



Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security

Natural England's Strategic
Direction 2025-2030



Foreword by Tony Juniper and Marian Spain: Why recovering Nature matters

Nature underpins our nation's growth, health, and security. We need to invest in Nature to maximise the full range of benefits it provides, and we depend upon.

The current value of Nature to the economy is estimated to be over £1.8 trillion. Putting Nature at the heart of new housing, infrastructure and renewable energy projects attracts greater investment and builds in resilience to climate change. Economic growth cannot be achieved without a thriving natural environment.

The future health and wellbeing of our society is dependent on a healthy natural environment. Time spent in contact with Nature improves people's mental and physical health. This reduces the burden on the health system and promotes increased economic activity, providing more than £400 billion in expected health benefits into the future. Nature has shaped our history and culture and will continue to shape the places we live and work in the future.

Nature gives us life's essentials of fresh water, clean air and food. Nature helps us manage flooding and pollution; provides better spaces around homes and workplaces; as well as food security and climate resilience for the future. Healthy soils provide long-term security for our food and farming industry. The loss of soil and reduction in quality cause losses of £1.2 billion each year in England and Wales.

The period 2025-30 will define this country's efforts to drive sustainable economic growth and move towards Nature recovery. Natural England is ready to meet this challenge, and in doing so make a significant contribution to the Government's missions. This Strategic Direction sets out the changes Natural England will make, informed by views from our staff, partners and organisations who use the services we provide. It outlines the direction we will take over the next five years.



Chair

Chief Executive

Natural England is changing

Protecting the rare and special has been the bedrock of Nature conservation in England for many years. We now need to go beyond stopping harm, to restoring and recovering natural systems that will enable Nature to thrive everywhere.

We need a step-change in our approach if we are to restore resilient ecosystems and landscapes with a focus on “more, bigger, better, and more joined up” Nature across the countryside, in towns and cities and on the coast and in the sea. We need to prepare for a future impacted by climate change so that people and Nature can respond and adapt. We need to enable more people to act for Nature: business and industry, farmers and land managers, local and national government, financial investors and communities. We need an inclusive approach to Nature, with everybody able to benefit and everybody able to contribute.

The next 5 years are critical if we are to meet the Environment Act target of halting the decline in species abundance, as well as our international commitment to protect 30% of the UK’s land and sea for Nature by 2030 (“30x30”) and our domestic goal to ensure more people can experience Nature close to home (“Green in 15”).

We recognise the urgency of action and will focus our efforts where they can deliver the greatest impact. This means making choices over how best to use our unique powers as a Nature regulator and our limited resources to deliver our vision of Thriving Nature for people and planet. We cannot and should not do this alone. Our mission of Building partnerships for Nature’s recovery remains more relevant than ever.

We are changing the way we work to recover Nature and improve the nation’s growth, health, and security.



What this means for how we work

Our Role

Natural England is the Government's adviser for the natural environment and the Nature regulator with a wide range of statutory duties and powers. We provide the evidence, expertise and advice to recover Nature and shape better places for people to live. We do this working through and with others.

This will mean:

- setting evidence-based standards, strategies and advice to empower others to recover Nature
- building partnerships across society to drive action for more people to benefit from Nature
- focusing on places where we can have the biggest impact and manage the biggest risks
- outcome-focused regulation and enforcement that supports growth and empowers people to make the right choices
- a dynamic approach to Nature protection, delivered in collaboration with other environmental regulators
- harnessing data and digital to provide a better service to our customers and work more efficiently
- using science, evidence, and analysis to empower action for Nature and support innovation

The direction set out in this document will mean changes both for Natural England and for the many organisations and people that we work with.

Strengthening our collaboration and working across Defra group, wider government, and business will be essential for our shared success. Strong local and regional relationships will ensure we continue to improve Nature for the benefit of all, through place-based delivery. We are committed to working together to identify and implement the best ways to make these changes.



Our Priorities

We will transform our services and develop digital systems to make it easier for our people and customers to deliver for Nature. We will focus on the following priorities:

1. Drive Nature recovery at a greater scale and faster pace than before by supporting large scale projects and making it easier for landowners to get permissions for Nature positive change.
2. Tackle the root causes of Nature's decline working with Defra partners to ensure cleaner air, clean and plentiful water, healthier soils and rich, productive seas.
3. Partner with planners and developers on "high nature; low carbon" houses, energy and transport infrastructure and introduce strategic solutions so development can also protect and restore Nature.
4. Support food security and sustainable farming, forestry and fishing through targeted advice and the right mix of public and private finance.
5. Shape better places for people to work and live by providing clear evidence and advice to our partners, using spatial plans for Nature as a framework for investment and joined up action.
6. Connect communities with Nature and create Nature close to people's homes, ensuring everyone gains from the health benefits Nature can bring.



Next Steps

Over the past six months, we engaged with colleagues across Natural England, and over 200 different organisations, to gather insights and perspectives. This Strategic Direction document brings together that feedback and our analysis of what Natural England needs to do differently to recover Nature and sets a direction for change.

As we prepare to launch our new Natural England strategy in the autumn, we will now work out exactly what will need to be different for us and for our partners and customers. This will be shaped by government reviews and funding decisions that will conclude in the coming months. We look forward to continuing our conversation with you.



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