

**Our Natural Heritage**  
*Policies on the Natural Environment*

**Policy Paper 93**



# Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
1 Introduction .....	7
2.1 Zero Waste.....	9
2.2 Product Design and Packaging .....	11
2.3 Labelling and Certification .....	12
2.4 Public Procurement.....	13
3 Water .....	14
4 Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment .....	16
4.1 Access .....	16
4.2 Protection .....	17
4.3 Litter .....	19
4.4 Air Quality.....	20
4.5 Noise .....	20
4.6 Light Pollution .....	21
5 Biodiversity .....	22
5.1 The Local Environment – Our Natural Health Service.....	23
5.2 Creating Urban Habitats.....	24
5.3 Wildlife Corridors.....	24
5.4 Getting the Balance Right.....	25
5.5 Ecosystems Approach .....	25
5.6 Native Species .....	26
5.7 Research .....	26
5.8 The Marine Environment.....	27
6 Rural Land Use.....	28
7 International .....	29
Appendix Three : Glossary of Technical Terms .....	34
Policy Equality Impact Assessment .....	37

## Executive Summary

A healthy natural environment is crucial not only to our quality of life but also to the sustainability of life on the planet. We are using finite resources at an ever-increasing rate to such an extent that some key elements will be exhausted by the middle of the century unless net consumption is curbed. The burden on ecosystem services is now so great that water resources are being overwhelmed, soils are losing their fertility, fish stocks are disappearing and biodiversity is threatened with a mass extinction.

Liberal Democrats recognise that the threat to biodiversity and the depletion of our natural resources are as great a threat as climate change. Our 2007 Policy Paper *Zero Carbon Britain* addressed the serious issue of climate change and here we look beyond this and make proposals to sustain and enhance the natural environment. We appreciate that GDP alone is not a sufficient indicator of success, we need a new standard which also values sustainability and quality of life.

### **Minimising the UK's Net Use of Resources**

Liberal Democrats believe that we need to learn to live more on less and would introduce policies to cut our net consumption and ultimately achieve zero waste to landfill by:

#### **More Efficient Use of Resources:**

- Passing an Anti-Waste & Resource Efficiency Act to establish an independent Resource Efficiency Committee (REC). The REC would be tasked to identify the key resources being used unsustainably and will have a duty to recommend legally-binding targets for reducing their net consumption, on the lines of the Climate Change Act.
- Setting automatically-updating sustainable design standards for key products.
- Require specified products to be sold with parts and labour guarantees for at least five years to ensure people benefit from products which are made to last.
- Introducing binding packaging reduction targets and better enforcement of the excess packaging regulations.

#### **Improved Water Management:**

- Introducing universal smart water metering in water stressed areas by 2020, and providing grants and preferential VAT rates for rainwater harvesting systems, water butts and dual-flush toilets.
- Providing stronger planning guidance in favour of compulsory rainwater harvesting systems, greywater recycling, green roofs and sustainable urban drainage systems where appropriate, this would include retrofitting as well as new developments.
- Reforming Ofwat's remit to put water resource efficiency at the heart of water companies plans including tougher leakage targets.

**Action on Waste:**

- Giving top-tier local authorities a statutory duty to develop resource recovery plans for all types of waste - municipal, commercial and agricultural - in their area with the objective of maximising the recovery of useful resources and bringing efficiencies of scale.

**Supporting Biodiversity and Ecosystem services:**

Liberal Democrats recognise that humans are not the only living things on this planet, and that our survival depends on the maintenance of ecosystems and biodiversity. We will:

- Move to using environmental capacity as the key guidance for identifying sites for development in the planning system.
- Initiate a national research programme to set guidance on environmental limits.
- Give local authorities a duty to protect local biodiversity and set local targets for wildlife.
- Use the planning system to encourage the provision of swift and bat boxes, green roofs and other wildlife-friendly features and wildflower areas in all new developments with a duty to promote the establishment of wildlife corridors.
- Encourage the re-introduction of species that used to be native to the UK but that have been lost due to persecution or habitat degradation, such as beavers.
- Extend the protection offered by the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) to some natural habitats that cannot be replaced, including the small remaining areas of ancient woodland and upland moorland.
- Return control of the interface between land and sea, in our estuaries, on our beaches and salt marshes needs to the democratically elected local bodies with appropriate advice from the statutory bodies such as Natural England, Environment Agency and the new Marine Management Organisation to provide a strategic overview and avoid a piecemeal approach.
- Base the allocation of Highly Protected Marine Reserves on scientific evidence.
- Reform the CAP so that all farm payments deliver public benefits and to strive for reforms that will make WTO rules subject to environmental criteria.

**Protecting and Enhancing the Environment**

Liberal Democrats believe that the natural environment is important to our health and well-being and recognise that everyone has the right to access to it. We will:

**Give Local People Real Access to Their Local Environment:**

- Amend planning guidance to insist on Natural England's Natural Green Space standards being incorporated into Local Development Frameworks to provide a range of spaces from local, small areas to large sub-regional sites.
- Increase rights of access to the countryside, as successfully introduced by the Liberal Democrats in Scotland.

## Our Natural Heritage

- Encourage the development of 'Greenways' (on the French 'Avenues Vertes' model) promising a well-managed accessible rural cycling and riding network linked to but separate from the road network and where possible linked to wildlife corridors.

### **Give Local People Real Control Over Their Local Environment:**

- Radically reform planning law and guidance to introduce the concept of landscape-scale planning and reverse the loss of local control in Labour's Planning Act. Local authorities will be given the responsibility for working together to agree Landscape Policies to protect and enhance natural geographical areas such as river basins, moors, flood plains or islands.
- Give local authorities the power to give protection to green spaces which are of particular value to local people – this would particularly apply to urban green spaces and to countryside on the very edge of urban areas, often the most heavily used of all green land.
- Enable local councils to take tougher action on litter by releasing the money raised from fines to be spent on measures to improve the local environment.

### **Act on Noise and Light Pollution:**

- Take action on noise pollution with stricter regulation and better enforcement.
- Propose that external lighting should be treated as a potential pollutant needing control and that responsibility for co-ordinating external lighting policies should be brought within a single government department.
- Require planning authorities to adopt policies to control external lighting, in particular with regard to banning lighting that would interfere with important habitats for nocturnal animals; controlling the brightness of approved lit advertising signs; and ensuring that security lighting does not cause a nuisance.
- Encourage local authorities and the Highways Agency to consider how the impact of street and sign lighting can be reduced.

### **Provide Proper Enforcement:**

- Ensure environmental crimes, including water pollution and wildlife crime are properly enforced and the penalties truly reflect the damage done and the cost of clean-up and restoration.
- Make the Environment Agency the 'buck-stops-here' body with responsibility for co-ordinating the enforcement of environmental protection regulations and with the power to direct the other bodies involved to fulfil their duties.

## **Acting Internationally**

Liberal Democrats will take decisive action to protect the natural environment on the international stage, including:

- Urgently developing a new system of bilateral agreements between the EU and forest-rich developing countries to reform forestry governance and exclude illegal products from trade.

- Encouraging the use of public procurement policy throughout the EU to require legal and sustainable timber and timber products for all government contracts.
- Adopting at EU level new legislation making it illegal to import and possess timber produced illegally in foreign countries.
- Adopting minimum standards of national forestry governance as condition for the provision of carbon financing for avoided deforestation under the climate change regime, ensuring that the money benefits forest communities and promotes sustainable forest management.
- Ratifying ILO 169, recognising the rights of indigenous peoples to land ownership, equality and freedom.

# 1 Introduction

1.0.1. Whether it's the rolling green hills of our rural landscape or the diversity of wildlife in an urban garden, Liberal Democrats recognise that a healthy natural environment is crucial to our quality of life. Our commitment to the environment recognises two key factors:

- Its importance in providing us with food, health benefits and enjoyment.
- Our responsibility to steward the earth for the generations who come after us.

1.0.2. From the party's very beginning we have recognised the importance of the natural environment. The Preamble to our constitution states our belief that "each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and, by safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long-term continuity of life in all its forms".

1.0.3. Although our concern for the environment is driven primarily by the urgent need to reverse the trends that threaten the future of our children and grandchildren, we also recognise that those people suffering the effects of economic deprivation have a much greater chance of living in areas of environmental degradation, with consequential health impacts.

1.0.4. The quality of the local environment has a direct impact on people's lives. Living among attractive parks, gardens and streets and with access to unspoiled countryside does not merely lift the spirits: it has been shown to enhance health and well-being. The noisy, litter- and graffiti-strewn streets with barren open spaces that provide the backdrop for so many of our deprived areas contribute to depression and ill-health. So one of the key objectives of the proposals outlined in this paper is to transform the worst of our local environments while preserving the best. A second, related, objective is to enable local people to engage directly with the natural environment and take control of their own local public spaces.

1.0.5. Of course, the natural environment provides more than just pleasure. It provides the food, timber, minerals and other resources on which we rely. The natural environment provides us with crucial ecosystem services which give us clean water and air, productive soils and oceans, and maintain the biodiversity which we exploit for everything from drugs to new food crops.

1.0.6. The trends, both globally and in the United Kingdom, are worrying. We are using finite resources at an ever-increasing rate and some key elements will be exhausted by the middle of the century unless net consumption is curbed. The burden on ecosystem services is now so great that water resources are being overwhelmed; soils are losing their fertility; fish stocks are disappearing; and biodiversity is threatened with a mass extinction.

1.0.7. Liberal Democrats recognise that action to reverse these trends is as urgent and as important as tackling climate change (which itself is having an increasingly negative effect on the natural environment). We spelt out our policies for dealing with climate change in policy paper 82 *Zero Carbon Britain*, published in 2007. This paper sets out proposals that will minimise the UK's net use of natural resources; will reduce the burden on ecosystem services; and will do much to halt the decline in biodiversity.

1.0.8. If successful, these proposals will improve the local environment for everyone but especially for those living in areas that are currently deprived; will protect our ecosystems from

further degradation; will make our landscapes and biodiversity much more resilient to climate and other changes; and will contribute to our economic well-being by cutting costs through the efficient use of resources.

1.0.9 Economic growth alone is not an adequate measure of success: many studies have found that wealth has only a very limited relationship to human happiness. To achieve the changes we desire we need to change the way that governments and society measure success. The traditional method is Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which counts economic activity as a positive irrespective of whether the outcome of that activity is good - adding to people's quality of life - or bad - for example, by increasing pollution. Chasing GDP-inspired growth without consideration of the consequences is environmental and economic lunacy, as demonstrated by the recent finding that between \$2 trillion and \$5 trillion worth of irreplaceable natural capital is lost every year due to deforestation alone, much of it tropical rainforest<sup>1</sup>. The Federal Policy Committee has commissioned further research into the ways in which success is measured so we do not pre-empt that work by saying more here about the financial value of environmental capital and services.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity*, report funded by the German Ministry for the Environment and the European Commission and published in 2008



## 2 Natural Resources

2.0.1 Liberal Democrats believe that, in enjoying the use of resources today, we also have a responsibility to consider the needs of the generations which will come after us. Consumption has typically increased with affluence, but constantly to demand more from the planet in this way risks jeopardising the long term sustainability of our standard of living. A more thoughtful use of resources, and a commitment to reuse and recycling, will allow us to maintain a high quality of life now, and into the future.

2.0.2 At the moment, however, our consumption of the planet's non-renewable resources is expanding exponentially and is clearly unsustainable<sup>2</sup>. If current trends continue, we will, in less than 50 years, run out of some metals that are essential to many products, including nickel, tin, tungsten and zinc. Other crucial resources - such as oil and the bauxite from which aluminium is refined - will become increasingly scarce and expensive to extract. As long ago as 1987 the UN Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* alerted the world to the urgency of making progress toward economic development that could be sustained without depleting natural resources or harming the environment, but resource consumption and environmental damage have since accelerated and action is now even more urgent.

2.0.3 Huge opportunities exist to reduce resource use with little or no effect on people's quality of life: various studies have suggested that up to 90% of raw materials end up as waste within six months of being acquired for human use. Reducing inefficient resource use has another important benefit: it cuts the pollution and waste which is threatening to overwhelm the world's balance between man and nature.

### 2.1 Zero Waste

2.1.1 Liberal Democrats will replace the numerous existing government-funded agencies with a Resource Efficiency Trust (RET) to support business efficiencies and an independent Resource Efficiency Committee (REC) to make recommendations to government. The REC would be tasked to identify the key resources being used unsustainably and will have a duty to recommend legally-binding targets for reducing their net consumption, on the lines of the Climate Change Act. An example of the type of resource the REC should look at is bauxite. This is often mined to produce aluminium at great cost to the natural environment, despite the fact that aluminium is easily recycled. Sand and gravel are also often mined and dumped rather than reused.

2.1.2 The REC will be responsible for advising government on the costs and benefits of recycling and resource use in the same way that NICE (the National Institute for Clinical Excellence) does for health matters. It will advise the government how to meet the specific targets for the identified key resources and to reduce waste and improve resource efficiency in general, aiming for 'cradle-to-cradle' design where resources are continuously reused and recycled in a perpetual cycle. The REC will have the power to recommend, among other things, information campaigns, recycling targets, loans to small businesses to make resource efficiency investments or VAT reductions on products that facilitate resource efficiency. Our overall aim is to remove market

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<sup>2</sup> *A Comparison of the Limits to Growth with Thirty Years of Reality*, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, 2008

barriers to resource efficiency; to reduce the economic risk posed by the increasing scarcity of some key resources; and to prevent the UK exporting its waste and resource problems to the developing world.

2.1.3 Some of the most rapid resource efficiency gains can be made through more effective recycling policies. One of the biggest obstacles is the divisive way in which, uniquely in Europe, recycling is organised in the UK, with household waste being collected and treated separately from business and agricultural waste. This is not only inefficient but is an obstacle to the introduction of some of the most modern treatment technologies. For example, anaerobic digestion - which produces both valuable gas that can either be fed into the mains supply or used to generate electricity and high-quality fertiliser - often works best with a mixture of municipal organic waste, food waste from manufacturers and supermarkets, and farm waste.

2.1.4 County and unitary local authorities currently have a statutory duty to develop waste plans for all types of waste - municipal, commercial and industrial – produced in their area. We will strengthen this duty to ensure the maximum recovery of useful resources – including, where appropriate, resources from agricultural waste – and the provision of the necessary resource recovery infrastructure. We will encourage neighbouring authorities to co-operate together, preferably through the formation of Joint Waste Authorities, already common in many urban areas, as Council boundaries rarely define a sensible catchment area for waste treatment. We will also ensure that

**Liverpool – Waste & Recycling**

Over the last three years, recycling has jumped from a mere 5% to over 30% and is still growing. To achieve this, Liverpool City Council have:

- ❖ Run an internationally recognised ‘eco schools’ scheme to raise awareness about recycling and environmental issues. Over 75% of local schools now take part.
- ❖ Started to collect and compost catering waste from businesses to save it going to landfill.
- ❖ Innovated ‘Bulky Bobs’, a social enterprise operating with council support to reuse, recycle or restore household items for families on low incomes.
- ❖ Tasked street sweepers to segregate their waste for recycling too.

whatever is needed to manage the use of resources more efficiently and deal with waste more effectively is given full consideration in Regional Spatial Strategies.

2.1.5 The REC will be given responsibility for driving up the level of resource recovery and advising on the most effective technologies. We endorse the existing Liberal Democrat policy of banning waste treatment contracts longer than 10 years in recognition of the rapid improvements being made, ensuring that the most effective environmental technologies are introduced as soon as is sensible. We will not allow new incinerators for municipal waste unless they can be shown to be the best environmental option after considering all alternatives, including new technologies where waste reduction and reuse are not possible. We continue to support the waste hierarchy. Top of this is waste reduction. Following this, we will encourage waste reuse and then recycling and energy from waste.

2.1.6 Our final objective is zero waste to landfill.

## Our Natural Heritage

2.1.7 We will keep the responsibility for municipal waste collection with district or unitary authorities, as this service needs to be tailored to local circumstances. However, we will ensure that this service is also made available to small businesses that are unable to access suitable alternatives. We will also insist that, over a period of time, a common standard, to be set by the REC, will be introduced throughout the UK for recycling collection, to avoid the current confusion among the public over what can be recycled and to make possible legislation to force clearer packaging and product labelling about recycling. These standards will be minimum requirements and will not penalise those authorities who choose to innovate and exceed them. We will also reinforce planning guidance to ensure that adequate provision is made for storage and collection of waste in new housing and commercial developments<sup>3</sup>.

2.1.8 These proposals will add to the pressures on businesses to improve the resource efficiency of their own operations and of their products and services. We will therefore reverse cuts made by the Labour government in the programmes that support businesses, especially small businesses, in the way they manage and reduce their environmental impact. Our new Resource Efficiency Trust will bring together government-funded agencies such as WRAP and Envirowise to work with businesses of all sizes to help them both reduce costs, make a step change in resource efficiency and insulate them from long-term increases in material and energy costs and scarcities – helping to improve the UK's competitiveness.

2.1.9 The global market for sustainable technologies has been projected to be worth some £600 billion a year by 2015. We believe that UK businesses can benefit substantially both by minimising their costs through resource minimisation and developing efficient products and services. This will require significant research and development, some of which will require government support.

## 2.2 Product Design and Packaging

2.2.1 A prime area for attention is product design, as most of the life cycle impacts - from manufacture and use to disposal - are decided at the design stage. The EU has begun to introduce measures to encourage design for sustainability but there is still a long way to go. We will work with the EU to introduce sustainable design standards that minimise the resources needed to make and operate a product; that maximise its effective life (including such factors as reparability and upgradability); and that ensure that, when its useful life ends, a product can be disassembled so that components can either be reused or recycled. Initially, such standards should be supported by a labelling scheme along the lines of the EU energy label; for key products, minimum standards should eventually become mandatory.

2.2.2 We will also seek to improve the way in which such standards are set to ensure that they are regularly updated to reflect improving practice. We believe that this can best be achieved by automatically updating the standards every three or so years to the level already being achieved by the best on the market: this gives manufacturers some certainty about future expectations and avoids accusations that higher standards are too difficult to achieve. This process has been used

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<sup>3</sup> A survey of waste professionals found that 77% thought that provision in residential developments is currently inadequate - [www.berr.gov.uk/files/file\\_39024.pdf](http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file_39024.pdf)

successfully in the USA and has particularly helped smaller companies who often have the flexibility to adapt quickly.

2.2.3 We recognise the fact that low quality appliances which fail quickly usually end up costing consumers more. Despite this, when given incentives, companies are quite able to improve the quality of products, as illustrated by the use of energy efficiency ratings on white goods which has driven up quality without driving up prices. At a UK level Liberal Democrats will require specified products to be sold with parts and labour guarantees for at least five years and will consider extending that period to encourage improved reliability. For these products we will also require manufacturers to supply spares for at least 10 years beyond the market life of the product. This will offer real peace of mind for consumers without the need to take out expensive additional insurance policies.

2.2.4 We recognise that identifying where improvements are most needed is not always straightforward and would ensure that decisions are based on an in-depth analysis of specific product supply chains. In the few cases where this has been done, the result have often not conformed with expectations. Products from developing countries can have lower environmental impact than western alternatives, as their production often involves far lower resource inputs (such as agricultural chemicals and the energy used in their manufacture and in road transport) than similar products produced intensively in richer countries. Once the analyses are carried out, REC should bring the relevant stakeholders together to commit to reducing environmental impact, supported by appropriate incentives.

2.2.5 Liberal Democrats know that people don't want to be burdened with too much packaging. We endorse the proposals set out in our 2007 policy motion *Taking Action to Tackle Excess Waste Packaging* - including introducing binding packaging reduction targets and better enforcement of the excess packaging regulations - and will add a requirement for the REC to consider whether introducing a deposit scheme for bottles and cans would be helpful.

### **2.3 Labelling and Certification**

2.3.1 Consumer choice can play a major role in reducing the environmental impact of products, often forcing the pace of change amongst manufacturers more effectively than legislation. By informing consumer choice, labels and the verification systems behind them can have a dramatic effect on markets and sectors. The white goods energy efficiency label and Farm Assurance schemes are two examples where poorly-rated or unapproved products have become virtually unsaleable. However, a proliferation of voluntary, government and private labels for different environmental and ethical criteria now threaten to confuse the public and undermine their confidence. The European Ecolabel is a brave attempt at a universal environmental label but it actually conveys little information, suffers from an 'all-or-nothing' approach and has been poorly supported in the UK.

2.3.2 A better precedent is the health labelling of food where a small selection of key indicators – such as salt, saturated fats and calories – are now combined in a few leading labelling schemes. The best schemes are recognised to be compact, give a clear 'traffic light' signal to consumers and convey a manageable amount of information, despite the complex methodology behind them. Environmental labelling should follow the same model and combine a few key indicators such as:

## Our Natural Heritage

- Embedded carbon.
- Energy efficiency.
- Impact on water resources.
- Impact on biodiversity.
- Recyclability.

Verification would have to be rigorous and indicators and methodology could vary from sector to sector but, as in the best food labelling, the scheme would aim for clear 'traffic light' signals and simply presented information. We will encourage the voluntary development of such schemes but, as with food labelling, we will reserve the right to legislate if voluntary agreement does not deliver.

2.3.3 Similar in concept to labelling, but covering a wider range of factors, is the idea of certification schemes indicating whether particular products have been produced in a sustainable manner. The best known examples are probably in timber (e.g. the Forest Stewardship Council certificate) and fisheries (e.g. the Marine Stewardship Council certificate). In both cases these and similar certification systems are increasingly being used as keys to market access; for example in the UK, among other countries, timber for public procurement contracts must be identified as being legally and sustainably produced, and certificates like FSC are almost the only means to do so. As a result, the incentive to defraud the systems is growing, and it is not clear that the certification bodies themselves have the capacity to combat this. We would aim to forge a new partnership with the certification bodies, using government enforcement powers to underpin their sustainability claims.

## 2.4 Public Procurement

2.4.1 Much more ambitious use of public procurement policy is needed to use government buying power to favour sustainable products. In the UK, as in most EU countries, government procurement averages about 10% of total purchasing in the economy and the public sector is a particularly important consumer of items such as construction products, food, clothing, paper, energy, office machinery and furniture as well as services such as construction, maintenance, printing and transport. The UK already has a positive record in some areas, such as timber products, but in others the sustainability message is much less well understood and promoted; the recent focus on energy and water use, for example, has tended to result in the responsible sourcing of materials being ignored. We will integrate the sourcing of sustainably produced materials into all areas of government procurement policy.

2.4.2 Local government's approach to sustainable procurement is in general haphazard and, while there are some outstanding examples of policies in local councils, most are doing very little. We will include sustainable procurement in the Audit Commission's comprehensive area assessment framework and provide guidance and assistance to local authorities in improving their procurement practices.

## 3 Water

3.0.1 As climate change kicks in, many parts of the UK will suffer increasing pressure on water supplies. Met Office models predict increasing proportions of UK land experiencing drought by 2050. The 2006 drought in the UK took some groundwater and river levels to their lowest on record and affected 13 million people. Lower groundwater and over-abstraction from rivers are already damaging the local wildlife balance. Our individual water use has risen 30% since 1970 and we waste huge amounts. Do we really need to take huge quantities of water, clean it to drinking water standard, pump it through pipes from which a substantial amount is leaked, only to use it to flush toilets?

3.0.2 Ofwat's regulatory regime is a hangover from the Thatcher era, paying no serious attention to environmental or social concerns. We will reform Ofwat's remit to put water resource efficiency at the heart of water companies plans including tougher leakage targets and provision to protect water quality through land management. A new pricing regime would delink profit from resource use by fixing a profit ceiling on the water company's income from each household based on historic usage and any special needs. With smart metering, water bills would still rise with usage but profits would be redirected towards social or water efficiency funds.

### Cardiff – Eco Properties

Liberal Democrat Cardiff City Council have been using their role as a social housing landlord to encourage the building of more sustainable homes. New council and social housing has been built incorporating solar panels, grey water recycling systems, insulation made from recycled paper and ground source heat pumps.

Cardiff's new central library was recently completed to an 'excellent' BREEAM standard - meaning it has been built to the highest environmental standards. Features include an eco-friendly water system and the use of recycled materials in construction, with a sedum grass roof to minimise heat loss.

3.0.3 We need to support water efficiency in existing homes by introducing home water efficiency ratings, bringing in universal smart metering in water-stressed areas by 2020, and providing grants and preferential VAT rates for rainwater harvesting systems, water butts and dual-flush toilets.

3.0.4 We will strengthen the planning guidance in favour of compulsory rainwater harvesting systems, greywater recycling, green roofs and sustainable urban drainage systems where appropriate. This would also increase resilience in the face of natural disasters like the 2007 floods during which many lost their water supply. All new housing developments in areas of water stress should become 'water neutral' with increased water usage offset by efficiencies elsewhere.

3.0.5 We endorse existing Liberal Democrat policy in favour of an overview of all flood risk by the Environment Agency. We would encourage the EA to work together with local authorities to address restoration of natural riverbanks, backwater channels and wetlands. In planning policy we will introduce landscape-scale planning policies (see below) with a specific remit to restore water channels, rivers and wetlands and reduce flood risk by properly utilising the natural capacity of

## Our Natural Heritage

the landscape to retain water. Where homes are lost to the sea, those who are affected should be compensated. We will achieve this within the existing flood defences budget. In the coming decades we will ensure that enough is spent on flooding alleviation and compensation so that we are able to adapt to climate change.

## 4 Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment

4.0.1 Liberal Democrats believe that our quality of life is dependant on the quality of our environment. We will not only work to maintain and enhance it but will give people more access to and influence over it. We believe everyone should be able to share in the enjoyment of our green and pleasant land.

4.0.2 Our natural environment has enormous value not just to the wildlife that inhabits it but to the people who eat the food we grow on it, who take exercise and simple enjoyment from it, some of whose jobs are inextricably bound to it, and whose future health and security on this planet depends on its protection. Too often we have parcelled off a small number of sites or areas for special protection by experts and left the rest to the mercy of market forces where different values often prevail and valuable natural resources are lost. Even our current absolutely necessary preoccupation with greenhouse gas reduction holds risks if we rely too heavily on market mechanisms at both national and international level.

4.0.3 We are not conservative conservationists. We understand that the UK's natural landscape in particular has been shaped by human activity and that this process will inevitably continue. We know that the countryside thrives when the communities in it are allowed to thrive. And we know that nature has the potential to thrive in the gardens, parks, air and skies of our towns and cities too. So we need a radical change in policy to expand the importance of protecting the natural environment from its current niche into a philosophy that reaches into far more areas of government, local government and international relations.

4.0.4 Our children risk becoming disconnected from the natural environment with serious consequences both for them and it. Liberal Democrat proposals for education reform were outlined in policy paper 89 *Equity and Excellence* (March 2009), advocating a slimmed down curriculum which will enable teachers to be more creative and use local examples so that pupils develop a deeper understanding of the natural environment. Without restrictive curriculum requirements, teachers will be able to take children on field trips as part of a curriculum which they can develop themselves.

