

## **Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry Environment and Quality of Place Strategic Theme**

### **Evidence from Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust**

#### **The state of nature in Hampshire**

Hampshire is said to be England's most biodiverse county: the range of habitats and species make us nationally and internationally prominent. The county is blessed with some of the most important chalk rivers in the world, internationally important coastal habitats, heathlands, chalk downlands and ancient woodlands. Hampshire has more designated sites and protected areas than many other counties in England.

This does not mean, however, that our natural environment is in the state that it should be and we cannot afford to be complacent. Hampshire's landscapes may look green and pleasant but large areas are intensively farmed, confining nature to the margins. Our parks and green spaces are so popular for recreation that wildlife struggles to cope with the disturbance. The scale and pace of development compounds the pressure.

The pressures of climate change, intensive agriculture, unsustainable use of resources and continuous development are as relevant to Hampshire as they are to the rest of the globe. The result is that our local wildlife is declining at an alarming rate.

Most of the important habitats and designated sites in the county are failing. Less than half of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are in favourable condition<sup>1</sup>. The existing protected wildlife sites and nature reserves are simply too small and too isolated to give nature a secure future. Even in our largest areas - the national parks – rapidly increasing recreational pressure is impacting the fragile wildlife that makes these places special. We must do better.

Every species and habitat has its own story, but the stories are overwhelmingly of decline. The following are indicative of broader trends:

- Saltmarsh is set to disappear by 75%<sup>2</sup> before the end of the century, largely due to sea-level rise and historic and current coastal defence schemes. Saltmarshes play their own part in coastal defence and are economically hugely significant.
- Chalk rivers in Hampshire are failing water quality standards: the iconic rivers Test and Itchen are beset by pollution and past engineering and their ecosystems are

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<sup>1</sup> Natural England, Protected Sites and Species Report <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk>

<sup>2</sup> Solent Dynamic Coast Project <http://www.channelcoast.org/reports/>

struggling. This not only threatens the sustainability of our drinking water supply but also undermines one of our global commodities: fly fishing.

- Water vole distribution has decreased by 30% in Hampshire over the past ten years.<sup>3</sup>
- Ground nesting birds such as curlew on the mires of the New Forest are declining rapidly. Nightjar and woodlark on the heaths of north-east Hampshire are vulnerable and require a regulatory approach to managing recreational pressure for their protection.<sup>4</sup>
- Species once common in Hampshire have been consigned to the history books. These include the polecat and wildcat, the Mazarine Blue butterfly and the black grouse.
- Several butterflies, including the small pearl-bordered fritillary are perilously close to extinction in Hampshire. A targeted partnership project restoring habitat has seen the reintroduction of the marsh fritillary butterfly to a site in north Hampshire, although this species is still absent from large parts of the county. Even common species of butterfly, like the large white, are becoming harder to find in Hampshire.<sup>5</sup>

### **The importance of nature**

A healthy, wildlife-rich natural world is essential for our wellbeing and prosperity.

The loss of habitats and species is important for many reasons. It erodes the character and unique cultural qualities of our local area. It undermines the county's strength as a great place to live and work and as a tourist destination. Importantly, wildlife decline signals other fundamental problems in the wider environment that, in turn, threaten our own health and wellbeing.

It is critical that our natural environment is robust enough to provide essential resources such as food and water for future and growing populations. Nature must also help us manage the causes and effects of climate change; providing natural flood management, absorbing carbon or protecting coasts from rising sea levels. In this context, the Solent coast holds nationally important seagrass beds which are an important carbon store as well as supporting biodiversity.<sup>6</sup>

A large and growing body of evidence shows the significant role nature plays in keeping people mentally and physically well. Individuals with easy access to nature are 40% less likely to become overweight or obese and national research, as well as our own experience, shows the huge impact that nature can have on combatting mental illness.

<sup>3</sup> Water Vole National Mapping Project report [https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/water\\_vole\\_report\\_2006-2015\\_final.pdf](https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/water_vole_report_2006-2015_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Hampshire Bird Atlas (2014)

<sup>5</sup> Hampshire and Isle of Wight Butterfly 2017 report, Butterfly Conservation, <http://www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/members/docs/Annual%20Reports/2017%20Butterfly%20Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [www.hiwwt.org.uk/solent-seagrass-project](http://www.hiwwt.org.uk/solent-seagrass-project)

The contribution our two national parks, AONB's, country parks, nature reserves and green spaces make to people's quality of life and future prosperity is incalculable. This provision, however, is not keeping up with the level of population growth nor the increasing demand for outdoor recreation.

### **Securing nature's recovery – the vision for 2050**

The Wildlife Trust is currently developing a plan to help tip the balance in favour of nature's recovery.<sup>7</sup> Individuals and organisations from all sectors will have a role to play. We would like to see an ambitious commitment within Hampshire County Council's strategy to help achieve this aim. The ambition must go beyond protecting and safeguarding existing wildlife havens and vulnerable species towards investing in recovery and restoration of nature.

By 2050, we must see:

- Strategic investment in the local Nature Recovery Network (see below). Not only should the network be protected through robust planning and decision-making, it should be actively enhanced through targeted investment, including through re-wilding areas.
- Measurable environmental net gains from all development plans and projects. This is over and above the statutory minimum and builds resilience to climate change and future pressures as well as addressing immediate and past damage.
- Freshwater catchments that are resilient to the impacts of projected population growth and climate change because natural processes prevail: floods are reduced by harnessing nature rather than the old approach to hard engineering; due to the concerted efforts of water companies, farmers, and statutory bodies, water quality has been turned around and our rivers are functioning more naturally.
- Natural coastlines allowed to be dynamic and resilient – protecting the population from rising sea levels by harnessing and accommodating nature.
- A sea which is free of the legacy of pollution, with important habitats such as seagrass beds safeguarded, hosting a thriving fishery, and resilient to the effects of industrial activity.
- A farmed landscape that is super-abundant with wild birds and pollinators. Pollution is reduced and soil quality restored.
- People connected with their local natural green spaces. There is enough space for residents and visitors to enjoy nature. Opportunities to appreciate, understand and care for the natural environment are built into people's everyday lives from childhood through to older age.
- More, larger and joined up areas where wildlife can take precedence and recover.

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<sup>7</sup> Wilder Hampshire and Isle of Wight <https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/wilder-hampshire-wight>

## **The Nature Recovery Network**

It has long been recognised that nature needs more spaces which are bigger, better and joined up across a network, in order to recover.<sup>8</sup> In response to this the Government's 25 year plan for the environment has set out a commitment to create a Nature Recovery Network nationally.

The essential mapping of our local nature recovery network has been undertaken in recent months, using best available data to identify the core network which must be protected and managed to the highest standard, as well as a wider network of opportunities to create habitats and restore the all-important connections. This Local Nature Partnership led project has been undertaken by HBIC in conjunction with the Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Local Planning Authorities and the maps have been tested and well received by planning officers and local authorities and should form the evidence base for all future proposed local plans and developments.

The maps should not only highlight where the important sites are that need to be protected, but also help to inform where investment should be focused in order to restore and enhance habitats, thus achieving meaningful net gains for biodiversity and the environment.

## **Establishing a robust evidence base**

To ensure that we move in the right direction in the coming years and decades, we must have the right data to see what is working and where we must focus our efforts.

Whilst there are a number of important data sets collected for particular species groups or habitats, the last comprehensive analysis of the state of nature in Hampshire was published back in 2006.<sup>9</sup>

The Wildlife Trust and other partners, including HOS and HBIC, are planning to produce a new report for Hampshire in 2019 which will complement the next edition of the UK state of nature report, also planned for 2019. As part of the strategy to 2050, there should be a commitment to help resource a regular state of nature report on a 3/5 yearly basis.

## **Land use, farming and re-wilding**

If we are to make more space for nature and tackle climate change, this will mean a fundamental rethink of how we use our land.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Making Space for Nature, Sir John Lawton et al (2010)  
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402170324/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> State of Hampshire's Biodiversity (2006)  
<http://www.hampshirebiodiversity.org.uk/pdf/Other%20reports/The%20State%20of%20Hampshire's%20Biodiversity.pdf>

There may be opportunities within the County Council's estate to test different approaches, such as rewilding larger areas. The Wildlife Trust is actively looking for such opportunities as well.

Around three quarters of the county's land is farmed and we must look at ways to encourage, incentivise and support farmers to work with nature rather than against it – finding approaches that will help to enhance rather than exploit the natural environment.

### **Housing and development**

The scale of future housing need could see hundreds of thousands of new homes built across Hampshire over the next three decades. Fundamentally we should ensure that housing targets are appropriate and managed in a way that balances the demand for housing with the wider societal needs, including for sustainable natural resources and green infrastructure.

