

Character and identity

Townscape and heritage
appraisals in housing
market renewal areas



ENGLISH HERITAGE



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Introduction

The creation of successful places requires recognition of its existing assets, combined with a strong vision of what that place could look like.

Historic housing and those neighbourhood buildings associated with it, such as schools, shops and places of worship, all help to define an area's sense of place and meaning. A basic tenet of good urban design is to understand this concept of local distinctiveness.

This report, co-published by CABI and English Heritage, reflects the desire of both agencies to ensure a good process for addressing character and identity. It focuses specifically on the experience of planning for regeneration in housing market renewal (HMR) areas and has been produced in partnership with Elevate East Lancashire.

The report describes agencies' experience of using a relatively new tool – the townscape and heritage appraisal (THA) – in assessing the character and identity of a place. THAs explain why a place is

as it is through text, mapping and illustrations and have evolved from the 'model brief' developed by English Heritage, which was drawn up to help those involved to understand the historical significance of housing market renewal areas (see page 7).

In practice, these heritage appraisals have also come to include an assessment of townscape, which means looking at extra elements, such as the relation of built form to topography, landscape and urban layout and identifying landmarks and key views. These wider aspects of a place are essential elements in defining its particular character. Both CABI and English Heritage see townscape and heritage appraisals as a positive contribution to the planning process.

The report demonstrates that townscape and heritage appraisals can help collaboration between local authorities and other agencies, including CABI and English Heritage – and it suggests how the positive lessons learnt from HMR can be applied elsewhere.



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Chimney Pot Park, Salford – successful regeneration retaining historic frontages with rebuilt interiors

Housing market renewal – the partnerships

This report looks specifically at the use of appraisals in the Elevate East Lancashire HMR pathfinder area – but it also draws on work that has been done in the other HMR projects.

- 1 Bridging Newcastle Gateshead – Newcastle and Gateshead
- 2 Tees Valley Living
- 3 West Lakes Renaissance
- 4 Elevate East Lancashire – Blackburn with Darwen, Hyndburn, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale
- 5 Partners in Action – Oldham and Rochdale
- 6 West Yorkshire Housing Partnership
- 7 Gateway Hull and East Riding – Hull and East Riding of Yorkshire
- 8 New Heartlands – Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral
- 9 Manchester Salford – Manchester and Salford
- 10 Transform South Yorkshire – Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster
- 11 Renew North Staffordshire – Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands
- 12 Urban Living – Birmingham and Sandwell.



From top Derelict houses in Accrington; houses undergoing group repair in Nelson; the final product: improved houses in Nelson

The importance of character in policy

Housing market renewal areas exist 'to provide lasting solutions for communities blighted by derelict homes through investment and innovation' (ODPM 2002).

As part of the sustainable communities plan, they are expected to meet 12 requirements, four of which 'are especially relevant to the market renewal pathfinders':

- *communities should be of sufficient size, scale and density, and the right layout to support basic amenities in the neighbourhood and minimise use of resources (including land)*
- *they should contain buildings that both individually and collectively can meet different needs over time and that minimise the use of resources*
- *they should include a well-integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes*
- *they should foster a sense of place.*

(Audit Commission 2005)

An understanding of context is vital to all of these but, particularly, to the last requirement if HMR investment is not to result in a series of developments that could be anywhere.

The distinctiveness of locality has been a central theme in the revival of urban design over the last decade and has been set out in planning policy guidance such as *By design: urban design in the planning system: towards better practice* (CABE 2000). In this guide, the first of the seven objectives of urban design is that related to **character**, which is defined as a 'place with its own identity' where the objective is:

To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.

The local government white paper, *Strong and prosperous communities* (HM Government 2006), promoted placemaking as a key driver for economic prosperity and highlighted the responsibilities of local authorities as 'place shapers'.



© Daniel Hopkinson

Selwyn Street, Oldham, which was awarded the Building for Life gold standard

More recently, and of specific relevance to this report, is the first recommendation of the *Housing market renewal: action plan for delivering successful places* (CABE 2008) which is 'to champion the placemaking agenda'. It also seeks to promote 'the creative use of historic environments'. The unique physical aspects of a place depend on its particular combinations of topography, soils, hydrology, flora, road and street patterns and the characteristics of its built form and the materials used. These combinations are the result of historic processes and only if we understand these can we hope to achieve a quality of design intervention that responds to the **genius loci** or 'spirit of place'.

Local area agreement national indicator 5 has also picked up this issue: Overall/general satisfaction with local area (CLG 2007) refers to the government's recognition that the **quality of place** remains a priority to residents and largely determines how satisfied people are with their local area as a place to live.

Community involvement in decision making is increasingly on the government's agenda with the purpose of the sustainable communities plan seen as setting the overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of a local area that tells the 'story of place' (CLG 2008).

There has been specific guidance on housing, too. Building for Life, a collaboration between CABE and the housebuilding industry, has published its award criteria for exemplary projects in *Delivering great places to live: 20 questions you need to answer* (CABE 2008). Of these questions, the first five are grouped under the heading of character with the implication that if a scheme does not meet these, then it is unlikely to gain an award. As Building for Life takes on a wider role in assessing all publicly funded housing proposals¹, its criteria are certain to take on more status.

¹ Building for Life is the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods, and is included in the government's annual monitoring report guidance for local and regional planning authorities.



Brierfield – landscape and topography have a significant impact on how settlements form

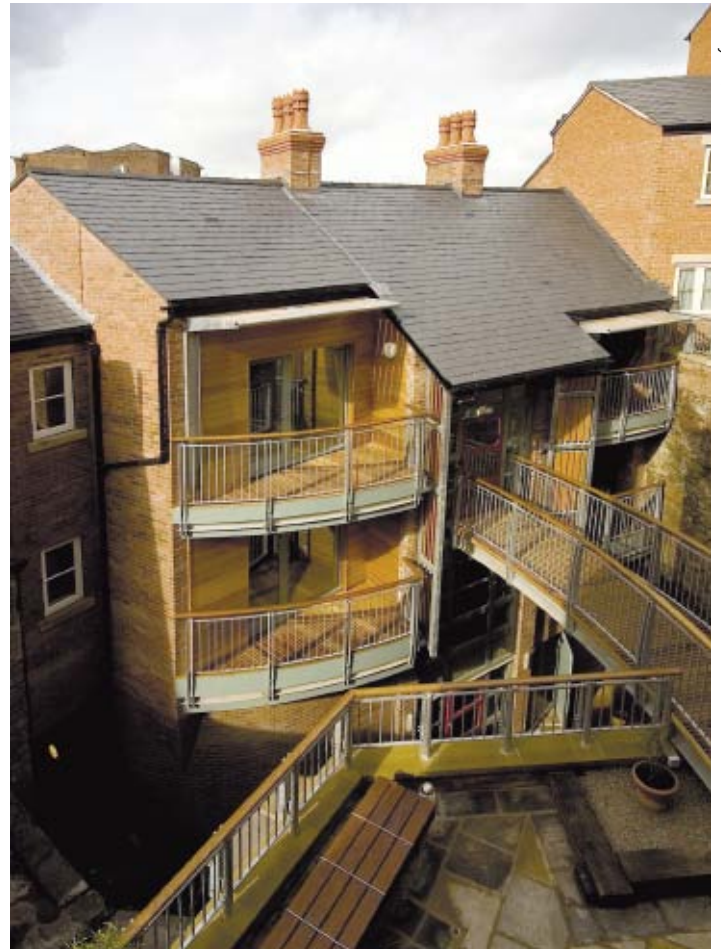
A key set of Building for Life criteria focuses on the theme of local distinctiveness. The other criteria depend on the context, which is especially important for interventions in existing urban areas.²

Character:

- 1 Is the design specific to the scheme?*
- 2 Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?*
- 3 Does the scheme feel like a place with distinctive character?*
- 4 Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?*
- 5 Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?*

Against this background of an overwhelming concern for character of place, it is clearly of fundamental importance to arrive at an understanding of the context in which it is proposed to intervene. A townscape and heritage appraisal offers a systematic and objective way of setting out the features that make a place unique and that must be considered as the background to any planning and design activity.

2 Delivering great places to live: 20 questions you need to answer (CABE 2008)



Rostron Brow, Stockport – winner of a Building for Life award

© Eddy Rhead

Where have townscape and heritage appraisals come from?

In 2005, English Heritage prepared a model brief for 'the commissioning of work to assess the historical significance in areas of housing renewal' to accompany its position statement *Low demand housing and the historic environment*. It starts from the principle that 'historic housing helps to define an area's sense of place and meaning'. Indeed, it can be argued that understanding local distinctiveness is fundamental to good urban design.

The brief proposes two different levels or 'scales of assessment'. An extensive assessment is intended to provide a broad-brush overview 'across a wide area' and should be used to inform strategic decisions on the choice of areas and degrees of intervention. A second phase, of intensive assessment, will then provide more detailed information on selected zones which can inform 'the regeneration of individual neighbourhoods, streets and associated buildings'.

The model brief outlines the information that an assessment should cover, including four key aspects for each study area:

- 1 Its **historic development**, followed by
- 2 the **mapping of character areas**, based on a combination of attributes leading to
- 3 an **assessment of the significance** of these areas
- 4 **recommendations** on integrating the significant heritage assets with a programme of renewal.

Further to the guidance contained in the model brief, which is for good reason heritage focussed, an additional 'townscape' element has been developed in practice. See page 13 for an audit of 10 appraisals.



Image courtesy of Oldham-Rochdale Partners in Action

A Kirkholt open day

Example 1 – historic development

The Accrington town centre heritage assessment and future strategy (Paul Butler Associates 2007) provides an overview of Accrington's evolution, including a series of historic maps that show how the town has developed from a small hamlet in the 18th century into a thriving textile town by the mid-19th century.

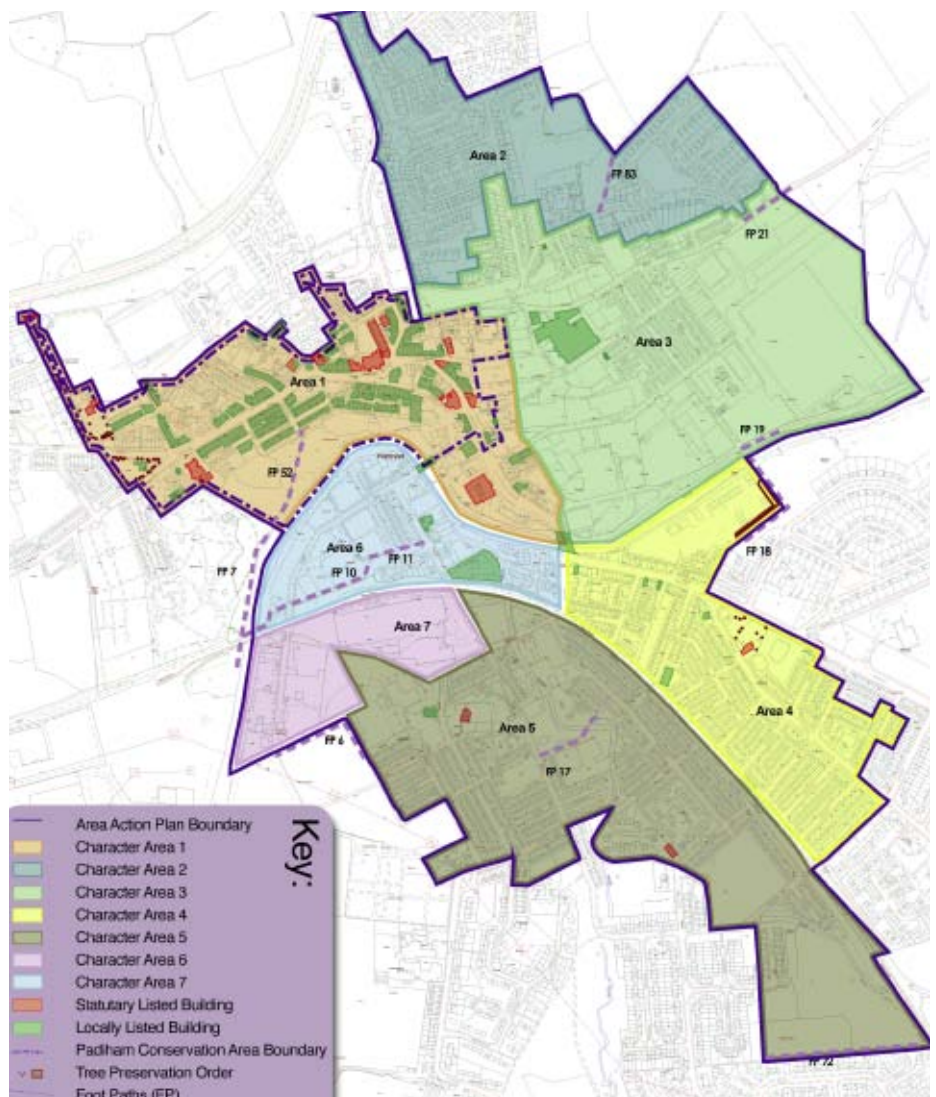
Yates 1786 map of Lancashire, courtesy of Lancashire County Council



Example 2 – mapping character areas

The Padiham heritage appraisal (Burnley Borough Council 2007) divides the town into seven character areas. These are then described in detail in separate chapters that explore aspects of the distinctive attributes that together comprise the character of each area: housing, industry, movement and key routes, shops and public houses, industrial buildings and landmarks, views, green spaces and trees.

Padiham Character map, courtesy of Burnley Borough Council
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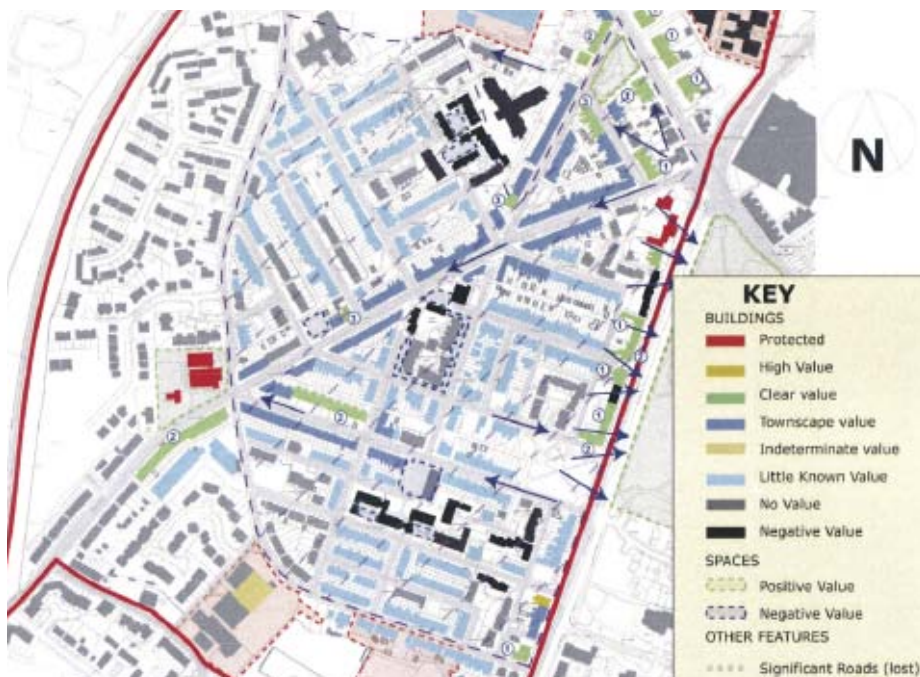


Example 3 – assessment of the significance of these areas

The Oldham-Rochdale HMR Pathfinder heritage appraisal

(Lathams 2006) adopts a strategic approach to the townscape and heritage of the HMR intervention areas, in that all of the buildings and spaces are attributed with a level of significance. In the case of buildings, this spectrum ranges from negative value through to those that have statutory protection.

