GREEN RECOVERY PLAN
During lockdown we have seen the importance of natural spaces for people come into focus.

Nature benefits the health of society in many ways. Access to nature-rich biodiverse green and blue spaces improves health, wellbeing, child development, productivity and social cohesion. Our ecosystems provide clean air and water, protect us against extreme weather events, climate change and health epidemics, and provide us with a climate-safe, sustainable, and resilient planet in which people can thrive. Investing in nature has a net benefit for health, society and the economy.

All this is under threat as we are in a nature and climate crisis, but it’s not too late if we work together. We understand that reviving our natural world is key to long term economic resilience and therefore should be part of a green recovery. We can invest in nature, set targets and implement policies now that will ensure we have sustainable, nature-rich, healthy communities and a green, resilient economy for generations to come.
Introduction

Our natural world is in crisis. We are in the Earth’s sixth mass extinction event, with global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles having declined, on average, by 60% between 1970 and 2014. One million species worldwide are at risk of extinction (IPBES, 2019). Within the UK, 41% of species have declined and 15% are at risk of extinction (2019 State of Nature Report). The World Economic Forum considers the five greatest risks to the global economy to all be environmental.

Yet, the recent Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 (GBO5) report shows that the UK has failed to meet the Aichi targets for nature restoration. We must set new international goals, enshrine them into our domestic laws, carry them through into policies, such as farming and fisheries reform, and fund nature as part of a green recovery.

The RSPB’s Green Recovery Plan sets out the key policies needed to put nature in England on the road to recovery and contribute to global efforts to tackle the nature and climate crisis. These measures would also help tackle climate change, level up societal inequalities and achieve the objectives set in the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan.

The UK could become a world leader in addressing the nature and climate crisis. Policy makers can help to achieve this by acting now to:

1. Set legally binding targets and ensure good governance
2. Invest in nature
3. Reform agriculture, land management, freshwater and fisheries policies
4. Tackle the dual nature and climate crises

This will help to revive our natural world, securing a cleaner, greener, fairer world for us all.
1

Set legally binding targets and ensure good governance

• Set legally binding targets to restore populations of wild species to a 1970’s baseline and to protect 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030, including binding interim targets to ensure that action is not delayed.

• Ensure good governance in the form of an independent and well-resourced Office for Environmental Protection to provide the necessary accountability to meet the targets.

2

Invest in nature

• Properly invest in a green recovery, with a Comprehensive Spending Review that delivers a total of £2.9 billion annually on environmental land management, including £615 million each year on restoration and creation of priority habitats, and £426 million annually on a new National Nature Service employment and training scheme.
Reform agriculture, land management, freshwater and fisheries policies

Agriculture

• Ensure a new world-leading agricultural policy and funding package including the Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) to support a vibrant, resilient farming sector, capable of supporting the recovery of the natural environment and rebuilding the productive capacity of the land. Farmers and other land managers will be rewarded for their essential role in the delivery of environmental public goods, including the recovery of our farmland wildlife.

• Implement a comprehensive food strategy which drives further reductions in food waste and facilitates the uptake of sustainable and healthy diets to reduce the impact of the food system on nature and ensure we meet our climate targets.

• Reduce the reliance on agro-chemicals and significantly reduce the quantity and toxicity of pesticides used in agriculture by providing increased support and advice to farmers to undertake genuine Integrated Pest Management, especially more natural pest control methods.

• Set a regulatory baseline with sufficient funding mechanisms to ensure that the agriculture sector achieves net zero GHG emissions by 2040 in ways that enhance the overall sustainability of the industry and drive the recovery of nature.

• Support farmers to implement the Farm Wildlife six key actions ensuring that at least 10% of the farmed area is managed for wildlife.

1 https://farmwildlife.info/how-to-do-it/
Land management, freshwater and fisheries

- Create new protected areas and revive our existing network of protected sites so that 30% of land, including freshwater, and seas in and around England are protected by 2030, ensuring that the whole network is monitored, protected, and well managed for nature and its changing needs along the trajectory of climate change.

- Ensure that there is **no downgrade to existing environmental protections** and the tools which can help to inform better decisions (such as Habitats Regulations Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment).

- **Require developers to contribute to the enhancement and recovery of the natural environment through an ambitious mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement (at least 20%) for all forms of development**, including Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, to help to secure the recovery of nature.

- Ensure that **Local Nature Recovery Strategies integrate water priorities, opportunities and data** into their development and delivery, with the integral support of Catchment Partnerships.


- Pass **fisheries legislation with an ecosystem-based approach** at its heart that tackles by-catch from the fishing industry, eliminating the incidental capture and drowning of marine wildlife in fishing gear, and **halts the commercial extraction of keystone species in the marine ecosystem**.
Tackle the dual nature and climate crises

Global targets

- Recognise the UK’s impact on natural capital overseas within the 25 Year Environment Plan, and work with business to design an appropriate policy framework to manage such impacts.

- By the end of 2020, establish an ambitious and time bound, legally binding target to halve the UK’s overall environmental impacts overseas by 2030, with an initial sub-target focussing on eliminating deforestation and land conversion from UK commodity supply chains as early as possible and no later than 2023. Build towards targets that cover all imports and traded products and all ecological impacts (e.g. water, soil, nutrients).

- Secure a mandatory due diligence obligation on businesses and financial institutions that requires them to identify, mitigate and report on environmental risks and impacts in their supply chains or investment portfolios.
Nature based solutions

- Ensure that a strategic approach to **woodland expansion is coordinated with plans** for the delivery of a Nature Recovery Network, national peat strategies, a strategic approach to the delivery of future Environmental Land Management (ELM), and infrastructure and development planning.

- Implement the **immediate end to the damaging practice of burning on peatland habitats**.

- Set ambitious targets and increase funding for peatland habitat protection and re-wetting restoration as part of a **peatland recovery strategy**. This must include 50% of lowland peat soils to be rewetted or sustainably managed by 2030, and all by 2040, and for the **serious, ongoing loss of lowland peat soils to be halted by 50% by 2030 and completely by 2040**, achieving 2 million hectares of peatland habitat in good condition by 2040.

- Deliver nature-based solutions to **restore habitats and reduce flood and coastal erosion risk** and prepare vulnerable UK habitats and communities for the impacts of climate change, including natural flood management and managed realignment to restore our salt marshes and mudflats and increase blue carbon opportunities.
Case studies in England

The Oxford–Cambridge Arc

Kingsbrook wildlife-friendly housing

Minsmere reserve

Medmerry

Wallasea

Hope Farm

The Fens
The Oxford–Cambridge Arc

As part of its ambition to double the economic output of the area between Oxford and Cambridge, Government has committed to pioneering a natural capital approach to planning development that aims to increase the quantity and enhance the condition of the area’s natural assets to deliver net gains for biodiversity and the environment. This approach has the potential to demonstrate how economic growth and development, done differently, can protect and restore nature and the environment rather than resulting in further loss and degradation. To deliver though, Government must put protecting nature and the environment at the heart of decisions about infrastructure and housing development and adopt ambitious targets for their restoration and enhancement. Together with our partners, the RSPB is asking Government and local partners in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc to adopt a set of principles, targets and recommendations to deliver Nature’s Arc as a truly world leading example of environmentally positive development.

Kingsbrook wildlife-friendly housing

Sitting in the middle of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, Barratt Homes’ Kingsbrook development on the edge of Aylesbury is an exemplar of housing designed and built to benefit wildlife and the people who live there by incorporating lots of high-quality accessible natural greenspace. The RSPB has been working with Barratt Developments on Kingsbrook’s wildlife-friendly design elements. On completion, Kingsbrook is expected to achieve industry-leading biodiversity net gain. Its 2,450 houses and gardens will take up less than 40% of the site, with 60% of the area consisting of wildlife-friendly greenspace. All this natural greenspace is not just for the birds – it will be good for Kingsbrook’s human residents too, with time spent in nature shown to be beneficial to people’s physical and mental health and wellbeing, and even children’s education and development. Kingsbrook shows that wildlife-friendly development at scale is viable, setting a new benchmark for the housing sector’s standards of wildlife-friendly design and delivery.
Minsmere reserve

Minsmere RSPB Reserve is the beating heart of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Managed as a nature reserve by RSPB since 1947, the site has been instrumental in the return and recovery of a number of iconic species of British birds. For example, Avocets returned to breed in the UK after an absence of more than 100 years at Minsmere. Now Minsmere's diversity of habitats over 1,000 hectares host more species of plant and animal than any other RSPB reserve in the whole of the UK, with approximately 6,000 species recorded. The RSPB works closely with other organisations (Suffolk Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Natural England, Forestry England, local authorities and local landowners) to ensure alignment of approaches to manage the surrounding landscape to ensure wider benefits for wildlife and people, including initiatives such as the Suffolk Wader Strategy. Local economy benefits include the fact that Minsmere’s over 100,000 visitors a year generate over 100 jobs and millions of pounds of investment per annum.

Minsmere’s excellent land management, including the restoration of conifer plantations and arable land to acid grassland and Heathland, earned it the Environment Agency’s Pioneering Biodiversity Programme award. Minsmere’s importance for wildlife is also recognised by numerous designations (SPA, SAC, SSSI and Ramsar Site) and it is one of only five sites in the UK to have been awarded the European Diploma Award for Protected Areas.
Nature protection at sea

Medmerry

The Medmerry project is large-scale managed realignment of coastal protection infrastructure, which combines the use of natural coastal vegetation as physical protection with the realignment of engineered infrastructure to retreat and move the coastline inland. This lets the waters further inland yet reduces the risks of flooding of neighbouring towns, while the surrendered land is increasingly becoming a biodiversity habitat for many species. This included the creation of around 200 hectares of wetland habitat and protects 348 properties and associated infrastructure from coastal flooding. The scheme, funded by the Environment Agency in partnership with the RSPB, has formed new intertidal habitat which will provide food and shelter for species, reduce flood risk, and captures carbon.

Wallasea

Wallasea Island is a managed realignment scheme supported by Defra, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Crossrail and the RSPB, and has seen the creation of approximately 670 hectares of intertidal habitat, saline lagoons and coastal grassland. This new area supports a wide range of species, including nationally and internationally important bird populations, and has significantly increased the carbon sequestration capacity of the reserve. Three million tonnes of earth was brought by boat from the tunnels and shafts created by the Crossrail scheme in London. This allowed us to raise the land above sea level and place the soil in a way that created a new 115-hectare intertidal area of saltmarsh, islands and mudflats (known as Jubilee Marsh). The reserve now covers a total of 740 hectares and includes walking trails and bird hides for visitors. The intertidal areas have been designed with climate change in mind, with long shallow slopes from the new seawall providing space for the saltmarsh to creep up as sea levels rise. Habitats like this will make us more resilient to the impacts of climate change as well as capturing and storing carbon for years to come.
Hope Farm

Hope Farm aims to demonstrate and research farming methods that are future-proof. Over the last 20 years, it has been moving further away from the farming system that relies predominantly on agrochemicals to return profits on a few crops. Instead, integrated pest management forms the core to our decision making. The habitats in place cover 15% of the farm, with seven different crops, whilst still returning stable profits year on year comparable to 20 years ago. It has the extra income of our habitat management, with 400% more butterflies, 185% more breeding farmland bird territories, and around 15 times more farmland birds on the farm overwinter. The farm has completed its second harvest, successfully, without insecticide use, and research is still ongoing to help find ways for farming to work with nature in a more sustainable way, to reduce and optimise our inputs.
Nature based solutions

The Fens

The RSPB and partners are delivering several habitat restoration projects in the Fens, contributing significantly to protecting peat reserves, reducing the carbon emissions compared to less sustainable land uses, whilst delivering species and habitat targets. Opportunities exist to combine delivery for wildlife and a reduction in carbon emissions with co-benefits for water storage and flood protection. Examples include Lakenheath Fen, which was converted from high intensity arable peatland to functioning wetland over a twenty-year period. The restored area now qualifies as an SSSI and SPA due to the populations of nationally important species such as bittern and crane, whilst delivering significant reductions in carbon emissions compared to previous land uses. The Ouse Washes Habitat Creation Project aims to restore 500 hectares of lowland wet grassland, reducing carbon emissions from the rapidly oxidising cultivated peat, whilst mitigating the deterioration of the Ouse Washes SPA. The adjacent Ouse Washes continue to provide flood storage protection for surrounding communities. At the nearby Nene Washes, arable land has been converted to functioning wetland within the flood storage area, thereby providing a triple function through flood protection, protection of peatland reserves and supporting internationally important wildlife, including the globally near threatened black-tailed godwit.