

Saxton Bampfylde



Appointment of

Chief Executive Officer

Closing Date: Monday 11 May

Reference: OBYWA



A Message from the Chair – Tony Juniper

Thank you for your interest in the role of Chief Executive of Natural England at such an exciting and pivotal moment in the organisation's evolution. This is a unique and challenging opportunity for an ambitious individual who wants to make a real difference to nature recovery through operational excellence so that our natural environment contributes to the wellbeing of society, to national security and to sustainable economic growth.

This is a truly exciting time to join the organisation as it embeds its new strategy: [Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security](#).

Launched in 2025, it embraces the strategic shift that the organisation has been making for a number of years - from isolated interventions to protect and restore nature at scale, ensuring its efforts deliver lasting improvement across wider landscapes, seascapes, towns and cities.

It focuses on operational excellence contributing to housing and infrastructure, public health and wellbeing, food, air and water security and resilience to climate change, recognising nature as essential to sustaining growth and a healthy society – requiring bold partnerships, streamlined regulation,

and mobilisation of public and private investment.

Natural England has a long-established role as the statutory deliverer and statutory adviser and champion of nature wildlife, natural beauty and public access. Through the Environmental Improvement Plan, recent legislation and statutory targets the government has made strong commitments to protect and improve nature.

As a Board, we are, however, under no illusions about the challenges and demands which face us, both as an organisation and to our natural environment more generally. While we are a well-established organisation, the scale and complexity of our mission is changing rapidly. We operate in an increasingly dynamic environment shaped by rapid climatic change, continuing pressures on biodiversity, land-use reforms, evolving public expectations and rapid technological advancement. At the same time as the pressures on our environment grow, we must work within an ever more complex network of partners, stakeholders and customers, and reflect into our advice and activities an ever more comprehensive but contested body of science and evidence.

And we must do all of this with a challenging budget position and the need to find ongoing efficiencies including through digital improvements and innovation in automation given the pressures on public finances.

Natural England is above all though, an organisation which prides itself on its expertise and its commitment to its cause. Our people are not just knowledgeable and experienced, often the nation's top experts in what they do, but are incredibly passionate in delivering positive changes.

Our new Chief Executive will need to be an outstanding and credible leader with a proven track record of operational delivery, transformation and leadership as well as being able to demonstrate a real commitment to our purpose and the important work that we do. We are looking for someone with exceptional skills and experience to continue to embed our new strategy and our priorities, processes and culture. You will need to continue to drive the organisation forward through a period of change, ensuring we remain at the heart of delivering nature recovery and meeting statutory nature, climate and wellbeing goals as set out in the government's Environmental Improvement Plan.

Our outgoing Chief Executive Marian Spain has led the organisation for more than eight years and leaves Natural England as an effective, well-organised, highly motivated and focussed organisation. We now need a leader who can make the most of this legacy through the delivery of our new strategy.

If this sounds like you then we would be delighted to receive your application.



Tony Juniper, Chair

[Click here to hear more](#)

About Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser on the natural environment. We are a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) responsible to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Created by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act in 2006, Natural England's general purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England has the following statutory duties:

- Promoting nature and conservation and protecting biodiversity.
- Conserving and enhancing the landscape.
- Securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment.
- Promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation.
- Contributing in other ways to social and economic wellbeing through management of the natural environment.

What drives our work?

Nature plays a vital role as the foundation of economic growth. It is essential national infrastructure, alongside transport,

energy and communication networks. Yet continued unsustainable use threatens the natural systems that underpin our economy, our health and our national security. Securing the future of these natural systems brings financial certainty and widespread resilience, helping to protect our food and water supplies, and manage climate impacts such as flooding and extreme heat.

To realise the power of nature in sustaining growth, protecting the best of our remaining nature is no longer enough. We need to increase the recovery, regeneration and resilience of ecosystems so that nature can continue to support us into a more secure and equitable future. As we deliver the homes, jobs and infrastructure needed for economic growth, we must embed nature into the heart of development, ensuring that everyone benefits from green spaces, cleaner environments and resilient ecosystems close to where they live.

The government has made strong commitments in the Environmental Improvement Plan to protect and improve nature. The strategy explains the role Natural England will play in realising these goals. By working with a wide range of partners, and reforming our delivery, advisory and regulatory functions, we will turn these plans into action to recover nature at scale, unlocking sustainable growth, housing delivery and long-term public sector savings.

Our strategy is framed through four strategic outcomes. Each of these outcomes reinforces and amplifies the others, and together they address environmental, social and economic actions critical to thriving nature and operational delivery.

1. Recovering Nature

Increased scale and quality of places where nature thrives.

2. Building Better Places

Greener homes and infrastructure create healthier, more investible places, recognising we live better where nature thrives around us.

3. Improving Health and Wellbeing

Build nature into everyday life so people can support, access and benefit from nature, wherever they live.

4. Delivering Security through Nature

Nature helps us adapt to the threats of a changing climate and improves our national security, supporting more resilient food production, healthy soils, clean and plentiful water and clean air.

Working in partnership

Our broad remit is reflected in the huge range of customers and partners we work with, including farmers and landowners, businesses and local authorities, charities and local communities as well as government departments. Some highlights of our work include:

- Increasing opportunities for everyone to enjoy nature through

greater access and engagement.

- Protecting and recovering England's most vulnerable species and habitats.
- Provide technical advice and recommendations to government on agri-environment scheme design and advising farmers and landowners on how to manage their land sustainably for nature and food security.
- Designating / creating National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Trails and working with Protected Landscapes to contribute to the internal commitment to protect and manage 30% of our land for nature by 2030.
- Supporting Government in the creation of Marine Protected Areas and ensuring resilient marine ecosystems.
- Creating and managing National Nature Reserves in partnership with other landowners.
- Notifying and monitoring Sites of Special Scientific Interest and ensuring they are effectively managed.
- Providing statutory advice to planners, developers and infrastructure providers to enable development alongside measures to protect and restore nature.
- Managing wildlife licensing to help businesses, developers and the general public do what they need without harming protected species.
- Promoting provision and use of accessible greenspace in rural and urban areas.
- Ensuring decisions by NE and others are based on the best possible scientific evidence.

Natural England is a national organisation with [offices](#) across England, and we have around 2600 people working with us across the wide range of functions needed to deliver our strategy.

Useful links:

[Environmental Improvement Plan 2025](#)

[Natural England Action Plan 2025 - 2026](#)

[NE Defra Framework Agreement](#)

[Latest NE Annual Report](#)

[NE on GOV.UK](#)

[Natural England blog](#)

[NE on Twitter](#)



About the Role

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has responsibility for the day-to-day executive leadership, management, and performance of Natural England. The Chief Executive is also the Accounting Officer, with responsibility and accountability to the Defra Accounting Officer (who is the departmental Permanent Secretary) for internal governance and financial probity. The Chief Executive directly reports to the Chair of Natural England and, as Accounting Officer, is also answerable directly to the Permanent Secretary of Defra.

NE work is shaped by the priorities of the Government of the day these contribute to a broad range of the Defra group outcomes such as those relating to nature and operational delivery, nature-friendly farming and climate resilience. NE is also responsible along with other arm's length bodies for delivering many of the goals set in the Environmental Improvement Plan, especially those relating to biodiversity, access and engagement and environmental health. As well as NE's own statutory duties and powers to designate, regulate, advise and fund etc, NE is also responsible for delivery programmes and services on behalf of Defra. NE's priorities as set out in its business plan and performance management system align to these goals and the CEO reports on these to Defra as our sponsoring department.

Embedding the new strategy - Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security is a bold agenda to restore nature and

operational delivery while supporting economic growth, public wellbeing and long-term environmental resilience and is fundamental to the future success of Natural England. The programme of change, summarised in four "critical reforms" are transforming how Natural England undertakes licensing of protected sites and species, its role in the planning system are reshaping the organisation's operating model to a service based system, redefining its workforce plan and culture, whilst also introducing a new cross government HR and Finance system. This scale of change will require a professional to lead, motivate and role model the behaviours required to deliver at the highest standards expected by government.

Natural England is a geographically dispersed, multi skilled and complex organisation, with around 2600 staff across the country and a budget of around £330m. The Chief Executive will need to be able to lead their team through a significant period of change and ensure that Natural England delivers against its range of statutory duties, the NE strategy and ministerial priorities.

Like other public bodies, Natural England operates within the wider context of Government's efficiency and reform agendas. Natural England is sponsored by Defra, and the two organisations work closely together to deliver an effective partnership relationship at all levels, including the provision of corporate services functions.

Key Tasks and Accountabilities

Leadership and Management:

- Work with the Board to embed the organisation's strategy, aims and objectives.
- Ensure that the organisation has the resources, skills and capability to enable it to deliver its aims and objectives.
- Lead, manage and motivate the Executive Team in their delivery of performance outcomes.
- Continue a major organisational transformation to deliver Natural England's new strategy and support new models of delivery and customer service.
- Lead the organisation's digital and data maturity and cultural change, embedding modern, agile ways of working and building enduring capability across the organisation.
- Be an inspirational role model across Defra and to Natural England's people, exhibiting the behaviours we expect of all our people.
- Demonstrate an ability to make difficult decisions and justify them at the highest level.

Delivery:

- Balance competing national and local agendas and the financial consequences to decide the right course of action.
- Develop the business planning processes and performance measurement systems required for delivery.
- Ensure the effective application of robust management disciplines including risk management and performance management arrangements and controls.
- Ensure the organisation discharges its statutory and legal obligations.
- Maintain and develop best practice, value for money and continued business improvement to the highest ethical and professional

standards.

- Ensure that the day-to-day operations of Natural England are effectively and efficiently coordinated and implemented and conducted in line with agreed policies.
- Oversee commercial partnerships and frameworks with third party suppliers.

Financial Stewardship and Governance:

- Take personal responsibility as the Accounting Officer for the highest standards of financial probity and regularity and value for money on Natural England expenditure and internal governance.
- Overall responsibility for a budget of £330 million.
- Ensure that all duties are carried out in line with the agreed internal governance rules.
- Ensure that all financial and non-financial reporting requirements are met on a timely and regular basis.

Stakeholder Engagement and Relationships:

- Promote progressive stakeholder and partner relationships that support collaborative ways of working to achieve the Government's aims for the natural environment.
- Work collaboratively with Defra as the sponsoring government department, as well as other public bodies in the Defra group, for the benefits of customers.
- Represent the organisation to a complex and varied stakeholder group and promote a wide understanding of the work that Natural England does and the role that it plays.
- Drive organisation-wide commitment to customer service excellence, transparency and value for money.

Organisational Structure



Person Specification

Candidates must be able to demonstrate that they are an innovative, values-driven leader with a demonstrable passion for protecting and restoring the natural environment, able to set strategic direction, lead complex operational delivery, and build trust with a diverse range of stakeholders. They must have the personal resilience required for operating in a complex, high profile and highly scrutinised environment, with the ability to persuade, influence, and communicate with senior stakeholders, both internal and external, and a track record of working in genuine partnership across organisational boundaries.

A successful track record of senior leadership gained in an organisation of comparable scale, complexity and financial responsibility, with a clear appreciation of the respective roles of both the Chief Executive and the Chair and Board.

Through your CV and Statement of Suitability, you should provide evidence and examples for each of the selection criteria listed.

Essential criteria

- **Strategic leadership and change management in dispersed organisations** - Proven ability to set and deliver a clear strategic direction, lead major transformational change, and manage a complex agenda across national and local priorities while maintaining staff engagement and performance.
- **Operational delivery and performance management** - Strong operational focus with a record of delivering agreed targets, managing business performance, and exercising sound judgement of risk in a high-profile and sometimes contested environment.
- **Demonstrate a real commitment and passion to conservation**

and sustainability - Significant, demonstrable commitment to nature, operational delivery and operational excellence.

- **Financial stewardship as Accounting Officer** - Significant experience of managing and delivering against a substantial and complex budget, with clear accountability for financial controls, resource allocation, and value for money.
- **People leadership** - Ability to build, lead, empower, and motivate high performing, dispersed teams; to make and defend difficult choices; and to create a culture of inclusion, high performance and continuous improvement.
- **Stakeholder engagement and public presence** - Demonstrable ability to communicate confidently to build trust and confidence with a wide range of stakeholders at all levels, from Ministers to developers. Inspire diverse audiences about the organisations mission. Proven track record of genuine partnership working across organisational boundaries.
- **Political and contextual judgement** - Politically astute decisionmaker who can weigh scientific and technical advice alongside regulatory, policy and political considerations and make pragmatic, evidence-based choices that reflect national and local priorities.

Desirable criteria

- Senior experience within an ALB, agency, local authority, national NGO, or corporate organisation delivering public policy or conservation outcomes.
- Media experience and confidence in high profile public engagement e.g. Select Committees.



Benefits & Terms and Conditions

Job Title

Chief Executive Officer

Location

Natural England has offices across the country with a significant presence in York, Peterborough, Newcastle and Bristol.

Natural England is able to support flexible working, so there is some limited scope for the Chief Executive to work from home but for the majority of time you will be working from an NE office with regular attendance in the London office and travel across England to engage with staff and stakeholders.

Salary

The grade of the role is equivalent to SCS3. Candidates should expect their salary upon appointment to be circa £130,000, with possible uplift for exceptional candidates.

Contract Type

This role is permanent.

Learning and Development

Whatever your role, we take your career and development seriously and want to enable you to build a really successful career with Natural England. It is crucial that our employees have the right skills to develop their careers and meet the challenges ahead, and you'll benefit from regular performance and development reviews to ensure this development is ongoing. As a Natural England employee, you'll be entitled to a

large range of benefits including 10 working days each year allocated for personal development.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We are committed to creating an environment where everyone feels valued and respected and see this as a good place to work. Natural England has a responsibility to ensure that we have an inclusive culture where discrimination, harassment, bullying and prejudice will not be tolerated. Our selection process is determined on ability and regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership.

Pension

Your pension is a valuable part of your total reward package. A competitive contributory pension scheme that you can enter as soon as you join where we will make a significant contribution to the cost of your pension; where your contributions come out of your salary before any tax is taken; and where your pension will continue to provide valuable benefits for you and your family if you are too ill to continue to work or die before you retire. Visit [Civil Service Pension Scheme](#) for more details.

Performance Pay

The CEO will be eligible for discretionary non-consolidated performance payments determined by the Board under the same terms as those applied to the Senior Civil Service (SCS).

Annual Leave and Bank Holiday Allowance

33 days annual leave on entry, plus options to buy and bank additional leave.

You will also be entitled to eight public holidays per year.

Salary Sacrifice Schemes

Bicycles - This scheme allows you to sacrifice part of your salary and instead receive the reduced amount as a voucher to pay for a bicycle to cycle to work. As a result you can save money because the salary you sacrifice for a voucher is free from both tax and National Insurance contributions.

Childcare - With the salary sacrifice scheme for childcare, you agree to a reduction in your salary and instead receive the reduced amount in vouchers to pay for childcare. The salary you sacrifice in vouchers is free from tax and National Insurance contributions.

Hours of Work

You are normally required to work a five day week of 37 hours excluding meal breaks. However, the individual would be expected to work such additional hours as may from time-to-time be reasonable and necessary for the effective performance of their duties. In view of their seniority and managerial duties and responsibilities, the individual would be regarded as a “managing executive” for the purposes of the Working Time Regulations 1998.

Civil Service Sports Club

If you work for Natural England, you are eligible to join the Civil Service Sports and Social Club. Not only does the CSSC offer the opportunity to get involved in a wide range of indoor and outdoor sports but there are also leisure activities such as theatre trips and there is access to retail and cinema discounts.

Health Cash Plans and Insurance

Natural England has agreed competitive rates with a number of health insurance/cash plan providers.

Professional Subscriptions

Natural England encourages and reimburses membership in relevant bodies as an aid to personal development.

Trade Union

Natural England has entered into a partnership agreement with its recognised Trade Unions Prospect, PCS and FDA.

External Interests and Compliance

The post holder must disclose promptly to the Natural England Board (the Board) in writing all interests in any business other than that of Natural England and will notify the Board immediately of any change in external interests.

Except with the written consent of the Board (such consent not to be unreasonably withheld) the post holder will not during their employment under this contract be directly or indirectly engaged (on their own account or on behalf of or in association with any other person) in any trade, business or occupation other than the business of Natural England.

Disclosure and Confidentiality

The role carries with it a requirement that certain information about the individual's salary and pension entitlements will be disclosed in the annual accounts of Natural England.

Confidentiality will cover key information about Natural England and that of its employees, sponsors and key contacts which is secret, confidential or commercially or politically sensitive and which may not be readily available to the business community, press or to the general public and which, if disclosed, will be liable to cause significant harm to Natural England, its sponsors or its key contacts as well as being subject to the Official Secrets Act 1989.

In circumstances where a new or outside appointment would require the individual to use or divulge confidential information belonging to Natural England then they are required to obtain the agreement of the Chairman of the Natural England Board before accepting any offer of employment outside Natural England or which would start within two years of leaving its employment. The Chairman will not unreasonably withhold their consent.

Conflict of Interest

If the post holder or their spouse have any business interest or potential conflict of interest with the activities of Natural England or Defra you will be expected to declare this at a later stage. You will also be asked to inform us if you have any indirect association of this kind through any other family member or partnership.



How to Apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to Natural England on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at roles.saxbam.com using code **OBYWA**.

The closing date for applications is noon on **Monday 11 May**.

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload the following:

1. A CV setting out your career history, with key responsibilities and achievements. Please ensure you have provided reasons for any gaps within the last two years.
2. A Statement of Suitability (no longer than two pages) explaining how you consider your personal skills, qualities and experience provide evidence of your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the criteria in the person specification.

Please also complete the Diversity Monitoring Form. If you do not wish to provide a declaration on any of the particular characteristics, you will have the option to select 'prefer not to say'. The information you provide when submitting your application will help us monitor our progress towards becoming an inclusive employer.

Failure to submit both a CV and Statement of Suitability will mean the panel only have limited information on which to assess your application against the criteria in the person specification.

Should you encounter any issues with your application please contact Maria.Dodson@saxbam.com.

Due diligence

Due diligence will be carried out as part of the application process, which may include searches carried out via internet search engines and any public social media accounts.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.



The Recruitment Process

Selection Process

Tony Juniper (Natural England Chair), will chair the process. In addition to Tony, the other panel members will be:
Professor Clare Fitzsimmons, Non-executive Board Member
Sally Randall, Defra Director General
Mary-Ann Ochota, Chair of the Protected Landscapes Partnership and Broadcaster

Longlist

Longlisted candidates will be invited to meet with Saxton Bampfylde for a preliminary interview sometime during w/c 18 & 25 May.

Shortlist

The panel will assess your application to select those demonstrating the best fit with the role by considering the evidence you have provided against the criteria set out in the 'Person Specification' section. Failure to address any or all of these may affect your application.

The timeline later in this pack indicates the date by which decisions are expected to be made, and all shortlisted candidates will be advised of the outcome as soon as possible thereafter.

Assessment

If you are shortlisted, you will be asked to take part in a series of assessments which could include psychometric tests and a staff engagement exercise. These assessments will not result

in a pass or fail decision. Rather, they are designed to support the panel's decision making and highlight areas for the panel to explore further at interview.

You may also have the opportunity to speak to Tony Juniper and the outgoing CEO Marian Spain prior to the final interview to learn more about the role and the organisation. Please note this is not part of the formal assessment process.

You will be asked to attend a panel interview in order to have a more in-depth discussion of your previous experience and professional competence in relation to the criteria set out in the Person Specification.

We are challenging ourselves to become a more diverse and inclusive organisation. We recognise that recruitment and inclusion of individuals with diverse skills, perspectives and backgrounds will bring real strength to the organisation, the wider public sector and to society. To help support this aspiration all selection panels will have both female and ethnic minority and/or disabled membership.

Full details of the assessment process will be made available to shortlisted candidates.

Offer

Regardless of the outcome, we will notify all candidates as soon as possible after the final interview.

Expected Timeline

Selection Process

We will try and offer as much flexibility as we can, but it may not be possible to offer alternative dates for assessments or interviews. You are therefore asked to note the below timetable, exercising flexibility through the recruitment and selection process, in order to meet the dates given. Please note that these dates may be subject to change.

The anticipated timetable is as follows:

Advert Closing Date	12.00 noon on 11 May 2026
Preliminary Interviews with Saxton Bampfylde	Week Commencing 18 & 25 May
Shortlist Meeting	Week Commencing 1 June
Assessments	Week Commencing 8 June
Interviews	Week Commencing 15 June



FAQs

Can I apply if I am not currently a public servant?

Yes. This role is open to suitably qualified people in the external market, to civil servants and those in accredited Non Departmental Bodies.

Is this role suitable for part-time working?

This is a full-time role although flexible working and job share partnerships may be considered.

Can I claim back any expenses incurred during the recruitment process?

No. Unfortunately we will not be able to reimburse you, except in exceptional circumstances and only when agreed in advance.

What nationality do I need to hold in order to apply?

The role is open to UK, Commonwealth and European Economic Area (EEA) and certain non EEA nationals. Further information on

whether you are able to apply is available here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationality-rules>.

Is security clearance required?

Yes. The successful candidate will need to be prepared to undertake CTC security clearance.

What reasonable adjustments can be made if I have a disability?

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments in order to support disabled job applicants. If you feel that you may need a reasonable adjustment to be made, or you would like to discuss your requirements in more detail, please contact us in the first instance. If you wish to receive a hard copy of the information, or in an alternative format e.g. Audio, Braille or large font then contact:

Maria.Dodson@saxbam.com.

Do you offer a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Disabled Persons?

Disabled applicants who meet the minimum selection criteria in the job specification are guaranteed an interview. Selection will be on merit. If you wish to claim a guaranteed interview under the Disability Commitment, you should complete the relevant section of the Diversity Monitoring Form. It is not necessary to state the nature and operational delivery of your disability.

What should I do if I think that I have a conflict of interest?

Candidates must note the requirement to declare any interests that might cause questions to be raised about their approach to the business of Natural England. If you believe that you may have a conflict of interest contact: Maria.Dodson@saxbam.com.



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ENGLAND

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