



ISEP
Impact Assessment

Environmental Clerks of Works:
**INDUSTRY GUIDING
PRINCIPLES FOR
DEVELOPMENTS**





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SUPPORTING GUIDANCE

At the time of writing, the following supporting guidance was available with regards to the role of an EnvCoW, which have been used to inform the Principles:

- Heads of Planning Scotland Energy and Resources Sub-Committee (2023). [Position Statement on the Role of Environmental Clerk of Works within the Planning System](#).
- Association of Environmental Clerks of Works (AEnvCoW) (2026). [Position Statement on the Role of an Environmental Clerk of Works](#).
- Institute of Clerks of Works & Construction Inspectorate of GB Inc. (2018). Ecological and Environmental Clerks of Works: Focus on Quality & Outcomes in [Clerk of Works and Site Inspector Handbook](#), Section 13. Purchase only.
- Institute of Sustainability and Environmental professionals (ISEP, while IEMA) (2024). [Monitoring Mitigation in Implementing the Mitigation Hierarchy from Concept to Construction](#), Section 7, pp.70-3.



INTRODUCTION

Environmental compliance during construction

Contractors are expected to comply with the construction contract, and legislation, but there can often be competing priorities between the two, and few contractual options/recourses for the developer to convert environmental non-compliance into penalties. This is usually compounded by poor independent environmental/planning monitoring systems, which are often reliant on self-regulation. This does not work well in commercial contracts, particularly as there are currently no environmental compliance monitoring regulations in place requiring developers and contractors to demonstrate their environmental compliance. This scenario dis-incentivises developers and contractors from delivering their environmental commitments and mitigation, and it is further compounded by poor contractor/developer compliance monitoring and reporting, that is often not publicly available.

Due to the current situation, it is highly likely that environmental risk is being realised on every construction project in the country, which results in impacts beyond the predictions and commitments in planning applications and pre-consent environmental assessments. Therefore, it is highly likely that development projects are significantly, yet discreetly, contributing to the Biodiversity and Climate Crises during their construction.

Establishing good practice

The Association of Environmental Clerks of Works (AEnvCoW) has developed these Industry Guiding Principles ('the Principles') set out in this document with support from its partners and stakeholders. They are the first UK principles on good practice with regards to the role of an Environmental Clerk of Works (EnvCoW).

The Principles provide a framework to help drive compliance and improve environmental outcomes during construction. They also provide a mechanism for development projects to demonstrate that they implement good environmental practice.

It is important that the Principles are tested, refined and improved through feedback and review. A Working Group co-ordinated by AEnvCoW will aim to carry out a review within 24 months from publication.

In the longer term, AEnvCoW aims to demonstrate the need for new regulations regarding environmental management and monitoring on development projects, with establishing similar provisions equivalent to those for health and safety in the [Construction \(Design and Management\) Regulations 2015](#).

It is beyond the scope of the Principles to address potential contractual and liability challenges, as that needs to be led by other industry stakeholders, whose remit and expertise cover these topics. However, AEnvCoW aims to carry out further consultation, so the necessary industry changes regarding construction contracts and liabilities are achieved, so these Principles can be fully implemented.



PRINCIPLES



PRINCIPLE 1

What an EnvCoW is

An EnvCoW is an independent environmental professional responsible for monitoring and reporting on environmental compliance during the construction phase¹ of a development project. Their role is to assess compliance against approved consent documents, relevant regulations/legislation and good practice. EnvCoW assessment reports are then communicated by the EnvCoW in a transparent and timely manner to the project delivery team², consenting body and/or Local Planning Authority.



PRINCIPLE 2

What an EnvCoW is not

An EnvCoW does not deliver or enforce compliance, apply for or hold project permits in their name, nor do they issue instructions or design/implement mitigation measures, especially as this could be construed as influencing the design under the CDM Regulations. The project delivery team is entirely responsible for meeting the project's environmental obligations. This is achieved through environmental managers, environmental advisors, environmental engineers, or Ecological Clerks of Works (EcCoW³/project ecologists or other technical specialist roles). It is the responsibility of the project delivery team to ensure that they understand, and are familiar with, all relevant planning information prior to the commencement of works.



