

A Future Vision for the Landscape Institute
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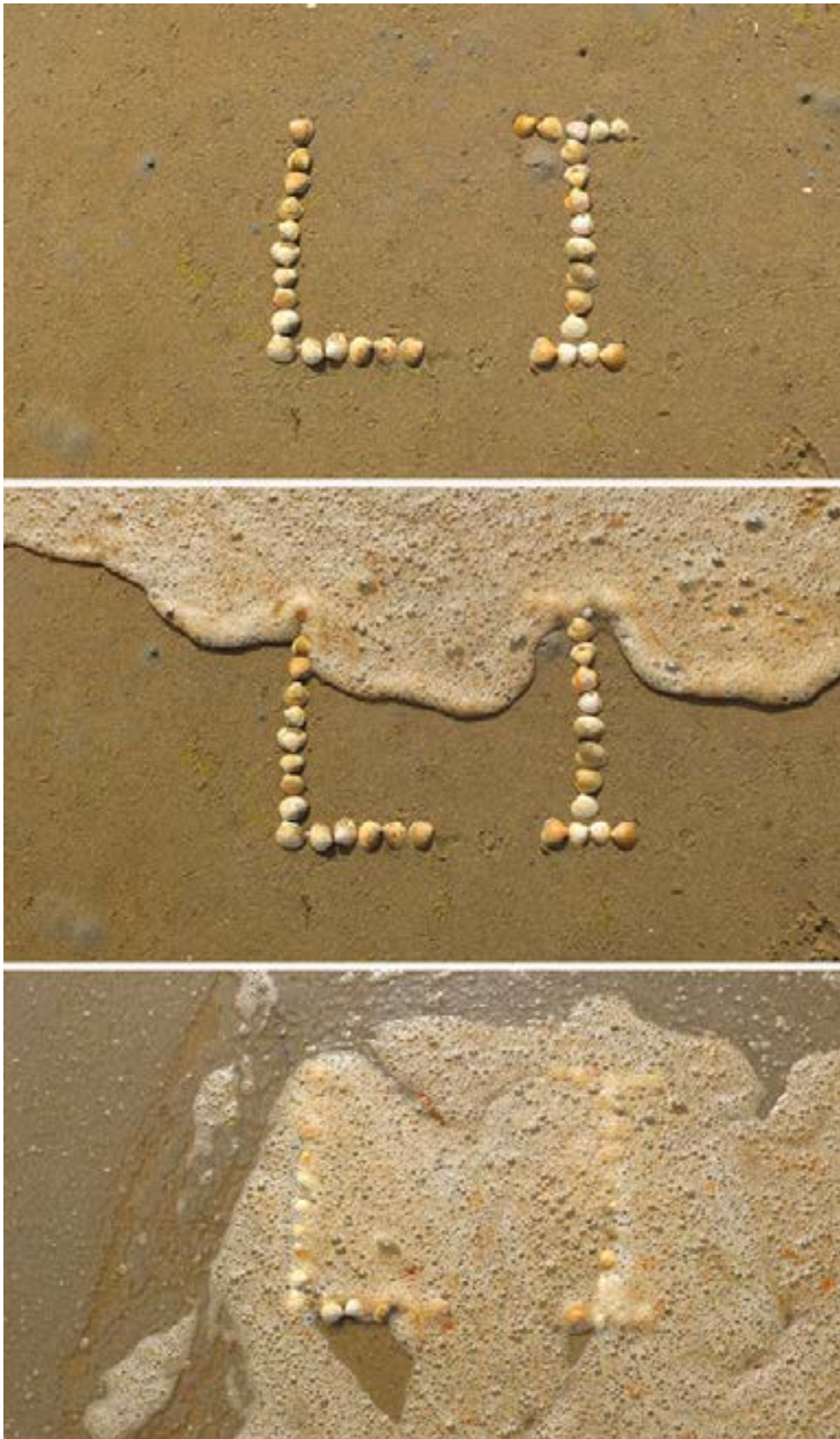


Fig 1 What is the Landscape Institute's future?

Landscape architecture is one of the world's most important professions. Yet it needs the support of an active and vocal professional body. The old ILA stepped up to this challenge. We had high hopes for the re-formed Landscape Institute when it was launched in 1975. Members of the public find the term 'landscape architecture' non-intuitive. So the focus on 'our most important word', **landscape**, might have helped - and might yet. But we need to publicise the many ways in which the landscape profession can help create more sustainable landscapes, more functional landscapes and more beautiful landscapes. Members of the profession can work together to achieve these goals. We are lucky that so many people have worked to create a professional organisation dedicated to our interests. We believe the Landscape Institute needs to re-formed, re-focussed and re-energised. This is most likely to happen with the full and active participation of the membership.



Fig 2 Of all the design professions, landscape architecture has the greatest potential to give society pleasure. The fulfilment and colourful enjoyment of this potential should be at the core of the Institute's ethos. But this is not the present situation (watercolour by Edward Hutchison)

THE CONDITION OF THE LI

The LI had a financial crisis in 2009 and disposal of the LI Library and Archive was one of the money-saving options considered. This led to an Extraordinary General Meeting of the LI in 2010, at which the proposal was shelved. The 2010 EGM was very well attended. This interest should be celebrated and put to good effect. Some of those who had petitioned for the EGM therefore formed a Landscape Institute Reform Group to consider future options for the LI. It was conceived as a think tank and as a group which could encourage the LI's leaders and members to 'gear up' for the challenges of the twenty-first century. If it does not change and adapt the LI could wither away. The high level of engagement shown in 2010 has not been maintained. Only 18% of members voted in the 2013 elections. Why are so many landscape architects uninvolved in the professional body? Do they believe that the LI is an irrelevance? We do not know. But we would like to see a return of the enthusiasm with which members promoted landscape architecture in the yearly years of the Institute's existence. This was

chronicled in 1979 by Tony Aldous and Brian Clouston in *Landscape by Design*¹. Brian Clouston has been an active contributor to the Reform Group, along with Hal Moggridge, another former president, and many current and former elected officers. Brian has just served two years as LI Vice President. The Reform Group has met regularly since 2009 and welcomed LI President Sue Illman's, launch of a debate on a Future Vision for the LI in 2013. This article, which is a short summary of ideas which the Reform Group has debated, is put to the membership for consideration. Not all members of the RG support all these proposals, but they have arisen from the debate.

A WITHERING PROFESSION?

Our underlying concern (see Fig 1) is that the Landscape Institute is withering in the botanical sense of becoming dry and shrivelled. In its early days, particularly under the leadership of Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe, Dame Sylvia Crowe and Brenda Colvin, the Institute had a dynamic approach to publicising and popularising the art and practice of landscape architecture. The Royal Charter gave us a welcome status but also led to the ossification of our procedures which made it difficult for the membership to be involved. Larger organisations need more structure than smaller organisations, but structures must not get in the way of debate and innovation.

LI ELECTORAL REFORM

The first and foremost requirement is to convert the LI into an effective participatory democracy. All candidates for Council should stand for election on uncensored manifestos (approximately 1000 words, expressed as texts, podcasts or videocasts) Elections to all posts should be free to all full members, with no longevity restrictions on who can stand. Those who are elected should take up their positions immediately. All significant decisions under consideration, by the Trustees, Council and Branches, should be aired on the Talking Landscape Forum, inviting members to comment. Officers should also join the discussion. There should be a diligent effort to increase the proportion of the membership which votes at elections - the 18% in 2013, points to a serious democratic deficit. The franchise should be extended to Licentiate Members and Retired Members. When their number is taken into account, the participation in the 2013 election was well below 18%.

LI STRUCTURE

The structural separation between the Trustees, the Advisory Council, the Executive, the Branches and the Membership has become a barrier to democracy and to member participation. A commitment to transparency and greater use of online communication and debate could do much to re-rejuvenate the LI's operations while also reducing costs. We recommend a period of organisational experiment before any new structures are codified. It may be that the new administrative structure will involve (1) bringing the Trustees and the Advisory Council back together as a single body (2) preceding meetings with online discussions, so that meeting time can concentrate on the discussion of contentious issues. The 'problem of the invisible divisions' (Landscape Design, Landscape Management and Landscape Science) should be resolved in a way which lets the LI promote its members' skills in urban design, garden design, landscape planning, landscape assessment, character assessment and ecological and sustainability sciences and other specialist aspects of the profession. The RICS has effective divisions so the LI could follow its example.

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

When taking on new employees, the LI should give preference to qualified landscape architects with a deep understanding of and, we hope, a long-term commitment to the well-being of the landscape profession. The LI's present Central London office should be closed as soon as possible (2015 is the next lease renewal date on Charles Darwin House). It is probable that the LI would benefit from (1) a small London office in a central location, for meetings etc (2) a low cost back-office at a location central to the British Isles with good transport links and lower rents than London (3) branch offices (with hot desks staffed by part-time landscape architecture staff). The Open University was located in Milton Keynes for similar reasons and does as much of its work as possible online. The LI should aim to become as much of a 'virtual' (web-based) organization as it can, with as little as possible spent on staff and offices as possible. Full consideration should be given to outsourcing business processes and using video conferencing instead of physical meetings. One council meeting/year should be held during the Chelsea Flower Show and other venues in order to promote the profession to a wide and sympathetic audience and to provide publicity for landscape architecture (the RHS membership was over 383,000 in 2012).

TRANSPARENCY

Any LI financial data which has to be confidential should be defined. All other LI data should be made accessible to members online, so that everyone can share in the responsibility for scrutiny and the consequences of decisions, particularly with regard to resource allocation and expenditure data (both fixed and variable). This data should be prefaced by a discussion of the alternative expenditure plans considered by the Institute's committees. Members should be encouraged to say which budget items deserve more expenditure - and where reductions should be made to cover this expenditure.

One of the basic functions of a professional institute is to bring people together, yet (because of a misguided interpretation of the Data Protection Act) the LI does not give members contact details. Yet unless members personally object there is no reason why it should not make email addresses available to other members. All it takes is one annual email to all members asking them to object to their details being published. An example of how to do this is the membership list of the RICS which lists emails and telephone numbers².

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The LI should allocate less of its resources to 'status symbols' (e.g. a large London office, a large staff and a glossy journal) and more of its resources to influencing public debate and decision-making. The Institute should explain how the landscape of town and country can be conserved and improved – and how the landscape profession can contribute to this task. A substantial proportion of the Practice Registration fees should go on advocacy and, since the promotion of a better landscape needs to be local as well as national, another substantial slice of the LI's resources should be allocated to active Branches with good uses for the money.

DEVOLUTION

More financial resources and more responsibility should be devolved to the Branches, particularly for policy making. This is because context-sensitive design is at the heart of landscape design. For the devolved nations environmental policy is decided in Edinburgh,

Cardiff and Belfast. The branches should appoint local policy officers to promote policies for landscape improvement and conservation at the local level: this is already recognised by the LI in its policy of appointing officers for the three devolved governments, covering the areas of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish branches.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Since the landscape profession is knowledge-intensive and skills-intensive, the LI should allocate more money to Information Resources and should utilise the archive now housed at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) in Reading. This is how we can become a highly-skilled profession. The new LI's offices should contain extensive information resources, to encourage it to act as a Think Tank. LI publications should be edited from this resource base. We should review all books of potential interest to landscape architects - so that their publishers get into the habit of sending us free copies for our members to read, perhaps as postal loans.

PUBLICATIONS

Publishing should be a major aspect of the LI's activities, as it was in the 1940s and 1950s. The LI should re-establish good links with the Landscape Architecture Foundation, a charity which was set up by the Institute to promote landscape architecture. The paper journal, *Landscape*, should be replaced by a range of high quality, professionally edited online publications, mostly written by landscape architects. There can be provision for Print-On-Demand (POD) for those who prefer print editions. The Talking Landscapes Forum should be supplemented with a discussion forum on the public LI website - which can be used to discuss issues relating to the improvement, conservation and sustainability of the landscape. Editorial direction of the LI website should be in the hands of a qualified landscape architect.

