

Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter

January 2014





Front Cover: Gasworks Business Park viewed from across the river Lagan

Message from The Minister

Northern Ireland's landscapes are its hidden treasure, something often recognised by others who visit but sadly less so by most of us living here. Sometimes it takes a visionary from amongst us to remind us in words, song or images of the unique value of our everyday surroundings. Someone like Seamus Heaney, Nobel Laureate and I am glad to say, native of my own County who celebrates place and people in the everyday and reminds us here and now of the universal value of what we may take for granted in the landscape around us:

My 'place of clear water,'
the first hill in the world
where springs washed into
the shiny grass

and darkened cobbles
in the bed of the lane.
Anahorish, soft gradient
of consonant, vowel-meadow

From the poem 'Annahorish' by Seamus Heaney about a place also in my own County.

It is said each one of us is an expert about the places we know well. Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter commits us to draw on this knowledge for the first time and should empower us to make better decisions about the places we value.

For this reason I am particularly pleased to sign this first draft of Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter. I invite all from every section of Northern Ireland society to sign up to this Charter over the next six months. You may be individuals, public representatives, community and NGO representatives, land owners and managers, private developers and company owners, professionals in the construction industry, officials in local authorities, public agencies and government departments and anyone who values our unique sense of place. In so doing I urge you to suggest examples of good practice which you think should be celebrated as case studies in the final draft to be issued later in the year.

You can do this by visiting this web address www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home.htm and following the simple instructions on-line.

It also gives me great pleasure, by signing this Landscape Charter, to be able to say for the first time that Northern Ireland is taking seriously its obligations under the European Landscape Convention. Northern Ireland now stands alongside the other devolved nations of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. This Charter comes at a critical time in local governance in Northern Ireland before the transfer of planning powers to new councils in April 2015.

The European Landscape Convention, administered by the Council of Europe, is now signed by 37 countries and places particular value on regional and local landscapes. Landscape Charters now exist and are being prepared in countries from all continents in the world. Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter is second in the United Kingdom after Scotland. It is a vision of hope and a call to action. It challenges us to examine our value system and to choose the correct path to manage change in our landscape not just for our sake but for our children's and their children's sake. It also acknowledges the legacy of the previous generations that shaped the landscape we inherited.

As Minister for the Environment I attach considerable priority to increasing the value and enjoyment we derive from our surroundings not just for the health and well being of our citizens but for the prosperity that good landscape value brings by way of tourism and job creation. Our landscape is an expression of who we are. At a time when change can be swift and irreversible, this Landscape Charter is a commitment by all who sign it to continue to value that expression of ourselves in all our places, everyday and special.



Mark h. Durkan
Minister of the environment

Why our Landscape matters

Northern Ireland's landscape is unique. I can say this as an outsider to this country. Its variety and distinctness over a relatively small land area mirrors in many ways the various cadences of its peoples' accents. This is quite exceptional in global as much as European terms. You may think of the drumlins of Strangford, the Mourne and Sperrin uplands, the wetlands of Fermanagh but the unique setting of Belfast city, where most people live, matters just as much as those special and protected landscapes. The European Landscape Convention is not just about designating special landscapes but putting a value on people's perception of place: where they live, work and enjoy themselves.

Today, doing nothing is no longer an option. This Landscape Charter calls on us to act. The pace of change in our landscape can be gradual and incremental or increasingly sudden and dramatic, accelerated by new technologies. In order to value the asset that is our landscape, built or natural, we must understand both the value of the asset and the forces for change so that we can make informed decisions. This will be even more important after April 2015 when these decisions will be made by new councils with new spatial planning powers under the Review of Public Administration.

As our first commitment to the Northern Ireland Landscape Charter, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency shall be renewing the Landscape Character Assessment for Northern Ireland in time for this change in local governance and in line with best practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Landscape Architects team in the Natural Heritage Directorate shall lead this renewal and manage this process in the future to provide a sound evidence base for our landscape that is up to date and responsive to change. I commend them and Helen Anderson, Director of Natural Heritage, for their work.

Australia, where I come from, adopted a Landscape Charter in 2011 with 5 guiding principles: Value our Landscape, Protect-Enhance-Regenerate, Design with Respect, Design for the Future and Embrace Responsive Design. Its Charter is directed at design professionals influencing change in the landscape. Our Landscape Charter, like Scotland's, is directed at the whole of society. This is right as we all have a role to play in managing the places we value and improving those that need to be valued. All landscapes matter as the European Landscape Convention stresses. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency will pursue its strategic objective of creating prosperity and well-being through environment and heritage excellence by signing up to Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter and I encourage others corporately and individually to do the same over the next six months.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry A'hearn', written in a cursive style.

Terry A'hearn
Chief Executive Officer,
 Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Deputy Secretary,
 Department of the Environment



The European Landscape Convention 2000

The European Landscape Convention was signed in Florence in October 2000. It was ratified by the United Kingdom in November 2006 and entered into force for the United Kingdom in March 2007. The Republic of Ireland has also ratified the European Landscape Convention.

