

A Check for Nature:

The environmental risks of the UK's data centre boom & how to manage them

Executive summary

- A new wave of hyper-scale data centres is proposed for the UK. The UK Government is weakening planning controls to enable the delivery of these new data centres.
- Each new data centre will come with sizeable water, energy and related land use demands, at a time when natural resources are extremely stretched.
- These water and land use demands, combined with the impact of the heat generated by data centres, add to the pressures causing the decline of wildlife populations.
- Adverse impacts on wildlife will be matched by adverse impacts on human quality of life.
- The Wildlife Trusts warn the Government about the consequences that will come from lowering barriers to data centre consents and allowing unplanned, uncontrolled development, in the face of nature loss and climate change.
- The Trusts propose a rigorous 'Nature-Check' for each data-centre application, as a start to strategically controlling the impacts of this new, resource-hungry form of development at a time of environmental crisis.

Introduction

In 2026 one of the hottest and driest summers ever brought the UK's water problems into sharp focus.¹ The 2026 drought has had severe impacts for people, farmers and for wildlife that is already under strain.

But this has coincided with a Government push for the country to build dozens of new data centres.² With little consultation or national discussion the UK is embarking on a drive for thirsty and polluting data centres. This is not a question of one or two buildings - if the dozens of proposed data centres are built they could more than double the UK's electricity demand.³

Different figures are bandied about, but the number of new, large and hyper-scale data centres could be anywhere from 100 to over 300.⁴ The discrepancy between these numbers is itself worrying - no one seems to know for sure how many data centres there might be. If this number of data centres were built it would transform the countryside, and electricity

¹ BBC News, 2026, *Summer 2026 was UK's hottest on record, Met Office says*, <https://www.bbc.com/weather/articles/c99dyp13igmo>

² UK Government, 2026, Data Centres, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-security-and-resilience-network-and-information-systems-bill-factsheets/data-centres>

³ Foxglove, 2026, Foxglove's Response to the Environmental Audit Committee's Inquiry into 'Risks and opportunities to the sustainability of data centres in the UK', <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/164731/pdf/>

⁴ Milmo D. and Ambrose, J., Guardian, 2026, *Datacentre projects face fees for grid access to ease connection queue, Ofgem says*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jul/29/datacentre-projects-fees-grid-access-connection-queue-ofgem>

demand, as well as water use in many catchments. These impacts come at a time when energy pressures are increasing, and when water supplies are under unprecedented threat. Data centre expansion plans pose a serious risk to nature recovery at a time of accelerating climate change.

A strategic approach to data centres is urgently needed. This would address the combined impact they would have and whether it is sustainable across the country as a whole, for water catchments, and for communities. At the moment, data centres are not reflected in future planning around water demand, electricity production, nor greenhouse gas emissions.

But instead of putting the right checks in place, the Government is removing planning hurdles and clearing the path for new data centres.⁵ Despite significant Government backing and enthusiasm, a Freedom of Information Request has revealed that the Government does not even know what these data centres will be used for. There are concerns that data centres will have significant environmental impacts while being used for “wasteful” or “pointless” activities.⁶

In January 2026 Ministers introduced legislation that will mean data centres can opt into the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) system.⁷ The NSIP system reduces the planning requirements that projects have to meet. The Government has promised billions in funding for AI Growth Zones,⁸ and an AI Minister placed in Prime Minister Burnham’s Cabinet.⁹ The Government is trying to accelerate data centre development while doing little to understand, or protect against, the potential impacts on nature and communities.

It’s time for the Government to take a more strategic approach to data centres. A sector that could potentially double the UK’s entire electricity demand cannot be treated as just another type of development. More information is needed on the combined impact of this industry, and sensible regulations are needed to protect people and wildlife. Most importantly the Government should put in place a series of environmental tests for data centres, which need to be met before planning permission is granted. This ‘Nature Check’ could be introduced by way of a National Policy Statement.

⁵ DigWatch, 2026, *UK data centre boom exposes a government information gap*, <https://dig.watch/updates/uk-data-centre-government-information-gap>

⁶ Neill, P., Guardian, 2026, *UK government does not know what datacentres are being used for, FoI request shows*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/sep/02/uk-datacentres-ai-boom-foi-environment>

⁷ UK Parliament, 2025, *National Infrastructure Planning: Data Centres*, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-10-15/hcws966>

⁸ UK Government, 2025, *AI Growth Zones*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ai-growth-zones>

⁹ SEC Newgate, 2026, *Closed loops, open questions: Burnham’s data centre challenge*, <https://www.secnewgate.co.uk/our-insights/closed-loops-open-questions-burnhams-data-centre-challenge>

Increasing energy and water demands from data centres

There are already 500 data centres across the UK - most of those are the size of a regular building.¹⁰ But there are dozens of new ones planned with some of them the size of a neighbourhood, covering hundreds of hectares.¹¹ The key difference is size - between existing small data centres and plans for new enormous 'hyperscale' ones. The number of data centres will rise by one third - but they will be so big that they will have an outsized demand for water and energy.¹²

Despite the scale of these proposals, there is little to no strategic planning for how to meet their energy and water demands. The 2026 update of the National Planning Policy Framework retained language on data centres, encouraging steps to support the development of a modern economy, including data centres.¹³ At the moment planning policy is weighted in favour of data centres, with little or no protection against their adverse impacts.

Data centres will significantly increase electricity demand - in fact some projections show that they could double the country's needs for electricity.¹⁴ To get around this some data centre companies plan to build and run their own power generation, including gas or diesel generators.¹⁵ Data centre demand for electricity, and reliance on gas, could significantly increase the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, and make it impossible for the UK to meet its climate targets.

Water companies have raised serious concerns about data centres' need for water. Just 20 years from now the UK could be lacking billions of litres of water *per day* to meet basic needs for drinking and farming.¹⁶ Each hyperscale data centre can require millions of litres of water per day.¹⁷ They also generate a lot of waste heat. If it's not captured then it heats the areas around them, creating a 'heat island' effect.¹⁸

¹⁰ The Times, Vaughan A., 2026, *Digital cities: the future of Britain's data centres*, <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/environment/article/digital-cities-future-britains-data-centres-mlzd6z9cd>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ UK Government, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2026, *National Planning Policy Framework: Plan-making and national decision-making policies*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a8334c03bd75b81e2329ac4/National_Planning_Policy_Framework.pdf

¹⁴ *Supra* note 3.

¹⁵ Harris J., Guardian, 2026, *As AI guzzles water and energy, we are already facing a choice: datacentres or homes?*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/aug/09/slough-famous-the-office-datacentres-locals-hub-europe>

¹⁶ Water UK, 2026, *Data Centres' Water Use - Water UK's response to the Environmental Audit Committee call for evidence 02.04.26*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/164766/html/>

¹⁷ *Supra* note 3.

¹⁸ Marinoni A, et al., 2026, *The Data Heat Island Effect: Quantifying the Impact of AI Data Centers in a Warming World*, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2603.20897>

Deep-dive: Data Centre Electricity and Emissions

Data centre demand for electricity is constantly changing and different government bodies have different figures. Ofgem, the energy regulator, has said that 140 data centres have asked for 50 gigawatts (GW) of electricity capacity.¹⁹ Of those data centres, around 20GW have finance. Even this more conservative figure would be a huge increase in electricity demand. The government energy department says it could be closer to 70GW.²⁰ 50GW of extra electricity would roughly double the UK's entire power demand, at a time when the country is already trying to shift from fossil fuels to renewables. Even 20GW would be a significant increase in demand.

In July 2026 Ofgem, the energy regulator, said that 315 data centres are waiting for a grid connection, far higher than the figure of 140 they gave in June.²¹ If this is the true figure, then the electricity demand could be even higher.

These data centres will either take electricity from the National Grid, or build their own power generation. Many will opt for dirty gas generators. Other evidence to parliament's Environmental Audit Committee estimates that this could add 50 million tonnes of greenhouse gases to the UK's annual emissions.²² That would be an extra 14% of the UK's total emissions, and could put climate targets beyond reach.

Wapseys Wood data centre, Buckinghamshire, is being treated by the Government as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, giving it special protection under the planning system. It plans to build its own gas generators, and release half a million tonnes of emissions.²³

Some data centres use renewable power. But this can vary from renewable power built on site, to purchasing the power from elsewhere. For example, in Ireland some data centres buy credits for renewable electricity generated in Poland or Greece.²⁴ This can result in Ireland's electricity mix remaining the same while data centres appear to be using clean power on paper. Clean power also requires land-take, with power generation to meet data centre demands adding to the intense competition for land use in the UK.

Recent media coverage has focused on data centres' huge potential emissions, with news stories reporting on how Wapseys Wood and a second data centre in Bedfordshire would, combined, release more emissions than ExxonMobil.²⁵ Another story looked at the Lincolnshire data centre that would release five times more emissions than Birmingham

¹⁹ Environmental Audit Committee, 2026, *Oral evidence: Risks and opportunities to the sustainability of data centres in the UK*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/17745/pdf/>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Supra* note 4.

²² *Supra* note 3.

²³ *Supra* note 3.

²⁴ Financial Times, 2025, *Inside the AI race: can data centres ever truly be green?*, <https://www.ft.com/content/0f6111a8-0249-4a28-aef4-1854fc8b46f1?syn-25a6b1a6=1>

²⁵ Neill P. Guardian, *Two planned datacentres will have higher UK carbon emissions than ExxonMobil, analysis finds*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/aug/25/planned-datacentres-carbon-emissions-uk-exxonmobil>

Airport²⁶ and a data centre in Havering that would release 1.2 million tonnes of greenhouse gases per year.²⁷

In Yorkshire Drax power station says it wants to sell electricity to a data centre, or to build its own data centre. Drax already creates electricity by burning trees, and it is the UK's single biggest source of carbon dioxide. In 2025 it released 14 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from burning wood.²⁸ It has said it wants to provide 600 megawatts of electricity capacity for a data centre it would build (diverting around half the electricity it generates today for the grid).²⁹ This would make a Drax data centre one of the most polluting ones in the country, burning almost 4 millions of tonnes of wood per year.³⁰

Deep-dive: Data Centres and Water Demand

Summer 2026 saw many parts of the country return into drought. Some rivers reached record lows not seen since 1976.³¹ Many parts of England are already under severe water stress. 2025 had already seen England's driest spring for 132 years, followed by a prolonged drought in many areas of the country.³²

Even before new data centre plans, by 2055 the UK has been forecast to be short 6 billion litres of water per day.³³ According to a report by a House of Lords Committee, "the taps could run dry".³⁴ To avoid this, new reservoirs and significant water harvesting measures will be needed. But data centres would make this shortfall even worse.

²⁶ Booth R., Guardian, 2026, *New UK AI datacentre could cause five times emissions of Birmingham airport*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jun/06/planned-ai-datacentre-in-england-could-cause-five-times-emissions-of-big-airport>

²⁷ Pearce M., Guardian, 2026, *Proposed London datacentre 'incompatible' with net zero with 1m-tonne carbon footprint*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/aug/21/proposed-london-datacentre-will-have-annual-carbon-footprint-of-27000-flights-to-new-york>

²⁸ Drax Group, 2026, *Enabling a secure energy transition: Drax Group plc Annual report and accounts 2025*, https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Drax_AR25_Interactive.pdf

²⁹ Drax Group, 2026, *2025 Full Year Results*, <https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Drax-FYR-2025-Analyst-Presentation.pdf>

³⁰ Wood A., Yorkshire Post, 2025, *Fears Drax-powered AI centre may 'burn a tree every time it is used'*, <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/fears-drax-powered-ai-centre-may-burn-a-tree-every-time-it-is-used-5330845>

³¹ BBC News, 2026, *Satellite images show dry weather impact on regions*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8jnw0e44j0o>

³² House of Lords, Environment and Climate Change Committee, 2026, *Surviving drought: reclaim the rain*, https://cdn.roxhillmedia.com/production/email/attachment/1820001_1830000/e2ba1d227b1317e875e152d72dbf255ce0c82c30.pdf

³³ The National Framework For Water Resources 2025 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-framework-for-water-resources-2025-water-for-growth-nature-and-a-resilient-future>

See also:

Laville S., Guardian, 2026, *England must harvest rainfall and take action on water usage, Lords warn*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/may/21/england-harvest-rainfall-water-usage-shortages-house-of-lords-report>

³⁴ *Supra* note 47.

The water industry is warning that the Government is not giving any thought to the impacts of this increased demand. In fact, the Government forces water companies to plan based on optimistic *reductions* in water demand, when it is likely that demand will increase.³⁵ Water UK, the industry body, says that it is not reasonable for the Government's Water Resources Framework to say that data centres will only use recycled water or collaborate with other water uses, and assume they won't create any extra demand on public water resources.³⁶ The most recent Government water forecasts exclude future data centre water demand from their projections,³⁷ which the water industry says is a mistake.

A medium sized data centre can use up to 300 million litres of water per year.³⁸ A hyperscale data centre can use 1.5 million litres per day - although Thames Water say it can be much higher at 19 million litres per day.³⁹ This would make many data centres the single biggest water user in their catchment.⁴⁰

Unless other systems are put in place, this water will be drawn from water bodies like streams and rivers. According to Yorkshire Water, if data centres discharge the water they have used into sewers, then this would create permanent extra load, meaning sewers were less able to cope during heavy rainfall.⁴¹ The company has also warned that data centres will require water companies to build a huge amount of new infrastructure - under current arrangements these costs would be passed onto the public's water bills.⁴²

Some data centres are reducing their reliance on water using novel technologies. These are a combination of closed-loop water systems (where the water circulates constantly), air cooling that doesn't use water, and submerging servers in coolant fluid without using any water.⁴³ Around one third of Europe's data centres adopt these approaches - but the technology they depend on requires even more energy.⁴⁴

³⁵ *Supra* note 16.

³⁶ *Supra* note 16.

³⁷ Environment Agency, 2026, *How much additional water we need: National Framework for Water Resources 2025*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-framework-for-water-resources-2025-water-for-growth-nature-and-a-resilient-future/3-how-much-additional-water-we-need-national-framework-for-water-resources-2025>

³⁸ 2026, joint NGOs (Beyond Fossil Fuels, Foxglove, Friends of the Earth, Global Action Plan, Global Justice Now, Green Web Foundation and The Citizens), 2026, *Joint NGO response to Environmental Audit Committee inquiry into the risks and opportunities to the sustainability of data centres in the UK*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/164967/pdf/>

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Yorkshire Water, 2026, *Evidence submission - Yorkshire Water: Environmental Audit Committee Inquiry: Risks and opportunities to the sustainability of data centres in the UK*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/165102/pdf/>

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Craske B, Data Centre Magazine, 2025, *How are Data-Centres Shifting to Zero-Water Colling Tech?*, <https://datacentremagazine.com/news/how-are-companies-pioneering-data-centre-zero-water-cooling>

⁴⁴ Mooney A, Savage S., Fleming S., Bernard S., Financial Times, 2026, *The economics of Europe's drought*, <https://www.ft.com/content/982229c8-a116-4679-8b4b-627df069ce66?syn-25a6b1a6=1>

Impacts on wildlife

UK wildlife is under severe strain. Nowhere is this wildlife crisis more acute than in Britain's lakes, rivers, and streams. 380 land and freshwater species have, on average, declined by 20% since 1994.⁴⁵ Over-using freshwater bodies, and polluting what's left, is causing severe harm to lakes, rivers, streams and the wildlife that depend on them.