As planned development proceeds, we must embed net gain for Hampshire's struggling biodiversity and the environment within policy and practice, so that every development makes a meaningful contribution to nature's recovery.

### **Greener cities and neighbourhoods**

In the coming years we should look for opportunities to create better places for people and wildlife in towns and cities.

This could include communities where schools contribute to the nature recovery network by enhancing school grounds and at the same time enable young people to connect with and learn about nature.

Management of public green spaces should also support wildlife through leaving some verges uncut, meadow management of parks and creating wild urban patches. A new approach to parks has been successfully piloted in Burnley, resulting in significant savings to the council and increased community engagement, alongside the benefits for biodiversity.<sup>11</sup>

### **Balancing need for green space with need for wildlife sanctuary**

Growing populations demand more dedicated green spaces for recreation. If this is not adequately accommodated we will see untenable pressures on our precious wildlife havens, resulting in disturbance, damage and increasing species decline. The Wildlife Trust is

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<sup>10</sup> Committee on Climate change, Land Use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change, November 2018 <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/land-use-reducing-emissions-and-preparing-for-climate-change/>

<sup>11</sup> Nesta, Rethinking Parks, Burnley study  
[https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/rethinkingparksburnley\\_0.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/rethinkingparksburnley_0.pdf)

starting to reach the point where recreational and other human uses of some of our nature reserves – for example commercial dog walking – is problematic.

We need more considered management strategies for our national parks that can allow wildlife to flourish as it should in these areas. This might include zones acting as wildlife sanctuary areas.

Our country parks are huge assets to the county, but there have been only a handful of new significant parks established in recent decades, despite huge increases in local populations. New country parks should be considered as part of local plans.

All new developments must build in green infrastructure and green open spaces as well as, not instead of, biodiversity net gain.

### **Sustainable natural resources**

The UK population is set to increase by 14% by 2050 and Hampshire's projections appear to be in line with a similar level of population growth. This will inevitably create ever greater demands and pressures on our natural resources, drive up consumption of water and energy and bring with it potential growth in waste and pollution.

The strategy for Hampshire should look to encourage positive individual behaviour change – supporting households to better manage their use of resources – from water and energy to transport. This will be essential to take pressure off the natural environment.

At the same time, it is clear that we will need all sectors to radically increase investment in natural capital and ecosystem services. The corporate sector will have a huge role to play in bringing innovation and investment to create new models of business and there are multiple areas where the business case aligns with investing in natural capital.

Recommendations by the Natural Capital Committee include that specific ecosystems such as woodland, peatbogs and wetlands are expanded because they deliver quantifiable ecosystem benefits.<sup>12</sup> A Natural Capital investment plan for the county should be at the heart of the Hampshire 2050 vision.

### **Quality of place and wilder lives**

Investment in our natural environment must be a priority as it is such a pivotal factor for the health of Hampshire's residents.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-capital-committee-advice-on-governments-25-year-environment-plan>

Whilst we know the impact that access to nature can have on individual wellbeing<sup>13</sup>, many people do not have the opportunities to enjoy or engage with nature, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are often the most excluded.<sup>14</sup>

The Wildlife Trust is currently working with partners in Portsmouth to explore approaches to increasing engagement with nature amongst the urban populations and opportunities to improve health and well-being outcomes.

Hampshire's strategy should seek a joined up approach that links local authorities, health bodies and civil society to deliver greater access to nature for all. Local communities and groups should also be empowered and incentivised to drive their own initiatives to create wilder, greener neighbourhoods.

### **Conclusion and summary**

We ask the Commission to place nature's recovery at the heart of a vision for Hampshire in 2050.

The natural environment has the potential to be the county's greatest asset – underpinning the health and prosperity of our local communities and of future generations. However simply maintaining the status quo is not enough and will lead to continued terminal declines in the health of the natural environment, loss of iconic and economically important places and species, and consequently damage to our health and wellbeing.

A step-change in investments, attitudes and behaviours is needed across all sectors of society. We would like to work closely with the Commission and the County Council to shape the 2050 strategy and find ways that we can, together, deliver significant improvements to our natural environment in the coming years and decades.

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<sup>13</sup> Richardson M et al. 30 Days Wild Development and Evaluation of a large-scale nature engagement campaign to improve well-being, 2016

<sup>14</sup> Natural England, Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment