

**LEADING NATIONAL
PARKS INTO THE
FUTURE:
MODERNISING
NATIONAL PARK
AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE**





Campaign for National Parks is the only independent charity dedicated to securing the future of National Parks in England and Wales. Our independence from government means we can speak out when no-one else can. Our mission is clear: we're here to unite, inspire and empower everyone to take action and enjoy wilder National Parks.

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For further information: www.cnp.org.uk

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Registered office: Canopi, 82 Tanner Street, London SE1 3GN

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and gillthomasdesign.co.uk (typesetting and design)

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FOREWORD

The way in which National Parks are set up and go about their work, who makes the decisions and how they are made, are really important if they are to deliver effectively for nature and people. We know there's lots of commitment and talent already on the Parks' Boards; but we're also aware that there are plenty of others, especially young people, who want to get involved and help shape the future of National Parks – their future, their National Parks.

This is why we're already supporting a group of young campaigners; and through our National Lottery Heritage Fund project, National Parks Reimagined, we aim to increase diversity in National Parks by providing opportunities for hundreds of aspiring young leaders to gain skills and experience. Development programmes, leadership pathways, mentoring, Board apprenticeships and ambassador schemes will all be part of the mix; and we're looking forward to doing much of this in partnership with the National Park Authorities, who we know share our aspirations, so that together we can help make National Parks more representative, inclusive and ultimately effective.

The discussion and recommendations in this report are part of this ongoing dialogue; but at Campaign for National Parks we realise that as an organisation we, too, must show how we are committed to social justice and ensure we are inclusive, open and equitable. That's why we've placed social justice at the heart of our own strategy, policies and internal systems, so that 90 years after we were founded, we remain true to our radical roots. For us, social justice is ensuring National Parks are truly for everyone. This means confronting racism and inequalities in accessing, working in and governing these places. Our own governance is purposefully becoming more diverse and intergenerational, with more opportunities for reflection and increasing skills and confidence to be courageous in our leadership, and support our member organisations and partners. We have made changes, including to our own recruitment processes and ways of working, such as reporting via the Race Report and we are exploring new approaches like giving nature 'a seat on the Board'.

We hope that you find this work constructive and thought-provoking and that it helps move the wider debate forwards.

Andrew McCloy

Chair of Trustees
Campaign for National Parks

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1. Introduction

There are currently many talented and inspiring people working, and volunteering, for National Park Authorities (NPAs)ⁱ at all levels. However, their efforts are continually hampered by an outdated legislative framework that constrains diversity and innovation and limits the huge potential for nature recovery and health and well-being benefits that National Parks could be offering.

National Parks need a much stronger mandate to deliver nature recovery, if we are to have any hope of meeting statutory environmental targets and the international commitment to protect 30% of land and water for nature by 2030. The need to modernise National Park governance and purposes is becoming increasingly urgent, as evidenced in several recent reports, including our [2024 Health Check Nature Recovery report](#). There are also strong social justice arguments for ensuring that those making decisions about National Parks are more representative of the wider population and that these areas truly are for all the nation.

In this new research, we spoke to 33 people with a deep level of knowledge and experience of NPA governance to develop a better understanding of what really needs to change. The proposals in this report are based on what we learnt in the course of those discussions.

Each NPA Board consists of a mix of nationally and locally appointed members. However, the number of members and the way in which they are appointed varies between the NPAs. The specific arrangements are set out in detailed legislation¹ which can only be amended with parliamentary approval. We have focused our recommendations on England where the Government has already committed to [introducing](#) relevant legislative change, and where there is now a significant opportunity to address this issue as part of the local government reorganisation process.

When announcing their commitment to legislation the Westminster Government emphasised that change was needed in order to “allow for greater innovation and collaboration to prepare [Protected Landscapes] for the future”. At a time of nature and climate crisis, we need these areas to play a leading role in halting species extinction, bringing an end to damaging practices such as burning of peatland, cleaning up our waterways and creating places which are wilder and more welcoming for everyone. This level of ambition requires even more courageous leadership, made possible with the right governance framework in place.

2. The case for change

Over the last decade or so, various reviews, including the 2019 Glover Landscapes Review, have highlighted the need to update National Park governance to ensure that those making decisions about these areas are **more representative of the nation**. [Analysis by the Guardian](#) in 2024 found that 70% of the members on NPA boards were men, and just 1.7% were from ethnic minorities (across England 18% of the population belong to a minority ethnic group).

The Glover Review also concluded that NPA Boards are “**lacking in people who emphasise the purposes** of securing nature and connecting people with our special places.” In most NPAs in England, the only members currently selected on the basis of their skills and experience are the ones who are nationally appointed by the Secretary of State (the Broads Authority also includes co-opted members who are selected for their expertise in navigation). Analysis by RSPB in 2022 found that only a small proportion of these national appointees have skills relevant to nature recovery.

Modernising NPA governance also offers **the potential for significant cost savings**. The existing boards are too big to operate effectively and many are well over double the size of the boards of other organisations with far greater powers and resources.

The creation of fewer, larger unitary authorities as part of the local government reorganisation process provides an opportunity to reassess the way in which local authorities are represented on NPA Boards. Furthermore, failing to reduce the number of local authority members when a new unitary is created risks creating a situation where a single organisation has a very dominant role on the NPA.

The case for change can be summarised as a need for reforms that support and enable NPA Boards to become even more:

Diverse – to ensure representation and relevance to the nation

Ambitious – for nature, climate and communities

Effective – so that the significant time invested has the biggest impact

Balanced – strengthening local and national voices

Transformational in their leadership, as they evolve from bodies that were tasked with conserving the landscape, to those that are responsible for negotiating and leading significant change.

ⁱ References to National Parks and National Park Authorities throughout this report include the Broads and the Broads Authority. The Broads has a status equivalent to that of a National Park and the Broads Authority has National Park Authority responsibilities but is also a navigation and harbour authority with its own Act of Parliament.

3. Our research

The research included 33 semi-structured interviews with people with a good knowledge of how NPA governance currently works including NPA chief executives, chairs, other current and former Board members, from a total of 13 National Parks (nine in England, two in Wales and two in Scotland). We also gathered views from National Park Societies and through a workshop with young people and supplemented this with desk research.

We defined governance in its broadest form to include culture, ways of working, committee structures and the statutory purposes as well as the legislative framework. The overall aim was to develop a better understanding of what is, and isn't, working well in terms of current arrangements and to identify potential options for reform.

4. Research findings: What currently works well

Well-run Boards

Many interviewees stressed that there is much that works well about the current system, and that there are many highly dedicated and experienced people on the Boards, including ones who have been appointed as Parish, local and national members. Some referred to how much they enjoyed being an NPA member too: *"I love being on the Board – it brings me so much joy"* (Current Board Member). Even some of those who were quick to identify the need for change had positive things to say about the current arrangements. There were also several comments on the positive working relationship between Board members and the staff team.

Representation of both local and national interests

Having a mix of locally and nationally appointed members ensures that decision-making takes account of the interests of those who live and work in the National Park as well as the importance of these places for the nation. Some interviewees felt that the balance between local and national interests was not always working well currently but all agreed that it was important to retain it as a principle. The need for local representation in order to ensure democratic accountability was also noted. For the Broads, specifically, the importance of keeping strong connections to the boating community was highlighted.

"Member induction included meetings with the CEO and other senior members of staff for all members.... It's important that good practice like this is retained as part of any changes." (Former Board Member)

Role of NPAs as planning authorities

It was noted that NPAs' planning powers provide them with both influence and leverage over what happens in their area, and in some cases can be important financially if NPAs receive compensation or mitigation to offset the impacts of major developments. The importance of planning in delivering the National Park purposes was also noted. As one interviewee put it: *"I used to worry that NPAs spent too much time on planning but, partly because of changes in the planning system, I now believe that there is huge potential for NPAs to use their planning powers to deliver for nature."* (Former Board Member)

Induction, training and performance appraisal

It was clear that there are significant variations between the NPAs in terms of the level of induction, training and performance appraisal that currently takes place and that these processes are more likely to be applied to national appointees than to local ones. *"[The NPA was] very good in terms of training, performance appraisal process etc for members.. Member induction included meetings with the CEO and other senior members of staff for all members.... It's important that good practice like this is retained as part of any changes."* (Former Board Member)

Examples of good practice

Interviewees identified a number of examples of good practice that are currently adopted by some NPAs such as the **Member Champion system** where champions are appointed for particular areas such as nature recovery, farming, and engagement. Other examples of good practice adopted by some NPAs are **Youth Boards** and **Youth Volunteering Programmes**.

5. Research findings: What needs to change

Size and composition of the Boards

There was strong support for **reducing the size of Boards** but an emphasis on ensuring that we don't just reduce the size but also think carefully about who is on that board and that this is considered alongside other changes aimed at ensuring that there are enough members of different types to cover the tasks required of them. Concerns were expressed that *“even just fitting everyone in a room can be an issue”* (Current Board Member) and that large Boards can lead to rambling debates, and *“passengers”* (non-contributors). One suggestion was for a small focused high-quality strategic board with more people involved in an advisory capacity on particular specialisms.

Some interviewees had significant concerns about the risks involved in not doing anything to address the **implications of local government reorganisation**, for example: *“There is also an imbalance in the [NPA] since [X] Council became a unitary authority, leading to 10 representatives from one authority now sitting on the NPA, where previously there would have been ten district/county reps.”* (Current Board Member)

There could be a case for increasing the number of nationally appointed members to counter the reduced input from local authorities.

A few of those interviewed felt that more **radical change is needed**, and there was a specific suggestion that **nature should be given a seat on the Board**.

Culture and mindset within NPAs

It was suggested that providing **more opportunities for members and officers to work together** outside of formal Board meetings could address some of these concerns and the importance of having a strong chair and staff with the appropriate skills to support the Board was also highlighted. Interviewees suggested that there needs to be a **change of culture among senior officers**, and a greater willingness to do things in a different way including changing the format and content of meetings, where appropriate.

Others expressed concern about **the culture and tone of meetings** and made suggestions for extensive changes, particularly in order to ensure a more inclusive and welcoming culture: *“[There's a need for] wholesale changes, for example changes in the chair of the board and chairs of committees. The same people tend to stay in these roles for many years, and most of them are older white men who cannot speak for the wider population.”* (Former Board Member)

Recruitment and selection process

The only members for which there is currently an open recruitment process are those appointed as national representatives by the Secretary of State and there has been some significant progress recently in using recruitment to diversify Boards. However, for nine of the English National Parks (the exception is the Broads), open recruitment is for just a quarter of the membership. Some interviewees suggested that the **criteria and recruitment process for national appointees** should be changed further to ensure that more value is placed on lived experience as opposed to professional expertise. There were also ideas for putting a lot more effort into promoting the opportunities available to ensure a much wider pool of people apply.

Interviewees also identified the need to consider changes to **the selection process for local authority members** as it was generally felt that the current way of doing this is not working well. One interviewee suggested that *“selecting all members on the basis of merit should be the top priority for change.”* (Other)

Another suggestion for improvement which should be relatively easy to implement is the introduction of **fixed terms for local members** as these already exist for national members.

There is already training available for new NPA members but several interviewees raised the need for **much better induction and training for all members in all NPAs**. The need for better training for NPA Chairs given the importance of this particular role in ensuring that all members are able to contribute effectively. Others highlighted the **need for more support for new members when they first join a Board**, and more on an ongoing basis, such as allocating an experienced Board member as a mentor and creating a network for them to share experiences with others in the same situation.

“selecting all members on the basis of merit should be the top priority for change.” (Other)

NPA influence over appointments to their Boards

A number of interviewees expressed a view that **NPAs currently have too little say over who is appointed to the Board**: “*We as an organisation select none of our Members. I think that is wrong and is not ‘good governance’.*” (CEO). Others cited examples in the recent past where NPA preferences had been ignored in the final decisions on national appointees and noted that they have even less of a role in the appointment of Local Authority and Parish members. One suggestion for giving NPAs more influence over appointments to their Boards is to change the regulations **allowing for new members to be co-opted on to Boards**.

Supporting a diverse range of people to join Boards

It was suggested that we should also consider the development of alternative mechanisms for ensuring a diverse range of voices are included in decision-making, all of which should involve appropriate remuneration. Suggestions included apprenticeships and the establishment of a Social Justice or similarly titled committee/forum chaired by a member of the Board and whose members are people with lived experience in order to ensure their views were being included in the Board’s decision-making.

Parish Councillors

Parish members often bring both local knowledge and a clear commitment to the National Park having chosen to specifically put themselves forward for the role. However, there was concern about the Parish Member selection process and the suggestion that all local residents should be eligible to apply for these posts in open recruitment. This would allow people who may not necessarily want to be Parish Councillors to put themselves forward for the NPA.

“strengthening the purposes must go hand in hand with governance reform if we are to achieve maximum long term impact” (CEO)

Statutory purposes

The majority of participants agreed that **strengthening the statutory purposes of National Parks** is essential. Suggested changes included making stronger references to nature recovery and climate action in the first purpose and introducing a reference to mental and physical well-being in the second purpose. It was noted that any changes to the purposes need to take account of the fact that the Broads has a third purpose focused on navigation and additional powers and responsibilities as a navigation and harbour authority.

Several interviewees highlighted the close links between governance and the purposes with one arguing that *“strengthening the purposes must go hand in hand with governance reform if we are to achieve maximum long term impact.... this would not only make National Parks better equipped and more focused to tackle the biggest challenges ahead, but it would also attract exactly the sort of people who would want to join NPA Boards and make this happen.”* (CEO)

It was suggested that all members should be required to sign up to a commitment to support National Park purposes.

A more strategic focus for Board meetings

Some interviewees felt that one of the most effective ways of improving governance would be to **reduce the amount of Board meeting time spent on planning decisions**. It was suggested that more NPAs could adopt the South Downs model and delegate more decision-making to constituent local authorities allowing the NPA to focus only on development of the Local Plan and the more significant planning decisions.

Another way of ensuring a more strategic focus for Board meetings would be to **remove some of the unnecessary bureaucratic burdens** which currently apply because NPAs are “special purpose” local authorities and are considered to be part of local government.

Workload, time commitment and remuneration

Interviewees had differing views about the levels of allowances paid to NPA members, with some expressing concerns that these were too high, particularly as some members only attend a handful of meetings each year. One issue appears to be the lack of clarity about **what members are expected to do in return for the remuneration they receive.**

However, both young people themselves and other interviewees highlighted that proper remuneration is needed to enable more younger people to join NPA Boards. Several interviewees commented on the time commitment required to do the role properly and the fact that even combining NPA membership with a full-time job can be a challenge.

The need for increased funding

Several interviewees made reference to the financial constraints that NPAs are currently experiencing, with some suggesting that this is a far greater constraint than governance.

More radical reforms

It was clear from the views of some of our interviewees that we should also be considering a complete overhaul involving drastic and far-reaching changes including, for example, a National Protected Landscape Service responsible for governing all the National Parks and National Landscapes – similar to the National Landscapes Service proposed in the Glover Review.

There were mixed views about **NPAs status as “special purpose” local authorities** but some interviewees suggested creating something more akin to Non-Departmental Public Bodies or NGOs.

6. Recommendations for change

Our research identified a wide range of options for delivering governance reforms, some of which could be implemented quickly and some of which will require legislative change. We are proposing changes to the way in which Board members are appointed which will ensure that all members are appointed on merit while also strengthening the balance of local and national knowledge which is so vitally important in decision-making about National Parks. This model would strengthen local expertise and experience on the Boards by enabling a greater range of people to apply.

Quick wins

- 🔍 **Clearer direction from Government:** A Ministerial direction setting out the expectations and duties which apply to Board members and clarifying any issues where further guidance may be required such as how the statutory purposes should be interpreted.
- 🔍 **Recruitment:** Ensuring that the selection criteria for nationally appointed members are inclusive and reflect the purposes of National Parks together with a focus on encouraging more people from a diverse range of

backgrounds to apply and measures to support all newly appointed members, such as a buddy or mentoring system. This should build on the positive progress made in the recruitment of national members in 2025.

- 🔍 **A stronger focus on increasing diversity** including a specific emphasis on developing alternative routes to becoming a Board member such as via shadowing and apprenticeship opportunities and the establishment of social justice committees.
- 🔍 **A stronger focus on widening expertise and making more use of advisory panels** as a way of ensuring NPA decisions are informed by a wider range of experience and strengthening the governance between NPA Boards and management plan partnerships, including the statutory bodies who have a duty to seek to further National Park purposes.
- 🔍 **Induction and training** to be compulsory for all members and to include additional training for NPA Chairs to cover issues such as how to ensure meetings are inclusive.

- **Improved appraisal and performance** accompanied by measures to make it easier to remove under-performing members.
- **Making attendance at meetings easier** including through the removal of requirements to attend all meetings in-person and greater use of online and hybrid meetings.
- **Delegate more decision-making** by making full use of the powers available to NPAs to delegate planning decisions to officers, thus ensuring that the time members spend on planning is focused on the most strategic cases.
- **Better remuneration:** A standard approach to member allowances and time commitments accompanied by clear expectations of what members are expected to do in return.
- **Sharing good practice** and experiences such as Youth Forums and Member Champions across the Parks.

Use legislative change to optimise the current model

- **Reduce the size of the Boards** to a maximum of 12–15 members.
- Strengthen democratic accountability by ensuring that NPAs have a clear role in the decision-making of Strategic Authorities thus strengthening the links between local government and National Park Authorities.
- **Strengthen local and national representation by increasing the proportion of recruited members** through the introduction of a new model where
 - One third are recruited on the basis of having local experience related to the statutory purposes. This would replace parish council representatives (although parish councillors could still apply).
 - One third are recruited on the basis of having national experience related to the purposes.
 - One-third are appointed by constituent local authorities on the basis of merit, taking account of the need for political balance, and a geographical spread as well as appropriate skills and expertise in relation to the purposes.

- Open recruitment decisions would be made by a panel which includes the Secretary of State, the NPA Chair and an independent member.
- This model would allow people with deep local knowledge of the area to join the Board without needing to become a Parish Councillor. Increasing the proportion of openly recruited members would increase relevant experience and diversity.'
- **Strengthen the purposes** by placing a much stronger emphasis on nature recovery, climate action and equitable and inclusive access.
- **The introduction of fixed terms for all Board Members.**
- **Make it easier to co-opt members** by removing the restrictions on co-opting members to the full Board.
- **Reduce unnecessary bureaucratic burdens** by reducing NPA auditing requirements to a scale that is in line with their budget and staff resources.
- **Giving nature a seat on the Board:** appointing a recruited member to represent the interests of nature.
- **Giving future generations a seat on the Board:** appointing a recruited member to represent the interests of future generations, both residents and visitors.
- **Ensure NPAs have a clear role in the decision-making of Strategic Authorities** thus strengthening the links between local government and National Park Authorities.

7. What needs to happen next

We have written this report with the intention of helping NPAs perform their important role even more effectively and we hope that Board members will work with their staff teams to explore which of the quick wins they can adopt. However, we recognise that much of what we are proposing will require action from Defra. We are aware that they have already commissioned research to inform the development of the legislation that Westminster Government committed to in December 2024, and we hope that our own research will help inform this and other related pieces of research.

We would also like Defra to work with us and NPAs to develop relevant legislative proposals and secure a Bill to enable the necessary changes to be implemented and we will be working with others to push for this legislation to be introduced at the earliest possible opportunity. We are already working with a group of young people campaigning to reshape National Park governance and we will continue to support and amplify their work until we have secured the changes needed.

We have also recently secured National Lottery Heritage Funding for the development phase of the National Parks Reimagined project which aims to aid transformation in the decisions made for National Parks in England and Wales. One of the key objectives of this project is to increase diversity in National Parks by supporting the development of skills and capacity and by creating equitable opportunities for 500 young leaders to be at the heart of Protected Landscapes leadership.

We would like Defra to work with us and NPAs to develop relevant legislative proposals and secure a Bill.

We are also considering what more we can do to implement some of the ideas we have considered in this report as part of our own governance arrangements. Our Trustees are considering options for giving nature and future generations each a seat on our Board in future.

We believe that the National Park Authority model has delivered much in the last 30 years. Now, there is significant potential to build on this, including by optimising the current model of governance in order to better meet our current and future needs. The Government should use the opportunity of reforms to the purposes and governance to encourage a wider discussion on this important issue.



SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why focus on governance reform now?

The rich variety of landscapes in the National Parks of England and Wales include chalk grasslands filled with wildflowers, stunning mountain peaks, wild windswept moorlands, gently flowing rivers and so much more. These areas remain as vital for both people and wildlife today as they were when first designated in the 1950s and provide numerous other benefits for the nation – drinking water, carbon storage and flood alleviation to name just a few. National Parks also contain many of our most historic settlements and important cultural heritage sites, as well as being home to thousands of people, and providing millions of visitors with opportunities for recreation and spiritual restoration every year. However, there is so much more that these places could be delivering. **While there are currently many talented and inspiring people working, and volunteering, for National Park Authorities (NPAs) at all levels, their efforts are continually hampered by an outdated legislative framework that constrains diversity and innovation and limits the huge potential for nature recovery and health and well-being benefits that these areas could be offering.**

Our 2024 [Health Check Nature Recovery](#) report showed that the need to significantly reform the way in which decisions are made in National Parks is becoming increasingly urgent. If we are to have any hope of meeting the international commitment to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030 (the “30x30” target) and other statutory environmental targets in areas such as species recovery and habitat restoration, then National Parks need a much stronger mandate to deliver nature recovery. This was recognised by the Westminster Government which, in 2024, announced plans to strengthen the purposes and improve governance. The latest version of their Environmental Improvement Plan, published in December 2025, includes a commitment to “go further and faster in Protected Landscapes to meet our national targets for nature’s recovery.”²

It is clear that there is a strong appetite for change among the general public too with various public opinion surveys in recent years showing a strong desire for National Parks to play a far more effective role in nature recovery. For example, over 70 per cent of respondents to a Green Alliance survey carried out in August 2023³ said that providing habitats for wildlife should be a priority for these areas. An earlier poll carried out by Rewilding Britain⁴ found that 83% of the public support Britain’s National Parks being made wilder, with areas set aside specifically for rewilding.

Delivering the level of change required will only be possible if National Park statutory purposes are amended to place a much stronger emphasis on issues such as nature recovery, climate action and equitable and inclusive access.

It is also widely recognised that there are strong social justice arguments for reforming National Park governance and purposes to ensure that those making decisions about National Parks are more representative of the wider population and that these areas truly are for all the nation. There is now a significant weight of evidence about the lack of diversity on NPA Boards and the need to modernise them in order to maximise their effectiveness. In recent years there have been a number of reports which include recommendations aimed at strengthening the leadership and level of ambition shown by NPA Boards such as those by the Glover Landscapes Review and Audit Wales but as we discuss in Section 2 these issues have not yet been addressed.

Delivering the level of change required will only be possible if National Park statutory purposes are amended to place a much stronger emphasis on issues such as nature recovery, climate action and equitable and inclusive access. It is also essential that there is a strong emphasis on protecting and restoring nature in National Parks if these areas are to justify international recognition as Protected Landscapes⁵.

The evidence is clear that these issues must be addressed in both England and Wales. As work is already underway in Wales to explore non-legislative reforms to governance⁶, our report focuses on recommendations for change in England where the Government has already committed to introducing legislative changes to reform National Park governance and strengthen the purposes. That commitment was made in December 2024, but at the time of finalising this report (March 2026) there were still no details of when such legislation would be introduced. There is now a significant opportunity to address this issue as part of the local government reorganisation and devolution process that is already underway in England. The creation of fewer, larger unitary authorities also makes it even more imperative to review the way in which local authorities are represented on NPA Boards to avoid a situation where a single authority appointing a large proportion of the members becomes the dominant model.

It is essential that we use this period of change to modernise and strengthen the governance of NPAs. At a time of nature and climate crisis, we need these institutions to play an even greater leadership role, advocating for, driving, and leading change to ensure that within National Parks species extinction is halted, nature begins to recover, there is an end to damaging practices such as burning of peatland, wildlife persecution and water pollution, and local communities are also supported, creating places which are wilder and more welcoming for everyone. **This level of ambition requires even more courageous leadership, and such leadership will only be possible with the right governance framework in place.**

This level of ambition requires even more courageous leadership, and such leadership will only be possible with the right governance framework in place.

A SHARED VISION FOR NATIONAL PARKS

In Autumn 2024, National Parks England, Campaign for National Parks, The Wildlife Trusts, The National Trust, RSPB, The Woodland Trust and Wildlife and Countryside Link together set out a [shared vision for National Parks](#).

“A vision in which our National Parks are wilder, greener and more accessible and where wildlife is in abundance, supported by effective and proper protections for nature at the landscape scale. Where all the rivers and lakes are clean, peatlands are restored to full health and ancient woodlands and temperate rainforests are expanded. A future where communities are supported to thrive through the green economy and all damaging activities are prohibited. A vision of National Parks that belong to the nation, where every citizen feels welcome and has an opportunity to experience peace and tranquillity.”

The evidence gathering phase of this research involved conversations with 33 people with a deep level of knowledge and experience of NPA governance to develop a better understanding of what really needs to change. The proposals in this report are based on what we learnt in the course of those discussions.

As one of our interviewees (an NPA CEO), put it: *“If we get National Park governance right... and refresh the statutory purposes to make them sharper and up to date, we will set the foundations for National Parks to effectively tackle head on the really big challenges in the decades to come around climate, biodiversity, and so on.”*

We recognise that some of the issues addressed in this research also apply to the governance of National Landscapes. However, there are also some significant differences between the governance arrangements for the two different types of Protected Landscape and the inclusion of National Landscapes would have made this a significantly larger piece of research. We have therefore chosen to limit the scope of our research to NPA governance. We have also limited our remit to considering the arrangements in England (and to a lesser extent Wales) and did not look at what happens in other countries.

“If we get National Park governance right... and refresh the statutory purposes to make them sharper and up to date, we will set the foundations for National Parks to effectively tackle head on the really big challenges in the decades to come around climate, biodiversity, and so on.” (CEO)

1.2 Current arrangements

National Parks have been designated for the benefit and enjoyment of the nation so those responsible for making decisions about these areas must balance the needs of local people and businesses with the needs of visitors, future generations and other species. Each NPA Board consists of a mix of nationally and locally appointed members. However, the number of members and the way in which they are appointed varies between the NPAs and between England and Wales. The specific arrangements are set out in detailed legislation⁷ and can only be amended with parliamentary approval.

NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES

The statutory purposes of National Parks are:

- ▶ To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area (“the conservation purpose”).
- ▶ To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public (“the recreation purpose”).

NPAs also have a statutory duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Parks.

The Sandford Principle specifies that where there are irreconcilable conflicts between the two purposes, then the conservation purpose should take precedence.

The Broads Authority has a third purpose relating to protecting the interests of navigation and the Sandford Principle does not apply here.

In England, the number of members on each NPA Board, except the Broads, currently varies between 18 and 30. Legislation requires that these are made up of the following:

- ▶ Around half of the members are elected representatives (councillors) appointed by the local authorities with land within the National Park who must make appointments in accordance with the political balance of their authority.
- ▶ Around a quarter to a third of members are appointed directly by the Secretary of State, following an application process (see text box below).
- ▶ The rest are selected by Parish Councils within the National Park often by a vote and then formally appointed by the Secretary of State.

The Broads Authority has slightly different arrangements. There are 21 members in total including nine appointed by local authorities in the area, ten appointed by the Secretary of State and two members who are appointed by the Authority itself from the eight co-opted members of the Navigation Committee.

In Wales, each NPA has 18 members and is made of:

- ▶ One third of members appointed by the Welsh Government, following an application process.
- ▶ Two thirds of members appointed from councillors of local authorities with land within the National Park.

SOME RECENT WINS: AN IMPROVED RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR SECRETARY OF STATE APPOINTEES

Both the NPAs and the Public Appointments Team in Defra put extensive efforts in to improving the most recent round of recruitment for Secretary of State appointees (Spring 2025). Defra prioritised both diversity and relevant skills by using inclusive criteria in the selection process, undertaking targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, and convening balanced, representative recruitment panels including independent panel members with EDI specialisms. This helped to support a diverse pool of applicants and uphold the principles of fairness, transparency, and merit throughout.

As well as promoting the roles on social media, Defra officials attended a webinar for prospective candidates hosted by Campaign for National Parks, contacted around 300 networks and approached 60 applicants directly. The result was an unprecedented level of interest from candidates. The advert to recruit 29 new board members across 10 NPAs closed on 19 May and resulted in a total of 284 applications. The resultant appointments were incredibly strong, in terms of expertise and lived experience, including a new cohort of younger board members. This shows what can be achieved, though it is important to note that with the current legislative arrangements, this kind of open recruitment only accounts for a small proportion (25%) of Board members.

Existing NPA members do not have any control over these arrangements and little opportunity to influence who is appointed to join them. Even if they are involved in the interview process for the nationally appointed members, they do not have any control over who is actually appointed.

NPAs are members of the local government family but are also **independent, “special purpose” local authorities** established to act in the best interests of the National Parks and to encourage others to do the same. The English NPAs and the Broads Authority are funded by Defra and the Welsh NPAs by Welsh Government.

All NPA Board members receive a basic allowance to cover their time and are able to claim other reasonable expenses, such as for travel to meetings. Those with additional responsibilities, such as the Chair and Deputy Chair, also receive an additional allowance. However, in England the level of these allowances, and the time commitment expected in return, varies between the NPAs. For example, in 2024/25 the basic annual allowance was almost twice as much for Dartmoor NPA members (£1,980) as it was for those on the Broads Authority (£1,046) even though the time commitment expected was slightly lower (2 days a month compared to 2–3 days) and the allowance for Lake District NPA members was even higher (£3,000 per year) but for a slightly larger time commitment (3–4 days a month)⁸. The allowances for NPA members in Wales which are set by an independent remuneration panel are higher than in England and the same rates apply in all three NPAs. The basic annual allowance for 2025–26 is £5,576.

WELSH GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE FOR NPA MEMBERS

Following a report by Audit Wales in 2024 which recommended that NPA members should be provided with more support and guidance, the Welsh Government published a guide to members' roles and responsibilities as "part of a wider package of governance assistance being provided to the NPAs by Welsh Government, designed to equip Members with the skills and resources required to navigate the conflicting priorities they face." As well as some more general advice on good governance and applying the principles for public office, the guide includes a section on the specific commitments involved in being an NPA member and highlights that members should dedicate sufficient time to ensure they can undertake this role effectively.

Welsh Government also issues a "remit" letter to NPAs setting out what they are expected to deliver in return for the funding they receive. The most recent letter asks them to ensure that this governance handbook is "embedded in both new Member induction and in the development of all existing Members."

The Boards of the **Scottish National Park Authorities** are made up of ministerial appointments, local authority councillors and directly elected representatives of the local community. Schedule 1 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out requirements for Board membership, with at least one fifth of the total to be directly elected. When the Scottish National Parks were first designated in the early 2000s each of the Boards had 25 members (the maximum allowed under the 2000 Act) but the numbers were subsequently reduced following a review in 2009. There are now 17 members on the Board of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and 19 members on the Board of the Cairngorms National Park. Five members in each of the Parks are directly elected with the remainder being appointed by Scottish Ministers, half of these following nomination by a local authority.

Some of the key differences from arrangements in England and Wales include:

- The **directly elected representatives**: Elections take place every four years by postal votes and there is usually a good turnout—40%–50% sometimes.

Candidates must secure nominations from 10 residents and there are usually five or six candidates competing for each place. In recent years, the NPAs have done a lot of work to encourage a range of people to put themselves forwards as candidates but there is still a lack of diversity among those elected, in part reflecting the make-up of the populations of the Parks. Candidates do not generally stand on behalf of political parties.

- **NPAs are Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)** rather than "special purpose" local authorities: This means that local authority nominated members must also be appointed by Ministers, although this is in fact something of a formality and it would be extremely unusual for Ministers to refuse to appoint someone nominated by a local authority.
- **Greater flexibility on who local authorities can nominate**: there is no requirement for political balance and in fact, local authorities do not even have to nominate an elected member although in practice they always have done so to date.
- **Higher remuneration**: the basic allowance for Board members is approximately £9,000 per annum, significantly higher than that for any of the English or Welsh NPAs.

Both Scottish NPAs have responsibility for producing local development plans, however, the arrangements for dealing with planning decisions vary between the two Scottish Parks. Responsibility for decision-making in the Cairngorms National Park is shared between the NPA and the five constituent local authorities with the NPA 'calling in' and deciding the bigger and more significant applications (around 6% of the total). In contrast, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NPA is responsible for deciding all planning applications within the National Park. This difference is due to the fact that when the National Parks were first established, the local authorities in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs area were happy to have a single planning authority but one of the constituent authorities in the Cairngorms did not want to give up their planning powers. The National Parks legislation in Scotland was specifically designed to allow for this flexibility and planning arrangements are specified in each Park's Designation Order. There is no pressure for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs to change to the Cairngorms model as Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA sees planning as a key way of delivering National Park objectives.

1.3 NPAs' role in planning

Today NPA Boards have two distinct and important roles in planning: (1) Plan-making – agreeing the Local Plan policies which shape future development in the area and (2) development management – making decisions on individual planning applications. Most development management decisions are delegated to officers so Boards usually only deal with those considered to be more significant or controversial.

When the first National Parks were designated in England and Wales in the 1950s, most were administered by a committee of the local planning authority responsible for that area, or a joint committee where the Park covered more than one local planning authority area. However, there were different arrangements in some National Parks, for example, the Peak Park Planning Board was established with full planning powers for the Peak District from the start. This meant there were a range of different arrangements in place for dealing with the planning functions in National Parks in the early days.

Legislation passed in 1974 ensured that all National Parks would have a single committee: where the Park was covered by two or more counties, this was to be a joint committee of the constituent counties. In 1991 the *Edwards' Review of English and Welsh National Park Authorities* (Fit for the Future) concluded that having fully independent bodies responsible for planning would enable a clarity of vision and self-confidence; a higher profile; and officer advice which was always focused on National Park activities. This led to the establishment of National Park Authorities as single planning authorities responsible for both plan-making and planning decisions across the whole of each of the National Parks when the National Park Authorities were created under the *Environment Act 1995*.

HOW THE GOVERNANCE OF NATIONAL PARKS EVOLVED FOLLOWING THE EDWARDS REVIEW IN 1991

The Edwards review in 1991 suggested between 18 and 24 members as providing the right balance between efficiency and acceptable representational coverage and proposed having only local authority and Secretary of State national appointees. Edwards' recommendations are very similar to those in the Hobhouse Report which was published in 1947 when the legislation to establish National Parks was first being developed. This proposed a maximum of 25 members on the National Park Committees as they were then known and recommended that 50% of these members should be nationally appointed. When the Environment Bill was first introduced to Parliament in 1994 it proposed that half plus one of members would be local appointees and the remainder national but a compromise amendment was then agreed allowing for Parish appointees as part of the Secretary of State's allocation, with the result that the ratio adopted in law is 75% representing local interests and 25% national interests.

The **mix of locally and nationally appointed members** is intended to ensure that both local and national interests in the National Park are taken into account in the Board's decision-making. In some NPAs, the whole Board sits on the Planning Committee, in others there is a separate sub-committee to which a selection of Board members are appointed, usually in the same proportions as on the whole Board so approximately half are generally local authority appointees.

In most National Parks in England and Wales, all local planning decisions are now made directly by the NPA, but a different model operates in the South Downs where the NPA has agreed partnerships with all the local authorities operating within the National Park boundaries. This has allowed the local authorities to continue dealing with the majority of planning applications for their area if they wish to. Five of the authorities have chosen to take up this option with the NPA dealing with all planning applications, advice and queries across the rest of the National Park area. There is a single Local Plan for the whole National Park which the NPA is responsible for developing and all applications must be determined against the policies in this plan, including those for which constituent local authorities are responsible. This approach ensures that constituent local authorities can continue to have a high degree of influence on individual planning decisions while still ensuring a strong focus on National Park purposes as a result of having a single Local Plan for the area.

A Defra review of the English National Parks in 2002⁹ concluded that the creation of independent authorities had been a positive step. More recent research for Welsh Government¹⁰ has demonstrated **the importance of planning to the boundary of National Parks**, as opposed to planning within National Landscapes which is to local authority boundaries, in order to achieve the statutory purposes. This is because the National Park Authorities are able to adopt a consistent approach across the whole of the National Park area regardless of local authority boundaries resulting in a clearer focus on the National Park purposes and better alignment between the Local Plan and the National Park management plan.

The mix of locally and nationally appointed members is intended to ensure that both local and national interests in the National Park are taken into account in the Board's decision-making.

1.4 Structure of the report

Section 2 provides further details on the case for change drawing on the findings from a number of government reviews and other previous research.

Section 3 introduces our research and sets out some of the key issues we identified.

Section 4 goes into more detail on some of the issues that need to be considered as part of any reforms to governance, focusing primarily on aspects of the current system that were identified as working well.

Section 5 considers some of the challenges of the existing system and the aspects that particularly need to change.

Section 6 sets out the options for change that we have identified.

Finally, **Section 7**, sets out what we believe should happen next and what we plan to do to ensure that happens.



SECTION 2.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

2.1 Representing the nation

Over the last decade or so, various reviews have highlighted **the need to update National Park governance**. This includes the [2019 Glover Landscapes Review](#) which concluded that the boards governing England's 10 National Park Authorities (NPAs) are “shockingly” “lacking in diversity”. A few years earlier, the Marsden Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales had noted that the governance arrangements for National Parks were not currently very representative of Welsh society in terms of gender, disability and ethnicity.

More recent analysis by the [Guardian](#) in 2024 found that 70% of the members on NPA boards were men, and just 1.7% were from ethnic minorities (across England 18% of the population belong to a minority ethnic group). At the time of the Glover Review, the average age of NPA Board members was 64.

There were similar findings in an [Audit Wales report](#) (2024) on the governance of National Park Authorities which highlighted **weaknesses with the current system including a lack of diversity** and called on Welsh Government to make changes to ensure that the model is fit for purpose for both the new and existing National Parks. At the time of the research for the Audit Wales report (September 2023), only 10 of the 36 NPA members in Wales were female and there were none from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background.

The **NPAs themselves recognise that there is a need for change**. As part of its [Great National Parks Plan](#), National Parks England has said they want to see “*reform of our governance to embed genuine co-creation and greater diversity*”. The Peak District NPA, which has the highest number of members of any UK National Park, published [a paper](#) in January 2025 setting out an ambition for the diversity of its members to be more reflective of wider society and National Park users and for the number of members to be reduced. The NPA expressed an intention to work with government and others to address these issues.

National Parks England has said they want to see “reform of our governance to embed genuine co-creation and greater diversity”.

The Peak District paper also highlights some of the barriers to increasing diversity on NPA Boards under the current arrangements when 22 of the 30 members must first have been elected as a Parish or local councillor before joining the Board. This is because: “There are many people who do not have the opportunity, capacity or interest to do all that is involved in being a local councillor or member of a Parish Council but who otherwise might make good National Park Authority Members. Parish Councils in particular tend to attract an older demographic and being residents of the National Park, the vast majority of them will also be white. Local politics is also skewed to an older demographic. The lack of ethnic diversity of local councillors in some of our appointing local authorities also makes it difficult for the Board to achieve ethnic diversity via this route.”

Similar concerns about the lack of diversity on NPA Boards were being raised at least as far back as 2002 when a [Defra review of the English National Parks](#) found that “There are very few people from ethnic backgrounds, and members tend to be older and male. This is particularly true of local authority and parish council appointees. This issue goes wider than National Park Authorities and is relevant to local government as a whole.” At the time of this review there was an almost 50:50 split between men and women among Secretary of State national appointees something which was attributed to efforts by Defra and the Countryside Agency to secure gender diversity. However, by the time of the Glover Review nearly two decades later only 35% of national appointees, and less than 30% of all members, were women.

It is clear that the need for action is even more urgent than ever.

2.2 Ensuring relevant expertise

In addition to identifying the lack of diversity the Glover Review concluded that NPA Boards are “lacking in people who emphasise the purposes of securing nature and connecting people with our special places.” While there are some expert and extremely dedicated NPA members, there are also others who do not have the skills and knowledge needed to take decisions that further the National Park statutory purposes. Only a few have expertise in nature recovery or other areas that are particularly relevant to delivering those purposes.

In most NPAs, the only members currently selected on the basis of their skills and experience are the ones who are nationally appointed by Welsh Government or the Secretary of State in England. The Broads Authority also includes co-opted members who are selected for their expertise in navigation. Analysis by RSPB in 2022 found that only a small proportion of these national appointees have skills relevant to nature recovery. The Guardian found that only 15 board members (7%) had nature or conservation expertise, and three National Parks had no conservation experts on their Board.

Our 2024 Health Check Nature Recovery report supports these findings. As part of the research for this report we asked all NPAs how many of their Board members have expertise in nature recovery.

- ▶ One NPA identified four members who were actively involved in nature recovery schemes e.g. through an interest in woodland or as nature-friendly farmers.
- ▶ Two NPAs said they had three current Board members with expertise in nature recovery.
- ▶ Most of the rest said they had one or two.
- ▶ The vast majority of NPA members with nature recovery expertise are national (Welsh Government or Secretary of State) appointees.
- ▶ Many other Board members have skills in related areas, for example, one NPA said that in addition to two SoS appointees with nature recovery expertise, they had six with land management expertise which included elements of nature recovery, only one of which was a national appointee.

In the Health Check report we concluded that the current arrangements for NPA governance and leadership are one of the most significant challenges to pursuing nature and climate recovery, achieving international ‘30x30’ commitments, and delivering the Government’s ambitions for greener and wilder Protected Landscapes and broadening public access to nature.

As the Glover Review highlighted, nature recovery is not the only topic where there is a need for increased expertise among NPA Board members. It is essential that Boards also include those with a diverse range of skills and experience in all the areas which are important for delivering National Park purposes including, for example, cultural heritage, access and inclusion.

A few months after we published our Health Check report the Westminster Government committed to introducing legislation to improve National Park governance and when announcing this commitment they emphasised that change was needed in order to “allow for greater innovation and collaboration to prepare [Protected Landscapes] for the future”.¹¹ This announcement also included a commitment to amend National Park purposes to provide a clear mandate for nature recovery and increasing public access to nature. **Delivering this mandate will require those on the Boards to have not only relevant expertise but the necessary strategic skills and lived experience in order to create a culture and ways of working which supports greater innovation and collaboration.**

It is essential that Boards also include those with a diverse range of skills and experience in all the areas which are important for delivering National Park purposes including, for example, cultural heritage, access and inclusion.

NATIONAL PARKS AND THE SEA

Another area where there is increased need for NPA members with relevant skills is marine conservation. Working with the eight English and Welsh NPAs with coastline, in 2025, we published new research exploring the appetite towards a new endeavour, for National Parks to include the sea¹³. It found that National Parks coastal boundaries vary between high and low water mark, with some including nearshore islands but not the sea. The level of engagement with coastal communities and in-house marine expertise varied, with some including coastal and seascape objectives in their management plans. Park officers considered it legitimate and logical to expand the existing National Park into the seascape, identifying various benefits including strengthening and enabling more democratic accountability in marine planning and better managing recreational pressures. But this could only happen if additional resources were available. The report highlighted that, ultimately, governance changes along with primary legislation are needed to extend National Park designations seaward, but, in the shorter term, there was significant potential to build connectivity in decision making across landscapes and seascapes. Overall, there was a positive level of interest in exploring the idea further and we are continuing this work as part of our National Marine Parks project.

2.3 Cost savings

Modernising NPA governance also offers **the potential for significant cost savings**, as it provides an opportunity to establish smaller, more efficient Boards. The allowances for Board members, along with the staff and other costs associated with running the Boards currently account for significant proportions of overall NPA budgets.

The existing boards are far too big to operate effectively.

Various research has found that large boards are less effective at decision-making and it has been suggested that the optimum size of a board is about 10 to 12¹². Many NPA Boards are well over double the size of the boards of other organisations with far greater powers and resources. For example, the Environment Agency has only nine board members, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has 11 and most companies and charities have fewer than 12. Natural England has a board of 12 members overseeing a budget that is several times the combined budget of England's NPAs.

2.4 The impacts of local government reorganisation

The creation of fewer, larger unitary authorities as part of the current process of local government reorganisation in England provides an additional justification for reassessing the way in which local authorities are represented on NPA Boards. Where a single unitary authority will now be covering an area in a National Park that was previously the responsibility of several different smaller authorities, it would not be appropriate for the unitary to continue to appoint as many members as were previously appointed by each of the smaller authorities.

Failing to reduce the number of local authority members when a new unitary authority is set up risks creating a situation where a single organisation has a very dominant role on the NPA, effectively giving the political party running the unitary authority control of the NPA too. It is therefore essential that there is a significant reduction in the number of local authority appointed members in such cases.

The case for change can be summarised as a need for reforms that support and enable NPA Boards to become even more:

Diverse – to ensure representation and relevance to the nation

Ambitious – for nature, climate and communities

Effective – so that the significant time invested has the biggest impact

Balanced – strengthening local and national voices

Transformational in their leadership, as they evolve from bodies that were tasked with conserving the landscape, to those that are responsible for negotiating and leading significant change



SECTION 3. OUR RESEARCH



3.1 How we gathered evidence

The evidence gathering phase of the research included interviews with 33 people with experience of how NPA governance currently works. This qualitative research method was chosen to allow us to explore issues in-depth through discussions with those with a good knowledge of the topic. Around half these interviews were with current or recent Board members in England – including Board Chairs and a mix of national, parish and local authority members. The interviews also included 14 people whose experience is based on working closely with Boards over a number of years rather than being members themselves, for example NPA Chief Executives, or who had experience of governance arrangements in Wales and Scotland. In addition, we gathered views on governance from National Park Societies and through a workshop with young people.

The table below includes a breakdown of the number of people of different types that we spoke to as part of this research.

Category	Number of participants
NPA Chairs	3
Other Current Board Members	6
Former Board Members	6
NPA CEOs	7
Young People	3
Other	8
Total	33

We have identified most of the quotes included in this report using the categories in this table but there are some we have completely anonymised to avoid any risk of identifying individual interviewees.

For the purposes of this research, we defined governance in its broadest form to include culture, ways of working, committee structures and the statutory purposes as well as the legislative framework.

Interviewees were selected in a number of ways: (i) The Chairs and CEOs of all NPAs in England and Wales were invited to take part; (ii) The research was promoted at Campaign for National Park events including our Council meeting in May 2025 and people were invited to express an interest in participating; and (iii) members of the project steering group and the Campaign for National Parks team identified additional interviewees (particularly to ensure a diversity of views were included). This resulted in interviews with people with experience on 13 different NPA Boards (nine in England, two in Wales and two in Scotland).

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire to explore what is currently working well and should be safeguarded when making changes and what are the biggest challenges and areas where change is most needed. Notes were taken throughout these interviews, and these were then analysed to identify the key themes and to understand the range of views expressed.

We have supplemented the evidence from the interviews with desk research. Finally, we sent the draft report to a small number of experts for comment. **The overall aim was to develop a better understanding of what is, and isn't, working well in terms of current governance arrangements and to identify potential options for reform.**

The overall aim was to develop a better understanding of what is, and isn't, working well in terms of current governance arrangements and to identify potential options for reform.

3.2 Identifying both common ground and differences


The interviews identified a number of areas where there appears to be broad agreement on aspects of the current system and what needs to change. **There was general agreement on the case for change and the key principles about what needs to change, but more differences when it came to considering the specific details of the changes required.** As we discuss in more detail in section 4.1, several interviewees were very positive about their experiences of being on an NPA Board, but no-one suggested that there wasn't any need for change.

The majority of interviewees highlighted the importance of having both the diversity in expertise and experience; and strategic skills and a deep knowledge of the local landscape and communities that comes from having a mix of local and national appointees. There was also a high level of support for NPAs continuing to have planning powers. In terms of what needs to change, again there was agreement on some issues, such as the need for better training and induction for members and for getting all members to 'buy-in' to National Park purposes. There was also widespread recognition of the need to increase the diversity of Board members.

Several interviewees were very positive about their experiences of being on an NPA Board, but no-one suggested that there wasn't any need for change.

There were also some notable differences of opinion in some areas, such as whether it would be better for NPAs to be Arms-Length Bodies (ALBs) similar to Natural England, rather than "special purpose" local authorities as it was felt no-one understands what the latter are. However, others raised concerns that being ALBs would make it easier for NPAs to be abolished. While most interviewees expressed their support for reducing the size of Boards, there were differing views as to how best to do this and what the optimum size would be. There were also concerns raised about the fact that reducing the number of members could potentially make it even harder to increase the levels of expertise on specific topics.

Participants raised a wide range of views and suggestions for change reflecting the fact that there is a lot of variation between the Parks currently in terms of the way in which governance functions in practice, and the way in which the culture and ways of working of individual NPAs influence the decision-making processes of their Boards. This included a number of examples of good practice which there is significant potential for replicating across the NPAs. Sections 4 and 5 discuss the findings from our research in more detail.



SECTION 4.
RESEARCH FINDINGS:
WHAT CURRENTLY
WORKS WELL

4.1 Well-run Boards

Many interviewees stressed that **there is much that works well about the current system, and that there are many highly dedicated and experienced people on the Boards**, including ones who have been appointed as Parish, local and national members.

“In general terms governance at [this NPA] works pretty well. There is a level of autonomy....Board members can express themselves and can communicate directly with Defra. This independence is important to maintain. The system is complex, but it works.... Board/staff relations are good. The Board provides advice and support to staff, but members try not to be dictatorial. Meetings work well....Committees are sometimes a little clunky but do things properly.” (Current Board Member)

“Governance as ‘special purpose’ local authorities – an awful lot is rather good, a well-run organisation.... [We] already provide good and robust training.” (CEO)

“What works well is...partnership working and team sense. It works well because we have the right people sitting at the Board.” (Chair)

Even some of those who were quick to identify the need for change had positive things to say about the current arrangements: *“The National Park legislation generally has stood the test of time but many things need updating. The right policies are generally in place, but implementation needs to change.”* (Current Board Member)

“What works well is...partnership working and team sense. It works well because we have the right people sitting at the Board.” (Chair)

“I love being on the Board – it brings me so much joy” (Current Board Member)

There were also several comments on **the positive working relationship between Board members and the staff team**:

“...having a “single team” – officers and Board members working together as one...” (Former Board Member)

“When I was Chair I enjoyed working with the officers, particularly the CEO and deputy CEO, in taking the National Park to a better place and seeing how strongly they believed in that ethos.” (Current Board Member)

“The Board is well run, has a good CEO, and staff are thoroughly committed. Real attempts are being made to ensure the board runs well.” (Former Board Member)

Some referred to **how much they enjoyed being an NPA member** too:

“I love being on the Board – it brings me so much joy” (Current Board Member)

4.2 Representation of both local and national interests

Having a **mix of locally and nationally appointed members** ensures that decision-making takes account of the interests of those who live and work in the National Park as well as the importance of these places for the nation. As one interviewee put it:

“This allows for a combination of deep local knowledge and a strategic perspective both of which are very important.”
(Current Board Member)

The need for **local representation in order to ensure democratic accountability** was also noted. It was felt to be particularly important that residents should have an opportunity to contact local elected representatives on the NPA Board about planning issues. One interviewee felt that for the purposes of local accountability Parish Members were even more important than local authority appointees.

