

# Natural England Action Plan 2025/26

Date: June 2025

# Contents

<b><u>Foreword</u></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><u>Introduction</u></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><u>How we work</u></b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b><u>Our priorities</u></b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b><u>Delivering our priorities in 2025/26</u></b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b><u>Assuring delivery of the Action Plan...</u></b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b><u>Our finances and resources</u></b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b><u>Our people</u></b> .....	<b>25</b>

# Foreword

The year ahead offers a real chance to make major progress in Nature recovery, but only if we act on the growing opportunities in front of us. Natural England has worked closely with the Government on its five missions, using our scientific and legal expertise to help shape policies that support the national priority of sustainable growth.

When we in Natural England talk about growth, we don't just mean the economy, housing or infrastructure but we also mean growing the amount and quality of Nature in England. Over the years, we've lost a lot of our natural environment. In the past, people often saw Nature as something to sacrifice for economic progress. But now we understand that Nature is a key part of a strong economy and a healthy society. We don't have to choose between growth or Nature, we need both. Green spaces and wildlife should be part of every new community and workplace.

To meet this challenge, Natural England has launched a new [Strategic Direction](#) called '**Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security**'. We created it with help from many partners, and working closely with colleagues in Defra and other parts of government. It is already beginning to guide our work as shown in the priorities set out in this Action Plan.

As we begin to embed the new Strategic Direction this year, we will focus at a more strategic level on where our positive influence on Nature recovery will have impact at a greater scale. At the same time, we will be removing bureaucratic barriers to allow partners delivering on the ground to increase the pace of restoring Nature.

We expect new tools to be available to help us over the next year. One is the Land Use Framework, which will help us balance the country's needs for housing, energy, water, food and Nature. Another is Environmental Delivery Plans and the Nature Restoration Fund, which would come into effect if the Planning and Infrastructure Bill becomes law. Together they will help new developments go beyond just avoiding harm to Nature, it will support real restoration of habitats and wildlife. It will work alongside Biodiversity Net Gain and build on Natural England's earlier work to resolve conflicts at a strategic level between development and protected species like Great Crested Newts. Finally, the Marine Recovery Fund provides a strategic solution to compensate for adverse effects of offshore wind developments on marine protected areas.

WE look forward to a further reset of all the funds that support Nature friendly farming. In 2025/26, we'll see the first Landscape Recovery projects in action. These projects bring together farmers, conservationists and government agencies to restore Nature and deliver benefits such as flood prevention and species recovery. Further landscape-scale successes are in the pipeline with five more new or significantly extended 'King's Series' of National Nature Reserves to be declared this year, maintaining our ambition of establishing 25 over five years and the completion of the King Charles III England Coast Path.

All our work, on land and at sea, depends on strong partnerships. While we're changing how we work, collaboration remains at the heart of our approach, and we are committed to empowering people to make the right decisions for Nature without detailed intervention.

Together, we can help deliver the Government's commitments to halt species decline, protect 30% of our land and sea for Nature by 2030 and make sure that everyone lives within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space, turning environmental ambition into meaningful action that benefits both people and wildlife.

**Tony Juniper CBE**

**Chair**

# Introduction

Our 2025/26 Action Plan sets out how we will prioritise our efforts to achieve the statutory targets for Nature in line with our new [Strategic Direction](#), the [Government's missions](#) Government's missions and the Defra Secretary of State's priorities<sup>1</sup>.

We stand at a critical moment, less than five years away from the first Environment Act target of halting the decline in species abundance as well as the UK's international commitment to protect 30% of the UK's land and sea for Nature by 2030 ('30by30'). These ambitious goals require urgent, decisive action and new ways of working by Natural England.

Our Strategic Direction reflects this urgency and change. It recognises that Nature is essential to society. It pushes us beyond just protecting Nature. Natural England aims to restore and rebuild natural systems so Nature can thrive everywhere and support growth (including housing, energy and transport infrastructure), security of food, water and the climate and health and wellbeing.

As we begin to prepare to act on the 2025 Spending Review, we need to respond to Government's ask for us to deliver savings and work more efficiently. We'll adapt by making sure Natural England is the right size and shape to deliver our priorities in the most impactful and efficient way, including by further automation of our services.

We'll work with Defra and other public bodies to deliver on our commitments following the Government's regulatory review recommendations, including enabling more people to self-licence and by instigating project-wide regulatory strategies for major infrastructure alongside colleagues in the Environment Agency and the Marine Management Organisation. We'll shift our regulatory approach to focus on large-scale ecosystems, not just individual cases. This will help us get better results while using our resources more wisely.

We'll reform how we handle casework and licences. We'll focus on high-risk and high-opportunity casework, like major infrastructure and large housing developments. We'll reduce the need for individual licences and expand the use of "earned recognition." For example, we'll test a new "trusted partner" model with the National Trust.

Together with Defra, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and other partners, and subject to legal changes, we'll start developing Environmental Delivery Plans ready to guide use of the Nature Restoration Fund and Marine Recovery Fund. These will help speed up infrastructure projects, support large-scale Nature recovery, and help developers meet environmental obligations more easily.

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<sup>1</sup> Clean up Britain's river, lakes and seas.  
Create a roadmap to a circular economy.  
Ensure Nature's recovery.  
Support farmers to boost food security  
Improve our nation's resilience to the dangers of flooding

We'll target our farm advice where it can make the biggest difference. We'll integrate Catchment Sensitive Farming advice with Environmental Land Management schemes, so more farmers enter schemes that make a real difference to water and air pollution and Nature recovery. We'll continue to advise Defra on the reformed Sustainable Farming Incentive and a new Countryside Stewardship Scheme, as well as delivering the long-term Landscape Recovery Scheme.

We'll also keep supporting public access to Nature. This includes establishing the Coast-to-Coast Path and the King Charles III England Coast Path, declaring more National Nature Reserves, and promoting Nature Towns and Cities. We'll continue to support Local Planning Authorities in their delivery of Local Nature Recover Strategies (LNRS), spatial planning tools that drive more coordinated, practical, and focused action to help Nature, as the forefront of our place-based working.

Science and evidence will continue to guide everything we do. We'll grow our knowledge through the Natural Capital & Ecosystem Assessment Programme. We'll also improve how we monitor Sites of Special Scientific Interest, using a new digital system to help us act faster and more effectively.

We're excited to work with our partners, customers, and stakeholders this year. Together, we'll keep shaping and delivering this ambitious Action Plan in-year and look forward to launching our full Strategy in the autumn ready for further change next year.

**Marian Spain**  
**Chief Executive**

# How we work

## Organisational context

Natural England is the government's statutory adviser for the natural environment. We are a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and as part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) group the work that we do contributes to the Defra Outcomes Framework. **Natural England is here to conserve and restore the natural environment for this and future generations.**

Nature recovery is closely related to the Government's missions as set out in its [Plan for Change](#). Nature has a vital role to play in delivering for Defra's and its Secretary of State's priorities in the coming year. Ensuring Nature's recovery was one of the five core priorities set out by the Secretary of State.

2025/26 sees significant change underway, both internally and externally:

- We are now within five years of the Environment Act target to stop the decline in species abundance and the UK's international commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for Nature by 2030 ('30by30').
- We expect publication of a refreshed Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP).
- Outcomes of the 2025 Spending Review mean ambitious savings targets set by HM Treasury up to 2028/29.
- We will act on recommendations from key reviews, including:
  - Dan Corry's review [Delivering economic growth and nature recovery: An independent review of Defra's regulatory landscape](#).
  - Jon Cunliffe's [Independent Water Commission: interim report](#) review of the water sector
- There are also legislative changes before Parliament, e.g. the Planning & Infrastructure Bill and Devolution Bill.
- Natural England's new [Strategic Direction 2025-2030 - Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security](#) was launched in April 2025, with the full Natural England Strategy due to be launched in the autumn.

Our mission remains as **building partnerships for Nature's recovery**. This reflects the need for us to work in collaboration with a wide range of people to undertake the rapid action to rebuild sustainable ecosystems and to protect and restore habitats, species and landscapes to help Nature thrive and be for everybody to enjoy. Our mission is set within the context of the current EIP which sets out the UK's commitment to environmental stewardship and global biodiversity conservation and our priorities will adapt to align with any new goals in the refreshed EIP due this summer.

## Our portfolios

Natural England delivers its work through six portfolios. These portfolios don't work in isolation. They combine statutory tools, expert advice, guidance and support services to deliver more together than they could alone.

- **Resilient Landscapes and Seas** - create thriving, resilient, functioning landscapes and seas rich in plants, wildlife and character that provide wide ranging benefits for Nature, climate and people.
- **Connecting People with Nature** - work to tackle the barriers to enjoyment, engagement, and connection with the natural environment, and to increase access to green and blue spaces in a way that supports socio-economic and health benefits for local communities.
- **Greener Farming and Fisheries** - focus our land and sea management activities in areas where we will achieve the greatest benefits for Nature and society. This will enable us to support system changes in strategic locations on land and at sea which provide a wider array of public goods including air, water, biodiversity, carbon and food security.
- **Sustainable Development** - Work to shape greener, healthier, investable places for people to live and work, with 'high nature; low carbon' housing, energy and infrastructure. Reform planning and licensing to secure the best outcomes for Nature and growth, moving away from piecemeal site-based casework towards strategic larger scale planning that enables developers to meet environmental obligations efficiently and achieves Nature restoration at scale.
- **Science and Evidence** - realise our ambition for Natural England to be an organisation where robust science and evidence is celebrated and used to understand how and why the natural world is changing, to be trusted and respected as leaders in applied environmental science, learning from what works and deliver Nature's recovery in an evidence-led way.
- **Managing the Organisation** – ensuring Natural England is a values-led organisation, delivering high quality services to our people, partners, organisations and communities engaged in achieving Nature's recovery.

# Our priorities

This year, we've carefully prioritised our work to focus on the areas where we can make the biggest impact. Our decisions reflect both our Strategic Direction, **Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security**, and the level and nature of funding we've received.

Thanks to additional funding for specific work, our overall budget has increased by 5% compared to 2024/25. However, our core funding has been reduced by 12%. This means we must focus our time and resources on the most essential activities. As a result, we will:

- prioritise only the 'must do' work that delivers the greatest value for Nature and people.
- scale back or stop activities that are unfunded, deprioritised by government or offer lower impact.
- ensure every action we take is aligned with our strategic goals and delivers value for public money.

We will focus on the following six priorities as set out in our Strategic Direction:

- 1) Drive Nature recovery at a greater scale and faster pace than before, by supporting large-scale projects and making it easier for landowners to get permissions for Nature-positive change.
- 2) Tackle the root causes of Nature's decline, working with Defra partners to ensure cleaner air, clean and plentiful water, healthier soils and rich, productive seas.
- 3) Partner with planners and developers on 'high nature; low carbon' houses, energy and transport infrastructure and introduce strategic solutions so development can also protect and restore Nature.
- 4) Support food security and sustainable farming, forestry and fishing through targeted advice and the right mix of public and private finance.
- 5) Shape better places for people to work and live by providing clear evidence and advice to our partners, using spatial plans for Nature as a framework for investment and joined up action.
- 6) Connect communities with Nature and create Nature close to people's homes, ensuring everyone gains from the health benefits Nature can bring.

We will deliver these priorities by:

- setting evidence-based standards, strategies and advice to empower others to recover Nature.
- building partnerships across society to drive action for more people to benefit from Nature.
- focusing on places where we can have the biggest impact and manage the biggest risks.
- outcome-focused regulation and enforcement that supports growth and empowers people to make the right choices.

- a dynamic approach to Nature protection, delivered in collaboration with other environmental regulators.
- harnessing data and digital to provide a better service to our customers and work more efficiently.
- using science, evidence, and analysis to empower action for Nature and support innovation.

## Critical Reform programmes

To deliver these priorities, Natural England will need to change. Our Critical Reform programmes will transform how we work, boost productivity and customer service, deliver more for Nature and improve the working lives of our people.

These programmes will give us a clear framework to coordinate the changes needed. We will integrate the recommendations from the various government reviews into our Critical Reform programmes. They will help us to prioritise our most important changes and provide structure and support for the teams delivering them, ensuring that we deliver the benefits across the organisation and bringing our Strategy to life.

There are four Critical Reform programmes:

- 1) Statutory service reform** - will reshape our key statutory services and how we deliver planning, licensing, and protected sites casework. It will focus on how these services can make a greater contribution to Nature recovery, improve certainty and speed of decisions, and improve customer experience.
- 2) Reshape the organisation** – will aim to reshape Natural England to build the foundations for delivering Natural England’s new Strategy. It will create a modern workforce for modern delivery, empowering our people to work in an agile, outcome-focused way and embrace change.
- 3) Planning policy reform** - will lead implementation of Government legislative and planning policy reforms, including preparing to deliver any new duties in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. It will shape legislative and planning policy and reforms in line with ambitions for our planning work to be customer focused, digitally enabled, and sustainable in the long term, with a shift in the scale at which Nature recovery is delivered through the planning system.
- 4) Optimise Synergy** – we will modernise and standardise our human resources, finance and commercial processes and replace existing systems with a modern and intuitive system that is being rolled out across all government bodies. We will strengthen our delivery by streamlining our systems, reducing our administrative burden and providing enhanced insight to aid decision-making.

# Delivering our priorities in 2025/26

Priority One	
<b>Priority</b> – our long-term goal	<i><b>Drive Nature recovery at a greater scale and faster pace than before by supporting large scale projects and making it easier for landowners to get permissions for Nature positive change.</b></i>
<b>2025/26 Key Performance Indicators</b> – how we will measure progress in 2025/26 towards our long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) features will have actions underway to achieve ‘favourable condition’.</li> <li>• Complete 1,000 landscape/vegetation and soil surveys as part of the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment Programme.</li> <li>• Monitor and support delivery of the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework across all 44 Protected Landscapes.</li> <li>• 250 rare and threatened species benefit from species and Nature recovery projects.</li> <li>• Creation or restoration of 13,200 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites.</li> </ul>
<b>Our priority actions for 2025/26</b> – what we will deliver this year towards achieving our long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We will pilot new ways to speed up consents for protected sites, helping us work more efficiently and meet growing demand.</li> <li>▪ We will improve our approach to SSSI designation and refresh our programme of cases under consideration.</li> <li>▪ We will prioritise monitoring SSSIs where it helps guide action to improve their condition and develop a new digital system for SSSI data and reporting</li> <li>▪ We will ensure responsible authorities complete Local Nature Recovery Strategies and support delivery with three major levers: Landscape Recovery, Protected Site Strategies and the Nature Restoration Fund.</li> <li>▪ We will provide advice to support Defra’s species targets and deliver key Species Recovery Programme projects.</li> <li>▪ We will give evidence-based advice to the Species Reintroduction Taskforce and licence reintroductions and translocations to move species to areas where it makes sense.</li> </ul>

## Priority One

- We will declare five new or expanded National Nature Reserves (NNR) as part of the 'King's Series' programme of works to ensure our NNR estate contributes to Nature recovery.
- We will complete the national landscape extension/designation of the Surrey Hills and Yorkshire Wolds.
- We will contribute to the Protected Landscape Partnership and report progress to Defra against the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework.
- We will define what Nature recovery looks like through Favourable Conservation Status and use to support licensing reform and our role as a statutory consultee, e.g. for offshore wind development.
- We will contribute to Government's Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment Programme including publishing a Peat Map for England.

Priority Two	
<b>Priority</b> – our long-term goal	<i><b>Tackle the root causes of Nature’s decline working with Defra partners to ensure cleaner air, clean and plentiful water, healthier soils and rich, productive seas.</b></i>
<b>2025/26 Key Performance Indicators</b> – how we will measure progress in 2025/26 towards the long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete 80 Marine Protected Area condition assessments.</li> <li>• Restore 4,000 hectares of peatlands through the Nature for Climate Fund (NCF) Peatland Grant Scheme.</li> <li>• Support tree cover targets by advice on 'right tree right place' to increase biodiversity and carbon secured through woodland creation.</li> </ul>
<b>Our priority actions for 2025/26</b> – what we will deliver this year towards achieving our long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We will deliver Protected Sites Strategies for up to 12 sites - including the five current pilots- by March 2026 to tackle issues like air and water quality/quantity on protected sites.</li> <li>▪ We will complete five Diffuse Water Pollution Plans and integrate with the wider Protected Sites Strategies programme.</li> <li>▪ We will work with the Environment Agency and water companies to support water efficiency for local plans in water stressed areas to achieve water savings in new developments, ensuring sustainable growth and Nature recovery.</li> <li>▪ We will review the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network and advise Defra on designating or expanding MPAs for offshore wind compensation.</li> <li>▪ We will develop the Natural England Spatial Seabed Sensitivity Tool (NESSST) and improve evidence on marine protected sites to support better decisions.</li> <li>▪ We will deliver the Peatland Capital Grant Scheme and develop the Peatland Restoration Register to coordinate peatland projects.</li> <li>▪ We will provide advice on planting the right tree in the right place, helping to meet the Environmental Improvement Plan tree planting target and deliver the best outcomes for Nature.</li> <li>▪ We will deliver the Nature Returns Programme to pilot and build the evidence base for Nature-based solutions for climate change at the landscape scale.</li> </ul>

