

# Natural England Board

Meeting 8  
12 December 2007



Paper No: **NEB PU08 05**

Title: **Natural England's Draft Policy on Landscape**

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## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. This paper presents a draft landscape policy for Natural England informed by discussion with Board Outcome Group 1. Landscape was the focus of a Board workshop in February 2007.
- 1.2. This paper has three annexes that give more detail on the scope and timing of four more detailed policy positions, a forward look to external drivers for our landscape policy and policy delivery tools in development.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Board:
  - a) Agrees this draft policy, so that it can be taken forward for external consultation and then brought back to the April Board for final approval;
  - b) Notes that we are preparing four detailed policy positions as outlined in Annex 1.

## **3. Overarching policy framework**

- 3.1. England's landscapes are key resources for Natural England: they are fundamental to the delivery of our creative, integrated, forward looking programme for the natural environment. Landscapes provide the physical settings of everyday life and are an important expression of the relationship between people and place. The term does not mean just special or designated landscapes, nor does it apply just to the countryside. Landscape can mean neglected, brownfield sites as much as a mountain range, and urban streets, squares and parks as much as a patchwork of farmland. It results from the way that different components of the environment – both natural (the influences of geology, landform, soils, climate and biodiversity) and cultural (the historical and current impact of land use, settlement, enclosure and other human interventions) – interact together and are perceived by people. It is vital that our landscape policies work in a changing world. Landscapes have always evolved, and will continue to do so under the influence of global drivers such as climate change, as well as in response to more local pressures. Our policies will be an expression of our commitment to ensure that, as landscapes change and evolve in response to climate

change and other influences, England's overall landscape retains its diversity and distinctiveness.

- 3.2. England's landscapes have the potential to deliver a wide range of ecosystem goods and services. To achieve this they will have to be sensitively and sustainably planned and managed and effectively monitored. This applies across the whole range of landscapes, from the most rural to the highly urban.
- 3.3. As well as encapsulating much that is important in the natural environment, landscape also involves people's perceptions. Landscapes contribute to 'sense of place' for people everywhere and are vitally important to local distinctiveness.

#### **4. Natural England's draft landscape policy**

- 4.1. Natural England believes that all landscapes matter: this statement is based on our statutory remit as adviser on landscape to the UK government and reflects the commitment made by the government to the European Landscape Convention. We endorse the European Landscape Convention's 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*'.
- 4.2. Natural England believes that protected landscapes play a key role in the conservation, enhancement and delivery of the sustainable use and management of England's natural environment; exemplifying and demonstrating best practice.
- 4.3. Natural England believes that landscape is a key aspect of the natural environment and a vital resource. This means that we will engage in landscape at many scales, from international, through national and regional, to local.
- 4.4. Natural England believes that an understanding of landscape character, systems and dynamics is essential in resource management and planning and in visioning future landscapes. Landscape character and cultural history are key contributors to regional and local identity, influencing sense of place, shaping the settings for people's lives, whether at work or play and providing a critical stimulus to their engagement with the natural environment. Landscapes in towns and cities are as important as those in the countryside and along the coast.
- 4.5. Natural England believes that sustainable, integrated land use planning and land, water and resource management need a landscape perspective, whether the topic is extensive or intensive farming, forestry, planning for new communities, regional spatial planning, meeting the Government's targets for renewable energy or any other large scale activity that impacts on the natural environment. Wherever possible we will adopt an ecosystem goods and services approach to our landscape work.
- 4.6. Natural England is committed to a future where England's changing landscapes are not only managed sustainably, but are highly valued, distinctive expressions of local identity. A well-articulated vision for our future landscapes is vital to England's secure environmental future.

## Annex 1

### Proposed Detailed, Prioritised Landscape Policy Positions

If we are to be effective in all the available policy influencing opportunities, we need some detailed landscape position statements:

- i) **The historic environment** This policy position will set the scene for Natural England to:
  - Engage with and influence the Heritage Protection Bill, currently being drafted by DCMS;
  - Explain and promote the positive relationship between the natural and cultural landscape in all our work, including our activities in pursuit of Strategic Outcomes 2 and 3;
  - Develop, with partners, ways of recognizing the significance of time depth in England's landscapes. This will include a clear framework for the promotion and practical use of historic landscape characterization in national, regional and local decision making;
  - Lead by example, in showing that integrated natural and cultural heritage conservation and management is practical and achievable.
  
