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● GREEN BULLET

26th February 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.

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Campaigns

Climate change

- Carbon dioxide emissions may have peaked in 2019, according to [the International Energy Agency](#). The decline in the use of coal in developed economies, like the US and [EU](#), in recent years has led to global output of CO2 plateauing.

- The [G20 group of the world's wealthiest nations](#), always at the cutting edge of progress, have just issued their first ever statement acknowledging that climate change might, perhaps, pose a bit of a risk.
- Alok Sharma, the new Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industry, has been appointed the [president of the COP26 climate talks](#) to be hosted in Glasgow this November. Since 2011 he has [voted against measures to prevent climate change 15 times](#), voted in favour 4 times, and been absent twice. Boris Johnson has promised urgent action on climate change – but only [in response to blistering criticism](#) about his failure to do so from Mr Sharma's predecessor. So we're in good hands.
- New analysis by Green Alliance suggests that despite the creation of a legally-binding net-zero target for 2050 last year, the [UK is still not on track to meet its fifth legally binding carbon budget](#). While a new report from Chatham House claims that the UK Government is [over-reliant on ineffective and implausible carbon capture and storage and biomass](#) solutions in its net-zero plans and is failing to account for the impact these technologies could have on land use.
- A new study suggests that [methane emissions from the fossil fuel industry are around 40% worse](#) than previously thought – which, perversely, may be good news, in that regulating the industry better and shifting to renewables will have more of an impact.
- In a shock to absolutely no-one, new research shows that [every major commercial UK airport has plans to expand](#), with many hoping to double passenger numbers by 2030. They all naturally expect that their additional greenhouse gas emissions will be compensated for by reductions in growth at the other airports. However, North Somerset councillors have [rejected plans to increase the capacity of Bristol Airport](#), and Uttlesford councilors [rejected Stansted expansion plans](#), both against their officers' recommendation, on grounds including that the scheme's wider negative impact on the environment would outweigh the "narrower benefits to airport expansion". The Bristol decision will be referred to the Secretary of State and the Stansted one is expected to be appealed.
- The [Church of England](#) has committed to achieving net zero emission by 2030.

Dark skies

CPRE's [Star Count 2020 is now open](#) for submissions! Star Count is CPRE's annual citizen science project to map the nation's view of the night sky, and they'd love you to take part. Doing a count is simple - whether you live in town or country, just look to the night sky between 21-28 February and tell them how many stars you can see within the constellation of Orion by submitting your count on their website. It only takes a few minutes.

Air pollution

- From February 2021, the government will [ban the sale of pre-packaged bituminous house coal and 'wet' \(i.e non-seasoned\) wood](#) in a bid to curb particulate matter (PM) emissions. The pledge was a major part of the Clean Air Strategy, published a year ago, which stated that solid fuels currently account for around 39% of all PM pollution in the UK.
- New research attributes [1,000 deaths per year in the Liverpool City Region](#) to air pollution, mostly from road transport.

Litter

- There's still time to sign up for this year's [Great British Spring Clean](#), from 20 March to 13 April. You can [pledge to pick](#) while you're walking the dog or taking the kids to school, [host a clean-up](#) or [join someone else's clean-up](#)...

- ... Including Friends of the Lake District's Great Cumbrian Litter pick on Fr 21-Sat 22 March. [Read](#) their guide "Helpful Hints for organising your Great Cumbrian Litter Pick Community Event", [register](#) your own local community litter pick, or [sign up](#) to join a litter pick in your area, and [Download](#) their great, free resources including posters, logos and banners.

Healthy Homes

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), supported by CPRE and others, are calling for a [Healthy Homes Act](#). This would ensure all new homes are safe, secure, accessible, environmentally responsible and consistent with healthy living. Poorly planned and designed new homes have repeatedly been shown to be bad for people, communities and the environment.

