

Landscape Character Assessment

Technical Information Note 08/2015

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This Information Note concerns Landscape Character Assessment in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It is accompanied by a Reading List TIN 05/2015

Please note that the document is for information only and no content should be taken as Landscape Institute policy, guidance, advice or LI commentary on national practice.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Our landscapes vary because of, for example, their underlying geology, soils, topography, land cover, hydrology, historic and cultural development, and climatic considerations. The combination of characteristics arising from these physical and socio cultural and socio-economic influences, and their often complex interrelationships, makes one landscape different from another. **Landscape Character** is defined as, “A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.”¹ **Landscape Character Assessment** is defined as, “the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment.”²
- 1.2 Landscape Character Assessment is relevant to Landscape Architects, landscape professionals and others, in the private, public, and voluntary sectors. It is as relevant to community led small scale projects as it is to consultant led major infrastructure projects.
- 1.3 Landscape Character Assessment has long been important in the UK by informing the management and monitoring of landscape change. It gained greater significance however when the UK Government signed up to the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2006 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236096/8413.pdf

The ELC provides a shared definition of “landscape” that encompasses character, as well as a commitment by signatories to “identify and assess” landscapes. The scope of the ELC applies to natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas and includes land, inland water and marine areas. As the ELC acknowledges, “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas”³ All landscapes matter to someone. By setting down a robust, auditable and transparent, baseline Landscape Character Assessment can not only help us to understand our landscapes, it can also assist in informing judgements and decisions concerning the management of change. Landscape Character Assessments can help to influence the planning, management and protection of our environment. Landscape Character Assessment may inform, for example:

Planning – planning policy, Place-Making, Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Landscape Impact and Visual Impact Assessment⁴, master

¹ The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (CAX 84), the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage. Also, Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England.

² Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England.

³ Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence October 2000.

⁴ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, London: Routledge.

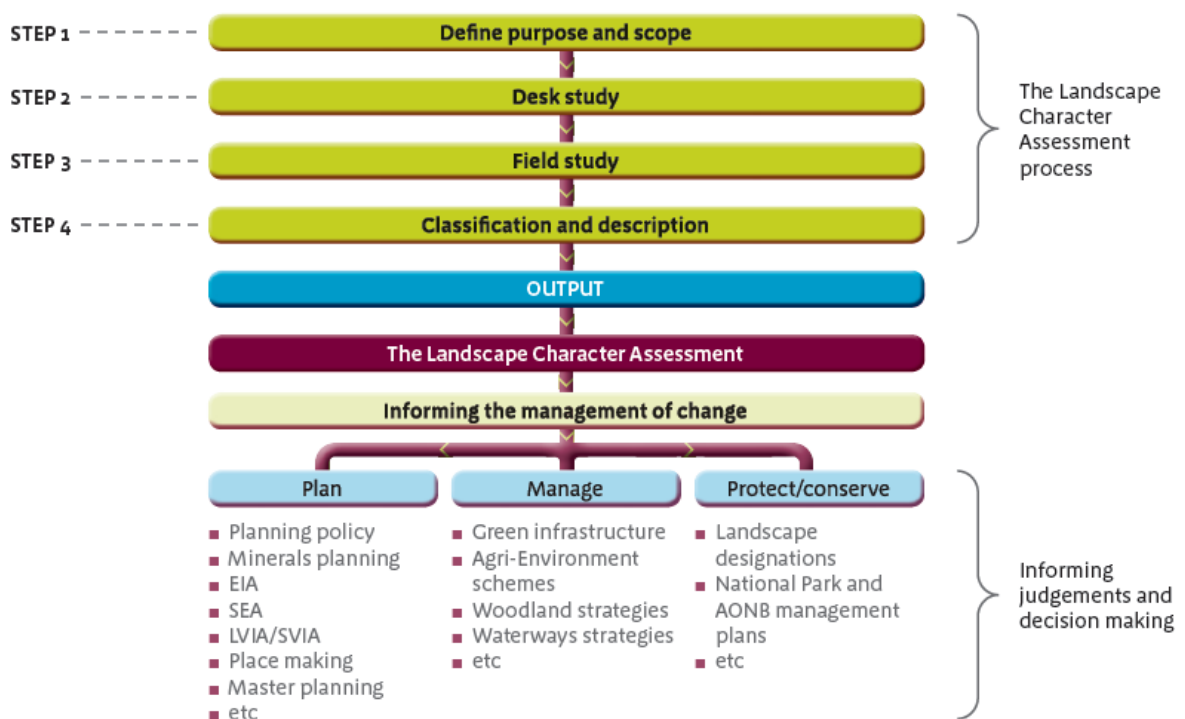
planning, minerals planning, renewable energy strategies, sensitivity and capacity studies etc.

