



Countryside Quality Counts

Countryside Quality Counts : An Indicator for Monitoring Change in the Character of the English Landscape 1990 - 2003

Andrew Baker
CQC Project Manager
Natural England

Landscape Indicators : Challenges and Perspectives
Landscape Observatory of Catalonia, Barcelona
30th November 2007



Original Project Sponsors



© Countryside Agency - Photographer David Burton



Project Team



- **Analysis and Reporting**

The University of Nottingham (Professor Roy Haines-Young), with University of Sheffield, (Professor Carys Swanwick), Julie Martin Associates, Alison Farmer Associates & Terra Consult

- **Communications & Consultation**

Countryside



Aim

- Countryside Quality Counts (CQC) aims to provide evidence about the ways the character of the English landscape is changing.
- To provide an Indicator of change



Origins

- The brief:
 - Where is change in the landscape occurring?
 - Do these changes matter?

“.....we want to see landscapes that continue to evolve, in ways that strengthen their character and value.... But the variety of the things that we value in the countryside means that we do not yet have an agreed way of measuring whether, overall, the quality of the countryside is being maintained” (Rural White Paper, 2000).

“....a measure of change in countryside quality, including issues such as biodiversity, tranquillity, heritage and landscape character” (Rural White Paper, 2000).

Relevance

- The UK's commitments under the European Landscape Convention
- The first international agreement specifically addressing landscape issues
- It formally recognizes the importance of *all* landscapes
- We need to monitor how landscapes are changing in order to test compliance with the requirements of the Convention

CQC – The Challenges

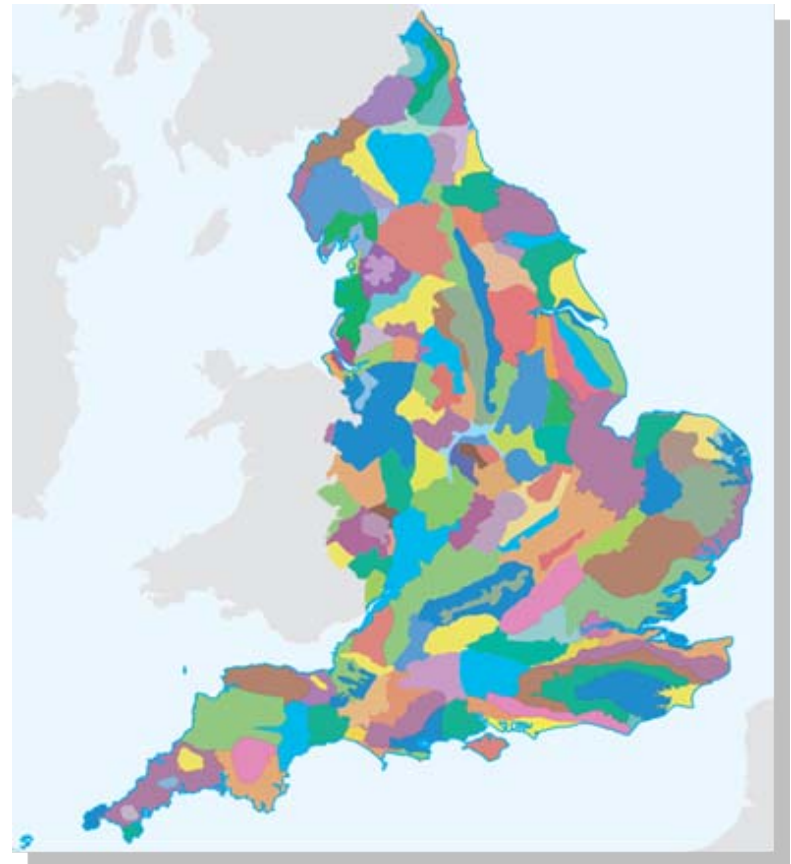
- Where is change in the landscape occurring?
 - Agree what characteristics need to be analysed
 - Assemble data resources
 - Agree time frame
- Do these changes matter?
 - Identify the criteria that can be used to assess significance of change
 - Make and test judgements about the significance of change

Geographical Framework

- The geographical framework used for CQC

The Joint Character Areas of England

- *156 distinct areas*
- *Combines physical and cultural landscape features*
- *Each has area represents set of unique combinations of landscape features*



Joint Character Areas

Shropshire Hills

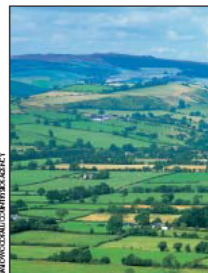
Key Characteristics

- Dominant pattern of south-west to north-east ridges, scarps and intervening valleys.
- Steep, rounded 'whaleback' hills.
- Hill tops often crowned with open moorland, with woodland on steeper slopes.
- Hill slopes with patchworks of small pasture fields, giving way to arable lands in the dales.
- Distinctive and prominent landmarks, such as Long Mynd, Wenlock Edge, the Wrekin and Clee peaks.
- Scattered farms in dales and sheltering in valleys. Larger settlements confined to the Stretton Valley and the A49 corridor.
- Small fields and cottages of squatter settlements in some areas.

Landscape Character

The Shropshire Hills are bounded by the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain to the north and the Severn Valley and Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau to the east. To the south-east lies the Teme Valley, on the edge of the Herefordshire Plateau, and to the south-west the Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills. The Shropshire Hills form an area of great diversity of landform, vegetation and landscape character comprising the Clee Hills, Wenlock Edge, Stretton Hills, Long Mynd, Stiperstones and the Wrekin. Each has a distinctive and individual character but, with the exception of Wenlock Edge, they are unified by their steep-sided, rounded 'whaleback' landforms, their generally north-east to south-west orientation and the abundance of open grassland and moorland tops. Between them are valleys in arable and pasture use which contain most of the settlements. The intervening areas include farmed lowland dales and a small section of the Shropshire coalfield.

