



LANDSCAPE-LED DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND GUIDANCE FOR NEW RESERVOIRS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE

AN INVITATION TO THE WATER INDUSTRY TO WORK WITH NATURAL ENGLAND

Our ambition is to develop landscape-led design principles and guidance for new reservoirs in the English landscape co-created between the water industry and Natural England.

In their draft WRMP24, several water companies are seeking to develop new reservoirs or expand existing ones, to meet the challenge of sustainable and resilient water supplies for the future. New reservoirs represent development and change at a landscape scale; they also offer an opportunity to deliver high quality and nature rich schemes to combine water security with a raft of other environmental benefits. In some places this is about creating new landscapes. In others an essential focus will be on respecting and reflecting the very high value, sensitivity and national importance of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (aka National Landscapes).

HOW WILL THE LANDSCAPE-LED PRINCIPLES AND GUIDANCE HELP WATER COMPANIES?

The guidance will help water companies comply with national planning policy and assist them in gaining planning approval. The guidance will also assist water companies to consider ways to deliver multiple benefits from the outset of option design, thus providing benefits for people, including health benefits through contact with nature and benefits for the environment through delivery of environmental net gain. This will in turn assist water companies in realising wider aspects of their environmental destination and create solutions that are truly best value.

The framework of legislation and planning policy to guide applications for new reservoirs and decision makers includes:

- Clause 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 requires 'relevant authorities' which includes the water service and supply companies to 'seek to further' the statutory purposes of the National Parks and AONBs. This increases the focus on their core purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and goes beyond mitigating for the effect of a development scheme.
- A new National Policy Statement (NPS) for water infrastructure which was published in April 2023 and establishes the planning policy for water related Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

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- The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) Design Principles¹ and other water industry design principles² provide high-level guidance.

Natural England sees an opportunity and need to work with the water sector to complement and build upon these sources of guidance to realise the landscape scale potential of these schemes, and in the process help them to secure public support and assist in gaining planning approval.

STEPS TOWARD PRODUCING THE GUIDANCE

The project will be progressed as follows:

1. Targeted engagement to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of you and your team (including your landscape consultants) as those who are responsible for delivering new reservoirs.
2. A review of good practice examples of reservoir design, including drawing upon the hugely important legacy of high quality reservoir design from the 1930s to 1970s.
3. A review the National Infrastructure Commission's and All Company Working Group's design principles;
4. A review of any relevant supplementary landscape guidance from Local Planning Authorities;
5. Drafting the guidance to draw together the input from yourselves and the information gathered from our review of the above sources. The guidance will use four locational scenarios:
 - a. in, and within the setting of, a nationally designated landscape
 - b. in the wider non-designated countryside
 - c. in the English uplands
 - d. in the English lowlands.
6. A webinar for the water industry and regulators where we will present the principles and guidance.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TIMETABLE

The project is scheduled for completion in March 2024. This invitation to work with us is our first contact with you/your teams. We would highly value your involvement in the co-creation of these landscape design principles, and we will be back in touch shortly about the consultative arrangements.

Timeline showing consultative process



¹ [NIC-Design-Principles.pdf](#)

² [acwg-design-principles-methodology-document.pdf \(wrse.org.uk\)](#)

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HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

We recognise that this is a busy time for the water industry and therefore, any input into this work to co-create the principles and guidance would be greatly valued; and we believe will assist you in delivering your projects in an efficient and timely manner. We want to be as flexible as possible to enable you to participate fully in this work, recognising the pressures on your time. You can contribute by:

- 1) Email (this can be a one-off email or continuous engagement);
- 2) Participating in a virtual meeting (typically this will be a one-off meeting to gather information and ideas from you);
- 3) Participating in the project consultative group (we envisage three meetings to enable detailed involvement in the development of the principles and guidance).

How ever you decide to participate, you will have the opportunity to review and input into the guidance before it is finalised.

We do hope you are able to accept this invitation. If so, please email Alexandra Scarlat (a.scarlat@apemltd.co.uk)