no strong correlation between the existence of a national landscape classification and whether or not a country has ratified the European Landscape Convention – Germany and Spain and the UK standing out as countries that have relatively well-developed LCA systems but have not yet ratified the Convention.

⁵³ Perez-Soba, M and Wascher, D M (eds) (2005) *Landscape Character Areas: Places for building a sustainable Europe*, ELCAI Policy Brochure, Landscape Europe, Wageningen

⁵⁴ Wascher, D M (ed) (2005) *European Landscape Character Areas: Typologies, Cartography and Indicators for the Assessment of Sustainable Landscape*, ELCAI Final Project Report, Landscape Europe, Wageningen.

5.3 LCA in Other Western European Countries

Table 5.1: Summary of LCA systems in other western European Countries

Austria:

In 1996 a national research programme on Austria's cultural landscapes was launched by the Ministry for Education, Science and Culture⁵⁵. The aim was to help policy- and decision-makers measure the performance of their policies on sustainable development. It was recognised at an early stage that a consistent spatial reference system was needed, and this took the form of a hierarchical cultural landscape classification focusing primarily on agricultural landscapes, and based on a mixture of biophysical and cultural criteria. A combination of field-based mapping and numerical analysis was used to define 47 cultural landscape types at the highest level, and 16,000 individual landscape units at the lowest level. The types reflect the major differences in land form and landscape structure.

A sample of 1x1km squares was subject to detailed field survey and has been used for monitoring of landscape change, the 47 cultural landscape types forming the reporting framework. Further research is now concentrating on the relationship between landscape character, agricultural land use, and different types of farm management regime, with a view to identifying the driving forces behind landscape change. The results are to be fed into evaluation of the Austrian agri-environment programme to facilitate reporting to the European Commission. In addition, the LCA is being used to identify those cultural landscapes considered to be of highest value and to assess their vulnerability to change, to inform a national strategy on landscape conservation. This is considered to be particularly important because the direct responsibility for conservation lies mainly at the regional level.

Belgium:

There is a recent (post 2000) programme to establish a landscape typology for Belgium as a whole at a scale of 1:1,000,000 based on land cover, heterogeneity and relief. Each km² has been allocated to one of 48 landscape types. Landscape regions have then been formed as unique combinations of the types. The regions are adjusted for visible landscape borders and characteristics using cluster groups and satellite images. The landscape regions are then aggregated into 198 landscape units that comprise 67 Landscape Character Areas. Further work will refine the visual properties and add the cultural and historical properties of the landscape.

The system aims to provide a national framework for landscape in Belgium as a whole. As a federal state with three separate regions each with different policy and legislation responsible for landscape management, environmental and spatial planning, data are collected, treated and used differently and there is a need for better coordination. In Flanders Region, earlier work has studied traditional landscapes by consideration of geophysical and cultural (but not visual) aspects of the landscape, while in Walloon Region the focus has been on morphology and visual landscape properties, but not on historic. Brussels Region has had no landscape studies.

⁵⁵ Wrška, T (2004) 'Contemporary agricultural landscape assessment – an Austrian experience' in *Proceedings of the Cardiff European Landscape Conference 2003*, Countryside Council for Wales, Cardiff.

England:

In England a national LCA exists in the form of the Countryside Agency's Character of England map. This defines 159 Countryside Character Areas (CCAs) and is accompanied by 1:250,000 maps and detailed descriptions of the character and pressures for change within each area. The descriptions are available on the web as well as in published form⁵⁶. The CCAs are each unique and geographically-specific. They are being developed as a framework for national monitoring of change in countryside character and countryside quality⁵⁷, and most recently have been used to provide the targeting framework for all measures (ie biodiversity and historic as well as landscape) within England's new agri-environment scheme, Environmental Stewardship. They have also been used to help market regional farm produce, as part of a programme called Eat the View.

At local authority level within England, however, there is no full LCA coverage. The Countryside Agency encourages local authorities to prepare LCAs within the framework of the CCAs, but current coverage is of variable age and quality, and extends to only 80-90% of England. There is no fixed timetable for completion. However, there is national guidance on LCA, and a practitioners' network funded by the Agency offers a wide range of on-line resources and a central register of local authority assessments⁵⁸. The Countryside Agency encourages planning authorities to prepare criteria-based landscape policies that are founded on character, by prior assessment of the specific ability of each landscape to accommodate development and change. A parallel programme of county-level HLC is sponsored by English Heritage and is intended to inform preparation of LCAs and landscape policies. There will shortly be full HLC coverage for all counties in England⁵⁹.

Germany:

In 2004, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation developed a standardised classification of German landscapes to provide consistent coverage throughout the country and help define conservation value. The work draws upon an earlier German landscape classification that was based on overlay mapping of soils and land cover, information on cultural and historical development, and information on landscape structure. The new landscape classification was based on 'natural boundaries' and on current land cover. The natural boundaries were identified from literature review while land cover data came from CORINE. Each landscape was assigned a particular type, and a total of 855 landscapes (including 59 urban landscapes) of 24 types within six geographical regions was identified for the country. The assessment went on to identify landscapes of significant conservation value by considering the distribution of nature reserves and the degree of fragmentation. For each landscape all relevant threats were also recorded.

At regional level within some German states such as Brandenburg and Saxony, there is also more detailed mapping and description of natural regions, based on biophysical, land use and visual factors and intended mainly for use in spatial planning. At this level additional information on historical and cultural landscapes and on strategies for landscape conservation and management is generally added.

⁵⁶ www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/index.asp

⁵⁷ www.cqc.org.uk/

⁵⁸ www.landscapecharacter.org.uk/

⁵⁹ www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1293

Northern Ireland:

In Northern Ireland (NI), the Environment and Heritage Service began an NI-wide LCA in 1997. It was completed and published in 2000 and identifies 130 unique landscape character areas across the region. Detailed descriptions of regional landscapes and individual character areas are provided in 26 LCA reports organised by local government district. These describe landscape character, landscape qualities and features and provide guidance on accommodating development and other land use change. The reports identify not only landscape character areas but also identify and map at 1:50,000 Areas of Scenic Quality and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the latter defined as a separate exercise), distinctive landscape settings to settlements, key views, landmarks, prominent ridges and degraded landscapes – hence providing a range of information to inform landscape policy and development control. They are regularly used by areas planners in preparation of Area Plans, in development control and as a reference source at planning inquiries.

The classification and description is consistent across NI because the assessment was undertaken as a single exercise. The level of detail is intermediate between that of the Character of England map and the Scottish LCAs. The descriptions (but not the detailed mapping for each of the 26 districts) are available internally on GIS and externally on the web⁶⁰, and have been further developed by the addition of detailed information on biodiversity and earth science for each landscape character area, hence providing a valuable framework and resource for management of natural heritage generally within Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, this framework does not yet contain any detailed information on cultural or historic landscapes as there is no HLC for Northern Ireland.

Norway:

In Norway, there is a national landscape mapping system, developed centrally by the Norwegian Institute for Land Inventory (NIJOS). This is GIS-based, and was developed by 'top down' hierarchical subdivision using relevant national datasets. Interactions between different landscape components form the basis for subdivision and description of landscape character. The system defines ten agricultural regions or 'farmscapes' and 45 landscape regions at national level; 444 sub-regions at regional/county level; and a much larger number of landscape areas at municipality level. Descriptions of the 444 sub-regions – perhaps the most important units within the system – were completed in 2002. The regions and sub-regions are effectively unique character areas with geographic place names. At all three levels a systematic description of landscape covers land form, geology, water and waterways, vegetation patterns, agricultural areas and buildings.

More detailed coverage is also being prepared in response to requests from the municipalities, who use the mapping for municipal and county planning and for a variety of land and coastal management purposes. At national level, the ten agricultural regions are being used as a reporting framework within which to monitor change in agricultural landscapes, and to aid policy development, allowing socio-economic and landscape data to be linked.

⁶⁰ www.ehsni.gov.uk/natural/country/country_landscape.shtml

Portugal:

In 1999, the government launched a study, *Landscape Identification and Characterisation in Portugal*, covering the whole country⁶¹. The aim of this study was to raise awareness and understanding of the national landscape, its variety, contrasts and common features. But most importantly, the study aimed to develop a product that could be used as a basis for spatial planning and sectoral integration in future, at various scales. The lack of integration of policies across different sectors was seen as one of the key factors preventing an effective approach to landscape issues.

The study applied a consistent approach to the whole country, using the same national data sets and mapping landscape character at 1:250,000 scale, identifying broad areas of unique character and defining their boundaries. The character, trends and problems of the each of the units identified were carefully characterised, in order to create a database for future landscape management. The classification is also intended to make it possible to monitor future landscape changes. It has already informed the Portuguese national agri-environment scheme, which has been drawn up largely with the aim of conserving the quality of traditional landscapes. Government is currently considering how the assessment is going to be developed further at local scale. More detailed LCA work within the above framework is also being undertaken in relation to the management of natural parks, and in physical planning in certain regions such as Alentejo, where stakeholder involvement is a key component.

Scotland:

A national programme of LCA was initiated by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in 1994. The principal programme outputs, prepared between 1994 and 1999, were 30 LCA reports providing complete coverage of Scotland. Data from the studies are also recorded in a national database as part of SNH's computerised Geographical Information System (GIS). The study reports, GIS mapping and database are intended as tools to assist in appropriate decision-making for managing landscape change.

The programme provides a key tool for SNH staff to use in fulfilling SNH's landscape duties and remit; has achieved formal recognition in policy and advice from central government; has been widely used for a host of different applications. It was the first full-coverage, detailed LCA programme to be completed in Europe; involved all local authorities and other partners across Scotland; and provides an excellent platform from which to implement the European Landscape Convention. A special strength is the degree to which the LCA programme outputs are recognised and used by planners for development planning and development control throughout Scotland. In particular, many successful landscape development capacity studies have been completed, and the results have fed into development plan policy⁶².

An overview study undertaken in 2003⁶³ found that the programme had met the majority of its objectives, providing an inventory of Scotland's landscapes, information for development control and development planning, and involvement of SNH's partners. However, it also found that objectives relating to wider landscape awareness consistent identification of forces for change, and input to national policy on landscape issues had been less fully met. This was considered to be due mainly to the lack of national/ regional landscape framework that is easily understood by policy-makers and the public. SNH is now planning to undertake work to define broad national/ regional character areas (rather than types), as these are considered to be most useful for communication purposes.

⁶¹ Gyuro, E K and Pinto-Correia, T (2002) 'A country's landscape: how to assess and record it and why' experience' in *Proceedings of the Cardiff European Landscape Conference 2003*, Countryside Council for Wales, Cardiff.

⁶² www.snh.org.uk/www/sharinggoodpractice/landscape.asp

⁶³ Julie Martin Associates and University of Sheffield (2003), *Overview of Scotland's National Programme of Landscape Character Assessment*, report to Scottish Natural Heritage.

Spain:

In 1998, the Spanish Environment Ministry commissioned the University of Madrid to undertake a project entitled *Characterisation and Identification of Spain's Landscapes*. The work was undertaken at a scale of 1:200,000 and the output is a hierarchical assessment of 1,200-odd national landscape units, 116 landscape types, and associations of types. Each landscape unit reflects the particular combination of natural and cultural landscape characteristics that occurs in that area, and is described in terms of structure, dynamics, perception, values and cultural considerations. The types have been created by grouping together similar landscape units, and in turn have been grouped into associations of types that share similar topography, climate and land use. Preparation of the LCA has involved detailed mapping and GIS work, complemented by field work to verify the boundaries of the landscape units and to input information on visual character.

The assessment work is now being taken further in some Spanish regions, for example Valencia, to inform spatial planning, counter the effects of intensive tourism development, and help implement the European Landscape Convention.

Wales:

In Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) has established the LANDMAP information system⁶⁴. This is based on creating a pool of landscape information stored in a GIS. The information is compiled at county level (generally by consultants) but is organised and validated at national level by CCW to provide a national consistent dataset. The system both classifies and evaluates landscape resources in a hierarchical way. It is a 'top down' exercise conducted by 'aspect specialists' in earth science, biodiversity, visual and sensory, history and archaeology, and culture. It does not necessarily produce an integrated landscape characterisation as such – this is optional.

A key characteristic of the LANDMAP approach is that the information and outputs are a shared resource for use by local authorities and a wide range of government department and agencies. The programme has been in development since 1994 and has recently been completed. It is not currently available on the web.

5.4 Comments and Possible Lessons for LCA in Ireland

Clearly, there is a wealth of experience in LCA in other parts of Europe and this should be a very valuable resource for further development and improvement of LCA in Ireland. While it is not possible within the scope of this report to analyse the European experience in great detail, there are obvious issues and pointers in a number of areas.

- It is evident, first of all, that nearly all European countries have some sort of national LCA system. In most cases 'landscape' embraces the natural, cultural and visual, often with a strong focus on the farmed landscapes, developed over many centuries, which are very characteristic of Europe. Many countries also recognise the distinction between unique landscape character areas and generic landscape character types. There appears to be a shared understanding of what LCA means.
- Reasons for introducing a national LCA system vary but in many cases it is aimed at policy integration; monitoring of the effectiveness of policies and expenditure; and the desire to have a shared spatial framework for a range of planning, economic and land use data. The need for a consistent approach to land use planning and land management is also an important consideration, especially within federal and other states where these functions are decentralised.

⁶⁴ <http://landmap.ccw.gov.uk/Default.aspx?lang=en>

- In most cases, the national LCA system has been developed as a ‘top down’ system, rather than by the upwards amalgamation of smaller landscape units. Where this has been attempted – as in Scotland – there have been practical difficulties with amalgamation of non-standard units and the assessment output has proved to be unsuitable for national level policy work or for promoting awareness and understanding of landscape issues.
- The development of LCA systems, especially at national level, has been made much easier in recent years by the growing availability of national GIS data sets, and by our increasing ability to overlay and analyse these data sets in a consistent way. This allows us to objectively characterise the patterns and variations within the landscape.
- The principal applications of LCA are in land use planning and land management, with LCA commonly being used to inform development planning and development control/ development management and to manage both the countryside generally and the landscape of protected areas.
- However, there is also a growing range of innovative and successful uses for LCA, including design of agri-environment programmes, monitoring of change in countryside quality, marketing of tourist destinations and regional farm produce, regeneration of landscapes degraded by industry or (as in Spain) by intensive tourism, protection and management of archaeological and cultural landscapes, and many others.
- Few if any countries have a fully standardised system of LCA at local authority scale. It seems that LCA at this scale may need to be flexible, at least to some degree, to accommodate the different needs and priorities of different geographic regions. At the same time it is seen as important that a common approach and principles should be applied, if only to ensure that the LCA is seen as reliable and credible. Published guidance, practitioner support networks and case studies of good practice (all of which form part of the English Countryside Character Initiative) can be helpful here.
- In a number of countries – notably Germany and Scotland – there is a recognition that administrative units do not form an effective basis for landscape management, because biogeographic units such as mountain ranges often straddle administrative boundaries. This issue applies to Ireland too, in relation both to counties and cross-border areas.
- The Northern Ireland LCA is unusual in that it combines the consistency of a ‘national’ assessment with the detail of a ‘local’ assessment. It might therefore form a useful model for future assessment work elsewhere in Ireland and could bring additional benefits in terms of cross-border consistency of approach and output.

Finally, there may be an opportunity for Ireland to draw upon and integrate any future assessment work with the emerging European Landscape Typology and Map developed as part of the ELCAI project. An attempt has already been made, as part of the ELCAI Project, to apply this typology to Ireland⁶⁵, identifying 30 landscape types and 1,300 individual landscape units across the country. Such future development could, in the medium to long term, assist with the implementation of a range of European policy and funding initiatives.

