

The Natural Choice

What the Natural Environment White Paper means for you

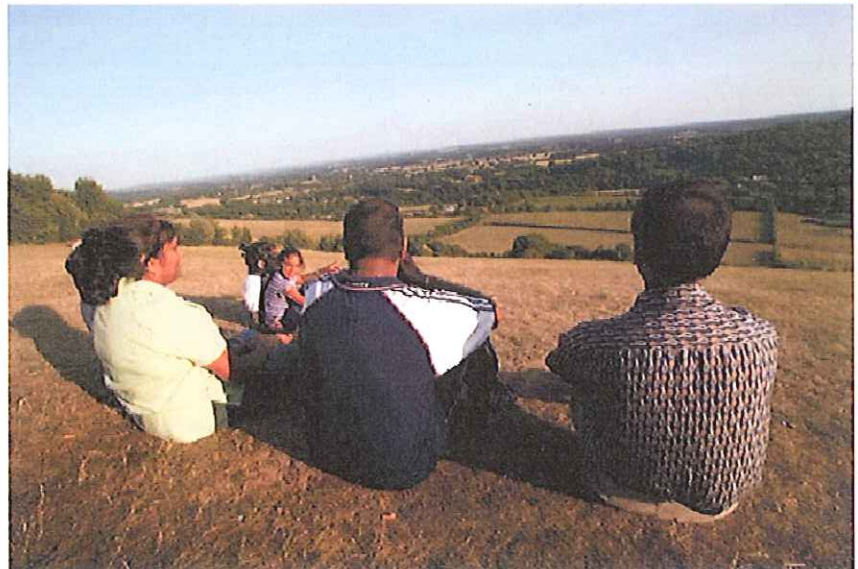
The natural world touches our lives every day. Whether we live in the city or the countryside, we rely on the natural systems that support us. Our natural environment underpins our health, wealth and happiness and gives us a sense of place, pride and identity.

What is a White Paper? Why do we need one now?

A White Paper is a statement by Government on what it intends to do about an important policy issue. This White Paper responds to compelling new evidence about the state of our natural environment.

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment published in June 2011 assessed both the social and economic values of the benefits we get from our natural environment and analysed the risks to them. We are the first country in the world to do this. It showed that 30% of benefits we get from nature are in decline. It also identified that many opportunities to increase these benefits are currently being missed because we take the value of nature for granted.

The White Paper sets out how we will act on this new knowledge by placing the natural environment at the heart of government thinking. It reflects the views of thousands



of people who responded to our consultation last year. People told us:

- that they want to see measures to protect and improve the places they care about in both rural and urban areas;
- that they are concerned about declines in native wildlife;
- that it is important to recognise all the different kinds of value provided by the environment, from the feeling we get from beautiful landscapes to the health benefits we get from outdoor exercise;
- that it is important to understand the financial value of these benefits as well as their intrinsic worth;
- that they are worried about the effect our modern lifestyles have on the environment;
- that they want Government to 'make it easier to do the right thing'.

We want to capitalise on the strength of public feeling by taking action to make this the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited. We will create a framework which will give people and organisations greater freedom to protect and improve the green spaces which are important to them.

Making connections to protect the natural environment

The natural environment is sometimes seen as a series of disconnected places – gardens, parks, farmland, forests, coastland, wetlands, rivers and seas. But this way of looking at it can prevent us from understanding how nature works as a system. It also means that action to protect it often focuses on a small area or a single issue, which may not

be as successful as more integrated action on a bigger scale.

We need to stop thinking about isolated spots of green on a map of England and start creating a thriving green network linking wildlife sites with farmland, forestry and urban parks and gardens. We are encouraging local partnerships to create new **Nature Improvement Areas** (NIAs) to improve and reconnect nature on a grand scale. To inspire action we will set up a competition to identify 12 initial areas and will provide **£7.5 million** to support this.

Connecting people and nature

There is a wealth of evidence to show how spending time in the natural environment can help people's mental and physical health. We want everyone to be able to make the most of nature's health service. We will:

- help local councils use their new duties and powers on public health to improve local environments;
- make sure communities have local green spaces to enjoy;

The natural environment can also help children's learning. We want to see every child in England given the opportunity to experience and learn about the natural environment. We will create more opportunities for learning outside the classroom by supporting teachers and cutting red tape.

To help make sure everyone can benefit from the natural environment, we will also give people new powers to protect and improve their own green spaces through a Localism Bill, a Community Right to Reclaim Land and a new Green Space Designation.

Giving back

We benefit from the natural environment and we have the power to protect and improve it in return. For example by making greener choices when shopping, travelling and at home:

- Shop sustainably. From fish to palm oil, many products can have a damaging impact on nature's systems if not produced sustainably;
- Avoid using peat in gardens. It is a non-renewable resource and protecting it will conserve important habitats around the world.
- Use water more sustainably, by turning off taps and fitting low usage appliances.

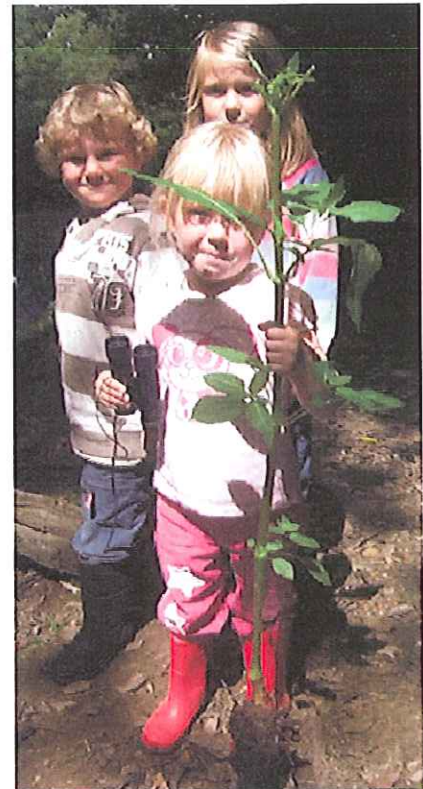
Volunteering and community action

Volunteering can be a fulfilling way to experience nature. It can help people develop new skills, keep fit; and develop a sense of local ownership. This country already has a strong culture of conservation volunteering. You can find out about volunteering opportunities at www.volunteering.org.uk and www.do-it.org.uk.

Monitoring the natural environment is another practical activity anyone can get involved with. For example, 600,000 people took part in the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch in 2011. This helps us to understand what wildlife is thriving and what is at risk.

We want to make it easier for people to get involved in protecting and improving the natural environment. We will:

- launch a new MuckIn4Life programme to help more people get active outdoors and



© Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

- help improve the quality of life in their local area;
- make environmental information available more easily to help people get involved – including the new My Environment web portal.

A role for everyone

We have an ambitious vision for the natural environment that won't be achieved overnight or by Government alone. This White Paper is a call to action for all parts of society - individuals, communities, businesses and Government.

Together we can secure the value of nature. You can find out more about our plans at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>

The Natural Choice

What the Natural Environment White Paper means for land managers

In England the landscapes we love and our native biodiversity have been shaped by the decisions of land managers over thousands of years. Over 70% of the land is farmed. Farmers and land managers are the stewards of the countryside and play a vital role in achieving society's ambitions for water, wildlife, healthy soil and food production.



The Government wants to inspire action in all sections of society, so that this can be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than it inherited. We cannot achieve this without the support of farmers and land managers across the country.

What is a White Paper?

A White Paper is a statement by Government of its vision on a key policy issue, setting out the long term direction of travel. This White Paper responds to compelling new evidence about the state of our natural environment.

Why do we need one now?

Concern for the environment is not new and most farmers are already involved in schemes to support environmental land management. Progress has been made in recent

years but we are still a long way from being able to claim that the job is done. The 2010 Lawton review, *Making Space for Nature*, reported that the natural environment in England is very fragmented and can't respond effectively to new pressures such as climate change and population growth.

The National Ecosystem Assessment, published in June 2011, shows how changes to the benefits we get from nature have been driven by changes in society over the past 60 years. In the period following the Second World War, food production increased dramatically, but many other benefits we get from natural systems declined, particularly those related to air, water and soil quality. For part of this period, successive governments incentivised land managers to increase food production in ways that put pressures on the environment.

What does this mean for land managers?

We need a competitive farming and food industry which contributes towards global food security. However, we also need to manage the impacts that food production has on the natural environment. In the long-term, food security depends on tackling the environmental impacts of production.

We recognise that potential tensions exist between improving the environment and increasing food production, and we see farmers and land managers as key to resolving this. The White Paper commits to working with the industry and environmental partners to reconcile the goals of improving the environment and increasing food production.

The primary responsibility for how land is managed lies with farmers and land managers themselves. The measures set out in the White Paper aim to make it easier for land managers to get involved in setting environmental objectives on and around their land.

Supporting action at the right scale

We know that action to date has tended to take place on too small a scale and to overlook crucial linkages across the landscape. We also know that a focus on a single environmental outcome to the exclusion of others (e.g. soil quality, water quality, landscape character, endangered species) and competing advice on different environmental outcomes creates unnecessary confusion and additional burdens for those working on the ground.

Action joined up at a local level can frequently deliver multiple benefits. For instance, creating wetlands can help bring significant benefits for water quality, biodiversity and flood management, while management of upland peat habitats can store carbon, clean drinking water, and improve habitats downstream.

To make this kind of joined-up action possible, the White Paper sets out how we will encourage local partnerships to create new **Nature Improvement Areas** (NIAs) where there are opportunities to improve the quality of the natural environment on a significant scale. We will set up a competition to identify 12 initial areas and will provide **£7.5 million** to support this. New **Local Nature Partnerships** will bring land managers together with local authorities, businesses and conservation organisations to lead integrated projects to connect and restore nature.

New economic opportunities for land managers

Much of the work which land managers do to protect and improve the environment has a financial value, not all of which has previously been reflected in the market place.

We want to work with land managers to explore the potential for developing new markets for 'ecosystems services'. These are additional ways to reward action to improve the environment for public benefit. This is already happening in some areas, for example, a water company might pay a farmer for protecting the ability of uplands to naturally clean and filter water.

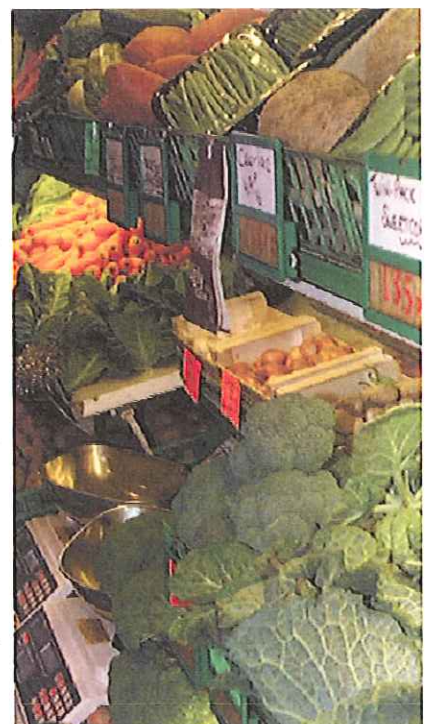
The White Paper also announces a new 'biodiversity offsetting' pilot. Biodiversity offsetting is where a developer secures habitat expansion or restoration to compensate for losses caused by development. There are emerging opportunities for landowners to provide and manage such habitat.

What will Government do differently?

We recognise that Government needs to be clear about our expectations of farmers and land managers, and to provide more joined-up support and advice. We will:

- work with the farming industry to reconcile the goals of improving the environment and increasing food production;
- improve the way government bodies work together so they provide more coherent advice and are easier to work with;
- carry out a full review of how we provide both advice and incentives for farmers and land managers, to create an approach that is clearer; more joined-up; and yields better environmental results;
- work with farmers and land managers to develop a new approach to Environmental Stewardship that increases the focus on results, including the possibility of allowing greater flexibility within agreements;

- establish a Task Force bringing together representatives from across the supply chain to advise on how best to overcome the barriers to reducing peat use;
- continue to call for ambitious reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, which should promote a strong industry better placed to deliver environmental outcomes.



