

Call for evidence: what slows down or prevents nature recovery in England?

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) wants to hear about your practical experience of nature recovery work in England. The call is open until Monday 14 December 2026.

Purpose

Our monitoring of the Environmental Improvement Plan shows that government remains largely off track to meet its commitments for nature. Even where policy and funding are in place, action on the ground can be prevented, delayed or discouraged by how laws, regulations and guidance work in practice.

This call builds on our 2023 call for evidence on improving nature, in which responses highlighted broad systemic issues such as fragmented governance, funding and regulator capacity. This call focuses instead on specific, practical blockers to nature recovery work. We aim to identify the most significant of these, and practical ways to address them, rather than a complete list of constraints. The findings will support our monitoring of the implementation of environmental law, our scrutiny of the Environmental Improvement Plan, and our work to improve progress towards environmental targets.

What we are looking for

We recognise that systemic blockers to nature recovery exist, including limited funding and staff resources. The focus of this call, however, is on practical blockers that affect the on-the-ground delivery of nature restoration, conservation and management in England, on land, in freshwater and in coastal areas down to and including the intertidal zone. We are seeking specific examples of both actual and perceived blockers, as well as enablers.

By a blocker, we mean any factor that prevents, delays or discourages action that would benefit nature. Blockers may relate to law, regulation and consenting, policy and guidance, how requirements are interpreted and applied, established practice, or wider factors such as communication, expertise or relationships. These blockers are often unintended or incidental, or may seem disproportionate. They can be actual, where a requirement does prevent or delay the work, or perceived, where people believe a requirement applies, or will be applied in a certain way, when it does not. Many requirements exist for good reasons, and the problem is often how they work in practice rather than the requirement itself. Enablers are things that have helped, such as a better process, clear guidance, a way of working or an exemption, including a solution you have found.

We would also welcome examples where further or clearer guidance from government or a regulator could help to reduce costs, delays or risk aversion.

A blocker might be a permission, licence or assessment needed for work that benefits nature; several consents from different regulators for the same river or coastal restoration project; slow or unpredictable decisions; uncertainty over whether a requirement applies; or guidance applied more

cautiously than it needs to be. The examples below are illustrations only. We welcome evidence on any blocker or enabler affecting delivery on the ground.

Example blockers

Restoring species-rich grassland

A landowner has funding to restore species-rich grassland on pasture that has not been ploughed, reseeded or fertilised for over 15 years. The work involves harrowing to prepare a seedbed before sowing seed or spreading green hay. Because this disturbs the soil surface, it can require a screening decision under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) (England) (No. 2) Regulations 2006 if the project covers 2 hectares or more, even though its purpose is restoration rather than agricultural productivity. The time and paperwork involved can discourage restoration at scale.

Managing road verges for wildflowers

A highway authority wants to remove cuttings after mowing road verges, as this lowers soil fertility over time and favours wildflowers. Once removed, the cuttings are usually classed as waste, so whoever moves them must be registered as a waste carrier under the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011, and storing or composting them requires an environmental permit or registered exemption under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016. The added cost and complexity can lead to cuttings being left on the verge instead.

Restoring seagrass

A marine conservation charity wants to restore seagrass beds in the intertidal zone. This can require permission from the owner of the foreshore, and a marine licence under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The cost, time and complexity involved can discourage smaller projects or limit larger ones.

Who can respond

Anyone with relevant experience can respond, including land managers, farmers, practitioners, contractors, advisers, regulators, local authorities, businesses and environmental organisations. Organisations are encouraged to coordinate a single response where possible, but individual responses are also welcome.

What counts as evidence

Specific examples carry the most weight. A well-evidenced issue raised by one respondent can be as significant as one raised by many, so a short response describing a single example is welcome. You can also send published or unpublished reports, data or case studies. Where possible, please quantify what you describe, for example the length of a delay, the extra cost or the area affected, and say what any view or estimate is based on.

We particularly welcome examples based on your direct experience. You may also provide examples reported by members, peers or networks, but please make clear where the evidence is second-hand and provide as much supporting detail as possible.

How to respond

We invite you to tell us about up to five blockers that you consider most significant, and anything that has helped with them. You are welcome to tell us about more, but please start with the most important.

The questions in the response template ([OEP launches call for evidence seeking examples of regulatory and practical blockers delaying nature recovery measures in England | Office for Environmental Protection](#)) are there to help you structure your response. Questions marked (optional) can be left blank, and you can write in your own words, in a single answer or in your own document. Please do not name individuals: you can give their role or organisation instead.

Please respond by 23:59 on **Monday 14 December 2026**:

- by email to eip.monitoring@theoep.org.uk
- by post to Nature Recovery Call for Evidence, Office for Environmental Protection, Wildwood, Wildwood Drive, Worcester, WR5 2QT.

Supporting documents can be sent by email or post. Responses received after the deadline may not be considered. Questions about the call can be sent to eip.monitoring@theoep.org.uk.

How we will use your response

Where our analysis of responses identifies specific blockers and ways to address them, we will share these with the relevant policy makers and regulators to consider. Depending on what emerges, the findings may also inform our future reporting, advice or engagement with government and regulators.

We have commissioned Apex Science and Conservation LLP to help us analyse the evidence. Apex will have access to responses as our processor, under our data protection terms, and may contact you if you agree to this in question 13, for example to invite you to an interview or workshop.

We will publish a synthesis of the evidence on our [commissioned research pages](#). We may refer to evidence from organisations by name, unless you ask us not to in question 10.

Confidentiality and data protection

We may publish or disclose the information you provide, including personal data, in accordance with the access to information regimes. These are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018.

If you want any of the information you provide to be treated as confidential, please tell us in question 11 and explain why. As the OEP is bound by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, we may be obliged to disclose all or some of it, but if we receive a request for disclosure we will take full account of your explanation. We cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

We will hold and process any personal data you provide in accordance with the privacy notice on our website [OEP Privacy Notice | Office for Environmental Protection](#)

Public authorities

Information that we receive from public authorities under their duty of co-operation with the OEP (section 27, Environment Act 2021) will be treated as confidential unless an exemption under section 43 applies. If you are responding on behalf of a public authority, please confirm in question 12 whether you consent to the OEP disclosing your information in its reporting.