



Councillor Linda Taylor
New County Hall
Truro
Cornwall TR1 3AY

12 June 2024

Re: Introducing Britain's Leading Edge

Dear Sir Keir,

I am writing to you on behalf of Britain's Leading Edge, a network of 12 predominantly rural upper tier Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat led local authorities. Although located on the geographical periphery, Britain's Leading Edge should be central to the plans of the next Government. Britain's Leading Edge contains a wealth of opportunities to benefit our communities and the country as a whole – if we can work in partnership with Government. We would welcome the opportunity to sit down with the incoming Government to talk about our ambitions to power the UK, feed the UK and be the lungs of the UK!

We can power the UK! Peripheral regions of the UK are the energy powerhouses of tomorrow, with our rich natural capital capable of producing clean, reliable, renewable energy for the entire country. In 2020, Britain's Leading Edge areas generated over 99,000 megawatt hours of renewable energy, compared to just under 23,000 megawatt hours from the rest of England. As international supply problems drive higher energy prices in the UK, while the climate crisis intensifies, we must move away from our reliance on imported hydrocarbons – Britain's Leading Edge has the untapped capacity to make large-scale clean energy generation possible. Working with an incoming Government, we can grow our supply and develop the environmental technology skills the industry requires, delivering high-quality jobs across our communities.

We can help feed the UK! Increasing Britain's food supply chain resilience will be even more critical in years to come, as geo-political disruption continues, and greater effects of climate change are felt. The UK imported 46% of its food in 2020, and Britain's Leading Edge areas can help provide better domestic supply. Much of the UK's food and drink sector is based within Britain's Leading Edge areas, as is a significant proportion of the UK's agriculture, fishing and forestry businesses. We are keen to work with the next Government to discuss how investment in research, automation and a focus on resource efficiency can help us reach our full potential. And the benefits of this collaboration would be felt throughout the UK: if more of our food is produced domestically, food prices may be reduced as costly imports decline, helping to address the cost of living crisis.

We are the lungs of the UK! Our local authority areas have no major cities and we are the custodians of the UK's natural public spaces, looking after almost 65% of England's Areas of

Outstanding Natural Beauty. As well as providing health benefits to residents, these green spaces drive a substantial volume of domestic and international tourism. We want to work with the next Government to ensure tourism in Britain's Leading Edge becomes even greener and more sustainable, providing well-paid, year-round jobs for our residents. Our forests, peat bogs and waterways also play a vital role in taking carbon out of the air and safely storing it. We can share the lessons we have learned about the contribution natural capital makes to a thriving carbon zero economy and the nature recovery agenda. Indeed, Britain's Leading Edge is at the forefront of seeking to reverse the decline in nature and address the climate crisis. Working with the next Government, Britain's Leading Edge is the perfect testbed to trailblaze an agricultural policy focussed on growing food and nature in a balanced, responsible way.

Unlocking our potential will help us address the challenges we collectively face. On average, our residents are older and less well off than the rest of England – which puts a growing demand on the public purse. We also experience levels of deprivation which can go unnoticed at the national level. If rural areas were counted as a single region, that region would be the worst-off in the country in levelling-up terms. Our small and medium-sized enterprises – the backbone of the rural economy – often miss out on investment and government support. Rural residents have poorer access to transport, lower housing quality and greater fuel poverty than their urban counterparts. Evidence for these damaging disparities can be found in our manifesto, a copy of which I attach. Yet we have the potential to be a net-contributor to UK plc, and have a huge appetite for working in partnership with Government to deliver the improvements in skills, infrastructure and productivity that are so urgently required.

In summary, there is no better place than Britain's Leading Edge to accelerate the provision of clean energy, nature recovery and food resilience that our country urgently needs - I warmly welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further or provide you with any additional information.

With best wishes, on behalf of Britain's Leading Edge,

Councillor Linda Taylor
Leader of Cornwall Council