



# Natural England News

Quarterly Bulletin – Summer 2019



## Welcome to this first edition of Natural England News!

This and successive issues are aimed at keeping you informed about some of the work we are undertaking at Natural England – and who you can speak to if you are interested to get more involved or if you have new ideas to share.

Exciting opportunities lie ahead. Whether it is delivering more through Net Gain or in shaping the development of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme, now is such a crucial time for us to work together. Decisions we take now will ensure the promises of the 25 Year Environment Plan and Government's commitment to Net Zero Carbon by 2050 are met through real action on the ground. Nature based solutions are a win-win for the climate emergency and the catastrophic loss of species, as are the well-being benefits to individuals and society from contact with the natural environment; all call on us to be ambitious.

We have reset our mission: to build partnerships for nature's recovery. Our recently published '[Natural England Action Plan for 2019/20](#)' sets out where we will focus our skills and resources around four goals needed to achieve nature's recovery: Greener Farming and Fisheries, Sustainable Development, Connecting People with Nature and Resilient Landscapes and Seas. The Plan sets out what we will do this year as we take our first steps toward our refreshed vision and the new opportunities on the horizon from forthcoming legislation. We are also working on a new 5 year plan for 2020 onwards and I look forward to working with you on that.

For now though, this newsletter is simply to give you easy access to stories about some of the projects and initiatives underway at Natural England. There is a lot in here, reflecting the range and volume of work in which we and our partners are involved. I do hope that you will dip in and find things that interest or inspire you.

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## Greener farming and fisheries

### New Environmental Land Management System (ELMS)

*Natural England is testing approaches to support the development of the new ELM System.*

#### Payment by results

As part of a series of tests and trials we are working with Defra and other partners to explore different aspects of how a new system might work. In Yorkshire and East Anglia, Natural England is managing 'Payment by Results' trials where farmers are rewarded for the environmental outcomes they deliver rather than for following a set of management rules. Farmers are involved with monitoring their results and have reported feeling increased levels of involvement, ownership and engagement in working towards the outcomes. To find out more contact [Annabelle LePage](#)

#### Landscape Pioneer

Four Defra Pioneers were set up under the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) (25 YEP) and Natural England are leading the Landscape Pioneer linked to the [North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve](#).

There are four main aims of the project:

- Test a natural capital approach,
- Demonstrate a joined-up, integrated approach to planning and delivery,
- Pioneer and increase the use of new funding opportunities and
- Grow our understanding of what works, sharing lessons and best practice.
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The Devon Pioneer has already produced some significant achievements. This has included working with local partners to develop an innovative and collaborative [natural capital](#) decision making process around which the rest of the Pioneer is designed. It has directly informed the Pioneer ELM trial which Defra has agreed to fund. The Trial is closely aligned with the 25 YEP and will work with farmers in North Devon to integrate land management and farm business decision making to understand current and future potential natural capital offers. The results will make a wider contribution to testing ideas for the next Environmental Land Management scheme particularly around farmer responsiveness to an integrated natural capital approach and payment rates for multiple outcomes. To find out more, contact [Jo Traill-Thomson](#)

### Natural England Podcasts

The Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Area team have produced a podcast showcasing the excellent work farmers are doing for wildlife in the area. It aims to inspire other farmers and land managers, allowing them to listen while they work. It will also help the wider public learn about farmland conservation and our work.



The series presents eight [Podcast interviews](#) with flagship farmers and advisers who are not only local leaders and respected amongst their peers but they are also implementing progressive management across the land they manage.

For more topics please search major libraries such as iTunes or Spotify for Natural England.

To find out more contact [Rob West](#)

# Greener farming and fisheries

## Clean Air Strategy

### Clean Air Day was held on 20 June 2019. Here's how we are working with farmers to make our air cleaner



Natural England's [Catchment Sensitive Farming](#) partnership believe that everyone has a role to play in improving the quality of our air, especially farmers and land managers who can also help to protect wildlife and deliver local environmental benefits.

Since 2006 we have been working in partnership with Defra and the Environment Agency to encourage farmers and land owners to improve water and soil quality. With the launch of the [Clean Air Strategy](#) in January this year, we are working with the agricultural industry to improve air quality by reducing ammonia emissions from agriculture.

Following an additional £3 million funding from Defra, we now have a team of air quality and agricultural specialists working with farmers in high priority areas to reduce farm ammonia emissions, paying a particular interest to farms close to protected areas vulnerable to ammonia deposition.



Clean Air Day was a chance to commend the work of our Catchment Sensitive Farming officers (CSFOs) who are working with farmers and land owners to provide essential advice and guidance to reduce air and water pollution. These officers are on the ground locally, building long-term relationships with farmers and the agricultural industry, visiting farms, running events and providing training and grant support.

Recently, staff from Defra and Natural England visited Kingston Hill dairy farm to discuss how measures from the Clean Air Strategy might be implemented on the farm. During the visit, the team spoke to farmer David Christensen and his contractors who demonstrated their low emission spreading equipment. CSFO Andrew Russell has started to engage with David to provide training and advice to reduce ammonia emissions.

Flexibility to allow farmers to achieve the aims of the Clean Air Strategy in a way that works for them was the main takeaway message. We want to help farmers and land owners to improve the environment and make sure that future agricultural schemes mean that farm businesses can work in harmony with the natural environment.

This Defra [video](#) explains low emission techniques for spreading slurry and digestate. Local training, advice and grant information for farmers and land managers is available [here](#).

For more information about the CSF Air Quality project contact [Paul Arnold](#)



## Sustainable development



**Biodiversity net gain is an approach to development or land management which leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than before.**

Government consulted on making biodiversity net gain mandatory for all developments (bar permitted development and house extensions) under the Town & Country Planning Act, using an updated Defra Biodiversity Metric. The consultation closed on the 10th February. In his [Spring Statement](#) on the 13th March the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the House of Commons that Government intends to proceed to make biodiversity net gain mandatory. This was a very welcome announcement. We do not yet know the details but Natural England will be working with Defra to help take forward mandatory biodiversity net gain via the [Environment Bill](#).

In the meantime, Natural England will be releasing an updated version of the Defra Biodiversity Metric (coined the Biodiversity Metric 2.0) later this Summer. Developed in partnership with the Environment Agency and with advice from industry and planners, Metric 2.0 will be freely available and will come with detailed guidance. Metric 2.0 is a significant advance on the original Defra metric. Once released we would welcome feedback from users.

Natural England also welcomed the publication in January 2019 of the [Biodiversity Net Gain – Good Practice Principles for Development](#) by \*CIRIA/CIEEM/IEMA. Natural England was involved in the development of this guidance and accompanying case studies.

If you'd like to find out more about Net Gain please email [Nick White](#)

*\*CIRIA: Construction Industry Research and Information Association, CIEEM: Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environment Management, IEMA: Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment*

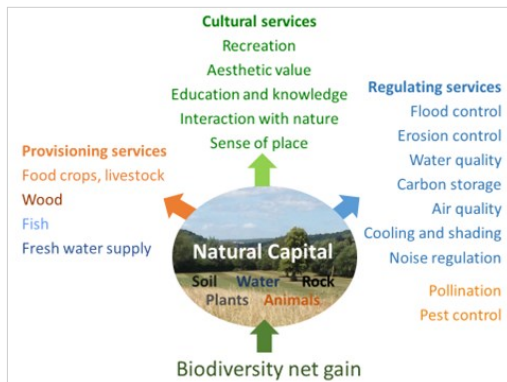
### Case Study

As one of Network Rail's Infrastructure Projects, [East-West Rail](#) (EWR) Alliance is committed to 'achieve demonstrable gains in biodiversity' on a major infrastructure project that will reinstate and upgrade the railway between Oxford, Cambridge and beyond. EWR has been engaging and working with local communities and stakeholders through a mixture of structured workshops and one-to-one interviews. These approaches help to identify the types and locations of biodiversity projects to invest in to achieve their biodiversity net gain goals.



Natural England is working closely with EWR further encourage this practice. Our area teams are also engaging with local planning authorities to encourage the incorporation of biodiversity net gain into local plans and strategies.

