‘Make no mistake, we are angry’

How and why do environmental NGOs in England use ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to participate in environmental land management policy?

By Kerry Stranix

University of East Anglia

School of Politics, Philosophy and Area Studies

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by research

June 2025

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs) in environmental land management policy in England from 2010 to 2024. It focuses particularly on the use of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world, such as natural capital. This period, marked by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government's ambition to be 'the greenest government ever' and to leave the natural environment in England in a better state than it found it, saw both sustained policy change and rising public concern over environmental decline.

As a qualitative interpretive policy study, this research is guided by Clarke and Star's (2008) social worlds framework to explore how eNGOs navigated this period. In particular, how they used non-human elements such as documents and ideas as boundary objects to participate in ELMS and shape policy outcomes. Drawing on document analysis and interviews, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, four social worlds are presented. The social worlds are based on the predominant emotion being expressed by eNGOs and feature (1) a 'hopeful' initial phase, followed by (2) a 'cynical' phase, which led to (3) a social world marked by anger and frustration. Finally, social world four sees a collaborative approach between eNGOs, where the sector built influence by publicly speaking up to government and finding strength by working through formal coalitions.

My analysis suggests that applying the social worlds framework as a theory/methods package, particularly the identification and use of non-human elements, positioned as boundary objects, offers valuable insights into the dynamics of policy participation by eNGOs. These findings contribute to the challenge set by Durnová and Weible in 2020 to bridge the gap between qualitative, small-scale interpretive policy studies and mainstream, quantitative policy research.

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Acknowledgements

I am hugely grateful for the support and patience of my supervisory team, Dr John Turnpenny and Professor Irene Lorenzoni. Their unwavering encouragement and enthusiasm for the subject of my thesis alongside their deep knowledge of environmental public policy has meant I have learnt more during this process than I will ever be able to thank them for. The path to submission has been winding, but at all stages, their guidance has focused on my wellbeing alongside excellent academic supervision, and for this I will always be thankful.

Balancing academic study with a career is not straightforward and I am thankful to my colleagues, past and present, who have met with grace and an eager ear, my wranglings on how a sector we all care so much about is represented through this research. An extra special thank you must go to everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this thesis. Their insights were fascinating and their openness to my questions meant I was gifted with a rich pool of data with which to develop my findings.

Academically, I am thankful to Adele Clark and Susan Leigh Star for developing such an enlightening theoretical framework with which to view the world. I am also thankful to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke for their approach to thematic analysis which speaks so strongly to the way in which I feel qualitative analysis should be undertaken.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my daughters, Wren and Anya and my husband Richard who has lived this process alongside me. I could not have done it without his proof-reading skills and endless cups of tea. Thank you.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In 2022, the environmental NGO (eNGO) RSPB took to Twitter to publicly attack proposed government policy changes linked to Prime Minister Liz Truss' mini budget. In the ensuing 13 tweet thread, strong, unambiguous language was used to state the organisation's despair at rumoured weakening of environmental protections. It clearly stated the organisation's intention to fight the proposed changes, and muster the support of its members to do so:

> *"Make no mistake, we are angry. This Government has today launched an attack on nature. We don't use the words that follow lightly. We are entering uncharted territory. Please read this thread. 1/13*
>
> *We cannot let this happen. And now more than ever nature needs your help. We need to make it abundantly clear that we will not stand for this." 10/13*[1]

While this may not immediately jump out as remarkable, it marked a tipping point in the relationship between the British government and the environmental third sector, one that can be tracked back to 2011 when the newly elected Conservative, Liberal Democrat coalition published a White Paper that stated a bold ambition to 'be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited it' (Defra, 2011, p. 3). The White Paper set out an approach to environmental policymaking that connected the value and condition of the natural world to financial growth and prosperity. This, I argue, began a period of cautious hope amongst the environmental third sector. However, in the ensuing years the ambition has not been realised (Carter and Clements, 2015, p. 12) and Brexit dominated the environmental policy agenda. Despite eNGOs hoping the Brexit process would provide opportunity to introduce progressive and stronger environmental protections to meet the government's 2011 ambitions, the feeling of frustration amongst eNGO staff at missed opportunity and false promises has led to a sometimes publicly acrimonious relationship. This thesis focuses on the role of eNGOs within this situation through a case study focused on environmental land management policy. It explores, through document analysis and interviews, how and why eNGOs are using ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to participate in this policy area.

[1] (Twitter, 23 September 2022: https://twitter.com/RSPBEngland/status/1573366815568580613)

1.1 Setting the scene

1.1.1 The environmental third sector in the UK

eNGOs are a force to be reckoned with in the UK. In 2013, a study by Clifford et al., found there to be approximately 1800 NGOs operating in England and Wales whose primary concern is environmental issues. More recent numbers are difficult to obtain, but a leading environmental jobs platform lists 1134 environmental organisations in its current directory[2]. Support for eNGOs which operate a membership model is formidable, with between four and five million members across approximately 300 organisations counted in 2013 (Cracknell, Miller and Williams, 2013). A more recent collated membership figure is not available but current membership of RSPB, National Trust and Wildlife Trusts alone exceeds seven million.[3] This is significantly higher than membership of all the country's political parties combined[4]. eNGOs active in the UK include international heavyweights such as WWF, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth as well as national stalwarts RSPB and National Trust. Locally focused conservation charities such as the federation of Wildlife Trusts often play a prominent role in county-level issues and more recently, decentralised, issue-based groups, notably Extinction Rebellion, have emerged as key players. The UK's environmental third sector is one of the busiest and most institutionalised in the world (Rootes, 2009, Carter, 2018) and this research focuses on a core group of eNGOs that traditionally work closely with the establishment. Largely operating a membership model, they include RSPB, National Trust, Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts and Woodland Trust. These, and other, smaller eNGOs often work via formal coalitions, with Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) and Greener UK of particular importance to this research.

eNGOs play an increasingly prominent role in many areas of environmental policymaking (see Carter & Childs, 2018 for an example that focuses on climate change policy). This prominence is due in part to the sustained scaling back of environmental government agencies such as Environment Agency and Natural England (Kirsop-Taylor, 2019a, 2022). In this landscape, eNGOs deploy a variety of ideas and instruments to ensure their voice is heard, including large, well resourced, single-issue campaigns such as the Friends of the Earth 'Big Ask' campaign, examined by Carter and Childs who found its high

[2] https://www.environmentjob.co.uk/directory (accessed 6.6.25)
[3] https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/about-us, https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/fascinating-facts-and-figures, https://www.rspb.org.uk/membership (accessed 6.6.25)
[4] UK political party membership sits at approximately 900,000: https://www.statista.com/statistics/871460/political-party-membership-in-the-uk/ (accessed 6.6.25)

profile contributed to the 2008 Climate Change Act (Carter and Childs, 2018, p. 1011). As the UK navigates its future relationship with the European Union, eNGOs have been quick to focus their campaigning efforts towards opportunities to influence legislation that seeks to address the environmental governance gaps that an exit from the European Union may bring (see campaigning materials from The Wildlife Trusts for example[5]).

1.1.2 The changing role of eNGOs

The growing remit of NGOs is a topic well covered in the third sector literature, for examples see (Salamon, 1994, Salamon and Sokolowski, 2016, Paxton *et al.*, 2005, McLaughlin and Osborne, 2003), particularly with regards to health, education and social care. However, despite strong public support for environmental NGOs, less attention has been paid to their role in wider society and how they influence public policy. eNGOs are increasingly viewed as delivery partners or 'service providers' (Berny and Rootes, 2018, p. 949) by government agencies and local authorities, often receiving government funding to carry out 'wildlife protection policies' through direct subsidy or increasingly through National Lottery competitive funding schemes (Carter, 2018, p. 174). There is a risk, however, that increasing institutionalisation comes at a cost, particularly if it stifles the effectiveness of the organisations to mobilise and campaign effectively (Diani and Donati, 1999, p. 20). Mermet identifies that eNGOs are often pulled in different directions (2018) and there is wide acknowledgement within the third sector literature that eNGOs continue to pick up the slack as the remit and budget of local authorities and government agencies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency continue to contract (Berny and Rootes, 2018), (Clifford *et al.*, 2013).

1.1.3 eNGOs' use of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world

How eNGOs choose to address the opportunities that come with government cutbacks, specifically the tools they are using to ensure their voice is heard, is critical. One such area that has undoubtedly gained significant traction over the past 20 years is the idea that nature can be valued by monetary terms, and the linked belief that by doing so, it will be better protected (see the government's 25-Year plan for Environment for example, 2018). A key element of this thinking is the idea of natural capital, which is defined by the government appointed Natural Capital Committee (NCC) as *'… those elements of nature which either directly provide benefits or underpin human wellbeing.'* (NCC, 2013, p.

[5] https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Nature_recovery_network_final.pdf

13). This definition is taken from the NCC's first report, and it acknowledges that the description is deliberately wide to encompass, for example, stocks of forests and rivers, extending to natural processes that provide benefit such as the water cycle and soil fertility processes. As eNGOs have been key players in spreading the notion of valuing the natural world in monetary terms (Hrabanski *et al.*, 2013), examining if and how they are using ideas such as natural capital to influence policy has potential to gain new insight into their role in the policymaking process.

David Cameron's success in the 2010 election was in part due to persuading the electorate that the Conservatives under his leadership would be a party for the environment. This was a sidestep for a party not traditionally outspoken on environmental issues (Carter and Clements, 2015, p. 5). The 'vote blue to go green' strategy raised Cameron's profile in opposition (Carter and Clements, 2015, p. 3) and once elected the coalition government wasted no time in cementing its commitment to the environment with the publication, in 2011, of a white paper titled 'The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature'. The paper clearly laid out the government's ambition to 'be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited it'. (Defra, 2011, p. 3). What is of note to this thesis, as is the white paper's dual commitment to recognising the financial value of the natural world. Sitting within the same paragraph of the executive summary are the words '*we must properly value the economic and social benefits of a healthy natural environment'* (Defra, 2011, p. 3). What is represented here is a systemic move towards a new way of 'doing' nature conservation, one that justifies investment in the natural world by the financial benefit that comes from restoring and improving habitats. Over the next 14 years, the Conservative government's approach of valuing nature in financial terms brought forth a new industry in natural capital accounting, ecosystem services and payments for ecosystem services. It saw a new committee, The Natural Capital Committee, led by economists, develop and report on accounting mechanisms for nature, with its influence filtering down to local authorities, private landowners and eNGOs.

By the time of the 2024 general election, the environmental policy landscape was awash with financial mechanisms, not least in the field of environmental land management policy under new environmental land management schemes (ELMS), introduced to replace the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. Attempting to navigate this landscape are environmental NGOs, many of whom are themselves landowners and not only involved in advising on the development of environmental land management policy; they also stand to be affected, both positively and negatively from changes,

such as the Conservative government's push for 'public money for public goods' (Gove, 2018). Despite this momentum, and wealth of documentation endorsing the approach of valuing the natural world through its economic worth (Defra, 2023), Defra, 2018, NCC, 2013, Helm, 2019, Finance Earth, 2023, (Green Alliance, 2016), there remains confusion around the details and there is yet to be meaningful and standardised mechanisms to account for natural resources as well as defining the role of private finance in environmental land management.

1.2 Approach rationale

In this thesis, the research question asks **how and why eNGOs in England use ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to participate in environmental land management policy**. There were three key observations that provided springboards for exploring this question: (1) my observation as an eNGO professional how ideas that place a financial value on the natural world were gaining prominence in the sector, alongside (2) the significance placed by eNGOs on the 2010 Lawton Review that investigated how wildlife sites in England were responding to climate change and which seemed in my opinion to place greater emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature, and (3) the potential to explore the situation under the theoretical guidance of social worlds analysis, where the role of non-human elements are considered alongside human actors. The question is explored through a case study looking at the ways in which eNGOs in England were participating in environmental land management policy from 2010, when a Conservative Liberal Democrat government was elected, to 2024 when the Conservatives lost power to Labour. During this time environmental policymaking more widely experienced a sustained period of change, not least due to the UK's decision to leave the European Union in 2016. Environmental land management policy was often at the centre of this debate, with strong feelings that the existing Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was deeply flawed, expensive and not conducive to much-needed environmental improvements (Roederer-Rynning and Matthews, 2019, Pe'er *et al.*, 2019), particularly on agricultural land, which covers more than 60% of England (Defra, 2022).

1.3 Theoretical and methodological approach

This thesis takes an interpretive policy studies approach (Durnová and Weible, 2020 p.573) to the research question, in that it looks to understand the meaning uncovered by 'acts, actors and objects' (ibid) through the chosen theoretical framework and methodological approach. Interpretive policy analysis has been regarded as less valuable or rigorous than positivist approaches (Durnová, 2022),

yet recent studies, including collaborations between mainstream and interpretive policy scholars, are shining light on the contribution of research that focuses on the importance of language, power, values, beliefs and emotions and that policies are the 'manifestations of meanings' (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 574, Pierce, 2021). Key to this approach is that knowledge gained throughout the research process is not something that exists 'independent of the researcher' (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 577). Interpretive policy analysis acknowledges that the position of the researcher will form part of the process and must be considered reflexively. This philosophical underpinning supports the choice of Clarke and Star's Social Worlds Framework (SWF) as the theoretical framework for this thesis, as well as Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to analyse documents and interview data. The key element of SWF deployed to support the research findings is the identification and subsequent use of non-human elements by actors in the case study. In this example, positioning ideas that place a financial value on the natural world as non-human actants provided scope to widen analysis and explore motivation and use of ideas, documents and channels that are doing work within and between social worlds. These elements are known widely in Science and Technology Studies (STS) as boundary objects (Clarke and Star, 2008 p. 121). This approach presents a novel exploration of the value of undertaking a social worlds analysis using SWF and RTA to explore a situation. The epistemological and ontological foundation of this approach is explored further in chapters three and four.

1.4 Thesis overview

Chapter two explores academic literature focused on the environmental third sector, including the sector's adoption and use of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world. It also considers recent research on interpretive approaches, particularly how this type of qualitative analysis can add value to mainstream policy analysis, which is typically positivist in its approach. Finally, literature exploring the study of emotions within policy process research is considered. Chapter three outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, exploring the decision to undertake a social worlds analysis deploying SWF alongside RTA. Chapter four details the methodological approach, including the decision to use a live-issue case study to address the research question. The chapter outlines the data collection and analysis process and sets the scene for the empirical analysis and findings in chapter five. Chapter five presents data from document analysis and interviews through eight key events that underpinned the development of four social worlds. The social worlds are presented under the predominant emotion interpreted from the data and are used to explore the actions and

motivations of eNGO actors involved in the case study. The thesis concludes with discussion in chapter six on the research findings and how a social worlds analysis can provide insight beyond the case study. Recommendations and ideas for future research focus on the value of the findings to eNGOs as well as how SWF and RTA can be combined to address research questions based on policy issues.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This research is interdisciplinary in nature, being rooted in the field of environmental politics, but leaning heavily on the philosophical underpinnings of STS, specifically social worlds analysis, using Clarke and Star's SWF which focuses on groups of actors 'doing things together' (Becker, 1986 quoted in Clarke & Star, 2008 p.113) and working with 'shared objects' (ibid). This thesis draws on literature focused on environmental economics (in terms of policy mechanisms that account for the value of nature) and third sector studies, broadly examining the role of the third sector in the UK, narrowing down to the role of eNGOs in environmental policymaking. The chapter begins with a review of literature exploring the third sector in the UK before focusing on the environmental third sector (where eNGOs sit). It then looks at the rise of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world and the reaction within and outside eNGOs. Attention is then turned to interpretive policy studies and literature that explores the value of ideas and emotions in policy studies, setting the scene to explore this further in chapter three, which examines the theoretical framework used to undertake analysis.

2.1 The changing role of the third sector in the UK

NGOs, which broadly refer to organisations and groups outside of the public sector which operate on a non-profit basis – often referred to as the third or voluntary sector, have steadily increased their role in the delivery of public services across the UK (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 487, Salamon, 1994; Salamon and Sokolowski, 2016; Kirsop-Taylor, 2019). The growth in both their role and remit has been tracked to 1997, when New Labour looked more towards the voluntary sector to provide 'best value' on government contracts in terms of expertise as well as financial value (Bevir and O'Brien, 2001), with NGOs being perceived as organisations that could be trusted by the public to do the right thing (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 493). Collaboration between the third and public sector was seen as partnership working (Adeyemo, Sanderson and Wells, 2024, p. 117) and referred to as the 'third way' because it sought to involve individuals and NGOs in the welfare state, opening up competitive tendering opportunities to voluntary organisations (ibid p.118). This opportunity was embraced by the sector and during New Labour's time in government the number, role and remit of voluntary sector organisations increased (ibid p.118). By 2010 the sector looked very different, with some beginning to question whether this 'shadow state' had lost the independence, diversity and nimbleness it had initially been valued for (ibid p.119) as organisations raced for funding in an

increasingly competitive market (Kirsop-Taylor, 2019). Under New Labour third sector organisations had seen investment and government support, but some feel this was at the expense of organisational autonomy, particularly for smaller NGOs (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 487). An effective third sector needs dynamic organisations, that are nimble enough to react to the changing needs of the individuals and areas they serve, but professional enough to implement meaningful change and hold government and policymakers to account. This was the dilemma for NGOs under New Labour as they were welcoming additional funding and opportunity, alongside a renewed interest in many of the issues organisations were looking to address but struggling to manage the added bureaucracy and monitoring favoured by the administration. Milbourne and Cushman referred to this as an '*inescapable trade-off between autonomy and accountability*' (2013, p.487).

Things were to change for the sector from 2010, when the coalition government began to implement spending cuts and civil society was encouraged to take on activities that voluntary organisations had previously been funded to do (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2016, Adeyemo, Sanderson and Wells, 2024, Milbourne and Cushman, 2013). This was seen clearly through initiatives like the 'Big Society' where the emphasis was put on groups and individuals to address societal issues (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012, p. 30, Alcock, 2010). This period also saw an increasing marketisation of third sector services, a theme central to this thesis, with NGOs having to adapt their approaches to mirror corporations in the hope of winning large government contracts (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 488). These pivots often came at the expense of organisational agility and reports of mission drift (ibid p.491). The third sector under both the coalition and subsequent Conservative governments saw difficult times. The Lobbying Act of 2014, for example, made it more difficult for many charities to hold government to account for actions they disagreed with and contracts were often run on a payments by results basis, which affected smaller voluntary organisations that could not compete with the economies of scale of larger NGOs (Adeyemo, Sanderson and Wells, 2024, p. 123, Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 502). These larger organisations had in turn been forced to become more organised and professional due to the bureaucratic requirements of managing large contracts (but were potentially less agile and effective for their intended beneficiaries as a result). This period sets the scene for general distrust from the third sector towards government. In many respects, the sector was there to pick up the slack when government departments were cut back yet expected to quickly contract themselves when funding was redirected back through agencies or diverted to different issues. This was and remains as true in the environmental third sector as anywhere. However, although the growing (and

shrinking) remit of the voluntary sector during the period under analysis (2010-2024) has been a topic well-covered in the third sector literature particularly with regards to the welfare state, health and employment, less attention has been given to how these changing circumstances affected subsectors of the third sector (Kirsop-Taylor, 2019, p. 20), including those focused on the environment.

2.2 The environmental third sector in the UK

As established in the introduction, the environmental third sector and eNGOs that feature within it, have a large and loyal following. Support for eNGOs operating across the UK with a membership model is formidable, with over seven million members[6] spread across approximately 300 organisations (Cracknell, Miller and Williams, 2013)[7]. eNGOs are increasingly viewed as delivery partners or 'service providers' (Berny and Rootes, 2018, p. 949) by government and local authorities, often receiving government funding to carry out 'wildlife protection policies' through direct subsidy or increasingly through National Lottery competitive funding schemes (Carter, 2018, p. 174). There is a risk, however, that increasing institutionalisation comes at a cost, particularly if it stifles the effectiveness of the organisations to mobilise and campaign effectively (Diani and Donati, 1999, p. 20). Mermet identifies that eNGOs are often pulled in different directions by actors with competing agendas and measures of success (2018, p. 1152). Indeed, the manifestation of mission drift to attract funding can take its toll on eNGOs' resources (Berny and Rootes, 2018, p.1044). Mermet acknowledges that environmental issues are 'presented as being everybody's problem but often appear to be 'a priority for few' (2018, p. 1148) and believes eNGOs are caught in collaborative working which can be counterproductive. Building on this theme, he believes eNGOs have the dual challenge of functioning as an organisation with all the accompanying requirements, particularly in terms of growing professionalisation of the sector, but this is in addition to a mission-led remit to address environmental issues. Berny & Rootes pick up this point by posing questions around difficulties faced by eNGOs to operate as effective organisations, focused on important environmental issues while not '*becoming lost in the business of organisational maintenance'* (2018, p. 956). They go on to argue that the cost of cooperating with government and business could be to the detriment of their ability to react quickly and effectively to fight environmental battles (ibid p.

[6] Membership of largest three eNGOs active in England equates to over 7million: https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/about-us, https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/fascinating-facts-and-figures, https://www.rspb.org.uk/membership (accessed 6.6.25)

[7] Current figures not available, but likely to be similar to 2013.

958). Carter observes that the mainstream environmental movement seems to have chosen 'reform over revolution' (2018). That is not to forget that institutionalisation could provide eNGOs with new access to decision makers and opportunity to develop a role as expert policy adviser, contributing to policy learning, in addition to acting in a delivery role (Diani and Donati, 1999).

eNGOs play an increasingly prominent role in many areas of environmental policymaking and can be seen to deploy a variety of ideas and instruments to ensure their voice is heard (see Carter & Childs, 2018 for an example that focuses on climate change policy, also see Cook and Inman, 2012). The UK's environmental third sector is one of the busiest and most institutionalised in the world (Rootes, 2009, Carter, 2018) and as the UK navigates its future relationship with the European Union, eNGOs have been quick to focus their campaigning efforts towards opportunities to influence legislation that seeks to address environmental governance gaps that an exit from the European Union may bring. As government has moved more towards the marketisation of public services (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013), eNGOs have been following this trajectory with interest, and no small dose of enthusiasm. Spotting early opportunity to bring the natural world and the practices of conservation into conversations around the country's economic prosperity was widely welcomed by the sector as an opportunity to raise awareness of environmental issues with government departments outside of Defra, namely the Treasury. In conservation, this trajectory began with and has developed under an idea that has undoubtedly gained significant traction over the past 20 years - natural capital. eNGOs have been key players in spreading the notion of valuing the natural world through its financial worth to society (Hrabanski *et al.*, 2013), seeing opportunity to draw attention to their organisational missions as well as explore new funding opportunities that come with opening up environmental policy to the markets.

2.3 The history, use and misuse of natural capital

When conservationists and governments speak of attributing a financial value to the natural world, one term is frequently used to define this activity: natural capital. Indeed, it is the term used to name the government committee charged with developing the argument and rationale for valuing the natural world by its financial worth to society – the Natural Capital Committee. Writing in 1973, German economist E.F. Schumacher was one of the first to refer to the term 'natural capital'. He used it to describe dwindling stocks of natural resources, warning that treating fossil fuels as income rather than 'natural capital' can only end in disaster (1973, p.12). Since that time, the concept has been

stretched to commonly refer to ideas of attaching a monetary value to natural resources such as fossil fuels and forests right through to 'cultural services' (Steger, et al., 2018, p. 158) such as public access to green space. Described as one of three capital types; manufactured, human and natural (Barbier, 2019, p. 14), the planet's natural capital is estimated to be worth between $14-$54 trillion annually (DesRoches, 2018, Costanza, et al., 1997). The UK government describes natural capital as*: '… stocks of the elements of nature that have value to society, such as forests, fisheries, rivers, biodiversity, land and minerals* (HM Treasury, 2022, p.63). There is much debate across academic fields and an increasing focus for interdisciplinary research between 'economists, ecologists and natural scientists' (Barbier, 2019, p. 31) as well as between political and social scientists, about the value and usefulness of defining nature in this way. Appendix viii presents a timeline of natural capital-focused ideas in England, beginning in 1972 with the publication of Limits to Growth which brought concerns about economic growth and environmental decline to the attention of world leaders.

Understandings of natural capital vary '*between agencies and over time'* (Vardon, et al., 2016, p. 146) and there is no widely accepted definition of the concept (Recuero Virto, Weber and Jeantil, 2018). Literature that focuses on natural capital often references ecosystem services (ESS), as the services that flow from stocks of natural capital (including food, drinking water and clean air) and subsequent payments for these services (PES). However, despite continuing confusion, natural capital has been heavily invested in by the UK government at a state and local level, evidenced by the number of working groups, reports, national accounting systems, promotion and to some extent funding that has been devoted to it in the past 20 years (Costanza, et al., 2017, HM Treasury, 2022, HM Government, 2018, Defra, 2018, Helm, 2019). The creation of a 'natural capital industry' (Helm, 2019, p. 1), was cemented into the UK's political psyche in 2011 when the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition established the Natural Capital Committee, tasked with interpreting international research to take stock of natural capital in the UK. Its debut report in 2013 boasted that it was *'the first of its kind in the world'* (Natural Capital Committee, 2013, p. 4). Run on an ad hoc basis, and overseen by economist Dieter Helm, its reports focus not only on detailing the UK's stocks of natural capital, but how to account for them within the context of the nation's wider economic progress. Initially set to run until 2015, the committee was recommissioned to report until at least 2020.

It is worth noting that there is a lively natural capital debate taking place outside government departments and academic circles. Popular nature writers also have much to say on the subject,

particularly on its value and use to society. Writing in 2017, Mark Cocker denigrates the application of economic terms onto nature, warning that *'by adopting the language and attitudes of capitalism, environmentalists are defeated at source'* (Cocker, 2018, p. 65). George Monbiot agrees. In an opinion piece for The Guardian, he laments the focus on natural capital as *'deluded… the expectation that we can defend the living world through the mind-set that's destroying it'* (2018). eNGO representatives have also written about the effect of natural capital on the sector. One example is Fiona Reynolds, former director general of the National Trust. She warns of the dangers of reducing the beauty and wonder of the natural world to a series of economically focused, technical terms such as natural capital, ecosystem services and sustainable development. She writes that they are *'clumsy and tongue tying… [and] risk becoming meaningless as well as uninspiring'* (Reynolds, 2016, pp. 310-311). Wider arguments against ideas that place a financial value on the natural world typically focus on their association with neoliberalism (Castree, 2008). There is a recognisable neoliberal influence on the definition of natural capital (Coffey, 2016), and the perceived reduction of the natural world to economic terms has received extensive criticism, see (Castree, 2008, Sullivan, 2018, Coffey, 2016, Latour, 2018, p. 95, Carter, 2018, Martin-Ortega and Waylen, 2018, DesRoches, 2018, Sandbrook, Fisher and Vira, 2013 and Turnpenny and Russel, 2017) for examples. Writing in 2016, Millward-Hopkins suggests that '*the marketization of environmental problems… is perhaps the most ambitious project of privatizing a collective problem that has been undertaken within the neoliberal era'* (p. 19). Coffey examines the significance of economic metaphors on environmental policy, finding that the subject has gained little attention (Coffey, 2015, p. 206). Through case studies he presents examples where policymakers are actively looking to *'persuade people towards embrace of an economic understanding of the environment*' (p. 216) and that it is not clear, when economic metaphors are embraced, if it is to '*sustain the environment or sustain capitalism'* (p. 216).

Key proponents of these ideas, however, recognise the incompleteness of knowledge and complexity regarding the '*economics of ecosystems'* (Helm, 2019, p. 2). Costanza, et al., in a 2017 review of ecosystem services following their seminal 1997 paper in Nature, argue that, as part of a democratic and transparent society, it is not if we should account for nature, but how? They go on to note that: '*No valuation technique is perfect, and one must balance the requirements of the analysis with the data and resources available.'* (Costanza, et al., 2017, p. 9). While the paper is clear that ecosystem services are an appropriate way to value nature, the authors acknowledge there is work to be done in terms of systems, knowledge, education and tackling mistrust (Costanza, et al., 2017, p.13).

Interestingly, although academic arguments on both sides of the valuing nature debate acknowledge further attention should be given to addressing the best way to interpret and implement natural capital in policy, see (Sullivan, 2018, DesRoches, 2018, p.1, Martin-Ortega & Waylen, 2018, Murray, 2016 and Vardon, et al., 2016 for examples), this appears to be lacking once you move away from academic literature. So far, there has been limited scrutiny of natural capital in government, local authority or public eNGO documents and this leads to questions around aspiration versus implementation. Despite a clear rationale from government on the benefits of natural capital (see Natural Capital Committee, 2017, for example), it has not yet resulted in standardised application in policy. Martin-Ortega & Waylen conclude that there is no common understanding of, in this instance, PES by environmental professionals (Martin-Ortega & Waylen, 2018, p.225) and Sandbrook, et al's examination of conservation professionals' opinions on market-based instruments finds that while there might be organisational buy-in, individuals within organisations reside predominantly within the realms of '*outcome focused enthusiasm'* and '*ideological scepticism'* (Sandbrook, et al., 2013).

2.3.1 eNGOs' use of and thoughts on ideas that place a financial value on the natural world

> *"…to value biodiversity through money is akin to asking the fox to look after the henhouse… natural capital has moved from being a technical method of environmental economics… to become a substitute for the concept of nature itself" (Rappel, 2018)*.

The above extract was taken from a blog written by the chief executive of a Wildlife Trust, a federation of charities very much part of the establishment[8]. In contrast to this emotional, and strong rebuttal to ideas of natural capital, many eNGOs present a very different picture, one of strong support for ideas that place a financial value on the natural world. Since 2010, these ideas have been widely adopted by eNGOs, with events such as the World Forum on Natural Capital being coordinated by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (from 2013) and international examples such as WWF's involvement in the Natural Capital Project (WWF, 2019). In 2017 the RSPB published 'Accounting for Nature: A Natural Capital Account of the RSPB's estate in England', which was pitched as a contribution to the valuing nature debate. By detailing the economic value brought to society by their landholdings, the charity was clearly aligning itself with the approach of the NCC. The sector's clear support of valuing

[8] RSWT – the federation's umbrella body stands for the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts

nature by its financial worth can also be found in publications focused on nature markets, some of which are published under the names of large, well established and well-known eNGOs (Finance Earth, 2023, Green Alliance, 2016). However, it is important to remember that the environmental third sector, although mighty in number of supporters and members, is smaller when you begin looking at its key actors. eNGO employees and civil servants regularly move between the public and third sectors, which has encouraged the embedding of financial ideas. For example, Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, who came into the position after lead roles at WWF, RSWT and Friends of the Earth, said: *'…at least the realisation that the forest has a clear economic function might help sharpen political attention and galvanise the commitment that will be so vital for success'* (Juniper, 2013, p. 166).

2.4 Conclusions

Since 2010, NGOs in the UK have experienced a period of change as they have reacted to a state that has shifted and contracted its priorities. Environmental NGOs are no exception in this landscape as environmental policymaking in England, and across the UK has undergone a prolonged period of transformation and conflict, as the country navigates its position outside the European Union and amongst growing public awareness of and interest in environmental decline and biodiversity loss (Green Alliance, 2016). Amidst this, the role of eNGOs has grown both in terms of their involvement in policy development and delivery. The literature review highlighted a progression towards using ideas that place a financial value on the natural world, such as natural capital, to inform environmental policy development and highlighted the debated nature of this progression. The literature also shows that eNGOs have been key players in using and disseminating these ideas (Hrabanskia, et al., 2013). Of value to this narrative are existing findings that eNGOs are deeply involved in both developing and delivering environmental policy, particularly in the face of government cutbacks, and that there are multiple reasons for this involvement (including financial and mission-led). The literature has also established that policy outcomes based on ideas that value nature by its financial worth are underdeveloped and under-researched, with no clear path to delivery. With these factors in mind, chapter three will turn to address the how the research question has been explored with a theoretical framework that focuses on how and why groups of people come together to take collective action to participate in a situation.

Chapter 3: Theoretical approach

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework deployed to explore how and why eNGOs use ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to participate in environmental land management policy. In a 2020 paper, Durnová and Weible argue that policy analysis is dominated by mainstream approaches, with popular theories predominantly taking a positivist or post-positivist approach. It is useful to consider how the most well-regarded theories frame their analysis, setting the scene to explore the rationale for the interpretive approach taken in this thesis. This is done by exploring briefly how it differs from mainstream approaches and why there is a gap in the policy process literature for more studies employing interpretive approaches. Public policy scholars have, in more recent years, started to explore policy studies that are carried out using alternative theoretical and methodological approaches, see (Fullerton, Gabehart and Weible, 2024, Barbehön, 2020 and Durnová, 2022) for examples. In their 2020 paper Durnová and Weible consider how the two approaches (interpretive and mainstream) could complement one another and lay out several suggestions to incorporate interpretive thinking into mainstream policy theories such as the narrative policy framework (NPF), punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) and the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) (p555). They go on to question whether mainstream approaches are paying sufficient attention to meaning, language and emotion, which they argue is required to present a full picture of a situation. At the heart of the paper is an argument that interpretative studies can give balance to mainstream approaches and potentially provide a base to build understanding and meaning uncovered by the 'acts, actors and objects' (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p.573) involved in a situation.

Critiques of mainstream policy process theories include their over reliability on positivist approaches which can leave out important context and nuance, a critique that has been levied at some of the most well-used approaches including NPF, (Jones and McBeth, 2010 and Jones and Radaelli, 2015) which takes a post-positivist approach to analysing the form and content of policy narratives and focuses on how stories are told and their impact on people's realities and emotions (Weible and Sabatier, 2018, p. 173). A positivist approach focused on groups of actors and how they coalesce around key beliefs to influence policy outcomes is Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), worth highlighting, due to its sustained popularity. Criticisms, often stemming from academics developing ACF, include gaps such as exploring the breadth and depth of collective action, as well as the mechanisms for it (Nohrstedt and Heinmiller, 2024, p. 310). Without diverting too much time to mainstream policy process theories, a final theory to highlight is Punctuated equilibrium theory (PET),

which focuses on short bursts of significant policy change, in contrast to ACF which argues that policy change is a long-term phenomenon (Weible and Sabatier, 2018, p. 55). PET also employs a positivist approach which has been criticised for its lack of attention to human agency in policy change (Shockley, 2017). Each of the seven policy process theories featured in the 2018 edition of Weible and Sabatier's book are drawn from positivist approaches, with many empirical examples utilising quantitative methods. This positivist dominance of policy studies feeds into Durnová and Weible's call for more interpretivist studies.

3.1 Interpretive policy studies

Interpretive studies have been regarded as less valuable or rigorous than positivist approaches (Durnová and Weible, 2020). However, interpretive policy scholars argue that complex situations require analytic tools that do not force '*social realities into restricted and restrictive models'* (Yanow, 2007, p. 117). Research, such as (Daviter, 2019) and (Durnová, 2022) and including collaborations between mainstream and interpretive policy scholars (Fullerton, Gabehart and Weible, 2024 for example), is shining light on the contribution of interpretivist approaches that focus on public policy as 'manifestations of meanings', featuring the importance of language, power, values, beliefs and emotions (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 574). In this sense, interpretivist policy scholars are rejecting positivist approaches, adopting analysis that acknowledges and embraces positionality. Key to this approach is that knowledge gained throughout the research process is not something that exists *'independent of the researcher'* (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 577, Yanow, 2007). An interpretive policy approach considers the researcher as self-aware and acknowledges their observational position will contribute to the construction of findings. Like mainstream policy studies, interpretive studies place value on '*transparency and clarity*' (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 579), but interpretative studies place significance on the '*singularities of a case'* and accept reflexivity, expecting and embracing human bias as important elements of research findings (ibid).

There are several interpretivist approaches available which provide an alternative to mainstream analysis that are traditionally underpinned by positivist ontological underpinnings (Yanow, 2007, p. 110). Yanow, writing on the interpretive turn in social sciences, sets out the vital and close relationship between analysis and (interpretive qualitative) methods (ibid p.111). She argues that interpretive studies must focus on what is meaningful to the involved actors, as well as consider the positionality and role of the researcher (ibid p111). Using the examples of phenomenology, and its

focus on lived experience and hermeneutics and its attention to communities, understandings and language (as well as its relationship to related approaches including studies based on epistemic communities (Haas, 1992)), Yanow sets out an argument for the value of interpretive approaches as a circular approach to policy analysis, starting from a position of understanding and coming back to it having gained more knowledge from analysis (Yanow, 2007, p. 117). One way to gain knowledge about a situation is by exploring the role of the emotions expressed by key actors. This is a relatively nascent field but is gaining prominence amongst interpretive and mainstream policy scholars, see (Pierce, 2021, Durnová, 2018, Fullerton, Gabehart and Weible, 2024, Durnová and Hejzlarová, 2018 and Durnová, 2022) for examples. Durnová suggests that emotions can be a useful '*critical lens*' through which to explore policy ideas through expressive language (Durnová, 2022, p. 44), but should not simply describe or note the emotion. She also argues that emotions must be recognised as a key part of knowledge and decision making in the policy process (ibid p.47). The meaning behind the emotions can enrich interpretive policy analysis by building understanding of why actors behave in the way they do, including the '*arguments and symbols they deploy in their actions*' (Durnová, 2018, p. 96).

3.2 Social Worlds analysis

> *'Social worlds generate shared perspectives that then form the basis for collective action…'* (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 115).

The study of social worlds was developed to analyse the dynamics of groups (Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 113) and is attributed to Anselm Strauss and the Chicago School of Social Science. Strauss argues that social worlds go beyond *'formal organisations with clear boundaries and known membership'* to *'universes of discord'* that include *'forms of communication… symbolization… activities… memberships… sites… technologies… and organizations'* (Strauss, 1978, p.121). Key proponents of social worlds research including Howard S. Becker and Anselm Strauss, define the principles of social worlds as groups of individuals with '*shared commitments*' (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 115) who use shared resources to build consensus and ideologies - organizing around an idea (Becker, 1982, 2023), (Strauss, 1978). Clarke and Star refer back to Becker's work on communities that make up the art world when defining what they mean by a social world within their framework, as *'groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals and building shared ideologies about how to go about their business'* (Becker, 1982; Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 115). Social worlds are self-organising units in which people share resources, information, assumptions

about what is important and ideas about what sorts of activities are desirable and worthwhile (Garrety and Badham, 1999, p. 280). Social world membership changes over time and individuals can be members of multiple social worlds at the same time, as illustrated by MacLean et al. on a paper exploring drinking cultures. MacLean et al. argue that examining drinking cultures through social worlds can equip public health practitioners with useful framings that go deeper than '*society as a whole'* (p. 236). From the 1960s social worlds analysis was deployed to study groups located in a particular geography but morphed to focus on *'shared discourses as both making and marking boundaries'* (Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 115). Strauss is widely cited as developing the focus of social worlds research to reach beyond geographic boundaries towards the sharing of resources to build ideologies (ibid). From the 1980s, social worlds analysis broadened from social issues to include STS, with academics such as Bruno Latour using the approach to explore the significance of non-human elements within social worlds (Latour, 1987).

3.3 Social Worlds Framework – a theory and methods package

The Social Worlds Framework (SWF) was published by Clarke and Star in 2008 and offers an approach to undertake social worlds analysis. The framework is presented as a theory and methods package (2008, p. 113) that includes focus on individuals and groups not typically considered *'the usual suspects'* in issue analysis (ibid p. 116). SWF places significance on discourse, language, meanings and ideas that are expressed by members of a social world (ibid p. 117). Within SWF, these discourses provide information on the perspectives that members of social worlds align to. Clarke and Star are keen to highlight that the '*universes of discourse'* within SWF are different to discourse analysis, because social worlds go beyond organisations and actors, to include fluid boundaries and collective action (ibid p. 116). In the philosophical tradition of symbolic interactionism, Clarke and Star strongly express how social worlds analysis does not try to present a real picture of the world, but that analysis is situated in a version of the world that already exists in the researcher's mind, preceded by events, situations and knowledge. In such, they refer to the theory/methods package as a '*prior picture or scheme'*. (ibid, p. 116). SWF has been typically applied to analyse situations in science, medicine, health and technology (Bogardus, 2012). Although SWF studies do not typically address the policy process, they often explore technical, policy-relevant issues, and in this sense the framework provides a novel and interesting route to explore an environmental policy situation that is as technical as it is political. By placing equal focus on situation and actor interaction, as well as incorporating the

role of non-human elements, SWF provides a method of analysis that is useful for exploring how collective action and decisions are reached.

SWF's use in this thesis has been guided by Durnová and Weible's encouragement to undertake interpretive policy studies that can enrich mainstream policy studies (2020). Methodologically, SWF has its own epistemological and ontological assumptions, linked to grounded theory and symbolic interactionism, that work alongside its practical assumptions (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 118) such as how researchers and subjects interact with one another, but also with the non-human elements associated with the situation under analysis. However, Clarke and Star stress that use of SWF should not be viewed as a mechanism or 'servant' of theory (p. 117). Clarke and Star argue that, in SWF, the epistemological and ontological approach not only create each other but manifest in the empirical activity (ibid). Typically, the methods 'end' of SWF has been grounded theory used to analyse qualitative data. This research does not deviate from this in its qualitative approach, but it does take the analysis down a slightly different path, utilising Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), where '*meaning and knowledge are understood as situated and contextual, and researcher subjectivity is conceptualised as a resource for knowledge'* (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 334). There is comparison here with RTA's overarching themes (Durnová and Weible may call these 'hunches', 2020 p.583) that may exist ahead of data collection and analysis, rather than building entirely from the ground up. As will be explored in the next chapter, RTA shares philosophical ties with social worlds analysis and attention will be given in chapter six to reflect on the compatibility and companionability of using RTA with SWF.

3.3.1 Suitability of social worlds analysis for the research question

Social worlds analysis is rooted in an epistemology influenced by the philosophy of science, (Gieryn, 2001) and is often deployed to explore how and by whom scientific and technical knowledge navigates the policy process. It is equipped to explore areas of likely conflict, regarding disputed boundaries (Jasanoff, 1987) and the trajectory of controversial ideas (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 123). Essentially, social worlds are self-organising units in which people share resources, information, assumptions about what is important and ideas about what sorts of activities are desirable and worthwhile (Garrety & Badham, 1999, p. 280). Social worlds analyses allow for exploration of the concept of an organisation that extends beyond traditional boundaries, considering its place within a social world (Strauss, 1978, p. 125). Imagining eNGOs in this way encourages consideration of why a

formal organisation may have been constructed in a particular way, thinking about how the organisation itself straddles social worlds. In addition, social worlds analysis allows for the study of an issue over an extended period, to allow, for example, examination of *'culminative consequences of commitment and action'* (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 122). Similarly, studying questions related to the policy process over a period of ten years or more is recommended by mainstream policy process theories including ACF, where change can be examined over *'the gradual accumulation of information'* such as '*scientific study, policy analysis and stakeholder experience'* (Weible, 2006, p. 101). Social worlds are concerned with the extent to which people at all levels of an organisation can influence the trajectory of an idea (Garrety & Badham, 1999, p. 4), by promoting, sabotaging or simply not acknowledging or using it in practice. Its focus on informal sub-networks within organisations, including friends carrying out roles at different levels within an organisation and in different departments, extending to individual connections outside of professional settings, all which the framework determines, will affect the trajectory of an idea (Garrety & Badham, 1999, p. 281). Social worlds should be considered separate from formal organisations, although the latter often mirror and run alongside them (Tuunainen, 2005, p. 206), which makes it especially suitable to explore a research question centred on non-traditional policy actors (eNGOs). In addition, as a social world is not bounded by traditional or even typical boundaries it can incorporate all types of formal and informal relationships, or subfields, that can be associated with a research topic. This can include organisations and government departments through to friends and ex colleagues who 'meet for coffee' (Garrety & Badham, 1999, p. 280). Social worlds themselves have no clear boundaries or formal membership requirements and members may think of themselves as *'more authentically of that world'* (Strauss, 1978, p. 123). Importantly, social worlds analysis expects interaction between social worlds and members belonging to several social worlds (Strauss, 1978, p. 123 refers to 'bridging agents'). In more recent examples, findings focus on the specific insight its use brings to *'the complexity and fluidity in social worlds'* (Vasconcelos, 2007, p. 133). Vasconcelos finds that using social worlds to understand situations rather than as another method by which to standardise information is where it can provide additional insight. Adele Clarke continued her work on social world's analysis until her death in 2024 and both her and Star's academic legacy is evident throughout STS, grounded theory and particularly in the approach of situational analysis (Casper, 2024, p. 123).

3.3.2 Components of SWF used to explore research question

When undertaking social worlds analysis with SWF, Clarke and Star provide a list of conceptual tools that can be used by researchers. The tools are presented as '*sensitizing concepts'* that can be picked from when designing a research project. Clarke and Star argue that the tools should be used to support '*provisional theorizing'* rather than as a fixed way (definitive concepts) to undertake analysis. The full list of tools is presented in the table below:

SWF conceptual tools
Boundary objects (Non-human boundary objects/NHBOs)
Situations
Identities
Shared ideologies
Implicated actors and actants
Intersections
Particular sites
Universes of discourse
Work objects
Conventions
Entrepreneurs
Mavericks
Segments/subworlds/reform movements
Bandwagons
Primary activities
Segmentations
Technology(ies)
Commitments
Boundary infrastructures

Table 3.1: SWF conceptual toolbox with key concepts used in this thesis highlighted in green (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 118).

It is unlikely and not recommended that all conceptual tools would be used to undertake social worlds analysis with SWF and this research employs as its main conceptual tool, the identification and use of NHBOs. Clarke and Star themselves place great value on this element of social worlds analysis (2008, p.121) and in terms of a research question focused on the role of ideas in the policy process, the identification and exploration of NHBOs allows for understanding to be built around the ways in which ideas are doing work within and between social worlds. The inclusion of NHBOs allows for ideas, documents, organisations, networks and channels of communication to be positioned at the forefront of analysis and helps identify social world members. To support the identification and analysis of NHBOs, the additional conceptual tools of situation, identity, shared ideology and implicated actors[9] were considered when developing the social worlds presented in chapter five.

Before looking more closely at the way in which Clarke and Star encourage use of NHBOs, it is useful to touch upon other elements of SWF that have shaped this thesis, such as the framework's attention to conflict and consensus within and between social worlds (Strauss, 1978, p. 120). Instances of conflict and consensus can apply to many of the conceptual tools listed above, not least NHBOs which can be used to build consensus between social worlds, even in areas of conflict. Exploring disagreement and stalemate, alongside agreement, provides a route to examine how conflict can have a role to play in fostering conditions for policy or social change. Similarly, SWF looks to highlight instances where opposing sides may come together for a common good (Baszanger, 1998), (Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 125), often using boundary objects that are recognisable to all sides (Star & Griesemer, 1989) to build consensus (Eisenshauer, 2021). There are examples in the literature where the meeting of social worlds has not successfully resulted in consensus, for an example see (Tuunainen, 2005) where a social worlds perspective was used to understand why university departments were reluctant to work together. Social worlds analysis also often features the use of maps to identify stakeholders and positions. Clarke & Star recommend three types of map that can be used to address empirical questions (Clarke, 2019, p. 15), (1) situational maps that detail human, non-human and discursive elements, (2) social worlds/arenas maps to illustrate collective actors, non-human elements and how actors are involved in 'ongoing negotiations' through discourse and commitment (Clarke and Star, 2008), and (3) positional maps which acknowledge the perspectives of actors within a social world based on the discourses they share. Positional maps identify behaviours, trends and

[9] Shaded in light green in table 3.1

non-human elements, by providing detail on the main positions taken (or not taken) by actors as well as detailing implicated actors (2008, p.128, Clarke, 2019, p. 15). The focus of positional mapping has been used to build a picture of actors involved in the social worlds presented in this case study, as identifying positions when building knowledge about a situation can increase understanding of where beliefs are paired with positionality, exploring how actors come together in support of a policy direction (Clarke, 2005, p. 133).

3.4 Non-human elements as boundary objects within social worlds

> *"Non-human is very broadly construed to include natural and built environments, technologies, plants and animals, etc. – whatever is empirically there in the situation"* (Clarke, 2019, p. 17).

Boundary objects are a key feature of SWF and social worlds analysis has a strong history of empirical exploration that uses them to explore communication and activity within and between different social worlds, arguably most famously in Star & Griesemer's analysis of how boundary objects were interpreted by different actors involved in a natural history museum setting (1989). Durnová and Weible write on the value interpretive policy studies draw from analysis of the relationships and meanings of '*objects, actors or words'* (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 583) and Yanow touches on the importance in interpretive policy analysis of *'artifacts… as expressive of human meaning' (Yanow, 2007, p. 117).* Objects feature in SWF as NHBOs, which exist between social worlds and can be interpreted and used in different ways within and between social worlds. '*Boundary objects… span social worlds, so that those on either side can "get behind" the boundary object and work together toward some goal'* (Gieryn, 2001, p. 415). Within SWF, NHBOs can include places, documents, specimens or ideas. The significance of non-human participants as *'frozen discourses that form avenues between social worlds'* (Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 115) gives emphasis to the infrastructures that form and are created by social worlds. NHBOs can build consensus or highlight differences between groups (Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 126). Their identification helps to explore why different social worlds support an idea or follow a particular trajectory, even if the issue is controversial or looked upon very differently by social worlds. Clarke and Star argue that the different meanings of key boundary objects held by participating groups allow them both to collaborate without having to come to consensus and to maintain their sharply different organisational missions (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 127). Although a boundary object has different meanings to different people, it must be recognisable by members of more than one social world to be effective in its use as an architect of understanding

(Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393). NHBOs are only effective when they are used by human actors and Eisenhauer argues that 'skilled facilitation', focused on local and issue knowledge and trusted by others, is needed for NHBOs to be effective (Eisenhauer, 2021, p. 626). When imagining ideas that place a financial value on the natural world, NHBOs are ideal in their remit as a means by which to explore how things and ideas remain focused and fixed in terms of concept, but adaptable in terms of how they are presented depending on the requirements of the receiver:

> *'…boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites'* (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393)

For an idea to be incorporated into policy '*trajectories require the construction of boundary objects that are simultaneously useful, meaningful, and flexible across all the relevant social worlds'* (Garrety & Badham, 1999, p. 281). Garrety & Badham use the term trajectory to explain the changes that happen when boundary objects are used by social worlds to 'get work done', considering both human and technological factors (Garrety & Badham, 1999, p. 279). They define boundary objects as *'the concrete and abstract entities that link people in different social worlds together'* (ibid. p. 287). They go on to distinguish primary and secondary boundary objects and use this to sort objects by their relevance to the topic being explored. A primary boundary object is the main concept around which the activity to be examined is focused and secondary boundary objects are created by those involved in this activity. In their example, which is focused on implementation of new technology, secondary boundary objects included contracts and workshops. Questions to ask of a primary boundary object include exploration into its level of flexibility as well as identification of the meanings that people in different social worlds attach to it. Boundary objects are fluid, and it is important to consider, when identifying a primary boundary object, how its meaning may change over time. Garrety & Badham conclude that although the mapping of trajectories and role of boundary objects can explain interactions and stalemates between social worlds, the politics of a situation should not be underestimated, there will always be '*negotiation, persuasion, and lobbying'* (Garrety and Badham, 1999, p. 288). However, identification of social worlds and the boundary objects they use can help identify key political pressures on the trajectory of an idea (Lundgren, 2021).

Boundary objects have been described as a stage that pre-empts a concept moving to become infrastructure (Steger, et al., 2018) and '*anchors or bridges'* (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 414) which

also makes the concept appropriate to apply to ideas that place a financial value on the natural world as they continue a journey from policy to practice. Thinking about the resources, groups, networks and documents that have been created to build consensus for ideas that place a financial value on the natural world as NHBOs which are in the process of institutionalisation of an idea through *'shared technical language and practices'* (Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 126) led to exploring which social worlds are talking about this type of idea and how this process can contribute to its wide adoption. Hansen et al. position the idea of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) as a boundary object in a 2020 paper and argue that in this role the idea can facilitate understanding between science and policy as well as between disciplines (p. 3). They go on to argue, however, that although NBS is becoming widely used to communicate an approach to conservation, it is yet to be determined if the concept will translate into practice (p. 8). The trajectory of ideas that value the natural world through its financial worth supports the identification of boundary objects that have facilitated or perhaps prevented the involvement of expected and unexpected policy actors, including eNGO actors. Gal et al, found that boundary objects not only construct understanding between social worlds, they also provide a means by which actors within a social world can create and convey an identity amongst themselves (2005, p. 4), including professional identity (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 126). Their definition can also stress areas of '*intense controversy and competition'* (ibid, p. 121) as those within and across social worlds race to control them. The identification and use of boundary objects by actors can help researchers navigate complex situations (ibid, p. 121) and Gal, et al. also found consideration of dynamic interactions between groups is an often-overlooked factor in studies of organisational change (ibid, p. 13). Examining the identification and use of NHBOs offers useful insight into how actors use knowledge to preserve a privileged status (Jasanoff, 1987, p. 196), to explore, for example, boundaries that exist between policy makers and other interest groups.

