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Nature based solutions: the key to powerful, win-win environmental results



Nature Based Solutions deliver cost-effective, sustainable, highly effective environmental objectives which also benefit communities. But, they demand bold and confident policy-making and stable funding. The results can help tackle complex, high profile issues and public concerns.

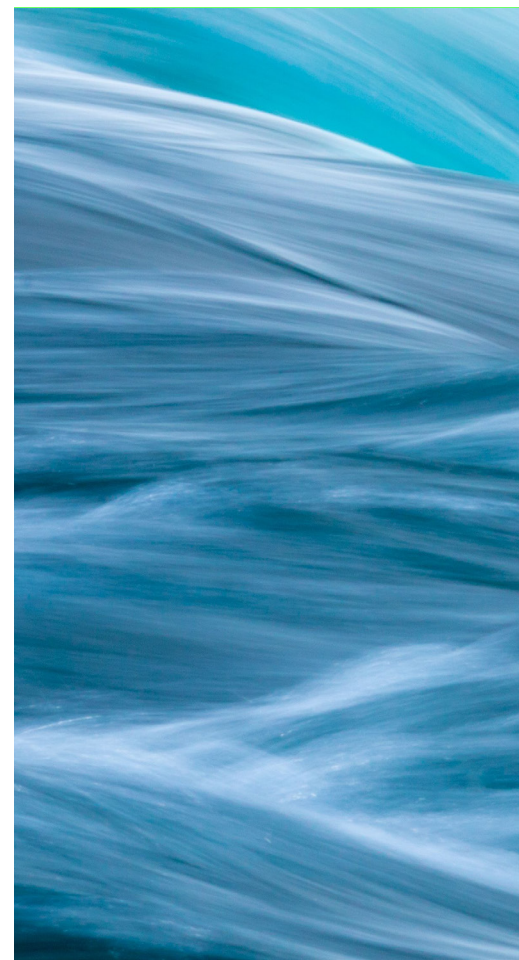
This summary report outlines the policy improvements that can support the evidence-based implementation of Nature Based Solutions in England.

What are Nature Based Solutions?

Nature Based Solutions (NBS) harness the power of the natural world to protect, manage and restore ecosystems, delivering clear benefits for society.

NBS could help provide the step changes needed to meet the Government's 25-year Environment Plan across landscape recovery, biodiversity net gain, water quality benefits and net zero commitments.

Even so, hard engineering solutions are often prioritised over nature based solutions. For example, as well as building flood defences, Natural Flood Management (NFM) techniques can slow water flow by revegetating bare areas that in turn reduce flood peaks in towns and cities downstream.



How can Government help?

There are four critical areas where NBS needs Government support.



1 Stable funding

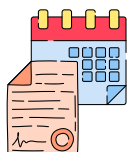
Integrated Government funding sources will enable benefit stacking (such as NFM, biodiversity and carbon storage). Stronger government funding mechanisms (FDGIA, ELMS, SFI and BNG) will enable long-term NBS projects and build trust with landowners and partners.

Government help with attracting private finance will create an investment platform for carbon and biodiversity markets, forums to connect projects and potential investors, and Payments-by-Results models.



2 Better evidence

Independent organisations need funding to develop and curate a strong and accessible evidence base for NBS aims and interventions. Accessible physical and social science-based evidence makes a strong case for NBS. This should include evidence of social, health and wellbeing impacts.



3 Planning policy changes

We need a national planning policy statement for NBS.

The planning requirements for NBS should be developed with stakeholders, then rolled out across all local authorities consistently. Planners will need training to help them manage this appropriately. Some NBS interventions should be allowed as permitted developments.

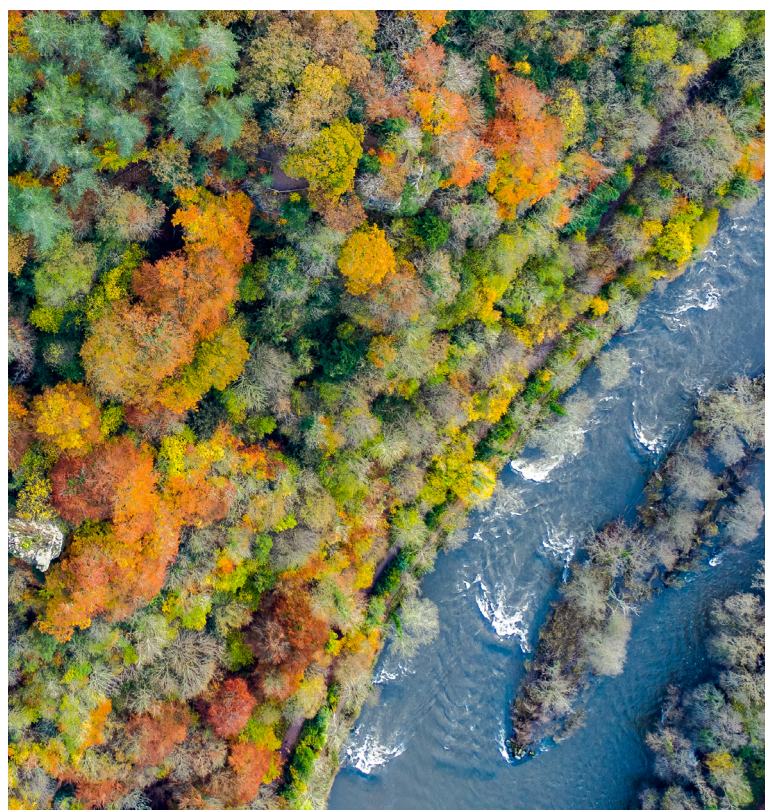


4 Improved Governance

Local NBS partnerships need to be better funded, facilitated and staffed to plan and co-design projects, developing evidence and ensuring community participation to bring together both rural and urban NBS activities.

Local NBS partnerships could be organised by different geographical units including existing and effective Local Nature Partnerships or river catchment partnerships – however, some of these need better direction and resources. A national NBS advisory body should be developed to support these local partnerships.

Currently, the 25-Year Environment Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategies are not being effectively developed or delivered in all parts of England. We need a more effective integration of community empowerment and the social, health and wellbeing benefits of NBS – including ideas like the Natural Health Service.





The bottom line

Nature Based Solutions need more strategic long-term funding, across local and national organisations, from the government first and then ideally through private investment. Key partnerships need to be developed with enhanced policy statements and structures – as well as training and strong, evidence-based communications.

All of this would give NBS the potential to empower our national response to some of the most pressing environmental challenges ever witnessed – and ultimately help deliver the Government's 25-Year Environment Plan cost-effectively and sustainably.

Collecting the evidence for this report

To find out more about how policy in England can make use of more widespread use of proven Nature Based Solutions, iCASP (<https://icasp.org.uk/>) and water@leeds (<https://water.leeds.ac.uk/>) were awarded funding from the University of Leeds Research England Policy Fund to collect evidence that could inspire the policies needed to make NBS a reality in England.

How did we collect the evidence?

We carried out a survey of practitioners with 128 responses as well as a systematic literature review of the evidence of impacts from NBS activities – over 120 documents were reviewed.

We also held three themed stakeholder workshops with 150 participants:

1. Green Finance: Unlocking Green Finance Opportunities
2. Nature Based Solutions: Identifying Key Priorities and Solutions
3. Natural Flood Management Monitoring and Evaluation

How was this evidence reviewed?

Our draft report was reviewed by an expert panel of 13 representatives from different regions of England, specialists in different types of NBS and a mix of organisations and community groups.

This summary is based on the information gathered from the above activities. A full report bringing together the results of the different stages of this work is available on our website at <https://icasp.org.uk/unlocking-policy-for-nature-based-solutions/>.

Contact details