



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Trudy Harrison MP
Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577

E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk

W: gov.uk/defra

Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
kate.brady@parliament.uk

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30 June 2023

Dear Sir George

Thank you for your email of 3 May to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents, about access to nature. I am replying as the Minister responsible for access policy.

The Government remains committed to increasing access to nature and recognises the benefits that access to green and blue spaces have for both our physical and mental health.

We are delivering a number of policies across Government to increase access to nature, including:

- Working to complete the King Charles III England Coast Path (KCIIECP) which, at around 2,700 miles, will be the longest waymarked and maintained coast walking route in the world. Over 2,000 miles have now been approved as KCIIECP, with nearly 850 miles already open. It will also create 250,000 hectares of new open access land within the coastal margin.
- Delivering the £9 million Levelling Up Parks Fund to improve green space in over 100 disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the UK.
- Designating Wainwright's coast to coast route across the north of England as a National Trail.
- Delivering the £14.5 million 'Access for All' programme, which consists of a package of targeted measures in our protected landscapes, National Trails, forests and the wider countryside to make access to green and blue spaces more inclusive.
- Our commitment to the provision of safe and appropriate public access in as many woodlands as possible as set out in the England Trees Action Plan. The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) reiterates our commitment to publish our ambition for improving the quantity, quality, and permanency of woodland access.
- Through programmes with the Community Forests and Forestry England, we are enabling creation of large scale publicly accessible woodlands near towns and cities.
- We continue to support land managers to provide woodland access through our Countryside Stewardship (CS) and England Woodland Creation Offer schemes.
- Under the new environmental land management offer, for woodlands, we are providing societal benefits by bringing people closer to nature, allowing long term permissive access for recreation and contributing to the rural economy.

We committed in our EIP to work across Government to help ensure that everyone lives within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space.

In terms of recording historic public rights of way, the Secretary of State has decided to commence the cut-off date, which will provide certainty for all parties. However, in recognising that the reforms have experienced delays due to COVID-19, the Secretary of State has also decided to use existing powers in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to implement a full five-year extension to 1 January 2031 which will have the effect of allowing time for the reforms to have a real impact.

The Secretary of State is keen to promote responsible access, protect nature and support people who work and live in the countryside. The Government remains committed to implementing the rights of way reforms package which will streamline processes and benefit users, landowners and local authorities as soon as reasonably practicable.

On the review of open access maps, work has already begun to plan for the review. The Government is also introducing amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill to facilitate both the first and subsequent reviews of the maps.

Defra understands and appreciates the benefits that permissive access can bring. Our CS scheme is evolving, and Defra policy officials are considering input from various stakeholders and evidence from similar historical schemes, to ensure any future offer is as effective as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trudy Harrison', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

TRUDY HARRISON MP