Andy Burnham MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

23 June 2026

A joint call to Labour's next leader

June 2026 - A cross-sector call to reset the Government's approach to nature recovery

Dear Mr Burnham,

This letter - building on the joint statement on nature published on 16 February 2026 and the 'red lines for nature' published on 14 April 2026 - calls on Labour's next leader urgently to reset the Government's approach to nature recovery. Significant regressions in environmental legal protections, introduced by this Government, have left our vital natural assets and ecosystems more vulnerable to degradation and loss than they have ever been. Laws that once required harm to be avoided now permit unmeasured and accelerated habitat loss. Manifesto pledges on climate, nature, green access and sustainable farming have been all but abandoned.

The Labour Party Manifesto 2024 pledged to "deliver for nature… without weakening environmental protections." These pledges were integral to the platform voters trusted Labour to deliver. The four asks below represent the minimum commitment needed to honour those pledges, rebuild public trust, and meet the scale of the growing national emergency.

FOUR ASKS - THE MINIMUM COMMITMENT REQUIRED

Ask 1: Build nature into our national economic and security infrastructure.

Nature underpins the UK's economy, public health, food security and national resilience, yet is treated as peripheral rather than essential. Candidates must commit to:

- A Strategic Nature Network — recognised as critical national infrastructure — to connect and restore ecosystems at scale, unlocking long-term private investment
- A Resilience and Adaptation Commissioner to drive cross-government accountability on climate and nature breakdown

- A National Nature Jobs Strategy to continue to grow skilled, future-proof employment and technical education pathways across the national nature economy

Ask 2: Protect nature at the point of harm.

The Habitats Regulations and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) laws together ensure environmental destruction is avoided, minimised and compensated for before it occurs, embedding nature protection into early development decisions, accelerating good, green growth. This Government is dismantling these laws. Candidates must:

- Immediately halt Environmental Delivery Plans which risk slowing development, and comprehensively assess their economic, social, environmental and health impacts
- Reject proposed expansions to BNG exemptions and support the continued implementation and improvement of these laws. When done well, these laws circulate investment locally while accelerating housing delivery in a high-trust planning environment.

Decades of protections for biodiversity are being reversed precisely when those protections are needed the most. Strong and clear biodiversity protections enable and accelerate a high-trust, locally resilient national development programme.

Ask 3: Back Nature-Friendly Farming and follow the evidence.

Farming that works with nature improves soil health, water quality, biodiversity and climate resilience while strengthening farm businesses and rural communities. Candidates must:

- Support sustainable, nature-friendly farming with long-term certainty and evidence-based policy
- Unequivocally end badger culling by the end of the next parliamentary session — a clear signal of commitment to science-led policymaking and effective use of public funds
- Fulfil Labour's election pledge to ban bee-killing pesticides

Food production, nature recovery and rural prosperity are not competing objectives. They are mutually reinforcing goals.

Ask 4: Put communities, health and nature at the heart of planning

Short-term pressures have produced developments that erode local character, reduce nature access and degrade biodiversity. Reform of the planning system must:

- Replace growth-at-all-costs presumptions with genuinely plan-led, sustainable development
- Make access to nature a public health right; prioritise densification over greenfield loss

- Introduce legal protections for chalk streams; mandate swift bricks in all new development
- Build trust in, and invest in, our institutions for effective regulation: planning authorities, national parks, Local Government, Natural England and the Office for Environmental Protection

Why this cannot wait

Nature breakdown is already a security threat, a public health crisis and an acute economic risk. The Joint Intelligence Committee has warned that every critical ecosystem the UK relies on is now on a path to collapse, with consequences for food security, displacement and global instability.

3 of the 5 *worst harvests on record in England have occurred since 2020*
£360 *added to average household food bills from climate impacts in 2022-23*
6.3 million *properties now at risk of flooding; 30% of new homes built in flood-risk zones*
£3bn/year *cost of extreme heat to the NHS - and the health service is not prepared*
£350m *of private investment channelled into natural resilience via BNG since 2024*
2,500 jobs/ £250-450m *annual economic value of BNG laws (if left intact) rising to £3bn by 2035*

Weakening environmental safeguards will not build more homes (see the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry). It will instead enable lower-quality development in the wrong places, at greater long-term cost to our national resilience and the public purse. Part 3 of the Planning and Infrastructure Act introduced by Labour now permits unmeasured habitat and species loss. Reversing BNG laws will accelerate it.

The winner of this leadership contest will inherit a national emergency: a planning system under untenable strain, food, defence and energy security in peril, fractured communities and a deepening health crisis. None of these can be adequately addressed without protecting our natural assets. Nature underpins every corner of our economy, our national identity and our society.

The stakes are too high for equivocation. We call on Labour's next leader to commit — publicly and specifically — to protecting nature at the point of harm, backing evidence-led nature-friendly farming, investing in natural infrastructure, enabling healthy access to green space, and safeguarding the ecosystems that underpin our national security.

Signatories

[*This statement is open for endorsement by corporates, not-for-profit organisations, public bodies, academics, professional organisations, businesses and individuals working for nature in the public interest. For enquiries, contact: alexa.culver@rskwilding.com*]

In alphabetical order by surname:

Jamie Agombar, Executive Director, SOS-UK (Students Organising for Sustainability-UK)

James Alexander, Meloria ESG, Environmental Insurance

Nida Al-Fulaij, Chief Executive, People's Trust for Endangered Species

Glenn Anderson, Founding Partner, Swallowtail Consulting

Kate Ashbrook, Chief Executive, Open Spaces Society

Dr Mark Avery, Author and Campaigner

Estelle Bailey, Chief Executive, Berks, Bucks & Oxen Wildlife Trust

Alex Begg, Co-Founder, Wendling Beck

Rachael Bice, Chief Executive, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

Professor Jeremy Biggs, Chief Executive, Freshwater Habitats Trust

Philip Brainin, Chief Executive, Biofarm

Matthew Brown and Rafi Cohen, Co-Chief Executives, Verna

Charlie Burrell, Co-owner, Knepp Estate

William Butler, Chief Executive and Founder, GaiaSicura Limited

Sarah Jane Chimbwandira, Chief Executive, Surrey Wildlife Trust

Sarah Compson, Head of Policy and Campaigns, Pesticide Action Network

Gabriel Connor-Streich, Chief Executive and Kim Connor-Streich, Chief Commercial Officer, Greenshank Environmental

Rob Costello, Director, Naturebank

Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, author of the Economics of Biodiversity: the Dasgupta Review

Bella Davies, Chief Executive, South East Rivers Trust

Georgia Dent, Chief Executive, Somerset Wildlife Trust

Dominic Dyer, Wildlife and Animal Welfare Campaigner, Writer and Broadcaster

Adam Eagle, Chief Executive, Lifescape Project

Bob Edmonds, Director, UKHab

Bob Elliot, Chief Executive, Wild Justice

Elliott Ford, Managing Director, New Leaf Habitats

Dr Tony Gent, Chief Executive, Amphibian and Reptiles Conservation Trust

Ben Goldsmith, Chief Executive, Menheden Capital, and Podcaster: Rewilding the World

Dr Tim Graham, Director, and Dr Phoebe Carter, Associate Director, RSK Biocensus, a designated Responsible Body under the Environment Act 2021

Sally Hayns, Chief Executive, CIEEM

Andrew Hicks, Chief Executive, BNGx

Professor David Hill CBE DL, Founder, Foundation for Nature, founder and former Chair, Environment Bank, Trustee of the Woodland Trust, founding member and former Deputy Chair, Natural England, former Chair Plantlife International, Commissioner with the Food Farming and Countryside Commission

Professor Saul Humphries, Anglia Ruskin University Professor of Sustainable Construction and Managing Partner at Saul D Humphrey LLP (B Corp)

Ollie Hunter, Director, The Hunter Gatherers, Trustee, Future Landscapes Trust

Dick Jeavons-Fellows, Chief Executive, Woodgate Land and Property and The Small Habitat Bank Company

Martin Kelly, Chair, The Trees and Design Action Group Trust

Benjamin Kite, Director, Ecological Planning & Research Limited

Matt Larsen-Daw, Chief Executive, The Mammal Society

Frances Lawson, Environmental Law Consultant

Professor Sir John Lawton, CBE, FRS, Chair of Making Space for Nature

Oliver Lewis CBE, Chief Executive, Joe's Blooms

Eliot Lyne, Chief Executive, Norfolk Wildlife Trust

Craig Macadam, Co-Leader and Director of Conservation, Buglife

Dr Phil McCluskey, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Manager, British Ecological Society

Amy McDonnell and James Sutton, Co-Directors, Zero Hour

Nick Measham, Chief Executive, WildFish

Tom Nelson, Director, Nature Impact

Robin Nicholson, Convenor, the Edge Think Tank

Dr Pascale Nicolet, Chief Executive, Newt Conservation Partnership

Robert Oates, Chief Executive, Arbtech

Dr Rose O'Neill, Chief Executive, Campaign for National Parks

Chris Packham, Director, Wild Justice, Broadcaster

Richard Peers, Founder, Responsible Risk

Ian Philips, Chair, Landscape Institute Policy & Public Affairs Committee

Jack Potter, Director, Wild Capital

Robert Pownall, Founder, Protect the Wild

Adam Ralph, Co-founder and Director, Field Works Biodiversity Land Management

Tom Rippin, Chief Executive, On Purpose, Chair, International Futures Forum

The Rossiter Family, Belmont Estate

Ruby Sleigh, Chair, Architects Climate Action Network

Gill Smallman, Trustee, Natural Basingstoke

Dr Jo Smith, Chief Executive, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

Digby Sowerby, Managing Director, Environmental Farmers Group

Catherine Spitzer, Chief Executive, Environment Bank

Jan Stannard, Co-Founder and Chief Executive, Heal Rewilding

Dr Paul Sterry, Wildlife Author and Conservationist, Trustee, Birds on the Brink

Kit Stoner, Chief Executive, Bat Conservation Trust

Archie Struthers, Chief Executive, Nattergal

Debbie Tann MBE, Chief Executive, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Morgan Taylor, Director, Greengage Environmental

Dr Tom Tew, Chief Executive, NatureSpace Partnership, former Chief Scientist, Natural England, former Trustee of the National Trust and Heritage Lottery Fund

Ruth Tingay, Director, Wild Justice and Raptor Persecution Blog

Simon Towers, Director, Green Earth Developments

Isabella Tree, Co-owner Knepp Estate and author of Wilding – *t*he return of nature to a British farm

Fay Vass, Chief Executive, British Hedgehog Preservation Society

Sylvain Vaquer, Chief Executive, Mozaic Earth

Dale Vince OBE, Founder, Green Britain Foundation and Owner, Ecotricity

Chris Wallace, Chair, Bristol Tree Forum

James Wallace, Chief Executive, River Action

Matt Walpole, Chief Executive, Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Douglas Wanstall, Head of Projects, Beyond Zero, Founder, UK Carbon Code of Conduct

Ali White and Dr Gio Iozzi, Co-Chairs, Canopy Coalition

Henri Willmot, Director of Natural Capital, Biocore Agri

Rosie Wood, Chair, The Badger Trust

Dr Stephanie Wray, Director, Athene Consulting and Nature Repair, past President of CIEEM, Chair of the Mammal Society, Trustee of Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

Dan Yates, Executive Director, EOCA (European Outdoor Conservation Association)