

Natural England Board



Meeting: 12
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Paper No: **NEB PU12 05**

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

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to present a draft policy for All Landscapes Matter. It builds on Natural England's overarching landscape policy (approved February 2008) and has been informed by internal consultation and discussions with a small group of external stakeholders. Discussions have also been held with Board Outcome Group 1. Annex 1 sets out the proposed policy.
- 1.2. Advocating that all landscapes matter does not mean that Natural England will actively engage directly in all landscape issues, everywhere. We will apply the principles in this policy to develop accompanying policy implementation guidance that sets out our priorities for engagement in landscape issues, where we judge the all landscapes matter principle will have the greatest impact.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Board consider and agree 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 is clear that Natural England believes all landscapes matter, but it does not set out the policy detail of this principle. It states that an understanding of landscape character, aesthetics, systems and dynamics is essential in delivering the Government's commitment to an ecosystem services approach to resource management and planning, and for visioning future landscapes.
- 3.2. The overarching landscape policy provides the context for the development of four detailed policies: All Landscapes Matter; Future Landscapes; The Historic Environment; and Protected Landscapes.

The scope of the All Landscapes Matter policy is intended to set the scene for Natural England to:

- show 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

metropolitan through urban and peri urban to the developed countryside and England's most rural areas;

- show how we deliver our statutory advice and guidance functions to government and other public bodies, emphasising the explicit connections between place, people and local identity;
- show how landscape is to be treated in national consultations and regional casework;
- continue to lead on overseeing the implementation of the European Landscape Convention in England.

- 3.3. A key driver behind the all landscapes matter approach is the Government ratified European Landscape Convention (ELC), which came into force on 1st March 2007. Natural England has endorsed the intent of the ELC and we are managing the implementation of the ELC Action Plan for England.
- 3.4. Recent Council of Europe guidelines on the implementation of the ELC presupposes 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'. A move towards this objective was part of the philosophy behind establishing England's Character Areas and the development of the landscape character assessment methodology.
- 3.5. Natural England is committed to a future where all England's landscapes are managed sustainably and are highly valued, distinctive expressions of local identity. Achieving this does not mean that our landscapes should be considered as being frozen at a point in time. Instead we must ensure that diversity, character and local distinctiveness continue to be fundamental elements of our landscapes as they evolve and face different pressures of change. An understanding of the existing qualities and characters of our landscapes should be the basic framework through which we organise, plan and manage change, whilst acknowledging those characteristics that provide environmental, economic and social benefits and are valued by people.
- 3.6. The State of the Natural Environment report (May 2008) has clearly demonstrated that the natural environment, including those landscapes and biodiversity that exist outside protected landscapes/areas, are increasing under many pressures. A comprehensive understanding of landscapes at different scales – their character, distinctiveness, biodiversity, cultural and aesthetic dimensions, and the goods and services they provide – provides a spatial framework and integrated basis for tackling these pressures, so that multiple benefits can be achieved. This principle of landscapes everywhere helping to guide and frame spatial planning and land management, is a fundamental principle embodied within the European Landscape Convention.

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

- 4.1. We believe that all landscapes matter whether rural, coastal, seaward or urban, ordinary or outstanding, as they are important to people's quality of life everywhere and can provide a range of ecosystem goods and services.
- 4.2. We believe that all landscapes should be considered as a whole - for their aesthetic, cultural, historic and ecological dimensions, and the goods and services that landscapes provide.
- 4.3. We believe that a comprehensive understanding of landscape should influence as well as set the context for the management of change at a range of spatial scales and governance levels.
- 4.4. We believe that England's designated landscapes should be afforded additional protection for their specific qualities, their national significance and their statutory purposes; but this does not mean that the aims of managing, protecting and planning landscapes outside these areas are of a lesser concern.
- 4.5. We believe that the intent, measures and objectives of the European Landscape Convention should be embedded deeper into processes, policies and actions which affect England's landscapes and their enjoyment and understanding by the public. Specifically, we believe that the all landscapes matter principle should be embedded into the development of national, regional and local strategies, policies and processes and in the strengthening of institutional frameworks, bringing a landscape perspective to influence spatial planning, land use and resource management.
- 4.6. We believe that an understanding of why and how the public values landscapes needs to be better captured, translated and fully represented in decision-making.
- 4.7. We believe that 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 all landscapes, and benefits for landscape and biodiversity should be sought through the design of development and infrastructure.
- 4.8. We believe that the diversity and character of England's landscapes are a basic component of European and International natural and cultural heritage, contributing to the health and prosperity of wider society.
- 4.9. We believe that the public should have greater involvement in the management, protection and planning of landscapes, so that as landscapes evolve they can continue to exhibit characteristics that reinforce connections between people, place and local identity.
- 4.10. We believe that England's Character Areas, defined at a national level, provide a baseline and broad understanding of the variation of landscape character and they should continue to be used and reviewed for this purpose. Landscape character assessment should be used to understand and describe landscapes at all other scales.

- 4.11. We believe that monitoring and understanding of how the condition and qualities of all our landscapes are changing is needed at a national, regional and local level. Such monitoring should be used as part of the evidence base to inform policies and choices about the direction of our landscapes in the future.

Annex 1

Natural England's All Landscapes Matter Draft Policy

Context

Landscapes are everywhere. They include brownfield sites as well as hills and mountains; streets, squares and parks as well as the patchwork of farmland; wild places as well as tame ones; coasts and estuaries as well as inland areas. Landscapes provide the physical setting for everyday life and are a key element in individual and society's well being and quality of life. Landscapes are important expressions of the relationship between people and place, and an expression of our cultural and natural heritage. People's enjoyment of the natural environment is strongly influenced by the landscape setting.

The UK Government's ratification of the European Landscape Convention (ELC)¹ reinforces the recognition 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 convention demonstrated that landscapes everywhere are the concern of the public and policy-makers alike. It underlines that landscape forms a whole, whose natural and cultural components should be considered together, not separately. The ELC proposes that the protection, management and planning of landscapes² "must become a mainstream political concern"³ and be further integrated into spatial planning and land management sectors as well as other sectoral policies.

Council of Europe ELC implementation guidelines⁴ presupposes 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'. A move towards this objective, whilst recognising the potential of all landscapes, was part of the philosophy behind establishing England's Character Areas and the development of the landscape character assessment methodology⁵. The majority of landscapes are a representation of the interaction between people and the physical (natural & built) environment over time and thus they provide the context in which the natural and built environment can be managed, whilst making explicit links to economic and social benefits.

Issues

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

¹ European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2000

² This language is used to be consistent with ELC definitions and broadly encapsulates a range of actions from conservation through to enhancement. *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.

³ Explanatory report to the European Landscape Convention - 'Aims and Structure of the Convention'

⁴ Guidelines for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, 2008

⁵ Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland, Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002

and 51% maintained; 20% were neglected and 19% diverging with new landscape characteristics emerging. The State of the Natural Environment (May 2008)⁶ 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.

Our response to the changes facing English landscapes needs to consider both their character and function and how these can be enhanced and sustained into the future. A comprehensive understanding of landscapes at different scales – their character, distinctiveness, ecological, cultural and aesthetic dimensions, and the goods and services they provide – provides a spatial framework and integrated approach for tackling these pressures. This principle of landscapes everywhere helping to guide and frame spatial planning and land management, is also embodied within the European Landscape Convention.

The intent to work ‘with and through’ landscape in this way, and strengthen the connections between people, place and local identity across all landscapes, needs to be further embedded in policies and the working practices of Government and other organisations.

Policies

Policy 1

We believe that all landscapes matter whether rural, coastal, seaward or urban, ordinary or outstanding, as they are important to people’s quality of life everywhere and can provide a range of ecosystem goods and services

All our landscapes provide the physical setting to our lives and include habitats for nature and wildlife. Wherever they are and however they are valued, each landscape is unique in its character, ever evolving, and culturally represents a link between people, place and local identity. Whether ordinary or outstanding, the deterioration of the character and function of landscapes can have an adverse affect on quality of life and on the natural environment systems that exist as part of them. We want all landscapes to be considered, managed, protected or planned so that they can deliver the goods and services that sustain quality of life, biodiversity, prosperity and reflects cultural identity.

Evidence

The general purpose of the European Landscape Convention is to encourage public authorities to adopt policies and measures at local, regional, national and international level for protecting, managing and planning landscapes throughout 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 decisions⁷. As part of Interreg IIIB funded European research ‘Creating a Setting for Investment’, studies are demonstrating the positive links between landscape and locational decisions and settings for economic investment⁸. There is also evidence of social and emotional

⁶ Conclusions to ‘State of the Natural Environment’, Natural England, 2008

⁷ Explanatory notes to European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, 2000

⁸ Impact of Landscape Quality on Investor Decisions – C. Roberts, University of Sheffield, April 2008 as a research action of the wider Interreg IIIB funded research programme ‘Creating a Setting for Investment’

benefits associated with different experiences of the landscape and how this might influence preference and use⁹.

Policy 2

We believe that all landscapes should be considered as a whole - for their aesthetic, cultural, historic and ecological dimensions, and the goods and services that landscapes provide.

The natural and cultural components of landscapes should be considered together, not separately. When delivering advice to Government, other public bodies and stakeholders; when dealing with national consultations; and where we engage in regional casework, landscape (at all scales and contexts) will be considered for its aesthetic, cultural, historic and ecological interests. The goods and services that landscapes provide will be considered, such as carbon retention, water management and contribution to well-being.

Evidence

Landscape in the European Landscape Convention 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'. Landscape is not defined in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, however the explanatory notes¹⁰ to the Act state that Natural England's statutory purpose will include conserving and enhancing the English landscape for aesthetic, cultural and historic aspects as well as habitats¹¹

Policy 3

We believe that a comprehensive understanding of landscape should influence as well as set the context for the management of change at a range of spatial scales and governance levels.

As England's landscapes evolve they should evolve in ways that continue to make them distinctive and functional. Landscapes everywhere should be considered as the framework for guiding the management, protection and planning of our surroundings and framing policies and actions for the natural (and built) environment. Taking this approach does not mean that our landscapes should be considered as being frozen at a point in time. Instead we must ensure that diversity, character and local distinctiveness continue to be fundamental elements of our landscapes as they evolve and face different pressures of change. An understanding of the existing qualities and character of our landscapes, should provide the basic framework in which we organise, plan and manage change, whilst acknowledging those existing characteristics and functions that are valued by people and provide environmental, economic and social benefits.

Evidence

⁹ Ward Thompson, C. Sugiyama, T. Bell, S. Millington, C. Southwell, K. Roe, J. Aspinall, P (2007) Landscape quality and quality of life, OPENspace Research Centre, Edinburgh College of Art & Heriot-Watt University/University of Queensland

¹⁰ Paragraph 63, Explanatory notes to NERC Act, 2006

¹¹ Paragraph 63, Explanatory notes to NERC Act, 2006

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.¹² 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)¹³. 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, on Local Development Frameworks¹⁴.

Policy 4

We believe that England's designated landscapes should be afforded additional protection for their specific qualities, their national significance and their statutory purposes; but this does not mean that the aims of managing, protecting and planning landscapes outside these areas are of a lesser concern.

The European Landscape Convention states that signatory states should adopt policies that support improving the quality of all living surroundings, rather than focusing on the most outstanding areas. Natural England's interests spans all landscapes, including England's nationally designated landscapes that are of outstanding natural beauty. Their statutory protection will continue within the broadening context of our all landscapes matter policy. There will be a specific detailed policy on protected landscapes that will clarify and make explicit our continued commitment. We can learn from the management of designated landscapes and apply lessons learned and good practice to other landscapes in England.

Evidence

As indicative evidence, the results of Countryside Quality Counts assessment of landscape change (by England's Character Areas, for the period 1999-2003) suggests that where there is additional protection for England's designated landscapes, its landscape character has either been maintained or enhanced within

¹² See for example: Haines Young, R. & Potschin, M. (2008) England's Terrestrial Ecosystem Services and the Rationale for an Ecosystem Approach. Overview Report, 30 pp. (Defra Project Code NR0107) and 'Spearhead' Ecosystem and Landscape Services (SELS) Research Project, Wageningen University, Netherlands (SELS is a long-term research program aimed at improving the understanding of the capacity of ecosystems and landscapes to provide services and quantifying the related benefits - socio-cultural, ecological and economic - at various scales to assist integrated planning, management and decision-making processes).

¹³ See for example: Antrop, M. 'From holistic landscape synthesis to transdisciplinary landscape management', Ghent University, Belgium in 'From Landscape Research to Landscape Planning: Aspects of Integration, Education and Application', Tress, B.; Tres, G.; Fry, G.; Opdam, P. (Eds.) 2006; Selman, P. 'Planning at the Landscape Scale', Routledge, 2006; Mahony, P. & Wharton, A. 'Landscape character - A Spatial Framework for Local Development Policy', Town & Country Planning, 2005.; Kirby, V. & Wharton, A. 'Landscape--a big idea with a big future', Town & Country Planning, 2004; Landscape as an integrating framework for rural policy and planning, Selman, P. and Knight, M. University of Sheffield (research for Rural Economy and Land Use Programme)

¹⁴ Cross boundary working Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning, Department for Communities & Local Government, 2008

those areas¹⁵. Whilst 51% of England's landscapes are considered to be maintaining their character, 20% showed signs of neglect (in terms of erosion of character) and in 19% new landscape characteristics have emerged. Both landscapes outside and within designated areas are subject to longer-term pressures and changes. Whilst evidence indicates that designated landscapes are retaining their natural and cultural benefits, we need to ensure that those benefits continue to be present in landscapes outside these areas. The State of the Environment has also shown that whilst overall landscape character appears as being sustained, there is a general decline in the functionality of landscapes, particularly outside protected areas¹⁶.

Policy 5

We believe that the intent, measures and objectives of the European Landscape Convention should be embedded more deeply into processes, policies and action which affect England's landscapes and their enjoyment and understanding by the public. Specifically, we believe that the all landscapes matter principle should be incorporated into the development of national, regional and local strategies, policies and processes, and the strengthening of institutional frameworks, bringing a landscape perspective to influence spatial planning, land use and resource management.

The European Landscape Convention provides the platform for promoting and understanding the evolution, present state and potential future of European landscapes and the contribution they make to the natural environment as well as to cultural identity, health, wealth and well-being of people. Whilst the UK is compliant with the convention, we believe there are many opportunities to further embed the intent of the ELC 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

The consideration of landscape, particularly in spatial planning, has until quite recently, been treated as a sectoral or specialist interest¹⁷. Landscape lends itself to the guiding of policies and strategies that have a spatial expression. 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. In terms of land management and climate change, developing policies within the 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, benefits and services. Agri-environment schemes that are delivered within the landscape context are likely to contribute to both biodiversity and landscape character objectives.

¹⁵ In 1999-2003, all of England's National Parks fell within the Character Areas that were reported as being 'maintained' or 'enhanced'. 63% of the area of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were considered to be maintaining landscape character and 14% enhancing landscape character, in State of the Natural Environment, Natural England, 2007

¹⁶ State of the Natural Environment, Natural England, 2008

¹⁷ Planning at the Landscape Scale – Prof. Paul Selman, Routledge, 2006

Research by Newcastle University for Natural England has provided recent evidence of the degree to which landscape is reflected in current legislation and strategies and policies at the regional level¹⁸. One key finding is the need to deal more comprehensively with landscape and more fully articulate the intent of the objectives of ELC in policies, and to improve the consistency of landscape terminology and language.

Policy 6

We believe that an understanding of why and how the public values landscapes needs to be better captured, translated and fully represented in decision-making.

England's distinctive and diverse landscapes are high in the public consciousness, for their environmental qualities as well as for their cultural significance. People value landscapes in different ways and in different places for different reasons. Sometimes these values are less tangible and do not always lend themselves easily to quantifiable valuation techniques. Nevertheless these values represent the public's connection with the natural environment and the benefits of landscape to their well-being and quality of life. To fully represent these values, there is a need to find better ways of capturing and presenting this information, whilst demonstrating the wider benefits that our landscapes bring to society.

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 it. Methods that focus on how people relate to individual components or features can aid the case for protection of specific landscape elements but it overlooks information about overall landscape value¹⁹. Considering landscape holistically moves beyond the elements making up the landscape and leads to discussion about the 'qualities' that make a place distinctive²⁰. For example, some people may find that openness and naturalness are what is really valued rather than any specific component in the landscape that can be directly observed. Studies in the heritage sector have shown that there is a need and benefits for alternative ways of capturing public value through qualitative analysis that can sit alongside quantitative models²¹.

Policy 7

We believe that 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

¹⁸ Research to support the implementation of the European Landscape Convention - Roe, Jones and Mell, Newcastle University & Manchester University, March 2008 (published on Landscape Character Network)

¹⁹ Scoping study to Defra on agricultural landscape valuation – Prof. Carys Swanwick, Prof. Nick Hanley & Dr. Mette Termansen, University of Sheffield, University of Sterling & University of Leeds, 2007

²⁰ Coeterier, J. F. (1996), Dominant attributes in the perception and evaluation of the Dutch landscape, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 34, 27-44.

²¹ Capturing the Public Value of Heritage – Proceedings of the London Conference, 25-26 January 2006 published by English Heritage on behalf of DCMS, Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Trust

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, thereby contributing to a sustainable community. By landscape context we mean its landscape character, existing settlement patterns, local built character and natural eco-systems. 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.

Evidence

Government policy emphasises the value of good design in the successful delivery of sustainable settlements and communities²². Assessment of landscape (and townscape) character is recommended as a basis upon which design principles and guidelines can be prepared for development and infrastructure²³. 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)²⁴. More recently, the importance of designing with local context and distinctiveness in mind forms one of the principles of 'By Design' (DETR/CABE, 2000)²⁵. 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 environment)²⁶

Policy 8

We believe that the diversity and character of England's landscapes are a basic component of European and International natural and cultural heritage, contributing to the health and prosperity of wider society.

England's landscapes should be seen in the context of the wider European and International community, celebrated for their diversity, and their influence on socio-economic development through their natural and cultural characteristics . Government should take the opportunity to engage in European and International measures, policies and initiatives that may impact upon or provide opportunities for the conservation of our landscapes. In particular, it should engage in legislation, conventions and directives that may have consequences for shaping what we are able to achieve domestically through Government landscape policy.

Evidence

At the European level a number of policy initiatives have underlined the particular role of landscape in environmental and socio-economic development. These include

²² Planning Policy Statement 1 – Delivering Sustainable Development, ODPM, 2005

²³ Planning Policy Statement 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, ODPM, 2004

²⁴ Ian L. McHarg (1969) – Design with Nature, re-published in 1995, John Wiley & Sons

²⁵ By Design: Urban design in the planning system – towards better practice, DETR/CABE, 2000

²⁶ Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government. Sir Michael Lyons, 2007

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, protection and planning of our landscapes domestically. England's designated landscapes are categorised under the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas²⁷, which provides an international framework for improved understanding of landscape conservation.

Policy 9

We believe that the public should have greater involvement in the management, protection and planning of landscapes, so that as landscapes evolve they can continue to exhibit characteristics that reinforce connections between people, place and local identity.

Landscapes matter to people. Local landscapes are most likely to be the scale that communities are most strongly connected with and aware of change. Such landscapes contribute significantly to the sense of place and local distinctiveness of an area or place. They will very often act as a gateway for people's interest, understanding and enjoyment of the wider natural and historic environment. As landscapes change, they should continue to reflect or incorporate those characteristics that are valued by the public. The public therefore needs to be encouraged and supported to have a greater and more inclusive role in the management, protection and planning of landscapes, whilst understanding their perceptions and the local pressures and global issues (such as climate change) that face those landscapes.

Evidence

Studies, such as 'Test Valley Community Landscape Project'²⁸ have shown that a clear framework to help guide the future development and management of landscape, that positively engages with the public can be achieved. Methodologies include the recording of perceptions and values of the landscape to the public, as well as communicating a better understanding of the processes of change that have implications for future landscapes. Other studies have shown the value of community involvement in understanding and recognising the role that landscapes have in local identity, through the relationship of people and place²⁹

Policy 10

We believe that England's Character Areas, defined at a national level, provide a baseline and broad understanding of the variation of landscape character and they should be used and reviewed for this purpose. Landscape character assessment should be used to understand and describe landscapes at all other scales.

²⁷ Identified as Category IV Protected Areas

²⁸ Test Valley Community Landscape project - Kirkham Landscape Planning Consultants, Countryside, Miller Associates, Giford & Partners, Test Valley Borough Council, 2004

²⁹ Community perceptions of landscape values in the South Highland high country, S.R Swaffield & R. J Foster, Department of Conservation, New Zealand, 2000

Natural England will continue to promote, use and update England's Character Areas (formerly known as Joint Character Areas) as the basis for defining and describing the broad variation of landscape character across the country. They should be used as a contextual basis for understanding the key characteristics of England's landscapes at the national and regional scales. We believe that landscape character assessment should be a key tool for understanding and communicating the characteristics of landscapes. Other methodologies, such as landscape and visual impact assessment³⁰ should be used to understand the likely impacts on our landscapes where significant change is anticipated or proposed.

Evidence

At the national scale, England's landscapes have been divided into 159 Character Areas³¹. The creation of these areas were based upon the assessment of the landscape (including its wildlife, natural, historic and cultural features). They have been referenced widely, for example, as the geographical basis of landscape policies in Regional Spatial Strategies³² and were the basis of Environmental Stewardship (Higher Level Scheme) targeting statements³³. They have also formed the national reporting framework for the analysis of change in the English landscape³⁴.

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 another³⁵. 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 place³⁶.

Policy 11

We believe that monitoring and understanding of how the condition and qualities of all our landscapes are changing is needed at a national, regional and local level. Such monitoring should be used as part of the evidence base to inform choices and policies about the direction of our landscapes in the future.

Landscapes are subject to many influences and forces of change over time. To make sure that future policies can have a positive effect on the character, qualities and conditions of England's landscapes and can provide a range of benefits and services, we need to understand how our landscapes are evolving under current policy. The monitoring of landscape change at a national level is key in helping to set out strategic objectives and visions for future landscapes. Evidence gathered on our

³⁰ Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment 2nd Edition, Landscape Institute & Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, Spon Press, 2002

³¹ The Character of England: landscape, wildlife & natural features, Countryside Commission/English Nature, 1996

³² See for example, Policy ENV2 Landscape Conservation, East of England Plan, Government Office for the East of England, 2008

³³ Environmental Stewardship Scheme Targeting Statements, Rural Development Service, 2005

³⁴ Countryside Quality Counts (1990-1998 & 1999-2003)

³⁵ Recent practice and the evolution of landscape character assessment, Landscape Character Assessment Topic Paper 1, Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002

³⁶ Based upon Landscape Character Assessment National Database, Landscape Character Network, 2008 (www.landscapecharacter.org.uk)

changing landscapes at this scale 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 has brought new landscape characteristics³⁷. The future will bring increasing demands for infrastructure, housing and sustainable energy production³⁸, for example, and with changes to our climate³⁹, our landscapes will face increasing pressures with new characteristics emerging.

³⁷ Countryside Quality Counts – Tracking Change in the Character of the English Landscape 1999-2003, Natural England, 2007

³⁸ For example - Growth Areas, Growth Points & Eco-Towns (DCLG), Renewable Energy Strategy (DBERR),

³⁹ The economics of climate change – Stern Review, Cabinet Office/HM Treasury