

Building Partnerships for Nature's Recovery

Action Plan 2021/22



Foreword

This year is an important year for Nature and an important one for Natural England. We have a new Environment Bill entering parliament. We expect to see access to Nature taking a central part in a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. We have already seen new commitments from government - for example, to protect more land for Nature ahead of the G7 summit. Plus, we have a vital opportunity in the two international Conference of Parties (COP) on biological diversity and climate change, where we hope that Nature-based solutions will be front and centre.

Natural England will also be front and centre in delivering on all of this, as we enter the second year of delivering our five-year strategy to establish our vision of **thriving Nature for people and planet**. Despite the restrictions and challenges to us all from the pandemic, last year we achieved the majority of our in-year targets and built a strong foundation for the coming year as we all adjust to a new way of work and life.



As well as the prevalence of Nature in public policy it is also wonderful to see a growing appreciation of the outdoors across our society and economy. The **beauty** of Nature inspires us - it can be as simple as hearing birdsong outside a window, seeing wildflowers in the local park, or breathing a lungful of fresh air. It's the personal benefits to **physical** or **mental health**, appreciated as never before by many people during the last year. It's the need for Nature to be part of our everyday lives, with safe and inclusive access for all - wherever and whoever we are. And it's the growing evidence base of the benefits from a fully functional ecosystem for plants, animals, flood protection, carbon and water quality.

Certainly, the Dasgupta review last year was another stepping-stone to call for the investment in our surroundings and natural capital. But equally we have seen in stark reality the inequalities in our society of access to high quality environment. Addressing this will be a major driver of Natural England's work in the coming year, hand in hand with our work to restore Nature, everywhere.

I very much welcome therefore the decision by Defra to increase Natural England's budget for 2021/22 following the Spending Review. A £63 million uplift to revenue and capital funding will be used to carry out our statutory duties and to achieve, with our partners, the big ambitions for Nature's recovery in England. It is hugely encouraging to all our staff, programmes and projects - and I hope to many of you.

As well as enabling us to invest in our staff, our National Nature Reserves, new technology and a better evidence base it will also mean we can increase our external programme budget as we seek to deliver outcomes through partnerships with others.

But even so there is a lot to do in one short year and we must continue prioritising our efforts to the maximum benefit and create efficiencies in how we operate. So, this year we will start to make four shifts to the way we work.

Our Shifts for 2021/22

1) To visibly drive the Nature Recovery Network

The Nature Recovery Network is the Government's commitment to Nature recovery within the 25 Year Environment Plan, restoring sites, species and landscape quality through rebuilding ecosystems across land and sea and in our towns and cities. This delivers Sir John Lawton's vision of **thriving Nature**, outlined in the 2010 Making Space for Nature report.

We will **lead** and **convene** to make this happen - from design, development and delivery in partnerships, through Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

2) To develop plans for places

We want to be able to point to a growing number of places where our planning and licensing work supports robust strategic plans that accelerate Nature recovery on the ground.

We are **investing** in our Area Teams to **work in partnership** with local responsible authorities to enable a green recovery. This includes building back greener through terrestrial and marine sustainable development - creating Nature-rich, accessible and characterful places to live and work.

3) To tackle barriers to Nature

We know that people have lost connection with Nature - but improving Nature alone doesn't always resolve this disconnect. We need to **connect** with the whole of society and to better understand and tackle the barriers to enjoying, engaging and connecting with the natural environment. This includes gaining better health, education and well-being for everybody within a better environment.

We will do this partly by making Natural England a more **diverse** organisation, representative of the full breadth of society we serve - ready to engage with communities across the nation.

4) To be evidence and evaluation led

The three shifts above cover the ecological, economic and societal - and all need us to design changes that are scientifically coherent, legally sound and credible to the people who need them.

We will design and embed evidence gathering and evaluation into our new approaches and learn from them, so we can be confident to **try new things, take risks, discover** and **lead**.

There are of course parts of our work which have not yet received the required funding. For example, our responsibilities for marine protection and development, the need to improve the quality of our protected sites and our duties for landscapes and access. We look forward to working alongside our sponsors in Defra to secure the funds needed from public and private sources to continue the public and government's wish to invest in Nature on a long-term basis.

But there is much to be grateful for and optimistic about in the year ahead for all of us at Natural England. This Action Plan tells you more about what we intend to do. We look forward to working with you, in partnership for Nature's recovery.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marian Spain".

Marian Spain
Chief Executive

Defra Group Shared Vision

The Defra group is here to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, leaving it in a better state than we found it.

Natural England is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and as part of the Defra group the work that we do contributes to the Defra outcome framework.

The Defra Outcome Framework

The outcome framework incorporates four priority outcomes agreed with HM Treasury through the 2020 Spending Review. It drives the planning and delivery of the critical real-world outcomes that the group is seeking to achieve.

- **Priority outcome 1 (PO1): Environment** – Improve the environment through cleaner air and water, minimised waste, and thriving plants and terrestrial and marine wildlife.
- **Priority outcome 2 (PO2): Net zero** – Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon storage in the agricultural, waste, peat and tree planting sectors to help deliver net zero.
- **Priority outcome 3 (PO3): Floods and resilience** – Reduce the likelihood and impact of flooding and coastal erosion on people, businesses, communities and the environment.
- **Priority outcome 4 (PO4): Agriculture, food, fisheries, animal welfare and biosecurity** – Increase the sustainability, productivity and resilience of the agriculture, fishing, food and drink sectors, enhance biosecurity at the border and raise animal welfare standards.

Embedding our mission of [building partnerships for Nature's recovery](#) with stakeholders and staff is fundamental to ensuring that everything that Natural England does contributes to the Defra priority outcomes.

The 25 Year Environment Plan

Our mission is set within the context of the [Government's 25 Year Environment Plan](#).

The Government's vision in the 25 year plan is for England to become the healthiest and most beautiful place in the world in which to live, work and bring up a family. The goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan inform Defra's priority outcomes, particularly for environment, net zero, floods and resilience, and through its international environment work.

Our Action Plan for 2021/22 will contribute to thriving terrestrial and marine wildlife, achieving net zero through Nature-based solutions, such as peat restoration and tree planting, and increasing the sustainability of farming and fishing.

Thriving Nature for People and Planet

Our vision is of **thriving Nature for people and planet**. Our ambition is not just to improve Nature, but to see it thriving everywhere, because a healthy natural environment is fundamental to everyone's health, wealth and happiness.

Nature encompasses natural beauty, wildlife and geology that underpins landscape character. It includes habitats on which our most precious species depend. Nature also includes our historic and cultural connections with Nature - for example through art and literature - and other opportunities we have to connect with the environment.

