



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# The 25-year environment plan

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# Summary

## Background to the plan

The idea of a 25-year environment plan arose from a proposal in a Natural Capital (an independent advisory committee to the Government) [report](#) in March 2014 that the Government should provide a 25 year framework to maintain and improve natural capital. The Government then [endorsed](#) this recommendation. A framed commitment for a 25-year environment plan was later made part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) former [single departmental plan](#) (2015-2020), published February 2016.

The Natural Capital Committee (an independent advisory committee to the Government) [published advice and recommendations](#) on what the Government should consider in developing the plan on 28 September 2017.

## Aims of the Plan

The final plan, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#) was published on 11 January 2018. Launching the Plan, the [Prime Minister identified](#) the protection and enhancement of the natural environment as a "central priority" for the Government as part of delivering its [manifesto pledge](#) to "be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it". Aspects of the Plan relate to England only, whereas others relate to the UK as a whole.

## Brexit

The plan is framed in the context of Brexit and the Government's [previous commitments](#) to continue EU environmental rights on a UK legal basis and its intention to uphold its obligations under international environmental treaties. The Plan confirms the Government will consult on any changes to environmental regulation it may identify, and reiterates the Government commitment to implementing international agreements. The Plan clarifies that it is not pre-empting discussions with the devolved nations regarding the shape of common frameworks after Brexit, but confirms the Government will continue to work with the devolved Administrations on these aspects.

The Plan reiterates the Government's intention to consult on a new, independent statutory body that would hold Government to account for upholding environmental standards in England; and to consult on the scope and content of a new policy statement to ensure environmental principles underpin policy making.

## Key policy areas

The Plan sets out a number of 25-years goals and a combination of new and existing strategies, targets, mechanisms and commitments in order to meet its goals. Some of the key area policy areas and announcements in the plan include:

- Using a "**natural capital**" approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, by recognising its tangible and non-tangible economic benefits.
- The establishment of a **green business council** to advise government on "environmental entrepreneurialism". A natural environment impact fund is being mooted to support this which would use natural capital valuations;
- Introducing a principle of "**environmental net gain**" into planning decisions where wider natural capital benefits will be assessed as part of the planning process;

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- Achieving zero avoidable **plastic waste** by the end of 2042 through a number of initiatives;
- A commitment to reducing the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy from natural hazards including **flooding, drought and coastal erosion**.
- The aims for a post-Brexit **sustainable fisheries policy**, based on a natural capital approach;
- A new commitment to publishing an **overarching chemicals strategy** to set out the UK's approach as it leaves the EU;
- Initial proposals for a new **environmental land management system** (based on paying public money for public 'goods' such as environmental enhancement), which will be set out in a Command Paper later this spring - a pre-cursor to the Agriculture Bill which will set out post-Brexit support arrangements for farmers;
- A target of ensuring the **sustainable management of soil** by 2030 and establishing sufficient data to understand the current state of soil health;
- An aim to **increase woodland in England** in line with the aspiration of achieving 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by the end of 2042; and
- A goal to **mitigate and adapt to climate change** by doing "what is necessary to adapt to the effects of a changing climate".

### Next steps

The Government proposes to update the Plan at least every 5 years, and to report annually on progress to Parliament. A set of indicators will be developed to monitor progress.

### Initial reaction

Overall reaction to the Plan has been mixed. Many have welcomed its ambition and promises on some specific areas like plastics pollution and sustainable land management, with Dieter Helm (chair of the Natural Capital Committee) [reported](#) to comment that the Plan is "substantive" adding that "nothing on this scale has been brought forward for at least a decade". On the other hand, the Plan has been criticised for making no solid commitments to new legislation and lacking in urgency. The legal NGO Client Earth has [stated](#) that the Plan is "full of empty promises" and called for strong nature laws as the UK leaves the EU. A [Defra media blog](#) from 12 January 2018 stated that the Government will legislate when needed in relation to individual policy areas.

# 1. Background to the Plan

The idea of a 25-year environment plan arose from a proposal in a Natural Capital Committee (an independent advisory committee to the Government) [report](#) in March 2014 that the Government should provide a 25 year framework to maintain and improve natural capital.<sup>1</sup> The Government then [endorsed](#) this recommendation.<sup>2</sup>

A framed commitment for a 25-year environment plan was then made part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) former [single departmental plan \(2015-2020\)](#), published February 2016.<sup>3</sup> In the departmental plan the Government stated that it would work alongside the Natural Capital Committee: to ensure that the environment is maintained and improved as well as becoming systematically valued and integrated into wider decisions across different sectors. The new [2017 departmental plan](#) reiterated this commitment.

A framework for the Plan was originally expected to be published in the summer of 2016, with the Plan to follow by the end of 2016, but it was delayed a number of times.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.1 Natural Capital Committee advice

In February 2016 the Secretary of State for Defra asked the Natural Capital Committee (NCC) to advise on what the 25 Year Environment Plan should aim to achieve, how it should seek to do so and what the necessary conditions for success would be. The NCC [published advice and recommendations](#) on what the Government should consider in developing the Plan on 28 September 2017. This followed its fourth [State of Natural Capital Report](#) in January 2017, which included the Committee's initial recommendations for the Plan. The NCC split its advice into five areas: goals, investments, milestones, governance and the special dimensions of agricultural subsidies in the context of Brexit.

In addition [the Office of National Statistics](#) is working towards the goal set in 2011 by the Government to incorporate natural capital into the UK Environmental Accounts by 2020.<sup>5</sup> This included the publication of a methodology [Principles of Natural Capital Accounting](#), in February 2017.

### Box 1: What is Natural Capital?

The Natural Capital Committee describes natural capital as the elements of nature that directly or indirectly produce value to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions. Natural capital considers the assets provided by nature with the capacity to generate goods and services and regards these as the source of all other types of capital: whether manufactured, financial, human or social.<sup>6</sup>

A natural capital approach aims to determine the value of natural capital, and then ensure this value is maintained, or compensated for elsewhere, when considering any action. It also advocates restoring natural capital in areas where it has fallen below a self-sustaining, or renewable, level. The aim is to ensure that an overall level of sustainable natural capital is maintained for future generations.

<sup>1</sup> Natural Capital Committee second report, [The state of natural capital: restoring our natural assets](#), March 2014

<sup>2</sup> [HC Deb 21 Oct 2014 c64WS](#)

<sup>3</sup> Defra, [Single Departmental Plan \(2015-2020\)](#) [withdrawn], February 2016, para 1.1 [accessed 15 January 2018]

<sup>4</sup> Defra, [Single Departmental Plan \(2015-2020\)](#) [withdrawn], February 2016, para 1.1 [accessed 15 January 2018]

<sup>5</sup> ONS, [Natural capital accounting 2020 roadmap, Interim review and forward look](#), March 2015

<sup>6</sup> Natural Capital Committee, [How to do it: a natural capital workbook](#), April 2017

## 2. Publication and wider issues

The Government published [A Green Future: Our 25-year plan to improve the environment](#) on 11 January 2018. Launching the Plan, the [Prime Minister identified](#) the protection and enhancement of the natural environment as a "central priority" for the Government as part of delivering its [manifesto pledge](#) to "be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it". The Environment Secretary (Michael Gove) said:

Our Environment Plan sets out how over the next 25 years we will radically reduce the waste that is choking oceans and rivers, cleanse our air of toxic pollutants and create new habitats for our most precious wildlife to thrive.<sup>7</sup>

The executive summary commits the Government to championing sustainable development and further elaborates the broad aims of the Plan:

...to deliver cleaner air and water in our cities and rural landscapes, protect threatened species and provide richer wildlife habitats. It calls for an approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fishing that puts the environment first. The Plan looks forward to delivering a Green Brexit – seizing this once-in-a-lifetime chance to reform our agriculture and fisheries management, how we restore nature, and how we care for our land, our rivers and our seas.<sup>8</sup>

The Plan was accompanied by three technical annexes:

- [Annex 1: Supplementary evidence report](#): which contains further context and analysis to underpin the 25 Year Environment Plan;
- [Annex 2: Government strategies to protect and improve the environment](#): a table listing strategies and plans for some of the government's work to protect and conserve the environment; and
- [Annex 3: The UK's international agreements to protect or improve the environment](#): a non-exhaustive list of the UK's international obligations in respect of the environment.

The Plan also sits alongside the Government's [Industrial Strategy](#) and the [Clean Growth Strategy](#).

The Government has also published an ['At a Glance' summary of its key targets](#).

### Devolution

Aspects of the Plan relate to England only, whereas others relate to the UK as a whole. This reflects the devolved nature of much of environmental policy and the [accompanying Written Statement](#) explains further:

While this 25 Year Environment Plan relates only to areas for which HMG is responsible, we will continue to work with the devolved administrations on our shared goal of protecting our natural heritage.<sup>9</sup>

### Overall reaction

Overall reaction to the Plan has been mixed. Many have welcomed its ambition and promises on some specific areas like plastics pollution and sustainable land management.

Dieter Helm (chair of the Natural Capital Committee) was reported to comment that the Plan is "substantive" adding that "nothing on this scale has been brought forward for at

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<sup>7</sup> HM Government press release, [Government's vision for a greener future launched](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>8</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018

<sup>9</sup> [HCWS398](#) [on 25 Year Environment Plan] 11 January 2018

least a decade".<sup>10</sup> The Ecosystems Knowledge Network said that the Plan marked "the end of an era in which we have simply slowed the decline of the natural environment."<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the Plan has been criticised for making no solid commitments to new legislation and lacking in urgency. The legal NGO Client Earth has stated that the Plan is "full of empty promises" and called for strong nature laws as the UK leaves the EU.<sup>12</sup>

### Political Party reaction

Following the publication of the plan the **Labour Party** Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Sue Hayman, wrote an opinion piece in the Guardian.<sup>13</sup> She said that the Plan looked "fairly weak on paper", and said that "we're not holding our breath when it comes to implementation." In particular, Ms Hayman highlighted the issue of plastic waste and said that the plan to reduce it should be more ambitious than the target date of 2042.<sup>14</sup>

The **SNP** responded to the Plan to say that the "UK government has now launched a new plan for the environment but on so many issues they're playing catch-up with our approach in Scotland."<sup>15</sup>

The **Liberals Democrat Party** commented on the proposals in the Plan that were trailed in the press before the Plan's official launch to say that the "Conservatives 25-year plan for the environment is nowhere near ambitious enough to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste. They must do more."<sup>16</sup>

The environmental website Edie.net reported comment from **Green Party MP** Caroline Lucas that "the plan would need to be backed up by an Environment Act with timetables and legislative weight."<sup>17</sup>

### Statutory footing

The Natural Capital Committee advice to Government recommended that the Plan should be placed on a statutory footing, in order to "enable greater traction across government and its agencies".<sup>18</sup> The Committee suggested the Agriculture Bill as an opportunity for this, acknowledging the pressures on the legislative pipeline.<sup>19</sup> The Plan does not provide for a new piece of law setting out its commitments on the environment, but does indicate specific areas where legislation may be forthcoming.<sup>20</sup>

A [Defra media blog](#), published on 12 January 2018 and in response to comments made about a lack of a new piece of environmental legislation, made clear that the Government "would legislate when needed". It said:

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<sup>10</sup> ENDS Report [subs needed], [25 year environment plan splits opinion](#), 11 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>11</sup> Ecosystems Knowledge Network, [25 Year Environment Plan](#), January 2018

<sup>12</sup> "[25 year environment plan splits opinion](#)", ENDS Report [subscription required], 11 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>13</sup> "Theresa May, prove your green vision isn't just more 'hug a husky' cynicism" Sue Hayman, [The Guardian](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>14</sup> "Theresa May, prove your green vision isn't just more 'hug a husky' cynicism" Sue Hayman, [The Guardian](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>15</sup> SNP, [Fact check: the Tory record on the environment](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>16</sup> Liberal Democrats, [Conservatives show a complete lack of ambition](#), 10 January 2018

<sup>17</sup> "25-year Environment Plan: UK unveils long-term strategy for 'greener future'" [Edie.net](#) 11 January 2018

<sup>18</sup> NCC, [Advice to Government on the 25 year environment plan](#), September 2017 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>19</sup> NCC, [Advice to Government on the 25 year environment plan](#), September 2017, section 4 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>20</sup> See for example page 99 of the [Plan](#) on legislation in relation to curbing emissions from combustion plants and generators

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We will always legislate when needed – our microbeads ban and 5p plastic bag charge have been huge successes – but importantly we also work with industry and invest in research and innovation to drive change. In addition, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, we will consult on plans to create a new statutory body to enforce environmental standards. By definition that will require legislation, although the precise vehicle is yet to be determined.<sup>21</sup>

Some commentators had criticised the Plan for making no solid commitments to a new piece of environmental legislation<sup>22</sup> and called for the Government to introduce a new Environment Act to underpin the ambitions of the Plan. For example, Green Alliance Executive Director commented:

Inevitably, questions remain. While the ambition and sense of direction of the 25 Year Environment Plan launched today are admirable, it is less clear how all its good intentions will be put into effect.

That makes it all the more essential that the government introduces a new Environment Act to underpin its ambitions. We hope to see a commitment to a new Act in the near future.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, the Wildlife Trusts Chief Executive commented:

It is clearly ridiculous to rely on political promises and the voluntary principle when it comes to securing a future for our most precious wild places. [...] There must be an ambitious Environment Act in the next Queen's Speech. Without real Government leadership our wildlife and wild places will continue to decline and with it our mental health as even more people become isolated from the benefits of day to day contact with nature.<sup>24</sup>

### New independent environmental body

On 12 November 2017, the [Government announced plans](#) to consult on a new, independent statutory body that would hold Government to account for upholding environmental standards in England; and to consult on the scope and content of a new policy statement to ensure environmental principles underpin policy making. A consultation is expected in 2018.

The Plan reiterates these plans and states that the Government is committed to consulting on how it should be held to account for environmental outcomes:

We will underpin all this action with a comprehensive set of environmental principles. To ensure strong governance, we will consult on plans to set up a world leading environmental watchdog, an independent, statutory body, to hold Government to account for upholding environmental standards.<sup>25</sup>

The Plan goes on to say that it will consult widely on the precise functions, remit and powers of this new body, including any significant role in scrutinising and advising on the 25 Year Environment Plan, subject to consultation.

Stakeholders have broadly welcomed a new environmental watchdog. However, the Wildlife and Countryside Link (a coalition of 31 bodies) warned it “should be given real teeth, to rival those of the EU’s Commission and the courts.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Gov.uk blog, Defra in the media, [25 year environment plan](#), 12 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>22</sup> See “[25 year environment plan splits opinion](#)” ENDS Report [subscription required], 11 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>23</sup> Edie.net, [25 year Environment Plan Green business reaction](#), 11 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>24</sup> Sussex Wildlife Trust news, [the 25 year environment plan](#), 11 January 2018 [accessed 15 January 2018]

<sup>25</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p7

<sup>26</sup> Wildlife and countryside link, [Environment charities welcome 25 year environment plan but environment act needs to secure its success](#), 11 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]



## Indicators and monitoring progress

A new monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed to enable effective measurement of progress towards the Plan's aims. This will include: annual progress checks, periodic comprehensive assessments, policy evaluations, international comparisons and ongoing publication of data and statistics.

Annex 1 to the Plan –the [Supplementary Evidence Report](#) sets out proposals for this and where further work is needed to develop indicators and metrics that give a 'robust insight into the effectiveness of actions aimed at improving the environment.'<sup>27</sup> The Government will review which current indicators and monitoring programmes remain relevant and can be reworked to take account of natural capital.

The Plan commits to particularly developing better measures in areas such as:

- soil health
- how ecological systems are functioning
- the human health benefits associated with a better environment and
- the overseas impact of domestic consumption

The Government proposes to measure both actions that it takes (performance measures) and long term progress towards its goals (outcome indicators). This is intended to enable it to check progress annually within a longer term context, looking across all the goals of the 25 Year Plan. A bespoke set of outcome indicators will be developed which will be used to check progress towards the long-term vision of the Plan.

The Evidence Report states:

Understanding how different interventions contribute to a number of outcomes will help us review their effectiveness and strengthen the synergies between them. Analysing trends and considering groups of indicators together will provide a more robust assessment of environmental change.<sup>28</sup>

In reaction to the Plan, some commentators have pointed to the processes for monitoring and reporting on progress as key. The Director of the environmental coalition Wildlife and Countryside Link called for a "decisive and well-resourced road-map for delivery":

[...] The 25 Year Plan makes for good reading, but words must be backed up with a decisive and well-resourced road map for delivery that includes clear milestones, evidence-based decision-making and transparent processes for monitoring and reporting on progress. If the UK is to lead the world in protecting the environment and get the environment back on track, it must now enshrine its goals and targets into law.<sup>29</sup>

A blog from Committee on Climate Change questioned how success will be measured:

The main gaps in the Plan relate to its success criteria. These might be regarded as points of detail, but they are crucial. Out of 44 success criteria in the Plan, only 11 are SMART – i.e. they are specific and contain both a quantified action and a date for completion. As currently set out, these success criteria only go a small way to explaining how the actions set out in the Plan will serve to meet the goals.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to improve the environment – Annex 1: Supplementary Evidence Report](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>28</sup> HM Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment: Annex 1: Supplementary evidence report, January 2018, p138

<sup>29</sup> Wildlife and Countryside Link, [Environment charities welcome 25 Year Environment Plan, but an Environment Act needs to secure its success](#), 11 January 2018 [accessed 16 January 2018]

<sup>30</sup> Committee on Climate Change, [25-Year Environment Plan – a climate change perspective](#), 12 January 2018 [accessed 15 January 2018]

## 3. Overarching themes within the Plan

The Plan contains a number of themes which cut across several policy areas. The introduction of a natural capital approach runs throughout the Plan, as does the context of the environment following Brexit, and the cross-cutting nature of climate change policies.

### 3.1 Natural capital

The Plan highlights that the scale of human impact on the planet has never been greater. It describes the impact on wildlife and habitats as “stark” and how in the past “our failure to understand the full value of the benefits offered by the environment and cultural heritage has seen us make poor choices.” The Government’s aim is to address this by using a natural capital approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, by recognising tangible and non-tangible economic benefits. The Plan states:

When we give the environment its due regard as a natural asset – indeed a key contributor – to the overall economy, we will be more likely to give it the value it deserves to protect and enhance it.<sup>31</sup>

As part of the Plan the Government pledges to:

...set gold standards in protecting and growing natural capital – leading the world in using this approach as a tool in decision-making. We will take into account the often hidden additional benefits in every aspect of the environment for national wellbeing, health and economic prosperity, with scientific and economic evidence to the fore.<sup>32</sup>

The Plan makes reference to the introduction of a natural capital approach in many areas, highlighting the economic value of the environment throughout. For forestry, for example, it refers to the timber value of forests. This has been estimated as representing only 10% of the financial value contained in them, as they also include significant value in other forms, such as for human recreation and carbon sequestration.<sup>33</sup> Fisheries is also highlighted as an area where a natural capital approach, that maintains fish stocks at sustainable levels, has long term environmental and economic benefits. The policy areas in section 4 of this paper below highlight further where a natural capital approach has been taken.

The Plan also announced that Government would establish a new green business council to “to advise government on setting the right conditions to stimulate environmental entrepreneurship.”<sup>34</sup> As part of a natural capital approach, a natural environment impact fund is being mooted alongside it which will “blend capital from a range of sources (e.g. public, private philanthropic) to provide technical assistance funding and repayable finance to projects with the potential to improve the natural environment and generate revenue.”<sup>35</sup>

Some commentators have expressed caution about the feasibility of a natural capital approach to the environment. For example, environmental campaigner Mark Avery commented in his [blog](#) that:

The whole business of ecosystem services is a means of trying to correct market failures for the environment and it is well worth a try, but we are miles away from

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<sup>31</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p19

<sup>32</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p9

<sup>33</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p19

<sup>34</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p149

<sup>35</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p149

having a working model; and until we do then we should rely strongly on old-fashioned stuff like regulation".<sup>36</sup>

On a more practical level, an article from the specialist publication, ENDS Report questioned how the proposed natural environment impact fund would work together with the establishment of a Green Finance Taskforce for low-carbon investments, which the Government has [committed to](#) in September 2017.<sup>37</sup>

## 3.2 Brexit

The Plan was first envisaged before the referendum on EU withdrawal. Following the decision to leave the EU, the Plan took on greater significance for environmental stakeholders who expected it to give an indication of environmental policy after EU withdrawal. For example, [commentators such as Client Earth](#), called for it to "set out the direction of the government's environmental policy once the UK is no longer a part of the EU."

The Plan makes a number of references to Brexit, including that:

The Plan looks forward to delivering a Green Brexit – seizing this once-in-a lifetime chance to reform our agriculture and fisheries management, how we restore nature, and how we care for our land, our rivers and our seas.<sup>38</sup>

The Government explains that some of the targets set out in the Plan derive from UK membership of the EU while others go further than EU rules require.<sup>39</sup> Some are already legally-binding while others are not. More detail is provided in the policy sections of this paper in section 4. With respect to the Government's approach after Brexit, the Plan states:

After leaving the EU, we will build on the many benefits provided by EU environmental regulation, and make sure that our policy framework delivers an environment of which we can feel even more proud, in a cost-effective way to taxpayers.<sup>40</sup>

The Plan confirms the Government will consult on any changes to environmental regulation it may identify, and reiterates the Government commitment to implementing international agreements.<sup>41</sup>

The Plan clarifies that it is not pre-empting discussions with the devolved nations regarding the shape of common frameworks after Brexit, but confirms the Government will continue to work with the devolved Administrations on these aspects. It explains:

Outside of the EU, we will need to ensure that we do not create any new barriers to living and doing business within our own union. For these reasons, there will be some areas where we will continue to need common frameworks.<sup>42</sup>

Professional services firm WSP's UK Director of Sustainability applauded the Plan for providing "assurance that a departure from the European Union will raise the UK's environmental ambitions"<sup>43</sup>, whereas ClientEarth, who have previously used EU

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Avery, [blog](#), 15 January 2018

<sup>37</sup> "Government to create green business council as part of 25-year plan" [ENDS Report](#), 11 January 2018 [subscription required]

<sup>38</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p9

<sup>39</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p24

<sup>40</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018,

<sup>41</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p129

<sup>42</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018

<sup>43</sup> "[25 year environment plan splits opinion](#)", ENDS Report [subscription required], 11 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018] and Society for the Environment, [A View on the 25 Year Environment Plan from Martin Baxter and David Symons](#), 12 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]

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environmental legislation to hold the Government to account, criticised the lack of detail and legally binding targets:

The 25 year plan makes the right noises about how our environment will be protected in the coming years. But it makes no solid commitments to new law and it lacks any detail about how we will enforce environment laws once we leave the EU.

The government has repeatedly said the UK will be more ambitious and lead on the environment once we leave the EU. They need to prove that they really mean it and make policies and targets legally binding, or risk the future of the UK's environment. We need proper protection for our air, rivers, nature and wildlife, not more empty promises.<sup>44</sup>

Further information on current environmental policy, legislation and the potential impacts of Brexit is available in the [Library Briefing Paper on Brexit and the environment](#).

### 3.3 Climate change

In order to manage pressures on the environment, the Plan sets out a Goal to mitigate and adapt to climate change. It commits to doing “what is necessary to adapt to the effects of a changing climate” and points to the [Clean Growth Strategy](#) as setting out how it will mitigate climate change and deliver clean growth. Further discussion on the clean growth strategy is provided in the House of Commons Library Paper on the [UK Fifth Carbon Budget](#).

Climate change is mentioned throughout the document acknowledging its cross-cutting nature. It is weaved through a number of ambitions and aims, including in relation to flooding, woodland planting, soil health and clean air. The Plan also points to existing UK commitments under the Climate Change Act 2008 and “making sure that all policies, programmes and investment decisions take into account the possible extent of climate change this century”.<sup>45</sup> The Government is expected to publish the second National Adaptation Programme later in 2018, which will set out further actions.

The Committee on Climate Change welcomed the publication of the Plan and [tweeted](#) that:

Achieving all of the #25yearplan's key objectives will be crucial if the UK is to prepare sufficiently for the impacts of climate change. This includes sustainable land use, recovering and protecting nature, safeguarding people's health and well-being and protecting soils.<sup>46</sup>

A later blog provides further discussion and states that “to meet the challenges of climate change, all of the goals in the Plan will need to be met”.<sup>47</sup> The Committee on Climate Change [published its analysis](#) of the Clean Growth Strategy on 17 January 2018.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Client Earth, [25 year plan for the environment full of empty promises](#), 11 January 2018 [accessed 15 January 2018]

<sup>45</sup> Gov.uk, [25 Year Environment Plan](#), 11 January 2018, p.29

<sup>46</sup> Committee on Climate Change [tweet](#), 11 January 2018 [viewed 15 January 2018]

<sup>47</sup> Committee on Climate Change, [25-Year Environment Plan – a climate change perspective](#), 12 January 2018 [accessed 15 January 2018]

<sup>48</sup> Committee on Climate Change, [An independent assessment of the UK's Clean Growth Strategy: From ambition to action](#), 17 January 2018

## 4. Key policy areas in the Plan

The Plan sets out 10 goals (see Box 2) and a combination of new and existing strategies, targets, mechanisms and commitments in order to meet its goals.

[Annex 2 to the Plan](#) sets out existing Government strategies to improve the environment and those that are planned in coming years.

### Box 2: Summary of 25-year goals

The Plan sets out the following 25-year goals which the Government aims to achieve:

1. Clean air
2. Clean and plentiful water
3. Thriving plants and wildlife
4. A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as drought and flooding
5. Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
6. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

The Government also commits to managing pressures on the environment by:

7. Mitigating and adapting to climate change
8. Minimising waste
9. Managing exposure to chemicals
10. Enhancing biosecurity

The Plan further expands on policies to support these goals under six broad chapter headings. The sections in this paper below provide further information about some key individual policy areas and announcements from these chapters, selected to be of interest to MPs. It sets these areas in the context of stakeholder reaction to them and any commitments from Government on these areas previously.

### Next steps

The Government proposes to update the Plan at least every 5 years, and to report annually on progress to Parliament. A set of indicators will be developed to monitor progress, as set out above in section 2 of this paper.

### 4.1 Environmental net gain in planning

In the Plan, the Government announced that, against a background of significant housebuilding, it would embed the principle of “environmental net gain” in the planning system:

We want to put the environment at the heart of planning and development to create better places for people to live and work.<sup>49</sup>

The Plan stated that the Government wants to establish “strategic, flexible and locally tailored approaches that recognise the relationship between the quality of the environment and development.”<sup>50</sup> The existing approach within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) of seeking biodiversity gains where possible would be strengthened and broadened to include wider natural capital benefits, such as flood protection, recreation and improved water and air quality. Various other changes to the NPPF were mooted.

<sup>49</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018 p32

<sup>50</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018 p33

### Box 3: Context and background

The NPPF already identifies how local plans should preserve and enhance the natural environment, for example by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils.<sup>51</sup>

The planning regime is set out in more detail in the Government's [Planning Practice Guidance](#) (PPG), which sets out (amongst other things) the comparatively few types of planning application for which, under the terms of the [Town and Country Planning \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) Regulations 2017](#) an environmental impact assessment (EIA) will be required.<sup>52</sup>

### Stakeholder comment

The head of policy, practice and research at the Royal Town Planning Institute gave a cautious welcome, arguing that environmental improvements should not be used to justify otherwise unacceptable development:

The RTPI welcomes the government's intention to ensure housing developments improve the environment. However, improvements to the environment must not be used as an excuse to permit housing that would otherwise be unacceptable, such as poor quality construction or developments without the necessary infrastructure.

Improvements to the environment must be very close to where the environmental damage has occurred - it is entirely unsatisfactory to improve the environment many miles away. Where a housing development is near the edge of a local authority, councils will need to work together to ensure environmental improvements are made in the most appropriate area, even if that's in the neighbouring authority."<sup>53</sup>

The [CPRE, too, has questioned](#) how the principle will work in practice:

But we are concerned about what will be the result of embedding 'environmental net gain' as a principle for development. While we support the idea on net environmental gain, whether it is positive or not will really depend upon how it will work in practice. It assumes that all environmental assets are quantifiable and replaceable, which is not the case.<sup>54</sup>

## 4.2 Reducing waste

The Plan sets out the Government's intention to achieve "zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042." The term "avoidable" is defined as what is technically, environmentally and economically practicable.<sup>55</sup> In December 2017 Michael Gove outlined a four point Plan for tackling plastic waste.<sup>56</sup> The Plan builds on this and provides more information about these areas, some of the key commitments in relation to it include:

- Reform and extension of the producer responsibility systems, in order to create a better market for recycled plastic;
- Launching a call for evidence in 2018 seeking views on how the tax system or charges could reduce the amount of single use plastics waste;
- Extending uptake of the 5p plastic bag charge to small retailers, initially through voluntary agreement;

<sup>51</sup> HM Government, [National Planning Policy Framework](#), 2012: p2 and p25

<sup>52</sup> HM Government, [Planning Practice Guidance](#), 6 March 2014 updated 28 July 2017 [and](#) SI 2017/57

<sup>53</sup> Forthcoming publication

<sup>54</sup> Belinda Gordon, CPRE, [Does the new 25-year Environment Plan offer a vision for change?](#), Politics Home, 12 January 2018

<sup>55</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, page 29

<sup>56</sup> "UK plan to tackle plastic waste threat" [BBC News](#), 18 December 2017

- Working with retailers and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to explore introducing plastic-free supermarket aisles in which all the food is loose;
- Consideration of advice from the Voluntary & Economic Incentives Working group (set up under the Litter Strategy), which is currently looking at measures to reduce littering and promote recycling of drinks containers;
- More to help developing nations tackle pollution and reduce plastic waste.

The commitment to plastics reduction sits alongside the Government's ambition, which was framed in the October 2017 [Clean Growth Strategy](#), for "zero avoidable waste by 2050".<sup>57</sup> The Plan also reiterated the Government's intention to publish a new Resources and Waste strategy in 2018.<sup>58</sup> It also reaffirms existing policies to reducing litter and littering, as set out in the [Litter Strategy for England](#), April 2017, as well as an ambition improve the management of residual waste and to crack-down on fly-tippers and waste criminals. This has now been followed by a consultation published on 15 January 2018 on [Reducing crime at sites handling waste, and introducing fixed penalties for waste duty of care](#).

## Stakeholder comment

The CIWM (the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management), called the Plan helpful, but asked for "these long terms ambitions on environmental protection, sustainable waste management, resource efficiency and productivity enshrined in legislation to ensure that the government can be held to account for their delivery."<sup>59</sup>

WWF said that it wanted to see a ban on single-use plastic by 2025, stating "we need to move towards an end to single-use plastics now, or our oceans will choke on litter."<sup>60</sup> Campaign group Greenpeace said that the "glaring gap" in the Plan was support for a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles.<sup>61</sup>

The Environmental Services Association said the Plan provided "much-needed encouragement" to the industry and welcomed the reform of the producer responsibility system. It added however that many of the measures were "too focussed on consumers" and that the Government should do more to promote the UK market for recycled materials.<sup>62</sup>

The British Plastics Federation also welcomed the consultation proposed on packaging recovery and recycling, but expressed concern that there was no acknowledgement of the benefits of the plastics industry. The Federation also stated that it would like to see a tougher stance on littering in order to stop plastics entering the sea, explaining that "it is highly doubtful that simply providing alternative materials will actually reduce littering in the UK, as this is an issue of personal behaviour."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> HM Government, [The Clean Growth Strategy](#), October 2017, page 16

<sup>58</sup> HM Government, [The Clean Growth Strategy](#), October 2017, page 16

<sup>59</sup> CIWM, [25-year plan is another helpful step in the dance, but ambitions must be turned into actions, says CIWM](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>60</sup> WWF, [Our reaction to the 25 Year Environment Plan](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>61</sup> "Conservatives' 25-year green plan: main points at a glance" [The Guardian](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>62</sup> Environmental Services Association, [ESA welcomes 25 year plan but action still needed to increase demand for recycled material](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>63</sup> British Plastics Federation, [BPF Statement in Response to Theresa May's Announcement on Plastic Waste](#), 11 January 2018

### 4.3 Air quality

The Plan reaffirms commitments made by the Government previously in relation to air quality. This includes a commitment to publish a clean air strategy for consultation in 2018.<sup>64</sup> The consultation will set out how the UK will work towards legally-binding ceilings on emissions from predominantly non-transport related sources and will include approaches to improve how farmers use fertilisers and reduce ammonia emissions to the air. The Government will review the strategy “regularly” and report publicly on progress.<sup>65</sup> The Plan emphasised the aim to meet legal commitments to reduce levels of air pollutants,<sup>66</sup> with aim of halving the effects of air pollution on health by 2030.<sup>67</sup>

The Plan also states that the Government will legislate to set limits on the levels of air pollutants that medium combustion plants and generators can emit. The draft [Environmental Permitting \(England and Wales\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2018](#) would bring these changes into force. In Scotland such changes were made by The [Pollution Prevention and Control \(Designation of Medium Combustion Plant Directive\) \(Scotland\) Order 2017](#), which is already in force. Northern Ireland has consulted on proposals to bring changes into force.<sup>68</sup>

The Plan also highlighted work that the Government has been doing in conjunction with local authorities to address pollution from coal and wet wood. It also restated the Government’s commitment to end the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040.<sup>69</sup>

While many commentators acknowledged the policies on air quality, few offered further comment on what was largely existing policy. WWF said that it was good to see a target to halve the effects of air pollution by 2030, but said that the ban on petrol and diesel cars “must happen sooner.”<sup>70</sup> The Mayor of London said that measures to reduce toxic air in London need to happen sooner than the 25-year target.<sup>71</sup> For further information about air quality issues see Library briefing paper, [Air Pollution: Meeting Nitrogen Dioxide Targets](#).

