



October 2021

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about ancient woodlands and the Environment Bill.

I fully understand the importance of this issue and I am glad that our ancient woodlands are already strongly protected under the National Planning Policy Framework. As well as this, the Government also provides standing advice for local authority planners for when they make planning decision proposals affecting ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees. As the majority of the proposals suggested in the Lord's Amendment you have highlighted are already covered under the National Planning Policy Framework and by the ancient woodland standing advice, I do not believe the proposed Amendment is necessary.

I am assured, however, that cases will be kept under review where loss or deterioration of ancient woodland has been or is justified on the basis of "wholly exceptional" circumstances and ministers will encourage them to be brought to the attention of Defra at an early stage.

Further, I welcome that guidance to planners making decisions on what is considered wholly exceptional will be revised.

In addition, and as recently committed to in the England Trees Action Plan, ministers will build on existing protections, including by introducing a new category of long-established woodland (woodlands that have been around since 1840) and will consult on the protections they are afforded in the planning system. The new England woodland creation offer will also fund landowners to buffer and expand ancient woodland sites by planting native broad-leaf woodland, and ministers will update the Keepers of Time policy on the management of ancient woodland, veteran trees and other semi-natural woodland.

The Secretary of State, the Rt Hon George Eustice, and his ministerial colleagues have been in regular discussions with their counterparts in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) to explore further measures that can be included in the upcoming Planning Bill to build on existing protections.

I am assured that the new Secretary of State for DLUHC, the Rt Hon Michael Gove, also shares the passion for ancient trees and their protection.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY