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Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about controlling the spread of bovine TB.

I know that the badger cull has been a controversial component of the bovine TB eradication strategy, but I understand that the initial areas that have been subject to a cull have seen a significant reduction in incidence of the disease. Of course, no one wants to keep culling badgers for a moment longer than is necessary.

Ministers only ever envisaged that the badger cull would be a phase in the strategy to reduce the weight of the disease in the wildlife population. The ongoing consultation sets out how they intend to phase out culling and accelerate the next phases of the strategy, especially improved diagnostic testing. This consultation also includes proposals to stop issuing intensive cull licences for new areas after 2022 and would enable new licences to be cut short after two or three years based on a review of the latest scientific evidence at that time. Under the new proposals, any new supplementary cull licences, which are granted in regions after intensive culls are complete, would be restricted to two years and would not be reissued afterwards. I understand that some form of culling would continue to be an option in exceptional circumstances to address any local disease flare-ups.

In parallel to the consultation, Ministers are also calling for views on possible future measures to accelerate bovine TB eradication in England, such as further improvements to testing, encouraging increased uptake of farm biosecurity measures, and rewarding low risk cattle purchasing behaviour.

It is also encouraging that work on developing a deployable cattle bovine TB vaccine continues at pace and is on track to be completed within the next five years, with field trials scheduled to commence in the coming months.

There is no single answer to tackling bovine TB, but by deploying a range of policy interventions, we can turn the tide on this terrible disease and achieve the long-term objective of eradicating it by 2038.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY