

Natural England Board



Meeting: 13
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Paper No: **NEB PU13 05**

Title: **Natural England's Draft Policy on All Landscapes Matter**

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. This paper presents a revised draft policy for All Landscapes Matter. It builds on Natural England's overarching landscape policy (approved February 2008), and is one of four detailed landscape policies, the others address Future Landscapes, the Historic Environment, and Protected Landscapes.
- 1.2. The draft policy has been informed by the Board's discussion on the previous draft (September 2008), discussions with Board Outcome Group 1, and input from a small group of external stakeholders. Annex 1 sets out the proposed policy (summarised at 3.5).
- 1.3. Advocating that all landscapes matter does not mean that Natural England will engage in all landscape issues, everywhere.

The principles in this policy will enable us to:

- develop policy guidance setting out our priorities for how and when we will engage in landscape issues at a range of scales, from international to local, and in a range of contexts, from urban to rural;
- develop Natural England's Action Plan for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Board agrees the draft policy, prior to external stakeholder consultation. A final draft of this policy will be circulated to all Board members for comment, prior to sign off by the Chair.

3. Summary of Context for our All Landscapes Matter Policy

- 3.1. Natural England's overarching landscape policy sets out Natural England's belief that all landscapes matter. It endorses the European Landscape Convention (ELC) definition of landscape as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". It confirms our belief that an understanding of landscape character, aesthetics, systems and dynamics, and cultural heritage is an essential part of resource management and planning.

- 3.2. The ELC came into force on 1st March 2007. The UK Government has ratified the Convention and considers the UK to be compliant with the ELC's requirements, although it wishes to embed its intent further within UK policy and practice. Natural England is managing the implementation of the ELC for England, on behalf of Defra. We have developed and agreed an implementation framework with Defra to guide the development of individual stakeholder and organisation's ELC action plans. Our own action plan is being developed, to be agreed later this year.
- 3.3. A fundamental principle of the ELC is that landscapes everywhere should help guide and frame spatial planning and land management. A comprehensive understanding of landscapes, their character, ecology, cultural and aesthetic dimensions, and the ecosystem goods and services they provide, aids integrated planning and decision making.
- 3.4. The State of the Natural Environment report (May 2008) has clearly demonstrated that the natural environment, including those landscapes that exist outside protected landscapes/areas, are increasingly under pressure. Natural England is committed to a future where all England's landscapes are managed sustainably to deliver a range of ecosystem goods and services while being valued as distinctive expressions of local identity. We will need to find ways of meeting these two objectives (this is explored in more detail in the Future Landscapes policy). It does mean that putting the all landscapes matter principle into practice will require a much better understanding of why and how different landscapes matter, and to whom they matter.
- 3.5. The draft policy has been developed in discussion with stakeholders, including a working group involving English Heritage, the Forestry Commission, the National Farmers Union, ENPAA, Defra, Cabe Space, the Local Government Association and the Landscape Institute. Overall, stakeholders are supportive, welcoming a policy that reflects the ELC intent and objectives. They support the policy recognising both the human aspects of landscape, including links to quality of life, as well as promoting the benefits and services of landscapes. Their main concern relates to how the policy will be implemented, recognising that this will require intervention not just in landscape issues, but also in the processes that shape our landscapes. This embedding process will be resource intensive, and they point out that Natural England will need to be a champion to win hearts and minds, as well as providing technical guidance and leadership.

4. Summary of Natural England's All Landscapes Matter Draft Policy

- 4.1. Natural England believes:
 - 4.1.1. All landscapes matter. They should be managed, planned and, where appropriate, protected to deliver a full range of ecosystem goods and services through a landscape character approach to ensure landscapes remain distinctive and highly valued.
 - 4.1.2. 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.

- 4.1.3. 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.
- 4.1.4. The European Landscape Convention should be embedded more deeply into national, regional and local strategies, policies, processes and actions which affect England's landscapes and their enjoyment and understanding by the public.
- 4.1.5. Why and how society values landscapes 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 can continue to exhibit the characteristics and functions that society values, and reinforce connections between people, place and local identity.
- 4.1.6. New development and infrastructure should be appropriate to, and wherever possible, enhance its landscape context. Good design is a key factor in the management, protection and planning of landscapes, and benefits for landscape and biodiversity should be sought through the design of development and infrastructure.
- 4.1.7. The management, planning and protection of England's landscapes should recognise the European and international context. Further opportunities should be taken to learn from and contribute to European and international measures, policies and initiatives.
- 4.1.8. England's Character Areas should be refreshed and used to provide a geographical framework, sound evidence base and broad understanding of the variation of landscape character at a national scale. Landscape character assessment should be promoted and used to understand and describe landscapes at all scales.
- 4.1.9. Monitoring and understanding how the condition and qualities of all our landscapes are changing is needed at a national, regional and local level. Such monitoring inform choices and policies about the direction of our landscapes in the future.

Annex 1

Natural England's All Landscapes Matter Draft Policy

Context

Landscapes are everywhere. They are the result of the interaction of natural (geology, landform, soils, climate and biodiversity) and cultural influences (historical and current land uses, settlement patterns and human interventions). People's perceptions are an inherent part of every landscape. Landscapes provide the physical setting for everyday life, habitats for nature and wildlife and affect individual and society's well being and quality of life. They are important expressions of the relationship between people and place, and of our cultural and natural heritage. People's enjoyment of the natural environment is strongly influenced by the landscape setting.

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is the first international treaty devoted exclusively to the management, protection and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It seeks to maintain and improve landscape quality 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 ELC came into effect in March 2007. The UK Government has ratified the Convention and considers the UK compliant with its requirements, although aims to embed further its intent within UK policy and practice. Natural England leads the implementation of the ELC within England, on behalf of Defra.

UK Government's ratification of the ELC recognises 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. It underlines that landscape forms a whole, whose natural and cultural components should be considered together, not separately.

The ELC proposes that the management, protection and planning of landscapes "must become a mainstream political concern" and be further integrated into spatial planning and land management sectors as well as other sectoral policies. 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 Council of Europe ELC implementation guidelines also presuppose that a transition in policy needs to take place from one focusing on 'outstanding' areas to one focusing 'on the quality of all living surroundings'. The development of England's Character Areas (formerly known as Joint Character Areas) and the development of landscape character assessment methodology reflects this objective.

Issues

The State of the Natural Environment (May 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 pressure. Research 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 neglected and 19% diverging with new landscape characteristics emerging.

Natural England is committed to a future where all England's landscapes are managed sustainably to deliver a range of ecosystem goods and services while being valued as distinctive expressions of local identity. Our response to the changes facing English landscapes will need to consider both their landscape character and the ecosystem goods and services they provide.

This will increasingly require a multi-functional approach to landscape management. Putting the all landscapes matter principle into practice will therefore require a much better understanding of the diverse ways in which different landscapes matter, as well as to whom they matter.

The ELC argues that the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe is a task, not just for governments, but for all sectors of civil society, entailing rights and responsibilities for everyone. It promotes understanding of and a commitment to use landscape as a spatial framework to aid decision making, and recognition that the importance, qualities and functions of all landscapes needs to be further embedded in policies and the working practices of Government and other organisations.

Policies

Policy 1 : Landscape management, protection and planning

All landscapes matter. They should be managed, planned and, where appropriate, protected to deliver a full range of ecosystem goods and services through a landscape character approach to ensure landscapes remain distinctive and highly valued.

The character, quality and functions of all landscapes can affect our quality of life and the natural environment systems that exist as part of them. We want all landscapes, whether protected, rural, coastal or urban, judged ordinary or outstanding, 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 provide. This requires the natural, cultural and functional components of landscapes to be considered as a whole. Natural England will reflect this holistic approach in our advice to Government, other public bodies and stakeholders, when dealing with national consultations, and where we engage in regional casework.

Evidence

Landscape in the ELC is defined 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 landscape includes aesthetic, cultural, geological and historic aspects as well as its habitats.

There is growing evidence on the multi-functionality of landscapes. Research has 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.

Policy 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.

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 its landscapes of the future and find effective ways of guiding and influencing change to ensure landscapes of tomorrow fully meet our needs. This issue is developed further in the future landscapes policy

Evidence

Past landscape change has tended to occur in a largely unplanned manner, 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 report evidences, recent landscape change has tended to result in loss of diversity, distinctiveness and ecological richness. There is also a need for our landscapes to deliver ecosystem goods and services such as water storage and climate regulation. Increasing recognition of the need for sustainable development, such as the demand for renewable energy will have significant landscape implications. Natural England's work to develop a vision for the natural environment will provide an important context for managing and directing future landscape change.