### 4.1 Access

4.1.1 There is significant evidence that local access to green spaces not only improves the quality of life but improves health and reduces NHS costs. For example, a study<sup>4</sup> of the cause of death of almost 400,000 people has found that the health gap between rich and poor could be nearly halved if the least well-off have access to parks and woodland. We will therefore amend planning guidance to insist on English Nature's Natural Green Space standards being incorporated into Local Development Frameworks to provide a range of spaces, from local, small areas to large sub-regional sites. We would involve local people in creating new community woodland and green areas.

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<sup>4</sup> Study carried out by Richard Mitchell of Glasgow University and Frank Popper of the University of St Andrews, published *The Lancet*, Volume 372, Issue 9650, Pages 1655 - 1660, 8 November 2008



## Our Natural Heritage

4.1.2 To encourage more access to the countryside and better health, we will encourage the development of 'Greenways' (on the French 'Avenues Vertes' model) promising a well-managed accessible rural cycling and riding network linked to but separate from the road network and where possible linked to wildlife corridors, including trees, grasslands and chains of ponds enabling people and nature to come together. These might need to be quite wide to allow for multiple users, but would be flexible to local circumstances. We will increase the general right of access to the countryside, along the lines of the model introduced by the Liberal Democrats in Scotland<sup>5</sup> where it has opened up previously restricted areas to walkers and proved to be highly popular and successful. This will give people access to all parts of the countryside, including the coastline.

### Scotland – Right to Roam

Lib Dem MSP Ross Finnie introduced the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 as Environment Minister establishing a statutory right of responsible access to land and inland waters for outdoor recreation, crossing land and some educational and commercial purposes. The access laws include:

- A clearer legal basis for access.
- Responsibility as the key principle for using access rights and managing land.
- Safeguards for privacy, land management and conservation.

There is an outdoor access code with detailed guidance on rights and responsibilities for land managers, countryside managers and recreational users.

[www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/upload/Full%20Access%20Code.pdf](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/upload/Full%20Access%20Code.pdf)

## 4.2 Protection

4.2.1 Outstanding beauty or scientific value already offer protection to green spaces but spaces of value to health and wellbeing often do not meet their criteria. We will introduce a special designation comparable to SSSI to allow the protection of allotments and other green spaces of particular value to the health and wellbeing of local people. Criteria could include local food production, green space used by or accessible to an urban population or special historic or community interest.

4.2.2 Punishment for many environmental crimes, including water pollution and wildlife crime, are poorly enforced and the penalties fail to reflect the damage or the cost of clean-up and restoration which often falls to the taxpayer. One problem is the confusion over who does what: for example, fly-tipping can involve the police, the local authority and the Environment Agency. We will therefore make the Environment Agency the 'buck-stops-here' body with responsibility for co-ordinating the enforcement of environmental protection regulations and with the power to direct the other bodies involved to fulfil their duties.

4.2.3 We will also strengthen the penalties for crimes against the natural environment including wildlife crime, pollution, fly-tipping and litter which threaten wildlife, place an unfair burden on landowners and ruin peoples' enjoyment of natural spaces. The illegal trade in wildlife products threatens some rare species and more action is needed to control it. In this country, we are

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<sup>5</sup> Please see Appendix two for more details  
Autumn Conference 2009

concerned that wildlife crime units are being cut back: we will ensure that the National Wildlife Crime Unit has a coordinator in every police force. We will also raise awareness of the impact of well-meaning but harmful activities like balloon releases and extremely loud fireworks and consider legislation as a last resort.

4.2.4 We will reverse the loss of local control in Labour's Planning Act and radically reform planning law and guidance to introduce the concept of landscape-scale planning - this is an holistic approach to planning which considers biodiversity, local economies and agriculture, eco-tourism, geodiversity and the health and social benefits of the environment.

4.2.5 Local authorities will be given the responsibility for working together to agree Landscape Policies to protect and enhance natural geographical areas such as river basins, moors, woodland areas, flood plains or islands. These would vary widely from place to place – as the natural landscape does - but could include urban as well as rural areas and would have clear measurable objectives which would carry legal force in planning decisions. Inevitably they would often cross local authority boundaries and neighbouring authorities will need to work together to ensure Greenways and Wildlife Corridors link up together, but regional or national intervention would only be permitted in the event of local authorities failing to agree or where there was consistent failure in performance.

4.2.6 Common themes in Landscape Policies will include:

- Restoration and protection of water channels, rivers and wetlands.
- Reduction of flood risk from both river and surface water, including proper mapping of likely water flows in extreme events of the kind that global warming is making more likely. This would allow local authorities to enforce a presumption against major new development on flood plains.
- Protection of valuable grade A and B agricultural land, encouraging good soil husbandry and local food production, including allotments and Community Food Co-operatives. Implemented nationwide, this could significantly reduce both energy use and spending on imports.
- Protection and restoration of important features, not just Sites of Special Scientific Interest but larger landscape features such as moorlands and ancient forests.
- Protection, management and expansion of Green Belt and green spaces of particular value to local people as multifunctional areas which encourage both access and biodiversity. Links and corridors would be encouraged from urban green spaces to countryside on the very edge of urban areas, often the most heavily used of all green land.
- Mapping and reduction of ambient noise and increase in tranquillity. One local council has involved children as 'sound detectives'.
- Encouraging biodiversity.

4.2.7 Landscape policies will have a cumulative effect. At the moment, environmental compromise can create a precedent for more compromises in the future. Under our landscape

## Our Natural Heritage

planning model, a compromise in one area would create pressure for the balance to be redressed somewhere else. It would also provide an incentive for developers to include things like green roofs in their developments, as the biodiversity benefits would count in their favour.

4.2.8 Many of these measures, including the promotion of local food production and biodiversity, tranquillity and flood mapping, are of such national importance that we should consider central government incentives and grants to support them.

4.2.9 Housing and spatial planning policy has gone badly wrong under Labour with serious environmental consequences. As spatial planning is handed over to unelected economic development agencies the ability for local people to determine where new developments should be sited will decrease further. Local people know best how many and where new homes are needed but there is a real risk that economic considerations will build too many homes on prime agricultural land while post offices, pubs, shops and schools close every week in smaller market towns and villages dying for lack of affordable housing for local people.

4.2.10 We will encourage flexibility and imagination in rural and urban land use, strictly under local control, for instance by promoting community land trusts and allowing the use of redundant agricultural buildings for affordable housing. We endorse the good rural development principles set out in Liberal Democrat MP Matthew Taylor's report to government *Living Working Countryside : The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing*. In housing policy we will reintroduce the 'sequential test' in favour of brownfield site development but leave local authorities free to implement it. We would raise the brownfield target to 75% of new development, urgently address the over 750,000 empty homes in the UK and clearly designate urban gardens as greenfield sites. We endorse existing Liberal Democrat policy to abandon nationally-imposed housing targets and will immediately halt their imposition, returning responsibility to local authorities to assess and meet local housing need.

4.2.11 We reaffirm here two existing policies to encourage the development of appropriate brown field land. Liberal Democrats will equalise VAT on new build and renovations on a revenue neutral basis to remove the current disincentive to repair existing properties. It is also one of the central principles of liberal economics over many generations that land should be taxed in preference to labour and capital. Indeed, properly applied such taxation encourages the conservation and efficient use of finite resources.

## 4.3 Litter

4.3.1 We know that people hate it when their local area is blighted by litter. Despite councils collectively spending more than £600 million a year cleaning it up, litter is five times worse now than in the 1960s and is particularly acute in rural areas where litter is often left to lie for much longer. Liberal Democrats believe in tough action on litter, not just cleaning up the mess but preventing it in the first place. We would encourage local councils to fine offenders by releasing the money raised to be spent on measures to improve the local environment. Surveys show that something as simple as providing more bins can dramatically reduce the levels of litter. By reducing packaging (as outlined in 2.2.1) we would also tackle litter at source by ensuring there is less to drop in the first place. By investigating bottle and can deposit schemes we may also be able to motivate people to return their empty containers rather than litter with them.

#### 4.4 Air Quality

4.4.1 The air that we breathe is vital to life and good health. Recent research from the EU has suggested 24,000 people are dying prematurely each year because of poor air quality. The UK has such a poor record on air quality that it has had to apply for derogation from the incoming European Air Quality Directive both for toxic Nitrogen Dioxide and for particulate matter (or 'PM<sub>10</sub>') which is implicated in causing asthma, lung cancer and heart disease. The Rogers Review estimated that in 2005 the annual cost to the UK of health problems caused by PM<sub>10</sub>, was between £9.1 billion and £21 billion<sup>6</sup>

4.4.2 Liberal Democrats are committed to returning the UK to full compliance with European Air Quality standards by 2012, in time for the Olympics. These policies will be reinforced by our existing policies to constrain aviation, promote clean public transport and convert all new cars in the European Union to zero carbon technology by 2040.

4.4.3 We will also support the development of strong action on air quality standards and in particular to research and tackle the potential threat of rising ozone levels.

#### 4.5 Noise

4.5.1 Noise pollution receives too little attention from government. Across the European Union, 210 million people are regularly exposed to road noise that exceeds the 55 dB level which the World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests harms human health and damages daily activity. In the UK, the Office for National Statistics reports that the number of complaints about noise has increased fivefold over the last 20 years. Noise is not just a nuisance: a recent report<sup>7</sup> linked noise from road and rail to 50,000 fatal heart attacks and 200,000 cases of cardiovascular disease in the EU every year and estimated that the cost of traffic noise to society is at least €40 billion a year.

4.5.2 We strongly support efforts by the European commission to set minimum noise standards for tyres and will provide an incentive to motorists who choose low-noise tyres by a reduction in the VAT they pay. We will require all new tyres sold to be of the low-noise type by 2015. Noise can also be considerably reduced by the use of quieter road surfaces; these have the additional advantage of enhancing the benefits of low noise tyres. However, such surfaces are currently more expensive than standard surfaces and we will fund research to develop less costly solutions while at the same time encouraging the use of such surfaces in critical areas, such as high-speed roads close to built-up areas.

4.5.3 We will ensure that existing legislation to control noisy vehicles is enforced with more inspections.

4.5.4 Although the noise standards set out in the Building Regulations were improved in 2004, the standard still allows airborne sound of up to 43 dB and impact sound levels up to 60 dB; the WHO guideline for night-time noise is just 30 dB. We will tighten regulations and seek better enforcement. We will also look into the possibility of introducing a noise rating to enable prospective homebuyers to identify potential problems before they commit to purchase.

<sup>6</sup> [http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/rogersreview/upload/assets/rogersreview/rogers\\_review\\_2007.pdf](http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/rogersreview/upload/assets/rogersreview/rogers_review_2007.pdf) page 59

<sup>7</sup> *Traffic Noise Reduction in Europe*, commissioned by the European Federation of Transport & the Environment, 2008

## Our Natural Heritage

4.5.5 For some communities, aircraft noise is a major issue, especially where it affects sleep and everyday activities such as teaching in school. We will seek ways to further restrict aircraft movements during the night and to speed up the phasing out of the noisiest aircraft and we will take further steps such as making silencers on training aeroplanes mandatory, as is common in the rest of Europe.

### **4.6 Light Pollution**

4.6.1 The burgeoning of external lighting is causing problems ranging from nuisance to neighbours from security lights to damage to wildlife and a widespread loss of the pleasure of seeing stars in a dark sky.

4.6.2 We propose that external lighting should be treated as a potential pollutant needing control and that responsibility for co-ordinating external lighting policies should be brought within a single government department.

4.6.3 We will require planning authorities to adopt policies to control external lighting, in particular with regard to restricting lighting that would interfere with important habitats for nocturnal animals; controlling the brightness of approved lit advertising signs; and ensuring that security lighting does not cause a nuisance.

4.6.4 We will also investigate the potential for protecting key areas of the remote countryside from light pollution. We will encourage local authorities and the Highways Agency to consider how the impact of street and sign lighting can be reduced, for example by reducing their brightness and using motion-detectors to switch lights on only when needed.

## 5 Biodiversity

5.0.1 We are not alone. We share our planet with millions of different species which have evolved over billions of years. This diversity of plant and animal life both increases our enjoyment of nature and helps to maintain the careful environmental balance which sustains our lives.

5.0.2 Healthy ecosystems and the biodiversity they support are critical to human welfare. They provide clean water, clean air, food and many of the other resources on which we all rely. Ecosystems are extremely complex: remove any one component and the results may be catastrophic. Two simple examples are the role of mangroves in mitigating floods and erosion and the role of bees in pollinating around one third of the world's food crops, including most fruit and vegetables.

5.0.3 While the services provided by global ecosystems are, literally, invaluable, the economic benefits of individual biodiversity resources are too often underestimated. For example, research by the OECD suggests that the inefficient management of the East Atlantic bluefin tuna fisheries is resulting in reduced yields to the value of \$1.3 billion a year<sup>8</sup>; overall, three-quarters of the world's fish stocks are threatened by over-fishing. At a much smaller scale, a study of orchards in Herefordshire by Forum for the Future put an annual value on one in excess of £40,000 if proper account was taken not only of the profits from its crop but also its contribution in absorbing carbon dioxide and the value put on it by local inhabitants for beauty and peace.

5.0.4 The verdict of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, published by the United Nations in 2003, that "Human activities have taken the planet to the age of a massive wave of species extinctions, further threatening our own well-being," needs to be taken seriously. Unfortunately (and unlike the parallel findings of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), the world's leaders have ignored the warning and little is being done to reverse the increasing rate of extinctions.

5.0.5 The trends are alarming. The World Conservation Union last year warned that more than a third of all the world's mammals could become extinct; previously, the WCU has suggested that half of all invertebrates are threatened, as are 39% of fish, 31% of reptiles and amphibians, and

### Sutton – Biodiversity

Sutton Council has a 5-year Biodiversity Action Plan to improve wildlife habitats for the benefit of wild species. Habitats were selected, rather than individual animals and plants because species will flourish if their surroundings are of suitable quality. A separate plan has also been prepared for bats as the requirements for their survival are more complex.

Recent highlights include sand martins successfully breeding at the artificial sand martin bank at Beddington Farmlands built in 2003, identifying two new species of bat living locally and brown trout spawning in the River Wandle.

<sup>8</sup> *Costs of Inaction on Key Environmental Challenges*, OECD, 2008;

## Our Natural Heritage

12% of birds. The EU is clearly not going to meet its commitment to stop the decline in biodiversity within the Union by 2010.

5.0.6 The trend in the UK is no better. Defra's index of wild birds shows that populations that breed or feed mainly or solely on farmland have declined by almost two-thirds since 1970 and are now at their lowest levels since recording began in the 1960s. And last year's survey of common plants carried out by Plantlife found that 121 out of 524 sites that should have held common wildflowers contained none at all.

5.0.7 So what can be done?

### 5.1 The Local Environment – Our Natural Health Service

5.1.1 There is an increasing appreciation that the natural environment provides us with many benefits to physical and mental health. We will ensure that any significant loss of green space within a community is subject to a health impact assessment to ensure that the health value of the greenspace is taken into account. We will encourage local authorities to promote green space as a health resource and NHS trusts to benefits to patients who could benefit from the exercise and spiritually stimulating experience it can offer, particularly those suffering from diabetes, obesity and mental health conditions.

5.1.2 We need to capitalise on the enjoyment that most people get from contact with nature. Gardens, allotments, playing fields and public open spaces are all potential havens for all kinds of wildlife but people often need encouragement and advice to make the best of them. We will encourage local authorities to provide advice and resources to schools, residents and tenants associations and other community groups to enable them to take an active role in managing open spaces to make them as attractive for people and wildlife as possible: the Friends of Parks community engagement project is an exemplar.

5.1.3 The need for advice or help is exemplified by the trend to fill in ponds because of a fear of accidents, despite the fact these provide an essential haven for some of the amphibians that are most at risk; ponds can usually be made safe quite simply. We will encourage local authorities and voluntary organisations such as wildlife trusts and the RSPB to work to help people maintain ponds and similar resources and make them safe for family gardens.

5.1.4 Support is especially important in areas of deprivation where the potential benefits are greatest: the most degraded environments match almost exactly the areas of greatest

#### Lambeth - Friends of the Park

Friends of the Lambeth Walk Open Space (FoLWOS) was formed in 2000 following the then Labour-controlled Lambeth Council's plans to build on the area. They organised petitions and finally instigated judicial review where the council's decision to grant planning permission was quashed because it had failed to follow its own urban development plan guidance. FoLWOS subsequently worked together with the 2003-6 Liberal Democrat Council to increase community involvement, with a community garden and community planting days. In 2003 they won a £75,000 Doorstep Green Grant from the Countryside Agency and have installed lights and new fencing, and subsequently traffic calming and crossings.

deprivation with the poorest people ten times less likely to live in the greenest areas. Opportunities to turn bleak open areas and disused or under-used spaces into attractive - and possibly productive - assets for the community should be taken. We will encourage local councils to provide of advice and encouragement for local people to grow some of their own food, helping both the environment, their purses and health – modelled on the best practice already going on in places like Middlesbrough and Camden, and considering the use of unproductive urban spaces for food growing such as schools, parks, commons, pavements and churchyards.

## 5.2 Creating Urban Habitats

5.2.1 Another area for local action is to ensure that policies to make buildings energy efficient do not eliminate all the nooks and crannies that provide homes for birds and insects in older buildings. We will introduce planning policies to encourage the provision of swift and bat boxes and other wildlife-friendly features and wildflower areas in new developments. Properly designed and maintained green roofs can also add significantly to local biodiversity and we will make sure that these are properly supported in local planning policies. As well as the biodiversity benefits of green roofs, trees and other planting, such features can play a significant role in moderating summer temperatures.

5.2.2 We will also ensure that planning authorities place conditions on new developments to guarantee the long-term stewardship of open spaces, landscaping, green roofs and other environmental features.

## 5.3 Wildlife Corridors

5.3.1 A far more pro-active approach is needed to ensure that areas of valuable biodiversity are linked. Small populations of animals are far more vulnerable if they are unable to interact with populations elsewhere. Migration routes for species to move to new habitats will be critical as climate change kicks in and makes some existing habitats untenable. We will ensure that a major programme of habitat restoration and creation is undertaken to provide some of the

### Camden & Islington - Urban Living

Camden & Islington Councils have a number of initiatives to promote the natural environment in urban living:

- ❖ Islington has conducted a wildlife survey, with more than 150 people surveying their gardens for wildlife and recording what they found. They have also produced a wildlife gardeners pack to advise how to encourage wildlife.
- ❖ A green roof is being fitted to Camden Town Hall, a Grade II listed building, to improve insulation in winter, provide cooling in summer, extract CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, enhance biodiversity and hold up storm water.
- ❖ Islington has introduced wildflower meadows in parks like Highbury Fields, moving away from traditional manicured parks. It encourages more ground cover planting, and reducing the number of rosebeds in order to minimise the areas of bare soil.
- ❖ Every new development going to Camden's planning committee has to have a green roof, rainwater harvesting, grey water recycling and 20% onsite renewables.
- ❖ An ambitious programme of tree planting in Islington with a net gain of over 1200 in the last five years.
- ❖ Camden has started planting community orchards on housing estates and giving away free fruit trees to residents.



## Our Natural Heritage

resilience necessary to deal with the consequences of climate change. We will place a duty on planning authorities to ensure that these requirements are met and that plans are coordinated with neighbouring authorities. Part of this work will involve expanding and protecting existing semi-natural habitats, such as ancient woodland, through further planting to make them more robust in the face of environmental change.

5.3.2 Habitat protection in the UK has largely been through the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Liberal Democrats will extend this protection to some natural habitats that cannot be replaced, including the small remaining areas of ancient woodland and upland moorlands, and to non-statutory Wildlife Sites, many of which provide an essential connecting complement to the statutory sites as well as being valuable in their own right.

### 5.4 Getting the Balance Right

5.4.1 Liberal Democrats will reverse the government's deletion of the phrase 'except if of biodiversity value' in the definition of brownfield land. Some brownfield sites, because they have been unused for so long, are high in biodiversity and worth maintaining for that reason alone, although we recognise that the extent of this protection has to be balanced with the need to minimise the use of greenfield sites for development.

5.4.2 More generally, we will ensure that Local Development Frameworks include policies to identify and restore degraded ecosystems.

5.4.3 Another area where environmental interests can conflict with other priorities is renewable energy. Generating carbon-free energy is, of course, crucial to tackling climate change (which is the major threat to biodiversity). But some major renewables schemes could severely damage some of the important habitats. Liberal Democrats will therefore insist that all energy proposals comply fully with the Habitats Directive and other environmental legislation unless there is real assurance that habitats that act as a genuine replacement can be created elsewhere. Lifetime carbon budgets should be considered - the loss of carbon sequestration within habitats which will be lost must be taken into account.

### 5.5 Ecosystems Approach

5.5.1 Protecting just the 'jewels in the crown' does nothing to support biodiversity outside those special areas and there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that what happens outside SSSIs is crucial (as is shown by the decline of farmland birds). We will therefore introduce an ecosystems approach to policy making to ensure that all factors needed to conserve and enhance biodiversity are treated comprehensively.

5.5.2 Within the planning system we will move to using environmental capacity as the key guidance for identifying sites for development. However, this is currently generally not practical due to a lack of information in terms both of identifying environmental limits and of the availability of local information about factors such as biodiversity and landscape quality (where the opinions of local people should be taken into account alongside more scientific evaluation). Liberal Democrats will initiate a national research programme to set guidance on environmental limits; locally, we will make the top tier local authorities responsible for obtaining and making easily available, through Local Records Centres, the necessary information for decision-making. We will encourage cross-border discussion and local authority combined action. Again, we believe

that voluntary organisations such as wildlife trusts can play a significant role in the collection of information provided they are helped to achieve the necessary quality standards. We believe that there should be no net loss for natural capital which can be replaced and none at all for that which is irreplaceable.

5.5.3 The aim of this ecosystems approach should be to ensure that the environmental impacts of policies are identified and addressed in plan making and implementation. A science-based ecosystems approach should also provide the prime guidance for agricultural and other policies that are crucial to the welfare of the natural environment.

5.5.4 Biodiversity must also be given a higher priority by local government. The current requirement for local authorities to have 'regard' for biodiversity is far too weak: we will replace this with a duty to protect and enhance local biodiversity and will require councils to set local targets for wildlife which would work on the assumption there should be a net gain of biodiversity from major developments. Where appropriate, we will extend this duty to other public bodies.

5.5.5 One important action for the UK is to do more to protect biodiversity in its Dependent Territories, which contain more endangered biodiversity than does the UK. As a start, they should be required to produce biodiversity action plans.

## **5.6 Native Species**

5.6.1 The huge increase in international trade in recent years has brought new threats to biodiversity, not least the spread of alien species and the damage they cause to native species. A study by the US Nature Conservancy found that almost all of the world's coastlines have been invaded by alien species, the vast majority of which arrive either by ship or by escaping from aquaculture farms. Liberal Democrats will legislate to ensure that ships visiting the UK have their hulls regularly cleaned and that ballast water is purged of alien species before being pumped out. We will also seek to tighten the management of fish farms to minimise escapes into the wild.

5.6.2 We will also encourage the re-introduction of species that used to be native to the UK but that have been lost due to persecution or habitat loss, such as beavers. Such re-introductions – provided that they are based on sound science, International Union for the Conservation of Nature criteria for reintroductions and local consultation – can benefit local and national biodiversity and help restore damaged ecosystems.

## **5.7 Research**

5.7.1 Much more research is needed, both internationally and by the UK, if biodiversity and ecosystem services are to be understood and managed to the best advantage. Spending on agricultural research by developed countries has fallen significantly in recent years, yet the benefits can be substantial. For example, research in Mexico has demonstrated that ploughing fields only every few years improves nutrient content and the structure of the soil to such an extent that yields can increase by up to 30%. At home, the Royal Agricultural Society has warned of dire consequences of cutbacks in soil research, which it claims threatens future food production. Liberal Democrats support the Society's call for the creation of a National Centre of Excellence in Soil and Water Management.

## Our Natural Heritage

5.7.2 Another valuable resource threatened with Government cuts is UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre based in Cambridge, which provides crucial and unique science-based information about the state of the world's biodiversity and ecosystem services. We will seek continued full funding both from UK and international sources.

### **5.8 The Marine Environment**

5.8.1 Marine Planning is a new concept introduced by the Marine Bill currently going through Parliament. Liberal Democrats believe that restoring the seas around the UK to healthy ecosystems that support the fullest extent possible of marine biodiversity should be the fundamental aim. Shipping, renewable energy, fishing, aggregate extraction and other important economic activities will still need to be accommodated. However the scientific evidence will dictate which areas of the marine environment should be closed to all damaging activities, becoming Highly Protected Marine Reserves, and which may be Marine Conservation Zones within which some activities may be licensed. Worldwide scientific observation shows that even in the short to medium term Highly Protected Marine Reserves are a very effective way of achieving not only environmental aims but also economic ones as fish stocks recover. Liberal Democrats are committed to having an ecologically coherent network of marine conservation zones designated by 2012.

5.8.2 The interface between land and sea, in our estuaries, on our beaches and salt marshes needs to be planned for by the democratically elected local bodies with appropriate advice from the Statutory bodies such as Natural England, Environment Agency and the new Marine Management Organisation. Currently the Government has determined to share the planning powers between the elected bodies and the MMO which is a national quango with powers from approximately mean high water, which can reach many miles inland, to the limits of the UK marine area. Liberal Democrats would return ultimate power to the democratically elected bodies having current overlapping jurisdiction.

5.8.3 Under the current Marine and Coastal Access Bill there is provision for anyone who intentionally or recklessly damages the sea bed in a marine conservation zone to be prosecuted with an exception for sea fishing. Liberal Democrats would seek to renegotiate the terms of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to prevent the need for such a wide-ranging exception in national legislation to comply with the CFP. We would also look to address the perversity by which currently much by-catch is lost and ensure that a reformed CFP gives local fishermen and other stakeholders a real say in the management of their own regional waters to return fisheries to abundance, profitability and ecological sustainability.

## 6 Rural Land Use

6.0.1 Whether we live in an urban or rural area ourselves, we rely on the thoughtful stewardship of our rural landscape.

6.0.2 The vast majority of the land area that we consider to make up our 'natural environment' in the United Kingdom is under commercial management for agriculture or forestry. Clearly, the resulting ecosystems are influenced and sustained by land management and cropping patterns which may alter those ecosystems. We must bear this in mind in framing our policies. Our task here is to bring forward policies that not only sustain but enhance biodiversity and result in a cleaner environment (particularly watercourses), yet at the same time allow farmers and land-based businesses the freedom to maintain output and the flexibility to respond to changing market conditions. This is not an easy task. We will use a combination of regulatory and grant aided measures.

6.0.3 We have set out in policy paper 87, *Shaping our World through a Strong Europe* (2008) how we propose to replace the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with a Sustainable Land Use and Rural Development Policy, should we gain a sufficient consensus across the European Union. This would be a great reform of the current antiquated arrangements which will ensure farmers proper rewards for their work as stewards of the countryside. We will continue to pursue, through the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a comprehensive multilateral agreement to ensure that all farm payments deliver public benefits and to strive for reforms that will make WTO rules subject to environmental criteria which would prevent, for example, US protectionism. We further propose that within the UK we will retain the current level of 80% of all Rural Development funds being devoted to environmental programmes, thereby more than doubling the available funding for them. These groundbreaking reforms to the CAP will help to safeguard our natural environment, allowing us both to reverse the loss of habitat through direct environmental schemes and to secure further environmental improvements through the retained agricultural payments.

