

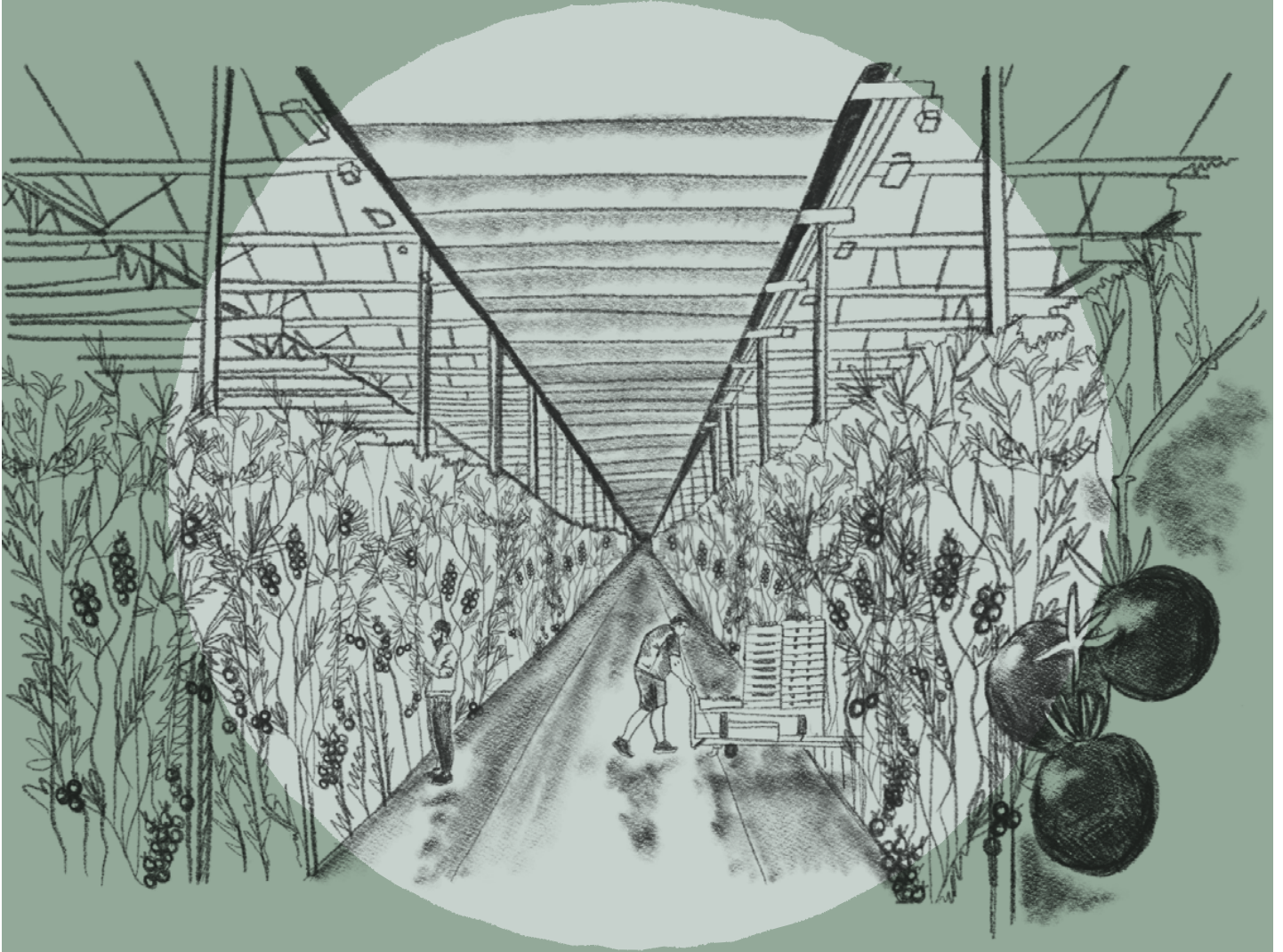
# 3

Cutting planning red tape to help farmers go green

## GOAL ONE

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Ease planning restrictions to allow farmers to sell their own produce and build new slurry stores, reservoirs, and glasshouses



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Accelerate plans to extend permitted development rights to farmers wishing to convert farm buildings into shops selling their produce.



