

Wildlife & Countryside Link
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Vauxhall London SE11 5JH

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State,
Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

21 February 2022

Levelling up access to nature

Dear Secretary of State,

For many people, disparities in living standards and inequality of opportunity are apparent from the very moment they open their doors and step outside.

The most affluent neighbourhoods are often the greenest, where families can enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of access to parks, woodlands and waterways.

By contrast, poorer communities and people from ethnic minorities are far more likely to be cut off from our natural world, living in a degraded environment, where it is hard to feel pride of place. The experience of lockdown has only magnified this long standing inequality.

The decline in UK wildlife has also been hastened by the fragmentation of ecosystems and by the continuing unsustainable development and intensification of land use. The loss of thriving green and blue ecosystems is a problem for nature itself, as well as for people's connection with nature.

We have come together from a wide range of sectors and interest groups—experts in nature, public mental and physical health, access and equality—to ask that you take three important steps to level up access to nature, which was missing from the “missions” in your White Paper:

- please make equitable access to a high-quality natural environment (in urban, rural and coastal environments) a key measure of success for your levelling up agenda;
- establish a new legal duty in forthcoming planning legislation for developers and public bodies to ensure equitable access to wildlife-rich green and blue spaces in new and existing communities; and
- help to fund improvements in access to nature, including extending the Levelling Up Fund, DLUHC's place-based funds and national infrastructure investment to green infrastructure projects.

There are already reliable measures of access to greenspace, such as Natural England's *Green Infrastructure Standards*, which can be used to measure success. However, existing guidance and Local Authority funding has not been sufficient to reshape our communities in a fairer and greener image, despite the many advantages greener communities would bring for public mental and physical health, local pride, active travel and climate resilience.

Change can come in many ways. The creation of high quality, safe and accessible green and blue spaces and routes in our towns and cities is an essential element in successful placemaking and urban development. The protection and enrichment of more biodiverse, well-connected and accessible places in the farmed landscape will benefit many rural areas. The solutions will be place-specific and varied, but we are certain that they will not be found unless the importance of equitable access to nature is recognised in law and placed at the heart of the levelling up agenda.

Success in creating a fairer country and in halting the decline of wildlife by 2030 will depend on restoring and enhancing nature near to people in every corner of the country. Of course, getting this right could bring billions of pounds of savings for the NHS, help sequester carbon and reduce flooding, inspire people to protect nature, and improve people's health, happiness and prosperity.

Nature-rich cities and towns are also much more attractive places in which to invest, to create businesses and jobs and to study. Cities across the world are putting nature and climate at the heart of their future growth strategies with inspiring results; the UK needs greater ambition and commitment if our cities are to compete on a world stage.

We hope very much that you will make levelling up access to a wildlife-rich environment central to your tenure at DLUHC and that you will put in place the legal duties and funding needed to achieve it.

We would be delighted to discuss these proposals in more detail if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Craig Bennett, Chief Executive, The Wildlife Trusts

Hilary McGrady, Director General, National Trust

Emma Marsh, Director, RSPB England

Helen Griffiths, CEO, Fields in Trust

Lord Crisp KCB, former CEO of the English NHS

Dr Miriam Dobson, NHS Forest Co-Ordinator, The NHS Forest

Dave Morris, Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces

Paul Davies, CEO, British Mountaineering Council

Tom Platt, Director of Operations and Advocacy, The Ramblers

Mark Rowland, CEO, Mental Health Foundation

Adrian James, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

James Blake, CEO, YHA

Ian Nutt, Director of Programmes and Partnerships, Earth Trust

Dr James Robinson, Director of Conservation, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

Dr Rose O'Neill, CEO, Campaign for National Parks

Dr Mya-Rose Craig, President/Founder, Black2Nature

Mark Lloyd, CEO, The Rivers Trust

Terry Fuller, CEO, Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management

