

● GREEN BULLET

28th October 2021

The Green Bullet connects and supports networks of voluntary, community and public sector organisations across a wide range of environmental and related issues, in North West England and beyond, originally produced by North West Environment Link (NWEL).

NWEL was a partnership of environmental NGOs established to respond jointly to regional environmental challenges and opportunities. NWEL was wound down after regional governance arrangements ended, and remaining funds supported the continued production of this bulletin. More recently CPRE North West has supported its production and retained the same aim.

Please send any items for inclusion in the next bulletin to andyuille@gmail.com - and feel free to forward all or parts of these bulletins throughout your own networks to help spread the word!

The Green Bullet is also available to download from [VSNW](#), the regional voluntary and community sector network.

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Campaigns

Human right to a healthy environment

The United Nations has passed a resolution recognising that everyone, everywhere, has a [human right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#). This has been enshrined as a human right and governments are being urged to incorporate the right in their constitutions and legislation.

Let Nature Help

The climate and ecological emergencies are intertwined and have to be tackled together. That is why the Wildlife Trusts are calling on the Government, industry and local authorities to step up and take action, by investing in nature's recovery and climate change mitigation. Drawing on the latest research, the '[Let Nature Help](#)' report shows how a variety of natural landscapes in the UK can store carbon and could absorb a third of UK emissions if these degraded habitats were to be expertly restored. More space for nature is required in all built environments and there needs to be significant increases of peatland restoration. It makes the case for addressing the climate and nature emergencies together, head on.

Climate change

COP26 is coming and civil society organisations are campaigning in many ways to try to secure a positive outcome. You can join in, individually or organisationally, with alliances such as [The Climate Coalition](#), [The COP26 Coalition](#) (focused on climate justice), or [Stop Climate Chaos](#), as well of course as individual environmental NGOs.

Information update

Brexit and beyond

- The Environment Bill continues to ping-pong its way between the Lords and the Commons. The House of Lords voted through 14 significant amendments to improve the Bill, to, amongst other things:
 - make interim targets binding
 - remove exceptions to the duty to give due regard to environmental principles
 - secure OEP independence
 - empower courts to grant meaningful remedies following an environmental review
 - safeguard the habitats regulations
 - give greater protection to ancient woodlands

The Government [rejected every amendment](#) apart from one extending the power to charge for single-use plastic bags to cover all single use items. The Bill was debated again in The Lords on October 27th, as [reported in real time by Ruth Chambers](#). The Lords will send a different, reduced set of amendments back to the Commons, focused on the independence and powers of the OEP. Following public and media pressure, the Government reluctantly announced that it would introduce an amendment to make water companies [reduce the amount of raw sewage dumped](#) into rivers and seas, having voted down exactly such a proposal in the Commons two days earlier. As ever, up-to-date and incisive [Wildlife and Countryside Link and Greener UK briefings](#) summarise and explain these amendments and other key issues in the Bill, with a [handy short summary blog](#) from Green Alliance on what's needed to make the bill a success. Ongoing ping-pong makes it increasingly unlikely that the Bill will be passed before COP26, damaging the UK's hoped-for positioning as a global leader on environmental issues

Climate change & energy

- In a landmark announcement, the Government has committed to [decarbonising the electricity system by 2035](#), bringing forward the target of a decarbonised power system from 2050, to reduce exposure to volatile international energy markets as well as eliminate reliance on fossil fuels.
- [COP26](#) is rapidly approaching! The COP26 Presidency has outlined plans to finally make good on a commitment from OECD nations to [provide \\$100bn of climate finance to poorer countries](#) annually, but stated that the full amount will not be delivered this year or next. The [EU has agreed an ambitious stance](#) going into the summit, but will only implement it if all other signatories of the Paris Agreement commit to do the same. The UK will be focusing on securing commitments from other countries on [coal, cars, cash and trees](#).
- But the latest [UN Emissions Gap report](#) states that climate commitments and plans from national governments are currently aligned with a 2.7C temperature increase, despite many nations badging their updated targets as net-zero or compliant with the Paris Agreement's 1.5C pathway. It finds that, on the whole, the world has failed to accelerate climate action in its Covid recovery plans. Only around 20% of total recovery investments made by nations between March 2020 and May 2021 are going towards activities likely to reduce emissions, and almost all of this funding has been spent by the G20.

- „,While the latest [UN Production Gap report](#) finds that fossil fuel production is set to soar over the next decade. Combined governmental plans for mining and drilling new fossil fuel reserves equal more than double the amount that would enable the world to meet the Paris Agreement targets
- The UK public backs a carbon tax on polluting industries, higher levies on flying and grants for heat pumps in order to tackle the climate crisis, according to the [biggest analysis of climate policy preferences ever published](#).
- Carbon Brief have analysed the [historical responsibility for climate change](#) – ie which countries have contributed how much to the climate crisis over time, with an excellent infographic animation to illustrate it. As [OpenDemocracy argue separately](#), “The infrastructure and relative wealth we enjoy in the UK has been built on huge amounts of past pollution – much of which is still in the atmosphere today,”
- Documents leaked to Greenpeace reveal how, to absolutely everyone’s enormous surprise, some of the world’s biggest coal, oil, beef and animal feed-producing nations are attempting to [get the IPCC’s report for COP26 watered down](#) to avoid threats to their domestic economic interests.
- The [Environmental Audit Committee warned](#) that the government does not have a clear plan for delivering against its pledge for the UK to host two million green jobs by 2030, and hasn’t yet finalised a definition of "green jobs" or produced comprehensive skills plans. The net zero strategy jobs claims would account for just under 25% of the total pledge.
- [Renovating the UK’s homes to low-carbon standards](#) would cost the government only £5bn within the next four years and would create 100,000 jobs, cut people’s energy bills, increase tax revenue and bring tens of billions in economic benefits, according to the Construction Leadership Council.

Planning

- The long-awaited Government response to the Planning White Paper consultation...remains long-awaited. Unconfirmed suggestions from well-placed sources suggest that the response will be published before Christmas (Christmas Eve is a popular time for burying ‘unhelpful’ announcements), with the Planning Bill published fairly early in the new year. However, DLUHC now also has the responsibility of publishing a Levelling Up Bill on a similar timescale, and it is not clear which Bill will come first. Levelling Up is said to be Michael Gove’s priority, but is not clear whether this will sideline planning reform or absorb it as an important levelling up lever. There is also speculation that the Planning Bill may become something of a tidying-up exercise, and that some of the meatier reforms will be dropped, or changed, and may be put instead into the Levelling Up Bill. Rumours abound on issues like [nature recovery zones](#) and [street-level votes](#). All we definitely know is that we don’t know, and Governmental cards are being played quite close to their chests. But the current direction of travel looks more promising, if anything can be inferred from the conference speeches of [Boris Johnson](#) (where he spoke out against the building of new homes on "green fields" and instead indicated a preference for "beautiful homes on brownfield sites") and [Michael Gove](#) (who emphasised “urban regeneration” and building on “neglected brownfield sites”). However, both Gove and Johnson have implied that they want to see an increase in housebuilding in the north, which may or may not be on brownfield land. There were also some hopeful hints in these [statements from Michael Gove](#) in his first outing in the Commons as Secretary of State, in a debate on planning rules on October 25th:
 - “As we take forward our proposals for planning reform, we will be balancing the need for new housing with environmental concerns and also the vital importance of listening to local people.”
 - “As we consider our plans for the future, one thing we want to do is to make sure that the voice of local people is integrated more effectively into planning decisions.”

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- "...I certainly welcome that direction of travel" [in response to Clive Betts saying that "there still needs to be an opportunity for local people to be able to comment on, object to, and, where necessary, influence the outcomes of individual planning applications."
- In its assessment of the net zero strategy (see Publications), the Climate Change Committee has [recommended that government includes a "net zero test"](#) in national planning policy to avoid promoting "high-carbon developments". The net zero strategy says that the NPPF will be reviewed to "make sure it contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation as fully as possible" and that government "will embed transport decarbonisation principles in spatial planning"
- A [new briefing from the Wildlife Trusts](#) calls for, amongst other things, a "wildbelt" land-use designation to be embedded in the planning system, a new legal requirement on councils to act "in accordance with" new local nature recovery strategies when making planning decisions, and a legally-binding target for access to nature, reflecting the current deeply unequal access to green spaces in deprived areas and for areas with higher proportions of minority ethnic groups.
- 13 local authorities, including Stockport in the North West, are taking part in [trials of new digital methods](#) to help people engage with planning
- 53 councils have received a share of £58 million in government [funding to unlock brownfield land](#) for development. Only one of these, Blackburn with Darwen, was in the North West, with the vast majority of the money going to southern councils.
- A group of planning and environmental organisations has written to Michael Gove [asking him to issue an "urgent" ministerial statement to prioritise net zero](#) and tackle flooding and overheating through the planning system

Transport

- Transport minister Andrew Stephenson has reported that [HS2 remains 'within budget and on schedule'](#) in a [regular 6-monthly update](#) on the project. He did not respond to the mounting speculation that the eastern leg of phase 2b (Birmingham to Leeds) will not be, or only partially be, delivered.

Nature and biodiversity

- COP26? What about COP15? This month, representatives from nearly 200 countries are meeting in Kunming, China, to finalise what has been described by some as ["the Paris Agreement for Nature"](#). The Kunming Declaration and Framework — which will be worked out at the UN's biodiversity convention, known as COP15 — also aims to put an end to humanity's disruption of a crucial planetary system. Among the targets proposed are:
 - 30 per cent of land and sea areas to be protected
 - Invasive species spread reduced by 50 per cent
 - Pollution from all sources reduced to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity
 - Extinction rate stopped from accelerating
- Almost half of Britain's natural biodiversity has disappeared over the centuries, with farming and urban spread triggered by the industrial and agricultural revolutions being blamed as major factors for this loss. That is the shock finding of the Natural History Museum's Biodiversity Trends Explorer, which has revealed that the UK is one of the worst-rated nations in the world for the extent to which its ecosystems have retained their natural animals and plants. ["Britain has lost more of its natural biodiversity than almost anywhere else in western Europe](#), the most of all the G7 nations and more than many other nations such as China," said Professor Andy Purvis, of the museum's life science department.
- The UK has recorded its lowest ever number of butterflies in an annual survey of the insects, prompting conservationists to warn that nature is in crisis. Butterfly Conservation,

which counted butterflies and moths between 16 July and 8 August, said the results, released on Thursday, marked the [lowest numbers since the Big Butterfly Count started](#) 12 years ago and called for urgent action to be taken.

- The Green Finance Institute commissioned eftec, the Economics for the Environment Consultancy, to calculate the difference between the spending required for seven environmental outcomes and the funds already forthcoming. [The Finance Gap for UK Nature report](#) indicates that the funding gap for the UK and its Overseas Territories is in the order of £44 to £97 billion over the next 10 years. A case study identifies a 98% shortfall in funding for the Northern Forest in England.
- Over 3,000 hectares of [new woodlands are set to be planted along England's rivers](#) and watercourses. Planting trees on and around riverbanks, or allowing them to grow naturally, can help to improve water quality by blocking the runoff of pollutants into rivers, manage flood risks by slowing the flow of water, boost biodiversity by creating new habitat corridors and make our rivers more climate resilient by providing shade and cooling water temperatures.

