

# Natural England



## Annual Review

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)





Peter Graal/Bankside Open Spaces Trust

Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings.

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More information on our work, including statistics on subjects in this review can be found on our website [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

# Foreword

## Welcome to our first annual review



Natural England was vested on 1 October 2006, following the successful transfer of its responsibilities, assets and staff from its Founding Bodies.

We want to provide an integrated service to our customers, and with this express purpose in mind we have designed our organisation and aligned our budget and staff resources with the priorities set out in our Strategic Direction 2006–2009. This process of integration and alignment will continue over the coming year.

Our early focus has been on maintaining the delivery of our ongoing programmes, particularly agri-environment schemes.



Almost half the farmland in England (4.13 million hectares) is now covered by agri-environment agreements and these deliver a huge range of environmental benefits. Working with Defra, we have secured £2.9 billion for Environmental Stewardship over the next seven years, and we are now working to ensure that this scheme delivers the maximum environmental benefits and value for money.

We have established ourselves as the Government's independent advisor on the natural environment. We have advised on issues such as improving coastal access and Common Agricultural Policy reform, and have promoted the establishment of marine protected areas.

We have also focused on emerging threats to the natural environment, such as climate change, and championed the case for an adaptation strategy to be included in the Government's Climate Change Bill. In addition, we are promoting the contribution that land management can make to reducing greenhouse gas pollution.

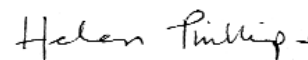
We are also extending our reach to new areas, such as the connection between health and the environment, and are increasing the awareness of health professionals of the health benefits that arise from people's contact with nature. We are also working to improve access to the environment for people in our most deprived communities.

Over the coming year, we look forward to delivering new outcomes, developing our policies and building the partnership and organisational culture we need to deliver our Strategic Direction. We are also building our evidence base and aim to establish Natural England at the forefront of new thinking on the natural environment.

We thank the Board, the Executive and our staff for embracing this new agenda, and our partner organisations for their support and advice during this formative stage.



Sir Martin Doughty  
Chair Natural England



Dr Helen Phillips  
Chief Executive Natural England

# A healthy natural environment

England's natural environment will be  
conserved and enhanced



Paul Glendell/Natural England



Faith Spence/Environment Agency

Alkborough Flats, North Lincolnshire.





# Case study **Alkborough Flats in the Humber Estuary**

The Humber contains some of the UK's busiest ports and is also an internationally important site for its wetland habitats and the wildlife they support, particularly birds.

Alkborough Flats, in the Humber Estuary, lies at the meeting point of the Rivers Trent and Ouse in North Lincolnshire. Sea level rise has been a serious problem here and the wildlife and wetlands, together with the homes and businesses of 300,000 people, are at risk from flooding.

To help control flooding Natural England, working in partnership with the Environment Agency, North Lincolnshire Council and Associated British Ports, developed a scheme to breach the flood defences at Alkborough, allowing the tide to come over what was previously dry land. These new 'intertidal' areas are a

vital flood management tool. The 440 hectare site was opened in September 2006, and will provide about 170 hectares of new intertidal habitat as well as fresh water and coastal grassland.

The partnership is also providing new access opportunities for locals and tourists alike to visit and enjoy the area and its wildlife.

Funding was initially awarded via Defra, the Capital Modernisation Fund, Yorkshire Forward, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European INTERREG programme with other partner organisations making contributions.

The scheme won the Innovation category of the national 2007 Waterways Renaissance Awards.

Outcome: **England's natural environment will be conserved and enhanced**

**Why**  
we are doing it

- For the intrinsic value of England's biodiversity.
- Because landscapes and wildlife enrich people's lives.
- For the services that healthy, functioning ecosystems provide.



Walkers along the South West Coast.  
Ian Dagleish/Natural England



Skylark  
Nick Watts/Natural England

## Highlights in our first year

- Brought 4.13 million hectares into the Environmental Stewardship scheme, an increase of more than 2 million hectares during the year.
- Secured an additional 33,500 ha (2.3%) of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable or recovering condition, bringing the total to 75.4%.
- Declared five new National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and extended 17 others, increasing the area covered by 3,205 hectares, including The National Trust managed Dovedale NNR in the Peak District.
- Played a leading role in the aim of reversing the decline of farmland birds, such as the skylark.
- Supported recovery initiatives for 130 Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species.
- Initiated programmes to create or restore 32,400 ha of BAP priority habitat.

## Project partners:



THORESBY ESTATES



Peter Wakely/Natural England

### **Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve (NNR)**

Working with the Thoresby Estate and Defence Training Estates, Natural England doubled the size of the Sherwood Forest NNR to 423 hectares. The NNR now includes a mosaic more typical of the historic Sherwood Forest, encompassing wood pasture and parkland, heathland, grassland and woodland. The existing reserve already welcomes around 500,000 visitors each year. A special event held at the NNR to celebrate the opening was attended by local parish councillors and voluntary groups. We will now work with our partners, the Forestry Commission and Nottinghamshire County Council, to increase the public's enjoyment and appreciation of the NNR, and enhance facilities to encourage greater community involvement.



Micky Andrews

### Habitat management for the Fisher's estuarine moth

Fisher's estuarine moth is a rare species with its main stronghold on the north Essex coast. Its caterpillars feed on one particular plant, hog's fennel; rising sea levels are threatening the habitat in which this plant grows, and therefore, the moth's existence. Natural England is working to secure the future of this moth, by establishing new, interconnected sites for the moth to live and feed away from the dangers of flooding. We are doing this by supporting farmers and landowners in the creation and management of appropriate habitat through Environmental Stewardship. This work is being done in partnership with the Centre for Environment and Rural Affairs, Defra, the Environment Agency, Tendring District Council, Butterfly Conservation and the Essex Wildlife Trust.

### Project partners:



# Enjoyment of the natural environment

More people enjoying, understanding and acting to  
improve the natural environment, more often

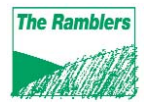


Paul Glendell/Natural England



Julia Bayne/Natural England

A family day out, Barrow In Furness.





## ENJOYMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

# Case study Coastal access

In February 2007, we delivered our advice to Government on how it could deliver its manifesto commitment to improve access to England's coast. Ministers proposed that action to improve coastal access should be an early 'flagship' initiative for Natural England, helping to demonstrate how access, landscape and wildlife benefits can be integrated in a positive and practical way.

Walking the coastline is very popular. However, our research shows that the lack of comprehensive and secure rights along the coast makes the current access situation variable and confusing.

We recommended new legislation to give Natural England – in consultation with local communities, landowners and businesses – flexible powers to create new access where there is none, deal with sections that are unpleasant or unsafe, and provide more 'spreading room' along the way.

The result would be well managed, quality access around the whole coastline – so far as practicable – with clear

visual signals to help people follow the best route without having to rely on maps.

Our proposals take account of the effects of climate change – new access should 'roll back' with erosion in areas of coastal change. Over time, this should be complemented by working with farmers to improve coastal habitats and landscapes, for example by reverting arable land to grassland and increasing the extent of coastal heath and grazing marsh. Our proposals also provide for vulnerable coastal species such as nesting terns, roosting waders and concentrations of feeding waders and wildfowl to be protected from damaging disturbance.

In developing our advice, we have worked closely with organisations such as the National Trust, Countryside Council for Wales, RSPB, CLA, NFU, Environment Agency, Ramblers Association, British Mountaineering Council and Open Spaces Society.

## ENJOYMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Outcome: **More people enjoying, understanding and acting to improve the natural environment more often**

**Why**  
we are doing it

- Because interaction with the natural environment improves wellbeing.
- So that the natural environment is properly and fully valued.
- To encourage people to actively care for the natural environment.



Identifying an orchid at Elliot Nature Reserve, near Stroud.  
Nick Turner/Natural England

Enjoyment of the  
natural environment



Walking through Hamsterley Forest.  
Forestry Commission England

## Highlights in our first year

- Delivered advice to Government on the best way of improving access to the coast in line with the timetable set by Defra.
- Expanded our Walk the way to Health Initiative to 450 health walk groups across the country and established new partnerships with Primary Care Trusts and local authorities to enhance the evidence base on the health benefits of the natural environment.
- Developed a programme to improve access to the natural environment for our most deprived communities.
- We have continued to implement interim service standards for visitors to Natural England's National Nature Reserves (NNRs). Public access and service improvements have been delivered at eight NNRs by working with businesses.

## Project partners:



Tony Devos/Natural England

### **Mineral Valleys Project**

The Mineral Valleys Project in West Durham is a partnership of 50 businesses, statutory, community and voluntary organisations that is delivering a range of improvements to the local environment and access to it. The five-year investment programme of £5.2m is supported by a Heritage Lottery Fund 'Landscape Partnership' grant. The project's vision is to regenerate the natural, social and industrial heritage of Weardale (89,000 hectares), help to boost the local economy by increasing visitor numbers, improve access to green space, and benefit local residents through training, skills development and volunteering opportunities.



Julia Bayne/Natural England

## A Natural Estate

In London, Natural England is involved with the Neighbourhoods Green partnership that aims to create space that is good for nature and also provides decent outdoor places for people living in urban settings. We worked with Nottinghill Housing, the Peabody Trust, CABE and Groundwork to publish *A Natural Estate*, which provides practical advice on techniques to enhance the green spaces in and around housing estates. This guidance enables the managers of social housing spaces to undertake simple schemes to encourage wildlife and improve the surroundings for the benefit of residents. Case studies featured include an award-winning re-development of a green on a Brixton estate by the Neilson Terry Residents' Association. The green now contains a variety of habitats, including a pond, attracting common species of dragonfly and water beetle. The garden is highly valued by the local community.

## Project partners:



Commission for Architecture  
and the Built Environment



Nottinghill Housing



# Sustainable use of the natural environment

The use and management of the natural  
environment is more sustainable



David Dalton/FIPA



Peter Wakely/Natural England

River Test, Hampshire.



# Case study **Environmental benefits for England's rivers**

Across England we are working with farmers and land managers on the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative (CSF).

The programme was launched in April 2006, it is managed by Natural England on behalf of Defra, and is delivered jointly with the Environment Agency. The programme aims to increase the adoption of best practice land management and reduce damaging agricultural activities around important rivers and streams.

Activity is focused on 40 priority catchment areas across England. Each catchment area has a dedicated adviser who has undertaken an in-depth appraisal of the issues affecting the catchment. 36 out of 40 catchment appraisals have been completed and the delivery of advice is now underway in all catchments. Catchment issues primarily revolve around diffuse water pollution from agricultural activities such as the leaching of nitrates,

phosphates and faecal organisms into water courses, and the siltation of water courses as a result of soil erosion. Reducing diffuse pollution entering freshwater habitats is essential if we are to achieve 'favourable condition' in many of our freshwater Sites of Special Scientific Interest and protect Biodiversity Action Plan species and habitats reliant on clean water. The programme includes an extensive monitoring and evaluation exercise which will measure and report on progress.

Since the initiative went live to farmers in November 2006, we have run more than 250 workshops, events and demonstration activities, attended by almost 3,000 people. There have also been nearly 2,000 one-to-one meetings, mainly in the form of farm visits. The next challenge is to move to fully integrated catchment management to deliver the full range of outcomes needed to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

## SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Outcome: **The use and management of the natural environment is more sustainable**

**Why**  
we are doing it

- So that the use of the land, freshwaters and seas does not compromise the natural environment.
- So that development can occur in a manner which protects and enhances the natural environment.