Priority Three	
<b>Priority</b> – our long-term goal	<i><b>Partner with planners and developers on ‘high nature; low carbon’ houses, energy and transport infrastructure and introduce strategic solutions so development can also protect and restore Nature</b></i>
<b>2025/26 Key Performance Indicators</b> – how we will measure progress in 2025/26 towards the long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare up to 6 Environmental Delivery Plans to support use of the Nature Restoration Fund. (subject to legislation).</li> <li>• Maintain the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) register; 95% of applications verified within 10 working days.</li> <li>• Deliver 85% of statutory casework within published timescales.</li> <li>• Respond to 90% of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) within agreed timeframes/deadlines for statutory requests at pre-application and pre-examination.</li> </ul>
<b>Our priority actions for 2025/26</b> – what we will deliver this year towards achieving our long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We will focus planning and licensing work on high risk/high opportunity casework that enable Nature recovery, housing and infrastructure together. This includes major infrastructure projects, large-scale housing (through the Homes Accelerator) and New Towns.</li> <li>▪ We will work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to reform our work as a statutory consultee, including expanding cost recovery for advice to local planning authorities.</li> <li>▪ We will expand licensing and consenting schemes that trust individuals or organisations to take on more responsibility and reduce the need for individual checks.</li> <li>▪ We will continue to reform our species regulation regime to make it easier for people to get the permissions they need.</li> <li>▪ We will work with Defra, the Environment Agency and Marine Management Organisation to establish a ‘lead regulator’ to address environmental risks and opportunities of major infrastructure development, making it easier for developers to get the permissions they need at the start of a project without harming the environment.</li> <li>▪ We will advise the Government on major legislation, including the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, to ensure this supports Nature recovery and improve access to Nature.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We will develop Environmental Delivery Plans and prepare for the implementation of the Nature Restoration Fund.</li> <li>▪ We will support delivery of the Marine Recovery Fund to enable compensation needed to permit offshore wind developments.</li> <li>▪ We will develop Marine Net Gain to improve ocean health while supporting economic growth.</li> <li>▪ We will manage the Biodiversity Net Gain register, run the credit sales service, and improve the biodiversity metric.</li> <li>▪ We will work across Government to introduce biodiversity net gain for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and develop a pipeline of NSIPs, so solutions are secured early.</li> <li>▪ We will pursue strategic solutions for water pollution, water resource and air pollution to unlock development and support economic growth as part of the Nature Restoration Fund. We will test strategic approaches for other species, building on the success of the Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing.</li> <li>▪ We will work with the Defra group to plan digital improvements to the planning system from 2026 so we can offer a better service to our customers.</li> </ul>
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Priority Four	
Priority – our long-term goal	<b><i>Support food security and sustainable farming, forestry and fishing through targeted advice and the right mix of public and private finance.</i></b>
2025/26 Key Performance Indicators – how we will measure progress in 2025/26 towards the long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop landscape-scale projects including approving up to 22 Landscape Recovery Round 1 and up to 34 Round 2 projects.</li> <li>• Carry out 900 pre-application visits to ensure 700 Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreements once the scheme opens for applications.</li> <li>• Engage 5,500 farmer to reduce water and air pollution through the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme.</li> </ul>
Our priority actions for 2025/26 – what we will deliver this year towards achieving our long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We will work with partners to modernise how we deliver our farm advice, including Catchment Sensitive Farming, so it is focussed on the places where we can have most impact for Nature recovery and contribute to the Environmental Improvement Plan targets.</li> <li>▪ We will approve agreements for the Landscape Recovery scheme to help landowners/managers deliver large-scale projects to restore Nature.</li> <li>▪ We will work with Defra and stakeholders to make sure the new Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier scheme runs effectively and advise on the design of a revised Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI).</li> <li>▪ We will advise on the rollout of Fisheries Management Plans, Strategic Environmental Assessments and Impact Assessments to help restore Nature at sea.</li> <li>▪ We will contribute to Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management to improve marine management and help restore marine Nature.</li> <li>▪ We will study the risks and benefits of private finance so we can build stronger green finance partnerships that support nature recovery.</li> </ul>

Priority Five	
<b>Priority</b> – our long-term goal	<i>Shape better places for people to work and live by providing clear evidence and advice to our partners, using spatial plans for Nature as a framework for investment and joined up action</i>
<b>2025/26 Key Performance Indicators</b> – how we will measure progress in 2025/26 towards the long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work proactively with 20 additional Local Authorities to embed the new Green Infrastructure (GI) Standard into local plan policies, delivery plans or design codes, including those Nature Towns and Cities working towards accreditation.</li> <li>• Ensure the preparation of 48 high-quality Local Nature Recovery Strategies by Responsible Authorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Our priority actions for 2025/26</b> – what we will deliver this year towards achieving our long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We will work with our partners in the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Trust to deliver Nature Towns and Cities to inspire and support communities to take bold action for Nature in urban areas based on what people want.</li> <li>▪ We will finalise 48 Local Nature Recovery Strategies with partners and embed into upcoming planning reforms and new spatial plans, as well as supporting local authorities to use these strategies to coordinate actions that support the Environmental Improvement Plan.</li> <li>▪ We will keep the Green Infrastructure Framework simple, helpful and up to date and work with local authorities to support more of them using it.</li> <li>▪ We will strengthen the role of Green Infrastructure Standards in the National Planning Policy Framework.</li> <li>▪ We will use the evidence from our State of Natural Capital report to support key stakeholders to embed Nature in their decision making to mitigate Nature related risks and drive Nature recovery.</li> </ul>

## Priority Six

<b>Priority</b> – our long-term goal	<i><b>Connect communities with Nature and create Nature close to people's homes, ensuring everyone gains from the health benefits Nature can bring</b></i>
<b>2025/26 Key Performance Indicators</b> – how we will measure progress in 2025/26 towards the long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the range and diversity of stakeholders and partners involved in the delivery of Nature recovery led or convened by Natural England, to realise the benefits for Nature and people.</li> <li>• Maintain the proportion of public with access to nature within 15 minutes from home at 62% and the rolling average of adults accessing nature within the last 14 days at 64% (as evidenced by the People and Nature Survey).</li> <li>• Publish final proposals for King Charles III England Coast Path and Coast to Coast National Trails and complete establishment works to enable the launch of both paths in 2026.</li> <li>• 10 new, or developing, strategic policies or plans which reference alignment between nature recovery and health outcomes through proactive engagement by Natural England staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Our priority actions for 2025/26</b> – what we will deliver this year towards achieving our long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We will progress the Government's commitment of ensuring that anyone can reach green or blue space within 15 minutes' walk from home through Nature Towns and Cities, River Walks and Green Infrastructure Standards.</li> <li>▪ We will publish the Standard Evaluation Framework and guidance to enable a consistent approach to the evaluation of health impacts from outdoor interventions to support decision makers in the health sector.</li> <li>▪ We will support the national and local expansion of Green Social Prescribing (GSP) with local and national healthcare providers, the National Academy for Social Prescribing and other sector partners active in this area, drawing on the evidence of the GSP Test and Learn programme.</li> <li>▪ We will run the People and Nature Survey to learn more about how people view the natural environment and how it supports their wellbeing.</li> <li>▪ We will publish our final proposals for the 2,700-mile King Charles III England Coast Path and support local authorities to complete establishment works to enable the official launch of the trail in early summer 2026.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ We will complete the establishment of the Coast-to-Coast path as a National Trail.</li><li>▪ We will manage National Trail maintenance grants, so more people benefit from the trails.</li><li>▪ We will launch EXPLORE, a new tool to help local and combined authorities create strategic plans that support health, wellbeing, sustainability, and Nature recovery.</li></ul>
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# Assuring delivery of the Action Plan

## The Natural England Board

As a non-departmental public body (NDPB), Natural England is led by a Board appointed by the Secretary of State for Defra. The Board is collectively responsible for the organisation's overall performance and success. It ensures that:

- Natural England meets its statutory duties
- we deliver on the priorities agreed with the Secretary of State
- the organisation is well-managed
- we act as responsible stewards of the public funds we receive

The Board includes the Chair, ten members appointed as individuals (not as representatives of any organisations), and the Chief Executive, who serves as an ex-officio member.

## The Natural England Executive Committee (NExCo)

The Chief Executive of Natural England reports directly to the Chair of the Natural England Board. They are responsible for making sure the organisation has strong systems in place for risk management, governance, and internal controls as well as leadership to implement the organisation's strategy and duties. These systems help Natural England achieve its goals and deliver its policies effectively.

As the Accounting Officer, the Chief Executive must also ensure that public funds are used properly and responsibly, following the rules set out in [Managing Public Money](#).

The Executive Committee comprises the Chief Executive and five chief officers. Its purpose is to assist the Chief Executive in discharging her responsibilities as delegated to her by the Board and providing overall leadership by setting plans, reviewing performance and overseeing resourcing.

## Performance reporting

As a public body, we must report our progress to ministers, as set out in the annual letter from the Secretary of State to our Chair, and the public. Clear and effective reporting helps us:

- show evidence for the actions we take and how we allocate resources
- identify ways to improve our practices, processes, and systems
- demonstrate our performance, accountability, and value for public money

To track our progress, we monitor performance using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and a Corporate Health Scorecard. The KPIs support the long-term outcomes linked to our six strategic priorities and align with the Defra Outcomes Framework and the targets in the Environmental Improvement Plan.

Each year, we report our progress to Parliament through our Annual Report and Accounts, showing how we're delivering on our targets and commitments and confirming that governance is effective.

# Our finances and resources

Our total planned funding for 2025/26 is £333.6 million (including depreciation and Annually Managed Expenditure {AME}), of which £227.3 million is revenue and £106.3 million is capital. This equates to a 5% increase compared to total planned funding for 2024/25, demonstrating that Nature and Natural England are at the forefront of delivering the Government's priorities.

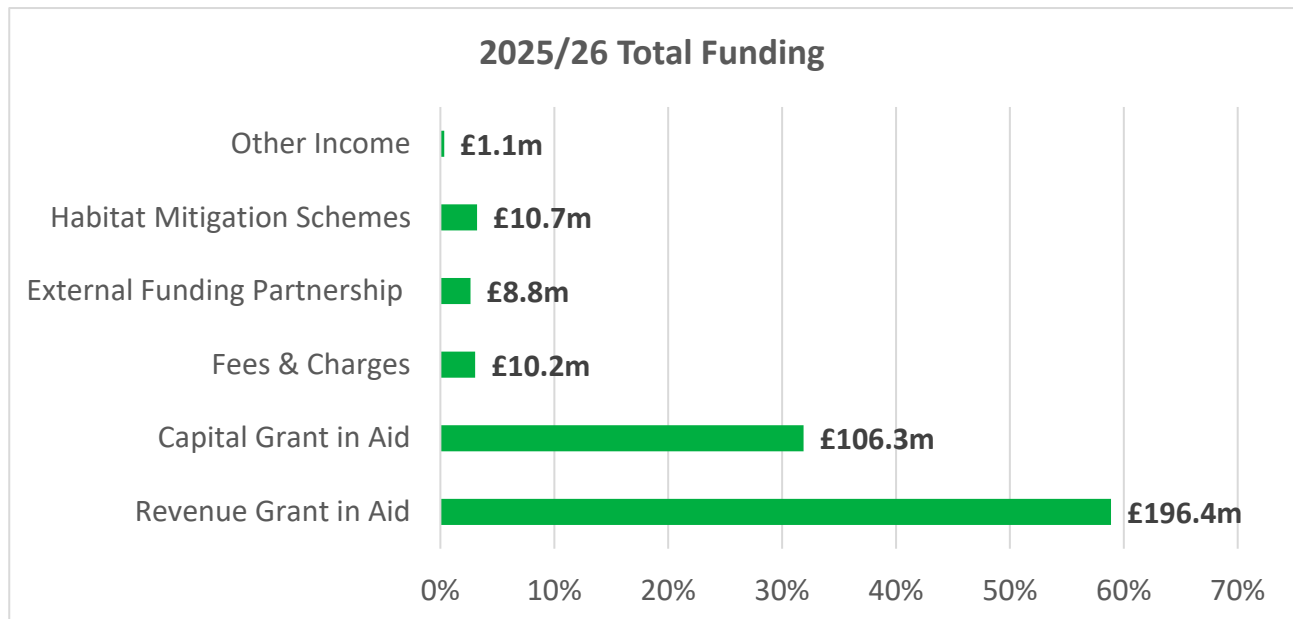
- 91% of our gross expenditure is funded from Grant in Aid (GiA) provided by Defra.
- 9% of our funding is from non-government sources which includes fees, charges, external partnership funding and other smaller income streams.
- We continue our endeavours to increase our chargeable income by recovering the full costs of the services we provide and invest in improvements for customers.

## Financial principles

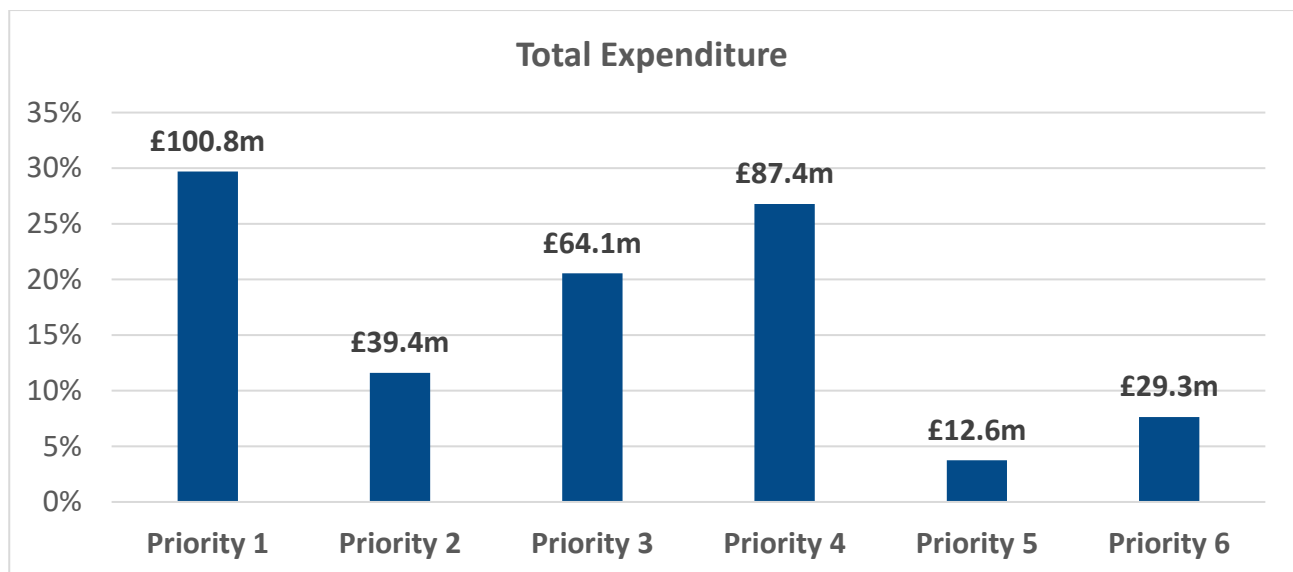
The principles underpinning our funding strategy ensure we maximise the returns from the resources we deploy to support the environment:

1. Where our services or outcomes benefit a group or organisation, and this group has the ability to pay for this, then the cost of the service should be met by this group as far as possible.
2. We must operate within our legal powers, adhere to principles of regularity and propriety and ensure alignment with relevant wider government policies.
3. We must be consistent in how we apply charges, and in how we deploy GiA. This means that where we have started charging for something we must always charge. We can't treat some users of our services differently from others.
4. We should look to enable market delivery wherever possible and avoid creating market distortion.
5. Consider funding options beyond GiA at the outset for any programme or area of delivery. This includes Green Finance, and external (grant) funding such as research funding.

