Essex Biodiversity Project

...working for a better quality of life

Mark Iley
Biodiversity Coordinator
01621 862975
marki@essexwt.org.uk
www.essexbiodiversity.org.uk

Essex Biodiversity Project, a group of more than 40 nature conservation organisations, statutory agencies, voluntary interest groups, businesses, community groups and local authorities working together for the biodiversity of Essex.

Funding members:

Chelmsford Borough Council
Natural England
Essex County Council
Essex & Suffolk Water
Uttlesford District Council
Brentwood Borough Council
defra
Maldon District Council
GlaxoSmithKline
John Laing
Harlow
Environment Agency
The D J H Currie Memorial Trust
CountyRoute
Essex Wildlife Trust
Epping Forest District Council
Forestry Commission England
Tendring Hundred Water
Thurrock Council

Supporting members: Braintree District Council • British Trust for Conservation Volunteers • Butterfly Conservation • Castle Point Borough Council • Colchester Borough Council • Conservators of Epping Forest • Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Project • Essex Amphibian and Reptile Group • Essex Bat Group • Essex Birdwatching Society • Essex Estuaries Initiative • Essex Field Club • Essex Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group • Game Conservancy Trust • Havering Borough Council • Lee Valley Regional Park • Peoples Trust for Endangered Species • Royal Horticultural Society • Royal Society for the Protection of Birds • Southend Borough Council • Thames Chase Community Forest • Thames Estuary Partnership • The National Trust • The Suffolk Coasts & Heaths Unit • Writtle College.

so what…?

Titanic…3 million rivets

Ecosystem Services

Our health and wellbeing depends upon the services provided by ecosystems and their components: water, soil, nutrients and living creatures.

‘Wild bees are worth about £440m to the UK economy annually’

Caroline Spelman, Secretary of State for the Environment

but they don’t send invoices!

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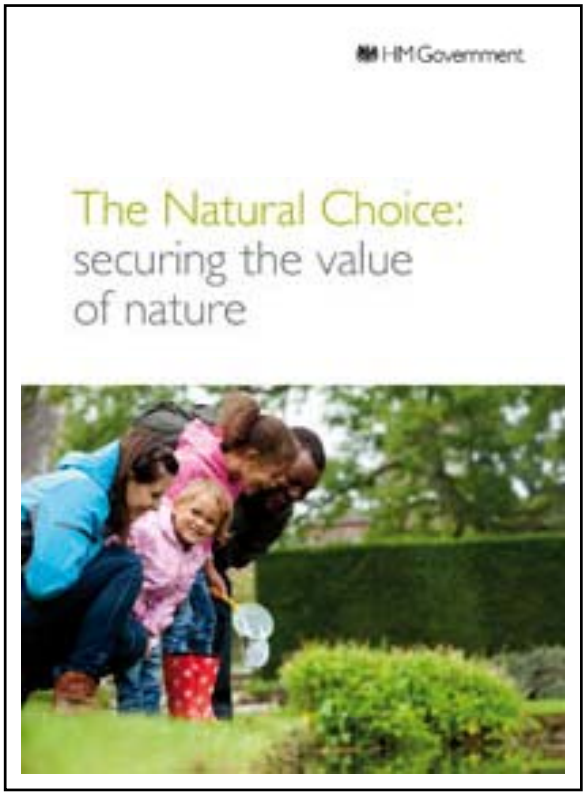
Where are we?

The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature

The Natural Environment White Paper was published on 7th June 2011.

It is a bold and ambitious statement outlining the Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years.



Natural Environment White Paper

Informed by two key reports

UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA)

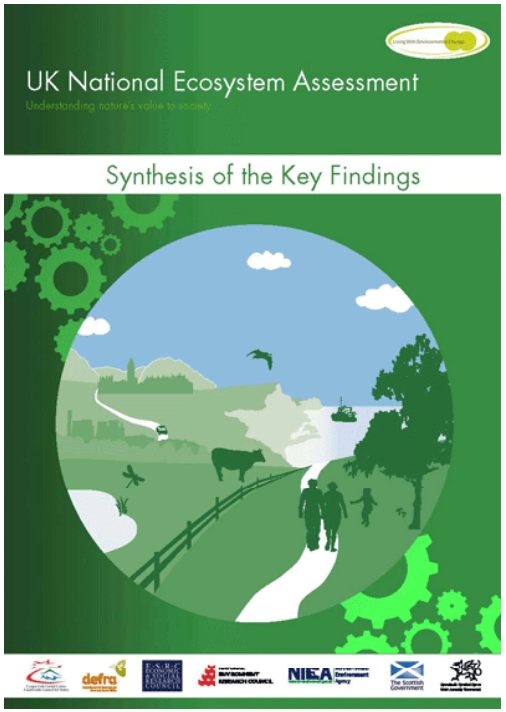
the first analysis of the UK's natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and our continuing economic prosperity. The assessment provides monetary and non-monetary values for a range of services we gain from nature

Making Space for Nature 'The Lawton Report'

considered whether England's collection of wildlife areas represented a coherent and robust ecological network that would be capable of responding to the challenges of climate change and other pressures.

UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA)

Putting a value on these natural ecosystem services enables them to be incorporated into policy in the same way that other factors are.



If the UK's ecosystems are properly cared for, they could add an extra £30bn a year to the UK's economy; if they are neglected, the economic cost would be more than £20bn a year

We can't persist in thinking of these things as free…

UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA)

Of the range of services delivered in the UK by eight broad aquatic and terrestrial habitat types and their constituent biodiversity, **about 30% have been assessed as currently declining**.

Many others are in a reduced or degraded state, including marine fisheries, wild species diversity and some of the services provided by soils.

Major declines of farmland birds >80% since 1960's (Walker 2003)

Butterflies - 76% of all species declined since 1970's (Thomas 2010)

Macro moths – total abundance declined by 44% between 1968 and 2002 in southern England

Overall about a quarter of all species are at historically low levels or significantly threatened (Natural England 2010)

The Lawton Report
Rebuilding nature

MORE

BIGGER

BETTER

JOINED

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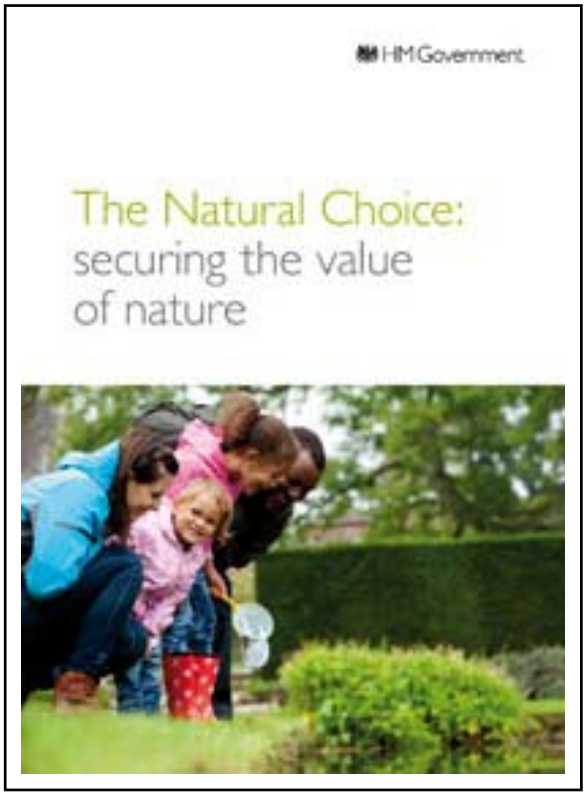
Lawton Report

- Nature Improvement Areas NIA's (formerly Ecological Restoration Zones, (ERZ's)
- Large enough (10-50k sqHa) to deliver ecological functions and services
- Providing connectivity and resilience

Biodiversity offsetting

One of the themes in the Natural Environment White Paper

It is seen as a key funding mechanism for protecting and enhancing nature



What is Biodiversity Offsetting?

- The objective is no net loss of biodiversity – ideally a net gain
- A market based conservation tool designed to deliver biodiversity benefits in compensation for losses in a measurable way
- A developer secures compensatory habitat expansion or restoration elsewhere.
- The compensation could be ‘pooled’ to create the scope for large scale high quality projects

How would it work?

Development is proposed -

1 Avoid impacts - existing legislation remains

2 Minimise impacts

3 On-site measures to rehabilitate/restore biodiversity

4 Offsetting residual unavoidable impacts to recreation/restoration sites elsewhere

No net loss of biodiversity – <u>ideally a net gain</u>

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How would it work?

Regulator body to facilitate the calculations and monitor the size and quality of offsets

Delivery organisations to provide sites and restoration expertise

It would need to be a compulsory national scheme – a purely voluntary scheme is unlikely to work

Requires adjustment for differences in land prices and index linked to inflation

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Example from Brighton & Hove City Council SPD 11

Table 6.1: Compensation payments for lost or damaged nature conservation features

Nature Conservation Feature	Cost per m^2 (all figures include maintenance for 10 years)
Chalk grassland [1]	**£1.54**
Coastal vegetated shingle [1]	**£1.26**
Hedgerow (with ground flora) [1]	**£7.30 per linear metre**
Native woodland (with ground flora)[1]	**£1.10**
Pond (including planting) [2]	**£131.57**
Reptile habitat (from continuous scrub) [3]	**£1.72**
Saline lagoon [1]	**£2.76**
Scrub of value to breeding birds[1]	**£1.10**

[1]: Costs adapted from: 'UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Preparing Costings for Species and Habitat Action Plans' GHK Consulting Ltd, 2006. Land purchase costs for habitat creation in Brighton and Hove (typical urban fringe farmland) are approximately 6 times the national average and this has been taken into account in the adapted figures.
[2] Costs adapted from: High Level Stewardship Payments Booklet – Second Edition October 2008
[3] Reptile Habitat Translocation based on actual quotes. Figures apply to land owned by the council which is suitable for reptile translocation, should on-site translocation not be possible. The existing vegetation of the council's receptor site is continuous, dense scrub. Developers wishing to use this site to translocate reptiles from development sites will be required to pay the council a commuted sum to cover the costs of creating and managing the habitat in a suitable condition for a period of not

Potential problems

- Biodiversity offsetting is controversial - philosophical stance against placing monetary values on nature - skylark=£?
- Need to recognise limits- some habitats are <u>not</u> re-creatable or movable
- Could be viewed as a licence to trash
- Subjective – argument over £values
- Break links with local people and cultural associations

Potential benefits

- It could make the process of managing the impacts of development on biodiversity predictable
- Financial values assigned to habitats and ecosystem services giving better integration into economic decision making
- Diversified income streams for landowners offering sites
- Strengthened conservation partnerships
- Reliability of long term conservation projects
- Targeted tangible outcomes and enhanced public benefits

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What next? Recommendations for Essex

- Essex County Councils submits an EOI to Defra for running a pilot scheme starting spring 2012
- Essex has a good mix of development types, available baseline data and the necessary people/skills to run an effective scheme

What next? Recommendations for Essex

- Develop policy as part of the pilot scheme.

- Include an option for biodiversity offsetting within the ECC Guide to Infrastructure Contributions (biodiversity and GI are not the same)

What next? Recommendations for Essex

- UK & Essex Biodiversity Action Plan habitats – creation and restoration targets exist
- Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) c.1600 sites great improvement following on from LAA legacy
- Essex minerals & waste sites – an emerging target of a minimum of 200ha of UK BAP habitat
- Living Landscapes initiative – identifying key areas within Essex

What next? Recommendations for Essex

- Metrics development likely to be complex
- Need technical study to develop metrics system for Essex with academic support (?University of Essex) developing metrics and ratios

What about the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)?

- Planning Act empowers LA's to apply a CIL on new developments
- CIL is determined on a case by case basis and biodiversity is unlikely to be a focus in most cases
- Core biodiversity requirements are not readily incorporated into green infrastructure (GI) - green/open space is not the same as biodiversity
- LA's may be unwilling to impose levies that are not similarly required by neighbouring LA's

In the US more than 400 wetland banks have now been established in a market worth more than $3 billion a year.

Australia and Germany have well established functioning offsetting mechanisms

The UK now has its own credit scheme run by a private company, the Environment Bank Ltd. Ideally developers will contribute to bigger conservation projects rather than the current tendency towards 'small plots of poorly maintained landscaping'.

THE ENVIRONMENT BANK LTD

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Nature conservation is too important
to leave to nature conservationists