

Economic prosperity: is it actually in our Nature?

It is sometimes said that the answer to any question in a headline is generally “no”. But with the question that we pose today – “Economic prosperity: is it actually in our Nature?” – the response from me is a resounding “yes”! As we’ll see, though, that isn’t just the view of the Chair of Natural England: it’s the verdict of a growing body of evidence from across the spectrum of science, business and government, and going back now for some years.

The question of whether we must sacrifice Nature for economic growth is not a new one, but the stakes have never been higher. Today we face not only into economic crisis, but also climate change and Nature emergencies, which means that if we take the wrong approaches, trading growth against environment, we risk plunging our country into a vicious spiral of decline, that is both ecological and economic.

The peril is already clear, with each week bringing yet more stark evidence of the climate and Nature emergency enveloping our planet: catastrophic flooding in Pakistan, wildfires across southern Europe and the demise of such rare and wonderful creatures such as the dugong.

In Britain this summer temperatures have comfortably broken the 40 C barrier for the first time, exacerbating a choking drought. Our web of life is unravelling with many once common wildlife, from hedgehogs to turtle doves, suffering decades of decline.

Too many people seem blind to the fact that our economy is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Nature, with our entire way of life sustained by ecosystems as diverse as soils and the sea. Nature is the basis of our food supply, clean water, air and vital for human health and wellbeing. Degrading those key services means money has to be spent dealing with the fall-out, money that could be better spent elsewhere.

When it comes to food security, it’s estimated that the pollination carried out by bees and other insects is worth nearly £700m to the UK economy, helping secure a farming industry worth over £120bn. Take that service away and we would have to spend an estimated £1.8bn a year hand-pollinating our crops, in the way they do in parts of southwestern China, where fruit farmers climb into the trees in the Spring to use feather dusters on sticks to move the pollen between blossoms by hand. 20 farmers are needed to replace the work of one bumblebee nest in those landscapes.

Peatlands are one of the best examples we have of the multiple benefits that Nature brings to society. Waterlogged blankets of dead plant matter cover a tenth of England and the high-quality water they filter into British rivers is valued at up to £888m per year. These wonderful wet places also make a huge contribution to conserving the native wildlife of our islands, hosting

some of our rarest species, bittern, swallowtail butterfly and plants such as carnivorous sundews. Such is their outstanding importance that nearly a third of our areas of deep peat is notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Considering the urgency of the climate change emergency, it is perhaps not surprising that most prominent in the benefits peatlands provide is the fact of them being England's biggest natural carbon store, locking away 580m tonnes of carbon in the ground, and in the process keeping it out of the atmosphere.

Unfortunately, and just as in the case of many tropical rainforests, their degradation is now such that they are currently net emitters of carbon, rather than the net sinks that they once were. We rightly express our horror at the destruction of the Amazon but need to recognise that we have important recovery work to do right here in our own doorstep.

Just 13% of peat is in a natural state and this means the rest of it – drying out and degrading – works against us, releasing 10m tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere each year and sending discoloured water cascading from hillsides to expensive treatment works. And the water our broken peatlands can no longer store instead rushes downstream and has been associated with various flooding incidents, in Yorkshire.

The Office for National Statistics has said that restoring all UK peatlands would cost £8bn-£21bn – but the carbon benefits alone would be around £109bn, giving a cost/benefit ratio of at least 5:1 and possibly 10:1. Got to be a good rate of return by anyone's estimation

This is before the millions of pounds of savings from water treatment and flood damage is factored in, never mind the wildlife benefits or the great potential for increased eco tourism.

Turning to the health benefits that arise from access to wonderful wildlife-rich landscapes, the strength of the connection between these has been underlined by a host of studies. One found that outdoor recreation provided health benefits worth more than £6bn a year, while another estimated that visits to woodlands saved £141m in reduced mental health treatment.

An often-overlooked aspect of the economy versus environment debate is how breathing life back into Nature results in life being breathed back into business too. In the United States there is evidence suggesting that for every \$1 million invested in Nature-based solutions, close to 40 jobs are created, about ten times more than would be secured via investments in fossil fuels.

The Dearne Valley in South Yorkshire, a former industrial wasteland has been transformed now the green lungs of communities across the North of England not only providing a wonderful place for people but the home of the increasingly scarce Willow Tit, it has led to a large number of new business enterprises springing up. This demonstrates how high-quality Nature is the precursor to high-quality investment and jobs.

Businesses understand this and are seeking opportunities to support Nature recovery with their own and investors' money. More than 160 companies have already joined forces with Natural England to help deliver the Government's promise to create a Nature Recovery Network across the country, which will be just as good for businesses as it will be for wildlife and people, because employees like to live in attractive Nature-filled places. On top of that are a range of other benefits that help companies to manage risk and realise opportunities. It's a case of both and rather than either or, business and nature.

The picture coming into sharp focus reveals how investing in Nature is not a drag on public finances, it actually saves the country money and creates the conditions necessary for economic prosperity. Far from being a block to economic development, it is increasingly clear that functioning natural systems are a vital prerequisite for it. The simple fact is that Nature is vital for our health, wealth and security. We can't do without it.

And of course on top of the financial and economic case is a moral and ethical one. It is recognised in the Government's ambitious 25 Year Environment Plan, which commits us to being the first generation that will leave the environment in a better state for the next generation. This is a pioneering idea and one that we must honour to hand to not leave future generations with ecological and financial debt, but instead to invest in nature recovery in a way that makes sense for the future as well as today.

Economic development will be even harder to achieve as the riches of Nature become even more depleted than now, unless we take immediate, coordinated action.

The broad goal to improve the state of the natural environment is backed by targets enshrined in the Environment Act 2021 – including that to halt the catastrophic decline of species by 2030. The UK has also adopted the goal of protecting 30 per cent of our land for Nature by 2030. That act of Parliament also brought forward some of the key tools to advance both these ambitions including Biodiversity Net Gain, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Conservation Covenants.

If we are to meet those targets – and we must – then, in the words of the Environment Secretary, we need to ensure that Nature and the economy are partners rather than seen as choices. That means weaving Nature recovery into the growth planning up front – the cheapest point at which to invest in Nature, and the one that also yields the biggest returns. That sort of logic appeals to all investors, whether their favourite colour is the green of Nature or the black of profit.

Nature recovery must be based on taking a more strategic approach to land use at the start of development planning, incorporating Nature recovery into the same process as planning for housing, infrastructure and industry. This would allow the identification of the most important places for Nature and the services society needs from Nature recovery. The resulting plans would deliver the beautiful places that would attract investment and enable people to enjoy healthy lives, as well as contributing to those 2030 targets.

Natural England, as the Government's statutory adviser on the environment, will continue to provide evidence-based advice to government on how it can progress its economic plans while establishing a better, more tailored British regime for Nature protection and recovery than the one implemented during the EU years. We do believe it is possible to do better, but only if Nature is taken to front and centre and if new regimes do not diminish existing protections, and indeed where possible seek to enhance them. At Natural England we have experience on how to do this, including from work on District Level Licensing for Great-crested Newts, and can see scope to expand that approach in proposed reforms.

Despite the opportunities to do better, some people are nonetheless understandably nervous about what a sharper focus on economic growth might mean for Nature. This is where an expression of more joined up thinking could help reveal the potential to secure bigger and quicker gains for Nature, including in Investment Zones which, if set up in an intelligent and integrated way, could allow Nature recovery to be planned into development at an early stage.

This in turn will give businesses the certainty needed to commit to Nature recovery in their planning, knowing that this will diminish risk, reduce costs, contribute to the more attractive places that will drive additional investment whilst fostering good relations with stakeholders. And if we can conceive processes that have the ecologists and planners sitting down together from the start, then the whole thing can go more quickly.

One important thing to bear in mind about Nature and economic development is that we already have the evidence that they can flourish together. A particularly strong case is the Thames Basin Heaths, which was declared a Special Protection Area for ground-nesting birds, stalling plans to build more than 50,000 homes. NE worked with the 11 local authorities involved and the developers on providing alternative greenspace for residents to use, resulting in the homes being built ahead of schedule and the populations of Dartford warbler, woodlark and nightjar actually increasing.

It's easy to look at this example and see how things might have gone very differently for the environment, without the intelligence and integration shown by all sides. This is the key to our debate. Short term economic growth achieved by trampling over Nature and its protections will not result in a healthy or sustainable economy. On the contrary, centuries of that kind of activity, whereby Nature has been liquidated for growth, has brought us to the doorstep of disaster, in the form of potentially catastrophic climate change and a mass extinction of animals and plants.

We cannot afford to carry on like that. Now is the time to take an integrated approach, whereby Nature recovery migrates to the centre of economic policy, and is no longer seen as an inevitable casualty of it.

British Embassy donates PPE to Honduras

World news story

The British Government donated PPE to Honduras to support Covid-19 pandemic response.



The UK government has donated personal protective equipment (PPE) to Honduras to support frontline staff and ensure they have the protection they need to do their vital work. The 123,000 PPE items will help thousands of frontline workers by supporting infection prevention control measures to reduce the risk of transmission and control the spread of Covid-19.

The donation arrived to Puerto Cortés on 25th September and will be distributed by the Secretary of Health. The PPE items include:

- Type IIR Masks: 48,600
- Gowns: 7,800
- Visors: 3,600
- Aprons: 63,000

The UK and Honduras have been working together to face global issues such as Covid-19. The global pandemic has challenged health systems around the world and the best way to overcome Covid-19 is to stand side by side with international partners.

The British Ambassador to Honduras, Nick Whittingham, said:

We are glad we are able to support Honduras' efforts to continue fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. We know that PPE, as high volume consumption items, are crucial for health systems to work properly. This donation is a great example on how Honduras and the UK can partner and work together to prepare for existing and future global health threats.

The Honduran Secretary of Health, José Manuel Matheu, thanked the United Kingdom for this significant donation that contributes to the protection of frontline personnel, since the support of cooperation from partner countries is essential to strengthen the institutional response, emphasising that “the Government of President Xiomara Castro is focused on humanising health in Honduras by providing quality health care services”.

The Sub Secretary for International Cooperation and Promotion, Ambassador Cindy Larissa Rodriguez, on behalf of the solidarity government of President Xiomara Castro, thanked the United Kingdom for supporting the efforts of the People’s Government of Honduras:

As a Democratic Government we value the cooperation provided by the British Government by donating medical protection equipment to continue fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, we reiterate our commitment to continue working in coordination with partner countries that are our greatest allies.

Published 17 October 2022

[Approbation of the new Lord Mayor of London](#)

My Lord Mayor Elect, I am commanded by His Majesty the King to express His Majesty’s express approval of the choice of the citizens of London in electing you to be Lord Mayor for the coming year.

I think we’ll all be acutely aware that the last time those words were spoken, it was on Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth’s behalf – and that this will be the first time in living memory that this ceremony has referred to His Majesty the King.

I am delighted to welcome you, Lord Mayor Elect, as well as your wife and soon to be Lady Mayoress, Felicity and other distinguished guests – to formally convey this message on His Majesty’s behalf.

Let me also thank the Recorder of London and High Steward of Southwark for his address – and congratulate on him on being one of the few people in public life with a title as long and complicated as mine.

I would also like to recognise the late Lord Mayor, Vincent Keaveny’s time in office. My late Lord Mayor, your year at Mansion House has been characterised by the theme of “People and Purpose”.

You have visited countless countries to promote the City and UK legal services, received ministers and ambassadors from around the world, and spoken out on a range of issues – from social mobility to climate change and digital trade.

As the first Irish citizen to be the Lord Mayor of London, it was no surprise to see you award the Freedom of the City to Ed Sheeran, who is himself of Irish descent. However, I don't think there could be anything more British than seeing you lead 1,000 people driving sheep over London Bridge! Thank you again for all that you have done for the City of London.

Now let me turn to the Lord Mayor Elect. Nicholas, I note that you were also born in Ireland – as they say, you wait 692 Lord Mayors for an Irishman and then two come along at once! Your career in the City has spanned more than four decades and your specialism – advising on mergers and acquisitions and raising capital – is indicative of the theme for your year in office: 'Financing our Future'.

The Lord Mayor is, of course, an ambassador for British business, financial and legal services – exporting all that is best of our great capital city at home and abroad. I know a focus for you will be how we use capital and expertise to boost our economy.

My own job as Lord Chancellor is to promote English and Welsh law and the legal services that underpin our economy; and the Government has been very clear that economic growth is our first priority – so, our aims are very much aligned.

London is, of course, at the heart of that world-beating legal services sector. The facts speak for themselves. Legal services contribute some 29 billion gross value added to our economy each year... Including billions in trade surplus and tax, as well as employing over 350,000 people directly.

It isn't just British businesses that benefit from the UK's legal excellence.

Companies from around the world carry out their business transactions here in the UK – because of our system's reputation for probity and predictability. In fact, last year more than half of all commercial cases in the UK were brought by international businesses.

Our legal services are undoubtedly one of our greatest exports – supporting the growth of global trade and investment not just in London but across the UK. That's why, through our GREAT Legal Services campaign, we are doing even more to promote the English and Welsh law abroad... and, of course, London as the world's pre-eminent centre for dispute resolution.

It's no coincidence that the largest international law firms in London have between 45% and 65% of their lawyers based outside of the country, demonstrating again that London is at the forefront of the way the world does business.

But I know another focus for you, Lord Mayor Elect, will be competitiveness. As ever, we have competition – from the likes of the USA, Germany and

Singapore among others. Competition is healthy but, particularly in challenging times – a world still recovering from the pandemic, and now rising to immense cost-of-living challenges – it's crucial that we do everything to stay ahead of the game.

So, ensuring our legal services continue to keep pace with the rest of the world... That they continue to innovate... and stay at the forefront of new ways of working... Couldn't be more important. Similarly, we must also make sure that the law evolves to provide certainty on emerging technologies – providing certainty to the businesses that use them.

