



**Sarah Owen MP**  
Member of Parliament for Luton North

Rt Hon George Eustice MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
By email [Secretary.State@defra.gov.uk](mailto:Secretary.State@defra.gov.uk)

8<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear George

**Reopening of Whipsnade Zoo**

I am writing to you after a large number of people in my constituency contacted me over the weekend with their concerns about the future of Whipsnade Zoo. The zoo is facing great uncertainty due to difficult but necessary coronavirus-related restrictions that have been introduced since March.

Any reopening of businesses, organisations and services affected by covid-19 must be done in the safest possible way. I personally would have preferred to see any easing of the lockdown happen only once we had a reliable mass test, track and trace system in place. However, to me, it seems illogical that outdoor garden centres have reopened, and the government is currently planning to allow the reopening non-essential retail whilst Whipsnade Zoo, which is largely accessible outdoors, may remain closed.

I understand that the director general of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has already developed a plan to make the zoo covid-secure and with no current source of income, and millions in ongoing monthly running costs, the zoo desperately needs visitors or it may face permanent closure. The ZSL have been proactive in coming up with a plan in good faith in the hope of saving the much-loved zoos they operate in Bedfordshire and in London. I would greatly appreciate if you could confirm whether the government has considered the ZSL's plans to make their Whipsnade site covid-secure.

Whilst the Zoo Support Fund has been established to cover animal care costs, as literature published by the fund itself states, it cannot "guarantee to save every zoo and aquarium business or job". This has been where the ZSL has hit trouble, as they must find £2.3m a month in running costs for Whipsnade and London Zoo or these sites risk being lost.

You might also be aware of a recent Centre for Cities report that stated Luton itself is already the second-most vulnerable town economy to the impact of coronavirus, with the difficult but very necessary imposition of restrictions causing problems for our town's motor vehicle industry and an almost overnight collapse in our large travel industry after passenger numbers at London Luton Airport fell to near zero. My constituents and I really do fear what even more jobs losses will mean for the area, especially when the ZSL insist that such a situation can be avoided at the zoo.

I ask you to listen to my constituents and outline the basis on which zoos may have to remain closed. I also urge to offer a clarification on the evidence that suggests zoos must remain closed, even with a plan for covid security, but non-essential retail and car showrooms can reopen.



Whilst I am currently on maternity leave, I look forward keenly to the government's response on this issue during Thursday's adjournment debate in the House.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Owen'.

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