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The Right Honourable Boris Johnson MP  
10 Downing Street  
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Also sent by email

16 September 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Making Space for Nature – 10 years on

Ten years ago, on 16 September 2010, we submitted a Government-commissioned review of England's ecological network, *Making Space for Nature*<sup>1</sup>. We were much encouraged by how well it was received by Government and a wide cross-section of stakeholders including NGOs, businesses and the farming and public sectors. At the time, we were even told by Biodiversity Minister Richard Benyon MP that he had read it cover to cover!

Since its publication, the report has helped shape significant Government policies, including the Natural Environment White Paper, the Biodiversity 2020 strategy, the National Planning Policy Framework and the 25 Year Environment Plan. It has also been cited over 400 times in the academic literature, with an accumulating evidence base largely confirming and adding weight to the conclusions of our review.

Our review found that England's wildlife habitats were largely inadequately protected and in poor condition, even for our most special sites. Many remaining habitat areas were too small and too isolated to support thriving populations of plants and animals; we also observed that too many people were denied access to nature. Overall, we concluded that the remaining network of places for nature was not sufficient to either halt the loss of biodiversity or to meet the needs that we have of our natural environment. The report drew upon a rich evidence base and made 24 recommendations to recover nature, which could be neatly summarised: England needed *more, bigger, better and joined* up spaces for nature.

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<sup>1</sup><https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402170324/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

Despite *Making Space for Nature* influencing Government policies, the last ten years have seen far too little action. As a result, England remains among the most nature-depleted nations in the world. Nearly half of all our species are in decline and about a quarter of our mammals are threatened with national extinction. These losses represent a decline in resilience of the ecosystems upon which we depend and a loss of experience and joy: there are too few places left where a child can walk through a cloud of butterflies or sit amongst a rainbow of flowers. The fact that species such as the hedgehog is at risk of extinction is a wake-up call.

If we were writing our review today, most of our original 24 recommendations would stand, however we would particularly highlight the need for three overarching actions:

1. Better protect and manage our remaining wildlife habitats. The past decade has seen no noticeable improvement in the condition of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and wildlife habitats outside of SSSIs, including Local Wildlife Sites, continue to be lost. The newly established Marine Protected Areas need management to avoid becoming nothing more than paper-designations.
2. Deliver ecological restoration at scale. Our review clearly demonstrated that the amount of wildlife habitat that remains is insufficient to halt wildlife declines: there is an extinction debt still to be paid if we do not create more space for nature. The 25 Year Environment Plan commits to establishing 25 large Nature Recovery Areas (NRAs) as part of a Nature Recovery Network. The 25 NRAs should be established urgently, building on the recent experience of delivering large-scale projects, such as the pilot Nature Improvement Areas. The NRAs need to deliver large blocks of contiguous habitat (>5000 ha) to establish thriving populations of species that can spread across the rest of the network. These large areas will also be ideally suited to delivering Nature Based Solutions to climate change and other societal challenges and they will enable the introduction of cost-effective and new management approaches, such as re-wilding.
3. Bring nature to people. We need a focussed programme of ecological restoration within and surrounding our towns and cities. Over the last decade compelling evidence has emerged of the benefits to people of regular access to nature, in terms of physical and mental health and well-being, with particular benefits experienced by children. Ecological restoration close to homes also provides a range of proven Nature Based Solutions including reducing air pollution, water management and cooling effects.

We see reasons to be optimistic. The Government's commitment to establishing a Nature Recovery Network on land and at sea, together with Local Nature Recovery Strategies, should provide a much-needed framework for action. There are also encouraging implementation mechanisms under development, notably the new Environmental Land Management Scheme with a strong focus on rewarding farmers for providing public benefits, and the requirement for both maintaining species protection and delivering net biodiversity gain from development. The new Nature for Climate fund also has the potential to make a significant contribution towards the UK's net zero ambitions as well as for wildlife. In *Making Space for Nature*, we highlighted the importance of tackling the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss together. Today, it is heartening to see Government recognising and promoting the critical role of Nature Based Solutions in addressing many of society's challenges.

These developing policies and implementation mechanisms should provide important building blocks for the future. There is, however, an urgent need for action today. In the Government's

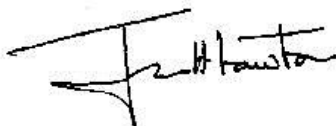
current Comprehensive Spending Review, we urge you to commit an additional £1 billion as a one-off capital investment to make more space for nature, with a particular focus on the three areas we highlight above.

Of course £1 billion is a great deal of public money, but this is about establishing the natural infrastructure that England urgently needs. This is about believing in a different, more sustainable future for our country, and the case for immediate action is strong:

- Habitats take time to establish and our threatened wildlife will take even longer to find those habitats and begin to recover. If we are serious about halting and then reversing biodiversity loss over the next decade, the habitat improvements need to happen quickly to enable the current species declines to reverse. We are running out of time if we are to meet the Government's commitment to be the first generation to leave behind a richer environment than we inherited.
- England needs a green recovery. A significant investment in nature's restoration has the potential to create thousands of green jobs. In the USA, ecological restoration activities employ more people than logging, coal mining and steel industries combined.
- We need to level up access to nature. The Covid-19 pandemic has led people to seek out their local greenspaces to connect to nature. This period has also, however, highlighted inequity of access; too many people have no natural spaces close to where they live. Acting quickly to create those spaces will help to close this gap in opportunity.
- We owe it to our children. Levelling up is needed across generations: during the Covid-19 pandemic children and young people have paid a heavy price to keep more vulnerable people safe. For several years, that same generation has been telling us with growing insistence that what they want most from Government is a step-change in action to address the joint crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. It's time we listened.
- The time for international leadership is now. We are entering the UN's decade of ecological restoration. With the UK's presidency of both the G7 and the Climate Change COP26 next year, the World will be watching what we do, so there is no better time to demonstrate global leadership through decisive, ambitious evidence-based action.

A decade ago, England needed *more, bigger, better* and *joined* up spaces for nature. Today, England still does. We urge you to make the next decade one of action, and to start now.

Yours sincerely,


A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Lawton', with a horizontal line above it.

**Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS**  
**Chair of the *Making Space for Nature* Panel**

**Making Space for Nature Panel Members**



Dr Peter Brotherton (Panel Secretariat)



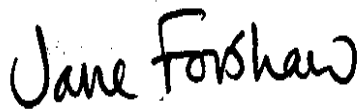
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