

Dear Rachel,

Thank you very much for taking the time to contact me on behalf of the Countryside Alliance.

Wales has some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, from coastlines to mountain ranges, enjoyed and cared for by people across the country. As the son of a Welsh rural vet and Zambian chicken farmer, I understand the importance of ensuring nature-friendly farming becomes the norm. Under my leadership, a new Nature Positive Bill must be developed alongside the Sustainable Farming Scheme which better connects families with affordable, nutritious food. I support the introduction of a living wage for agricultural workers and have pledged a review of the operation of the Agricultural Advisory Panel to ensure it is truly independent and has the confidence of unions and employers.

We would make Wales the leader on animal welfare standards in the UK, by giving RSPCA officers additional enforcement powers and introduce an outright ban on pets being given as prizes, as many Welsh Labour local authorities have already done.

My government would set strong statutory targets for the protection and restoration of nature and include payment for farmers in exchange for public goods. By 2030, 30% of our land and sea would be protected and we would lead by example in sustainably managing and expanding woodland.

As First Minister, I would strengthen enforcement action to protect our environment, starting with the creation of a fully functioning environmental governance body, filling the gap left post-Brexit. The pollution of our rivers and watercourses has been one of the great scandals of the last 14 years of Tory rule, and we would introduce stricter penalties for those who break environmental rules. We would also invest to protect communities from flooding, coastal erosion and other impacts of the climate emergency. We would do all we can to ensure the UK Government works with us – especially if we have a constructive Labour administration in Westminster – to bring about overdue action on unsafe coal tips, which are only likely to be made more dangerous by more frequent and intense storms.

I am meeting Labour Party members from all areas of Wales during this leadership campaign. Welsh Labour values of equality and fairness have guided me all my life, and they are at the heart of the vision I set out in my manifesto to be leader of our party.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vaughan Geste'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.