



Ministry  
of Justice

# Nature Recovery Plan

Restoring biodiversity across  
our estate and operations

Summary  
2024



# Introduction

Welcome to the summary version of our Nature Recovery Plan. It is our vision to become a flagship department for the environment. This means actively contributing to nature recovery, changing our ways of working to value natural capital, and promoting resilience to climate change.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is in a unique and exciting position to achieve this – on our property, during operations, within our organisation, and working alongside others. This Nature Recovery Plan is the first publication to collate and demonstrate what we will offer and the nine principles of action we will ensure.

As a large landowner in government, we have a legal duty to enhance our estate for biodiversity. We can do this by allowing more wildlife to flourish on our land; integrating the recovery of habitats into our operations; and improving our holdings to function sustainably and in harmony with the wider landscape.

We can facilitate alternative choices to limit our impact on nature and the wider environment. We can do this by using our probation unpaid work programmes to aid national conservation efforts; modernising our data; supporting innovation; and sharing our knowledge in stakeholder networks to help make informed decisions.

The delivery of this Nature Recovery Plan will also provide an important contribution to our people. For our staff, offenders, people on probation and visitors, we will provide access to quality green space and encourage connection with nature for health and wellbeing. We will support opportunities to develop green skills – contributing to the government’s ten point plan for a green industrial revolution – and promote understanding of our natural resources.

The MoJ considers environmental sustainability an enabler to the success of our strategic outcomes. This means that the thread of sustainability runs through every aspect of our wider organisation. This includes protecting the public from serious offenders, improving the safety and security of our prisons, reducing reoffending, and delivering swift access to justice.

This plan is the beginning of our challenge to help restore nature, embed sustainable principles into ways of working, and support the justice system in being fit for the future.

# The importance of nature

The poor and declining state of biodiversity in the UK has now been acknowledged across government and conservation bodies. We have lost 60% abundance of our most important species in the last 50 years, and 15% of species within the UK are currently threatened with extinction.<sup>1</sup> Significant proportions of the most valuable wildlife habitats remain in unfavourable conditions, and urgent action is needed to reverse these losses.<sup>2</sup> The international Leaders' Pledge for Nature aims to reverse the loss by 2030 by increasing protection to cover 30% of land (known as 30x30).

Natural capital assets such as atmosphere, water, soils and species, provide ecosystem services which benefit the whole of society. For example, grasslands provide water storage and filtration, and peatland sequesters carbon. The **25 Year Environment Plan** commits to a comprehensive and long-term approach to protecting and enhancing the natural world for the next generation. It asks us to replenish depleted soil, plant trees, restore wetlands and peatlands, and protect threatened species and habitats. In Wales, the Nature Recovery Action Plan clarifies similar urgency and the need for resilience for future generations. The Biodiversity Deep Dive outlines recommendations to protect at least 30% of the land and sea by 2030. In 2021, **The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review** highlighted that our economy, health and wellbeing are embedded within nature and not external to it.



1 See '**State of Nature 2023**'.

2 See '**Biodiversity in the UK: Bloom or bust?**' 2019 (accessed March 2024).

However, as a society we have been depleting our natural capital to fuel economic growth. This is not sustainable. Restoring biodiversity and embedding a natural capital approach in decision making is therefore essential for a sustainable future. This is because nature and its preservation and recovery through a natural capital approach is critical to achieving climate stability.

Healthy, functioning habitats provide the best defence against further climate change by locking in and absorbing carbon. They also provide resilience to changing conditions. For example, wetlands attenuate water, trees moderate temperature, and green infrastructure absorbs excessive surface water. Often, such nature-based solutions are cheaper, require less maintenance, and last longer than man-made solutions. Restoring and guarding nature is essential to the functioning of these solutions, and in doing so, we will preserve the services for future generations.

As the MoJ commits to doing more on our estate, we also plan to change our operational ways of working and support our people to learn, contribute and benefit from nature recovery.

We will also participate in new and effective partnerships to ultimately action widespread change and aid successful nature recovery together.



# Enabling justice outcomes

The MoJ's organisational priorities are clear: protecting the public from serious offenders, improving the safety and security of our prisons, reducing reoffending, strengthening the justice system and delivering swift access to justice.

