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HB is pending X.  
MOA 1572

PRIME MINISTER

The attached note from Hartley Booth takes stock of the current position on conservation. He does not believe there is any urgency on this, but thinks you will be interested to have a general and comprehensive account of where matters stand for now.

You are hosting a 'conservation lunch' in November, and we shall need to have DOE's reaction to Hartley's ideas before that.

If you wanted to know more about the Doomsday proposal (page 2 of Hartley's covering note) I know he would be happy to provide this.

X

Yes please mt

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Mark Addison

mt

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12 July 1985

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CONSERVATION: OUR RECORD AND THE WAY AHEAD

"I guess that I shall never see  
A bill board lovely as a tree  
Indeed unless the bill boards fall  
I'll never see a tree at all."

Ogden Nash

The Government has a good story to tell on Conservation Policy. It is set out at Annex A.

"Conservatives Conserve". Two thirds of all conservation and anti-pollution legislation has been passed by Conservative Governments. Indeed, a hundred years ago it was a Conservative Government under Disraeli who first passed laws to clean up the country with River Pollution legislation and Public Health and Alkali Inspectors Acts. Every Conservative Government since the turn of the century has acted to improve Britain's environment. We can repulse Alliance Greens.

The Way Ahead

There are a number of ways in which we could consolidate our record.

1. A Heritage Register

There is an opportunity this Autumn on the 900th anniversary of the Domesday book to publish cheap, heritage registers, together with the register of unused Government and local authority land, which is often an eyesore.

2. Acid Rain

By July 1986, we should be able to join the 30% club on acid rain (Waldegrave successfully defused our opponents this week).

3. Clean Air

In 1987, we should legislate on clean air (DoE want this) and also link this with the Royal Commission proposal to unify environment inspectorates (DoE are proposing this. Tom King controls Alkali Inspectors and does not yet know DoE's plan.)

4. The Price of Conservation

We must look for ways of being "green" more cheaply.

- (a) Owners of stately homes look after their houses cheaper than the State. Incentives for these owners to stay with their large houses rather than off load them should be devised.

(b) Landscape conservation farmers are now given grants for saving the countryside. In future, why not introduce landscape "conservation orders" (MAFF resist these). They would cost little, and give assured protection.

DoE are looking at all these proposals, but will miss the Domesday opportunity if not given some encouragement by you.

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*H. Booth*

HARTLEY BOOTH

1. Conservation in the Countryside

Policy: The Government's declared resolve to bring about a closer understanding between farmers and conservationists, remains undiminished.

Legislation: Through its legislation, the Government has put this principle into effect. The Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, for the first time, established a much needed framework, within which conservation could be actively promoted. Amongst its provisions were:

- new safeguards for animals, plants and their habitat;
- greater protection for sites of special scientific interest;
- arrangements for increased co-operation between those with interests in the countryside.

In addition, the Wildlife and Countryside Amendment Act will, when enacted, make the 1981 Act even more effective.

EEC Directive: The Government has promoted its conservation policy in Europe. Britain has pressed for environmental protection to be provided within the Agricultural Structures Directive. In recent months, legal backing has been obtained in principle from the EEC

to pay more grants to conservation-conscious farming in certain areas.

Capital Grants Structure: Prior to 1979, the capital grants structure was slanted in favour of farmers. The Government has modified its previous policy to introduce measures to improve conservation. Land reclamation is no longer supported by grants, except in Northern Ireland, and field drainage grants have been substantially reduced. On the other hand, grants have been increased for the laying and planting of hedges, traditional walls and broad-leaf shelter belts in less favoured areas and now in lowland areas as well.

Halvergate: The Government is spending £18 million nationally to secure farming practices which are sympathetic to the environment. MAFF has agreed that Halvergate is to contribute 50% of the total cost of the Broads Grazing Marshes Conservation Scheme, so conserving landscape in a crucial tourist area.

Strawburning: The Government has taken action to control the careless burning of straw and stubble each Summer. So responding to a vociferous lobby. New and stronger model by-laws have been adopted by local authorities. These have raised the maximum fine to £2,000 for each offence. As a result, the level of irresponsible strawburning has declined dramatically. The number of complaints last year was a quarter of that in 1983.

Farmers are being encouraged to develop new methods of straw disposal and the Government is supporting this with £2 million per year of research money.

