

Cabinet

23 June 2026

Dorset National Landscape Defra funding

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr N Ireland, Leader, Climate, Performance, Communications and Safeguarding

Local Councillor(s):

Cllr B Bawden, Cllr S Christopher, Cllr B Bolwell, Cllr P Mooney, Cllr S Williams, Cllr S Clifford, Cllr G Taylor, Cllr C Monks, Cllr C Kippax, Cllr N Eynsenck, Cllr S Holland, Cllr D Taylor, Cllr R Tarr, Cllr D Northam, Cllr R Biggs, Cllr P Dickenson, Cllr L O'Leary, Cllr N Ireland, Cllr M Baker, Cllr L Beddow, Cllr B Wilson, Cllr B Ezzard, Cllr R Holloway, Cllr G Suttle, Cllr C Tomes, Cllr J Haynes, Cllr D Murcer, Cllr E Parker, Cllr B Cooper, Cllr S Jespersen, Cllr J Somper, Cllr R Legg

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton – Executive Director, Environment and Economy

Report author and job title: Tom Munro, Dorset National Landscape Manager

Email: tom.munro@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. **Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)**
 - 1.1 Dorset has two National Landscapes (areas of outstanding natural beauty): the Cranborne Chase and Dorset.
 - 1.2 Dorset Council is the accountable body for the Dorset National Landscape Partnership and hosts the Dorset National Landscape Team.
 - 1.3 The Dorset National Landscape Partnership is the local governance body for the management of this national designation which covers over 45% of the County.
 - 1.4 The Partnership Board acts as an advisory committee to Dorset Council and includes 3 Dorset Council members alongside representatives from parish councils and organisations representing landowning, farming, forestry, nature and rural business interests.
 - 1.5 Majority core funding for the partnership is provided by Defra, the sponsoring government department for National Landscapes and National Parks.

- 1.6 Defra funds are allocated via a national funding formula. All funds are intended to enable delivery of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan. The allocation is divided into the following categories:
 - Core revenue funds, for the operation of the team and its projects, and wider allocation according to the partnership's recommendations.
 - Core capital funds for furthering the purposes of the designation with specific priority to be given to (a) enabling more equitable access to the landscape and its special qualities, and (b) nature recovery.
 - Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL), for distribution as a grant for farming-related projects which deliver outcomes for nature, climate people, and place.
 - 1.7 The Dorset National Landscape Partnership has received notification of its funding allocation for the financial year 2026-2027 totalling £1,765,915 with indicative allocations for 2027-2028 and 2028-2029 being the same (subject to confirmation). They offer is as follows:
 - Core revenue grant £283,705
 - Core capital grant incorporating £574,591
 - Core revenue 'one-off uplift' grant £107,666
 - Farming in Protected Landscapes £799,953
 - 1.8 Delivery of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan facilitates Dorset Council meeting its statutory duty in relation to the protected landscape. Specifically this is s85 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act (2000) as amended by the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act (2023), which states, "In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty"
 - 1.9 The Dorset National Landscape Management Plan supports delivery of aspects of the Dorset Council Plan. This is strongest in "responding to the climate and nature crisis" but has relevance to the other strategic priorities.
2. **Recommendation(s)**
 - 2.1 Cabinet accepts (in principle) the funding offered by Defra as the accountable body for the Dorset National Landscape Partnership, subject to the contract/s being found acceptable by officers representing legal and financial interests.
 - 2.2 Cabinet delegates the signing of contracts according to the Constitution's Scheme of Delegation
 3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**
 - 3.1 Funding offered supports the discharge of statutory duties and enables positive delivery in alignment with Council Plan priorities.

4. **The report**

- 4.1 Dorset National Landscape is the fifth largest of England's 34 areas of outstanding natural beauty, covering 1,129km² the vast majority of which is in the Dorset Council area, with minor areas of East Devon and South Somerset included. It is designated for its natural beauty as described in the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan's Statement of Significance, summarised as:
- Scenic beauty; landform and landmarks; 'a microcosm of rural England'; undeveloped rural areas and coast; tranquillity and dark skies
 - Wildlife of national and international importance
 - Significant archaeological and geological features; 'a living textbook'
 - Significant cultural responses to the landscape from many important individuals in the areas of poetry, literature, music and the visual arts.
- 4.2 The Dorset National Landscape Partnership encompasses 17 organisations (including Dorset Council) representing the interests of land use, rural economy, nature, culture and community. The Dorset National Landscape Partnership Board acts as an advisory committee to Dorset Council which is the accountable body for the partnership, hosting its dedicated team.
- 4.3 While the Dorset National Landscape Partnership is a hosted organisation, its core aims as articulated in its management plan aligns strongly with the council's priority of responding to the climate and nature crisis.
- 4.4 In a letter of intent from Defra, the Dorset National Landscape Partnership received notification of its funding allocation for the financial year 2026-2027 totalling £1,765,915 with indicative allocations for 2027-2028 and 2028-2029 being the same (subject to confirmation). The offer is as follows:
- Core revenue grant £283,705
 - Core capital grant incorporating £574,591
 - Core revenue 'one-off uplift' grant £107,666
 - Farming in Protected Landscapes £799,953
- 4.5 Defra's letter of intent goes on to set the following expectations for expenditure: "During 2026/27 I would like each National Landscape team to determine how it can use grant funding to support delivery of the government's priorities for protected landscapes set out in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework and Environmental Improvement Plan 2025, particularly our commitments to;
- Enable protected landscapes organisations to make land greener, wilder, and more accessible to all, and;

- Increase the contribution that protected landscapes are making to Environment Act and EIP targets, measured through the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework.

“It is also important that National Landscape teams collaborate effectively at a regional and national level, working together with each other, the National Park Authorities, the Protected Landscapes Partnership and Green Finance Accelerator towards delivery of these priorities.”

- 4.6 The expectations are met by committing this funding to the delivery of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026-2031 which was adopted by Cabinet on 9th December 2025.
- 4.7 Dorset Council commits an annual budget of £56,300 to the partnership's operation.
- 4.8 The Dorset National Landscape Team seeks funding from other sources to deliver the Management Plan. Total direct spend by Dorset National Landscape Partnership for 2026-2027 was £2,198,295 – typical annual spend is around this figure. Added value in terms of estimated partner contributions (£733,140) and volunteer time (£177,905) bring a total value delivery to just over £3million.
- 4.9 For every £1 of Dorset Council budget committed the Dorset National Landscape, £38.94 is generated in direct value, with the total value rising to an estimated £54.02 when including partner contributions and volunteer time, demonstrating a strong return on investment and the wider social, environmental, and economic benefits of supporting landscape-scale initiatives.
- 4.10 Delivery of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan supports action on the Dorset Council corporate priorities, in particular the response to the climate and nature crisis:
 - 30% of land managed for nature: core funds and Farming in Protected Landscapes are administered as grant to support nature's recovery. For instance, in 25-26 a grant went to support land acquisition by National Trust at Cerne Abbas bringing 25.08ha land adjacent to a Site of Special Scientific Interest out of intensive management and into management for nature.
 - Rights of Way: core funds are allocated to enhance access for all.
 - County Farms: Farming in Protected Landscapes grants have supported a project 'unlocking the biodiversity potential of Dorset Council Farms', providing tenants an ecological assessment and a list of potential actions that could be grant supported.

- Landscape Recovery: the Dorset National Landscape team are supporting Wareham Arc Landscape Recovery in their negotiations with Defra for a 20-year, 4000ha nature recovery programme to the north of Wareham.
- Landscape resilience: the Dorset National Landscape team lead the Brit Catchment Natural Flood Management project, supported by the Environment Agency. This project is installing measures to slow the flow of water and sediment, reducing flood risk to vulnerable properties in Bridport and reducing the maintenance burden in West Bay Harbour. Farming in Protected Landscapes funds have also supported several interventions co-designed by Dorset Council's Flood Risk Management team as part of the Dorset Rural Runoff Project.
- Community action: Dorset National Landscape team administer the Dorset Community Tree Fund supporting a network of tree wardens and providing grants and advice to community groups for tree planting.
- Supporting sustainable farming: several of the Dorset National Landscape team's initiatives support farmers in their continued transition towards more nature-friendly farming. Grants have supported on-farm composting to enhance soil health and displace artificial fertilisers, peer-to-peer learning in soil management and regenerative techniques and the team facilitate a farmer group interested in developing biofertiliser.
- Renewable energy: the management plan supports the development of forms of renewable energy that are appropriate to the protected landscape in scale, location and design.

4.11 Delivery of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan supports action across the other Dorset Council corporate priorities:

- High quality and affordable housing: the Management Plan recognises the need for more affordable housing and supports development of appropriate exception sites.
- Grow our economy: the Dorset National Landscape team is working with partners across Purbeck, for instance, to provide more employment opportunities for young people in a growing nature-positive economy.
- Communities for all: the Dorset National Landscape team has been supporting green prescribing and nature-based wellbeing activities for many years through its project Stepping into Nature. Its latest iteration Nature Buddies is establishing a network of volunteers to support those facing barriers to accessing the countryside due to long-term health conditions.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 Except for two Conservation Boards for Chilterns and Cotswolds National Landscapes which were established by Parliamentary Order, all other English National Landscape accountable bodies are local authorities.
- 5.2 There is no alternative accountable body organisation for the Dorset National Landscape Partnership.
- 5.3 There is no alternative source of significant core funding for the Dorset National Landscape Partnership.

6. Legal considerations

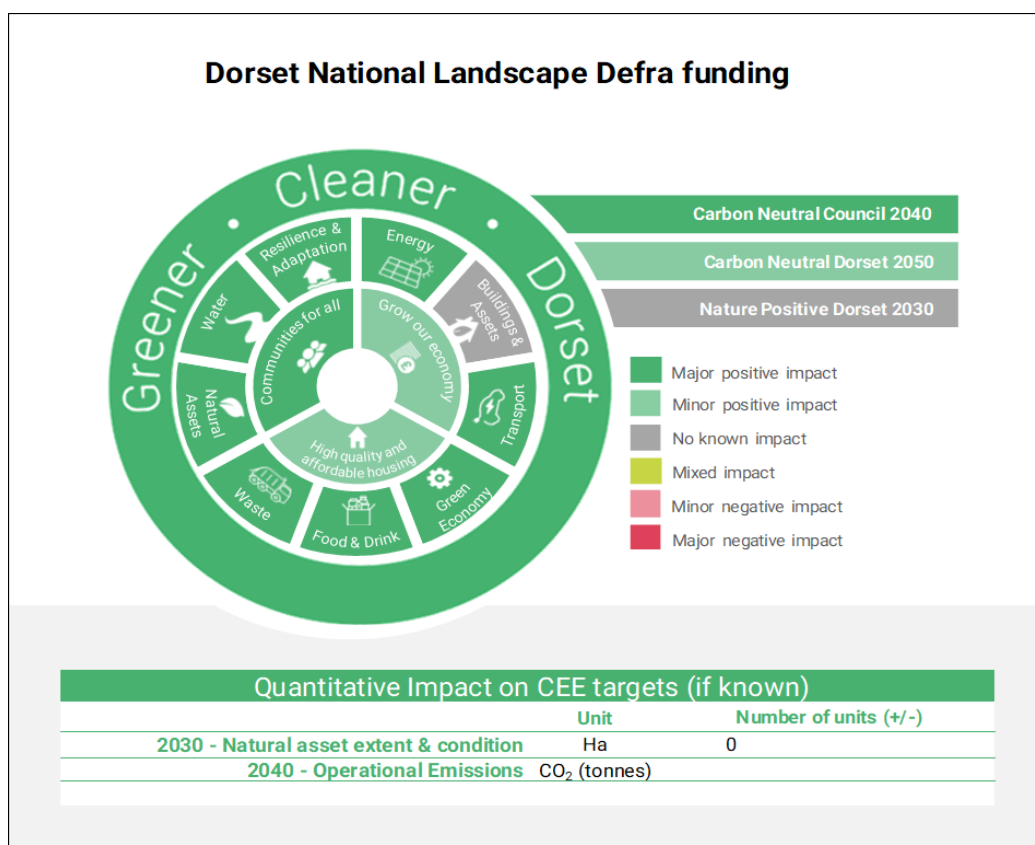
- 6.1 The funding contract will be reviewed by Legal Services.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Dorset Council provides an annual budget of £56,300 as its contribution to the Dorset National Landscape Partnership; this local match funding is expected by Defra.
- 7.2 The funding contract will be reviewed by appropriate officers in the Resources Directorate.
- 7.3 No additional financial burdens fall on Dorset Council by accepting these funds.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 The Dorset National Landscape Partnership, its team and its funds are a significant contributor to nature recovery and the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, alongside supporting landscape resilience to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- 8.2 The Dorset National Landscape Partnership's aims as articulated in its management plan support the delivery of the climate and nature council plan priority.
- 8.3 The funds are for the delivery of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026-2031. This plan was written alongside a Strategic Environmental Assessment which shaped its policies and supporting actions and was adopted by Cabinet on 9th December 2025 (with a supporting Climate & Ecology wheel).



This wheel assesses the impact of the aims and policies of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan, delivery of which this funding is being provided to support.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 Since 2017 the Dorset National Landscape team has been programmes facilitating greater access to the landscape for older people and those living with long-term health conditions.
- 9.2 These programmes have been shaped and steered with input from Public Health Dorset and Adult Social Care.
- 9.3 The current initiative, Nature Buddies, is developing a network of trained volunteers to support green social prescribing and access to nature for anyone facing barriers to doing so – more online here: https://dorset-nl.org.uk/all_ways_out/nature-buddies/

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None.

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 Dorset Council has previously accepted grants from Defra on behalf of the Dorset National Landscape Partnership.
- 11.2 The recommendation is to accept this grant in principle subject to the contract/s being found acceptable by officers representing legal and financial interests, thereby minimising risk.

12. 12. Equalities

- 12.1 The funds are for the delivery of the Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026-2031. This plan was written alongside an Equalities Impact Assessment which shaped its policies and supporting actions and was adopted by Cabinet on 9th December 2025.

13. 13. Appendices

- 13.1 Climate & nature accessible table

ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS	
Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	major positive impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	major positive impact
Green Economy	major positive impact
Food & Drink	major positive impact
Waste	major positive impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	major positive impact
Water	major positive impact
Resilience and Adaptation	major positive impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	minor positive impact
High-quality and affordable housing	minor positive impact
Communities for all	strongly supports it

- 13.2 Climate & nature recommendations

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS	
Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
consider opportunities to generate renewable energy on the land	opportunities for REgeneration are promoted by the management plan in so far as they are compatible with other policy imperatives and statutory duties for the protected landscape
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	
Transport	
No recommendations found for this category	
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	
No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	

14. **14. Background papers**

- 14.1 Dorset National Landscape Management Plan is available online at:
<https://dorset-nl.org.uk/resources/management-plan-2026-31/>

15. **Report sign-off**

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director of Assurance & Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director for Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)