

HERITAGE COUNTS

The State of the
WEST MIDLANDS'
Historic Environment

2005



Heritage Counts 2005 in West Midlands

Cover image: Lower Clopton Farm Shop near Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. Lower Clopton is one of a network of farm shops in the West Midlands Region. By adapting traditional farm buildings, the owners of Lower Clopton have established a direct link between the producer and the consumer. The increased and welcome demand for locally grown produce provides new opportunities for rural communities and, in cases like this one, the chance to re-use and bring new life to historic buildings.

Heritage Counts is the annual survey of the state of England's historic environment. The report identifies the principal trends and challenges affecting the historic environment, with a particular focus in 2005 on the state of England's rural heritage. This report is one of nine separate regional reports and has been prepared by English Heritage on behalf of the West Midlands' Historic Environment Forum. It should be read in conjunction with the national *Heritage Counts 2005* report, available at www.heritagecounts.org.uk.

Heritage Counts will be of assistance to all those with an interest in and a responsibility for the management and care of the West Midlands' historic landscapes, buildings and places.

Heritage Counts is divided into three sections.

- **Understanding the assets:** which examines the region's designated sites, places, landscapes and areas.
- **Caring and sharing:** which looks at the way the historic environment is managed and how its condition is changing.
- **Supporting the assets:** which considers some of the issues facing the West Midlands' rural historic environment and how those challenges might be met.

This is an important time for the rural areas of the West Midlands. The management of our countryside is changing. The England Rural Development Programme and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Rural Strategy (2004) will re-configure the way in which the landscapes, market towns and rural villages of the West Midlands are cared for.

It is vitally important that the unique legacy of the region's rural historic environment is a central consideration in this process of change. In 2004, *Heritage Counts* looked at the way in which investment, in particular by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has generated significant economic, social and cultural returns for this region's heritage. Understanding our historic environment helps us to maintain the undeniable benefits of that investment and build upon the values we ascribe to our heritage. Our collective understanding enables us to identify and implement the best ways to manage and safeguard our historic environment. *Heritage Counts* plays a singular role in addressing this challenge.

Using a variety of indicators and measures, this edition of *Heritage Counts* seeks to distinguish and identify patterns in the rural historic environment. The report considers a number of distinctive challenges that this region's historic environment faces. The worrying shortage of trained craftspeople to sustain and nurture our heritage poses serious long-term threats to our historic assets. Equally, the way in which the rural historic environment is understood and innovative measures, such as Historic Landscape Characterisation, are used to full effect is a key and immediate consideration for the historic environment sector.

I hope that you find *Heritage Counts* to be both useful and stimulating.

Chris Smith
Chairman of the West Midlands Historic Environment Forum

The West Midlands is often characterised as a manufacturing area. However, some 70 per cent of the region is farmed. Herefordshire and Shropshire are amongst the most 'rural' counties in England. Nonetheless, agriculture accounts for less than five percent of all employment in the West Midlands. Tourism accounts for a greater proportion of economic activity in rural areas than agriculture, although in the West Midlands the tourism market is dominated by 'day trip' visitors.

In common with the rest of the UK, the West Midlands region has experienced a dramatic and painful deterioration of its agricultural economy. The contribution of agriculture to the region's Gross Value Added is in decline, a process exacerbated by the Foot and Mouth epidemic of 2001. The drive for diversification gathers at a rapid pace, as do changes to the way in which the countryside is managed. This has created a new set of issues for planners and land managers as many of the region's 19,000 farm holdings try to adapt and respond to a new and distinctive set of market pressures. In tandem come potent and discernible challenges for the West Midlands' historic buildings, monuments and places. The purpose of *Heritage Counts* is to identify the evidence that will enable a better understanding of these trends and issues, and to suggest actions and issues for the historic environment sector of the West Midlands to consider in responding to this new order.

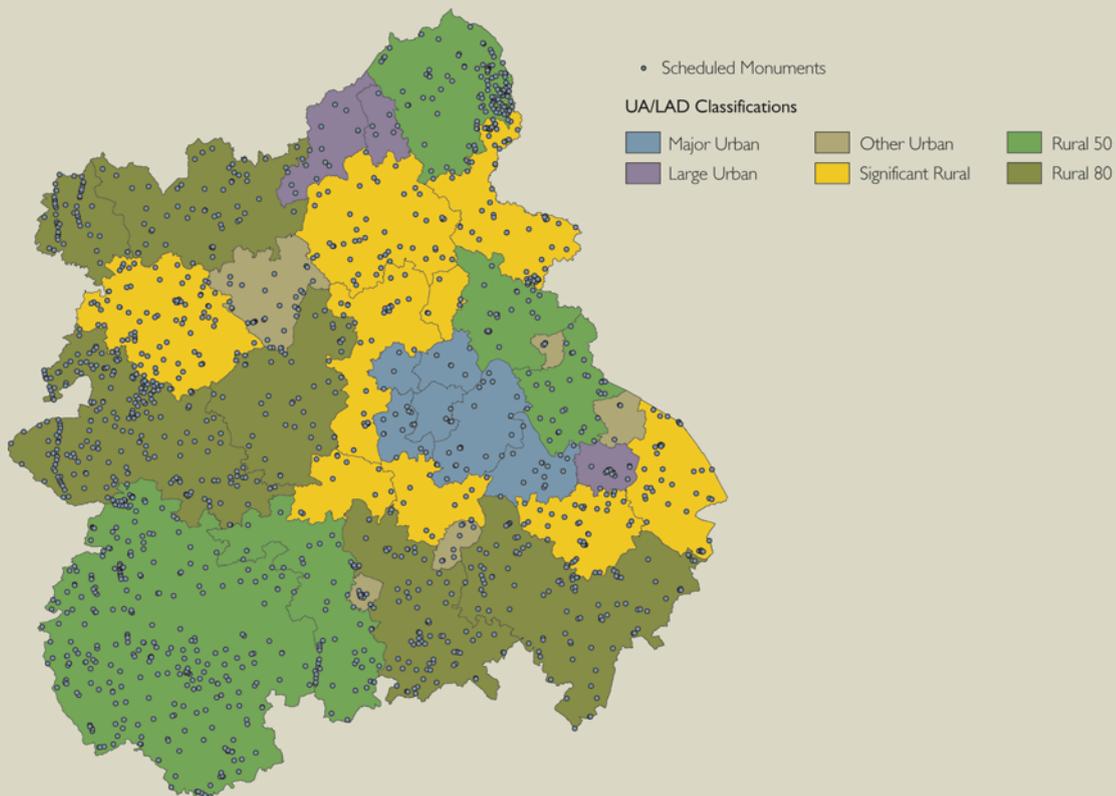
The historic environment in the West Midlands: distribution of assets

West Midlands – Regional Data

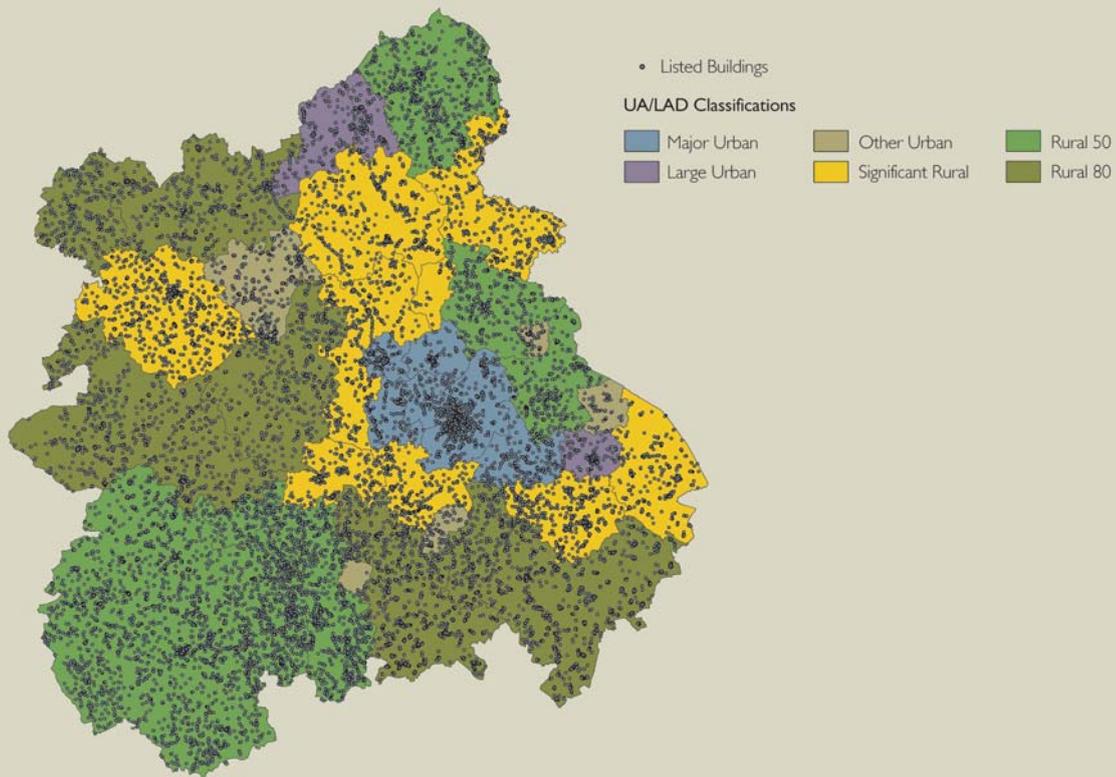
LOCAL AUTHORITY	DISTRIBUTION OF LISTED BUILDINGS	DISTRIBUTION OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS	DISTRIBUTION OF REGISTERED PARKS & GARDENS	DISTRIBUTION OF CONSERVATION AREAS
HEREFORDSHIRE	5,903	263	24	46
WORCESTERSHIRE	6,361	175	15	142
SHROPSHIRE	6,895	435	29	111
TELFORD AND WREKIN	814	28	3	7
STAFFORDSHIRE	5,063	277	12	151
STOKE-ON-TRENT	202	5	6	21
WARWICKSHIRE	5,992	180	31	134
WEST MIDLANDS				
BIRMINGHAM	1,374	13	14	29
COVENTRY	277	10	3	15
DUDLEY	262	11	3	21
SANDWELL	276		5	6
SOLIHULL	366	15	2	20
WALSALL	148	5	4	18
WOLVERHAMPTON	374	4	2	30

Source: English Heritage

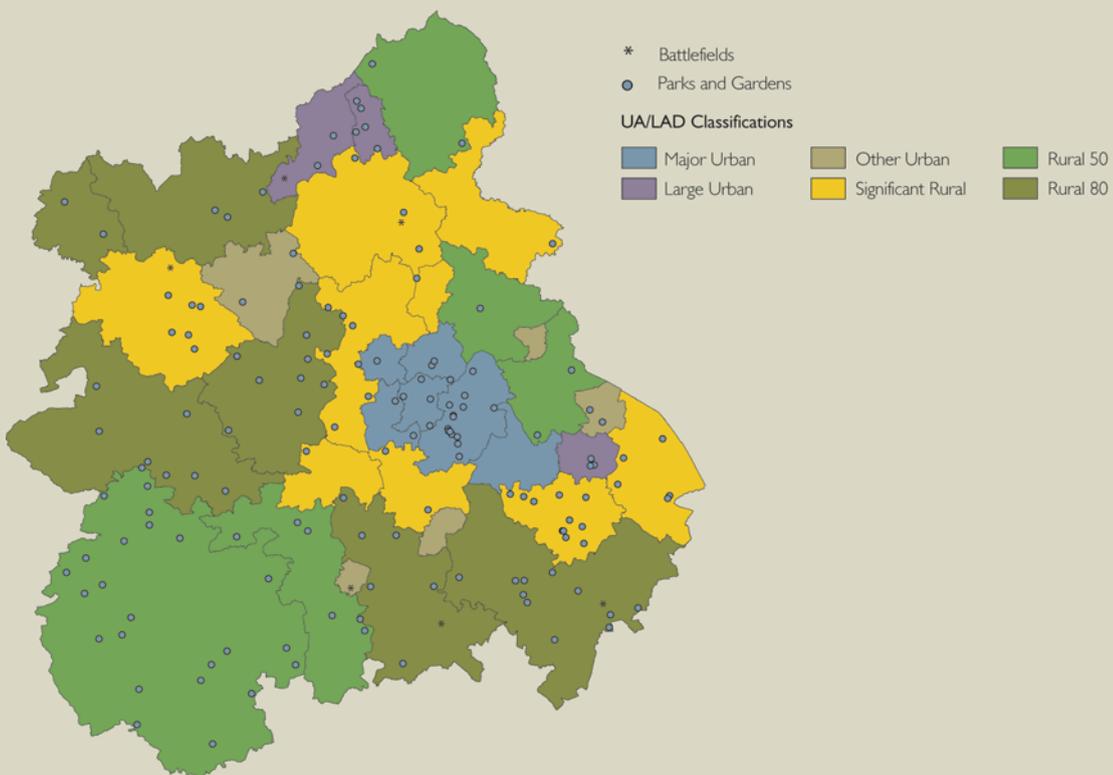
Scheduled Monuments in the West Midlands Region against the Rural/Urban Classification of Local Authorities



Listed Buildings in the West Midlands Region against the Rural/Urban Classification of Local Authorities



Battlefields and Parks & Gardens in the West Midlands Region against the Rural/Urban Classification of Local Authorities



The historic environment and the West Midlands' strategic priorities

The historic environment is an integral part of regional life. It is a fundamental part of the cultural heritage of the West Midlands. It presents a wealth of opportunities for supporting the regeneration of the rural economy, adding value to rural tourism, and enhancing the quality of life and well-being of rural communities. The historic environment sector has worked hard to ensure that the historic environment and its potential are reflected in the review, development and delivery of the West Midlands' policy framework as demonstrated by the following:

The Regional Spatial Strategy: The renaissance of the region's rural areas is one of the key objectives of the West Midlands Spatial Strategy. It emphasises that activities to improve the quality of life in rural areas must protect and enhance its unique qualities, including the historic environment. Protecting and enhancing the character and distinctiveness of the region's market towns and villages, and its historic rural landscapes is a priority.

Delivering Advantage – The Regional Economic Strategy: This sets the goal of making the West Midlands a world class region by 2010. One of the main mechanisms for achieving this is through geographically defined, targeted Regeneration Zones within which priority is given to raising employment levels, increasing business activity and improving quality of life. The West Midlands is the only region in the UK to have designated a Rural Regeneration Zone (RRZ), covering most of Herefordshire, much of Shropshire and parts of Worcestershire. The RRZ is one of six zones established by Advantage West Midlands (the regional development agency) and will be the focal point for rural regeneration in the West Midlands.

Rural Renaissance: This document explains in more detail Advantage West Midlands' role in rural areas in implementing the Regional Economic Strategy and addressing the specific needs of the rural areas. It refers specifically to cultural heritage and the associated environmental quality of the region's rural areas. An identified priority is to capitalise on the region's environmental assets (including its cultural assets) in order to support sustainable economic and community regeneration.

The Regional Cultural Strategy: The regional cultural strategy sets the framework for developing the West Midlands' cultural assets. Building on and enhancing local distinctiveness throughout the region is a priority for the cultural sector.

Visitor Economy Strategy: Rural destinations are a fundamental part of the regional Visitor Economy Strategy and include unique assets such as Shakespeare Country, the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, and the region's cathedral cities, market towns and its countryside.

Regional Housing Strategy: The core aim of the Strategy is to secure mixed, balanced and inclusive communities across the region's urban and rural areas. It highlights the wide variations in the region's rural housing markets and the need for affordable housing. It also underlines the importance of delivering high quality and distinctive new housing developments that create a sense of place and which are informed by and respond to their context – in particular the historic environment.

Rural Delivery Framework: This aims to secure better prioritisation and delivery in relation to rural areas, together with strengthened coordination of activity between regional, sub-regional and local agencies and departments.

Beyond this policy framework, the historic environment sector is also trying to ensure that the value of and opportunities offered by the historic environment are fully reflected in the new Local Development Frameworks, Local Authority Community Strategies and community-based Parish Plans.

Listed buildings, scheduled monuments, conservation areas and registered parks are subject to a range of legislative controls. This section examines the trends that have occurred in the West Midlands within these categories of designation over the last 12 months and describes the major legislative changes that will affect the management of the designated historic environment.

A.1

THE HERITAGE PROTECTION REVIEW

The Heritage Protection Review is examining the way in which designations are made. It is the most significant legislative change to affect the historic environment for a generation and will have profound implications for the way the West Midlands' historic environment is protected and managed.

The Government has announced that it will replace the existing designation management regimes by amalgamating the existing designation regimes onto an inclusive and unified list: the Register of Historic Sites and Buildings of England. Initial changes have already come into effect, including the transfer of the administration for designating listed buildings in England from the Government to English Heritage. Key changes include the requirement for consultation with owners and local planning authorities on all designation cases. Publicly available criteria, against which designation decisions are made, will make the process more transparent.

'Statements of Significance' set out the reasons for designation and are being trialled. A number of pilot projects have been set up, to test the proposals and to explore the consequences of designation, including at Kenilworth in Warwickshire. Voluntary management agreements are being introduced as an alternative to statutory regulation for some assets.

Longer-term measures such as the establishment of the new Register, the possibility of statutory management agreements and revised rights of appeal, will require primary legislation. The Government hopes to introduce a Heritage Bill in the 2007/08 Session, and work on the White Paper is underway.

Further information is available at www.culture.gov.uk/historic_environment/heritage_protection_review.htm.

A.2

SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

There are 1,426 sites scheduled as monuments in the West Midlands, representing approximately seven per cent of the total number of scheduled ancient monuments in England. 1,283 of these monuments (89.9 per cent) are within local authorities that are defined as rural or semi-rural.

A.3

LISTED BUILDINGS

The region is home to 602 Grade I listed buildings, 2,090 Grade II* listed buildings and 31,505 Grade II listed buildings. A further 110 ecclesiastical buildings are listed at Grades A, B or C.

The breakdown of the West Midlands' listed buildings by rural and semi-rural /urban local authority area type is as follows:

A.4

REGISTERED PARKS AND GARDENS

The West Midlands has 148 registered historic parks and gardens. Nine are registered at Grade I, 44 at Grade II* and 95 at Grade II.

A.5

CONSERVATION AREAS

There are 761 designated conservation areas in the West Midlands. This represents an increase of 24 on the number reported in 2004, as a result of a consolidation of existing and archived records carried out by English Heritage in 2004/05.

B

Caring and sharing

This section considers indicators that provide an impression of the relative condition of the West Midlands' historic environment.



Umberslade Baptist Chapel, Warwickshire

Many rural churches feature on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register.

© English Heritage

grant-aiding a phased programme of repairs. A strategy for the other castles in the region will be developed over the next few years. Industrial buildings also feature prominently on the register, ranging from former textile mills in the north of the region to foundries in the Black Country and the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent. English Heritage is assisting with the gradual process of regenerating these buildings and is taking a leading role at Ditherington Flaxmill, Shrewsbury and Chatterley Whitfield Colliery, Stoke.

A significant proportion of entries on the buildings at risk register are under-used or redundant churches. This poses a major challenge for the region. English Heritage is working with the Historic Chapels Trust to secure the future of the Bethesda Methodist Church, Hanley, and the Umberslade Baptist Chapel, Warwickshire. English Heritage is also working with a local preservation trust to restore the Hermon Chapel, Oswestry, which is to be brought back into use for public worship after repair. These are non-conformist churches, but places of worship of all denominations are increasingly under threat.

Former country houses, some no longer occupied, present different problems as do the numerous estate buildings which appear on the register. Encouraging the repair and viable re-use of such buildings can be a slow process and is hampered by iniquitous VAT rules that favour new build rather than repair. In some cases appropriate enabling development may be considered, such as at Great Barr Hall, Walsall. In other cases, statutory action may be required.

Of those buildings and standing monuments identified in this year's register, the breakdown between rural and urban districts is as follows:

	GRADE I	GRADE II*	STANDING SM	TOTAL
Rural	9	67	58	134
Urban	3	38	11	52
Total	12	105	69	186

B. I HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AT RISK

English Heritage's register of Grade I and II* listed buildings and standing scheduled monuments that are considered to be at risk shows that 186 such structures are at risk of imminent loss in the West Midlands. This represents the second highest number of 'at risk' buildings in England, after the South East, and a net increase of three on the position in 2004.

Approximately 38 per cent of the buildings on the register are buildings or structures which are not capable of beneficial use. There is no economic incentive for owners to maintain them. The most significant group under this heading are the medieval castles, many in a ruinous state, which are a feature of the Welsh borders. There are over 20 of these on the register. There has been significant progress at Wilton Castle, near Ross-on-Wye, where in partnership with the owner, English Heritage is

B.2 MONUMENTS AT RISK PROGRAMME
B.3 PLANNING TRENDS

B.2

MONUMENTS AT RISK PROGRAMME

The Monuments at Risk (MARS) project assessed the condition and vulnerability of a five per cent sample of designated and undesignated archaeological monuments in England. The Scheduled Monuments at Risk (SM@R) project builds on the approach adopted by MARS, but it is a more strategic and in-depth study of the condition and vulnerability of all scheduled monuments. SM@R was initiated in a pilot study in the East Midlands and is now being rolled out across the country on a region-by-region basis. The East Midlands pilot study confirmed the findings of MARS that, since 1945, agriculture and erosion have been the major reasons for unrecorded losses to archaeological sites.

The West Midlands SM@R project started in October 2004 and will be completed in May 2006. The project includes some 1,600 scheduled monuments across the region's six counties. Each scheduled monument is assessed according to a range of criteria that takes into account its condition and its use.

Preliminary results from the desk-based assessment of Herefordshire's scheduled monuments show 67 at high risk, 93 at medium risk and 98 at low risk. It is clear that in each county local factors influence the results. For example, high-risk monuments in Herefordshire tend to include the large border castles with long-term, ongoing problems of masonry collapse and the large hillforts with significant tree-growth problems.

Early indications suggest that monuments considered to be at low or medium risk are so because fewer fields are under the plough – because of economic or other factors – or that in many cases there is a strong and beneficial Environmental Stewardship (or similar) arrangement.

B.3

PLANNING TRENDS

In 2004/05, local planning authorities in the West Midlands received approximately 56,900 planning applications, some 6,300 more than the previous year:

Of the planning applications received, 2,997 directly affected the designated historic environment, either through listed building consent or conservation area consent. 2,733 applications were made for listed building consent. Of those, 89 per cent were granted. 264 applications were made for conservation area consent, of which 90 per cent were approved.

The breakdown of those figures by county is as follows:

	CONSERVATION AREA CONSENT	LISTED BUILDING CONSENT	TOTAL
Herefordshire	18	380	398
Shropshire (Includes Unitary Authority of Telford and Wrekin)	56	548	604
Staffordshire (Includes Unitary Authority of City of Stoke-on-Trent)	33	360	393
Warwickshire	38	571	609
Worcestershire	66	604	670
Former county of West Midlands	53	270	323
Regional Total	264	2,733	2,997
(Regional Totals in 2004)	(194)	(2,549)	(2,743)

District Level data is available upon request from westmidlands@english-heritage.org.uk.

In 2003/04, 2,743 applications were made for conservation area or listed building consents. The figures for 2004/05 therefore represent an increase of 8.5 per cent in the number of applications submitted to local planning authorities for change in the historic environment, with a notable increase of 26.5 per cent in the number of applications for conservation area consent.

B.4 PARKLANDS

B.5 UNSCHEDULED ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

B.4

PARKLANDS

The rural and urban fringe areas of the West Midlands are well-known for their large expanses of parkland. From medieval deer parks within the Royal hunting lands of Cannock Chase and Feckenham Forest to the formal avenues and 'eye catcher' plantations of designers Brown and Repton, these landscapes tell the story of the region's most influential land owners, from Saxon kings to the first industrialists. In 1918, parkland covered four per cent of the region's landscape. By 1995, half of that parkland had been destroyed: just two per cent of the region is parkland today. This is a greater loss than in any other region.

Agri-environment schemes have been targeting the restoration of parkland for some years. The Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme funds have been used to restore the design, structure and land use in some of the region's key historic parkland landscapes. Agri-environment schemes are active in 66 of the region's 148 registered parks and gardens, and the West Midlands has a four per cent share of all the parklands in England that are in agreement.

B.5

UNSCHEDULED ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

Only a very small proportion of archaeological remains are protected as scheduled monuments. The impact of development on other archaeological remains is controlled through the planning system. Every planning application in the region is appraised by an archaeological advisor who assesses the impact of development proposals and ensures that any remains affected are suitably recorded, for example, if the preservation of the archaeology within the development is not feasible.

The table below summarises the number of assessments and recordings carried out in 2004/05. It covers the range of assessment types that occurred in connection with development projects affecting archaeological sites of all types, from rural prehistoric remains to medieval urban sites, post-medieval industrial buildings and buried remains. Archaeological advice in the planning system draws on the region's network of Historic Environment Records (HERs), and all of the information recovered from archaeological work is fed back into HERs. This adds to our understanding of the past and allows planning archaeologists to respond to development proposals more effectively and efficiently.

Development-based Archaeology in the West midlands 2004/05

	ASSESSMENTS	EVALUATIONS	EXCAVATIONS	WATCHING BRIEFS	BUILDING RECORDING	TOTAL
Birmingham	7	4	10	5	0	26
Coventry	3	5	4	2	1	15
Dudley	7	0	1	8	6	22
Herefordshire	9	19	6	80	22	136
Sandwell	6	9	0	13	8	36
Shropshire (including Telford)	5	14	2	16	2	39
Solihull	0	2	0	2	0	4
Staffordshire	12	11	3	19	13	58
Stoke-on-Trent	5	7	4	12	6	34
Walsall	5	1	0	1	3	10
Warwickshire	2	31	14	65	9	121
Wolverhampton	7	2	0	5	5	19
Worcester	9	11	1	17	2	40
Worcestershire	0	19	38	35	53	145
TOTALS	77	135	83	280	130	705

B.6 THE RURAL HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT: IN FOCUS

B.7 AGRI-ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

B.6

THE RURAL HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT: IN FOCUS

This section looks at agri-environment schemes, one of the key mechanisms for caring for the rural historic environment.

The principal mechanism for delivering conservation and good management of the historic environment in rural areas is through agri-environment schemes.

Two agri-environment schemes (or 'classic' schemes) operated until late 2003 when final agreements were issued. The schemes were:

- 1 Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS), a ten-year agreement aiming to make conservation part of farming and land management practice. It offered payments for changes that encouraged better conservation management regimes and was available throughout England.
- 2 The Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme (ESA), which encouraged farmers to adopt practices to protect landscapes, wildlife and areas of historic value. There are 22 ESAs in England representing ten per cent of all agricultural land.

This year, a new Environmental Stewardship (ES) scheme was launched in England to replace the previous schemes. ES represents a significant change of emphasis: instead of offering grants as incentives, farmers are now rewarded for undertaking sustainable environmental practices.

Environmental Stewardship streamlines the two 'classic' schemes into one. It operates on two levels:

- A 'broad and shallow' entry-level scheme (and organic entry level scheme) available to all farmers, rewarding them for providing a basic level of environmental management.
- A higher level scheme, open to farmers and land managers, which rewards delivery of higher standards of environmental management and is targeted at particular areas.

'Protecting the Historic Environment' and 'Maintaining and Enhancing Landscape Character' are two of the five primary objectives of the new scheme. This increases the potential for future benefits to the historic environment and the wider cultural landscape.

B.7

AGRI-ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS

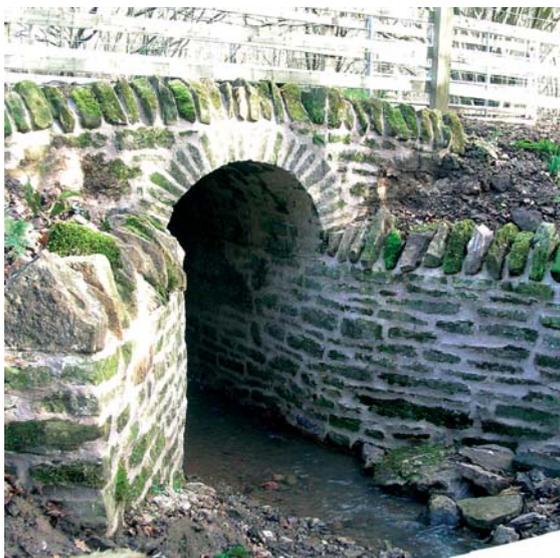
This year, Defra/Rural Development Service is reporting on the outcomes of the expired stewardship schemes and demonstrating their financial input into England's historic environment. For the first time, it has been possible to consider how this has changed over a five-year, and in some instances, a ten-year timeframe.

Using key statistics drawn from the CSS and ESA (the 'classic' schemes) databases, the land management and capital works elements of the schemes, which specifically enabled the restoration of historic environment features, have been examined to give an impression of the impact agri-environment schemes had on the rural historic environment.

Analysing the impact of agri-environment schemes on the protection of the rural historic environment is a particularly important area of work for Natural England (the new agency which combines Defra's Rural Development Service, English Nature and parts of the Countryside Agency) and for the historic environment sector as a whole.

By 2004, landowners and land managers had entered 7.9 per cent of the land area of the West Midlands Region into beneficial stewardship, almost double that of ten years ago. Although figures are not yet complete for 2004, preliminary analysis shows that 23 per cent of Defra's regional scheme budget was spent on historic environment objectives, higher than any other region. The final spend on these objectives is expected to mirror the 2003 figure of around £3.3 million.

