

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Pre-appointment hearing with the
Government's preferred candidate for Chair of
Natural England, HC 1979

Tuesday 26 February 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 26 February 2019.

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Mary Creagh; Alex Cunningham; Mr Philip Dunne; Zac Goldsmith; Mr Robert Goodwill; John Grogan; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kerry McCarthy; Mrs Sheryll Murray; David Simpson; Angela Smith; Julian Sturdy.

Questions 1 - 88

Witnesses

I: Tony Juniper, the Government's preferred candidate for Chair of Natural England

Examination of witness

Witness: Tony Juniper

Q1 **Chair:** Tony, we will start the formal procedure. Would you introduce yourself for the record, please?

Tony Juniper: My name is Tony Juniper. I am an environmentalist. I joined the process to join Natural England as the Chair and I am delighted to have reached this point in the process.

Q2 **Chair:** Excellent. What is going to happen—and I had better make this absolutely clear so I don't confuse you right from the start—is that the EFRA Committee is going to ask all the odd questions, 1, 3, 5, and I will chair those questions. I will hand over on 2, 4, 6 to Mary and there will be questions asked on behalf of the Environmental Audit Committee. I hope you are absolutely clear on that.

Tony Juniper: Thank you.

Q3 **Chair:** I will start off with the first question. How do you propose to ensure that Natural England is sufficiently independent from DEFRA?

Tony Juniper: Natural England has quite a complex set of roles with central government. It is an adviser and I hope it provides impartial and science-based advice regarding a whole range of policy and other choices. It is a regulator, implementing laws that were passed in Parliament and also it is a delivery partner for Government. In all ways it needs to have a close working relationship with DEFRA but at times to be slightly at arm's length. Probably the key to this is about being clear what role is being played at any one time in the kinds of relationships we have with officials and Ministers in DEFRA, to be very close when we are delivering policy and partnership and to be more at arm's length when we are undertaking advice sometimes that might be on controversial subjects. It is really about being clear what kind of role we are playing at any one time.

The other day I was sent a document by colleagues at Natural England setting out the powers and duties that are discharged by the organisation and I was struck that there are more than 500 of them. To say that the relationship is complex is to put it mildly.

Q4 **Chair:** The retiring Chair of Natural England, Andrew Sells, came before us the other day and he was slightly worried by the fact that Natural England no longer has its own press officer and so those things have to go through DEFRA. Generally speaking, will you want to enhance the role of Natural England and, therefore, how is that relationship with DEFRA going to work? I should not put words in your mouth but is DEFRA taking over Natural England? Are you going to take over DEFRA? Where do you see it working?

Tony Juniper: During my early days as Chair, should I be appointed, I would be looking very closely to understand some of these relationships.



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I did look at my predecessor's contribution to your session and was struck by the comments about independence and the perception that there has been a loss of the distinctive voice of Natural England, in part linked with the closure of its own press office and that being centralised within DEFRA. On the one hand, I think that everyone would appreciate that at a time of tight public finances we would want to find efficiency savings, including through centralising some functions that could be done for a number of organisations at once. I know that HR and finance have been similarly centralised.

On the question of the press office, however, that is probably slightly different insofar as what we would like to have is the ability to speak our own voice without having to go through filters that might be created through a centralised function.

- Q5 **Chair:** Looking at different things you have said at different times in different organisations that you have worked for, you can be and are reasonably outspoken, and I might refer to one or two of those more in a minute. It is all very well putting out a press release but aren't you worried that it will then get doctored by DEFRA? I don't know that I would be very keen as a Select Committee Chair to have all my press releases and all the Committee's press releases put through another Department. It is not actually another Department, but it is another wing. You are not DEFRA itself. I would like a more straightforward answer, a more yes or no answer as to whether you feel you should have a press office, or you should not have a press office.

Tony Juniper: Yes, we should have a press office. The question will be whether that can go through DEFRA or whether it needs to be something that is entirely separate. I think that would come down to the nature of the relationship and the extent to which we are determining our own content compared with having a well-run press office that is getting press releases and communicating via other routes in an efficient way with the people who need to know it. If we are managing our own messages and content, that might be a very good way of doing it, but I am not in a position yet to know whether that is the situation.

- Q6 **Chair:** As we move forward into a new agricultural policy, a new Agriculture Bill, how do you see the relationship between DEFRA and yourself as Chair of Natural England, if appointed, developing? Surely you are going to need to have a real input into future policy.

Tony Juniper: Indeed. This is again a question about the relationship between Natural England and DEFRA that is based very much on there being a partnership in what we are trying to do and how we are trying to do it, recognising that on occasion there will need to be a separate and independent voice that is speaking frankly with evidence to Government in a way that reflects the regulatory duties and the situation in the outside world. But when it comes to the big questions around agriculture, net gain, the implementation of the 25-year environment plan, the development of a nature recovery network, that will have to be done in



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partnership with DEFRA and a very close working relationship will be required to make that work.

Q7 **Chair:** Do you feel you will have that strong voice with DEFRA?

Tony Juniper: I would hope to. That would be my intention. I would intend to take the evidence base concerning the state of nature in England and to be encouraging colleagues in DEFRA to work with us in partnership to bend the curves in the direction that is set out in policy. We have now set out in a 25-year environment plan that we are going to leave nature in better shape than we found it. That is a truly radical idea. I can't think of any other country in the world that has gone beyond making things less bad to making them better. That is going to require a deep and joint relationship between ourselves and DEFRA and indeed other arms of Government.

Q8 **Mary Creagh:** Thanks, Tony, for what you said about the Office for Environmental Protection, which was born out of one of the Environmental Audit Committee's previous reports into the commission-shaped hole, the governance structure, if we leave the EU.

You talked about the role of the body as an adviser, a regulator and a delivery partner, but isn't it the case that this is an organisation that is effectively in crisis, that has lost over half of its budget, down from £220 million in 2010 to just over £100 million today, which has seen 460 staff transfer to the Rural Payments Agency and which, as Neil was saying, has effectively lost its independent voice? Can I press you on that independent voice? What do you want Natural England to do? Do you want it to have an independent voice?

Tony Juniper: I touched on the independent voice a moment ago in the sense of the extent to which there is an ability to speak and express a distinctive view through its own press office. Independence is in some large part also linked to the extent to which we have the resources to be able to do the job that society is asking us to do. As I said before, there is a very wide range of duties and powers that are discharged by Natural England, some very big tasks that are there all the time for the designation and protection of the sites of special scientific interest, the licensing side on protected species, delivery of a whole range of different policies on a diminishing budget.

I am not in the organisation yet and so am unable to detect in detail how this is affecting things but from what I pick up from colleagues in the wider environmental community and what I see published from different organisations, including Natural England's labour union, I see an organisation that is suffering very much from reduced staff morale as a result of repeated budget cuts at a time of rising expectations on the environmental side. I think it is fair to say that our society now is looking to increase our environmental ambitions and delivery and obviously an organisation with diminishing resources not only is in a weaker position to do that but also its ability to express an independent view goes down



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because it does not have the people there to even know what is going on. The science base is vital and the more we salami slice the resource the less able we are to have that independent voice. These two things are fundamentally connected.

As the incoming Chair, if there were two big issues that I have registered as I approach this point in the process, it is that question about independence—is Natural England independent—and the other part of it is about the resources. As I say, on the independence side it is quite complicated, given that there does need to be a closeness of relationship, but on the money side there is a really big question about the extent to which we can deliver on what is currently required never mind what is expected of us in the future as we approach, for example, the implementation of the 25-year environment plan and a whole range of other challenges that could accompany our departure from the European Union should we make that step.

Q9 Mary Creagh: You haven't said that you think you should have an independent press office and that answer has been noted. What do you think about the fact that the agency is no longer meeting its statutory targets on its responses to planning applications, for example? It is failing to meet its 21-day timescales on planning applications and the numbers that are now delayed have just ballooned, more than doubled from 2013 to 2017. It has gone up from just under 200 to well over 500 that are behind the times.

Tony Juniper: On the press office, I am not saying that we should not have an independent press office. I am saying it is something that I would like to look at at any early stage to understand the pros and cons of there being a centralised function. It could be that that is working; it may be that I will take the view that we do need a separate press office.

In relation to those numbers and the extent to which Natural England is not able to keep up with the workload as expressed there, I am not close enough yet to the organisation to understand exactly what is going on there but what I am picking up from various conversations is that is a reflection of the diminishing capacity in the organisation. There are many fewer people now than there were some years ago, yet the burden and the requirements on the organisation have not gone down and quite soon we are expecting them to go up as we seek to implement various elements of Government policy.

Q10 Mary Creagh: Have you spoken to any members of the Prospect trade union that organises in Natural England?

Tony Juniper: No, but I did look at their report that was published recently and I was very troubled to see not only the effect on the capacity but also the effect on staff morale. In any organisation that I have worked in over the years, capacity is one thing in the sense of whether you can do what you are designed to do but the other big part of it is the extent to which your people feel motivated and supported and



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empowered. At the moment it looks like we do have a challenge there in the staff body. This then relates to the extent to which there is a wider job to be done now, including recruiting a new chief executive. All these things link together as part of a package.

Q11 Mary Creagh: Michael Gove has said that Natural England will have the resources it needs. We have got a spending review on 13 March. What are your red lines for the spending review? What have you told the Secretary of State?

Tony Juniper: I have not had an opportunity yet to speak with the Secretary of State about the spending review, but I don't think the organisation can be expected to deliver on what it is currently being asked to do with further cuts. I would strongly urge that it needs to have its budget increased, especially if we are going to be able—

Q12 Mary Creagh: By how much?

Tony Juniper: I have not had a chance yet to start looking at numbers but will be speaking to the staff at an early stage, should I be appointed, in order to start understanding the implications of what we think will be coming towards us quite soon, for example the implementation of a nature recovery network, what we might need to be doing in the development of ideas about net gain. I hope the net gain idea will start to raise some money for conservation.

One of the things I hope that we could reflect in the spending review is a wider understanding that is now coming from some of the work that is being done by Natural England, the Natural Capital Committee, various university departments, various NGOs, revealing how the investment in nature brings big dividends to the country and should not simply be seen as a cost. I do think at times when we have had spending reviews in the past the natural environment is seen as something that can be left for later, something that really is a cost that can be only afforded in the good times. We now know, however, that investing in a healthy natural environment can help us with reducing flood risk, improving human health, even improving agricultural productivity. I hope that we can begin a dialogue across Government that would recognise some of that.

Q13 Mary Creagh: DEFRA is an unprotected spending Department and it has been reported in the press that unprotected Departments are looking at cuts of between 3% and 8%. Do you think a standstill budget is a reasonable target to aim for or do you want to see the budget increase in real terms?

Tony Juniper: I would like to see the budget increase in real terms from what I have seen so far, but I would need to sit and speak with colleagues and then speak with the Secretary of State.

Q14 Kerry McCarthy: So far we have been talking very much about the mechanics and the processes of Natural England and how it will function as an institution, but clearly something motivated you to apply for this



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job. You have such a background in the environmental movement. What is it that you hope to achieve, not things like restoring staff morale, sorting out the finance and all that sort of thing, that is all very well and good, but what are the things that you think you could make a difference on in its underlying role of protecting our natural environment?

Tony Juniper: I have been involved with the protection and the enhancement of the natural environment for my entire career. It will be coming up to 35 years this year. I have worked as an advocate, a campaigner, a policy analyst. I have been a writer and a university lecturer. I have advised private sector companies. It seems to me that we are on the cusp of quite big and exciting change in the world of conservation right now, not least because we have a wider understanding in science and in policymaking about the importance of the natural environment.

At the moment, we have a whole raft of quite exciting new ideas coming centre stage. One is the idea of the recovery of nature. The 25-year environment plan says that. This is something that is very exciting considering the last several decades of debate. We have the net gain idea where we are hoping to start finding ways of linking, for example, housing development with the recovery of nature. That is an incredibly exciting opportunity. In our farm policy public money will now be moved away from area payments and towards public money for public goods. It is an incredibly exciting opportunity to be working with the farming community, to be doing more not only for agriculture but also for wildlife. All of this is against the backdrop of growing public understanding about the need for urgent action.

Looking at Natural England from the outside and seeing the organisation at this juncture whereby we have had the period when I think it is fair to say the organisation has been looking like it is rather beleaguered and under pressure, there is then the opportunity for a new Chair to come and lead the organisation into this new period when we might be seeking to increase the positive impacts that the nature conservation agency of England can deliver through these new policies. That is really why I applied, to see this hugely exciting period coming in an organisation that could benefit from the kind of experience I have developed over more than three decades of working in this sector, not only on the conservation side but also running organisations and leading them in a way whereby they feel as though they can get things done.

Q15 Kerry McCarthy: But in most of your other roles in organisations, you are very much outside pushing for the Government to do things. This is a slightly more conflicted role. Do you think you might not get a bit frustrated by some of the constraints?

Tony Juniper: No, I don't think so. Probably the perception of my contribution is coloured by the extent to which the bits that have been more public are the bits that people see as me. I have been an energetic campaigner and I am very proud of what I have been able to achieve



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over many years in legislation and in public opinion. But also I have been working very much behind the scenes facilitating processes, trying to build consensus around areas of action that are very complicated, such as sustainable fisheries, conservation of the tropical rainforest, and working at a very high level with companies in a very invisible way and finding opportunities for big businesses to be able to see business opportunities for delivering on the conservation side. I am used to working outside the public roles that perhaps have been more visible.

In the end, all of my work has been around achieving what can possibly be done for the natural environment. I am not wedded to any particular style of working. What I am looking for is to improve the environment for the benefit of society.

Q16 Julian Sturdy: Tony, I wanted to come back on something you have just said on that question. You talked about your campaigning activities before applying for this job. Do you see your campaigning activities coming into conflict with the position of the Chair of Natural England at any point going forward?

Tony Juniper: My campaigning activities are in the past. I may go back to a campaigning role at some point in the future but as I depart from my present role at WWF, where I am the Executive Director for Advocacy and Campaigns, and move towards this role, it would be different. I would be moving into a different role, so I would leave campaigning behind. Having said that, I think that in the world that we are now moving into with the growing consensus about environmental issues and the urgency of dealing with them, quite a lot of the things that I campaigned on in the past might have looked controversial 20 years ago but are pretty mainstream now. Quite a few of them are Government policy. Where I move to with Natural England I think I would be looking at what is the logical next stage of having been an effective campaigner of implementing the things I was campaigning for.

Q17 Julian Sturdy: What you are saying is that you are anticipating some of your campaigns that you have campaigned on coming in as part of Chair of Natural England. I accept that some are now mainstream, but some are not mainstream. Are you accepting that some of those will come in and be part of your role as Chair of Natural England?

Tony Juniper: No. The things that I am talking about are mainstream, for example recovery of blanket bogs. I campaigned for a very long time on peatlands in Britain on the grounds that they are important for carbon capture, for water purification, flood risk reduction, biodiversity conservation. Today we are implementing policies that recognise all of that and I would consider it an enormous privilege, having worked for many years making the case for those ecosystems, to now be in a position to work on the ground with the landowners, the farmers and the other interests in moving from A to B.

Q18 Julian Sturdy: I wasn't specifically talking about the mainstream ones. I



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agree with you on that. I am talking about ones that might not be seen as mainstream at the moment.

Tony Juniper: Do you have a specific one in mind?

Julian Sturdy: Maybe we will go on to that in further questions, but it was just picking up on that.

Tony Juniper: Yes, sure. I think the generality would be that I would not expect to be campaigning from this role. I would not be doing that.

Q19 **Mr Philip Dunne:** I am going to ask you some quick questions about the recruitment process and I have to go more or less when I have finished so it will not be in response to anything that you have said. Could you tell us how you first heard about this opportunity?

Tony Juniper: I was on the train going to London and I saw a tweet saying that the Chair of Natural England had announced his resignation. I think that was back in June and I registered that fact. I thought it was very interesting and, for the reasons I just mentioned to Kerry, it struck me as being an interesting moment to hear that news. Then I had various conversations with people at conferences who over a cup of coffee said, "Would you consider applying for that role?" and I said I might do and then I did.

Q20 **Mr Philip Dunne:** Did any of those people include the Secretary of State?

Tony Juniper: No.

Q21 **Mr Philip Dunne:** He did not invite or ask you to apply?

Tony Juniper: No, he didn't.

Q22 **Mr Philip Dunne:** Did you apply before or after the resignation of the chief executive?

Tony Juniper: Before.

Q23 **Mr Philip Dunne:** How many rounds of process did you go through?

Tony Juniper: The first round was a letter and a CV. That was the first stage. That went to a panel who then sifted and made a short list. There was an interview face to face with the panel and then there was a pause and then we had a follow-up, which was a further interview with the panel but on the telephone just because of everyone being scattered around. The final stage was a meeting with the Secretary of State right at the very end and this is the further next stage.

Q24 **Mr Philip Dunne:** Was the pause prompted by the resignation of the chief executive?

Tony Juniper: I don't know. I was never told that although I was aware that he did go in that period. He went after the first panel interviews, I believe.



Q25 **Mr Philip Dunne:** Did you feel this was a fair and transparent process?

Tony Juniper: I did. I felt it was a fair process. I felt as though it was very thorough. The very fact that we started in July and we are now in February and it is still going, if length of time is anything to go by, it has been extremely thorough.

Q26 **Mr Philip Dunne:** That may not be atypical for Government appointments, but it does seem very long.

Tony Juniper: I think it is quite long. There are many things going on in the wider discussion around policy and politics at the moment, so maybe that explains partly why. But it has felt very thorough, it has felt very fair and I did have the impression that the panel stages were very much based upon criteria that were being used in order to assess the candidates in relation to one another in a fair way. I have nothing to suggest that in any way it has been biased or unfair.

Q27 **Mr Philip Dunne:** How long are you committed for in the post?

Tony Juniper: As I understand it, it is a two times three-year appointment with the first three years being confirmed after this, should that be the wish of the Secretary of the State and the Committee. Then there is the prospect of a three-year extension after the first three years. I would hope to be there for six years in order to make the best possible use of the opportunity.

Q28 **Mary Creagh:** You are the executive director at WWF. When you were appointed to that role, were you appointed by a telephone panel or an in-person panel?

Tony Juniper: I was appointed via an in-person panel and then quite a few conversations subsequently.

Q29 **Mary Creagh:** I don't think it is normal that a panel interviews by phone and I don't think that is best practice.

Tony Juniper: The first panel interview was face to face and then there was a reason to go back to test. Now you are asking, I am remembering that I think part of the reason why we did a second interview with the panel stage was because of the resignation of the chief executive and some questions there about leadership and how to build leadership in an organisation. I think it was prompted by that, but that was an unscheduled part of the process.

Q30 **Mary Creagh:** Was it the same panel?

Tony Juniper: Yes, it was the same panel and they conducted a standard interview process, as I understand it. Obviously I was only in the one bit that I was in. At that stage I don't know how many candidates they were down to, but however many were left we were all subject to the same piece of process, as I understand it.

Q31 **Mrs Murray:** Welcome, Mr Juniper. I would like to continue along the



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trend that my colleague Mr Sturdy started. Clearly in response to this Committee you said that, "I am not presently involved in any party-political activities. My only recent activity with the Green Party was to provide a foreword to a book about the work of Green Party MEPs". You can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe you gave an endorsement and made a donation to the 2017 election campaign fund for a Green candidate. At a fringe event at the Conservative Party conference last year, October 2018, you attended and sat beside the Minister at a vegan breakfast. In July 2015, I believe it was, you wrote an article for *The Guardian* where you described the Conservative Government as "overseeing the worst period of environmental policy I have seen in 30 years". Given these very recent views that you have publicly stated, can you ensure that you will be able to uphold the position of the Chair of Natural England without any partisan influence or political conflicts of interest?

Tony Juniper: Yes. I don't remember making that donation to a Green Party candidate and if I did it would have—do you have a figure there?

Mrs Murray: No, I don't think I have a figure.

Tony Juniper: It might have been £50 now you mention it. It seems so insignificant as to actually slip my mind, but thank you for reminding me.

Q32 **Mrs Sheryll Murray:** It was for 2017. It was involving a candidate in Brighton, I believe.

Tony Juniper: Okay. The Member for Brighton, yes. I am trying to remember. Anyway, if it was something I donated it would have been a very small donation. But I am a Green Party member and I am a Green Party voter in some elections, depending on the circumstances prevailing at the time and in which election as well, depending on which Assembly it is, but I would not consider myself as strongly party political one way or the other. One of the things that has coloured my activities over the years—and I think it is fair to say this—is that I have encouraged leadership on the environmental and conservation side in all parties. If you go back a little further, probably you will find things saying equally challenging conclusions about Labour Governments as you may find more recent views expressed in relation to Conservative Government policies. Also you will find articles from me warmly congratulating Conservative politicians in their leadership on the environmental side. There is one article there that is—

Q33 **Mrs Murray:** If I could just come back to you there, because you also went on to say that George Osborne, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, was entirely to blame for the Conservative Party's policy on the environment.

Tony Juniper: I don't think I used exactly that quote, did I, but what I would have said—

Q34 **Mrs Murray:** "There is no doubt that this new period has little to do with



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evidence and everything to do with ideology.” You went on to say that George Osborne was entirely to blame for this. It was an article you wrote on 24 July 2015.

Tony Juniper: This would be in response to various statements that were being made in the run-up to that period, which were quite hostile to us taking—

Q35 **Mrs Murray:** We had a Conservative Government from only May 2015. Prior to that there was a coalition Government, but you did choose to single out the Conservatives.

Tony Juniper: I did at that moment and my reasoning for that was based upon some quite strident remarks that were made, which really were attacks on some of the environmental policies that we had taken quite a long time to put in place. One quote from the Chancellor that I recall, which I thought was indicative of the drift of policy at the time, was how the European Union habitats directive was a ridiculous burden on British business. That was the view that was being expressed. For a conservationist, I think it was important for me to stand up and say, “This is not true and the conservation and protection of nature, including through rules that we have entered into with partners across the European Union, actually is good for British business”. That was all in the spirit and the cut and thrust of debate.

As I say, today we are in a far happier place with the consensus that has now broken out across parties about the extent to which we should invest in the protection and enhancement of the environment, not only for reasons of its beauty and the fact that it is irreplaceable but also because it is good for business and good for society.

Q36 **Mrs Murray:** Can we take it from that that you can ensure that you will be able to uphold the position of the Chair of Natural England without any partisan influence or political conflicts of interest in your opinion?

Tony Juniper: Yes, I can say that. Thank you.

Q37 **Mary Creagh:** Are you going to stay a member of the Green Party?

Tony Juniper: Yes, I think I will remain a member of the Green Party although on reflection if this is something that would help to underline party political neutrality, I will review that. You have reminded me, Mary, that in my days at Friends of the Earth, when it was very important to be free of any party-political affiliation, I was not the member of any political party during that period and perhaps it is time to return to that.

Chair: I think it is relevant that you made a donation to a campaign that you have only just remembered. We are conscious of that.

Q38 **Julian Sturdy:** Tony, just going back to my earlier questions and following on, I wanted to home in a little bit on your comments on upland management. We have touched on blanket bog and I entirely agree with you on that. I visited some amazing work being carried out on North



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Yorkshire Moors, not far away from my constituency, on reinstated blanket bog. The work being done there is great stuff and should be championed. But do you favour scaling back current upland management in favour of rewilding, which I think is something you have talked about in the past?

Tony Juniper: What I have talked about in the past is the extent to which we might get more value for society from our uplands by managing them in a more intelligent way from the point of view of the wide range of ecosystem service benefits we could get. When it comes to blanket bog, the United Kingdom is one of the most important countries on planet earth for that kind of ecosystem and it is delivering a wide range of benefits here in the UK as well as globally. It is the biggest carbon store by a big margin and could be taking more carbon if those ecosystems were managed in a more sustainable manner. It is providing a great deal of fresh water, especially to those towns and cities adjacent to areas of blanket bog—the moors in the south-west of England, the North Yorkshire Moors and the Pennines—in a way that is much cheaper and more secure than through machinery and chemicals alone, and also flood risk reduction.

Julian Sturdy: But on the rewilding question.

Tony Juniper: Yes, I am coming to that. I take the view on rewilding anywhere, not just in the uplands but in the lowlands too, that it is one end of a spectrum. Conservation has a wide range of approaches and management tools that we can use to achieve the goals that we have. Those goals, broadly speaking in terms of the Natural England purpose, are around the conservation and enhancement of the biodiversity of the natural environment and protection and enhancement of landscapes.

Rewilding in some circumstances is one tool that we have for doing that right through to things that are much more about high levels of human management and intervention, for example in urban parks. Hay meadows is a good example of a highly managed ecosystem that if you left it to go wild it soon would not be a hay meadow. You would not advocate rewilding in all circumstances, but you might say in some places it makes sense, not least because we can get more value from certain ecosystems for people if we go down that route.

Various people are now beginning to explore different ways in which this can go and there are different reasons for different rewilding in different circumstances. One near to where I live is Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire. This is a lowland, heavily intensively farmed part of the east of England. There are large areas there being taken out of cereals production and turned into restored wildlife habitat. The biggest benefit that we find there is an area of the country where the urban population is growing very rapidly but there are very few places for people to go outside and enjoy natural environments. In that part of the country you might say there is a good case for rewilding. In some of the uplands you might say it would be good to have wooded valleys, possibly with reintroduced animals like beavers, in order to reduce flood risk and increase carbon



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storage, but you would not want to do that everywhere and you certainly would not want to do it in ways that were going to interfere with other uses of the landscape.

My views on rewilding are it is an exciting and useful tool, but we would not want to do it willy-nilly or in large areas without thinking. We want to blend it into the landscape as one approach alongside many others.

Q39 **Julian Sturdy:** I take from that what you have said is that you would back a change in how upland management is currently being carried out?

Chair: I think you have to say yes or no. Do you like rewilding or don't you? Where are you? Let's get to grips with this answer rather than going round and round it. I think we want a straightforward answer, please.

Tony Juniper: I would like to give you a nuanced answer, Chair. I do support change in management in uplands, but it does not necessarily only involve rewilding. One of the things that has become understood during—

Q40 **Chair:** But either you do support rewilding, or you don't. I think the answer that we are getting is that you do.

Tony Juniper: Well, I do, but not everywhere all the time.

Q41 **Chair:** You do?

Tony Juniper: Yes, I do, but not everywhere all the time.

Chair: Okay, that is fine.

Q42 **Julian Sturdy:** How much rewilding are you envisaging? You talked about fenlands rewilding and that is some of the most productive arable land in the country.

Tony Juniper: Temporarily. The peat is evaporating into the atmosphere very quickly.

Q43 **Julian Sturdy:** How much rewilding would you support?

Tony Juniper: To be very clear, if I said 1% of the British landmass to experiment and to do this in ways that it is being led by the landowning interests rather than it being imposed. A very good example is the National Trust one I mentioned in Cambridgeshire. Knepp Castle in Sussex is another. I understand landowners along the north Norfolk coast and farming landowners in the Norfolk Broads are looking to do rewilding. If we said over the period of the next decade that we wanted to rewild 1% of mainland Britain to see how that goes, I think that might be a reasonable aspiration.

Q44 **Angela Smith:** Tempted as I am to wax lyrical about upland blanket bog quite close to my constituency, I want to go back to the issue of party affiliation, which is quite dear to my heart at the moment. You are a member of the Green Party. I don't necessarily see that as a barrier to the appointment, but if the Green Party is on a council somewhere and is



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delivering environmental services in any way that you think is wrong, do you consider yourself capable of standing back and criticising the Green Party if that is necessary, when it is in office?

Tony Juniper: If I was to criticise the Green Party as much as the Green Party criticises me, I would consider that as evening the score.

Q45 **Angela Smith:** Let's have the question the right way round, if you don't mind.

Tony Juniper: Yes. No, absolutely and when I stood as a candidate for the Green Party back in 2010 I was very public in my disagreement with several areas of our manifesto. Party politics for me has always been about the best fit rather than a total slavish agreement with the lines that come from policymaking process. There were things that the Green Party was advocating that when I stood in public meetings and spoke to the constituents I said, "I don't agree with this" and did it very publicly and very transparently. At the moment I can't say for sure exactly where we have reached in policymaking on the idea of natural capital, for example, but I have had very fundamental disagreements with colleagues in the Green Party who think the idea of natural capital is a dangerous one that will harm the environment whereas I take the view that it is a very powerful way of reframing the discussion about the purpose of conservation and environmental protection, and we have agreed to disagree on that. I would anticipate that there would be more of that into the future.

But as I say, my experience of all of this, and certainly my motivation, is to try to build the broadest possible consensus, whether it is in business among landowning interests or in politics, to be able to solve these problems. None of them can be solved by any sector or any one political persuasion. If you look back at my career, I have lobbied and sought to persuade politicians of all persuasions as we have gone along and found reason to disagree with all of them at different times, including Green Party friends.

Q46 **Chair:** One final thing from me before we leave this point. You have very strong views on the badger cull. In 2014 you tweeted not only was it wrong but also you were very uncomplimentary about the then Secretary of State Owen Paterson. You are thinking for three years, you are thinking for six years, so you could have different Secretaries of State. Are you confident you can work with all of them? Natural England, whatever its controversies, does license the badger cull. Can I have your assurances on record that you are not going to interfere with what is Government policy?

Tony Juniper: There were two questions there, Chair. I will deal with the one about the Secretaries of State very quickly. In my entire career I think I have proved that I can be very adaptable and work with pretty much anyone so long as we have a good constructive working relationship. I hope to be able to work with anybody.



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Q47 **Chair:** If you had somebody with the same views as Owen Paterson had—because we are a broad church in the Conservative Party, as many parties are. You could have a different Government; you could have a different view altogether. Can you work with people coming from all different directions? You certainly did not show that with—I am not going to read out what your tweet was, but it can be looked up. It was 28 February 2014. Please answer the question.

Tony Juniper: On the badger cull, this goes back to your first question about the nature of the relationship between Natural England and DEFRA and the extent to which in some part this is about being a delivery partner for Government policy. Government policy will be shaped by a whole range of different opinions. One of the opinions that I would hope Natural England would be able to bring in would be the conservation science side of this and to help explain to Ministers what would be the most effective way of solving a particular problem, in this case controlling bovine tuberculosis, which is affecting the businesses of dairy and beef farmers. Nobody wants to see those businesses being undermined by a disease that we can control but what I would hope is that—

Q48 **Chair:** Do you accept that this is one of the tools in controlling bovine TB? There are movement controls, cattle controls. Do you believe that the badger cull is one of the tools?

Tony Juniper: It is one of the tools that is being used at the moment. My view has been as a result of my engagement as President of The Wildlife Trusts and the work that we have done there is that vaccination would be more effective. I take that view as my current understanding and the research that I have done to date. Should I arrive as the Chair of Natural England, I would look very carefully at the science again and hope to be convinced that what we have at the moment is rational and based upon the best available evidence. Should there be new evidence coming—and this is the nature of science, we are always gathering new data and interpreting data—to suggest that we could do better in being able to control the spread of that disease, I would hope to be able to speak to Ministers about that, but I would not publicly disagree with Ministers.

Q49 **Chair:** You are quite prepared to look at the science or look at the science of vaccination.

Tony Juniper: Yes.

Q50 **Chair:** Are you also prepared to look at the science now that shows that the badger cull is working in those infected areas? Science works in both directions and you will be Chair of Natural England. That is part of your job. At the moment a licensed badger cull is Government policy. Are you prepared to license badger culling?

Tony Juniper: I will look at the science and I will license as directed if this is Government policy and Natural England's job in that circumstance is to implement Government policy. If it is part of the relationship then



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Natural England would be required to do that. At the same time, I hope the capacity would be in the organisation to take a considered and science-based view given that badgers are a protected species and it is the duty of Natural England in its purpose to conserve protected species that are—

- Q51 **Chair:** I very much accept that, and I am very happy to look at the science that you might provide, but I am asking the question: are you prepared to look at the science that is now showing the different areas that cull has affected?

Tony Juniper: Yes, I am very much prepared to look at the science. I have not done lately but I am looking forward to that being one of the piles of documents on my desk should I be Chair of Natural England.

- Q52 **Mary Creagh:** I wanted to respond to something Julian said about productive fenland. We did a report into the fens and blanket bog restoration—which I am sure will be in your reading list if you have not already read it—which said that some of that land would be economically unproductive within a generation. The forward-thinking farmers are looking at what plan B, C and D is going to be and, of course, you have the whole issue of coastal erosion.

Julian Sturdy: But if the usual farming practice is to increase it, I imagine it will go the other way.

Mary Creagh: Yes, but so far that has not happened, and we have the photos in our report to show the two-metre soil loss from the fens.

Tony Juniper: Yes, absolutely two metres plus, four metres in some parts.

Mary Creagh: Those farming practices clearly have not been employed in some places.

- Q53 **Kerry McCarthy:** I was particularly shocked to hear about the vegan breakfast. I am asking about the Office of Environmental Protection. When that comes in it could create challenges with Natural England working alongside it. How do you see that relationship working?

Tony Juniper: I don't know. This is the subject of legislation that is still in draft and there are some quite big questions relating to how this finally lines up. One thing to ask for is some more clarity around the purpose of the Office for Environmental Protection and exactly what kind of role it will be fulfilling should we leave the European Union. The basic idea of this is to replace the European Commission and European Court of Justice with some body inside the UK that can discharge the functions of those organisations once we have left the EU. There is quite a big piece of thinking that needs to be done about how this fits in with the existing regulatory and other machinery that we have in the UK.

There are two things on the relationship that we would have with the Office for Environmental Protection going forward. One thing is going to



be the extent to which we have overlapping interests in regulation and the other one is the extent to which we might be taken to task by the Office for Environmental Protection itself insofar as Natural England is an emanation of the state. Insofar as we are the state delivering on certain things, it might be that we would be prosecuted by the Office for Environmental Protection. I think that is plausible in how this might unpack as we go forward. There is a lot of complexity there in how we build that extra organ into the existing pieces of the Environment Agency, Natural England and others.

I have not fully processed yet exactly how this would work, although there are some comparable questions that were raised in the early part of this conversation about the extent to which it has sufficient resources to do its job, will it be adequately funded, and the other side of it is will it be properly independent of Government since its task in life will be to hold Government to account. Those two things are probably paralleling some of the discussions we are having here about Natural England as well as relationships between these two bodies going forward. I am afraid I cannot paint a very clear picture for you yet of how this would be, but I can say, as I am saying, there are some quite big questions that we need to answer probably related to the purpose of that new body. What is its purpose?

Q54 Kerry McCarthy: Natural England has described itself as the Government's statutory adviser for the natural environment in England. As you say, we don't know everything about how the OEP would operate but it looks as if they will have a role in driving policy objectives forward; they will have a certain degree of ownership of the 25-year environment plan. Do you think there is a danger that your role could diminish as a result of that?

Tony Juniper: As I said earlier, there is an awful lot that we are trying to do. If there was some capacity, whether it is with us or somewhere else, probably that would be welcomed so long as we are clear about where the boundaries are, and we are getting the most efficient and most logical lining up of different bits of the machinery of delivery to be able to make sure that we are getting the best outcomes for the environment. I would not see it as competitive, but I would say that it will need to be designed to make it as complementary as possible.

Q55 Kerry McCarthy: Would you expect to be consulted by the Secretary of State as he tries to design this new agency?

Tony Juniper: I think Natural England has already been consulted but I hope there will be further discussion as we go forward. As I understand it, we have a draft Bill. An actual Bill will be published later this year.

Q56 Kerry McCarthy: Yes, we have part of a draft Bill. I think the longer bit has not been published yet and both these Committees are doing inquiries. Have you seen any of the evidence sessions for both the Environmental Audit Committee and EFRA Committee who are doing



inquiries into that?

Tony Juniper: No, but I have seen some of the documents. I have not looked at the sessions online or anything yet.

Q57 **Chair:** We are doing pre-legislative scrutiny of the Environment Bill at the moment. You mentioned that the OEP could take you to court or hold you to task. I think it will have to if it is going to take any role that the European Commission or European Court have at the moment. We have to be able to hold our Government offices to account. Are you prepared for that? I don't say you have to roll over, but you almost have to co-operate in order to make sure this OEP has enough teeth. Have you given thought to how it would work?

Tony Juniper: I would very much welcome it. The idea of Natural England being held to account to do its job would be something that, as a conservationist, I would very much welcome. We are there for a purpose and we need to make sure the purpose is being discharged.

Q58 **Mary Creagh:** Isn't there a risk that you could lose your regulation role to this new body?

Tony Juniper: I would not have thought so given the great breadth of what we are currently doing, but this is something to visit once I was in the role. I don't know at the moment but looking at the great sprawling territory of Natural England powers and duties, I can't imagine there would be anybody queuing up to take too many of them because it is already quite a task.

Q59 **Chair:** Are you sure you could be held to account?

Tony Juniper: Being held to account is something that I would very much welcome.

Q60 **John Grogan:** We have covered much of the ground. To look at the potential for turf wars and conflict and so on, the new body will have a regulatory role. In one document that has already been quoted, Natural England's publication "Conservation 21", you see yourselves as the Government's statutory adviser for the natural environment in England. Yet in the draft Bill that we have also referred to, there is a clear reference that the OEP, at the discretion of the Minister, could advise on any matter relating to the natural environment. Do the Government really need two advisers on matters relating to the natural environment? I recognise it is early days yet but there is some potential here for conflict, isn't there?

Tony Juniper: There is, and one would hope that as we go through this process we could iron out those potential duplications. There are three things that have been talked about for the new body. One is an advisory function. I think we can say that Natural England has that covered already on the natural environment side. There is a scrutiny function for policy and legislation. There could be an overlap with Natural England but



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the thing that will be missing once we leave the European Union will be the enforcement side.

Looking at this from the outside and from what I know of where we are at the moment, the thing that is most important as we leave the EU is who is going to be holding Government to account, recognising that we already have the advisory side quite well covered and there are various ways in which legislation and policy can be scrutinised. It is also a role of Natural England to help with that in relation to the natural environment, but it might be that there are other sides such as climate change, pollution, for example. The Climate Change Committee and the Environment Agency have some role there already. This is going to need to be mapped in order to make sure that we get the very best value for money from all of these different bodies we have there. The piece that will be missing very evidently is the enforcement side and being held to account. That is one where I think we need a properly funded, independent body with decent powers and the ability to take people to task.

Q61 Mr Goodwill: You said in one of your earlier answers that investment in nature brings big dividends, and I think no one would argue with that. With the new Agriculture Bill, where direct payments are going to be switched more into public goods, there is a lot of opportunities for that to happen. I think it would be fair to say there were a few raised eyebrows in the agricultural community when your appointment was announced. How do you think you can manage the balance between the environmental enhancements that the public wants to see and the food production, which is still going to be the core task of farmers up and down the country?

Tony Juniper: Indeed, thank you. If there is one stakeholder group that Natural England needs to work with more effectively than almost any other it is the farming community given how this is the dominant land use across the country, whether it is arable farming or different kinds of livestock agriculture. Natural England needs to be working very closely indeed with people farming in the countryside. The idea of balance is an important one. I think better still is the idea of integration and finding ways whereby we can produce more food of better quality in a more secure way at the same time as increasing the biodiversity and cutting the carbon. From what I have seen from different practical things going on around the country right now, we are finding that there are ways to increase biodiversity and food production at the same time. That is even more powerful than saying there is a sense of balance here: is it food or is it wildlife and how do we balance the two? Can we do both better? The answer appears to be yes in some circumstances.

Focusing on those win-wins is where I would hope that Natural England could be finding some very good grounds for partnership with the agricultural community. I think the discussion has moved on lately in the apparent tensions between farming and conservation. On the



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conservation side we have begun to appreciate much more the challenges involved in feeding a growing human population. On the other side, the farming community increasingly is realising that it is not necessarily a choice between growing food and protecting the environment. If you are going to grow food into the future, a healthy environment is a prerequisite.

There was a report published last week by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization setting out how agriculture needs to work in a way whereby it can be much more clearly recognised that healthy biodiversity is a prerequisite for farming: soil biodiversity, pollination, the services we get from the environment in replenishing fresh water, some of which is down to natural ecosystems, and how we blend that into the landscape, not only in how we maximise food security but also for bringing wider social and public benefits.

I have mentioned some of those already and they are just as valid in the agricultural landscape as they are in semi-natural landscapes in relation to, for example, carbon capture. By improving our soil health, we could take a lot of carbon out of the atmosphere and make farming more secure. If we did that we would also make the water purer, which would have a beneficial impact on water bills that are paid by consumers across the country. What I hope we can do is find these real sweet spots where we could be investing in agricultural landscapes in ways that are not only working with the grain of farming but also bringing all these other benefits.

That is going to be about a dialogue, having a good quality conversation with the farming community. I hope that Natural England, with its devolved structure, is in the very position to do that. I see one of the priority tasks for me, should I finish up as Chair, as being to go out and find what the farmers are presently thinking and working with them and their organisations to build the strongest possible partnership that we can to do these things down the track.

Q62 Mr Goodwill: I guess some would see you as somebody who has been a poacher all your life and has now applied for a job as a gamekeeper. Maybe some have concerns that some of the issues you have campaigned on in the past for environmental groups and green parties often have more to do with attracting support for a campaign than necessarily revising the science regularly. One group of people who do manage the environment, and certainly in my constituency that has two-thirds of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, is those who shoot grouse and manage the moors, who conduct rotational burning in order to ensure that the heather is small not only for the grouse but for the sheep. Can you give any reassurances that you will not be campaigning to prevent this longstanding practice that has kept the moor, which is a very fragile environment, as it is?

Tony Juniper: I noticed at the weekend there was some concern expressed in a newspaper article, but I think the lines and concerns being



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expressed there were based on a false premise. It gave the impression that I had said things against shooting, which I have not done. What I had set out was an idea as to how the land might be managed in the future in order to achieve multiple benefits. One of the benefits for sure coming from upland estates is some of the sporting interests but other interests that exist there for society as, as I said before, water quality, carbon capture flood risk reduction.

My question in that piece that was quoted selectively was about how we might in the future move to maximising all of those benefits through in part using the kinds of tools that are now being talked about in the new policy, which is about using public money for public goods. I would not want to be undermining people's businesses or interfering in ways that were going to achieve fewer good outcomes by changing management practices, but I did notice in some of the preparation for this conversation some Natural England papers setting out how there has been a very strong uptake of voluntary withdrawal from rotational burning in the uplands in England as a result of the desire to protect these wider ecosystem services. Some of the people I have spoken to have said that you can burn less and still have more grouse.

I am not an expert in heather management, in how you maximise that particular ecosystem service, namely the sporting side of it, but I would be very pleased to engage with people about how we do that. I was pleased to meet Simon Hart, the Chair of the Countryside Alliance, here a few weeks ago and have a chat with him. We had a very friendly conversation and he said I should go to the north of England should I be appointed to meet with his members, and I said I would be delighted to do that. I remain of that mind even though there were some different views expressed in the newspaper.

- Q63 **Mr Goodwill:** We look forward to you coming to North Yorkshire should you get the appointment. The other area where I think many would see the Green Party getting themselves into a bit of a cul-de-sac is on GMO crops. One of the advantages of leaving the European Union is that we will be able to legislate in this area. If farmers want to reduce their reliance on pesticides, GM technology is one of the ways of moving forward with that. Have you any sort of dyed-in-the-wool views on this that would possibly obstruct your ability to make decisions?

Chair: Are you a fundamentalist?

Tony Juniper: No, I am not a fundamentalist on any of these subjects, Chair. On the GMO crop discussion, things have moved a very long way in the 25 years-odd that society has been talking about this. Some of the views I expressed on GMO crops back in the late 1990s, for example, and subsequently some of the concerns we set out about the impact of herbicide-tolerant varieties being grown in the UK, English Nature, which was the predecessor of Natural England, came out with science that really corroborated our point of view in the extent to which there might be impacts on biodiversity arising from the loss of wild plants because of the



herbicides killing everything except the crop. One of the things we were raising at the time was the extent to which there could be impacts on the environment. Things have moved on considerably from there to today whereby there are much more advanced technologies.

There was an interview on the "Today" programme a couple of years ago whereby I was debating with one of the scientists on the extent to which we might be using new methods to be effectively accelerating selective breeding. For example, instead of moving genes between species, we might be moving genes within species to avoid a particular kind of disease by taking a gene from a wild relative, putting it into a domesticated variety of potato or wheat, for example. I do see the sense of that especially if those kinds of technological advances can be put into the agricultural landscapes in a way that are not only controlled by single multinational companies that have patented a particular genetic method in order to extend the life of a pesticide, which is what some of those early genetic technologies were. They were business strategies rather than agricultural innovations first and foremost. They were about extending the lifetime of certain chemicals in the market under patent rather than being about improving the environment or agriculture.

This is an incredibly complicated area, but the answer to the question is, no, I am not a fundamentalist on any of these things. What I would expect to do, however, as the Chair of Natural England, is to reflect the purpose set out in the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, which is to protect and enhance the natural environment. Insofar as these kinds of technologies can do that, I would hope that the scientists at Natural England could advise Government on the benefits as well as the pitfalls of that.

Q64 David Simpson: To follow on from what Robert has said, how will Natural England influence future environmental land management schemes as proposed by the Agriculture Bill?

Tony Juniper: The position is that the policy is still being developed. I would hope that Natural England could be a trusted and helpful adviser for Government as that new policy is being developed and then to be able to work with Government on the implementation of that. I know there have been changes in how rural payments are being allocated and ways in which that is being managed now across different Government agencies. This is something that I will need to look at at an early stage to understand the history of that and where we are now at, but I would hope that Natural England could be a very important partner in making sure that we get maximum public value for public money.

On the policy under the headline of public money for public goods, I would hope that we could help to maximise the value for the public and as well—to go back the question before last—the way in which we can maximise the benefits to the farmers too in how we can get that win-win for yields and quality and security at the same time as the conservation benefit but also being able to make sure that we are getting best value



for the people in the end who are funding the scheme. I would hope also—and I understand that Natural England is already engaged in some of this—that there is an extent to which we can help shape some of the policy choices through some pilots that help to gather information by working with farmers on the ground in partnership to understand the best ways of doing this.

Q65 David Simpson: There has been some concern on the face of the Agriculture Bill that there is not much detail of food production. Have you a view on that?

Tony Juniper: Not a strong view. The purpose of agriculture is food production, so this is something that has to remain front and centre of how we go forward. I know that some people have said that food production should be one of the public goods. I sympathise with that insofar as secure food, healthy food is vital for the health of our society, but just note the extent to which public goods is really a technical term that is used by economists to describe those elements that are not in the market. Food is in the market and it attracts a price and people can engage in transactions. Carbon, biodiversity, water, flood risk reduction is largely not in the market. Insofar as the policy is trying to correct that market failure and find ways in which we can have policies to correct some of these hidden externalities, I think that is right, but I am not somebody who would say that the public goods is more important than the food production. Obviously that would be mad on the grounds that everybody eats, and we need to have secure and healthy food and nearly all of it is coming from agriculture.

Q66 Chair: You would be very much in favour of natural food production, grassland, permanent pasture, grazing of cattle and sheep as part of the natural environment, would you?

Tony Juniper: Yes. In the future we will have these complicated discussions about meat and the extent to which livestock-based diets are an environmental issue or not. Society has heard quite loudly now the idea of eating less meat. What we have heard less about is eating better meat and I think in this country we have an opportunity to really be speaking very positively about the ways in which we might combine livestock production with conservation outcomes through different kinds of extensive permanent pasture management. I think that is very much a part of the future.

I have been rather inspired by the work at Knepp Castle with the rewilding that has been going on there, which has been blended with very high standards of organic meat production. This is something that has enabled that estate to make more money than they were before. They have entered a new business model that is about extensive conservation grazing, which has also been linked with the recovery of nightingale, purple emperor, turtle dove populations, among many other things, at the same time as recovering the soil, bringing in the carbon and being a hugely important place for people to visit. Obviously we would not want



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to do that on every livestock farm but what we are beginning to see is glimpses of how we might adopt different kinds of models.

