



Roundtable on 28th November 2022, with Alan Law and Mike Burke

Deputy Chief Executive and Director,
Sustainable Development of Natural England

Introduction

Natural England met with industry leaders to discuss their policy and on outlook nutrient and water neutrality. The group canvassed the constraints faced by them as a government body and what more can be done to tackle the lack of progress in the housing market in regards to the environmental consultation process and its impact on planning applications.



Key takeaways

- Nutrient pollution is a big environmental issue for many of our most important places for nature in England. In rivers and estuaries, increased levels of nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, can harm wildlife. These nutrients are affecting the condition of internationally protected rivers.
- There are over 100,000 houses stuck in the planning system because of the Nutrient Neutrality strategy.
- The National Planning Policy Framework prospectus early next year is an opportunity to look again at chapters 13 and 16, concerning nature conservation on the green belt. In addition, it will also focus on delivery mechanisms for nature based solutions and how that will be monitored and assessed. The two primary sources of pollution are nitrogen and phosphorus, 70 per cent of Phosphorus comes from sewage treatment works and 70 per cent of Nitrogen is coming from agricultural sources. However, most of the burden of tackling this issue is placed on developers through the current mitigation system.
- The law and policy are set by the government and Natural England's role is to implement the legislation. The tools available to them are directed at the development side and their role as a statutory advisor in the planning process.
- The choice around how stringent to regulate the agricultural sector versus the housebuilding sector is ultimately a political one. In that mix all Natural England can do is advise the government around the nutrient sources and the relative impacts on sites.

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Issues raised

- The burden is wholly placed on developers because there are no mechanisms for recourse against other actors such as water treatment companies. The imperative for resolving the nutrient issue should be placed on the utilities companies who make billions of pounds out of water management and have the resources to manage the issues in a structured way.
- The manner in which the proposals have been briefed to local authorities means that currently there is a disconnect in their understanding of its implementation and Natural England's 'advisory' output, leading to a rigidity in practice.
- According to the government's chief planner, nature based solutions such as Natural England's Nutrient Mitigation Scheme will take years to implement and become fully functional, allowing houses to be occupied. How will this help development?

Outcomes and future actions

- Natural England to take feedback from the meeting into consideration and will meet with the group again in the new year.
- The Chairs of the APPGs for Housing Market & Housing Delivery, and Regeneration & Development will have a consultative meeting with Natural England in due course.

We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support.



Gagan Mohindra MP is the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Regeneration & Development



Ben Everitt MP is the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Housing Market & Housing Delivery

To get involved, please contact
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