

About Natural England

Most of you will already know something about Natural England - some may even have heard Natural England's chairman Sir Martin Doughty's address to the Countryside Management Association (CMA)'s conference in September.

For those of you who would like a brief reminder, Natural England came into existence on 1 October 2006. Its purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural environment not only for its intrinsic value, but also for the well-being and enjoyment of people and for the economic prosperity that it brings.

Natural England was formed by bringing together English Nature, the landscape, and recreation functions of the Countryside Agency, and the environmental functions of the Rural Development Service. It has a budget of £500 million and employs 2,500 people. It has inherited the powers and statutory duties of the founder bodies, including those to help safeguard National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Country Parks and natural greenspace. The scale of these inherited duties is impressive. For instance, there are 8 English National Parks; 36 AONBs; 2,500 miles of winding footpaths; 15 National Trails; 118,000 rights of way; 214 National Nature Reserves; and 1273 Local Nature Reserves. It is also worth noting that Natural England will continue with the long-standing support for over 300 Country Parks.

As to our 'new' role, Natural England has identified four strategic outcomes which will be used in focussing our activities, and around which we will develop new campaigns.

A healthy natural environment

To ensure that future generations can enjoy England's rich geology, landscapes and biodiversity means we must significantly improve the protection and management of what we have today. We need to improve the condition of the natural environment to ensure that everyone benefits from the services it provides. We need to promote access to our coastal areas and also preserve their beauty and biodiversity. We will champion improved access to the coast and a network of Marine Protected Areas to recover and enhance the marine environment.

Enjoyment of the natural environment

Experiencing nature and being out of doors reduces stress and improves well-being. Obesity and inactivity already cost the nation £11bn a year, so we will champion preventative health solutions in the natural environment. Improving the opportunities for people to enjoy the natural environment is an essential contribution to encouraging healthier and more sustainable lifestyles. We will champion preventative health solutions and the provision of good quality green space within 300m of every home.

Sustainable use of the natural environment

We want to celebrate the land manager's role in improving England's landscape and its value for wildlife and people. We offer incentives through

our Environmental Stewardship grant schemes designed to reward land managers that work in an environmentally positive way. These will provide funding for simple, low-cost measures like maintaining hedgerows, ditches and in-field trees and creating new features like buffer strips, pollen and nectar mixtures for bees and butterflies, wild bird areas and conservation headlands, whilst also taking a 'whole picture' approach that also encourages access and education opportunities. First-rate land management provides a wide range of other benefits to society such as soil protection, carbon management and flood prevention that the many people may previously have taken for granted. We will campaign to promote public understanding of and support for the benefits and services of good land management.

A secure environmental future

Climate change poses a serious long-term threat to England's natural environment. There is already clear evidence that plants and animals, including those characteristic of England's countryside and seas, are being affected. This includes changes in populations, ranges, migration patterns, and seasonal and reproductive behaviour of certain species. Our role is to focus on mitigation and adaptation. Firstly mitigation: how can we lessen our harmful impact on the environment, and secondly adaptation: how can we manage the change and ensure wildlife doesn't lose their foothold.

Natural England and CMA

Natural England recognises the important role that countryside and greenspace managers play in shaping and maintaining our natural environment. We want to continue working in partnership with CMA (and others) to build on successes like the 73 Country Parks that have achieved Green Flag awards in 2006.

Natural England would like to encourage land managers to get to know Natural England staff, and in particular their dedicated local Natural England contact. We invite you as land managers to take up the environmental stewardship schemes, where they can support your work. We hope you will continue to capture and share good practice on the ground and to respond to our consultations. We would like CMA to work with Natural England and other key partners to deliver shared outcomes and national, regional and local priorities. Natural England would encourage CMA to fully take its place as a key professional body in the countryside and greenspace networks.

Further information

For more information about Natural England and Environmental Stewardship please visit our web site www.naturalengland.org.uk

For information and case studies which illustrate how to marry Natural England's first two strategic outcomes and achieve access and enjoyment of a healthy natural environment, please visit the Best of Both Worlds' website www.bobw.co.uk

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