

England's National Parks and the European Landscape Convention



Foreword - Understanding the European Landscape Convention

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The ELC is the first international instrument devoted exclusively to the protection, management and planning of landscape in its entirety. The ELC definition is short and simple, yet inclusive and comprehensive: “landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. The definition applies to all urban and peri-urban landscapes, towns, villages and rural areas, the coast and inland areas. It also applies to ordinary or even degraded landscapes, as well as those landscapes that are considered outstanding and may be protected by designations.

A question often posed is what difference the ELC will make to English landscapes. The Government considered UK policy and procedures to be compliant with the formal requirements of the ELC when it was signed and ratified in 2006. There is, however, scope for a further strengthening of the implementation of the ELC in England.

First, it is important to understand that landscapes have undergone past change, often dramatic, yet they continue to ably provide a wide range of natural services such as soil, water, air and biodiversity as well as a range of cultural services such as aesthetics, sense of place and enjoyment. The English landscape sets a context for peoples’ lives and is a meeting-ground between the past, the present and the future as well as between both natural and cultural influences.

Secondly, landscape as an integrating and unifying concept provides both a physical and an emotional presence. The real difference the ELC can make will be through a re-energising and re-focus of landscape activity which strengthens the performance of landscape policy and its relevance in practice across, and with, as wide a section of society as possible. This means working at different levels and in differing ways to make a marked difference so that future generations receive the highest quality landscape possible.

England’s future landscapes will continue to be influenced by changes in climate, agriculture, housing and development needs, and by progress towards a low carbon society. Through integrated management, good planning, design, protection, public involvement and good information the intent and objectives of the ELC can be achieved.



Introduction

England's ten National Parks cover 9.3% of the country by land area, and are home to some 330,000 people. The National Parks are designated for their natural beauty and the recreational opportunities that they offer. National Park designation affords the highest level of statutory landscape protection. Collectively, they represent some of England's most dramatic and scenic landscapes.

Landscape in National Parks has always been about more than just spectacular scenery – people are at the heart of what makes them tick. The National Parks are living, working landscapes, home to often deeply rural communities and providing a venue for over 120 million visitor days per year. National Parks are charged with two purposes: conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Parks; and promoting opportunities for the public enjoyment and understanding of these special qualities. In delivering these purposes, the National Park Authorities (NPAs) also have a duty to foster the social and economic wellbeing of local communities. Importantly, National Parks are not landscapes frozen in time: they are constantly evolving and developing. The challenge for NPAs is to ensure that this happens in a sustainable way, that maintains and enhances the special qualities that those who live in and visit the Parks value so highly.

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) focus on landscape protection, management and planning is mirrored in the policies and strategies that guide decision making by NPAs. Increasingly, landscape is being used as an integrating mechanism to bring together the wide ranging concerns that must be reconciled: such as nature conservation; heritage; recreation; and development. Looking at whole landscapes rather than working to traditional administrative boundaries can bring many benefits – landscape is a concept that relates to people's understanding of an area, and often provides a close fit with natural systems such as water catchments. The ELC focus on communicating simply and clearly the importance of landscape is also welcome, and NPAs recognise that learning about landscapes can increase the value and enjoyment that they bring to children and adults alike.

The case studies that follow show just some of the ways in which NPAs are working with and through the landscape to achieve their aims and purposes. These projects and strategies very much chime with the intent and purposes of the ELC. The South Downs NPA is not represented here as it is still in the establishment phase, and will become fully operational in 2011.

Broads: Trinity Broads Restoration Project

www.broads-authority.gov.uk/projects/trinity-broad.html



The Trinity Broads is a wild wetland of interconnected shallow lakes, dykes, open fen, reedbeds and wet woodland near Great Yarmouth in Norfolk. The Trinity Broads Partnership – whose members are the Broads Authority, Essex and Suffolk Water, Natural England and the Environment Agency - have pooled their expertise, resources and commitment since 1995 to tackle pollution sources, restore neglected fens, mud-pump and manage non-native species such as mink. The Trinity Broads Restoration project has recently won both a Waterways Renaissance Award and the East of England UK Landscape Award.

The project has demonstrated the real benefits that can be achieved by using a landscape-sale approach, in this case tackling catchment management issues to bring about a significant change in water quality. Deepening local people's involvement in management, practical conservation and events was a key part of the project. An extensive programme of public events has helped to communicate the importance of both the place and the project. Many more people now know the area and share their enthusiasm with others. The partners engaged with landowners to establish common aims, and the Trinity Broads experience has been used as a model at regional catchment sensitive farming meetings. The now clear waters of Ormesby Broad attract such biodiversity priority species as water voles, otters and bitterns; and the project has worked hard to provide good facilities and better access for quiet recreation including fishing, bird-watching, canoeing, and sailing.

North York Moors: Lime and Ice

www.limeandice.org.uk

Lime and Ice is a five year project running from 2008 to 2013, funded in large part by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project area covers the Hambleton and Howardian Hills, stretching over part of the North York Moors National Park and the Howardian Hills AONB. The North York Moors National Park Authority has played an important role in the development and funding of this partnership project. The Lime & Ice project seeks to involve local communities and visitors in exploring the distinctive landscape heritage by providing opportunities to access and enjoy the rich geological, glacial and cultural heritage of the area. The Lime & Ice theme was derived through research, exploration and consultation. Consideration was given to what makes the area distinctive and unique; how its landscape character can be defined; and what can be understood about people's sense of place.

A range of activities is provided each year including guided walks, talks and work with young people through schools programmes and events. A recent excavation at Boltby Scar has helped to improve public understanding and awareness of the landscape feature through open weekends; themed activities at Sutton Bank National Park Centre; and the involvement of volunteers at the dig site. The overall project aims for Lime and Ice seek to encourage management of the distinctive landscape heritage by existing and new audiences, groups and volunteers. Lime and Ice also aims to enable communities, organisations and groups to sustain active input to and benefits from the heritage.



Peak District: From Strategy to Action

www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/index/looking-after/landscape.htm



The Peak District National Park Management Plan (2006-2011) identified the need for a Landscape Strategy and Action Plan for the Park, including a landscape characterisation exercise. The Landscape Character Assessment was completed in 2008 to establish a baseline of current landscape character, with a commitment to undertake a review by 2018. The Landscape Strategy, which was completed in July 2009, makes explicit reference to the overall aims, intent, and language of the ELC throughout.

The Action Plan uses and endorses the ELC definition of landscape, and an explanatory introduction moves the reader on from "landscape as just the view... to it is about the relationship between people, place and nature". It addresses varying scales of landscape, and points to landscape encompassing the urban as well as the rural. The Strategy includes a forward looking vision and with the Action Plan establishes a landscape perspective for integrated land use planning and land, water and resource management. It explains how landscape can act as an integrating medium for local planning and policy. The involvement of local people and visitors was central to the production of the Action Plan, which contains a dedicated section on stakeholder consultation in decisions about landscape changes.

Exmoor: Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/exmoor-moorland-landscape-partnership-scheme



This project aims to improve the quality of the Exmoor moorland landscape based on thorough analysis of the key issues and by working with the public to address them. Its underlying premise is that by engaging all parts of society with their moorland heritage, they will understand it, value it, look after it, and enjoy it. The project is being run by a partnership of 12 local and national organisations, including the National Park Authority and Natural England. The bulk of project funding has been secured through the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the project will run from January 2011 to the end of 2013.

Delivering the ELC principle of raising awareness of the importance of landscape is a key focus of the scheme. It aims to re-connect people with their moorland heritage, to help deliver a shared vision for Exmoor's moorland. The project is finding accessible ways to explore terms and definitions relating to the understanding of moorland landscapes, such as exploring what tranquillity means to people. There is a strong focus on practical engagement and landscape management, through volunteering opportunities and agricultural practices. For example, projects are helping farmers and landowners to protect archaeological sites and support the management of Exmoor ponies. Local people are at the centre of the project, which is reaching out through engagement with local schools and colleges and a series of events.

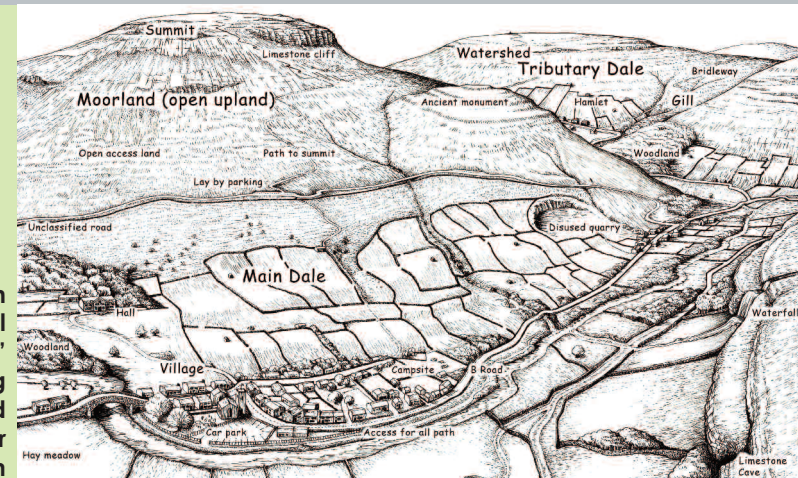
Yorkshire Dales: Special Qualities, Special Experiences

www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/ydnpa_sqse_final.pdf

Special Qualities, Special Experiences brings together the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's policy and principles for access, recreation, diversity, visitor management and sustainable tourism in the National Park. The strategy advocates a landscape-based spatial approach that fits people's own direct experiences of the landscape and so is one that people can easily relate to. This approach connects the special qualities that people come to enjoy, and the diversity of experiences that the area offers. Maps and summaries were produced showing the broad distributions of natural and cultural landscape features, and opportunities for access, recreation and tourism throughout the whole landscape area.

Existing Landscape Character Area descriptions were fleshed out with more local level assessment of landscape types, establishing a spatial framework within which busier and quieter areas of the National Park are considered. The strategy uses simple topographic concepts that are readily understood (such as dale and moorland features), explains the sensitivities of these elements, and provides a guide to what activities or development would or would not be acceptable in each location. By using landscape as an organising principle, it is embedded in decisions rather than becoming a separated layer of constraint.

Illustrative diagram showing special qualities of a 'typical' dale and surrounding uplands, and opportunities for access and recreation



New Forest: A Visionary Strategy

www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/landscapeviews



The New Forest is one of the more recent additions to the National Parks family, being designated in 2005. The decision to develop a Landscape Strategy for the National Park was taken early on, with the aim of setting out the strategic direction for conservation and enhancement of the landscape over the next twenty years. The Strategy will sit alongside a Biodiversity Action Plan and together they will form supporting documents to the National Park Management Plan which was produced in March 2010. The Landscape Strategy will be a document that can be read and understood by all those who have an interest in the landscape of the New Forest. It is being informed by widespread public and stakeholder consultation and engagement, including a series of roadshows and an online questionnaire.

The Strategy is compliant with ELC guidelines and the central themes of protecting, managing and planning the landscape run throughout the document. Every effort has been made to ensure clarity in definitions, and to communicate what landscape is and how it is perceived, with a clear emphasis on a vision for the New Forest National Park. Various New Forest landscapes are described, along with major issues that affect the National Park such as tranquillity, dark night skies, road design, suburbanisation and forestry. The strategy uses a spatial framework to identify features and attributes that define landscape character in a given area. It also identifies the condition of the landscape and features, and considers the forces for change that are acting on the landscape. Flowing from this a future vision for that landscape character area is identified, with management guidelines to assist in achieving this.