Dr Darren Moorcroft, CEO, Woodland Trust

Sue James, Convenor, Trees and Design Action Group

Crispin Truman, CEO, CPRE – The countryside charity

Graham Duxbury, CEO, Groundwork UK

Maxwell Ayamba, Founder, Sheffield Environmental Movement

Allison Ogden-Newton, CEO, Keep Britain Tidy

Stuart Singleton-White, Head of Campaigns, Angling Trust

Sandy Luk, CEO, Marine Conservation Society

Darren York, CEO, The Conservation Volunteers

Talia Goldman and Matt Williams, Directors, UK Youth for Nature

Adam Donnan, CEO, The Institution of Environmental Sciences

Hannah Gardner, Trustee, The Trails Trust

Dr Mark Avery, co-Director, Wild Justice

Pat Venditti, Interim Executive Director, Greenpeace UK

Nicci Russell, Managing Director, Waterwise

Dr Stephen Head, CEO, Wildlife Gardening Forum

Sarah Mitchell, CEO, Cycling UK

Professor David Gowing, Director, Flood Meadows Partnership

Paul Coulson, Director of Operations, Institute of Fisheries Management

Julie Williams, CEO, Butterfly Conservation

Simon Allford, President, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

Emma Slawinski, Director of Advocacy and Policy, RSPCA

Robin Nicholson CBE, Convenor of the Edge and Fellow, Cullinan Studio

Andy Knott MBE, CEO, League Against Cruel Sports

David Joy, CEO, British Canoeing

Chris Butler-Stroud, CEO, Whale and Dolphin Conservation

Gill Perkins, CEO, Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Sue Morgan, CEO, Landscape Institute

Dr Sarah Whild, Chair of the National Forum for Biological Recording

Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary, Open Spaces Society

Luke Murphy, Head of the Environmental Justice Commission and Associate Director for the Energy, Climate, Housing and Infrastructure Team at Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)

Prof Alastair Driver FCIEEM, Director, Rewilding Britain

Prof Miles Richardson, Professor of Human Factors and Nature Connectedness, University of Derby

Sarah Carr, CEO, Naturewatch

Andy Bool, CEO, The Mammal Society

Jo Lewis, Director of Policy, Soil Association

Murray Davidson, Deputy Chair of the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE)

Kit Stoner, CEO, Bat Conservation Trust

Miriam Turner and Hugh Knowles, Co-Executive Directors, Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

Andrew Whitehouse, Head of Operations, Buglife

Steve Andrews, CEO, Earthwatch Europe

Jim Burt, Executive Director Programmes, National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP)

Xavier Brice, CEO, Sustrans

Dr Wei Yang, Co-chair, Digital Task Force for Planning

Alison Ball, Chair of Community Forest Trust, on behalf of the Northern Forest Partnership

Jessica Thompson, Director, Manchester City of Trees

Andy Lester, Head of Conservation, A Rocha UK

Professor Tine Van Bortel, Professor of Global Health & Wellbeing and Director of Health & Wellbeing at De Montfort University, Leicester, and University of Cambridge, Cambridge

Kate Norgrove, Executive Director of Advocacy and Campaigns, WWF-UK

Jill Nelson, CEO, People's Trust for Endangered Species

Barney Eden, Manager at First Port, and Wellbeing Community Outreach Campaigner at the University of Cambridge

Dr Honey Smith, BMedSci, BM BS, MRCGP, DFSRH, PGAMedEd, Chair of Greener Practice

Jamie Agombar, Executive Director, Students Organising for Sustainability UK

Sarah Mukherjee MBA, CEO, Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA)

Dan Raven-Ellison, Geographer and Founder of London National Park City and Slow Ways

QUENCH Network (Linking the Quality of Urban Environments with Nature Connectedness and Health) co-ordinators:

Professor Jess Davies, Professor of Sustainability, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University

Dr Mark Green, Senior Lecturer, School of Environmental Sciences, Liverpool University

Dr Charlotte Hardman, Senior Lecturer, Institute of Population Health, Liverpool University

Professor Jo Knight, Professor of Applied Data Science, Lancaster Medical School, Lancaster University

Dr Rachel Marshall, Senior Research Associate, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University

Dr Andy Yuille, Senior Research Associate, Lancaster Medical School, Lancaster University

Paula Hewitt, President, Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT)

Professor Rhiannon Corcoran, Professor of Psychology and Public Mental Health, University of Liverpool

Sally Haynes, CEO, Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management

Dr Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife and Countryside Link