

## Natural England's draft position on soil

*Response of the Landscape Institute*

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### 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.

### General comments

In principle the LI agrees with all of the positions outlined by Natural England in the draft position. However, there are specific comments we suggest are taken on board which we believe would strengthen the document. These are outlined below:

- Page 1 of the consultation document states that "*Decisions about the natural environment should take full account of the impact on soils...*" We believe that this should be better explained. By this we mean, what is meant by 'decisions about the natural environment'.
- If one of the goals of Natural England's work is to raise awareness of the importance of the subject, then the document may be improved by more detail on soil in the context of urban areas.
- The position suggests that the level of detail available for native soils is very limited. However, the LI is aware that Hampshire has already carried out a county-wide audit of their soils to inform strategy and to embed into local policy. Other authorities should be encouraged to do the same, with the information uploaded to the National Database hosted by the National Soil Resources Institute, to be accessible to all. This could provide a better guide and reference to planners and landscape architects in the nature of the native soils resource, including the features responsible for its origins, and the vegetation it supports
- Natural England's position would benefit from greater encouragement to leave soils, where at all possible, in place. The LI believes this might include greater uptake of treatment of contamination and techniques to render immobile contaminating elements. There also needs to be a clearer position on historic soils generated through industrial and other activities; is this a legitimate part of our natural and cultural heritage and a medium we should work with or should it be buried deep in a hole in the ground? Some materials which have had an impact on the composition of soils have resulted in unique biodiversity make-up within the wider area – do we preserve this or remove it?
- The use, conservation and, where necessary, accelerated creation of soil relevant to its location should be encouraged via landscape restoration. There is also a need to encourage research in the nature and management of urban soils. As a stated aim, the LI believes there should be encouragement for the creation and use of more of this growing medium in green roofs, living walls etc.

The Landscape Institute would like to thank Natural England for the opportunity to contribute to its position on soils. For any queries relating to this response, or for future consultations, please contact:

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