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10 February 2025

Dear Chancellor,

**Please don't bulldoze through Labour's greatest legacy: England's National Parks**

Among the many announcements in your speech on 29 January, were two that are profound for England's National Parks and National Landscapes. Did you consider your mandatory duty to seek to further these Protected Landscapes before making these announcements? For example, how does your support of Gatwick Expansion seek to further the South Downs National Park, when it will have a devastating impact on its tranquillity and dark skies? Did you consider your legal duty to seek to further the natural beauty of Kent Downs National Landscape before deciding to seek private finance for the Lower Thames Crossing? If you are in any doubt about how seriously you should be taking this mandatory duty, you should talk to your cabinet colleague, Angela Rayner, who last week was forced to concede that she had acted illegally when ignoring this duty.

The Lower Thames Crossing does not yet have planning approval but if it does go ahead, it will involve significant roadbuilding in the Kent Downs National Landscape, a Protected Landscape designated for its natural beauty, and afforded the highest levels of planning protection. When the Secretary of State for Transport, Heidi Alexander, decides whether to grant consent for this scheme, she will need to ensure her decision complies with the strong duties which apply in Protected Landscapes as a result of changes introduced in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023. This duty requires Government Ministers and other relevant authorities to seek to further the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes when making decisions which affect land in these areas. This means that any decisions relating to the Lower Thames Crossing must seek to further the objective of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. The Kent Downs National Landscape Team have made it absolutely clear [when commenting](#) on this scheme that approving it in its current form would not meet the requirements of the new duty as *"the harm to the Kent Downs National Landscape arising from the Project could be wholly avoided by choosing one of the alternative locations/alternative ways of meeting the need (such as technological methods of managing traffic flows)"*.

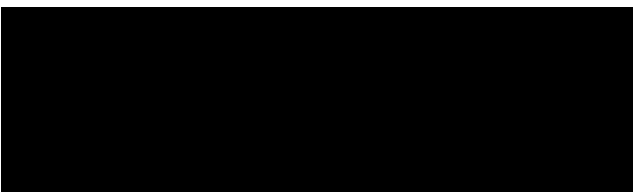
The decision on whether to give the go-ahead to Gatwick expansion will also be for the Transport Secretary, and again she will need to be sure that her decision complies with the strengthened Protected Landscape duty.

Last month, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government was forced to concede that she had acted illegally, by failing to apply the new LURA duty when making decisions about a planning case in the Dedham Vale National Landscape. This was an important precedent – and we should not have to resort to the courts to ensure that legal requirements are complied with.

We would like reassurance that you take your responsibilities towards Protected Landscapes seriously and that you will be applying the LURA duty when making decisions on the funding of any other proposals which affect Protected Landscapes. If necessary, you should also reconsider decisions you have already made about the financing of the Lower Thames Crossing and Gatwick expansion, in order to ensure they comply with this duty.

We recognise that you have tough choices about how best to address the economic challenges the country currently faces. But that should not come at the expense of the Protected Landscapes which are one of your party's greatest and lasting legacies. It was Labour that created the National Parks and National Landscapes (then known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) in the aftermath of the Second World War when rationing was still in place. Labour designated the South Downs, England's youngest National Park, at a time when the country was still reeling from the effects of the 2008 financial crash. Your Labour forebears recognised the importance of protecting England's most iconic landscapes for working people – and from inappropriate development - even in economically challenging times. That need is even stronger today, for the sake of the nation's health, and for the sake of the nature and climate that all our futures depend on. We would welcome the opportunity to show you just why these places are so special and why they must not be sacrificed.

Yours sincerely



Dr Rose O'Neill, Chief Executive, Campaign for National Parks