

## Case Study

# Landscapes and ecosystem futures

## Public engagement in England, Scotland and Wales

### Vital statistics

#### Commissioning bodies:

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)  
Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)  
Government Office for the East of  
England (GO-East)  
Natural Capital Initiative (NCI)  
(Evaluation and learning)

#### Duration of process:

14 months: May 2010 - June 2011

#### Number of public participants:

188

#### Number of experts/stakeholders involved: 20

**Cost of project:** £190,000 total,  
Sciencewise-ERC funding = £85,000

### Key messages from the public

Detailed messages from each of the three areas are covered in the individual project reports below. Key messages included:

- Those who were engaged in the dialogue processes felt the experience was positive and interesting, and enabled meaningful conversations about issues that are important for local communities
- Participants valued the opportunity to potentially influence policy and simply to have time out to think and talk in more depth about the issues
- The concept of ecosystem services worked well as a neutral entry point to enable participants within communities to have meaningful conversations about landscape and land use planning. It also enabled open discussion of potentially contentious subjects such as wind energy projects with less immediate polarisation of views.

*In recent years, an ecosystems approach (EsA), a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way, has become a key framework for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and other public bodies in making land use and environmental planning decisions. Ecosystem services, the benefits society gains from the natural environment, are an important part of an EsA. They include food, climate regulation and opportunity for recreation.*

*The three public dialogue initiatives in this project were designed to contribute to the development of participatory techniques as part of an EsA to planning for the future of landscapes in the UK, and to feed public attitudes and values into the land use plans for the particular areas in Scotland, Wales and the East of England in which the dialogues took place.*

- Feedback from the participants identified some additional features, such as settlements vulnerable to sea level rise and key installations at risk, that had been missed in 'official' appraisals.

All pilots had a slightly different approach and focus to the activity, which is reflected in the views of ecosystems and landscapes by the public:

#### Scotland:

In discussion of mitigation of climate change, participants:

- Recognised that climate change is likely to result in significant change across the area and that it will not be possible to prevent this
- Expressed concern that the focus should be on managing this change to retain or, where it may be lost, record what is important and distinctive about the area
- Understood that there will be some tensions, trade-offs and compromises, and there may be competing pressures for land from agriculture, habitats, flood protection, sea level change and renewables

- Preferred smaller scale and diverse approaches to carbon reduction which could fit better with the local area's resources and character rather than large-scale, wind-farm development.

#### East of England:

- East Anglia: providing food, climate regulation, flood regulation, biodiversity and wildlife, sense of place, learning, freshwater provision and soil erosion control were rated the most important ecosystem services
- Lee Valley: Participants felt that the approach:
  - helped them to get involved in local land use planning
  - could help to ensure that the true value of different land uses to local communities is more fully reflected in planning decisions
  - could help to ensure that land-use planning decisions reflect environmental concerns and longer term sustainability issues (e.g. climate change).



## Background

As highlighted in the Foresight study of Land Use Futures<sup>1</sup>, land underpins the whole economy. This includes the provision of food and other goods, as well as space for housing, business, transport, tourism and recreation. Future major challenges include projected population increases, climate change, and economic growth in the context of limited land and natural resources. The benefits and services society gains from the natural environment, known as ecosystem services, include fuel, food, clean water, flood protection and recreation. Balancing competing demands for land through complementary uses in a single area can help adaptation to environmental change. In recent years, Defra and many other public bodies have advocated the application of an EsA, a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way, to integrate management of natural resources now and into the future.

It has been recognised for some time that local and other lay knowledge can complement technical knowledge to produce better informed choices about the natural environment and to reduce conflicts. Such public engagement allows a wider range of people to become more fully engaged with the challenges, opportunities and trade-offs that face our landscapes in future. The three dialogues in this project brought together scientists and lay people in selected areas of England, Scotland and Wales to explore attitudes and values, benefits and trade-offs in landscape change, particularly in relation to climate change adaptation and the reform of agricultural policy.

The pilot projects were established and managed by GO-East, SNH and the CCW. In each pilot area, consultant teams designed and facilitated engagement processes to test how well the public and stakeholders could enter into dialogue, combining the best of science with local knowledge, using the ecosystem services framework to bring these different sets of evidence together. The outcomes sought were devolved decision-making and dialogue to explore future challenges, opportunities, pressures, and management options to inform vision and policy. The NCI supported the project by drawing out lessons that would help the process of embedding policy and practice on participatory approaches to ecosystem assessment.

### Wales:

#### Participants:

- Broadly understand and value the use of ecosystem services within their area, with the regulatory services being less well understood
- Identified a need for discussions to be held at a more local level to support the identification of local solutions to national issues, thereby ensuring they are appropriate locally, cross sectoral and delivered in a way that is locally applicable
- Felt that food and energy production will continue to be important ecosystem services.

The general overall message arising from the dialogue was that people wish to be involved in more sophisticated, ongoing discussions across a broad range of stakeholders and topics.

### Policy influence

The evaluation process was undertaken in parallel with the delivery of the pilots, so only initial observations on policy influence can be made at this stage.

- Initial positive policy links were made in the Welsh pilot through a final policy workshop with a range of stakeholders, so that policy makers could hear public discussions first hand. A meeting immediately followed this with the Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs to discuss the results. Immediate influence on the National Environment Framework - Wales and Glastir, the new, all-Wales Agri-Environment Scheme, were indicated by feedback from those involved

<sup>1</sup> Foresight Land Use Futures Project (2010) Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London. Available at: <http://bit.ly/NEVoT>

- The Scottish pilot established good policy and practice links with local authorities during the process, which then helped shape other dialogue initiatives and regional strategies. The potential to influence the Highland Council's Adaptation Strategy was identified as an immediate possibility
- Other immediate policy and practice impacts were seen to be likely within the commissioning bodies of CCW and SNH, and some of the other local authorities involved directly.

## The dialogue activities

### East of England:

Two separate public dialogue projects were established to contribute to the Valuing Ecosystem Services in the East of England (VESiEE) study, which was set up to assess and evaluate ecosystem services in the region. The first phase of the study provided evidence of the value of some of the most important ecosystem services in the East of England. The second phase involved initiating two public dialogue projects to further develop the methodology for use with the public and stakeholders, and test it through real-life regional and local pilots. The two public dialogue projects were:

- The Arable Agriculture Local Pilot, which considered the practical application of the VESiEE methodology to some case study arable farms in four distinct ecosystem areas. The first stage was to work with farmers to identify the main ecosystem services offered by their farms and the possibilities for the future. The second stage was to share these findings at an evening workshop in each area at which participants scored the current ecosystem services and the desired future balance of services. About 15 participants, recruited through local networking, attended each workshop. A final larger half-day stakeholder workshop was then held at which participants created and scored a future vision of ecosystem services
- The Lee Valley Regional Park Pilot considered options with the public on two contrasting sites within a regional park centred on the northern fringes of London. Following a planning workshop with key stakeholders, one-hour focus groups were held in each of the two sites, attended by a total of 27 local residents and interest group members. These groups identified the current benefits and existing ecosystem services, high and low value services and the effects on services of the proposed development. A half-day workshop with a mix of community and professional participants then considered the different options to reach a preferred option.

### Scotland:

SNH piloted a deliberative methodology using the EsA to engage community members and key local stakeholders in exploring the effects of climate change on their local landscapes and quality of life. It was hoped that a better understanding of the value of landscape and its services would help inform policy-making and decision-making on mitigation and adaptation strategies.

The public dialogue pilots focused on the settlements of Nairn in Highlands and the Machars in Dumfries and Galloway. Three consecutive 2.5 hour evening workshops were held in each location. About 20 people were recruited by the local community development organisation to attend each series of events and these formed a 'community panel' made up of local leaders, community representatives, local NGOs, local business owners, students, etc.

The workshops identified distinctive elements of the landscape and the ecosystem goods and services provided by them, reviewed how climate-change impacts would affect these services, and then discussed choices and trade-offs for local and policy action to

manage the climate-change effects. The SNH was joined on the Steering Group for the project by the Forestry Commission, the National Parks, the local authorities for the area and the Scottish Government. This work is being continued with the development of an online toolkit 'Talking about Our Place' guiding communities and their partners through identifying the value of their landscape and how to influence its management.

### Wales:

CCW is a partner in the Cambrian Mountains Initiative (CMI), a rural sustainable development project in the Central Wales uplands, which is working on mitigation measures against the impacts of climate change across a number of river catchments in the region. The public dialogue pilot was designed to consider the ecosystem services in the area and make recommendations for policy and practice.

The project engaged with a range of stakeholders in the rural communities of Talybont and Devils Bridge in the North West corner of the Cambrian Mountains. As well as community workshops in each location, the project also facilitated a farm business workshop and street stalls were set up in the main shopping area for the region with the help of local community groups.

The participants at the workshops identified key land-management issues requiring change. A full-day policy workshop, involving additional stakeholders and policy makers, then considered what needed to change in land-use planning.

## Summary of good practice and innovation

- The EsA approach provided a useful starting point that could facilitate effective consensus building around issues, options and proposals
- The pilot was particularly strong in terms of working with ongoing community structures
- Individuals who participated were perceived as going beyond the usual suspects and provided the project with a good mix of participants with different backgrounds and interests, and a good balance between agency and community people
- The quality of the facilitation was professional, helping to ensure that there was good listening to different views and ensuring it was possible to have your voice heard
- Methods that enabled visualisation of planning options, ecosystem types and related goods and services (such as the polyscape modelling software used in Wales) were particularly useful.

## Lessons for future practice:

- The purpose of the exercise needs to be clear from the start of the engagement process. The purpose needs to be communicated very clearly to participants
- Reports need to be made to participants about how their input has been used and what difference it has made
- Linkages need to be made to, and work developed with, existing community structures
- Direct links need to be made to current policy developments and relevant policy makers
- More time for public discussions, and stronger links to existing detailed regional and national scientific data, may enable more in-depth deliberation on these issues
- More clarity was needed in terms of framing discussion questions, and discussion facilitators at tables would have enabled better focus and recording of key points.

“ Not the usual suspects, real people from varied backgrounds. Not just the agricultural community, but residents, members, business people – a good cross section. ”

**Participant, Cambrian Mountains process**

“ It was a good example of deliberative methodology but if the findings go nowhere then it's not been worth it. It just enables the practitioners in the middle to feel they've done something. ”

**Participant, Cambrian Mountains process**

“ We could all discuss without feeling utter Charlies anything we wanted to – it was a very comfortable environment. A transparent and friendly day. My view altered slightly through the discussions. People listened to each other properly and nothing was too silly to discuss. ”

**Participant, Cambrian Mountains process**

## Impacts

Policy impacts are covered on the first page of this summary. This section examines the impacts on all the participants in the process.

### Influence on policy makers

- At a local level, the pilots established new links between different people and related initiatives within the area. In one group this resulted in new discussions about community-led energy projects and links to parish planning activities
- The Machars pilot in Scotland benefited from working with a pre-existing community organisation which may be well positioned to perpetuate some of the work undertaken
- A range of policy instruments was cited as having been influenced or likely to be influenced with particular potential emerging from the pilots in Wales and Scotland. This may reflect better and easier links between the commissioning and delivery teams and the devolved administrations
- National level voluntary/third-sector organisations such as the National Trust and the RSBP could be key organisations in taking up and using the findings of these pilot processes at a policy and practice level.

### Impacts on public participants

- The processes were successful in enabling people to think differently and view issues through a different lens (landscape value and ecological services)
- Participants' feedback was that taking part in the deliberative processes had been positive and interesting, enabling meaningful conversations on issues that are important for local communities
- For many, this was the first opportunity to consider these issues in some detail with others and the EsA approach provided a useful lens through which to view issues such as the impacts of climate change, and landscape and land-use planning.

### Impacts on scientists/experts and other stakeholders

- Feedback from the process in Scotland suggested that environmental professionals very much valued the identification of cultural and aesthetic features by local residents.

## Contacts and links

### Commissioning bodies

Scottish National Heritage (SNH)  
Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)  
Government Office for the East of England (GO-East)  
Natural Capital Initiative (NCI) for the evaluation

### Sciencewise contacts

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**James Tweed** (Projects Manager)  
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### Delivery contractors

**Scotland:** Land Use Consultants, <http://www.landuse.co.uk/>

**Wales:** Resources for Change, <http://www.r4c.org.uk/>

**East of England:** Lea Valley Regional Park – URS Scott Wilson, <http://www.urs-scottwilson.com/>

**Arable Agriculture Local Pilot:** Ursus Consulting Limited <http://www.ursusconsulting.co.uk/>, and Dialogue by Design, <http://www.dialoguebydesign.net/>

### Project evaluator

Icarus Collective, <http://www.icarus.uk.net/>

### Reports

Full project and evaluation reports available from Sciencewise-ERC on <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/public-engagement-on-landscape-and-ecosystem-futures-wales/>