



EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION GUIDANCE PART 3:

Preparing an ELC Action Plan



**GUIDELINES
FOR IMPLEMENTING THE
EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE
CONVENTION**

**PART 3:
PREPARING AN ELC ACTION
PLAN**

**Prepared for Natural England
by
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I.0. PREPARING AN ELC ACTION PLAN

The guidelines are set out in three parts:

Part 1: The ELC – What does it mean for your organisation?

Part 2: Integrating the intent of the ELC into Plans, Policies and Strategies

Part 3: Preparing an ELC Action Plan

This is **Part 3** of the guidelines.

Why is this guidance needed?

“The Framework for implementing the European Landscape Convention in England seeks to further strengthen the protection, management and planning of landscapes in England by providing a structure for Action Plans of partners and stakeholders.”

ELC Framework for Implementation in England, England Project Group (EPG), 2008

- I.1. The following section of the guidelines provides information for those organisations who wish to prepare an **ELC Action Plan**. It is set out as simple generic guidelines to be adapted to the needs of individual organisations. This initial guidance seeks to ensure that as Action Plans are developed they follow a broadly common format and form a consistent family of plans set within the ELC Implementation Framework.
- I.2. ELC Action Plans have already been developed by Natural England, English Heritage and the National Forest Company. They are available as part of the ELC resources on the Landscape Character Network website (<http://www.landscapecharacter.org.uk/node/208>). The process of preparing these plans highlighted the need for some simple standard guidelines to help ensure a consistent approach. These examples of practical working Action Plans should be read in conjunction with these guidelines.
- I.3. The guidelines cover the following:
 - Background on the role and purpose of an ELC Action Plan;
 - Deciding the need for and identifying the benefits of having an ELC Action Plan;
 - Establishing structure, themes and priorities for an ELC Action Plan;
 - Process for preparing an ELC Action Plan;
- I.4. It concludes with a template for producing an ELC Action Plan and Checklist of what an Action Plan should achieve.

THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF AN ELC ACTION PLAN

What is an ELC Action Plan?

- 1.5. The 'ELC Framework for Implementation in England' seeks to further strengthen the protection, management and planning of landscape in England by providing a structure for Action Plans of partners and stakeholders.
- 1.6. The preparation of focussed ELC Action Plans is therefore **the key vehicle** through which the aims of the ELC will be implemented in England. ELC Action Plans have been prepared by Natural England, English Heritage and the National Forestry Company. Although not a specific requirement of the Convention, in England, Action Plans are seen as one of the most useful way that organisations can engage with the ELC, which in turn can realise benefits to the core business activities of an organisation (see Part 1 of this Guidance).

What is the purpose of an ELC Action Plan?

- 1.7. An ELC Action Plan is an organisational process to:
 - Reflect the aims of the ELC and show how this can benefit the core business activities of an organisation;
 - co-ordinate and audit existing involvement in landscape and identify gaps;
 - provide greater recognition, and raise the profile, of landscape within an organisation and associated partners and stakeholders;
 - identify actions to improve performance leading to a 'better' protected, managed and planned landscape.
- 1.8. In simple terms an ELC Action Plan sets the current position (baseline), what the objectives are for the future, and what actions and processes are required to achieve these objectives. The plans can be ambitious in scope in terms of new actions, or alternatively, they can help co-ordinate the organisation's existing involvement with landscape into an overall framework. The ELC can give added impetus to existing work, bring it into focus and raise awareness of its importance. Relatively small (low cost) actions may be required 'to fill the gaps' and collectively small actions across a range of organisations could make an important contribution to implementation of the ELC.
- 1.9. Action Plans also have a role to play in monitoring implementation of the ELC. Organisations who prepare their own Action Plans are encouraged to report actions to the England Project Group as part of the wider monitoring process.

Why prepare an ELC Action Plan – what are the benefits?

Benefits to the organisation

- 1.10. Preparation of Action Plan is not simply a process for its own sake. It should relate to the core business and activities of an organisation and show how engagement with landscape can help an organisation achieve against its own objectives and drivers. These may be wide ranging, relating to the social, economic or environmental

sustainable development agenda (see Guidelines PART 1). An ELC Action Plan promotes a ‘joined-up’ approach to landscape and this integrated thinking can have numerous wider benefits, including identifying potential resource efficiencies.

Benefits to landscape

- I.11. By preparing an ELC Action Plan an organisation can clearly articulate how it is involved with landscape and develop new ways of thinking and dealing with landscape.
- I.12. An Action Plan aligned closely with the ELC and its Articles can enable organisations to establish a forward-looking vision for landscape. It can help:
 - Audit the existing activity of an organisation against ELC objectives and develop new areas of activity.
 - Ensure that landscape is thought about more in shaping policy;
 - Embed landscape into decision-making at an early stage;
 - Raise awareness of the importance of landscape within an organisation;
 - Re-affirm and refocus and raise the bar of involvement in landscape;
 - Establish cross- sector links within an organisations with landscape being an integrating concept;
 - Identify wider partnerships and opportunities for stakeholder involvement;

What should an ELC Action Plan look like?

- I.13. ELC Action Plans are likely to be as diverse as the organisations preparing them, but with a broadly common approach which together create a consistent family/cascade of plans and actions. Action Plans are working documents and do not have to be produced as expensive glossy plans (although in some cases such documents may be useful as part of a landscape awareness raising exercise). The preparation of the plan itself does not need to be a major resource requirement and indeed could result in efficiencies in the use of resources through enhanced integration of landscape within the organisation.

Which organisations should prepare an ELC Action Plan?

- I.14. Any organisation that is involved with or can see the benefits of engaging with landscape can prepare an ELC Action Plan. This can include an organisation operating at any spatial scale from the national policy level to a local area or project-based organisation. It applies to organisations involved with all landscapes everywhere: rural, peri-urban, urban, marine. It is recognised that the organisations will have different degrees of landscape understanding and knowledge as a starting point for the preparation of their Action Plan.
- I.15. At the national level the emphasis is more likely to be on the leadership, promotional championing role of Action Plans potentially setting the scene for more detailed

Action Plans. At the local level the emphasis will be more on delivery, implementation and engagement of stakeholders.

- I.16. The guidelines aim to establish a common approach to the preparation of Action Plans. They are, however, flexible rather than prescriptive and can be adapted to the specific needs of different organisations.
- I.17. Clearly the emphasis of Action Plans will differ, according to the type of organisation and level of involvement with landscape. Some key points are set out in the table below.
- I.18. The plan and its actions should be ‘owned’ by the organisation as a whole. It is possible that some organisations may wish to join up and produce a joint ELC Action Plan.

Table 1: Potential Role of an ELC Action Plan for organisations with different degrees of involvement with landscape

Current Level of Engagement/Involvement with Landscape	Purpose/Role of ELC Action Plan
High	<p>Re affirm importance of landscape</p> <p>Re-energise involvement with landscape within the organisation</p> <p>Align activities with the ELC and landscape work of other bodies</p> <p>Opportunity to co-ordinate existing work</p>
Medium	<p>Strengthen and advance the importance of landscape</p> <p>Make links across the organisation regarding landscape</p> <p>Raise awareness of the importance of landscape within the organisation</p>
Low	<p>Introduce the importance and potential benefits of landscape</p> <p>Raises awareness of landscape within the organisation of landscape</p>

Who should prepare the Action Plan within an organisation?

- I.19. Ideally, Action Plans will need to be prepared by one person within an organisation acting as ‘ELC champion’, but the Action Plan itself should provide a mechanism for making links both horizontally across sectors and vertically within the organisation

and involve a wide range of people. Crucially, ownership of the plan must be at the highest level (e.g. Management Board, Chief Executive) with ‘buy in’ at all levels within the organisation. Landscape expertise in developing the plan is important.

How does an ELC Action Plan relate to the guidance on integrating the intent of the ELC (part 2)

- I.20. Some organisations may not currently be in a position to produce a specific ELC Action Plan (although this might be a long term aim). These organisations may have considerable engagement in landscape, for example through the productions of plans, strategies or policies that encompass or have an impact on landscape. For these organisations, the first priority might be to align policies and embed an understanding of landscape in line with the ELC (following the Guidelines in PART 2). Other organisations may wish to produce an ELC Action Plan at the outset, within which, a key action may be for better integration of landscape into plans, policies and strategies.

