

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Briefing Note

Economy, Transport and Environment Select Committee – 24 April 2018

25-Year Environment Plan

1. Purpose of Briefing

1.1 To brief Select Committee on the content and focus of what is commonly referred to as the government's 25 Year Environment Plan, and the implications for Hampshire County Council's service delivery going forward.

2. Background

2.1 The Plan (full title: [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#)), arose from a proposal by the Natural Capital Committee (an independent advisory committee to the Government) and was published on 11 January 2018.

2.2 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".

2.3 The Plan covers a broad range of environmental issues and sets out the following 25-year goals which the Government aims to achieve:

- Clean air
- Clean and plentiful water
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as drought and flooding
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
- Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

2.4 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

2.5 The Plan reiterates the Government's intention to consult on a new, independent statutory body that would hold Government to account for upholding

environmental standards in England; and to consult on the scope and content of a new policy statement to ensure environmental principles underpin policy making.

2.6 The Plan sits alongside two other important government strategies, the Industrial Strategy, which sets out how productivity will be improved across the UK, and the Clean Growth Strategy, which sets out the government's ambition to promote economic and environmental policies to mitigate climate change and deliver clean, green growth.

2.7 Section 3 of the document (below) highlights where the Plan may impact the County Council and its specific service functions, alongside some potential implications for future service delivery.

3. Main themes and implications for the County Council

3.1 The Plan sets out a vision and a number of high level policies. These policies are not yet backed by specific legislation, but will have implications for service areas within ETE and across the wider County Council now and into the future.

3.2 Some of the key policy areas in the plan include:

- Using a “**natural capital**” approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, by recognising its tangible and non-tangible economic benefits.
- The establishment of a **green business council** to advise government on “environmental entrepreneurialism”.
- Introducing a principle of “**environmental net gain**” into planning decisions where wider natural capital benefits will be assessed as part of the planning process.
- Achieving zero avoidable **plastic waste** by the end of 2042 through a number of initiatives.
- A commitment to reducing the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy from natural hazards including **flooding, drought and coastal erosion**.
- Initial proposals for a new **environmental land management system** (based on paying public money for public ‘goods’ such as environmental enhancement).
- A target of ensuring the **sustainable management of soil** by 2030 and establishing sufficient data to understand the current state of soil health;
- An aim to **increase woodland in England** in line with the aspiration of achieving 12% cover by 2060.
- A goal to do “what is necessary” **to adapt to the effects of a changing climate**.

3.3 Planning

3.3.1 The plan aims “to embed” a new planning principle of “net environmental gain” when building housing and infrastructure. The idea derives from the concept of natural capital, which both underpins the plan and aims to take full account of

natural assets, such as forests, woodland, urban green spaces, rivers, wetlands and marine environments that benefit humans.

3.3.2 The government will now consult on making this “net environmental gain” requirement mandatory. However, the document also makes it clear that government would consider “any exemptions that may be necessary” and that any such measures should avoid increasing the burden on developers.

3.3.3 The recently published draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been ‘updated to align with the 25 Year Environment Plan and requires that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by “minimising impacts and providing net gains for biodiversity”. This will influence planning decisions made by the County Council in future and consultation responses to major developments across the county.

3.3.4 The idea of natural capital signals a shift toward valuing our natural assets, a step that has been widely supported by environmental groups.

3.4 Waste Management

3.4.1 With regard to waste management, the Plan has the broad aims of eliminating all avoidable waste by 2050, eliminating all avoidable plastic waste by 2042 and reducing food waste by one fifth by 2025, and a suggested landfill ban of food waste by 2030. There is also an aim to improve the management of residual waste by maximising the amount of energy recovered from it, and reducing the environmental impact resulting from it.

3.4.2 The Plan is light on details on waste and recycling, and the policies are not yet backed by legislative proposals. A clearer picture is likely to emerge later this year with the publication of DEFRA’s Resources and Waste Strategy.

3.4.3 While the Plan’s proposals to reduce single-use plastics have been welcomed, including a commitment to investigate which economic incentives work best in reducing their use, there was criticism from environmental groups that there was no proposal on the issue of single-use drinks containers or a Deposit Return System (DRS).

3.4.4 However, government has recently confirmed it will introduce a deposit return scheme in England for single use drinks containers, and has suggested the inclusion of metal and glass as well as plastic, subject to consultation later this year. The consultation will look at the details of how such a scheme would work, alongside other measures to increase recycling rates. This initiative will inevitably have implications for the make up and quantity of recyclable materials in household waste collections in Hampshire and will influence future policy.

3.5 Landscape and Natural Environment

3.5.1 A key aim of the Plan is to encourage engagement with the landscape by establishing a ‘Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing’ program to improve people’s connectivity to open space and nature. There are also proposals for

increased protection of ancient woodland, and the appointment of a national Tree Champion to oversee increased tree planting and the creation of new forests.

3.5.2 There is also an aim of creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the existing protected site network, focusing on priority habitats and linking broader landscapes by large wildlife corridors. It also promises action to recover threatened, iconic or economically important species.

3.5.3 There is a proposal to create and improve green infrastructure through the creation of a national framework including a commitment to plant 11 million trees by 2060, 1 million trees in England's towns and cities by 2022, and to incorporate green infrastructure commitments into national planning guidance and policy.

3.5.4 The government will launch a year-long youth-focused promotional campaign to engage people with environmental issues – the 2019 Year of Green Action. The campaign will aim to increase action and engagement on the environment among 10 to 20 year olds. A range of events and activities are also planned to coincide with the 70th anniversary of National Parks and centenary of the Forestry Commission.

3.5.5 Defra will publish a new Strategy for Nature, building on the Biodiversity 2020 Strategy.

3.6 Flood & Water Management

3.6.1 The Plan contains a number of key aims relating to flood and water management. These include updating the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy in 2019, with emphasis on strengthening joint delivery across organisations.

3.6.2 There is a commitment to examine current partnership arrangements with the aim of attracting more non-public sector investment in flood management, an issue which is particularly relevant to the County Council with significant challenges faced in securing funding for flood alleviation measures.

3.6.3 There is also an aim to promote and expand the use of Natural Flood Management (NFM) solutions and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). This includes investing £15m up to 2021 to further explore the use of NFM and considering changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and Building Regulations in the longer term to encourage SuDS.

3.7 Energy and Climate Change

3.7.1 The key aims of the Plan relating to Energy and Climate Change include removing dependence on fossil resources and creating new solutions that are economically and environmentally sustainable and resource efficient.

3.7.2 Specific aims include ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars by 2040, achieving an 80% reduction on 1990 carbon emission levels by 2050 and phasing out coal-fired electricity by 2025.

3.8 Transport

3.8.1 Through the 'Future of Mobility' Grand Challenge, announced in the Industrial Strategy, the Plan has identified four early priorities:

- Establishing a flexible regulatory framework to encourage new modes of transport and new business models.
- Seizing opportunities and addressing the challenges of moving from hydrocarbon to zero emission vehicles.
- Preparing for a future of new mobility services, increased autonomy, journey-sharing and a blurring of the distinctions between private and public transport.
- Exploring ways to use data to accelerate the development of new mobility services and enable the more effective operation of the transport system.

3.8.2 The initiatives are part of the ongoing commitment to air quality improvements and cleaner transport and the plan to tackle roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations.

3.9 Broader Delivery Considerations

3.9.1 Aspects of the Plan will have synergies with the themes being considered by the Hampshire Commission of Inquiry, in its aim to make recommendations on a Vision for Hampshire 2050. The Commission will need to consider the long term aims of the Plan when debating the various strategic themes, particularly those relating to Environment and Quality of Place and Rural Hampshire.

3.9.2 Some of the policies and aims arising from the Plan will also be important for the County Council to consider in its wider Strategic Planning role and for example, in working with the Districts and Boroughs and other partner organisations.

3.9.3 While a number of policies do currently remain at high level and not yet backed by specific legislation, it is understood to be likely that Defra will seek to put together working groups to help steer the implementation of policies. It is likely that local authority representation will be required on these groups, which may be an opportunity for the County Council to help shape policy in any areas it considers to be of particular local importance.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The Plan is a high level document that sets out a long term strategy for environmental improvement and management. The Government proposes to update the Plan at least every 5 years, and to report annually on progress to Parliament. A set of indicators will be developed to monitor progress.

4.2 The Plan will now be followed by more detailed policy and legislation which will give a clearer picture as to how the aims of the Plan will be implemented by central and local government. Future reports will advise the Committee on the implications for service delivery.

4.3 In the interim, officers will give due consideration to the Plan, its policies, and its broader implications, across all relevant areas of service delivery and policy recommendation.

Contact name: Chris Murray

Tel: 01962 846728 **Email:** chris.murray@hants.gov.uk