

# Statement

## SNH's LANDSCAPE POLICY FRAMEWORK

### Policy Statement No. 05/01

---

*This policy statement sets out SNH's approach for Scotland's landscape, to guide staff and others on the overall scope of our landscape remit and how we seek to fulfil this within the context set by Government policy. Detailed policy statements and guidance addressing specific topics such as National Scenic Area designation<sup>1</sup>, wildness in Scotland's countryside<sup>2</sup>, design, and local landscape designations, have been or will be prepared in support of this policy framework.*

*This policy statement has been prepared at a time of increasing debate about the better care of Scotland's landscapes. Building on SNH's discussion paper – Scotland's future landscapes?, it provides the starting point for SNH's engagement with this wider debate, which as it develops will in itself inform development of the approach set out here and future revision of this statement.*

## INTRODUCTION

### The Importance and Value of Scotland's Landscape

1. Scotland is renowned for its distinct and diverse range of landscapes, many of which are appreciated and held in high regard as a significant part of our natural and cultural heritage. Interpreted and often celebrated by society through different art forms, their varied character and the historical record they contain defines what is distinctive about different parts of Scotland and contributes to a sense of identity, both nationally and regionally. These landscapes are an important resource that contributes to the social and economic well-being of the nation. They provide the surroundings for people's daily lives, often contributing positively to the quality of life and economic performance of an area, but also sometimes detracting from it. And they provide the special places whose character and scenic quality is the main attraction for outdoor recreation and tourism.
2. The Scottish Executive's National Planning Framework<sup>3</sup> describes the diversity of Scotland's landscapes as "a national treasure", where "the aim should be to build environmental capital and pass well-managed, high quality landscapes on to future generations". Concern for the landscape is therefore part of wider efforts for a more sustainable future, and their better care is an important contributor to agendas promoting economic development, social inclusion, environmental justice, cultural identity, health, well-being and access. These all hold people at centre, and the public's interest and values must likewise be reflected in SNH's work and inform our professionally based approach to landscape.

---

<sup>1</sup> SNH, *National Scenic Areas. SNH's advice to Government.* 1999

<sup>2</sup> SNH, *Wildness in Scotland's countryside. Policy statement 02/03.* 2002

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Executive, *National Planning Framework for Scotland.* 2004

3. In November 2003 SNH issued the *Scotland's Future Landscapes?* discussion paper<sup>4</sup> to stimulate debate about how we can better care for our landscape resource. The discussion paper drew a significant response from a wide range of organisations and individuals from across Scotland, many of which endorsed our concerns and welcomed SNH's initiative in promoting a debate. Collectively they served to confirm our impression that many people care deeply about the fate of Scotland's landscapes but that this interest often remains unarticulated until a cherished place is seen to be under threat. If landscape objectives are to receive greater attention in the future, SNH and others must find ways of translating this underlying concern into more overt and continuous pressure. This will require us to engage actively with communities of place and communities of interest, and enhance our understanding of their landscape values, so as to be able to set their perceptions and priorities alongside our own professional analyses and assessments.
4. This policy statement draws from the discussion paper and responses received to set out SNH's approach to our landscape work. It also provides the basis for the development of SNH's thinking on a longer term and collaborative approach to landscape which many responses to the consultation recognised was now needed to better care for this important resource. **SNH welcomes and encourages greater public debate about the quality of landscapes that Scotland deserves now and in the future, and intends this statement to inform and be informed by this discussion.**

### **SNH's Remit for Scotland's Landscape**

5. Effort for Scotland's landscapes lie at the heart of SNH's remit, alongside our work on biodiversity, earth heritage and people's enjoyment of the natural heritage. Our landscape work is founded on our remit for the conservation, enhancement, understanding, enjoyment and sustainable use of the natural heritage, which includes its "*natural beauty and amenity*"<sup>5</sup>. The legislation's composite phrase encompasses the landscape's physical fabric and people's appreciation of its beauty and character - what people see, experience and enjoy as they react to their surroundings at the broad scale. 'Natural' here is used in the sense of not exclusively human-made, and our interest includes both rural and more urban or developed settings. **At the forefront of SNH's approach is a concern with the aesthetic and more natural qualities of the landscape, and the enjoyment people derive from this, always recognising the strong connections that exist with other overlying values which are primarily the responsibility of others.**
6. Our landscape work draws on and complements SNH's efforts for the natural heritage as a whole. For many it is the environment in general, and the landscape in particular, which makes informal recreation appealing and by which many appreciate and value the sense of place. The character of many of our landscapes draws significantly on the geology, landforms, natural and semi-natural habitats that are the focus of our earth heritage and biodiversity work. Wildlife in its natural setting also enhances people's experience and appreciation of their surroundings. And at the scale that natural systems and processes function, the landscape is an important part of our efforts to achieve a more sustainable future. **SNH will seek to work at a variety of scales to the benefit of Scotland's landscape.**

---

<sup>4</sup> SNH, *Scotland's future landscapes? Encouraging a wider debate. A discussion paper from Scottish Natural Heritage*. 2003

<sup>5</sup> Section 1(3), Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991.

7. In addition to the important historic component of Scotland's landscapes, SNH recognises that they also form part of the nations wider cultural heritage. Literature, music, song, dance and the visual arts, for example, draw upon our distinctive landscapes as a source for their work, and language, customs, traditions, beliefs, mythologies and histories often celebrate it. These activities can themselves shape people's perception of landscapes. Recognising these cultural links is therefore important if we are to better understand people's appreciation of their surroundings, and encourage responsibility for its care. **SNH will be sensitive to these links in its work, and be encouraging of other's efforts to support these.**
8. SNH's Corporate Strategy<sup>6</sup> sets out our priorities for the next ten years, based on the principles of sustainable development and recognising that the quality of people's lives depends on having a healthy and attractive environment. While much of SNH's work can have some bearing on Scotland's landscape, the six priorities identified in Box 1 lie at the core of our landscape work.

