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Letter from James Cross, Chief Executive of Natural England

I am writing to you to mark the end of my first year at Natural England; and what a thoroughly engaging, rewarding and busy year it has been!

Over this time we have made far-reaching and bold changes to Natural England. We are working with Defra to build a joined up strategy and are determined to be a modern and highly efficient government body, completely focused on delivering outcomes for the environment, economy and people.

With the appointment of Andrew Sells as Chairman, myself as Chief Executive Officer, a new Board and a new Senior Leadership Team, we have re-focused the organisation on two simple goals. First, to make us easier to work with and second, to make us more effective.

I joined Natural England because I believe the work we do is important. Our country's environment and landscapes are a precious resource, and the foundation of much of our economy, culture and wellbeing. This resource should be looked after carefully – now - and into the future. Having grown up in Teesside, an area of heavy industry, vibrant wildlife and wonderful landscapes I believe passionately that people, our economy and our environment can and must thrive together. These convictions are at the heart of the changes that we are making at Natural England.

We are stripping away bureaucracy and replacing tick-box conservation with real world outcomes. We are working more closely with business and helping them to do something positive for the environment and earn a living at the same time.

An organisation on the move – introducing our Outcomes Approach:

At the heart of all of this work is what we have named our new 'Outcomes Approach'. We will be focusing on what we want to achieve in the real world rather than on rules and process. By listening more to those we deal with, agreeing common and shared objectives and by explaining our workings out, we firmly believe that we can all go much further to achieving our desired outcome to secure a healthy environment, economy and society.

Whilst our advice will always be based on government policy, the law and evidence, Natural England will strive to work with the grain rather than against it. We will do this by:

- Engaging early, listening to what people want; and helping them achieve their aims in a way that benefits the environment, but takes account of their circumstances;
- Building a common understanding of what we are trying to do on the ground. Be it on an upland moor, a port development or a local nature reserve, we will always seek the best outcomes for everybody, at the right pace;
- Being open minded, flexible and focusing on problem solving;
- Being completely transparent and answering questions in a way that people can understand;
- Providing clear and objective advice based on an even-handed view of the best available evidence.

In short, our teams will be looking for every opportunity to establish really positive working relationships based on shared objectives; radically reducing the need for regulation, commercial uncertainty and unnecessary delays.

What else are we doing?

Working on a principle of 'earned recognition', we want to cut red tape and trust our partners to be able to do more for themselves, whilst at the same time doing something great for the environment. One way we are doing this is by setting up delegated authority agreements.

We are cutting delays and cost by introducing more class licences such as our new low impact bat class licence. We have also very recently launched an exciting [pilot project](#) that will bring more flexibility to the licensing system for great crested newts. With more intelligent use of data, and improved strategic decision making around impacts, this project will significantly reduce the licencing and mitigation costs to business and provide much better protection for newts.

We are also building up our enhanced chargeable advice service so that we can meet strong market demand from business for our assistance in helping them progress their projects in an environmentally friendly way.

What are we doing next?

One year on, under our new leadership, we have made very strong progress. But for us this is just the start. Natural England has a highly committed and expert workforce and we are growing and rising to the challenges of the future. Over the coming months, we will be driving forward open access to our environmental data, to stimulate better management of our environment and open up new market opportunities for business and rural communities. We are launching our modern apprenticeships scheme, to provide jobs and build skills and expertise in the rural economy and environment sector.

We are also developing our conservation and designations strategies; embedded within Defra's overarching strategy, these will clearly set out our focus, and where we will direct our efforts to maximise our conservation contribution. The designation strategy will, for the first time, set out which sites we are designating and why, providing stakeholders and interested parties with complete transparency.

To deliver on our promise as an organisation it is vital we listen to, understand, and respond to your needs, and to offer support and to help. The early feedback that we have had on what we are doing in Natural England is very positive. I am very much looking forward to my next year and am certain that we will continue to change and grow as an organisation.

I hope you found this letter interesting and I would welcome any comments you may have, please feel free to contact me at: Chairman.CEO@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Cross', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

James Cross
Chief Executive
Natural England