

Briefing

Protected Landscapes Duty - briefing for MPs



2 July 2026

This document is designed to brief MPs and other decision makers on the current situation with the Protected Landscapes Duty, introduced as part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act in December 2023.

Why this is important

We are keen advocates for the vitality of National Landscapes, actively working to help them be places that are climate adapted, nature rich, welcoming and inclusive, with prosperous and resilient communities. Achieving this is a shared endeavour and this is the real potential and value of the Protected Landscapes Duty; bringing together all of a place's key players to shape meaningful, long-term decisions which can bring about the vitality of place. It is not a blocker. Done right, as parliament intended, it is a powerful enabler.

Protected Landscapes Duty

Passed in December 2023, Section 245 of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act amended Section 85 of the Countryside and Right of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). This sets out that relevant authorities, in exercising or performing any functions that affect National Landscapes in England, "must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty."

Since 2000, each National Landscape has been governed by a Management Plan, whose production is a legal duty on local authorities and which is prepared by the National Landscape team and reviewed every five years. This statutory document sets priorities for the whole area, and as such is ideally positioned as area-specific guidance for relevant authorities on how to comply with the Duty.

National Landscapes and their partner relevant authorities are asking government to implement the Duty as intended by Parliament; for Defra to provide greater clarity to relevant authorities on the Protected Landscapes Duty and introduce the regulations through secondary legislation to ensure its full and proper implementation.

Priority 1: Drafting and passing of secondary legislation to strengthen and clarify the Duty and the binding weight of Protected Landscape Management Plans.

- Parliament made provisions for regulatory powers as part of the implementation of the Duty, recognising this was critical to the support and clarity needed to deliver its intention. This secondary legislation must set out a

clear, structured process for how relevant authorities (including local authorities, strategic authorities, public bodies, and statutory undertakers) are required to implement the Duty across their functions. It must also establish that these bodies are legally obligated to “seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty”.

- Secondary legislation should establish that relevant authorities are legally obligated to take account of, and actively contribute, to the objectives of the Protected Landscape Management Plan, including requirements to conserve and enhance natural beauty alongside other government policies. Critically, it should define the statutory weight of Management Plans and establish their relationship to other strands of strategic planning.

Priority 2: Proactive Defra engagement to co-produce clear, authority- and area-specific guidance on implementing the Duty.

- Ahead of secondary legislation, Defra should proactively engage other government departments and, via MHCLG, local government to co-produce tailored guidance on implementing the Duty.
- This co-production process would generate practical, on-the-ground insight that directly informs the design of secondary legislation, strengthening its effectiveness before it is enacted.

Why action is needed now:

Defra has stated that [National Landscapes and National Parks will form the backbone of the UK's nature and climate objectives](#). Covering 25% of the land area of England and with existing Management Plans and strong local partnerships in place, they are well placed to deliver this. There is increasing recognition by Government and business that the traditional economy and our national security sit on a bedrock of irreplaceable natural assets, a significant amount of which is within protected landscapes.

However, the current lack of policy coherence means these places are continually being damaged and degraded, stripping our nation of critical infrastructure and leaving us increasingly vulnerable to the crises identified in the [Climate Change Committee's May 2025 report](#), the [Joint Intelligence Committee's 2026 National Security Assessment](#), the [Environmental Improvement Plan \(2025\)](#), and the [National assessment of flood and coastal erosion risk in England 2024](#). Secondary legislation supporting the implementation of the Protected Landscapes Duty would be a strong lever to help halt and reverse this trend, ensuring Protected Landscapes are valued appropriately across all government sectors and boosting our economic, agricultural, and environmental resilience as a nation.

Inadequate implementation has been the main barrier to realising the benefits of the Duty - most notably, greater policy cohesion and cross-sectoral collaboration in support of Protected Landscapes. Properly implemented, the Duty will open new conversations at the early stages of projects, raise awareness, and create concrete opportunities for stakeholders to work towards shared goals. The challenges we are facing are well-established and the role of Protected Landscapes in addressing them is clear. Through the provision of secondary legislation and clarifying guidance Defra would be greatly supporting us in delivering the changes needed.

The Duty has already made a difference in bringing nature around the table early as in the case of the Sea Link NSIP project. AECOM, the consultant working on behalf of National Grid adopted an open process of consultation and discussion with the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscapes team. As part of meeting the 'enhancement' element of the duty, AECOM has actively engaged with landowners to find suitable sites for the creation of new acid grassland within the National Landscape.

Specialist staff from National Landscapes, working together in communities of practice have drafted initial guidance for [public authorities](#) and [local authorities](#) to support them in complying with the Duty, which could be used as a basis for Defra guidance. Additionally, teams could provide valuable input and real-world learnings to support Defra in developing appropriate secondary legislation.

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