



● GREEN BULLET

30th October 2019

North West Environment Link (NWEL) is a partnership of environmental voluntary sector organisations, representing hundreds of thousands of members in the North West. We are members of VSNW, the regional voluntary sector network for the North West, whose purpose is to support a connected and influential voluntary and community sector (VCS).

This bulletin is intended to keep NWEL members and wider networks up to date on events and issues that will be of interest to environmental voluntary and community sector organisations in the North West. 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 the [VSNW](#) website.

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Campaigns

Climate change

- What you measure matters – [according to the Office for National Statistics](#), while the UK's direct territorial carbon emissions have fallen by 39% since 1990 (from a peak in 1972), if you include the carbon that we import (eg through consuming products made elsewhere), our emissions kept rising until 2007, and are currently less than 10% lower than in 1997 – far below the [claims made successive governments](#) or our national and international commitments.

- [Extinction Rebellion](#) hit the streets around the country and around the world again, trying to [establish a new narrative around climate change](#).
- A recent study by Smart Energy GB found that two-thirds of Brits want to do more to tackle climate change, but don't know where to start. With a general election announced, the most effective single thing you can do is [write to your MP](#). You can use the Climate Coalition's template and ask them to commit to policies that slash our emissions.
- Donald Trump has confirmed that [the USA will abandon the Paris Climate Agreement](#)
- The Committee on Climate Change have [called for a ban on air miles reward schemes](#), and for an "escalating air miles levy" to discourage frequent flyers. The proposals are aimed at the 15% of the UK population estimated to be responsible for 70% of flights, many of whom take additional flights to "maintain their privileged traveller status". But such precautions are unlikely to go very far considering that [UK airports are planning to expand three times faster than is considered sustainable](#), jeopardising the government's 2050 net-zero commitment.
- The [Government's response to the CCC's advice](#) on meeting net-zero carbon by 2050 has been published, including new measures to decarbonise business buildings and transport, and to support the uptake of energy storage at scale. It will also form a new Cabinet sub-committee on climate change, intended to drive progress towards net-zero across all areas of Government, to be [chaired by Boris Johnson](#).
- Just [20 oil firms are responsible for 35% of all energy-related carbon dioxide and methane emissions worldwide](#). Fossil fuel companies have been aware of the industry's detrimental environmental impact since 1965 – and have managed to persuade us that [the vast damage they've done was a matter of consumer choice](#).

Moorland burning

This month, the government indicated that it's working to [ban the practice of moorland burning on blanket bog](#) – a vital habitat that stores huge amounts of carbon. During a Westminster Hall debate Zac Goldsmith said that a voluntary system to protect the peatland "simply has not worked". After a decade-long struggle, the government finally agrees we need a "legislative response" to stop one of the UK's biggest carbon stores going up in smoke.

Tree and Woodlands

- [Tree Charter Day](#) is on November 30th – get involved in local planting, campaigning access, and other activities!
- DEFRA and the Forestry Commission have published a summary of responses and the Government's response on [plans to introduce new measures for felling street trees](#) and strengthening the Forestry Commission's power to deal with illegal tree felling.

Air quality

- At UK100's Clean Air Summit this month, 16 mayors and city leaders from across the country signed a Clean Air Declaration which [calls for a legally binding commitment to meeting World Health Organisation \(WHO\) guidelines](#) on air pollution.
- New research shows that hundreds more people have [heart attacks, strokes or asthma attacks](#) on days where air pollution levels are high
- [Little progress has been made on tackling air quality in Europe](#) despite public outcry in many countries and increasing awareness of the health impacts of pollution, according to new research from the European Environment Agency.

Information update

Brexit and beyond

- [Environment Bill 2019-20](#): introduced in the Queen's Speech, the Bill sets out a framework to ensure that the UK maintains and improves its environmental protections after Brexit. This includes the creation of a new public body called the Office for Environmental Protection that is supposed to act as an independent watchdog to ensure that Government and other public bodies fulfil their obligations to the environment. It also aims to introduce significant changes to laws on air quality, water resources, waste management, nature improvement and chemicals as well as introducing biodiversity gain. The ENDS report [summarises some of the key points](#). [Reactions have been mixed](#), with [criticism from NGOs](#) and [criticism from MPs that the Bill is not fit for purpose](#), and [widespread concerns](#) that it [significantly weakens existing environmental protections](#). The Bill was introduced to the House of Commons and given its First Reading on 15 October and its Second reading on 28 October. It has now passed to a Public Bill Committee (membership to be announced shortly) which will scrutinise the Bill. The Committee is expected to report back to the House of Commons by 19 December. The EFRA select committee has announced an inquiry into the Environment Bill, and is seeking written evidence on a number of questions, including possible amendments to the Bill (closing date 3 November). The Chair of the Committee said that he was ["disappointed" that the Bill had "fallen short"](#) of its stated ambitions.
- There are also growing concerns that the Government will [ignore powers devolved to the Scottish parliament](#) in downgrading UK environmental protections.
- There are concerns and ambiguity about [what the Withdrawal Bill might mean for green policy](#), amidst fears that it will lead to a deregulatory race to the bottom.
- The [Queen's Speech](#) promised to publish the first National Infrastructure Strategy later this autumn, a bill to allow the High Speed Two (HS2) line between the West Midlands and Crewe and a white paper on further English devolution...But who knows what might happen after the election? I'd recommend following [Greener UK](#) for views on what the parties need to be saying re Brexit and the environment.
- A leaked briefing prepared for Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers warns that her ministry will come under "significant pressure" from the Department for International Trade to [weaken the UK's food and environmental standards](#) to secure a trade deal with the United States.

Energy

- Following the end of Cuadrilla's fracking operations near Blackpool, a report from the [National Audit Office has called the future of fracking in Britain into doubt](#), finding no evidence that prices would be lowered, uncertainty as to whether it could viably produce gas in meaningful quantities, no plan for clean-up if a fracking firm were to go bust, serial breaches of agreed limits on earth tremors, strains on local authorities in fracking areas, and plummeting public support.
- The Scottish Government have made their [ban on fracking permanent](#) following extensive evidence gathering and analysis
- A detailed study of the world's coastlines by the International Energy Agency (IEA) has found that [offshore wind farms alone could provide more electricity than the world needs](#) – even if they are only built in windy regions in shallow waters near the shore.
- A new report from Green Alliance and Localis claims that [Government needs to support local funding and devolved powers](#) in order to move the UK's local areas to a net-zero

carbon economy, otherwise local areas will miss emissions reductions goals, despite [more than 230 English local authorities](#) declaring [climate emergencies](#) in the past year.

- Energy secretary Andrea Leadsom has over-ruled the Planning Inspectorate to grant a permission for a new gas-fired power station at the Drax Power Station, just one of six occasions when a minister has gone against their Inspectors' recommendations when determining Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). In recommending refusal of the project, the Planning Inspectorate said that [approval would "undermine the government's commitment...to cut greenhouse gas emissions"](#) and that "a failure to decarbonise and diversify our energy sources now could result in the UK becoming locked into a system of high carbon generation, which would make it very difficult and expensive to meet our 2050 carbon reduction target. We cannot afford for this to happen." [Client Earth](#) are investigating legal remedies.
- Labour has launched a future energy plan outlining how a net benefit of £800bn could be realised in the UK, by [fast-tracking its energy sector to net-zero emissions by 2030](#).
- In 2017, UK Export Finance pledged £1bn in loans to help UK companies export their expertise in "infrastructure, green energy and healthcare" to invest in Argentina's economy. However, the UK is now considering using these green investments to [fund Argentina's burgeoning fracking industry](#).

