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HOUSING THREAT TO NATURE NETWORK

Sir, The government's policy for a nature recovery network, published last October as part of its 25-year environment plan, committed it to creating a connected network of places across England that are richer in wildlife, more resilient to climate change, and provide wider benefits, including carbon capture. Housing policy has not caught up with this commitment, with councils considering development on sites that will be key to nature networks.

In West Sussex, 3,500 houses are being proposed next to the Knepp rewilding project, an outstanding example of habitat restoration hosting some of the country's most threatened species, and a site under consideration to become a National Nature Reserve and, potentially, the beating heart of one of Natural England's new nature recovery areas. The development would stop nature in its tracks, preventing the Knepp estate from connecting with St Leonard's Forest and Ashdown Forest, reducing it to a wildlife island in a sea of housing, allocated by central government.

We appreciate the need for more homes to meet housing requirements but urge the government to honour its pledge to build "the right homes in the right places".

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David Hill, Chair of Plantlife, Chair of the Environment Bank; Dr Paul Jepson, Nature Recovery Lead, Ecosulis; Tor Lawrence, Chief Executive, Sussex Wildlife Trust; Prof Sir John Lawton, FRS; Dr Mike Maunder, Executive Director, Cambridge Conservation Initiative; Darren Moorcroft Chief Executive, Woodland Trust; Dr Michael R W Rands, Master, Darwin College, University of Cambridge; Hugh Raven, Chairman, John Ellerman Foundation, and the Environmental Funders Network; Mark Rose, Chief Executive, Fauna & Flora International; Lord Smith of Finsbury, former Chairman, Environment Agency, and Master, Pembroke College, Cambridge; Dr Ken W Smith, former Head of Species Research, RSPB; Chief Executive, RSPB; Shaun Spiers, Executive Director, Green Alliance; Jonathan Spencer MBE, FRSB, FRSA; Tanya Steele, Chief Executive, WWF; Prof William J Sutherland, Miriam Rothschild Chair in Conservation Biology, University of Cambridge; James Thorton, Chief Executive, ClientEarth; Isabella Tree, Knepp Estate; Crispin Truman, Chief Executive, CPRE The Countryside Charity; Dr Frans WM Vera, founder of The Ecological Network, The Netherlands; Dr Tony Whitbread, President, Sussex Wildlife Trust; Prof Kathy Willis, CBE FGS, Professor of Biodiversity, University of Oxford; Baroness Young of Old Scone