

October 3rd marks World Habitats Day, yet there is no cause for celebration. CIWEM has serious doubts over the UK Government's ability to protect and reintegrate vital habitats which provide a number of valuable ecosystem services in light of the new National Planning Policy Framework. A much more integrated policy approach is needed in order to halt increased habitat fragmentation, vital to increasing our resilience to the impacts of climate and demographic change.

The fragmentation of habitats can considerably undermine the integrity of whole ecosystems - reducing genetic diversity, limiting migration and reducing predators' range. In the UK the degree of habitat fragmentation has long been recognised and the 2011 National Ecosystem Assessment found that of the 8 habitat types assessed, 30% are in decline.

The importance and value of ecosystems and the services they provide to the economy, to society and to individuals are now widely recognised, with the international TEEB study (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity) placing a value of trillions on the potential loss of ecosystem services. The recent Natural Environment White Paper offered a welcome recognition of this value and a shift in approach with the promotion of ecological networks at a landscape scale to deliver increased resilience to ecosystem pressures.

However, any optimism over the White Paper is quickly called into question in light of the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which outwardly compromises many of the outlined objectives. The loss of regional tier planning, the removal of any protection for local wildlife sites (placing some 40,000 at risk across England) and the absence of any reference to the Nature Improvement Areas introduced by the White Paper misses the opportunity to integrate this new thinking into practical delivery via planning.

CIWEM's Executive Director, Nick Reeves OBE, says:

"Fragmented approaches across government departments raise serious doubts over this Government's green credentials. A lack of compatibility between the NPPF and Natural Environment White Paper leaves huge questions over how planning delivered at a local level will incorporate wider strategic aims. The NPPF reduces the environment to a series of discrete protected areas rather than a dynamic set of ecosystems interacting with our built environment. At the current speed of the planning reforms, England looks set on a trajectory of increasing

biodiversity loss and fragmentation, further reducing the ability of this nation's ecosystems to undertake the valuable services they provide threatening our natural heritage."