Towards a popular
environmentalism:
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# A manifesto for nature
# and re-enchantment

# Contents

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## Introduction

During the last 18 months our lives have been bare, digitally mediated and stripped of real presence, encounter or vitality. Alienation and loneliness have increased, with many still too scared to return to living something approaching a normal life. And yet our physical confinement has led to a hungering for something more.

This hungering is found in the waiting lists for allotments, the queues for garden centres, the rediscovery of wild swimming and illicit rambling as British traditions, and the movement of people from the cities to the countryside; and it has been found too in the endless stories – some of them factually dubious – about nature returning during the start of the pandemic: the goats of Llandudno, the dolphins of Venice, the murmurings about the unique clarity of stars we saw in the still Spring of 2020. There is a desire to once again find our place in nature.

At the same time the environment has never been more prominent in our politics. Parties compete over commitments to plant trees, invest in green infrastructure, and achieve net zero. This prominence has been driven by the shift from climate change as distant threat to present reality. Our inability to impose institutional restraints on capitalism's endless appetite is leading not just to the breakdown of our climate and ecosystems, but also to great movements of people, geopolitical conflict, and challenges to democracy.

The latest IPCC report makes it clear that we are heading towards irreversible tipping points, with a 1.5C rise in temperature likely by 2040. [1]Global temperature is increasing faster than it has for 2,000 years, and extreme weather events are growing in intensity and number. Pollution continues to harm human and animal health, and ecosystems are collapsing due to deforestation, high-intensity agribusiness, and urbanisation. Already, there are limits to what prevention can do; mitigation and adaptation will be part of the solution too. Our lives are already changing, and the pace of these changes will accelerate over the coming decades.

However, at least in Britain, debate around climate change and the environment takes place at a high degree of abstraction, and has no relationship with the hungering for something more than what modern life has to offer. It is either a technocratic debate, with solutions so rarefied as to imply no impact on ordinary people's lives whatsoever, or else a trivial form of ethical consumerism. Allegra Stratton, for example, spokesperson for the COP26 summit in Glasgow, suggested that individuals might do their bit by stopping rinsing dishes before putting them in the dishwasher[2].

Worse, where climate change policy does seem to directly affect people – as with the low traffic neighbourhoods in London – it does so largely punitively, and in a way that risks leaning into a culture war. Our culture finds it near-impossible to talk substantively or normatively about the good life or what might constitute it, and we have therefore failed, beyond fringe subcultures, to generate a richer vision of how we might live lives better in tune with our natural surroundings.

The aim of this manifesto is to develop a programme that might bring people not typically attracted to environmentalism into the fold by re-enchanting nature and our everyday lives. Conceptualised not in terms of the abstract or global, but rather the local and national, a popular environmentalism would proceed from mutual interests, broadly conceived, and tie in with a wider strategy of national renewal in our polity and everyday lives. This manifesto begins by detailing the political background and possible fault lines in public opinion, before arguing climate change is symptomatic of our wider disenchantment, and finally outlining our proposals.

This is not a comprehensive document – key issues of carbon capture, nuclear power, international pressure and so on are avoided altogether. That is not because they are unimportant; any serious response to climate change begins with investment in nuclear power, for

[1]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-58130705
[2]https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/07/26/consider-not-rinsing-plates-dishwashing-suggests-prime-ministers/

example. But this manifesto focuses on the environment and nature not as some external force that happens to us, but rather something we live in and through, and suggests changes that would transform our everyday lives as well as carbon emissions.

Underlying our approach are three principles. Firstly, that Britain should be a productive country, and its industry should be good for nature and the climate. Secondly, that nature should be a common treasury for all, with everyone given the opportunity to develop a rich relationship with their natural surroundings. Finally, that local places and environments should be encouraged to develop their distinctiveness and particularity. From these principles flows a politics and a policy that can resonate in the country.

## Part one:
## The political background

Across the world, the politics of the environment have come to dominate debate in the media, in parliaments, and in international organisations. There is an extraordinary proliferation of summits and reports and breathless reportage. Promises made by Theresa May's government to achieve net zero by 2050 are expected to require the upending of our current economic settlement and prosperity[3].

Across Europe, green parties are growing, most notably in Germany[4]. In Britain, first-past-the-post and historic loyalties have so far prevented a similar shift in vote, but there is a substantial demographic that could be tapped into for whom the environment is a top priority. Around 30 per cent rank climate change as in their top three important issues facing the country, losing out only to health and the economy. That figure rises to 40 per cent for 18-24-year-olds[5].

Contrary to some who would make a culture war issue out of climate change, there is overwhelming public consensus in the reality of manmade climate change, and majority support for a Green New Deal. What was once a minority interest is now popular politics – parties in their 2019 manifestos clashed over who will plant more trees more quickly, who will reach net zero faster. (None spoke about the sacrifices entailed by these promises.) As climate change–induced natural disasters continue to gain in frequency, intensity and media attention, the rump of sceptics may well decrease further still.

But there remains a significant minority of between 15 and 20 per cent who distrust the scientific consensus on climate change, or at least the motives of the politicians who interpret it[6]. And when policies to combat climate change move from the abstract to the particular this scepticism accentuates existing class and geographic divides. From urban environmentalists who offer blanket criticisms of livestock farmers to policy-makers in inner London targeting car-owners, aspects of environmentalism risk alienating swathes of the country. At the extreme edge, the embrace by some environmentalists of lockdown for its contribution to reducing carbon emissions is a dangerous rhetorical move, lending credence to those who view the politics of the environment as being more about control than greenhouse gases.

The Yellow Vests in France have become the symbol for this kind of small town, private sector, working class resistance to an environmental politics that is urban in focus. In London, clashes over low-traffic neighbourhoods propelled Shaun Bailey to unexpected electoral respectability, revealing class divides between those who could work from home and those who had to drive for work. If environmentalism continues to be the preserve of a particular demographic in terms of class, geography and political affiliation, these flashpoints will only grow, risking the integrity of our response to climate change and ecosystems collapse. The Green party in Germany, leading national polls in April, fell back into third place in the final vote with 15 per cent after suggesting a carbon price for petrol.

A successful politics of nature will escape the environmentalist ghetto, in which membership is contingent on subscribing to a wider progressive worldview. The failures of the uniformly progressive British Green party are understandable in this light. Instead, we must find ways and means to celebrate the enhancement not the denial of self-interest, especially for those who fear what a green politics means for them – for their jobs, for their cost of living, for their quality of life. In Britain, then, a green politics must be conservative as well as radical, and capable of enhancing the richness of our lives rather than being seen as dour or punitive.

[3]https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/environment/2021/07/why-britain-s-timid-green-politics-shows-it-not-taking-energy - [4]https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/03/polls-put-german-green-party-in-lead-five-months-before-election - [5]https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/06/04/environment-once-again-top-three-priority-british- [6]https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/do-brits-think-the-threat-of-climate-change-is-over-exaggerated

## Part two:
## Disenchantment and human nature[7]

That climate change, though a lived reality for billions, has become an abstract and technocratic issue divorced from questions about how we have been living with nature and how we might be living better, is a consequence of a much wider story in the West. A politics of nature that proceeds from an understanding of our wider, long-term disenchantment, and rejects the deracinated liberal idea of the human person, could generate a richer dialogue about the environment and our place in it, and have greater purchase in the country.

Our starting point is that, though human beings occupy a distinctive position within the natural world, we are of it and therefore cannot be fully ourselves when we are separated from it. As the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset wrote, "I am I plus my surroundings; and if I do not preserve the latter, I do not preserve myself." Our abuse of nature, and our alienation from it, damage us – as the abundant research on the value to our wellbeing from encounters with nature evidence[8].

In The Sociology of Religion, German sociologist Max Weber described how the Enlightenment led to modernity's instrumentalism and rationalism supplanting magic, tradition and affect. Whereas previously people had lived in a "great enchanted garden", all was now subject to rational calculus, whether scientific in the physical world or felicific in the ethical world. Borrowing from German romantic Friedrich Schiller, Weber coined this process disenchantment. Covid, and our retreat from the physical to the virtual and mediated, can be seen as the intensification of disenchantment.

