



Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill – 2nd Reading

WWF Parliamentary Briefing

25th May 2022

*The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill must **embed natural capital and nature positive obligations and duties** to ensure commitments are met across rural and urban landscapes.*

Summary

Published in February, the Levelling Up White Paper, admirably, recognises that addressing regional inequalities and spreading opportunity more evenly across the UK, must encompass not only economic, but also broader social, health, and well-being parameters, whilst also devolving more power locally to communities.

WWF supports the general aspiration of the White Paper; however, it is incomplete – there must also be a **comprehensive consideration of nature and climate change** and the related impact on communities and families, particularly to the ongoing crises of the cost of energy and of food.

The White Paper gives minimal reference to the Government's Net Zero and Nature commitments, and the recently published Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill gives no further reassurances in this regard.

Levelling up means everyone breathing cleaner air, having greater access to green space. It means ensuring families don't pay through the roof for their energy costs, and can eat healthy, sustainably grown and affordable food. It means creating thousands of green jobs to transform our economy to one that is nature positive and net zero.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill must properly embed climate and nature to address regional inequalities and meet its stated “missions”.

Questions to raise at Second Reading: (see below for further details)

1. How will the Bill align with the net zero, and nature protection and restoration targets? Can there be a more explicit duty built into the “missions”?
2. To address health inequalities the White Paper references the National Food Strategy (NFS) and the importance of addressing poor diet and obesity. How will this be built into the metrics particularly with regards the health “mission”? What commitments can the Government give to urgently bringing forward the recommendations of the NFS?



3. Why was *Natural Capital* not included within the White Paper, nor embedded in the Bill? (other “Capitals” including Social, Human, Financial and Physical were referenced drivers of spatial disparities).
4. Currently the White Paper and Bill focus is primarily on urban regeneration. Can the Bill be strengthened to ensure rural communities are not left behind, whilst other areas are levelled up?
5. How will devolution provisions in the Bill help provide communities with the appropriate powers to work with farmers and landowners to shape nature-positive solutions that work for all?

Further Details:

Natural Capital

- The White Paper states that there are six factors that will contribute to driving levelling up:
 - physical capital
 - human capital
 - intangible capital
 - financial capital
 - social capital
 - institutional capital

It argues, in places where these are absent, pride in local communities declines as well as the overall quality and living experience. **Natural Capital is missing here.**

- A natural capital approach reframes nature positively as an asset that can support a range of social and economic outcomes, rather than simply as a constraint on or a victim of policy or development. A natural capital approach would look at providing green, sustainable jobs and businesses, alongside rights to access to nature, supporting climate action and nature recovery.
- Our own analysis shows that investing in net zero and nature can provide more than double the amount in positive co-benefits. For example, **£40bn of targeted investment** can not only deliver £50bn in business growth opportunities, but also **£80bn in co-benefits including woodland creation and improved air quality, alongside £3bn in avoided costs of inaction, including flooding and water shortages.**¹
- The current risk from inaction on climate change are becoming more apparent. Around 1.8 million people across the UK are living in homes that are at risk of significant river, surface water or coastal flooding.²
- Pollination alone contributes an annual £510-690 million to the UK’s agricultural production,³ while long-term pollinator decline is well documented.⁴

¹ https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/Keepingus_competitive.pdf

² The Committee on Climate Change. 2019. UK housing: Fit for the future?

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962785/The_Economics_of_Biodiversity_The_Dasgupta_Review_Full_Report.pdf

⁴ <https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-full-report.pdf>



Food and Health

- If the Levelling up agenda is to truly address inequality and set in place the social and economic programme for the whole of government, it must address the **economic drivers of geographic inequalities, the food system in its totality, communities' resilience to climate change and peoples' ability to access nature on their doorsteps.**
- Access to nature is **empirically proven to have beneficial impacts on health, well-being and the economy.** Every £1 invested in restoring nature [provides £3 in public benefits](#) including recreation and improved health and wellbeing, while [the NHS could save over £2 billion a year](#) in treatment costs if everyone in England had access to good quality green space.
- Multiple studies have also found a link between [access to green space and a reduced risk of mental health](#) problems, improved mood, and increased life satisfaction.
- However, we know that the food system is at the heart of nature's collapse. Almost one fifth of the fresh food the UK imports comes from countries vulnerable to climate change⁵. Our own nation is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Making the changes needed across the whole of the UK on how we consume and produce food is essential to securing a net zero, nature positive future – two key priorities for the government. Furthermore, with the backdrop of growing pressures on weekly food costs for families, it is all the more important to address these concerns.

