



## **BRIEF UPDATE ON SOME SHROPSHIRE HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE TEAM ACTIVITY**

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### **Summary**

This paper provides selected brief updates on recent activities of the staff team (this is not a full work programme update).

### **Recommendation**

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the information provided.

### **Background**

#### Shropshire Hills Summer Forum and Field visits 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024

The Forum event at Cleehill village hall was attended by over 50 people, followed by three field visits:

- Farming in Protected Landscapes - farm visit to see how funding is supporting farmers in the Clee Hills.
- Our Upland Commons - a walk on Clee Liberty to hear about the project and community archaeology activity.
- Abdon District Dormouse Project – community conservation supported by the Conservation Fund.

The format of this event continues to successfully bring together the different parts of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape community – including the staff team, Partnership members, those involved with the Trust, Friends, and interested members of the public. A good amount of time was allowed for circulation and informal networking and there were around 12 stalls from different organisations in the hall in the morning.

#### Farming in Protected Landscapes

Allocation of grants in this fourth and final year of the FiPL programme is going well, but there is still around half of the £1.3 million grant pot for this year to allocate. Two evening drop-in sessions for farmers have recently been held to promote the availability of grants. The programme ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, but Defra have secured funding to extend all roles for a further 6 months until the end of September 2025. This will be to undertake work associated with wrapping up the FiPL programme, including monitoring and headline data gathering, financial reporting and payment of all claims. In addition,

they have secured funding to extend FiPL adviser roles until March 2027, the end of the transition period in which direct subsidy payments to farmers are being phased out. There will not be the same FiPL grants available through this period but the expectation is that these roles instead will help optimise the effectiveness and take-up of ELMs (Environmental Land Management) in alignment with the Protected Landscape management plan, local priorities and the Targets and Outcomes Framework.

One interesting project supported through FiPL which is not just about work on a single farm is 'Pasture and Profit in Protected Landscapes', a programme from [Pasture for Life](#) that deploys 'peer-to-peer learning' to help farmers boost profits while delivering environmental benefits through grazing.

<https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/news/innovative-programme-for-shropshire-hills-livestock-farmers>

### National Landscapes Association Conference

We co-hosted the National Landscapes annual conference from 3-5<sup>th</sup> July at Harper Adams University. The majority of the team were involved in some way in the three field visits we provided:

- River Clun Catchment Management. Starting at the highest catchment headwaters, the trip crossed a heathland nature reserve along with farmed and forest areas right by the Welsh border. Current survey work here on peat, soils and hydrology is helping to encourage re-wetting and re-naturalising of headwater areas, and delegates heard about the work of Natural England's pilot Protected Site Strategy for the Clun catchment. After lunch the group visited a lower section of the River Clun to find out about citizen science water quality monitoring, and discuss the wider context of the challenges facing this catchment.
- Long Mynd and Stiperstones. This trip took a ride on the Shropshire Hills Shuttle Bus, crossing the Long Mynd and then explored the Stiperstones with a walk through flowering heather between the evocative quartzite tors. In the afternoon the group explored access and engagement in the area's mining story, and a trip below ground to explore the 'Day Level' of Snailbeach lead mine.
- Clee Hills. This trip visited two farm businesses supported by Farming in Protected Landscapes grants, looking at their farming systems, land management and local food enterprises. Led by the team's FiPL Advisers, delegates met the farmers and managers plus the other consultants and advisers who work closely with the Programme and with the farmers.

Wednesday afternoon's conference workshops included:

- Doughnut Economics for policy goals. Helen Lucocq, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park.
- Green Finance - What (and who) should we say no to? National Landscapes Association Nature-based Solutions team and Finance Earth.
- A conversation on how we make national landscapes more inclusive, using the experience of Cannock Chase as an example. Cannock Chase National Landscape team and Direct Access.

- Binding powerful coalitions in the landscape: shifting the paradigm through seeking to further the purposes? Ruth Larbey, National Landscapes Association, Tim Slaney, South Downs NPA, and John Mills, Cotswolds National Landscape.
- How a social and behavioural context can help us to deliver better farm advice and support. Dr Fiona Williams and Prof David Rose, Harper Adams University, supported by protected landscapes staff. (We helped to bring this workshop together).
- National Landscapes: responding to the climate, nature and wellbeing crisis. Dawn Griffiths and Hazel McDowall, Natural England.
- Heritage 2033 and opportunities for funding. Emma Birks, Jackie Lee and Drew Bennellick, National Lottery Heritage Fund.