## Natural England's Eco-metric



*[The 25 Year Environment Plan](#) highlights the opportunity to expand the net gain approaches used for biodiversity to include wider natural capital benefits, and sets out the ambition of embedding an Environmental Net Gain (ENG) principle in development.*

Natural England has been working with Defra and a consortium led by the University of Oxford to develop an eco-metric for measuring the wider natural capital benefits for people and places from Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The recent Defra [consultation](#) focuses on

mandatory biodiversity net gain, with the eco-metric identified as a potential future mechanism for making the transition to natural capital and environmental net gains in a way that is underpinned by BNG.

Natural capital tools can lack transparency and often don't capture the value of biodiversity. The eco-metric will be a consistent, transparent, freely available tool for measuring natural capital losses and gains, specifically ecosystem services, in land use change/development scenarios. Critically it is biodiversity led, with biodiversity net gain a pre-requisite of applying the tool.

The eco-metric measures 18 ecosystem services - services provided by nature - including: water and air quality regulation, soil erosion, carbon storage and flood regulation. The eco-metric also measures cultural services such as recreation, access to nature and sense of place along with provisioning services like water supply and food production.

The eco-metric is based on an expert scoring approach that assigns scores for the ability of each habitat to provide these services. Scores are modified by multipliers to reflect the influence of habitat condition and spatial location on the delivery of ecosystem services, as well as the time taken for habitats to deliver these services.

We have recently undertaken quick turnaround testing in 20 pilot areas including large and small land management projects across England. These pilots have tested at what stage in the life cycle of a project or plan the eco-metric tool can be best applied, its potential to inform the site choice and design of scheme green infrastructure, its potential to strengthen the business case for investment in biodiversity and natural capital by demonstrating benefits for nature and people. Over the next six months we will be evaluating the findings and plan to publish a beta version of the tool in early 2020. When fully tested, we aim to bring together the biodiversity metric and eco-metric into one platform for simplicity of use.

A [recent webinar on the eco-metric](#) (April 2019) is available for anyone interested in finding out more or contact [Clare Warburton](#)

### District Level Licensing



Great crested newts (GCNs) are widely distributed throughout lowland England. However the species has suffered enormous declines, with approximately 50% of ponds in the UK lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and 80% of current ponds in a poor state. The current licensing system is focused on management to prevent harm on individual development sites rather than addressing the wider health of GCN populations.

Our new District Level Licensing approach seeks to redress this balance, encouraging targeted efforts towards provision of GCN habitat in areas where surveys show it will most effectively connect and expand GCN populations. This new approach will increase GCN populations at a landscape scale. It will also reduce delays for developers. Under the current licensing approach developers who want to build on land which is home to GCNs need to trap and relocate the species before starting work. Seasonal restrictions, where these are not effectively planned for, can lead to delays and create uncertainty over the costs and scheduling of planned development. Under District Level Licensing developers no longer need to do this. Instead they can make a conservation payment which will cover creating or restoring ponds in areas away from the development. These areas, mapped by Natural England, represent the best places for newts to thrive, habitat created here will be maintained and monitored for 25 years, all funded by developers. This new [award-winning](#) evidence-based approach to licensing is about streamlining regulation to bring about greater conservation outcomes.

Natural England are now scaling up the rollout of District Level Licensing as part of a three year programme funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It is currently available across 23 Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in [Woking](#), [Kent](#), [Cheshire](#) and the [South Midlands](#). Our target is for a District Level Licensing scheme to be available across 150 LPAs by 2020. We can't do it alone and local partnership working with Local Planning Authorities, the Wildlife Trusts and many others has been key to our success so far. In February we took this further by convening leading figures in GCN conservation from across academic, private, local government and Non Government Organisation (NGO) sectors to form a new 'GCN Licensing Expert Panel' to provide authoritative, expert opinion on our approach to GCN conservation and regulation.

Our '[Framework for District Level Licensing of Development Affecting Great Crested Newts](#)' represents the first major piece of work that the Panel have been consulted on. With increasing interest in District Level Licensing there is a need to set the standard for the approach which the Framework document aims to do.

