



# Land Use in England Committee

## Corrected oral evidence: Land use in England

Monday 18 July 2022

3.30 pm

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Members present: Lord Cameron of Dillington (The Chair); Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville; Lord Curry of Kirkharle; Lord Goddard of Stockport; Lord Grantchester; The Earl of Leicester; Baroness Mallalieu; Baroness Redfern; Lord Watts; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

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Questions 234 - 242

### Witnesses

**I:** The Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; David Kennedy, Director-General for Food, Farming and Biosecurity, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

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## Examination of witnesses

George Eustice MP and David Kennedy.

Q234 **The Chair:** Welcome to this evidence session of the Land Use in England Committee. We are very fortunate to have before us the Secretary of State, Mr George Eustice MP, and David Kennedy, Director-General of Food, Farming and Biosecurity at Defra.

Thank you very much, Secretary of State, for coming before us. We understand that you may not be able to give full answers to all our questions as it has been difficult for you to co-ordinate within other departments what the proper full government position might be. We are also sympathetic to the fact that your Government could be described as being in a state of flux at the moment, with some Ministers going, some Ministers coming, and others who do not have their feet under the table.

I apologise for the slight prematureness of this meeting, but we want to get the bones of some of the government thinking behind all this so that we will be in a position to start thinking about our report before we go into the Summer Recess. Thank you very much for coming.

I will go straight into the first question. What do you see as the key drivers of land use in this country, and what impact will these have on policy and land use decision-making in the medium to long term?

**George Eustice MP:** Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here. That is a very big and complex question. There are many features of it. As we look forward at the key drivers and key pressures on land use as we seek to move towards net zero, it is very clear that tree planting will be an important part of that. There will be a need for a degree of land use change. We have been absolutely explicit about that with our tree planting targets. We will also need to see peatland restoration in some landscapes. That will be a big factor. We need to put the right financial incentives in place to ensure that both those policies happen.

Set against that, never mind the Ukrainian conflict, which we hope is a short-term episode that we are seeing now, the reality is that, through climate change, we are likely to see some currently versatile agricultural land in parts of the world becoming less so. We may well see some structural changes in food prices over the longer term, which may send a stronger financial signal to produce food and crops in this country.

Then, of course, you have the changing context of our own agriculture policy, where we are moving away from arbitrary subsidies for land ownership towards payments for sustainable farming and the delivery of environmental assets. Those are the key drivers.

As to other factors, for very obvious reasons, businesses and landowners will always be quite commercially attuned to what works on their own particular land and in their own landscape. A lot of it comes down to individual choice. In many areas, the reason why somebody might choose to be a brassica grower rather than growing winter wheat is often down to the aptitude of the business concerned and whether they are able to

handle the risk and the logistics involved in running a complex horticultural enterprise versus selling a bit of wheat. Those sorts of personal, individual factors are also quite important, and we should always recognise that.

**The Chair:** On the food production side, do you favour land sparing or land sharing? Just to explain to everyone, land sparing is when you focus the food output in a particular area with full commercial input farming, and you have other areas for nature, access, forestry or any of the other land uses, as opposed to trying to get a multitude of outputs from the same piece of land.

**George Eustice MP:** The reality is that we will need a bit of both. My personal preference is for what people who created this new nomenclature call land sharing. From the analysis that we have done, to achieve both our targets on biodiversity and tree planting, it is increasingly clear to us that approaches akin to agroforestry, getting more trees in a farmed landscape or having a slightly more extensive nature-sensitive approach to farming in some landscapes will be quite critical to delivering the environmental targets that we set ourselves.

If you want to improve water quality and biodiversity and see nature recover, you have to see some significant changes at scale across the farmed landscape. You cannot just have a national parks policy; otherwise you never deal with the external pressures on some of our protected sites.

On balance, it is principally what they would call land sharing and, in order to maintain our degree of agricultural output, some sustainable intensification embracing a new generation of glasshouses, for instance, allowing the growth of the horticulture sector and supporting it with what it needs to do that. I can also see new approaches such as vertical farming being quite important.

Q235 **Baroness Redfern:** Minister, thank you for attending our meeting. In the past the Government have resisted calls for a land use framework for England until it was announced in the Government's food strategy paper. What has led to the change of view?

**George Eustice MP:** The initial reticence was probably a personal one on my behalf, if I am honest. I have an aversion to strategy documents. We have an environmental strategy that is set out in our 25-year environment plan. We have an agricultural transition plan that is one of the key tools to deliver the objectives of the environment plan. We also have key policies such as biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery strategies, which are another key component of delivering that 25-year environment plan.

In my view, there is a danger that you can have a multitude of strategy documents. I have seen many in my time. They often do not say very much that is new. They often attempt to be too prescriptive and do not allow innovation to occur in the way you want it to occur.

It started with a personal aversion from me to having yet another strategy document that would not necessarily add much to our knowledge or our policy programme. However, the genesis of the change came about probably around last October, as we started to think quite clearly about the degree of tree planting we might need in order to hit, in particular, our net-zero target, and the importance of planting those trees in the right places and not putting them in landscapes where they might actually cause more harm. That led us to think that perhaps we needed to have a land use strategy in the net-zero context.

Henry Dimbleby also recommended a land use strategy in his independent review. More latterly, groups such as the NFU said they would like a land use strategy because they were worried that all the land was going to be lost from food production.

There were calls from many quarters that we needed to articulate what we thought the journey was through land use to get to the end state, and we have accepted that there is a case for a land use strategy. I am still keen that it avoids becoming just another strategy document, as we have seen in some other countries, and that it is a genuine strategy that grapples with some of the key tensions around delivery of tree planting and peatland restoration alongside food production.

**Baroness Redfern:** Who will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation as it progresses?

**George Eustice MP:** It depends on the role of the land use strategy. In essence, I know that Scotland has done a land use strategy—it has done three in fact; it does a new strategy roughly every four or five years—but there is nothing in its land use strategy that is not in our environment improvement plan. We see that plan as the centrepiece of our work in this area. The monitoring of that plan is down to Natural England and the JNCC, which lead on the data on how we are performing in that area. Scrutiny of our progress towards delivery of that environment improvement plan will be a matter for the OEP.

**Baroness Mallalieu:** Minister, do you see a distinction between a framework and a strategy? We have had some evidence that strategies tend to be overly prescriptive, whereas a framework would not only gather and collate the data but make the recommendations to government, who presumably would be responsible for the strategy. Do you still have reservations? If so, what might they be?

**George Eustice MP:** My view is that there is a need for us to articulate how we can deliver those multiple objectives that place competing demands on land. Without being prescriptive, we should use the land use strategy to describe what that possible journey might be, in which landscapes you might see more trees being planted, how you might promote things like agroforestry and other landscapes and develop more permanent pasture, and equally where you might see sustainable intensification. It is trying to articulate how you can do all of that so that

you maintain your agricultural output while accommodating some land use change. That is what I see as the principal purpose of the document.

I am not sure I really understand what people mean by a difference between a framework and a strategy, if I am honest. I know that people often use these different terms, but it is one that is slightly lost on me. I generally think that the more important thing is to have policy responses that address the challenges and deliver what we are setting out in the 25-year environment plan rather than having a plan, or indeed a framework, that is too prescriptive. I do not know whether David wants to add something.

**David Kennedy:** I agree with you. We have committed to publishing a land use framework, and it will set out broadly, order of magnitude, the balance of land sharing and land sparing. It will show different ways in which we can meet our environmental targets. You can grow trees in the uplands; you can grow trees in the lowlands, for example. It will explore different scenarios. I do not think it will be a blueprint that says, "This is exactly how you have to use every hectare of land in the country", because that would not be sensible.

What is the point of this? It is to show that we have a plausible path to meeting our targets, but it is also to inform the design of our agri-environment scheme. Once we have set out this framework we can then design local nature recovery, for example, to have the incentives to encourage tree planting wherever the framework says that would be useful.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** David, you used the expression "a balance of land sharing and land sparing". I thought they were almost two different philosophies, in that land sharing implies that multiple objectives will be delivered by pretty well every bit of land to a greater or lesser extent.

**David Kennedy:** I am using land sharing to refer to sustainable farming, often called regenerative farming, although that sometimes has very specific meanings. A good illustration of sustainable farming is through the soils standard that we have just launched for the sustainable farming incentive around various practices that are both good for the environment and good for production. We will do a set of things that will involve food production, but we will set out and quantify how farming practices that are conducive to the environment will contribute to environmental targets. They make very significant contributions to biodiversity, net zero and water quality.

Over and above that, though, as the Secretary of State says, you can go a long way. We know that we need to have tree planting. We know that we need to have peatland restoration and there will have to be some land sparing. Land currently used in production will have to be taken out of production. The question of how much we are not able to answer today. That is what the framework will explore.

Q236 **Lord Watts:** Noting that the detailed decisions on the framework for England will be made following the appointment of a new Prime Minister, what preparatory work has been undertaken so far on the implementation of the framework? What is envisaged as the local and regional network that will be needed to deliver this in an effective way?

**George Eustice MP:** I will ask David to come in on that in a moment, but a team has been working on this land use framework since the beginning of the year and possibly from late last year. It is a piece of ongoing work. It has been consulting. I think it actually won an award from the national Geological Society for some of the analysis that it was doing<sup>1</sup>.

That work will continue and progress, but obviously the publication of any land use framework will come after the next Government and it will be for the next Government to consider what they want to do with that and how they want to take it forward.

**Lord Watts:** What about the work with regional and local partners? The committee has heard evidence that there is not an easily identified structure for delivery of the plan at a local and regional level. Are there proposals to build something there or to use existing organisations? What is the thinking of the department?

**George Eustice MP:** The delivery will come through two principal routes. One is local nature recovery strategies that local authorities will be required to put together. They will have a funding stream through biodiversity net gain to support that. There will be a role for local government in that context.

Then there is the future agriculture policy. In many cases, we will be funding clusters of landowners, clusters of groups, to do either landscape recovery projects or local nature recovery projects.

The two key tools will be local nature recovery strategies, which give you the local level, and the landscape recovery and local nature recovery work that we do through the future agriculture policy.

**Lord Watts:** Will each local authority be represented, or is a structure being built to represent local authorities?

**George Eustice MP:** Each local authority will have a legal obligation to create a local nature recovery strategy. That was introduced under the Environment Act.

**Lord Watts:** How will they do that?

**George Eustice MP:** The committee should understand that we are not going to create a rival or parallel system that will think about these

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<sup>1</sup> The Minister's office subsequently clarified that this was the Geography in Government Award for Modelling the Geography of Land Use Change.

things. That is the big difference, I would say, between us and Scotland. We have the Environment Act. We are setting long-term environment targets. We have a 25-year environment plan that draws all these things together. Scotland does not have those things. Instead, it has a series of land use strategies.

We will have a land use framework that answers the question of how you deal with competing interests for land use, but it will not drive policy. The policy drivers will be the Environment Act and the Agriculture Act.

**Lord Watts:** Would it be fair to say that this is a top-down system rather than bottom-up, as in Scotland?

**George Eustice MP:** No. The delivery mechanism will very much be bottom-up, because that will be driven by local authorities through the local nature recovery strategies. This particular framework will be a document that basically answers the question that many people are asking: how can you plant trees and grow food? You cannot have both. That is the claim that is levelled against us and that will be what this document articulates.

**David Kennedy:** I think these things will iterate. The land use framework will inform the local nature recovery strategy. It will set out the national priorities. The local nature recovery strategy will pick those up and say, "We could do some tree planting here or some water quality improvement, or whatever". We will then design our scheme. This is under environmental land management, the local nature recovery and the landscape recovery. They will be informed by what is in those local nature recovery strategies.

Q237 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** A whole load of other folk are interested in land as well. It is not just folk who are interested in climate change, food, farming or nature, but the people who are interested in infrastructure, access, recreation, housing and development, and probably umpteen other things that I cannot remember. There is water quality, flood risk management and all that kind of stuff.

Are the current pieces of work that are going on taking account of the interests of BEIS and the Department of LUHC, as I like to call it, as well as other government departments that are to do with local government?

**George Eustice MP:** Yes. Obviously, what happens to that Bill will now be largely dependent on the formation of a new Government. The intention is obviously that in this current Session the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will address many of these issues, such as how we improve the planning system and how we ensure that the planning system takes adequate account of the importance of good drainage and sewage infrastructure. All these matters will be addressed through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill.

Some clauses in the Environment Act dealt with national infrastructure projects in the context of biodiversity net gain. There may well be more

on that particular issue coming up through that particular piece of legislation.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Are DLUHC and BEIS involved in the work as it is moving forward at the moment?

**David Kennedy:** They are, yes. As to the way we came to the food strategy, I have a cross-Whitehall group, which includes BEIS and DLUHC, and it was signed off that we would publish a land use framework in the normal way, through a write-round with Ministers.

We absolutely will have to cover land use for bio-energy feedstocks, which is potentially a major part of the broader carbon strategy with big land use implications. There is a question about how we deal, in the land use framework, with the issue of housing. That is for further discussion when the new Government are in place.

**The Chair:** Do you see the framework covering both rural and urban land? Lady Young asked about housing in a part of that question. Do you see that working together, or are we only looking at rural land use?

**David Kennedy:** Do you mind if I answer?

**George Eustice MP:** Go on, just in case I say the wrong thing.

**The Chair:** Perhaps it is too detailed at the moment.

**David Kennedy:** We have come at this through food strategy. The big question was: what is our approach to food production? We have said that we aim to broadly maintain or increase food production while at the same time meeting environmental objectives and targets. You do not need to deal with the use of urban land in that context to answer the questions that we are setting out to answer. I do not think that will be a major focus.

There is a boundary question, which is about housing expanding from urban and suburban areas into rural areas. As I have said, that is an open question. Whether it is within scope, we will have to see in September.

Q238 **Baroness Mallalieu:** My question really leads on from Baroness Young's question that you have just been answering.

We have heard a lot of evidence from a range of people that land use policy is not joined up and that there is far too much working in silos. There is some indication, from the answers you have just given, that areas that clearly appear to fall within the remit of a framework are not being consulted on at the moment. How has Defra tried to solve this problem to date? How did this particular challenge contribute to your decision to introduce a framework? Will it improve?

**George Eustice MP:** For the reasons David just gave, obviously Defra feeds into planning policy and national planning guidance. Then there are

local plans that each local authority sets, and that becomes the plan that they work to.

I think it is very important with this piece of work that we do not reinvent things that already exist. We should not try to reinvent something that is running in parallel to the environment improvement plan, which is our flagship process for determining what we should do to improve the environment. We must not try to second-guess things that we have already set in train through the Environment Act—for instance, by way of biodiversity net gain.

This land use strategy has quite a specific focus. It may touch on some planning issues, but it is principally to answer the question that people keep telling us needs to be answered, which is: how can you plant trees and farm sustainably but also have food? That is the question that people are asking, from green NGOs through to the National Farmers' Union. We do have a strategy for all of that, but we are now being asked to put that into a document, and that is what we will do.

**Baroness Mallalieu:** We have been looking very much wider than that, from tourism to every sort of access and so on. Are you saying that at the moment the Government are focusing on that rather narrow part?

**George Eustice MP:** They are focusing on the things that we can do on agricultural land. On things like tourism and access, obviously the Agriculture Act makes explicit provision for us to be able to fund policies in that space. Indeed, the first component of our future agriculture policy was the farming in protected landscapes scheme. A big focus of that was on supporting public access to the countryside.

We have the policies to deliver that. The Glover review has already looked in some detail at national parks and the issue of public access. We have responded to that. We will use the powers in the Agriculture Act to deliver some of those recommendations. We are not really seeking to duplicate work that has already been done but to answer that quite specific question.

**The Chair:** What about energy? You are trying to reach net zero. Energy could be an important factor in this and therefore solar panels, even perhaps on-land windmills and wind turbines. There must be a link with BEIS in that respect.

**George Eustice MP:** Yes, and, of course, on biomass. There is a link with BEIS and DLUHC on both those issues.

**David Kennedy:** That will be within scope. I have mentioned bio-energy already. There is a great ambition for the use of bio-energy to meet the net-zero targets. That needs bio-energy feedstocks, which will have to be grown at least in part domestically. That will have to be part of the strategy, which is, "Are we going to use land for food production or something else to achieve environmental objectives?"

There is also a fair question: if we had a big play to put in solar panels all over the countryside and take land out of farming, would that be appropriate? That is within scope for this study, and similarly for wind turbines, although solar is probably the bigger question now given that we have had wind turbines for a long time.

**Q239 Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** Thank you again for attending today. I would like to tease out a bit more from you on this issue of competing strategies. To some extent you have answered my question about the 25-year environment plan, net zero and 30% of land for nature, because it appears that these were all announced independently without taking account of the potential crossover and the impact on an overall land use strategy.

I am still concerned that your own definition of land use is narrower, as Lady Mallalieu has said, than we have envisaged from the evidence that we have collected, particularly on housing and urban, and the fact that brownfield sites are expensive to develop so it is much easier to spread into agricultural land. David, I know you have said that you will reconsider this. I think it ought to be in the strategy. I am keen for you just to think about that a bit more.

Teasing out a bit more on food security, as you said, George, since the invasion of Iraq, food security has become a much bigger issue. I very much welcomed your statement in response to the Dimbleby report on at least maintaining current levels.

How will you deal with other departments if, in our report, we take a broader view of land use? I am thinking of how you manage rural proofing and bring other departments to the table. Can Defra really influence the decisions that will be taken by other government departments, particularly on planning and the impact that that will have at a local and regional level?

**George Eustice MP:** My experience of these things is that the more government departments whose territory you tread on with any document or piece of work like this, the harder it is to get consensus as to what should be done. There is a lot to be said for having something that is focused very much on agricultural land, while recognising that there will be read-across to other things where it is easy for us to get consents, and recognising that DLUHC and other government departments will have their own plans and will consult us on them. They will have their own planning policies, for instance, and national planning guidance and what to do about solar farms, on which we would be consulted.

There is a lot to be said for having something focused, but far be it for me to tell the committee what you could do. It is much easier for a committee to reach a broader set of recommendations than for one government department interacting with many others. I would advise you to go where you think the evidence takes you, which is what committees should do.

**Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** You must have seen, certainly in our part of the world, that the expansion on the fringe of cities into good agricultural land for housing continues at pace. Villages are being subsumed into cities as housing development is encouraged and spreads out. I genuinely believe that there is an impact on our food production capacity when there are alternatives, in many cases, to building on brownfield sites.

**David Kennedy:** There is a discussion to have in September about quite what the boundaries of our study and framework are. We have not ruled out looking at this issue. If you look at the numbers, though, and if you are taking a food production lens, the order of magnitude land use change for environmental objectives is probably significantly larger than any land use change that you might have for purposes of housing.

Q240 **The Earl of Leicester:** Secretary of State, how do the Government ensure that the right thing is being done in the right place and at the right scale to deliver significant and multiple environmental benefits, including, very importantly, diversity loss versus restoring nature, and the pressures that all the competing land uses will have particularly on those two aspects?

**George Eustice MP:** I know that this is very much a feature of the design of all our policies, particularly when it comes to tree planting. It is very important that we plant the right trees in the right place. Some serious errors were made in the 1970s when lots of conifers were planted in peatland areas. They dried out the peats and probably led to more carbon emissions. We want to make sure that we do not repeat those mistakes. We need to be careful about planting trees on some of the podzol soils as well. The wrong type of tree in some of those landscapes could cause a similar type of issue.

In some landscapes, maintaining predominantly a permanent, pasture-type system makes more sense. We are giving some thought to that, and we will ensure that that happens through the eligibility criteria for schemes such as the England Woodland Creation Offer. We require landowners to be able to demonstrate that they are not on a vulnerable soil that would be damaged by tree planting, creating quite a strong presumption in our tree planting programme for native broadleaf species, which have more biodiversity benefits, where possible, but not ruling out conifers, because we will need some conifers to get to the level of tree planting that we need.

There will be other more universal things. Good soil husbandry, improving the organic content of soils, and good nutrient management have multiple benefits for both soil biodiversity and water quality, and we want them to happen at scale right across the farm landscape. Broadly speaking, the schemes that are in the sustainable farming incentive will be pretty much universal, because any farmer who does them, wherever they are, is doing good. Then, at the other end of the scale, elements of eligibility will be required to ensure that we do not plant trees in the wrong places.

**David Kennedy:** Local nature recovery is one of the three new schemes that we will be putting up. We have developed that, we have gone through, and we have said, "What is the set of actions that will form the basis of these schemes that can contribute to biodiversity and net zero and improve water quality?" We have come up with about 100 actions for local nature recovery. We have then gone through and said, "Which of those are specific to the location in order to unlock benefits?" If you do some things in the wrong place they are bad and harmful, some things have no benefit whatever, and some things may be a bit beneficial here but are really beneficial there. A significant proportion of that 100 have location-specific benefits.

We are now working through how we can design the scheme to match those location-specific aspects with the scheme design. We can do that through guidance, through filtering of options depending on the area and local assessments, or through varying our payment rates. We have not made any decisions there, but that is just to show you that we are thinking very much about how you get that location-specific benefit and avoid location-specific harm by doing the wrong thing.

**The Earl of Leicester:** That sounds very laudable and quite top-down. How do you square that with where a landowner or farmer has very good knowledge of his holding and might want to put certain trees and is obviously doing it for good environmental or commercial reasons?

**George Eustice MP:** It is a very good point. My argument throughout in designing the new agriculture policy is that it should principally be about supporting the choices that an individual landowner makes. It is important in all of this that a land use strategy is about articulating a potential model at a macro level for getting from A to B. That is getting from where we are today to getting to a future where there are competing pressures on land use, and we have a sense of how we could enable some land use change through tree planting and peatland restoration but we do not use it as a planning document.

I sometimes feel that some people who advocate land use strategy have in the back of their minds that it will become some sort of spatial planning system that is bolted on to that. I think it is important to avoid that, since property rights and things like the Law of Property Act are central to our legal system. We want to facilitate things like covenants being attached to land to support the environment and so on. There has always been some regulatory restriction on certain land use, not least through the planning legislation, but we do not want to move to a system where we have some kind of centralised government spatial planning system. It is a guide rather than a new legal system.

Q241 **Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** Thank you for coming this afternoon. We have heard from a number of farmers, including tenant farmers, that they are not sure what to expect from the new ELMS regime and that there is a lack of direct support to farmers to help them make informed decisions on how to get the most benefit out of ELMS. There is some concern that the system is quite complicated. You

mentioned earlier that there are 100 actions under the local nature recovery scheme, which indicates that it is quite complicated. What is Defra doing to address that?

**George Eustice MP:** The good news is that in the last couple of years we have seen a really sharp increase in interest in Countryside Stewardship. There was a 40% increase in demand for it last year. Landowners are already moving towards those sorts of agri-environment schemes. We now have 31,000 farmers in England in those schemes. That is about 40% of all farmers in England and it covers about half of all agricultural land. That is a really important first step.

We opened the sustainable farming incentive, which is all about focusing on soil health, helping farmers to assess soil nutrient content, and paying them and incentivising them to have things like green cover crops to prevent soil erosion during the winter and to use nitrogen-fixing legumes where possible to reduce the need for exogenous fertiliser applications. That is all moving in a generally positive direction.

Tenant farmers will not generally have a problem accessing the sustainable farming incentive, since we have made it something that they can get into even if they only have two years left of their tenancy agreement. We think they will be able to get into that reasonably easily. There will be other modules on things like hedgerow management and integrated pest management to follow.

We set it out in quite a bit of detail in the agricultural transition plan that we published in November 2020, and we are rolling out the various components of that as we speak.

Equally, I know that some concerns have been raised about tenant farmers in particular—about whether they will find it difficult to access that—so earlier this year we commissioned Baroness Rock to do a piece of work on access to the schemes by tenant farmers. I met her earlier today. She is working on that piece of work, and we look forward to what she has to say later in the year.

**The Chair:** When is she due to report?

**George Eustice MP:** It will be at some point in the autumn, probably in September.

**David Kennedy:** Regarding the sustainable farming incentive, we opened the window for the soils standard about three weeks ago. The feedback we have received—and it is pretty consistent—is that it is very easy to access; it does not take long at all to sign up for it, which is different from previous schemes; it does not take long to get your agreement. You do not need a land agent to help you do it; you can do it yourself. You do not need an agronomist to advise you, either.

The local nature recovery strategy, which I mentioned, is the next level of ambition for farmers who want to go a bit further. There will probably be a need for advice as part of that, and we are working through where that

advice will come from. It will probably be a mix, as it is now for Countryside Stewardship, of a government body advising and private sector advice. We do not have the answer yet. Certainly, for the sustainable farming incentive, it is easy to access, and that is the feedback we have received.

**Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** Thank you.

**The Earl of Leicester:** Some criticism has been levelled at landscape recovery as being, effectively, too much wilding and pushing agriculture out. Are you thinking that it is a way of land sparing?

**David Kennedy:** Not really. We have had very healthy applications for funding there. We are doing that by selecting a number of projects to develop prior to their making a decision on funding. There is a whole range of things that have been applied for. Some of them are land sparing, but some of them, equally, are land sharing. Some of them are farmers; some of them are not farmers. There is a real mix in there. It is not all about rewilding.

**Baroness Redfern:** I want to clarify whether provision of access to the countryside will be included within ELMS. I know you have some queries about that. Can you confirm that?

**George Eustice MP:** Yes, it already is. A scheme was opened last year called farming in protected landscapes. In fact, a number of people involved in that scheme have said that it is the best scheme that Defra has ever run, which I find encouraging, in so far as these things are encouraging, because it is also the first scheme that Defra has designed and run itself.

Normally, we are trying to implement various EU schemes. Already, a lot of that is around public access, particularly in the national parks. The Agriculture Act makes explicit reference to public access. It is something we can support. We have already started supporting it, as I said, through that first part of the programme, but I envisage there will be other elements as well in the future.

**Baroness Redfern:** Thank you.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** I am a bit confused about local nature recovery. We have an ELM scheme called the local nature recovery scheme and we have local nature recovery strategies that local authorities are going to lead on. How do the two link up?

