

To: Mary Creagh CBE MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature)
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Cc: Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister of State (Minister for Housing and Planning)
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

2 July 2025

Dear Minister,

Re: Consultation on Irreplaceable Habitats and the inclusion of priority habitat grasslands.

With National Meadows Day approaching (5 July 2025), we are asking you to protect England's most rare and unique species-rich grasslands **by bringing forward the consultation on the list of Irreplaceable Habitats (IHs) to include these priority habitats.**

Priority habitat species-rich grasslands are irreplaceable treasures in our natural, historic and farmed environment. The majority have been destroyed in the last century and they now cover an estimated 0.8% of England's land.

The loss of these grasslands continues to this day; they are more vulnerable to damage and destruction, as their value for nature and climate can be less obvious than other habitats such as ancient woodlands. Despite representing some of the rarest and most threatened habitats according to law in England – 'priority habitats' – **there are no priority habitat grasslands on the current IH list.** This effectively means that these vulnerable grasslands can be destroyed within the Biodiversity Net Gain framework and do not have adequate protection within the wider planning system.

Priority habitat grasslands clearly meet the Government's irreplaceability criteria; they **cannot be re-created within a meaningful timeframe** due to age, uniqueness, rarity, and species-richness:

- **Age:** their rich ecosystems take many decades, if not centuries, to establish; for example, the chalk grassland of Salisbury Plain has been grazed from the Neolithic period and the pastures of Coombe Abbey Hotel (within your constituency) are remnants of its historic and ecclesiastical past.
- **Uniqueness:** they have unique communities of wild plants, fungi and other biodiversity found nowhere else in the country (and often of global importance) as well as complex soil structures.
- **Rarity:** whilst the extent of all types of priority habitat grasslands have decreased, some types are even rarer; there are estimated to be only 7200 hectares of lowland meadows and just over 800 hectares of upland hay meadows remaining in England.

- **Species-richness:** they are among our most biodiverse habitats; for example, calcareous grasslands can contain more than 40 plant species in one square metre.

This Government has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect England's irreplaceable grassland heritage, to help meet its statutory targets and global responsibilities for nature's recovery. We welcome the Government's commitment to create a planning system that delivers for both nature and people; updating the IH list to protect priority habitat grasslands and other irreplaceable habitats is a key step in upholding this commitment.

Attached is a statement signed by organisations who are calling for a consultation on the IH list, as well as a briefing that we have shared with your officials. **We would welcome a meeting with you to discuss the opportunities to safeguard these precious habitats for future generations.**

Yours sincerely,



Nicola Hutchinson
Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Conservation