



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt. Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

By email

Dear George,

12 April 2021

I am writing to you in connection with an incident of illegal tree felling and woodland clearance at Scorey's Copse, Horton Heath in my constituency. I have also contacted Eastleigh Borough Council and Hampshire Constabulary and asked these local agencies to take enforcement action, which is underway.

This clearance was undertaken by a persistent offender who has done this at numerous sites across the country. Sadly, this individual is employing the same tactics at Horton Heath. I am deeply frustrated by the enforcement process that local authorities and other agencies have to follow and as a result, would like to explore how this process could be strengthened and improved.

On Saturday 10 April, I was made aware that a landowner who had recently purchased this small section of local woodland at auction had begun clearing trees at the Scorey's Copse. All trees at this location have Tree Protection Orders (TPO's) and part of area is also classified as Ancient Woodland.

Despite this incident being reported to the relevant authorities over the weekend, the owner of the site has continued with the tree clearance unabated. Furthermore, this clearance has continued in spite of visits by both Council Officers and the Police on both 11 and 12 April. Enforcement officers have told him to stop but this individual has ignored this request and continued to clear the site. I believe the constraints of the current enforcement regulations have in part facilitated this continued breach of the law.

As well as commenting on the specifics of this issue and providing some advice, I would also be grateful if you could set out what more the Government can do to protect trees and ancient woodland. I have two suggestions as to how this process could be improved.

Firstly, as this happened over the weekend, it was not possible to begin enforcement action because legal departments are closed. This means that even though enforcement officers and the police attended, a stop order could not be issued to halt the clearance of site until today. This must be rectified.

Second, I would like to see faster and more robust enforcement action available to local agencies as well as more severe penalties imposed on those responsible, particularly repeat offenders.

Understandably, there is considerable disquiet, anger and disbelief in Horton Heath about this incident. We need to show that those who break the law in this way will be stopped and punished for acts of environmental vandalism.

Yours sincerely,

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