Soil in the Party Manifestos 2019

2019 has been a record year for public and governmental engagement with climate change and the environment and talk of environmental action has been a priority in the run up to the General Election. The UK’s dominating political parties have registered the importance of nature restoration, with three of the four engaging in the first Climate & Nature debate, televised by Channel 4. However, the environment features to varying degrees in the party manifestos, and soils itself only rarely. The following outlines the broad approaches to the environment with regards to land use and soils in the manifestos.

**Conservatives**

In brief: despite promises to ‘leave the environment in a better state’ than it was found, the Conservative Party make scant reference to environmental commitments or soils with the exception of potential investment in peatland restoration.

- ‘Public money for public goods’ system to replace the Common Agricultural Policy
- Set up new independent office for Environmental Protection and introduce legal targets, e.g. for air quality
- £640million for Nature for Climate Fund, for planting trees and restoring peatland, for example

**Labour**

In brief: Labour focus on a ‘land for the many’ approach, sustainable agriculture and legislation to protect the environment, but there is little mention of specific protections for soils.

- Introduce a legally binding Climate & Environment Emergency Bill with new standards for decarbonisation, nature recovery, environmental quality, habitats and species protection
- Maintain and improve current EU standards of environment regulation
- Provide £5.6bn for flood defences
- Plan for Nature – legally binding targets to restore species and habitats, tree planting, improve upstream river management
- Maintain agricultural and rural structural funds but repurpose them to support environmental land management and sustainable food production. Invest more into county farms and work with agricultural organisations to increase access into farming for new entrants
- Land for the Many framework presents multiple policies in line with supporting soil health and the wider environment, for example land available for everyone wishing to grow food, protection and development of urban green spaces, support for small-scale low impact farming, restoration of peat bogs, extended planning system to cover farming / forestry, tougher regulations on industrial agriculture and pesticide use etc.

**Liberal Democrats**

In brief: the Liberal Democrats intend to invest in large-scale restoration of the environment including peatlands, and ‘effective land management’ including nature-friendly farming.

- Introduce a legally binding Nature Act to restore the natural environment in the long and short term by setting targets for water, soil, air and biodiversity - £18billion over five years.
• Plant 60 million trees a year
• Invest in large scale restoration of peatlands, heathlands, native woodlands, saltmarshes, wetlands and coastal waters
• Reduce basic agricultural support payments to larger recipients and redeploy the savings to support goods that come from effective land management, including restoring nature and protecting the countryside, preventing flooding and combating climate change through measures to increase soil carbon and expand native woodland
• Reform water management and higher water efficiency standards. £5 billion fund for flood prevention and climate adaptation

Green Party
In brief: the Green Party present the most comprehensive manifesto support for the wider environment including, specifically, research in to the conservation and development of high quality soils and soil restoration in upland areas.

• Green New Deal: work with farmers to refocus subsidies to help transition to more sustainable, diverse and environmentally friendly form of land use, including organic farms, agroforestry, mixed farming and a move away from intensive livestock farming
• Expansion of hedgerows
• Invest in training and skills for farmers to participate in smaller/people/nature-focused farming
• Reduce pesticide and fungicide use by 50% by 2022. Stricter regulations on pesticides
• Plant 700 million trees; 50% of all farms to engage in agroforestry by 2030. Encourage tree planting in urban areas. Encourage rewilding
• Establish Food & Agriculture Research Council to research sustainable and health-promoting methods of food production and distribution
• Support research into reduction of methane emissions from livestock and the conservation and development of high-quality soils. Encourage urban food growing. Tax meat and dairy which will be spent on the transition to more sustainable farming methods
• Tree planting and soil restoration in upland areas for flood management