



European Landscape Convention

Forestry Commission
Action Plan

Forestry Commission England

Action Plan 2010-2015

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Summary

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is the first international instrument to deal formally with landscape. Endorsed by the UK government it requires action at a national level to plan, manage and protect landscapes and at an international level to liaise and co-operate across Europe. (Ref. 1)

Importantly, the Convention recognises both cultural and natural landscape values, defining landscape as: ***'An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'***

As the Government's statutory adviser on landscape, Natural England is working through an implementation plan for the Convention, in partnership with Defra and English Heritage.

The Forestry Commission in England has agreed, as the government's agent dealing with woodland matters, to produce an ELC Action Plan that will include proposals to **strengthen and promote the understanding and consideration of landscape issues** on all areas of trees, woods and forests, including those on the Public Forest Estate (Ref. 2)

This Action Plan will set out actions to be undertaken over a five year period (commencing April 2010) to assess existing landscape regulation, policies, strategies and programmes, guidance and training; to ensure the principles of the ELC are applied in an appropriate manner to the management and creation of woods and forests throughout England.

Background to the European Landscape Convention

Established by the Council of Europe in 2000 the ELC was signed by the UK Government in Feb 2006 and came into effect in March 2007 following assurances that there would be no additional regulatory burden to change existing policy or legislation other than to agree that ELC principles will be incorporated into new or reviewed policy and practice.

The ELC requires signatories to protect, manage and plan for landscape values across all landscapes, rural and urban, large and small, coastal and inland, protected or degraded; the Convention also promotes international co-operation.

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Natural England's implementation plan is part of a wider landscape policy review process within NE that will pave the way for a refreshed approach to landscape characterisation and planning.

The preparation of ELC Action Plans is the key vehicle through which the aims of the ELC will be implemented in England. Action Plans are seen as one of the most useful ways that organisations such as the FC can engage with the ELC.

Natural England has produced guidance for organisations preparing ELC Action Plans along with case studies produced by themselves, EH and National Forest. (Ref. 3)

The importance of the European Landscape Convention to Forestry Commission England

The ELC is relevant to the FC England in the following ways

- as a Government department with landscape-related policy delivery responsibilities, including under ETWF
- as manager and custodian of a major landscape asset, the Public Forest Estate (PFE), and exemplar of good practice
- as a sponsor of landscape change through woodland grants, partnership initiatives and other development programmes
- as an expert or statutory adviser on the impact of trees and woodlands on landscape character and functionality.
- as a statutory duty under Environmental Impact Assessment (Landscape and Visual Impacts) and the Forestry Regulations.

The Forestry Commission has substantial experience of landscape management and change over a wide range of scales and geographic locations.

The role of the Forestry Commission is already closely aligned with themes from the convention such as recognition of landscape as an essential component of the setting for people's lives and the need to engage with communities and stakeholders to protect, enhance, plan and manage local landscapes.

The FC has led the development of approaches to landscape analysis and design and published well-respected guidance for woodland owners and managers that is used around the world.

In particular the FC has developed a robust and forward-looking approach to landscape change that integrates sustainable natural resource management and

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landscape ecology with aesthetic and cultural principles to create distinctive landscapes.

The FC has also been at the forefront of encouraging and demonstrating large scale urban fringe woodland creation schemes, brown field restoration projects and Green Infrastructure programmes.

Vision and objectives

The vision for this Action Plan is to:-

- Raise the profile of landscape quality across the forestry sector through policy, guidance, and practice.
- Promote opportunities for learning and developing understanding of landscape through research and training.
- Involve people (local communities, stakeholders and partners) in the decisions related to woodland in the landscape.
- Develop a landscape culture across the forestry sector to ensure landscape issues are recognised, analysed and addressed in a consistent and professional way in both the public estate and external programmes.
- Modernise the approach to landscape analysis and design to reflect the continuing evolution of forestry towards a diverse, multifunctional activity that meets a wide range of objectives.
- Develop a more unified and forward-looking approach to landscape characterisation, planning opportunities and management with other agencies.
- Secure a robust expert capability to meet internal and external demand for landscape advice on policy development, estate management, grants and external programmes, statutory responsibilities and legal challenges.
- Engage with communities where forestry impacts on their local landscape.
- Have a secure evidence base, particularly around the social and cultural roles and values of wooded landscapes and their contribution to sense of place, identity and social cohesion.

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Identifying ELC themes for the FC England Action Plan

The Articles of the ELC can be translated into ten actions appropriate to ELC Action Plans. The main groupings are set out in the table below.