The Clee Hills consist of three contrasting elements: a broad undulating plateau; the distinctive and dramatic peaks



This typical view of the Shropshire Hills' patchwork enclosure pattern is backed by the dramatic skyline of the Stiperstones.

To the north-west of the Clee Hills, Wenlock Edge is a steep, wooded limestone escarpment over 25 km long, flanked on either side by broad, flat-bottomed dales. The eastern edge of Ape Dale sweeps up to meet the long line of woods of Wenlock Edge with its two parallel escarpments, between which runs the lesser Hope Dale. This intricate and well-wooded pastoral dale opens via a series of funnel-shaped, 'amphitheatre-like' valleys leading through the eastern escarpment and down into the flat agricultural land of Corve Dale. Here, larger predominantly arable fields have been formed by amalgamation, whilst some areas of smaller, well-hedged fields remain. Woodland is a strong influence on the character of Wenlock Edge and

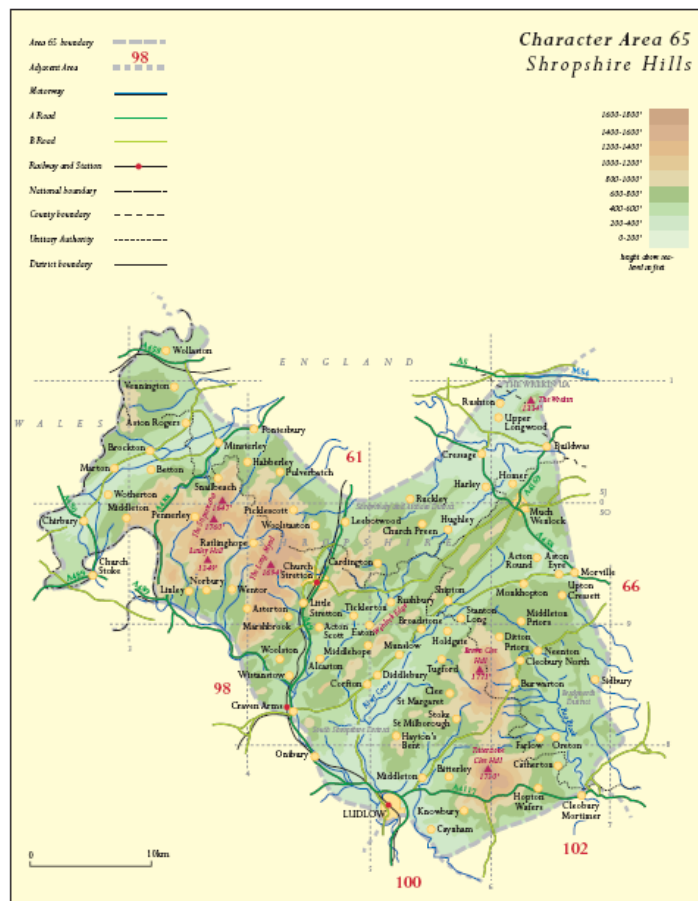
Character Area

65



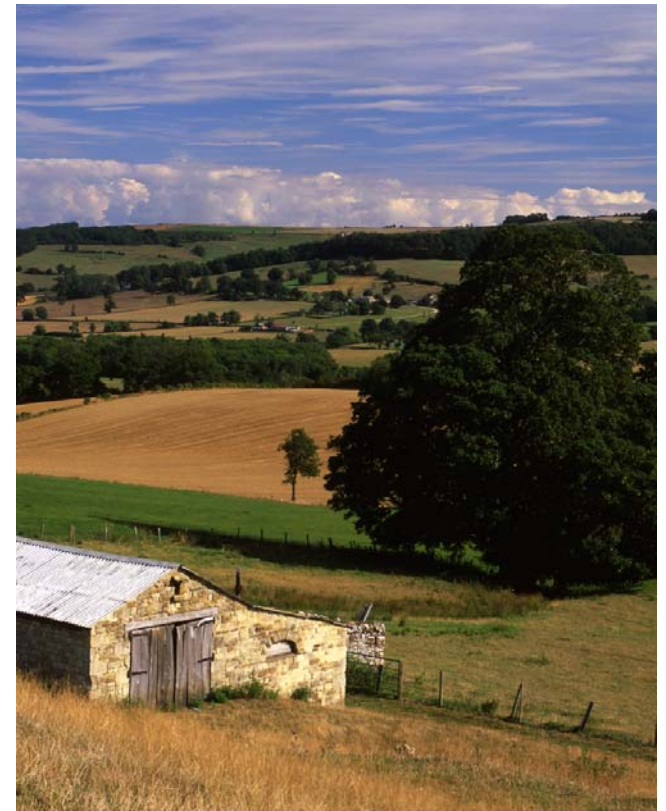
restricts views along and from it. In the 'amphitheatre-like' valleys of Hope Dale, it gives a strong sense of enclosure which is in abrupt contrast to the broad, open Corve Dale below. There are also strong contrasts within the agricultural landscape. Patchworks of small fields on the upper slopes near the woodland, give way to a rectilinear

pattern on the lower slopes and the open arable of the dale bottom. Some conifer woodland is present along the Edge and there are small parks and attractive groups of villages, manor houses and churches on the mid slopes, sometimes associated with spring lines. Limestone quarrying has long been a feature of Wenlock Edge and still continues today.



Landscape Themes

- **Woodlands and trees**
- **Boundary features**
- **Agriculture**
- **Settlement and development patterns**
- **Semi-natural features**
- **Historic features**
- **River and coastal**



Landscape Themes - Example

- **Woodland and tress**



© Countryside Agency Photo: Terry Heathcote 00-7686

Data Sources – Woodland and trees

- National Inventory of Woodlands and Trees
- Ancient Woodland Inventory
- Woodland Grant Scheme Data
- Habitat Inventory Data
- Forestry Commission: Felling licenses
- Forestry Commission: Legal ownership

Data Types - Spatial



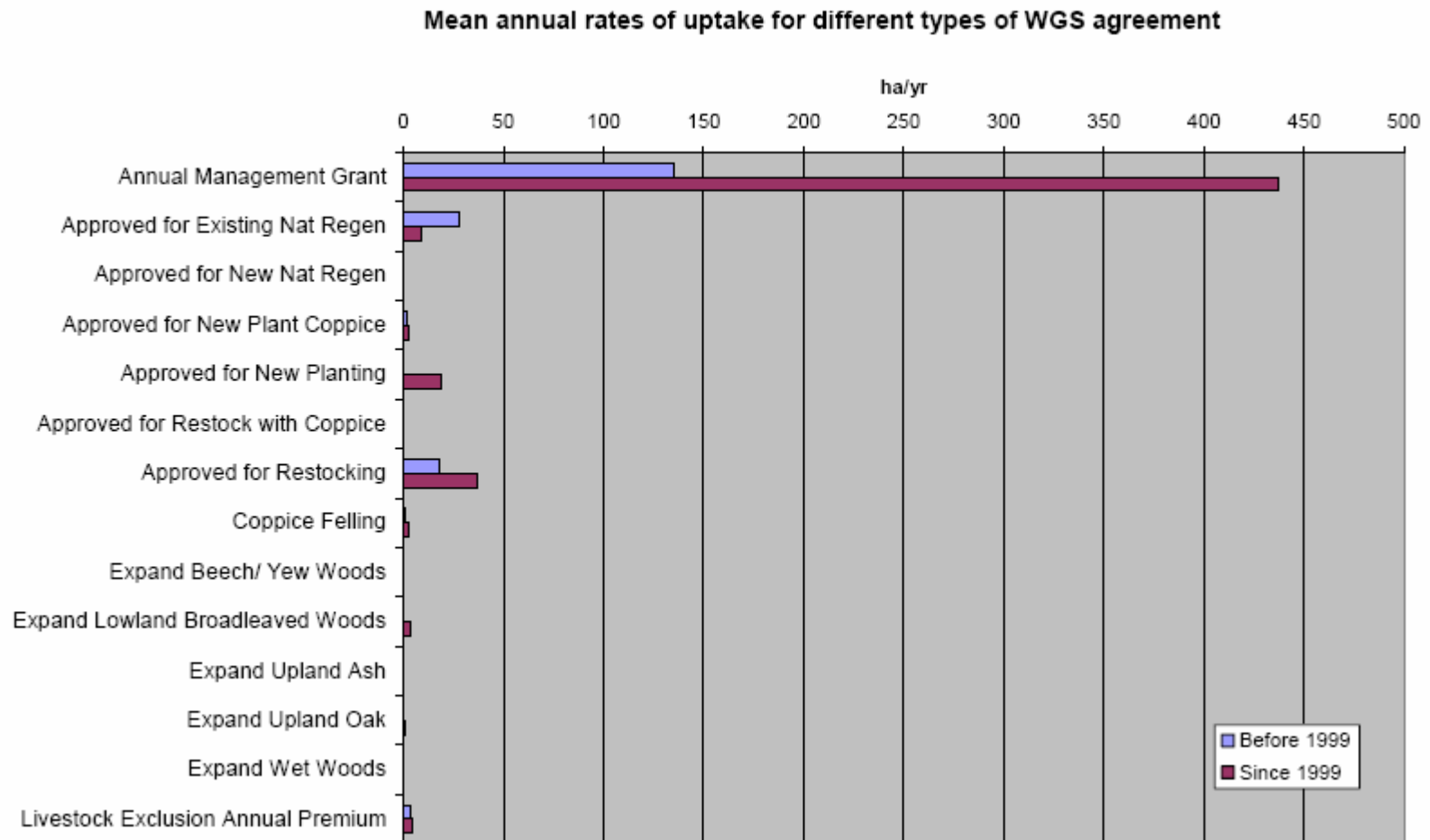
This map is based upon Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. © The Countryside Agency 2006 License No. 100019981. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Cartography by the Centre for Environmental Management (CEM), School of Geography, University of Nottingham



This map was created as part of the Second Assessment of Change in Countryside Quality 1998 - 2003.



Data Types - Tabular



Contextual Information JCA Profiles Structure

- Character description of the area
- Landscape ‘visions’- threats and opportunities
- Information organised via landscape themes
- Assembled from several information sources and updated via consultation with landscape community
- Stored in database for analysis and reporting purposes

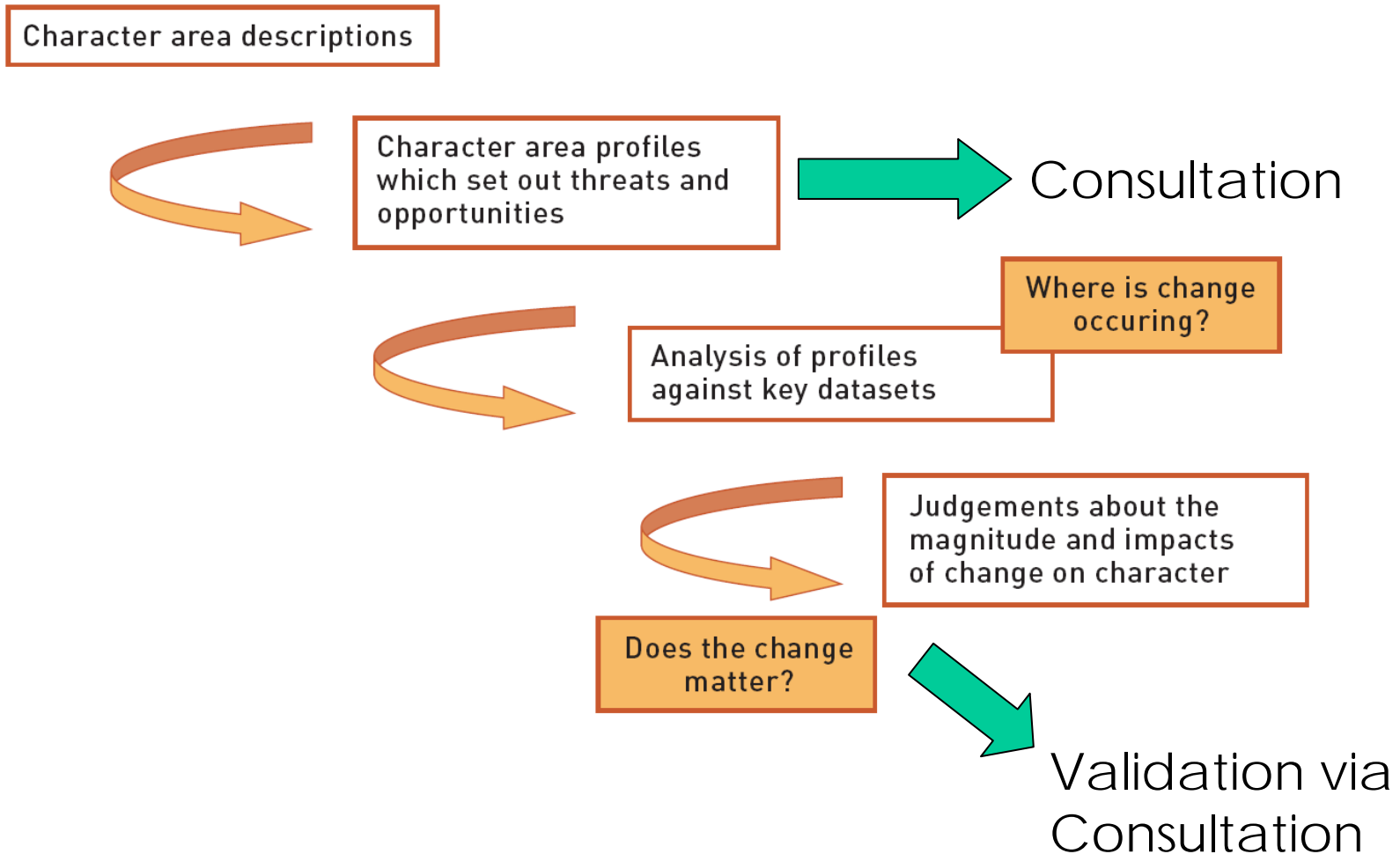
Character Area Profiles : information sources

- Original character area descriptions, created in the mid 1990s and published in the late 1990s
- Guidance notes developed by Defra for Environmental Stewardship (ES) targeting
- Unpublished Countryside Agency material used to inform Defra's ES targeting notes
- English Heritage documentation Historic JCA Profiles, created for the CQC project

Threats and Opportunities

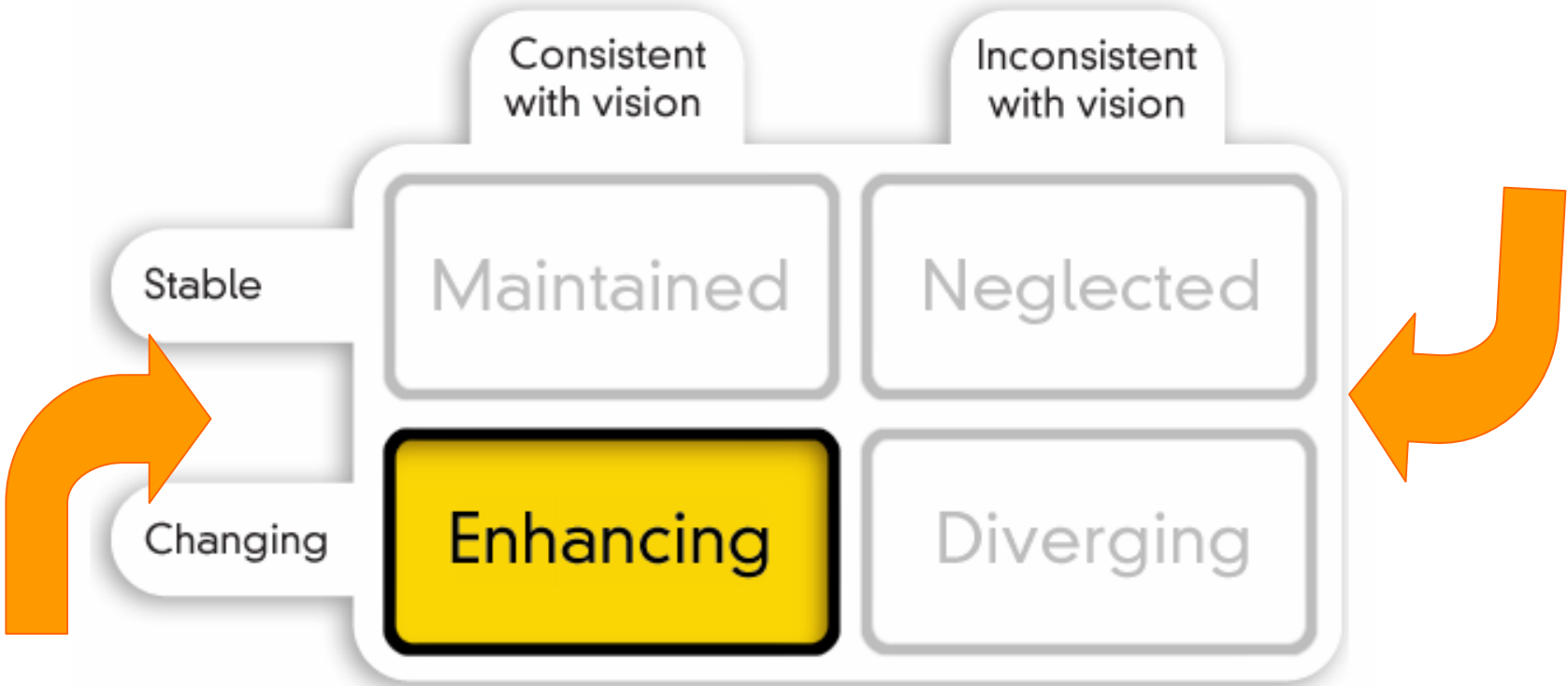
- How the landscape has changed in the recent past (often take the form of 'problems' that need to be addressed)
- Management suggestions for future landscape 'enhancement's', usually in expressed terms of existing character

