



**Councillor Keith Aspden**  
**Leader, City of York Council**  
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York YO1 6GA

Mr George Eustice MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Date: 6 July 2020  
Email: [cllr.kaspden@york.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.kaspden@york.gov.uk)

Dear George Eustice

We are writing to you to raise our concerns about the lack of clarity and urgency regarding the implementation of the proposed ban on grouse moor burning.

Over 550 incidents of grouse moor burning were recorded across Yorkshire alone between October 2019 - April 2020. With hundreds of fires deliberately started on Yorkshire's iconic moorlands this season to engineer game bird breeding habitat, the Government must act to protect the upland environment.

Several recent research projects have clearly outlined the considerable environmental damage caused by the practice. On top of driving vulnerable wildlife from its moorland home, burning on sensitive peatland degrades ecosystems, releases climate-altering gasses into the atmosphere and worsens flooding risk.

Blanket bogs, a threatened moorland habitat, are one of the UK's biggest carbon stores, locking up millions of tonnes of climate-altering gases. With hundreds of thousands of acres of blanket bog being used for grouse shooting, landowners systematically burn the heather on them to maximise numbers of game birds. Research realised by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) shows that peat degradation releases more carbon per year than all of the oil refineries in the country combined. Protection of our country's single largest carbon store would take us one step closer to ending the climate emergency our country faces.

Grouse moor burning has also shown to increase the flood risk that York and other communities face. York is one of the worst affected areas in the UK affected by regular flooding, with countless properties damaged and millions of pounds lost by businesses and the council every flood season.

The continued burning on moorland in Nidderdale and the North York Moors damages peatland hills, which are intended to serve as a flood barrier keeping downstream communities safe. Due to the damage caused the increased run-off waters are now being channelled downstream further increasing the risk of disastrous floods taking place.

Whilst we welcomed the Government committing in October 2019 to outlaw grouse moor burning and protect peatland from further harm, we have been disappointed with the lack of urgency and clarity regarding the implementation of the ban.

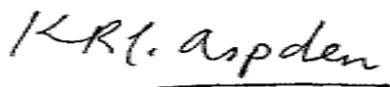
Keith Aspden Leader of City of York Council

[www.york.gov.uk](http://www.york.gov.uk)

In April, whilst the country was battling the deadly outbreak of the Coronavirus, firefighters across West Yorkshire were tackling a major moorland blaze at Deer Hill Reservoir in Marsden as a result of what was supposed to be a controlled burn on a grouse moor. This not only caused further environmental damage, but also put unnecessary further pressure on our emergency and rescue services at a time of national crisis.

A ban on this ecologically destructive practice, is vital in order to protect our environment, wildlife and communities. We urge you to commit to delivering on this Government's promise before the grouse moor burning season opens less in less than three months, to ensure our local communities, wildlife and the environment is protected from any further harm.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Keith Aspden in black ink, underlined.

Cllr Keith Aspden  
Leader of City of York Council

Handwritten signature of Paula Widdowson in black ink, on a light grey background.

Cllr Paula Widdowson  
Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change