	The Ten ELC Actions	Current measures & actions	Examples of how these apply to the Forestry Commission
1	<i>Recognise landscapes in law</i>	Forestry EIA Forestry Regulations	Influencing future legislation, regulation and advice.
2	<i>Identify and analyse the landscape - describing their character and forces and pressures acting on them</i>	General Forest landscape guidelines UK Forest Standard Within FC Opportunity Mapping Public Benefit Recording System	Improving the role that trees, woods and forests can make in the wider landscape. Promote use of sound landscape identification and assessment procedures.
3	<i>Assess the landscape – considering what contributes to and detracts from their quality and character</i>	Supporting regional planning advocacy and influencing e.g. spatial planning and RFFs Within the PFE Strategic & Forest Design Plans Contributing to landscape scale projects (Neroche, Wyre Forest)	Improving the understanding of landscape character in relation to trees, woods and forests.
4	<i>Define objectives for the landscape;</i>	Within FC Forest Plan public consultation Within the PFE FDPs on public register	Embed landscape into decision-making process at an early stage through objective setting in EIA process for new woodland creation/clearance schemes. Strategic design planning within FE with local community and stakeholder involvement.
5	<i>Protect, manage, and plan the landscape</i>	UKFS Forest Landscape Design Guidelines FD Planning and OSA implementation processes. Felling licences	Re-affirm, refocus and raise the bar on delivery of landscape benefits through forest planning and management programmes.
6	<i>Integrate landscape into relevant policies (regional, town planning, cultural, environmental, agricultural, social, economic, and other policies)</i>	Sustainable Growth Group	FC engagement with growth agenda Ensure that landscape is integral to FC policy. Providing expert advice to Defra/NE on trees, woods and forests during consultation on development of landscape policy. Contributing recreation opportunities to LDFs (e.g. Thetford FP recreation plan) Guidance note on the use of tree, woods and forests in delivery of Green Infrastructure programmes
7	<i>Monitor what is happening to landscape</i>	Within PFE FDP reviews Landscape audits	Audit the existing activity of the FCE against ELC objectives and identify new areas of activity. Monitor landscape change against specific criteria (climate change, FDP implementation on PFE and elsewhere within the public/private sector) Development of tools to monitor site evaluation (Methuselah)
8	<i>Increase awareness of the value of landscape</i>	Guidelines Promotion of UKFS Forest landscape design training	Increase landscape awareness among society, private woodland owners, forestry professionals and within the FC. Inclusion of relevant landscape related issues on the FC website
9	<i>Promote landscape training and education</i>	Guidelines Ad hoc in-house training and mentoring	Promotion of good woodland landscape design and management, and development of appropriate education and training programmes for the forestry sector.
10	<i>Seek opportunities for European co-operation</i>	Interreg projects COST Action European Forum on Urban Forestry	Establish cross-sector organisational links at home and overseas with landscape being an integrating concept.

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Establishing a base line for FC England against the ELC

Skills and Training The Forestry Commission currently employs 4.5 members of staff with professional landscape expertise. A number of other FCE staff have a landscape background, but do not work directly as Landscape Architects in their current role.

The focus for FC landscape architects is largely on design work for Forest Enterprise, including:

- auditing and updating forest design plans (FDPs)
- concept development and funding bids for infrastructure projects on the PFE
- public consultation work on major new PFE proposals
- design and construction of recreation and visitor facilities on existing PFE sites
- design & construction work on new sites
- more strategic documentation and dissemination of good practice & guidance

There is currently no landscape support for Grants and Regulations, or for the Regions (other than for specific EIAs).

Since 2000 personalised training and mentoring by FC England landscape architects has only been made available to newly appointed planning foresters, who in addition are occasionally able to take a place in Scotland, where the former course is run on an intermittent basis. No training is currently in place for Woodland Officers, other public bodies, or for the private sector.

Most landscape appreciation and awareness within the FC is as a result of individual staff interest, which tends to have come through training and mentoring.

Practice and process Within FE the system of planning foresters being responsible for design planning tends to ensure landscape issues are more effectively assimilated than a system where Area Foresters are responsible for their own individual design plans.

Within FC Regions, landscape issues are usually identified through EIA scoping, but can sometimes be missed within the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) as it is not specifically flagged as an issue to be addressed. Within the EWGS the Woodland Planning Grant (WPG) is able to contribute to the costs of producing management plans for existing woodlands that meet the requirements of the UK Forest Standard, though landscape is not specifically mentioned as one of the aims of the grant.

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The FC has been involved in landscape **policy, guidance and standards** for many years so the inclusion of landscape is an integral part of most documents and thinking. Obviously many documents predate the ELC so don't make specific reference to it, except for the most recent (e.g. ETWF Delivery Plan); some integrate the essence of the ELC well (e.g. Keepers of Time); some are in the process of being rewritten and incorporate the ELC and its principals (e.g. Open Habitats policy and the New Landscape Guidelines). Other policies might need to be reviewed with some urgency due to changes in priorities (e.g. Landscape Guidelines for Short Rotation Coppice) whilst others can have the principles of the ELC integrated when the time comes for them to be revised.

Research and monitoring Little recent research and monitoring has been specifically conducted in the area of landscape though in the late 1990's a forest landscape monitoring programme was set up to assess the change of public and private forest landscapes over time as FDP and Forest Plans were implemented. The report produced was entitled 'Monitoring the UK Forestry Standard: The Landscape of Upland Conifer Forests'

Within the PFE a limited programme of landscape audits is undertaken on FDPs and major recreation sites by FC England Landscape Architects.

Implementation (actions 2010–2015)

NB Tasks to undertake in the first year are indicated in boxes:-

The following **policies** have potential landscape implications that need to be checked against the ELC to ascertain what landscape actions are necessary and where supplementary landscape guidance and training is necessary.

- A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests (ETWF) Delivery Plan
 - Keepers of time: A statement of policy for England's Ancient and Native Woodland
 - Open Habitats policy – Subject to ministerial approval this is due to be drafted in February 2010
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999• Forestry Regulations |
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Benchmarking of current **guidance and standards** needs to be undertaken against the ELC to identify where the priority areas need revision or development.

- The UK Forestry Standard (consultation draft as at 2009).
 - New Landscape Guidelines - (currently being revised as part of the UK Forest Standard and incorporates connections to ELC)
 - Historic Environment Guidelines - (as above)
 - Practice guidance note 'Forest Design' (pre-dates ELC)
 - FP Guidance note 3 'Designed Landscapes'
 - The UK Woodland Assurance Standard, Second Edition
- Landscape Guidelines for Short Rotation Coppice (pre-dates ELC and current carbon/woodfuel agenda)
 - English Woodland Grant Scheme guidelines and the application of the Woodland Planning Grant

Benchmarking **practice and process** as it is reflected in the ELC. Identifying areas of potential weakness or omission and preparing recommendations for revision, development and training.

- Ensure that landscape impacts are properly addressed as part of a holistic EWGS review process.
 - Review FE Strategic plans to assess if landscape is appropriately integrated into wider policies/objectives.
- Review a selection of FDP's, assess if landscape has been appropriately addressed and what systems are being used to determine when Landscape Architect involvement is necessary.
 - Assess the relevance of OGB36 to the ELC (FE process for undertaking FDPs)
 - Assess the usage of perspective illustrations in forest planning and the suitability of 3D visualisation tools.
 - Assess the current level of public engagement on landscape matters through public register and identify how this might be improved if necessary.
 - Undertake an assessment (with others) of whether government departments are liaising effectively on the landscape matters related to Trees, Woods and Forests.

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Undertake an assessment of current level of landscape **knowledge, skill and commitment** within the following areas; preparing relevant and appropriate recommendations, training and guidance.

- FC - Woodland Officers, Grants and Regulation Managers, Policy Advisors
- FE - Planning foresters, Beat foresters
- Other public sector and private sector – i.e. local authority woodland officers, woodland owners, Land Agents for private estates and forest management companies
- Within higher/further education forestry training programmes

Undertake a workshop/support visit to each FC Region over the next year to present the ELC, other relevant landscape policy framework and address specific landscape related issues relevant to each Region. Also make a presentation of ELC and current relevant landscape policy to FE planning foresters at their annual meeting.

Landscape Architect participation and involvement in the development and delivery of the Landscape and Historic Environment workshops associated with the revision of the UKFS Guidelines.

Over the next 12 months work up a proposal for the delivery of a forest landscape design training course specifically for practitioners in FE, FC, the private sector and public bodies, drawing on experience from FC Scotland.

Undertake an assessment of current **research** specifically related to landscape within the forestry sector, (in liaison with DEFRA) and identify relevant areas of landscape study/research.

Monitoring and review

Monitoring of the FC England ELC Action Plan will be an ongoing process and evaluation will take place annually to review progress and established tasks to be undertaken in the next annual work programme.

Checklist for Annual Review

- Update the baseline
- Identify actions completed
- Identify effects downstream i.e. landscape change on the ground or 'knock-on' effects to the regional/local level;
- Identify any organisational changes resulting from the Action Plan;

References

1. European Landscape Convention
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Landscape/default_en.asp
2. England's Trees, Woods and Forests: Delivery Plan 2008-2012
3. Guidelines for implementing the European Landscape Convention Part 1: What does it mean for your organisation?
<http://www.landscapecharacter.org.uk/files/u1/ELC-GUIDANCE-PART-1.pdf>

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