

National Estate for Nature Group

Meeting Minutes: 20 March 2025

Attendance

- Defra: Secretary of State Steve Reed, Minister for Nature Mary Creagh, James Greenway, Jed Hamblin-Boone
- Natural England: Tony Juniper, Oliver Harmar
- Forestry Commission: Richard Stanford
- Forestry England: Mike Seddon
- MoJ: Carl Von Reibnitz
- MoD: Paul Yates & James Clare
- Network Rail: Neil Strong
- National Highways: Stephen Elderkin
- Homes England: Ken Glendinning
- Department for Transport: Lucy Stone
- LocatED: Lara Newman
- Department for Education: Joe Billington
- Church Commissioners: Ciara Williams
- The Crown Estate: Paul Sedgwick
- Elveden Estate: Andrew Blenkiron
- Duchy of Cornwall: Will Bax
- Clinton Devon Estates: John Varley
- Duchy of Lancaster: Alistair Martin
- United Utilities: Jo Harrison
- Yorkshire Water: Tim Hankins
- National Trust: Harry Howell
- Wildlife Trusts: Sarah Jane Chimbwandira
- RSPB: Michael Copleston
- Canal and River Trust: Richard Parry
- Defra officials: Sally Randall, Deb Hankins, Andrew Jackson, Nick Barter, Ian Fenn, Tom Lafford, Louisa Willows, Kathryn Bell

Apologies:

- Cabinet Office: Saurabh S Bhandari
- DESNZ

Actions

1. **Defra Secretariat:** Gather working-level contacts for all members and provide a survey with questions for member feedback (attached to email)
2. **Defra Secretariat:** Circulate terms of reference (ToR) for agreement
3. **Defra Secretariat:** Schedule the Q2 meeting
4. **All members:** Provide feedback and responses to the Defra Secretariat by 23rd May on the member survey, the proposed minimum standard proposed, and on future agenda items as preferred.

Minutes

1. Purpose, objectives and minimum standard

The Secretary of State and Minister Creagh introduced the group's purpose as action and outcome-focused, with a significant opportunity to drive meaningful change and to collaborate and share experience.

Members were positive about the objectives and proposal for a minimum standard, and for using meetings as a 'safe space' for discussing challenges and sharing burdens to help drive collaboration, innovation and long-term planning within and beyond the group.

Members noted a need for time to consider how to implement and agree to the proposals, though a number noted alignment of their existing estate management plans and targets with the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), Environment Act targets and/or 30by30 criteria.

Comments and suggestions included:

- Defra should develop a strategic national vision for nature recovery to help members and others align regional work with national goals. The Land Use Framework's potential value was noted.
- Leveraging the expertise and experiences of early adopters e.g. sharing learning from implementing TNFD (Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures) disclosure recommendations; and sharing mapping/baselining tools
- Benefits of including water in management plans and measures of success
- Focusing effort and investment on areas/habitats of best potential e.g. low-grade agricultural land, linear features, while also noting benefits of small actions 'adding up'
- The value of partnership – particularly between public and private sectors, including examples between members and with the minerals industry - and across government, including to share expertise and to consider relative demands on land.

- ‘Sandboxing’ as a tool to catalyse action and unlock private finance, including through platforms such as Soil Association’s ‘Exchange Market’
- Using the convening power of government to bring together organisations with insights and tools
- Need and benefit of engaging communities and positive storytelling to support action
- Challenges with participating in multiple Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) as large, dispersed and/or linear estates-based landowners
- Concerns around funding, including reference to affordability for tenanted farmers; stacking opportunities; and Environmental Land Management schemes’ (ELMs) future.

Minister Creagh noted points on farming and ELMs for discussion with Minister for Farming Daniel Zeichner, with keenness to collaborate with this group to help determine impactful actions, including while the refreshed Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is considered.

Defra officials proposed to gather and discuss further feedback on issues such as LNRS and TNFD between meetings and to use such discussion to inform future agenda items; and to share tools and approaches in use to develop a natural capital baseline for the Defra estate, for members’ wider application.

2. Governance and membership

Members agreed by consensus to name the group the ‘National Estate for Nature Group’ and to meet quarterly. Suggestions for additional members or experience included a representative for local government and insight from farming clusters and Landscape Recovery pilots.

Suggested future agenda items included:

- Regular updates on progress towards estate management plans and targets
- Sharing successful initiatives and best practice
- Updates on relevant HMG policies, incentives and regulatory changes
- Considering the human and emotional aspects of land management, including the motivations and challenges faced by individual land managers and farmers.

The Defra Secretariat will:

- Collate working-level contacts to discuss points in detail, including through existing working groups, to support agenda-setting and decision-making at quarterly meetings
- Consider creating a regular working-level group(s) for the Group if helpful to support action and facilitate data sharing and collaboration.