

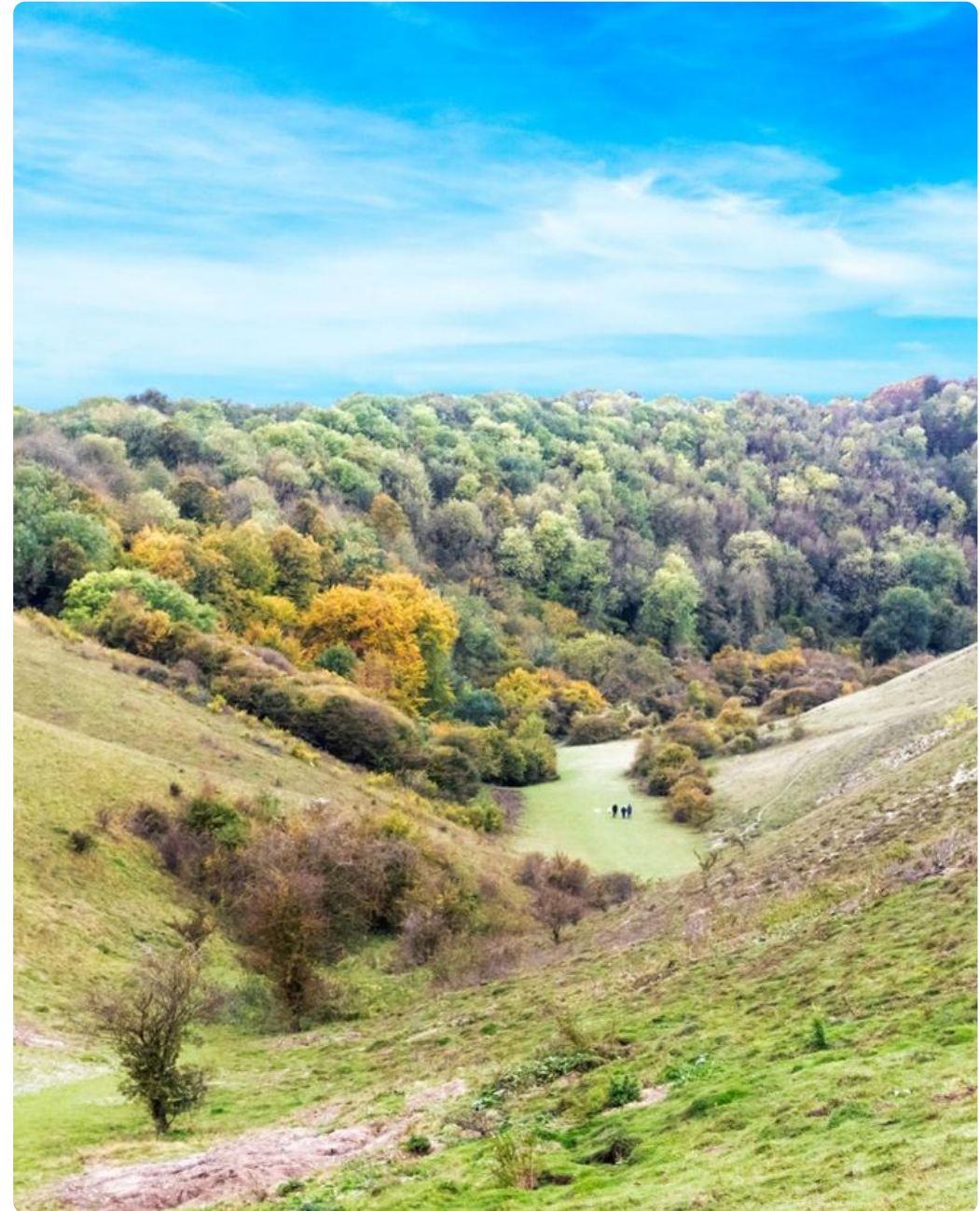
Welcome to National Landscapes!

Induction on national context
for new staff, committee
members and volunteers



Welcome to the National Landscapes network. Though you may be involved with just one of these fabulous landscapes, you are part of a much larger picture and contributing towards the conservation and enhancement of some of Britain's finest countryside.

This induction is written to complement information you may get locally, by providing the national context in an introduction to National Landscapes, what they are, the work National Landscapes staff do, the national network, and how you can find out more.





Naturally beautiful – nationally protected

There are 38 National Landscapes across England and Wales and eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Northern Ireland (AONB remains the legal designation in England and Wales too, but we rebranded as a network in 2023). These outstanding landscapes, unique and irreplaceable national assets, are some of our most special and cherished places.

Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value. The natural beauty of a National Landscapes is to do with the relationship between people and place. It encompasses everything - 'natural' and human - that makes an area distinctive. It includes geology and landform, climate and soils, flora and fauna; and the rich history of human settlement, land use over the centuries, archaeology and buildings, cultural associations, and the people who live in it, past and present.

National Landscapes Partnerships and Conservation Boards work to conserve and enhance natural beauty in the interest of everyone - local residents, businesses and visitors – for nature and for culture - and for future generations.



What is a National Landscape?

Since 2023, National Landscape is the name given to a landscape designated in law and previously known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (this is still the legal designation), whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest. In this presentation, we may use the term AONB to refer to the legal designation and in historical references.

The primary purpose of a National Landscape is “to conserve and enhance natural beauty”. This was laid out in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and confirmed in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

The 1949 Act was passed following the reports of the Hobhouse and Dower committees earlier in the 1940s. These were commissioned by government to look at safeguarding valuable landscapes and providing public access to land for recreation.

Supplementary (non-statutory) purposes to designation were developed in the 1990s and are:

In pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries, and of the economic and social needs of the local community.

Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.

Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met in an AONB so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.



National Landscapes in the UK

There are 38 National Landscapes in England and Wales.

- 33 are in England
- four in Wales
- one straddles the England - Wales border.

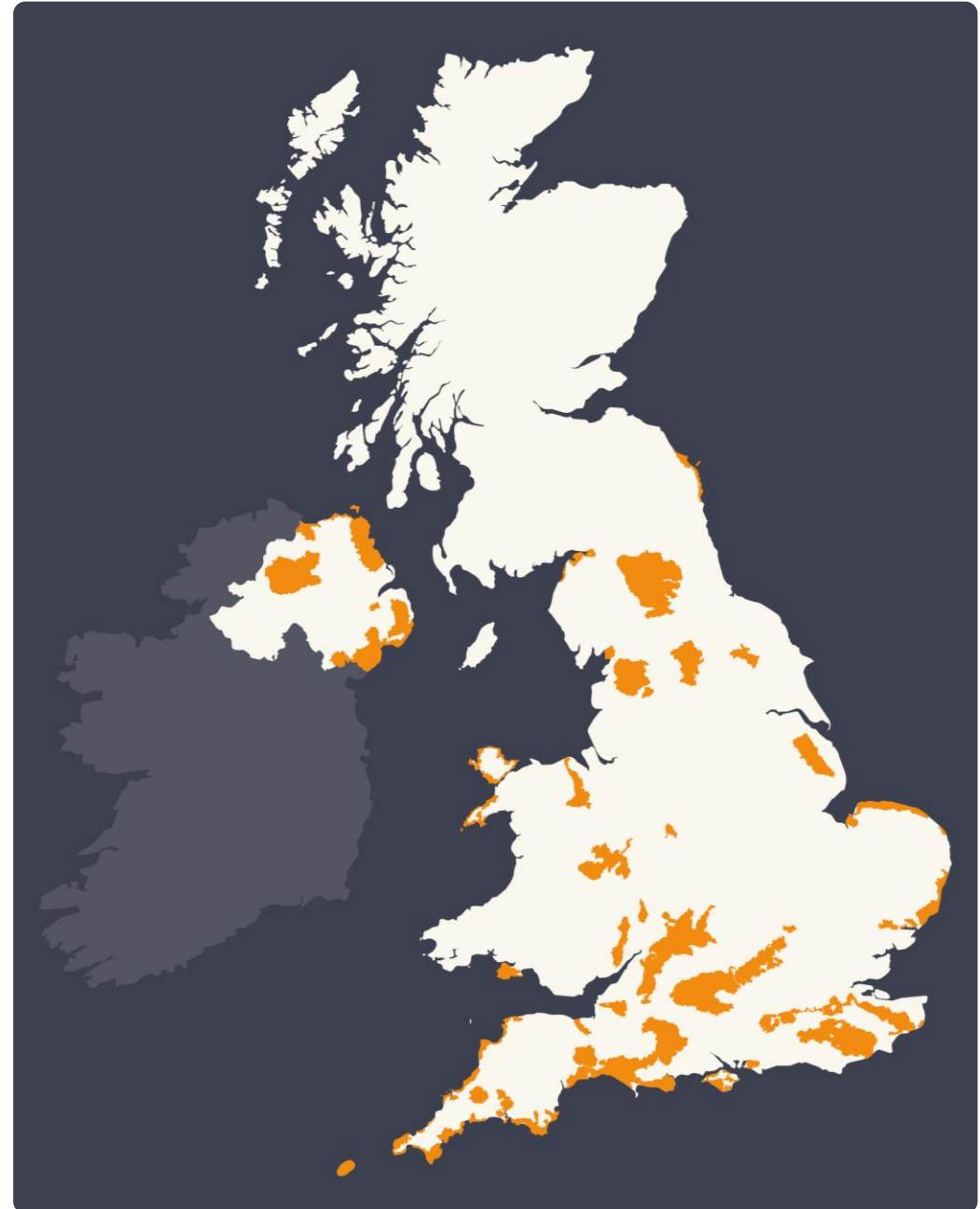
There are eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Northern Ireland, but these have a different statutory basis.

National Landscapes vary greatly in size, from the Isles of Scilly (16 km²) to the Cotswolds (2,038 km²).

The Gower was the first National Landscape to be designated in 1956, and the most recent was the Tamar Valley in 1995. The Clwydian Range National Landscape was extended in 2011 to become the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape.

National Landscapes cover just under 20,000 km², equivalent to around 13% of the land area of England and Wales.

Over 700 elected or appointed representatives are involved in National Landscape governance or advisory bodies, from a wide range of interests to reflect local needs.





National Landscapes – the wider context

National Landscapes and National Parks were enabled by the 1949 Act and are deemed by government policy to have equal status in terms of landscape value and protection. While National Parks have independent authorities with their own planning functions, for National Landscapes responsibility lies mainly with the local authorities. Two National Landscapes, the Cotswolds and the Chilterns, have independent Conservation Boards.

In international terms, National Landscapes are part of a worldwide family of protected landscapes (IUCN Category V) that includes our own National Parks and those of North America and elsewhere. Many European countries have a tier of designated areas in addition to their National Parks, such as in France a 'Parc Naturel Regional' (PNR). The Europarc Federation is an umbrella membership body for protected areas in 40 countries.

To find out more, follow these links:

[UK National Parks](#)

[Europarc Federation](#)

[IUCN Category V landscapes](#)

[Europe's Nature, Regional & Landscape Parks](#)

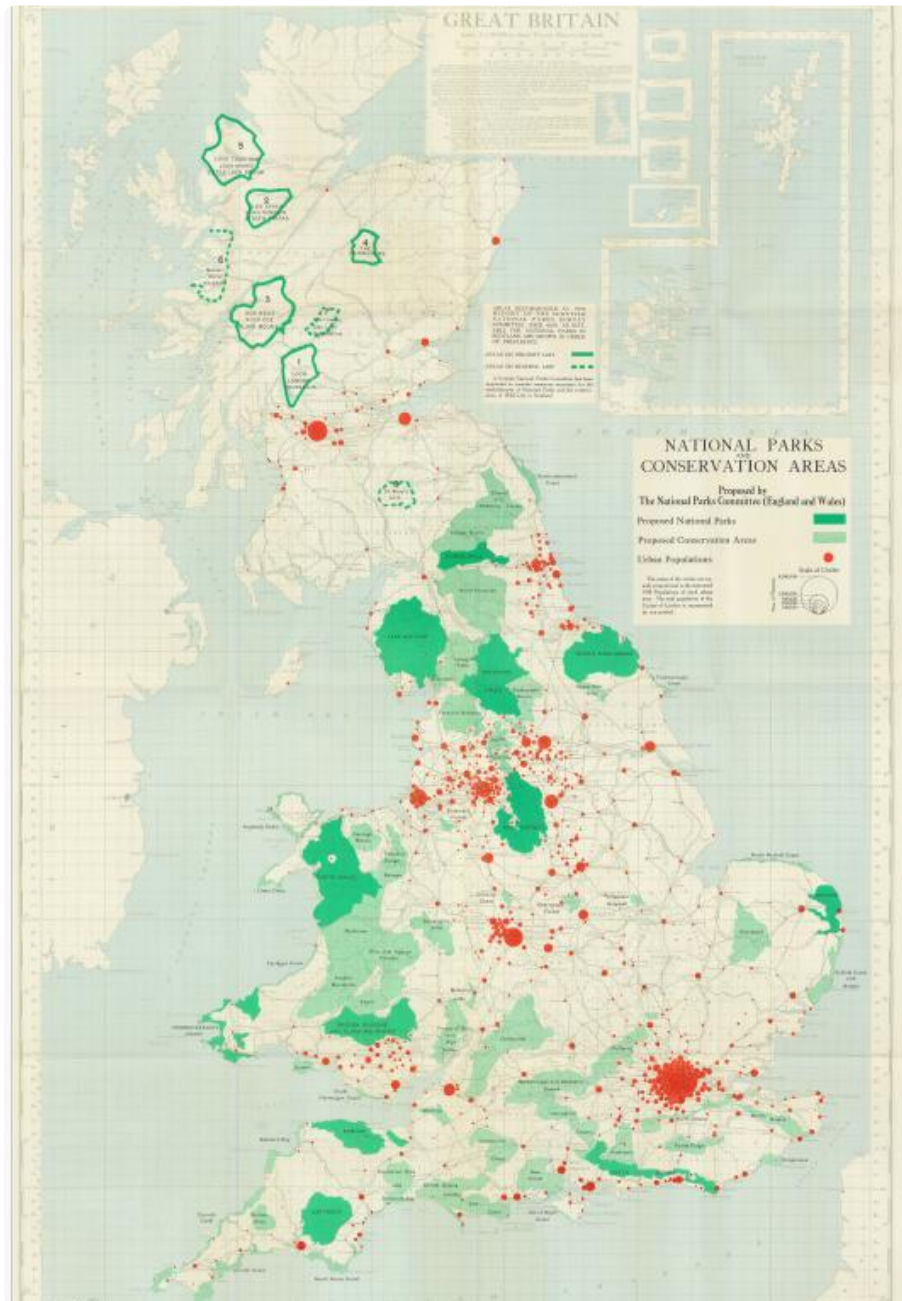


A brief history and legal basis of AONB designation

Our most beautiful and cherished landscapes have been valued and revered long before designations. Through art, poetry and literature, areas which are now National Landscapes and National Parks have been celebrated for centuries. In the 19th Century, outdoor clubs and conservation bodies were formed with the surge of interest in outdoor recreation, appreciation and protection of nature. Yellowstone in the USA was the first National Park designated in 1872.

The first attempt to legislate to protect landscapes in the UK was the 1884 Access to the Mountains (Scotland) Bill. The Bill failed to progress but calls for greater access and appreciation continued. In 1931 Christopher Addison MP chaired a Government committee that recommended the creation of an authority to designate national parks and safeguard areas of exceptional natural interest against disorderly development, spolioation and to improve the means of access for pedestrians to areas of natural beauty and to improve measures for the protection of flora and fauna. This was not put into effect, but momentum continued.





A Standing Committee on National Parks made up of interested groups was formed in 1936 to champion their case. In 1938 its secretary John Dower produced a pamphlet 'The Case for National Parks in Great Britain'. In 1939 a summary of proposed provisions for a National Parks Bill followed. This envisioned a commission that would designate both National Parks and nature sanctuaries. In 1939 the Access to Mountains Act was passed. During the Second World War the Standing Committee continued to press for a National Parks Commission. This was supported by the recommendations of the Scott Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas in 1942.

In 1945 John Dower produced a Report to the Government on National Parks in England and Wales. This also identified the need for protection of naturally beautiful landscapes which were not candidate National Parks owing to their small size and lack of wilderness. This led directly to the establishment of the National Parks Committee (chaired by Arthur Hobhouse), working alongside the Wildlife Conservation Special Committee (chaired by Julian Huxley). The resulting Hobhouse Report of 1947 led to the creation of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act - the legislation including the provision to designate AONBs.

Towards the present day

For many years AONBs were mostly a line on a map and a consideration in planning matters. But by the 1980s and early 1990s, the threats to the special qualities of AONBs were coming from factors such as intensification of farming as well as inappropriate development. Proactive community-based work was being done by 'countryside management' teams in many local authorities, often guided by management plans. Many staff teams and joint advisory committees started in this way around the 1990s. Through its review and recommendations for 'Finest Countryside', the Countryside Commission lobbied hard that the legal basis of AONBs was not strong enough, and this resulted in provisions in the **Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000** which we have today. AONB Management Plans became statutory, Conservation Boards were enabled, and a duty of regard placed on public bodies. Following the Act, the Countryside Agency introduced core funding for AONB teams dependent on staffing and governance reviews.





The Countryside Agency was merged into Natural England in 2006, and at this point responsibility for English and Welsh AONBs separated and gradually diverged. In England, AONB funding passed to Defra in 2011, though Natural England retains an advisory role to government on protected landscapes and responsibility for making designations. In Wales this role and the provision of funding is done by Natural Resources Wales.

Many Joint Advisory Committees are now known as Partnerships, and partnership working remains a core principle and strength of the way that these treasured places are managed. The staff teams themselves are generally small, but through a Partnership the capacity of many other organisations and people can be brought in to benefit the landscape.



The Colchester Declaration

In July 2019, rather than wait for long delayed government nature recovery targets, the UK's AONB Partnerships worked together to publish the Colchester Declaration - the most ambitious targets for nature in the sector, undertaking that by 2030, within their boundaries:

- at least 200,000 hectares of the most valuable natural areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest or SSSIs) will be in favourable condition;
- 100,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside of SSSIs will be created or restored;
- 36,000 hectares of woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate.



The Landscapes Review (Glover Review)

In September 2019, the Landscapes [Review's final report](#) was published. Commissioned by government in May 2018, it looked at England's National Parks and AONBs as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan. Its ambitious recommendations included:

National Parks and AONBs should work more closely together, under a new National Landscapes Service.

"What are now AONBs should be strengthened, with increased funding, governance reform, new shared purposes with National Parks, and a greater voice on development."

More must be done for nature and natural beauty, and to encourage wider participation in enjoying landscapes.

The name and acronym 'AONB' should be replaced, and the suggested new name is National Landscapes.



Landscapes Review

We want our national landscapes to work together with big ambitions so they are happier, healthier, greener, more beautiful and open to everyone.

Final Report



National Landscapes

Moving on the recommendations of the Landscapes Review, AONB Partnerships jointly agreed to rename, taking the opportunity to fully rebrand. The new name and brand represents a forward-looking network of organisations with a name recognising their national importance and a consistent visual identity for the first time.



Members of the Landscapes Review panel with National Landscapes Association Chair, Philip Hygate at the National Landscapes launch event November 2023



National
Landscapes
Association



**Arnside &
Silverdale**
National
Landscape



**Blackdown
Hills**
National
Landscape



**Bryniau Clwyd a
Dyffryn Dyfrdwy**
Tirwedd
Cenedlaethol
Clwydian Range and Dee Valley
National
Landscape



**Cannock
Chase**
National
Landscape



**Chichester
Harbour**
National
Landscape



Chilterns
National
Landscape



Cornwall
National
Landscape



Cotswolds
National
Landscape



**Cranborne
Chase**
National
Landscape



**Dedham Vale
& Stour Valley**
National
Landscape



Dorset
National
Landscape



Dyffryn Gwy
Tirwedd
Cenedlaethol
Wye Valley
National
Landscape



East Devon
National
Landscape



**Forest of
Bowland**
National
Landscape



Gŵyr
Tirwedd
Cenedlaethol
Gower
National
Landscape



High Weald
National
Landscape



**Howardian
Hills**
National
Landscape



Isle of Wight
National
Landscape



Isles of Scilly
National
Landscape



Kent Downs
National
Landscape



**Lincolnshire
Wolds**
National
Landscape



Llŷn
Tirwedd
Cenedlaethol
Llŷn
National
Landscape



Malvern Hills
National
Landscape



Mendip Hills
National
Landscape



Nidderdale
National
Landscape



Norfolk Coast
National
Landscape



**North Devon
Coast**
National
Landscape



**North
Pennines**
National
Landscape



**North Wessex
Downs**
National
Landscape



**Northumberland
Coast**
National
Landscape



**Quantock
Hills**
National
Landscape



**Shropshire
Hills**
National
Landscape



Solway Coast
National
Landscape



South Devon
National
Landscape



**Suffolk & Essex
Coast & Heaths**
National
Landscape



Surrey Hills
National
Landscape



Tamar Valley
National
Landscape



Ynys Môn
Tirwedd
Cenedlaethol
Anglesey
National
Landscape



Update to the duty of regard

Section 85 in the CROW Act required public bodies to “have regard to” AONB purposes. In practice this was found to be a fairly weak provision and legislation passed in the 2023 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) now states that public bodies ‘must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty’.

The National Landscapes Association has produced guidance for [local planning authorities](#) and [relevant authorities](#) on how this should work in practice.

Representatives from National Landscapes teams and the National Landscapes Association are providing input to Defra on how the new duty can be regulated.