The schemes meet their historic environment objectives by funding a range of land management options and capital items that cover all sorts of historic environment assets. These include the repair of traditional farm buildings, parklands, stone walls, hedgerows and field ditches; the protection of archaeological features; the restoration of historic ponds and water management features; and the restoration of traditional orchards and pollards.



Stone Bridge, Worcestershire

Repair of this distinctive stone bridge was carried out by a local stonemason using lime mortar and was funded by Countryside Stewardship.

© Defra RDS

B.8

KEY AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEME MEASURES

In 2004, 26 per cent of the region's 1,400 or so scheduled monuments were within agri-environment scheme agreements. These 66 schemes appear to be positively targeting protection of the scheduled monuments, with 90 per cent of this area managed under one or more historic environment objective.

In addition to the designated sites, 83 agreements contain non-designated National Monuments Record sites, of which 78 per cent by area is managed under an historic environment objective. Common measures employed under the scheme would include sensitive management of grassland containing archaeological sites, reverting cultivated land to pasture to protect below-ground archaeology from plough damage, or managing scrub to prevent root damage.

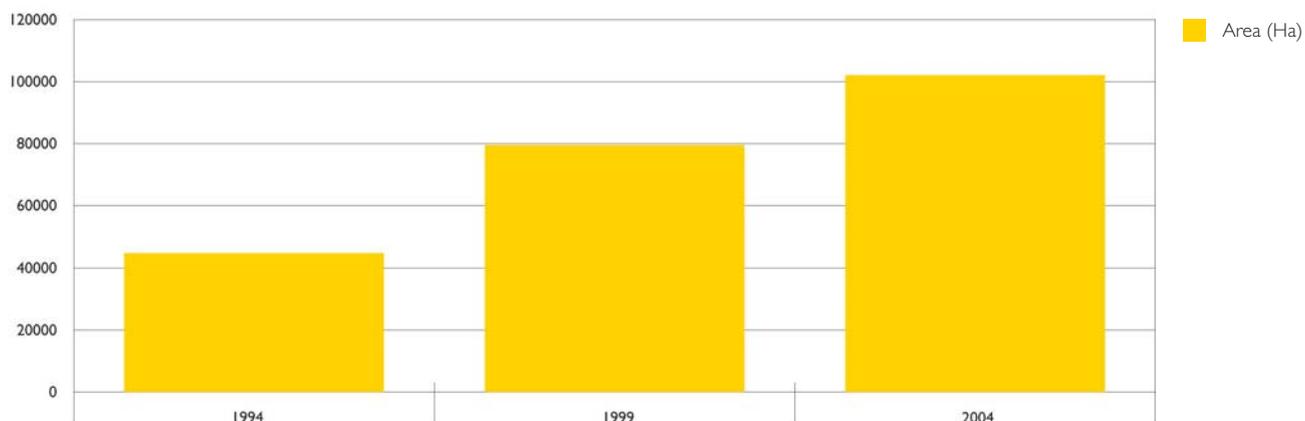
Of the 21,586 listed buildings in 'rural' local authorities, 1,943, or nine per cent, are in agri-environment scheme areas. There is no evidence that scheme funds have been used to safeguard those buildings, but initial analysis of figures shows spending on the repair of traditional farm buildings has at least doubled since 1998, from £427,000 to more than £992,000 in 2004. These funds may also have contributed to repairing listed or undesignated buildings, although there is little evidence to suggest that vernacular farm buildings have benefited.

In 1998, 101 km of hedgerows in the region were restored, increasing to 769 km in 2004. Stone walls are a characteristic landscape feature of parts of the West Midlands, in particular, in the South West Peak, Clun and the Shropshire Hills. The schemes funded the restoration of 2.4 km of stone walls in 1998, rising to 18.1 km in 2004.

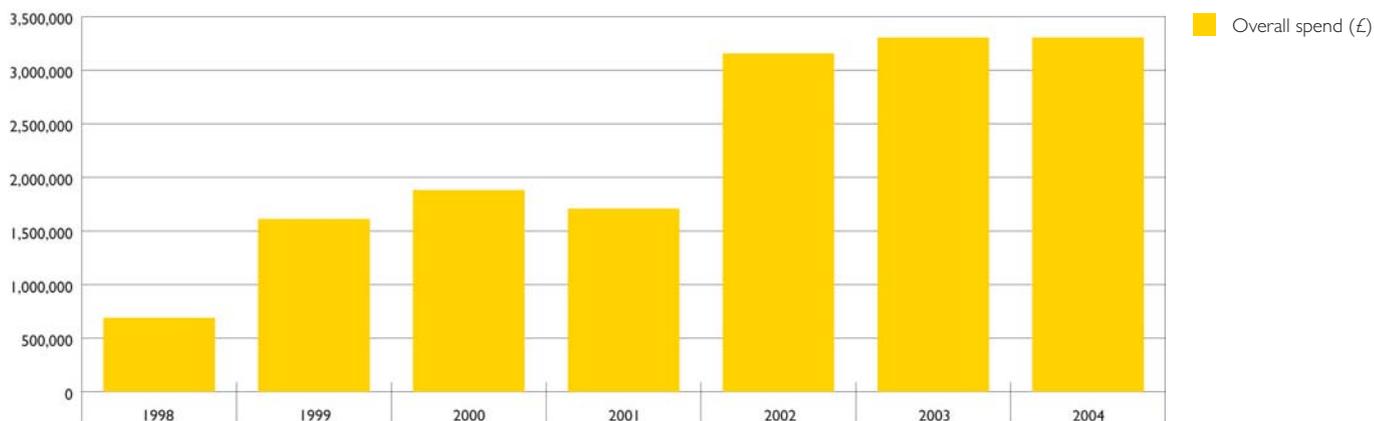
The restoration of traditional orchards, a strong but declining element of the West Midlands landscape, is also targeted through agri-environment schemes. In 1998, 3,520 hectares of orchards were restored, compared with 6,640 hectares in 2004.

B.8 KEY AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEME MEASURES

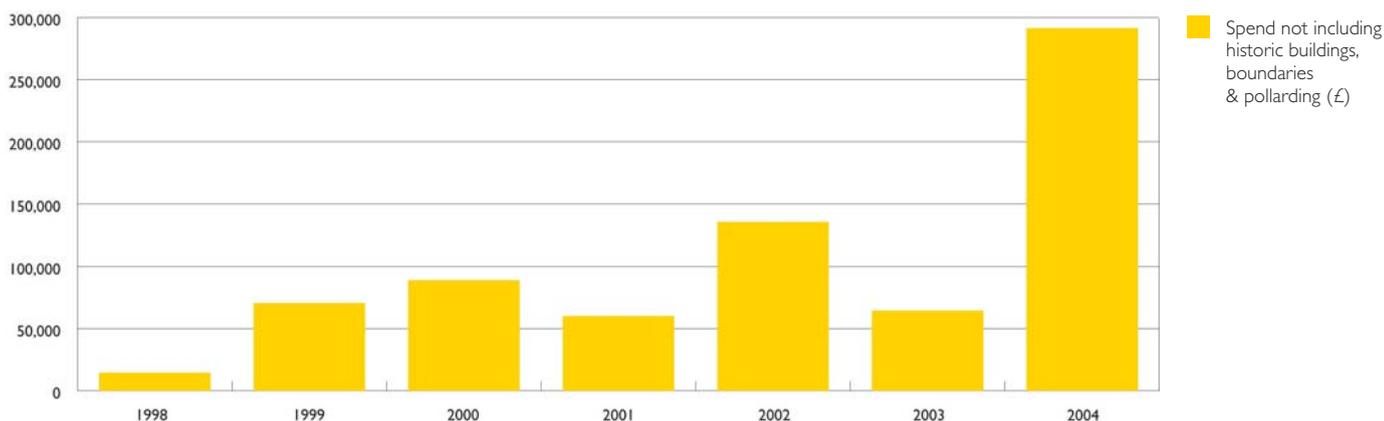
Area of Land in West Midlands under agri-environment scheme management options



Agri-environment spend on all historic environment options in the West Midlands



Agri-environment scheme funding of historic environment options (excluding historic buildings, boundaries, orchards and pollarding)



Source: Defra RDS

This section discusses issues facing the rural historic environment in 2005 and beyond.

C.1 SUSTAINABILITY

There is a wide range of related sectors and emerging issues that the heritage sector will need to influence and actively contribute to in order to secure the future protection and sustainable management of the region's rural historic environment. These include:

Biodiversity: The natural and historic environments are interlinked – the interaction of people and nature over the centuries has been a major force in shaping the distinctive character of the countryside, including its habitats. Aspects of the historic environment are directly relevant to the region's biodiversity resource, such as ancient woodlands, veteran trees and wood pasture. However, care must be taken that activities to enhance biodiversity also respect the historic environment, for example, habitat creation, and that opportunities are maximised for jointly promoting and improving access to and understanding of the natural and historic environment.

Climate Change and Renewable Energy

Technologies: Climate change is likely to have a range of implications for historic buildings, archaeological remains and historic landscapes. While commitments to reduce emissions which contribute to global warming are welcome, it is important to recognise that renewable energy technologies can have an impact on the historic environment.

Brownfield development: Targeting new development on previously developed land is seen as an important way to avoid the use of greenfield sites. The appropriate adaptation and re-use of historic buildings can go a long way towards achieving this. However, the historic or archaeological interest of brownfield sites must also be taken into account in helping to determine the suitability of a site for redevelopment.

Countryside Management: With a decline in food production, farmers need assistance in diversifying their activities. Countryside and heritage tourism can provide opportunities if undertaken in an informed and sensitive way. Tourism related activities are a major source of diversification opportunities and are increasingly important to the region's rural economy. Ensuring that these activities have a sustainable future that contributes to the local economy and the quality of the environment is a major priority for the region's rural areas.

C.2 THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE

The transitional zone between town and countryside, the rural-urban fringe, has a distinct character of its own. Historic environment features of all types are often better preserved and more apparent here than in adjoining urban areas. For example, archaeological remains include many sites surviving as earthworks, and these often survive in their settings rather than in isolation.

Residents of the rural-urban fringe are typically part of the urban rather than rural economy, so have few links to the land around their properties. Much of the fringe area is not in formal agricultural use (and doesn't attract many applications for stewardship grants) but includes extensive areas subdivided as horse paddocks and leased to tenants who live in the urban areas. Although this can pose management challenges, this type of land-use means that much of the rural-urban fringe has largely escaped the damage caused by late-20th-century intensive farming. However, even though much of this zone is designated Green Belt, it is still under pressure for new development in various forms.

The accessibility of the rural-urban fringe to the many people living in the adjoining urban areas provides huge opportunities to increase public awareness of the historic environment through appropriate management.

C.2 THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE

C.3 EXPANDING THE EVIDENCE BASE

This section looks in more detail at Historic Landscape Characterisation, an innovative technique that helps the sector and others to manage and interpret our historic environment. It also looks at the National Heritage Training Group's recent report on the extent and nature of the West Midlands' skills base and at the trends this highlights in the West Midlands Region.

C.3

EXPANDING THE EVIDENCE BASE

Characterisation techniques, including Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC), offer a way to understand the character and quality of the wider landscape beyond individual, designated sites and features. In particular, HLC provides a more detailed understanding of the historic dimension of today's rural and urban landscapes. It involves identifying and mapping commonplace but distinctive aspects of the present day landscape, as well as describing past landscape types. HLC can help to identify areas that have experienced the greatest and least change over time, and it can help with decisions about preservation and long-term conservation.

Across the West Midlands HLC is at varying stages, with completed or near completed coverage in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire. Shropshire County Council has successfully piloted the use of HLC to inform land management on the Severn and Vernwy river floodplains under the Countryside Agency's Land Management Initiative. As part of the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme, applicants are given information on the character of their local historic landscape and advice on how to strengthen and maintain that character through beneficial land management changes.

