



NSA Consultation
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20th April 2006
Dear Sir or Madam,

“Enhancing our care of Scotland’s landscapes”

This is a response from the Scottish Environment LINK Landscape Task Force to the Consultation on “Enhancing our care of Scotland’s landscapes”. The groups which have contributed to this response are listed at the end of the letter.

LINK is pleased to be given the opportunity to respond to this consultation 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.

Points and Questions discussed follow the order given in the document.

Statutory Purpose for NSAs

3.3 - Due to the constrained timescale of the consultation and legislative opportunity, we do not wish to open up discussion on the definition of NSAs given - *‘natural heritage designations of the highest national standing, identifying the national interest in the scenic qualities of an area’*. We also accept the new definition of purpose *‘that National Scenic Areas are areas of land which represent the very best of the landscapes for which Scotland is renowned’* and the designation that *‘this may also encompass other values’*, while continuing *‘to be a scenic designation based on preferences for natural beauty and amenity.’*

However we would like to see specific mention of the need for the identification and protection of cultural heritage landscapes, whilst accepting that this concern is identified in bullet point 2 in paragraph 3.6

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'Our most scenic landscapes form a critical part of our national heritage, encompassing a range of natural and cultural values (special qualities).'

3.4 - The point is well made that many of the critical land use changes which can affect landscape do not require planning permission. It is absolutely critical, 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.

3.5 - Due to the extremely constrained timescale for this consultation – if it is to be taken forward in the Planning, etc. (Scotland) Bill - we are content to accept the proposed definition, rather than try and refine it through further discussions

However, we wish to see the wording of the proposed aims of the designation to be amended to remove *"whilst recognising the social and economic needs of communities"*. This wording is vague – which communities are referred to? – and unnecessary since it is covered by the concept of *"managing change"*. We would commend the wording suggested by the Council for Scottish Archaeology in their submission – *"to manage changes arising from development and other pressures consistent with protecting and enhancing the special qualities of the NSAs"*.

Designations of NSAs

We agree with the proposals for designating, de-designating and revising boundaries which are essential to make NSAs a "live" designation. The phrase *"consult with SNH and other relevant bodies"* is rather vague and should be expanded upon. We are generally content with the roles outlined.

3.10 We feel that it is insufficient for *"planning authorities to have regard to the designation in its consideration of planning applications"*. 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.

3.11 We are concerned that there will *"be no obligation on local authorities to take special steps to enhance or prevent deterioration of the character of such an area"*. If there is no difference in the way NSAs are considered by planning authorities, compared to other areas, how will they be *"safeguarded and enhanced"*? 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

Since, at the current time, NSAs have greater protection than National Parks, because of the differences in Permitted Developments, we do not feel NSAs should be subsumed into the National Parks. Even if the NSA status within the National Parks was removed, this would leave bits of some NSAs just over the boundary. So Management Strategies for NSAs which are partly within the National Parks will still need to be co-ordinated with the Park management. National Parks have a broader remit than that for NSAs which is purely 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 area of the outlined proposal which concerns us most. We believe 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 incentive to do nothing much.

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. 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.

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

It is critical that all stakeholders – local and national – are fully involved in developing the management strategies to achieve recognition of the worth of the designation and to allow working together to achieve it. As representatives of groups with key landscape interests, we will be happy to work with all parties to take this forward.

Helen McDade,
Convenor, LINK Landscape Task Force

On behalf of the following Scottish Environment LINK Landscape Task Force members

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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
Scottish Wild Land Group

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