



| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Committee and Date Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 21 June 2011 | Item 7 |
|--|-----------------------------|

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WHITE PAPER AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR US

Responsible Officer Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
e-mail: phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01588 674088 Fax 01588 674099

Summary

This paper provides members with information on the recently published Government White Paper on the Natural Environment, and gives the opportunity for discussion of issues arising.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the information provided, and offer comments.

Background

1. Defra launched on 7 June the Government's first White Paper on the Natural Environment in over 20 years, titled 'The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature'. This followed a public consultation in 2010. Defra says that *"The Natural Environment White Paper is a bold and ambitious statement outlining the Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years, backed up with practical action to deliver that ambition. Nature is sometimes taken for granted and undervalued. But people cannot flourish without the benefits and services our natural environment provides. A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing."*
2. Alongside the White Paper, the Government has published its response to the Lawton Review 'Making Space for Nature', which found that nature in England is highly fragmented and unable to respond effectively to new pressures, such as climate and population change. The Government's response reflects evidence in the recently published National Ecosystem Assessment, and builds on outcomes of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya in October 2010. The government's response to Lawton's specific recommendation on AONBs is shown as Appendix 2.
3. The National Association for AONBs has been working hard at a national level to ensure that the national importance of AONBs as 15% of the land area of England is recognised, along with the role of AONB Partnerships in taking forward the White Paper's aspirations. Both the Secretary of State and relevant Minister from Defra have recently visited AONBs, and the view from the National Association is that political support at a national level for AONBs is as good as it has ever been. With other protected landscape partners, the Association has issued a joint ambition statement about ecological recovery in protected landscapes (attached as Appendix 3).
4. The themes of the White Paper further reinforce directions we have seen in recent years – working at a landscape scale, consideration of ecosystem services, and the value of local partnerships working with land managers and local communities. It will not require a

significant change of direction in the work of the AONB Partnership. We will however need to demonstrate linkages to these themes more strongly in our reporting both direct to Defra as our new main sponsor, and to Natural England which retains strategic roles in relation to AONBs. A supplementary paper to the White Paper on how organisations can work together is attached as Appendix 4 to stimulate discussion over the role of the AONB Partnership in taking forward the priorities.

List of Background Papers

The full White Paper and associated documents are available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>.

The AONB Partnership's response of 22 Oct 2010 to the White Paper consultation can be seen at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/DEFRA-Nat-Env-White-Paper.pdf>.

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal

The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.

Risk Management Appraisal

Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

There have been no previous consultations on this topic with Partnership members.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Executive summary of The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature, the Natural Environment White Paper, Defra June 2011

Appendix 2 Government response to Lawton Review, AONB extract

Appendix 3 'Think big: ecological recovery in protected landscapes' A joint ambition from key stakeholders in England's National Parks and AONBs

Appendix 4 Natural Environment White Paper accompanying document 'How we can work together'

Appendix 1 Executive summary of The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature, the Natural Environment White Paper, Defra June 2011

1. Nature is sometimes taken for granted and undervalued. But people cannot flourish without the benefits and services our natural environment provides. Nature is a complex, interconnected system. A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing.
2. This is why we must properly value the economic and social benefits of a healthy natural environment while continuing to recognise nature's intrinsic value. The Government wants this to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited. To achieve so much means taking action across sectors rather than treating environmental concerns in isolation. It requires us all to put the value of nature at the heart of our decision-making – in Government, local communities and businesses. In this way we will improve the quality and increase the value of the natural environment across England.
3. We will mainstream the value of nature across our society by:
 - facilitating greater local action to protect and improve nature;
 - creating a green economy, in which economic growth and the health of our natural resources sustain each other, and markets, business and Government better reflect the value of nature;
 - strengthening the connections between people and nature to the benefit of both; and
 - showing leadership in the European Union and internationally, to protect and enhance natural assets globally.

