

Comments on behalf of Norfolk Local Access Forum - revised draft

Consultation closes on 8 May <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-for-food-farming-and-the-environment>

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | These comments are limited to questions of public access. |
| 2 | Norfolk Local Access Forum welcomes the inclusion of public access as a 'public good' to be considered alongside other identified public goods (p35), but believes that the value and benefits of access have not been fully recognised. We believe that public access should be included as a public good on p6 (§6), p8 (§16), p12 (3rd paragraph), p15 (§ii), p33 (§vi) and p34 (last paragraph). We are strengthened in this view by noting that the recently published report from the Select Committee on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, <i>The countryside at a crossroads: Is the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 still fit for purpose?</i> concluded (§24): "The Government is consulting upon a new system of farm and environmental payments to be applied following the withdrawal of the UK from the EU and the cessation of Common Agricultural Policy payments. We recommend that the Government should include payments for maintenance and enhancement of public access within this new system of public funding ...". The report is available at https://www.parliament.uk/nerc-act-committee . |
| 3 | The LAF is therefore disappointed that, in spite of many recent mentions by Michael Gove of the importance of access for the public to the countryside, within the document itself, significant mention of public access is limited to p35. Even on this page, the wide range of benefits is barely touched on, in spite of the mention of over 100 million visitor days and spending of £2.2 billion in the National Parks alone, and 8 years ago; the very substantial income generated through public access receives no other mention. We also note that the inclusion of public access in the consultation question on p35 is framed so that information about its importance to consultees will be lost unless it is in the top three. |
| 4 | We welcome the intention to make public access one of the subjects of new schemes about which legislation will be framed (p64), but the effect of the consistent lack of recognition of its importance and value in the rest of the document causes us to doubt how seriously this aspect is being taken. We would press for additional thoroughgoing consideration of the benefits of public access to the health and wealth of the nation: there is already substantial and regularly increasing evidence of the welfare benefits of being and exercising outdoors and especially in the countryside - which requires access. |
| 5 | We would also request attention to the importance and value of permissive access. Too often, access is seen to be given only through the rights of way network. As legislation stands, changes to this network (including additions) are made only by a slow and cumbersome process. Proposals for change to this process were enacted through the Deregulation Act 2015, but 3 years on there is still no sign of the Regulations necessary to implement them. |
| 6 | In addition to these concerns, we have an additional issue in Norfolk (which |

Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

| | |
|--|---|
| | we believe also affects Suffolk and other East Anglian areas). Under previous Stewardship schemes, farmers have been able to receive funding when providing public access through permissive routes (mainly footpaths but also some bridleways). As these schemes come to an end, in most cases there is no funding to replace that provided, and in the absence of funding, the majority of farmers are ending access. In parts of the county, these routes provided the main off road walking routes and their absence represents a significant loss to those communities. We would hope to see encouragement and support from the government to provide such routes in the future. |
|--|---|

The extracts below from the source document are provided for ease of reference and should be deleted from the final submission

| | |
|--|--|
| | p6: 6. We will incentivise methods of farming that create new habitats for wildlife, increase biodiversity, reduce flood risk, better mitigate climate change and improve air quality by reducing agricultural emissions. We will achieve this by ensuring that public money is spent on public goods, such as restoring peat bog and measures which sequester carbon from the atmosphere; protecting dry stone walls and other iconic aspects of our heritage; and reducing disease through new initiatives that better monitor animal health and welfare. |
| | p8: 16. Our new environmental land management system will be underpinned by natural capital principles, so that the benefits the natural environment provides for people and wildlife are properly valued and used to inform decisions on future land management. The new system aims to deliver benefits such as improved air, water and soil quality; increased biodiversity; climate change mitigation and adaptation; and cultural benefits that improve our mental and physical well-being, while protecting our historic environment. |
| | p10: 24. Agriculture exists within broader rural communities and economies. We recognise that businesses in rural areas (including farms) face particular challenges, which include reduced physical and digital connectivity; and we will be working closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on improving rural broadband and 4G. Those who live and work in the countryside should have the same opportunities as those in urban areas. We will work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, as part of delivering the government's Industrial Strategy, to support rural businesses. |
| | p12: A number of public goods arise from farming and forestry. This includes contributing to the protection and enhancement of the character of our historic landscapes; biodiversity and environmental provision; climate change mitigation [EC:56]; innovation and development which provide consumers with better, safer, cheaper food; and animal disease surveillance and control. Outside of the EU, we have an opportunity to support farmers and landowners better to deliver these public benefits. |
| | P15: ii. Rewarding farmers and land managers to deliver environmental goods that benefit all Our aim is for public money to buy public goods. In 25 years' time, we want cleaner air and water, richer habitats for more wildlife and an approach to agriculture and land use which puts the environment first. From 2022 onwards, |

Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>a new environmental land management system will be the cornerstone of our agricultural policy, achieving improved biodiversity, water, air quality, climate change mitigation, and the safeguarding of our historic landscapes. This will allow us to fulfil our manifesto commitment to become the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.</p> |
| | <p>p33: vi. Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment</p> <p>Agriculture and farming practices shape our rural historic environment, our distinctive landscape features and our historical monuments [EC:55-6]. The conservation and enhancement of our cultural heritage contributes directly to a healthier environment, benefitting people, offering support to thriving rural economies and national prosperity.</p> <p>Woods and forests offer many benefits to society and the economy. They offer the potential for very significant benefits in carbon sequestration; provide outdoor spaces for exercise and recreation; and also contribute to improving agricultural productivity and rural business diversification.</p> |
| | <p>p34: Areas such as the uplands deliver many public goods that are worthy of public investment: not only are they a beautiful and rich part of our heritage, they can encourage biodiversity, protect water quality and store carbon. Farm businesses and communities in rural areas can face particular challenges, including physical and digital connectivity. Improved connectivity increases innovation and productivity across the economy, bringing significant economic rewards.</p> |
| | <p>p35: Public access to the countryside</p> <p>With agriculture accounting for more than 70% of land use in the UK, farmland forms an important amenity value for those who are accessing it and farmers and land managers can have a vital part to play in facilitating a deeper connection with the countryside. This may be through the maintenance of public rights of way, which can improve public health through access to clean air and exercise, for instance horse riding or providing opportunities for recreation and tourism. In 2010, England's National Parks accumulated 104.2 million visitor days and attracted spending of £2.2 billion.</p> <p>The UK's unique landscape also makes it a widely sought after location for film and television, thus providing an important advantage for the UK's creative arts industry over its international competitors. Initiatives such as Open Farm Sunday can also act as an important vehicle to educate the general public about where their food comes from and the natural environment.</p> <p>Consultation questions Which of the environmental outcomes listed below do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance: a) Improved soil health b) Improved water quality c) Better air quality d) Increased biodiversity</p> |

Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>e) Climate change mitigation f) Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment</p> <p>Of the other options listed below, which do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:</p> <p>a) World-class animal welfare b) High animal health standards c) Protection of crops, tree, plant and bee health d) Improved productivity and competitiveness e) Preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands f) Public access to the countryside</p> <p>Are there any other public goods which you think the government should support?</p> |
| | <p>p47: Rural businesses</p> <p>It is important for rural communities to be sustainable and multi-generational, providing employment opportunities for the young and not forcing people out due to a lack of suitable housing. We want to raise the productivity of rural businesses to improve growth and prosperity across rural communities. We will work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, as part of delivering the government's Industrial Strategy, to support rural businesses.</p> <p>We recognise that businesses and communities in rural areas face particular challenges, including physical and digital connectivity. Alongside the significant public investment being made, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is working to make improvements to digital connectivity, including in rural areas. Improved connectivity also increases innovation and productivity across the economy, bringing significant economic rewards. In agriculture, improved connectivity can support precision farming, including environmental sensing systems.</p> |
| | <p>P64: 15. Legislation: the Agriculture Bill</p> <p>We will introduce an Agriculture Bill that breaks from the CAP, providing the United Kingdom with the ability to set out a domestic policy that will stand the test of time.</p> <p>We will make sure that Parliament has due scrutiny of our agriculture legislative programme, we will seek consent from the devolved legislatures where relevant and ensure that farmers and land managers have time to prepare and adjust.</p> <p>To meet the policy ambition set out in this consultation paper, the Agriculture Bill could provide legislative powers, including:</p> <p>i. to continue making payments to farmers and land managers, with power to</p> |

Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>amend eligibility criteria for payments</p> <p>ii. measures to strip out unnecessary bureaucracy and strengthen the delivery landscape</p> <p>iii. to create new schemes for one or more of the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• promoting and increasing agricultural productivity and resilience• preserving, protecting and enhancing the environment• providing support to rural communities• animal and plant health and animal welfare• public access <p>iv. to establish a new basic compliance or inspection regime</p> <p>v. to take emergency measures to provide aid in extreme events</p> <p>vi. to retain UK-wide frameworks where we need commonality</p> <p>vii. to provide for continuity during the 'agricultural transition' period for some elements of the current CAP</p> |
|--|--|