The one hundred and forty-sixth meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 24 and 25 March 2026 in Cathays Park, Cardiff

Paper JNCC 26 16P: Prioritising nature within broader land use decisions

All available papers for the one hundred and forty-sixth meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee can be found at: https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/cf3fdf8e-684a-4ec5-9ed5-335f09ff7c51.

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Turning science into action for nature, people and the planet.

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Prioritising nature within broader land use decisions

Paper by Steve Wilkinson, Hannah McGrath and Gwawr Jones

1. Proposal

1.1 JNCC's work within England and Northern Ireland has been exploring how to begin to emphasise the value of nature, in terms of the ecosystem services it provides, within broader land use decision making. JNCC sees this as a key opportunity to accelerate nature's recovery. The experience has been captured in a draft JNCC Signpost report. Committee are asked to consider:

- **Where this work adds most value across the UK?**
- **Where it needs strengthening or adapting for country needs?**
- **Who should we engage as we refine and deliver this vision and how Committee members could support this?**

2. Background

2.1 The UK's limited land area faces rising and often competing demands across food, energy, nature and health. This is equally true of the UK's marine area. Overall, UK resilience depends on how we balance meeting these demands, including shaping our exposure to supply chain and climate risks. The strategic decisions around this are perhaps the key opportunity for impacting nature across the UK and have been highlighted within the recent IPBES Nexus Assessment and the Royal Society report on Multifunctional Landscapes.

2.2 JNCC have been working closely with Defra and DAERA to explore how investment can support the implementation of multifunctional landscapes. We inputted to Defra's recently published Land Use Framework. We have engaged widely and regularly across Defra, DAERA, ALBs, the other UK devolved

governments, and a range of non-government organisations to raise awareness of our land use work, including our Spatial Prioritisation project in England and our Balancing Land Use Needs project in Northern Ireland. In England, while most engagement has focused on government and agencies, we have intentionally involved academia, eNGOs and private-sector partners to test our approach to spatial prioritisation, gather feedback, and build shared understanding. More recently, engagement has intensified through user-testing activities with Arm's Length Bodies, including focus groups with Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Historic England.

2.3 A key challenge is alignment between overall country outcomes (top down) with more regional or local priorities and choices (bottom up). Additionally, within a UK context, there needs to be consideration of the cumulative outcomes from the four countries and how this impacts overall UK resilience within the context of import dependencies. A robust evidence base is key to informing choices.

2.4 In order to promote wider engagement and conversation on key topics, JNCC are trialling the production of a new publication series called 'Signposts'. On land use, based on our experience, we have drafted the Signpost - "Integrating nature's value into land use decisions across the UK". This has seven steps:

- Develop a UK strategy for land use that delivers agreed national priorities for nature, climate, food, energy and health
- Support development of regional plans
- Accelerate private investment to deliver change
- Secure societal awareness and engagement for land use change
- Standardise outcome measurement and reporting
- Develop analytical approaches to support decision making to deliver multifunctionality
- Project outcomes and monitor progress

2.5 The session at Joint Committee will present this area of work and seek reflection from the members of Committee on whether more can or should be done to enable broader implementation.