

Annual Review 2007 – 2008



Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings.





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More information on our work, including statistics on subjects in this review, can be found on our website www.naturalengland.org.uk



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Foreword

In our second year we've made significant progress in conserving and enhancing the natural environment for the benefit of people. We've also gained a clearer understanding of the future challenges facing the natural environment.

Our unprecedented progress towards securing the favourable condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and clear leadership in implementing the England Biodiversity Strategy are important steps in meeting the challenge of reversing the decline in biodiversity beyond 2010. The changes that we have championed to the way the £2.9 billion for Environmental Stewardship is used over the next six years, will target it to the right environmental priorities and help the natural environment adapt to climate change. Our work on the growth areas is providing accessible natural greenspace for people in urban communities to enjoy and derive health benefits from.

Our advocacy has focused on how we sustain the vital benefits we get from the natural environment in the face of pressure from urban development and climate change. We initiated a national debate on greenspace and housing growth and contributed to the Common Agricultural Policy Health Check, in particular providing Defra with convincing evidence of the environmental impact of ending set aside and making the case for measures to mitigate this. Our advice has resulted in strong adaptation measures in the Climate Change Bill and helped shape the provisions to improve coastal access in the draft Marine Bill.

We have improved our organisation and systems to provide better customer service, considerable efficiency savings and better outcomes for the natural environment.

Alongside this Annual Review we are publishing:

- The *State of the Natural Environment* report, which clearly shows that our natural environment is under increasing pressure from a range of threats; and
- Our refreshed *Strategic Direction*, setting out how we will provide the environmental leadership required to meet those challenges.

For more information on these and our work go to www.naturalengland.org.uk



Sir Martin Doughty
Chair, Natural England

Dr Helen Phillips
Chief Executive, Natural England

Martin Doughty *Helen Phillips*



Outcome 1

A healthy natural environment

England's natural environment will be conserved and enhanced

Why we are doing it

- for the intrinsic value of the natural environment
- because landscapes and wildlife enrich people's lives
- for the services that healthy functioning ecosystems supply and for the economic prosperity that they bring



Highlights in our second year

Net increase of 81,000 ha of SSSIs brought into favourable or recovering condition, representing an in-year gain of 7.3% to 82.7% in total.

Natural England appointed as lead delivery partner for the England Biodiversity Strategy. 65% of species action plans led by Natural England are on target. 64% of priority habitat for which Natural England is responsible is under beneficial management through Environmental Stewardship.

Delivered over £10 million to support Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) partnerships in their work and delivery of the Sustainable Development Fund and projects contributing to their management plans.

Increased the quantity of bird-friendly habitats on farmland, through Environmental Stewardship, to help halt the decline in farmland birds.

Prepared a *State of the Natural Environment* report, published in May 2008.

Worked closely with Defra in the development of the draft Marine Bill and drafting of the associated policy guidelines.

Case study: The Wash SSSI

Natural England has agreed ground-breaking shellfish management policies with the Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee and the local fishing industry, which has brought 15,000 ha of England's largest SSSI (total area 62,000 ha) into recovering condition. This has contributed 20% of the total increase in the area of SSSI into favourable or recovering condition in 2007–08. This agreement is an example of how, through partnership, Natural England has worked to achieve a sustainable future for both the natural environment and the economy.

The Wash is an internationally important wetland of intertidal mudflat and coastal saltmarsh supporting important populations of redshank, knot and oystercatcher. It also supports commercially important stocks of shellfish, especially mussels and cockles. Ten-years ago, over fishing had reduced shellfish stocks to an all-time low with disastrous consequences for wading birds which feed on the shellfish, and for the fishing industry itself.



Looking to the River Great Ouse from Terrington Marsh SSSI.

Recent improvements in the harvesting of shellfish, and the newly agreed shellfish management policies, have resulted in additional areas of the SSSI being in favourable or recovering position. This is testament to the efforts made by all parties to bring about a massive turn around in the health of the Wash.

Partners



Case study: Countdown 2010

Natural England's Countdown 2010 grant scheme has awarded nearly £2 million to 34 projects, run by a variety of partners, that have helped protect and enhance priority biodiversity species and habitats, engaged people in conservation work, and raised awareness among key stakeholders, community groups and the general public.

For example, the Cirl bunting reintroduction project, which involves local farmers, Natural England, RSPB, Paignton Zoo and the National Trust, has re-established a breeding population of Cirl buntings in Cornwall after they became extinct in the county over 10 years ago. Another project has improved the wildlife of rivers and streams in Cumbria by encouraging natural river processes, fencing out stock and clearing invasive non-native plants.



Male Cirl bunting.



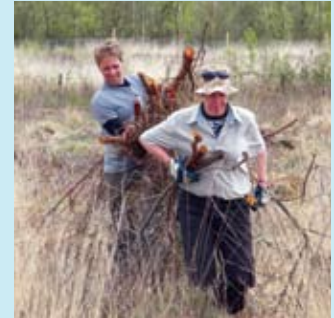
Outcome 2

People are inspired to **value** **and conserve** the natural environment

More people inspired to enjoy, understand
and act for the natural environment

Why we are doing it

- because everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the natural environment
- so that people are inspired by and engage with the natural environment and understand its importance to our survival
- to galvanise people and communities to act to conserve and enhance the natural environment



Highlights in our second year

Our advice to Government on coastal access fully reflected in the draft Marine Bill. Developed the outline methodology (scheme) published with the Bill.

Increased volunteering on National Nature Reserves by 8.5% to over 2,000.

Delivered and evaluated 24 pilot projects in cities and towns to improve accessible natural greenspace close to where people live.

Supported the Department of Health-led Physical Activity Care Pathway trial involving eight GP practices across five London boroughs in recommending outdoor exercise in local greenspaces to help general health and aid recovery from heart disease.

Support provided to local authorities on developing their Rights of Way Improvement Plans to increase the opportunities provided by rights of way for people to enjoy the natural environment.

Launched the new 164 km Cotswold Way National Trail.

Delivered four action research projects testing novel ways of engaging under-represented groups in accessing the outdoors.

Secured £25 million from the Big Lottery Fund Changing Spaces programme for Access to Nature, a grant scheme managed by Natural England on behalf of a consortium of 12 national environmental organisations, to provide new opportunities for people to enjoy the natural environment.

Case study: Health and the natural environment

This year, Natural England has worked with the Department of Health on its trial of a new Physical Activity Care Pathway (PACP) in London, where GP surgeries are encouraged to use a new system for recommending physical activity, including outdoor 'green exercise', to help treat certain patient groups. For each practice involved, a map has been drawn up showing the location of outdoor opportunities in the vicinity of the surgery. These maps will be used throughout the trial period and are being copied around England in further promotional work with the NHS Alliance and its commissioning GP practices.

Initial feedback has shown that this approach is welcomed by GPs, nurses and patients and is encouraging more uptake of local walking schemes through the Walking the Way to Health Initiative (WHI) across London, as well as in the selected GP practices.



On the Seven Cornfields Walk, Wolverhampton.

The effectiveness of green exercise as part of healthcare treatment and disease prevention has to date been hard to quantify. Natural England has worked with the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and other academics to develop a simple Outdoor Health Questionnaire that is being promoted to Natural England's 525 WHI schemes. The comparable evaluation data collected will be used to inform the NICE Review of Physical Activity and feed in to the review of the Quality Outcome Framework (QOF) in 2009, the basis on which GPs are funded.

Partners



Case study: The Cotswold Way

In May 2007 we launched the Cotswold Way as England's 14th National Trail, the culmination of over £1 million investment.

Following the Cotswold escarpment for most of its 164 km (102 mile) length, the Trail runs between the Cotswold market town of Chipping Campden and the World Heritage city of Bath, passing through the Cotswolds AONB with its unimproved limestone grassland, the Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods National Nature Reserve, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, together with many historic sites.

The Trail is supported by a detailed guide book, website, and accommodation and public transport information, and should bring lasting economic benefit to the local economy. Over 84,000 people have used the Trail since it was launched.



Walking on the Cotswold escarpment.



Partners



Outcome 3

Sustainable use of the natural environment



The use and management of the environment is more sustainable

Why we are doing it

- so that the use of the land, freshwaters and seas does not compromise the natural environment
- so that change and development can occur in a manner that protects and enhances the natural environment.



Highlights in our second year

Achieved a net increase of 655,303 ha of land under Environmental Stewardship so that it now totals 51.6% of all farmland in England.

Developed a spatial targeting approach to Higher Level Stewardship to better address environmental priorities and support landscape-scale climate change adaptation.

Completed the Environmental Stewardship Review of Progress with Defra to make the scheme even more effective.

Published online map showing all the five million plus hectares of land that are currently in one of the agri-environment schemes, so that for the first time the public can see the benefits these are delivering.

Delivered face-to-face advice to 10,582 farmers and land managers at 575 events, resulting in a significant increase in their awareness of cross-compliance and Environmental Stewardship.

Initiated a national debate on greenspace and housing growth.

Secured and strengthened adaptation provisions in the Climate Change Bill.

Handled 7,747 wildlife licence cases. 88% of customers rated our service as excellent or good.

Case study: Higher Level Stewardship targeting

It is critical that we deliver the greatest environmental and public benefit from the £2.9 billion secured for the Environmental Stewardship scheme for the period 2007–13. Natural England has therefore developed a spatial approach to targeting and prioritisation of Higher Level Stewardship, that will account for at least £600m over the next 6 years.

The approach will ensure delivery of the multiple objectives of the scheme in areas of high environmental priority, identified using an evidence-led approach. These cover between 25 and 30% of England and more than 76% of Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats, such as calcareous grassland, heathland and upland hay meadows.

This year we developed targeting maps to inform ongoing decisions on Environmental Stewardship applications. These maps are being developed further in consultation with our partners along with more detailed maps of the priority



Flower rich arable field margin

holdings in each area that contain the habitats and features that are likely to deliver across the objectives of the scheme. 80% of Higher Level Stewardship funding for new agreements will be focused on these areas. The remaining 20% will be targeted at important single-theme priorities outside the main target areas and at large-scale restoration projects.

The new approach will provide clarity and transparency and will be fully implemented by October 2008.

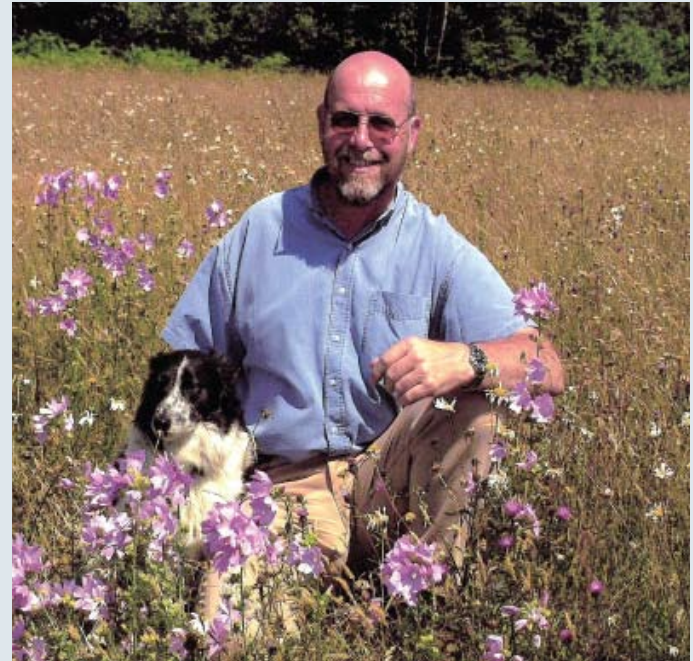
Partners



Case study: Future of Farming Award

Natural England has a long term vision for agriculture where farmed landscapes are valued as much for the wildlife habitats, landscapes and access to the natural environment they provide as for agricultural products. The Future of Farming Award, in association with the Country, Land and Business Association, National Farmers' Union and Tenant Farmers' Association, aims to recognise the achievements of like-minded farmers and promote these more widely. The finalists' successes included innovations in habitat restoration techniques, education, access, healthcare and tourism.

The national winner, Keith Datchler, Farm Manager at the Beech Estate in Sussex, has changed the focus of his farming practices from solely intensive food production to one where conservation of high quality landscapes and biodiversity are fully integrated with agricultural production.



Keith Datchler, national winner at the Future of Farming Awards.

Partners





Outcome 4

A secure environmental future

Decisions which collectively secure the future of the
natural environment

Why we are doing it

- because the factors that affect the natural environment are complex and changing rapidly
- to ensure the information and evidence is available to monitor, anticipate and plan for major changes that will affect the natural environment
- to clarify our vision for the natural environment and engage people in debating the future choices this involves



Highlights in our second year

Assessed the potential impact of climate change on the natural environment in four Character Areas – Cumbria High Fells, Shropshire Hills, The Broads and Dorset Downs and Cranbourne Chase – and developed draft response strategies.

Supported partnerships to deliver 71 Green Infrastructure projects in growth areas, provided direct funding to 10 site-based projects and advised 33 partners on site preparation and management.

Developed a joint UK agency response to the European Union consultation on the CAP Health Check process, putting the case to at least maintain current funding levels for the Rural Development Programme and secure measures to safeguard the environmental legacy of set-aside.

Established an agreed monitoring system with Defra to measure the impact of the loss of set-aside and scoped policy options for mitigating the environmental consequences of this.

Built good relationships with the water companies in preparation for Water Pricing Review 2009, to secure investment in over 350 schemes to improve the condition of European wildlife sites, SSSIs, manage priority habitats and deliver more sustainable land management in water catchments.

Engaged over 72,000 people at Breathing Places Cities events and created an award winning web portal with the BBC, used by over 2 million people in the first month.

Case study: Climate change – The Broads

The natural environment is already altering as a consequence of climate change. The Broads is one of the four pilot areas where Natural England, in conjunction with local partners, is evaluating the possible responses at a local level for the natural environment to adapt to climate change.

The pilot consisted of three elements: the identification of significant environmental assets, assessment of potential climate change impacts and the development of responses to adapt to the impacts.

The Broads is a low lying, mainly freshwater landscape abutting the East Norfolk coast. It forms one of Europe's finest and most important wetland areas and is one of the family of National Parks. Much of it is also of European wildlife importance, being a Natura 2000 and Ramsar site.



The Broads

The main impact of climate change will be a loss of freshwater habitat due to sea level rise and salt water intrusion, and a consequent increase in coastal and brackish habitats. The scale of potential climate change impacts will require a response. A number of options have been examined including re-engineering the shape of the coast and developing new wetlands and washlands.

The final reports for all four pilot response strategies will be published this autumn.

Partners



Case study: Green Infrastructure pilots

Green Infrastructure (GI) is a network of formal and informal green spaces and related environmental assets providing a host of ecosystem services, such as biodiversity and sustainable urban drainage and social benefits, such as the opportunity for outdoor exercise.

Natural England is supporting the planning and delivery of GI in areas targeted for significant urban development, providing technical guidance to 59 GI partnerships and contributing to the preparation of strategies in 21 locations. We have also advised on the delivery of 72 greenspace projects, and funded 10 site-based projects.

At Rainham Marshes, within the Thames Gateway, we are working with the RSPB and the London Borough of Havering to secure significant new access to the marshes and Thames Riverside enabling people to enjoy this area for the first time in over 100 years.



An educational visit to Rainham Marshes.

Partners



Natural England
will be a **distinctive
public body**
committed to the
environment and
people



What we strive to do

- Be independent and trusted
- Build consensus and lead opinion
- Act as a catalyst for others and take action ourselves
- Develop our people so that they can realise their potential

Highlights in our second year

Stakeholder Survey showed a high level of satisfaction in relationships at a senior national level. 21% of the public aware of Natural England.

Leadership and Staff Development Programme launched – over 2,000 staff trained in our Performance Management system, 2,000 attended advocacy training and over 1,500 knowledge sharing events.

Put in place a single set of terms and conditions for all staff.

Delivered £6.5 million cash efficiency savings and made a further £2 million productivity savings through new ways of working, better procurement practices and reducing the number of offices from 60 to 47 during the year.

Attracted external funding of over £4 million for environmental improvements.

Established Incentive Scheme Service centres resulting in major efficiencies and improvement in customer service:

- 56,000 claims, totalling £370 million paid on time or earlier;
- 96% of classic scheme agreement holders paid one month early;
- 98% of all Entry Level scheme applications processed in a month, two months quicker than previous standard.

Green travel policy options developed to help us deliver our 50% reduction in carbon target by 2010.

Established a modernised Health and Safety approach and signed-up to the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) sensible risk management principles. The number of incidents reported to HSE remain low at four for the year.

Published a Diversity and Equality policy together with Gender Equality and Disability Equality schemes and put in place supporting staff accountabilities and training.



**NATURAL
ENGLAND**

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