SLICES THROUGH TIME
GREATER MANCHESTER’S HISTORIC CHARACTER REVEALED
Greater Manchester’s current landscape by Broad type
Over the past decade or two, the business of ‘heritage protection’ has evolved significantly. There is now a much wider focus on the historic dimension of our surroundings as a whole, which is often referred to as the ‘historic environment’ or ‘historic landscape’. This shift has coincided with a wider appreciation of the social importance of landscape (urban as well as rural) in general, and of its proper management and protection.

In support of these aims, English Heritage has been working with local authorities across the whole of England to carry out a national programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) projects. This work is designed to increase familiarity with the whole of the inherited landscape, not just the ‘special’ sites or heritage assets (such as individual Listed Buildings) on which most heritage management has in the past focused. Our HLC projects aim to document and map the historic character and origins of today’s landscapes across the whole of England, because all localities possess historic character and because landscape, as the European Landscape Convention reminds us, is everywhere, not merely in special places. HLC started in the predominantly rural ‘shire’ counties, but a later generation of projects has tackled the great industrial ‘metropolitan’ conurbations of England. These areas, where many aspects of today’s global industrial urbanisation were pioneered, distinctively exemplify many key themes of British history over the past few centuries. They include Liverpool and the rest of Merseyside, Sheffield and its south Yorkshire iron working and manufacturing region, the Black Country and, of course, Greater Manchester, where fortunately EH was able to harness the expertise, enthusiasm and energy of the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit (GMAU) to carry out the work.

The Greater Manchester HLC is one of the largest and most ambitious projects undertaken by GMAU. Using GIS (Geographical Information Systems – sophisticated computerised mapping software linked to a database) the entire area of each of the ten Greater Manchester authorities has been examined in detail, taking information from a combination of modern and historic maps, aerial photographs and other sources as well as from our historic and archaeological knowledge of the region’s heritage, created over the past four decades and recorded in Greater Manchester’s Historic Environment Record. Areas of distinct historic character in the modern landscape have been defined and mapped, and their earlier history investigated. The result is a highly detailed interactive GIS map with related interpretations that chart the historical development and present-day historic character of the whole of Greater Manchester. The mapping and database contains information about some 54,000 individual blocks of land and this information can be queried and displayed in an almost infinite combination of ways.
End products include a detailed report on the historic character of each authority, and in conjunction with the HLC data these have a wide variety of uses. They can inform planning and regeneration proposals, assist with Conservation Area designation and management, provide context for decisions about designating individual structures, give a starting point for more detailed research into particular areas or topics, and help to inform local people and communities about the history of their localities, and to engage them in debate about future plans. Looking more widely, the Greater Manchester HLC can be compared with those for other areas, such as Merseyside and West Yorkshire, to help define what gives Greater Manchester its particular character.

GMAU is to be warmly congratulated on completing this huge and ambitious project. What matters now is that the value and potential of the Greater Manchester HLC is fully exploited, for the benefit of the area’s historic environment and people. We commend this project, and urge anyone who thinks that it may be of use to them to contact the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

Map of a simplified output from the HLC showing the Greater Manchester area in the context of its wider region. The classification used is primarily ‘Broad type’ (the highest level of simplification in the HLC). Part of a more detailed level of classification – ‘HLC types’ – are also shown (in shades of green/yellow and red respectively) for two classes, the rural areas of ‘Enclosed fields’ and the urbanised areas of ‘Residential’ character, but these finer distinctions are not shown in the legend. The contrast between the relatively simple earliest and largely rural HLCs and the greater detail and sophistication of the new HLC for Greater Manchester also illustrates how much the HLC method has been expanded and developed over the past 15 years.

Graham Fairclough & Roger M Thomas
English Heritage, February 2012
This booklet celebrates completion of the characterisation of Greater Manchester for our Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. The project is an important element of the national HLC programme, and the results can be seen in the wider context in the map on page 4. This booklet, though, aims to showcase the results of the Greater Manchester work while also showing the potential for further uses of this excellent resource.

The Greater Manchester project began in July 2007 and the characterisation work was completed almost four and a half years later, in November 2011. To start with there were two full-time project officers carrying out the work, but first the HER Officer at GMAU and later on some additional temporary staff were drafted in to help, and by the end of the project as many as five people could be characterising at any one time.

There are ten districts within Greater Manchester, including the two City districts of Manchester and Salford and the eight Metropolitan Boroughs of Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan. Each was characterised in a separate phase and a report was then written that highlighted some of the important characteristics of its landscape. The methodology behind this is outlined in the next section of the booklet.

The overall aim of the project was: “to undertake a broad-brush characterisation of the landscape of Greater Manchester using GIS and a linked database which can be interrogated on a wide variety of data, and thus encourage the management and understanding of the landscape through the planning process and the formulation of research strategies.”
Five objectives to help achieve this were set out in the original Project Design in 2007. These addressed key elements of the characterisation work and initial analysis by the project team, but also set out what would ultimately be done with the wealth of data that was to be created. The generation of nearly 54,000 records was not an end in itself. Instead, the data is a potential beginning for many different kinds of projects. Importantly, processes have already begun to include references to the project in management and strategy documents for some of the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester.

Following on from the Methodology overleaf, a broad overview describes Greater Manchester’s character at a county scale. The next three sections in the booklet then use the data to examine a series of topics, namely:

- the rural landscape and its surviving historic elements
- the pace of industrial development and later decline
- understanding the evolution of suburbs.

The focus then turns to the borough planning authorities, summarising a specially commissioned piece of research into how HLC data is being used by planning officers as a strategic and management tool. Finally there is a report on how the HLC data could be used to identify new Conservation Areas for designation, using the district of Stockport as a case study.

The potential of the HLC data for all kinds of studies is immense, and only a small fraction of the possibilities have been covered in this booklet. It is hoped that the data will prove its worth in years to come and will help all kinds of people to reach new insights into the development of Greater Manchester, both past and future.
Behind each coloured block shown on a map of landscape character is a wealth of data. This information enables different aspects of the landscape in the present day and in the past to be brought to the fore in a great many different kinds of maps. For example, areas can be shown in different colours according to the date when they first appear on mapping, according to the density of areas of housing, or simply according to their ‘Broad’ character type.

The ‘Broad’ type is what is most usually seen at a county scale, as it gives a general overview of land use. Thirteen such types were identified in Greater Manchester, and these include Industrial land, Residential land and Institutional sites. When looking at a smaller area in more depth, data can be displayed as more detailed ‘HLC’ types to show what kinds of industrial, residential or institutional sites and areas make up a particular locality. ‘HLC’ types falling into the Residential ‘Broad’ type, for example, include Terraced housing, Semi-detached housing and High-rise flats. 174 HLC types were identified.

To create the individual elements that make up the data is a lengthy and exacting task. At the start of the Greater Manchester project, resources such as digital historic mapping and useful reference books were gathered and a special HLC module was activated within GMAU’s Historic Environment Record (HER) database program. The program includes a Geographical Information System (GIS) element. This means the historic maps can be shown as layers above or below modern maps and aerial photographs, as well as other layers showing sites and areas of archaeological and historic interest that are recorded in the HER.

In a pilot phase at the start of the project, four different types of landscapes in the county were examined to test the proposed methodology. After some adjustments to the level of detail recorded characterisation of Bolton (alphabetically the first district) began.
To create each individual block, or ‘polygon’, on the map, the project officers looked at the current landscape first. Discrete areas made up of a single HLC type were identified. These could include the grounds of a school or hospital, or the extent of a housing estate. Once an area had been identified, a new record was created in the database and a polygon directly associated with this record was drawn on the map. Historic map layers were then looked at to confirm the date when the school, hospital or housing estate was built and to reveal past land uses at the site.

The earliest maps available to the project team for the whole area were county-level Ordnance Survey maps of the mid-19th century (showing the old counties of Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire). For some towns, there were highly detailed maps of the same date. Online tithe maps of the 1830s to 1840s were available for the parts of Greater Manchester that used to be in Cheshire. Subsequent sets of maps dating to the late 19th century, the early 20th century and the mid-20th century were also available, to show whether land use in each area had changed at these points in time. The current and past HLC types can be reconstructed as ‘timeslice’ maps from the finished data (see centre pages).

Some areas of fields, and indeed some buildings, were found to have been present by the time of the earliest available mapping. For most of these areas no previous HLC type could be identified. Sometimes though, other sources could show that they were once part of an area of ancient mossland or perhaps a historic park.

Once the character type, previous character and date of an area had been established, attributes were defined for the area. These included factors such as the scale of any buildings, or the morphology of field boundaries (for example, straight or S-curved). Lastly any sources used, including maps, books and websites, were entered into the database. By the end of the project a total of 53,966 records had been created by the team.
Some of the later sections of this booklet look at specific aspects of the HLC data and how it can be used for detailed study. This section outlines some of the observations that can be made from a map of the Broad types at a county scale (see the map on the inside cover).

The Residential Broad type dominates the central and southern areas of the county in an almost continuous block, spreading out into the districts of Trafford and Salford to the west, Bury and Rochdale to the north, Oldham to the north east, Tameside to the east and Stockport to the south east. At this scale, the towns of Bolton and Bury also appear connected to the Manchester conurbation.

Construction of the Dowry and Piethorne water supply reservoir complexes in Oldham and Rochdale districts has significantly impacted on the historic and current Pennine landscape.
Rochdale is the largest completely separate town in the area, although there are also some settlements of a significant size to the east of Stockport and west of Rochdale. The only district that seems to lie apart from the influence of central Manchester is Wigan to the west. Here there are a number of smaller towns, separated by areas of Enclosed land and some large areas of Ornamental land.

On the map, the pink Residential land is dotted through with smaller patches of colours indicating other Broad character types. In particular, some large clusters of red Commercial and pale blue Industrial areas can be seen. For the most part these represent town centres including Manchester, Stockport, Ashton-under-Lyne, Oldham, Rochdale, Bury, Bolton, Leigh, Wigan, Swinton and Salford. Larger Industrial sites and sometimes, again, mixed areas of Commercial and Industrial land can be found at some distance from the town and city centres, often at the edges of Residential areas. This is especially the case in Trafford, which includes Greater Manchester’s largest Industrial and Commercial area, Trafford Park.

Away from the main urban centres, small Commercial cores are dispersed throughout the suburbs. Small Ornamental sites can be found throughout the Residential areas of the county, with larger sites generally on the edges and sometimes dividing Residential areas from one another, as can be seen in the southern part of Manchester district. Institutional sites are also dispersed throughout areas of suburban housing. Other Institutions form important elements of town and city centres.

The largest Communications sites in Greater Manchester are Manchester Airport in Manchester and Woodford Aerodrome in Stockport. Barton Aerodrome in Salford district is also a large site. Another important Communications feature in the landscape is the M60, encircling the wider Manchester city area. Whilst some of the land alongside the motorway is in Ornamental or recreational use, almost all of the non-ornamental land has now been developed as Commercial, Industrial, Institutional or Residential land, with very little green Enclosed land visible within the circle of the M60 on the character map.

Most of the active Extractive land in Greater Manchester lies in the northern part of the county, with very little in Trafford, Manchester and Stockport. There are some sites in the moorland areas around the eastern and northern edges. A few larger Extractive sites can be seen in the non-moorland parts of the northern and western districts, particularly Wigan but also in Bury, near the border with Rochdale.
Only a few Horticultural sites of a significant size are apparent in the modern landscape. The largest is an area to the west of Ashton-under-Lyne in Tameside, crossed by the M60 at Ashton Moss. Smaller sites can also be seen within and close to Residential areas, including a few small clusters in Wigan and Bolton and some larger sites at the edges of Trafford’s suburbs. There is very little Military land in the present-day landscape, with the only area of a notable size at county scale being at Holcombe Moor, in the northern part of Bury district.

Enclosed land, as noted above, is generally not present in the area ringed by the M60, but tends to be found toward the edges of Greater Manchester. To the east it is flanked by Unenclosed moorland. It can also be found between Residential areas, including along the borders between many of the districts. Manchester district has almost no Enclosed land. Most of the Enclosed land is dotted throughout with small settlements, which will include farms and hamlets.
Unenclosed land is prominent along the eastern edge of Greater Manchester and in some patches to the north. These areas represent the edges of expanses of moorland that extend beyond the county boundary, as can be seen on the HLC map on page 4 that puts Manchester into its regional context.

Large Water bodies are also concentrated in the north-eastern part of the area, in Rochdale and Oldham districts. Most are reservoirs concerned with the drinking water supply. Although smaller reservoirs are dotted through Wigan, Bolton and Bury, there are very few substantial Water bodies in Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford, except for the Audenshaw Reservoirs in Tameside and Heaton Park Reservoir on the border of Bury and Manchester.

Woodland is generally found as linear features within the more rural parts of most of the districts, but particularly Stockport, Tameside, Oldham, Bury and Bolton. Larger blocks of Woodland are also found in some of the other districts, and particularly in former mossland areas in Salford and Wigan. Plantations and other wooded areas will also occur within former private parkland that is now in use as public parks or country parks, such as Heaton Park or Haigh Country Park.

A series of ‘timeslice’ maps showing the character of Greater Manchester as snapshots at particular points in time is shown in the central pages of this book. From these, broad observations can be made in a similar way to trace the development of industry and settlement over the last 160 years. A study of geology and topography (the shape of the land) alongside the broad historic landscape character data can lead to a deeper understanding of the factors that have shaped today’s landscapes.
Greater Manchester in the 21st century, despite being intensely urban, still has rural fringes that cover 445km², almost 35% of the county. This varies from lowland arable land and pasture to the more marginal hill farms of the uplands, producing a diverse countryside that has evolved over hundreds of years.

The HLC categories of Enclosed (fields) and Unenclosed (open land) were used to assess the extent of the rural land. These two Broad types have narrow types within them characterising the field types and the nature of the open land. Other Broad types such as Woodland could also be considered rural, and some of the narrow types within the Broad type of ‘Ornamental, parkland and recreational’ also contribute towards the character of the countryside.

Across the county the most common field type was Piecemeal enclosure, with many examples surviving in all districts. Even in Manchester, which has the smallest area of Enclosed land of all the Greater Manchester districts at 2.8km², Piecemeal enclosure covers 1.9km². The Pennine fringes of the north and east have the most extensive areas.
Much of the land in the region was reorganised from the 16th century onwards, having earlier been based on the medieval manorial system. By the mid-19th century most of the fields were Piecemeal enclosures of irregular shapes, bounded by hedges in the lowlands and drystone walls on the Pennine fringes. Before the HLC project started it was suspected that Agglomerated fields would be the most common Enclosed land type as these represent modern farming regimes. However, this proved not to be the case as there are 145.3km² of Piecemeal fields as opposed to 127.4km² of Agglomerated. This has been one of the surprises of the HLC as the small irregular fields of Piecemeal enclosure are in almost all cases those shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps of the mid and late 19th century. This is significant as the HLC type of Piecemeal enclosure tended to be used as a catch-all for areas of small irregular fields and there may be earlier field types included within these. Wigan district has many active farms and the greatest area of Agglomerated fields, covering some 52.6km² (28% of the total). All the other districts have some Agglomerated fields with Trafford at 16.2km² and Rochdale at 15.1km² as the next largest areas.

*Botany Bay Wood is a late 18th century plantation in Chat Moss, the largest former wetland complex in Greater Manchester. But most of the moss has been reclaimed for farmland (source: Cities Revealed 1997)*
The next most common field type was that of Surveyed enclosure, which covers some 57.3km². Population pressures along with innovations in agriculture meant that from around the 16th century onwards wastes and commons were enclosed. This was initially by agreement but from the late 18th and into the 19th century by Act of Parliament. This produced areas of very regular fields with straight boundaries, common on the drained lowland mosses and Pennine fringes. Rochdale and Oldham have the largest extents (covering 12.6km² and 11.7km² respectively). Wigan has some 20th century Surveyed fields created from reclaimed colliery tips.

Castleshaw Valley in Saddleworth, Oldham. An area of dispersed Farmsteads, Folds, Piecemeal enclosure, Surveyed enclosure and Agglomerated fields, with several disused mill ponds and the Upper and Lower Corporation Reservoirs. The hilltop at the head of the valley has Unenclosed land (open moorland).
The general pattern of medieval settlement across the region was of many small farms and hamlets with gentry estates, often with a park and focused on a hall. A few large estates, such as those at Dunham Massey in Trafford and Smithills Hall in Bolton, have partially survived into the modern era. A surprising, possible medieval, element identified as a previous type were the remnants of deer parks. These appeared scattered across the lowlands of the region with one large possible moorland deer park at Hollingworth in Tameside. The only current deer park in the region is at Dunham Massey.

A few groups of fields in the current landscape are possibly surviving fragments of wider areas of enclosure types originating in medieval times. These include Assarts, Strip fields and Open fields, together totalling some 6.8km². Eight of the ten districts had at least one of these types; only Manchester and Rochdale had no current examples. Manchester is the most built-up district in the region with very little farmland, so this was not surprising. Rochdale had a large number of Piecemeal fields so any medieval field types that are present may have been included in these areas.

Cronkeyshaw Common, Rochdale, is a distinctive reverse 'L'-shaped ancient common that has retained its early 19th century form, shown on this 1851 OS map, despite some encroachment by housing.
Strip and Open fields represent a communal system of farming centred on nucleated medieval settlements (villages). These were never common in the region, but the 19th century mapping showed concentrations of the associated field types around Mottram, Manchester, Northenden and Wigan, all known medieval settlements. Some strips were seen in Salford, to the west of Eccles at Patricroft, where they may represent a lost planned medieval village. Strips at right angles to the B5207 in Golborne may represent early planned enclosure. In both of these areas the strips influenced the alignment of 19th century residential development.

At Birchenough in Stockport there is an almost complete example of the field type classified as Assarts. This is an oval enclosure subdivided internally with a farmstead at one side. The enclosure would have been carved out of the woodland that was once extensive across the region. Assarts were also identified in Oldham, Rochdale, Tameside and Wigan, but cover only 3.4km² in total.
Woodland in the current landscape occurs in pockets across the county, especially on the sides of steep valleys or cloughs. The total amount of land covered by woodland has remained about the same since the 19th century. However, this does not mean there have been no changes; some historic woodlands have been lost, and the figure includes new woodlands that have been planted or regenerated naturally, especially in Wigan on some of the land reclaimed from former collieries.