### 4.4 Water

The Plan sets out a number of existing targets and actions to meet its goal of clean and plentiful water. The overall aim is to improve at least three quarters of waters “to be close to their natural state as soon as is practicable”.<sup>72</sup> This 75% target reflects the current [River Basin Management Plans](#) analysis of where environmental benefits of improvement outweigh costs.

The Government aims to achieve this through its existing plans to reform the abstraction system, meeting or exceeding existing legal requirements for water quality targets, in particular for bathing waters and waters that are specially protected. The Plan also

<sup>64</sup> As set out in the HM Government, [UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations: detailed plan](#), July 2017, para 185

<sup>65</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, page 99

<sup>66</sup> The five pollutants are ammonia, nitrogen oxides, non-methane volatile organic compounds, fine particulate matter and sulphur dioxide

<sup>67</sup> HM Government, [At a glance: summary of targets in our 25 year environment plan](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>68</sup> Northern Ireland [Consultation on the transposition of the Medium Combustion Plant Directive \(1-50 megawatts\) including the regulation of thermal electricity generators](#), 21 June 2017

<sup>69</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, page 98

<sup>70</sup> WWF, [Our reaction to the 25 Year Environment Plan](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>71</sup> “Government to target farms and fuels to improve air quality” [Ends Report](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>72</sup> Gov.uk, [25 Year Environment Plan](#), 11 January 2018



explicitly supports Ofwat's proposals that the water industry aims to reduce water leakage by at least an average of 15% by 2025.<sup>73</sup>

A blog from industry body Water UK saw the Plan as "big news" for the water industry and commented on some of the more specific actions:

The target on leakage by 2025, for example, provides genuine grit for water companies. The Plan's aim to set a target for efficient use of water is well placed: but we already know that the Government is looking for something ambitious here. Much hard work lies ahead to make sure the target is well-specified, and that the full range of policy tools is available to help achieve it.<sup>74</sup>

## Water abstraction

The Government's [Water White Paper \*Water for Life\*](#) in 2011 set out the evidence and need for a reform of the abstraction regime. The aim was to put in place a new system by the mid to late 2020s. Following consultations, the Government published a [plan to reform abstraction management](#) on 15 December 2017.<sup>75</sup> These plans and commitments are reiterated in the Plan. The Plan also confirms a report on progress on abstraction reform will be made to Parliament by May 2019<sup>76</sup>, which reflects the statutory commitment to report in the Water Act 2014.<sup>77</sup>

## Water quality

The EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) requires the UK to achieve 'good' status of all water bodies (including rivers, streams, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater) by 2015 (or 2027 at the latest if certain waivers are relied on). Bathing waters require special protection in accordance with the EU Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC). The key source of information on measures being taken to improve water quality is set out in [River Basin Management Plans](#).

The Plan confirms continuing work to improve water quality, including the work of the Environment Agency, water companies and other stakeholders. Particular actions and aims highlighted include:

- New simplified rules for all land managers designed to reduce water pollution from agriculture were published in November 2017 and will come into force on 2 April 2018.<sup>78</sup>
- The Government's [Strategic Policy Statement to Ofwat](#) (September 2017), in particular expectations that management of wastewater is improved, and leakage targets are met.
- Aim to minimise risks from chemical contaminants in English waters, (see section 4.7 below).

Further information on water quality (including bathing waters) is set out in the [Library Briefing Paper on the Water Framework Directive](#).

A discussion on bathing waters is available in the [Library blog: What does Brexit mean for the UK's beaches?](#)

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<sup>73</sup> See: Utility Week, [Ofwat takes tougher line on leakage](#), 11 July 2017 [accessed 15 January 2018]

<sup>74</sup> Water UK blog, [The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan](#), 12 January 2018 [accessed 15 January 2018]

<sup>75</sup> Gov.uk, [Water abstraction plan 2017](#), 15 December 2017 [accessed 12 January 2017]

<sup>76</sup> Gov.uk press release, [Abstraction reform: further moves made towards green Brexit](#), 15 December 2017 [accessed 12 January 2017]

<sup>77</sup> Section 57, Water Act 2014

<sup>78</sup> See: Gov.uk, [Farming rules for water – overview](#), 30 November 2017 [accessed 15 January 2018]

## 4.5 Natural hazards: flooding and drought

The Plan commits to reducing the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy from natural hazards including flooding, drought and coastal erosion. Relevant actions and targets to achieve this aim are intertwined throughout the Plan, including in relation to decisions on land use and new development, restoring peatlands, and creating woodland.

On drought, the Plan commits broadly to “ensuring interruptions to water supplies are minimised during prolonged dry weather and drought” and includes information on the existing work of and expectations on the water industry to incentivise greater water efficiency and less personal use. The CEO of Water UK said the water industry looked forward to working with Government on this:

Given pressures from climate change and a rising population, the plan justly recognises the need to protect our water supplies. We look forward to working with Government on getting to the right long-term pathway for maintaining our rivers, wetlands and groundwater at the levels we need, which will include action on personal consumption as well as making sure houses and pipes are water-efficient.<sup>79</sup>

Specifically in relation to flooding and coastal erosion, the Plan references existing Government investment and actions. Further information on these is available in the [Library Briefing Paper on flood risk management and spending](#). The Plan also commits to “make greater use” of natural flood management; updating the national flood and coastal risk management strategy in 2019; and reviewing current partnership arrangements ahead of a review of funding needs beyond the current six-year capital programme ending in 2021.

In relation to building on floodplains, the Government provides assurance that it will look at strengthening relevant protections in the National Planning Policy Framework and amending Planning Practice Guidance to clarify construction and maintenance arrangements for sustainable drainage. Background on these aspects is set out in the [Library Briefing Paper on Planning and flood risk](#).

## 4.6 Marine and fisheries

The Plan sets out details of the Government’s aims for a sustainable fisheries policy after Brexit, based on a natural capital approach, which allows for sustainable fisheries, whilst protecting and enhancing the marine environment. The Government approach will use [maximum sustainable yields](#) (MSY) for fish stocks, set based on the scientific assessment of stock levels, as already exists within the EU [Commons Fisheries Policy](#). This will be part of broader ecosystem based approach that protects the wider marine environment.<sup>80</sup> In the Plan the Government also makes a commitment to publish an annual statement on the state of fish stocks of interest to the UK, once it leaves the EU.

More generally the Government will complete an assessment of the marine environment in 2018, which will inform an updated UK Marine Strategy. The [existing UK Marine Strategy](#) was published in three parts between 2012 and 2015, under the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#) (2008/56/EC), which requires Member States to set out measures to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) in EU marine waters by 2020. The Directive also requires each stage of the strategy to be reviewed every 6 years and

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<sup>79</sup> Water UK, [Water UK responds to Government’s environment plan](#), 11 January 2018 [accessed 12 January 2018]

<sup>80</sup> The JNCC [describes](#) an ecosystem-based approach for fisheries as one that takes account of all the interactions the target fish stock has with predators, competitors and prey species; the effects of weather and climate; the interactions between fish and habitat; the effects of fishing on species and habitat.

updated as necessary, starting in 2018. On marine planning the Government also restates the commitment to complete all UK marine plans by 2021, as per the requirement of the [EU Maritime Spatial Planning Directive](#) (2014/89/EU).

The Government will consult in 2018 on the third tranche of Marine Conservation Zones for England, and commits to designating them by mid-2019. The first tranche was designated in 2013, the second in 2016 and a third tranche was originally expected to be announced in 2016. Further details can be found in the Commons Briefing Paper [Marine Conservation Zones in England](#).<sup>81</sup>

Internationally the Government highlights a number of areas, including the ongoing implementation of the [Blue Belt programme](#), which aims to provide long term protection four million square kilometres of marine environment within UK Overseas Territories waters and its support for the development of the new [treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction](#).

