



City and County Heritage Officer Local Landscape Projects

For the past ten years, the Heritage Council has developed partnership agreements with local authorities to employ heritage officers. Twenty-eight heritage officers are currently employed in local authorities and they deliver a strategic and co-ordinated heritage service at county level.

The Heritage Council recognises the importance of local government with regard to heritage, including landscape, and each partnership is a mutually beneficial arrangement, which emphasises the aims and objectives of the Heritage Council in the context of a local authority's requirement for sustainable development.

Landscape is a core aspect of heritage in each county. Heritage officers regularly address landscape issues and deliver landscape projects. This landscape fact sheet highlights four brief case studies on local landscape projects. They serve as examples of the difference in approach that can be taken and how standard methodologies can be applied in different ways to meet local needs.

Local Landscape Project 1:

Ecclesiastical Landscape of County Offaly

One of Offaly's defining landscape characteristics is the large number of early Christian sites, 23 in all. The particular density of sites is in part due to the fact that four of the five ancient provinces of Ireland met in the area now known as Offaly. These monasteries played a crucial economic and political role in Irish history. The sites were founded between the fifth and seventh centuries by evangelist monks. Today only fragments of the landscape the founding monks encountered survives. However the key aspects of the landscape the monks encountered can still be read in today's landscape; the vast areas of bog, Croghan Hill in the east, the River Shannon in the west and the Slieve Bloom mountains in the south. The Shannon acted as a natural communication route through the heavily wooded parts of the midlands, as did the network of eskers, which is still a distinctive feature in 2009. The monks would have used both the river and the eskers as routeways. Near the Slight Mór, Colum Cille founded his monastery at Durrow. At the point where the great ridge called the Eiscir Riada meets the River Shannon, Ciarán founded Clonmacnoise. The monks created settlements and some grew into large monastic towns.

Today, Offaly Local Authorities have undertaken a number of projects to conserve and enhance these sites.

- In 2003, a report was commissioned to set out appropriate work and principles for the management of these sites: Condition and Management Report on the Early Christian Monasteries of County Offaly by Caimin O'Brien
- Conservation reports were drawn up for Drumcullen and Lynally in 2003
- The same year a series of information boards were erected at sites that can be visited
- In 2006, a publication *Stories from a Sacred Landscape, Croghan Hill to Clonmacnoise* by Caimin O'Brien was published by Offaly County Council
- From 2001-2007, conservation work has taken place at Lemanaghan monastic site conserving the church and early Christian oratory. This work sprung from the preparation of a Conservation Plan by the Heritage Council
- From 2003 – 2006, conservation works were undertaken to stabilise the church on the early Christian site in Birr town
- Geophysical surveys to help understand the nature of the sites have taken place at Lemanaghan, Killeigh and at Rahan
- The OPW commissioned a Conservation Plan for Durrow and have since moved the high cross into the church, which is being renovated as a visitor centre
- Offaly County Council commissioned a Conservation Plan for Rahan Monastic Site in 2007 /2008 to assist the various landowners that are involved in the site. Work by the Church of Ireland to conserve the church at Rahan is ongoing and supported by the Heritage Council, Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government as well as by Offaly County Council
- Currently the high crosses and carved Romanesque stone in the county are being scanned and interpreted; they will be available on line by the end of 2009

The culmination of this research, advice, practical conservation work, and publications at a local level helps to keep the fabric, and raise appreciation of the landscape character. When this is multiplied by work across other areas of heritage, the significance of work at the local level is understood.

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Local Landscape Project 2:

Historic Landscape Character Assessment in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown

In 2005 the Heritage Office of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown commissioned its first Historic Landscape Character Assessment (HLCA). Since then five HLCAs have been completed for areas in the urban-rural fringe part of the county. These areas were chosen because they were coming under the most pressure from development and because most of them were going to be the subject of Local Area Plans. All of these HLCAs were carried out as actions of the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Heritage Plan 2004-2008 and were supported financially by the Heritage Council.

The HLCAs were exclusively intended to assist the Council's planners. The scope and content of the HLCAs were almost entirely shaped by this objective. There was a considerable amount of consultation to achieve this end and any concerns or issues the planners had were addressed at an early stage.

The existing Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Landscape Characterisation methodologies were considered but each was found to be unsuitable.

The Council had produced its own LCA for the areas but these assessments were generally visual in character and lacked both historical and ecological layers. However, the boundary areas for the LCAs were used as the boundary areas for the relevant HLCAs.

The existing Historic Landscape Characterisation methodologies seemed to be primarily concerned with classification of landscapes, rather than an understanding of them. We wanted character assessment, not characterisation. We felt that if we followed the characterisation methodology we would end up with a colourful map that was expensive to produce and of limited use to planners.

In our view, what we were trying to do was something very simple. We were trying to define the character of a given area to inform the future planning of that area. So we adopted a simple methodology.

The reports were produced by a team from the Dublin Institute of Technology, which was made up of a planner, an historical geographer, and an ecologist. The sections in the HLCAs are geographical context, topography, biodiversity, history and society, archaeology, morphology and streetscapes, architectural fabric, analysis, identification of character, recommendations, and bibliography.

The documents themselves are very straightforward. They give a clear picture of the areas as they are today and how they got that way through text, maps, and photographs. While the HLCAs were not designed with the purpose of identifying significant landscapes, there were significant discoveries (at least to the planning authority) such as important clachans and the possible site of a castle.

An indication of the effectiveness of the documents in supporting the planning department is that while it took some time to get agreement for the first HCLA, the rest of the HCLAs have been produced at the request of the planning department. When looking at Local Area Plans that were produced with the help of HLCAs (importantly provided early in the process) their influence is very obvious. The information and recommendations of the HLCAs are embedded in the Local Area Plans.

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Local Landscape Project 3:

Clones Historic Landscape Characterisation

Clones is located on the border with Northern Ireland in the west of County Monaghan. It borders County Fermanagh and is part of the Erne Catchment area. Clones or Cluain Eois (Meadow of Eois) is situated on a height overlooking flat ground. Clones is associated with the monastic saint St Tigernach who established a church and monastery here in the sixth century. Clones is rich in archaeological monuments including the Round Tower, High Cross (tenth century), Wee Abbey (Augustian twelfth century), Norman motte and bailey (thirteenth century). Remains of Clones Castle wall were found a number of years ago during construction work. More recent developments such as the Ulster Canal and the Great Northern Railway have left a legacy of associated buildings, aqueducts, and bridges, and also contributed to the fine Georgian and Victorian buildings in the Diamond and other streets. The only Special Area of Conservation in County Monaghan, the Kilroosky Lough Cluster bounds the town to the north.

The broad objective of the Historic Landscape Characterisation of Clones is to identify the unique character, landscape, and historic core of the town so that it can be understood and so that regeneration can be undertaken in a way that enhances the distinctive qualities of the town.

Clones is a historic settlement in County Monaghan. Its recent history as a border town meant that much of the town was essentially mothballed due to lack of investment. This resulted in the retention of a lot of its built heritage, albeit in a poor condition. There is optimism locally that the restoration of the Ulster Canal initially as far as Clones will bring renewed life to a town which has been negatively affected by the border and the closure of the GNR. The project took place between 2008 and 2009.

The project created a comprehensive knowledge base on the historic environment of Clones including:

- Knowledge of the town's historic development and resulting urban topography
- Overview of surviving historic fabric, including archaeology and distinctive architectural forms, materials and treatments
- Overview of significant elements of Clones streetscapes, street furniture, gates, entryways, etc.
- Assessment of buried and standing archaeological remains and their likely significance
- Recommendations for the management and regeneration of historic Clones

The project identified, described, and mapped nine historic character areas in Clones and identified issues and recommendations for each one. The nine areas are:

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| 1. Monastic / early Christian Clones | 6. Catholic institutional and GAA Grounds |
| 2. The motte and bailey / Anglo-Norman | 7. Edge of settlement terracing |
| 3. Plantation town/ historic core / civic centre | 8. Victorian suburban villa |
| 4. Commercial area/ Fermanagh Street | 9. Industrial archaeology |
| 5. First expansion of the town from its historic core | |

A building survey was conducted for the main areas of the town.

The project was funded by the Heritage Council and Monaghan County Council as an action of the County Monaghan Heritage plan. A steering group was established comprising Clones Town Councillors, the County Monaghan Heritage Forum and local people. The group supported and advised on the project, which was outsourced to TKB Southgate, under the supervision of Louise Harrington. A public workshop was conducted mid-way through the fieldwork. The HLC report was adopted by Clones Town Council in January 2009. In addition to the historic and field research, an innovative art project was held during Heritage Week 2008 to support the project. This Big Sketch – heritage inspiring art project – created a set of ten postcards featuring original images of Clones in addition to material for an exhibition. The Historic Landscape of Clones exhibition will be held during heritage week 2009 in the Clones Library.

Next steps include:

- Historic Landscape Characterisation report launch and exhibition – August 2009.
- To use the HLC in the Local Area Plans for Clones
- To implement the recommendations of the report
- Identify funding sources for report recommendations

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Local Landscape Project 4:

Historic Landscape Characterisation: Experience in Fingal

Fingal comprises an area of County Dublin to the north and west of Dublin city, on the eastern Irish seaboard. The county has an extensive coastline with significant rural areas and a number of large urban centres, such as Blanchardstown and Swords in close proximity to Dublin City. Fingal has a rich natural and cultural heritage which challenges us to plan for the future taking this rich legacy into account.

Fingal had both the highest growth rate (22%) and the greatest actual increase in population (44,500) in the last 10 years, accounting for 68% of all growth of the Dublin Region since 2002. This growth is reflected in the major towns and suburbs in the county. Swords is now equivalent in size to Waterford City and Greater Blanchardstown is bigger than Galway or Limerick. The county is home to 100 different nationalities. Fingal's population profile and economic expansion is exceptional by Irish and European standards.

Against this backdrop, Fingal County Council has commissioned Margaret Gowen & Co to undertake three HLC studies in Fingal since 2006, located in the growing urban centres of Swords and Balbriggan, which have experienced very rapid growth recently, and in Donabate/Portrane a coastal area experiencing significant but less rapid growth in recent years than either Swords or Balbriggan. Management of the historic environment in this period has been concentrated on discrete sites, in response to legislative demands, with little attention paid to the broader historic environment. There is a growing recognition that landscape-scale tools are needed to better understand and manage the historic environment in the future.

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is essentially a structured data-gathering and mapping exercise in which a wide range of historic and contemporary sources of mapped data are used in combination with modern orthophotography to assign land parcels to a range of different landscape character types. HLC mapping and data analysis is managed through a Geographic Information System (GIS), which allows environmental, topographic, historic, archaeological, and other data to be attached to land parcels or polygons. Land parcels in these studies were digitised to follow the line work on modern OS mapping which ensures that the results could be related easily to other contexts such as land-use planning. This process resulted in the identification of 38 landscape character types all of which were verified in the field. Past landscape character was also examined based on an analysis of nineteenth century and twentieth century OS maps, and the 'relict' landscape was also mapped by assigning land parcels to the dominant historic time-period based on an assessment of all current archaeological knowledge which was brought together as part of this process.

Outputs include the GIS based Historic Landscape Characterisation, which has been integrated into Fingal County Council's GIS system and is capable of being updated on an ongoing basis. Detailed descriptions of the historic development of Swords, Balbriggan and Donabate/Portrane have also been produced, together with descriptions of each landscape character type. Taken together with the GIS mapping this enables the user to develop a detailed understanding of the historical development of these areas and to understand and contextualize historic information in relation to a particular site. In addition, guidance has been provided on the future management of each landscape character type. The potential for HLC to be used as a predictive tool to indicate the location of previously unknown archaeological sites has also been explored using existing data, digital orthophotography, and aspect, elevation, surface contour and hill-shade models in the case of Balbriggan.

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2009 Irish Landscape Conference

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