Significance mapping in Werneth Freehold. Image courtesy of Oldham-Rochdale Partners in Action © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved



Example 4 – recommendations for integrating heritage with renewal

Bradley intensive urban survey and masterplan (Pendle Borough Council 2006) was conducted by BDP and its recommendations can be traced through the subsequent Bradley masterplan. Several buildings that presented opportunities for redevelopment were identified and these were then incorporated into the masterplan. It also identified an area of poor housing environment, which is then translated into an area for clearance and redevelopment in the masterplan. Informed by the identification of cohesive areas or areas of historic housing in the townscape and heritage appraisal, the masterplan also identifies areas where group repair/facelifting work would benefit.

The chimney at Riverside Mill, Bradley



Informing design

Townscape and heritage appraisals inform but do not dictate proposals. It is the task of the designer to interpret these proposals in a way that enhances the essential qualities of a locality by selecting those elements that must be conserved and those that can be changed. There is a spectrum of possible interventions, from total preservation to complete renewal, and in the HMRs most interventions will lie somewhere around the centre of this spectrum and only exceptionally at the ends.

For example, even if it is decided to demolish some houses because of their total unsuitability it is possible to retain the integrity of the historic street pattern.

This has happened at **Selwyn Street, Oldham**, which lies just outside an HMR. Here the houses have been rebuilt as much bigger units and no vestiges of the previous dwellings have been retained. However, the street section has been maintained and the relation between private and public space remains essentially the same, although it has been modified to accommodate current perceptions of privacy. The use of a similar coloured brick means the new buildings are in harmony with older houses in the street.

Understanding character and identity is key to the art of good placemaking. This has been demonstrated by CABE's work in the Thames Gateway, where people living and working in the area were asked what they think makes the place unique as well as what it needs. This information was then used to inform key ideas recommended to be at the heart of planning policies, investment strategies, design decisions and environmental projects for individual places across the region (CABE 2006).



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From top The pocket park, Selwyn Street, Oldham; back gardens; site plan

At **Chimney Pot Park, Salford** (pictured here), the facades of the houses have been retained and, therefore, the street elevation remains essentially intact but the homes have been turned upside down inside so that living rooms are on the first floor looking on to a patio or garden above the car park at ground level. This creates a more spacious living area than is found in a traditional terraced house.

At **Whitefield in Pendle, Lancashire**, a much less intrusive remodelling has taken place in which pairs of houses have been combined to provide larger units that are more suited to the local community's needs. Here the structure and material of the homes are conserved as well as the street and yard pattern being retained.



© CABE/Paul Lavelle



© Urban Splash



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From top Chimney Pot Park, Salford, under construction; shared courtyard at first floor level; visualisation of cross section

Beyond heritage

Any understanding of context requires knowledge of history and culture, including the town planning decisions that produced it. Moreover, the study of the historic townscape has been a source of inspiration for urban designers for over a century. Although the English Heritage model brief is specifically directed towards the assessment of historic significance, in practice it has often been linked to an analysis of the quality of the townscape and, especially in the case of the towns of Pennine Lancashire, the relation between the settlements and their landscape context. Most of the studies considered have made this connection and we are therefore using the terms 'townscape and heritage appraisal' employed by them in this report.

For CABI it is essential that the link between townscape and heritage appraisals be made. There are many benefits that this approach brings, not least that it provides a rounded understanding of the place

that is to change. Townscape analysis includes ground figure diagrams that help to define settlement pattern, landmarks and vistas, as well as an appreciation of the layout, scale and form of buildings and space, materials, colours and texture. The example in the box below demonstrates this point.

The importance of consultation

It is also critical to involve the community in placemaking investigations. They are the local experts who can direct the attention of outside experts to townscape and heritage assets that are valued by particular communities, but which may not have been recognised by, for example, having been listed. The outside experts can then place these assets in a wider value context, given their ability to draw upon experience of working further afield.

The Oldham-Rochdale HMR pathfinder heritage appraisal (Lathams 2006) is a good example of how townscape analysis can be integrated into a heritage appraisal. Each of the character area maps includes ground figure plans along with clearly identified landmarks and views. This appraisal also demonstrates the effective use of an extensive participation programme with community workshops embedded in the overall approach.

Townscape analysis mapping in Werneth Freehold. Image courtesy of Oldham-Rochdale Partners in Action
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Activity audit

Design and Heritage Pennine Lancashire researched the content and application of townscape and heritage appraisals completed in the Elevate HMR area. This revealed that 10 appraisals have been prepared, although their distribution and approach across the five authorities is somewhat uneven, with Burnley completing five in-house and the remainder done by a range of consultants, some in tandem with masterplans and others ahead of these.

Six appraisals from Pennine Lancashire were analysed in detail. These were supplemented by an examination of examples of townscape and heritage appraisals from four other HMR pathfinder areas: Oldham-Rochdale, North Staffordshire, Gateshead and Merseyside. These were chosen either because they demonstrated approaches that differed or

were for wider areas than those cases chosen from the Pennine Lancashire area. They were evaluated to establish the extent to which they meet the requirements of the English Heritage model brief.

The table below shows that, although the description of historic development has been widely and effectively executed, the subsequent stages of the mapping of character areas and assessment of their significance have been less consistently carried out. This may be because these activities involve the difficult task of making judgements about the value of places and spelling out the implications for their future. The right-hand column in the table shows where a townscape analysis has been combined with a heritage appraisal.

	Historic development	Mapping of character areas	Assessment of significance	Recommendations for integrating heritage with renewal	Townscape analysis
Blackburn Queen Street	●	●		●	
Burnley Padiham	●	●	●	●	●
Hyndburn Accrington Town Centre	●		●	●	
Pendle Brierfield	●		●	●	
Pendle Bradley	●	●	●	●	●
Pendle Colne S. Valley	●		●	●	●
Oldham-Rochdale	●	●	●	●	●
North Staffordshire	●	●	●	●	●
Gateshead	●	●	●	●	●
Merseyside New Heartlands	●	●	●	●	●

Key:

● complies with the model brief ● partially complies with the model brief ● includes an integrated townscape analysis

Working beyond administrative boundaries

Working within administrative boundaries does not always produce optimum results and the local government white paper (HM Government 2006) therefore announced sub-regional governance mechanisms such as multi-area agreements which are being piloted in several HMR areas. In CABE's 2008 HMR action plan, it is reported that one of the achievements of the HMR programme 'is that it has initiated new or reinforced existing cross-boundary models of working'. That document recommends that, among the measures that should be taken to achieve socially and environmentally sustainable development and the creative use of historic environments, HMR partnerships and local authorities should:

commit to the early commissioning of comprehensive urban design and historic area characterisations and assessments and ensure that they inform the future planning, design and phasing of physical interventions in neighbourhoods.³

³ Housing market renewal action plan (CABE 2008)

The action plan also recommends that the potential of working across boundaries should be maximised so townscape and heritage appraisals should not only be completed early, but also at the sub-regional as well as the local scale.

Examples of sub-regional approaches are found in Oldham-Rochdale and North Staffordshire, both of which undertook extensive appraisals ahead of the more detailed intensive townscape and heritage appraisals.

This information has the potential to inform a range of strategies and policies including local development frameworks, local area assessments, multi-area agreements and sub-regional spatial plans.



A view of Whitefield in its landscape context

Image courtesy of Elevate

Appraisals and statutory procedures

A systematic appraisal provides transparency and legitimacy, so they can help to deliver consensus and avoid criticisms of ignoring the local context. While the use of some form of townscape and heritage appraisal is an unquestioned matter of good practice in urban design, there are also important procedural and statutory reasons for adopting them in HMR areas, particularly when pursuing compulsory purchase orders (CPOs). When applying for a CPO using the 1985 Housing Act, a local authority has a statutory duty under section 607 to have paid regard to the amenities of the locality and the desirability of preserving extra works of architectural, historic or artistic interest. Indeed, following two public inquiries in Whitefield, Nelson, the planning inspector stated that:

...the council appears to have paid little regard to the assessment of the [compulsory purchase] order

lands in terms of any architectural or historic interest they may have in their own right, or in terms of any contribution to the wider whole, as required under section 607 of the act. This is despite its production of a built heritage strategy in 1997. Whilst character appraisals have been carried out for other parts of Whitefield no such appraisal has been done for the order lands...

(Planning Inspectorate 2003)

Pendle Borough Council rapidly moved to accommodate the inspector's comments and took the decision to designate an extensive conservation area in Whitefield. Subsequently, the Whitefield Partnership Regeneration Board was established and the regeneration of the area is an example of positive collaborative working.



Aerial view of the Conservation Area in Whitefield, Nelson

© English Heritage, image courtesy of HTNW

How have appraisals been used?

As well as serving as part of the evidence base to support future public inquiries, a townscape and heritage appraisal becomes an asset that can be used in the preparation of further instruments, including design briefs, design guides and masterplans beyond those immediately concerned with the HMR project.

In Pennine Lancashire, appraisals have been used to inform a varied range of planning instruments. These include masterplans (Hyndburn, Pendle), area action plans (Burnley) and supplementary planning documents (Blackburn, Burnley). This array demonstrates the utility of townscape and heritage appraisals and the way investment in their preparation can be justified by reference to the other work that they can support. Where appraisals were prepared after other instruments (masterplans etc) had been drawn up, they have proved useful as an evaluation tool. Elsewhere the appraisals have also proved useful in identifying buildings that should be recommended for spot listing or inclusion on a local list and the creation or extension of conservation areas.

How townscape and heritage appraisal are used in HMR areas

Burnley Borough Council – context and design guidance

The South West Burnley heritage appraisal was undertaken to: *'identify opportunities to retain, strengthen and enhance local character and identity; and inform the production of design guidance for the redevelopment and/or renovation of the neighbourhood action plan areas that builds on strengthening distinctive local character and identity.'*

The heritage appraisal proposed four character areas as follows:

- 1 high-density housing and mill buildings on a gridiron street pattern
- 2 garden suburb lower-density 20th century housing estates
- 3 late 20th century Radburn style housing estates
- 4 modern industrial estate.

The design guidance for South West Burnley, adopted as a supplementary planning document in 2006 to reinforce and enhance local character, was based on the findings of the heritage appraisal.

Burnley Borough Council – area action plans

Having initially completed heritage appraisals for the areas with neighbourhood action plans, Burnley Borough Council extended its coverage to the five area action plan (AAP) areas. They are well-illustrated and easily accessible documents.

The preferred option report for the Padiham AAP cites 13 objectives. The seventh relates to the historic environment:

7. To secure development that meets the principle of good urban design and that helps to create a sense of place whilst protecting and enhancing the historic heritage and character of Padiham.

It then requires that:

good design should enhance and protect local distinctiveness. The Padiham heritage appraisal provides an assessment of the elements that give the area its distinctive character and identifies opportunities to retain or enhance this local character.

For example, the area that covers the 19th century mill complexes extending east of the town centre is proposed for heritage-led regeneration with mixed uses as the optimum option in terms of the sustainability appraisal (Burnley BC 2007).

The Padiham AAP preferred option document uses the guidance of the heritage appraisal to compare a range of choices.

Welsh Streets Merseyside – development proposal

In 2004, a plan was devised for the clearance of Welsh Streets in the Merseyside HMR pathfinder area.

However, following the advice of English Heritage, amongst others, the city council requested that a heritage appraisal be completed to provide the context and background for the regeneration of this area.