Planning

- The [local authority green belt statistics for 2018-19](#), reports that the loss of green belt area in the last year was the second-highest decrease since 2010/11, when records began, and that 13 local authorities adopted local plans that involved a reduction in green belt land, the highest number this decade. The figures show that overall, there was a decrease of 3,290 hectares in the total area of English green belt between 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2019. The [North West lost 1,380 hectares](#) (3,410 acres) of designated Green Belt land over the past year.
- Housing Minister Esther McVey wrote to Broxtowe council [encouraging them to build on brownfield land](#) rather than on newly-released ex-Green Belt land, within days on their plan (which included the Green Belt release) being found sound.
- Too many "proud towns" have been "scarred by architects and planners" who have "no regard for what local residents want," housing minister Esther McVey has said in the foreword to a [collection of essays on the importance of beauty in the built environment](#), published by think tank Policy Exchange.
- DEFRA has published a summary of responses and the Government's response to proposals to make [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) necessary for developments when granting planning permission. It is considering several "narrow exemptions" to the policy, including for residential self-build and for certain types of brownfield land development.
- While the next version of the [Greater Manchester Spatial Framework has been delayed until next year](#) (for which [Andy Burnham blames the UK Government](#)), the [responses to the last consultation have been published](#) this month. However, also this month the [Stockport Conservative group failed to rule out voting against](#) any final draft that they were asked to endorse.
- 100 places across England are being supported to develop a new generation of [Town Deals](#), each worth up to £25M
- The government has launched a £10 million fund to help councils [develop proposals for up to ten "new communities"](#) across England using development corporations
- The [housing secretary has said](#) in a speech this month that the government's target of building 300,000 homes a year "may not be ambitious enough"; that the forthcoming

Accelerated Planning Green Paper has been upgraded to a white paper which will deliver "radical reform" of the planning system; and has suggested that he will support the "renovation and refurbishment" of existing buildings through the planning system to improve the sustainability of development.

- MHCLG has sent a [Planning Update Newsletter](#) to local planning authorities setting out updates on the Government's programme of planning reform, including guidance on design, Community Infrastructure Levy regulations and planning practice guidance, District level licensing for great crested newts, New joint guidance on flood risk emergency plans for new development, Neighbourhood planning research, Airport Noise Guidance, The Environment Bill, and 2019 Housing Delivery Test Results

Transport

- The Department for Transport (DfT) is preparing the UK's first [Transport Decarbonisation Plan](#) "to bring together a bold and ambitious programme of coordinated action needed to end the UK's transport emissions by 2050". This "first-of-a-kind plan will set out in detail what government, business and society will need to do to deliver the significant emissions reduction needed from all modes of transport". Work on the plan will start immediately, with the department publishing a document setting out the challenge later this year with the plan is due to be completed next year.
- The Government has proposed [introducing green license plates to electric cars](#) in an attempt to incentivise drivers to switch to EVs and help the UK meet its net-zero targets. The green plates would make it possible for local authorities to allow zero-emission vehicles to benefit from cheaper parking and access to bus lanes.
- Sajid Javid announced an extra [£25 billion to be spent on strategic roads](#), and an extra £220 million – less than 1% of the new money for roads – to be spent on buses. Clear priorities. And, surely by coincidence...
- ...[Bus journeys have plummeted by more than 300 million](#) in five years, falling to their lowest level in over a decade. A poll for the LGA found 69% of residents think councils should be the main decision makers on local bus services. Buses are the most used form of public transport but they are also [the only mode for which the government has no strategy](#). The Campaign for Better Transport is calling for a National Bus Strategy which focuses on increasing the use of bus services across the country; better integration of buses with other transport; a clear route to zero emission buses; and growth in use of technology to improve services. The Confederation of Passenger Transport has published [Moving Forward Together](#), a strategy to help tackle climate change and get a billion more passenger journeys by bus by 2030.

Publications

State of Nature 2019

The [State of Nature Reports](#) collate the best available data on the UK's biodiversity, with a focus on species to form the evidence for how nature is faring. The latest findings show that since rigorous scientific monitoring began in the 1970s there has been a 13% decline in average abundance across wildlife studied and that the declines continue unabated. It also reveals that 41% of UK species studied have declined, 26% have increased and 33% show little change since 1970, while 133 species assessed have already been lost from our shores since 1500. The authors state that the main pressures on the environment are "agricultural management, climate change, urbanisation, pollution, hydrological change, invasive non-native species and woodland management".