For the Broads, specifically, the importance of keeping strong connections to the boating community was highlighted, as were the additional challenges associated with the Authority's role as a navigation authority and the fact that the Sandford Principle does not apply here. It was also noted that there is a lot of competition among local councillors to secure a seat on the Broads Authority, something that is not necessarily the case in other NPAs. The interviewee who mentioned that said they weren't sure whether this was because there were fewer local authority seats there or because the Broads Authority was more popular locally.

Some interviewees felt that the **balance between local and national interests was not always working well currently** but all agreed that it was important to retain it as a principle. As one interviewee put it:

“Local members bring financial, business, conservation experts.... a diversity of thought.... [and] Secretary of State representatives provide much more intellectual capacity, broader thinking, more innovation, stewards in critical thinking as unencumbered by emotional attachment...” (Chair)

It was also noted that **Parish members often bring both local knowledge and a clear commitment to the National Park** having chosen to specifically put themselves forward for the role. One interviewee suggested that there is a stronger argument for having Parish members in terms of ensuring the Board is locally accountable than there is for Local Authority members.

4.3 Role of NPAs as planning authorities

It was noted that **NPAs' planning powers provide them with both influence and leverage over what happens in their area**, and in some cases can be important financially if NPAs receive compensation or mitigation to offset the impacts of major developments. Some interviewees also highlighted **the importance of planning decisions being dealt with by a separate committee** rather than the full Board as this allows the Board to focus on strategic issues and avoids planning dominating Board meetings.

The importance of planning in delivering the National Park purposes was also noted:

“I used to worry that NPAs spent too much time on planning but, partly because of changes in the planning system, I now believe that there is huge potential for NPAs to use their planning powers to deliver for nature. The focus should be on how development management decisions can help further National Park purposes.” (Former Board Member)

4.4 Induction, training and performance appraisal

It was clear that **there are significant variations between the NPAs in terms of the level of induction, training and performance appraisal** that currently takes place and that these processes are more likely to be applied to SoS appointees than to local ones. In those NPAs where they are working well, these measures are considered to be very valuable, but they often require significant staff time in order to be run effectively and concerns were raised about the potential for these areas to be cut in future if further budget savings are required.

“[The NPA was] very good in terms of training, performance appraisal process etc for members. This is very important in terms of members understanding their legal responsibilities. Member induction included meetings with the CEO and other senior members of staff for all members.... It’s important that good practice like this is retained as part of any changes.”
(Former Board Member)

“Member induction included meetings with the CEO and other senior members of staff for all members.... It’s important that good practice like this is retained as part of any changes.” (Former Board Member)

4.5 Examples of good practice

Interviewees identified a number of examples of good practice that are currently adopted by some NPAs. It is essential that these are not only retained but are also promoted more widely as part of plans to improve governance. The examples identified included the **Member Champion system** where champions are appointed for particular areas such as nature recovery, farming, and engagement. These champions then take a particular interest in the NPA’s work in that area, for example meeting with relevant staff to discuss issues in depth and contributing to the development of relevant papers. One interviewee noted that:

“Members always say afterwards that this was the most rewarding part of their involvement with the Authority.” (CEO)

Another interviewee commented that their NPA had already undertaken a **governance review**:

“[We’ve] adopted slightly lighter governance than other NPAs. [We have] relatively few committees and don’t have loads of formal governance in diaries. [We also have our] own delegation scheme which means 90% of planning decisions are made by officers...” (CEO)

Other examples of good practice adopted by some NPAs are **Youth Boards** and **Youth Volunteering Programmes**.

YORKSHIRE DALES YOUTH VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME

The Up Skills Down Dale Youth Volunteering Programme provides a wide range of volunteering and training opportunities over a year-long programme for young people. As well as monthly sessions to undertake practical conservation tasks such as tree planting and dry-stone walling, participants have an opportunity to learn more about the work of different teams in the NPA. While not specifically focused on governance, this initiative was highlighted as being a good way of ensuring that more young people understand the role of the NPA and are, therefore, more likely to see the value in applying to be members in the future.



SECTION 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

5.1 Size and composition of the Boards

There was strong support for **reducing the size of Boards**. Concerns were expressed that *“even just fitting everyone in a room can be an issue”* (Current Board Member) currently and that large Boards can lead to rambling debates, and *“passengers”* (non-contributors). One interviewee suggested that *“too many members also tend to make it more adversarial rather than collective working to achieve outcomes.”* (Anon)

In the experience of another interviewee: *“one third of NP Board members are the ones who actually do the work and show leadership, another third are fringe players, and the remainder are simply baggage.”* (Anon)

Reducing the size of the Boards was one of the key recommendations from the Glover Review and there was considerable disappointment among some interviewees that the Government had not done more to implement the recommendations from this review.

However, several interviewees emphasised the importance of ensuring that we don't just reduce the size but also think carefully about who is on the board. It was also noted that there is a potential tension between reducing the number of members and increasing diversity as with fewer members, then are fewer opportunities to increase representation.

“if we chop out members then we chop out representation. Boards need to be representative of places as well as national.” (Chair)

Another interviewee who was concerned about poor attendance at meetings commented on the need to ensure that the Boards are still large enough that committee meetings are quorate.

“Because of the need to be quorate, I'm really concerned about cutting the size of Boards unless there is some kind of mechanism to ensure members turned up/participated.” (Chair)

“even just fitting everyone in a room can be an issue” (Current Board Member)

There was also concern about the potential impact on members' workloads:

“Size does need to be tailored to the Authority. Some...have a huge planning workload, we couldn't expect a smaller set of members to do all of the work on the stipend they get. It would be a full time job” (Anon)

One suggestion was for a small focused high-quality strategic board with more people involved in an advisory capacity on particular specialisms (e.g. farming, urban). There was another similar suggestion for setting up *“a stakeholder forum (or fora)...providing an informed, authoritative but advisory voice”* for a much smaller Board all of whom would be appointed on the basis of their skills and expertise as *“this would also address Board culture and help move away from traditional, over-large Boards that are bureaucratic and stuffy.”* (Current Board Member)

There were also comments on the current plans for **devolution and local government reorganisation** in England with the move towards larger unitary authorities and combined authorities strengthening the case for having fewer members on NPA Boards as fewer authorities will need to be represented. Some interviewees had significant concerns about the risks involved in not doing anything to address this issue.

Some interviewees had significant concerns about the risks involved in not doing anything to address the impacts of local government reorganisation.

“There is also an imbalance in the [NPA] since [X] Council became a unitary authority, leading to 10 representatives from one authority now sitting on the NPA, where previously there would have been 10 district/county reps. This is cumbersome and unhealthy, as these 10 are a majority of the 15 local authority members and a significant dominant proportion of the 25 NPA members.” (Current Board Member)

There could be a case for increasing the number of nationally appointed members to counter the reduced input from local authorities. One interviewee suggested Boards should be a maximum of 9 members and possibly even fewer, but most of those who proposed a figure, suggested around 10–15 members.

One interviewee suggested that there needs to be **more flexibility for Boards to be designed to suit local circumstances** and that individual NPAs should be able to decide on the size of their Board based on their stakeholder community. It was further suggested that there needs to be flexibility generally to allow for local variation between the NPAs for example, allowing for variations in how planning is dealt with to take account of changes in local circumstances, population size etc.

It was suggested that having a **greater proportion of nationally appointed members** would allow for a better balance of local and national interests in decision-making, something which is particularly important in planning decisions. Some interviewees felt there should actually be a slight majority of national members but most of those who commented on this supported a 50:50 split with Parish members included in the local 50%. It was noted that retaining local authority and parish appointments makes it harder to increase diversity on NPA Boards due to the lack of diversity among local and parish councillors in rural areas. To avoid increasing the size of Boards it would be better to reduce the number of local members rather than increasing the number of national members.

One interviewee highlighted the fact that *“Secretary of State members have to go through a very rigorous recruitment process but there is nothing equivalent for local and parish appointees which can be another source of tension between different types of members, with local knowledge being cited as a reason to ignore the views of those with particular expertise which can lead to those with expertise being driven out.”* (Other)

While most interviewees felt it was important to retain local involvement in NPA Boards, one suggested having **only national appointees** and felt that *“breaking the link between NPAs and local government is crucial going forwards if they are to become forward looking, agile and effective organisations.”* (Current Board Member)

Another interviewee was keen to ensure that we don't revert to a system of National Parks being governed by a sub-committee of local government as happened when these areas were first designated.

A few of those interviewed felt that more **radical change is needed**, and there was a specific suggestion that **nature should be given a seat on the Board**.

“Nature's presence in decision making is key. How do we get nature onto our boards? Not someone who knows a bit about nature. Nature herself.” (CEO)

“The biggest stakeholder is nature but this is never acknowledged. All decisions impact the natural world, but nature is the only stakeholder with no say.” (Other)

NATURE ON THE BOARD

Giving nature a seat on the Board is a relatively new concept but it has already been adopted by a number of different organisations ranging from the company Faith in Nature who, in 2022, were the first company in the world to make nature a director¹⁴ to the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales¹⁵. Another example is the Wye Catchment Nutrient Management Board (NMB). In April 2025, the NMB appointed Dr Louise Bodnar to represent the interests of the River Wye, to act as an advocate for the River and the species and habitats which are dependent on it and to vote on behalf of the River in Board decisions¹⁶.

It has been suggested that even just having someone appointed to attend meetings as a nature-representative observer can have a positive influence on the extent to which nature's interests are taken into account. NPAs could use their powers to co-opt members to appoint someone to take on this role on relevant committees and on the full Board if the regulations were amended to allow for co-opted members to join the Board as we recommend (see section 6.2).

5.2 Culture and mindset within NPAs

Some interviewees felt that one of the key challenges of **the current system was the way in which members and officers work together**. The importance of having a strong chair and staff with the appropriate skills to support the Board was highlighted.

“I would say the culture comes from the Chair & CEO. That relationship is key.” (Chair)

As discussed in section 4.1, there were many positive comments about the working relationship between Board members and staff. However, some interviewees suggested that there is often too little opportunity for members to contribute to the development of proposals before they were put to a Board meeting and that those meetings were often very formal with too little opportunity to discuss proposals in any detail.

“Board meetings were very formal. Perhaps this was down to the Chair and Standing Orders and...in part to the nature of a committee but ideally there should be more emphasis on collaboration and consensus building, rather than ‘grandstanding’ when it came to discussing particular topics.” (Former Board Member)

Although Board papers usually contain a number of options, officers always make their preferred option very clear meaning that sometimes members felt that they were just there to rubber stamp what officers had already decided. One interviewee even went so far as to describe the culture as *“constraining and intimidating”* (Other) because officers have such tight control over meetings.

It was suggested that providing **more opportunities for members and officers to work together** outside of formal Board meetings could address some of these concerns and the Yorkshire Dales Policy Forum was mentioned as an example of good practice for providing this kind of opportunity. However, others were also keen to highlight the need to maintain a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of officers and those of members.

“It’s really important to understand the separation between officers who are operational and members who are strategic and higher level. Members are fantastic at being champions as well, but there is a danger if potential board members think they will be ‘doing’ the work.” (Chair)

“I would say the culture comes from the Chair & CEO. That relationship is key.” (Chair)

“The problem is with implementation. There are already good codes of conduct for members but they are not always followed.” (Current Board Member)

Concerns were also expressed about the **culture and tone of NPA meetings**.

“There needs to be better behaviour and conduct from members, some of whom make inappropriate comments at times or even act in an abusive way. Some people tend to dominate meetings.” (Former Board Member)

“Meetings are often dominated by pet subjects and local ‘squabbles’. [Too many] members don’t think nationally – who represents the ‘national parks’?... They are not looking forward, and driving change and improvement both for the environment and society.” (Other)

The fact that Board meetings are public (which was felt to be a good thing), can influence the behaviour of some members, again indicating a need for opportunities for officers and members to discuss issues more informally. Concerns were raised about the need to ensure **members behave appropriately in meetings** and in all their dealings with officers and other members.

