

## White Paper

# Green Recovery: Changes to the landscape

Throughout the first few months of 2020 and most of 2019, the ‘Climate Emergency’ dominated news headlines and media platforms. Calls for stronger action on climate change intensified, including the high-profile protests led by Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg’s appearance at the Bristol Youth Strike 4 Climate at the end of February. Fast forward a few months and you’d be forgiven for thinking those events were a distant memory, as the news and our everyday lives are dominated by the COVID-19 crisis. Amongst the devastation that the pandemic has brought upon the world, stories about the positive impact that lockdown has had on our environment have provided some encouragement during these unprecedented times. This has included the report that we can expect the largest ever annual fall in CO<sup>2</sup> emissions this year<sup>1</sup>, not least due to the dramatic plunge in car use in favour of walking and cycling or staying at home altogether. There has also been an increased awareness around the value of nature on mental wellbeing, with visits to local greenspace becoming part of the daily routine for many.

As our leaders begin to set out their plans to rebuild the country, public and political momentum has and continues to build behind calls for a ‘green recovery’ - one that places addressing the climate crisis at the center of rebooting the economy.

Our landscapes have a vital role to play in facilitating a green recovery, but any changes need to be considered carefully. Two examples include deploying new renewable energy development and tree / woodland planting. These are just small parts of the green recovery equation, but the likely rapid expansion of both land use changes is likely to have significant impacts on the character of our landscapes.



<sup>1</sup> CarbonBrief (2020). Analysis: Coronavirus set to cause largest ever annual fall in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Available at: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-coronavirus-set-to-cause-largest-ever-annual-fall-in-co2-emissions>

## Renewable Energy Development

It's now been over a year since leaders from the devolved nations announced an environmental and climate emergency and as of February 2020, two-thirds of councils in the UK have also announced their own climate emergency<sup>2</sup>. This period of recovery comes at a time where renewable energy development is at the forefront of tackling the climate crisis, evident by the fact that it accounted for almost half of the UK's electricity generation between January and March 2020<sup>3</sup>. Renewable energy developers hold the potential to boost the UK's economy by attracting billions in investment and creating thousands of green jobs while providing a huge contribution to the UK's climate ambitions. This was proven in the wake of the 2009 financial crisis, when the Confederation of British Industry calculated that the green economy contributed a third of the UK's economic growth in 2010-11<sup>4</sup>. We are also now four months on since the government announced that onshore wind and solar projects will be able to take part in the next round of the Contracts for Difference scheme, paving the way for renewable developers to receive financial support on their projects.

Renewable energy will make a significant contribution towards a green recovery and the prospects are now even more attractive to developers. We have come to expect that boundaries will be pushed in relation to the scale of projects (as discussed in our recent publication '*The Scale of the Task: increasing turbine size to achieve Net Zero*'), and their location, with the continual pressure upon the landscape to accommodate this development type intensifying. While it is essential that the anticipated influx of renewable development is installed and becomes operational in the near future to meet the ambitious targets of reducing climate emissions, ensuring that these developments occur in the right place and at the right scale remains crucial for the preservation of our landscapes. Careful design and robust assessment are necessary to ensure that schemes are suited to the landscapes they will sit within and that harm upon them is minimised.

LUC has a wealth of experience in providing landscape and visual feasibility advice to clients for a range of renewable energy projects and have an excellent track record in the preparation of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIAs) when projects are taken forwards for planning application.

We are also experienced in undertaking Landscape Sensitivity Assessments in relation to renewable energy development on behalf of local authorities and national park authorities, and have recently been commissioned by Cornwall Council to create a new strategy for accommodating new renewable generation infrastructure in Cornwall's landscapes. Last month the Council announced its intention to accelerate its Climate Emergency Plan (which aims to make Cornwall carbon neutral by 2030), with the COVID-19 recovery and renewal process bringing further impetus to drive this forward<sup>5</sup>.

## Tree Planting

The government's recent announcement of their plans to 'Build back better' has been met with criticism from environmental groups for the emphasis to "Build, build, build"<sup>6</sup>. However, the elements aligned with a green recovery have been more warmly received, notably the re-commitment from the government to plant over 75,000 acres of trees every year by 2025. Last month the government launched a consultation to inform a new England Tree Strategy<sup>7</sup> to ensure that this commitment is delivered and to set out policies to expand tree cover, support woodland management and increase public engagement with trees and woodlands. There are also tree planting initiatives being brought forwards which will bring huge benefits in mitigating the effects

<sup>2</sup> Declare a Climate Emergency (2020). List of Councils Who Have Declared a Climate Emergency. Available at: <https://www.climateemergency.uk/blog/list-of-councils/>

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian (2020). Renewable energy breaks UK record in first quarter of 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jun/25/renewable-energy-breaks-uk-record-in-first-quarter-of-2020>

<sup>4</sup> The Guardian (2020). How renewable energy could power Britain's economic recovery. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/19/how-renewable-energy-could-power-britains-economic-recovery>

<sup>5</sup> Cornwall Council (2020). Council pledges to accelerate Cornwall's climate emergency plan. Available at: <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-news-room/media-releases/news-from-2020/news-from-june-2020/council-pledges-to-accelerate-cornwall-s-climate-emergency-plan/>

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian (2020). Treasury's 'green recovery' not enough, say campaigners. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jul/07/treasurys-green-recovery-not-enough-say-campaigners>

<sup>7</sup> Gov.UK (2020) Consultation launched on the England Tree Strategy. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/consultation-launched-on-the-england-tree-strategy>

of climate change, as well as providing positive impacts on the economy and nature, including the Northern Forest (which aims to plant an additional 50 million trees across the north of England<sup>8</sup>).

Following the 'radical changes' to our planning system announced by the Prime Minister earlier this month, planning rules are set to become streamlined to encourage development on brownfield sites in a bid to revive high streets and reduce the need to build on greenfield sites<sup>9</sup>. Whilst tree planting should form part of the Green Infrastructure strategies within our town and cities for their ability to store carbon and remove pollutants (see our publication [\*Green Infrastructure: a tool for Local Authorities in tackling the Climate Emergency\*](#)), larger swathes of planting (including woodlands/forests) could be accommodated on greenfield sites within our rural landscapes, contributing towards nature restoration and providing benefits to amenity.

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (LSA) are well-established approaches to guide and inform where green infrastructure is best suited within our landscape, whilst ensuring the most sensitive and valued landscape features and characteristics are protected. LUC has a wide range of experience in applying LCA and LSA to projects including proposals for tree planting and have authored a large collection of LCAs and LSAs for a variety of councils within the UK.

To find out more about guiding and informing landscape change please speak to [Sally Marshall](#).

LUC  
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<sup>8</sup> [thenorthernforest.org.uk](https://thenorthernforest.org.uk). (2020). The Northern Forest: Planting 50 Million Trees. Available at: <https://thenorthernforest.org.uk>

<sup>9</sup> Inside Housing (2020). Planning applications no longer needed for brownfield sites as part of 'radical changes' announced by prime minister. Available at: <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/planning-applications-no-longer-needed-for-brownfield-sites-as-part-of-radical-changes-announced-by-prime-minister-67010>