Information update

Brexit and beyond

- Greener UK, a coalition of UK environmental NGOs who are attempting to ensure that environmental protections are maintained and enhanced during the Brexit process, have concluded that the new Environment Bill has come a long way from its first iteration, but is still set to leave protections weaker than before and fall short of government promises. They have produced a range of up-to-date briefings this month: on the [Environment Bill](#), [Agriculture Bill](#) (both jointly with Wildlife and Countryside Link) and [Fisheries Bill](#), plus an [overview of their priorities for all the latest government legislation](#). Link also published a blog highlighting analyzing the [changes to the Agriculture Bill](#).
- Responses to the Environment Bill from [other green campaigners and businesses](#) reiterate the same message – this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, that the government has not yet got right.
- The [Cabinet reshuffle](#) led to some major Ministerial changes at DEFRA, BEIS and MHCLG, and more minor ones in DfT, and [some speculation](#) as to what this might mean for policy and practice.

Energy

- Environmental law charity [Client Earth is taking the UK Government to the High Court](#) following the energy secretary's approval of plans to modify coal-fired generating units to gas-powered ones at Drax Power Station. An inspector recommended that the secretary of state refuse consent for the development due to its "failure to deliver carbon reduction objectives", but energy secretary Andrea Leadsom went against this advice.
- The [biggest battery \(100MW\) in Europe](#) is planned for the West of England, to help balance out the intermittency of renewable energy sources and decarbonize the grid. It will store renewable power in two 50MW cells and then sell it to consumers when demand and prices are high.
- The UK Government has announced [£70m in funding to help cut emissions from industrial processes](#), including backing two low-carbon hydrogen production plants. The funds will explore and trial technologies that can switch industrial production from fossil fuels to renewables in industries including glass and cement production. And additional £21m has been awarded to [10 ground-breaking "smart energy" projects](#) across UK, to trial new technology which could become a blueprint for greener localized energy generation on the road to net zero
- A campaign group has been granted permission for a [judicial review of Cumbria County Council's decision](#) to allow the first deep coal mine in 30 years in the UK to be built.

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- [BP has pledged to go net-zero by 2050](#), which would require cutting emissions each year by more than the sum total of UK emissions. It is hard to reconcile with their published plans to continue exploring for and exploiting new fossil fuel reserves up to 2030 and beyond.

Planning

- Planners are [not obliged to take into account visual impact when assessing whether a proposed development will harm the openness of the green belt](#), the Supreme Court has ruled, reversing a [2018 Appeal Court decision](#). It found that, on a 'true' reading of the NPPF, the visual quality of a landscape is not in itself an essential part of the openness for which the green belt is protected. While decision-makers can consider landscape and visual impacts if the circumstances of the case make it relevant, they do not have to and it is a matter for planning judgement whether they do so or not.
- Boris Johnson has appointed the head of housing from free-market think-tank Policy Exchange, Jack Airey, as his new housing and planning special adviser. Last month, Airey co-wrote a [report calling for a "clean break" with the existing planning system](#) and an end to local councillors determining planning applications.
- [109 councils face penalties](#) as a result of the [2019 Housing Delivery Test](#). 22 will have to produce an action plan setting out how they will increase housing growth, 83 (including Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rossendale, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Warrington and Wirral) will have to add a 20% 'buffer' to their housing land supply, making them more vulnerable to speculative development, and 8 will have the presumption in favour of 'sustainable' development applied to housing decisions in their area, the most severe penalty. Blackburn, Pendle and Sefton are among 24 councils that have had their housing land supply targets reduced as a result of the test.
- [Housing Land Supply Annual Position Statements](#) were introduced in 2018 by the revised NPPF to allow a local authority with a recently-adopted plan to confirm its housing land supply position, to defend against speculative development. If a statement is approved, a local planning authority ensures its five-year housing land supply position cannot be challenged while it remains in place. Of the [three councils that have applied](#) for a statement, [Wyre](#) has just been the first council to successfully have one approved, while attempts by Fylde and Mid-Sussex were rejected by PINS. [Fylde is taking PINS to court](#) for, as it alleges, unlawfully ruling that that the authority must increase its local plan housing target.
- The head of the Environment Agency has said that [no more homes should be built on floodplains](#) unless there is no real alternative – but has also acknowledged that the number of properties on floodplains is likely to double again over the next 30 years. 10% of all new homes in England since 2013 have been [built on land at the highest risk of flooding](#), doubling the numbers at highest risk.
- [New research by Planning Resource](#) (subscription only) suggests that the proportion of appeals being allowed on unallocated greenfield sites has dropped over the past four years (after a steep rise after 2012). It points to a trend whereby secretary of state and inspector decisions are giving more weight to issues such as landscape impact. This often 're-tilts' the balance away from developers, even where there is no five-year housing land supply.
- Housing secretary Robert Jenrick has announced that [small and medium sized builders](#) will be able to apply for £1 billion in government funding.

