

Part 3

a protected countryside

We want to see a restored countryside in which the environment is protected and enhanced, and which all can enjoy

9. conserving and enhancing our countryside
10. restoring and maintaining wildlife diversity
11. increasing enjoyment of the countryside

conserving and enhancing our countryside



The issues

- Development pressures on the countryside have grown as the number of households has steadily increased and businesses and homeowners have moved out of urban areas to the country or rural fringe.
- Although the English landscape generally has been well protected through our planning system, particularly in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks, continuing greenfield development is causing progressive loss of countryside.
- Too often the development that does occur in the countryside fails to respect its character and quality.
- Changes in agricultural practices have also affected the landscape and archaeological features.

The future: what we want to see

- Reduced pressures for greenfield development through more successful cities and making the best use of recycled land. A planning framework which continues to safeguard our countryside while allowing rural communities to thrive. Landscapes will continue to evolve but in ways that strengthen their character and value.
- There will be stronger protection for our most valued landscapes in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty through improved funding and management; and better understanding by all decision-makers of the distinctiveness and diversity of the wider countryside. Local village design statements will ensure that development is sited and designed to conserve and enhance valued landscape and heritage features of the countryside.
- Increased measures will be taken to promote tranquillity.
- Trees, woods and forests will have a more prominent place in the countryside. This will include an increase in the role of forestry in the rural economy, more woodlands on derelict and former industrial land, more woodlands available for people to visit and enjoy as well as an increase in the extent of semi-natural and native woodlands.

Summary of measures

- Tackling development pressure through improving the attractiveness of urban areas and strong controls on building on greenfield sites;
- A more holistic approach to take better account of all landscapes in planning decisions;
- Consultation on applying environmental impact assessment procedures to major new agricultural activities which could affect landscape or wildlife;
- More funding for National Parks and AONBs, and stronger planning and management arrangements for AONBs;
- Doubling the number of new Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements to enhance wildlife and landscape.

Contents

9.1.	Introduction	104
9.2.	Tackling development pressure in the countryside: planning for rural areas	105
9.3.	Understanding, evaluating and protecting countryside diversity and character	107
	• Safeguarding the landscape	108
	• Quarrying and minerals extraction	109
	• The influence of agriculture	110
	• Historic heritage	110
	• A role for everybody in looking after our countryside	110
9.4.	Promoting tranquillity	111
	• Noise	111
	• Light pollution	111
9.5.	Measuring countryside quality	112
9.6.	Enhancing the protection of our most valuable landscapes	112
	• National Parks and AONBs	112
	• Commons	114
9.7.	Woodlands and forestry	114
	• Forestry: a true multi-use activity	115
	• The National Forest	116
	• Working in Partnership	116

9.1. Introduction

9.1.1. Rural landscapes, green spaces, wildlife and the heritage features created by man's interaction with them lie at the heart of why people value the countryside so highly. They are a most precious asset, providing enjoyment, refreshment of body and mind, cultural inspiration, opportunities for improved health and expanding potential for recreation. The English countryside is, however, largely man-made and has evolved over thousands of years of settlement and agricultural use. For it to retain its vitality, we must allow for necessary change. Both the evolution of society itself and wider global trends such as climate change will, as in the past, continue the process.



Mendips landscape

Credit: The Countryside Agency, Jim Hallet

9.1.2. Our aim is to manage this change in a way which recognises and where possible enhances the diversity and distinctiveness of the countryside and its amenity value for society as a whole. Our policies elsewhere in this White Paper emphasise our commitment to economic prosperity and social progress in the countryside. We also need to exercise good stewardship of our natural resources and to protect and enhance our environment.

“Don't be in such a hurry to make the villages towns”

“Keep the rural areas rural, support the farming, support the communities which are the rural areas”

“Yeah, support the farmers, don't put pressure on them so that they end up having to sell to building concerns”

“Farming's one of the most important things in this area of course, because these are the people who look after the countryside”

9.1.3. There will sometimes be hard choices, and not everyone will agree as to what should and should not be conserved. Ensuring that good decisions are taken for our descendants is one of our most difficult challenges. We also recognise that the conservation both of landscape and of wildlife often go hand in hand. Measures to help one will tend to help the other as, for instance, with hedgerows which are both a valued traditional landscape feature and are also the home of many forms of wildlife.

9.2. Tackling development pressure in the countryside: planning for rural areas

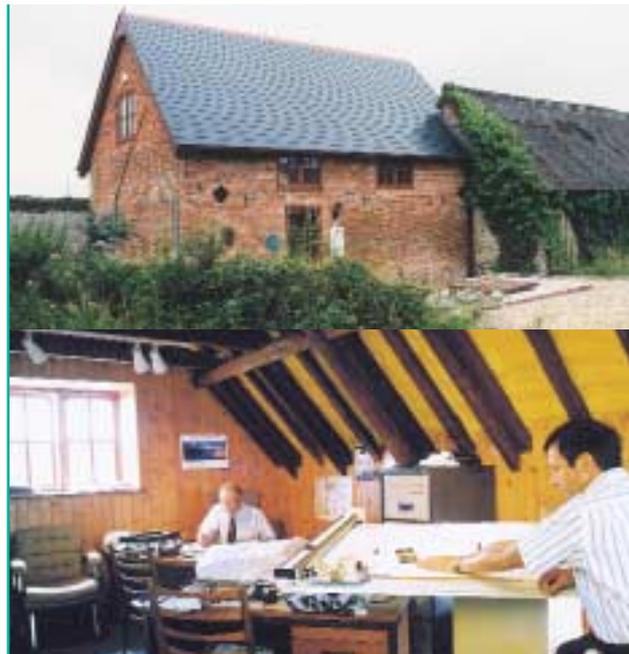
9.2.1. A key challenge is to get right the relationship between our towns and cities and the countryside. That is why we are publishing the Urban and Rural White Papers together. The Urban White Paper sets out how successful urban regeneration with its emphasis on higher quality design, improved services and better and more efficient use of urban land will help to stem migration from towns to the countryside. That will reduce the pressure on our countryside.

9.2.3. Development on farms and in villages will still be needed to provide homes and to support living and working communities. Where development does take place, we want this to be good quality and well planned. This means minimising land take, fully utilising existing buildings and previously developed land where possible; locating new building as far as possible where it will reduce rather than increase the need for transport; and respecting local character and environment. This needs commitment and imagination on the part of local authorities, local communities and developers alike. To help them achieve these objectives:

9.2.4. We are modernising our planning system so that it strikes a balance between protecting our countryside, providing for economic prosperity and promoting social inclusion:

- **Housing:** Our new planning guidance gives priority to the development of sustainable brownfield sites before building on greenfields. We have set a national target that, by 2008, 60% of additional housing should be built on previously developed land or reuse existing buildings. That will help prevent the unnecessary loss of countryside to development.
- We are encouraging **rural housing to be increasingly concentrated round market towns**, but with some small developments in villages where there is a particular need for affordable dwellings (see chapter 5).
- **Green belts:** We are committed to retaining green belt policy. Our record speaks for itself: during this Government 30,000 hectares of new green belt has been designated or proposed.
- **Town centres:** We have strengthened our planning guidance to protect town centres from out of town retail and leisure development. We want to put the heart back into our market towns.

- **Countryside:** We will continue with our policy of safeguarding the open countryside against inappropriate development, protecting our best landscapes and conserving our wildlife. We will be updating our planning guidance (*PPG7*) to take account of the needs of the living, working countryside.
- **Redundant farm buildings:** farm diversification projects can often make use of existing farm buildings. We are in favour of ensuring that good quality existing buildings are reused to provide jobs in the countryside and we are going to make this clear in planning guidance. Not all farm buildings are suitable for reuse – some, for instance, are unsightly and were never designed to be permanent – and we will have safeguards to ensure that a proper balance is struck between helping the rural economy and protecting the environment.



Very derelict barn converted to provide design/office space
Credit: Countryside Agency

- **Planning for transport:** we will be issuing new planning guidance which implements our policy of strengthening market towns by making them the focus for development of new jobs, housing and services. Our new guidance will make it clear that new employment opportunities – such as jobs in redundant farm buildings – should not be ruled out simply because they are in less accessible locations, especially where they can be reached by walking, cycling or public transport.
- **Open space:** open spaces like parks and play areas are especially important to quality of life in towns and villages. We will be issuing a new planning framework which will help safeguard existing recreational open spaces and create new ones where necessary.
- **Speeding up planning applications:** nearly 500,000 planning applications are made each year, 38% in rural districts. Decision-making needs to be efficient. We are using the new Best Value regime to raise performance and we are considering setting statutory performance targets to drive up the performance of the poorest authorities.
- **Village design statements:** we want local people to have a role in the planning process. We have set out (chapter 12) our intention that more villages and towns should prepare village design statements which can be adopted as a supplement to the main development plan of a local authority.
- **Planning obligations:** these are the arrangement by which contributions from developers can be used to offset the negative consequences of development or to secure positive benefits that will make development more sustainable by, for example, providing new infrastructure or money for local environmental improvements. **We will consult shortly on a range of options, including impact fees (see box) and broadening the range of local improvements which can be requested under a planning obligation.**

9.2.5. New buildings in the countryside need to be well thought out and designed to fit in with their surroundings.

Our agenda for good architecture and for better urban design and planning skills applies equally in rural areas. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, described in the Urban White Paper, is concerned with settlements of all sizes and will seek to involve communities in the future of their environment.

Rural Economies Report: planning provision

This report by the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) discussed the impacts that granting planning permission can have: positive for the value of land and buildings, but often negative for the local community (eg increased traffic and demands on local services). Under planning obligations a developer may agree to provide services or amenities (for example, an element of social housing, or a children's play area) to the local community as part of the approval process. However the PIU noted that (amongst other problems) this generally fails to address directly the off-site effects it is intended to compensate for. The PIU suggested that we examine two ideas in more detail:

- **Offsetting** involves developers being required to offset the external or off-site effects of the development. For example, the loss of an area of greenfield habitat might require the establishment of a nature reserve in its place.
- **Impact fees** involve an explicit schedule of charges for the various external and off-site effects of development. This can directly capture the costs to the local authority (or indeed the economy or society more widely) of some of these off-site effects, such as increased demands on public services; and could provide the funding for local authorities to offset other effects, such as replacing lost habitats.



Award-winning new development – Offices (BI useclass) at Broughton Hall in CLA Farm and Country Building Award scheme 1999

Credit: Gerry Passman

“You don’t want to walk into the countryside and see these modern boxes littering fields ... Some fit in, but the majority don’t, and I think if you have a rural setting then you want a rural style of property rather than a little concrete box”

Flooding in Rural Areas

As recent events have indicated, both rural and urban areas can suffer flood damage as a result of extreme weather conditions. Whilst individual extreme weather events cannot be attributed purely to climate change, **climate change** is expected to lead to more extreme weather, such as heavy rainfall, becoming more frequent and this, together with sea level rise, is contributing to more flooding. We intend to enhance and speed up the research at the Hadley Centre and the UK Climate Impacts Programme to improve our prediction and assessment of the effects of climate change. In particular this will look at the link between climate change and the severe floods we have had in recent years.

The Government is looking at **long term action** to deal with the effects of climate change generally, and flooding in particular. Land use and land use management practices, for instance, can have a significant impact on the capacity of the land to retain water and reduce the severity of flooding.

Our approach is one of flood alleviation, that is to reduce risks to people and the developed and natural environment. It will never be possible to protect every piece of property against all flood risk. In some cases flood defences work to protect the environment but in every case they must take account of the environmental impact. MAFF works in partnership with operating authorities – the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and local authorities – who are responsible for determining the works programme locally within the policy framework established by MAFF. We will explore the potential to bring other partners into discussions, where they have particular expertise in this area.

An effective **flood defence** infrastructure is in place as evidenced by the performance in the recent floods. A total of around 1.8m properties in England are at some risk of flooding and in the recent events only some 6000 have been flooded. Current national spending on flood defence is some £380m annually and will rise to £430m annually by 2003–4. Additional funding of £51m was announced on 4 November 2000. As part of this we will be looking to make further significant improvements in flood warning, to carry out whole river catchment area assessments to improve our ability to plan flood management, and to look at factors, such as land use, that have affected the most vulnerable areas. The answers may require significant re-thinking of our land use priorities. The major part of the additional funding will be targeted on investment in an accelerated programme of river flood defence works.

