

# BRIEFING



The Government's Natural Environment White Paper

9 June 2011

## *“The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature”*

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has this week published a White Paper - **“The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature”** - setting out policy proposals for the protection and improvement of the natural environment. It is the first such policy statement from Government for more than 20 years.

A central theme of the White Paper is the value that the natural environment can provide to society and the economy as well as its intrinsic importance.

Key proposals are to:

- Establish Local Nature Partnerships which could operate across local authority boundaries and Defra sees as complementing and working with Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Create new Nature Improvement Areas to create critical mass in protecting and enhancing the natural environment
- Protect nature through the planning system
- Establish a new, voluntary approach to biodiversity offsets and test this approach in pilot areas
- Grow the green economy and place the concept of “natural capital” at the centre of the Government’s economic thinking
- Create a new “Local Green Areas” designation to enable people to protect the green areas that are important to them
- Establish a Green Infrastructure Partnership
- Continue to push for effective international action to protect the natural environment and promote biodiversity.

For HBF a key issue will be any impact of the White Paper’s thinking on planning policy – particularly the new National Planning Policy Framework – linked in turn to the proposed new designation for Local Green Areas.

The proposed new designation is a commitment that was included in last year’s Coalition Agreement to establish the Government’s programme for the period of the current parliament. It has been scheduled for consultation by DCLG and Defra later this year with a view to introduction in April 2012. Ensuring that such a designation does not undermine the pro-growth and pro-development aims of DCLG and the Treasury in formulating the NPPF will be an important focus for our work on planning change in coming months.

We will also discuss with members the proposed trials for biodiversity offsetting (paragraphs 2.38 to 2.42 of the White Paper). We have previously raised with Defra and DCLG our concern that any such policy should not become another general and significant tax on home builders and it is welcome

therefore that the idea is only proposed for testing at this stage. We would be interested to learn of any member interest in being involved in any pilot schemes established.

A copy of the White Paper can be downloaded via the following link:

<http://www.archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/documents/newp-white-paper-110607.pdf>

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