

Highways Agency Consultation  
*Roadside Facilities Policy Review, December 2007*

Response of the Landscape Institute

**Introduction**

The Landscape Institute is the Chartered Institute in the UK for Landscape Architects, incorporating designers, managers and scientists, concerned with enhancing and conserving the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, representing members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies and in academic institutions and commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute believes that roadside facilities, particularly motorway service areas (MSAs), are significant features of our highway network and indeed the wider landscape and given the role of the Institute and the expertise of our members, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the Highways Agency's Roadside Facilities Policy Review and would urge the Agency to include the Institute in future Highways Agency consultations at the earliest possible stage as a matter of course.

**Comments**

Within the Policy Review, of particular relevance to the Landscape Institute are items 34 and 35 which relate to design standards:

Item 34

*"The Government believes that good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process".*

Item 35

*"In design terms, roadside facilities should respond sensitively to both the site and its setting, including the existing landscape and other physical features, and take account of the purposes of any designation which may cover the site or the surrounding area; create character and identity within the site by the careful design of spaces and buildings and relationship between them and minimise the visual impact of the landscape on its surroundings".*

The Landscape Institute welcomes the Agency's commitment, as outlined in this Policy Review, to the necessary considerations that should be afforded to good design with regards roadside facilities. However, the Institute is concerned at the lack of detail within the proposals and would recommend the inclusion of explanations of how such objectives are to be achieved. It is the view of the Institute that, with a few exceptions, roadside facilities and MSAs are largely characterised by poor quality space. The Landscape Institute is concerned that this is a trend that is likely to continue with the current draft policy review, given the lack of detailed acknowledgement of the potential impacts of such facilities on the landscape and wider environment and methods for tackling such issues.

The engineering origin of such facilities often means that early emphasis is concentrated on the convenience to vehicles rather than the convenience to the traveller. The Institute believes that good quality landscape design can strongly influence the establishment of pedestrian circulation and desire lines as a safety priority. Furthermore, landscape measures can significantly enhance the atmosphere of the service area site to ensure it is relaxing and in contrast to the harsh motorway/highway environment from which the public are seeking relief. These measures need to be fully integrated into the layout as one combined concept at an early stage in the design process rather than an afterthought. Another case for the early consideration of a landscape scale approach to the design process is that many original MSA designs have been compromised by the need to expand facilities later on, with inadequate access to additional land. Therefore, future capacity should be an early consideration in the design process, though the Institute would not wish to see the irresponsible acquisition of land in this regard.

Many roadside facilities were originally designed with a theme or a strong degree of architectural continuity however subsequent additional facilities have degraded these concepts. An example of this are the Membury Services on the M4 which demonstrate an innovative 'wave' roof of service building of Scandinavian design but this has been compromised by subsequent additional Travelodge

and McDonalds building which also block the original preserved view south to the countryside. There should be recognition within the policy that appropriate and proper management of the landscape is needed to ensure that the original landscape design objectives are achieved. Many service areas are characterised by degraded landscape as a result of inadequate and poor maintenance.

The Landscape Institute believes that to date, in general the location of MSAs has taken insufficient notice of the local landscape character and designation of the area, being constrained to regular distances between facilities; local features have the potential to emphasise the attractive landscape of the area.

The Landscape Institute also feels that the policy review is severely lacking in terms of acknowledging the potential negative environmental impact of roadside facilities and feels strongly that this is included in the final document, along with details of potential measures that could be employed to tackle such impacts. For example, there is no mention within the policy review of the potential damage caused to biodiversity as a result of roadside facility development. The Institute would like to see full recognition of this within the review and the need to mitigate in this regard at the very least, with further recognition also required of the potential for biodiversity gain at the perimeter of the roadside facility via effective planning and management.

An additional environmental consideration, the absence of any reference to which within the review is of concern to the Landscape Institute, relates to the potential harm caused by surface run-off and subsequent pollution from the roadside facility to the adjacent environment. The Institute would like to see recognition of this in the final policy along with details of such measures designed to tackle this issue, for example, sustainable drainage systems (SUDs). An example of where SUDs have been employed to deal with this issue can be found at the Hopwood Park MSA on the M42, where monitoring by the Environment Agency has proven its effectiveness.

The Institute would also like to see adequate consideration afforded to the sustainability of the developments, in terms of construction processes, materials and management to meet best practice standards in addition to the implementation of periodic checks to ensure that standards for compliance with original landscape design objectives are maintained.

The Landscape Institute is aware that the Highways Agency once employed landscape architects and architects who commented on the location and design of service area facilities through the Landscape Advisory Committee. The Institute would therefore be interested to know how this facility has been replaced in the current Highways Agency methodology.

The Landscape Institute would like to thank the Highways Agency for being given the opportunity to contribute to this policy review. For any queries relating to this response, or for future consultations, please contact:

Stephen Russell, Policy and Public Affairs Officer  
Tel: 020 7299 4509  
Email: [stephenr@landscapeinstitute.org](mailto:stephenr@landscapeinstitute.org)

*Prepared on behalf of the Landscape Institute by Bob Bray, Roger Kent MLI and Andrew Linfoot MLI*