⁶⁵ See Wascher, D M (ed) (2005) *European Landscape Character Areas: Typologies, Cartography and Indicators for the Assessment of Sustainable Landscape*, ELCAI Final Project Report, Landscape Europe, Wageningen, p73.

5.5 Key Points from this Section

- There is a wealth of European experience to draw upon in any further development of LCA in Ireland.
- Nearly all western European countries have or will shortly have a national LCA system, regardless of whether or not they have signed the European Landscape Convention.
- Definitions of landscape, landscape character areas and landscape character types are converging across Europe and a European landscape typology and map is in preparation.
- Reasons for developing national LCA systems include the need for policy integration, monitoring, a shared spatial framework, and a consistent national approach.
- Most national LCAs have been prepared as a 'top-down' exercise.
- 'Bottom-up' amalgamation of units is more difficult and the outputs are less useful for policy-making and awareness-raising.
- GIS offers new opportunities for LCA, not least because it facilitates objective characterisation.
- The main applications for LCA are in land use planning and management, but there is also a growing range of innovative and successful uses aimed broadly at sustainability eg targeting agri-environment measures, facilitating rural development, marketing tourism and regional produce, regenerating degraded landscapes.
- Few countries have fully standardised local authority level LCAs, but a common approach is nonetheless essential to LCA credibility and support.
- Good LCA guidelines and practitioner networks can help achieve a common approach.
- Landscape character and landscape planning and management issues often straddle administrative boundaries and borders.
- The Northern Ireland LCA may be a useful model for a national LCA in Ireland in terms of scale, content and cross-border consistency.
- There is scope to integrate any national LCA coverage in Ireland with the emerging European landscape typology and map.

6 KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview of Our Findings

This study has reviewed LCA practice in Ireland to date. As required by the brief, it has provided up-to-date information on the scope and extent of LCAs, explored the degree to which LCA has or has not informed or influenced policy and development objectives at a range of levels, reviewed LCA methods and costs, assessed the experience of planning authorities in using the *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, considered the strengths, weaknesses and consistency of the Irish LCA programme to date, and looked at whether there are useful lessons that can be learned from LCA programmes and good practice elsewhere in Europe. In this section we go on to provide recommendations for an improved LCA programme and methodology, based on the findings of earlier sections.

Inevitably the study has touched upon the pace, scale and significance of the landscape change that is ongoing in Ireland at present. Although this was not a specific subject of our research, and we have not had an opportunity to consider it in detail, it was a consideration that permeated every aspect of the work. There is a very widely held view that the current pace and scale of landscape change in Ireland (due to the rapid economic growth described in *Section 2.1 Landscape Character Assessment*) is unsustainable without major impacts on the quality of life and the quality of the environment in Ireland. This view is supported by recent European Environment Agency digital mapping of Europe's landscapes, which shows that Ireland has experienced unprecedented urbanisation and landscape fragmentation due to extensive new housing, major roads and other infrastructure projects. This has affected open countryside, villages and towns in all parts of the country, and the extent of the impacts is much greater than in other parts of Europe⁶⁶.

There is related concern about the impacts of change on Ireland's tourist economy, which generates €5.1 billion (almost 4% of gross national product) in revenue annually⁶⁷. As mentioned in *Section 4*, research shows that scenery is the single most important reason why people visit and holiday in Ireland. However, there is also recent evidence of a decline in tourism – especially in outdoor activity-based holidays in the west of Ireland⁶⁸ – that may possibly be associated with landscape change.

Against this background, the study has thrown up a hugely complicated and interrelated series of issues and concerns relating to landscape and landscape character. It is evident that, for all sorts of reasons, LCA in Ireland has got off to a relatively bad start. With hindsight this could have been anticipated. LCA is a relatively difficult and complex field, and it was, perhaps, too much to expect that local authority staff – already overstretched in most cases – would be able to get up to speed and embrace the concept easily from a standing start, with little or no induction, training or support.

The fact that the process was based on Guidelines that appear (both to us and to most of those who have used them) to be fundamentally flawed, especially in relation to judgements, values and sensitivity, made matters worse.

In the circumstances it is therefore surprising that local authorities have made as much progress with LCA as they have. Consultations suggest that compared to the position prevailing in 2000 when the Guidelines were first introduced, there is now a relatively good understanding of landscape character and a reasonable grasp of landscape character concepts among many heritage officers, planners and consultants. Most seem, by themselves, to have realised that many of the problems associated with LCA stem from a failure to distinguish characterisation from judgements on value and sensitivity. Indeed, there was quite a lot of positive feedback on LCA, particularly from planners grateful for a tool to update and rationalise their landscape policies. Hence most of those involved with, and using, county LCAs indicated that they thought LCA was value for money and had influenced decision-making – while at the same time commenting that the DoEHLG draft Guidelines were in urgent need of a radical overhaul.

Notwithstanding the relatively positive response to LCA from local authority officers, it is plain that LCA – especially LCA material on landscape value and sensitivity that is poorly presented or appears to impose unreasonable levels of constraint upon land use change and development – has generated considerable concern among councillors. It has served to inflame legitimate development interests unnecessarily, rather than providing the basis for fair and reasoned

consideration and discussion of ‘what, where and how’ development or change may be acceptable within different landscape contexts. The outputs of local authority LCA in Ireland now need to be recast in a positive rather than a negative light, although there will always remain a place for development constraint.

In our national-level discussions on LCA and its effectiveness, we found a mixture of frustration at the lack of consistent, national LCA coverage, and ignorance that any LCA work exists at all. The frustration came from those bodies such as Fáilte Ireland that have begun to see the potential adverse impacts on their business sectors of poorly sited and planned changes in the landscape. But ignorance was also remarkably widespread. It was disappointing, for example, to find that there is still limited awareness of LCA in Teagasc. Experience in other European countries, such as England, shows that landscape-trained farm advisers, using agri-environment funding that is tailored and targeted by landscape character area or type, have a potentially huge role to play in helping to maintain and enhance the character of farmed landscapes.

It is clear that it was highly unrealistic to expect (as stated in the Guidelines) that LCAs prepared in support of County Development Plans would generate a national landscape map. No such map has emerged and even those, such as the Forest Service, who have conscientiously tried to pull together all the county LCA coverage, have failed. In the absence of a national LCA map there is no way that government bodies or development interests such as the NRA and the Irish Wind Energy Association can be expected to be aware of – let alone take account of – landscape character issues. It would simply be too complicated and time consuming to collect information that would probably not meet their needs anyway. Indeed they might well take the view that there is no point in having policies on landscape character at all at present, because they lack the information that would enable them to implement or monitor the delivery of those policies.

This has led us – and most of the national consultees who felt able to comment – to the conclusion that there is an overriding need for a consistent national LCA map to be prepared for Ireland, a view that was also shared by many local authority consultees who would like to see their LCAs sitting within a broader national assessment framework. A national LCA map would be a key tool in raising the profile of landscape issues in Ireland generally, helping Ireland to integrate landscape into a wider range of government policies and plans, and to meet its obligations under the European Landscape Convention. Ireland is almost the last remaining country in western Europe without a national LCA system. Such a system is now desperately needed.

Further details of key issues and recommendations are set out below under a series of cascading and interlinked themes, relating to: statutory definitions of and responsibilities for landscape; national and regional planning policies and guidelines; a national landscape classification; new Guidelines on LCA; applications of LCA; promoting landscape awareness, appreciation and understanding; and roles and resources.

Our recommendations inevitably go wider than LCA alone, because we believe that to fulfil the spirit of the European Landscape Convention, and make LCA as effective as it should be, a number of wider changes are needed, especially in relation to the statutory and policy interpretations of landscape. Many of the recommendations are interdependent. For example, better recognition of landscape at national level in planning and policy is dependent on the creation and availability of an improved national landscape dataset.

⁶⁷ Fáilte Ireland (2005) *Tourism Facts 2004*, Fáilte Ireland, Dublin.

⁶⁸ Fáilte Ireland (2005) *Annual Survey of Overseas Travellers 2004*, Fáilte Ireland, Dublin.

6.2 Statutory Definitions of and Responsibilities for Landscape

Key issues here are that:

- The Planning and Development Act, 2000, does not define landscape, although it refers extensively to the preservation and conservation of landscape.
- The Heritage Act, 1995, defines landscape and seascape as part of the national heritage. However, some state bodies with heritage duties (eg Teagasc) do not appear to fully recognise that heritage embraces landscape.
- The Heritage Council, which has a clear landscape policy remit under the Heritage Act, 1995, is not a body that must be consulted on planning applications in areas of special amenity or other landscape interest under Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, and nor is the DoEHLG.
- There is some uncertainty as to the scope of the DoEHLG's responsibilities in relation to landscape. National consultees have an expectation that the DoEHLG will take a strong lead on landscape matters, but would like to see this confirmed and the extent of its responsibilities clarified.

It is beyond the scope of the study to propose exactly how these issues should be dealt with, but in our view they most definitely need to be addressed if there is to be effective action on landscape issues in Ireland.

We suggest that:

- **Action should be taken by Government to clarify, in statutory terms, the meaning of landscape and the fact that it is a component of the national heritage.** Landscape should be clearly defined in all relevant legislation, and duties to conserve the national heritage should extend in all cases to include the landscape.
- **Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, should be amended to make the Heritage Council and the DoEHLG bodies that must be consulted on planning applications in areas of special amenity or other landscape interest.**
- **The DoEHLG should confirm that it is the Government department responsible for taking lead on landscape, and should issue a statement clarifying its responsibilities,** which should include reviewing and implementing landscape policy proposals put forward by the Heritage Council, and providing an overview of planning casework that affects landscape interests.
- **In addition, the DoEHLG should confirm its lead role in relation to implementation and monitoring of the European Landscape Convention,** the Minister of Environment, Heritage and Local Government having signed the European Landscape Convention.

6.3 National and Regional Planning Policies and Guidelines

The key issues here are that:

- Landscape and LCA appear to have had comparatively little influence, so far, on national or regional spatial planning or major infrastructure projects, with ongoing potential for major adverse impacts on the Irish landscape.
- The *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* have not been finalised or formally issued by the DoEHLG, and hence some authorities at least have chosen to ignore them.
- No Landscape Conservation Areas have yet been designated, even though they are seen by the DoEHLG and others as a key landscape planning tool.
- National consistency in the identification and protection of Ireland's most valued landscapes is seen as being important.

Recommendations are that:

- ***The DoEHLG should ensure that landscape receives greater attention in future within the National Development Plan and Regional Planning Guidelines by developing, and referring in policy to, a new National Landscape Classification*** (see Section 6.4 for further details).
- ***The DoEHLG should also ensure that landscape issues are explicitly mentioned in the proposed new Critical National Infrastructure Bill***, which will set out planning procedures for major infrastructure projects.
- ***Re-writing and formal issue of the Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines should be set in train as soon as possible*** (see Section 6.5 for further details of proposed Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines) to ensure that planning authorities have due regard to landscape issues. The new Guidelines should be firmly set in the context of the proposed National Landscape Classification.
- ***Other relevant planning guidelines (eg for sustainable housing and wind energy development) should be updated in due course to ensure consistency with the new Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines.*** Any new guidelines – for instance on SEA – should also refer to LCA and to the new Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines.
- ***The DoEHLG should take the lead, nationally, on Landscape Conservation Area (LCA2) designations*** to counter local authorities' apparent reluctance to proceed. This appears to be possible under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, and could help with the urgent protection of Ireland's finest landscapes, also ensuring national consistency in their identification.
- ***Failing that, the DoEHLG should urge planning authorities themselves to implement the Landscape Conservation Area provisions, and supply them with advice on how to do so. It should also provide clear advice on the designation of Areas of Special Amenity.*** This advice should be included in the proposed new *Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines*.

6.4 A National Landscape Classification

Key issues here are that:

- The local authority LCAs do not (and could not reasonably have been expected to) provide full, consistent national landscape information and mapping.
- A national landscape classification could provide a starting point and framework for future local authority LCAs, facilitating the definition of landscape character types and character areas in a consistent, nested hierarchy.
- A national landscape classification is also an essential resource if government bodies and development interests are to be expected to take due account of landscape issues (as indicated above).
- A national landscape classification is a key tool for implementation of the European Landscape Convention, facilitating awareness-raising, training, definition of quality objectives and delivery of landscape policies.
- In a European context, the development of a national landscape classification is increasingly seen as essential, providing a sound national framework for policy, targeting of management measures, and monitoring the effectiveness of those measures.

We recommend that:

- **A National Landscape Classification should be commissioned** as a joint exercise between the Heritage Council in its role as the body that proposes landscape policy to Government, and the DoEHLG as the principal body responsible for implementation of landscape measures. The involvement of Fáilte Ireland, as a potential user of the classification both for marketing and a prescribed authority on landscape issues under the Planning and Development Act, may also be beneficial.
- **The scale of the classification should be tailored to the character of Irish landscapes, and designed especially to help in communicating and promoting awareness of Ireland's landscapes** (see Section 6.7 below). This suggests that landscape character areas (rather than types) should be the principal focus, because these best encompass the cultural aspects of landscape. The Northern Ireland LCA, which identifies 130 broad landscape character (identity) areas, may be a useful model. If possible, consistent coverage at this level should be extended to cover all Ireland.
- **Objective analysis of landscape patterns, correlations and types of character should underpin the definition of the broad landscape character areas.** The classification should draw on Irish national GIS datasets and recent European experience in landscape classification. Data on topography, geology, soils, land cover, biodiversity and historic and cultural landscapes should be used, building on the analytical work done in the County Clare landscape characterisation pilot. The ELCAI LANMAP2 work (which has defined 30 broad landscape types and 1600 landscape units for Ireland) may also be relevant.
- **The classification should be widely available and easily accessible for a range of different uses.** We recommend 1:250,000 mapping and landscape descriptions, to be published on the web (for policy and marketing use etc), accompanied by more detailed 1:50,000 GIS-based mapping (for use in more detailed, local applications).
- **The classification should be widely promoted as a spatial framework for management of Ireland's national heritage as a whole,** for example by collating information on other heritage topics such as biodiversity and archaeology, and developing, with stakeholder input, a 'vision' for the future landscape of each character area, to guide policy and action.

6.5 New Guidelines on Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

Key issues here are that:

- There is strong support for LCA at local authority level, where it is clearly considered to be value for money, and an important and necessary influence on decision-making.
- However, there is also a very widespread view that the existing draft *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines* require urgent overhaul and formal issue. Most authorities would welcome clearer and more prescriptive advice as to what they should do, and how.
- Aspects that especially need to be covered are definitions and terminology, GIS and mapping, separation of characterisation from judgements about the landscape, guidance on the way in which landscape should be addressed in planning policy, and the range of LCA applications.
- There appears to be a very serious, related issue of training in LCA and in application of the landscape Guidelines. Very few of those involved in the preparation or use of the LCAs has had any landscape training, and there appear to be no courses currently on offer anywhere in Ireland.

We recommend that:

- ***The DoEHLG and the Heritage Council should jointly prepare new Guidelines on Landscape Character Assessment.*** These should be much stronger and more prescriptive than past guidelines. They should have a definite focus on characterisation, highlighting the importance and value of *all* Irish landscapes, but should also contain advice on making judgements about the landscape. They should be aimed not just at planners but at a much wider audience, including farmers, foresters and other land managers, and developers.
- ***The new Guidelines should provide clear definitions and terminology, advice on a hierarchy of landscape character areas and types and on the relationship to the new National Landscape Classification,*** guidance on GIS and mapping outputs, and worked examples of good practice in LCA and its applications.
- ***Special attention should be paid to HLC and its role in LCA.*** Not only are Ireland's landscapes especially rich in historic and cultural features, but historic landscape is a concept that people can readily understand and identify with, which at local level may be a key tool in raising landscape awareness. The new Guidelines should recommend that LCA and HLC (the latter including the cultural aspects of landscape) be undertaken in tandem.
- ***Seascape and townscape assessment should also be embraced by the new Guidelines,*** in recognition of the fact that coastal and urban/ peri-urban areas are amongst those areas experiencing greatest landscape change in Ireland at the present time.

