

NATIONAL UPDATES

Purpose

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

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- DEFRA and Welsh Government officials maintain regular contact with National Landscape Lead Officers, both directly and through the National Landscapes Association and Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales.
- Andrew Blake, Wye Valley National Landscape Manager holds the chair of Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales until June 2026.
- Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales hosted 3 events at the Royal Welsh Show, including a debate on Ffermio Bro in the NFU marquee with the deputy First Minister.
- The National Landscapes Annual Conference was 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 National Landscapes Association and Campaign for National Parks recently led a campaign to protect the strengthened duty on relevant authorities in England who 'must seek to further the purpose' of Protected Landscapes, which the Westminster Government were considering repealing.
- A new All Party Parliamentary Group on National Parks and National Landscapes was launched in Westminster on 21st October 2025.
- The National Landscapes Association AGM and Chairs' Conference is in London on 20th November.
- The National Landscapes Association recently undertook a members' satisfaction survey which identified high levels of overall satisfaction with membership.
- The next National Landscapes Lead Officers Meeting is in Birmingham in mid February.
- Future funding allocations for National Landscapes from DEFRA will be determined following the Autumn Budget on 26th November.

Reasons

Both governments are broadly supportive of National Landscapes. However, public resources are likely to remain constrained. Civil servants have built effective communications channels with the National Landscape Lead Officers, both directly and

through the National Landscape Association and Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales. This enables swift and efficient exchanges of information as and when required.

In September the Campaign for National Parks heard rumours that the UK Government was considering repealing the duty on public bodies in England to “seek to further the purposes” of National Park and National Landscapes, through an amendment to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. This was reported in The Times on 24th September.

Implications

The National Landscapes Annual Conference was on 7th – 10th July 2025 at Winchester University. The conference addressed the topic of ‘Are National Landscapes “Fit for the Future?”’ It provided 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. Nine members of the Wye Valley National Landscape Team attended. This helped new members of the Team meet colleagues from other National Landscapes and gain a perspective on the depth and breadth of the network. The programme included a range of keynote speakers and site visits to local National Landscapes and National Parks. The Ministerial address was made by Mary Creagh, DEFRA Parliamentary Under-Secretary. For more detail see <https://national-landscapes.org.uk/news/a-reflection-on-our-annual-conference-landscapes-for-the-future>. Ismail Kholwadia of Focal Elements, giving his insight and expertise in the area of race and faith in Protected Landscapes, noted, “The conference allowed for opportunities of inspiration to explore learning and engagement through shared experiences. This builds for stronger and meaningful relationships with different communities and groups that can inform positive action towards behavioural change in creating a welcoming natural world which is thriving and reflective of society. Change takes time and is gradual with consistent work.”

Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) hosted 3 events at the Royal Welsh Show, 21st-24th July 2025. Andrew Blake, as current chair of TCLW, chaired a debate on the Ffermio Bro programme in the NFU marquee with the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Changes and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies.

In September the National Landscapes Association, National Parks England and Campaign for National Parks became concerned by suggestions that the Government was seeking to water down or repeal the Protected Landscapes duty. The strengthened duty only became law at the end of 2023 and requires public bodies and utility companies to take an active, rather than passive, role in the environmental stewardship of National Landscapes and National Parks. The Chairs of the National Landscapes Association and National Parks England wrote to Rt Hon Steve Reed MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, stating

“Environmental and landscape protections are not a ‘brake on growth’ – they are what make our country worth living in and worth visiting for the 245 million visitors per year that visit National Landscapes and National Parks, and who generate at least £36 billion in visitor spend. Moreover, the health of our environment silently and powerfully underpins the health of our economy.....We respectfully urge both your departments (DEFRA and MHCLG) to:

- Rule out repeal or dilution of the duty as a policy option;
- Commit publicly to robust implementation, guidance, and regulations;
- Engage with stakeholders (Protected Landscape bodies; Local Authorities; relevant authorities, including planning bodies and developers; environmental NGOs) to codesign practicable approaches to implementation;
- Ensure transparency and accountability in the application of the duty in future relevant authority, infrastructure and planning decisions.”

However, following further rumours and concerns, the Campaign for National Parks co-ordinated a letter to the Prime Minister. This is appended below and was signed by over 200 organisations & individuals, including the Cllr McFarling, JAC Chair:-



On 13th October, the Westminster government published its long list of amendments for the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. This was the final opportunity for Ministers to include any legal changes: it did not contain any proposals to weaken protections for National Parks and National Landscapes.

The challenge now will be to work over the coming months to ensure that plans to weaken protections do not re-emerge. But it is also recognised that urgent progress is needed to change things for the better: to better support farmers and landowners and make our National Parks and National Landscapes richer in nature; to foster change in leadership and culture to ensure that these landscapes feel accessible and welcoming to all. In December 2025, in recognition of the 75th anniversary of the passing of the landmark post-war legislation that led to the creation of National Parks and National Landscapes, the then DEFRA Environment Secretary – Rt Hon Steve Reed MP - announced the commitment for new powers to be granted to National Parks and National Landscapes to boost nature recovery and access to the outdoors. It is hoped now that DEFRA Ministers will turn towards fulfilling this commitment. The significant support for these outstanding landscapes demonstrated through this campaign shows the potential and offer to government to work with the breadth of organisations to conserve and enhance these nationally designated landscapes and make them even better for the future.

The new All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on National Parks and National Landscapes was launched on 21st October 2025. John Watkins, Chief Executive, and Ruth Larbey, Head of Policy, at the National Landscapes Association attended the launch, along with National Parks England, Campaign for National Parks (CNP) and CPRE. Barry Gardiner MP was nominated as the new Chair with CNP being the secretariat. There was good cross-party attendance of Parliamentarians and broad discussions on Nature and Climate; the communities that live within these spaces, and how to make them thrive; inclusive access; how young people can grow their interest in these places; green jobs and rural skills of tomorrow; homes for people to live in and the impact of development across the Country were high on MPs' interests. The aims of the APPG include developing and promoting a shared parliamentary agenda based around the issues affecting National Parks and National Landscapes, and creating opportunities for MPs and Peers to experience National Parks and Landscapes first-hand, through visits and on-site briefings.

The National Landscapes Association AGM and Chairs' Conference is in London on 20th November. The annual 'Leading Landscapes' conference is an opportunity for National Landscape Chairs and Lead Officers to discuss key policy and political issues shaping the future of landscape management and conservation. As a strategic forum it provides updates, insights, and collaborative opportunities to strengthen National Landscapes individually and collectively. Keynote speakers, who will inspire exploration of issues and responses, include Mary-Ann Ochota, President of CPRE, on landscape conservation and community engagement; Natalie Prosser, Chief Executive of the Office for Environment Protection, on environmental policy developments; and Richard Hebditch, Coordinator of the Better Planning Coalition, on planning reforms and strategic land use. Andrew Blake, Wye Valley National Landscape Manager will attend on behalf of the JAC Chair.

A National Landscapes Association member satisfaction survey was sent to all National Landscapes in England and Wales, supplemented by two workshops open to staff members of National Landscape teams. The main findings arising from the survey were:

- High levels of overall satisfaction with membership;

- Recognition and value of the growth in influence and activity of the Association in recent years;
- National Landscape teams sometimes struggle to find capacity to engage with everything on offer;
- Across key areas of member benefit, satisfaction is strongest for Policy & Advocacy and for Events;
- Voice with DEFRA, the rebrand and the annual conference are considered the delivery highlights from the last 12-18 months;
- Wish to see advocacy extending to other government departments, notably Treasury and MHCLG

The Autumn Budget on 26th November will determine the settlement for DEFRA and subsequent future funding allocations for National Landscapes.

John Watkins, National Landscapes Association Chief Executive, stated

“With government spending on landscape chronically low (all 34 National Landscapes in England share the same funding as a single medium-sized secondary school), National Landscapes’ teams have still managed to do the job. They’ve become adept at pulling in money from other sources, at convening powerful partnerships in their local areas to get the work done, and at sharing best practice across the network. For every £1 invested in us by central government, our fundraising and convening skills mean we can spend at least £4 on the ground. But rising expectations along with cost increases means continually doing even more with even less. If National Landscapes can’t keep the staff who are trusted in the local area, know the projects and apply for the external funding, we can’t bring in that additional money that means the local work gets done.

“At a time when most people are feeling the pinch of the cost of living, and society seems more divided than ever, it can be a challenge to remember that landscape is not a nice to have, but the thing that underpins everything else; without a functioning environment, we don’t have a functioning economy.”

Background

The National Landscapes Association 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/>