Chapter 2

Definitions, scope and context
Part 1 Introduction, scope and context

Chapter overview

- What does landscape mean?
- The importance of landscape
- Landscape change and sustainable development
- The role of LVIA
- Professional judgement in LVIA

What does landscape mean?

2.1 The UK has signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC) since 2002, when the last edition of this guidance was published. The recognition that government has thus given to landscape matters raises the profile of this important area and emphasises the role that landscape can play as an integrating framework for many areas of policy. The ELC is designed to achieve improved approaches to the planning, management and protection of landscapes throughout Europe and to put people at the heart of this process.

2.2 The ELC adopts a definition of landscape that is now being widely used in many different situations and is adopted in this guidance: ‘Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’ (Council of Europe, 2000). This definition reflects the thinking that emerged in the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was summarised in the 2002 guidance on Landscape Character Assessment. The inclusive nature of landscape was captured there in a paragraph stating that:

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives. The term does not mean just special or designated landscapes and it does not only apply to the countryside. Landscape can mean a small patch of urban wasteland as much as a mountain range, and an urban park as much as an expanse of lowland plain. It results from the way that different components of our environment – both natural (the influences of geology, soils, climate, flora and fauna) and cultural (the historical and current impact of land use, settlement, enclosure and other human interventions) – interact together and are perceived by us. People’s perceptions turn land into the concept of landscape.

(Swanwick and Land Use Consultants, 2002: 2)

2.3 This guidance embraces this broad interpretation of what landscape means and uses it throughout. It is not only concerned with landscapes that are recognised as being special or valuable, but is also about the ordinary and the everyday – the landscapes where people live and work, and spend their leisure time. The same approach can be taken in all these different landscape settings, provided that full attention is given to the particular characteristics of each place.

2.4 The importance of the ELC definition is that it moves beyond the idea that landscape is only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity. Instead it encourages a focus on
landscape as a resource in its own right. It provides an integrated way of con­ceptualising our surroundings and is increasingly considered to provide a useful spatial framework for thinking about a wide range of environmental, land use and development issues.

The ELC definition of landscape is inclusive. Article 2 of the European Landscape Convention states that

Subject to the provisions contained in Article 1.5, this Convention applies to the entire territory of the Parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas.
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areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes. (Council of Europe, 2000)

The definition therefore applies, among other things, to:

- all types of rural landscape, from high mountains and wild countryside to urban fringe farmland (rural landscapes);
- marine and coastal landscapes (seascapes);
- the landscapes of villages, towns and cities (townscapes).

2.6 Rural landscapes have been the main focus of attention for a number of years. Now both townscape and seascape have also emerged as particular sub-sets of ‘landscape’ for consideration. This guidance is equally applicable to all forms of landscape and does not separate townscape and seascape out for special treatment. However, for clarity the following paragraphs define these terms. All LVIA work needs to respond to the particular context in which it takes place. Whether the project is located in a rural, an urban or a marine context, attention will need to be paid to the distinctive character of the area and reference made to any relevant specific guidance.

Chapter 5 sets out how the different forms of landscape are assessed to provide baseline descriptions for LVIA.

Townscape

2.7 ‘Townscape’ refers to areas where the built environment is dominant. Villages, towns and cities often make important contributions as elements in wider-open landscapes but townscape means the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings, the relationships between them, the different types of urban open spaces, including green spaces, and the relationship between buildings and open spaces. There are important relationships with the historic dimensions of landscape and townscape, since evidence of the way that villages, towns and cities change and develop over time contributes to their current form and character.

Seascape

2.8 The importance of coasts and seascapes as part of our marine environment has increasingly been acknowledged, not least due to the growing pressures being placed upon them by new forms of development, notably aquaculture, offshore wind farms, tidal energy schemes and the development of coastal risk management defences. The definition of landscape from the European Landscape Convention includes seascapes and marine environments. As the UK Marine Policy Statement indicates, ‘seascape should be taken as meaning landscapes with views of the coast or seas, and coasts and the adjacent marine environment with cultural, historical and archaeological links with each other’ (HM Government, Northern Ireland Executive, Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government, 2011: 21).
Figure 2.2 'Townscape' means the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings and the relationships between them.

Figure 2.3 'Seascape' means landscapes with views of the coast or seas, and coasts and the adjacent marine environment.
2.9 This definition includes the meeting point of land and sea but also encompasses areas beyond the low water mark, and so includes both areas near to the shore and the open sea. Any assessment of the landscape and visual effects of change in marine and coastal environments should carefully consider the relationship between land and sea in coastal areas and also take account of possible requirements to consider the open sea.

Relationship to green infrastructure

2.10 Green infrastructure has come to the fore since the publication of the second edition of this guidance. It refers to networks of green spaces and watercourses and water bodies that connect rural areas, villages, towns and cities. Such networks are increasingly being planned, designed and managed to achieve multiple social, environmental and economic objectives. Green infrastructure is not separate from the landscape but is part of it and operates at what is sometimes referred to as the ‘landscape scale’. It is generally concerned with sites and linking networks that are set within the wider context of the surrounding landscape or townscape. LVIA will often need to address the effects of proposed development on green infrastructure as well as the potential the development may offer to enhance it.

The importance of landscape

2.11 As the ELC makes clear, particular attention needs to be given to landscape because of the importance that is attached to it by individuals, communities and public bodies. Landscape is important because it provides:

- a shared resource which is important in its own right as a public good;
- an environment for flora and fauna;
- the setting for day to day lives – for living, working and recreation;
- opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment;
- a sense of place and a sense of history, which in turn can contribute to individual, local, national and European identity;
- continuity with the past through its relative permanence and its role in acting as a cultural record of the past;
- a source of memories and associations, which in turn may contribute to wellbeing;
- inspiration for learning, as well as for art and other forms of creativity.

2.12 In addition landscape provides economic benefits, both directly by providing an essential resource to support livelihoods, especially in agriculture, forestry and other land management activities, and in recreation and tourism, as well as indirectly through its now widely acknowledged benefits for health and wellbeing.

Landscape change and sustainable development

2.13 Landscape is not unchanging. Many different pressures have progressively altered familiar landscapes over time and will continue to do so in the future, creating new landscapes. Today many of these drivers of change arise from the requirement for development to meet the needs of a growing and changing population and economy.
They include land management, especially farming and forestry, and many forms of development, including (among many others): new housing; commercial developments; new forms of energy generation including wind turbines; new infrastructure such as roads, railways and power lines; and extraction of minerals for a variety of uses.

In the last thirty years there has been growing emphasis on the need to accommodate such change and development in ways that are sustainable. Definitions of sustainable development have been extensively debated but according to the widely accepted definition in the Brundtland report this means 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It is broadly agreed that it involves finding an appropriate balance between economic, social and environmental matters, and that protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment is an important part of this.

As a technical process LVIA has an important contribution to make to the achievement of sustainable development. It takes place in a context where, over time, landscapes evolve and society's needs and individual and community attitudes change. This can make the professional judgements about the significance of effects identified through LVIA, and whether they are positive or negative, particularly challenging.

Climate change is one of the major factors likely to bring about future change in the landscape, and is widely considered as the most serious long-term threat to the natural environment. The need for climate change mitigation and adaptation is now well established at a policy level in the UK and beyond. There are many different ways in which mitigation and adaptation can be addressed and landscape professionals are directed to the Landscape Institute's policy document on climate change (Landscape Institute, 2008a) when considering such matters. Some climate change mitigation and adaptation projects may in themselves require EIA. Further information on climate change and EIA is available in IEMA guidance (e.g. IEMA, 2010a, 2010b).

There is some emphasis in the UK and elsewhere on appropriate renewable energy development as a means of mitigating climate change. Renewable energy development proposals are subject to the same LVIA process as any other type of development proposal, with the same need for careful siting, design and mitigation, and impartial assessment of the landscape and visual effects. It is for the competent authority to judge the balance of weight between policy considerations and the effects that such proposals may have.