Our understanding of Nature covers the whole natural world on earth and at sea and encompasses the natural environment in our towns and cities as well as the countryside. This was the scope upon which Natural England was founded and is set out in the [legislation](#).

Building Partnerships for Nature's Recovery

Our mission is **building partnerships for Nature's recovery**. This reflects the need for us to work with and through a wide range of people. Nature needs all of us to take the rapid action to rebuild sustainable ecosystems and to protect and restore habitats, species and landscapes.

Our Five-Year Aims

Underpinning our vision and mission are our five-year aims. These aims demonstrate how Natural England contributes to the Defra group's priority outcomes. These aims provide the threads that bind our everyday work back to **thriving Nature for people and planet**.

- 1) **A well-managed Nature Recovery Network** across land, water and sea delivering resilient ecosystems rich in wildlife and character, enjoyed by people and widely benefitting society.
- 2) **People connected to the natural environment** for their own and society's wellbeing, enjoyment and prosperity.
- 3) **Nature-based solutions** contributing fully to tackling the climate change challenge and wider environmental hazards and threats.
- 4) **Improvements in the natural capital** that drives sustainable economic growth, healthy food systems and prospering communities.
- 5) **Evidence and expertise** is used by a broad range of partnerships, organisations and communities to achieve Nature recovery and enable effective regulation and accreditation.
- 6) **Being a values-led organisation** which delivers excellent service standards to all partners, organisations and communities engaged in achieving Nature's recovery.

Our Programmes

Our five-year aims are delivered through our four strategic programmes:

- **Resilient Landscapes and Seas**
- **Sustainable Development**
- **Greener Farming and Fisheries**
- **Connecting People with Nature**

They are underpinned by two supporting programmes:

- **Specialist Science and Evidence**
- **Managing the Organisation**

Resilient Landscapes and Seas

The focus of the resilient landscapes and seas programme is to create thriving, resilient, functioning landscapes and seas rich in plants, wildlife and character that provide wide ranging benefits for Nature, climate and people.

Our Five-Year Aims (2020-2025)

Over the next four years, building upon our legacy of protected sites and designated areas, our ambition is to connect, restore and create **distinctive and Nature-rich** places across cities and rural countryside, on land, water and sea.

- Working at scale, we will tackle the **climate crisis** through re-establishing functioning resilient ecosystems on land and at sea, that contribute to net zero and create distinctive places for all of society to enjoy and benefit from.
- We will work with responsible authorities to develop **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** in partnership with communities, to promote action and target investment in Nature recovery and Nature-based solutions, in the areas where it will achieve the most.
- We will establish an evidence-led **Nature Recovery Network**. Working with and through the national Nature Recovery Network partnership we will inspire organisations to take action to deliver the Nature Recovery Network across England.
 - Delivery will be supported by **new tools** including biodiversity net gain, conservation covenants and the future land management schemes, working alongside a broader investment base.
- Through a **reform programme** we will ensure that more protected sites are in favourable condition for their geodiversity and biodiversity, are resilient and central to driving Nature recovery on land and sea and contribute to the Nature Recovery Network and the wellbeing of society.
- We will work to ensure that the **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** series can adapt to climate change and that individual sites are ecologically connected to the wider landscape.
- Our expert evidence and advice will inform a well-managed network of **marine sites** that contribute to securing Good Environmental Status for our seas.
- We will drive reforms to our **protected sites** work including improving our monitoring and evaluation programme, our evidence, data and information, making use of new technology and working more proactively with landowners, site managers and other regulators on land and sea.

- Our enhanced evidence, advice and challenge to **designated landscapes bodies** will support them in delivering even more for Nature recovery and for the benefit of people, creating meaningful change within and beyond their boundaries.
- We will develop **National Nature Reserves** (NNRs) as exemplary sites at the heart of Nature recovery across England, working with partners to improve biodiversity and to inspire others.
- We will use our delivery and scientific expertise to advise government on what is required to be an **international leader** in green recovery, Nature recovery and climate change.
- We will learn from a refreshed monitoring and evaluation programme about the **character and resilience** of our landscapes and seas, and how and why they are changing. That information will continuously inform the development of this programme.

Our Priorities for 2021/22

Nature Recovery

- **Visibly drive** the Nature Recovery Network, ramping up our partnerships at local and national level to deliver and support the Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- **Bring together** partners and support responsible authorities in the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. In preparation for their national rollout in 2022, we will support Defra to develop and publish the Statutory Guidance and Regulations and complete the National Habitat Map.
- **Work collaboratively** to agree and implement five landscape scale areas for Nature recovery and Nature-based solutions, building on existing partnership initiatives and making best use of existing and new tools.
- **Work in partnership** to inform government's future approach to species recovery and reintroductions. This includes working with Rethink Nature to develop a species recovery framework and establishing a species reintroductions stakeholder task force.

Protected Sites

- **Strengthen** our investment in protected sites to deliver better outcomes. It will be a year of change and improvement including understanding how protected areas can help with climate change adaptation and mitigation and strengthening the delivery of some of our statutory duties for SSSIs, driving action on the ground. We will work closely with landowners and managers to do this.
- **Invest** new capital budget for our NNRs to address their health and safety needs as well as supporting infrastructure necessary for their management and delivering a safer, more accessible environment for visitors and staff. We will also explore opportunities for NNRs to catalyse significant land use change.

Landscape

- **Continue** to play our strategic leadership role, engaging with all 44 designated landscapes to support them to become more resilient for the future and provide targeted input to help deliver the ambitions of the Glover Review.
- **Commence** an ambitious Landscape Designations Programme that celebrates and protects our finest landscapes, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), and develops alternative landscape approaches that drive Nature (wildlife and landscape) recovery and improve people's connection with Nature, focusing on our towns, cities and peri-urban areas.
- **Develop and publish** a State of National Parks and AONBs report in partnership, that brings together evidence and provides clarity on the priority outcomes and actions for delivery.

Nature-based Solutions

- **Implement** the Peat Action Plan through the new Nature for Climate fund, launch the Peatland Grant Scheme and advise and support Forestry Commission in the delivery of the England Tree Planting Programme and England Tree Action Plan.

Marine

- **Provide** advice and expertise to support regulators, Defra and developers and work in partnership to deliver marine environment improvements at local, regional and national levels. Our focus, now that designations are largely complete, is on improved condition and Good Environmental Status across our seas.
- **Drive** good management of the Marine Protected Area network by publishing high quality conservation advice, maintaining an evidence base to inform management, and conducting condition assessments to underpin and measure progress.
- **Continue** to support Defra in expanding the means of enhancing marine recovery, including the development of Highly Protected Marine Areas and by leading on the England Seabird Strategy.

Strategy

- **Continue** to play a key role for Defra on the Green Recovery Challenge Fund including convening partnerships of environmental non-governmental organisations, to ensure the very best projects are submitted, to bolster threatened jobs, create new ones and enable organisations to play a full role in restoring Nature with us.
- **Develop** indicators for monitoring and evaluating the resilience of landscapes and seas, including advice to Defra to support the development of a 25 Year Environment Plan indicator for landscape, and build our understanding of the Favourable Conservation Status of species and habitats.
- **Continue** to provide expert advice to Defra including on updating plans and strategies to meet our biodiversity ambitions, the Environment Bill targets and the Office of Environmental Protection and support Government to develop and bring forward new policy priorities and ambitions.

Sustainable Development

The purpose of our sustainable development programme is to help achieve thriving wildlife populations and beautiful landscapes and seascapes that are enjoyed by people whilst enabling society to prosper.

Our Five-Year Aims (2020-2025)

Our sustainable development programme encompasses our **advisory and regulatory** work on planning for housing and infrastructure initiatives on land and at sea, and all our **species licensing** work. It includes strategic initiatives such as district level licensing and net gain, linking to local natural capital planning and urban greening.

This programme provides significant opportunities to deliver the **25 Year Environment Plan** ambitions in a place through more effective use of our planning and licensing levers. We have a powerful remit combining our regulatory role with our ability to convene partnerships and collaborate. Planning for Nature's recovery, health and wellbeing and climate change from the outset will be vital as the demands in places continue to grow. Over the next four years we will develop stronger long-term partnerships with planning authorities, on land and at sea to enable this.

This year, the Government described its plans to Build Back Better and Build Back Greener. Through **Project Speed**, we are also working to streamline our services, delivering better outcomes for the environment and for people.

Over the next four years we will:

- Enable more **effectively planned**, high environmental quality development and infrastructure.
 - Not only is this essential for a healthy and resilient environment in the face of climate change, it is also integral to securing the greatest **economic benefits** from development investment and creating great places to live and work.
 - The environment should not be considered 'nice to have' or as an add-on but as **key** in providing local solutions for economic and social issues and to build back greener.
- Deliver Government's **25 Year Environment Plan** ambitions on net environmental gain, natural capital plans and green infrastructure.
 - We will work in partnership to influence a much wider range of **strategies and plans** such as local industrial strategies, marine plans, water resource plans and those of other government departments.

- Re-shape our licensing approach, we will offer **streamlined regulation** that increasingly enables delivery of environmental gains at a strategic level and more clearly supports conservation outcomes for species and Nature’s recovery.
 - District level licensing is providing us with the opportunity to gain experience in delivering this. In **partnership**, we are starting to explore strategic approaches that will deliver better conservation outcomes for other species.
- Develop and embed an **evaluation** programme that measures the environmental outcomes from our input to inform continuous improvement.

Specifically, through our planning advice we will:

- Focus on **proactive** and strategic advice at plan level, building environmental considerations in early and considering place-based solutions for environmental impacts.
- Ensure high environmental quality development and infrastructure that deliver **net gains** for the environment and people.
- Reform how our **environmental advice** is provided and funded to deliver more for Nature from our investment.

And through our wildlife licensing we will:

- Offer **streamlined regulation** that enables delivery of environmental gains at a strategic level and more clearly supports conservation outcomes for species and Nature’s recovery.
- Learn the lessons from **district level licensing** for both net gain implementation and application to other species.
- Reform licensing, including permitting others to carry out some lower-risk licensing functions through **earned recognition** and moving to species licensing on a strategic basis.

We have a phased programme to achieve these aims over five years.

Our Priorities for 2021/22

Development Management

- **Build** our statutory consultee role with planning authorities to address Environment Bill and planning reform initiatives and account for the growth agenda effectively.
- **Invest** in digitising our casework services, enabling a more efficient and better customer service.
- **Reform** our planning work to enable a greater focus on high value cases with greatest environmental risk or opportunity with an advice service to support early engagement.

Local Strategic Plans

- **Bring** Nature to everyone’s doorstep by embedding green infrastructure standards into development planning.
- **Invest** in developing our staff skills to help facilitate the placemaking agenda alongside planning authorities and local partnerships.

Strategic Approaches to Planning Advice

- **Continue** to develop a net gain implementation framework for government, including marine net gain, and shape how biodiversity net gain investments can deliver into the Nature Recovery Network.
- **Develop** strategic solutions to long standing environmental challenges with particular reference to nutrient pollution and disturbance impacts from development, for instance our partnership work to address nutrient issues on the Solent.
- **Advise** on the expanding offshore wind renewables programme ensuring that impacts are minimised and strategic approaches to compensation and consenting considered where necessary.

Species Regulation

- **Continue** to explore wider applications of district level licensing to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).
- **Reform** our licensing activity to enable expansion of our strategic approaches building consensus around species conservation strategies with others. We will develop strategies first for species which face high risks and for which there are good opportunities to improve outcomes.
- **Embed** reforms and new licencing regimes for game birds, gulls and other wild birds.

Enabling Activity

- **Develop** an evaluation and monitoring programme so that our interventions can be better targeted in future. Establish forums to share and explore this data.

Greener Farming and Fisheries

Sustainable farming and fisheries rely on a healthy natural environment. Food production and supply depends on healthy fish stocks, soils, water, air and natural processes. The need to address the causes of climate change and environmental degradation is now paramount and how we manage our land and seas is a major factor.

Our Five-Year Aims (2020-2025)

We will make full use of our **expertise** in advice, delivery and evidence, whilst recognising the importance of our regulatory role. We will work with government, industry, our partners and other stakeholders, to help achieve the objectives of the 25 Year Environment Plan.

The reforms of agriculture and fisheries set out in new legislation provide an opportunity to achieve a **step change** in environmental improvement from sustainable land management and achieving Good Environmental Status for our wider seas.

For fisheries, that means **measuring sustainability** beyond just the impacts on target stock and ensuring the establishment of marine by-laws that contribute to environmental outcomes in Marine Protected Areas.