Protecting and improving our natural environment

4. The National Ecosystem Assessment shows that over 30% of the services provided by our natural environment are in decline. The Lawton Report, *Making Space for Nature*, found that nature in England is highly fragmented and unable to respond effectively to new pressures such as climate and demographic change.
5. Past action has often taken place on too small a scale. We want to promote an ambitious, integrated approach, creating a resilient ecological network across England. We will move from net biodiversity loss to net gain, by supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and coherent ecological networks. We will publish a new Biodiversity Strategy for England, responding to our international commitments and setting a new direction for policy over the next decade.
6. We will establish a clear institutional framework to achieve the recovery of nature:
 - We will establish Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) to strengthen local action. LNPs will enable local leadership and may operate across administrative boundaries. They will raise awareness about the services and benefits of a healthy natural environment. They will contribute to the green economy and complement Local Enterprise Partnerships, with which we are encouraging them to form strong links.
 - We will create new Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) to enhance and reconnect nature on a significant scale, where the opportunities and benefits justify such action. Local partnerships will come together to form NIAs. We will set up a competition to identify 12 initial areas and will provide £7.5 million to support this.
 - Through reforms of the planning system, we will take a strategic approach to planning for nature within and across local areas. This approach will guide development to the best locations, encourage greener design and enable development to enhance natural networks. We will retain the protection and improvement of the natural environment as

core objectives of the planning system. We will establish a new, voluntary approach to biodiversity offsets and test our approach in pilot areas.

7. More broadly we will achieve a better quality natural environment by taking and promoting concerted action across our farmed land, woodlands and forests, towns and cities, and rivers and water bodies. We will press ahead with our ambitious commitments for the marine environment.

Growing a green economy

8. Economic growth and the natural environment are mutually compatible. Sustainable economic growth relies on services provided by the natural environment, often referred to as 'ecosystem services'. Some of these are provided directly, such as food, timber and energy. Others are indirect, such as climate regulation, water purification and the productivity of soil.

9. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study shows that protected natural areas can yield returns many times higher than the cost of their protection. There are multi-million pound opportunities available from greener goods and services, and from markets that protect nature's services.

10. Too many of the benefits we derive from nature are not properly valued. The value of natural capital is not fully captured in the prices customers pay, in the operations of our markets or in the accounts of government or business. When nature is undervalued, bad choices can be made.

11. We will put natural capital at the centre of economic thinking and at the heart of the way we measure economic progress nationally. We will include natural capital within the UK Environmental Accounts. We will establish an independent Natural Capital Committee to advise the Government on the state of natural capital in England.

12. Government alone cannot create a greener economy. Markets that trade sustainably in natural goods and services are essential. More businesses should benefit from new market opportunities, and from using natural capital more sustainably in their own supply chains. Government and business have a shared interest in protecting natural capital and should work together. Action we are taking includes the following:

- We will publish an action plan to expand markets and schemes in which payments are made by the beneficiary of a natural service to the provider of that service.
- We will set up a business-led Ecosystem Markets Task Force to review the opportunities for UK business from expanding the trade in green goods and the market for sustainable natural services.
- We will publish a review of waste policy later this year.
- We will issue new guidance for businesses by 2012 on how to measure and report corporate environmental impacts.

Reconnecting people and nature

13. The NEA and the Marmot Review, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, demonstrate the positive impact that nature has on mental and physical health. High-quality natural environments foster healthy neighbourhoods; green spaces encourage social activity and reduce crime. The natural environment can help children's learning.

14. Human activity can, in return, enrich nature. Voluntary activity to improve wildlife habitats or remove litter increases the value of nature. Well-informed choices made by

people in their everyday lives – for example as shoppers, householders and gardeners – also have a positive impact. These connections are good for people and good for nature.

15. We need to make enhancing nature a central goal of social action across the country. We want to make it easier for people to do the right thing, with action in the health and education systems and in our communities. Particular action includes the following:

- To help local authorities use their new duties and powers on public health, Public Health England will publish practical evidence about improving health, including through access to a good natural environment.
- We will remove barriers to learning outdoors and increase schools' abilities to teach outdoors when they wish to do so.
- We will create a new 'Local Green Areas' designation to allow local people to protect the green areas that are important to them.
- We will establish a Green Infrastructure Partnership with civil society to support the development of green infrastructure in England.
- We will launch a new phase of the Muck In4Life campaign, offering volunteering opportunities to improve the quality of life in towns, cities and the countryside.

International and EU leadership

16. We will show environmental leadership internationally and within the EU, to protect and enhance natural assets globally, promoting environmentally and socially sustainable growth. We will advance internationally the approach and principles set out in this White Paper.

17. We will press for effective implementation of the 2010 Nagoya agreement by the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, we will promote the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

18. We will improve the quality of the lives of some of the poorest people on the planet by providing £25 million for biodiversity and ecosystem projects through the Darwin Initiative. Through the International Climate Fund, we will support action to prevent dangerous climate change in developing countries and help those affected by the change that is happening. The £2.9 billion of finance we have announced for 2011–15 will include funding to reduce emissions from deforestation and achieve biodiversity benefits.

19. We want the EU to become the world's largest green economy and market for environmentally sustainable goods and services. We will work with our partners to put in place appropriate strategies and sectoral policies, to achieve low-carbon, resource-efficient growth. We are working to achieve:

- greening of the Common Agricultural and Common Fisheries Policies to improve environmental benefits, while achieving our other policy goals;
- implementation of an ambitious new EU Biodiversity Strategy, to put into effect what was agreed at Nagoya;
- a powerful 'EU2020 Strategy' that achieves low-carbon, resource-efficient growth; and
- an effective EU Roadmap for a Resource-Efficient Europe.

Monitoring and reporting

20. We will develop a set of key indicators by spring 2012 to track progress on this White Paper. We will publish periodically a single concise and integrated report about the state of the English environment.

Appendix 2 Government response to Lawton Review, AONB extract

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13537-lawton-response-110607.pdf>

Lawton Recommendation 14: In view of the opportunity presented by their existing statutory remits, in National Parks and AONBs: (i) favourable condition of SSSIs should be achieved as quickly as possible; (ii) non-SSSI semi-natural habitat should be brought under management equivalent to SSSI standards; and (iii) other land should be managed so as to enhance connectivity.

Government Response to Recommendation 14:

The English National Park Authorities Association recently published “Beacons for Biodiversity”, which reports in more detail on the contribution that National Parks currently make to biodiversity. Government agrees that because of their unique governance, close engagement with local and visitor communities, and their statutory purpose to “conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage” and their obligation for nature conservation, National Parks, alongside AONBs, should be at the forefront of the recovery of England’s biodiversity.

(i) In England, 27% of land designated as SSSIs falls within National Parks. At the end of December 2010, 96.9% of SSSIs in National Parks, including those owned by National Park Authorities and those in private landownership were in “favourable” or “recovering” condition; for AONBs it was 97.6%. As part of the post 2010 policy framework for SSSIs, Natural England has developed a new trajectory to achieve the move from “recovering” into “favourable” condition with monitoring of sites to measure success. This has been presented in Natural England’s Corporate Plan (see also response to Recommendation 11). There is much potential for National Parks to be in the vanguard of achieving this objective.

(ii) For the majority of land in National Parks and AONBs that is under private ownership, action for biodiversity is best pursued through close working with landowners and voluntary agreements both within and outside SSSIs. We will therefore continue to encourage National Park Authorities and AONB partnerships, working closely with Natural England, to encourage landowners to adopt and maintain suitable land management practices to deliver habitat restoration and increased connectivity within and between designated wildlife sites, including the potential role of Environmental Stewardship and other incentives. There is also a role for businesses, such as water companies, to support initiatives that secure improved habitat management alongside other public benefits such as improved water quality and carbon sequestration; tourism businesses can also contribute, for example through payback schemes.

(iii) There are examples of close collaborative working to enhance biodiversity in all National Parks and AONBs as exemplified in the “Beacons for Biodiversity” publication. Building on this experience, we will encourage National Park Authorities and AONB partnerships to work in collaboration with other Local Authorities to extend this enhanced connectivity outside the boundaries of the National Park or AONB, and develop their own responses to *Making Space for Nature*.

N.B. The English Biodiversity Strategy is expected to be published later in June 2011.