

# Notes of the ELC Workshop:

London, 13th January 2009

Natural England has commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to produce guidelines on what the European Landscape Convention (ELC) means in practice. This involved two open participatory workshops held in London and York in January 2009.

This note summarises the main points raised at the ELC workshop held in London on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2009. The purpose of the workshop was to provide an early opportunity for stakeholders to influence the shape and content of the ELC guidelines. The guidelines are being prepared on behalf of Natural England and have a two-fold purpose:

- provide guidance on incorporating the intent of the ELC into their plans, policies and strategies;
- to encourage and provide advice to organisations who wish to produce a specific ELC Action Plan.

The aim of the workshop was to:

- Increase awareness of the ELC;
- Highlight benefits to organisations of engaging with the ELC;
- Show how the intent of the ELC can be integrated into policies, strategies and plans;
- Provide guidance on developing an ELC Action Plan.

## **DISCUSSION 1: INCORPORATING THE PRINCIPLES AND INTENT OF THE ELC INTO PLANS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES**

There was general agreement on the need for these guidelines and the principles of the approach. It was considered to be a 'helpful checklist that gives clarity'.

A key requirement is to turn the checklist around so it is more proactive – guiding what needs to be done rather than checking/ 'ELC proofing' what has been done already. The guidelines can be used at different stages to review existing plans and strategies (are they compliant and to what extent), and in developing new plans and policies.

It was considered that any organisation should use the checklist realistically – “what is realistic for your organisation area” - may not be able to achieve all at once. The checklist also needs to be more flexible than a simple yes/no - should measure progress (e.g. scoring).

The discussion also focussed on 'review and monitoring' – need for realistic timescale for action and being clear about what is being monitored policy or action on the ground?

There is a need for the ELC to facilitate engagement with new audiences. Don't just advocate a 'landscape-led approach' need to sell benefits and engage others.

Raising awareness is key to successful implementation and should be added to the checklist and there was considerable discussion of this issue. There is a need for wider awareness raising by NE on landscape generally and the ELC in particular.

Comments on individual points are set out below. Note that the order of principles in the checklist does not denote any order of priority.

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS BY PRINCIPLE</b>	
<b>Principle</b>	<b>Main actions for this project</b>
<b>1: Clarity in terms and definitions</b>	
<p>Debate over the use of the word 'landscape' – is this the right word. Consider use of the word 'place' or 'surroundings'.</p> <p>Understanding terms is problematic at all levels – there is a need for clearer guidance on landscape</p>	<p>Organisations should adapt and fit language to their needs.</p> <p>At the local level - need to use local - non technical language.</p> <p>A key message to NE- engage people in understanding 'what landscape is', plus need for broader communication of the ELC with stakeholders</p>
<b>2: Recognise landscape in the holistic sense intended by the ELC</b>	
<b>3: Apply to all landscapes</b>	
Public perception is largely 'rural'	Again, this is a wider awareness raising issue.
<b>4: Understand the baseline</b>	
<p>Need to widen away from LCA emphasis – be more precise and inclusive (don't forget landscape change!)</p> <p>Need to recognise that LCA is a separate process</p>	<p>Bring in and refer to wider baseline, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HLCA</li> <li>- Conservation Area Appraisal</li> <li>- Heritage Appraisal</li> <li>- Urban Assessments</li> <li>- Local studies</li> <li>- Tranquillity</li> </ul> <p>etc.</p>
<b>5: Integration</b>	
Comment on multi-functionality of landscape. Landscape performs functions e.g. relate to GI	Relate landscape to the functions that it performs.
<b>6: Involve People</b>	
<p>Guidance needs to be much stronger: Involving people is a challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- costs;</li> <li>- how to involve people (methods and processes, how to get on board)?</li> <li>- how to engage people with different levels of understanding– more than just 'involve' people?</li> <li>- at what level and what stage should we involve people?</li> <li>- any plan or document should state the level of consultation at the outset.</li> </ul>	<p>Go back to convention text – 'perceived by people'.</p> <p>Guidance to cover who, where, when to involve. How to establish people's perceptions and values.</p> <p>Need to distinguish between national and local level perceptions/values.</p> <p>This guidance can signpost to best practice and case studies.</p>

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Consider varied users/perceptions/levels of knowledge etc – how can we include all? Noted that it is relatively easy to understand values for high quality protected landscape but more difficult for degraded landscapes.	Also opportunities to integrate into existing consultation processes e.g. LDF consultation (avoid consultation fatigue). The ELC should help refine process for establishing values elements in the landscape.

