O ne of the fundamental building blocks of Plan 2030 is the need to foster careful, sensitive growth that will conserve, preserve, and restore the region's critical natural environments and habitats. The ecosystem services provided by these unique marine and desert systems are invaluable and their ongoing viability is essential to maintain a high quality of life in the region.

Plan 2030 calls for the creation of a national park system to preserve key areas, but goes beyond that with the concept of a 'green gradient.' This gradient designates levels of conservation, preservation, restoration and development for each of five zones, ranging from the most intensely developed urban core to the natural areas that must be preserved. This concept and its policy objectives are more clearly defined in the Conservation Development Guidelines issued by UPC in January of 2009.

Plan 2030 also proposes an open space framework — a system of formal and informal spaces in communities that connect and augment a broader national park system and the resources it protects. This 'green infrastructure' strategy should be reflected not only in plan and form, but also in implementation, leading to healthier ecosystems, habitats and ultimately communities.

"The islands, sand dunes, sea, coast lines, and native wildlife all blend to create Abu Dhabi's incredibly intricate, sensitive and unique natural environment. This extraordinary mix has coexisted with the people living within it for thousands of years."

- Capital 2030, A Sustainable Foundation

The Natural Systems Credit Section is intended to encourage natural resource management and sustainable land use through:

▪ Thorough analysis and assessment of natural systems;
▪ Conservation of existing valuable features through protection or mitigation;
▪ encouraging reuse of land;
▪ Remediation of contaminated land;
▪ Enhancement in ecological value; and
▪ Habitat creation, restoration and provision of habitat connections.

In addition, the credits encourage landscape designs which minimise resource and management requirements.

The overarching hierarchy followed is illustrated below: