



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

The Rt Hon the Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park
Minister of State

Commissioners' Office
620 Bristol Business Park
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol
BS16 1EJ
United Kingdom

:

19 July 2022

Dear William,

I am writing in response to your request for advice on the disputed case at Wallshield, in Northumberland. I have received a submission outlining the core facts of the case and understand the sensitivities regarding the balance between woodland creation and breeding wader conservation. I am conscious of the fact that this application is a holdover from a previous grant scheme and therefore has already undergone the notification process for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

This Government has significant ambitions to at least treble tree planting in England and halt nature's decline by 2030. These ambitions need not be in conflict, but instead should reinforce each other, and so the aim should be to chart a course that allows for both to be achieved. Breeding wader populations are under increasing risk and have seen sharp declines in recent years which warrants our significant consideration. As new evidence has been collected on the potential impacts of woodland creation on breeding waders in this case, you should incorporate this new evidence into your decision making.

Moving forward, updated guidance on how to manage woodland creation schemes in high-risk areas for breeding waders will be published soon, expected by the end of the summer, in which we intend to cover in more depth what constitutes an important or significant wader population. The guidance will outline which projects could be considered low risk and which may need more specific assessment, a process that will be designed to be as streamlined and data led as possible. Future cases should be decided in line with updated Government policy as soon as it becomes available, and this case should not be used as ongoing operational precedent. Defra will be working closely with the Forestry Commission going forward to further reform the EIA and grant scheme processes, with the aim of ensuring potential environmental impacts are more effectively identified, assessed, and appropriately mitigated, providing landowners with more clarity regarding our regulatory system.

In the meantime, we should continue to encourage projects to conduct bird surveys where relevant so that they can be assessed as quickly as possible. I am conscious that the speed at which we clarify this process is vital for many projects in the pipeline and so intend to set out the process as soon as possible, before the end of the summer 2022.

With best wishes,

THE RT HON THE LORD GOLDSMITH OF RICHMOND PARK