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for Environment,
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Dear Léonie,

Thank you for your letter of 18 June to the Secretary of State about enhancing protection for ancient and veteran trees. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I share your concerns over the felling of the Whitewebbs Oak in Enfield and the Sycamore Gap tree in Northumberland. Ancient and veteran trees are living links to our past, offering lasting benefits for people, wildlife, and the environment. Many of these trees are classed as 'irreplaceable habitat' in the National Planning Policy Framework and Biodiversity Net Gain Regulations as well as protected through individual Tree Preservation Orders and Felling Licence regulations.

Defra has conducted a review into the threats and the effectiveness of existing protection measures for England's most valuable trees. Valuing and Protecting Important Trees Outside Woodlands (<https://treecouncil.org.uk/science-and-research/valuing-and-protecting-important-trees-outside-woodlands/>) was Defra funded and led by the Tree Council and Forest Research with contributions from a large and diverse group of expert stakeholders to deliver a range of options and recommendations. We are currently reviewing these recommendations, and it will be important to balance our approach with existing priorities and our statutory obligations.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.

Yours ever,

MARY CREAGH CBE MP