“The problem is with implementation. There are already good codes of conduct for members but they are not always followed.” (Current Board Member)

MAINTAINING HIGH STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 introduced a duty on NPAs and other relevant authorities to ensure that their members and co-opted members maintain high standards of conduct. The Act also requires these authorities to adopt a code of conduct for their members and to put in place arrangements for investigating allegations of breaches of the code. Some NPAs provide comprehensive details on their websites setting out the measures they have taken to comply with these requirements, see for example, this information on [the Peak District NPA’s website](#).

Another challenge identified was that, even though many NPA officers and members do now recognise the importance of reforming current governance practices and structures, there are still some who do not accept that change is needed. Interviewees suggested that in some cases NPAs keep doing certain things such as putting papers on particular topics to the Board because that's what they have always done. Interviewees suggested that there needs to be a **change of culture among senior officers**, and a greater willingness to do things in a different way including changing the format and content of meetings, where appropriate.

"There is always some dry stuff for boards such as the finance and audit session [but NPAs are sometimes having the] same old meetings for meetings sake. Some of this comes from officer culture – 'this is the way have always done it'. It seems too many people doing things a set way, by the book, there's no dynamism and [no willingness to try] new approaches. This is not helped by a culture resulting from restricted resources and budget." (Former Board Member)

This person also suggested that: *"NPAs need to embrace collaboration culture. They have established long-in-the-tooth ways of working – CEOs who make fiefdoms and refuse to work together. That culture needs to change."* (Former Board Member)

Others wanted to stress that some aspects do need to remain the same:

"There is a lot of formal governance that has to be done to make sure the Authority is being run well. That's just facts." (Chair)

There were also suggestions for extensive changes, particularly in order to ensure a more inclusive and welcoming culture:

"[There's a need for] wholesale changes, for example changes in the chair of the board and chairs of committees. The same people tend to stay in these roles for many years, and most of them are older white men who cannot speak for the wider population." (Former Board Member)

This interviewee also felt that: *"The Board needed to be bolder and to be modernised in terms of vibrancy – meetings were often dull and dated. Some members tended to be complacent as complacency suited them."* (Former Board Member)

As another interviewee highlighted, the current culture can sometimes be very difficult for those who come from underrepresented backgrounds:

"I'm an outlier on [my NPA]. When I joined, I knew I was up against some challenges....I think about access and inclusivity in terms of a hijabi mother with kids being able to get to [the National Park], or someone with mental health issues accessing via social prescribing, or even just good public transport, being able to get there and arrive without a car – etc is it accessible for them? Others on the Board don't think like that [when it comes to interpreting the purposes]." (Current Board Member)

5.3 Recruitment and selection process

Interviewees identified a number of challenges around the process for recruiting and selecting new Board members. As set out in section 1.2, the selection process is different for each of the different types of members and the only ones for which there is an open recruitment process are those **appointed as national representatives by the Secretary of State or Welsh Ministers**.

It was suggested that the criteria and recruitment process for national appointees should be changed to ensure that **more value is placed on lived experience** as opposed to professional expertise. There were also ideas for putting a lot more effort into promoting the opportunities available to ensure a much wider pool of people apply, including making better use of social media and a greater emphasis on using word of mouth as not everyone has a mobile phone or IT access. This could include community members visiting young people's clubs, sports clubs, schools, mosques, synagogues, community organisations and events etc.

“People should not have to read a website or piece of paper – they need to be enthused face to face. We should be building a network of potential new members from all sectors across society– residents, visitors, users, supporters, workers, businesses. Being an NPA member gives young people a chance to learn about and understand the democratic process, contribute to the decision-making process and empower others to become members.” (Current Board Member)

Another interviewee felt that there needs to be more support for applicants as the current application process discourages people from applying and favours *“the old boys’ network”* (Other).

Interviewees also identified the need to consider changes to **the selection process for local authority members** as it was generally felt that the current way of doing this is not working well. While nationally appointed members must apply and be interviewed before being appointed, there is nothing similar for local authority members. There was support for introducing a more rigorous selection process for all members.

“Selecting all members on the basis of merit should be the top priority for change.” (Other)

“Every member, whether local or national, should pass through the same process of appointment with a rigorous interview by the Secretary of State panel.” (Current Board Member)

“We should be building a network of potential new members from all sectors across society – residents, visitors, users, supporters, workers, businesses” (Current Board Member)

The need for appropriate expertise was felt to be particularly important where members need to work closely with senior officers and when there is a need to make difficult decisions e.g. about which areas of work to keep when budget cuts are needed. **If the size of boards is to be reduced it will be even more important to consider what each member brings to the table, making it even more appropriate to identify skills gaps that need to be filled by local members.**

There was a suggestion from one interviewee that it might be appropriate to **consider alternative routes for securing local representation** other than local authority or parish appointees. There was little support among interviewees for introducing direct elections for NPA members as happens in Scotland as it was felt that these would risk adding bureaucracy without necessarily securing improved representation or expertise. However, one interviewee with experience of being selected as a Parish member expressed concern about the lack of enthusiasm among both candidates and voters for the Parish Member selection process and suggested that all local residents should be eligible to apply for these posts and that the selection process should be the same as for Secretary of State appointees i.e. with an interview for short-listed candidates. This would allow people who may not necessarily want to be Parish Councillors to put themselves forward for the NPA.

There was also a suggestion from one interviewee that consideration should be given to introducing **direct elections for Parish Council members only**. The NPA they are familiar with has divided the resident population roughly into quarters, each of which contains around 20 parishes. Each of these ‘constituencies’ has a parish appointed member who is knowledgeable about that area and can provide feedback to the NPA about that area (and vice versa). However, even the person who suggested that direct elections for each constituency might work in this case, did not support Park-wide direct elections of parish members or elections for other categories of members as they felt there was too much risk of them being hijacked by populists or single-issue campaigners.

One suggestion for improvement which should be relatively easy to implement is the introduction of **fixed terms for local members** as these already exist for national members. The issue of fixed terms for the Chair of the Board and the Chairs of Committees was also raised and there was concern that the same people tend to stay in these roles for many years, that often these people are not very representative of the wider population, and that this is a factor holding back change in National Parks.

Some NPAs do already provide good training for their members as highlighted above, but several interviewees raised the need for **much better induction and training for all members in all NPAs**. One interviewee mentioned the training courses for new NPA members which Natural England (NE) used to run to provide them with an introduction to their role and responsibilities. These courses were also considered to be valuable as they gave members an opportunity to interact with members from other NPAs which helped them recognise they are part of a national family. It was suggested that there needs to be greater collaboration generally between NPAs at both member and officer level. There is now a national induction course for new NPA members each year but none of our interviewees mentioned having had experience of this.

It was also suggested that there needs to be better training for NPA Chairs given the importance of this particular role in ensuring that all members are able to contribute effectively.

“We need better training for Chairs so they are properly equipped to deal with Members who object to operating in line with the NPAs established policies.” (Current Board Member)

“Chairs should have training. I did the Association of Chairs training off my own back” (Chair)

Young people expressed a concern that they did not want to be taken less seriously because of their age and wanted to see **more support for measures such as Youth Boards and shadowing Board members**. These types of opportunities allow young people to gain experience and a better understanding of how governance works without needing to make a full commitment to being a member.

It was suggested by both the young people themselves and other interviewees **that there needs to be more support for new members when they first join a Board**, such as allocating an experienced Board member as a mentor and creating a network for them to share experiences with others in the same situation. While such measures are likely to be particularly valuable for young people, they would also be of benefit to all newly appointed members.

Young people pointed out that this is something of a “chicken and egg” situation – the more young people there are on Boards, the more likely it is that those Boards will vote for youth programmes and the more youth programmes there are, the more young people there will be with an interest in putting themselves forward for Boards. They also highlighted the opportunities for providing young people with an understanding of NPA governance through initiatives such as the Up Skill Down Dale programme and the Youth Ranger programmes that several NPAs run.

Another interviewee commented on how much there is for new members to learn and suggested that anyone expressing an interest in being an NPA member should be provided with sufficient information before their appointment so they understand what they are taking on as after they’re appointed it’s too late and people may then lose interest and leave. This should include sitting in on a Board meeting.

Others pointed out that there are some **misperceptions about what’s involved in being an NPA Board member**, for example, some people wrongly assume that you need to live in the National Park in order to apply to be a Secretary of State appointed board member. Another interviewee felt that *“as I was the only member who lived outside the Park at the time I was on the Board this was sometimes used against me”* (Former Board Member).

INCREASING YOUTH PARTICIPATION ON NPA BOARDS

The latest round of recruitment for Secretary of State members in England which took place in Summer 2025 led to the appointment of a number of young people including Hannah Corran in the Peak District, Daniel Holmes in the Yorkshire Dales and Robson Peisley in the South Downs, and others from more diverse backgrounds including Mohamed Dhalech in Northumberland and Soraya Abdel-Hadi in the South Downs. This followed concerted efforts by Campaign for National Parks to ensure the opportunities were promoted more widely and to support those with an interest to apply so we are delighted to see this outcome. Now it’s essential that these newly appointed members get the support they need to ensure they can influence the Boards’ decision-making effectively.

5.4 NPA influence over appointments to their Boards

NPA Chairs usually participate in the interviews for new national appointees and are invited to express a preference as to who should be selected but the final decision is for the Secretary of State or Welsh Ministers. The NPAs have even less of a role in the appointment of Local Authority and Parish members. A number of interviewees cited examples in the recent past where NPA preferences had been ignored in the final decisions on national appointees and expressed a view that **NPAs currently have too little say over who is appointed to the Board.**

“The last recruitment round, we had some brilliant, diverse candidates, skills exactly aligned with purposes, but the Secretary of State ignored our preference for these and appointed the same old landowners etc.” (Chair)

“[There is a] perception that Defra may often appoint an acceptable candidate for political reasons rather than the one the panel preferred.” (Former Board Member)

“We as an organisation select none of our Members. I think that is wrong and is not ‘good governance.’” (CEO)

There was a suggestion that NPA Chairs should be given far more opportunity to guide decisions around appointments as they have a good knowledge of their area and the specific needs, and skills gaps, of their Board. There is a particularly strong argument for this when it comes to national appointments which are most likely to offer opportunities for increasing diversity on the Boards.

“The Authority board needs to identify skills they require to carry out the functions of the board in terms of governance. These can then be referred to when recruiting new SoS members and hopefully used by the Minister to help decisions. That includes youth, lived experienced, land management skills, audit and finance to name a few.” (Chair)

Several interviewees raised concerns about **the requirement for political balance** when local authorities appoint members and the fact that this reduces the chance of people with the most appropriate skills being appointed.

“We as an organisation select none of our members. I think that is wrong and is not ‘good governance.’” (CEO)

“The need for political balance in representation means that we don’t always get the best people from local authorities as Board members”.

(Current Board Member)

“We have produced an advice note to local authorities...but how far that is followed is questionable, especially given the current requirement for local authorities appointing to NPA Boards to achieve political balance – this is ridiculous!” (CEO)

“The need for political balance in representation means that we don’t always get the best people from local authorities as Board members”. (Current Board Member)

Concerns were also expressed that the need for political balance can sometimes lead to the appointment of people who represent wards outside the National Park or those who don’t have a particular interest in it. There were calls for this requirement to be removed and for local authority appointees to be subject to vetting and approval by NPAs.

A further suggestion for giving NPAs more influence over appointments to their Boards is to change the regulations **allowing for new members to be co-opted on to Boards.** Currently these regulations enable NPAs to co-opt “non-voting” members of sub-committees and a number have taken advantage of this opportunity to ensure they are considering a wider range of views in their decision-making. For example, the South Downs NPA co-opts up to three members “to increase the diversity of voices” on its Policy and Resources Committee¹⁷ and Yorkshire Dales NPA has already co-opted two young people on to its Finances and Resources Committee¹⁸ as part of a wider initiative to increase the voice of younger people in the NPA’s governance. Amending the regulations to allow for co-opted members to be appointed to the Board would provide another potential opportunity for increasing diversity and securing appropriate expertise.

5.5 Supporting a diverse range of people to join Boards

It was suggested that in addition to the issues already discussed above, we should also consider the development of **alternative mechanism for ensuring a diverse range of voices are included** in decision-making, all of which should involve appropriate remuneration.