- ii) **All landscapes matter** This policy position will set the scene for Natural England to:
  - Reinforce our position as the lead government body that champions all England's diverse landscapes;
  - Show how we will deliver our statutory advice and guidance functions to government and other public bodies, emphasising the explicit connections between people, place and local identity;
  - Show how and when we will intervene 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 deeply rural areas;
  - 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.
  
- iii) **Protected landscapes** This policy position will set the scene for Natural England to:
  - Continue to work in partnership with the organisations representing the national family of protected landscapes;
  - Explore the roles of protected landscapes in the immediate future, linking to the longer term, Strategy-led review of all designations;
  - Clarify Natural England's position on new and amended designations;
  - Review our related advisory and guidance activities;
  - Establish a Natural England position on Heritage Coasts.

- iv) **Future landscapes** This policy position will set the scene for Natural England to:
- Articulate a vision for our future landscapes in the context of climate change;
  - Explain how we will promote a secure environmental future, in which England's changing landscapes are not only managed sustainably, but remain highly valued, distinctive expressions of local identity.
- v) **Working with other policy teams to ensure a landscape input**

There will continue to be close cooperation in the preparation of detailed positions on other topics. In particular our landscape policy needs reflecting in policy work on renewable energy, planning and transport, biodiversity, health, access and recreation.

### **Timetable for Landscape Policy Positions**

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Position Statement</b>	<b>Estimated Date to PSG</b>	<b>Estimated date To NE Board</b>	<b>Target period of External Consultation</b>
1	Historic environment	Jan 2008	March 2008	April – June 2008
2	All landscapes matter	March 2008	August 2008	Sept – Nov 2008
3	Protected landscapes	June 2008	Sept 2008	Oct – Dec 2008
4	Future landscapes	Dec 2008	March 2009	April -June 2009
5	Integrated policy work	Ongoing		

## **Annex 2**

### **Policy drivers – a forward look**

England's landscapes are affected by wide ranging and complex external influences. These must be considered as part of the process of deciding what detailed landscape policy positions need developing.

The lists below highlight specific opportunities for engaging in policy influencing over the next two years.

#### **2007/08**

- Council of Europe - possible initiative to promote a European Landscape Directive
- IUCN - examination of international categories of protected landscape
- UK Government's Climate Change Bill
- UK Government's Planning Bill
- Heritage Protection Bill
- Revisions to Planning Policy Statements (ongoing)
- Possible PSA target on environmental management
- EU - review of scheme and targeting for Environmental Stewardship (RDPE)

#### **2008/09**

- Revisions to Planning Policy Statements (ongoing)
- Council of Europe - possible Landscape Directive
- EU – review of scheme and targeting for Environmental Stewardship (RDPE)

## **Annex 3**

### **Landscape policy delivery tools in development**

Work is planned on:

- Completing and implementing the Implementation Framework for the European Landscape Convention in England, plus preparing a detailed action plan for Natural England's contribution to that framework;
- Seascape characterisation;
- Review of Countryside Quality Counts as the vehicle for delivering the national indicator of landscape change;
- Assessing the potential of the new qualitative approach to defining tranquillity, in our work in monitoring landscape change;
- Guidance on a risk-based approach to visual impact assessment (inland, coastal and off-shore);
- The assessment of cumulative impacts of major new developments;
- Review of Joint Character Area descriptions;
- Review of guidance on landscape characterisation, including townscape and urban landscape character;
- Spatial frameworks for landscape work – getting the right tool for the job;
- Promote clarity and comprehension through the use of plain English

### **Contributing to other teams**

We will ensure that we have appropriate positions and guidance to enable landscape contributions to:

- Environmental Stewardship scheme review and HLS targeting review;
- Projects focusing on upland landscapes and upland futures;
- Work on Green infrastructure and growth areas;
- Guidance on regional planning and spatial frameworks;
- Biomass – crop choice, mapping & guidance;
- Common land major project;
- Water and wetland visioning;
- Landscape scale delivery – via projects such as NEMO and climate change.

## **Policy and Evidence:**

- The Policy Team will work with Natural England's Chief Scientist's and Evidence Teams and other colleagues and partners to identify gaps in our knowledge about landscapes and to develop a prioritised programme for filling those gaps;
- We will refine existing methods where appropriate so that they are fit for our purposes, building on innovative projects such as Countryside Quality Counts;
- We will ensure that there are transparent links between evidence and policy, and that our research produces evidence that is relevant to our strategic outcomes and targets and policy advocacy;
- We are committed to working with both qualitative and quantitative methods, to produce the data that we need. All methods must be capable of producing data that can withstand rigorous analysis, whether we are focusing on the complex dynamics of landscape systems or the equally complex value systems that influence landscape perception.