

Dehenna Davison MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham St, London SW1P 4DF

Sent by email

17 March 2023

Dear Minister,

Opportunity to level up nature for people through Round 3 of the Levelling Up Fund

We are writing to highlight an opportunity to further the levelling up agenda, through use of existing funds to help more people benefit from access to nature.

There is increasing evidence that access to a healthy natural environment rich in biodiversity underpins people's quality of life. People who live in areas with higher amounts of green space live longer.¹ Nature also boosts wellbeing: people who are more connected to nature tended to be happier and experience more feelings of vitality and life satisfaction.²

However, this life-enhancing, life-extending tonic is not available to everyone. One in three people in England do not have access to greenspace within 15 minutes' of home.³ There are significant inequalities in access to nature across the country, with people from more deprived communities, disabled people, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and people living in the north of England having less access to nature.^{4,5,6} Rectifying these gross disparities in access to nature is vital in the context of increasing health inequalities across the country.

So far, access to nature has been absent from the levelling up agenda. While we welcome the Levelling Up Parks Fund of £9 million, which was boosted by an additional £30 million, this funding pales in comparison to the gap of £690 million which has been lost from local authorities' park budgets over the past decade.⁷ The decline of greenspace provision and quality over the last decades means that considerable investment is needed to remedy inequalities in access to nature in our communities.⁸ Recent research found that a £5.5 billion investment in urban greenspace could generate an estimated £200 billion in physical and mental health benefits.⁹

There is still £1 billion of the landmark £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund, which, if directed towards projects which support access to nature in the most nature-deprived communities, would make a significant contribution to tackling health inequalities and levelling up the country.

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26540085/>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25249992/>

³ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/MappingAnalysis.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/latest-news/2020/september/the-grass-isnt-greener-for-everyone.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/about-groundwork/reports/outofbounds/>

⁶ https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Feb-2022_CPRE_Local-Green-Spaces-full-report-1.pdf

⁷ <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/state-of-uk-public-parks-2021/#>

⁸ <https://neweconomics.org/2022/05/exposed-the-collapse-of-green-space-provision-in-england-and-wales>

⁹ <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/binaries/content/assets/website/national/pdf/urbangreen-infrastructure-investment-appraisal-2020-report.pdf>

We hope you will consider prioritising support for green and blue infrastructure projects through Round 3 of the Levelling Up Fund which contribute to ending geographic and demographic disparities in access to nature, so that all people in the UK can live healthier, longer, and more fulfilling lives.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Lester, Head of Conservation, A Rocha UK

Paul Coulson FIFM, Director of Operations, Institute of Fisheries Management

Jill Nelson, CEO, People's Trust for Endangered Species

Darren York, CEO, The Conservation Volunteers

Kit Stoner, CEO, Bat Conservation Trust

Tom Fewins, Head of Policy & Advocacy, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Dr Catherine Flitcroft, Policy and Campaigns Manager, British Mountaineering Council

Jenny Hawley, Policy Manager, Plantlife

James MacColl, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, The Ramblers

Dom Higgins, Head of Health and Education, The Wildlife Trusts

Patrick Begg, Outdoors and Natural Resources Director, National Trust

Matt Browne, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Wildlife and Countryside Link

CC: Minister Trudy Harrison MP, Minister for Natural Environment, Defra

Replies can be sent to: matt@wcl.org.uk