Applying the CROW Act section 85 duty to ‘seek to further the purpose’ in National Landscapes (AONBs)



Guidance for relevant authorities

National Landscapes Association, with the National Landscapes Planning and Placemaking Panel

Briefing May 2025

Purpose of this Briefing

This Briefing has been produced to provide additional guidance to relevant authorities on meeting the strengthened duty in Section 85 of the Countryside and Right of Way (CROW) Act 2000 when exercising their functions that affect National Landscapes (areas of outstanding natural beauty) in England.¹

It is complementary to the guidance published by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) *Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes*,² which provides broad principles to guide relevant authorities in complying with the duty.

The Briefing aims to offer practical, easy-to-follow guidance on good practice, covering a range of relevant authority functions, and includes:

- ❖ Legislative context and broad approach – an overview.
- ❖ Use of the relevant Management Plan.
- ❖ CROW Act 2000 s.85 duty in relevant authority functions.
- ❖ Information sources that have been used in the preparation of this Briefing.

¹ From November 22nd 2023, all AONBs in England are known as National Landscapes. The statutory designation remains an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and is currently referred to as such in legislation, hence the term National Landscape (AONB) Management Plan in this document.

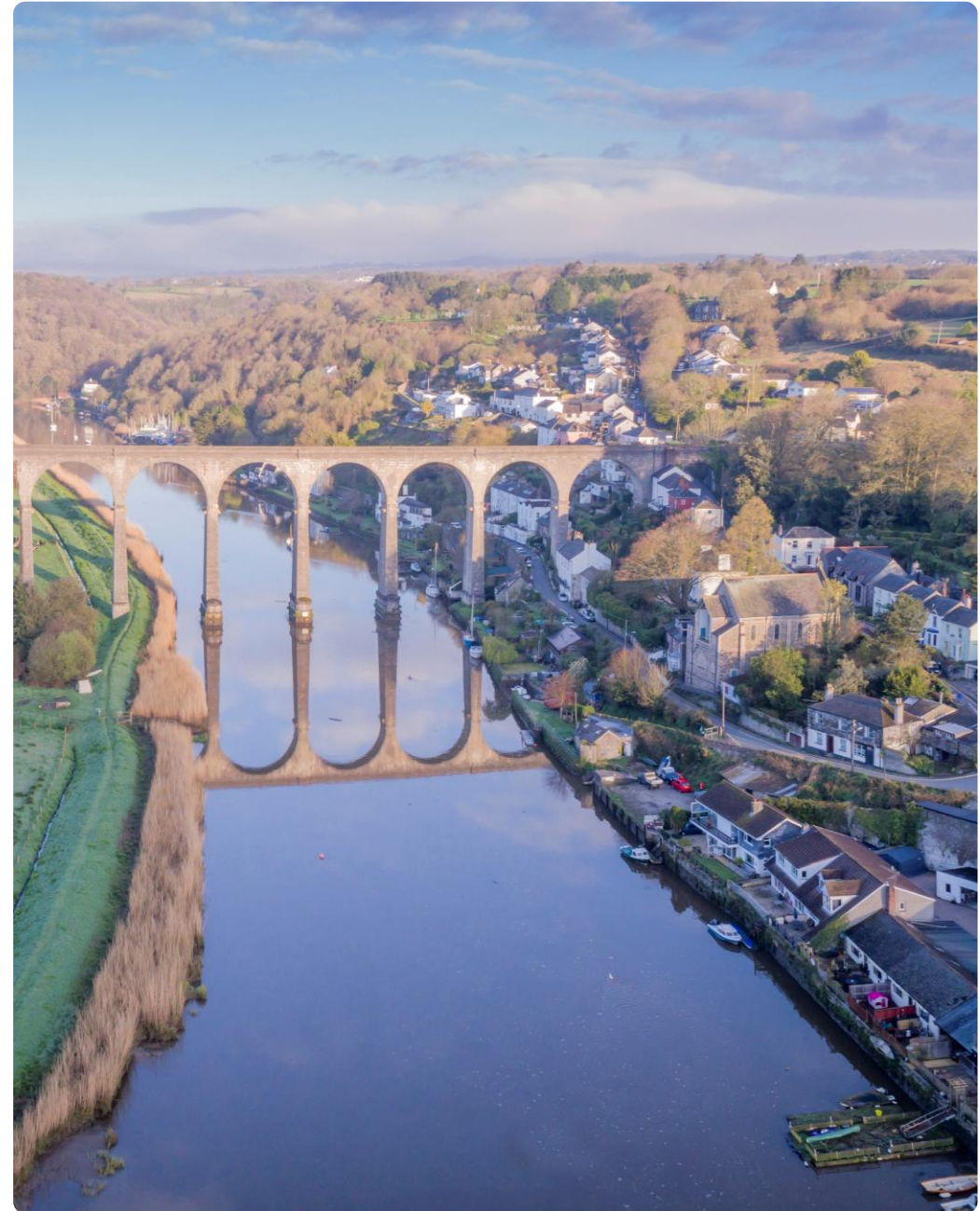
² [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](#)



