



COUNTRYSIDE

Background

CY100 The Earth is our home. Life on it depends upon complex interdependent ecological systems, and humans are only one of its species. Damage to habitats, the result of un-ecological ideology, the denial of the spiritual link between ourselves and nature and the relentless pursuit of economic growth, is now of such a magnitude that life on this planet is threatened.

CY101 The crisis facing the countryside continues to grow in pace and magnitude. "Globally over-exploitation of resources, loss of genetic diversity and damage to ecological processes and life-support systems have dangerously reduced the planet's capacity to support people in both developed and developing countries" (The World Conservation Strategy 1980). "In Europe the range of wildlife and natural ecosystems present in the Community now is less than it has been for thousands of years; and the rate of decline and loss is probably greater than it has ever been" (The State of the Environment in the European Community 1986). In Britain "...the present generation is witnessing the most comprehensive and far-reaching change of the natural history and historical landscapes that Britain has ever experienced in such a short period of time. What is particularly alarming is that so little is understood about these changes - their magnitude and long-term consequences - yet what is known is simply appalling" (Countryside Conflicts by Lowe, Cox,

MacEwen, O'Riordan and Winter 1986).

CY102 The rural economy itself no longer supports people as its primary objective. Small farms continue to be lost, there is growing rural unemployment, multiple deprivation and, in areas distant from urban centres, depopulation. Soil erosion and pollution of both air and water threaten life processes. Access to the countryside continues to be denied. Industrial processes continue to take precedence over natural processes. There is no strategic response to these problems by government.

General Principles

CY200 The countryside is a living organism, a vital and irreplaceable natural gift, not a resource to be turned into money. No one has the right to destroy its ecologically diverse character. To do so would be to the detriment of the community at large.

CY201 We believe that it is a fundamental human right and obligation for people to live a life style that ensures they can hand on to their descendants an environment that is at least as rich in wildlife and attractive landscapes as when they inherited it.

CY202 Rural and urban communities meet the many different needs of people in a healthy society. They are not separate from each other and one should not dominate the other. In a green society, towns will not grow beyond the ability of the countryside around them to provide fresh and healthy water and food, recre-

ation, timber and wildlife habitats. There will be a constant flow of environmental, social and cultural information between them. Towns will return compostable materials to the countryside. These urban communities will integrate into all their decisions the impact on a vital, thriving rural community.

Long Term Aims

CY300 The objective of our countryside policy is to create self-reliant communities that retain the fruits of local investment and activity and preserve the conditions where people can live in ways which care for habitats and wildlife and allow them to fulfil spiritual, emotional, social and intellectual needs.

Short Term Aims

CY400 In pursuing the following aims, we will address the underlying causes, and seek to integrate environmental, social and economic objectives in all areas of countryside policy. One of the major underlying problems is the current system of agriculture. To remedy this we aim to:

- a) Stop further destruction of wildlife habitats, the soil, the landscape, ancient monuments and our countryside heritage. (see CY500-508 and CY550-562)
- b) Begin to make the whole countryside more hospitable to wildlife. (see CY500-526 and CY570)
- c) Begin the process of revitalising the economy and life of

- rural areas. (see CY540-543, CY600 and CY610)
- d) Start to work towards a more just system of land tenure and access to land. (see CY530 and CY580)
- e) Increase indigenous tree cover. (see CY570-572)

Policies

Habitat and Species Protection

CY500 It is not possible to protect species unless the many threats to habitats are stopped. The whole of the Green Party's political programme is designed to create a society where these threats to the environment are ended. In particular our policies on agriculture, forestry, fishing, energy, transport and industry will lead to the end of the pollution of the air, land and water. Our policies on increased self-reliance and changes to our consumer-based lifestyle will ensure that we do not make environmentally damaging demands on the rest of the world. We will support at every level of the international community effective measures to protect the environment.

CY501 We support the European Community Commission's Fourth Environmental Action Programme which, amongst others, aims to make the environment an essential element of all Community policies and extend this aim to all national policies. We will in addition:

- a) Accelerate the programme timetable where environmental problems are pressing.
- b) Extend the policy programme to include public availability of environmental information.

- c) Reinstate the policy for resources within an overall strategy for the environment as a priority.
- d) Ensure that the programme's achievements and failures are fully assessed, and as a result make changes to realise the programme's goals without lengthening its timetable.

CY502 The Wildlife and Countryside Act as the principal legislation for protecting the countryside has proved inadequate because:

- a) Protection is given primarily to National Parks and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- b) Compensation is payable to farmers who are refused grant aid embodying the notion that there is an absolute entitlement to grants and other subsidies, whereas in the past they have been refused on grounds of technical or economic viability.
- c) Compensation is based on estimates of profits foregone, even though the forecast higher level of production is speculative and not ecologically sustainable.
- d) Compensation is paid out of the meagre budgets of conservation agencies or local authorities rather than of agricultural departments whose policies are being pursued.

