

# People, Place and Landscape

A position statement from Scottish Natural Heritage  
and Historic Environment Scotland



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## Introduction

1. Scotland's landscapes are central to our identity and wellbeing. They are at the heart of our nation and they are central to the Scottish Government aspirations contained in its key historic and natural environment policies, including [the common statement prepared by the Scottish Historic Environment Forum](#).
2. This Position Statement sets out the vision and approach of SNH and HES for managing change in Scotland's landscapes in more detail. As the lead heritage bodies in Scotland, our organisations have statutory roles in the conservation, management and sustainable use of our landscape resources, and in promoting their enjoyment and understanding.
3. We fulfil our roles in a number of ways. We develop policy and practice, provide advice, and encourage others to get involved. We facilitate understanding, conversations and actions around landscape issues in Scotland, and we own and manage land in rural and urban areas.
4. Both organisations are aware of the scale and significance of changes that will be needed in our landscapes as we respond to the climate emergency. We will work together to ensure that necessary change is consistent with the approach set out in this statement and also contributes positively to other cross-cutting issues such as wellbeing, community empowerment and inclusive economic growth.

### What is landscape and why does it matter?

5. Scotland and the UK have adopted the people and place-based definition of landscape contained in the European Landscape Convention (ELC):

“Landscape” means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

Taking this definition, landscape encompasses nature and people, the past and the present, and tangible and intangible components. It includes all landscapes: the natural and managed; the urban, peri-urban and rural; the special, everyday and neglected.

6. Today's landscapes are the result of a range of natural processes and human activity over many generations. As we continue to shape the landscape, the landscape continues to shape us. It is a foundation of local and national identity, rich in cultural and natural heritage. It is a key asset that enriches society and supports our prosperity, health and wellbeing. Landscape supports livelihoods and provides a source of knowledge and understanding, learning and enjoyment.
7. Scotland's landscape continues to evolve in response to natural processes and human activity. Change can be largescale and sudden – the consequence of a single dramatic natural event or extensive development. More often, it is small in scale and incremental – taking place over many years. The capacity of humans to alter our environment has never been greater.
8. The climate emergency and our response to it will increase the scope and speed of landscape changes during our lifetimes. Decisions taken today will have to be carefully considered so that our landscapes can continue to support us, and enrich people's lives in the future. Communities need to be actively involved in these decisions. [The statement of Scotland's Land Rights and Responsibilities](#) is recognition that there is more public interest in decision-making affecting landscapes than ever before.

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## Principles

9. Scotland is world famous for its landscapes – their variety, distinctiveness and quality. But not all of our communities benefit from high quality surroundings, or have the chance to influence changes in the landscape around them. This can contribute to a range of social, economic, health and environmental inequalities.
10. The approach set out in the ELC guides our efforts for landscape. We have captured the approach in five principles:
  - a. **All landscapes** – Every landscape is important because everyone has a right to live in and enjoy the benefits of vibrant surroundings.
  - b. **Shared landscapes** – Scotland’s landscapes are a common asset and everyone has rights and responsibilities for looking after them.
  - c. **Your landscapes** – People and communities should always be involved in decisions that shape their landscapes.
  - d. **Understanding landscapes** – Decisions need to be based on understanding and awareness of both the cultural and natural dimensions of our landscapes.
  - e. **Dynamic landscapes** – Landscapes will continue to change, but change needs to be informed and managed to ensure they remain resilient.

## Vision

11. Our shared vision is:

All Scotland’s landscapes are vibrant and resilient. They realise their potential to inspire and benefit everyone. They are positively managed as a vital asset in tackling climate change. They continue to provide a strong sense of place and identity, connecting the past with the present and people with nature, and fostering wellbeing and prosperity.

12. When we use these terms, this is what we mean:

**Vibrant landscapes** are places people want to live and work in, visit and enjoy. They are rich in cultural and natural heritage.

**Resilient landscapes** are in good, robust and adaptable condition. They help us adapt to climate change by enabling natural systems and processes to function well. They retain cultural significance and evidence of human interaction, now and in the future.

**Inspiring and beneficial landscapes** tell Scotland’s story. They support economic competitiveness and tourism, and reflect our response to climate change. They provide benefits to our education, health and wellbeing. Scotland’s landscapes are a source of inspiration for the creative sector, and are a draw for recreation for both their cultural and natural richness.

13. To deliver our vision the following strategic action is needed:

a. Talking about landscape and its range of benefits

Outcome – Increased awareness and interest from a broad range of stakeholders including the public in the benefits that landscape provides.

We will:

- i. establish national and local reporting frameworks that capture landscape's contribution to the wellbeing and economic prosperity of Scotland's communities
- ii. engage a wider and more diverse range of partners in debate about future landscapes for a changing climate at national and local levels

b. Engaging more local communities and other stakeholders in helping shape future landscape change

Outcome – More local communities and other stakeholders actively involved in debate and decision-making on future landscape change.

We will:

- i. continue to develop web-based resources and other information, to make it easier for communities to access and add to knowledge of the landscapes of their areas and how they are changing
- ii. work with more communities to shape priorities for landscape change in their area, using a range of tools and approaches

c. Strengthening the role of landscape approaches in the planning, management and design of built development and other land uses

Outcome – Landscape approaches make a stronger contribution to the planning, management and design of built development and other land uses.

We will:

- i. integrate the natural and cultural dimensions of landscape better into national and local planning and land use policy and strategies
- ii. demonstrate the benefits of landscape-scale working, building on the experience of landscape partnerships and the work of protected areas and designated sites
- iii. support local authorities to establish a network of local landscape designations that are locally championed and valued

14. We will measure progress on these three areas against a small number of indicators that can demonstrate the fit and contribution of landscape to the Scottish Government's [National Performance Framework](#).

These will include:

- a. More people aware of and involved in considering landscape change in their areas
- b. More public satisfaction with the way landscapes are planned and managed
- c. A range of data available to track landscape change and the quality of built development and land use

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## Implementation

15. This statement sets out the shared principles that guide our efforts for landscape, and identifies the key outcomes we will work towards (together and independently). Our forthcoming Action Plan sets out the main areas of work we will commit to, alongside our existing work, to achieve this.
- Scottish Forestry
  - Scottish Government Planning Division
  - Transport Scotland
  - Visit Scotland
  - Scottish Government Natural Resources Division
  - COSLA and Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS)
16. We will work with a range of national and local organisations and stakeholders from the public, community and third sectors to implement the strategic actions in this statement. Key partners include local authorities and members of the ELC Coordination Group:
- Architecture + Design Scotland
  - Education Scotland
  - Forestry and Land Scotland
  - Marine Scotland
  - The National Park authorities
17. More detailed information on SNH and HES's specific approaches to landscape is available on our websites:
- [www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape-change/framework-landscape-policy/snh-landscape-policy-framework](http://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape-change/framework-landscape-policy/snh-landscape-policy-framework)
- [www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/landscape-and-the-historic-environment/](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/landscape-and-the-historic-environment/)

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Cover image: General view, Aberdeenshire, showing the Peel of Lumphanan – a 13th century earthwork  
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