



Right Honourable Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

June 20 2017

Dear Secretary of State

AIR QUALITY

I write as a former Defra Minister – and more particularly as current Honorary President of Environmental Protection UK - to offer warm congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Affairs.

DEFRA clearly has an enormously important range of responsibilities post-BREXIT – from reinventing an English agricultural policy to mitigation of climate change. However one area in which your early intervention is needed is a new initiative to bring together policies to curb the damaging levels of air pollution in many parts the country and the ill health and earlier deaths which it is causing. The matter is urgent: it is estimated by health professionals that each year some 40,000 people in the UK have their lives cut short by our failure to tackle air pollution effectively.

Whilst it is not easy to bring about rapid improvement in this area because there will need to be major changes in vehicle fleets, vehicle technology, traffic management and in several other industry sectors to get to the air quality we should all like to achieve. But I believe there is now a real public – and Parliamentary - appetite for tackling this problem more vigorously than hitherto and there could be a warm response on all sides for some new initiatives on your part.

Any such initiatives would however have to go substantially beyond the cautious proposals which the High Court compelled your predecessor to publish shortly before the election. I have to say that those proposals seem to bear all the marks of a timid Whitehall compromise and seem to consist largely of passing the problem to inadequately resourced local authorities. Focussing on mere compliance with a European directive in a few cities (or parts of cities) they convey no sense of urgency in creating an integrated national strategy for cleaner air co-ordinated at central Government level.

Environment Protection UK (formerly the National Society for Clean Air) are commenting in detail on the current consultation proposals and I commend those comments to you. EPUK and its predecessor – the National Society for Clean Air – is one of the oldest environmental organisations in the country and has particular strengths in its professional and business membership and its links to local government. It has always been a reliable source of very well-informed and practical advice and support to Government in the development and implementation of clean air policy, and I am sure would be very well-placed to help further at

the present time if you are wanting to reach out beyond Whitehall to develop a more effective policy.

I would like to commend to you one particular proposal put forward last year by EPUK and the Clean Air Alliance – namely the establishment of a high-level Clean Air Commission to help formulate and drive forward an ambitious national strategy for Cleaner Air - with an immediate task of prioritising efforts across government to ensure more effective enforcement of existing legislation and standards; and then to develop a forward strategy including a new Clean Air Act. 60 years ago the Beaver Committee played just such a role in working out an integrated strategy for tackling the notorious smogs caused by coal-burning in those days, and in building public and all-party support for the radical action embodied in the great Clean Air Act of 1956. You might find the creation of such a body with all-party support could be a useful way forward in the present uncertain times.

I should be happy to discuss further together with a few colleagues from EPUK to go into more detail.

With best wishes for your tenure

Yours sincerely

LORD WHITTY