3.4.1 Positioning ideas that place a financial value on the natural world as NHBOs

Looking at how and why eNGO actors are using these ideas by exploring who and what is involved in a case study presents opportunity to undertake an interpretive policy analysis using Clarke and Star's Social Worlds Framework (SWF). This provides a route to explore not only the motivations and actions of eNGO actors, but their creation of, interaction with and use of NHBOs, such as ideas and emotions. STS scholars, most notably Gieryn, reasoned that taking a constructivist approach to the messy boundaries of science and non-science can provide a deeper understanding of who is involved and who holds authority in a situation and there is a useful parallel here with SWF's focus on NHBOs

alongside Durnová's focus on emotions shown through 'arguments and symbols' in interpretive policy studies. Policy process scholars are increasingly looking to understand how emotions play a role in policy change, see (Fullerton, Gabehart and Weible, 2024, Pierce, 2021, Durnová, 2018 and Durnová, 2022), in both mainstream and interpretive policy studies. In her 2018 paper Durnová argues that the inclusion of emotions in policy analysis should move away from current approaches of (1) emotions as working against understanding meaning due to their unpredictable nature (attributed to Deleuze) and (2) emotions as a 'pre-stage', the raw emotion that develops into meaning (attributed to Foucault) (p.95). She argues that emotions can be used in policy debates to give *'legitimacy to some actors while silencing other actors by labelling them as 'emotional''* (p.96). Pierce argues that mainstream policy process theories are too focused on a belief that the actions of individuals are boundedly rational, limited by '*cognitive capacity, situational constraints and emotion'* (Pierce, 2021, p.595). He believes that although it is unhelpful and most likely impossible to attribute a single emotion to a situation or individual (ibid p.597), there is value to acknowledging *'constructed'* emotions in policy studies with all their fuzzy boundaries and overlap (ibid p.596). The effect of emotions at a group level was explored by Pierce, who concludes that emotions can strengthen and encourage collective activity, which in turn promote collective action (ibid p597). This presents a novel opportunity to bring social worlds analysis into the emotions in policy research debate, where it feels there is natural fit to group collective action as social worlds bounded by group-level emotions. When basing research around issue-based organisations, as NGOs are, consideration of how emotions shown by individuals representing the organisations under analysis seems a valuable route to take, particularly as the use of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world cause contrasting and contradictory emotions (Durnová, 2018, p. 99) within and outside of eNGOs.

3.5 Critiques of SWF and its key elements

SWF has been criticised as being too similar to actor network theory (ANT), with ANT better identifying the most powerful actors. Clarke and Star, however, are keen to stress that although there are obvious similarities, SWF is better suited for analysis over longer timeframes as well as situations where a broad range of actors are included (p. 123). They emphasise that this of course differs depending on the approach taken to SWF by individual researchers (ibid). Although there are few direct critiques of SWF with reference to Clarke and Star's 2008 interpretation, much has been written on the elements it features, such as the suitability and principles of boundary objects. These critiques have been an important consideration when deciding on the appropriateness of SWF to

address the research question. Boundary work has been criticised as only being effective if actors on all sides of the boundary are recognisable to one another (Pereira, 2019, p. 343). Also, boundary objects have been criticised as tools to maintain power imbalance (Dar, 2018) and that they exist in a static state rather than representing an ongoing process (Gustafsson & Lidskog, 2018, p. 4). This is surprising, considering boundary objects have been widely used to explore the ways in which objects, ideas and practices facilitate changes in understanding by different social worlds, see (Sismondo, 2018, Steger, et al., 2018 and Star & Griesemer, 1989). Argument has also been raised around if boundary work can effectively explore how ideas are adopted and understood on all sides of a boundary if the actors are not socially recognisable to each other (Pereira, 2019). This too is pertinent when thinking about who stands to gain from ideas that place a financial value on the natural world as well as questions around who holds authority within eNGOs. Another criticism highlighted by Gustafsson & Lidskog (2018) is that boundary objects do not address institutional design in terms of *'the way an organization works, with regards to both operational practices and in relation to other organizations'* (p.8). Throughout the research, thought has been given to how actors across boundaries recognise one another, opening-up useful insight into motivations for support for these ideas within the eNGO sector.

3.6 Conclusions

In their 2020 paper, Durnová and Weible suggest four approaches to bring together interpretive and mainstream policy studies. One of these is for mainstream scholars to take the findings of small-scale, in-depth qualitative studies, such as this thesis, and apply mainstream quantitative methods that scale-up findings. They suggest that using this approach could be an effective way to develop knowledge around policy questions (p. 584). Durnová and Weible highlight opportunities for mainstream and interpretive studies to draw from each other, and of pertinence to this research, how mainstream approaches could be borrowed to better communicate the transparency of methods (ibid p585). This chapter has introduced SWF and examined the suitability of its use in interpretive policy studies. It has determined a specific role for NHBOs as identified within SWF as non-human elements. There is clear opportunity to explore how NHBOs feature and are used by actors within eNGOs and using RTA to undertake an SWF analysis provides a novel means by which to explore the research question. Ontologically and epistemologically, SWF (both theory and methods) provides opportunity to undertake an interpretive policy analysis that places significance on the position of the

researcher in the creation of the reality presented (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 116). These elements are explored further in the next chapter which looks at the methods employed to undertake the research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

> *'…understanding the views of environmental professionals is at least as important as understanding theoretically-derived viewpoints, they have so far received little attention' (Martin-Ortega and Waylen, 2018, p. 218)*

4.1 Introduction

Political science, and policy process studies more specifically are not typically associated with a particular research method, they are considered a 'junction discipline' (Burnham, 2008, p. 44). As an interpretive policy study, qualitative methods have been deployed, specifically document analysis and elite interviews. These research methods are typical to social worlds analysis and Clarke and Star refer to several SWF studies in their 2008 paper which typically feature case studies explored through interviews and document analysis. Ethnography is also often used but has not been chosen for this research. This chapter builds on the theoretical overview presented in chapter three to explore the methods used to gather and analyse data. The next section provides an overview of the approach taken, followed by an outline of the case study including why a single case study approach was chosen and its temporal and geographical boundaries. The chapter then turns to look at both SWF and RTA and the suitability of this combination for an interpretive policy study, before reflecting on researcher positionality and how this supports an interpretive policy analysis. The chapter concludes by detailing how the analysis was carried out.

4.2 Approach overview

Close consideration has been given to the most appropriate and logical way to approach the research question (Burnham, 2008, p. 42), applying methods commonly used by researchers undertaking social worlds analysis. This helps address criticisms that methods used for interpretive studies are difficult to replicate and lack rigour (Durnová and Weible, 2020, Flick, 2022). The decision to use a case study was reached as the situation under analysis refers to a contemporary event and explores a 'how' and 'why' question (Yin, 2014, p. 9). Case studies provide opportunity for in-depth examination, and practically are possible within geographical, financial and temporal limitations. As an interpretive policy study, the aim of using a case study is not to present an objective truth, but to construct a

reality in which the researcher, documents and interviewees construct meaning by incorporating different perspectives (Yin, 2018, p. 16). The case study is explored through interviews with eNGO professionals and other actors along with document analysis to build a picture of the social worlds involved in the situation, as well as identify the tools (NHBOs) they are using to participate. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) has been used to analyse data by coding and developing themes under its six phases which include a period of data familiarisation before initial coding supports the development of themes that are then refined and defined before findings are written (Vazzoler, 2023). The use of RTA acknowledges my own positionality and experiences within the situation, as an eNGO employee and RTA supports the theoretical underpinnings of SWF, including its argument that social worlds should be seen as collective actors, with their own perspectives and commitments to action (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 116).

4.3 Case study

The case study focuses on eNGOs' role in environmental land management policy in England. It has been chosen as a live issue, with a temporal and geographical bounding of England, spanning the election of a Conservative Liberal Democrat government in 2010 to the 2024 general election. Although changes to environmental land management policy have affected all parts of the UK, the focus is on how eNGOs in England have been involved in this situation. The reason for bounding the case study to England lies in the availability of interviewees to the researcher, as well as my own experience working for eNGOs active in England, which provided good access to interviewees and scope for insightful conversations. Being based in and having worked in the conservation sector in East Anglia for more that 18 years, local knowledge pertinent to the research question, gave confidence to interviewees that their points were understood and would be represented thoughtfully in the research findings. As highlighted by Berry, (2002), competent dialogue partners are particularly important when conducting elite interviews. Focusing on one country also makes the analysis more manageable within the timeframe and scope of a master's thesis as the nuances and differences in environmental land management schemes across the devolved nations would have been difficult to explore within the wordcount.

4.3.1 Environmental Land Management Schemes

Environmental land management schemes broadly refer to public money paid to landowners to subsidise agricultural production and land, with additional payments available if prescribed environmental benefits are evidenced through different levels (and tiers) of support. As a member of the EU, landowners in England received these subsidies through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). CAP is a cornerstone of EU policy but has been a source of controversy in the UK since it joined the union in 1973, (Roederer-Rynning and Matthews, 2019). Indeed, the overhaul of CAP was central to pro-Brexit arguments (Roederer-Rynning and Matthews, 2019, p. 41). CAP was lambasted for its detrimental effect on the environment, with critics believing payments linked predominantly to the amount of land owned can encourage poor environmental practices (ibid). As part of the Brexit process, a new subsidy system to replace CAP was proposed by the UK government in its 25 Year Plan for the Environment (HM Government, 2018). Known as Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS), they were designed to work on the principle of payments for public (environmental) goods, rather than size of landholdings. eNGOs were involved in the development of ELMS in multiple ways including participation in pilot projects. They also stand to benefit through income on their own land holdings as well as acting as paid-for consultants, supporting landowners to apply to the new schemes. In addition, eNGOs were excited about the potential environmental benefits to large areas of land, inside and outside of protected habitats.

4.3.2 Timescale

The period under examination runs from the election of the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010 to the election of a Labour government in 2024. As discussed in earlier chapters, an enormous amount of change is associated with environmental land management policy during this period. The Brexit process in particular sparked changes to land management subsidies that eNGO actors advocated for, as well as took a stand, sometimes collectively, against. Alongside the Brexit process there was growing interest in environmental issues from the public linked both to awareness of climate change and environmental degradation, due to the threat of weakening environmental protections after Brexit, which resulted in growing support for eNGOs.

4.4 Applying SWF with RTA

As SWF provides a theoretical framework that looks to understand collective working through people and things (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 113), and is presented as a theory and methods package, careful consideration was given to choosing a method of analysis that would complement its philosophical underpinnings. Braun and Clarke's RTA was chosen as a strong fit as it shares assumptions around researcher subjectivity (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 593) and the authors stress the suitability of using it with 'different guiding theories' (Braun and Clarke, 2021) if they share '*qualitative paradigmatic and epistemological assumptions about meaningful knowledge and knowledge production'* (ibid). Braun and Clark are clear in their argument that RTA is '*theoretically flexible, but not atheoretical*' (ibid, p338) and believe it provides researchers with a theoretically sensitive and creative approach to qualitative research. As discussed in chapter three, SWF shares such assumptions in that it does not seek to provide an objective truth, but considers the situation under analysis, including the context in which it exists to the researcher as well as the perspectives of involved actors (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 119). Braun and Clarke stress that using RTA means analysing data with a lens stemming from existing research or theory, beginning with assumptions (or hunches as they may be called in interpretive policy analysis (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 583)) about the situation under analysis, which is then continually reflected on and developed throughout the coding and theme creation process. RTA has been criticised for not being a method in the traditional sense, but a set of 'analytic procedures' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 330). In this sense, using RTA within a theoretical framework that shares its philosophical underpinnings and features its own methodological priorities can help guide its use.

4.4.1 Researcher positionality in RTA

RTA acknowledges that the researcher's position on the situation under analysis will contribute to all stages of the research, including decisions on who to speak to and which documents to analyse, as well as the themes and conclusions that are developed (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Braun & Clarke stress the importance of being clear on how the perspective of the researcher will affect the use of RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81) and acknowledges the researcher will bring their own '*social,*

cultural, historical, disciplinary, political and ideological positionings', ultimately telling their own story about the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 339). In this sense the use of RTA should: *'identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of data'* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Additionally, RTA is a suitable method for a single researcher study as there is no requirement for collaboration on a codebook as there are with other 'neo-positivist' versions of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 332). The 'subjective skills' of the researcher are required as part of RTA and themes are the outcome. In RTA it is important to continually reflect on your assumptions, about research questions, but also about the data, using the method to interrogate pre-held beliefs (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 595). RTA recommends taking time to ponder on the data and researchers are encouraged to step away, coming back to their data with fresh eyes to develop and refine themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 332). Undertaking data analysis over a longer timeframe suits part-time studies, such as this where there has been space to step away, reflect and come back to the data.

4.4.2 Coding data with RTA

RTA should be used to aid construction of a reality created with the researcher, interviewees and documents through the process of creating and refining themes to tell a story. Data analysis centred on coding data to themes (both inductive and deductive), where early themes are created during phases 2 and 3 of RTA, then refined and reviewed in phases 4 and 5.[10] Baun and Clarke identify that two types of code are needed, descriptive codes and codes looking for implicit meaning. It is expected in RTA that early themes for coding will exist in the mind of the researcher and help to begin shape and sort the data in early reads and include deductive elements that are informed by theory (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.83). In this sense, initial codes were created that looked to identify elements of social worlds such as positions, networks and NHBO identification. In RTA, the coding process differs from other forms of thematic analysis as themes do not 'emerge' from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2023, p. 343, Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594, Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 331) but are actively created to explore the situation by drawing together shared meanings under a central '*concept or idea'* (ibid p341). The next section will explore in detail how the analysis was carried out, beginning with the interview process.

[10] See figure Aiv featured in appendix iv

4.5 Data collection

4.5.1 Interviews

Guided by SWF, eighteen semi-structured, elite interviews were carried out with eNGO professionals and other actors between May 2022 and November 2023. Elite interviews differ in the traditional balance of power in that the interviewee holds unique knowledge and experience and is often well-versed in expressing an idea verbally (Burnham, 2008, p. 231, Leech, 2002). Interviews are a key feature of interpretive policy studies, where the aim is not to observe a situation from the outside, but to understand that the researcher's presence as part of the process will shape the situation (Yanow, 2007, p. 114). With this in mind, and under the theoretical guidance of SWF, interviews were designed to build understanding of the social worlds involved in the case study with questions looking to (1) identify and explore who was part of social worlds, (2) understand what participation looked like, (3) build knowledge on the positions of key members and (4) identify the key tools (NHBOs) used. Early on in their development of RTA Braun and Clarke warn not to use interview questions as codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.94), as this will deter from quality analysis. Questions were continually refined to adapt to discussion points and to follow areas of importance raised by the interviewee. Although interviews followed a common pattern, with headline questions shown below, each differed depending on the interviewee, their experience and the direction in which they were keen to take the interview, an approach guided by RTA. This reflexive approach to refining interview questions, as explored by Furlong & Marsh, 2007, (p. 200), helped ensure unexpected themes were given space for development based on participants' views and insight:

Headline questions:

1	Tell me about your role at …?
2	Do you think financial subsidy is a useful tool in nature conservation?
3	Are ELMS a good progression from subsidy schemes provided under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?
4	Do you work with other eNGOs on ELMS? Tell me about this
5	Do you work with government departments/agencies/local government on ELMS? Tell me about this
6	How is your working relationship with other stakeholders (e.g. NFU, CLA)?
7	Where do you go for trusted information? Within or outside your organisation?
8	Do you see examples of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world featuring in your work? Is this helpful? What other ideas are prominent/useful?
9	Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
10	Is there anyone else I should speak with?

Table 4.1: headline interview questions

Each interview lasted around an hour and to ensure the anonymity of participants, interviewees are referred to using a coding system linked to their affiliation with the case. Eight eNGOs were represented by interviewees alongside four formal coalitions and networks. Natural England and Defra were also represented through previous roles of interviewees, but these are not included in the coding system. The response rate to interview requests was 86%. Seventeen interviews were held remotely using Microsoft Teams and one was carried out in person using voice recording equipment. The automatic transcription function was enabled for the Teams interviews, with transcriptions

carefully read and amended to correct mistakes. This allowed notes to be taken during the interview to aid follow up questions and note important points as conversations progressed. Anonymised transcripts and recordings of the interviews were uploaded to OneDrive for secure storage and NVivo for organisation and to aid analysis (Maher *et al.*, 2018 p.5) which followed RTA's six phases[11] which include data familiarisation, theme creation and continual revision (Braun *et al.*, 2022). Themes were created by reading and re-reading the data, creating and refining codes and developing themes along the way (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594). The resulting code book was used to create a picture of the situation that grouped the data under a coding schema focused on the types of ideas that were being shared and used as well as highlighting key players and events that featured in the creation of the social worlds. The same code book was used for both interview and document data and can be found in appendix iv.[12]

4.5.1.1 Researcher positionality in interviews

There was a value of being on the 'inside' when approaching potential interviewees, especially in the early stages of the research (Turnpenny, 2025, p. 6). In some respects, this made it easier to reach out to individuals who were more likely to want to speak with a researcher they knew and would understand their view on the situation. It could, however, make them more guarded if speaking about individuals known to both parties. Considering issues like this is an encouraged element of RTA where a knowing researcher should not hide from practicalities in research design (Braun and Clarke, 2023, p. 1). Although familiarity did initially make it easier to reach out to potential interviewees, the vast majority (86%) of those contacted were willing to be interviewed and appeared to enjoy talking about their work. Some interviewees certainly used the experience as an opportunity to air frustrations, position their personal viewpoints against organisational priority and to speak about the activity or approaches of other organisations and government departments, all of which led to a rich data-set full of insight from which to begin RTA. However, and it is not clear if this is due to knowing the interviewees, two people expressed concern that they 'would not know enough' to be able to answer the questions, so it was important to reassure them that the aim was not to test knowledge or search for a right or wrong answer. To support the collection of data and as recommended by RTA, a

[11] See appendix iv for a diagram illustrating RTA analysis phases
[12] The resulting codebook can be seen in appendix iv

research diary was kept to informally note themes and thoughts and was used to discuss research progression with the supervisory team.

4.5.1.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of East Anglia's ethical committee, ahead of interviews. The methods deployed in the research did not present a high degree of ethical risk as interviewees were questioned in a professional capacity. All interviewees were sent a document outlining the research ahead of interviews as well as a consent form to sign[13]. Interviewees were invited to ask questions at any point, the consent form stated that participation would be anonymised in the research, and they were free to request comments be 'off the record' or removed from the study at any point. This information was restated verbally at the beginning of each interview. Participants were also asked if they were happy that the interview was recorded.

It is important at this point, to reflect on the effect of the pandemic on the interview process. Initially, interviews were planned to take place in-person, yet they ended up being carried out almost exclusively online given the switch to homeworking accelerated by the pandemic. This undoubtedly opened the interview pool, and there were benefits to conducting interviews remotely, such as time and cost savings. In addition, interviewees were comfortable being interviewed online, having adapted to working in this way during the pandemic (Howlett, 2021, Maher *et al.*, 2018). Concerns about rapport building which is considered a benefit of in-person interviews may be outweighed by the benefits of remote interviews and, as noted by (Burnham, 2008, p. 234), there are limits to how much rapport can be built during a short interview.

4.5.1.3 Interview criteria

Once ethical clearance was gained, careful consideration was given to securing access to organisations and individuals with the most appropriate experience to add insight to the case study (Burnham, 2008, p. 235). Using the principles of SWF's positional mapping (see chapter three, section 3.3.2), a list of potential interviewees was established, which evolved into an interview tracker used

[13] See appendix ii for example interview consent form

throughout the fieldwork to note relationships and shared positions.[14] Snowballing was used to extend the interview pool once contacts were exhausted and was a useful method by which to contact individuals who may otherwise be difficult to secure access to (Burnham, 2008, p. 233). Requests by the researcher into who else may be suitable to interview also provided an additional source of information contributing to social worlds analysis, in that suggestions may include individuals in an interviewee's social world. The interview tracker was used to note and track who recommended who and helped identify when an interviewee pool had been exhausted. It is important to note that interviewees covered a broad range of roles within the organisations, ranging from officer to policy lead, providing value through a wider range of experience (Turnpenny, 2025, p. 7).

The research features interviews with 18 eNGO and other policy actors. Interviews are coded to protect anonymity and codes are randomly allocated in two groups (1) eNGO interviewees and (2) formal coalition interviewees.[15]

[14] The interview tracker is not included to ensure anonymity of interviewees

[15] See appendix iv for a list of organisations and networks represented by interviewees

Interviewee code	Affiliation
eNGO1	Environmental NGO
eNGO2	Environmental NGO
eNGO3	Environmental NGO
eNGO4	Environmental NGO
eNGO5	Environmental NGO
eNGO6	Environmental NGO
eNGO8	Environmental NGO
eNGO9	Environmental NGO
eNGO10	Environmental NGO
eNGO11	Environmental NGO
eNGO12	Environmental NGO
eNGO13	Environmental NGO
eNGO14	Environmental NGO
eNGO15	Environmental NGO
FCoN1	Formal coalition or network
FCoN2	Formal coalition or network
FCoN3	Formal coalition or network
FCoN4	Formal coalition or network

4.5.1.4 Document analysis

In contrast to interview data, documents are carefully crafted presentations that have been described as a result of the policy making process (Yanow, 2007 p.194). As interpretive policy analysis focuses on meanings and positions of involved actors and researchers (ibid, p. 112), the way in which documents are interpreted by eNGO actors is important (ibid, p. 116), as is the process of document selection by the researcher. Close attention was paid to the categorisation of documents with a running record updated throughout the course of the research, used to summarise potential documents for inclusion. Sorting documents in chronological order provided a useful overview of the case study and financial mechanism landscape. This exercise provided insight, such as how many documents were published by formal coalitions, rather than individual eNGOs. The same analysis approach to document analysis was used as interview transcripts, where documents were uploaded

into NVivo, highlighted and coded using the same codes as interview data.[16] This allowed the differences between what eNGOs (and formal coalitions) publish and use in their work to be compared with how they talk about it and their experience of what plays out in practice.

The criteria for including a document in the analysis were that it was publicly available and directly addressed the case study and/or ideas that place a financial value on the natural world[17]. A small selection of springboard documents helped develop the research question and inform the direction and focus of the research from the outset, these were: (1) 'Making Space for Nature.' (Lawton *et al.*, 2010). The publication of this report was arguably a seminal moment in nature conservation, particularly for eNGOs, and it continues to inform and justify their activity. (2) the Natural Environment White Paper (Defra, 2011) and (3) the 25 Year Environment Plan (HM Government, 2018). As a researcher working for an eNGO, I was aware of these publications, and their value to the eNGO community. As the research progressed it soon became evident that publications from the Natural Capital Committee would be pertinent and as interviews began it became clear that eNGOs were communicating their positions via formal coalitions including Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) and Green Alliance, so documents published by these organisations were included. In this sense, key documents were initially analysed, interviews carried out and if documents were mentioned these were added to the analysis list. In some instances, the documents then led to reaching out to additional interviewees and so on. Often, interviewees would directly reference documents, their creation, use and in some cases the controversy they caused. When documents were referenced directly by interviewees and they related either (or both) to ideas that place a financial value on the natural world, or the case study (and they are available in the public domain), these documents were included in the analysis. On some occasions these documents were sent by the interviewee after the interview, by email. It is also worth noting that as interviews progressed it became apparent that Twitter was being used to share and comment on documents. In this sense, it was a very useful platform to support the identification of documents to include in analysis (as well as explore NHBOs doing work within social worlds). Overabundance is a key consideration of research design and document type was carefully limited to include as narrow a focus as possible while allowing the research questions to be effectively explored.

[16] See appendix iv for RTA analysis phases
[17] See table 4.2 below for an overview of the document selection criteria

Documents analysed fall under three broad categories:

Document published by:	Type of document:	Example author:
Government and agency documents focused on environmental land management	Government report, white paper, policy briefing and online blog written by civil servants (e.g. Defra)	Defra, EA, NE
eNGO (or formal coalitions featuring eNGO representatives) focused on environmental land management	Campaign literature, blogs, reports and reactionary articles, policy briefings, annual reviews[18]	WCL, Green Alliance, RSPB, RSWT, NT
Documents from government sources, eNGOs and formal coalitions focused on the use of mechanisms that place a financial value on the natural world in environmental policy[19]	Natural capital accounts, eNGO natural capital accounts, reports setting out the value of using financial mechanisms in nature conservation	NCC, Treasury, NAO, NFU + all of the above

Table 4.2: Document categories

101 documents were included in the analysis and appendix vii lists these chronologically by their publication date. Document data was brought together with interview transcripts and analysed between 2022 and 2024.

4.6 Conclusions

Interpretive policy studies emphasise the value of 'hunches' (Durnová and Weible, 2020, p. 583), which are informed by a researcher's prior knowledge and positionality, and which can guide

[18] Documents did not extend to media coverage or news articles by third parties

[19] https://ueanorwich-my.sharepoint.com/:x:/g/personal/qdy15fwu_uea_ac_uk/ETMykqi0MZxBqzuMMQus54gBgovGt0WxEPP5lB4wz_rP8w?e=4vZm9U See appendix vii for a full list of documents analysed

research design. The methodological approach employed in this thesis acknowledges researcher positionality and has been selected to reflect the role of the '*knowing researcher*', to help mitigate potential '*mismatches in conception and practice*' (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 595). Building on this, the next chapter presents the empirical data by constructing a broadly chronological exploration of the situation that captures key events within the changing political context outlined in the introduction and literature review. Four distinct social worlds are presented towards the end of chapter five, which address the central research question concerning how and why eNGOs are using ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to participate in environmental land management policy.

Chapter 5: Environmental land management policy – case study findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical analysis and findings from the case study, focused on the development of environmental land management policy in England from 2010 to 2024. The case study is explored through eight key events that mark the period under exploration. The analysis looks at how and why eNGOs were involved in each event and how they were using ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to influence policy outcomes that support their organisational aims. The chapter concludes by presenting four distinct social worlds based on how eNGOs responded to and subsequently participated in the situation. The social worlds are identified by the overarching emotion expressed by eNGOs, both in interviews and the documents they were creating and sharing online. Using emotions to group social worlds allows exploration into both the why and how elements of the RQ in terms of the motivations for eNGO participation and is guided by an emerging area of policy process studies that uses emotions to explore policy questions (Durnová, 2022, Fullerton, Gabehart and Weible, 2024). Importantly, the analysis incorporates the identification, use and significance of the NHBOs being used by eNGOs to participate in social worlds and ultimately influence policy outcomes.

5.2 NHBOs being used by eNGOs to participate in ELMS

One of main findings from the interviews and documentary analysis is the relevance of NHBOs which were used to build understanding of the role of eNGO actors in the case study and develop definition of the four social worlds presented later in the chapter. The analysis identified one key group of primary boundary objects (as recommended by Garrety and Badham, 1999), which are the ideas that place a financial value on the natural world, supported by a further four groups of secondary NHBOs which include documents such as government reports, policy briefs, eNGO blog posts, tweets, open letters and publications as well as associated networks, organisations and channels. Coding interview and document data helped identify, group and build understanding of the role NHBOs have played in shaping and defining social worlds, and their subsequent effect on policy outcomes. This can be shown in the coding schema shown in appendix iv and was used to develop the final themes that make up the social worlds presented in section 5.4. Section 5.3 presents them in more detail through the eight key events and table 5.1 on the next page presents key NHBOs and hierarchy:

Primary non-human boundary objects: NHBO1 = ideas	**Analytical relevance**
Ideas that include placing a financial value on the natural world	
Natural capital	Mentioned frequently in documents analysed and by all 18 interviewees (in both a positive and negative light). The term was the most frequently used when talking about ideas that place a financial value on the natural world
Biodiversity net gain	Mentioned by 11 interviewees, primarily with reference to new opportunities and areas of work
Ecosystem services	Fewer mentions by interviewees. However, spoken about directly by four interviewees, primarily in the same way as natural capital
Payments for ecosystem services	Few mentions (three interviewees), but the term is evident in documents and spoken about in the same way as natural capital
Nature-based solutions	Mentioned by seven interviewees, usually with regards to how their organization can demonstrate/showcase expertise to government
Blended finance	More recent term, introduced by government. Mentioned directly by two interviewees, but the concept of funding from a mix of private and public finance was spoken about by seven interviewees.
Nature markets	More recent term, introduced by government. Mentioned by one interviewee, but focus of government documents
Private finance mechanisms	Mentioned explicitly by seven interviewees, and referred to by all interviewees with regards to where funding was coming from (often where they think it may come from in the future)
Bigger, better, more joined	From Lawton Review and adopted widely by eNGOs (referenced directly by two interviewees)
CAP/ELMS	Specific policy names and tiers referred to by all interviewees including SFI/CS+/Nature Recovery
Public money for public goods	Cornerstone of Gove era and mentioned by three interviewees (attractive concept to eNGOS)
Attack on Nature	Key eNGO campaign linked to the case study, mentioned directly by nine interviewees
Secondary non-human boundary objects: NHBO2 = networks NHBO3 = documents, (often publicly shared) NHBO4 = organisations NHBO5 = channels/ methods of communication and distribution	

NHBO2 Networks	
Formal coalitions	WCL, Green Alliance, Greener UK (mentioned by all interviewees, most frequently WCL)
NCC	Not widely mentioned by interviewees (three un-prompted mentions), but key mechanism for developing and disseminating financially focused ideas
NHBO3 Documents	
Government documents: white papers, reports, NCC documents[20]	Some chosen for analysis ahead of interviews due to their subject and some added after reference by interviewees. Key documents are highlighted throughout section 5.6
Reports setting out a position published by eNGOs and formal coalitions (often with academic/scientific input)	Some chosen for analysis ahead of interviews due to their subject and some added after reference by interviewees
Policy position statements produced by eNGOs and formal coalitions	Most selected during interview process due to mention of the situation by the interviewee
Open letters expressing a (professional) position/opinion signed by multiple eNGOs via formal coalitions	Most selected during interview process due to mention of the situation by the interviewee
Blogs expressing a (professional) position/opinion of an individual at an eNGO or formal coalition	Most selected during interview process due to mention of the situation by the interviewee
NHBO 4 Organisations	
eNGOs	RSPB is most referenced (by all 18 interviewees)
Defra	Mentioned by all interviewees
Treasury	Mentioned by 11 interviewees
NHBO 5 Channels	
Social media: Twitter	Mentioned directly by three interviewees, as a platform important for sharing views and highlighting issues
Tweets expressing the (professional) position/opinion of an organisation or individual	Most selected during interview process due to mention of the situation by the interviewee
Online meeting platforms: Teams and Zoom	Mentioned by fourteen interviewees as an increasingly important way to share information and strengthen working relationships
Messaging: WhatsApp	Mentioned by two interviewees, but key to how information is shared between small, trusted groups of actors

Table 5.1: Key NHBO identification and hierarchy

[20] See appendix vii for a full list of documents analysed

5.3 Eight key events that define the case study

To explore the positions of eNGO actors in this situation, the data analysis is presented here through eight key events, broadly chronological and drawn from document analysis and interview data using RTA to develop codes and themes. They are examined in turn, each beginning with a summary table to outline key actors and NHBOS:

5.3.1 Publication of the Lawton Review in 2010

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs
Publication of the Lawton Review	2010	Report authors eNGO staff from CEO to onsite delivery staff	**Document:** The report **Idea:** 'bigger, better and more joined up'

Enthusiastically welcomed by eNGOs, the Lawton Review, titled: 'Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network' was published by Defra in 2010. It was the first review looking at nature conservation approaches in England for 20 years (Rose *et al.*, 2018, p. 1705). Led by Professor Sir John Lawton, and conservation scientists, ecologists and experts representing eNGOs, it made recommendations to government that to protect nature and wildlife, in the face of climate change, government would need to think bigger and be supported by the private and third sector. Through a thematic analysis of the report in 2018 Rose et al found two dominant themes: *"(1) nature provides valuable ecosystem services and (2) nature has intrinsic value."* (Rose *et al.*, 2018, p. 1706). Rose et al argued that the report's success was down to its accessible format and clear messages as well as its publication during a time of interest in environmental issues from a new government (Rose *et al.*, 2018, p. 1706). Its recommendations include dramatically increasing the area, connectivity and funding for land managed for nature. Its publication was arguably a seminal moment in nature conservation, particularly for eNGOs in England, and it was referred and used extensively to inform and justify direction and activity of major landholding eNGOs (Woodland Trust, 2017), (Avery, 2010), (National Trust, 2025), (RSWT, 2022, p. 25). The report struck a chord with eNGO practitioners, validating both organisational and personal beliefs on how to 'do' nature conservation (Rose *et al.*, 2016), (Adams, Hodge and Sandbrook, 2013). Using social worlds analysis, the report acts as a strong NHBO, '*since [it] helped to bridge the gap between science and policy*

through clear and relevant communication of a scientifically acceptable idea'. (Rose *et al.*, 2018, p. 1717). Certainly, with regards to eNGO staff, it created an opportunity to bond over shared ideas that furthered the ambitions and aims of their respective organisations.

The Lawton Review did not shy away from recognising the emotional connection between people and nature, nor did it shy away from highlighting the financial worth of the natural world, stating: *"Many people feel a strong emotional connection to nature and will consider the recommendations of this report vital simply because of the intrinsic value they place on our wildlife and a moral conviction that we have a duty to pass on the plants and animals we have inherited to future generations."* However, it acknowledges that: *"… we have also begun to understand that a healthy natural environment, the creatures that it supports, and the ecosystem processes which underpin it, are crucial for our own well-being, health and economy. We are gradually recognising that 'natural capital' is as vital to current and future prosperity as economic and social capital"* (Lawton *et al.*, 2010, p. 14). When considering how the report influenced subsequent environmental land management policy developments, there is no doubt it has fed into the design of ELMS, most notably the highest tier of landscape recovery, which provides funding for large-scale, multi-partner projects across areas of land greater in size than 500ha. However, it appears that less attention was given to the report's emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature, focusing instead on ideas linked to financial efficiencies and emerging ideas to leverage private finance to fund nature conservation[21]. Although the report's ethos and mantra of 'bigger, better, more joined up' influenced the 2011 Natural Environment white paper, with elements such as a commitment to establish 12 largescale, multi-landowner Nature Improvement Areas (Rose *et al.*, 2018, p. 1713), two eNGO interviewees mentioned that they have not seen the ambition of the report play out in practice: *"Well, they're (landowners) probably on the other scale, bigger, better in terms of farming gets more productive results and more money"* (eNGO9).

There was frustration expressed at the trajectory of the process *"… that was the opportunity with ELMS… as the cornerstone of future policy, not to perpetuate a retrofit approach*[22]*. Unfortunately, it*

[21] A key element of landscape recovery is a 'blended finance' approach where project managers are required to bring private finance to fund project implementation. As of the end of 2024, there is no clear guidance from Defra on where this should come from, or how much should be made up from private funding.

[22] In reference to the rollback of tier two ELMS nature recovery to Countryside Stewardship plus

might win votes… because farmers understand it, but it takes away the urgency and opportunity to fundamentally rethink the farm business model in terms of how the environment sits at the centre of farming. That's a challenge for Defra, how they overcome that cultural understanding of stewardship, we want farmers to understand ELMS as an opportunity. Ultimately, if you think about Lawton theory, food production depends on the ability of species to move between areas of the countryside" (eNGO4).

Despite this, the report has stood the test of time amongst eNGOs and academics, being praised for its accessibility, scientific robustness, inclusivity, clarity and positivity (Rose *et al.*, 2018). Echoes of its approach have endured through approaches such as the ambition to manage 30% of England's land and sea for nature by 2030 via a Nature Recovery Network.[23] It was published on the crest of the coalition government's promise to be the 'greenest Government ever' (Randerson, 2010) and appeared to feature the right ingredients, at the right time, to mark the beginning of a new, hopeful phase of nature conservation, including a nature-led approach to environmental land management policy.

5.3.2 Election of the coalition government in 2010 and subsequent publication of the natural environment white paper (2011)

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs[24]
Election of the coalition government and subsequent publication of the natural environment white paper	2010/2011	David Cameron Defra staff	**Document:** Natural environment white paper **Idea:** Natural capital **Organisation:** Defra

When the Conservative, Liberal Democrat coalition government led by David Cameron came to power in 2010, it boldly stated an intention to be the 'greenest government ever'. To cement this, soon after the election, and on the heels of the Lawton Review, a white paper was published titled: 'The Natural

[23] eNGOs picked up on Nature Recovery Networks – most predominantly The Wildlife trusts: https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Nature_recovery_network_final.pdf (Wildlife Trusts, 2018)

Choice: securing the value of nature'. The white paper set the scene for the government's approach to nature conservation in the years ahead. It was wide-ranging and ambitious, covering agricultural, marine and social issues and it made its intentions clear from the offset, the government wanted to bring natural capital into the country's economic mindset. In her opening statement, Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman moves on quickly from the intrinsic value of nature: *"Most people already recognise that nature has an intrinsic value" to* an economic approach *"government and society need to account better for the value of nature, particularly the services and resources it provides"* (Defra, 2011, p. 2). Indeed, Rose et al found that the financial value of nature was the most prominent theme in the white paper (p1711). The white paper makes clear reference to the Lawton Review, not least when focusing on agricultural policy: *"The Lawton Review, Making Space for Nature, found that nature in England is highly fragmented and unable to respond effectively to new pressures such as climate and demographic change"* (p4). It firmly sets the scene for environmental land subsidy to be linked to the financial value of natural assets, as well as view these assets as opportunity for private income generation[25]:*"We want land managers to get returns from a range of ecosystem services in addition to those they get from food production. We will work with the sector to investigate the development of markets for these services"* (p25).

The white paper came at a time when ecosystem assessments, accounting for natural assets, were being undertaken at an international and national level (*Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, 2011), (UK NEA, 2011), and made a commitment to accounting for the country's natural capital, including it in the bigger picture of the country's financial situation: *"The Government will take action to capture the value of natural capital on the nation's balance sheet. In doing so, we will end the situation where gains and losses in the value of natural capital go unrecorded and unnoticed"* (p36). *"They're trying to attract more money in and they're trying to manage the policy process"* (eNGO7 – referring to how Defra works with the Treasury). The white paper clearly sets out the government's commitment to environmental improvement and it is worth reiterating here the significance of two documents on its development - the Lawton review and National Ecosystems Assessments (NEA), both of which are heavily referenced as informing the white paper. However, they appear to come from opposing ideological standpoints: (1- NEA) including nature and conservation in current economic systems, prioritising economic growth and (2- Lawton review) nature conservation for its intrinsic value. The

[25] Remembering this is well ahead of Brexit, and before knowledge of needing to move away from CAP

figure below (4.1), shows key documents and how I have interpreted their influence on each other and how they supported the trajectory of valuing the natural world through financial terms. This is based on their publication date as well as interview data and document analysis. For example, the ecosystem assessment approach was becoming well-known at an international level following the Millennium Ecosystem assessment in 2009, feeding down to the national level in 2011 and influencing subsequent natural capital ecosystem assessments for both natural capital and marine natural capital in the UK from 2017. The documents in this figure were mentioned by interviewees as influencing their organisational activity and used to develop projects such as organisational natural capital accounts and policy recommendations such as Green Alliance's Dasgupta Review implementation recommendations (Green Alliance, 2025). The Lawton review is included due to its wide-adoption (and reference) by eNGOs, but highlights its lack of influence on subsequent ecosystem assessment and natural capital-focused documents:

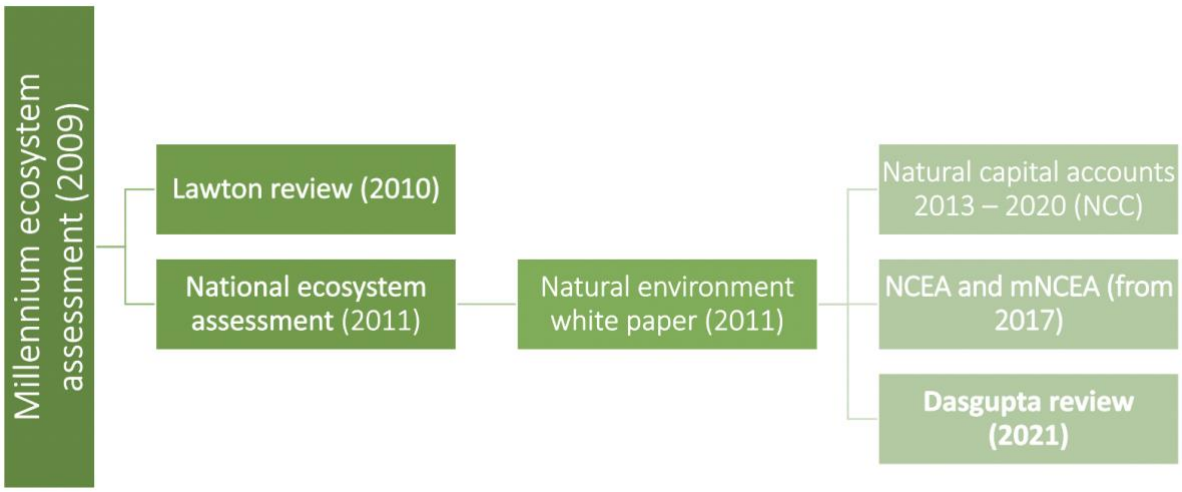

Figure 5.1: key document hierarchy and influence

Despite the dominance of the ecosystem assessment approach, there is no missing the inspiration the white paper takes from the Lawton Review, with its core message of bigger, more robust areas of land for nature woven throughout. The Lawton Review also had significant and lasting impact on eNGO activity. Despite this influence, the white paper firmly established that environmental improvement should be linked to the strength of the country's economy. The white paper, and Defra were aiming this directly at the people who hold the purse strings, the Treasury. This did not go unnoticed by interviewees: *"The idealist in me doesn't particularly like natural capital, putting a*

financial value on wildlife… or habitats. But the pragmatist in me says we are living in a society where money talks, so being able to communicate with those people about nature conservation in language that they understand and respond to" (eNGO6).

Interviewees showed scepticism as to the success of this approach, with eNGO1 commenting that "*the language of natural capital and ecosystem services don't get so much cut through with Treasury."* And eNGO5 mentioning what they see as the Treasury's desire to reduce the country's agricultural subsidy bill: "*Treasury have spent many years wanting to not spend £3 billion on direct payments.*" (eNGO5). eNGO14 described how it was difficult to cut through to Treasury due to *"so many limitations"* with natural capital accounting, "*nature just doesn't have the tangible economic benefit that's needed to sway a decision"* (eNGO14). What happened next, as set out in the white paper, was the establishment of a new body led by economist Dieter Helm. The body was established to advise on, and create a roadmap to embed natural assets within the country's accounts. Called the Natural Capital Committee, it was tasked to: "*… put natural capital at the centre of economic thinking and at the heart of the way we measure economic progress nationally. We will include natural capital within the UK Environmental Accounts. We will establish an independent Natural Capital Committee to advise the Government on the state of natural capital in England"* (Defra, 2011, p. 4).

5.3.3 Establishment and subsequent role of the Natural Capital Committee (established in 2011, first report published 2013, committee closed 2020)

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs[26]
Establishment and subsequent role of the Natural Capital Committee	2011 - 2020	Dieter Helm eNGO leaders Government agencies Defra staff	**Network:** NCC **Documents:** Committee reports and natural capital accounts **Ideas:** natural capital and associated policy mechanisms such as ecosystem services and BNG

The NCC was set up as an independent advisory committee as an outcome of the 2011 white paper. It was established to draw upon academic expertise to:

- *"Help the Government better understand how the state of the natural environment affects the performance of the economy and individual wellbeing in England; and*
- *Advise the Government on how to ensure England's natural wealth is managed efficiently and sustainably, thereby unlocking opportunities for sustained prosperity and wellbeing. (NCC, 2013, p. 2)."*

Established by the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition in 2011 and running until 2020, its success and longevity in what proved to be a period of sustained and significant change in environmental land management policy is ripe for analysis. As expected, the NCC sits firmly within the pro-financial mechanism camp, by providing technically focused, expert advice to landowners (including eNGOs) on how to undertake natural capital accounting of natural assets. Chaired by Oxford University economist Dieter Helm, the committee comprised seven members with expertise ranging from marine policy to soil health.[27] The committee ran until 2020; in which time it published seven reports and fed into the development of the 25-Year Plan for the Environment, which was published in 2018, leading to the 2021 Environment Act. These developments all had an impact on the design and development of ELMS. The committee's mission was clear from its first report published in 2013. Natural capital should be included in the country's finances: *"Natural capital is enormously important to the economy and yet it is largely omitted from national economic indicators as well as from most corporate and government policy decisions"* (NCC, 2013, p. 7). Subsequent documents, reports, and accounting toolkits published by the NCC put forward a clear and compelling argument to the value of accounting for natural capital within the UK's overall economic position. This approach made its way to eNGO staff via traditional policy routes and two of the seven NCC members had public links with eNGOs. Its chair, Dieter Helm, was honorary vice president of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and

[27] NCC committee members:

- Professor Dieter Helm – Chairman, economist, **(University of Oxford)**
- Professor Melanie Austen – marine expert (University of Plymouth)
- Professor Ian Bateman – environmental economist (University of Exeter)
- Professor Christopher Collins – environmental chemist (University of Reading)
- Professor Paul Leinster - Environmental Assessment (Cranfield University) and ex-EA
- Professor Colin Mayer - Management Studies (Saïd Business School, **University of Oxford**)
- Professor Kathy Willis – Biodiversity (**University of Oxford**)

Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) and Professor Kathy Willis was a trustee for WWF. Interestingly, eNGOs also picked up on the work of the committee via the media, with one interviewee describing how eNGOs were encouraged to use the NCC's approach to natural capital accounting, commenting that it was '*very believable*', that it *'involved lobbying and setting out recommendations*' and that key to its adoption was to '*… launch in a way that will catch the eyes of the media and ministers and convince your fellow NGOs that something is the case"* (eNGO14).

The first NCC report states its support for Lawton's findings but says unless it goes a step further by measuring and managing natural capital – collecting and using evidence, it will not work. *"The NCC strongly supports the Lawton recommendations, but it needs to be recognised that while these are necessary conditions for the stewardship of particular elements of our natural capital, they are not sufficient for all the benefits of natural capital to be secured"* (NCC, 2013, p. 20). Most interviewees were aware of the NCC, believing its work made it easier to talk about nature conservation in new forums such as with economists and the Treasury and for a time, particularly during Michael Gove's period as Environment Secretary (2017-2019), the NCC and its priorities were riding high, confident that its expertise was being listened to: *"The Natural Capital committee was always really useful and they had a lot of credibility"* (eNGO5). The 25-Year Environment Plan, published in 2018, thanked the NCC for its contribution, saying: "*The economic benefits that flow from the natural world… have begun to take a greater prominence in policy-making, thanks in part to the ground-breaking work of Professor Dieter Helm's Natural Capital Committee*' (HM Government, 2018, p. 16). However, the usability of the toolkits developed did not necessarily translate easily into practice, with an interviewee commenting that although the quality of the information was high "*… there was always some translation needed"* (eNGO7). Given this prominence, I had expected interviewees to refer to government resources when asked where they go for information about the case study[28], but nobody referred to NCC resources unless prompted. More common was turning to knowledge within their organisation for information about ELMS as well as other developments that incorporate financial mechanisms such as BNG.

The NCC came to an end in 2020. Reflecting on progress made in the committee's final annual report, Dieter Helm wrote: *'The absence of progress since 2011*[29] *is more notable than the successes',* the

[28] Question seven in the headline question table xx

[29] Publication of the natural environment white paper that detailed the role and remit of a new NCC

blame for this inaction was laid on the government's failure to adopt the natural capital approach recommended by the committee: '*This failure is due in large part to the lack of a natural capital assets baseline against which to measure progress'* (NCC, 2020, p. 1). Helm goes on to state the NCC's concerns with BNG, without the scheme having a stronger statutory basis. Interviewees also expressed opinion on the inability of the NCC to act: *"The Natural Capital Committee never really had any official clout. But it had the ability to press release and field people on to the Today programme and Costing the Earth and those sorts of things"* (eNGO7). One interviewee suggested that the influence of the NCC came to an end after Michael Gove moved on from Defra*: "Its influence has waned and the language has moved on from natural capital back towards things like ecosystem services, which is what it was called before"* (eNGO12).

Following its closure, some elements of the committee passed to a newly established Office of Environmental Protection (OEP). It was hoped, not least from those within the NCC, that OEP would be an independent body with the teeth to challenge government on policy decisions and even enforce financial penalties *('Government will launch a consultation in early 2018 on establishing a new, world-leading, independent, statutory body to give the environment a voice, championing and upholding environmental standards as we leave the European Union' (HM Government, 2018, p. 139)).* By the time of the 2024 election this was not the case, and the OEP arguably has a much lower profile than the NCC. The legacy of the NCC can be felt across the conservation sector, from grassroots organisations who have adopted its language and approach in their publications (Norfolk Wildlife Trust, 2022), to the larger players - RSPB published natural capital accounts for its entire landholdings in 2017 (RSPB, 2017), as did the Greater London Authority, covering the city's green spaces (Greater London Authority, 2017).

5.3.4 **Brexit referendum and the move away from CAP to ELMS (from 2016)**

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs
Brexit referendum and subsequent gradual move from CAP to ELMS	From 2016	David Cameron Michael Gove eNGO leaders eNGO policy staff Formal eNGO coalitions Landowners	**Policy:** CAP/ELMS **Event:** Brexit (as a disaster for conservation) Brexit (as an opportunity for positive policy change – silver lining)

Throughout the referendum period, farming subsidy in the form of CAP was often cited as a reason why the UK should leave the EU, in that the UK paid in far more than it got from land management subsidies (Woods, 2017). For my interviewees, this was a potential benefit of Brexit, the chance to implement land management schemes based on environmental improvements. For a while, following the referendum result, this is what they were led to believe would be the case, and multiple interviewees expressed feeling excited at the prospect (eNGO12, 14, 15, 17). eNGO2 spoke of a *"a genuine opportunity to do something differently, to free ourselves of EU red tape and actually do something really exciting."* With Michael Gove as environment secretary[30] and in the run up to leaving the EU, it felt there was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to overhaul environmental land policy for the benefit of nature conservation. One interviewee (eNGO12) referenced this as the environment sector "*getting lucky*". Brexit was viewed as an opportunity to overhaul land subsidy policy to incorporate environmental benefits. These were referred to by Michael Gove as public money for public goods: *"…agriculture was a space that we need to act now in a way that in the past there was no point because it was just the European policy, and we had the European colleagues working on it"* (eNGO12). There was a sense from interviewees that ELMS would present an opportunity to bring Lawton's principles to fruition: *"… that idea of connecting things up, spatial prioritisation and tailoring are big ideas" (eNGO2).*

ELMS were developed under three separate schemes. The first scheme, broadly comparable to CAP's basic payment scheme, is the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI). The key difference is that landowners must demonstrate more than owning the land to benefit from the subsidy (although there is a maximum £1000 p/a administration grant). SFI features a list of standards that landowners and farmers (including tenant farmers) can select to undertake to receive subsidy. These include hedgerow and nutrient management. On the face of it, it was an improvement, and certainly one welcomed by some of the eNGO community. For example, one interviewee expressed cautious optimism: *"…it's definitely an improvement on what we had before*" (eNGO13). The second level is Countryside Stewardship. This tier and its name are a hangover from CAP, but a rollback from its original suggested name of 'local nature recovery' which was presented as a new kind of support for landowners to produce public goods at a larger scale (drawing on the principles of the Lawton Review). This was rolled back during the Truss government following pressure from the farming community that it sounded in favour of rewilding. Two interviewees, eNGO4 and eNGO5, both

[30] 2017-2019

commented on the naming of the scheme and how it caused offence to some within the farming community, stating that "*…politically there is little appetite for that language… local nature recovery" (eNGO4).* They went on to say that to win back votes from the rural community in the next general election there had to be a compromise on the name, "*local nature recovery sounds a bit too fluffy".* eNGO5 noted that farming minister Mark Spencer had been on record to say he did not agree with the name and hinted that Defra was not at a stage to roll this scheme out as it had not yet been designed, in which case it suited the department to drop it. Ultimately though, as suggested by eNGO4, *"*(Local Nature Recovery) *wouldn't get past Treasury, so the alternative being to revert back to some element of subsidisation of farming".* However, they continued to note that *"…we've opened Pandora's box because neither the leave or remain camp during the referendum debates talked about farming policy because we were all talking about £13 billion being paid into the European coffers… we weren't losing £13 billion, we were getting money back and our farmers were benefiting"* (eNGO4).

The third and most ambitious tier of ELMS, landscape recovery, has also received criticism from the farming community, with eNGO4 commenting that *"there are still camps out there that see landscape recovery as only for the green layers, only a scheme for environmental NGOs about rewilding and nothing to do with farmers and food production".* Indeed, eNGOs have benefited from both pilot rounds of landscape recovery, leading projects, sometimes independently or as groups of landowners to undertake nature conservation projects across multiple sites. So far, eNGOs have received funding for the development stage of these initiatives, which are set to go into implementation in 2025. Despite initial excitement about new schemes, frustrations were soon to follow. eNGO1 expressed disappointment that ELMS changed from one overall scheme based on public money for public goods to three tiers, in a similar style to CAP. They went on to say how they thought the schemes were not as ambitious as initially presented under Gove and commented that the tiers came into being under the traditional leadership of George Eustace as environment secretary, with close ties to the NFU and farming sector. eNGO2 spoke about doubts across the eNGO community that Defra does not have a clear implementation plan for the new schemes "*which is a constant frustration".* This sense of frustration was expressed clearly by all interviewees and will be explored further towards the end of this chapter.

5.3.5 Michael Gove as environment secretary (2017-2019)

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs
Michael Gove as environment secretary	2017-2019	Michael Gove Defra staff NCC members Defra staff eNGO leaders[31]	**Document:** 25-Year plan for the environment, Health and Harmony – the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit **Ideas/policy mechanisms:** natural capital informing ideas of 'nature markets' 'Public money for public goods'

One name mentioned frequently during interviews and linked to many of the documents analysed was Michael Gove. Gove was an ambitious minister making policy promises that would benefit the objectives and missions of eNGOs. To many working in the sector, this was an unexpected and pleasant surprise, particularly following the reputation left by Gove to those working in education.[32] During Gove's time as environment secretary, the government's 25-year plan for the environment (25YEP) was published. It features clear inspiration from the Lawton Review and a long-term commitment to environmental improvements, such as a promise to *'… turn over fields to meadows rich in herbs and wildflowers, plant more trees, restore habitats for endangered species, recover soil fertility and attract wildlife back.'* These promises were stated under the guidance of the Lawton Review, *'We will ensure broader landscapes are transformed by connecting habitats into larger corridors for wildlife'* (HM Government, 2018, p. 7). This language was highly appealing to the eNGO community. But government was clear these benefits were only possible by embracing a natural capital approach, placing natural assets as part of the country's wider economic measures, ripe for investment by private markets. It praises the work of the NCC, stating that *'The economic benefits that flow from the natural world and our natural heritage have begun to take a greater prominence in policy-making, thanks in part to the ground-breaking work of Professor Dieter Helm's Natural Capital Committee (NCC).'* (HM Government, 2018, p. 17). The 25YEP provides details of the government's *'new approach to managing the environment'*, stating; *'… we have come to realise that the*

[31] Many of the actors during this period were ex-Oxford University see appendix vii for a timeline that includes this information

[32] Budget cuts, department reshuffles, extra testing for pupils and academy plans left a bitter taste in the mouth of many in the education sector: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jul/22/michael-gove-legacy-education-secretary

environment does indeed deliver calculable economic benefits' (p15). It also looks to bring environmental policymaking into other government departments and work with ONS *'… to develop a full set of natural capital accounts for the UK that are widely understood and shared internationally'(HM Government, 2018, p. 133).*

Interviewees expressed a belief that Micheal Gove was at the heart of these ideas and were keen to talk about the opportunity they saw with him at the helm of ELMS development. eNGO5 commented that there was a set of key players, including Gove and Dieter Helm, bringing an economist's mindset, looking for opportunities to make money from green initiatives. Their observations led to a comment that this behaviour suited a conservative mindset of *'economic growth and capitalism'.* They were keen to state that they believed eNGOs were quick and keen to latch on to this mindset and use it as an opportunity to talk to decision makers in government. eNGO4 agreed and made the link between this mindset and income generating activity from private sources, commenting that *"Michael Gove had a clear ambition around the role that private markets could play"* (eNGO4).

In 2019, after coming third in the Conservative party leadership contest won by Boris Johnson, Michael Gove moved from Defra to become Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with responsibility for 'no-deal' Brexit preparations. He left an eNGO sector (as well as Defra and associated agencies), emboldened and fired up for change and innovation, not least in environmental land management policy. However, it appears that to some extent, the appetite for change left with the outgoing minister.

5.3.6 From natural capital to net gain, the emergence of BNG as a potential source of income for eNGOs

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs
Emergence of BNG as a potential source of income for eNGOs	2019-2021	NCC recommendations	**Idea/policy mechanism:** BNG as a concept/ mechanism **Document:** The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review **Document:** Nature markets: A framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming (Defra, 2023)

Although Gove had moved on by the time BNG was mandated, its inclusion in the 25YEP bears his stamp. Referenced as early as 2011 in the natural environment white paper (*'We will move from net biodiversity loss to net gain']* (Defra, 2011, p. 3), biodiversity net gain was gaining real traction towards the end of the period under analysis. In 2023, Defra published a report titled Nature Markets, which was positioned as '*A framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming'.* BNG was positioned as a key mechanism to leverage private investment that would "*take pressure off the public purse" (eNGO4)*. BNG was enshrined in law under the 2021 Environment Act which required *'developers in England… to compensate for the biodiversity impacts of new developments that they cannot improve on-site and deliver biodiversity net gain through the purchase of biodiversity units'* (Defra, 2023, p. 9). BNG was propositioned as a win to nature without compromising economic growth targets, a *'way to contribute to the recovery of nature while developing land' (Defra, 2023, p. 3).*

There was a sense of excitement and optimism amongst interviewees that BNG would achieve what ideas of natural capital (including natural capital accounting) had not, because of its statutory standing. eNGOs were upskilling staff in BNG (eNGO8, 9), positioning themselves as experts, as well as standing to benefit financially via their own landholdings and as consultants to private landowners. There was a sense of opportunity amongst interviewees of what they could achieve with income from BNG. eNGO9 commented that reserve staff were excited about a potential new source of income that would give them opportunity to *"do more stuff on the reserves … almost pipe dream stuff"* (eNGO9). eNGO8 spoke about how, as a federated organisation, the central body had been helpful in terms of

"developing position statements on BNG", that they could use when communicating with landowners and their members, as well as *"… feeding into the policy development at government".*

eNGOs, particularly the larger organisations, employ in-house environmental economists to ensure their business can respond to and benefit from developments such as BNG. These organisations are well-versed in seeking out funding opportunities in a competitive marketplace and are quicky looking to upskill in BNG. eNGO14 commented that "… *it makes the core business of charities directly saleable, but it requires all sorts of financing discussions internally, it's a lot to get our head around."* One interviewee commented on the emergence of private companies offering to work with landowners to baseline their natural capital assets, preparing them to benefit from schemes such as BNG and said they felt it is like *"… a wild west of private companies popping up everywhere"* (eNGO8). However, eNGOs potentially have the upper hand in this landscape, as trusted establishments with motivation wider than financial gain. They appear to be aware of this and are investing in new staff and upskilling services, offering advice (often as a paid-for consultancy service) to landowners. One eNGO represented by an interviewee had increased its staff team in this area from two to eight members of staff in under two years. eNGO8 was keen to say how schemes like BNG are seeing them work in new ways with private landowners, and how this is a good thing - they can support the landowner to get the most (financially) from the scheme as well as ensuring optimal benefits for nature.

However, there was also a sense of resignation from interviewees (eNGO7, 8, 14, 15, 17) that financial mechanisms like BNG were inevitable, and eNGOs would have to adapt and support the approach whether they agreed with the trajectory or not. eNGO14 commented that "*… all the main parties see market approaches as being the way forward"* (eNGO14). On an individual level there was skepticism on their potential, in particular that there is no long-term management built into the scheme (eNGO14) and concerns around making it easier to justify the loss of irreplicable habitat such as ancient woodland (eNGO13). eNGO8 questioned the legitimacy of BNG applying to land owned by eNGOs "… *reserves shouldn't be able to access net gain funding because they're already fantastic. That's one of our principles, reserves are already good and if they're not, we've failed."* Opinion was also expressed that Defra and EA are using the opportunity of BNG (and nature markets more generally) to capacity build themselves, with eNGO14 feeling that Defra are trying to *"… attract more money in and they're trying to manage the policy process with things like net gain"* (eNGO14).

Despite the scepticism, government has clear ambitions for private investment in nature restoration in England, and BNG is at the centre of this: *'We have set a goal to grow annual private investment flows to nature to at least £500 million every year by 2027 in England, rising to more than £1 billion by 2030*' (Defra, 2023, p. 5). eNGO7, commenting on the scale of finance involved, said "… *government is expecting net gain to produce… I think the latest estimates are £135 to £270 million a year in England, which is substantial*." Although this investment is yet to materialise, Defra continues to push the message, particularly through ELMS, and its highest tier of landscape recovery. Time will tell if this plays out, with rumours of the new Labour government looking to scrap BNG amidst a notion that there is room for either development (under the government's growth agenda) or nature. The RSPB is speaking out about this, and Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) is also at the forefront of this debate, with messages that development and growth need not come at the sacrifice of the natural world.

5.3.7 Covid 19 pandemic (2019-2022)

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs
Covid19 pandemic	2019-2022	Formal eNGO coalitions	**Network:** Formal coalitions **Channel:** Zoom/Teams meetings **Documents:** Policy letters/notes/briefs and statements issued by formal coalitions and signed by multiple members **Channel:** Twitter/tweets

Social worlds undertake collective action underpinned by shared positions on a situation (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 117) and the pandemic resulted in eNGOs working more closely together through new channels of communication. This theme was first noted in the research diary, but grew to a theme as several interviewees mentioned how their working practices had changed during this time (eNGO2, 6, 9, 10, 17). For example, FCON3 talked about a small group of policy staff at different eNGOs who are regularly in contact with each other and communicate via a WhatsApp group that was set up during the pandemic to share thoughts on policy development and announcements. They spoke about how this allows eNGOs to comment through formal coalition channels *"… quickly and at quite a senior level. Stuff happens and we quickly put a meeting in the diary or call people… so much stuff is done via WhatsApp"* (FCON3). For a time, online working provided opportunity for a greater number of eNGOs

of all sizes to be involved in developing ELMS alongside government, with one interviewee noting how the pandemic coincided with Defra setting up ELMS stakeholder engagement groups: *"The transition to online enabled much broader stakeholder engagement because people aren't having to travel, smaller organisations could justify the time"* (eNGO2).

However, it seems these larger stakeholder groups with more representation from eNGOs did not always result in more effective policymaking. One interviewee spoke about the frustration of trying to make decisions when there were up to 60 people on a call "*it just descends into madness"* (eNGO2). In December 2023, a leak was reported from one of these large stakeholder groups, about rumoured rollback of ELMS. Defra then removed meetings from participants' diaries with no explanation and no indication they would be reinstated. A gradual return to smaller, more closed groups working on policy development may be inevitable as working practices adjust and shift, however the pandemic enabled eNGOs to strengthen relationships, at all levels and across sometimes opposing groups. One interviewee noted how Zoom meetings have enabled regular communication between individuals representing organisations with traditionally opposing views such as RSWT and NFU: *"Craig and Minnette*[33] *will speak often and know each other well and Craig and Mark from the CLA*[34] *also know each other well. It's all done by zoom now"* (eNGO2).

5.3.8 Attack on Nature campaign (2022)

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs
Attack on Nature campaign	2022	RSPB staff Liz Truss Kwasi Kwarteng	**Channel:** Twitter/tweets **Organisation:** Individual eNGO organizations **Networks:** Formal coalitions

> *"Make no mistake, we are angry. This Government has today launched an attack on nature. We don't use the words that follow lightly. We are entering uncharted territory. Please read this thread. 1/13"*[35] (RSPB, 2022)

[33] Craig Bennet CEO RSWT and Minette Batters (ex-president NFU)
[34] CLA President Mark Tufnell
[35] https://twitter.com/RSPBEngland/status/1573366815568580613

Sparked by Liz Truss' mini budget, but ultimately a culmination of events preceding this, the Attack on Nature campaign was launched by the RSPB on Twitter to voice its concerns over rumoured significant rollbacks to a range of environmental protections, including ELMS. It made use of a public forum to clearly call-out government stating that *'we are entering uncharted territory'* in a 13-tweet thread that outlined exactly what the organisation was angry about. *"The real tragedy is this: the utter lack of understanding by ministers that healthy nature underpins a healthy society and a healthy economy. Have they even read their own report?*[36] *(9/13)."*

This campaign was unprecedented in recent eNGO history, being quickly shared and highlighted by all the major eNGOs and formal coalitions. It highlights that despite scepticism about the shift to market-based policy mechanisms, the predominant feeling across the eNGO sector was that policy developments such as ELMS were worth fighting for. Interviewees (eNGO5, 14, 17) described the campaign as necessary and happening organically due to being pushed too far towards a line the sector was not prepared to cross. eNGO5 spoke about the relief felt when it was clear the membership of eNGOs involved in the campaign were supportive, as well as reassurance when colleagues from other organisations and public figures such as Stephen Fry began to share the campaign's messages. *"It was definitely needed. I think there's never been a government who was making such an unvarnished, full frontal attack on environmental protections" (eNGO3).* The campaign caused ripples across government and some within the farming sector were not pleased. eNGO5 noted that *"A lot of MPs that we've worked with for many years were really rocked."* Although they acknowledged that it had damaged relationships, there was no sense of regret, only a sense that there was no other option at that point in time *"so many lines (were) crossed".* Alongside this defiance was acknowledgment that this type of campaign was unusual (eNGO13), and not something that can be repeated very often, as well as recognition that it was risky as the eNGOs involved are not traditionally politically active: *"We're not Greenpeace, but we had to do this, and I think people got that."(eNGO5).* eNGO13 did, however, believe that ahead of future elections the sector would need to continue its strong stance on issues as *"the environment is not gonna be high up the agenda".* During the campaign, hashtags '#defendnature' and '#attackonnature' were used on Twitter to gain traction. As NHBOs these hashtags were uniting eNGOs and formal coalitions, as well as building support and recognition with the wider public. In this example, social media hashtags as boundary

[36] Referencing the Dasgupta report

objects built consensus within social worlds, to grow support for an agenda and embolden eNGOs in the process. It pitted them publicly against government, as a united force that was prepared to speak out: *"A lot of people use Twitter… because it's a bit of a pinboard for journalists and academics, and I think while it can be a negative space, it is a good way of doing that" (FCON3).*

eNGOs are no strangers to communicating scientifically robust information within political landscapes that use doubt and uncertainty to shape and stall policy, but now they had reached breaking point with the only channel left the public sphere. Despite the growing strength of formal coalitions, the Attack on Nature campaign was driven directly by the individual eNGOs, WCL then picked up support and ongoing profile of the issues raised. "*RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts and others organically came together and said we have to stop this"* (FCON2). There was no way of predicting the Attack on Nature campaign when this research started. However, looking back on preceding events and circumstance, it can be reflected upon as an almost inevitable conclusion of a series of situations where eNGOs had been pushed and pulled over the preceding 12 years (from the beginning of the coalition government). Rather than squashing their spirit, it seems to have united and emboldened a group of organisations to work effectively together to direct their voice at those with agency within government to heed their demands. Liz Truss' mini budget and its (credible) hints at scrapping ELMS was quite literally the final straw: *"…it was a real wakeup call" (eNGO5).* The campaign was effective "*… government thought actually we can't ignore these people because they have a huge membership and you started getting ministers talking about how many members and supporters organisations like ourselves have, [it] helped to redefine where government is on all of this and saved ELMS I think"* (eNGO5). The success of the campaign undoubtedly emboldened eNGOs. FCON3 spoke about feeling more confident to call government out when they go back on promises. This shift includes those eNGOs traditionally considered part of the establishment such as RSPB and NT. "*I think that's where the slightly more traditional NGOs are getting a bit punchier",* knowing they have the support of their membership. Speaking on how polling shows the public are in support for environmental improvements and action to mitigate for climate change they believe that *"(eNGOs) see a public mandate to be a bit more punchy" (FCON3).*

The result of the Attack on Nature campaign was an emboldened eNGO community, who "*really had to mobilize ourselves as a sector… and work hand in glove to try and see off some of that challenge"* (eNGO4). eNGO3 believed that the government did not see it coming, "*… (Liz Truss) and Kwasi*

Kwarteng and a few others behind closed doors with the libertarian, free market think tanks, I don't think they thought about what the environmental movement would do in response. They certainly weren't prepared for it" (eNGO3). There is an argument to be had here that if the preceding seven events covered here had not played out in the way they did, the 'Attack on Nature' campaign may never have happened. Without the bonding events brought forward particularly by Brexit and the pandemic, eNGOs would not have felt strong enough to retaliate in such an unusually forceful manner. It proved effective, alongside the quick change of prime minister and cabinet positions, as proposed rollbacks on ELMS were halted, in the short term at least. "*Investment zones sound like they are dying a death, fracking is off the table for now, so I think it* (Attack on Nature campaign) *was effective. Obviously, there are other things like the market changes that are also very important, but I think that did lead to quite a significant shift in government policy"* (eNGO5). Once again, there are now rumbles of land subsidy policy budgets being scrutinised afresh, but that is for future research.

5.4 A social worlds analysis of the case study

As a result of my interpretation of the events presented above, I now present four social worlds that have been built around my perception of the predominant emotions being expressed through documents and by interviewees. Pierce argues that using *'categories'* of emotion in policy analysis can lead to better understanding of actors' *'thoughts and actions'* (Pierce, 2021, p. 606), and, as introduced in chapter three, the value of exploring emotions in policy research is gaining recognition (Pierce, 2021, Durnová, 2018, Fullerton, Gabehart and Weible, 2024), and includes Durnová's argument that exploring the meaning of emotions (as opposed to simply describing or noting the emotion), can enrich interpretive policy analysis. This is done by building understanding of why actors behave in the way they do, including the *'arguments and symbols they deploy in their actions'* (Durnová, 2018, p. 96). There is a useful parallel here with SWF's focus on the human and non-human elements being used by social worlds to build consensus and meaning around a situation. This framing also gives prominence to the emotional reaction to arguments and symbols, in the case of this research the use and significance by eNGO actors on ideas that place a financial value on the natural world.

The first social world presented is SW1: the hopeful world. This social world focuses on the optimism and excitement that was being expressed both within documents and by interviewees, that a period of positive change for environmental land management policy, linked to Brexit, was to be seized

upon, and ideas that place a financial value on the natural world were a key element of this optimism. What was to follow - SW2: the cynical world, was creeping suspicion around these ideas. While the cynicism was not across the board, it was clearly expressed in many of my interviews and linked often to policy ideas not being resourced or thought through in a way that could be applied to practice. SW3: the frustrated, is focused on the feelings of frustration and anger expressed in interviews and documents published by eNGOs, when initial promises on new ELMS and the promised benefits of financial mechanisms like BNG, were not delivered, changed and even rolled back. The final social world, SW4: the emboldened, explores the strong group of eNGO actors that came together (linked to the pandemic and online working) often through formal coalitions. These groups were emerging as effective channels to call-out government on changes to environmental land management policy that eNGOs were not comfortable with.

Membership and activity of the four social worlds is explored in the next section. Interestingly, the social worlds feature fewer members as they move chronologically closer in time to the present. However, smaller numbers seem to result in more impactful and meaningful results for eNGOs. Although my presentation is chronological, members of the four social worlds overlap and are active at the same time. Clarke and Star note that; '*People typically participate in a number of social worlds simultaneously, and such participation usually remains highly fluid*' (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 118). Throughout the period under examination, the dominance of the four social worlds waxes and wanes, often linked to the key events presented above. Membership is not static, and as people's emotional response to events changes, so does their membership of the social world.

5.4.1 SW1: Social world one: the hopeful world

Members of this social world take the position that ideas that place a financial value on the natural world will improve environmental land management policy for the benefit of nature

Who is in this social world? [37]	Key NHBOs	Key events
1. eNGO actors across the board 2. Government actors – Defra/Treasury/ONS/cabinet office/ 3. Certain fields of academia (economists/environmental economists) 4. Local government 5. Private landowners - Essentially anyone who believes they have something to gain financially (and/or mission-led from this development)	• **NHBO1:** Ideas that place a financial value on the natural world including but not limited to, natural capital/BNG/ELMS • **NHBO3:** Numerous government documents published by Defra, ONS, NCC, Treasury[38] •	(2) Publication of natural environmental white paper (4) Brexit (5) Gove as environment minister and publication of 25YEP

Table 5.2: SW1 membership and NHBOs

There was genuine hope and excitement, both from interviewees and expressed in documents, that private investment had the potential to bolster government and private funding for environmental land management. Brexit was viewed as an opportunity to overhaul land subsidy policy to incorporate environmental benefits - referred to by Michael Gove as '*public money for public goods.'* FCON3 believed the environmental sector did '*the best of all sectors*' during the Brexit process, despite not getting everything they wanted. eNGO12 saw the break from the EU as an opportunity to challenge policy design that was untouchable under the EU. This is also in opposition to many

[37] Members of the four social worlds have been determined from documents and interview data as well as the key events detailed in section 5.6

[38] See appendix vii for full list of documents analysed

interviewees' personal feelings towards the referendum decision, with eNGOs (controversially) campaigning for a 'remain' vote in the run up to the referendum (IEEP, 2016).[39]

Members of SW1 express support for ideas that attribute a financial value to natural resources and see the value of embedding these in nature conservation. They see their use as largely beneficial to communicating policy priorities. It is somewhat ironic that when Schumacher was writing about natural capital in the 1970s he was doing so to highlight the threats faced to the natural world, rather than as an opportunity to create wealth for governments, organisations and individuals. Interviewees spoke about the ways in which ideas of natural capital in particular had become part of their organisation's everyday language and activity (eNGO4, 9, 12), with the approach validated by developments such as the ONS natural capital accounts (FCON4). Interviewees did, however, point out that although some government departments promoted and developed these ideas, their hope of using them to get through to Treasury was not an easy task, with one interviewee stating that: "… *it's not necessarily in the minds of those in Treasury when they're making big decisions, but it's definitely progress"* (FCON4).

There is an air of optimism when eNGOs talk about this social world, that they had backed the right trajectory towards favourable policy outcomes. The idea of '*public money for public goods'* was an attractive narrative to share with members and strengthened further by the work of Dieter Helm and the NCC. The NCC was clear on its vision that ELMS would be built on a natural capital approach, and this would go on to feature in the government's 2018 25-Year Environment Plan: *'A natural capital approach (to ELMS) will help us build a new environmental land management system which values the benefits of the environment...'* (HM Government, 2018, p. 42). eNGOs were keeping an open mind, resigned to the fact that *"they (government) see market approaches as being the way forward, so I suspect we're going to try them. There will be good projects that come forward depending on who runs them."* (eNGO14). Interviewees spoke about the resource within Defra under the leadership of Michael Gove, and this too gave them hope in meaningful policy change, with one interviewee commenting that they had never known Defra to be so well resourced (eNGO5). eNGOs have fed off this hope and made their own investments, with a new department within RSPB dedicated to exploring private investment into nature recovery (eNGO4). An interviewee who works advising

[39] https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/environmental-charities-publish-100-page-paper-warning-against-brexit.html

private landowners on improving the environmental value of their land sees financial ideas feature heavily in the communications they have with landowners (eNGO8). They expressed confidence that these ideas are understood and have seen their organisation invest heavily in associated opportunities. This includes a growing team (eight members of staff) dedicated to advising landowners on areas such as applying for land subsidy, BNG and developing natural capital accounts for landholdings. They clearly expressed a belief in the opportunities associated with this area, particularly the opportunity for eNGOs to provide advice on ELMS and BNG, and to earn consultancy income from this. They spoke about private consultancies that have been set up to support landowners to derive income from their landholdings but saw little competition here as they were confident that the landowners they work with were more receptive to eNGOs than private organisations because eNGOs are recognised as more knowledgeable and trustworthy.

Before moving onto the second social world, it is important to note that the hope and optimism expressed within SW1 does not come exclusively from the promise of financial support for environmental improvements. An interviewee representing one of the formal coalitions was keen to emphasise how its activity to develop policy recommendations based on the Dasgupta Review would include all elements of the report (GDP, education and natural capital) (Dasgupta, 2021), and how talk of growth should not exclusively refer to finance, but to growth in wellbeing, health, happiness – and nature.

5.4.2 Social world two: the cynical world

Opinions expressed by this social world focus on the position that ideas that place a financial value on the natural world are being progressed for the benefit of the economy, not the natural world.

Members of this social world are more likely to express their positions on an individual level, rather than collectively or publicly, resulting in the identification of fewer non-human boundary objects associated with this group.

Who is in this social world?	Key NHBOs	Key events
1. eNGO actors across the board – but more likely to express their cynicism at an individual level through interview, rather than organisation publications 2. Environmental commentators (journalists/nature writers) 3. Certain fields of academia (degrowth/sustainable development/limits to growth/critics of neo liberalism) 4. Landowners cynical to the motives of eNGOs keen to progress the private finance elements of ELMS	• **NHBO1:** Ideas that place a financial value on the natural world including but not limited to, natural capital and biodiversity net gain • **NHBO4:** The Treasury	(4) Brexit (5) Gove (3) NCC - particularly at the end of their term

Table 5.3: SW2 membership and NHBOs

Despite dominance of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world in the publications analysed, produced both by government and the eNGOs themselves, interviewees expressed personal opinions that were different to the documents. Many were sceptical, but resigned to using them in the hope of progressing their organisation's aims for environmental land management policy. There was a resignation expressed by some interviewees that the direction of travel had been set, and they had to toe the line: "The *idealist in me doesn't particularly like natural capital, putting a financial value on wildlife… or habitats. But the pragmatist in me says they were living in a society where money talks"* (eNGO6). Other interviewees also picked up on how the sector was beginning to talk in a different way about the natural world: *"…they* (government and business) *have all the power and you have to speak to them in their language, otherwise you, you're never gonna get them to understand or to be interested" (*eNGO2). One interviewee, who had retired after a career working in senior positions at two major landholding eNGOs, gave an alternative argument, that these ideas were coming into the sector as early as 1997, *"so, it became really strong in the late 90s when you started talking about the cost per redshank"*, and felt the success of these ideas in the sector was driven by the eNGOs themselves: *"…we started to change the language… to what an accountant*

would say" (eNGO10). They go on to explain how financial approaches were encouraged at chief-executive level, and how these figures were influential within government departments, meaning that the spread of these ideas *"came very much from the top down and the bottom up".* This interviewee goes on to comment how they believe the language used became too academic. This turned off politicians and the public and gave politicians a reason to step away from conservation issues. Interestingly, the same interviewee (eNGO10) did believe that in the earlier days of natural capital ideas, on-the-ground staff were very interested: *"the wardens especially picked it up, they certainly started to look at the value of their land in a different way."* Another interviewee whose job involves working with nearby landowners as well as delivering stewardship schemes, included discussion on how they are aware of natural capital ideas and using financial language to talk about nature, but feels it is only now trickling down to reserve staff mainly via BNG (eNGO9). There was an overall sense that farmers and landowners, as well as landowning eNGOs, are very aware of financially focused ideas. They are seeing wide use throughout the sector, evidenced by the number of private companies now available to support landowners to develop an understanding of their stock of natural capital, but it is felt there is '*no consistency*' (eNGO15) to the way approaches are being applied, weakening the entire concept. In addition, eNGO9 continued to say that they see these ideas as something that is talked about at a senior level, but they are not affecting day-to-day activity. This is in contrast with eNGO staff in policy focused roles, as well as eNGO staff in more senior positions where it is embedded.

Some of the strongest objections to financial ideas, and their usefulness for ELMS, came from recognition that those in power who make the economic decisions did not see nature conservation as a priority, and that any potential income source from nature would not be significant enough to the Treasury (eNGO14). They felt that, despite supporting market-based approaches in general, too much was at stake to gamble the future of this crucial policy area on market mechanisms, that subsidy should be state led: "*given the scale and the importance of what is in play here, we can't afford to have a market failure"* (eNGO14). A common point, raised by multiple interviewees, centred on whether market-based approaches resulted in funding opportunities for the eNGO they represented (eNGO14, 3, 5, 9, 10). This seems to be a key reason eNGOs would be supportive of these ideas. There was less said around how subsequent policy changes and mechanisms that come from these ideas benefit and protect the natural world, which ultimately is what the eNGOs exist to do. This suggests

that these ideas are at the forefront of the minds of eNGO actors, but their use is closely linked to accessing funding rather than nature conservation. Comments from interviewees representing the early days of financial ideas (from the late 1990s) paint a picture of eNGO actors curious and keen to adopt this new approach in the hope it would boost funding, awareness and environmental outcomes (SW1). The move from SW1 to SW2 appears to be staggered, and members join it individually and covertly, personally questioning the motive and effectiveness of the progression, *"…personally, it feels a bit wrong, but we have to value everything by its monetary value... we have to work within that structure to get things done*" (eNGO15). In some ways SW2 is a social world that you would be a closet member of, with members intrigued and hopeful when financial ideas and language was initially being spoken about as a way to value nature and bring it to the centre of policymaking, but did not necessarily play out in the way many had hoped: "*It's being held up as this knight in shining armour, but I would say that it's not even agreed as natural capital, it's just private finance" (eNGO2).*

There was wide recognition amongst interviewees (eNGO2,3,10,12,14,15,17) that Brexit brought significant opportunity for environmental policy innovation, but this has not been realised and is where a lot of cynicism crept into conversations. One interviewee, speaking in 2023, expressed concern that farmers are holding off making environmental improvements to their land until there is more certainty about new subsidy schemes (eNGO12). This might be to wait for government funding or for private investment via mechanisms such as BNG and carbon credits. The worry here is that much-needed environmental improvements, that may have been in the plans of landowners, such as tree and hedge planting as well as flood mitigation measures, will be postponed indefinitely if landowners believe they will receive greater financial support for these measures further down the line. As of 2024, this is still very much a live issue as the new Labour government continues to review ELMS. There was also concern and cynicism expressed about the effectiveness of ELMS if they were directed at private investment, and that this would skew the priorities of the land for conservation with the priorities of the private funder. One interviewee had concerns that if land subsidy is skewed towards support from the private sector: *"…they haven't got the same motives as government to have balance. The needs of businesses can be very powerful and effective"* (eNGO12).

As the cynicism grew, so too did suspicion towards the way financial mechanisms were being built into new ELMS. The obvious place for eNGOs to focus their lobbying activity around this is Defra, and there was a reassurance, during Gove's time as environment secretary, that the department was

putting resource and expertise into developing a scheme that would have a greater focus on nature conservation than existing schemes. However, there was definite scepticism from interviewees, that influencing and collaborating with Defra staff was to some extent futile as this is not where the power lies, *"we spend an awful lot of time trying to influence Defra and actually the overall direction of government policy is elsewhere"* (eNGO14). Interviewees expressed a belief that this power laid with the Treasury. If the Treasury was interested in an idea, if it put resource into research or published a report, there was greater likelihood the policy would be put into practice – such as BNG. Membership of SW2 is not limited to eNGOs. Cynicism comes from all angles, and farmers and landowners too show concern that eNGOs are grabbing land because they see opportunity for new income from ELMS and food and farming has been forgotten from the narrative (The Grocer, 2016). An interview with a representative from a farming network strongly expressed this view (FCON1), along with a belief that financial ideas are the most appropriate way to support farmers in a post-Brexit environment. The next social world is the result of building cynicism amongst the eNGO community, and centres on events such as the 2022 Attack on Nature campaign.

5.4.3 Social world 3: the frustrated world

Members of this social world expressed a position of feeling ignored, not being given information and subsequently shut out of decision making on environmental land management policy changes

Who is in this social world?	Key NHBOs	Key events
1. eNGO actors across the board 2. Formal coalitions (namely WCL and Greener UK) 3. Certain fields of academia 4. Local government (lesser extent) 5. Private landowners (lesser extent)	**NHBO2:** Defra-hosted working groups **NHBO3:** Blogs and policy position papers by coalitions and eNGOs **NHBO5:** WhatsApp groups of eNGO policy staff **NHBO5:** Twitter/X	(8) Attack on Nature (5) Gove - moving on from Defra

Table 5.4: SW3 membership and NHBOs

Several interviewees expressed frustration that as the development of ELMS continued, government was not listening to them, despite having previously consulted on their expertise. They spoke about feeling betrayed that eNGO input into the health and harmony consultation[40] in 2018 was ignored, with ELMS looking like they had been developed 'almost independently' from the consultation (eNGO2). The emotion and language used to express the betrayal by interviewees and documents published by eNGOs around this subject is clear and was the guiding factor when basing the four social worlds around emotions. When talk began with Gove from 2017 that subsidy would be redirected from payment based on area of land owned to payment for 'public goods', there was hope in the sector (SW1). This hope was sustained initially when talk turned to financial mechanisms and blended finance as eNGOs saw opportunity to play a pivotal role in developing and ultimately gaining from government subsidy and private investment. In multiple interviews, eNGO staff expressed frustration that their ideas for environmental land subsidy, while at first were welcomed, particularly by Defra under Gove, were subsequently ignored in favour of mechanisms familiar to those working on CAP, and those that prioritised channels of private financing (eNGO2, eNGO14, eNGO10). Frustration was also expressed on the lack of a detailed plan to put their ideas into practice, particularly the more ambitious elements of ELMS that can be traced back to concepts expressed in the Lawton Review, *"…local natural recovery was going to be the scheme which embedded those ideas* (landscape scale environmental improvements) *in practice. But of course, that's been canned"* (eNGO2).

Interviewees expressed frustration that towards the end of the period under analysis they were being increasingly and actively shut out of decision making, and their influence was declining. eNGO14 expressed anger at this decline, commenting how counterintuitive it was for government to act in this way given *"the combined membership of all of those organisations is millions".* This is an interesting point to explore, as eNGOs are aware of their wide influence and reach with the public, and this led to the assumption, in the case of this interviewee, that this would buy them influence with politicians courting votes every four years. As it played out, during the latter stages of the period under analysis (from 2022), policymakers actively turned away from eNGOs, an example of which is illustrated by this Tweet from Guardian journalist Helena Horton from 4th October 2022, relating to the Attack on

[40] (Defra, 2018) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684003/future-farming-environment-consult-document.pdf - a consultation document commissioned by Michael Gove to understand what was needed from ELMS following Brexit and move away from CAP

Nature campaign: "*It seems from speaking to Tory MPs that the official line they've been told to take is that the RSPB are liars, worrying their members on purpose to boost their mailing lists… A very bold stance to take*."

As explored in the previous section, eNGOs did not take the Attack on Nature campaign lightly and FCON3 commented on the emotional toll it took on eNGO staff, "… *people were having a tough time for sharing it… it came from a place where people just felt like being gaslit for years"* (FCON3). Interviewees, representing both individual eNGOs and formal coalitions, expressed frustration that for many years the sector has been toeing the line, looking to operate within proper channels, but were repeatedly not being listened to: *"…there was a feeling that you have all these big organisations who politely continue to call for progress and it politely continues to not happen"* (eNGO14). One interviewee, eNGO12, was critical of the ELMS stakeholder engagement process that was set up by Defra (NHBO group 2), feeling it was too large to be effective. They commented that meetings typically had up to 60 participants, which meant it was impossible to have meaningful discussion and make decisions. After a leak about the mid-tier ELM scheme (local nature recovery) and its reversion to countryside stewardship from this group (December 2022), the format of the stakeholder meetings changed. Some Defra meetings were removed from diaries following the leak that sparked the 'Attack on Nature' campaign. The meetings that remain are much smaller and more focused. A frustration expressed by several interviewees was that the influence of eNGOs weakened significantly after Micheal Gove left office. eNGO13 spoke about how they feel Defra pulled back from active consultation with eNGOs after Gove was moved on. They are involved in Defra's Environmental Land Management Engagement Group which is made up of representatives of 28 organisations (primarily eNGOs) but said this group had gone noticeably quiet. They feel this was since Thérèse Coffey came into post and that she has pulled back from actively consulting eNGOs and other stakeholders and just issuing information. It could be this was happening ahead of a general election as politicians hunkered down to prepare. There is a sense of frustration towards the end of the period under analysis, as the power and influence entrusted to Defra under the secretariat of Michael Gove was feared lost, along with any momentum to push ambitious policy change into practice: *"…what we have now is more business as usual, which is Defra as a small department, with not particularly high-profile ministers, which doesn't have much influence across government"* (eNGO14). One interviewee expressed a belief that *"…each subsequent secretary of state and minister (after Michael Gove) has weakened the ambition" (*eNGO12).

In conclusion, SW3 represents the point at which eNGOs felt they had little left to lose. Everything they had been working towards was slipping away with reforms and rollbacks on ELMS. They were feeling ignored and realised that participating and trying to affect change via the official channels of working groups and consultations had not worked. Long-established relationships with ministers and civil servants, not to mention the organisational resource which had been channelled into the participation of these groups had not resulted in the policy outcomes eNGOs were hoping for. The financial language and mechanisms put forward were not materialising or being invested in further than talk about their potential value by government. eNGOs felt they had no choice but to take a different approach, *"… I don't feel at the moment we're (eNGOs) having the influence we need, and it troubles me greatly… having strong relationships with civil servants and even with ministers has not got us anywhere near what we need to achieve" (eNGO14).*

5.4.4 Social world four: the emboldened world

Members of this social world express a position of confidence across the sector. They work through formal and informal coalitions. RSPB has emerged as the dominant player, and the most prepared to speak out.

Who is in this social world?	Key NHBOs (see table 5.1)	Key events
1. eNGO policy staff **2.** Formal coalitions (most notably Wildlife and Countryside Link and Greener UK)[41] **3.** RSPB	**NHBO4:** RSPB **NHBO2:** WCL **NHBO1:** 'Attack on Nature' and 'Defend Nature' (hashtags) **NHBO3:** Public letters signed by coalitions and multiple eNGOs **NHBO5:** Twitter/X	(8) Attack on Nature (7) Pandemic (bond building between organisations and individuals) (5) Gove (and the value of personal relationships)

Table 5.5: SW4 membership and NHBOs

SW4, although the smallest in terms of membership out of the four identified, has had arguably the most significant impact for eNGOs. Membership comprises predominantly eNGO professionals working exclusively on policy issues, with some of the larger organisations employing land policy specialists. The Brexit process sparked this group to begin a much deeper level of collaboration, and they often work through formal coalitions to do this. Formal coalitions play a pivotal role in building consensus (and recognition) between eNGOs as well as between eNGOs and government and increasingly between eNGOs and the public. During the Brexit process and the pandemic, eNGOs came to realise the value of an amplified voice, often found via a formal coalition. The coalitions also gave eNGO policy staff the opportunity to come together and share expertise, frustrations and ambitions for their respective organisations.

As interviews progressed, it became apparent that eNGO actors were increasingly participating in environmental land policy through formal coalitions. The key formal coalitions in this policy area are Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL), and to a lesser extent Greener UK, which was established to

[41] Greener UK was established to provide a voice for environmental issues throughout the Brexit process – it concluded its work in 2023: https://green-alliance.org.uk/project/greener-uk/

respond to environmental policy changes in the run up to the Brexit process. Acting via these formal coalitions became an important way for policy staff at the different eNGOs to communicate, *"I speak to colleagues in other NGOs more than I speak to colleagues within (my organisation)"* (eNGO2). Initially, eNGOs used these channels to present a joined-up voice across the sector, such as WCL's work on the food and farming consultation which features a section on 'innovative finance 'and was published as a WCL document (WCL, 2017), but; *"was led jointly by the RSPB and National Trust"* (eNGO4). eNGOs recognised the value of acting via formal coalitions due to reasons such as a belief that *"… (the) environment is not gonna be as high up the agenda* (during the next general election)*"* (ELMS14). The value of personal connections is also key, both within eNGOs and formal coalitions and this was made evident with interviewees frequently mentioning people they personally work with, but also referring to relationships between traditionally adversarial organisations such as eNGOs and NFU (eNGO14). These relationships appear to have strengthened during the pandemic where online working made it easier for individuals based across the country to talk regularly to one another. There was reference to WhatsApp groups (eNGO10), where policy staff from across organisations would discuss events and coordinate responses that would play out in public via social media - predominantly Twitter (X). The research diary written to guide the RTA process was used to note relationships between actors such as those involved in WCL, which was increasingly used as a forum to share trusted information between eNGOs as well as a channel to get information out to the public. Its CEO used to work at Defra and several interviewees referenced relationships between actors at different organisations and how personal friendships between staff at eNGOs and traditionally opposing groups, such as NFU, TFA and CLA for example, can influence working relationships, going up to CEO level (e.g. Craig Bennett TWT and Minette Batters, NFU). SWF emphasizes the importance of understanding situations of cooperation without consensus (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 121) between social worlds and how NHBOs (such as shared ideas and language) can facilitate productive relationships on controversial issues.

On its website, Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) states that it comprises organisations that have a combined membership of more than 8 million people.[42] This makes the coalition a powerful force, with a collective voice loud enough to be taken seriously by government. WCL is trusted within the eNGO community, with strong relationships and wide expertise, mentioned by FCON3 as a key factor

[42] https://www.wcl.org.uk/

in the success of the coalition "*…the whole point of the coalition* (WCL) *is to pull resources, to get everyone's best talent"* (FCON3). Public trust of eNGOs is important and there was recognition from interviewees that eNGOs have wide public support due to factors such as public concern about climate change and environmental and biodiversity decline (FCON3, eNGO10, eNGO2, eNGO4) and that their newly-found voice to speak against government decisions is a reflection of this… "*the slightly more traditional NGOs are getting punchier… if you look at polling about support for environmental action, it's high and people are worried"* (FCON3).

The RSPB was often referred to by interviewees as the leading eNGO voice on ELMS (eNGO3,12,15). There appear to be three core reasons for this; (1) they are a large, well-resourced organisation that is traditionally considered part of the establishment, well supported financially, and in terms of public support for their mission, (2) they adopted ideas that place a financial value on the natural world very early on in their activities, publishing, for example, natural capital accounts for their landholdings (RSPB, 2017). Finally (3) RSPB has embedded itself successfully into government, unlike other eNGOs of similar size and standing, by aligning with policy priorities including nature-based solutions, evidence-based policymaking, and more recently BNG. It employs in-house scientific and social science experts, and there are examples of RSPB employees working within government departments (usually as secondments). One interviewee commented that '*the RSPB have more policy staff than the rest of the eNGOs put together'* (eNGO14). Interviewees representing smaller eNGOs were generally positive about RSPB's position in the formal coalitions and saw the value of shared expertise that could be called upon to respond to policy decisions quickly, *"…RSPB have quite a lot of influence"* (FCON2) and *"…you do end up relying on a small number of organisations to carry everybody's knowledge forward and do the legwork" (*eNGO14). A notable example of RSPB's growing confidence (and frustration) in this field is its infamous 'Liars' tweet, published on the rollback of nutrient neutrality rules for developers in 2023. The tweet was, unusually, directed at named ministers including the Environment Secretary Thérèse Coffey, and it received criticism for this.[43] Its CEO, Becky Speight, was interviewed about the incident on the Today programme, where she said usual social media protocols were not followed, and she did not sign-off on the 'Liars' tweet. There was then a spotlight on the organisation's head of campaigns[44] in the right-wing press, highlighting their previous

[43] : https://twitter.com/RSPBEngland/status/1696845799383003180

[44] https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12471833/Hard-left-activists-turned-nations-favourite-bird-charity-provisional-wing-Labour-Party-GUY-ADAMS-RSPB.html)

role as a Labour party campaigner. Although the RSPB apologised for its actions, it did not take the tweet down for some months. FCON3 commented, "… *I mean whether you think putting liar and Thérèse Coffey's head*[45] *is a good idea or not it came from a place where people just felt like being gaslit for years"* (FCON3).

Even the large, well-resourced and long-established eNGOs look to RSPB for guidance on environmental land management policy. WWF, for example, has long been comfortable working alongside government policymakers and the business community, both in the UK and internationally. It was quick to adopt financial language to build these relationships, evidenced by initiatives such as its partnership in the 2006 Natural Capital project[46] which aims to support natural capital focused research around the world. WWF came relatively late to working on land subsidy policy in the UK with a small department established in 2018, as a reaction to Brexit (eNGO12). It relies on other NGOs, namely RSPB and the formal coalitions to lead this area of activity but is increasingly keen to be represented and bring specialist resource to the conversation, such as a food angle, due to its close ties with the food industry (eNGO12). In this sense, WWF is an example of a larger eNGO working via formal coalitions in this policy area, and not directly communicating with the public as one of the more outspoken eNGOs. Another example comes from an interviewee representing a large, landowning eNGO who talked about how they rely on the RSPB and formalised coalitions for information and communicating positions, even though they have significant interest in ELMS development as a very large landowner (eNGO4). This cautious approach may be due to ongoing criticism the organisation has received to its land management approach linked to rewilding, so is looking to other eNGOs to defend its conservation priorities.

SW4 is the smallest social world identified as part of the research in terms of members, but the interviews and documents published by key SW4 organisations (including formal coalitions) present a picture that this small group is effectively raising the profile of the sector with regards to ELMS development. The value of cooperation without consensus between SW4 members and traditionally adversarial partners was noted, and it is important to highlight that this occasionally extends to actors within the social world. Although competition between eNGOs is rare between staff in policy-focused roles (rather than membership or fundraising for example), where they have more to gain from

[45] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/31/rspb-chief-apologises-ministers-liars-green-policy-environment
[46] https://www.worldwildlife.org/projects/the-natural-capital-project

collaborative working, conflict and competition between eNGOs does still happen, *"…very occasionally there is conflict, it only tends to be when members (of WCL) have directly oppositional claims"* (FCON2). Despite interviewees feeling hopeful about improved collaboration, some longstanding issues around competition and the guarding of information remain, with one interviewee representing a larger eNGO commenting that *"…(we) have a big voice, so we (don't) always have to work in coalition to generate the impact we do"* (eNGO2).

5.5 Conclusions

> *"I do think the markets are good at some things, but I think given the scale and the importance of what is in play here, we can't afford to have a market failure"* (eNGO14).

Actors representing eNGOs are using ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to participate in and ultimately influence environmental land management policy outcomes. Financial language, tools and policy mechanisms are key elements of influence on the situation under analysis, and have undoubtedly acted as a bonding factor. Their use has enabled eNGO actors to talk the language of policy decision-makers within government, particularly if they can showcase their expertise and demonstrate the value of market mechanisms in their own organisation's activities. However, as SW3 and SW4 demonstrate, this support for their use and adoption into practice has not guaranteed that eNGO priorities will translate into policy, and this is understandably frustrating. This upset manifested in some instances as frustration with the ideas themselves. However, it is important to note before moving onto the discussion chapter, that the use of financial ideas, language and policy tools by eNGO actors does not tell the entire story. Additional, important elements that have emerged from analysis include the role played by the documents, networks and channels (as NHBOs) that eNGOs have created and participated in to progress their position in the situation. This participation is evident via the activity of formal coalitions, the publication and online sharing of opinion pieces and policy briefings and the impact of small networks of policy staff working closely together. Considering this, the final chapter will look at how social worlds analysis, using SWF, addresses the research question and will dig deeper into the additional areas of importance identified above, before turning to the role of emotions in social worlds. The chapter will also include the suitability of combining SWF and RTA, identify areas for taking this research further based on Durnová and Weible's call for the scaling up of small-scale policy studies, and look at the implications of the case study findings on the wider NGO landscape.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and conclusions

6.1 Introduction

At the beginning of this research, three key springboards for exploring the case study were presented. These were (1) my observations as an eNGO professional as to how ideas that place a financial value on the natural world were gaining prominence in the sector, alongside (2) the wider value placed by the sector on the approaches underpinned by the Lawton Review, which seemed in my opinion to contradict one another. Finally, (3) the potential to explore the situation under the theoretical guidance of social worlds analysis, using SWF, where all actors and non-human elements affecting a situation are included. Observations (1) and (2) provided a thread running through the research to help understand more about how and why eNGOs have been using financial language, tools and mechanisms to shape environmental land management policy in England.

The findings were explored through the creation of four distinct social worlds, grouped under the predominant emotion being expressed by eNGO actors, drawn from document analysis and interviews. This approach to social worlds analysis was a response to Durnová and Weible's call for strengthening collaboration between interpretive and mainstream policy analysis (2020) and Durnová's 2022 argument that emotions should be recognised as a key part of knowledge and decision making in the policy process (p.47). Guided by SWF and carried out using RTA, this is a novel route to explore the role of eNGOs in the policymaking process and this final chapter will reflect on how the approach has provided theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to policy research. The value of the findings to the eNGO sector will also be explored, particularly how they could be used in practice to guide eNGO activity and approaches. This section will touch on my personal reflections, drawn from a research diary written under the guidance of RTA. Finally, the chapter will think about opportunities for future research.

6.2 Summary of key findings

The research found eNGOs in England navigating a challenging situation, detailed over 14 years that featured the UK leaving the EU, a pandemic and continuing austerity. It found that eNGOs see the potential of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to influence environmental land management policy, but individuals representing eNGOs do not always agree with the approach on a

personal level and, crucially, that this is not the only way they are participating in policy development in this area. Undertaking a social worlds analysis with RTA has revealed a far richer picture of the ways in which eNGOs are working together and my reading of the interview data highlighted a collective sense of disappointment that Brexit was a missed opportunity to strengthen environmental protections. Interview and document analysis identified that eNGOs are using documents and social media channels (as NHBOs) to build support and share information widely and quickly, a practice they established over the pandemic when groups of actors across different eNGOs were meeting more regularly due to increased use of online meeting facilities (and fast-changing policy areas linked to Brexit). As interviews progressed, it became ever more apparent that eNGO actors were collaborating through formal coalitions to participate through documents they collectively create and use to publicly demonstrate (and direct) distrust and frustration to government in an increasingly confident manner.

6.3 Contribution of findings

6.3.1 Contribution to eNGOs

As explored in the literature review, existing research shows that the third sector has been stepping in where government austerity measures had seen the resources of government departments and agencies reduced. This is as evident in the environmental third sector as health and education (Paxton *et al.*, 2005; Kelly, 2007; Cook and Inman, 2012; Macmillan, 2015; Salamon and Sokolowski, 2016; Kirsop-Taylor, 2019), and there have been varying degrees of effectiveness documented (see Carter and Childs, 2018 for an example of effective eNGO policy intervention). The findings of this research support this narrative, certainly the experiences of interviewees tell the story of a widening remit for eNGOs in environmental land management policy that reaches from involvement in development to deployment of ELMS. However, there is a definite line when it comes to the ability of eNGOs to turn this widening remit and its associated responsibilities into policy outcomes. ELMS is an example of this, where eNGO actors have been heavily involved throughout the 14 years this research spans, from reviewing CAP to piloting ELM schemes on land they own. Yet, when it comes to policy implementation and longer-term outcomes, particularly when policy implementation is looking to cost more than first hoped, eNGOs are shut out of conversations (for example, SFI has been halted

due to its funding limit being reached with no notice given[47]). This lack of policy outcomes favourable to eNGOs has been addressed in the literature in terms of the serious gap between policy ambition and implementation due to agency resource (Kirsop-Taylor, 2023), but there is another element to this situation where eNGO support, which could be used to bolster the knowledge of often-stretched agency staff, is not always a trusted relationship, on either side, as explored by Milbourne and Cushman in 2013 when looking at failings related to the 'Big Society' initiative. The recommendation here would be to build trust between agency staff and eNGO policy resource, where a united voice could potentially have a greater impact on influencing policy outcomes. This is particularly plausible given the movement between third and public sector environmental policy roles highlighted in this research.

The research question asks how and why eNGOs use ideas that place a financial value on the natural world to participate in environmental land management policy. My interpretation of the data shows that in both document analysis and interviews, financial ideas and mechanisms (as NHBOs) are frequently and increasingly used to secure a place at the policymaking table, even if personally, (and sometimes organisationally) individuals do not agree with these ideas. The benefits of using the ideas have been identified by interviewees as increased recognition of and respect for organisational aims as well as potential access to funding and being able to help shape and deliver ELMS. There is a recognition amongst eNGO actors that I spoke with that their organisation could benefit financially from policy changes to land subsidy schemes, such as receiving payments for environmental improvements on their own landholdings, as well as opportunity to earn an income from consultancy activity to provide expert advice on new schemes (particularly in the light of government agency cutback, where support to landowners may have come from EA or NE in the past) (Kirsop-Taylor, 2019). However, financial ideas (NHBO1)[48] and mechanisms do not present the full picture with regards to the participation and influence of eNGO actors in this policy area, as touched on in chapter five. Here, the important role played by documents (NHBO4), networks (NHBO2) and channels (NHBO6) as NHBOs must be considered when presenting a picture of the dynamics, effectiveness and positions taken by members of the four social worlds.

[47] https://www.edie.net/defra-abruptly-closes-sustainable-farming-incentive-applications-ahead-of-scheme-revamp/
[48] Referring to table 5.1

eNGOs should reflect on the period between 2010 and 2024 with a combination of pride and resolve in addition to the frustration expressed by interviewees and shown in eNGOs' online communications. By working together and through formal coalitions they often made good use of circumstances presented to them that were largely out of their control (Brexit/pandemic). This reflects the literature that presents third sector organisations as nimble and progressive (Carter, 2018; Mermet, 2018) and led to them being valued policy partners by government from New Labour onwards (Bevir and O'Brien, 2001; Milbourne and Cushman, 2013). What was interesting to observe was the growth in confidence from eNGOs to speak more candidly as circumstances changed over the course of the period under analysis. These changing circumstances, as discussed earlier, stem from the eight key events, but most notably (1) Brexit, which forced changes to CAP that eNGOs maximised to put forward ideas they had been developing for years (including those represented in the Lawton Review), (2) the pandemic, which changed working practices and made it easier for organisations to come together and (3) the rise in the use of social media to share positions publicly. In addition, the gradual stripping back of government department and agency resource created a platform for eNGOs to fill governance gaps. These factors were combined with a growing lack of trust from the public in the government, alongside less well-known and charismatic environment secretaries after Gove, which created an opportunity for eNGOs to showcase their expertise.

