



**GREENER  
GARDENING**  
for peat's sake

**BRIEFING**

## Peat briefing

### Summary

- **Peatland is an important UK habitat and carbon store which needs to be restored.** When degraded, these wetland habitats emit carbon but, when restored, they have the potential to be our largest natural carbon store and to provide high quality habitat to many important flora and fauna. Peat soil extracted for UK horticulture in 2020 was estimated to release **880,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>** over its lifetime as a growing medium.
- **The UK government is committed to restoring our peatlands.** Recognising its vital importance to our environmental objectives, the new government has supported the restoration of peatland across the UK. But the previous government's long-standing commitment to ban peat for horticultural uses has still not been delivered.
- **Councils can help to restore our peatlands and reduce demand for peat soil.** Every council can play a role in reducing the amount of peat used as a gardening medium, but **less than one quarter** of councils have stopped using peat compost themselves. Councils that have peatland nearby can also directly support the habitat's restoration.

### Background

- **The UK possesses great amounts of peatland.** Peatland is a dense wetland formed by partially decayed vegetation built up over thousands of years at a rate of around **one millimetre per year**. **Twelve percent** of the UK's land area is peatland (**10%** of England), this includes blanket bogs, raised bogs, and fens.
- **Peatlands can provide habitat for rare wildlife.** Peatlands are home to insects, plants, over **380 species** of sphagnum moss, and birds including the threatened hen harrier.
- **Peatlands are our largest natural carbon store on land.** UK peatland contains **more carbon than the forests of the UK, France, and Germany combined**.
- **Despite their environmental importance, 87% of England's peatlands are degraded, and therefore a net source of carbon emissions.** Activities such as burning and farming on peatland along with the extraction of the peat soil, all contribute to this degradation. Drained lowland peat, used for food production, is the **largest source of emissions** of any land use in England.
- **Peat soil is a valuable gardening growth medium due to its nutrient density and ability to retain water, but its use in horticulture drives extraction.** Bags of compost now usually display any peat content, but it is also **hidden in other gardening products** like bedding plants. In 2022, the UK horticulture industry used **950,000 metres cubed** of peat, **41%** of which was extracted from UK peatlands. Retail horticulture still accounts for **70% of peat compost sold in the UK** versus the professional sector.

### Previous government action on peatlands

- **In 2011, the government supported a voluntary phase-out of horticultural peat by 2020, with a commitment to legislate if it proved to be ineffective.** Though yet to be legislated, in 2022, the government **announced its commitment to ban** the sale of products containing peat in the retail horticultural sector by 2024.

- **A pledge to restore approximately 280,000 hectares of English peatland by 2050 was made.** This pledge has been accompanied by over [£50 million](#) in funding for peatland restoration, as well as research into peat-free growing media and assisting businesses with the move to peat-free horticulture.
- **The government has supported the development of a Peatland Code to create a private market for peatland restoration.** The code incentivises the restoration of peatlands using private finance. Landowners can generate peatland carbon units that are sold to companies seeking to offset their residual emissions.
- **Land managers can now receive payments for restoring peatland.** The UK's post-Brexit farm payment regime has enabled the government to pay land managers [£900 a hectare](#) to re-wet their peatland, supporting its overall restoration.

### Labour's plan for peatland

- **Labour will uphold the UK's environmental targets.** Labour has recommitted to reach net zero emissions by 2050, halt the decline of British species, and protect at least 30% of the land and sea by 2030. As a key carbon sink and precious ecosystem, peatland restoration is vital for meeting these goals.
- **Peat bogs were mentioned in the Labour Party manifesto.** As part of its plans to protect nature, Labour said it will expand nature rich habitats including peat bogs.
- **Questions remain as to how Labour will deliver and fund peatland restoration projects.** The manifesto did not contain details on how it will fund its nature commitments, but did recommit to publishing a land use framework which, given the amount of peatland in England, should feature peatland management within it.

### What your council can do

- **Create an information page on your website.** Not all councils have peatland but all councils have gardeners that use compost. Using the information above, create a [peatland page](#) for your council's website or run a digital awareness campaign on social media. This is a low cost way of informing residents about the importance of peatland, the extraction of peat for horticultural use, and steps they can take to protect peatlands, such as using peat-free compost alternatives. [Enrich the Earth](#) and the [Wildlife Trusts](#) both have resources for communicating this topic to residents.
- **Run in-person peat awareness campaigns.** Ways to socialise the importance of protecting peatlands in your community include: distributing leaflets; hosting a peat-themed gardening workshop event; and leading talks with local schools.
- **Submit a peat-related motion.** Ideas for motions include calling for the council to: conduct a council-wide peat audit; end the use of peat in council green spaces; promote peat-free products to local residents; and restore local peatlands. The background section of this briefing can be included as context in your [motion](#).
- **Include peatland restoration in your Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).** As a unique ecosystem and carbon store, any local peatland makes for an ideal habitat to be restored and can feature prominently within your LNRS.



- **Conduct a peat audit.** [Less than one quarter](#) of councils have stopped using peat compost in their green spaces. Ask your environmental officers to identify whether your council is using any peat compost within its green spaces. If your council is using peat compost, develop a strategy to help phase out its use by a given date.
- **Collaborate with your local garden centre.** Partner with your local garden centre on a campaign to promote peat-free gardening to residents. This could include hosting a joint event and running a local gardening competition.
- **Engage with local landowners and farmers who manage peatlands.** Help land managers to identify and apply for relevant grants and funding pots, such as the government's [sustainable farming incentive for peatland restoration](#), to protect and restore peatland on the land that they manage.

### Case studies

- **Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has been actively reducing the use of peat for the past 10 years.** Since the government first announced the voluntary phase out in 2011, this council has worked with its suppliers to reduce the use of peat-based compost in its parks and other green spaces.
- **A councillor in Chester West and Chester Council led a motion on peat.** Cllr Simon Eardley, the Conservative Shadow Cabinet Member for the Environment, [submitted a motion](#) to remove peat from the council's supply chain. It was unanimously carried, and after an initial peat audit, it turned out that the council had already ceased the use of peat in council-owned allotments.
- **Dorset Council is restoring local peatlands.** As part of its LNRS, the council has targeted peatlands as a priority for local nature restoration. Funded by the government's [Nature for Climate Peatland Discovery Grant Scheme](#), and in partnership with environmental charities and government agencies, a local peatland has been rewetted. This involved removing trees from the peatland and blocking drainage ditches to enable water to be retained on the land.

CEN would love to hear about the action you have taken locally on peat. Please get in touch with [info@cen.uk.com](mailto:info@cen.uk.com) to share more details.



**CONSERVATIVE  
ENVIRONMENT  
NETWORK**