



People's Plan for Nature

Engaging local government



What's the issue?

Nature in the UK is in crisis.

38 million birds have vanished from our skies in the last 50 years

97% of our wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930s

A quarter of all mammals are at risk of **extinction**

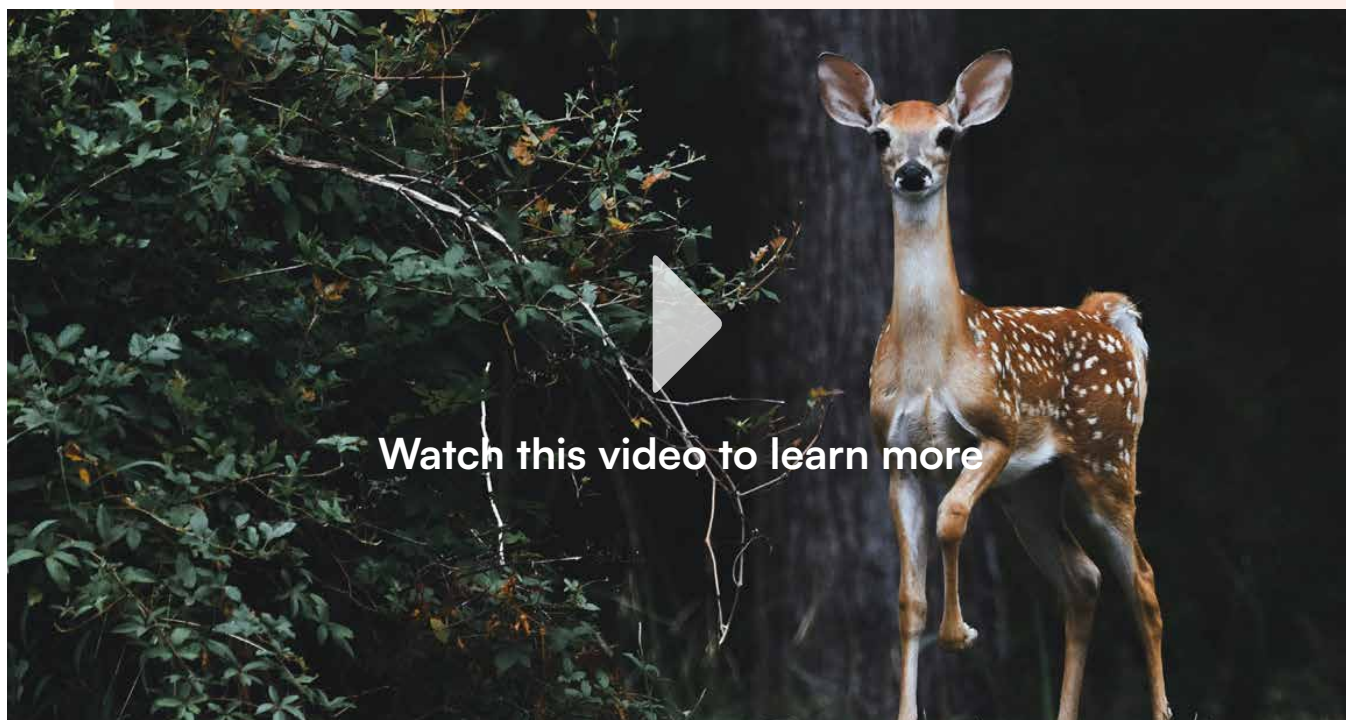
The UK is one of the most **nature-depleted** countries in the world

Time is running out, but we have just enough of the natural world left to help it recover.

What is the People's Plan for Nature?

The People's Plan for Nature is a vision for nature in the UK and a roadmap for what we need to do to protect and renew it.

The People's Plan was created by the people of the UK. It started with **'The National Conversation'** - a call for ideas about how we can save nature, which received nearly 30,000 responses. Then, 103 people with different backgrounds and experiences were randomly chosen to come together and form the People's Assembly for Nature. Over four weekends, the People's Assembly learnt from experts about the nature crisis and together, created the People's Plan.



Why we need local government support

The People's Plan calls for urgent, immediate action — from governments, businesses, charities, communities and individuals — to fundamentally change how we value nature. It asks all of us to pull together and do our bit to save our natural world.

Local governments have a big part to play. They are often responsible for relevant services, such as housing development, waste management, public health and the management of local green spaces. They can be instrumental in protecting local natural resources and supporting grassroots efforts to restore nature.

But engaging local government with nature can be tricky. Councils are time and resource poor, and have multiple competing priorities. This guide will provide you with the tips and tricks you need to successfully engage your local government to take action for nature.

Types of local government

The types of local government operating in your area depends on where you live in the UK.

England

In most places in England, there are:

- **Parish Councils**
Operate at the level below District and County Councils and responsible for local services such as allotments, parks and community centres.
- **District Councils**
Provide local services such as rubbish collection, housing and planning applications.
- **County Councils**
Provide services such as education, social services and waste disposal.

There are also unitary authorities that provide all local government services in their areas; metropolitan districts in large urban areas; and London Boroughs in London.

Scotland and Wales

In Scotland and Wales, local government is primarily made up of:

- **Unitary authorities**
Responsible for all larger local services
- **Community and Town Councils**
Responsible for smaller issues of local concern, for example representing local views on planning applications

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, there are District Councils. Unlike the other UK nations, there is no lower tier of local democracy below these.

Note: *The nations of the UK use different electoral systems in local elections. While England and Wales use a First Past the Post system, Scotland and Northern Ireland use Single Transferable Vote. This means that each local constituency in Scotland and Northern Ireland is represented by 3-4 councillors, sometimes from different parties.*

To find out what council is responsible for your area, you can search [here](#).

Calls to action for Local Government

The People's Plan for Nature outlines a number of calls to action for local government around key themes: vision and leadership, regulation and implementation, nature friendly farming, food production and consumption, waterway and catchment management, local access to nature and using evidence effectively.

Vision and leadership	Assist in creating grassroots coordination in local areas, including the creation of local directories of partners and projects, such as local sustainability groups.
Regulation and implementation	Ensure that regional and local needs and views are represented within a permanent Assembly for Nature, established by local government.
	Look at local policing and penalties for crimes against nature, if possible within local authority powers.
	Take account of any findings of the body balancing social and economic interests in decision-making about nature protection and restoration, and applying them locally.
Nature-friendly farming	Introduce local rules and projects to encourage farmers' markets, knowledge sharing locally and promote local good practice.
Food production and consumption	Aim to limit unhealthy food outlets, change food offered in schools and hospitals i.e. through procurement, and lead education / re-education initiatives in their area.
	Help with distributing excess food, introduce or enforce rules that make food sharing easier, enable more composting of food waste and undertake the education and the communication with the public that is needed.
	Prioritise making land available to communities for allotments and communal growing spaces to enable people to grow their own food.
	Help spread knowledge of local initiatives and enable local farmers markets.

Waterway and Catchment Management

Work together to identify priority sites across the country and resource executive agencies to plan action, alongside local communities, to drive change.

Lead on bringing together relevant partners to develop a plan for river catchment renewal as they hold planning responsibility within their areas and have routes into local communities to get them involved.

Work with water suppliers in all parts of the UK to establish and implement a consistent system for introducing water meters to domestic properties and domestic water billing that is not associated with Council tax.

Local access to nature

Provide funding to projects, help groups to navigate the rules and regulations, and provide land directly for projects to get going.

Secure the relevant expertise, coordinate local community groups, consider how green decisions are part of planning decisions. Research what local communities want for their green and natural spaces and activities.

Encourage walking meetings, volunteering in green space and other nature-based activities (with time given by employers during working hours).

Contribute to the cost of upkeep of local green spaces.

Using evidence effectively

Provide interpretation so that evidence takes into account local needs. Others can get involved by sharing “what works” and best practice/impact.

Act as a bridge between stakeholders and communities to communicate a change of language from nature restoration to renewal. Support action locally and encourage more public involvement.

Tactics for engaging local government

Target the ‘doers’

- Take time to research and understand the structure of local government in your area, including the roles and responsibilities of different committees and council members. This will help you to identify the best people to engage with your cause. It’s important to find the right people to target — people that are interested in nature and likely to be enthusiastic about your cause, but also that have the power to do something about it. You can then start building a relationship with them.
- Try to find out what issues your local representative(s) cares about and then see how you can relate nature to that issue. For example, if they are passionate about public health, you could see what nature initiatives you want to implement that you could frame as a public health issue instead.

Top tip: *Keep an eye on election cycles. Local elections don’t all happen at once across the UK, and building a relationship with someone who might not be in post in six months time won’t be the best use of your time. You can also use election cycles to your advantage. People are more likely to want to engage with you when they need your vote. For example, if you can show the incumbent councillor that their rival is supportive of your cause, it might motivate them to also show their support.*

If you need help thinking through who you should target, you can use this [Power Mapping Canvas tool](#).

Solve a problem

- Councils are time and resource poor and have a lot of competing priorities. Showing that your nature solution is a cheap and easy win for local government, that contributes to broader community objectives and could even save them money, is a great way of getting councillors on side.
- Make your nature solution is an easy ‘yes’. Instead of simply highlighting a problem and asking your local government to do something about it, have a prepared solution up your sleeve and a team of community members who are willing to help implement it. That way, all the local council needs to do is sign it off and potentially provide some resources.

Mobilise community support

- Mobilise support from people in your community before you approach your local councillors. Officials are more likely to respond to your ask if you can demonstrate that you already have support from others.
- Many communities have visible community leaders, whether it's people who are part of residents groups, Tenants and Residents Associations or other local groups. They might be willing to support you and already have strong relationships and sway with the local council.
- Similarly, third sector organisations, such as charities, with a local presence might already be involved with the council and can be a good way in.

Make sure you have a clear ask

- Think about what you need your local council to do. Do you want someone to attend an event you're holding in the community? Do you need local government permission to plant some trees or put up some swift boxes? The most effective asks are 'SMART' asks - asks that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely.
- When you know what it is you want to ask, get in touch with your councillor. Don't be scared to pick up the phone — phone calls are harder to ignore than emails or letters.

Back it up

- Support your arguments with evidence and data that demonstrate the importance of nature protection and the impacts of nature loss.
- Use the People's Plan for Nature to add legitimacy to your argument. This Plan was produced by a democratic process, involving thousands of people and a demographically representative group of the UK public. It is the public voice on how nature should be protected and renewed in the UK. Does what you're asking the local council to do tie in with one of the calls to action in the People's Plan? If so, say it.

Be persistent

- Engaging with local government can be a slow process, requiring persistence and patience. Keep the lines of communication open, follow up on meetings and conversations, and continue to advocate for your objectives over time. Recognise that change may require sustained effort.

Checklist:

- Have you found the best person on your local council to approach?
- Do you know what issues they care about most?
- Do you know what you specifically need them to do?
- Have you framed your ask in a way that addresses something they care about and in a way that is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely?
- Are you providing a solution to a problem?
- Do you already have support for your initiative? If so, from who?

Case studies



Belgrave Community Garden

The Belgrave Community Garden in Leicester successfully managed to persuade their local council to stop spraying a local green space with herbicides as part of their park management scheme, enabling the group to develop a beautiful wildflower corridor that is now home to lots of wildlife.



Penrith Swift Group

When a flyer for a new political candidate was delivered, it made no mention of what they would do for nature. Susan from the Penrith Swift Group emailed the candidate to ask them about their plans and told them about the Swift Group and the work being done to persuade developers to install swift bricks in all new homes. As a result of the meeting, the candidate wrote an article for two local newspapers publicising the work of the group, as well as posting their support on social media.



Local residents in London

Local residents in Haringey approached their local council with a solution to a notable rise in antisocial behaviour and drug taking in a local green space. They suggested that the area was re-designed to be more open and welcoming for residents, with more plants and trees. The group offered to hold responsibility for maintaining the space. The council helped to get the work done and provided a budget for the plants. The work not only contributed to a thriving green space, but also tackled the problem of antisocial behaviour.





This guide was created alongside The Save Our Wild Isles Community Fund, supported by Aviva, WWF's lead partner in the insurance and pensions sector. The fund has now closed but if you're a community group looking for funding for a project focused on climate action, explore the [Aviva Community Fund](#)