**Box1: Key landscape priorities in SNH's Corporate Strategy**

SNH will:

- raise awareness of Scotland's diverse and distinct landscapes and the human and natural processes which shape them, and help make sure they are cared for by guiding change and supporting better standards of management;
- promote debate about what Scotland's landscapes should look like in future, and improve our understanding of people's views about landscapes;
- care for existing National Scenic Areas (NSAs), investigate the potential for new NSAs and develop a fresh approach to local landscape designations;
- encourage better recognition for the distinctive wild qualities of some areas, as set out in our policy 'Wildness in the Scottish Countryside';
- work with others to regenerate landscapes that have deteriorated as a result of human activities, and damaged environments close to where people live; and
- work with land managers to look after the beauty and wildlife of the countryside.

**SNH's Aim for Scotland's Landscape**

9. SNH's overarching aim for Scotland's landscape is as follows.

**To safeguard and enhance the distinct identity, the diverse character and the special qualities of Scotland's landscapes as a whole, so as to ensure tomorrow's landscapes contribute positively to people's environment and are at least as attractive and valued as they are today. For the range of Scotland's landscapes identified in the Natural Heritage Futures programme this means working to ensure:**

- **attractive and distinctive settlements with high quality greenspace, that reflect regional design and materials, fit their wider setting, and positively contribute to people's quality of life;**
- **farmed and crofted landscapes of diverse character, with the significant contribution of designed landscapes to the lowland scene recognised and safeguarded;**
- **an enhanced contribution of forest and woodland to many landscapes;**

<sup>6</sup> SNH, *A natural perspective. Scottish Natural Heritage's corporate strategy. Looking forward 10 years.* 2003

- **distinctive landscapes of upland, hills and moors, recognised for their openness and quality of wildness; and**
- **fine scenery and diverse character of the seascapes and landscapes of our developed, undeveloped and isolated coasts.**

10. In working to achieve this aim SNH will work with, and encourage, others to:

- foster high standards of land management, the design of new development and the location and setting of land use change;
- encourage the enhancement of those landscapes which have been degraded by past activities so that they make a positive contribution;
- promote awareness and enjoyment of the diversity, distinctiveness and special qualities of Scotland's landscapes; and
- uphold the tangible and intangible qualities that contribute to the landscapes being recognised as distinctive of Scotland through:
  - safeguarding the diverse and distinctive regional character of different parts of Scotland;
  - promoting the provision and enhancement of greenspace in the built landscape, and its relevance to other social and economic agendas;
  - safeguarding the rural character of Scotland's countryside from the effects of urbanising influences, recognising the quality of tranquillity;
  - reinforcing the natural character of many of Scotland's landscapes by enhancing and restoring habitat;
  - protecting the wild character of the undeveloped uplands, peatlands and coast; and
  - supporting the built and historic character exhibited in many landscapes by promoting care of the fabric of the managed landscape, the historic environment and the character and setting of settlements.

11. Integral to achieving our aim is the contribution of good design of development and land uses to the landscape. SNH's interest in built design is with the impact of buildings and structures in the wider landscape and their contribution to the identity of place, and not with their intrinsic cultural, architectural or artistic merit on their own. SNH's effort will be focused at the generic level, through encouraging design guidance and similar measures. While there are many individual examples of good design appropriate to its setting, the general standards of location, siting and design need to rise as reflected in recent Government policy statements<sup>7</sup>. In aiming for a marked improvement in our care for Scotland's landscape, **there is a need to place more emphasis on achieving higher standards of design and management of both built development and land-use.**

## **The Principles of SNH's Approach**

12. Our work to achieve the overarching aim set out above is based on four propositions.

### **i) Scotland's landscapes are a shared responsibility**

13. Many activities influence our landscapes, many of which lie outwith SNH's or any one organisation's control. SNH can not achieve better landscape care on its own. Indeed we all have a responsibility for its care in the decisions we make, and in particular the range of key stakeholders set out in Box 2. **Working with this range of individuals and organisations, SNH will seek to encourage wider appreciation of Scotland's**

<sup>7</sup> The Scottish Executive, *A policy on architecture for Scotland*. 2001. The Scottish Executive, *A policy statement for Scotland. Designing places*. 2001. The Scottish Executive, *SPP 1 The planning system*. 2002.

**landscape resource, closer involvement in its management and its explicit recognition in decision making. SNH's statutory remit provides a leadership role for SNH, but the many interests have a shared responsibility and require commitment to its better care through a more integrated and collective approach.**

14. Within the public sector, a long-standing duty to ensure that the landscape is managed sensitively arises under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967<sup>8</sup>. Today, the broad approaches of sustainable development and well-being<sup>9</sup> encompass such concerns. SNH will continue to support and advise public bodies to ensure that they take adequate and appropriate account of the landscape in exercising their functions. **Public bodies have a key role in delivering the landscape's public benefit, requiring clear objectives to be set for their work, and landscape expertise to be enhanced so that they are better equipped to deliver.**

#### **ii) All Scotland's landscapes deserve attention**

15. Although traditionally effort has focused on areas identified as of special value (protected and designated areas), all landscapes, in both town and country, deserve consideration and care as they are of value to those who live and work in them and provide a wider public good. **SNH's interest extends across all Scotland's landscapes, encompassing the rural and the urban, the ordinary, the degraded and the special.** This includes those settings that are largely natural, the semi-natural, those that arise as a consequence of human activity (including the designed landscapes created for aesthetic purposes), and the developed townscape. Our landscape effort in more built settings lies in enhancing the quality of people's surroundings, and the wider landscape setting of settlements to improve the quality of life for local communities.

#### **iii) Scotland's landscapes will continue to change**

16. Change is intrinsic to the landscape, with the appearance of many of today's landscapes significantly altered by relatively recent modifications. Scotland's landscape will continue to evolve, in part through natural processes but largely through human action in response to the needs of a changing society. This will happen in both a planned and unplanned way. **SNH's approach is to influence, guide and manage this change and its forces - not to 'fossilise' today's landscape through frustrating its evolution.** SNH's approach to landscape change is set out in Annex A of this statement.
17. Change in the landscape is not inherently positive or negative. Which it is ultimately judged to be will depend on a comparison of its future and current states. The different ways in which people react to change are a consequence of the values they hold, and often reflect the comfort associated with the known and familiar. While commonly held perspectives can be identified, these may not be universal across society. This highlights the need for greater public debate about the landscapes Scotland wants in the future, and the need to establish clear objectives for these informed by all those with an interest. **SNH will promote wider debate about Scotland's landscapes to inform our work, and seek to ensure that landscape change is positive in effect, so that people can recognise and value the landscape as distinctive and appealing.**

---

<sup>8</sup> Section 66 requires Ministers, government departments and public bodies to "have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside".

<sup>9</sup> Section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 provides local authorities with the power to promote or improve the well-being of its people and area.

## Box 2: Key Stakeholders in Scotland's Landscape

**Individual land owners and managers** are important stewards of Scotland's landscape, the appearance and health of which are the result of numerous decisions and actions taken over several generations. The ownership of land provides a special responsibility, but the decisions of individuals are influenced by the priorities and incentives set by Government, and increasingly by world market forces. As economic conditions change, it is increasingly accepted that public support for agriculture and forestry should recognise the wider public benefit provided by the landscape.

**Individuals and communities** often take pride in their surroundings, and people's enjoyment of these provide an important means by which commitment to the management and conservation of landscape can be achieved. Decisions about our future landscapes are not a matter solely for specialists, but need to be informed by the shared landscape understanding and appreciation from a wide community of interests. Our understanding of what is important about places, and their contribution to our quality of life, needs to be enhanced.

**Non-governmental organisations** own and manage many important landscapes, be they fine mountain scenery or accessible community woodlands, and have long played an important role in promoting good design and the importance of greenspace. They represent certain sets of values, and are at the forefront of debate about change to our more valued landscapes, reflecting that people's enjoyment of the outdoors is highly dependent on the quality of the environments they use.

**Government departments and public bodies** who if not driving landscape change are often its enablers, have a key role to play through the range of regulatory systems or financial incentives operated by them, through their policies and through the management of their own land. The key interests include the local authorities, the national and local enterprise and tourism networks, Historic Scotland, the National Park authorities and those with responsibility for major land uses such as the Forestry Commission, Deer Commission, Scottish Water, Crofters Commission and Government departments overseeing planning, transport, economic development, agriculture, energy and the armed forces.

### iv) Scotland's landscape's deserve greater care

18. The European Landscape Convention notes that "*developments in agriculture, forestry, industrial and mineral production techniques and in regional planning, town planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism and recreation and, at a more general level, changes in the world economy are in many cases accelerating the transformation of landscapes*"<sup>10</sup>. Similar issues were recognised by many of the responses to the consultation on *Scotland's future landscapes*, with landscape issues resulting from the agricultural changes arising from the current phase of CAP reform, from accommodating the increasing demand for housing in some parts of Scotland, and from growth in telecommunication and renewable energy developments highlighted.

---

<sup>10</sup> The Council of Europe European Landscape Convention came into force in March 2004 with the aim of promoting landscape protection, management and planning. It is currently being considered for ratification by the UK government.

19. The increasing extent and pace of landscape change, the growing standardisation that results in the loss of distinctiveness, its piecemeal realisation and cumulative consequence for the landscape, need addressing. SNH recognise that some change is unregulated or largely beyond our control (such as climate change), but landscape issues are best tackled at the landscape scale. Greater effort to guide and manage change is not to establish a prescriptive blueprint, but work towards achieving agreed landscape objectives. **SNH will encourage a more proactive approach to landscape planning and management by public agencies with responsibilities that affect land and coastal waters. There is a need for all to exercise their functions in an integrated manner that recognises the landscape interest as an explicit factor in decisions.**

## APPLYING SNH'S APPROACH

20. In applying SNH's approach to landscape in practice, we will work at both the national and local levels.

### Nationally, we shall:

- champion the landscape interest and promote its importance, recognising the broad socio-economic benefits and public good that it delivers;
- advise others on the landscape consequences of action or inaction, to encourage the landscape's better care, enhancement of those that are degraded, and safeguard of the most valued;
- seek to engender greater responsibility and commitment by public agencies driving or influencing change in the landscape, and encourage a more pro-active and planned approach to this;
- facilitate landscape understanding through undertaking research and promoting best practice, maintaining a national overview of the character of Scotland's landscape, and monitoring trends;
- enhance understanding of the landscape values of communities and visitors;
- foster awareness and promote debate about Scotland's future landscapes;
- encourage others, through consultation and engagement, to develop a shared view of what is valued in the landscape;
- support the enhancement of land-use support systems that will encourage land managers to provide landscape benefits at the landscape scale;
- work with others to promote good design in new development and land use change;
- seek improvements to the system of protected areas that ensures their safeguard, with strengthening of the NSA designation the priority;
- recognise the quality of wildness in the countryside and seek to safeguard areas of wild land, through advising others; and
- demonstrate through our ownership of property and land appropriate landscape planning and management, and explore new approaches and promote best practice to landscape issues;

### Locally, we shall:

- stimulate debate about the future evolution of the landscape;
- work with others to develop agreed landscape objectives, and promote a 'landscape scale' approach that incorporates the landscape interest through the range of strategic plans (including the development plan);
- ensure approaches to land management develop a vision for our future landscapes at the landscape scale;

- advise on landscape change in seeking to ensure it makes a positive landscape contribution, and promote the preparation of landscape capacity studies to guide change where appropriate;
- support the development and application of design guidance that reflects the local identity and design styles, and provides for innovation;
- in partnership with others tackle local issues of landscape degradation, supporting new uses for the land where they can make a positive contribution to the landscape;
- foster community appreciation and recognition of local landscape character through local projects; and
- ensure that management of SNH's land makes a positive contribution to local landscapes and demonstrates good practice.

## Priorities for Action

21. Complementing this general approach to our landscape work, SNH will continue to develop thinking and take forward specific actions in the following areas (further background information is provided in Annex B).

### i) Promoting debate on Scotland's future landscapes

22. The discussion paper *Scotland's future landscapes* was intended to inform, provoke and promote debate about how the nation can better care for the landscape. As the first step in this process we recognise the need to extend the scope of those contributing to the debate, and to move from discussion to action through tackling specific issues. This is a long term process, requiring a shift in attitude and culture as well as tangible changes. **Through encouraging greater debate about Scotland's future landscapes SNH will seek to promote a shared agenda and working between all interests to ensure better care for the landscape.**

### ii) Describing Scotland's Landscape Resource

23. It is only relatively recently that a national inventory of Scotland's landscapes has been compiled through the process of landscape character assessment (LCA) identifying, classifying, mapping and describing what makes one place distinct from another. LCA does not seek to indicate the values attached to, or importance of, these landscapes, and a landscape character approach now underpins much of SNH's and others landscape work. The process of landscape characterisation provides a baseline to inform decisions about change, and against which change can be monitored. Landscape sensitivity and capacity studies<sup>11</sup> build on the descriptive inventory provided by the reports detailing the landscape character of a particular area, and seek to identify the degree to which particular landscape character types are able to accommodate specific kinds of change. The capacity of the landscape varies according to both its key characteristics and to the type and nature of change being proposed. This is a relatively new approach and as this methodology is developed and tested, capacity studies may become an important tool for managing landscape change. Early studies have already been applied to the preparation of development plans. **SNH will promote the LCA approach as the tool for assessing changes to Scotland's landscapes.**

24. SNH has a strong interest in the important contribution of the built cultural heritage to the character of the landscape, its special qualities, and their contribution to people's understanding and enjoyment. SNH has no statutory remit for individual buildings,

---

<sup>11</sup> SNH and The Countryside Agency, *LCA guidance for England and Scotland. Topic paper 6: techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity.* undated

monuments or assemblages of buildings but it does have an interest in the overall contribution of the past to today's landscape and regional distinctiveness, which is often undervalued. Complementing LCA and providing a more detailed understanding of the cultural development of the landscape, Historic Land-use Assessment (HLA) is a national survey jointly developed by Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. This maps the extent of past and present land uses in order to aid the understanding of how today's character has been influenced by human activities, and the cultural legacy to be found in the landscape. **Through the SNH/Historic Scotland concordat, SNH will work closely with Historic Scotland in taking forward a more integrated approach to the planning and management of natural and historic aspects of our landscapes.**

### iii) Monitoring Change in Scotland's Landscapes

25. It is important to our work to have an understanding of the important influences shaping our landscapes, their current condition, and the range of values attached to them. Our effort to date has focused on countryside settings rather than the more developed. The Scotland-wide assessment of landscape character provides a snap-shot of the landscape and forces for change affecting it in the mid 1990s, and the family of landscape designations provide some measure of certain (mainly scenic) landscape values. But neither by themselves indicate changes in the condition of Scotland's landscape, its diversity or distinctiveness.

26. Previous surveys of individual landscape features, such as the National Countryside Monitoring Scheme, and Countryside Survey 2000, provide some evidence of physical changes to the fabric of the countryside from which trends in the landscape can be implied. Some limited work has been undertaken to assess changes in the extent to which the qualities of 'tranquillity'<sup>12</sup> and wildness<sup>13</sup> are found in the landscape. **SNH will work to develop indicators that monitor the condition of Scotland's landscapes, and the effectiveness of our efforts to ensure its better care.**

### iv) Landscape planning and management

27. Various regulatory systems require consideration of the effect on the landscape of the actions that they are seeking to control. Some of these are enshrined in statute, but others are based on administrative arrangements. The new requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of all strategies, plans and programmes developed by the public sector, provides for landscape considerations to be taken account of at an early stage, and at a strategic level their cumulative effect. In all these procedures SNH is not the final decision maker, but seeks to offer advice on the landscape effect of the range of policies, procedures and projects to both the applicant and decision-maker. **Through its role as a statutory consultee, SNH will seek to ensure that the landscape is recognised as an explicit factor in decision-making under the range of existing regulatory systems and in the SEA of future strategies, plans and programmes.**

28. By seeking to control the location, siting and design of new development and proactively planning for change, the Town and Country Planning system<sup>14</sup> has a strong influence on the nature of change and the character and appearance of the landscape. Specific tools,

---

<sup>12</sup> Ash Consulting Group, A96 Aberdeen – Inverness tranquil areas study. 1998 (unpublished report)

<sup>13</sup> Carver, S and Wrightham, M, *Assessment of historic trends in the extent of wild land in Scotland: a pilot study*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned report no.012. 2003

<sup>14</sup> SNH, *SNH's involvement in the town and country planning system*. Policy guidance note 99/4. 1999

such as Greenbelts<sup>15</sup> and similar greenspace policies (green networks, wedges and corridors), make an important contribution to landscape objectives through maintaining the identity and setting of towns, and contributing to the quality of life in and around settlements. Government policy<sup>16</sup> recognises that protecting and enhancing the quality of the natural heritage and built environment in urban and rural areas brings benefits to local communities and provides opportunities for economic and social progress, and key goals of the planning system will be supported by our landscape work. **Through our involvement in the planning system SNH will promote consideration of landscape interests.**

29. Many land management activities with considerable effect on the landscape are not subject to regulation and control, but there is increasing acceptance of the need for and benefits of their financial support regimes supporting wider landscape objectives. Agri-environment measures through earlier Environmentally Sensitive Areas schemes and most recently Rural Stewardship Schemes recognise the benefits of funding the management and enhancement of important landscape elements, and future CAP reform provides for further enhancement. The introduction of whole farm plans and land management contracts, encouragement of collaborative farm schemes, and the requirement of cross-compliance facilitate the integration of landscape considerations and at the larger scale. **SNH will encourage others to recognise and consider the landscape interest within the incentive schemes they administer, promote greater priority and resources to be allocated, and ensure they do not undermine wider landscape objectives.**