## Our budget by funding stream



## Our budget breakdown by priority



### Key:

**Priority 1** - Drive Nature recovery at a greater scale and faster pace than before by supporting large scale projects and making it easier for landowners to get permissions for Nature positive change.

**Priority 2** - Tackle the root causes of Nature's decline working with Defra partners to ensure cleaner air, clean and plentiful water, healthier soils and rich, productive seas.

**Priority 3** - Partner with planners and developers on “high nature; low carbon” houses, energy and transport infrastructure and introduce strategic solutions so development can also protect and restore Nature.

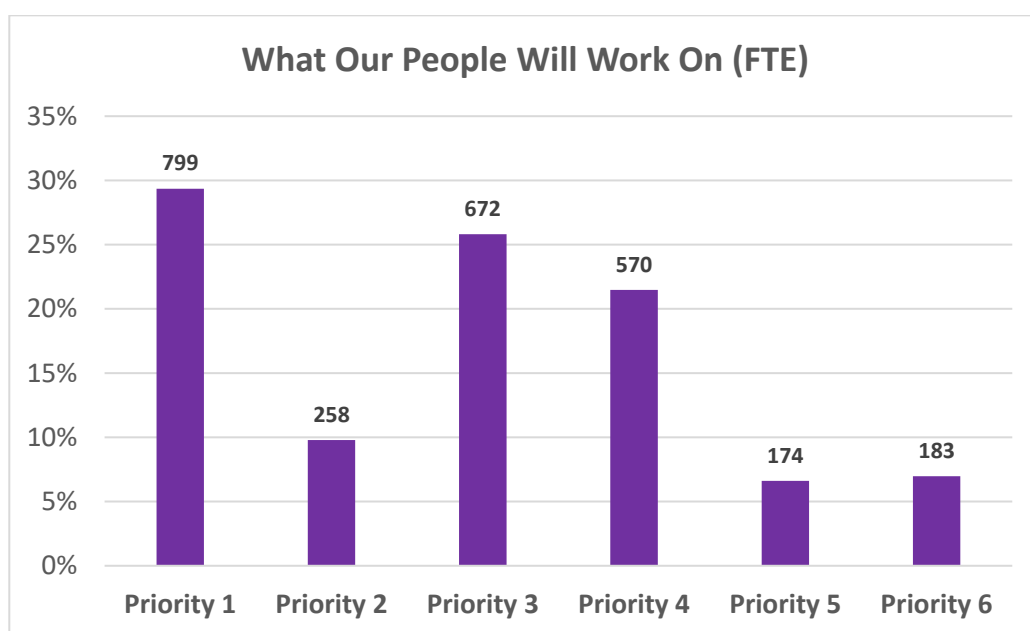
**Priority 4** - Support food security and sustainable farming, forestry and fishing through targeted advice and the right mix of public and private finance.

**Priority 5** - Shape better places for people to work and live by providing clear evidence and advice to our partners, using spatial plans for Nature as a framework for investment and joined up action.

**Priority 6** - Connect communities with Nature and create Nature close to people’s homes, ensuring everyone gains from the health benefits Nature can bring.

### Our staff resource

Our agreed average staff resource across 2025/26 is 2,656 full time equivalents (FTE), with an end of March 2026 target of 2,484 FTE. This staff resource is profiled as set out below across our Strategic Direction priorities.



As we move forwards with our new Strategy, we need to make sure Natural England is the right shape and size to deliver our priorities and be mindful of the wider political and fiscal context. In 2025/26 we are running a small Voluntary Exit Scheme as one of the measures to achieve the reshape and resize of Natural England.

# Our people

Our people are at the heart of everything we do. They bring a wide range of skills, knowledge, and experience across many professions and roles.

We put health and safety, wellbeing and personal development at the centre of how we work. Our values guide us every day:

- **We are ambitious**
- **We act with integrity**
- **We are inclusive**
- **We are collaborative**

We are committed to making sure that:

- Our people feel supported, encouraged, and valued throughout their careers.
- We work in an inclusive way, celebrating diversity and respecting everyone for who they are.
- Our leaders set the tone by motivating and engaging our people.

Our Strategic Workforce Plan supports our commitment to our people. It ensures we have the right people, with the right skills, in the right roles, at the right time and place to deliver our Strategic Direction. By aligning our workforce planning with our strategic goals, we can stay agile, focused, and ready to meet the challenges ahead.

