



Executive Summary of Woodland Trust response to 'An Invitation to shape the nature of England'

The Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, warmly welcomes the production of a White Paper on the natural environment.

Whilst there is growing understanding of the value of nature, it is however one thing to recognise this value and grow the evidence base but quite another to take the necessary action both in terms of possessing a vision and in ensuring the government machine is responsive to it.

We believe that the challenges facing our natural environment are a shared responsibility and that there are seven prerequisites to embedding the natural world in decision making at all levels.

1. Vision

We believe the starting point should be a vision for the future of the natural environment **where conservation moves from being a segregated activity to an integrated one** and one where a new focus on the landscape scale is combined with the provision of ecosystem services to people. This is something which Government, civil society, the private sector and the wider public can rally behind. The old reserve based focus of the past is no longer viable either for nature's survival or for the effective harnessing of services to society.

At the heart of this vision should be a doubling of native tree and woodland cover. The UK has one of the lowest tree covers in Europe but tackling this would be an extremely cost-effective interactive step forward in terms of delivering on the vision described above. Not only are native trees of outstanding value for wildlife, they also deliver carbon sequestration, food alleviation, clean our air and rivers, harbour insects which pollinate our air and crops, provide shade in towns and cities, shelter for our livestock and enhance public health - both physical and mental. **At a time of enormous pressure on public finances, cost effective instruments such as tree planting are more valuable than ever.**

This view is reinforced by the scale of the response to Richard Benyon's call for Woodland Trust members and supporters to engage with this consultation. Some 8,395 individual responses were sent to Defra calling for action to double our native tree and woodland cover and better protect our finest trees and woods.

2. Political leadership

Political leadership is required at the highest level through a new emphasis - in word and deed - upon our dependence on and responsibility for, the natural environment. This needs to start from the top with the Prime Minister and Chancellor and find policy expression through reform of Government reporting mechanisms and provision of funding support to wider society.

All the evidence is there to demonstrate that the natural environment is central to our survival. It requires leadership - both for moral reasons - as with international development - and because a healthy natural environment is fundamental to human existence.

3. Ecosystems strategy

We believe that each Government department should be required to produce and be held accountable for, an ecosystems strategy reflecting its own dependencies upon the natural environment and its environmental responsibilities.



4. Intelligent targets

We recognise the Coalition Government's desire to reduce the number of overall targets. This should not mean however a shift from the use of intelligent targets which aid efficient use of resources. Indeed there has never been a more important time than the present financial climate to promote good stewardship. We therefore feel that clear cross-government indicators for the achievement of a healthy natural environment are also required - reviewed by a powerful Cabinet Committee.

5. Localism as environmentalism

The natural environment matters to people in a deeply personal way. It is therefore important that the new localism is informed by a strong emphasis on environmentalism. This should mean making it as easy as possible for people to engage with their local environment. Key to this is use of innovative civil society tools such as the Woodland Trust's *MyView* - a new interactive online campaigning tool that enables people to show councillors via a picture precisely how they want their communities to look.

Proposals for a local green space designation and national tree planting campaign are a step in the right direction and the new localism should be grasped as an important opportunity to rekindle the spirit of 'Think global, act local'.

6. Planning for green

It is essential that the White paper and planning policy inform each other. The new national planning framework and Localism Bill should adopt an approach which is spatial not site specific and help planners and communities to visualise the scale of the challenges ahead and how their community relates to them.

It should also reinforce that the purpose of planning is to conserve ecosystem services and provide a framework that ensures co-operation between local authorities - recognising that the natural environment does not respect administrative boundaries.

7. Creating shared responsibility - taking action

There is much to agree with in the consultation document but what is vital is that it stimulates activity. Moving conservation from a segregated to an integrated activity means building understanding of the responsibilities of a range of actors - government, civil society, the private sector and the wider public.

For Government key actions include: establishing a vision and policy principles; indicators of a healthy environment; development of enabling mechanisms and use of the government estate to exemplify best practice - a prime example being ensuring the restoration of ancient woodland sites planted with conifers in the Public Forest Estate - a key way for Government to secure major biodiversity gain.

For civil society key responsibilities include: supporting government in identifying and promoting best practice and innovation; supporting community action; acting as advocates and champions and securing and brokering support from the private sector.

For the private sector key actions include: understanding its impact on the environment; alleviating and improving this and funding others engaged in environmental improvement work.

For the wider public key actions include: growing understanding of their impact on the environment; taking action to protect and enhance the environment both locally and nationally; taking responsibility for telling authorities where legislation and policy are failing and can be improved.