

European Landscape Convention

Defra/Natural England 'light touch' review of implementation in England

October 2012

ELC review questions

1. How has the ELC increased landscape awareness within your organisation?

The Landscape Institute is the Royal Chartered body for landscape architects. As a professional organisation and educational charity, we work to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the public benefit. We champion landscape, and the landscape profession, through advocacy and support to our members, in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. We work with government to improve the planning, design and management of urban and rural landscape. We accredit university courses and promote professional development to ensure that landscape architects deliver the highest standards of practice.

As such, landscape is already at the very core of the activities carried out by the organisation. There is a great deal of similarity between the mission and vision of the LI and the aims of the ELC. The LI is already actively engaged in promoting the ELC and delivering against many of its articles.

2. How useful have you found the ELC in meeting your own objectives (policy, strategy, plans, engagement, delivery etc)?

The ELC has been useful to the Landscape Institute in many ways, for example:

(a) Policy

The ELC has been useful in providing support for the arguments put forward by the Landscape Institute in its work with various government departments and agencies. In particular our responses to public policy consultations, where appropriate, will remind government of its commitments to ELC implementation and the benefits of ensuring these are enshrined in policy.

There have been many occasions where government policy proposals appear not to have taken into consideration the need to comply with the ELC (in particular articles 1, 5 and 6), or recognised the benefits of taking these articles into account when developing policy (further information in response to question 6 and 7).

Landscape Institute Policy Position Statements will nearly always include reference to the ELC and explain how the themes being tackled in these publications (e.g. housing, green infrastructure, climate change) have a policy 'hook' in the Convention.

(b) Internal communications

The ELC has been beneficial in terms of providing consistency of terms and language in a field which is extremely broad.

(c) Wider stakeholder engagement

In 2010 the Landscape Institute ran, on behalf of Defra, the UK Landscape Award. This process sought to find a UK entrant for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe. As part of this process, the Landscape Institute worked with a number of 'affiliates' – organisations which we felt should be made more aware of landscape generally. These 'affiliates' were introduced to the fundamental principles of the ELC and it was explained to them how the Convention was relevant to their objectives. Affiliates, which included the TCPA, British Ecological Society and National Housing Federation, subsequently communicated the Awards process to their audiences.

3. Can you provide some examples where the ELC has helped meet or deliver your own objectives?

See response to question 2.

4. Are you aware of or have you used any ELC research or guidance material? If so, in what way have you used such material? Do you think there are any gaps in ELC information provision in England?

n/a

5. Have you used the ELC to communicate landscape issues with your key partners and, if so, which partners and how has this been communicated?

Yes. Primarily the ELC is used in our policy and communications activity. In particular the Landscape Institute focuses on articles 1, 5 and 6 and their relevance to

6. Do you perceive of any barriers to ELC implementation in England?

As the ELC is a treaty signed by national governments, responsibility for its implementation falls to those governments and not to organisations such as the Landscape Institute. Some actions by government will, potentially, have a negative impact on ELC implementation, including:

(a) Public finance expenditure

There is evidence (report undertaken by the Landscape Institute of its public sector members) that the landscape profession within the public sector is being directly and substantially affected by reductions in expenditure in local authorities, with many taking early retirement, being made redundant or being required to take on wider responsibilities. At the same time permanent landscape posts are being removed from the public sector establishments, which in some cases, leaves the local authority or government department without any remaining in-house landscape skills. As a consequence the environmental services to society are being directly affected and the support for private landscape services by the public sector is being lost.

These losses could potentially have significant negative implications for ELC implementation in England. These include:

- The loss of support to local communities involved in transforming their local environment, including the loss of local knowledge of people and place;
- The loss of landscape influence on internal public sector policy and capital programmes across numerous functions of the public sector;
- The loss of the promotion of landscape design, brief writing, scoping, accreditation and internal follow-on of private landscape commissions, weakening of the mutually beneficial relationship between the public and private landscape sectors. Given the influence of the planning system in addressing landscape quality in respect of both development and policy, this seems likely to result in substantially reduced employment throughout the profession and a significant degradation in the quality of landscape provision; and
- The weakening of the professions ability to fulfil the objectives of European Directives and initiatives, such as Environmental Impact Assessments and the European Landscape Convention.

(b) Planning reform

The purpose of planning is to regulate the use of land in the public interest, to balance competing land use needs in order to shape the places in which we all live, work and visit and to integrate them into the natural environment upon which we all depend. This all chimes well with the aspirations of the ELC. It was therefore a disappointment that the National Planning Policy Framework did not adequately reflect the Convention, though DCLG's Summary of Responses (July 2012) stated the following:

"It is not considered necessary to specifically reference the European Landscape Convention, as the general approach is reflected in the Framework. We have included a definition of Green Infrastructure in the glossary to make clear that it is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. The Framework has also been amended to provide greater reference to geodiversity".

The Localism Act could have been a useful mechanism for advancing some of the key principles of the ELC, however to date the consideration given to the Convention in the subsequent policy proposals have been entirely inadequate.

7. How could ELC implementation in England be improved?

The two points raised in response to question 6 are clearly going to remain a barrier. In light of this, perhaps ELC implementation in England could be improved through closer dialogue between the Defra family and other government department, in particular DCLG (given its role in planning policy).