

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Third edition

Landscape Institute and
Institute of Environmental
Management & Assessment

STAVIA

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) can be key to planning decisions by identifying the effects of new developments on views and on the landscape itself.

This fully revised edition of the industry standard work on LVIA presents an authoritative statement of the principles of assessment. Offering detailed advice on the process of assessing the landscape and visual effects of developments and their significance, it also includes a new expanded chapter on cumulative effects and updated guidance on presentation.

Written by professionals for professionals, the third edition of this widely respected text provides an essential tool for landscape practitioners, developers, legal advisors and decision-makers.

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Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Third edition

Landscape Institute and Institute
of Environmental Management
& Assessment

 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

**Landscape
Institute**
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Institute of Environmental
Management & Assessment

First edition published 1995
by Spon Press

Second edition published 2002
by Taylor & Francis

This edition published 2013
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Management & Assessment

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Guidelines for landscape and visual impact assessment / the Landscape
Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

– Third edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Landscape assessment. 2. Landscape protection. 3. Environmental impact analysis.

I. Landscape Institute. II. Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

GF90.G58 2013

712—dc23

2012037994

ISBN: 978-0-415-68004-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-43629-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon and Frutiger
by Keystroke, Station Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton

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Foreword

I am delighted that the third edition of GLVIA has now been published, as this updated guidance has been long awaited by those working in the field of LVIA. The new edition is comprehensive and clear, covering the many developments that have taken place in the scope and nature of impact assessment since publication of the second edition. There have been significant changes to the environmental framework within which LVIA is now undertaken, particularly with the UK Government's ratification of the European Landscape Convention, confirming the importance and role of the landscape as used and enjoyed by us all. At the same time, the demands that are put on our landscape to accommodate new development, and to adapt to the changing world environment confirm the need for a strong framework within which the effect of change can be assessed and understood.

The straightforward approach taken in this revised edition emphasises clarity and simplicity in approach, and the importance of sound professional judgement. It also usefully identifies aspects of assessment that are commonly misunderstood or misinterpreted, and advises on approaches to best practice without being prescriptive.

My particular thanks must go to Carys Swanwick, who wrote this edition, to Jeff Stevenson CMLI, Chair of the GLVIA Advisory Panel, and to all involved in producing these guidelines. The guidelines remain the benchmark for landscape and visual assessment.

Sue Illman PLI
President of the Landscape Institute

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Preface to the third edition

The third edition of the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* has been produced under the joint auspices of the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (IEMA), as co-authors of the guidance. The third edition supersedes earlier editions, and while aimed primarily at landscape professionals is written in such a way as to provide a flavour for those who are simply interested in the subject, as well as more detailed (but less prescriptive) guidance for the professional engaged in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments.

The third edition clearly recognises that many different pressures have changed and will continue to change landscapes that are familiar to many, whether at national or local community level, and the landscape professional will be of particular importance in bringing forward measured and responsible assessments to assist decision making.

This new edition takes into account recognition of the European Landscape Convention by the United Kingdom government, and subsequently by the devolved administrations, which raises the profile of this important subject and emphasises the role that landscape can play in our day-to-day lives.

It has been produced to reflect the expanded range of good practice that now exists, and to address some of the questions and uncertainties that have arisen from the second edition. It also gives greater recognition to sustainable development as a concept – something that has come further to the fore through government policy and guidance across the UK. However, while mentioning government policy and guidance (whether at the UK level or through the devolved administrations) the third edition seeks to avoid reflecting a specific point in time, recognising that legislative, statutory and policy contexts change so that guidance that is tied to contexts will quickly become dated and potentially out of step.

A clear objective has been to continue to encourage higher standards in the conduct of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments – something which the two previous editions of the guidelines, published in 1995 and 2002, have already helped to achieve.

The third edition attempts to be clearer on the use of terminology. The emphasis should be on the identification of likely significant environmental effects, including those that are positive and negative, direct and indirect, long, medium and short term, and reversible and irreversible, as well as cumulative effects. This edition encourages professionals to recognise this and assess accordingly.

The Landscape Institute is the recognised expert and professional body for landscape matters and this edition again acknowledges the holistic perspective that landscape

professionals take and the particularly valuable contribution they can make to Environmental Impact Assessment in general and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment in particular. As such the third edition stresses that it is important that landscape professionals are able to demonstrate high professional standards and that their work should offer exemplars of good practice. It is to be hoped that this edition will further reinforce the professional's skills base by providing sound, reliable and widely accepted advice, aimed at helping professionals to achieve quality and consistency in their approach to Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

This edition concentrates on principles and process. It does not provide a detailed or formulaic 'recipe' that can be followed in every situation – it remains the responsibility of the professional to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the task in hand. The aim has been to make the advice specific enough to meet the needs of UK practitioners but also to avoid too much detail about specific legislation which will make it of less value elsewhere.

Two areas where there has been considerable discussion and where we feel that we are moving forward are in exploring and providing better advice concerning assessing significance of effect, and in identifying and assessing cumulative effects. In both cases, debate will continue as these subjects evolve.

It is especially important (a) to note the need for proportionality, (b) to focus on likely significant adverse or positive effects, (c) to focus on what is likely to be important to the competent authority's decision and (d) to emphasise the importance of the scoping process in helping to achieve all of these.

As Chair of the GLVIA Advisory Panel which oversaw the production of this edition, I offer the most heartfelt thanks to Professor Carys Swanwick of the University of Sheffield, commissioned as the writer of the text, to Lesley Malone, Head of Knowledge Services at the Landscape Institute who co-ordinated the project, and to Josh Fothergill of IEMA. Carys is to be praised and very warmly congratulated, given the complexity of the task of balancing the sometimes competing needs and wishes of members, practices, government agencies and interested others, along with the views and input of the Advisory Panel. Producing this new edition has been challenging for all concerned but ultimately highly rewarding.

Government agencies have an important role throughout the LVIA process, particularly at the initial scoping stage and also in reviewing the final assessment. This guidance has been prepared following feedback from English Heritage, Natural Resources Wales (formerly the Countryside Council for Wales), Scottish Natural Heritage (Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba), Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Thanks are also due to all those who, whether as individuals or as representatives of organisations or agencies, have contributed, with sometimes widely varying opinions and suggestions, to the evolution of the third edition. This edition could not and therefore will not satisfy every interest and opinion, but the Advisory Panel considers that it moves the subject forward considerably from the second edition. Doubtless debate will continue and new questions and issues will arise as this edition is applied and tested in practice but, after all, that is how progress in a subject is made.

The Landscape Institute and IEMA consider it essential to remember that the third edition is a 'step along the way'. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, along with Environmental Impact Assessment more generally, evolves and will continue so to do with the role of the professional making professional judgements at the heart of the process.

Jeff Stevenson CMLI
Chair, GLVIA Advisory Panel

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Acknowledgements

The third edition of the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* was prepared by Professor Carys Swanwick guided by the GLVIA Advisory Panel:

- Jeff Stevenson CMLI (Chair)
- Julian Francis CMLI
- Mary O'Connor CMLI
- Mark Turnbull FLI
- Marc van Grieken CMLI

The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment gratefully acknowledge sponsorship from English Heritage, Natural Resources Wales (formerly the Countryside Council for Wales) and Scottish Natural Heritage.



Photography credits

- Julian Jones: frontispiece Chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, Figure 2.3
- Lesley Malone: frontispiece Chapter 4, appendices, Figures 2.1D, 2.2
- Jeff Stevenson: frontispiece Chapters 5, 6, Figures 2.1A and C, 5.4, 5.8
- Carys Swanwick: Figure 2.1B
- WYG: Figure 6.6

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- REG Windpower: Figure 3.3
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- Waterman Energy, Environment & Design: Figures 5.3, 6.4, 6.8
- West Coast Energy: Figures 4.2, 6.9, 7.1A and B
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Part 1

Introduction, scope and context

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Chapter overview

- About this guidance
- When is LVIA carried out?
- Impacts, effects and significance
- Who is this guidance for?
- Organisation and structure of the guidance

About this guidance

- 1.1 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity. The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (and its predecessor the Institute of Environmental Assessment) have worked together since 1995 to publish guidance on LVIA. Two previous editions of these guidelines, published in 1995 and 2002, have been important in encouraging higher standards in the conduct of LVIA projects.

'Development' is used throughout this book to mean any proposal that results in a change to the landscape and/or visual environment.

- 1.2 This is the third edition of the guidance and replaces the earlier editions. The new version takes account of changes that have taken place since 2002, in particular:
- changes in the context in which LVIA takes place, including in the legal and regulatory regimes and in associated areas of practice;
 - the much greater range of experience of applying LVIA and testing it through Public Inquiries and related legal processes, which has revealed the need for some issues to be clarified and for the guidance to be revised to take account of changing circumstances.