## Stakeholder comment

Dr Chris Tuckett, the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Head of Programmes, [welcomed](#) the plan and the focus from Government on the environment but highlighted the lack of legal basis, and a lack of firm commitments:

The plan itself is lengthy and gives a lot of high level promises but it is short on firm commitments and solid targets for action. For our seas, there is a commitment to sustainable fish stocks and to consult on further marine conservation zones. But there is nothing about implementing measures to protect marine sites that are already designated.<sup>82</sup>

She also welcomed a focus on natural capital:

There are some good ideas though. The focus on natural capital – taking better account of the resources that we get from the environment – is positive, but this is far from being embedded.<sup>83</sup>

The MCS also welcomed the commitment to a science based management of the marine environment, but referred to a lack of any clear action points in the plan and some areas of concern, such as dredging.<sup>84</sup>

## 4.7 Managing exposure to chemicals

The Plan contains a number of commitments relating to the safe use and management of chemicals. The major new commitment is that the Government will publish an overarching chemicals strategy to set out the UK's approach as it leaves the EU. Other commitments relate to efforts to ensure that the levels of harmful chemicals entering the environment (including through agriculture) are significantly reduced.

### New chemicals strategy

Currently, the UK's chemicals regulation law is largely determined by the EU registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals Regulation (No 1907/2006), known as REACH. Many industry stakeholders have called for the UK Government to remain aligned with REACH following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. More background information is provided as a case study in the Library briefing paper, [Brexit and the Environment](#) (Section 5). There are also specific EU rules for particular groups of chemicals,

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<sup>81</sup> HC Library, [Marine Conservation Zones in England](#), 2015

<sup>82</sup> Marine Conservation Society, [What the 25 year plan says about our seas](#), 15 January 2018

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid*

for example pesticides (Biocidal Products Regulation), or for hazardous chemicals, such as the Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP) Regulation. More background information is available in the Library briefing paper, [Chemicals Regulation](#) (August 2016).

A fundamental aspect of the EU REACH framework is information sharing of risk and hazards about chemicals across the EU. In the 25-year Plan the Government stated that the new strategy will explore methods of identifying emerging chemicals issues, consider how to address tracking of chemicals with respect to recycling and reuse, as well as begin efforts to work internationally to standardise methods to assess chemical safety.

A date has not been set for the publication of the Chemicals Strategy however no document is expected until after the completion of the ongoing EU withdrawal negotiations.<sup>85</sup>

## Managing exposure to chemicals

The 25-year Plan also contains various commitments to manage exposure to chemicals to the environment which arise due to existing commitments under various international agreements such as the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants.

### Stakeholder comment

There has been limited stakeholder comment to date. Campaign group CHEM Trust was reported to state that the proposals regarding chemicals were “vague and unambitious”.<sup>86</sup> Campaign group Buglife, described the Government’s statement to work internationally to strengthen standardisation methods to assess chemical safety as “good news” but suggested that a significant increase in funding for environmental monitoring and science would be required to address efforts in the Plan to develop an early warning system on chemicals and reduce pollution of harmful chemicals to the environment.<sup>87</sup>

## 4.8 Wildlife and biodiversity

The Government sets out its aim of restoring and creating habitats to provide the greatest opportunity for wildlife to flourish, and “promote the economic and social benefits that healthy habitats offer”. The Government will prioritise species that are threatened globally or in the UK, or internationally significant. It also commits to improve the status of declining species groups, such as butterflies and insects.

In order to achieve the above the Government will update the 2011 Biodiversity 2020 strategy for England, by publishing a strategy for nature. The Plan also announced a Nature Recovery Network creating 500,000 hectares of wildlife habitat. This will link existing protected sites and landscapes, with urban green and blue infrastructure (i.e. parks and rivers valleys and canals), based on the principles set out in the 2010 Lawton Report, [Making Space for Nature](#).<sup>88</sup> Delivery options for the Network will be considered over the next two years.

The Plan also sets out support for the reintroduction of previously extinct species and plans to develop a code and guidance for assessing the benefits of any future introductions. The code will “make sure proposals provide clear economic or social benefit

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<sup>85</sup> [UK promises post-Brexit chemicals strategy that reflects future relations with EU](#), Chemical Watch, 11 January 2018.

<sup>86</sup> [“25-year plan’s chemicals strategy pledge ‘vague and unambitious’](#) ENDS report [subscription required], 11 January 2018 [accessed 11 January 2018].

<sup>87</sup> “25 Year Environment Plan promises meadows for bees” [Buglife](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>88</sup> Sir Johan Lawton, [Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network](#), 2010

and are alive to any risk to public, the environment or to business". This reintroduction of species is a process that is already ongoing, most recently Defra [approved](#) the release of beavers in the Forest of Dean in December 2017.<sup>89</sup>

The Law Commission recommended the creation of statutory [conservation covenants](#) in 2014. These would allow landowners to place obligations on all subsequent owners for the conservation of natural or heritage features.<sup>90</sup> In the Plan the Government commits to exploring the role that covenants could play. It will assess the level of demand and the potential for the use of covenants, and consult stakeholders when reviewing and taking the Law Commission proposals forward.

On biosecurity, in addition to ongoing work, the Government will "develop plans to reduce the risk from all high priority pathways for invasive non-native species introduction" and work to increase awareness of the risks posed by invasive-non-native species.

Internationally the Government highlights the London 2018 Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference, which Defra [officially launched](#) last year, a continuation of financial support to developing countries to help manage biodiversity and tackle the illegal wildlife trade, and its intention to investigate the feasibility of an anti-poaching task force.

## Stakeholder comment

The Wildlife Trusts [welcomed](#) the recognition of the importance of the environment stating that "the speech and the plan contain some very encouraging words and ambitions for land and sea", stating:

Protecting, restoring and reconnecting the places that wildlife needs to survive and thrive is crucial. The plan will ensure broader landscapes are transformed by connecting habitats into larger corridors for wildlife, as recommended by Sir John Lawton in his official review. We welcome this support for a Nature Recovery Network, landscape-scale conservation and for nature-friendly farming. We've been calling for this for years - but we must ensure that we don't overlook the areas where most people live. Access to nature and inspiring wildlife experiences should be a normal feature of everyday life, especially in towns and cities.<sup>91</sup>

The Trusts, however, were concerned about the lack of legal underpinning for many of the measures announced.<sup>92</sup> See the section on statutory footing in section 2 of this paper for further discussion on this issue.

## 4.9 Agriculture and land management

### A new approach to land management

UK Government proposals for a new environmental land management system will be set out in a Command Paper later this spring – a pre-cursor to the Agriculture Bill which will set out post-Brexit support arrangements for farmers.

As the UK transitions to a new farm support system post-Brexit, and the [Industrial Strategy's](#) 'farm to fork' food policy, the Government wants to:

- put greater emphasis on paying farmers public money in return for public goods - mainly environmental enhancement (but also public access and rural resilience).

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<sup>89</sup> Defra, [Environment Secretary backs release of Beavers in Forest of Dean](#), 8 December 2017

<sup>90</sup> Law Commission, [Conservation Covenants](#), June 2014

<sup>91</sup> The Wildlife Trusts, [The Wildlife Trusts' initial response to the 25 Year Environment Plan](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

- incentivise and reward land managers to restore and improve natural capital and rural heritage with a more effective application of the 'polluter pays' principle (where those who cause pollution pay for it)
- explore new approaches such as offering private payments for eco-system services, reverse auctions and conservation covenants (see also section 4.8. ).
- keep the bureaucracy of future land management schemes to a minimum.
- explore where capital grants could support the adoption of long-term sustainable land management practices.

This new approach will be subject to consultation with stakeholders and the devolved Administrations which each implement their own farm support systems.

Environment Secretary, Michael Gove set out more detail on the UK Government's plans for future agricultural support to 2022 and beyond in his [speech](#) to the Oxford Farming Conference in January 2018.

He commented that:

'..Having a subsidy system which incentivises farmers to place every acre they can into food production means that public money isn't always being spent on renewing natural capital assets like forestry and wetlands.'<sup>93</sup>

The Natural Capital Committee noted that if good value for money is demonstrated in the switch in approach to funding public goods, then "further investment is justified."<sup>94</sup>

### **Public money for public goods**

The Plan refers to a range of public goods that farmers can be paid to deliver. In terms of enhancing the environment these include 'goods' such as:<sup>95</sup>

- returning cultivated land to wildflower meadows
- planting woodland
- restoring habitats for endangered species
- recovering soil fertility
- increasing biodiversity

Michael Gove also indicated earlier in 2018 that the delivery of wider public goods such as: scientific innovation, technology transfer, skills, infrastructure (e.g. universal super-fast broadband), public access and rural resilience (smaller farms and rural businesses supporting rural communities and culture) could be rewarded.<sup>96</sup>

This is not a new approach and one which already features in the Common Agricultural Policy. However, current farm support is still largely based on the area of land and successive UK Governments have highlighted in various CAP reforms that farm support, without requiring public goods in return, is not the best use of tax-payers money.<sup>97</sup>

Farmers can currently receive rural development payments for membership of agri-environment schemes (e.g. [Countryside Stewardship](#) in England) and their contribution to wider rural development objectives. In addition, 30% of direct payment support (under the [Basic Payment Scheme](#) - BPS) is linked to specific 'greening measures' such as

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<sup>93</sup> GOV.UK, [Farming for the Next Generation](#), 5 January 2017

<sup>94</sup> Natural Capital Committee, [Advice to Government on the 25 Year Environment Plan](#), September 2017

<sup>95</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p.7

<sup>96</sup> GOV.UK, [Farming for the Next Generation](#), 5 January 2017

<sup>97</sup> See GOV.UK, [CAP greening criteria announced](#), 10 June 2014 and House of Commons Library briefing, [Brexit impact across policy areas](#), 26 August 2016

maintaining permanent grassland. However, farmed and environmental measures linked to the direct payments, (rather than specific agri-environment schemes) have had limited impact.<sup>98</sup> Farmers also have to comply with a range of environment and farm management practices to receive their payments.

Post-Brexit, the Government wants to replace the BPS with the kind of public goods based system which the Plan describes.

The Government has already started making changes to its approach with a simplified Countryside Stewardship scheme for 2018, as per the commitment in the Plan, and all landowners making a valid application are guaranteed funding.<sup>99</sup>

Box 4 below indicates the levels of farm support that the UK Government has indicated will be available during the transition to a new approach to land management.

#### **Box 4: Current levels of funding for farm support**

- The UK Government has pledged to maintain the “same cash funds” of support for farmers (as they receive under the CAP) until the end of the Parliament, expected to be 2022. Farmers will then have some form of guaranteed payments for a transition period expected to last until around 2024.<sup>1</sup>
- The UK allocation over the 2014-2020 period of the current CAP is €25.1 billion (c.£22.3bn) in direct payments (Pillar 1) and €2.6 billion (£2.3bn) in rural development funds for rural development and the environment (Pillar 2).<sup>2</sup>
- £3.5bn is allocated to Rural Development Programme for England (‘Pillar 2’) for that period with over £3.1bn of that allocated to environmental schemes.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2016, English farmers received £1.6bn through the Basic Payment Scheme for England (direct payments – known as ‘Pillar 1’).

1. [HC Deb 2 November 2017 c.949](#) and GOV.UK, [Farming for the Next Generation](#), 5 January 2017

2. GOV.UK Press Release, [CAP allocations announced](#), 8 November 2013

3. [HL 2568, 13 November 2017](#)

4. Defra, [The New Common Agricultural Policy Schemes in England: February 2015 update](#) February 2015

## **Pesticides**

The Plan sets out a variety of continuing action on the environmental impacts of farming, including water pollution from fertilisers.

Of particular interest are plans relating to pesticides as the UK currently works within the EU regulatory system. These include:

- encouraging the minimum use of pesticides with a stronger emphasis on the holistic Integrated Pest Management approach (IPM) e.g. using effective crop rotation and natural predators. This will include reviewing the UK National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides in 2018.
- a commitment to maintaining EU restrictions post-Brexit on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides because of the “growing weight of scientific evidence” that they are harmful to bees and other pollinators. The Plan states that any continuing use should be limited and permitted only where the environmental risks are shown to be very low.

<sup>98</sup> Alliance Environnement, [Evaluation of the CAP greening measures](#), November 2017

<sup>99</sup> GOV.UK, [New Countryside Stewardship offers open for applications](#), 15 January 2018

## Improving soil health

Soil is a renewable resource but can be permanently degraded by pressures such as urbanisation or erosion. Soils filter and store water, support agriculture and other plant and animal communities, and harbour a quarter of the world's biodiversity.<sup>100</sup>

UK peatlands are our largest terrestrial store of carbon helping to mitigate impacts of climate change. Peat soils cover 10% of the UK land area but store around half (5bn tonnes) of the UK's soil carbon.<sup>101</sup>

However, the majority of peat soils are in some way damaged leading to the release of greenhouse gases and preventing them from acting as a natural filter for drinking water, hence increasing the cost of water treatment for customers.<sup>102</sup>

As part of the Plan's target to double resource productivity by 2050 it sets out the aim of ensuring the sustainable management of soil by 2030 and establishing sufficient data to understand the current state of soil health.

This will include:

- developing a new soil health index (investing at least £200,000 in new metrics)
- maintaining the voluntary targets to end the use of peat in horticulture by 2030 (with further measures introduced if insufficient progress by 2020)
- delivering a new framework for peat restoration

In October 2017, speaking at a Sustainable Soils Alliance event, Michael Gove [said](#) that 'bold new measures to protect and restore soil health' must be at the heart of the forthcoming Agriculture Bill as well as the Plan.<sup>103</sup>

## Stakeholder comment

The [National Farmers' Union \(NFU\)](#) has welcomed the Plan's recognition of farming's 'unique position' to 'deliver for the environment.' However, it has also cautioned that only productive and viable businesses can deliver the environmental benefits envisaged in the Plan. It therefore believes that it is vital that a holistic approach is taken with environment policy joined-up with future food policy (as outlined in the Government's [Industrial Strategy](#)) and measures to manage volatility enabling 'profitable, productive and progressive' farm businesses post-Brexit.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, the [Soil Association](#) wants to see the Government 'harnessing' the full potential of agroecological systems such as organic and provide more detail on the practical measures that will turn the Plan's aspirations into reality and the 'fundamental shift in farming systems' needed to do that.<sup>105</sup>

The [RSPB](#) supports the Plan's aims to invest the existing farm support budget in a better system which works for nature and underpins farm livelihoods. It has highlighted recent joint research with Defra which shows that some agri-environment schemes have led to

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<sup>100</sup> POST Note 502, [Securing Soil Health](#), August 2015

<sup>101</sup> Natural England, [Summary of Evidence: Soils](#) (EIN012), 19 May 2015

<sup>102</sup> IUCN National Committee UK (Peatland Programme), [25 Year Environment Plan signals new era for England's peatlands](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>103</sup> Soil Association, [Secretary of State commits to soil health](#), 25 October 2017

<sup>104</sup> NFU, [25 Year Environment Plan launched by PM: Environmental Policy and food production must go hand in hand – NFU](#), 12 January 2018

<sup>105</sup> Soil Association, [SA comment on 25 Year Environment Plan](#) [as viewed on 15 January 2018]



more than a doubling in the abundance of around 17 priority bird species despite the overall national trend of declining numbers of farmland birds since 1970.<sup>106</sup>

The charity [Buglife](#) welcomed the measures in the Plan to boost pollinator populations through increasingly wildflower habitats and reducing pesticide pollution. However, it notes that despite a commitment to the long term monitoring of soil health, there is no such commitment to long-term support for the national pollinator monitoring programme.<sup>107</sup>

The [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) welcomed the recognition of peat as an important natural capital asset as part of enabling a 'step-change' in efforts to avoid the problems of damaged peatlands.<sup>108</sup>

## 4.10 Landscapes, trees and green spaces

### Landscape

The Plan aims to “conserve and enhance the beauty of our natural environment, and make sure it can be enjoyed, used by and cared for by everyone,” while being sensitive to considerations of its heritage. The Secretary of State considers that landscapes should be safeguarded from economic exploitation stating because they are “goods in themselves, places of beauty which nurture and support all forms of wildlife.”<sup>109</sup>

Despite asserting that there are “more stringent” protections at national and international level for “our most precious landscapes,” the Plan sets out measures to review designations for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. This review will consider (in some cases for the first time since the establishment of protected areas in 1947): coverage of designations, how areas deliver their responsibilities, financing, and possible scope for expansion of areas, as well as opportunities to enhance environmental performance. A timetable for the review has not yet been set.

### Stakeholder comment

Elements of the Plan build on approaches set out in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper, although there is limited reference in the current Plan to these. Commentators welcomed the pursuance of some of earlier approaches, for example [Rewilding Britain](#) welcomed the pursuance of landscape-scale approaches first set out in the Lawton Review in 2010.<sup>110</sup> Other commentators, such as [Mark Avery](#),<sup>111</sup> criticised the failure to include comprehensive proposals. The [Farmers Guardian](#) reporter Abi Kaye considered that “massive” opportunities for landscape-scale conservation have been missed, with commons and uplands “ignored”.<sup>112</sup>

### Trees

The Plan aims to increase woodland in England in line with the aspiration of achieving 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by the end of 2042. The Government aims to plant 11 million trees and 1 million urban trees by 2022. The Plan also states that:

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<sup>106</sup> RSPB, [UK farmers offer hope for farmland birds](#), 2 January 2018

<sup>107</sup> Buglife, [25 Year Environment Plan promises meadows for bees](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>108</sup> IUCN National Committee UK (Peatland Programme), [25 Year Environment Plan signals new era for England's peatlands](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>109</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), January 2018, p.6

<sup>110</sup> Rewilding Britain tweet, 11 January 2018 [viewed 15 January 2018]

<sup>111</sup> Mark Avery, [blog](#), 15 January 2018

<sup>112</sup> Abi Kaye tweet, 11 January 2018 [viewed 15 January 2018]

We will maintain our Public Forest Estate, keeping it in trust for the nation, reflecting the value of the social and environmental benefits it provides so that future generations continue to enjoy them.

There are three main elements to the Plan's forest and woodland objectives:

- **Supporting the development of a new Northern Forest:** planting a belt of trees, using the M62 corridor as its spine, with £5.7 million of government funding to accelerate the work of the Community Forests and the Woodland Trust.
- **Supporting larger scale woodland creation:** including through incentivising extra planting on private the least productive agricultural land, where appropriate, through a new woodland creation grant scheme. Domestic carbon offset mechanisms will be strengthened to encourage more businesses to off-set their emissions through planting trees: a reporting framework will be introduced to drive demand for Domestic Offset Units or Credits and a Forest Carbon Guarantee Scheme will be introduced using the existing Woodland Carbon Code. Commercial investment will be directed towards Forestry Investment Zones.
- **Appointing a national Tree Champion** to help meet tree planting targets and to promote the social, economic and environmental benefits offered by trees and forests and "make sure that the right trees, in terms of biosecurity, value for money, air quality impact and biodiversity among other criteria, are planted in the right places, in line with the UK Forestry Standard".

The Plans also states that the Government:

- supports increased protection for existing trees from pests and diseases – a new Plant Health Biosecurity strategy will be published in 2020, with a Tree Health Resilience Plan to be published later in 2018.
- is committed to stronger protection of ancient woodlands through their sustainable management to provide social, environmental and economic benefits.
- will work with industry and support [Grown in Britain](#) to increase the amount of home grown timber used in England in construction, creating a "conveyor belt of locked-in carbon in our homes and buildings".

Dr Therese Coffey, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, stated in a forestry [debate](#) on 11 January that the original target of 2020 for tree planting was reset to 2022 since the pledge was restated after the 2017 General Election. Despite the "slow start" of take-up of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the Woodland Carbon Fund, she was confident that recent changes would lead to an increase in tree planting and the target would be exceeded.<sup>113</sup>

The Plan reiterates Government support for zero-deforestation supply chains including the Amsterdam Declarations and the New York Declarations on Forests, and the Partnerships for Forests Programme. Deforestation will remain a priority when targeting future Official Development Assistance spend and there is a firm commitment to halting illegal logging. The Government also supports the REDD+ Framework under the UN Convention on Climate Change.

### Stakeholder comment

The [Woodland Trust](#) welcomed the Plan's comprehensive and cross-cutting Government objectives but considered it to be "short on specific targets, deadlines, mechanisms and funding options." The Trust asked for changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to put into practice stronger protections for ancient woodland. It criticised the lack of

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<sup>113</sup> HC Deb 11 January 2018 c186WH

centralised records on ancient woodlands since this lack “could be cloaking a state of deforestation”.<sup>114</sup> [Confor](#), representing wood and forestry businesses, welcomed the plans to address bureaucratic barriers but noted that “planting in England is at a modern-day low and we must increase it quickly”.<sup>115</sup>

## Green spaces

The Plan aims to make sure:

that there are high quality, accessible, natural spaces close to where people live and work, particularly in urban areas, and encouraging more people to spend time in them to benefit their health and wellbeing.

The Plan considers that more and better quality green infrastructure, including urban trees, will make towns and cities more attractive places and bring about long-term health improvements. It aims to encourage more investment by defining by 2019 a set of standards of what “good” green infrastructure is, in consultation with stakeholders including the Parks Action Group. Defra will work with the MHCLG to consider how green infrastructure aims can be incorporated in the National Planning Policy Framework.

### Stakeholder comment

The [UK Green Building Council](#) welcomed the proposals for new standards for green infrastructure but wanted ambitions reflected in Building Regulations and an Environment Act.<sup>116</sup> [Groundwork UK](#) considered the Plan to provide a solid platform for delivering benefits as long as the proposals are given legislative and regulatory teeth.<sup>117</sup> The [Campaign for the Protection of Rural England](#) welcomed the commitment to improving the environment but considered that the Plan did not adequately address growing development pressures in England.<sup>118</sup> The [Open Spaces Society](#) also applauded the ambition but wanted to see delivery plans.<sup>119</sup>

## 4.11 Connecting with the natural environment

The Plan states that connecting more people with the environment will promote greater well-being. Goal 6 of the Plan is to secure “enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment”. Chapter 3 of the Plan “Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing” sets out how policies can help people improve their health, including their mental health, and wellbeing by using greenspaces; how children can be encouraged to be close to nature both in and out of school and how towns and cities can be greened with more open spaces and trees.

2019 is to be made a “year of action for the environment”. Working with Step Up to Serve, #iwill campaign partners, and other youth and environmental partners, the Government will develop an environment theme for the #iwill campaign in 2019.<sup>120</sup>

Key commitments from the Plan on **health** included:

- We will launch a three-year ‘Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing’ programme, focused on supporting local authorities, health organisations, health

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<sup>114</sup> Woodland Trust, [blog](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>115</sup> Confor, [Reaction to the 25 year environment plan](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>116</sup> UK Green Building Council, [UK GBC Reacts to PM’s environment speech](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>117</sup> Groundwork UK, [Groundwork response to the 25 year environment plan](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>118</sup> Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, [CPRE reaction to 25 year environment plan](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>119</sup> Open Spaces Society, [Environment charities welcome environment plans but Environment Act needs to secure its success](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>120</sup> Further information about Step Up to Serve is available from the [Step Up to Serve website](#) [downloaded on 16 January 2018]

professionals, teachers and planners in promoting the natural environment as a pathway to good health and wellbeing.

- We will scope out how we could connect people more systematically with green space to improve mental health, using the natural environment as a resource for preventative and therapeutic purposes.
- Ideally, we would like access to the natural environment put at the heart of all local Health and Wellbeing Board strategies.

In relation to **children**, the plan:

- Sets out initiatives to encourage and support outdoor activities, particularly where a child has no access to a family garden. Government will make available £10m of funding to support these initiatives.
- States that Government will launch a Nature Friendly Schools Programme to help more communities create the kind of school grounds that support learning about the natural world.
- Sets out that Government want to make it easier for schools and Pupil Referral Units to take pupils on trips to natural spaces on a regular basis.

### Stakeholder comment

[The Ramblers](#) welcomed the Plan's positive ambition and were keen to look at the detail of delivery of improved access to the countryside, including through payments to farmers.<sup>121</sup> The [Soil Association](#) also welcomed plans for engagement but warned that these will fail if children continue to be "taught to associate nature with nature reserves rather than our farmed countryside."<sup>122</sup> Commentators such as Miles King in [Lush Times](#) criticised the conflict between Defra aspirations and other departmental policies such as the sell-off of school land and urban parks by local authorities which could have been used for nature.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ramblers, [The Ramblers reaction to 25 year plan for the environment](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>122</sup> Soil Association, [SA comment on 25 year plan for the environment](#), 11 January 2018

<sup>123</sup> Miles King, [No tern unstoned: a green future?](#) 11 January 2018, [uk.lush.com](#)

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