

Report to Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment

Title: DEFRA 25 Year Plan –overview of main policy
announcements

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Local members affected: All

Summary

The DEFRA 25 year Environment plan is the most substantial piece of environment policy in the last decade. It has a very broad scope covering waste, air quality, biodiversity, water abstraction and climate change adaptation. This briefing paper provides an overview and background to the plan, picks out key themes and commitments, and provides a summary of action that BCC is taking with respect to a number of key policy areas.

Recommendation

The TEC Committee is recommended to:

- i) **NOTE** the main policy announcements set out within the DEFRA 25 year Environment Plan and the work BCC has undertaken to date
- ii) **AGREE** which areas the Committee would wish to focus on going forward. Recommended areas of focus are highlighted in bold in Table 1 namely
 - **Clean Air Strategy**
 - **Growth Arc and the incorporation of key environment principles from DEFRA 25 year Environment plan**

Background to the plan

1. The idea of a 25-year environment plan arose from a proposal in a Natural Capital Committee (an independent advisory committee to the Government) report in March 2014 that the Government should provide a 25 year framework to maintain and improve natural capital. The Government then endorsed this recommendation. The publication of the first part of the draft Environmental Bill in December 2018, effectively seeks to put the 25-year plan on a statutory footing.

Aims of the Plan

2. The final plan, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment was published on 11 January 2018. Launching the Plan, the Prime Minister identified the protection and enhancement of the natural environment as a "central priority" for the Government as part of delivering its manifesto pledge to "be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it".
3. The executive summary commits the Government to championing sustainable development and further elaborates the broad aims of the Plan:
4. "...to deliver cleaner air and water in our cities and rural landscapes, protect threatened species and provide richer wildlife habitats. It calls for an approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fishing that puts the environment first. The Plan looks forward to delivering a Green Brexit – seizing this once-in-a lifetime chance to reform our agriculture and fisheries management, how we restore nature, and how we care for our land, our rivers and our seas."
5. The Plan sets out the following 25-year goals which the Government aims to achieve:

Clean air

- meeting legally binding targets to reduce emissions of five damaging air pollutants, and
- ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040;

Clean and plentiful water

- ensuring that by 2021 the proportion of water bodies with enough water to support environmental standards increases from 82% to 90% for surface water bodies and from 72% to 77% for groundwater bodies, and
- minimising the amount of water lost through leakage year on year, with water companies expected to reduce leakage by at least an average of 15% by 2025;

Thriving plants and wildlife

- reversing the loss of biodiversity and, where practicable, restoring it,

- increasing woodland in England in line with the goal of 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by the end of 2042;

A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as drought and flooding

- making sure that decisions on land use, including development, reflect the level of current and future flood risk, and
- ensuring interruptions to water supplies are minimised during prolonged dry weather and drought;

Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently

- maximising the value and benefits we get from resources, doubling resource productivity by 2050, and
- improving the approach to soil management, so that by 2030 all of England's soils will be managed sustainably; and

Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

6. The Government also commits to managing pressures on the environment by:

- Mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Minimising waste.
- Managing exposure to chemicals.
- Enhancing biosecurity.

Links to other Plans

7. The Plan sits alongside two other important government strategies namely:

- Industrial Strategy – low carbon technology, zero emission vehicles
- Clean Growth Strategy – decarbonisation of power sector, sustainable technologies, Green Finance

Brexit

8. The plan is framed in the context of Brexit and the Government's previous commitments to continue EU environmental rights on a UK legal basis and its intention to uphold its obligations under international environmental treaties. The Plan reiterated the Government's intention to set up a new, independent statutory body that would hold Government to account for upholding environmental standards in England.

Key policy areas

9. The Plan sets out a number of 25-years goals and a combination of new and existing strategies, targets, mechanisms and commitments in order to meet its goals.

10. Some of the key area policy areas and announcements in the plan include:

Using and Managing Land Sustainably

- Using a “**natural capital**” approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, by recognising its tangible and non-tangible economic benefits.
- Introducing a principle of “**environmental net gain**” into planning decisions where wider natural capital benefits will be assessed as part of the planning process
- Initial proposals for a **new environmental land management system** (based on paying public money for public ‘goods’ such as environmental enhancement)
- A commitment to reducing the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy from natural hazards including flooding, drought – greater use of **natural flood management** and sustainable drainage(SUDS)

Recovering Nature and Enhancing Beauty of Landscapes

- New Strategy for Nature
- **Nature Recovery Network** – 500,000ha of additional connected wildlife habitat
- Reviewing National Parks and AONBs
- An aim to increase woodland in England in line with the aspiration of achieving 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by the end of 2042;

Connecting People with the Environment

- Helping people improve their health and welling by using green spaces
- Greening our towns and cities by planting 1m additional urban trees
- New Green Infrastructure Standards by 2019

Increasing Resource efficiency and Reducing pollution

- Achieving **zero avoidable plastic waste** by the end of 2042 through a number of initiatives;
- Achieving **Zero avoidable waste** by 2050
- Publish Resources and Waste Strategy
- Publish Clean Air Strategy

Climate Change

11. A goal to mitigate and adapt to climate change by doing “what is necessary to adapt to the effects of a changing climate”.
12. The Government proposes to update the Plan at least every 5 years, and to report annually on progress to Parliament. A set of national indicators has also recently been consulted on to monitor progress with the plan.

Progress to date and response/actions of BCC

13. The following table provides a summary of the key policy commitments, what action has been taken to date at national level and what BCC has done at a local level.

25 Year Plan Policy Commitments	Delivered?	National Update	BCC Update
<u>Governance</u>			
Principles and Governance Bill including National Environmental Enforcement Body	Ongoing	Draft Environment Bill Published. This includes details of new Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) will take on some of the oversight and enforcement functions of the European Commission and the European Court of Justice.	BCC Responded to consultation on this. New Office of Environmental Protection will be able to hold Central Government and Local Authorities to account over their Environmental Performance.
<u>Using and Managing Land Sustainably</u>			
Natural Capital Plans	Ongoing	No plans started or completed yet but £1.5m allocated for Natural Capital Plan for Growth Arc	BCC and Bucks and MK Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) feeding into working group that is develop a Natural Capital Plan for Growth Arc. The NEP is now working with other Local Nature Partnerships across the Growth Arc to produce a natural capital-based vision for the growth arc area and in the short term to influence the Government's vision for the growth arc
Net biodiversity gain	Ongoing	Consultation closed Feb 2019	BCC submitted supportive response. Net Biodiversity Gain policies incorporated into emerging local plans in partnership with Bucks and MK Natural Environment Partnership. A Local biodiversity accounting scheme is under development in partnership with Bucks and MK Natural Environment Partnership. Possible use of BCC estate for offsetting projects. BCC is actively pursuing net biodiversity gain for emerging major infrastructure projects (eg. EWR, Heathrow) and other developments
Expansion of the use of natural flood management solutions	Ongoing	The Environment Agency handed the water sector a £5bn environmental improvement programme in June	BCC trialing natural flood management solutions with external funding in the River Leck catchment in the north of the County, following flooding incident a couple of years ago.
Making 'at-risk' properties more resilient to	Ongoing	Consultation launched by The Prudential Regulation	BCC at start of £8m flood prevention capital programme targeting most at risk sites with first

flooding		Authority (PRA) in October	scheme in Chesham due to start in 2019/20. £4m of this funding is being leveraging in from Environment Agency
Putting in place more sustainable drainage systems(SUDS)	Ongoing	Strengthening of National Planning Policy Framework in relation to SUDS	SUDS team in place at BCC as part of role of Strategic Flood Authority. Responding to all major planning applications and minors in WDC and AVDC. The team is dealing with a significant increase in demand as a result of the growth agenda in the County, placing pressure on existing resource.
New agricultural subsidy system – delivering public good for the environment	Ongoing	Expected as part of the Agriculture Bill	New payment system will likely impact tenant farmers on BCC agricultural estate
Developing better information on soil health	No		Better retention of soils would limit runoff, flooding and silting of gullies.
<u>Recovering Nature and Enhancing Beauty of Landscapes</u>			
Review of National Parks and AONBs	Yes	Review launched	BCC responded to call for evidence as part of the review. BCC also responded to Chiltern Conservation Draft Management and call to explore Chilterns becoming a National Park. BCC are a funding partners of Chilterns Conservation Board and are working closely with them on two successful heritage lottery funded bids.
Strategy for Nature	No	No details announced	
Creation of Nature Recovery Networks	No	No details announced	Bucks and MK NEP is due to update the Buckinghamshire Biodiversity Action Plan imminently. This document highlights Biodiversity Opportunity Areas within the County. The Bucks and MK NEP has also recently launched a map of broad areas of Green Infrastructure opportunities across the County. As part of the Growth Arc there is an opportunity to identify how local areas of priority will link to broader Nature Recovery Networks and biodiversity accounting may provide a means to help achieve this The Growth Arc including the Expressway represents a significant opportunity to embed the key principles of DEFRA 25 year

			Plan within an area of planned growth. Suggestion for possible area of focus for TEC work programme to look at this topic in more detail
Support for larger scale woodland creation	Ongoing	The UK's first Forestry Investment Zone (FIZ) was launched in October	Opportunities for significant increase in woodland and tree cover could be explored in relation to Aylesbury Garden Town(commitment to 50% green space within emerging Masterplan) and Growth Arc. Exploring opportunities to increase tree cover on BCC own land i.e BCC Agricultural Estate and BCC Schools i.e. seed days
Supporting the development of a new Northern Forest	Yes	Announced in January 2018	
Appointment of a national Tree Champion	Yes	Appointed in June 2018 Additional protection for Ancient woodland and veteran trees now included in National Planning Policy Framework	
Improving biosecurity to protect and conserve nature	Ongoing	Consultation launched	
Increasing Resource efficiency and Reducing pollution			
Resource and Waste Strategy - higher recycling rates, increased resource efficiency, a more circular economy and measures to tackle waste crime	Yes	Strategy Published in December 2018 Series of subsequent consultations launched Feb 2019: i)Reforming the UK packaging producer responsibility system; ii)Introducing a deposit return scheme for drinks containers; iii)Measures to accelerate consistency in recycling for both households and	BCC response to these consultations being prepared. Item taken to CMT in February 2019 and being taken to LAG in April in time for formal response in May 2019. BCC is one of best performing Waste Disposal Authorities both on terms of recycling rates and value for money BCC is also one of the best performing authorities with respect to tackling waste crime and fly tipping. Cabinet Member for P&E has met Deputy Prime Minister and former Justice Minister to lobby on additional actions in relation to sentencing, powers and reform of waste carrier system.

		businesses	
Clean air strategy	Ongoing	National Strategy Published in Dec 2018	<p>Following on from BCC hosting a conference on air quality last year, BCC is now working with the District Councils on a joint Low Emission Strategy for Buckinghamshire. The aim is to have strategy finalised by March 2020. There are currently 9 Air Quality Management Areas(AQMA) in Buckinghamshire. District Council must put in place air quality action plans for each AQMA.</p> <p>Suggestion for possible area of focus for TEC work programme to look at this topic in more detail</p>
<u>Connecting People with the Environment</u>			
Considering how environmental therapies could be delivered through mental health services	Ongoing	Pilot project launched in Luton	<p>Public Health colleagues are actively involved in the master planning for Aylesbury Garden Town</p> <p>The Bucks and MK NEPs has also looked at scoping work to link mental health and conservation, for example through social prescribing and identifying suitable volunteering opportunities and/or access to nature to assist mental and physical health and wellbeing.</p>
Planting more trees in and around towns and cities	Ongoing	<p>Consultation launched in December setting out how the government will introduce new measures to boost transparency in how local authorities manage street trees as well as production of local Woodland Strategies</p> <p>No details yet of funding for promise of 1 million urban trees</p>	<p>BCC response being prepared to this consultation.</p> <p>Scoping of preparation of Woodland and Tree Strategy. Would cover management of street trees especially in relation to Aylesbury Garden Town</p>
Developing New Green Infrastructure(GI) Standards	Ongoing	Consultants commissioned by Natural England to develop standards.	BCC represented on new Green InfrastructureStandards working group. Suggestion of using Aylesbury Garden Town as

		Expected by end of 2019	possible pilot for new GI standards. Green Infrastructure bid of £6m(Green Triangle) including Housing Infrastructure Bid Additional blue and green infrastructure being sought in relation to Heathrow mitigation
<u>Climate Change</u>			
Second national adaptation programme	Yes	Set out in the climate change act	BCC has no formal climate change adaptation plan to deal with increase in temperatures and increase in intensity of rainfall and other extreme weather events Services most at risk are the highway network and adult social care. Suggestion for possible area of focus for TEC work programme to look at this topic in more detail

Conclusion

14. This brief report is aimed at providing a high level overview of the main policy announcements within the DEFRA 25 year Environment Plan together with what action has been taken to date at national and local level. To date a large number of strategies and consultations have been undertaken by DERRA on the back of their ambitious 25 Year Environment Plan. One of the key issues will be how these national strategies will now be effectively resourced to ensure delivery on the ground at a local level BCC has already made significant progress on a number of key areas namely flood prevention, recycling and the emerging biodiversity accounting scheme. However a clear opportunity now exists to embed some of the key DEFRA 25 year Environment Plan policies within the areas of growth and development that the County will be accommodating over the coming years.
15. The committee are requested to consider what areas they may wish to focus on in further detail as part of their forthcoming work programme. A couple of particular areas of possible focus have been suggested namely:
- Clean Air Strategy
 - Growth Arc and the incorporation of key environment principles from DEFRA 25 year Environment plan i.e. natural capital plan, large scale woodland creation, Nature Recovery Network

Unitary Council

16. A number of these policy areas i.e. net gain, biodiversity accounting(via Bucks and MK Natural Environment Partnership), air quality, GI standards, waste, overlap with District Councils area of work. Close partnership working has taken place with District colleagues in developing these areas of work.

Background Papers

DEFRA 25 Year Environment Plan

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

Draft 25 Year Environment Plan Indicators

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766207/indicator-framework-consult-document.pdf

Natural Capital Investment Planning in Growth Arc

<http://bedfordshirenaturally.com/projects/natural-capital-investment-planning/>

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on [Date]. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382343), or e-mail to democracy@buckscc.gov.uk