

# TOM TUGENDHAT MBE MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

27 July 2022

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3JR

Our Ref: TT60294/Hectorage Road, Tonbridge

Dear George,

I have been informed by the Forestry Commission that they have made a decision to refer alleged illegal felling of trees at Hectorage Road, Tonbridge, to the DEFRA Investigation Services (DIS) for further investigation.

Having taken account for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Enforcement policy statement dated October 2015, in advance of the DIS investigation reaching a decision I would like to make clear that there would be clear support from residents locally in Tonbridge for the severest sanctions that might be pursued as a result of this investigation.

Between Thursday 6 January 2022 and Friday 7 January 2022, a large area of woodland was destroyed which included the felling of significant trees on land north of Hectorage Road, Tonbridge. There was no prior communication to any neighbouring resident as well as the local authority, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, or any local business. Over many years residents have been able to enjoy sightings of bats, foxes and their cubs and nesting birds. There were also reports of slowworms, protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and a listed priority species in the post-2021 Biodiversity framework. I have enclosed numerous pictures to demonstrate the scale of destruction locally.

In the intervening months, working closely with Cllrs Jon Botten, Matt Boughton and James Lark at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, we have been able to secure a Tree Preservation Order for the remaining trees on site and its neighbour, while an Article 4 direction has already been placed on the land.

Given the scale of local public interest in the resolution to this matter, I would be keen to understand further from your team as to the timetable of the investigation and the matters under consideration. I have a longstanding concern that the felling of this woodland does not comply with section 2.1 of the Forestry Commission guidance under the felling licence legislation, which states:

*"In any calendar quarter you may fell up to 5 cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) of growing trees on your property without a felling licence, as long as no more than 2m<sup>3</sup> are sold."*

**Member of Parliament for Tonbridge and Malling**

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In addition, I would be pleased to meet with you and your officials to establish whether there is any further information that could be provided which would help you reach a decision in the best interests of local residents in Tonbridge.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

*Best wishes,*

*Tom Tugendhat*

**TOM TUGENDHAT**