Farmers market, Cambridgeshire.  
D Burton/Natural England

Sustainable use of  
the natural environment



Nick Turner/Natural England

## Highlights in our first year

- Delivered face-to-face conservation advice to almost 10,000 farmers and land managers at 533 events. Half of all attendees joined, or considered joining, Entry Level Stewardship and 20% did the same for Higher Level Stewardship.
- Supported the implementation of cross compliance by delivering advice to over 10,000 farmers and land managers at 247 events.
- Marine management schemes have been put in place in special protected areas at Poole Harbour, Plymouth Sound and the Exe estuary.
- Received positive customer feedback on our regulatory activities, particularly wildlife licensing, dealing with 7,224 licensing cases; an increase of 14% compared to the previous year.
- Completed first year implementation of the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative (see case study), including the development and launch of a £5 million Capital Grant Scheme to reduce diffuse water pollution from agricultural activities.
- Driven forward the debate about the future of farming through our evidence to the House of Commons Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee on the 'Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy'.
- Secured key natural environmental policies on biodiversity, landscape and green infrastructure within a number of regional spatial strategies.

## Project partners:



Cefas

### **The Wash**

The Wash supports the most extensive wild shellfish beds in the UK, providing food for birds such as oystercatcher, knot and eider. However, because of a combination of factors – over-fishing in particular – shellfish and bird numbers crashed in the early 1990s. Natural England has worked closely with the Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee (ESFJC) and the fishing industry to develop sustainable fishery management measures. Draft measures have been successfully applied to the 2006 mussel and cockle fisheries. This has helped Natural England, the ESFJC and local fishermen achieve a common understanding of the issues and work together for the benefit of fishing and wildlife in the Wash.



Paul Glendell/Natural England

## Planning for Sustainable Communities

Natural England is supporting and challenging local authorities, regeneration bodies and developers to deliver high quality environments as part of all new developments – with a particular focus on England’s hubs for regeneration and housing growth, especially the Growth Areas and Growth Points around the South East. We have been instrumental in encouraging a broad spectrum of stakeholders to prepare green infrastructure strategies for the four Growth Areas, including the award-winning Greengrid strategy for South Essex. We have promoted the adoption of strategies within local development frameworks, leading to East London’s Greengrid Supplementary Planning Document. Nationally, we have ensured that the Government has an environmental policy in place for many of the 29 Growth Points and included a requirement for local authorities to work with Natural England to develop a green infrastructure strategy.

## Project partners:



# A Secure environmental future

Decisions which collectively secure the future  
of the natural environment



Julia Bayne/Natural England



Vall Hack

Geo-jute on unstable slopes, Dark Peak SSSI.





# Case study Restoration of upland peat

Improving the condition of upland peatlands is an essential element of our work to mitigate climate change. England has some 215,000 ha of peatland, which supports vital habitats and stores approximately 400 million tonnes of carbon. This represents more than the total carbon stored in the forests of Britain and France combined, and is the equivalent to around three years of the UK's total carbon dioxide output.

Peatlands in poor condition can release carbon dioxide, and it is estimated that improving the management of these peatlands could reduce England's greenhouse gas pollution by up to 400,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, the equivalent of removing 2% of cars from the country's roads.

Natural England is working with leading scientists, policy makers and other specialists to look at how peatlands can be restored to secure these important reservoirs of carbon. Our Environmental Stewardship programme is playing an important role in improving the management

of both grazing and burning in the uplands. We are also working with water companies who benefit from restored peatland through a reduction in the cost of the treatment of water discoloured by eroding peats.

Natural England has been working as part of the Moors for the Future Partnership which has taken direct action in the Peak District National Park to enhance the condition of upland peats. This has been achieved through the following:

Laying over 160 km of biodegradable geo-jute netting (1.2 m wide) to help stabilise the peat and prevent erosion; re-seeding 600 hectares to prevent the erosion of peat; airlifting 1,500 tons of heather brush (cut heather) onto the moors to help stabilise the peat and provide a seed source; restoring over 8 km of footpaths; planting 135,000 dwarf shrub plug plants on the moors; and securing on-going funding for this restoration work, which recognises the contribution that peat in good condition can make to climate change mitigation.

Outcome: **Decisions which collectively secure the future of the natural environment**

**Why**  
we are doing it

- Because the factors that affect the natural environment are complex and changing rapidly.
- To ensure the information and evidence is available to anticipate and plan for major changes that will affect the natural environment.



