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The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for the Environment Food & Rural Affairs
By email: george.eustice.mp@parliament.uk
cc defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

Landscapes Review : Response of Government

I am writing to you on behalf of the Nature Conservation Working Group of the UK Environmental Law Association (the “Group”).

In October the Group met to consider the position relating to our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We were fortunate to receive a presentation from Ned Westaway of FTB Chambers who is also standing counsel to the Campaign for National Parks. We were also joined by Ruth Bradshaw of the Campaign for National Parks. Sixteen members of our Group were present at the meeting held on 5th October 2020 - drawn from a diverse range of organisations and roles - all with an interest in nature conservation law and practice.

As you reflect on the recommendations of the Glover report and your response to it, our Group was struck by the following:

- Existing National Parks, AoNB and other protected areas comprise approximately 26% of land in England;
- 75% of SSSIs within national parks are in an unfavourable or ‘unfavourable-recovering’ condition. This contrasts with 61.3% of SSSIs across the UK that are in this condition suggesting SSSIs within national parks are in a worse condition than those outside. This suggests more needs to be done. National parks should be leading in biodiversity, not lagging behind.

The Glover Report identified six proposals to improve the conservation of wildlife:

- Proposal 1: National landscapes should have a renewed mission to recover and enhance nature, and be supported and held to account for delivery by a new National Landscapes Service
- Proposal 2: The state of nature and natural capital in our national landscapes should be regularly and robustly assessed, informing the priorities for action
- Proposal 3: Strengthened Management Plans should set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery including, but not limited to, wilder areas and the response to climate change (notably tree planting and peatland restoration). Their implementation must be backed up by stronger status in law
- Proposal 4: National landscapes should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks - joining things up within and beyond their boundaries

- Proposal 5: A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes
- Proposal 6: A strengthened place for national landscapes in the planning system with AONBs given statutory consultee status, encouragement to develop local plans and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework

Given the high proportion of our SSSIs located within national parks and the combination of their poor condition currently and the clear need for enhanced effort to improve their condition and then to maintain that condition - we believe that it is fundamental that these recommendations of the report are implemented.

There is a further aspect which is troubling which relates to the degree of time and attention devoted to nature conservation by national park authorities. It seems clear that authorities are generally pre-occupied by planning policy and decision-taking, leaving little time and resources to exercise their existing nature conservation functions, let alone any further nature conservation roles as recommended, and which may be introduced as a result of the Glover Report. It is essential that this disproportionate application of effort and resource is redressed. Nature conservation within national park authorities constitutes an essential statutory part of their functions:

In the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, natural beauty is defined as including wildlife. Sandford 1974 and Edwards 1991 both identified the need for more wilderness and active environmental enhancement. The Environment Act 1995 introduced structural changes and the establishment of National Park Authorities and National Park management plans. The purposes of national parks were also refined: (a) of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the areas specified; and (b) of promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public. Where there is a conflict between these two purposes, then natural beauty is given greater weight. Regrettably the statistic regarding the condition of SSSIs in national parks indicates that the management plans are either not promoting favourable biodiversity or their implementation is failing to achieve such.

In parallel with these essential improvements to our National Parks and AoNBs is the overarching need for increased funding and security of funding to enable these recommendations to be realised. The Glover Report's Recommendation 27 is in these terms:

- Proposal 27: A new financial model - more money, more secure, more enterprising

We believe that it is essential to make good on the clear deficit in funding.

We strongly urge you to bring forward the promotion and securing of our vitally important national parks and AoNBs and within them a renewed emphasis upon nature conservation and the favourable management of the extensive biodiversity to be found in these areas.

Should you wish us to amplify upon any of these aspects or to provide any further information, we will be pleased to do so.

Yours faithfully



Richard Barlow
Chair
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