



# **Call for a Grassland Action Plan for England**

**Plantlife Briefing**

# Fill the Grassland Gap to unlock the value of grasslands

England's land is under pressure to produce food, store carbon, host wildlife, produce food, give people space to breathe, stop flooding... we're giving our land a never-ending 'to-do' list.

Yet the ultimate multi-tasking solution is right here. From mountain pastures to floodplain meadows, from road verges to private gardens and urban parks, grasslands are all around us. Nature-rich grasslands are sustainable solutions for nature, food, climate, economy, and health.

Grasslands cover more than 40%<sup>i</sup> of England. They are a huge natural asset, yet have untapped potential to do so much more – unlike peatland and woodland, there is no Action Plan or strategic approach. As demonstrated by the England Trees Action Plan and the England Peat Action Plan, a joined-up approach to habitats can deliver large-scale economic and social benefits.

To unlock the value of grasslands, a new approach is needed. Plantlife and its partners are calling on the UK Government to prioritise grasslands as a sustainable solution to society's challenges and commit to taking a strategic approach to grasslands, via developing a standalone Grassland Action Plan for England, or within a new Land Use Framework.

For example, managing road verges and urban green spaces for biodiversity provides a huge opportunity for local authorities and green space managers to cut management costs and carbon emissions, create connected wildlife corridors, and turn waste grass cuttings into resources as part of a bio-based circular economy.

However, highly-fertilised monoculture fields and tightly-mown grassy areas now dominate our landscape, providing few benefits or 'public goods – currently at great expense to the public purse'. This doesn't have to be the case.

Nature-rich grasslands are the ultimate multitaskers, providing many different benefits<sup>ii</sup>. But their value to society has been overlooked for too long and the vast majority have been destroyed.

In particular, the role of grasslands in tackling climate change has been systemically undervalued. An estimated 2 billion tons of carbon<sup>iii</sup> is already stored in their undisturbed soils across Great Britain. Grasslands could absorb even more carbon if money is put into farmers' pockets to change the way they are managed and bring back a diversity of plants and fungi,<sup>iv</sup> whilst producing healthy food, forage, and fibre as productive farmland.

## The Grassland Gap

### Policies set out in existing UK Government Action Plans

	Trees & Peat	Grasslands
Dedicated resource in Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), working on deliverables in the habitat Action Plan	✓	✗
Monitoring and mapping, with an up-to-date National Inventory, driving better spatial targeting of funding for restoration and habitat management	✓	✗
Pilot scheme and/or Taskforce to test evidence, supporting the development of a natural capital approach to valuing habitats	✓	✗
Recognition as a Nature-based Solution to climate change, for example in the UK's National Adaptation Programme or funding in the Nature for Climate Fund	✓	✗
Development of private biodiversity and carbon markets, for example through a Carbon Code	✓	✗
Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) agri-environment funding actively incentivises the wide-scale uptake of options for habitat maintenance, restoration, and creation	✓	✗
Incentivising private investment for flooding mitigation schemes, such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs)	✓	✗
Robust protections in the planning system, for example through 'Ancient Woodland and Trees' legal definition	✓	✗
International action and funding to restore biodiversity and lessen impact of climate change, via Biodiverse Landscapes Fund	✓	✗

## Grasslands rich in wild plants & fungi are multifunctional

- Food production within a sustainable farming system with healthy soils, as grazing livestock on nature-rich permanent pasture and meadows provides nutritional benefits to livestock and produces high quality and healthier meat and dairy products<sup>v</sup>
- Nature-based solutions to climate change; greater plant diversity in grasslands increases carbon sequestration<sup>vi</sup> and resilience to floods, drought and other extreme weather events
- Sustainable bio-based resources as part of a circular economy, providing economic benefits from grass cuttings in green space management
- Connected habitat for nature recovery, providing food, shelter and corridors for pollinators and other wildlife across the landscape
- Health benefits from cleaner air and water, through reduced use of fertilisers and pesticides<sup>vii</sup>
- Irreplaceable parts of our cultural heritage and a key component of rural livelihoods
- Mental and physical health benefits through public access to species-rich green spaces and landscapes



Fill the grassland gap to unlock the value of grasslands. Alongside our partners, we're calling on the UK Government to take a strategic approach to grasslands with via developing a standalone Grassland Action Plan for England, or within a new Land Use Framework.

Make the most of grasslands for for nature, food, climate, economy, and health.

## Contact

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## Sources

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## Supporters of the call for a Grassland Action Plan

Plantlife and partners support this statement:

“With competing pressures on England’s land, we need to make the most of our grasslands, which cover at least 40% of the country. Appropriately managed and connected grasslands (including semi-natural and species-rich areas) can be highly multifunctional, providing a wealth of benefits including food production, nature’s recovery, clean air and water, pollination services, accessible green space, soil health, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. From upland pastures, ancient and floodplain meadows, to gardens, parks and road verges, grasslands are a major national asset and require a strategic, cross-sectoral approach led by government. We therefore call on the UK Government to commit to developing a Grassland Action Plan for England.”



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Patron HRH King Charles III

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Plantlife is the global charity working to enhance, protect, restore and celebrate the wild plants and fungi that are essential to all life on earth. With two in five plant species at risk of extinction, biodiversity loss is now the fastest it’s ever been – which means our work has never been more vital. We champion and accelerate conservation action, working at the heart of a global network of individuals and organisations, to influence and inspire landowners and land managers, public and private bodies, governments and local communities. As time begins to run out, we are using our position as the global voice for wild plants and fungi to bring lasting and positive change to our natural world – for everyone’s sake.