



Parliamentary
Forward View



Land Use Framework for England

Consolidating commentary and implications for professionals



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Land Use Framework

Consolidating commentary and implications for professionals, August 2024

This is a briefing on the forthcoming [Land Use Framework for England](#). It sets out the context of the Framework, recent developments regarding the proposed level of ambition, 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 how land can support England's approach to environmental challenges.

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1. Specialism-specific relevance

Specialisms which may be affected by the subject-matter of the briefing include:

- Built environment
- Climatology
- Conservation & ecology
- Energy
- Environmental management
- Forestry & Landscaping
- Impact Assessment
- Land condition
- Sustainability
- Transport

Ultimately, this subject is likely to affect any professional whose work interacts with land use, environmental effects of land use, or the wider promotion of sustainability and environmental governance 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](#).

2. Recommendations: How can policy make the most of the Land Use Framework?

Delivering an effective Land Use Framework for England will require a joined-up approach across policy making.

This briefing outlines commentary from a number of organisations with their own perspectives on how the Land Use Framework could be delivered. As a result, there are many implicit recommendations throughout the briefing, representing the view of the organisations concerned.

As a supplement, these summary recommendations provide further insights into how the overall approach of government could be coordinated to fully meet the promise of the Land Use Framework:

1. **Take a holistic approach to the use of land** across the UK to secure multiple benefits for communities and our natural world.
2. **Reach a cross-governmental consensus on the use of land**, supported by a Land Use Framework that coordinates – and manages trade-offs for – social, economic, and environmental objectives, and addresses the linked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution.
3. **Coordinate nature-based approaches** to environmental improvement and climate mitigation to maximise the 'ecosystem services' provided.
4. **Deliver a consistent approach** to the objectives sought through Environmental Land Management Schemes, soil health, and the Land Use Framework, informed by scientific insights.
5. **Commit to leaving UK nature and the wider environment in a better state** than it was at the start of the 2020s, recognising that the current trend of environmental decline means that 'do no harm' is an insufficient approach to preventing long-term damage.

Read the IES 'Message to Government' for further recommendations: [Environmental scientists: 'Use the next 5 years to... ..Transform the UK through a new Mission for Sustainable Wellbeing.'](#)

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3. What is the Land Use Framework?

The Land Use Framework is an environmental policy promised by DEFRA to support multiple objectives for the use of land in England. It was due to be published in 2023, but has faced considerable delays, with the scope and focus of the promised policy changing over time.

In the Plan published by the independent [Dimpleby Review into a National Food Strategy](#), one recommendation was the creation of a Rural Land Use Framework “*setting out which areas of land would be best suited to ... different functions*” to “*inform the payments and regulations that are being designed to incentivise farmers across England*” based on three designations: semi-natural land, high-yield farmland, and low-yield farmland.

Since that initial recommendation, proposals for the Land Use Framework expanded to promises of a much more ambitious framework setting out the Government’s approach to balance all objectives for land use, including agriculture, the environment, net zero, and climate adaptation.

While that commitment was made in the [2023 Environmental Improvement Plan for England](#), the Government at the time subsequently suggested that the final Land Use Framework would be closer to non-prescriptive guidance for land managers, farmers, and other interested parties.

That version of the Land Use Framework was not published ahead of the 2024 General Election.

Now, the new Government will be responsible for publishing the Land Use Framework, which may have been developed in line with a vision for the environment which differs from the new Government’s priorities.

Different approaches to the Framework could lead to substantially different outcomes for people, the rural economy, and the environment, so the level of ambition of the eventual Land Use Framework will be crucial to understanding its implications.

4. What has the new Government indicated about its approach?

In the Government’s [2024 election manifesto](#), it stated “*food security is national security ... we will champion British farming whilst protecting the environment ... we will introduce a land-use framework and make environment land management schemes work for farmers and nature.*”

By explicitly including the Land Use Framework in its manifesto, the Government has reaffirmed the commitment to its publication, so we should expect it to be delivered in due course, likely in the next few months.

Beyond confirming that the Framework is still scheduled for delivery, the new Government has given few details about the form it will take or how it will function in practice. Despite the limited information, some details can be predicted from the Government’s other plans.

Firstly, by including the reference to the Land Use Framework in a section about agriculture and food production, the new Government has indicated that a significant focus of its Framework will be food security and the context of agriculture in particular.

However, the details in the manifesto indicate that environmental farming remains a significant priority, so there is likely to be an element seeking to balance the role of nature-friendly or otherwise environmentally-beneficial actions within the broader role of agriculture in producing food.

Secondly, the Government’s manifesto places a significant degree of emphasis on its plans to create [Great British Energy](#) and to work towards a cleaner UK energy system within the next few years.

Already, the Net Zero Secretary has ended the [effective ban on onshore wind](#), so this trajectory is only likely to continue over the course of the current Parliament. Whether or not energy production is explicitly included in the Land Use Framework, it is likely to be a prominent consideration in how the Government views the use of land.

Thirdly, another of the Government’s manifesto commitments is to “*get Britain building again*”. Although this is neither one of the Government’s ‘missions’ nor a key priority, it was a significant focus of their campaign and planning reform has already been one of the biggest discussion areas of the early weeks of the new Government.

Housebuilding in particular, and infrastructure development as a secondary concern, are likely to be significant priorities for the Government when it comes to the use of land.

While these may not be included in the Land Use Framework itself, the Framework is likely to be developed in a way that does not interfere with the ability of developers to proactively resume the process of housebuilding and development.

Each of these are plausible factors that may influence the development of the Land Use Framework, though the specifics will remain uncertain until the Government commits to its publication.

It is also possible that, due to the long process of development under the previous Government, the Land Use Framework does not fully reflect these priorities when it is first published, with further changes or reforms made subsequently.

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5. What could be affected by the Land Use Framework?

Depending on the exact scope and subject matter of the Land Use Framework, it could have wide-reaching implications for a whole range of environmental issues. It is most likely to impact the core land use challenges covered by its scope, but could also have knock-on implications for other issues if it fully addresses the trade-offs and implications of decisions about how land is used.

Core issues likely to be directly affected by any form of Land Use Framework include:

- **Conservation**, particularly for 'land sparing' objectives such as 30x30, the commitment that at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal & marine areas will be effectively conserved and managed by 2030;
- **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** and other [local actions to address nature and biodiversity](#), including through measures such as [Biodiversity Net Gain](#);
- **Landscapes**: the role and overall scope of protected land, landscapes, [SSSIs](#), and [AONBs](#);
- **Planning**, particularly for housebuilding and infrastructure development, as well as the realisation of planning policy through the [National Planning Policy Framework](#);
- **Energy production and storage** and grid connectivity, including onshore wind, solar panels, and other forms of renewable energy generation;
- **Carbon capture, utilisation, and storage**, as well as carbon sequestration (both naturally occurring sequestration and by direct intervention); and
- **Food production and farming**, with potential implications for food security, [Environmental Land Management](#), and all other agricultural activities.

Given the interactions between these issues and other social and environmental systems, other key considerations which could be affected by the Land Use Framework include:

- Sustainable development;
- Economic growth and security;
- Climate mitigation and resilience;
- Water security and surface water flooding (and the delivery of [Sustainable Drainage Systems](#));
- Nationally-significant infrastructure delivery;
- Transport; and
- Environmental improvement.

What questions could the Land Use Framework answer?

Beyond the substantive scope of the Land Use Framework, there are also considerations about its function and the role it would play on those topics. There are a number of questions related to land use which could be answered through a single clear Framework, including:

- **What**: decisions and guidance about land use in England, setting out an overall vision for how different benefits will be achieved, including through a multifunctional approach.
- **Where**: geospatial analysis of English land, its characteristics, and the different functions it could provide, with an overall indication of where different vital ecosystems services will be secured across the country.
- **Who**: processes for decision making on the use of land at the local or regional scales, with reference to democratic engagement and capacity building to ensure a legitimate approach to land use policy.
- **Why**: strategic considerations that link specific decisions about the use of land to the Government's wider social and environmental objectives, with reference to framework-level governance and the ability to solve cross-departmental and cross-boundary challenges.
- **How**: delivery plans for enacting the Framework's vision and ensuring that local decisions reflect national objectives (and vice versa), with plans for implementation including specific policy instruments, guidance, and how skills will be put in place to support delivery.



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6. What have stakeholders requested from the Framework?

The Land Use Framework has seen considerable debate since the Government first committed to producing it, with a range of perspectives on what should be included or how it should address land use challenges.

National Food Strategy & Government Food Strategy

The initial recommendation on land use from the [independent National Food Strategy](#) was to “Create a Rural Land Use Framework based on the three compartment model.”

The three compartment model refers to another approach in the report, combining ‘land sharing’ and ‘land sparing’ approaches to identify three types of land use for farmland: semi-natural land, high-yield farmland, and low-yield farmland. The approach advocates for a mixture of land uses, balancing the different needs and benefits of land more effectively.

In this proposed approach, the role of the Rural Land Use Framework would be to “[set] out which areas of land would be best suited to the different functions of the three compartment model”, informing agricultural payment schemes and farming incentives. The report sets out a number of criteria for a successful Framework:

- It should inform payments and regulations;
- It should be clear and explicit about what the Government wants to achieve;
- It should be clear about which incentives and regulations will lead to which outcomes (specifying nature recovery, climate, and food security);
- It should include a National Rural Land Map, identifying which land would be best used for which purpose;
- It should connect and inform different incentive schemes and land-based strategies across DEFRA;
- It should be informed by input from other relevant departments (the departments named in the Strategy have since been superseded by others);
- The Government should publish an annual progress report on the Framework.

Naturally, this vision for a Land Use Framework is different from more recent calls for the Framework in a number of ways. Most notably, it would have been a ‘Rural’ Land Use Framework with a heavy focus on agricultural land use. While agriculture is likely to be a significant focus of any Land Use Framework, given how much land is committed to it, other commentators have called for a more extensive and holistic approach.

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Following the independent report, the [Government's Food Strategy](#) was published, including a commitment to “publish a land use framework in 2023 to ensure we meet our net zero and biodiversity targets, and help our farmers adapt to a changing climate, whilst continuing to produce high quality, affordable produce that supports a healthier diet.”

The Strategy also included further details on what the Land Use Framework would include:

- It would reflect all Government objectives for English agriculture, the environment, and net zero;
- It would respond to (and reflect on) the outcomes of the then-ongoing [House of Lords inquiry](#) into land use in England;
- It would inform incentives for agri-environment schemes;
- It would be a ‘valuable resource’ for responsible authorities preparing [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#).

While the information provided by the Government's Strategy is lighter on details than the independent [National Food Strategy report's vision](#), it covers much of the same scope and focus.

At the time the commitment was made, it is reasonable to predict that the Government's vision was not too dissimilar to the one proposed in the independent review. However, the resignation of the Prime Minister shortly after the Strategy's publication led to a significant shift in UK environmental policy, likely affecting the trajectory of the Land Use Framework's development.

House of Lords Committee on Land Use

Running in parallel to the publication of the Government's Food Strategy, the [House of Lords Committee on Land Use in England](#) was established in 2022, conducting an inquiry into English land use and competing demands for land.

The Committee's final report also called for a Land Use Framework, as well as a Land Use Commission to enable the Framework's “*development and promulgation*”. It also welcomed the Government's commitment to a Land Use Framework in its Food Strategy.

In the process of publishing the inquiry's final report, the Committee published a significant amount of detail on what it believed would make for the most effective Land Use Framework, including:

- It should encompass land use priorities across government departments, with the report explicitly referencing departments responsible for the environment, housing, energy, culture and sport, and transport;
- It should operationalise the concept of multifunctionality in the context of finite land;

- It should be firmly embedded in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) and associated guidance;
- It should account for a multifunctional approach to afforestation and woodland management, accounting for biodiversity, food production, and suitability of land use;
- It should review the role of green and open spaces in health and wellbeing, also acknowledging near urban and peri-urban areas;
- It should include energy and other large-scale infrastructure projects, working closely with the [National Infrastructure Commission](#);
- It should acknowledge the interaction of housing with land use, but not set out any explicit housing policy or replace any part of the planning system;
- It should assess the use of land for new housing and collate information on projected future demand, identifying areas of land which should be prioritised for non-housing purposes;
- It should reflect and complement other frameworks and their priorities, such as [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#);
- It should feature a central priority to make better multifunctional use of the green belt, particularly for biodiversity, access to nature, and other environmental benefits;
- It should take a multifunctional and locally-driven approach to ‘land sharing’, only adopting a ‘three compartment’ model if it is recognised as a ‘continuum of land use’ rather than a set of specific and rigid boundaries;
- It should be informed by accessible, rigorous, and frequently updated data;
- It should be developed in consultation with those affected, including a wide range of stakeholders associated with land use, identifying evidence gaps and opportunities for stakeholder engagement and feedback; and
- It should be supported by an independent Land Use Commission responsible for preparing and updating the Framework and supporting the wider set of objectives associated with multifunctional land use.

This is one of the most extensive and wide-reaching visions for a Land Use Framework that has been proposed, going significantly further than the original proposal for a Framework focused on agricultural land use specifically.

The Committee argued in its report that through this more multifunctional approach, a wider category of challenges could be addressed, leading to better outcomes.

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The [Government's response](#) to the final report disagreed with the recommendations for a Land Use Commission, but acknowledged the need to “*take a wide range of land uses into account*”.

It ruled out either a ‘land sparing’ or ‘land sharing’ approach, as well as explicitly prescribing individual land uses from a national level. However, it agreed to focus the Framework on delivering resilient, multifunctional landscapes.

Perspectives from outside government

Before the Government or the independent review called for a Land Use Framework, the [Food, Farming, and Countryside Commission](#) had already recommended that England adopt a national land use framework in 2019, focused on inspiring ‘cooperation based on the public value of land, mediating and encouraging multipurpose uses’.

This recommendation formed the basis of the House of Lords report’s recommendation, and it also called for a Land Use Commission. Unsurprisingly, it is similar in nature to the recommendations proposed by the House of Lords Committee, albeit with fewer details of how the framework could work in practice.

In particular, it highlighted key aspects of what a successful Framework would include:

- It would compile a comprehensive evidence base;
- It would promote a public value approach to land use, mediating conflicting priorities and proactively encouraging multifunctionality;
- It would support alignment of land use with physical and social geography;
- It would protect the value and beauty of landscapes, giving a particular emphasis to [Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#) and [National Parks](#);
- It would map a connected-up countryside; and
- It would place land use at the centre of the Government’s approach to addressing environmental challenges.

The substance of the recommendation bears a considerable resemblance to the House of Lords’ perspective, including a multifunctional approach and a perspective that goes beyond agriculture.

Naturally, as one of the first versions of the recommendation to appear, it is less-developed, though the Commission has [continued to advocate for a Land Use Framework](#) and develop further evidence on how it could be delivered.

In August 2024, the Commission reiterated its position in [an online article](#), highlighting how the Land Use Framework could contribute to the new Government’s objectives, particularly around resilience.

Other non-governmental organisations have also share their views on what a Land Use Framework should include and the form it could take.

[Wildlife and Countryside Link](#), a coalition of conservation and wildlife concerned charitable organisations, produced a [briefing on the proposed Land Use Framework](#) in 2023, arguing that the Framework should “*help integrate national and local decision-making across different land uses, to guide greener use decisions and achieve a healthy natural environment*” and that it should inform and incentivise national and local policy making on land use by:

- Setting long-term direction and cross-Government accountability for land use change;
- Informing national policy and decision making, such as on [Environmental Land Management Schemes](#); and
- Guiding local decision making through stronger [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) which help to deliver intended environmental outcomes.

The charity’s CEO, Richard Benwell, has also [shared three key features](#) which he believes will be crucial to the Framework’s success: (i) it should be target-driven; (2) it should carry weight in planning, permitting, and spending decision; and (3) it should be transparent and adaptable so that accountability is clear.