When is LVIA carried out?

- 1.3 LVIA may be carried out either formally, as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), or informally, as a contribution to the 'appraisal' of development proposals and planning applications. Both are important and the broad principles and the core of the approach is similar in each case.

LVIA as part of EIA

LVIA applies to all projects that could require a formal EIA but also includes projects that may be assessed informally. EIA has been formally required in the UK, for certain types of project and/or in certain circumstances, since 1985. It applies not only to projects that require planning permission but also to those subject to other consent procedures like use of agricultural land for intensive agricultural purposes, irrigation and land drainage requirements or reclamation of land from the sea. The various European Union Directives underpinning this requirement have now been consolidated in Directive 2011/92/EU *The assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment*. The objective of the Directive is to ensure that Member States

1.4

adopt all measures necessary to ensure that, before consent is given, projects likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue, inter alia, of their nature, size or location are made subject to a requirement for development consent and an assessment with regard to their effects.

(European Commission, 2011)

The Directive and the Regulations that implement it in different countries of the UK specify the types of project and the circumstances in which EIA may be required. In summary, EIA is a way of ensuring that significant environmental effects are taken into account in decision making.

Devolution in the United Kingdom has meant growing emphasis on the individuality of approaches in devolved administrations and their related organisations. The framework within which EIA is carried out therefore consists of:

1.5

- the European Union Directive;
- UK Country Regulations which interpret and implement the Directive individually for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
- guidance documents produced by government departments to assist in implementation, including planning policy guidance and other forms of more specific EIA guidance, including guidance on specific types of change or development;
- specialised guidance produced by government agencies, or professional bodies (such as the Landscape Institute and IEMA), dealing with specific aspects of implementation.

This means, depending on project location, that the landscape professional must be aware of the relevant devolved government/administration's requirements with respect to EIA so far as it is pertinent to Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

The EU Directive covering EIA and related matters applies equally to all countries of the UK but is implemented through country Regulations that may be different in each and may also change periodically as they are updated. Each country also has a number of specific Regulations that cover a range of named activities, some of them outside the planning system. Such specific Regulations cover (among other things) electricity supply, transport, fish farming, energy production and transmission, gas and petroleum extraction, water abstraction, forestry, land drainage, agricultural improvements on uncultivated land or semi-natural areas and restructuring of rural land holdings.

1.6

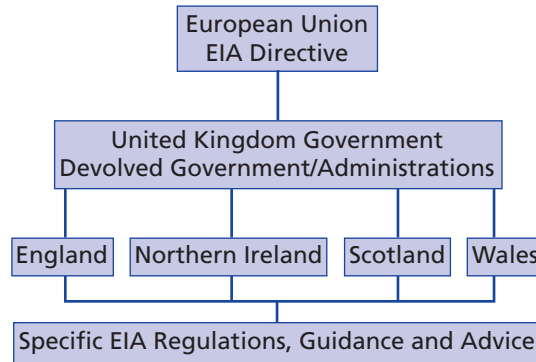


Figure 1.1 The EIA hierarchy

- 1.7 Planning policy guidance also differs across the four countries, as does the specialised guidance that has been issued by government departments and their agencies. The variety of specialist guidance from agencies and others also changes from time to time. Scottish Natural Heritage has been particularly active in producing advice and guidance both on EIA in general and on issues relating to the effects of wind farms in particular.
- 1.8 EIA procedures require a wide range of environmental topics to be investigated. The European Union Directive, the Regulations that apply in the UK and the guidance documents that support them all list these, albeit with slight variations in the wording. The topics can be summarised as:
- human beings, population;
 - flora and fauna;
 - soil, water, air, climate;
 - landscape;
 - cultural heritage (including architectural and archaeological heritage);
 - material assets.
- 1.9 As well as specifically identifying landscape as a topic to be considered, the Directive and the Regulations also make clear the need to deal with the interrelationship between topics. This raises the issue of how landscape interrelates with matters such as, for example, population, flora and fauna, and cultural heritage. Consequently in the context of EIA, LVIA deals with both effects on the landscape itself and effects on the visual amenity of people, as well as with possible interrelationships of these with other related topics.
- 1.10 This guidance intentionally does not set out to identify or summarise the complex regulatory framework of legislation, Regulations and policy for EIA in general or for more specific aspects of it. To do so would immediately date it as the regulatory framework changes. The websites of relevant government departments and agencies provide the starting point for finding up-to-date information and will usually contain links to other relevant material. Anyone who may be involved in carrying out an LVIA as part of an EIA must ensure that they are fully familiar with the current legislation, Regulations and guidance documents that may be relevant to the specific project or location they are dealing with.

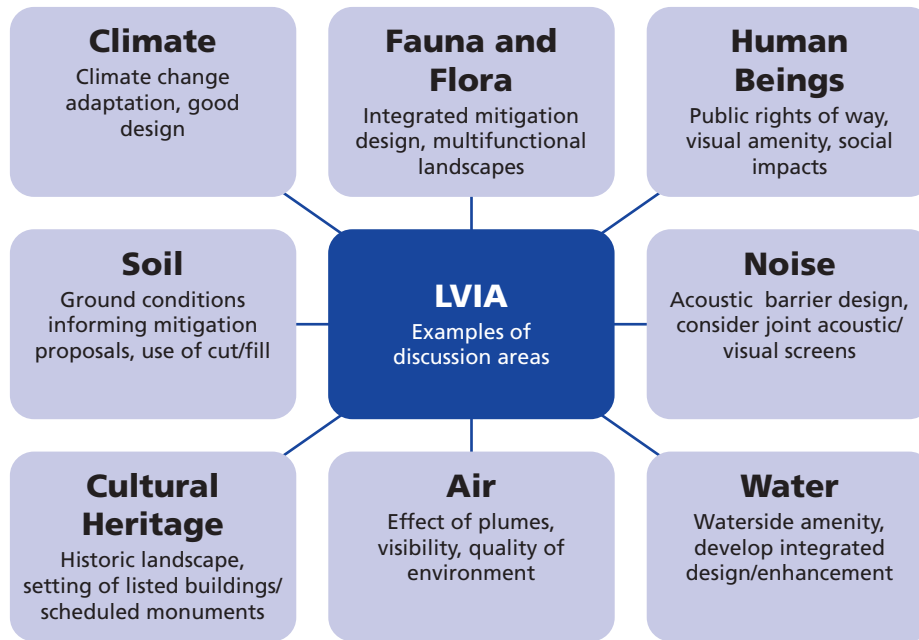


Figure 1.2 Examples of LVIA's relationship with other topics

LVIA in the 'appraisal' of development proposals

The principles and processes of LVIA can also be used to assist in the 'appraisal' of forms of land use change or development that fall outside the requirements of the EIA Directive and Regulations. Applying such an approach in these circumstances can be useful in helping to develop the design of different forms of development or other projects that may bring about change in the landscape and in visual amenity. Reference is sometimes made to the 'appraisal' of landscape and visual effects when such work is carried out outside the requirements of the EIA Directive and Regulations, and Local Planning Authorities may ask for such 'appraisals' where planning applications raise concerns about effects on the landscape and/or visual amenity. While much of this guidance is concerned with formal requirements for EIA and with the role LVIA plays in that process, the methods described will also be useful in such situations.

1.11

LVIA in Strategic Environmental Assessment

It has been widely recognised that project-level EIA alone cannot lead to comprehensive environmental protection or sustainable development. The European Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC *The assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment* (European Commission, 2001) is intended to address this and ensure that environmental consequences are addressed at strategic as well as project levels. It applies to certain plans and programmes that are developed by the public sector and by private companies that undertake functions of a public nature under the control or direction of government. This Directive is again transposed into UK law by a series of country-specific Government Regulations.

1.12

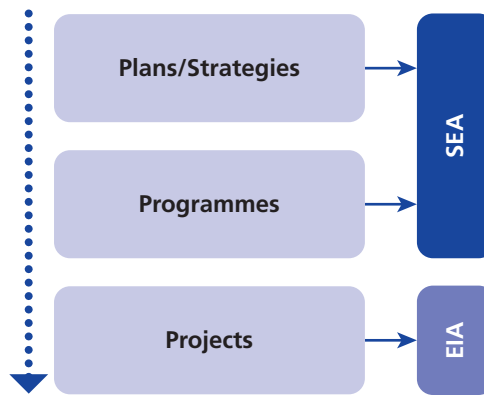


Figure 1.3 Relationship between SEA and EIA

1.13 Government and UK country agency guidance on implementing the SEA Directive and Regulations includes a similar list of environmental topics to the EIA Directive and Regulations, and so includes landscape. The principles of LVIA set out in this guidance are therefore equally applicable to SEA. There is a degree of overlap between the two processes and landscape and visual amenity issues may arise in both. However, as there is no clearly specified project to be assessed in SEA, the approach is more strategic and generic. The SEA process allows the cumulative effects of potential developments to be taken into account at an early stage of planning and alternative strategic approaches to be considered before decisions are taken, all in a way which is transparent. In England there are close relationships between SEA and sustainability appraisals of development plans, which have been carried out in various forms since the 1990s and have become an integral part of spatial planning, covering plans at all levels from national to local. There is a degree of overlap between the two processes and landscape and visual amenity issues may arise in both.

1.14 The approach is generally to judge how far the plan, programme or strategy performs against criteria relating to matters such as:

- conservation and enhancement of landscape character and scenic value;
- protection and enhancement of the landscape everywhere and particularly in designated areas;
- protection and enhancement of diversity and local distinctiveness;
- improvement of the quantity and quality of publicly accessible open space;
- restoration of landscapes degraded as a consequence of past industrial activity.

Impacts, effects and significance

1.15 Terminology can be complex and potentially confusing in this area, particularly in the use of the words ‘impact’ and ‘effect’ in LVIA within EIA and SEA. The process is generally known as **impact** assessment but the European Union Directive refers to assessment of the **effects**, which are changes arising from the development that is being

assessed. This guidance generally distinguishes between the ‘impact’, defined as the action being taken, and the ‘effect’, defined as the change resulting from that action, and recommends that the terms should be used consistently in this way. The document itself does use both, using ‘impact’ where this is the term in common usage.

Other guidance and advice has recognised that practitioners may use the terms ‘impact’ and ‘effect’ interchangeably while still adhering to the Directive and Regulations.¹ This may also be true of the wider public who become involved in EIA. This guidance urges consistent use of the terms ‘impact’ and ‘effect’ in the ways that they are defined above but recognises that there may be circumstances where this is not appropriate, for example where other practitioners involved in an EIA are adopting a different convention. In this case the following principles should apply: 1.16

- The terms should be clearly defined at the outset.
- They should be used consistently with the same meaning throughout the assessment.
- ‘Impact’ should not be used to mean a combination of several effects.

The Directive is clear that the emphasis is on the identification of **likely significant** environmental effects. This should embrace all types of effect and includes, for example, those that are positive/beneficial and negative/adverse, direct and indirect, and long and short term, as well as cumulative effects. Identifying significant effects stresses the need for an approach that is in proportion to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of its likely effects. Judgement needs to be exercised at all stages in terms of the scale of investigation that is appropriate and proportional. This does not mean that effects should be ignored or their importance minimised but that the assessment should be tailored to the particular circumstances in each case. This applies to ‘appraisals’ of landscape and visual impacts outside the formal requirements of EIA as well as those that are part of a formal assessment. 1.17

Who is this guidance for?

The holistic perspective that landscape professionals take, coupled with the broad scope of their interests as embodied in the Landscape Institute’s Royal Charter (Landscape Institute, 2008b) means that they make a particularly valuable contribution to EIA in general and to LVIA in particular, often playing leading or key roles in the multidisciplinary teams who carry out EIAs. It is important that they are able to demonstrate the highest professional standards and that their work should offer exemplars of good practice. While there has been continuous improvement in the standard and content of Environmental Statements – which are the documents resulting from the process of EIA – as experience has grown, there is still a clear need for sound, reliable and widely accepted advice on good practice for all aspects of EIA. Good practice in LVIA is key to this and also applies as much to ‘appraisals’ carried out informally as to contributions to the ‘appraisal’ of development proposals and planning applications. 1.18

As with the previous editions, this guidance is therefore aimed primarily at practitioners and is designed to help achieve quality and consistency of approach, to raise standards in this important area of professional work and so to ensure that change in the landscape is considered in an effective way that helps to achieve sustainable development 1.19

objectives. The intention is to encourage good practice and achieve greater consistency in the use of terminology and in overall approach.

- 1.20 The guidance concentrates on principles while also seeking to steer specific approaches where there is a general consensus on methods and techniques. It is not intended to be prescriptive, in that it does not provide a detailed ‘recipe’ that can be followed in every situation. It is always the primary responsibility of any landscape professional carrying out an assessment to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the particular circumstances.
- 1.21 Although aimed mainly at those carrying out LVIA, the guidance should also be of value to others who have an interest in understanding more about the importance of landscape and visual amenity issues, about the role of LVIA and about the way that it is carried out. They may include:
- developers, members of professional development project teams and other organisations who own or manage land and may be involved in projects that have the potential to change the landscape and visual amenity;
 - other professionals involved in assessing the consequences of change for other aspects of the environment;
 - planners and others within local government and the government agencies who may be the recipients of reports on the consequences of change and development and be required to review them;
 - politicians, amenity societies and the general public who may be involved in decisions about proposals for change and development;
 - those providing education and training in LVIA as one of a range of tools and techniques contributing to landscape planning and design;
 - students and others wishing to learn about the process of LVIA.
- 1.22 While written primarily in the context of the UK, it is recognised that previous editions of the guidance have also been used in other parts of the world. The aim has been to make the advice specific enough to meet the needs of UK practitioners while at the same time avoiding too much detail about particular legislation which will make it of less value elsewhere.
- 1.23 If this guidance is used beyond the UK, it will be important to remember that concepts and definitions vary and approaches must be tailored to local circumstances and legislation. There is a focus on the overall approach and methods rather than the specifics of their application in particular places or to particular types of development. More specific guidance may exist for certain types of development, such as roads for example, in which case account will need to be taken of both the general and the specific guidance.

Organisation and structure of the guidance

- 1.24 Given the different needs of the professional and the wider audiences the guidance is organised in two parts, as follows:

Part 1: Introduction, scope and context is aimed mainly at a wider audience with a more general interest in the topic, although it also contains material of relevance to practitioners. It provides an introduction to LVIA, in the context of some of the changes that have taken place since 2002. It sets the scene but is **not** concerned with the practicalities of actually carrying out LVIA.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – this chapter – gives a brief introduction to LVIA and its relationship with EIA and SEA, introducing some key terms and describing the audience at which the guidance is aimed.
- **Chapter 2: Definitions, scope and context** describes the introduction of the European Landscape Convention, and definitions of landscape, seascape and townscape. It discusses the role of LVIA in dealing with landscape change in the context of sustainable development, the role of professional judgement and the relationship of LVIA to the design process.

Part 2: Principles, processes and presentation is the core of the practical guidance. It sets out fundamental principles and provides guidance on methods, procedures and technical issues.

- **Chapter 3: Principles and overview of processes** outlines the process of LVIA and places it in the context of wider EIA processes. It provides a framework for the later chapters on assessing landscape effects and visual effects by setting out the general approach to the core steps of describing the baseline, identifying the effects and assessing their significance.
- **Chapter 4: The proposed development, design and mitigation** describes what those involved in carrying out LVIA need to know about the development or change that is proposed and discusses the detail of approaches to mitigation, which may become part of the scheme proposals through the iterative design process.
- **Chapter 5: Assessment of landscape effects** describes how the general approach and processes apply when assessing landscape effects.
- **Chapter 6: Assessment of visual effects** describes how the general approach and processes apply when assessing visual effects.
- **Chapter 7: Assessing cumulative landscape and visual effects** describes ways of approaching the issue of cumulative landscape and visual effects.
- **Chapter 8: Presenting information on landscape and visual effects** summarises approaches to presenting material about LVIA whether as a chapter in an Environmental Statement or as a standalone document.

Summary advice on good practice

- LVIA may be carried out either formally, as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), or informally as a contribution to the 'appraisal' of development proposals and planning applications. Both are important and the broad principles and the core of the approach are similar in each case.
- Anyone involved in carrying out an LVIA, whether as part of an EIA or not, must ensure that they are fully familiar with the current legislation, Regulations and guidance documents that may be relevant to the specific case they are dealing with.
- This guidance recognises a clear distinction between the **impact**, as the action being taken, and the **effect**, being the result of that action, and recommends that the terms should be used consistently in this way. 'Impact' should not be used to mean a combination of several effects.
- The emphasis on **likely significant** effects stresses the need for an approach that is proportional to the scale of the project that is being assessed and the nature of its likely effects. This applies to 'appraisals' of landscape and visual impacts outside the formal requirements of EIA as well as those that are part of a formal assessment.

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