**George Eustice MP:** I know it may sound confusing. We have deliberately named them similarly because they are addressing a similar challenge but with different money, if I can put it that way. The idea is that local authorities put together the local nature recovery strategies. That could involve designating local nature recovery sites. It could even include national nature reserves or additional local nature reserves. It could use biodiversity net gain funding to support nature objectives in some of those sites.

Some of it could be council owned. Some of it could be done in conjunction with willing landowners and other local partners. We have termed the middle scheme “local nature recovery”, because it is also predominantly around making space for nature on parts of the farmed landscape. There may or may not be a direct overlap with some of those local nature recovery strategies. It is aimed at similar objectives, which is making space for nature within our landscape.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** If I can take you one step further than that, what will the mechanism be to join up the local nature recovery strategies with what might be happening with a fairly large number—100,000—of farmers making decisions about whether they go into the local nature recovery scheme?

**George Eustice MP:** Fundamentally, you cannot get farmers into a scheme unless they want to. You need landowner buy-in. I am very clear about this. You cannot get anything done unless landowners want to participate and you make it worth their while to do so. Fundamentally, we are supporting, under local nature recovery, some group working—trying to facilitate clusters of 50 or 60 farmers in certain geographies so that you have that landscape-scale impact—and working with local partners. It could be the local nature partnership. It could be wildlife trusts in some cases or the RSPB in others, but with willing landowners who sign up to it and participate and get a financial benefit for it.

Some of the funding could come from a combination of biodiversity net gain or local nature recovery. There could be some overlap, but only if you have willing landowners wanting to participate in it.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** No doubt, local authorities will be moaning that they do not have enough money and expertise to do this. Only about 30% of local authorities have an ecologist on the staff. It may have decreased since I last looked at it. Apart from the ELMS budget and biodiversity net gain, you have also set yourself a target of very substantial private finance—£1 billion—coming into the whole system. Can we hear a bit about where that might be generated from?

**George Eustice MP:** On the first point on biodiversity net gain and those local nature recovery strategies, we have made available new burdens funding to local authorities in the normal way. David might correct me if I am wrong, but my recollection is that there has been about £4 million so far to support those new burdens of preparing these strategies and preparing for biodiversity net gain. We see it as probably quite important that they build their capacity to have ecologists in-house.

We are also looking at ways in which Natural England could provide greater support on a cost recovery basis so that you get the local nature expertise of Natural England being brought to bear in these processes as well.

On your final point about private finance, this is an important issue. Lord Benyon is doing a significant piece of work in the department, working

out how we can bring coherence and regulatory integrity to this market. It will be an important part of the future, in my view, particularly where you have land use change and woodland creation, and probably peatland restoration.

Green private finance has an important role to play. We have to make sure that there is integrity and coherence to that market. We have made a start with the woodland carbon code and the peatland code. There is much further to go in that area. It is an embryonic market that is developing, with all the problems and difficulties that can go with such new markets, but we are putting quite a bit of attention into it.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Some of our witnesses have been pretty ambitious for local nature recovery strategies and have typified them to us as a parallel process to the town and country planning system, which ought to be called the town planning system because it does not actually deal with the country. It might be a substitute for the country planning bit of the town and country planning system. Is that how you see it, or do you see it much more focused on agricultural land?

**George Eustice MP:** For the local authority local nature recovery strategies, I could see that being very much areas in which local authorities either co-ordinate with willing landowners to participate in the creation of a new local nature reserve with funding to follow that or create new local nature reserves on land that they own. What we definitely will not do or do not envisage under that is that local authorities will start to develop a competence into agriculture policy that would start to undermine land ownership rights in those areas. Generally speaking, the future agriculture policy that we have is being run by Defra dealing with those landowners and farmers, but there could, in some cases, be some overlap, provided it is around incentives for willing landowners rather than new by-laws that prevent landowners doing certain things.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** On the last question, which is on biodiversity net gain and the governance around the ecosystem market, you have referred to Lord Benyon's work. Do you have anything more to say about how we will get some sort of strict auditing process around what actually happens in the long term, and that land that is converted to biodiversity net gain is not then used for something else five or 10 years later, which is really rather pointless?

**George Eustice MP:** Yes. The codes that have been developed may not be perfect, but they are a very important first stab at this area. The concept of additionality being required is very much at their core; you cannot be paid twice for doing basically the same thing. At the same time, we do not want to preclude the concept of blended finance where you may have some government finance—that may be an agriculture scheme for some work—and then, if you are doing additional things, the ability for additional private finance to come in. It is important that we enable that blended finance model to work, but it is equally important

that there is additionality and you do not just end up with people pretending they are paying for things that someone else has already paid for.

**The Chair:** David, you look as though you want to add to that.

**David Kennedy:** All I would say is that for all the agri-environment schemes that we are doing there is a question: do you pay for land to be converted to forestry and you do not care if in 10 years the forest is ripped out again? That would be counterproductive from a carbon perspective. We will need to have protections in place, but we have a very detailed monitoring and evaluation scheme as well to understand that we are paying for certain things to happen and certain benefits to be generated. We will watch very closely to make sure that that is the case.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Just going back to Lady Young's final point about local nature recovery strategies, there have been local nature recovery strategy pilots, have there not? What lessons have been learned, and how are you going to take that forward?

**George Eustice MP:** I do not want to sound biased, but, largely, do what Cornwall does. They were all generally quite successful. I was told once that Cornwall was the beacon to follow. I am not sure whether that is just because I am a Cornishman and officials thought that that would be a good thing to say. We learned quite a bit from them, to be honest. David, do you want to add to that?

**The Chair:** This is from a non-Cornishman, David.

**George Eustice MP:** As a non-Cornishman to balance things.

**David Kennedy:** As a Mancunian. We have learned that a good local nature recovery strategy will have an assessment of the local area; it will say what the priorities for action in the area are; and it can identify some specific things that need to be done. We talked before about the farmers. It is the farmers who know their land and who will be interested in how they can best benefit their local area and the priorities there. That will inform what farmers come to put together in terms of whole farm plans, which will be within our framework of the new agri-environment scheme. That is how it all fits together.

Q242 **Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** We were encouraged when you stated in your response to the Dimpleby report on the food strategy, as was mentioned earlier, that you were going to introduce a land use framework, and that you were waiting—my words—with interest for the deliberations of this committee. What has become clear from your answers is that you have already done quite a lot of thinking in the department on what you want to include in the land use framework, and that you would be considering more in September, as you mentioned, David.

We are not due to report till towards the end of this year. Are we going to be too late to influence your deliberations? Are we wasting our time? Is it a done deal, or is there still some value in the report that we are going to

spend considerable time in producing?

**George Eustice MP:** I very much expect that we will take longer than you will to come out with a report. I will describe it this way. We have started the work. We have done a lot of thinking. Although it is true, as you said at the start, that we were a bit reticent, for all the reasons I gave, about having another strategy document that would be largely repeating things that were in other documents, we have done a lot of thinking about land use, where things might need to change, how you would square the circle between maintaining agricultural output and having some land use change, and how you would get more sensitive and more sustainable agriculture in other landscapes.

We have done a lot of thinking about it over the last couple of years, and it has been a constant feature of our consideration in all our design work for the future agriculture policy. I do not think anything will happen until a new Government are in place. When that new Government are in place, they will want to think about this further. It is highly unlikely that we will be publishing anything in advance of your report. I am sure that whoever is in this post at that point will read your report carefully before they commit to publishing any consultation document that Defra might be planning.

**David Kennedy:** We did not say when in 2023 we will publish. It is not realistic that it will be January or February. There will be good time to take account of whatever you say. That is not to commit to a particular publication date, which needs to be agreed.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** This stuff is quite complicated. An awful lot of people are gathering a huge amount of really good data on all the issues that reflect on land use. Is there any plan to have an accessible, boiled-down, simple conglomeration of the data so that people get the message in a clear way and have access to the data in an open access format that means that they can begin to look on a granular scale at the level of their own land as well as at local authority level and possibly even regional level? Every stone you turn over has somebody under it gathering information on land use.

**George Eustice MP:** Probably six or so years ago, Defra opened up all its data and published it, and made it all publicly available to try to help inform things. There are a lot of other citizen science-type projects in this space. Lots of the local green NGOs have useful data. The short answer is yes. Understanding the data is crucial to everything we are trying to do, including on our Environment Act targets. There are some very good projects that I have seen gathering and harnessing data, and the more we can share that and make that available to everybody and they make their data available to us the better.

**David Kennedy:** That is a good point. We have a lot of data. We have modelling capability. When we put out the land use framework, people would want to see and benefit from seeing the evidence base that underpins it. Let us see what we can do there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Secretary of State, and David, for coming before us. Thank you both for your evidence.