Once associated with rural settlements were greens or commons on marginal land known as wastes. These included lowland mosses and the fringes of the upland moors and were widely dispersed across the region. They were classified under the Broad type of Unenclosed land. Only a few scattered greens and remnants of commons survive but these, like Cronkeyshaw Common in Rochdale, are often within or on the fringes of residential areas where their character is threatened by development. The patterns of many of the lost greens and commons are still visible on the 19th century mapping, preserved in the boundaries of the fields that surrounded them.

Also included in Unenclosed lands were the mosses. Once a distinctive characteristic of the region, these limited the spread of settlement and obstructed travel. Nearly all of the mosses were drained in the 19th century and have now been built on or turned into good agricultural land, as seen at Carrington Moss in Trafford and Chat Moss in Salford. There is one active mossland at Ince Moss in Wigan, created by mining subsidence and improved by the removal of colliery waste in the late 20th century. The buried peats of the drained mosses have the potential to preserve organic remains from the past, but as the peat dries out these will degrade.
The need for new land also ate into the moors in the form of Intakes, regular medium and large-sized fields on the moorland edges. By definition these were on very marginal land, and many were abandoned in the 19th and 20th centuries. They are found in the same areas as Surveyed enclosure on the Pennine fringes. These areas have a very distinctive landscape with mixed field types and drystone walls. Amongst them are stone-built farms and folds, the small rural based textile workshops that were the origins of the textile industry which came to dominate the region. Many of these survive, particularly in Oldham and Rochdale, interspersed with large stone houses of the 16th and 17th centuries, built by the farmers and merchants who made their fortunes in textiles.

The remains of Royton Hall, Oldham, being excavated as part of the ‘Royton Lives through the Ages Project’. The site of the hall and gardens forms a green space within the town centre.
Over 1700 farms still exist, evenly spread across the less developed districts of Greater Manchester. At least 102 have known dates of origin before 1750. These rural buildings along with their land and field boundaries represent an important archaeological resource. They have not been subject to county-wide systematic recording or analysis, so much of their history remains to be discovered. In many cases they are direct evidence of the medieval and post medieval landscape of the region and add greatly to its cultural value. Many farms, folds and halls have been overwhelmed by residential development and have been demolished, although some have been converted to purely residential use and have thus survived.

In the 19th century the loss of rural land was gradual, but the rate of loss accelerated massively in the 20th century. By the end of the 20th century the area covered by the Enclosed and Unenclosed land Broad types had fallen from over 80% to just over a third of the total area of the county. The growing industrial towns and cities developed networks of canals, roads and railways which ultimately allowed workers to move away from the centres of towns. As a result commuter belts and suburbs engulfed agricultural land. The mid to late 20th century saw an unprecedented increase in house building to meet regional needs together with national policy and it is this that has caused the greatest loss of rural land across the county. However, some undeveloped land was preserved within the planned residential expansion of the 19th and 20th centuries as parks, recreation grounds, sports fields, allotments, country parks and golf courses.

The HLC project has identified a surprising level of survival of past rural landscape features. Some of these point to early farming and settlement of medieval and earlier periods, and would repay more detailed research. The HLC data, whilst not itself making judgments, nonetheless informs the assignment of value to current rural landscapes, relating to their historic integrity. For planning and future management purposes it is possible to identify those landscapes worthy of sympathetic planning, where historic character is well preserved or where enhancement can make good previous erosion of character. Equally, badly degraded landscapes can also be identified, where new development or change of land use would be more appropriate.
The HLC project has provided much useful information and a great many insights into the extraordinarily rapid pace of industrialisation of the Greater Manchester landscape in the 19th and first half of the 20th century. It also allows us to comment on the impact of 20th century industrial decline on the landscape and its aftermath.

All but one of the ten Greater Manchester districts has a 3-5% area of industrial use making up its current landscape. Trafford, which has the fewest traditional industrial type sites, actually has the largest current industrial land use, at 7.3km². This is explained by the fact that the borough has very large industrial estates, such as Trafford Park. Even Wigan, by far the largest district in terms of overall area, does not have quite as much industrial land as Trafford (6.9km²).

The late 18th and 19th century industrial growth of Manchester and its hinterland into the world’s leading manufacturing centre has been well chronicled (Williams 1992, McNeil 2002, Nevell 2008 etc; see the ‘Further Reading’ section). This was based on the textile industry, particularly cotton, facilitated by natural resources, technological advancement, improved communications, and plentiful cheap labour. This has left a significant and often visible imprint on the landscape. Whilst much has been swept away, there is still considerable legibility of historic industrial character types.

The HLC data allows us to say something about historic growth of the textile industry and also about current derelict land and conversion of surviving historic industrial character types. In Bury district 23% of former textile mill sites have been redeveloped for residential use whilst 38% are now used for commerce or light industry. Only four of the residential sites appear to include a significant mill building that has been retained and converted.
Much of Oldham was historically dedicated to the wool industry, especially in the east (Saddleworth). However, as cotton spinning came to predominate, formerly small villages such as Shaw experienced dramatic industrial expansion in the late 19th century as the industry rose to world importance in this area. By 1910 76% of the industrial sites recorded by the HLC for Oldham were related to the textile industry, and in 1913 there were 337 textile mills in the district. The subsequent decline in textile manufacturing is clearly represented in the two pie charts derived from HLC data.

Coal mining comes under the ‘Extractive’ broad type, but any overview of Greater Manchester’s industrial landscape cannot ignore its impact and importance. A glance at late 19th century mapping of the Wigan area leaves one in no doubt of the massive impact of coal working on the landscape. Today only traces of the coal industry survive across Greater Manchester.
By 1868 Rochdale had 58 collieries, but most had closed by 1880. The Pennine hills have many coal-working earthworks preserved in the landscape, particularly in reservoir catchment areas where the derelict industrial landscapes have been ‘frozen’ in time following depopulation; a good example is the Watergrove Valley, Rochdale. Some former colliery sites have been exploited for opencast mining, a destructive process which results in a transformed, reinstated landscape devoid of historical distinctiveness. Examples of this can be seen at Cutacre on the border of Salford, Wigan and Bolton, and at Standish and Bickershaw in Wigan borough.

Engineering was once a very significant industry in Greater Manchester, supporting particularly the textile manufacturing industry and transport, but it has seen massive decline. Salford’s HLC study produced 101 records relating to historic engineering sites, made up of engine works, vehicle works, heavy and light engineering, and this totalled 1.8km² in area. Some of the heavy engineering works were historically very important, such as Nasmyth’s Bridgewater Foundry in Eccles, which is now mostly demolished and awaiting new development.
A pattern seen across much of Greater Manchester’s landscape is one where former industrial complexes such as mills, finishing works, engineering works and collieries have been demolished but the surrounding infrastructure has survived. This includes not only workers’ housing, shops and institutes (such as schools, churches and chapels), but also communications routes. This has made these ‘brownfield’ sites attractive for new, low cost housing developments. It will be interesting to see whether this trend continues in the light of changing government planning policies such as the National Planning Policy Framework, and economic stimuli.
Many former industrial sites have reverted to semi-natural vegetation or have been landscaped as part of regeneration schemes. Wigan stands out in terms of the scale of treatment to former coal-working sites, which had a strong negative impact on the landscape. Most of these have been successfully transformed into green spaces or economic sites. Individual industrial buildings or complexes have had housing schemes following remediation; often the new build retains the boundary of the former industrial works, providing a small measure of historic legibility in the landscape of the previous land use. Where historic industrial sites are located in greenbelt land the contrast can be quite marked between new housing, sitting tightly within a former brownfield site boundary, and the green pasture land that surrounds it. A good example can be seen at the former Calprina Works site at Carr Brook, Tameside.

Manchester’s historic industrial giants such as engineering, chemical works, glass manufacture, textile finishing and gas production have been almost completely lost. Many former sites have seen intensive remediation of contaminated ground to make them fit for new development. This usually involves removing all buried remains, which often have considerable archaeological potential and value. Many of these sites have had archaeological investigations through the planning system, and in some cases the results have been published, either in booklet form (Greater Manchester’s Past Revealed Series) or as thematic books (Miller & Wild 2007, Nevell 2008).

Several industrial activities, such as light engineering, are very difficult to detect using the HLC methodology, both historically and in today’s landscape. This is because the sites are generally not named on mapping. A much more detailed study employing trade directories and extensive fieldwork would be needed to tease out this information.
The pace of loss of historic industrial complexes is alarming. The HLC map data for the present day is based on 2006 mapping (the most up-to-date available at the start of the project), but even in the few years since then there has been notable erosion of industrial heritage, particularly large complexes of redundant industrial HLC types. The Greater Manchester Historic Landscape Characterisation project has been able to broadly quantify the scale of this loss. Whilst representative examples of some types of industrial heritage sites have been protected, such as Listed cotton spinning mills, many have not. These include textile finishing works, iron foundries and brick works. Below-ground archaeological remains of significant historic industrial sites, and their associated landscapes, are also unprotected for the most part, even though some of these remains are demonstrably of national and even international importance. The HLC provides indicators of potential sites and would help inform a more detailed survey of industrial heritage at risk in Greater Manchester.

Wallsuches Bleachworks, Bolton, is a rare and successful example of a converted textile finishing works

Former coal workings on the hills above Watergrove Reservoir, Rochdale
Timeslices showing Greater Manchester’s landscape development since the mid-19th century.
Our contemporary suburban landscapes contain the accumulated evidence of past urban expansion in its various forms and stages. The original suburban ideal was a residential settlement linked to the city by transport systems but separated from it by open country. In the later 19th century and through to and including the interwar years, the spaces in between were filled in with less prestigious suburbs and more houses per acre. Suburban growth depopulated urban cores, allowed people to live at a distance from places of work, encouraged social segregation and spread new status indicators such as housing types and architectural styles.
In subsequent waves of outward urban expansion and suburban infill down to the present day, the social character and physical appearance of the suburbs themselves were often transformed (especially when former outer suburbs became inner city ‘suburbs’). The social status of occupants changed and individual houses, streets and whole districts were redeveloped.

Defining the subject is not straightforward. Recent developments in urban sociology, influenced by American thinking on the transformation of suburbs into ‘edge cities’ or ‘technoburbs’, have undermined the age-old distinction between city and suburb. Instead, the intensification of urban sprawl over the last half-century has highlighted a decentralisation of services (‘out of town’ shopping malls, business parks, industrial estates and the like) and the interconnection of ex-urban locales within a broader metropolitan area with its several urban cores. The historic separation between urban core and suburban districts may help explain earlier forms of residential growth around our towns and cities. To understand our present-day urban structure, though, it is more appropriate to view the urban and the suburban as integrated elements in a “variegated polycentric metropolitan complex”.

It is vital that we better understand the evolution and character of the ordinary residential environment in which the majority of the UK population lives. A fuller understanding of the shape and process of suburban development in Greater Manchester could inform a wider agenda of research and conservation on suburbs and their development and help us to better understand the changing character of our urban world.
Greater Manchester has witnessed all the stages of residential suburban growth. These began with the earliest developments along turnpike roads and those serviced by omnibus routes from the 1820s. Then came the first suburban commuter railway lines and the emergence of the railway suburb. The influential garden suburb ideal and the triumph of semi-detached suburbia emerged in the 1930s, and ultimately led to the overwhelmingly residential character of the modern metropolitan districts. Greater Manchester also provides ample physical evidence of the repeated redevelopment of earlier privately built suburbs as well as the significant impact of social housing on the urban landscape, especially over the last 50 years. It is the UK’s second largest metropolitan county outside London (in terms of both area and population) and certainly the most complex with its ten metropolitan boroughs and numerous urban cores.

The Greater Manchester HLC Project is of immense potential value for the study of suburban development. It provides a huge range of data that can generate innumerable tables and maps. The distribution of residential HLC types in each of the metropolitan boroughs can be mapped, for example, revealing the proportion of social housing, private housing and semi-detached housing that make up a substantial part of the Residential Broad type.

A series of ‘timeslice’ maps showing the Broad types at four points in time is shown on the centre pages of this book. The earliest (1852) reveals the early prominence of development around the historic urban cores of the municipal boroughs of Manchester and Salford (created in 1838 and 1844 respectively), but also the existence of smaller, discrete residential build up connected to the surrounding urban cores (Rochdale, Oldham, Ashton-under-Lyne, Stockport, Altrincham, Wigan, Bolton and Bury). Nonetheless, the overwhelmingly rural character of the landscape is clear. By 1912, on this existing pattern has been overlaid the characteristic ‘starfish’ shape of Manchester’s outward suburban expansion along arterial roads and railways, especially to the south of the city. However, ‘Enclosed land’ remains the predominant character type. By 1967
the suburban drift southward has become pronounced and whilst the evidence of residential growth around all the urban cores is clear (including even the smaller ones), the influence of Manchester is demonstrated in the evolving shape of the suburban landscape.

If we move forward to the mapping of the current view we can see clearly demonstrated the extent to which the Residential Broad type characterises the landscape. The borough of Manchester is the most completely urbanised; the territories of the other municipal authorities all retain reduced but noticeable areas of enclosed land. Only Wigan and Rochdale show any degree of separation by enclosed land from the rest of the urban mass. From past evidence we can expect these non-residential areas to further reduce over time. From this broad ‘current view’ it becomes evident that a simple suburb/city dichotomy is no longer useful in describing the shape of the modern conurbation. The southern suburbs do not stand out so markedly as they did before. The ‘starfish’ shape can still be seen but the ‘infill’ has been intense both to the north and to the south of Manchester/Salford.

Despite Manchester’s pre-eminence, the HLC data sheds significant light on other patterns and sequences of suburbanisation in the outer urban cores. A single example will illustrate some initial observations about similarities and differences across the county. Zoned timeslice maps for Rochdale in 1852 and 1912 suggest a pattern of urban growth analogous to the archetype described by Friedrich Engels for Manchester in the 1840s: a series of concentric circles around a commercial centre with industry and workers’ housing occupying the inner rings and middle class housing of varying types spreading out from an outer residential ring. Likewise, in the 19th century and early 20th century, a wide band of workers’ housing encircled Rochdale town centre, and beyond that lay a necklace of suburban housing, occupying a more rural environment beyond the smoke of the town’s factory chimneys.
Timeslices for Rochdale Broad types
The subsequent maps suggest that this pattern endured through to 1965 at least. Over the near half-century since then, Rochdale’s inheritance of industrial period suburban housing has been all but lost. The town’s commercial core shrank considerably during this period and its inheritance of workers’ housing has been reduced. Much workers’ housing has also been lost in other parts of the county, and this can be broadly quantified by interrogating the HLC data. In Manchester district, for example, about 72% of the terraced houses have been lost to later redevelopment. This is particularly a result of planned late 20th century urban renewal, including large social housing estates.

The residential pattern found in Rochdale is echoed in most of the urban cores of Greater Manchester although evidence from the HLC suggests that industrial period suburban housing had a varying impact. For example, although there were high-status villas and detached houses in and around 19th century Bury, the town did not develop the larger residential suburbs found in some other districts such as Salford and Manchester. Although distinct suburban zones emerged during the late Victorian era and up to the mid-20th century, more extensive and generalised suburban growth did not happen until later in the century, mostly after the creation of the metropolitan borough in 1974. Much of this has involved the absorption of former agricultural land on the fringes of established settlement. Similarly, although there were mid-19th century middle class suburbs to the north of Wigan town centre, it was not until the later 20th century that private suburban housing formed a residential ring around the town.

The individual district reports for the HLC project highlight the conservation and management issues surrounding the future of our ‘historic suburbs’. This is a policy issue but one which could be informed by academic study. Villas, detached houses and perhaps other kinds of suburban housing that are of historic, social or architectural significance but are not Listed could be identified through a programme of desk-based study and systematic building survey.

**Conclusion**

This has been an initial assessment of the value of the data generated by the HLC project for a study of the history of residential suburbs in Greater Manchester. The conclusion is undoubtedly positive. In order to assess its value as a research tool the author asked a number of questions and requested various presentations of the data. The range of and varieties in the representation of information provided is impressive, allowing both broad generalisations about Greater Manchester as a whole and also remarkably detailed longitudinal observations down to neighbourhood level. As a support for archive and fieldwork the potential is immense. There is every reason to think the data generated could be a central part of future research projects and indeed stimulate new research itself.
One striking feature of the evidence generated by the project is worthy of final emphasis: the transformation of the urban environment of Greater Manchester over the last half century is nothing less than revolutionary. The expansion of the built-up area has been at a greater pace and more extensive in scope than at any time since the region’s suburban development began two centuries ago. This has involved an explosion of new building in the private and social housing sectors and extensive infill development as well as outward expansion. Accompanying this has been a dramatic shift in the balance of the housing stock, with a sharp decline in the proportion of 19th century housing of all types and quality. This latter change has clear implications for the recording and conservation of ‘historic suburbs’, however defined. Put together, these are changes unprecedented in scope and significance that along with the decentralisation of urban services and functions is producing a revolution in our midst. The Greater Manchester HLC Project is a valuable contribution to our understanding of this revolution.

Zoned map showing the historic development of residential areas in Sale, Trafford
From the beginning of the Greater Manchester HLC project it was intended that the results would be of benefit to a range of end users, but one of the main target groups were local authority planning officers. It was hoped that these people would use the HLC data to inform development management and plan making. Previously historic environment data sets have relied on information about individual sites and designations, whereas now the HLC mapping has filled the blank spaces in between them, providing a more holistic understanding of the historic development of the urban and rural landscapes of Greater Manchester.

A short study was carried out in December 2011 to investigate how the ten local planning authorities of Greater Manchester were making use of their HLC data and how they intended to use it in the future. Encouragingly the study revealed that seven of the ten authorities had used it to inform the historic environment sections of their Core Strategies. These are the documents that set out the planning policy framework for local authority areas over the next ten to fifteen years. Many planning officers said that using the HLC data had helped to create policies that considered the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment at large, rather than just focusing on designations such as Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

Following on from this success, planning officers thought the HLC data could be used to inform other planning documents such as those that identify land allocations for housing and employment use, and one authority has already started work on this.

