

Making the Natural Environment White Paper a success

The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the Government to make a bold and ambitious commitment to support the recovery of the natural environment.

In autumn 2010, Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) submitted a response to the discussion document with 32 member organisation signatories. The organisations who signed on to the Link response also support this document.

The record number of responses to the consultation indicates a substantial level of public support both for the NEWP itself and for the natural environment more widely.

What does the NEWP need to achieve?

The overall aim of the White Paper should be to ensure we have a resilient, ecologically healthy natural environment rich in wildlife. This will be of value in its own right and also provide the ecosystem services upon which we all depend.

Specifically, we look to NEWP to achieve:

- habitat losses and species declines reversed, site condition further improved, and better delivery of a range of ecosystem services, through a more sustainable approach to the management of our land and water, the creation of a coherent network of wildlife-rich landscapes and seascapes and targeted projects to save our rarer and threatened species.
- people across England to enjoying, understanding and valuing the natural environment, and wanting to take action for it.
- Government policies and funding to reduce the UK's impact upon, and to promote the protection of global biodiversity.

What are our key 'tests' of a good NEWP?

We identified a number of areas in our response. It is important that the NEWP goes beyond rhetoric in these areas and incorporates specific actions and commitments.

In the table below we list our six priority headlines for a successful NEWP, and indicative actions and commitments to give a sense of the level of detail we believe is required to achieve these headline aims. These are taken from Link's full formal response, submitted last year, and are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive.

To be successful the NEWP should:

Headline	How will we assess this?
<p>1. Set a new vision and commit to a step change in nature conservation by implementing the <i>Making Space for Nature</i> report in full</p>	<p>A strongly worded commitment to implement the report, including a headline ambition to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network.</p>
	<p>Clear plans for each <i>Making Space for Nature</i> recommendation – woven throughout the document, not restricted to the EBS.</p>
<p>2. Set out how the UK will meet the Nagoya global agreement</p>	<p>A commitment to specific measurable natural environment outcomes and the means by which progress toward these will be monitored, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>A wildlife and watch list indicator</i>: To measure the overall state of both common and threatened wildlife in England. For common species, a composite index of species’ population trends for well-covered taxa, and for threatened species, a composite index of trends for species of high conservation priority would be developed. b. <i>A wildlife in the countryside quality indicator</i>: To measure the condition of special terrestrial and aquatic wildlife sites wildlife sites in England. c. <i>Wildlife, landscape and people indicator</i>: For example the proportion of school children in England having the opportunity for at least one high quality learning activity based in the natural environment in each school year.
	<p>No proposals to alter existing legislation, policies and practices that we consider to be beneficial, and a commitment to better implement these. In other words, secure and implement those policies and practices for protecting our natural environment that are already working well.</p>
<p>3. Set out measures to reconnect people and nature</p>	<p>Clarity on how everyone can play their part, recognising that unless people can experience their natural environment they are unlikely to want to take action for it.</p>
	<p>The national well-being indicator produced by the Office of National Statistics to include measures of the quality of the natural environment and people’s access to it.</p>
	<p>A commitment to using the proposed pupil premium as an opportunity for schools to ensure that every disadvantaged child in England can have at least one high quality learning outside the classroom experience per year.</p>

	Definitive maps of rights of way will be up to date, all public paths open and usable, all access land accessible, and an English coastal path and associated margin of land completed.
4. Establish mechanisms for embedding the value of nature in our economy and decision making at all levels	Increase innovative funding streams for the natural environment. Ambition and governance will only result in delivery if resources are available; therefore it is absolutely essential that government proposes solutions to the funding shortfall.
	Natural capital accounting within Treasury.
	Sound protection for, and ability to enhance, the natural environment through the reformed planning system.
	Actions to strengthen the role the natural environment plays in health care.
	Implementation of the Marine & Coastal Access Act, specifically, Marine Conservation Zones and Marine Protected Areas.
	Actions that recognise the role the natural environment can play in mitigating climate change (e.g. protection of peatlands).
5. Introduce a framework to facilitate local action for the natural environment	A statement in the NEWP that uses policy commitments to recognise and empower local nature partnerships, with a series of rights and responsibilities to deliver landscape-scale conservation.
	Establish strong biodiversity governance to empower local delivery. The foundations of the EBS delivery framework must be established in the NEWP to give them credibility and status.
6. Integrate policy and funding to make the most of every public pound spent	Commitment from CLG and Defra to work together to introduce new financing methods, such as a non-voluntary biodiversity offsetting system that would allow local government to generate funding for biodiversity and other environmental benefits from developers.
	Defra to adopt strong support for maximising environmental delivery through the Common Agricultural Policy, and agri-environment in particular.
	Commitment to better align policies and current funding streams at the appropriate strategic level (e.g. catchment or landscape scale) to achieve multiple objectives e.g. biodiversity, WFD, flood risk management.

**Wildlife and Countryside Link
March 2011**