6.0.4 Two examples of biodiversity problems already identified are the lack of wildlife corridors to link isolated habitats and the lack of sufficient winter food for farmland birds. We will bring in more effective protection for hedgerows and other field boundaries as well as requiring environmental schemes to demonstrate their effectiveness and to be evidence-based.

6.0.5 It is important that landowners are incentivised to do the right thing – woodland management provides a good example of this. Production of woodfuel is likely to increase as a result of national targets. In some areas, this provides a real opportunity to link the woodfuel agenda with the removal of conifers from ancient woods which were inappropriately planted up with conifers in the past. However, in those woods where management has not occurred for a very long time, this may not be appropriate and we must ensure that targets do not drive inappropriate management in these areas.

6.0.6 Pollution in rural areas must also be tackled more effectively. Pesticides, fertilisers and livestock manures all have the potential to pollute watercourses if used inappropriately. We will work with farmers, environmental scientists and public health officers to bring forward a Water Protection Strategy to include effective protection zones, floodplain management plans, machinery and training standards, application methods, and measures to reduce diffuse pollution.

## 7 International

7.0.1 Efforts to protect and enhance our own environment, preserve resources and maintain species diversity are meaningless without an international dimension. On the environment in particular we have to consider things on a global as well as a local scale. How do our actions impact on people in other countries? How do theirs impact on us?

7.0.2 Liberal Democrats have always argued that the concept of environmentally sustainable development must lie at the heart of international policy-making as it must at the domestic level. Yet too often the environment is treated as an afterthought in international negotiations, and the international framework for the promotion of sustainable development is weak and under-funded. This must change. In particular, development needs to take place on the basis of the principles of *contraction* and *convergence*. This means global *contraction* of greenhouse gas emissions to the level needed to stabilise the climate. It also means *convergence* of emissions between the developed and developing world to ensure that the relatively smaller populations of the developed world do not contribute a disproportionately high level of greenhouse gases.

7.0.3 Liberal Democrat policy in this area is set out in full in policy paper 74, *Britain's Global Responsibilities: The International Rule of Law* (2006). Its key proposals include:

- Proper funding for the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), together with more effective enforcement of their provisions.
- Reform of international environmental institutions, including the provision of guaranteed funding for the UN Environment Programme.
- The full integration of environmental objectives into the World Bank and World Trade Organisation.

7.0.4 The main international mechanism for protection of the natural environment is the framework of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), or treaties, of which over 500 are currently in force. Although there have been some clear successes, such as the treaties protecting the stratospheric ozone layer, in general these agreements lack strong enforcement mechanisms and financial support. Some issues, such as deforestation, are not addressed adequately by existing agreements, while in other areas, such as biodiversity, action to date has been insufficient given the magnitude of the challenge.

7.0.5 A few international agreements, including the Montreal Protocol on the Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, possess an effective financial mechanism to compensate developing countries for the incremental costs of ensuring their development is environmentally sustainable. Most, however, do not. The main route for developing financial support to MEAs, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is significantly under-resourced. It should be an urgent priority for the UK and EU to argue for enhanced financing for the GEF.

7.0.6 Most international agreements also lack effective enforcement mechanisms, though some of them, including the Montreal Protocol and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, have used trade measures (bans on trade, in the products controlled by the treaty, with non-parties or non-complying parties) with success. Licensing or permit systems have been used to exclude undesirable products (e.g. endangered species of wildlife, or illegally caught fish) from consumer markets. In general these have worked effectively, and should be used more extensively – e.g. for timber – to control trade in illegal products. Domestic law can also be used more effectively to exclude illegal products, and the principle of the US Lacey Act, which makes it

illegal to possess or market wildlife, fish or timber produced illegally overseas, should be introduced into EU law.

7.0.7 Licensing or permit systems are used under CITES for species that may become threatened with extinction if trade is not strictly controlled. These permit systems have had some success controlling illegal trade and overexploitation. However for some species, such as the tiger and elephant, pressure from the UK and a greater international effort, is necessary to ensure that CITES recommendations and national legislation are implemented and enforced adequately.

7.0.8 Enforcement of international agreements work best when enforcement officials from different countries work together. The UK and EU should promote and provide funding for the development of international environmental enforcement networks – such as the Lusaka Agreement on wildlife crime – and encourage the involvement of police and customs in them, through Interpol and the World Customs Organisation.

7.0.9 The Montreal Protocol is one of the most effective MEAs, having successfully banned a wide range of ozone-depleting substances such as CFCs; recovery of the ozone layer to its pre-industrial state is projected to be starting about now. It has also had a major positive impact on climate change, as most of the chemicals it bans are greenhouse gases too; by 2010 the Montreal Protocol will have reduced global warming emissions by more than five times the amount the Kyoto Protocol should achieve by 2012 (given full compliance).

7.0.10 Nevertheless, it can be strengthened. Liberal Democrats will argue for:

- Faster progress with phasing out the few remaining exemptions from the controls, e.g. for CFC-using inhalers or for methyl bromide for fumigating goods in international trade. If full global phase-out of methyl bromide cannot be achieved by 2015, its use should be banned within the EU by that date.
- Taking steps, including providing financial assistance, to ensure that existing stocks, or banks, of ozone-depleting substances, including those in products and equipment, are destroyed rather than released.
- Setting a phase-out schedule for HFCs, common replacements for CFCs and HCFCs in refrigeration and air-conditioning. This would be a major innovation, as HFCs are not themselves ozone-depleting substances; but they are powerful greenhouse gases, and so far the Montreal Protocol has proved much more effective than the Kyoto Protocol in controlling environmentally dangerous substances. The UK and EU should argue for this as a matter of urgency within the Montreal Protocol.

7.0.11 One notable omission from the coverage of international agreements is forestry, yet the survival of forest ecosystems is essential to sustainable development. World-wide, more than 1.6 billion people – almost a quarter of the total global population – depend on forests for their livelihoods, including for fuelwood, foodstuffs and medicinal plants. Exploitation of forests has come at the expense of biodiversity and natural regulation of water and climate, and has undermined subsistence support and cultural values for some communities; in some countries, armed conflict has been funded by revenues from timber sales. Almost 20 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions are estimated to derive from deforestation.

7.0.12 In recent years, attention has focused on efforts to prevent illegal logging; in some developing countries, more than half of timber production is illegal in some way. Liberal Democrats call for:

## Our Natural Heritage

- The urgent development of the new system of bilateral agreements between the EU and forest-rich developing countries to reform forestry governance and exclude illegal products from trade.
- In the longer term, the inclusion of other timber-importing countries (chiefly the US, Japan and China) in this framework and its gradual evolution into a global agreement for promoting trade in sustainable timber.
- Encouragement for the use of public procurement policy throughout the EU to require legal and sustainable timber and timber products for all government contracts (see section 3.5), and encouragement for the private sector to develop similar systems.
- The adoption at EU level of new legislation making it illegal to import and possess timber produced illegally in foreign countries.
- The adoption of minimum standards of national forestry governance as condition for the provision of carbon financing for avoided deforestation under the climate change regime, ensuring that the money benefits forest communities and promotes sustainable forest management.

7.0.13 The world's forests are also home to an estimated 60 million indigenous people. Sustainable forestry cannot be achieved without full respect for their rights and their full involvement in forestry strategies. The UK should therefore sign and ratify International Labour Organisation Convention 169, Concerning Indigenous and Tribal People in Independent Countries. Together with the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it is a vital instrument for the protection of tribal peoples, recognising their rights to land ownership, to equality and freedom, and to make decisions about projects that affect them. The UK Government has so far refused to sign this agreement on the grounds there are no tribal peoples in the UK. Liberal Democrats will reverse this opposition and sign the convention, recognising that in doing so we will strengthen its overall force and commit British companies and bodies working overseas to basic standards of consultation, ensuring that indigenous peoples have a say in projects that affect them. We will also ensure that carbon financing for avoided deforestation (see 7.0.12) cannot be made available in countries where the rights of indigenous peoples are not adequately protected.

# Appendix One - The Role of Local Authorities

Throughout this paper there have been frequent references to the roles played by local authorities as service deliverers. Whether it is using local procurement policy to encourage sustainable production and consumption, planning policy to improve environmental standards in construction or social housing responsibilities to deliver improved homes, local government is uniquely placed to drive best practice and encourage good environmental behaviour.

Liberal Democrat local authorities are already pioneering innovative new practices in many of these areas, as highlighted in the case studies throughout the preceding pages. We believe that there should be more training for councillors and officers about the important issues raised in this paper and the new challenges that we face. In government we will also ensure that local government is properly funded by central government.

## Natural Environment Case Studies

The case studies given throughout the paper are illustrative of some of the innovative ways in which Liberal Democrat councils are helping to enhance and protect our natural environment. They are by no means exhaustive of all the activities going on in those councils, let alone elsewhere in the country.