Members of the laptop class in particular, having abandoned even the relative anonymity of the office, are formless nodes in the ether. During the pandemic, time zones proved no barrier, with workers and students toiling through the night and across hemispheres, inhabiting a liminal time beyond place. At the same time, limits on physical mobility shrunk each individual's world to a size that predates the invention of the steam train, let alone the internet, and ongoing problems with global supply chains bring home the importance of place in the production of food and goods.
There is no purchase in abandoning the legacy of the Enlightenment. Calls to restore premodern pastoralism

are naïve not just because of their utopianism but also because of the extent of the brutishness and poverty of that way of life. Nevertheless, something has been lost too: our direct and sensuous relationship with our natural surroundings, and an understanding of the limits they impose upon us as surely as we impose limits on them.

The most obvious consequence of this loss is climate change. But it is evident everywhere, from our illiteracy about the species of the natural world to our specialised, indifferent approach to animal life. Slaughter has always happened, of course, often barbarically – but the slaughter of the buffalo in 1870s America, for example, was widely understood as a form of desecration and subsequently commemorated as such. Today's factory farms, a triumph of Enlightenment rationalisation and the free market's division of labour, pass unloved and unremembered.

Human's relationship with nature, then, has come out of kilter. Never before have we lived lives so distant from natural ecosystems, so superficially freed from their constraints and so bereft of their wonder. A richer environmentalism would begin with a proper appreciation for the role of human beings as natural creatures, possessed with unique capabilities but limited and given, not endlessly free and self-creating. In pre-secular times, it was understood that humans were above animals but below the angels and therefore had duties of stewardship.

The human relationship with nature is a philosophical problem that predates Genesis. For some, nature should be tamed and remade according to human will. The restrictions it imposes on us can and should be eliminated through technology. Leon Trotsky exemplified this approach in Literature and Revolution:

*"The present distribution of mountains and rivers, of fields, of meadows, of steppes, of forests, and of seashores, cannot be considered final. Man has already made changes in the map of nature that are not few nor insignificant. But they are mere pupils' practice in comparison with what is coming. Faith merely promises to move mountains; but technology, which takes nothing 'on faith', is actually able to cut down mountains and move them. Up to now this was done for industrial purposes (mines) or for railways (tunnels); in the future this will be done on an immeasurably larger scale, according to a general industrial and artistic plan. Man will occupy himself with*

*re-registering mountains and rivers, and will earnestly and repeatedly make improvements in nature. In the end, he will have rebuilt the earth, if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste. We have not the slightest fear that this taste will be bad."*

This is an attitude that finds contemporary expression in advocates of gene editing and the kind of gain-of-function research taking place in the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and in Bill Gates' ambition to dim the sun to combat climate change.

Then there are the dreams of rewilders and primitivists, that humans retreat from the world, allowing wild nature to flourish uninhibited. It is the mirror image of the position of Trotsky and Gates. Though one anthropocentric and the other misanthropic, both view human beings and nature as oppositional, both ignore the role and dignity of human labour, and both result in similar outcomes.

Finally, there is the third view, that humans are not separate to nature, we are of it. Through self-consciousness and mastery of tools our position in it is unique, but we cannot escape its limits. Human nature is given, not self-made, and planetary boundaries place hard constraints on human behaviour[9]. Our landscape is, as W.J.T. Mitchell wrote in Landscape and Power, "a medium of exchange between the human and the natural" – not the sole property of one or the other[10]. The implication of this is that we honour the human labour that gently shapes the rest of nature, while in turn being shaped by it.

Long before the Age of the Anthropocene, humans have been engaged in a relationship with nature that is simultaneously asymmetrical and fully integrated. There is the ancient art of pollarding, for example, by which we remove the upper branches of trees to encourage growth and longevity. Without human intervention they would wither and die before their time. It is a practice both human and natural, the two in symbiotic relationship.
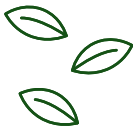
The three positions' respective attitudes towards farming are illuminating. The first and second again mirror one another. The technologists might support some combination of highly intensive farming and lab-created food with nature an afterthought. Though advocates of rewilding would recoil from this vision, the natural corollary of huge swathes of land rendered unproductive

through 'wildness', is highly intensive food production elsewhere and so the implications of the two worldviews are not so different.

The third view, however, would encourage low-intensity, low-input farming on a wide scale, respectful of the accord between human beings and nature that persisted for around 7,000 years in Britain until the 19th Century (perhaps supplemented with, for example, vertical and precision farming that manages to be high-productivity without damaging inputs).

The implications of this third view are not limited to agriculture. They extend to our broader social arrangements. For if we are of nature, then the homes we make for ourselves in the world ought to reflect the distinctive features of the landscapes in which they are embedded. The gardens and parks, the rivers and seas, the architecture we build, ought to be imprinted with the particularities of our natural environment. It is no coincidence that some of the most cherished and sought-after parts of our built environment – the Cotswold cottage, for example – are built with local materials and that this is protected by legislation. This view, then, is opposed to the flatness that increasingly characterises life under liberal globalisation in general and lockdown in particular[11].

French anthropologist Marc Augé described airports and hotels as "non-places" with no relationship to any particular tradition, culture or environment. Textureless, they are purely functional, and designed so that in them, "people are always, and never, at home". [12]Lockdown was non-life, an experiment in undifferentiated living, the end point of progressive disenchantment. The aim of a popular environmentalism rooted in human anthropology would be to re-enchant places of meaning in which humans were part of, not separate from, their natural surroundings.

[11]https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/everything-is-broken – [12]https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/122106/mod_resource/content/1/Marc%20Augé%20Non-Places-%20An%20Introduction%20to%20Supermodernity%20%202009.pdf

# Part three:
# A manifesto for nature and re-enchantment

A popular environmentalism would be rooted in the three basic principles outlined in the introduction: that Britain should be a productive country, and its industry should be nature and climate friendly; that nature should be a common treasury for all; and that local places and environments should develop their distinctiveness and particularity.

The political and policy implications of such an approach include a green industrial policy that would stop the outsourcing of externalities, reshore supply chains and invest in green jobs; a national nature service that would provide everyone from children to retirees opportunities to work and find solace in the countryside as it really is, not as a picture postcard; and better towns and cities, with regulation and investment to reverse the homogeneity of our high streets and beautiful housing that gives young people the chance to have a home in the world. This politics would be both green and industrial, ancient and modern. It would be an attempt to build a country more at ease with itself.

## 1. Nature and climate friendly industry and agriculture

A popular politics will seek to stop and reverse outsourcing, reshoring supply chains and bringing back decent jobs to the regions. A popular environmental politics will do this in two principal ways: through implementing a green industrial policy that situates Britain at the centre of emerging markets in green manufacturing; and by transforming British farming.

## 1a. Industrial policy

Some of this industrial policy will be aimed at high-intensity, high-value added green industry; some will support small-scale and artisanal manufacturing, using local materials and supply chains. This industrial policy will reboot the national economy, and it can be both green and high-tech. Even high-tech manufacturing brings large numbers of jobs for low-skilled workers and it can revitalise areas considered left behind.

This is a green politics that is neither punitive nor about abandoning prosperity. Instead, an active industrial policy would end the practice of outsourcing the externalities of production. As Chair of the UK's Natural Capital Committee Dieter Helm has said, "The great globalisation of the last couple of decades has been generally pretty bad for the environment."[13] Now, with national governments under pressure to reduce emissions to meet domestic pressure and international agreements, many countries are engaged in policies that result in 'carbon leakage'. In other words, we outsource the externalities of production (whether in energy production, the steel industry or agriculture) to other countries, decreasing national emissions without decreasing global emissions.

