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● GREEN BULLET

30th January 2020

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.

CONTENTS

- Campaigns – climate change, woods & trees, litter, Lake District, HS2 dark skies
- Information update – Brexit & beyond, energy, planning, transport
- Publications – Housing Design, land use & climate change, planning reform, food waste, marine climate impacts
- Events – Space & community wellbeing, Northern air quality conference, Northern Upland Chain
- Resources – Natural capital, biodiversity & planning, green economy tracker, valuing forest ecosystems
- Consultations – North West Marine Plans, North West coastal access
- Funding – Food waste prevention, Aviva community fund

Campaigns

Climate change

- This month saw the first weekend of the [UK Climate Assembly](#): 110 citizens, selected to be a representative sample of the British public. They will hear expert evidence on the choices the UK faces, discuss them, and make recommendations to Government about what the UK should do to become net zero by 2050.
- Next month on February 14th – Valentines Day - hundreds of thousands of people from all over the country will join the UK's biggest conversation about climate change, as together

we become a voice for change that is impossible to ignore. We know that a cleaner, greener future where the things we love are protected from climate change is within reach, but we need to see action today. Green hearts will be popping up all over the country with events in schools, village halls, libraries, town centres and even football stadiums. There's never been a more important time to show the love for a future where the life we love is safe from the impacts of climate change. So how will you [#ShowTheLove](#)? Feb 14th is also the date of the next [UK Students Climate Strike](#)

- Climate change got a good hearing at the [World Economic Forum in Davos](#), with Greta Thunberg and Prince Charles among many others addressing the theme, and the WEF's latest analysis suggesting that the [five biggest global risks are all environment and climate-related](#). Warm and encouraging words were spoken, although Donald Trump criticized the "[doomsayers](#)" and activists reported that "the WEF was closed in a bubble of positivity away from reality". Billionaires detached from reality, who would have thought it?
- At a local level, approaching [400 of the UK's principal local authorities have declared a climate change emergency](#), making it one of the fastest growing environmental movements in recent history. [85% of the UK population](#) now lives in an area that has declared an emergency. Reflecting the urgency of action needed, typically, authorities commit to being carbon neutral by 2025 to 2030 – significantly earlier than the government's Climate Change Act target date. Authorities will put in place measures to achieve a carbon neutral position/negative, through schemes and behavioural change, including the provision and procurement of services and the decisions it makes. This will be particularly evident in the control and planning for development, sustainable transport infrastructure and enhancement of green fabric and biodiversity.

Woods and trees

Over a [thousand ancient woodlands are under threat from built development](#), the first time that the number has got so high. Meanwhile, The [National Trust has announced plans to establish 18,000 hectares of woodland \(20 million trees\)](#) as part of its ambition to become carbon net zero by 2030. The charity said the woodland would lock up 300,000 tonnes of carbon, which is equivalent to the electricity output of 370,000 homes a year.

Litter

Keep Britain Tidy has launched this year's [Great British Spring Clean](#). It will take place from 20 March to 13 April and aims to build on last year's success. In 2019, over 560,000 #LitterHeroes joined forces to collect litter. This year's target is to reach 600,000 litter pickers. While the primary aim is to clean up our streets and open spaces, this campaign also provides a more significant opportunity for local organisations to bring the community together, help health and social wellbeing, and improve the environment. The Great British Spring Clean is about demonstrating that you love where you live – whether that's by [pledging to pick](#) while you're walking the dog or taking the kids to school, [hosting a clean-up](#) or [joining someone else's clean-up](#).

Lake District

Friends of the Lake District have launched a [Save our Lake District](#) campaign, claiming that its landscapes are exploited for commercial gain with very little being given back in return, and that commercialisation without conservation can only lead to permanent damage to this fragile, beautiful place, especially in these times of climate and environmental emergency. They are seeking radical change to the way the Lake District is managed is needed to ensure that its beauty and heritage will survive and thrive in these difficult times.

HS2

The Wildlife Trusts are asking people to [sign a letter to the Prime Minister](#) asking for a rethink of HS2 based on their [new report](#) revealing the scale of the damage the project would do to wildlife and nature along the route (see Transport section for more on HS2)

Dark Skies

[CPRE's annual Star Count](#) is back, and they'd like you to help create a map of the nation's view of the night sky. Counting the stars you can see will help them to find out where light pollution is a problem and where the darkest skies are, so they can help protect them. It's easy to take part - just look to the heavens between 21-28 February and count the number of stars you see in the constellation of Orion. It's family-friendly and anyone can take part. In Cumbria, Friends of the Lake District are [campaigning to achieve 'Dark Skies Reserve' status](#) in Cumbria by 2022. As part of this they are hosting their first [Dark Skies Festival](#) 21-23 February, and you can download a [Dark Skies Discovery Pack](#).

Information update

Brexit and beyond

- Boris Johnson's withdrawal agreement lacks the previous agreement's commitments to alignment with EU environmental regulations. May's draft withdrawal agreement included a legally-binding commitment to "non-regression" in the level of environmental protection. However, this commitment to non-regression is absent from the new withdrawal agreement. This means that from 1 January 2021 the UK could choose to water down environmental regulations covering everything from water and air quality to carbon emissions to protected nature sites to environmental impact assessment ([Planning Resource, paywall protected](#)).
- The UK Government's long-awaited [Environment Bill](#) has finally been reintroduced to Parliament, with [new provisions](#) outlining powers to stop the exports of plastic waste to developing countries, and a commitment to review global and national developments concerning environmental legislation, which will be considered in an Environmental Improvement Plan and environmental target setting process. There are also changes to governance systems on clean air and biodiversity and two-yearly reviews to update the Bill if required. The Bill has previously faced fierce criticism from [over 40 environmental NGOs](#) and the [Environmental Audit Committee](#) for watering down existing environmental protections, and these issues do not appear to have been satisfactorily resolved.
- The new [Agriculture Bill](#) has also had its first reading, [promising sweeping changes](#) to farming in the UK. It is set to establish a new system where farmers will receive financial support for providing 'public goods' rather than for land ownership. These public 'goods', or 'benefits', will include restoring habitats, providing cleaner water, and improving the quality of the soil. The transition to the new system will commence in 2021. [Soil protection](#) is a key new feature in the Bill, [a long-term campaign aim for CPRE](#). While the broad thrust of the Bill has been cautiously welcomed by environmental NGOs, there remain [wider concerns with the government's approach](#). Despite pledging to maintain the UK's high food and environmental standards, the government has not yet put such commitments into law, and no details about how the intentions of the Bill will be delivered have yet been established.
- Clause 26 in the withdrawal agreement bill would [allow all UK courts to diverge from European case law](#), which could have a major impact on environmental protections and therefore planning. The environmental protections afforded by EU directives have already been enshrined in domestic law, but much of how they should be interpreted has been a

matter of case law established in the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) in Luxembourg. In recent years, a number of ECJ court judgments have had a major impact on English planning, such as the April 2018 People over Wind ruling (see panel). All such cases could be subject to challenge in the UK courts from 1 January 2021.

Energy

- A new report suggests that the UK will need to facilitate a [four-fold increase in low-carbon energy](#), including expanding offshore wind capacity by up to 75GW, in order to reach its net-zero emissions commitment for 2050...
- ...While [new analysis by Carbon Brief](#) shows that the amount of electricity generated from low-carbon sources in the country stalled last year. Although confusingly, a [report from National Grid](#) says that 48.5% of electricity consumed in Britain in 2019 was generated through zero-carbon methods such as wind, solar and nuclear - compared to 43% for fossil fuels.
- Boris Johnson announced that the [UK will no longer support overseas coalmining](#) – a welcome but tiny gesture as 97% of our overseas fossil fuel subsidies go on oil and gas. He did not mention that [we will continue to fund overseas fossil fuel projects that will emit 69 million tonnes of greenhouse gases per year](#).
- [The Church of England is launching an energy rating system](#) similar to those used for household appliances to help monitor the carbon footprint of its almost 40,000 buildings. In a first step, parishes are being offered a new rating tool, which calculates their energy consumption, taking into account factors including the type of power they use, whether they are on 'green' tariffs, the size of the building and usage.
- The Government has been urged to [target one million heat pumps a year by 2035](#), investing in ground source heat pump infrastructure in the 2020s, just as previous generations ploughed money into the gas and water grid, in order to help kickstart the fledgling sector.

Planning

- The government has revealed some details of the [likely content of the long-awaited Planning White Paper](#) (Planning Resource, paywall protected), which is due to be published a couple of weeks either side of the Budget, scheduled for 11 March., e.g. measures to speed up local authority decision-making, reducing pre-commencement conditions, reviewing application fees, reviewing Compulsory Purchase Orders, discounts for first-time housebuyers funded by developer contributions, changes (possibly both extensions and constraints) to permitted development rights, and making the planning process clearer, more accessible and more certain for all users. However, commentators suggest that it could contain some more radical proposals, including a possible relaxation of green belt protection rules in certain areas (e.g. around train stations), 'enforced devolution', with combined authorities with planning powers everywhere, and a possible wide-ranging review of "planning regulations".
- A [High Court judgement](#) has ruled that the exceptional circumstances test for releasing Green Belt in local plans is "less demanding" than the development control "very special circumstances" test for permitting inappropriate development in the green belt. He added that the scope of the test can include "general planning needs, such as ordinary housing" and it is "not limited to some unusual form of housing, nor to a particular intensity of need". Commentators have suggested this is likely to make it easier for Green Belt to be released via local plans.
- Demonstrating the continuing centrality of the five year housing supply to planning decisions, Preston is to set to [overturn consents for 10 planning applications](#) totalling almost

1,000 homes, on the basis of an appeal decision that it claims shows that it now has a five year supply.

- Housing minister Esther McVey has announced [£8 million in funding to help deliver 'new, better-designed' homes](#) for communities across England. About £6 million would be spent on helping 21 new 'garden' towns and communities to progress their plans. An additional £1.9 million will be given to councils in England to support new neighbourhood plans.
- South Oxfordshire council have responded to the Government's threat to intervene in their local plan process and take away the council's ability to produce a plan (and give it to another body, possibly the County Council) due to long delays has been accused of being a "[dangerous precedent](#)" that would "[undermine local democracy](#)"
- More than 50,000 people have signed up to Right to Build registers across England, but the National Custom and Self Build Association) is concerned that a "[growing minority](#)" of local authorities are using 'dirty tricks' to prevent sign-up.
- A review of Manchester City Council's local plan could include a [target to reach zero carbon emissions twelve years ahead of the government's 2050 target](#)

Transport

- Despite costs almost doubling and cost:benefit ratio substantially declining, the Chancellor Sajid Javid is giving his [backing to HS2](#) in a meeting to discuss the report of the Oakervee Review into HS2. However, the final decision will not be taken yet. According to the National Audit Office, the costs have escalated because the [risks and complexities of the project were underestimated](#) and there is [significant uncertainty about when it might be delivered and what it might cost](#). A new report by The Wildlife Trusts, described as "the most comprehensive assessment of the [environmental damage that HS2 will cause](#)" reveals, "the vast scale of the destruction and impact that HS2 will cause to nature". It assesses the broad range of impacts across all phases of HS2 on protected wildlife sites, species and landscape restoration projects. In a dissenting report written since resigning from the Oakervee Review, an ex-Panel member has also branded the project as "[not good for the environment](#)" when compared to the option of improving existing railway lines. A [new environmental policy for HS2](#) was published in December, which [is substantially weaker](#) than the original one. The new policy drops the company's commitment to "seek environmental enhancements and benefits". Both documents commit to improving environmental performance but the policy to do so "by means of establishing relevant objectives appropriate to the nature, scale and environmental impacts of the organisation and the project" has been removed. The new policy omits ambitions to "minimise the combined effect of the project and climate change on the environment", minimise public and workforce exposure to air pollution, and "reinstate agricultural land to its original quality where it has been disturbed as a result of construction". It does however make a new commitment to making HS2 a green corridor for biodiversity. However, there is also concern that without HS2, the 'Northern Powerhouse Rail' the [east-west upgrades will not be as effective](#) as they could be and that the rail network will just miss out on a huge investment.
- The struggling [Northern Rail franchise has been brought under public control](#) after years of poor service, with [Network Rail also criticized](#) for their part in the problems.
- Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has announced the publication of a report that makes a case for national government backing to deliver the region's cycling and walking plans. "If they help us change our city-region, we can help change the country, too," said Burnham. [Change a Region to Change a Nation](#) argues that Greater Manchester's £1.5 billion "[active travel](#)" [Bee Network](#) could be the national blueprint for getting people out of cars, improving health, boosting economic growth, and delivering cleaner air.

- The Government has announced limited funding (£22 million) to [start to reverse some of the Beeching cuts](#) to regional railways, including the line to Fleetwod. There are [allegedly “hundreds of millions” to follow](#).

Biodiversity & nature

- This October, world leaders will meet in China to discuss a new set of biodiversity targets that will decide the fate of nature on this planet. On Monday 13th January, the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) released a [first draft](#) of a global biodiversity framework outlining the proposed targets to be discussed and adopted by governments. So far, the draft has been [cautiously welcomed](#) by both governments and conservationists, with environmental campaigners emphasising that these goals should be a minimum acceptable level to aim for. The draft outlines 20 action-oriented targets to be hit by 2030. These will contribute to five longer-term goals to be met by 2050 in order to achieve a world where: “biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.” One stand-out figure from the draft is that [almost a third of the world’s oceans and land should be protected and conserved by 2030](#), in order to meet the long-term goal of a 20% increase of the integrity of freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems.
- A former chief scientific adviser to the UK government has suggested that [half of the nation’s farmland needs to be transformed into woodlands and natural habitat](#) to fight the climate crisis and restore wildlife

Publications

Housing Design

Councils are rejecting poorly-designed housing schemes only to see them approved on appeal, "fatally" undermining the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), according to a study by University College London and CPRE. The report, [A Housing Design Audit for England](#), reviewed the design of 142 large housing developments across the country. They assessed each development against 17 criteria and judged three-quarters of audited projects to be of "mediocre" or "poor" design quality, with poorer communities worst affected. "One in five of the audited schemes should have been refused planning permission outright," the report says. "The design of many others should have been improved before relevant permissions were granted." The report also found “evidence that poor design is being approved on appeal”, adding: "This fatally undermines the government’s own policy on design in the NPPF. It sends a message that design quality does not matter." It also found that [new developments were car-dominated](#) and that new road designs failed to make space for pedestrians and cyclists, locking in high-carbon and polluting modes of transport. A new report by the Centre for London likewise found that new housing in Greater London is [forcing people into unsustainable patterns of car ownership and travel](#).

Land use and climate change

A new report presents the [Committee on Climate Change’s first ever in-depth advice on UK agricultural and land use](#) policies. The report assesses the way we use our land today and the changes required in how we farm and use land in order to deliver the UK Government’s Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050. This will require a major shift in land use practices, in particular to increase tree planting, encourage low-carbon farming practices, restore peatlands, encourage bioenergy crops and reduce food waste and consumption of the

most carbon-intensive foods. The UK public should [reduce their meat and dairy intake by at least 20%](#), they suggest. Land use was responsible for 12% of UK emissions in 2017.

Planning reform

[The Raynsford Review one-year-on report](#), commissioned by the TCPA, renewed the call for ministers to immediately revoke "damaging permitted development rights" and said "[government policy has led directly to the creation of slum housing](#)". It claimed that evidence of PD rights producing poor quality housing "is now overwhelming" and that the planning system has the opportunity to make people's lives better, but this is being undermined by deregulation and a 'chronic loss' of public confidence and trust in it. Meanwhile, a report from the LGA claims that a that more than [13,500 affordable homes have been lost](#) over the past four years as a result of developers using PD rights, which do not require applicants to contribute to affordable housing. Possibly buoyed up by these examples of the stunning success of deregulating the planning system, Policy Exchange has released a new report [recommending further radical deregulation](#) and a much reduced role for local councils in planning, focused on a '2 zone system', where land would either have development permitted, or not, and councils would have little further influence beyond determining that. The No 10 policy unit is alleged (by The Times, paywall protected) to be seriously considering the report and that ministers are keen to "[radically reform](#)" [the planning system](#)

Food waste

A new report from WRAP, based on data from the last five years from around the UK, suggests that local authorities that have separate food waste collections have [substantially lower rates of food waste arisings](#) (as well, of course as the food waste that is produced being re-used as a resource rather than disposed of in landfill). The presence of the food waste collection may therefore have changed behaviours as well as dealing more sustainably with residual arisings. In another report this month, WRAP reveal that [almost half a million tonnes less food was wasted](#) in the UK in 2018 than in 2015.

Marine Climate Change Impacts

The Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership has published a [new Report Card for 2020](#), which provides the latest update on scientific understanding of climate change impacts on the UK's coast and seas. For the first time the report includes the impacts of climate change on oxygen, cultural heritage and transport and infrastructure. The report card draws on information from 26 scientific reviews commissioned by MCCIP and more than 150 scientists from over 50 leading research organisations have contributed to this view on the range and scale of physical, ecological and societal impacts of climate change.

Events

Spaces & community wellbeing

The Whitehall & Industry Group is hosting a free panel discussion [on the role of spaces in community wellbeing](#) in Manchester on Tuesday 24 March 2020. Participants will learn why community spaces are under threat and how the Co-op are working with Locality, the Plunkett Foundation and others to revitalise them; discuss approaches to impactful use of community spaces and how this can be evaluated; and network with peers and build cross-sector links to support the provision and funding of community spaces

Northern Air Quality Conference

As the levels of toxic air being registered in our towns and cities increase and the numbers of deaths which are attributed to air pollution grow, there is a clear and perceptual change in mind-set with regard to delivering policies which offer quantifiable solutions across health, energy, urban design and transport. The [Northern Air Quality News Conference](#) explores some of the issues and the possible solutions to the increasing levels of toxic air in our communities, the challenges and opportunities of Clean Air Zones and Indoor Air Pollution. Manchester, April 28th.

Northern Upland Chain Annual Forum

The Annual Forum is intended to provide people with an opportunity to find out about the work being done by the Local Nature Partnership, and to provide a forum for debate about the future for nature and for the 'natural economy' of the northern Pennine uplands. The main theme for this year's [7th Annual Forum](#) will be 'Nature Recovery' – looking at both the developing national policy picture and the potential local opportunities. Numbers are strictly limited and booking is essential. Thursday 5 March, 2 – 4.30, The Morrill, Greta Bridge, County Durham. If you would like to attend the Forum please respond by Friday 21 February to Josie Wilson at: secretariat@nuclnp.org.uk.

Resources

Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ([Defra](#)) [has launched an online resource to 'guarantee' 'better' environmental decision-making by valuing natural capital](#). The tool hosts a "comprehensive and integrated" set of evidence and guidance about natural capital in the UK, to help users better understand natural capital and how to take account of it. Policymakers, businesses, landowners and public and third sector organisations will be able to use the tool. The government thinks this approach to natural capital will make it easier for public and private organisations to better assess and value the environment, which will in turn help to deliver long-term benefits, a reduction in flood risk, boosts to wildlife, improvements to water and air quality, and opportunities for biodiversity net gain.

Biodiversity and planning

the RTPI has recently published new [practice advice on Biodiversity in planning](#): Obligations and opportunities to promote biodiversity through the UK planning systems. It sets out the key challenges relating to biodiversity and the current national statutory duties and guidance that should be addressed through planning.

Green Economy Tracker

The Green Economy Coalition - an alliance of big-name businesses, NGOs and researchers - has today (23 January) unveiled a new [tool which will help nations measure and accelerate their transitions](#) to economic systems which are more environmentally friendly and socially fair. Launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the tool assesses green policies across five key areas: measuring and governance; reforming financial systems; greening individual sectors; tackling social inequality and valuing nature.

Valuing forest ecosystems

Forest Research has just published the headlines from its on-going research programme on [valuing and governing forest ecosystem services](#) which uncovers new insights into how to recognise and understand the value of the services and benefits provided by our trees and

forests. This work aims to inform policy-makers and practitioners, helping them make decisions about tree and forest management in urban and rural areas

Consultations

North West Draft Marine Plans

The Marine Management Organisation has launched a [public consultation on the draft North West Inshore and Offshore Marine Plans](#). This is the final stage of statutory public consultation before the Plans are submitted to the DEFRA for adoption. The MMO has arranged implementation training sessions for decision-makers throughout the consultation period and there will also be a series of webinars (national and plan area-based) early in the consultation period to assist all stakeholders in making representations on the draft marine planning documents. The consultation will run until 6th April.

Coastal Access

Natural England has submitted a collection of reports to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, setting out the proposals for improved access to the coast between Silecroft and Silverdale and between Silverdale and Cleveleys. Once the Secretary of State has approved the reports, Natural England will start work with Cumbria County Council on preparing the route for public use. Deadline: 4th March.

Funding

Food waste prevention

WRAP have launched [two new funding streams](#): first, up to £100,000 of funding to support projects tackling food waste. They are looking for SMEs, including not-for-profit organisations, running projects or interventions that encourage citizens to waste less food. And second, “Value from Waste” grants to support collaborative pilot projects that trial and test new processes and ideas to specifically target difficult and challenging streams of wasted food, to ensure that this food remains useful and retains value, preventing it from being sent for disposal and becoming waste. Deadlines – 25th March

Aviva Community Fund

The Aviva Community Fund has announced its criteria and funding pot for 2020. [Small charities are invited to bid for a maximum of £50,000 each](#) and funding will total £1m throughout the year. They will be expected to use this funding to “drive long-term sustainable success” and “make a life-changing impact”. Alongside this funding, Aviva have announced that they will provide digital and data support for charities through its digital Knowledge Library. Applications are open until 11 February 2020.

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