Space to Breathe: State of the Green Belt

CPRE's latest [State of the Green Belt report](#) shows that only 1 in 10 homes built on land released from the Green Belt over the past decade are 'affordable', and that development on the Green Belt is inefficient and land hungry, with the average density of homes within the Green Belt just 14 dwellings per hectare, compared to an average of 31 outside these designated green areas. It highlights that the Green Belt is under threat like never before: from the impacts of climate breakdown to the unprecedented proposals for building housing in the Green Belt, squandering this valuable asset at a time where it is needed for our own health and wellbeing, and to address the climate emergency, more than ever before.

Our Future in the Land

The final report of the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission calls for a [radical 10-year plan to transition to a sustainable food and farming system](#), in order to address the climate crisis. The commission wants farmers to innovate to unleash a "fourth agricultural revolution", as part of a 15-point plan for policymakers, business and communities to help address ecosystem collapse, to recover and regenerate nature and to restore people's health and wellbeing.

'Natural capital' statistics

The Office for National Statistics has released a new set of estimates of the "[financial and societal value of natural resources to people in the UK](#)". While some of the statistics have a long heritage of inclusion in official figures (e.g. timber production, fish capture and mineral extraction), others are new. For example, the ONS reports that the cooling provided by the shade of trees and water saved the UK £248 million by maintaining productivity and lowering air conditioning costs on hot days in 2017. The Natural Capital Initiative has also published its conference report, [Valuing our Life Support Systems 2019](#).

Environment & economy in rural counties

A new Valuing Nature Programme report summarises research into [how environmental degradation affects economic development and employment](#). While focused on Dorset, the assessment approach will be of interest to other rural counties. The authors suggest that future environmental degradation could lead to relatively abrupt changes in the benefits flowing from the environment with a "significant impact on the local economy and employment".

National Policy Statement for Geological Disposal Infrastructure

The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy has published the policy framework providing the basis for planning decisions on [geological disposal infrastructure](#) for the long-term management of higher activity radioactive waste (or how we decide where to dump our most dangerous nuclear waste)

Heritage at Risk

Historic England published details of the [2019 Heritage at Risk Register](#) on 17 October. The Register identifies sites most at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development. There are 5,073 entries on the Heritage at Risk Register in 2019, 87 fewer than in 2018.

UK2070

The UK2070 Commission is undertaking an [independent inquiry into spatial inequalities across the UK](#). Its second report (September 2019) calls, amongst other things, for "new metrics to

reflect the well-being, environmental and other criteria that will support the re-balancing of the economy".

Resources

Health and nature

Natural England's [National Outdoors for All Working Group](#) is an England-wide network bringing together environmental and voluntary organisations committed to making sure everyone has access to the countryside. The group has a specific focus on promoting access for those people who are less likely to use the natural environment for recreation, and on sharing good practice and evidence. [All Outdoors for All publications can be found here](#), including resources addressing dementia, specific educational needs, obesity and mental health, while '[Natural solutions for tackling health inequalities](#)' highlights how the environment we live in is hugely important in shaping our lives and, consequently, our health. Separately, NHS England has published a [guide for creating "health-promoting communities"](#). It includes numerous references to the role of natural features in reducing demands on healthcare services. And a recent paper in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health shows how [increasing connection to urban nature can bring clinically significant improvements](#) in quality of life for those with living with a mental health difficulty – and bring significant benefits to all adults. All through simply [noticing the good things in nature](#).

Development and Design

MHC LG has published the [National Design Guide](#) (NDG) which 'sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice.' Good design is set out under ten characteristics: Context, Identity, Built form, Movement, Nature, Public spaces, Uses, Homes and buildings, Resources, and Lifespan. It forms part of the Government's collection of planning practice guidance and should be read alongside the separate, newly updated Planning Practice Guidance on [Design Process and Tools](#). The updated guidance encourages councils to prepare strategic design policies, as well as non-strategic policies and local design guides. Greater emphasis is placed on the use of Design Review Panels. Greater proactive engagement with communities in guiding development is encouraged.

Natural Course

The [Natural Course project](#) brings together organisations and stakeholders from across North West England to work together to seek cost-effective solutions to improving water quality across urban and rural landscapes, sharing best practice across the UK and Europe. 78% of our rivers in North West England are not considered healthy and many solutions are found to be too expensive to implement. Work completed this month on [Eagley Brook in Bolton](#) to remove a weir has opened over two kilometres of the brook, allowing fish like Brown Trout to pass and reach spawning grounds. The project seeks to protect and improve the water quality of the North West of England, and [share best practice](#) throughout the UK and Europe.

Heritage Planning Case Database

Historic England tweets planning decisions of heritage interest, via [@HeritageAdvice](#), and these are then collated into the [Heritage Planning Case Database](#). This is a searchable online database of appeal and call-in decisions relating to planning permission (that affects a heritage asset) and listed building consent. Cases have been summarised using a standard list of search terms, for ease of use; searches can also be carried out by address, date or decision reference.

Local heritage

MHC LG has announced a campaign to encourage more local authorities to [draw up 'local lists' of historic buildings](#). A fund of £700,000 will be used to help ten English counties draw up local lists, with members of the public (supported by a team of heritage experts) encouraged to nominate heritage assets which are important to them and reflect their local area.

Urban greening

GreenBlue Urban has produced an introduction to the [Urban Greening Factor](#), designed to help local authorities score the merits of various green infrastructure and sustainable urban drainage interventions.

Raynsford Review of Planning: Councillors' Guide

The Town & Country Planning Association has published a [Councillors' Guide to Implementing the Raynsford Review of Planning](#) in England. The guide is designed to support councillors in going further towards putting the Raynsford Review into practice, and support best practice in leadership, plan-making, place-making and delivering good outcomes for communities.

Consultations

Environment Bill

The EFRA select committee has announced an [inquiry into the Environment Bill](#), and is seeking written evidence on a number of questions, including possible amendments to the Bill (closing date 3 November).

Future Homes Standards

MHCLG is consulting on [The Future Homes Standard](#): Changes to Part L and Part F of the Building Regulations for New Dwellings, including proposed options to increase the energy efficiency requirements for new homes in 2020. The Future Homes Standard will require new build homes to be future-proofed with low carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency, and every new home should "typically have triple glazing and standards for walls, floors and roofs that significantly limit any heat loss". Additional carbon-saving methods could also be delivered through heat pumps, heat networks and direct electric heating. (Closing date 10 January 2020)

Liverpool City Region Spatial Development Strategy

The Liverpool City Region has begun consultation on what is set to become the UK's first high-level [spatial development strategy \(SDS\)](#) outside of London. The consultation is seeking views on the main policy issues in six areas - environment and climate change, housing and communities, town centres, transport and connectivity, inclusivity and infrastructure. A local industrial strategy, which will form a key part of the SDS, will be published in March next year. After the current consultation, a draft of the SDS will be prepared, after which specific policies will be consulted on again. LCR hope to publish the final strategy within 2 years.

Greater Manchester buses

The GM Mayor and Transport for Greater Manchester have launched their formal consultation on bus regulation through a franchising scheme (like London's), called "[Doing Buses Differently](#)". The Better Buses campaign, which are part of, is issuing [a quick way to complete the short version of the questionnaire](#).

River Basin Planning

The Environment Agency is consulting on [River Basin Planning: Challenges and Choices](#). It is seeking views on the challenges that limit the benefits society obtains from the water environment in the river basin districts in England and the best way to address these issues.

Electricity storage

The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy is seeking views on [Amendments to the Treatment of Electricity Storage within the Planning System](#). They propose removing electricity storage, except pumped hydro, from the NSIP regime. This follow up consultation also provides the Government's response to the original consultation (closing date 10 December).

To subscribe or contribute

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To contribute to the NWEL Bulletin, please contact:
Andy Yuille
andyyuille@gmail.com
01524 389 915

To contribute to the policy work of VSNW, please contact:
Warren Escadale
warren.escadale@vsnw.org.uk
0161 276 9307