DEFENDED TERRITORY:
THE OTTERBURN TRAINING AREA AND THE
1997 PUBLIC ENQUIRY

Rachel Woodward

Research Report

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Terminology

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AS90  Artillery System 90
CNP  Council for National Parks
GDA  Gun Deployment Area
HCDC  House of Commons Defence Committee
MLRS  Multiple Launch Rocket System
MoD  Ministry of Defence
NCC  Northumberland County Council
NNP  Northumberland National Park
NNPA  Northumberland National Park Authority
NNPC  Northumberland National Park Committee
NoPD  Notice of Proposed Development
NPC  National Park Consortium
nnp  no page number
OP  Observation Post
OPI  Otterburn Public Inquiry
OTA  Otterburn Training Area
P  Proof
R  Rebuttal
SSSI  Site of Special Scientific Interest
TERMINOLOGY

To avoid confusion, I have used the term ‘CNP Consortium’ when I refer to the group of organisations co-ordinated in their opposition to the development plans by the Council for National Parks. When I refer to the Council for National Parks, I refer only to that organisation, and not the consortium of groups which they co-ordinated. The documents produced by the CNP Consortium were referenced during the public inquiry as ‘NPC’ documents, and although this acronym is slightly misleading in this context, I have kept it as it forms part of a system for the identification of each public inquiry document, of which there were many hundreds. I use the slightly clumsy term ‘NCC/NNPA’ to refer to the Northumberland County Council and Northumberland National Park Authority, who presented a joint case at the Inquiry. These documents are referenced as ‘NCC’ documents.
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In 1997 a Public Inquiry was held to examine the Ministry of Defence’s (MoD) plans for the Otterburn Training Area (OTA). Between April and October of that year, advocates and opponents of the scheme, their supporters and a range of interested parties (myself included) sat in a conference room in a hotel by Newcastle airport and listened to arguments about why the MoD should or should not be allowed to undertake a number of physical developments and carry out a particular type of training at the OTA, which lies almost wholly within the Northumberland National Park (see Figure 1).

Ostensibly, this was simply a non-statutory local inquiry into a small planning dispute. The MoD wished to use the OTA for training at regimental level with two of its artillery systems. The local planning authority (Northumberland County Council and the Northumberland National Park Authority) and a consortium of local and national amenity and conservation groups under the umbrella of the Council for National Parks (hereafter CNP Consortium) disagreed. The local planning authority and the CNP Consortium both argued that the developments proposed and the training that would take place afterwards would constitute a significant threat to the natural environment and recreation purposes of the Northumberland National Park. The Inquiry was therefore an adjudicatory process for determining which uses should take precedence on this land.
But as I shall argue in this report, the Inquiry was also more than a local planning dispute. First, it provided a unique insight into the land use and management strategies of one of the UK’s largest landowners, the

Figure 1  Map showing the location of the Otterburn Training Area within the Northumberland National Park
MoD. With around 227,000 hectares (561,000 acres) freehold and 16,000 hectares (39,500 acres) leasehold, and with various rights over a further 270,000 hectares (667,000 acres), the Defence estate, as it is known, constitutes the second largest land holding in single ownership in the UK (House of Commons Defence Committee, 1994). Operational requirements and the effects of a specific organisational culture have meant that, traditionally, information on the management and use of the Defence estate has been difficult to obtain. The Otterburn Public Inquiry (hereafter OPI), a public event, resulted in the MoD’s management strategies for its lands being opened up for public scrutiny. For those interested in this issue it provided unprecedented insight into the use of the Defence estate by the armed forces.

The second point of significance for the Inquiry was that the arguments made for and against the developments in turn raised much broader and more abstract issues about land use in the countryside and even the very nature of rural areas. For example, talk within the Inquiry of noise levels, black grouse breeding habits, visitor monitoring and local planning policy led to much wider debates about tranquillity in the countryside, conservation policies for protected species, access to National Parks and the potential and limitations of planning and environmental legislation. An examination of these wider issues and the terms in which they were discussed shows how different groups view and understand rural areas. An analysis of the evidence submitted to the Inquiry shows how these understandings - these different conceptual-isations of the countryside - sit within the context of the political aspirations, ideologies and moralities of the parties which produce
them. The Inquiry also provided an opportunity to examine how these different conceptualisations of the countryside compete, intersect, agree and disagree. Otterburn, like much of Britain’s countryside, is a contested space; the Inquiry provided a wealth of information on how that contest operates at both concrete and abstract levels.

Finally, the Otterburn Public Inquiry was significant because of what it says about our attitudes towards warfare and militarism in contemporary Britain. Hidden from direct view for most of the Inquiry, yet underpinning much of the debate, were arguments about the need for a military capability and the extent to which we (society, if you like) are prepared to pay for this, economically and environmentally. That these arguments were hidden speaks volumes about the power of discourses of militarism in shaping our thinking about the rights and wrongs of military land use. Yet from where I sat as an observer at this inquiry, it seemed that these issues of militarism, defence and national security needed as much rigorous analysis and critical gaze as other more immediate concerns (wildlife conservation or public access, for example). This analysis is necessary because ultimately it is discourses of militarism and ideologies of national security which will determine whether the developments at OTA should proceed or not. It is important also because these same ideologies and discourses shape the outcome of other land use debates over current and former MoD lands. The restructuring of the Defence estate is having pronounced local impacts in many parts of (particularly rural) Britain; the formulation of genuinely sustainable rural development strategies for such areas needs to proceed from a full understanding of the political, social and cultural context in
which this restructuring is based. Ultimately, too, any contemporary analysis of issues of defence and militarism puts under scrutiny an institution (the armed forces) in the middle of a quite profound process of reorganisation for both international and domestic political and economic reasons. The ‘Options for Change’ Programme (MoD, 1991) and the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (which at the time of writing has yet to report) are just two manifestations of a broader process. If that institution is to be remade in a form which maintains the endorsement of the majority, it needs to attend to their concerns.

This research report is written in the spirit of critique and inquiry rather than as a more direct adjudication of the rights and wrongs of each case put to the Inquiry. It is the view of a ‘critical bystander’, rather than that of an active participant in the debate. The report draws on a range of sources, including most of the Otterburn Public Inquiry documentation, my notes of the cross-examination of witnesses at the Inquiry, local and national government reports, academic publications and media coverage. Informal conversations with Inquiry participants helped in the comprehension of many of these sources, and a long period of observation at the Inquiry itself provided insight into the trajectory of arguments and the use of documentary evidence. I have not attempted comprehensive chronological reporting of all the debates as they unfolded during the Inquiry, but have reconstructed dialogues between parties with reference to a small number of themes. Nor have I attempted to discuss all the issues raised at the Inquiry. (See Appendix A for a full discussion of the research techniques and methodology.)
This report is about the politics of military land use, in its widest sense. It takes as a starting point the argument that research into the use and management of the Defence estate is timely, given current political debates about its function and academic debates about the contested nature of Britain’s countryside. The central thesis is that different groups choose to portray space and place in specific ways as part of a process of debate about rural land uses; an analysis of these debates about land use can be informed by an examination of those portrayals. This analysis stands as a contribution towards current debates within rural studies on the necessity of academic investigation into the material and discursive operation of countryside conflicts and the conceptualisation of rurality (Murdoch and Pratt, 1993, 1994; Pratt, 1996; Lowe et al, 1997). This report looks at the ways in which the OTA was portrayed and its uses promoted or contested by the three main parties at the Public Inquiry. It does this with reference to three themes. After a factual account of the background to the Inquiry and the stated concerns of each party there, successive chapters examine the issues relating to each theme. The first theme is history. How was the history of the area and the OTA told by each party, and what do these narratives tell us about the wider concerns of each storyteller? The second theme is landscape. How was the landscape portrayed by each party, and to what ends? The third theme is function. What were the uses of this space, and how were those uses argued for? The report concludes with a commentary on the relevance of studies of military land use to wider debates on the social construction of rural space.
CHAPTER 2 CONTEXT: THE 1997 OTTERBURN PUBLIC INQUIRY

This chapter gives a brief account of the background to the Otterburn Public Inquiry, to set the scene for the discussion that follows in the remainder of the report. It begins with the context for the formulation of the development plans for the Otterburn Training Area, looking at the tone of the initial Parliamentary debate and the terms in which the Ministry of Defence justified the developments during the initial plan preparation period. It outlines the development plans proposed by the MoD before turning to the main objections made by the two major parties opposed to the development scheme. The chapter then goes on to give a flavour of the course of the Public Inquiry.

The story of the Otterburn developments begins with the Options for Change Programme (MoD, 1991). This rolling programme of restructuring was the British armed forces’ response to the end of the so-called Cold War. With the evaporation of perceived military threat from the (now dismantled) Soviet Union, British military capacity in Germany could be reduced. The restructuring of the British army which followed involved a host of changes. The three most pertinent with regard to the future of Otterburn were first, the closure of the Soltau/Luneburg training area in Germany in June 1994; second, the relocation of certain artillery regiments within the UK; and third a more general reorganisation of the training lands used by the armed forces in the UK (Independent, 25 August 1994).
From December 1992, the issue of the future development of Otterburn was debated in both Houses of Parliament. On the 8th December 1992, for example, questions were put to the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, Viscount Cranbourne, about the additional provision required at Otterburn as a result of Options for Change, and the possible environmental impacts of any development, given that the OTA sits almost wholly with the Northumberland National Park. In an answer which set the tone for much of the parliamentary discussion of this issue over the next two years and the public discussion over the next five, Lord Cranbourne reassured the House of Lords of the Ministry of Defence’s commitment to National Parks, with the proviso that:

The Government’s declared policy in respect of national parks recognises that training in them remains essential to military preparedness. (Hansard, 1992)

This argument positioned National Parks, and specifically the Northumberland National Park, as central to the UK’s defence capabilities. The possibility of a Public Inquiry into any major developments proposed for Otterburn was first raised at this point.

Speculation continued to grow over the future of Otterburn (see Hansard 1993, 1994a-g, 1995a and b). Then in the Spring of 1995 the Ministry of Defence published three documents. The Military Justification for the Development of Otterburn Training Area (MoD, 1995a), Otterburn Training Area: Options for Change Proposals (MoD, 1995b) and Striking a Balance (MoD, 1995c), which set out in full the plans for the development of Otterburn Training Area, and give a clear indication of the strategy that

The plans for development were formally submitted to the local planning authority as a Notice of Proposed Development (NoPD) in April 1995. ¹ These plans, as the headlines suggested, outlined the infrastructure which the MoD argued it needed to enable its artillery regiments to train at Otterburn using the Artillery System 90 (AS90) and the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS). These are tracked, self-propelled artillery systems. They are heavy, weighing 45 and 25 tons respectively. They are both deployed using fire and manoeuvre (or shoot and scoot) procedures; the operational principle of both systems is the location and destruction of the enemy, followed by rapid relocation to avoid incoming retaliatory fire. The potential firepower, plus the mobility and manoeuvrability of these weapons systems make them lethal. Anecdotal evidence attributed the destruction of

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¹ The National Park Committee, a committee of Northumberland County Council, was the original planning authority. However, careful scrutiny of the development proposals revealed that part of the OTA to be developed lay outside the National Park. The County Council therefore argued that it was the relevant planning authority for the whole scheme, rather than the National Park Committee, which by 1996 had become the National Park Authority and separate from the County Council following legislation under the 1995 Environment Act establishing free-standing National Park Authorities for each national park. This is a complex issue, and was the subject of much debate at the Inquiry. Meanwhile, for the sake of clarity, the local planning authority here is held to be the County Council, although in reality the County Council and National Park Authority worked closely together in the scrutiny of the developments prior to the Inquiry, and presented a joint case at the Inquiry.
the Iraqi army on the Basra Road during the 1991 Gulf War to the power of
the MLRS.

In its *Military Justification* (MoD, 1995a) the MoD set out its case for the
use of the Otterburn Training Area for training with these weapons. Locating its arguments squarely within a discourse of support for National
Parks (the document opens with a quotation from *Fit for the Future*, a 1991
Government statement on policies for the National Parks) the document
outlined the need to develop the UK’s training areas, the training
requirements of the AS90 and MLRS and the infrastructure requirements
needed at OTA. The core argument was that the space required to allow
effective training by both artillery systems at regimental level was only
available on two of the army’s eight Army Field Training Centres -
Salisbury Plain and Otterburn. However, the MoD argued that Salisbury
Plain was already used to capacity. Furthermore, the purchase of additional
training areas in the UK and the use of overseas training areas such as the
British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS) in Canada, were ruled out as
either too costly or otherwise unacceptable. Otterburn, the document
argued, was the only option:

OTA has the necessary range facilities for AS90 fire and
manoeuvre, indeed it is considered to have the best artillery
impact area in the UK. The restricted impact area of Redesdale
Ranges is 27 km² and some 45 km² is available for deployment,
at distances between 2.5 km and 8.5 km for firing into
Redesdale South and between 2.5 km and 11.5 km for firing
into Redesdale North. (MoD, 1995a, p.30)
The problem of the incompatibility of heavy weapons systems with the soft peat of the OTA was played down:

Additional infrastructure would be required to facilitate tracked training, but the total length of new road/track needed would be fairly small; existing roads would be widened in the majority of cases. Otterburn would not, therefore, allow free tactical manoeuvre but this, though desirable, is not absolutely essential to AS90 live firing. All AS90 and MLRS deployment at OTA would take place on roads, tracks and hardstandings. (MoD, 1995a, p.30)

The softness of the ground was not the only problem for MLRS and AS90 training at the OTA. The OTA sits within the Northumberland National Park. Winning a public relations battle and convincing the public of the need to use this land for military training would be just as important as persuading the local planning authority not to object to the plans. Accordingly, the summary document outlining the main features of the Options for Change proposals and a non-technical summary of the Environmental Statement (MoD, 1995b and d) stressed the mitigation measures that would be used to counter any potential damage to the natural and cultural heritage of the area.

Consultation with the local planning authority, with local and national amenity groups and local residents then followed the publication of the proposals. Many respondents called for a Public Inquiry into the matter. In Response to Consultation: A New Initiative by the MoD (MoD, 1996a) presented a set of modified proposals and a set of arguments by the MoD as
to why these developments would not constitute the catastrophe for the National Park that some opponents of the scheme had implied.

The proposals finally submitted to the planning authority for approval by were as follows (see also MoD, 1996a; MoD, 1997). Gun spurs would be built to accommodate the AS90s and MLRS rocket launchers whilst firing into the impact area. Of these, 5 existed at Otterburn already, 17 would be modifications of existing hardstandings and 24 would be new constructions. Those to be used by two guns (34 in all) would measure around 35m by 25m. A further 12 gun spurs would be larger (56.5m by 25m) to accommodate three guns simultaneously. Four of the existing gun spurs would be large enough to accommodate six or more guns without modification. Gun spurs would be constructed of dark coloured stone aggregate. The gun spurs were to be grouped into six Gun Deployment Areas (GDAs) - Alpha, Bravo-Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot and Stewartshiel. Each GDA would also contain a Battery Echelon Area for ammunition resupply, maintenance and other support functions, with a circuit of track and a parking area concealed within woodland.

When manoeuvring between gun spurs, both artillery systems and their support vehicles would travel on the roads of the OTA. These are mostly single track and between 2.5m and 3.5m wide, and too narrow to accommodate some of the vehicles within an AS90 and MLRS regiment. Some 57.5 km of existing roads and tracks would be widened to either 4m or 5m, with an additional 1m hardshoulder, and an additional 15.3 km of new stone track would be built. Of this, 3.1 km would form 18 Tactical
Observation Post positions, consisting of a network of linked stone tracks along a ridge line overlooking the Redesdale South impact area. These would be used for target acquisition training. In order to train in the use of tactical observation, 3 Technical Observation Posts would be built in the northern part of the training area, again looking into the Redesdale impact area. These are effectively stone lay-bys measuring 40m by 10m. A 4.45 hectare Central Maintenance Facility would be required next to Otterburn Camp for vehicle maintenance. Additional accommodation for 125 soldiers would be needed within the Otterburn Camp itself. The existing airfield would be used as a Regimental Replenishment Point for training in the resupply of stores under tactical conditions.

The MoD’s case for the developments rested on two sets of arguments. The first was that the proposals set before the local planning authority were the irreducible minimum necessary to meet the operational requirements of the artillery. The language used to make this argument drew on the idea of no compromise:

The MoD has gone to great lengths to allay concerns about the proposals and take full account of the advice received from consultees. The detail would, of course, be a matter for negotiation with the National Park Authority, but the MoD cannot envisage a substantially different approach proving acceptable. The Army has a pressing need to train its highly sophisticated artillery regiments at Otterburn and a minimum level of infrastructure must be put in place if this training is to be effective. 46 gun spurs, the equivalent of 6 GDAs, Technical and Tactical OPs, a Central Maintenance Facility, a Regimental Replenishment Point and additional accommodation facilities are the minimum and this cannot (and has not been) compromised. (MoD, 1996a, p. 27)
Within this argument, proof that the proposals did indeed constitute a ‘minimum development necessary’ was emphasised. *In Response to Consultation: Meeting the Minimum Requirement* talked of ‘two years of careful study’, of examining the issues ‘in detail’ and of comprehensive mitigation packages. The document stressed the integrity and reliability of the MoD’s case for the use of Otterburn (MoD, 1996a). *Striking A Balance*, a public relations document reinforcing the case for Otterburn as the place for heavy artillery training, emphasised the efforts made by those responsible for the most efficient use of the defence estate (MoD, 1995c). As this document title suggests, the second argument on which the MoD’s case rested was all about balance. The MoD’s publicity documents about the scheme defined the issue of the developments as one of a balance between two sets of interests. These were the need for a trained army on the one hand, and the need for due concern for the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of a National Park on the other. The MoD’s case, defined within these terms, was presented as constituting an even balance between these two interests, a moderate course or compromise chosen between the two objectives of military training and environmental conservation. The question of a balance of interests lay at the heart of debates over the land use of Otterburn, and the success of the MoD in promoting the issue as one of balance is seen by the adoption of this language by the scheme’s opponents in debates at the OPI.

In the Spring of 1996, the National Park, Highways & Transport, Planning and Policy & Resources Committees of the local planning authority (now the
Northumberland County Council considered the proposed developments. The latter co-ordinated the responses of the first three and recommended that the County Council reject the plans in order that a Public Inquiry might be held to discuss the proposals. On 15th May 1996 the full County Council meeting did so, citing eight reasons for objection (see NCC/P/1 and Northumberland County Council, 1996). Objections were made on the grounds that:

a) the development would have a damaging impact contrary to National Park purposes and Structure and Local Plan policies;

b) the proposals did not strike an acceptable balance between military training requirements and National Park purposes;

c) the MoD had not submitted sufficient information to demonstrate the need for the developments;

d) the developments proposed were not shown to represent the irreducible minimum to meet training requirements;

e) overall, the developments would constitute a cumulative impact resulting in intensification of military activity in the Park contrary to Local Plan policies;

f) the proposals would lead to an unacceptable impact on properties and settlements in the vicinity of the OTA;

g) the proposals for the movement of military equipment to and from the Training Area would have an unacceptable impact on the transport network outside the OTA;

h) the mitigation and counterbalancing measures proposed would not offset the environmental harm resulting from the proposals.
The objections emanating from the Northumberland County Council deal quite specifically with policy and planning issues. Concerns about the impact of the proposed developments on conservation, access and the general qualities of National Parks sprang from other bodies. Following the publication of the MoD’s plans and the consultation period in 1995 a host of groups and individuals had made their objections known to the National Park Officer, the County Council, the MoD, to Members of Parliament and to many of the statutory and non-statutory countryside, amenity and environmental agencies. The Council for National Parks, a national charity devoted to the promotion, protection and conservation of National Parks in England and Wales, co-ordinated a consortium of local and national amenity and conservation bodies in objecting to the proposals, the CNP Consortium. These were later summarised as a set of objections on the grounds that:

‘[t]he proposed major development and military intensification:

- detract from the natural beauty of the landscape and undermine the special character of the Northumberland National Park;

- reduce the value of the Northumberland National Park as a national resource for a largely urban population;

- erode naturalness, remoteness and tranquillity in a National Park where those qualities are particularly valued and represent the major contribution of the Northumberland National Park to the national stock of National Parks;

- conflict with the National Park’s first purpose of conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage;

- compromise - at a national, regional and local level - the possibility for the public to understand the National Park
designation (by suggesting that National Parks are places where military training and live firing can take precedence over conservation and public enjoyment);

- reduce opportunities for public enjoyment: the infrastructure, increased military activity and live firing detract from the enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of National Parks;

- reduce the potential for future generations to enjoy National Parks at a time when their value is increasing;

- undermine National Park qualities of striking scenery, remoteness and harmony between man and nature;

- strike a blow at the integrity of both the Northumberland National Park and the integrity of the family of National Parks;

- compromise the role the Government has given to National Parks as models for the sustainable management of the whole countryside;

- militate against Government policies on Sustainable Development.’ (NPC/P/1, pp.5-6)

In accordance with procedures set out in Part IV of Government Circular 18/84, and in view of the formal objection to the proposals by the planning authority, the Secretary of State for the Environment decided that a non-statutory local inquiry would be held to determine the matter. In August 1996 a letter notifying the relevant parties of this fact also set out the issues to be examined in the course of the inquiry (Government Office for the North East, 1996). For the record, these were:

a) the extent to which the proposals conflict with the Northumberland Structure Plan and Northumberland National Park Local Plan;
b) the extent to which the proposals conflict with the advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 7;

c) the implications of the proposals for the purposes and character of the Northumberland National Park, the extent to which any adverse impacts can be mitigated, and whether the mitigation and counter-balancing measures proposed by the MoD are sufficient to achieve the mitigation necessary;

d) whether the infrastructure arising from the current proposals represents the irreducible minimum necessary to meet military training requirements;

e) the implications of the proposals for highways and transport;

f) the implications of the proposals for local residents, their properties and settlements, and on the local economy;

g) any other relevant matter which may be raised at the inquiry.

On 22nd April 1997, the Otterburn Public Inquiry began, sitting for a total of 57 working days, across six months. On the right-hand side of the room sat the MoD team of officers and consultants led by a legal team and Neil McLeod QC, instructed by the Treasury Solicitors. On the left-hand side sat the Northumberland County Council and Northumberland National Park Authority team represented by Robert McCracken. Behind them sat representatives from the CNP Consortium with their advocate, David Wolfe. Behind proponents and opponents of the scheme stood tables for Press (and researchers...), and at the back of the room were the public seats, full on the opening day, but soon home to only a handful of interested individuals. Facing all this was the Inspector, Peter McMaster, joined when the evidence required by a Landscape Assessor, Christopher Frost. A table and chair
constituting the witness stand faced the Inspector and the audience, elevated on a small platform (or scaffold, as one Lieutenant Colonel joked, over coffee).

The main parties presented evidence and were cross-examined on the following topics. After an opening Statement of Case, the Ministry of Defence gave evidence on the UK army’s training requirements, AS90 and MLRS training requirements, the level and pattern of training at Otterburn, nature conservation, cultural heritage, the Salisbury Plain Training Area, land use planning, landscape and visual impact, the moderation of adverse effects, estate management, noise, traffic and toxicity of MLRS rockets. The Northumberland County Council and Northumberland National Park Authority gave evidence on land use planning, effects on the National Park, noise and traffic. The Council for National Parks Consortium presented evidence on its main areas of objection, outlined above, and the views of representatives of the Youth Hostels Association, the National Association of Voluntary Countryside Wardens, the Northumberland Natural History Society, the Northumbria and Newcastle Society, the Northumberland and national branches of the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Ramblers Association. A local resident, Bill Short, presented evidence on the toxicity and pollution effects of the MLRS rocket. The Northumberland County Lifeline Group presented evidence on the traffic implications of the developments, countered by evidence from the Highways Agency. Powys County Council gave evidence about Sennybridge Training Area. Some fifty members of the public also spoke to the Inquiry on topics ranging from the impact of military training on property values to the advantages of the
military presence to the local economy. Over 150 letters were also written to the Inspector in support and in objection to the proposals. (A full list of witnesses is given at Appendix B.)

Many people commented to the press and informally during coffee breaks that the Inquiry was a waste of time and money; the MoD should be allowed to carry on with the developments it required without the delay and bureaucracy associated with an investigation of this kind. My own opinion is to the contrary, for three reasons. First, it appeared to me that the MoD approached the Inquiry, and presented themselves at it, with a degree of seriousness and a manner of intent which implied a determination to win, almost at any cost. Of course, no organisation approaches a Public Inquiry lightly or flippantly, but the level of detail in the MoD’s case, the continual rebuttal and further rebuttal of contradictory evidence gave an impression of an organisation resolutely single-minded in its determination to win its case. This may not have been war, but it was certainly a crucial battle; the OPI was a test case for the MoD. Winning the argument at the OPI would mean the endorsement of the MoD’s land use and management strategies for the Defence estate.

Second (and again, this is my interpretation), I would argue that some of the parties came to the Inquiry not necessarily with a view to the possibility of winning the argument, but with an intention to see just how far they could proceed with the demolition of the MoD’s case through the advocacy of alternative viewpoints on land uses. The two involve different strategies. I would argue that particularly in the case of some representatives within the
CNP Consortium, a key motivation was not the idea that victory might be possible, but that opposition might more usefully entail a careful attention to the detail of the scheme in order to undermine its logic. The OPI was important in this respect because it provided a location for the promotion of wider land use debates. And perhaps the OPI was a minor skirmish on the margins of an entirely different battle.

Third, the OPI was important because of the need to submit the proposals to full and proper scrutiny. My interpretation of County Council documentation leads me to suggest that one reason for refusing planning permission and calling for a public inquiry in the first place was a recognition of the need to examine the proposals for Otterburn in far more detail than a local planning authority would be able. The OPI was money well spent because it provided a forum for the full debate, of complex proposals, before an impartial adjudicator, in public, with full participation allowed. Indeed, the Inspector was assiduous in ensuring that all parties and individuals who might have an interest, a question or a comment at any time during the proceedings, should get a chance to speak if they chose so to do. Speaking in public, and being questioned on ones views by a barrister, is a nerve-racking experience that may have deterred many. It is a fact, though, that participatory opportunities such as this are rare within the British planning system and thus are of considerable value.

This chapter has tried to give a flavour of the variety of topics discussed during the Inquiry. This research report will concentrate on one issue amongst many, the portrayal of space and place by the three main parties at
the Inquiry, in order to understand how the politics of military land use, and opposition to that land use, work in practice. The definition of ‘politics’ referred to in this report is a broad one of politics as a process. Considering politics in this way includes consideration of the ways in which social and institutional practices are historically and geographically located. It requires consideration of politics as they operate at both the material and discursive levels. It means attending to the purposes and strategies of social action. It also entails a consideration of the distribution of resources, which can be so critical in shaping political activity (after Painter, 1995). All these practices are considered in relation to the debate over the Otterburn Training Area, and the contest between opposing arguments about the form and function of this place.
CHAPTER 3 MAKING HISTORY

In this chapter, I look at the ways in which the history of the Otterburn Training Area was presented. It’s a logical place to start an analysis of the contest between conflicting conceptualisations of the countryside. The ‘Battle for Otterburn’ began with a skirmish around the origins and history of the Otterburn Training Area. My focus here is on the three main players at the Inquiry - the Ministry of Defence, the Northumberland County Council/National Park Authority and the CNP Consortium. Each of these parties told a different story about the past and its relationship to the present at Otterburn. My argument is that by looking at the differences in emphasis between each story we can start to piece together the portrayals of the OTA by each group and the different understandings and conceptualisations of place that inform these portrayals. We need to do this because we cannot understand fully the logic and trajectory of arguments made by different groups about land uses until we understand the ideas and ideologies, contexts and politics which inform those arguments. Exploring these ideas and ideologies through their appearance in stories told about the history of a place provides a good starting point.

Let us begin with the landowner, the Ministry of Defence. The long history of military activity in this part of the Cheviots provides a basis on which the MoD’s claims to space are made. This is put succinctly in an MoD publication on the archaeological heritage of the training area, entitled *Fifty Centuries of Peace and War*:
It is perhaps ironical that an area which was once the theatre of war for so many centuries should now be devoted to the self-same pursuit - the methods may be different but the objective is identical. (Charlton, 1996, p.50)

This is less a case of irony and more a case of good fortune, for in its public pronouncements advocating the continued use of the Otterburn Training Area the MoD used to great effect the precedence granted to contemporary activities by historic military use. For example, in a public access guide we are reminded that:

The War Office bought 19,000 acres [7600 ha] of land in Redesdale in 1911 as an artillery range for the newly formed Territorial Army. Horse drawn artillery batteries came from all over Britain by train to West Woodburn and marched up Dere Street (now the A68) to camp in tents and huts near High Rochester (Bremenium), just as the Roman Legions had done in Hadrian’s time. (MoD and NNP, undated, npn)

Current use is linked to the adoption of the area at the beginning of the century which in turn is linked to Roman activity at the beginning of the first millennium. The Roman presence is very important symbolically to contemporary military claims to space, as it validates contemporary use:

The tramp of armed marching men has long been a familiar sound in these Border hills. For 300 years Roman soldiers controlled the country between Hadrian’s Wall and the Antonine Wall in Scotland, using a network of roads, marching camps and forts begun in about AD80. (MoD and NNP, undated, npn)

There is serendipity in the archaeological excavation of this Roman inheritance. An army officer joked informally to me that contemporary
plans to extend the road widths at Otterburn to 7 metres to accommodate the AS90 and MLRS would merely bring the modern roads up to Roman standards; archaeological evidence from Dere Street showed the Roman road to be 7 metres wide.

It is the military use of Otterburn from the beginning of the twentieth century which really consolidates military claims to space. The public access guide underlines this visually, setting pictures of troops in training alongside old photographs of military activity in the 1920s and 1930s. Their use is subtle. For example, a 1937 photograph of a ‘Karrier’ General Service Wagon stuck in soft ground emphasises the perennial problem at the OTA of manoeuvring over soft peat with heavy vehicles; hardstandings for vehicles are not a new and unprecedented requirement but the expected response to the challenges presented by the training area’s terrain. Similarly, a photograph of two Vickers Medium Mark 2 tanks driving through Rochester puts paid to claims about the historic peace and tranquillity of the area shattered in modern times by the introduction of larger artillery systems. Older residents in support of the MoD maintained at the Inquiry that historically noise levels at Otterburn were far in excess of contemporary levels.

The MoD’s claims about the rights conferred to it through occupancy and precedence are complemented by claims about the rights conferred through stewardship of that land. This argument is absolutely central to the MoD’s claims to space at Otterburn. OTA lies within the Northumberland National Park. The relationships between military training and national park purposes
are highly complex and at times very difficult to reconcile. The MoD simplify this by telling a story of the designation of this land as a National Park as the end result of MoD stewardship policies (see also Woodward, 1997).

It is an often forgotten fact that the Army has had a presence in the National Parks since long before they were designated as such. At Otterburn, for example, the military training area was established in 1911, some 45 years before it was designated as a National Park. [...] There has been a military presence on Dartmoor since the early 19th century, again many years before the National Park was created. (Nicholas Soames, Armed Forces Minister, Hansard, 1995c)

According to this line of argument, the military presence was instrumental in securing national park status for areas such as the OTA:

Although military training may not conform to the general perception of quiet enjoyment, it is often forgotten that it is that very military presence which has helped to preserve and secure the exceptionally beautiful and varied landscape which attracts so many visitors to the National Parks. (Nicholas Soames, Armed Forces Minister, Hansard, 1995c)

In his opening statement to the Public Inquiry, Counsel for the MoD expanded on this history:

...military training had been taking place at Otterburn Training Area for over 40 years before it became part of a National Park; it will also be widely known that military training activities in National Parks were recognised as in being and likely to continue when the legislation creating National Parks was first introduced. What is perhaps not so widely known, though now becoming more recognised, is the skill which the MoD has built up in managing its training area in such a way which actually
conserves and enhances landscape, ecological, and cultural heritage interests. Otterburn Training Area is a very good example of this. It is acknowledged, almost universally, that woodland and farming management practices on the training area have produced substantial benefits for the environment which are not present in large areas of the remainder of the Northumberland National Park. (I/MoD/1, pp.4-5)

As the last sentence of this quotation suggests, a key element of the MoD’s stewardship claims are assertions that the protection afforded to valued landscapes by the MoD presence has secured a greater degree of protection than that afforded to similar holdings within the National Park but beyond the training area boundary. According to this argument, military training has protected the environment more than National Park status ever could. One example used involves sheep; lower stocking rates required to enable more efficient military training result in the preservation of relict landscapes which have vanished in other parts of the National Park because of the introduction of more intensive agricultural practices. Another example involves trees. According to this argument, military use of the training area has prevented the afforestation by conifers that has been allowed in national park land outwith the training area during the 1940s and 1950s:

Whilst some smaller sites on the Training Area were leased by MoD to the Forestry Commission for this purpose, it is without doubt that had it not been for Army occupation of the area, much of the current Training Area would have been planted up in that period. (MoD/P/4, p.7)

Arguments such as these can, of course, be countered. The Northumberland County Council and National Park Authority argued, for example, that a
change in national forestry practices since the 1950s had protected the OTA from conifer cover as surely as MoD stewardship. In any case, conifer plantations had been allowed at OTA, which suggested that the absence of trees was merely a fortuitous benefit of the demands of military training. The OTA would be more use to the armed forces as open moorland than as forest (OPI, 28th May 1997). The point here is not to adjudicate on the rights and wrongs of the many arguments about MoD stewardship, but to illustrate that at any given opportunity at the Public Inquiry, the MoD took pains to emphasise the benefits of its stewardship policy for the conservation of a valued historic landscape (a point I return to in Chapter 5).

The repeated stress on the successes of historical stewardship of the Otterburn ranges was a strategy used to legitimise the military occupation of this area. Scepticism about the appropriateness of military training in a National Park was met by MoD arguments of sound land management and good conservation practices on the training area. These claims were validated by the conferral of National Park status on the area. In this process, the occupancy of the armed forces of this piece of land is legitimised. A planning consultant representing the MoD at the Inquiry put it more bluntly than most when, in response to questions about the mitigation of adverse effects of the development scheme, he countered that the key point was that the MoD were there first. The things that made the National Park attractive were due to MoD stewardship (OPI, 11th June 1996).
Further legitimacy for the MoD case for the use of Otterburn for military training is found through wider debates about military training in National Parks more generally. According to this history, the fact that established military training uses exist within many national park boundaries reflects the fact that ‘it has always been accepted, from the time of designation of National Parks, that military training would take place within them’ (MoD/P/3, p.5). There has been public debate on this issue from the inception of National Parks in the 1930s. The MoD made continual reference to various Government and Parliamentary statements supporting this argument, emphasising in its history of land use at Otterburn the point that successive Government statements had never stated that military uses should cease. For example, Lord Silkin was quoted from the second reading of the National Parks Bill in 1949:

I want to make it quite clear that I can give no guarantee whatever that it might not be essential to permit a certain amount of what some hon. Members will regard as undesirable development in the national parks areas. It may be necessary in the future as it has been in the past to permit some part of the national park areas to be used for purposes of national defence. (Hansard, 31st March 1949, quoted in MoD/P/3, p.5)

Baroness Sharp’s findings following her 1977 inquiry into military use of Dartmoor were also used in support of this argument. For although she stated in a now well-worn phrase that military training was ‘discordant, incongruous and inconsistent’ with national park purposes, these purposes had never been accepted as paramount by Parliament or successive governments:
They must be balanced against other objectives of national policy. There may be circumstances in which the proven needs of defence must take precedence. (Cmd 6837, 1977, p.1)

These two examples give a flavour of a bigger debate, in which military use of National Parks was justified because it had never been unequivocally opposed by successive governments. The justifications produced by the MoD for continued and even intensified use of the Otterburn Training Area followed on from this, emphasising need for land use on the basis of good stewardship. The idea of balance was also critical here. National park and military training interests were portrayed as two national needs which historically had been met through careful land use strategies.

Opposing the developments planned for the Otterburn Training Area required a different history to be told about the area. The MoD’s claims for a long-established interest in the area and an unblemished record of excellent stewardship had to be countered with a different interpretation of how that particular landscape came to be. Some claims were more easily countered than others. For example, the argument that the MoD was somehow responsible for the creation of the landscape at Otterburn was dismissed readily by the CNP Consortium with the retort that natural processes produced natural environments. ‘The trees and curlews have been there since the last ice age,’ after all (OPI, 11th June 1997); 86 years of military occupation pale in comparison with the Holocene.

Other statements by the MoD needed to be countered with a more structured narrative about this area. For the CNP Consortium, this meant the
presentation of an alternative history of the OTA which emphasised the variety of environmental processes and cultural activities which had left their inscription on this place.\textsuperscript{2} The history of Otterburn, then, became one of the interplay of human and environmental events, rather than solely of human impact. The landscape is valued less for the linear history written across it than for the variety of imprints it bears. The human imprints stressed are also different from those talked about by the MoD. For example:

The historical associations are those of a wild Border landscape, the setting for Border raiders and (with the Scottish side of the Border) of the best-known of British narrative ballads. Redesdale, on the English side, was a heartland of the clans of Border farmer-thieves. It is likely that the influence of Border insecurity in inhibiting economic development for several centuries contributed to the wilderness qualities of the Northumberland National Park, and makes the moorland and semi-natural woodland landscape of the OTA relict and therefore of historic importance in two senses. It is relict from the 16th and 17th centuries through to the 20th century (the bastles are a part of this), and it is relict within the 20th century while surrounding moorlands were afforested or experienced agricultural intensification. (NPC/P/1a, p.7)

According to this narrative, the history of the area lies with reivers, not Romans. The CNP Consortium constructed a different history to the MoD. Also, stressing the variety of processes at work in the history of Otterburn was important to the CNP Consortium case. It follows from this that all uses leave their mark, and with it equal claims to occupy that space. In this narrative, no single use has ever taken precedence.

\textsuperscript{2} In this report, I present the CNP Consortium viewpoint perhaps as more monolithic and internally coherent than it was. One thing I do not attempt to do here is assess the internal dynamics of this grouping, particularly the tensions between member organisations with regard to strategies and arguments. This would complicate an already complex narrative, and is probably best examined in a separate publication.
This narrative argued that it was the variety of different imprints on the landscape that had led the Otterburn area to be designated as a National Park. Furthermore, and in contrast to the MoD case, appreciation of the variety and value of this landscape did not, in the CNP Consortium narrative, spring forth without precedent in the 1930s and 1940s prior to national parks legislation, but was given a far longer history. This history of appreciation, in the CNP Consortium narrative, goes back to the history of the Middle Marches inspiring poets such as Sir Walter Scott and Walter Swinburne, as well as later writers such as the historian G.M. Trevelyan. For the Northumberland and Newcastle Society,

...the area has long inspired a sensitive human response and [...] its landscape has rich cultural and historical associations. It was the appreciation of these qualities which led the National Parks Commission to include the range area in the National Park and so led to the linkage of the Cheviots with Hadrians Wall to form one national park. (NPC/P/3, p.9)

The process of designation was described as taking place on the basis of ‘detailed assessment’ and ‘careful deliberation’ conducted by the National Parks Commission in the 1950s (NPC/P/1, p.13). Designation was therefore presented as a reflection of the value of the relicts of this rich history, and part of a longer history of appreciation of the area. This narrative directly counters that of the MoD by arguing for the National Park designation as reflecting the area’s physical characteristics, evolved over centuries, and not the army’s stewardship in more recent times. The history of Otterburn is then described in terms of the history of the National Parks, originally conceived of as:
...an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation’s benefit and by appropriate national decision and action, (a) the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved, (b) access and facilities for public open-air enjoyment are amply provided, (c) wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected, while (d) established farming use is effectively maintained. (John Dower, 1945, quoted in NPC/P/1, p.9)

Finally, the narrative of CNP Consortium emphasised how timeless this appreciation could be, by linking past appreciation with future needs:

...it is no less essential [...] to preserve for the nation walking grounds and regions where young and old can enjoy the sight of unspoiled nature. And it is not a question of physical exercise only, it is also a question of spiritual exercise and enjoyment. It is a question of spiritual values. Without vision the people perish and without sight of the beauty of nature the spiritual power of the British people will be atrophied. (G.M. Trevelyan, 1938, quoted in NPC/P/1, p.9)

The third history of the OTA presented at the public inquiry came from the Northumberland County Council and the Northumberland National Park Authority (NCC/NNPA). In some respects, this history was not at variance with that of the MoD. The public access guide linking Roman occupation with the present, for example, was a joint publication between the National Park Authority and the MoD; both bodies could be viewed as associated with the production of that particular argument. Similarly, the idea that the appreciation of wilderness qualities has a distinctive history leading to the creation of the National Park appeared in proofs of evidence from the NCC/NNPA as well as the CNP Consortium.
But of course there are differences. The NCC/NNPA’s history included a detailed picture of the story of land acquisition and development at the OTA over three pages of a proof of evidence (NCC/P/2, pp.12-15; the CNP also provided a detailed history; see NPC/P/1, pp.24-26). The MoD’s proof of evidence told the story in one paragraph (MoD/P/4, p.25). The NCC/NNPA’s detailed history told of a process of land acquisition in four distinct phases. These were the creation of the core of the Redesdale Ranges in 1911; expansion during the Second World War; consolidation in the early 1950s; and the acquisition of Stewartshiel Plantation in 1987.

The NCC/NNPA’s close analysis of the detail of the expansion of the OTA served a number of purposes. First, it implied that the NCC/NNPA had a good grasp of the history of the area - full local knowledge in the Geertzian sense (Geertz, 1983). This was not an authority with a distant and impressionistic view of the lands under its jurisdiction but rather an informed body with an eye for detail. They might not have been military experts, but they knew what they were talking about when it came to military training areas. Second, this detailed history provided an opportunity for the NCC/NNPA to start to present their arguments about intensification. A key objection to the scheme was that the Options for Change developments constituted significant intensification of use of the training area, as well as extending the footprint of physical development on the OTA. Arguments about intensification required quite detailed assessments of the past in order to sustain an argument about the future, hence the amount of detail on this in the NCC/NNPA’s case. For example, they provided an analysis of records of training activity dating back to the 1950s in order to
argue that there had been a steady increase in training levels at Otterburn (OPI, 8 July 1997). Similarly, an analysis of Notices of Proposed Development and General Development Orders since 1977 supported an argument that the footprint of development had extended significantly since the late 1980s.

The third purpose served by a detailed account of the history of the OTA was that it revealed hidden opposition to military land use. This was a detail lost in more broad-brush accounts of the history of the training area. For example, developments in the immediate post-Second World War period were shown to have led to protests from amenity and recreation associations, which in turn led to a one-day public inquiry in June 1948. The NCC/NNPA used this fact to consolidate its claims by finding historical precedent for its arguments:

This Inquiry of almost 50 years ago has remarkable echoes for the present Inquiry. Definition of the minimum military requirement and environmental thresholds was, as now, a central issue as the following extract from the Inquiry transcript reveals:

“After all, Sir, this would not be the first time in human history when two absolute minima conflicted. The business of government, as I understand, among other things is to reconcile conflicting absolute minima and to see where each can give way. It has been done before and I have no doubt it can be done in the future. (J. Harvey-Robson for Pennine Way Association)” (NCC/P/2, p.13)

As well as expanding on the history of the OTA to support its case, the NCC/NNPA also provided a history of its policies with regard to the
existence of military training in the Northumberland National Park. This presented the National Park as an organisation continually engaged in the search for ‘reconciliation between two important national interests’, that is, national park and military training purposes. An argument was presented which showed the NNPA and the National Park Committee which preceded it as consistently accepting the military presence, whilst trying to ensure that intensification did not take place. Past versions of the National Park Plan were used to reiterate this. For example, the 1977 First National Park Plan was quoted:

The NPA have previously expressed the view that, whilst raising no objections in principle to the continued use of the Ranges, there should be no intensification of the activities carried on in terms of the boundary of the training area and the nature of the training involved and have subsequently suggested a regular review in order to monitor these aspects and ascertain the continued need for the training area. (NCC/P/2, p.20, emphases in proof)

The 1984 First Review of the Plan reiterated this view, ‘despite advice received from the Countryside Commission to adopt a stronger line’:

The Park Authority [...] adopt a realistic approach and accept the existence of the Training Area and, within this context, they will pursue policies which attempt as far as possible to reconcile military and national park purposes.

The Park Authority are of the view that there should be no intensification of training activities and that the boundary of the Training Area should not be extended. (NCC/P/2, p.21, emphases in proof)
The Second Review of the Plan in 1994 again reiterated this view, consolidating the NNPA’s history of the Park’s managerial body as a continual search for reconciliation between two different land uses and against intensification of military land use. Again, we see here the use of the language (and discourse) of balance, where military training and national park purposes are constructed as reconcilable issues.

In conclusion, I have argued in this chapter that the three main parties at the OPI presented different histories of the training area. The fact that they each independently wrote a history of the OPI in their proofs of evidence and supporting documentation was significant. The function of history is the presentation of a narrative about the past in order to consolidate claims to the present and future. The MoD stressed a history of occupancy to support arguments for future military development. The CNP Consortium stressed a diversity of land uses in order to argue for the continuation of a National Park as a space for a multitude of activities. The NCC/NNPA stressed their continual concern for military activity in order to support their claims of consistent opposition to military intensification on the ranges. These histories also provide the basis for my explorations in the next chapter of the ways in which the landscape of the OTA was perceived and portrayed by each party, and to what ends.
CHAPTER 4      PAINTING LANDSCAPES

This chapter looks at the ways in which the landscape of the OTA was portrayed by different parties at the OPI. As I stated at the beginning, rather than seeing the OPI as a local planning dispute and adjudicating over the rights and wrongs of the development, my purpose is to view the Inquiry as part of a broader contest over different land uses in the countryside and different conceptualisations of rurality. In order to understand this contest and its ramifications, we have to understand how this contest works, and we can proceed towards an understanding by looking at how that landscape is portrayed. By looking at these portrayals closely and by examining the language used and the additional ideas referred to by that language (the discourses drawn upon, if you like), we can get an insight into the political motivations and underpinning ideologies supporting these different claims to space.

This analysis starts with a simple observation: different groups view specific places and spaces in different ways. It is an obvious point but necessary to make. All the different parties speaking at the Inquiry based their arguments on their own portrayal of the OTA. Of course, there was overlap between these portrayals; few would disagree that they saw the Training Area as an upland area, a remote place, with a landscape used for farming, military training and nature conservation. But there were significant differences between the major players at the OPI in terms of how they portrayed the area to the Inquiry, differences which were rooted in the political motivations, ideologies and moralities behind these arguments.
The proofs of evidence to the Inquiry are good sources of contrasting portrayals. The three paragraphs below show the similarities and differences quite clearly. The CNP Consortium emphasised in their portrayal the point that the OTA was primarily a rare example of remote upland:

...natural/semi-natural vegetation is a key attribute of the central and northern parts of the OTA. The absence of modern conifer plantations, and extensive management of the hill farms, has resulted in the survival of an historic landscape - large tracts of open moorland, managed in a traditional way and breathtaking in their splendour. Such environments are now very rare in Britain. (NPC/P/1a, p.6)

The Northumberland National Park Authority shared this view, but could not resist the opportunity to point out how military activity detracted from this:

The OTA is largely composed of moorland with 80% of the land area falling in this category compared to 70% for the National Park as a whole. There is little dense conifer cover and some thirty one widely distributed farmsteadings. The OTA therefore has “wilderness” qualities in abundance spoiled only by the scatter of military installations which is largely concentrated in the southern perimeter. (NCC/P/2, p.9)

The MoD disagreed, of course, and instead painted a picture of a varied landscape, where military activity failed to impose on the landscape quality of the area:

The OTA landscape lies towards the northern boundary of the Park and includes parts of the Cheviots. The training area has continued to be managed as an open moorland with scattered plantations and shelterwoods and retains many of the traditional landscape features which the Park Plan seeks to protect and
enhance. Some elements of the military infrastructure are intrusive, but these are relatively localised and dispersed and have not diminished the scenic quality of the landscape as a whole. (MoD/P/3, p.29)

The different objectives of these three players - conservation, management and military use - are clear in these paragraphs. This chapter explores these differences in the portrayal of landscape in detail, and discusses the objectives behind these different representations.

**Otterburn: too big to matter or too small to lose?**

I start by looking at the terms in which the size of the OTA was discussed. A common idea shared by the three main parties stressed the sheer size of the training area, extending as it does over 22,908 hectares. All drew on Trevelyan’s notion of Northumberland as the ‘land of the far horizon’ to make this point. The CNP Consortium quoted Trevelyan more extensively:

> In Northumberland alone, both heaven and earth are seen; we walk all day on long ridges, high enough to give far views of moor and valley, and the sense of solitude above the world below, yet so far distant from each other, and of such equal height, that we can watch the low skirting clouds as they ‘post o’er land and ocean without rest’. It is the land of the far horizons. (Trevelyan, 1934, p. 5, quoted in NPC/P/3, p.8 and NPC/P/1a, p.8)

The Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) used this idea in many of their publications about the National Park, describing it as an area of ‘Remote and lonely hills, wide horizons and big skies; Northumberland National Park is unique in its sense of space and the breadth of its historical
legacy’ (Northumberland National Park, 1993, npn). The emphasis for both the CNP Consortium and NNPA was on the sheer extent of the space, portrayed as almost limitless where users might feel free from the confines of the town and the restrictions of urban life. This portrayal of the landscape of the OTA underpins arguments that development on the training area would spoil this feeling of space and openness.

For the CNP Consortium, the size of the OTA was also relative. Although huge, it was portrayed as the last remaining area of remote wilderness on an island where upland moorland is perceived to be under threat, a relict of a landscape type all but vanished elsewhere in Britain. See, for example the statement by the Ramblers’ Association, members of the CNP Consortium:

> There are few parts of England that can offer walking country of such high quality with its grass covered, rounded green hills divided by steep valleys, all of interest, some possessing great beauty, some special intimacy and some both. (NPC/P/2, p.6)

The proposed developments would remove this last surviving example of a rare landscape type.