The European Landscape Convention defines 'landscape' as 'an area as perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' and 'it concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes'. (Articles 1 and 2)

'It is a new way of thinking about landscape, responsive to different local, national and regional interpretations. It is not simply about landscape as biodiversity or ecology. It's not only concerned with the countryside or matters of heritage. It addresses the entire package, values and memories, the experience we have of place. A more democratic concept, it relates to remarkable *and* degraded landscapes, the special *and* the everyday, all territories from rural to urban; all areas, from the most treasured to the most nondescript and unloved, the places and spaces in desperate need of regeneration.'

Kathryn Moore

(Past President of the Landscape Institute)



Ten Affirmations for Northern Ireland's Landscapes:

1. Our landscapes are an essential aspect of our sense of place and belonging.
2. Our landscapes contribute to our health, well-being and quality of life.
3. Our landscapes are for all of us as part of our national and community identity.
4. Our landscapes reflect the multiplicity of our history and culture.
5. Our landscapes shall continue to inspire expression in words, sound and images.
6. Our landscapes shall continue to express who we are and have been as people.
7. Our landscapes shall continue to attract others to visit and generate wealth.
8. Our landscapes shall continue to attract individuals and businesses to locate here.
9. Our landscapes shall assist in marketing the export of our goods and services.
10. Our landscape and its management shall become an example to other nations.

A Single Vision for Northern Ireland's Landscapes

Within one generation we shall all be proud of our landscapes because they continue to be cared for by all of us as a vital national resource, expressing who we are as a people and fundamental to our prosperity and well-being. We all play an active role in decisions affecting our surroundings because we have clear evidence of their value and the forces that are shaping them. For this reason, public bodies, commercial enterprises, land managers and individuals whether they own land or not are able to maintain the distinctness and quality of our landscapes in the decisions and actions they take.

Six Guiding Principles in Decision Making

1. All landscapes matter and each of us has the right to derive the benefits of those places that matter to us.
2. Each of us respects this in all places even when they are not our own because our landscapes are a shared asset for which we have to exercise care and responsibility.
3. Each distinctive sense of place collectively adds more value to the variety and uniqueness of Northern Ireland's landscape than the sum of each part.
4. Change is continuous but we can manage it by using evidence to inform policy and decisions that respect and enhance the character and value of our landscapes.
5. Transparency and communication about how the diversity, distinctness, history and character of our landscapes are considered engenders awareness and confidence.
6. Each of us is responsible and empowered to shape the future of our landscapes in the actions and decisions taken now by us and others on policy and development.



Call to Action

Together we have a shared responsibility to manage and enhance the quality of our places: natural, rural, urban and peri-urban whether on land, inland water or the coast and whether outstanding or degraded, which collectively constitute the landscape of Northern Ireland.

By signing Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter you are committing to take determined action to fulfil this vision and ensure you are as proud to pass on to the next generation the places you value as you were to inherit them.

How to sign the Northern Ireland Landscape Charter:

Everyone with an interest in the value of Northern Ireland's landscapes, individually and corporately, is asked to sign up to this charter and in so doing commit themselves to fulfilling its vision in accordance with its 6 guiding principles and the actions relevant to themselves.

You can do this by visiting this web address www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/landscape_home.htm and following the simple instructions on-line.

After signing... now what You can do

• Individuals, Communities & non-Government Bodies

Look around your local area, get involved in understanding what makes it unique and how to improve it.

- Tell others what you value about it and what gives it a unique sense of place.
- With others agree what this is and how to maintain and enhance it.
- With others communicate this to public and private decision makers.
- Be vigilant and act to protect the value you have identified.
- Celebrate and promote this value by raising awareness in all age groups.

• Land Owners & Managers

Be proud of what you do to maintain and enhance the unique character of our landscape.

- Understand the sense of place your actions serve to maintain and enhance.
- Design new development and management practices that strengthen this.
- Maintain landscape features in good condition that contribute to this.
- Find opportunities to introduce new features or actions that strengthen this.
- Protect tranquillity, remoteness and wilderness as values in their own right.

• Developers & Professionals in Planning & Design

Adopt and promote best practice to ensure all development works with and enhances sense of place.

- At the outset seek out the values of place that have been identified locally.
- Ensure choice, siting and design of new materials or features enhance these.
- Design sensitively for an improved future aware of climate and other change.
- Maximise opportunities to improve public health, well-being and prosperity.
- Integrate design, construction and future management with sense of place.
- Use local and professional landscape expertise to optimise sustainability.

• Government, Public Agencies & Representatives

Ensure sense of place is central to all decision making about landscape and empower people locally to be involved.

- Recognise sense of place as central to decisions about landscape.
- Define and monitor landscape as a key aspect of performance measures.
- Consult and include local people in decision processes about their places.
- Ensure appropriate landscape expertise is used from the outset in decisions.
- Raise awareness of landscape designations and the value of ordinary places.
- Promote best practice by publicising nationally good local examples.
- Enforce implementation of landscape requirements to build confidence.

Create prosperity and well being through environment and heritage excellence

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