

Delivering for Scotland's Landscapes through the Charter – 30 October 2025

Summaries of Workshops and Panel Sessions

Some key themes

The document highlights several key themes for delivering on Scotland's landscapes:

1. **Charter Alignment:** Emphasis on the Charter's role in integrating policy and emphasizing the significance of landscapes. It serves as a framework for collaboration across sectors, helping align efforts in landscape impact, planning, and forest management.
2. **Collaboration and Community Engagement:** Strong focus on partnership working and community connections. The Charter encourages collaborative approaches, breaking down silos and involving diverse communities, including underrepresented voices.
3. **Holistic and Place-based Approaches:** Advocates for place-based methods to achieve greater connections between people and landscapes, emphasizing local involvement and education as crucial for fostering these connections.
4. **Climate and Environmental Focus:** Landscape is used as a lens for climate change solutions, integrating strategies for biodiversity, nature restoration, and sustainable land use.
5. **Tools and Best Practices:** The document suggests using tools like the Place Standard Tool and management agreements to guide planning and implementation, citing various successful projects and initiatives as examples.
6. **Awareness and Education:** Enhancing public and professional understanding of landscape importance through education at all levels, from schools to professional training, is seen as vital.
7. **Policy and Governance:** Calls for integration of the Charter into national and local governance structures, advocating for its inclusion in legal frameworks and planning policies to ensure landscapes are prioritized.
8. **Funding and Support:** The need for financial incentives aligned with Charter goals, ensuring funding supports long-term landscape management and environmental stewardship.

Areas of consensus – one page summary

1. **Skills and Systems Are Fundamental** - There was broad agreement that Scotland's landscape future depends on a strong and diverse skills base. Traditional, ecological, cultural, planning, and future-facing skills are all needed. Skills must be supported by coherent systems that join up education, policy, and practice. This was one of the clearest, most universal areas of consensus.
2. **Stories, Lived Experience, and Local Knowledge Matter** - People's stories, memories, and lived experience of landscapes are valuable. These narratives shape identity, belonging, and understanding. They should inform planning, decision-making, and the Landscape Charter.
3. **Community Participation and Agency Are Essential** - Communities must have a real role in shaping landscape decisions. Local Place Plans and similar tools have significant potential. Local knowledge should influence national policy. Empowering communities is seen as foundational to a sustainable landscape future.
4. **Landscape Change Must Be Recognised and Planned For** - Landscape change is happening and will intensify (climate, energy, housing, biodiversity). Scotland must embrace this reality and prepare for transformation at multiple scales. Recognising change is a prerequisite for effective adaptation.
5. **Collaboration Across Sectors Is Necessary** - No single organisation can deliver landscape-scale change alone. Joined-up working is needed across nature, heritage, planning, agriculture, tourism, and communities. Stronger cross-government coordination is essential. Collaboration is understood as a practical requirement, not a desirable extra.
6. **Long-Term Funding Is Crucial** - Long time frames (10–30 years). Stable, predictable resources, and investment in partnership-building. Short-term funding cycles are incompatible with long-term landscape processes.
7. **Landscapes Are Multifunctional and Support Society** - Landscapes provide ecological, cultural, economic, historic, and wellbeing benefits. Using landscapes for a single purpose (e.g., only production, only conservation) is reductive. The Landscape Charter should reflect the whole value of landscapes.
8. **A Clear, Motivating Narrative Is Needed** - "Landscape sustains us." - This reframing helps the public and policymakers understand landscapes as foundational to life, not as an optional amenity.
9. **Unified, Cross-Party Advocacy Is Required** - The Charter needs cross-party support. Engagement should start before political manifestos are written. A shared set of messages and priorities can unite diverse organisations.

Dilemmas - one page summary

1. **Skills vs. Systems** - Scotland needs strong landscape skills—but skills development and deployment sit within fragmented systems (education, qualifications, government silos). Public bodies can advocate but not lobby, reducing their influence on needed reform.
2. **Narrative vs. Reality of Land Use** - Public narratives emphasise “food production” and “food security,” yet much Scottish land produces non-food outputs (whisky barley, bioethanol, livestock). There is a mismatch between what landscapes actually deliver and how society talks about them, creating confusion in policy and public debate.
3. **Stories vs. Measurement** - Lived experience, local stories, and cultural understanding are crucial but rarely captured or valued because they do not fit easily into quantitative systems. This leads to under-representation of community perspectives in decision-making.
4. **Local Agency vs. National System** - Communities want greater ownership of decisions, but local place plans lack authority, resourcing, and integration with national policy. Local knowledge is valued but not structurally empowered.
5. **Rapid Landscape Change vs. Slow Institutions** - Climate change, renewable energy expansion, and demographic shifts are transforming landscapes faster than planning and governance systems can respond. Landscape issues often “fall through the cracks” of slow, outdated processes. Landscapes deliver multiple, interconnected benefits—ecological, cultural, economic, and social—but policies are designed around single issues. This oversimplification makes it hard to prioritise and coordinate landscape-scale action.
6. **Collaboration vs. Governance Structures** - Everyone agrees collaboration is necessary, but existing governance structures—described as “zombie systems”—are outdated, siloed, and unsuited to modern landscape-scale challenges. Structures hinder the very co-production they aim to support.
7. **Short-Term Funding vs. Long-Term Landscape Needs** - Landscape restoration and management require decades, but funding cycles typically last only 2–3 years. Long-term, landscape-scale partnership work is unviable under short political cycles. Private finance can fill gaps but brings ethical and governance dilemmas.
8. **Decision-Making vs. Fear of Making the “Wrong” Decision** - Communities and politicians often avoid decisions due to fear, uncertainty, or political risk. Landscape decisions get delayed (“kicked down the road”), even when action is needed. Yet landscapes are resilient—non-action carries its own risks.
9. **13. Public Motivation vs. Technical Language** - The concept of “landscape” may not resonate strongly with the public. Technical or abstract language limits engagement, reducing public and political momentum for change.

Summary of Workshop Sessions

SESSION 1 – Reflection on the Charter, its Vision and Principles

1. How the Charter Aligns with Current Work

- Place-based and landscape-led approaches across planning, land management, landscape architecture, heritage, and community work.
- Partnership working and collaboration across sectors and communities.
- Responding to climate, biodiversity, and land-use change, including renewables and woodland creation.
- Raising the visibility and value of landscape within national frameworks (NPF4, Land Use Strategy, National Parks, land reform).
- Providing the “WHY” of landscape, helping articulate shared purpose and unify diverse interests.
- **Key insight:** Alignment is strong, but awareness of the Charter remains low.

2. How the Charter Supports Participants’ Work

- Raise the profile of landscape and provide a shared reference point for decision-making.
- Break down silos, offering a common framework for planning, design, climate work, and community engagement.
- Guide holistic, long-term, place-based approaches, integrating climate, biodiversity, and land use.
- Strengthen cases for funding, projects, and partnerships and support arguments for landscape-led design and stewardship.
- Provide policy hooks and tools, especially through alignment with the European Landscape Convention.
- **Key insight:** The Charter provides a useful, unifying framework but needs ongoing reinforcement.

3. Best Practice Examples Delivered by Participants

- Landscape-scale restoration (Leven Programme, Living Lomonds, Dundreggan, river restoration projects).
- Community-led initiatives (community gardens, Local Place Plans, volunteer mapping, Neilston Town Charter).
- Integrated planning approaches (woodland frameworks, character area assessments, climate-led evaluations).
- Place-based tools and innovation (Place Standard Tool, canopy mapping, storytelling methods).
- **Key insight:** Scotland already has strong models to build on; the Charter can help scale and connect them.

SESSION 2 – Tools for Success: A 5-Year Action Plan

1. Actions Needed to Deliver Priorities

- Improved landscape understanding and literacy through co-learning, education, and communications.
- Clear landscape values and metrics (natural capital tools, monitoring frameworks, evaluation methods).
- A central information platform for case studies, data, and best practice.
- Linking the Charter to national policy (NPF4, Land Use Strategy, agriculture, climate).
- Long-term, multi-year funding, including revenue and landscape-focused investment streams.
- Skills development and knowledge-sharing across professions and communities.
- Outreach to disconnected groups strengthening trust and inclusion.
- **Key insight:** Delivery requires clarity, shared tools, and landscape literacy

2. Who Should Act and Where Collaboration Is Needed

- Scottish Landscape Alliance as convenor and “glue”.
- Scottish Government, particularly in planning, land use, agriculture, and access.
- Local authorities and Local Place Plans.
- Communities, farmers, foresters, landowners and grassroots organisations.
- Professional bodies (LI, HES, NatureScot, ICAS, planners).
- Schools and education partners to embed early landscape understanding.
- Cross-sector advisory groups to coordinate landowners, communities, and practitioners.
- **Key insight:** Collaboration must be top-down and bottom-up, joining national frameworks with local action.

3. What Success Looks Like in Five Years

- Clear, simple expectations for Charter implementation
- Landscape seen as essential, not optional, and embedded in policy and planning.
- Raised public awareness, reduced polarisation, and meaningful community voice.
- Charter integrated into Land Use Partnerships and agricultural legislation.
- Monitoring and reporting on landscape quality with stronger enforcement.
- Long-term investment and contracts that mandate collaboration.
- People understanding landscape’s value, including health and wellbeing.
- Every child having access to nature, and outdoor learning mainstreamed.
- Landscape recognised as the foundation for future land-use decisions.
- **Key insight:** Success means **landscape becomes a shared, strategic, and widely understood framework for Scotland’s future.

Places named on workshop sheets

1. East Lothian
2. Glasgow
3. Dalmarnock
4. Ferguslie
5. Renfrewshire
6. Douglas (SLC)
7. Dundee
8. West Stormont
9. Leven
10. East Lothian (Blindwells)
11. Tayvallich
12. Granton
13. Kilsyth
14. Applecross
15. Lochgoilhead
16. Winchburgh
17. Neilston