Notwithstanding progress in achieving complete coverage of HLC across the rural West Midlands, there remain a number of challenges to its wider use and practical application. As yet, there is no agreed methodology for assessing the sensitivity of a particular landscape to change. HLC is, however, contributing to a region-wide Woodland Opportunities Mapping exercise which is attempting to map areas that are sensitive to new woodland planting.



Sutton Park

At the northern fringe of the Birmingham conurbation, Sutton Park is a rural landscape in an urban setting, facing unique challenges.

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Further challenges include increasing awareness and understanding of HLC and demonstrating how it can help inform the work of the region's planners, landscape managers and farm advisors as well as urban and rural regeneration officers. Incorporating HLC within the new planning system of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks poses a particular challenge. How to best engage communities in identifying what features are of local value also presents another challenge in linking HLC to what people value as their everyday historic environment.

Actions Facing the Historic Environment Sector

- Developing a more holistic approach to landscape management that values and makes the most of Historic Landscape Characterisation
- Cross-sector training for those involved in landscape management and wider dissemination of best practice
- Supporting pilot projects that extend the practical application of HLC, including community engagement

C.4 SUSTAINING SKILLS IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT



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C.4

SUSTAINING SKILLS IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

In 2002, the National Heritage Training Group (NHTG) was set up to respond to the shortage of skilled craftspeople by shaping and coordinating activities that aim to prevent further erosion of conservation related skills. In June 2005, the NHTG launched the first ever skills needs analysis study of the built heritage sector in England, *Traditional Building Craft Skills: Assessing the Need, Meeting the Challenge*. It combines information regarding research findings and a comprehensive skills action plan to address existing shortages and gaps.

The built heritage sector is a sub-set of the main construction industry. This sector provides vital craft skills such as bricklaying, carpentry, lime-plastering and thatching. However, the research indicates that the number of employed and self-employed within the built heritage sector in the West Midlands totals just 2,293. These shortages have become a national issue with major regional implications.

It is estimated that there are approximately 433,000 pre-1919 historic buildings in the West Midlands. The practical craft skills required for the careful repair and maintenance of these buildings is currently threatened by lack of knowledge, understanding and expertise.

Working on any historic building requires great care and understanding of the original materials of construction and the need to retain as much as possible of the original fabric. If replacement is necessary, then this is undertaken in a sensitive manner to preserve and respect the delicate historic balance. In the past, the skills required to strike this balance have been handed down from generation to generation. However, the availability of these craft skills is now dependent on different factors which include availability of training, economic conditions and awareness of their need.

The skills mapping research has provided a picture of the main traditional building craft skills required in the West Midlands. The consultation process for the NHTG research, in which 144 quantitative interviews were undertaken, allowed the current shortages of traditional building craft skills in the region to be identified. Carpenters, stone masons, decorators, lead workers, bricklayers and slate and tile roofers were the trades most frequently used over the last 12 months in the region.

Existing levels of training provision through the regional Further Education (FE) colleges have been mapped, with particular emphasis placed upon understanding the degree of relevant training currently available. The region has the highest number of applicants in England, with 74 applicants in the last 12 months applying to undertake conservation related FE courses. There are currently 37 college conservation-related courses available.

The NHTG aims to ensure that the decline in craft skills is reversed and that this renaissance will replenish craftspeople and craft skills as the mainstay of the NHTG's efforts to preserve the historic environment.

C.5 NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

C.5

NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

There are a number of inherent challenges associated with making the most of our region's heritage. Putting in place the measures that will enable future generations to enjoy and learn from the buildings, places and monuments that we have inherited demands vigilance, care, investment and attention. There are some distinctive challenges facing the region's historic environment sector:

LEADERSHIP

- Over the last few years, the historic environment sector at a national level has made significant progress in meeting the challenges set out in the Government's *Force for our Future* report (2001). The West Midlands Historic Environment Forum has achieved a lot in a relatively short space of time, but it lacks the resources to deliver its own ambitious agenda.

Challenge: The historic environment has to be an integral part of the future well-being and prosperity of the West Midlands. Demonstrating this to regional partners demands the coordinated leadership of the region's historic environment sector.

UNDERSTANDING

- In the West Midlands, as with the rest of the country, agriculture, its practices and its economy have changed. The Government has responded to these changes, and in 2005 we are seeing the beginnings of a new order of management and delivery of services in rural areas.

Challenge: As a partner of the Government and as a custodian and lead advisor on the management of rural areas, the historic environment sector has a responsibility to understand the new economy, techniques and management of the West Midlands' rural areas. Much progress has been made in achieving this – Landscape Characterisation is one such example – but there is still much to be done.

DELIVERY

- The condition of the historic environment in the West Midlands is variable. Indicators such as the assessment of parkland loss and the assessment of the provision of regional skills paint a worrying picture, as does the annual buildings at risk register. They point to some alarming trends which should set the agenda for the historic environment sector. Delivering that agenda is a huge challenge, which relies on the capacity of the sector to address a demanding programme.

Challenge: If we are to sustain the historic environment for this and future generations then it is essential that regional and local government as well as the public and private guardians of the West Midlands' heritage are sufficiently resourced to meet the challenges highlighted by *Heritage Counts*.

The West Midlands Historic Environment Forum is committed to meeting the challenges outlined in this section by working with its partners in the historic environment sector and elsewhere.

More data about participation, volunteering, and the designated and undesignated historic environment is available on the Heritage Counts website or on request from English Heritage's Birmingham office:
Telephone 0121 625 6820
www.heritagecounts.org.uk
[westmidlands @english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:westmidlands@english-heritage.org.uk)



The West Midlands Heritage Counts Editorial Board 2005:

Jez Bretherton (Rural Development Service/Defra), Matthew Dobson (English Heritage), Dr Mike Hodder (ALGAO), Caroline Magnus (Historic Houses Association), Amanda Smith (English Heritage), Elizabeth Turner (British Waterways), Margaret Way (Government Office West Midlands).

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- Atherstone Civic Society
- Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers
- Birmingham City Council
- Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
- Black Environment Network
- Borough of Telford and Wrekin Council
- British Waterways
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- Civic Trust / West Midlands Amenity Society Association
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- West Mercia District Workers' Educational Association
- West Midlands Regional Assembly



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