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Pressures and challenges

1. What do you see as the most notable current challenges in relation to land use in England? How might these challenges best be tackled? How do you foresee land use in England changing over the long term? How should competing priorities for land use be managed?

From the sustainability perspective, there are multiple challenges: the spread of hard paving and surfaces, preventing water absorption; continued building in the floodplain; adapting to the impacts of climate change, particularly flooding and the urban heat island effect; loss of species and natural habitat through intensive farming and encroachment on natural spaces; and the land-take for housing and associated infrastructure.

Managing these complex and interlinked challenges is not helped by the lack of an overarching national plan for England and the lack of clear policies for green infrastructure.

From Building with Nature's point of view we should prioritise protection of special places, delivery of nature's recovery through provision for biodiversity gains through development, and through protection and enhancement of existing and planned for ecological networks (e.g. employing and activating Nature Recovery Networks and Local Nature Recovery Strategies), and when we do develop land, doing that in doing the best possible for nature and wildlife. This might involve using frameworks and standards like Building with Nature. It should certainly involve bringing nature closer to people, with the associated health and wellbeing benefits.

2. What are the key drivers of land use change which need to be planned for, and how should they be planned for? What is the role of multifunctional land use strategies in implementing these plans?

Assumed pressures for more housing and associated infrastructure. The housing figures – and their allocation across local authorities – may need to be revised in the wake of Brexit and the Covid pandemic. The digitally-enabled delivery economy will mean increased demand for sheds, logistics space and delivery infrastructure – including last mile. Hybrid working will change commercial and residential real estate patterns, with requirements for more space in homes and the need to re-purpose redundant capacity in commercial office space.

Responding to climate change (mitigation and adaptation) will also require new land use patterns and strategies. Most current planning frameworks were drawn-up and consulted upon before some the recent changes and pressures were apparent. A more dynamic and responsive planning system is needed.

3. How might we achieve greater and more effective coordination, integration and delivery of land use policy and management at a central, regional, local and landscape level?

Building with Nature believes that integrated green infrastructure standards should be adopted at the different tiers of planning in England. Capacity should be built in planning authorities to make sure these policies are implemented. The forthcoming Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards Framework can provide a good structure for policy, while tools such as Building with Nature can be used to enable delivery, sensitive to local and landscape level, and ensure compliance. Local authorities are using Building with Nature to create and accredit good policy and guidance. Essex County Council and the West of England combined authority are the latest planning authorities to use the Building with Nature Standards to help frame their green infrastructure strategies and to show what good looks like.

Farming and land management

4. What impacts are changes to farming and agricultural practices, including food production, likely to have on land use in England? What is the role of new technology and changing standards of land management?
5. What impact are the forthcoming environmental land management schemes likely to have on agriculture, biodiversity and wellbeing? What do you see as their merits and disadvantages?

Nature, landscape and biodiversity

6. What do you see as the key threats to nature and biodiversity in England in the short and longer term, and what role should land use policy have in tackling these?

The key threats to nature and biodiversity are loss and degradation of existing habitat, including impacts of pollution e.g. nitrates.

Land use planning has a key role in protecting and enhancing special, designated and key wildlife sites, through the local planning system, and through national policy. By promoting nature's recovery (e.g. employing

and activating Nature Recovery Networks and Local Nature Recovery Strategies) and requiring multifunctional green infrastructure at both the development site-scale and the regional/sub-regional/landscape-scale, it will be possible to limit habitat loss, and promote opportunities to create new and enhance existing habitats, supporting the provision of co-benefits to people and nature, and underpinning policy commitments to address the three key emergencies facing every local planning authority – climate emergency, nature emergency, and public health emergency.

7. What are the merits and challenges of emerging policies such as nature-based solutions (including eco-system and carbon markets), local nature recovery strategies and the biodiversity net gain requirement? Are these policies compatible, and how can we ensure they support one another, and that they deliver effective benefits for nature?

The Building with Nature Standards are designed to optimise long-term and climate resilient net benefits for nature, by retaining and enhancing existing ecological assets and creating locally relevant new habitats within the boundary of the project. By taking a green infrastructure-led approach, development can create effective links with existing and planned for ecological features and networks beyond the boundary of the project to support the creation and restoration of resilient ecological networks in the wider landscape.

Building with Nature accredited schemes should help reverse the long-term decline in biodiversity by being sensitive to the local ecological context and providing space for wildlife to flourish. They should link habitats within the project and out into the wider landscape to help the restoration and creation of wider ecological networks.

Environment, climate change, energy and infrastructure

8. How will commitments such as the 25-year environment plan and the net zero target require changes to land use in England, and what other impacts might these changes have?

The Building with Nature Standards help development/developers and planners to positively respond to the climate emergency. Schemes should be designed to be climate resilient by incorporating mitigation and adaptations that respond to the impacts

of climate change. The green infrastructure should be designed to promote low carbon behaviours and contribute to achieving zero carbon development by optimising carbon sequestration and demonstrate low carbon approaches to design, construction, and long-term maintenance.

As more and more organisations commit to net zero strategies, this will put pressure on land for offsetting.

9. How should land use pressures around energy and infrastructure be managed?

Land use planning

10. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of the existing land use planning system and associated frameworks in England? How effectively does the system manage competing demands on land, including the Government's housing and development objectives? What would be the merits of introducing a formal spatial planning framework or frameworks, and how might it be implemented?

A challenge we have consistently identified is variation of expectations of the development sector from one local plan area to another. The Building with Nature Standards Framework was developed in direct response to this challenge and frustration communicated by developers and housebuilders. By more consistently defining 'what good looks like' – via a national green infrastructure benchmark applicable to development of all types and scales across the UK – we have been able to 'level the playing field' and better set expectations of investment and design process/principles for the industry. This will lead to more effective outcomes for people and wildlife, having a net benefit impact on biodiversity and quality of place.

Another identified difficulty is consistently and effectively delivering green infrastructure at the landscape-scale and catchment-scale, to secure nature's recovery and sustainable water management. Building with Nature optimises multifunctionality and connectivity within the boundary of the project and links with existing and planned for green infrastructure in the surrounding area. To secure the multiple benefits for people, wildlife, and the wider environment that a green infrastructure approach is capable of, Building with Nature requires a strongly context-driven and multifunctional approach to all aspects of the green infrastructure design and delivery.

11. What lessons may be learned from land use planning frameworks in the devolved nations and abroad, and how might these lessons apply to England?

England can learn from the placemaking approach in Wales, which also integrates green infrastructure through a requirement for Green Infrastructure Action Plans. The National Sustainable Placemaking

Outcomes (which will help deliver the Environment and Well-being of Future Generations Acts) is aimed at improving quality of life and also to improve biodiversity and ecological resilience for the future.

Conclusion

12. Which organisations would be best placed to plan and decide on the allocation of land for the various competing agendas for land use in England, and how should they set about doing so?

Democratically led local authorities, with knowledge of the needs and opportunities in their local areas should be at the heart of the process.

Frameworks such as the Building with Nature Standards can help to clearly define the parameters and expectations that make quality green infrastructure. The use of Building with Nature Standards can help create a level playing field for applicants, making it easier for them to understand what good looks like for a particular scheme and provide an external, independent verification of quality. (The Building with Nature Standards are overseen by a Standards Board, which is made up of representatives from across government and industry, as well as key bodies such as RTPI, Landscape Institute, CIEEM, and TCPA. It is their role to ensure that the Building with Nature Standards are robust and reflect up-to-date environmental and planning policy, legislation, and good industry practice.)

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