

Why the growth agenda imperils your grandchildren and how everyone wins if we ‘Make Nature a Stakeholder’

The drive for growth by government, supported by 100 Labour MPs, encouraged by Dominic Cummings’ new ‘Looking for Growth’ group¹, and fuelled by Rachel Reeves in her request to regulators to regulate for growth, brings great risks and false benefits. Not only that, but government is off track to achieve its environmental goals and targets, according to the OEP².

Unrestrained growth destroys our already depleted biodiversity³. Biodiversity isn’t a ‘nice to have’, to be paid for by developers in isolated patches of Britain. It underpins our very way of life.

Loss of green spaces and wetlands diminishes the ability of landscapes to absorb carbon, mitigate floods, and regulate temperatures. The Food Security report 2024⁴ reminds us that, “*productivity and sustainability of food production rely on ecosystem services provided by biodiversity, healthy soil and clean water.*” Building on farmland and further destroying natural capital is short-sighted.

Prioritising high-carbon infrastructure, energy-intensive industries, roads and urban sprawl exacerbate greenhouse gas emissions, increase pollution and reduce climate resilience.

Even ‘green’ infrastructure can be harmful. It needs to be designed sensitively. That might include solar on car-parks and rooftops or a grid upgrade that, instead of pylons, favours using the existing grid better, HVDC⁵ underground cabling and offshore coordination.

GDP growth as the sole goal is a false economy. Generational inequality is a certain consequence, prioritising short-term gains over long-term sustainability. Environmental degradation sees higher costs for disaster response, health care, and infrastructure repair if we do not act swiftly on the climate and biodiversity crises. We need a **viable** economy. Focusing on well-being, education, public and active transport and health can still result in positive financial outcomes per capita.

Our specific concerns:

- **A targets-based housing policy** that seeks 1.85m new homes and new towns will see countryside concreted over like never before – just when the world has reached so many climate and biodiversity tipping points. Government’s own analysis of the National Planning Policy Framework acknowledges it will cause environmental harm. (See our submission⁶ to the Environmental sustainability and housing growth Select Committee.)
- **Allowing infrastructure developers to pay to destroy nature.** The working paper⁷ on development and nature recovery (in advance of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill), brings huge risks to nature⁸. Risks include the particularly shocking removal of the need for species surveys, the untested cumulative impact of development proposals, the lack of consideration of alternatives within the system and the lack of community input into the system.
- **150 fast-tracked infrastructure projects.** 150 projects will be fast tracked. But without rigorous testing in the planning system how can we know that they are acceptable and necessary projects? Why hand permissions & profits to private developers?

¹ [Looking For Growth](#)

² [Progress in improving the natural environment in England 2023-2024: Speech by Dame Glenys Stacey, Chair of the OEP | Office for Environmental Protection](#)

³ <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

⁴ [United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024: Introduction - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ High-Voltage Direct Current

⁶ committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/132074/html/

⁷ [Planning Reform Working Paper: Development and Nature Recovery - GOV.UK](#)

⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uyhYRxH2WcdazfKqH_8CEeSjWUwP_C4G/view?usp=sharing

Why the growth agenda imperils your grandchildren and how everyone wins if we 'Make Nature a Stakeholder'

Alternative approaches (or how to have our cake and eat it)

Smarter housing strategies: Rather than prioritising new builds, focus on retrofitting existing homes and commercial properties and prioritising development on brownfield sites. We can use some of the 26 million empty bedrooms and make sure builders actually build out the one million planning permissions they have already. Our own Homes for Everyone⁹ approach sets out how to do this - and it is popular: over 11,000 people have sent it to their MP.

The Dasgupta Review: valuing nature in economics

Partha Dasgupta got it right when he concluded, in his wide-ranging review, that we should integrate natural capital into economic decision-making, ensuring that ecosystems are treated as assets, not externalities. He also called for investment in nature-based solutions and reduced consumption.

Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics

We need to recognise that our planet has an ecological ceiling and respect the biophysical limits. We need a social foundation: policies that support basic needs such as housing, health care, and education without breaching ecological thresholds. And we must shift to a circular, or regenerative, economic model where waste is minimised, and resources are reused.

And finally, the case for nature as a stakeholder

The current narrative treats nature as a passive backdrop to human development rather than an active stakeholder with intrinsic rights. To secure a habitable planet for our grandchildren:

- **Respect nature's intrinsic value.** Nature is more than a resource; it is a living system with inherent worth. Its preservation is not optional but essential. Make it a stakeholder.
- **A just transition with Intergenerational responsibility.** Policies must ensure that the prosperity of future generations is not undermined by short-term growth priorities.
- **A new social contract.** Embed ecological stewardship in governance, requiring businesses, communities, and governments to uphold the principles of sustainability.

By recognising nature as a stakeholder, we can value life over profit, ecosystems over extraction, and the future over fleeting gains for the few. We know the environment matters to voters of all parties: our national polling confirmed this.

So, what do you need to do to leave future generations with a habitable planet?

- o **Make nature a stakeholder:** be the voice of your local natural capital assets and champion the concept of viable growth
- o Follow the Planning & Infrastructure Bill and ensure that nature's voice is heard



Why the growth agenda imperils your grandchildren and how everyone wins if we 'Make Nature a Stakeholder'

Appendix A: Summary of the Government's environmental and biodiversity obligations

1. The Environment Act 2021

- Legally binding targets for air quality, water, waste reduction, and biodiversity.
- Commitment to halt species decline by 2030 and increase biodiversity by 10% via Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in new developments.

2. 25-Year Environment Plan

- Ambition to leave the environment in a better state for the next generation.
- Objectives include cleaner air and water, thriving plants and wildlife, and reduced waste.

3. International Agreements

- The UK is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which underpins the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, requiring nations to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030.
- Commitments under the Paris Agreement to mitigate climate change, an urgent driver of biodiversity loss.
- UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰ (referenced in the NPPF)

4. Natural Capital Approach

- Recognition of ecosystems as vital contributors to the economy, with Natural England and DEFRA championing investments in natural capital.

5. Climate Change Act 2008

- Net zero emissions target by 2050, necessitating nature-based solutions such as tree planting and wetland restoration.

6. Environmental Principles Policy Statements

- These must be prepared for all policies.

Appendix B: Nature as a stakeholder

- **Legal Rights for Nature:** Extend legal recognition to ecosystems, as pioneered in countries like Ecuador and New Zealand, where rivers and forests are granted rights akin to those of a person.
- **Mandatory Natural Capital and Biodiversity Audits:** Require all major projects to include a full and detailed Natural Capital and biodiversity impact analysis, with penalties for those that harm ecosystems.
- **Ecological Democracy:** Include environmental representatives in decision-making processes to advocate for long-term ecological health.
- **Green Levies for Growth Projects:** Redirect funds from growth-oriented initiatives to support local conservation and rewilding projects.
- **Punish Ecocide:** Introduce legislation to criminalise unlawful or reckless acts that cause severe and long-term damage to the environment, particularly when caused by those in positions of power.

¹⁰ [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development](#)