Flooding in Rural Areas – continued

We also need to discourage further **housing development** in areas of high flood risk.

We consulted earlier this year on draft planning guidance in relation to areas at flood risk. The new guidance will emphasise the need to take a precautionary and sequential approach in minimising the amount of new housing in high-risk areas. When development occurs, developers need to fund provision and maintenance of adequate defences as part of the development and ensure a sustainable design, minimising water run off. We will issue revised guidance shortly.

We have also asked the water regulators to look at a **more sustainable water management** and in particular at how integrated management approaches can help to reduce both the incidence and the impact of flooding. (see 10.3.14-15)



Looking over Upton-on-Severn
Credit: Richard Findon

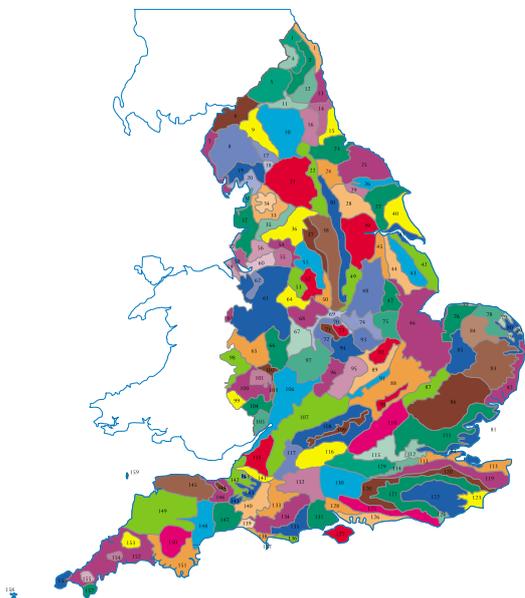
9.3. Understanding, evaluating and protecting countryside diversity and character

9.3.1. Rural landscapes are changing as landscape features such as hedges and dry-stone walls lose their economic functions. Historic features have also been in decline with over 22,500 or 16% of recorded archaeological monuments lost since 1945, a rate of over one a day. We need to find ways of ensuring that the valued features and attributes of the whole countryside are conserved and enhanced.

9.3.2. Our aim is to ensure that the things people value about the countryside are properly taken into account in planning and similar decisions; and that local communities have the opportunity to play a part in shaping the landscape around them.

Countryside character

To raise understanding of what gives the different areas of our countryside their diversity and distinctiveness, the Countryside Agency, English Nature and English Heritage have collaborated in developing the countryside character approach. Following the national mapping project, more detailed descriptions of each of the 159 English character areas have been published. To help those interested in carrying out character assessment at sub-regional or more local level, the Countryside Agency will publish shortly revised landscape character assessment guidance and has carried out county demonstration case studies for Durham and Oxfordshire. The Agency has also established an information exchange and support service, with its own newsletter (Countryside Character Network Update) reporting the latest developments in the application of the countryside character approach, and highlighting regular workshop training opportunities (details can be found on the Countryside Agency website at www.countryside.gov.uk).



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The Character of England – Major landscape characteristics – see box above.

Safeguarding the landscape

9.3.3. It has been long-standing Government policy to protect 'best and most versatile' (BMV) farmland from development, as a national agricultural resource. This is land (about a third of all farmland in England) which can be used for the widest range of farming uses and is the most productive. The Minister of Agriculture has been able to intervene in decisions over development of such land.

Rural Economies report: BMV land

The PIU report questioned whether there was a continuing national interest in protecting BMV land, and suggested that removing such protection would facilitate economic adjustment in rural areas. Instead, decisions about the protection or development of BMV land should be entirely matters for local authorities. But in order to improve upon the present arrangements, the PIU suggested that removing protection for BMV land should be dependent on the introduction of a new national framework for protecting areas of high environmental value. This new framework should be based on the principles of sustainable development, and flexible enough to take account of the possible consequences of future changes to local circumstances and priorities; but it should take account of local distinctiveness of the land and give stronger protection to land of exceptional environmental value. The PIU envisaged a mechanism to draw all the elements together so as to inform planning processes and decisions at both national and local levels.

9.3.4. We believe that planning decisions should consider the **overall value of the land** in deciding what countryside should have the greater protection. Agricultural quality should be treated only as one factor. The quality of landscapes, wildlife and habitats, recreational amenity and our historic and cultural heritage are equally important and must be weighed in planning decisions. We need effective ways to identify which are important to any particular decision and how they should be taken into account. It would be wrong to protect an area simply because of its agricultural quality at the expense of another that offers much greater countryside character.

- The Government's policy is that the countryside should be safeguarded for its own sake, and we will continue strict controls over development in the open countryside;
- We will continue to give the highest level of planning protection to our very best landscapes, in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

- But we want local authorities to seek ways to enrich the countryside as a whole, not just in the protected areas, and maintain its distinctive local features. The box above describes an approach to the assessment of **countryside character** and sources of advice on its use. To help local decision-makers, we will provide **good practice guidance** on evaluating in a more integrated way factors such as landscape quality, local character, biodiversity and soil quality. We accept as a long term goal the PIU's suggestion of a single evaluation framework.
- To achieve **a more holistic approach**, decisions about proposed development affecting the best and most versatile agricultural land will be made locally through the planning process. National best practice guidance and advice provided by Government will ensure no diminution of protection for the countryside overall.
- The powers of the Minister of Agriculture to intervene in decisions on **BMV land** will be repealed.
- For the time being, the Agricultural Land Classification will be kept up to date to assist local planning authorities in making decisions affecting BMV land. **MAFF technical expertise** will be available to advise local planning authorities about agricultural land quality issues;
- To further assist decisions on agricultural land we will publish for consultation a draft **Soil Strategy** for England which will identify the need to manage the extent, diversity and quality of soils.

Quarrying and minerals extraction

9.3.5. It is not just new development which can affect communities and the local landscape. Quarrying and minerals extraction can have intensive and sometimes long-lasting effects on rural environments. We need mineral extraction to provide for the needs of society and the economy. But we need to take account of the environmental costs of aggregates extraction when deciding how much society needs. And when there is extraction, modern techniques for working and restoring sites should be used to protect the soil and return the land to an agricultural or alternative use such as nature conservation, woodland or amenity. The Government has already announced a number of measures to achieve this:

- From 2002 we will place **a levy of £1.60 per tonne on sales of primary aggregate**. This measure, announced in the last budget, will ensure that the quarrying of aggregates (which go into concrete and other materials used for road building and maintenance and for the construction of buildings) carries a price tag that will encourage the use of alternative products made from recycled construction materials or from wastes;
- The Budget 2000 announced that the revenues raised from the levy would be recycled to business partly via a new Sustainability Fund aimed at delivering local environmental benefits to areas subject to the environmental costs of aggregates extraction. The Government has recently consulted on how this fund could best be used and has decided **to allocate £35 million to the new Sustainability Fund** that will be introduced alongside the Aggregates Levy in April 2002. In the run up to Budget 2001, the Government will hold discussions with the devolved administrations on whether there is scope for setting up a UK-wide Fund with shared objectives that maximise the environmental benefits of the fund and complement the aggregates levy.
- We will issue **new planning policy guidance on aggregate supply in 2001**, with the aim of getting away from the present mechanistic 'predict and provide' approach by making more realistic estimates of future requirements, and providing a greater opportunity for these estimates to be tested at a local and regional level. We also want to find better ways of ensuring that environmental issues are built into the decision taking;
- We are applying the European Directives on Environmental Impact Assessment to the periodic statutory reviews of conditions at existing sites, with effect from November 2000. This will ensure that the remaining programme of work at long-term quarries will be subject to the same environmental scrutiny as would be a proposed new quarry.



Quarry at Leinthal Earls, Herefordshire
Credit: The Countryside Agency, Archie Miles



Stone wall restoration
Credit: The Countryside Agency, Simon Warner

The influence of agriculture

9.3.6. Some of the unwelcome changes to our countryside have resulted from modern agricultural practices and the intensification of farming encouraged by the Common Agricultural Policy. The length of managed hedgerows fell sharply up to 1990, although since then there have been more incentives for new hedge planting and there are new tougher regulations – introduced in 1997 – on when hedgerows may be removed. Cultivation is the main cause of loss of archaeological monuments in the countryside. New intensive agricultural activities, for instance when farmers plough up hitherto uncultivated land, or drain such land as part of improvements to the grazing, can have a major impact on landscapes and on wildlife.

- Under the ERDP we are doubling the number of new **Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements** offered each year to bring about a significant increase in the area and range of habitats, species, landscapes and historic features covered. Through such agri-environment schemes we have already paid for the restoration of more than 1400 kilometres of traditional stone walls. These are the schemes under which farmers are paid subsidy to take measures which conserve and improve the landscape, wildlife and historic heritage of the countryside. Such schemes can also contribute indirectly to sustaining countryside skills and extending employment opportunities;

- MAFF will shortly be going out to consultation on the application of **environmental impact assessment procedures** to projects intended to make more intensive agricultural use of uncultivated land. The proposed procedures, which derive from obligations contained in European Community legislation, will seek to minimise the regulatory burdens on farmers and will apply only in cases where projects are likely to have significant environmental impacts. In such cases, the farmer would be asked to submit an environmental statement so that the impacts could be fully assessed.

Historic heritage

9.3.7. We are currently reviewing our policies for **the historic environment**; the first stage is being conducted by English Heritage. The outcome will be announced next year, and the need for further measures in rural areas considered. MAFF already funds and will continue to fund research to help develop management strategies for archaeological sites on arable land, concentrating on where damage is most serious and looking at ways of minimising or remedying damage.

A role for everybody in looking after our countryside

9.3.8. We also want to encourage the community as a whole to care for their landscape and historic heritage.



In this Local Heritage Initiative project children from Brigstock Village School recorded their observations about the village and influenced action plans for landscape change.

Credit: The Countryside Agency

- **The Local Heritage Initiative**, devised by the Countryside Agency and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, provides a national grant scheme that helps local groups to investigate, explain and care for their local landscape, landmarks, traditions and culture;
- We will continue to support the **voluntary sector**, through grants for specific projects and through the provision of core funding to key partners, in the invaluable work they do to conserve and enhance our environment, and we allow volunteers' time to count towards match funding for grant proposes. We want to encourage as many people as possible to join voluntary organisations such as the BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), the Wildlife Trusts and Community Service Volunteers which offer volunteers the help and experience they need to get things done.

9.4. Promoting tranquillity

9.4.1. It is not just its physical features which gives the countryside its unique character; there are also less tangible features such as tranquillity and lack of noise and visual intrusion, dark skies and remoteness from the visible impact of civilisation.

Noise

9.4.2. There will always be sources of noise in the countryside, and many of these – such as noise from harvesting and livestock – are themselves representative of activities which have long been central to the rural way of life. But protecting the countryside from further intrusion of noise is not a luxury. It is about preserving and promoting a feature that is genuinely valued by residents and visitors alike. Noise can also disturb the breeding of vulnerable species, and thereby undermine biodiversity.

- **We will consult next year on a national noise strategy.** The strategy will include mapping the main sources and areas of noise – a major new exercise for which we have put aside £13m. In rural areas, this will involve major road and rail links. We aim to complete the mapping by 2004. The maps will enable policy to take account more accurately of the implications of noise sources for rural areas, including major reservoirs of rural tranquillity and valued local pockets of tranquillity.

9.4.3. In the meantime, we are taking a number of specific measures to reduce noise pollution, particularly from traffic and quarrying operations.

- We will be putting **low noise surfaces** on 60% of the trunk road network, including all concrete roads, over the next 10 years. This, together with other new techniques of road building and repair, can cut road noise by half – bringing significant relief to the many rural areas affected by road noise on busy roads. Our policies for road safety and reducing the impact of traffic in rural areas, including the 'quiet roads' initiative, described in section 6.6, will also contribute to promoting greater tranquillity in rural areas;
- We will introduce revised planning guidance next year to enable local authorities to apply suitable **low noise limits to new or extended quarries.** They will also be able – subject to payment of compensation where necessary – to apply lower noise limits than at present when existing permissions to quarry are reviewed.

