



# The Environmental **Horticulture** Manifesto

Priorities for a Future UK Government from the Horticultural Trades Association

January 2024



# The Environmental Horticulture Manifesto

Ten priorities for a Future UK Government from the Horticultural Trades Association

- 1** Maximise the value of the UK's green spaces across key policy areas by delivering an Office for Green Spaces, a Horticulture Strategy and a health and well-being campaign.
- 2** A bold national programme of urban greening supported by reformed planning processes and guidelines setting out clear targets in relation to location, green space, garden size and biodiversity.
- 3** Build on the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement by negotiating an SPS agreement with the EU and delivering a functioning cross-border trade regime for plants.
- 4** Work with UK horticultural experts to deliver a world-class plant health regime in order to safeguard a thriving UK horticultural sector and the UK's natural landscape for future generations.
- 5** Commit to a sustainable transition and timeline to peat-free horticulture from 2030 with a support package that grows the industry, supporting SMEs and the UK's gardeners.
- 6** Include environmental horticulture in the government's green jobs and skills definitions and recognise the value of sector careers and opportunities from early curriculum to apprenticeships and degree-level.
- 7** Complete a review of and publish a strategy for the UK water sector, covering water resilience from flooding to drought, which recognises the importance of environmental horticulture growers and landscapers delivering and maintaining green spaces.
- 8** Undertake a consultative review of current and future UK environmental and business regulation to ensure proportionality, allowing UK businesses to transition to Net-Zero, deliver on environmental and growth targets, whilst being competitive and viable.
- 9** Ensure UK Public Procurement rules, guidelines and approaches at all-levels of government can be met and delivered by UK growers, landscapers and horticultural businesses, providing confidence to invest and grow.
- 10** Make the UK a global leader in environmental horticulture through smart use of accessible R&D and grant support schemes for SME horticulture businesses, providing an economic and environmental return on investment.

Why  
**UK Environmental Horticulture**  
matters

It is worth  
**£28.8bn in GDP,**  
supports 674,000 jobs  
and contributes  
**£6.3bn**  
in tax revenues

Supports the delivery of  
**7 out of the 10 goals**  
in the Environmental Improvement Plan

# The Environmental Horticulture Manifesto

The HTA's Recommended Actions for Government

**1. Maximise the value of the UK's green spaces across key policy areas by delivering an Office for Green Spaces, a horticulture strategy and a health and wellbeing campaign.**

Recognising, realising and maximising the value of Green Spaces – from gardens to public parks, green corridors to wider cultivated landscape – is an opportunity to be grasped by any new government. These spaces can deliver on green growth, health and social benefits, and the UK's net-zero and environmental targets. A Government Office for Green Spaces should be created to address the cross-government policy portfolio and opportunity.

*53% of MPs support the creation of a coordinating body for Green Spaces.*

*YouGov poll Dec 23 on behalf of the HTA.*

This unit would work to champion and maximise the value of Green Spaces and Environmental Horticulture in all aspects of policy-making and target delivery. There must be a clear link into a range of Ministerial portfolios and for delivery of a Horticulture Strategy which recognises the wider benefit of environmental horticulture. We encourage any new government to review and respond to the recent House of Lords' Horticultural Committee Inquiry report as soon as possible.

**2. A bold national programme of urban greening supported by reformed planning processes and guidelines setting out clear targets in relation to location, green space, garden size and biodiversity.**

The UK's green and pleasant land must stretch to urban areas – where planning to post-build maintenance needs to be embedded. The HTA seeks for the UK to mandate green space sizes and improve planning policy to deliver high-quality, well-designed floral areas. Such green spaces can deliver on urban cooling, flood resilience, and much more.

*29.5% of the UK's urban areas are domestic gardens and cover an area of around 0.54 million hectares [ONS Natural Capital accounts]. For England, the garden area is more than four and a half times larger than that of our National Nature Reserves. This is a colossal resource of national significance for the thousands of generalist species that can live in gardens.*

*Wildlife Gardening Forum*

New developments or developments collectively in a planning authority should incorporate at least 29.5% space for garden density to maintain the current proportion of Britain's urban residential gardens.

Green spaces and the sector  
**deliver for the UK economy,**  
green growth, net-zero targets,  
environmental aims,  
health and wellbeing,  
climate change mitigation  
and boost biodiversity

There are  
**30 million**  
UK gardeners



Planning and Biodiversity Net-Gain (BNG) policy must support UK environmental horticulture growers, for example, those growing protected crops (i.e. greenhouses) who are growing to deliver for green spaces must not be subject to BNG rules which impact their ability to increase capacity.

### 3. Build on the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement through negotiating an SPS agreement with the EU and deliver a functioning cross-border trade regime for plants.

UK environmental horticulture is dependent on its decades-long global trading relationships to deliver the diversity and variety we have in the UK gardens and green spaces.

*Due to climate change, cities and urban spaces will grow increasingly warmer and, without urban green space and urban forestry benefits, citizens in these environments will have limited relief. Indeed, a lack of support for the use and management of green spaces will see increased rates of obesity, diabetes, and other health problems, which will have far reaching complications in the future.*

Growing a Green Economy  
Oxford Economics and Foresight Factory

The UK horticulture sector was the first to experience the full costs of border checks following EU-Exit; with phytosanitary controls from 1 Jan 2021, the movement in plants for planting, seeds and bulbs are in the high-risk goods category. Biosecurity and the swift and secure movement of these perishable products must be a core ambition. We implore that, in reviewing trade policy or future negotiations, the UK Government delivers an SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary) Agreement with the EU or reaches an agreement on Plant Health where equivalence is recognised in relevant areas removing the need for phytosanitary certificates. There is substantial opportunity for the UK to further build-back on cross-border plant trade through building on the Windsor Framework, address CITES (endangered species) rules gold-plating and operate an Authorised Operator System for imports.

### 4. Work with UK horticultural experts to deliver a world-class plant health regime in order to safeguard a thriving UK horticultural sector and the UK's natural landscape for future generations.

Plant health and biosecurity is a priority for UK environmental horticulture. Plants exhibiting poor health or carrying unwanted pests and diseases carry potential risk to both the wider environment and also a reputational and commercial risk to the businesses within the plant trade. There must be a balance between facilitating safe trade and maintaining the nation's biosecurity.

A future government should look to remove barriers to reporting suspected quarantine pests and diseases by establishing a workable compensation scheme for businesses who, through no fault of their own, have had their trade restricted or stock destroyed by pest and disease outbreaks and their management. This mitigates the risk or disincentives for an actor not to report a pest or disease and would create a systemic benefit to the UK's natural capital. Information gathered by the UK Government's Plant Health Risk Group relating to the risks posed by trading in plants and any subsequent decisions should be as transparent as possible, with trade representatives invited to observe the group's evidence, research and decisions.

### 5. Commit to a sustainable transition and timeline to peat-free horticulture from 2030 with a support package that grows the industry, supporting SMEs and the UK's gardeners.

UK environmental horticulture must be supported in the transition to peat-free through a collaborative partnership with government on a sustainable policy. This should deliver investment and the desired policy-outcomes whilst supporting sector growth and competitiveness. The sector's progress to peat-free is already world-leading and must be celebrated.

Any new government must end uncertainty and commit to a challenging 2030 date for transitioning from professional peat-use and directly support the sector to ensure delivery of consistent quality alternatives at commercial scale in order for the industry to thrive and supply market demand as well as meet environmental targets.

### 6. Include environmental horticulture in the government's green jobs and skills definitions and recognize the value of sector careers and opportunities from early curriculum to apprenticeships and degree-level.

A future government must immediately include environmental horticulture jobs as green jobs and skills. The exclusion, including in Office for National Statistics definitions, fails to understand and recognise those who grow and deliver the original green industry. This is an opportunity to deliver a step-change in the perception of sector jobs and to support addressing critical gaps.

*People who live within 500 metres of accessible green space are 24% more likely to meet 30 minutes of exercise levels of physical activity.*

Green Space and Health  
Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology 538

In 2020, air pollution removal services provided by nature led to an estimated 2,001 deaths being avoided **and prevented 49,126 life years being lost**

The urban cooling services provided by UK nature was valued at **£430 million** in 2020

The **air pollution removal services** provided by nature was valued at **£2.4 billion** in 2020

“Hot days” are those **over 28 degrees Celsius**. In 2021, 42.1 hot days were recorded. The annual value of avoided costs from urban cooling **was an estimated £233 million in 2021**

It is estimated that the **removal of harmful pollutants by urban vegetation** **generated £800.5 million** in avoided negative health impacts in Great Britain in 2021

Careers in horticulture must be championed by the government as vital green growth jobs (and green skills) to inspire future generations to get the benefits from rewarding and varied careers. Gardening or green space engagement in schools must be seen as a STEM subject carried through compulsory schooling and supported at higher levels such as through apprenticeships and higher-level qualifications. Securing the next generation of British horticulturists is essential to the future prospects of the industry.

**7. Complete a review of and publish a strategy for the UK water sector, covering water resilience from flooding to drought, which recognises the importance of environmental horticulture growers and landscapers delivering and maintaining green spaces.**

Water is critical to UK environmental horticulture and green spaces. In reviewing the UK water sector and strategy, and developing policies, the sector would need to be able to participate in the decision making process for improving the reliance infrastructure of water use - from its role in flood mitigation to the unique needs of growers and the critical importance of maintaining green spaces. The minimum investment required to qualify for Defra's Water Management Grant needs to be lowered as many businesses in the sector do not require water capture technologies at the current specified scale and many cannot afford the initial outlay. It is essential that grant support is accessible and available for SME horticultural growers to implement water retention innovations such as reservoirs and water tanks, and that businesses are encouraged to recycle. This will result in return on investment in both economic and environmental terms.

**8. Undertake a consultative review of current and future UK environmental and business regulation to ensure proportionality and that it allows UK businesses to transition to Net-Zero and deliver on environmental and growth targets, whilst being competitive and viable.**

Businesses are being burdened by mounting costs of doing business. This is not just driven by inflation, but the growing impact of regulation where costs of implementation and compliance undermining investment.

As a sector of mostly SMEs, navigating packaging regulation, waste, transition to peat-free, business rates revaluation, energy costs, new border arrangements and more are overwhelming resources and undermining competitiveness. Any new government must reset the UK's approach to regulation, and work in partnership with businesses who are committed to becoming more sustainable and delivering net-zero. A new approach to impact assessments, business consultation, regulatory roadmaps and cross-government oversight must be implemented as a matter of priority and to deliver for UK growth.

**9. Ensure UK Public Procurement rules, guidelines and approaches at all-levels of government can be met and delivered by UK growers, landscapers and horticultural businesses, providing confidence to invest and grow.**

The government should work with industry regarding the number and type of plants and trees needed for its public procurement, so these can be produced by UK growers. Staged payments are also needed to support UK growers, who must commit to a growing cycle of ten years or more. A nationally standardised list of plant varieties and sizes for public sector projects should be produced via government and industry collaboration. This will provide confidence and enable UK growers to focus their ranges. Determining a method of specification that preferences indigenous UK grown species with a specification tolerance (for example girth and height etc.) will work to prevent landscape architects having to buy from overseas suppliers for minor variations. An overriding policy announcement on this would give growers the confidence to invest.

*The direct economic value of public parks and green spaces to communities and residents has been estimated at 25:1 for London and Birmingham: every £1 spent returns 25 times that value for residents. For Sheffield this number is even higher, at 34:1.*

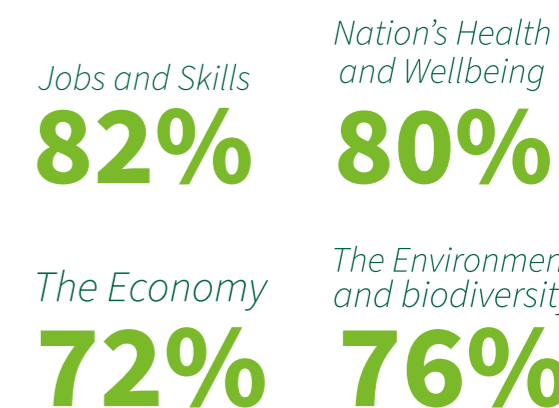
Growing a Green Economy  
Oxford Economics and Foresight Factory

The government should establish a greater proportion of British produced plants in public sector projects through best-practice setting in public procurement and projects.

**10. Make the UK a global leader in environmental horticulture through smart use of accessible R&D and grant support schemes for SME horticulture businesses, providing an economic and environmental return on investment.**

Automation has the potential to increase the productivity and sustainability of the sector. However, the current grant conditions to access financial support are discouraging investment. Environmental horticulture has a unique set of needs which are often conflated with those of agriculture and edible horticulture. The sector has different requirements for automation, water usage and peat-free growing mixes to name a few. The government must ensure that R&D and grant support is sector specific and that grant conditions are accessible to SMEs to facilitate greater efficiency and productivity growth. This will provide not only a financial return on investment (ROI) but also significant environmental benefits too.

*MPs agree that the environmental horticultural industry is beneficial to:*



YouGov poll Dec 23 on behalf of the HTA

*"Despite its economic contribution, horticulture is widely misunderstood and poorly promoted. Governmental oversight is patchy, and both the professional and amateur horticulture sectors are facing challenging circumstances that could put their future in jeopardy... There is no doubt that this is a pivotal moment for the future of horticulture... Yet, with the right support, policies and funding, the UK horticultural sector can become a world leader in the sustainable practices and policies that will ensure generations to come can enjoy the full variety of produce grown in Britain."*

House of Lords Committee on Horticulture Report — November 2023

# About the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)

*The Horticultural Trades Association represents the entire garden and green space industry and its supply-chains – including growers, retailers, landscapers, manufacturers and suppliers, with members in nearly 600 of UK parliamentary constituencies.*

Environmental Horticulture is the art and science of improving the world around us with plants and trees. This includes the cultivation, planting and designing of flora for environmental and health benefits.

The HTA represents the entire UK sector's supply chain (over 1,400 businesses)– including growers, retailers, manufacturers, landscapers and service providers as well as running the National Garden Gift Voucher scheme – meaning we are well positioned to use the experience, expertise and knowledge within our membership and professional employment in representations to the next Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The HTA is run by members for members giving a voice to the industry and representing them to Government and other key stakeholders. We also support gardening businesses and the wider supply chain with learning courses, trade shows, briefings, research, marketing and operational support.

There is a huge opportunity for the UK, if genuine recognition of the value of the Environmental Horticulture Sector and its tangible benefits are grasped.



## Further Information and Resources

**HTA Policy** [hta.org.uk/policy](https://hta.org.uk/policy)

**Stakeholder briefings** [hta.org.uk/policy/policy-library](https://hta.org.uk/policy/policy-library)

**The Value of Plants research reports** [hta.org.uk/value-of-plants](https://hta.org.uk/value-of-plants)

**Unlocking Green Growth research documents** [hta.org.uk/policy/unlocking-green-growth](https://hta.org.uk/policy/unlocking-green-growth)

**Policy News & Press Releases** [hta.org.uk/policy/policy-news-press-releases](https://hta.org.uk/policy/policy-news-press-releases)

**Contact: [policy@hta.org.uk](mailto:policy@hta.org.uk)**