Many officers agreed that HLC is a useful map-based tool that can be used alongside other spatial data to help build a comprehensive understanding of an area. For example, it could be used to inform plans and proposals for large areas earmarked for change through the master planning process. There is also a great deal of support for using HLC to identify where new Conservation Areas could be designated or where existing ones might be extended.

It was generally felt that HLC has great potential for use in community engagement and consultation exercises. HLC is a highly visual tool that can show through a series of timeslice maps how the modern landscape has evolved (see centre pages). Experience has shown this to be an excellent way of stimulating discussion about a locality with professionals and non-professionals alike. HLC might therefore be integrated into the newly emerging Neighbourhood Plans, particularly where communities want to better understand how their neighbourhoods have been shaped over time before they consider what changes they would like to see in the future.
Following on from this the HLC could have a role as an educational resource to be used by schools in projects about the history and development of their local area. Local history societies and others could also use the HLC as the basis for much more detailed study of a specific area, possibly by adding to the existing data set or even by breaking down the character areas into smaller units to reflect the scale of their project.
There was general agreement that HLC has a vast research potential, for applications ranging from community based projects through to academic investigation into the historic development and land use patterns of Greater Manchester. It is possible to run an almost infinite combination of searches on the HLC database, which has a powerful modelling capability, and the interactive mapping can be combined with data from other sources in multi-disciplinary projects.
Although the research potential of the data is acknowledged by many, it nonetheless needs to be tested. It is therefore hoped that universities and further education institutions in the Greater Manchester area will encourage the development of academic projects that will rigorously test and interrogate the HLC data. For example, projects might include investigation into:

- the survival and distribution of prefabricated housing across Greater Manchester
- the survival and distribution of farmsteads on the urban fringe.

It is also hoped that academic bodies will encourage the use of HLC data sets to explore multidisciplinary working. Projects might include:

- climate change adaptation: mapping open spaces and green infrastructure
- identifying sites for community food-growing projects – perhaps helping to identify where there might be risk of contaminated land from former industrial uses.

Last but not least, it is important to encourage the use of HLC by community groups and local societies. This could include Lottery funded community projects, for example using the HLC to inform a Neighbourhood Plan or similar geographically focused initiative designed to have specific outcomes that bring benefit to a local community.

Looking to the future, it is hoped that the good work already achieved by local planning authorities in Greater Manchester can be built upon and extended into other areas. Crucial to the use of the HLC data set is its accessibility. Ideally it will be made available via the internet as Lincoln City Council and South Yorkshire Archaeology Service have done with their projects. This will mean that the data is there for anyone to use, whether they are based within Greater Manchester or anywhere in the world.
Introduction
Across Greater Manchester there are 231 designated Conservation Areas. Whilst there are common themes within designation across the ten authorities, there is significant variation in the numbers and distribution.

A Conservation Area is an “area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance,” according to Section 69 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 69(2) of the Act imposes a duty on Local Authorities to review their Conservation Areas from time to time.

Historic Landscape Characterisation is a recognised way of understanding and documenting the character of place. However, there is potential to develop this further by using the HLC as a tool to assist in the designation and review of Conservation Areas in Greater Manchester.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has an exemplary record for its approach towards conservation, with a robust heritage strategy and an ongoing five-yearly review process for each of its 37 Conservation Areas. Stockport was used as a case study to investigate how the HLC data could be manipulated to identify potential new Conservation Areas or extensions to existing ones. This was explored at two sites. One is in Greave Fold, Romiley, in the eastern half of the borough, and the other is in Edgeley, close to Stockport town centre.

Methodology
In order to predict future designation, an understanding of the pattern of land use in Stockport was first established. Data was drawn from the HLC to measure the Broad and HLC types in terms of area for:

- the borough of Stockport (excluding Conservation Areas)
- Stockport’s Conservation Areas as a whole
- individual Conservation Areas in Stockport.

Through analysis a pattern emerged indicating a range of Broad and HLC types common to both Conservation Areas in Stockport and to the borough. The data was streamlined in order to identify the HLC types that were most highly associated with Conservation Areas. For example,
within Stockport the ‘Textiles’ type occupies an area of 43.6 hectares (one hectare is equal to 0.01 km²). Of this, 88% (38.2 hectares) is contained within Conservation Areas. The Textiles HLC type is a strong characteristic of Stockport’s Conservation Areas, so the remaining 12% of ‘Textiles’ land in the borough was investigated for future designation potential.

68 narrow HLC types were indicated, and a GIS layer was created to give a cartographic view of the extent to which these types, or ‘Conservation Area indicators’, occurred across the borough.

The map showed that the Conservation Area indicators were tightly grouped together and displayed a high variance in terms of type. Furthermore, significant pockets were present on the edges of Conservation Areas, for example in Edgeley, Marple, Cheadle and Romiley. Other clusters included linear arrangements in North Reddish, Hazel Grove and Mellor.

**Case Study 1: Greave Fold Conservation Area**

The pie chart below shows the mix of HLC types for Greave Fold Conservation Area. The Conservation Area appraisal produced by Stockport MBC identifies an “arrangement of buildings in an intricate fold that was enclosed to accommodate communities on the upland fringe of Stockport” (2006, Greave Fold Conservation Area Character Appraisal: 2).

![Pie chart showing HLC type composition of Greave Fold Conservation Area, Romiley](image)

The pie chart shows only 6 narrow types, with the dominant being ‘Historic settlement core’, comprising 59% of the total land covered by the Conservation Area. In this case, the HLC shows that the character of this Conservation Area is derived not from its diversity, but from the dominance of a particular type. This kind of objective analysis is something which can be included for a more robust understanding of character that will strengthen future appraisal documents.
Case Study 2: Edgeley

The second case study looked at Edgeley, an area to the west of Stockport town centre. Edgeley developed as a result of housing expansion during the 19th century, when large gridiron developments were created to house workers for Edgeley Bleach Works. The works, established by the Sykes family in the late 18th century, is no longer extant. However, the wider industrial landscape of reservoirs, parks, churches, halls and other social institutions still remains and these features are a visible legacy of the area’s industrial past.

Whilst part of Edgeley is designated as a Conservation Area (Alexandra Park Conservation Area), the designation is not fully representative of Edgeley’s industrial past. Much of the Conservation Area is comprised of a public park and reservoir, semi-detached housing and villas.
On the northern and southern edges of the Conservation Area there are large surviving gridiron developments of workers’ housing which are not included in the Conservation Area. This represents a spatial divide between housing types and suggests a bias in the designated area towards higher status housing and planned green spaces.

A site visit revealed that there is potential for the Conservation Area boundary to be extended. Terraced housing and public and community buildings create a unified landscape relating to the former industrial character of Edgeley. However, the visit also showed that incremental erosion of historic features has weakened the architectural integrity of the area. This qualitative factor would need to be taken into account should the Conservation Area boundary be reviewed.

Conclusion
The two case studies clearly demonstrate that the HLC data can be used to assist local authorities in carrying out their statutory duties of review and appraisal. It provides an effective tool to highlight designation potential, and used in combination with on-site qualitative assessment can significantly enhance the designation and review process. A methodology has been established which can be easily used by other authorities, particularly where borough-wide Conservation Area reviews are required.

Predominant character of Edgeley with communal buildings and terraces associated with 19th century industrial activity. (Starting from top) St Matthew’s Church, Edgeley Conservative Club and a row of houses on Bulkeley Street. The church and club are locally listed buildings.
This booklet has dipped into a very small part of the huge HLC data set that defines Greater Manchester’s landscape character. The main part of the project involved creating records and producing reports for the ten local planning authorities. But in the last phase of the project it has been possible to start analysis across the whole county, from district to district. Indeed it is now feasible to make wider comparisons, across regions and nationally, as noted in the Foreword.

Several points of interest have come to mind in this last phase of analysis:

- the extraordinary pace of suburban growth, and especially social and private housing estates since 1965

- historic development of communications networks which have had such a great impact on the landscape, not just in themselves but also in the way in which they have acted as a catalyst for industrial and suburban growth; these include: turnpikes, canals, trams and railways, cars, buses, airports, and modern trams

- the rapid expansion of industrial land use in the 19th century followed by equally rapid decline of traditional manufacturing during the second half of the 20th century

- how local authorities have dealt with the challenge of replacing with new economic generators and recreational space the land previously occupied and often scarred with heavy manufacturing and extraction industries

- a remarkable level of survival of field systems, especially in upland valleys and the Wigan area; but poorly understood and in many cases vulnerable to degradation

- significant archaeological sites and historic landscapes that reflect the history and character of the Greater Manchester area generally lack recognition and appropriate levels of protection.

It has not been possible due to space restrictions to describe some other important landscape themes. These include the establishment of municipal parks and gardens, often previously associated with halls and mansions, the complexity of historic town cores, some of medieval origin, and the fragmentation of urban fringe areas by piecemeal redevelopment. Of course topography and drainage have played a large part in shaping and defining the area’s landscape character and use, and provide a framework for the HLC study. It should be remembered that the HLC data
set is one way of looking at and understanding the landscape, but there are other tools as well which complement it. The HLC data set and interpretation of the project results have been prepared mainly by archaeologists, but other users, such as spatial planners, conservation specialists, geographers, landscape historians, and local communities, might interpret the data in their own way – the project data allows this.

Within the confines of a booklet of such short length, it is impossible to do full justice to the HLC project. But it is hoped that the overview and themed chapters have given the reader an insight into the character of Greater Manchester’s landscape and the rich potential to take the project further. All of the contributors have given views on themes for future research. The relevance of the project’s findings to current and future planning policy has also been discussed. It is hoped that some of the recommendations will be taken up and that the database will be utilised as an integral part of the evidence base informing local planning authority policies.
The higher level of landscape character type. 13 were identified in Greater Manchester. These are listed in the ‘legend’ on the inside cover.

Geographical Information System. A computer program enabling the creation of layers of information, such as the HLC data, which can be placed above or beneath the available layers of mapping. Data associated with the map features is stored in tables and can be interrogated and shown in different ways.

Historic Environment Record. An interactive database recording all the sites, buildings and areas of archaeological and historic interest in the county. An extensive paper archive forms part of the resource.

The narrow level of landscape character type. 174 were identified in Greater Manchester, and each of these was assigned to a specific Broad type. For example, the HLC type ‘Allotments’ fell within the Broad type of ‘Horticulture’.

A unit of landscape character, so called because it is represented as a polygon rather than a line or a point in the GIS database.
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Nevell, M, 2008 Manchester: The Hidden History, Stroud

Stockport MBC, 2006 Alexandra Park Conservation Area Character Appraisal
Various publications on historic landscape characterisation can be downloaded at:

http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas/characterisation/historic-landscape-character/

Other books in the Greater Manchester’s Past Revealed series:

(available from Oxford Archaeology North, Mill 3, Moor Lane Mills, Moor Lane, Lancaster, LA1 1GF)

- Piccadilly Place: uncovering Manchester’s industrial origins – 1
- The Rock Triangle, Bury: the archaeology of an industrial suburb – 2
- Discovering Coccium: the archaeology of Roman Wigan – 3
- Rediscovering Bradford: archaeology in the engine room of Manchester – 4
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The nature and diversity of Greater Manchester’s current landscape has been described through a major study called the Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. This has documented and mapped the historic character and origins of today’s landscape, over 51% of which is urban. Areas of distinct character in the modern landscape have been defined and mapped, and their earlier history investigated.

As well as giving an overview of the project, this booklet presents some of the key themes that have emerged from the data, for instance the survival and character of rural landscapes, the decline of historic industry, and the extraordinary growth of suburban housing. It shows ways in which the data set might be applied, such as in assessing new Conservation Areas. It also makes suggestions on the project’s relevance to planning management and spatial strategy, and to communities interested in understanding about the history of their localities. It is hoped that the project will prove its worth in years to come and will help all kinds of people reach new insights into the development of Greater Manchester, both past and future.