Landscape Institute
People, place and nature

Consultation on Scotland's Draft Climate Change Strategy

Landscape Institute Response

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Questions & Responses

Introduction

The Landscape Institute (LI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan 2026–2040. We support the level of ambition set out in the Plan, including the adoption of carbon budgets, the emphasis on a just transition, and the recognition that climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity recovery must be delivered together.

Landscape has a critical role in delivering the Plan. The landscape profession works across land use, climate, nature, infrastructure and communities, turning national policy objectives into coherent, place-based and deliverable outcomes. Landscape-led approaches are fundamental to reducing emissions, supporting adaptation, restoring biodiversity, shaping sustainable transport, managing flood risk, and delivering high-quality places that support health, wellbeing and inclusive economic resilience. The skills of landscape professionals can apply sustainable and nature-based solutions through planning, design and management thar will help to create places that are more resilient to climate change impacts.

Our response focuses on delivery. In particular, it highlights the importance of embedding landscape expertise early in implementation, strengthening skills and public sector capacity, and ensuring that monitoring frameworks capture place-based and environmental outcomes alongside emissions reduction.

Section 1: Delivering a Just Transition

Question 1

What are your views on our approach to delivering a just transition for people and communities?

The Landscape Institute welcomes the Draft Climate Change Plan's commitment to delivering a just transition that recognises both the social considerations of climate action and the need for place-based delivery. We support the framing of a just transition as both an outcome and a process, and the emphasis on participation, regional variation and community engagement.

The success of a just transition will depend on how effectively national policy ambitions are translated into changes that people can see, experience and benefit from in their everyday environments. Climate change, and the measures introduced to address it, are experienced through the landscapes we live in: streets, neighbourhoods, parks, town centres, transport corridors, farmland and wider landscapes. How these environments are designed, function and are accessed will significantly shape perceptions of whether the transition is fair and beneficial.

Landscape-led approaches are critical to delivering a just transition on the ground. By working across the spatial scales at which climate, land use, infrastructure, nature and communities interact, landscape professionals help ensure that mitigation and adaptation measures deliver wider social, environmental and place-based benefits. Embedding landscape expertise early supports better quality outcomes, strengthens resilience and reduces the risk of fragmented delivery, poor public realm design or inequitable impacts.

We welcome the Plan's recognition that climate impacts and responses will differ across regions and types of place, including rural, island and post-industrial communities. Stronger integration between climate policy, spatial planning and landscape-led placemaking will be essential to delivery. Without a coherent, landscape-scale approach, decisions on land use, infrastructure, energy and nature restoration risk being experienced as disruptive at local level, rather than delivering tangible community benefits.

Meaningful participation is also essential. Engagement should go beyond consultation on individual projects and support communities to shape how climate action is delivered in their places over time. Landscape-led engagement, including visualisation and co-design, can help communities understand change, explore options and influence outcomes constructively.

Question 2

What skills, training and qualification provisions will be most important in a net zero future and what more could be done to support them?

The Draft Climate Change Plan rightly recognises that skills and workforce development are central to delivering a fair and effective transition to net zero. However, there is a risk that the skills required to deliver place-based climate action are under recognised within current green jobs and training frameworks.

Landscape architects have a critical role in delivering the Plan's objectives, operating across land management, urban design, climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, transport, water management and community engagement. This expertise is essential to translating policy ambition into coherent, deliverable outcomes at neighbourhood, town and landscape scale. However, the current training pipeline is limited and fragmented, particularly in relation to climate adaptation, nature-based solutions and landscape-scale delivery.

The Landscape Institute's Skills for Greener Places research, alongside clearer and wider evidence such as the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan, highlights growing demand for landscape expertise that is not currently matched by available training provision. Skills gaps are particularly evident in climate-responsive design, green and blue infrastructure, and long-term landscape management and monitoring. Without action, these gaps risk constraining delivery by affecting the quality, speed and effectiveness of implementation.

Public sector capability is also critical to delivery - Local Authorities and other public bodies have a central role in commissioning and implementing climate action, but access to landscape architecture expertise is inconsistent and often limited. Where landscape-led expertise is not embedded, projects are more likely to be designed around isolated sector-specific objectives, rather than joined-up, place-based approaches. This increases the risk of fragmented delivery, missed co-benefits and outcomes that fail to support long-term resilience.

Addressing these issues will require clearer recognition of landscape architecture skills within net zero skills planning, targeted support for accredited education and training pathways, and greater investment in continuing professional development. Strengthening both the supply of landscape professionals and the capacity to commission their expertise will be essential to delivering high-quality, place-based climate action. Decision-makers, whether acting as commissioning clients or regulatory bodies, should be better informed of the functional benefits that well-designed and managed landscape can deliver in both rural and urban settings.

Question 3

How can we best support employers across the private, public and third sectors to make the changes needed and seize the benefits of net zero?

Supporting employers to deliver net zero requires the early and effective commissioning of the right professional skills. Landscape architects play a critical role in shaping place-based responses to climate change, yet landscape expertise is often introduced too late to influence strategic decisions on land use, infrastructure and investment.

Greater emphasis is needed on enabling public sector bodies and other employers to commission landscape architecture expertise at the outset of projects and programmes. Early landscape-led input helps align climate objectives with spatial planning, nature recovery and community outcomes, and supports integrated approaches that deliver multiple long-term benefits. Where commissioning is focused narrowly on individual assets or sector-specific objectives, opportunities to enhance public realm, support biodiversity and build community resilience are frequently missed.

Clear and consistent policy direction is also important in supporting this approach. Confidence in the long-term direction of climate and land use policy enables landscape practices to invest in skills, training and capacity to support delivery. Without this certainty, it is more difficult for practices to plan ahead, develop specialist expertise and retain skilled professionals.

Question 4

What are your views on our approach to supporting places where the transition presents particular regional impacts?

The Draft Climate Change Plan rightly recognises that the transition to net zero will have uneven regional impacts, with some places experiencing more rapid and concentrated change than others. A place-based

approach to supporting these regions is essential, particularly where climate action involves significant land use change, infrastructure investment and environmental intervention.

These impacts are most clearly felt through changes to land, landscapes and local environments. Communities experience the transition through new energy and transport infrastructure, shifts in land management, and large-scale nature restoration, including woodland creation and peatland recovery. Taken together, these changes can have a substantial influence on landscape character, local identity and sense of place. Supporting regions through the transition therefore requires an understanding of how different interventions interact across landscapes, rather than treating projects in isolation.

Landscape-led planning plays an important role in managing regional impacts. Working at the scale of landscapes and settlements allows climate mitigation, adaptation and nature restoration to be aligned with local context, environmental capacity and community priorities. This is particularly important in rural, island and post-industrial areas, where land use change associated with renewable energy, habitat restoration and agricultural transition can be extensive and poorly coordinated interventions risk undermining trust and public support.

We support the Plan's intention to tailor support to places facing particular challenges but consider this would be strengthened through clearer integration with spatial planning and landscape frameworks at regional and local level. Embedding an understanding of landscape character, ecosystem function and long-term management into decision-making will help ensure that nature restoration delivers both climate and biodiversity benefits while contributing positively to local environments and livelihoods.

Section 2: Sectoral Contributions and Policies and Proposals

Buildings (Residential and Public)

Question 5

How can we decarbonise homes and buildings in a way that is fair and leaves no one behind?

Decarbonising homes and buildings should be approached at the scale of streets, neighbourhoods and shared public spaces, rather than as a series of isolated property-level interventions. Many decarbonisation measures have direct implications for the public realm, including impacts on streetscape, access, open space and green infrastructure.

Where delivery is undertaken on an individual property basis, there is a risk of fragmented outcomes and inconsistent quality in the spaces between buildings. More coordinated, place-based approaches can help manage these impacts, reduce disruption and ensure that decarbonisation contributes positively to the quality, function and character of local environments.

Landscape expertise is particularly important where building decarbonisation interacts with public space, green infrastructure and climate adaptation. Integrating retrofit and heating infrastructure with improvements to streets and greenspace can support wider outcomes such as active travel, urban cooling and surface water management, alongside emissions reduction. Clearer recognition of the role of landscape and spatial planning in coordinating these interventions would strengthen the Plan's approach and help ensure emissions reduction supports well-designed, inclusive and resilient neighbourhoods.

Landscape-led planning also has an important role at larger spatial scales, including town, city and city-region level, where decisions about building decarbonisation interact with energy infrastructure, land use and environmental capacity. Strategic landscape frameworks can help coordinate the location of district heating networks, renewable energy generation and supporting infrastructure alongside housing, transport and green infrastructure. This can support more efficient energy systems, reduce cumulative impacts and ensure that decarbonisation is planned in a way that reflects landscape character and local context.

Question 6

How can clean heating systems be made more affordable for everyone?

The affordability of clean heating systems is closely linked to how energy infrastructure is planned and delivered. Place-based, landscape-led approaches can support affordability by enabling coordinated

investment in district heating and locally sited renewable energy, reducing reliance on piecemeal, property-by-property solutions.

Planning clean energy infrastructure at neighbourhood, town or city scale can create efficiencies through shared systems, economies of scale and reduced installation and disruption costs. Integrating renewable generation such as solar, wind or heat networks as close as possible to where energy is used can also reduce transmission losses and long-term operational costs.

Landscape professionals can help ensure that these systems are designed as part of coherent spatial frameworks that balance technical requirements with environmental quality, public acceptability and long-term management. Embedding this strategic, landscape-led planning within delivery mechanisms would help ensure clean heating is not only lower carbon, but more affordable, equitable and resilient over time.

Transport

Question 7

Which measures would be most effective in enabling a transition to zero emissions vehicles?

The effectiveness of measures to support the transition to zero emission vehicles is closely linked to how charging and related infrastructure is planned and integrated within streets and public spaces. Infrastructure that is poorly planned or retrofitted risks cluttering streets, reducing accessibility and undermining the quality of local environments. By contrast, strategically planned infrastructure, integrated with wider public realm and transport improvements, can support safer, more inclusive and better-functioning places.

Alongside measures to support the transition to lower-emission vehicles, the siting and design of new development will be critical to reducing transport emissions overall. Locating new housing, employment and services close to high-quality public transport, and designing places that prioritise walking, wheeling and cycling, can significantly reduce car dependency from the outset.

Landscape-led, place-based design plays a key role in this, shaping street layouts, public spaces and green infrastructure to make active travel safe, attractive and convenient for everyday journeys. Embedding these principles early through spatial planning and masterplanning can support healthier travel choices, improve access to services and reduce the need for private car use, delivering long-term emissions reduction alongside wider health and placemaking benefits.

The availability of appropriate skills is also important. Designing, locating and maintaining charging infrastructure in a way that responds to different types of place requires landscape and public realm expertise alongside engineering and technical skills. Ensuring that these skills are available will help avoid negative impacts on streets and neighbourhoods and support a smoother transition to zero emission vehicles.

Question 8

How can the Scottish Government support communities to participate in planning of local sustainable infrastructure (such as walking, wheeling and cycling routes)?

Meaningful community participation in the planning of local sustainable infrastructure depends on early engagement that focuses on places rather than individual schemes. Walking, wheeling and cycling routes are experienced as part of wider streets and neighbourhoods, and communities are more likely to engage constructively where proposals are clearly linked to improvements in everyday environments.

Landscape-led approaches can support more effective participation by helping communities understand how infrastructure will work on the ground and how it may affect local character, movement and the use of space. Techniques such as visualisation, site-based engagement and co-design can make proposals more accessible and enable communities to explore trade-offs, priorities and opportunities in a practical way. This is particularly important where routes involve changes to street layout, parking, green space or how people move through an area. Opportunities can be taken to rethink urban streets as attractive thoroughfares and treed spaces that can accommodate people, active transportation and motor vehicle access rather than the conventional dominance of the latter.

There are established examples in Scotland where early and meaningful community engagement has supported the successful delivery of low-carbon infrastructure. For example, the Fintry Community Wind Turbine Project demonstrates how involving communities directly in planning and decision-making can build local support, strengthen trust and deliver long-term shared benefits. While focused on energy infrastructure, the principles demonstrated are directly transferable to the planning of sustainable transport and public realm projects, highlighting the value of engagement that is embedded early, place-based and clearly linked to locally valued outcomes.

Question 9

What action would be most helpful in supporting a more climate-friendly lifestyle?

The most effective way to support climate-friendly lifestyles is to ensure that everyday environments enable low-carbon choices as a matter of course. Well-designed streets, connected neighbourhoods and accessible greenspace make it easier for people to walk, wheel and cycle, use local services and spend time outdoors as part of daily life.

Landscape-led investment in public realm, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions can support these behaviours while also delivering wider benefits, including improved health, reduced exposure to heat and flooding, and stronger local environments. Embedding climate objectives consistently within the design and management of streets and public spaces is therefore vital to facilitate individual behaviour change.

Question 10 (Waste)

No response

Question 11 (Energy Supply)

What are your views on Scotland generating more electricity from renewable sources?

The Landscape Institute supports the expansion of renewable energy generation as a core part of Scotland's transition to net zero. The success of this expansion will depend not only on the amount of renewable capacity delivered, but on how development is planned, designed and integrated into landscapes and seascapes.

The effective delivery of renewable energy at scale also depends on access to appropriate landscape and visual expertise. As renewable infrastructure becomes larger and more widespread, there is an increasing need for high-quality landscape and visual impact assessment, including accurate visualisation and representation of change. These tools are critical to enabling informed decision-making, supporting meaningful community engagement and maintaining public confidence in the planning process.

Renewable energy infrastructure often results in significant and visible change, particularly in rural, coastal and upland areas with high landscape sensitivity and biodiversity value. A landscape-led approach, supported by early masterplanning and interdisciplinary working, helps ensure proposals are shaped by landscape character, settlement patterns and environmental capacity, and is essential to managing cumulative impacts and protecting valued and designated landscapes.

There is growing pressure on professional capacity in this area, with demand for landscape-led visual assessment and design mitigation increasing faster than available skills and training. Addressing these skills gaps will be important to ensuring that renewable energy development is both well-designed and publicly acceptable, and that decisions are based on robust, transparent evidence about landscape and visual effects.

Where schemes are informed by landscape and ecological expertise from the outset, there are opportunities to protect and restore habitats, enhance wildlife corridors and deliver wider nature recovery alongside energy generation. This is particularly important in relation to carbon-rich habitats such as peatlands, where disturbance risks releasing stored carbon and undermining climate objectives. Careful site selection and design are therefore critical to avoiding damage to sensitive habitats and supporting long-term ecosystem function.

Biodiversity net gain can play a positive role where it forms part of a broader commitment to protecting and

restoring biodiversity. Used well, it can help secure habitat enhancement, improved ecological connectivity and long-term management alongside renewable energy development. Its effectiveness will depend on being embedded within landscape-led planning that reinforces ecological networks, safeguards designated landscapes and contributes to nature recovery.

Business and Industrial Processes

Question 12

What support do industries need to reduce emissions while remaining competitive?

No response

Agriculture and LULUCF

Question 13

How can the Scottish Government encourage sustainable land use that is also productive for local communities?

Encouraging sustainable land use that continues to support local communities requires a long-term, landscape-scale approach. The transition to net zero brings multiple, overlapping demands on land, including food production, nature restoration, renewable energy and carbon sequestration. Without effective coordination, these pressures can lead to fragmented decisions and reduced confidence among communities and land managers.

Landscape-led approaches support more coherent decision making by considering how different land uses interact across whole landscapes, rather than being addressed at an individual site level. This helps deliver more multifunctional outcomes, where land supports food production, biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, access and local livelihoods together. Such approaches are particularly important in rural and urban fringe areas, where land use change can have significant social and economic implications.

Nature restoration should be integrated within productive land use, rather than treated as a separate objective. Well-designed interventions, including woodland creation, peatland recovery and strengthened ecological networks, can support soil health, water management and long-term resilience while also contributing to local economies. Closer integration between land use policy, spatial planning and landscape frameworks would support locally appropriate solutions shaped with communities and land managers and strengthen delivery.

Question 14

What do you think about our proposals for planting trees and restoring natural habitats?

The Landscape Institute supports the ambition to expand tree planting and restore natural habitats, including peatlands, as central elements of Scotland’s response to climate change and biodiversity loss. The effectiveness of these proposals will depend on how well they are planned and delivered at an appropriate landscape scale, and how they respond to local environmental and social context.

Tree planting and habitat restoration should be guided by a clear understanding of landscape character, soil conditions, hydrology and existing land use. Poorly located or narrowly delivered interventions risk undermining biodiversity outcomes, releasing stored carbon or creating conflict with other land uses. This is particularly relevant for peatlands and other carbon rich habitats, where disturbance can result in significant emissions and long term damage to ecosystem function.

Well-designed woodland creation and habitat restoration can also strengthen ecological networks, improve connectivity and support wider nature recovery. When planned as part of a coherent landscape framework, these interventions can enhance resilience to climate impacts, support water management and contribute positively to local identity and sense of place. Considering long-term management and stewardship will be important in ensuring these benefits are sustained over time.

Urban tree planting in streets and spaces is of particular value by delivering shade and run-off detention,

carbon sequestration, air filtration and cooling effects through evapo-transpiration. The LI would strongly support existing tree retention and measures to promote new planting of appropriate trees in urban areas.

Question 15

How can farming become more climate-friendly while continuing to support food production and biodiversity?

The Landscape Institute welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to regenerative farming and recognises the close interrelationship between climate mitigation, biodiversity recovery and the long-term resilience of food production. Farming systems that work with natural processes, rather than relying on high external inputs, have the potential to deliver multiple public benefits across climate, nature, soil health and water management.

There is now strong evidence that intensive agricultural systems, particularly the widespread use of inorganic nitrogen fertilisers, contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. Nitrous oxide emissions arising from fertiliser application have a very high global warming potential, around 265 times greater than carbon dioxide over a 100-year period. Agriculture is the largest source of nitrous oxide emissions in the UK, accounting for around 70 per cent of the total, primarily from soil processes following fertiliser and organic nutrient application.

Regenerative and agroecological farming approaches, including diverse crop rotations, integrated crop and livestock systems, and practices that build soil organic matter, can support productive food systems while restoring ecosystems. Improving soil structure and microbial health enhances fertility, increases water retention, reduces diffuse pollution and supports biodiversity, while also enabling carbon sequestration. These benefits contribute simultaneously to climate mitigation, adaptation and nature recovery objectives, strengthening the natural capital on which farming depends.

Climate change is also increasing exposure to more frequent and severe weather extremes, including flooding, drought and wildfire. Building resilience into land management is therefore critical, not only for farm businesses but for protecting downstream communities, infrastructure and landscapes. This reinforces the need for approaches that consider land use and environmental processes at an appropriate landscape scale.

In this context, the Landscape Institute supports the multifunctional use of agricultural land, including agri-forestry, so that food production can be integrated with a range of ecosystem services that benefit biodiversity and help mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, including water management. The Landscape Institute recognises that changes in farming practice, including diversification, can have significant effects on landscape character and would wish to see these addressed with sensitivity and appropriate professional expertise. The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment have published widely used guidelines on assessing landscape and visual effects.

To support farmers in navigating this transition, the Landscape Institute recommends the development of strategic, landscape-led management frameworks aligned to National Character Areas. These areas reflect the interaction of land use, soils, topography, ecosystems and local climate, and provide a coherent spatial basis for decision-making. Strategic plans at this scale could translate national climate, biodiversity and land use objectives into locally relevant guidance, helping farmers develop Whole Farm Plans that are responsive to landscape character, environmental capacity and local aspirations.

Embedding this place-based, landscape-scale approach would help ensure that climate-friendly farming continues to support productive agriculture, delivers measurable biodiversity gains and strengthens resilience across Scotland's rural and urban landscapes.

Section 3: Impact Assessments

Questions 16–21

The impacts of the transition to net zero will be felt unevenly across Scotland, with some communities facing greater pressures due to existing social, economic and environmental factors. These impacts are most directly experienced through changes to places, including housing, streets, landscapes, access to greenspace and exposure to climate risks such as flooding, overheating and environmental degradation.

Communities with limited access to high-quality green and blue infrastructure, including parts of urban areas and the urban fringe, may be particularly affected where climate action is poorly coordinated. Rural and island communities may also experience concentrated change linked to land use transitions, renewable energy development and nature restoration. Where multiple interventions occur together, impacts are often experienced collectively, increasing the importance of managing cumulative effects.

Stronger coordination between climate policy, spatial planning and landscape frameworks will be essential to avoid fragmented delivery and ensure locally appropriate outcomes. Landscape-led, place-based approaches can help integrate mitigation, adaptation and nature restoration, reducing negative impacts and supporting multiple benefits. Impact assessments would be strengthened by greater use of place-based evidence alongside emissions data, including information on access to greenspace, landscape condition, flood and heat exposure, and the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

Section 4: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Questions 22–25

The Landscape Institute agrees with the overall scope of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and its identification of the likely significant environmental effects associated with delivery of the Draft Climate Change Plan. We welcome the recognition that many proposed measures have the potential to deliver positive outcomes for biodiversity, water and climate. From a landscape perspective, however, the extent to which these outcomes are realised will depend on how spatial change is planned and coordinated in practice.

Many of the Plan's policies and proposals will be delivered through multiple interventions within the same landscapes over time, including land use change, renewable energy development, infrastructure investment and nature restoration. While individual measures may appear limited in isolation, their combined effects on landscape character, ecological networks, hydrology and sense of place can be substantial. Reflecting these cumulative, landscape-scale effects more clearly within the SEA would strengthen its ability to assess likely impacts.

The SEA would also benefit from clearer recognition of the importance of design, spatial coordination and long-term management in shaping environmental outcomes. Positive outcomes are not guaranteed and will depend on landscape-led approaches being embedded in delivery. Greater consideration of spatial alternatives, and of how landscape character, environmental capacity and local context inform decision making, would support more effective mitigation and enhancement and more resilient, place-based outcomes.

Section 5: Monitoring Emissions Reductions

Questions 26–28

No response.

Section 6: Monitoring Just Transition

Questions 29–33

Whether the transition is experienced as fair will depend largely on how climate action affects everyday environments and access to high-quality places. Existing inequalities in access to greenspace, public realm quality and exposure to climate risks mean impacts will be felt unevenly.

Monitoring frameworks should place greater emphasis on place-based evidence, including indicators relating to landscape and place quality, access to green and blue infrastructure, and long-term stewardship. Involving landscape expertise in monitoring and evaluation will support a more nuanced understanding of cumulative effects and help ensure the transition delivers fair, high-quality outcomes for communities across Scotland.

Conclusion

The Landscape Institute supports the ambition of Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan 2026–2040 and the commitment to delivering climate action through a just transition. Our response highlights the importance of landscape-led, place-based approaches in translating this ambition into effective delivery on the ground. Embedding landscape expertise across planning, design, implementation and monitoring will be essential to ensuring that climate action delivers lasting benefits for nature, communities and the quality of Scotland's places. We look forward to continued engagement as the Plan is finalised and implemented.

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