Extend permitted development rights to the construction of new slurry stores, medium-sized on-farm reservoirs, and small-scale glasshouses, including in National Landscapes, to cut greenhouse gas emissions, improve water quality, and increase domestic food production.

**O**ur planning system is too inflexible for farmers. Too often, planning red tape ties farmers up, preventing them from building new reservoirs, converting farm buildings, or opening new farm shops that could have environmental benefits. The system needs simplifying to improve farmers' profitability and aid their role as custodians of the land.

Permitted development rights are a useful tool to encourage responsible development without the need to pass through the full complexities of the planning system. Sadly, they are underutilised in rural areas. To allow farmers to further diversify their income and encourage more people to eat and shop locally, the government should also accelerate plans to extend permitted development rights to farmers wishing to convert farm buildings into shops selling their produce.

Similarly, glasshouses and slurry stores are often caught up in the planning system, despite government grants to build the latter. Building new glasshouses allows us to grow more fruit and vegetables in the UK, boosting our food security and potentially cutting carbon-intensive food miles, provided that low-carbon heating is a condition of receiving fast-tracked planning permission. Increasing the number of slurry stores would improve water and soil quality, as well as reduce the amount of methane released into the atmosphere. Some local authorities have blocked their construction, however, due to the immediate short-term increase in emissions from their construction.

For these reasons, permitted development rights should be extended to new slurry stores and small-scale glasshouses. Importantly, this should include National Landscapes, where planning permission is often difficult to obtain. New on-farm infrastructure, like slurry stores, could be key to improving their condition. Of course, protections should be put in place to ensure that they are only constructed where they would tangibly improve water and soil quality, in addition to reducing methane emissions. For slurry stores, this may also mean limiting increases in the size of a farmer's herd after their construction, so that the environmental benefit to their construction is tangible. By reducing the uncertainty for farmers within the planning system, we can cut the cost of construction and improve the state of our natural world.

Efforts to build new on-farm reservoirs are frustrated by piles of paperwork too. Farmers must first apply for planning permission, complete an Environmental Impact Assessment, and then obtain an abstraction licence if the reservoir will take more than 20 cubic metres of water per day. By 2050, the UK's water supply could be reduced by as much as 15 percent, with some rivers seeing between 50 and 80 percent less water in the summer months.<sup>27</sup> This could

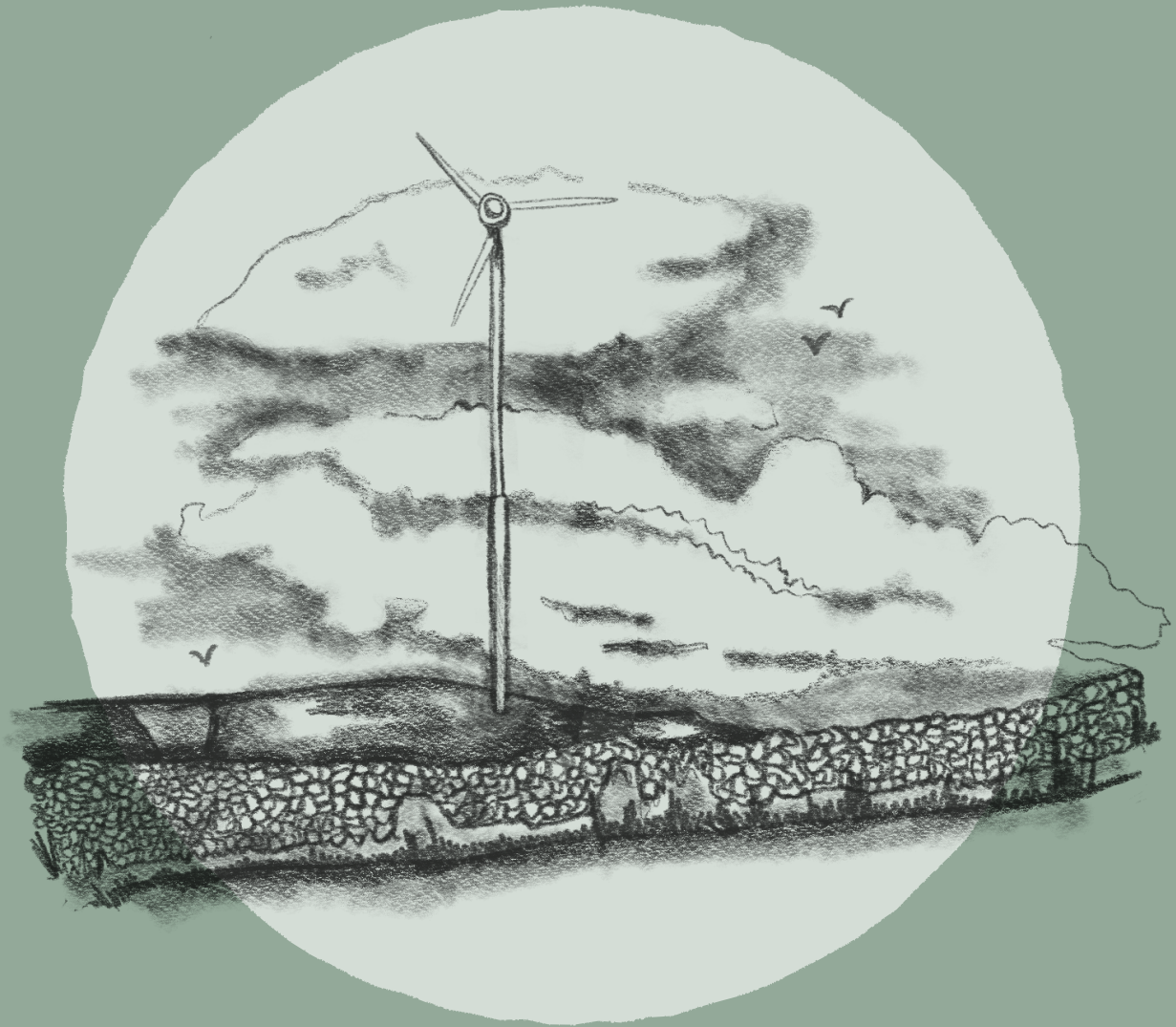
## CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

have a devastating impact on farmers' efforts to tend to their crops and livestock, and, in turn, our food security, as well as on the natural environment which relies on a clean and abundant water supply. On-farm reservoirs help to improve irrigation, guard against drought, and reduce overall demand on the water network. They will also be key to meeting the government's target of increasing water storage on farms by two-thirds by 2050. The government should therefore extend permitted development rights to medium-sized reservoirs. This would help to speed up their construction and cut the cost to farmers. To avoid any negative impact on water quality, abstraction licences should remain a requirement of building and the government is right to review measures to speed up the approval process.

## GOAL TWO

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Enable farmers to use more, and produce their own, renewable energy



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



**Extend permitted development rights to new small-scale onshore wind turbines over 11.1 metres up to a maximum height of 30 metres, as with new mobile phone masts.**



**Extend community benefit measures to include both the generation and transmission of electricity, and mandate a minimum threshold for payments to ensure that farmers and rural communities benefit from hosting new energy infrastructure.**

**T**he illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine sent European energy costs soaring and reinforced the importance of the UK's domestic energy security. UK-based renewable energy removes our reliance on volatile fossil fuel markets, while helping to cut bills and carbon. New sources of renewable energy also present an opportunity for farmers. However, all too often, planning red tape prevents farmers from exploiting this lucrative opportunity.

Farmers wishing to install small-scale wind turbines have to plod through the planning system, often at great expense. Permitted development rights only cover new wind turbines under 11.1 metres tall and with a rotor dimension of 2 metres, similar in height to the size of an average two story house. This is despite most turbines on the market being larger than this specification. To help cut the cost of construction and help more farmers become energy independent, the

## PLOUGHING AHEAD

government should increase the maximum permitted height of new small-scale turbines to 30 metres and extend the allowance for blade length to 8 metres. It is worth noting that this modest increase would bring planning requirements into line with new mobile phone masts which can be built with permitted development up to a height of 30 metres.

In addition, where farmers' land is required for the transmission or generation of new renewable energy, they should receive a fair reward for their cooperation together with the local community. The government's voluntary guidance on community benefits for electricity transmission infrastructure released at the 2023 Autumn Statement was welcome. To meet the 2035 target to decarbonise the UK's supply of electricity and build public support for the necessary infrastructure, however, the government must go further. Community benefits should be extended to both the generation and transmission of electricity with a new minimum threshold for payments to ensure that farmers and the surrounding community receive a fair reward for their cooperation.