CY503 The Wildlife and Countryside Act will be drastically overhauled:

- a) The right of farmers to compensation for conservation orders will be repealed and positive measures to care for the countryside put in its place.
- b) Habitat protection will be extended to the whole countryside.

- c) The species protection clause will be clarified and strengthened and the legislation enforced.

CY504 We will implement International Wildlife Law contained in: The 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, the Special Protection Areas of the European Councils 1979 Birds Directive, and the 1979 Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats.

CY505 We would assist in the preparation of, and implement, a European Habitat Directive (recognised as a priority of the EEC Fourth Environmental Action Programme 1987-1992) which would oblige national governments to set up statutory frameworks for the protection of habitats and their associated plant and animal communities at local and regional levels using funds diverted from the Common Agricultural Policy. It would place a legal obligation upon Member States to carry out land use inventories for the purpose of identifying all areas of semi-natural and natural habitats.

CY506 Many wild plant species are collected from the wild for commercial sale with little or no knowledge of its impact on wild populations. We would support measures to introduce a European Wild Plants directive which would:

- a) Give clear labelling on all living wild plant material traded within the European Community (EC) and in and out of the EC.
- b) License all traders dealing with plant material that has been wild-collected.
- c) Tighten up import and export controls on wild plants.

CY507 Estuaries are biologically one of the richest habitats. They are feeding grounds for more than half of Britain's 1.5 million wintering wading birds (40% of all waders wintering each year in the whole of Europe) and are joined each year by hundreds of thousands of migrating wildfowl. These estuaries are important because:

- a) They lie on the main migration route from both Greenland and Iceland and from Siberia to West Africa.
- b) The British Isles offer the most northerly refuge from the prolonged freezing of continental Europe.
- c) The large tidal range of our many estuaries provides exposed rich feeding areas.

Most of Britain's internationally important estuaries have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and many qualify for international treaties such as the Ramsar Convention and the European directive on the conservation of wild birds. These estuaries are under threat from developments such as tidal barges; large-scale dock developments, land reclamation, industrial pollution, recreation, oil exploration, an extremely vigorous hybrid spartina grass and other development. The Green Party will carefully think through the short- and long-term effects of all estuary developments and will agree to only those which offer overall ecological benefits.

CY508 The Green Party believes that these 'developments' will grow in number as our growth-obsessed society demands ever greater wealth to feed its industries and wasteful advertiser-induced consumer demand for ecologically destructive lifestyles.

Until wealth creation is taken off its pedestal as the primary goal in society, and replaced by an ecologically sustainable society wildlife (despite laudable, one-off victories such as the purchase of nature reserves) stands little chance of long-term survival. We will in the short term:

- a) Press for habitats to be given greater protection.
- b) Assist consumer-led pressure for conservation, recycling and the introduction of consumer durable goods and plant that are energy efficient, non-polluting, long-lasting, well designed, repairable and upgradeable.
- c) Develop ecologically sound strategic planning as a more sound alternative to growth orientated plans.
- d) Oppose the relocation of environmentally damaging operations overseas. In the long-term the achievement of our ecologically sound and sustainable society will prevent such threats to the environment.

Agriculture and the Countryside (see Agriculture)

CY520 Farming does not automatically destroy wildlife interest, but the form and intensity of present agricultural methods have been the main reasons for loss of habitats. We recognise that without adequately rewarding small and part-time farmers who produce food in an environmentally sound way there can be no viable countryside.

CY521 Recognising that food production is only one of the demands made upon the land, we would reform the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and the Forestry Commission to in-

clude conservation in their remits as primary objectives.

CY522 The Common Agricultural Policy price support scheme encourages farmers to cultivate every square inch of marginal land, including hedgerows, to take advantage of guaranteed prices, and as such, has been the major reason behind the loss of wildlife habitats. This will end. Farmers will be given, like everyone else, an unconditionally guaranteed basic income and other forms of support to encourage ecologically sound land-use.

CY523 Payments will be given to farmers for agricultural or conservation improvements provided they meet the objectives of an appropriate, conservation agency approved 'farm development and conservation plan'. The plan will integrate woodland, wildlife, habitats, landscape conservation, food growing, historical monuments, geological and archaeological sites, soil conservation, hydrological changes, buildings, landscapes and public access. Conservation objectives and the means of achieving them will be made clear to farmers.

CY524 We will positively encourage, by a careful balance of subsidies and taxes, environmentally beneficial organic food producing systems. An organic system, that employs more people, comprises of mixed rotational farming, ecologically sound stocking rates, and no use of harmful synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. Such systems will greatly ease the pressure on wildlife, reduce pollution and conserve the soil. (see FD210)

CY525 Water courses continue to suffer from increases in farm-based pollution; from fertilisers leached into water courses,

sprays, silage and slurry run-off. Farmers are now the main source of water pollution in rural areas, but they are exempt from prosecution under parts of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 so long as they observe a voluntary code of 'good agricultural practice'. Water authorities lack the political will and sufficient powers to prosecute. We believe that the polluter should be responsible for the damage caused and will introduce heavy fines (see 'Pollution' section). The introduction of organic farming techniques which return farm waste to the soil, the adoption of a statutory code of good agricultural practice and free advice on pollution prevention will reduce pollution from fertilisers and toxic pesticides. There will be a ban on intensive livestock units. Planning controls on silage clamps and other farm buildings will be introduced and capital grants will be made available to prevent pollution.

CY526 Efforts to cut farm surpluses by set-aside and extensification will halt because they aggravate present destructive trends in agriculture. We would adopt less intensive, lower input and more environmentally benign land-use policies which integrate forestry, conservation and organic food growing, employ more people and use of all the land.

Land Tenure

CY530 Partly as a result of speculation, the price of land has risen way above what can be justified by its normal earning capacity, combined with the rising costs of conventional farming and lower guaranteed prices farmers have been compelled to maximise production from every available piece of land. In consequence our inheritance of irreplaceable features like hedges and woods,

which have depressed land values, have been destroyed. We will introduce a Land Value Taxation (see 'Land' section), based on land values, which will automatically compensate for the economic disadvantage of having to conserve wildlife habitats, archaeological sites and other landscape features.

Planning

CY540 We would ensure that planning for widespread multiple use of the countryside would be a major and integral part of the new Unitary Development Plans prepared by Local Authorities. Advice would be provided by the government's statutory authority on conservation and full democratic consultation undertaken. Ecological criteria will be given full weight in all planning decisions.

CY541 We accept the particular characteristics and difficulties of the 'Less Favoured Areas' - we would however review the operation of the LFA Directive of the EEC in line with our general policy principles.

CY542 Planning controls will be strengthened and extended to major land-use changes (in particular, all farm buildings, new and improvement works by drainage bodies and water authorities, afforestation, and all clearances of ancient woodland and semi-natural woodland). Destruction of ancient woodland, in existence before 1600, would be prohibited.

CY543 The Green Party will introduce legislation to halt and reverse the spread of light pollution in the countryside in order to protect the heritage of the dark night sky and to minimise disturbance to wildlife from artificial light. There will be a presumption

against new lighting in the countryside which will be incorporated into the Development Plans of planning authorities.

Improved lighting design and the use of more efficient lighting will be required for new developments or replacement of existing lighting. Energy conservation, including the removal of unnecessary lighting, will be promoted.

Countryside Designations

CY550 To separate the land surface into specially designated areas that are to be treated in ways that preserve their ecological diversity is a sad indictment of the way our society treats the land. Such areas become 'honeypots' for nature and tourists whilst the rest of the countryside is allowed to become an industrial wasteland. We see the whole of the countryside as important for conservation and will treat all land as environmentally sensitive.

CY551 Being aware of the current political realities we support the Countryside Commission's plea for a thorough review of the bewildering system of designated areas and in the long term will expand conservation principles to the whole of the countryside. In the short term our policies on designations will be as follows.

CY552 National Parks. National Parks have failed to give the adequate ecological protection to the countryside they were intended to give, due to a lack of power, gross under-funding and confused and divided authorities.

CY553 In the long term the lessons learned from National Parks in their attempts to arrest unbridled agricultural, forestry, industrial and mining developments will be applied to the whole

countryside. The Parks (and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) will then become unnecessary and will be phased out.

CY554 In the short term we will widen the role of National Parks and the Park Authorities and support the extension of existing National parks and the designation of National Parks in other areas, such as the National Scenic Areas in Scotland, the North Pennines, South Downs and New Forest in England and the Cambrian Mountains in Wales.

CY555 Military Use of National Parks. The Green Party considers that the use of National Parks for artillery ranges and other forms of military training are destructive and incompatible with the designation of a National Park and its continuance cannot be tolerated. We will press for the earliest withdrawal of military training within National Parks.

CY556 Minerals in National Parks. We oppose all mineral developments until the 1976 Stevens enquiry into planning control over mineral development, that called for a national survey of key minerals and a national strategy for their conservation, is implemented, and even then we may impose extra provisos.

CY557 Road Building and National Parks. The Green Party will halt all damaging road construction and 'improvements' within National Parks.

CY558 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). We will keep the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. In addition we will give local authorities the power to

make Countryside Conservation Orders to protect vulnerable features which require conservation.

CY559 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. AONBs will receive comparable status to National Parks. They will eventually become unnecessary as our wider policies on conservation for the whole countryside come into force.

CY560 Green Belts. Green Belts, as they are currently defined, are a rather blunt instrument that have:

- a) Helped to protect land for agriculture or recreation but have not positively promoted these activities.
- b) Prevented the worst excesses of sprawl
- c) Have sustained the separations between towns but sometimes only for the convenience of motorways, leisure complexes, gravel pits and other claims on the urban fringe.

CY561 The Green Party will retain and rigorously strengthen Green Belt legislation as a positive measure to revitalise the countryside and encourage the extension of the Green Belts into the cities. We will end the pressure on Green Belts by policies that:

- a) Reject economic-growth-orientated development in favour of conservation (see 'Economy' section).
- b) End the speculation in land in towns and cities; (see 'Land' section).
- c) Encourage the building of thriving communities in urban areas.
- d) Reduce population numbers (see 'Population' section).

- e) Extend Environmental and Social Impact Statements into all areas of decision making
- f) Make rural communities rewarding places to live and work in, which will end rural depopulation.

CY562 Environmentally Sensitive Areas. The Green Party welcomes the concept of Environmentally Sensitive Areas where agricultural support may be used for environmentally sympathetic ends, and wishes to see the concept extended to the whole of the countryside. However, there are problems with the existing scheme that will have to be resolved before we see ESAs having a positive role to play in securing the future of the countryside.

Woodlands, Forests and Trees (see Forestry)

CY570 Trees, as some of the largest and long-lived of plants, are a living indication of the health of the countryside. They intercept heavy rainfall and release water steadily and slowly to the soil beneath and to the streams and rivers that start in or flow through them. They hold the soil in place and contribute to its formation. They form a canopy beneath which many insects, plants and mammals find their ecological niche. They modify climate, detoxify the air, recycle nutrients from deep in the ground, provide food and form materials from which we make our homes and places where we play. They are therefore especially important in our policies to conserve the countryside.

CY571 Woodlands will be an integral part of Local Authority Unitary Development Plans. The authorities will liaise with the Forestry Commission when deal-

ing with the establishment of new woods and the management of existing ones. (see 'Forestry' section)

CY572 Much new planting will be undertaken on farms, within farm development and conservation plans. (see 'Agriculture' section)

Access to the Countryside

CY580 We would open the whole countryside (including common land) to access on foot provided that no damage is done, care is taken not to injure or kill farm stock and other wildlife are not disturbed, and the privacy of those who live in the countryside is respected. Access would be curtailed at times (such as lambing, nesting and breeding seasons, and sensitive wildlife sites), and where there is a definite reason for it to be refused.

Local Authorities

CY590 We see local authorities, as custodians of local democracy, being the primary agency for conserving the countryside.

Rural Life

CY600 We recognise that any policy for conserving the countryside hinges around provisions made for people to live and work in rural areas. In particular we will encourage the availability of an adequate stock of reasonable priced, decent housing and work space for those who live and work in the countryside, including low-cost housing to rent and buy in existing small villages and towns.

Tourism in the Country

CY610 We accept that recreation and tourism can benefit a local economy, but would ensure that such activities are ecologically, economically and socially appropriate to local requirements.

Urban Conservation

CY620 The nature of much of the farmed landscape has become inhospitable to wildlife and as a result urban areas have come to be relatively valuable habitats and impoverished areas have become rich in wildlife. Although agricultural practice which discourages wildlife will change, the extension of the countryside into the towns and cities is an opportunity the Green Party enthusiastically supports. It re-kindles enthusiasm for the commonplace, shows how valuable and positive democratic decision making can be, and how decision-makers can be 'turned on' to wildlife, and it has established new and creative ways of occupying large numbers of people in worthwhile jobs which benefit wildlife and can improve the quality of life in our society.

CY621 In the long term, habitats in urban areas will be more easily established and maintained by the introduction of land reform measures which will stop land being seen as a speculative commodity. In the meantime we will support measures such as:

- a) The establishment of a base of information on wildlife and habitats, to inform and assist the development of policies which take account of the needs of conservation.
- b) Develop in all local authority departments involved in the use and management of land, an awareness of the need to take account of wildlife conservation.

- c) Use of local authority byelaws to support local nature conservation objectives.
- d) Preparation of local nature conservation strategies as an aid to integrate conservation into local authorities' forward planning.
- e) Creation of new wildlife habitats through derelict land reclamation schemes.
- f) Establishment of local nature reserves.
- g) Education and the provision of information to increase public awareness of conservation.

The following additional policy statements can be found in the Green Party Record of Policy Statements (RoPS):

- Endorse "The Land is Ours" Campaign (Autumn 1995)
- Archaeology (October 1996)
- Rural Issues (Spring 1999)
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act (Spring 2004)
- Protecting Youth Hostels (Spring 2006)
- Badgers, Cattle & Bovine TB (Spring 2006)