



## Natural England's Position on All Landscapes Matter

### Purpose

All Landscapes Matter sets out the position that Natural England will adopt when addressing the conservation and enhancement of England's landscape. It sets out how we will consider and work with landscapes everywhere, at all scales and in all contexts. We will apply these principles set out in this position to our own work and advocate and advise how they can be applied to guide and influence the policies and work of others.

All Landscapes Matter should be read in the broader context of Natural England's overarching landscape position (February 2008). It also forms part of a suite of detailed landscape positions that address:

- Future Landscapes;
- Protected Landscapes; and
- The Historic Environment.

Relevant linkages to these are highlighted. All Landscapes Matter also integrates with other interests, in particular our emerging positions for more sustainable agriculture, spatial planning, biodiversity and ecosystem services.

### Context

Landscapes throughout England are the result of the action and interaction of natural (geodiversity, climate and biodiversity) and cultural influences (historical and current land uses, settlement patterns and human interventions). People's perceptions are an inherent part of how landscape and its character and qualities are experienced and valued.

Landscapes provide both the physical setting for everyday life, habitats for nature and wildlife as well as affecting the well being and quality of life of individuals and society as a whole. They are important expressions of the relationship between people and place, of our cultural and natural heritage and our identity. People's experience and enjoyment of the natural environment is strongly influenced by the landscape setting.

Our landscapes include urban, rural and coastal areas, and, where they extend out from our coasts into the marine environment, seascapes. This position covers all these areas.

The character, quality and condition of our landscapes is influenced by natural forces, such as climate change, as well as agriculture and land use, resource management and development in response to society's needs and demands. The operation of the spatial planning system and the policy and regulatory frameworks governing land management and use of the sea, are key mechanisms for enabling the positive conservation and enhancement of our landscapes.

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is another key driver. The ELC is the first international treaty devoted exclusively to the management, protection and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It underlines that landscape forms a whole, whose natural and cultural components should be considered together, not separately. It seeks to maintain and improve landscape quality everywhere and bring the public, institutions

and local and regional authorities to recognise the value and importance of landscape and to take part in related public decisions.

The Government has signed up to the Convention, which came into effect in the UK in March 2007. It aims to embed further the Convention's intent and measures within UK policy reviews and through the ongoing practical management of landscapes. The Government's signing of the ELC demonstrates that England's landscapes matter for the health, wealth and well-being of society, for our cultural identity and for the diverse habitats that exist as part of them.

The ELC proposes that the management, protection and planning<sup>1</sup> of landscapes "must become a mainstream political concern", entailing rights and responsibilities for everyone, not just governments. It states that the importance, qualities and functions of all landscape should be further integrated into spatial planning and land management sectors as well as other sectoral policies. It also states that landscape provides a spatial framework, applicable at different geographic scales, where ecology, landscape character, cultural and aesthetic values, and the ecosystem goods and services that landscapes provide, can be brought together and support an integrated approach to decision making.

The ELC implementation guidelines, prepared by the Council of Europe, presupposes that a transition in policy needs to take place from one focusing on 'outstanding' areas to one that focuses on 'the quality of all living surroundings'. The development of landscape character approaches over the last 20 years in England has helped move towards to this broader objective.

Natural England is leading on the implementation of the ELC in England. An implementation framework has been prepared with Defra & English Heritage to guide the development of Action Plans by other stakeholders and organisations. Natural England has prepared its own ELC Action Plan to embed the Convention's measures through its own work and through others.

## Issues

The State of the Natural Environment (Natural England, 2008) demonstrated that the natural environment, particularly those landscapes and the habitats that form part of them that sit outside protected areas/landscapes, are increasingly under many pressures. Research published by Natural England into changes in the English landscape between 1999 - 2003 identified that, of England's 159 Character Areas, 10 % had been enhanced and 51% maintained; 20% were judged to be neglected and 19% were diverging with new landscape characteristics emerging.

Our landscapes face changes not only from natural systems and processes but also in response to society's needs for food, housing, energy, recreation and the development of the economy. The drivers of these changes, and their consequences, are further explored in our Future Landscapes position.

Natural England is committed to a future where all England's landscapes are managed sustainably and are highly valued, distinctive expressions of local identity. Equally, we recognise there is an increasing shift in policy for landscapes to be planned and managed to deliver a range of ecosystem goods and services.