Members of the CNP Consortium also talked about the sheer scale of the training area as a way of emphasising the inspirational, spiritual qualities of the OTA and National Park. They talked of the landscape as being of the very highest quality ‘which provide[s] an experience appealing to all the senses and to Man’s [sic] inner needs’ (NPC/P/3, p.9). This vast landscape was enjoyed by many for its characteristics of openness and its feel of wilderness. Again, it was portrayed as the last of the ‘far horizons’, with its
attraction centring on the relatively unspoilt qualities of the landscape. Despite the MoD presence, the training area ‘still provides a very rare and moving experience for the sensitive visitor’ (NPC/P/3, p.7):

No other National Park has still such a tangible sense of emptiness which by sight and sound gives Nature predominance over Man [sic]. In that wilderness the solitary spirit can find involvement of a deep quality and only the individual can truly appreciate it. (NPC/P/3, p.8)

Otterburn, it was stressed, constituted an ‘important reservoir of rural tranquillity in Northumberland’ and ‘is part of the largest remaining Tranquil Areas in England’ (NPC/P/9, p.5):

The sound of the wind and, in spring and early summer, the songs and calls of skylark and curlew and the drumming of snipe, are part of tranquillity. (NPC/P/1a, p.8)

This portrayal of landscape emphasises the idea of its appreciation by the solo (male?) seeker of solitude and spiritual refreshment. Access to this is a privilege, or perhaps the preserve of the privileged few who are able to make the journey up to the Cheviots. This point about the feelings inspired by this vast landscape were echoed in many letters to the Inspector. This is typical:

The reason that living in the city is bearable, (the city of Newcastle), is that there is Northumberland to escape to. Even if one is unable to go there, it makes life bearable to know that there is fresh air, there are rare bogs, there are lovely wild birds, there are beautiful clear rivers, in the National Park. (Letter to Inspector, 2nd October 1997)
This portrayal of landscape as a reservoir of tranquility, potentially at risk from military infrastructure, was countered by the MoD who instead used the idea of the OTA as a huge space to underpin their claims on the relative insignificance of the proposed developments within this vast landscape. A quotation from a book by the late Brian Redhead on the inspiration of landscape for artists was used to great effect in this argument:

The Northumberland National Park is a landscape of wide open spaces, where access is unrivalled and solitude easily found. Seventy per cent of it is open moorland. And yet it also contains the finest Roman monument in the land, the largest military training area in the north of England, and the biggest man-made lake and man-made forest in Europe.

That is its majesty. It is rich in history and yet it feels as if its geography has not been tampered with. Every inch of it has a story to tell, stories of Roman occupation, of Christian conversion, of border conflict. And every inch of it has been exploited, directly or indirectly.

But it does not feel like that. It feels as it must have always felt with the clouds on the horizon and the wide sky. It is too large a landscape to be diminished by the activities upon it. (Redhead, 1995, quoted in MoD/R/3/1, p.7)

Commenting on this portrayal of landscape, the MoD noted that:

The quotation underlines the dominance and scale of the upland landscape which is such an important factor in assessing the effects of change. (MoD/R/3/1, p.7)

The logic of this argument was that the developments were small and insignificant relative to the vast expanse of the Training Area which would accommodate them. With localised exceptions, the military presence
...is not intrusive and my overall impression of OTA is one of open moorlands and sheltered valleys with distant views and a sense of space. (MoD/P/3, p.21)

A fragmented landscape

The composition of the landscape, in the sense of the relationships between the constituent parts and the whole, was also a key point in the depiction of landscape. Again, different accounts of the landscape’s composition support different arguments as to the purpose of the area. The MoD drew on descriptions of the National Park, used in the Northumberland Structure Plan, to represent the OTA as fragmented, as composed of a number of discrete areas rather than as a comprehensive unified entity:

The dominant elements are the landform, the open moorland, wooded and cultivated valleys and the extensive conifer plantations. These features combine together with historical and conservation associations to create a number of distinct landscape areas. (MoD/P/3, p.19)

The fragmentation of the landscape is not a strategy unique to the MoD at the OPI. For example, a Northumberland National Park Plan Working Paper identifies six broad areas within the National Park (including a Military Range area) subdivided into 41 smaller areas. There are also precedents in the Countryside Commission’s National Countryside Character Maps, which identify three broad zones meeting within the Training Area - Border Moors and Forests, Northumberland Sandstone Hills and the Cheviots. My argument here is that these subdivisions of the landscape provided a precedent for the MoD, which drew upon these techniques to describe the landscape as fragmented. Accordingly, thirteen smaller areas were identified
within the OTA, an approach which ‘illustrates the wide variety of landscapes within OTA ranging from wild open moorland in the northern uplands to wooded and enclosed farmland on the south plateau slopes and valleys’ (MoD/P/3, p.21).

The MoD did not do anything unique in dividing the landscape of the Training Area into smaller units, but it did do something very specific with the results of this exercise. This subdivision was crucial because ‘the character areas have different abilities to absorb different types of development’ (MoD/P/3, p.21). The subdivision was also useful because it then allowed the MoD to attach different values to different parts of the whole. Rather than describing the entire landscape of the ranges as of very high quality, some parts could be granted higher value, in landscape terms, than others.

An example of how this argument works, and the responses made to it, comes from the debates over the impact of Gun Deployment Area (GDA) Alpha on the Grasslees valley, in the south-eastern part of the OTA. The plans for this part of the training area contained in the original NoPD, submitted in April 1995, were contested by the Northumberland National Park Authority on the grounds that the proposed configuration of gun spurs would have a major impact on the landscape quality of the Grasslees valley. Following the public consultation process, the revised plans removed some of the gun spurs to a new GDA in Stewartshiels Forest and relocated others within the area, and revised the configuration of the six gun spurs at GDA Alpha (Gun Spurs 1a, 1b, 1c, 7, 8 and 10) (MoD, 1996a). One of these (Gun
Spur 7) would be used for firing the MLRS. All the gun spurs in GDA Alpha would also be used for the dispersed deployment of a 6-gun AS90 battery. In the proofs of evidence to the Inquiry, the MoD recognised the quality of landscape of the valley, but emphasised that, relative to other parts of the training area, its quality was not so high:

The qualities of the area include the contrasts and variations in the scenery of the Grasslees valley and the relatively unspoilt character of the landscape on the eastern edge of the Otterburn impact area. In my view neither area possess the strong sense of remoteness which is regarded as the special quality of the Northumberland National Park because of the close proximity of farm buildings and the short distance of the area from the B6341 [road]. (MoD/P/3, p.48)

In this argument, the landscape quality of the Grasslees valley, though recognised as high, was distinguished from other parts of the Training Area in the Park, and in this relative scheme judged to be relatively lower. This argument was refuted by the CNP Consortium:

...there is no logic in comparing the OTA only with the rest of the National Park and then saying that, because the Cheviots and Hadrians Wall are deemed of higher quality, the OTA is diminished. As the landscape types are acknowledged to be different, why choose only the National Park for comparison? Why not compare it with similar upland moors in England? [...] National Parks were identified precisely because their landscapes are, in general terms, of national significance and each differing component landscape contributes to the value of the integrity of the whole. (I/NPC/87, p.19)
The Northumberland Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, a member of the CNP Consortium, had very specific reservations about the impact of GDA Alpha on the Grasslees Valley:

The proposed access (some 250m long) to gun spur 7 would run across undulating ground and a watercourse within a particularly attractive scenic location. In my opinion, this would completely spoil the landscape. The revised GDA Alpha is still a disturbing feature since it is proposed near an area relatively unaffected by military activities and in close proximity to popular visitor sites, including Lady’s Well at Holystone. The upgrading of the existing track leading to gun spurs 1a, 1b and 1c will be a prominent feature in the landscape. There would be noise problems created by the firing of guns in these locations. (NPC/P/9, p.7)

Not so, said the MoD. With reference to Gun Spur 1c, for example:

...the gunspurs would not be intrusive by virtue of their relatively small scale in the landscape, the use of sympathetic materials, and their agricultural associations [...]. Other factors which reduce their impact on views are the attractions of other more distant views away from the line of the road and the distractions of prominent features such as Henry’s Wood which forms a conspicuous feature on the skyline in GDA Alpha. (MoD/R/3/1, p.15)

According to this portrayal, the fragmentation of the landscape, and the sheer size of the area, would reduce the visual impact of physical development.

The MoD’s approach was further questioned by the Landscape Assessor working with the Inspector. In his replies, the MoD’s consultant on
landscape and visual impacts justified the fragmentation of the landscape with reference to the need to emphasise the differences with the OTA (OPI, 1st May 1997):

Q: The OTA is in a National Park, but we take that on board. Within that, there are variations of sensitivity with it being in a National Park. Some areas are only as sensitive as others outside the National Park.

A: It’s clear that the National Park offers a level of protection. A series of assessments where everything is high is not helpful in the decision-making process.

Q: Why is this not helpful?

A: Because it would dilute or suppress the clear and contrasting differences within the National Park and Otterburn Training Area. So an effect, for example, close to Otterburn Camp may be of similar significance to an effect closer to the Cheviots. Through a scoping exercise a clear consensus that there are differences within Otterburn is acknowledged. Different areas have different sensitivity, and those differences should come through in assessment.

Assessing impacts

Each party at the OPI drew on particular ideas as to how the landscape of the training area appeared, in order to argue either for or against the construction of physical infrastructure there. The portrayal of the likely impact of different parts of the development was therefore as important for each party as the portrayal of the landscape as it stood. One of the more contentious elements to the overall scheme was the construction of the Tactical

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3 I do not deal here with the vexed question of the correct procedures for Environmental Impact Assessment, but rather with the notion of impact assessment as a discursive process.
Observation Posts (Tactical OPs). In this section, I examine how the construction and use of the Tactical OPs was described by the MoD in language which down-played the impact of this part of the development on the landscape. I then go on to see how the opposition parties refuted the MoD’s arguments by talking-up the level of destruction which would follow the construction of the Tactical OPs.

Tactical OPs are hardstandings for training in tactical observation of the enemy. The development plans in the NoPD involved the construction of 18 positions which would be used by single Warrior OPVs (‘armoured minibuses’ in the words of the CNP Consortium’s advocate) as part of the AS90 system. The Tactical OPs would be spaced out along the length of a ridge facing north into the Redesdale South impact area. Tactical training in target acquisition would take place here:

> The infrastructure [...] would enable OP crews to practise ‘jockeying’ - running up to and, if need be, over the crest line to acquire the target in the impact area, before withdrawing out of sight. The OP crew would then find another suitable position and reacquire the target to confirm or correct fire. (MoD, 1995d, p.23)

Each position would be on a short spur track running up to the crest line, and these would be linked to an access track running along the reverse slope of the ridge stretching between two prominent view points, from Watty Bell’s Cairn at the eastern edge to the Crow Stone to the west. Vehicles here would be out of sight of the impact area when on the track. The original plans for the emplacement of the Tactical OPs required the widening of some 6.9 km of existing tarmac road to a width of 5 metres and the
construction of some 3.2 km of new stone track, again 5 metres in width. Following consultation, the plans were modified so that some parts of the existing road would remain at their existing width and other parts would be widened to a reduced specification.

The MoD recognised the Tactical OPs as ‘one of the more significant elements of the MoD’s Proposals’ (MoD, 1995d, p.105). After all, their construction involved laying new stone tracks in open moorland in a National Park. The impact on the landscape was played down on the grounds that

[the] effect of topography [...] would be to fragment views, so that only some of the road and/or track would be visible from any one point. There are few higher points close by and, because of its location along a ridge line on the top of a convex hill, the central part of the infrastructure would not be very visible from lower elevations. The main (public) view of Tactical OPs would be from the western end of the Cocklaw-Holystone Road. However, the road/tracks would be relatively inconspicuous at this distance and military vehicles would appear as small (and camouflaged) features in the landscape. The Burma Road is closed to the public when there is live firing on the Otterburn Ranges. (MoD, 1995d, p.105)

The MoD make a point here which is critical to our understanding of their portrayal both of the area and the possible impact of the proposed development. The impact on landscape through development was recognised only when there was human observation of that impact. The MoD expressed concern about the visual intrusion of the development, but only insofar as it would be perceived by visitors to the National Park. It is not that the MoD were arguing that the construction of the Tactical OPs
would have no impact at all. The Environmental Statement, for example, recognised that the construction of the Tactical OPs on open moorland might have pronounced effects on landscape and ecology:

The Tactical OPs would be developed in a high, moorland area with few existing tracks and buildings. Construction would lead to fragmentation of the moorland and elevated levels of disturbance. Increased disturbance is likely to result in a local reduction in the numbers of birds breeding and feeding in this area. Increased levels of erosion are likely to occur until soils are stabilised. (MoD, 1995d, p.148)

However, the impacts that were presented as being most acute were those on human visitors:

Special consideration has been given to the design of the tracks and spurs to minimise the extent of development and help to blend them into the landscape. (MoD/P/3, p.61)

Furthermore, the ridge affected was portrayed not as an isolated, remote part of the training area, where development might intrude on the wilderness experience, but as a ridge already surrounded by evidence of military activity. Military infrastructure such as barriers, red warning flags and existing tarmac roads were used as examples. For the MoD, although this was open moorland with the attraction of distant views the location was by no means remote because of the proximity of the airfield and a road, 3 km and 1 km distant, respectively:

Other values such as scenic quality and unspoilt character are also lower [...] because of the greater evidence of military activity and the orientation of the slopes towards the southern
(Redesdale) plateau which lacks the visual contrasts and drama of the northern uplands. (MoD/P/3, p.62)

Overall:

The construction of the Tactical OPs in open moorland would have an adverse effect on the character of the landscape in this area. However substantial efforts have been made to moderate the magnitude of this effect through the selection of the track alignment and the general use of dark coloured stone surfaces. The effect on views would be small because of the undulating nature of the ground, the height of the ridge (reducing overview) and the restrictions on public access.

The scenic quality of the area is diminished somewhat by the existing military infrastructure and the proposals would add to this effect by increasing the extent of built development along the ridgeline. However, this effect would be mitigated by the relatively narrow width of the stone tracks and their close relationship to the landform. (MoD/P/3, p.64)

The National Park Authority were less sanguine about the Tactical OPs, objecting strongly to this element of the development plans:

The construction of the Tactical OP tracks will have a major visual impact. The ridge of high ground between the Crowstone and Watty Bell’s cairn is open and exposed moorland and between these two points there is no development. The complex array of new tracks will be very prominent when seen from these two points and appear as a particularly discordant and unsightly feature. The Crowstone is a viewpoint promoted in access literature for OTA and from here there are wide and dramatic views extending to the Cheviot Hills. I believe the development will seriously disfigure this tract of landscape and completely alter its wild and unspoilt character. (NCC/P/2, p.45)
In this portrayal, the landscape was presented as a public resource because of the views. The views, and thus the public resource, would be spoilt by the development. In rebuttal evidence (additional evidence to rebut points made in the evidence of other parties or in cross-examination), the MoD’s landscape consultant dismissed these claims:

I do not share Mr. Carroll’s assessment that the Tactical OP would have a “major visual impact”. The effect of the proposals on views from the viewpoint at Crow Stone and Watty Bells Cairn are largely restricted to the foreground of views to the east & south and would not detract from the dramatic views to the north. (MoD/R/3/1, p.51)

The MoD were consistent in downplaying the significance of the developments such as the Tactical OPs. The MoD’s consultant on landscape and visual impact was questioned at length on the visual impact of the Tactical OP track by the NCC/NNPA’s Counsel. The consultant was insistent. Only one view counted, this being the view looking away from the development towards the north. Looking in this direction (the one which counted) impacts would not be discernible:

Q: When you’re at the Tactical OP, from the Crow Stone - that is a place where the feel is of moorland round about. You’re up on top of the world.

A: There’s a magnificent view looking north.

Q: Beyond, the brooding presence of the Cheviot to the north. At right angles to the road, looking east to Watty Bell’s Cairn, is magnificent moorland.

A: The view is to the north, with the higher ranges and the Cheviots. The view to the south is moorland, a common feature.
Q: The eye is led into the valley of Wilkwood. To the east, moorland, common in the area - its a characteristics for which the area has received designation as a national park. Photomontage 24 shows what you’ll put there - the Tactical OP tracks. The feel at the Crowstone and the Burma road is characterised by remoteness.

A: Its remote, but not so much as the Technical OP. That gets a higher sensitivity rating.