Lake District: Derwentwater Foreshore

www.foreshoreproject.com

The Derwentwater Foreshore Project was borne out of concerns highlighted by local community groups and the Derwentwater Management Plan that the site, which receives high volumes of visitors, was in need of restoration. The project aims to restore the site, improve long-term management, and increase opportunities for the appreciation and interpretation of its unique heritage. The project is being largely funded by the BIG Lottery Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund.

The project recognises all aspects of landscape, incorporating the physical landscape; experience of landscape; and recreational opportunities. The Derwentwater foreshore has strong cultural roots, as a site that has been used as a viewpoint for appreciating natural beauty since the beginnings of the romantic and sublime period. The project has included detailed surveys and assessments, including public consultation on how the landscape is perceived and what people want from the landscape. A three year post has been funded to engage the public with the site, and the wider landscape. A group of volunteers has been established to look after the site and provide interpretation through organised events and informal information provision.



A view of Derwentwater painted by Thomas Smith of Derby, circa 1767

Dartmoor: Moorland Vision

www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/index/lookingafter/laf-landmanagement/laf-moorfutures.htm
www.uklandscapeaward.org/Entryfiles/1281686240A-Vision-for-Dartmoor-2010.pdf

The Dartmoor Vision is a project initiated by Dartmoor National Park Authority in 2003. Despite a long history of moorland management, there had previously been no cohesive view of what Dartmoor's moorland should look like in the future. The project is a collaboration between farmers, commoners and statutory agencies to articulate a single clear vision for 2030. It is to be used as a framework for action on the ground, and as a basis for policy to manage this valued upland landscape. The Vision was published in 2006. It was published as a simple map based document with explanatory notes and photographs, which set out, with a clarity of purpose, how the moorland landscape will look. The Vision describes how individual habitats and archaeology will be managed and the moorland landscape protected.

The Vision highlights the importance of Dartmoor's upland landscape and recognises the direct relationship between social needs, economic activity and the environment. It also highlights the value and importance of the natural and cultural heritage and the need for continued management of this resource. The Vision has helped demonstrate that responsibility for the landscape lies not only with the National Park Authority, but also with other agencies, farmers, commoners and the general public. It has also highlighted fundamentally that management of this resource can only be protected, maintained and enhanced by cooperation. It recognises collective working as the best way to protect and manage the upland moor and also ensures effective use of resources. While it seems a simple message, it is in fact a radical approach to working in a complex environment with many pressures and disparate interest groups and issues. The Vision is now being taken forward through various projects which have the vision at their heart. The overall project received a commendation in the UK Landscape Awards 2010.