The Architectural History Practice completed this study, which included an assessment of the significance of buildings within the area and their contribution to the overall townscape. Subsequently, a revised scheme was devised which retains part of the street grid pattern and a number of large, three-storey houses, which have been identified as having heritage value. This scheme is now being financially appraised to establish its viability.

The heritage appraisal identified previously overlooked assets and allowed them to be validated.



One of the Welsh Streets, Merseyside

© Max Moynereux

Oldham-Rochdale – community outreach in Kirkholt

Having completed the various heritage appraisals for the HMR area, Oldham-Rochdale is now keen to see this information used by as many people as possible. The appraisals are being used as the basis of community leaflets that explore the heritage of HMR areas, including a heritage trail in some cases.

An exciting local project has also been sparked by the identification in the Kirkholt heritage assessment that archaeology dating back to the middle ages (and perhaps earlier) may well be recoverable within the area of Balderstone Park and the adjacent school playing fields. Amongst other activities this HLF-funded initiative will include two community excavations, allowing local people the rare opportunity to discover their own heritage.

The heritage appraisal has been the catalyst for a wide range of initiatives involving the local community.



Image courtesy of Oldham-Rochdale Partners in Action

Community participation in Kirkholt

Lessons for the future

The experience so far of the use of townscape and heritage appraisals has demonstrated that they are an effective way of defining what makes the towns of Pennine Lancashire so very special. They are a means of turning the emotional and instinctive reactions to place, shared by residents and external specialists alike, into something more tangible that can be used in the planning system to harness the power of place in regeneration.

Other lessons apply more widely to housing market renewal areas and in urban regeneration projects in general.

- **Heritage is a key issue that needs to be considered when plans and programmes are being devised.** A townscape and heritage appraisal provides a systematic and transparent method of bringing the relevant data together in an easily accessible form. **This is particularly relevant when considering compulsory purchase orders,** to ensure that this issue has been fully regarded and not overlooked.
- Although it is still early in the implementation phase of housing market renewal to assess results on the ground, townscape and heritage appraisals have already proved essential for informing instruments such as area development frameworks, supplementary planning documents, area action plans and development briefs. **It is essential that, when completed, the full value of townscape and heritage appraisals continues to be realised by their full integration into the design and planning process.**
- **The commissioning of townscape and heritage appraisals has to be seen as an investment that gives returns beyond that of the single appraisal.** The commissioning bodies and **planning authorities must play a key role in monitoring the application of the recommendations of these studies.**
- **Timing is crucial** for both the creation and application of heritage appraisals. It is clearly the best use of resources if they are completed in advance but at any stage they may be critical in determining intervention priorities. However, even if executed later, townscape and heritage appraisals have proved useful.
- **If the potential of townscape and heritage appraisals is to be fully realised, it is essential that they have a strategic component** such as an **appraisal of significance** which can be used to inform further stages of the process.
- **Townscape and heritage appraisals can operate on a variety of scales, across administrative boundaries** and respond to the specific needs of places by starting with a strategic overview before moving on to a more detailed assessment of local areas.
- **Townscape and heritage appraisals are generally met with a great deal of support from a range of protagonists in the planning and development field** – from developers to councillors and local residents. By aligning the positions of the different parties with respect to heritage, they can help to deliver consensus.
- **While the English Heritage model brief has provided a starting point for these studies, many have departed from it in a number of positive ways.** In the light of this experience, it is an opportune time to review this guidance and present it in a way that will steer future townscape and heritage appraisals. English Heritage is considering this issue and guidance publications on historic area assessments and urban characterisation and spatial planning are expected in the near future.

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Townscape and heritage appraisals offer a systematic and structured way of exploiting the unique historical features of an area. This report, published jointly by CABE and English Heritage in collaboration with Elevate East Lancashire, looks at the use of appraisals on the ground in Pennine Lancashire housing market renewal area. It shows that appraisals aren't just about looking back but about looking forward too, helping to give new developments both character and a sense of place. The report will be useful to professionals, elected members and others working in urban regeneration.

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