EDUCATION

The Pathway to Chartership should be developed so that staff with 10+ years of qualifying experience can go straight to an interview without having to undertake the full P2C route as is usual elsewhere in Europe (e.g Germany and Scandinavia). Entry to Chartership should require a masters degree or equivalent for all applicants (i.e. including those who can, at present, join as landscape managers with only a Bachelors level qualification). Consideration should be given to incorporating an element of voluntary work, for the benefit of the landscape, in the P2C programme and in continuing career-long CPD. It could be for the LI or for local communities. The cost of the P2C should be reduced to, for example, 20% of its present cost and should be entirely covered by charges to candidates undertaking the pathway (or their employers). Currently the system runs at a loss. The LI should use its good offices to promote the integration of landscape practice with landscape education and research in the universities. The aims should be to provide a stronger research-base for practice and a strong practice-base for teaching and research.

POLICY STATEMENTS

We are very pleased that in recent years the LI has put more effort into the promotion of landscape policies and would like to see a substantial expansion of this initiative. As large a proportion of the membership as possible should become involved in writing, illustrating and promulgating policies relating to the landscape of town and country. Since the promulgation of landscape policies should become a much more significant aspect of the work of the Institute

and its branches, we prepared a list of over 100 Landscape Policy/Position Statements for consideration³. They are summarised below and listed on the Talking Landscapes website. Policy statements are a means by which the landscape profession can 'set out its stall': to explain what we can do for society and the environment, to explain why people should join the profession, to explain some of the specialist areas in which landscape architects can provide advice and to set out a vision for improving what Geoffrey Jellicoe called The Collective Landscape (which would itself be a good topic for a Policy Statement). Policies should be formulated and promulgated at both branch and national levels. They should be widely distributed, in print and online, and should go to political parties at local and national levels. Policy statements should take the form of 1-5 pages of text + 2-3 good illustrations + a Press Release. Those which attract interest can then be expanded into longer documents. The short versions of the policy statements should be released on a regular basis (eg the 1st of each month) so that editors know they can rely on the Landscape Institute for a regular supply of good stories and ideas relating to landscape and environmental issues. All policy statements should be available online (as both .html and .pdf files). Policies should be drafted with as much help as possible from the membership at large, to take advantage of 'the wisdom of crowds'. Never forgetting the axiom that all publicity is good publicity, we should take some risks and should not be afraid to issue revised policies. It is likely that some policies will relate to the whole UK, some to the devolved assemblies and some to specific cities or regions. Each policy should be regularly updated and policy statements should be sent to both government and spokesmen of political parties in both Westminster and the devolved governments in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast.

- NATIONAL LANDSCAPE PLANNING
- LOCAL LANDSCAPE PLANNING
- SUSTAINABILITY
- TRANSPORT RELATED POLICIES
- LANDSCAPE DESIGN
- URBAN LANDSCAPE DESIGN
- HOUSING
- CONSERVATION
- GARDENS and PLANTS
- WATER
- THE LANDSCAPE PROFESSION
- INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN LANDSCAPE DESIGN
- LANDSCAPE AND ENERGY
- LANDSCAPE AND MINERALS
- TRANSPORT RELATED POLICIES
- WATER

Fig 3 The Reform Group has proposed 118 LI policy statements in the above groups

This is a long and ambitious list, but the statements could be done at a rate of, say, one/month. Several have been drafted in the past. Many can be produced fairly quickly. Each should cover implementation, costs, benefits and funding sources. Some will be the responsibility of particular branches. The LI's Policy and Technical Committees would act more as reviewers than taking on all the work themselves. This would involve the regions. Practices could take on some subject areas, just as Arup are working on sustainability policy and landscape with the Institute at present. Some universities could take on some areas (e.g. Sheffield is working on

green roofs, Edinburgh on accessibility and Greenwich on desertification, we have a dozen landscape schools so each could prepare at least one policy statement). Such a programme of policy statements could galvanize the Institute.



Fig 4 Landscapes are for yesterday, today and tomorrow

CONCLUSION

Landscape Architecture has much to offer society. We need to remember our past, plan for the future realize our potential as a profession. The underlying aim of these proposals and policies is that the Landscape Institute should continue to serve its purpose, as described in the Royal Charter, "to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public by promoting the arts and sciences of Landscape Architecture".

¹ Aldous, T Clouston, B., *Landscape by Design* London:Heinemann 1979

² <http://www.rics.org/uk/find-a-member/>

³ <http://www.talkinglandscape.org/forum/topics/reform-group-list-of-118-suggested-advocacy-initiatives>