## Appendix Two : Access Rights in Scotland

Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, everyone has the right of responsible access to the land. Key points to note are:

1. Access is granted over most land and inland water in Scotland, including mountains, moorland, woods and forests, grassland, margins of fields in which crops are growing, paths and tracks, rivers and lochs, the coast and most parks and open spaces.
2. Access is at any time of the day or night.
3. Access You is for recreational purposes (such as pastimes, family and social activities, and more active pursuits like horse riding, cycling, wild camping and taking part in events), educational purposes (concerned with furthering a person's understanding of the natural and cultural heritage), some commercial purposes (where the activities are the same as those done by the general public) and for crossing over land or water.
4. Existing rights, including public rights of way and navigation, and existing rights on the foreshore, continue.
5. The main places where access rights do not apply are:
  - a. houses and gardens, and non-residential buildings and associated land;
  - b. land in which crops are growing;
  - c. land next to a school and used by the school;
  - d. sports or playing fields when these are in use and where the exercise of access rights would interfere with such use;
  - e. land developed and in use for recreation and where the exercise of access rights would interfere with such use;
  - f. golf courses (but you can cross a golf course provided you don't interfere with any games of golf);
  - g. places like airfields, railways, telecommunication sites, military bases and installations, working quarries and construction sites; and
  - h. visitor attractions or other places which charge for entry.
6. Local authorities can formally exempt land from access rights for short periods and can introduce byelaws.
7. Access rights do not extend to:
  - being on or crossing land for the purpose of doing anything which is an offence, such as theft, breach of the peace, nuisance, poaching, allowing a dog to worry livestock, dropping litter, polluting water or disturbing certain wild birds, animals and plants;
  - hunting, shooting or fishing;
  - any form of motorised recreation or passage (except by people with a disability using a vehicle or vessel adapted for their use);
  - anyone responsible for a dog which is not under proper control; or to
  - anyone taking away anything from the land for a commercial purpose.

## Appendix Three : Glossary of Technical Terms

**Anaerobic Digestion**– The naturally occurring decomposition of organic matter by bacteria, which when harnessed by an industrial process can be used to treat waste, produce biogas that can be used to power electricity generators, provide heat and produce soil improving material.

**AONB** - An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are 40 AONBs in England and Wales and each has been designated for special attention by reason of their natural beauty, including flora, fauna, historical and cultural associations as well as scenic views.

**Automatically Updating Sustainable Design Standards** – These are standards for use in design work which are automatically updated every few years to ensure the standards reflect that which is already being achieved by the best performers.

**Biodiversity** – This is the variation of life forms within a given area – it is often used as a measure of the health of biological systems. The biodiversity found on Earth today consists of many millions of distinct biological species, which is the product of nearly 3.5 billion years of evolution.

**Biofuels** - A fuel or energy produced from dry organic matter or combustible oils produced by plants.

**Brownfield** – Also known as "previously developed land" (PDL). Such land is usually vacant, derelict or underused.

**CAP** - The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a European Union system of agricultural subsidies and programmes. The CAP combines a direct subsidy payment for crops and land with price support mechanisms, including guaranteed minimum prices and import tariffs and quotas on certain goods from outside the EU.

**Climate Change Levy (CCL)** – A tax, introduced in April 2001, on energy delivered to non-domestic users in the United Kingdom. It aims to provide an incentive to increase energy efficiency and to reduce carbon emissions.

**Cradle to cradle** – The term used to describe a design model where materials are either used in continuous cycles as the same product without losing their integrity or quality or can be disposed of in any natural environment and decompose into the soil, providing food for small life forms without affecting the natural environment.

**DEFRA** – Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

**Environmental Capacity** - The capacity of the environment to perform its natural functions. An environmental limit is reached at the level where the environment is unable to accommodate a particular activity without sustaining irreversible change.

**Ecosystem** - A natural unit to describe all living and non-living things in a area working together.

**European Ecolabel** – A voluntary scheme designed to encourage businesses to market products and services that are kinder to the environment. Products that meet strict ecological and performance criteria are awarded with the Flower logo which can be displayed as a marketing tool to show consumers that product has a superior environmental performance.

**Farm Assurance Schemes** – A range of voluntary schemes which producers can join to inform customers that certain standards have been maintained in the production process. Each scheme covers a range of standards including safety, welfare and environmental. The main British assurance schemes are:

- the Red Tractor scheme

## Our Natural Heritage

- the RSPCA Freedom Food scheme
- the LEAF Marque (Linking the Environment and Farming)
- the Soil Association organic standard

**Greywater** - Domestic wastewater which is neither fresh (unlike white water from groundwater or potable water), nor heavily polluted (blackwater). It includes all wastewater which does not have significant food residues, high concentrations of toxic chemicals but never includes water from toilets. Greywater comprises 50-80% of residential wastewater.

**Green Roofs** – A building roof that is partially or completely covered with vegetation and soil, or a growing medium, planted over a waterproofing membrane.

**Greenways** - A long, narrow piece of land, often used for recreation and pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

**HCFCs** – An ozone-depleting substance which is frequently used in refrigeration and air conditioning.

**ILO 169** - A convention of the International Labour Organisation for the protection of tribal peoples, recognising their right to:

- land ownership
- equality and freedom
- make decisions about projects that affect them

**Landscape Scale Planning** – A planning concept that has arisen in response to the challenges of climate change. It aims to take a holistic approach to planning, looking at biodiversity, local economies and agriculture, eco-tourism, geodiversity and the health and social benefits of the environment.

**MEA** – A Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Each MEAs requires that countries develop implementation mechanisms and fulfill obligations involving reporting, training, public education, and other activities. MEAs are at the heart of the international response to global environmental issues such as CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, eco-efficiency, land degradation, energy systems and technology innovation.

**MMO** – The Government's proposed Marine Management Organisation. This would be a centre of marine expertise, provide a consistent and unified approach, deliver improved coordination of information and data and reduce administrative burdens.

**Municipal waste** – Waste collected by local authorities, predominantly domestic.

**OFWAT** - The Water Services Regulation Authority. The body responsible for economic regulation of the privatised water and sewerage industry in England and Wales.

**Rainwater Harvesting System** – A means of collecting and storing rainwater.

**Regional Spatial Strategy** - Emerging from the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) provide a planning framework at regional level for the English regions (with the exception of London where spatial planning is overseen by the Mayor). Planning is devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

**Resource Efficiency Committee (REC)** – The body we propose to set up to identify the key resources at risk either from looming scarcity or because their sources are at political risk; the REC

will then have a duty to recommend legally-binding targets for reducing their net consumption, on the lines of the Climate Change Act

**SSSI** – Site of Special Scientific Interest.

**Spatial Planning** – This is the planning tool used to influence the distribution of people and activities in spaces of various scales. Spatial planning includes all levels of land use planning including urban planning, regional planning, environmental planning and national spatial plans.

**Starlight Reserves** - A Starlight Reserve is an area where there is a commitment to defend the night sky quality against sky and light pollution to provide access to starlight.

**Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)** – Those systems which are designed to reduce the surface water drainage discharges on new and existing developments. SUDS solutions should be easy to manage, require little or no energy input (except from environmental sources such as sunlight, etc.), resilient to use, and being environmentally as well as aesthetically attractive. Examples include wetland habitats that collect, store, and filter dirty water while providing a habitat for wildlife.

**UNEP** - United Nations Environment Programme. Established in 1972, it coordinates United Nations environmental activities, assisting developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and encourages sustainable development through sound environmental practices

**Wildlife Corridors** - An area of habitat which connects wildlife populations that have been separated by human activities (such as roads, development etc). This allows an exchange of individuals between populations and facilitates the movement and re-establishment of population groups.

**World Trade Organisation** - Deals with the rules of trade between nations at a global level.

**Energy Efficiency Label** - Most white goods, light bulb packaging and cars must have an EU Energy Label clearly displayed when offered for sale or rent. The energy efficiency of the appliance is rated from A to G on the label, A being the most energy efficient, G the least efficient. In an attempt to keep up with advances in energy efficiency, A+ and A++ grades have been introduced for refrigeration products.

**WRAP** – The Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) helps individuals, businesses and local authorities to reduce waste and recycle more, making better use of resources and helping to tackle climate change.

# Policy Equality Impact Assessment

		Yes/No	Comments
1.	<b>Will the outcomes from the policy paper affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of:</b>		
	• Race, Ethnic origins (including gypsies and travellers) and Nationality	No	
	• Gender	No	
	• Age	No	
	• Religion, Belief or Culture	No	
	• Disability – mental and physical disabilities	No	
	• Sexual orientation including lesbian, gay and bisexual people	No	
2.	<b>Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?</b>	No	
3.	<b>Is there a need for external or user consultation?</b>	No	
4.	<b>If you have identified potential discrimination, are any exceptions valid, legal and/or justifiable?</b>	N/a	
5.	<b>Is the impact of the policy/guidance likely to be negative?</b>	No	
6.	<b>If so can the impact be avoided?</b>	N/a	
7.	<b>Are there alternatives to achieving the policy/guidance without the impact?</b>	N/a	
8.	<b>Can we reduce the impact by taking different action?</b>	N/a	

## Our Natural Heritage - Policy Paper 93

*This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.*

*Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.*

### Working Group on the Natural Environment

*Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement or every proposal in this Paper.*

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