It is important for eNGOs to recognise the significant role that formal coalitions play in their newfound confidence, through shared resources and pulling on skills and experience to present joined up responses to policy issues. Funding and resourcing are key concerns for third sector organisations, and this research has shown the value of using human resource to participate in formal coalitions which provide benefits such as channels for disseminating information, as well as access to a wider pool of expertise, which is particularly valuable for smaller eNGOs. The high number of documents published by formal coalitions, particularly WCL, have played and continue to play an important role in ensuring the priorities of eNGOs are represented in the development of ELMS. However, it is important to note that although eNGOs are demonstrating stronger, and more effective collaboration, due in part to the role played by formal coalitions, consensus is not always the outcome. Traditionally, there has been competition between eNGOs, especially those that compete for membership, as well as encouraged via government approaches to third sector funding (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 505). There is also evidence of disparity between the larger, more established and better financially resourced eNGOs and smaller organisations. Formal coalitions can

be used as a mouthpiece by dominant eNGOs and this can cause resentment. For example, RSPB is firmly established within government, with employees being seconded to Defra, and this was commented on by interviewees, as was the number of people working in its policy department. Its dominance was also evident in its leading of the 'Attack on Nature' campaign. In addition, the formal coalitions themselves have much less financial resource than the larger eNGOs, but they need each other as the coalitions are usually taken seriously by government due to the large number of people they represent (made up of the supporters of member eNGOs).

6.3.2 Contributions and critical reflections on SWF

Social worlds analysis has a rich history exploring controversial scientific and technical situations (Garrety and Badham, 1999), and this research found social worlds analysis a valuable theoretical approach to a situation focused on a policy question. Clarke and Star's SWF was created to support researchers undertaking social worlds analysis, providing a framework not only on the theoretical underpinnings of the approach, but insight and guidance on methods. Social worlds analysis provides a way to explore 'shared perspectives' that 'form the basis for collective action' (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 115) and the framework enabled this research to explore how eNGO actors involved in the case study came together to influence policy outcomes. As set out in the framework, this research focused on groupings of people and the tools (NHBOs) they use within and between social worlds. The elements of focus were chosen from Clarke and Star's conceptual toolbox (2008, p118), selecting situations, identities, shared ideologies and crucially boundary objects.[49] Implicated actors and actants were also initially selected to form part of the research focus, but as the data collection and analysis progressed, it became apparent that the scope and duration of the research would need to be wider to incorporate all these elements, creating an important reflection on the use of SWF, to follow the guidance of Clarke and Star and not attempt to undertake all elements of SWF in a study (Ibid, p.118). Future research could delve even deeper, using alternative SWF tools such as positional mapping, which could provide insight on where actors are sharing important ideological beliefs in relation to ideas that place a financial value on the natural world (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 128). Importantly, but beyond the scope of this research, is how positional maps include the role of 'implicated actors', those on the receiving end of a policy change, but who are not involved in the

[49] See table 5.1

process of its development (Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 123). I have found social worlds analysis a valuable theoretical approach when exploring the role of emotions in policy research as it encourages the researcher to think carefully about not only who features in a social world, but the tools, language and ideas (NHBOs) they use to participate. Introducing RTA as the method to undertake social worlds analysis has given novel insight into the interview and document data, acknowledging the positionality of the researcher throughout.

6.3.3 Social worlds membership and activity

A key reflection from the activity of social worlds is the differences between personal and professional thoughts on ideas that place a financial value on the natural world. The data analysis found overlap and fluidity between eNGO actors (and NHBOs) within the four social worlds, with some membership focused more on professional opinions than personal. Members of SW1 (hopeful), for example, express publicly through their work their support for ideas that place a financial value on the natural world and the policy mechanisms they produce, such as BNG, by writing blogs, policy positions and adding their name to organisational and formal coalition documents. However, when speaking with interviewees on a one-to-one basis and asking specific questions around their thoughts on these ideas, and their understanding of the benefits they could have on environmental land management, I frequently found the responses to be much more nuanced, or even overtly against financial ideas, which would put them in SW2 (cynic).

6.3.4 The value of identifying NHBOs as part of an interpretive policy analysis

A key value of using SWF was the significance placed by the framework on non-human elements, to explore not only who was involved, but what. NHBOs can be objects, ideas or concepts that are important to members of multiple social worlds, understood across social worlds and which can be used and shaped to progress positions as well as stall activity. Clarke and Star argue that boundary objects are a useful tool to understand complex situations, by studying not only what boundary objects are being used but paying attention to actors' relationships with them (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 121). Defining NHBOs into primary and secondary objects, as recommended by Garrety and Badham (1999), created opportunity to sort the key NHBOs used by actors in the case study. Clarke and Star argue that non-human elements act *"as translation devices but also as resources for the formation and expression of professional identities"* (2008, p. 126) and documents published by eNGOs were identified as integral to the formation and activity of the four social words, particularly

SW4. The documents identified as key NHBOs came in a range of formats, including short policy statements and blogs expressing opinions on or reactions to government decisions, as well as well-resourced natural capital accounts of eNGO landholdings (e.g. RSPB, 2017), demonstrating commitment to the ideas and policy positions being developed by government around financial mechanisms. The importance placed on documents by eNGOs actors became apparent as the interviews progressed. It became clear that documents, and the ideas expressed within, were being used to build consensus within the social worlds, but also to win public support by communicating positions in a public sphere. However, it is important to reflect that during conversations it became apparent that although documents were shared on a public platform (almost always Twitter), the public were not necessarily the intended audience. This tactic was also an important route to government and Defra actors, who were then more likely to react to a position aired publicly, than via a closed meeting or direct communication. One interviewee highlighted that although they see Twitter as a negative space, it is also a good route to journalists and academics (eNGO2). Interviewees often referenced specific reports, some of which were already included in document analysis and some of which were added following mention during an interview. This was the case with the 2021 Dasgupta Review (FCON4), published by the Treasury, that was being used extensively by the Green Alliance coalition to design policy approaches based on its findings around the financial value and benefits of biodiversity improvements (Dasgupta, 2021). It became evident that on multiple occasions, when interviewees were talking about their organisation's effectiveness and influence, they were often referring to publications, rather than personal interaction and influence, *"…particularly those bill briefings, I think have become like a very trusted resource for parliamentarians to the point where some of them just read them out"* (FCON3).

The Health and Harmony document that set out the consultation on environmental land subsidy after Brexit (Defra, 2018) was mentioned as important by multiple interviewees (eNGO2,4,13), and significant in the creation of SW4. This document was published under Michael Gove as environment secretary; the Brexit process was in full swing and eNGOs were presented with a genuine (and rare) opportunity to influence a policy area that was critical to their organisational missions. As a bonus, they had started to realise the potential of new streams of income linked to ELMS and private finance (eNGO2,3,8,11). Given this situation they were quick to come together to push forward on achieving their collective aims. eNGOs often turned to academics (both in-house and via academic institutions) to give validity and rigour to their work, demonstrating their commitment to evidence-based

policymaking which was featuring more frequently in government communication. This was referenced by one interviewee, who said "*…we used to work closely with academics… we always used to take things for peer review and test them into certain ministries, mostly Defra."* (eNGO10). It suggests that eNGOs and the academics they were collaborating with had a shared understanding of the NHBOs they were creating. This practice of working within the establishment, following its rules, had become business as usual for eNGOs, referenced via interviewees as well as the documents they were publishing. This fed into the strength of the betrayal expressed in the 'Attack on Nature' campaign, leading to the position taken by some eNGOs (initially RSPB), that they had nothing to lose by speaking out about decisions they felt they had no hand in and actively disagreed with. Guided by SWF, allowing space and time in a research project utilising RTA to identify and consider the role of NHBOs alongside the role of human actors has proven a worthwhile and insightful endeavour. Opening analysis, not only to documents, but networks, channels and organisations, as well as conceptualising the ideas used for participation as NHBOs has strengthened understanding of the situation and supported the building of the social worlds.

Before moving on from NHBOs, it is important to return briefly to a criticism boundary objects, and the wider topic of boundary work has received in recent years. In a 2019 paper, Maria do Mar Pereira argued that the value and effectiveness of boundary work in STS is compromised for marginalised groups where persistent structures of exclusion occur (p. 340). She argues that this must be recognised, addressed and incorporated into theorisation, which is an argument equally relevant to boundary objects and policy studies (as well as STS), where boundary objects are likely recognisable to members of social worlds because membership is made up of individuals from narrow social economic and ethnic groups. Dar, when looking at the impact of an English language report positioned as a boundary object used by an international NGO, found that boundary objects can be used as a way to maintain power relations (Dar, 2018, p. 579) and argues for recognition of local knowledge (and language) as well as critical reflection on the ways in which boundary objects can reproduce inequalities. Thankfully, more attention is being given to inequity in the conservation sector in the UK, through projects such as the Race Report, which seeks to address the reasons behind why the environment sector is amongst the least diverse in the UK (The Race Report, 2024). However, there is a very long way to go, and future research in this field that utilises boundary objects should look to question and explore issues of recognisability and power relations.

6.3.5 Using RTA to undertake social worlds analysis

RTA proved to be a valuable methodological approach to undertake a social worlds analysis. This was due, in no small part to the significance RTA places on the positionality of the researcher as part of the analysis process, in keeping with SWF and many other interpretive approaches. The resulting codes and themes, created from interview and document data are a representation of my reading, understanding and construction of the situation in alignment with Clarke and Star's argument that context is not separate from the situation (Clarke and Star, 2008, p. 128). One concern of interviewees known to me was that they would 'not know enough' to be able to answer the questions. The guiding principles of RTA helped address this concern by being able to confidently respond that I am not looking for right or wrong answers and not trying to hide my subjectivity under an impossible goal of neutrality (Braun and Clarke, 2023, p. 4). On reflection, I found little difference in terms of the openness of the interviewees I already knew to those I did not and feel RTA's guidance in how to approach interviews led to rich and insightful data. The SWF approach of using positions taken to build understanding of social worlds has included, under the guidance of RTA, the *'researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process'* (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594). To explore this, a research diary was written, with a brief overview presented here as part of the concluding discussion. The diary was key to constructing the four social worlds, as it was used to reflect on conversations, note thoughts and pose questions back to myself. The diary was a collection of notes and reflections on both interviews and documents read. It was written alongside the data analysis process and discussed regularly with the supervisory team. An example of how the questions it posed influenced the findings of the research include one that asked how best to reflect on the outspoken comments made by RSPB in 2022 (later known as the 'Attack on Nature' campaign), on proposed changes to ELMS by the Truss government. I noted in the diary that RSPB used Twitter for this, with a very strongly worded tweet that set off a chain of responses from all the major eNGOs. Defra then began removing meetings from people's diaries with no explanation. I noted at the time how one interviewee who was involved with this action said they reached a point where they just had to say something, too many lines had been crossed. Diary entries were a key tool used to note seeds of ideas, some of which were then developed into key findings, and I would encourage researchers using RTA to include this in their research design. The research diary was also used to note documents and reports being used by eNGOs, detailing when interviewees referred to documents such as something mentioned by a representative of Green Alliance (linked to Greener UK) who was working on a document to align

the Dasgupta Review with a natural capital approach. This observation led to the inclusion of the document in the analysis, an interview with a newly identified policy actor involved in the report and further down the line, a key finding that eNGOs and formal coalitions were creating and using documents like this as NHBOs to influence policy outcomes.

6.3.6 Interpretive policy studies and the role of emotions

In responding to Durnová and Weible's call for interpretive policy studies to be used as a base to scale up and test findings using mainstream, quantitative policy process approaches (Durnová and Weible, 2020), this research found value in undertaking a small-scale, qualitative exploration, that explored a live policy issue. The findings could be taken and adapted to a mainstream approach to test if eNGO confidence is growing in other policy areas and if ideas that place a financial value on the natural world are being adopted, despite individual scepticism, across much larger data sets. Interpretive policy analysis, including research carried out using RTA, is particularly suited to focus on emotions as this not only allows for human bias and reflexivity, it expects and uses this to develop findings. Pierce argues that including emotions in policy analysis can aid exploration into actors' motivations, helping researchers to understand how people *'think and behave'(Pierce, 2021, p. 606)*. Building findings around emotions has played an important role in this analysis, with the four social worlds built around my interpretation of the predominant emotion being expressed by eNGO actors. In this sense, it was the emotion that was bonding the social world, with its members understanding the position of one another through the emotion. Grouping social worlds by emotions created, particularly in SW4, a small group of members with deep levels of trust. The resulting NHBOs created and used by the social worlds can be seen as representations of the emotions. This approach helped build understanding of why actors behave in the way they do, including the 'arguments and symbols they deploy in their actions' (Durnová, 2018, p. 96). Durnová argues that exploring emotions in policy research can build understanding of outcomes and change. In this example, the emotions expressed by interviewees were clear and strong, so it felt fitting and appropriate to build the social worlds around them. Emotions worked well as an umbrella under which to explore position and action in a way in which I hope would be recognisable to those within each social world. This framing also gives prominence to the emotional reaction to arguments and symbols, (human and non-human), which demonstrates its suitability with SWF. With contrasting emotions within and between the four social worlds, down to individual level, understanding how eNGO actors feel about ideas that place a financial value on the natural world sheds insight into how they are using these ideas to influence environmental land

management policy. The study of emotions when exploring policy questions is emerging as a new area of analysis for policy studies (Pierce, 2021), (Durnová, 2018), (Durnová and Hejzlarová, 2018), (Durnová, 2022, p. 47), with both interpretive and mainstream approaches recognising the potential (see Fullerton, Gabehart and Weible, 2024 for a mainstream policy approach). In this sense, interpretive studies using emotions to draw findings could be extrapolated to other policy areas using mainstream approaches.

6.4 Final reflections and areas for future research

Despite eNGOs' greater profile in the development and delivery of environmental land management policy, my reading of the empirical data found that collectively, the sector experienced a bumpy ride full of compromise and frustration, and that groups of eNGO actors came together to navigate an approach that ensured their organisational missions were represented. eNGO actor positions were explored through four social worlds, developed to highlight the breadth and depth of success, frustration and determination from eNGOs in one area of environmental policymaking. This research contributes to the understanding of the ways in which eNGOs participate in environmental policymaking by demonstrating how social worlds analysis, when combined with attention to emotions, can aid exploration into the dynamics between eNGOs and government. By situating eNGOs within distinct yet overlapping social worlds, based on the emotion interpreted by the researcher, the approach highlights how emotional drivers such as frustration and hope shape not only individual actions but also the collective strategies through which eNGO actors navigate shifting political contexts. In line with recent public policy research, this emotional dimension enriches traditional analyses of environmental policy by revealing how shared emotional responses to a situation can bind or divide actors, sustaining cooperation amid tensions based on external circumstances. In doing so, the thesis extends the application of social worlds analysis beyond its traditional applications in STS to demonstrate its interpretive power in environmental policy research.

There are obvious limitations of small-scale qualitative studies like this, in that they examine only one case, meaning it is not feasible to draw wider, sector-specific conclusions. However, as Durnová and Weible suggest, this type of approach may be suitable as the basis for a larger, mainstream approach that draws from its findings. This may be particularly suitable when looking to further understand the finding that eNGOs have become more confident and bolder in standing up to government decisions

they are not in agreement with, outside of the environmental third sector. A larger-scale study could develop this approach further by exploring the role of documents as boundary objects and including the methods used to disseminate information in encouraging and shaping communication between socials worlds as well as publicly demonstrating a position. Such research could examine how documents, as boundary objects, acquire meaning through interpretation, and how their interpretive flexibility allows different actors to project their priorities while maintaining shared language and policy priorities. A more extensive investigation could explore the ways in which documents circulate emotionally as well as bureaucratically, carrying traces of emotions such as tension, pride or resistance that influence how policies evolve. In this way, and guided by Durnova's work on emotions in policy making (Durnová, 2018), future work could deepen understanding of how meaning, emotion and interpretation converge in the development and delivery of environmental policy. Also of interest may be looking to establish via mainstream methods, or indeed further qualitative approaches, if the wider NGO community are using documents (and distribution channels) in a similar way to eNGOs.

The social worlds identified as part of this research are eNGO-focused and present an entirely subjective interpretation, constructed from one reading of the situation, context and data, and as such, findings should be considered with this awareness. It is important to consider that members of social worlds identified through this research are by no means exhaustive and extend well beyond the interview pool. There may be value in further exploration into who and how actors outside of eNGOs (including implicated actors) are affecting the development of ELMS.

Also of potential value for future research was the observation that no interviewees overtly questioned the concept of government subsidy by suggesting the route to better environmental land management could be achieved without government intervention, even with constant promises of private finance on the horizon. Reflecting on this in future research could be important as it may be evidence of a deep belief from eNGOs in government subsidy that binds social worlds, or it could be that my questioning should have probed this area further. Finally, it is worth noting that this is a live case study and the story is far from over. The new government in the UK, elected in the 2024 general election, has already made its mark on ELMS by halting applications to SFI (tier 1), due to spending caps being reached (Defra, 2025), as well as reviewing the approach and effectiveness of BNG, with particular attention to the monitoring and evaluation of land used in the scheme, which is heavily behind target (The Independent, 2025). As the situation evolves, considering the emotional

motivation behind actions may help eNGOs plan for the most effective route to get their priorities heard. Much has changed for the eNGOs involved in environmental land management policy since the beginning of this research period in 2010. The political landscape in England has seen significant change and eNGOs have adapted, as they always have, and likely always will. However, although eNGOs are undoubtedly frustrated and angry, the sector feels stronger, more confident and better prepared to use learnings from the past 14 years to respond to future challenges. The Lawton Review has certainly been heeded by eNGOs, and not just on a practical approach to nature conservation. As the findings from this research show, and to quote the review's mantra, the organisations themselves have become 'bigger, better and more joined up'.

7. References

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Appendices

Appendix i: Glossary and abbreviations

25YEP	25-Year Plan for the Environment
ACF	Advocacy coalition framework
ANT	Actor network theory
BNG	Biodiversity net gain
BO	Boundary object
CAP	Common agricultural policy
CLA	Country Land and Business Association
CS	Countryside stewardship
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EA	Environment Agency
ELMS	Environmental land management schemes
eNGO	Environmental non-governmental organisation
ESS	Ecosystem services
LNR	Local nature recovery
NAO	National Audit Office
NBS	Nature based solutions
NCC	Natural Capital Committee
NE	Natural England
NEA	National ecosystems assessment
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHBO	Non-human boundary object
NPF	Narrative policy framework
NT	National Trust
OEP	Office of Environmental Protection
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PES	Payments for ecosystem services
PET	Punctuated equilibrium theory
RSPB	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RSWT	Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
RTA	Reflexive thematic analysis
SFI	Sustainable farming incentive
STS	Science and technology studies
SWF	Social worlds framework
TA	Thematic analysis
TFA	Tennant Farmers Association
TS	Third sector
WCL	Wildlife and Countryside Link
WT	Woodland Trust
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

Appendix ii: Interview consent form

Consent Form

Title of research project: **How do environmental NGOs participate in the policy process?**

Researcher: **Kerry Stranix**

I confirm that I have read and/or discussed the nature of the above-named research project so that I understand its aims and objectives. I agree to be interviewed as part of this research and for the interview to be recorded for research purposes.

I understand that my participation is entirely **voluntary** and that I have a **right to withdraw** before, during or within one month of my interview, without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. Should I decide to withdraw, I understand that any information I have provided will be safely discarded and not used in the analysis or outputs of the named research project. I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question, I am free to decline without needing to specify why.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly **confidential**, such that *only* the named researcher can trace this information back to me individually. I understand that the information I provide will be **anonymised** and that my name will not be linked with the research materials or any published or unpublished materials that result from the research. I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in the named project in an *anonymised form*. I understand that all practicable steps will be taken to protect the privacy, confidentiality and security of the data I provide, in compliance with UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

I understand that the information I provide will be retained for as long as may be required for the completion of the research and will be safely discarded thereafter; however, I may ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time. In accordance with the *Data Protection Act 2018*, I can request access to the information I have provided at any time.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be informed about the outcomes of the research.

I,_____(PRINT NAME) **Date**:
consent to participate in the above-named study

Appendix iii: Interview protocol

Interview protocol

Precise questions will depend on the interviewee's role and experience, and the emerging themes in each interview. The following are indications of the areas of interest:

1) Introductory questions:

- *Thank the participant for taking part – ask if it's OK to begin recording*
- *Please can you tell me about your role at …*

2) ELMS:

1. *Do you think financial subsidies are a valuable tool in nature conservation?*
2. *Are ELMS a good progression from subsidy schemes provided under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?*
3. *Do you work with other eNGOs on ELMS? Tell me about this?*
4. *Do you work with government departments/agencies/local government on ELMS? Tell me about this*
5. *How is your working relationship with other stakeholders (such as NFU, CLA)?*
6. *Where do you go for trusted information? I.e. within or outside your organization?*
7. *Do you see examples of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world featuring in your work on ELMs? Is this helpful? What other ideas are prominent/useful?*

If needed:

- *From your point of view, what have been the main frustrations in the development of ELMs?*
- *What techniques have worked well to ensure your organisation's priorities are represented in ELMS development? What have not worked so well?*
- *Have you noticed a change in responsiveness from government or agencies at any point? If so, why do you think this is?*

Rounding up and concluding questions:

1. *Is there anything else you would like to add, or would you like to ask me any questions?*
2. *Is there anyone else within or outside of your organisation that you think I should talk to about this subject?*

Thank them for their time, explain what happens next (timescales etc.) and offer to share findings with them. If suitable, ask if they are happy for me to contact them with follow-up questions or to ask for further clarification on their answers. Reassure that this is unlikely and if needed will not require a lot of time. Remind them that they can withdraw their contribution within one month of the interview.

Appendix iv: Organisations represented by interviewees

eNGOs

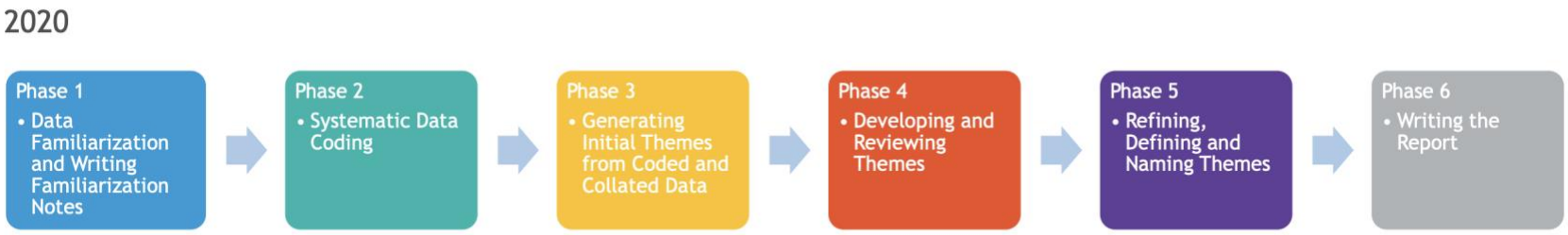
- Essex Wildlife Trust
- National Trust
- Rivers Trust
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust
- The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The World Wide Fund for Nature
- Woodland Trust

Formal Coalitions and networks

- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
- Green Alliance
- Greener UK
- Wildlife and Countryside Link

Appendix v: RTA phases and NVivo coding schema

Figure Aiv: Analysis phases of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), diagram taken from NVivo Research Network, Thematic Analysis using NVivo (Vazzoler, 2023). Created with information from (Braun and Clarke, 2021)



RTA phase 2 codes (developed from SWF and added to during phase 2-4 of RTA)

Name	Description
Social worlds	Group all codes that help identify social worlds, members and resources
Positions/beliefs	Where interviewees mention their position on financial mechanisms and how this influences their work
Core beliefs	Expressed core beliefs that influence positions
Approaches to conservation	
Lawton Review	Mention of the 2010 report or of the approach of joining up landscapes for nature recovery
Neoliberalism and capitalism	Operating within existing systems and ideologies (positions). Do actors believe in them, or are they tools (NHBO) that are being used in SW activity?
Shrinking state support	Mentions around the impact of shrinking government departments and or agencies. Or not

Name	Description
eNGOs picking up state work	
Policy positions	Note changes, for example after significant event or sustained learning
Policy mechanism positions	Note changes, for example if used as a bargaining tool between social worlds
Social worlds info	
Activity	General SW activity
Formation	Examples of social worlds forming and the reasons why they form or strengthen - what circumstances supported this?
Members	Mention of people they work with on the case study area
Resources	Financial, expertise, skills, venues, access
Consensus and coordination	Within and between social worlds
ELMS	
CAP	
ELMS as a disaster	
ELMS as a positive progression	
eNGO resource and influence on ELMS	
eNGOs benefitting from land subsidy schemes	
Formal coalitions	Formal coalitions that interviewees self-identify as belonging to or using the resources of
NCC	Mentions of the NCC
Non-human elements	Ideas/documents/networks/organisations/channels used by or forming part of a social world
Ideas	Descriptions and mentions of the ideas that are used and present in the interviewees' work. Seen as NHBOs
Financial terms	Instances of interviewees using financial language to talk about nature conservation
Natural capital	
NCEA	

Name	Description
Attributing a financial value to nature is a good thing	The benefits identified by interviewees of attributing a financial value to nature, either by explicitly referencing ideas, or indirectly as they talk about their work
Attributing a financial value to nature is unhelpful	Negative comments about financial ideas that seek to attribute a financial value to nature and the natural world
Biodiversity net gain	Mentions and discussion
Carbon markets	Mentions of markets for carbon and discussion around this
Ecosystem services	Mentions and discussion
Payments for ecosystem services (PES)	Mentions and discussions around the mechanisms for financing ecosystem services
Net zero	Mentions and discussion
Private investment in nature	References to mechanisms that are being used and/or spoken about by interviewees
Blended finance	Mentions of and discussion about this term
eNGO benefits of new private market mechanisms	
Nature markets	Term used by UK government
Public money for public goods	Used by Michael Gove
Nature based solutions	Mentions and discussion
Rewilding	Mentions and discussion
Brexit	Not if interviewees agreed or disagreed with Brexit, but their thoughts on the opportunities it could bring the case study area
Brexit as a disaster for conservation	
Brexit as an opportunity for progression from CAP	
REUL Bill	Mentions and discussion
Change in SoS and or minister	Mentions and discussion

Name	Description
Climate change	Climate change as an exogenous shock (?) influencing policy actors
Cost of living	Mentions and discussion
Covid	The impact of the pandemic on the eNGO sector/conservation/ELMS
Ukraine war	Mentions and discussion
Activity within SWs	
Policy entrepreneurs	Notable policy actors using the situation to progress a (sometimes personal) agenda
Notable social world members	
Policy learning	
Policy venues	
Govt departments	Details about working for/with government departments and their makeup
Defra	
Natural England	
OEP	
Government agencies	Info about Govt agencies, lack of resource and effectiveness
eNGOs	
eNGO structures	How the organisations are structured and operate
Individual eNGO activity	Lack of cooperation or consensus
Interviewees' level of experience in the environmental third sector	Experience taken on case-by-case basis
Experienced within the sector	
New to the sector	
eNGO resource and role in the policy process	
Personal reflections on eNGOs	Misc comments to sort on the structure and function of eNGOs
Personal reflections on working in eNGO	To sort into other codes as the analysis progresses

Name	Description
sector	
Political landscape	Wider comment on the political landscape – developed over course of interviews
Conservative government	Mentions and discussion
EU focus of activity	Mentions and discussion
General election 2024	Mentions and discussion
Labour government	Mentions and discussion
Political integrity	Mentions and discussion
Political short-termism	Mentions and discussion
Standout quotes	Text that may be used to illustrate points in findings

RTA phase 3-5 codes

Overarching themes/social worlds

Name	Description
Theme/social world 1 - hope	
Theme/social world 2 - disappointment/cynicism	
Theme/social world 3 – frustration/anger	
Theme/social world 4 – confidence/emboldened	

Appendix vi: Overview of eight key events with associated key actors and NHBOs

Event	Date	Key actors	Key NHBOs
1: Publication of the Lawton Review	2010	Report authors eNGO staff from CEO to onsite delivery staff	**Document:** The report **Idea:** of 'bigger, better and more joined up'
2: Election of the coalition government and subsequent publication of the natural environment white paper	2010/2011	David Cameron Defra staff	**Document:** Natural environment white paper **Idea:** Natural capital **Organisation:** Defra
3: Establishment and subsequent role of the Natural Capital Committee	2011 - 2020	Dieter Helm eNGO leaders Government agencies Defra staff	**Network:** NCC **Documents:** Committee reports and natural capital accounts **Ideas** of natural capital and associated policy mechanisms such as ecosystem services and BNG
4: Brexit referendum and subsequent gradual move from CAP to ELMS	2016+	David Cameron Michael Gove eNGO leaders eNGO policy staff Formal eNGO coalitions Landowners	**Policy:** CAP ELMS **Event:** Brexit (as a disaster for conservation) Brexit (as an opportunity for positive policy change – silver lining)
5: Michael Gove as environment secretary	2017-2019	Michael Gove Defra staff NCC members Defra staff eNGO leaders	**Document:** 25-Year plan for the environment, Health and Harmony – the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit **Ideas/policy mechanisms:** natural capital informing ideas of 'nature markets' 'public money for public goods'
6: Emergence of BNG as a potential source of income for eNGOs	2019-2021	NCC recommendations	**Idea/policy mechanism:** BNG as a concept/ mechanism **Document:** The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review **Document:** Nature markets: A framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming (Defra, 2023)
7: Covid19 pandemic	2019-2022	Formal eNGO coalitions	**Network:** Formal coalitions **Channel:** Zoom/Teams meetings **Documents:** Policy letters/notes/briefs and statements issued by formal coalitions and signed by multiple members **Channel:** Twitter/tweets
8: Attack on Nature campaign	2022	RSPB staff Liz Truss Kwasi Kwarteng	**Channel:** Twitter/tweets **Organisation:** Individual eNGO organizations **Networks:** Formal coalitions

Appendix vii: Secretary of state for the environment throughout case study (2010-2024)

The Rt Hon Steve Barclay: 2023 - 2024

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP: 2022 to 2023

The Rt Hon Ranil Jayawardena MP: 2022 to 2022

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP: 2020 to 2022

The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP: 2019 to 2020

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP: 2017 to 2019

The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP: 2016 to 2017

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP: 2014 to 2016

The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP: 2012 to 2014

Dame Caroline Spelman: 2010 to 2012

Appendix viii: Documents analysed

Colour key:

Pre-case study publication
eNGO
Government agency/department
Government
Formal coalition
Other

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
Paying for the Stewardship of the Countryside: A Greenprint for the Future of Agri-environment Schemes in England	Wildlife and Countryside Link	2001	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Agri-environment%20Schemes%20Greenprint(report)_Jul2001.pdf	
HM Treasury Green Book	HM Treasury	2003	https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20080305121602/http://www.hm-Treasury.gov.uk/media/3/F/green_book_260907.pdf	Early mention of natural capital
Wildlife and Countryside Link's response to Defra's consultation on Options for Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy	Wildlife and Countryside Link	2003	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2003/WCL_repsonse_to_CAP_reform_%20Oct03.pdf	
Application of the natural capital approach to the marine environment to aid decision-making	Wildlife and Countryside Link	2005	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_statement_AES_scheme_launch_03Mar05.pdf	
Millenium ecosystem assessment, Ecosystems and human well-being - synthesis	UN	2005	https://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.356.aspx.pdf	Beginning to value the natural world as capital

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
The economics of ecosystems and biodiversity	TEEB project	2007/8 - ongoing	https://teebweb.org/publications/other/teeb-interim-report/	
Farming policies need a radical 'Health Check' say green groups	Wildlife and Countryside Link	2007	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/BeyondthePillarspublicationPR_12Nov07.pdf	
An introductory guide to valuing ecosystem services	Defra	2007	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69192/pb12852-eco-valuing-071205.pdf	From millennium project at national level
Beyond the Pillars: Wildlife and Countryside Link's policy perspective on the future of the CAP	Wildlife and Countryside Link	2008	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_Beyond_the_Pillars_11Mar08.pdf	
No Charge? Valuing the natural environment	Natural England	2010	https://www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/No-Change-Valuing-the-Natural-Environment-pdf.pdf	
Making space for Nature	Defra/Chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS	2010	https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402170324mp_/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf	Report announcement: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-today
The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature - white paper	Defra	2011	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228842/8082.pdf	Natural environment white paper (first for 20 years). Under SoS Caroline Spelman. Establishment of the Natural Capital Committee. Close alignment with natural environment and economic recovery. Mention of Lawton Review, much less of nature markets and private investment mechanisms.

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
UK National Ecosystem Assessment	UNEP-WCMC	2011	http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx	
ThinkBIG How and why landscape-scale conservation benefits wildlife, people and the wider economy	NE/England Biodiversity Group	2011	https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/30047	
Crunch time for CAP: Choosing the right tools for a richer countryside	WCL	2011	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Crunch_Time_for_CAP_08Nov11.pdf	
The State of Natural Capital: Towards a framework for measurement and valuation (NCC first report)	NCC	2013	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516707/nc-state-natural-capital-first-report.pdf	First report from the Natural Capital Committee
The State of Natural Capital: Restoring our Natural Assets - Second report to the Economic Affairs Committee	NCC	2014	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516698/nc-state-natural-capital-second-report.pdf	
Farming fit for the future	WCL	2015	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/farming_fit_for_future_vision.pdf	
The State of Natural Capital: Protecting and Improving Natural Capital for Prosperity and Wellbeing (3rd NCC report)	NCC	2015	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516725/nc-state-natural-capital-third-report.pdf	
A new policy for our countryside: Environment, Farming and Rural Development	WWF, RSPB, RSWT, NT	2016	http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/18109_farming___wildlife_policy___a4_leaflet_27_9_16_c.pdf	
Natural partners: Why nature conservation and natural capital approaches should work together	Green Alliance	2016	https://www.green-alliance.org.uk/resources/Natural_partners.pdf	

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
New markets for land and nature: How Natural Infrastructure Schemes could pay for a better environment	Green Alliance	2016	https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/New_markets_for_land_and_nature.pdf	
Natural partners: Why nature conservation and natural capital approaches should work together	Green Alliance	2016	https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Natural_partners.pdf	
Improving Natural Capital: An assessment of progress - NCC 4th report	NCC	2017	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/585429/nc-annual-report-2017.pdf	Included the recommendation that government should promote natural capital valuation and accounting in both the private and public sector
How to do it: A natural capital workbook Version 1, Principles of Natural Capital Accounting	NCC	2017	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957503/nc-natural-capital-workbook.pdf	Guide for the application of natural capital. A background paper for those wanting to understand the concepts and methodology underlying the UK Natural Capital accounts being developed by ONS and Defra
Accounting for Nature: A Natural Capital Account of the RSPB's estate in England	RSPB	2017	https://www.nienvironmentlink.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/accounting-for-nature.pdf	No longer available on RSPB website
Wildlife Trusts policy brief: What next for farming? A future policy for land in England: investing in our natural assets	RSWT	2017	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/What%20next%20for%20farming%20-%20a%20future%20policy%20for%20land%20in%20England%2C%20investing%20in%20our%20natural%20assets.pdf	
Assessing the costs of environmental land management in the UK	Matt Rayment	2017	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/RSPB%2C%20The%20National%20Trust%20and%20The%20Wildlife%2	Report for RSPB, National Trust and Wildlife Trusts

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
			0Trusts%20-%20Assessing%20the%20costs%20of%20environmental%20land%20management%20in%20the%20UK.%20Final%20report..pdf	
Increasing investment in natural capital	Aldersgate Group	2017	https://www.aldersgategroup.org.uk/content/uploads/2022/03/1711-Increasing-investment-in-natural-capital-updated_for-web.pdf	
A future sustainable farming and land management policy for England (overview)	WCL	2017	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/WCL%20Sustainable%20FarmingFINAL%20spread.pdf	
A future Sustainable Farming and Land Management Policy for England: A Wildlife and Countryside Link discussion paper	WCL	2017	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link%20farming%20and%20land%20use%20policy%20paper%20FINAL%20Sep%202017.pdf	
Agriculture at a crossroads: The need for sustainable farming and land use policies	WCL	2017	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link-GUK%20Agriculture%20Principles%20Briefing_2.pdf	
Natural Capital Committee Annual Report 2018 - Fifth report to the Economic Affairs Committee	NCC	2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677873/nc-annual-report-2018.pdf	
UK Natural Capital: interim review and revised 2020 roadmap	ONS	2018	ONS, July 2018. UK Natural Capital: interim review and revised 2020 roadmap	A background paper for those wanting to understand the concepts and methodology underlying the UK Natural Capital accounts being developed by ONS and Defra
A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment	Defra	2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf	High-profile report stating the government's commitment 'to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited'.

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill	Defra	2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766849/draft-environment-bill-governance-principles.pdf	
Health and harmony: The future for food, farming and the environment in a green Brexit	Defra	2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684003/future-farming-environment-consult-document.pdf	Mentioned (eNGO10) as key document/important moment in the progression of ELMS
Health and Harmony: The future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit Summary of responses	Defra	2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741461/future-farming-consult-sum-resp.pdf	
Farm Inspection and Regulation Review	Glenys Stacey for Defra	2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/764286/farm-inspection-regulatio-review-final-report-2018.pdf	
Fieldfare, the RSPB's land use policy newsletter	RSPB	2018	https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/FIELDFARE%2066%20Autumn%202018_tcm9-461414.pdf	No longer available online
A Wilder Britain: Creating a Nature Recovery Network to bring back wildlife to every neighbourhood	RSWT	2018	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Nature_recovery_network_final.pdf	
Response to Defra's consultation: Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit	RSWT	2018	https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/defra-future-of-farming-consultation-may-2018---nt-response.pdf	An example of an eNGO's reponse to the consultation.
Undertaking Corporate Natural Capital Accounting (CNCA)	National Trust	2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516975/nc	

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
			c-research-cnca-national-trust-testimonial.pdf	
Bridging the finance gap: How do we increase financing for conservation?	RSPB	2018	https://web.archive.org/web/20220114082519/https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/aboutthersbp/bridging-the-finance-gap.pdf	
United by our Environment, Our Food, Our Future	NFU	2018	https://www.nfuonline.com/media/k3upirkg/uniited-by-our-environment-our-food-our-future.pdf	
Putting our eggs in a better basket: A survey of English farmers' opinions on agriculture policy	WCL	2019	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/WCL_Farmer_Survey_Report_Jun19FINAL.pdf	
State of Natural Capital Report 2019: Sixth Report to the Economic Affairs Committee of the Cabinet	NCC	2019	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/916074/ncc-annual-report-2019.pdf	Criticises proposed workings of OEP as lacking necessary independence and more generally weakening from current EU legislation
Net environmental gain: The Natural Capital Committee's response to Defra's commission	NCC	2019	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/909268/ncc-advice-net-gain-response1.pdf	
Measuring environmental change: Outcome indicator framework for the 25-year environment plan	Defra	2019	https://oifdata.defra.gov.uk/	Indicators based on the natural capital conceptual framework (see nat cap workbook version 1)
Early review of the new farming programme	NAO and Defra	2019	https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Early-review-of-the-new-farming-programme.pdf	
Fieldfare, the RSPB's land use policy newsletter, Oct 2019	RSPB	2019	https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/Fieldfare%20Summer%202019%20web_tcm9-469739.pdf	No longer available online

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
The state of Natural England 2018-19	Prospect trade union	2019	https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2019/January/16/The-state-Natural-England-2018-19	
State of Natural Capital Annual Report 2020 (7th NCC report)	NCC	2020	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/858739/nc-annual-report-2020.pdf	
NCC end of term report	NCC	2020	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/931695/nc-end-of-term-report.pdf	
Interim response to the 25-Year Environment Plan: Progress report & advice on a green economic recovery	NCC	2020	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919997/nc-interim-response-25yr-env-plan.pdf	
Final Response to the 25-Year Environment Plan Progress Report	NCC	2020	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933803/nc-final-response-25yr-env-plan.pdf	
Response to Defra's Environmental Land Management Policy Discussion Document	RSWT	2020	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/The%20Wildlife%20Trusts%20response%20to%20Defra%27s%20ELM%20discussion%20document_July%202020.pdf	
Environmental Land Management – Policy Discussion Document	Wildlife and Countryside Link	2020	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_ELM_PDD_response_July20FINAL.pdf	
Building Partnerships for Nature's Recovery	Natural England	2020	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/924682/Natural-England-building-partnerships-for-natures-recovery.pdf	

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
Lords Report Stage of the Agriculture Bill: Briefing for peers	WCL and Greener UK	2020	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Greener%20UK-Link_Ag_Bill_Lords_Report_Stage_briefing_Sept20.pdf	
Blogs from RSWT land policy lead	RSWT	2020	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/barnaby-coupe	
10 March 2020: Environmental governance factsheet (parts 1 and 2)	Defra	2020	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020/10-march-2020-environmental-governance-factsheet-parts-1-and-2	
The Environmental Land Management scheme and 30x30: Managing land for nature's recovery	WCL	2021	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_ELM_and_30x30_Briefing_Oct2021.pdf	
Public access is a public good: Connecting people to nature through Environmental Land Management	WCL	2021	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Public_access_is_a_public_good-ELM_Link_briefing_Nov21.pdf	
The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review	Treasury	2021	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962785/The_Economics_of_Biodiversity_The_Dasgupta_Review_Full_Report.pdf	Commissioned by Treasury
Environmental land management schemes: payment principles	Defra	2021	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-land-management-schemes-payment-principles/environmental-land-management-schemes-payment-principles	WCL response: https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/WCL_Digging_Deeper_Report_14_Oct_%20Final.pdf
Natural Capital Evidence Handbook: To support place-based planning and decision-making	Natural England	2021	NCHandbook-PDF-Final-May2021.pdf	
Environmental Land Management is too important to fail, but risks remain	RSWT/RSPB	2021	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/barnaby-coupe/environmental-land-management-risks-remain	

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
Link briefing: The Sustainable Farming Incentive	WCL	2021	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_briefing-Sustainable_Farming_Incentive.pdf	
Written evidence submitted by Wildlife and Countryside Link to Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee: Environmental Land Management and the Agricultural Transition	WCL	2021	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link%20evidence%20EFRA-%20Environmental%20Land%20Management%20and%20the%20Agricultural%20Transition-Jan2021.pdf	
Digging deeper: Why the farming transition must go further and faster for nature and people	WCL	2021	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/WCL_Digging_Deeper_Report_14_Oct_%20Final.pdf	
Nature partners - why nature conservation and natural capital approaches work together	Green Alliance	2021	https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Natural_partners.pdf	
Environmental Land Management is too important to fail, but risks remain	RSWT lead	2021	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/barnaby-coupe/environmental-land-management-risks-remain	
Are vital farming reforms in peril?	RSWT lead	2021	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/barnaby-coupe/are-vital-farming-reforms-peril	
The State of Natural England 2020-21	Prospect trade union	2021	State of NE 2020 2021.pdf	
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Oral evidence: Environmental Land Management Scheme: Progress Update, HC 621	EFRA	2022	https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/11573/pdf/	Transcript (for info not analysis)
Enhancing the environmental land management schemes: A cornerstone for a resilient and secure food system Joint Statement	Multi-signatory	2022	https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/Joint%20statement%20-%20Enhancing%20Environmental%20Land%20Management%20Schemes%20-%2015%20Dec%202022.pdf?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=organic-	

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
			social&utm_campaign=foodsystem&utm_content=151222_singleimage_ELMsJointStatement&pc=AVZ001101	
A nature-positive pathway to decarbonise UK agriculture and land use	WWF	2022	https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/WWF_land_of_plenty_England.pdf	
Land of plenty (UK)	WWF	2022	https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/WWF_land_of_plenty.pdf	
The state of Natural England 2022	Prospect trade union	2022	https://prospect.org.uk/naturalengland/	
Getting ELMS right for nature positive farming	RSPB	2022	https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/nature-s-advocates/posts/25-yep-refresh-series-getting-elms-right-for-nature-positive-farming	
Environmental Land Management Scheme: Progress Update Written evidence submitted to EFRA Select Committee by Wildlife and Countryside Link	WCL	2022	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/EFRA_ELM_inquiry_Link_evidence_August_2022.pdf	
Standards and Options Development for the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Local Nature Recovery	WCL	2022	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Defra_LNR_and_SFI_engagement-Link_briefing-Final-August2022.pdf	
Joining the dots - ELM and LNRSs	WCL	2022	https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/Joining_the_dots_LNRSs_ELM_briefing_April2022.pdf	
Natural capital, the battle for control	Green Alliance	2022	https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Natural_capital_the_battle_for_control.pdf	
It's time to get Environmental Land Management right	Green Alliance/RSPB	2022	https://greenallianceblog.org.uk/2022/11/24/its-time-to-get-environmental-land-management-right/	

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
Financing nature recovery UK	Financing Nature Recovery UK Coalition	2022	https://irp.cdn-website.com/82b242bb/files/uploaded/FINAL%20Financing%20UK%20Nature%20Recovery%20Final%20Report%20ONLINE%20VERSION.pdf	
Nature markets: A framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming	Defra	2023	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1147397/nature-markets.pdf	Always mention farmers first when they refer to consultees - this is a document aimed at farmers
A Consensus on Food, Farming and Nature	Multi-signatory	2023	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/FFND%20v6.pdf	Mentioned as a positive step forward and an unusual approach by eNGOs, but one that is becoming more common (eNGO2 interview). Developed 'on the margins' of the Oxford Real Farming Conference
Farming announcement today a welcome step in the right direction	RSWT lead	2023	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/barnaby-coupe/farming-announcement-today-welcome-step-right-direction	
Nature 2030: Five urgent reforms to meet natural environment targets in the next Parliament	WCL	2023	https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/Nature_2030_Report_18.07.2023.pdf	
Environmental Improvement Plan 2023	HM Government	2023	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1168372/environmental-improvement-plan-2023.pdf	Update on 25 YEP
Green Book update	HM Treasury	2023	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063330/Green_Book_2022.pdf	

Document title	Author	Date produced	Source	Notes
Greener UK evaluation	Greener UK	2023	https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Greener-UK-Evaluation.pdf	
Shaping UK land use - Priorities for food, nature and climate	Green Alliance	2023	Shaping-UK-land-use.pdf	
Natural Capital accounts	ONS	2023	https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/uknaturalcapitalaccounts/2023	
Nature Markets Principles: Voluntary Principles for Science-based Investment to create High Integrity Natural Capital Markets in the UK	Finance Earth, RSWT, RSPB, National Trust, Woodland Trust,	2023	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Full%20-%20Nature%20Markets%20Principles%20-%20October%202023.pdf	

Appendix viii: Timeline showing key developments in the development of ideas that place a financial value on the natural world

	Political	Third sector	Environmental	Academic/research	Economic	Case study
1972			Limits to Growth published			
1973				Schumacher uses the term natural capital to describe dwindling stocks of natural resources warning that treating fossil fuels as income rather than 'natural capital' can only end in disaster (Schumacher, 1973, p. 12).		
1979		Green Alliance coalition formed				
1990					First conference of the International Society for Ecological Economics	
1992			Rio Earth Summit			
1997	Tony Blair elected Prime Minister John Prescott appointed Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Lab)			Costanza, et al., publish a paper in Nature titled 'The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital' which seeks to put a figure on the world's stocks of natural capital – it settles for somewhere in the region of $14-$54 trillion		
2001	Department change to Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) – Margaret Beckett first secretary (Lab)					
2005	Helen Ghosh appointed Defra permanent secretary (ex Oxford University and National Trust)		The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) initiative launched by the UN aimed to synthesise research that explores use of the planet's ecosystems and its impact on human well-being.			

	Political	Third sector	Environmental	Academic/research	Economic	Case study
			(Carpenter, et al., 2009). The assessment included the first comprehensive audit of the status of Earth's natural capital - analysis of 24 ecosystem services showed a 60% decline (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005)			
2006	David Miliband appointed Secretary of State for the Environment (Lab)			Stanford University launches the Natural Capital Project - partners include eNGOs WWF and the Nature Conservancy. The project aims to support and gain greater recognition for natural capital focused research around the world. It developed a standardised accounting system called InVEST (Integrated Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Trade-offs) – which is used by 185 countries, including projects in the UK		
2007	Hilary Benn appointed Secretary of State for the Environment (Lab)					
Period of analysis begins						
2010	2010 – John Lawton publishes seminal report which influences future land management approaches of many eNGOs (Lawton, et al., 2010). Natural capital Is referred to without explanation (e.g. p5)					
	Conservative /Lib Dem Coalition					
	Caroline Spelman appointed Secretary of State (Con)					
2011	UK government publishes natural environment white paper which builds on the principles of the Lawton Review (Defra, 2011)			Publication of the UK's National Ecosystem Assessments based on the MEA		
	The UK government establishes the Natural Capital Committee (NCC) to					

	Political	Third sector	Environmental	Academic/research	Economic	Case study
	be led by Oxford University economist Dieter Helm					
2012	Owen Patterson appointed Secretary of State (Con)	Helen Ghosh (formerly Defra) appointed CEO of National Trust				
2013	NCC publishes its first report on the 'State of Natural Capital – towards a framework for measurement and valuation' to the Economic Affairs Committee which focuses on application of the concept (Natural Capital Committee, 2013)					
2014	NCC publishes its second 'State of Natural Capital: Restoring our Natural Assets' report to the Economic Affairs committee (Natural Capital Committee, 2014)	Tim Parker (formerly Treasury) appointed Chair of National Trust				
	Liz Truss appointed Secretary of State (Con)					
2015	Conservative majority		SDGs adopted by UN member states	The ONS publishes a natural capital value estimation for freshwater habitat in the UK at £37billion in 2012 (ONS, 2015)		
			Paris Agreement			
	Clare Moriarty (Ex Oxford University) appointed Defra permanent secretary					
	Gideon Henderson (Ex Oxford University) appointed Defra chief scientist					
	EU referendum					

	Political	Third sector	Environmental	Academic/research	Economic	Case study
2016	Andrea Leadsom appointed Secretary of State (Con)	Greener UK Coalition of 13 eNGOs formed in response to Brexit				
2017	NCC publishes its first 'how to' guide for applying a natural capital approach to environmental analysis (Natural Capital Committee, 2017)	RSPB publishes natural capital accounts of its estate in England (RSPB, 2017)		Costanza et al., publish 'Twenty years of ecosystem services: how far have we come and how far do we still need to go?' in Nature		
	Michael Gove (Ex Oxford University) appointed Secretary of State (Con)					
2018	25-Year Plan for the Environment, influenced heavily by a natural capital approach to nature conservation – arguably to win the attention and support of the Treasury	Hilary McGrady appointed CEO National Trust				European Commission present legislative proposals on the common agricultural policy (CAP) for the period 2021-27
	HM Treasury Green Book update which refers to the work of NCC (HM Treasury, 2018). Numerous mentions of natural capital	Extinction Rebellion established (October)			HM Treasury Green Book update	
2019	Theresa Villiers appointed Secretary of State (Con)	Beccy Speight (formerly Woodland Trust and National Trust) appointed CEO of RSPB			David Attenborough at Davos	
	Tony Juniper (formally FoE, RSWT, WWF, Green Party) appointed Chair of Natural England	Darren Moorcroft (formerly RSPB and ex Oxford University) appointed CEO of Woodland Trust				

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	Tamara Finkelstein (Treasury background, ex Oxford University) appointed Defra permanent secretary					
	EU Green New Deal which commits to support businesses and other stakeholders in developing standardised natural capital accounting practices					
2020	The Natural Capital Committee, led throughout its duration by Dieter Helm, publishes the Committee's end of term report. Amongst its listed achievements are its influence on the Environment and Agriculture Acts (Natural Capital Committee, 2020)	Craig Bennett (formally FoE) appointed CEO of Wildlife Trusts			Greta Thunberg at Davos	
	George Eustice appointed Secretary of State (Con)					
	UK leaves EU		Implications from EU withdrawal (policy/governance gaps)		Implications from EU withdrawal	
2020		Covid 19 pandemic				
2021	Agriculture Bill passed		Agriculture Act 2020			
	Dasgupta Report		COP26 in UK			
2021	Environment Act passed					
	Establishment of the Office of Environmental Protection – a key recommendation of the 25YEP					
2022		RSPB Attack on Nature campaign				Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) launch (tier 1)
						First landscape recovery awarded funding to 22 projects (tier 3)

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						NCEA launched, drawing on NCC recommendations and Dasgupta Review
2023						Countryside Stewardship (CS+) updated and incorporated into ELMS (tier 2)
2024	Labour government elected (July)					