To ensure our **evidence and expertise** is central to the development of future farming and fisheries policy and delivery we will:

- Advise Defra as they develop new policy for farmers and fishers that contribute to the achievement of **25 Year Environment Plan** goals and incentivise the delivery of a well-managed Nature Recovery Network.
- Provide advice to customers and the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) on **Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier applications** ensuring delivery of high-quality environmental outcomes.
- Provide advice to Defra on the design and rollout of future schemes and support **land managers** during the roll out of pilots to ensure delivery of environmental outcomes.
- Seek a major role for Natural England in the delivery of **environmental advice** to realise the potential of Landscape Recovery and Local Nature Recovery schemes.
- Work with Defra and the **protected landscape** family to ensure future schemes improve the environment in protected landscapes.
- Work with Defra and our partners to ensure the future schemes are **ambitious** in scope and scale and their environmental impact is evaluated.

- Advise across government to ensure a new, progressive and behaviour changing **regulatory regime** – one that achieves high levels of compliance backed up by a credible inspection and enforcement programme, with supporting advice and guidance.
- Focus on enabling **greater environmental gains** through strategic casework and advice, promoting Nature-based solutions and developing them with our delivery partners.
- Improve the quality of advice given to land and sea managers including through the identification of appropriate standards and possible **accreditation** of third party advisers.
- Ensure that improving **natural capital** is at the heart of farm and fishing business decision making, and that improvements are being delivered through evidence-based advice and the new incentive systems.
- Provide environmental advice for fisheries and aquaculture management to regulators that is used to drive **sustainable** fishing and environmental improvements, including by-law advice to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).
- Ensure our advice on policy maximises protection and recovery of **marine ecosystems** both inside and outside of Marine Protected Areas.

Our Priorities for 2021/22

Future Farming

- **Provide** technical guidance and policy advice to feed into the design of future schemes described in the Agricultural Transition Plan, including drafting Environmental Standards for Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and advice to support the SFI Pilot on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
- **Provide** policy and delivery advice on the design and piloting of Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery and advise Protected Landscapes by being a panel member for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.

Farm Advice

- **Implement** Future Farm Advice Review recommendations which bring together all Natural England's farm advice: Countryside Stewardship, Catchment Sensitive Farming, SSSIs, the Farm and Conservation Service (FCS), Farm and Land Management Advice (FaLMA). This will maximise contributions towards 25 Year Environment Plan goals and the Nature Recovery Network, including delivery through application building of Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship and agreement recommendation.

Protected Sites Casework

- **Improve** SSSI consenting, assenting and advice by implementing reforms - building on the legacy consents project and the introduction of the Single Point of Contact.

Fisheries

- **Provide** evidence and policy advice to help deliver an ecosystem approach to fisheries.
- **Provide** environmental advice to inform fisheries by-laws for Marine Protected Areas.

Connecting People with Nature

Both data from the People and Nature survey and our collective lived experience of the last year, have provided even stronger evidence that a connection with Nature is good for our mental and physical health. A meaningful connection with Nature brings enjoyment and boosts our wellbeing.

With more people than ever spending time outdoors and a large majority of adults in England reporting that protection of the environment is important to them as a result, the programme will seek to consolidate the work from last year to help sustain that trend and continue to connect more people with Nature.

Our Five-Year Aims (2020-2025)

Natural England's connecting people with Nature programme will continue to focus on delivering **transformative change**, aiming for everyone to be able to enjoy Nature's benefits and act for the environment, wherever they live.

The five-year programme aims remain unchanged, but we have captured further evidence of impact from our People and Nature survey during the Covid-19 pandemic. This has taught us how much **people need green and blue spaces** coupled with a harsh reality of the extent of **inequalities** of being able to access those outdoor spaces. This evidence has helped us re-shape our delivery priorities for this programme: around health, wellbeing, social inclusion and community engagement.

We will therefore work cross sector to support, and where appropriate lead, initiatives that tackle unequal access to Nature and facilitate a continued growth in the **diversity of people** enjoying Nature. We will seek new, mutually supportive partnerships with groups that are already trusted with new audiences nationally, and locally in communities. We know that this amplifies messages, brings authenticity and importantly, **breaks down barriers** to help new audiences maintain and strengthen their connection with Nature.

The programme is comprised of both macro projects that seek to broaden the relevance and value to society's health and wellbeing of spending time in Nature, to focussed initiatives that look to tackle barriers in specific geographies as part of strategic local planning. The focussed work as part of these local plans embraces the needs of people and places in Nature recovery, thus bringing the benefits of Nature recovery closer to where people live and work.

Working in this way, our programme will deliver these specific five-year aims:

- More people **connected with and acting for** the natural environment.
- More people **spending time** in Nature.
- More people **benefitting** from the natural environment.
- Better quality **accessible** Nature-rich places **close** to where people live.
- Better access to high quality Nature **further afield**.
- More **resilient environment** that protects people from environmental harms. For example, flooding and air pollution.

Our Priorities for 2021/22

Health and Wellbeing

- **Develop** effective local Nature-based solutions in the cross-government Green Social Prescribing partnership pilots through a network of regional health advisors in our Area Teams.
- **Support** the development of policy for the use of Nature-based solutions in the social prescribing model, by providing expert advice to the National Academy for Social Prescribing.
- **Complete** a pilot project to reduce pharmaceutical load into the water supply, with Wessex Water, by referrals of individuals to social prescribing and reducing need for clinical treatments.
- **Conclude** the delivery of the Children and Nature programme and evaluation.

Engagement and Inclusion

- **Support** the better design of places across local authorities to enhance the Nature recovery network - and inequalities of access to green spaces near to where people live and work, through the publication of Green Infrastructure standards.
- **Deploy** effective community engagement in the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the Nature Recovery Network through new community engagement standards.
- **Host** seasonal rangers on National Nature Reserves this summer - to maximise the visitor experience, raise standards and demonstrate new approaches across the Estate.
- **Continue** to diversify and expand the range of voices Natural England listens to in our work and decision making, specifically via roundtables, the Better with Nature partnership building project and breaking down local barriers to connecting with Nature.
- **Address** lack of diversity in the sector and Natural England's staff body through the forthcoming State of Diversity in the sector report and implementing subsequent recommendations.
- **Reform** our language and our imagery enabling our communications to be more inclusive.
- **Continue** to develop our evidence base, through expansion of the People and Nature survey with extra questions regarding race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ and children, and embedding findings of social media analytics to reach new audiences.
- **Run** a public awareness campaign on the Countryside Code that uses the power of partnership to reach new and diverse audiences in order to help a new generation form long lasting relationships with Nature.

Access Programme

- **Conclude** submission of proposals for the England Coast Path while working with local authorities to establish stretches of the trail as they are approved by government and commencing evaluation.
- **Continue** our work supporting the National Trails Partnership including investigating alternative funding models.

