



● GREEN BULLET

25th January 2021

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 – planning, seas, plastics, pesticides, dark skies, air pollution, car use
- Information update – Brexit & beyond, climate change & energy, planning, devolution, biodiversity & nature
- Publications – Energy White Paper, farming for change, social benefits of blue spaces
- Events – Biodiversity net gain in Greater Manchester, northern net zero summit
- Resources – Cheshire to Lancashire ecological network model, soils, green infrastructure, urban nature-based solutions, climate resilience in coastal communities, VCSEs: guide to working with government
- Consultations – Liverpool City Region Spatial Development Strategy, future buildings standard, 'right to regenerate', rail in the North

Campaigns

Planning reform

A coalition of housing, planning, transport, environmental, heritage, built environment and public health organisations have come together to set out a [shared vision for planning](#) in response to the proposals in the Government's Planning White Paper. It makes suggestions for how the government can maximise the fantastic potential of planning, including to implement existing legal commitments to environmental protection and addressing climate change.

Living Seas

The Wildlife Trusts' Living Seas teams are the eyes and ears of the UK coast. They have published their [marine review of 2020](#), a summary of the good news, bad news and action for conservation around the UK coast last year, and suggest [personal actions](#) and [campaigns to](#)

[support](#) to improve the health of our coastal water. Meanwhile, WWF and Sky Ocean Rescue have argued that aligning with the UN's recommendations and [committing to fully protect at least one-third of UK seas](#), the government could catalyse a £50bn boost for the economy and unlock 100,000 jobs.

Plastics

The UK has been accused of failing to honour its promise to curb shipments of plastic waste to developing countries, after it emerged Britain's new post-Brexit regulations are less stringent than those imposed by the EU. From 1 January, shipments of unsorted plastic waste from the EU to non-OECD countries [were banned](#). But [Britain will continue to allow plastic waste to be exported to developing countries](#), despite a Tory party manifesto commitment to banning the practice, and promises of no regression of environmental standards post-Brexit.

Pesticides

The Government has bowed to pressure from the National Farmers Union and agreed to authorise the use of the highly damaging neonicotinoid thiamethoxam for the treatment of sugar beet seed in 2021. Environmental NGOs such as [The Wildlife Trusts](#) and [Greenpeace](#), and the crowd-sourced campaign network [Avaaz](#) strongly oppose this decision and are [campaigning](#) against it.

Dark skies

CPRE are running a modified version of their [Star Count campaign](#) this year. From 6 -14 February 2021 they are encouraging supporters to measure of their view of the stars by counting the number of stars they can see in Orion. However, as we're currently under a national lockdown in England, supporters should take part from home only. This could be from their garden, balcony, doorstep or even bedroom window. The [Cumbria Dark Skies Festival](#) is hosting live online events over 17 evenings in February giving you the opportunity to explore the Cumbrian Dark Skies with astronomers, astro-photographers, authors, film-makers, lighting & design professionals, performers, poets and outdoor adventurers.

Air pollution

Oxford City Council has approved [local air pollution targets](#) through to 2025 that are stricter than the national legal target – a UK first. If they can do it, so can your local council – precedent has been set!

Car use

One of the key challenges to reducing transport emissions and improving air quality is the question of how to get more people out of their cars. In light of this challenge, Friends of the Earth has worked with Transport for Quality of Life to call on local authorities across the country to double the proportion of journeys by public transport, cycling and walking. They have developed a set of [27 actions that local authorities can take to reduce car use](#) in their areas – while recognising that a shift away from a car-dependent society requires support and leadership nationally as well.

Information update

Brexit and beyond

- The Environment Bill is now due to have its [report stage](#) and [third reading](#) on Tuesday 26 January 2021. Amendments can be made to the Bill at Report Stage. Amendments to be

considered are selected by the Speaker. Greener UK and Wildlife And Countryside Link have produced two briefings, one a [summary setting out the key elements](#) that they believe the Bill needs to provide robust protection for the environment, and one on the [amendments to the Bill that they are supporting](#) in order to get these elements in place. The Environment Bill, as put forward by Government, does not provide an adequate basis for future environmental protection: Caroline Lucas sets out some of its [key weaknesses and omissions](#).