The CQC Method



CQC Assessment Matrix

Overall JCA Assessment



By Landscape Theme

The Assessment Matrix

The diagram features a 2x2 grid with a horizontal arrow above it labeled 'Direction of Change' pointing left and right, and a vertical arrow to its left labeled 'Magnitude of Change' pointing up and down. The grid cells are color-coded: top-left is orange, top-right is brown, bottom-left is light orange, and bottom-right is yellow.

	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	<p>Maintained: if the character of an area is already strong and largely intact, and the changes observed for the key themes served to sustain it, or simply because the lack of change meant that the important qualities are likely to be retained in the long term.</p> <p>An appropriate synonym for maintained is 'sustained'.</p>	<p>Neglected: if the character of an area has been weakened or eroded by past change, and the changes observed in the key themes were not sufficient to restore the qualities that made the area distinct.</p> <p>Synonyms for neglected are 'weakened', or 'degraded'.</p>
Changing	<p>Enhancing: if the changes in the key themes tended to restore the overall character of an area, or to strengthen it.</p> <p>'Strengthening' is an appropriate synonym of 'enhancing'.</p>	<p>Diverging: if the change in the key themes appeared to be transforming the character of the area so that either its distinctive qualities are being lost, or significant new patterns are emerging.</p> <p>'Eroding' or 'transforming' are appropriate synonyms of 'diverging'.</p>

Applying the Assessment Matrix – Landscape Theme

In the case of woodland and tress:

Maintained, if the JCA profile indicated that:

Neglected, if the JCA profile indicated that:

Enhancing, if the JCA profile indicated that:

Diverging, if the JCA profile indicated that:

- Woodland cover was intact or that additions to woodland were not appropriate
- Woodland cover had increased substantially and that patterns of new planting were inconsistent with the aspirations recorded in the JCA Profile

Applying the Assessment Matrix



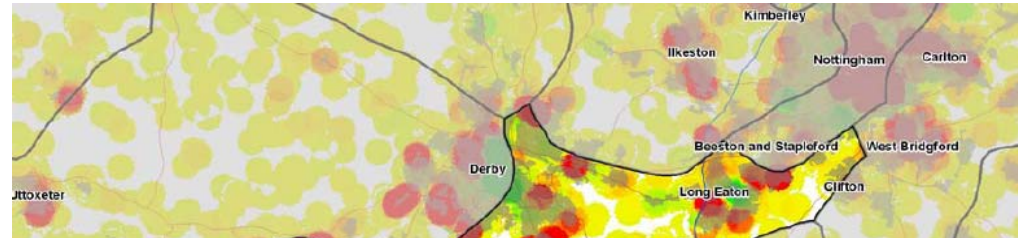
Example of commentary for trees and woodland from JCA 69: Shropshire Hills. Information on WGS uptake was used to assess management status of eligible stock. In 1999 about 13% of the established eligible NIWT stock was covered by a WGS management agreement. In 2003 the proportion of established, eligible NIWT stock was about 27%. Thus the character of the resource has probably been enhanced.

Applying the Assessment Matrix – Overall JCA assessment

Final Second Overall Assessment	Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge (JCA 90): Maintained	Border Moors and Forests (JCA 5): Enhancing	North West Norfolk (JCA76): Neglected	Lancashire and Amounderness Plain (JCA 32): Diverging
Trees and Woodland	Maintained (key)	Maintained (key)	Maintained (key)	Neglected
Boundary	Neglected	Neglected	Maintained	Neglected
Agriculture	Diverging (key)	Enhancing (key)	Neglected (key)	Diverging (key)
Settlement and Development	Maintained (key)	Maintained	Diverging (key)	Diverging (key)
Semi-Natural	Neglected	Enhancing (key)	Neglected	Diverging
Historic Features	Neglected	Unclassified	Maintained	Neglected
River and Coastal	Unclassified	Neglected	Unclassified	Maintained

Case Study - Trent Valley Washlands

JCA 69



	Consistent with vision	Inconsistent with vision
Stable	Maintained	Neglected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boundary features ◆ Historic features
Changing	Enhancing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trees & woodland ◆ Semi-natural habitats River & coastal ◆ 	Diverging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Settlement & development ◆

