

# Proposal for Adaptive Resilient Kernow (Ark)

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## Context: the threat of ecosystem collapse

On 20 January this year, the government published a report on global biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse. The report, written by the Joint Intelligence Committee<sup>1</sup>(JIC), was the first of its kind to position global biodiversity loss as a national security threat to our future, not simply an ‘environmental’ issue peripheral to mainstream economic policy considerations. The report warns that the degradation of six critical regions, including the Amazon and the Himalayas, could trigger cascading risks such as mass migration, geopolitical conflict, and severe food insecurity. Using a formal intelligence framework to weigh uncertainty, the text highlights that the UK is particularly vulnerable due to its reliance on international trade for food and fertiliser. Ultimately, the document serves as a strategic call to action, arguing that protecting and restoring nature is a fundamental requirement for a safe and secure society.

Separately, the independent National Emergency Briefing<sup>2</sup>, along with the latest World Economic Forum Global Risks report<sup>3</sup>, come to the same conclusions: **we face an existential threat of monumental proportions and we are nowhere near ready to face this.**

The government’s response to the JIC report has been ambivalent. It cancelled the public launch of the report, has given no response to its findings so far, and has ignored requests by its own MP’s for a parliamentary debate. Moreover, the publication of this report marks an

<sup>1</sup> The JIC brings together the heads of MI5, MI6, Defence Intelligence and GCHQ. You can [read the report here](#)

<sup>2</sup> [National Emergency Briefing](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Global Risks Report 2026](#). WEF

increasing 'policy incoherence' between the government's growth agenda with a national housebuilding programme as its centrepiece, and its avowed aim to decarbonise and protect nature. Policy incoherence is further compounded by polarised politics, bankrupt leadership and toxic party political tribalism. There is no leadership to speak of, nor any vision. **In short, our political leaders are like squabbling children at a beach party, kicking each other's sandcastles down while out to sea a tsunami approaches.**

## The local context

The scale of the challenge we face requires a response no less great in magnitude. Yet Cornwall is a small region tied to a large, highly centralised, technocratic state. That state has, for the past fifty years, been governed by a neoliberal policy framework that imposes a financial straitjacket on government action. Neoliberalism emphasises the centrality of the market and positions government as a 'problem' rather than a solution. Moreover, the primacy of economic growth comes at the expense of democratic expression, not just the environment. This is clearly illustrated in the latest iteration of the devolution agenda which redefines local government as 'Strategic Authorities' tasked with promoting local growth, not as elected chambers responsive to local needs.

In the light of the above, the proposals below are necessarily limited in what they can achieve, but it is hoped that they might stimulate debate and galvanise community action in ways that help build a larger democratic constituency whose insistent demands start to shift the political centre of gravity away from Westminster. Cornwall cannot do this alone but must join other regions and nations - Wales, Scotland, Yorkshire in particular who are demanding much greater autonomy.

## Proposals

### Adaptive Resilient Kernow (ARK) - a kitemark and call to arms

While we must continue to do all we can to move towards a net zero world, more emphasis needs to be put on climate adaptation and how we can prepare for a difficult and dangerous future.

A key issue for the UK is food security. The report referred to above by the Joint Intelligence Committee highlights that between 40-50% of our food is imported, much of it from Europe whose agricultural production is also facing significant, long-term disruptions due to accelerating climate change and ecosystem degradation.

The notion of an Ark or building an Ark deliberately draws on biblical imagery. It serves as a signal to all that our future is in the balance and that in Cornwall and the UK, we need to move rapidly to secure the vital natural resources that affords us clean air, food and water. The use of Ark is both an overarching strategy and a promotional tool that seeks to accelerate all the good work that so many people in Cornwall are already doing as well as an invitation to groups and communities who have not yet seen the need to involve themselves

in initiatives that reduce their carbon footprint and protect the natural environment around them.

In its crudest form it is a kitemark to benchmark any project, business, or community initiative as meeting an agreed set of eco standards within a given time frame.

As a separate overarching strategy, it requires a more co-ordinated alliance of public, private and community initiatives. But to stress again, the Ark is not a boat, it is ourselves and our capacity to care for each other and the natural environment using every innovative means at our disposal.

[The examples contained in the Annex below](#) are illustrative only. Others may adapt and build on the approach or choose to go in another direction; to be truly successful we need to crowd source ideas and initiatives that come from the wider community and voluntary sector.

## Kernow Climate Charter

Different voluntary, community and campaign groups come together to draft a climate charter which serves an embryonic constitution for Cornwall. It would be divided into two parts.

- 1) **The Preamble** would be a short high level document which articulates the vision and direction of Cornwall in an age of climate breakdown. It would affirm its distinct historic, cultural and linguistic identity. It would include a key demand/ aspiration for the progressive realisation of an autonomous Cornwall equipped with the powers and resources necessary to address the climate and nature crisis and chart its own destiny.
- 2) **Guiding principles** would serve as the main beams and foundation of a new Cornwall. It would serve as a 'green' policy framework that directs the work of Cornwall Council and every public body operating in Cornwall.

This means that any work undertaken by any public body would need to align with one or more of its principles. The public body would name the guiding principle(s) under which a particular project or policy sits. This builds in transparency and public accountability and helps ensure that the constitution is a living document not an empty set of principles and aspirations that are quietly ignored.

The same would apply to towns and parish councils.

## An open public letter addressed to the government

This would be a widely circulated open letter addressed to the government and our MPs which directly challenges the claim that 'the government has no more money'. It would remind the government that it is the monopoly issuer of its own currency with the capacity to electronically create vast amounts of money in response to an emergency. It would use the covid pandemic as an example, and the £400 billion electronically created in a matter of weeks in order to fund the furlough scheme, vaccine research and expand the NHS.

The letter would state that we now face several overlapping crises: an ongoing cost of living crisis, crumbling infrastructure, collapsing health and social care, the housing crisis, bankrupt councils, a creaking welfare state, criminal justice system gridlock; and looming over all, an accelerating climate and nature crisis. It would also name gross inequality that enables excessive wealth and the influence of money that acts as a stranglehold on government action.

It would go on to argue that this is not the time to double down on fiscal rules. As with the covid pandemic, the government needs to respond at scale and mobilise every resource at its disposal.

The letter would also make reference to the Second World War and the role of the economist Keynes who stressed the need to place the economy on a war footing in his pamphlet 'How to Pay for The War'<sup>4</sup>. His research focused not on money but on the real human and material resources available in the economy. He concluded that "*Anything we can do, we can afford.*"<sup>5</sup> It is the availability of resources not money, that defines what we can and cannot do.

A separate detailed background brief would be shared with journalists, as well as members of the public, to familiarise them with a basic understanding of modern money, and how a government with its own sovereign currency has far more policy space in which to act, than is often claimed.

## **A citizens assembly**

A high profile citizens assembly would be an opportunity to air these proposals in a way that maximises public exposure and informed discussion. It would listen to presentations by a wide range of experts and community activists and it would call on elected representatives to be part of that conversation.

To avoid the risk of this being another 'talk shop', a parallel co-production team of volunteers would advocate and carry forward citizen assembly proposals in order to ensure that there is a full and considered response by local and central government in the form of action rather than words.

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<sup>4</sup> [How to Pay for The War](#). Wikipedia article

<sup>5</sup> [Anything we can actually do, we can afford](#) Bill Mitchell Blog 29-Jan-2024

## Annex - ARK examples

### Overarching strategy with food security as an example

The single biggest barrier to UK food self-sufficiency is the amount of land dedicated to livestock. Animal agriculture currently occupies around 85% of the UK's total agricultural land<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, approximately 56% of the UK's croppable land is used to grow crops specifically to feed animals instead of humans.<sup>7</sup> Shifting to a plant-rich diet - which still allows for small amounts of meat and dairy—would free up an area of land roughly the size of Scotland. By doing so, the UK could become largely self-sufficient in many major crops.<sup>8</sup> This transition is a particular challenge for Cornwall given that pastoral farming dominates the Cornish countryside.

#### **Provide Financial and Advisory Support for Farmers**

To make the transition viable, robust financial and technical support is essential. Expand funding streams like the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme<sup>9</sup>, and provide access to expert ecologists and farm advisers who can give landowners the resources and confidence to adopt sustainable, plant-based food production.

#### **Build water resilience**

Climate change is expected to bring more frequent agricultural droughts alongside intense, soil-eroding rainfall. Farms must invest heavily in water storage and management. Creating ponds, swales (shallow, wide channels or depressions in the landscape designed to store water and slow surface runoff) and natural flood management systems will help ensure reliable irrigation during dry spells and prevent topsoil from washing away during storms.

#### **Strengthen the Local Food Safety Net**

Cornwall faces significant socio-economic challenges, with one in three children living in poverty<sup>10</sup> and record highs in emergency food parcel usage<sup>11</sup>. In this context, the "free" services provided by nature, such as local food provisioning, act as a critical social safety net for vulnerable populations. To improve food security specifically for these groups, experts and local strategies recommend the following interventions:

- 1) **Expanding Community Growing and Market Gardens.** Cornwall's Nature Recovery Strategy specifically recommends encouraging market gardens and community growing schemes that align with sustainable practices. Cornwall already has a foundation to build on, with 7 Community Supported Agriculture sites, 33 community or social gardens, and 22 community orchards active as of 2023<sup>12</sup>. Restoring and replanting traditional orchards that have been lost to neglect or development can help promote food security while serving as a community resource

<sup>6</sup> [NEB food security](#). Presentation by prof Paul Behrens

<sup>7</sup> [Environmental Land Management Schemes and Food Security](#). The Wildlife Trusts

<sup>8</sup> [NEB food security](#). Presentation by prof Paul Behrens

<sup>9</sup> [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#). Cornwall National Landscape

<sup>10</sup> [Vital Signs 2025](#) Cornwall Community Foundation,

<sup>11</sup> [Vital Signs 2025](#) Cornwall Community Foundation

<sup>12</sup> [Community growing in Cornwall](#). Report by Sustainable Food Cornwall and Exeter University

that brings people together.

- 2) **Decentralise Food Distribution** The UK's highly optimised "just-in-time" supply chains are extremely vulnerable to disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit highlighted the vulnerabilities of a centralized system. By contrast, localized systems, such as direct box schemes, showed greater agility in supplying food when global supply chains faced massive disruptions. It is also about fairer profit margins and reducing the number of middlemen (where farmers often gain only 1% profit)<sup>13</sup>
- 3) **Develop Civil Resilience Plans** Local authorities and communities must develop specific civil resilience plans to outline exactly how food distribution and emergency support will be managed in the event of an acute food shock, such as those caused by extreme weather or supply chain failures. Planning ahead ensures that the most marginalized communities are not left without access to food during a crisis.

## Secure vital ecosystem assets

One example is Bodmin Moor which acts as a carbon storage and climate regulator. It is also the primary water collector for Cornwall, containing reservoirs that store over 33,000 megalitres of water. The peat bogs and mires across the moor act as massive "hydrological sponges" which absorb extreme rainfall during wet winter months and release it gradually over time directly mitigating the effects of drought. Another is Penwith Moor which performs the same services on a smaller scale. Other vital bio-infrastructure that must be conserved at all costs:

- 1) **The Fal and Helford Estuaries:** "Blue carbon" sequestration, climate regulation, and nursery habitats for marine life
- 2) **Mounts Bay:** Coastal water filtration and carbon storage with seagrass meadow spanning five kilometres that act as a highly efficient carbon sink
- 3) **Penhale (near Perranporth) and The Towans (near Hayle)** These extensive sand dune systems act as dynamic natural sea defences#
- 4) **Ladock:** The reintroduction of Eurasian beavers at the Cornwall Beaver Project in Ladock provides a cost-effective, nature-based solution to flooding
- 5) **Cornish hedges:** these unique stone-faced earth banks act as "biophysical filters" that catch and mitigate the runoff of harmful pesticides and fertilisers before they reach rivers. They offer wildlife connectivity, water filtration, and cover over 30,000 miles across Cornwall.

### 'Adopt' a natural asset.

This is a practical action that follows on from the above. There are many other examples of vital natural assets specific to a local area. Rather like town-twinning, towns and parish councils should formally name and 'adopt' a particular natural asset within their locality that marks that area as unique, distinctive and valuable to the life of its people. This would be done in agreement with local faith organisations, schools, the business community, environmental voluntary groups and farmers who would do all they can to protect that natural

<sup>13</sup> [Supporting Sustainable Food Systems](#). Article by Stephanie Steele

asset. A town crier would announce the 'adoption' as part of a public celebration that acknowledges the vital role of nature in our lives. A plaque would be created in the town square naming that asset together with an explanation of why it is so important to the life of the community.

### **The role of farmers markets.**

Farmers markets would also be encouraged to name the free ecosystem services that give rise to the products they sell as part of a public education programme that reminds the public of the vital natural resources and life systems on which they depend.

## **ARK as a kitemark**

This is used as a marketing tool within a broader promotional strategy to raise the importance of conserving our natural assets.

**Parish councils:** an Ark kitemark might be awarded to Parish councils that

- Actively supported community-led tree planting initiatives that captures carbon, increases local biodiversity and prevents flooding
- Promoted vital "pollinator highways" that also allow the soil to hold more water during heavy rains
- Were part of a project to restore upland peatlands
- Installed permeable paving in community spaces to reduce the pressure on local drainage systems during flash floods.
- Imposed pesticide-free zones
- Promoted bulk buy schemes for solar installation

**Community associations:** A local community or residents association might be awarded a kitemark if they:

- Replaced garden paving with gravel or flowerbeds, installed water butts, and created "rain gardens" (depressions planted with water-loving species).
- Formed a volunteer flood group that monitors local "hotspots" (like blocked culverts or storm drains) and maintains a contact list of vulnerable neighbors
- Organised bulk buy for property flood barriers
- Planted "pocket forests" dense, native, miniature woodlands planted in small urban spaces
- Adopted waterbutts and solar panels for each of its members

**A local farmer** might be awarded a kitemark if they:

- Adopted regenerative agriculture that improved biodiversity and soil health
- Adopted Nature Flood Management techniques to protect towns and villages from flash floods.
- Shifted more towards arable rather than pastoral farming thereby freeing up much more land for food production geared towards local markets

**Housing development:** on a commercial level, an Ark kitemark might be awarded to a housing development that adopted a minimum set of flood protection measures as follows:

- Low-Carbon Heating: Air source heat pumps (ASHPs) or ground source heat pumps are mandatory, replacing traditional gas boilers.
- Mandatory Solar PV: Solar panels must cover the equivalent of 40% of the dwelling's ground floor area, where feasible.
- Water-Resistant Flooring: Ceramic tiles or solid concrete flooring, avoiding carpets and wooden floorboards on the ground floor.
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS): permeable paving, rain Gardens (landscaped areas designed to hold and absorb surface water run-off); rainwater tanks and butts to manage surface water and reuse it.