



Chapter seven: Changing the narrative on nature



Priority actions for the UK Government: Biodiversity



1 Respect nature's value...

Change the narrative on nature. From the highest levels of government, make sure we are thinking about and engaging with nature in a way that reflects its value.



2 Get planning right...

Unleash a modern and data driven planning system that delivers high-quality development together with meaningful nature recovery.



3 Connect nature strategically...

Make the Nature Recovery Network a reality, creating a strategic, connected and accessible network of nature-rich spaces.



4 ...and deliver in practice.

Urgently deliver the UK's existing commitments to protect and restore nature by the end of this decade.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. We have already lost half of our biodiversity, and one in six species in the UK are threatened with extinction.

Globally, biodiversity is disappearing at an unprecedented rate – part of the ‘triple crisis’ threatening the systems essential to human wellbeing. Scientists warn we are living through Earth’s sixth mass extinction.

In response, the world has committed to reversing these trends. In 2022, the Kunming-Montreal Framework set biodiversity targets and goals, including protecting 30% of land and sea by the end of the decade.

Yet the pace and scale of action remain far below what is needed to meet these targets and confront the reality of the ecological emergency. The 2020 Aichi biodiversity targets were set and then left unmet by all countries. In the UK there is a real risk of backsliding, with key protections for nature within the planning system under threat.

What needs to change? Nature restoration can be tricky and difficult to predict – there is no universal metric like carbon emissions, and not all efforts yield equal benefits.

Isolated pockets of nature in the wrong places can struggle and are vulnerable to climate and other impacts. For nature to thrive, we must focus on creating spaces that are bigger, better and joined-up.

This means restoring and supporting the right habitats, in the right places, for the right species. It also means physically connecting these spaces to create a thriving and resilient nature recovery network.

If we get this right, the benefits could be astronomical. If we get it wrong, the risks to

communities, businesses and national infrastructure are existential.

The independent Dasgupta Review made clear that the global economy is completely dependent on the natural world. Evidence shows that for every £1 invested in nature restoration, at least £3 is returned in social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Green and blue spaces can improve our mental health, boost tourism industries and provide natural flood defences. But we are doing little more than watch as we lose some of our most valuable assets.

Britain is a nation of nature lovers – it is why nature documentaries bring us together like nothing else. Over 80% support rewilding initiatives, and people consistently report the value of access to green and wild spaces for their mental and physical health.

So many of the landscapes and species that define the UK’s natural heritage are under threat. Now is the time for decisive action, before our ancient woodlands and chalk streams, and hedgehogs, birds and butterflies, become part of our past and not our future.

Box 6. Our work on biodiversity

Biodiversity underpins the work of our Communities, especially our **Environmental Policy Implementation Community (EPIC)**, which delivers the sector-leading **BNG in Practice** project alongside the **Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE)**.

Many IES members work in conservation, including as ecologists, researchers, and environmental managers.

1. Change the narrative on nature. From the highest levels of government, make sure we are thinking about and engaging with nature in a way that reflects its value.

- i. Set standards for government communication with the public: no claims without facts and stop asserting that nature is a blocker, a nuisance, or a victim.
 - This can be supported by teaching our young people about the value of nature. See our chapter on environmental education for more details.
- ii. Make nature literacy training available for all MPs and a requirement for new Ministers.
- iii. Fill the **finance gap** for UK nature by doubling the target to raising at least £1 billion a year in private finance by 2027, and assign responsibility for delivering the target to HM Treasury.
- iv. Put the value of nature at the heart of economic decision making by providing financial and tax incentives for adopting nature based solutions.
- v. Develop a national standardised framework for citizen science projects to monitor biodiversity, and endorse and encourage the use of citizen science by government departments, arms-length bodies and others.
 - This framework would also support the use of citizen science across the water environment. See our chapter on water for more details.

The Government's recent **response to the OEP's** review of the EIP acknowledged that: **"the natural environment is amongst our most valuable national assets."** That perspective needs to be reflected in all government communications on nature.

Further to the **Government's view** that **"additional incentives are needed to mobilise private investment towards our environmental targets"**, this would deliver that goal and support **Defra's Call for Evidence** on increasing private investment in nature recovery.

2. Unleash a modern and data driven planning system that delivers high-quality development together with meaningful nature recovery.

- i. Ensure the Planning and Infrastructure Bill does not erode common-sense and vital protections for nature in practice, following the **advice set out by the OEP**.
- ii. Implement the findings of the IES & ALGE's **BNG in Practice Report**, including establishing a BNG regulator to regulate the biodiversity market and enforce penalties on landowners who fail to deliver promised gains.
 - See our chapter on environmental implementation for more details.
- iii. Utilise the **Transformation Fund** to invest in innovative habitat monitoring techniques, such as remote sensing, and ensure that habitat data at all stages of the planning process is made easily accessible in a centralised, digital format.
- iv. Over the long-term, transition Biodiversity Net Gain into a broader Environmental Net Gain standard that captures the full value of nature.

This would realise the **Government's assurance** that the Bill will not reduce environmental protections, **delivering a win-win for nature and development.**

3. Make the Nature Recovery Network a reality, creating a strategic, connected and accessible network of nature-rich spaces.

- i. Connect policies to connect spaces: the Land Use Framework, LNRs and Environmental Delivery Plans must work together to join up nature across the country, supporting ecosystems and wildlife, and increasing resilience to climate impacts.
- ii. Implement the recommendations of the **OEP's LNRS Report**, fund a central coordination point to join up LNRS, and commit to funding LNRS for the next 10 years, increasing confidence in their delivery.

- iii. Take action to ensure everyone can access and enjoy nature-rich spaces, by introducing an Access to Nature Bill.
- iv. Take an ecosystem approach to nature recovery, informed by how actions can support whole ecosystems, rather than disconnected or contextually inappropriate interventions.
- v. Pilot ‘**nature recovery innovation zones**’, as pioneered by the Dutch government, that would encourage novel approaches to nature recovery, such as cutting edge monitoring methods and stacking environmental payments.

This would support the **Government’s commitment** that “**everyone should live within 15 minutes’ walk of green or blue space.**”

4. Urgently deliver the UK’s existing commitments to protect and restore nature by the end of this decade.

- i. Enshrine the commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 into UK law, and urgently produce the **promised delivery strategy**, which must include how sites will be maintained in the long-term.
- ii. Protect biodiversity from the most destructive threats to nature, including by reducing pesticide use and minimising the impact of invasive species (such as American mink) in line with the **Kunming-Montreal Framework**.
- iii. Get nature-friendly farming right for farmers and the environment and for farmers, by delivering on the recommendations of the NAO’s **Farming & Countryside Programme Report**, and by encouraging the adoption of the most effective nature recovery schemes, such as Countryside Stewardship.
 - This can be supported by improved soil management. See our chapter on land condition for more details.

This would deliver the **Government’s commitment** that the revised EIP should “**clarify Environment Act target delivery plans**” and “**include a more streamlined and effective plan of action linking government actions and the role of key delivery organisations.**”

This will help deliver on the Environment Secretary’s promise to “**make sure the Government renews our relationship with ... the farming community**”, as well as the **Manifesto commitment** to ‘**make environmental land-management schemes work better for both farmers and nature**’.