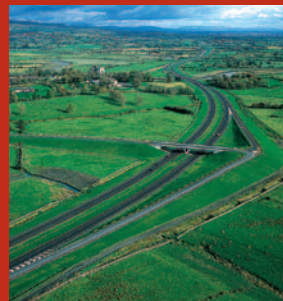


Proposals
for
Ireland's
Landscapes
2010

Summary
Document

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council





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INTRODUCTION

THE FUTURE OF THE IRISH LANDSCAPE

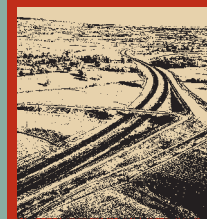
The Irish landscape is where we all live, work and spend our leisure time. Today, it faces an increasingly complex range of challenges. Whether through the accelerating natural and man-made impacts of climate change, or the demands of an increasingly urbanised society on our natural and cultural resources, there are major issues that need to be resolved and changes made in how we legislate for, plan, manage and conserve our landscapes today and in the future. The evidence supporting the need for these changes is etched in our towns, villages and the countryside throughout Ireland.

This document reflects new ideas regarding how we might manage, plan and conserve Ireland's landscape into the future. It is based on the work of the Heritage Council and many of its Irish and European partners in seeking, over a ten-year period, to promote the implementation of the European Landscape Convention (ELC). The Convention offers us a new way of thinking about our landscape — one that places people, and their active participation in shaping their landscape, in a central position. The frameworks within which this is delivered may vary from country to country, depending on their needs.

The proposals made in this paper are not about freezing the development of the Irish landscape. Instead, they seek to manage change in a proactive, informed and inclusive manner.

The National Landscape Strategy

The current *Programme for Government*, in building on the 2007 programme, retains the commitment to develop a National Landscape Strategy (NLS). The Heritage Council is actively involved in the Advisory Group established by the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government to develop this strategy.





The Heritage Council's Approach

The Heritage Council advocates a landscape approach that will benefit the management of our heritage — one that demonstrates that this is important not just for heritage but for our quality of life, our identity, our sense of ourselves and for making a bright future for our society. The Irish landscape is where tangible and intangible aspects of our culture (story, folklore, sense of place) intertwine. Together, these forge identity and belonging and provide inspiration.

Since the Heritage Council was established in 1995, it has consistently stated that, without management of the landscape, the various protections being applied to elements of our national heritage are less effective. In calling for a landscape approach to managing our national heritage, Council is seeking an integrated approach to managing cultural, built and natural heritage, rather than seeing them as discrete entities or stand-alone designations. This can be achieved through partnership with local communities, local government and government agencies, as a means to be proactive in problem-solving and in managing change.

The European Landscape Convention (ELC)

The Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (the Florence Convention) was published in 2000 and came into force in Ireland on 1 March 2004. The publication of this paper coincides with the tenth anniversary of the publication of the European Landscape Convention. Its aim is to promote landscape protection, management and planning and to organise European co-operation on landscape issues. Signatories to the Convention declare their interest in achieving sustainable development that is based on a harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity and environmental conservation.

As a party to the Convention, Ireland has agreed to promote landscape protection, management and planning, and to define landscape quality objectives, while fully involving the people concerned in the decisions that affect their area.



The Convention aims to increase awareness of the value of all the landscapes in which we live. It emphasises the right of people to identify with their landscape and to exercise their duty of care for it. Something as fundamental to our well-being as landscape needs to be treated well. If we do so, it will sustain a good quality of life, health and prosperity, helping us to meet our obligation to pass it on to future generations in perhaps even better condition than how we inherited it.

In common with other European countries, Ireland is encouraged through the European Landscape Convention to adopt an integrated approach to the management of the landscape, one that gives equal weighting to its economic, social and natural values, and recognises the interplay and symbiosis of these different agents.

The examination and analysis of measures taken by other countries that have implemented the European Landscape Convention show that the Convention has allowed those States to mould it to their own needs. Catalonia has introduced a new and specific piece of legislation. France has seen modifications to its existing legislation allowing for more integrated sustainable development. The UK has also developed new strategies and policies.

What is landscape?

‘Landscape means an area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.’

(The European Landscape Convention)

‘The landscape is the entirety of our surroundings, where everything happens. It is the foundation of a good living space for man and of biodiversity, and it constitutes capital in business sector development and in local and regional development. The landscape is society’s own shared resource and living archive. It is invaluable in helping us understand and explain our history.’

(Swedish National Heritage Board)



‘SOMETHING AS FUNDAMENTAL TO OUR WELL-BEING AS
LANDSCAPE NEEDS TO BE TREATED WELL’





The Dynamic Irish Landscape

Above all, the Irish landscape is a dynamic one. Recent census data (Census 2006) gives Ireland's population as 4.2 million — an 8.2% increase compared to figures from 2002, and a 16.9% increase since 1996. This increase — and indeed population increases projected for the future, and the associated demand for new infrastructure, housing and services — requires a greater consideration of how best to manage the landscape and the basic services that it can provide to us such as water, food, energy and recreational opportunities. Climate change introduces an added imperative, as adaptation and mitigation measures will need to be carefully considered and planned for at landscape level.

Ireland's — and Europe's — agricultural landscapes are hugely significant cultural reference points. Their multifunctional nature means they deliver a range of services to us. Agriculture and its associated policies, both at European and global levels, continue to play a significant role in land management. Over 60% of the land in Ireland (4.3 million hectares) is devoted to agricultural activities, with an additional 10% given to forestry.

Urbanisation is another key driver of change in the landscape. In 2006, 2.57 million people (approximately 60% of the population) resided in 600 urban areas (*i.e.* cities, towns and villages). According to the 2006 census, 56,186 one-off rural houses (*i.e.* 22.5% of total construction) were built. In a similar vein, the Irish worker is increasingly reliant on the car for transport needs, and the spread of settlements around our major cities has resulted in increased traffic flows.

The link between economic success and environmental quality is reflected in the Irish government's 2008 *Framework for Economic Recovery*, with the recognition that a high-quality environment is a key contributor to 'quality of life' and a key requirement for economic performance in a 'Smart Economy'. While there is a clear need to manage the legacy of the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' phase of the Irish economy, we must now prepare ourselves to deal with the various projections outlined above, creating frameworks and structures that are capable of managing future stress-points in the Irish landscape in a sustainable way.



Six Key Messages

- 1 Effective and meaningful public participation is at the very core of the European Landscape Convention. Community involvement, increased public participation, accessibility and the use of local knowledge in landscape planning and management are highly beneficial and could transform the way we manage all our designated landscapes and other special places.
- 2 The European Landscape Convention brings a clear requirement for an integrated approach to landscape planning and management across all areas of government policy formulation and implementation. In Ireland today, a plethora of State bodies operates at various levels to influence and impact upon landscape. This leads to a fragmented style of governance in relation to landscape management, planning and conservation in Ireland.
- 3 The landscape is multifunctional and constantly evolving. We use the landscape to produce food and other economic resources, as well as to support settlements and transport, yet it also supports a variety of environmental public goods, including the maintenance of valuable cultural landscapes and the ecosystems and historic features they support.
- 4 Tools such as Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) can inform planning for sustainable development. The consistent use of this technique would facilitate greater consideration of historic landscapes, habitats and ecosystem functions and services and would lead in turn to better management and quality of life.
- 5 One of the most critical aspects for increasing our consideration of landscape, and its constituent parts in decision-making, is the availability and accessibility of high-quality information. This includes characterisation studies, and evidence for landscape change, becoming available in an accessible digital format for decision-makers and the general public.
- 6 While a variety of initiatives targeted at different ages and sectors ought to take place in terms of landscape education and awareness, the ultimate goal must be to increase overall understanding of the significant contribution a quality landscape can make to our daily lives and to our health.

‘TOOLS SUCH AS LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
ASSESSMENT (LCA) CAN INFORM PLANNING FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT’





‘THE ULTIMATE GOAL MUST BE TO INCREASE OVERALL UNDERSTANDING OF THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION A QUALITY LANDSCAPE CAN MAKE TO OUR DAILY LIVES AND TO OUR HEALTH’

The Way Forward

The following proposals will allow us to consider many of the issues that surround the future management, planning and conservation of the Irish Landscape in a themed manner. They are cogently presented and have been derived from ongoing discussion with key partners, the findings of the Heritage Council’s October 2009 Tullamore conference, and numerous years of Heritage Council involvement and that of others on local, regional, national and international levels. What is needed now is a series of actions to make a real contribution to improvements in the future.

The Heritage Council proposes the following actions:

- Establishing a Landscape Observatory of Ireland (LOI).
- Introducing a Landscape Ireland Act.
- Landscape-proofing existing primary legislation, government programmes and policies.
- Promoting a vibrant research and learning culture on landscape.
- Increasing public participation, accessibility and the use of local knowledge in landscape management.



Establishing a Landscape Observatory of Ireland (LOI)

The Heritage Council proposes the establishment of a Landscape Observatory of Ireland to provide landscape with recognition at a national level. The Observatory would: champion the landscape approach, with a key objective being the promotion of a 'whole landscape approach' in all sectoral land-use policies within a specified time frame; propose policy; assist the implementation of a National Landscape Strategy; and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation.

To facilitate it in its work, the Observatory would be provided with the capacity to tackle the technical aspects of landscape. It would also be equipped to articulate and accommodate the spiritual and aesthetic values of landscape that are so enshrined in both our natural and cultural heritage. In line with earlier policy proposals from the Heritage Council in 2002 and 2006, it would be tasked with the production of the National Landscape Character Map. This would, uniquely on a European level, fully integrate the associated layers of historic landscape and habitat mapping to produce a series of Regional Landscape Catalogues.

Should Council be asked to assume this function on behalf of the Minister, the Observatory would be located within the existing Heritage Council headquarters in Kilkenny.

Introducing a Landscape Ireland Act

The Heritage Council has demonstrated just how effective community involvement can be in a range of landscape management projects. Communities from Julianstown, Co. Meath, to Bere Island in Cork, from the Wicklow Uplands to the Burren, and in the historic walled towns of Youghal to Fethard, have all been empowered to identify and implement the works and tasks that they wish to see in their landscape.

A new legislative framework could lay out a range of options available to projects that encourage and enable collaboration between national and local government, State agencies and local communities on an agreed range of landscape management and conservation measures.



Such collaboration would promote actions that bring social, environmental and economic benefits within the Irish landscape. This could provide for the agreement of practical management and conservation frameworks in places such as Natural Heritage Areas, Landscape Conservation Areas and National Nature Reserves, within the context of emerging provisions for Historic Landscapes or indeed resourcing measures within Architectural Conservation Areas or actions agreed in Village Design Statements. It would also, most significantly, provide for structures to assist communities in managing their everyday landscapes.

Landscape-proofing existing primary legislation, government programmes and policies

The European Landscape Convention requires that signatories 'recognise landscapes in law'. While the proposal to introduce a Landscape Ireland Act is intended to introduce new participative approaches for communities in determining agreed actions for the management of their own landscapes, there is also a need to recognise landscapes in existing primary legislation as a matter of some urgency. The Heritage Council welcomes the recent changes to the Planning Acts which include the definition of landscape as per the European Landscape Convention and the placing of landscape requirements in regional planning policies and County Development Plans. These are clearly positive developments, yet the implementation of these new provisions will require training, guidance and monitoring in the years ahead to ensure that the potential of these measures is met and that real change is affected at regional and local levels.

There is also a need to review and landscape-proof all existing legislation and policies, including NAMA. Government policies too — such as the National Development Plan or National Spatial Strategy; fiscal policies such as area-specific tax incentives; and climate change, renewable energy and agri-environment policies, including the Rural Development Plan — must take account of the emerging National Landscape Strategy.



Promoting a vibrant research and learning culture on landscape

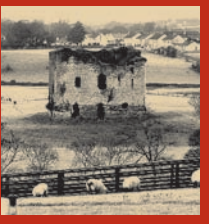
While there are challenges in multidisciplinary training and research, a research programme on landscape offers exciting prospects and ought to be a strategic target for the Irish university sector. Should this new programme become available, the range of courses currently offered in individual institutes indicates that a high level of expertise is available to deliver quality training and research.

There is a need to consolidate existing research on landscape matters at the third level and to encourage collaboration on research along the same lines as achieved with the Irish National Strategic Archaeological Research (INSTAR) Grants Programme as operated by the Heritage Council. A similar programme should now be initiated for landscape as a research topic to transform the very nature of Irish landscape studies. This should require collaboration not only within the island of Ireland but, encouraged by the measures contained in the European Landscape Convention, should also seek to heighten and develop international collaboration on landscape matters.

With regard to professional training, the Heritage Council has ably demonstrated — through the conception, development and delivery of its award-winning, multidisciplinary Landscape Character Assessment/Continuing Professional Development (LCA/CPD) Training Course Programme — that the appetite exists for ongoing multidisciplinary professional development in landscape management theory and practice.

A greater landscape input to farmer training and agri-environmental schemes would be highly beneficial. Dialogue to commence this is a key priority. A major contribution to successful landscape management involves working in partnership with the farming community and relevant State agencies.

However, the successful realisation of such measures does require resources. A landscape training fund is essential to enable these aims to be accomplished. International and all-island exchange and collaboration should be seen as key elements of such a funding mechanism.



Increasing public participation, accessibility and the use of local knowledge in landscape management

As an integral part of the ELC, each party commits to introduce procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other parties with an interest in the landscape. Mechanisms to promote such involvement have been tried and tested for a number of years by the Heritage Council and its partners through the use of Village Design Statements and Waterway Corridor Studies, through the Field Monument Advisor Scheme, and by Conservation Plans. These measures have had a significant degree of success. However, in keeping with the spirit of this document, and the need to continue the promotion of a landscape approach to managing our heritage, measures with a greater impact are required.

The development of High Nature Value Farming and its adoption to help manage cultural heritage, as well as Green Infrastructure practices, offer a means to promote landscape-scale benefits while forging strong local partnerships. Measures such as these do, however, require public policy support, not just through the work of the Heritage Council but within government departments, agencies and local government. Measures to mainstream initiatives like these, such as through the Rural Development Plan or future agri-environment schemes, would be advantageous.



Conclusion

This paper is presented with a view to ensuring that we have the best possible structures and frameworks to plan, manage and conserve all our landscapes, now and for future generations.

In conclusion, the Heritage Council wishes to thank everyone who has guided them along this path. From the Landscape Conference in 1999 and the publication of the 2002 *Policy Paper on the Irish Landscape* to the second Landscape Conference in 2009, many individuals, communities, agencies, government departments and international bodies have helped to shape the thinking that has gone into the formulation of this paper.





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