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## 25-Year Environmental Strategy – a commentary

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**“A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment” published by HMG 11.1.18**

This 151-page document was put out by the DEFRA, Michael Gove, as a statement of long-term intent on specific policy issues to do with clean air and water, biodiversity, parklands, wildlife, limiting flooding, preserving “natural capital” (a phrase made familiar in the 1990’s by Amory and Hunter Lovins in the USA), minimising waste and mitigating / adapting to climate change. It was asked for by Gove as it had been a plank in the Conservative Manifesto.

The notion of an overarching 25-year plan was originally proposed by the Natural Capital Committee (“NCC”), which is “an independent advisory committee that provides advice to the government on the sustainable use of natural capital - that is, our natural assets including forests, rivers, land, minerals and oceans”. Gove, while mentioning that the plan was in line with his party manifesto, also noted “an overarching plan is vital to secure the greatest dividend for our environment” as we leave the EU. Happy coincidence!

The particular magic of a 25-year plan for environmental issues is however unclear, as it does not obviously coincide with timetables for Climate Change policies determined by the 5-year carbon budgets arising out of the 2008 Climate Change Act – we are at present allegedly over-achieving carbon reduction targets in the first three 5-year carbon budgets set by the Committee on Climate Change (another body set up to give “independent advice to government on building a low-carbon economy and preparing for climate change”), which presently run up to 2022.

It might be interesting by 2042 – the 25 years of this plan – if these two ‘Independent’ committees are on the same page in holding the government to account. The 2050 end-point of the Climate Change Act – to reduce UK emissions by at least 80% of 1990 levels by 2050 – may be attainable, despite warnings of the projected 4<sup>th</sup>

and 5<sup>th</sup> carbon budget shortfalls, and the target is at least measurable. Measuring the progress of the sustainable use of the UK's natural capital is considerably more questionable, generating academic discourse keeping many universities busy! Perhaps that is the merit of such a long timetable; by 2042, Mrs. May will be 86 and Gove will be 75, though the above-mentioned committees will probably still be providing independent advice to government.

With regard to the detail of the 25-year Plan, the document references >40 different specific policy initiatives or objectives. Many are aspirational but quite a few have detailed actions proposed so it is certainly worth perusing the index to see if any areas addressed in this Plan might impact on your business. The Planning Process, vehicle emission policies, agricultural practices among others are addressed with clear intent to implement more focused policies. **It is worth reviewing for any business.**

There is also a [Supplementary Evidence Report](#) - an even more detailed, academic background document giving some of the NCC methodology for anyone wanting better to understand the origin of some of the policy proposals in this Plan.

Several particular things struck me as interesting:

- The proportion of the population believing 'environmental' issues are important to them personally is high (94%) but people not prepared to change their behaviour for an environmental reason increased from 26% to 33%!
- The proportion of people undertaking recycling has not changed in 7 years
- Only 2% of the population think environmental concerns are the top issue for UK!
- Agriculture produces the highest proportion of climate gas emissions
- Agriculture in the east of England may diminish due to water shortage
- Marine food chains and fisheries are under threat from increased salinity
- Farmers face new policies on land use management, fertilisers, water use and pesticides!

- The government will appoint a national Tree Champion!
- Tired old, tried and often ineffective flood defends policies are repeated
- We are to encourage children to be closer to nature
- 2019 is to be a year of Green Action (hurrah!)
- There will be a Clean Air Strategy published.... And one on Chemicals
- And a new committee, probably, to give independent advice on.....
- Less frivolously the proposals on waste, which have so wrongly caught the popular headlines, are simplistic in the extreme:
  - Zero avoidable plastic waste by 2042: improving management of residual waste – sensible.
  - Reducing litter and cracking down on fly-tipping – not quite the same agenda?
  - Reducing impact of waste water and food supply chain waste – serious again

This sort of summarises this massive, very long-term compendium of a policy wish list which the 25 year Plan represents. There is a small cross referencing with climate policy and even smaller contact with the recent Industrial Strategy, but very little recognition that innovation, technological change and business impacts might just have as great a role as all the diverse policy aspirations listed?

**Hugh Parnell, Chairman, Cambridge Cleantech**