Publications

Net zero strategy

- The UK Government has published its long-awaited [Net-zero strategy](#), which outlines how spending will be prioritised to deliver job growth while reducing emissions from transport, power, heavy industry and the built environment in order to meet the 2050 net zero target. The Strategy claims this will support up to 190,000 jobs by 2025, and up to 440,000 jobs by 2030, and leverage up to £90bn of private investment by 2030. It includes investment in carbon capture and storage, hydrogen technologies and nuclear energy, an end to sales of gas boilers by 2035 and targets for manufacturers to deliver net zero vehicles. It pledges £3.9 billion for the decarbonisation of heat and buildings, including £450 million to subsidise domestic heat pumps, but nothing to replace the failed green homes grants aimed at improving energy efficiency. It also includes a £124 million boost to the government's Nature for Climate Fund, and commits to restoring 280,000 hectares of England's peat by 2050 and trebling woodland creation in England to meet the government's commitment to create at least 30,000 hectares a year across the UK by the end of this Parliament. An extra £500 million will go towards "innovation projects" to develop green technologies for the future.
- The separate [heat and buildings strategy](#) was published on the same day (Richard Lowes briefly unpacks it [here](#)). This strategy was expected to include a change in how local and national government would approach [the embodied carbon in buildings](#), making refurbishment and retrofitting more attractive than demolition and new build, but it [remained silent](#) on the matter. The [Treasury's net-zero review](#) of how to pay for the transition was also published at the same time. The Review has been criticised for [focusing too much on the costs of transition and ignoring or downplaying the benefits](#). There are also concerns that too little public money is being committed and that the plan is overly-reliant on leveraging private investment.
- The [Climate Change Committee](#) have assessed the net zero strategy as "an ambitious and comprehensive strategy that marks a significant step forward for UK climate policy" and an "achievable and affordable" means to reaching our legally binding climate targets. However, they also warn that there are still major strategic policy gaps that still need to be addressed, primarily that not all sectors have clear plans and pathways to tackle emissions.
- [Carbon Brief have prepared an in-depth Q&A](#) on everything you could possibly want to know about the net-zero strategy. Other reaction from the sector has been mixed. [Becky Willis](#) explains the difficulty of praising or condemning it, as it makes huge relative progress but clearly insufficient absolute progress, and [Tim Lord](#) summarises the key points. There are

thoughtful responses, focusing on their specific fields, from the [Wildlife Trusts](#), [CPRE](#), [Friends of the Earth](#), the [National Trust](#), [Sustain](#), and [WWF](#).

Budget 2021 / 3 Year Spending Review

In environmental terms, [the spending review](#) was more notable for what it didn't say than what it did. The green economy and environmental sector was hoping that, coming hard on the heels of the net zero strategy, it would set out public investment plans for a green recovery. It didn't, with [climate and the environment barely getting a mention](#). This added to fears that the net-zero strategy is seriously underfunded and [overly-optimistic about private sector investment](#). There remains continuing uncertainty over major rail projects, although existing commitment of [£46 billion investment for rail](#) was confirmed without details. The most climate-relevant policy was probably the decrease in domestic Air Passenger Duty, aimed at driving modal shift towards short-haul aviation, the least climate-friendly option possible – although there was also an increase in very long haul APD. Commentators broadly agree that this sends [the wrong message just before COP26](#). However, the remit of the National Infrastructure Commission was revised to include a commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, the Environment Bill's target to halt biodiversity loss by 2030, and “the effective implementation of biodiversity net gain”. The big environmentally-related highlight for the North West is the £6.9bn package for levelling up transport links outside of London (although only £1.5 billion is new money). That includes £1.07bn to Greater Manchester and £710m for Liverpool City Region. In Greater Manchester, the money is slated for next-generation trams and new bus corridors at Bury and Ashton-under-Lyne. In Liverpool City Region, the £710m is reserved for new and renovated stations in Liverpool and Runcorn and an interchange project in St Helens. Other key (and welcome) numbers include:

- £9m towards creating 100 urban “pocket parks”
- £1.8bn for brownfield housing developments
- £65m towards developing software to digitise the planning system.

25 Year Environment Plan progress report

The UK Government has published its third report on [progress with implementation of the 25 Year Environment Plan](#) (relating mainly to England and UK Overseas Territories). This lists actions taken according to various goals and priorities expressed in the Plan. It comes with an online report on 66 indicators of the condition of the natural environment, divided by Plan themes. A short executive summary and a table summarising whether outcomes for an indicator are mostly desirable, mostly undesirable, or a mixed picture is useful for quick reference. Overall, it represents a very mixed picture, with fewer desirable indicators than mixed and undesirable. Air quality, biosecurity and biodiversity fare particularly poorly.

Rewilding and the rural economy

Rewilding Britain have produced a new report to provide a compelling vision for the [creation of localised Nature-Based Economies](#) across 30% of Britain by 2030. It powerfully demonstrates that by putting nature at the heart of a green recovery, we can drive locally-led economic regeneration in a way that is good for nature, climate and people. They are calling for public and private finance to be refocused towards Nature-Based Economies. Although government spending on nature and climate has increased, there is still a huge financing gap.

A Viable Future

Steady State Manchester have published [A Viable Future?](#), a collection of writings from the last decade critically engaging with the key issues around the climate and ecological emergencies. They tackle the hard, structural issues necessary to develop an economy that works for people and planet rather than the other way around, and focus on specific topics such as the Green

New Deal, circular economy, credit and investment, planning and policy, social welfare, and economic development. Free to download and well worth a look!

Events

Planning urban forests

Thursday November 11, 2-3, online. In the first of the Treeconomics 2021 winter webinar series, participants will [learn about Urban Forest Master Plans](#) and how they differ from tree strategies. Kenton Rogers of Treeconomics will be joined by Simon Needle of Birmingham City Council, and Ian McDermott of Birmingham Tree People, to take a look at the Birmingham Urban Forest Master Plan which is currently underway

Promoting health and wellbeing through integrated water management

Tuesday November 30, 10-12, online. This webinar will explore the opportunities and challenges in ensuring that the [health and wellbeing benefits of integrated water management are maximised](#). It is being organised by the Catchment-Based Approach Network's Urban Water Group.

Resources

Ecological emergency action plan

In response to a commitment to 'managing and creating space for nature', Bristol City Council has published a four-year [Ecological Emergency Action Plan](#). The stated actions include embedding environmental enhancement within various responsibilities of the Council, including highways, transport and flood risk reduction. Don't reinvent the wheel, shamelessly borrow ideas and use them to lobby the councils in your area!

Ecosystem Services valuation database

The [Ecosystem Services Valuation Database](#) is the largest publicly available database and tool with standardised monetary values for all ecosystem services and all biomes on all continents. Standardised and location-specific monetary values allow for readily-available data to be used in decision-making.

Regenerative agriculture

A few years ago, eftec (Economics for the Environment Consultancy) prepared a natural capital account to understand the multiple [benefits of regenerative farming practices](#) at the Cholderton Estate in southern England. A new film explains the potential for a 'natural capital approach' to identify the value created by new farming practices and the use of natural features to resolve challenges in society

Mapping environmental value

The Transforming the Trent Valley partnership project is seeking to maximise the natural and cultural value of their local area. [A new 'storymap'](#) provides an opportunity to explore the area's habitats (the natural capital 'stock'), the benefits from them (the 'flows' or ecosystem services) and the economic benefits they provide (their 'value'), for example, in terms of avoided health care or water treatment costs.

Consultations

National Infrastructure planning reform

The government are consulting on [changes to the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Planning regime](#). Amongst other topics, they are seeking to speed it up (which usually means less time

for public input and consultation) and to understand how the quality of applications and the examination and decision process could be improved. Deadline: 17 December.

Ongoing consultations

There is still time to respond to the open consultations highlighted in previous Bullets on [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) (deadline: 2 November) and on the five [updated draft national policy statements for major energy infrastructure projects](#) (deadline: 29 November).

Funding

England Woodland Creation Offer

Landowners, land managers and public bodies can apply to the [England Woodland Creation Offer \(EWCO\)](#) for support to create new woodland, including through natural colonisation, on areas as small as 1 hectare – and even this can be broken into smaller blocks. EWCO opened for applications on 9 June 2021 and replaces the Woodland Carbon Fund, which closed for applications in March 2021. Applications can be made year-round.

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