

[A different future for Designated Landscapes in Wales?](#)

[New report published](#)

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The purpose of Designated Landscapes in Wales may be changing. A debate is due to be held in Plenary on 6 June 2017 on the review of Designated Landscapes. This blog post explores the recently published, long awaited [Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales](#) report which follows of a review of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. The report advocates a change in management approach that would see these landscapes become the drivers of the sustainable management of natural resources.

Background

Nationally important landscapes in England and Wales are designated as **National Parks** or **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** under the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949*. Together these Designated Landscapes cover around **25% of Wales**.

Wales is home to 4 AONB's (Anglesey, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley, Llyn Peninsula and Gower – additionally the Wye Valley AONB spans England and Wales) and 3 National Parks (Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia). In 1952 Pembrokeshire Coast National Park was designated as the first coastal National Park in the UK, and in 1956 the Gower was designated as the first AONB in the UK.

The current management and purpose of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

National Parks have two statutory purposes:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty,



wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas; and

- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas to the public.

Where conflict arises between these two statutory purposes the National Park Authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area under the '[Sandford Principle](#)'.

AONBs are areas designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty and differ from National Parks in that they lack the statutory purpose to promote opportunities for the public to enjoy and understand the area.

The Marsden Review

In light of the age of the legislation setting out the statutory purposes of the two designations (almost 70 years old), in 2014 the Welsh Government commissioned a group of experts, led by Professor Terry Marsden, to undertake a [Review of Designated Landscapes](#). Published in 2015, the 'Marsden Review' provided [69 recommendations](#).

The Future Landscapes Working Group

Following the review, in the autumn of 2015, the then Minister for Natural Resources, Carl Sargeant advised for a Future Landscapes Working Group to be set up. Led by Dafydd Elis-Thomas, the Working Group involved representatives of the National Parks, AONBs, environmental groups, business and government officials, who explored the Marsden Review recommendations. This also allowed consideration of the recommendations in the context of new legislation; the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* and the *Environment (Wales) Act 2016* and the evidence provided in the inaugural [State of Natural Resources Report](#). The Working Group published its report [Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales](#) (the 'Future Landscapes Review') in May.



The Future Landscapes Review – a report by the Future Landscapes Working Group

Proposition

The report sets out a new Proposition for Designated Landscapes to go beyond their current purposes relating to conservation and amenity value. It states that **Designated Landscapes should be the drivers of the sustainable management of natural resources** providing wider public and private benefit. It emphasises the opportunity, through partnership working, to **realise the economic potential of communities and promote green growth and the resilience of ecosystems** through these landscapes.

Governance

A **new way of working** through governance arrangements that include a **wide range of delivery and partnership models with a common vision** is proposed. It also recommends that bodies and partnerships with responsibility for the Designated Landscapes should work across boundaries with Natural Resources Wales and local partnerships to promote their social, cultural and economic value and sustainable use. The report states that partnerships would be required to **attract new resourcing** and influence investments by others. It stressed that this new way of working will require a behavioural and institutional change.

Action Plan

An 18 month action plan of first steps to realise the Proposition is contained in the report. It is divided into the following elements:

- collaboration and partnership;
- vision and direction;
- refreshing governance: improving performance and accountability;
- innovations in resourcing; and
- driving well-being and resilience.

Responses to the report

- On publication of the report, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths [said](#):



Wales' landscape is a huge part of our identity and an important national asset. It attracts tourism, outdoor recreation and local employment. It delivers benefits to our health and well-being and has been identified as having huge potential for developing greener energy solutions.

This is why it is so important we are making the most of our iconic landscape. There is much we can learn from each other as we navigate our way towards a future outside of the EU.

I thank the group for their work on this report. The next step is to deliver against the ambition, not in isolation, but together as part of the collaborative approach.

Whilst welcoming the report's commitment to Designated Landscapes, the [Snowdonia Society has criticised the report](#) for its lack of clarity and lack of emphasis on the primary conservation purpose of these designations:

We searched the Future Landscapes document for the key words in National Parks' existing purposes – 'natural beauty', 'conservation', 'wildlife', 'cultural heritage' 'enjoyment' 'access', 'recreation'.

None of the words occurs in the body of the document. **'Conservation'** is the C-word spectacularly missing from the Future Landscapes document.

...It purports to summarise the detailed independent report produced by the Marsden panel in 2015...but fails to mention one of Marsden's key recommendations – that the Sandford Principle must continue to apply, thereby ensuring that conservation remains the primary purpose of National Parks and AONBs.

[Monmouthshire GreenWeb](#) (a voluntary association of up to fifty environmental organisations) has also commented on the report stating that:

While there is reference to controversial topics such as tourism and renewable energy, the report is more concerned with matters such as governance, collaboration, monitoring change, sustainable land management and drawing on good practice.



Next steps

The Future Landscapes Review proposes a model for developing future public policies and drafting devolved legislation. It will be for the Welsh Government to look at whether legislation needs to be changed to support the recommendations of the report.

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Image from Elfyn Henderson.