The role of LVIA

LVIA must address both effects on landscape as a resource in its own right and effects on views and visual amenity.

Effects on landscape as a resource

The ELC definition of landscape supports the need to deal with landscape as a resource in its own right. In the UK this particularly reflects the emphasis on landscape character
Green Infrastructure
An integrated approach to land use

Landscape Institute Position Statement

Figure 2.4 Landscape Institute position statement on green infrastructure
that has developed since the 1980s. Landscape results from the interplay of the physical, natural and cultural components of our surroundings. Different combinations of these elements and their spatial distribution create the distinctive character of landscapes in different places, allowing different landscapes to be mapped, analysed and described. Character is not just about the physical elements and features that make up a landscape, but also embraces the aesthetic, perceptual and experiential aspects of the landscape that make different places distinctive.

**Views and visual amenity**

When the interrelationship between people ('human beings' or 'population' in the language of the Directive and Regulations) and the landscape is considered, this introduces related but very different considerations, notably the views that people have and their visual amenity—meaning the overall pleasantness of the views they enjoy of their surroundings.

Reflecting this distinction the two components of LVIA are:

1. **assessment of landscape effects**: assessing effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right;
2. **assessment of visual effects**: assessing effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people.

The distinction between these two aspects is very important but often misunderstood, even by professionals. LVIA must deal with both and should be clear about the difference between them. If a professional assessment does not properly define them or distinguish between them, then other professionals and members of the public are likely to be confused.

**Professional judgement in LVIA**

Professional judgement is a very important part of LVIA. While there is some scope for quantitative measurement of some relatively objective matters, for example the number of trees lost to construction of a new mine, much of the assessment must rely on qualitative judgements, for example about what effect the introduction of a new development or land use change may have on visual amenity, or about the significance of change in the character of the landscape and whether it is positive or negative.

The role of professional judgement is also characteristic of other environmental topics, such as ecology or cultural heritage, especially when it comes to judging how significant a particular change is. In all cases there is a need for the judgements that are made to be reasonable and based on clear and transparent methods so that the reasoning applied at different stages can be traced and examined by others. Professional judgements must be based on both training and experience and in general suitably qualified and experienced landscape professionals should carry out Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments.

Even with qualified and experienced professionals there can be differences in the judgements made. This may result from using different approaches or different criteria, or
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from variation in judgements based on the same approach and criteria. Ideally, and especially for complex projects, more than one person should be involved in the assessment to provide checks and balances, especially in identifying the likely significant effects. If, for example, the professional judgements made on behalf of different interested parties vary widely it is the decision makers in the competent authority who will ultimately need to weigh up the evidence and reach a conclusion.

2.26 Landscape professionals are likely to be closely involved in the development of the scheme and its design. If they also undertake the LVIA, they must be able to take a sufficiently detached and dispassionate view of the proposals in the final assessment of landscape and visual impact. In carrying out an LVIA the landscape professional must always take an independent stance, and fully and transparently address both the negative and positive effects of a scheme in a way that is accessible and reliable for all parties concerned.

Summary advice on good practice

- LVIA should adopt the broad and inclusive ELC definition of landscape embracing, among other things, seascapes and townscapes as well as all forms of rural landscape.
- LVIA will often need to address the effects of development on green infrastructure and also the potential for enhancing it. Green infrastructure is not a separate consideration from landscape – rather it is part of it and should be treated as such.
- As a technical process LVIA has an important contribution to make to the achievement of sustainable development, including assessment of proposals for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.
- LVIA must deal with and clearly distinguish between the assessment of landscape effects, dealing with changes to the landscape as a resource, and the assessment of visual effects, dealing with changes in views and visual amenity.
- Professional judgement is a very important part of LVIA. Ideally, and especially for complex projects, more than one person should be involved in the assessment to provide checks and balances, especially in identifying the significant effects likely to influence decisions.