

NATIONAL UPDATES

Purpose

To advise members of activity nationally relating to National Landscapes in England and Wales.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- DEFRA have published 'Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes'. The National Landscapes Association has also produced 'Guidance for Local Planning Authorities' on applying the strengthened duty.
- DEFRA have yet to confirm the funding allocations for National Landscapes, apart from continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) officer posts.
- Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have confirmed provisional National Landscape allocations for 2025/26 and 2026/27 subject to final approval of Welsh Government Budget in late March.
- Welsh Government have published 'Good Practice Guidance: Planning for the Conservation and Enhancement of Dark Skies'. This also launched Wales Dark Skies Week.
- Plans are progressing for Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales Seminar at Caer Llan, Lydart on 30th April and 1st May.
- The National Landscapes Association published its 5 year Strategy
- The National Landscapes Association hosted a Lead Officers Meeting in Birmingham in mid February, focusing on the top policy and advocacy priorities for 2025/26.
- The National Landscapes Annual Conference will be 8th – 10th July 2025 at Winchester University, on the topic of 'Are National Landscapes "Fit for the Future?"'

Reasons

December 2025 was the 75th anniversary of the passing of the landmark post-war legislation that led to the creation of National Parks and National Landscapes. DEFRA Environment Secretary has announced the commitment for new powers to be granted to the country's iconic National Parks and National Landscapes to boost nature's recovery and access to the outdoors. Both governments have expressed their on-going support for National Landscapes. However, it is recognised that public resources and the Spending Review are constrained by national and international factors.

Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 amended and Section 85 of the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, strengthening the 'duty' on relevant authorities in England, in respect of their functions which affect land in National Landscapes,

Implications

DEFRA published their Guidance for Relevant Authorities on the strengthened 'duty' on in England, in respect of their functions which affect land in National Landscapes. The DEFRA Guidance is here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-protected-landscapes-duty/guidance-for-relevant-authorities-on-seeking-to-further-the-purposes-of-protected-landscapes> . The National Landscapes Association has also produced Guidance for Local Planning Authorities, available here: <https://national-landscapes.org.uk/guidance-for-local-planning-authorities-on-crow-s-85-duty>

The new legislation is gathering case law, with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities accepting that a failure to apply the statutory duty 'to seek to further the purposes' in Dedham Vale National Landscape was an 'error of law'. This arose through a challenge to the Manningtree Railway Station Car Park development. For more detail see <https://national-landscapes.org.uk/news/disregarding-the-protected-landscapes-duty-is-an-error-of-law> .

A recent Planning Appeal ruling in the Forest of Dean also referenced the strengthened duty, with the Planning Inspector stating "Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 as amended (the Act) requires that I seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB." Consequently the appeal was dismissed due harmful effects on the character and appearance of the area, including the Wye Valley National Landscape [Appeal Ref: APP/P1615/W/24/3348029].

Coinciding with the start of Wales Dark Skies Week, Welsh Government published 'Good Practice Guidance: Planning for the Conservation and Enhancement of Dark Skies'. This makes Wales the first UK nation to introduce national good practice guidance to help protect its dark skies. The guidance was produced through close partnership between Welsh Government, local authorities, Wales' Designated Landscapes and Natural Resources Wales, and is endorsed by DarkSky International. The document is available here: <https://www.gov.wales/dark-skies-guidance>.

The Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales Seminar will be on 30th April & 1st May 2025 in the Wye Valley National Landscape, based at Caer Llan. The programme is being finalised, but will focus on Farming in the Designated Landscapes of Wales and opportunities to address the nature and climate emergencies, panel discussions, workshops and networking opportunities. The Wye Valley National Landscape Team will host visits to 2 local farms and Cleddon Big SSSI.

The National Landscapes Association published its Strategy for 2025-2031, with the Vision of "Beautiful landscapes where nature and people thrive together". The 'one-page' strategy summary is attached, the full Strategy document is available here: <https://national-landscapes.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/images/Documents/Strategy/Strategy-2025-to-2031-English.pdf?dm=1732892746>

In mid February the National Landscapes Association hosted the annual Lead Officers Meeting in Birmingham, which focused on the top policy and advocacy priorities for 2025/26. These included: robustly implementing the duty to 'seek to further the purpose'; better articulating the benefits of National Landscapes; leading the way on nature recovery and climate action; influencing debate on National Landscape purpose(s), and: securing 3 year funding commensurate with the tasks demanded by Government.

The National Landscapes Annual Conference is on 8th – 10th July 2025 at Winchester University. The conference will address the topic of 'Are National Landscapes "Fit for the Future?"' It will provide the opportunity for delegates to share insights, collaborate and inspire change in addressing the pressures on our landscapes while fostering solutions that promote both natural beauty and sustainable development for the landscapes of tomorrow.

The programme is still being finalised, but for further details see: <https://www.national-landscapes-conference.org.uk/>. Field trip hosts (with details TBC) are as follows:

- Chichester Harbour National Landscape
- Cranborne Chase National Landscape
- Isle of Wight National Landscape
- The New Forest National Park
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- South Downs National Park
- Surrey Hills National Landscape
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Background

The National Landscape Association, formerly the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), is a national charity which works to make sure the UK's most outstanding landscapes are beautiful, thriving places that everyone can feel part of. It supports the UK's network of National Landscapes to help them to be as effective as possible. For more information see <https://www.national-landscapes.org.uk/>