PRINCIPLE 3

Environmental documentation

Before appointing an EnvCoW, project delivery teams should have a register of site-specific commitments detailing how approved environmental/ecological obligations, including mitigation⁴, will be delivered. The EnvCoW's role is to independently, and impartially, assess compliance with the delivery of the commitments/obligations/mitigation.

¹ EnvCoWs are primarily used for construction but may also be appointed for other project stages including mobilisation, decommissioning, demolition and repowering.

² For these purposes the Project Delivery Team is defined as the Developer, Principal Contractor and their Subcontractors ie. those responsible for delivering the project.

³ Project roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined at the start of the project, including the identification of individuals responsible for delivering/achieving/ensuring compliance (ie. a named Environmental Manager).

⁴ Any plans regarding the delivery of these must be prepared by suitably qualified environmental professionals and agreed with the Consenting Body/Local Planning Authority and relevant environmental regulators. These plans are often regulated through pre-commencement conditions.



PRINCIPLE 4

Independence and transparency

An EnvCoW appointment, and scope, must be independent, transparent and fair. Therefore, an EnvCoW should be funded by the developer and appointed by the consenting body or Local Planning Authority, as set out in Figure 1. This approach is also advocated in the aforementioned Heads of Planning Scotland guidance.

AEnvCoW recognises that the industry needs to address the contractual challenges to achieve this approach and highlights the need for industry EnvCoW frameworks and standards. This approach has already been implemented elsewhere in the industry. For example, the appointment of Planning Monitoring Officers (PMO) by South Lanarkshire Council through a PMO framework. AEnvCoW defers to that appointment model, which it considers has set the precedence for this approach.

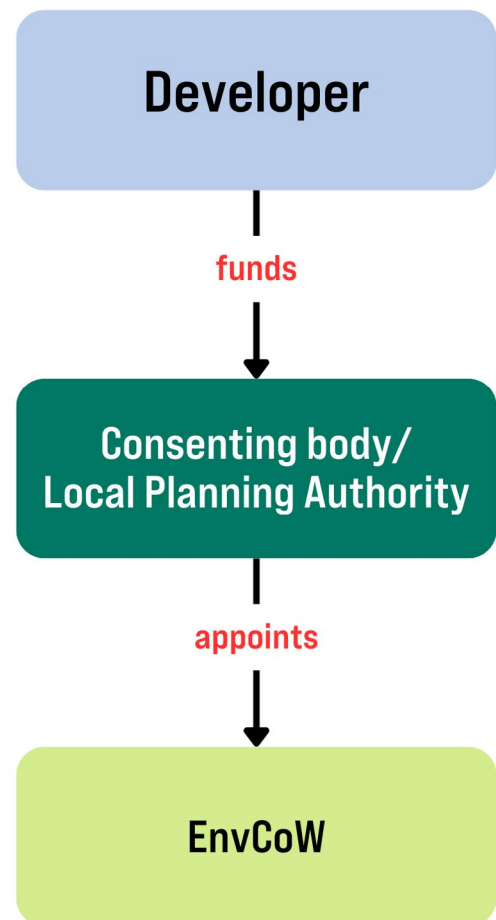
The Planning Inspectorate has a similar position that independent compliance monitoring is carried out by Local Planning Authorities on major infrastructure projects⁵, which is often funded by the developer. This is to avoid any potential conflict, or compromise, which may otherwise arise, if the role were to be financially vested in the project.

To achieve true independence, EnvCoWs (and their organisations) should not have been involved with the project prior to appointment and, ideally, they should not have been employed by the project delivery team for any other current projects that they are working on elsewhere (ie. there should be no current relationship that may influence monitoring and reporting). Research supports this approach as key to fair, transparent monitoring⁶ but it is recognised that this is an industry challenge, given current supply/demand of services.

Developers and contractors may also voluntarily appoint their own EnvCoWs, as they are recognised as a beneficial compliance tool to support projects; however, this is not in substitution of an independently appointed EnvCoW that is required by planning conditions.

In terms of an EnvCoW's scope, as highlighted in Principles 1 & 3, it is to independently audit the environmental compliance of development projects, namely through site visit inspections, in accordance with the key criteria outlined in Principle 6.

Figure 1: Recommended appointment route for an EnvCoW



⁵ The Planning Inspectorate (2015). [The Role of Local Authorities in the Development Consent Process](#).

⁶ Glasson, J., Durning, B., Broderick, M. & Welch, K. (2021). Monitoring and auditing the local socio-economic and environmental impacts of the early-stage construction of Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station, UK. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal* 39(2).



PRINCIPLE 5

When an EnvCoW is required

The need for an EnvCoW should be evaluated case by case, using a precautionary approach based on the sensitivity of the location and the risk from the development. It is suggested that consenting bodies use planning permission and associated condition(s) to trigger the requirement for an EnvCoW. Other regulatory routes include, but are not limited to:

- Development Consent Orders
- Licences under devolved legislation of the Water Framework Directives
- Protected species mitigation licences
- Pollution Prevention and Control Permits
- Consents under The Roads Act
- Consents under Section 36/37 of the Electricity Act 1989 [Scotland].



PRINCIPLE 6

Defining compliance

EnvCoWs monitor compliance based on three main categories:

- Consent documents
- Regulations/legislation
- Industry good practice guidance.

Ideally, the designer⁷ should define compliance criteria so it can be quantitatively assessed, where possible, to enable objective monitoring⁸ against baseline and consent conditions⁹. These criteria should be reviewed by consenting bodies or the Local Planning Authority, and agreed on as part of the planning process (often this is as pre-commencement conditions). This data-driven, evidence-based approach minimises subjectivity and maximises fair, transparent monitoring.

It is advised that the project delivery team avoids defining compliance, as there is a reasonable risk that the criteria that they define is not fair or transparent due to their vested interest in the project. Therefore, to achieve unbiased and impartial criteria, the designer is considered to be best placed to achieve this and reduce the risk of criteria being set unreasonably low. However, it is recognised that this may require a step-change in construction contracts to achieve.

Setting out wider industry roles and responsibilities is beyond the scope of this Principle but it is recommended that this is addressed in the development of Good Practice Guidelines for EnvCoWs.



PRINCIPLE 7

Risk identification

The project delivery team is responsible for identifying and managing environmental risks. Where an EnvCoW identifies a potential new risk, they will notify the project delivery team for them to facilitate risk management. It is the responsibility of the project delivery team to communicate any change in circumstances with the relevant Local Planning Authority and/or other consenting bodies (eg. Natural England, Marine Management Organisation, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Energy Consents Unit).

⁷ As defined in the CDM Regulations.

⁸ Where quantitative assessment is not possible, a method of qualitative assessment should be agreed at the start of the project to reduce subjectivity in so far as possible.

⁹ Criteria should define thresholds/compliance for good practice, legislation and permit conditions.



PRINCIPLE 8

Inspection frequency

The EnvCoW and the consenting body/Local Planning Authority should determine compliance monitoring frequency in consultation with the developer. As a guideline, at least one EnvCoW inspection per week is required during construction, with increased frequency at the start of a project and during high-risk activities for environmental and ecological receptors.

Inspections should also be carried out during other phases in the construction programme, such as during ground investigations, enabling works and defects periods. This does not substitute the need for the principal contractor to bring in technical specialists to achieve compliance, such as archaeologists and ecologists.