Abstraction is the process of taking water from natural sources like lakes and rivers. Water is currently abstracted for drinking, watering crops, and for industry. Over-abstraction of water can have impacts on wildlife.⁴⁶ Over-abstraction dries out rivers and streams stopping fish from migrating, reduces oxygen levels in the water causing fish to die, and makes polluting chemicals more concentrated. In England all protected freshwater habitats (save one) are in bad condition, and the majority of protected freshwater species are also in Unfavourable condition.⁴⁷

The latest data from the Environment Agency shows that just 14% of England's water bodies are in good condition. And 100% of water bodies in England are breaching the acceptable limits on toxic chemicals that can harm wildlife and lead to cancer in humans.⁴⁸ With our waterways polluted and dying, they can't afford to be placed under even more pressure. But that is what data centres will do.

Wildlife can be extremely sensitive to changes in temperature and climate.⁴⁹ Communities are also concerned by the impacts of heat generated by data centres, which occur due to waste heat, water vapour from evaporative cooling and even spent cooling water discharged directly to rivers and streams.⁵⁰ Some studies are beginning to show that data centres can create their own heat island, just like urban heat islands (where towns and cities are warmer than the surrounding countryside). Researchers have identified a significant data centre heat island effect. Their results showed that around a data centre temperatures were anywhere from 2C to 9C higher, and that even 4.5 kilometres away from a hyperscale data centre, the average monthly temperature could be 1C higher.⁵¹ This is likely to have a particularly serious impact for people and wildlife and urban areas, where temperatures are already higher than average. The heatwaves urban residents and wildlife suffered through this summer could be exacerbated in coming summers, as a result of data centres.

⁴⁵ State of Nature Partnership, 2023, State of Nature Report, https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf

⁴⁶ Wildfish, 2025, *The Abstraction Report*, https://wildfish.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/WildFish-Abstraction-Report_090625.pdf

⁴⁷ Freshwater Habitats Trust, 2026, *Habitats Regulations reports: worrying trends for the UK's protected freshwater species and habitats*, <https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/news/habitats-regulations-reports/>

⁴⁸ Neill P., Guardian, 2026, *All bodies of water in England polluted with toxic chemicals official data shows*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/aug/06/all-bodies-of-water-england-polluted-toxic-chemicals>

⁴⁹ Avon Wildlife Trust, *What is Climate Resilience?*, <https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder-resource-climate-resilience>

⁵⁰ *Supra* note 15.

⁵¹ *Supra* note 18.

Climate change has hit home this summer. People's homes have burned down and extreme heat has affected health. Wildfires have also destroyed a number of important habitats and nature reserves.⁵² The UK needs to urgently reduce its reliance on fossil fuels to cut emissions. Data centres have huge demands for energy, and many of them plan to rely on burning gas, which will release huge amounts of carbon dioxide.⁵³

Hyperscale data centres that are being planned require huge areas of land. One proposed data centre just outside London could be one of the largest in Europe, using 218 hectares of greenbelt land - the same size as all the woodland in Richmond Park. In Lincolnshire one data centre campus that has planning permission will be 2 million square metres.⁵⁴

Even data centres that are not this big pose a risk to established and important nature sites. For example a Google data centre is threatening to destroy the 52 hectare Arena Raceway wildlife site in Essex, home to huge numbers of important species.⁵⁵

The Government has committed to protect 30% of land and sea in England for nature by 2030.⁵⁶ One of the key considerations is ensuring that there is high quality nature close to where people live. But if data centres are located near towns and cities, they could eat up or destroy large areas of land that could otherwise be transformed into nature-rich land for communities.⁵⁷ In terms of social impacts, new analysis suggests data centres will create far fewer jobs than claimed by the technology industry.⁵⁸ Threats to wildlife will not be 'balanced out' by benefits to people.