Possible case studies for the guidance were noted:

Hants CC

Highways Agency/EH;

East London Green Grid

Tonbridge Core Strategy

Helpful comments were also made on types of plans and strategies that it might be applied to, for example incorporating 'landscape' into design and access statements.

## **DISCUSSION 2: ELC ACTION PLANS**

There was broad agreement on the principles of the approach to encourage others to prepare ELC Action Plans and the general process outlined in the draft guidelines. There was agreement on the simple 'generic' approach presented in the guidelines as considered that this offers flexibility that organisations can adapt to their own needs.

It was considered that 2 levels of guidance are required. A short and succinct executive summary for senior decision-makers to promote landscape and why they should be involved (needed now!), and more detailed guidance for practitioners.

Specific comments were made, particularly with regard to awareness raising and communication of the ELC and Action Plans generally, and the need to package the information and sell benefits to different organisations.

<b>PREPARING AN ELC ACTION PLAN</b>	
<b>Comment</b>	<b>Main actions for this project</b>
<p><b>Purpose of AP</b></p> <p>The Action Plan process provides the opportunity to 'coral' the actions of an organisation such as a local authority. It is a process rather than a 'doing' plan such as a landscape strategy. It can be short. The aim is to raise the bar from wherever starting from. AONB Management Plan could be a form of Action Plan.</p>	<p>Make links between this and other 'processes' such as SEA, EIA</p> <p>An AONB Man Plan could incorporate an ELC Action Plan. A</p>

<b>PREPARING AN ELC ACTION PLAN</b>	
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	man plan will however, normally go beyond 'process' but extend into actions e.g. developing policies.
<p><b>Selling Benefits and Raising Awareness</b> Need to sell 'benefits' of the approach to different audiences/ organisations e.g. CLG, DCMS. Recognise preparation of AP's and take up by organisations will be a gradual process.</p> <p>Action Plans and Landscape are both 'big topics' that require further work on 'raising awareness' before they will happen</p>	<p>Guidelines to articulate 'benefits' – why should organisations engage.</p> <p>Raising awareness of a) importance of landscape, and b) the ELC and c) Action Plans all needs to be done (big topics!)</p>
<p><b>Level in Organisation</b> The process needs to be recognised at the 'highest level' within organisations. Need for awareness raising at highest level. LA will need to persuade members of benefits – AP = vehicle for political engagement.</p> <p>Raising awareness needs to happen at the national level and actions at the local level.</p>	<p>NE should undertake wider communications and awareness raising on ELC (this is separate from this specific project). Need to highlight 'urgency and usefulness' of APs to organisations Think about packaging of guidelines 'a softly softly' approach as a series of short guidance notes – do not present as one report/document. NE to consider preparing a presentation 'why should engage/prepare an action plan' that others can use within their organisations.</p> <p>NE to present examples of Action Plans as 'best practice'</p>
<p><b>Resources</b> Are these an issue? Need to ensure not promoting more time on plans and strategies for the sake of it.</p>	<p>Guidelines need to promote benefits of this approach 'joined up thinking'/linking and spending all budgets wisely. Note Local Area Agreements (LAA2). Need to link closely to the existing activities of organisations. Growth Points – can help growth be consistent with the landscape context and reinforce spending to ensure this.</p>

<b>PREPARING AN ELC ACTION PLAN</b>	
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<b>Communication</b> Communication between organisations and authorities is crucial.	Guidelines to note importance of, and provide advice on communication, awareness – raising and training.
<b>Differentiation of Guidance for different organisations (who should produce and AP?)</b> Simple generic guidance is useful. May need to be tailored for individual organisations.	Benefits of keeping generic/flexible guidance that individual organisations can adapt and tailor to their own needs.  Guidance could be targeted at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint Regional Action Plans</li> <li>- What does the ELC mean for planning</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
<b>Call for Action Plans</b> – it would be helpful if this came jointly from CLG and Defra – covering all areas from land management to growth points.	NE to progress with Defra/CLG. Organisations need a clear message from NE (and government) that ELC Action Plans are best practice and then they will take them on

## **NEXT STEPS**

The comments and suggestions made at the workshops will be reviewed by LUC and NE and incorporated into the guidelines. The final guidelines will be produced in March. They will be publicised by Natural England and placed on the LCN website ([www.landscapecharacter.org.uk](http://www.landscapecharacter.org.uk)). All workshop participants will be notified at this point.

Defra and Natural England are currently scoping out next steps for implementing the ELC in 2009/2010 and beyond. Please keep an eye on the LCN website for further updates.

Any organisation thinking of producing an ELC Action Plan should contact Gary Charlton, Natural England (Tel: 01242 533264, or email: [gary.charlton@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:gary.charlton@naturalengland.org.uk)) for current information and to share best practice.