30. Other financial incentives are directed solely to landscape ends. SNH offers financial incentives for landscape purposes directly through its grants budget, from small schemes to enhance or protect individual landscape elements, to larger schemes with a broader landscape purpose. Organisations supporting our landscape objectives are also funded. Increasingly SNH's funds are deployed in wider funding packages, tied to other national funds (such as Heritage Lottery Funds) or European sources (such as structural funds or LEADER+). Funds from Landfill Tax or the Aggregates Levy are also directed towards landscape objectives. Inheritance tax exemption can be sought for areas considered of particular landscape merit with the requirement for particular management requirements. **SNH will continue to promote financial incentives that support wider landscape objectives.**

#### **v) Action for Scotland's special landscapes**

31. Complementing SNH's all-landscapes approach is the identification of landscapes that are widely recognised as being of particular value and justifying special effort to ensure their safeguard. A range of approaches with varying effect have been developed for Scotland's more valued landscapes, although not all are formally designated nor have statutory underpinning. While we recognise that these special places cannot be managed in isolation from their wider surroundings, they are by their nature sensitive to change as they are highly valued for the character and qualities found in them today. In these places there is usually less scope for modification without losing the qualities for which a landscape has been identified as special. **Some landscapes require special safeguard, with designation an important tool to guide and manage change sensitively. SNH has a particular responsibility (with others) for those considered of national or international importance (National Scenic Area, National Park and World Heritage Site). We will press for the strongest protection and highest**

---

<sup>15</sup> SNH, *Greenbelts. Policy guidance note 01/02*. 2002

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Executive, *SPP 1 The Planning system*. 2002; Scottish Executive, *NPPG14 Natural Heritage*. 1999

standards in their management, supported by the necessary resources, to safeguard these most valued landscapes.

- The National Scenic Area<sup>17</sup> continues to play an important role amongst Scotland's natural heritage designations, and SNH supports the need to put in place an effective mechanism to deliver their special care as a priority, including a new legislative base and preparation of Management Strategies, with investigation of the potential for designating additional areas in the longer term.
- National Parks<sup>18</sup> encompass landscapes whose sensitivity, and associated values attached to, will vary across its area. Like NSAs, the highest standards of landscape care and management are required within the Parks. SNH considers that existing NSAs should be subsumed within the new designation once appropriate provision ensuring their safeguard and enhancement has been made in the National Park Plan.
- Local Landscape Designations continue to be a useful tool, and SNH will continue to support local authority efforts to identify particularly valued landscapes, and will promote new guidance on local landscape designations<sup>19</sup>.
- SNH's responsibility for the inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes will be transferred to Historic Scotland in 2006, although our interest in their contribution to the character and appeal of the wider landscape remains. SNH will work with Historic Scotland to ensure the contribution of the cultural elements in the landscape are better recognised and safeguarded, and encourage others in their efforts to manage and where appropriate restore those degraded.
- The landscape qualities of World Heritage Site status deserves greater recognition, and SNH in partnership with others will seek to ensure the landscape and setting of existing sites continues to be of a quality deserving of WHS status, and advise on the merit of potential sites.

32. Not all the landscape values that are SNH's primary concern are necessarily identified through formal designation. An important quality found in some of Scotland's mountainous and coastal landscapes is the perception of wildness. SNH has published a policy statement<sup>20</sup> in support of the Scottish Executive's policy, identifying broad areas of search for wild land to stimulate a debate on the extent of Scotland's wild landscapes. This recognises that wildness can also be found more widely throughout rural Scotland, in more managed and less remote settings, which whilst not truly wild none the less are of wild character. Other intangible qualities, such as landscapes with limited noise and light pollution (sometimes identified as tranquil areas), are increasingly valued. **SNH will work to identify and secure recognition of the less tangible qualities that people value in Scotland's landscapes, including wildness.**

---

<sup>17</sup> SNH, *National Scenic Areas. Policy summary 00/15.* 2000

<sup>18</sup> SNH, *Scotland's National Parks. Policy statement 02/04.* 2002

<sup>19</sup> SNH published *Guidance on local landscape designations* in August 2005.

<sup>20</sup> SNH, *Wildness in Scotland's countryside. Policy statement 02/03.* 2002

## ANNEX A – LANDSCAPE CHANGE

### SNH's Understanding of Landscape

- A1. Landscape is defined by the European Landscape Convention as “*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*”<sup>21</sup>. It is a concept broad in scope, applying to all areas of land, inland water and sea, whatever their character (whether predominantly natural, rural, urban or peri-urban), and regardless of whether they are considered outstanding, commonplace, or degraded.
- A2. *Landscape* is more than simply our physical surroundings. SNH understands it as encompassing our experience and perception of all the elements of the physical environment that surrounds us – the natural (landform, water, and natural vegetation) and the cultural (the patterns of land use, buildings and other structures – old and new). We experience and perceive this physical fabric predominantly through sight, but the totality draws upon all our senses, together with the feelings, memories and associations evoked by different places. So landscape is multi-faceted, and individuals and communities can perceive a landscape in subtly and significantly different ways, with sometimes very personal and individual responses, that can change over time. This recognition of landscape as including these necessarily subjective aspects of experience and perception strengthens our work by ensuring it is inclusive of, and maintains a relevance to, the people of Scotland.
- A3. Landscapes can also be analysed in terms of their special qualities, such as the scenic or wildness. These have been the traditional basis for the designation of some of Scotland's most important landscapes, following a process of landscape evaluation. Informed by national surveys, professional experience and stakeholder discussion, such an approach seeks to identify commonly held but personal and very subjective judgements.
- A4. But there are common responses that enable us to analyse and describe landscape in terms of its landscape character – the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape and the way in which people perceive these. The assessment of landscape character is undertaken through a systematic, transparent and reasoned process that enables robust conclusions to be drawn, informed by professional judgement, with confidence. This process of characterisation should be seen as separate and distinct from landscape appraisal for evaluation which requires more subjective judgements of landscape quality and preference, often involving questions of aesthetic taste. **SNH considers that both approaches are needed to develop an effective understanding of, and action for, Scotland's landscape resource.**
- A5. People's understanding and appreciation of a landscape will depend in part on the values<sup>22</sup> they attribute to it (see Box 1). Collectively, these values inform preferences for one landscape over another. Preference is an individual and subjective matter but there are some widely-shared and long-held opinions about which landscapes have special merit for certain values. Some of these preferences are currently reflected through designations, such as National Scenic Areas and Areas of Great Landscape Value regarding certain scenic values. Indeed, the terms landscape and scenery are

---

<sup>21</sup> The European Landscape Convention was adopted by the Council of Europe in July 2000 and came into force in March 2004. The UK is currently considering whether to sign and ratify the Convention.

