

## Nature recovery green paper: protected sites and species Response from the Open Spaces Society, May 2022

### Introduction

The Open Spaces Society is Britain's oldest national conservation body. We were founded in 1865 as the Commons Preservation Society. We campaign for common land, town and village greens, and other open spaces, and public paths, and for the rights of the public to enjoy them. We have more than 2,000 members: individuals, organisations and local authorities at all levels.

### Response to the green paper

We were pleased to note that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs stated in the last paragraph of his foreword: *As we continue our work to build back better and level up our country, the health of our environment and access to it has (sic) never been more crucial.* These are welcome words, but we are sorry not to see them reflected in the green paper, beyond the reference to the nation's forests on page 23.

We remind Defra that the government, in its 25-year environment plan, pledged to make sure that our natural environment *can be enjoyed, used by and cared for by everyone.* This paper is about our natural environment, but it appears not to address people's relation with it—a sad omission.

Clearly, if people are to be encouraged to care for their environment, they need to have access there and opportunities to visit—which are equal for all the population. Discussions about protection, management and enhancement of nature must include people.

There is rarely any conflict between people and nature and, where there is, it can generally be removed by careful management of the site.

### Arm's-length bodies (ALBs)

We are concerned that Defra intends to review the ALBs in relation to nature recovery, as we fear this could be an expensive and disruptive exercise. Natural England has responsibilities for public access and landscape as well as nature, and all three should have equal weight within the organisation (although we often find that access is the poor relation). We would strongly oppose any change which led to the diminution of the access and landscape roles of Natural England and, indeed, would wish to see these better resourced and strengthened.