#### Sustainable tourism Charter verification

We have had a couple of online meetings as part of the verification process for our application for the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. This has involved partners from Visit Shropshire, Visit Shropshire Hills and Shropshire Council. The process of the Charter continues to help keep sustainability considerations at the forefront in the tourism sector, both in the Shropshire Hills and county-wide.

#### Shuttles

The Shuttles service is extending this year thanks to a donation.

<https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/news/shropshire-hills-shuttle-bus-ndash-great-news-six-more-days->

#### Outreach work- Engagement Ranger

Joe Penfold has successfully engaged some new groups and has given talks and run some supported and guided visits. Groups have included a local sight loss group, a group from Shropshire Supports Refugees, the Young Rangers and the first groups through the national Generation Green 2 project.

#### Capital and revenue funding

As reported at the last meeting, the Team have an additional allocation of Defra funding this year. A number of projects through partners have now been allocated capital funds. Unexpectedly, half of the initial capital allocation for Nature and People was turned into revenue, bringing around £75k of additional Defra funds into the core budget. This has enabled us to extend our new Engagement Ranger post and to increase the hours of three members of the team, which has been a quick and effective way to increase capacity in the team. The additional funding hopefully puts us in a good position with regard to the next Defra funding period from April 2025 - it is not so likely that government will want to be seen to be reducing core funding from this level.

#### National Landscapes Association engagement with new government and MPs

The National Association has produced briefing material for new MPs and ministers, and a short summary of this is given in Appendix 1. There is a strong pitch to secure and increase government funding for National Landscapes.

**List of Background Papers**

None

**Human Rights Act Appraisal**

The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

**Environmental Appraisal**

The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.

**Risk Management Appraisal**

Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.

**Community / Consultations Appraisal**

The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 National Landscapes Priorities Briefing, National Landscapes Association, July 2024



# National Landscapes Priorities Briefing

As keystone partners bridging the gap between national priorities and local decision making, National Landscapes are ready to realise their potential to ramp up delivery of key national outcomes. These funding and legislative priorities are critical now. With binding national and global targets meaning this is the Parliament that must deliver 30 by 30, this Briefing sets out the top three, immediate actions we recommend the Government could take.

## Our top priorities

**Priority 1: Consolidate and recommit to current funding of £35 million per year** maintaining the effectiveness of ongoing programmes and achieving efficiency through streamlining Defra's funding support. National Landscapes are a proven mechanism to deliver priority outcomes at pace. Part of this £35 m. should come from embedding land management advice, guidance and delivery as an essential function of National Landscape teams, maintaining the current funding level (£20.2 million) of the successful, innovative Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

**Priority 2: A prudent, additional investment of £11 million per year** to rebuild National Landscapes' capacity, shore up effective functioning and position them to help deliver government targets, take advantage of immediate opportunities and lever in new external resources including private finance, which will greatly multiply government investment.


**Priority 3: Strongly implement the game-changing duty to 'seek to further the purposes' in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, through secondary legislation, government guidance and sector-specific advice.** The LURA duty directs public bodies to conserve and enhance natural beauty in and around National Landscapes and should be used as a means to align decision making and investment, achieving greater momentum and coherence for national, legally binding objectives and targets. This is an opportunity to strengthen the powers associated with National Landscapes, to deliver for the nation.


## Who are we?


The National Landscapes Association is a registered charity, supporting the mission to conserve and enhance natural beauty in National Landscapes and other protected areas. The 46 National Landscapes in the UK are designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty, and their teams and partnerships work effectively to convene, enable and deliver positive outcomes that align with national and local priorities. We have a vision for **thriving and diverse nature, livelihoods and communities across the UK countryside – all underpinned by joined-up, wilder and greener landscapes that support biodiversity, climate resilience and essential environmental services from the soil up**. These priorities have been determined through in-depth consultation and discussion with a wide range of colleagues and partners in National Landscapes.