<sup>22</sup> Values is used here in the sense of beneficial qualities which have benefit to people and their lives and which are appreciated as such.

often interchanged in popular usage, although scenery and scenic more precisely imply landscapes with certain, largely visual, aesthetic qualities, which people appear to respond to instinctively and value.

### **Box A1: Understanding the range of values in landscapes**

People can attribute a number of different values to a particular landscape, based on its character and qualities and its significance in their lives. The following includes some of the common reasons for valuing particular landscapes.

- *Pleasant surroundings* - attractive settings for living, working and recreation contribute to and enrich people's lives.
- *Regional distinctiveness* - an important component of what makes Scotland attractive is the distinctive character of its main regions and local people's attachment to them.
- *Local identity* - more locally, distinctive landscapes define a sense of place for those who live and work there, and a sense of continuity from the evidence of social and economic change over time.
- *Memories and associations* - individuals may associate certain landscapes with particular experiences, spiritual importance and popular associations linked to work and community.
- *National identity* – Scotland's landscapes are part of the national identity but some are widely held to project a sense of 'Scottishness' and are considered national icons.
- *Scenic quality* - many landscapes are appreciated for their outstanding visual attractiveness.
- *Naturalness* – landform and land cover at the landscape scale can be of physiological and/or biodiversity interest for their own sake and for scientific study.
- *Historic and cultural record* – there is strong physical evidence and cultural associations to be found in the landscape which chart the nation's history and culture, valued for their own sake and providing evidence for understanding its evolution.
- *Recreational opportunity* – many landscapes are important for the appealing setting they provide for the enjoyment of formal and informal recreation, for physical challenge and spiritual refreshment and as a resource for lifelong learning.
- *Productive resource* – those who have stewardship of the land value its role in providing food, water and raw materials, and society increasingly recognises the environmental services it can provide and the benefits it brings through tourism.

### **Advising on Landscape Change**

- A6. Scotland's landscapes are changing all around us, so we need to recognise that the term landscape change can encompass a spectrum of change, from that which modifies but is accommodated within the landscape's existing character (which can strengthen or weaken character), to that which transforms a landscape's character and creates a different character type. The latter can be the result of the long term attrition of a landscape's key characteristic(s) (say, loss of field boundaries through gradual improvement or neglect), or there can be more rapid transformation in the medium term (say, loss of a landscape's open character through afforestation) or even in the short term (say, new large scale development at the urban edge, or reclamation of land with past industrial use).
- A7. The unknowns and uncertainties of future land use and management practice means that SNH can not predict how Scotland's' landscapes will evolve, but we can seek to

identify what in the landscape is valued and appreciated and therefore merits safeguarding. **To a great extent this means that most change should fit with and enhance existing landscape character, particularly where present character is highly valued, and seek to minimise adverse effects on the special qualities of the landscape and the wider natural heritage.** But while the landscape's existing character is often well-regarded, today's landscape character can not and should not be retained everywhere. Some will be transformed regardless of our efforts and others may not be particularly valued in their current form - all that is inherited from the past cannot be safeguarded. Agreeing what the appropriate objective for a particular landscape should be requires an understanding of:

- the range of values that people ascribe to today's landscape and their importance;
- the nature of the trends for landscape change now and in the future (as best we understand them); and
- the landscape's function together with the wider public goods that the landscape provides.

A8. Agreement of landscape objectives requires debate amongst the community of interests, and being explicit about what underlies its purpose. Possible landscape objectives include:

- **accommodating change** that is sympathetic to or strengthens the existing character and special qualities of the landscape;
- **recognising the change in character and qualities** that will emerge as the key characteristics of some landscapes are lost;
- **resisting change** that results in significant adverse effects on our most highly valued landscapes, recognising that the most sensitive have little or no capacity to accommodate change without significant detrimental effect;
- **reinforcing weak or restoring lost character** that is valued, where this is appropriate;
- **enhancing those landscapes degraded** by past use (recognising cultural values where appropriate), to secure a positive contribution to Scotland's landscape;
- **guiding change that will transform landscapes** whose character lends themselves to achieve positive change and whose current character is not highly valued; and
- **minimising the adverse effects of change** that are accepted as a necessary consequence of actions bringing other societal benefits, whose current character is not highly valued.

A9. SNH's approach to assessing the effects of development and land use changes on the landscape is based on the *Guidelines for landscape and visual impact assessment*<sup>23</sup>. This guidance is widely adopted by professional landscape architects and land use planners throughout the UK, and supported by more detailed guidance for specific forms of development<sup>24</sup>. It adopts a systematic and structured process, enabling judgements made to be transparent. SNH's advice requires an understanding of the nature and magnitude of the landscape change, and analysis of the sensitivity of the landscape resource, to inform an assessment of the significance of the resultant landscape change (in terms of its overall fit in the current landscape character or

---

<sup>23</sup> Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, *Guidelines for landscape and visual impact assessment*. 2002.