In relation to judgements about the landscape, the Guidelines should:

- ***Encourage the development of guidelines or strategies for each character area*** to help ensure that development management and land management respect character and distinctiveness;
- ***Reiterate that landscape policies should relate, where possible, to landscape character areas or types,*** and give good practice examples of such policies;
- ***Emphasise the concept of landscape capacity*** to accommodate different forms of development and change, as opposed to the 'blanket' concept of landscape sensitivity;

⁶⁹ www.landscapecharacter.org.uk/

- **Encourage involvement of an appropriate range of stakeholders** in making judgements;
- **Stress the importance of rigorous identification of valued or special landscapes** against clear criteria;
- **Explain the specific roles and functions of Areas of Special Amenity and Landscape Conservation Areas (LCA2)**, and who is responsible for their definition.
- **The Guidelines should be accompanied by a full national programme of training in LCA, targeted specifically at different groups** including: practitioners preparing LCAs; planners and others using LCAs; and councillors taking decisions on landscape capacity and on development proposals. The training should be interactive, making extensive use of case studies and real-life examples of LCA in practice.
- **Finally, a web-based support network for LCA practitioners and users should be developed** following introduction of the new Guidelines. Experience with a similar network in England and Scotland has shown that this can be an excellent way of giving access to LCAs across the country, sharing information and experience, and promoting good practice examples and a wide range of LCA applications.

6.6 Applications of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

Key issues here are that:

- Use and application of LCA so far has mainly focused on planning, whereas LCA has potential to inform a much wider range of activities, as indicated in the existing draft *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines*.
- There is generally low awareness of the range of potential applications of LCA, which extends to national and regional spatial planning, infrastructure planning, development strategies and capacity studies for many forms of development (eg communications, wind farms, minerals, housing), tourism, forestry, agri-environment, EIA and SEA.
- Many people fail to recognise that LCA applications usually require further work to develop the characterisation, make judgements, and to involve stakeholders. For example a study of landscape capacity for forestry needs firstly to examine the specific ability of the landscape to accommodate this type of change, and secondly to involve consultation with the forestry sector, landowners, tourism and angling interests and other local stakeholders.
- Most of existing LCA applications in Ireland use landscape as a constraint on development or change, whereas in fact it should be seen as a positive, proactive tool to guide and help accommodate change ie to ensure that economic development that is informed by, rather than constrained by, landscape considerations.

We recommend that:

- **The DoEHLG, the Heritage Council and Fáilte Ireland should promote the development of innovative LCA applications at national, regional and local level**, through a series of demonstration projects, timed to coincide with the launch of the National Landscape Classification and the new Guidelines on Landscape Character Assessment.

- **A key task for the DoEHLG should be to ensure – and demonstrate – that landscape issues are fully taken on board in the National Development Plan** and also properly reflected in Regional Planning Guidelines, and in any new planning guidelines, for example on SEA.
- **Other demonstration projects should particularly target fields such as agriculture, tourism and rural development, where there is potential to show the positive way in which landscape issues can contribute to delivery of socio-economic objectives.** We recommend, as examples:
 - A national level, demonstration project that would use national landscape character areas as a targeting and monitoring framework for REPS (clearly this would require the involvement of Teagasc and others on the agriculture side);
 - At regional level, a tourism marketing study that would explore the potential of the new National Landscape Classification and/or local authority LCAs for tourism marketing purposes (with a regional tourist authority);
 - At local level, a rural development initiative aiming to identify development opportunities dependent on, or consistent with, landscape character (eg with the Irish LEADER Support Unit).

6.7 Promoting Landscape Awareness, Appreciation and Understanding

Key issues here are that:

- Awareness and understanding of LCA are generally very poor, or indeed nil in many areas outside local authorities and landscape consultancy.
- Many Government departments, other state bodies and development interests appear to have little, if any knowledge of or interest in LCA.
- In addition, many consultees highlighted the apparent lack of political will to address landscape issues, at all levels within Government.
- Poor existing LCA practice in Ireland has also tended to give landscape issues a bad name, especially among county councillors – even though most people believe that the general public cares deeply about landscape issues.
- Clearly, therefore, there is a major issue over understanding and awareness of landscape issues in Ireland at present.

We recommend that:

- **The Heritage Council should initiate a major national programme to promote landscape awareness and education, with the backing of the DoEHLG.** The programme should be targeted at two main audiences: senior decision-makers and the wider public.
- **Advice and input should be sought from a professional PR/ communications consultancy,** and the programme should employ a variety of methods and communications media, including workshops, press, radio, TV, lobbying and marketing work.

- **Targets at senior level should include policy staff in a range of Government departments, environmental managers within state bodies, An Bord Pleanála (and equivalents such as the Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board), regional planning and tourism executives, county managers and industry representatives** in fields such as forestry, wind energy, construction, housing and telecommunications.
- **Targets amongst the wider public should include community groups, county consultative fora, and those in higher education responsible for delivering landscape and planning degree courses.** There is scope here for the Heritage Council to develop and extend to a wider audience its successful Heritage in Schools project, but with a specific landscape focus.

6.8 Roles and Resources

Key issues here are that:

- There is shared responsibility nationally for landscape matters, the statutory responsibility lying with the DoEHLG, the role of policy proposer lying with the Heritage Council, and Fáilte Ireland having a lesser role as a prescribed authority in relation to areas of special amenity under the Planning and Development Act, 2000.
- Inevitably, more resources will need to be allocated to addressing landscape issues than in the past – especially if the recommendations made above are to be implemented. However, there should also be adequate returns in the long run, in terms of improved environmental quality and competitiveness in fields such as tourism.

We recommend that:

- **The Heritage Council, the DoEHLG and Fáilte Ireland should work in close partnership to tackle the landscape issues raised in this report**, and to implement its recommendations. They should also involve other bodies, notably the County Councils, as and when required.
- **Within this partnership, each body should have a particular role.** The Heritage Council should continue to act as policy proposer and champion for landscape issues; the DoEHLG should take a strong lead on development and implementation of landscape policy; and Fáilte Ireland should be responsible for helping to demonstrate the economic role and importance of landscape.
- **Members of the partnership should have access to in-house landscape expertise ie one or more landscape advisers should be appointed. The adviser(s) should have a landscape research budget** at their disposal to help investigate common issues eg rates of landscape change and ways of monitoring landscape change.
- **These advisers should also be in a position to offer at least some specialist landscape advice to local authorities**, although in the longer term, local authorities should also be encouraged to appoint their own landscape staff where possible.
- **Government should allocate additional funding to the three bodies to reflect the importance of addressing landscape issues, to allow the recommendations made in this report to be implemented, and to indicate that real action is being taken in Ireland in relation to the European Landscape Convention.**

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1: MEMBERS OF THE STEERING GROUP FOR THE STUDY

Name	Expertise
Michael Starrett	Chief Executive, Heritage Council (Project Director)
Professor Gabriel Cooney	School of Archaeology, University College Dublin
Bruce McCormack	Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, (DoEHLG)
Donal Guilfoyle	Fáilte Ireland
Alison Harvey	Planning and Development Officer, Heritage Council (Project Manager)
Ian Doyle	Archaeologist, Heritage Council
Anne Barcoe	Administrator, Heritage Council

APPENDIX 2: LCA REVIEW FORM

Basic Details

Title of LCA

Date and status (draft, final etc)

No of volumes, pages etc

Form in which available (hard copy only, CD, web etc)

Area covered

Commissioned by

Prepared by

Cost to prepare (if known)

Cost to purchase (if applicable)

Content (mark those that apply):

- Method statement
- Physical and human influences
- Descriptions of landscape units
- Descriptions of seascapes units
- Review of forces for change
- Material on landscape sensitivity
- Material on landscape capacity
- Guidelines on different forms of development or land use change
- Landscape strategy material
- Material on landscape policy and/or designations

Process and Methods

Brief and objectives (if known)

Intended users

Qualifications and profession of those involved (if known)

Methods and information sources

Stakeholder consultation if any

Number, scale and type(s) of landscape units

How units defined (if known)

How illustrated

Specific Questions and Issues

Do the DoEHLG consultation draft guidelines appear to have been used? If so, in what way?

Did the LCA make use of the principal GIS datasets that are available in Ireland?

Was the assessment informed by historic landscape characterisation? If so, give details

Do the landscape units defined appear consistent in scale and boundaries with adjoining counties (including counties north of the border where applicable)?

Do they appear to be a reliable and meaningful reflection of variations in character?

How were urban or built-up areas treated in the assessment (if covered at all)?

Was a robust, evidence-based assessment of forces for change provided?

Was a clear separation made between landscape characterisation and judgements based on character?

Does there appear to have been stakeholder input, and if so how did it contribute to the assessment?

Is the LCA readily available?

Is it suitable for use by people outside the landscape and planning professions?

Applications

Give details of any applications for which the assessment is known to have been intended and/or used eg county development plan or local area plan, development control, landscape designations, capacity for housing/ wind energy/ infrastructure etc, design issues, forestry, tourism, EIA, regional planning, national spatial planning.

Outputs

Comment on the overall scope, structure, style and readability of the outputs (including maps and illustrations). Give details of its main strengths and weaknesses compared to other LCAs.

APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONS PUT TO CONSULTEES (LOCAL LEVEL)

General

- What is your understanding of the term 'landscape'?
- What involvement or experience have you had with landscape character assessment (LCA)?
- Which assessments are you familiar with, and in what context (commissioned them, prepared them, used them etc)?
- What is your own professional background (if applicable)? What responsibilities does your job entail (if applicable)?
- Overall, what do you view as the key strengths of the LCAs that you know or have used?
- What are the key weaknesses?

How the LCA Was Prepared

- Who commissioned and steered the LCA? Who prepared the brief (please provide a copy if possible)?
- How long did the whole process take?
- Were there specific reasons for the LCA or its timing (or was the authority simply responding to the requirements of the Planning and Development Act)?
- What were the skills and expertise of those who undertook the work (planning, landscape, GIS, archaeology, ecology, etc)?
- Do you think there is a need for further training in LCA?
- Were the DoEHLG consultation draft guidelines on landscape assessment used? If so, did you find them helpful? If not used, why not?
- Do you think there is a need for updated guidelines on LCA in Ireland? If so, how should these differ from current guidelines?

Landscape Classification and Description

- What issues were considered in preparing the landscape classification? Did you the LCA use landscape character areas or landscape types, or both, and if so why?
- What information and/or mapping were used in making the classification? Was it GIS-based?
- Was historic landscape character taken into account, and if so, how?
- Was the classification influenced by the LCAs for adjoining local authorities/Northern Ireland? If not, do you think this would have been a good idea?
- Did the assessment give any special attention to coastal areas, and if so, how?
- Did the assessment cover urban/urban fringe areas, and if so, how?

Making Judgements Based on Landscape Character

- Was information on landscape condition and change included in the LCA?
- To what extent did the LCA include judgements on the landscape eg strategy/guidelines material, advice on landscape sensitivity and/or capacity, advice on landscape value/designation?
- Was this judgemental material clearly separated out eg presented in a separate report or reports?
- What was the judgemental material intended for (to inform decisions, or to control development or change)?
- What was the role of stakeholders (interest groups and local communities) in preparing the LCA?
- Did any areas of difficulty or dispute arise between consultants, officers, councillors or community groups?
- Have Landscape Conservation Areas (Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act) been designated in your county, and if so, did the LCA influence the designations in any way?

Applications

- What has the LCA been used for? eg county development plans, local area plans, development control, landscape management/monitoring, studies of capacity for housing/ wind energy/ major infrastructure etc, design issues, forestry, agri-environment, tourism, EIA, regional and national spatial planning
- Please give details of any specific applications and if possible provide copies of relevant material
- Was there any training for staff in how to use the LCA?
- Overall, was the LCA material helpful or did you encounter any problems with it?
- Did the LCA provide value for money? Did it match expectations?
- In the absence of LCA, would you have made different decisions?
- If not used, why not? What are the obstacles to wider use?

Improvements and Future Developments

- Are the LCAs widely known? How are they generally regarded?
- Do you think the LCAs themselves could be improved and if so how?
- Are they at a useful scale? Would it be helpful to have a) more detailed coverage or b) more broad-brush, strategic coverage?
- Do they provide enough information on all dimensions of landscape (historic, biodiversity, etc)?
- Are there other improvements could be made? eg better publicity and promotion, targeting of potential users, central web access/networking, greater consistency across boundaries, better seascape coverage, better peri-urban and urban coverage...
- Are you aware of that Ireland has ratified the European Landscape Convention? Are you familiar with the requirements of the Convention?

APPENDIX 4: LISTS OF CONSULTEES

Local Level

County	Consultee	Position in Authority	Consultant
Carlow	Louis Wildenboer	Planner	
Cavan	Anne Marie Ward	Heritage Officer	
Clare	Congella McGuire	Heritage Officer	Ruth Minogue
	Graham Webb	Senior Planner	
Cork	Sharon Casey	Heritage Officer	Tomas O'Leary
	Brian Riney	Planner, Planning Policy	
Donegal	Joe Gallagher	Heritage Officer	
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	Tim Carey	Heritage Officer	
	Louise McGaurin	Planner (now South Dublin)	
Fingal	Gerry Clabby	Heritage Officer	
	Marjorie O'Shea	Senior Planner	
Galway	Marie Mannion	Heritage Officer	Bernadette O'Connell
	Liam Gavin	Senior Engineer	
Kerry	Una Cosgrave	Heritage Officer	
Kildare	Bridget Loughlin	Heritage Officer	Conor Skehan
Kilkenny	Dearbhala Ledwidge	Heritage Officer	Conor Skehan
	Denis Malone	Senior Executive Planner	
Laois	Catherine Casey	Heritage Officer	
Leitrim	Ciaran Tracey	Senior Planner	Ruth Minogue
Limerick	Tom O' Neill	Heritage Officer	
Longford	Lise McDaniel	Heritage Officer	
Louth	Brendan McSherry	Heritage Officer	
	Marie O'Callaghan	Officer - Building Control	
Mayo	Deirdre Cunningham	Heritage Officer	Conor Skehan
	Kitty O'Malley	Senior Executive Planner	
Meath	Loretto Guinan	Heritage Officer	
Monaghan	Shirley Clerkin	Heritage Officer	
North Tipperary	Siobhan Geraghty	Heritage Officer	
	Pat Slattery	Planner	
Offaly	Amanda Pedlow	Heritage Officer	
Roscommon	Nollaig McKeon	Heritage Officer	
Sligo	Siobhan Ryan	Heritage Officer	
	Fionnuala Meagher	Planner	
South Dublin	Bob Mathews	Senior Executive Planner	
South Tipperary	Marie McGivern	Admin Officer, Planning	
Waterford	Dominic Berridge	Heritage Officer	Tomas O'Leary
Westmeath	Bernie Guest	Heritage Officer	
Wexford	Niall McDonnell	Planner	
	James Lavan	Planner	
Wicklow	Deirdre Burns	Heritage Officer	

National Level

Organisation	Name and Role
Professional Institutes	
Irish Planning Institute	Andrew Hind, Vice President
Irish Landscape Institute	Declan O’Leary, Council Member
Government Departments and Agencies – Policy	
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)	Bruce McCormack, Planning Section (landscape)
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)	Aileen Doyle, Planning Section (wind energy)
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)	Willie Cumming, Heritage Policy Section
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR)	Dave O’Donoghue, Coastal Zone Management Division
Government Departments and Agencies – Regulatory	
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR)	Tom Burke, Foreshore Administration
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR)	Dick McKeever, Aquaculture Licensing
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (DCMNR)	Michael Enright, Mining Division
Fáilte Ireland	Donal Guilfoyle, Head of Regional Development
Government Departments and Agencies – Land Management	
Forest Service, Department of Agriculture and Food	Pat Farrington, Landscape Architect
Teagasc, Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority	Catherine Keena, Countryside Management Specialist
Development Interests	
Coillte, the Irish State Forestry Company	John Prior, Chair of Landscape Practice Group
National Roads Authority	Vincent O’Malley, Environmental Manager
Bord Na Mona	Gerry McNally, Land Development Manager
Irish Wind Energy Association	Paddy Teehan, Council Member, then colleague Aidan Sweeney of Eco Wind Power Ltd
Non-Governmental Organisations	
An Taisce	Ian Lumley
Landscape Alliance Ireland	Terry O’Regan
Others	
University of Dublin, School of Archaeology	Professor Gabriel Cooney
CAAS (Environmental Services) Ltd	Conor Skehan
MosArt	Tomas O’Leary/ Art McCormack

APPENDIX 5: SUMMARY OF LOCAL LEVEL CONSULTATIONS

Theme	Issue	Comments
General	Understanding of the term landscape	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The whole - from topography to patterns and buildings ● Physical environment and man's influence ● The surrounding environment of physical features, natural processes and cultural attributes - it is urban and rural <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visual and land use ● Combination of man and nature ● All-encompassing and more than visual ● Everything ● The backdrop or backcloth ● Includes ecology, geology, topography, cultural and ecological ● What physically is out there – layers of culture, ecology, vernacular, geology, soils etc. <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Land, water, sky and their interrelationship as well as perceptual aspects ● Sense of identity and distinctiveness ● Holistic term
	Strengths of LCA	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Raises profile and awareness among planners, developers, agencies ● Can be used to assess sensitivity of landscape to types of development particularly wind farms ● Provides a baseline and holistic view ● Descriptive components ● Some policies and resultant guidelines eg rural housing, forestry and wind farms <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Basic reference and baseline of landscape ● Provides a standard of how landscape should be understood/considered ● Robust when based on scientific data ● Informs decision making and therefore more than a tool to just stop development ● Can give rise to principles for development ● Resource for development planning and control ● Gives legitimacy to landscape, raises awareness and profile of wider countryside ● Helps to bring forward other initiatives such as wind farm strategies ● Responds to the need to give adequate consideration to landscape ● Helps justify previous approaches to landscape i.e. scenic areas and zoning – continuity and greater robustness ● Valuable information and description ● Highlights sensitive landscapes

	<p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Baseline audit of landscape resource - good description of what exists ● Helps planners to understand the landscape they are making decisions about ● Description of what exists ● Better that previous data on landscape ● Body of research on which to build ● Policies developed as part of the assessment can be used in development control ● Helps inform what type of development is appropriate in different landscapes and helps establish zoning ● Preparation of a sensitivity matrix which is most useful to planners ● Informs landscape sensitivity and therefore helps define areas requiring greatest protection ● Structured and systematic ● Provides a context in which to consider rarity of landscapes ● Framework for other studies
Weaknesses of LCA	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft guidelines are muddled and therefore value judgements in assessments are not clear ● Planners do not wish to use the assessment ● Assessment are generally not useful for forestry (as little new forestry now) or one off housing because assessment is generally not prescriptive enough for planners ● Cross-boundary problems – LCAs and judgements do not match up and there is little cooperation with other counties when undertaking an adjacent LCA ● Briefs can be unclear ● Often clients have misconceptions on what an LCA is and how it should be used ● Lack of national perspective ● More recent rural housing policy has undermined the zoning derived from LCAs ● Lack of understanding of landscape assessment terminology which can be off-putting and act as a barrier to understanding/use ● Indiscriminate conflation of descriptive and interpretative material ● Failure to take account of variable accuracy levels of input data <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LCA process is unwieldy and not popular with councillors who see it as an anti-development tool ● Assessments are too detailed and cost too much money to produce ● Assessments need to go further than just describing character ● Detailed assessments can be hard to follow and repetitive ● Consultation as part of process does not thoroughly engage people – often lack of time and resources ● Perceptions and evaluation is too subjective ● Character areas/types identified can be too general and are therefore meaningless or too detailed and this puts people off, particularly planners ● Lack of information on ecology, habitats and cultural heritage within LCA ● Lack of integration of HLC ● Character descriptions need to be developed in more detail ● More information on the issues experienced in each character area is required ● Guidelines need to be developed more fully

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devalues and downgrades the value of some landscapes due to zoning of degraded or ordinary landscapes which are considered to have greater capacity to accommodate development Assessment is not incorporated into GIS Can become out of date and need to be reviewed No description for areas but just for types LCA is not taken forward for evaluation work Edges of character areas are transitional and not exact LCAs do not match up across administrative boundaries Can't defend characterisation used because don't understand its application ie its worth <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much emphasis on physical aspects of landscape and not enough on ecology and cultural dimensions Assessment do not consider dynamic nature of the landscape Need for a stronger electronic base – use of GIS for analysis and for final outputs Need for more detailed analysis of individual landscape features Lack of definitive criteria to assess the value of features Not enough information on sensitivity Special places may be more meaningful to people than landscape character assessment Biodiversity and historic environment not well covered Assessments are county wide and do not look across administrative boundaries resulting in inconsistencies Bad timing can result in a lack of support of assessment by councillors and developers Assessments which major on evaluations (subjective) can be used against local authority by developers Quality of assessment is dependant on the knowledge of the assessor Assessments are not accessible to many including general public Assessments using CORINE can fail to identify what is special about an area in 'normal countryside' Difficult to see how characterisation alone can lead to clear policy Landscapes of low sensitivity become a 'free for all'
Methodology	<p>Use and value of DoEHLG Draft Guidelines</p> <p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines are useless and unworkable All sections on visual units and values should be removed Guidelines are almost there - would benefit from illustrations, case studies and the need to differentiate between the process of characterisation and evaluation Guidelines need to be less theoretical and more practical Weakest part of guidelines is appendix Guidelines are unnecessarily complex and clumsy Guidelines have resulted in uneven application of LCA approach across Ireland Need to separate out characterisation from evaluation more clearly Clarify the association between image units/visual units with character areas and types Early section in guidance on characterisation is really useful Deterioration in quality, logic and utility of latter sections on evaluation Need to rewrite and limit guidance to characterisation only with clear systematic approach and headings

		<p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unusable and unworkable ● Conflate characterisation with evaluation - results in problems undertaking an assessment and getting it used ● Need to be rewritten and objective and subjective approaches separated out ● Complex and difficult to use ● Need to be rewritten before LCAs are going to be undertaken in a useful way for assisting planning decisions ● Confusing – been used but not a lot or fully - result is variation in approaches ● Not tangible enough ● Confusing and difficult to work with <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Robust method but need updating i.e. to be finalised ● Good but weakness in moving from characterisation to evaluation ● Need to be scrapped, redone or published – remove current uncertainty ● Convoluted and unhelpful ● Gives headings but does not set out clearly how to do assessment ● Helpful but complex and difficult to follow ● Need to present a clear method and be shorter
Characterisation	Classification and definitions	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character areas are difficult to define because of the need to incorporate values when using DoEHLG guidelines- this leads to subjectivity ● Areas and types need to be defined but planners involved in policy development prefer broad-brush assessments and typologies which can be used to determine zoning and sensitivity ● Character types should be identified first and then areas ● Areas can be an amalgamation of types or sub-division depending on circumstances ● Classification used should be derived from county assessing - important to just identify internal consistent character ● National guidelines for forestry and wind farms make reference to national character types but there is inconsistency between them and they are not used in county LCAs <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consultants identified character areas (broad-brush) and planners insisted that additional areas of local distinctiveness be defined as well-finer grain ● Characterisation on its own does not inform planners and difficult to justify additional resources for evaluation studies if character assessment expensive to produce ● Characterisation has become poor relation to sensitivity assessment <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If assessment is for development plan then character units and resultant zoning needs to be general but if for decisions on individual development then need greater detail ● Advice from landscape consultants was to keep character areas broad brush and not mapped on OS base as boundaries to areas are not abrupt ● Definition of both character areas and types can increase the number of end uses of the character assessment ● Selecting a scale to define character is difficult ● Urban areas and lakes were excluded from classification but have their own policy ● Very detailed assessment - 76 LCAs but this is useful

	<p>Consistency issues eg at administrative boundaries and at the coast</p>	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Variation at administrative boundaries presents significant problems but when attempting to address this often meet lack of cooperation from adjacent counties ● National typology for Ireland would help iron out some of the inconsistencies ● No consideration of adjoining counties despite strong encouragement to do so ● Inconsistencies are evidence that methods used are riddled with subjectivity ● GIS used to define visual units at coast which can then be translated into different coastal character areas <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessments in different counties do not match up and neither do evaluations ● Lack of national/regional perspective and consistency - and if there was - where would this leave county assessments? ● LCAs do not deal well with the coast <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Landscape continues beyond administrative boundaries but lack of cooperation between counties ● Need formal procedures for better communication ● Coastal visual compartments were identified to help flag up issue of indivisibility between coastal towns but not done for other adjacent counties
Judgements	<p>Value of judgemental material</p>	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Judgements are muddled because guidelines are muddled ● Definition of visual units and values contributed little to use of assessment to determine capacity for development ● Judgemental aspect of assessment is essential to assist in policy development and development control ● Judgemental aspects of assessment should be kept separate from characterisation ● Important for assessment and value judgements to be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team not just planners - to avoid too strong a planning bent ● LCAs based on history of defining extent of areas which are sensitive and have limited capacity to accommodate change ● It is a subjective approach and reflects the value systems of the profession <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Value judgements are based on comparison of landscape within county - therefore identification of landscapes of national value is meaningless ● One of the weakest aspects of the LCAs ● Guidelines conflate characterisation and evaluation - value of landscape is used to define character areas - result is that nobody can agree on the areas defined <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most useful and influential part of LCA ● Sensitivity zoning is problematic ● Areas of high sensitivity may be protected from development whereas areas of low sensitivity may mean all types of development are permitted - too simplistic and not enough focus on character

	<p>Relationship between character and judgements</p>	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Muddled because guidelines are not clear ● Character forms the base understanding of what exists, evaluation determines appropriate change ● CORINE land cover mapping is the basis for undertaking evaluation of sensitivity - because only comprehensive data-set and therefore reduces subjectivity ● Little – developers prefer evaluation and character areas with reams of description are seen as less relevant/useful ● Need for development of guidelines which are more informative and reliable than zoning of areas for sensitivity ● Characterisation determines variety in landscape character over relatively small areas whereas policy needs to be reasonably consistent over large areas for practical purposes - result is that landscape characterisation is often incompatible with policy development <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unclear in development plan how zoning is derived from characterisation ● Not sure what the relationship is – question the real benefit of characterisation in relation to planning – evaluation is better <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Zoning is derived from an understanding of character
	<p>Role of stakeholders</p>	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Time-consuming, expensive and not seen as a worthwhile exercise ● Consultation on values of landscape can refine and inform the definition of character areas and forces for change ● Cannot undertake sensitivity assessment without consulting local people ● Need to understand people's values ● Characterisation should be undertaken by consultants and not involve consultation <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Useful but question the extent to which views reflect the local population or are really the views of the consultants <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consultation by phone and letter with key organisations provides useful specialist input ● Local people consulted on LCA through development plan process ● Consultation was undertaken to determine local community landscape values but poor response
	<p>Use of and access to LCA</p>	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National guidelines for forestry and wind farms make reference to national character types but there is inconsistency between them and the reader is not referred to county LCAs <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Planners refer to parts of the assessment that are in the development plan ie evaluation section and do not refer back to the original assessment ● Good awareness of content of development and particularly any development control zoning maps ● If LCA undertaken in-house then information held by planners ● Landscape character is not given sufficient weight – planners go straight to evaluation and zoning <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Planners refer to original assessment if application decision goes to appeal ● Have requested all developers to submit landscape plans with applications and some architects/developers encouraged to refer to LCA

Future developments	Awareness of the LCA programme	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most policy planners seem reasonably aware as a result of Development Act 2000 and DoEHLG Guidelines <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure planners refer to LCA as part of induction into new job ● A national perspective and push for co-ordinating landscape assessment would raise awareness and encourage co-operation ● LCA is currently losing momentum and there is a need for clear national leadership <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote LCA more in planning guidance leaflets for developers ● Encourage developers to refer back to original LCA
	Training and assistance	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local authorities need to involve an in-house landscape architect in the writing of the project brief and managing contract ● Planners and consultants need training in LCA to avoid assessment which show strong bias for or against development and not based on robust analysis ● Need a seminar to promote good understanding particularly for consultants - currently individual consultancies are going their own way with inconsistencies in approach ● Training required for those likely to apply LCA in development control and policy foundation <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training of planners and councillors would be beneficial – need to explain process and application of LCA ● Training for HOs would help them fly the banner for LCA ● Need to go back to basics – what is landscape, what is important, how it should be used ● Assessment provides familiarisation of landscape for new planners (induction document) - important as turn over of planning staff is high ● Need more information on the preparation of landscape management guidelines – planners are more attracted to evaluation and character needs to be given more significance ● Need for dedicated in-house staff trained in assessment to engage planners in the process and encourage knowledge, use and ownership ● Outside consultants produce a report but planners have not developed an in depth knowledge of landscape and can feel report is too detailed or unwieldy ● Dedicated staff would be a good advocate for the process ● No training required for planners - their professional training and reading up on LCA should be enough <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wider involvement in preparation is essential ● Training on how to appraise potential development in the landscape ● Improve awareness that landscape is about good decision making - i.e. awareness of the resource and not about preservation ● Not training on how to do an assessment but rather how it is written and can be used ● Training for planners on how to appreciate and read the landscape and use an assessment

	<p>Perceptions and understanding</p>	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need for a national perspective - need to get all consultants together to agree and co-ordinate a consistent way forward ● Re-write the guidelines ● Need national conference to rekindle interest in landscape and determine way forward because it is 'going off the boil' ● Need 'think tank' to establish new guidelines ● Need to increase general public awareness of the value of landscape though television series - public to put pressure on Government to take landscape issues more seriously ● Convince councillors/elected members of validity of process by bringing them in and involving them at the start ● Officers are often opposed to landscape change and place a high value on tools that automatically determine development control decisions ● Councillors and communities are pleased to see value systems in LCA but are worried that LCA is a constraint to development <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need more training to increase awareness of value of LCA - currently seen as academic and of little practical application ● Need greater awareness of what LCA is and can deliver when commissioning projects ● Need to address the negative press LCA got as a result of Leitrim assessment not being approved by councillors - resulted in perception that LCAs are costly and not of great worth ● Address perception of councillors that LCA if detailed is too restrictive on development and planning <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need for a national or regional approach but important to avoid perception of central control ● Guidelines need to demonstrate best practice and provide examples of the application of LCA elsewhere ● Guidelines need to be finalised and published ● Establishment of central 'help desk' to answer queries on undertaking an assessment in house and its application ● Access to central data base to demonstrate good practice examples from elsewhere
	<p>Priorities and actions</p>	<p>Consultants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A national approach required – typology ● Coordination of approaches and consistency between counties ● Improved methodology agreed between practitioners ● Review of all assessment and coordination of assessments once guidelines are re-published ● Ensure better commitment and funding for undertaking LCAs and integrating HLC ● Improve perceived value of characterisation and encourage development of design guidance and greater emphasis on urban areas ● Raise profile of landscape in schools, for general public though TV series, and better involvement of local communities ● Make better use of GIS <p>Heritage Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improve consistency between assessments ● Make clear judgements (separate characterisation and evaluation) and show how one informs the other ● Make better use of GIS data <p>Planners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop use of LCA for peri-urban areas and coastal areas ● Increase use of LCA for settlements and address currently conflicts between restrictive landscape sensitivity policy which washes over settlements where there is a need and policy for growth

