

King's Speech 2024: Link response

Planning & Infrastructure Bill

Planning reform has the potential to deliver critical natural infrastructure, as well as renewable energy and new homes. The Government can fulfil its manifesto commitment to [deliver more development whilst promoting nature recovery](#) by incorporating the following measures into its Planning & Infrastructure Bill:

- A purpose of planning (also applied to the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning Act 2008) to contribute to achieving the Environment Act and Climate Change Act targets, and a duty on relevant authorities to pursue that purpose when exercising their planning functions.
- A duty on the Secretary of State to publish effective strategic spatial plans within a set time period, and to publish regulations requiring authorities to act in accordance with the plans when making relevant plans, consents and decisions. Strategic spatial plans should include a Land Use Framework and a Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme, setting out what development goes best where and how the commitment to protect and effectively manage 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 can be achieved.
- A stronger link between Local Development Plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies, with a requirement to achieve local habitat protection and restoration targets. This would complement the proposed duty in the Planning & Infrastructure Bill requiring planning authorities to identify land for new housing to meet housing targets.

These amendments can be complemented by further [nature-friendly planning measures](#) outside of primary legislation, including a National Development Management Policy to incorporate biodiversity measures into housing and infrastructure design and [increases](#) to Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

The Government has also stated that it may legislate to change nutrient neutrality rules “if necessary”. Non-legislative solutions are possible. A [strategic approach](#) to nutrient neutrality would allow applicants would pay a fixed fee into a central pot in return for planning permission in nutrient stressed areas, smoothing the process for developers and creating the funding needed to restore habitats on a scale to more than compensate for development impacts. Where tried locally, a strategic approach is already delivering these results, the Government has the opportunity to do this at a national level. We welcome the Government’s [commitment](#) to work with nature delivery organisations and other stakeholders on this issue.

Great British Energy Bill

Legislation to drive forward the decarbonisation of Britain’s energy supply is hugely welcome. It could deliver additional benefits for nature recovery if the Great British Energy public body is given a specific nature recovery objective of also doing all in its power to contribute to the achievement of Environment Act targets. This nature objective would drive environmental co-benefits, such as habitat restoration in and around Great British Energy owned assets, ensuring that new renewable energy infrastructure delivers for nature as well as climate. A similar ‘Green Duty’ could also be [usefully extended to other public bodies](#) with a potential to drive forward nature recovery but without a clear statutory purpose to do so, such as the Forestry Commission and the Crown Estate.

Water (Special Measures) Bill

Strengthened regulation to ensure that water companies are delivering for the environment and for customers is welcome. As with the GB Energy Bill, there is an opportunity to align this work with efforts to achieve Environment Act targets, through applying a nature recovery objective/Green Duty to Ofwat. This would not only give Ofwat the mandate it needs to implement the most robust possible sanctions on polluting water companies, but would also ensure that Ofwat makes future regulatory decisions on the basis of what would deliver the best environmental and social outcomes, enabling greater delivery of [low carbon, multi-benefit nature-based solutions](#). The Bill should also include measures to respond to the [chemical pollution](#) that is undermining the health of freshwater ecosystems, including an extended producer responsibility for manufacturers to work with water management companies to reduce pollution.

The Crown Estate Bill

Modernising the powers of The Crown Estate is vital to accelerating offshore wind deployment and as such is welcome. There is another opportunity here to maximise nature and climate co-benefits by effective application of a Green Duty to the Crown Estate. This would mean that the owner and steward of the seabed of England and Wales is required to put restoration of the marine environment at the heart of all its investment decisions and seabed leases, making a significant contribution to the achievement of Environment Act targets.

Nature recovery across the board

The lack of a nature bill in the King's Speech reflects the fact that most of the tools needed to deliver the policy interventions necessary to achieve Environment Act targets are already in the Government's hands. Effective implementation of existing policy is what is needed, along with putting nature at the heart of planning reform and aligning more decision making behind Environment Act target achievement efforts. The Government's commitment to reviewing the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) to make it more effective at achieving targets is welcome first step. This review [must be completed swiftly by Defra](#), with a view to providing detailed blueprint for nature recovery, including costed increases to the ambition of Environmental Land Management schemes and further investment in the interventions needed to meet tree planting and other habitat restoration targets.

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