To find out more contact [Jen Almond](#)

## Resilient landscapes and seas

### Marine conservation zones

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has created 41 new Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) along with the addition of new features to 12 existing Marine Conservation Zones. In total this means an extension of marine protected areas by 1.2 million hectares (more than the total area of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in England!)

But that is only part of the story. The announcement in June is the culmination of 10 years of work as this 3<sup>rd</sup> tranche of Marine Conservation Zones substantially completes a network of Marine Protected Areas (alongside SSSI's, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas), also referred to as the 'blue belt'. That means that 9.1 million hectares of our seas are now in marine protected areas!

Natural England has played a key role from the start of the process, from setting up and providing guidance to the stakeholder led regional projects which originally identified possible sites for designation, to our world-leading marine scientists providing advice to Defra and Ministers to support the designation of the three tranches. In this 3<sup>rd</sup> tranche of MCZs alone we have analysed over 1,900 individual datasets on the candidate sites and activities affecting them, and worked hard with stakeholders to ensure their views were captured.

The Purbeck MCZ is the latest to be announced and will protect Black Bream nesting sites though this species can do a great job of protecting its nests on its own as shown in this [video](#)!

Lundy Island was one of the first MCZs to be designated back in 2013 and this short [video](#) shows its vibrancy and the community of species found in the site.

[Click here to see all of the tranche 3 site fact sheets and designation orders.](#)

To find out more contact: [Sam King](#)





### Delivering more for Biodiversity and People

As part of a project to help Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) identify and assess the quality of the ecosystem services which flow from the natural capital within their areas, Natural England and the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) ran a series of web conferences. These highlighted tools, guidance and good practice available to help AONB's plan and deliver more for nature and people. By building more resilient landscapes, the benefits to wildlife, geology and people can be delivered and maintained in the longer term.

#### Four topics were covered:

Enhancing natural capital and ecosystem services: Natural England, has developed a range of Natural Capital Indicators. They shared how the indicators can help to improve ecosystem services and using the Nature Network Handbook to improve resilience across ecological networks.

Understanding your ecosystem services GIS and other tools:- The best tools to help better understand and plan for multiple benefits from a landscape.

Climate Change Adaptation Assessment: showing how this resource can help plan for better, more resilient landscapes and biodiversity as the impacts of climate change bite.

Working together to deliver the ecosystem service through partnership projects around the UK to embed ecosystem services approach in delivery and major projects.

25 AONB's were involved in the web conference series with links to tools and guidance, Feedback surveys from respondents attending the conferences identified that all had increased their knowledge and that they planned to use the tools in their future working.

To find out more contact: [Liz Bridges](#)



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## Connecting people with nature

### £10 million Children and Nature programme



In May Marian Spain, Therese Coffey (Minister for the Environment) and Nadim Zahawi (Minister for Children and Families) launched the Growing Care Farming Project.

Natural England is overseeing the Growing Care Farming Project which is being delivered by [Social Farms & Gardens](#) in partnership with Thrive to 'connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing'. Care farming is the therapeutic use of farming practices - including animal husbandry, crop and vegetable production and woodland management. It provides supervised, structured care services on a regular basis to children and adults who have a defined health, social or educational need.

NHS England demonstrated their strong support for the project, with the Director of Personalised Care James Sanderson, outlining the extent of the current mental health challenge in the country and the potential for care farming to support health and social care through up to one million extra funded places over four years.

To find out more contact [Sarah Preston](#)

### **You've heard of 5 a day..... how about 120 a week?**

A recent article in '[Scientific Reports](#)' interrogated the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment Survey (MENE) survey found two-hour "dose" of nature a week significantly boosts health and wellbeing.

The statistics found that people who spend at least 120 minutes in nature a week are significantly more likely to report good health and higher psychological wellbeing than those who don't visit nature at all during an average week. During 2017-18, 38% of the adult English population, or 17 million people, visited the natural environment less than once a week or never.



One finding that really surprised the researchers was that 'getting out in nature' seemed to be good for just about everybody they could think of, young and old, wealthy and poor, and those who live in towns and the countryside. And that it didn't matter what they did, whether that was physical exercise or just sitting on a bench.