Management – Green Infrastructure, agri-environment schemes, woodland strategies, waterways strategies etc.

Protection (conserve and maintain) – landscape designations, National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans etc.

1.4 The separation between the processes of Landscape Character Assessment and making judgements is illustrated in Figure 3., from Natural England’s An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014):

Figure 3: Landscape Character Assessment and making judgements



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1.5 The process of Landscape Character Assessment can be carried out at any scale. The purpose of the Assessment will influence choice of scale. The three key levels at which such assessments are usually carried out are:

National and Regional Scale – typically at 1:250,000 identifying broad patterns in the variation of landscape character – assessments at this scale often provide the context for more detailed assessments;

Local Authority Scale – applied at the county, unitary authority or district level, at 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 identifying landscape types and / or areas – landscape character traverses administrative boundaries so care needs to be taken to ensure assessments on either side of administrative boundaries match up; and

Local Scale or Site Level – at approximately 1:10,000 or larger scales.

Assessments can also be carried out at any level in between, or below, these 3 levels.

- 1.6 **The history of Landscape Character Assessment goes some way towards explaining the approaches to Landscape Character Assessment followed by the nations in the UK - their websites should be accessed for up to date information.** One of Natural England's predecessors, the Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission), had a long association with areas designated as being of national importance (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). However, it was also concerned about the active management of the wider countryside and its work highlighted the need for a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gave the countryside its character. So, following on from work in the 1980's the Countryside Commission and others developed the technique of Landscape Assessment – for example in 1993 Landscape Assessment Guidance⁵ was published. From its' outset, in the early 1990's, the "Countryside Character Programme" was designed "to be a framework for helping to incorporate the rich heritage of landscape diversity into present day decisions, not as a process that seeks to prevent activities."⁶ It was envisaged that the Programme would have 4 main uses: to provide a landscape context; to guide policy development and help to target resources; to identify opportunities for local action, and; to provide a base for advice. This work evolved to give us what was widely regarded as the best practice approach, Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, (2002)⁷, which has over the years helped to inform the management of change and deliver sustainable development. In England this document was replaced in 2014 by "An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment."⁸, (Oct. 2014) – the Landscape Character Assessment methodology remains the same, but outdated references to policies for example have been removed, more information on stakeholder engagement added, and information on updating Landscape Character Assessments added. In England this document also complements "An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment"⁹ which was published two years earlier. These Natural England documents can be found on the gov.uk website (more information can be found below under "England").
- 1.7 Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has confirmed that "Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland", (2002) remains the appropriate guidance for Scotland. SNH is in the process of reviewing Natural England's "An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment", (2014). When the review is complete SNH will advise on its applicability or

⁵ Countryside Commission (1993) Landscape Assessment Guidance, CCP 423, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham.

⁶ Countryside Commission (1994) Countryside Character Programme Information, CCP 472, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham.

⁷ The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (CAX 84), the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

⁸ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England.

⁹ Natural England (2012), An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment, Natural England Commissioned Report NECR 105, October 2012.

otherwise to Scotland. A methodology for assessing Coastal Character is in development for use in Scotland, instead of the Seascape Character approach.

- 1.8 LANDMAP is the Welsh approach to landscape assessment. Wales introduced LANDMAP in 1997 and in 2003 a benchmark methodology and quality assurance process was introduced. LANDMAP is the key Welsh landscape evidence base and national quality assured coverage is complete. It is an all-Wales GIS-based landscape information resource where characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded as 5 themed spatial layers. Though some terminology differs from Landscape Character Assessment, the LANDMAP layers inform the sequential process of Landscape Character Assessment in Wales at the Desk Study Stage, and also help provide a common base for assessments in different areas. (Refer to “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment”, Annex 2, and also to Natural Resources Wales website for LANDMAP information, guidance, and an interactive GIS map.)
- 1.9 Northern Ireland is following “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment”, this is informing the new Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment which is currently in progress.
- 1.10 The methodology in the Republic of Ireland (Éire) generally follows the guidance outlined above and in particular “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment”. As part of the development of this Technical Information Note (TIN) it is expected that the approach to Landscape Character Assessment can be formalised. Section 6 of this document presents a detailed description of current developments.
- 1.11 The need for Landscape Character, and Landscape Character Assessment, to inform change in our environment is articulated in a range of influential documents, that are applicable across the UK, for example:

Design Manual for Roads and Bridges volumes 10, Environmental Design and Management, and 11, Environmental Assessment, by the Highways Agency (now Highways England) and others -

<http://www.standardsforhighways.co.uk/ha/standards/DMRB/vol10/index.htm>

<http://www.standardsforhighways.co.uk/DMRB/vol11/section1.htm>

<https://www.tsoshop.co.uk/bookstore.asp?FO=1160352&DI=508495&TrackID=005297>

- refer also to Transport Analysis Guidance WebTAG, from the Department of Transport
<https://www.gov.uk/transport-analysis-guidance-webtag>

e.g. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/webtag-tag-unit-a3-environmental-impact-appraisal-december-2015>

and

The UK Forestry Standard Guidelines <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/ukfs>, this document is the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK, and **the Forestry**

Commission, emphasises the importance of Landscape Character – see also Forests and Landscape [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCGL004.pdf/\\$FILE/FCGL004.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCGL004.pdf/$FILE/FCGL004.pdf)

1.12 **The UK Marine Policy Statement** importantly also mentions landscape character and seascape.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69322/pb3654-marine-policy-statement-110316.pdf

2. ENGLAND

2.1 As indicated in the Introduction, above, **Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, (2002)**¹⁰, has been replaced in England by “**An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment.**”¹¹, (Oct. 2014). In England this document complements “**An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment**”¹² which was published two years earlier. These Natural England documents can be found on the gov.uk website <https://www.gov.uk/landscape-and-seascape-character-assessments>. In England the process of Seascape Character Assessment is essentially the same as Landscape Character Assessment thus providing a seamless approach to character assessment from the terrestrial to the marine environment – this approach has also been followed in Northern Ireland and Wales. In England the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is using “An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment” to inform Seascape Character Assessment around the English coast to inform its Marine Plans. For example, refer to information provided by the MMO: “Planning and Development Guidance East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plan Areas” <https://www.gov.uk/east-inshore-and-east-offshore-marine-plan-areas> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/east-marine-plan-areas-seascape-character-assessment> and; “Seascape Assessment for the South Marine Plan areas” (MMO 1037) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seascape-assessment-for-the-south-marine-plan-areas-mmo-1037>

In line with Government policy Natural England no longer has its own website (the website ceased to exist at the end of September 2014), information developed by Natural England can now be found on the Government’s website www.gov.uk. Many of Natural England’s earlier publications and products can be found however on Natural England’s publications website <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/> (search using the word “landscape”).

In addition to the above, an archive of the very well respected **Landscape Character Network**, funded and coordinated by Natural England and active from 2002 to 2011, can be accessed via [LCN website in the National Archive](#). The archive includes resources such as case studies,

¹⁰ The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (CAX 84), the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

¹¹ Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England.

¹² Natural England (2012), An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment, Natural England Commissioned Report NECR 105, October 2012.

newsletters with topical and in depth articles, workshop proceedings and a “database” of Landscape Character Assessments in England (this is not exhaustive, however). Some of this information is indexed in the “Landscape Character Reading List”, Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 05/2015.

- 2.2 **Landscape Character Assessments can be prepared at any scale from** the national/regional scale to the local / site level. Three key levels at which such assessments are carried out in England are: national/regional scale; local authority scale, and; local scale or site level.
- 2.3 Natural England has produced information on the 159 National Character Areas across England – they replace the older Joint Character Areas. These profiles can be accessed via <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/587130> Each **National Character Area** profile includes: a description of the natural and cultural features that shape our landscapes; information to show how the landscape has changed over time; the current key drivers for ongoing change, and a broad analysis of each area’s characteristics and ecosystem services. Statements of environmental opportunity (SEOs) are suggested, which draw on this integrated information. The SEOs offer information on critical issues, which could inform the management of change and sustainable growth.
- 2.4 **County and District Councils, and unitary authorities** produce more detailed Landscape Character Assessments to inform plan making, and development management for example. These assessments will be found on the appropriate local authority website.
- 2.5 **Local Landscape Character Assessments can be produced by local communities, parish councils and others.** For example, Hampshire County Council has produced “Advice to Communities on Undertaking a Local Landscape Character Assessment – Assessing and Maintaining Local Distinctiveness”:

http://www3.hants.gov.uk/llca_and_local_distinctiveness_guidance_for_communities_less_than_3mb_hf000003366640_.pdf.

Many parishes and communities across England have produced Parish Plans and Village Design Statements that have been informed by Local Landscape Character Assessment. Neighbourhood Plans are now increasingly being produced and these will be informed by Landscape Character Assessments (and if they are at the coast ideally by Seascape Character Assessments). A Guidance Note for Preparing Neighbourhood Plans has been produced for the Touching the Tide project that focuses on “Sense of Place and Landscape in the Suffolk and Essex Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty”:

<http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/assets/documents/Landscape-and-Neighbour-Plan-final.pdf>

- 2.6 **Historic Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Seascape Character Assessment** – Both are methodologies taken forward by Historic England (and its predecessor English Heritage), and they can work alongside – and inform – Landscape Character Assessment and Seascape Character Assessment – not least to add the all-important time depth. Historic Seascape Character (HSC) Assessment notably considers the water surface, the water column,

the seabed, and beneath the seabed. See the new Historic England website, for information on Historic Landscape Characterisation see:

<http://www.historicengland.org.uk/research/approaches/research-methods/characterisation-2/>

There is information on Characterising Historic Seascape at:

<http://www.historicengland.org.uk/research/approaches/research-methods/characterisation-2/historic-seascapes/>.

Also HSC is mentioned on the 'Coastal, Marine and Maritime Heritage' page at:

<http://www.historicengland.org.uk/research/current-research/assessing-significance/coastal-and-marine/>

- 2.7 **National planning policies in England** refer to the importance of landscape character, local character etc. For example the National Planning Policy Framework <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework-2>, and the suite of National Policy Statements <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/legislation-and-advice/national-policy-statements/>

3. SCOTLAND

- 3.1 The relevant LCA guidance in Scotland is "Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland" (2002) which is available via the SNH website <http://www.snh.org.uk/ww/sharinggoodpractice/CCI/cci/guidance/Main/Content.htm>. Some aspects of this, e.g. relating to sensitivity and capacity studies, have been developed further.
- 3.2 The whole of Scotland has been mapped and described through landscape character assessment and the list of reports, mostly done for individual local authorities, is available here: <http://www.snh.org.uk/pubs/results.asp?Q=landscape+character+assessment&rpp=10> National coverage at 1:50,000 scale was achieved by 2000 and the full information is in the form of paper copies and "pdf". The series is currently being reviewed and re-formatted. The aim is to have a standardised dataset of Scotland's landscape character types available via interactive mapping on the SNH website by 2017.

At a broader scale, and compiled in a different way as a dataset of place as well as landscape character, the [Landscapes of Scotland map](#) complements the national LCA suite.

- 3.3 **Coastal character assessment** guidance has been developed by SNH; the draft guidance is due to have a focussed consultation in early 2016. It will form the equivalent to seascape character assessment as used in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.
- 3.4 The SNH [website](#) contains several pages of landscape information and guidance, including a section on landscape character assessment, the home page for which is available here: <http://snhwebsite:8090/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/lca/>. The site also has pages on related aspects of [Scotland's landscapes](#) such as their importance for health and well-being.