Light pollution

9.4.4. 'Light pollution' of the night sky is an increasing intrusion into the countryside at night, and it is an issue that we want all rural local authorities to take into account in their planning and other decisions. Local planning authorities have powers, for instance, to control many external lighting installations.



The adverse effects of lighting can be reduced or prevented by using the right technology, design and installation. Road lighting is one of the main problems, and the Highways Agency is now using lighting that focuses the light onto the road surface – as here on the M62 over Saddleworth Moor.

Credit: Highways Agency

9.5. Measuring countryside quality

9.5.1. We have recently completed **Countryside Survey 2000**, a major survey of the English countryside. The results will be published shortly, and will provide extensive information on changes to the countryside during the 1990s. In the light of this information, we will be considering what further action needs to be taken to protect and enhance countryside features such as hedges.

9.5.2. The variety of the things we value in the countryside means that we do not yet have an agreed way of measuring whether, overall, the quality of the countryside is being maintained. But it is important for us to be clear about the nature and overall direction of change, to see whether our strategy is working.

- We will publish **a measure of change in countryside quality**, including issues such as biodiversity, tranquillity, heritage and landscape character using analysis of the results of Countryside Survey 2000 and based on the Agencies' character areas map.

9.6. Enhancing the protection of our most valuable landscapes

National Parks and AONBs

9.6.1. Our most valuable landscapes have long been designated and administered as National Parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs). We are bringing in new powers, administrative and funding changes to improve their protection and management.



Peak District National Park

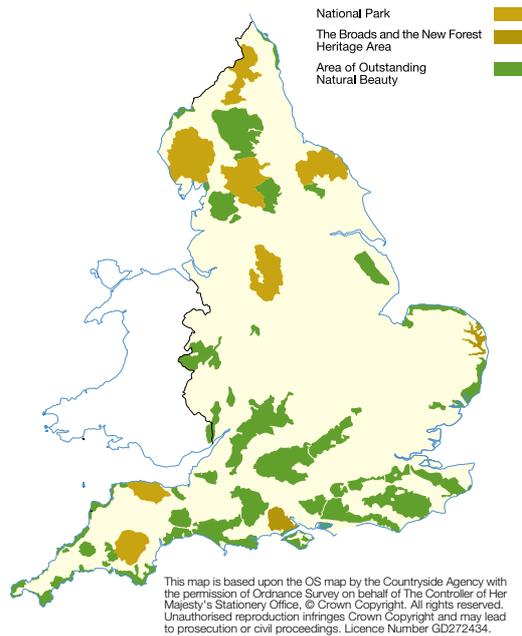
Credit: The Countryside Agency, Mike Williams

National Parks cover 7.6% of the land area of England. They attract over 100 million visitors annually, and have led the way over the past 50 years in making the countryside accessible to people. The Parks are designated as areas of national importance both for their landscape and wildlife and for open air recreation. Most of the land in National Parks is in the hands of farmers and other private landowners. Some areas are managed by public bodies such as the Forestry Commission, the National Park Authorities or English Nature and some are managed by voluntary conservation organisations such as the National Trust. **AONBs** are also some of our very finest and special landscapes, designated by the Countryside Agency under the same legislation as the National Parks. Like the National Parks, they are areas considered as a national asset, but principally for their natural beauty rather than opportunities for open air recreation. Nevertheless, many AONBs attract a considerable number of visitors and face considerable pressures due to their popularity. There are 37 AONBs in England, covering some 15.6% of the territory. Government funding for AONBs is channelled through the Countryside Agency.



Fovant Down, Cranborne Chase and Wiltshire Downs AONB

Credit: The Countryside Agency, Jim Hallett



National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- We will continue to increase the Government's direct **grants to the National Parks** over the next decade and implement a system to ensure that the grant is distributed more equitably among the Parks, using an approach based on an objective assessment of needs. Our aim is to bring the management of all the Parks up to the standard of the best. We have already shown the importance we attach to the National Parks by increasing their funding by 13% from £23m in 1998–99 to £26m in 2000–01;
- The Countryside Agency has begun the process of designation of **new National Parks in the South Downs and the New Forest**. The current eight National Parks (including the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads) were established between 1951 and 1989. We think that there should continue to be a distinction between National Parks (as areas where opportunities to enjoy their special qualities should be promoted by an authority established for that purpose) and AONBs, and by and large we think that the right decisions have been made on which areas should be National Parks and which should be AONBs. But it has been strongly argued that there is a case for creating new National Parks to include the New Forest and the South Downs. The designation process will involve extensive local consultation to ensure the best arrangements, and is likely to take some two to three years. The final decisions will take account of what emerges from this consultation.

- **Stronger planning protection for AONBs.** We formally confirmed in a *Parliamentary answer, June 2000* that, in terms of landscape beauty, AONBs were equivalent to National Parks and that planning policies for the protection of the landscape should also be equivalent. This removed an anomaly which could be perceived as giving AONBs less protection than National Parks from unsuitable development;



New Forest – traditional pony round-up (or 'drift')
Credit: The Countryside Agency, Tony Heathcote

- **Stronger management arrangements for AONBs.** The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill, currently before Parliament, requires local authorities to adopt, within three years, a statutory management plan for each AONB. Management plans will provide the clear strategy and particular targets needed to improve conservation and enhancement of AONBs. Grants will be available from the Countryside Agency. In addition, the Bill will allow **Conservation Boards to be created for individual AONBs** where there would be particular benefit and there is local support for doing so, for example in the larger AONBs which cross a number of local authority boundaries. Our aim is to establish satisfactory management arrangements in all AONBs by 2005;
- **We have increased the funding for AONBs almost threefold over the last three years and will be increasing it further.**

9.6.2. Planning in National Parks can be a contentious issue with policies and decisions criticised on the one hand for being too restrictive, and on the other for giving insufficient weight to conservation purposes. The Countryside Agency is setting up training seminars for National Park Authority Members to help them assess the different priorities. This complements a wider initiative, as part of Modernising Planning, to encourage better training in planning for councillors in local authorities.

9.6.3. Particularly if new National Parks are established in the New Forest and South Downs, some changes may be desirable to allow regimes better tailored to the circumstances of individual Parks. We intend to undertake a policy review beginning in 2001 which will look at a range of issues: governance, policy remit, the distribution of funding and the legislation affecting the Parks.

Commons

9.6.4. Commons are a particular and valued feature of the English countryside which cover 370,000 hectares or 4% of the land area of England and are appreciated by all for their special open and uncultivated character. Traditional farming activities have maintained this valued character and handed it down through the centuries, and the commons are vital to the viability of many upland livestock farms. Many are valued for their wildlife and plant life.

What are commons?

Though their ultimate origins are obscure, commons are generally taken to have emerged from the medieval manorial system. The least agriculturally productive land, or the "waste of the manor", was often used for communal grazing, cutting of peat, gathering firewood or bracken and other activities now recognised as rights of common. Often misunderstood as land belonging to or free for the use of all, most common land is privately owned and rights of common are for the most part exercisable only by owners of specific properties in the vicinity of the common – these are the commoners. General public access is not at present a right on most commons (although it is tolerated on many). The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill, currently before Parliament, will introduce a new right of access for open air recreation to all commons.



Common at East Runton, Norfolk

Credit: The Countryside Agency, David Burton

9.6.5. Although the ancient regimes covering common land have worked well over the years, there are now pressures which mean that a review is needed. For example, when too many commoners graze their sheep on a common, this can cause real environmental damage. Moreover, rights of common can be bought out by the owner of the land, and the common deregistered, losing its special protection. 65% of common land has no remaining rights of common over it and as a consequence is at risk of de-registration.

- We have been consulting on possible **improvements to the law on commons** in *Greater Protection and Better Management of Common Land in England and Wales*. We plan to legislate as soon as Parliamentary time allows to provide for the protection of all commons for the benefit of future generations; we want to increase our ability to tackle overgrazing wherever it occurs and to provide fairer and more effective systems of registration and management. We will also look to improve the arrangements for town and village greens.

9.7. Woodlands and forestry

9.7.1. It is often assumed that trees are planted just for their timber. But woodlands and forests are also immense assets in terms of landscape, nature conservation and recreation. We want forestry in future to be an investment in the beauty and prosperity of the countryside, as well as a commercial asset.

9.7.2. In medieval times, large parts of England were covered by forests, many protected from clearance for farming because they were royal hunting forests. The New Forest is now one of the few remnants of the royal hunting forests, and over the centuries there has been massive deforestation as agricultural activity has increased. With 8% of the land area under woodlands, England is one of the least forested areas in the European Community.

- **We are determined to reverse this decline.** We want a significant increase in woodland cover across England; and we want to encourage tree planting whose main priorities are visual, environmental and recreational as well as commercial.

The Forestry Commission is the Government Department responsible for forestry policy. It regulates forestry activities in England, provides grant aid to woodland owners, and – through its Forest Enterprise Agency – it manages the Government's forest estate. It is:

- the largest land manager (265,000 hectares);
- the largest timber producer (1.5m cubic metres a year);
- the largest provider of informal countryside recreation with about 50 million visits a year)

It is financed through its commercial activities, including sales of timber from its forests, and through the Forestry Fund voted annually by Parliament.

Forestry: a true multi-use activity

9.7.3. Our forestry strategy *A New Focus for England's Woodlands*, published in December 1998, represents a quiet revolution in forestry policy. Gone are the days when forestry policy largely consisted of encouraging the planting of serried rows of conifers. Generating an economic return will still be important, but it will sit alongside other objectives. In future, our aim is to use forestry for rural development and economic regeneration, and for the environment and conservation.

Forestry for rural development

The Forestry Commission will harvest four million cubic metres of timber from the nation's forest estate between 2001 and 2004, thus helping sustain rural employment and reducing our dependence on imported supplies. Over 19,000 people work in the forestry and wood processing industries in England. Recent research carried out for the Forestry Commission shows that over 90% of economic benefits of these jobs accrue locally. Our aim is to ensure that new and existing woodlands are managed in a way that brings continued benefits to local economies, creating jobs and wealth.



Extraction of oak and hornbeam logs from the National Trust's Hatfield Forest in Essex

Credit: Forestry Commission

Forestry for economic regeneration

Woodlands can be very effective in improving the environment in and around towns, particularly through planting on formerly derelict land. Forestry Commission research has shown that trees can often be successfully planted on land such as ex-landfill sites and derelict coal pits which frequently have few alternative uses. £9m has been made available from the Government's Capital Modernisation Fund to plant on damaged ex-industrial land in the Mersey, Red Rose and Thames Chase Community Forest areas.



New woodland being established on a former landfill site in the Ingrebourne Valley, Thames Chase Community Forest.

Credit: Forestry Commission

Forestry for recreation, access and tourism

More than 300 million visits are made to England's forests and woodlands every year. Forestry Commission land already attracts some 50 million visitors a year and the Commission is undertaking works to make it easier and more pleasurable for people to visit its forests. The box above paragraph 11.2.3 gives further details of Forestry Commission plans to improve access to its estate. Community Forests are described above paragraph 11.3.2.



Picknickers at Symonds Yat Rock in the Forest of Dean
Credit: Forestry Commission

Forestry for environment and conservation

The Forestry Commission is the manager of 180 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, including the largest in the country (the New Forest). It is the largest manager of lowland heath, wood pasture and lowland broad leaved woodland endangered habitats. It has agreed management plans with English Nature for all of the SSSIs, and is putting in place plans for conserving the substantial number of scheduled ancient monuments on its estate.



Learning about red squirrel conservation in Thetford Forest, Norfolk
Credit: Forestry Commission

9.7.4. There are a range of grants and incentives to support woodland creation and management. The main ones are the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme which provides variable incentives for people to create and manage woodlands depending on the type of planting and the extent of public benefit conferred; and MAFF's Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, which encourages the creation of new woodlands on farmland.

- Under the England Rural Development Programme we are increasing the budget of the **Woodland Grant and Farm Woodland Premium Schemes** bringing total expenditure to £216m over the seven years of the programme.

The National Forest

9.7.5. In addition, the Government finances the **National Forest Company**, a public body set up specially to create greater woodland coverage over a large area of the East Midlands, much of it scarred by the legacy of coal mining. It has the task of increasing afforestation in its area from its original level of 6% to 30%, and has so far succeeded in planting over 1,500 hectares of new woodlands.

The 200 square mile area covered by **the National Forest** is predominantly rural, but includes sizeable settlements and numerous villages. It also encompasses the former North West Leicester/South Derbyshire coal field. From being derelict and rife with the social and economic problems associated with high levels of unemployment, the coal field is being transformed into a green and pleasant area, the hob of a new leisure and tourism resource located in the heart of the country.

The unique National Forest Tender Scheme funds landowners to create new woodlands whilst committing them, in a legally binding contract, to provide public benefits such as public access, nature conservation and education facilities as well as woodland management. There have been six annual tender rounds, injecting £13m into the local economy through 90 winning schemes. Tender Scheme winners are not only planting substantial new woodlands, but are using them as a means of developing new recreational enterprises as well as for future timber production.

Working in Partnership

9.7.6. A vital role is played by the voluntary sector and public/private sector partnerships in promoting woodlands. Bodies pursuing shared forestry goals include the Woodland Trust (which by acquiring woodland sites brings them into care and protection in perpetuity), the RSPB, the National Trust, and

many small but committed bodies such as the National Small Woods Association and individual Groundwork Trusts. A substantial proportion of England's woodlands is owned by private landowners. Our aim is to continue to work with them to increase the area of England's woodlands that are managed in a sustainable way. We will also encourage local planning authorities and others to use trees and woodlands to the full for the benefit of the local population.



Tree planting – part of South West Forest's training programme
Credit: South West Forest

Case Study – South West Forest

The South West Forest is pioneering a new approach to integrated rural development in parts of Cornwall and Devon. A broad partnership of aims to reinforce the links between people and rural land by using woodland planting and management as a catalyst for the sustainable regeneration of a remote rural area. In the process it will:

- Double the woodland cover by planting 30,000 hectares over two generations;
- Provide a supplement to farming incomes and jobs;
- Provide other small scale rural employment;
- Enhance landscape and biodiversity;
- Stimulate employment opportunities for instance in tourism and recreation.

Opportunities include the establishment of forestry skills and adding value to rural businesses, wood products and craft industries, country sports, coppicing for energy biomass, rural tourism, and hopefully larger scale economic developments.

An important part of the initiative will be arranging for training in the new and wider skills needed.

A new Forest Centre will act as a gateway for visitors and educational establishments wishing to explore and understand the surrounding countryside.

The initiative is being supported by the Forestry Commission through a special locational supplement and challenge fund, as well as by European funds, MAFF, local authorities, other countryside bodies and individuals.

restoring and maintaining wildlife diversity and the natural environment



The issues

- Loss of wildlife habitats due to changes in agricultural practices (including intensification, with its greater mechanisation, fertiliser and pesticide use) and a general loss of biodiversity – for example numbers of farmland birds declined by 36% between 1970 and 1998.
- The number of wildlife species has also been declining, particularly since the 1970s, and many species are now at risk of disappearing from this country.
- Many of our important wildlife sites need restoration or enhanced management, for instance only about 60% of sites of special scientific interest are estimated at present to be in a favourable condition.
- Wider impacts on the natural environment for example on water management from development and changing agricultural practice.
- Over the longer term, climate change is likely to bring new challenges, and preparing to meet these will be an important preoccupation.

The future: what we want to see

- Better protection for wildlife. Expanded agri-environment schemes and more promotion of best practices in agriculture will help reverse the long-term decline in farmland birds by 2020. 95% of nationally important wildlife sites will be brought into favourable condition by 2010, with increased funding both through English Nature and through agri-environment schemes, and through the new measures, in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill to improve the management and protection of SSSIs.
- A new strategy and targets for the 400 species and habitats identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan for priority action. There will be more rational policies on imported species; and heavier sanctions against wildlife crime. The need to preserve biodiversity will increasingly be accepted as automatically to be taken into account in both government and private sector decisions.

- More sustainable water management and an approach which safeguards environmental capital.

Summary of measures

- Government targets to reverse the decline in farmland birds by 2020 and to bring 95% of nationally important wildlife sites into favourable condition by 2010;
- New national guidelines for the identification and management of local wildlife sites;
- New planning guidance on nature conservation and biodiversity to ensure that they are better taken into account in local decisions;
- A new biodiversity strategy for England to carry forward the action plans which have already been developed for species and habitats identified as particular priorities;
- A new area-based Hill Farm Allowance Scheme.
- Fundamental review of policy on alien and invasive species.

Contents

10.1. Introduction	120
10.2. Designated sites	121
• Local wildlife sites	122
10.3. Biodiversity Action Plans and species at risk	122
• Habitat restoration	125
• Agriculture	126
• Water	129
• Putting sustainability into practice – better water management	129
10.4. Integrating biodiversity into everybody's actions and decisions	129
10.5 Climate change	131

10.1. Introduction

10.1.1. Because the overwhelming majority of land in England has been actively managed – largely for farming – for hundreds of years, the pattern of habitats and species of wildlife that has emerged is especially sensitive to changes in the way that the countryside is used and managed. This has resulted over the centuries in a richer and more varied wildlife than climate and geography alone might have produced, but also in a vulnerability, well illustrated over the last 50 years. Changes in agricultural practices have been linked to a serious decline in farmland wildlife, exemplified by the 36% fall in the populations of farmland birds since 1970. One of the Government's Public Service Agreement targets is to reverse this decline.

10.1.2. Our aim over the next 10 years is to:

- Provide better protection and management of the network of specially designated wildlife sites;
- Achieve – or at least move significantly towards achieving – sustainable populations of species at risk;
- Restore and enhance disappearing habitats.

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the amazing richness and variety of life. It includes all living things from the tiniest insect to the mightiest oak tree. Biodiversity is found everywhere, in window boxes and wild woods, roadsides and rain forests, snow fields and the sea shore.

We, too, are part of biodiversity and depend on it for our quality of life. Our essential goods and services depend on the variety and variability of genes, species and habitats. They feed and clothe us and also provide housing, medicines and spiritual nourishment. Nor do we exist in isolation. Our interdependence with other species is essential to the healthiness of the planet as a whole and we should hand on to future generations an environment no less rich than the one we inherited.



Muker Meadows SSSI, North Yorkshire – A traditional upland haymeadow

Credit: English Nature, Peter Wakely

10.1.3. We will do this by promoting agricultural practices which enhance biodiversity; ensuring that the adverse effects on wildlife and its habitats of other necessary activities are avoided or minimised; making sure that everybody is conscious of their responsibilities towards maintaining biodiversity; pursuing action plans for priority species and habitats; and addressing future threats such as alien and invasive species and climate change.

The economic benefits of wildlife conservation

Wildlife conservation benefits rural economies in different ways:

Employment in nature conservation in England was estimated to total 8,000 full time equivalent jobs in 1991–92. Recent surveys by the RSPB estimate that the natural environment sector employs 1,400 people in South West England and a further 1,400 in North West England;

Expenditure by nature conservation organisations on goods and services provide jobs and incomes in local businesses. For example, more than £57 million is spent annually in managing the South West's natural environment, including over £1.2 million spent on managing heathlands in Dorset;

Agri-environment and woodland management schemes offer land managers opportunities to gain revenue and employment by managing wildlife habitats in the wider countryside. ESAs, Countryside Stewardship, organic farming and woodland management schemes such as the Wessex Coppice project have all been shown to benefit wildlife and support rural jobs and incomes.

Wildlife tourism brings also growing benefits to local economies. RSPB reserves in the UK are estimated to bring additional visitor spending of at least £11m to local economies each year, supporting more than 300 FTE tourism jobs. A recent survey of visitors to six sites on the North Norfolk coast found that people attracted to the area mainly by its birds and wildlife spend more than £6m annually in the local economy.

- We are taking legislation through Parliament in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill to **increase the protection and enhance the management of SSSIs** by:
 - Giving English Nature a new power to refuse consent indefinitely for damaging operations;
 - Providing better tools for English Nature to address problems of neglect, including a power to serve notices to enforce management practices to enhance the quality of sites;
 - Increasing penalties for people who damage SSSIs and introducing a new offence of intentional or reckless damage to an SSSI;
 - Placing duties on all public bodies to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs in the course of their normal activities.
- We will aim to complete the land based elements of our contributions to **the Natura 2000 network** before the end of 2001, and to put in place effective systems for managing these sites to ensure their conservation in favourable condition. By the end of 2002, we will also have identified further marine sites both within the 12 mile territorial limit and beyond;
- We will review our contribution to the Ramsar Convention's list of internationally important wetlands, with a view to designating additional necessary sites by 2005 (for details of Ramsar see box on page 120).

10.2. Designated sites

10.2.1. At the heart of our policy to conserve and enhance wildlife is the network of nationally designated wildlife sites, the sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs). But biodiversity is not just a national matter, as wildlife does not recognise international boundaries. The UK is therefore co-operating actively in European Community measures to set up a European network of wildlife sites, known as Natura 2000 (see box on page 122).

- **We have set ourselves an ambitious target of ensuring that 95% of the nationally important sites (SSSIs) in England are in favourable condition by March 2010**, and we are taking a number of measures to help achieve this target and to meet our obligations in respect of the Natura 2000 network and other internationally important sites in England.



Limestone grassland at Barnack Hills and Holes NNR Cambs.
Pyramidal Orchids

Credit: English Nature, Peter Wakely

Different kinds of wildlife site

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** are the main nationally important wildlife sites. The first SSSIs were established in 1949. There are currently some 4,000 in England covering 7% of the land area. English Nature, the Government's statutory advisory body on nature conservation, designates SSSIs on the basis of scientific criteria to represent our most valuable wildlife and geological sites.
- Some SSSIs have also been designated as **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** for birds under the EU Birds Directive. These are the sites which are judged to be of EU-wide importance for the conservation of birds. We have currently (as of October 2000) designated 84 SPAs in England and aim to complete the network of terrestrial SPAs early next year.
- Under the Habitats Directive, all EU member states have also proposed **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)**. Together with SPAs, these sites will form the NATURA 2000 Network. This network is still being developed, but when in place will provide the fundamental basis for biodiversity conservation in the European Union. We have so far proposed 148 areas in England to the Commission for inclusion in the network and are currently consulting on the submission of a further 81 sites. All of these potential SACs are already SSSIs or are being designated as such.
- Under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, we have designated 71 sites in England as **Ramsar sites**, after the place where the convention was signed. These are SSSIs which are particularly important for the conservation of wetlands species and habitats. Many are also SPAs or SACs.
- Many SSSIs are also **National Nature Reserves (NNRs)**. These are exceptionally important sites designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Country Act, and normally under the ownership or management of English Nature, or other approved managers' bodies, including voluntary conservation organisations or local authorities. The sites are those which are of particular interest for research and for visitors wanting to see how nature conservation works in the field. English Nature has just designated the 200th NNR.
- Outside the SSSI network there are **Local Nature Reserves**. These are designated by local authorities, who have bylaw-making powers to prevent damaging activities from being undertaken on these sites.

- Many local authorities also identify areas of particular interest for their flora and fauna as **Local Wildlife Sites**. This is not a statutory definition, but helps local authorities to take account of these areas in their planning and other policies.

Local wildlife sites

10.2.2. There are many sites of importance for nature conservation at the local level, often managed or owned by conservation organisations such as the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts and the Woodland Trust. We see as one of our major priorities the encouragement and better management of these non-statutory local wildlife sites. We established a Local Sites Review Group in 1999, and their recommendations have convinced us of the need for further action to increase the protection and effectiveness of the network.

- We will develop and issue **national guidelines** for the identification and management of **local wildlife sites**. This will meet the concern expressed by the Review Group about the absence of national guidance to ensure a consistent approach;
- We will issue for consultation next year a revision of **planning policy guidance on nature conservation** and biodiversity (PPG9) which will emphasise to local planning authorities the need to take account of local wildlife sites and biodiversity action plans (see below) in their planning policies and proposals;
- We are commissioning research on how to avoid damage to local sites from activities outside the planning system.

10.2.3. Minerals workings, especially peat workings, can be a particular threat to the value of wildlife sites. We are already reviewing existing minerals workings in cases where they are damaging to an unacceptable extent the scientific interest of internationally designated sites. In the longer term we will be considering how best to protect statutorily designated sites from the effects of such workings.

10.3. Biodiversity Action Plans and species at risk

10.3.1. The second leg of our biodiversity policy is based on action plans aimed at individual species and habitats which are particularly at risk. In 1999 the UK Biodiversity Group (a partnership between government, the statutory agencies and voluntary conservation and land management organisations) completed the publication of fully costed and targeted action

plans setting out the measures to be taken over the next 5-10 years to restore some 400 priority species and over 40 habitats. Each plan involves a number of partners in the public, voluntary or private sectors, with a Lead Partner responsible for co-ordinating implementation. In addition, Country Groups have been set up in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to oversee the implementation of the plans.

Case study – Species Action Plan

The stone curlew. Likes open places with short vegetation and they used to nest among open crops. But modern intensive farming methods mean that most crops now grow too tall or cover the ground too quickly; and nests were often lost as a result of operations such as mechanical hoeing. As a result, stone curlews were becoming an increasingly endangered species. The Action Plan involves measures to maintain short downland and heathland through grazing; create bare, open ground for nesting sites on farmland in summer; and protect nests and chicks from accidental destruction on arable farmland. RSPB is the lead partner, but many other partners such as English Nature, MoD, Wildlife Trusts and MAFF have played an important part. For instance, MAFF has used the Countryside Stewardship Scheme to pay farmers to undertake agricultural practices which provide suitable nesting areas for Stone Curlews. As a result, the target in the action plan of raising the population to 200 breeding pairs by the year 2000 has already been exceeded.



Stone Curlew
Credit: Chris Knights

10.3.2. Furthering these plans and ensuring that they are all implemented and their targets met is a major part of the Government's biodiversity policy over the next decade. The UK Biodiversity Group will be issuing a **Millennium Biodiversity Report** in spring 2001, assessing the successes of the process so far, and setting out the main challenges for the next five years. In the light of that report:

- **In 2001, we will establish new objectives** for the biodiversity action plan process over the next 5 years and working with the England Biodiversity Group **we will produce a Biodiversity Strategy for England** which will identify the objectives, mechanisms and players for the delivery of biodiversity conservation. We see this as a major initiative, essential to maintaining the vitality of the action plan process. The strategy will also co-ordinate the implementation of the national species action plans with action on biodiversity at the local level;
- **We are giving greater encouragement to local authorities to have their own local biodiversity action plans.** Local Biodiversity Action Plans are a way of involving all sectors of the local community in identifying what can be done and making choices about priorities. At present some 50% of local authorities in England already have such plans. We will expect all local authorities to incorporate planning for local action on biodiversity in the integrated community strategies which they are required to prepare under the *Local Government Act 2000*.

10.3.3. We also propose through the *Countryside and Rights of Way Bill*:

- To introduce a duty on DETR to keep permanently under review the species and habitat types which require priority action.

10.3.4. All action to conserve wildlife should be based on accurate and up-to-date **information** about biodiversity trends. Countryside Survey 2000 (see section 9.5) will provide much valuable information about general trends, and we will be putting in place arrangements to continue the monitoring of the state of our national biodiversity using the latest technology. **The Government is contributing £500,000 over two years to help the establishment of a National Biodiversity Network.** This major project, with contributions from both public and voluntary sectors, will create a comprehensive web-based biodiversity information system, bringing together existing local and national records.

Case study – species recovery programme

English Nature's species recovery programme

already addresses 286 species in England which are rare or threatened with extinction and co-operates with over 100 organisations, businesses and charities, making a significant contribution to the delivery of BAP species action plans.

As well as well-known species such as otters and red kite, the programme has also had many other achievements in direct species conservation. For example, *Calcium corynellum*, a church yard lichen, has been saved from extinction; the blue ground beetle has been re-established at six former sites; the UK population of *Carex muricata*, a rare sedge species, has been doubled; and there have been significant increases in the national populations of greater horseshoe bats.

10.3.5. To supplement the species and habitat action plans, we are taking a number of other measures to ensure that species and habitats at risk have better protection:

- We are reviewing the provisions in Part I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with a view to rationalising the identification and protection of rare and endangered species, and will bring forward amending legislation where necessary and as Parliamentary time permits;
- **Bigger penalties for wildlife crime offences**, including prison sentences of up to six months and fines of up to £5,000, have been included in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill. This is in response to the increasing threat which wildlife crime is posing in both rural and urban areas – including the poisoning of birds of prey and the digging up of large numbers of wild snowdrop and bluebell bulbs;
- **We are also proposing the establishment of a National Wildlife Crime Unit** bringing together intelligence and information on wildlife crime so as to help the investigating and prosecuting agencies to carry out successful operations against such criminals;

- **We will carry out a fundamental review of the policy on alien and invasive species.** Grey squirrels and rhododendrons show the impact that introduced species can have – and the well nigh impossibility of controlling these species once well established. Climate change will create a greater likelihood of natural invasions which it may prove difficult to distinguish from human introductions. Our review will look at ways of improving the early warning of problems, and at establishing criteria for when action should be taken and by whom. We hope that the review's findings will be available at the end of next year. We have already made two orders under the Import of Live Fish Act 1980 to try to prevent the further spread of non-native fish and crayfish, requiring a licence before most non-native fish species are kept in fish farms or other waters such as ponds, and introducing tough measures to restrict non-native species of crayfish in England and Wales.



Otters are now recolonising former areas as water quality and habitat improve

Credit: English Nature, M J Hammett



Spraying invasive rhododendron with herbicide at Bramshill Forest, Hampshire
Credit: Forestry Commission

Habitat restoration

10.3.6. Wildlife is not limited to habitat ‘islands’ in our landscape; most has to survive and breed in the wider countryside – in its fields and field margins, hedges, copses, small patches of less improved grassland and the ‘matrix’ of farmland habitats. Habitats in the wider countryside have become more fragmented, making wildlife like butterflies more vulnerable to external pressures, such as climate change, and natural variations in population dynamics.



Scrub clearance: without grazing or cutting, rare heathland will be invaded by scrub, reducing its wildlife (and amenity) value. Restoration involves removal of scrub and young trees and re-introduction of grazing management.
Credit: English Nature, Nick Michael

10.3.7. As part of the Biodiversity Strategy for England, we will be setting targets for re-creation and enhancement of the main habitats which are being lost. Re-creation can be expensive. But there are a number of funding sources such as the National Lottery that can be tapped. And much can be achieved by sensible prioritisation and co-ordination of existing public sector programmes – those for instance of English Nature, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission, and of course MAFF’s Agri-Environment programme.

Case study – habitat recreation

An example of what habitat recreation can achieve is provided by **the lowland heathland action plan** under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan which aims to re-establish 5,400 hectares of heath by 2005. Lowland heath is an example of an important and characteristically English habitat that has suffered large losses. England has 32,000 hectares of lowland heath – 20% of the area of two hundred years ago, as a result of increased ploughing up of heathland, afforestation, and building development. Recreating lowland heath offers great opportunities to reverse wildlife losses and to provide open space for people to enjoy wildlife and outdoor recreation in some of the most congested areas of Southern England.

Tomorrow’s Heathland Heritage, a 10-year £25 million programme will help reverse the decline of lowland heath. It is led by English Nature and made possible by grant aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and has already enabled 10 separate projects to begin the task of restoring and re-creating nearly 16,000 hectares of heathland for the benefit of wildlife and people. In June 2000, English Nature announced 4 new projects in Norfolk, Dorset, East Sussex and Devon which will restore, maintain and re-create nearly 11,000 more hectares of heathland. Overall, the programme will make a major contribution to the Biodiversity Action Plan target to restore and manage 58,000 hectares of lowland heathland (an area larger than the Isle of Wight). Rare species like the silver-studded blue, ladybird spider, sand lizard and woodlark will also benefit.

Case study – the South Downs

The South Downs is one of the most popular English landscapes (with 30 million visits every year) and its chalk grassland is one of the richest habitats of Western Europe, but its survival depends on sheep grazing. The positive management of the majority of the downland is supported by MAFF under the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme, and this will be helped if more **value is put on the farming product** – lamb – through helping people to make the essential link between farming and the landscape it supports, through ‘eating the view’ (see 8.3.4). The Sussex Downs Conservation Board has built a partnership with the various players in the supply chain (from producer through to retailer) and is now establishing a business operation to develop awareness, confidence and the demand and supply for a genuine local product so that people can really support their local landscape and ensure its conservation. The aim is to have the system self-financing within two or three years, and expanding with increasing awareness and demand. The Countryside Agency is launching a new study to explore additional mechanisms for bringing about **restoration of the South Downs** to open downland, building on existing environmental schemes such as the South Downs ESA. The study will explore new and closer ways of working with local people and the different organisations involved in a sustainable economy and environment for the South Downs, including English Nature (given the precious downland habitats to be found there) and MAFF.



The South Downs: ancient downland still exists on the steeper slopes (escarpment)

Credit: Sussex Downs Conservation Board

10.3.8. These initiatives illustrate the growing recognition that our policies must be applied on a larger scale if they are to tackle the wider issues of habitat and species loss. English Nature is therefore developing a new concept, ‘**Lifescapes**’, which will provide an integrated approach to nature conservation at a wider scale than traditional site management. They intend to trial this approach in specific areas in concert with other organisations – such as local authorities, the Countryside Agency, MAFF, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and the Environment Agency. We welcome this initiative to maximise the opportunities for the better delivery of policies and the integration of landscape, wildlife, and general environmental, social and economic objectives at a wider scale.

Lifescapes will help the conservation of wildlife by:

- Enhancing the sustainability of designated sites through the creation of buffer zones and connections between sites;
- Improving the pattern of habitats within the landscape to restore the ecological health of the countryside as a buffer against climate change;
- Creating the pattern of habitats needed for the 20% of species covered by action plans that rely upon general action outside designated sites.

Agriculture

10.3.9. Agricultural practices and water management are perhaps the two most important influences on our wildlife. More intensive agricultural practices have been the major contributor to the decline over the past 50 years in farmland birds, wild flowers and insects. Even where land has not been ploughed up, intensive stock-rearing and greater use of fertilisers has led to the loss of meadows rich in wildflowers and wildlife, and over-grazing of upland moors has had similar effects. In other areas, traditional management practices such as the grazing of lowland heaths have changed or ceased, with a loss of species dependent on short grass.

10.3.10. Paragraph 8.2.5. describes the shift of emphasis away from subsidies which increase farm production towards payments to farmers under agri-environment schemes which give them incentives to farm in ways which enhance and preserve our wildlife and its habitats. As described in section 9.3, under the ERDP we have already doubled funding for agri-environment schemes. Support for the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme (which focuses on 22 areas of particularly high landscape, wildlife or historic value) will continue at broadly current levels.



Overgrazing and inappropriate supplementary feeding has resulted in severe damage to moorland vegetation and loss of heath on Long Mynd. The Long Mynd Common ESA agreement aims to prevent further damage and to restore the moorland vegetation
 Credit: English Nature, Andrew Hearle

- **We will undertake a major review of the agri-environment schemes** with a view to reshaping and simplifying them in time for the mid-term evaluation of the ERDP in 2003, and will be seeking a further shift of the Common Agricultural Policy in the longer term towards support for farmers to farm in ways that positively enhance our wild fauna and flora;
- **better advice to farmers will also play a role in promoting more environmentally-friendly agricultural practices.** MAFF already has Codes of Good Agricultural Practice covering the protection of soil, water and air and the use of pesticides. The Codes have recently been revised and a summary leaflet produced in order to make them more user-friendly. MAFF also publishes specific advice on subjects such as fertilisers, manures and waste minimisation.

In February 2000 MAFF published a pilot set of 35 **indicators of sustainable agriculture** – *Towards Sustainable Agriculture* – to provide a means of measuring the economic, social and environmental impacts of agriculture and to help assess the effectiveness of policies and the sustainability of the agriculture sector. The set complements the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy. Our aim is to use these indicators to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of agriculture and of its contribution to sustainable development. A first review of the pilot set will take place in 2003. MAFF also undertakes a major research programme to find ways of reducing the adverse environmental effects of agriculture. Current MAFF projects are looking for instance at the best ways of restoring priority habitats such as – uplands, wetlands and heathlands; minimising pollution from agriculture; and encouraging the best use of mineral and organic fertilisers for both environmental and economic benefit.

Case study – Integrated Farm Management

Integrated Farm Management is a whole farm policy aiming to provide the basis for efficient and profitable production, which is economically viable and environmentally responsible. It is an approach to farming which combines beneficial natural processes (such as biological predation on crop pests) and traditional practices (like crop rotation) with modern technology and selective targeted use of agri-chemicals. The result is to minimise pollution, and avoid the unnecessary use of chemicals and energy, whilst maintaining profit margins. Measures such as retaining hedges and the vegetation at their base (to help predators like ladybirds which control aphids) and avoiding ploughing stubble (to save fuel, reduce soil erosion and leaching of nitrogen) also provide better habitats for birds and other wildlife. We are working closely with the Integrated Arable Crop Production Alliance and LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) to develop and promote this approach. In particular, an independent Working Group has been set up to make recommendations by the end of 2000.

10.3.11. Hill farming, and especially extensive beef and sheep grazing, is the major influence on upland landscapes and biodiversity. It is also a significant (and in remoter areas very significant) part of the rural social fabric. The ERDP therefore includes an area-based Hill Farm Allowance Scheme, to help offset the natural disadvantages faced by farmers in these areas and maintain sustainable livestock systems. The Scheme will be directed towards sheep and suckler cow producers with more than 10 hectares of forage land (mainly permanent grassland including rough grazing) who undertake to continue farming for at least five years. Basic payments will be enhanced by 10% or 20% for producers following specified practices which favour the environment. Conversely, payments will be conditional on adherence to Good Farming Practice, detailed in the ERDP.

We have set a target to maintain extensive grazing on 1.4 million hectares in the Less Favoured Areas. To help hill farmers use their Hill Farm Allowance support to build sustainable businesses:

- We will fund a programme to develop business skills and training, and establish demonstration farms where farmers can look at what others have done, so that they can use it as a basis for their own planning;
- We will commission work to explore ways of improving land classification systems so that HFA payments can be better targeted;
- We will review the operation of the beef and sheep regimes to ensure that – insofar as it is within our control – regulatory controls are reduced and the schemes do not inhibit enterprising farmers from developing their businesses as they see best;
- We will review future options for supporting hill farming in consultation with key interests.

10.3.12. The intensive use of fertilisers has been one of the main agricultural practices causing a decline in wildlife. We have already taken measures to tackle this problem and intend more in the future. Pesticides have also harmed animal and plant life. Regulatory action against pesticides has already led to a reversal in the declines of populations of some birds of prey and the successful reintroduction of others such as the red kite, and the growing market for organic products is also reducing the use of agri-chemicals.

- **We will increase the rate of grant payable under the Farm Waste Grants scheme from 25% to 40%.** Under this scheme, farmers in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones can apply for grants for farm slurry storage facilities to help them comply with restrictions on manure use;

- **We propose to extend a pilot scheme run by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group to promote nutrient budgeting to farmers in the new nitrate vulnerable zone areas.** This initiative helps farmers to manage their use of fertilisers, both to save money and protect the environment.
- Better use of inputs will also be addressed by the Inputs taskforce described in chapter 8.
- **The Government is committed to minimising the adverse environmental impact of pesticide use**, consistent with effective crop protection. The main vehicle for carrying forward this policy is the Pesticides Forum and we intend to raise the profile of this body and enhance its effectiveness. We have also invited the agricultural pesticides industry to develop a package of voluntary measures aimed at achieving the Government's objective and will be holding discussions with the Crop Protection Association on how their current proposals can be further improved.
- **We are increasing the assistance to organic farming** under the ERDP by increasing the resources to help farmers to convert their land to organic use (a process which normally requires two years). Organic farming is a successful example of policy and public preference marching in step – it has benefits for wildlife, landscape and pollution control; high standards of animal welfare; and can provide more employment. Resources will rise from £12m in 2000–01 to £23m by 2006–07. This will enable around 45,000 hectares per year to be converted. Our target is 430,000 hectares of land converted or converting to organic farming by 2007.



Scrag Oak Farm – Organic vegetable boxes
Credit: Soil Association

Water

10.3.13. The quality of rivers and waterways especially has suffered from phosphorus and nitrogen leaching from fertilisers and animal wastes. Some rivers and lakes have suffered from silt from agricultural land, and over-grazing and cultivation close to river banks has caused erosion of the banks. A lot has already been done. Otters are also returning to our rivers, largely as a result of reduced pollution levels. But more action is needed.

- By 2005 we will improve our rivers by developing and implementing a programme of measures to improve compliance with **river quality objectives** from 82% in 1997 to at least 91%. As part of the package of agreed price increases by the water companies for the 2000-05 period, the water companies are financing schemes to deal with water abstraction related problems affecting nearly 100 stretches of river or wetlands.
- Some especially sensitive areas are designated as **nitrate vulnerable zones** within which restrictions apply on the use of fertilisers. We will be consulting farmers fully about detailed proposals in the New Year, with a view to making further nitrate vulnerable zone designations following consultation.

Putting sustainability into practice – better water management

10.3.14. Rivers and streams face a range of pressures – water abstraction to meet the needs of a growing population, and for industry and agriculture; land drainage and river ‘improvement’ to speed up the flow of water downstream; reduced ability of the land and vegetation to absorb water, due to agriculture and forestry changes; pollution and damage to fisheries and water supplies. But we often address the consequences piecemeal. Vital connections, such as between changing the capacity of the land to soak up water and the flooding of towns way downstream, are not being made. This makes it more difficult to develop long-term solutions to these problems, which can be serious – as shown graphically by the recent floods with their great social and other costs.

10.3.15. We want to find ways of tackling these issues better, by working together towards more sustainable management. This will mean strengthening tools like the *Environment Agency’s Local Plans*, which engage with industry, rural interests and local communities to work out how the environment can be better protected and enhanced. For example, this might mean EA encouraging farmers or foresters to follow simple and cheap changes to cultivation practices, for better water management. It will also mean more ‘joining up’ between major policies impacting on water:

- We will encourage the water regulators to take a broader and longer-term view in encouraging more **sustainable water management schemes**, which tackle problems at source rather than through major engineering, where this will be effective and economic.
- As part of the current inter-departmental review of funding mechanisms for flood and coastal defence (due to report September 2001) we will examine the scope for better integration between spending on flood defence and that for environmental and water resource management.
- We will also continue to protect undeveloped flood plains against inappropriate development and to look for environmental gains as part of a coastal and flood defence policy including flood plain management and including environmental considerations in the cost-benefit analysis for new schemes.

10.4. Integrating biodiversity considerations into everybody’s actions and decisions

10.4.1. Our aim is a situation where both every public authority and every private body automatically takes account of the implications for biodiversity in all their policies and programmes. We want to make concern for biodiversity part of the furniture for everyone. Specific measures and activities include:

- **Green Ministers biodiversity check-list.** We want to be a Government that practices what it preaches. We have started on ourselves, therefore, by ensuring that each Government Department has a Minister with specific responsibility for green issues. These ‘Green Ministers’ have drawn up a biodiversity check-list which all Departments are asked to observe when they decide on new policies. Our aim is both to encourage the development of Government policies which are sensitive to potential biodiversity impacts and to help promote the policy changes which are required to make a real difference across the board;
- **Business:** In partnership with the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development and Earthwatch UK, advice to businesses has been published on how to integrate biodiversity into their environmental management systems. We are also helping to fund Earthwatch to set up a biodiversity resource centre which aims to provide a one-stop-shop for biodiversity advice to business;

- Introduction through the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill of a **new duty** for Government Departments **on biodiversity**.
- **Local communities:** everyone in their local community can play a part in biodiversity conservation, for example in schools, in their gardens and in managing local wildlife sites. Many people are members of conservation organisations and wish to participate actively in conservation work. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are a way of involving all sectors of the local community. Local communities can also benefit themselves through building demand for environmental tourism – eg bird watching holidays and conservation activities such as hedge laying, coppicing and pond digging.



Wylam, Northumberland: volunteers planting trees
Credit: K Webster/D Petrie

The voluntary sector

The Government relies heavily on its partnership with the voluntary conservation sector, including the Biodiversity Challenge Group, to help deliver its biodiversity strategy. They play a strong role in the partnership structures established to pursue the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. They continue to be knowledgeable and provocative advocates for greater progress as well as being tireless workers in the field. Voluntary conservation organisations including Plantlife, the RSPB, Butterfly Conservation and The Wildlife Trusts are the lead partners for some 278 Action Plans, and voluntary organisations manage many SSSIs as well as local wildlife sites.

The Green Ministers' biodiversity checklist,

published in March 2000, shows the actions that Government Departments can take to promote biodiversity, including:

- Making a commitment to conserve any SSSIs on their land and developing management practices which conserve biodiversity across the whole estate;
- Screening policy areas for changes which could have significant effects on biodiversity;
- Building biodiversity into grant-aid or funding programmes and policy advice.
- Building biodiversity into staff training and development eg awaydays and teambuilding.

Green Ministers will monitor progress and account for their actions in the Green Ministers Annual Report.

Case study – business action for biodiversity

English Nature and Hanson Quarry Products Europe signed an agreement in February 2000 that will bring many benefits to the 54 SSSIs controlled by the company and help to meet national nature conservation targets. Hanson has agreed to:

- Make no new planning applications on land currently designated as a SSSI unless an overriding national need for the mineral is clearly identified or it can be demonstrated that the scientific interest will not be significantly adversely affected by the Company's operations;
- Achieve the highest state of conservation management, described by English Nature as favourable, on all land designated as a SSSI under the control of the company with agreed Site Management Statements and necessary action underway within two years;
- Incorporate biodiversity targets, English Nature's Natural Area objectives and the defining local character within all company restoration schemes and afteruses.



Hanson's Cleve Hill quarry in Shropshire won a Civic Trust Award in 1999 for work to restore the old quarry workings and other derelict areas to a semi-natural upland landscape, allowing the land to be returned to grazing and wildlife
Credit: Hanson Aggregates

10.4.2. In seeking a more effective role for Government Departments, other statutory agencies and the business and voluntary sectors on the biodiversity agenda, an especially important issue will be the benefits to be gained from adjusting investment programmes. There will be many instances in which investment initially generated by other demands, including other environmental pressures, can be designed to secure biodiversity benefits at the same time. An example is the pressure to continue the clean up of rivers and other water courses where biodiversity benefits elsewhere in the system may be secured at the same time.

Business action for biodiversity

Around 40 companies in 15 FTSE sectors own and/or control land within more than 1300 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in England. Business action for biodiversity makes sound commercial sense because:

- Biodiversity provides direct and indirect economic services to business – many businesses depend, for instance, on biological resources;
- Better biodiversity performance can give companies competitive advantage (compliance with regulation and mitigation of risks) and benefits in terms of reputation.

Business can help make biodiversity happen by adopting a company policy on biodiversity; developing a company biodiversity action plan; and ensuring high quality environmental management on all land under the company's control. Where a company owns land designated as an SSSI, its aim should be to achieve "favourable condition" as defined by English Nature.

10.5. Climate change

10.5.1. One of the most serious challenges for the future will be the likelihood that **climate change** will force species to migrate northwards or to higher ground, whilst low-lying coasts will be at risk of flooding and wetlands will become drier. Such natural responses will have to take place in a countryside where agriculture is also adapting to new climatic conditions and extra demands are being placed on water and renewable energy resources. It may not be feasible to strive to keep every species where it is now or every habitat in the same condition, nor to prevent 'new' species from moving in and habitats responding naturally.