Q67 **Chair:** Do you see that very much fitting into Natural England schemes in the future?

Tony Juniper: I would hope so.

Q68 **Zac Goldsmith:** What is your initial assessment of how well Natural England has delivered its Conservation 21 strategy?

Tony Juniper: I have not been close to the KPIs and the overall assessment of how that has gone, but just in relation to some of the earlier remarks that were made about the funding situation, I think Natural England is struggling to be able to do the broad range of duties that it is being asked to deliver on. I can only say that as we go forward, and given some of the things we are talking about today whereby we will have potentially elevated expectations, probably the squeeze will become tighter still. I am afraid I can't comment, Zac, on the details of that in terms of KPIs or targets met or lost, but listening to some of the points earlier it seems unsurprising that if an organisation is progressively cut and cut and cut and cut, after some time, despite all the best efforts we can make in efficiency savings, we are going to find that we can't deliver in a way that people would hope.

Q69 **Zac Goldsmith:** It is probably unfair to ask you at this stage what you would do differently or how you might manage things differently in delivery.

Tony Juniper: I am still working on that. One very big picture thought that is there already is the extent to which we are going to need to think much bigger as we go forward in how we are going to achieve on conservation goals into the future. We know that the protected area network has been very important, and a key site focus has been delivering a certain amount for us, but we are going to need to go into the wider landscape to be building partnerships, to be going beyond a regulatory approach towards inspiring and creating the right kinds of incentives. This is still very broad thinking for me at the moment and I would be listening to Natural England colleagues, should I arrive there, to be paying close attention to what they are saying. As I say, conservation in England seems to be on a cusp at the moment and I think probably we will be wanting to take a different approach going forward but what that is exactly I don't know yet.

Q70 **Zac Goldsmith:** The budget, the admin cuts that you have described, and that previous people have described as well, are one thing but presumably some at least of the delivery budget, in other words the money that would be available to invest in on the ground projects, gets taken up by the new regime that replaces CAP.

Tony Juniper: Yes.



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Q71 **Zac Goldsmith:** That could theoretically be something that would provide a bit of a turbo boost.

Tony Juniper: One would hope so. The shift of public money to public goods and coming from the CAP situation to the new situation, which could be extremely positive, would be potentially the biggest budget heading of all, depending on how we deployed it.

Zac Goldsmith: I want to make one tiny point, unrelated to the question I am asking. This goes back to the raised eyebrows about the £50 donation to the Green Party. I have to put it on the record, if it has not already been put on the record, that Andrew Sells, the previous chairman, gave £111,000 to the Conservative Party before he was appointed. This £50 is a mere pimple compared to his predecessor's donation.

Chair: Did he remember he had done it, though, Zac?

Zac Goldsmith: I think most people remember a £111,000 donation. I will stop there.

Chair: There are going to be three questions in a row now from the EFRA Select Committee, 11, 12 and 13, and then 14 and 15 will be back to the EAC, just so you are aware of that, Tony. Question 11 now.

Q72 **Julian Sturdy:** I want to talk about farm inspection and the regulation review. The final report by Dame Glenys Stacey recommended that a new independent regulator would be supportive of farmers' individual circumstances, offering them practical advice and guidance, and helping to incentivise good practice. Do you see that there is an appropriate balance between regulatory and incentivising management schemes at the moment? Would you agree with that recommendation?

Tony Juniper: Yes. After all the work, and all the thinking that I have done over the years in engaging with farmers in different ways, which I have done a lot of, I have come to the conclusion that there are two most important things that are going to enable us to deliver.

The first important thing is good advice and the extent to which farmers can get good, impartial input about how best they can achieve their food and agriculture goals at the same time as their conservation goals. The second thing is the right kinds of incentives, and part of that is down to what we might find from the Environmental Land Management Schemes for example. Some bits of it are coming from the market, both the food side and what some of the utilities might like to do. Some of the water companies, for instance, are already looking to farmers to help them get a more secure and cheaper raw-water feed into their water treatment plants.

All these things could be lined up, the incentives and the advice, in ways that could create quite an exciting new situation. This goes back to what I just said to Zac about the broad thoughts I am beginning to form about the future, the extent to which we can be successful in the wider



countryside in lifting the biodiversity and the way in which we might do that through these kinds of approaches and blending them with the nature recovery network idea, which is in the 25-year environment plan. How we do all that is obviously work in progress, including Dame Glenys Stacey's review, which is now, as I understand it, either just about to be consulted on or is already being consulted on.

To answer your question, Julian, that would be the front line of conservation—advice and incentives—with the regulatory piece being quite far down the line. If we want to get people to do things, we have to equip them with the right kind of knowledge and the right reasons. Then, if they are not doing things, regulation is something you do as a last resort. I hope Natural England will be in a good position to reflect that way of working, given how we already conduct ourselves.

One thing about Dame Glenys Stacey's review that did strike me as being potentially quite challenging was the extent to which it would be possible to create a single farm inspection and regulatory body. When you think about it, a farmer might have historic buildings, might have something to do with animal welfare, something to do with an endangered species, something to do with water quality. Whether you could have a single regulator that could cover all of that, I don't know. There are dozens and dozens of regulations—maybe there are too many—and we need to find ways of streamlining some of this stuff. That would be the one thing that I would think to myself. Could you do it with a single regulator? The answer is that I don't know. It may be that it could be done, but I can see the attraction—

Q73 Chair: I think she is suggesting a single inspection rather than a single regulator. We are quite interested in that because we are trying to reduce bureaucracy. Do you agree with that, or not?

Tony Juniper: Reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency have to be what we strive for at every turn. One of things that I would hope for, should I be there at Natural England, would be to have very strong relationships with organisations that have overlapping remits—the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission are two of them.

I was out yesterday with Emma Howard Boyd from the Environment Agency. She and I visited the Suffolk coast to look at areas where managed retreat is something we are doing in partnership, with natural flood risk reduction being something that is of importance to both of us in terms of not maintaining very expensive sea walls but at the same time recreating substantial areas of new saltmarsh, which are both fish nurseries and flood-risk reduction opportunities and well as having conservation benefits, that kind of blending of approaches and overlapping remits.

Q74 Julian Sturdy: Dame Glenys also talked about individual farm circumstances. You have talked about the work of utility companies. Utility companies are working with landowners and farmers all around the



country. Around my constituency, Yorkshire Water is doing some trial work on over-wintered cover crops to see how much that can clean up the land-drained water. It is about those individual circumstances, because each farm is different, each land type is different. These cover crops could be very good in certain areas. They could do great work in helping to clean the water up and also, as was mentioned earlier, in recovering organic matter and putting it back into the soil. How do you feel those individual circumstances will play out? What role do you think Natural England could play in that?

Tony Juniper: This is a very good question that goes back to the extent to which we are going to have expert advisers in the countryside. There are a few there already. Natural England is providing some; the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups are still there. I know some of the NGOs—RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts—have some expertise in doing some of this work. We will need to look carefully at how best we can harness the different opportunities we have for that bespoke advice and line it up with the aspirations of the Environmental Land Management Schemes.

I do not yet have a clear idea of what the answer to that question would be, except to see that very strong synergy between good advice and individual farms and linking that to the wider policy aspiration. From what I have seen, however, we have an increasingly good evidence base now, telling us how particular interventions can achieve particular things under different circumstances and being able to apply that learning to individual farms is the gap we are going to need to cross.

Q75 Angela Smith: From what positions and commitments, and in what timeframe, do you intend to resign if you were to be appointed as Chair of Natural England?

Tony Juniper: I am the Executive Director for Advocacy and Campaigns at WWF UK. I am also the President of The Wildlife Trusts across the UK. Those positions are obviously a clear conflict of interest, so I would resign from both of them, which would be very sad, but I think this role is worth it. I would anticipate triggering conversations with those organisations as soon as we have a firm decision one way or the other from this process.

My contractual arrangement with WWF UK is that I have a three-month notice period, but I would hope to be able to negotiate a quicker departure. My role with The Wildlife Trusts is honorary and I would hope to hand over to a new president in a way that would work with the Natural England handover.

Q76 Angela Smith: I had forgotten to declare that I am a member of The Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB, the full range. I put that on the table now.

You have no intention of resigning from, or severing your connections, putting an arm's length relationship between you and the Robertsbridge Group?



Tony Juniper: I am still formally in the Robertsbridge Group. I could either resign from it completely, which would mean severing any connections or what I thought I would do, at least for an experimental period, is see if I could give some advice to companies via that organisation but companies that have no interest in land management or the activities of Natural England. For example, we have worked with forestry companies based in some Asian countries in the past, helping them with sustainable management of land. I have not been involved with them since I joined WWF. It was an interest that I put aside. It could be that there would be some potential for working with people who have no interest in the management of the landscape in England. However, if the Committee saw that as a conflict of interest—and I discussed this also with colleagues in DEFRA—I would be very happy to put that aside as well, if needed.

Q77 **Dr Johnson:** My question is about the things you would intend to continue, one of which was the fellowship at the University of Cambridge. The other was your work with the Robertsbridge Group, which you co-founded.

Tony Juniper: We just mentioned them, yes.

Dr Johnson: You did just mention the Robertsbridge Group. Do you think these other obligations that you have conflict with the time that you are able to give to the new role? In particular, you would be supposed to spend two days a week on Natural England. Which would be your primary role? If you had a diary clash, which one would take priority?

Tony Juniper: The Natural England role was advertised at two days per week. I have already said, and I said this during the recruitment process, that it looks to me as though it was at least three days a week and the more I learn, the more it looks like fulltime. I hope that by working four long days, one would be able to do what is needed in the role of chair, but I would also hope to be able to retain a little bit of capacity to engage with some other work.

I have found over the years the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership to be an extremely valuable affiliation, not only through what I have been able to contribute to some of their programmes, working with companies to help them on their sustainability journeys, but also through some of the insights I have been able to take back, working with big organisations—in consumer goods, agriculture, forestry, water, whatever it is—to enrich my understanding of how companies can respond to some of these things. I think this is a valuable complement to what I could do at Natural England. On average, I would expect a couple of days a month to be devoted to activities with the institute, so that should fit quite comfortably.

I would hope to be able to do the odd keynote address here and there. I speak quite widely on conservation and environmental subjects. For example, I was in Falmouth last week, speaking at the university there



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about the conservation of the tropical rainforests. I would hope to be able to continue with some of that work, obviously recognising the need to avoid any conflicts with my role at Natural England. Natural England, should it come to that, would be my primary focus. I would see myself as primarily identified with Natural England and that would get the first call on the diary time.

Q78 **Dr Johnson:** Thank you. That is very clear. The other thing that you are involved with is this Robertsbridge Group, of which you are a shareholder. Is that correct?

Tony Juniper: Yes.

Q79 **Dr Johnson:** What proportion of that company is yours?

Tony Juniper: A tiny amount. I cannot remember. It is about 2% or something.

Q80 **Dr Johnson:** Okay. On its website it says, "What are we about?" "What do we do?" and it describes the advisers as "extremely well connected with NGOs, the public sector and politics". Is this job a way of improving that company's outlook?

Tony Juniper: Well, it could be, couldn't it? It could be perceived to be. This is where the perception of conflicts is a very important part of what should be in my schedule going forward. I am happy to look at that with either the Committee or with DEFRA to see if we feel as if there is a way in which I could have some affiliation there, explicitly linked only to companies with no interest in the work of Natural England, or whether we feel as if any connection there would be unworkable. I am very happy to look at that one, and for it to go.

An initial conversation I had with DEFRA did suggest to me that probably it would be all right, as long as any client I worked with was outside the United Kingdom, for example forestry companies working in Asia, supplying sustainable commodities to global markets. We spoke a little bit about that and that seemed to be okay. However, it is not a huge issue for me. I am happy to let that one go, if so guided.

Q81 **Mary Creagh:** What is your current professional relationship with Michael Gove?

Tony Juniper: I am a prominent member of an environmental organisation that lobbies him and that organises campaigns to influence his thinking on the prominence of, for example, the ambition we have on environmental protection in the new Environment Bill. I see him very rarely. In the run-up to this process, and during this process, I have met him only once, I think, when I spoke to him at the interview with the Secretary of State before he selected his preferred candidate. I think I might have said hello to him at the Conservative Party conference, at a fringe meeting we were hosting, but we did not discuss anything to do with this.



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Q82 **Mary Creagh:** So not the vegan breakfast?

Tony Juniper: That was George Eustice.

Q83 **Mary Creagh:** How would you expect your relationship to change in this role?

Tony Juniper: With?

Mary Creagh: With the Secretary of State.

Tony Juniper: I would be working closely with him. I would not be lobbying him. I would be in dialogue with him.

Q84 **Mary Creagh:** Wouldn't you be lobbying him?

Tony Juniper: Not in the sense that I do now. I would be there as an impartial and independent adviser rather than being seen as somebody coming as a representative of a group with an agenda of its own.

Mary Creagh: You are about to lead an organisation that has had massive staff cuts, massive budget cuts, through a period of the spending review. Why wouldn't you lobby the Secretary of State?

Tony Juniper: I would not consider that to be lobbying. I would consider that to be a conversation. That would be the difference. At the moment I come to him as an independent organisation that has no connection with Government. Coming from an arm's length body funded by Government, I think the nature of the relationship would be different. I would have good conversations with him; I would bring him good evidence; I would hope to bring him persuasive cases of things such as the budget and the extent to which we might need more space to express ourselves, perhaps through an independent press office. But I would not regard that as lobbying. I would regard that as part of a different relationship whereby an arm's length body is trying to achieve the best possible outcomes for the country through working with the person who is in charge of policymaking and ultimately has a big role in the allocation of the resources needed to do the jobs that his Department needs to do.

It is probably a semantic difference we are discussing there about what lobbying is. We discussed my background as a campaigner a moment ago and I hope I reassured the Committee that I would not be campaigning from this position. I guess that in some ways, lobbying is part and parcel of campaigning. I would consider the relationship to be different although, I hope, highly influential in bringing to the attention of the Secretary of State some of the things that we have talked about here today that we know are of concern.

Q85 **Mary Creagh:** The staff representatives and the environmentalists who are watching would expect at the very least some muscular advocacy from you in this role. I don't think you have been appointed to be a yes man, have you?

Tony Juniper: No, and I do not expect that I would be.



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Mary Creagh: Very good. Thank you.

- Q86 **Chair:** One final question from me. At the moment there is no chief executive of Natural England. Do you have any idea when one will be appointed? Much of the day-to-day management of Natural England will be done by the chief executive. What sort of influence do you expect to have over the new chief executive? What sort of role do you expect to have in the appointment of a new chief executive?

Tony Juniper: Task number one for the new chair is the recruitment and appointment of a new chief executive. We have interim arrangements in place. We have Marian Spain, who is a board member. Her normal work is with Plantlife. She is the chief executive there. She has been released from Plantlife for six months. We are already about three months into her tenure in this interim role, so we do need to get on with this very quickly. This is one reason why it would make a lot of sense for me to make a rapid transition, should this process lead to my appointment. That would be the role that is the top of the list to do.

- Q87 **Chair:** You are considering taking a hands-on approach to the appointment of the new chief executive?

Tony Juniper: For sure. This is a key partnership. The chair is basically working in three directions in close partnership with different groups: one is with the chief executive and his or her team; another is with the board of Natural England; another is with DEFRA. Being able to work across these three groups in a way that I hope is seamless, going forward together, recognising everybody's different role is what I will be striving for and the recruitment of the chief executive is key to the whole thing. The chief executive will be working in close partnership with the chair to make sure that the organisation is being effectively run, that we are doing what we say we are going to be doing, and that we are delivering on all the commitments we are making to Ministers and the country. It is something I will be playing a close role in, and leading actually.

- Q88 **Chair:** Thank you very much. If you would like to withdraw, and if the members of the public would not mind withdrawing as well, because we have to go into private session to do our report. You should know immediately what our reactions are. I think that you do not have too much to worry about, but that will be for the Committee to decide.

Tony Juniper: That is reassuring. It was a great pleasure to be able to share a few reflections with you. I would reiterate the excitement I feel about where conservation in the UK, and in England specifically, could be going. I love nature, I love England, and I hope I will finish up in this role.

Chair: If you are successful, we look forward to working with you. Thank you very much.