

Motion on environmental and habitat protection in planning, land management and energy policy.

Council notes:

There is widespread anger in response to government plans to remove fundamental legal protections for our environment. Opposition has come from many organisations including the RSPB, the National Trust, the Wildlife Trusts and Friends of the Earth.

The government is removing protection for nature in a three-pronged strategy by:

- 1) Scrapping planning rules that protect nature in new 'investment zones' covering huge areas of the country.[1] [2]
- 2) Revoking environmental protections introduced by the EU, without plans for replacement.[3]
- 3) Withdrawing plans to help farmers to protect nature [4], with reports suggesting the Environmental Land Management Scheme has been put on hold whilst a return to a Common Agricultural Policy type per acre payment is expected.[5].

However, we know that people's livelihoods and local economies can be put on a sound footing with investment in nature recovery, in renewable energy, in sustainable transport, and in home insulation. The recovery of nature and the revival of local living standards should go hand-in-hand.

Council resolves:

That the Leader of the Council to write to the prime minister:

- 1) Expressing the value which local people place on the green spaces, countryside and wild places in the Borough of Swale and the vital role of such amenity to maintaining good physical and mental health.
- 2) Reminding the prime minister of the appalling decline in wildlife, including bird and insect populations and the urgent need to reverse this decline.
- 3) Pointing out that local councils require government support and appropriate policies to deliver a step-change in use of active travel, energy efficiency of buildings and renewable energy that is essential to deliver a local plan which is compatible with Government's statutory obligations on net zero emissions, and the Council's ambitions for achieving net-zero and the restoration of nature in the borough.
- 4) Demanding that the existing protections for wildlife habitats, nature and agricultural land, including the requirement for biodiversity net gain, are as a minimum retained, or better enhanced, in all aspects of the planning system including investment zones.

Proposed: Cllr Tim Valentine

Seconded: Cllr Sarah Stephen

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-growth-plan-2022-factsheet-on-investment-zones/the-growth-plan-2022-investment-zones-factsheet>

[2] Map of investment zones:

<https://twitter.com/RSPBEngland/status/1573366828222808064>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/23/uk-environment-laws-under-threat-in-deregulatory-free-for-all>

[4] <https://www.edie.net/reports-defra-set-to-scrap-plans-to-pay-farmers-for-nature-restoration-and-creation/>

[5] ““in return for funding, [farmers] must farm in a way that protects and enhances our natural environment” <https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan/conservative-party-manifesto-2019>