

**CERES GROUP**

**RESPOND TO:**

EXPANDING THE  
ROLE OF THE  
PRIVATE SECTOR IN  
NATURE RECOVERY

2025



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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|   |   |
|---|---|
| TABLE OF CONTENTS.....                              | 2 |
| INTRODUCTION.....                                   | 3 |
| EFFECTIVE POLICY MEASURES .....                     | 3 |
| SECURITY OF ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS ..... | 4 |
| IDENTIFYING & MANAGING RISKS.....                   | 4 |
| CASE STUDIES .....                                  | 5 |

## INTRODUCTION

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Ceres Group welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the call for evidence on expanding the role of the private sector in nature recovery. As a consultancy and research group working across the rural economy, we support over 1,100 farmers and landowners in building profitable, resilient, and sustainable businesses. We also support landowners and investors with property planning and development.

This call for evidence seeks insights on how best to support and incentivise business sectors to invest in nature recovery, especially those sectors which impact or depend upon nature the most.

We are uniquely positioned to provide valuable insights and evidence for this call for evidence. Our extensive experience in supporting farmers and landowners, combined with our deep understanding of the rural economy, allows us to offer practical and informed perspectives on how to effectively engage the private sector in nature recovery efforts. We have discussed below the three key areas that we feel are fundamental for government to consider in improving its economic growth mission, alongside the economic case for business investment and the natural environment.

Our response will support the government in its further development of policies to increase private sector investment in protecting and improving nature.

## EFFECTIVE POLICY MEASURES

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The most effective policy measures to increase business investment in protecting and improving the natural environment in England should:

- Promote industry profitability by using fiscal and trade policies to encourage investment in long-term schemes/projects.
- Be clear, consistent and evidence-based to provide greater transparency, certainty and confidence to plan and invest.
- Have a clear measuring and monitoring plan (including standardised metrics and accountability) to ensure successful implementation or identify areas for improvement. This prevents reduced demand from unsuccessful rollouts and preserves credibility for future policies and schemes.
- Establish a comprehensive long-term governance framework to ensure thorough oversight of the plan, its implementation, and related processes.

- Have joined up thinking across government departments (as highlighted in our response to the Land Use Framework Consultation) to avoid conflicting policies.
- Promote collaboration between key industry stakeholders such as developers, farmers and local planning authorities to build aligned strategies relating to nature protection and improvement.

## SECURITY OF ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

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To secure the economic benefits of a healthy natural environment and of business innovation in environmental protection and improvement, government should:

- Ensure that policies/schemes complement, not compete with, food production and other environmental services. Land use should be multi-functional in supporting food, biodiversity, carbon, and water outcomes together.
- Have a supportive and aligned infrastructure of policy, education, innovation, and market access to drive profitability.
- Implement policies that incentivise adherence to elevated environmental standards, particularly in the context of food production, and especially when compared to imported products.
- Integrate sustainability reporting and transparent supply-chain certifications that consider the key environmental benefits relating to biodiversity, carbon and water.

## IDENTIFYING & MANAGING RISKS

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In addition to the aforementioned long-term policy and measurement/monitoring standardisation, government should better identify and manage any risks for businesses, communities or consumers arising from increased investment in the natural environment by:

- Incentivising early engagement with local communities/stakeholders to reduce resistance to future nature-based projects/changes, whilst educating them on the wider benefits.
- Mitigating financial and operational risks for smaller businesses (e.g. farmers) by offering support through risk-sharing mechanisms (e.g. government-backed funds to protect early-stage investment), or support aggregation models (e.g. consortiums) to avoid market volatility and exposed, disproportionate liability.
- Identify long-term stewardship agreements, with responsibilities clearly outlined.



- Support succession planning and legal clarity for landowners and developers to prevent unexpected costs falling on communities or future buyers.
- Ensure transparent reporting on the natural environment to avoid greenwashing.

## CASE STUDIES

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To support this consultation, we present below two practical examples demonstrating how effective private sector investment can both incentivise and enable nature recovery. The following case studies highlight the positive impact that business-led collaboration and financial incentives can have on fostering environmental stewardship and regenerative practice.

### Case Study 1: Routes to Regen

[Routes to Regen](#) is a collaborative initiative led by the Sustainable Markets Initiative and The Royal Countryside Fund, designed to make regenerative farming more accessible and rewarding for UK farmers. The programme offers a tailored, whole-farm approach supported by leading food and finance businesses. Farmers receive free on-farm advice from Ceres Rural, alongside access to a curated menu of resources including:

- Premiums for sustainably grown crops,
- Discounts on cover crops, pollinator and specialist seeds,
- Opportunities to integrate livestock and organic matter,
- Demonstration days and knowledge-sharing events,
- Support for environmental data collection.

The pilot phase of 100 farms is now full, reaching its recruitment and delivery targets within 3 months, indicating strong uptake and interest. This model exemplifies how private sector collaboration can drive nature recovery by aligning commercial incentives with environmental stewardship.

### Case Study 2: Spains Hall Estate

[Spains Hall Estate](#) in Essex is delivering high-integrity Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) habitats as part of a long-term Ecological Masterplan spanning 500 hectares of farmed landscape. The project combines species reintroduction, regenerative agriculture, and habitat restoration to create a connected mosaic of ecosystems that deliver ecological, hydrological, and carbon outcomes.

The current phase includes over 100 hectares of habitat creation, underpinned by a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP), in-house ecological expertise, and detailed baseline and ongoing surveys. All habitats are managed directly by the estate team, ensuring

quality and continuity throughout the scheme's lifetime. This component is being financed through sales of BNG units.

Spains Hall has developed an advanced working relationship with its Local Planning Authority, with a legal agreement for BNG delivery due in 2025. This provides a strong foundation for private offtake through the planning system, and long-term market confidence.

The BNG work forms part of a broader portfolio that includes natural flood management, water quality improvements, carbon credit generation, and delivery of wider social and environmental benefits. Public-private financing is integral to the delivery of the ecological landscape plan. Government support comes in the form of a number of large-scale, countryside stewardship agreements, including over ancient woodlands and in-field habitats, capital grants from NFM projects and resource protection (CSF). Private finance is realised through estate reinvestment and borrowing, food product sales, ecotourism revenues, sales of BNG and carbon units and water company capital grants (see details below). This integrated funding model enables a resilient and long-term delivery plan, but has come at significant cost (both in terms of time and fees). Simplification of government funding models and enabling regulation would reduce such costs and make the model more easily replicable elsewhere.

The Estate has also pioneered a holistic approach to on-farm water modelling, with AtkinsRealis, that quantifies the water benefits across 9 stores (including vegetation canopy, ponds, wetlands, rainwater harvesting, soil and shallow groundwater). The modelled outcomes quantify both flood risk reduction (up to 30%) and summer base flow water resources (up to 10% extra river flow). This enables beneficiaries such as water companies to build business cases in support of proposed on-farm water management activities.

The Estate assembled over £380,000 of mixed public and private grants to deliver an innovative Natural Flood Management project. Funders were also beneficiaries, with water companies funding biodiversity recovery (through WINEP), surface water flood risk reduction. The Local Authority (as RMA) provided funding through the Local Levy alongside the Environmental Agency (WEIF) to secure localised fluvial flood risk reduction.

Spains Hall Estate demonstrates how rural estates can become hubs for integrated nature recovery, combining environmental integrity with long-term commercial models.