



Briefing paper for the House of Commons Climate Change: Preparation for the Climate Change Conference at Copenhagen, Thursday 5 November 2009

Climate change is the gravest threat to our environment, society and economy in the UK. Its impacts on nature are already becoming highly visible. In particular, oak trees came into leaf four weeks earlier this spring than in 1950.¹ Meanwhile our ecosystems provide essential services on which society depends. They improve air and water quality, alleviate flooding, conserve soil, support food production and safeguard public health. Yet habitat loss - the UK is amongst the least-wooded countries in Europe with 12% cover, compared with a European average of 44%² - and intensity of land use has rendered these services highly vulnerable.

Mitigation

Recent observations indicate that the climate is changing at least as fast as the more severe projections in the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).^{3,4} The gravity of the situation demands:

- **Leadership by the Government in international climate negotiations** to secure a deal that gives the best chance of avoiding dangerous climate change.
- **Substantial and immediate cuts in domestic carbon emissions** below 1990 levels of at least 40 per cent by 2020 and 80 per cent by 2050, as prescribed by the Climate Change Act 2008.
- **Rejection of all plans for carbon-intensive infrastructure**; for example, expansion of Stansted airport which also threatens ancient woodland.
- **Creation of new native woodland** to remove carbon from the atmosphere.
- **All management of forests and all international trade in forest products are ecologically sustainable and certified in line with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) principles.** Deforestation accounts for 18% of global carbon emissions.⁵

Adaptation

Even if global carbon emissions are reduced massively the effects of accelerated climate change will continue for many decades. Urgent action across Government is needed to create resilient landscapes in urban and rural areas, which can absorb and respond to change while sustaining the widest range of ecosystem services.⁶ This means that the Government should use all available instruments and incentives to:



- **Double native tree cover**, including in urban areas.
- **Protect and restore all irreplaceable wildlife habitats, including ancient woodland.**

Government departments and bodies, at national, regional and local levels, should work in concert to guarantee rapid and successful implementation. If government does not act proactively, then climate change will bring indirect impacts to the environment from changes in land and resource use. Due to their scale, scope and speed, many of these changes could be more damaging to ecosystems and the services on which we rely than the direct impacts of climate change. Indeed, those that lead to further habitat loss and increasingly intensive land use are of particular concern.⁶

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References

¹ <http://naturescalendar.org.uk>

² Forestry Commission (2009) *Forestry statistics 2009*. Downloaded at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/statistics>

³ IPCC (2007) Summary for policy makers. In: *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Solomon, S., D. Qin, M. Manning, Z. Chen, M. Marquis, K.B. Averyt, M. Tignor and H.L. Miller (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. Downloaded at:

http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_wg1_report_the_physical_science_basis.htm

⁴ University of Copenhagen Synthesis Report. (2009). *Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions*. Downloaded at: <http://www.pik-potsdam.de/news/press-releases/files/synthesis-report-web.pdf>

⁵ IPCC (2007) Summary for policy makers. In: *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [B. Metz, O.R. Davidson, P.R. Bosch, R. Dave, L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. Downloaded at:

http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_wg3_report_mitigation_of_climate_change.htm

⁶ Smithers, R.J., Cowan, C., Harley, M., Hopkins, J.J., Pontier, H. and Watts, O. (2008) *England Biodiversity Strategy Climate Change Adaptation Principles. Conserving biodiversity in a changing climate*. Defra. Downloaded at: www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/biostrat/index.htm