Policy 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 a basic framework 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 can provide a framework for guiding the management and planning of our surroundings and for framing 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 and functional.

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 at the local level with regard to Local Development Frameworks.

Policy 4: European Landscape Convention

The European Landscape Convention should be embedded more deeply 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. Natural England will champion the implementation of the ELC in England on behalf of Government and will advise other stakeholders and policy-makers on the preparation of their own ELC Action Plans.

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 regional level. Key findings include a requirement for greater recognition of natural, cultural and functional aspects of landscape; that the intent of the ELC is not clearly or fully embedded; and 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 and landscape has a much greater potential to inform and help shape spatial strategies, and in particular policies and action for the natural and built environment. Landscape lends itself to the guiding of policies and strategies that have a spatial expression.

Policy 5 : Valuing landscape

Why and how society values landscapes 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 can continue to exhibit the characteristics and functions that society values, and reinforce connections between people, place and local identity.

People value landscapes 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, there needs to be better ways of capturing and presenting this information.

Local landscapes will often act as a gateway for people's interest in, and understanding and enjoyment of, the wider natural and historic environment. Their local landscapes contribute significantly to their sense of place and their sense of

local distinctiveness, and people are often most aware of change at this scale. The public should be encouraged and supported to articulate and share their perceptions of landscapes. They should be supported to have a greater and more inclusive role in the management, protection and planning of local landscapes, and to understand the global issues (such as climate change) that face those landscapes. Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and Supplementary Planning Documents as part of Local Development Frameworks, should be supported and encouraged as ways of encouraging local stakeholder and community involvement in the development of local landscape objectives.

Evidence

Most people tend to value landscapes as the whole experience, rather than in relation to its component parts. How people experience landscapes can also affect or change 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 it overlooks information about overall landscape value and the qualities, such as openness and naturalness that combine to make a place distinctive. Studies in the heritage sector 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 landscapes have in local identity, through emphasising the relationship of people and place.

Policy 6: Development

New development and infrastructure should be appropriate to, and wherever possible, enhance its landscape context. Good design is a key factor in the management, protection and planning of landscapes, and benefits for landscape and biodiversity should be sought through the design of development and infrastructure.

The design of new development should, where ever possible, respect and enhance the character and local distinctiveness of the surrounding natural and built environment; use natural resources sustainably; and bring benefits for the local community, for example through greenspace provision and contact with nature. Landscape character maps and townscape assessments provide a framework for planners and developers to consider new development and ensure that such development makes a positive contribution in terms of design, form and location, to the character and functions of the landscape. Whilst the focus of this policy is landscape, there are clear connections with our policies on conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and the provision of green infrastructure. Opportunities to provide positive messages to developers should be encouraged, for example via Green Infrastructure Strategies and urban design frameworks.

Evidence

Government 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 '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.

Policy 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

England's designated landscapes are classified as Category V under the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, which provides an international framework for improved understanding of landscape conservation. At the European level various policy initiatives have underlined the particular role of landscape in environmental and socio-economic development. These 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.

Policy 8: Landscape Character Areas

England's Character Areas should be promoted and used to provide a geographical framework, sound evidence base and broad understanding of the variation of landscape character at a national scale. Landscape character assessment should be promoted and used to understand and describe landscapes at all scales.

England's 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 and use 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, and inform the development of regional and sub-regional strategies and plans. We will encourage the development of up to date assessments of landscape character at regional and local authority scales, and support the development of landscape strategies and guidelines, linked to spatial planning and land management strategies and plans. Other methodologies, such as landscape and visual impact assessment, should also be used to understand the likely landscape impacts of potential change.

Evidence

At the national scale, England's landscapes have been classified into 159 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 national reporting framework for the analysis of change in the English landscape.

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 County Councils have a landscape character assessment in place, but forty per cent do not.

Policy 9: Landscape monitoring

Monitoring and understanding how the condition and qualities of all our landscapes are changing is needed at a national, regional and local level. Such monitoring 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 our decisions for the future. We will use England's Character Areas as a framework to refine and improve our evidence of changes in the character, condition and qualities of landscapes. Such monitoring of landscape change at a national level is key in helping to set out 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 using England's 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 and changes in landscape character.