



# 25 Year Environment Plan

*Ambition to realisation*

## Executive Summary

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**Please think before you print**

## Executive summary

**We are currently facing an unprecedented environmental crisis.** The recent National Biodiversity Network's 2019 State of Nature report shows that biodiversity declines continue unabated, with a 13% decline in average species abundance since 1970<sup>1</sup>. Alongside this, UK Climate Projections<sup>2</sup> by the Met Office forecast changing weather patterns and highlight the need for mitigation and adaptation.

Climate change and biodiversity declines have sparked mass protests and demand for action to protect life on earth as we know it. As public interest and awareness of these challenges increase, the spotlight on environmental delivery will intensify.

At the same time, Brexit represents both an opportunity to manage the environment differently and more creatively, as well as a risk to levels of vital funding and investment if it results in significant economic impacts or regulatory erosion.

Whilst there have been welcome policy and legislative advances recently, such as the net zero emissions target by 2050 amendment to the Climate Change Act<sup>3</sup>, actually delivering against impressive pledges represents an entirely different challenge.

**In January 2018 the government published its 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP).** This drew together many existing environmental targets as well as extending ambition in some areas. The plan was widely welcomed as an important step in raising the environment up the political agenda.

Since the publication of the 25 YEP **we have seen widespread consultation and production of more detailed, target-specific plans** to address the main criticism of the 25 YEP; that it acted as a repository of targets rather than an action plan for change.

Whilst we welcome the planning activity and policy development that have been carried out since the 25 YEP launch, **we perceive that there has been a lack of focus on supporting and strengthening existing delivery.**

This focus should improve as the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP: the new independent environmental watchdog to be set up under an Environment Bill post-Brexit) begins to scrutinise progress against the 25 YEP. However, **delivery mechanisms need to be strengthened if the ambitions of the 25 YEP are ever to be achieved.**

## Scope

Following identification of a range of targets requiring delivery at different geographic scales, this report reviews various government and non-government organisations currently involved in environmental delivery. The delivery landscape is complex with a plethora of bodies involved in environmental management. This report focuses on organisations that are expected to play a significant role in delivering against 25 YEP targets.

Organisations, bodies and initiatives covered in this report are: Environment Agency, Rural Payments Agency, Natural England, Catchment Sensitive Farming, Forestry Commission, local authorities, Lead Local Flood Authorities, National Park Authorities, Local Nature Partnerships, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Catchment Based Approach, water companies, Regional Flood and Coastal Committees, Internal Drainage Boards, and business.

## Findings

The extent to which bodies are able to deliver environmental improvement and recovery is impressive given the challenges they face. However, delivery is falling short of what is both possible with the right approaches and levels of support, and indeed necessary to achieve the ambitions set out by government on the environment.

We have found that there are a number of factors which impact on delivery across a range of different bodies and / or initiatives, many of which are common to the majority.

## Reporting

**There is a need for more extensive, transparent and consistent reporting.** The variety that currently exists in reporting structure, scale, and frequency **creates difficulty in assessing and comparing different bodies' delivery.** This negatively impacts on accountability and the ability to justify increased funding requests.

## Funding

**The lack and inconsistency of funding for nature is directly exacerbating the unfolding crisis.** There is **wide variability in the levels and reliability of funding received by different organisations.** Funding reliability and long-term security was a particular issue for non-government bodies. Funding conditions experienced by some bodies incentivise short term projects over long-term strategic planning and delivery that could deliver greater benefits and so better value for money.

## Delivery

**Greater awareness and buy-in is required so that 25 YEP becomes a true driver of environmental delivery across government and wider society.** Both government and non-government bodies and organisations' actions are contributing towards the realisation of 25 YEP goals and targets. In the case of some non-government bodies this delivery could be viewed as coincidental, with the main driver being to address pre-existing targets.

**Whilst government bodies showed a good awareness of the plan, many having been involved in its drafting, non-government bodies did not all show strong awareness in their reporting.**

## Barriers

**There are many and varied barriers to environmental recovery which must be broken down.** Through our review we have identified several barriers that multiple relevant organisations are experiencing either individually or as a collective:

- **Non-alignment of their objectives with the 25 YEP goals**
- **Lack of strategic oversight and coordination**
- **Funding constraints**
- **Lack of accountability**
- **Human capacity constraints, and**
- **Misaligned boundaries.**

## Collaboration

**The environment is complex and interconnected. It needs far more widespread collaboration than currently exists to deliver the nature recovery and climate resilience we so desperately need.**

Collaboration provides benefit through facilitating knowledge exchange, pooling resources, and developing solutions that address trade-offs and pursue win-win options. **Collaboration can also help overcome misalignment of boundaries as a delivery barrier.**

Our review identified many examples of collaboration, some of which are presented as case studies. However, most cross-organisation collaboration was focused around individual projects with limited evidence of collaborative planning at a regional scale, with the exception of specific funded approaches shown in the case studies.

## Systems-based approach

**The climate and ecological emergency demands a systematic response.** Fundamental to any systems-based approach is a need for good **planning**, good **data**, good **monitoring and reporting** and effective **strategic oversight**. We do not consider that this is currently being provided in the context of delivering the 25 YEP.

There are a range of targets within the plan where a systems-based approach would be beneficial, but perhaps the most immediately relevant area is improving the **spatial planning and management of land-use to deliver its nature recovery ambitions.**

Strategic-level planning would greatly facilitate 25 YEP delivery provided that it was properly resourced. Such resourcing is considered necessary to unlock and enable the wider contributions that can be provided by non-governmental bodies, within which there lies enormous passion, commitment and local delivery knowledge and expertise, but which are often hampered in such delivery by the need to simply continue to exist.

In exploring collaboration further, we saw that **implementing a strong and well-designed framework could develop systematic collaboration** if it:

- **Supports structured dialogue for knowledge exchange and the development of shared environmental visions and plans**
- **Engages potential financiers**
- **Allocates central government funding in a transparent way that supports collaboration, and**
- **Fulfils a reporting function to provide accountability and allow enforcement.**

This will require appropriate design to ensure that the right parties are properly aware and engaged, and that they work effectively and efficiently together. The organisations concerned will vary with location, but the overall approach should be consistent. **Where collaborative working can be achieved effectively, it is seen as cost-effective, delivering optimal outcomes.**



## Recommendations

To address the barriers identified and improve delivery against the 25 YEP goals we recommend:

- 1. Delivery organisations should be required to review their objectives and work towards 25 YEP goals. This requirement should be underpinned by a robust statutory duty for public bodies to consider and enhance the environment.**

For the 25 YEP to be an effective overarching plan, organisations which will need to deliver against it should have properly aligned objectives. This should raise awareness amongst their staff and volunteers of the importance and relevance of the 25 YEP and provide legitimacy for groups to pursue targets in the 25 YEP and bid for funding on that basis.

This could be further leveraged by a stronger statutory duty on public bodies to consider and enhance the environment in their actions. The current duty to have regard to biodiversity, which was established by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, is ineffective because wording is weak and there is a lack of reporting requirements and enforcement.

- 2. Collaborative, partnership working should be facilitated through improved strategic planning and governance.**

To reap the benefits of collaboration and ensure integrated delivery, cooperation between organisations should be encouraged at a range of scales to ensure the 25 YEP goals are met efficiently and cost-effectively.

A far more strategic approach is required to planning and delivery, taking a systems-based approach to planning and delivering environmental recovery and action at the landscape scale. Appropriate statutory bodies could have responsibility for taking on a governance role depending on the location and its particular characteristics, needs and associated public bodies. **More research is needed, alongside end users, on how to best facilitate systematic collaboration in a range of different contexts and on which delivery frameworks are likely to be most effective.**

- 3. Annual reporting should be required locally, regionally and nationally.**

Organisations and their national support structures should be required to report annually on their finances, delivery and future delivery plans. This will provide transparency, allowing organisations to identify opportunities for collaboration and facilitating accountability.

Effective monitoring will be vital to the effectiveness of planning as it allows approaches to be reviewed and revised. The 25 YEP and proposals in the draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill linked to the new Office for Environmental Protection identify the need, and make provision, for improved monitoring of progress against indicators. This is welcome and should be enabled by clear requirements for data gathering and reporting in

common formats so that organisations can effectively share data. Once established, the OEP should ensure that all appropriate bodies – both government and non-government – are able to report on their activities in a way which effectively informs understanding of progress and of strategic planning.

Public bodies could be required to report on their progress against any stronger statutory duty on public bodies to consider and enhance the environment in their actions that could be introduced through an amendment to the NERC Act.

#### **4. Delivery organisations should be supported in developing skills needed to deliver the 25 YEP.**

To enable effective delivery and meaningful reporting, organisations should be supported in developing necessary skills. These may include data collection and analysis and natural capital accounting.

Currently government and non-government organisations are faced with skills and capacity challenges. In cases where good practice is being delivered, this is too often because of the presence of committed and passionate champions within organisations rather than as a result of comprehensive training programmes. Lack of necessary skills, linked to funding shortage, is a challenge, particularly for local authorities and those in the charitable sector.

Improved support structures are necessary to enable bodies to develop the base of skilled employees and volunteers needed in order to achieve the best outcomes at the scale needed.

#### **5. Government funding of organisations must be reviewed.**

It is essential that government commits to providing enough base funding, over the long term, to support organisations' capacity to meet their planning, external fundraising and administrative requirements.

Realistically the achievement of the government's increased ambitions on the environment will need to see a corresponding reversal of the extensive funding cuts which have been felt particularly acutely in the environment sector.

#### **6. Innovative funding routes should be developed.**

To achieve the ambition of the 25 YEP there will need to be a mix of public and private funding and investment. More concerted implementation of the polluter pays principle and natural capital accounting are important steps in encouraging the growth of private funding and further research and development of where and how these can be most effectively targeted is encouraged.

**The 25 YEP provides good ambition at a time when there is a need for urgent action and investment in the environment. However, now its delivery must be secured. We urge government to consider our recommendations as a means of achieving this more effectively.**



## References

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<sup>1</sup> National Biodiversity Network (2019) *State of Nature*

<sup>2</sup> Met Office (2019) *UK Climate Projections (UKCP)*

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives (2019) *The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019*