Climate change and UK nature conservation

Because climate change is a key consideration in planning the future conservation of biodiversity, DETR and MAFF have funded a study on climate change impacts on priority habitats and species and on how climate change may affect the achievement of current nature conservation policies.

The DETR is also contributing to the MONARCH and REGIS projects. MONARCH is funded by a consortium of 11 governmental and non-governmental nature conservation organisations in the UK and Ireland, led by English Nature. The study uses modelling approach to evaluate impacts on a broad range of species and geological features in diverse environments in both Britain and Ireland.

REGIS has been commissioned by DETR, MAFF and UK Water Industry Research and is assessing climate change impacts on water resources, agriculture, coastal defence and biodiversity in two regions: North-west England and East Anglia. It involves developing a methodology for conducting integrated impact assessments at the regional scale, including a new model for forecasting changes in species distribution (SPECIES).

10.5.2. We will need to look ahead to see which species are likely to be supported in the future climatic conditions and think carefully before investing in conserving species or habitats that may eventually be lost from a site. We will need to ensure that our approach to biodiversity conservation is flexible enough to react to climate induced changes and that climate change is explicitly considered in policy development and appraisal. New opportunities such as the increasing expenditure on agri-environment schemes will give scope to enhance the conditions for particular species/habitats in particular places.

Case study – recreation on coastal marsh: Abbotts Hall, Essex

In the Essex estuaries some 60% of salt marsh and 90% of coastal grazing marsh in Essex have been ‘squeezed’ out due to sea level rise, expansion of arable cropping and building development. Essex Wildlife Trust have led the purchase of a 700 acre arable farm on the Blackwater Estuary, to be used to demonstrate techniques for enhancing the wildlife value of a commercial arable farm. A major element is the proposal to breach the seawall over a 2.5km length, allowing the flooding of some 300 acres to recreate lost salt marsh – making this the largest such project in England. This will show other landowners how to re-create the habitats lost due to rising sea levels in South East England. MAFF agri-environment schemes are supporting this initiative.



Essex salt marsh

Credit: English Nature, Peter Wakely

increasing enjoyment of the countryside



The issues

- How to make it easier for in particular urban dwellers to visit the countryside, and to help everybody benefit from the potential for enjoyment which it offers.
- How to reconcile increasing opportunities for people to visit the countryside with the interests of those living and working in the countryside.

The future: what we want to see

- The public will have, for the first time in recent history, access for recreation on foot to open country – mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land, with appropriate safeguards for landowners.
- An improved network of rights of way, with improved legal remedies to secure the removal of obstacles.
- Opportunities to visit and enjoy the countryside increased for disadvantaged groups and for town dwellers, for example through better management of the countryside around towns – where the pressures are strongest and the need for green spaces greatest.
- Traditional countryside sports will continue to play their important role in the countryside.

Summary of measures

- A new right of access for walkers by 2005 to mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land;
- New powers (in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill) for landowners to dedicate their land as permanently open to walkers and other users;
- The rights of way system brought up to date through the new legislative measures in the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill and new finance from central Government;
- Codes of practice, a national access database and other readily available sources to inform people of the opportunities available to them in the countryside;
- A review on how to provide more opportunities for all groups of people to enjoy countryside recreation;
- New guidance on revitalising country parks and special funding to improve the country around towns

Contents

11.1. Introduction	134
11.2. Walking in the countryside	134
• Walking in open countryside	134
• Rights of way	135
11.3. Recreation for all	136
• Countryside around towns	136
• Helping all sections of the community to enjoy the countryside	137
• Sports and other activities	139
• Traditional countryside sports and activities	140

11.1. Introduction

11.1.1. The countryside is an enormous recreational asset, with its high quality landscapes, fresh air, open space and tranquillity. Recreation can improve the mental and physical health of participants and the revenue from millions of visitors to the countryside every year is an important component of the economy of rural England. Part of what makes our countryside alive and vibrant is the enormous number of activities created chiefly by and for the residents – agricultural shows, point-to-points, pony shows, game fairs, village fetes, carnivals, etc.

Revenue from visitors

Total spending by all visitors to the countryside is estimated to be around £11.5bn in 1998, of which 77% is associated with day visitors from home, 17% with UK holiday makers and 6% with overseas tourists. Total employment directly supported by recreation and leisure visitor activity in the countryside is estimated to amount to some 290,000 jobs in 1998 and a further 50,000 indirectly in other sectors of the rural economy.

11.1.2. Our strategy to increase enjoyment of the countryside involves:

- Legislation to make it easier for people to enjoy recreation in open countryside and to use footpaths, bridle ways and other rights of way;
- Making sure that all sections of society can enjoy the countryside by:
 - making it easier for disadvantaged communities to enjoy the countryside;
 - finding out more about what minority groups would like to do in the countryside;

- ensuring that there is proper provision for a full range of recreational interests.
- Seeking to ensure that recreation is managed in a way that benefits local communities and protects the environment that people come to visit.

11.2. Walking in the countryside

Walking in open countryside

11.2.1. Walking is by far the most popular activity in the countryside. The UK Day Visits Survey showed that 35% of countryside visits and 27% of seaside visits had walking as the main activity. For over a century people have sought the right to explore open countryside. Our manifesto promised that we would give greater freedom to them to do so. In the *Countryside and Rights of Way Bill* we are introducing new statutory rights of access on foot to 1.1 million hectares of open countryside in England and Wales.

- **We aim to ensure that by 2005 people in England and Wales will have a right of access for recreation on foot to mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land. The right will be limited in scope and take account of the interests of land managers and others in the land. The Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales will be mapping the land concerned. There are provisions for all interested parties to comment on the maps and for landowners to appeal against the boundaries.**

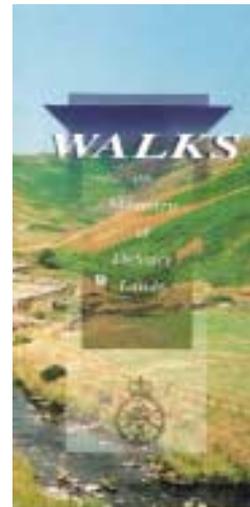


Soar Mill Cove, Devon
Credit: Countryside Agency, Graham Parish

11.2.2. There is also considerable public interest in better access to woodlands, canal sides, riversides and coastal land. Much of such land is owned by public authorities such as the Forestry Commission and British Waterways; or by non-profit-

making bodies such as the National Trust and the Woodland Trust who already open most of their land to the public. We believe, therefore, that a statutory right in respect of woodlands, canal sides and riversides is unnecessary. But the public bodies concerned are looking at ways to improve the access that they provide to walkers and horse-riders, and we have aimed through the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill to make it easier for all landowners, whether public bodies, charitable or non-profit-making organisations or private landowners to dedicate their land as permanently open.

- The Bill introduces **new powers for landowners to dedicate their land** as permanently open to walkers, and to other users such as horse-riders if they wish. This means that the land will remain open even when it passes to another owner. We shall be encouraging landowners to make full use of this new power;
- The Forestry Commission will continue to encourage landowners to provide **access to their woodlands** through incentives under the Woodland Grant Scheme. The Forestry Commission will also consider the scope for dedicating its own woodlands, so that they will remain open to the public even if they are sold on. The Commission will seek to increase the area of woodlands under its control open for public access by purchasing the freeholds of leasehold properties where opportunities arise;
- British Waterways, which manages most of the navigable **canal network**, has instituted a programme – Access to All – to promote access to the canal network;
- The Ministry of Defence has committed itself in the Strategy for the **Defence Estate** to providing public access wherever possible. It will seek to increase the amount, quality and certainty of access overall, and ensure that maximum advance notice is given of access opportunities. The existing presumption of access to its estate will continue wherever consistent with operational, safety and security considerations, and the interests of conservation;
- The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill provides for the statutory opening of **coastal land** if appropriate in the future. We shall review this in the light of experience with other types of land open for statutory access, and consult fully on any proposals.



Walking guide for MOD Estate
Credit: Defence Estates

Rights of way

11.2.3. The new rights of access to open countryside will open up new possibilities for many millions of walkers. Nonetheless, our historic rights of way network are likely to remain the most important means of access into the countryside for walkers, as well as for the several million horse-riders and cyclists in England. Although much of the rights of way network reflects the day-to-day working needs of a bygone age, it now offers many opportunities for countryside recreation. There are 147,000 kilometres of footpath, 32,000 kilometres of bridleway, 6,000 kilometres of roads used as public paths/restricted byways and 4,000 kilometres of byways open to all traffic in England.

11.2.4. However, the current legal regime makes it difficult to remove obstructions, to divert routes or to be certain where some routes exist. The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill aims to provide an improved network and a fairer system for both landowners and users.



Credit: Countryside Agency, A Seth

- **Through the *Countryside and Rights of Way Bill*, we will:**

- Provide a new right to require **removal of obstructions**;
- Require local highway authorities to produce **rights of way improvement plans**;
- Give a right to landowners to appeal to the Secretary of State if local highway authorities do not deal with **requests for diversions** promptly; and make it possible for farmers to make temporary diversions of rights of way where this is really necessary for a land management operation such as tree-felling;
- Introduce a **new class of restricted byway** to give certainty to users, including carriage drivers, as to their rights;
- Set a **deadline of 25 years for registering forgotten historic footpaths and bridleways** on the local definitive maps of the rights of way network. This will bring benefits for both landowners and those using the rights of way. Landowners will have certainty as to whether a footpath or bridleway exists on their property; and the existence of a deadline will encourage work to be done more quickly on the identification of forgotten footpaths and, especially, bridleways to the benefit of walkers and horse-riders. We have chosen a deadline that gives enough time to research forgotten rights. We shall provide grants to voluntary associations of an average of £2m per year to help them undertake research to complete definitive maps;
- We will also provide **resources of up to £19m to local highway authorities** to enable them to carry out their new duties;

- We shall **monitor the performance** of local highway authorities and review the performance plans of those that are making poor progress. Some authorities have an excellent record in fulfilling their duties to define, maintain and signpost rights of way; others do not. The Countryside Agency is undertaking a further survey to record the state of the rights of way network in 2000. We shall use the results of the Countryside Agency survey as a base from which to judge improvements to the system and use the best value procedures now being introduced to ensure that local authorities undertake their rights of way work efficiently and effectively. By 2005 we aim to achieve a 10% improvement in defining, maintaining and publicising the rights of way network.

11.3. Recreation for all

Countryside around towns

11.3.1. The countryside around towns has a particular importance as source of recreation for city dwellers. It also creates the environmental setting for a city which will encourage inward investment – as increasingly firms want to locate in places where they know their employees will have easy access to attractive and good quality green areas. Our aim is to improve its amenity value.



Children using access created under Countryside Stewardship, at Great Western Community Forest, Wilts.
Credit: MAFF

- We will continue to protect **green belts** as a means of helping to keep our towns and cities compact and distinct, and for the environmental resource that they provide;
- The Countryside Agency will administer a new fund to provide up to £4.5m over the next three years for schemes to improve the **countryside around towns**;
- The New Opportunities Lottery Fund recently announced a multi-million pound programme of lottery grant aid to transform and upgrade **green spaces in local communities** across the UK. The countryside around towns is extremely well placed to benefit from this programme, which includes nearly £13m for the Countryside Agency to help disadvantaged urban and rural communities create or revive public green spaces. The Agency will be awarding grants of up to £150,000 during this initiative, and we urge local authorities and other key players to help local communities benefit from these grants;
- The Countryside Agency will be issuing guidance on best practice to revitalise the **country parks** around our towns and cities. Over 250 country parks were established around towns, most in the 1970s. Many are now beginning to show their age. Yet they remain potentially a great asset for urban dwellers, providing 'gateways' between town and country. We want to see country parks better maintained and brought up to date to accommodate the activities and sports that people are now interested in, and they will be eligible for help from both lottery funding and the Countryside Agency grant scheme for countryside around towns;
- We will consult on **a revision of our planning policy guidance on sport and recreation (PPG17)** to give local planning authorities a clearer framework to make provision for open spaces in and around our towns;
- **Farming** remains an important activity even in the countryside immediately around towns maintaining attractive landscapes. At the same time, farmers near towns are especially well placed to diversify into the provision of recreational facilities for their urban neighbours. Where appropriate MAFF's Countryside Stewardship scheme can be used to enhance the countryside around towns and to improve opportunities for people to enjoy it;

- **Community forests.** The Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission, working together with local authorities and others, have helped create 12 community forests on the edges of our larger towns and cities. These woodland areas provide peace and recreation, improving the quality of life of half of England's population. The Government would like to see the approach adopted more widely and will consider how it can be used to assist with the implementation of other regeneration, forestry and community-based initiatives.

