

# 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.