

Background

1. The Environment Select Committee (ESC) discussed at [16 January 2018](#) Committee that they would be interested in considering the Government's new 25-year Environment Plan.
2. This Briefing Note aims to provide a summary of the pertinent points highlighted in the [Government's 25-year Environment Plan](#) (hereafter referred to as "the plan") for the Committee's interest, with the aim of helping the Committee to decide which areas (if any) they would like to receive further information on. The Committee have already signalled that they would like to look at 'air quality'; which is one of the 6 areas of the plan.

Purpose of Committee engagement

3. The ESC is primarily interested in current (and likely future) Council policies that are designed to help mitigate detrimental impacts on the environment in Wiltshire.

Summary of the Government's 25-year Environment Plan

4. The plan's overall objectives include achieving the following:
 - Clean air
 - Clean and plentiful water
 - Thriving plants and wildlife
 - Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards (e.g. flooding)
 - Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
 - Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment
5. Informed by the work of the Natural Capital Committee, the plan suggests taking into consideration the economic value of the environment; as this would more likely lead to its protection and enhancement. However, Government recognises that not all the benefits that nature provides can be quantified.

Important points of interest to the ESC

Development Planning

6. The plan includes a commitment to an 'Environmental Net Gain' principle for new housing and infrastructure development. One element of this is expanding the use of developer contributions in the form of tariffs to drive development to least environmentally damaging areas and increase investment in natural capital. One stated aim of the Government is to include this net gain principle in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

7. The NPPF has also been updated (March 2018) to state that development relating to the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, such as woodland, ought to be refused.

Flooding

8. 2019 will see an updated flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy and it may be that the Committee decide to engage further with the Executive responsible for the flooding portfolio as this strategy becomes clearer. Interestingly, £15m has been earmarked by the Government until 2021 to explore the use of national flood management schemes.
9. Planning policy has been updated (from March 2018) with new guidance to include Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) in new developments.

Greener Towns and Cities

10. A national framework of green infrastructure standards will be created in co-operation with Local Authorities (LAs) and developers.

Increased resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste

11. The plan recognises that there is a role for well-designed taxes and charges, to help enable cleaner economic growth. Indeed, this can already be seen through the Government's engagement with the 'bottle deposit scheme' and the 5p charge on plastic bags.
12. The commitment to ensure zero avoidable plastic waste by 2042 is also noted within the plan. This is aimed to be achieved through water bottle top-up points in towns and cities and the extension of the 5p plastic bag charge to small retailers.
13. The Committee will be particularly interested in the Government's hope to increase the number of LAs separating food waste, however, no indication has been given on how this objective could be achieved.
14. A consultation on a Clean Air Strategy is set to be commenced this year (2018) and is arguably the result of the Government losing in the courts for a third time, over its existing plans to tackle air quality. Again, this is especially relevant to the Committee, given the item on 'Emissions' listed on its FWP and the discussions that it has had over air quality recently.
15. New legislation is also mentioned to limit pollutants from combustion plants and generators used for heat/power generation in larger buildings.

Implementation of the Plan

16. There will be a consultation in 2018 on a new, independent and statutory body to help ensure that the Government has a voice and can uphold environmental standards as the UK leaves the EU.
17. The plan is due to be refreshed every 5 years and immediately after Brexit and there will also be annual parliamentary reports. National Ecosystem Assessments will occur every 10 years, with the next one being in 2022.
18. A £220m Clean Air Fund is available for LAs to apply for funding for projects that will help to reduce air pollution in their area.

Conclusion

19. LAs have a major role to play in the plan's availability to deliver green infrastructure and the net environmental gain in all new developments. The Committee will be interested in how the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy and Clean Air Strategy consultations progress, as well as the Clean Air Fund and may decide to update their FWP accordingly.

Proposal

The Committee to decide whether to receive further information on the any of the following sub-topics of the Government's 25-year Environment Plan:

- Clean and plentiful water
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards (e.g. flooding)
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
- Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

Bland S, 2018, [Briefing: A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to improve the environment](#), LGiU [11 April 2018]