

Shropshire Local Access Forum	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
13 July 2011	11	D
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Natural Environment White Paper : Extracts from Press release

England's natural environment will be better protected, restored and improved under ambitious new plans published by Defra. The proposals set out a detailed programme of action to repair damage done to the environment in the past, and urges everyone to get involved in helping nature to flourish at all levels – from neighbourhoods to national parks.

The plans are contained in 'The Natural Choice', the first White Paper on the natural environment in 20 years, and are directly linked to the groundbreaking research in the National Ecosystem Assessment that showed the strong economic arguments for safeguarding and enhancing the natural environment.

The White Paper also acts on the recommendations of 'Making Space for Nature', a report into the state of England's wildlife sites, led by Professor John Lawton and published in September 2010, which showed that England's wildlife sites are fragmented and not able to respond to the pressures of climate change and other pressures we put on our land.

Launching 'The Natural Choice', Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman said: "The natural environment matters to us all – not just because it makes us feel good when we stumble across a bluebell wood or spot a pair of goldfinches, but because we are now all able to see the terrible price we would pay if we lost what we have or neglected to care for it. Nature belongs to us all, and we've all got a vested interest in protecting it. That's why the true value of nature should be built in to the decisions we make – as individuals, organisations, businesses and governments – so that we become the first generation to leave the environment in a better condition than we found it. This is what 'The Natural Choice' will help us all achieve." Key measures in the White Paper, which also takes forward recommendations contained in 'Making Space for Nature', include:

Reconnecting nature

- **New Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)**, transforming rural and urban areas and providing bigger, connected sites for wildlife to live in and adapt to climate change. With a £7.5 million fund for 12 initial NIAs to demonstrate just what can be done. Professor Sir John Lawton has agreed to chair the panel to allocate funding.
- **Biodiversity offsetting** – new way for developers to ensure we don't lose wildlife sites and make them better by making and improving other sites.
- **New Local Nature Partnerships** to strengthen joined-up action across local agencies and organisations, with a £1 million available this year.
- **Phasing out peat** – working with the horticulture industry to phase out peat use, which will help to protect and restore our peatlands, which are valuable carbon sinks, habitats and part of our ecological network. A task force to consider all options to phase out use of peat in the supply chain will be chaired by Dr Alan Knight OBE.

Connecting people and nature for better quality of life

- **Green Areas Designation** allowing local communities to give protection to areas that are important to them for recreation, the view or their importance for wildlife.
- Better urban **green spaces** for the benefit of cities and towns. Support for parks, gardens, and tree planting which benefit people and nature alike
- **More children experiencing nature by learning outdoors**, through practical support to schools and reducing red-tape for outdoor learning.
- **Strengthening local public health activities** which connect people with nature for better health
- **New environmental volunteering initiative “Muck in 4 Life”** to improve places in towns and countryside for people and nature to enjoy.

Capturing and improving the value of nature

- **Natural Capital Committee** – an independent body to report to the Government’s economic affairs committee chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This body will put the value of nature at the heart of the Government’s economic thinking, and advise Government about the best way of securing our natural assets for the future.
- **An annual statement of green accounts for UK Plc** – showing where our economy has withdrawn from the value of nature’s bank balance, and where we have invested in it. This will help measure green growth alongside GDP.
- **A business-led Task Force** chaired by Kingfisher Group Chief Executive Officer Ian Cheshire, to expand the UK business opportunities from new products and services which are good for the economy and nature alike.

The White Paper aims to improve the quality of the natural environment across England, halt the decline in habitats and species, and strengthen the connection between people and nature. The new way of looking at nature will help the growth of a green economy which treats natural capital in a responsible and fair way, encouraging businesses to use that capital sustainably. The actions contained in the Natural Environment White Paper will create a radical shift on how we view our natural assets by incorporating the natural environment into economic planning and ensuring there are opportunities for businesses that are good for nature and good for a strong green economy.

“In the past we have undervalued what our natural environment gives us,” Caroline Spelman added. “This White Paper changes that, because we cannot afford to make the same mistakes again. We can all gain from the economic, social, and health benefits nature gives us, but we need to recognise that if we withdraw something from Mother Nature’s Bank, we’ve got to put something back in to ensure that the environment has a healthy balance and a secure future. What I’d really like to see happening as a result of this White Paper is more children enjoying nature and continuing that interest into adulthood, so that they pass that passion for the environment down through the generations. That would be a legacy well worth leaving.”

Notes The Natural Environment White Paper, ‘The Natural Choice’ can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/.

The Government have also published their response to Professor Sir John Lawton’s independent review of England’s wildlife sites and ecological network, *Making Space for Nature*. This can also be found at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/.

The National Ecosystems Assessment can be found at <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>.