<sup>24</sup> For example: SNH, *Minerals and the natural heritage in Scotland's Midland valley*. 2000; SNH, *Marine aquaculture and the landscape: the siting and design of marine aquaculture developments in the landscape*. 2000; SNH, *Guidelines on the development of wind farms and small scale hydro schemes*. 2001; SNH, *Guidance. Cumulative effect of windfarms*. 2003

development of a new landscape character). In formulating advice on the appropriateness of the landscape change, the following factors will be considered.

- The consequences for the landscape, in terms of whether it enhances or weakens its landscape character and special qualities, taking into account the likely trend of landscape change, the cumulative effect of the change, the timescale over which change occurs, and whether the change is temporary or permanent, and reversible or not.
- The indirect or secondary effects on the landscape arising from the change under consideration.
- The broad objectives established for the landscape where these have been set, informing the judgement about whether the landscape change is considered positive/beneficial or negative/adverse.
- The values attributed to the landscape that SNH is seeking to safeguard. These include its contribution to the diversity of Scotland's landscapes; its contribution to local identity and distinctiveness; its aesthetic appeal; and its value in attracting informal recreation.
- Recognition of other values contained in the landscape.
- The landscape opportunities offered by the proposed change, including (if appropriate) whether change will strengthen landscape structure, increase landscape diversity, provide landscape enhancement or enable better integration of future change in the landscape. Some opportunities may be indirect, such as landscape change that supports social or economic needs and therefore enables future landscape management.

A10. In considering the acceptability of the effect of policies and actions on the landscape, SNH's landscape advice will be set alongside the full range of natural heritage considerations, and have regard to its balancing duty as required by statute<sup>25</sup>.

A11. For some valued landscapes, judgements on the acceptability of change are determined against policy tests. The Government has set out a policy test in NPPG14<sup>26</sup> for proposals under the planning system affecting national designations, including NSAs and National Parks, and SNH considers this broad approach is relevant when considering proposals under other regulatory systems. The test states that development should only be permitted where:

- *“the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or*
- *any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance”* (paragraph 25, NPPG 14).

A12. SNH interprets the objectives of designation as the safeguard, conservation and enhancement of the interests for which the area is designated (for NSAs this is their special qualities and character; for National Parks this is a broader range of natural and cultural heritage interests). Overall integrity means the wholeness of the area, the unity

---

<sup>25</sup> Section 3, Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991; SNH, *Balancing Duties Policy summary* 19. 2000.

<sup>26</sup> para 25, Scottish Office Development Department, *National Planning Policy Guideline 14 Natural Heritage*. 1999

or soundness of the whole being unimpaired, recognising that the entire area of the designation is valued and adverse effects to part of it is damage to the unity or soundness of the whole. The alternative policy test of social or economic national benefits clearly outweighing the designation's interest is for Scottish Ministers to determine.

## ANNEX B – THE TOOLS OF OUR LANDSCAPE WORK

- B1. **Landscape Character Assessment** - With the co-operation of a range of partners including local planning authorities, agencies and community organisations, SNH undertook a series of 30 regional LCA studies since 1994 which together identified and mapped the landscape character of the whole of Scotland (mostly at a scale of 1:50000). The national programme identified 275 distinct landscape character types (LCTs) – areas of consistent and recognisable landscape character - which recur as more than 3900 individual character units. The analysis identifies the key forces for change within each LCT – that is activities which are likely to have a significant impact on the landscape. This provides for the first time a relatively objective description of Scotland’s rich and varied landscape, as it was in the mid- to late- 1990s, and the range of activities impacting upon it.
- B2. **National Scenic Areas** - Scotland is renowned for the high scenic quality of its landscape. 40 areas covering 13% of Scotland are considered “*to be of unsurpassed attractiveness which must be conserved as part of our national heritage*”<sup>27</sup>, and were established by Order of the Secretary of State in 1980 under planning legislation<sup>28</sup>. Its effect is largely through the planning system applying stricter controls and requiring high standards so that development does not detract from the quality or character of the landscape. Planning authorities are required to consult SNH on specified forms of development, and certain permitted development rights are removed. Similarly, a more rigorous approach is applied to applications under the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme and for sea-bed leases.
- B3. It has been widely acknowledged that the NSA designation is not a particularly robust one, and during 1998-99 SNH undertook a review of its purpose, effectiveness and coverage and made recommendations to Government on the range of actions required<sup>29</sup>. We have subsequently undertaken two pilots developing Management Strategies in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway, and The Highland Councils. These have identified the special qualities of these areas, and identified the range of actions required to ensure their long term safeguard, through an extensive programme of community involvement.
- B4. **National Parks** - Scotland’s two National Parks (The Cairngorms, and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs), encompass some 7% of Scotland and identify areas of outstanding natural and cultural heritage, including landscapes of the highest scenic quality and valued for the recreational opportunities they provide. Their effect at present is largely through existing mechanisms, and will remain so until the Park Authorities prepare their Park Plan. The Parks’ extensive areas should enable the landscape interest to be addressed at the appropriate landscape scale, and provide the opportunity to demonstrate best practice in terms of landscape planning. The Parks’ area as a whole is of national importance for their natural and/or cultural heritage interest. But the values attached to their landscape will vary across the Parks, in part demonstrated by the presence of other designations. Both Parks include two NSAs wholly within their boundaries and part of a third, and also encompass local landscape designations, sites in the inventory of gardens and designed landscapes, and a prospective World Heritage Site.

---

<sup>27</sup> para 3.1, Countryside Commission for Scotland, *Scotland’s scenic heritage*. 1978.

<sup>28</sup> Scottish Development Department, *Circular 20/1980 Development control in NSAs*. 1980; Scottish Development Department, *Circular 9/1987 Development control in NSAs*. 1987

<sup>29</sup> SNH, *National Scenic Areas. SNH’s advice to Government*. 1999

- B5. **Local Landscape Designations** - Areas of Great Landscape Value and similar designations such as Regional Scenic Areas/Coasts are identified by planning authorities in their development plan for their landscape and amenity value. They identify landscapes of local or regional importance, whose level of protection should not be as restrictive as national designations. SNH reviewed the use of this designation in 1999, which revealed the varied purpose, status, application and even title that local designations used. In collaboration with the Scottish Executive, Historic Scotland and COSLA, SNH has prepared guidance on the policy and operation of local designations to reaffirm their role and ensure greater consistency and robustness in their identification and use<sup>30</sup>.
- B6. **Gardens and Designed Landscapes** - A national suite of Gardens and Designed Landscapes are included in an inventory<sup>31</sup>, compiled to date jointly for SNH and Historic Scotland. The original inventory of 275 sites was published in 1988, but this survey was not comprehensive and is currently being extended to incorporate other sites that merit inclusion. Sites are selected for their scenic and nature conservation value amongst other reasons, and taken together represent a national resource for both landscape and cultural heritage reasons. Inventory sites are regarded as Scotland's most important historic garden and designed landscapes, and make an important contribution to the wider character, and people's enjoyment, of many landscapes. Many designed landscapes are in poor condition through lack of sufficient management, and some have been destroyed.
- B7. In response to the Government's Strategic Review of SNH, our responsibility for preparation of the inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes will be transferred to Historic Scotland in 2006. The current requirement for planning authorities to consult SNH (alongside Historic Scotland) regarding proposals that may affect those listed on the original inventory will be reviewed in light of this change. Planning authorities are also expected to consult regarding sites which they suspect may either merit Inventory status or have interest<sup>32</sup>. SNH will retain its interest in the contribution of Gardens and Designed Landscapes to the character and appeal of the wider landscape.
- B8. **World Heritage Site** - World Heritage Site status is an accolade, with sites and cultural landscapes promoted by UNESCO in recognition of their "outstanding universal value" for their natural and/or cultural interest<sup>33</sup>. Although not a landscape designation in the strict sense, identified areas often incorporate certain landscape values. Natural sites recognise amongst other things landscapes with scenic beauty (St. Kilda), and cultural sites the contribution of the wider landscape setting (Neolithic Orkney). Cultural landscapes reflect the interaction between people and their natural environment. All must demonstrate a high level of management and safeguard, which in the UK is largely achieved through existing mechanisms.

---

<sup>30</sup> SNH published *Guidance on local landscape designations* in August 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Land Use Consultants, *Inventory of gardens and designed landscapes in Scotland*. 1987

<sup>32</sup> Article 15 of the *Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Scotland) Order 1992*; and Historic Scotland, *Memorandum of guidance on listed buildings and conservation areas*. 1998.

<sup>33</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Committee, *Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Undated. <http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=57>

## ANNEX C - GLOSSARY

### Definition

(with sources in italics)

<b>Historic land-use assessment</b>	The process of mapping the extent of past and present land use areas, categorised according to their form, function and period of origin.
<b>Landscape</b>	An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. <i>(Article 1, European Landscape Convention. Council of Europe, 2002).</i>
<b>Landscape capacity</b>	The ability of a landscape to accommodate different amounts of change or development of a specific type. Capacity reflects the landscape's sensitivity (see definition below) to the type of change, and the value attached to the landscape, and is therefore dependent on judgements about the desirability of retaining landscape characteristics and the acceptability of their loss. <i>(p.4 Landscape character assessment guidance for England and Scotland. Topic paper 6: techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity. The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2004).</i>
<b>Landscape character/ Landscape character assessment</b>	The distinct and recognisable pattern of landscape elements that occurs consistently in a particular area, and how these are perceived by people, that makes one landscape different from another. Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the process of systematic description, classification and analysis of landscape, in order to identify, describe and understand its character. The scale and detail of the assessment will depend upon the purpose for which it is being undertaken. <i>(para 7.8, Landscape character assessment guidance for England and Scotland. The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002).</i>
<b>Landscape evaluation</b>	The process of attaching relative value(s) to landscapes, through the application of a consistent methodology and agreed criteria. Landscape evaluation is carried out for a specific purpose, such as the designation of protected landscapes or the identification of landscapes of value to a particular group or community.
<b>Landscape scale</b>	An approach that examines issues at an extensive scale (such as a catchment system), rather than the individual site scale. Here the term landscape refers to the scale of the approach (landscape as an area), rather than as a topic of interest.
<b>Landscape sensitivity</b>	The degree to which the character and qualities of the landscape would be affected by specific types of development and land-use change. Sensitivity depends upon the type, nature and magnitude of the change. High sensitivity indicates landscapes are vulnerable to the change; low sensitivity that they are more robust to the change and that the key characteristics of that landscape will essentially remain unaltered.
<b>Landscape qualities</b>	Less tangible and experiential aspects of a landscape, such as the appreciation of its beauty or history, its sense of wildness or its challenge for recreation. While these qualities are dependent on individual perception, they are commonly recognised and valued by people.

<b>Natural beauty and amenity</b>	A composite term that refers to those qualities of the landscape that appeal to all our senses, but particularly the visual. The use of the word natural does not exclude landscapes or features which result from, or are changed by, human activity - a canal for instance may have considerable natural beauty and amenity.
<b>Scenery</b>	A popular term for landscape, which emphasises people's visual perception of their surroundings and the landscape's composition in views.
<b>Scenic quality</b>	The aesthetic value placed on the landscape, based primarily on the visual senses. This value is not absolute and tends to reflect prevailing ideas about which landscapes offer a particular aesthetic.
<b>Seascape</b>	An area, as perceived by people, in which the character is a composite of maritime and terrestrial elements where they meet at the coast.
<b>Townscape</b>	An area, as perceived by people, in which the character is the result of the grouping of built forms and the spaces between.
<b>Visual impact</b>	The effect on the appearance of the landscape as a result of development, landuse or land management change. Visual impacts can be positive (beneficial) or negative (detrimental), and can be cumulative.

## Contact Details

Simon Brooks  
 SNH (National Strategy)  
 27 Ardconnel Terrace  
 Inverness IV2 3AE.

Tel: 01463 712221  
[simon.brooks@snh.gov.uk](mailto:simon.brooks@snh.gov.uk)

**Date: December 2005**