The MoJ's vision as outlined in the Prisons Strategy White Paper (2021), and the Prisoner Education Service (2023) includes:

- a resilient estate with the capacity to meet demand safely and securely
- a fit-for-purpose estate where the built environment and daily activity regimes provide a stable environment and rehabilitation for offenders
- prisons and probation working together to equip offenders with the skills for jobs and promote participation in purposeful activity

This means providing support to tackle the factors which lead to committing crime, and following that support into the community. For example, the likelihood of reoffending significantly decreases if people have a place to live, a job, and access to healthcare (including substance misuse treatment).



Therefore, the MoJ are investing £200 million annually to transform approaches to rehabilitation and improve work-related activity and job prospects.

Sustainability is an enabler to this vision, and the MoJ are committed to putting environmental sustainability at the heart of our operations and decision-making by embedding it into everything we do. This will provide the most productive environment to reform.

The routes of helping to reduce reoffending through nature can be complex. First, offering offenders qualifications in green skills and with sustainability awareness increases employment potential. Skills and awareness can be built indirectly and in a fair, safe and decent way through curriculum offerings, vocational experiences, and purposeful and meaningful activity. Second, engagement with nature and wildlife has proven exceptionally valuable to improving personal wellbeing, mental health and physical health. These benefits are particularly valuable within a prison environment, and help support the rehabilitation of offenders before they are released.<sup>3</sup>

## MoJ's role in nature recovery

In terms of providing safe and decent conditions, recent research shows that sites with more lawn, shrubbery and trees can lower violence, reduce self-harm, and decrease assaults on staff.<sup>4</sup> Third, work in non-custodial environments (e.g. with people on probation or unpaid work) offers multiple benefits to nature recovery and communities at a much larger scale. Working closely with contractors, expert partners, other government departments, or large landscape organisations offers nature recovery influence beyond our estate. This has been demonstrated by the new national partnership with the Canal and River Trust.<sup>5</sup>

This Nature Recovery Plan acts as a sponsor and provides support to identify good practice, co-ordinate and consolidate current opportunities, and develop, strengthen and scale-up green initiatives to contribute to reducing reoffending.

3 Taken from HMPPS 'Celebration of Wildlife and People 2020-21', unpublished.

4 See '**Greenspace outside prison walls has a positive effect on prisoner wellbeing**' (accessed March 2024)

5 See '**Offenders to pay back society more visibly under 90 million plan**' (accessed March 2024).

# Our estate in context

The MoJ represents five executive agencies – His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) being the two largest – alongside providing a role in 34 agencies and public bodies.<sup>6</sup>

Our property is part of the Justice, Law and Home Affairs cluster. We have the second largest portfolio within government, functioning mostly as: courts and tribunals, prisons, probation contact centres, approved premises (secure accommodation), training facilities, administrative offices, and supply/manufacturing/waste depots and farms.

Our freehold totals around 4,000ha in England and Wales, with a small number of court and tribunal properties in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

This exists across a variety of locations, landscapes, heritage considerations and building types. In addition, with long-term leases, our rural and urban holdings total over 1,500 sites.

Any holding could be under development, in operation or decommissioned, and often grounds and building management are subcontracted to a facilities management provider. Security restrictions vary across the estate (custodial and non-custodial), and several private operating contracts are in place.

We are currently aiming to expand through new builds and modernisation of the existing estate. By 2025, we will be on our way to increasing capacity by 20,000 places through four new-build prisons and expansion of the adult custodial estate.

HMCTS has adjusted considerably to the impact of the recent pandemic, formalising and expanding to provide new and additional tribunal capacity (known as Nightingale Courts). Secure accommodation will be improved and 1,700 places created via the Approved Premises Expansion programme.

The MoJ estate is often surprising in size, type and location. It comprises a wide variety of habitats with often restricted public access and unexpected functions, for example farming.

6 See '[Ministry of Justice Annual Report and Accounts 2022 to 2023](#)'

Increasing habitat features and access to nature has been a focus in recent years.<sup>7</sup> This has included opportunistic projects centred on staff volunteers and local experts, site-led improvements, and partnerships working around ponds and orchard provision.