For more information or to discuss any of these priorities, please contact Ruth Larbey, Policy and Advocacy Manager at [ruth.larbey@national-landscapes.org.uk](mailto:ruth.larbey@national-landscapes.org.uk)

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## Key information: National Landscapes priorities

### Priority 1: Consolidate and recommit to current funding of £35 million per year, for a proven mechanism to deliver outcomes at pace.

- Maintain the effectiveness of ongoing programmes and achieve efficiency through streamlining Defra's funding support. This funding would most advantageously be secured for teams to deliver flexibly against Management Plan objectives, or it could be retained in its current form. Either way, **the funding would be used to deliver projects on the ground which will in turn deliver priority national and local outcomes, helping to ensure nature's recovery and supporting farmers to boost Britain's food security in a sustainable and nature-friendly way.**
- In National Landscapes, **national and local priorities are combined into a coherent, democratic vision for the landscape**, established via collaborative Management Plans, which are convened and enabled by the National Landscape teams. These Partner-approved Plans form the basis and structure for spending.
- Part of this £35 m. would come from **embedding land management advice, guidance and delivery as an essential function of National Landscape teams by maintaining the current funding level of the successful, innovative Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme at £20.2 million** for England's National Landscapes: a proven, cost-effective way to achieve landscape conservation and enhancement alongside productive, resilient food systems. **The statutory purpose of the National Landscapes cannot be delivered without engaging these areas' farmers and landowners.**
- 10% of UK farmland sits within National Landscapes. If that 10% of farmland received a proportional share of England's annual farming budget, that would be £240 million. We recommend that **targeting environmental land management (ELM) schemes towards objectives for National Landscapes, which integrate national- and local-level objectives, filling in the gaps in ELMS, and increasing accessibility of ELMS is worth much more than £20 million.**

### Priority 2: A prudent investment of £11 million per year to rebuild National Landscapes' capacity, shore up effective functioning and position them to help deliver legally binding targets.


- **These resilient teams have been underfunded for decades.** Though highly valued by local communities, their national role and potential is under-recognised. With strong evidence of their adaptivity and cost-effectiveness, additional investment will make them even more impactful.
- Enable them to take advantage of immediate opportunities and **lever in new external resources including private finance, which will greatly multiply government investment.** With the maturing market for private sector investment in nature, comes the potential to leverage funding at an unprecedented scale, supporting at least the previous government's ambition to raise £500 million a year for nature by 2027, with a relatively modest and achievable investment now. This will unlock the opportunities offered by National Landscapes, with their nimble, adaptive model, eager, experienced and effective teams and excellent track record of innovative delivery.
- The amount that England's National Landscapes need to get them on a more resilient footing is £10.9 million above this year's baseline of £34.7 m. – £45.6 m. which, for comparison's sake, **represents only 1.9% of the £2.4 billion annual farming budget, for an area covering 15% of England's land.**


### Priority 3: Strongly implement the duty to 'seek to further the purposes', through secondary legislation, government guidance and sector-specific advice. Use the duty to align decision-making and investment, achieving greater momentum and coherence for national, legally binding objectives and targets.


- **The duty is potentially game-changing if we get it right** – galvanising and steering organisations to act positively to conserve and enhance natural beauty and pull together to protect and restore nature and landscape quality, take action for climate resilience, and contribute fairly to a thriving, diverse and accessible UK countryside. If supported with prudent secondary legislation and clear guidance, it could also **profoundly and positively influence organisational decision-making cultures in the UK, for instance, for water quality, nature recovery and natural flood management.**
- **Democratically derived Management Plans need to be championed as having the central role** in answering the question: 'what does furthering the purposes of National Landscapes look like?'
- **Strengthen the powers associated with National Landscapes, in line with increased national expectations**, starting with formal protocols in the secondary legislation and by making the two Conservation Boards (Chilterns and Cotswolds) and Chichester Harbour statutory consultees.

For more information or to discuss any of these priorities, please contact Ruth Larbey, Policy and Advocacy Manager at [ruth.larbey@national-landscapes.org.uk](mailto:ruth.larbey@national-landscapes.org.uk)

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