

Climate change and A Living Landscape



Valuing our natural environment in a changing climate



Ptarmigan. Warmer temperatures will push mountain species like the ptarmigan to the edge of their natural range in the UK. (photo: Stuart Anthony)

How can climate change adaptation policies help to deliver A Living Landscape?

Attention is now turning to policies that will help us adapt to inevitable climate change. The new Climate Change Act will require governments at UK level and in devolved administrations to develop truly cross-departmental adaptation policies and programmes. As a result, we anticipate many government policies and actions will need to be reassessed in the coming years.

‘Adaptation’ means increasing the ability of natural systems to absorb and respond to change¹. Climate change will bring about more extreme weather events such as hot, dry summers, storms and floods. A 2°C rise in temperature will shift the natural range of some species more than 150 miles to the north or nearly 1,000ft up hillsides. Now more than ever it is vital that we manage and use our land, so it is hospitable to plants and animals, enabling them to move and adapt to new conditions for survival. Critically, we need to restore healthy, living landscapes that help to alleviate floods, control pollution and help us cope with extremes of temperature.

To help the natural environment survive these dramatic changes, Wildlife Trusts around the UK have an ambitious vision known as A Living Landscape. Throughout the UK, in urban and rural areas, The Wildlife Trusts are putting this vision into practice.

What is A Living Landscape?

It is a strategic vision of our landscape that will help us create a resilient and healthy environment. We are identifying key areas to

What do we propose?

- * **Policy change** Adaptation policies must address the urgent need for change in several areas including land use planning, agriculture, water, woodland and forestry policy; as well as the importance of protecting and enhancing core wildlife-rich areas through both the statutory and non-statutory site protection systems.
- * **Working together** Enabling our natural environment to adapt in this way will need commitment from governments, their agencies and departments, local authorities, land owners and managers, planners and politicians, as well as organisations such as The Wildlife Trusts. We need to alter our thinking about how we use and manage our land; where our development is sited and how we design and maintain the built environment.
- * **Value the natural environment** In every decision we must value the natural environment and invest in its future. We believe A Living Landscape will improve the quality of our lives and that this is the basis of a vibrant and sustainable economy. The climate change adaptation programmes will provide an opportunity to put the natural environment where it belongs - at the heart of government policy. Some local and regional governments are already leading by example and developing their own climate change adaptation strategies which clearly link to the natural environment, such as the Mayor of London’s new climate change adaptation strategy.

protect for wildlife, enlarging, improving and joining them up, across the UK; on nature reserves, in towns and cities, and in partnership with hundreds of other land-owners. This includes tackling key threats to wildlife at a landscape scale. We need a healthy natural environment to enable wildlife and people to adapt to a changing climate.

Creating A Living Landscape is not just large scale habitat restoration. This is an inclusive approach that relies on participation and partnership. The cultural and natural values of landscapes are inextricably linked, and local communities are the key to sustaining these landscapes. There are now over a hundred Living Landscape schemes around the UK. These schemes are creating inspirational, accessible landscapes - full of wildlife and rich in opportunities for learning, better health and wellbeing, alongside sustainable economic development. Figs 1 and 2 below show two examples. See wildlifetrusts.org/alivinglandscape for full details of over 100 Living Landscape schemes around the UK.

What do we propose? (continued)

* **Act now before it's too late** The adaptation programmes must give high priority to the natural environment throughout the UK. This requires a thorough assessment of all policies influencing land use and land management. With the right political will, we have the ability to do this. However, the policy mechanisms to deliver A Living Landscape need to be developed now before it is too late.

1 Conserving biodiversity in a changing climate Defra (2007)

To create A Living Landscape, we need to:

- * **Protect and enlarge our 'core' areas** – the foundation of our approach. These are the most important areas such as ancient woodlands, wetlands and natural green spaces in towns and cities. They are often protected by law (eg Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or Areas of Special Scientific Interest in Northern Ireland) and provide reservoirs of plants and animals which can colonise other areas. Many are popular tourist destinations and are well used by local communities.
- * **Join up these areas** by creating ecological networks based on natural features such as rivers or non-natural features like green lanes and tree lines. As well as helping the movement of plants and animals, some can become pleasant places for people to walk or cycle along. These ecological networks need to be mapped out and then delivered, for example, through effective town and country planning and river basin management.
- * **Improve the 'permeability'** of the rest of the landscape by introducing small scale greening measures such as field and ditch margins and hedgerows, which cumulatively make a significant impact. This is particularly important in intensively farmed or urban areas that can be hostile to plants and animals. Changes like this mean that wildlife can move more easily through these landscapes. They will also make urban areas more comfortable for people, by moderating the local climate, and will reduce soil erosion and pollution in intensive farmland.

Case studies



(photo: James Osmond)

Fig 1. West Berkshire Living Landscape –

An ambitious 30-year conservation project covering an area of 2,600 hectares near Newbury. Benefits include increased tourism potential, new and restored habitat for threatened wildlife, increased access for recreation and public health benefits.



(photo: David Woodfall, BBC WT)

Fig 2. Birmingham & Black Country Living Landscape –

An exciting new project that aims to transform accessible natural greenspace and local nature reserves across the Black Country in partnership with local communities.