



Nature positive?

Public attitudes towards the
natural environment

Patrick Hall

 bright blue

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First published in Great Britain in 2021

by Bright Blue Campaign
ISBN: 978-1-911128-25-0

www.brightblue.org.uk

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Contents

	About the author	2
	Acknowledgements	3
	Executive summary	4
1	Introduction	17
2	Methodology	25
3	Public concern for the natural environment	27
4	Assessing, valuing and benefitting from the natural environment	37
5	Responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment	48
6	The role of individuals in protecting and enhancing the natural environment	56
7	Government role in protecting and enhancing the natural environment	64
8	Nature and neighbourhoods	78
9	Conclusion	89
	Annex: Polling questions	95

About the author

Patrick Hall

Patrick Hall is a Senior Research Fellow at Bright Blue, helping to inform the energy and environment policy debate in the UK, as well as contributing to Bright Blue's programme of research and events. At Bright Blue, he has previously authored reports on electric vehicle uptake, sectoral decarbonisation and biodiversity decline. Patrick has written for *The Independent*, *Yorkshire Post*, *The Scotsman*, *CapX*, *ConservativeHome*, *BusinessGreen*, *Public Finance*, *Prospect Magazine*, *The Ecologist*, and *iNews*.

Patrick holds a Master of EU Studies degree, as well as a BA in Political Science, Economics and Geography from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

Acknowledgements

This report has been made possible in particular by the generous support of WSP. It is part of Bright Blue's wider work on biodiversity, which is kindly supported by the John Ellerman Foundation. The ideas expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the sponsors.

I would like to thank Dan Williams for his thoughts and advice throughout the project.

I would like to thank all members of Bright Blue's Conservation Project Advisory Board, whose ideas and feedback have helped shape the polling questionnaire and report: The Rt Hon Lord Deben; Julian Glover; Lord Inglewood; Jeremy Lefroy; The Rt Hon Lord Sir John Randall; Timothy Palmer; Stanley Johnson; Sam Hall; Professor Alastair Driver; Dominic Jeremy CVO OBE; Benet Northcote; Helen Jackson; and, Sir Andrew Cahn.

Special thanks to Ryan Shorthouse and Anvar Sarygulov for their thoughtful editing and suggestions.

Savanta ComRes conducted the polling for this report, and I would like to thank Scott Monaghan-Gibson and the rest of the team for their hard work. The polling included an online survey of 2,000 UK adults and was conducted between the 25th and 30th of March 2021.

Executive summary

The decline of the natural environment – that is, all living and non-living things occurring naturally on earth – both in this country and overseas is an urgent crisis, similar and interlinked to climate change, requiring urgent attention and action.

None of the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets – a series of targets established by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2011 to be achieved by governments globally in 2020 in order to stem the tide on biodiversity decline – have been wholly met worldwide. On current trajectories, global biodiversity will continue to decline.

In the UK, only six of the Aichi Targets have been met and the remainder have had insufficient progress made towards them. The UK's *State of Nature 2019* report illustrates what this looks like in reality, highlighting that 41% of UK species are in decline, with 15% being under threat.

As Chapter One explains, recently the UK Government has introduced a suite of policies to safeguard our natural environment, but the slow progress towards the Aichi Targets shows more ambitious policies are needed. Furthermore, responsibility does not solely lie with the UK Government to protect and enhance the natural environment. Other actors – including businesses, charities and individuals – have a role to play as well. For the UK public themselves, behavioural changes will be required to reduce their impact on the natural environment.

While there has been a significant amount of polling undertaken examining public attitudes towards accessing, protecting and enhancing

the natural environment, much of it is several years old and does not reflect contemporary factors such as failure to achieve the Aichi Targets and the impact of COVID-19 on public attitudes towards the natural environment. There is also a distinct lack of contemporary polling examining: the perceived value of the natural environment; the perceived responsibility for its protection and enhancement; a comprehensive overview of attitudes towards policies to protect and enhance it; and, attitudes towards its integration into urban areas. This report aims to fill in these gaps around evidence on public attitudes towards the natural environment.

For this report, we conduct and analyse polling of the UK public to explore attitudes towards the value of the natural environment, accessing and engaging with it, and the responsibility and actions of different actors – including government, businesses, charities and individuals – for its protection and enhancement. Public attitudes are analysed according to a range of socio-demographic characteristics, enabling us to examine variation in perspectives by social and economic divides.

Focus of this research and methodology

This report addresses the following research questions:

- 1.** To what extent is the UK public concerned about the natural environment relative to other policy areas?
- 2.** How does the UK public engage with, and value, the natural environment?
- 3.** What are the attitudes of the UK population towards the role and responsibilities of different actors in protecting and enhancing the natural environment?

To answer these research questions, we designed and undertook polling with Savanta ComRes of a representative sample of UK adults, as detailed in Chapter Two. The large sample size we used allowed us to consider specific socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, social grade, region, area lived, and income level.

This polling enabled us to identify what the UK public thinks about the following issues: the public's prioritisation of, and concerns held about, the natural environment (Chapter Three); accessing different types of the natural environment and the value of and benefit from the natural environment (Chapter Four); views on where responsibility lies for protecting and enhancing the natural environment (Chapter Five); views on the actions individuals themselves should take to protect and enhance the natural environment, and the sensitivity of adults to product price changes in order to safeguard it (Chapter Six); attitudes towards different existing and potential government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment (Chapter Seven); and, incorporating features of the natural environment into neighbourhoods and urban areas, and how receptive the public is to land development under a 'biodiversity net gain principle' (Chapter Eight).

Public concern for the natural environment

In regards to domestic policy priorities, the UK public is most concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic (53%), the NHS/healthcare (41%), and the economy (31%). Climate change (20%) and the natural environment (14%) are of less concern, ranking fourth and eighth respectively in a standard list of policy priorities.

However, when considering foreign policy priorities which should be most important to the UK Government, one in three adults believed combating climate change should be a priority. Ahead of combating climate change were two policy issues: safeguarding national security (35%) and human health (45%). Only 17% of adults felt that nature conservation should be most important to the UK Government as a foreign policy priority.

We examined what the UK public perceives the greatest threats to the natural environment to be both in the UK and globally. For the UK, plastic pollution (41%), climate change (37%) and fly-tipping and littering (25%) are perceived to be the top three most significant threats to the natural environment. Globally, the public believes climate change is the most significant (43%), followed by plastic pollution and

deforestation (both 36%).

Socio-demographic differences occurred by age when it came to foreign policy priorities. Older adults over the age of 55 are much more likely than younger adults between the ages of 18 and 34 to prioritise combating climate change (42% and 26% respectively) and nature conservation (21% and 14% respectively).

Again, there were variations by age regarding what were perceived to be the greatest threats to the natural environment in the UK and globally. Older adults over 55 are more likely than younger adults aged 18 to 34 to consider fly-tipping and littering (32% compared to 18%) and flooding/rising sea levels (29% compared to 15%) to be significant threats to the UK's natural environment. In contrast, younger adults (29%) are more likely to view air pollution as a significant threat to the UK's natural environment than older adults (26%). When considering the natural environment globally, older adults are more likely than younger adults to believe deforestation is a significant threat (48% and 29% respectively) and vice versa for air pollution (31% for younger adults and 14% for older adults).

Accessing, valuing and benefiting from the natural environment

When looking at which different types of the natural environment are visited on at least a monthly basis, we see majorities of the UK public visit urban green space and parks (70%) as well as woods and forests (55%), whilst significant minorities frequent farmland or grassland (49%), rivers or lakes (48%) and coastal/sea areas (40%).

Despite being the type of natural environment in which most adults spent time, a small percentage of the UK public (11%) felt that urban green space and parks were the most valuable environment in the UK. Woods and forests (33%) were perceived to be the most valuable type of natural environment in the UK, followed by coastal/sea areas (18%) and rivers or lakes (14%).

When asked for their views on the quality of different types of the natural environment in the UK, the majority of the UK public think that

all different types of the natural environment are of good or excellent quality, except wetlands. Woods and forests were most perceived to be of good or excellent quality by the UK public (61%).

The UK public felt the most valued benefits about spending time in the natural environment were enjoying beauty (69%), improved mental wellbeing (60%) and observing wildlife (58%).

There was also broad recognition amongst the UK public of the importance of the natural environment for tackling wider societal challenges, particularly improving air quality (71%), reducing flooding (70%) and improving health and wellbeing (68%).

Given the benefits and importance of the natural environment, we then asked whether the UK public would be willing to pay to access the natural environment, provided that the amount paid would go towards its protection and enhancement. The majority (51%) of adults were not willing to pay for access, not even less than £5, for all different types of the natural environment that we tested.

There were variations by age, social grade and gender to these questions. Younger adults aged 18 to 34 more frequently spent time in each different type of the natural environment we tested than older adults over 55, as did those from more affluent backgrounds compared to those less affluent. However, those over 55 are more likely to value most benefits about spending time in the natural environment – especially improved mental wellbeing or enjoying beauty – than those aged 18 to 34, as were females compared to males. When it came to paying to access different types of the natural environment, overall, a majority (58%) of those aged 18 to 34 were willing, compared to minorities for those aged 35 to 54 (41%) and over 55 (30%).

Responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment

We asked the UK public to rank from one to ten how much responsibility different actors *should* have, and how much responsibility they are perceived to *actually* have, for protecting and enhancing the

natural environment, with eight to ten indicating very high levels of responsibility. Majorities of the UK public felt that government agencies (59%), national government (58%), local government (52%) and private landowners or farmers (50%) *should* have very high levels of responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment. When it came to which actors are perceived to *actually* have very high levels of responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment, government agencies (44%) and national government (40%) scored the highest, but no actor is attributed as *actually* having very high levels of responsibility by a majority of the UK public.

We also asked whether or not the UK public agreed or disagreed that the different main actors we identified were doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK. A majority (62%) agree that charities and voluntary groups alone are doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK. For all other actors, less than 33% of the UK public agreed that they are doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK, and businesses ranked the lowest at 18%.

There was, again, variation by age in response to these questions. A clear trend emerged showing that adults over the age of 35 are more likely to believe all actors we tested should have very high responsibility than those aged 18 to 34. When it came to assessing the performance of different actors, those aged 18 to 34 are more likely to feel that the public themselves and businesses were doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK (36% and 30% respectively) than older adults over the age of 55 (16% and 8% respectively). In contrast, younger adults were more critical of charities and voluntary groups, with 20% disagreeing that they were doing enough, whilst only 8% of older adults said the same.

The role of individuals in protecting and enhancing the natural environment

The majority of the UK public felt recycling (63%) and reducing food waste (53%) were the most important behavioural changes for the

public themselves to undertake to protect and enhance the natural environment. Reducing consumption of dairy products (12%) was seen as the least important behavioural change that the public themselves should make.

When we asked about whether the UK public had adopted these behavioural changes, recycling (80%), reducing food waste (71%) and buying less and reusing more (61%) were the top three actions.

The UK public is relatively receptive to making dietary changes in order to reduce their impact on the natural environment. Almost a third have reduced their consumption of meat, and a further 27% are considering it. When it comes to dairy products, a majority (53%) has either reduced their consumption or is considering doing so.

The UK public are least likely to have volunteered for environmental causes (15%), but if they have already done so or are considering it, they are most likely to be involved in tree planting (49%).

Significant minorities are prepared to pay a premium for all the different types of products we tested which may harm the natural environment, especially cleaning products (49%), clothing (47%), electronics (46%) and food (46%).

Differences in behaviour by age was seen. Older adults over 55 are more likely than younger adults between the ages of 18 and 34 to have made the most common behaviour changes such as recycling (93% compared to 65%) and reducing food waste (88% to 52%). But in all behavioural changes we tested, younger adults were more likely to consider making a behavioural change than older adults. Younger adults were also more likely than older adults to have reduced or considered reducing their meat consumption – 68% of younger adults had already reduced, or were considering doing so, compared to 49% of older adults – and consumption of dairy products – 68% of younger adults had reduced, or were considering doing so, compared to only 39% of older adults. When it comes to paying more for products which have a negative impact on the environment, there is a clear pattern showing that the older people become, the less likely they are to be willing to pay more.

Government role in protecting and enhancing the natural environment

Our research suggests that the UK public marginally prefers interventionist policy approaches when it comes to getting individuals to better protect and enhance the natural environment, preferring laws and regulations that discourage or ban products or behaviours which harm the natural environment (59%) rather than financial incentives to encourage behavioural choices and products which have a lesser impact on the natural environment (41%). However, the UK public is divided exactly on whether to raise taxes on businesses harming the natural environment or to subsidise those which have sustainable business practices.

The UK public are prepared to prioritise the natural environment at the expense of other priorities when it comes to the granting of aid or signing of trade deals. The majority of the UK public (59%) agreed that the UK should not be giving overseas aid to projects which harm nature, even if they create economic opportunities for people, and 55% agreed that the UK should seek to include conservation clauses in future trade agreements, even if it makes them harder to agree.

The UK public expresses strong support towards leading domestic and international UK Government policies that seek to protect and enhance the natural environment. Domestically, the UK Government's policy to protect 30% of the UK's land from environmental harm by 2030 was the most widely supported domestic policy we tested (75%), followed by a requirement for developers to enhance the natural environment when building new houses (74%) and establishing a network of places that are important for wildlife (73%). Setting aside funding to enhance the environment to combat climate change received the lowest amount of public support relative to the other policies tested (66%), but still received an overwhelming majority.

Internationally, stopping the exporting of waste to developing countries was the policy with the highest level of public support (67%).

This was followed by two potential international policies: pushing for future fishing subsidies to be used only for sustainability and livelihood support (67%) and providing counter-poaching training and support to combat the illegal wildlife trade (64%).

When we polled the UK public on their support for future possible policies pertaining to the natural environment, we found that a significant majority of the UK public (76%) believe that fines for littering should be higher, and that non-flushable wet wipes should be banned (71%) as well as non-recyclable black plastic (67%). This reinforces earlier findings suggesting the UK public marginally favours the use of 'sticks' to 'carrots' in government policies to better protect and enhance the natural environment.

Once again, variation by age occurred. Regarding the broad government approach for businesses to better protect and enhance the natural environment, a majority (62%) of those aged 18 to 34 favoured subsidies for environmentally responsible businesses, whereas a majority (63%) of those over 55 favoured increased taxes for environmentally damaging businesses.

When we tested specific government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment, we found that older people were more likely to support all of the domestic policies we tested than younger people. Similarly, we found that the more rural a person lived, the more likely they are to support all of the domestic policies we tested. However, when it came to international policies, increasing foreign aid towards global conservation was more strongly supported by those aged 18 to 34 (54%) than over 55 (38%).

For the potential future policies we tested, we found strong support amongst over 55s compared to those aged 18 to 34 for introducing minimum product standards (81% compared to 53%); introducing mandatory product labelling (76% compared to 58%); higher fines for littering (85% compared to 63%); a ban on non-flushable wet wipes (83% compared to 57%); and, a ban on non-recyclable black plastic (77% compared to 57%).

Nature and neighbourhoods

The UK public's conservationism is largely local. When we asked the UK public where they would spend £1,000 if it was given to them to enhance the natural environment, we found that they were most likely to spend it in their own property or garden (30%), followed by their neighbourhood (23%) and village, town or city (23%). They were least likely to spend the money enhancing the natural environment overseas (3%). If the UK public was to spend money enhancing the natural environment in their own property, they would be most likely to plant flowers and shrubs (63%).

When we asked what the UK public felt were the most important features which make up an ideal neighbourhood, 74% felt low crime levels are of very high importance, followed by access to green space and no litter (both 66%). For different natural features specifically, the UK public felt that having immediate access to a private outdoor garden was the most valuable natural feature when considering where they would like to live (54%), followed by close proximity to public parks (36%) and immediate access to a communal park or garden (33%). The UK public somewhat recognised the benefits of having natural features in urban areas, but only an improvement in air quality was recognised by a very slim majority (50%) of the UK public.

When it comes to infrastructure developments, the overwhelming majority (72%) of the UK public would be more likely to support them if the organisations constructing them are obliged to materially improve the natural environment. This bodes well for the UK Government, who recently amended their flagship Environment Bill to require a 'biodiversity net gain' for nationally significant infrastructure projects. However, when asked whether the UK public would support new developments on the Green Belt if they materially improved the natural environment, only a slim majority (53%) said they would. Overall, these findings show solid support for the UK Government's 'biodiversity net gain' principle.

There were, unsurprisingly, some differences by age when the

UK public were asked about features which make up an ideal neighbourhood. Over 55s are more likely (74%) to consider access to green space as having very high importance compared to those aged 18 to 34 (55%), as well as having no litter (75% and 56% respectively). When thinking specifically about incorporating natural features into urban areas, over 55s are much more likely (68%) than those aged 18 to 34 (35%) to consider having immediate access to a private outdoor garden as being of very high value. When asking the UK public as to whether they would support new developments on the Green Belt if they materially improved the natural environment, we saw that 67% of young people would support this, whilst 52% of over 55s would oppose.

Main trends

There were very occasional differences in attitudes towards the natural environment across socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender and where adults lived. However, there were frequent variations in attitudes by age.

Though specific differences vary from question to question, we broadly find that older adults are more likely to be concerned about the natural environment and expect a higher level of responsibility from all different actors for its protection and enhancement than younger adults. Additionally, we observe that older adults are more likely to favour 'sticks' over 'carrots' regarding government policies to better protect and enhance the natural environment, whereas the opposite is true for younger adults.

The final chapter (Chapter Nine) summarised the 12 main findings from the report:

- The environment is not as much of a domestic or foreign policy priority for the UK public relative to other policy areas.
- A majority of the UK public frequents some elements of the natural environment on at least a monthly basis.
- A majority of the UK public think that all different types of the

natural environment we asked about are of good or excellent quality, except wetlands.

- A majority of the UK public values different benefits associated with the natural environment, but isn't prepared to pay to access it.
- The UK public believes that government agencies and national government should have the highest levels of responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
- With the exception of charities and voluntary groups, a majority of the UK public believes all other actors are not doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK.
- The UK public believes that individuals will have to adopt a number of behavioural changes to reduce their environmental impact, and some of those behaviours have already been adopted by a substantial number of adults.
- The UK public marginally favours an interventionist as opposed to an incentive-based policy approach from government to protect and enhance the natural environment.
- A firm majority of the UK public is prepared to support certain trade offs in our foreign policy to prioritise the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.
- There is widespread support amongst the UK public for the UK Government's domestic and international policy agenda regarding the natural environment.
- The UK public's conservationism is largely local.
- The UK public is more likely to support both infrastructure and housing development in their local area under a biodiversity net gain principle.

Whilst the natural environment may not be relatively high on the UK public's list of policy priorities, this report has nonetheless demonstrated that the majority of the UK public engages with the natural environment, frequenting it regularly and widely recognising its associated benefits.

The UK public sees government agencies and national government as those who should be most responsible for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. In the face of biodiversity decline, occurring both in the UK and globally, national government has a mandate to go further and faster to protect and enhance the natural environment.

The Government can take solace in the fact that its policy agenda towards the natural environment is well received by the UK public. When devising further policies which to protect and enhance the natural environment, policymakers should consider that the UK public marginally favours ‘sticks’ over ‘carrots’.

But responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment does not solely lie with government – all of us have a role to play. This report shows that the UK public recognises individuals themselves will have to adopt a number of behavioural changes to reduce their impact on the natural environment, and many already have.

The UK public’s conservationism is predominantly local: adults want to see material improvements to the natural environment closer to home. With the insights from this report, the UK Government ought to be able to build upon its popular agenda for the necessary protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent decades, climate change has captured public attention as the major global crisis of our time. The decarbonisation agenda and shift to a greener economy has largely been embraced by both the UK public and Government, especially the legal commitment to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. But, as Bright Blue argued in our recent report *Global green giant?*,¹ the decline of the natural environment – that is, all living and non-living things occurring naturally on Earth – is a major related and interlinked crisis, which also requires urgent attention and action.

The 2010s were meant to be the United Nations' (UN's) 'Decade on biodiversity'. Global biodiversity – the variety of all plant and animal life on earth – underpins the health of the natural world, yet the UN's *Global biodiversity outlook* report paints a very grim picture. None of the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets – a series of targets established by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2011 to be achieved by governments globally in 2020 in order to stem the tide on biodiversity decline, as listed in Box 1.1 below – have been wholly met, and on current trajectories, global biodiversity will continue to decline.² Further highlighting humanity's unsustainable relationship with the

1. Patrick Hall and William Nicolle, "Global green giant? A policy story", Bright Blue, <http://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Global-green-giant-a-policy-story.pdf> (2020).

2. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, "Global biodiversity outlook 5", <https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo5/publication/gbo-5-spm-en.pdf> (2020).

natural environment, the government-commissioned *Dasgupta Review* – which assessed the economics of biodiversity loss – concludes that our demands on the natural environment mean 1.6 Earths would be required to maintain the world’s current living standards.³

Box 1.1. The 2011 UN Aichi Biodiversity Targets

1. Make the public aware of the values of biodiversity and ways to conserve it
2. Integrate biodiversity values into National Plans
3. Eliminate harmful subsidies
4. Implement plans for sustainable production and consumption
5. Halve rate of habitat loss and degradation
6. Manage fish stocks sustainably
7. Manage agriculture, aquaculture and forestry sustainably
8. Tackle air pollution
9. Invasive alien species identified and controlled/eliminated
10. Minimise anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs
11. Effectively manage protected areas, 17% land and 10% sea
12. Prevent species extinctions and populations
13. Maintain genetic diversity
14. Restore and safeguard ecosystem services
15. 15% restoration and resilience of biodiversity’s contribution to carbon stocks
16. Nagoya protocol in force and operational
17. Develop and commence implementing a national biodiversity strategy
18. Integrate views of indigenous people and local communities into relevant national legislation

3. Sir Partha Dasgupta, “The economics of biodiversity loss: The Dasgupta review”, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962785/The_Economics_of_Biodiversity_The_Dasgupta_Review_Full_Report.pdf (2021), 123.

19. Improve knowledge and technology relating to biodiversity
20. Mobilise financial resources

Source: Convention on Biological Diversity, "Aichi biodiversity targets", 2020.

That being said, the UN report notes that it is not too late for efforts to slow, halt and reverse biodiversity decline, including the scaling up of nature-based solutions to climate change, curbing pollution and unsustainable exploitation of ecosystems, reducing agriculture's environmental impact, changing individuals' behaviour, and deploying green infrastructure.⁴

In the UK, only five of the Aichi Targets have been met and the remainder have had insufficient progress made towards them.⁵ The UK's *State of Nature 2019* report illustrates what this looks like in reality, highlighting that 41% of UK species are in decline, with 15% being under threat from extinction.⁶ Public concern for wildlife decline is also high. Polling conducted at the beginning of 2021 has shown that 66% of the public is worried about the decline in wildlife.⁷ This concern is expressed by majorities across different socio-demographic groups and voting history.

A recent survey of the public's engagement with the natural environment in the same repeat study over a ten year period found that 97% of adults enjoy the natural environment, and nine out of ten feel revitalised, refreshed, calm and relaxed having spent time in it.⁸ The same study conducted in 2020 showed that in addition to the

4. Ibid.

5. JNCC, "Sixth national report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland", <http://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/527ff89f5f6b4e06bde6b823e0ddcb9a/UKCBD-6NR-v2-web.pdf> (2019).

6. National Biodiversity Network, "State of nature 2019", <https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-full-report.pdf> (2019).

7. Savanta:ComRes, "Daily Express, environment poll – 4 February 2021", https://2sjjwunnq141ia7ki31qqub1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Final_Daily-Express-20210204-01_Private.pdf (2021), 8-10.

8. Natural England, "People's engagement with nature: Reflecting on ten years of the Natural England MENE survey", <https://defra.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=d5fe6191e3fe400189a3756ab3a4057c> (2020).

eudemonic benefits of the natural environment, those who visited the natural environment more frequently were 1.9 times more likely to report better physical health.⁹

With the public acutely aware of the personal benefits of being in the natural environment, they understandably want to see an increase in it. One poll showed that 78% of adults wanted to see more nature in their cities, and in another, that 84% of respondents felt that the government should increase nature-rich spaces in the UK.¹⁰

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, public appreciation and concern for the state of the natural environment has been high. Polling which sought to unearth public opinion on the role and importance of the natural environment during COVID-19 in England found that more people noticed nature in their own neighbourhood since the pandemic began, as well as nature becoming more important to them since the pandemic took hold. In the same poll, over 85% of people thought living close to wildlife and nature was advantageous during the COVID-19 pandemic, and almost 80% agreed that COVID-19 had highlighted the need for more green space in their communities.¹¹

In another poll, over half of respondents said they would make a habit of spending time in the natural environment “when things go back to normal” and respondents’ interest in the natural environment had risen by a third since the pandemic began.¹²

9. Natural England, “Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: A summary report on nature connectedness amongst adults and children in England”, <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6005041314136064> (2020), 15.

10. The Wildlife Trusts, “New poll reveals city-dwellers love nature but don’t get enough of it”, <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-poll-reveals-city-dwellers-love-nature-dont-get-enough-of-it> (2017); Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, “Recovering together: A report on public opinion of the role and importance of nature during and in our recovery from the Coronavirus crisis in England”, https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf (2020), 3.

11. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, “Recovering together: A report of public opinion on the role and importance of nature during and in our recovery from the Coronavirus crisis in England”, https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf (2020), 3, 5.

12. National Trust, “UK values nature more as a result of lockdown, according to a summer solstice poll”, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/press-release/uk-values-nature-more-as-a-result-of-lockdown-according-to-summer-solstice-poll> (2020).

Stopping the decline of the natural environment

Recently, the UK Government has taken steps to safeguard our natural environment, including some flagship measures such as: pledging to protect 30% of the UK's land by 2030;¹³ introducing a 'biodiversity net gain principle' for all new residential developments and infrastructure projects;¹⁴ and, introducing a tax on plastic packaging made from high levels of non-recyclable plastic.¹⁵ Additionally, the UK Government has recently adopted three Bright Blue policy recommendations to improve the natural environment: making public subsidies for farmers more dependent on protecting and enhancing the natural environment;¹⁶ ensuring no UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) harms nature;¹⁷ and, banning bottom trawling in key Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).¹⁸

But the slow progress towards the UN Aichi Targets in the UK shows that alongside quicker action on biodiversity decline, more ambitious policies are needed. Fresh thinking is required on how to protect and enhance the natural environment across the UK and embed sustainability across different parts of the public and private sectors.

13. Roger Harrabin, "Boris Johnson promises to protect 30% of UK's land by 2030", BBC News <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54320030> (2020).

14. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, "Government to mandate 'biodiversity net gain'", <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/05/13/government-to-mandate-biodiversity-net-gain/> (2019).

15. HM Revenue & Customs, "Plastic packaging tax", <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introduction-of-plastic-packaging-tax/plastic-packaging-tax> (2020).

16. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Rt Hon George Eustice MP, "Landmark agriculture bill becomes law", <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-agriculture-bill-becomes-law> (2020).

17. HM Treasury, "The economics of biodiversity: Government response", https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/993290/MASTER_Dasgupta_Response__web.pdf (2021), 17.

18. Karen McVeigh, "Big day for UK seas' as bottom trawling ban in four protected areas proposed", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/02/big-day-for-uk-seas-as-bottom-trawling-ban-in-four-protected-areas-proposed> (2021).

Further government measures to safeguard the natural environment would be welcomed. But responsibility does not solely lie with the government to stop the decline of the natural environment. Further measures to protect and enhance the natural environment are also required from a range of actors – including businesses and charities – and the wider public as well.

Indeed, in its Sixth Carbon Budget, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), an independent statutory body which advises the UK Government on greenhouse gas emissions targets, made a series of recommendations regarding the behavioural changes of the public which will be required to decarbonise the UK economy and reduce consumers' environmental impact. Those which would also impact the natural environment included: reducing the consumption of meat and dairy products; purchasing long-lasting products; buying less and reusing more; recycling; and, increasing walking and cycling as a mode of transport.¹⁹

There has been a significant amount of polling undertaken in recent years examining public attitudes towards accessing, protecting and enhancing the natural environment. However, some polling – including extensive polling by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)²⁰ – is several years old. As well as no longer being contemporary, other factors which have since occurred – such as failure to achieve the UN Aichi biodiversity targets and the impact of COVID-19 on public attitudes towards the natural environment – are not reflected in this polling. There is also a distinct lack of contemporary polling examining: the natural environment in the context of its value; responsibility for its protection and enhancement; policies towards it; and attitudes towards its integration into urban areas. This report aims to fill in the gaps around evidence on public attitudes towards the natural environment.

19. Committee on Climate Change, "The sixth carbon budget: The UK's path to net zero", (2020).

20. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, "Survey of public attitudes and behaviours towards the environment", <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/ab16e19fa4e1-42e4-9f6e-5fffe2dc7680/survey-of-public-attitudes-and-behaviours-towards-the-environment> (2014).

Focus of this report

For this report, we conduct and analyse polling of the UK public to explore attitudes towards the value of the natural environment, accessing and engaging with it, and the responsibility and actions of different actors – including government, businesses, charities and individuals – for its protection and enhancement. Public attitudes will be analysed according to a range of socio-demographic characteristics, enabling us to examine variation in perspectives by social and economic divides.

In this report, we seek to answer the following three research questions:

1. To what extent is the UK public concerned about the natural environment relative to other policy areas?
2. How does the UK public engage with, and value, the natural environment?
3. What are the attitudes of the UK population towards the role and responsibilities of different actors in protecting and enhancing the natural environment?

The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter Two** explains in detail the methodology employed for the public polling we conducted.
- **Chapter Three** explores the public's prioritisation of, and concerns held about, the natural environment.
- **Chapter Four** examines how often adults access different types of the natural environment and their views on the value of and benefits from the natural environment.
- **Chapter Five** assesses views on where responsibility lies for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
- **Chapter Six** considers views on actions that individuals themselves should take to protect the natural environment, and the sensitivity of adults to product price changes in order to safeguard it.

- **Chapter Seven** analyses attitudes towards different government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment.
- **Chapter Eight** looks at the importance and role of nature in choosing and changing where people live.
- **Chapter Nine** concludes with a discussion of main trends in attitudes towards the natural environment that have emerged from the polling.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This report aims to unearth the views of the UK public across a range of socio-demographic characteristics towards the concern for, and value of, the natural environment, as well as towards where responsibility lies for its protection and enhancement, and the measures that should be pursued by different actors.

Polling approach

The polling was undertaken by Savanta ComRes. It was conducted between the 25th and 30th of March 2021 and consisted of 2,000 UK adults, who were surveyed online. The sample is nationally representative in terms of gender, age, social grade, region and income level. A full list of polling questions is provided in the Annex.

The population is divided into two groups by social grade: ABC1 and C2DE. This is based on the NRS social grade typology. ABC1 is often associated with more affluent people – including high or intermediate managerial, administrative or professionals; supervisors; and, students – and C2DE with less affluent people – including skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers; house-wife or house-husbands; retirees; and, the unemployed.

Box 2.1 below lists all the cross-breaks that were used in the polling.

Box 2.1. Complete polling cross-breaks

- Gender
- Age
- Social grade
- Region
- Urban or rural
- Income level

The polling has a large number of questions, with many of them demonstrating marginal or no difference between different socio-demographic groups of UK adults. For that reason, and to ensure that prominence is given to the greatest divergences between different socio-demographic groups, the report will prioritise reporting variations by socio-demographic characteristics which are frequently or occasionally observed.

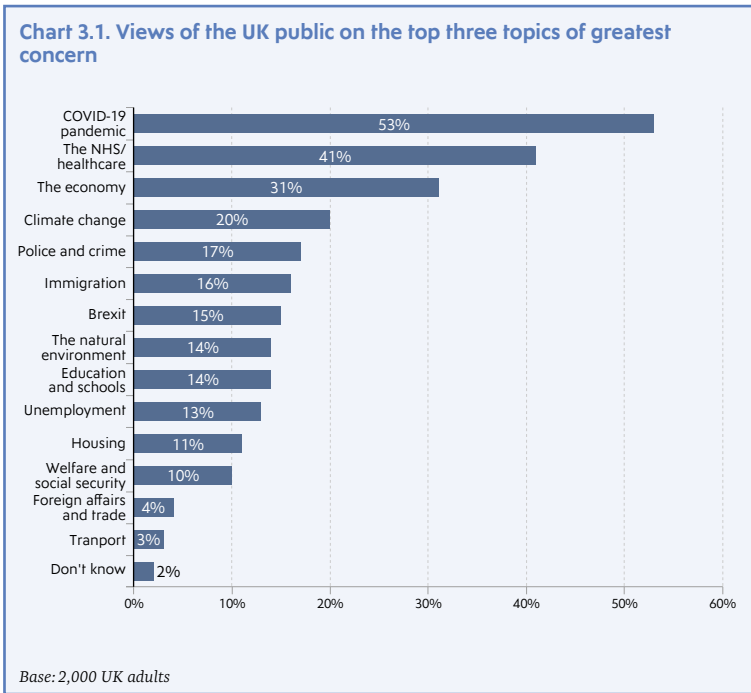
Chapter 3:

Public concern for the natural environment

This chapter examines UK public concern for the natural environment relative to other policy areas, both domestically and internationally. It also explores concerns the UK public has about threats to the natural environment.

Overall policy concerns

Unsurprisingly, our polling suggests that the UK public is currently most concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic. We asked the public to select the top three topics/issues which were of greatest concern to them. The majority of adults were most concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic (53%), followed by the NHS/healthcare (41%) and the economy (31%), as illustrated in Chart 3.1 below.

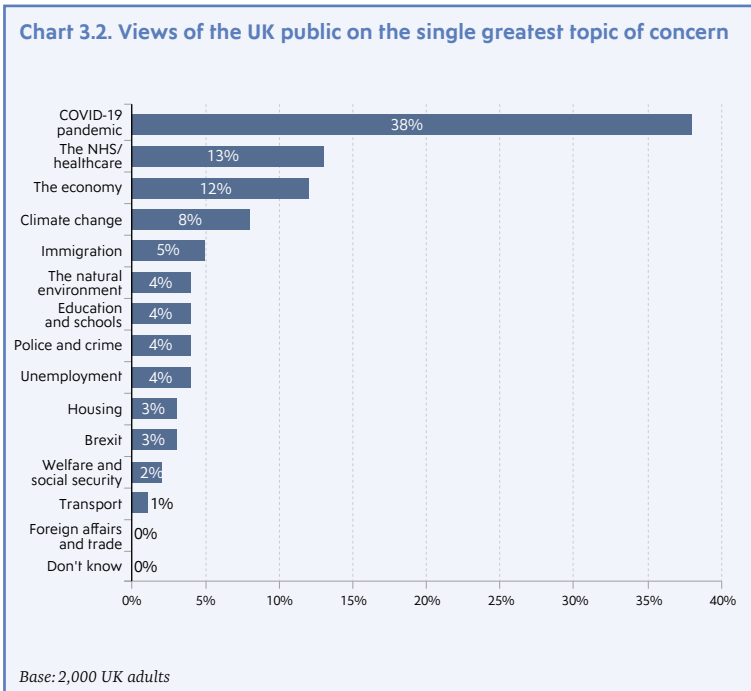


Given the polling was conducted in March 2021, when the UK was still in lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unsurprising to see high levels of public concern towards the NHS/healthcare and the economy, given the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these policy areas.

Climate change was the fourth greatest concern, with one in five adults selecting this in their top three policy areas of greatest concern. Relative to other policy areas, the natural environment was of less concern to the public, behind immigration and Brexit, with only 14% of adults selecting this as a policy area of concern. However, the UK public held greater concern for the natural environment than other policy areas such as unemployment (13%), housing (11%) and transport (3%).

To make the UK public focus on identifying what they see as the greatest concern, we asked them to select, from their top three, the

policy area of single greatest concern. The results of this are displayed in Chart 3.2 below.



As Chart 3.2 above shows, unsurprisingly, a majority of the public (38%) say the COVID-19 pandemic is the policy area of single greatest concern. The COVID-19 pandemic, the NHS/healthcare, the economy and climate change remain the top four policy areas of concern amongst the public. However, the public's concern towards the COVID-19 pandemic largely outweighs concern for the NHS/healthcare – the policy area of second greatest concern – by 25 percentage points.

Despite still being ranked fourth for concern in the list of policy areas, only 8% of the public felt climate change was the policy area of single greatest concern. For the natural environment, only 4% of the public cited this as the policy area of single greatest concern. Even when

combining the scores of climate change and the natural environment (8% and 4% respectively) to give a score for the environment as a policy area overall, only one in eight adults felt it was their single greatest concern.

Foreign policy priorities

We then asked the UK public to consider their foreign policy priorities. As already shown, climate change and the natural environment do not feature in the overall top three policy areas of concern amongst the public. However, it is notable that when we asked the public to select their top three foreign policy priorities for the UK, our polling finds around one in three adults selected combating climate change, meaning it ranked third, as shown in Chart 3.3 below.

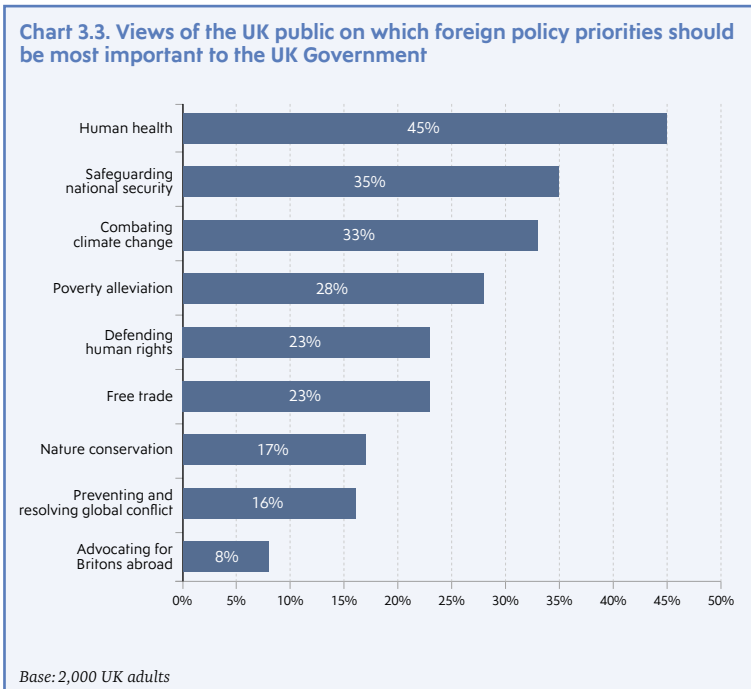
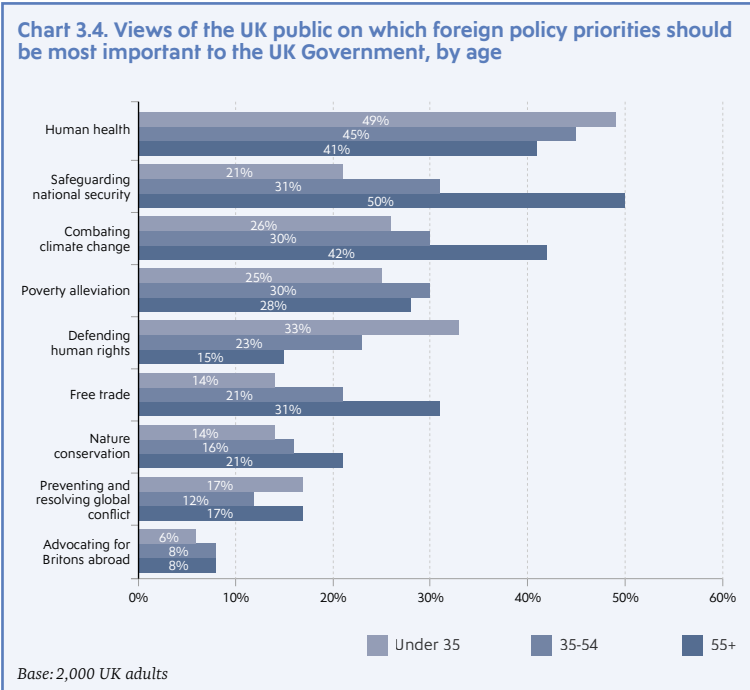


Chart 3.3 shows that alongside combating climate change (33%), human health and safeguarding national security were the three most selected foreign policy priorities (45% and 35% respectively). It is unsurprising to see human health scoring the highest as a foreign policy priority, given the polling was undertaken during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, combating climate change sits only two percentage points behind safeguarding national security, which has been more traditionally associated with foreign policy. Unlike combating climate change, nature conservation is in the bottom three foreign policy priorities (17%), below poverty alleviation (28%), defending human rights (23%) and free trade (23%).

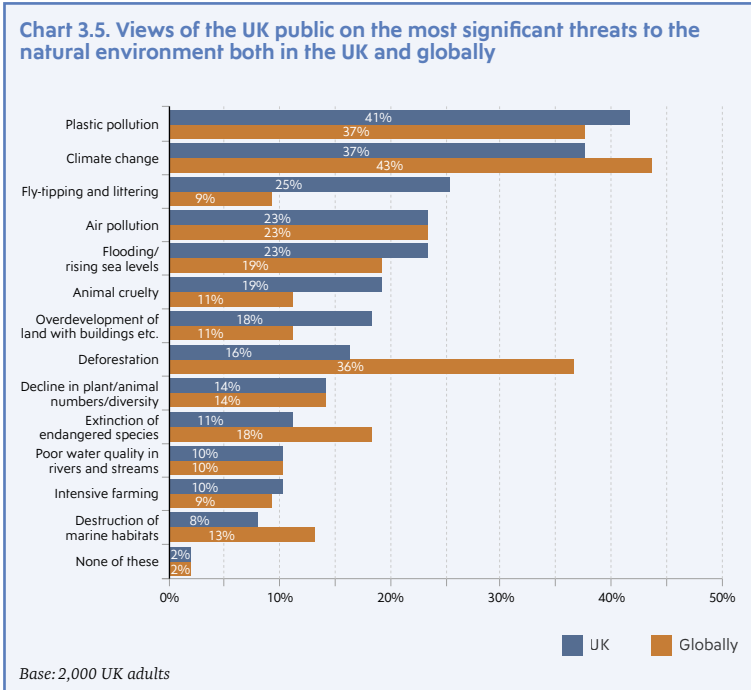
Once we examine socio-demographic groups, as shown in Chart 3.4 below, we can see clear differences by age. The top three foreign policy priorities for older adults over the age of 55 were safeguarding national security (50%), combating climate change (42%) and human health (41%). For younger adults between the ages of 18 to 34, their top three foreign policy priorities were human health (49%), defending human rights (33%) and combating climate change (26%).

Older adults are much more likely than younger adults to prioritise safeguarding national security (50% and 21% respectively), combating climate change, somewhat surprisingly (42% and 26% respectively), free trade (31% and 14% respectively) and again, somewhat surprisingly, nature conservation (21% and 14% respectively) as foreign policy priorities. Younger adults are more likely to prioritise defending human rights (33%) than older adults (15%).



Threats to the natural environment

Having established the concern the UK public has about the natural environment relative to other domestic and foreign policy areas, we examined the specific concern the public have about threats to the natural environment, both in the UK and globally. We asked the public to select what they perceived to be the top three most significant threats to the natural environment both in the UK and globally, the results of which are displayed in Chart 3.5 below.



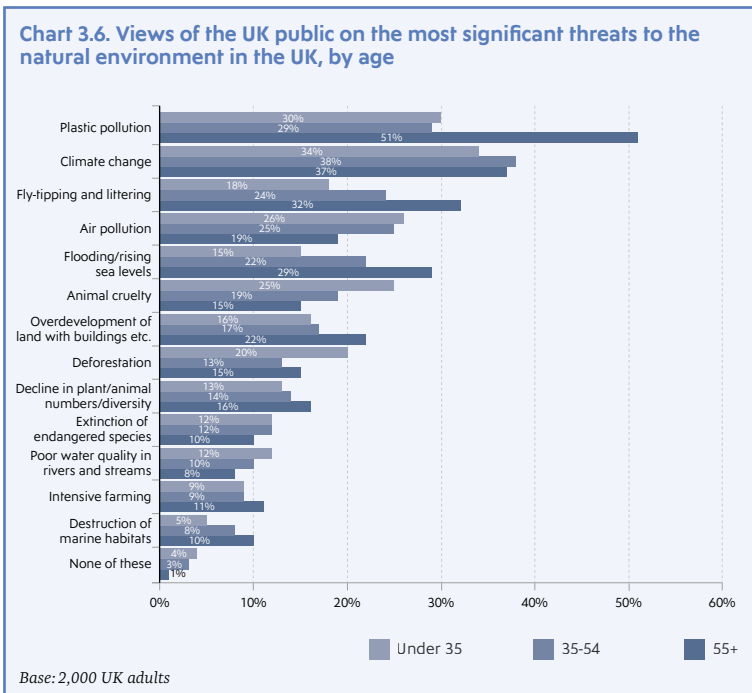
As Chart 3.5 above shows, the public perceived the top three most significant threats to the natural environment in the UK to be plastic pollution (41%), climate change (37%) and fly-tipping and littering (25%). However, when considering threats to the natural environment globally, the public believes climate change is the most significant (43%), followed by plastic pollution (37%) and deforestation (36%).

A large divergence between threats to the natural environment in the UK and globally was seen in the case of deforestation, where over twice as many adults felt this was a threat to the natural environment globally compared to the UK. When it came to the extinction of endangered species, more adults felt this was a threat to the natural environment globally (18%) than in the UK (11%).

Another large divergence was also seen in regards to fly-tipping and

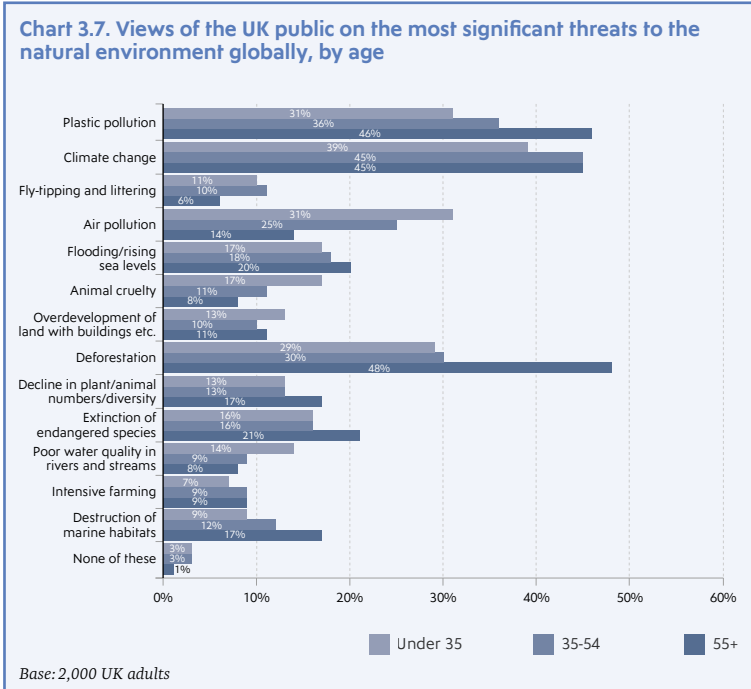
littering, where almost three times as many adults felt this was a threat to the natural environment in the UK rather than globally. Other divergences included animal cruelty and overdevelopment of land with buildings, where almost double the percentage of adults felt that these were significant threats to the natural environment in the UK rather than globally.

There were some variances between age groups as to what the most significant threats to the natural environment are both in the UK and globally. In the UK, the most significant threat to the natural environment for those aged 18 to 34 was climate change (34%), whereas for those over 55 it was plastic pollution (51%). This is shown in Chart 3.6 below.



Globally, the most significant threats to the natural environment are rearranged for older adults, who see deforestation (48%) as the most significant threat. Younger adults still consider climate change (39%)

to be the most significant threat to the natural environment globally. These results are displayed in Chart 3.7 below.



When looking at significant threats to the UK's natural environment, older adults over the age of 55 are much more likely than younger adults between the ages of 18 and 34 to consider these to be fly-tipping and littering (32% compared to 18%) and flooding/rising sea levels (29% compared to 15%), as shown in Chart 3.7 further above. For younger adults, they are slightly more likely to view air pollution as a significant threat to the UK's natural environment (26%) than older adults (19%).

When considering the natural environment globally, older adults are more likely than younger adults to believe that deforestation is a significant threat (48% and 29% respectively) and vice versa for air pollution (31% for younger adults and 14% for older adults).

Older adults over the age of 55 are much more likely to consider plastic pollution and the destruction of marine habitats as significant threats to the natural environment in both the UK and globally than younger adults. By contrast, younger adults are more likely than older adults to view animal cruelty as a significant threat to the natural environment in both the UK and globally.

Another variation was by which area someone lived. Those who live in rural areas are less likely to consider air pollution a significant threat to the natural environment in the UK (18%) than those living in urban (28%) and suburban areas (23%). In particular, for those who lived in London, air pollution was considered the most significant threat to the natural environment in the UK (39%). This is to be somewhat expected, given that those in rural areas are typically exposed to lower levels of air pollution and that legal air pollution limits have been frequently exceeded in London.²¹

Conclusion

Overall, the UK public does not consider climate change and the natural environment to be policy areas of greatest concern when compared to other policy areas, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the NHS/healthcare and the economy. However, in the context of foreign policy priorities, there is stronger support for climate change.

Plastic pollution, climate change, and fly-tipping and littering are perceived by the UK public to be the most significant threats to the natural environment., both in the UK and abroad, with climate change being seen as more of a global threat, and plastic pollution a domestic one.

Variations amongst age groups are noticeable, with older adults more likely to believe climate change and the natural environment should be a foreign policy priority than younger adults, surprisingly.

Next, we look at how individuals access and value the natural environment.

21. London Assembly, "Latest data shows two million Londoners living with illegal toxic air", <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/two-million-londoners-live-with-illegal-toxic-air> (2019).

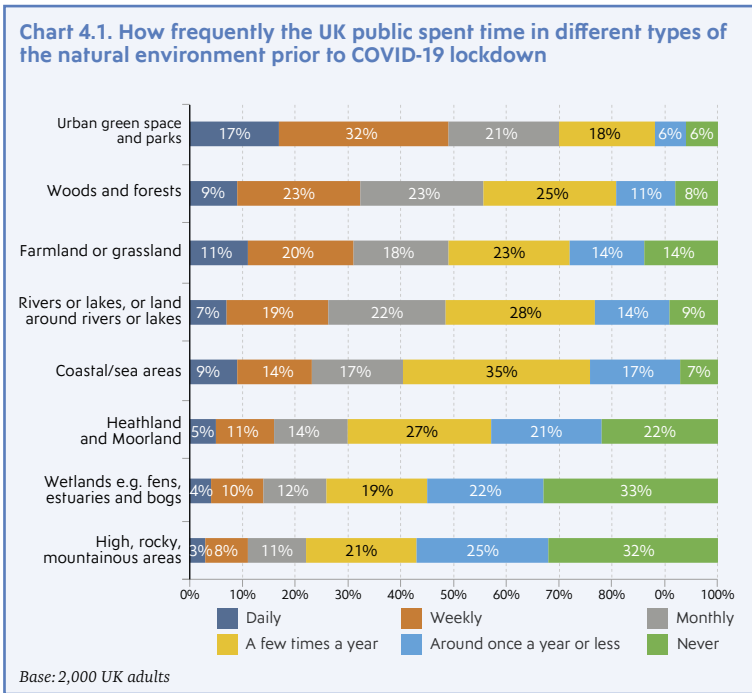
Chapter 4:

Accessing, valuing and benefitting from the natural environment

Having understood where the natural environment sits amongst competing domestic and foreign policy priorities for the UK public, this chapter focuses on public access to, valuing of and benefitting from the natural environment. The chapter initially looks at how frequently the public has spent time in different types of the natural environment, before exploring how much they rate and value them and perceive their quality and benefits to be.

Accessing the natural environment

When it comes to spending time in the main different types of natural environments tested, the UK public is most likely to visit urban green space and parks. This is shown in Chart 4.1 below.



When looking at which different types of the natural environment are visited on at least a monthly basis, we see majorities of the public visit urban green space and parks (70%) as well as woods and forests (55%), whilst significant minorities frequent farmland or grassland (49%), rivers or lakes (48%) and coastal/sea areas (40%).

Differences by age come into play, with the polling finding that younger adults between the ages of 18 and 34 have more frequently spent time in each different type of the natural environment than older adults over the age of 55. For example, 72% of younger adults spent time in woods and forests on at least a monthly basis whereas only 41% of older adults did so.

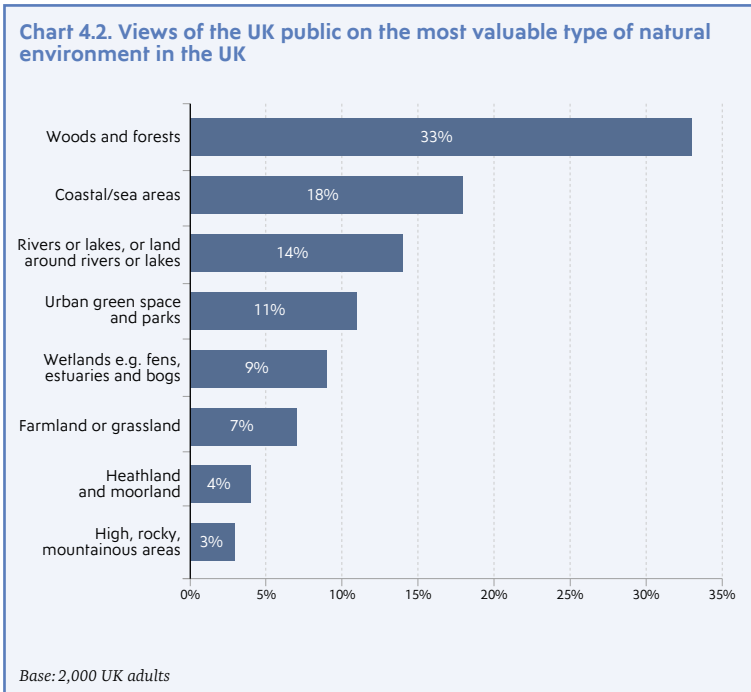
A majority of younger adults have spent time in urban green space and parks (81%), woods and forests (72%), rivers or lakes (64%), farmland or grassland (62%) and coastal/sea areas (52%) on at least a monthly

basis. For older adults, a majority was only found in frequenting urban green space and parks on at least a monthly basis (61%).

There is also a clear divide between different social grades. Those from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to have spent time in each different type of the natural environment than those from less affluent backgrounds. For example, 63% of adults from more affluent backgrounds said they had spent time in woods and forests on at least a monthly basis, whereas only 44% of adults from less affluent backgrounds said the same. Majorities were found amongst more affluent adults in spending time in urban green space and parks (75%), woods and forests (63%), rivers or lakes (54%) and farmland or grassland (53%) on at least a monthly basis. For less affluent adults, a majority was only found in frequenting urban green space and parks on at least a monthly basis (64%).

Value and quality of the natural environment

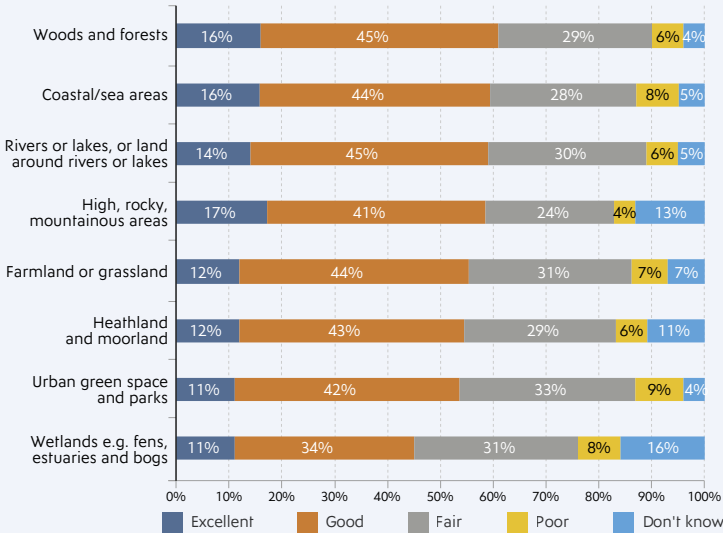
Having unearthed the most frequently accessed natural environments by the UK public, we explored how they valued the main different types of natural environments. Despite being the type of natural environment which most adults spent time in, a small percentage of the UK public (11%) felt that urban green space and parks were the most valuable environment in the UK. Woods and forests (33%) were perceived to be the most valuable type of the natural environment in the UK, followed by coastal/sea areas (18%) and rivers or lakes (14%), as illustrated in Chart 4.2 below.



There was a slight association between types of the natural environment where the public spent little time in – such as high, rocky, mountainous areas, wetlands, and, heathland and moorland – and the percentage of the public which most valued them. High, rocky, mountainous areas and heathland and moorland were least likely to be considered the most valuable natural environment in the UK, with only 3% and 4% of the UK public valuing them the most respectively.

Having identified the main different types of the natural environment which the UK public frequents the most, as well as those considered the most valuable, we investigated which types of the natural environment the UK public perceived to be the best quality. This is illustrated in Chart 4.3 below.

Chart 4.3. Views of the UK public on the quality of different types of the natural environment in the UK



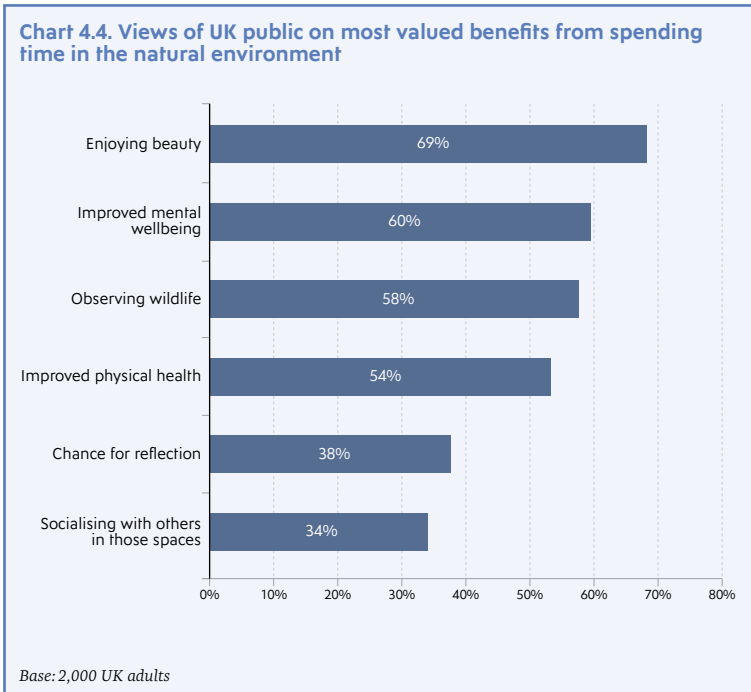
Base: 2,000 UK adults

As Chart 4.3 above shows, the majority of the UK public think that all different types of the natural environment in the UK are of good or excellent quality, except wetlands, although a plurality of 45% still think they are at least good quality. Those which were most perceived to be of good or excellent quality were woods and forests (61%), coastal/sea areas (60%) and rivers or lakes (59%).

Benefits of the natural environment

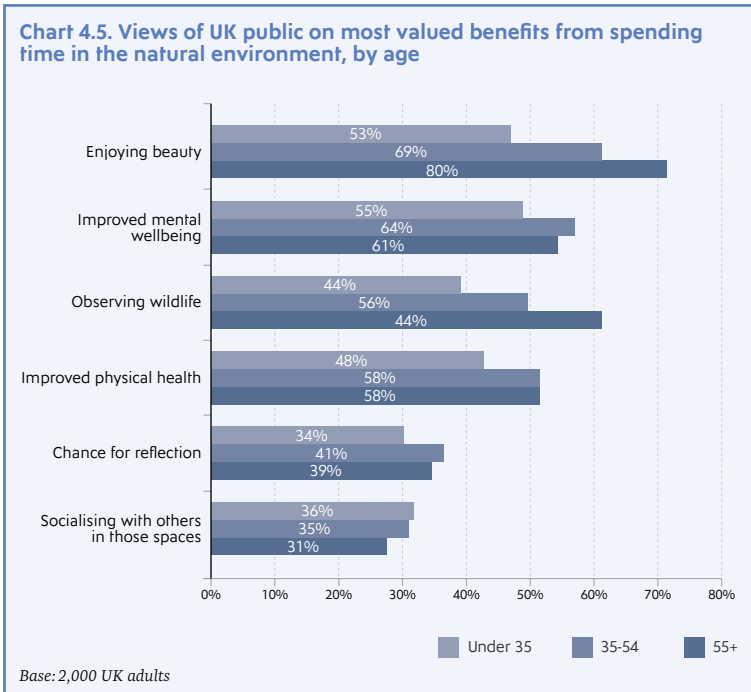
Having understood how often adults spend time in different types of the natural environment, as well as their value and perceived quality, we investigated which individual benefits from experiencing the natural environment resonated most with the UK public.

We asked the UK public what benefits from spending time in the natural environment they valued the most. This is shown in Chart 4.4 below.



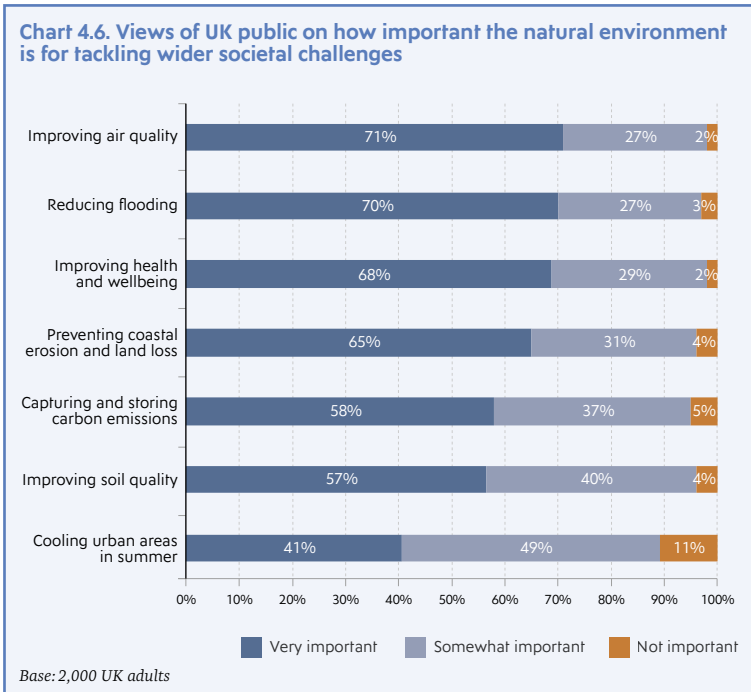
As Chart 4.4 above shows, enjoying beauty (69%), improved mental wellbeing (60%) and observing wildlife (58%) were the most valued benefits amongst the UK public that come from spending time in the natural environment. All benefits were valued by a majority of adults, with the exception of having a chance for reflection (38%) and socialising with others in those spaces (34%).

Large variations on the perceived benefits of experiencing the natural environment between age groups can be seen in Chart 4.5 below, with older adults over the age of 55 much more likely than younger adults between the ages of 18 and 34 to value most benefits about spending time in the natural environment. For example, 80% of older adults most valued enjoying the beauty of the natural environment, the most popular benefit for them, compared to 53% of younger adults, the second most popular benefit for them behind improved mental wellbeing.



Differences between men and women also emerged. In every instance, a greater percentage of women valued benefits from spending time in the natural environment than men, although these variations were not as pronounced as those by age. For example, 64% of women cited improved mental wellbeing as a valued benefit from spending time in the natural environment, whereas for men, only 55% did so. When it came to enjoying beauty, 72% of women thought this to be a valued benefit from spending time in the natural environment compared to 65% of men.

In addition to the benefits of the natural environment for the individual, we asked adults to think about the role of the natural environment in tackling wider societal challenges such as air pollution and climate change. This is illustrated in Chart 4.6 below.

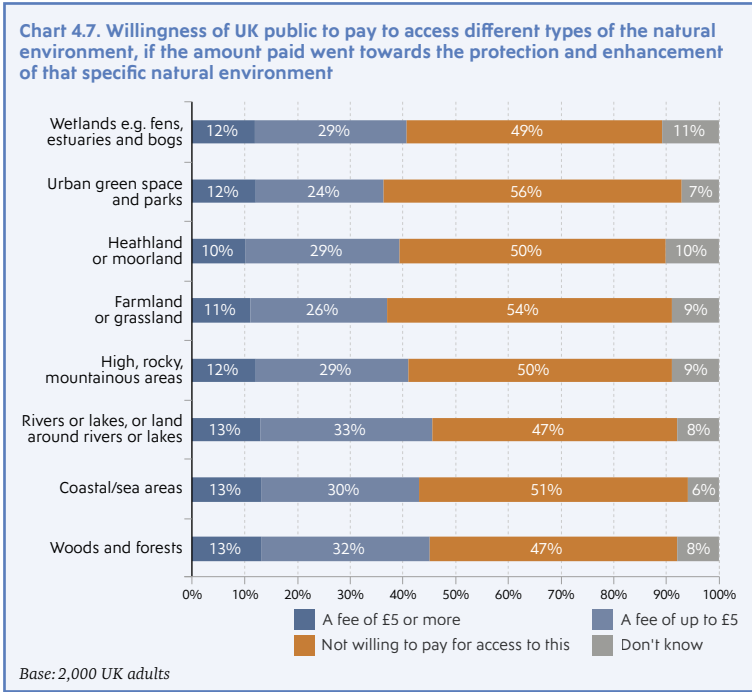


As Chart 4.6 above shows, there was broad recognition of the importance of the natural environment across all wider societal challenges by the UK public, particularly improving air quality (71%), reducing flooding (70%) and improving health and wellbeing (68%). The majority of the UK public think that the natural environment is not just important but very important for tackling all challenges, except cooling urban areas in summer, where still a significant minority (41%) of adults felt it was very important. Clearly, very few adults felt that the natural environment was not important in tackling wider societal challenges.

Paying for access?

With the benefits of the natural environment for individuals and wider society strongly recognised by the UK public, can we expect adults to pay for access to different types of the natural environment?

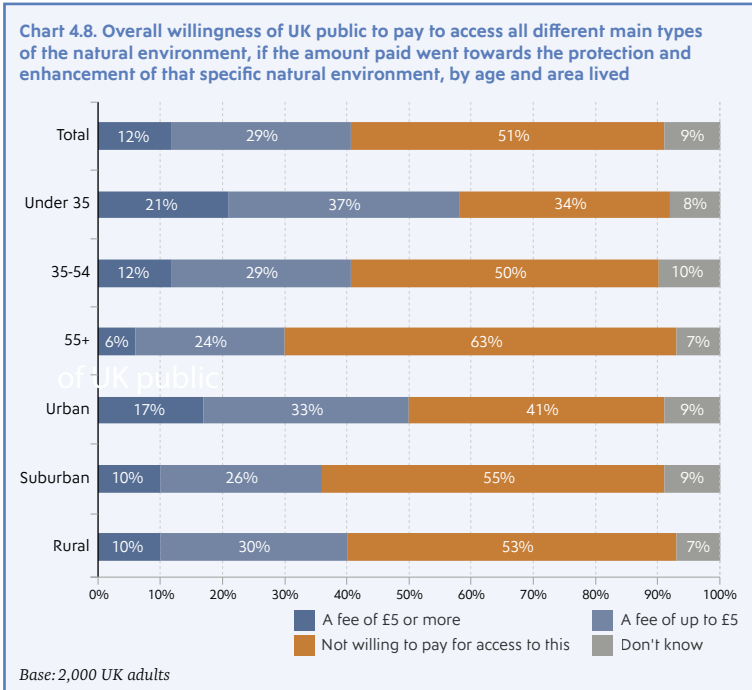
We examined the UK public’s willingness to pay for access to the main different types of the natural environment, provided that the amount paid would go towards the protection and enhancement of that specific natural environment. The results are displayed in Chart 4.7 below.



As Chart 4.7 above shows, for most main types of the natural environment, the majority of the UK public is not willing to pay to access them, even if the amount paid went towards the protection and enhancement of that specific natural environment. However, there is a significant minority of adults willing to pay a fee of up to £5, especially for rivers or lakes, or land around rivers or lakes (33%) and woods and forests (32%). A small minority is prepared to pay even more – 13% for rivers or lakes, or land around rivers or lakes, or woods and forests.

Looking at public willingness to pay to access the main different

types of the natural environment, we can see some clear differences across sociodemographic groups. Chart 4.8 below brings together the total public willingness to pay to access all natural environments by age and area lived.



As Chart 4.8 above highlights, whilst majorities of adults between the ages of 35 and 54 (50%) and over 55 (63%) were unwilling to pay anything to access all the main different types of natural environments, the majority of younger adults aged 18 to 34 were (58%), provided that the amount paid went towards the protection and enhancement of the different natural environments.

A slim majority (50%) of adults living in urban areas would also be willing to pay at least something to access all the main types of natural environments, provided that the amount paid went towards protection

and enhancement. Adults in suburban and rural areas were less willing to pay something – only 36% and 40% respectively.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the majority of the UK public typically spends time in nearly all of the main types of natural environments on at least a monthly basis. Types of the natural environment where adults spent the least amount of time tended to also be the least valued. Woods and forests are the most valued type of natural environment by the UK public, and are also the type of natural environment most likely perceived to be of at least good quality.

The UK public sees strong benefits associated with the natural environment for themselves, and widely recognises the importance of the natural environment in tackling wider societal challenges, especially improving air quality and reducing flooding.

Despite this, the majority of the UK public is not prepared to pay to access all of the main different types of the natural environment, even if the amount paid went towards the protection and restoration of that specific natural environment. However, the majority of younger adults under the age of 35 are willing to pay at least something.

The next chapter will explore public attitudes towards who is responsible for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Chapter 5:

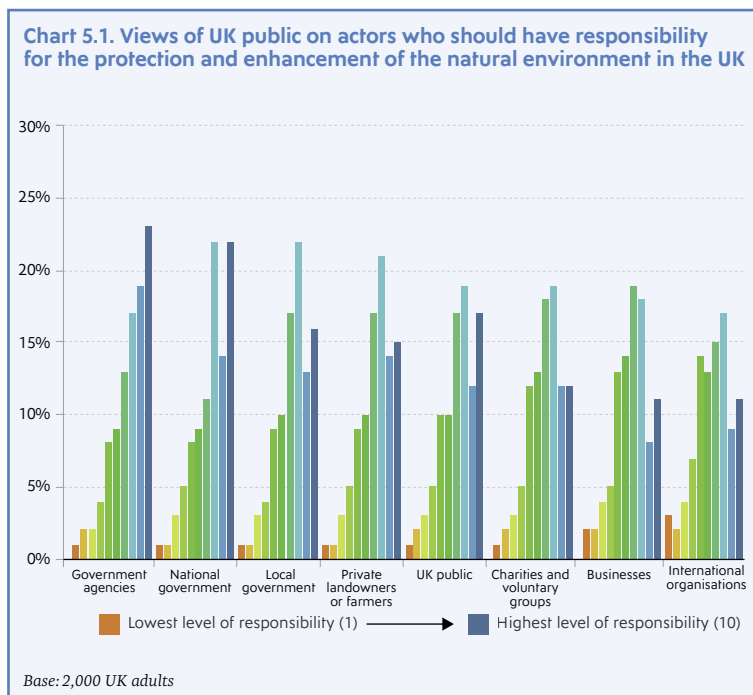
Responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment

This chapter examines public attitudes towards responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. As highlighted in Chapter One, the state of the natural environment in the UK is in decline, so we wanted to explore where the UK public thought responsibility *should* lie, and where they perceive it to *actually* lie, for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, focussing on different actors.

We identified the following actors that could have responsibility: government agencies, such as the Environment Agency; national government; local government; private landowners or farmers; the UK public; charities and voluntary groups, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB); businesses; and, international organisations.

Where does responsibility lie?

Chart 5.1 below shows the actors we identified that the UK public believe should have responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK when asked to give a score between one and ten, with a score between eight and ten indicating a very high level of responsibility.



The majority of the UK public believes that government agencies (59%), national government (58%), local government (52%) and private landowners or farmers (50%) should have very high levels of responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK, though there is a view that government agencies should have the highest responsibility, as demonstrated in Chart 5.1 above. While 59% of adults believe government agencies, such as the Environment Agency, should have a very high level of responsibility, 23% give them a score of ten. A similar portion of adults believe national and local government should have a very high level of responsibility (58% and 52% respectively), with 22% actually giving national government a score of ten but only 16% for local government.

Private landowners or farmers and the UK public received slightly lower levels of responsibility, with 50% and 48% respectively believing they

should have very high levels of responsibility. Members of the UK public felt that charities or voluntary groups should have relatively less responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK, with 43% of adults believing they should have very high levels of responsibility. Finally, businesses and international organisations were seen as those who should be relatively less responsible, with only 37% of adults believing they should have very high levels of responsibility.

Overall, however, a majority of the UK public believe all actors should have a fairly high (a score between six and ten) responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

There was notable variation by age attributing a very high level of responsibility (a score between eight and ten) to different actors for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK, as seen in Chart 5.2 below.

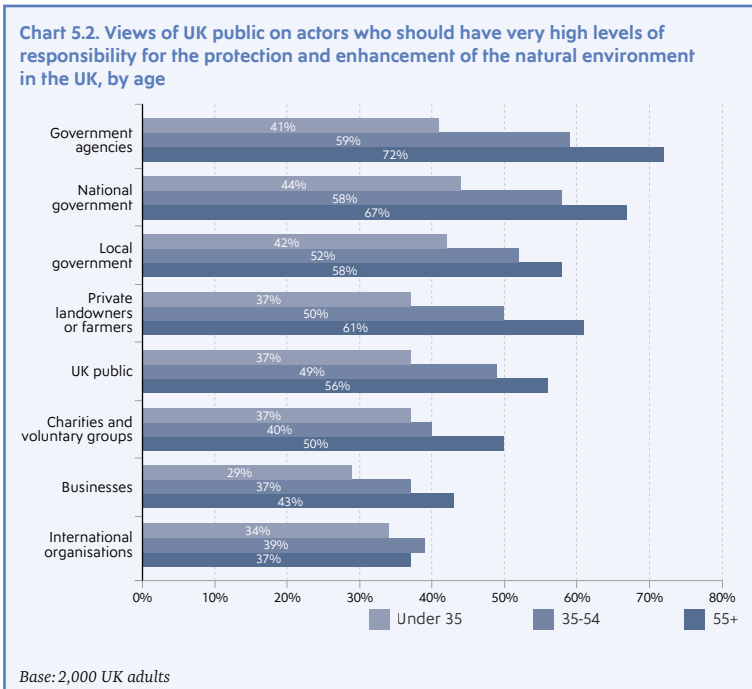
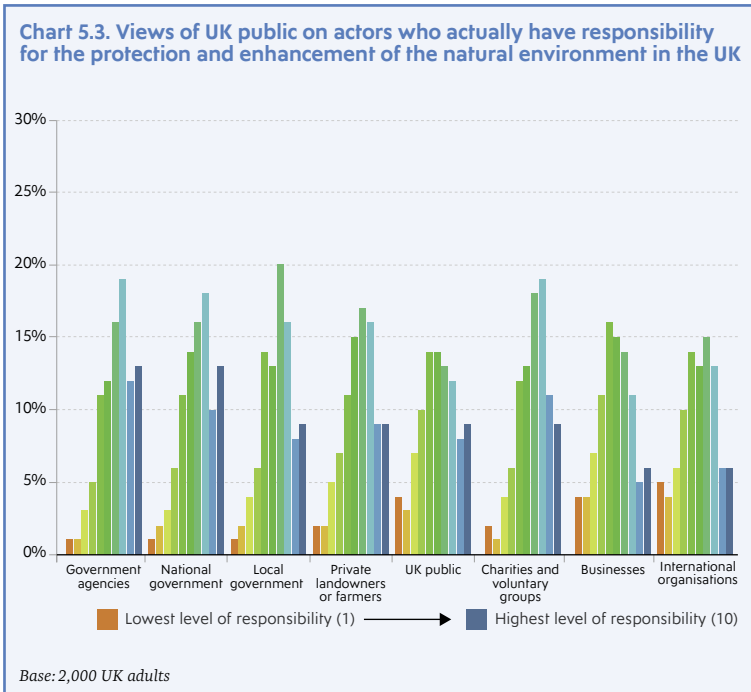


Chart 5.2 above shows a clear trend of adults above the age of 35 more likely to attribute very high levels of responsibility to all actors compared to younger adults aged 18 to 34. In fact, there was no majority for younger adults attributing very high responsibility to any actor. The disparity between different age groups becomes more pronounced when comparing older adults over the age of 55 against younger adults aged 35 and under.

For example, a significant majority of older adults (72%) attributed very high responsibility towards government agencies, whereas only a minority (41%) of younger adults did so. The same occurred for the national government, where 67% of older adults attributed very high responsibility compared to only 44% for younger adults.

Even when considering where responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment should lie amongst individuals, we still see significant variation between older and younger adults. A majority of older adults aged 55 and over attributed high responsibility to private landowners or farmers compared to a minority of younger adults (61% and 37% respectively), and similarly for the UK public themselves (56% and 37% respectively).

Having established to what degree the UK public believes different actors *should* have responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK, we asked how much responsibility they thought each actor *actually* has. The results of this are displayed in Chart 5.3 below.



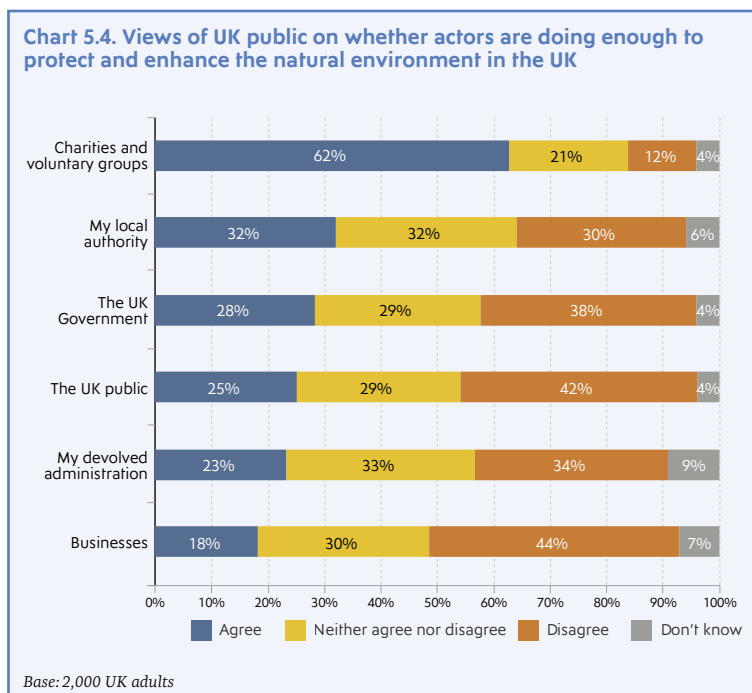
As Chart 5.3 above shows, in contrast to what the UK public think should be the case, no actor is attributed with actually having a very high level of responsibility (a score between eight and ten) for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK by more than 50% of the UK public. The UK public feels that government agencies and national government have the highest degree of actual responsibility (44% and 40% scoring them very high, respectively). Interestingly, charities and voluntary groups are seen to have the third highest degree of actual responsibility (39%), above private landowners and farmers (34%) and local government (33%). Businesses ranked the lowest, with 23% of the UK public scoring them very highly for actual responsibility.

There was a slim majority of those aged over 55 (53%) who thought that the leading actor with very high responsibility was government agencies, compared to only 33% for those aged 18 to 34. However, results

remained fairly consistent across all other socio-demographic groups.

Performance of different actors

Having examined public attitudes towards where responsibility *should* lie, and where it is perceived to *actually* lie, for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK, we wanted to understand whether the UK public thought the different main actors we have identified were doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK. This is illustrated in Chart 5.4 below. Only adults who indicated that they lived in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales were given the option of expressing whether they thought their devolved administration was doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK.



A majority (62%) of the UK public agree that charities and voluntary groups alone are doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK. There is much greater scepticism about the role of other actors. Only 32% believe that local authorities are doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK, and this falls to less than three and ten (28%) for the UK Government. Businesses performed most poorly, with net agreement that they were doing enough of only 18%. For the UK Government, the UK public, devolved administrations and businesses, adults are more likely to report that they are not doing enough rather than that they are.

Differences by age once again come into play, with the polling finding that younger adults between the ages of 18 and 34 are more likely to feel that the public themselves and businesses were doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK (36% and 30% respectively) than older adults over the age of 55 (16% and 8% respectively). In contrast, younger adults were more critical of charities and voluntary groups, with 20% disagreeing that they were doing enough, whilst only 8% of older adults said the same.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed that the UK public feels all actors we have identified should have a fairly high level of responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in the UK, though government agencies are identified as the actor the UK public believes should have very high levels of responsibility. However, somewhat surprisingly, young adults are least likely to expect high responsibility from all actors compared to older adults.

When considering whether the different actors were doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK, only charities and voluntary groups were deemed to be doing so by the majority of the UK public. All other actors underperformed, with well

below half of the UK public saying they felt they were doing enough, especially businesses.

In the next chapter, we look at a particular actor – the wider public themselves – and explore more deeply the role of the individual in protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

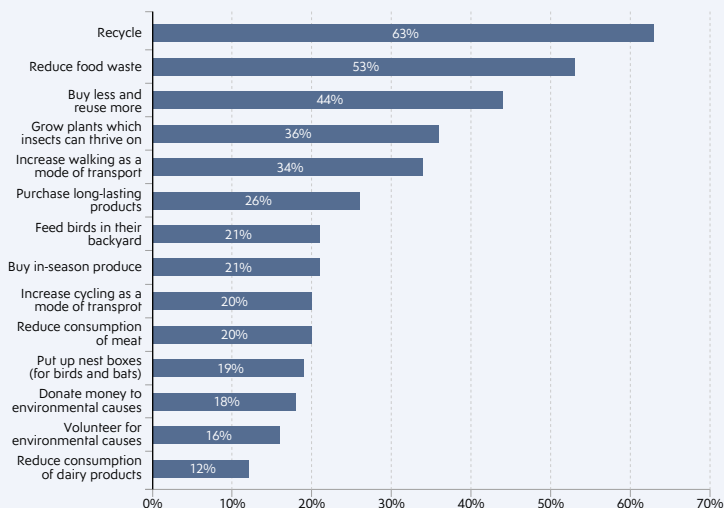
Chapter 6: The role of individuals in protecting and enhancing the natural environment

With the last chapter illustrating that members of the UK public are perceived to not be doing enough when it comes to protecting and enhancing the UK's natural environment, this chapter focuses on attitudes towards specific actions individuals could take to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK. This chapter initially examines what changes adults think the public will need to make to reduce their impact on the natural environment and their willingness to adopt those changes themselves. We then explore to what extent individuals would be prepared to pay more for different kinds of products which have a negative impact on the natural environment.

Behavioural change

We asked what behaviours the UK public thought individuals would have to adopt to protect and enhance the natural environment, selecting the top three which they believed would have the greatest impact. The results are shown in Chart 6.1 below.

Chart 6.1. Views of UK public on what behaviours are most important for the UK public to undertake to protect and enhance the natural environment

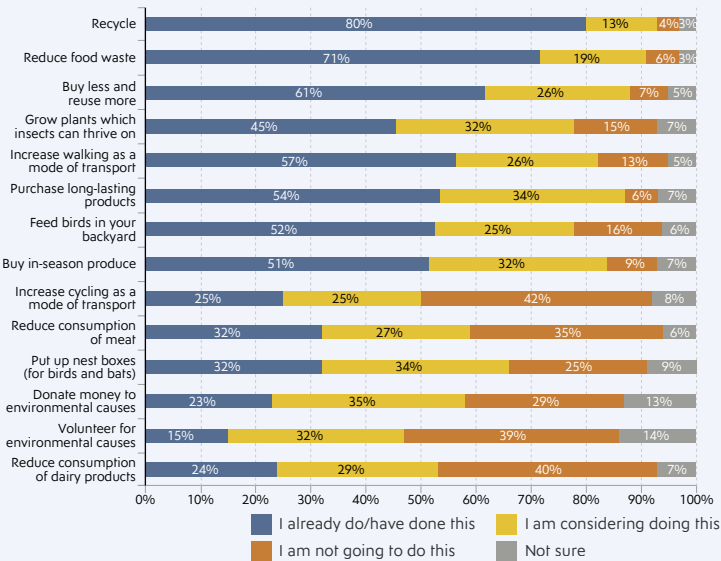


Base: 2,000 UK adults

Chart 6.1 shows that a majority of the public think that recycling and reducing food waste are the most important behaviours for individuals to adopt to protect and enhance the natural environment (63% and 53% respectively). A significant minority (44%) thought that buying less and reusing more was the most important behaviour. Reducing consumption of dairy products ranked last at 12%.

We then examined which of these actions the wider public were themselves undertaking, as illustrated in Chart 6.2 below.

Chart 6.2. Actions undertaken by UK adults to protect and enhance the natural environment



Base: 2,000 UK adults

When it comes to behavioural changes the UK public report that they are recycling (80%), reducing food waste (71%) and buying less and reusing more (61%) – the top three actions, as can be seen in Chart 6.2 above. These are the same top three actions which the public thought were most important to protect the natural environment, as Chart 6.1 earlier showed. The majority of the public has also: increased the amount they walk as a mode of transport (57%); purchased long-lasting products (54%); fed birds in their backyard (52%); and bought in-season produce (51%).

The UK public is also relatively receptive to making dietary changes in order to reduce their impact on the natural environment. Almost a third of the public has reduced their consumption of meat, and a further 27% are considering it. Despite the least amount of adults considering it to be one of the most important behavioural

changes for individuals to make in reducing their impact on the natural environment, a majority (53%) of the population has either reduced their consumption of dairy products or is considering doing so.

Volunteering for environmental causes scored the lowest for changes already undertaken by adults to protect and enhance the natural environment (15%), although almost one in three adults are considering volunteering, as shown in Chart 6.2 above.

Once again, differences in behaviours by age can be seen. Older adults over the age of 55 are much more likely than younger adults between the ages of 18 to 34 to have already made behavioural changes such as recycling (93% compared to 65%) and reducing food waste (88% compared to 52%). But in all instances, younger adults were more likely to consider making a behavioural change than older adults.

Young adults are more open to cycling as a mode of transport as well, with 31% saying they were doing this and a further 35% considering it. But for older adults, only 18% were cycling more and even less (13%) would consider doing so. Disparities between young and old were also seen in regards to donating money to, and volunteering for, environmental causes; four in ten younger adults would consider both, but only two in ten older adults said the same.

When it came to making dietary changes, younger adults were also more receptive to making behavioural changes. A majority (68%) said they had reduced, or were considering reducing, their consumption of meat, whereas 49% of those over 55 said the same. For dairy products, 68% of younger adults had reduced, or were considering reducing, their consumption, compared to only 39% of those over 55.

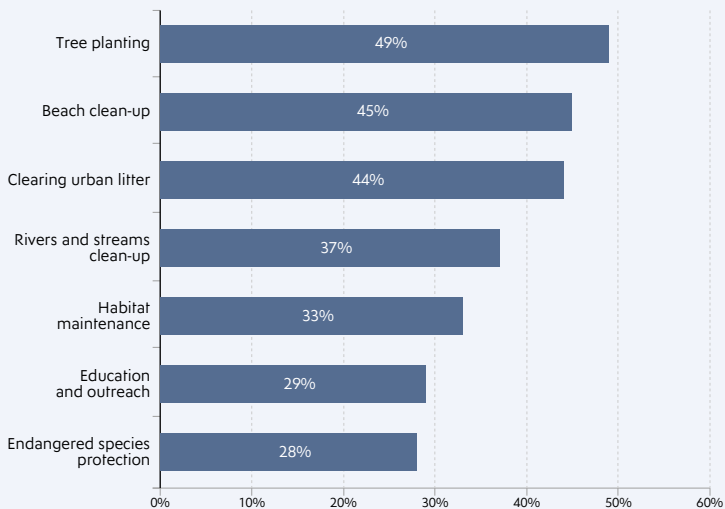
Variations in behaviours also occurred by gender. Women were ten percentage points more likely to have reduced their consumption of both meat and dairy products compared to men. They were also less likely to rule out making dietary changes towards meat and dairy products.

Box 6.1. Volunteering

In Chart 6.1, we saw that a low number of adults (16%) felt volunteering for environmental causes was one of the most important behaviours that should be undertaken to protect and enhance the natural environment. Similarly, in Chart 6.2, volunteering for environmental causes was identified as the action least likely (15%) to have already been undertaken by the UK public. However, Chart 6.2 also showed that 32% of the UK public is considering volunteering for environmental causes.

For those who said that they are currently involved in environmental voluntary work or are considering becoming involved, we asked which types of environmental volunteering most interested them (or which aspect they are already involved in). The results are displayed below in Chart 6.3.

Chart 6.3. Aspects of environmental volunteering of greatest interest to members of the UK public who are already involved or interested in environmental volunteering



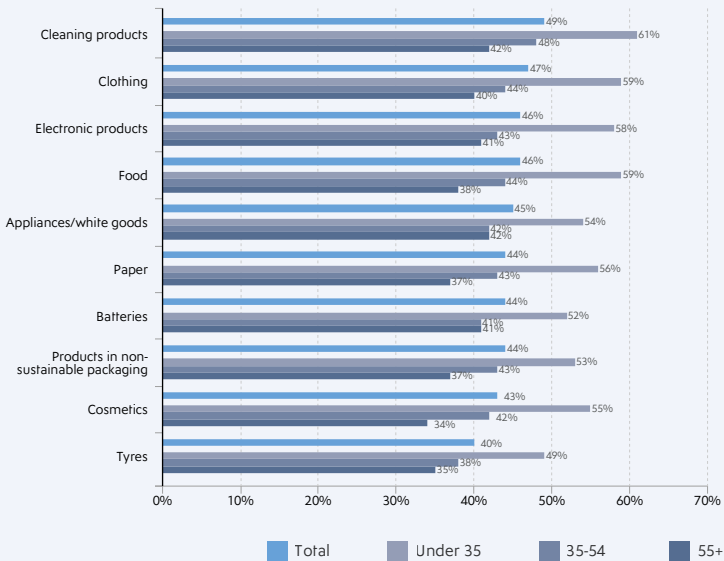
Base: 2,000 UK adults

As Chart 6.3 above shows, adults who are interested or engaged in volunteering for environmental causes are most likely to be doing so for tree planting (49%), beach clean-ups (45%) and clearing urban litter (44%). Endangered species protection ranked the lowest, with 28% of the UK public interested or engaged in volunteering for environmental causes doing so for this reason.

Paying more for products

Behavioural changes can also be driven by prices. We were curious to understand whether the UK public would be prepared to pay a premium for products which harm the natural environment. To examine this, we asked the UK public about a variety of products which often have a negative impact on the natural environment, as seen in Chart 6.4 below.

Chart 6.4. Willingness of UK public to pay more for different types of products which have a negative impact on the natural environment, by age



Base: 2,000 UK adults

Overall, Chart 6.4 illustrates that there is a significant minority prepared to pay more for products which have a negative impact on the natural environment. The UK public was most prepared to pay more for cleaning products (49%), clothing (47%), electronic products (46%) and food (46%). Slightly fewer adults were prepared to pay a premium for tyres (40%), which ranked the lowest of all types of products polled.

Differentiation by age emerged. There is a clear pattern showing that the older adults become, the less likely they are to be willing to pay a premium for a product which has a negative impact on the natural environment. As Chart 6.4 above shows, in every instance, those aged 18 to 34 were more willing to pay a premium for products which harm the natural environment than those aged 35 to 54, and even more so than those over 55. For example, 61% of those aged 18 to 34 are willing to pay a premium for cleaning products which harm the natural environment, compared to only 42% of those aged over 55. When it comes to food products which harm the natural environment, 59% of those aged 18 to 34 are willing to pay a premium, whereas only 38% of those aged over 55 said the same.

Conclusion

The public believes behaviours such as recycling, reducing food waste and buying less and reusing more are the most important changes individuals can make to reduce their impact on the natural environment.

When asked about what behavioural changes the public have already made, the overwhelming majority are already doing the three that were considered most important. The majority of the public are doing, or considering doing, all actions to protect and enhance the natural environment, with the exception of volunteering for environmental causes. Of those that already volunteer for environmental causes, or are interested in doing so, tree planting is what they are most likely to be engaged in or interested in doing.

Whilst only a minority of the public would pay more for products which harm the natural environment, a majority of young adults aged 35 and under would be willing to do so for all the products we tested – especially cleaning products, clothing and electronic products – other than tyres.

The next chapter will explore public attitudes towards different measures and policies to protect and enhance the natural environment from another crucial actor: the government.

Chapter 7:

Government role in protecting and enhancing the natural environment

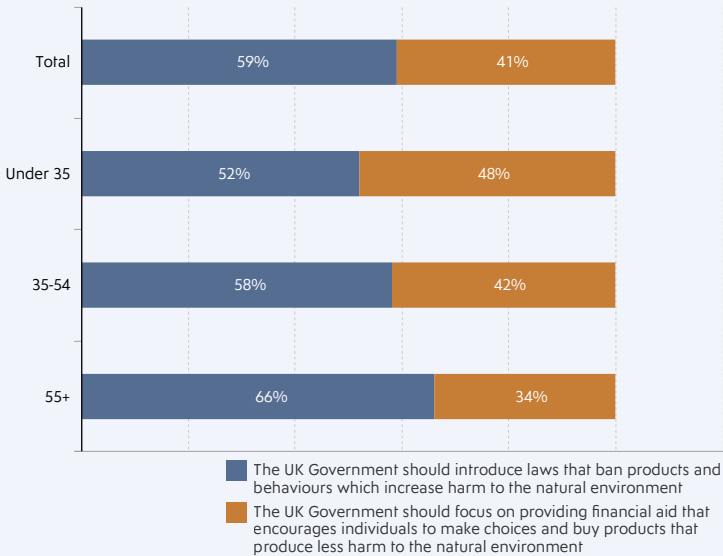
With the previous chapter examining behaviours the public believe are important for individuals to adopt to reduce their impact on the natural environment, this chapter examines public attitudes towards different government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment. As highlighted in Chapter Five, government agencies and the national government were seen as the actors who should have the greatest responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, so we wanted to explore further how the public wants the government to deliver on this responsibility.

Carrots or sticks?

Government policies can, broadly speaking, drive behavioural changes through incentives ('carrots') or punishments ('sticks'). 'Carrots' are typically fiscal incentives – such as a subsidy or tax cut – whereas a 'stick' is typically regulating or banning certain behaviours, but can also be about raising taxation.

Our polling examined whether the public favoured financial incentives from government to encourage individuals to make choices and buy products that produce less harm to the natural environment, or through laws which ban products and behaviours that increase harm to the natural environment. The results are displayed in Chart 7.1 below.

Chart 7.1. UK public views on broad government approaches for individuals to better protect and enhance the natural environment, by age

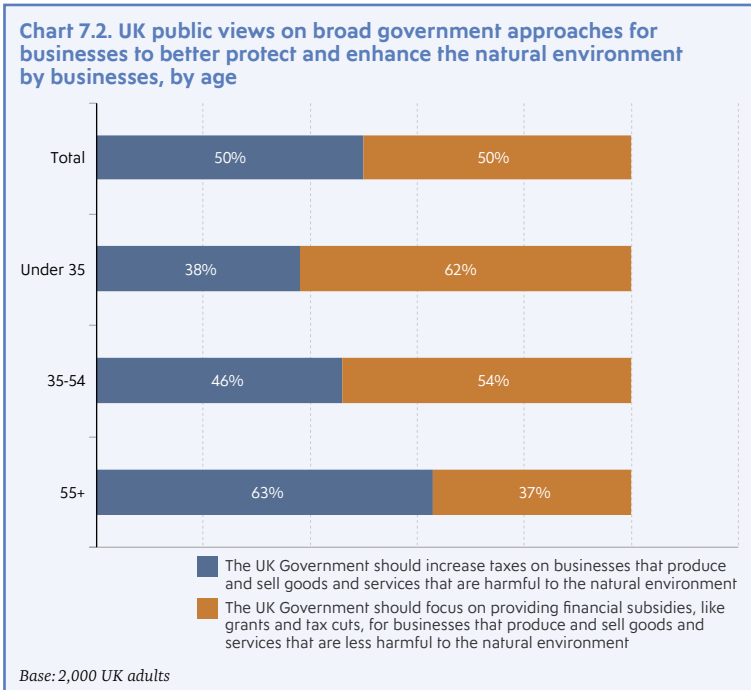


Base: 2,000 UK adults

As Chart 7.1 shows, ‘sticks’ are generally preferred to ‘carrots’, with the majority of the UK public (59%) preferring bans on products which are harmful to the natural environment, in comparison to 41% who prefer financial incentives from government for individuals to make more sustainable choices.

This preference was held consistently across different socio-demographic groups, but there is notable variation by age. The older adults are, the more likely they are to support government product bans over financial incentives. Product bans are favoured by a slim majority (52%) of younger adults aged 18 to 34, whereas a larger majority (66%) of older adults over 55 favour them. Younger adults are also more likely to prefer financial incentives than older adults, with 48% expressing them as a preference over product bans compared to only 34% of older adults.

We also tested what the UK public thought about ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’ for businesses, not just individuals, to drive behavioural change to better protect and enhance the natural environment. We asked whether the public favoured increased taxes on businesses that produce and sell products which are harmful to the natural environment, or subsidies – such as grants or tax cuts – for businesses which produce less harmful products. The results can be seen in Chart 7.2 below.



As Chart 7.2 above shows, when asked whether they prefer increased taxes on businesses which produce and sell products that are harmful to the natural environment or financial subsidies for those whose products are less harmful, the public is divided exactly.

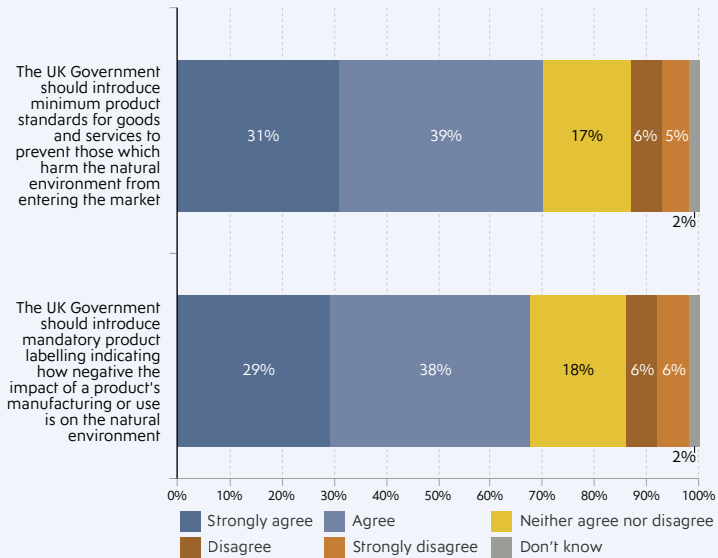
However, there is significant variation by age. Similar to Chart 7.1, we see again that younger adults are more likely to favour ‘carrots’, and

older adults 'sticks'. The majority (62%) of those between the ages of 18 to 34 favour financial subsidies whereas the majority of over 55s (63%) favour increased taxes. For those between the ages of 35 to 54, a slim majority (54%) favoured financial subsidies over increased taxes (46%).

Informed choices or sales bans?

Greater information about the impact of a product on the natural environment could allow consumers to make more informed choices when deciding what products to purchase, possibly resulting in the public being less inclined to buy those which are identifiable as being harmful to the natural environment. We tested whether the public preferred the government introducing mandatory labelling to give sufficient information to inform consumers, or whether they would prefer a more interventionist approach – of government simply banning products which are harmful to the natural environment. Specifically, we tested whether the public favoured the introduction of minimum product standards – preventing products which fail to meet the standard from entering the market – and mandatory product labelling – indicating how negative the impact of a product's manufacturing or use is on the natural environment. The results are displayed in Chart 7.3 below.

Chart 7.3. UK public views on whether the UK Government should introduce minimum product standards and mandatory labelling to reduce the sale of products which harm the natural environment



Base: 2,000 UK adults

As Chart 7.3 above shows, the UK public widely supports both the introduction of minimum product standards (70% net agreement) and mandatory product labelling (67% net agreement), with around three in ten strongly supporting the introduction of both. The more interventionist approach of banning goods and services which are harmful to the natural environment is preferred, albeit marginally.

Again, there was variation by age. Those over 55 were more likely to support the introduction of both minimum product standards and mandatory product labelling (81% and 76% respectively) compared to those aged 18 to 34 (53% and 58% respectively). However, for all socio-demographic groups, there was a majority of support for both measures.

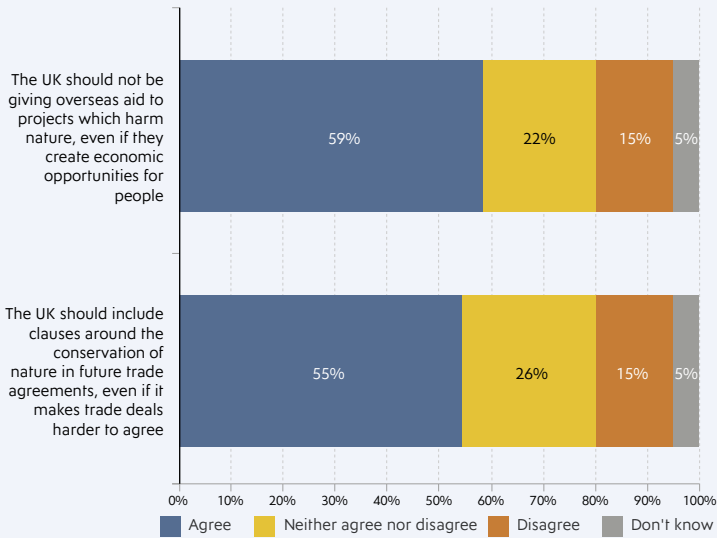
Trade-offs

Sometimes, government policy must prioritise one aim at the expense of another – in other words, there must be trade-offs. We were interested in investigating public attitudes towards the trade off between the natural environment and other foreign policy priorities, such as international poverty alleviation and economic growth through trade.

To gauge this, we asked the UK public to what extent they agreed with two statements. First, that the UK should not be giving overseas aid to projects which harm nature, even if those projects create economic opportunities for adults. And, second, that the UK should include clauses around the conservation of nature in future free trade agreements (FTAs), even if it makes those trade deals harder to agree.

As Chart 7.4 below shows, the majority of the UK public support limiting overseas aid and trade agreements for the protection of the natural environment (59% and 55% respectively).

Chart 7.4. Views of UK public on measures to protect the natural environment when granting UK aid or signing free trade agreements



Base: 2,000 UK adults

Variation across age was distinct, with support for both statements being notably higher among those over the age of 55. In the case of stopping overseas aid which harms the natural environment, a majority (73%) of those over 55 agreed with this premise whilst only a minority (43%) of those aged 18 to 34 did as well. The inclusion of conservation clauses within trade agreements, at the expense of making future trade deals easier to agree, was supported by a majority (63%) of over 55s and only a minority of 44% of those aged 18 to 34.

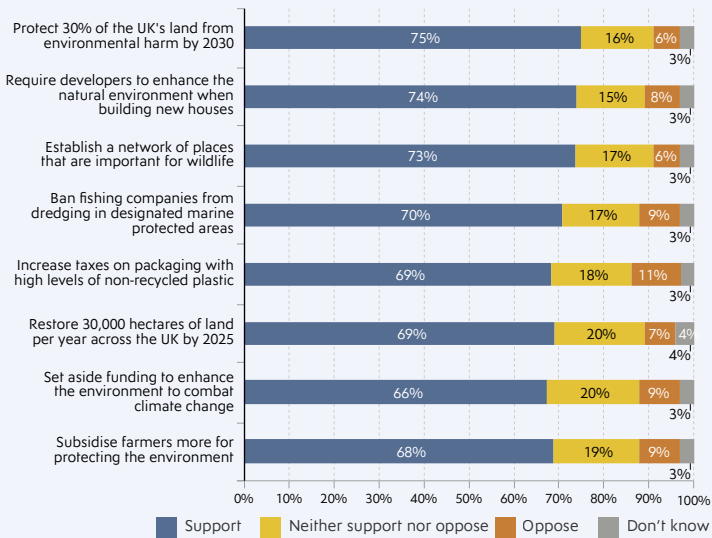
Interestingly, a majority of those living in rural (65%) and suburban (63%) areas supported halting overseas aid that harms the natural environment, whereas only a minority of those in urban areas (47%) held this view.

Assessing government policy

To deepen our understanding of the UK public's views towards government policy, our polling tested support for major existing UK Government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment both in the UK and internationally, shown below in Charts 7.5 and 7.6. The domestic policies, some of which were described in Chapter One, have all recently been announced by the UK Government. The international policies, in contrast, are a mixture of existing and potential future policies. The policies were chosen because, first, they pertain to a range of threats to the natural environment – including agriculture, fishing, the illegal wildlife trade and waste. Second, because they include a combination of policy approaches to protecting and enhancing the natural environment – both 'carrots' and 'sticks'. Third, because they include flagship policies of this UK Government for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

As Chart 7.5 below shows, the UK public strongly supports all of the UK Government's leading domestic policies polled to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK, with each receiving a majority of public support.

Chart 7.5. UK public support for actual UK Government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK



Base: 2,000 UK adults

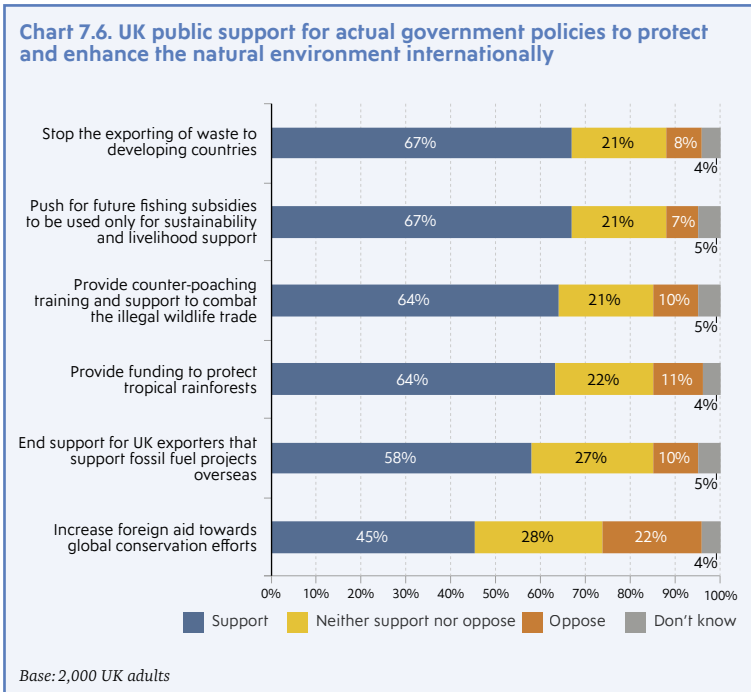
The UK Government's policy to protect 30% of the UK's land from environmental harm by 2030 was the most widely supported policy we tested (75%), followed by a requirement for developers to enhance the natural environment when building new houses (74%) and establishing a network of places that are important for wildlife (73%). Setting aside funding to enhance the environment to combat climate change received the lowest amount of public support relative to the other policies tested (66%), but still received an overwhelming majority.

Some trends between different socio-demographic groups emerged. Older adults are more likely to support all the UK Government's leading domestic policies tested than younger adults. For example, of those over 55, 85% supported banning fishing companies from dredging in designated Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), whereas only 54% of those aged 18 to 34 said the same. When it came to establishing a joined up

network of places that are important for wildlife, 84% of those over 55 supported this policy compared to 62% of those aged 18 to 34. However, a majority of every age group supported all of the policies tested.

A trend between adults who lived in different areas also emerged. The more rural someone lives, the more likely they are to support all the policies tested. For example, 77% of those living in a rural area supported banning fishing companies from dredging in designated MPAs, whereas only 59% of those living in urban areas said the same. When it came to requiring all developers to enhance the natural environment of a local area when building new houses, 81% of adults living in a rural area supported this policy, compared to only 66% of those living in an urban area. Again, a majority of each group defined by the area in which they live supported all of the policies tested.

We then tested support for leading or possible UK Government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment internationally. The results of this are displayed in Chart 7.6 below.



As Chart 7.6 above highlights, we see a majority of the UK public support all tested policies for protecting and enhancing the natural environment internationally, except increasing foreign aid towards global conservation efforts (45%), but a plurality still support this UK Government policy. Stopping the exporting of waste to developing countries, which was promised in the 2019 Conservative Government's election manifesto, is the policy with the highest level of public support (67%), followed by pushing for future fishing subsidies to be used only for sustainability and livelihood support (67%) and providing counter-poaching training and support to combat the illegal wildlife trade (64%).

When looking particularly at support for increasing foreign aid towards global conservation efforts, a slim majority of younger adults (54%) support this as a UK Government foreign policy to protect and

enhance the natural environment, whereas only 38% of those over the age of 55 said the same. When broken down by social grade, we also see that a very slim majority (50%) of those who are more affluent support foreign aid compared to a minority (38%) of those less affluent.

Overall, between Chart 7.5 and 7.6, we can see that public support for leading existing and proposed UK Government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment internationally is marginally weaker than for leading existing domestic policies.

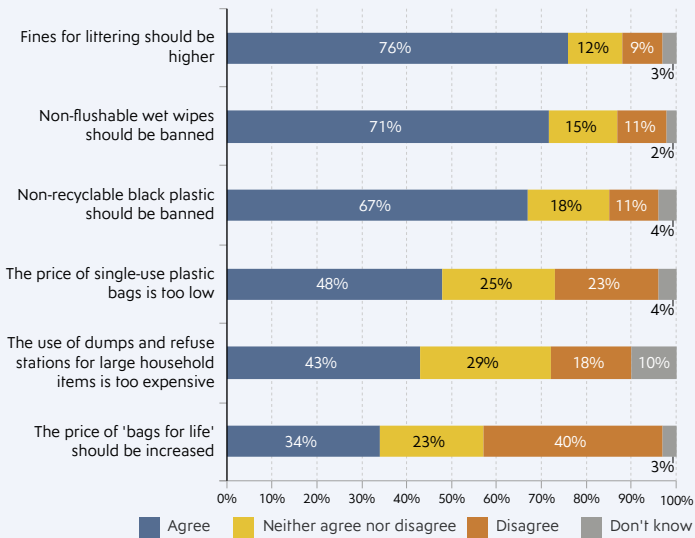
Future policies

Having assessed the UK public's opinion of leading existing UK Government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment domestically, we wanted to gauge the public's opinion further on possible future policies which the UK Government could adopt for nature in the UK.

In 2020, Bright Blue published our report *Global green giant?*, which put forward over 40 policy recommendations to help stem the tide of biodiversity decline.²² We took a number of these policies which related to reducing waste, and polled the UK public to see to what extent they agreed or disagreed with them. The results are displayed in Chart 7.7 below.

22. Patrick Hall and William Nicolle, "Global green giant? A policy story", *Bright Blue*, <http://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Global-green-giant-a-policy-story.pdf> (2020).

Chart 7.7. UK public support for possible future UK Government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK



Base: 2,000 UK adults

As Chart 7.7 above shows, a significant majority of the UK public (76%) felt that fines for littering should be higher, the most popular policy idea polled. Generally, we see that banning products which are harmful to the natural environment is more popular than charging a premium for them, mirroring the slightly higher support for a more interventionist approach from government which we unearthed earlier in this chapter. For example, a majority of the public supported banning non-flushable wet wipes (71%) and non-recyclable black plastic (67%), the second and third most popular future domestic policies we polled.

Despite a minority (43%) of the public agreeing that the use of dumps and refuse stations for large household items is too expensive, there was little disagreement with this statement (18%). Increasing the price of 'bags for life' was the least popular policy of those polled, with 34% of the public agreeing, while 40% disagreed.

The only notable difference between socio-demographic groups was again based on age, with those over 55 being more likely than those aged 18 to 34 to support higher fines for littering (85% and 63% respectively); a ban on non-flushable wet wipes (83% and 57% respectively); and a ban on non-recyclable black plastic (77% and 57% respectively). It should be noted, however, that there is majority support for all these possible domestic policies across age groups.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the UK public marginally favours more interventionist rather than incentive-based government policies for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

When it came to trade-offs between different foreign policy priorities, we see that the UK public was prepared to make sacrifices to priorities of the UK's overseas aid and trade deals in order to protect the natural environment.

There is widespread support amongst the UK public for the UK Government's policy agenda for protecting and enhancing the natural environment, especially domestic policies.

Age was a recurring factor in divergence of views. Older adults tended to favour 'sticks' more than younger adults.

