

Renewable and Low-carbon Energy Capacity Methodology: Methodology for the English Regions, final draft November 2009

Introduction

The Landscape Institute (LI) is an educational charity and chartered body responsible for protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The 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 LI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above document. As you may be aware, the Landscape Institute has produced its own Position Statement¹ concerning climate change, sent with this response, which you may wish to include in your bibliography. A very clear statement is made in the Introduction by the LI President Neil Williamson and Jon Lovell, Chair of Policy Committee: "Responding to this challenge, this Position Statement is designed to demonstrate to stakeholders and government the critical and central role that the landscape architecture profession has to play in the delivery of climate change policy objectives..." This should be read alongside Section 3.5 of the Position Statement which states: "The Landscape Institute is fully committed to the maximisation of renewable energy capacity as an essential aspect of climate change mitigation whilst ensuring the robust protection and enhancement of landscape character and condition".

The LI is pleased therefore to note that landscape and visual amenity considerations are well represented with respect to relevant technologies and we are particularly supportive of the attempt to bring consistency of approach to these matters across the English Regions.

Response

The LI has no substantive criticisms of the document, and see it as well-balanced and thoughtful. We do however have some suggestions by way of which we feel that it might be improved further. Accordingly, we would ask you to consider the following detailed points.

¹ Landscape Institute (2009) *Landscape architecture and the challenge of climate change*. London: Landscape Institute

Ref	Issue	Comment
Table 2-1	International Designations – World Heritage Sites	<p>We are supportive of the reference but it should be noted that the document is seeking to accord the WHS 'designation' a higher status than National Parks and AONBs. Further, we understand that these sites are not statutory designations, rather they are identified by 'inscription' on the UNESCO listing and, further, their identification does not being any additional level of protection than those which might underlie them. Further, it should be noted that certain WHS sites in the UK do in fact carry 'buffer' zones although they may not be termed as such e.g. Hadrian's Wall. Whilst clearly an accolade of international importance, the distinction between inscription and designation etc might usefully be made in a footnote to the table. Further, may we suggest that the status of WHSs and the levels of protection conferred on them or not, by the planning system, be confirmed by the authors of the report before labelling them as designations in the final version of the document?</p>
	Nationally Designated Sites – Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings... Heritage Coasts	<p>Whilst Conservation Areas are designated via legislation, the above mentioned clarification of status might usefully be employed in this regard also. Concerning Listed Buildings, it may be worthwhile drawing attention to the very broad range of elements which can be designated as a listed building (as well as the grading – I, II* and II). Listed buildings can range from palaces to milestone marker posts at the side of a road. Accordingly, their treatment must also vary considerably. It is also important to remember that we need to be concerned not only with the 'site' as it is referred to but also the setting of listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments (noting that the landscape setting – whether contemporary or historical – has been cited in numerous planning policies and Public Inquiry decisions with respect to renewable energy proposals. Finally, it might also be worth mentioning via a footnote that whilst PPS 22 is clearly central to renewable energy delivery, other PPSs (for the moment) are relevant e.g. PPS 15 and PPS 16.</p> <p>Concerning Heritage Coasts, Heritage Coast status is not a statutory designation and it should not be ranked alongside National Parks and AONBs (bearing in mind that c90% of Heritage Coast already falls within National Park/AONB landscape).</p>

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Table 2-1 and elsewhere	Frequent reference is made to '... the development does not compromise the visual amenity...' or does not compromise some other aspect under consideration.	We feel that this is a very inflexible statement that does not allow the exercise of discretion in decision making. As the authors of the report make clear elsewhere in the document, Natural England are resisting the idea of 'blanket' prohibition on certain forms of renewable energy development. Natural England should be complimented on their open-mindedness and flexibility in approach. Whilst that may be a plea for geographical flexibility, we suggest that a similar plea needs to be made for judgemental flexibility and that in each mention of the word 'compromise', the word 'unacceptably' should be placed in front. In this way (a) the individual circumstances of each type of renewable energy development, (b) the individual characteristics of different scales of proposals and the (c) the individual characteristics of different sites and settings can be brought together further down the line without having to waste time on meaningless argument whether factor 1, 2 or 3 is or is not compromised whereas the important test is whether or not acceptable harm might arise.
Table 4-1	5 – Exclusion Areas - Roads	Is it intended that <u>all</u> roads should be buffered? Clearly there are consents already in place (e.g. North Pickenham Wind Farm) where minor roads lie well within the topple distance of a turbine. Whilst Motorways, Trunk Roads and 'A' Class Roads should logically be placed in the protected category, ought there not to be a measure of discretion when other categories of road are being considered?
	5 – Exclusion Areas – Airports and Airfields – 5 km	We would never suggest for a moment that undue risk should arise from inappropriately located development near these areas, but we feel that more evidence needs to be given as to what underpins the 5 km figure.
	7 – Designated Landscapes – Follow the 5 step process.	See 'Other relevant matters' below

