



Name
Via email

Kent Nature Partnership
c/o Kent County Council
Natural Environment & Coast
Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone
Kent
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www.kentnature.org.uk

13th October 2022

Dear

I write to you to express the deep concern of Kent Nature Partnership and its members about the recent direction being taken by the Conservative government in relation to nature and the environment.

Kent Nature Partnership is made up of many organisations working across Medway Unitary Authority and the County of Kent to protect and grow the 'natural capital' of the area. We have been proactively collaborating with partner organisations, all local authorities, protected landscapes and others to ensure we are all ready to implement the new statutory mechanisms the government has introduced via the Environment Act. The new approaches contained within the Act could really start to 'change the dial' locally for nature. They will drive production of Local Nature Recovery Strategies which are intended to provide a coherent and ambitious strategy for nature's recovery across the area for the benefit of both nature and people. Biodiversity Net Gain, linked to these strategies, has the potential to provide meaningful local uplift for nature via the planning process at a district scale. These are positive new initiatives that a Conservative government has introduced and have been embraced positively and with optimism across Kent and Medway.

However, these flagship environmental innovations risk being almost completely undermined by recent proposals from government. These announcements would collectively 'pull the rug out' from under our already pressurised natural environment and make it difficult to deliver any meaningful gain or recovery of nature across Kent and Medway. This would have inevitable knock-on impacts for local communities through the loss of services a healthy natural environment provides, including but not limited to, flood reduction, carbon sequestration and storage, improvement of water quality and pollination.

Of specific concern are the following:

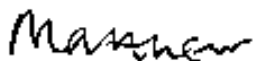
- The recent announcement of the new planning and infrastructure law and 'investment zones' represent the weakening of protections that safeguard an already fragile natural environment, whilst putting our most precious wildlife sites at risk from development. Whilst there are no maps which currently show such proposed 'investment zones' in Kent and Medway - the very concept of large spatial areas where development can take place without rigorous understanding of its impact on the natural environment is shortsighted and fails to understand the role of the environment as the foundation of our health, wellbeing and economy.

- The new Retained EU Law Bill threatens to tear up the basic wildlife protections we have relied upon for years. We cannot work towards ambitious new strategies for nature's recovery if our ability to protect what we have now is eroded. The net result for nature in your constituency and across the country will not be positive.

- Changing plans to support nature-friendly farming through a revision of the planned 'Environmental Land Management Schemes' (ELMS) or returning to an agricultural system where farmers are paid with taxpayers' money based on how much land they own, would be a regressive and shortsighted step. ELMS were pledged within your manifesto. Radical review of these schemes at this stage would dismiss at a stroke over five years of painstaking collaboration between Defra, farmers, landowners and environmental NGOs to design schemes 'post CAP' that will reward land management that not only produces food but supports nature and delivers other vital 'public goods'. These emerging schemes are unlikely to be perfect or address all of the challenges facing farming and food production, but they currently have at their core a long-term commitment to a sustainable approach to land management. Given the environmental challenges we face, this should not be weakened. With specific reference to the Environment Act, watering down the focus on supporting nature through ELMS would also effectively de-couple these schemes from Local Nature Recovery Strategies - which would again undermine these strategies and disincentivise farmers and landowners from engaging in their preparation, vision and ambition.

We urge you to send a message to those making these decisions to think again. It is vital that a 'growth at all costs' narrative is tempered and that the hard-won and well supported trajectory of investing in nature as a vital foundation of our economy and society is positioned as a cornerstone of the Conservative Party approach to both economic and environmental policy. Your manifesto contained several pledges to this effect and deviating from these will not only stimulate long term harm to nature, but will significantly diminish the environmental legacy that has been the government's aspiration over the past decade. Standing firm on protections for nature, aligning planning policy with the intentions of the Environment Act and ensuring that the funds and capacity are present to ensure its delivery must be your priority.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Balfour

Chair of the Kent Nature Partnership