

# ● GREEN BULLET

28<sup>th</sup> January 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](mailto: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](http://vsnw.org.uk), the regional voluntary and community sector network.

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## Campaigns

### Environmental justice

Clause 1 of the controversial Judicial Review and Courts Bill threatens to have severe [detrimental impacts on environmental justice](#), by limiting the effectiveness of successful judicial review challenges to unlawful decisions which damage the environment. [Wildlife and Countryside Link](#), [Client Earth](#) and the [Public Law Project](#) have all produced briefings setting out the problems and potential solutions. Contact you MP to alert them to this under-reported but highly alarming effect of the Bill.

### Cumbrian coal

Coal is the single biggest contributor to the climate emergency. But in 2022, despite hosting a critical international summit on climate action barely two months ago, the government could still give the green light to a new coal mine in Cumbria – the first of its kind in over 30 years. Pressure from citizens forced the government to step in last year to take the decision on the mine themselves, rather than leaving it locally. And now, with the final decision on the table, it needs [citizen power to put that pressure on](#) again.

### Bees & banned pesticides

The Government has again [put bees at risk](#) by permitting the use of the banned pesticide thiamethoxam. This will be the second year running that the Government has allowed for a banned bee-harming pesticide to be used by sugar beet farmers in England, threatening our precious pollinators. This goes against the explicit advice of their own scientific advisors not to allow the pesticide to be used. It also comes just weeks after the Government set out a target in law to halt species loss by 2030. Environmental NGOs are [calling out the “betrayal of promises”](#).

### Air Quality

Greater Manchester was set to establish the [UK’s largest Clean Air Zone](#) in May this year. However, this month they referred it back to Government, seeking urgent discussions as they are no longer confident of being able to get it in place in a way that would be just and fair for those likely to be worst impacted.

### Information update

#### Brexit and beyond

- The UK’s post-Brexit environmental watchdog – [the Office for Environmental Protection](#) (OEP) – this month gained its full legal powers following its formation in November 2021. The formation was made possible due to the Environment Bill receiving Royal Assent after a process through Parliament that lasted around two years. The purpose of the OEP is to ensure that businesses and local authorities comply with the UK’s long-term green policy requirements – a function previously performed in the UK by the European Commission. Debate is ongoing about [whether the body has sufficient “teeth”](#) to properly hold the Government to account and to prosecute organisations breaking green policy requirements. The OEP is currently consulting on its draft strategy and enforcement policy, with [the consultation](#) due to run through to 22 March.
- But meanwhile, staff at England’s Environment Agency have been told they [should not investigate low impact water pollution events](#) - such as farm pollution or hazardous dumps by industry - a leaked internal [document](#) revealed this week. The report blames a lack of money, stating that the watchdog has “made clear to government that you get the environment you pay for”. It comes as a [parliamentary report](#) concludes that the raw sewage, microplastics and slurry swimming through Britain’s rivers is putting public health and nature at risk, with [only 14% of English rivers in good ecological condition](#) and “not a single river in England has received a clean bill of health for chemical contamination”. None of which bodes well for the OEP getting adequately resourced or given real independence.
- The Government has confirmed plans to pay farmers and landowners for restoring biodiversity from 2023, as part of its post-Brexit changes to agricultural policy. It confirmed that the [Local Nature Recovery scheme](#) will be trialled in 2023 and rolled out nationally in 2024. Under the scheme, farmers will be paid for actions that boost biodiversity. Approved activities will include tree planting and other habitat creation – like hedgerow planting or wildflower or wildgrass meadow creation – as well as peatland and wetland restoration. This follows the confirmation in December of the structure of the Basic Payments scheme – the most basic / entry level suite of environmentally friendly farming practices that will qualify for public funding.
- However, a [new report from the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee](#) has accused UK Ministers of failing to provide enough information about how new post-Brexit farming subsidies will contribute to national environmental goals, or see farmers fairly compensated for their work. It calls for urgent clarifications on environmental benefits, claiming that Defra is “blindly optimistic” about the potential environmental outcomes of the new schemes and is overestimating farmers’ trust in Government.

- The UK and Switzerland have been [accused of undermining the European Union's push for green reforms](#) of an investment treaty. Both countries have not supported the European Commission's attempts to end protections for investments in fossil fuels in the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) and are not planning to withdraw from the treaty if the reforms are rejected.

### **Climate change & energy**

- The UK Government is forecasting that, without better plans to improve climate adaptation and resilience, billions of pounds will be wiped off of national GDP in the coming decades, with the costs of inaction set to outweigh the cost of action by 2045. The forecast is a headline finding of the UK's [Third Climate Change Risk Assessment](#), which has been published by Defra. Building on [the forecasting and advice](#) on climate risks and resilience published by the Climate Change Committee last June, the new report assesses dozens of risks the UK could face due to the global temperature increase and related changing weather patterns through to 2050 and 2080.
- Leaders of [community energy projects](#) across the UK are urging the Government to provide more support in 2022, after last year's Budgets and Net-Zero Strategy provided little in the way of new funding or regulation, leading to the community energy sector being effectively abandoned, despite net zero commitments.
- In his [first major speech as COP26 President since the summit in Glasgow](#), Alok Sharma has called on nations to deliver the proposals set out in the Glasgow Climate Pact, including submitting new climate targets, ratcheting up climate finance and providing new mechanisms to cover loss and damage, in a bid to "keep 1.5C alive" in the build-up to COP27.
- Friends of the Earth have launched a [legal challenge to the Government's "lacklustre" decarbonization plans](#). They contend that the Net Zero Strategy does not comply with the Climate Change Act 2008 and that the Heat and Buildings Strategy should have considered "the impacts of its policies on protected groups, as part of ensuring a fair energy transition where climate action aligns with social responsibility".
- The Government has confirmed [£100 million public funding towards a new Sizewell C nuclear reactor](#), out of a total cost in excess of £0 billion. This has been described variously as a [vote of confidence in nuclear and an admission that it is not commercially viable](#).
- A week after Scottish seabed plots were auctioned to the developers of 16GW of floating wind projects, the UK Government has confirmed [£31m of new funding for the sector](#), which will be matched by funding from the private sector.
- A new surveys of over 8,000 adults shows that [75% of Brits don't trust Government and businesses to deliver just transition](#) to net-zero
- Back in 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron was quoted in the Sun saying he wanted to "cut the green crap" in order to face off an energy bills crisis. It turns out that was rather silly, according to a new analysis by [Carbon Brief](#). Cameron's edict meant the gutting of energy efficiency standards, the axing of the zero-carbon homes standard, and an effective ban on onshore wind in England. Taken together, this analysis suggests that those changes have meant that energy bills in the UK are nearly £2.5bn higher today than they would have been if they hadn't happened

### **Planning**

- Planning Bill? Rapidly becoming an urban myth.
- ...But in what seems to be a significant U-turn from the original planning white paper reforms published way back in the mists of time, the Government has confirmed (in its evidence to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee inquiry on [Meeting Housing Demand](#)) that "even where the broad principle of development is agreed through the plan,

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all the details would still need to be consulted on". This is a huge shift of position compared to the White Paper proposals on zoning which strongly implied that consultation on planning applications would be sidelined. CPRE celebrate this concession [here](#).

- The [results of the 2021 Housing Delivery Test](#) show that 51 councils face the presumption in favour of sustainable development. These councils failed to deliver 75 per cent of their housing target during 2021. Councils must deliver at least 95 per cent of their housing target to pass the 2021 test. When the test was first used in 2018, councils had to deliver 25 per cent before facing the presumption in favour of sustainable development and this went up to 45 per cent in 2019 and 75 per cent in 2020. Councils that delivered between 85 per cent and 95 per cent of their assessed need must develop an action plan to assess why they under-delivered and to address the shortfall. Councils that delivered between 75 per cent and 85 per cent of assessed need must identify a buffer of 20 per cent more land (on top of their five-year housing land supply) and develop an action plan.
- The government has announced the first local authorities to receive funding under two pilot schemes that aim [to boost neighbourhood planning in urban and deprived areas](#). A total of £95,000 in grant funding has been allocated to 11 councils. 7 councils have been allocated a total of £45,000 as part of the Simpler Approach to Neighbourhood Planning pilot scheme, designed to help communities establish their priorities for development. 4 councils are set to receive a total of £50,000 as part of the Bidding Fund for Local Planning Authorities in Underrepresented Areas. According to the DLUHC, "this will go towards initiatives that give additional support to residents to produce a neighbourhood plan".
- In advance of the mandatory introduction of a 10% biodiversity net gain requirement for new development, Cambridge City Council has adopted a Supplementary Planning Document that will [seek to "encourage" a 20 per cent biodiversity net gain](#) for all new developments, despite concern about "potential significant impacts on viability and land allocations" arising from the policy. The consultation on net gain release this month explicitly states that "It remains the UK government's intention to continue to allow higher percentage targets to be set by planning authorities at a local or site level"
- The transport secretary has [delayed decisions on two major roads infrastructure projects](#) by six months to "allow for further consideration of environmental matters", while the energy secretary has [delayed decisions on two offshore wind farms](#), again to allow for further consideration of environmental matters.

### Transport

- The government has launched [Active Travel England](#), a cycling and walking agency that will be led by Chris Boardman (previously GM's transport commissioner) as interim commissioner. Active Travel England will be responsible for driving up the standards of cycling and walking infrastructure. It will manage the national active travel budget and award funding for projects that meet the national standards set out in 2020. It will inspect finished schemes and ask for funds to be returned for any that have not been completed as promised, or have not started or finished by the stipulated times. It will be a statutory consultee on major planning applications, and will have the powers to rate councils "Ofsted-style, for how well they make space for cycling and walking".
- The [high-speed rail \(Crewe to Manchester\) bill](#) has been laid before Parliament. If passed, the bill will see HS2 extended from Crewe to Manchester. The government claims that it would double capacity on the routes between Manchester and London, and cut journey times from London to Manchester by 55 minutes and from Birmingham to Manchester by up to 45 minutes. HS2 Ltd has committed itself to delivering 10 per cent net gain in biodiversity for replaceable habitats on the Crewe to Manchester route. However, there is still a row over [whether a Manchester city station should be overground or underground](#), with Andy Burnham declaring it "the wrong plan, both for Greater Manchester and for the North as a

whole." Concerns remain about the [environmental impact of the route](#). The developers of HS2 have announced [plans to only source zero-carbon electricity](#) from the first day of operation, but green groups have called this claim out as greenwashing.

- Liverpool City Council last night took a [step towards “removing financial support” for Liverpool John Lennon Airport](#) amid concerns about its proposed expansion and the impact that it would have on the environment and surrounding Green Belt. Councillors have backed a motion to explore the processes for removing the financial support it provides to the airport in protest against a proposed £100m expansion.
- Green Alliance reflect on [what 2021's new transport policies will mean for action in 2022](#)

### **Landscapes & nature**

- The Government has published its [response to the Glover Review into protected landscapes](#), a mere two and a quarter years after the review itself was published. The response contains many positive measures, including a commitment to strengthen protected landscapes role in nature's recovery. However, there are also critical omissions from the response. These include an urgent need to increase funding for protected landscapes. AONB's provide an illustrative example of this need – they receive £6.7 million in annual funding, a 60% reduction on 2005 funding levels and far below what is required. Some key environmental NGOs respond to the proposals [here](#). The Glover Review recommended a doubling of this funding, along with more money for National Parks. The Campaign for national Parks is [calling for a new Landscapes Bill](#), to be included in the next Queen's Speech, to halt biodiversity loss, stop destructive developments and to ensure accessible National Parks for all. See consultations section for consultation on this response, especially in relation to proposed legislative changes.
- Despite strong talk around [nature-based solutions to the net-zero challenge](#), the UK Government is not properly planning to deliver them at scale and in a manner that engages the nation's farming communities and wider population, a new report from the House of Lords' Science and Technology Committee warns.

### **Devolution**

- Lancashire's 15 council leaders have agreed to consider the creation of a new formal body to oversee the delivery of a county deal. [Lancashire's proposal for a county deal](#), worth £5.6bn over a seven year period, will be taken to the government following the launch of the levelling up white paper, which is expected to take place later this month or in February. The county will not be pursuing the model of a mayoral combined authority, but instead will look to assemble a body composed of all 15 councils and chaired by the county council in order to act as a vehicle for the county deal. It has also been proposed that the body will operate on a one council, one vote system, with a two thirds majority required to pass through policy.
- The High Court has denied permission to Cumbria County Council for a judicial review of the Government's decision to create two unitary authorities in the county. It has also ordered the local authority to pay more than £30,000 towards the legal costs of the Secretary of State and other councils involved. This brings an East unitary council covering the areas of Barrow, Eden and South Lakeland, and a West unitary covering the areas of Allerdale, Carlisle and Copeland one step closer.

### **Publications**

#### **Net zero for 2022**

The UK Government talks a very good talk on climate mitigation and decarbonisation. The Institute for Government has set out seven actions that it needs to take to also [walk the walk on the net zero agenda in 2022](#). They warn that the current cost-of-living crisis, largely driven by

energy price hikes, is the "most immediate threat" to the UK's delivery of its long-term climate targets.

### **Net-zero stress test**

The investments and incentives announced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak last October, as part of the Budget and Spending Review, are at odds with the UK's long-term climate plans, according to a [new analysis by WWF](#). They applied their net-zero stress test to each of the measures announced by Sunak in [his speech on 27 October 2021](#). By WWF's calculations, the package included £55bn of backing for policies that will ultimately push up the UK's emissions in the short term, including cuts to air passenger duty for domestic flights, a further freeze on fuel duty and a reaffirmed commitment to a multi-billion-pound roads building programme. These policies, even when offset by the policies which will cause emissions cuts elsewhere, will ultimately result in an extra 38.4 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e being generated in the UK by 2026.

### **Habitat restoration and carbon**

Wilder Carbon is establishing itself as a 'benchmark' for native habitat restoration projects in the UK that remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The project has [recently produced reports](#) estimating that the restoration of marine and terrestrial habitat could 'lock up' at least 676 million tonnes of atmospheric carbon by 2050. This is twice the UK's annual total carbon emissions. According to Wilder Carbon, this can be done without losing any productive agricultural land and it could involve financial transactions worth £30 billion.

### **Ocean Recovery**

A new Wildlife and Countryside Link analysis of the [Government's delivery of ocean recovery commitments](#) has revealed slow progress. The Government declared 2021 would be a '[Marine Super Year](#)' at the Coastal Futures Conference in January of that year, highlighting an 'unprecedented alignment of international and domestic marine agendas'. Twelve months on Link's analysis welcomes subsequent announcements on tackling bottom trawling and progressing newly Highly Protected Marine Areas but concludes that, overall, concrete action to deliver ocean recovery has been lacking. Areas of slow progress include marine target setting, species protection and work to realise the potential of blue carbon. Overall, the report found that the Government has made no demonstrable progress in 11 out of 17 important steps for action on ocean recovery.

### **Nature positive for business**

The Council for Sustainable Business was established by the UK Government in 2018, to help deliver the 25 Year Environment Plan for England. As part of its *Get Nature Positive* campaign, the Council has launched the '[Nature Handbook](#)' for business. Much of the handbook is focused on the avoidance of negative impacts, but the case studies also highlight the value of environmental restoration.

### **Events**

#### **Natural Capital Laboratory: A rewilding experiment**

The Natural Capital Laboratory is an award-winning rewilding experiment in the Highlands of Scotland which serves as an outdoor laboratory for the design and testing of innovative new solutions to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis. This [webinar will provide insight into the results from the second year of the project](#). Topics will include accounting for different forms of 'capital', aquatic ecology and eDNA, remote biodiversity monitoring, virtual reality rewilding, and peatland restoration. February 24, 1-2pm.

### **Urban forest planning**

i-Tree is a collection of free science-based tools that quantifies the benefits and values of trees around the world. [This webinar](#) will examine the information i-Tree provides, how useful this information actually is in delivering a sustainable urban forest, and whether it can help catalyse urban greening.. 10 February, 2-3pm

### **Coastal management**

The Wholescape Approach to Marine Management (WAMM) project was established to help drive closer collaboration between the Catchment Based Approach 'CaBA' Partnerships, Coastal Partnerships and the Coastal Partnerships Network. [This webinar will provide an overview of the project](#), including the development of a 'Roadmap to Collaborative Delivery', the coastal data package and explorer and case studies of collaborative working. 2 March, 9.30-11.30

### **Nuclear fusion in Cumbria**

The UKAEA (UK Atomic Energy Authority) is currently looking for a site in the UK to host the world's first prototype fusion energy plant, known as STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production). Of the fifteen longlisted sites, only five now remain, and Moorside in Cumbria is one of them. UKAEA will host a [virtual consultation event](#), complete with a presentation on STEP and a question-and-answer / feedback session on 31 January between 6pm and 8 pm.

### **Dark Skies Cumbria Festival**

Find out about Alien Worlds, take a Galaxy Tour, go sunset rockpooling, take a night time forest walk or follow an Eclipse Chaser! These are just some of events in the next [Dark Skies Cumbria Festival](#), which runs from 12<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> February. More events will be added as we near the festival so do check back to see what other astronomical activities are on offer.

### **Star Count 2022**

Star-filled skies are one of the most magical sights our countryside has to offer. CPRE research shows that light pollution is leaving fewer stars than ever visible to the naked eye, and we need your help to track how light levels are changing. You can [become a 'citizen scientist' and take part in the annual Star Count](#), a cosmic census to map light pollution. This year we'll be asking you to take part from home. We'll be asking you to choose a clear night between 26 February - 6 March 2022 and look to the skies to see how many stars you can spot within Orion. Don't worry, we'll give lots of guidance so you know where to look! It's a great, easy piece of stargazing – no telescopes required – for kids and adults, and it can be done safely from your garden, balcony or even bedroom window.

### **Resources**

#### **Council climate scorecards**

Climate Emergency UK have assessed and scored all UK councils' written Climate Action Plans, creating the [Council Climate Plan Scorecards](#). They found that 85 of the UK's 409 local authorities don't have a valid plan. And the others are of varying quality and ambition with the average score for all UK councils around 50%.

#### **Biodiversity net gain**

The Planning Advisory Service and Natural England have added answers to questions about the Biodiversity Metric and added them to their [Biodiversity Net Gain FAQs](#) webpage. Feedback and additional questions to add to the page are always welcome. Contact Beccy at [rebecca.moberly@local.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.moberly@local.gov.uk).

### **Natural Course update**

Natural Course has made significant progress in the way we're working together to approach the many challenges facing the water environment across the North West. It is now in its fourth and final phase and will be delivering 18 exciting and ambitious projects - all with a view to creating more sustainable ways of working that puts us in a better place to achieve bigger, better and longer-term improvements for the water environment. The latest project information has just been published on the [Natural Course website](#),

### **Protected species & ancient woodland**

Natural England has reviewed and updated its [standing advice on protected species](#) and its [joint standing advice with the Forestry Commission on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees](#) for LPAs. The species advice has been streamlined and simplified, with a clearer distinction between planning and licensing requirements and updated links to other guidance.

### **Natural capital accounting**

Eftec (Economics for the Environment Consultancy) have produced a [summary of natural capital accounting practices in the UK](#). It identifies how natural capital evidence is influencing funding decisions in the public sector, and the availability of private finance for environmental restoration.

### **Restoring agricultural soils**

Changes to the management of agricultural soil could contribute to improving the ability of soils to produce crops, as well as to wider benefits including mitigating future climate change. [This briefing](#) (from the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology) summarises the state of England's agricultural soils and evaluates soil stewardship opportunities. Soil indicators that could be used for monitoring in policy frameworks and incentives relating to soil restoration are explored.

## **Consultations**

### **Office for Environmental Protection**

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) is a new public body, established by the Environment Act 2021. They are independent, with functions to advise ministers and government departments and to hold them and other public authorities to account against their environmental responsibilities and the law. They are seeking views on two documents:

- Their draft strategy, which explains how they will work in their first period of operation, with a review in around 18 months' time.
- Their draft enforcement policy, which explains more specifically how they will approach their enforcement role.

Deadline: 22 March

### **Response to the Glover Protected Landscapes Review**

After more than two years, the government has published its response to the Glover review of protected landscapes. It includes a set of proposals for action. They are [consulting on this response](#), in particular in relation to the potential legislative changes they are planning.

Deadline: 9 April.

### **Biodiversity net gain**

The government is consulting on how it proposes to take forward its impending [requirement for all new development to increase biodiversity by 10%](#). Developers will need to demonstrate how they plan to achieve at least the 10% increase in biodiversity in order to obtain planning permission. The necessary habitat enhancement will be paid for by the developer and must be guaranteed to endure for 30 years. One key change from earlier proposals is the dropping of an exemption for brownfield sites from the BNG requirement. Another proposed new measure in the consultation is the requirement that “on-site biodiversity gains should be secured for delivery within 12 months of the development being commenced or, where not possible, before occupation” Permitted developments are exempt from the BNG rule. Deadline: 5 April.

### **Funding**

#### **Funding resources for green infrastructure**

Green infrastructure and green networks are terms used to refer to the ways in which greenspace and other natural features deliver multiple benefits for people, such as promoting good health and reducing flood risk. The Green Infrastructure Partnership supports the creation, enhancement and promotion of green infrastructure in the UK. It has recently updated its helpful listing of [opportunities for funding for green infrastructure projects](#) across the UK.

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