In a global market, supply chains are also lengthened, which increases emissions further still for two reasons. Firstly and most obviously, because of the heavy transport required to transport goods across the globe. But also because complicated supply chains make the emitting components hard to track down, and give companies an easy means of greenwashing their business without getting to the root cause. Supply chain greenhouse gas emissions are estimated to be around 5.5 times higher than an average companies' emissions from their direct operations.[14] So just as countries outsource their externalities abroad, individual companies do the same thing with one another. Rather than masking these externalities, industrial policy aimed at reshoring polluting industries under our high regulatory standards and shortening supply chains would be a global environmental net-positive, and give any future British environmental legislation more teeth.

Yet at present, Britain's industrial strategy is uncoordinated, poorly funded and gives no special priority to the green industries of the future. The axing of the Industrial Strategy Council suggests it is not viewed as a priority.[15] As Robert Wade, former World Bank economist has written, "The British state recently has mounted what it calls 'industrial strategy', apparently stepping away from neoliberal norms while not actually doing so." Indeed, the choice of the word 'strategy', rather than policy, reflects the vagueness of the government's existing plans in this area.

However, as Wade has observed, industrial policy – once considered an outdated and disproved statism – has returned as a possible solution to the present economic woes facing much of the Western world. In addition to increasing accountability over and the power of

[13] https://borderlex.eu/2019/07/18/interview-uk-academic-dieter-helm-makes-case-for-carbon-border-taxes/
[14] https://www.cdp.net/en/research/global-reports/global-supply-chain-report-2019
[15] https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/kwarteng-scraps-industrial-strategy-council-and-hints-at-beis-rebrand

environmental targets, it helps to address declining productivity, the hollowing out of industry and the decent jobs that went with it, and dependence on hostile states for critical parts of key supply chains.

Finally, a successful industrial policy that revives the distinctiveness of place will be regional and local, as well as national.[16] At present, young people in small towns and the countryside often leave for bigger cities. Contrary to expectations, there is evidence that they do so often against their will. Whereas young people in the countryside would, on the whole, like to stay there, young people in cities would frequently like to live in the countryside.[17] Yet the real movement follows the opposite pattern, largely because of the uneven distribution of decent jobs in the country.

Here we can learn from what has worked globally. Denmark and northern Italy, for example, successfully adapted to 1970s economic decline (in particular decline in agricultural employment) with a revival of small-scale, artisanal manufacturing. Local financial institutions provided capital for the local economy, and industrial districts were regulated by "cooperation between local public bodies, trade associations, local industrial training schools and labour unions."[18] Small businesses and the self-employed engaged in high-skilled manufacturing found niche markets and a viable future in a global economy. This kind of civic economic infrastructure, with incentives based on nature and environment-friendly work, could revitalise the faraway places which have suffered economic decline through the era of globalisation.

## 1b. Farming

The same principles apply to the future of British farming. Leaving the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) is an enormous opportunity to develop an approach that is pro-worker, pro-nature and pro-climate. Subject to CAP, we have had decades subsidising first production itself, incentivising destructive over-intensification (leading to the infamous wine lakes and butter mountains of the 1980s), and then tying subsidy to the area of land landowners own, incentivising consolidation and punishing small farmers. Britain can now subsidise farming that will reverse the damage we have done to our land and our traditions.

A popular environmentalism may incorporate elements of the rewilders' objectives, to "catalyse the mass

restoration of the living world, bring trees back to bare hills, allow reefs to form once more on the seabed and to return to these shores the magnificent, entrancing animals of which we have so long been deprived."[19] But it would be wary of their methods, which would undermine the role of the farmers who manage our landscapes, just as it would the free traders who would outsource our farming and tout the consequent carbon (and jobs) leakage as an environmental and economic win.

Our post-CAP support system, then, must incentivise the re-enchantment of our countryside, with the return of wildflower meadows, chalk grasslands, woodlands, wetlands and the hundreds of thousands of miles of hedgerow lost since the start of the second world war. But it must be a working countryside too, filled with good, productive farming, not a curated picture postcard countryside alongside increasing dependence on imports. It will be work led by farmers, but with the involvement of entire communities – an idea developed below.

