



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

12<sup>th</sup> February 2021

*Dear Coniferent,*

**RE: AIR QUALITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT BILL AMENDMENTS**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns about air quality, specifically in relation to the *Environment Bill*; your comments upon which I have read with interest.

Let me deal, first, with the important matter of air quality.

It is encouraging that air pollution has reduced significantly in the past decade. Emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen by 33 percent and are at their lowest level since records began. However, there is still more to do.

I am therefore pleased that the *Clean Air Strategy* aims to cut air pollution and save lives, backed up by new primary legislation. The strategy details how the UK will go further and faster than the EU in reducing exposure to particulate matter pollution. It sets out a goal to halve the number of people living in locations with concentrations of particulate matter above WHO guidelines and I am encouraged that it has been described by the WHO as “*an example for the rest of the world to follow.*”

The *Environment Bill* builds on this strategy. It will drive significant environmental improvement and tackle pollution by setting and achieving legally-binding, long-term targets in key areas including air quality, water, and resource efficiency and waste. I am pleased that the Bill introduces a duty on the Government to set at least two air quality targets by October 2022; a target to reduce the annual average level of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in ambient air, and a further target to improve air quality.

This action is backed up by a £3.8 billion plan to improve air quality and create cleaner transport. This includes a nearly £1.5 billion investment to support the uptake of ultra-low emissions vehicles; £1.2 billion to increase cycling and walking and make our roads safer for vulnerable users; and £880 million to help local authorities develop and implement local air quality plans and to support those impacted by these plans. This funding is in addition to a further £2.5 billion to support a number of cities improve their local transport systems through the Transforming Cities Fund.

I am also pleased that at the Budget in March 2020, the Chancellor announced a £304 million investment in capital over the next two years to combat roadside pollution, enabling local authorities to take steps to reduce nitrogen dioxide emissions.



As we rebuild our economy in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, I know Ministers will continue to shape a cleaner, greener, and more resilient society.

I am pleased that the Government launched a 'call for evidence' to ensure the full impact that Coronavirus is having on air quality can be understood for future policy development. The independent Air Quality Expert Group has now produced a report which found that there were significant changes in the emissions of air pollutants during the initial 'lockdown' period. The full report is available, here:

[https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/library/reports.php?report\\_id=1005](https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/library/reports.php?report_id=1005).

The *Clean Air Strategy* already sets out an ambitious programme of action to reduce air pollution from a wide range of sources, including indoors, and highlights the Government's objective to raise awareness of the potential impacts of air pollution at home. I am pleased that my ministerial colleagues are already supporting work on indoor air quality by gathering evidence needed to inform effective policies in the future. The Air Quality Expert Group, with input from members of the Department of Health & Social Care's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, will be publishing a paper on indoor air quality this year, which will focus on fine particulate matter and volatile organic compounds as the air pollutants which are prevalent in indoor environments. I am aware that Ministers have also engaged actively with the research community through the Clean Air Programme, which is part of UK Research & Innovation's Strategic Priorities Fund.

As I have mentioned, the Government is committed to taking action on PM<sub>2.5</sub>, as it is the pollutant that has the most significant impact on health. Ministers are developing a clear evidence-based process for setting the fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) target introduced in the *Environment Bill*. This process will involve thorough analysis and independent expert advice, considering economic, social and technological factors. It will also involve detailed analysis to assess what additional action would be needed to achieve potential targets. I am pleased that both Parliament and the public will have the opportunity to provide input into the development of an ambitious and achievable target.

Furthermore, Clean Air Zones will deliver targeted action in air pollution hot spots to improve air quality, improve health and support economic growth in the urban environment. They will also encourage the replacement of old, polluting vehicles with modern, cleaner technologies, such as ultra-low emission vehicles.

I understand that Bath & North East Somerset Council will introduce a Clean Air Zone on the 15th March 2021, with Birmingham City Council following on the 1st June 2021. I shall be following the impact of these new Clean Air Zones with interest. I am pleased that my ministerial colleagues are committed to ensuring that local authorities have access to a wide range of options as they develop plans to address roadside pollution in a way that meets the needs of their communities.

As far as the progress of the *Environment Bill* is concerned, I remain fully committed to this key part of delivering the manifesto commitment on which I was proud to stand. The *Environment Bill* aims to create the most ambitious environmental programme of any country



on the planet. It is a pioneering piece of legislation that tackles climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as establishing a new system of environmental governance and accountability.

I would like to assure you that 'carrying over' the Bill to the next Session of Parliament does not diminish the ambition for our environment in any way, with Report Stage recommencing early in the Second Session and Royal Assent expected in the Autumn. Key work on implementing the Bill's measures will continue at pace, including establishing the Office for Environmental Protection, setting long-term legally-binding targets for environmental protection and creating a new Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers.

The *Environment Bill* will place environmental ambition and accountability at the heart of the Government's work. I am pleased that legislative measures will be introduced to address the biggest environmental priorities of our age, ensuring we can deliver on the commitment to leave the natural world in a better condition than we found it. As I have outlined, these will include meeting net-zero by 2050, as well as wider long-term legally binding targets on biodiversity, air quality, water, and resource and waste efficiency, all of which will be established under the Bill.

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) is now expected to commence shortly after Royal Assent. The OEP will have the power to take public bodies to an upper tribunal if there are breaches of the law. I believe it is important that the OEP is independent and fully transparent in order to effectively hold the Government to account on its targets. I am therefore pleased by assurances from Ministers that the OEP will be operationally independent from the Government, including from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. This means that Ministers will not be able to set its programme of activity, or influence its decision-making.

The *Environment Bill* requires that Statutory Instruments setting out environmental targets must be laid before Parliament by the 31st October 2022. Ministers will continue to develop targets through a robust, evidence-led process to meet this deadline. Long-term targets will be developed through a robust evidence-led process, and Ministers shall not prejudge where this will take them. Ministers have also committed that their proposed objectives for biodiversity targets will include restoring species populations and priority habitats, which will improve the state of nature. By setting targets of at least 15 years, Ministers will ensure that governments look beyond the short-term, but this does not mean we should not make progress until 2030. I am confident that the process put in place to develop targets will contribute to meeting new global goals set under the *Convention on Biological Diversity*.

Additionally, now that the UK has left the EU, EU REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation & Restriction of Chemicals) regulations have been brought into UK law. The UK continues to seek high standards of protection for the environment and human health in the UK REACH regime. I am pleased that the *Environment Bill* already includes safeguards to protect the fundamental principles of REACH, and therefore the proposed amendment was not necessary.



I hope this long and substantive response offers you some reassurance: like you, I believe this is landmark legislation and its progress, as well as its scrutiny through Parliament, is imperative.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you, then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*With best wishes,*  
*Tom*

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**