



Bright Blue conservation call for evidence

Evidence submitted by the National Trust to Bright Blue

27 November 2018

The National Trust is a charity founded in 1895 by three people who saw the importance of our nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. More than 120 years later, these values are still at the heart of everything we do. We look after special places throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland for ever, for everyone.

Introduction

We are answering some of the questions that relate to the rural and the urban environment. In the rural environment, an Agriculture Bill that enshrines a new approach based on public payments for environmental public goods will be critical in England. We are calling for Government to use the Bill to ensure that there is a long-term funding guarantee for the agricultural sector based on the level of need to deliver environmental outcomes. Our full response to the Agriculture Bill can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/2AqIKMM>.

For the natural and heritage environment more widely (rural, urban and beyond) the Government can use the Environment Bill to deliver on its promises for world-leading new arrangements. This will benefit people, nature and the wider environment. A strong watchdog, environmental principles and a legislative basis for environmental targets will go a long way to ensuring the future of the natural and heritage environments. The Agriculture and Environment Bills apply to England, but we hope the UK Government will work with the other administrations of the UK to develop shared or aligned frameworks for the environment. You can find our response to Government's consultation on environmental governance and principles here: <https://bit.ly/2AontmK>.

Rural

1. Where is there scope for the agricultural sector to assist in mitigating carbon emissions (for example, through carbon sinks)?

The agricultural sector can reduce emissions through:

- Playing an active role in storing and sequestering emissions through land use management and change. In particular, a new environmental land management system that rewards public goods should include payments for climate mitigation. This can help biodiversity too, as maintaining or restoring habitats on farms (permanent grasslands, trees, wetland areas) can also lock up carbon. For example, at Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire we are working with nearby farmers to

encourage practices (such as low-tillage) that preserve the peat and the carbon stored in it.

- In the UK the agricultural sector has failed to reduce emissions in line with other sectors. To meet future carbon budgets it will be crucial that the agricultural sector takes stronger action to reduce emissions.
- Reducing chemical inputs, using no-till farming and introducing cover crops can help to store and sequester more emissions. The diversification of farm businesses, including renewable energy subsidies, can help to reduce farms' carbon footprint too.

3. What measures or practices can the agricultural sector engage in to best protect or enhance biodiversity in rural Britain?

Under a new environmental land management system, farmers should be rewarded for existing and new measures that benefit biodiversity. This could include the maintenance or creation of new habitat, buffer strips for pollinators and reducing chemical inputs.

We have worked with farmers in Yorkshire to demonstrate how a 'Payments for Outcomes' approach that rewards benefits to pollinators could work (<https://bit.ly/2DZZM8v>). We have also worked with Green Alliance to develop a 'Natural Infrastructure Scheme' model for how farmers could sell environmental outcomes to private buyers (<https://bit.ly/2KBmeoT>). This work has to date focused on water management and flood risk reduction; in 2019 we will be working on carbon storage.

We are working with the Small Robot Company to find ways to reduce agricultural inputs and enhance environmental protection (<http://bit.ly/2SmoyD8>).

9. What are the most important public goods provided by the agricultural sector which should be rewarded through government funding?

We believe that environmental outcomes are the most important goods provided by the agricultural sector that should be rewarded by government funding. The Agriculture Bill should make clear that environmental public goods are the priority and that any productivity payments contribute to their delivery. It is important that soil, landscape, biodiversity and health and wellbeing are rewarded, even though they are not specifically named in the draft Agriculture Bill in the list of public goods (they are understood as covered by the list of broader public goods).

Urban

1. What are the key policies which the Government should introduce to better protect Britain's urban environments?

- For green infrastructure to be considered as critical urban infrastructure, leading to better planning and policies to protect and enhance (bigger, better, more, joined up)
- Investment in innovative models to improve natural capital at scale, e.g. Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan wants to test habitat banks supported by developer contributions, SUDs built into planning controls, etc.

- Policies which connect rural and urban to show how environmental improvements in the wider catchment help resilience and environmental quality in the city, e.g. slow the flow projects which reduce urban flooding, Northern Forest which will deliver social, economic and environmental gains for cities
- With regards to brownfield re-use and higher density development we urge the Government to work with Historic England ensure that planning relaxations do not put at risk historic buildings and conservation areas.

2. What can improve a city or town's efficiency and environment?

- Accessible green infrastructure which makes getting around the city easier and healthier, e.g. green walking and cycling routes to encourage physical activity, improve air quality and help to reduce congestion. Greater Manchester Beelines project is a good example of this aspiration to create over 1,000 miles of routes
- Urban parks can play an extremely important role in improving the environment of urban areas. We have recently launched the Future Parks Accelerator together with Heritage Lottery Fund (<https://bit.ly/2q9cR6k>). The National Trust has worked with others to develop a Parks Trust model in Newcastle to care for the city's parks for the benefit of people and nature. We hope that this model, using the Our Future Parks toolkit, can be explored by other Local Authorities.
- Any policies to make new developments in towns or cities more energy efficient should take care to avoid impacting on buildings with important heritage value.

3. How can new developments for housing and other infrastructure projects be made more ecologically friendly?

- Our experience from developments such as Stamford Brook shows that it is difficult if relying on volume house-builders to develop, it needs to be required through planning policies and landowner interest. But our development showed that it was possible to build more houses at the same time as reducing flood risk by carefully planning green corridors and SUDs across the development.
- We look forward to hearing Government's proposals for England on biodiversity/environmental net gain. While the mitigation hierarchy should always be applied to development, net gain approaches, if designed well, could help to ensure that the environmental impacts of development are more than compensated for, ideally on-site or nearby affected communities.
- High energy efficiency and renewable energy standards for new developments, and land set aside to be green space, can benefit people, nature and the environment.

4. Should more building be permitted on green belt designated land? If so, how should such development be carried out so as to minimise ecological harm (or maximise ecological benefit)?

The Green Belt has proven very important in England in preventing the type of urban sprawl that occurs in many other countries. Any release of undeveloped land should be done through the local planning process and should not undermine the principles of, or long-term confidence in, the Green Belt.

We support the protections in the National Planning Policy Framework for designated areas including green belt land, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and we are concerned that development pressure could lead to additional loss of land in these areas that harms both the environment and the benefits people gain from it. You can read our full response to the revised National Planning Policy Framework here:

<https://bit.ly/2DZPW6A>

For instance, we are very concerned by the new formula for calculating local housing need that includes an uplift based on local demand. We are worried that this will increase development pressure in precisely those areas that are popular because of their green belt, National Park or AONB land, thereby putting at risk these protected categories of land.

5. How important is access to green and blue space in urban areas and what policies could the Government adopt to improve access to such spaces in the UK?

- The Nature Recovery Network for England can play a key role in improving urban environments by delivering improved and new natural spaces.
- If the Government introduces a system of biodiversity/environmental net gain for England, then it should ensure that habitat/biodiversity/environmental improvements are delivered on or near to the affected site, or near to where people live.
- Health data shows that people are less physically active and suffering more from mental illness and stress. Access to nature has been shown to tackle both of these major concerns. Therefore access to green and blue space should be considered critical. Policies that require local authorities to plan for adequate levels of access, as well as supporting the protection of parks and green spaces, are important. Urban parks can play an extremely important role in improving the environment of urban areas. We have recently launched the Future Parks Accelerator together with Heritage Lottery Fund (<https://bit.ly/2q9cR6k>).

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