Inspection frequency should be proportionate to environmental risk levels, with lower-risk activities/sensitivity receptors receiving fewer inspections (ranging from a minimum of once per week through to full-time presence, perhaps with a team of EnvCoWs for major infrastructure projects).

The Local Planning Authority/consenting body, in consultation with the EnvCoW, will determine visit schedules in consultation with the project delivery team.



PRINCIPLE 9

Reporting

If identified, the EnvCoW will report non-compliance to the project delivery team as soon as practically possible. This depends on the nature/scale of the non-compliance and could range from 'immediately' (for non-compliance with high environmental risk), to 'within 24 hours' (for those with lower environmental risk). It is intended that this process enables a prompt corrective action from the project delivery team to minimise potential impacts.

EnvCoW reports¹⁰ will be submitted to the consenting body and project delivery team (simultaneously) at least once a month, with increased frequency for activities that pose high-risk to environmental and/or ecological receptors or environmentally and/or ecologically sensitive sites. They should include relevant context to support informed decision-making. Alongside this, reports should be uploaded to the public planning system to provide a transparent feedback loop and be recorded in a central repository.

The EnvCoW reports are a snapshot in time and it is expected that the project delivery team will address non-compliances through corrective actions which the EnvCoW is expected to assess in subsequent inspections, and reports.



PRINCIPLE 10

Enforcement

In the event of non-compliance, it is not the role of the EnvCoW to take enforcement action, it is the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority or other consenting bodies.

¹⁰ Reports should be based upon a standardised framework/templates, customised to address project specific issues.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Next steps

The Principles set out in this document are the first step in addressing key inconsistencies within the industry to establish a broad framework to achieving fair and transparent environmental compliance monitoring. Further, specific details for the scope, role and responsibility, and good practice for EnvCoWs will be provided through the development of further guidance.

AEnvCoW is developing follow-on guidance and will carry out stakeholder consultation to ensure it is credible and achievable.

How you can get involved

If you would like to be involved in the follow-on good practice guidance for EnvCoW's, please contact projects@aenvcow.org. It is AEnvCoW's aim to carry out stakeholder consultation and publish them with ISEP in 2026.

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CLERKS OF WORKS (AENVCOW)

How we deliver development projects matters. The Association of Environmental Clerks of Works (AEnvCoW) is the UK and Ireland's professional body for Environmental Clerks of Works (EnvCoWs) and industry professionals who want to drive environmental compliance during delivery of projects. We shine a light on all environmental roles and organisational responsibilities in the development chain. This is critical to avoid inappropriate delegation of responsibility through contracting arrangements and setting goals for projects and people that cannot be achieved.

Our mission is to raise professional standards and promote the EnvCoW role within development teams to better drive environmental compliance. Through knowledge sharing, good practice guidance and collaboration with regulators, policy makers and other industry bodies, we aim to make the EnvCoW role standard practice on projects where environmental risks exist and clarify contractor and developer responsibilities. At the heart of our work is a commitment to safeguarding the natural environment while supporting innovative and sustainable construction practices and responsible development.

If you care about environmental compliance and want to make a difference, then join AEnvCoW and become part of our community, either as a member or on our Delivery Team.



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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS (ISEP)

Sustainability matters. Environmentally, economically and socially.

The Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP) – formerly known as IEMA – is the global membership body for anyone wanting sustainable change that delivers across government, business and society.

By harnessing the collective expertise and experience of our global membership, we set the standard in sustainable leadership, knowledge, skills and practice.

Whether you're an environmental specialist, a sustainability generalist, or just want to be a champion for change in your area – we empower people with cutting-edge evidence and insights, enable with world-class training and guidance, and ensure excellence with unrivalled professional standards and assessment.

We are passionate about uniting talent, creating collaborations and forming networks that influence government policy, drive best-practice within business, and inspire change across society.

No matter what stage you're at in your career or what sector you work in, we can equip you with the skills, standards and support needed to nurture your talent and advance your career.

Join ISEP and become an agent of change, transforming the world today for a sustainable future.



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