

P-06-1173: Give legal protection to designated Special Landscape Areas in Wales.

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 4 Hydref 2021
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Reference: SR21/0497-1

Petition Number: P-06-1173

Petition title: Give legal protection to designated Special Landscape Areas in Wales.

Text of petition: In response to our Climate Emergency we ask the Welsh Government to safeguard Special Landscape Areas for future generations. SLAs are areas of high landscape importance for environmental, physical, visual, cultural or historical value and may be unique, exceptional or distinctive but they are NOT PROTECTED.

Their ancient woodlands, rare species, special areas of habitat or the setting in which they exist are vulnerable to new roads, business parks or other damaging developments.

More details

An example of an SLA at risk is in and around the conservation village of Pendoylan in the Ely Valley through which the Vale of Glamorgan Council propose building a new freight road. This road will destroy ancient woodland and endangered wildlife habitat as well pollute the air and water courses on which this SLA depends.

Sadly, being a Special Landscape Area carries no protection so planners and developers are at liberty to develop whatever schemes they wish.



We call on the Welsh Government to be mindful of their commitment to environmental and climate change policies and of their responsibilities to the Wellbeing of the Future Generations Act.

The unique areas of Wales that have already been identified as Special Landscape Areas need urgent legal protection.

Background

Special Landscape Areas (SLA) are a **non-statutory designation** applied by the local planning authority to define areas of high landscape importance, across the UK. SLA designations recognise and aim to protect the physical, environmental, visual, cultural and historical value of such landscapes.

Planning authorities should state which features, characteristics or qualities require extra protection, and explain how the policy or designation will achieve this protection.

There may be more than one role for an identified SLA:

- to recognise and protect (through development management) locally valued landscapes important for their distinctive character, qualities and sense of place / 'bro';
- to influence positive landscape planning. For example, by producing design guidance to enhance landscape character or to target land management grants towards the conservation of special landscape features recognised within the SLA; and/or
- to raise understanding and appreciation of the importance of local landscapes by communities, visitors and the wider public.

SLAs may be included in a local planning authority's Local Development Plan (LDP) or Unitary Development Plan (where LDPs have not yet been adopted) to identify areas for an extra level of landscape protection through special landscape policies.

The Welsh Government's paper on this petition highlights that **LANDMAP** (a national landscape policy and decision making tool hosted and managed by Natural Resources Wales) and any associated landscape character assessments

should be used to inform local landscape policies and to help identify or revise SLAs.

Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government's National Planning Policy ([Planning Policy Wales 11](#)) states that:

SLAs are non-statutory designations that define local areas of high landscape importance, which may be unique, exceptional or distinctive to the area. Planning authorities should apply these designations where there is good reason to believe that normal planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection.

The [Welsh Government's Future Wales - the National Plan 2040](#) introduces at Policy 9 an approach for the protection of habitats (amongst other objectives) to ensure that they are not unduly compromised by development. This policy aims to protect areas of land that are important for expanding or connecting ecological networks, adapting to climate change or other pressures, or providing key ecological services.

The Minister's letter on this petition states:

Whilst it is 'early days' for Future Wales policies to filter through the planning system, Welsh Government's policy aspirations are high and ambitious; the legal status of Future Wales means that local policies and decision making must be in conformity with Future Wales.

Senedd action

There has been no significant action by the Senedd to give legal protection to designated SLAs to date.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.