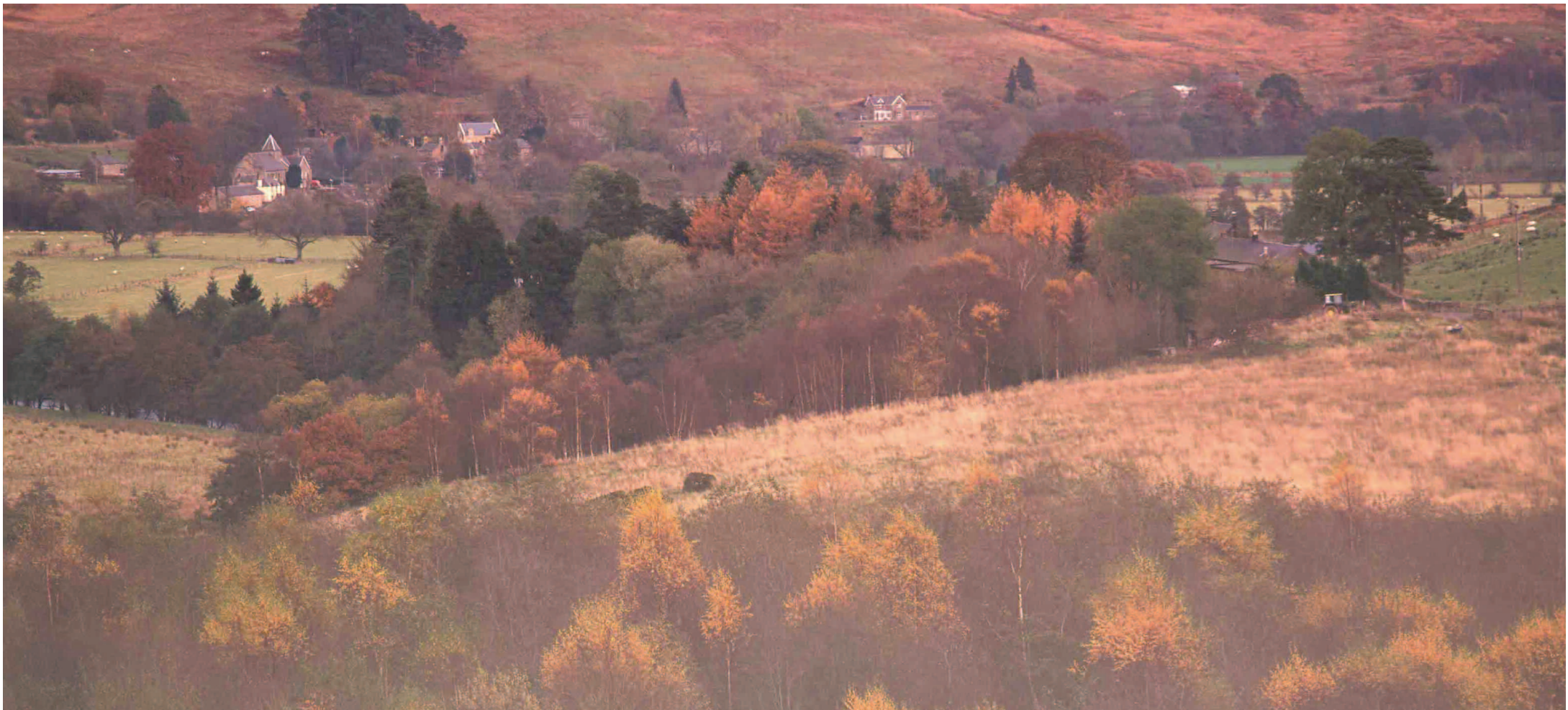
Northumberland: Planning to Guide Change

www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk/livingin/planning/planningpolicyandguidance/developmentplan/landscapespd.htm



In 2007 Northumberland National Park Authority commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment of the National Park (and the wider Tynedale District). Building on this, the Authority is now producing a Landscape Strategy for the National Park area. The Landscape Strategy will look at the key issues and influences affecting change in the National Park landscape and seek to develop a strategy which will guide development and land use change in a way that benefits this treasured landscape. It will also demonstrate how the intent and purposes of the ELC can be carried through in the work that the National Park Authority undertakes. The Landscape Strategy will be developed through consultation with a variety of agencies, land owners and managers, community groups, residents and visitors to the National Park.

In addition, the Authority will be developing a Landscape Supplementary Planning Document to provide information on the landscape character of the National Park. This will be relevant for the assessment of planning applications, and establishing guidelines for particular types of development. A survey is currently underway to establish what people value as the special qualities of the National Park landscape; what they see as priorities for conservation; and what types of development or activity would affect their enjoyment of the landscape.



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If you would like more information on National Park Authorities' work on landscape, please use the weblinks provided or contact the ENPAA office. For more information about the European Landscape Convention visit www.naturalengland.org.uk or email gary.charlton@naturalengland.org.uk

Images courtesy of:

Dartmoor NPA, North York Moors NPA, Exmoor NPA, Yorkshire Dales NPA, Chris Ceaser (North York Moors), Mike Page (Broads), Martin O'Neill (New Forest), Roger Clegg (Northumberland), Simon Fraser (Northumberland)