

National Assembly for Wales

An Introduction to natural environment policy in Wales and a comparison with natural environment policies for other parts of the UK

May 2012

The *Sustaining a Living Wales* Green Paper was launched on 30 January 2012. The Green Paper outlines a new approach to natural resource management in Wales, proposing changes in delivery of natural resource management.

This paper examines the current approaches to management of the natural environment in Wales and summarises how the new approach set out in the Green Paper differs to them. In addition, the paper outlines the approaches to the natural environment being taken by the UK Government and the other devolved administrations and compares them to the approach being put forward by the Welsh Government in the Green Paper.

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May 2012

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Summary

On 30 January 2012, John Griffiths, the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, launched the *Sustaining a Living Wales* Green Paper. The Green Paper outlines a new approach to the management of the natural environment in Wales. The Welsh Government has stated that current approaches to the management of natural environment in Wales have been too narrowly focused on specific issues and have failed to deliver a joined-up approach to management.

Management of the natural environment is largely an area of devolved competence and is set within a framework of both devolved and UK legislation. In addition to national and international statutory legislation, each of the devolved administrations (and for England the UK Government) also produces its own policies and strategies for development, management and regulation of the natural environment.

The Green Paper proposes four key areas for action: development of an ecosystems approach; creation of a single environment body; a review of existing, and development of new, legislation; and development of a National Resource Management Plan. It is not clear if the Green Paper will supplement or replace the existing Environment Strategy for Wales and Wales Biodiversity Framework.

Proposals in the Natural Choice White Paper for England focus primarily on conserving and improving the natural environment, in contrast to the combined sustainable development objectives (economic, social and environmental) that are the guiding principles of Wales' Green Paper. Both countries further promote biodiversity-specific action within separate biodiversity strategy documents.

Scotland's approach to natural environment policy broadly follows a similar framework to that in Wales and England, with a broad high-level Strategy supplemented by a separate Biodiversity Strategy. Proposals in Scotland focus on investigating how existing delivery mechanisms can be better used to achieve current objectives, whereas the Green Paper aims for a complete shift in thinking.

At the current time, there is no official natural environment strategy for Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy represents the main policy document for natural environment work in Northern Ireland. It does have a sustainable development strategy that sets a broad context for natural resource management, but this is more comparable to the Wales Sustainable Development Strategy, *One Wales One Planet*, than the Green Paper.

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An Introduction to Natural Environment Policy in Wales and a Comparison with Natural Environment Policies for Other Parts of the UK.

1. Natural Environment Policy

On 30 January 2012, John Griffiths, the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, launched the *Sustaining a Living Wales*¹ Green Paper (hereafter, the Green Paper). The Green Paper outlines a new approach to the management of the natural environment that is markedly different to previous approaches. In a written statement launching the consultation on the Green Paper, the Minister stated:

'Sustaining a Living Wales' seeks views on a fresh approach to the management and regulation of the environment in Wales. Adopting an ecosystem approach to the management of our natural resources will mean considering and regulating the environment as a whole rather than dealing with individual aspects of it separately. It also considers the benefits that better management of the environment can bring - for people, for jobs and for health now and for the future².

The Green Paper is published within a context of EU-wide reviews of Government approaches to management of the natural environment. These reviews have been **a response to the EU's failure to meet its targets of halting biodiversity loss by 2010**³. Previous approaches by Governments to management of the natural environment have been criticised for being too fragmented and limited in their approach and a report by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) states that 'failure of markets to adequately consider the value of ecosystem services is of concern not only to environment, development and climate change ministries, but also to finance, economics and business ministries.'⁴

The Welsh Government believe that current approaches to the management of natural environment in Wales have been too narrowly focused on specific issues and had failed to deliver a joined-up approach to management⁵. In addition, the Welsh Government considers that previous responses to problems in the natural environment tended to only be triggered when serious pressures or issues arose⁶. The Green Paper on the new approach states that:

¹ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales: A Green Paper on a new approach to natural resource management in Wales*, 30 January 2012 [accessed 16 February 2012].

² Welsh Government, *Written Statement by the Welsh Government*, 30 January 2012 [accessed 17 February 2012].

³ British Ecological Society, *EU announces new strategy to achieve 2020 biodiversity targets* [accessed 19 March 2012].

⁴ *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for National and International Policy Makers - Summary: Responding to the Value of Nature*, 13 November 2009 [accessed 20 March 2012].

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Welsh Government, *A Living Wales: A new framework for our environment, our countryside and our seas*, September 2010 [accessed 21 March 2012]

We (Wales) need to set our priorities to better meet the strategic outcomes of our European environmental obligations and to address the fundamental risks and opportunities before us rather than tackling individual symptoms in isolation⁷.

The Green Paper indicates that the new approach to the natural environment in Wales will not sit within a specific environment policy but will reach across all Government portfolios.

This paper examines the current approach to management of the natural environment in Wales and summarises how the new approach set out in the Green Paper differs to them. In addition, the paper outlines the approaches to the natural environment being taken by the UK Government and the other devolved administrations and compares them to the approach being put forward by the Welsh Government in its Green Paper.

⁷ Welsh Government, *[Sustaining a Living Wales: A Green Paper on a new approach to natural resource management in Wales](#)*, 30 January 2012, p2 [hard copy].

2. Introduction to Existing Natural Environment Legislation and Policy

2.1. Legislation

Management and protection of the natural environment in Wales takes place within a framework of both **European and UK legislation**. All European Union (EU) Member States are obliged to comply with two directives related to nature conservation⁸:

- *Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds* (Birds Directive)⁹; and
- *Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (Habitats Directive)¹⁰.

The Birds and Habitats Directives provide **protection for animals and habitats of European conservation importance**, primarily through the designation of conservation sites established through the **Natura 2000 network**¹¹.

In addition, *Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 Establishing a Framework for Community Action in the field of Water Policy* (Water Framework Directive) provides protection to the water sources of terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands¹². *Directive 2008/56/EC on establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy* (Marine Strategy Framework Directive) provides a legislative framework for sustainable management of the marine environment based on an ecosystem approach¹³.

