Attached brief: Campaign to secure the future of the Societies of Burlington House

What is the campaign about?

The Society of Antiquaries, Geological Society and the Linnean Society (‘The Societies’) have joined forces in a final effort to find an affordable, workable solution with HM Government, their landlord that allows them to continue their work at Burlington House.

The Societies are facing a situation where they will soon be forced to move from their historic accommodation, Burlington House, due to unaffordable, escalating annual rent rises set by MHCLG, the government landlord.

As part of our national campaign, we are asking Parliamentarians to support us to preserve an arrangement which has been to the advantage of the country for over 145 years.

What is the public interest?

Forcing the Societies to vacate Burlington House will significantly damage their scientific, cultural, societal and heritage contribution to the UK, and to global culture and science more generally.

In 2019, PwC completed an analysis on the contribution the Societies made to the “economic, scientific, social and cultural well-being of the UK through [their] range of activities and programmes”. It was estimated that the three societies in total contributed in the order of £39.7 million annually, with the Linnean Society of London contributing £8.2 million.

They estimated that a huge contribution in public value would be at risk because of the rent increases being imposed by MHCLG.

A forced move presents a threat to the Societies in their present form and threatens the educational, academic and public engagement activities they facilitate, endangers the integrity of the priceless collections and libraries containing over 1.3 million items. ¹

How have discussions with MHCLG progressed?

In 2005, the Societies’ tenure at New Burlington House was formalised through a lease, the rent intended to be on a non-profit basis, to cover (the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s) capital charge and depreciation, and to rise slowly to market rent over 80 years.

¹ This 1.3 million figure includes books (530,000), images and photos (290,500), maps (40,000), paintings (27,595), museum collections (374,000), specimens (50,000), manuscripts (10,500).
However, from 2014, government accounting policy changed, and Burlington House began to be treated as an investment property. While a lengthy arbitration in 2016 confirmed that the government's interpretation of the formula for setting the rent was legally correct, the market value of property in the West End soared.

In consequence, unforeseen back in 2005, the rent rose at a staggering rate.

In 2018 it appeared that discussions were progressing towards an affordable solution for the Societies, however these slowly came to a halt.

At the beginning of 2020, MHCLG offered to peg increases to 8% per annum (compound) for five years, but this rate of increase (effectively doubling the rent every 8-9 years) would still be unaffordable for the Societies and will force them to move out.

Further efforts to restart negotiations were made by the Courtyard Societies, including a proposal for the acquisition of a long-term lease for a total premium equivalent to the fair market value.

This offer was rejected by MHCLG in mid-2020 without any opportunity for discussion.

While Government has historically recognised the value of the Societies being based at Burlington House, the current landlord (now MHCLG) has refused to engage in discussions about a sustainable future in an open and fair manner.

We are working to change this and find a sustainable solution.

**What will be the impact of forced relocation on the Societies?**

The Societies are under enormous pressure to raise funds for alternative premises, especially with regards to housing their precious collections in a safe and accessible venue. It is highly unlikely that the Societies would be able to afford alternative premises in a central city location; and a more feasible remote location would potentially reduce public access to the collections.
Millions of pounds would be spent on the relocation alone; moving fragile historical items *en masse* is a huge undertaking, and the collections would require customised premises with environmentally-controlled rooms to house them safely and make them accessible.

The Societies do not have the funds for the purchase of new premises and such highly complex relocation. They are fully focused on persuading the government to allow the Societies to remain at Burlington House. However, if they are unsuccessful, they will potentially have to think what should be the unthinkable and consider disposing of or putting into storage some of the objects entrusted to the Societies for centuries.

The situation the Societies face is unique and has arisen because of the long history of Government providing affordable tenancy, and the sudden switch to large rent increases which the Societies could not have anticipated and cannot afford.

**What are we asking the government to do?**

We call on Government to agree to an affordable and sustainable arrangement which allows the Societies to remain at Burlington House and ensure preservation of the unique and irreplaceable record of history, discovery and heritage.

This will provide the Societies with the location and long-term security needed to fulfil their Royal Charters and allow them to invest in their future to the benefit of the public, our national heritage and a broad set of research communities.

**How can I help the campaign?**

The campaign is working with a cross-party group of parliamentary supporters (MPs and Lords), who are helping advise and raise the profile of the campaign.

The campaign needs your help to further reinforce and build on this public and political support. In the coming weeks we will be leveraging this support to promote our case alongside supporting economic analysis, to unlock increased engagement with Ministers, secure discussion in Parliament and public profile. We will simultaneously rally for support for a solution in the public sphere through a media campaign, social media engagement and via the testimonials of our partners.

You can help us to safeguard our home by doing one or all of the following:

1. **Write to your MP (if you are a Fellow based in the UK)**

   We would encourage you to support our campaign by writing to your Member of Parliament. The details will be made available on our website: [www.linnean.org/saveBH](http://www.linnean.org/saveBH).
You can write to your local MP to ask for their support to help the Linnean Society stay at Burlington House.

Some suggested points are available below for you to tailor and use for your own personalised email or letter.

If you don’t know who your MP is, you can find out along with their email address here (www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-an-mp-or-lord/contact-your-mp/).

2. If you are a Fellow from outside the UK

We would also very much welcome the support of Fellows based outside of the United Kingdom, who are invited to make their representation directly to the UK Government. Our campaign team (LSL@aprilsix.com) can provide instructions on request.

3. Raise awareness on social media

You can help to get the message out by using the hashtag #LinneanAtBH on social media channels.

4. Share your Society story and submit a testimonial to be published on our website

We would love to hear your stories of how the Linnean Society has helped to inspire you about the natural world or inform you of the significance of nature. Share your testimonial on what the Society means to you, and why you believe it should remain at Burlington House with the team at (LSL@aprilsix.com).

Linnean Society – Instructions and Template Points for writing to Members of Parliament

1. Instructions

- The Society has developed the below core points which you are welcome to include in your email to your Member of Parliament.

- We would encourage you to tailor and personalise your emails as much as possible to voice your own view and your personal experience of the Society’s work.

- In coordination, Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries and those of the Geological Society, are also contacting their local Members of Parliament.

- In order for us to record and help manage Fellows’ representations, please do forward a copy of the email sent to lsl@aprilsix.com.
2. **Suggested points to include in your email to your Members(s) of Parliament**

Dear [Name],

- **Introductory line** – for example:
  - *I am writing to you as my local Member of Parliament to ask for your support to safeguard the future of the Linnean Society.*

- **Summary of situation**
  - *The Society will soon be forced to move from Burlington House, due to unaffordable, rapidly escalating annual rent rises set by our landlord: the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.*
  - *Rent has increased by more than 3000% between 2012 and 2018. A similar situation is faced by our neighbours, the Society of Antiquaries and the Geological Society.*

- **About the Society, its work and value**
  - *Founded in 1788, the Linnean Society of London is the world’s oldest active society dedicated to the natural world.*
  - *The Society’s home at Burlington House acts as an international hub for research, discovery and debate. It was purpose-built for the Society’s charitable activities and is a significant educational and historical resource for the nation.*
  - *Burlington House has been refurbished and adapted to hold the Society’s many educational activities, safeguard its world-renowned and Arts Council England (ACE)-Designated heritage collections, and bring together academia and other enthusiasts about the natural world with a diverse public.*
  - *The Society helps to establish concepts like natural capital and ecosystem services, which will help the UK to protect the environment and pave the way for sustainable economic growth.*
  - *Burlington House is where the first public presentation of the theory of evolution was held and will continue to play a central role in research and understanding as the UK and wider world look to find solutions to the biggest challenges our society and the planet face, including the biodiversity crisis and climate change.*
  - *Independent analysis estimates that the Society contributes £8.2 million of public benefit to the UK every year, in part realised through educational resources, regular tours, conferences and a range of lectures every month.*
A move from Burlington House would separate the Society from the international hub of research and discovery at Burlington House and threaten the UK’s position on the world-stage.

The dispersal of the co-located learned societies, their collections, libraries and archives would inevitably limit the combined contributions made to research and discovery for both national and global benefit.

It would also diminish the Society’s network that supports its valuable work for the UK. The Society will lose its close ties to the other important biological and historical collections and associated research expertise in London, its political, diplomatic and media influence, and its international status.

Request

As my local Member of Parliament, I would ask if you could:

- Express my concerns on this matter to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (as the landlord), as well as the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (as the department concerned with natural and the environment) and ask for their support in finding a solution.
- Contact Tim Loughton MP, who is helping coordinate Parliamentary interest on this matter.

Kind regards,