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Year of
COVID-19
Editions

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Winter 2020 Edition

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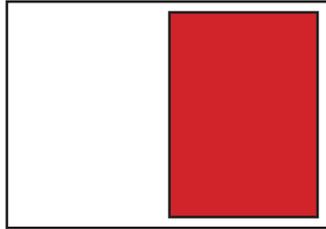
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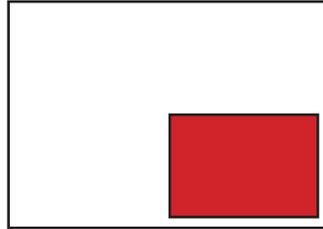
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News Roundup

and sports

Summary of the main news and sports events over the last three months

By Paul G Bazeley for Government World

October News Review

In COVID-19 news, the United Kingdom surpassed 500,000 COVID-19 cases. A Tier system was introduced by PM Boris Johnson with most places being placed in Tier 1, some in Tier 2 and just Liverpool and the surrounding areas placed in Tier 3, the strictest tier. Later in the month, it was announced a month-long lockdown would begin in November to try to contain a surge in COVID cases across the UK.

US President Donald Trump and the First Lady Melania Trump tested positive for COVID-19. The President spent a few days in the hospital before being released and going back to work. Weeks after being diagnosed as positive he claimed in a Twitter statement to have had 'A total and complete sign off from White House Doctors' and that he was now "immune" to the virus.

The 2020 Nobel Prize for Medicine was awarded to Harvey J. Alter, Michael Houghton and Charles M. Rice for the discovery of the Hepatitis C virus. Half the Nobel Prize for Physics was awarded to Roger Penrose "for the discovery that black hole formation is a robust prediction of the general theory of relativity," and the other half to Reinhard Genzel and Andrea M. Ghez "for the discovery of a supermassive compact object at the centre of our galaxy."

The Nobel Prize for Chemistry was awarded to Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer A. Doudna "for the development of a method for genome editing". Louise Glück won the Nobel Prize for Literature "for her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal." Finally, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the World Food Programme (WFP) "for its efforts to combat hunger, for its contribution to bettering conditions for peace in conflict-

affected areas and for acting as a driving force in efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict."

Samuel Paty, a teacher in France was beheaded close to the school he worked at. It is believed he was targeted after showing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad to his class. His killer was shot dead by police shortly after the attack and seven people had been charged over the teacher's death.

The Special Boat Service (SBS) stormed the Nave Andromeda tanker which had been in a ten-hour stand-off after stowaways became violent. Seven people were arrested after the ship was suspected of being hijacked off the coast of the Isle of Wight. All 22 members of the crew were

rescued, and the tanker was brought into Southampton port.

The Labour Party suspended its former leader, Jeremy Corbyn. The news came after a report into antisemitism claimed 'serious failings' in the leadership of Corbyn were partly to blame. An investigation was due to take place.

Tasmanian devils were reintroduced to the Australian mainland. It was the first time in 3,000 years since the animals have been on the mainland after it is thought they were eradicated by dingoes. The mammals were released into a large sanctuary with hopes the endangered animals will be able to thrive.

A Roman Coin was sold for £2.7million a record for an ancient coin. The gold coin issued by Brutus depicted the assassination of Julius Caesar and is only one of three of its kind. The auction piece had an estimate of £500,000 before selling for £2.7million which totals about £3.2million with fees.

October Sports Review

Iga Swiatek beat Sofia Kenin 6-4, 6-1 in

the women's singles French Open final, it was the first WTA title for the Polish tennis star. The men's singles title was won by Rafael Nadal after he beat Novak Djokovic 6-0, 6-2, 7-5. It is the Spaniard's 13th French Open title and his 20th Grand Slam title.

The LA Lakers won the NBA title as they beat the Miami Heat in game 6 of the playoffs 106-93. It was the Lakers' first title in a decade and their 17th Championship, tying them with the Boston Celtics for the most titles.

The Los Angeles Dodger defeated the Tampa Bay Rays in six games to win the Baseball World Series. It was the Dodgers' first title since 1988.

November News Review

A four-week lockdown in England began to stem the rising cases of COVID-19. Later in the month, it was announced that gyms, bars, and restaurants would be able to reopen on 2 December 2020 when the lockdown was due to end. Prime Minister Boris Johnson also stated that England would return to the three-tier system when

the lockdown ended.

The US Presidential election took place in America. Early reports suggested that Joe Biden had beaten Donald Trump. President Trump refuted the reports and claimed that fraud had been committed and that he would be taking legal action. Trump also refused to concede defeat even though the official result had declared Joe Biden the winner of the election.

Four were killed and over 20 injured in a gun attack in Vienna, Austria. Members of special forces were quickly on the scene before the gunman was shot dead. The incident was declared a terror attack and the gunman was said to have links to Islamic State.

SpaceX successfully launched Crew Dragon, a spacecraft carrying four NASA astronauts to the International Space Station. It is the second time SpaceX have supplied a rocket and capsule to NASA.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a ban on the sale of new diesel and petrol cars by 2030 and hybrid cars by 2035. The move was part of the government plan for the UK to reach a net-zero emissions target by 2050.

Sir Phillip Green's Arcadia group collapsed into administration. The group which consists of brands such as Topshop, Topman, Evans, Miss Selfridge, and Dorothy Perkins along with others put 13,000 jobs at risk as administrators tried to find a buyer. The Arcadia CEO blamed the groups' demise on the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many have said the problems stemmed before the pandemic and the company failed to keep up to date with an increasingly online retail sector.

The United Arab Emirates completed an overhaul of its legal system. The changes loosened restriction on alcohol consumption and cohabitation while criminalising honour killings.

Elon Musk surpassed Bill Gates to become the second richest person in the world, behind Jeff Bezos. The entrepreneur behind Tesla and SpaceX was said to have a net worth of £97bn.

Virgin Hyperloop made its first test run with passengers. The transport model uses pods inside vacuum tubes to transport passengers at high speeds. Two passengers travelled a 500m tube in 15 seconds and reached a max speed of 107mph during the test.

A sealed copy of the Nintendo Entertainment Systems game Super Mario Bros 3 sold for a record US\$156,000 at auction. The game featured a rare piece of cover art with the 'Bros' text on the left of the cover instead of the centre. It's the most ever paid for a video game.

Johnny Depp lost his libel battle against the Sun newspaper after an article it published called him a 'wife-beater'. A judge ruled that what the paper had written was 'substantially true' and found that his ex-wife Amber Heard had been a victim of domestic abuse. Mr Depp launched an appeal which was later turned down.

November Sports Review

Lewis Hamilton had a clean sweep of the three F1 races in November winning the Emilia Romagna, the Turkish and the Bahrain Grand Prix. The UK driver also

won his seventh title after victory in Turkey. He has now equalled Michel Schumacher's title wins after already surpassing his total race wins earlier in the season.

In Golf, Dustin Johnson won the Masters Tournament at Augusta. The American won by five shots with a record-breaking 20 under par.

December News Review

Trade negotiations between the UK and the EU continued throughout the month to finalise a Brexit deal agreement. After the deadline was pushed back, a post-Brexit trade deal was agreed on the 24th December 2020 and guaranteed 'zero tariff and zero quota' on goods. A spokesperson for No10 said "The deal is done. Everything that the British public was promised during the 2016 referendum and in the general election last year is delivered by this deal."

A new COVID-19 variant was found in the UK. The early indications suggested the variant was more contagious than its predecessor.

As the COVID-19 deaths in the UK surpassed 70,000, it was announced that plans to allow households to mix over the festive season would be changed to Christmas Day only. A new Tier 4 restriction was also introduced in London and South-East England. Households under Tier 4 restrictions were not allowed to mix on Christmas Day. In Scotland, a travel ban was imposed, and the highest level of restrictions was imposed from Boxing Day for three weeks. Further areas were placed into Tier 4 towards the end of the month as the number of COVID-19 cases began to rise rapidly.

The UK-French border was temporarily closed after France decided to ban travel between the two countries to try and limit the spread of the new COVID-19 variant. The ban was eventually lifted providing people travelling across the borders could provide a negative COVID-19 test from the last 72 hours.

The UK Government announced that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine had

been approved for use, becoming the first country to approve it. The vaccine began to be administered to those over 80, NHS staff and at care homes within a week. Later in the month the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca vaccine was approved with a rollout planned for early January 2021.

A joint calculation between China and Nepal settled on a new height of 8,848.86m for Mount Everest. The new height of the peak ends a long-running feud between the two countries.

The British Antarctic Survey confirmed that one of the largest ever recorded icebergs, A-68, had broken in two in the South Atlantic. The iceberg originally had a surface area of 5,800 square kilometres.

Bitcoin, the cryptocurrency, hit an all-time high of \$20,400 after demand rose 4.5% from investors. The virtual coin gained 170% over the year.

Ikea said it would stop printing its catalogue after 70 years. The Swedish Furniture Retailer made the decision as part of its ambition to become a more digital business.

December Sports Review

Anthony Joshua beat Kubrat Pulev after a ninth-round knockout to retain his unified WBO, IBF, WBA and IBO heavyweight titles. After the fight attention turned to a possible unification bout between Joshua and WBC and The Ring titleholder Tyson Fury.

Seven-time Formula 1 champion Lewis Hamilton was knighted by the Queen as part of the New Year Honours list. He becomes the fourth F1 driver to be knighted after Sir Jack Brabham, Sir Stirling Moss and Sir Jackie Stewart. The knighthood drew congratulations from a range of former F1 drivers and pundits such as Damon Hill and Martin Brundle.

Neil Robertson won the UK Snooker Championship beating Judd Trump 10-9 in a close final. The event saw Kyren Wilson and Stuart Bingham achieve maximum 147 breaks in the first round.

End

Start of ban on plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds

October

The ban on supplying plastic straws and stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds has come into force in England today (Thursday 1 October), marking yet another major step in the Government's fight against single-use plastic waste to protect our environment and clean up our oceans.

Just one month after ministers confirmed the single-use plastic bag charge would be increased to 10p and extended to all retailers, today's commencement of the ban will further ensure the country builds back greener.

It is estimated we use 4.7 billion plastic straws, 316 million plastic stirrers, and 1.8 billion plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England every year, many of which find their way into our ocean. By banning the supply of these items, we can further protect our marine wildlife and move one step closer to our ambition of eliminating all avoidable

plastic waste, as set out in our 25 Year Environment Plan.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

“Single-use plastics cause real devastation to the environment and this government is firmly committed to tackling this issue head on.

We are already a world-leader in this global effort. Our 5p charge on single-use plastic bags has successfully cut sales by 95% in the main supermarkets, we have banned microbeads, and we are building plans for a deposit return scheme to drive up the recycling of single-use drinks containers.



The ban on straws, stirrers and cotton buds is just the next step in our battle against plastic pollution and our pledge to protect our ocean and the environment for future generations.”

While making this important step to help the environment, disabled people and those with medical conditions will also be protected, and will be able to request a plastic straw when visiting a pub or restaurant and purchase them from pharmacies.

It is estimated that between 4.8 and 12.7 million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean globally every year, which has produced many scenes of marine wildlife being injured or killed by plastic waste. The UK is leading on a wide programme of overseas engagements, including through the Commonwealth



Clean Ocean Alliance and the Commonwealth Litter Programme, aiming to prevent plastic waste from reaching the ocean in the first place.

The government is also committed to launching a £500 million Blue Planet Fund to protect the ocean from plastic pollution, warming sea temperatures and overfishing.

Dr Laura Foster, Head of Clean Seas at the Marine Conservation Society, said:

“It’s fantastic news that the ban on plastic cotton bud sticks, stirrers and straws is now in place. The results of our annual Great British Beach Clean have shown a decrease in cotton bud sticks littering British beaches.

In 2017 we found an average of 31 cotton bud sticks per 100 metres of beach, and in 2019 we found just eight on beaches in England. This reflects that many companies have already made the switch away from plastic, in cotton buds and other items, something we need to see more companies doing.

Only with ambitious policy and forward-thinking brands and companies, can we truly stop the plastic tide.”

Other key government actions on plastics include a world-leading ban on microbeads, consulting on introducing a deposit return scheme to drive up the recycling of single-use drinks containers, and committing to a ban on the export of polluting plastic waste to non-OECD countries. As announced recently, the 5p charge on single-use bags will be doubled to 10p and extended to all retailers from April 2021.

The government will also introduce a new world-leading tax on plastic packaging which does not meet a minimum threshold of at least 30% recycled content from April 2022 to encourage greater use of recycled plastic.



Southampton to London Pipeline Project granted development consent

October

Yesterday, Wednesday 7 October 2020, the application for the proposed Southampton to London Pipeline Project has been granted development consent by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Development consent has been given for the Southampton to London Pipeline Project, which aims to replace 90km of Esso Petroleum Company Limited's 105km aviation fuel pipeline



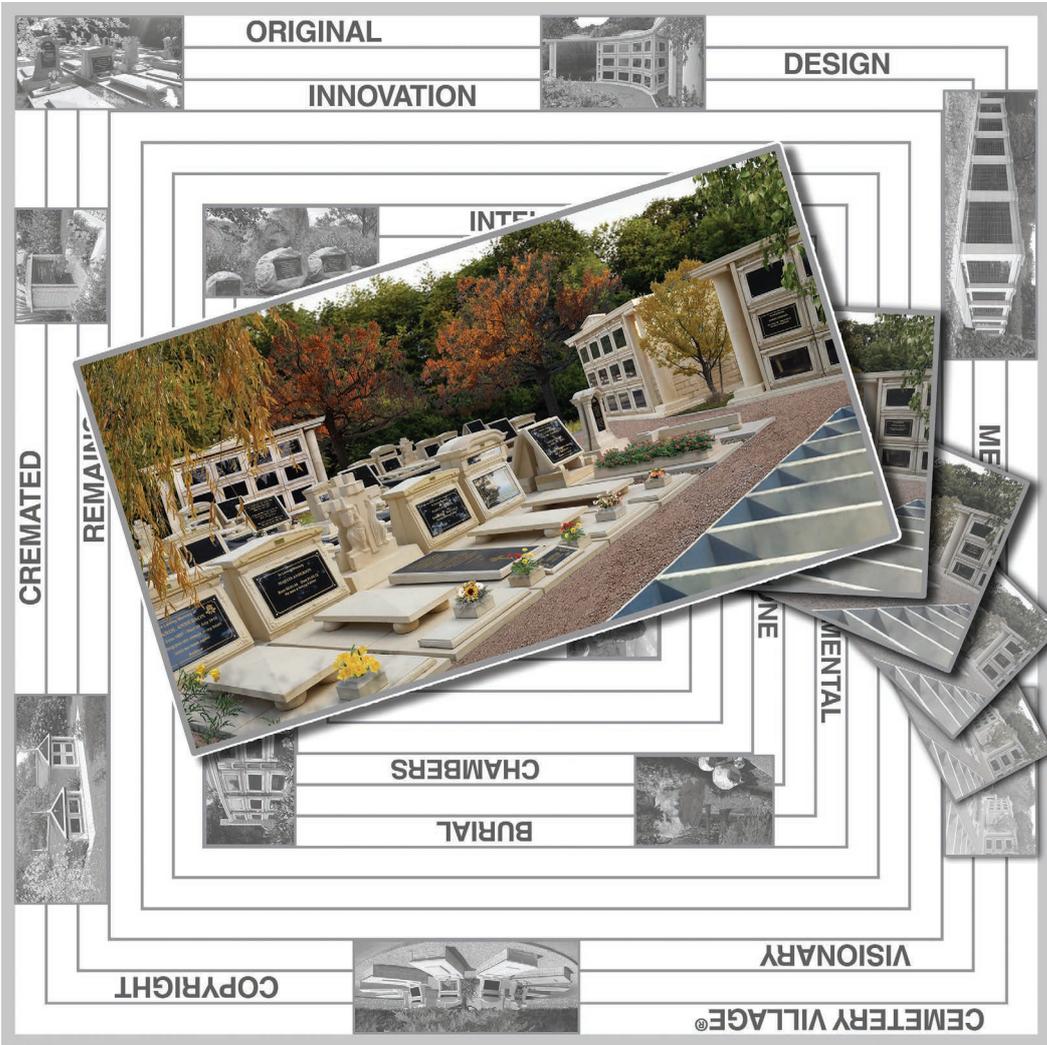
that runs from Fawley Refinery near Southampton to Esso's West London Terminal Storage Facility in Hounslow.

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by Esso Petroleum Company Ltd on 14 May 2019 and accepted for Examination on 11 June 2019. Following an Examination during which the Applicant, Statutory Consultees and Interested Parties were given the opportunity to provide evidence to the Examining Authority, a Recommendation was made to the Secretary of State on 7 July 2020. The Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Sarah Richards said:

"This is the 95th Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and 59th Energy project to have been examined and decided within the timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008.

The Planning Inspectorate is committed to giving local communities the opportunity of being involved in the Examination of projects that may affect them. Local people, the Local Authorities and other Interested Parties were able to participate in a 6-month long Examination.

The Examining Authority listened and gave full consideration to local views before making their Recommendation." The Decision, the Recommendation made by the Examining Authority to the Secretary of State and the evidence considered by the Examining Authority in reaching its Recommendation is publicly available on the National Infrastructure Planning website.



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445 heritage organisations saved by £103 million investment from Government

October

Culture Secretary announces a massive rescue package to protect our heritage, save jobs and prepare for a cultural bounceback.

Almost 450 heritage organisations in England have been awarded cash from the first round of the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage Grants of up to £1 million will deliver a lifeline for the heritage sector in England with further support to follow and larger

grants for capital projects awarded through the Heritage Stimulus Fund First major tranche of funding from the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund

Heritage organisations across the country are set to receive a lifesaving financial boost from the government thanks to the £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund to help them through the coronavirus pandemic.

Government and administered at arms length by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Both funds are part of the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund which is designed to secure the future of Britain's museums, galleries, theatres, independent cinemas, heritage sites and music venues with emergency grants and loans.

445 organisations will share £103 million to help restart vital repair and maintenance work on cherished heritage sites, to keep venues open and to save jobs and livelihoods.

This vital funding is from the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage and the Heritage Stimulus Fund - funded by

433 organisations will receive a share of £67 million from the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage to help with costs for operating, reopening and recovery. This includes famous heritage sites across the country, from Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire to Blackpool's



Winter Gardens, Blyth Tall Ship to the Severn Valley Railway, the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincolnshire to the Piecehall in Halifax. The funds will save sites that define communities across the country.

Beneficiaries also include famous locations that have starred in film and TV and are huge draws for tourists the world over, such as Gloucester Cathedral - whose cloisters formed the backdrop for Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films - and Highclere Castle - the setting of Downton Abbey. These sites define how our nation is seen around the world.

Grants are between £10,000 and £1 million with a further round of grants of up to £3 million due to be announced imminently.

12 organisations, including English Heritage, Landmark Trust, Historic Royal Palaces and the Canal and River Trust, will receive £34 million from the Heritage Stimulus Fund to restart construction and maintenance on cherished heritage sites to

preserve visitor attractions and protect livelihoods for some of the most vulnerable heritage specialists and contractors in the sector.

The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) has also been awarded a grant from the Culture Recovery Fund through Historic England. The AHF will use the funding to support charities and social enterprises occupying historic buildings to develop new business plans and strategies for organisations affected by the pandemic.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

“As a nation it is essential that we preserve our heritage and celebrate and learn from our past. This massive support package will protect our shared

heritage for future generations, save jobs and help us prepare for a cultural bounceback post covid.”

Lucy Worsley, Chief Curator, Historic Royal Palaces, said:

“There’s no truer way to experience the past than to walk in the footsteps of those who have lived it – that’s why preserving our built heritage is so important.

At Historic Royal Palaces, we care for six nationally significant buildings, opening them to the public and preserving them for future generations. Sadly, the pandemic meant that we had to stop some of our critical conservation work. The grant we have received from the Culture Recovery Fund will enable this work to resume – so we can give some of Britain’s most historic buildings the care and attention they deserve, while supporting the specialist craftspeople who



are vital for the future of our national heritage. We are enormously grateful to the Government for this support.”

Duncan Wilson, Historic England’s Chief Executive said:

“It is heartening to see grants, both large and small, from the Government’s Culture Recovery Fund helping heritage sites and organisations across the country which have been hit hard by the effects of Covid-19. These grants range from giving skilled craft workers the chance to keep their trades alive to helping heritage organisations pay the bills, and to kick-starting repair works at our best-loved historic sites. The funding is an essential lifeline for our heritage and the people who work tirelessly to conserve it for us all, so that we can hand it on to future generations.”

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of the National Lottery Heritage Fund said:

“It is absolutely right that investing in heritage should be a priority during this crisis and this support by Government is crucial. Heritage creates jobs and

economic prosperity, is a major driver for tourism and makes our towns, cities, and rural areas better places to live. All of this is so important for our wellbeing and will be particularly vital when we start to emerge from this incredibly difficult time.

Our heritage is still facing a perilous future – we are not out of the woods yet. But this hugely welcome funding from Government, and the money we continue to invest from the National Lottery, has undoubtedly stopped heritage and the organisations that care for it being permanently lost.”

Kate Mavor, Chief Executive of English Heritage, said:

“This support for our nation’s heritage is fantastic news. Over the last few

months, our teams have been working hard to welcome visitors back safely to the great castles, stone circles, abbeys and historic houses in our care. This funding will help us invest to safeguard the historic fabric of these much-loved places, which everyone can learn from and enjoy.”

Matthew Mckeague Chief Executive of the Architectural Heritage Fund:

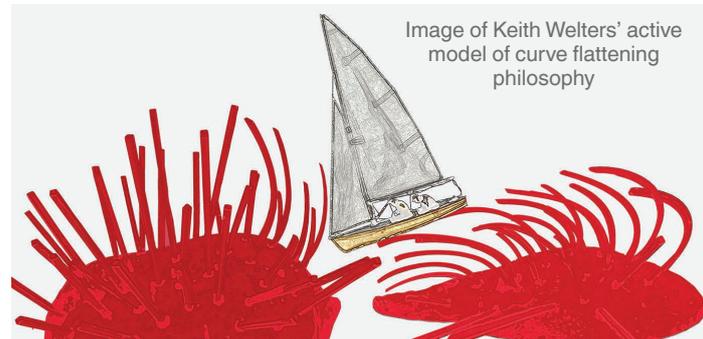
“Social enterprise and charitable organisations based in historic buildings play a range of critical roles in communities across England - offering chances to learn, create and come together, helping foster local identity and social capital and by providing key services. This funding announced today will be a crucial lifeline to many organisations and projects, enabling them to carry on delivering their vital work in the months and years ahead.”



CHOPPY SEAS

with

Second Wave Building



We can all agree that 2020, so far, has been an unexpected challenge in many ways. If you are relatively static in your work or domestic location, you are largely immune to the daily management challenges that Welters have had to, and still do, wrestle with on a daily basis - all dramatically heightened by the covid pandemic.

Added to the obvious scenario of pressure, is the fact that, as a manufacturing organisation, designing and installing cemetery and crematoria interment systems and providing support through service and care, we require a hybrid of challenge and personal dedication from every conceived resource.

Upon the realisation that, not only our country but the whole world, was and is suffering from a pandemic, our first question was, do we stop work and await the calm, quietly preparing for things to return to 'normal' or do we fight through and do everything we can to continue looking after our customers and providing for their needs. The answer was obvious. We are dedicated to our customers and will always do what we can for them.

It is inevitable that sometimes we feel our work and dedication is appreciated and sometimes not but there is no doubt that this is to be expected of life's journey. We have and do, in our judgement, continue to do our part to 'flatten out the curve' whilst providing an uninterrupted service to our clients.

The additional challenges that we have overcome during this time of uncertainty and worry are numerous and, although some were to be expected, we have encountered many that could not have been predicted.

As may be expected, along with the saddening rise in daily death toll due to covid, came the increase in demand for interment systems. In response, we have increased our investment risk to maximise our tooling and systems, increasing our production capacity. This, in turn, necessitated the increase in workforce and training to ensure we have the necessary personnel to facilitate the use of these new systems.



Massive investment in additional tooling capacity

Our status as key workers allowed us to persevere throughout lockdown. However, with the daily uncertainty resultant from personnel self isolating and the need to accommodate part time hours due to child care issues as a result of the schools being off, this time also provided it's own set of challenges. Every day, there was (and is) no certainty as to how many of our personnel would be available to work and, if they were not, how long they would be absent.

The ever changing government guidelines and policies are extensive. Through country wide lockdowns, local lockdowns and negotiating a tiered system of guidelines throughout the country, the planning, control and distribution of our workforce has provided us with our own management challenges. It is essential to ensure that all personnel are updated constantly to

make certain that the correct guidelines are being followed in each location that we are working. Masks are worn at all times, whether on site or at our production facility. Additional hand washing and welfare facilities have been provided and staggered breaks implemented to ensure that all our personnel are safe whilst at work.

In order to maintain our production capacity, it is essential that our supply chain continues without interruption which, unfortunately, was impossible during lockdown. We have found ourselves in a new world of uncertainty where we could not, and cannot still, rely on our regular suppliers to have the necessary materials available at all



Work continues apace in our manufacturing facility

times. In fact, although most of our suppliers were able to stay, at least partially, open, the materials were often not available. Cement, for example, has been in short supply with a nationwide shortage.

In addition to our suppliers, we are reliant upon our hauliers for delivering our components and materials to site. We are fortunate to be working with haulage companies that have been able to facilitate our increased loads.

With our teams working at various locations throughout the country, the management, coordination and availability of accommodation is of vital importance. During lockdown, some of our most commonly utilised facilities were no longer available and alternatives had to be found. Fortunately, other facilities remained open for key workers, enabling us, for the most part,

to continue working. However, due to the reduction in hotel staff, we have found that facilities have, and are, not being cleaned as well as you would expect in these times, resulting in our personnel having to carry their own cleaning equipment to wipe down all surfaces and handles etc before use.

With the rate of unemployment plummeting, the theft of plant, tools and equipment from sites and vans has unfortunately escalated over the last few months. As you might appreciate, this has necessitated the increase in security measures, increasing our expenditure once again. We find that there is some apparent unwillingness or inability to provide any support or financial awareness of these ever changing circumstances in which we must operate in order for our services to continue.

As with the rest of the world, welters have had to adjust to the 'virtual meeting'. With the inability to meet face to face and conduct indoor meetings, our meetings have primarily been taking place virtually - internally with personnel and with clients and suppliers. Particularly as we move into the colder, wetter months where outdoor, socially distant meetings are no longer possible, this method of 'meeting' has become invaluable. Although it takes a bit of getting used to, it has, in many ways, proved to be efficient in terms of time management and availability. It may be that some meetings continue in this format into the future.

Regardless of the ongoing struggles as a result of the pandemic, welters have continued to do what we do best.



Production continues of ashes & full body interment systems & memorials alike

The ongoing production of all full body and cremated remains interment facilities has been essential. All our products and systems can be installed together, in any configuration or layout, designed to best suit the needs of our customers, to create the welters® Cemetery Village® concept. Previously unusable land can be transformed into attractive cemeteries and cemetery extensions, creating interment positions where none were possible in the existing land prior to our involvement.

Please visit our website for further information on our products and services.

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BEFORE - examples of the excavated material and accumulated rubbish found on sites being developed by welters, unsuitable for earthen burial



AFTER - the sites are transformed into Cemetery Villages, providing many interment opportunities where none were possible before

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- Pollution - The Future

by Paul Bazeley

Over the last few editions, we have been looking at the impact of pollution on our planet. In the final in the series, we will see what the future may hold.

Although it is hard to say precisely what impact pollution will have in the future, we can use some research to develop a picture. While governments, companies, charities, and individuals, are all doing their bit to fight pollution, the problem is still increasing instead of decreasing.

Climate change is making the world warmer at an alarming rate. Around the time of writing, a giant iceberg, approximately 1,500 square miles in size, known as A68 has begun to break up close to South Georgia Island. A piece believed to be around 70 square

miles in size broke away from the main iceberg, and a few days later, another piece thought to be a similar size also broke away from a tip. It seems



unclear what effect these large pieces breaking off might have. There is a possibility they will get swept towards South Georgia, and scientists are monitoring the situation closely. While some say the iceberg breaking may have been a case of the production and decay of an iceberg, many believe it is a direct result of global warming.

The rising earth temperature is affecting the world. With the weather becoming seemingly more temperamental each year, the long-term impacts are so far unclear. However, researchers expect more floods, hotter temperatures, and a whole host of other unwanted weather.

The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) researched how climate change could affect pollution in China, one of the worlds most polluted countries. They found that “results indicate that climate change is likely to increase the risk of severe pollution events in China”. They also suggested, “that increasingly frequent extreme events such as atmospheric stagnation and heat waves could negatively impact air quality, especially during extreme air pollution episodes”. The model suggested that this would increase the number of deaths due to pollution each year.

Recent data has shown that around 70 animals have become extinct due to changing ecosystems or pollution. The data also showed well over 6,000 animal species are at threat. To further this, scientific research between 1970 and 2014 found that approximately 500 mammal populations in Canada

shrank by an average of 43%. There is a wealth of data to show that pollution is and will kill off animal and plant species in the future, and in some cases, it is likely too late to reverse the impact.

A further concern is the economic factors of future air pollution. Greenpeace’s study estimated that pollution is responsible for a \$2.9 trillion financial cost, which equates to 3.3% of the world’s GDP. The report also estimated that pollution was

responsible for 1.8 billion sick days and 4.5 million deaths a year. It also saw large amounts of children missing school days due to asthma and other issues, which can have a detrimental impact on their learning and add to healthcare requirements.

Finally, an exciting story from the BBC found that not only are we killing our planet, making ourselves ill, and affecting our economies, we may also



be changing our behaviour. Their story discussed studies that show air pollution can impair our judgement, cause mental health issues, lead to lower performance in schools and even increase crime. One study even showed that even moderate pollution levels could raise crime rates. The study found that pollution could cause inflammation in the brain and cause people to feel increasingly anxious. Although the research is in its infancy, early data shows that pollution could alter our behaviour.

There certainly is a bleakness to the prospects of the future with pollution. Nevertheless, now more than ever, are we trying to reduce and reverse the problem. A recent UN Climate Summit saw the EU pledge to cut its emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 1990. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson also vowed to cut greenhouse gas pollution by a minimum of 68% by 2030 compared to 1990. There is also renewed hope for the US. At the time of writing, Joe Biden is close

to entering the White House, and he has already said: "I will join the Paris [Climate] Accord". The President-Elect seems to be far more concerned with climate change than the man he will succeed.

There was further good news late in 2020. Somewhat surprisingly, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that China would cut emissions to net-zero by 2060. The announcement at the UN General Assembly was a shock but great news in the fight against pollution. Many believe that this statement from a country with a poor track record in fighting pollution could



be the catalyst for a global fight against climate change.

As individuals, the news also seems optimistic. Recycling is on the up, many are using cleaner energy sources, many are buying less fast fashion, and more people are eating more sustainably. The sale of electric and hybrid vehicles has also increased substantially. In fact, Tesla is now the most valuable car company in the world.

It appears that the future could be bleak; however, if governments, companies, and we as individuals pull together, there is a possibility that we can turn things around. At the time of writing, it seems we may be on the precipice of change, and with more countries joining the fight against pollution and a new President due in America, we may still be able to save the beautiful planet we live on.



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Captain Sir Tom Moore presented with first Veterans Railcard

October

- Captain Sir Tom Moore presented with the very first Veterans Railcard as design is unveiled
- former servicemen and women to receive up to a third off fares from Armistice Day, unlocking opportunities to re-enter work and connecting with loved ones
- Rail Minister hails selflessness and spirit of all veterans as he visits former service personnel retraining to enter construction industry

Military veterans of every generation will soon benefit from cut-price rail travel, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced today (14 October 2020), as he presented Captain Sir Tom Moore with the very first Veterans Railcard.

Aimed at supporting veterans post-service, the newly unveiled railcard will provide up to a third off all peak and

off-peak fares, as well as discounted travel for adult companions and children. It forms part of the government's commitment to make this country the best place to be a veteran, helping repay the debt we all owe to those who have served.

At his home in Bedfordshire Captain Tom Moore, who served in World War II and won the nation's hearts with his incredible fundraising efforts, was presented with the very first card.

The card pays tribute to the Royal Navy, RAF and Army, using the colours featured on the veterans' flag. An estimated 830,000 veterans, who are not eligible for existing railcards, will now be able to get up to a third off rail travel from 5 November 2020.

The new card will be on sale at an

introductory price of £21 until 31 March 2021.

Grant Shapps, Transport Secretary, said:

"We have an eternal debt of honour to those who have served our country and this railcard is part of marking our gratitude. For veterans looking to re-enter the world of work and connect with friends and family, it will cut the cost of travel to open up new opportunities. Delivering this Manifesto promise will improve lives for veterans and their families across the United Kingdom.

I am also delighted to present Sir Captain Tom Moore with the very first railcard. Through his service

and his inspirational fundraising, he has shown the selflessness and indomitable spirit of all those who have served.”

Captain Sir Tom Moore, Captain Tom Foundation, said:

“This is a wonderful occasion to accept the first Veterans Railcard.

It is a rare opportunity to show thanks and gratitude to veterans and this railcard is a necessary recognition and investment in veterans, giving them the ability to re-connect and combat loneliness, something that we promote and support at the Captain Tom Foundation.”

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris also visited the Building Heroes centre in Wandsworth, to meet with veterans undergoing a 6-week training course in building and construction.

Targeted at teaching veterans new skills and tackling unemployment by delivering a seamless transition into a career in the construction industry, Chris Heaton Harris discussed how the railcard would support re-entering civilian life after

service.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

“Providing discounted rail travel is a fantastic way to underline the debt of gratitude we owe to those who have served.

For younger veterans, it will also help boost employment prospects, allowing more flexibility in their travel to work or job interviews.”

Charles Byrne, Director General of The Royal British Legion said:

“Every day our armed forces community provide an incredible service in so many



ways and it's right their unique contribution is recognised.

We welcome the introduction of measures such as the new Veterans Railcard that will allow veterans and their families to enjoy discounted rail fares.

At a time when many veterans are facing significant financial hardship, we hope as many as possible will be able to enjoy the benefits this card will bring when travelling by train.”

Help for Heroes CEO, Melanie Waters said:

“We are pleased that the government will make good on its promise to introduce a railcard for veterans and extend discounted train travel to former service personnel in England.

The pandemic is having a lasting impact on veterans and their families both financially and socially, and its introduction will come at a welcome time.”

COVID-19:

What we know so far - part 2

by Paul Bazeley

Since the previous article published in the Summer 2020 edition of Government World, a lot has changed in terms of coronavirus.

To give you a quick refresh, by the end of June the government had reduced the UK alert level to Level 3 from level 4. The change meant the UK was moving away from a 'severe risk of transmission' to 'coronavirus in general circulation' and that a gradual relaxation of rules could happen. A spike in cases saw stricter measures introduced in Leicester. Nevertheless, the sun was out and spirits, in general, seemed high as lockdown measures were relaxed.



COVID-19
Coronavirus

What has happened since?

A brief overview.

In July, the government announced a £1.57 billion support package to support galleries, museums, theatres, and other cultural venues that the pandemic had impacted. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a further easing of restrictions. The government ordered 90 million vaccines from BioNtech/Pfizer and Valvena; this was in addition to 100 million Oxford AstraZeneca vaccines previously ordered. The government placed restrictions on Greater Manchester, Yorkshire, and East Lancashire after a surge in cases. A rise in coronavirus numbers across the UK saw the scheduled easing of

further restriction postponed.

As we moved into August, the successful Eat Out to Help Out scheme began, it provided 50% off meals at certain restaurants and pubs. By the end of the project, 100 million meals were consumed. A review into A-Level and GCSE grades took place after results were significantly lower than teachers expected grades.

During September, an alarming number of coronavirus cases began to develop with many government officials and advisors expressing their concern over the increase. New restriction later came into force including

a curfew on pubs, restaurants, bars, casinos, bowling alleys and a range of other entertainment places. England and Wales saw the release of the Track and Trace App.

October saw the news that the James Bond film, No Time To Die, would be delayed again. The announcement led cinemas to close or drastically reduce their opening hours due to the lack of new film releases. Papers released showed that the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) had recommended a short 'circuit-breaker' lockdown to stem the rising cases. The news led to many calling for a small lockdown to take place. Deaths from COVID-19 rose to highs not seen for several months.

By November, coronavirus cases continued to rise, hitting numbers not seen since May. England went back into a lockdown to try and control the spread of the virus. The discovery of a mutant strain of the virus in Denmark led to the government imposing a ban on Non-UK

nationals arriving from the country. The UK became the fifth country behind the US, Brazil, India and Mexico to record 50,000 deaths. Plans were announced to allow three households to mix for a short period over the Christmas holidays.

At the beginning of December, the UK became the first country in the world to approve the Pfizer/ BioNTech vaccine. A new COVID-19 variant was found in the South of England. England returned to the tier system after its second lockdown ended. The government reduced the self-isolation period from 14 days to 10. A new tier 4 restriction was introduced and imposed around the London area. Plans for households to mix over Christmas were limited to the 25th December only. Over 40 countries suspended flights to and from the UK due to concerns over the new variant. France halted all ferry traffic for 48 hours, closing the Port of Dover. Another strain of coronavirus was found in South Africa.

Where are we now?

Currently, at the end of December,

approximately 250,000 vaccinations have been given across the UK. The Oxford/ AstraZeneca vaccine has been approved and will be given to people imminently. It is hoped that by mid-February the first four priority groups will have had their first vaccines. That would include residents and staff working in care homes for older adults, all those over 80 and frontline health and social care workers, all those over 75, those over 70 years of age and over, and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals.

Although vaccinations have begun, the number of cases and the number of deaths increase at an alarming rate. The stricter tier 4 measures are seemingly spreading to more parts of the UK, and rumours of another lockdown are circulating as there seems to be a worry that the NHS may become overwhelmed.

What does the future look like?

It is hard to say what long term impact coronavirus will have on the world. Many experts have stated that the virus will probably be around forever; however, it will become more easily managed over time. Whether that is true or not is yet to be seen. While things seem to be going the wrong way, we should note that some scientists did warn there was likely to be a second spike over winter.

Based on the cases and deaths in the UK, a third lockdown seems almost inevitable in the not-so-distant future. Nevertheless, the vaccination rollout has begun and with a second vaccine approved, and more hoping to be in the coming months, there is a possibility of a light at the end of the tunnel. The vaccination process will not be a quick one, especially when accounting for the entire world, but at least it has now begun and is likely to only increase in speed.

The big question mark for the future it

seems at the moment are the mutations of the virus. If the vaccines are effective against them, then by the end of the year many of us will hopefully be seeing a return to normality. If the vaccines are not effective against some strains, then who knows. Will there be a scramble to create other vaccines? Now it is easier to test, could we see Covid-19 being contained? Or will we be back to square one? At the minute, we are not sure. Although some experts believe the vaccines will still work, we are waiting for data to verify it.

It seems that this pandemic is still quite far from over. Yet, with the introduction of vaccines, there is a sense of renewed hope that we are nearing the end. One thing seems inevitable; vaccinations and variants will play a large role in what happens next.

A follow-up article will feature in a future edition of Government World.



The collage features several distinct elements: a poster for the 'SOUTH BANK EXHIBITION LONDON' with a colorful geometric design and a 'WELTERS of Wacombe' tag; a circular logo for 'THE HIGH WYCOMBE AND DISTRICT FURNITURE MANUFACTURERS SOCIETY'; a square maze; the text 'Keith Welters FURNISHING' in a dark grey box; the 'welters' logo in a large, bold, lowercase font with 'ORGANISATION WORLDWIDE' and 'Design and Innovation' below it, and the website 'www.welters-worldwide.com'; and a bronze elephant statue with its trunk raised.

Liverpool to be regularly tested for coronavirus in first whole city testing pilot

November

- Prime Minister announces new whole city testing approach to launch in Liverpool from Friday with hundreds of thousands of new, rapid turnaround tests deployed

- all residents and workers will be offered repeat COVID-19 testing, even if asymptomatic, to find more positive cases and break chains of transmission
- tests to be provided through a partnership between Liverpool City Council, NHS Test and Trace and Ministry of Defence, with logistical support from Armed Forces personnel

Everyone living or working in Liverpool will now be offered COVID-19 testing, whether they have symptoms or not, in the first pilot of whole city testing in England made possible by the dramatic increase in testing capacity and new technologies.

At the request of and in close collaboration with local leaders, the Prime Minister is announcing the first deployment of whole city testing in order to help support the local area to find even more people with coronavirus to control the spread of the virus and gain more data on the number of cases across the city, which are already among the highest per 100,000 in the UK. Testing will begin this week.

Residents and workers will be tested using a combination of existing swab tests, as well as new lateral flow tests which can rapidly turn around results within an hour without the need to be processed in a lab, as well as LAMP technology due to be deployed in Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust for NHS staff.

The pilot will help to inform a blueprint for

how mass testing can be achieved and how fast and reliable COVID-19 testing can be delivered at scale.

Local leaders who invite mass testing will benefit from receiving a clearer picture of the number of cases across the city, enabling them to make informed decisions to manage the spread of the virus and support their communities. The greater the number of people who participate, the greater the accuracy of the local picture, which will mean better local decision-making to suppress the virus to help communities get back to doing more of the normal things they like to do.

Testing will be carried out in sites across the city, including a large

number of new sites determined by local leaders. There will be a variety of ways to book a test, including online, walk-up, or by invitation from the local authority. Testing will be carried out in new and existing test sites, using home kits, in hospitals and care home settings, and schools, universities and workplaces.

Positive results from tests will be collected by NHS Test and Trace, and published as part of the daily case numbers, including how many positive cases are detected with this new method of testing. Results will be received from NHS Test and Trace via text and email.

Anyone who tests positive, using either a lateral flow test or an existing swab test, must self-isolate along with their household immediately and their contacts will be traced. Those who test negative will need to continue to follow all national guidance.



These more advanced tests will help identify infectious individuals who are not displaying symptoms and help far more positive cases so they can self-isolate and prevent the virus from spreading, in a first step towards rolling out mass testing more widely across the UK.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

“I want to thank the civic leaders of Liverpool for volunteering to join the UK’s first city-wide population testing pilot and the people of Liverpool for taking part.

These tests will help identify the many thousands of people in the city who don’t have symptoms but can still infect others without knowing. Dependent on their success in Liverpool, we will aim to distribute millions of these new rapid tests between now and Christmas and empower local communities to use them to drive down transmission in their areas.

It is early days, but this kind of mass testing has the potential to be a powerful new weapon in our fight against COVID-19.”

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

“Last month we set out our ambition to use the latest mass testing technologies to bring this virus under control.

Mass testing will help us to control this virus, by finding it even before people get symptoms. I’m delighted we can now roll out mass testing to whole cities – starting with the City of Liverpool. Using half a million of the very latest rapid tests, this rollout can help suppress the virus and give residents and workers some peace of mind.

I want to thank local leaders, Mayor of Liverpool Joe Anderson and City Region Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram, and Liverpool’s Director of Public Health Matt Ashton, who will continue to work hand in hand with our dedicated armed forces to provide tests to anyone who wants one, fully supported by NHS Test and Trace.

Everyone in Liverpool can help play their part by getting a test and following the rules, including the critical basics of ‘Hands. Face. Space’.”

Eligible individuals who test positive – and contacts who are required to self-isolate – will be entitled to the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment in the same way as a regular swab test ordered through NHS Test and Trace.

Whole city testing aims to protect those at highest risk and find asymptomatic cases to help prevent and reduce transmission in the community. By testing a large proportion of a single town or city more positive cases can be identified and told to self-isolate to help control the spread.

Liverpool is in local COVID alert level very high and weekly cases currently



stand at 410.4 per 100,000, as of 25 October. The government’s strategy is to suppress the virus while supporting the economy, education and the NHS, until an effective vaccine is widely available. Local action is at the centre of the government’s response, and engagement with local authorities is, and will continue to be, a key part of this process.

Liverpool City Council will set out how residents and workers will be able to access the tests this week.

Mayor of Liverpool Joe Anderson said:

“During negotiations with central government, myself and Steve Rotheram have always highlighted the need for enhanced public health intervention measures in Liverpool and the wider city region, and we were keen that we should be considered for any new strategies to tackle the worrying rise in COVID-19.

We are pleased that our numerous conversations have resulted in Liverpool becoming a pilot for mass testing, which will help to quickly identify people who have the virus and reduce transmission

substantially.

We are seeing a slow reduction in figures in Liverpool which shows we are on the right path and residents and businesses are working together and following guidelines for the greater good.

We hope this new initiative boosts our efforts, and we will continue to see the numbers of positive cases drop across the city.”

Alongside NHS Test and Trace and commercial partners, the Ministry of Defence will supply additional military personnel to support the COVID-19 mass testing initiative in Liverpool through assisting local authorities with planning logistics locally, and delivering the additional lateral flow testing part of the programme. Roughly 2,000 personnel will be deployed from Thursday 5 November.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Armed Forces have deployed specialist planners, medics and

logisticians to assist with the Government response to the outbreak through the COVID Support Force. When the national testing programme launched, the Armed Forces provided invaluable support, deploying thousands of personnel at short notice across 236 mobile testing units, carrying out more than 700,000 tests. As part of the sustainable testing model for the long term, personnel were replaced with civilian operators, but Armed Forces have continued to bolster local logistics and outbreak management.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

“Since the start of the pandemic, the Armed Forces have worked with colleagues across government to increase the national testing capacity. We will be deploying 2000 talented Armed Forces personnel to, once again, rise to the challenges posed by COVID-19 to ensure we go above and beyond for the Liverpool community – we will have your backs throughout the trial.

The military are uniquely placed to help with the fight against COVID-19 and remain ready to support with the mass

testing initiative in Liverpool along with the additional needs of the country at this time.”

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

“Mass testing has the potential to enable us to find the vast majority of people who have coronavirus, regardless of whether they have symptoms or not, and therefore dramatically enhance our ability to stop the spread of the virus. This first deployment of whole city testing in Liverpool is a really important step forward and is thanks to the big increase in testing capacity and our investment in new testing technologies.



NHS Test and Trace will continue to work closely with local leaders, directors of public health and the Armed Forces to ensure Liverpool residents and workers can benefit from these

advances. By everyone in Liverpool coming forward to get tested, and isolating if they need to, we have a real opportunity to make a massive difference.”

Lateral flow tests are intended to detect the presence or absence of coronavirus by applying a swab from the nose and throat to a special test kit, and provide results without the need for a full scale laboratory.

LAMP is a new type of testing technology which stands for loop mediated isothermal amplification, and provides the ability to deliver significant volumes of tests.

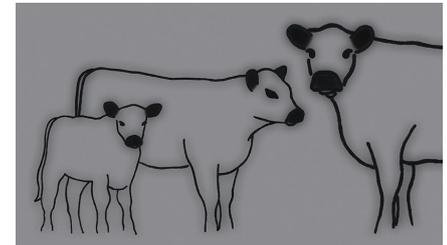
PCR swab tests are the tests that have been used as the default. These tests look for the genetic code (RNA) of the virus. The test involves taking a swab of the throat and nose. The test will confirm if an individual who is showing symptoms of the virus currently has it. It will not confirm whether they have had it and have now recovered.

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New warning schemes support Scotland's preparedness for flooding

November

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has today (10 November 2020) launched two new flood warning schemes for rural Scottish communities threatened by coastal and river flooding.

Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) launches new services for residents in two flood prone areas

- As Scotland's national flood forecasting and flood warning authority, SEPA is launching two new flood warning schemes

- Schemes will warn of forecast coastal flooding in Eilean Siar and river flooding in Aberfoyle, building on SEPA's network of regional flood alert and local flood warning areas across Scotland

- They're rolled out as Scotland marks one year until COP26 and aim to help at risk communities prepare more powerfully for future increased flooding

- Residents and road users are encouraged to sign up to SEPA's Floodline to receive free Flood Alerts



and Warnings to their phones in these areas and across Scotland

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has today (10 November 2020) launched two new flood warning schemes for rural Scottish communities threatened by coastal and river flooding.

The schemes, covering Eilean Siar and the village of Aberfoyle near Stirling, expand SEPA's network of more than 60 targeted local warning schemes and build on its commitment to support Scottish communities to prepare more powerfully for future increased flooding.

With climate change projected

to cause wetter, stormier winters, more intense rainfall in summer and sea level rise in Scotland, SEPA's Floodline delivers regional Flood Alerts across 19 geographical areas spanning the whole of Scotland, advising up to two days in advance if flooding is possible.

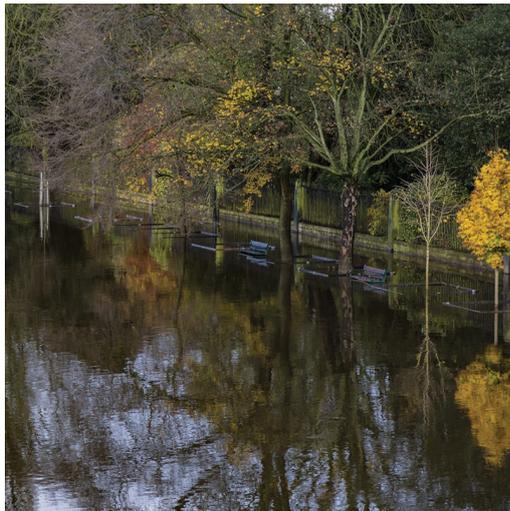
Warning schemes, like those in Eilean Siar and Aberfoyle, are developed using dedicated monitoring and flood forecasting systems to provide more localised, shorter-range warnings with additional information relevant to local communities on projected flood impacts.

Funded by the Scottish Government and developed in partnership with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Stirling Council, the new schemes will cover 1,275 at risk properties, but also benefit those traveling through these areas.

The coastal scheme in Eilean Siar will span 1,000 homes and businesses directly at risk from coastal flooding and will also benefit the residents of nearly 7,000 properties who could be affected by coastal flooding during their travel or

other activity across the Western Isles, including Lewis and Harris, Berneray, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, Barra and Vatersay. It will also provide notice of coastal flooding and disruption to roads and causeways across the Island communities.

In contrast, the Aberfoyle scheme will cover a specific flood-prone street, where flood waters from a nearby river can directly threaten an estimated 275 properties but also block access to and from the local primary school and the main route from the village to



neighbouring Kinlochard. As such, the residents of more than 650 properties will benefit from the scheme. Now, flood warning messages will be issued when flooding is forecast to impact the road, and then again to warn if impacts worsen affecting homes and businesses in Aberfoyle. The new service will provide advance warning when flooding is forecasted and, in flash flood situations, offer a small window during which to take action.

Vincent Fitzsimons said:

“Through the Floodline service, we spread awareness and understanding of immediate flood risk to give people, businesses and partners a window to act and reduce the impact of flooding when it occurs.

“Next year, Floodline will celebrate its 20th anniversary and, with a regional alert network spanning the whole of Scotland

and more than 60 local warning schemes, it's clear to see the progress that has been made in helping Scotland prepare for flooding over these last two decades. And we will continue to build on that, as our river monitoring network and new flood forecasting models give us more information than ever before about the potential flood risk and impacts.

“In the face of a climate emergency and with flooding set to increase across Scotland, schemes like these in Eilean Siar and Aberfoyle are more important now than ever, and we encourage those living, working and visiting these areas to sign up to Floodline.”

Environment Secretary Roseanna Cunningham said:

“We know the devastating impact that flooding can have on communities and livelihoods – and we know climate change can make this worse. Being prepared for any flood event is critical if we are to manage the risks and promote long term flood resilience.

“That is why I'm pleased to see the launch of SEPA's two new flood warning schemes in Eilean Siar and Aberfoyle. Early alerts of any forecasted flooding will help people living in these areas better prepare for and recover from a flood event. In 2020-21, the Scottish Government has made more than £1.6 million available to SEPA to deliver and improve its flood warning schemes.

“Flooding remains of the highest priority to the Scottish Government. This year's Programme for Government committed to invest an extra £150 million for flood risk management in addition to the £42 million provided each year to local authorities through the Local Government Capital Grant. We are also providing £193,000 in 2020-21 to the Scottish Flood Forum who work directly with communities and individuals at risk of flooding.”

SEPA is Scotland's national flood forecasting, flood warning authority and strategic flood risk management authority. It works in partnership with the Met Office to forecast for flooding and operates the Floodline service to

warn the public and emergency responders when it is likely.

SEPA's current Floodline service annually issues an average of 300 regional Flood Alerts and 400 local Flood Warnings to more than 31,500 customers nationwide.

Communities and businesses can register to this free service and can choose to receive a notification via phone call or text when flooding is forecast, and can register more than one address: property, work or regular travel routes.

In addition to issuing regional Flood Alerts and local Flood Warnings, Floodline provides live flooding information and advice on how to prepare for or cope with the impacts of flooding 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Find out more and sign up today at floodlinescotland.org.uk.

Free flu vaccinations rolled out to over 50s from December

November

- Individuals will be able to get free flu jab from their GP or pharmacist
- Centrally secured supply of vaccines available to GPs and pharmacies for newly eligible group

Adults over the age of 50 will be able to get their free flu vaccine from 1 December in the next phase of this year's expanded flu vaccination programme, the government has confirmed.

Individuals aged 50 to 64 will be able to get a vaccine from their GP or pharmacy. This significant new group can now be included in the flu programme, with the initial phase of flu vaccinations well under way.

Flu vaccine uptake is higher in all vulnerable groups except pregnant

women compared with this time last year. Provisional data published by Public Health England on Thursday 20 November suggests 72.9% of those aged 65 and over, 45.0% of 2 year olds and 46.8% of 3 year olds have had their vaccine.

GPs, trusts and pharmacists can order additional stock to vaccinate this new group from the centrally secured government supply of over 7 million vaccines.

This has been secured amid high global demand for more flu vaccine and now means vaccines can be provided to this group over December and into the New Year. There is enough flu vaccine supply to vaccinate 30 million people throughout this year's flu season in England.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock said:

“This winter is like no other, and



we have to worry about the twin threats of flu and COVID-19.

COVID means getting a flu jab is more important than ever this year. So we are delivering the largest ever flu vaccination programme. Free vaccinations for 50 to 64 years olds will now be available from GPs and pharmacies starting from 1 December.”

Public Health Minister Jo Churchill said:

“To prepare for this challenging winter, we committed to protect as many people as possible from the flu, to keep those at risk safe and reduce the strain on our NHS. I am pleased we are now able to deliver on that commitment with those aged 50 to 64 invited to get their free flu vaccine from the start of December.

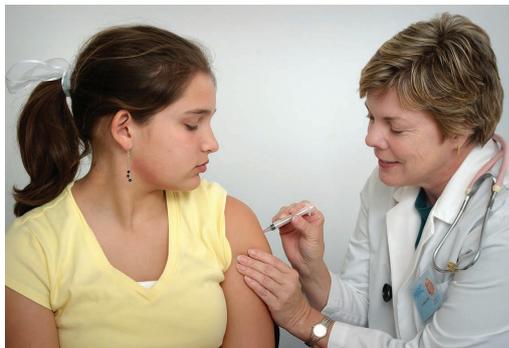
These vaccinations are already being given to our existing priority groups and that vital work will continue. More vaccine is flowing into GPs and pharmacies throughout the next few months, and I would urge anyone eligible for their flu vaccine to get one, including all health and social care workers.”

The extended offer comes as part of the most comprehensive flu vaccination programme in the UK’s history this winter, alongside plans to support the NHS as it continues to respond to coronavirus, and to relieve winter pressures on A&E and emergency care.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said:

“Influenza vaccination is a critical tool this and every winter to prevent severe illnesses and potential hospitalisations for thousands of people.

I urge all those who are eligible for the flu vaccine, including the new group of 50 to 64 year olds, to book their appointments



as soon as they can.”

The roll-out of the flu vaccine to over 50s is separate to any future COVID-19 vaccine roll-out and people will be able to receive the flu and COVID-19 vaccinations in parallel. The NHS is well equipped to administer both.

Further details on the COVID-19 vaccination deployment plan will follow.

The flu vaccine will be offered to 30 million people in England this year, our largest ever flu vaccination programme. The groups now eligible are:

- adults aged 65 or over
- pregnant women
- those with certain pre-existing conditions
- NHS and social care workers
- all children up to year 7
- household contacts of those who are clinically extremely vulnerable
- adults aged 50 to 64



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Home sought for UK's ground-breaking prototype fusion power plant

December

- UK government has called on local communities across the country to put forward proposals to host the UK's prototype fusion energy power plant
- when complete, the plant will pave the way to a limitless supply of low carbon, clean energy to the UK
- follows Prime Minister's ten-point-plan for a green industrial revolution and the UK's ambition to be the first country in the world to commercialise fusion energy technology

Local communities across the UK are being asked to step forward with proposals to house a prototype fusion power plant in a move that could propel them on to the global stage in a world first. The successful bidder could be first in line for thousands of new local highly-skilled jobs, putting them at the heart of the government's green industrial revolution.

Fusion offers a virtually limitless source of clean electricity by copying the processes that power the sun.

The UK government has today (Wednesday 2 December) invited UK regions and communities to put forward proposals to become the home of STEP - the Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production – the UK's ambitious programme to design and build a prototype fusion plant.



Communities will have until the end of March 2021 to submit their nominations and will need to demonstrate that their local area has just the right mix of social, commercial and technical conditions to host the new plant – such as adequate land conditions, grid connection and water supply.

The successful site will be home to the construction of the plant, targeted for completion by 2040, and will become a global hub for fusion energy and associated industries. This could create thousands of local highly skilled jobs during the construction and operation of the plant, as well as for the local supply chain, while attracting a new science and technology hub for the UK.

This follows the Prime Minister's 10 point plan for a green industrial revolution set out earlier this month which committed to doubling down on the UK's ambition to be the first country in the world to commercialise fusion energy technology, with £222 million allocated to begin the STEP design work.

Business and Energy Secretary Alok Sharma said:

“We want the UK to be a trailblazer in developing fusion energy by capitalising on its incredible potential as a limitless clean energy source that could last for generations to come.”

Communities across the country have an incredible opportunity to secure their place in the history books as the home of STEP, helping the UK to be the first country in the world to commercialise fusion and creating thousands of highly skilled jobs to drive our green industrial revolution.”

STEP will be delivered through the UK Atomic Energy Authority which carries out fusion energy research on behalf of the government.

In addition to its £222 million commitment to STEP, the government has also invested £184 million by 2025 in new fusion facilities, infrastructure and apprenticeships at the Culham Science Centre in Oxfordshire, providing further support to this important centre of fusion and innovation.

UK Atomic Energy Authority CEO Professor Ian Chapman said:

“STEP is about moving from research and development to delivery.

It will prove that fusion is not a far-off dream, but a dawning reality with the UK leading the commercial development of fusion power and positioning itself as a pioneer in sustainable fusion energy.



To achieve this ambitious goal will require all the ingenuity and application of the UK's science and engineering industry and we look forward to working with industrial partners in the years ahead, not just to invest, but also to support the technical evolution of the programme.

We are confident that working together with partners in the UK and around the world will enable the UK to bring a revolutionary technology to market.”

A recent independent study by London Economics found that the UK economy has gained £1.4 billion from the government's direct investment in fusion energy over the past decade.

UK Atomic Energy Authority

The UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) carries out fusion energy research on behalf of the UK government at Culham Science Centre near Oxford.

UKAEA oversees Britain's fusion programme, headed by the MAST Upgrade (Mega Amp Spherical Tokamak) experiment. It also hosts the world's largest fusion research facility, JET (Joint European Torus), which it operates for European scientists under a contract with the European Commission.

Fusion research at Culham is funded by the Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and by the European Union under the EURATOM treaty.

More information is available on the UKAEA website and the UKAEA Twitter account @UKAEAofficial.

What is fusion energy?

Fusion research aims to copy the process which powers the sun for a new large-scale source of clean energy here on earth. When light atomic nuclei fuse together to form heavier ones, a large amount of energy is released. To do this, fuel is heated to extreme temperatures, 10 times hotter than the centre of the sun, forming a plasma in which fusion reactions take place. A commercial

power station will use the energy produced by fusion reactions to generate electricity.

Fusion has a huge potential to be a long-term energy source that is environmentally responsible (with no carbon emissions). It is inherently safe with abundant and widespread fuel resources (the raw materials are found in seawater and the earth's crust).

What is STEP?

STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production) is an ambitious programme to design and construct a fusion energy prototype plant, targeting 2040 for completion. It is a UKAEA programme with an initial £222 million funding from the UK government to produce a concept design by 2024. The STEP prototype will be used to research and develop the technology and enable a fleet of commercial plants to follow in the years after 2040. The aim for this first phase of work is to produce a 'concept design' by 2024. This means an outline of the power plant, with a clear view on how we will design each of the major systems. The next phase of work

will include detailed engineering design, while all relevant permissions and consents to build the prototype are sought. The final phase is construction, with operations targeted to begin around 2040. The aim is to have a fully evolved design and approval to build by 2032, enabling construction to begin.

Nominations for the STEP siting will likely be coordinated by local authorities with input from a range of partners including landowners, Local Enterprise Partnerships, local businesses and others.

Communities have until the end of March 2021 to submit their initial nominations and assessment of sites will be based on a set of social, commercial and technical criteria, taking around 2 years to complete. On conclusion of this assessment UKAEA will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy with the successful site announced around the end of 2022.



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COVID-19 isolation having detrimental impact on children's education and welfare, particularly the most vulnerable

December

- Repeated isolation has chipped away at the progress pupils have made since returning to school in September
- The effectiveness of remote education is varied and difficult to determine
- Children arriving at secure children's homes are, in effect, put into solitary confinement
- Many children with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not attending school, are struggling with remote learning and are at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Even more schools report at least one child now being home schooled. Many

parents doing this say their children will not return to school 'until pandemic is over'

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector today praised education and social care staff for their hard work and resilience against all the odds, as Ofsted published the third and final set of reports looking at the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people.

Amanda Spielman said:

"Faced with all of these pressures, the education and social care sectors are showing considerable resilience and creativity to provide children and learners with the best experience they can ... And all of this is being done against the most challenging backdrop for staff in recent times. I would like to record my appreciation for everyone

working in education and social care – from childminders and social workers to teachers and college tutors."

Read reports on our findings for:

Ofsted inspectors have carried out nearly 2,000 visits to education and social care providers during the autumn term. Today's reports reflect on the experiences of leaders working in schools, further education and skills, early years and SEND.

Inspectors heard that repeated absences due to COVID-19 outbreaks have resulted in pupils losing more learning. Many children are thought to be at least 6 months behind where they should be. And for a significant



number of pupils, repeated periods of self-isolation have chipped away at the progress they have been able to make since September.

The reports find that in just over half of the schools visited, pupils in bubbles were sent home to self-isolate at some point during the term. More children were sent home in bubbles from secondary schools than primaries. Some schools were extensively affected by COVID-19-related absence. And a few school leaders said that a significant proportion of their pupils had to self-isolate on 2 or 3 separate occasions.

Inspectors found schools were having to provide meaningful remote education under 2 distinct circumstances: bubble isolation and individual isolation. Many schools were making real progress with remote provision for bubbles, which often included live or pre-recorded online lessons. However, pupils who were self-isolating individually for a fortnight at a time often had a poorer experience. Whole bubbles can more easily be kept up to speed with the planned curriculum while they work from home. But isolating individuals

often miss out on the new content being taught to peers in class, instead doing revision at home. For these children, the loss of learning they experienced in the summer is being repeated.

Commenting on remote education, the Chief Inspector said:

“While remote education is better than nothing, it’s no substitute for the classroom ... Schools are struggling to assess whether remote learning is effective or not. For many, the measure of success is whether or not children are engaging with the work at all, rather than whether they are developing their knowledge and understanding – a case of remote attendance, rather than remote learning.”

In children’s social care, the need to isolate had a more detrimental impact. When children arrive at secure children’s homes, they are required to self-isolate for 14 days, which in effect creates a form of solitary confinement. This had a negative impact on many children’s well-being. In some cases it also undermined the child’s safety, and that of others in the home, because the child’s anxieties

resulted in self-harm or physical attacks on staff.

Elsewhere, inspectors found that children with SEND often struggled with the restrictions placed on them. Many were not attending school full time. Remote education was a challenge for some of these children, particularly if their parents were unable to support them. And when vulnerable children are not at school and are out of sight, they may be at risk of



abuse or neglect.

Inspectors also found that the number of children being home schooled has risen again. Almost three-fifths of schools told inspectors they had at least one pupil whose parents had removed them from school to be home educated since the start of the autumn term. School leaders said that some parents have told them that they only want to home educate temporarily and that their children would return once 'the pandemic is over'. This suggests there will be a significant number of children returning to school after a very long gap, expecting to catch up.

Closing her commentary, Ms Spielman said:

"There is real optimism that the end is finally in sight for the sort of restrictions that we currently live under, but it's clear that there is a long way to go before education and social care returns to normal. For many children, there is more to be done: to catch them up, to level the playing field and to prepare them well for the next stage in their lives."

Statement on the approval of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine for use in the UK

December

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has made the following statement on the approval of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

"A global pandemic requires global solutions. The UK and its scientific expertise is a key part of the international fight against coronavirus and thanks to hard work at Oxford University and AstraZeneca, the world is one step closer to defeating it. This month I visited a health clinic in India where this vaccine will be administered.

"As the biggest country donor this year to both CEPI and to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment, we are also leading the way in making sure vaccines will be accessible to developing countries."

Background:

- At the UK hosted Global Vaccine Summit in

June 2020, AstraZeneca committed that 300 million doses of the Oxford University vaccine candidate would be made available to the COVAX facility. The UK has committed up to £548 million to the AMC which will go towards helping developing countries access vaccines, including the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

- AstraZeneca has also announced a licencing agreement for the Serum Institute India (SII) to produce 1 billion doses of the vaccine candidate for low- and middle-income countries.

- AstraZeneca is working with governments, multilateral organisations and collaborators around the world to ensure broad and equitable access to the vaccine at no profit for the duration of the pandemic.

Record numbers of doctors and nurses working in the NHS

December

Professionally qualified clinical staff including paramedics are at record levels, as are scientific, therapeutic and technical staff.

Responding to today's NHS workforce statistics, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

"This winter will be challenging as we continue to fight this deadly virus, and I'm hugely grateful to all our staff who continue to save lives and provide care to those who need it.

I'm delighted that record numbers of doctors and nurses are working in our NHS, plus a record pipeline of future talent in nursing, medicine and general practice.

We are backing our NHS and thanks to their unrelenting dedication, we will not only beat COVID but secure the future of our health service and deliver on our manifesto commitment of 50,000 more

nurses."

The final figures from this year's admission cycle show there were 29,740 acceptances to nursing and midwifery courses in England, 6,110 more than last year and an increase of over a quarter (26%). The number of new nursing applicants to English providers between 15 January and 30 June was 68% (4,600) higher than the same period last year.

In addition, recent figures for this year show the highest ever number of GPs entering training with 3,793 posts accepted, exceeding the mandated target of 3,250. Health Education England has increased GP trainee acceptances year on year for the last 7 years.

Over the summer the NHS People Plan set out how the NHS will put staff wellbeing at its heart with a new recruitment, retention and support

package. It sets out practical support for wellbeing such as safe spaces to rest and recuperate, wellbeing guardians and support to keep staff physically safe and healthy.

The NHS recently announced £15 million to strengthen mental health support for nurses, paramedics, therapists, pharmacists and support staff. Staff will get rapid access to expanded mental health services that are being rolled out across the country as part of efforts to deal with the second wave of coronavirus.





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