Management of the natural environment is largely an area of devolved competence and is set within a framework of both Wales and UK legislation. The main piece of legislation governing nature conservation in the UK (not including Northern Ireland) is the ***Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981***¹⁴ (hereafter, the Act). The Act provides protection to UK native species and to sites designated for their importance to UK nature conservation, and controls the release of non-native species.

⁸ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [European Legislation](#), [accessed 13 February 2012].

⁹ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [EC Birds Directive](#), [accessed 23 February 2012].

¹⁰ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [EC Habitats Directive](#), [accessed 23 February 2012].

¹¹ European Commission, [Natura 2000 network](#), [accessed 23 February 2012]. This network consists of European designated sites including Special Protection Areas (designated under the Birds Directive), Special Areas of Conservation (designated under the Habitats Directive) and Ramsar sites (designated under the UN Ramsar Convention).

¹² Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [Water Framework Directive](#), [accessed 23 February 2012].

¹³ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#) [accessed 16 March 2012].

¹⁴ UK Government, [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#), 30 October 1981 [accessed 23 February 2012].

A number of supplementary Acts also exist. For England and Wales, *the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CroW)*¹⁵ places a duty on the **UK and Welsh Governments** to have regard for biodiversity and to list habitats and species of priority for conservation action¹⁶. The *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006*¹⁷ places an additional duty on all **public authorities** in England and Wales to ‘have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity’¹⁸. For the marine environment, the *Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009*¹⁹ sets the legal framework for management and protection of marine and coastal environments, placing a duty on the Governments of England and Wales to ensure sustainable use of marine resources and providing them the power to designate marine sites for their nature conservation value²⁰.

In addition to national and international statutory legislation, each of the devolved administrations (and for England the UK Government) also produces its own policies and strategies for development, management and regulation of the natural environment.

2.2. Existing Policies in Wales

Management of the natural environment in Wales is currently set within the context of the *Environment Strategy for Wales*²¹ (hereafter, the Wales Strategy). The Wales Strategy sets out a framework for the ‘long-term protection of the environment’ and details a vision and challenges for protecting and conserving the natural environment up to 2026. It also sets outcomes for monitoring progress. The Wales Strategy sets out **five key environmental themes**: climate change, sustainable resource use; biodiversity, landscapes and seascapes; local environment; and environmental hazards.

The Wales Strategy was supplemented by *Environment Strategy Action Plans*²². Two Action Plans were published in total, with the Second Action Plan (hereafter, the Action Plan) covering the period 2008-2011. The Action Plans provided detailed information on targets for action and the organisations responsible for delivery of each target. It provided 10 priority areas for action with **targets for biodiversity and ecosystems services placed alongside wider environmental objectives**²³.

¹⁵ UK Government, *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*, 30 November 2000 [accessed 23 February 2012].

¹⁶ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, *The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* [accessed 23 February 2012].

¹⁷ UK Government, *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006*, 30 March 2006 [accessed 17 February 2012].

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ UK Government, *Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009*, 12 November 2009 [accessed 22 March 2012].

²⁰ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, *UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009* [accessed 22 March 2012].

²¹ Welsh Government, *Environment Strategy for Wales*, 17 May 2006 [accessed 20 February 2012].

²² Welsh Government, *Environment Strategy Action Plan*, October 2008 [accessed 22 February 2012].

²³ *ibid*

The Action Plan included actions for biodiversity that were targeted at improving the condition of designated sites, protecting and conserving priority species and habitats, enforcing wildlife crime law and embedding the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act biodiversity duty into public sector spending. The Action Plan sets out one action on ecosystems services which was primarily focused on establishing a technical group to undertake some initial scoping exercises into ecosystem services and its integration into marine and coastal management²⁴.

A Progress Report, based on initial consultation responses received for *A Living Wales*, states that the new framework being developed will:

...sit below the current Sustainable Development Scheme and above the Environment Strategy and individual environmental policies which set out present detailed actions.²⁵

Biodiversity Action Plan

The UK published its first ***UK Biodiversity Action Plan*** (UK BAP)²⁶ in 1994, following the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)²⁷. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) state that this plan responded to the CBD's call for members to develop and implement national strategies to **'identify, conserve and protect existing biological diversity, and to enhance it wherever possible'**²⁸.

An update to the UK BAP *Conserving Biodiversity – the UK Approach*²⁹ was adopted in 2007. The UK BAP provides a detailed plan for the conservation of the UK's biological resources, with supplementary plans existing for species and habitats that are most threatened³⁰. The UK BAP is nested within the international legislative framework and is **supported by separate strategies and delivery programs for the UK Government and each of the devolved administrations.**

In Wales, implementation of the UK BAP is coordinated by the Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP). The WBP states that implementation of the UK BAP in Wales is shared between a number of organisations, with overall responsibility laying with the Partnership³¹.

In March 2010, the Partnership adopted the Wales Biodiversity Framework which interpreted how the priorities of the UK BAP would be delivered in Wales. Set

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Welsh Government, *A Living Wales Progress Report February 2011 Statement of Next Steps and Principles*, February 2011 [accessed 24 February 2012].

²⁶ *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan*, 1994 [accessed 20 February 2012].

²⁷ Convention on Biological Diversity, *The Convention on Biological Diversity* [accessed 24 February 2012].

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ Defra, *Conserving Biodiversity – The UK Approach*, October 2007 [accessed 23 February 2012].

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Wales Biodiversity Partnership, *The Biodiversity Action Plan – Wales* [accessed 1 March 2012]. The Partnership itself consists of approximately 30 members from public, private and voluntary sectors that are each responsible for some part of biodiversity conservation in Wales.

within the context of the *Environment Strategy for Wales*, the Wales Framework sets out the roles and responsibilities of biodiversity delivery partners as well as providing targets to be achieved through delivery of the framework and outlining proposals for monitoring and reporting on work that has been undertaken³². The Wales Framework has a single aim – **to halt and ultimately reverse the loss of biodiversity in Wales**.

