



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Simon Hodgson
Chief Executive
Forest Enterprise England
620 Bristol Business Park
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol
BS16 1EJ

25th June 2018

Ref: AL/TG/1806

Dear Mr Hodgson

Re: Salcey Forest Tree Top Way

I write with some concern about the closure of the much-loved Tree Top Way in Salcey Forest in my constituency of South Northamptonshire. As well as the many constituents who have been in touch with me about this matter, over 30,000 people have signed a petition on Change.org asking for the walkway to be saved; my family and I have also spent happy hours exploring the canopy.

As you may be aware, the decision was taken recently to close the walkway following a safety inspection that indicated there were a number of maintenance issues that needed to be resolved.

Let me first say that I am entirely supportive of Forest Enterprise England's requirement to ensure that all its forestry sites and activities are safe, and that it would have been irresponsible to have allowed the Tree Top Way to remain open if there were safety concerns that had not been addressed.

I appreciate that the Tree Top Way is reaching the end of its projected 15-year life span, but I would highlight that Salcey Forest receives some 250,000 visitors per year and an estimated 60 per cent of these use the walkway facilities. As an accessible structure for wheelchair users and family-friendly for all ages to enjoy, the Tree Top Way encourages both local residents and visitors from further afield to enjoy our beautiful Northamptonshire countryside. Additionally, I understand that the green oak used to build the walkway was sustainably sourced from local Northamptonshire woodlands, helping to support vital jobs in the area.

As a former Environment Secretary, I am a huge champion of encouraging everyone to come out and enjoy their natural surroundings, and we have some of the most beautiful ancient woodland you'll find anywhere in the country on our doorstep here in Northamptonshire. Whilst I know that the closure of the Tree Top Way does not mean that Salcey Forest itself has closed – indeed, there are a number of walking trails, cycling routes and bridleways that allow people to explore the forest – it is a sad reality that we have lost two other attractions in these woods in recent years: the Gruffalo Trail and the Tree Ninja Adventure Course.

Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire



Fully conscious of the need to spend taxpayer money wisely, I would argue that the tourism benefit of the Tree Top Way to the local economy is substantial, and its permanent closure would result in a considerable drop in visitor numbers to Salcey Forest. Given the current car-park charges that are levied for vehicles parking at the site, there is a source of revenue available already to cover the costs of the repairs. Indeed, I understand that these charges have already increased in the years since the Tree Top Way opened.

So, whilst I fully understand the need for caution, I would be grateful to receive further updates on this matter.

Furthermore, I would ask you to do all that you can to ensure that my constituents – and other visitors from around the UK and abroad – will be able to continue to enjoy all the benefits that Salcey Forest has to offer, but in particular the wonderful Tree Top Way that most people come to see.

I look forward to hearing from you on this important issue.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrea Leadsom".

The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom MP
Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire