

## Summary and analysis of “A Green Future: our 25 year plan to improve the environment”

### Overview

The twenty-five year plan is wide ranging in scope and ambition – it is more like the 1995 sustainable development strategy “Securing the Future” than, for example, the more recent Natural Environment White Paper, as it covers issues like resource efficiency and international leadership. The main document runs to some 150 pages and an annex contains a further 145 pages of supplementary evidence. It is structured around ten 25-year *goals* (rather like the eleven outcomes in the PMP for the SDNP) followed by six overarching *policies*, each of which is split into up to six *actions*. The six policies do not map directly onto the ten goals as the headings are entirely different but each seems to relate to a mechanism by which the goals will be achieved. For example, the first policy is about managing land sustainably, which could contribute to the goals of clean air, water, thriving wildlife and so on.

Although much of the media coverage when it was launched criticised the plan for lack of tangible next steps, it is in fact peppered throughout with all sorts of new commitments: to developing *strategies*, consulting on use of *taxes or levies*, changing the *planning regime* and so on – some have a clear timescales others do not. In some sections, eg on plastics, the full range of possible interventions are set out: use of regulation, price mechanisms, public campaigns and government procurement, but in many others the response is more patchy rely only on voluntary measures or conversely on regulation.

Before setting out the goals and policies, the document sets out some wider context. It describes a “living blueprint” and references the work of the Natural Capital Committee as a world first (the prominence given to Natural Capital continues throughout). Describing leaving the EU as a unique opportunity, it commits the Government to consulting on an *effective governance structure* and a new set of *metrics to measure annual progress* in 2018. It sets the plan alongside the *Industrial Strategy* and within it the *Clean Growth Strategy*, but does not mention other cornerstones of policy such as the Housing White Paper or NPPF, or links with fiscal, health or education policy. It is unclear to what extent the commitments in it are intended to relate to, build on or replace previous Government policy such as the Climate Change Act, the Natural Environment White Paper or Biodiversity 2020. Apart from the section on the Hobhouse-type review, one mention of Nurture Lakeland, and a reference to NPAs in the final 20 pages on how the plan will be put into practice, there is no specific mention of National Parks.

### Goals

The ten goals are split into two groups, the first six (*quality of air, water, and wildlife; reducing environmental hazards like drought and flooding environmental hazards, resource efficiency, beauty, heritage & engagement*) being more about the intrinsic state of the environment whilst the latter four (*climate change, waste, chemicals and biosecurity*) are described as managing pressures on that environment. A number of the goals clearly relate to issues which are currently the subject of EU Directives or Regulations. This may be a way of providing a bridge as we go through Brexit and these areas of EU legislation are subsumed into UK law.

Under each of the ten goals are a number of statements which go into more detail. These statements vary enormously in scope. Some describe how we will know if we have reached the desired state: eg. halving the effects of air pollution by 2030 (under the goal of clean air), others are mechanisms for getting us there: eg. ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040 (against the same goal). Some statements are very vague and ambitious, for example: reversing the loss of marine biodiversity (under thriving plants and wildlife) or ensuring that all food is produced sustainably and profitably (under using resources from nature more efficiently). Others

are quite specific, for example: reaching the detailed goals to be set out in the Tree Resilience Plan of 2018 (under enhancing biosecurity) or supporting OFWAT's ambitions on leakage (under clean and plentiful water).

Very few Goal statements have a clear baseline, target and timescale – perhaps the best example is under mitigating and adapting to climate change (80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 against 1990 levels) and these usually relate to existing EU commitments or international agreements such as the Stockholm protocol for chemicals. It is to be presumed that clearer metrics in other areas are to be set out as we transition out of the EU. It is not always clear whether the various statements relate to England only, the UK only, or the UK as a Member State of the EU.

**There is plenty of scope for National Parks to contribute to the goals.** Particularly relevant for us are the goals on: *clean and plentiful water, thriving plants & wildlife, reducing harm from environmental hazards like flooding drought & coastal erosion, using resources from nature more sustainably, and enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.* National Parks also have something to contribute on mitigation and adaption to *climate change, and enhancing biosecurity,* though arguably less on *clean air, managing exposure to chemicals or minimising waste.* Of the statements against the actions there is again much to which National Parks can contribute, for example in relation to *river basin management plans, surface and groundwater abstraction, protected sites* and so forth. Of particular note is the statement about “creating and restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife rich habitat outside the protected sites network”. This idea of a *Nature Recovery Network* is expanded upon in Chapter 2 see below.

## Policies

The major part of the report (pages 31 to 128) is set out as six chapters which describe the six policies and the various actions which sit behind them. This section gives more idea of the intended direction of travel and contains numerous commitments of all types.

**Chapter 1 is titled “Using and managing land sustainably”.** Headlines include *embedding environmental net gain in housing and infrastructure* and *delivering a new environmental land management system* (ie to replace the CAP). Soils, woodlands and natural flood management also feature at the top. The *net gain* commitment is welcome but will cause debate about the balance between mitigating for residual impacts of development when all other options on site have been exhausted, or paying in compensation for environmental damage. There is a commitment to *explore use of developer tariffs and pilot a rural land bank,* and new data, tools and strategies are to be deployed locally. Green Belt merits several mentions, and a *commitment to ensuring high environmental standards for all new builds* echoes the Code for Sustainable Homes scrapped by the Coalition Government.

*The section on a new scheme to replace the CAP* sets out the principles (in the same way as Michael Gove's speech to the Oxford Farming Conference and the subsequent Agriculture Command paper Health & Harmony) – public money for public goods with environment being top of the list of goods). It describes a *broadly accessible entry level scheme and a higher level targeted scheme, capital grants, and also talks of exploring innovative mechanisms such as reverse auctions, payments for ecosystem services and conservation covenants.* There are specific sections on farming and water, use of fertiliser and crop protection without pesticides. Most of this builds on existing initiatives, but the support for restricting use of *neonicotinoids* (announced by Michael Gove before Christmas) is mentioned. Under *soil health* there is a commitment to invest £200,000 to create a monitoring tool for farmers, and a new framework for peatland restoration, grants, and going beyond voluntary initiatives if these do not produce horticultural alternatives quickly enough.

Woodlands feature strongly, with the ambition to plant 11 million trees as part of a *Nature Recovery Network* (mentioned several times throughout the plan). The new Northern Forest is given prominence as are community forests in general. There are commitments to create a “conveyor belt” of locked-in carbon by *increasing the amount of home grown timber used in construction,* a long–

term framework for forestry, and a *forest carbon guarantee scheme*. There is mention of the need to *increase the proportion of broadleaf woodlands that are sustainably managed*.

*The last part of chapter 1 deals with reducing risks from flooding and coastal erosion. The national strategy is to be updated in 2019, and the NPPF is to be strengthened. Most relevant to National Parks is the commitment to expand the use of natural flood management solutions through the £15million fund to 2021 seems miniscule. SUDS and making existing properties more resilient completes this chapter.*

**Chapter 2 is Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes**, which clearly speaks foursquare to the National Park experience. The headlines are the creation of a *Nature Recovery Network*, a review of *National Parks and AONBs*, and sustainable use of water. P56 acknowledges the designation of these protected landscape as *amongst the outstanding achievements of the past 100 years*, and the South Downs gets a mention as the newest in the family.

The concept of a *Nature Recovery Network* acknowledges Sir John Lawton and NIAs and pledges to provide an *additional 500,000 hectares of wildlife habitat*, (including peatlands, woodlands, grasslands and heathlands), to yield other benefits such as public enjoyment, pollination, carbon capture and natural flood management. Opportunities to reintroduce native species are sought. Delivery options for the Nature Recovery Network are to be considered over the next two years, in parallel with the development of the new environmental land management scheme and the idea of *conservation covenants* as a mechanism for individuals to protect features on their land. There is a commitment to publish a new *Strategy for Nature* to build upon Biodiversity 2020. This section also covers *biosecurity and invasive non-native species*, and mentions a *tree health resilience plan* to be published later in 2018.

The next section *conserving and enhancing natural beauty* commits the Government on p64 to commissioning a 21<sup>st</sup> century *Hobhouse Review of National Parks and AONBs*. This will consider *coverage, delivery responsibilities, financing and the potential for expansion*. It mentions the 8-Point Plan, and encouraging *NPs and AONBs to deliver environmental enhancement*, engaging communities through their *statutory management plans*. The final, rather brief, section is on respecting nature in how we use water, focused on tackling unsustainable levels of *abstraction* and consulting on a new *National Policy Statement for Water* in relation to large infrastructure projects and the Industrial Strategy.

**Chapter 3 is Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing.** The headlines are about using greenspaces to improve *health & wellbeing*, encouraging *children to be close to nature*, creating *green infrastructure* (including one million urban trees), and making *2019 a year of action for the environment*. Links are made between this and the Sports Strategy and the Grand Challenge for an Ageing Society in the Industrial Strategy.

Background evidence for the *benefits of access to nature* especially for the most deprived communities, is set out, along with the idea of *social prescribing*, with a commitment to develop standard tools to support its roll-out across England via the Conservation Volunteers and NHS. There is a specific call for mental health services to work more closely with environmental charities to offer *environmental therapies*. On education there are actions to develop a *nature friendly schools programme* and supporting a *national expansion of care farming*.

The next section of chapter 3 deals with *green infrastructure*. In addition to mentioning parks and research, it establishes a cross-Government project, led by Natural England, to *review and update standards for GI*, support for local authorities to assess against these standards, and working with MHCLG (the new name for DCLG) to *embed commitments on GI into national planning policy guidance*. The commitment to plant a million trees in towns and cities by 2022 is set out in more detail, along with new requirements to ensure that council consults if considering removing street trees.

Finally, the thinking behind making *2019 a year of action for the environment* is set out, working with *#iwill* campaign which is run by Step Up to Serve and is focused on mobilising 10-20 year olds. It also makes an explicit link to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Parks and, right at the end, mentions scoping out an evidence based behaviour change strategy to enable actions by individuals, communities, business and government beyond 2019.

**Chapter 4 is Increasing resource efficiency and reducing waste and pollution.** The headlines here are targets for *eliminating plastic waste by 2042* and *all avoidable waste by 2050*, tackling Air Pollution through the *Clean Air Strategy* and reducing the impact of *chemicals*.

The target of zero avoidable waste by 2050 is accompanied by a commitment to a new *National Waste & Resources Strategy* in 2018 and links to the Industrial Strategy. It talks of a whole life-cycle approach, making data more available between businesses and in supply chains, supporting comprehensive and frequent waste collections, diverting more away from landfill, and also trails a new *Bioeconomy Strategy* to increase productivity, enable clean growth and capture more of the growing international market in biotechnology and new greener products and materials.

The section on achieving *zero plastic waste by 2042* is accompanied by a series of actions or commitments. These are set out very logically in relation to the different stages of the product cycle and suing different types of intervention. They include a 2018 consultation on using taxes or charges (presumably this is the “latte levy” trailed in the media along with extending the 5p levy on plastic bags to all retailers), rationalising packaging formats and reforming the Producer Responsibility systems including *extending waste packaging regulations* to create a better market for recycled plastics. Research and innovation feature, with a link back to the Clean Growth Strategy, research councils and the next round of the *Industrial Challenge Fund*, and the ban on microbeads is to be extended. There a number of ideas for consumer measures (such as “*top-up*” initiatives for water bottles and *plastic-free supermarket aisles*), a commitment to remove all single use plastics from the central government estate, and further action on food waste via WRAP.

Litter merits its own section, based on the existing *Litter Strategy* and the development of a new *national anti-litter campaign*, along with the introduction of *new regulations to improve enforcement powers for Local Authorities*. It also covers the need to recover more energy from waste, tackle waste crime, and improve planning for and investment in wastewater by the water industry. There is a specific section on marine litter and the need for more international co-operation.

The final part covers the need to reduce *pollution*. It has a particular focus on *urban air quality and chemicals regulation*, the latter with reference to the Stockholm Convention and other multilateral environmental agreements to which the UK is a signatory. There is a commitment to consult on a new *Clean Air Strategy in 2018* and to *set legal limits* on the currently unregulated emissions from *medium-sized combustion plants*. There is also mention of exploring options to address pollution from coal and wet wood and help farmers reduce ammonia emissions to air from fertilisers. The section on minimising the *risk from chemicals* contains a good analysis of the issues but few concrete or tangible measures apart for *A Blueprint for Water*.

**Chapter 5 is Securing clean, healthy, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans.** Overall, this chapter appears quite thin when compared to the earlier ones. Much of relevance to the marine environment appears in Chapters 4 and 6 (perhaps reflecting that fact that much of the action needed is about tackling land based sources of pollution and /or international co-operation). The headlines are to *replace the common fisheries policy* with a domestic version, and to achieve good environmental status including the *completion of the network of marine protected areas*, but given the genuinely international importance of the UK’s marine environment the approach looks weak.

There is a mix of national and global issues. There are references to international conventions of which the UK is a signatory, such as OSPAR (the treaty for the North-East Atlantic), the Paris agreement on climate change, coral reef initiatives as well as working with the Commonwealth. On the domestic front there is a commitment to publish a *Fisheries White Paper*, working with the devolved administrations, and publish an *annual statement on the state of fish stocks*. A full set of *England Marine Plans* is to be completed by 2021 and implementation of a *marine licensing management regime* completed. A new *marine online assessment tool* is to be developed to look at the marine environment and the pressures affecting it and a *major assessment of the status of our seas* completed in 2018. Consultation on the *third tranche of Marine Management Zones* is to take place, with designations by mid 2019

**Chapter 6 is Protecting and improving our global environment.** The headlines here are to provide international leadership on *climate change and biodiversity*, help with *disaster planning*, protect *forests and sustainable agriculture*, and to leave a *lighter footprint*.

There is a quite lengthy introduction which sets out some of the global challenges such as climate change, deforestation, illegal wildlife trade, whaling, etc. It also describes the role successive UK governments have played as signatories and active partners in treaties and conventions from the Rio Earth Summit through the Montreal Protocol to the Paris Agreement. There is a specific panel on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It highlights the importance of our Overseas Territories as reservoirs of biodiversity.

In the biodiversity section there are commitments to developing an *ambitious post 2020 international biodiversity strategy*, develop new *remote sensing techniques* and implement the *Blue Belt programme in Overseas Territories* as well as continue to support the moratorium on *whaling*. The next section deals with disaster planning and the assistance the UK government can and is giving, particularly through the *Darwin Initiative*, the preparation of *National Adaptation Programmes* and ensuring the flow of *finance into low carbon and clean energy markets*. On forests and agriculture the emphasis is mostly on continuing existing forms of support and co-operation such as the *UK International Climate Finance initiative*, but there is a new commitment to support the global move to high-efficiency agriculture through the *Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund*.

The final part of the chapter looks at how to leave a *lighter footprint on the global environment* from the UK economy and supply chains (recalling Defra thinking under previous governments about using ecological footprint as a metric alongside GDP). The natural capital approach is to be used to help businesses to understand their *supply chains impacts* and make them more sustainable, and there is explicit reference to the need for a trading framework (ie post EU) which puts environmental sustainability at its heart alongside development goals. The *Basel and Stockholm agreements* on chemicals are mentioned, and there is to be a *cross-government global resource initiative to reduce deforestation* by improving supply chains.

### Putting the plan into practice

This is the final part of the document (Section 2). The headlines here are to consult on a *new independent body to hold government to account* and to develop *metrics to assess progress*: including a *National Ecosystem Assessment type initiative beginning in 2022*. There are further commitments to establish a *Green Business Council* and explore the potential for a *natural environment impact fund*. The plan is to be regularly refreshed, and leadership and delivery strengthened through *better local planning*.

Within this section the mechanisms above are expanded upon and others laid out. The first section deals with how the process of transferring EU legislation via the *European Union (Withdrawal) Bill* will work. There is a commitment to consult on a *policy statement on environmental principles* to underpin future policy making (this is presumably to embed or replace EU principles such as the precautionary principle or polluter pays), and the importance of achieving some parity across the four nations of the UK is stressed.

*Metrics for measuring progress* are then discussed. A framework is set out which would attach *outcome indicators to the goals*: such as water quality, numbers of households protected from flooding or the area of sustainably managed and harvested woodland. These would be complemented by *measures of performance* (such as numbers of trees planted or area of land under agri-environment schemes) and it is acknowledged that the *pressures* on the environment (such as emissions of chemicals or carbon emissions) will also need to be measured. (This indicator framework is based on the State-Pressure-Response model developed by the OECD). *Natural Capital features* prominently with a commitment to continue the work to produce a set of national accounts and to incorporate the methodology into analysis and appraisal across government. The experience from the *four pioneer projects* (in Cumbria, North Devon, Greater Manchester and Suffolk Coast) is laid out as a case study.

Reporting on the plan is to be done to Parliament on an annual basis but with emphasis on different goals at different times as data sets show trends, building up a picture of progress towards the 25 year goals, with regular release of statistics via the ONS. On top of this there is to be a *more in-depth assessment of natural capital on a roughly ten year basis – starting in 2022* - along the lines of the 2011 National Ecosystem Assessment. A consultation is to be launched in early 2018 on establishing a *new world-leading, statutory body* to scrutinise and advise on progress. (A role previously performed by the Sustainable Development Commission.)

In order to provide a *clear line of sight between the national goals and local delivery*, each of the fourteen areas used by the EA and NE are to produce *natural capital plans*, working with LEPs, LNPs, local businesses and utility companies, *National Park Authorities* and others.

The final section of the plan looks at *finance and resourcing*. The West of England concept of a *Natural Capital Trust* is seen as having the potential for being replicated throughout the country, designed to be a vehicle for enabling the strategic allocation of revenue from developer contributions and payments for ecosystem services. There is mention of the contributions of water companies, NGOs, the HLF and trusts such as the Esmée Fairbairn. The new *environmental land management scheme* is seen as a major public funding mechanism for the plan and there is a guarantee to *underwrite the funding for EU LIFE projects* which would run beyond Brexit.

In terms of catalysing more private sector investment, the pilots developed by the *Ecosystem Markets Task Force* between 2012 and 2015 and the recent report on green finance by the Aldersgate Group of businesses are seen as important along with a forthcoming RSPB report. As part of the Clean Growth Strategy a *Green Finance Task Force*, with representatives of government and the finance industry, is to be set up. (nb *Nurture Lakeland* is mentioned as one of seven areas of innovation in financing natural capital – the only National Park example in all the case studies). A stronger *carbon offset mechanism* is to be set up along with a look at the feasibility of developing the existing *Woodland Carbon Code* into a *Forest Carbon Guarantee Scheme*. Finally, there are commitments to explore the idea of a *Natural Environment Impact Fund* (to blend public, private and philanthropic capital) and a *Green Business Council* (though note that this already exists in UK as part of an international network).