The main mechanism of delivery of biodiversity targets and objectives is through Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs). These LBAPS are developed and delivered by Local Authorities and National Park Authorities and the Wales Framework states that regional coordination of LBAP delivery will enable landscape scale delivery of biodiversity action³³.

The Green Paper does not set out how it will link to the UK BAP or if the Wales Framework and/or Wales Strategy will be maintained, updated or replaced.

2.2.1. Current Delivery Arrangements

The Green Paper states that current mechanisms for managing the natural environment in Wales are complex³⁴. The Green Paper outlines that one third of the land, one third of the seas and three quarters of the coast are currently subject to at least one statutory designation, either for nature conservation, geological features, natural beauty or cultural significance.

The Green Paper provides an illustrative list of current **designations** that can apply to the natural environment in Wales, detailing a total of 17 separate statutory and non-statutory designations³⁵. The majority are related directly to the conservation of the natural environment (for example SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves and Special Areas of Conservation) or indirectly via wider national and European environmental objectives (such as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones, Shellfish Waters and Heritage Coast).

An illustrative list of current **environment-related plans** that guide policy and decision-making in Wales with regards to the natural environment is also set out in the Green Paper³⁶. The list details a total of **12 separate statutory plans** or strategies that are based on five international Directives³⁷ and four UK Acts³⁸. These statutory plans sit alongside **six non-statutory plans**. **Eight separate bodies** have responsibility for delivery of these plans.

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*, p26.

³⁴ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales*, 30 January 2012, p 10 [hard copy].

³⁵ *ibid*, Annex A, Table 2, p32-34.

³⁶ *ibid*, Annex A, p34-35.

³⁷ The EU Water Framework Directive, the EU Habitats Directive, the Environment Noise Directive, the Waste Framework Directive and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

³⁸ The Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Water Industry Act 1991, the Environment Act 1995 and the CRoW Act 2000.

Of these eight separate bodies, three are ‘principal statutory delivery bodies’³⁹ responsible for regulation and management of Wales’ natural resources. These are Countryside Council for Wales (CCW); Environment Agency Wales (EAW); and Forestry Commission Wales (FCW). The Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission are cross-border organisations covering England and Wales, with some expertise and resources based outside of Wales.

In addition, the Green Paper states that management, development and regulation of the natural environment in Wales can also fall within the remit of the planning system, particularly in relation to the use of and development of land, and of agriculture, forestry and fisheries through the Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy⁴⁰.

³⁹ Welsh Government, *Single Environment Body in Wales Business Case*, November 2011, p9 [accessed 21 February 2012].

⁴⁰ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales*, 30th January 2012, p10 [hard copy].

3. Sustaining A Living Wales: The new approach

The Green Paper proposes the adoption of the ecosystem approach to management of the natural environment. It states that this new approach will place environmental objectives alongside those of the economy and society. The Green Paper considers that this new approach will drive the Welsh Government to move from a fragmented approach to environmental management to **a single consistent approach** to natural resource management across Wales. The Welsh Government believes this will require policies that manage the environment as a single, integrated resource and will result in decision-making on benefits that can be derived for society as a whole⁴¹.

This paper follows an earlier consultation document, on the new approach, *A Living Wales*⁴², which was launched in September 2010. The *Sustaining a Living Wales* Green Paper is currently out for further consultation, ending 31 May 2012, with the Welsh Government's response to the consultation expected in the summer/autumn of 2012.

Primary law-making powers for the environment have been devolved to Wales following the addition of Schedule 7 to the Government of Wales Act 2006. The Green Paper states that these new powers have allowed the Welsh Government to propose a **refresh of current systems, regulation and management** in order to achieve a more joined-up, purpose-designed approach⁴³.

The Green Paper makes a number of broad proposals and high level statements on actions the Welsh Government will take to implement the new approach to management of the natural environment but four key areas for action can be identified from the Paper. These are:

- Development of an ecosystems approach;
- Creation of a single environment body;
- The development of new legislation and the reviewing of existing legislation; and
- Development of a National Resource Management Plan.

3.1. *The Ecosystem Approach*

The Welsh Government states that the ecosystems approach proposed by the Green Paper is a:

⁴¹ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales*, 30th January 2012, p3 [hard copy].

⁴² Welsh Government, *A Living Wales*, 15 September 2010 [accessed 17 February 2012].

⁴³ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales*, 30 January 2012, p2 [hard copy].

...strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable land use in an equitable way⁴⁴.

According to the Green Paper the main aim of the new approach is **‘to ensure that Wales has increasingly resilient and diverse ecosystems that deliver environmental, economic and social benefits now and in the future’**⁴⁵. The Welsh Government argues that this new approach is **informed largely by evidence** gathered and presented by both the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment⁴⁶ and more recently the UK National Ecosystem Assessment⁴⁷, describing the many benefits of the UK’s natural environment to society and economic prosperity⁴⁸.

3.2. Single Environment Body

The Green Paper argues that the **creation of a new single environment body** for Wales from the existing statutory environmental bodies, CCW, EAW and FCW will make an important contribution to the delivery of the new approach⁴⁹. The Welsh Government is currently undertaking a separate consultation on the form and function of the new body with the consultation closing on 5 May 2012. The new body will come into being from April 2013 but a shadow body will be established in the summer/autumn of 2012.

3.3. Proposed Legislative Changes

Some measures to underpin the new approach to natural resource management will be taken forward through the **Environment Bill, Planning Bill** and the **Sustainable Development Bill**⁵⁰. The first of these (Sustainable Development Bill) is due to be laid before the Assembly in autumn 2013, with the Environment Bill scheduled for 2015 and the Planning Bill for 2015/16⁵¹.

