

PRESS RELEASE

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UK organisations call on Governments to reaffirm commitment to the European Landscape Convention

An alliance of over 60 organisations and individuals have signed an open letter to the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government and Northern Ireland Assembly urging them all to reaffirm the nation's commitment to the European Landscape Convention. The letter, dated 10th January 2011, calls for a clear indication from the governments that:

- A system of monitoring and proofing all new relevant legislation, policy and guidance will be carried out to ensure compliance with the Convention
- The principles of the Convention will be central in the upcoming Natural Environment White Paper in England and similar country-wide initiatives of the devolved governments.

The European Landscape Convention was developed by the Council of Europe. It was ratified by the UK Government in November 2006. The Government thereby committed the UK to recognise landscape in law and to integrate landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, environmental, economic and social policies. It also made a commitment to engage all members of society in the protection, management and planning of landscapes.

The UK has contributed much to the rising awareness of landscape values throughout the world, and UK experts were central in drafting the Convention. However, the commitments described above have not yet been fully honoured in any of the four UK administrations. The signatories of the letter request that the commitments set out by the Convention are brought forward, particularly at a time when governments are reviewing policies and seeking new partnerships with local stakeholders. The signatories believe that landscape is an important national asset, a key factor in people's quality of life, a major economic resource, a stimulus for community action and a potential focus for building the 'Big Society'.

The core benefits of the Convention are that it helps to fulfil the following purposes of public policy:

- Reinforce democracy, in that landscape belongs to everyone.
- Promote co-responsibility, in that every member of civil society, every property owner, every user of land can influence landscape for good or ill.
- Strengthen good governance, in that concern within communities for their landscape can lead to the development of greater environmental responsibility.
- Encourage localism, in that landscape not only contributes to the formation of local cultures and local quality of life, but the ELC also respects the principle of subsidiarity at every administrative level and landscape scale.

- Secure a valuable economic resource, in that landscape protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation, as well as social, cultural, environmental and economic value.
- Advance integration, in that landscape issues can provide the stimulus and framework for integrated policy-making and action affecting environmental change.

Key figures from organisations with a concern for landscape have voiced their support of the open letter, calling for Governments to re-affirm their commitment to the Convention.

For example, Jo Watkins, president of the Landscape Institute, commented:

"In times of recession, where we currently find ourselves, the benefits of careful intervention in the landscape become more relevant. What you do with a landscape, how it is nurtured and improved to the benefit of the environment of which it is a part and the communities that use it, becomes significant...it also begs the question: if you're not thinking about landscape, are you really thinking sustainably?"

Peter Ogden, Director of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW), said:

"Reaffirming the nation's commitment to the European Landscape Convention is particularly timely and an obligation that our existing and forthcoming Assembly Government must publicly reaffirm. Doing so now is particularly important given the need for local communities to have increasing involvement in shaping their local environments".

Neil Sinden, Director of Policy at the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), said:

"Landscapes shape all of us and we shape our landscapes. This relationship has given us some of the most beautiful, distinctive and diverse urban and rural landscapes in the world. It's not for sentimental reasons that we should work to protect and enhance this beauty and diversity. It has great social, cultural and economic, as well as environmental value. The integrity and quality of all the landscapes in which we live our lives, across the country, should be given the highest status in Government policies and decisions."

John Mayhew, convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's Landscape Taskforce, said:

"We have made a good start in Scotland through the creation of Scotland's Landscape Charter, but without wider backing for landscape from the Scottish Government, the UK Government and the other devolved administrations there is a danger that it will continue to take a back seat."

A copy of the letter is attached to this Press Release.

ENDS

Notes for editors:

The European Landscape Convention is the first international convention to focus specifically on landscape. It is dedicated exclusively to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. The Convention was signed by the UK government on 24th February 2006, ratified on the 21st November 2006, and became binding in this country on 1st March 2007. For more information visit www.landscapecharacter.org.uk/elc

Landscape, as defined by the European Landscape Convention, means “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.” Landscape is more than just scenery: it is the interaction between people and place; the bedrock upon which our society is built. Landscape is what gives meaning and value to the world around us, contributing greatly to our sense of identity and quality of life. Landscape in this context does not just mean rural: it includes urban areas as well as inland water, coastline and marine areas; it includes both beautiful and everyday places, as well as those in need of restoration.

The open letter is an outcome of the **2010 UK Landscape Conference**, held in Liverpool in November 2010. The Conference emphasised the vital importance of the commitment made by the UK Government when it ratified the European Landscape Convention, and the need to ensure that the commitment is honoured. For more information visit www.uklandscapeconference.org

The call for reaffirmation of that commitment has also been prompted by the recent publication of the **Localism Bill** and the upcoming **Natural Environment White Paper**, both of which call for greater involvement of local communities in shaping their environment: itself a core requirement of the Convention.

Signatories of the letter include organisations from the voluntary, private and public sectors as well as individuals with a concern for the European Landscape Convention. A full list of signatories is included in the letter.

This press release has been issued on behalf of the **Landscape Institute**: an educational charity and chartered body responsible for protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. The Landscape Institute is responsible for organising the UK Landscape Conference and Awards. For more information visit www.landscapeinstitute.org

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