Q: Both are remote. It’s a question of degree. (OPI, 30th April 1997)

The Council for National Parks shared the NCC/NNPA’s view that the Tactical OPs would affect one of the qualities of the environment which contributed to the wilderness experience of the OTA. They argued that the Tactical OPs:

[...] will very substantially intrude in this environment - the network of new tracks serving the tactical OPs is particularly damaging, injecting a strongly discordant feature into the landscape. (NPC/P/1a, p.9)

Because of their location, the Tactical OPs would constitute a significant reduction in wilderness quality of the landscape (NPC/P/9, p.11):

[The ridge is] one of the best ridges available for walking, set in the centre of the range and between impact areas, with fine views, particularly to the north. It is characteristic of much of the rough moorland on the range. The track and large number of spurs will be visually intrusive as the surface will be completely different in character from the surrounding vegetation and raised above the existing ground level, compartmentalising bits of moorland, completely taking away that wild and remote feel that is present. (NPC/P/2, pp.7-8)
As I noted above, the MoD represented the impact of the Tactical OP primarily in human terms. Whereas the impact of each element of the scheme in landscape and visual terms was assessed quite systematically, the evidence on the effects of development on environmental conservation paid far less attention to individual elements of the scheme. Impacts were of course identified. The Tactical OPs were considered areas ‘where more extensive habitat loss would occur’ (MoD/P/7, p.30). However, there was far less detailed assessment. It is tempting to interpret this as indicative of a portrayal of landscape as a human resource. The CNP Consortium members with a specific interest in conservation took a different view. Landscape was portrayed as inextricably part of the natural environment, rather than as a human construct and resource. So, for example, descriptions of the impact of the construction of the Tactical OP stressed a portrayal of landscape as a natural environment, with the impact of the developments on flora and fauna emphasised, rather than the visual impact on a human visitor.

The mires which will be damaged by the construction of the new tactical OPs road system, including the upgrading of the road leading to Watty Bell’s Cairn, have not retained as high a water-table as that at the head of Folly Sike, but - given the international and national importance of blanket mire and the very high status of Northumberland’s mires - their inevitable partial loss and damage by excavating a road network through them will be a loss to nature conservation. Measures to minimise damage, especially the disposition of drains [...] underestimate the effects through the whole of a mire unit of lowering the water-table. (NPC/P/1a/2, p.17)
This part of the training area was identified as a site for a black grouse lek (territory used for visual display by male birds). CNP Consortium members argued that it should not be used before 9am in the period April to June to minimise disturbance to the black grouse as they go about their display rituals. The large heath butterfly was also shown as a significant user of this site, which was portrayed as a critical location for the conservation of this species:

Raised bog is a rare habitat with a variety of vegetation types. Sphagnum mosses of several types are key indicator species together with bog cotton and other sedges and grasses. There are also animal indicator species, mostly the Large Heath (Coenonympha tullia), a rare and distinctive butterfly confined to wet mires where the caterpillars feed almost exclusively on Hare’s tail Cotton-grass (Eriophorum vaginatum), and the adults on the nectar of Cross-leaved Heather (Erica tetralix). Throughout this century it has become increasingly threatened in England by the progressive drainage of mires. Northumberland has a high proportion of the surviving English population and this species is therefore on the draft county red list. Its future survival depends wholly on the continued existence of these ancient wet mires of which OTA has about 100 ha remaining at 19 known sites. (NPC/P/5/3, pp.53-4)

For the Natural History Society of Northumbria, a member of the CNP Consortium, the adverse impact of the Tactical OPs on the natural environment were felt to be so severe as to warrant withdrawal of this element of the scheme from the NoPD.

**Visual portrayals of landscape**

Arguments can be constructed through pictures as well as word. The representations of landscape presented by each party to the Inquiry drew on
language and also on visual images. These were used far less frequently, but
deserve some consideration because of the effect of their use. Photomontages, maps and photographs all contributed to the portrayal of
landscape.

Photomontages produced by consultants working for the MoD portrayed the
impact of the proposed development on the landscape. Thirty-three
appeared in an A3 sized appendix to the Landscape and Visual Impact proof
of evidence. A photomontage is ‘the superimposition of an image onto a
photograph for the purpose of creating a realistic representation of proposed
or potential changes to a view. This can be done manually by hand
rendering, or by using computer imagery’ (MoD/P/3/Ph, npn). The
technique followed guidelines recommended by the Landscape Institute of
Environmental Assessment:

The methodology [...] uses a series of photographs to create a
panorama in accordance with general practice. In many cases
this approach does not do justice to the sweeping horizons of
the Northumberland landscape and it is intended that the
photomontage would supplement the Inspector’s own
assessment from site visits. (MoD/P/3/Ph, npn)

The MoD found the technique useful for showing various parts of the
landscape ‘before’ and ‘after’ development, and to consolidate their claims
that the proposed developments would have little deleterious impact on the
landscape. Yet as the above quotation suggests, this is not a perfect
technique. Opponents of the scheme seemed to take some pleasure in
pointing out further flaws to this rather bewitching visual technique.
For example, one set of ‘before’ and ‘after’ photomontages were used by a member of the CNP Consortium to make a point that photomontages can rely for their effect on an optical illusion. This particular set showed a road before and after widening. The landscape consultant responsible was asked:

Q: See Photomontage 18. Which of the two roads appears wider?

A: Ah! The top one because it’s darker.
(OPI, 1st May 1997)

The point was that although the roads shown in each photograph were of equal width, the road in the ‘before’ (top) photograph, placed above the ‘after’ photomontage made the top road appear wider, because of the optical illusion created by two sets of lines converging towards a distant point. The technique was potentially fallible.

Also critical in the use of this technique was the choice of locations and aspects of the development for inclusion in the collection of photomontages. Again, the interchange is between the MoD’s landscape consultant and the NCC’s Counsel:

Q: Photomontage 32 shows the approach to gun spur 38, amended to show its full width. This is an interesting photomontage. I may have missed some, but I’m wondering where I’d find a photomontage of a 3-gun gun spur, 56m by 25m. Do we see one?

A: No.

Q: But it would be relevant to the Inspector to have a sense of what this would look like?
A: I’m not sure what the Inspector would find helpful. The photomontages were selected on the basis of the principal roads used. Gun spurs 10 and 19 are 3-gun gun spurs. Number 19 has access and some infrastructure there at the moment. No. 10 is on a slight rise and is not visible from the road. There was not the time or resources for the selection of these, and this was not a particular issue raised by the National Park Authority. (OPI, 1st May 1997)

In his concluding statement, Counsel for the NCC/NPA went on to criticise the absence of a photomontage of a view along a gun spur access track at 90 degrees from the road, and the lack of an illustration of a 12 metre wide access track (I/NCC/36, p.29). The point I am making here is not that the inclusion or omission of various views of the landscape and development supported or undermined either case, but rather that this rather attractive and impressive-looking technique could be used for a number of conflicting purposes in the portrayal of landscape.4

Maps were another visual source significant to the portrayal of landscape at the Public Inquiry. The Inspector himself, Peter McMaster, was a former Director General of the Ordnance Survey. Maps appeared as battered fold-out OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheets, muddied and rain-splattered through practical use. Or they appeared as large 1:25,000 MoD range maps overlaying the familiar Ordnance Survey markings with danger zones, impact areas, field firing areas, anti-tank ranges and demolition areas. Large scale cartoon-type maps of landscape character areas carved up the region to suggest, as I discussed above, the heterogeneous nature of the area’s

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4 Photographs were used sparingly, and I do not discuss them here, beyond drawing a comparison between the colour reproductions of photographs of environmental improvements, produced by the MoD, and the rather vague black and white stills produced at one stage by the Council for National Parks Consortium to counter the claims of the photomontages. The CNP were criticised for the quality of the photographs. It
geomorphology and habitats. Finely-drawn 1:10,000 maps produced by MoD surveyors showed the precise locations for gun spurs, stone tracks, battery echelon areas and technical observation posts whilst 1:500 engineering plans plotted out their detail. And plain white sheets appeared time and time again, scattered with red dots, blue dots, pink lines and green squiggles; no scale. These were the maps that were used to illustrate the infrastructure developments that the MoD wished to undertake.

If we follow Brian Harley, Mark Monmonier and others in approaching maps not as part of an objective scientific system but as part of a cultural system, the role of the map in the portrayal of Otterburn turns from neutral descriptive tool to active participant in the construction of portrayals of place. As Brian Harley notes, the ‘quest to map’ or ‘mapping impulse’ replicates the ‘territorial imperatives of a particular system’ (Harley, 1988, p.278). I do this too, of course; see Figure 1. In both cases, the territorial imperative is the portrayal of space for specific purposes. At the OPI, maps achieved this in two ways, either by supporting the army’s claims for the functions it wished to conduct over this particular space, or by supporting the army in its existing, relatively unhindered use of space. As Mark Monmonier points out, no map is capable of including all information and telling all stories:

[The] process of mapping requires cartographers to limit content in order to create a readable map and so allows them to manipulate their audience with the information they choose to include. (Monmonier, 1995, p.1)

seemed at the time that a small charity with few resources could do little to counter the techniques at the disposal of a larger Government ministry.

5 The history of cartography is of course inextricably bound with the history of the British armed forces, particularly their role in enabling imperial expansion during the latter half of the 19th century.
This observation often came to mind when examining the drawings produced by engineering consultants White Young for the MoD to show the proposed developments. The information included is minimal. Brian Harley’s observations on a North American road atlas are also pertinent here. He talks with reference to the effect of these maps on North Americans’ perceptions of their country. His observations could apply to the rather anonymous maps produced to illustrate the developments:

What sort of image of America [Otterburn?] do these atlases [maps] promote? On the one hand, there is a patina of gross simplicity. Once off the interstate highways the landscape dissolves into a generic world of bare essentials that invites no exploration. It avoids the irregularities of lived experience. Context is stripped away and place is no longer important. On the other hand, the maps reveal the ambivalence of all stereotypes. Their silences are also inscribed on the page: where, on the page, is the variety of nature, where is the history of the landscape, and where is the space-time of human experience in such anonymized maps? (Harley 1992 p. 246)

The White Young maps showed a plain white surface. There are no contours, no idea of the shape of the land, no suggestion of human habitation or conversely the wilderness celebrated by poets and writers, no local landmarks, no existing roads. This could be anywhere or nowhere. This representation is so highly abstracted that it doesn’t even appear to pretend to have any reference to the ‘reality’ it purports to illustrate. It is meaningless unless you have an intimate knowledge of the geography of this part of Northumberland. What is shown are the new and improved tracks, new and existing gun spur locations, existing and proposed woodland areas and the Central Maintenance Facility. The development is presented as
taking place in an empty space marked only by two features of army infrastructure: the OTA boundary and the two camps at Otterburn and Redesdale. A local resident made a similar point when arguing that military use of the ranges had obliterated a previous history of settlement and land use by ceasing to use particular place-names:

I often wonder when studying maps of the Upper Coquet Valley - who was Jock of Jock’s Knowe road; or Watty Bell of Watty Bell’s cairn etc. etc. Just occasionally the map’s secrets are given up as for instance when a local told me that Dykeham’s Edge was named after a whisky smuggler who safeguarded himself, and his grey hens of mountain dew, in a nearby cave the entrance to which was cunningly hidden. [...] I doubt that future residents in the Upper Coquet Valley will be much excited by the characters Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, et al. Once you have altered, and even obliterated, names from a map (Dykeham’s Edge has disappeared cartographically) you obliterate the lives of the inhabitants and deny their legacy of heritage. (Evidence of Harbottle resident to OPI, 7th October 1997).

Local knowledge and the portrayal of landscape
The arguments discussed in this chapter on the impacts of the proposed developments ultimately all stood relative to one another. Their validity ultimately depended on interpretation and judgement as to which portrayal of landscape was the most convincing. These arguments were often substantiated only with difficulty. To conclude this section, it is worth making a point about how validity in interpretation was established. I have already noted how local knowledge was used by the National Park Authority to legitimize its claims to know this contested space and thus to predict likely outcomes of the proposed developments. Local knowledge also
seemed crucial in establishing the legitimacy of different interpretations of landscape.

The portrayals of the landscape at Otterburn constructed in the course of the Inquiry appeared in proofs of evidence and witness statements, cross-examinations and rebuttal evidence. Often they appeared in documents that had been drafted and re-drafted over a period of months. Furthermore, many of the people giving evidence at the Inquiry claimed a long and intimate knowledge of the training area, and presented a picture of a place they felt they knew well. Others, brought in as consultants and representatives to the different parties, had to acquire knowledge of the area rather more quickly. Often they were based elsewhere and not able to build up a picture over a long period of association. Yet all the evidence presented for and against the developments needed to appear rooted in direct experience of the area. Everyone had to claim local knowledge to substantiate their case. Many witnesses were picked up on this issue. For example, one unfortunate MoD witness was asked about the use of a road by military vehicles. He replied that he was unsure when he wrote his proof of evidence whether the road in question was open to the public (OPI, 1st May 1997). In the debate over the bog at the Tactical OP (to which I return in the next chapter) the precise name and location of this feature caused considerable debate, with each party claiming superior local knowledge. A CNP Consortium witness, arguing for increased public access, talked knowingly of his many years’ experience on the hills of the Cheviot Dry Training Area, only to be told that he had been technically out of bounds by straying off the public rights of way all this time. He seemed most surprised. An MoD representative with
good knowledge of the OTA appeared during cross-examination not to know about the existence of a public bridleway near Otterburn Camp. Another was questioned as to whether he would recognise a curlew, the symbol of the National Park, if he saw one. Counsel for the NCC/NNPA appeared to take delight in talking knowingly of small features such as buildings, roads, junctions and footpaths, establishing a high level of local knowledge. In turn, Counsel for the MoD took many a witness to task by testing their knowledge of the details of the NoPD, and finding them wanting. Of course, these are partly strategies used by advocates as part of their brief. But they also seemed to be used to validate or alternatively destabilise portrayals of landscape. Local knowledge was vital.

In conclusion, this chapter has focussed on the portrayal of the landscape of the OTA, looking at how it was described by each of the three main parties at the Inquiry. These descriptions were all part of a political process, with purpose and strategy, and directed towards the support of a particular case. These descriptions can also be understood as discursive, in that they draw on wider patterns of statements or systems of concepts in order to give meaning to the thing that they describe. The MoD, for example, draw heavily on the idea of the countryside as functional space with specific human uses. For the Council for National Parks, ideas of environmentalism were central. The next chapter elaborates on these ideas by looking at the function of Otterburn and the strategies (material and discursive) deployed to establish specific uses.

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6 He replied later that he had ‘made a point, since our last discussion, of looking for curlews, and you’ll be pleased to know I’ve seen many.’ (OPI, 10th July 1997)
CHAPTER 5 PRIORITISING USES

In this chapter, I look at how the arguments about the function of the Otterburn Training Area were presented and contested. Although military training *per se* was generally accepted as a legitimate use for MoD land at Otterburn, the OPI of course was about something different: the impact of physical developments and of possible intensified or changed use of the training area. All parties at the OPI produced arguments to support or refute the notion of impact and implicit within these arguments were statements about the use and function of the training area. These arguments can be assessed in two ways. First, we can see what is said, literally. Second, we can inquire about the politics, ideologies and moralities bound up within such statements. This chapter, then, looks at the statements made about the function of the OTA, with reference to the discourses - the systems of concepts, or frameworks of meanings - that all parties drew upon in order to argue their case.

Historically, and as one would expect, the MoD has stressed the primary function of the OTA as a military training area. Its 1990 Conservation Management Plan stated bluntly:

The MoD holds its estate at Otterburn for one reason - to provide realistic training facilities for the Armed Forces. It must be appreciated that, in view of the many other pressures upon the nation’s land resources, the areas available for military training are very restricted. This inevitably means that those areas, such as OTA, which are designated military training grounds, must be used to the full, and developed to meet changing needs, in order to satisfy training requirements.
Therefore military training needs are of paramount importance in the management of the Otterburn estate. (MoD, 1990, p.8)

Similarly, a 1992 MoD Forestry Management Plan emphasised the priority given to training; Management Objective No.1 was ‘[T]o fulfil military training requirements and to enhance the training value of OTA.’ The protection of woodland with high habitat and landscape value and the provision of shelter for farms and military buildings came second and third (MoD, 1992). A 1993 Strategic Estate Management Plan stated that ‘[T]he sole reason for MoD holding land is to provide training facilities’, and emphasised that ‘[T]he land holding of OTA is held by the MoD for one purpose only - to provide a realistic training facility for the Armed Forces’ (MoD, 1993, p.13, p.84). Furthermore, the priority accorded to military training provided a justification for general development there:

The military training requirement is the paramount concern in the management of OTA and it must be recognised that if the training area is to provide the facilities to train our modern Army to an acceptable standard, it can not be frozen in time, but must be allowed to develop to accommodate the changing requirements. (MoD, 1993, p.84)

The military function of the OTA has historically met with little opposition from parties contesting the MoD’s development plans. For example, an early publicity leaflet published by the Council for the Protection of Rural England and other amenity organisations in response to initial discussion of the MoD’s plans stressed that ‘[T]his issue is not about pressing for military withdrawal from Otterburn’ (CPRE, undated). Similarly, the thrust of the Northumberland County Council, the Northumberland National Park
Authority and the CNP Consortium’s arguments throughout the OPI was opposition to the proposed developments, but not to the military presence as such. Dissent on the military’s right to use the OTA for training purposes came only from a few members of the public writing to the planning authority, and later to the Inspector:

Father left the best years of his life in the Western Front, he was 31 years old when he got back home. His 2 sons my eldest brothers were killed in bomber command. Surely they didn’t die to create death for some-one else and to deprive our people of some lovely landscape. (Letter to NPA, 30th July 1995)

Such invasive military training is also a constant reminder of the very antagonism the public wishes to forget when it seeks spiritual refreshment within the Parks. The sights and sounds associated with the theatre of war are distressing enough on the television. To be aware of them in a supposed peaceful refuge, is to destroy all tranquility and well-being in the beholder. (Letter to Inspector, 24th April 1997)

With the publication of the NoPD, and at the public inquiry itself, the MoD’s statements about the function of Otterburn shifted. As we would expect, the primary purpose of the OTA as a military training area continued to be asserted, but in addition the range of supplementary functions was stressed. We can speculate as to the reasons for this shift. It is possible that they lie with geopolitical changes which led to new developments in the structure and functions of the armed forces as defined in documents such as Options for Change, and Front Line First (MoD, 1991 and 1994). It may well be the case that commentaries on military land use in National Parks, such as those contained in the Edwards report on the future of National Parks and the Countryside Commission’s examination of military training in
Northumberland were highly influential in shaping MoD policy statements on the compatibility of military training with other land uses (Edwards, 1991; Countryside Commission, 1994). It is also possible that the emergence of a critique of military training in protected landscapes from environmental groups in the light of the so-called ‘peace dividend’ prompted the development of new public relations strategies for the portrayal of military training (Owens, 1990). Whatever the reasons, I would argue that the MoD’s statements on the key function of Otterburn, developed at the OPI, placed very great emphasis on the compatibility of military training with other functions. The OTA was still portrayed as having a military use, but emphasis on this land use was tempered with reference to additional functions.

One example of this shift in statements about the function of Otterburn comes from the portrayal of farming and military training as compatible. Extensive grazing by sheep, it was argued, resulted in vegetation control, important in the impact areas on the ranges where live firing carries a fire risk through combustion of vegetation. After all, ‘suspension of live firing to fight fires results in loss of valuable training time’ (MoD/P/2, p.5). The ‘beneficial co-existence of farming and military training’ (MoD/P/4, p.43) was supported by claims made for the utility of the proposed developments for agricultural as well as military purposes:

The provision of additional hardstandings in the form of gun spurs will be of benefit in providing useful hard winter feeding stations for livestock. This would help to minimise poaching that normally exists around feed stations and the manure and grass seed would assist in ‘greening-up’ and therefore obscuring the gun spurs from view. (MoD/R/4/1, p.14)
These statements on the compatibility of military training with other activities can be viewed as material statements of fact. They may also be viewed as *discursive strategies*. If we do the latter, we pay attention not only to what is said, but also to the manner in which the statements are presented and the ideas implicit within these statements - the discourses upon which such statements draw. The material and discursive content of statements about conservation, a second example of compatibility of function, provide considerable scope for analysis of material and discursive representations of purpose.

Across the defence estate, the MoD stress the compatibility of military training with environmental protection through the deployment of a number of material strategies. The Defence estate contains a unique natural heritage, of which the MoD is justifiably proud. For example, there are over 200 Sites of Special Scientific Interest on the Defence estate (eleven of which are on the OTA). Extensive areas of breckland, heathland and chalk grassland are preserved on the Stanford, Longmoor and Salisbury Plain Training Areas (MoD, 1995c). A number of policy initiatives are directed towards the conservation of this natural heritage. For example, Declarations of Intent exist between the Ministry of Defence and English Nature (signed in 1996), the Countryside Council for Wales (1995) and Scottish Natural Heritage (1993) which establish that factors relating to nature conservation and natural heritage will be taken into account in the use and management of lands held by the MoD. In 1987 the MoD signed a Declaration of Commitment to the National Parks and successive Statements on the
Defence Estimates for 1994, 1995 and 1996 stressed MoD compliance with national and European environmental legislation. There are active conservation groups on most of the major training areas to advise on the environmental protection matters. The Ministry of Defence presents initiatives such as these as evidence of a framework for the environmental protection of the defence estate (see Savege, 1997, for a fuller discussion).

Material strategies for environmental protection are accompanied by discursive strategies which work towards the production of public image of military activity as compatible with environmental protection. Discursive strategies - of ‘crater-as-habitat’, perhaps - consolidate this prioritisation of land uses on the defence estate. These strategies work by making connections between conservation and military training, enabling the construction of training as environmentally beneficial (Woodward, forthcoming). This is not a strategy unique to Otterburn, as Shields and Wright note with respect to Porton Down and the ranges in southern Dorset, respectively (Shields, 1996; Wright, 1996). Nor, of course, is this strategy the sole preserve of the MoD. There is vigorous debate, of course, as to whether the rich natural heritage of the defence estate is the result of careful and deliberate stewardship on the part of the MoD, or the serendipitous outcome of a quite different set of land management policies. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, but adjudicating on it is not my purpose here. Rather, I am interested in the ways training, environment and
policy are linked at the discursive level. The MoD talk confidently about the environmental benefits of military training activities, yet many remain highly sceptical (Westing, 1990; Seager, 1993; Thomas, 1995). Given this scepticism, how does the representation of military environmentalism operate?

One of the simplest ways in which this discursive strategy operated at the OPI was through the presentation of military training as a land management practice, rather than as a destructive pursuit:

Military training activities themselves can be of benefit in conservation terms. For example, many mires and blanket bog areas have been adversely affected by agricultural drainage in the past. Drainage results in a loss of vegetation diversity and a reduction in insect populations. Shell craters from artillery firing help to maintain waterlogged conditions and as the holes are gradually colonised, a diverse habitat is created which supports a varied insect population. The availability of insects in spring is particularly important to the survival of chicks of many ground nesting bird species. (MoD/P/4, pp.7-8)

Military training - in this instance, the firing of shells resulting in the creation of craters-was presented as part of environmental stewardship. The implication of this statement was that the creation of craters might help in the conservation of protected species such as the Black Grouse. In another example, the limits placed on public access to certain areas because of live firing were promoted as a practice to reduce disturbance to wildlife:

Military training, by its very nature, precludes public access during periods of dangerous training activities and to areas with

7 The US military deploys similar strategies to promote awareness of conservation activities on its training areas, to an often sceptical public (Dycus, 1996; Loomis, 1993; Boice, undated).
inherent dangers from unexploded ordnance. However, the benefit of constraints to access is less disturbance to wildlife by the public and this is a positive factor in conserving the wildlife value of the Estate. (MoD/P/4, p.8)

When questioned by Counsel for the NCC/NNPA, the Senior Land Agent for the MoD at Otterburn provided further explanation as to why this should be:

Q: The point here is that there is no evidence that constraints on public access are of benefit to Otterburn.

A: There are no studies of ground nesting birds. But studies for example show that birds don’t nest near footpaths. Generally there is no problem for the birds if public access is not allowed.

Q: And would a bird distinguish between a rambler and a soldier?

A: There’s a difference between using a path and military spread out across land. They’re spread thinly and use different areas.

(OPI, 28th May 1997)

Any suggestion that the conservation benefits of military training were overstated was vigorously disputed by the MoD (MoD/R/7/1, pp.9-10). The conservation argument was, after all, a key element in a strategy pursued by the MoD to maintaining public endorsement of military activity in Britain’s open landscapes, especially where those contain protected areas. The Defence Estate Organisation has a dedicated Conservation Office, which publishes Sanctuary, a glossy magazine detailing the activities of conservation groups across the defence estate. Its main message, on the compatibility of military training and environmental protection, is promoted
tirelessly; for example, photographs of compatible uses (stone curlews at Porton Down, barn owls in ammunition boxes) appear in the annual Statements of Defence Estimates for 1995 and 1996 (MoD, 1995e, 1996).

A number of ideas feed into this discourse of training as land management. There is the notion of the soldier as an environmental guardian - a true eco-warrior, perhaps. Videos like ‘Train Green’ teach soldiers how to take account of environmental protection when training. Implicit within such videos, through the use of text and images, is the idea of the soldier as steward of rural space.8 The notion of paternalism in land management is also evident here, where restrictive but well-meaning land management practices are followed, underpinned by a specific view of the landowner’s ‘natural’ authority over territory. (Paternalism in land management is by no means the sole preserve of the MoD but an attribute shared by many large land owners; see Marsden et al, 1993; Lowe and Ward, forthcoming.) The third idea drawn upon in the presentation of the MoD’s environmental work is one about balance between sets of interests. Two interests which might initially be perceived as irreconcilable - such as military training and environmental protection - are placed within a framework which allows for the possibility of compatibility between them. These interests are both named as MoD policy objectives to be balanced in the pursuit of the ultimate goal, a trained army for defence of the realm. The emphasis on balance frames the question in such a way as to make the attainment of this goal the outcome of the co-ordination of two equal things, rather than a contest

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8 As I argue elsewhere, this video and other army publications promote particular notions of what it is to be a soldier in the countryside (Woodward, 1998). For an alternative commentary on ‘Train Green’, see Coulson and Wright, 1995.
between two conceptually opposed objectives. This notion of balance, again, is not the sole preserve of the MoD, for Northumberland County Council raised it in the Inquiry too:

[...] in relation to the current NoPD there are two public interests which must be reconciled. That is the national public interests of the military and of National Parks. Government policy does not state that either the defence interest or the National Park interest is paramount. The County Council therefore wishes to see a balance struck between these two national interests and considers that the present proposal does not present such a balance. (NCC/P/1, p.29)

For much of the OPI, a balance could be struck; environmental protection could be promoted as mitigating the destructive potential of military training using heavy artillery systems. For example, although peat bogs might be encroached upon by the new stone tracks at Watty Bell’s Cairn, management strategies elsewhere on the ranges would ensure the preservation of this valued habitat for breeding waders.

However, one purpose in pursuing an interpretative methodology grounded in the analysis of discourses is to establish the point at which discourses collide or compete. As developments within rural studies have shown, a focus on the interaction between opposing discourses can illuminate conflicts over rural land use.⁹ A good example of this competition between discourses appears in the exchange of views between the Natural History Society of Northumberland (a member of the CNP Consortium) and the MoD over the impact of the construction of the Tactical OP tracks on an area

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⁹ Lowe et al (1997), for example, examine how farm pollution is constructed by two conflicting discourses of rurality.
of blanket mire between the Crow Stone and Watty Bell’s Cairn (the subject of a small dispute over its precise name and location mentioned in the discussion of local knowledge in the previous chapter). Two very different discourses of conservation were discernible here. One drew on the idea of statutory environmental protection as the determining factor in allowing development to go ahead. The other took a looser, more inclusive stance towards protected habitats, resting ultimately on a moral arguments against interference in a protected habitat. This exchange started with the argument put forward by the Natural History Society as to the damage that might be caused by the Tactical OP track:

The new roads in this area will involve excavation of deep peat as can already be seen near Watty’s Cairn [...] . This will be followed by further and permanent erosion by weathering. The peat in this area is part of a blanket mire. Damage of this sort is unacceptable. Blanket mire is a rare habitat worldwide of which 10-15% is in Great Britain. It is a habitat listed (because of its importance) in Annex 1 of the Habitat and Wild Fauna and Flora Directive of the EU and is protected under UK legislation. (NPC/P/5/1, p.5)

The MoD countered this by arguing that the shortness of the track and the care taken in its construction would mitigate against environmental damage through drainage and erosion. As to statutory protection:

...the area of blanket mire at Watty Bell’s Cairn is a small outlier/extension of a larger area of blanket mire which extends away to the south east. [...] Blanket mire is listed in Annex 1 of the EC Habitats Directive. This does not mean that every area of blanket mire is protected under the provisions of the Directive. Instead, the Directive requires that member states are to protect such habitats through the selection of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to form a coherent community
wide network called Natura 2000. [...] No part of Otterburn Training Area has been identified as a possible SAC by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee whose responsibility it is to identify candidate sites. Although Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status was not a prerequisite of identification of SACs, as would be expected the majority of sites identified have already [been] notified as such. Several mires at Otterburn are within SSSIs. The blanket bog at Watty Bell’s Cairn does not form part of an SSSI. Neither is it part of a non-statutory site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) [...] The small area of blanket bog which would be affected by the proposed new tracks does not therefore give rise to issues under either European or UK legislation or nature conservation policies. (MoD/R/7/4, p.17)

According to this line of argument, local specificity is unimportant; areas of bog are presented as interchangeable:

Whilst this habitat cannot be replaced, the loss will be mitigated by improvements to moorland and bog habitats elsewhere through reductions in cattle and sheep grazing and restoration of hydrology. [...] These improvements would more than offset the minor loss of habitat at Watty Bell’s Cairn. (MoD/R/7/4, p.10)

The terms in which the MoD argument for the construction of the Tactical OPs was made, of adherence to the strict parameters of environmental legislation, ran completely counter to those of the Natural History Society, who asserted the need for adherence to the spirit of environmental legislation within moral argument about the protection of valued habitats having priority over other issues. In this example, a discourse of managerialism collided with a discourse of moral environmentalism.
Another point of interest for discourse analysts are the limits and points of rupture in a discourse. Looking at this shows the boundaries of what that discourse claims to describe, and the limitations of the use of that discourse. In examining the MoD’s deployment of a discourse of military training as land management, it is pertinent to look for the point at which those claims about balance, stewardship and compatibility between conservation and training cease. The example chosen here shows the limits to the various declarations binding the MoD to sound environmental practice.

As discussed above, the MoD is party to a number of Declarations with statutory bodies which emphasise that it is MoD policy to uphold values leading to sound conservation practices. These documents do not establish the primacy of environmental concerns, however. The Declaration of Intent with English Nature, for example, states that:

It is recognised that the primary purpose for which MoD holds or uses land is for military requirements and in the interest of national defence.

It goes on:

This Declaration of Intent does not interfere with these purposes but it is intended that full consultations with English Nature [...] shall ensure that nature conservation is taken properly into account thereafter, together with any other alternative uses or interests.

Ultimately:

It will aim to ensure the integration of environmental considerations into all policy areas having regard to the
The priority granted to military requirements echoes that within the MoD’s Declaration of Commitment to the National Parks, signed in September 1987:

In managing land which it owns or uses within the national parks, the MoD declares that it will endeavour to promote the objectives of the park authorities wherever these are compatible with the needs of national defence. (MoD, 1987)

The annual Statements of Defence Estimates say much the same. For example:

[The MoD] protects and enhances the natural environment in line with the Government’s environmental strategy, and the principles of stewardship and sustainability, within overriding operational and financial constraints. (MoD, 1996b, p.102)

Conservation, then, is important but not paramount; national security interests take precedence. In theory, this means that if training is required which is environmentally destructive but essential for operational purposes, according to legislation and agreements with statutory bodies, the MoD is entitled to carry out such training in the interests of operational effectiveness. Conservation is not an equal priority with military requirements.
The same principles that underpin these Declarations also underpin the mechanisms put forward by the MoD for conservation on the OTA; sound environmental conservation practices were to be followed, where they did not compromise military training requirements. The CNP Consortium expressed in their closing statement to the OPI their reservations about the mechanisms which operationalise such commitments. The Environmental Steering Group (ESG) to be established for the management of conservation practices on the OTA was welcomed in principle. However, it was presented by the CNP Consortium as being an extension of the existing regime through which the Range Commandant as Chair of the ESG considered any conflicts. The CNP Consortium argued that the existence of a mechanism for resolution provided no guidance as to how conflicts could be resolved:

As to how this process will work in practice, the MoD’s position is straightforward: where there is a conflict which cannot be resolved through modification of the training pattern or other mechanisms, the need for military training will prevail. [...] in the present case, there is a very real likelihood of impacts, many of which could not be remediated while the MOD still met its training needs. [...] the ESG - with all the will in the world but faced always with the imperative of military training - will be compelled to sanction activities causing harm to the environment of OTA. (I/NPC/87, pp.25-26)

According to this analysis, the primary function of the OTA would always remain military training. Though symbolically constructed as compatible with other interests such as conservation, and framed within declarations as to sound environmental management practices, military needs would always
prevail. The limits to the discourse of training as land management had been reached.

Of course, there is nothing surprising about the MoD arguing for the prime function of Otterburn as a military training area. Though presented with reference to notions of compatibility and balance with conservation objectives, the OTA is a military training area and, for the MoD, would always be used as such. Hence the need for the developments set out in the NoPD. The function of the OTA was argued on the basis of need, a national or public interest served by military training on that space. That need was perhaps unassailable; certainly, the two main opposition groups appeared to face significant obstacles in the development of an oppositional strategy and argument when it came to this point. As I pointed out above, at no point was the right of the MoD to conduct military training at the OTA disputed by the opposition groups. Yet those parties were there to oppose the NoPD, a document framed within discourses of needs and the public interest in national security. Unable or unwilling to dispute these claims, alternative interpretations of the function of Otterburn had to be presented.

One avenue open for discussion of this issue was the interpretation of planning policy. The calling letter for the OPI stated that one area for investigation by the Inspector would be the extent to which the development proposals conflicted with the advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 (PPG7), which provides guidance on land use planning in England’s rural areas. It states in paragraph 4.5:
Special considerations apply to major development proposals, which are more national than local in character. Major development should not take place in the National Parks, the Broads and the New Forest Heritage Area save in exceptional circumstances. Because of the serious impact the major developments may have on these areas of natural beauty, applications for all such developments must be subject to the most rigorous examination. Major developments should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed. Consideration of such applications should therefore normally include an assessment of:

(i) the need for the development, in terms of national considerations, and the impact of permitting it or refusing it upon the local economy;

(ii) the cost of and scope for developing elsewhere outside the area or meeting the need for it in some other way;

(iii) any detrimental effect on the environment and the landscape and the extent to which that should be moderated.

Any construction or restoration should be carried out to high environmental standards.

PPG7 offered one route towards opposition, not through the deployment of arguments against militarism, but through the more positive strategy of arguments about the public interest. The MoD’s statements about the unassailable need for the developments in the public interest were countered by NCC/NNPA and CNP Consortium arguments about the public interest served by refusing permission for further physical development on the training area. The debates about PPG7 were also instructive for what they indicated about the political contexts informing the strategies of each party.
We can begin by looking at the way PPG7 was framed by each party. Needless to say, there was little agreement between the three. The Assistant County Planning and Environment Manager for the Northumberland County Council stated that ‘[T]he guidance note provides advice on major developments in National Parks’ (NCC/P/1, p.24). The MoD’s planning consultant argued in his Proof of Evidence that ‘paragraph 4.5 sets out the circumstances in which major developments can occur’ (MoD/P/12, p.11). The CNP Consortium provided an alternative interpretation, stating that PPG7 ‘provides for a strong presumption against major development in National Parks’ (NPC/P/1, p.35).

Each party then went on to explain how its interpretation of need supported a particular interpretation of PPG7. For the MoD, PPG7 required that any major development should include an assessment of need in terms of national considerations. This assessment was given in descriptions of the ‘important role played by AS90 and MLRS regiments in the new international security environment’ (MoD/P/12, p. 12). Given that there were no alternatives to training using live firing and no alternative locations for this training other than the OTA, the conclusion was that ‘the Artillery’s effectiveness and capability would be significantly compromised if the proposals did not go ahead’. Need in this scenario was interpreted as a military one. PPG7 was presented as essentially permissive if a public interest or need could be established. ‘There is acknowledgement that major development in the National Parks can be in the public interest. [...] PPG7 therefore recognises that major developments may be in the public interest’ (MoD, 1997, p.37).
What was this public interest? The MoD’s Statement of Case outlines over two pages the ‘urgent, national need for AS90 and MLRS to train for operational deployment including live firing’:

The artillery system is complex and requires considerable training if its potential as a key battle winning component is to be realised and the safety of troops maintained. The artillery is utilised across the spectrum of conflicts, but must fundamentally train for high intensity conflict. (MoD, 1997, p.38)

There was a need for troops to practice using sophisticated weaponry, which as well as giving soldiers basic competence to use their equipment would also bring them confidence, build an esprit de corps, demonstrate the effectiveness of command procedures, show that the equipment would work and test soldiers under difficult conditions.

Lack of proper training on a live firing range denies soldiers these advantages and means that the artillery will not be prepared or capable of carrying out the tasks laid upon it by the Government. Lack of confidence, inexperience, distrust of equipment and concern about the ability of others leads to uncertainty, ineffectiveness, unnecessary casualties and defeat. The discipline and determination required to succeed in war are bred on the training ground. (MoD, 1997, pp.38-9)

Ultimately the need for soldiers to train was required by the armed forces’ obligations to meet certain states of readiness for deployment. These were set out at length with detailed descriptions of the UK armed forces’ involvement in NATO’s Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) and the UK’s Joint Rapid Deployment Forces (JRDF) (MoD/P/1).
Failure to reach readiness states required by regiments contributing to ARRC and JRDF would lead to a reduction in operational effectiveness, surely a public interest. Furthermore, given the lack of existing facilities to train with AS90 and MLRS, current commitments were not being reached. The need was also therefore a pressing one. In short, Otterburn’s function was defined in terms of the public interest in having a trained, proficient artillery. PPG7 was interpreted as permitting development to serve interests such as these.

The CNP Consortium offered an alternative interpretation of PPG7 and the issue of need and the public interest. Its representatives argued that PPG7 should be placed in the context of the history of attitudes towards major development in National Parks. This history was presented as hingeing on the so-called ‘Silkin Test’\(^\text{10}\), whereby need had to be demonstrated to be absolutely in the public interest, with no possible alternatives. The Council for National Parks’ Proof of Evidence went into substantial detail to show how successive governments had upheld the principle that National Park designation conferred the highest possible status of protection, with development proposals being subject to the highest possible level of scrutiny. It argued in its main Proof of Evidence that PPG7 had to be interpreted within this historical context.

The key questions under PPG7 are whether the nation’s need for military training with the AS90 and the MLRS in the Northumberland National Park in the way proposed has been demonstrated. The burden of proof rests with the developer. Has it further been demonstrated that there are no alternative sites available anywhere at all? And can the need, if proven, be met in any other way? Only if those criteria are satisfied should

\(^{10}\) Named after a former Town and Country Planning Minister, Lewis Silkin.
consideration take place of the environmental impacts and any mitigation necessary. (NPC/P/1, pp.35-6)

According to the Council for National Parks, the requirements of PPG7 had not been met. A considerable amount of time was taken up in the cross-examination of MoD witnesses in order to establish this (with a great deal of additional information appearing at the Inquiry which for some participants pointed to the paucity of information kept by the MoD about their activities on training lands). For example, the Council for National Parks argued that a single geographical solution had been sought to the problem of training with MLRS and AS90. The assessment of overseas training options had been dismissed too quickly. The environmental impacts of the scheme had not been properly assessed from the outset. The Council for National Parks’ Proof of Evidence on this issue concluded that:

The MoD has not demonstrated that it has carried out the rigorous examination required by PPG7, which contains a strong presumption against major development in National Parks. The MoD has not demonstrated that the need to develop in the OTA is sufficient to over-ride the public interest in National Parks. Its internal decision-making process has handicapped it from examining fully the alternatives. The rigorous examination of need and alternatives required by PPG7 is further compromised by the MoD tying the two weapons systems together, when the training requirements are different. The application further fails the PPG7 test by not proposing measures that would adequately mitigate the impacts of the major development in such a sensitive area. (NPC/P/1, p. 48)

The MoD produced two counter-arguments to these assertions. The first was to argue against the idea of a ‘Silkin Test’ incorporated in the assessments to
be made in PPG7. ‘They do not require development to be demonstrated to be ‘absolutely’ necessary in the public interest’ (MoD/R/12/4, p.18). The planning consultant went on to cite an inquiry into a proposed holiday village in Kent, where the Inspector had argued that the Silkin Test did not appear in PPG7, and that the correct interpretation of PPG7 should be on ‘what is explicitly stated’. Accordingly, the MoD argued that PPG7 contained clear guidance ‘that major development proposals which are national in character can go ahead in National Parks’ provided, of course, that they were examined rigorously, were demonstrably in the public interest and properly assessed. For the opposition, this was insufficient; PPG7 contained a significant presumption against major development in a National Park:

The long tradition of National Park policy from the Dower report up to the recent Parliamentary debates on the Environment Act make it absolutely clear that this substantial presumption exists precisely because the National Park designation is afforded the highest status of protection for landscape and scenic beauty.

To overcome that presumption, it must be shown that “exceptional circumstances” prevail. It is not enough, as Mr Joyce [the Planning consultant] seeks to do, to assert that anything which overcomes the “needs and alternatives” test [...] rebuts the presumption and becomes, by definition, “exceptional”.

We say that the test goes one stage further; and that the absence of a definition of “exceptional circumstances” is unsurprising because, by their very nature, such circumstances cannot be foreseen or described until they arise. Certainly, we say, that a development such as this - which Colonel Cross [Range Officer, OTA] described as reflecting the “normal rhythm and
pattern of use at a major training area” - cannot be considered exceptional. (I/NPC/87, pp.10-11)

The Northumberland County Council pursued a different line of argument, instead arguing that the developments were highly exceptional. Other considerations, as well as those explicitly stated in PPG7, should also be taken into account:

The PPG7 examples of considerations are directed to deal with the usual situation of individual site specific development proposals such as a quarry or a windfarm rather than a proposal such as this NoPD which is spread over a wide geographical area with consequences which have a wider impact including noise, vehicle movements and further increases in the live firing area from which the public is excluded periodically. (NPC/P/1, p.24)

For Northumberland County Council, it was the unusual nature of this development that affected the way the NoPD should be interpreted within the provisions of planning policy guidance. PPG7 states that major developments should be demonstrated to be in the public interest, and that consideration of applications should normally include an assessment of the need for a development and alternatives to it. For the County Council’s witness on planning matters,

I take PPG7 and conclude that it includes the word ‘include’. Because of the unusual nature of the NoPD, and the abnormal consequences, it is relevant to look at other matters. This is allowed for by the word “include” in 4.5. (OPI, 13th June 1997)
For NCC/NNPA, other matters included, for example, the question as to whether the development would have a net adverse effect on the landscape. The witness on planning matters was questioned closely on this issue by Counsel for the MoD:

Q: Where does it say that if there’s a net adverse effect, this should lead to a refusal?
A: It doesn’t say that if there’s a net adverse effect, then there must be refusal. But clearly a net adverse effect in a National Park must weigh heavily. It’s my interpretation of guidance.
Q: So it doesn’t say ‘no net intensification of activity’.
A: Doesn’t say that.

(OPI 13th June 1997)

This interchange illustrates two opposing interpretations quite clearly, with the MoD Counsel arguing that PPG7 should be interpreted literally, versus a local authority arguing that guidance such as PPG7 is there for interpretation.

Furthermore for the NCC/NNPA as local planning authority, the need for the development had to be proven, rather than taken merely as a statement of fact. One argument made was that in the absence of an independent national review of army training requirements, the principle of need for the development had not been demonstrated (NCC/P/1, p.28), an argument also made by the Council for National Parks, the UK Centre for Environmental and Economic Development, the Countryside Commission, the National Parks Review Panel and the House of Commons Defence Committee (NPC/P/1, p.38). The issue of a review of training needs was one the MoD
was very reluctant to bring in to the debate on the needs for the Otterburn developments:

There is no suggestion in PPG7 that the assessment of whether there is a need for a proposed development which it is in the public interest to meet should require an independent national review of requirements. There is a difference between assessing whether there is a need for a proposed development which it is in the public interest to meet, i.e. carrying out a PPG7 assessment, and a national review of the nations needs. (MoD/R/12/1, p.22)

The question of proof of need was a fundamental one. The MoD was also faced with a considerable amount of cross-examination from the NCC/NNPA and CNP Consortium who tried to demonstrate that the MoD had not shown sufficient proof that there was a recognised need for the development and an absence of alternatives. For the MoD, the sheer weight and detail of its evidence to the OPI was demonstration enough of proven needs and a lack of alternatives. The MoD’s planning consultant referred twice to the ‘considerable volume of material’ available, such as the NoPD and supporting documentation, the core documents, proofs of evidence and supporting information, additional documentation submitted to the Inquiry, evidence given in cross-examination and rebuttal proofs of evidence, stating that:

[...] there is no reason why the Secretary of State cannot properly assess the NoPD proposals on the basis of this substantial volume of information.

This considerable volume of material is more than enough to enable the assessments set out in PPG7 to be made. (MoD/R/12/1, p.23; MoD/R/12/4, p.19)
Not so, said the CNP Consortium in their concluding statement. The rigorous examination of the issues required by PPG7 had not been met. The quality of information presented by the MoD was inadequate, not least because, for the CNP Consortium, the MoD had been less than helpful in supplying relevant information.

We [...] have been left to play something of a ‘cat and mouse’ game with the Ministry of Defence in order to obtain information upon which to assess the MoD’s arguments. This has not been the usual Inquiry scenario where (at least in theory) all the parties have access to all the information. Here, the MOD has taken advantage of its special position and has kept its information close to its chest. The process of “clarification questions” has helped [...] but one needs to know what questions to ask. And while the MOD has (generally) answered the actual questions asked, its answers have rarely enabled a proper assessment of the correctness of its overall assertions. (I/NPC/87, p. 12)

An example was given to substantiate the CNP Consortium’s argument that the need for the development had not been proven because of inadequate information:

[...] in making its case that its training lands are fully utilised, the MOD placed great reliance on the Land Reconciliation Study [an internal MoD review of military training land requirements]. You will recall that we sought access to that study from an early pre-inquiry meeting. It has been consistently refused. Thus, through cross-examination we probed the analysis which was undertaken in the Land Reconciliation Study. In doing so, we had to make various assumptions because the Study was not available. In reply, Colonel Carter told us our assumptions were wrong and that, on proper information, our conclusions were therefore flawed. He
provided more, but still partial, information. We therefore took the exercise one stage further based upon this new information. He then informed us that we had made yet more incorrect assumptions and gave us yet more partial information. That process could have gone on forever, but time ran out. The exchange shows that, because of the approach adopted by the MOD, it has not been possible to subject the MOD’s case to the “rigorous examination” required by PPG7. It certainly cannot be claimed, on the basis of the information before the Inquiry, that the Land Reconciliation Study supports the case on ‘need’ that the MoD has presented. (I/NPC/87, p.12, emphases in original)

Counsel for the Northumberland County Council and National Park Authority raised a similar objection to MoD claims to have met the provisions of PPG7, claiming that they had neither the resources or ‘sufficient access to relevant information and documents to subject the project to the scrutiny to which a civil project would be exposed’ (I/NCC/ p.34). According to the NCC/NNPA, the MoD team had placed much reliance on material peculiarly within their own knowledge, such as classified documents and much, therefore, depended upon the amount of trust in the reliability of MoD statements to the Inquiry. The NCC/NNPA went on to claim that MoD statements were ‘seriously misleading on important matters’ with, for example, a failure to produce references to important pages and paragraphs supporting major parts of the MoD’s case. This:

strongly indicates that the MoD case is based upon an interpretation of the classified documents rather than upon any clear statement within them which supports the MoD’s case. (I/NCC/36, p.35)
In conclusion, in opposing the development proposals, the two main opposition groups faced a peculiar difficulty. They did not (and perhaps could not) oppose the principle of the use of the OTA for military training, but did oppose the idea of further development and possible intensification of that military use. Direct confrontation on the function of Otterburn was avoided; and although other functions (primarily recreational) were promoted, the central purpose of the OTA remained beyond dispute. A more oblique oppositional strategy was therefore required. In this, the question of the need for the developments became central, with the NCC/NNPA and the CNP Consortium both attempting to undermine the MoD’s argument by pointing to the proof of need required by Planning Policy Guidance, and arguing that need for artillery training of the type proposed had not been sufficiently demonstrated. In this argument, public interest in this case was defined as the need for protection of landscapes with high levels of statutory protection. This countered MoD arguments that it served the public interest both through the provision of training for national security needs, and through the protection of landscapes and the environment through compatible conservation practices. In the following and concluding chapter, I look at this how discourses of national security operated at the OPI, consolidating the MoD’s case and shaping the ways in which oppositional arguments were developed in response.
CHAPTER 6  CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this concluding chapter, I draw together some of the arguments presented during the examination of the empirical material to argue that a reading of the discourses which informed the portrayal of Otterburn can be understood with reference to a powerful discourse of national security and military capacity which ultimately underpinned the whole Otterburn debate. I argue that this warrants discussion because of its power in shaping the arguments for the development, or otherwise, of the OTA for artillery training.

As I stated in the introduction, this report is not an adjudication of the rights or wrongs of any one case put forward at the OPI. This would be a fascinating and weighty matter for research. The skill, knowledge and expertise available to each party at the Inquiry produced an enormous amount of documentation and supporting oral evidence on a range of arguments, such as whether Salisbury Plain Training Area really could be used for MLRS training, the extent to which military training activities did or did not impinge upon access to the OTA and its wider area by walkers, and whether or not the M28 rockets used in training with the MLRS produced a toxic efflux which would endanger people and wildlife in the vicinity of its firing position. These and other arguments were debated in order to establish one way or another their validity and the veracity and accuracy of the data used in their support. Needless to say, at the close of the Inquiry, all the participants and observers seemed united in the view that none of us envied the Inspector his task of mediating between these competing claims. The intention of doing likewise was not my purpose in
attending the Inquiry. Rather, the research was prompted by my interest in the ways in which the arguments between competing land uses were constructed, the portrayals of place, space and landscape which such arguments produced, the origins of such portrayals and ultimately the political purposes which they served. The rich cultural geography and rural studies literature on the shape and purpose of constructions of place, space and landscape provided a theoretical framework for the exploration of the complex material emanating from the OPI.

This report presents the results of that study, and views the OPI as an example of a contest between competing portrayals of space and place by different organisations to different ends. The methodology used is an interpretative one assessing the purpose of arguments as opposed to a more positivistic assessment of their validity. The intention of an interpretative methodology is to tease out the form and function of portrayals and the arguments which produced them, assess their power as discursive constructions and examine how such discourses operate. This is what I have done with the material on Otterburn.

In Chapter 3, I examined the way in which different historical narratives contributed to discourses which supported competing interpretations of the function of Otterburn. For the MoD, the portrayal of OTA as a military training area was rooted in a narrative which presented the Otterburn area historically as a military location. For the CNP Consortium, a different history emphasising the multiple uses of this land and their remaining imprint contributed towards a moral discourse which portrayed land as a
universal, shared resource in which no activity, human or otherwise, should ultimately take precedence. For the NCC/NNPA, a more pragmatic discourse of land management informed a history which stressed the needs for mediation between competing land use claims.

In Chapter 4, I went on to look at how each main party at the Inquiry portrayed the landscape of the OTA. A functionalist discourse drawn upon by the MoD emphasised a pragmatic approach to the description of a (military) landscape. This was countered by portrayals by the CNP Consortium which emphasised the scarcity of such relict landscapes and the moral imperative for their protection, a line of argument pursued in NCC/NNPA evidence as well.

In Chapter 5, I examined how these portrayals were underpinned by arguments on the use and function of Otterburn, where managerialist and environmentalist discourses collided. I then went on to discuss the strategies used by the two main opposition parties to provide arguments drawing on discourses of public interest, and suggested that this was a strategy to counter seemingly unassailable claims by the MoD on their right to use the OTA for military training.

This report, then, represents the OPI as a struggle between competing discourses, where different frameworks for the interpretation of social life intersect and conflict during a debate about the future of a particular place. I could just leave it at that, were it not for the point that the significant issue in the study of the discursive nature of social life is the ways in which different
discourses support particular political interests and the configuration of certain sets of social relations, at the expense of others (Pratt, 1996). A complete exposition or ‘archaeology’ of the discourses abounding at the OPI is beyond the scope of the research reported here. However, in the remainder of this chapter I explore one area where further investigation would be warranted by suggesting that a powerful and widely-shared discourse about military capacity informs both the structure of the OPI arguments outlined here and the wider political context in which the future of the OTA will be ultimately decided.

At the heart of the OPI sat a silence. War was rarely referred to. When references were made to the primary purpose of the AS90 and MLRS they seemed rather shocking, and perhaps brutally out of place in the pastel shades of the Wansbeck suite of the Moat House Hotel where the OPI took place. One of the most startling examples came from the evidence to the Inquiry of Bill Short, a local resident arguing against the developments on the grounds that the toxicity and noise levels of the MLRS practice rocket had not been fully assessed. In making his case, he showed a manufacturer’s video of the MLRS in action. The video, entitled *MLRS: The Force Multiplier*, left observers in little doubt as to the destructive potential of this artillery system (OPI, 7th October 1997). It was one of the few reminders as to why we were all there in the first place.

One reason for this silence lies with the nature of the inquiry process. Public inquiries are perhaps not necessarily occasions for the discussion of environmental policy issues because of the constraints of the structure of
such encounters, with their emphasis on local practicalities, their adversarial nature and the costs of participation (Rydin, 1993). And as Doxford and Savege have argued with reference to Otterburn, a public inquiry would offer an inappropriate framework for the discussion of the two core issues, the MoD’s allocation and use of training lands, and the role of the MoD within National Parks (Doxford and Savege, 1995). However, as I have argued in this report, in many ways the OPI was of great significance. One of these points of significance concerns the conclusions we can draw on our attitudes to warfare and militarism from the debate over the future of the Otterburn Training Area. It is to this which I now turn.

The silence about war and violence was perhaps the outcome of the ways in which the debate was framed by the Ministry of Defence. In his opening statement, Counsel for the MoD began by removing the issue of the need for the developments from the scope of debate. After describing the characteristics of the AS90 and MLRS (‘they are formidable weapons’) he went on to argue for the need to train soldiers in their use:

We do not expect anyone to deny this nor do we expect it to become an issue, because failure to be properly trained in the use of these weapons means greater difficulties in succeeding in military conflict objectives and more casualties. The proposals now being put forward, for consideration at this Inquiry, are to enable those who use, and will use, these weapons to be fully and properly trained with the weapons and to be at required readiness states. So we say that the development proposals are of the highest national importance and self evidently in the public interest. I say that this is beyond argument. (I/MoD/1, p.2)
One response to this statement could be that ‘they would say that, wouldn’t they?’, and to leave it at that. But a discussion of this discursive silence about warfare and militarism is crucial, because it points to the power of one particular discourse which underpins the portrayals of place and space that have been discussed here.

The work of Martin Shaw on the relationships between military institutions, military culture and social relations, is helpful here (Shaw, 1991). As part of a wider analysis of what he terms ‘post-military society’, Shaw describes militarism in contemporary British culture in terms of a ‘national military myth’. The central tenets of this are an ideology and imagery of totalitarian threat; a belief that appeasement of such threats is morally wrong; and the notion that military strength is the foundation of national security (Shaw, 1991). These ideas, he argues, constitute a sustaining myth about British defence and military activity, a myth in the sense of an explanatory narrative embodying popular ideas about social phenomena, rather than as a fictional story. This myth about British militarism, Shaw argues, is central to ideas about defence and security needs, and is a central feature of the political culture (in which the MoD, as a state institution, is central). He argues that this national military myth also contributes to an ideology and discourse about military matters which is both resilient to removal and adaptable to change (p.119).

The tenets of Shaw’s national military myth were identifiable at the OPI on the rare occasions that issues of military capacity and ability were raised. For example, the notion of military strength as the basis for national security
was used to refute arguments that the need for the NoPD developments had not been demonstrated:

    The goal of British security policy is to maintain the freedom and territorial integrity of the United Kingdom and its dependent territories, and the ability to pursue its legitimate interests at home and abroad. Key to this is deterrence which depends not only upon the perception of the nation’s political will to respond to a threat, but on other factors, including forces which are perceived to be effective and capable of preventing a potential adversary from achieving his strategic objectives. To be perceived to have a highly trained, well motivated and operationally ready army is an important part of that deterrence. (I/MoD/107)

The resilience and adaptability of this national military myth is also applicable. An example might be the shifts in the portrayal of the function of Otterburn to include discourses of conservation, as discussed in Chapter 5.

A key point about this national military myth is its salience. This may be contentious, but I would argue that the majority of the participants at the Inquiry shared very similar views on the role of the military national security policies. For although some used language to emphasise a different world-view to the MoD¹¹ in fact the official statements from the two main opposition groups tended to endorse the idea that national security and defence needs, expressed through military strength, were unassailable. For example, in their closing statements, Counsels for the NCC/NNPA and CNP Consortium respectively, took pains to express their clients’ support for the
work of the armed forces (I/NCC/36, I/NPC/87). Individual witnesses, when questioned on the need for a trained army, mostly agreed on its importance. Opposition to the very issue of the militarisation of the countryside was, for the most part, absent.

My argument is that Shaw’s ‘national military myth’ is a powerful discourse. It is a discourse in that it can be interpreted as a system of concepts which gives meanings to the social world, in this instance the role of the armed forces and the priorities we give them in our society. It is powerful for the following reasons. It is of fundamental importance at Otterburn because it shaped the ways in which the history, form and function of that place were expressed, by its owners, and the ways in which alternative views were expressed by other social groups (the local authority, or amenity societies). It is powerful because it was difficult to overturn, so much so that at the OPI opponents of the scheme did not attempt to do so. It is powerful because it shifted Otterburn from being a corner of remote, windswept Northumberland to being a central element in the UK’s national security strategy. It is powerful in that it shaped the discourses which provided support for the arguments discussed in this paper on, for example, the environmentally benign nature of military training (see also Woodward, forthcoming), or on the minimal visual impact of the NoPD developments on human visitors, constructed with reference to this discourse as a price worth paying in the pursuit of military security goals. And ultimately it is powerful because it will undoubtedly influence the decision of the Secretary of State for Transport, Environment and the Regions to permit the developments, a

13 Counsel for the NCC/NNPA started his questions in clarification to the MoD by talking of ‘Ohtah’and
decision which at the time of writing has yet to be made. We are so wrapped up in the notion of the unassailable importance of military strength that the case to allow the developments to proceed appears unanswerable.

‘Mewlars’ rather than OTA and MLRS; a deliberate slip of the tongue? (OPI, 22nd April 1997)
APPENDIX A:  METHODOLOGY

This commentary on the OPI stands not only as a contribution to the debate on military training in National Parks but also as a contribution to current debates about the social construction of rural space, and the methodologies most suited to such inquiry. Recent debates on the social construction of rurality have stressed the insights that can be drawn through the use of interpretative methodologies which focus on the operation of discourses in the construction of social activity (Halfacree, 1993; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993, 1994). These debates also stress that such an approach should properly focus on the operation of power and its effects on social relations. Thus, it is insufficient, for example, to merely describe the features of a set of statements (a discourse) about something (such as military training in rural areas); the power relations which operate through the deployment of discourses are also a legitimate focus (Pratt, 1996). The analysis of discourses requires close attention to language, for it is through language that ideas are expressed and conveyed.

This report is not an adjudication of the rights or wrongs of any particular case presented at the public inquiry. Nor do I attempt to promote any particular views as to whether the developments should proceed or not as more valid than others. What I have set out to do is to illustrate the arguments made by the main parties at the OPI, and to show how the claims of one side were countered by another, reconstructing the dialogue between the various parties. This reconstructed dialogue is not recorded chronologically; some of the arguments discussed in this report took place
over a period of months. The intention has been to show how they unfold, and to indicate their nature, rather than to present a blow-by-blow account of debates. Mostly, I have reconstructed these dialogues with reference to the documentation presented at the Inquiry (proofs of evidence, rebuttal evidence, Inquiry documents and core documents). I have also drawn heavily, in the interpretation of this evidence, from the questions of clarification put to witnesses, and their cross-examination. Where I use oral evidence in this report, through a literal reconstruction of dialogue, I have tried to be as accurate as my hand-written notes will allow (as I did not tape-record the proceedings).

A public inquiry over six months inevitably generated a vast amount of information. I have been extremely selective here in the topics chosen for discussion, and would not wish to give the impression that debates over the history, landscape and use of the OTA were the only issues. Topics discussed at the Inquiry and not dealt with here include: the provision of alternative training facilities for MLRS and AS90 at Salisbury Plan and Sennybridge Training Areas and at BATUS (Canada); noise and vibration from shell and rocket firing; moderation of adverse effects of the development; access and rights-of-way; transportation of convoys of artillery and the effect on highways; MLRS toxicity and pollution; procedures for Environmental Impact Assessments; tranquillity mapping. Any apparent emphasis in this report on the MoD case is a reflection of the procedure of public inquiries, where the developer presents the case and thus sets the agenda for debate, and also a reflection of the far greater amount of documentation produced by the MoD than other parties at the Inquiry.
The view from where I sat at the back of the Inquiry room was a peculiar one. I saw the faces of those giving evidence, and the backs of everyone else. I am not sure whether this is a metaphor for my involvement at the Inquiry. I neither sought, nor was granted, involvement with any of the parties at the Inquiry, and this account is partial in that respect. Because I did not have privileged inside information on the production of the arguments put forward at the Inquiry, there are obviously limits to the claims I can make about their purposes. I make this point to stress that this report is a critical interpretation of the debate over the OTA, rather than a definitive statement on the rights or wrongs of any one case.
APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL WITNESSES TO THE OTTERBURN PUBLIC INQUIRY

For the Ministry of Defence

Counsel for MoD: Nigel McLeod QC, with C Katkowski and L McDonald
Lt Col J Carter (UK army training requirements: MoD/P/1)
Lt Col J Bleasdale (AS90 and MLRS Training Requirements: MoD/P/2)
Mr K Trew (RPS Clouston) (Landscape and visual impact: MoD/P/3)
Mr R Manners (Defence Estate Organisation) (Estate management: MoD/P/4)
Lt Col (Rtd) R Cross (The level and pattern of training at Otterburn: MoD/P/5)
Mr R Evans (RPS Clouston) (Moderation of adverse effects: MoD/P/6)
Dr K Jones (RPS Clouston) (Nature conservation: MoD/P/7)
Mr D Freke (RPS Clouston) (Cultural heritage: MoD/P/8)
Mr P Harney (White Young Consulting Group) (Highways and engineering: MoD/P/9)
Mr G Parry (RPS Clouston) (Noise and vibration: MoD/P/10)
Mr P Smith (Frank Graham and Partners) (Salisbury Plain Training Area: MoD/P/11)
Mr R Joyce (Drivers Jonas) (Planning: MoD/P/12)
Dr I Vince (AGEL-CBI) (Modelling of M28 Rocket efflux dispersion: MoD/R/13/8)
Prof J Bridges (University of Surrey) (M28 rocket efflux products: MoD/R/14/8)
A number of rebuttal proofs were also produced by the above witnesses, dealing with the points raised by the witnesses below.

**For the Northumberland County Council and National Park Authority**
Counsel for NCC/NPA: Robert McCracken
Mr G Halliday (Assistant County Planning and Environment Manager, Northumberland County Council) (Planning and related issues: NCC/P/1)
Mr T Carroll (Deputy National Park Officer, Northumberland National Park Authority) (National Park and related issues: NCC/P/2)
Mr M Forsdyke (AcousticAir) (Noise and Vibration: NCC/P/3)
Mr H Collis (Ove Arup and Partners) (Highways: NCC/P/4)

Also inquiry documents I/NCC/1 - 37

**For the Council for National Parks Consortium**
Ms V Elcoate (Council for National Parks) (National Parks and related issues: NPC/P/1 and supplements)
Dr A Lunn (Council for National Parks) (National parks and environmental issues: NPC/P/1a and supplements)
Mr T Pollard (Ramblers’ Association) (Access and related issues: NPC/P/2)
Mr G Coggins (Northumberland and Newcastle Society) (Environmental impact, mitigation and related issues: NPC/P/3)

Dr D Gardner-Medwin (Natural History Society of Northumbria) (Environmental impact, conservation and related issues: NPC/P/5 and supplements)

Mr T Hardy (Association of Voluntary Countryside Wardens) (Access and related issues: NPC/P/6)

Dr K Ashby (Youth Hostels Association (Access and related issues: NPC/P/7)

Mr W Sheate (for Council for the Protection of Rural England) (Environmental impact assessment, decision-making process and related issues: NPC/P/8)

Mr J Lewis (CPRE Northumberland Branch) (environmental impact and related issues: NPC/P/9)

Also inquiry documents I/NPC/1 - 87

For the Northumberland County Lifeline Group

Mr W Short on MLRS toxicity, noise and vibration.

Mr J Carter on traffic and highways issues.

For the Highways Agency

Mr P Morris
A number of shorter proofs were also submitted by members of the public.
REFERENCES


Hansard (1994g) House of Commons Written Answers: Military Training. 


I/MoD/107 Memorandum to Inquiry from MoD on Source Papers (Unclassified) on Military Training. OPI document, presented 3rd June 1997.


Ministry of Defence and Northumberland National Park (undated)

Otterburn Training Area: Public Access Guide. Northumberland: MoD and NNP.


MoD/R/4/1 Rebuttal evidence to OPI of Robert Manners, OTA Estate Manager, on Recreation, Local Community, Farming and Cumulative Development.

MoD/R/7/1 Rebuttal evidence to OPI of Keith Jones on Nature Conservation, to evidence of Northumberland County Council.
MoD/R/7/4  Rebuttal evidence of Keith Jones on Nature Conservation, to the National Park Consortium.

MoD/R/12/1  Rebuttal Evidence to OPI of Rory Joyce on Planning and Moderation of Adverse Effects, to the Northumberland County Council.

MoD/R/12/4  Rebuttal Evidence to the OPI of Rory Joyce on Planning, to the National Park Consortium.


NCC/P/2  Proof of Evidence of Terence Carroll, Northumberland County Council, to the Otterburn Public Inquiry.  Presented 8th July 1997. Inquiry Document


