

# ELIZABETH TRUSS MP

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## HOUSE OF COMMONS LONDON SW1A 0AA

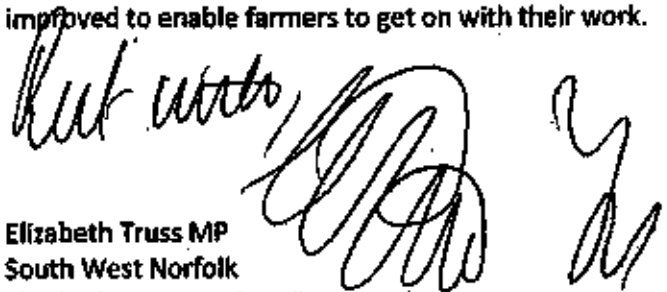
Caroline Spelman  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
DEFRA  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
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Dear Secretary of State,

I am concerned that the replacement of the European Commission's Habitats Directive is too onerous and bureaucratic. I recently visited Abrey Farms at Wretham, a potato and onion farm in my constituency. The farm has been struggling to develop their brown fields sites to accommodate extra storage facilities. The site is situated on the boundary within an SPA area, home to Stone Curlews. They have been advised to develop on a green field site as this is further away from the SPA boundary, yet actually closer to the Stone Curlews. The RSPB have visited the site and acknowledge that the Stone Curlews are increasing in numbers on the farm due to the sensitive approach by the farmers. Abrey Farms have just been granted planning permission for one storage facility only on the brown field site. They would like to increase the storage capabilities to at least an additional four in order to accommodate their growing onion business. This will once again require a lengthy process of inspections and applications. Whilst this is happening, storage facilities are having to be used in Lincolnshire involving a substantial cost in terms of man hours and fuel.

There has been no evidence that the activities of this particular farm has had any negative impact on the Stone Curlews, quite the opposite with numbers flourishing. In fact whilst the farmers are positively nurturing the development of these birds, the development of the farm is restricted by being within an SPA buffer zone and tied up in legislation. I believe there needs to be increased flexibility within the system that accommodates those farmers who safe guard the environment whilst at the same time supporting their business strategy. I believe more attention needs to be focused on the nature of the business before a 'one size fits all' approach is adopted.

I would welcome your comments on how we can best support farmers such as Abrey Farms to develop their business quickly and efficiently, whilst at the same time recognising their invaluable contribution to the environment and wildlife. I would like you to examine how the process might be improved to enable farmers to get on with their work.

  
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