

The Right Honourable Rishi Sunak MP  
10 Downing Street  
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*Sent by email*

22 February 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

### **Delivering on COP15 promises by making space for nature**

The UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in December concluded with agreement, signed by 195 countries, to protect 30% of our land and ocean by 2030. Your Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs rightly [hailed](#) the agreement as “*a historic milestone in protecting our natural environment for future generations*”.

We are writing, as scientists and experts working to protect the natural environment, to urge you to uphold these welcome global commitments by implementing them at home.

The blueprint for restoring natural systems in England is now over a decade old. In September 2010, a group of scientists, including some of the authors of this letter, submitted a Government-commissioned review of England’s ecological network, [Making Space for Nature](#).

The review found that England’s wildlife sites were largely inadequately protected and in poor condition, even in our most special habitats. Overall, the review concluded that the existing network of places for nature was not sufficient to either halt the loss of biodiversity or to meet our natural capital needs. In response to this conclusion, the review’s core recommendation was that England needed more, bigger, better and joined up spaces for nature.

Sadly, this vision has still not been delivered in full. The past decade has seen deterioration in the condition of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) still lack the purposes, powers and resources needed to fulfil their potential to protect and restore nature within their boundaries. If not urgently addressed, this lack of progress in delivering bigger, better and joined up spaces for nature will mean the end of any chance of meeting nature recovery targets in England by 2030, undermining UK promises made at COP15.

Every year counts, and to uphold COP15 commitments at home, 2023 needs to see early, ambitious action to deliver better spaces for nature. There are two steps that can be taken straight away by your Government to implement key Making Space for Nature recommendations:

- [Amending the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill to deliver legislative reforms to purposes, duties and management for Protected Landscapes](#). The [Glover Review](#) of Protected Landscapes, building on Making Space for Nature conclusions, highlighted how National Parks and AONB were held back from delivering for nature and put forward a package of recommendations to address this. A number of these recommendations were accepted by the Government in their

[response](#) to the review, including recognition of need for legislative reform. Ahead of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill's report stage in December, Sir Gary Streeter MP [tabled amendments](#) to the Bill which would have put these key recommendations and related reforms into law for National Parks. It was [very disappointing](#) that at Report Stage on 13.12.22 the Bill Minister failed to take this opportunity to legislate to deliver agreed commitments, merely [stating](#) that the Government was "*continuing to consider how best to implement*" the Glover review. Now that the Bill is in the Lords a further [amendment](#) to deliver Glover recommendations, both for National Parks and AONBs, has been tabled by Lord Randall, with cross-party support. This amendment must be accepted. There have been years of consideration of recommendations to improve protected landscapes for nature. It is now high time for delivery.

- [Adding a terrestrial protected sites condition target to the Environment Act targets](#). There is no target for the condition of designated nature sites in the package of Environment Act targets, despite the fact that the UK's SSSI network (the last fragments of habitat that are most important for nature) are languishing in sub-standard condition, with just 38% in favourable status. This should be addressed by a direct [target](#) for at least 75% of SSSIs to be in favourable condition by 2042, with the remaining 25% showing evidence, based on monitoring, that SSSI features are making progress towards ecological recovery. Although the interim SSSI condition targets in the new [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) are a step forward, they are not legally binding and are no substitute for a headline target set under the Environment Act. The Environment Act gives Ministers the power to set new environmental targets at any time; a new terrestrial protected sites condition target should be set as soon as is practicable. The new Environmental Land Management (ELM) system of farming support, if properly structured and adequately funded (at least [£2.4 billion per annum](#) for the next five years), has the potential to help improve the condition of SSSIs in farmed landscapes. Improvements to SSSI condition assessments will also help to drive progress.

Your Government has made welcome COP15 commitments to net zero, to halt and reverse the decline in the abundance of species and to protect 30% of our land and sea by 2030. It must now complement these global promises with meaningful domestic delivery – starting with implementation of the above recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS, Chair of Making Space for Nature

Julian Glover OBE, Chair of the Review of Protected Landscapes

Lord Cameron of Dillington, member of the Review of Protected Landscapes panel

Jim Dixon, CEO Peak District National Park 2003-2014, member of the Review of Protected Landscapes panel

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Professor Nathalie Pettorelli, Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London

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Professor Christopher Short, Associate Professor in Environmental Governance, Countryside and Community Research Institute, University of Gloucestershire

Professor Bob Smith, Director of the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent

David Stroud MBE, Former Chair of Ramsar Convention Science Panel and AEWA Technical Committee

Professor Philip Warren, Emeritus Professor of Ecology, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield

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Trudy Harrison MP, Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use