Ref	Issue	Comment
Table 4-2	Energy Crops	<p>We feel that further explanation is required as to why permanent pasture/grassland is included as an excluded area. Many readers will feel that grassland which is pastured is ubiquitous and therefore definition may be required.</p> <p>Concerning Public Rights of Way, on the one hand there seems to be PRow exclusion followed by PRow buffering. This appears confusing and more clarity would assist in this regard.</p> <p>Concerning the exclusion of cropping underneath power lines, it is perfectly clear that maize is grown to a height of 2-3m in many places beneath high voltage electricity transmission lines and to exclude other crops of a similar height seems illogical. Is there a need to clarify (a) the sorts of crops and (b) the scale of power line distribution which may or may not be incompatible?</p>
Annex E	3 - Energy Generation Delivery per km2	Whilst the figure of 9MW/km2 has been provided as a benchmark, we feel that it needs to be made clear that with increased efficiency the output is expected to increase and the figure should <u>not</u> therefore be regarded as a ceiling or maximum.
	5 – Exclusions	See previous comments.
	5 – Exclusions ... '...without adversely affecting the objectives of the designation...'	Our comments in this regard are similar to the point made with respect to 'compromise'. Given the inherent resistance to change especially in the countryside (c91% of the public in the countryside would like 'no change' to be the order of the day – source: Countryside Agency Study) <i>any</i> change will be resisted in some quarters. The Landscape Institute's position is, ideally, the right sort and form of development in the right place. We nevertheless recognise that the ideal situation is frequently impossible and therefore would support the phrase '...without giving rise to unacceptable harm to the objectives of the designations.'
		We would like to emphasise that absolutist phrases such as 'do not compromise...' or 'without adverse effect...' are impractical and require the word 'unacceptably' and 'unacceptable' to qualify the intention. In this way discretion for the decision-maker can be maintained to deal with different circumstances in different locations and also to deal with changing circumstances over time.

Other relevant matters

There are two further matters which we believe must be mentioned.

First, the role of the landscape professional can be of great assistance is contributing towards guiding different types of renewable energy to the landscapes most capable of accommodating them (a) without giving rise to unacceptable harm and (b) assisting in maximising environmental enhancement opportunities. Further, at the core site specific level, the landscape professional may again assist in taking a synoptic as well as a specific approach to environmental constraints and opportunities when planning, designing and implementing renewable energy developments. We feel that whilst the document under consideration is clearly aimed at the Regions, it is imperative that there is a clear reference to the need for excellence in site selection, planning and design so that laudable aims and objectives at the regional level are followed through with high quality on-the-ground delivery of renewable energy generation. In this way the public can have greater confidence in and acceptance of renewable energy development.

Second, the LI wishes to make clear that it is not against the principle of change in terms of landscape character, and that it cannot and must not be assumed that change equates to adverse. The European Landscape Convention's definition of landscape "*For the purposes of the convention: a. 'Landscape' means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*" (Article 1 of the European Landscape Convention – Definitions) brings two principal components to bear: 'perception' and 'character'. The key word is '*perception*' which brings subjectivity firmly centre stage and which is recognised by the Institute. Change, therefore, is neither adverse nor positive: it is simply change and it is a matter of judgement whether such change as may arise should be regarded as being for the better or for the worse and that, in turn, is a judgement to be made in the circumstances at that time and in that place.

We are aware of the final draft document relating to the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges which deals with landscape and visual change. Whilst we cannot indicate the LI's opinion or any comments which may be made on that document, we wish to endorse the recognition that a positive change in visual amenity and/or landscape character should not be limited to or necessarily require the removal of incongruous or intrusive elements or the restoration of features which once were present. There is no for example that key characteristics / characteristic patterns should be reintroduced or strengthened for a positive change to occur. A positive change can arise from the addition of new, distinctive features which may give rise to a different landscape character and prospect.

Bringing (a) the LI's Position Statement on Climate Change together with (b) recognition of the great assistance that can be brought by the landscape professional to the process of delivery and (c) the open-mindedness of our approach to the concept of change, we trust that you will acknowledge this in the document and include the LI within the list of consultees. We believe that the delivery of renewable energy capacity and ensuring the robust protection and enhancement of landscape character and condition together with the visual amenity it provides are not mutually exclusive objectives and we would be pleased if you would record this in the document.

The Landscape Institute is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. For any queries relating to this response please contact:

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