In addition to the creation of new legislation will be undertaken to review existing regulations and regimes. This work will primarily be aimed at ensuring **‘that they integrate ecosystem sustainability issues from the outset in order to protect the supporting, provisioning, regulating and cultural services provided by ecosystems’**⁵². The Green Paper states that this will be achieved by identifying how existing regimes and regulations can be brought together to allow for single permits and consents.

⁴⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity, *The Ecosystem Approach* [accessed 10 February 2012].

⁴⁵ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales*, 30th January 2012, p4 [hard copy].

⁴⁶ Initiated in 2001 and called for by the United Nations, the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* provides a comprehensive analysis of all of the world’s ecosystems and the services they provide, along with the options to restore, enhance or conserve their sustainable use.

⁴⁷ The *UK National Ecosystem Assessment* initiated in 2009 as the first analysis of the UKs natural environment in terms of its ecosystems and the benefits they provide to society and economic prosperity.

⁴⁸ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales*, 30 January 2012, p4 [hard copy].

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² *Ibid*, p28.

In addition the Green Paper declares that the Welsh Government aims to simplify and rationalise duties on public bodies, with a view to replacing or integrating a number of these with an over-arching **sustainable development duty**⁵³.

With regards to the range of nature conservation designations currently applied in Wales, the Green Paper acknowledges that some statutory designations are required by European Directives but the Welsh Government believes there is scope to **streamline the list of current designations** in Wales to support multiple outcomes⁵⁴. The Welsh Government will be considering the future role of designations and will work closely with the European Commission to rationalise existing designations:

This will be based on positively securing wider resilience and diversity rather than placing environment protection in a role, where it is too often placed, in direct opposition to development.⁵⁵

Law Commission

In addition to changes being proposed by the Welsh Government, the Law Commission is currently undertaking an initial scoping exercise to review wildlife legislation in England and Wales⁵⁶. An official consultation document is due to be released during the second half of 2012 proposing a **modernisation and simplification of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**⁵⁷. Results and analysis of the consultation will be shared in spring 2013 with the final report published in 2014. In the Green Paper the Welsh Government states that the Law Commission intends to fully consult stakeholders in Wales. The Welsh Government has said it will work closely with the Commission as much of the law is common to both England and Wales the Welsh Government.

3.4. National Resource Management Plan

One of the main tools proposed by the Green Paper to guide management of the natural environment in Wales is **the creation of a National Resource Management Plan**. This plan would sit alongside a proposed new Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan⁵⁸ and inform infrastructure planning as well as set the framework for investment in positive environmental improvement, such as positive habitat creation and financial incentives for more sustainable land management⁵⁹. According to the Green Paper the aim of a new framework would be to resolve conflicting aims and provide clarity for developers and decision-

⁵³ *Ibid*, p27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p13.

⁵⁷ The Law Commission, *Eleventh Programme of Law Reform*, 19th July 2011 [accessed 17 February 2012].

⁵⁸ The Welsh Government state this will be published at the end of May 2012.

⁵⁹ Welsh Government, *Sustaining a Living Wales*, 30 January 2012, p18 [hard copy].

makers. The Green Paper does not explain how delivery of the Welsh Government's environmental targets will be reflected in the framework.

The Green Paper states that proposals for a new spatial framework move beyond the broad spatial planning context outlined in the *Wales Spatial Plan*. While spatial policies already exist separately for renewable energy, flooding, water quality and resources, waste infrastructure, landscape and nature conservation⁶⁰, the Green Paper states that the National Resource Management Plan will provide a **common framework for decision-making** in all of these areas. The Green Paper does not specify if this new plan will add to or replace the existing set of spatial policies.

Set within the context of the ecosystem approach, the Green Paper explains that the proposed spatial planning framework will also enable the **identification of how environmental constraints can be overcome to allow sustainable exploitation of the environment for socio-economic objectives**. According to the Green Paper investment in positive environmental improvement will be facilitated through this spatial framework and will enable the capacity of key ecosystems to be increased whilst also reducing pressures on those that may already be reaching their environmental limits⁶¹. The Green Paper does not explain how such environmental constraints may be overcome or set out the mechanisms for investing in environmental improvements.

The Green Paper states that the Welsh Government will **scope a National Resource Management Plan during 2013** and that this process will set an important part of the context for EU programmes post-2014 that will focus on the EU2020 target of halting biodiversity loss and restoring degraded ecosystem services as well as the objectives of sustainable growth, resource efficiency and climate change⁶².

The relationship between the Welsh Government's new approach to natural resource management and development of a marine spatial plan for Wales is unclear at the current time. The Green Paper explains that the Welsh Government will consider the extent to which the two plans can be linked⁶³.

⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ *ibid*

4. Natural Environment Policy in England

Caroline Spelman, the UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, presented *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature*⁶⁴ (hereafter, the White Paper) to Parliament in June 2011. According to the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), it is the first natural environment White Paper to be presented to Parliament in 20 years and sets out a vision for the natural environment in England for the next 50 years⁶⁵. The UK Government has stated that the White Paper has been produced in response to ‘compelling new evidence about the state of our natural environment’, primarily obtained from the recent work of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA) and the failure to meet the EU 2010 objective of halting biodiversity loss⁶⁶.

The proposals included within White Paper also respond to recommendations outlined in *Making Space for Nature*⁶⁷, known also as The Lawton Review, a report into the state of England’s wildlife and nature sites⁶⁸. Defra states that the Lawton Review was undertaken to ‘look at [England’s] wildlife sites and whether they are capable of responding and adapting to the growing challenges of climate change and other demands on [England’s] land’⁶⁹. In four words, Defra summarise the recommendations from the report as: **more, bigger, better and joined**⁷⁰. The White Paper explains that in other words this means: the **creation of new** wildlife sites; an **increase in the size** of existing wildlife sites; **better management** of wildlife sites; and **creation, and improvement, of connections** between wildlife sites through physical wildlife corridors that directly link sites or through smaller discrete wildlife sites that act as stepping stones between larger sites⁷¹.

4.1. *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*

The broad aim set out the White Paper is for ‘**this generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited**’⁷². It outlines actions targeted primarily at protecting and improving the natural environment but also on meeting economic and social objectives through interaction with the natural environment⁷³.

⁶⁴ Defra, *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature*, 7 June 2011, p3 [accessed 9 February 2012].

⁶⁵ Defra, *New plans promise flourishing future for the natural environment*, 7 June 2011 [accessed 17 February 2012].

⁶⁶ Defra, *The Natural Choice: What the Natural Environment White Paper means to you*, and *The Natural Choice: What the Natural Environment White Paper means to conservation organisations* [accessed 16 March 2012],

⁶⁷ *Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network*, 16 September 2010 [accessed 17 February 2012].

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ Defra, *‘Making Space for Nature’: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites published today* [accessed 29 February 2012].

⁷⁰ Defra, *Government response to the Making Space for Nature review* [accessed 29 February 2012].

⁷¹ Defra, *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature*, 7 June 2011, p9 [hard copy].

⁷² *ibid*, p3.

⁷³ *ibid*

The White Paper explains that measures for improving and protecting the health of England's ecosystems will be promoted through an integrated landscape scale approach:

[The White Paper] outlines the Government's vision for the natural environment shifting the emphasis from piecemeal conservation action towards a more integrated landscape-scale approach⁷⁴.

Following the recommendations made by the Lawton Review, the White Paper provides specific targets for restoring ecological networks, focused on increasing the cohesion of the natural environment at both a local and national level. The Lawton Review recommended that large areas be formally recognised as **Ecological Restoration Zones (ERZ)**. In response, £7.5 million will be provided to support the initial establishment of **12 Nature Improvement Areas (NIA)** across England, where opportunities for restoring and connecting nature have been identified⁷⁵.

The White Paper states that Defra intend to consult on a draft of the National Planning Policy Framework⁷⁶ to ensure the planning system contributes to the objective of halting the loss of biodiversity. The framework document was published on 27 March 2012 and replaces a number of Planning Policy Statements, including Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. A single chapter now relates to nature conservation and concentrates on protecting designated sites and ensuring the best areas for nature are protected through the planning process. This will be achieved by focusing development on brownfield sites and those of least environmental value.

The White Paper sets out a plan for **introducing biodiversity offsetting**, whereby compensation for biodiversity loss during development is offset with the securement of compensatory habitat expansion or restoration elsewhere⁷⁷. The White Paper states that biodiversity offsetting will be a voluntary scheme, piloted for two years (2012-2014) in selected Local Authorities and will **provide evidence to the UK Government** for use in its decision regarding the widespread use of biodiversity offsetting in England.

⁷⁴ Defra, [Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services](#), 19 August 2011, p4 [accessed 2 March 2012].

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p21.

⁷⁶ The Department for Communities and Local Government published a draft consultation on a National Planning Policy Framework as part of reforms to make the planning system less complex and more accessible. The document was out for consultation between 25 July 2011 and 17 October 2011.

⁷⁷ Defra, [The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature](#), 7 June 2011, p21 [hard copy].

4.2. Biodiversity Policy

Following the publication of the White Paper, in August 2011 Defra published *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services*⁷⁸ (hereafter the England Strategy). The JNCC state that this document provides the strategic direction for biodiversity policy in England over the next 10 years⁷⁹.

The broad aim of the strategy in England is to **'halt biodiversity loss, support health well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people'**⁸⁰. Building on the high-level goals of the White Paper, the England Strategy primarily reflects recommendations of the Lawton Review, setting out targets for creating new areas of priority habitats and improving, increasing and joining up existing priority habitat areas⁸¹. For priority species whose protection will not be achieved through habitat-directed conservation efforts, the England Strategy proposes targeted action on a species-specific basis, focusing efforts on those at greatest risk of extinction⁸².

Further to these broad targets, the England Strategy commits the UK Government to the development and publication of a set of indicators that will assess and measure the delivery of the strategy⁸³. These indicators will build upon and improve the England Biodiversity Indicators⁸⁴ first published in 2003 and revised in 2010.

4.3. Environmental Regulatory Review

On 19 March 2012, the UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs launched the *Red Tape Challenge for the Environment Theme*⁸⁵, a document setting out how environment regulation in England will be made simpler and more effective⁸⁶. Defra states that proposals within the document will help to protect the environment by making it cheaper and easier for organisations to abide by environmental regulations.

Proposals for nature conservation focus on reviewing the EU Birds and Habitats Directives with regards to their impact on proposed development and their

⁷⁸ Defra, *Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services*, 19 August 2011 [accessed 2 March 2012].

⁷⁹ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, *Country Biodiversity Groups*, [accessed 2 March 2012].

⁸⁰ Defra, *Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services*, 19 August 2011, p4 [accessed 2 March 2012].

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p19.

⁸² *Ibid*, p21.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p36.

⁸⁴ Defra, *England Biodiversity Strategy Indicators*, [accessed 2 March 2012].

⁸⁵ Defra, *Red Tape Challenge - Environment Theme proposals*, 19 March 2012 [accessed 22 March 2012].

⁸⁶ Defra, *Environment protected and business boosted by cutting unnecessary red tape* [accessed 22 March 2012].

burdens on businesses. The Budget 2012⁸⁷ announcement made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 21 March 2012, states that such a review will aim to:

...reduce the cost, complexity and delay to businesses that the Habitats Directive can impose by preparing streamlined guidance, setting clearer standards for evidence and improving the customer focus of the statutory bodies⁸⁸.

The Budget 2012 document also announced that the introduction of a Major Infrastructure and Environment Unit that is intended to improve the delivery of 'nationally significant infrastructure projects' by identifying any over-riding public needs and enabling early engagement with potential Habitats Directive issues.

The *Red Tape Challenge for the Environment Theme* sets out targets for an improvement in the performance of both Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA), as statutory environmental bodies for England, focusing proposals on reducing and simplifying paperwork and concentrating resources on the higher risk sites and businesses⁸⁹.

