



The Old Ragged School, Brook Street, Nottingham, NG1 1EA

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Media Release

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Public fears over ‘build, build, build’ policy highlight failings of Government’s proposed planning reforms

Results of new survey highlight people’s concern that roads and housing developments pose a real threat to nature.

Analysis of a survey undertaken by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust to understand people’s fears and aspirations for environment after lockdown shows the greatest concern is the risk posed to wildlife and wildlife habitats from increased pressure from new development.

78% of respondents stated that their greatest concern for nature in Nottinghamshire came from construction work such as roads and housing. The survey also showed that 69% believed that high quality greenspace and wildlife habitats should be incorporated into new housing developments.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, the county’s largest locally based environmental charity, believes that these findings illustrate just how badly the Government’s proposed new planning reforms will fail both wildlife and people.

The Trust believes that as they currently stand, the reforms proposed in the Government’s White Paper, *Planning for the Future*, will increase the threat to nature in England and do little to create better homes and communities for wildlife and people.

Speaking about their concerns Head of Nature Recovery (North) Janice Bradley said:

“More than ever, over the past six months it has become increasingly clear just how much people value local greenspace and access to nature. We knew that people were concerned about the ‘build, build, build’ strategy outlined by the Government in the summer but our survey results highlight that this isn’t a minority view.”

The Trust fears that the new system with arbitrary, nationally set housing targets could increase housing allocations across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire by almost 40%, without meeting local need for affordable and social rented housing any

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better than the current system. In addition, the Government's proposals could actually reduce the chances of meeting their own targets for energy efficient homes.

Janice added: "We recognise that the planning system isn't perfect and welcome change, but these reforms really are not the answer. The Government seems intent on pushing through change based on the false assumptions that local scrutiny and consultation lead to unnecessary delays to development. However, across Nottinghamshire permission has already been granted for thousands of homes to be built, with around 1 million permissions in place across the UK which have not been built after more than 2 years. We feel it would be wrong to weaken local scrutiny and to allocate more land for building because developers are not completing developments fast enough. People need homes, but developers are not building them in a timely way when they get permission.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's own analysis shows that there are 17,104 extant housing permissions across just 5 of the county's 8 Local Planning Authorities – some of these have been permitted for 3 or 4 years and are **still** not yet built. It could be argued that this is because developers will not saturate their own market, so they need to keep a slow and steady supply of high value housing, rather than build what is needed for local people at a speed that will keep prices affordable.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries on the planet and the government has committed to reversing wildlife declines. A successful planning system is crucial to securing the recovery of nature and creating healthy communities with natural green space on people's doorsteps. However, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, which monitors thousands of planning applications each year and provides wildlife expertise to local authorities, believe the new Government proposals will make a bad situation worse.

The Wildlife Trusts' key concerns over the reforms are:

- Failure to address the climate, ecological and health emergencies together
- The new zones will not reverse nature's decline nor integrate it into people's lives
- Inadequate nature data means that planners will make poor decisions about the proposed new growth zones
- The bias will be towards permitting new developments, without any proper assessment of the real needs of local communities for numbers and types of housing.
- Simplifying Environmental Impact Assessments will weaken environmental protections dramatically.

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· Undermining the democratic process by reducing people's opportunity to influence the planning process and to have a say about development in their area.

Nature-friendly developments that benefit both people and wildlife would not happen under the proposed reforms

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust will be responding to the Government consultation, and are urging the public to rewild the planning system too by responding at <http://wtru.st/do-not-fail-wildlife>.

The Wildlife Trusts are calling on the Government to commit to five principles to be applied to future planning which would ensure the reforms can address the climate and ecological crises and people's need for nature around them. One of these principles would, for the first time, protect new land put into nature's recovery.

The Wildlife Trusts' five principles are:

1. Wildlife recovery and people's easy access to nature must be put at the heart of planning reform by mapping a Nature Recovery Network
2. Nature protection policies and standards must not be weakened, and assessment of environmental impact must take place before development is permitted
3. People and local stakeholders must be able to engage with the planning system
4. Address the ecological and climate crises by protecting new land put into recovery by creating a new designation – Wildbelt
5. Decisions must be based on up-to-date and accurate nature data

Janice explained: "We're in a climate and ecological crisis and we cannot afford to lose any more wildlife – we must keep the environmental protections that we have – but even these are not enough. The rhetoric justifying these reforms suggested that the local consultation and ecological surveys that are essential to good decision-making cause unnecessary delays to housing projects and other development. Our local experience is that this simply isn't the case. Healthy communities need nature and we believe that wildlife protections must be strengthened and that the Government must map out a Nature Recovery Network across every one of their proposed new planning zones, whether it's a growth, renewal or protected area."

The deadline for public responses is 29th October 2020.

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The Wildlife Trusts are also holding a Wild Live digital event for all to join on Thursday 15th October at 7pm, booking via wildlifetrusts.org/events/2020-10-15-wild-live-planning-fail-wildlife

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Notes to Editors

The Wildlife Trusts and planning

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust monitors and responds to planning applications locally and also works to influence Local Plans and other strategic planning documents across the county. It provides ecological advice to a number of Local Authorities and provides training to local planners. It is currently working with councils across Nottinghamshire to develop an ambitious approach to delivering net gain for nature through the local planning system.

