



# Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

17 December 2021

Dear Michael,

## Learned Societies of Burlington House

We are writing to you in respect of the meeting that took place in November between the Learned Societies and officials from your Department and the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport which sought to find a sustainable solution for the continued tenancy of the Learned Societies at Burlington House.

We urge you to ensure that any proposed deal is affordable to the Societies on a long-term basis. We emphasise the need for Government to recognise the cultural, scientific and educational value of the Societies in any agreement reached.

The Linnean Society is the oldest active society dedicated to the natural world. The Royal Astronomical Society represents UK astronomy nationally and internationally. The Geological Society's work is critically important to the transition to a low carbon economy. The Society of Antiquaries was founded in 1707 and is now an educational charity that promotes the understanding of the human past.

Co-located at Burlington House they have formed a unique scientific and cultural campus since the bespoke buildings were provided for the Societies by HM Government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All Societies deliver programmes of benefit to UK industry, government, research, education and, both directly and indirectly, to the wider public.

We see the proposal of the Societies made to officials at that meeting as positive for:

- (1) **Public value:** an agreement which will increase public value and engagement with UK science and heritage. Independent analysis by PwC found that the societies at Burlington House contribute over £40 million a year in public value from their activities. Instead of this contribution being put at risk, it will be built upon.
- (2) **UK Science:** bolstering knowledge generation and dissemination is an important contribution the Learned Societies make to UK science. Remaining at Burlington House is key to maintaining the UK's leading position in the respective disciplines of the Societies. Uniquely, we see their co-location within the Courtyard as a flagship activity aligned with the mission statements of both BEIS and UKRI: they are core to building a thriving, inclusive research and innovation system connecting discovery to prosperity and public good.
- (3) **Safeguarding historic collections** - a forced move would endanger the integrity of the priceless collections and libraries containing over 1.6 million items.
- (4) **Levelling up engagement with UK science and heritage:** the Societies' wish to drive investment and expand their public engagement programmes throughout the country. This is contingent upon long-term security being provided.

We note the cross-party support on this matter, as demonstrated in the debate held in Westminster Hall on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

We urge the Government to find a long-term solution for the Societies to remain at Burlington House which recognises the opportunity to save an asset - the co-located Societies' contribution to UK science, and to our own mission of harnessing research and innovation to build a stronger, greener future.

The Societies are not asking for direct support or subsidy but for an affordable agreement with DLUHC as landlord which allows them the opportunity deliver their ambitious collective vision for Burlington House.

We welcome a response which will assure the Societies of affordable, long-term security of tenure at Burlington House without delay.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Darren Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Darren Jones MP**  
**Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Rt Hon Greg Clark MP**  
**Chair of the Science and Technology Committee**

**Copy: Secretary of State DCMS**



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

**Eddie Hughes MP**

*Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing*

**Department for Levelling up, Housing and  
Communities**

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Our Ref:12841835

12 May 2022

Dear Greg and Darren,

Thank you for your letter of 17 December 2021 about the Learned Societies at New Burlington House. I would like to apologise for the significant delay in responding to you. I can confirm that my officials and officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), continue to engage with the Learned Societies and that good progress has been made in these discussions.

Following the positive and well-received meeting in November 2021, a further meeting was held with the Learned Societies in February this year. These engagements continue and we have very recently received a proposal in response to the terms we presented to the Learned Societies in early 2021. It is our wish that the Learned Societies, both individually and as a whole, remain at New Burlington House, but we must recognise that these historic societies must operate in a modern and accessible way, and ensure that government support is on an equitable basis with other cultural institutions.

I recognise the valuable contribution that the Learned Societies make in their fields. To secure their financial future, they must provide greater general public access to their significant collections, increase commercialisation, and secure charitable and philanthropic funding to support their charitable objectives. My department was grateful for receipt of the proposal from the Learned Societies at the end of 2021 and we are keen to work with them to widen public access and generate further commercial revenues. The Learned Societies are eligible to apply for government funding, such as support through National Lottery Heritage Fund, through fair and open competition. DCMS have offered to facilitate conversations with their arm's length bodies, including the National Lottery Fund.

The Learned Societies occupy New Burlington House as tenants under a lease that is due to expire in 2085. Their rental commitments operate under a mechanism that shields them from paying market rents until the date of lease expiry. I note that there has been a persistent view that the future market rent will be the equivalent of commercial rents paid by offices and retail occupiers in Mayfair. I can assure you that this is not the case. Under the existing lease, the Learned Societies will only be required to pay a market rent equivalent to the use and occupation of this type of listed asset, as would be paid by comparative educational and cultural bodies in the property market, and this only by 2085. At present their rents are towards 70% below this equivalent use and far below the office and retail markets. The

intention of our agreement, and the continuing negotiations, is to allow the Learned Societies the opportunity to independently adapt so that they could continue to afford their financial commitments and secure their long-term future.

I trust this information is helpful, and I must apologise again for the severe delay in this response reaching you.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Hughes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**EDDIE HUGHES MP**