Dr Mat White, of the University of Exeter Medical School, who led the study, said: "It's well known that getting outdoors in nature can be good for people's health and wellbeing but until now we've not been able to say how much is enough. The majority of nature visits in this research took place within just 2 miles of home so even visiting local urban greenspaces seems to be a good thing."

To find out more contact [Martin Gilchrist](#)

## Connecting people with nature

### Inspiring New Generations



**The People and Nature programme, one of four cross cutting themes in Natural England, will help everybody in Natural England do more to inspire new generations.**

*"Natural England has a vital role to play in inspiring new generations to discover, enjoy, learn about and care for the environment. We can make a real difference using our environmental expertise, our evidence and partnerships". Tony Juniper*

Our 'Inspiring new generations' vision will:

Ensure that significantly more children and young people, from a broader cross section of society, are benefitting directly and indirectly from the natural environment, are inspired by the natural environment and inspired for the natural environment.

The 'Vision' has five inter-related and equally important key aims:-

- ◆ To develop our role as evidence lead.
- ◆ To work with and across Government on projects such as Growing Care Farming, highlighted in the next section.
- ◆ To create high quality, accessible natural assets through partnerships you may be familiar with such as Nature Improvement Areas, Landscape Partnerships, National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and National Trails enabling young people, their families and communities to have quality experiences.
- ◆ To build our reputation for inspiring new generations, through our role as a conservation leader and public body. The provision of high quality volunteer placements is a good example.
- ◆ To enable young people to shape the work we do by engaging more young people through forums like 'Plans for places' and give young people a greater stake in decisions that affect them.



To find out more contact [Rachel Cook](#)

### Health, wellbeing and the natural environment



Why is Natural England interested in health and wellbeing and the natural environment and what are we doing about it? Hear about some great projects that are already happening and our ambition for the future in this [5 minute video](#) introduction to our work on health and wellbeing and the natural environment.

To find out more contact [Hazel Ainsworth](#)

### Southern England Coast Paths

Natural England has published 3 sets of proposals to improve public access to over 192 miles (310 km) of coast in southern England.

The first stretch is from Gosport to the Round Tower in historic old Portsmouth; the coastline here offers walkers tranquil views of mudflats and saltmarsh with diverse birdlife, as well as urban areas with a long history of use by the navy and attractions such as the 170 metre Spinnaker Tower, Portchester Castle and the historic dockyard. If approved, the proposals will link up existing access routes to create a continuous signposted walking route around Portsmouth harbour for the first time. The two other stretches are in Cornwall - a whopping 164 miles of coast between Newquay and Penzance and St. Mawes to Cremyll (on the Tamar estuary).

The England Coast Path (ECP) is there for everyone so it is important to ensure it is embedded in, valued, used and owned by the local community. Pilot projects are collecting evidence of public engagement. For example one project called "Community Voice" is collecting information on people's engagement with the coast around the Solent and in Durham and Cumbria a Youth Voice project has begun See the reports - [Newquay to Penzance](#), [St Mawes to Cremyll](#) and [Gosport to Portsmouth](#).

[See a map showing a timetable for the work](#) on the England Coast Path.





### **An Act of nature and a rite of passage**

[National Trails](#) came about as part of The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 – a hugely influential and ambitious piece of post war legislation which also gave us our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The vision was to define and protect these special landscapes – but also crucially to encourage people to enjoy them by providing high quality, well managed access to and through them.

However, well managed routes are good for more than those who don their woolly socks and walking boots in search of adventure and an uplifting experience! Properly waymarked routes benefit landowners, land managers and our biodiversity.

National Trails provide genuine multi-purpose connectivity across our work and across the country. As we celebrate how far we have come in 70 years, and look forward through the 25Yep to connecting more people with nature; this network offers unrivalled opportunities for people to engage with the diverse landscapes across England whilst recognising the value of their careful and sensitive corridor management for our biodiversity.

For more information contact: [Hazel Thomas](#)





## Evidence

Chief Scientist, Tim Hill, [reports on science and evidence](#) highlights in Natural England. These reports are produced for the Natural England board meetings. The Chief Scientist Directorate in Natural England consists of our national specialists and [evidence](#) staff. For comments or queries contact [the team](#).



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Please forward this newsletter to colleagues.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions for future issues.

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