

Unlocking Natural Capital: Turning Assets into Action

Speakers: Alex Black (Farmers Guardian), Tom Vacher (Natural Capital Advisory), James Ramkir-Gardiner (Forestry Commission)

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With increasing focus on sustainability, biodiversity, and land use reform, the *Unlocking Natural Capital* panel explored how farmers and rural landowners can transform environmental assets into new income streams.

Alex Black chaired a dynamic discussion that brought together expertise in forestry, carbon, and ecosystem valuation. The session unpacked how to quantify, manage, and monetise natural capital — from woodland creation and biodiversity net gain (BNG) to carbon credits and water management.

The panel agreed that natural capital should no longer be viewed as a compliance burden but as a **core business opportunity**. By understanding the evolving policy landscape and building credible partnerships, landowners can align environmental value with financial resilience.

10 Key Takeaways for Landowners

- **Natural capital is an asset.** Woodland, soil, hedgerows, and habitats hold measurable environmental and financial value that can now be traded or offset.
- **Start with measurement.** Understanding your baseline biodiversity and carbon stock is essential before exploring markets or funding options.
- **Policy is driving demand.** BNG requirements, carbon markets, and corporate ESG targets are fuelling new income opportunities for rural landowners.
- **Stacking opportunities.** With expert advice, land can often support multiple credits — for example, combining carbon sequestration with biodiversity enhancement.
- **Forestry remains a strong route.** Grants and private finance are increasingly available for tree planting and woodland creation that delivers verified ecosystem benefits.
- **Partnerships are key.** Work with credible advisors and developers to navigate complex market mechanisms and avoid overcommitting future land use.
- **Plan for permanence.** Long-term agreements (often 30+ years) mean projects must fit within family, tenancy, and succession plans.
- **Add value beyond payments.** Enhancing biodiversity can also increase land resilience, improve soil health, reduce flood risk, and strengthen public image.
- **Beware of ‘greenwash’.** Engage only in schemes with robust measurement, verification, and clear contractual terms.
- **Think strategically.** Natural capital should sit within a broader business plan — supporting diversification, sustainability goals, and long-term land value.