

# Landscape Institute Northern Ireland

## **A National Landscape Strategy for Ireland: Strategy Issues Paper for Consultation, September 2011**

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Response of the **Landscape Institute in Northern Ireland (LINI)**, November 2011

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The Landscape Institute is the chartered institute in the United Kingdom for landscape architects, incorporating designers, managers, and scientists, concerned with conserving and enhancing the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, and represents members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies, in academic institutions and in commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute is an educational charity and chartered body whose purpose is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Landscape Institute's accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of urban and rural environments and to the protection and enhancement of our physical and natural environments.

The Landscape Institute in Northern Ireland (LINI) represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

Previously known as the Institute of Landscape Architects representing landscape architects in both Ireland and Great Britain, the Landscape Institute restructured in the early 1970s. At this point the Irish chapter of the Institute of Landscape Architects also restructured, into a Northern Irish branch of the UK Landscape Institute (LINI), and a separate professional body in the Republic of Ireland, the Irish Landscape Institute (ILI). Due to this historic evolution, and also arising from more recent working opportunities, members of LINI work throughout the island of Ireland, and many are also members of the Irish Landscape Institute.

This background is given in order to provide context for the following response submitted by LINI to the National Landscape Strategy for the Republic of Ireland, as proposed by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

LINI welcomes the opportunity to consider the Strategy Issues Paper relating to the proposed National Landscape Strategy for the Republic of Ireland.

Numbers in the response refer to paragraph numbers of the Strategy Issues Paper.

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LINI agrees with the opening statement that the success of the economy is 'intimately related' to management of the landscape, and in light of the current critical economic situation of Ireland and Europe, commends the government of the Republic of Ireland in drawing up a National Landscape Strategy in order to address its economic potential, as well as to meet its obligations under the European Landscape Convention (ELC).

1.1 Almost all agencies of government, just like the diversity of many actions of the general public, impact on the landscape. According to the ELC definition, it is understood that landscape is an interdependent process of interaction between society (including economy) and the environment. Thus LINI advises that the Strategy must coordinate not just those agencies and actions which are 'charged with looking after the land and its resources', but be clear that it applies to all matters of 'interaction with the landscape', which is a much broader remit than the phrase included in the Issues Paper. Recognising that landscapes change, LINI advises that it is important that recognition is given to the 'value' of landscape. LINI particularly supports that the Landscape Strategy is not about 'protecting' landscape, but is about the 'management of change'; LINI advises that whilst landscapes change, landscape value should be enhanced or maintained.

1.2 LINI is in full support of the definition of landscape as contained within the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, and agrees strongly with the Strategy Issues Paper that the 'value of landscape' should be distinctly clarified in all governance processes, such that it is recognised why regard should be paid to landscape and the enhancement of landscape value in all matters.

The ELC states that landscape comprises rural countryside, built heritage (as in townscape, urban place, peri-urban development), and seascape. It is essential that the NLS accords with this multifaceted understanding of landscape. Specifically, it is important to have consistency throughout the NLS – 'land' and 'landscape' are not interchangeable terms; countryside and landscape are not interchangeable terms.

1.3 LINI commends the NLS for recognising that human activities other than farming now have the greatest impact on the landscape (type, condition, and value), but prefers that this interaction is not referred to as a physical matter: society's interaction with land to create landscape is not only about 'shaping' the land: landscape exists physically, aesthetically, functionally (ecology), and in time (change).

Again, consistency is essential – countryside and landscape are not interchangeable terms, and landscape as a process includes the interaction of man: all landscapes are (not 'can be') more than just scenery, they are the lifestyle which society lives.

1.4 LINI commends the approach of the NLS that the landscape character assessment (LCA) process is a continuous process, rather than one which can be completed as a frozen presentation of landscape type and value. This must be stated in High Level Objective 3. Whilst Northern Ireland completed its landscape character assessment in 2000, it has not been updated since. In England, LCAs are continuously reviewed by the local authorities. Ireland's LCAs should be updated continuously on an all-island and cross-administrative boundary basis. The LCA process should be one which leads to an understanding of landscape 'value'. The process of landscape planning advocated by the ELC means that by addressing the value of landscape, all other matters are addressed as a result. As such, the LCA process can become the basis for all decisions relating to planning and governance processes. This does not just apply to 'the countryside', but to all places: urban, rural and peri-urban, countryside and seascape.

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1.5 The Paper states that the NLS will meet its objectives through the 'land-use planning process'. The ELC advocates a 'landscape planning process', and LINI requests that the current tendency towards land-use planning is seriously reconsidered to align with ELC requirements. LINI commends the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 for its mandatory objective for landscape policies in local development plans, but advises that for these to be meaningful, it is essential that there is consistency as to the use of the term landscape. These objectives must refer to all aspects of landscape (rural, urban, peri-urban, seascape, of good quality, ordinary and degraded condition), as more than likely most local authorities consider this to be an objective for countryside of high quality.

It is essential that all persons (not just government) undertaking action and interaction in the landscape perceive the benefit to society of caring for and enhancing landscape value. LINI strongly supports the government in its position as exemplar, but asks how this general commitment towards landscape value through general and individual human interaction is going to be achieved (High Level Objective 4).

1.6, 1.7 LINI believes that the ELC process strives to achieve an understanding of landscape value which is not based on subjective assessment of 'beauty'. The ELC recognises that character will change according to requirements within that landscape, but seeks to maintain or enhance landscape value through and beyond that change. The NLS must promote design quality in terms of space, time and ecological systems.

Consistency in the NLS is essential: some professionals prefer the term 'place' to landscape. However, LINI advises that often place is understood as a spatial consideration, rather than being inclusive of the time and ecology aspects of landscape under the ELC landscape definition. LINI advises that the term 'landscape' should be used throughout, with a clear definition relating to 'place' given at the outset of the document.

2.0 LINI advises that the environment envisaged by the NLS must not be restricted to a better 'physical environment': the environment which is landscape is space + time + ecology + human lifestyle and culture.

Action 1: LINI advises that humans have played a role in the establishment of all landscapes, not just 'rural' landscapes.

Action 1.3: LINI suggests that this action should be to develop methods whereby all actions of all people and organisations put their landscape obligations as a priority.

Action 1.4: LINI commends the consideration of landscape categories into existing awards schemes.

Action 2: LINI strongly supports the adequate training of professionals and all persons relating to landscape matters. However, LINI is extremely concerned that there is currently insufficient provision of such educational programmes in Ireland. An undergraduate programme in landscape architecture is provided at UCD, but postgraduate programmes in landscape architecture, previously provided at both UCD and the University of Ulster in Belfast have both been discontinued (UCD in 2008, and UUB in 2011). The University of Ulster in Belfast has stated its commitment to provision of CPD programmes previously provided by the Heritage Council relating to Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Planning. Nonetheless, LINI can report that the University of Ulster in Belfast has made its decision to discontinue the programme despite evidence of significant demand. Each signatory to the ELC has agreed to provide sufficient training for landscape expertise in order to fulfil the obligations of the Convention. In strong support of all the points of Action 2, LINI asks that the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht responsible for meeting the ELC in the Republic of Ireland, alongside

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the Minister for the Environment responsible for meeting the ELC in Northern Ireland, fully appraise themselves of existing provision relating to landscape education and expertise. Where this is clearly not being provided by the Universities currently, direct support should be given to fulfilling this obligation, whether at the Universities mentioned, or through other means (Action 2.3, 2.5).

Action 3: LINI specifically supports that the identification and categorisation of landscapes is done on an all-island basis, and also on a cross-administrative boundary basis, and asks why the Strategy Issues Paper is brought forward by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht alone, without the corresponding department responsible for the ELC in Northern Ireland (Department of Environment). As the professional body for landscape architects in Northern Ireland, who are professionally accredited with the skills, standards and expertise relating to landscape matters, LINI respectfully requests integral involvement as core stakeholder to the all-island landscape co-ordinating structure proposed in Action 3.2.1.

Action 3.1: LINI requests that the stipulations of Action 3.1 are clearly for an all-island landscape catalogue, which in addition to the items listed should also include human life and ecosystems, tendency to change (rather than change to date).

Action 3.2.2: LINI advises that the LCA process must be a continuous process, rather than a dated representation of a 'status quo'.

Action 3.2.3: The LCA must include tendency to change, and sensitivity; LINI strongly supports the establishment of green infrastructure standards, which must also include planning for ecosystems, water, resources, and waste.

Action 4: In response to the question relating to landscape quality, LINI advises that it might be more pertinent to use the term landscape value rather than quality. Landscape might be 'quality' for only some of many interacting users and resources. Landscape value is reached when all aspects of a landscape are appropriately served. LINI advises that it must be recognised that even though landscapes change in character and interacting components, the value of the landscape may be enhanced or maintained. It is possible, desirable and important to maintain or enhance landscape value through landscape change. LINI advises that the Department adhere to the advice of expert landscape professionals (rather than the 'general' perception of the public) for further advice in this regard.

3.1 Relating to the implementation of the NLS, LINI advises that a 5 year initial preparatory period is entirely unacceptable. The landscape of the island of Ireland is suffering now, as is the economy. It is essential that these measures are brought forward without any further delay whatsoever, in order that the economy of the island of Ireland and the landscape value of the island of Ireland are mutually and beneficially developed together. As an initial undertaking, the landscape character assessment of the whole island of Ireland should be urgently completed, and that of Northern Ireland reviewed and brought up to date (eg. to include seascape, and cross-border LCAs, let alone change since 2000). Education programmes must be put in place immediately (not after a 5 year preparatory period) in order to provide the expertise and training required by the ELC. All-island landscape coordinating structures should be put in place at once. As a result, the all-island Landscape Strategy, and its objectives (as per Action 4) for enhancement of landscape value for social (lifestyle, economic and cultural etc) wellbeing should be fully in place within the ten year period, rather than waiting for a myriad of small actions to be completed first. Awareness raising (Action 1) can take place now, with the involvement of landscape experts already in existence on the island of Ireland (specifically chartered members of the ILI and LINI who are trained in landscape planning). The measures of Action 2 (specifically including Action 2.5) can also commence now, either working with those institutions that already

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provide landscape architectural education, or initiating alternative approaches with the two professional institutes (Landscape Institute / LINI, and ILI). The all-island governance structures relating to landscape (Implementation objective 1) must also be established without further delay, and should be a specific agenda of Northern Ireland's annual programme for government. All policy, plans and programmes throughout the island of Ireland are already required by the ELC to base their intended actions on the enhancement of landscape value. Thus Implementation Objectives 2 and 4 should start immediately, or already be underway. Relating to Implementation Objective 5, where local authorities do not have adequate landscape expertise within their existing staffing, such landscape experts should be employed, either as permanently or as consultants until the core staff are appropriately trained through successful completion of a landscape architecture educational programme. This will mean that the landscape characterisation can be appropriately completed without delay which will prove to be detrimental to the future of both the Irish landscape and the island's resulting economic wellbeing.

LINI commends the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht for its proposal for an all-island consideration of landscape, and respectfully requests that LINI is integrally involved as core stakeholder to the coordinating structure established as a result of this Strategy Issues Paper.

The Landscape Institute in Northern Ireland (LINI) would like to thank the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Strategy Issues Paper on a National landscape Strategy for the Republic of Ireland, and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the policy development team and undertake further consultation relating to the development of the Landscape Strategy and other landscape matters on the island of Ireland.

For any queries and further discussion relating to this response, and for future consultations, please contact:

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