The Natural Choice

What the Natural Environment White Paper means for conservation organisations

Because nature touches all aspects of our lives, the choices we make about it affect every part of society. The central idea behind this White Paper is that of value. This is not just about financial value but all the benefits we get from a healthy natural environment. If we can value the natural environment more fully than we have in the past we will be better placed as a society to make better choices.

With this White Paper, the Government wants to inspire action in all sections of society, so that this can be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than it inherited.

What is a White Paper? Why do we need one now?

A White Paper is a statement by Government of its vision on a key policy issue, setting out the long term direction of travel. This White Paper responds to compelling new evidence about the state of our natural environment.

Concern for the environment is not new. Some progress has been made in recent years with improvements to air and water quality and to many of our most precious wildlife sites. But we recognise that we are still



a very long way from being able to claim that the job is done.

The previous global target to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010 was not met. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment published in June 2011 showed that 30% of the social and economic benefits we get from nature are in decline. It also identified that many opportunities to increase these benefits are currently being missed because we take the value of nature for granted.

The White Paper sets out how we will act on this new knowledge by placing the natural environment at the heart of Government thinking. It reflects the views of thousands of people and conservation groups who responded to our consultation last year to call for Government action on the environment.

What does this mean for conservationists?

We are a nation of nature lovers. There are more than 9 million members of the main nature conservation charities and collectively they have more than a million active volunteers. 54% of the adult population visits the natural environment every week. The White Paper sets out an ambitious vision for our natural environment and a new framework designed to make it easier for conservation organisations to achieve real and lasting change.

Working in partnership

The White Paper sets out how we will support **Local Nature Partnerships**. This will enable conservation organisations to work with a range of partners including land managers, businesses and local authorities to identify opportunities to protect and improve nature at

the local level. To support both new and existing partnerships who want to adopt this integrated approach, **we will provide £1 million in 2011/12 to build capacity for Local Nature Partnerships.**

There are already many highly effective local partnerships with a focus on different aspects of the natural environment. We want to encourage existing partnerships to join-up and integrate action to achieve multiple benefits – for example, on water and air quality, biodiversity, climate change adaptation and provision of green infrastructure; and we want to help new partnerships to emerge.

Local Nature Partnerships will link action to protect and improve the natural environment with wider national and local social and economic priorities. They are encouraged to make links with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Boards.



Making the links through new Nature Improvement Areas

The natural environment is sometimes seen as a series of disconnected places – gardens, parks, protected areas, farmland, forests, coastland, wetlands, rivers and seas. The 2010 Lawton review, *Making Space for Nature*, reported that the natural environment in England is highly fragmented and can't respond effectively to new pressures such as climate change and population growth.

We should be thinking not of isolated spots of green on a map of England but of a thriving green network linking, wildlife sites with farmland, forestry and urban parks and gardens. We will encourage local partnerships to create new **Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)** where there are significant opportunities to enhance and reconnect nature. To inspire action we will set up a competition to identify 12 initial areas and will provide **£7.5 million** to support this.

The role of the planning system

Planning has a key role in securing a sustainable future. We will retain protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives for local planning and development management. We need a more strategic and integrated approach to planning that guides development to the best locations and encourages greener design.

The planning system will facilitate coherent and resilient ecological networks. It will contribute to our objective of no net loss of biodiversity. We will encourage local authorities to promote multi-functional development so that we get the most from land.

To achieve this, we need more flexible and innovative approaches. The White Paper announces new 'biodiversity offsetting' pilots. Biodiversity offsetting is where a developer secures habitat expansion or restoration to compensate for unavoidable losses caused by development. We see real opportunities for conservation organisations to create and manage such habitat.

What will Government do differently?

We will:

- support new Local Nature Partnerships,
- promote the creation of Nature Improvement Areas to protect and restore nature;
- support a new network of Natural Value Ambassadors;
- work with conservation organisations and land managers to address the tensions between improving the environment and increasing food production;
- improve the way government bodies work together so they provide more coherent advice and are easier to work with;
- Phase out peat use completely by 2030 and establish a Task Force bringing together representatives from across the supply chain to advise on how best to overcome the barriers to swiftly reducing peat use;
- continue to call for ambitious reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, which should promote a farming industry better placed to deliver environmental outcomes.