ESTABLISHING THE STRUCTURE /THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR AN ELC ACTION PLAN

Identifying Action Plan themes/headings - Using the Articles of the Convention as an organising structure

- I.21. The Action Plan should be closely related to the Articles of the Convention, selecting those themes with most relevance to the organisation. Individual organisations will need to select those themes/headings which are most relevant to their aims, objectives and priorities. The Articles of the ELC can be translated into ten actions appropriate to ELC Action Plans. Not all of these will be relevant to every organisation and the Action Plan should concentrate on relevant priority areas. The main groupings are set out in the box below.

Ten ELC Actions

- Recognise landscapes in law;
- Identify and analyse the landscape - describing their character and forces and pressures acting on them;
- Assess the landscape – considering what contributes to and detracts from their quality and character;
- Define objectives for the landscape (after public consultation);
- Protect, manage, and plan the landscape;
- Integrate landscape into relevant policies (regional, town planning, cultural, environmental, agricultural, social, economic, and other policies);
- Monitor what is happening to landscape;
- Increase awareness of the value of landscape;
- Promote landscape training and education;

- Seek opportunities for European co-operation.

Note: These Actions are different to the principles set out in the Checklist in PART 2 of the Guidelines. The checklist relates specifically to getting the right terms, definitions, understanding of landscape and appropriate participation, integrated into plans policies and strategies. The 'Actions' describe the main 'things that need to be done' to implement the ELC.

Table 2: ELC Actions and Relevant Organisations	
1: Recognise landscapes in law (Article 5a)	Relevant organisations: Government and organisations that influence legislation.
2: Identify and analyse the landscape - describing their character and forces and pressures acting on them (Article 6C) 3: Assess the landscape – considering what contributes to and detracts from their quality and character (Article 6C) 4: Define objectives for the landscape after public consultation (Article 6d)	Relevant organisations: Any organisation involved in producing information/evidence about the landscape. This may range from the national level, such as Natural England's National Character Area Programme, Regional bodies, down to local area based organisations and projects. It is particularly relevant to local authorities.
5: Establish Policies to protect, manage, and plan the landscape (Article 5b) 6: Integrate landscape into relevant policies (Article 5d)	Relevant organisations: Any organisation involved in the preparation of plans, policies and strategies. See guidelines in PART 2.
7: Monitor what is happening to landscape (article 6C) 8: Increase awareness of the value of landscape (Article 6A) 9: Promote landscape education and training (Article 6B) 10: Seek opportunities for European Co-operation (Articles 7 – 9)	Relevant organisations: All (although 9 is of particular relevance to educational establishments)

- 1.22. For a national level government department or agency, the emphasis might be on improving performance within the current legal and regulatory framework and influencing future legislation. For local or area based organisations the main emphasis could be on identifying and assessing landscapes and involving/engaging stakeholders in developing objectives. For other organisations the emphasis might be on promotion, education and training. An initial task in preparing an Action Plan will be to review the ELC Articles and select and prioritise those headings with most relevance to the specific organisation.

Examples of Action Plan Themes/Headings

- 1.23. The Framework for Implementation in England interprets the Articles and identifies five headings, which can provide the organising structure for Action Plans. The

Natural England ELC Action Plan is organised under these five themes. These are slightly condensed than the 10 actions outlined above and are specifically relevant to the activities of Natural England.

Example 1: Headings followed by the Natural England ELC Action Plan

Natural England ELC Action Plan Themes	ELC Articles
Improving performance within the current legal and regulatory framework;	Article 5a
Influencing future legislation, regulation, advice, including contributing to gap analysis;	Article 5a,5b, 6E
Improving the understanding of landscape character and dynamics, and the monitoring of change and trends;	Article 6c
Engaging people through comprehensive and accessible awareness and understanding activities, as well as through promotion, education and training;	Article 6a and 6b
Sharing experience and best practice.	Article 8

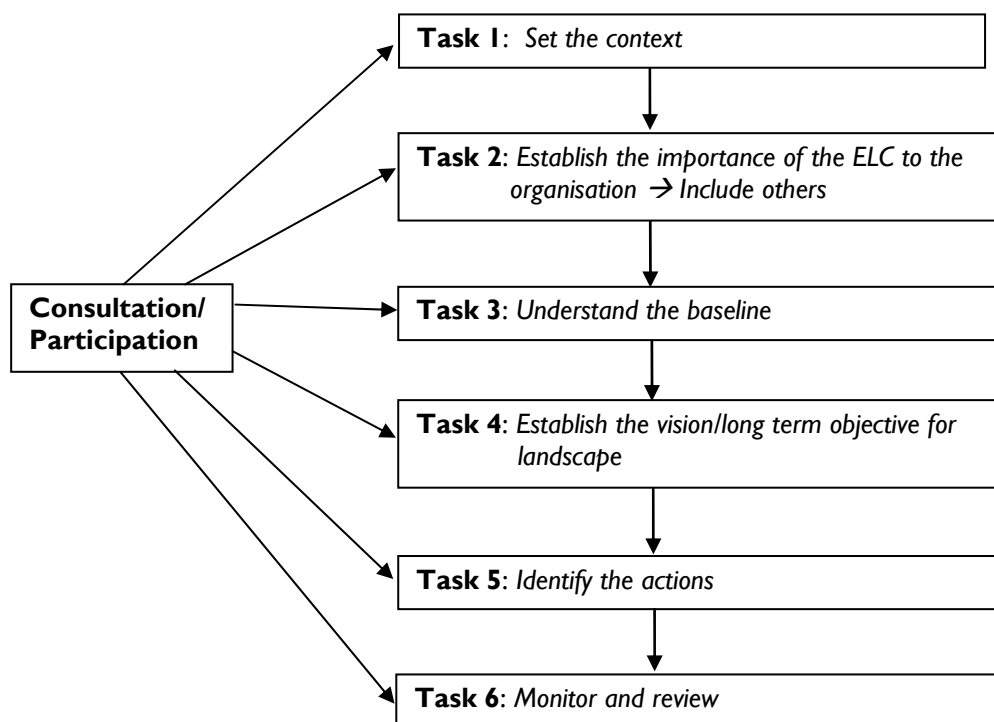
- 1.24. The National Forest Company Action Plan is similarly structured around these five headings.
- 1.25. The English Heritage ELC Action Plan is organised under five headings that follow the main Articles of the Convention, correlated to English Heritage’s Strategic Aims and relating to (but not identical to) the five headings in the Framework for Implementation.

Example 2: Themes followed by the English Heritage ELC Action Plan

English Heritage ELC Action Plan Themes	ELC Articles
Adhering to the philosophy of the ELC	ELC Articles 1–3
Meeting the ELC’s General Provisions	ELC Articles 4,5,6
Contributing to national landscape policy	ELC Articles 5b-d
Developing specific measures for historic aspects of the landscape	ELC Articles 6a-d
Working with partners	ELC Articles 3-5, 6e, 7-9, 11

PROCESS FOR PREPARING AN ELC ACTION PLAN

- I.26. The following section describes an outline process for preparing an ELC Action Plan. Clearly, the process will vary considerably from organisation to organisation and the guidance here provides an approach; it is not intended to be rigid or prescriptive. The documents should be fit for purpose aligned with the specific needs and core business of the organisations.
- I.27. The principal tasks are to
- Establish the 'baseline' – what is in place already;
 - Define the vision or long term objectives;
 - Identify actions to achieve the vision/objectives.
- I.28. The above points are considered under six main tasks, as illustrated in the diagram below. Engagement and dialogue feeds into all stages. At the outset it will be important to establish how people within an organisation and external partners will be engaged in the process, and appropriate methods for participation and communication.



Task 1: Set the context

- I.29. The initial task in preparing an Action Plan is to set the context for the plan and understand how the specific organisation is involved in landscape.
- I.30. It is useful to provide an initial statement of the landscape remit/engagement of the organisation. This should establish the rationale and business case for engagement with the ELC and potential benefits for the organisation.

Example 1: Area- Based Project

The National Forest Action Plan starts with a statement that the Forest's creation is rooted in a landscape-led approach and lists its key objectives and landscape policies.

Example 2: National Agency/Organisation

This could identify the landscape remit of the organisation as set out in statutes and interpreted in key policy documents, for example, in the organisation's Corporate Plan or Strategic Aims.

Task 2: Scoping - Establish the importance of the ELC to the organisation

- I.31. The next step is to establish the importance of the ELC to the organisation. This will involve a review of the Convention and a summary of where and to what extent the organisation interacts with the ELC.
- I.32. This initial scoping might include:
- Where and to what extent does the organisation or its activities interact with landscape (policy setting through to implementation)?
 - Which of the Conventions Article's are important to the organisation and should be selected and prioritised within the Action Plan (see above)?
 - Who deals with landscape within the organisation and who else needs to be engaged in the Action Plan process?
- I.33. An internal briefing workshop on the plan may be a useful way forward at this stage.

Task 3: Understand the baseline

- I.34. Once the themes or headings for the Action Plan have been established (drawn from the ELC Articles) it is important to understand the baseline of where organisations are at now (audit) before establishing the long term aim or objectives. This does not require an overly detailed analysis and can involve simple statements setting out the current position, under each of the identified headings. This might include:
- Is landscape considered explicitly by the organisation or is it a subset of wider themes?
 - Is landscape considered in the holistic, integrated way (i.e. all landscape matters) promoted by the Convention?

- Is landscape appropriately integrated into wider policies/objectives?

Task 4: Establish a vision/overall objectives

- I.35. The vision or overall objectives should set out the medium – long term goals for landscape. For most plans a 5 year timescale is feasible. In the Natural England Action Plan this section is titled ‘What do we want to see?’ It is an overall ambition rather than precisely defined actions. There could be one overarching vision setting out how the organisation envisages its engagement with the ELC or a series of mini visions or ambitions under each of the ELC themes or headings identified for the Action Plan.

Task 5: Identify actions

- I.36. The key requirement of an ELC Action Plan is that the vision/overall objectives are translated into more precisely defined actions. These will normally be over a shorter timescale, for example actions for year 1.
- I.37. The actions should identify:
- What needs to be done?
 - How will it be achieved?
 - Who needs to be involved? (key sectors/people within the organisation and any external stakeholders/partners).
- I.38. This does not need to be a lengthy detailed exercise. Actions can be tabulated in a simple format.

Task 6: Monitor, review and evaluate

- I.39. As with all plans the process is as valuable and important as the plan itself. Monitoring of plans should be an ongoing (annual) process. An evaluation process should be established from the outset setting a framework for future evaluation studies and reports.

A checklist for annual review

- Update the baseline
 - Identify actions completed
 - Identify effects downstream i.e. landscape change on the ground or ‘knock-on’ effects to the regional/local level;
 - Identify any organisational changes resulting from the Action Plan;
 - Develop actions for year 2.
- I.40. Organisations will be encouraged to report actions and achievements to the England Project Group as part of a national ELC monitoring process. Collectively the individual actions within a number of plans should result in positive results for the protection, management and planning of landscape and help move towards the

objective of the Framework for Implementation “all England’s diverse landscapes are valued and well looked after”.

- I.41. The precise mechanism for national ELC monitoring is yet to be confirmed; watch the Landscape Character Network website for further information or contact Natural England.

ELC ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

- I.42. An example template for an ELC Action Plan is set out below:

Possible headings for an ELC Action Plan

1. Summary
2. Background to the Convention
3. Importance of the ELC to the organisation (rationale and business case for engaging with the ELC)
4. Identifying ELC Themes for the Action Plan (using Articles of the Convention)
5. Establishing the Baseline
6. Vision and Objectives (5 year ambitions)
7. Implementation (Actions for year 1)
- 8: Monitoring and Review

CHECKLIST OF WHAT AN ELC ACTION PLAN SHOULD ACHIEVE

- Consolidate and organise what an organisation is doing already in relation to landscape
- Identify any gaps and areas for improvement
- Develop an agreed vision for landscape
- A clear set of actions, with ownership and delivery mechanism, (timescale and resources)
- Raise awareness of landscape with key people within the organisation and at all levels
- Establish cross sector links and integrated thinking between different sectors engaged in landscape within and outside the organisation
- Ownership of the plan and actions at the highest level within the organisation and 'buy in' at all levels
- Help an organisation deliver against its own objectives