The UK has finite land, and we need to make sure we are making best use of it, especially in a country where space for nature is already so squeezed and every water body is already polluted by human activities. That's why the new Land Use Framework for England is so important.⁵⁹ Due to these multiple impacts, there is a strong possibility that developing data centres would not comply with the four key principles of the new Land Use Framework. These principles focus on making sure that land use is ready for the future, adaptive to

⁵² National Trust, 2026, *Devastating fires sweep across Dunwich Heath*, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/support-us/appeals/dunwich-heath>

⁵³ Down A., Guardian, 2026, *More than 100 UK datacentres plan to burn gas to generate electricity*, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/may/18/uk-datacentres-plan-to-burn-gas-to-generate-electricity>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ 38Degrees, *Save Arena Essex - Tell Google to Search Elsewhere!*, https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-arena-essex-tell-google-to-search-elsewhere?source=rawlink&utm_medium=socialshare&utm_source=rawlink&share=6e878364-6a8a-4c02-848d-61e01d9ed829

⁵⁶ UK Government, 2026, *Government accelerates drive to protect 30% of England's land for nature by 2030*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-accelerates-drive-to-protect-30-of-englands-land-for-nature-by-2030>

⁵⁷ The Wildlife Trusts, 2024, *What is Wildbelt and how can it help planning policy?*, <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/becky-pullinger/what-wildbelt-and-how-can-it-help-planning-policy>

⁵⁸ Stewart H., Guardian, 2026, *UK datacentres will create just 25% of jobs predicted by tech sector, analysis finds*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/sep/09/uk-datacentres-will-create-just-25-of-jobs-predicted-by-tech-sector-analysis-finds>

⁵⁹ UK Government, 2026, *The Land Use Framework for England*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c69033471d520038d0f7a6/Land_Use_Framework_Accessible.pdf

future impacts, and the right use in the right place. In many instances data centres will make future impacts worse will not be well-designed to adapt to the future, and could have harmful impacts on land around them, and the wildlife who depend on that land.

As wildlife species decline in the face of mounting pressures, the additional water, land-use and heat pressures added by data centres are the last thing nature needs. As part of nature, these pressures also threaten the quality of life of human beings.

Managing the pressures - a Nature Check for each data centre

Dozens, or hundreds, of new data centres would transform the landscape, use large areas of land, heat up the areas around them, and place unprecedented demand on electricity and water in a short space of time. But little consideration is being given to these impacts. Instead the Government is looking to accelerate their rollout.

A more strategic and rigorous approach to data centre development is needed, to protect nature and the countryside, as well as communities. The Wildlife Trusts recommends a Data Centre Nature Check, for each and every data centre application. Planning permission should only be granted if the following Nature Check tests are passed:

- That a new data centre aligns with the four principles (multifunctionality, right use right place, future-ready decisions, and adaptive by design) of the Land Use Framework for England.⁶⁰
- That there is no adverse impact on local water systems - namely that demand is non-consumptive or is accounted for in sustainable water planning. Freshwater systems should not be adversely impacted by any data centre and water resources should not be diminished. In the most water-stressed parts of the country, for example southeast England, this could mean a pause in data centre applications (some housing developments are already on pause over a lack of available water). Water companies must be statutory consultees on planning applications for data centres. The ecological impacts of any coolant water discharge must also be mitigated.
- All data centre applications, whether local planning or nationally significant infrastructure, should comply with the mitigation hierarchy. This should mean avoiding all harm to designated sites and Local Wildlife Sites.
- Up to date ecological data on any impacted site is provided.
- That these developments, given their substantial individual and cumulative size are required to provide a minimum 20% biodiversity gain if they are allowed to go ahead, and that accurate boundary data is provided for the location of any compensatory measures or habitat.
- That data centres generate their own electricity from genuinely clean sources, and do not put strain on the grid, nor build their own dirty energy like gas or wood burning.

This Nature Check should be accompanied by social-good checks also, such as a minimum number of local, high-quality, living wage jobs being provided for communities where data centres are located. It should also be accompanied by a wider strategic examination of the additional pressures on land-use created by data centres, especially the additional land-take

⁶⁰ *Supra* note 19.

required from their energy demands, to ensure this overall land-use impact is not overlooked.

The Nature Check for data centres should be put in place swiftly, by a National Planning Statement. Our strained natural resources cannot accommodate an unplanned explosion in energy hungry, water hungry, land hungry development.

For further information, contact Matthew Browne, Head of Public Affairs for The Wildlife Trusts: mbrowne@wildlifetrusts.org

Briefing prepared for The Wildlife Trusts by Matt Adam Williams in September 2026