

FAO Combined Authority and city leaders

CC Robert Jenrick

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Combined Authority and city leaders,

I am writing to you as the RSPB's England Director as I am aware that you will be considering how your region will recover from impacts of the coronavirus crisis. As you consider your plans, I wanted to make you aware of a recent YouGov survey – carried out last month - seeking people's views on the role of nature both during, and as part of our recovery from, the pandemic. At the RSPB we have been encouraged by the increasing recognition by leaders and decision makers of the need for a green recovery. However, we are concerned that for some this is being considered in terms of carbon reductions alone. The results of the survey are set out in the attached report and are striking in their demonstration of **overwhelming public support for nature to also be placed at the heart of recovery plans.**

As you will see in the report, the ability to access nature close to home has been seen by many as vital during the lockdown. However, the survey highlights **inequalities in access to nature between households with the highest and lowest incomes, and between urban and rural areas**, suggesting that the impacts of the virus have not fallen equally across society. The results of the survey reveal overwhelming support for recovery plans to include action to increase accessible nature-rich greenspace, with 89% of respondents in England agreeing that doing so will improve people's general health, well-being, and happiness. Furthermore, 80% of respondents actively opposed the suggestion that Government spending on nature should be reduced during our recovery.

City and metro mayors have an important role to play in leading the economic recovery in their regions, *and* as advocates for stronger and greener policies and legislation at a national level. It is now widely accepted that protecting and enhancing the environment can benefit the economy, create employment, and have far-reaching positive impacts on people's health & wellbeing. The RSPB are therefore calling on you to respond to the findings outlined in the attached report by placing ambitious targets for protecting and increasing nature and natural greenspace at the heart of your recovery plans. In doing so you will strengthen the resilience, health, wellbeing and prosperity of your constituents, whilst simultaneously delivering action that will benefit nature and the climate.

**We are calling on all city and metro mayors to prioritise measures in your coronavirus recovery plans that benefit nature whilst simultaneously supporting people's health and wellbeing as well as the economy. These measures should include:**

- 1. Increasing the amount and quality of accessible nature-rich greenspace where people live to help improve health and wellbeing and connect local communities and wildlife to the wider landscape;**

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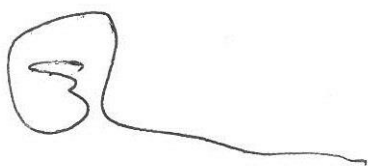
The RSPB is part of BirdLife International, a partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world.

2. **Adopting a target to double the area of land for nature<sup>1</sup>** through the creation and delivery of a Nature Recovery Strategy that will protect, restore, increase and connect our most precious wild places;
3. **Putting nature and the environment at the heart of infrastructure planning** to maximise social, environmental and economic benefits;
4. **Investing in nature-based solutions** to help mitigate and adapt to climate change while benefitting biodiversity, society and the economy.
5. **Promoting active travel** through investment in green transport infrastructure such as cycle routes and footpaths to make cycling and walking both safe and enjoyable.
6. **Pressing UK Government to put nature and the environment at the heart of national policy and plans** for a green recovery, including better implementation, enforcement and monitoring of environmental legislation.
7. **Engaging with statutory and non-statutory nature organisations like ourselves** to better understand and realise the potential for nature to contribute to recovery plans.

We hope that the attached report will help to inform your thinking on the role and importance of nature in your region's recovery from the impacts of coronavirus. In order to effectively forge a path out of this crisis we believe it is vital that you engage with all sectors of society, and for a recovery to be truly green this will require the input of the environmental sector. We would be delighted to meet with you to discuss how we believe a green recovery could become reality in your region, including our ideas around projects that could be undertaken immediately.

If you or your team would be interested in holding a virtual meeting to explore our ideas further please contact [jess.chappell@rspb.org.uk](mailto:jess.chappell@rspb.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'EMM', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Emma Marsh  
Director, RSPB England

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<sup>1</sup> The RSPB's adopted definition of doubling nature is "Doubling the area of land well-managed primarily for nature".