The Dorset Downs, one of four pilot areas selected to assess the impact of climate change  
Ian Dalgleish/Natural England



Wind farm, Blyth Harbour.  
Andy Tryner/Natural England

## Highlights in our first year

- Successfully campaigned for adaptation to be included in the Draft Climate Change Bill.
- Together with our partners, we succeeded in getting a commitment from Government to establish Marine Conservation Zones in the Marine White Paper.
- Developed Green infrastructure strategies for each of the Government's four Growth Areas.
- Reviewed the evidence on the role of different land management practices in carbon storage and sequestration.
- Established four pilot projects to assess the impact of climate change on different types of landscape and to develop action plans to increase the capacity of the natural environment to adapt.
- Reached agreement with offshore wind energy companies on the appropriate location and design for up to 1,300 MW of wind energy development (441 turbines) whilst protecting the natural environment.

## Why we are doing it

- To ensure that the value of the natural environment is factored into decision making.
- To improve the natural environment through well planned social and economic development.

## Project partners:



Chris Gomersall/Natural England

### **The Solent – a regional coastal partnership**

The Solent is a heavily populated area containing important ports (Portsmouth and Southampton), wildlife and recreational areas. Rising sea levels will have a significant effect on the environment and people here. Some change is already happening, with some salt marshes eroding at 6 metres per year. Natural England has been working with the Channel Coastal Observatory, the Environment Agency and local Councils to predict the changes that might happen over the next 100 years. This information is invaluable if we are to ensure that those organisations who manage coastal change do so effectively for people and wildlife.

A Secure



Flooding in Bewdley, Worcestershire. Paul Glendell/Natural England

### **Climate change adaptation: the BRANCH project and Joint Character Areas pilot**

Planners, policymakers and scientists from Northern Europe, led by Natural England, have come together to show what help wildlife will need to adapt to climate change. One of the conclusions of the BRANCH project (Biodiversity Requires Action in Northwest Europe under a CHanging climate) is that our planning system needs to be more flexible and allow the creation of networks of well-connected habitats. These networks will help wildlife survive the changes brought on by climate change. Building on the BRANCH project, we have begun the process of increasing our understanding of how climate change could affect the natural environment in various parts of England. Within four pilot areas, we are assessing the sensitivity of the natural environment to climate change. Comparing this with an assessment of the projected change allows us to understand the impact of future changes on the environment and how we might respond.

Project partners:



## Natural England will be a distinctive public body committed to people and the environment

### What we strive to do

- Be independent and trusted.
- Build consensus and lead opinion.
- Be a catalyst for others and take action ourselves.

Natural England will implement a range of programmes that will build and maintain a dynamic and innovative organisation. These include specific projects looking at our leadership, people, knowledge, communication systems, finances, efficiency, sustainability and regulation.

# Highlights in our first year

- Launched the organisation with a new Strategic Direction setting out our outcomes and targets for 2006–2009. Implemented a new staff framework and management arrangements with 2,500 staff in new roles to create the teams that we need to deliver our Strategic Direction.
- Secured over 30,000 Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme agreements last autumn, worth £140m, one month ahead of deadline.
- Halved the turnaround times for processing valid Entry Level Stewardship applications.
- Saved £3m through new ways of working, procurement savings and reducing the number of offices to create an estate that meets the new needs of the organisation. Attracted external funding of £4m for environmental improvements.
- Established a carbon accounting system and a baseline footprint for Natural England from which to develop measures to halve our carbon emissions by 2010.
- Implemented new Health and Safety policy and processes across the organisation, with the emphasis on reducing the number of accidents. The year ended with four incidents reported to the Health and Safety Executive compared to five in the previous year. The overall number of minor incidents reported to the Natural England Health and Safety team fell by 38%, from 261 to 163 during the same period.
- Became the first body to outsource a number of services to Defra's newly created Shared Services Directorate.



Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. We conserve and enhance the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people, and the economic prosperity it brings.

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