4.4. *Comparison to Policies in Wales*

Natural environment policy in England follows a similar framework to that in Wales; an over-arching natural environment strategy supplemented by a framework setting the context for specific biodiversity-related action.

The proposals contained in the White Paper reflect many of the proposals outlined in the Green Paper and echo the **shift in thinking** from addressing single issues to a more joined-up ecosystem approach to natural resource management. The White Paper sets this new approach within the context of existing legislation, regulations and delivery mechanisms, proposing new designations and schemes to improve the resilience of the natural environment and facilitate the integration of environmental protection into economic growth and development. In contrast, the Green Paper sets the new approach in the context of a refinement and integration of existing regulation and delivery mechanisms. The Green Paper proposes comprehensive changes to the way in which management of the natural environment is delivered, aiming to reduce the breadth of current policy and move to a single unified approach to natural resource decision-making.

The White Paper proposes an improvement and enhancement of nature conservation designations, introducing new initiatives and funds to support additional non-statutory nature conservation designations that are primarily focused on responding to the Lawton Review's recommendations for more, bigger, better and joined wildlife sites. In contrast, the Green Paper proposes a

⁸⁷ HM Treasury, [Budget 2012](#), 21 March 2012 [accessed 22 March 2012].

⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁸⁹ Defra, [Red Tape Challenge - Environment Theme proposals](#), 19 March 2012 [accessed 22 March 2012].

change in the current practice and delivery of designations, recommending a review of the role of designations within the new approach to natural resource management and moving away from the singular objective of protecting wildlife sites to that of achieving multiple outcomes.

Proposals in the White Paper focus primarily on **conserving and improving the natural environment**, in contrast to the combined sustainable development objectives (economic, social and environmental) that are the guiding principles of Wales' Green Paper.

With regards to biodiversity strategies, both the England Strategy and the Wales Framework build on the broad targets outlined in the White Paper and the Wales Strategy respectively. The England Strategy provides more detail on specific objectives and creates a new policy layer between the England Strategy and Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

5. Natural Environment Policy in Scotland

5.1. *Getting the best from our land: A land use strategy for Scotland*

Getting the best from our land: A land use strategy for Scotland (hereafter, the Scotland Land Use Strategy) is the first land use strategy for Scotland and was laid before the Scottish Parliament on 17 March 2011. The Scottish Government state that the document will build on current activities regarding land and natural resource management, provide a set of priorities for **sustainable land use** and guide thinking towards the three key pillars of sustainability: the economy; the environment; and communities⁹⁰.

The Scotland Land Use Strategy sits alongside an information note on applying the ecosystem approach to land use⁹¹ and an action plan⁹² with more specific details on delivery.

The vision set out in the Scotland Land Use Strategy is for a:

Scotland where we fully recognise, understand and value the importance of our land resources, and where our plans and decision about land use deliver improved and enduring benefits, enhancing the wellbeing of our nation⁹³.

Of the three themes of the document, targets for the environment and nature conservation are provided within the 'land use and the environment' section. The Scotland Land Use Strategy provides a single objective here; responsible stewardship of Scotland's natural resources, delivering more benefits to Scotland's people⁹⁴. The Scotland Land Use Strategy states that an important new approach to delivering this objective is **integrating nature conservation with social and economic objectives**.

According to the Scotland Land Use Strategy proposals for the natural environment include providing information on embedding an ecosystem approach in land use decision-making by public bodies and investigating how land management changes and ecosystem processes are related⁹⁵.

The Action Plan and Ecosystem Note provide supplementary information in support of the main Land Use Strategy. The Ecosystem Note 'encourages greater application of an ecosystems approach in decision-making affecting land use'⁹⁶

⁹⁰ The Scottish Government, [Getting the best from our land: A Guide to Scotland's first land use strategy](#), 17 March 2011 [accessed 17 February 2012].

⁹¹ The Scottish Government, [Applying the Ecosystems Approach to Land Use Information Note](#), 16 March 2011 [accessed 17 February 2012].

⁹² The Scottish Government, [Getting the best from our land: A land use strategy for Scotland Action Plan](#), 19 December 2011 [accessed 17 February 2012].

⁹³ The Scottish Government, [Getting the Best from our Land: A Land Use Strategy for Scotland](#), 17 March 2011, p3 [hard copy].

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p16-21.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

⁹⁶ The Scottish Government, [Applying the Ecosystems Approach to Land Use Information Note](#), 16 March 2011 [hard copy].

and provides information on why and how the ecosystems approach may be beneficial to decision-making. It also provides examples of where the ecosystems approach is currently being used, including a number of case studies that were used to inform the *Living Wales* consultation document⁹⁷.

The Action Plan provides detailed information on how the Scottish Government will meet the proposals within all three themes set out in the Scotland Land Use Strategy⁹⁸. It states that the Scottish Government and its lead partners⁹⁹ will undertake a comprehensive **mapping of ecosystem services** in Scotland as well as providing, by 2013, frameworks for embedding land use management with ecosystem services and identifying the key aspects of future change in relation to land use and climate change¹⁰⁰.

5.2. Biodiversity Policy

*Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands*¹⁰¹ (hereafter, the Biodiversity Strategy) is the current biodiversity strategy for Scotland and was launched in May 2004. Scottish Natural Heritage state that the Biodiversity Strategy represents Scotland's obligations to the Convention on Biological Diversity and to the UK BAP, along with 'the Scottish Ministers' desire to put biodiversity at the heart of [Scotland's] national identity and culture'¹⁰².

The Biodiversity Strategy is a 25-year plan and its main aim is to '**conserve biodiversity for the health, enjoyment and wellbeing of the people of Scotland now and in the future**'¹⁰³. Split into five strategic objectives, the Biodiversity Strategy provides target actions related to biodiversity that cover a broad remit including nature conservation, community engagement and sustainable development, direct action for species, habitats and ecosystems focuses on halting biodiversity loss and restoring and enhancing biodiversity through improved planning and land management¹⁰⁴.

The JNCC explains that the Scottish Biodiversity Forum has responsibility for implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy, primarily through Scottish Implementation Plans, of which there are five separate plans¹⁰⁵. The Biodiversity Strategy sets the content of these implementation plans, stating they will be updated on a three-year cycle and will review on-going, and outline new, actions,

⁹⁷ Provided via: Welsh Government, *Case Studies*, [accessed 16 March 2012].

⁹⁸ The Scottish Government, *Getting the best from our land: A land use strategy for Scotland Action Plan*, 19 December 2011 [hard copy].

⁹⁹ Including the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

¹⁰⁰ The Scottish Government, *Getting the best from our land: A land use strategy for Scotland Action Plan*, 19 December 2011 [hard copy].

¹⁰¹ Scottish Government, *Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in your hands*, May 2004 [accessed 2 March 2012].

¹⁰² Scottish Natural Heritage, *Scottish Biodiversity Strategy* [accessed 2 March 2012].

¹⁰³ Scottish Government, *Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in your hands*, May 2004 [hard copy].

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p35.

¹⁰⁵ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, *Country Biodiversity Groups* [accessed 9 March 2012].

provide timescales and responsibility for actions, and detail how progress will be measured¹⁰⁶.

There is currently a pre-consultation document available for discussion (until March 2012) for a new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy document – *The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity*¹⁰⁷. The Scottish Biodiversity Forum details how development of this document follows a change in the 'international context' and that a full and formal public consultation is planned for summer 2012 followed by publication of the document in early 2013¹⁰⁸. The consultation document states that it will complement the existing Scotland Land Use Strategy and have the overall outcome for 2020 as:

The diversity of animals, plants and habitats is preserved, and Scotland manages the natural environment as a resource, which supports our prosperity, our welfare and our national identity¹⁰⁹.

5.3. *Comparison to Policies in Wales*

Scotland's approach to natural environment policy broadly follows a similar framework to that in Wales and England. Broad high-level targets are set out in the Scotland Land Use Strategy and supplemented with more detailed and defined actions in the Biodiversity Strategy.

In contrast, proposals set out in the Scotland Land Use Strategy focus on investigating how **existing delivery mechanisms can be better used to achieve current objectives**, whereas the Green Paper aims for a complete shift in thinking to that of ecosystems and proposes widespread and comprehensive changes to the way in which management and regulation of the natural environment is delivered.

The Scotland Land Use Strategy sets high-level ambitions for the environment that mirror those in the Green Paper, addressing the combined sustainable development themes of society, economy and the environment. Like the Green Paper, the Scotland Land Use Strategy also proposes that ecosystem processes and services be embedded, via an ecosystems approach, into natural resource management. However, the application of this approach is set within the context of existing policies. This is best reflected in a section of the opening statement by Richard Lockhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment:

It is important we do not rush headlong into irreversible decisions. Although we need to have Objectives for the long term, our first Land Use Strategy is about setting the agenda for the first five year period. Some of our Proposals tackle knowledge gaps, some propose

¹⁰⁶ Scottish Government, *Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in your hands*, May 2004, p 53 [hard copy].

¹⁰⁷ Scottish Government, *The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity*, 2012 [accessed 9 March 2012].

¹⁰⁸ Scottish Biodiversity Forum, *Scottish Biodiversity Strategy* [accessed 9 March 2012].

¹⁰⁹ Scottish Government, *The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity*, 2012 [accessed 9 March 2012].

further work. Our desire for reasonable caution has received criticism from some quarters. Yet we believe it is justifiable: to put it simply, we cannot afford to get it wrong¹¹⁰.

With regards to biodiversity-specific policies, the Biodiversity Strategy and the Wales Framework both strongly link to, and build upon, the higher-level targets set out in the Scotland Use Land Strategy and Wales Environment Strategy respectively. The Biodiversity Strategy sets a broad context for biodiversity action in Scotland, proposing targets and actions that directly and indirectly influence biodiversity conservation. The production of Implementation Plans to supplement the Biodiversity Strategy also introduces a new layer of policy that does not exist in Wales where LBAPs are the key mechanisms for interpretation and implementation of the Wales Framework.

¹¹⁰ The Scottish Government, [*Getting the Best from our Land: A Land Use Strategy for Scotland*](#), 17 March 2011, Ministerial foreword.

6. Natural Environment Policy in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive launched its new framework for sustainable development *Everyone's Involved: Sustainable Development Strategy* in May 2010 (hereafter, the Northern Ireland Strategy). It sets out a vision for 'a peaceful, fair, prosperous and sustainable society'¹¹¹.

This strategy sits alongside the *Focus on the Future: Sustainable Development Implementation Plan 2011-2014*¹¹², which outlines practical information on implementing the commitments laid out in the Northern Ireland Strategy.

6.1. *Everyone's Involved: Sustainable Development Strategy*

The Northern Ireland Strategy states its main aim is to '**identify and develop actions that will improve the quality of life for [people in Northern Ireland] and for future generations**'¹¹³. The document states that its Strategy provides a vision for how Northern Ireland will develop in a sustainable way, based on a number of guiding principles. Two guiding principles provide the foundation of the document. Of these, the Northern Ireland Strategy explains that the principle of 'living within environmental limits' is based on respecting the limits of Northern Ireland's natural resources and protecting and improving all aspects of the natural environment¹¹⁴.

With regards to objectives for the natural environment, the Northern Ireland Strategy provides a single priority area for action: '**Striking an appropriate balance between the responsible use and protection of natural resources in support of a better quality of life and a better quality environment**'. The Strategy declares a number of strategic objectives within this priority area that focus on promoting sustainable land and marine management, halting biodiversity loss, reducing waste and delivering wider environmental statutory obligations¹¹⁵.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (DOENI) published a discussion document for a first Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland in March 2011¹¹⁶. The document states it will set out priorities for the DOENI for the next 10-15 years. Progress on the publication of an official consultation document or draft environment strategy is unclear although DOENI state that the informal

¹¹¹ Northern Ireland Executive, *Everyone's Involved: Sustainable Development Strategy*, 27 May 2010 [accessed 17 February 2012].

¹¹² Northern Ireland Executive, *Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plan*, 28 February 2011 [accessed 17 February 2012].

¹¹³ Northern Ireland Executive, *Everyone's Involved: Sustainable Development Strategy*, 27 May 2010, p1 [hard copy].

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p16.

¹¹⁶ Department of the Environment, *An Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland Discussion Document*, 24 March 2011 [accessed 13 March 2012].

discussion was due to end by 5 May 2011¹¹⁷. Official consultations were launched for a White Paper on Enabling Legislation for National Parks and an Environment Better Regulations White Paper in March 2011 that ran to the end of September 2011. DOENI states that these two documents will form the cornerstone of the new Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The Discussion Document outlines how the final strategy document will target specific areas of environmental concern and in relation to biodiversity will:

...incorporate a review and revision of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy (NIBS) with specific reference to ecosystem management, an approach that provides for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes their conservation and sustainable use.¹¹⁸

6.2. Biodiversity Policy

The *Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy*¹¹⁹ was published in August 2002 in response to the publication of '*Biodiversity in Northern Ireland: Recommendations to Government for a Biodiversity Strategy*¹²⁰' by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group (NIBG)¹²¹. This recommendation document identified major issues affecting Northern Ireland's biodiversity and provided a total of 76 recommendations, within 12 themes¹²², for the Government, Local Authorities and other relevant sectors¹²³.

The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy describes the commitment from the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver the actions and recommendations set out in the NIBG report for a 14-year period to 2016¹²⁴. The Strategy provides a number of broad high-level goals, focused primarily on **protecting the natural environment and halting biodiversity loss**¹²⁵, as well as providing a list of habitats and species that are of conservation priority¹²⁶.

The NIBG's second report on the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy, *Delivery of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy 2005-2009*¹²⁷, provides a number of recommendations for improving the on-going delivery and implementation of the

¹¹⁷ Department of the Environment, [Poets launches National Parks and Better Regulation consultations](#) [accessed 28 March 2012].

¹¹⁸ Department of the Environment, [An Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland Discussion Document](#), 24 March 2011, p3 [accessed 13 March 2012].

¹¹⁹ Department of the Environment, [Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy](#), August 2002 [accessed 12 March 2012].

¹²⁰ Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group, [Biodiversity in Northern Ireland: Recommendations to Government for a Biodiversity Strategy](#), October 2000 [accessed 20 March 2012].

¹²¹ *ibid*

¹²² The 12 themes are: biodiversity issues; freshwater; tourism and recreation; invasive alien species; coastal development; construction and development; protecting areas for biodiversity; protecting species and habitats; conserving genetic biodiversity; research and monitoring, knowledge; participation and understanding; and local action.

¹²³ Department of the Environment, [Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy](#) [website] [accessed 12 March 2012].

¹²⁴ Department of the Environment, [Strategic Plan Framework: Environment and Conservation Biodiversity](#) [accessed 12 March 2012].

¹²⁵ Department of the Environment, [Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy](#), August 2002 [hard copy].

¹²⁶ Department of the Environment, [Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy](#) [website] [accessed 12 March 2012].

¹²⁷ Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group, [Delivery of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy](#), 2010 [accessed 12 March 2012].

Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy. The report states that recommendations are aimed at improving progress towards the overall goal of halting biodiversity loss by 2016¹²⁸. Supplementing the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy is the *Northern Ireland Biodiversity Implementation Plan*¹²⁹. The DOENI states that the obligation to produce such a plan is included within the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy and that since publication of the first implementation plan in 2002 there have been a continuous series of plans¹³⁰. The current Northern Ireland Biodiversity Implementation Plan provides actions for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency¹³¹ (NIEA) for the period April 2009 to March 2012, that reflect each of the 12 themes of the original NIBG recommendations.

6.3. Comparison to Policies in Wales

At the current time, there is no official natural environment strategy for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy represents the main policy document for natural environment work in Northern Ireland. Although Northern Ireland has a sustainable development strategy that sets a broad context for natural resource management this is more comparable to the Wales Sustainable Development Strategy, *One Wales One Planet*¹³², than the Green Paper.

The content of the Northern Ireland Environment Strategy Discussion Document broadly reflects the three pillars that are the foundation of the Green Paper: economy; society; and the environment. In terms of management of the natural environment, the Discussion Document sets the ecosystems approach singularly within the context of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy, in contrast to the Green Paper where the ecosystems approach is stated as the foundation for all of Wales' commitments towards the natural environment.

The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plan provides a similar biodiversity policy framework to that in Scotland. The context for biodiversity-specific action in Northern Ireland is broad, reflecting the broad range of responsibilities of the NIEA. The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy and Northern Ireland Biodiversity Implementation Plan propose a wide-ranging set of actions that focus on all areas where the NIEA can, and do, influence biodiversity¹³³. The Northern Ireland Implementation Plan introduces a new layer of environmental policy to Northern Ireland (as the Biodiversity Strategy did in

¹²⁸ *ibid*

¹²⁹ Northern Ireland Environment Agency, *Northern Ireland Biodiversity Implementation Plan*, 2009 [accessed 12 March 2012].

¹³⁰ Department of the Environment, *Biodiversity Implementation Plan* [accessed 12 March 2012].

¹³¹ The NIEA are part of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and are responsible for implementing environmental policy in Northern Ireland.

¹³² Welsh Government, *One Wales: One Planet The Sustainable Development Scheme for the Welsh Assembly Government*, May 2009 [accessed 13 March 2012].

¹³³ NIEA units mentioned in the Implementation Plan include: Biodiversity; Conservation Science; Corporate Communications; Countryside and Coast; Conservations, Designations and Protection; Regional Operations; Strategy Unit; and Water Management.

Scotland) that does not exist in Wales where the Wales Framework is delivered primarily through LBAPs.