



## **Natural England's Landscape Policy**

### **Context and Issues –the overarching policy framework**

Landscapes are key resources for the nation: 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. People's enjoyment of the natural environment is strongly influenced by the landscape setting. Landscapes are everywhere, not just in special or designated places. 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 and coasts and estuaries as well as inland areas.

Landscapes result from the interaction between different components of the environment, both natural (the influences of geology, landform, soils, climate and biodiversity) and cultural (the impact of historical and current land uses, settlement patterns, enclosure and other human interventions). People's perceptions are an inherent part of every landscape: there are close interactions between perception, experience and the appreciation of landscape's aesthetic qualities. Landscapes contribute to people's sense of place and are a vital component of local distinctiveness. We will continue to improve our understanding of, and monitor changes in, both landscape character and perception.

Our landscape policy must 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 and in response to more local pressures. Our policy is an expression of our commitment to ensure that, as landscapes change, they evolve in distinctive, diverse and special ways.

We believe that England's landscapes already deliver a wide range of ecosystem goods and services and we are committed to making this link more explicit through expanding and improving our evidence base. This will help integrate landscape thinking into the multi-functional, sustainable planning and management of the whole natural environment. Annex 1 sets out the scope of the development of our detailed landscape policies.

### **Policies**

#### **Policy 1: Natural England believes that all landscapes matter**

We will act on this belief in our advice to the UK government on landscape issues and in our implementation and advocacy of 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'.

## Evidence

England's landscapes are already characterized through the network of Joint Character Areas. As part of our evidence programme we will update and extend the descriptions and analyses of the JCAs. We will develop ways of understanding people's perceptions of the whole range of landscapes as part of our commitment to engaging a wider proportion of the population in landscape issues.

**Policy 2: Natural England is committed to a future where England's changing landscapes are managed sustainably and are highly valued, distinctive expressions of local identity.**

A well-articulated vision for our future landscapes is a key component of our efforts to secure England's environmental future.

## Evidence

Our evidence programme will include innovative work on representing and evaluating a range of scenarios for England's future landscapes. We will test these scenarios in a number of settings and with a range of partners and stakeholders.

**Policy 3: 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.**

23% of England is designated as National Park or AONB. The continued conservation and enhancement of these iconic landscapes is a priority for Natural England. In addition there are opportunities to explore the potential for improving the way protected landscapes contribute to a healthy natural environment.

## Evidence

Natural England will work with the partners and stakeholders who work with and for England's protected landscapes to improve the ways in which evidence about their achievements is gathered and disseminated.

**Policy 4: Natural England believes that landscape is a key aspect of the natural environment and a vital resource. An understanding of landscape character, aesthetics, systems and dynamics and cultural heritage is essential in resource management and planning.**

We will engage in landscape at many scales, from international, through national and regional, to local. Landscape character and cultural history are key contributors to regional and local identity, influencing sense of place. They shape the settings for our everyday lives and influence the way people engage with and enjoy the natural environment. Landscapes in towns and cities are as important as those in the countryside and on the coast; lowland farmed landscapes are as important as those in the uplands.

## Evidence

We are developing our evidence programme so that it effectively underpins revised advice and guidance on working with landscape at a range of scales: for example, our advice to local authorities on landscape character assessment needs to be based on both qualitative (including peoples' values and aesthetics) and quantitative (for

example landform, settlement patterns) ways of knowing about landscapes.

**Policy 5: Natural England believes that sustainable, integrated land use planning and land, water and resource management need a landscape perspective.**

A landscape perspective is essential, whether the focus 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.

**Evidence**

Our developing landscape evidence programme will incorporate an ecosystem goods and services perspective, especially in our work on extending our understanding of landscape change.

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## Annex 1

### Scope and timing of detailed landscape policies

#### i) **All landscapes matter**

This policy will set the scene for Natural England to:

- 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.

#### ii) **Future landscapes**

This policy 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 managed sustainably whilst remaining highly valued, distinctive expressions of local identity.

#### iii) **The historic environment**

This policy will set the scene for Natural England to:

- 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.

**iv) Protected landscapes**

This policy 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.

**v) Working with other policy teams to ensure a landscape input**

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