

EFRA Branch:
Natural England Section



February 2023

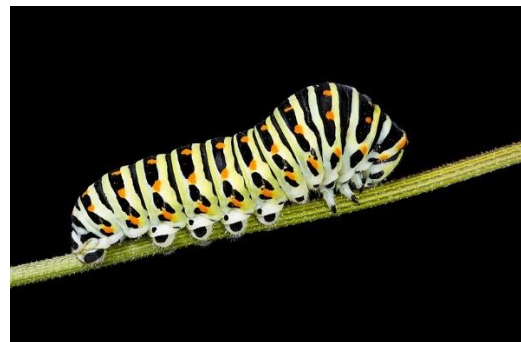
Number 1/23

Dear All

Bounce..



Don't Creep



**Over the 50% turnout threshold. Vote
for Action. Post that Ballot paper.**

Voting for action now allows us to ride the wave of larger industrial action, with much of the rest of Prospect having "caught up" with us, and we no longer stand out there alone.

With the much bigger unions driving real impact, this government is starting to inwardly buckle.

So, be resolute. Don't waste the years of our campaign which started in 2018.

Vote, post and give us the mandate we all deserve.

Hearts Union week 13 – 19 February

A Zoom call from 12.50 – 1.30 on Monday February 13th.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fprospect-org-uk.zoom.us%2Fj%2F84261423330%3Fpwd%3DUnR3M3JzUENjVzRiV3MwcUtlekgwdz09&data=05%7C01%7CDavid.Heaver%40naturalengland.org.uk%7C27701f7e9569491b564d08db090dc0f6%7C770a245002274c6290c74e38537f1102%7C0%7C0%7C638113726892122436%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZs b3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IklhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=r00Qrs894%2BkSONaNyyFGPqT1flsL%2B8RcdtYWUwnGTaA%3D&reserved=0>

Meeting ID: 842 6142 3330

Passcode: 976595

You should find the Outlook calendar invite for this call attached alongside this newsletter ☺☺

While we have you – have you questioned the rhetoric flying at us daily on economics and inflation, the drivers, and arguments made against raising wages for fear of prolonging the pain of steeply rising costs?

Read on from one of our newer reps, Ruben, for some myth busting.

Inflation, inequality, and the post-covid economy

Mainstream media and politicians often paint the drivers of inflation as increasing wages and irresponsible provision of government support to working people. While central bank policies of QE and furlough have played a critical role in inflation, it's certainly not because this money has led to increased wages, which have seen 40 years of stagnation exceeding that of our peer countries¹. Instead this money ended up in the hands of owners of government debt, who stowed it into the safe world of assets rather than investing in new production & jobs, spurring property & stock price rises which continued to defy the lived experience of working people in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

The covid-19 pandemic only saw these trends accelerate. In the three years since the first lockdown, £700 billion was printed by the bank of England through the furlough scheme. While this was necessary to avoid total collapse of society while people were unable to leave their homes, the question of where this money ended up and how it should be redistributed has been shamelessly omitted in discussions around inflation and cost of living in the post-covid economy.

It doesn't take a stretch of the imagination to realise that when working people still needed to pay the majority of their furlough on rent, debts, food and energy bills, and while wealthier people were unable to spend their money in the real economy, this would result in a direct transfer of cash from working people to wealthy asset owners². Despite this, commentators were still shocked when property and stock prices soared during a once-in-a-century pandemic. Covid-19 saw the largest ever increase in the number of UK billionaires³, and given the indirect subsidy of 600 billion pounds from the government, the wealthiest in society were able to spend more, not just on assets but on the essentials of food, energy and medicine, increasing prices across the board as we emerged from the covid fever dream. These drivers were exacerbated by the energy crisis in Ukraine, however the invasion doesn't carry sole responsibility for the biggest fall in UK living standards since the Napoleonic wars⁴. Only decades of managed decline in productivity, a political aversion to wealth redistribution and an inclination to insulate assets in response to crises are to blame for that.

So if you're met with arguments of wage-price spirals and incantations of fiscal responsibility, remember how we got into the cost-of-living crisis, the vital importance of wage rises keeping up with inflation and the raised prices that will outlive that inflation, and the value of your role as a union member in improving the lives of working people.



¹ [Labour market inequalities show a need to boost wage growth of middle earners and low earners in non-traditional employment | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)

² [Who wins and who pays? Rentier power and the Covid crisis | IPPR](#)


³ [Number of billionaires in UK reached new record during Covid crisis | Rich lists | The Guardian](#)









⁴ [Is wage growth at the same level as during the Napoleonic wars? - Full Fact](#)

Prospect's demands








1. **Recognition from Natural England senior leadership of the broken pay system in Natural England:** that Natural England pay has been subject to longterm restraint over a decade. Further it has failed to resolve structural problems arising from vesting in 2006 including disparity between founding body pay and cases of unequal pay. That Natural England pay, especially payscale minima across all workforce pay levels, are now significantly out of step with other organisations across Defra. That the case of Natural England is an exceptional one within Defra which cannot be reformed fairly through annual pay awards or within Treasury dictat of cost-neutral and self-funded reform and must be resolved with additional money.
2. **Fundamental review and reform of pay system in Natural England by July 2022:** which delivers the fair *rate for the job*, fairly; is benchmarked with Defra group and elsewhere; which moves away from performance pay and instead embeds meaningful pay progression based on knowledge, skills and experience. For this to be achieved through:
 - Review of all roles in NE for classification and grading; priority given to problem areas most notably National Nature Reserve (NNR) site staff including reserve wardens, managers and senior reserve managers; group coordinators. This is not a call for a wholesale JEGS assessment.
 - External benchmarking of all NE pay level minima and maxima and rate for the job for the whole workforce (no piecemeal benchmarking)
 - Annual increases for everyone in line with cost of living
 - Guarantee for reaching target rate/ rate for the job within five years of starting
 - Disassociate pay increases with performance and implement annual salary increases based on demonstrable skills, knowledge and experience
 - Guaranteed progression for those with declared disabilities
 - Establish expert allowances for those at the top of payscales who can demonstrate higher competencies linked to their job as a form of through-grading and as a mechanism to retain expertise within Natural England.
3. **Wider and ancillary pay issues**
 - All cases of legacy body and equal pay disparity to be resolved within the initial revised pay framework settlement
 - Stop in-year performance payment scheme, with this money restored to pay budget
 - Embed paid weekly Wellbeing Hour for all staff to enable staff to spend a small amount of time each week focusing on activities that enrich their mental and/or physical health.
4. **The above demands for reform must be committed to in line with the following underpinning principles:**
 - That reform is not achieved through savings made from existing staff's terms and conditions, and ways of working
 - That a reformed pay system from thereon keeps pace with any lifts in Defra group payscales to avoid history repeating of NE falling behind department counterparts and private/ NGO sectors
5. **Submission of the payflex case by Natural England to Treasury in the 2022 cycle to make available the funds for achieving the above.**



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If there is not a local rep for your office/ area, have you considered getting involved? The rep role is very rewarding and flexible, with great training and support from Prospect HQ, and facility time given so it is a part of your job. You can also specialise in topics that you feel strongly about. It can be a genuine boost to your personal development and career.

Please get in touch with Julia Coneybeer (Section Secretary)
Julia.Coneybeer@naturalengland.org.uk if you want to know more.