



Councillor Nick Ireland
County Hall
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14 April 2026

To: Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Dear Secretaries of State,

Britain's Leading Edge

It is approaching two years since my predecessor wrote as chair of Britain's Leading Edge to affirm our partnership's commitment to addressing the critical challenges facing the country.

As a cross-political collaboration of predominantly rural local authorities, Britain's Leading Edge champions the huge potential across our regions to contribute to the nation's prosperity. We are writing to you now in recognition of the impact significant global events are having here in the UK and the contribution Britain's Leading Edge can make to mitigate these.

In 2024, we set out our aspirations for Britain's Leading Edge to support the government to deliver its priorities, focusing on three core missions:

1. To **power the UK** through the expansion of new renewable energy solutions, made feasible by the favourable geography of our regions. We have made great headway in this area, with the introduction of a geothermal plant in Cornwall and ongoing expansion of solar and wind projects reinforcing our energy resilience.
2. To **feed the UK** through support and growth of our domestic food producers. 30% of England's agriculture, forestry, and fishing businesses are located within Britain's Leading Edge. We are committed to strengthening food security by empowering increased domestic production.
3. To **be the lungs of the UK**, improving access to nature for all, promoting biodiversity, and protecting our landscapes and wildlife. Our members are committed stewards of our green and blue spaces, essential both for drawing carbon from the environment and to promoting the mental and physical wellbeing of us all.

Two years on, our dedication to these missions remains undimmed – and the increasingly volatile geopolitical context serves only to underline their importance. The extraordinary disruption to energy and food markets from the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, present an urgent and compelling case for accelerating our national self-reliance.

And to our original three missions, we add a fourth – to help **defend the UK**. Britain's Leading Edge regions are not only essential to the UK's environmental and economic resilience. Many of our regions also support vital defence industries, technologies, and supply chains. We host critical defence infrastructure, including military bases, training grounds, and manufacturing sites. Our communities contribute to emergency response, cyber defence, and resilience, often in ways that are overlooked in national policy.

Against a tumultuous global backdrop, Britain's Leading Edge is therefore particularly well placed to aid the government in enhancing national stability. Now more than ever, the country needs the added resilience that our regions can offer, particularly for energy and food security. Britain's Leading Edge comprises the energy powerhouses of tomorrow, with our rich natural capital capable of generating clean, reliable, renewable energy for the whole country. Local authorities stand ready to create smart local plans to expand domestic food production on high-quality agricultural land, alongside complementary nature recovery projects.

We know that unlocking the full potential within our regions will require commitment and close partnership working.

We plan to publish a renewed manifesto for Britain's Leading Edge later this summer. This will present our analysis of the potential contribution our regions can make to the nation's prosperity and will identify enabling measures we consider necessary to deliver on this promise.

Ahead of the manifesto launch, we would greatly welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how our peripheral rural regions can come to the fore in responding to the key challenges of our times.

With best wishes, on behalf of Britain's Leading Edge,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Ireland'.

Councillor Nick Ireland
Leader of Dorset Council and chair of Britain's Leading Edge