Our response to the changes facing English landscapes, including their adaptation to and mitigation of climate change will need to consider both their landscape character and the ecosystem goods and services they provide. This will increasingly require a

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<sup>1</sup> These management actions are used throughout the policy to be consistent with ELC definitions. *Landscape management* – means action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes. *Landscape protection* – means actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity. *Landscape planning* – means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.

multi-functional approach to how landscapes everywhere are planned and managed. The success of this approach will rely on the actions of those who own and manage land and those whose indirect activities influence the character and function of landscape.

Putting the all landscapes matter principle into practice will require a much better understanding of the diverse ways in which different landscapes matter, as well as to whom they matter and why.

## Positions

### 1. Landscape Management, Planning and Protection

**All landscapes matter. They should be managed, planned and protected to be distinctive, highly valued and provide a range of ecosystem services.**

All landscapes matter to someone in some way. The character, quality and functions of landscapes can affect our quality of life and the natural environment systems that exist as part of them. We want all landscapes, whether rural, urban, coastal and outwards to sea, whether outstanding, ordinary, degraded or nationally designated, to be managed, planned, and, where appropriate, protected for their landscape character, their diverse contribution to quality of life, and the range of ecosystem goods and services they can provide. Landscape management, planning and protection are not necessarily mutually exclusive actions and a combination of all actions could be appropriate across one given landscape area. Achieving this requires the natural, cultural and functional components of landscapes to be considered as a whole. Natural England will reflect this holistic approach through our own work and in our advice to Government, other public bodies and stakeholders, when dealing with national consultations, and where we engage in regional and local casework.

By advocating all landscapes matter Natural England recognises within this principle that our finest landscapes (those designated as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) should continue to be afforded the highest levels of protection. We can learn from the management of designated landscapes and apply approaches and good practice to other landscapes in England. Our Protected Landscapes position focuses further on the role of these designations.

## Evidence

The ELC defines landscape as *'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'*. This underlines that landscape is holistic and should be understood on that basis. Explanatory notes to the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 also make clear that the consideration of landscape by Natural England will include its aesthetic, cultural, geological and historic aspects as well as its habitats.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment demonstrates that the 'actions and interactions' that contribute to the shaping of our landscapes provide a range of benefits to society. These benefits are derived from physical processes in the landscape as well as in the form of cultural services (the perceptual, educational and experiential qualities) that are important to people's quality of life. Natural England's Ecosystems Services position sets out further detail.

There is growing evidence of the positive benefits provided by multi-functional landscapes. Research has also demonstrated the positive links between landscape, locational decisions and settings for economic investment. There is also evidence of social and emotional benefits associated with different experiences of the landscape and how this might influence preference and use.

## 2. Dynamic and Evolving Landscapes

**Landscapes are dynamic and constantly evolving. We need to plan and manage this change to ensure that all landscapes in the future respond to society's changing needs and values whilst retaining diversity and distinctiveness.**

Landscapes are dynamic, complex systems and have always changed in response to physical processes and human intervention. With our improved understanding of landscape systems, and our ability to forecast and model change, there is a positive opportunity to proactively plan and manage their evolution. We need to consider what society will want from future landscapes and find effective ways of guiding and influencing change (both direct and indirect) to ensure the landscapes of tomorrow fully meet our needs. We support the setting of forward-looking landscape quality objectives that help to guide what key characteristics and qualities need to be retained and enhanced as our landscapes evolve. This aim is developed further in our *Future Landscapes* position.

### Evidence

Past landscape change has generally tended to occur not in a strategically planned and intentional manner, but as society responds to the prevailing economic and social circumstances of the time. Some change has improved the quality of the natural environment, but overall, as the *State of the Natural Environment 2008* report evidences, recent landscape change has tended to result in loss of diversity, distinctiveness, tranquillity and ecological richness.

There is also a shift in policy emphasis for landscapes to increasingly deliver environmental and social outcomes, reflected in a growing interest in the provision of ecosystem goods and services, such as water storage and climate regulation. Increasing recognition of the need for and implications of sustainable development, such as the need for longer-term food and energy security could have significant landscape implications. Natural England's work to develop scenarios and a long term vision for the natural environment will provide an important context for managing and directing future landscape change.

The measures of the European Landscape Convention, includes proposals to set down landscape quality objectives for all landscapes that have been identified and assessed. Council of Europe ELC implementation guidelines indicates that such objectives "should be based on knowledge of the specific characteristics and qualities of the places concerned, and identification of their dynamics and of potential as well as of how landscape is perceived by the public".

## 3. Landscape as an Integrating Framework

**A comprehensive understanding of landscape should influence, as well as provide an integrating framework for, the management of change at a range of spatial scales and governance levels.**

An understanding of the existing qualities, character and functions of all our landscapes should provide the basic framework (spatial and temporal) through which we organise, plan and manage change, as well as help understand and recognise those existing characteristics and functions that are valued by people and provide environmental, economic and social benefits. Landscapes should guide the management and planning of our surroundings and frame policies and actions for the natural and built environment, at national, regional and local levels. Taking this approach does not mean that our landscapes should be considered as being frozen at a point in time. Instead it requires that as England's landscapes evolve they do so in ways that continue to make them distinctive as well as functional. The importance of the temporal dimension of our landscapes is dealt with further in our *Historic Environment* position.

## Evidence

Research suggests that a landscape or 'place-based' approach to delivering ecosystem goods and services has the advantage of focusing decisions on places, with landscape providing a context for understanding the interactions that exist in that place. Landscape provides a spatial framework for the integration of human and natural needs, within defined geographic spaces at different scales (from international to local) and in different contexts (from urban areas to rural and coastal). Landscapes provide their own boundaries and contexts, defined by their landscape character and/or landscape function. At different governance levels, landscapes can provide a basis for more integrated and cross-administrative boundary spatial plans, for example through Regional Single Strategies and Joint Core Strategies for Local Development Frameworks at the local level. Many Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans provide good examples of where landscape is providing an integrating framework across administrative boundaries.

### 4. Implementing the European Landscape Convention

**The intent and measures of the European Landscape Convention should be integrated more comprehensively into national, regional and local strategies, policies, processes and actions which affect England's landscapes and their enjoyment and understanding by the public.**

Whilst the UK is compliant with the ELC, there are many opportunities to further embed the intent of the Convention and strengthen and improve the way in which England's landscapes are considered and managed in the future. The all landscapes matter principle should become embedded within the full range of national, regional and local sectoral policies that have a direct and indirect influence on landscapes. In particular the implementation of the ELC should be used to improve how a landscape dimension and landscape quality objectives are integrated into spatial planning, land use and resource management policy. Natural England will champion the implementation of the ELC in England on behalf of Government and will advise and guide other stakeholders and policy-makers on how aims of the ELC can be integrated into their work.

## Evidence

Research by Newcastle University for Natural England has provided evidence of the degree to which landscape is reflected in current legislation and strategies and policies at the national and regional level. Key findings include a requirement for the greater recognition of natural, cultural and functional aspects of landscape; that the 'intent' of the ELC is not clearly or fully embedded; and the need for greater consistency in landscape terminology. The consideration of landscape, particularly in spatial planning, has until quite recently, been treated as a sectoral or specialist interest. Landscape and spatial planning processes are now becoming better interconnected, particularly at a local level through Local Development Frameworks.

Landscape has much greater potential to inform and help shape spatial strategies, in particular policies and action for the natural and built environment. Landscape lends itself to guiding policies and strategies that have a spatial expression. Developing policies in a landscape context allows for an evaluation of how changes in agricultural policy and practice and climate may provide opportunities for adaptation, whilst understanding impacts on key landscape characteristics and services.

## 5. Valuing Landscape

**How and why society values landscape needs to be better captured, translated and fully represented in decision-making. The public should have greater involvement in the management, planning and protection of landscapes, so that as landscapes evolve they continue to exhibit the characteristics and functions that society values, and reinforce connections between people, place and local identity.**

People value landscape in different ways and in different places at different times, for different reasons. Sometimes these values are less tangible and do not always lend themselves easily to quantifiable valuation techniques. To fully represent these values, we need better ways of capturing and presenting this information, whilst reflecting the wider services and benefits that landscapes bring to society. It is recognised that Local Landscape Designations have been used to provide additional protection to areas which are deemed to be highly valued outside of national designations. Criteria based policies, based on an assessment of landscape character, sensitivity and capacity should provide the basis for landscape planning and management, with local designations retained only where it can be shown that criteria based policies are insufficient.

Local landscapes will often act as a gateway for people's interest in, and understanding and enjoyment of, the wider natural environment. Local landscapes contribute significantly to sense of place and a sense of local distinctiveness, and people are often most aware of change at this scale. We will proactively encourage community planning and other participatory approaches for the public to articulate and share their perceptions of landscape. The public should be supported to have a greater and more inclusive role in the management, protection and planning of local landscapes, and to understand the context of global issues and pressures (such as climate change) that face those landscapes.

### Evidence

Most people tend to value landscape as the whole experience, rather than in relation to its component parts. How people experience landscape can also affect the way they value them. Methods that focus on how people relate to individual components or features can help make the case for specific landscape elements, but overlook information about overall landscape value and the qualities, such as openness and naturalness that combine to make a place distinctive.

Research in the landscape and heritage sectors have shown the need for alternative ways of capturing public value through qualitative analysis that can sit alongside quantitative models, and the benefits of doing so. Local level projects are also demonstrating how a framework to guide the future development and management of landscape that positively engages with the public can be achieved. Other studies have shown the value of community involvement in understanding and recognising the role that landscape has in local identity, through emphasising the relationship of people and place.

## 6. Landscape, Design & Development

**Good design is a key factor in the management, protection and planning of landscapes. Positive benefits through landscape enhancement should be sought through the design of development and infrastructure.**

The design of new development and infrastructure should respond to and aim to enhance the character and local distinctiveness of the surrounding natural and built environment; use natural resources more sustainably; and bring benefits for the local community, for example through green space provision and access to and contact with nature. It should avoid any unacceptable impacts on landscape character and

function. Landscape characterisation and townscape assessments, and associated sensitivity and capacity assessments, should be used to guide the preparation of spatial strategies and provide a tool for planners and developers to consider new development and ensure that it makes a positive contribution in terms of design, form and location, to the character and functions of the landscape.

Whilst the focus of this position is landscape, there are clear connections through landscape-led design for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity and the provision of green infrastructure. Opportunities to provide positive benefits through landscape planning and enhancement should be guided by the setting of landscape quality objectives and delivered, for example via green infrastructure strategies and urban design and landscape design frameworks.

## **Evidence**

Government planning policy emphasises the value of good design in the successful delivery of sustainable settlements and communities. Assessment of landscape (and townscape) character is recommended as a basis upon which design principles and guidelines can be prepared for development and infrastructure. Designing with landscape and the natural environment as cues for more integrated landscape character-led and ecologically based development has been a principle that has been embedded through iconic works such as ‘Design with Nature’ by Mc Harg (1969).

More recently, the importance of designing with local context and distinctiveness in mind forms one of the principles of ‘By Design’ (DETR/CABE, 2000). Integrating both landscape and biodiversity into the design of sustainable communities is the basis of guidance by the Town & Country Planning Association (2004). The recent ‘place-shaping’ agenda for local Government includes the need for ‘building & creating local identity’ and creating places that respond to local circumstances (including its environmental characteristics).

## **7. European and International Context**

**The management, planning and protection of England’s landscapes should recognise their European and international context. Further opportunities should be taken to learn from and contribute to European and international measures, policies and initiatives.**

England’s landscapes should be recognised and promoted in their wider European and international context, for their diversity and character, their contribution to natural and cultural heritage and the ecosystem goods and services they supply. Government should take the opportunity to engage with European and international legislation and initiatives that may directly or indirectly support the delivery of domestic landscape objectives. In particular, it should use the implementation of the ELC as the basis for closer cooperation and links with the European landscape community; to identify and share good practice; and to develop our understanding of the global drivers of change that will affect our future landscapes, such as climate change.

## **Evidence**

At the European level various policy initiatives have underlined the particular role of landscape in environmental and socio-economic development. England’s protected landscapes are classified as Category V under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas, which provides an international framework for improved understanding of landscape conservation. Other initiatives include the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (Council of Europe, UNEP and ECNC 1995); the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe 2000); the European Commission’s ‘Health Check’ of the Common Agricultural Policy (2008); and the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development adopted by the European Conference of Ministers responsible for

Regional Planning (CEMAT 2005). These policy initiatives apply to all landscapes and can influence approaches to the management, planning and protection of our landscapes domestically.

## 8. Landscape Character

**Landscape characterisation should be promoted and used to understand and describe landscapes at all scales, and to support making judgements. England's National Character Area information should be reviewed and updated to provide a geographical framework, sound evidence base and broad understanding of the variation of landscape character at the national scale.**

Understanding landscape character is key to managing change. We will encourage the development of up to date assessments of landscape character at regional and local authority scale, and support the development of landscape strategies and guidelines, linked to spatial planning policies and land management activities. Other methodologies, such as sensitivity and capacity studies and landscape and visual impact assessment, should be used to understand and aid judgements about potential change.

England's National Character Areas (formerly known as Joint Character Areas) provide the basis for understanding the characteristics and variation of England's landscapes at a national scale. Natural England will continue to promote, use and update National Character Areas to define and describe the broad variation of landscape character across the country. They will inform our targeting of Environmental Stewardship schemes to ensure they support actions that reflect the local landscape context. They will also provide context for the development of regional and sub-regional strategies and plans.

### Evidence

The focus of landscape character assessment is the classification and description of what makes one area different or distinct from another. This differs from landscape evaluation methodologies of the 1970's, which focused on evaluating why one area was 'better' than another. The landscape character assessment process provides a robust, repeatable method that separates the actual characterisation of landscape from the process of making judgements about particular landscapes. Landscape characterisation can be applied from site level to 1:250000 scale. Sixty per cent of local authorities have a landscape character assessment in place.

At the national scale, England's landscapes have been classified into 159 National Character Areas. They have been referenced widely, for example, as the geographical basis of landscape policies in Regional Spatial Strategies and were the basis of Environmental Stewardship (Higher Level Scheme) targeting statements. They have also formed the Natural England reporting framework for the analysis of change in the English landscape. Some of the information in the National Character Areas, such as forces for change, is becoming outdated and new information on provision of ecosystem services is required.

## 9. Seascape and Seascape Character

**An understanding of seascapes and seascape character should inform the integrated management, protection and planning of the marine and terrestrial environment and should guide advice at all levels.**

Natural England defines seascape as "*an area of sea, coastline and land, as perceived by people, whose character results from the actions and interactions of land with sea, by natural and/or human factors*". A better understanding of seascapes around the English coast is needed to improve understanding and appreciation of coastal and underwater landscapes -

their habitats, geomorphology and functions - and to ensure that the inter-relationships between land and sea are emphasised and valued by all.

An agreed method for seascape characterisation in England is required to produce robust, transparent and consistent baseline information (at a range of scales) on our seascape resource. This will help all stakeholders better understand, assess, plan and manage change. The advent of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill and the forthcoming Marine Spatial Planning system, implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management, Shoreline Management Plans, proposed revisions to PPS 20 and the European Landscape Convention (which applies to the 12 mile territorial waters) all offer important levers for achieving a more holistic and integrated terrestrial, coastal and marine management.

## **Evidence**

England has some of the finest marine wildlife in Europe. Dramatic underwater landscapes consist of habitats for 10,000 different plants and animals. 33% of the English seashore is defined as Heritage Coast, of which 89% falls within a National Park or AONB, and the coast and our seas provides many opportunities for high quality and diverse recreational activities.

Government's objectives for the UK marine environment (2009) confirm a commitment to *"The diversity of seascape character around our coastline will be maintained"*. Objective 2 includes the desired outcome, *"People appreciate the diversity of the marine environment, its seascapes, its natural and cultural heritage and its resources and act responsibly"*. These high level objectives will underpin the development of the Marine Policy Statement which will be applied in more detail in specific areas via marine plans.

Strategic Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Assessments and associated Seascape and Visual Impact Assessments will require sound and robust seascape character assessments (at the appropriate scale) to inform associated baseline studies.

## **10. Landscape Monitoring**

**Monitoring and understanding how the character, condition and qualities of all our landscapes are changing is needed at a national, regional and local level. Such monitoring will help inform choices and policies about the direction of our landscapes in the future.**

Landscapes are subject to many influences and forces for change over time. We need to understand how and why our landscapes are changing and evolving now, to inform decisions for the future. Natural England will use England's National Character Areas as the framework to refine and improve our evidence of changes in the character, condition and qualities of landscapes, and develop an improved monitoring system (CQuEL – the Character and Quality of English Landscapes). Monitoring of landscape change at a national level is key in helping to set out and indentify progress in achieving strategic objectives and visions for future landscapes. It will help provide the context for informing a range of land use, economic and social policies that may have a direct or indirect influence on the future shape, state and health of our landscapes.

## **Evidence**

Assessments of landscape change at the national level have been undertaken for the periods 1990-1998 and 1999-2003 (Countryside Quality Counts) using England's National Character Areas as the reporting framework. The trend across these two periods has shown that the number of character areas where there is evidence of neglect or erosion of landscape character has decreased. However, during 1999-2003 changes to 19% of character areas have brought new landscape characteristics.

Natural England scoping of existing landscape evidence has identified the need for further information on the condition of landscapes, changes in landscape character, how people's perceptions are changing, as well as whether our landscapes are functioning well. The review will identify the approaches to understanding and knowledge that should underpin our landscape evidence base, and the developments and/or refinements in methods, data capture and analysis that are required to enable us to achieve our outcomes.

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