Finally, any agricultural policy rooted in an understanding of humans as part of nature, though always at an angle to the rest of creation, would legislate to ban factory farming domestically and tighten trade policy internationally to ban excessively cruel imports. Humans are omnivores, but the specialism and standardisation of factory farming is a moral disgrace that undermines any sense of human beings existing in symbiotic relationship with nature. Our animal welfare standards are already higher than in most of the world, but battery hen farms and so on still proliferate. The public are hugely supportive of animal welfare measures in the abstract, but labelling and reliance on consumers making expensive consumer decisions have severe limits: active regulation is needed.

To ensure that Britain pursues a model of nature and climate friendly production, then, we make the following recommendations:

1. Government should commission an audit of our national economy, identifying critical supply chain dependencies, particularly on countries such as China with an often-hostile agenda, and current skills gaps. In June 2021, the US published a similar audit.[20]

2. Government should commission a parallel audit of the green industries of the future, identifying in particular industries where Britain has comparative advantage.

[16]http://www.softmachines.org/wordpress/?p=2340   -   [17]https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FABJ6015-Rural-Labour-Report-180320-WEB.pdf pp. 18-19
[18]Town and Country, ed. Anthony Barnett and Roger Scruton. Vintage, 1999.   -   [19]https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/16/britain-wild-nature-rewilding-ecosystems-heal-lives
[20]https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/100-day-supply-chain-review-report.pdf

3. Together, these audits should then be used to develop a new and more robust green industrial and regional strategy, at the same scale (proportionately) of ambition as China's Made in 2025 plan.

4. Government needs to establish a vision of a green, national economy across government with a single-mindedness in pursuit of that goal. This should have nature and the environment at its centre, ending fragmentation of purpose and departments jockeying for position and resources, and challenging 'Treasury mindset' which blocks any attempt at institutional reform.

5. EU directives have imposed non-discrimination clauses on procurement policy, limiting measures countries can take to boost their domestic economy. Just as Henry Dimbleby's Food Strategy explored how to strengthen local food supply chains to encourage localism and healthy lifestyles, Britain should use the opportunities of Brexit with a robust procurement policy that favours local and green manufacturing throughout the public sector.

6. The post-CAP agricultural policy should incentivise nature-friendly farming across Britain, while disincentivising high-input, high-intensity farming.

7. Animal welfare standards should be significantly raised, with bans on factory farming domestically and on imports of animal products raised in excessively cruel conditions.

## 2. A common treasury for all

We have progressively lost both our sense of wonder and our knowledge of the workings of our natural surroundings. Access to nature, meanwhile, is unevenly distributed across the country; tree density is still correlated with wealth, and many people rarely get into the countryside at all – or feel like outsiders if they do.[21] A popular environmentalism would assert that nature is not a commodity, and the British countryside is our inheritance. As Roger Scruton wrote, "hedges and walls speak of private rights to exclude people; footpaths, bridleways and green lanes speak of the public refusal to be excluded. Ours is a negotiated countryside, one that belongs in a certain measure to all of us."[22]

To restore people's relationship with nature, and help make our land more nature and climate friendly, support has been growing for the idea of a National Nature Service. Dozens of organisations representing

environmental organisations as well as rural and farming interests have signed their name to the proposal. The aim of the service would be to "tackle climate change, restore nature, and give everyone a healthier environment, [restoring] thousands of hectares of habitats, [creating] a more sustainable food and farming system, [ensuring] equitable access to quality greenspaces for nature-deprived communities, [rooting] out invasive species and [working] the land in sustainable ways."[23]

It could help young people and retirees alike looking for purpose, providing them with a vocational education in jobs engaged with the land: building flood defences and peatlands protection, hedge laying and regenerative farming, organising local apple days and planting city gardens. To succeed, it would be a patriotic endeavour and entail hard work and skills training, not just a green scheme for bohemians.[24] It would also need to be designed to help farmers adjust to the replacement of the EU's common agricultural policy with Britain's environmental land management schemes (ELMs), rather than attempting to replace them – though it would help alleviate the succession crisis in small farms in Britain by priming young new entrants for a future vocation in nature-friendly farming.[25]

It should begin in schools and extend to activities that are about engaging people with nature as much as tackling climate change. Those serving, for example, could take primary school students on walks through their parish, naming the plants and animals that surround them, learning their habits and histories.[26] Those on the service should be engaged in the natural environment immediate to them – cleaning up and rewiggling the rivers, building flood defences, planting meadows on verges where they live.

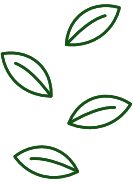In particular, we make the following recommendations:

1. Following the lead of the existing campaign, government should embark on "a well-funded training and employment programme, investment in a co-designed portfolio of conservation projects to kickstart green recovery."[27]

2. This should have a focus on nature and ecosystem, as well as climate change, and seek activities should be embedded within and have leadership from the local communities in which they are taking place.

[21]https://news.trust.org/item/20201112050523-5j78d – [22]https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/countryside/9715922/In-Britain-everyone-has-a-place-in-the-country.html
[23]https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/National_Nature_Service_letter_June20_2.pdf – [24]There is now majority public support for trialling a four-day week and this too would open up opportunities for an extraordinary rise in engagement with nature and the places in which we live. – [25]https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/is-there-a-future-for-the-small-family-farm-in-the-uk-executive-summary.pdf
[26]https://ruthswriting.wordpress.com/2020/11/19/a-ten-point-plan-for-nature/ – [27]https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/National_Nature_Service_letter_June20_2.pdf

### 3. A home in the world

Nearly 20 years ago, the New Economics Foundation coined the term Clone Town Britain to describe the growing homogenisation of Britain's high streets, with local character losing out to big chains, busy high streets losing out to supermarkets on the edge of town, civic spaces losing out to car parks.[28] Since then this process, by which places become non-places, has continued and extended beyond high streets to housing and more. The final principle of a popular environmentalism, then, would be to develop the distinctiveness and particularity of local places.

Recultivating distinctive places in which people have a direct relationship with nature will mean, for example, housing built at human-scale, with local materials and in the vernacular style, so that the built environment sits in convivial relationship with its natural surroundings. Create Streets have researched what this looks like in an urban context, and the Prince's Countryside Fund in a rural setting.[29] In both, local people want affordable housing, built in a traditional style with local materials, and integrated with nature, gardens and other green spaces. Policy Exchange's report, Building More, Building Beautiful, pulls together these threads and articulates greater local democratic control in the style of new developments.[30] Support for traditional housing was even greater among working class participants in the research. [31]

The increase in working from home that lockdown has brought about also increases possibilities for re-enchanting local places. The global chains that dominated high streets and near offices could be subdued, and some consumers may use the free time that comes from giving up commuting to shop locally. Workshops and independent businesses – engaged in sustainable artisanal manufacturing, or with the national nature service – could spill out onto the street in every town and village in the country. Some of this may occur through the market, but government always sets the incentives and parameters within which the market operates, and it has powers which could help return vitality to Britain's cities, towns and countryside.

In particular, we make the following recommendations:

1. New developments are springing up across the country all the time (though not at the scale needed to contend with the housing crisis.) Government could buy up the land in several plots immediately and develop plans with architects and local people for garden suburbs, rather than identikit Barratt Home-style developments. Done at a small scale initially, these could be used as a model for more ambitious garden cities, built with local materials and in keeping with the character of the natural environment in the area.

2. Local people should have greater decision-making in the style and character of local places. Research overwhelmingly suggests this would lead to more nature-friendly and locally distinctive developments. This must not be allowed to become a proxy for NIMBYism, but rather is about how the homes should be built, rather than whether they are.

3. Government could pass a swathe of legislation to protect the diversity of our high streets and civic spaces and ensure they are nature and environment-friendly. This could include everything from changes to monopoly law and bans on shops of a certain size, as exist in some parts of Europe, to altering planning law to ensure that new commercial developments must include a set amount of locally-run and green businesses – just as new housing developments have an affordable housing requirement.[32]

[28]https://web.archive.org/web/20060516034726/http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/mrrefr55lroqjwrefpvg525528082004130712.pdf
[29]https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/recharging-rural-exec-summary-final-1.pdf   https://www.createstreets.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Heart-in-the-Right-Street.pdf
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