

30by30 on land in England: Delivery Plan

Consolidating commentary and
implications for professionals

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About the Institution of Environmental Sciences

The Institution of Environmental Sciences (the IES) is at the forefront of uniting the environmental sciences around a shared goal: to work with speed, vision and expertise to solve the world's most pressing environmental challenges, together.

As the global professional membership body for environmental scientists, we support a diverse network of professionals all over the world – and at every stage of their education and careers – to connect, develop, progress and inspire.

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Introduction

This is a briefing on the Government's [Delivery Plan for 30by30 on land in England](#). It sets out the context of the plan, details of its contents, and headline implications for environmental professionals.

It is intended to support IES members to understand how policy developments may affect their work, but may also be of interest to those seeking more information about the implications of environmental policy for the natural world and England's approach to restoring and protecting biodiversity on land.

Ultimately, this subject is likely to affect any professional whose work interacts with biodiversity, nature recovery, conservation, or the wider context of land use and strategic environmental delivery in England.

If you want to support the work of the IES, you can [become an affiliate](#), or if you're a professional in the environmental sector working with science, consider [joining the IES](#).

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“Taken as a whole, the plan provides many of the building blocks for delivery but does not yet provide enough detail to demonstrate that its actions will add up to 30by30. It creates a strong framework for participation but does not sufficiently set out a clear, quantified, and accountable route to protecting and improving 30% of England's land for nature.”

[Essential Environment: Will the Government's 30by30 plan deliver for nature?](#)
Ellie Savage, Policy Lead, Institution of Environmental Sciences

Recommendations: Better delivery for 30by30 on land

1. Develop a genuine delivery plan for 30by30, building on the current plan to produce a framework that will support implementation in practice.
2. Take a 'golden thread of governance' approach to delivering 30by30, with measurable and clear contributions assigned to specific agencies and actors; a credible pathway and milestones supported by the necessary resources; and accountability for ensuring that outcomes are delivered.
3. Bring back a commitment to a strategic, connected, and accessible network of nature-rich spaces, delivering it in practice through joined-up approaches to policy.
4. Coordinate nature-based approaches to environmental improvement and climate mitigation to maximise the 'ecosystem services' provided.
5. Commit to leaving UK nature and the wider environment in a better state than it was at the start of the 2020s.

Read our message to the UK Government for further recommendations and details on how each of the above recommendations could be delivered in practice: '[Our Shared Mission for Sustainable Wellbeing](#).'

Context: What is the 30by30 delivery plan?

In July 2026, the UK Government published its long-awaited 30by30 on land delivery plan, setting out how it intends to protect and improve 30% of England's land for nature by 2030.

Its goal is to set out different routes through which land can contribute towards the target, while encouraging land managers to improve the condition and management of their land over time.

More than three years after the UK committed to the international 30by30 target at COP15 in 2022, and following the publication of England's criteria for what counts towards the target in 2024, the long-awaited plan sets out details on how the commitment will be delivered in practice.

Government analysis estimates that only 7% of land in England currently meets the criteria, while around 32% may already meet them or has the potential to do so.

With just four years remaining, the Government itself acknowledges that meeting the target will “require a step change in ambition, co-ordination and delivery”.

The delivery plan has a substantial role to play in bringing together an assortment of isolated policies and strategies, including [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#), Environmental Delivery Plans, and mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain.

At the same time, there is also a sizeable gulf between commitments and the current landscape of what is being delivered in practice, so the delivery plan also needs to set out a clear pathway that will bring together the myriad stakeholders needed to achieve 30by30 on land.



“The 30by30 delivery plan acknowledges the scale of the challenge but does not set out an adequate response.

The Government says a step change in ambition is needed, yet the plan largely brings together existing initiatives.”

Tom Raven, IES External Policy Advisory Committee

What does the 30by30 delivery plan include?

Given its complex strategic role, the delivery plan brings together a range of existing initiatives with a view to their combined contribution to meeting the 30by30 target.

The plan also introduces some new initiatives, including a tiered approach to recognising progress towards 30by30, with land categorised as Bronze, Silver or Gold according to how closely it meets the criteria and its contribution to nature recovery.

It additionally sets out three delivery themes: (1) clearer pathways to eligibility, (2) easier routes to delivery, and (3) inspiring participation and leadership.

Some of the most important new initiatives under each theme include:

1. Clearer pathways to delivery

- Developing a 30by30 toolkit to provide practical guidance for delivery partners, land managers, and communities on the criteria, tiered approach, and routes to eligibility.
- Establishing an assurance process to provide confidence that land counted

towards 30by30 meets the criteria and that it is delivering outcomes for nature.

- Creating a national 30by30 portal for England as a single access point for guidance, resources, and information on how to contribute to the target.

2. Easier routes to delivery

- Better aligning existing public funding across the Defra group with 30by30, making it easier for land managers to access support that contributes to the target.
- Supporting the growth of nature markets, including off-site biodiversity net gain.
- Using the **Nature Restoration Fund** to pool developer contributions with a view to supporting strategic, large-scale conservation, with the first Environmental Delivery Plans due later this year.
- Strengthening the long-term protection of habitats, including promoting wider use of conservation covenants and exploring changes to **Environmental Impact Assessment** regulations.

- Publishing a [Trees Action Plan](#) and delivering at least 20 Protected Site Strategies.

3. Inspiring participation and leadership

- Strengthening the role of Protected Landscapes in delivering 30by30, including through a refreshed vision for nature recovery and greater capacity for teams to deliver at scale.
- Developing a national 30by30 delivery community, supported by improved communications and engagement.
- Exploring a visible marker that land managers can use to demonstrate they are working towards the 30by30 criteria.
- Working with local authorities to embed 30by30 into local plans and [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) (LNRS).
- Using the Nature Towns and Cities programme to support nature recovery in urban areas, including through regional parks, canal and riverside habitats, and neighbourhood green spaces.
- Supporting wider participation from businesses, the public, and young people, including through partnerships with the National Education Nature Park and 30x30 UK.

For full details on the 30by30 delivery plan, read our [analysis for Essential Environment](#), or check out the [Delivery Plan](#) itself.

Is the Delivery Plan sufficient?

Two features of the plan stand out.

Firstly, many of the measures in the plan rely heavily on voluntary action by landowners and land managers. While this reflects the reality that much of the land with the potential to contribute to 30by30 is not owned by government, it raises challenges for delivery in practice.

Where the plan focuses heavily on participation, incentives, and private investment, it needs to be supported by action to ensure widespread uptake.

Secondly, the emphasis is largely on the ‘soft infrastructure’ of delivery: guidance, networks, partnerships, communications, and local coordination.

For example, there is a commitment to a new vision for nature recovery in protected landscapes, where arguably a new legal duty is needed.

Even where more substantive measures are included, particularly around private finance in the second theme, most public funding commitments referenced in the plan had already been announced.

With that in mind, there is still a significant gap between the plan’s ambitions and the money needed to make it a reality.

Insights: Will the plan deliver in practice?

Even as the delivery plan sets out a framework for working towards 30by30, the question remains as to whether it will actually work as a delivery plan.

One way to assess this is to look beyond the number of initiatives it contains and ask some basic implementation questions: what needs to happen, who is responsible, by when, with what resources, and what support is available to make it happen?

For more information on how to connect environmental targets with more credible outcomes, read our latest report, '[The Golden Thread of Governance](#)'.

Are there measurable and clear commitments?

The delivery plan contains no shortage of commitments, but the strength of those commitments varies considerably.

Some have a clear output and deadline, such as publishing a Trees Action Plan in 2026 and delivering at least 20 Protected Site Strategies.

Others are framed more as ongoing intentions, using language such as “explore”,

“support”, and “work with”. For example, the commitment to “explore how existing and emerging funding streams can be aligned and optimised to contribute to 30by30” does not specify what will be done, by when, or what success would look like.

More importantly, there is little quantification of how individual actions will contribute to closing the gap between the **7% of land currently meeting** the criteria and the 30% target.

Without this, it is difficult to judge whether the individual initiatives are sufficient, or whether implementation is on track.

Is responsibility for delivery clear?

The plan identifies a wide range of organisations and partners involved in delivery, reflecting the collaborative nature of 30by30 and how much it relies on voluntary action by landowners and other organisations. However, the plan's commitment to involving stakeholders is not consistently followed by clear lines of responsibility.

Many commitments refer to multiple organisations or use broad language such as

“we will work with partners to explore”, making it difficult to identify who ultimately owns a particular action.

A handful of commitments, such as “Defra will establish an assurance process”, provide a much clearer line of responsibility, though most of the plan’s commitments do not.

The plan also gives insufficient clarity about what it expects organisations such as local authorities and National Park Authorities to actually deliver, beyond participating in or supporting the wider programme.

Accountability is even less clear. The plan does not consistently identify who is answerable if commitments are not delivered, how progress will be reported and publicly tracked, or what will happen if delivery falls behind.

Are there milestones and a credible pathway to 2030?

The plan sets out actions to be taken between now and 2030 but there are not enough details of the milestones needed to show that these actions will add up to the target.

With only four years remaining, a truly credible pathway would need to show not only what will happen and when, but how much each intervention is expected to contribute towards the 30% target.

The OEP raised a similar concern, calling for a **clearer, quantified pathway** showing how the actions in the plan will collectively deliver the target.

Without interim milestones and quantified contributions, it will be difficult to know

whether implementation is on track, and how quickly we need to change course if it is not.

Are funding and other resources identified?

The plan identifies a range of existing funding streams and proposes to explore how these can be better aligned with 30by30, alongside efforts to mobilise private investment.

However, relatively few new public funding commitments are attached to the plan, and it is not always clear how the resources identified relate to the scale of delivery required.

This is particularly important because the plan relies on voluntary action. Funding and incentives must do more than encourage participation: they need to support long-term management and restoration that moves land from having a potential contribution to actually meeting the 30by30 criteria.

Is sufficient support been provided for implementation?

The plan contains several promising elements of implementation support, including a 30by30 toolkit, national portal, improved spatial data, an assurance process, and a proposed delivery community.

Despite those positive steps, it is less clear whether support extends beyond understanding and navigating the framework to the practical actions needed to deliver

nature recovery on the ground. This includes giving delivery organisations access to advice, technical expertise, skills, and funding.

Taken as a whole, the plan provides many of the building blocks for delivery but does not yet provide enough detail to demonstrate that its actions will add up to 30by30.

It creates a strong framework for participation but does not sufficiently set out a clear, quantified, and accountable route to protecting and improving 30% of England's land for nature.



How have stakeholders responded to the plan?

Reactions to the delivery plan from environmental organisations have been largely critical, while farming and landowning stakeholders have broadly welcomed its emphasis on voluntary participation and incentives.

Scrutiny and Parliament

The [Office for Environmental Protection](#) (OEP) welcomed the additional clarity and the identification of a substantial pool of land with potential to contribute, but it questioned whether the actions set out would deliver change “at the scale and pace needed”.

It called for a “clearer and quantified pathway” from the current position to the target, including an indication of the contribution expected from each element of the plan.

Meanwhile, [Toby Perkins MP](#), Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, said “I welcome this plan, which is an important step in realising our pledge to restore 30% of our land for nature by 2030 ...

The government is right to note that protected sites are the backbone of nature

restoration, and in its ambition to unlock finance for nature. But the plan makes no new commitments to developing new sites or establishing new legal protections.

Without new legal protections, and with much of this land under the ownership of already cash strapped farmers, I am yet to be convinced that enough is being done to turn this important aspiration into a reality.”

NGOs and networks

[Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) said the plan “will not deliver 30by30”, arguing that the Government needs to urgently increase efforts to restore, expand, and connect protected sites and revitalise Protected Landscapes.

The [RSPB described the plan](#) as “deeply disappointing and completely insufficient”, highlighting what it sees as a lack of focus on the condition of existing protected sites.

The [Wildlife Trusts argued](#) that it offers “no credible plan” for bringing wildlife back, pointing to what the Wildlife Trusts see as insufficient regulation and incentives to restore nature at scale.

Rewilding Britain echoed concerns about delivery: “While this is as an important step towards delivering the UK Government’s commitment to restore nature by 2030, it doesn’t go far enough.

It’s encouraging to see greater recognition of restoring natural processes and landscape-scale recovery as vital to achieving lasting biodiversity gains. However, to turn ambition into action, this work now needs to be backed by a robust implementation plan.”

By comparison, the **National Farmers Union** (NFU) welcomed the plan, saying “The NFU has been pleased to be involved in the development of the government’s approach to 30by30 and welcomes its ambition to provide a clearer plan for delivery and a tiered approach that recognises and encourages the vital role of farmers.”

Environmental professionals

Tom Raven, Member of the IES External Policy Advisory Committee, gave his perspective on the plan:

“The 30by30 delivery plan acknowledges the scale of the challenge but does not set out an adequate response.

The Government says a step change in ambition is needed, yet the plan largely brings together existing initiatives, guidance and voluntary mechanisms rather than introducing major new measures to increase the area of land managed for nature.

The criteria for what counts towards 30by30 are rightly rigorous, but the missing piece is a credible and accountable plan for how England gets there within the time

remaining – there is no clear year-by-year roadmap to 2030, little detail on how protected sites will be restored at scale, and few commitments that place obligations on government itself rather than encouraging action by others.”

Find out more

In the IES’s **2024 message to government**, the Institution called for the new Government to “Enshrine the commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 into UK law, and urgently produce the promised delivery strategy, which must include how sites will be maintained in the long-term.”

In the delivery plan, only some of the tiers of sites (Gold, and in some cases Silver) require clear plans for long-term management, and there are still significant gaps in the delivery framework.

The IES also called on the Government to “Make the Nature Recovery Network a reality, creating a strategic, connected and accessible network of nature-rich spaces.”

Overall, the strategic framework for delivering nature targets in practice still has many gaps. Policies are insufficiently connected and not set up to deliver.

- Read ‘**Our Shared Mission for Sustainable Wellbeing**’ for further information on our recommendations to government.
- Learn more about reconnecting environmental targets with credible outcomes in our recent report, ‘**The Golden Thread of Governance**’.

Implications of the 30by30 delivery plan

30by30 is more than another environmental target. The Government describes it as a “shared national effort” and puts it “at the heart” of England’s ambition for nature recovery, with expected contributions from initiatives including [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) (LNRs), [Protected Landscapes](#), and the [National Estate for Nature](#).

This means 30by30 is likely to become an increasingly important framework for connecting existing work on nature recovery, rather than a separate programme sitting alongside it.

For practitioners, particularly in local government, planning, and land management, this will mean understanding how existing decisions and programmes can contribute to 30by30, and helping to translate national ambition into local action.

The delivery plan explicitly calls for 30by30 to be embedded in local plans and LNRs, while its proposed toolkit, portal, mapping, and assurance processes aim to make participation easier.

For 30by30 to become a shared national effort, rather than just another target, environmental professionals will be central

to connecting the Government’s ambition with what happens on the ground.

Since the delivery plan has not fully provided the tools, resources, and clarity to make that happen, environmental experts need to step up to the challenge of delivering environmental outcomes in practice.

The IES will continue to work to support the experts who restore, create, and protect wildlife rich habitats across the UK. Working together, we can accelerate towards a country with [thriving people, a healthy economy, and a flourishing environment](#).

If you want to support the work of the IES to stand up for science and nature, [become an affiliate](#), or if you’re an environmental professional, [join the IES](#).

Other relevant links and resources

How to engage with policy

Policy is increasingly relevant to the work of environmental professionals and having engaged scientists will be vital to creating a [future where people and nature thrive](#).

The IES publishes primers to help member develop their skills around engaging with environmental policy:

- [Policy analysis and awareness](#)
- [Evidence-informed policy making](#)
- [Cost-benefit analysis for policy](#)
- [Influencing the UK Parliament](#)
- [Cross-departmental policy](#)

Specific case studies for engaging with environmental policy are also provided in '[Speaking up for science](#)' which provides examples of how professionals can engage with environmental policy effectively.

The IES also [offers training](#) to help professionals learn more about policy and how they can engage with policy decisions. On-demand training sessions are available for sign-ups [on the IES website](#).

Other links and resources

Find out more about existing legislation on this topic:

- [The 30by30 on land delivery plan](#)
- [Environmental Improvement Plan for England](#)

Read other relevant briefings and resources from the IES:

- [The Golden Thread of Governance: Delivering environmental targets](#)
- [Latest developments on land & nature](#)
- [Our Shared Mission for Sustainable Wellbeing](#)
- [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#)

To support our work, consider [joining the IES](#) or [becoming an Affiliate](#).

Get in touch with Joseph Lewis, Head of Policy (joseph@the-ies.org) to let us know your thoughts for future briefings, or with your suggestions for content.

“While the delivery plan contains many of the building blocks for implementation, significant gaps remain.

The result is a framework for delivery, rather than a fully quantified and accountable pathway to 30by30.”

Ellie Savage, IES Policy Lead