11.3.2. Many of the other policies described in this paper will help the countryside around towns. The target of 60% of new housing on brownfield sites will help reduce the especially acute pressures for development in the countryside around towns, although there will be a need to develop on some green fields on the urban fringe. Our measures to promote the better planning of development will help ensure that development in these areas reflects the character of the local landscape and helps strengthen the sense of community.

11.3.3. The countryside around towns will also be eligible to benefit from the £70.4 million lottery funding for Sustrans for *Green Routes Safe Routes*, including green transport corridors to, from and in disadvantaged areas.

Helping all sections of the community to enjoy the countryside

11.3.4. We want the countryside to be a source of enjoyment for all sections of society. We are concerned that most country pursuits such as walking are now largely the preserve of the white, middle-aged, middle-class and able-bodied. Over the next few years we shall be looking for ways to spread the benefits of countryside recreation more equally, while ensuring that this is done in a way which both protects the countryside itself and brings benefits to local communities.

11.3.5. The proposed new statutory right of access to open countryside will open up huge new areas of land close to where people live, particularly for those in the conurbations of Northern England. If new national parks are designated in the New Forest and South Downs, millions more people in the conurbations of Southern England will then live close to a national park managed by an authority concerned to promote opportunities for people to enjoy the special qualities of the Parks.



The Norfolk Broads
Credit: Countryside Agency, David Woodfall

11.3.6. We also want to make it easier for people to benefit from the increased opportunities which will exist for enjoying the countryside. We shall expect local authorities to give priority to links between **town and country** in their rights of way improvement plans and local transport plans. And we shall expect local transport plans to consider town to country journeys for leisure purposes as well as those from the country to town for work, shopping and education. We will also encourage local authorities to develop and promote public transport links for people wishing to go to the countryside.

11.3.7. Surveys have shown that many people are inhibited from enjoying countryside recreation fully because of uncertainty about what is available and what they may legitimately do. We shall be improving the **information** available to them.

- The Countryside Agency will publish **Codes of Practice for walkers and for landowners** to accompany the new statutory right of access to open countryside;
- We plan to establish a **National Access Database**. This will be on the internet and will give full up-to-date information about both rights of way and areas open to the public.



Farthing Down, Surrey
Credit: Countryside Agency, R M Pilgrim

11.3.8. We have asked the Countryside Agency to investigate what more may be done to provide opportunities for disabled people, ethnic minorities, residents of inner city estates, and young people to enjoy countryside recreation. They will be establishing pilot projects in a number of areas. We will also expect local authorities' rights of way improvement plans to include proposals for making improvements for people who do not normally visit the countryside, for instance increasing accessibility for those with sight or mobility problems. We are encouraging local authorities to consider all social groups and the full range of countryside recreation in drawing up their local cultural strategies. But we accept that we need to do more at government level to develop a longer term strategy.

- By 2005, we will carry out a full **diversity review** of how we can encourage more people with disabilities, more people from the ethnic minorities, more people from the inner cities, and more young people to visit the countryside and participate in country activities. Initially we will do this by seeking their views on what they need to enjoy the countryside. Then we will draw up a plan of action.

Tourism and Transport

In some honeypot areas, tourist numbers can be damaging to the local environment if not properly managed and some rural communities may feel swamped by visitors in the peak seasons. We believe that the main solution to these problems is to develop effective visitor management schemes and a marketing approach which spreads visitors to new attractions in the less visited regions and away from honeypot sites. The main challenge is transport. The majority of tourist visitors to rural areas use private cars rather than public transport, adding to pollution, and traffic congestion. Without action this is likely to become worse over the next decade as the popularity of visits to the country grows. We favour a two-pronged approach:

- Providing realistic alternatives in the form of better **public transport infrastructure** and better access to cycling. Bodies such as the Youth Hostels Association and the National Park Authorities are already developing interesting schemes. For example, the *Moorsbus Network* provided by the North York Moors National Park supplements the network of rail and bus services which serves many of the main towns and villages in the area to allow walkers to plan routes without the need to return to a car. Its aim is to provide recreational access to the National Park at the lowest environmental cost;
- Even with such schemes, a large number of visitors to the countryside are still likely to come by car and we will need to see more use of **toll and car parking schemes**. They will not be possible or appropriate everywhere. But they are likely to have a useful role in managing visitors to particularly popular sites; and toll and parking charges can also help cover the costs of maintaining those sites. An example of how the powers that the Transport Bill will give local authorities to charge for road use could be used is the planned small scheme centred on Derwent Lane, a popular beauty spot in the Peak District National Park. This would tackle congestion and environmental damage by levying vehicle charges at peak times, using the surplus charge revenue to expand public transport provision and provide better facilities for cyclists and walkers.



A better view: more sustainable transport

Credit: The Countryside Agency, Graham Wiltshire

Sports and other activities

11.3.9. Many people go to the countryside to admire the scenery, listen to the sounds of nature and generally feel that they are 'away from it all'. But others (or the same people at other times) value the countryside because it offers the space to enjoy more active pursuits which cannot be undertaken in built-up areas. We are keen that the countryside should offer opportunities for adventure and sport, so long as these do not interfere unduly with the enjoyment of others or with land management work. We believe that by careful planning and management there is a place for all activities. In many instances this will require local authorities, including National Park Authorities, and others to identify the demand for activities in their areas and to see how it can be accommodated. There is a role for central Government in reviewing overall provision and ensuring that local authorities have adequate powers to deal with any problems.

11.3.10. Many people would like more freedom to swim and undertake other activities on **waterways, ponds and lakes**. The recent White Paper on Inland Waterways – *Waterways for Tomorrow* describes how the Government wishes to maximise the opportunities for leisure and recreation, tourism and sport on canals. We have also recently revised the *Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation* giving guidance to bodies with statutory responsibilities – such as the Environment Agency, and water and sewerage companies – on the need to have regard to the provision of recreational facilities.



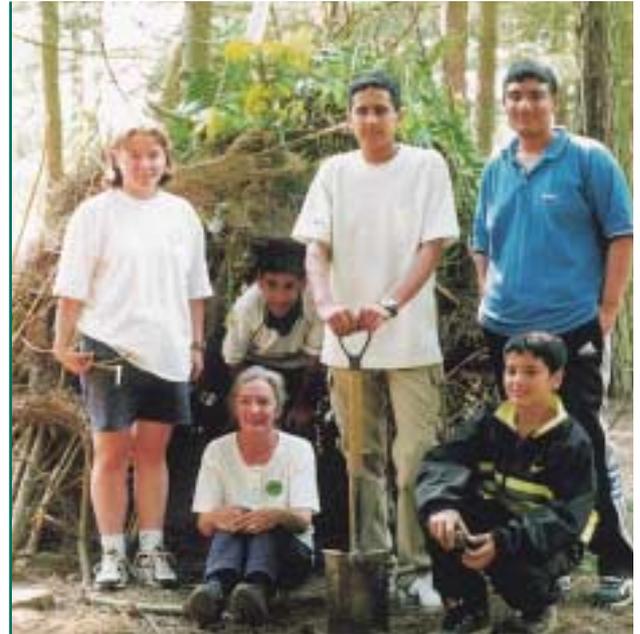
River Witham, Bassingham, Lincolnshire
Credit: Countryside Agency, Andy Tryner

11.3.11. The British Canoe Union has drawn attention to the fact that one million canoeists have access to only 3% of navigable water. The Environment Agency has issued a guide Agreeing Access to Water for Canoeing to encourage the establishment of voluntary agreements on the use of waterways for canoeing. But access for canoeists has to be managed in a way that is compatible with the rights of existing users such as anglers. The extent of the problems over access to water for boating and other water sports is difficult to ascertain, and we feel that we need more information before taking decisions on the best way forward.

- We shall therefore commission research into the extent of **access to water for sport and recreation**, and into the problems which exist, in order to inform our future strategy for optimising the recreational possibilities of water.

11.3.12. Horse-riding is an increasing pastime. The British Horse Society has plans for a national bridleway network to provide more safe routes for horseriders. And the support we are providing for research into historic rights of way may well result in the discovery of additional bridleways for use by riders.

11.3.13. The National Cycle Network – a Millennium Commission project undertaken by Sustrans – will provide continuous traffic-free routes and traffic-calmed minor roads, running right through urban areas and reaching all parts of the UK. It will be a safe, attractive, high quality network for cyclists and a major new amenity for walkers and people with disabilities. The first 5,000 miles were officially opened in June. By 2005 there will be over 8,000 miles.



The Tees Forest Awareness Camp: informal adventure activities and experience of the natural environment coordinated by the Tees Forest and the Admiralty Ecology Group.
Credit: The Tees Forest

Traditional countryside sports and activities

11.3.14. Concern has been voiced about hunting with hounds. The arguments over hunting with hounds have been well rehearsed. To inform the position the Government commissioned the Burns report which covered four key areas in relation to hunting;

- The contribution that hunting makes to employment and the rural economy as well as to social and cultural aspects of life in rural areas;
- Animal welfare issues and matters of population management;
- Whether drag hunting is a viable alternative to hunting with hounds;
- An assessment of the consequences on any ban on hunting, and how a ban might be implemented.

Following that report the Government is to bring before Parliament, for a free vote, proposals on a range of options for the future of hunting with dogs.

11.3.15. The Government recognises there has been some concern too over shooting and fishing. We guarantee that we will not ban these countryside sports. We recognise the major role that these sports have in the countryside, not just as a source of recreation and employment, but also as a contributor to the conservation of landscape and wildlife.



Woodland is managed to provide cover for game birds, producing beneficial habitats for other species.

Credit: The Game Conservancy Trust

Game shooting and wildfowling

These have a far-reaching influence on landscapes, habitats and wildlife. The management of 7.3 million hectares (18 million acres) is influenced by 4,500 professional gamekeepers; 23% of upland Britain and 80% of small woods in England is managed for game. Wildfowling clubs own or manage 18% of the 163 UK estuaries, of which 90% are designated conservation sites; a number are managing National Nature Reserves in agreement with English Nature.

The management practices adopted by those involved in these pursuits make a significant contribution to biodiversity in rural areas. The environmental value of the heather moorlands of northern England has been maintained through the land management regime pursued to raise game birds, and that management produces an important further benefit by providing a habitat conducive to the survival of other bird species, such as curlews and golden plovers.

Angling and fishing

These remain one of the most popular reasons for visiting the countryside, with over a million anglers a year buying rod licenses from the Environment Agency. The important role that angling and freshwater fishing play in the rural economy and in conservation was confirmed by the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review commissioned by the Government from independent experts in 1998 and published in March 2000.

Part 3

a protected countryside – objectives and spending

Objectives:

- To conserve and enhance rural landscapes and the diversity and abundance of wildlife (including the habitats on which it depends).
- To increase opportunities for people to get enjoyment from the countryside. To open up public access to mountain, heath, moor and down and registered common land by the end of 2005.

£m	Spending (£ million)			
	1996–7	2000–01	Projected for 2003–4	Projected 2001/2–2003/4
National Parks and Broads Authorities (including new parks)	17	21	30	77
National Forest Company	2	3	4	11
Countryside Agency (access and environment)	n/a	33	44	117
English Nature	40	51	64	183
Implementation of measures in Countryside & Rights of Way Bill	–	–	25	58
Countryside around towns	–	–	2	5

Note: MAFF and FC expenditure on agri-environment and forestry schemes under ERDP is included in the table at the end of Part 2.