There is a long history of species promotion and biodiversity action planning by local and enthusiastic individuals. These can now be formalised into plans aligned with landscape priorities and other elements of natural capital. This will give rise to exciting opportunities for biodiversity improvements.

It should be noted that we own no habitats at sea. However, there are potentially indirect but widespread societal impacts to marine habitats through supply chains or catchment issues, e.g. water resources or nutrient output.

Publication of this Nature Recovery Plan will commence a strategic, co-ordinated and policy-based approach to estate management and provision of quality green space for wildlife and people.



7 See '[Ministry of Justice biennial ecology update 2016 to 2018](#)' (accessed March 2024).



# Our nine Nature Recovery Principles



# Key MoJ commitments

Through commitments and detailed actions within our nine Nature Recovery Principles, we aim to:

- ✓ commence **10% increase** in woodland quality (to be achieved by 2030)
- ✓ commence **10% increase** in pollinator area (to be achieved by 2030)
- ✓ ensure **100%** of our sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) remain in favourable or recovering condition
- ✓ grow **100,000** trees annually for MoJ, our partners and other public land
- ✓ start planting **50,000** trees across the estate (to be achieved by 2030)
- ✓ create or enhance **25km** species-rich hedging
- ✓ create or restore **150** ponds and **50** orchards
- ✓ develop ecological management plans for our freehold sites, including farms, to ensure good practice
- ✓ implement biodiversity net gain on all new build, major construction and permitted development
- ✓ formulate MoJ contribution towards the **Leaders' Pledge for Nature** (30% of land protected by 2030, known as 30x30)

Alongside this we will develop further specific targets around the contribution of probation unpaid work to national conservation efforts, embedding a natural capital approach to our land use, and promoting connection with nature for physical and mental wellbeing.

Success will require us to actively engage, partner and share; build knowledge and skills; and modernise our data systems, and we are committed to demonstrating our progress through the **Greening Government Commitments** and other legislative reporting.



# Measuring and reporting our progress

Measuring progress on nature recovery is a nationwide challenge, and there are still clarifications required over what success looks like for the public estate.

We can openly acknowledge that we don't know all of the answers, but we do understand the direction we need to proceed and how we can initially measure progress, as outlined below.

Measure	Frequency	Target	From
<b>Outcomes</b>			
Overall biodiversity units	Every 5 years	Increasing trend of units / ha	2025
Woodland		Begin delivery of 10% increase in biodiversity units (from 2021 baseline, to be achieved by 2030)	2025
Pollinator habitat		Begin delivery of >10% increase in area (ha) (from 2021 baseline, to be achieved by 2030)	2025
Protected site status	Annual	100% of owned SSSI area in favourable or recovering condition	2023
		Hectares of land proposed towards 30x30 (OECM) to be developed throughout 2021 to 2025	2025

Measure	Frequency	Target	From
<b>Outputs</b>			
Trees	Annual	100,000 trees grown annually	2023
		50,000 trees planted on the estate (by 2030)	2023
Hedges	Annual	Create or enhance 25km species-rich hedging	2023
Wildlife ponds	Annual	Create or restore 150 ponds	2023
Orchards	Annual	Create or restore 50 orchards	2023
<b>Inputs</b>			
Ecological management plans Land management plans (or equivalent)	Annual	% sites formulated and agreed	2023
		% sites contracted and under positive habitat management	2023
		% farm area (ha) agreed and working to action plan	2024
BNG	Annual	% increase associated with development	2023



We have finalised this plan early in the reporting period, as we are keen to acknowledge the challenge ahead and realise potential of the estate in greening government. Our ongoing routes of reporting are outlined below.

 Ongoing routes of reporting	
Progress updates to <b>Senior Sustainability Board</b>	Biannually
<b>Greening Government Commitments</b>	Annually
<b>MoJ Business Plan and annual report</b>	Annually
<b>Section 6 biodiversity duty reporting</b> Environment (Wales) Act 2016	2022-23 (every third year)
<b>Biodiversity duty reporting</b> Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011	2023-24 (every third year if applicable)
<b>HM Government 25 Year Environment Plan</b>	As required
<b>Biodiversity reporting</b> Environment Act 2021	As required



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