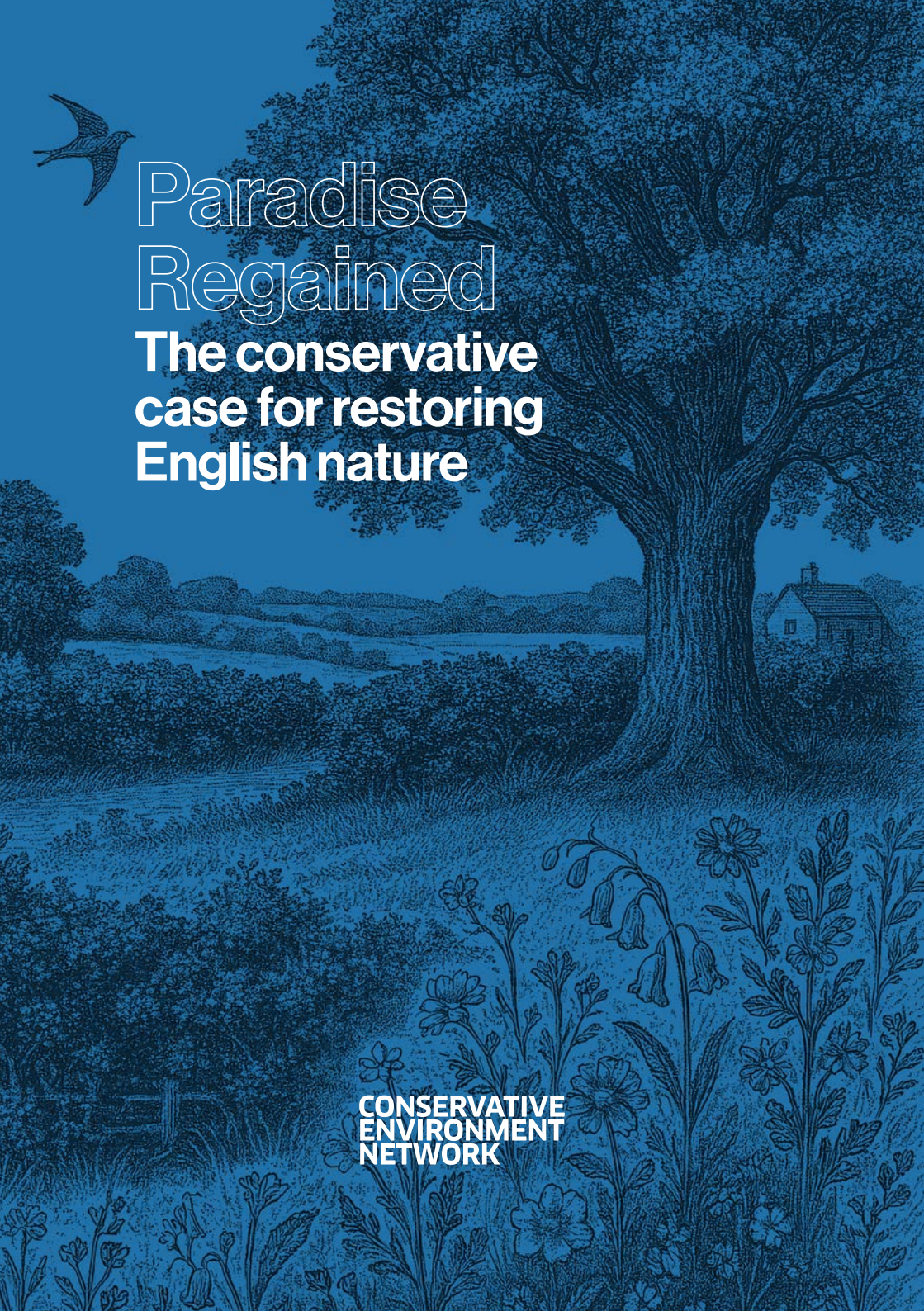

Paradise Regained

The conservative case for restoring English nature

CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

CONSERVATIVE
ENVIRONMENT
NETWORK

The Conservative Environment Network (CEN) is the home for conservatives who support responsible environmental leadership.

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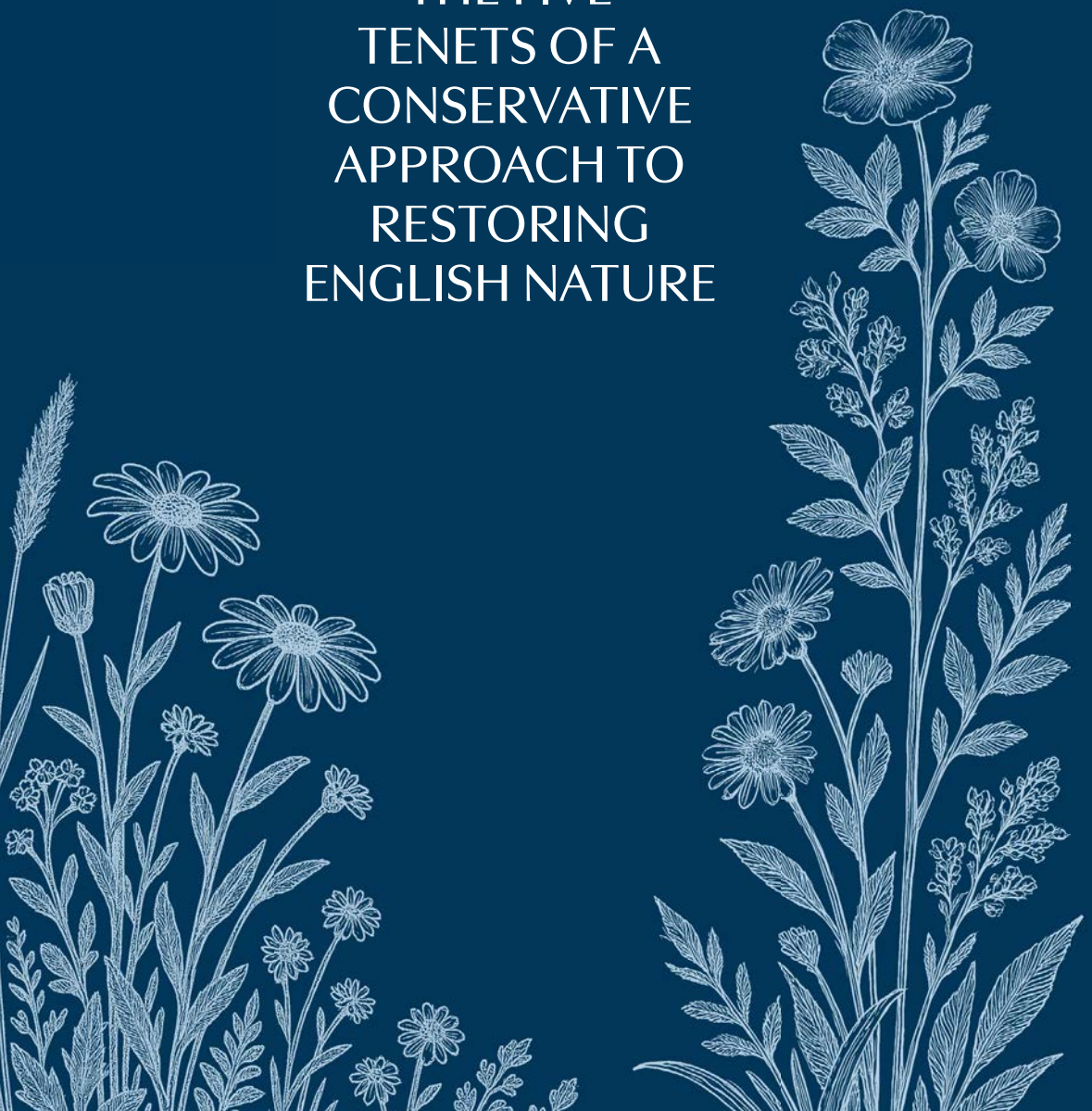

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To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely.

— EDMUND BURKE
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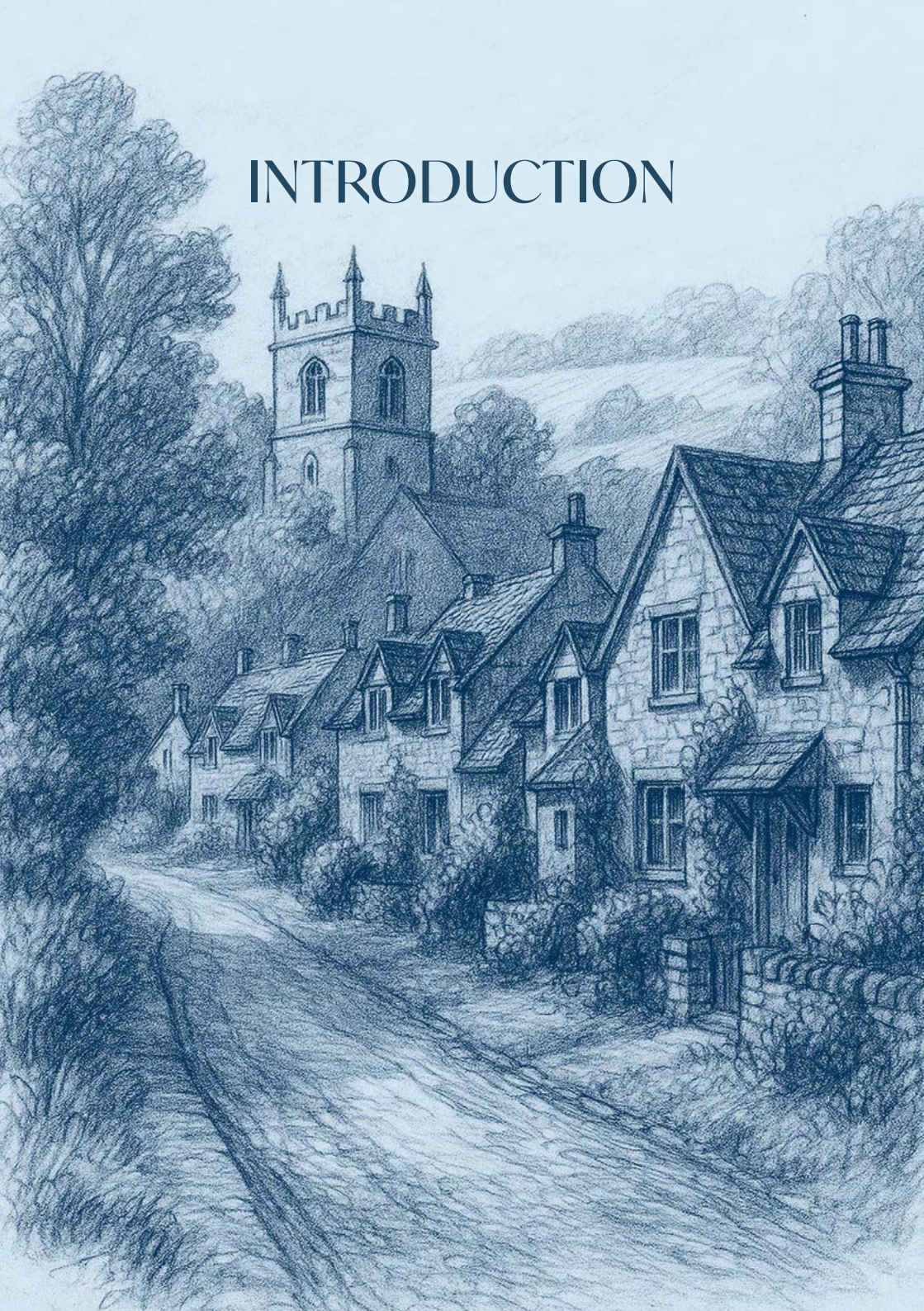
INTRODUCTION



Society is a contract between past, present, and future generations. As conservatives, it is our duty to uphold this contract, to pass on our world to the next generation in a better state than we found it. We strive to do this because we care about the home that future generations will inherit. Our instinctive love of home, or "oikophilia" as the late Sir Roger Scruton called it, is intertwined with a desire to improve it.

We are the stewards of England, our home. This shared inheritance applies as much to our cultural and economic heritage as it does to our guardianship of the natural world. The English countryside lies at the heart of this collective natural inheritance. A source of great national pride and international recognition, our countryside is at the core of our national identity. But we risk taking it for granted.

Although England contains many things worth conserving, our natural inheritance is weak. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries[1] in the world. We have diminished our countryside and - unless we are prepared to live with the consequences - it is our duty to restore nature to our landscapes. As with so many issues, conservatives recognise that, if we want to protect what is important, we must be ready to change it.

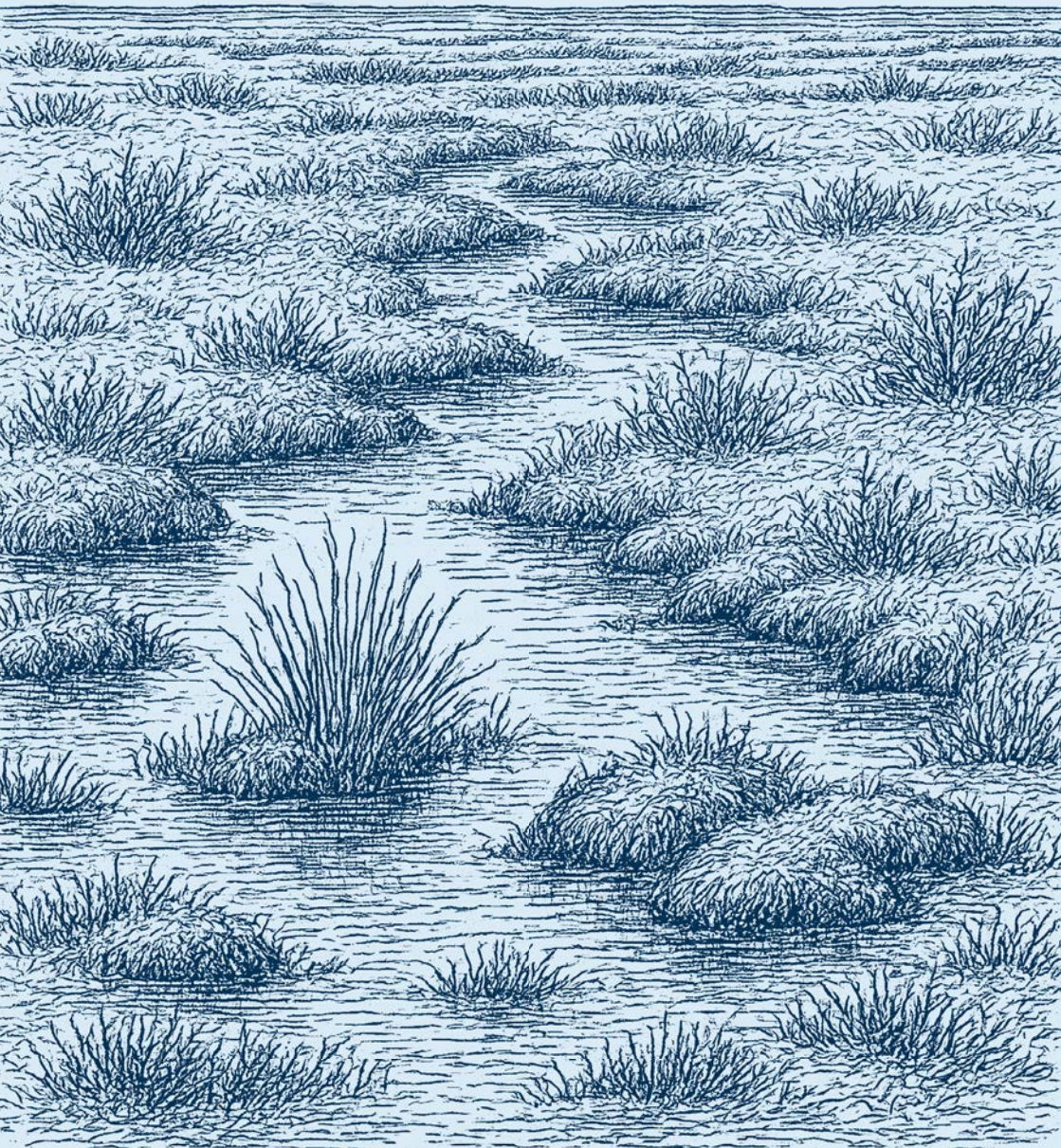
Unfortunately, in recent years, some conservatives have been sceptical about the need to restore our natural environment. Worse still, some do not regard its protection as a 'proper' conservative priority. This is misguided.

We cannot trust the left to conserve and restore our natural inheritance. They do not understand the real significance of the natural environment, nor do they have the inclination to protect and restore it. While leftist ideology aligns with the dark satanic mills, it is conservatism that attaches itself to England's green and pleasant land. Nature is something that, as conservatives, we are philosophically predisposed to care about. And as conservatives, we must heed the call to action.

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat

— **JOHN MILTON**
Paradise Lost

THE SCALE OF DECLINE



Our most valuable habitats are hanging on by a thread. England is home to 85 percent[2] of the world's chalk streams, and yet just 17 percent[3] of them are currently in good ecological condition. Our globally rare temperate rainforests cling on in isolated fragments, now covering just one percent[4] of the landscape. Meanwhile, 87 percent[5] of England's peatlands are degraded, damaged and dried out, emitting tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. In the last one hundred years alone, we have lost around 97 percent[6] of our wildflower meadows.

But alarming statistics rarely evoke an emotional response and the necessary action by themselves, especially among conservatives. For conservatives willing to look and listen, however, one ramble through our countryside is enough to realise that we run the risk of failing to meet the terms of our precious intergenerational contract, squandering the inheritance bestowed upon us and the better life we owe to our children and grandchildren.

There have been valiant attempts from some conservationists, farmers, and policymakers to reverse the fate of English nature and, as a result, some small pockets of hope certainly do exist. However, together they unfortunately still cover such a small proportion of land overall. Where these precious English habitats once stretched across entire landscapes, their depletion now paints a bleak picture of the scale of nature's decline in our once wild isles, despite valiant efforts to conserve nature across the country. Within these landscapes, the many species that were once native to and abundant on our isles, from beavers in our watercourses to sea eagles soaring through the sky, are now classified as endangered and under threat. Many others, from the Eurasian lynx to the large copper butterfly, are no longer present at all, driven to extinction on our land.

The ability to grasp the scale of this recent change is eroded with each passing generation as our baseline of what amount of biodiversity constitutes 'normal' shifts ever lower. Many of today's children cannot

even identify blackberries, let alone fathom that the creatures within the whimsical world of *The Wind in the Willows* or the valiant beavers traversing through Narnia are not only native to England, but once roamed here in abundance.

We would all be forgiven for forgetting that these species are actually native - for seeing is believing, and for most people, they are an all too rare sight. This is not our or our children's fault. When our baseline of what biodiversity means shifts so much and so rapidly with each passing generation, we cannot expect people to know that more abundant nature is possible, let alone to desire it.

Understanding of our natural history has declined with the decline of our natural environment. Connection with and access to nature is an essential resource for human flourishing and the inspiration behind the works of so many English authors, poets, and painters of generations past. Nature is a source of inherent beauty and, now detached from it, we are all paying the price.

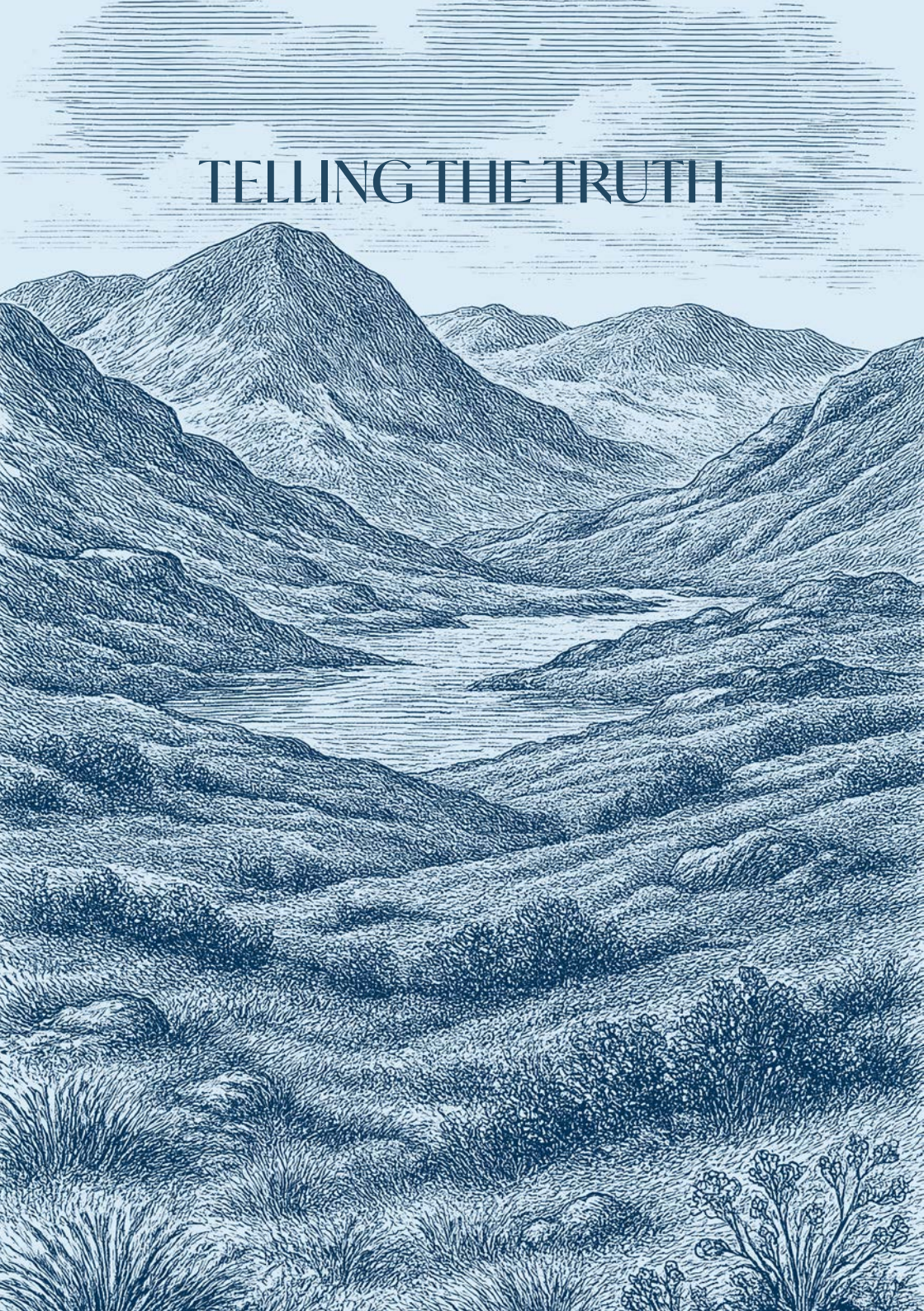
And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

— **GENESIS 1:26-28**

TELLING THE TRUTH



Our dominion over the Earth has undeniably been a long story of making nature bend to the will of mankind, transforming the amount of workable and habitable land for us to occupy. The drivers of our natural decline are, therefore, complex. In almost all instances, this decline has delivered otherwise desirable outcomes, together creating life as we know it.

Making more land available for food production has removed nature from our farmland and entire habitats altogether. But this system of intensive agriculture that has been ushered in has also gifted us with cheap and plentiful food to eat. Likewise, the paving over of land to lay the foundations for buildings and transport systems has increased the time it takes people to access nature and left communities vulnerable to the impacts of flash flooding. But it also stimulated the industrial revolution, unleashing economic growth on a scale never before seen, lifted millions out of poverty, and gave them a safe place to raise their families.

Harnessing the power of our natural resources led to world-leading advances in chemistry and chemical engineering that have since saved countless lives and generated many millions of pounds in profits. But these chemicals and plastic products have had nowhere else to flow once used except into our bodies, soil, and watercourses. Pollution of our ecosystem is a negative externality, but one that we have not sought to rectify in a sustainable way.

Striving for safety, we eradicated our apex predators, the wolves and lynx, and removed other important keystone species, like the beaver. In their place, new species of curiosity were collected from around the world and introduced to the UK, often intentionally in the name of aesthetics and intrigue. Unbeknownst to the Victorian naturalists that brought foreign plants and animals home, these alien species would go on to cause untold disruption, damaging domestic species and

ecosystems. These unintended consequences for the natural world were in part a consequence of a successful attempt to improve life at the time.

We should be immensely grateful for the progress society has made. But while we have had a good run, our current approach, which depletes our natural assets, cannot carry on forever. As a consequence of this progress, we can no longer dotingly refer to our country as both green and pleasant; for it is, for the most part, neither.

At their core, the problems we face today are no different from those our ancestors faced: how to find a balance between what humanity takes from nature and what we leave behind for our descendants.

— **SIR PARTHA DASGUPTA**
The Economics of Biodiversity: the Dasgupta Review

THE CHALLENGE

Disturbing hitherto balanced ecosystems inevitably has consequences. It is only from the vantage point of today that we can look back at our past and the changes we have made to our land, to see the scale of nature's decline. Indeed, it is only relatively recently that the true impact of this removal of nature from our land has started to show.

Past generations have left us with a new challenge to solve. Biodiversity loss and climate change are two challenges confronting English life as we know it.

Solving them does not mean harking back to a time before this vital progress took place. There are good reasons that society has changed and change has often been for the better, though inevitably sometimes for the worse. We cannot, will not, and should not return to a rose-tinted version of England from centuries past. But we can harness the wisdom of the past to establish a better future.

Just as we cannot go backwards in time, we cannot also decide to stop the pursuit of economic progress in the name of the environment. Too many environmentalists are at least perceived to desire a return to life before these changes and to halt further economic progress in its track. Life as we know it today relies on these changes having taken place. Any form of environmentalism that thinks degrowth is not only feasible, but desirable, is dangerously naïve.

Solutions that seek to defy human nature are destined to fail, as are those that ignore basic economics. Nature restoration is not an exception to these rules. If we treat it as one, our efforts will be doomed. Responding accordingly to this reality is what should separate a conservative approach to environmentalism from a socialist one.

We must remember our duty to nature before it is too late. That duty is constant. It is never completed. It lives on as we breathe. It endures as we eat and sleep, work and rest, as we are born and as we pass away. The duty to nature will remain long after our own endeavours have brought peace to the Middle East. It will weigh on our shoulders for as long as we wish to dwell on a living and thriving planet, and hand it on to our children and theirs.

— **MARGARET THATCHER**
Speech at Second World Climate Conference

OUR MISSION

Sir Roger Scruton once noted that the countryside 'is a human institution built over centuries in the image of the people who made it.' He was right. Humans have toiled on this land for centuries. But this toil has changed in step with the wider world that was changing around it. The land we are left with today is unrecognisable compared to the land we had only a few generations ago, let alone centuries.

The countryside that exists today can and will look markedly different in the future. It cannot be, and throughout history has not been, preserved in aspic. With profound environmental changes underway, we know our countryside will evolve, and if we are to achieve greater ecological balance within it, we will need to make changes ourselves. We must be honest about this.

As conservatives, we must also recognise the consequences of the changes that have taken place and, as Burke's living generation, acknowledge our duty to reverse the decline of British biodiversity in a way that creates a rich and prosperous future for the next generation.

We must reflect on what parts of the past can enrich us now and work to shape the modern world we live in for the better, ready to pass it on in a better state than we found it. Change can carry risk. It can be a bad thing. Change for the sake of it is certainly not worth doing. But change, when done well and with a clear sense of purpose, can bring with it opportunity.

Brexit is the single greatest opportunity for England's living generation to restore our natural inheritance and revive our rural communities. By taking back control of laws and funding, we now have the opportunity to act differently to the EU, using our new freedoms to deliver better outcomes for nature that tailor solutions to the needs of England.

Our legislative environment has changed accordingly, with the passage of the Environment Act, Fisheries Act, and Agriculture Act.

However, we have not accompanied this with other necessary changes in how we regulate environmental outcomes, nor reevaluated the role of the state within this.

Taxpayers alone cannot finance nature's recovery at the scale we want and need. Governments have too readily reached for the lever of public money as the answer to our environmental problems. We have developed a highly complex and deeply bureaucratic system of environmental regulations that are expensive to navigate and seemingly impossible to overcome. Moreover, this system has failed to restore nature at the pace and scale required.

We must right the wrongs of our past by admitting the imperfections of the system we have built. This is an opportunity for conservatives to carve out a path to nature's recovery, creating a better world for our children and grandchildren, in a way that remains true to our principles and values. It is an opportunity waiting to be seized. And we must seize it.

I'll begin to sing of what keeps
the wheat fields happy,

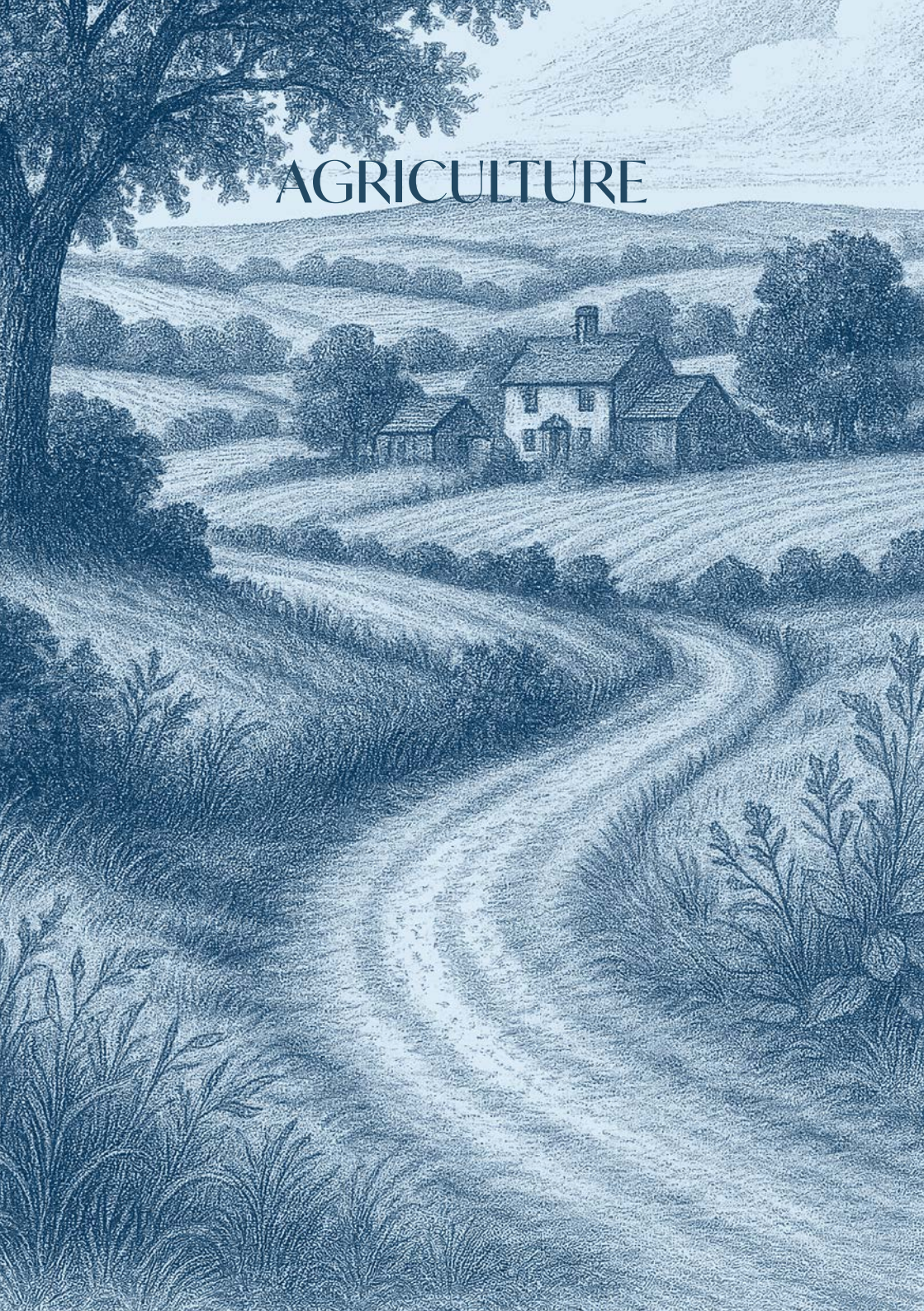
under what stars to plough the earth,
and fasten vines to elms,

what care the oxen need, what
tending cattle require,

Maecenas, and how much skill's
required for the thrifty bees.

— **VIRGIL**
Georgics

AGRICULTURE



Constable's *The Hay Wain*, perhaps the most famous depiction of a bucolic English scene, engulfs you in the sweet visual embrace of rolling fields, splaying trees, and shaggy hedgerows that epitomised the English romanticism of the late eighteenth century.

Before the Second World War, farmland took up a much smaller part of England than the 70 percent[7] it does today. The farming that took place then was far more gentle on the land when nature, not machinery, dictated a field's shape. Rarely were these fields perfect squares and rectangles. From unfarmable field margins, wildflowers could spring up. Their seeds and insects underfoot were a food source that fuelled a cacophony of birdsong that was seemingly ever present, with birds, like the now-rare curlew and lapwing, swarming the air.

These are the fields we think about. They were made iconic by the farmers working within them. Farmers have long been the stewards of our land, building the human institution that is the English countryside. Until very recently, farming was synonymous with family enterprise. There is something deeply conservative about family farming. It is the ultimate embodiment of Burke's intergenerational contract, with each generation of farmers passing on their land and their knowledge to their children.

When you inherit land, you feel a duty to honour your inheritance by tending carefully to it. You want to protect your land and the soil underneath it for the next generation, investing in longer-term natural assets like hedgerows and trees. You may not live to see all the benefits they bring, but your children and grandchildren certainly will. If policies that support this intergenerational contract are eroded, many family farms risk no longer being passed down the generations, damaging incentives for long-term environmental stewardship.

It is right, however, to question why this bucolic idea of family farming has too often not delivered positive outcomes for the environment in recent decades. There are, after all, legitimate reasons to be unhappy with the stewardship of England's farmed environment, as farmland bird populations have declined, soils are depleted, and agriculture has made a sizable contribution to water pollution.

Head into the countryside in 2025 hoping to experience a scene like that depicted in *The Hay Wain*, and it will quickly become apparent that the English countryside that exists today is not the same as that which was adored and made iconic then.

This is because, intergenerationally minded as they may be, farmers are fundamentally economic actors. The loss of farmland nature was motivated not by environmental vandalism on the part of farmers, but in response to incentives set by politicians.

The Second World War's Dig for Victory campaign rightly spurred the rapid expansion of farmland and advancements in agricultural technology. This was cemented within the 1947 Agriculture Act, which sought to increase domestic food production by providing massive subsidies. For a wartime generation which risked being starved into submission, it was a very understandable response.

In 1962, as a participant in the then European Economic Community's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), these incentives were further entrenched, with direct subsidies for food production. Subsequent iterations of the CAP distributed payments based on the amount of land managed. This did little to attract new talent or improve productivity on our farms. What it did do, however, was incentivise the systematic removal of farmland nature, to maximise the size of 'managed' farmland.

As a result, the once shaggy field edges have been tamed, hedgerows and the wildlife that inhabited them are gone, and the cacophony of farmland birdsong has been all but silenced. Instead, an increasing

number of expensive chemicals have been poured into fields to perform many of the tasks that nature once provided for free, at the increasing expense of soil health, the most important of all a farmer's natural assets. While this has meant we can produce more food domestically in the short term, we have paid the price in the form of the long-term resilience of our land.

Incentivising the removal of nature and depletion of our soils did not sit well with many traditional farmers. These farmers recognised the vital services our natural ecosystems were providing them with, thanks to the intimate knowledge of their land that had been passed down to them through the generations.

It did not sit well with the Treasury either. Billions of pounds of public money were being spent to sustain a farming sector that was becoming increasingly unsustainable, both financially and environmentally.

Liberated from the shackles of the EU, we no longer lavish taxpayer subsidies on farmers simply for managing land. Nor do we subsidise food, a private good which consumers already pay for in their weekly shop.

Recognising the importance of healthy natural assets for our long-term domestic food production, we are now directing our limited public funds to what the market has not traditionally valued, but which is essential for farming and food production - healthy soils, clean and abundant water, pollinators, and a thriving natural environment.

That is why regenerative agriculture underpins England's transition away from the EU's CAP towards the Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs). This is not some new fangled fad. It is the rediscovery of traditional farming practices of past generations that are rooted in stewardship of the land. ELMs comprises three tiers, reflecting three levels of ambition for those wanting to receive government funding to support their farming businesses.

The first is the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), which rewards farmers for adopting nature-friendly and regenerative practices. Payments are available for actions like establishing flower-rich margins in and around a field, testing soil organic matter, and planting legumes which protect the soil from erosion during winter and fix nitrogen from the atmosphere, enriching the soil with a natural source of fertility to enhance future yields.

The second tier is Countryside Stewardship, which supports efforts to enhance nature on land to improve the local environment. Payments are given for the restoration of farmland habitats, be they wetlands or woodlands, to increase biodiversity, improve water quality, and deliver other ecosystem services on the land.

The third, and most ambitious tier, is Landscape Recovery. As the name suggests, this funding is made available to support large-scale, longer-term projects in which neighbouring farmers work together to restore nature and habitats at the landscape level. Each of the first three rounds of Landscape Recovery has been oversubscribed.

To encourage as many English farmers as possible to embrace regenerative farming, more funding was put into SFI, the lowest tier. This approach drove good uptake. Fifty percent[8] of farmed land is now covered by SFI agreements, providing the vital stepping stones for farmers across England to embrace regenerative practices on their land. Whether it delivers environmental change at the scale required, however, remains to be seen.

The current funding model should not remain static for years to come. The overall spending envelope should be increased in line with inflation, to stop its value being eroded as we've seen in recent years. We also need a more agile approach to farm payments that ratchets up ambition over time, bringing farmers into the fold and then incentivising further ambition. Such an approach would enable the government to

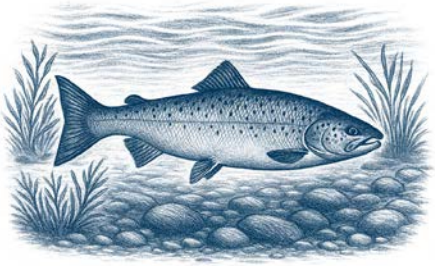
deliver an increasing amount of public goods for the same amount of public money.

Modern farmers also have powerful tools that their grandparents did not. We can now combine cutting edge modern technology with the art of good, traditional farm husbandry. Precision farming with drones and robots, aided by advances in GPS mapping and soil testing, allows farmers to reduce their reliance on expensive chemical inputs. Not only will this save farmers money whilst retaining yields, it will also help to improve soil health and water quality.

Free from the EU, we have also liberalised regulations on gene-edited crops, which could prove revolutionary for our yields and their resilience to the impacts of climate change. Legislation passed by a previous Conservative government has given us the levers to lead in this field. They now need to be pulled.

Even with these advances, our food supply chains remain unfair. Farmers receive incredibly low prices for the food they produce. This has been another key driver away from smaller family farms practising regenerative farming, and towards larger, more industrial, intensively managed farms.

Important steps have already been taken to address unfairness in vulnerable sectors like eggs and fresh produce. This work must continue across the board. As conservatives, we rightly baulk at subsidising private goods. And food is ultimately a private good being sold in a private market. But this does not justify inaction.



I chatter, chatter, as I flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

I wind about, and in and out,
with here a blossom sailing,
And here and there a lusty trout,
And here and there a grayling,

And here and there a foamy flake
Upon me, as I travel
With many a silver water-break
Above the golden gravel,

And draw them all along, and flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

— **LORD TENNYSON**
The Brook

WATER

Water brings life. Meandering their way through our countryside, rivers are the conduit of life into our landscapes. A river ecosystem encapsulates so much more than just the river itself, with catchments stretching from the original source right out to the sea.

Porous and rich in organic matter, healthy soils absorb and store water efficiently and effectively, making the land more resilient against flooding and drought. Much of our land no longer contains the web of roots and healthy soil that hold, filter, and slowly remove excess water during periods of heavy rainfall.

We have stripped our land's ability to deal with insufficient and excess water. Flooding is becoming more frequent and fierce in the UK as a result, an issue that will intensify as the impacts of climate change are fully realised. Meanwhile, as English spring and summer time get hotter, the risk posed by drought to nature, farming, and people, especially in the South East of England, grows. At the source of a river, removing the woodlands and forests from our uplands has also removed a vital sponge from our land. Less water is retained upstream. This has led to more incidents of flooding on the often higher quality farmland found downstream.

We must reestablish this network of roots by planting more and different plants on our land, from source to sea. This will reverse the damage caused and increase our land's resilience to both flooding and drought, protecting communities and livelihoods along the way.

While the land can no longer hold as much water as it once could, nor can our watercourses. Our naturally meandering rivers have been corseted, banks have been buttressed, wiggles have been straightened, and natural river processes have been obstructed. Alongside the draining of land, manmade solutions, like concrete weirs and dams, have been built to control the flow of the water. In doing so, we have once again started paying for manmade solutions that nature had hitherto provided

for free. This has had damaging repercussions for the native species we purport to care about.

The Atlantic salmon is a Darwinian marvel. Born in freshwater streams, it navigates thousands of miles, adapts to saltwater life, and avoids fierce predators. After years at sea, it finds its way back home, guided by instinct and environmental cues. Battling upstream currents, it returns to the very river where it was born, completing a cycle refined by millions of years of evolution. This is a stunning display of evolutionary adaptation and endurance.

These marvels are not, however, miracle workers. Salmon must now navigate an impossible assault course of manmade obstacles to complete their remarkable journey upstream. River straightening and reinforcement was done with the best of intentions, to control the flow of water and prevent flooding in the immediate vicinity. But it has had knock-on effects for wildlife, the wider river catchment, and communities downstream.

Farmers are coming together to restore river ecosystems through Landscape Recovery. In the north-east Cotswolds, a cluster of 150 farmers in the River Evenlode catchment has developed a plan[9] to restore 3,500 hectares of land. This restoration will protect threatened species and enable locals to continue to farm productively for years to come by increasing flood resilience.

While ELMs has enabled these farmers to finance their nature recovery ambitions, their ambition stems firstly from membership of what Edmund Burke referred to as 'little platoons', small building blocks of affiliation that together form society at large. These little platoons want to take action, driven by the desire to protect the place they call home, but also out of their own self-interest. Afterall, a farmer's business relies on healthy and resilient landscapes, sustained by healthy soil and clean, abundant water.

This desire to change their home emerged organically, from their experience of living in that landscape and seeing the realities of flooding and soil erosion taking a toll on their businesses and lives. These little rural platoons are rooted in their landscapes. They are the ones wanting to deliver this landscape-level change. Landscape Recovery merely provides the means for them to do so. This is an inherently conservative approach, empowering communities to protect their own livelihoods and landscapes.

Some politicians have wrongly labelled these projects as government-mandated 'rewilding', an affront to farming that has been inflicted on unwilling farmers. But for farmers on the ground, there has been real enthusiasm for Landscape Recovery, with each available round having been significantly oversubscribed. We should be responding to this demand by providing more rounds of funding.

The ability of our farmers to think of the bigger picture - in this case, the river catchment - is an approach that politicians should seek to replicate, not chastise. Water is facing a growing number of threats, there being too much or too little, but also from a growing number of pollutants. Our ability to secure our supply of water and to improve its quality effectively and efficiently demands a more reasoned and holistic approach than the status quo allows.

Unfortunately, the water policy debate has been anything but reasoned or holistic in recent years. Sewage discharges are deeply unpleasant for people and damaging for aquatic life. But they are not the only issue facing water in this country, nor necessarily the biggest. And yet sewage continues to dominate the environmental conversation.

Bad faith actors have ignored facts and reason in favour of political mudslinging. It is time to tell the truth. Sewage discharge from storm overflows is not an intractable problem, but it will not be solved overnight either.

England has 15,000[10] storm overflows. Thanks to the foresight of Conservative ministers over a decade ago, we now monitor all of these overflows. Other countries do not. Scotland, for example, monitors less than 10 percent[11] of its storm overflows.

Storm overflows, the automatic outlets that act as a relief valve during periods of heavy rainfall, are an intentional part of our sewerage system's design. Subject to strict conditions, water companies can legally use storm overflows. In fact, contrary to what some have said[12], without this automatic system, sewage would back up into our homes and streets.

Our use of the sewerage system has changed over time. Following unprecedented levels of immigration, our population has grown. More people are using our sewage system. More buildings are connecting to the system. More things are entering the system that should not be, blocking pipes and adding pressure.

Most importantly, more rainwater is also going down into the system. This is the primary driver[13] of storm overflow spills and will only worsen as the impact of climate change intensifies. We need to work to keep rainwater out of our sewers if we are going to solve the storm overflow problem; we cannot simply turn them off.

As a country famed for our inclement weather, our inability to harness and manage this rainwater is a farcical problem entirely of our own creation. We need to value rainwater as the resource that it is.

We have failed to build any new substantially sized reservoirs since 1991[14]. We need to build more reservoirs. But they are expensive. Notable for its rarity and ambition, the Tideway Super Sewer in London relied on a novel mechanism to be financed, made possible through the Specified Infrastructure Project Regulations in 2013. These regulations must be reformed so that reservoirs and other ambitious water infrastructure projects can be financed.

At the same time, we have continued to build on flood plains, well aware of the consequences, but unwilling to mitigate the obvious impacts of doing so. This is a clear failure of our generation to consider the needs of future generations, once again defying the conditions of Burke's intergenerational contract.

We need to roll out more sustainable drainage systems in our built environment. Plants can be used as nature-based infrastructure in our towns and cities. They will act as sponges, rather than relying on a network of pipes to carry rainwater to the nearest storm overflow. This can reduce flash flooding, as well as reducing the need to use storm overflows. Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 contains the means to require developers to install sustainable drainage systems, but we have failed to enact it.

To deliver more nature-based infrastructure, we also need to be honest about the role of water companies. In England and Wales, they have invested £236 billion since 1989[15]. For the next five years alone, water companies wanted to invest over £100 billion[16], to fund, among other things, nature-based solutions, reservoirs, and the reduction of storm overflow usage. By way of comparison, DEFRA has an annual total budget of just over £7.4 billion[17] by 2028-29.

Seen as a quick fix by many, including Reform UK, nationalising water companies would ultimately fail to deliver the scale of investment required to secure abundant, clean water. Improvements to water quality and security come at a price. Nationalising our water companies would cost a lot of money and pass responsibility squarely onto the government, but it would not inherently change anything about our sewerage system. It is emphatically not the answer to our water quality woes.

We should harness the power of the private sector to deliver our nature-based ambitions, not hinder them by creating more sticks to beat them with. Instead, their ability to deliver services at an appropriate

price whilst investing in the future is increasingly frustrated by Ofwat, the Water Services Regulation Authority.

The chronic lack of investment in reducing the use of storm overflows is, therefore, ultimately the responsibility of Ofwat and successive governments which have set a vague list of 'strategic priorities' for Ofwat. This process has trade-offs.

Every five years, water companies must submit business plans to Ofwat as part of a price review process. This process determines the service customers can expect to receive and at what cost. Through the price review process, Ofwat has ensured water bills have experienced a decade of below-inflation increases. This impacts how much a water company can invest. Low water bills have come at the price of action to improve our water system and, as a result, farmers struggle to water their crops, gardeners are unable to use their hosepipes, polluted rivers are not safe to swim in, and wildlife is under threat in our most precious habitats.

As the water quality debate has grown in toxicity, the flexibility of water companies and regulators has diminished. Water companies are now required to develop a vast array of different plans and strategies, diverting precious resources away from real investment in our water system and instead towards jumping through regulatory hoops. For the 2025 price review process alone, water companies submitted a staggering 53,000 pages[18] worth of plans, with these same companies spending over £250 million[19] on the process.

Equally, prescriptive requirements and siloed thinking across government and regulators have hampered efforts to deploy nature-based solutions to water quality and security, even where water companies want to do so, despite these solutions also delivering other desirable benefits like habitat creation, which support wider governmental ambitions.

We need a sensible and honest conversation about water pollution. Sewage from storm overflows is far from our only problem. Yes, sewage damages the aquatic environment and harms wildlife, but so does run-off from roads and agriculture, as well as the chemicals and microplastics from heavy industry and everyday household products.

While punishing water companies can make us feel good, it does not lead to direct improvements to our water system. In fact, it can divert money away from the necessary solutions and deters the best and brightest from pursuing a career in the water sector.

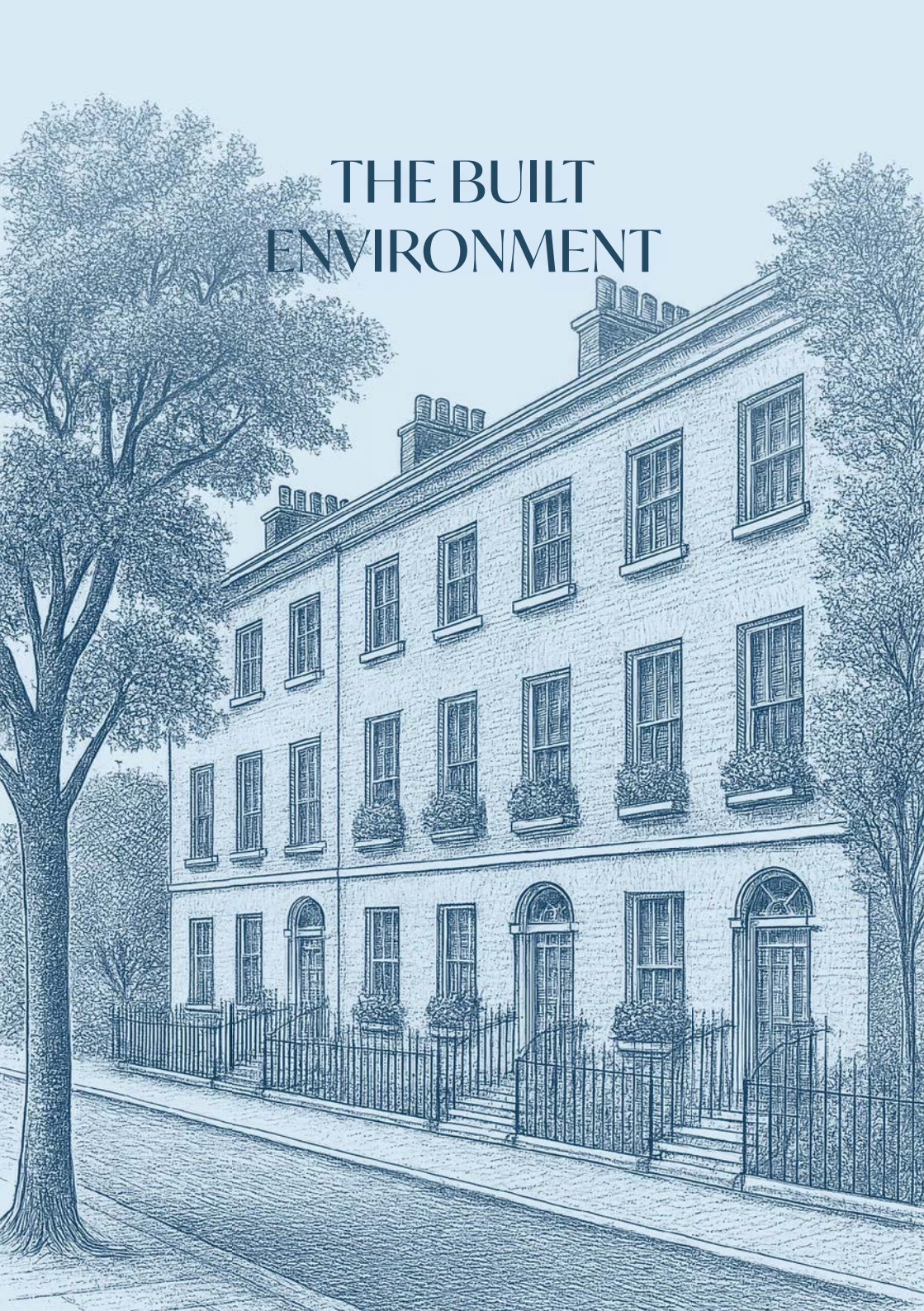
We need to reform our approach to water regulation. We cannot focus solely on the pipes at the end of the system. We need to look at what is happening across a river's catchment and reduce the pressures accordingly. Such an approach would increase flexibility, enabling us to tailor solutions to local priorities and pollutants, harness nature more effectively, rationalise regulations, reduce the costs of compliance, and encourage innovation.

Advocating for this new approach demands political bravery. A failure to act will mean the next generation will pay the price.

Back to the simple life.
Back to nature.
To a shady retreat in the reeds
and rushes of the River Ches.
The lure of Metroland was remoteness and quiet.
This is what a brochure of the 20's said.
'It's the trees, the fairy dingles, and
a hundred and one things in which
dame nature's fingers have lingered long in
setting out this beautiful array of wooden slope,
trout stream, meadow and hill top sites'.
'Send a postcard, for the homestead of your
dreams, to 'Loudwater Estate', Chorley Wood.

— SIR JOHN BETJEMAN
METROLAND

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Whether in a bustling city centre or in the rolling fields of the countryside, conservative environmentalism should be a spontaneous and bottom-up endeavour: responding to the world around us - what we see and experience - and wanting to protect and improve the small corner of the world that we regard as home.

Our increasingly urbanised society is disconnected from the natural world. This has been, in no small part, thanks to the nature of the built environment we have created and the sense of community that we have destroyed in the process. If, as Sir Roger Scruton suggests, "true civic responsibility arises from our sense of belonging", we have failed to create and sustain communities to which people not only feel they belong, but are proud to belong.

There is no denying the aesthetic decline of many English communities and the psychological impact this has on its residents. The built environment is often undeniably ugly. Litter is strewn across our scarred pavements, crumbling tarmac covers our once cobbled streets, and iconic English street furniture, from water fountains to telegraph boxes, has been transformed from elegant to eyesore. Beauty is now missing from our lives.

Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder. Our Georgian townhouses and grand Victorian infrastructure projects are the envy of the world. They are objectively beautiful. They have not just stood the test of time because of what they are made of. They have stood the test of time because we wanted them to stay. Even when stated preferences suggest Englanders want their own castle, revealed preferences[20] continue to show a yearning for these aesthetic townhouses, and the connected community life that accompanies them.

Modern developments pale in comparison to what we know we are capable of building. For too long we have denied ourselves beauty, striving to build housing units without stopping to think if people will want to call these places 'home'. The need to build more beautifully cuts

to the core of this issue. Nature can play an integral role in restoring beauty to our everyday lives. This restoration can be lucrative too, with houses and flats within 100 metres of green spaces being on average £2,500[21] more expensive than those located more than 500 metres from them.

The previous Conservative government took steps to reverse the wave of ugliness that has afflicted our communities for far too long. The Office for Place and the integration of beauty into the National Planning Policy Framework put building beautifully back on the agenda. This was accompanied by the creation of biodiversity net gain, which demands that new developments deliver an increase in biodiversity of at least 10 percent. Together, these policies strived to make our communities green and pleasant and, by extension, more liveable. These policies have since been removed or eroded.

Communities that can afford to are willing to prioritise beauty and nature in the built environment. Communities that cannot afford this lose out. The lack of beauty and nature within them then contributes to their own decline.

Improving nature in parks may be the go-to choice for communities wanting to make a positive change, but visiting a park should not be the only way that people can see nature in their daily lives. Most people spend very little time in them, with this amount of time decreasing[22] the further away a person lives from a park. Nature should be embedded in our communities little and often, not just limited to parks. It needs to be present as we walk down the high street and gaze out of our own windows.

While nature for its own sake is desirable to feed a community's soul, nature can be embedded in a way that acts as infrastructure too. The creation of sustainable urban drainage systems can help prevent flashflooding and reduce the use of storm overflows, meanwhile street

trees are cooling for those walking underneath them on a warm day and can help to protect the tarmac on the roads.

Requiring more nature in new developments is admirable, but this approach depends on new developments being built in the first place. We are not building nearly enough new homes and we are certainly not building enough to keep up with current levels of migration. That is because it costs too much to navigate the planning system. This system does not make enough land available for development and adds huge uncertainty and risk into the process. Beautified corners are cut and the price of housing remains far too high.

Blame is often laid at the feet of legal protections to conserve our natural world against the impacts of development. While it remains unclear[23] how much development is blocked in the name of nature, due to a lack of quality data, it is becoming increasingly clear that this system of natural safeguards, much of which was inherited from the EU, is delivering neither enough homes nor enough nature.

As well intentioned as current protections may be, with only 38 percent[24] of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) currently in favourable condition, our current approach to nature conservation within the planning system has demonstrably failed.

We have sought comfort in creating processes, focused squarely on prescribing outputs, the box ticking and form filling to prove you have thought about nature conservation, with little regard for whether this is delivering the outcomes we seek, namely greater biodiversity and more nature-rich spaces.

Rather than bountiful nature, all we have to show for ourselves is an increasingly complex suite of environmental regulations. We have an alphabet of acronymed site designations that often overlap due to explicitly technocratic reasons, with over 80 percent of our SSSIs[25] by area also designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special

Protection Areas (SPAs). Developers wanting to build anything must pay consultants and lawyers huge sums of money to navigate this system on their behalf.

Expensive white elephants, in the form of tunnels for bats and discos for fish, are put forward to satisfy the regulations as currently drafted and interpreted, with little thought for whether they get the most value for nature for the money spent. This is an inefficient use of money, both for the developers themselves and for those wanting to restore the natural environment. It does not deliver the outcomes we want and need to see.

This site-by-site approach to nature conservation fails to think of the bigger picture. Protections have allowed us to conserve some of our natural environment, and without them, nature's decline would likely have been steeper. But this complex web of different processes, designations, and obligations is demonstrably not fit for purpose when it comes to delivering on a new ambition to not just conserve but to restore our natural world. Without an overarching strategy to underpin these individual mitigation actions, our collective effort to protect nature is in vain.

Whether in favour of more development, more nature, or both, it is important to recognise the need to change our current approach. Our development and nature recovery ambitions are especially poorly served by the unreformed, EU-derived Habitats Regulations.

The EU designs rules to cover all of its member states, with subsequent rulings by the European courts adding further and unanticipated complexity beyond what was originally adopted. We now have the environmental sovereignty to do things differently, not merely for the sake of it, but in order to deliver better outcomes for our own country.

After decades hooked on EU control, in the years following the rediscovery of our freedoms, we have not yet seized all of the

opportunities Brexit has presented us with. We now must do so, lest we deny future generations the benefits of both richer biodiversity and essential infrastructure and homes.

A credible and balanced attempt to reform our designations was developed, in the form of a green paper[26], back in 2022. This plan sought to simplify our complex designation system for nature's recovery, shift to a more strategic approach to mitigating harms to protected sites, and tackle the underlying reasons for decline, not just to protect the often dwindling amount of nature that is already within a protected site. This plan represented a fundamental change in approach which was wrongly perceived as a potential threat to the environment. As a result, the green paper was never taken forward and instead far more damaging piecemeal attempts to carve out specific types of infrastructure from these requirements have been pursued.

It is critical that, rather than ripping up the rule book or exempting certain types of development from having regard to nature, we have a fundamental shift in approach, which strengthens our commitment and ambition towards the restoration of nature. This does not mean the total eradication of procedure, but rather a retreat from procedure for its own sake. If something is broken, it is our duty to fix it. This does not mean the first step is to destroy what we have. We must keep the good and change the bad. Pragmatism over revolution is an unquestionably conservative approach.

Where England is blessed with truly unique habitats, such as chalk streams, we need a system that recognises our important role as a custodian of these globally rare habitats and seeks to properly protect and restore them. Currently, a mere 11 out of 220[27] English chalk streams have any legal protection and when they do, they are designated as SSSIs, a designation that fails to adequately protect them from the real pressures they face in their wider catchment.

Stepping away from EU-derived directives and instead striving towards an ambitious and achievable vision for English nature is a natural place to lay our ambition for the coming decades. This is where an overarching strategy that prioritises nature restoration and trickles down through the planning system and wider regulatory landscape can be beneficial.

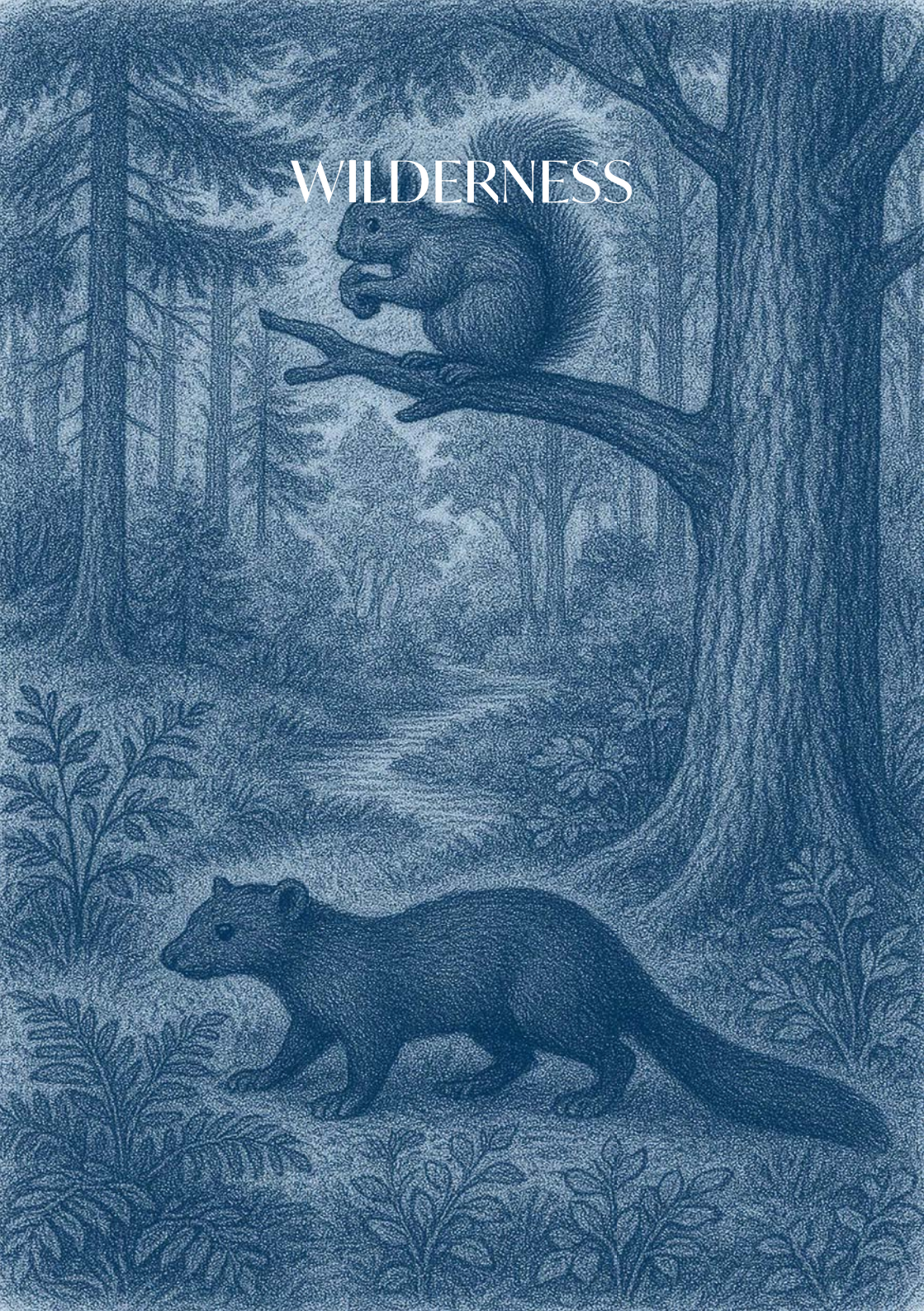
The government controls the key policy mechanisms but it does not need to and should not control the delivery of nature's restoration too. An instinctive lurch towards centralised state control, for a government agency to be able to compulsorily buy land to restore nature, is a typically flawed, leftist approach. It ignores the spontaneous desire of little platoons to improve their small corner of the world. We need a system in which local actors are able to play their part. Respect for civic association, and what it is capable of delivering, is a distinctly conservative approach to restoring our once green and pleasant land.

Seemingly small ideas, like the creation of the Water Restoration Fund to pay for restoration efforts using water company fines by the last Conservative government, can have a mighty impact on the little platoons benefiting from them. The restoration of local nature can not only boost biodiversity and beauty, but restore community pride, reinvigorating the autonomy of little platoons across the land and allowing humans and wildlife alike to flourish within them.

The world, nature, human beings, do not move like machines. The edges are never clear-cut, but always frayed. Nature never draws a line without smudging it.

— **SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL**

Great destiny: Sixty years of the memorable events in the life of the man of the century recounted in his own incomparable words


WILDERNESS

Where once the sublime qualities of the natural environment were actively sought out and embraced, our wilderness has been traded for safety. Issues arising from the unpredictable behaviours of apex predators and other mammals have been eradicated. English landscapes are now synonymous with manicured gardens and orderly farmland.

In striving for safety and order, England has lost its wilderness. This removal of the wild, the scruffy corners, from our land has not been without consequence. Each habitat that is lost or degraded in England was once home to creatures great and small.

England's native flora and fauna are dwindling. Many have already left the landscape entirely. With one in six species[28] threatened with extinction in the UK, the imaginary nature-rich worlds once occupied by the likes of Squirrel Nutkin, Mrs Tiggy-Winkle, and Mr Jeremy Fisher have become all the more imaginary and fantastical in recent decades.

Animals are ultimately how many of us connect with nature. We are, after all, a nation of animal lovers. Our hearts surge as we hear birds sing from the trees, catch a glimpse of a pine marten in a forest, or spy a beaver swimming in a river. Unfortunately, these sightings of native fauna have become an all too rare occurrence in England.

Some of these animals, like the beaver, were hunted to extinction. Others were usurped by alien species brought over, intentionally or not, from overseas. Many were driven out by the changes we have made to our land. In their place, we still cling onto what we are able to, from farmed livestock in the countryside, to dogs frollicking around in our parks.

Perversely, as baselines continue to shift in tandem with our loss of biodiversity, the presence of an invasive species, such as grey squirrels, has become desirable, unbeknownst to their admirers that the native red squirrel has been driven out by them and forced to live in remote corners of the land.

Awareness of which animals actually belong on these shores has been eroded. This helps to explain, in part, why projects that seek to reintroduce the likes of beavers and lynx can be met with fierce opposition. While we have an emotional, human connection to the presence of certain animals in our landscape - often those deemed to be safe and, more importantly, familiar - we have forgotten how to coexist with those that disrupt the world around us. But this disruption is important. It is done with purpose. It is seeking to restore balance to our changed environment.

Some of England's most useful species are seemingly unremarkable, like the commonal garden lobworm which burrows deep into the soil, aerating it, improving its structure and ability to absorb water, or the venerated English oak tree, which supports an incredible 2,300 other species[29], with 326 dependent on this tree alone[30] for their own survival. Others, like the Atlantic salmon and the white tailed eagle, remain iconic despite having become too rare a sight.

So-called 'keystone species' play a critical role in maintaining the structure, stability, and biodiversity of the ecosystem they call home. Even if they may not be the most numerous in the ecosystem, their impact on the environment is disproportionately large relative to their abundance. Indeed, many other species depend on the keystone species for their survival. Removing a keystone species in particular leads to dramatic and negative changes in the ecosystem, throwing off the wider ecological balance. And removed them we have.

In our rivers, the Eurasian beaver, when given space, can reestablish complex wetland ecosystems that hold water upstream and provide a resting place and watering hole for innumerable species of birds, animals, and insects. But the waterproof qualities of their fur and unpredictability of their dams led them to be hunted to extinction in England.

In our woodlands, the wild boar roots in soil looking for shoots to eat. By disrupting the layers of earth, the wild boar reignites the microbial

activity within it, giving wildflower seeds the chance to germinate. Today, they remain in just a handful of isolated woodlands, like the Forest of Dean.

Each of our native keystone species faces its own battle to be maintained within or restored to our landscape. None are as controversial as our once native apex predators, however. The Eurasian brown bear, lynx, and wolf were each once native to England but have been extinct here for centuries.

Just like the English oak tree and lobworm, these keystone species once performed a vital ecosystem service in England: they killed other animals. Without apex predators in our landscape, multiple species of deer - including the invasive muntjac variety - have been able to proliferate in England.

At such high densities, deer negatively impact biodiversity, primarily through overgrazing. They prevent the natural regeneration of trees and woodlands and scupper well-meaning attempts by communities and land managers to plant more trees. Keeping them off of land through deer-proof fences comes with a large price tag that few farmers and conservationists can afford.

Our squeamishness towards the hunter-prey relationship differs wildly when we think about domestic versus international nature. One would never venture to the Serengeti, for example, and complain that a lion has killed yet another wilderbeast. We regard natural processes that take place 'over there' as normal. We must apply the same logic at home.

We have slowly but surely seen positive change on this front. More and more pine martens are being released into our woodlands each year to help control the invasive grey squirrel population, in order that our native red squirrel population may one day return in abundance. While recognising the added complexity of reintroducing bigger predators, we should adopt this same attitude to control our growing deer problem.

Recognising that the likes of lynx can play an important role in restoring nature to England is important, for the same reasons as we know why an English oak tree is important. In the place of functioning ecosystems and abundant keystone species that perform vital ecosystem services for free, taxpayers foot the bill for manmade solutions for restoring ecological balance. This should inspire any budget-conscious conservative to consider the role that apex predators can play. These species not only belong in England; their absence is felt.

There are obvious risks to mitigate when introducing any species back into the landscape. Predators, like the lynx, can hunt livestock. Beavers create wetlands which necessarily flood land. That is why the necessary precautions should absolutely be taken, and financial compensation made available, to protect communities and businesses that could be impacted.

These are not insurmountable problems, however, assuming the debate remains evidence-based. It is wrong to pretend that any of these native species would suddenly appear in every corner of England. That is not how nature works. Just like the guiding principle of successful tree planting, the right native species should be returned to the right place.

Returning native species to the landscape is not a novel ambition harboured by diehard environmentalists. Italy has 'bear-proofed' mountainous communities; France's hunting association membership fees help cover the damages incurred to farmers by its wild boar population; and the Spanish government compensates sheep farmers for damages caused by lynx predation.

Yet England remains an outlier in both Europe and the West for its timidity towards species reintroductions. It took us far too long and far too many governments to devise, for example, a simple licensing regime for wild releases of native beavers. We are now lagging behind and our landscapes are paying the price.

Just as farmers now have Countryside Stewardship options for controlling deer and grey squirrel populations, we should embrace the role that ELMs can play in helping to restore native species to the landscape. Entry into a Landscape Recovery project should be synonymous with the reintroduction of species that belong within that landscape. Elsewhere in England, farmers that coexist with reintroduced species should be rewarded for protecting and restoring the species' habitat through SFI payments.

Communities that want these species back should not have to wade through endless bureaucracy to get them, not least because the presence of these species can unlock entirely new economic benefits for the whole community. Opportunities abound to cut unnecessary red tape to make recovering nature easier, like granting permitted development rights for ponds and simplifying the paperwork that impedes animal transfers.

People crave nature, even if their interpretation of what nature constitutes has shifted. More nature-rich places will attract people to them. While there is a certain charm in having nature for nature's sake, springing out from restoration efforts are wider benefits. A wildlife tourism industry can blossom. Skilled and unskilled jobs in nature restoration can be created. Sites of scientific study and endeavour can emerge. Sources of inspiration and awe, and not to mention pride, reemerge and will feed the soul of the next generation of Englanders.

By way of an example, in 1990, ospreys were reintroduced to the county of Rutland. Birdwatching tourism was stimulated, drawing crowds from across the world. From this enthusiasm emerged the annual Global Bird Fair conference. Visitors come all year round, staying in local hotels and dining out in local eateries. The presence of this bird has even led to the production of the Rutland Osprey ale by a local brewery, now sold nationwide.

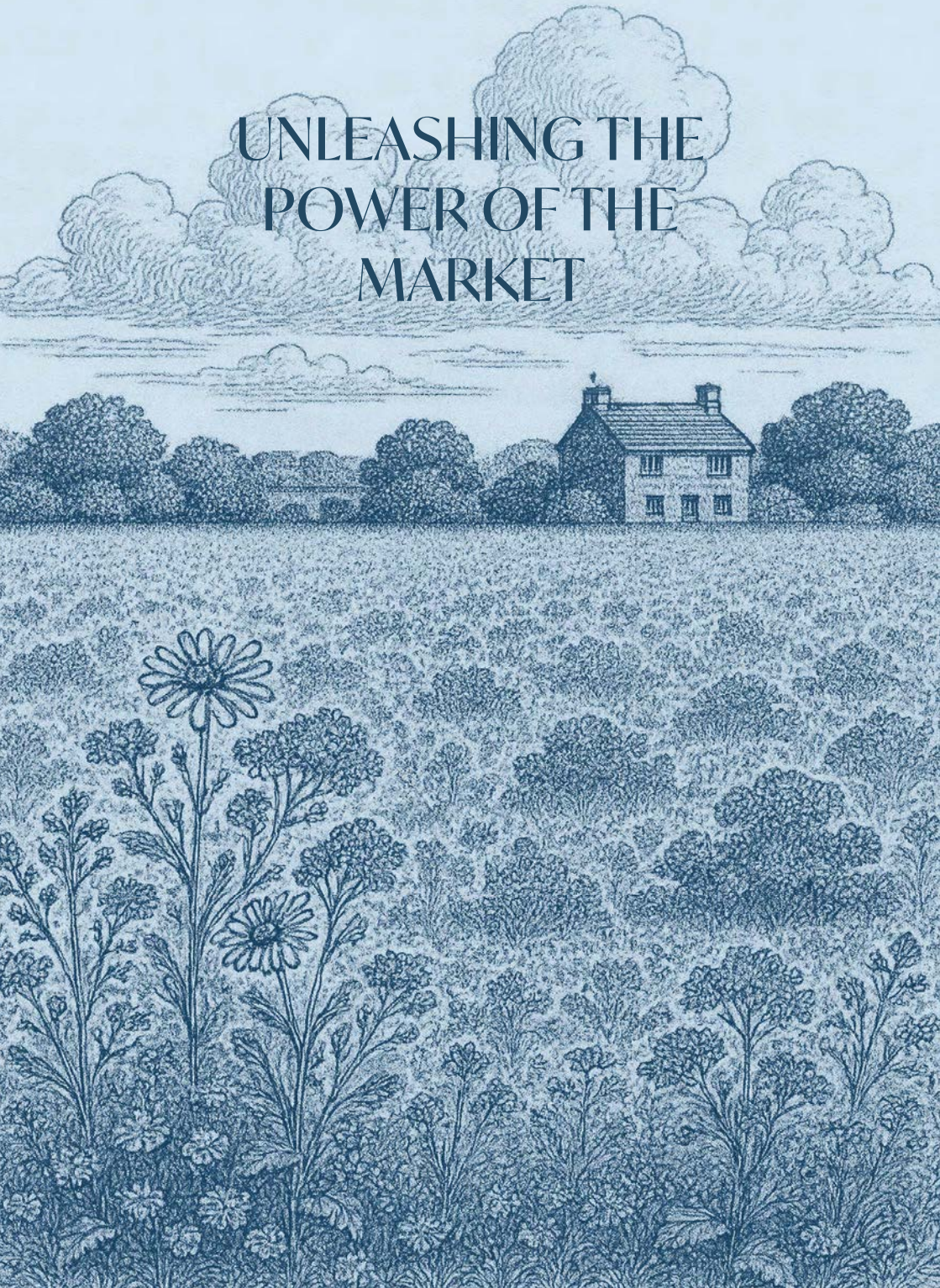
Conservatives should, therefore, take the power of nature seriously. Reintroducing species into our landscapes, especially keystone ones,

can save taxpayers money that would be otherwise spent recreating the processes nature provides for free. Equally, with nature's recovery come new opportunities to be seized by innovative local businesses, providing a means to reignite rural economies. Creature by creature, a more species abundant England can help to foster a renewed appreciation for our landscapes that is currently relegated to the natural history books.

The solution is not the socialist one, of abolishing the free economy, since this merely places massive economic power in the hands of unaccountable bureaucrats, who are equally in the business of exporting their costs, while enjoying secure rents on the social product. The solution is to adjust our demands, so as to bear the costs of them ourselves, and to find the way to put pressure on businesses to do likewise.

— **SIR ROGER SCRUTON**
Green Philosophy

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF THE MARKET



While little platoons are motivated by a love of place and a desire to steward it, businesses are motivated by profit. One is rooted in community, the other in enterprise. For conservatives, both are equally noble aims and both can be harnessed to deliver nature restoration.

When a forest is cleared or a wetland drained, its loss may not show up in company accounts, but the costs are still realised elsewhere. Biodiversity loss represents a negative externality within our economic system.

The costs of environmental destruction are far too often not borne by those who cause it, but by society at large over successive generations. We and future generations pay the price as these costs are socialised. Our natural environment is often degraded not because it is worthless, but because its value is invisible to markets. But natural capital - our forests, rivers, soil, air, and wildlife - is not without value. In fact, the economy relies on the valuable goods and services they provide every single day, which is estimated to be worth £1.5 trillion[31] in the UK.

These benefits are essential to our economic prosperity, yet they are undervalued or ignored in most transactions in the economy. Nature cannot opt out of markets, but it is currently priced at zero. Some environmentalists recoil at the notion of "putting a price on nature"; conservative environmentalists should not. While there is no doubt something spiritual and sacred about nature, this is ultimately about finally recognising the true worth of our natural environment. If we do not put a price on nature, it will continue to be undervalued and ignored, relying instead on inadequate charitable giving and state subsidy.

For too long, we have depended on public money alone to finance nature recovery. This has been a well-intentioned but ultimately inefficient and insufficient approach. Public funding has its place, particularly in de-risking early investments in our natural environment, but it cannot shoulder the burden alone. With natural capital markets still in their infancy, the farming budget, therefore, should be maintained

in real terms to ensure farmers can finance their nature-friendly farming practices. However, for conservatives concerned about the size of the state, embracing the role of private enterprise is an opportunity to begin to reduce nature's reliance on government subsidy.

Economic opportunities available to rural communities should not begin and end with public money. DEFRA's budget will never rise to the levels required to restore nature. There is a funding gap that only the private sector can fill. Without the private sector, we are depriving rural communities of billions of pounds that would otherwise be invested in them.

Private enterprise can become a powerful ally in the recovery of our natural world, defying the left-wing fallacy that capitalism is the enemy of the environment. Natural capital markets work with the rules of economics, rather than ignoring them. They represent a practical, scalable, and principled response to the challenge of biodiversity loss. By turning nature into a recognised asset, these markets are creating a mechanism by which biodiversity can be measured, valued, invested in, traded, and ultimately restored. This approach can align the incentives for business, government, and society.

Unfortunately, despite positive noises and a recognition of the potential role of private money in theory, successive governments failed to sufficiently embrace the role of private investment. The original intention of ELMs, for example, was to build farmer and investor confidence in financing nature's recovery, to prepare the way for private natural capital markets. But progress in establishing these markets for farmers to access fell by the wayside in favour of talking about how and where the government's farming budget should be spent and how much it is possible to increase it by.

In adopting a market-based approach, we must not repeat the mistakes of carbon offsets and the wild west these created. Where each environmental benefit enables additional habitat to be restored, multiple

types of credits can be 'stacked' on top of one another. This would allow water quality and soil health, for example, to be taken seriously in their own right meaning the same parcel of land could generate multiple types of environmental benefits and multiple sources of revenue.

While the embrace of natural capital markets is an ideologically sound one, it demands political leadership with a clear and persistent sense of direction to get us there. This has not been forthcoming in recent years, with the lever of throwing public money at immediate problems too readily reached for.

In 2023, the role of nutrient trading schemes in 'nutrient neutrality' areas was kneecapped by the government, in favour of putting more taxpayer money into a Natural England-led nutrient offsetting scheme. This hasty announcement was ill thought through, an attempt to unblock issues in the short term, rather than to develop a sustainable solution to the underlying policy and environmental problems. This approach damaged confidence in fledgling nature markets, failed to ensure that this change would maintain positive outcomes for nature, and continues to swallow up millions of pounds of taxpayers' money.

These markets require the government to set clear rules of the game that are tied to overarching nature recovery objectives, such as our legally-binding target to halt and reverse species decline and the other targets set through the Environment Act 2021. Without these clear standards, we will not convince investors to put their money into natural capital assets. But, once robust governance arrangements are in place, the government does not need to be the referee.

The government should designate private sector bodies to accredit and monitor projects, using the rigorously designed nature credit standards developed by the British Standards Institute. Getting government out of the way will speed up the scaling of these markets, reducing regulatory uncertainty that changes in short-term political priorities can lead to.

The missing piece of the puzzle has been a failure to create real demand. We need to expand the number of potential buyers of nature credits. Currently, only a few forward-thinking companies take nature seriously, and while some do seek to engage in fledgling natural capital markets, it is much easier to offshore efforts to care about nature to dubious international tree planting initiatives that do not help to restore nature domestically. For these markets to develop at scale, businesses must be given a reason to care. Demand for credits could be stimulated, for instance, by mandating the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures' reporting guidelines and requiring listed companies to produce nature strategies to encourage companies to monitor and address harms to biodiversity in their operations.

Implicitly, this does mean adding a regulatory burden. Conservatives must acknowledge that good regulation can correct market failures. It is bad regulation that adds burden with no benefit. An embrace of natural capital markets must be accompanied by meaningful reform of our regulatory environment. In doing so, billions of pounds of private capital can flow into domestic nature restoration projects and our rural economy in the coming decades.

One of the most important reforms made by the last government was extending agricultural property relief from inheritance tax to land managed under ELMs. This removed a significant financial disincentive for farmers to participate in the schemes, but did little to incentivise them to get involved in private equivalents. The relief should be extended further to include land restored under privately-funded schemes. This would level the playing field between public and private finance, providing landowners wanting to recover nature with greater choice and flexibility, without incurring punitive tax treatment.

By favouring a system in which public money is used to de-risk private investments and letting the market do the heavy lifting, we can

end the dominance of public money to fund nature recovery and prop up our rural economy.

Embracing natural capital markets will enable us to marry up the two sometimes clashing centre-right identities of classical liberalism and conservatism. We can harness the power of capitalism to repair the damage of our past neglect, creating an abundant natural world for future generations to enjoy and benefit from. Natural capital markets are not just a pragmatic solution to end our addiction to spending public money and adding regulatory burdens, they are a deeply conservative means of allowing us to meet the terms of our intergenerational contract.

I Who e're while the happy Garden sung,
By one mans disobedience lost, now sing
Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,
By one mans firm obedience fully tri'd
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foil'd
In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,
And Eden rais'd in the wast Wilderness.

— **JOHN MILTON**
Paradise Regained

CONCLUSION

We do not merely inherit the Earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our grandchildren. Through this shared inheritance, we have a duty to create a better world for future generations. This works hand in glove with the pride we have in our country.

A nation of animal lovers we may be, but, we are no longer a country that is proud of itself. This is an issue of existential proportions for any conservative to grapple with.

Pride in England can take many forms. Balanced and abundant ecosystems, rid of pollution, that connect with beautiful, clean, and nature-rich communities are not merely nice to have; they are absolutely vital sources of national pride. This drive to restore this pride should guide efforts to restore nature to England.

In order to reverse our environmental fortunes, therefore, references to our green and pleasant land must take on a new and substantive meaning. No longer will it hearken back to the land the poets and authors described. By building biodiversity back into the natural environment of the present day, we can create contemporary landscapes full of native flora and fauna that future generations are able to identify and look upon with pride.

ENDNOTES

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