



Written Submission to the Scottish Parliament Communities Committee

LINK is pleased to be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed updating of National Scenic Areas, through amendment of the Planning, etc (Scotland) Bill. This comes at a time when Scotland's precious landscapes face unprecedented threats. It is critical that this re-consideration of National Scenic Areas achieves its stated aims – as there will be no second chance.

Statutory Purpose for NSAs

The point is well made in the NSA Consultation, "*Enhancing Our Care of Scotland's Landscapes*", which is running alongside the consideration of the Planning Bill, that many of the critical land use changes which can affect landscape do not require planning permission. It is essential, therefore, to achieve the stated aims of NSAs, that an integrated management approach is taken which includes consideration of agricultural measures, e.g. under the Rural Development Plan for Scotland, and forestry measures and which includes working with all relevant public sector bodies. These should include Visit Scotland and Historic Scotland. The proposed reform of NSAs as it stands will not, on its own, deliver the desired result.

Designations of NSAs

We agree with the proposals for designating, de-designating and revising boundaries which are essential to make NSAs a "live" designation. However, we feel that it is insufficient for "*planning authorities to have regard to the designation in its consideration of planning applications*" as is described in the Consultation. For the designation to protect NSAs from inappropriate planning decisions, there needs to be an onus on local authorities to give proper consideration to their special status.

We believe that, without a statutory obligation on local authorities, it will be very difficult to achieve the stated aims. In the absence of this obligation, the incentive of 100% funding for developing management strategies and for ongoing management is essential and must be offered.

NSAs and National Parks

There is ongoing discussion about whether to remove NSA status within the National Parks. Since, at the current time, NSAs have greater protection than National Parks,

because of differences in Permitted Developments, LINK does not feel NSAs should be subsumed into the National Parks. Even if the NSA status within the National Parks was removed, this would leave parts of some NSAs just over the boundary. So Management Strategies for NSAs which are partly within the National Parks would still need to be coordinated with the Park management. National Parks have a broader remit than that for NSAs which is about protecting our best scenery. It is therefore appropriate that NSAs continue to be delineated whether within or outwith National Parks. So there is a case for keeping the designations separate.

Management Strategies

This is the part of the proposal outlined in the Consultation document which concerns us most. **LINK believes that the financial cost of managing National Scenic Areas which are of national importance should be an accepted national cost.** It is unreasonable that a few local authorities which have most of the NSAs in their area should have to find the finance required to implement these plans. Moreover, it will give local authorities a huge disincentive to take forward the concept of NSAs and make them work for local communities, whilst protecting national assets.

With adequate funding and commitment, we believe it is possible to meet the timetable outlined in the Consultation. Otherwise, LINK does not believe that it will not be achievable.

In the absence of a statutory obligation, it is essential for the success of these proposals that 100% funding for developing management strategies and implementing them is provided. The proposed SNH grant structure does not do this – providing up to 85% funding. NSAs are of critical importance to many other public bodies, including Visit Scotland, so these agencies could potentially contribute. This must not be something which is left to local authorities or others to have to find project funding for. A half-hearted scheme will fail.

The funding scheme must be brought in with the legislation to allow NSAs to re-launch successfully. The pilot NSA project in Dumfries and Galloway and the projects associated with Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales have demonstrated what can be done – so long as funding is included. These inspirational projects should be used as exemplars of how to take the development of NSAs forward.

On behalf of the following Scottish Environment LINK Landscape Task Force members –
Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
Council for Scottish Archaeology
John Muir Trust
Mountaineering Council for Scotland
National Trust for Scotland
Ramblers Association Scotland