Specialist Science and Evidence

We will realise our ambition for Natural England to be an evidence-led organisation. We will be recognised, respected and trusted for our expertise and the provision and use of evidence-based advice on the natural environment locally and nationally.

Our Five-Year Aims (2020-2025)

The quality of our advice, actions, and the legality of our decisions fundamentally depends upon our use of sound **evidence**. This includes understanding how and why the natural world is changing, identifying and enhancing areas of high environmental value, advising on the design of future land management schemes and creating opportunities for people and Nature to thrive.

Fostering a culture where high quality science and evidence is **celebrated** and is **at the heart** of what we do and how we do it, is key to delivering Natural England's vision.

We will:

- Use **science and evidence** to identify strategic opportunities, priorities and innovation.
- Ensure that the best available evidence is **central** to all our decision making, delivery, advice and risk assessment.
- Be a **learning organisation** that evaluates the outcomes of our actions.
- Develop a **diverse and resilient** specialist and technical expert cohort to ensure Natural England can draw on in-house expertise across its remit. We will invest in all our staff to ensure they have the skills they need to succeed in their work and adapt to future challenges.

Our Priorities for 2021/22

Science Leadership

- **Continue** our shift to an **evidence-led organisation**. We will do this through delivering our Science, Evidence and Evaluation Strategy via our cross-cutting science and evidence programme - and through the evidence and specialist advice commissioned through our four strategic programmes.
- **Review** the evidence base, producing evidence statements for each strategic programme and commission evidence reviews based on the needs identified.
- **Employ** horizon scanning to help us identify emerging challenges (including high risk cases) and potential solutions.
- **Develop** science and evidence partnerships and utilise Public Sector Research Establishment (PSRE) status.
- **Ensure** that the major investments in delivering Nature's recovery and connecting people with Nature, notably the Nature Recovery Network, tree planting targets, Nature-based

solutions, peat restoration strategy, species recovery, marine designations and the design and targeting of future land management schemes, are grounded in evidence.

- **Provide** natural capital science evidence and advice package including natural capital atlases and support to Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Best Available Evidence

- **Commission** a portfolio of evidence projects delivering research, monitoring and analysis to address immediate evidence priorities of our four programmes, including national monitoring programmes for agri-environment schemes, protected sites, people and Nature survey, and long-term environmental change.
- **Invest** in technologies such as Earth Observation, environmental DNA techniques, field-based science and data science techniques to find better ways of collecting and using data.
- **Maintain** a science and evidence infrastructure that is cross-cutting and accessible (for example providing data services across all our programmes) and is capable of supporting forward looking investigations and experimentation.
- **Develop** webmap resilience improvements and other system enhancements, including system integration and moving to cloud based platforms.
- **Implement** standards for all aspects of the data journey, developing appropriate digital and data governance.

Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment

- **Play** a lead role in delivering the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) extended pilot. The NCEA will provide a high-quality time-series of data on biodiversity, ecosystems and natural capital (on land and at sea) to fill a significant gap in our data assets and knowledge and enable us to assess the state of our natural capital assets.
- **Lead** NCEA workstreams for: (habitat) mapping and earth observation, (species) data mobilisation and access, marine pilot, England ecosystem survey development, citizen science, area-based pilots, peat mapping and state of natural capital reporting.

Evaluation and Capability Building

- **Continue** to embed evaluation across all our programmes, learning what works, in what circumstances and for whom and provide evaluation support, including training to programmes.
- **Build** our science, evidence and evaluation skillsets and capabilities across Natural England; sharing expertise and building joint capability across the Defra group and with our partners.
- **Invest** in dedicated and targeted learning and development based on robust and comprehensive needs assessment. Plus build increased professionalisation of Natural England staff through professional body memberships and professional registration.

Managing the Organisation

Our aim is to be a values-led organisation which delivers excellent service standards to all partners, organisations and communities engaged in achieving Nature's recovery.

Our Five-Year Aims (2020-2025)

Natural England cannot deliver all of the ambitions and commitments in this Action Plan on our own. Reflecting our mission - **building partnerships for Nature's recovery** - we will work in a way that encourages, enables and amplifies the contributions of others.

As a public sector body, we will also work in a way that honours the full range of obligations and standards of the **public sector** and, specifically, we need to adhere to the regulatory and legal requirements placed on Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

We will deliver against these objectives:

- We are **trusted and respected** for our collaboration with those engaged in Nature's recovery.
- We are **ambitious** in securing additional funding and support for Nature's recovery.
- We reflect our **vision and mission** in ensuring that the environmental impact of our own operation reduces.
- We **invest** in our people to develop a capable, agile, engaged and diverse workforce.
- We operate with **integrity** in keeping staff (and visitors) safe, using public money safely and using data and information in line with regulatory requirements and best practice.
- We **listen** to our customers and strive to provide a timely and responsive service.

Our Priorities for 2021/22

Corporate Governance and Planning

- **Meet** our corporate obligations – to keep people, money and data safe and to deliver good governance – noting the increased scale of this plan, in terms of increased programme spend and the requirement for new recruitment.
- **Continue to invest** in bringing further funding into the sector, both for partners where they can best deliver and for the organisation.
- **Refine** our business planning processes to ensure that we have a clear focus on the longer-term outcomes we seek for the natural environment and for people.
- **Articulate** these outcomes and their value to government (including within future Spending Reviews) and demonstrate the link between all our shorter-term activities and the longer-term ambitions.

Transformation and Change

- **Continue to grow** our capacity and capability to manage change well, including building a programme approach to deliver four key shifts:
 1. to visibly drive the Nature Recovery Network
 2. to develop strategic plans for places
 3. to tackle barriers to Nature
 4. to be evidence and evaluation led.
- **Complete** the implementation of refreshed processes and accountabilities, to ensure that the commitments we make are delivered professionally and we report transparently on what we do.

Our People

- **Progress** the commitments made in Natural England's People Strategy – to improve the overall employee deal, to build staff and organisational capability, including reform to the organisational framework that determines pay and reward.
- **Deliver** key aspects of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan, including new support and priority to our networks and champions and reforming our recruitment approaches so our workforce becomes more representative of the communities we serve.

Way of Working

- **Invest** in continually improving our ways of working, notably in learning from, and building on, the experience of working through the pandemic.
- **Refine** the ways we work with stakeholders and partners to bring more of their expertise into the way we develop the work that we do.
- **Continue** to build the profile and reputation of Natural England as the government's statutory adviser on the natural environment.
- **Stabilise** the operating model for the Corporate Services that we receive from Defra, ensuring that we work in partnership with the wider group in agreeing fit-for-purpose and transparently delivered shared services, with flexibility to meet our specific organisational needs where that is justified.

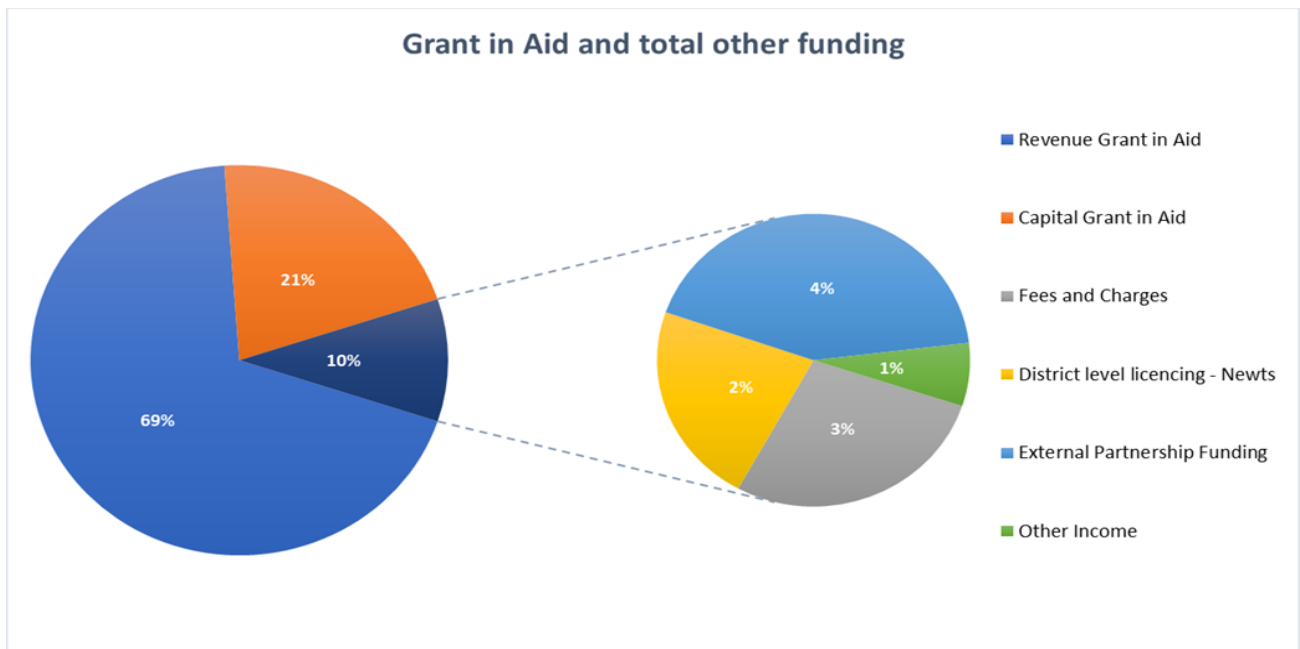
Our Finances

The 2021/22 financial year will be the second consecutive year of increased year on year funding which further supports our endeavours to achieve our five - year aims.

Our total planned funding for 2021/22 is £197.1 million, of which £155.5 million is revenue and £41.6 million is capital. This equates to a 47% increase in funding from last year.

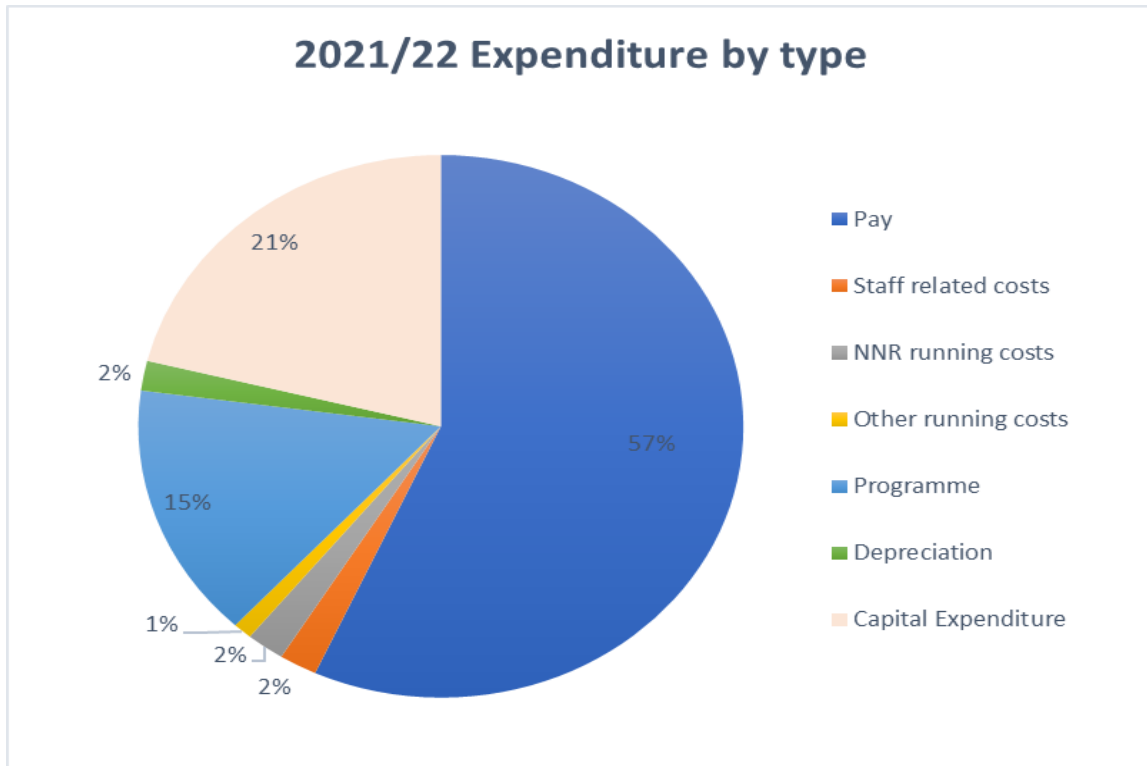
- 90% of our funding is Grant in Aid (GiA) provided by Defra. Of the GiA, £1.8 million is funded from other government departments towards joint projects.
- 10% of our funding is from non-government sources which includes fees, charges, external partnership funding and other smaller income streams.
- We continue our endeavours to increase our chargeable income and will be looking at explore further opportunities to extend this during the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Our Budget by Funding Stream

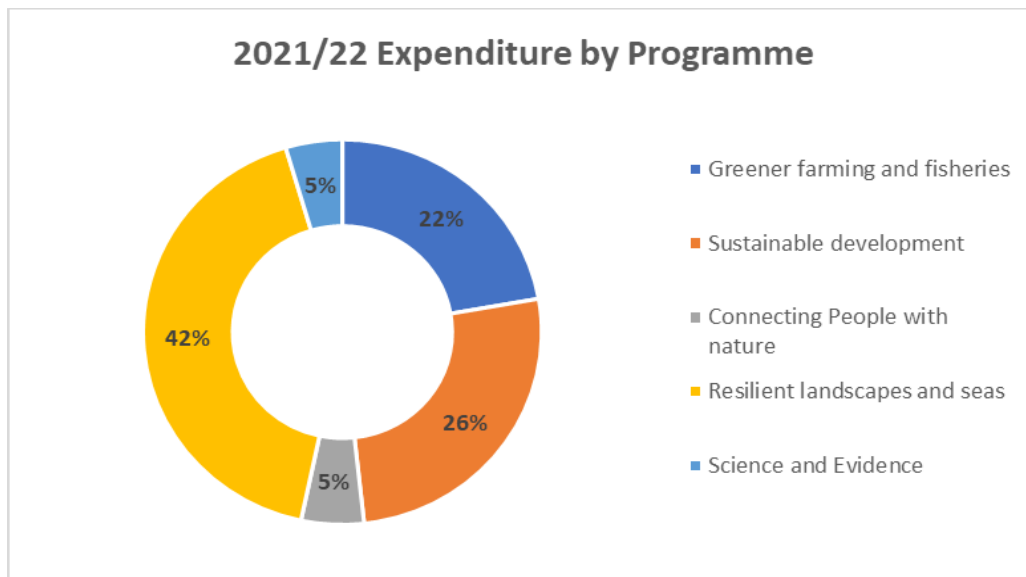


Our Budget by Expenditure Type

Planned expenditure for 2021/22 is allocated to priorities through our business planning.



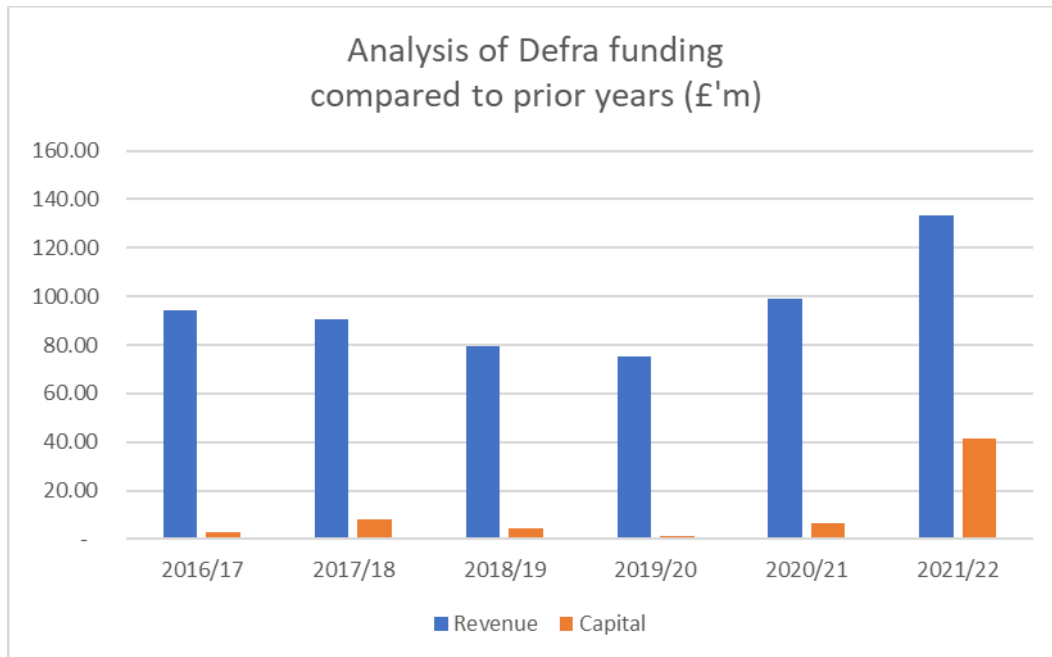
Our Budget Breakdown by Strategic Programme, underpinned by the Specialist Science and Evidence Programme



Note: Managing the Organisation costs are attributed to each of the strands above.

Five-Year Funding Trend and Outlook

The growth in funding continues for the second consecutive year with significant increases in GiA provided by Defra.



Note: Above table represents GiA funding received from Defra from which any one-off funding items have been removed to aid comparison over the five years.

Financial Principles

The principles underpinning our Future Funding Strategy ensure we maximise the returns from the resources we deploy to support the environment. These principles are incorporated into all our spending plans:

- Public money for public goods - this should not mean that public money is automatically viewed as the exclusive or preferred funding option.
- Where our services or outcomes benefit a group or organisation, and this group has the ability to pay for this, then the cost of the service should be met by this group as far as possible.
- We must operate within our legal powers, adhere to principles of regularity and propriety and ensure alignment with relevant wider government policies.
- Consistency in the application of charges, but also in the way we deploy GiA.
- Look to enable market delivery wherever possible and avoid creating market distortion.
- Consider funding options beyond GiA at the outset for any programme or area of delivery.

Measuring Success

We measure success against our five-year aims through long-term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), detailed below. Underpinning the KPIs are a number of in-year delivery Progress Indicators (PIs). The 2021/22 metrics are also shown in this table.

Our Five-Year Aims	Our Long-Term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	2021/22 Progress Indicators (PIs)	2021/22 Metrics
Well-managed Nature Recovery Network	Local Nature Recovery Strategies are in place and influencing local environmental decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Nature Recovery Strategies national rollout programme on track for 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Natural England supports Defra to develop and publish the Statutory Guidance and Regulations by April 2022. ▪ National Habitat Map completed and ready for national launch of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in April 2022. ▪ Natural England has developed local capacity to support proposed responsible authorities in England ready for national launch in April 2022.
	Landscapes and seas are becoming more resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A growing set of national and local partners and partnerships, actively supporting the growth of the Nature Recovery Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 50,000 hectares of wildlife rich habitat that partners have committed to support delivery of the Nature Recovery Network. ▪ 750 organisations who support the objectives of the Nature Recovery Network and become members of the Nature Recovery Network partnership (increase from 400). ▪ 5 landscape scale areas for Nature recovery and Nature-based solutions have been identified with plans in place for delivery.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve confidence in our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) data and information to support delivery of the 25 Year Environment Plan goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3,500 units where the condition assessment on our database is updated in 2021/22. ▪ An increase of 900 features which have a recorded condition.

Our Five-Year Aims	Our Long-Term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	2021/22 Progress Indicators (PIs)	2021/22 Metrics
	Landscapes and seas are becoming more resilient	to get 75% of SSSIs into favourable condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An increase of 15,000 active threats and remedies which have been reviewed and updated with relevant information to support specific interventions on site.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Natural England’s marine advice and regulation is driving Good Environmental Status (GES) across our Marine Protected Area network and wider seas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conservation advice and condition assessments delivered on schedule to support regulators and evidence.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New landscape designations programme approved and being implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agreed designations programme being delivered. ▪ Alternative landscape approaches’ proposals developed by end of Quarter Four 2021/22.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Licensing improves the conservation status of protected species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deliver the developer pipeline we have established by creating/restoring a minimum of 949 ponds in 2021/22. ▪ Ensure we are fully prepared to deliver circa 1,000 compensation ponds each future financial year to service developer demand for district level licensing. ▪ Progress in implementing the licensing review.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning casework advice and biodiversity net gain contributes to Nature recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 50 hectares identified and planned for net gain habitat creation and enhancement. ▪ Progress in implementing change plan towards high environmental value casework.

Our Five-Year Aims	Our Long-Term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	2021/22 Progress Indicators (PIs)	2021/22 Metrics
People connected to the natural environment	There is a positive trend of increasing levels of Nature connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural England is working inclusively, and staff body is representative of society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13.8% of our newly recruited staff from BAME backgrounds (Source: Office for National Statistics 2018 - UK population from a minority ethnic background). Progress in implementing the recommendations of the forthcoming State of Diversity in the sector report.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> England Coast Path ready for opening - all reports submitted to Secretary of State for approval, and establishment works in train 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment works complete or in train.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increasing proportion of people (adults and children) have access to good quality natural green spaces close to home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in green space in areas of greatest environmental deprivation.
	General population is increasingly aware of the importance of Nature recovery in order for us to all live well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature is embedded in Social Prescribing National Delivery Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver Green Social Prescribing interventions as part of a pilot programme.
Nature-based solutions	Land management and land use change are contributing to net zero through enabling greater carbon sequestration and storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The area of land in current agri-environment schemes is maintained and contributes to net zero and 25 Year Environment Plan goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop with the applicant the 300 highest scoring Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier applications.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Nature for Climate Fund enables delivery of the peat action plan and the Nature Recovery Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4,143 hectares peat restoration underway resulting in improved condition.
	The impact of agriculture on Nature reduces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural England's advice to farmers is reducing the impact of farming on Nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural England's Catchment Sensitive Farming advice to 5,000 farms is targeted to high priority catchments.

Our Five-Year Aims	Our Long-Term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	2021/22 Progress Indicators (PIs)	2021/22 Metrics
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 60% of our recommended measures implemented.
Improvements in natural capital	Responsible authorities have plans and policies in place that grow natural capital, build climate resilience and implement Nature-based solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Natural England’s strategic advice to responsible authorities helps build Local Planning Authority capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Progress in implementing change plan for local strategic plans. ▪ 60 (provisional subject to project sign-off) responsible authorities receiving proactive advice on local plans and policies.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop strategic solutions to development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10 (provisional subject to project sign-off) local planning authorities we are engaged with on strategic solutions – either in development or implemented. ▪ Progress in implementing strategic solutions for offshore wind.
	Natural England’s advice supports land and sea managers to deliver sustainable farming and fishing systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Future land management schemes include measures that support environmental delivery against the 25 Year Environment Plan and net zero outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide advice to support development of options for Local Nature Recovery Pilot.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental advice for fisheries and aquaculture management is used by regulators to drive sustainable fishing and environmental improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 95% of Natural England’s fisheries advice provided within statutory and agreed time frames.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Natural England’s advice on policy protects the marine environment from fisheries impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submitted evidence and advice to Defra shapes evolving fisheries policy so that it drives fisheries management to deliver the 2020 Fisheries Act ecosystem objective and Good Environmental Status (GES) across our seas.

Our Five-Year Aims	Our Long-Term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	2021/22 Progress Indicators (PIs)	2021/22 Metrics
Evidence and expertise	Doing evaluation, and learning from it, is part of Natural England’s culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved “doing and learning” from evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theories of Change completed and being used to drive delivery improvements for each of the major programmes. Quality assure 50% of our staff who were previously trained in evaluation techniques during 2020/21.
	Natural England has a fully embedded culture of being Science and evidence led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence Statements support decision making and resource use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence statements completed for all programmes and used to inform resourcing decisions.
	We ensure we make clear evidence available so it can be central to all our decision making, delivery, advice and risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better access to robust data to support decisions The Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) Programme will develop and pilot a range of techniques to gather quality data on the location of natural capital assets on land and at sea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised standards for accessing and using our data and evidence are published, promoted and fully adopted. Implement the NCEA terrestrial extended Pilot through detailed planning (end of July) and delivery of the six NCEA projects (end of March). Deliver one quick win marine NCEA project (i.e. to assess whether sufficient existing evidence to assess natural capital accounts for a sand eel fishery) by end of September.
	Natural England remains an expert organisation which continually invests in its capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chief Scientist Directorate staff provide learning opportunities based on their expertise to colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reported positive improvements in staff scientific knowledge.

Our Five-Year Aims	Our Long-Term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	2021/22 Progress Indicators (PIs)	2021/22 Metrics
A values-led organisation	Natural England's operations and ways of working make the maximum contribution possible to net zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a good understanding of our entire carbon footprint and have agreed long-term steps to make further reductions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We adopt a robust methodology for measuring our carbon footprint. We have identified and prioritised the primary options for reducing our corporate carbon footprint.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements in the 2020 People Survey key areas of engagement, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee engagement index rises by 2% to 62%. 80% of staff believe Natural England is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. 80% of staff respond positively to 'I believe my organisation cares about my wellbeing'.
	Natural England's customers and partners receive inclusive, trustworthy, high quality and valued support and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We provide and maintain a safe working environment, work practices, equipment and facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve our Near Hit ratio by 10% based on 2019/20 performance to bring us back in line from pre-Covid statistics. Teams identify and assess risks associated with their work and take action to implement proactive controls to reduce physical and emotional harm/ill health. 98% of all NNR check lists are up to date and completed by end 2021/22.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A high-quality service to our customers and meet our response obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of statutory casework delivered within published timescales. Develop and deliver a customer handling improvement plan.