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In the same year, environmental think tank [Green Alliance](#) also [produced a briefing](#) setting out its view on what a good Land Use Framework would include. The Green Alliance briefing highlighted five key functions for the Framework:

- Mapping English food production and its productivity, and the potential for English land to store carbon and support nature, with a view to potential trade-offs between the two; identifying the long-term scale of land use change up to 2050 and estimated costs of delivering that pathway;
- Connecting the Framework to the biggest policies influencing rural land use, such as [Environmental Land Management Schemes](#);
- Identifying the potential to coordinate public and private finance for land use, including agriculture and nature recovery projects;
- Setting out specific plans for the pace and scale of land use change on lowland and upland peat with a view towards peatland restoration; and
- Outlining how the Government's target to protect 30% of land for nature would be met.

The Green Alliance recommendations reflect many of the same suggestions as other commentators, though they also include a broader set of considerations associated with land use, expanding the role of the Framework into long-term land use change planning and specific geospatial questions around conservation.

Another vision for the Land Use Framework was set out in [WWF-UK's 'Land of Plenty' report](#). The report calls for Governments to “roll out local and regional land use frameworks to give communities a meaningful voice in shaping the future of their landscapes.”

While the WWF's recommendation is framed more generally, it includes a handful of details outlining the organisations expectations for a Land Use Framework:

- It should be developed with communities, local authorities, and land owners;
- It should be linked to national targets and evidence, bringing together policies on nature, climate, and food; and
- It should link to local priorities, opportunities, and needs, with a view to driving public and private investment for specific actions.

In the [IES's 2024 'message to government'](#), the Institution called for the new Government to “Reach a cross-governmental consensus on the use of land, supported by a Land Use Framework that coordinates – and manages trade-offs for – social, economic, and environmental objectives” with specific reference to food security, public health, and addressing the linked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution.

The IES also called on the Government to “coordinate nature-based approaches to climate mitigation to maximise the 'ecosystem services' provided [through] a consistent approach to Environmental Land Management Schemes, soil health, and the Land Use Framework, informed by scientific insights.”

[Read the full Message to Government for further information.](#)

Overall, while different NGOs have different perspectives on the priorities that should underpin a Land Use Framework, there are several common threads, emphasising a multifunctional and joined-up approach that can reliably inform decisions at a national and local level.



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Case study: Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy

While details of what to expect from the Land Use Framework remain unclear, there are existing case studies which can be used for inspiration. The [Scottish Land Commission](#) and [Scotland's Land Use Strategies](#) are given as examples by many of the organisations that first recommended the adoption of a Land Use Framework, providing insights into how such a Framework can operate in practice.

[Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy \(2021-2026\)](#) sets out the vision and objectives of the Scottish Government with regards to the use of land, supported by opportunities to create positive change, such as through the [National Planning Framework](#) and [Regional Land Use Partnerships](#), as well as key policy actions for a more integrated and holistic approach to land use. It seeks to create alignment between existing policies and documents.

In terms of the questions answered by the Land Use Strategy, it encompasses the following:

- **What:** the Land Use Strategy sets out an overall vision, with specific objectives and an approach to how decisions about land use should be made, albeit not at the level of detail some commentators have requested for the English Land Use Framework.
- **Where:** the Land Use Strategy does not engage in geospatial analysis or mapping, but it discusses different types of land, key considerations, and how each can contribute to the Strategy's objectives.
- **Who:** the Land Use Strategy discusses Regional Land Use Partnerships and how they can be used to develop Regional Land Use Frameworks which represent a more local approach to land use.
- **Why:** the Land Use Strategy sets out the strategic considerations underpinning choices about land use, also linking them to other Scottish policy frameworks.
- **How:** the Land Use Strategy has some commentary on how the overall vision and objectives will be delivered in practice, but does not provide the full level of detailed delivery plans that some commentators have called for the English Land Use Framework to include.

If the Land Use Framework for England was designed to mirror the content and level of detail in Scotland's 3rd Land Use Strategy, it would likely cover many of the strategic considerations requested by the environment sector.

Gaps may still remain on the level of implementation, leaving communities to make their own decisions about delivery, however equivalents to Regional Land Use Partnerships could easily support the process of capacity building for effective operationalisation and delivery of the Framework in practice.

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8. Implications for policy makers

The Land Use Framework has already been considered extensively by the previous Government and has been subject to discussion with several government departments. Other public bodies may not have had the chance to consider the Government's current proposals in detail.

Regardless of whether policy makers are appraised of the details of the Land Use Framework or not, the most pressing implication for decision makers is that they will need a strong understanding of what can be lost or gained for their specific policy interests as a result of the Framework.

For example, policy makers working in climate change should be aware of how land use affects climate adaptation and mitigation, so they should be prepared to adjust their policy approach when the final Land Use Framework is published.

Similarly, policy makers working in biodiversity, pollution, food security, planning, and other priority areas should also be ready to identify opportunities for an approach with multiple benefits for people, the economy, and the planet.

9. Implications for professionals

When the Government publishes the Land Use Framework, environmental science will have a crucial role to play in providing scrutiny and evidence to support the delivery of the Framework in the most effective way.

While the wide interest in a Land Use Framework demonstrates that there is likely to be significant commentary on the Framework when it is released, only environmental science

is positioned to provide evidence of what works in practice and how to take an evidence-informed systems approach to achieving multiple benefits from the use of land.

The Framework is not anticipated to be subject to extensive consultation, so opportunities to engage with the specifics of the Framework may be limited after its publication.

Further iterations of the Framework are likely to emerge in subsequent years as government policy develops, and the manner in which the Framework is carried through to decision making also creates opportunities for positive engagement by environmental scientists.

The Land Use Framework also has implications for the ways that environmental scientists work, stemming from the practical ways that land use affects different disciplines of environmental science.

Professionals should be prepared that when the Framework is published, it may affect how decisions are made about biodiversity and nature, planning and housing, and other applications of land use.

Until the Land Use Framework is published, environmental scientists will also need to contend with the ambiguity associated with the uncertain policy landscape.

While this may present challenges, particularly for those engaged in environmental land management and conservation, the uncertainties of the policy landscape can be mitigated through effective horizon scanning and by understanding the potential scope and content that could be included in the Framework, which this briefing provides.



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10. Influencing government decisions

Our member briefing note: '[Influencing the UK Parliament](#)', first published in 2011 and most recently re-issued in 2022, provides an overview of some of the ways that environmental professionals can influence Parliament and legislation.

The IES also runs training to help environmental professionals learn more about policy, how it affects them, and how they can influence policy decisions. Regular training sessions are available for sign-ups [on the IES website](#).

In the UK, many issues of environmental policy are devolved to national administrations. If you live in Scotland, you can contact your [Member of Scottish Parliament](#) or [learn more](#) about influencing Scottish legislation.

If you live in Wales, you can [contact your Member of Senedd Cymru](#) or learn more about the [business of the Senedd](#). If you live in Northern Ireland, you can [contact your local Member of the Legislative Assembly](#) or learn more about the [Assembly's work](#).

11. Other relevant links and resources

Find out more about existing legislation on this topic:

- [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)
- [Environmental Improvement Plan for England](#)
- [Independent National Food Strategy](#)
- [UK Government's Food Strategy](#)
- [Food, Farming, and Countryside Commission report](#)
- [House of Lords Land Use Committee report](#)

Read other relevant briefings and resources from the IES:

- [IES Message to Government: Transform the UK through a new Mission for Sustainable Wellbeing](#)
- [Transforming the planet: Our vision for the future of environmental science](#)
- [Climate Action: A Manifesto for Transformative Change](#)
- [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#)
- [Land Condition Community](#)
- [Climate Action Community](#)
- [Implications of OEP's progress report on the EIP for environmental science](#)
- [Reframing EIA: A tool for better design for people and planet](#)
- [Horizon Scanning: Land & Nature Policy \(November 2023\)](#)

Is there a policy-related topic which you would like to see covered by the IES? Get in touch with Joseph Lewis, IES Policy Lead, at joseph@the-ies.org to let us know your thoughts on potential topics for future briefings, or with your suggestions for other content.

12. Find out more

The IES provides briefings on a range of policy-related topics, as well as guidance and other resources for IES members covering the full range of environmental science disciplines.

If you need more information about any of these recommendations or how to support nature and biodiversity, contact the IES at joseph@the-ies.org.



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