Farming and Net Zero

- The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill could provide the statutory framework to support an overall vision that is currently lacking for policies on agriculture and the wider rural economy. Such a vision could help to boost climate-friendly food production, local food growth, rural tourism and opportunities for those living and working in the countryside.
- Land use is a critical factor in ensuring long-term resilience and food security. **In all, over 70% of our land is used for agriculture, and the way we farm and use the land is responsible for 12% of our territorial greenhouse gas emissions.**
- **It is therefore vital land is protected to ensure the well-being of British people.** WWF is calling on the UK Government to raise their ambition and deliver transformational agricultural subsidy reform that pays farmers fairly to deliver for nature and climate. This should include clear objectives, based on a new **agriculture and land use decarbonisation strategy**, as recommended by the Committee on Climate Change. As set out in our [Land of Plenty report](#), the strategy must be aligned with net-zero and nature positive, and should:
 - Reduce direct emissions from agriculture by at least 35% by 2030 on 2018 levels.

⁵ Scheelbeek, P. F. D., Moss, C., Kastner, T., Alae-Carew, C., Jarmul, S., Green, R., Taylor, A., Haines, A., Dangour, A. D. 2020. United Kingdom's fruit and vegetable supply is increasingly dependent on imports from climate-vulnerable producing countries. Nature Food. Vol. 1: 705–712



- Reduce net land-related emissions so that UK land becomes a net carbon sink by 2040 at the latest.
- Halt and reverse the loss of UK nature by 2030.
- Cut UK farming's overseas carbon footprint particularly relating to soy feed and fertiliser inputs by at least 31% by 2030 and 57% by 2050 on 2018 levels.
- To meet the UK's world-leading targets, it is vital that the UK Government implements a "net zero test" to help **ensure that all budgets and spending reviews are compliant with reaching net zero**. This would ensure public money is spent on policies that protect the planet and match the ambition it's placing on the private sector.

Jobs

- Targeted investment in green infrastructure and jobs is the most efficient, fiscally sustainable way to deliver levelling up:
 - Net zero jobs have a median annual gross income that is 18% higher than the national average wage, and 30% higher than jobs in current carbon-intensive industries. These jobs are predominantly in currently lower wage and GVA areas such as Yorkshire and the Humber and the North East
 - Delivering a net zero building stock would create 350,000 additional jobs in the construction sector by 2028
 - Investment in public transport could create 230,000 jobs
 - Investment in the circular economy create 450,000 jobs, many in areas with high unemployment rates
 - Upgrading the distribution network to build the smart grid of the future could support 34,000 direct jobs and 147,000 jobs in the wider system
 - Expanding nature restoration could create 16,050 immediate jobs in the 20% of constituencies likely to face the most significant employment challenges post Covid⁶
- The case for investing now to deliver net zero is clear – delaying investment for ten years is deeply inefficient, doubling the amount the UK would need to invest to hit the same target⁷, and would risk causing a major recession.

Power in Communities

- Power in the communities is **about giving people agency over landscapes to restore nature and tackle climate change**. Taking advantage of the opportunity of creating a more resilient food system to invest in communities.
- Government must work with communities, local authorities and landowners to develop **locally-driven land use frameworks and partnerships, allowing communities to shape the future of their landscapes**. Guided by national targets and evidence, such frameworks should bring together policies on nature, climate and food, aligning with local opportunities, priorities and needs in order to drive public and private investment towards specific actions on the ground.

⁶ https://green-alliance.org.uk/resources/Green_renewal_WPI.pdf

⁷ https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/Keepingus_competitive.pdf



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- The **Environment Act** provided for the development of **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** to set out biodiversity priorities for an area – to level up nature across the country these LNRSs should be given clear objectives to align with and collectively deliver national biodiversity and net zero targets. To achieve these targets Government should investigate whether LNRSs require statutory underpinning in land use decision-making.
- We need to strive for a future **where the most sustainable food is also amongst the cheapest**. Yet too often both the true cost and value of our food is lost along the path from farm to fork, with a race to the bottom in terms of quality and price. This is not fair either to food producers or the public, while nature often takes the hit in between.
- Consumers, business, and farmers must be united in showing support for **affordable food for everyone without harming the planet**. Pride in one's town is engendered by valuing the well-being of its inhabitants, with access to abundant nature, affordable and good food as well as good, secure green jobs. The UK produces **globally renowned food including beef, lamb, and cheese, which deserves to be championed**. By bringing consumers and producers closer together through growing local market and supply chains we can **bring more variety into our supply chains and can help generate greater value** for those producing high quality, less intensive products.

For further information and to work with WWF on amendments to the Bill at Committee Stage please contact Daniel Rubio, Drubio@wwf.org.uk