



## 2 Landscapes

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## 2.1 Introduction

We value our landscapes because of their inherent interest, their contribution to both our national identity and our local distinctiveness, their artistic inspiration and for the services they provide to us.

The natural environment of England consists of a very wide range of landscapes, each formed by a number of factors, including the underlying geology, soils, climate, habitats, and human influence past and present.

Our landscapes extend from the upland hills to the lowlands, through the urban fringe and into the networks of green space of our cities, towns and villages, and on to our varied coastal seascapes. Each landscape type is valued by people for a variety of reasons and each is characterised by its own patterns of landforms, habitats and land use, which create local distinctiveness.

Local distinctiveness not only reflects the natural, historical and cultural diversity of English landscapes but also, with the increasing globalisation of economies, constitutes a unique resource that can contribute to directly improving people's wellbeing and prosperity. For example, it can help people connect agricultural products with their origins and may help link people's health with that of the countryside (see Chapter 4).

### **Landscapes, geology and habitats**

England's diverse geology is important in its own right, scientifically and economically but, in addition, these geological and geomorphological processes have contributed to the creation of England's landscapes and habitats. For a relatively small country, this diverse geology has influenced the great variety of landscapes, and also their associated habitats (see Chapter 3). For example, the improved grassland and arable fields that form a large part of England's lowland landscapes, have developed in the main on deeper, better drained soils. These are now heavily influenced by land management practices as they are primarily used for food production. The chalk and limestone rocks and thinner soils result in a distinctive landscape rich in their own

characteristic wildlife, buildings and settlements. By contrast, the poorly drained acid soils of the uplands are dominated by peatlands, scattered settlements and extensive grazing or game management.

England's diverse coast, with its often spectacular scenery, is also a result of geological and geomorphological processes. Hard and soft rocks create headlands and sandy bays, and wind and tides create sand dunes and saltmarshes. Even under the sea, the scenery varies dramatically, with rock stacks and muddy beds each supporting very different wildlife.

### **Landscapes and people**

Our landscapes mean more than just attractive scenery. They continue to inspire art and literature and influence our national culture. Our landscapes represent a coming together of the natural world, human society and people's needs and provide a range of ecosystem services (the services that the Earth's ecosystems provide, including food, water, disease management, climate regulation, spiritual fulfilment and aesthetic enjoyment). They have influenced the character of our towns and cities, and provide a place to relax, recreate and learn. This is examined further in Chapter 4.

The historic environment makes a particular contribution to the character and value of all of our landscapes. It includes archaeological sites, monuments and buildings; features and patterns of historic land use and management; and historic landscapes, such as parklands (see Section 2.5.1) and battlefields. It provides us with an important understanding of how our landscapes have developed over time. Similarly, common land provides a long-term perspective on the conservation of our natural environment, where landscape, biodiversity, access and historical values are all interlinked (see Section 2.5.2).

### **International context**

Conservation of landscapes has now been recognised at the European level, through the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe 2000). This is the first international treaty devoted exclusively to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It states: “Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.” The Convention applies to towns and villages, as well as open countryside; the coast and inland areas; ordinary or even degraded landscapes, as well as those that are outstanding.

### **Landscape-scale conservation**

Healthy landscapes are crucial to providing high-quality ecosystem services. A rich natural environment has landscapes that are diverse, resilient to external pressures (see Chapter 5), with abundant wildlife and valued by people. Poor natural environments are characterised by simplified land use, crop monocultures, lack of diversity (from habitats and species, to culture and local identity) and fragmented habitats that are not only small but also isolated.

In a rich natural environment, habitats are linked, enabling wildlife – and people – to move between them. Many animal species occupy more than one habitat during their life cycle. Consequently, the isolation of habitats hinders not only movement but also completion of life cycles and even threatens a population’s survival.

Increasingly, it is recognised that to conserve our full biodiversity and to allow systems to function more naturally, we need to plan conservation activities at a “landscape scale”. In practice, many of the principles of landscape-scale conservation are already established in the uplands and on the coast. However, in many parts of lowland England, that is not true. Small pockets of wildlife-rich habitat are isolated from others by intensively managed and wildlife-poor farmland. This fragmentation of habitats is particularly evident for lowland grasslands and heathlands (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4), and the remnants of wildlife-rich habitat within urban areas (Section 3.10).

A landscape of disconnected fragments is also less likely to be valued by people as it lacks the aesthetic appeal, opportunities for recreation and historical and other features linked to a sense of local identity.



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