

Written evidence submitted by David Eagar [FPS 009]

A. Question 1

Taking Questions 5 and 6 in reverse order as the two are inter-related and sequential in this particular experiential evidence for the committee.

B. Question 6

C. Question 5

REVIEW

A.

Question 1. Is the current planning system working as it should do?

- Whilst the current planning system may often appear not to be meeting many public needs and expectations, more fundamentally neither is it adequately serving critical environmental needs, especially the conservation of nature and diminution of climate change threats.
- The purpose of planning should be revisited in the world we now find ourselves in of (a) runaway climate change, (b) drastic loss and extinction of natural species, and (c) inadequately managed and harmful pollution.
- The government's proposals do not properly acknowledge the realities of the situation. Now is the right time for a different approach.

B.

Question 6. How can the planning system ensure adequate and reasonable protection for areas and buildings of environmental, historical, and architectural importance?

The question implies 'what needs protecting?' and comes closest to asking a most important question. To answer this specific wide-ranging question, an appreciation of a relevantly engaged older professional's evolving understanding of, and not insignificant contribution to, the issues may be helpful.

1. My background and understanding of the physical world and the demands made upon it dates from the 1960s when I studied geography, undertook research in plant ecology, and began studying town planning. My first job was with Unilever. From that period, I was aware of serious demands being made upon the natural world and became objectively concerned.
2. I was interested too in public attitudes and motivations - training in marketing - and also in the roles and engagement of democratic politics.
3. Aged 24, I joined the Civil Service as a countryside and land policy professional, and trained to be a planner, becoming a member of the Town Planning Institute in 1974, and later a Science member of the Landscape Institute. My career included central (21.5 years) and local (12 years) government. The latter included periods in county development management and development planning.
4. I moved from Norfolk where I was team leader policy, liaison and countryside to be responsible for eight years for Gwynedd County Council planning department's countryside service. This included much work for the Snowdonia National Park, such as the landscape assessment, built heritage and reclamation policies in the first Park Plan. Returning to central government with the Countryside Commission in the English Midlands, my experience covered several counties including the West Midlands conurbation, Warwickshire, and Nottinghamshire. The work had (by statute) two main perspectives: conservation of natural beauty (landscape), and promotion of public enjoyment of the countryside.

5. The Covid pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to nature in people's lives, supported by a growing body of research evidence of its value for health and well-being.
6. Specialising in these fields of work and in the service of the public, I had many opportunities to observe in a variety of places, and to think about, the adequacy or otherwise of the available information about environments, and about the degree of protections and interventions for various environmental qualities. This is a crucial point, as I had concluded, by the mid 1980s that too many environmental qualities were being overlooked and lost, at least for the foreseeable future.
7. 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act had begun a strand of legislation to give national weight to nature and landscape conservation. Areas were designated as national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, and various attempts were made to describe and distinguish between 'different' landscapes. By the mid 1980s this had reached prominence when the national methodology for identifying special landscapes was questioned at the Inquiry into the designation of the proposed North Pennines AONB.
8. As a consequence of that, the Countryside Commission [for England & Wales] trialled a method offered by Land Use Consultants, called 'character areas'. This was adopted and a Character Map of England was published in 1994. This map, of 159 areas, became a basis of landscape planning in England.
9. The Commission also effectively promoted the concept of landscape character to the Council of Europe who drafted it into the European Landscape Convention that most countries, including the United Kingdom, have adopted.
10. Re-joining the government's Countryside Commission in 1985 I brought to that agency complementary experience from local government that saw a definite need for robust methodology to distinguish between landscapes, with their many facets. At the time, county farming and wildlife advisory groups with advisers were being established, the Commission playing an enabling role. My experience of those groups was that there was a strong desire among land managers and conservationists

to do the right things for the environment, yet there was also evident caution and uncertainty about what were the right things to be doing. Appreciating that point is important towards answering this Committee's Question 6.

11. In 1986 the Commission agreed to my staff proposal of a three-year research project jointly with Warwickshire County Council to develop a methodology for landscape assessment.
12. The Warwickshire Landscapes Project (WLP) was successfully managed, with two complementary project officers who divided their time between the methodology project and the county planning department's ongoing advisory work. In 1991 the Commission and the County Council each published a report on the project findings. The Commission's essentially presents the character areas methodology, while the county's publication is an illustrated demonstration of the new maps and text for the Warwickshire Arden pilot area.
13. The WLP project was nationally ground-breaking in how it mapped, analysed, and made recommendations for landscape. Each of the planning authorities in Warwickshire had taken a close interest in its progress, having the power to identify landscapes in their development plans, yet lacking national guidance on how to do that. The project had also attracted considerable interest from other central government agencies.
14. We commissioned Dr Della Hooke, an experienced West Midlands historical geographer who edited the journal 'Landscape History', to research and innovatively map the Arden area's historic landscape features from all periods. This initiative built on an insight of my Commission colleague, David Brooke who later led on the England agency's planning and protected landscapes policy.
15. Observing the new Warwickshire landscapes approach, English Heritage quickly introduced a national programme of historic landscape character area mapping and description. This also relates directly to this Question 6.
16. Both the government's forestry and water bodies, who sat on the consultative group observing the Arden area project, were also taken by its work to distinguish between landscapes, (a) as found, and (b) as desired, and the associated strategies and