As Lord Chancellor, I have pledged to do all I can to support legal innovation. I want the UK to be a global hub for lawtech, in the same way it has been with fintech. And I want to see our regulatory system continue to enable legal innovators to do what they do best – to innovate in the interests of better outcomes. It's this combination of the two that will enable us to keep our world-leading status.

My Lord Mayor Elect, I know you share our goals. The City has a long, successful history and the theme for your year in office – 'Financing our Future' – is all about promoting both resource and resilience. Your focus on getting capital and expertise in the right places will undoubtedly drive our economy and make us even more competitive.

As we look ahead, I am convinced that together we can achieve so much for the City of London and for the UK more broadly. I'm looking forward to working in tandem with you to promote UK legal services and get the economy growing again. I think I might give the sheep drive a miss, however!

I wish you and the future Lady Mayoress well for your year in office. Thank you.

[Civil news: housing and debt and HPCDS tenders now open](#)

Housing and debt tender

We are inviting tenders to deliver housing and debt contract work from 1 December 2022 until 31 August 2024 in the following procurement areas:

1. City of Kingston upon Hull
2. Cheshire
3. Shropshire
4. Staffordshire
5. South Tyneside
6. Wigan

The opportunity to deliver housing and debt services is open to any organisation that can meet the minimum tender requirements. An organisation does not need to be a current legal aid provider to tender for this opportunity.

We would like organisations to deliver work from 1 December 2022 where possible. But organisations unable to start on 1 December will be able to tender to start delivering work from a later date.

There is no limit to the number of contracts that can be awarded to deliver housing and debt services in a procurement area.

Applicants can bid to deliver housing and debt services in a procurement area through an office that is either a:

- permanent presence in the procurement area, or a
- part-time presence in the procurement area

HPCDS tender

We are also inviting tenders to deliver services in the following Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS) areas from 1 December 2022 until 29 April 2023:

1. Basildon
2. Crewe
3. Hull
4. Medway and Maidstone
5. Stafford
6. Walsall

Services will start on 1 December 2022. However, organisations unable to deliver work from 1 December can tender to start delivering work from a later date.

Organisations may bid for housing and debt contract work and/or HPCDS contract work through this procurement process. They are not required to bid for both housing and debt and HPCDS.

However, organisations bidding for an HPCDS contract must hold, or successfully bid for as part of this procurement process, a 2018 Standard Civil Contract. This needs to include authorisation in the housing and debt categories of law.

When awarding HPCDS contracts preference will be given to organisations:

- with recent and relevant experience of delivering HPCDS services
- with an office in the corresponding housing and debt procurement area
- able to start delivering work on the contract start date

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is seeking to award one contract for each of the HPCDS areas listed above.

How to apply

Tenders must be submitted using the LAA's eTendering system.

Tender deadline

The tender opens on 17 October 2022 and closes at noon on 7 November 2022.

Further information

[Civil tender activity 2022](#) – to find out more and download documents

[eTendering system](#) – to submit your tender

British Embassy Ashgabat organises Climate and Eco-Festival

The British Embassy in Ashgabat worked alongside young climate activists, volunteers and Turkmen eco-blogger, Gulnara Tayjanova to organise the festival, which took place on 9 October.

The festival welcomed everyone of all ages and featured an array of interesting eco-friendly activities. These included live entertainment, eco-friendly workshops for children, climate quizzes, flash mob dances, fun games, music and songs, guest speakers and presentations. There was also a screening of Sir David Attenborough's film "A Life on Our Planet".

Deputy Head of Mission of the British Embassy to Turkmenistan, John Hamilton opened the festival:

There is no doubt that climate change is a defining challenge facing our planet. Some climate change is now irreversible and our ability to influence the future has been reduced. But there is no doubt that we can avoid the worst if we act now.

All of you here today our valuable contributors to dealing with climate change. We are all agents of change – whether it's through education, through use of science and technology, or by being innovators. Everybody can make an important difference by taking individual action in their own day-to-day lives.

Throughout the day, visitors learnt how to recycle and re-use plastic products, as well as how to manage waste. Guests also had the chance to taste and make vegan food, learn how to weave plastic rugs, and meet likeminded people and share their experience of being more eco-friendly. Eco-bags were also for sale at the event.

The festival was free to attend, but participants were asked to bring one used plastic bottle per person as an "entry fee". Visitors could also bring toys, clothes and animal food for donation.

As a result, hundreds of people visited the festival with an intention to learn how to contribute to a more sustainable and green world. The climate and eco-celebration ended with an awarding ceremony for the speakers, activists, volunteers and the competition winners.