- The Government has published '[The Path to Sustainable Farming](#)', its agricultural transition plan. This sets out the changes that are going to be made to agricultural policy in England from January 2021 to 2024, and looking forward to 2027. It also covers what these changes will mean for farmers and land managers, although much of the necessary detail is still missing. It focuses on the shift from area-based payments to the three components of the new Environmental Land Management scheme: The Sustainable Farming Incentive (a universal scheme open to all farmers); Local Nature Recovery (eventually replacing Countryside Stewardship, intended to build nature back into and beyond farmed landscapes), and Landscape Recovery (supporting more fundamental changes to land use in order to significantly enhance the landscape and restore wilder landscapes). The ELM scheme will be piloted in 2021 and rolled out from 2024. The linked '[Farming is Changing](#)' publication summarises the contents of the plan, and is aimed at farmers and land managers.
- The UK managed to secure a [Trade and Co-operation Agreement](#) (TCA) with the EU, although the headlines show that it's already not working out as promoted. But it's certainly better than no deal, [the worst possible option](#). The agreement is pretty good on climate, pays lip service to the concept of sustainable development and affirms the parties' determination "to maintain and improve" environmental and other standards (p182). But Greener UK's [preliminary analysis](#) concludes that it gives little certainty that standards will not be lowered in the future, and the Government's first concrete action – to [reverse the ban on bee-killing neonicotinoid pesticides](#) – don't bode well as we [look to the future](#). The Government has also gained the power to approve, without scrutiny, the [import of animal and agricultural products of a lower standard](#) than currently permitted in the UK, after attempts to amend the trade bill failed.
- Dame Glenys Stacey has been supported as the [Chair-designate for the new Office for Environment Protection](#) by a joint hearing of the Environmental Audit Committee and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. However, the committees also raised concerns about the independence of the OEP.
- The European Investment Bank has committed to [stop financing fossil fuel projects by 2021](#). Its 'climate roadmaps' detail plans to use at least 50% of its activity to support dedicated sustainable projects and industries, including those which assist with climate adaptation and mitigation and those which conserve and restore nature. As the Brexit transition period has now ended, the UK is not eligible for EIB funding. Chancellor Rishi Sunak used the [spending review](#) late last year to confirm plans for a national investment bank. The bank will be based in the North of England and begin operating this spring. Green groups are [urging the Treasury](#) to confirm that the bank will have sustainability-related core remits in line with climate science.

Climate change & energy

- The UK Government's announcement that it will follow the advice of the Climate Change Commission and adopt the target of [68% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030](#) (from a 1990 base) is, unlike most recent claims to be 'world-beating', genuinely one of the strongest in

the world. It is hoped that this will encourage other countries to raise their own commitments in advance of the UK-hosted COP26 conference later this year. However, crucially, the Government is currently [not even on track to achieve its previous, less ambitious commitments](#). It also lags behind the ambitions of many UK local governments and city regional authorities, who have set targets to achieve net zero in many cases between 2030 and 2040. [74% of UK local authorities have now declared a climate emergency](#).

- Shortly after the Government's 68% target was announced, the CCC released their [6th carbon budget](#), which would require reductions of 78% by 2035 to keep us on track with our legally binding commitments.
- The UK has become one of the first countries to publish an official plan setting out how the nation is responding to the climate crisis through [adaptation and resiliency plans](#) that focus on (engineered) flood prevention measures and nature-based solutions.
- The Supreme Court has overturned the Court of Appeal's decision that the [Heathrow third runway project](#) would breach the Government's legal climate change commitments, allowing the project to move forwards and with serious implications for other climate-damaging infrastructure projects.
- The Government has refused to call-in a decision to [approve a deep coal mine in Cumbria](#) to supply the steel industry, the first in the UK for over thirty years. If all the coal scheduled to be dug from it is burned as planned, it will release 9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide every year until 2050. That's [almost half of the UK's entire annual carbon budget](#) during the recently published sixth carbon budget period (2033-2037).
- [Northern Tidal Power Gateways](#) and [Cumbrian MP Simon Fell](#) are promoting tidal barrages with roads on top across Morecambe Bay, the Duddon Estuary and Solway Firth. Environmental NGOs are less convinced about their claims that this will protect Morecambe Bay's fragile ecosystems

Planning

- Under pressure from pretty much everyone to scrap the plans in the Planning White Paper for a new algorithm that would set LPA housing targets nationally, the [government has announced](#) an ["updated" formula for its standard housing need methodology](#), which it says would aim to increase housing delivery in England's 20 largest cities and towns and would encourage such areas to "plan for more family homes". This essentially consists of insisting that all LPAs continue to use out-of-date 2014-based household projections as the starting point for calculating 'need', and then [adding 35% to that for the 19 most urban LPAs plus all the London boroughs](#) (not, as announced, the 20 biggest cities – for example it applies to Manchester City Council, which only covers part of the urban area of Manchester, not to Greater Manchester). MHCLG has [updated the housing and economic needs assessment section](#) of its Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) to reflect the changes. The PPG includes a new section on calculating a minimum annual local housing need figure using the revised standard method, taking into account the new cities and urban centres uplift.
- The Government are 'considering' the 44,000+ responses that it has had to the other aspects of the planning reforms consultations (a summary of the proposals are available in a [briefing in the House of Commons library](#)), and hope to bring a Planning Bill before Parliament by the end of the year. Although the u-turn on the new housing need methodology was partly welcome, if a bit spatially incoherent, the [problems with the government's damaging planning proposals](#) run much deeper than the housing algorithm itself – see Campaigns section. Simon Ricketts argues that the Government's proposals are unachievable without changing – ie weakening or scrapping – the EU-derived rules on [strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment](#), concluding that

the recent Trade Deal with the EU offers little protection for the environment against a deregulating government determined to build build build.

- The [2020 Housing Delivery Test results](#) will lead to a third of all English councils (107) facing sanctions. Nineteen councils now have an increased housing land supply target, with the proportion of planned homes they need to add to their five-year pipeline going up from five to 20 per cent. [55 councils will be subject to the most severe penalty](#), the presumption in favour of “sustainable” development.
- Meanwhile, [28% of English councils cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply](#), making them likewise subject to the presumption in favour.
- The government announced in December that it will soon launch a [new £100m Brownfield Land Release fund](#) to support brownfield development, estates regeneration, and development on public sector land and self- and custom-built serviced plots.
- ...But [gaps in local authorities’ recording of brownfield sites](#) in their area mean the opportunity to develop these for housing “is massively under-estimated”, according to a new study by regeneration specialists U+I. Having commissioned an analysis of brownfield land registers in six English areas (Greater London, Greater Manchester, Cambridge, Oxford, Birmingham and East Berkshire), U+I calculated that 348,000 new homes could be built on unregistered land in these areas alone, amounting to nearly 29 per cent of national housing need arising by 2030.
- In their [response to the consultation on the Future Homes Standard](#), the Government has scrapped a proposed block on councils setting energy efficiency standards for new homes in their local plans at levels higher than existing building regulations, opening another avenue for LPAs to drive climate action. By 2025, all new homes are expected to produce 75-80% lower carbon emissions compared to current builds.

Biodiversity & nature

- The government has announced that [projects in England seeking to protect landscapes and retain thousands of green jobs](#) will receive a share of nearly £40 million of funding as part of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The projects include planting more than 800,000 trees and restoring habitats such as moorlands, wetlands and forests.
- The government has outlined plans to allocate at least [£3bn of the international climate finance that the UK will spend through to 2026 on nature-based solutions](#). The figure is more than a quarter of the UK’s existing commitments within the five-year timeframe, which total £11.6bn.
- A new report warns that the planet is facing a “[ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals](#)” that threaten human survival because of ignorance and inaction. The international group of scientists, having reviewed 150 major studies into the world’s major environmental challenges, warn that people still haven’t grasped the urgency of the biodiversity and climate crises, partly due to disciplinary boundaries and a failure to ‘connect the dots’ between the different studies, models and predictions.

Devolution

- Barrow Council, Lancaster City Council and South Lakeland District Council are pushing ahead with [plans to form a new Morecambe Bay unitary authority](#), competing with plans led by Cumbria and Lancashire County Councils to [divide Cumbria into a northern and a southern authority](#), and for [Lancashire to be split three ways](#), north west, central and east.
- A new report, [The Policies of Belonging](#), supported by a cross-party coalition of MPs and leading civic organisations, calls for ministers to hand power and capital back to

communities after the pandemic to repair Britain's fraying social fabric, including giving every area a right to self-government via a town or parish council.

Publications

Energy White Paper

After months of delays, the UK Government finally published its [Energy White Paper](#) in December, detailing how an overhaul to transport, energy and infrastructure will deliver "overwhelmingly decarbonised power in the 2030s" on the road to net-zero by 2050. The White Paper builds on the Prime Minister's [Ten Point Plan](#) for a Green Industrial Revolution and the [National Infrastructure Strategy](#) (NIS) in outlining how the nation plans to transform its power and heating systems to support the net-zero emissions target for 2050. In fact, much of the 166-page report is spent reiterating commitments to renewables and green buildings that have been announced earlier in the year. [Read an in-depth summary here.](#)

Farming for Change

Land use in the UK must be dramatically transformed by the end of the decade if the UK is to meet its 2050 net-zero target, with space re-allocated from livestock to vegetables, meadows and hedges, resulting in all of us eating less meat and more plant-based foods, according to a major [new report from the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission](#) (FFCC). The FFCC is calling for the use of all synthetic fertilisers and pesticides to be stopped, and the amount of land available for "green and ecological infrastructure" including meadows and hedgerows to almost double by 2030. At present, only 2% of agricultural fallow land is being used this way. A further 7.5% of land will need to see its use converted to woodland or other habitat creations, with some space also be dedicated to increasing public access, improving social sustainability.

The social benefits of blue spaces

The Environment Agency has published its review of evidence of the [social benefits of access to rivers, lakes and coastal waters](#). It reports that living near the coast is associated with lower levels of being overweight and some evidence of higher levels of self-reported mental health. The review included comparison of the social benefits of rivers, lakes and coastal to the benefits of the environment in general.

Events

Biodiversity net gain – Greater Manchester

Public, private and third sector organisations from Greater Manchester are invited to a free [Greater Manchester Biodiversity Net Gain Webinar](#) on Wednesday 10th February, 13.00 to 14.30. Find out more about embedding Biodiversity Net Gain within new developments, based on the UK's good practice [principles for Biodiversity Net Gain and the associated practical guidance](#), as well as Greater Manchester's own guidance. This webinar provides an overview of the Government's Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and how this could work in Greater Manchester.

Northern net zero energy summit

Northern Power Grid (NPG) is holding a virtual summit on [delivering net zero energy to the region](#), 9.30am – 1pm on Thursday 28 January 2020. The summit will consider how NPG are

developing plans for a low carbon future, and how they are responding to feedback they've had so far on the issue.

Resources

Cheshire to Lancashire ecological network model

As part of the [Natural Course](#) project, Natural England has created an innovative ecological network tool which models [wetland and woodland habitat networks across Cheshire to South Lancashire](#). It highlights priorities for biodiversity and nature-based solutions for Natural Course objectives (such as Water Framework Directive), and provides an evidence base for Local Nature Recovery Strategies and biodiversity net gain opportunities. Freely available as a single GIS layer, it is intended to support partnership working at landscape scale and help maximise nature recovery for both terrestrial habitats and waterbodies.

Soils

www.uksoils.org is a new online, one-stop-shop for the most engaging and innovative public-facing information and education resources relating to soil health from around the world and across the web. Its aim is to kickstart a nationwide public appreciation and understanding of the economic, societal and ecological importance of soil health. Founding members of uksoils are UK representatives on the [EU Mission for Soil Health and Food](#) and its Assembly ([the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology](#), [Earthwatch](#), [University of Sheffield](#)) and the [Sustainable Soils Alliance](#). The group will continually seek new partners to expand the initiative's reach and engagement, and have recently been joined by the British Soil Science Society and SRUC. This is a collaborative initiative so please contact them find out more, offer suggestions or to become a partner!

Green Infrastructure Standards

Natural England has published a rapid scoping [review of health and wellbeing evidence](#) to inform the development of the National Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards, a commitment in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

Urban nature-based solutions

Catch up on Earthwatch's interdisciplinary webinar series on the use of [urban nature-based solutions to support more resilient cities](#) in the face of climate change. Guest speakers from academia, private and public sectors explore the opportunities, challenges and complexities of implementing nature-based solutions in urban areas. Learn from inspiring case studies drawn from different parts of the world, and hear key findings from their global citizen science research on nature-based solutions.

Climate resilience in coastal communities

The Coastal Communities Adapting Together project aims to support coastal communities in understanding climate change and how to adapt. A recent [series of webinars](#) is available, examining national, local authority, and community-level responses to climate change along the UK coastline.

VCSEs: A guide to working with government

A [new guide](#) has been produced for charities and social enterprises looking to build experience and credibility, boost sustainability and diversify income, by considering the opportunities of

selling on a large or small scale to central Government, local authorities and/or other public sector buyers.

Consultations

Liverpool City Region Spatial Development Strategy

Still open: Liverpool City Region Combined Authority is [consulting on its emerging Spatial Development Strategy](#). This second stage of the consultation will concentrate on people's specific ideas for the SDS across five key areas: climate change and the environment; health and wellbeing; inclusive economic growth; placemaking and communities; and social value. The consultation will also ask for suggestions in certain policy areas, including air quality, active travel and employment skills. After receiving responses, the combined authority will review the feedback and take them into consideration together with formal evidence as it compiles the strategy. A draft of the SDS will then be presented to the combined authority, followed by a 13-week consultation when the public will be able to comment on specific policies.

Future Buildings Standard

This consultation is the second stage of the 2-part consultation on proposed changes to Part L (Conservation of fuel and power) and Part F (ventilation) of the Building Regulations. It builds on the now-closed [Future Homes Standard consultation](#) by setting out energy and ventilation standards for non-domestic buildings, existing homes and includes proposals to mitigate against overheating in residential buildings. It sets out proposals for a [Future Buildings Standard](#), which should provide a pathway to highly efficient non-domestic buildings which are zero carbon ready, better for the environment and fit for the future. Deadline: 13 April.

Right to Regenerate

The Government is consulting on a '[Right to Regenerate](#)' – to make it easier for individuals, businesses and organisations to identify, purchase and redevelop underused or empty land owned by the public sector in their area. "Underused" public land could be sold to individuals or communities by default – unless there is a "compelling reason" for the owner to keep it. [Some civil society organisations have welcomed the move](#), but it could also open the way to further asset-stripping from the public sector, converting public resources into private profit. Deadline: 13 March.

Rail in the North

The Government has launched a consultation on improving rail services in and around Manchester, which have a knock-on effect for [rail services across the North of England](#). It offers [three options](#) for improving performance, punctuality and reliability.

To subscribe or contribute

To subscribe to NWEL's Bulletin please email andyvuille@gmail.com with the subject line: "Subscribe to NWEL Bulletin". Please send items for inclusion in the next Bullet to me by **23rd 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.

• **GREEN BULLET**

VSNW is the regional voluntary sector network for the North West, whose purpose is to support a connected and influential voluntary and community sector (VCS).

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

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