“We need a different type of appointment to address this – something like an ‘apprenticeship’ which would last for two or three years and ideally you would have two or three apprentices on a Board at any one time so they can support each other better, and there should be no expectation that they would immediately join the Board after their apprenticeship finishes as they may still not have the required level of experience.” (Current Board Member)

Another suggestion was for the establishment of a **Social Justice or similarly titled committee/forum** chaired by a member of the Board and whose members are people with lived experience in order to ensure their views were being included in the Board’s decision-making. There would need to be a very clear remit for this group including clarity about their decision-making powers, opportunities for them to raise topics that should be discussed by the Board and requirements for the Board to provide feedback on how they have addressed the views raised by the committee. There should also be support to enable those joining this committee to become full Board members if they wish to do so, including appropriate training and skills development opportunities such as shadowing Board members. It was suggested that ensuring that people have the confidence and capacity to engage fully in discussions at Board level before they join would avoid the inclusion of diverse voices being seen as tokenistic.

Other suggestions for change included a **greater role for civil society**, for example giving NGOs such as local Wildlife Trusts a greater role in NPA decision-making.

“Members should have to be demonstrably supportive of the work we do. Any transgressions and you are off the board.” (CEO)

5.6 Member commitment to the NPA and to National Park purposes

A number of interviewees expressed concern about a **lack of commitment to the NPA among some members**.

“The biggest challenge is the lack of buy-in from some members to National Park purposes, they see their role as purely about defending the community.” (Former Board Member)

Some referred to this as being a particular issue among local authority appointees who sometimes tended to vote on NPA decisions with their own local election prospects in mind:

“Local authority members are a slight problem – sometimes you get people who don’t fully buy in to the NPA and cause trouble or are party-political.” (Current Board Member)

This interviewee went on to suggest that “NPAs should be able to vet and approve (or not) proposed local authority member appointments.” (Current Board Member).

However, others felt it was unfair to put all the blame on locally appointed members.

“In my experience, there are cracking local members on [the Board]. They put the Park first, people first, visitors as well. They’re ideal members and don’t bring party politics into it. I can think of national members almost as bad as the local who don’t engage locally, ...and don’t make effective contributions. It’s not as simple as local bad, national good.” (Former Board Member)

“In all the time I’ve been working with the NPA Board, I have never experienced party politics and never seen it creep in, for example never seen block voting. There is a good understanding of who local councillors are there to serve – our members leave their council hat at the door, they do their best as NPA board members.” (CEO)

One interviewee suggested that **all members should be required to sign up to a commitment to support National Park purposes**. Another interviewee went further.

“Members should have to be demonstrably supportive of the work we do. Any transgressions and you are off the board.” (CEO)

5.7 Statutory purposes

We specifically asked participants in this research for their views on **strengthening the statutory purposes of National Parks** and the majority agreed that this was essential.

“The problems are deeper than the Boards, a lot comes back to the purposes and how we deliver those purposes.” (Other)

Suggested changes included making stronger references to nature recovery and climate action in the first purpose and introducing a reference to mental and physical well-being in the second purpose. It was also suggested that consideration should be given to including equity as an explicit part of the purposes, so this principle becomes properly embedded and to including a reference to natural resources as in Scotland.

One interviewee was very keen the phrase natural beauty should be removed on the ground that it is fundamentally unsuitable for use as part of decision-making criteria as it is so subjective. However, someone else felt that it was essential to keep this phrase but provide better guidance on how it should be interpreted:

“We really can’t lose the phrase ‘natural beauty’ from the wording as it is part of the international criteria. Instead members need to understand ‘natural beauty’ better.” (Current Board member)

Another interviewee wanted the word biodiversity to be used rather than nature which is a very general term.

“Strengthening the purposes must go hand in hand with governance reform if we are to achieve maximum long term impact.... this would not only make National Parks better equipped and more focused to tackle the biggest challenges ahead, but it would also attract exactly the sort of people who would want to join NPA Boards and make this happen.” (CEO)

It was noted that any changes to the purposes need to take account of the fact that the Broads has a third purpose focused on navigation.

Participants in the workshop with young people were very clear that the purposes need to change, suggesting that they are too vague and are failing to deliver what their generation needs as they don’t do enough to address the pressing challenges of the biodiversity and climate crisis.

“The purposes are not right on climate and biodiversity – as a generation we are more aware of the urgency. The current purposes are too vague to tackle the current emergencies. There would be more of a driving force for action if the purposes were changed.” (Young person)

Several interviewees highlighted **the close links between governance and the purposes**.

“Strengthening the purposes must go hand in hand with governance reform if we are to achieve maximum long term impact.... this would not only make National Parks better equipped and more focused to tackle the biggest challenges ahead, but it would also attract exactly the sort of people who would want to join NPA Boards and make this happen.” (CEO)

Other interviewees felt that it wasn’t the purposes that need changing but the “mandate” and the level of political support for National Parks and that if this was right, it would be possible to achieve a lot more without amending the purposes.

“It’s the mandate that needs changing: what our contract is with the nation (which is different from the purposes). A stronger mandate would put us higher up the political agenda.” (Chair)

5.8 A more strategic focus for Board meetings

Some interviewees felt that one of the most effective ways of improving governance would be to **reduce the amount of Board meeting time spent on planning decisions**.

“The whole planning system needs to change, for example, the last meeting we spent 30 mins debating whether two trees in a conservation area should have Tree Protection Orders. The default should be protection. Especially in the context of climate change....But ultimately this stuff – officers should be able to decide.” (Current Board member)

It was suggested that more NPAs could adopt the South Downs model and delegate more decision-making to constituent local authorities allowing the NPA to focus only on development of the Local Plan and the more significant planning decisions. In fact the vast majority of NPA planning decisions – over 90% in some cases – are already delegated to NPA officers working to strict policy guidelines but it is generally the most contentious, if not always the most strategic, decisions which come to committee, and these can take up a lot of time.

Another way of ensuring a more strategic focus for Board meetings would be to **remove some of the unnecessary bureaucratic burdens** which currently apply. Because NPAs are “*special purpose*” local authorities and are considered to be part of local government, they currently have all the same auditing requirements as large local authorities despite being significantly smaller in terms of staff and budgets. This is unnecessarily costly, overly complex and a significant cause of NPA Board agendas often being very internally focused. One interviewee suggested that we need to break the NPA link with local authorities which was described as “*onerous and baroque*”. (CEO)

Another way of ensuring a more strategic focus for Board meetings would be to remove some of the unnecessary bureaucratic burdens which currently apply.

5.9 Workload, time commitment and remuneration

The **time commitment involved in being an NPA Board member can be considerable**, particularly for those who take on additional responsibilities as Chairs or committee members. For example, being on the planning committee can involve a full day every month on top of regular Board meetings which may also be monthly, and all of these meetings will also require preparation time. While Board members are paid an allowance (see section 1.2 for details), those who take their obligations seriously will be earning less than the minimum wage for the hours they devote to these tasks.

Interviewees had differing views about the levels of allowances paid to NPA members, with some expressing concerns that these were too high, particularly as some Members only attend a handful of meetings each year. One issue appears to be **the lack of clarity about what Members are expected to do in return for the remuneration they receive**. The allowance is intended to recompense members for the time they spend on preparation for, and attendance at NPA meetings and other related duties including representing the NPA and dealing with correspondence but it is paid automatically on a monthly basis regardless of whether, and how much, time has been spent on these activities.

Some interviewees felt that there are **inequities in the current system** not only in terms of the variations between NPAs but also due to the fact that some Members put in considerably more time than others at the same NPA even though they are paid the same allowances and there are the same expectations for what they should do in return. Several interviewees commented on the time commitment required to do the role properly and referred to the fact that combining NPA membership with a full-time job can be a challenge:

“The time required is huge. Something needs to change in how this works otherwise [Boards] will be limited to people...who are financially independent.” (Chair)

“A large amount of time is expected of NPA members. It often takes up a whole Friday most months, with a couple of committee meetings and all the travel... plus all the reading of papers.... It worked for me because I had gone down to 4 days a week in a previous employment but what about those on 5 days? They would have to take a day's holiday for each meeting, ie 12 days, or hold meetings on a Saturday.” (Current Board Member)

“The time required is huge. Something needs to change in how this works otherwise [Boards] will be limited to people...who are financially independent.” (Chair)

The importance of making roles accessible to people who have other responsibilities such as childcare was also highlighted.

“We must make roles accessible to people who have other responsibilities e.g. kids....But they have meetings during school holidays. It is really hard to have so many meetings. I am one of the [few] members who also works full time as well as being a councillor and Board member.... [You] have to be retired to do it.” (Anon)

Some participants in our workshop with young people had considered applying but had been put off by the time commitment involved and the **practical difficulties of being required to attend meetings during the working day**. Another had decided against applying as they felt they could have more impact as an activist campaigning for change from the outside. There were also concerns about the impact involvement might have on their career if it required too much time commitment and on the potential pressure involved in being the sole youth voice on a Board, particularly for someone who was also likely to be the only person of colour and in a minority in terms of their gender.

Both young people themselves and other interviewees highlighted that **proper remuneration is needed to enable more younger people to join NPA Boards**. However, it should be noted that one interviewee suggested a need to consider whether it is appropriate for ordinary members (i.e. those without additional responsibilities such as the Chair) to be paid at all, citing the example of school governors as an equivalent role for which there is no payment.

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5.10 NPAs’ relationship with Defra

There were differing views among interviewees about the **NPAs’ relationship with Defra**. One interviewee commented that they valued their NPA’s independence from Defra, another that they thought the relationship was unhealthy because of the NPA’s dependence on Defra funding. There were also concerns about the low level of support that nationally appointed members received from Defra and the fact there did not seem to be any interest in drawing on members’ insights to help inform civil servants’ understanding of what is happening in Protected Landscapes. It was suggested that **national appointees should have an exit interview** when they leave to understand any concerns they may have had and identify suggestions for improvements.

“...there are no funds for monitoring, action plans or reviews. 30 by 30 is completely unachievable without additional funding....Lack of funding is a much greater issue than governance.” (Current Board Member)

5.11 The need for increased funding

Several interviewees made reference to the financial constraints that NPAs are currently experiencing, suggesting that this issue would need to be addressed if governance reform is to be effective.

“...there are no funds for monitoring, action plans or reviews. 30 by 30 is completely unachievable without additional funding....Lack of funding is a much greater issue than governance.” (Current Board Member)

5.12 More radical reforms

As well as considering what could be done to adjust the existing system, it was clear from the views of some of our interviewees that consideration should also be given to a complete overhaul involving drastic and far-reaching changes. The more radical reforms suggested included:

- ◉ a National Protected Landscape Service responsible for governing all the National Parks and National Landscapes – this would be similar to the National Landscapes Service proposed in the Glover Review;
- ◉ regional Protected Landscape partnerships covering two or more National Parks, together with the National Landscapes in that area. These partnerships would provide shared back-office functions so that there would no longer be a requirement for each National Park to run separate HR functions, finance systems etc; or
- ◉ a national service or regional partnerships covering only the National Parks.

“Having a national service as in the US would give more clout, and delivery power – and position Protected Landscapes much more powerfully both politically and publicly. Currently they all work independently on strategy and operation. Having one service would be more effective and powerful. National Parks are still not seen as this amazing ‘public asset’, for everyone to use....there is no collective message or ambition because they are doing their own thing to a large extent.” (Other)

“Set up a Protected Landscapes Commission – not an umbrella organisation but something which brings them all together, [and provides] core functions [such as] HR, fundraising, training, and finance...A delivery body, an innovation and experimentation body.” (Former Board Member)

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PROTECTED LANDSCAPES PARTNERSHIP

The Protected Landscapes Partnership (PLP) is a forum for national innovation, evidence and collaboration between the various organisations representing Protected Landscapes in England – National Parks England, the National Landscapes Association, National Trails UK and Natural England.

The PLP’s work is focused on building capability across the Protected Landscapes family; accelerating nature recovery; mitigating, and adapting to, the impacts of climate change; and improving and equitable access to nature. PLP projects already underway include the Big Chalk Partnership, which aims to create thriving chalk and limestone landscapes across southern England; the Landscape Observatory, harnessing the power of tech and AI to advance new approaches to landscape monitoring and management; and work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) aimed at ensuring Protected Landscapes reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

There were mixed views about the **NPAs’ status as “special purpose” local authorities**. One interviewee suggested that this was a problem as no-one understands what these are. This person thought it would be better for NPAs to be non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), similar to Natural England and the Environment Agency. Another interviewee with a knowledge of the Scottish system of governance emphasised the value of NDPB status as it means the NPAs in Scotland are closer to national government and are able to be more strategic. This interviewee felt that NPAs in England and Wales tend to be dominated by a local government culture which can “suck up a lot of energy” (Other) and make it harder to focus on delivering national objectives.

However, other interviewees expressed concerns that NDPBs (sometimes referred to as quangos) are very easily cut.

“The strange hybrid model of an NPA – a ‘special purpose’ local authority with a dual local and national outlook – may seem flawed in some ways, but perhaps it’s simply the best we will get unless everything is dismantled and we start all over again” . (CEO)



SECTION 6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE



Our research has identified that there is clearly much that is valued about the existing system of NPA governance as well as much that needs to change.

