

NATIONAL UPDATES

Purpose

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

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- In order to test the strengthened duty on relevant authorities who 'must seek to further the purpose' of Protected Landscapes, the Campaign for National Parks supporting a Judicial Review challenging a Secretary of State's decision to allow a significant housing development in the High Weald National Landscape.
- The National Landscapes Annual Conference is 7th – 10th July on the theme of 'Landscapes for Tomorrow - Are National Landscapes "Fit for the Future?"', with good attendance from the Wye Valley National Landscape Team.
- The Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales Seminar was hosted at Caer Llan, Lydart on 30th April and 1st May, along with the Ministerial launch of Ffermio Bro at Meend Farm.
- DEFRA have launched a 'Call for evidence' to seek insights into how best to support and incentivise business sector investment in nature recovery, especially those sectors which impact or depend upon nature the most. The Call for Evidence is open until 10 August.
- The Spending Review has imposed an overall 2.3% cut to DEFRA over the period to 2029. Confirmation of National Landscape funding beyond the current allocation to March 2026 is awaited.

Reasons

Both governments have expressed their on-going support for National Landscapes. However, the Spending Review, that sets out the government's plans to invest in Britain's renewal: its security, health and economy, has constrained the ambition of DEFRA.

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, so that they "must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty". The new legislation is starting to gather case law.

Implications

The High Court is considering a Judicial Review brought by CPRE Kent that challenges a Secretary of State's decision to greenlight a significant housing development on the meadows of the High Weald National Landscape. The case will be a fundamental test of what the new Protected Landscapes duty means in practice. This is one of the first legal cases to consider what the strengthened duty means and will therefore set a legally binding precedent on interpreting the duty in future for all of England's 10 National Parks and 34 National Landscapes. Consequently the Campaign for National Parks has intervened to put the argument before the court that this duty is about action not words: it is a proactive duty that should make a material and significant difference to the outcome. The outcome is awaited.

The National Landscapes Annual Conference is on 7th – 10th July 2025 at Winchester University. The conference will address the topic of 'Are National Landscapes "Fit for the Future?"' It provides 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 Wye Valley National Landscape Team will have a strong attendance this year, enabling new Team members to gain a perspective on the depth and breadth of the network of National Landscapes. The programme is available to here: <https://www.national-landscapes-conference.org.uk/>, and includes a Ministerial address by Mary Creagh, DEFRA Parliamentary Under-Secretary.

Field trip hosts 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
- 101 Outdoor Arts

The Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales Seminar was hosted in the Wye Valley on 30th April & 1st May 2025. Caer Llan provided a stunning venue, aided by fine weather, for the 60 delegates from across Wales' 5 National Landscapes and 3 National Parks. The programme focused 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 hosted site visits to Meend Farm, Lower Gockett Farm and Cleddon Big SSSI. The event incorporated the official launch of Ffermio Bro by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies, at Meend Farm, Penallt.

DEFRA has launched a Call for Evidence on boosting private sector investment in nature recovery. Environment Secretary Steve Reed brought business leaders and investors together to launch the initiative to scale up private investment in nature, delivering a key recommendation of the Corry Review. The Call for Evidence is open for responses until 10 August 2025. For further details see <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/expanding-the-role-of-the-private-sector-in-nature-recovery>.

The Spending Review 2025 has set out Government's plans to invest in Britain's renewal: its security, health and economy. SR25 sets departmental budgets for day-to-day spending until 2028-29, and until 2029-30 for capital investment, with total departmental budgets growing by 2.3% across the Spending Review (SR) period. It also sets devolved government block grants for the same period.

However, overall DEFRA received a 2.3% reduction. Meanwhile the Government reiterated its steadfast commitment to farming, food security, and nature's recovery. It will invest over £2.7 billion per year in sustainable farming and nature recovery from 2026-27 until 2028-29. Farmers will benefit from an average of £2.3 billion through the Farming and Countryside Programme and up to £400 million from additional nature schemes. This is aimed to boost productivity and protect the natural ecosystems underpinning food production and broader economic activity, supporting food and economic security. This includes increasing support for nature-friendly farming through Environmental Land Management schemes from £800 million in 2023-24 to £2 billion by 2028-29, sustained by rapidly winding down subsidy payments that do not provide a return on investment. This will make a significant contribution to the Environment Act targets, including improving the quality of water, air, and spaces for wildlife so biodiversity can thrive. DEFRA has also committed to delivering at least 5% savings and efficiencies over Phase 2 of the SR period.

Commenting on the Spending Review, Belinda Gordon, Director of Policy & Public Affairs at the Landscape Institute, said:

"The need to make every pound go further underlines the vital role taking a landscape-led approach needs to play in delivering efficiently across government agendas in housing, health and the environment.

"Through landscape-led approaches to development, we can deliver economic growth and long-term value as well as benefits for the environment and local communities. Placing landscape at the heart of the planning and development process creates enhanced value. The government must recognise this to make the most of public spending."

"The revised Environmental Improvement Plan will be published in 2025, with delivery information on Environment Act targets. The government's response to the OEP's progress report from January will be published this summer, a welcome speeding up.

"Implementing the recommendations from the Dan Corry review will fundamentally reform and re-wire Defra and its arm's-length bodies so will need the input of external stakeholders to help test and shape the plans."

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/>