2. Conservation in and Around Towns

Green Belts: The Government its full support of the policy of Green Belts that has existed since the 1950s. A planning circular issued in July 1984 says that:

"Once the general extent of the Green Belt has been approved as part of a structure plan for an area, it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances."

Green Belt boundaries must be realistic. If they are drawn excessively tightly around existing built-up areas, it may not be possible to maintain the degree of permanence that Green Belts should have.

Your Government, fully protects a 6,800 square mile area, the size of East Anglia. This is 2½ times the area that was fully protected under the old planning system. This issue has come up again this week. We have a strong response to critics.

Urban Regeneration: Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) have brought homes and industry back to docklands in London and Liverpool. The new Urban Development Grant supports private sector development in the inner cities

which would otherwise not be economic. The Conservative policy of encouraging more homes, more jobs and a pleasant environment in the inner cities helps to relieve the pressure for development on greenfield sites. Though the need for development elsewhere will remain.

Labour, by contrast, has no policy for the inner cities. Under the Labour Government, money was lavished on grants to "voluntary groups", sometimes run by Labour Party activists, where nothing was done to encourage new jobs and provide homes that people wanted to buy and live in.

Other measures, taken to improve the older urban areas, include:

- establishment of registers for unused or under-used, publicly-owned land; (so far, 18,000 acres of land on the registers have been sold for development or brought into use);
- restoration of derelict land has accelerated;
- aid through the Derelict Land Grant in 1985/6 in England was £76.4 million, compared with only £20 million in 1978/9 in Labour's last year in power.

Garden Festivals: The first International Garden Festival in Liverpool last year confounded the critics of the Government's urban policies and attracted 3.4 million



visitors. A second festival next year will be in Stoke on Trent.

### 3. Air Pollution and Acid Rain

Atmospheric pollution was tackled by Conservatives as early as 1956 by the Clean Air Act. This was largely responsible for removing London smog that had killed 5,000 people. In addition, since 1970, the emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO<sup>2</sup>) from industry and power stations have been cut by 40% - you were made aware of this last week - better than all countries in Europe except probably Sweden and Germany (but NB we are still the biggest gulcher in Europe).

The Council of the EEC recently agreed a Directive, supported by the UK, that provides for the introduction of unleaded petrol throughout the Community not later than 1989. In June this year, the UK also agreed with European partners reductions of 60% in emissions of vehicle exhausts by the end of the decade, as you know from recent minutes.

### 4. Nuclear Energy

Air pollution will be assisted by increased use of nuclear power, which we can rightly claim is cheap, safe and efficient. Safety considerations are paramount. Britain's record is good. An estimated 87% of all radiation received by the population in the UK is from natural sources, and a further 11% comes from medical uses. There has never been a

nuclear emergency at any of the United Kingdom's nuclear power stations. Nevertheless, to allay fears, the Government has considerably increased the nuclear inspectors (from 4 to 20). We can also point to the appointment of Sir Douglas Black to consider the evidence of complaints concerning Sellafield, and that we have acted on all his recommendations. His independent review reported in July 1984 that there was no evidence of any general risk to health of children or adults. Emissions from this reprocessing plant have been reduced by 500% in the last 5-6 years. We are spending £1.8 billion at Sellafield to make it as good as, if not better than, any other such plant in the world.

5. Onshore Oil

The Department of the Environment and County Councils have been restrictive in granting planning permission for exploration or development of onshore oil. Where planning permission has been granted, it has imposed numerous conditions safeguarding the environment. For example, at Furzey Island in Poole Harbour, 34 conservation and planning conditions were imposed which include effective restoration of the site after its use and minimum disturbance during vital appraisal. Standard extraction equipment is small, creates virtually no noise and is inconspicuous.

6. Water Pollution

For many years, Britain's rivers and coastal waters were

seriously polluted. In 1984, by bringing into force Part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Government did more to tackle water pollution than any other single administration. This will build on progress already achieved. Between 1958 and 1984, the length of tidal and non-tidal rivers and canals in England and Wales classed as grossly polluted fell from 7% to less than  $\frac{1}{2}$ % of the total length of those waterways. The first mature salmon since 1835 was recently caught in the Thames.

#### Summary

The Government introduced no less than 23 measures during the last 6 years - more than any other British Government. In particular, the passing of the Wildlife and Countryside Act in 1981 represented our main achievement, for it was the first occasion on which the interests of the many groups involved in the countryside had been reconciled so effectively.