

# A NATURE AND WELLBEING ACT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## What would it do?

### Recovery of nature in a generation

The Nature and Wellbeing Act would set the first legal commitment to the recovery of nature in a generation.

It would recognise that real improvements in the quality of life for people across England can be secured by working with, and increasing, nature.

It would set targets for government to drive progress, such as a 10% increase in populations of key species and for 80% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) to be in good condition by 2040. This will make sure that we can pass on the natural environment to our children in better condition.

### Value

Better valuation and management of nature will help to protect it, while also securing economic and social benefits. The Act would formalise the natural capital approach to ensure that we put nature into the heart of decision-making, nationally and locally.

It would establish an independent statutory body, such as the Natural Capital Committee (NCC) or an Office for Environmental Responsibility (OER), with powers to hold Government to account for how we use and grow our natural assets and the benefits they provide us with.

### Protect and Recover

The Nature and Wellbeing Act would establish a "national ecological network", designed and built from the bottom up but within a national strategy to ensure that it "knits" together across local boundaries and delivers national ecological benefits.

It would require every local authority to work in partnership to develop local ecological network strategies, which are then embedded in local plans and delivered with the input of all relevant government bodies.

These "Blueprints for Investment in Nature" would be used to target funds and planning to deliver the natural infrastructure needed for the fulfilment of ecological, social and economic objectives.

The Act would also ensure that our most threatened species populations are targeted with the action needed at the local level to ensure their recovery.

### Connect

The Act would set out mechanisms to ensure that everyone can easily access nature – through increasing the extent, accessibility and quality of natural green space near every home.

It would include an appreciation and understanding of the natural world as part of the purpose of schooling – so that all children leave school with the knowledge, skills and motivation to care for how we affect and benefit from our environment.

## How would it work?

The Act would build on, rather than replace, existing legislation for the natural environment, which will continue to play a vital part in the protection of nature.

It would provide an opportunity to create a clear, logical and consistent legal framework for the recovery of nature, within which existing law and policy would work.

Like the Climate Change Act 2008, it would use duties, mechanisms and reports to create the accountability and political pressure necessary to achieve the purposes of the Act.

## Why do we need new legislation?

The *Natural Environment White Paper* set out a bold ambition for the recovery of nature, but on its own will not be sufficient to achieve it.

A much stronger driver is needed, with the power to bring about fundamental change and the long-term commitment to keep all successive governments and all sectors of society, on track to deliver what nature needs and what we need from nature.

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Edited by James Robinson<sup>1</sup>

### <sup>1</sup>The RSPB

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again.

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### <sup>2</sup>The Wildlife Trusts

There are 47 individual Wildlife Trusts covering the whole of the UK and the Isle of Man and Alderney. Together, The Wildlife Trusts are the UK's largest people-powered environmental organisation working for nature's recovery on land and at sea.

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A GREEN PAPER FROM THE  
WILDLIFE TRUSTS AND THE RSPB

A BRIEFING



The RSPB is a registered charity in England and Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654.

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Protecting wildlife for the future

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Protecting wildlife for the future





# A NATURE AND WELLBEING ACT

**Our natural environment is important in its own right, but it also underpins our economy, health and our wellbeing. Yet nature is in decline. It is vital that we halt this decline and secure nature's recovery in a generation, not only for its own sake, but for what it does for us.**

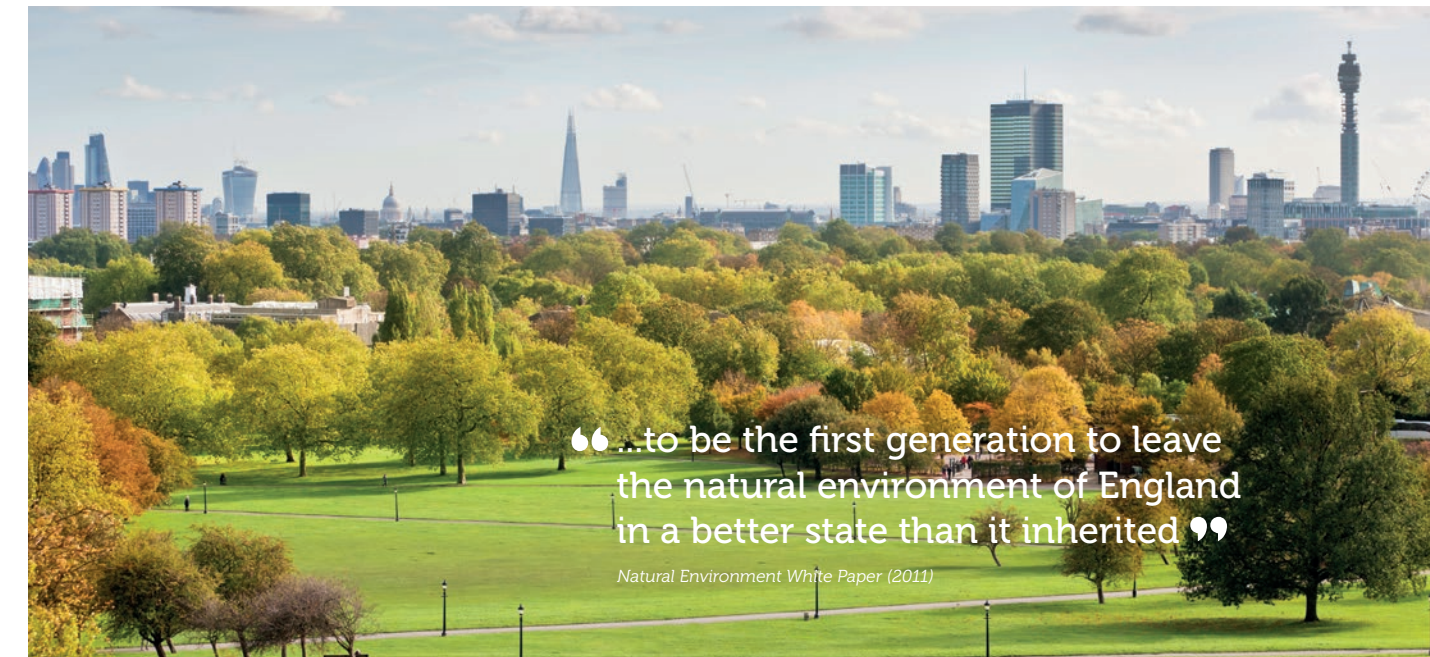
**We need new legislation – a *Nature and Wellbeing Act* – to provide the commitment and laws required to achieve it.**

Our environment is under more pressure than ever before. The *State of Nature* report found that 60% of UK species we know about are in decline. Habitats are becoming more fragmented and their condition is worsening to the extent that only 37% of our best sites are in good condition. Many of the "free" (but valuable) services provided by nature are under threat, such as clean water supply, pollination, resilience to flooding and food production. Despite our existing legislation and policy, we continue to use many of our natural assets in an unsustainable way, putting our long-term economic prosperity at risk.

As a country, we are experiencing increasing levels of obesity and physical inactivity. Furthermore, one in four of us will experience a mental health problem at some point in our lives. Improvements in overall health are skewed towards wealthier sections of society, causing health inequalities to increase. Yet there is considerable evidence to show that contact with nature can help to prevent and reverse poor health and wellbeing.

A thriving natural environment is part of the solution to many social, economic and environmental problems. This was recognised in the *Natural Environment White Paper*, which set out an ambition to improve our natural environment and our connection to it. But in order to achieve its aims, we need greater commitment to its recovery and fundamental changes in how we value, use and interact with nature.

Together, The Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB are calling for a Nature and Wellbeing Act for England that will go beyond existing policy and legislation to secure nature's recovery in a generation, ensuring we value what it does for us and that we work with nature to achieve significant improvements in the health and wellbeing of people, society and the economy.



“...to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited”

*Natural Environment White Paper (2011)*



“Environmental objectives could be delivered with greater net benefits to society if a more holistic view was taken”

*Prof. Dieter Helm, Chair Natural Capital Committee*



“Spending time in nature improves our mental health and general sense of wellbeing”

*Sport and Recreation Alliance (2014)  
Reconomics: The Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation*