

The European Landscape Convention

What does it mean for your organisation?

ELC Workshops: London and York

Background

1. The ELC is the first international instrument to deal in an integrated manner with the whole landscape. It provides an international context for landscape, placing this important resource alongside biodiversity and cultural heritage.
2. The ELC is adopted and promoted by the Council of Europe. It is a Treaty and not an EU Directive. The convention is binding on the states that sign it; it is drafted in a flexible manner allowing individual states to interpret in their own way to achieve its overall aims. It therefore seeks to influence rather than direct.
3. The ELC was signed by the UK government in February 2006, ratified in November 2006 and came into effect in March 2007.

Implementation of the ELC in England – The Framework

4. The lead government department for the ELC is the Defra. Defra has established a small England Project group (EPG) comprising Defra, Natural England and English Heritage to assist in delivering the broad outcomes of the ELC. An overall strategy – A Framework for Implementation in England has been drawn up by Defra, Natural England and English Heritage
5. The Framework for Implementing the ELC in England seeks to strengthen the protection, management and planning of landscapes in England by providing a structure for Action Plans of partners and stakeholders. The main actions derived from the convention are:
 - improving performance within the current legal and regulatory framework;
 - influencing future legislation, regulation, advice, including contributing to gap analysis;
 - improving the understanding of landscape character and dynamics, and the monitoring of change and trends;
 - engaging people through comprehensive and accessible awareness and understanding activities, as well as through promotion, education and training;
 - sharing experience and best practice.
6. Natural England, English Heritage and The National Forest Company have produced initial ELC Action Plans. Natural England is currently preparing guidelines on the implementation of the ELC with workshops an integral part of

the process. It seeks to guide and influence organisations so that they can effectively engage with the ELC to help deliver their own objectives.

The ELC definition of landscape

7. The convention adopts a broad definition of landscape:

“landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”

8. This is a purposely non-scientific definition that should resonate widely.

- Landscape is important, not as just scenery or a backdrop, but because it links culture with nature, and past with present.
- Landscape has many values not all of them tangible; and it matters to people – it is people who create and value landscape, and it provides a context for people’s lives.
- It puts emphasis on the whole landscape not just the ‘best bits’ and applies to all landscapes everywhere and in any condition – land, inland water, inter-tidal, marine, natural, rural, urban and peri-urban, outstanding, ordinary and degraded.
- The ELC is forward looking in its approach, and recognises the dynamic nature of landscape – with an emphasis on management of change and creating new landscapes as well as managing the landscapes that we inherit.

What does the convention do?

9. In summary, the Articles of the convention can be translated into 10 key actions:

- Recognise landscapes in legislation;
- Integrate landscape into sectoral and spatial policies;
- Identify and analyse landscapes - describing their character and forces and pressures acting on them;
- Assess landscapes – considering what contributes to and detracts from their quality and character;
- Establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies.
- Define objectives for landscape quality (after public consultation);
- Develop policies for the protection, management, and planning of landscapes;
- Monitor what is happening to landscapes;

- Increase awareness of the value of landscape;
- Promote landscape training and education;
- Seek European co-operation.

Why is the ELC relevant to your organisation?

10. Landscape is increasingly seen as a contributor and context to a wide range of agendas including health, well-being, social inclusion, and economic and sustainable development. Actions within any of these agendas may also have consequences for landscape. The ELC articulates landscape's important contribution to society, why it matters to all of us and how we can ensure its future quality.
11. The workshops and guidelines are therefore targeted at a wide audience - *“any organisation that is involved with or can see the benefits of engaging with landscape”*. This includes organisations operating at spatial scales from the national to the local. It is relevant to government departments, statutory agencies, national bodies, regional bodies, local authorities as well as non governmental organisations, project or area based initiatives, utility companies and major landowners.
12. The workshops will highlight how the ELC is relevant to different organisations and the benefits of engaging with the ELC.

How does this guidance fit?

13. The Framework for Implementation has an objective “to promote and coordinate actions within the ELC Implementation Framework to key audiences” and contains a specific action to promote the development of Action Plans by others.
14. The guidelines currently being produced by Natural England seek to persuade, encourage and influence others. They provide guidance on two key aspects:
 - The development of a specific ELC Action Plan;
 - The integration of the ELC approach into plans, policies and strategies.
15. The guidelines aim to highlight how engaging with the ELC can help your organisation deliver outcomes against current environmental, social and economic drivers.
16. It is expected that this process will help raise the profile of landscape within organisations and give more weight to decisions and actions involving landscape. For those organisations that are not currently intending to prepare an Action Plan it provides guidance on how you can align existing plans, policies and strategies more closely with the ELC.

Some ELC definitions

Landscape policy – means an expression by the public authorities of the need to frame an official policy on landscape. It sets out the basic general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes.
Landscape quality objective – means for a specific landscape (once a particular landscape has been identified and described) a detailed statement of the characteristics which local people want recognised in their surroundings.
Landscape protection – actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape.
Landscape management – means action from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise change which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.
Landscape planning means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.

Further reading

The full text of the European Landscape Convention and details of its current status and on going work across Europe can be found at:

www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/conventions/landscape

The Landscape Character Network provides a ELC resources section containing downloads, information and links relating to the Convention, including: the text of the convention and its explanatory report; the Council of Europe's Guidelines for Implementation of the ELC; the Framework for Implementation of the ELC in England, produced by Natural England with Defra and English Heritage, as well as examples of ELC Action Plans (produced by Natural England, English Heritage and the National Forest Company). www.landscapecharacter.org.uk

Research to support the implementation of the ELC, Newcastle University, 2000 (see www.landscapecharacternetwork.org.uk)

European Networks

Three European networks have been established to pursue the implementation of the ELC:

The **RECEP-ENELC** is an international association of territorial public authorities, under the aegis of the CoE's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (which developed the convention in the first place). It aims to support 'municipalities, counties, regions and any other interested decentralised authorities' in implementing the ELC, and co-operates with the competent international organisations, the EU institutions, the States, the universities, the NGOs and other bodies active in this field.

<http://www.recep-enelc.net/eng/index.php>

Civilscape is a platform for NGOs from all over Europe to work in support of the ELC. http://www.landschapsmanifest.nl/content_fr.php?pageCode=6

UNISCAPE is the European Network of Universities for the implementation of the ELC. It will support and reinforce scientific interdisciplinary co-operation among European universities regarding landscape issues, especially in the areas of research and teaching. <http://www.uniscape.org/>

Contacts

For further information on the project contact:

Gary Charlton, Natural England
gary.charlton@naturalengland.org.uk
01242 533264

Kate Ahern, Land Use Consultants
kate.ahern@landuse.co.uk
0207 3835784