

Landlines: why we need a strategic approach to land

April 2017

This is a summary of the Campaign to Protect Rural England's paper (CPRE) which makes the case that the UK should think seriously about a strategic, long-term approach to land use to help address the challenges the country faces and produce better outcomes for the economy, environment, and for society. The full paper is available [here \(42 pages\)](#).

The case for a strategic land use policy in the UK is highly persuasive, given the compelling data on the economic and environmental state of the countryside, and the further challenges that climate change will pose. If such an approach is accepted, there will be major challenges on how to implement such a strategy, both politically and in designing effective policies. It also raises obvious issues for any future UK-based agricultural policy.

Key points have been highlighted by S&P (not the author).

Why we need a new approach to land use

The outcome of the EU referendum provides the chance to rethink agricultural policy and integrate it with forestry (which did not fall under EU legislation), as well as environment policy. And as policies for the natural environment, infrastructure provision and climate change are under review, the timing could not be better.

Land underpins our existence – it provides a wide range of goods and services that we rely on:

- for housing
- to accommodate population growth
- transport infrastructure
- food production (and food security)
- safeguarding soil quality
- timber production
- energy production¹
- medicine production
- water quality and quantity
- biological diversity, including rewilding
- landscape
- recreation
- tranquillity
- flood risk management and ability to reduce the effect of extreme weather events
- to mitigate climate change
- to adapt to climate change, including coastal erosion
- quality of life
- health and wellbeing

¹ In 2006, a DEFRA working group produced 'energy crop opportunity' maps to provide guidance on suitable locations for energy crop plantations, taking account of data on likely yields, designated areas and landscape character.

Yet, as a country, we fail to recognise the importance of land use to our wellbeing. [Although we have a planning system] there is growing evidence that our fragmented approach to land, and lack of control over non-urban land uses, means we are failing to deal effectively with the conflicts and complexities of what land can provide for us and how we can protect it for the long-term. It is time to address the fundamental question of how we can best use our limited land resource.

In the broadest sense, a land use strategy might be described as an integrated approach to optimising the use of land to maximise long-term social, economic and environmental benefits. Despite a compelling case for a more strategic approach to land use, the Government approach is piecemeal.

The current approach is delivering land use that is far from optimal for almost everyone. The risks from perpetuating this approach will increase with greater pressures and with climate and other environmental changes. Land use decisions driven solely by market values have much lower aggregate values for the UK population than decisions that take account of the wider range of benefits from the land.

Towards a more strategic approach

We need to start with defining the objectives of a land use strategy and the principles that should govern our decisions on land use. These will need careful consideration but they might initially be framed as:

- to review land use statistics and assess the amount of land required to meet various needs
- to optimise the use of land, taking account of the interactions between different uses
- to integrate consideration of land use into public decision making and investment
- to provide a better basis for taking account of the value of land in land use planning and management decisions

Refining these objectives and beginning to develop policies and institutional structures that address them could be the mission of a new Land Use Commission. The commission would comprise representatives from all the key sectors with an interest in land and, at least initially, would be independent of Government. It might presage the creation in due course of a new Department of Land Use as advocated by Lord Deben (see below).

Land use policy: a brief history and recent work on land use (and some not so recent)

Land ownership and use has been a matter of interest to the powers-that-be for centuries:

1086	The Domesday Book was the first comprehensive survey of land in England
1919	Forestry Commission was established after concern about timber shortages after WW1
1919	Ministry of Agriculture established, with responsibility for food production added in 1955
1944	The Control of Land Use White Paper talked about the need to secure the 'best use of land in the national interest' and 'that a national and positive policy for the right use of land can best be evolved by a continuous process of collaboration between local and central authorities and the individual citizen.'
1947	Town and Country Planning Act nationalised the right to develop land after concern about the effect of development and land use change
1949	National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act put in place the legal framework for designating and protecting undeveloped, mainly upland, areas of high landscape quality.
1970	Department for the Environment established to combine responsibility for planning, housing, transport, public buildings and environmental protection. The link between environment and planning continued until 2001, when the responsibility was split, between Defra and DCLG's predecessors.
2002	Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution report , which proposed 'integrated spatial strategies...covering all aspects of sustainable development; and ensuring that such strategies cover all forms of land use, in particular agriculture and forestry as the largest uses'.
2010	Land Use Futures : making the most of land in the 21st century was an output of the Land Use Futures project. It noted 'Land and its many uses provide the bedrock of the country and the foundation of our wellbeing, prosperity and national identity. The pervasive effects of change in land use and management underline the need to take the broadest possible perspective in developing future policies and strategies on land. While much has been achieved over recent decades, there is a strong case to do more....a critical choice for Governments is whether to address the future challenges in an incremental and piecemeal

	fashion, or whether to aim for a more coherent and consistent approach to managing land use – or indeed some combination of the two’.
2010	The Lawton Report Making Space for Nature concluded that ‘There is compelling evidence that England’s collection of wildlife sites are generally too small and too isolated, leading to declines in many of England’s characteristic species. With climate change, the situation is likely to get worse. This is bad news for wildlife but also bad news for us, because the damage to nature also means our natural environment is less able to provide the many services upon which we depend. We need more space for nature.’
2011	Natural Environment White Paper , which set up the Natural Capital Committee which is tasked with reporting on ‘how to ensure England’s natural wealth is managed efficiently and sustainably, thereby unlocking opportunities for sustained prosperity and wellbeing’.
2011	UK National Ecosystems Assessment
2015 - ongoing	National Infrastructure Assessment , being carried out by the National Infrastructure Commission
2015	The new Partnership Plan for the New Forest National Park , produced in November 2015, shows the potential of national park authorities to chart a more strategic approach to land, with their dual responsibilities for preparing land management and planning strategies.
2016	Scottish Land Use Strategy , 2016-2021, which has a vision to ‘fully recognise, understand and value the importance of our land resources, and where our plans and decisions about land use deliver improved and enduring benefits, enhancing the wellbeing of our nation’.
2017	UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 , Committee on Climate Change, which identified six priorities for addressing climate change, all of which are affected by or can be contributed to by land use.
2017	Defra’s 25 year plan for the environment and 25 year plan for farming and food
	The coordination of land use planning with infrastructure provision would be an important component of a national spatial strategy, according to the RTP1, and could address regional economic disparities and deliver more balanced regional development.

Viewpoints – these are thought-provoking ideas on land use from some key thinkers

Key points have been highlighted by S&P (not the author).

Lord Deben² on land and government

There’s no hope of sensible land use while planning is imprisoned within the Department for Communities and Local Government, agriculture in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, infrastructure in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and long-term transport planning in the Department for Transport.

We need a Department of Land Use which would bring the strategic elements of all these together. Planning, environment, agriculture, and infrastructure make a cohesive whole and taken together enable us to decide what kind of country we want to leave to our grandchildren. Such coherence would also ensure we can face up to the huge changes we will have to demand from our farmers to deal with flooding and climate change as well as the depletion of the fertility of our soils.

The most urgent social need is for housing. Yet that must not be at the expense of the countryside. Rural land needs protection not just for its own intrinsic value but because ensuring the vibrancy of our towns and cities demands they are intensified, not extended.

The immediate action of the Department of Land Use would therefore be to insist on the release of land held by government agencies and quasi-governmental bodies. By reversing of the burden of proof, organisations would have to prove short-term need or they would have to sell.

This would be accompanied by levies on land which had planning permission but remained undeveloped...to stop the land hoarding, or ‘landbanking’ ... and the proceeds would be hypothecated to decontamination of land otherwise suitable for housing.

² Lord Deben (John Gummer) is Chairman of the UK Committee on Climate Change and former Secretary of State for the Environment and Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

This release of so much previously developed land would enable a much tougher approach to development on green fields. It would ensure that local authorities concentrate on the integrated planning of our towns and cities and it would make developers recognise that there would no longer be the easy option of using virgin land.

That strategic shift would provide the foundation for a national land use policy in which growth did not simply sprawl; where the essential spirit and excitement of urban living would be recovered; and where the countryside would be returned to robust health for our grandchildren to cherish.

Corinne Swain³ on land use and spatial planning

Scotland and Wales have much more fully fledged national [planning and development] frameworks, and have devolved planning systems. But in England we lack a national vision and even stated purposes for public planning.

... the Land Use Futures foresight project [2010] ... made a strong case for the need to think strategically about the future of land over longer timescales than usually the case, not least because of the challenges brought by climate change.

It explored the emotional and cultural significance of land, and the need for a better system for resolving conflicts between competing land uses, including for renewable energy, as demand for resources intensifies.

Another benefit would be to further mutual understanding and better working relationships as is being achieved at regional scale through the Scottish Land Use Strategy demonstrator projects. This might help re-create a deeper understanding of the interrelationships between natural systems and development than currently achieved through most tick-box approaches to strategic environmental assessment of plans.

...both these organisations [Town and Country Planning Association in Lie of the Land! which identified long-term trends in environmental, social, economic and political factors in four geographies, and the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) Map for England project, which was researched by the University of Manchester, and identified the range of policies that already have a spatial level] highlight the significant risks of flooding, water shortages and other environmental constraints in the very parts of the country subject to the greatest housing growth pressures – tensions which will need proactive planning at various spatial scales, including the national, to resolve.

Andrew Wescott⁴ on infrastructure

The [infrastructure] National Needs Assessment (NNA) takes stock of the performance of the UK's infrastructure, and what is needed for a national infrastructure system that is efficient, affordable and sustainable. It provides the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) with a blueprint for its own National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA). National infrastructure policies need to address long-term land use pressures, particularly in the context of climate change.

Technological innovation means that people will pay for infrastructure services in different ways, for travel and in the home:

- Paying for road use with car tax and duty on fuel will become obsolete as vehicles become powered by electricity (a low tax fuel) and car ownership diminishes. Charging per trip with smart metering provides a more flexible way of paying for roads while enabling smarter management of demand.
- In the home, working and socialising with ultra-fast digital connectivity that removes a need to travel. Smarter use of energy and storage which can be balanced with intermittent renewable energy supplies, energy generation with cheap photovoltaic cells, drastic reductions in demand for heating and cooling through intelligent design and retrofit, re-use of rainwater and sewage, and resource recovery from solid waste. These are all opportunities that should be harnessed in new or retrofitted buildings.

Uncertainty as to where new housing, population and economic activity will be located undermines our capacity to plan infrastructure services for the future. Housing development will always require a balance between local and national objectives. At the moment national needs are not being met by the local planning system. The NNA has made the following recommendations to bring the planning of housing and economic infrastructure together which could help secure a more integrated approach:

- a) The NIC should undertake a comprehensive review of public land available for housing [, and] unlock this land ... through the provision of economic infrastructure.

3 Arup fellow and final report peer reviewer for the Land Use Futures foresight report.

4 Head of Policy and Public Affairs at the Institution of Civil Engineers.

- b) Housing should be considered as part of the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Planning (NSIP) regime to enable opportunities for housing to be brought forward with new infrastructure schemes in the right locations.

It is vital that infrastructure investment is integrated with wider land use planning, ...at a range of scales, which could be enhanced by the devolution of powers and responsibilities to combined authorities. However, there remains a need for decision-making on the national level to actively enable and shape sustainable housing growth and infrastructure development rather than simply responding to existing demand.

Baroness Young⁵ on climate change and land use

We need our land to deliver a range of public benefits, for people and biodiversity including, vitally, to help cope with climate change. A more strategic and integrated approach is needed if we are going to balance all these pressures.

The first task of a land use strategy must be to protect the basic resource, with agricultural and forestry policies targeted on more sustainable management of our soils. Trees can help with this: stabilising soils, boosting infiltration of rain into the ground 16-fold and reducing fast run-off of water and sediment.

Infrastructure planning of roads, utilities, hospitals, schools and other public services is needed so they are located and designed in ways that ensure they are adapted to flood, heat and other pressures. These pressures will increase with climate change and can cause disastrous loss of key public services.

We do need to decide how we want to ensure our rising population is to be fed and how much land that will require and how it should be managed. Climate change will raise challenges for water supply and sustainable land use for agriculture. Crop types will need to change, cultivation methods adjust and new ways of dealing with new pests will have to be grasped.

Farmers, with the right signals and incentives, are up for delivering multi-purpose land management, including climate change mitigation.

Scotland has made a credible start with its land use strategy. Why can't the rest of the UK follow suit?

Georgina Mace⁶ and Ian Bateman⁷ on making better land use decisions

Most of the land in the UK is privately owned, and clearly the owners, land managers and farmers are major players in determining land use. Society, through the actions of public policy makers, however, also plays a substantial role in influencing land use via mechanisms such as planning policy, regulations, subsidies and other incentives.

This is important, because land use can provide many benefits ranging from the production of marketed goods, such as food or timber, to a wide variety of non-market public goods, including clean air and rivers, recreational green spaces and places for healthy exercise, the storage of greenhouse gases and as species and habitat conservation. There is an ongoing debate about the extent to which land use should be modified to change the mix of private and public goods, which has been stimulated by the decision to leave the EU.

Land use decisions are becoming more complicated and the simple distinction between agriculture, built infrastructure and nature conservation areas is no longer adequate. [Consider] the land as a system that provides a set of goods and services to people:

- Some of these benefits are well-known (such as food and timber supplies, water quantity and quality)
- But we are also concerned about [other] emerging priorities (such as flood regulation, climate regulation, pest and disease control, and the recreational and health benefits of green spaces). These benefits don't have market prices, but the benefits they provide can be estimated via a series of economic valuation tools, and these values can be substantial.
- Other benefits are very precious to many people but are often very difficult to value reliably (such as wild species and habitats).

In principle, an understanding of these benefits, their costs and the nature of the land uses that can deliver them, would enable decision-makers to design overall land use strategies that meet the most needs at the lowest cost.

⁵ Chair of the Woodland Trust, former Chair of English Nature, and former Chief Executive of the Environment Agency and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

⁶ Professor of Biodiversity and Ecosystems at University College London.

⁷ Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of Exeter.

Our pilot study that came out of the work for the UK National Ecosystem Assessment provides some key learnings. We used knowledge from environmental science, maps of both land use types and population distributions, and valuation methods to estimate comparable economic values for different overall approaches to land use decisions over the next 50 years, with and without climate change. We showed that decisions driven solely by market values have much lower aggregate values for the UK population than decisions that take account of the wider range of benefits from the land. Our results strongly emphasise the importance of taking account of where people live, and the local or wider nature of the costs and benefits, alongside the biophysical attributes of the land.

[The gaps in knowledge] are small compared to the complicated policy and political issues that are raised in decision-making over land use.

It is clear to us that the current approach is delivering land use that is far from optimal for almost everyone, and that the risks from perpetuating this approach will increase with greater pressures and with climate and other environmental changes. There are approaches to land use design based on existing environmental and economic science that could be relatively easily developed and whose overall benefit values are several times greater than is currently realised, with much greater gains also being possible.

Baroness Parminter⁸ on a new agricultural policy

...we must reward farmers for the public goods they provide – producing healthy food and protecting the natural capital of our farmed landscapes (such as carbon storage, flood prevention and clean water) on which we depend; building up our 'natural health service' through a landscape we can wander in and wonder at.

The only way to maintain farm support is if future subsidies are guided by a more coherent approach to land use. They must not be seen as propping up an industry but an investment in the provision of healthy locally produced food, high animal welfare standards and protecting the countryside as a resource for the whole population. The new approach must reward those who deliver the biggest outcomes, not those who have the most land.

As a first step, we need effective public consultation about the future of farming and food policy.

It is a concern though that the Government currently remains intent on producing a 25- year plan for the environment separately from its post-CAP policy work. More than ever we need one vision for our food and farmed land which combines the goals of feeding a growing population and protecting natural resources.

Merrick Denton-Thompson⁹ on a rural land management policy

The planning system has generally been successful in retaining the clear definition between town and country but it has concentrated on regulating development and has ignored the gradual decline in the quality of the countryside.

A disciplined approach to integrate the desired outcomes from our countryside can only be achieved by a review of rural land use and developing an associated rural land use strategy to meet the needs of both town and country. Public intervention systems are needed to support the farming industry to achieve this new objective through a new National Rural Land Management Policy articulated at a landscape scale that is easily interpreted and actioned by individual farms.

A new opportunity has emerged that permits us to recover the way the public relates to the farming industry, where a clear vision for the countryside can be prepared, and where both the farmer and the public can see what is intended.

The National Character Map of England would be the most efficient framework for setting and delivering a new Rural Land Management Policy. The map was produced by Natural England and identifies 159 distinct landscapes character areas...The reference to character provides the direct link with people; these are places everyone can understand and relate to, such as the New Forest or the South Pennines.

A new relationship with the farming community could emerge by reducing regulation to a safety net status and develop a new contract-based arrangement. The preparation of the farm/estate plan would be how the farming and landowning community responded to the landscape-scale public agenda, on which any contract would be based.

⁸ Liberal Democrat spokesperson on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the House of Lords and former Chief Executive of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

⁹ President of the Landscape Institute. He was formerly County Landscape Architect and Assistant Director of Environment at Hampshire County Council and a Board Member of Natural England.

John Everitt¹⁰ and Adrian Phillips¹¹ on land use lessons from the National Forest

Since it started in the early 1990s, out of a Countryside Commission initiative, over 8.5m trees have been planted, increasing tree cover from 6% to more than 20%, with 80% of the wooded sites open to public access and tourism boosted by 48%, all achieved with just £60m of public funds, channelled through the National Forest Company.

Based on The National Forest experience, large-scale, positive approaches provide significant return on investment by improving the environment, growing the economy and building resilient communities.

The following are the principal lessons that we think are vital in delivering an integrated approach to land use over a large area:

- Vision – keep the vision really simple and accessible to make buy-in easier.
- Commitment and co-ordination – the commitment to landscape change needs to be embedded over the long term (longer than political time scales), no single entity can deliver large scale landscape change. So it is important to create a small coordinating body that supports existing partners to deliver, and which can spread the load, responsibility and support.
- Government support – commitment by successive governments across party lines enables political buy in.
- Reliable, long-term funding, albeit at a modest level, enables momentum to build and gives time for initiatives to deliver benefits.
- Innovation and sustainability – public funding should be used to drive change and to put the scheme on a sustainable financial footing. This will provide lasting impact in a way that simply subsidising public benefits cannot.
- Strong local authority support – needs to be built into decision making rather than simply vested in the current leadership. Supportive planning policies can help the planning system to work with, rather than against, the creation of a forested landscape.
- Strong community buy-in – communities need to own an initiative if it is about changing their landscape. This means that people need to see tangible benefits within a short period of time.

Helen Meech¹² on engaging people in the land use debate

Britain is one of the most ecologically depleted nations on Earth. We have lost all our large carnivores and most of our large herbivores. The latest State of Nature report reveals that 56% of species have declined over recent decades, and that more than 1 in 10 species are under threat of disappearing from our shores altogether.

As soon as we think beyond the short term, it is clear that our long-term food security, indeed our long-term survival, is entirely dependent on the health of our natural resources.

It is vital we involve the public in defining what they value from land, and in determining what public benefit they wish to see delivered. The Brexit vote shows there is appetite for a change to the way that decisions are made. There is a need for politics and decision making to be much more participatory, involving people at the grassroots with a clear focus on reducing the huge inequalities in society.

Sir Terry Farrell¹³ on a vision for the land

Spatial planning ... is much more about holistic thinking and about going with the natural flow of all the parts working together.

Political expediency, due to the institutionalised short-termism driven by elections, means that even medium-term spatial planning is just not done.

...population growth and global warming effects like sea rises and fluvial flooding, as well as temperature rises and rainfall changes, are making us think again. The scale, complexity and seriousness of these issues mean we cannot any

¹⁰ Chief Executive of the National Forest.

¹¹ Director of the Countryside Commission and former Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas, as well as previously being chair of CPRE's Policy Committee and a national trustee.

¹² Director of Rewilding Britain and former Assistant Director, Outdoors and Nature Engagement, at the National Trust.

¹³ A leading British architect and urban planner.

longer proceed as before, treating land as a disposable asset. We have now got to plan – and proactively plan for rapid and radical change.

Annex: Principles of Sustainable Land Use from the Scottish Land Use Strategy (2016):

- a) Opportunities for land use to deliver multiple benefits should be encouraged.
- b) Regulation should continue to protect essential public interests whilst placing as light a burden on businesses as is consistent with achieving its purpose. Incentives should be efficient and cost-effective.
- c) Where land is highly suitable for a primary use (for example food production, flood management, water catchment management and carbon storage) this value should be recognised in decision making.
- d) Land use decisions should be informed by an understanding of the functioning of the ecosystems which they affect in order to maintain the benefits of the ecosystem services which they provide.
- e) Landscape change should be managed positively and sympathetically, considering the implications of change at a scale appropriate to the landscape in question, given that all Scotland's landscapes are important to our sense of identity and to our individual and social wellbeing.
- f) Land use decisions should be informed by an understanding of the opportunities and threats brought about by the changing climate. Greenhouse gas emissions associated with land use should be reduced and land should continue to contribute to delivering climate change adaptation and mitigation objectives.
- g) Where land has ceased to fulfil a useful function because it is derelict or vacant, this represents a significant loss of economic potential and amenity for the community concerned. It should be a priority to examine options for restoring all such land to economically, socially or environmentally productive uses.
- h) Outdoor recreation opportunities and public access to land should be encouraged, along with the provision of accessible green space close to where people live, given their importance for health and wellbeing.
- i) People should have opportunities to contribute to debates and decisions about land use and management decisions which affect their lives and their future.
- j) Opportunities to broaden our understanding of the links between land use and daily living should be encouraged.

Correct as at	Review date	Person responsible	Tags / categorisation	Type
10 April 2017	10 April 2018	Jason Beedell Research 0207 3814757 07795 651493	Farming, land management, land use, agricultural policy Copy these into Tags, in the File, Info menu	Briefing

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