

SCOTLAND'S FUTURE LANDSCAPES

Response of the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland

The Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) was established in June 2003 as an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). The function of HEACS is to provide Scottish Ministers with strategic advice on issues affecting the historic environment.

We very much welcome this important consultation from Scottish Natural Heritage, and the recognition in many parts of the text to the importance of the echoes of our past in the landscapes of today. We firmly believe that in seeking a place for the historic environment in future landscape we will build on the good work already established. We look forward to taking a full part in the debate, which, we feel must be both wide-ranging and inclusive.

We have responded to the questions as per the consultation document.

Section 2

Q1 Sections 1 and 2 set out a number of reasons for regarding all Scotland's landscapes as important to the life of the nation. a) Do you agree with this proposition and the case put forward to support it? b) Are there any values associated with those listed in Box 2 to which you would wish to draw attention?

A Q1a) In broad terms, yes. The difficulty, however lies in the definition of landscape. Scotland's landscape is a product of continuous human interaction with the land since the last Ice Age, and of increased urbanisation. It cannot be divorced from this interaction nor the impacts that creates; eg views to/from Stirling Castle. Landscape is therefore a product of society, a relationship between settlement patterns derived over the centuries and landform, and is continuously evolving. The text whilst acknowledging the relationship between society and the land too often targets the natural landscapes for discussion and debate and thus seems to underplay the role of society in shaping the future.

Q1b) Whilst supporting generally the values in Box 2, as an organisation advising on the historic environment we would wish to draw your attention particularly to the significance of the "cultural record" in terms of the landscape. Elements of the past are contained in almost every part of the landscape, though it is acknowledged this is not necessarily always immediately apparent. If we are to understand our past and use that to advise the future then we must take great care in how we manage these landscape traces - which must go well beyond designation of discreet areas.

Q2 SNH believes Scotland's landscapes deserve greater care. Do you agree and, if you do how do you think that SNH and others can best achieve this?

A It would be difficult not to agree with this statement, but with greater care must come greater understanding. Landscape is a product of how people interact with the land. It is thus not simply a matter of SNH or indeed other organisations achieving this, but more about articulating a debate, increasing education and awareness and changing public attitudes to the effects of human impacts.

Section 3

Q3 Scotland's landscapes will continue to evolve. This section has described the factors that SNH has identified as the principle forces of change over the last 50 years. a) Do you agree with this analysis? b) Are there new forces, already with us or foreseeable, that will shape Scotland's landscape over the next few decades?

A Q3a) Broadly, yes, but the impact of agricultural change and particularly of increased monoculture forestry in the last fifty years is not fully recognised. This forestry planting has been a major threat to previously known cultural landscapes, particularly of pre-agricultural improvement settlements.

There is not sufficient recognition given to the dramatic effects that government fiscal policy can have on the environment, eg energy grants or agricultural support.

Q3b) The most obvious change to emerge will surely be one of climate change that could have enormous consequences to all aspects of the landscape. There is also likely to be major population decline leaving unpopular settlements with a fragmented urban landscape and perversely continued pressure on the urban edge as the suburbanisation process continues. This may well impact on the historic settlement patterns in some areas.

A unique opportunity could also be apparent with the fact that as much of Scotland's forests were planted at the same time in response to grant aid it is coming to maturity at the same time. Over the next two decades therefore much will need to be felled, and over large areas. With the changed priorities for the Forestry Commission there is an opportunity to re-assess the landscape of significant parts of rural Scotland - and to re-assess the cultural significance of landscapes lost in planting.

Q4 Change can be for the better or the worse, or indeed neutral in its effects. This section has identified a number of trends that SNH views as detrimental to landscape quality. a) Do you agree with this assessment? b) Are there any other significant developments we have omitted?

A Q4a) Agreed. Q4b) No

Section 4

Q5 This section has put forward six principles which SNH should steer our efforts to guide and manage change in Scotland's landscapes of the future. a) Do you agree with these six propositions? b) Do they leave out anything important?

A Q5a) Broadly, yes, but the most profound changes will almost certainly be either climate or economic development led. These cannot be controlled by landscape policy alone but through a change in understanding by all agencies involved.

This section again seems to refer to the landscape as a rural context rather than a balance between rural and urban. The concept of "positive" in relation to landscape is difficult to define. Communities can often be at odds over what might be construed as positive or negative.

On balance the concept of some landscape warranting special safeguarding is probably necessary - this could well apply to significant relict landscapes. However it is difficult to take this too far, as landscape evolves with the requirements of society. The principle of caring for all landscape has greater importance.

Quality is increasingly difficult to promote particularly as both SNH and Local Councils reduce their emphasis on the design skills of landscape architects and others. This will put pressure on statutory requirements to bring forward regulation which is often not the best way to deal with a subject often as ephemeral as landscape.

Above all landscape is a shared responsibility between professionals and the community, and as yet there is no clear direction as to how this debate can be managed.

Q5b) No

Q6 This section has highlighted a variety of challenges that in SNH's view must be tackled successfully if Scotland's future landscapes are to be at least as good as those we have today. For each of the sub-sections, addressing a particular landscape setting or theme:

a) do you agree with the concerns identified and are there others that you wish to register?

b) how do you think that the challenges, listed as bullet points, can best be tackled?

c) Overall, do we have available the tools and mechanisms necessary to ensure better care for Scotland's landscapes?

A a) There is general support for the issues raised under each heading. There is, however an overall concentration in the text on the purely physical aspects of the process of change. Without greater public understanding and debate many of these issues will not change. The areas that seem most risk are the urban fringe and the fragile upland landscapes - both reflecting the more fragile

remains of the past - yet these are the areas where pressure is greatest for change.

Certain areas are of particular importance to the historic environment. There is no reference to the particular importance of the coast to the Scottish landscape. This is where erosion is already taking a heavy toll on important archaeology. Designed landscapes of the lowland landscapes are all about to reach their maturity and in some parts of Scotland are the predominant landscape. There is a great need for urgency in tackling these issues which are outside the legislative framework, and mostly outside grant aid.

b) The issues raised are complex and there is no easy answer. There is clearly need for a shared agreement on the way forward by the Scottish people, as it is only through them results can be delivered. Societies get the landscapes they deserve. This would suggest that a higher profile needs to be raised on our aspirations for the landscapes of the future if we are to secure the sort of changes envisaged here.

c) Simply, no. Legislation and indeed recent consultation suggests that area designations are still considered by SNH to be the most appropriate way forward. There is a strong case to be made for characterisation to become the means by which the future landscapes are shaped. This would allow evidence from the past to be more fully recognised in the process of change.

Section 5

Q7 SNH believes that only shared commitment and collective action will secure for Scotland's landscapes the attention and care they deserve. How can such a shared agenda be generated, bearing in mind the need to marry local and wider perspectives?

A Agreed. Through debate and discussion and by landscape set in the broader context of opportunity for a future Scotland. The only way is through consensus establishing the type of future landscape we all want. But this will take time, and indeed may change over time.

Q8 This section has spelt out the wider range of individuals and organisations whose contributions are essential to the better care of Scotland's landscapes. a) Do you agree with the roles identified for all the various interests? b) How can you or your organisation contribute to achieving the better care desired?

A a) Generally agreed, but there has to be a role for Scottish Ministers.

b) The Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland has a remit to advise Ministers on all aspects of the historic environment. We very much welcome being part of the future debate about the landscape and how our remit of the historic environment can contribute to the overall development of future options.

February 2004