Across the UK The Wildlife Trusts work with national and local government, businesses and local communities to influence planning and development to achieve better outcomes for wildlife. The Wildlife Trusts respond to around 6,500 planning applications per year, and tens of thousands more are vetted and checked for impacts on wildlife. The Wildlife Trusts' Homes for people and wildlife – how to build housing in a nature-friendly way can be read [here](#).

The Wildlife Trusts' five principles in more detail are:

1. Wildlife recovery and people's easy access to nature must be at the heart of planning reform. Strategic planning for nature, in which the network of space needed for nature's recovery is identified, mapped and integrated into the planning system, must be applied across all zones. This Nature Recovery Network map must be upheld by law and should inform Local Plans.
2. Nature protection policies and standards must not be weakened, and assessment of environmental impact must take place before development is permitted. Currently the reforms appear to suggest that in most cases this takes place after permission has been automatically given.
3. People and local stakeholders must be able to engage with the planning system at points where it is meaningful to them and sufficient information is available to understand the impacts – on nature and on local communities. It is vital that

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communities are made aware in the consultations of all the issues and opportunities their community faces – including climate and ecological challenges

4. Decisions must be based on accurate nature data. A full program of investment is required to establish high quality ecological data. This will take time, so a transition program is needed to ensure that any fast turn over to new systems doesn't destroy natural places in the process. As strategic data does not provide the site-level detail necessary to ensure nature is properly taken into account, 'permission in principle' in the zones should still be able to be revoked. Timely, site-based survey work is crucial for accuracy and will recognise that nature changes and moves around.

5. Address the ecological and climate crises by protecting land put into recovery. The Wildlife Trusts propose this be done by creating a new designation – Wildbelt – to support nature's recovery. This would enable new land that is currently of low biodiversity value to be designated for nature, and so speed the creation of the Nature Recovery Network to which the Government is already committed. It must reach into every part of England, from rural areas to towns and cities, securing the future of the new land that we are putting into recovery so that we can reach at least 30% of land in recovery by 2030 and address the climate and biodiversity emergency. Wildbelt would form a central part of the National Planning Policy Framework review.

As the Planning White Paper proposals currently stand, The Wildlife Trusts' key concerns, in more detail, are:

- New zones will not reverse nature's decline nor integrate it into people's lives.

Allocating all land to fall within one of three new proposed zones will jeopardise nature at every count and fail to integrate it into the places where people live, work, learn and play. Nature will be automatically ignored and built over in the Growth area, overwhelmed by denser development in the Renewal area and not actively helped in Protected areas where we know that wildlife is already struggling. Planning decisions should be informed by surveys of potential sites, not purely informed by zones.

- Inadequate nature data means that planners will make poor decisions about zones leading to potentially catastrophic impacts for wildlife sites. The Wildlife Trusts do not believe it is possible to gather the level of data needed for these proposals.

- The bias will be towards permitting new developments – and allowing much more of it. The proposals are driven by economic growth and building – and doing all this at speed rather than considered place-making. The government has committed to put the environment at the heart of planning and development, to create better places for people to live and work in its 25 Year Plan for the Environment. These

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proposals are failing in that ambition because development could go ahead even if it is later found to be seriously damaging to nature.

- Simplifying Environmental Impact Assessments that are designed to save nature, where it still exists, will weaken environmental protections and threaten its ability to survive and recover. There is already, often, insufficient information on which to make reliable decisions and the proposals do not address this. The cost of providing robust data over whole Local Authority areas is huge, which is why development decisions are currently informed by targeted survey. Streamlining could reduce quality and mean impacts on nature are not fully assessed.

- Undermining of the democratic process – the reforms provide less opportunity to influence individual development proposals. The zoning approach will mean decisions are made up-front leaving no option for communities to challenge harmful developments.

- Failure to address the climate, ecological and health emergencies together – restoring and creating wild places across all zones would ensure carbon-storing habitats that help tackle climate change and provide access to nature to improve people's lives.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, a registered charity, manages Nature Reserves throughout the county of Nottinghamshire. It advises local authorities, community groups and landowners on nature conservation issues, and makes a major input into decision-making on planning matters and other issues. For more information please see our website: nottinghamshirewildlife.org.

The Trust is part of a nation-wide network of local Trusts which work to protect wildlife in town and country - The Wildlife Trusts.

The Wildlife Trusts

The Wildlife Trusts believe that people need nature and it needs us. We are here to make the world wilder and to make nature part of everyone's lives. We are a grassroots movement of 46 charities with more than 850,000 members and 38,000 volunteers. No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people and saving, protecting and standing up for the natural world. With the support of our members, we care for and restore special places for nature on land and run marine conservation projects and collect vital data on the state of our seas. Every Wildlife Trust works within its local community to inspire people to create a wilder future – from advising thousands of landowners on how to manage their land to

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benefit wildlife, to connecting hundreds of thousands of school children with nature every year. wildlifetrusts.org