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Dear Andrew.

The 20,000 miles of Britain's railway are lined with a vast array of habitats which support many different species. This unique nationwide estate is a natural asset that we know we must do more to manage effectively on behalf of the public. I therefore want to set out how we are changing our approach in response to John Varley's detailed and constructive report, and how it forms a core part of the wider vision for sustainability we are developing this year.

John rightly highlighted that our past approach has often been sporadic and hasn't given enough consideration to our impact on the local environment. I enclose our initial response to the review setting out how we are responding to its specific recommendations, and looking to go further.

Our core purpose is to provide passengers and freight users with a safe and reliable railway, which requires continuous management of lineside vegetation. We also have a responsibility to 7 million people living alongside the railway, who consider that well-managed vegetation can significantly reduce the sight and sound of nearby trains. Our commitment is to manage lineside vegetation as a natural asset that supports our core purpose while enhancing the habitats on our estate.

Working with biodiversity and sustainability experts, we are developing an ambitious vision for managing our lineside habitats. Getting the right mix of habitat types alongside the tracks is crucial for safety but can be achieved in such a way that enables a thriving diversity of plants and wildlife, including many protected species.

We are improving how we communicate with local communities and stakeholders to help them understand the work we are doing, and to develop with them the right approach for their area. We will also work closely with expert groups to support the development of our plans, and how we communicate them to the public.

These are just part of a much broader vision for sustainability in development during Control Period 6. For example, we are also looking at how we can better manage waste and pollution, investigating opportunities to generate green electricity on our estate and, where appropriate, use our non-operational land for community-led social and environmental projects. We will also improve the environmental data we collect, to contribute to the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan targets.

I want to record my sincere thanks to John Varley for the important work he has done, recognise the significance of this issue to many local groups and experts, and confirm our commitment to valuing and enhancing nature alongside Britain's railways.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Haines  
Chief Executive