Transport

- The final report of the UK2070 Commission, due to be published this Thursday, called 'Make No Little Plans', warns that projects including HS2 and Northern Powerhouse rail are ["unlikely to take benefits beyond city centres to help the more deprived areas"](#) unless local

transport links are also upgraded. The UK has one of the world's highest levels of regional economic inequality, ranking 28th out of a list of 30 nations, above only Slovakia and Ireland. Transport for the North has endorsed the Government's proposals to ['dovetail' HS2 with Northern Powerhouse Rail](#). It remains to be seen whether this will avoid or exacerbate the problems pointed out by the UK2070 Commission.

- [HS2 has been given the go-ahead](#) in full following the [Oakervee Review](#), which recommended that: HS2 should proceed, with the full Y-shaped network to Leeds and Manchester; the specification for phase 1 (London to West Midlands) should be reduced, eg from 16 trains per hour to 14; the construction of phases 2a (West Midlands to Crewe) and phase 1 should be merged; the parliamentary bill to authorise phase 2b (Crewe to Leeds) should be paused until it can be integrated into a rail investment programme for the north (=5-7 year delay to opening); and Old Oak Common should be the London terminus initially, but continue to progress Euston as the terminus when ready. To try to counter claims that it was bad value for money and [highly environmentally destructive](#), an extra [£5 billion was promised for unspecified local bus and cycle infrastructure](#). However, there are still serious questions over its [impact on biodiversity, carbon emissions and other environmental matters](#).
- The government announced they will [ban the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid vehicles](#) from 2035, bringing forward the original date by five years and bringing [new sets of challenges and opportunities](#)
- The DfT has unveiled plans to fund and support the UK's first '[all-electric bus town](#)'

Biodiversity & nature

- [National governments will meet in Rome this week](#) to discuss a [20-point UN draft proposal](#) to halt irreversible ecological damage, which looks set to be formally adopted in October. Government ministers from across the globe will this week discuss the draft plan [aimed at halting the collapse of nature](#) – the sixth mass extinction in the planet's history - by 2030, a deal likened as the Paris Agreement for biodiversity. However, green campaign groups have criticized the plan and say that it is “hopelessly weak and inadequate”, lacking binding rules to protect wildlife or indigenous people's rights, and that it [faces three major challenges](#).
- A five-year study of a small [beaver population re-introduced to Devon](#) finds that they have cut flooding and pollution and boosted wildlife populations. [The report](#) will help the government decide whether to allow wild beavers to return to England after being hunted to extinction more than 400 years ago
- 13 projects in urban communities in England will receive a share of £10 million in the first round of the [Urban Tree Challenge Fund](#). The scheme, which launched in May 2019, aims to plant 130,000 trees across England by 2021 – however this will only make a small dent in the UK's current historic tree-planting deficit. The next round of funding opens this spring (see 'Funding' section for more info).

Publications

Building Better, Building Beautiful

The final report of the [Building Better, Building Beautiful](#) Commission has been published, setting out a series of 130 recommendations for delivering better quality, better designed new development. The Government has already committed to introducing a “fast track for beauty”, with a “relatively straightforward” planning application stage for developments that meet local design standards, and a “National Model Design Code”. The report also recommends changes to the NPPF, applying design and quality standards to permitted development, tougher

measures to prevent standards being watered down after schemes receive consent, more community involvement, more masterplanning and detailed local policy interventions, and much more. The government will respond to all recommendations in time.

Transport deserts

CPRE have launched a major new report, [Transport Deserts](#), about the lack of public transport provision in rural towns. The report shows that an alarming amount of rural communities are becoming cut off due to the lack of public transport and it begins to set out how we can tackle this.

Planning and housing

New analysis by the Local Government Association (LGA) has suggested that there are more than [one million homes that have been granted planning permission but are yet to be built](#). Since 2009/10, 2,564,600 homes have been approved, 1,530,680 completed. It noted that since 2012/13, the number of planning permissions granted has almost doubled, with councils approving nine in 10 applications. There can be a lag between approval and homes being built but the new build completions have only increased by half as permissions. They stressed that the backlog of homes with permission that have not been built shows that “the planning system is not a barrier to housebuilding”, and called on the government to give councils the power to take action on land that has planning permission for homes in the planning white paper.

Agrichemical industry

The global pesticide industry sits next to the fossil fuel giants as one of the biggest and most destructive on the planet - and yet it gets far less scrutiny. It makes its money by marketing crops and chemicals to the world’s farmers. The choices it makes about which chemicals to sell will not just decide the fate of the world’s wildlife, soil and insects (and so our ability to feed ourselves in future). It’s also fundamental to the climate crisis. Intensive farming - fuelled by the mass use of destructive chemicals - wipes out natural ecosystems that absorb carbon dioxide and limit temperature rises. [Greenpeace’s latest investigative report](#) discovered the five biggest companies - brands like Bayer, Syngenta and Chem China make more than a third of their money from pesticides that are hazardous to human health or the environment. And [the biggest demand comes from crops grown for animal feed](#).

National Infrastructure Design

Four design principles should be addressed in all new national infrastructure projects, according to the newly published [Design Principles for National Infrastructure](#):

- **Climate:** Infrastructure must help set the trajectory for the UK to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 or sooner. It must be capable of adapting to climate change.
- **People:** Projects should be human scale, instinctive to use and seek opportunities to improve the quality of life for people who live and work nearby.
- **Places:** Schemes should provide a sense of identity for communities, supporting the natural and built environment and enriching ecosystems.
- **Value:** Value should be added beyond the main purpose of the infrastructure, solving problems well and achieving multiple benefits.

The Viable Economy...and Society

Steady State Manchester has published a large-scale revision of their 2014 Viable Economy pamphlet, now titled [The Viable Economy ... and Society](#), to reflect its critical perspective on

approaches that give a precedence to the economy over social or environmental needs. It will be of interest to anyone concerned about the dangers we face from the current *unviable* economic system and who would like to explore an approach that integrates economic, social and ecological well-being. It includes two new sections on Care and Caring and the Built Environment, and gives the ecological crisis even greater prominence. While it is a conceptual paper, it does include some outline viable policy ideas for each of the topics covered.

Food waste

The latest report from WRAP show that progress is being made in reducing food waste, with a 7% reduction per person in the last three years. The [new data](#) shows that there has been a half a million tonne reduction in total UK food waste in just three years – enough to fill the Royal Albert Hall ten times.

Events

Power Up Liverpool

The city region's green spaces are under threat and bad developments are increasing carbon emissions and leading to increased air pollution. But with the right skills and knowledge, local people can help stop inappropriate developments from being built and protect our green spaces for people and nature. Friends of the Earth invite you to a [free one-day workshop](#), focused on how you can use the planning system to help protect your local environment and to campaign for green development. The training will outline your rights under the planning system, and how you can successfully influence planning decisions to win your campaign. Saturday, 7 March 10am–4pm, Liverpool Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool, L1 3BT

Urban food growing and wildlife

Want to grow veg in your courtyard or on a balcony? Not sure how to get started on an allotment or begin growing veg in your own garden? Want to know how to graft apple trees? [Woodbank Community Food Hub](#) (Woodbank Park, Offerton), have an exciting year of events on growing, wildlife and food beginning with 'From Seed to Harvest' - a day of workshops, a tool maintenance demonstration and a seed-swap.

Degrowth / ecological economics conference

The 7th International Degrowth / 16th International Society for Ecological Economics Joint Conference: [Building Alternative Livelihoods in times of ecological and political crisis](#) will be held in Manchester, 1 - 5 September 2020. They have just issued an [open call](#) for papers, special sessions (round tables, symposia), participative sessions, activist and artistic sessions. The conference will combine academic discussion and presentations with contributions from artists, activists, community groups and politicians. It will explore how we might meet our needs in ways more relevant to the worsening ecological, climate and social crisis: "alternative livelihoods".

Webinar: An environment for everyone

[Multiculturalism, nature and place](#) - Thursday 26th March 2020, 1 - 2pm. Judy Ling Wong CBE, Honorary President of Black Environment Network will talk about why greening our towns and cities and involving everyone is vital for their future success. She will share the challenges and joys of opening up benefits to everyone and releasing their rich contribution, bringing in the current themes of health, wellbeing, cultural exchange, vision and policy in a time of climate crisis. Following Judy's presentation, Alison Metheson from Scottish Natural Heritage will provide commentary on the BME community in the natural environment.

Catchment-based approach biodiversity conference

[This free-to-attend event](#) brings together speakers and practitioners from across Catchment Partnerships and other initiatives to discuss the current context for freshwater biodiversity conservation in England, and to hear about principles and techniques used in delivery projects on the ground. 20th March, Birmingham.

Resources

Planning for green infrastructure

'Green infrastructure' refers to networks of natural features that provide a wide-range of important functions. The Glasgow and Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership, together with the Central Scotland Green Network Trust, have recently launched a succinct [Planning for Green Infrastructure brochure](#), providing a guide to 'exemplar' green infrastructure planning policies.

Spatial Development Strategies

PINS has published new guidance on examining (and therefore on preparing!) [city-regional Spatial Development Strategies](#). The legislation and process for preparing, examining and adopting a Spatial Development Strategy is different from that relating to local plans. Detailed procedural guidance on all aspects of the examination can be found in the Procedural Practice in the Examination of Spatial Development Strategies booklet.

Tipping points

Carbon Brief have produced a useful infographic explaining [nine key climate tipping points](#) that could push Earth systems into rapid non-linear change.

Valuing urban greenspaces

[Greenkeeper](#) is a new online tool to support public authorities, developers and managers of urban greenspaces in the UK to make evidence-based planning and investment decisions. It uses big data and leading academic research to estimate visits to urban greenspaces and the benefits provided in terms of health, wellbeing, local value and carbon sequestration. It quantifies these benefits in monetary terms for any urban greenspace in the UK in a user-friendly format and without requiring any data input, standardising and making evidence accessible to decision-makers in the public and private sector. There is a [webinar](#) to introduce new and potential users to Greenkeeper on Thurs 2nd April 1-2pm

Consultations

First Homes

The government is consulting on its [flagship new First Homes policy](#), to allow first-time buyers to purchase market homes at discounted values. It will not be a like-for-like replacement for affordable home schemes delivered via planning obligations, and both public and private sector practitioners have warned it would cut developer contributions available for social rent and other affordable housing tenures, and impact viability. So – basically we'll see even [less genuinely affordable housing](#) for those in most need, and [less rural affordable housing](#). The policy appears very similar to the Government's previous flagship affordable homes policy, 'Starter Homes'. The National Audit Office report '[Investigation into Starter Homes](#)' found that despite costing the

public billions and the promise of 200,000 new discounted homes for first-time buyers in 2015, not a single starter home had been built by 2019. Deadline: 3rd April.

Funding

Bright Ideas Fund

The [Bright Ideas Fund](#) supports new [community business](#) ideas through the start-up and planning stages with tailored business support, to the implementation stage with grants of up to £15,000.

Urban Tree Challenge

Potential applicants can submit an [Expression of Interest](#) to the Government's Urban Tree Challenge fund, to register their interest and receive the latest up to date information on the fund in advance of the application window opening later this spring. This call is open 26 Feb – 7 April

Survey

Attitudes to housebuilding

What changes are needed to our current model of housebuilding? A [new survey](#) aims to gather the views of local residents about housing development and the planning system. It is being run by Dr. Quintin Bradley, senior lecturer in planning and housing at Leeds Beckett University. He has carried out interviews with community groups and the aim of the survey is to get the views of many more people concerned about housebuilding. The survey asks only a small number of questions but it leaves plenty of room for people to write their views. It asks about housing targets and housing need, the allocation of housing land and the impact of development on the environment. Quintin says: "I hope my research will contribute to a more informed public debate on our model of housing supply and distribution. My aim is to help communities to have real influence over planning decisions". You can find details about the objectives of this research, articles about planning and housebuilding, and information about Quintin's previous work with community groups at <http://www.criticalplace.org.uk>.

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