

English Nature Research Report 475

**The Living Landscapes Project: Landscape Character and Biodiversity. Final Report**

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### *Introduction*

In December 1998 English Nature was approached by Steven Warnock, an independent consultant, to set up meeting to discuss 'a character-based approach to integrated rural decision making'. This came not too long after the production of the Joint Countryside Character Map developed by the Countryside Agency, English Heritage and English Nature. At this time English Nature was developing its Natural Area Profiles to support its work on the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The contact with Steve Warnock led to discussions with the Living Landscapes Project, a consortium of interests involving universities, consultants and participating local authorities, which was established to develop and produce Landscape Character Assessments (LCA).

### *What was done*

This report charts the progress of a number of developments in the techniques of Landscape Character Assessment and its use in assessing the potential for habitat conservation and re-creation. The Living Landscapes Project was undertaken at a time of increasing awareness of landscape issues in English Nature and a realisation that new approaches needed to be taken to deliver BAP outside designated sites, and to support designated sites and their species within a less hostile landscape. More recently an analysis of BAP species has revealed that two thirds of more widespread species are still declining, in contrast to the considerable successes, which had been achieved for the very rarest species.

A number of other initiatives emerged during this time, some of which are noted in the report, such as the joint Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment, and the increased availability of spatial data. Other initiatives such as strategies for targeting new agri-environment schemes, have helped to shed more light on how information can be used at various scales in the characterisation framework.

### *Results and conclusions*

Living Landscapes Project Final Report demonstrates the utility of LCA, a landscape tool, for nature conservation purposes; something which was not readily appreciated at the start of the process. The approach enabled tools to be developed which could assist both nature conservation and landscape conservation and this broke down the artificial barriers between the disciplines which have often been constructed.

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## English Nature's viewpoint

This project came at a formative time (1998-2003) when landscape work was developing across a number of fronts and was something which did not readily fit in with day to day work of English Nature. However the techniques developed by the Living Landscapes Project enabled English Nature to be more aware of the potential to develop landscape scale approaches which benefit both landscape and nature conservation. The work developed in such a way that it provided a stimulus to thinking about a series of landscape geographies beneath Joint Character Areas - which were already a nationally agreed between Countryside Agency, English Heritage and English Nature. The investment in the project has paid off in that it is now helping to set the way in which such landscape issues are taken forward as part of confederated working and by Natural England.

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