guidelines for managing each of the different landscapes. As the proposer of the project, those were things I had been able to contribute directly to the new environmental assessment methodology.

17. The Committee will appreciate that something as wide ranging as 'landscape' - which hadn't before been particularly grounded or explicably understood in a systematic way, and yet which was fundamental to land use and environmental planning - was a crucial advance, with application to urban as well as rural land.
18. I personally had some reservations about the 'character areas' methodology that was transferred into the Warwickshire project from the LUC work. Being responsible for executing the Commission's work across three counties, there wasn't time to develop my reservations in what was a new and relatively complex area of work. Because of an urgent staff shortage elsewhere in the Countryside Commission's nine Midlands counties, I had sadly to transfer away from being its senior Warwickshire custodian in late 1998, hardly a year into the landscape methodology's projected three.
19. However, a most welcome opportunity was later to present itself to take a fresh look at how best to take environment into account, especially for planning decision-making.
20. In 1991 the government reorganised the Nature Conservancy Council, which had served England, Scotland and Wales, into three country administrations. I transferred to the newly created Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) that combined nature conservation with the countryside functions. (The two functions remained separate in England until the establishment of Natural England).
21. To recap, the Warwickshire project reported and published as CCW was starting, and three years later, in 1994 the English countryside agency published its national Character Map.
22. My interest in landscape was known to CCW, my new employer, and after two years working on public recreation and access (to the countryside) policy, I was next asked to work on landscape assessment.

The question this Committee poses about 'adequate and reasonable protection' is interesting. Who and how are judgements to be made about those standards? What degrees of loss in individual cases, and cumulatively over what geographical areas and over what periods of time will constitute inadequate? How important ought the 'precautionary principle' to be at the present time in the light of scientific, public and professional concern about threats to, and losses of, the natural and cultural environment?

23. The national landscape information system for Wales, LANDMAP (see Natural Resources Wales website for links to the system and its publicly available map coverage of all Wales) was the outcome of our concentrated work in 1995-97 and 2000-04.
24. LANDMAP identifies over ten thousand (10,000) geographical areas, their particular qualities described and comparatively graded. This is presented on GIS (geographical information system) software. Users with comparable software can compare their own spatial data with the LANDMAP information (data). In the system's development, economic and social data was tested, and comparability found satisfactory.
25. LANDMAP coverage of the entirety of Wales was achieved by 2008. Trialled in 1997, its uniqueness at first obscured its utility and potential. Hurdles were overcome, and LANDMAP gathered speed from early 2001 with explicit backing to follow from Welsh Assembly Government, and EU.

How this relates strongly to the Committee's Questions 6 and 5 is at the core of the reasoning behind LANDMAP.

26. In autumn 1996 the Welsh Office landscape officer (Tim Dorken) and I had led detailed discussions with colleagues in central and local government (in Wales) on what was required of a methodology that would produce really useful information about as wide a range of environmental things as was reasonably practical under the wide umbrella term of 'landscape'. The working forum was the Wales Landscape Partnership Group (WLPG) set up in 1995 in anticipation of such discussions. That was a few months

after the English Countryside agency had published their Character Map.

27. There was agreement that Wales wanted both more thematically and geographically specific information than character maps were providing.

28. I combined the thoughtful work of a recently retired CCW senior earth science and conservation colleague (David White) - on the nature of landscape and its interaction with people - with that of my own experience, especially from Gwynedd/ Snowdonia and the Warwickshire project.

29. The result was a method that both my countryside and science colleagues in CCW, and the WLPG members, supported for a trial. This took place in four areas of Wales during summer of 1997. One of the areas collected its data onto GIS computer maps, a move that was then endorsed by the WLPG for the roll-out of the new method: 'LANDMAP'. CCW colleague Dr Peter Minto had helpfully proposed the GIS software route.

There are some important points to be made about what had been achieved, and also the status of LANDMAP since 2008 as a leading source of environmental data for Welsh planning and land use management.

1. That the system yielded useful INFORMATION about places was of key importance. This was in-built in the design and briefing of the many so-called aspect specialists who provided and generated the data.
2. LANDMAP's name was derived from the phrase used to describe the nature of the system that was trialled: the method was a key component of a **Landscape Assessment aNd Decision-MAking Process**. The task of rigorously collecting such a wide range of environmental data was fully intended and justified for the contribution it would make to better land use decision-taking and policy-making.
3. The scope of the environmental information (data) available for interrogation in LANDMAP is contained on five GIS

'aspects of landscape' map platforms: (a) **geological**; (b) **habitat**; (c) **visual and sensory**; (d) **historical**; and (e) **cultural**.

4. Quality assurance procedures were put in place to ensure that the aspect areas are comparable one with another both within each of the five mapped aspects, and also between them, across the five.
5. The five aspects each has a lead national specialist.
6. Prospective robustness of data when under challenge at public inquiry, for example, was a fundamental system design consideration.
7. Each of the (10,000+) geographical areas has a text description based on clear parameters for each of the five aspects.
8. Every area is also graded by the comparative importance of the quality (thing) that led to its being selected for mapping as an area, and on a four-point scale from 'Outstanding' to 'Low' (though worthy of note). The condition of areas is also noted.
9. Where feasible a record is also made of the sensitivity to, or tolerance of, land use change that could affect the individual aspect area. This, though, will depend on the nature of the land use change, and so is mainly left to post-LANDMAP analysis at a specific proposal stage.
10. The term 'impact' is generally avoided, as the concept of '**consequences**' for an area and its specific qualities was considered to be more accurate and helpful.
11. The Welsh Assembly Government has endorsed the LANDMAP information as a valuable tool for planning in ***Planning Policy Wales*** since it achieved national coverage in 2008.
12. Management of the data is undertaken by Natural Resources Wales, the successor body to CCW, which led its development. Data updates and specialist information usage papers are issued as required.

C.

Question 5 asks 'What is the best approach to ensure public engagement in the planning system? What role should modern technology and data play in this?'

During the development of LANDMAP environmental information, the public's comprehension of environment was examined in a commissioned social survey and associated focus groups to pick up the views of a wide range of people. The work (by Dr Alister Scott, now at Northumbria) was fed into the methodological design. Open public service access to its data was a core principle of LANDMAP.

GIS used by LANDMAP is a 'modern technology'. It is also essentially a data information system to inform land use area, case and policy thinking. It was ahead of its time. LANDMAP has been developed to be informative, and to give anyone who is interested balanced equivalent data about a location in as systematic a way as possible.

REVIEW

LANDMAP assists "the planning system ensure adequate and reasonable protection for areas and buildings of environmental, historical, and architectural importance" by systematically bringing together several important strands of contextual data, so that the nature and comparative significance of many things in, and associated with, the environment can be viewed together in as fair and meaningful way as possible.

The system's historical landscape maps, for example, are informed professional interpretations of historic building and archaeological records, which they complement, and they also take account of historic character areas.

The beauty of LANDMAP information and its areas is the systematic thoroughness that underpins them. Unlike the landscape 'character areas', the LANDMAP information system isn't intended as a method for identifying areas for national

designation, but it does provide geographically detailed information that allows people to take into account, with accuracy, the nature and comparative importance of a wide range of environmental factors.

In other words, wherever one is, in a settlement for example, or within the countryside - whether or not the locality is designated or identified for its natural beauty or landscape quality - LANDMAP informs everyone on the range of qualities any location possesses, and the comparative importance of each of these qualities, these things.

The environment can only be protected if we know what there is in a place, and how important the things about that place are. Integrity of data is crucial for wise land management. For wise decision-making that is now vital to human survival.

LANDMAP is flexible, and so were it to be adopted in essence as a public land data GIS technique for England, more data, e.g. soils, hydrology, climate even, could be added to its geographical platform.

As a method, therefore, its credentials as an environmental utility vehicle are well proven.

My thanks to the Committee for reading, and also to everyone who contributed to the detailed thinking about land use and landscape over many years. In addition to those named in this paper, special thanks to the late Dr Liz Howe for leading LANDMAP's Habitat Aspect so very well, to Jill Bullen for assimilating LANDMAP's management from its quality assurance stage, and to Drs Malcolm Smith, Stewart Campbell, and John Taylor for their contributions and support.

The gestation, patience and determination required to achieve something as significant as the LANDMAP national information system ought not to be underestimated. It's an example of how the public sector can deliver a major benefit across society,

given understanding, inspired support and trust from
colleagues, appointed members of agencies, and politicians.

October 2020