Planning and development in National Landscapes

Planning policy and decisions to protect the natural beauty and character of National Landscapes are the only real regulatory aspect of the designation, and are the responsibility of local authorities, under national guidance. This does not mean no development, but ensuring that development complements the character of the landscape, is sustainable and is of an appropriate scale and nature.

The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) sets out national policy and Paragraph 189 states that “*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.*” It goes on to set out that “*Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.*”





Planning and development (continued)

Local Plans usually have policies for specific National Landscapes, and some National Landscapes have more detailed planning guidance to aid decision making for developers and planning authorities. The Arnside & Silverdale National Landscape Development Plan Document, and High Weald Design Guide are good examples.

Involvement in planning is a core function for all National Landscapes Partnerships/Conservation Boards, and Management Plans are a material consideration in planning. National Landscape Partnerships and Conservation Boards are consultees in planning (the Glover Review recommends them to become statutory consultees) and regularly comment on development proposals affecting their National Landscape, e.g. in relation to landscape, biodiversity, historic environment, etc. In National Landscapes under significant development pressure a dedicated Planning Officer is often employed to deal with the high caseload.





National
Landscapes
Association

Welcome

National Landscapes Association
Strategy 2025 to 2031



The National Landscapes Association

The National Landscapes Association is the membership organisation for the UK's 46 National Landscapes and a registered charity.

It advocates, communicates and manages national programmes, supporting the UK's network of National Landscapes to be as effective as possible.

Its vision is 'beautiful landscapes where nature and people thrive together'

Its mission to 'lead and champion activity, working with National Landscapes Partnerships, to protect and restore the UK's most outstanding landscapes and make sure everyone can enjoy them'

The charity's membership is made up of National Landscapes partnerships and conservation boards, and other organisations and individuals. It is governed by a board of trustees assisted by a staff team (most pictured on the left).



National
Landscapes
Association



National Landscapes Association Strategy on a page

[You can access the full strategy document here.](#)



National Landscape Management Plans

Under the CRoW Act, National Landscape Management Plans are statutory documents. They must be reviewed every five years, and where a National Landscape crosses into the areas of more than one local authority, the authorities must 'act jointly' to prepare the Plan. National Landscapes Partnerships will usually prepare Management Plans on behalf of the local authorities, drawing on their wide stakeholder involvement, but the Plans have to be formally approved by the local authorities themselves (except where there are Conservation Boards).

There is guidance on the process and content on Management Plans, but no set format. They are locally produced for local needs. They must define the policies of the local authority/authorities for the National Landscape and will also usually set a vision and actions.

Importantly, National Landscape Management Plans are plans for the area, not for the organisation. They rely on many different people and organisations for their implementation. The strength of Management Plans rests in the depth of engagement and involvement of different people in their preparation. They promote collaboration, help to bring a shared understanding, and can help to support funding bids.





Nature recovery and addressing climate change

Since 2022, the UK has been a signatory to the UN Leaders' Pledge for Nature – otherwise known as 30by30 – signatory nations have committed to protecting 30% of their land and sea area for nature by 2030.

In October 2024, Defra announced that National Landscapes and National Parks will 'provide the backbone to 30by30 in England, contributing towards the target where they are effectively managed and delivering in-situ conservation.' and that the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (published in January 2024) would be a useful tool to target work effectively and measure delivery.

The 34 National Landscapes in England cover 15% of the nation's land area and contain a disproportionate area of England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (28%) and broadleaved woodland (24%). Teams are committed to contributing to the delivery of 30by30 and welcome the contract the PLTOF represents, if National Landscapes teams are to deliver the targets, they must be adequately resourced to do so.

There are many examples of successful nature recovery projects from National Landscapes on the [website](#).



Programme Spotlight:

Farming in Protected Landscapes

Farming in Protected Landscapes is a Defra scheme to pay farmers and landowners to deliver nature friendly farming and access projects.

National Landscapes teams have specialist Farming in Protected Landscapes officers who provide advice and support to farmers in preparing applications for the scheme, this leads to far more ambitious schemes. Applications for under £10K are reviewed by a senior member of the National Landscapes team. Applications over £10K are reviewed by a local panel with representatives from partner organisations and landowners.

Since 2021 National Landscapes teams have coordinated over 3600 Farming in Protected Landscapes grants on behalf of Defra, giving personalised advice and support to landowners and:

- Creating 71,212m of new paths
- protecting 282 at risk heritage monuments
- laying 258,000m of hedgerow
- restoring 12,746m of dry stone wall
- delivering 6482 educational visits





Programme Spotlight:

Big Chalk



Growing from an initial partnership of protected landscapes, the Big Chalk Partnership comprises more than 150 organisations with a common vision of creating thriving chalk and limestone landscapes across southern England. At its heart are 14 [National Landscapes](#), the [South Downs National Park](#) and nine [National Trails](#), including the iconic [Ridgeway](#).

Big Chalk performs a vital role in nature's recovery, connecting national targets and plans with participatory modes of delivery, including regional and local partnerships and farm clusters.

Importantly, it helps ensure delivery is effective and makes the best use of the resources available.

Big Chalk has been supported through several development phases, firstly by Natural England and then, since 2023, by Defra via the protected landscapes partnership.

The National Landscapes Association hosts the programme lead.



Equality, diversity and inclusion

National Landscapes are protected for the enjoyment of everyone. Evidence gathered in the Glover Review reveals a lack of diversity in both governance and enjoyment of our landscapes. As of 2019 there were just five members (0.7%) from BAME backgrounds and three with a declared disability (0.4%) across all National Landscapes boards. Staff teams are of a similar make up. No information is available on representation by the LGBTQ+ community and we should also be more aware of inclusivity around gender, age and religion.

Research shows that 1% of visitors to National Parks are from BAME communities and disabled people are 10 times less likely to access the countryside than the general population, National Landscapes are likely to be similar. This compares to a national population representation of 14% BAME and 18% disability respectively.

Projects like Nature Calling and Generation Green nationally are helping us to redress the balance, as well as Farming in Protected Landscapes access related projects.



Programme Spotlight: Nature Calling



Nature
Calling

[Nature Calling](#) was a £2M ground-breaking national art commissioning programme by the National Landscapes Association, working with executive artistic partners Activate Performing Arts and funded by Arts Council England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) (as part of the Protected Landscapes Partnership) and National Landscapes in England. It ran through 2025, aiming to inspire communities across England to connect with National Landscapes, increasing people's access to nature, [improving their wellbeing](#) and [inspiring a sense of belonging in these special places](#).

The programme created a new [Henge for Luton](#), a new giant alongside the [Cerne Abbas giant inspired by the game Consequences](#), [Choose Your Own Adventure trails](#) in Croydon and Surrey Hills and inspiring written pieces from 6 Music favourite [OneDa](#) and Mobo Award winner [Still Shadey](#) amongst much more.





Programme Spotlight: Generation Green

Generation Green 2 was a £4.5 million project designed to connect over 25,000 young people - many from some of the most disadvantaged areas in England - with nature and rural life. Delivered by Access Unlimited, a coalition of not-for-profit organisations, the project was a powerful example of what can happen when organisations come together with a shared purpose.

Over the course of the project, ten National Landscapes across England provided over 3,300 young people with life-changing opportunities, through more than 1,200 day experiences, 900 residentials and 600 farm-based visits. From beach schools in Northumberland to days spent at Bath City Farm, and even nights sleeping under the stars, these moments weren't just fun, they were transformative.

Feedback from participants:

"the best school day ever"

"I feel like I don't need to be inside Croydon or London. I can do new things outside of my area. And because here, there's not much internet I can do more things, I don't always have to be using my phone, I can find new things to do."



National Landscapes teams



There are around 280 people working in the 38 National Landscapes in England and Wales. There are many similarities but each team is set up and run differently. Employment is usually through a host Local Authority except for the Conservation Boards, but hosting arrangements vary quite a lot. There are a wide variety of job roles, full and part time, permanent and project specific, across the National Landscapes network.

The size of a National Landscape team varies from 2 or 3 posts to 50+. Almost all have a dedicated Lead Officer (Manager/Director). Other common job roles include project development, conservation and land management, planning, communications, sustainable tourism, volunteer support, finance and administration. There may also be staff working on heritage, health and wellbeing, access and recreation, youth engagement, education and much more. Have a look at these [case studies](#) of teams' work for a flavour.





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