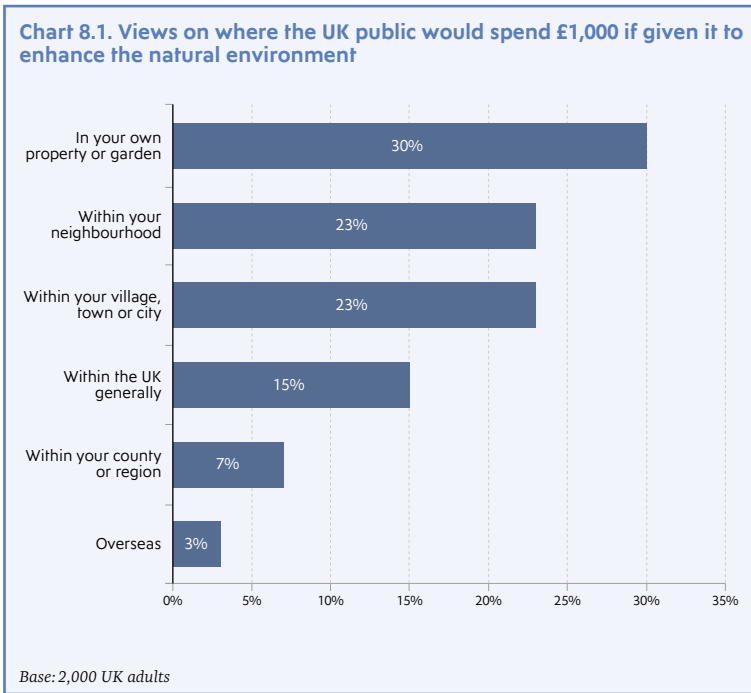
Having gauged public opinion towards specific government policies pertaining to the natural environment, in the next chapter, we explore public views on policies relating to the incorporation of the natural environment into their neighbourhood.

Chapter 8: Nature and neighbourhoods

As the previous chapter highlighted, there is strong public support for a wide range of government policies to protect and enhance the natural environment both domestically and overseas. In this chapter, we move closer to home to look at the public's attitudes towards incorporating features of the natural environment into their own neighbourhoods, since we suspect that the public's conservationism prioritises their local area. Specifically, we explore the role of nature in choosing and changing the neighbourhoods people live in.

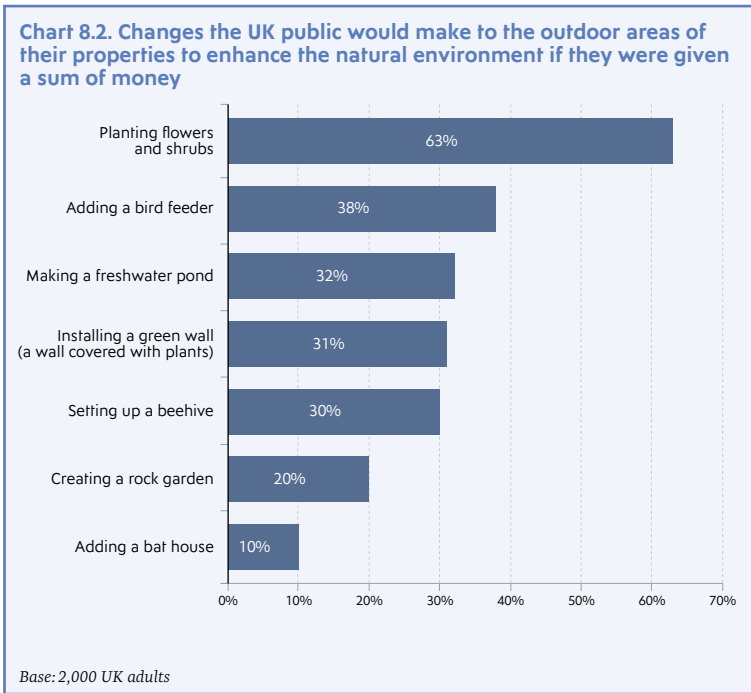
Scope of conservationism

We assessed the scope of the public's conservationism – whether it was closer to home or further afield. To do this, we asked the UK public where they would spend £1,000 if it was given to them to enhance the natural environment. The results are displayed in Chart 8.1 below.



As Chart 8.1 above shows, the UK public are most likely to spend the money in their own property or garden (30%), followed by their neighbourhood (23%) and village, town or city (23%). They were least likely to spend the money enhancing the natural environment overseas (3%). Given the majority of adults (53%) would spend the sum of £1,000 in their own property or neighbourhood, it suggests that the UK public's conservationism is largely local, with respondents wanting to see enhancements to the natural environment closest to them.

Considering the UK public's conservationism is largely local, with respondents most likely to spend money on their own property or garden, we then asked respondents to select their top three specific changes which they would make to the outdoor areas of their properties to enhance the natural environment, if they were given a sum of money to do so. Chart 8.2 below illustrates the findings.

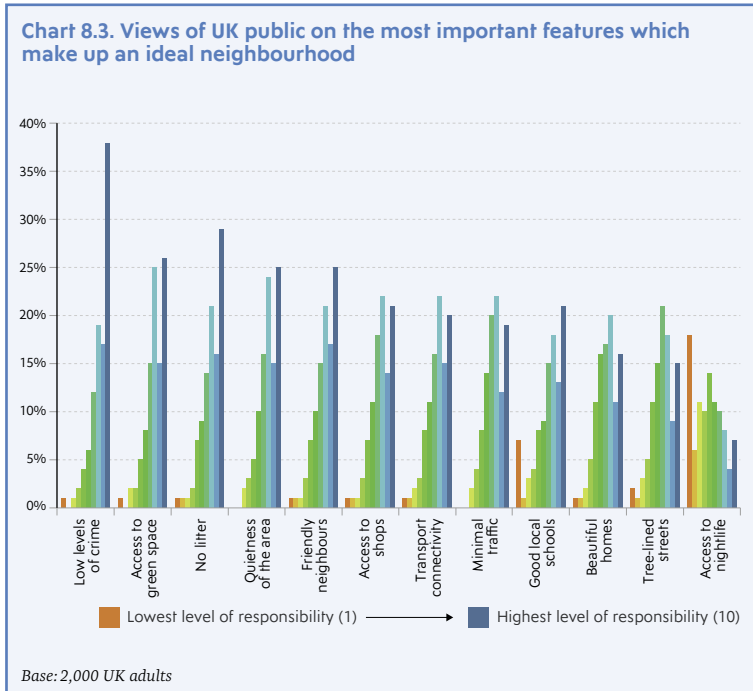


As Chart 8.2 above displays, planting flowers and shrubs was the most popular change the UK public would make in their own property (63%) to enhance the natural environment. Adding a bird feeder to their outdoor area and making a freshwater pond were the second (38%) and third (32%) most popular changes, but had significantly less interest. Adding a bat house was the least popular option, with only 10% of the public saying they would make this change to the outdoor area of their property to enhance the natural environment.

Neighbourhoods

Having established that the UK public prioritises conservationism much closer to home, in their own home or neighbourhood, we wanted to understand how important features of the natural environment – such as green space and tree-lined streets – were to the UK public, in comparison

to other features, when thinking about the ideal neighbourhood to live in. To do this, we asked adults to rank the importance of different features which might make up an ideal neighbourhood from one to ten; one being not important at all and ten being extremely important. Scores between eight and ten indicate a very high level of importance. The results are displayed in Chart 8.3 below.



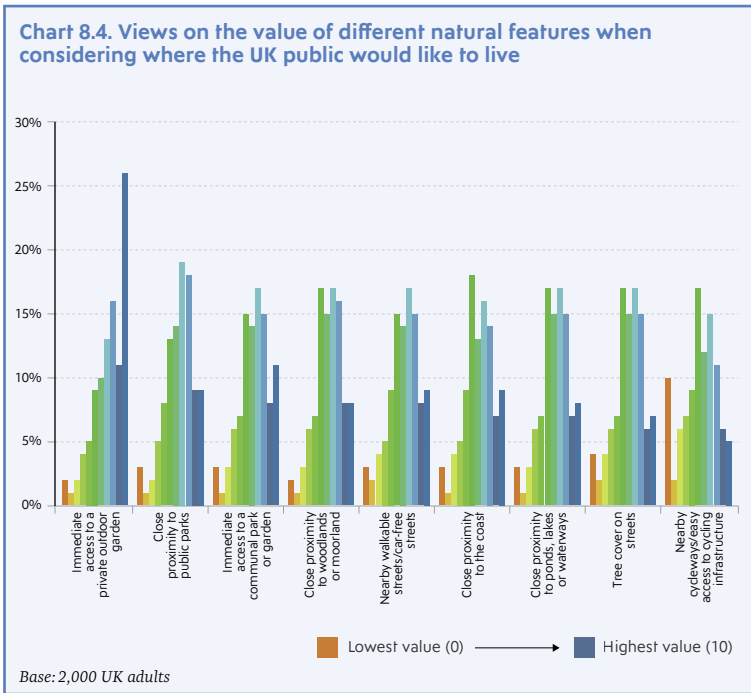
As Chart 8.3 above shows, the UK public considers low crime levels to be the most important feature of an ideal neighbourhood. Almost three quarters (74%) of adults thought it was of very high importance, and 38% said it was extremely important, giving it a score of ten. Access to green space was ranked second-equal in importance, with 66% of adults considering it of very high importance. Having no litter was the other feature ranked second-equal, with 66% of adults believing it is of very

high importance.

The other feature of the natural environment polled, tree-lined streets, did not rank so highly compared to other features. Only 42% of adults felt it was of very high importance. Nevertheless, tree-lined streets were considered of greater importance than access to nightlife, which ranked the lowest with only 20% of adults considering it of very high importance.

Older adults are more likely to consider access to green space and no litter – the most popular environmental features of an ideal neighbourhood – as being of very high importance than younger adults. Of those over 55, 74% scored access to green space as having a very high importance compared to 55% of those aged 18 to 34. When it came to having no litter, a significant majority of those over 55 felt this was a feature of very high importance (75%) compared to 56% of those aged 18 to 34.

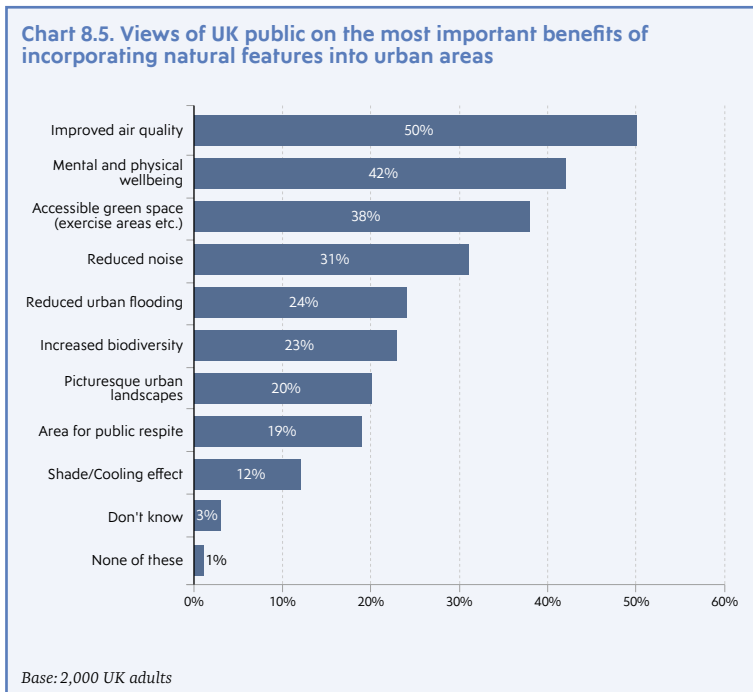
When assessing the value the UK public places on different natural features when considering where they would like to live, we see in Chart 8.4 below that green space – including private outdoor gardens, public parks and communal parks or gardens – ranks highly again. The public ranked different natural features from zero to ten, with zero being of no value at all and ten being the highest value. Scores between eight and ten indicate very high value.



As Chart 8.4 above demonstrates, the UK public felt that having immediate access to a private outdoor garden was the most valuable natural feature when considering where they would like to live, with the majority (54%) of adults considering this to be of very high value. Close proximity to public parks and having immediate access to a communal park or garden were the second and third most valued natural features, with 36% and 33% of the public respectively considering them to be of very high value. Having nearby cycleways and easy access to cycling infrastructure was the least valued, with only 22% of adults attributing a score between eight and ten.

There were notable variations by age. Having immediate access to a private outdoor garden was most valued by older adults, with two out of three (68%) considering it very high value (a score between eight and ten). Only one out of three (35%) younger adults said the same.

We also wanted to test what the UK public thought were the main benefits of incorporating nature into their neighbourhoods. In Chart 8.5 below, we identify what the public sees as the most important benefits of incorporating natural features into urban areas by asking them to select their top three.



As Chart 8.5 identifies, a slim majority (50%) of the UK public recognised improved air quality as one of the most important benefits of incorporating natural features into urban areas. This echoes Chart 4.7 much earlier, which showed that the public most widely recognised tackling air pollution as a benefit of the natural environment overall. The benefits of mental and physical well being, and having accessible green space which can be used for activities such as exercise, also ranked highly in importance amongst the

public; 42% and 38% respectively.

The shade and cooling effect created by incorporating natural features such as tree planting in urban areas was the least recognised by the UK public as a benefit (12%).

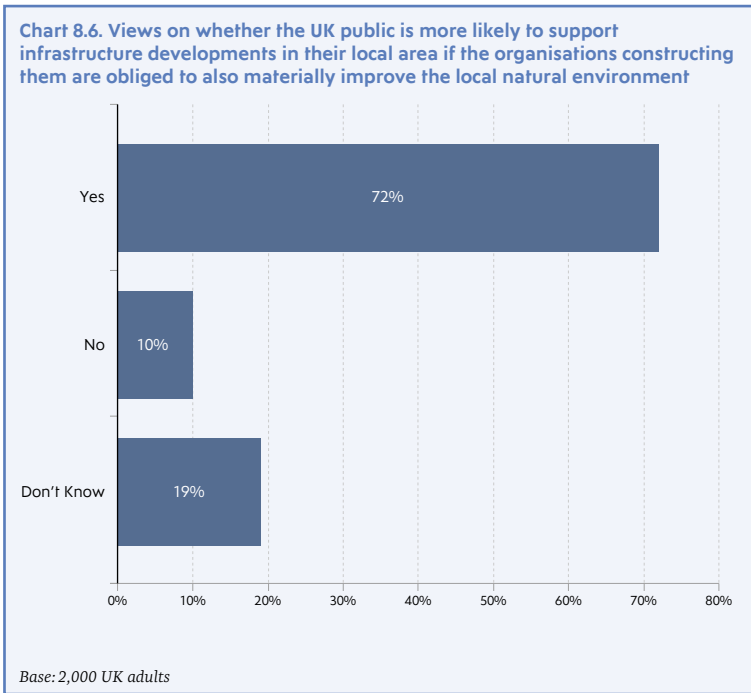
New infrastructure and development in neighbourhoods

We then wanted to explore how receptive the UK public are to the building of new infrastructure and developments in their neighbourhood if the natural environment is enhanced – what politicians and policymakers encouragingly claim to be the ‘biodiversity net gain principle’.²³

Major infrastructure developments – such as a new railway line, road upgrade or flood defence scheme – can have adverse effects on the natural environment. Recently, the UK Government announced that it will be amending its flagship Environment Bill to require a ‘biodiversity net gain’ for nationally significant infrastructure projects.²⁴ We therefore asked whether the public would be more likely to support infrastructure developments in their local area if the organisations constructing them were obliged to materially improve the natural environment in that local area. The results are displayed in Chart 8.6 below.

23. Natural Capital Committee, “Net environmental gain: The Natural Capital Committee’s response to Defra’s consultation”, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/909268/ncc-advice-net-gain-response1.pdf (2019).

24. HM Treasury, “The economics of biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review – Government response”, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/993290/MASTER_Dasgupta_Response__web.pdf (2021), 6.

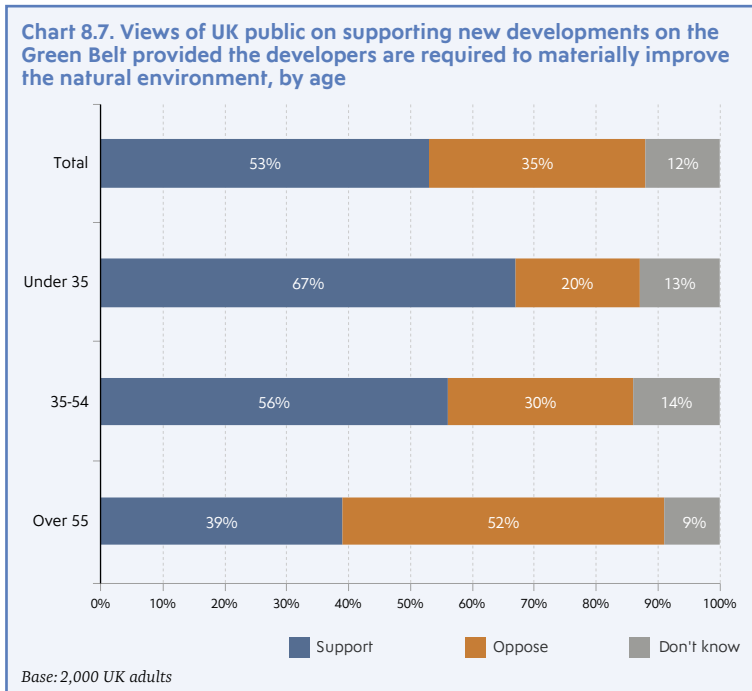


Evidently, the UK public is much more likely to support infrastructure development if it is accompanied by an obligation to materially improve the natural environment in the same area where such developments are occurring, as Chart 8.6 above shows. A significant majority (72%) of adults said they would be more likely to support infrastructure development under such a caveat, compared to only 10% of adults saying it wouldn't influence their decision to support or oppose developments.

This public support bodes well for the introduction of a biodiversity net gain principle – requiring development to leave the natural environment in a better state than before – which is in the current UK Government's Environment Bill.²⁵

25. UK Parliament, "Environment bill", <https://bills.parliament.uk/Publications/41447/Documents/196/21003.pdf> (2020).

With growing political pressure on central and local government to free up more land for housing development, we asked the UK public whether they would be more likely to support new developments on the Green Belt, provided that developers are required to materially improve the natural environment on the Green Belt. The results can be seen in Chart 8.7 below.



As Chart 8.7 above shows, a slim majority of the public (53%) would support new developments on the Green Belt under the proviso that they improved the natural environment there.

But opinions distinctly vary by age, with a majority (52%) of those over the age of 55 opposing new developments on the Green Belt, even if they materially improved the natural environment, in contrast to only 20% of those between the ages of 18 to 34. A clear majority of

under 35s support new developments on the Green Belt if developers materially enhance the local natural environment.

Support for developments on the Green Belt if the natural environment is enhanced was also high amongst those who live in London (65%), compared to less than 55% for all other regions. Similarly, 65% of those who live in urban areas support Green Belt development if it materially improves the natural environment, compared to only minorities in suburban and rural areas (49% and 43% respectively).

Overall, a biodiversity net gain principle to materially enhance the natural environment when developing on the Green Belt is supported, but only just, and less so than when it is applicable for infrastructure developments.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the focus of the UK public's conservationism is largely local. Given the opportunity to enhance the natural environment within their own homes and gardens, the UK public is most likely to plant flowers or shrubs.

Looking beyond their homes, the UK public somewhat recognises the benefits of nature within neighbourhoods, and believe that access to green space and streets free of litter are important environmental features in an ideal neighbourhood.

Finally, this chapter showed that the UK public supports a biodiversity net gain principle for new infrastructure and housing development.

The next chapter will conclude the findings of this report, highlighting key trends.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This report has unearthed how the public values and engages with the natural environment, who they believe is responsible for its protection and enhancement, and what needs to be done by different actors to safeguard it. It explains how public attitudes varied according to different socio-demographic characteristics.

The report revealed 12 main findings:

- **The natural environment is not as much of a domestic or foreign public policy concern for the UK public relative to other policy areas.** The COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare and the economy were the top three domestic policy areas of greatest concern to the UK public. Climate change came fourth, and the natural environment came sixth after immigration. When assessing the UK public's foreign policy priorities, we see human health and safeguarding national security as the top priorities, followed by climate change. Nature conservation came much further below, behind poverty alleviation, defending human rights and free trade. In the context of foreign policy priorities, older adults were more likely to consider climate change a priority than younger people.
- **A majority of the UK public frequents some elements of the natural environment on at least a monthly basis.** Urban green space and parks are the most visited type of natural

environment in the UK. Younger adults are more likely to have spent time in each different type of the natural environment which we tested than older adults. Similarly, those from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to have spent time in each different type of the natural environment which we tested than those from less affluent backgrounds.

- **A majority of the UK public think that all different types of the natural environment we asked about are of good or excellent quality, except wetlands.** Those which were most perceived to be of good or excellent quality were, first, woods and forests, followed by coastal/sea areas and rivers or lakes.
- **A majority of the UK public values different benefits associated with the natural environment, but isn't prepared to pay to access it.** The UK public values the eudemonic benefits of spending time in the natural environment, particularly enjoying beauty, improved mental wellbeing and observing wildlife. Similarly, the public strongly values the ecosystem services which the natural environment provides in tackling wider societal challenges, especially improved air quality, reduced flooding and improved health and wellbeing. Despite valuing the benefits associated with the natural environment, an overall majority of the UK public is not willing to pay to access the natural environment, not even less than £5, even if the money spent went towards the protection and enhancement of the specific type of natural environment accessed. Older people are more likely to value the benefits of spending time in the natural environment than younger people. However, younger people are more likely than older people to be prepared to pay to access different types of the natural environment, if the money spent went towards its protection and enhancement.
- **The UK public believes that government agencies and national government should have the highest levels of responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.** The largest majorities of the UK public believe

government agencies and national government *should* have very high levels of responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, followed by local government and private landowners or farmers. In contrast to what the UK public think *should* be the case, no actor is attributed with *actually* having a very high level of responsibility by a majority of the public. Older people are more likely than younger people to believe all actors *should* have higher levels of responsibility.

- **With the exception of charities and voluntary groups, a majority of the UK public believes all other actors are not doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK.** In particular, only about a third of the public believe that local authorities are doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK, and even less said the same about all other actors – including local authorities, the UK Government, the UK public, devolved administrations and businesses – which we polled. Younger adults were more likely to feel that the public themselves and businesses were doing enough to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK than older people. By contrast, they were more likely to disagree that charities and voluntary groups were doing enough than older adults.
- **The UK public believes that individuals will have to adopt a number of behavioural changes to reduce their environmental impact, and some of those behaviours have already been adopted by a substantial number of adults.** Recycling and reducing food waste were seen by a majority of the UK public as the most important behaviours for the UK public to undertake to protect and enhance the natural environment. Furthermore, for all behavioural changes tested, especially recycling and reducing food waste, a majority of adults have either already started making these changes or are considering doing so, with the exception of volunteering for environmental causes. Younger adults were more receptive to making behavioural changes such as active

travel and dietary changes, and older adults were more likely to have made behavioural changes such as recycling and reducing food waste.

- **The UK public marginally favours an interventionist as opposed to an incentive-based policy approach from government to protect and enhance the natural environment.** For policy measures for individuals, a majority of the public favours bans on harmful products over subsidies for sustainable ones. But when it comes to increasing taxes on businesses which harm the natural environment or providing tax breaks to those which minimise their environmental impact, the public is exactly divided. Older adults favoured bans and taxes, whereas younger adults preferred subsidies and tax breaks. When it came to testing public support for various existing or possible government policies, those which included bans, fines and restrictions tended to be more strongly supported than those which included financial incentives.
- **A firm majority of the UK public is prepared to support certain trade offs in our foreign policy to prioritise the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.** Majorities of the public agreed that the UK should not be giving aid to projects which harm nature, even if they create economic opportunities for people, and that the UK should include clauses around the conservation of nature in future Free Trade Agreements, even if it makes trade deals harder to agree. Older adults were more likely to agree with both statements than younger adults.
- **There is widespread support amongst the UK public for the UK Government's domestic and international policy agenda regarding the natural environment.** Strong majorities of the public support all of the leading domestic and international UK Government policies pertaining to the natural environment, except for increasing foreign aid towards global conservation efforts. In particular, the UK public is highly supportive of

protecting 30% of the UK's land from environmental harm by 2030, requiring developers to enhance the natural environment when building houses, stopping the export of waste to developing countries, and pushing for future fishing subsidies to be used only for sustainability and livelihood support.

- **The UK public's conservatism is largely local.** If given £1,000 to spend on protecting and enhancing the natural environment, the public is most likely to spend the sum on their own property, followed by their own neighbourhood, then within their village, town or city. The public is least likely to spend the sum of money to protect and enhance the natural environment overseas.
- **The UK public is more likely to support both infrastructure and housing development in their local area under a biodiversity net gain principle.** An overwhelming majority of the public would be more likely to support infrastructure projects, provided that they materially improved the natural environment. A smaller majority would support new developments on the Green Belt under the same caveat. Younger adults are much more likely to support development on the Green Belt under a biodiversity net gain principle than older adults.

Variation according to different socio-demographic characteristics

There were very occasional differences in attitudes towards the natural environment across socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender and where adults lived. However, there were frequent variations in attitudes by age.

Though specific differences vary from question to question, we broadly find that older adults are more likely to be concerned about the natural environment and expect a higher level of responsibility from all different actors for its protection and enhancement than younger adults. Additionally, we observe that older adults are more likely to

favour 'sticks' over 'carrots' for policies to get individuals and businesses to better protect and enhance the natural environment, whereas the opposite is true for younger adults.

Conclusion

Whilst the natural environment may not be relatively high on the UK public's list of policy priorities, this report has nonetheless demonstrated that the majority of the UK public engages with the natural environment, frequenting it regularly and widely recognising its associated benefits.

The UK public sees government agencies and national government as those who should be most responsible for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. In the face of biodiversity decline, occurring both in the UK and globally, national government has a mandate to go further and faster to protect and enhance the natural environment.

The Government can take solace in the fact that its policy agenda towards the natural environment is well received by the UK public. When devising further policies which to protect and enhance the natural environment, policymakers should consider that the UK public marginally favours 'sticks' over 'carrots'.

But responsibility for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment does not solely lie with government – all of us have a role to play. This report shows that the UK public recognises individuals themselves will have to adopt a number of behavioural changes to reduce their impact on the natural environment, and many already have.

The UK public's conservationism is predominantly local: adults want to see material improvements to the natural environment closer to home. With the insights from this report, the UK Government ought to be able to build upon its popular agenda for the necessary protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Annex

Polling questions

1) Looking at the following topics/issues, which are of greatest concern to you? [Select up to three answers]

- The economy
- The natural environment
- Education and schools
- Climate change
- Foreign affairs and trade
- Transport
- Welfare and social security
- Immigration
- Brexit
- COVID-19 pandemic
- Police and crime
- Unemployment
- Housing
- The NHS/healthcare
- Don't know

2) Here are the three topics you selected. Which of these is your single greatest concern? [Select one answer]

3) Out of the following foreign policy priorities, which do you believe should be most important to the UK Government? [Select up to three answers]

- Safeguarding national security
- Poverty alleviation
- Defending human rights
- Nature conservation
- Free trade
- Human health
- Combating climate change
- Advocating for Britons abroad
- Preventing and resolving global conflict

4) Of the following threats facing the natural environment in the UK, which do you think are the most important? [Select up to three answers]

- Climate change
- Decline in number and diversity of plants and animals
- Poor water quality in rivers and streams
- Destruction of marine habitats
- Deforestation
- Air pollution
- Plastic pollution
- Fly-tipping and littering
- Extinction of endangered species
- Flooding/rising sea levels
- Animal cruelty
- Intensive farming practices
- Overdevelopment of land with buildings and infrastructure
- Other (please specify)
- None of these

5) And from the same list, which of the following threats are the most significant to the natural environment globally? [Select up to three answers]

- Climate change
- Decline in number and diversity of plants and animals
- Poor water quality in rivers and streams
- Destruction of marine habitats
- Deforestation
- Air pollution
- Plastic pollution
- Fly-tipping and littering
- Extinction of endangered species
- Flooding/rising sea levels
- Animal cruelty
- Intensive farming practices
- Overdevelopment of land with buildings and infrastructure
- Other (please specify)
- None of these

6) If you were given £1,000 to spend on improving the natural environment in one of the following areas, where would you choose to spend it? [Select one option]

- In your own property or garden
- Within your neighbourhood
- Within your village, town or city
- Within your country or region
- Within the UK generally
- Overseas

7) If you were given some money to make the following changes to the outdoor areas of where you live to improve its natural environment, which would you prioritise? [Select up to three answers]

- Planting flowers and shrubs
- Setting up a beehive
- Adding a bird feeder
- Adding a bat house
- Creating a rock garden
- Making a freshwater pond
- Installing a green wall (a wall covered with plants)
- Something else (please specify)

8) How frequently, if at all, do you spend time in the following natural environments in the UK? Please answer for how you spent your time prior to current COVID lockdown restrictions. [Daily, weekly, monthly, a few times a year, around once a year or less, never]

- Coastal/sea areas
- Farmland or grassland
- Rivers or lakes, or land around rivers or lakes
- Heathland and moorland
- Urban green space and parks
- Woods and forests
- Wetlands e.g. fens, estuaries and bogs
- High, rocky, mountainous areas

9) Which would you regard as the most valuable natural environment in the UK? [Select one option]

- Coastal/sea areas
- Farmland or grassland
- Rivers or lakes, or land around rivers or lakes
- Heathland and moorland
- Urban green space and parks
- Woods and forests
- Wetlands e.g. fens, estuaries and bogs
- High, rocky, mountainous areas

10) How would you describe the quality of these natural environments in the UK? [Excellent, good, fair, poor, don't know]

- Coastal/sea areas
- Farmland or grassland
- Rivers or lakes, or land around rivers or lakes
- Heathland and moorland
- Urban green space and parks
- Woods and forests
- Wetlands e.g. fens, estuaries and bogs
- High, rocky, mountainous areas

11) How much would you be willing to pay to access each of the following natural environments, if the amount paid went towards the protection and enhancement of that natural environment? [A fee of £5 or more, a fee of up to £5, not willing to pay for access to this, don't know]

- Coastal/sea areas
- Farmland or grassland
- Rivers or lakes, or land around rivers or lakes
- Heathland and moorland
- Urban green space and parks
- Woods and forests
- Wetlands e.g. fens, estuaries and bogs
- High, rocky, mountainous areas

12) Which of the following benefits, if any, do you value about spending time in natural environments? [Select all that apply]

- Improved mental wellbeing
- Improved physical health
- Enjoying beauty
- Chance for reflection
- Socialising with others
- Observing wildlife
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

13) How important, if at all, would you say the role for the natural environment is for the following challenges? [Very important, somewhat important, not important]

- Improving air quality
- Capturing and storing carbon emissions
- Reducing flooding
- Improving soil quality (e.g. protect and enhance forests to stabilise soils and slow water runoff)
- Preventing coastal erosion and land loss
- Cooling urban areas in summer
- Improving health and well-being

14) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following groups are doing enough to protect the natural environment? [Strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, strongly agree]

- The UK Government
- My local authority
- Private businesses
- The UK public
- Charities and voluntary groups (e.g. National Trust)
- My devolved administration

15) How much responsibility do you think each of the following should have for protecting and enhancing the natural environment in the UK? [Scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is having a very low level of responsibility and 10 is having a very high level of responsibility]

- International organisations (e.g. the UN)
- National government (e.g. the UK Government and devolved administrations)
- Local government (e.g. local mayors, councils and boroughs)
- Government agencies (e.g. Environment Agency)
- Businesses
- Charities and voluntary groups (e.g. National Trust)
- Private landowners, land managers or farmers
- The UK public

16) And how much responsibility do you think the following actually have for protecting and enhancing the natural environment in the UK? [Scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is having a very low level of responsibility and 10 is having a very high level of responsibility]

- International organisations (e.g. the UN)
- National government (e.g. the UK Government and devolved administrations)
- Local government (e.g. local mayors, councils and boroughs)
- Government agencies (e.g. Environment Agency)
- Businesses
- Charities and voluntary groups (e.g. National Trust)
- Private landowners, land managers or farmers
- The UK public

17) Which of the following activities do you think are most important for the public to undertake to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK? [Select the top three you think will have the greatest impact]

- Reduce consumption of meat
- Reduce consumption of dairy products
- Buy less and reuse more
- Purchase long-lasting products
- Recycle
- Increase walking as a mode of transport
- Increase cycling as a mode of transport
- Donate money to environmental causes
- Volunteer for environmental causes
- Grow plants which insects can thrive on
- Feed birds in their backyard
- Put up nest boxes (boxes for birds and bats)
- Buy in-season produce
- Reduce food waste
- Other (please specify)

18) And which of the following activities have you already done or are considering doing to protect and enhance the natural environment? [I already do/have done this, I am considering doing this, I am not going to do this, not sure]

- Reduce consumption of meat
- Reduce consumption of dairy products
- Buy less and reuse more
- Purchase long-lasting products
- Recycle
- Increase walking as a mode of transport
- Increase cycling as a mode of transport
- Donate money to environmental causes
- Volunteer for environmental causes
- Grow plants which insects can thrive on
- Feed birds in your backyard
- Put up nest boxes (boxes for birds and bats)
- Buy in-season produce
- Reduce food waste
- Other (please specify)

19) What aspect of protection and enhancement of the natural environment are you currently involved in or would you be interested in volunteering for? [Select all that apply]

- Tree planting
- Education and outreach
- Rivers and streams clean-up
- Beach clean-up
- Clearing urban litter
- Habitat maintenance
- Endangered species protection
- Something else (please specify)

20) Would you be willing to pay more for the following goods and services which have a negative impact on the natural environment? [Yes, no, don't know]

- Cosmetics
- Cleaning products
- Food
- Products which aren't packaged in biodegradable, sustainable packaging
- Clothing
- Paper
- Batteries
- Tyres
- Electronic products
- Appliances/white goods

21) If you absolutely had to choose one, which of the following options for UK Government action should be prioritised in your view? [Select one option]

- The UK Government should focus on providing financial aid that encourages individuals to make choices and buy products that produce less harm to the natural environment
- The UK Government should introduce laws that ban products and behaviours which increase harm to the natural environment

22) Again if you had to choose one over the other, which of these options for the UK Government action should be prioritised in your view? [Select one option]

- The UK Government should focus on providing financial subsidies, like grants and tax cuts, for businesses that produce and sell goods and services that are less harmful to the natural environment
- The UK Government should increase taxes on businesses that produce and sell goods and services that are harmful to the natural environment

23) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, strongly agree]

- The UK Government should introduce minimum product standards for goods and services to prevent those which harm the natural environment from entering the market
- The UK Government should introduce mandatory product labelling indicating how negative the impact of a product's manufacturing or use is on the natural environment

24) Do you support or oppose the following measures by the UK Government to protect and enhance the natural environment in the UK? [Strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose, strongly oppose]

- Protect 30% of the UK's land from environmental harm by 2030
- Naturally restore 30,000 hectares of land across the UK by 2025
- Establish a joined-up network of places that are important for wild plants and animals
- Subsidise farmers more for protecting and enhancing the natural environment
- Set aside a large amount of funding to restore and enhance the natural environment as a way of combating climate change
- Require all developers to enhance the natural environment of a local area when building new houses
- Ban fishing companies from dragging nets across the sea floor to catch fish in areas of designated marine protection
- Increase taxes on the manufacture or import of packaging with high levels of non-recyclable plastic

25) Do you support or oppose the following measures by the UK Government to protect and enhance the natural environment internationally? [Strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose, strongly oppose]

- Campaign for an international agreement that future fishing subsidies will only be used for sustainability and livelihood support, and nothing else
- Increase foreign aid towards global conservation efforts
- End financial support for UK-based exports that support fossil fuel projects overseas
- Provide funding to protect tropical rainforests
- Stop the exporting of waste to developing countries
- Provide counter-poaching training and financial support to poorer countries to combat the illegal wildlife trade

26) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, strongly agree]

- The UK Government should not be giving aid or export finance to projects which harm nature, even if they create economic opportunities for people in developing countries
- The UK should seek to include clauses around the conservation of nature in future trade agreements, even if this makes trade deals harder to agree

27) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, strongly agree]

- Non-recyclable black plastic should be banned
- The price of single use plastic bags is too low
- The price of 'bags for life' should be increased
- Non-flushable wet wipes should be banned
- The use of dumps and refuse stations for large household items is too expensive
- Fines for littering should be higher

28) How much value do you place on the following factors when considering where you would like to live? [Scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is no value at all and 10 is the highest value]

- Close proximity to public parks
- Close proximity to ponds, lakes or waterways
- Immediate access to a private outdoor garden
- Immediate access to a communal park or garden
- Nearby cycleways/easy access to cycling infrastructure
- Nearby walkable streets/car-free streets
- Tree cover on streets
- Close proximity to the coast
- Close proximity to woodlands or moorland

29) Would you be more likely to support infrastructure developments in your local area – such as a railway line, road upgrade or flood defence scheme – if those organisations constructing them are obliged to also materially improve the local natural environment?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

30) In the UK, the green belt is a specially designated area of countryside protected from most forms of development. To what extent would you support or oppose new developments in the green belt provided developers are obliged to enhance the natural environment in those same areas?


- Strongly support
- Tend to support
- Tend to oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know

31) When thinking about the ideal neighbourhood/community to live in, how important are the following factors? [Scale 1 to 10, where 1 is not important at all and 10 is extremely important]

- Access to shops
- Access to green space
- Access to nightlife
- Low level of crime
- Quietness of the area
- Friendly neighbours
- Tree-lined streets
- Beautiful homes
- Traffic connectivity
- Minimal traffic
- Good local schools
- No litter

32) When considering the benefits of incorporating nature into urban environments, which are most important to you? [Select up to three options]

- Improved air quality
- Mental and physical wellbeing
- Picturesque urban landscapes
- Increased biodiversity
- Shade/cooling effect
- Reduced noise
- Area for public respite
- Accessible green space (exercise areas etc.)
- Reduced urban flooding
- Don't know
- None of these



The state of the natural environment in the UK and overseas is in critical condition, with habitats being lost and species in decline. More ambitious policies from government are required to protect and enhance the natural environment, as are behavioural changes from individuals to minimise their environmental impact.

This report examines UK public attitudes towards the natural environment. It looks at how the public engages with, values and rates the natural environment, who they believe is responsible for its protection and enhancement, and what needs to be done by both government and individuals to safeguard it.

Bright Blue Campaign
brightblue.org.uk

ISBN: 978-1-911128-25-0