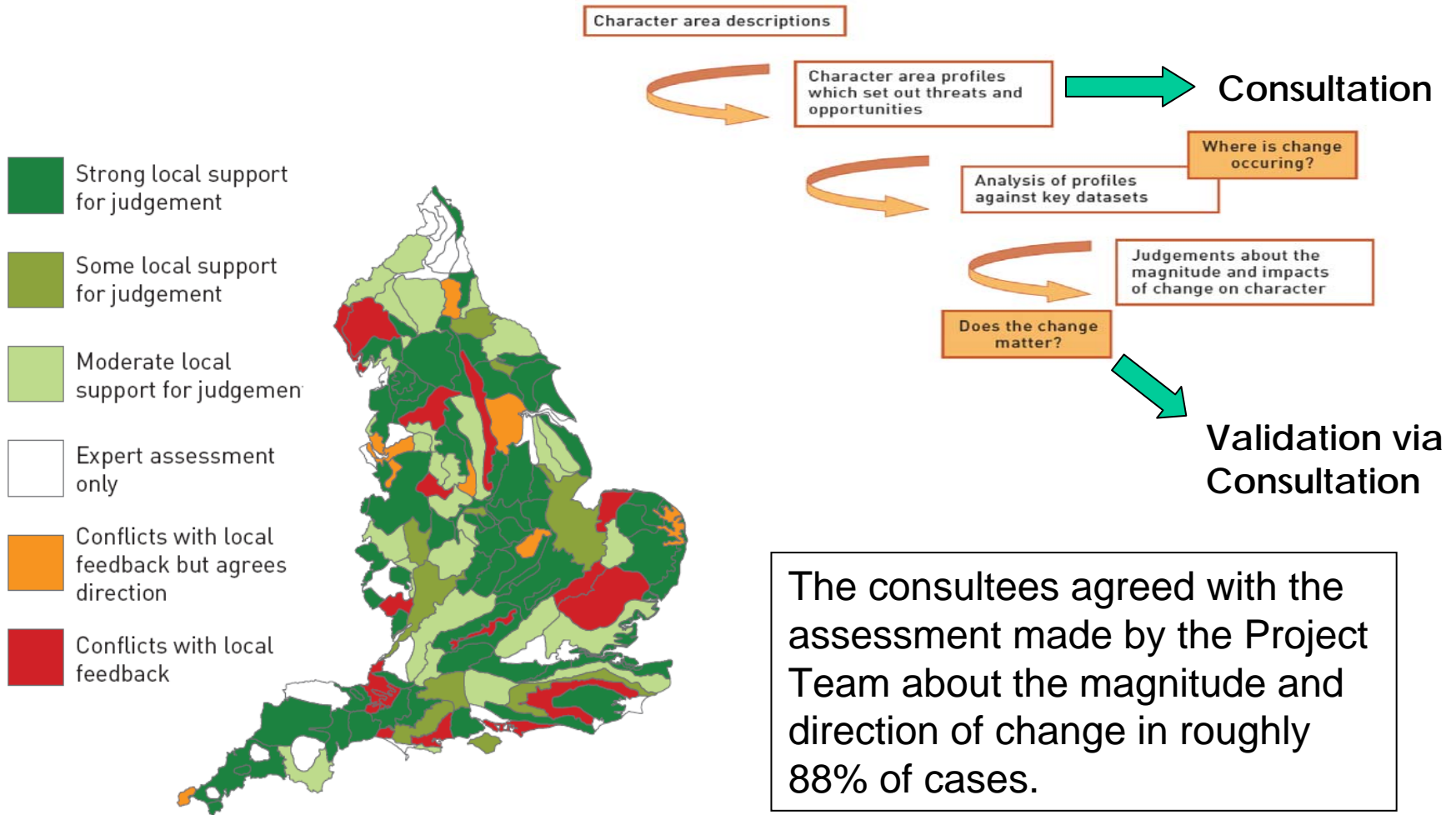


Consultation

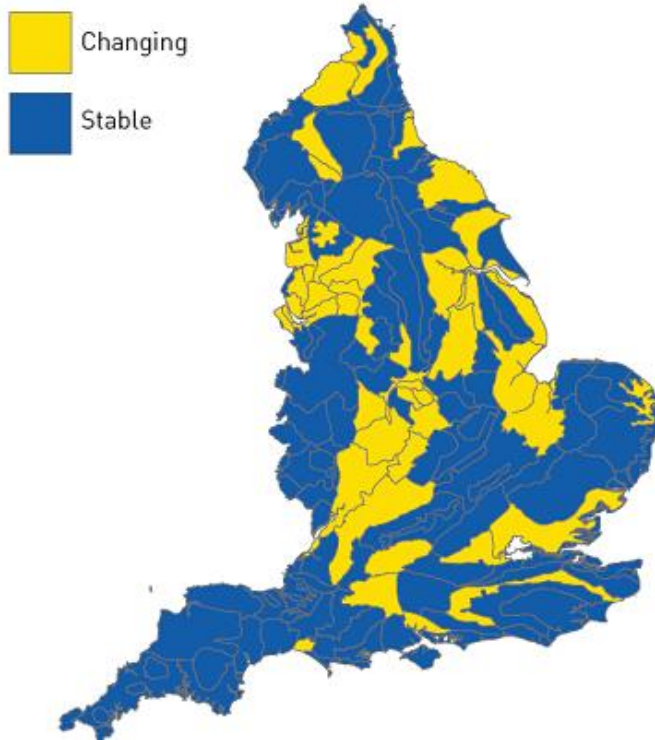
- Capturing local knowledge and values
 - Internet-based consultation processes
 - Targeted group; landscape professionals
 - Requirement for documented evidence to support judgement

Stakeholder Group	No.
Local Government (Planning Departments)	153
Government Agencies	117
Designated Landscape Teams (AONBs and National Parks)	48
Private sector organisations	40
University / Research Institute (UK and International)	26
Local interest group (e.g. County Wildlife Trusts)	21
Landowner / Agent	19
National NGO	5
Regional Government	3
General Public	2
Total	434

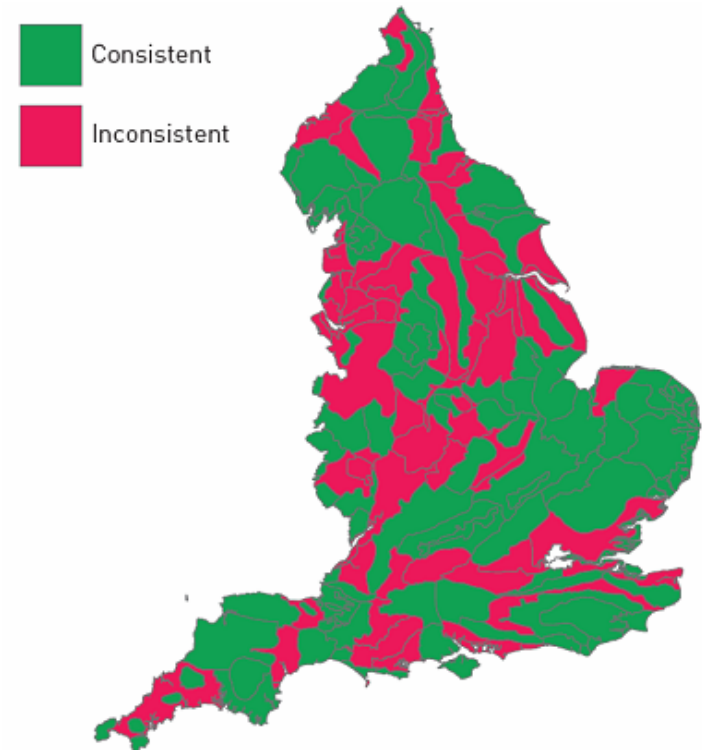
Validating the Results



The Results, 1999-2003



The assessment of the magnitude of change showed that 71% of our landscapes were stable between 1999 and 2003, while 29% were changing in relation to the key elements that shape their character.

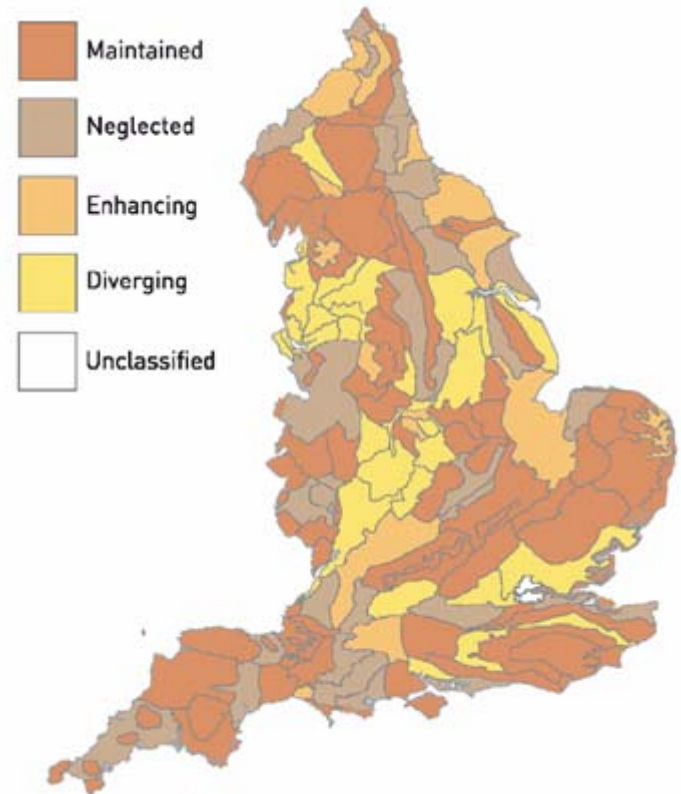


The assessment of the direction of change showed that for about 62% of our landscapes change was consistent with character between 1999-2003, while for the remaining 38% change was inconsistent

The Results 1999-2003

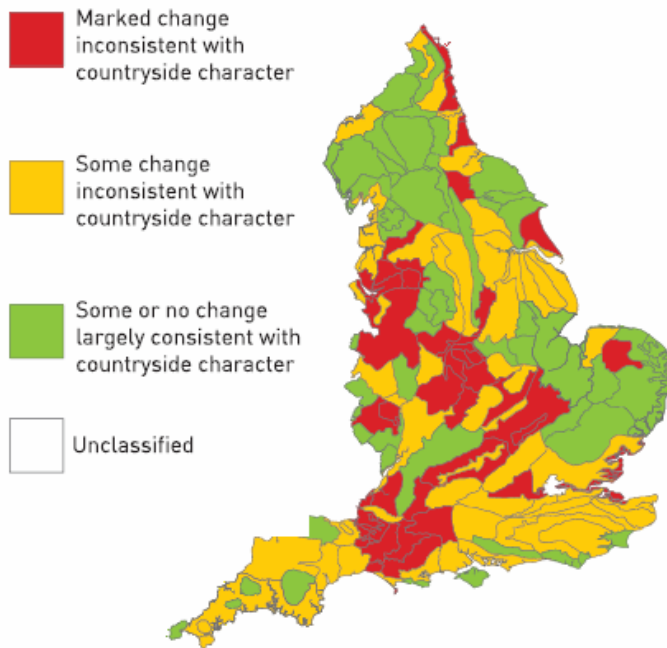
The overall results of considering both the magnitude and direction of change, between 1999 and 2003 showed:

- existing landscape character was maintained in 51% of England's landscapes
- while in a further 10% existing landscape character was enhanced
- 20% of our landscapes showed signs of neglect, given the loss of character suffered in the past
- while in 19% new landscape characteristics have emerged



Longer Term Perspectives

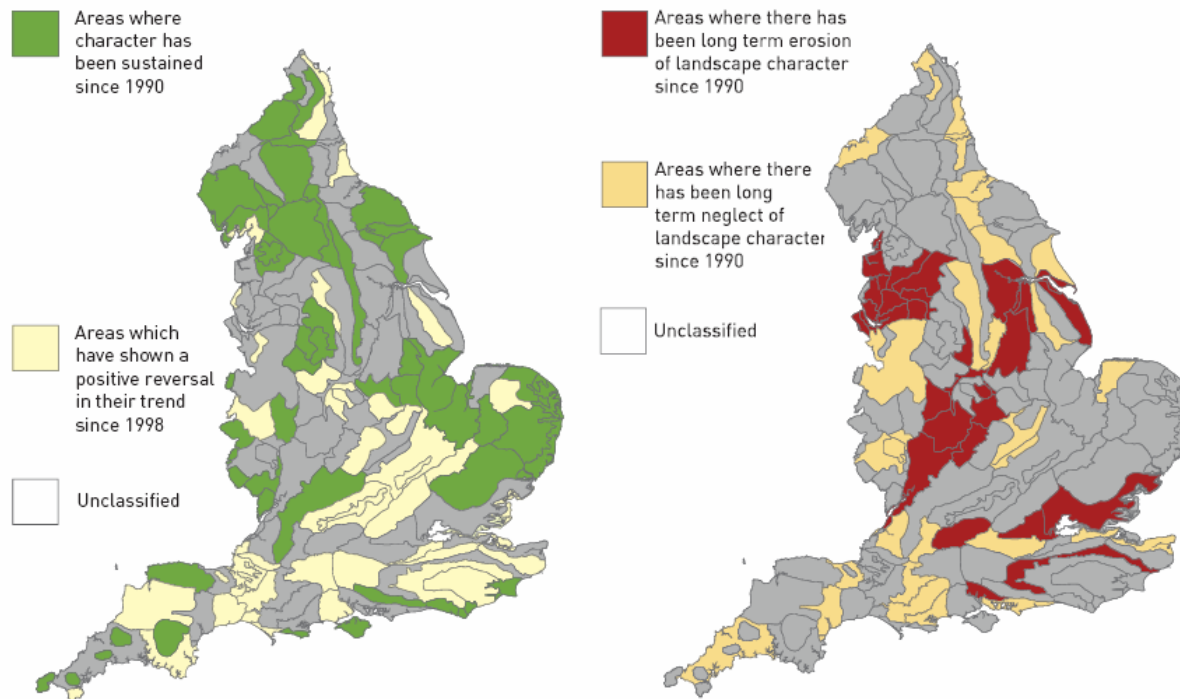
The first CQC assessment covered the period 1990-1998



- About 36% (56) of JCAs were stable or showed changes that were consistent with either maintaining or strengthening their character
- In about 64% (100) were diverging, in the sense that they showed marked patterns of change that were transforming or eroding the elements that made them distinctive

Longer Term Perspectives

During the period 1990 – 2003 the number of JCAs with patterns of change that either maintain or enhance character has increased from 36% to about 61%, while the number with signs of neglect or loss of character appear to have decreased.



Policy Support Tools and Future Development

- CQC can contribute in a number of policy areas:
 - Ecosystem approaches to natural resource management
 - Monitoring changes in our protected landscapes
 - The Targeting and Monitoring Environmental Stewardship payments under CAP Pillar 2
 - Helping to understand the impact of climate change on the character of the English landscape



“...the linkage between people and their environment needs to be more clearly identified, so that future social, economic and environmental goals become more closely aligned.”

Perspectives

- CQC has demonstrated that;
 - If something can be described it can be monitored
 - Through consultation agreement can be reached on the significance of change
 - Because landscape character cannot be determined by absolute value, measurement can only occur through a process of social negotiation.
 - By having an indicator of landscape change, landscape character can now be accounted for by Government



© Countryside Agency - Photographer R Pilgrim 02-918

www.cqc.org.uk/



Countryside Quality Counts



Tracking Change in the English Landscape

Home

About

Consultation

Results

Archive

Links

Contact

Home

Countryside Quality Counts (CQC) is a project to develop a national indicator of how the countryside is changing. It aims to understand how and where change is occurring, and most importantly, where change matters the most. This information can be used to help plan future landscapes and manage change that delivers public benefits - enhancing and maintaining the character and quality of our countryside for this and future generations.

The project is currently undergoing a second phase of development and consultation, involving further refinement of CQC data for the period 1998 to 2003. The consultation will be undertaken online via this website in September 2005 and April 2006, providing an important opportunity for the landscape community to collaborate in developing a national indicator of landscape change.

[Click here](#) if you wish to take part in the CQC consultation.

[Home](#) | [About](#) | [Consultation](#) | [Results](#) | [Links](#) | [Contact](#) | [Top](#)

CQC is sponsored by the Countryside Agency Landscape, Access and Recreation division, English Nature, Defra RDS, English Heritage and Defra

