



2.2 Landscape characterisation and change

2.2.1 Landscape characterisation

England's landscapes are described and characterised at the national level through 159 Character Areas. Each Character Area represents a characteristic blend of geographical, ecological and historical variations in landscape features. Mapped using an analysis of national datasets, Character Areas do not ascribe value to landscape, but combine a consistent suite of baseline evidence with descriptions of character. Character Areas can be used to target schemes and resources. For example, they are the basis for implementing measures of the Higher Level Stewardship agri-environment scheme, to ensure that individual agreements contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape character of the area, its historic environment and biodiversity.

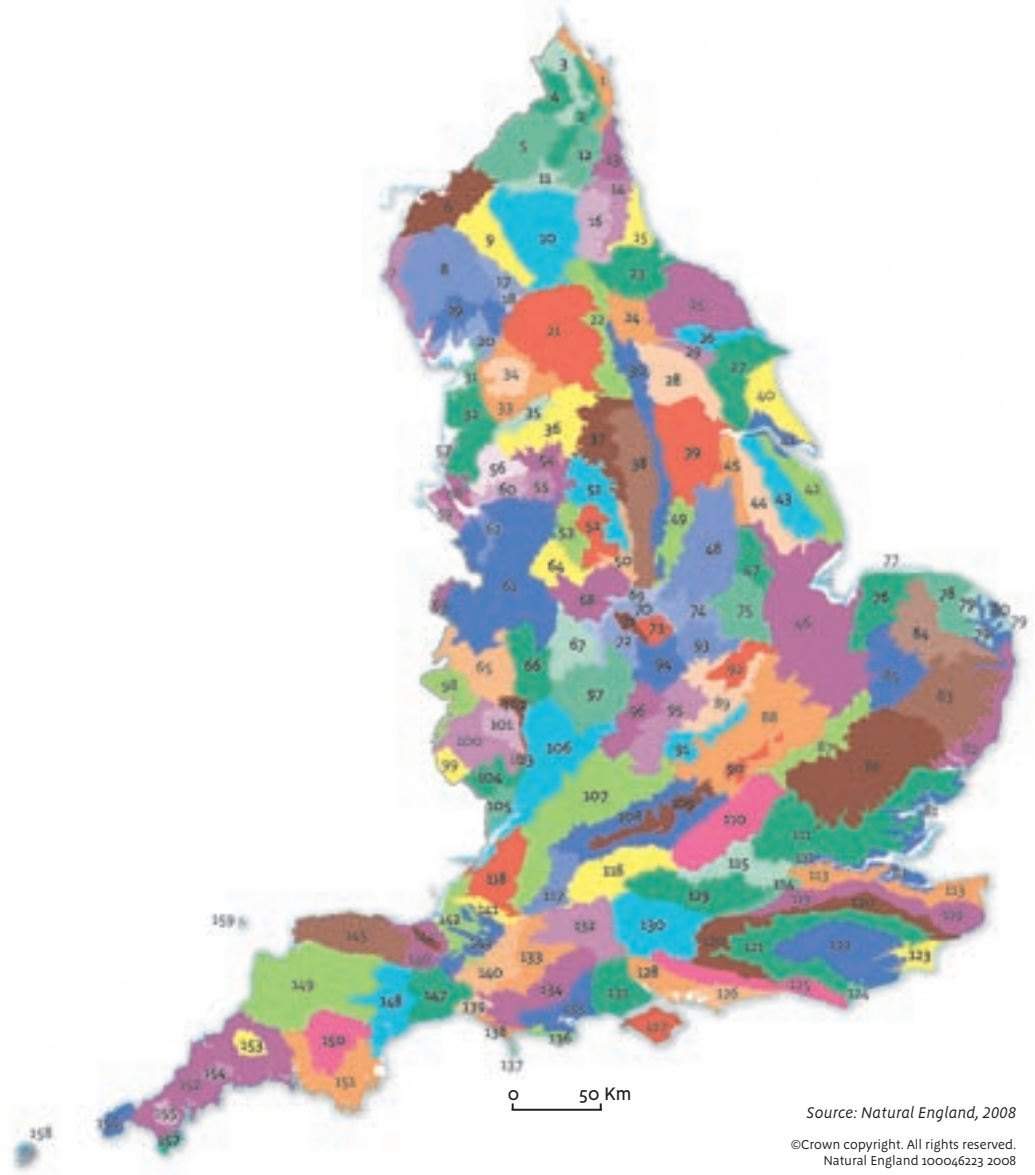
While Character Areas (Figure 2.1) show the broad variations in England's landscapes, they are not sufficiently fine-scale to describe landscape at a local (e.g. district or county) level. For this, Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has been devised. Up-to-date LCAs have been prepared for approximately 60% of shire counties and most National Parks and AONBs. In many cases, LCAs are being used to inform local planning policies as well as to guide landscape management and other local strategies (Landscape Character 2008). The ongoing local level Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) work by English Heritage is potentially very helpful to the LCA process, by increasing understanding of our evolving landscapes. HLC should, within a few years, provide nationwide coverage of historic landscapes with a standard classification (English Heritage 2005a).

2.2.2 Landscape change

Our landscapes are dynamic and subject to many forces of change. We need to understand how change is impacting upon their diversity and character so that strategies and policies can be put in place to ensure that our future landscapes evolve to function as healthy ecosystems as well as reflecting cultural values and distinctive qualities. A deeper understanding of the relationship between landscape structure and natural, cultural and economic values will enable us to manage the consequences of long-term environmental change.

Figure 2.1 England's Character Areas

See Figure 2.2 overleaf for key

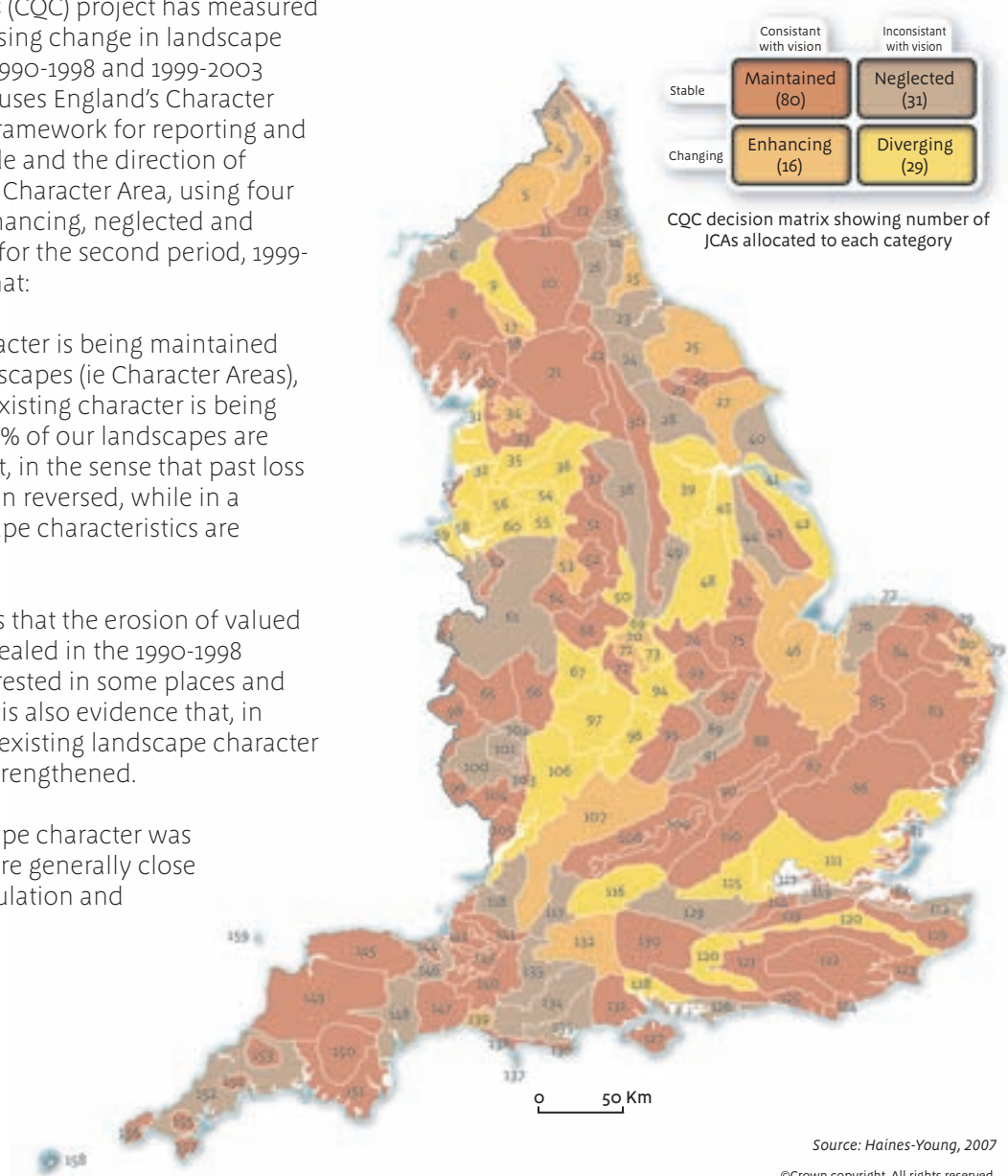


2.2.2.1 Assessment of landscape character change

Nationally, the monitoring of landscape change has been undertaken through a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment. The Countryside Quality Counts (CQC) project has measured landscape change by assessing change in landscape character for two periods, 1990-1998 and 1999-2003 (Haines-Young 2007). CQC uses England's Character Areas as the geographical framework for reporting and assesses both the magnitude and the direction of landscape change for each Character Area, using four categories: maintained, enhancing, neglected and diverging. The assessment for the second period, 1999-2003, (Figure 2.2) showed that:

- Existing landscape character is being maintained in 51% of England's landscapes (ie Character Areas), whilst in a further 10% existing character is being enhanced. However, 20% of our landscapes are showing signs of neglect, in the sense that past loss of character has not been reversed, while in a further 19% new landscape characteristics are emerging.
- The assessment suggests that the erosion of valued landscape character revealed in the 1990-1998 assessment has been arrested in some places and slowed in others. There is also evidence that, in many key localities, the existing landscape character has been sustained or strengthened.
- Areas where the landscape character was neglected or diverging are generally close to major centres of population and transport routes.

Figure 2.2 Assessment of landscape character change 1999-2003 - Headline Indicator



1	North Northumberland Coastal Plain	55	Manchester Conurbation	105	Forest of Dean and Lower Wye
2	Northumberland Sandstone Hills	56	Lancashire Coal Measures	106	Severn and Avon Vales
3	Cheviot Fringe	57	Sefton Coast	107	Cotswolds
4	Cheviots	58	Merseyside Conurbation	108	Upper Thames Clay Vales
5	Border Moors and Forests	59	Wirral	109	Midvale Ridge
6	Solway Basin	60	Mersey Valley	110	Chilterns
7	West Cumbria Coastal Plain	61	Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain	111	Northern Thames Basin
8	Cumbria High Fells	62	Cheshire Sandstone Ridge	112	Inner London
9	Eden Valley	63	Oswestry Uplands	113	North Kent Plain
10	North Pennines	64	Potteries and Churnet Valley	114	Thames Basin Lowlands
11	Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall	65	Shropshire Hills	115	Thames Valley
12	Mid Northumberland	66	Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau	116	Berkshire and Marlborough Downs
13	South East Northumberland Coastal Plain	67	Cannock Chase and Cank Wood	117	Avon Vales
14	Tyne and Wear Lowlands	68	Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands	118	Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges
15	Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau	69	Trent Valley Washlands	119	North Downs
16	Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe	70	Melbourne Parklands	120	Wealden Greensand
17	Orton Fells	71	Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield	121	Low Weald
18	Howgill Fells	72	Mease/Sence Lowlands	122	High Weald
19	South Cumbria Low Fells	73	Charnwood	123	Romney Marshes
20	Morecambe Bay Limestones	74	Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds	124	Pevensey Levels
21	Yorkshire Dales	75	Kesteven Uplands	125	South Downs
22	Pennine Dales Fringe	76	North West Norfolk	126	South Coast Plain
23	Tees Lowlands	77	North Norfolk Coast	127	Isle Of Wight
24	Vale of Mowbray	78	Central North Norfolk	128	South Hampshire Lowlands
25	North Yorkshire Moors and Cleveland Hills	79	North East Norfolk and Flegg	129	Thames Basin Heaths
26	Vale of Pickering	80	The Broads	130	Hampshire Downs
27	Yorkshire Wolds	81	Greater Thames Estuary	131	New Forest
28	Vale of York	82	Suffolk Coast and Heaths	132	Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs
29	Howardian Hills	83	South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands	133	Blackmoor Vale and Vale of Wardour
30	Southern Magnesian Limestone	84	Mid Norfolk	134	Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase
31	Morecambe Bay and Lune Estuary	85	Breckland	135	Dorset Heaths
32	Lancashire and Amounderness Plain	86	South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland	136	South Purbeck
33	Bowland Fringe and Pendle Hill	87	East Anglian Chalk	137	Isle of Portland
34	Bowland Fells	88	Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands	138	Weymouth Lowlands
35	Lancashire Valleys	89	Northamptonshire Vales	139	Marshwood and Powerstock Vales
36	Southern Pennines	90	Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge	140	Yeovil Scarplands
37	Yorkshire Southern Pennine Fringe	91	Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge	141	Mendip Hills
38	Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire Coalfield	92	Rockingham Forest	142	Somerset Levels and Moors
39	Humberhead Levels	93	High Leicestershire	143	Mid Somerset Hills
40	Holderness	94	Leicestershire Vales	144	Quantock Hills
41	Humber Estuary	95	Northamptonshire Uplands	145	Exmoor
42	Lincolnshire Coast and Marshes	96	Dunsmore and Feldon	146	Vale of Taunton and Quantock Fringes
43	Lincolnshire Wolds	97	Arden	147	Blackdowns
44	Central Lincolnshire Vale	98	Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills	148	Devon Redlands
45	Northern Lincolnshire Edge with Coversands	99	Black Mountains and Golden Valley	149	The Culm
46	The Fens	100	Herefordshire Lowlands	150	Dartmoor
47	Southern Lincolnshire Edge	101	Herefordshire Plateau	151	South Devon
48	Trent and Belvoir Vales	102	Teme Valley	152	Cornish Killas
49	Sherwood	103	Malvern Hills	153	Bodmin Moor
50	Derbyshire Peak Fringe	104	South Herefordshire and Over Severn	154	Hensbarrow
51	Dark Peak			155	Carmenellis
52	White Peak			156	West Penwith
53	South West Peak			157	The Lizard
54	Manchester Pennine Fringe			158	Isles of Scilly
				159	Lundy

The study also assessed change by landscape character theme:

- **Woodlands:** 85% of England's landscapes are either being maintained or enhanced in terms of woodlands and trees. The neglected areas are mainly in the south west and north west.
- **Boundary features:** In 64% of England's landscapes, the boundary features are in the neglected category. The exceptions are in the north west and the areas of eastern England around the Wash, where the quality of boundary features is being sustained.
- **Agriculture:** 64% of areas show that the agricultural landscape is maintained or enhanced. The areas classified as neglected or diverging from their former agricultural landscape character tend to be concentrated in central and southern England, notably the West Midlands.
- **Settlements:** For the majority of England's landscapes (61%), a new character of settlement and development patterns is emerging. Most of the landscapes where character has been maintained in relation to settlement and development are associated with the uplands or the National Parks.
- **Semi-natural features:** The character of 75% of England's landscapes is maintained or enhanced, linked to Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition, Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreements.* Landscapes showing neglect are mainly in a block extending from the East Midlands through the Yorkshire & Humberside region into the North East.
- **Historic features:** 23% of Character Areas were unclassified due to insufficient data. Where an assessment was considered possible, 65% of those landscapes were assigned to the neglected category in relation to its historic features.
- **River and coastal features:** The majority of landscapes (64%) are considered as maintained or enhanced. Those that are neglected occur in a belt through south and central England, northwards through the Yorkshire and Humberside region and the North.

The results of the assessment of the **magnitude of change** showed that 71% of our landscapes were stable or showing low rates of change in landscape character between 1999 and 2003. For the remaining 29% of our landscapes there was greater rate of change. This was evident, for example, in a belt from the Severn and Avon Vales through the West Midlands to Humberside (Figure 2.3).

The results for the assessment of the **direction of change** between 1999-2003 showed that for 62% of our landscapes, change is consistent with the characteristics that define the area. For the remaining 38% of landscapes, change is inconsistent with the underlying characteristics of the area (Figure 2.4).

2.2.2.2 Analysis of longer-term change since 1990

The earlier 1990-1998 CQC assessment showed that:

- 36% of Character Areas were stable or showed changes that were consistent with either maintaining or strengthening their character; and
- 64% were diverging, in the sense that they showed marked patterns of change that were transforming or eroding the elements that made them distinctive.

Comparing the data for the 1990-1998 and 1998-2003 assessments reveals longer-term change in the English landscape, illustrating where character is being sustained and where there is long-term erosion (or neglect) of character. The number of Character Areas with patterns of change that either maintain or enhance character has increased from 36% to 61%. The number of Character Areas with evidence of neglect or erosion of character has decreased. This evidence suggests that the character of the majority of English landscapes, at Character Area scale, is being sustained. Figure 2.5 shows the geographical distribution of these landscape changes.

* See Glossary for definition of these and other terms.

Figure 2.3 Magnitude of landscape change 1999-2003

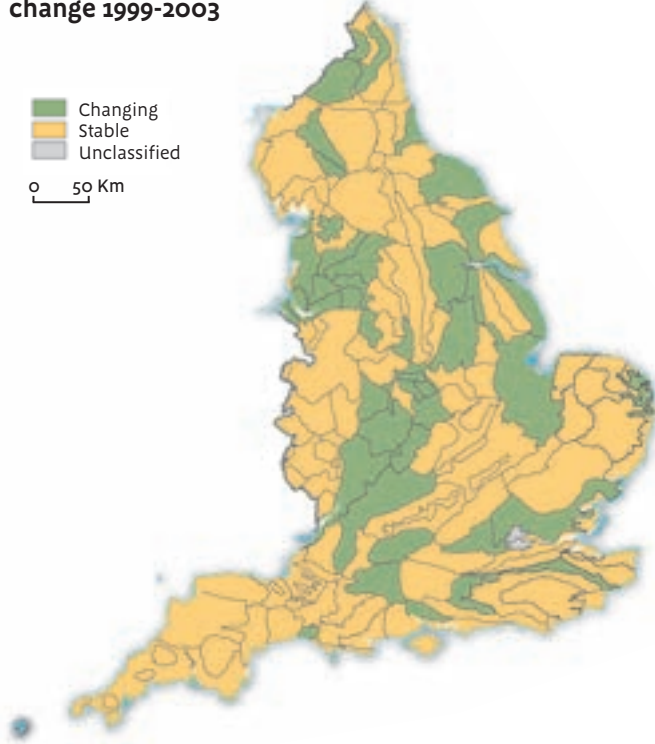
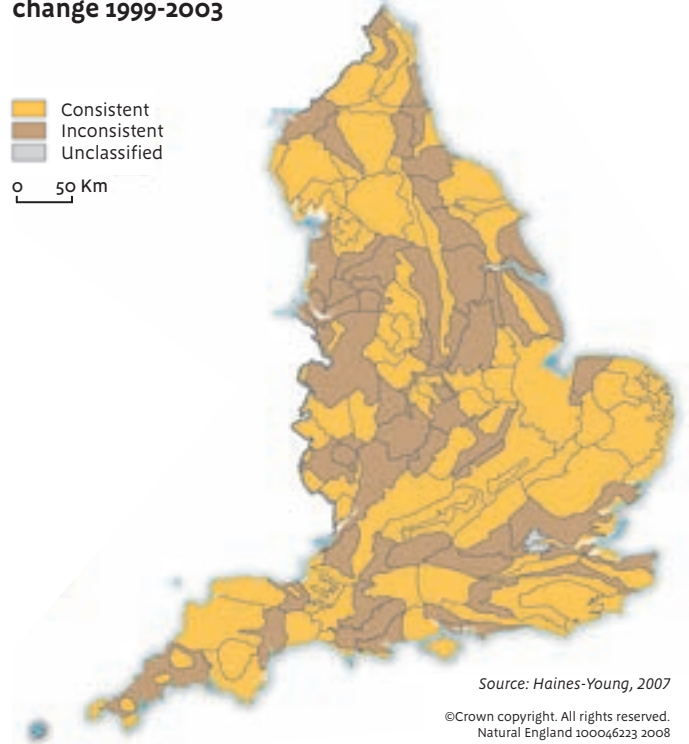
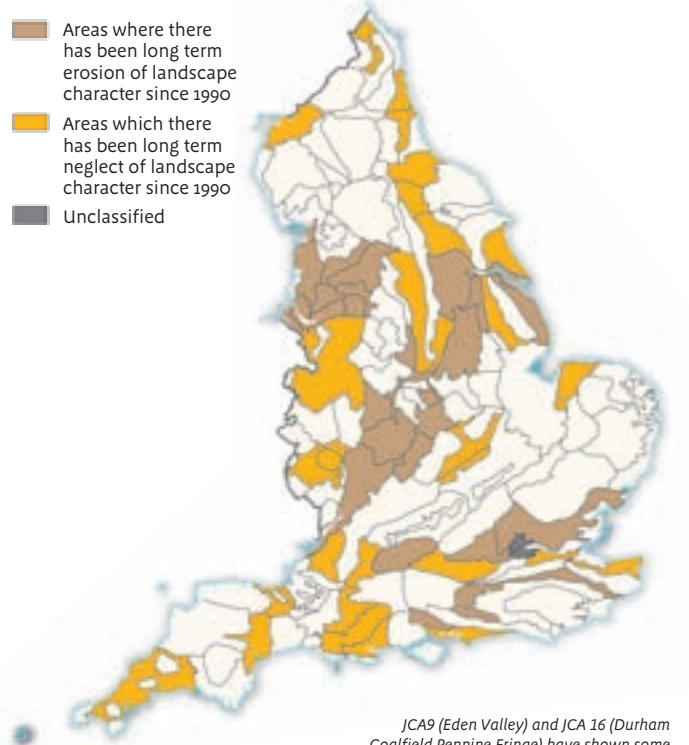
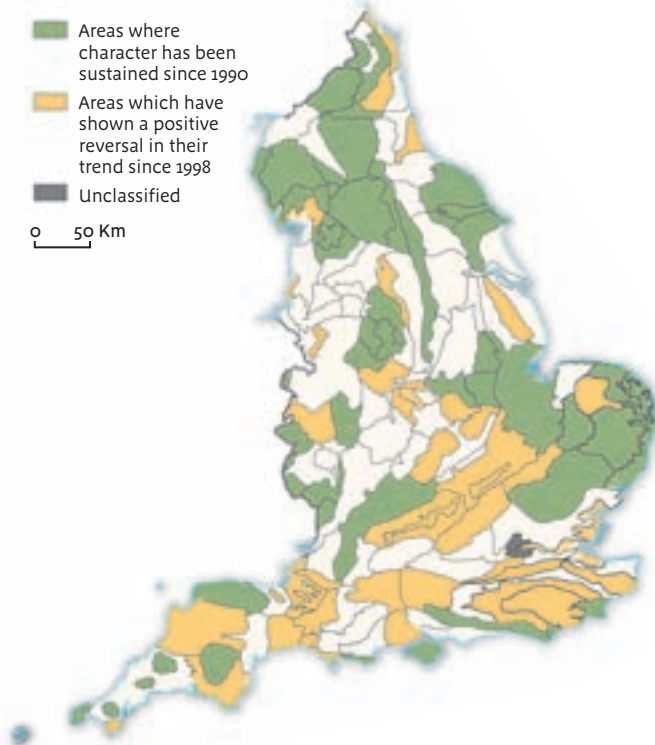


Figure 2.4 Direction of landscape change 1999-2003



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Figure 2.5 Long-term landscape change: analysis of 1990-1998 and 1999-2003 assessments



JCA9 (Eden Valley) and JCA 16 (Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe) have shown some erosion of landscape character since 1998.
 Source: Haines-Young, 2007
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