

Landscape Institute Northern Ireland

Living Places:

An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland (Draft)

Public Consultation by Department of Environment (DOE).

Response of the **Landscape Institute Northern Ireland** (LINI).

31 October 2013

The Landscape Institute is the chartered institute in the United Kingdom for Landscape Architects, incorporating Designers, Managers, and Scientists, concerned with conserving and enhancing the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, and represents members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies, in academic institutions and in commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute is an educational charity and chartered body whose purpose is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Landscape Institute's accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of urban and rural environments and to the protection and enhancement of our physical and natural environments.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI) represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

Introductory Comments

LINI welcomes the opportunity to consider and respond to the 'Living Places' – an Urban and Design Guide for Northern Ireland'

Firstly LINI would like to commend the Department for recognising the need for a document of this nature and for committing resources to its delivery. We would also hope having come this far, that an adequate level of resource will be applied through the course of this consultation process such that all valid and valuable recommendations arising are not only considered but incorporated into the final document.

The LINI endorse and welcome the overarching sentiment behind this guide in seeking to positively shape Northern Ireland's urban places through recognition of the essential qualities contributing toward 'good' and 'sustainable' placemaking.

In an increasing globalised world, our sense of identity and connection with a particular place or locality becomes increasingly important. Human beings are fundamentally social

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creatures that rely on complex interrelationships with each other and their environment. The condition and appearance of our urban places is often a direct reflection of the health of our society.

We would like to emphasize in advance the importance for inclusion of the key issues we raise for the betterment of this document.

OMISSIONS FOR INCLUSION:

Definitions

It would be helpful for readers to see an extended list of definitions relating to the creation and stewardship of 'Living Places' early in the document. Whilst LINI acknowledge that a relatively short glossary is located in Appendix A, expansion and relocation to the start of document is recommended.

The definitions proffered insufficiently deal with the 'living' aspect of the places which the guide aims to support. The document is titled 'Living Places' and the words 'Place' or 'Places' prevail throughout. LINI consider that a definition of 'Place' should be included. As a specific identifiable unit of landscape, it is essential to comprehend good places as living environments inclusive of action and interaction, beneficially maturing and evolving over time, between social, cultural, physical and ecological aspects.

An extended list should also include the following:

- Good design
- Natural Capital, and Ecosystem Services (good places cannot ignore our dependent relationship with nature)
- Landscape Character and Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)
- Green Infrastructure, Multifunctionalism & Connectivity
- SUDs

Overall Detail

- LINI understand that it would be difficult to include a full technical level of guidance within this document (such as an urban design compendium). However, it is essential that this document highlights this deliberate omission and goes on to clearly define what additional requirements should be in place to deliver its objectives.

This could be in the form of a simple diagram showing where this guide sits in relation to the entire suite of policy and guidance required to deliver, manage and protect our urban places. (Highlighting not only those documents which currently exist, but also suggestions of documents and guides which still may also need to be produced. eg, Local Authority Design Compendium, Neighborhood Plans, Design Codes etc.)

- LINI consider it very important that this document makes reference to encouraging an 'Intelligent Client' approach to planning, management and protection of our urban

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places and their landscape context.

The Context section requires expansion to emphasize the importance of baseline information – in other words we need to fully appreciate and understand what we have, before we make appropriate decision about its future. The document should include discussion regarding the importance of:

- Design Education and Competence in Assessment;
- Appropriate procurement procedures and Brief formulation;
- Identification and utilization of Local Expertise and Awareness.

LINI are very surprised and disappointed that the authors have made no reference to the importance of 'Landscape Character and Value' as a component of placemaking. (Including this within the Context section would be appropriate). The Landscape Character Assessment for Northern Ireland (which the Department is currently updating) has potential to function as an essential evidence baseline. It identifies distinct landscape character types across the province, of which all settlements are an integral part. Decisions about the future of a settlement can not be accurately made without appreciating the landscape character within which it is located. LINI consider reference to Landscape Character Assessment would ultimately support the positive objectives of this Guide. The document should refer to CABE 'Planning for Places' for landscape character assessment methodology applied to urban places.

- LINI are also unsure why the authors have failed to discuss the interlinked topics of Green Infrastructure, Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital. A good place is a multifunctional place. The LCA process assists in identifying its assets and connectivity as part of a strategic forward-plan for beneficial use and management. These topics are all inextricably linked with the condition of one impacting the other - It would therefore seem appropriate that much more is made of them.
- Biodiversity and Ecosystems or Ecologist should be added as one of the Silos in the diagrams relating to cooperative delivery. LINI also seeks the inclusion of matters such as waste, energy and drainage in the multifunctional good design of our places. (not often dealt with at local level as indicated in the diagram).
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- Whilst photographs are attractive and in some cases help to create a feel for 'Places' or topic being discussed. It would be better to focus on larger annotated diagrams to communicate aspects which the images are trying (and in some cases failing) to achieve. A pleasant wallpaper to the text, the photographs throughout the document do not sufficiently indicate what aspects of those places are particularly important. It would be better to rely on annotated diagrams to communicate these aspects. The photograph can be included as contextual supporting information to the diagram. ie. the diagram must be included in all cases, and must be more prominent than the photograph.

Direction

- The Introduction contains a section 'Who should read this document' which concludes with the acceptable ambition that everyone should read it, however in real terms it will

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be of most relevance to those directly involved with shaping our environments.

- LINI therefore feel that it would be extremely beneficial to prepare and include a 'What Next' section setting out some specific pointers for particular user groups. We would suggest that the authors consider examples such as contained within the Scottish Landscape Charter (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B721956.pdf>) which although a short document places great emphasis on setting out clear recommendations, instructions and direction for 4 wide reaching target audience groups as set out below:-

'What we must do'

- A. *Individuals, communities and non-government organizations*
- B. *Land Managers*
- C. *Developers*
- D. *Local authorities, public agencies and government departments*

Extract from SNH – Scottish Landscape Charter 2010

LINI believe this approach would add significant value and usability to the document.

- In addition to the above, in general the document is comprised of a series of statements / paragraphs which support 'ten principles' of urban design and stewardship. It is difficult to interpret how these text backgrounds become useful in guiding decision making. ie. they do not necessarily provide forward-looking guidance. LINI consider it would be appropriate to extract from this background information active guidance which any person making decisions about places could ask. These could be listed immediately at the end of each paragraph, or in the Bringing it Together chapter. For example:
 - A. **Visionary:**
 - What is the potential for this place?
 - Who could be its champion (leader)?
 - What skills are required to realise its potential?
 - B. **Collaborative:**
 - How can a forum for joined up practice be established?
 - How can collaboration to a shared vision be facilitated?
 - How can meaningful two-way communication be fostered?

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER (Additional Comments)

Challenges:

LINI consider that the Guide should also make mention of the follow challenges:

- The loss of biodiversity and its impact on our health and wellbeing
- lack of exercise in our lifestyles, encouraged by developments in

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communications technology.

Context:

- it needs to be clear that context is not just the physical it is all aspects of place. Below is a professionally recognised graphic (*The Landscape Wheel, SNH and Natural England*) which may assist the authors understand that settlement is actually part of the wider landscape within which is located.



- It is the primary ambition of the European Landscape Convention that 'all landscapes matter' (including urban places) and that their planning, management and protection are essential for prosperity of all our citizens.
The European Landscape Convention must be included in the Appendix and its key messages incorporated into the main body text. The Convention has been adopted by UK / NI government which requires that all landscapes are recognised, that change is appreciated and evaluated, that quality objectives should be formulated for each landscape, and that these objectives are implemented. (This includes urban and peri-urban areas as well as rural landscapes). Through the process of ratification and adoption, the NI Government have made a commitment to its European neighbours and cosignatories that it would embed the commonsense, deliverable objectives of the ELC into all relevant emerging policies.

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LINI therefore believe it would be remiss for the Department to exclude mention of it from this material document.

- Reference should also be made to Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services.
- The awareness of place is the first step towards proposing a good place. Finding out what is required (eg. through adoption of the landscape character assessment process) in a place in order for it to be sustainable and beneficial in long term, enables quality objectives to be recognised for its nurture and replenishment, in order that we give back value equal to that which we wish to harness from a place.
- Natural systems are only mentioned in terms of protection, rather than for their fundamental benefit to us and their very necessary replenishment of natural capital.
- Harnessing heritage is a useful term. The heritage referred to must be both built and natural as these cannot be disentangled. To use the phrase Nurturing Heritage is a more active process of 'giving back equal to, or more than, what is taken': the legacy of a well-designed and stewarded place.
- Responding to context must be more than paying lip-service to an aesthetic or form, a response is an active process of 'giving back'

Responsible:

- Green infrastructure (GI) should be clearly referenced within this document and perhaps specifically within this section. Many strong messages are emerging globally and from Europe in particular how the consideration of GI at all scales of place and landscape can maximize and deliver benefit from limited resources for the benefit of all. In this regard LINI are bewildered why no specific mention has been made to the particular importance and value of urban street trees (as an exemplary recognised component of Green Infrastructure)? Ironically almost every image used within the document to illustrate 'Good Place' includes trees, yet no direct mention is made of their cultural and aesthetic qualities nor the many ecosystem services they are proven to deliver. LINI would urge the document to refer to work undertaken by the 'The Tree and Design Action Group' <http://www.tdag.org.uk/index.html>
- LINI supports shared space (i.e. example 'Exhibition Road'), but this multifunctional design of place must also be considered as shared between biodiversity and society, and the benefit of such shared interaction to our wellbeing. Good places are where society and biodiversity interact.

Accessible:

- Inclusivity must include biodiversity and connectivity to open space

Hospitable:

- Again mention biodiversity, ecosystem services aspects of climate

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considerations,

- Consider the value, importance and critical interrelationship of 'Settlements and their Settings' –i.e imagine Newcastle Co. Down without the striking landscape backdrop or without opportunity to access it from the settlement.

Viable:

- Biodiversity / Natural Capital / Green Infrastructure should all be mentioned in durability (and enduring, and self sustaining). Biodiversity is not a luxury, it is a necessity and an essential ingredient in the urban mix.
- Viable places must include replenishment of natural capital as one of their requirements.
- Multifunctionalism must be mentioned as a core aspect of viability.

Policies:

- Should also list:
 - PPS2 (nature conservation) ,
 - European Landscape Convention
 - European Statements & Position on Green Infrastructure
 - NIEA NI Landscape Character Assessment
 - 'The Tree and Design Action Group'

Inclusions for Omission:

It is unclear why DCAL's Policy for Architecture and the Built Environment Policy is particularly highlighted in the Introduction of the document, when all other policy references are withheld until the Appendix. Further it is understood that this policy is currently under review and may indeed have a different title and or emphasis when complete therefore will render this document out of date.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch would like to thank the Department of the Environment for the opportunity to contribute to the Living Places policy document. For any queries and further discussion relating to this response, and for future consultations, please contact:

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