Our research has identified that there is clearly much that is valued about the existing system of NPA governance as well as much that needs to change. As we set out at the start of this report, the current period of change in local government provides an opportunity to modernise and strengthen this system. At a time of nature and climate crisis, we need NPAs to play an even greater leadership role, advocating for, driving, and leading change to ensure that within National Parks species extinction is halted, nature begins to recover, there is an end to damaging practices such as burning of peatland, wildlife persecution and water pollution, and local communities are also supported, creating places which are wilder and more welcoming for everyone.

This level of ambition requires even more courageous leadership, and such leadership will only be possible with the right governance framework in place. It was clear from our interviews that there are a wide range of options for changes. Here we summarise the key options our interviewees proposed and add a few of our own, starting with the 'quick wins' which could be implemented without the need for legislation and then going on to set out the legislative changes which we believe are needed in order to optimise the existing model. As well as implementation of these changes, we want to see attention given to ensuring that those elements of the current system which are working well (as set out in section 4) are retained and supported.

Our proposed changes to the way in which Board members are appointed would ensure that all members are appointed on merit while also strengthening the balance of local and national knowledge which is so vitally important in decision-making about National Parks. The model we have suggested would strengthen local expertise and experience on the Boards by enabling a greater range of people to apply, meaning that there would be more opportunities for local residents to put themselves forward to join the Board as it would no longer be necessary to be elected as a parish councillor first, although parish councillors would still be welcome to apply.

6.1 Quick wins

- 👁️ **Clearer direction from Government:** The Westminster Government should build on the model already adopted in Wales to address improved performance of NPA Boards immediately through a Ministerial direction setting out the expectations and duties which apply to Board members and clarifying any issues where further guidance may be required such as how the statutory purposes should be interpreted. This should be followed up with annual remit letters setting out the priorities that Government wants them to deliver that year such as contributing towards the delivery of 30x30.
- 👁️ **Recruitment:** Improvements should include a review of the public appointments process to ensure that the selection criteria for nationally appointed members are inclusive and reflect the purposes of National Parks. This should be accompanied by measures to ensure that more people from a diverse range of backgrounds apply for these opportunities, and measures to support all newly appointed members, such as a buddy or mentoring system. This should build on the positive progress made in the recruitment of national members in 2025.
- 👁️ **A stronger focus on increasing diversity:** In addition to putting significant effort into increasing diversity by encouraging a greater range of people to apply to be Board members, there should be a specific emphasis on developing alternative routes to becoming a Board member such as via shadowing and apprenticeship opportunities and the establishment of social justice committees as set out in section 5.5.
- 👁️ **A stronger focus on widening expertise** to ensure that NPA Boards include members with skills in nature recovery, widening access and inclusion and other areas of relevance to delivering National Park purposes. **NPAs should be encouraged to make more use of advisory panels** as a way of ensuring their decisions are informed by a wider range of experience and expertise. There should also be a strengthening of the governance between NPA Boards and management plan partnerships, including the bodies who have a duty to seek to further National Park purposes.
- 👁️ **Induction and training:** There needs to be improved induction and training which should be compulsory for all members and should include additional training for NPA Chairs to cover issues such as how to ensure meetings are inclusive. There should also be more opportunities for members from all the NPAs to come together, including opportunities to meet with Defra.
- 👁️ **Improved appraisal and performance:** In addition to the introduction of annual appraisal and performance reviews and a requirement that all members make a commitment to taking full account of the specific responsibilities of their NPA role, there is also a need for measures to make it easier to remove under-performing members. This should include better promotion of the codes of conduct and ensuring that any breaches of those codes are thoroughly investigated. Defra should consider working with the NPAs to develop a standard approach or template to be used for performance reviews.
- 👁️ **Making attendance at meetings easier:** NPAs should give careful consideration to the timing of their meetings to make it easier for those with caring responsibilities or full-time jobs to attend. This should be supported by the removal of requirements to attend all meetings in-person and greater use of online and hybrid meetings.
- 👁️ **Delegate more decision-making:** We do not support the Glover recommendation for separating out planning from the work of NPA Boards and believe that NPA Board members must retain overall responsibility for planning. However, in line with plans to modernise planning committees across England, all NPAs should make sure they are making full use of the powers available to them to delegate planning decisions to officers, thus ensuring that the time members spend on planning is focused on the most strategic cases.
- 👁️ **Better remuneration:** Ensuring that members are properly remunerated for the time they need to commit to NPA activities will make it easier for people from a range of backgrounds to join the Boards. All the English NPAs should adopt a standard approach to member allowances and time commitments, and the running costs associated with NPA governance should be clearly set out in the Defra core grant. Increased allowances should be accompanied by clear expectations of what members are expected to do in return, including a requirement to attend the majority of NPA meetings in order to be eligible.
- 👁️ **Sharing good practice:** As our research has identified both significant variance in governance practice between the Parks, and a number of excellent initiatives, such as Youth Forums, Member Champions etc, there is a need for a greater emphasis on sharing good practice and experiences across the Parks.

6.2 Use legislative change to optimise the current model

In addition to the changes set out in 6.1 above, there are a number of other improvements that could be made to the existing model of governance, all of which would require legislative change:

- **Reduce the size of the Boards:** The number of members on each Board should be reduced to a maximum of 12–15. Given local government reorganisation and the creation of unitary authorities in some areas with National Parks, there should also be a review of the number of local authority places on each Board, with a view to reducing these where there is no longer a need for as many authorities to be represented. This would allow for an increase in nationally appointed members without the need to increase the overall size of the Board.
- **Strengthen democratic accountability** by ensuring that NPAs have a clear role in the decision-making of Strategic Authorities thus strengthening the links between local government and National Park Authorities.
- **Increase the proportion of openly recruited members:** This should be achieved through the introduction of a new model where:
 - One third are recruited on the basis of having **local** experience related to the statutory purposes. This would replace parish council representatives (although parish councillors could still apply).
 - One third are recruited on the basis of having **national** experience related to the purposes.
 - One-third are appointed by constituent local authorities on the basis of merit, taking account of the need for political balance, and a geographical spread as well as appropriate skills and expertise in relation to the purposes.
 - Open recruitment decisions would be made by a panel which includes the Secretary of State, the NPA Chair and an independent member.
 - This model would allow people with deep local knowledge of the area to join the Board without needing to become a Parish Councillor first. Increasing the proportion of Secretary of State appointed members will also help increase diversity on NPA Boards, particularly if it is supported by the “quick wins” discussed above aimed at supporting and encouraging those from a diverse range of backgrounds to apply.
- **Strengthen the purposes:** Amending the purposes to place a much stronger emphasis on nature recovery, climate action and equitable and inclusive access will ensure that these issues are given far greater priority in NPA decision-making.
- **The introduction of fixed terms for all Board Members.** Currently Secretary of State appointed members can serve for a maximum of eight years (two four-year terms) but there is no restriction on the length of time that other members can remain on an NPA Board.
- **Make it easier to co-opt members:** Removing the restrictions on co-opting members to the full Board would make it easier to use this as a mechanism for increasing diversity and including specific expertise. There would need to be restrictions on the number of members who could be co-opted to ensure that this does not lead to significant increases in the size of Boards. We recommend having a maximum of two co-opted members on the full Board.
- **Reduce unnecessary bureaucratic burdens:** Even if it is not possible to completely remove the current auditing requirements for NPAs, these should be reduced to a scale that is in line with their budget and staff resources, rather than being equivalent to the requirements for a large local authority as is currently the case.
- **Giving nature a seat on the Board:** This would involve giving nature a formal role in decision-making processes by recruiting a Board member to represent the interests of nature. This would ensure that the implications for nature were fully considered in all the decision-making by NPA Boards.
- **Giving future generations a seat on the Board:** This would involve recruiting a Board member to represent the interests of future generations, both residents and visitors.



SECTION 7. WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT



7. What needs to happen next

We have written this report with the intention of helping NPAs perform their important role even more effectively. We hope that Board members will read it in the spirit with which it was intended and will work with their staff teams to explore which of the quick wins it might be possible for them to adopt. However, we recognise that much of what we are proposing will require action from Defra.

We are aware that Defra has already commissioned research to inform the development of the legislation that Westminster Government committed to in December 2024, and we hope that our own research will help inform this and other related pieces of research. It would also be useful for Defra to commission a comprehensive review of National Park governance arrangements in other countries within Britain, elsewhere in Europe and more widely as this was out of scope for our research. Similarly, there may well be some important lessons to be learnt from other governance models, such as those used for secondary schools (which have similar sized budgets to NPAs) and for charities.

However, as well as undertaking research, we are keen to see Defra making progress on their commitment to introduce legislative changes. We would like them to work with us and NPAs to develop relevant legislative proposals and secure a Bill to enable the necessary changes to be implemented. We will be working with others, including the APPG for National Parks and National Landscapes, to push for this legislation to be introduced at the earliest possible opportunity. We are already working with a group of young people campaigning to reshape National Park governance and we will continue to support and amplify their work until we have secured the changes needed.

We have also recently secured National Lottery Heritage Funding for the development phase of the National Parks Reimagined project which aims to transform the quality and level of debate in the decisions made for National Parks in England and Wales. One of the key objectives of this project is to increase diversity in National Parks by supporting the development of skills and capacity and by creating equitable opportunities for 500 young leaders to be at the heart of Protected Landscapes leadership.

We will achieve this by delivering the following activities:

- 📍 **Heritage Leaders Course:** A leadership development programme for adults under 30, including a National Park residential, online learning, and peer support building on the successful New Perspectives model.
- 📍 **Heritage Leader Pathways:** Five leadership pathways are offered for course graduates and others based on their interests:
 1. Reciprocal mentoring with established leaders
 2. Board apprenticeships
 3. Advocacy Fellowships
 4. Youth Ambassador scheme
 5. Paid leadership placements

During the development phase of the project we will be exploring how we can further develop our Leadership course, building on the impact of the three Future Leaders programmes¹⁹ which we delivered in 2024 and 2025. We will also be considering how we can develop, formalise and scale up leadership pathways and what format these should take. We are keen for all the NPAs to partner with us on this opportunity.

We are also considering what more we can do to implement some of the ideas we have considered in this report as part of our own governance arrangements. Our Trustees are considering options for giving nature and future generations each a seat on our Board in future.

We believe that there is much that could be done to build on and optimise the current model of governance. The time is also now right to think about more fundamental changes too: what should the role of National Parks and National Park Authorities be in the longer term? The current model has been in place for 30 years, but it is clear it needs change in order to meet our current and future needs. What model will best serve future generations? The Government should use the opportunity of reforms to the purposes and governance to encourage a wider discussion around these important questions.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The relevant legislation includes Schedule 7 of the Environment Act 1995, The National Park Authorities (England) Order 2015, The New Forest National Park Authority (Establishment) Order 2005, The South Downs National Park (Establishment) Order 2010, the Broads Authority Act 2009 and Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988.
- 2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan-2025/environmental-improvement-plan-eip-2025>
- 3 <https://greenallianceblog.org.uk/2023/10/11/the-public-thinks-national-parks-are-for-nature-but-does-the-government/>
- 4 <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/press-hub/four-in-five-britons-support-rewilding-poll-finds>
- 5 Under the globally recognised system adopted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the UK's National Parks are currently classified as Category V (Protected Landscapes) rather than Category II (National Park) on the basis that these are lived-in landscapes where there is an emphasis on the interaction between nature and people but their classification as Protected Areas is still dependent on them being managed and protected effectively for nature.
- 6 <https://landscapeswales.org.uk/reviewing-wales-designated-landscapes/>
- 7 The relevant legislation includes Schedule 7 of the Environment Act 1995, The National Park Authorities (England) Order 2015, The New Forest National Park Authority (Establishment) Order 2005, The South Downs National Park (Establishment) Order 2010 and Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988.
- 8 All figures taken from the candidate pack for 2025 national recruitment round, available here: <https://apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/roles/8166#attachments>
- 9 https://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/66809/englishnationalparksreview-defra2002.pdf
- 10 <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/planning-statutory-landscapes.pdf>
- 11 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/protected-landscapes-to-be-strengthened-with-new-legislation-and-guidance-to-protect-nature>
- 12 See, for example, <https://www.crowe.com/uk/insights/charities-board-size-when-less-is-more>
- 13 <https://www.cnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/National-Parks-and-the-Sea-REPORT-v4.pdf>
- 14 <https://www.natureontheboard.com/>
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- 16 <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/2025/april/voice-of-the-river-wye-represented-on-local-board/>
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- 18 <https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/youth-co-opted-to-enhance-governance/>
- 19 <https://www.cnp.org.uk/national-parks-movement/national-parks-new-perspectives/future-leaders-course/>