- 3.5 The national landscape designation in Scotland is National Scenic Areas. For these, and the two National Parks, their landscape Special Qualities have been identified. These are listed and explained on the [SNH website](#).
- 3.6 **Historic Landuse Assessment** ([HLAmap](#)) provides a Scotland-wide view of land use in modern and past times, revealing the extent of surviving prehistoric, historic and modern land uses. It was developed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, newly joined with Historic Scotland to form Historic Environment Scotland.
- 3.7 SNH has mapped, as [Wild Land Areas](#), the most extensive areas of high wildness in the country. Wild land areas are referred to in national planning policy (see 3.8).
- 3.8 **National planning policies** in Scotland refer to the importance of landscape and landscape character. Scottish Planning Policy ([SPP](#)) 2014, paragraph 193, notes the environment is a valued national asset and says (paragraph 194) that the planning system should “facilitate positive change while maintaining and enhancing distinctive landscape character”. Wild land is referred to in paragraph 200. The 3rd National Planning Framework ([NPF3](#)), paragraph 4.4, notes Scotland’s landscapes are spectacular, with important roles to play in quality of life, cultural identity, and the economy, and in contributing to local distinctiveness.
- 3.9 The role of landscape character assessment to inform **change in the environment** has been facilitated by the development of techniques such as [landscape sensitivity](#) studies. SNH has developed a [landscape capacity toolkit](#) (9MB) that provides advice on commissioning and managing a study, and links to resources and information. There is also a list of capacity / sensitivity studies in Scotland on the SNH website. A compilation of the main sensitivity assessment techniques is in preparation.

4. WALES

- 4.1 Wales diverged from the former Countryside Commission in 1992 and as a result developed its own slightly different approach for assessing landscapes, known as **LANDMAP**. The result today is a resource consisting of five landscape aspects, each considering a different theme but collectively covering the scope of landscape character. Each aspect has its own unique map layer and survey records. Although rolled out by local authority, these have been joined to create 5 national datasets.
- 4.2 LANDMAP aspect layers are: Geological Landscapes, Landscape Habitats, Historic Landscapes, Cultural Landscapes and Visual and Sensory Landscapes. The multi-disciplinary range of expertise used helps the Landscape Architect interpret the different aspects of baseline information at a landscape scale in the desk-stage of LCA. Annex 2 of “An approach to Landscape Character Assessment” (Natural England, 2014), shows the **relationship between LANDMAP aspects and the different parts of the LCA ‘wheel’** as well as setting out the principles of LCA that Wales follows in common with other parts of the UK in the main text of the document.
- 4.3 The **methodology and guidance notes** on using LANDMAP information and an interactive map to view maps and surveys is accessible from Natural Resources Wales at

www.naturalresources.wales/landmap. LANDMAP maps and surveys can also be downloaded to use in a **GIS** environment from <http://lle.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue?lang=en&text=landmap>

- 4.4 LANDMAP also includes a suite of **criteria-based evaluations and an overall evaluation** for each aspect area, which may assist in early identification of key locations across the study area in sensitivity assessment. As evaluation criteria are unique within each of the five LANDMAP layers, the evaluation results are also unique in each layer. Generally the approach to **sensitivity and capacity assessment** in Wales follows the best practice guidance produced in England and Scotland.
- 4.5 **Local Landscape Character Assessments in Wales** are published by Local Authority and National Park Authority, and are derived using LANDMAP plus other information. (See the accompanying Landscape Character Reading List 05/2015 for links to each). Much of Wales has been covered and most (but not all) are published on-line by Planning Departments as **Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)**. Some gaps in coverage are partially filled by character descriptions for **Special Landscape Areas** (local landscape designation) and a number of studies are contained within **sensitivity and capacity studies**.
- 4.6 **National Park and AONB Management Plans** add further detail for the 25% Wales they cover, relating to the ‘special qualities’ being managed. Some coastal planning authorities also have **local seascape character assessments**, with about 50% Wales’ coast and in-shore marine areas having been covered to date, and are based on the principles of Natural England’s “An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment” (2012).
- 4.7 **National Landscape Character Areas** in Wales equate in scale to England’s National Character Areas, being a much broader-scale assessment that covers Wales in just 48 areas. Area boundaries reflect cross-border landscapes with England. NLCAs are also complimented by **National Marine Character Areas**, whose 29 areas cover in-shore waters (out to the 12 nautical mile limit) and provide Wales’ broad scale seascape character assessment. All are published by Natural Resources Wales at www.naturalresources.wales/landscape and <https://www.naturalresources.wales/our-evidence-and-reports/marine-character-areas/?lang=en>
- 4.8 **Historic Landscape Character** – LANDMAP’s Historic and Cultural aspects provide all Wales coverage. Additionally, about 20% of Wales falls within the non-statutory Register of Landscapes of Outstanding and Special Historic Interest. These areas are described in the register, and characterised in further detail by Wales’s 4 Archaeological Trusts on their respective websites (see the accompanying Reading List for links). Check also with Cadw for **Historic Urban Characterisation, World Heritage Site Management Plans**, and with local authorities for **Conservation Area Character Appraisals**.
- 4.9 There is no separate programme of historic seascape characterisation in Wales, although work by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW) on **submerged landscapes** may be of relevance:

<http://cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/protection/maritimewrecks/submergedlandscapes/?lang=en>

- 4.10 **Planning Policies relating to landscape in Wales** – Most planning policy matters in Wales have been devolved to the Welsh Government with the exception of planning policy relating to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects where the National Policy Statements prepared by the UK Government are the overarching planning consideration. All other categories of planning application in Wales are determined in accordance with the national planning policy framework in Wales. This is **Planning Policy Wales (PPW)** Edition 7 July 2014 <http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/ppw/?lang=en> which is supported by a series of Technical Advice Notes (TANs) which will be subject to periodic reviews over the coming few years to reflect the changes being brought in by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 and secondary legislation attached to it. PPW sets the land use planning policy framework for Wales. It actually contains 97 references to ‘landscape’ and 62 references to ‘character’ however the most relevant are contained in its **chapter 5**, including specific reference to the European landscape Convention. **Technical Advice Note 12 (Design)** July 2014 also refers to the importance of landscape character para. 4.8 and LANDMAP, seascapes and historic landscape character in para. 4.11.
- 4.11 Currently there is new legislation emerging in Wales including the **Planning (Wales) Act 2015**; **Historic Environment (Wales) Bill**; **Environment (Wales) Bill** and **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**, as well as a **Review of Protected Landscapes**. These new items of legislation are likely to affect the content of national planning policy and guidance. While the policy framework is changing, LANDMAP and LCA remain relevant as technical tools, within the overall approach of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, defined in the Environment (Wales) Bill. This bill will introduce an area based approach and **Area Statements**, to be drawn up by NRW. Matters relating to landscape character and the preferred trajectory of change will increasingly need to be expressed within this context.
- 4.12 Wales is also developing its first Marine Plan, for which the definition and scope of **seascape** is that set out in the **UK Marine Policy Statement 2011** in para. 2.6.5 and as further described in the **Wales Marine Evidence Report 2015** in section 4.4 <http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/marineandfisheries/marine-planning/other-supporting-evidence/wales-marine-evidence-report/?lang=en>

5. NORTHERN IRELAND

- 5.1 In Northern Ireland the “Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment Series” (NILCA Series) was published in July 1999. It recognises the inherent diversity of the landscape character in Northern Ireland and identifies 130 landscape character areas (LCAs) within 26 reports, one for each of the old local government districts (Council areas). Each of the character areas contains a list of the key characteristics for the area, a landscape description, commentary on the landscape condition and sensitivity to change and principles for landscape management and accommodating new development:

<https://www.doeni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland>

The principal settlements in each of the local government districts are also analysed in more detail including their landscape setting and the principles for the siting and design of new development. This information is only available in a hard copy of the report, available from DOE NI Environment and Marine Group, NIEA. The series was credited as being the first regional landscape character assessment in the UK and was given an award in the planning category of the Landscape Institute annual awards. The following year a regional report covering the whole of Northern Ireland was published, the “Northern Ireland Landscape Assessment 2000. An Appreciation and Analysis of the Landscapes of the Region” (the report is only available in hard copy from DOE NI Environment and Marine Group, NI Environment Agency). This report addresses the diversity of local landscape character, key components and forces for change and includes strategic advice on how to tackle the effects of development and land use change both in the countryside and in the urban fringe.

- 5.2 Biodiversity profiles and geodiversity profiles for each of the 130 LCAs in the NILCA Series followed <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland>. The biodiversity profiles list the key characteristics of each LCA, describe the key biodiversity components, consider the issues and suggest actions to improve the biodiversity. The geodiversity profiles outline the geomorphology and landscape setting of each LCA and list the key elements. They recognise that the use of a cultural overlay in defining LCA’s means that they frequently subdivide natural physiographic units and as the underlying geological, topographic and visual continuities can be smaller or larger than the character area it is essential when considering the geodiversity of an individual character area that regard is given to adjacent character areas and to the larger regions within which they are located.
- 5.3 Another study which used the NILCA Series as its basis was the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) “Wind energy development in Northern Ireland’s landscapes” published in August 2010:

http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/supplementary_guidance/spg_other/wind_energy_development_in_northern_irelands_landscapes_spg_for_pps18-2.pdf

This accompanies Planning Policy Statement 18 (PPS 18), “Renewable Energy” http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/planning_statements_and_supplementary_planning_guidance/planning_policy_statement_18_renewable_energy.pdf. The guidance is based on the sensitivity of Northern Ireland’s landscapes to wind energy development and contains an assessment of each of the 130 LCAs by referencing the characteristics and values associated with each character area, providing broad, strategic guidance in relation to the landscape and visual impacts of wind energy development. It recognises however, that every development proposal is unique and there remains a need for detailed consideration of the landscape and visual impacts of individual applications on a case by case basis, as well as for consideration of PPS18 and other regional policy.

- 5.4 As a natural progression to the NILCA Series, the “Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment” was published in 2014 <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/articles/seascape-character-areas>. This is based on the best practice guidance “An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment” by Natural England, published in October 2012 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396177/sea

[scape-character-assessment.pdf](#). The aim of the study is to provide a strategic understanding of different areas of regional seascape character along the Northern Ireland coast, complementing similar assessments undertaken elsewhere in the UK which will contribute to promoting the protection, management and planning of the seascape and support European co-operation on landscape issues. The description of each of the 24 seascape character areas relate to its neighbouring terrestrial LCAs with coastline (as described in the NILCA Series) and takes account of boundaries identified in relation to neighbouring seascape areas for the British and Irish coastline.

- 5.5 In January 2014 the first draft of the Northern Ireland’s Landscape Charter was published and launched by the Minister of the Environment. It contains 10 Affirmations for Northern Ireland’s Landscapes and 6 Guiding Principles in Decision Making which include acknowledgement that all landscapes matter and each of us should respect this, that each distinctive sense of place collectively adds more value to the variety and uniqueness of Northern Ireland’s landscape, that change is continuous and transparency and communication about our landscapes engenders awareness and confidence and that each of us is responsible and empowered to shape the future of our landscapes. The Charter asked for everyone with an interest in the value of Northern Ireland’s landscapes, individually and corporately, to sign up to the charter and in so doing commit themselves to fulfilling its vision in accordance with its guiding principles. Many see that the Charter demonstrates that Northern Ireland is taking seriously its obligations under the European Landscape Convention (ELC) and now stands alongside the other devolved nations of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Further the Charter came at a critical time in local governance in Northern Ireland before the transfer of planning powers to new councils in April 2015.
- 5.6 As the first commitment to the Northern Ireland Landscape Charter, the landscape character assessment for Northern Ireland has been renewed in line with the latest best practice. The Landscape Architects team in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency led and managed this process with peer review by Natural England. The “Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment” (NIRLCA) provides a strategic overview of the landscape within 26 LCAs, setting the context for more detailed local studies to follow in future (see <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/articles/landscape-character-northern-ireland>). It aims to draw together information on people and place and the combinations of nature, culture and perception which make each part of Northern Ireland’s landscape unique. It will provide an evidence base which can be used by planners, developers, the public etc. which will enable informed decisions to be made concerning the planning and management of Northern Ireland’s landscapes, guide policy development and designations, identify opportunities for local action, target resources, monitor landscape changes over time etc. The assessment has been developed in accordance with the general principles set out in the Natural England document “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” by Christine Tudor, Natural England, published in October 2014 as well as earlier guidance on the subject https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf

5.7 In the future it is anticipated that Northern Ireland's local planning authorities (the 11 new Councils) will carry out local landscape character assessments for their own areas at a larger, more detailed scale to inform their development plans and associated policies. These may be done by local landscape partnerships encouraged through community planning powers and managed by the local planning authorities as well as by in-house staff. In time this will produce a suite of local landscape character assessments for Northern Ireland under the umbrella of the NIRLCA, all carried out to the same scale and using the same methodology based on the Natural England guidance. This will reflect work already carried out in the rest of the UK and the work Ireland hopes to carry out in the future. In addition Councils and others may carry out other landscape character assessments at a range of different scales depending on the subject matter and proposed end-use, such as landscape sensitivity studies to inform land use planning and development management issues.

6 REPUBLIC of IRELAND

- 6.1 The methodology for Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in the Republic of Ireland in general follows the UK guidance as outlined above (section 2.1) but is subject to much variation in practice as outlined in a report produced in 2009 by the Heritage Council¹³. It has been suggested there is a requirement for a coherent methodology¹⁴ at the national and regional scale with clear statutory guidance on data collection and LCA mapping to ensure that datasets are organised in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment and within the wider European and Atlantic area.
- 6.2 Following publication of a National Landscape Strategy¹⁵ (NLS) and in keeping with commitments under the European Landscape Convention, a key objective of the NLS is the development and collation of a National Landscape Character Map.
- 6.3 Irish Landscape Institute in conjunction with colleagues in the Heritage Council and others is currently reviewing the available methodology with a view to the publication of detailed guidance on the methodology to be employed at various scales as outlined in the preamble to this document.
- 6.4 The Republic of Ireland ratified the European Landscape Convention in 2002. In subsequent years Landscape Character Assessment became a more widely used methodology for incorporating landscape issues into the planning decision making process. A report to the Irish Heritage Council in 2006, "Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland: Baseline Audit and Evaluation" identified shortcomings in the use of Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland (Martin 2006). These included a strong criticism of the lack of consistency in landscape classifications across county boundaries and limited stakeholder consultation. This report also pointed out that Landscape Character Assessments were not generally used for landscape management, and suggests the need for suitably qualified professional resources for landscape/countryside management within the relevant public authorities.
- 6.5 Historical Use of LCA: Statutory physical planning started in the Republic of Ireland in 1963 with the Local Government Planning and Development Act. There was little direct provision for landscape within this Act whose main focus was the stimulation of economic development. In 1964 An Foras Forbatha, (the National Institute for Physical Planning and Construction Research) was established to assist national planning. In 1977 it published the first key document on Irish landscapes, 'The Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes in Ireland'¹⁶. This document identified about 170 of such landscapes, all of which were characterised by geomorphologic form and relationship with water, i.e. they were expressions of natural process, rather than predominantly cultural landscapes. Human modification was only modestly apparent. The majority of these designated outstanding landscapes are located on

¹³ http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Landscape/LCA_Update_Report_10.11.09.pdf

¹⁴ http://www.paesaggiopocollina.it/paesaggio/dwd/lineeguida/elcai_projectreport.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2015/07/N-Landscape-Strategy-english-Web.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000128216>

the west coast of Ireland with over half of them being located in counties Cork, Kerry, Galway, Mayo and Donegal. The subsequent treatment of these landscapes would have involved, where possible, the activity of 'landscape protection' of these designated special areas.

- 6.6 In the Heritage Act of 1995, landscapes and seascapes are described as part of the National Heritage. The Planning and Development Act 2000, which consolidated all previous Planning Acts and much of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulation did not define landscape but included requirements for preservation of the character of the landscape and made statutory provision for areas of special amenity and landscape conservation areas within Development Plans. The Department of Environment and Local Government (DOELG) issued draft Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines¹⁷, also in 2000, with aims of heightening awareness of landscape issues (DOELG 2000). This document has retained its "Draft" status and would require to be further developed and updated to incorporate current guidance.
- 6.7 The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 included a legal definition of Landscape based on that contained in the European Landscape Convention, namely, "landscape means an area, perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". It is understood this aspect of incorporating landscape issues within legislation and statutory guidance will continue in keeping with the objectives of the National Landscape Strategy.
- 6.8 Though written for the assessment of impacts on World Heritage properties, the methodology outlined in the reference below may be usefully employed for heritage properties or landscape in general:

Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties – A publication of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (International Council on Monuments and Sites, 2011).¹⁸

6.9 Historic Impact Assessment

The following may be useful references when dealing with historical impact assessment:

Historic Landscape Characterisation in Ireland: Policy and Best Practice Guidance (al. G. L., 2010)¹⁹

Historic Landscape Characterisation in Ireland: Best Practice Guidance (George Lambrick, Jill Hind and Ianto Wain, 2013).²⁰

¹⁷ <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,1608,en.doc>

¹⁸ http://www.icomos.org/world_heritage/HIA_20110201.pdf

¹⁹ http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/archaeology/news/view-article/article/historic-landscape-characterisation-policy-and-best-practice-guidance/?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=bc97410f11

²⁰ Document available as above

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