

Press release: New Clean Air Strategy to be launched by Environment Secretary Michael Gove

Later today Environment Secretary Michael Gove will publish a Clean Air Strategy which aims to cut air pollution and save lives, backed up through new primary legislation.

Air pollution is the fourth biggest threat to public health after cancer, obesity and heart disease and the new government strategy sets out how we will go further and faster than the EU in reducing human exposure to particulate matter pollution. Today's proposals are in addition to the government's £3.5 billion plan to reduce air pollution from road transport and diesel vehicles, set out in July last year.

It is estimated that the action set out today will reduce the costs of air pollution to society by an estimated £1 billion every year by 2020, rising to £2.5 billion every year from 2030.

The new strategy, which is now out for consultation, is a key part of our 25 Year Plan to leave our environment in a better state than we found it. It sets out:

- Our goal that by 2025, we will halve the number of people living in locations where concentrations of particulate matter are above the WHO guideline limit of 10 ug/m³ by 2025.
- We will introduce new primary legislation, which will give local government new powers to improve air quality.
- We will legislate to ensure only the cleanest domestic fuels will be available for sale, preventing 8,000 tonnes of harmful particulate matter from entering the atmosphere each year.
- For the first time the government will take concerted action to tackle ammonia from farming – which is responsible for 88% of ammonia emissions – by requiring farmers to invest in the infrastructure and equipment that will reduce emissions. Farmers will be supported to achieve this through our new system of public money for public goods.
- We will work with international partners to research and develop new standards for tyres and brakes to enable us to address toxic non-exhaust emissions of micro plastics from vehicles which can pollute air and water.
- We will provide a personal air quality messaging system to inform the public, particularly those who are vulnerable to air pollution, about the air quality forecast, providing clearer information on air pollution episodes and accessible health advice.
- We will put new investment into scientific research and innovation strengthening the UK's position as a world leader in clean technology and secure further emissions reductions.

During a visit to meet air quality researchers at Imperial College, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Air quality has improved significantly since 2010 but sixty years on from the historic Clean Air Act a clear truth remains – air pollution is making people ill, shortening lives and damaging our economy and environment.

This is why today we are launching this clean air strategy, backed up with new primary legislation. It sets out the comprehensive action required across all parts of government to improve air quality.

The strategy also sets out how we will work with media outlets to improve public access to the air quality forecast and help individuals and organisations reduce their contribution to air pollution; showing how this can help them protect their families, colleagues and neighbours.

The importance of raising awareness of the dangers of air pollution is evident in a research report, also published today, which shows just 1 in 5 respondents felt they knew a lot about its effects. The report also showed a lack of awareness of the wide range of sources of air pollution with most naming transport as the main cause. But transport emissions are only one part of the problem. From farming to cleaning solvents there are a large range of other day to day practices, processes and products that produce harmful emissions.

Of particular concern is burning wood and coal to heat a home which contributes 38% of UK emissions of damaging particulate matter. Cleaner fuels and stoves produce less smoke, less soot and more heat. In future only the cleanest domestic fuels will be available for sale.

Mr Gove added:

Government cannot act alone in tackling air pollution. Our strategy sets out how we will work with businesses, farmers, industry and households to develop innovative new solutions to reduce emissions. It also highlights how we can all take action and playing an important role in cleaning up our air.

Also being announced today, by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, is a new tool for local authorities developed for Public Health England by Imperial College and the UK Health Forum which will enable local authorities to estimate the economic impact of air pollution in their area. The tool takes account of the cumulative cost for diseases where there is a strong association with air pollution: coronary heart disease; stroke; lung cancer; and child asthma.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Jeremy Hunt said:

Air Pollution is contributing to a national health crisis. If we fail to take decisive action, we risk more of our children suffering from asthma, and patients needlessly ending up in hospital.

Our health service can only go so far in treating the conditions that dirty air can contribute to, and we have a responsibility to stop this issue at source. Today's Clean Air Strategy and Air Pollution Tool do just that, taking a giant step towards cleaning up our air for good.

News story: Decontamination work complete at Maltings site in Salisbury

This follows on-going clean-up operations to remove any potential residual contamination following the nerve agent attack on 4 March 2018.

The site was visited by specialist teams and any items that may have harboured residual amounts of the agent were removed. All waste has been removed and will be disposed of safely.

A Defra spokesperson said: "Following extensive clean-up operations in Salisbury to remove any potential residual contamination resulting from the nerve agent attack on 4 March, decontamination work is now complete at the Maltings.

"The site will now be handed back to Wiltshire Council, who will decide when it is appropriate to release it back into public use."

Speech: Environment Secretary Michael Gove at RHS Chelsea Flower Show

Thank you for those incredibly kind words and thank you also for the chance to come to Chelsea. Like all of you here I'm captivated by what's been achieved by the designers, growers and everyone who has been brought together to create something truly magical for a limited period of time and something that we can all share.

It's a very special moment in the light of the nation Chelsea Flower Show.

It's a very special organisation the RHS and can I begin by expressing the thanks that I feel all of us to Sir Nicholas, the RHS and to everyone who has made this Chelsea possible. Can we show our gratitude please.

This has been something of a Chelsea weekend for me. I spent Saturday at Wembley with my son watching Chelsea Football Club who afloat the FA cup. I can see that many of you were there. But it's a somewhat different crowd who are here this afternoon. But what we are also celebrating is excellence in another field.

But of course, both the Chelsea Flower Show and the FA cup were significant events this weekend. But there's another event even more significant, if you forgive me this weekend, that was of course, the wonderful wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. And like many of you, I was held wrapped by the sermon delivered by Michael Curry. I thought that perhaps after hearing that sermon I should rewrite my speech.

I shall begin thus, there's a power in flowers, flower power can change the world. And indeed, there is a power in flowers, and flowers can change our world because its flowers that provide us with food and drink. It's flowers that clean up the mess that mankind makes and ensures that climate change can be dealt with by coping with the CO2 that we emit.

It's flowers increasingly that are providing the treatments that will heal the sick. It's flowers that ensure our Earth remains in balance. And in that sense, those who invest and those who care for, those who husband and nurture flowers, those who work in horticulture are those who are contributing so powerfully to keeping our Earth in balance and ensuring that future generations have a chance to flourish. So Chelsea as well as being an amazing celebration of creative, aesthetic power and of commercial flavour.

It's also a celebration of those who do the most fundamental work of all, the work of nurturing this planet, the only one that we have, so it can survive and flourish in the future. But of course, that work as Nicholas reminded us is threatened and challenged by the impact of globalisation and climate change.

Now of course, globalisation and trade brings many benefits, it's the single most powerful force for rescuing us from poverty and of course, the whole history of the RHS, the history of Chelsea is a history of taking different parts of the globe and celebrating fusion and growth.

But even as our history is one of trade and interchanging, even as globalisation brings benefits. We know that the unique mixture of global trade flows on the scale that we have at the moment, and climate change occurring at the pace it is at the moment creates new threats and new dangers to the UK's environment and particularly to plant life here. Whether it's Oak Processionary Moth or Xlyella, it is the case that changing weather and also the flow of international trade brings to our shores, bugs, parasites and threats which now have a chance to flourish, multiple and cause devastation as never before.

And that requires vigilance and above all, it requires a partnership between Government and the industry in order to ensure that we can continue to enjoy the benefits of trade. But we also provide protection for that which we grow here. And in particular, I want to thank Nicola Spence and all those who within the Defra family do so much in order to ensure that we have appropriate protection for that what we grow here. And the particular threat of Xlyella as Sir Nicholas pointed out has acted as a wakeup call, a particular goad to ensure that we do everything necessary in order to provide protection for our plants and our environment.

And the plant health service carries out targeted inspections of plant and wood imports at ports and airports every day of the year in order to ensure that we can be protected. For the past five years, the UK and the work of the plant health service has ensure this have made around 900 interceptions of harmful organisms from Non-EU countries. That's more than any other EU member state, that's around 40% of the EU total, and it's that energetic work which has ensured that our nurseries can continue to flourish and we can continue to protect that what we grow here. And only last week, our plant inspectors outed the thousand pest to the UK plant health register. It's an invaluable tool which reflects the outstanding work in making sure that we screen new pests and new diseases, and ensure that growing here can continue successfully. And of course, we continue to monitor these threats and we continually seek to ensure that we have the arrangements in place and expertise at hand in order to be able to deal with threats like Xlyella and others.

Now of course, as well as the action that's been taken which already exists within the Defra family. There's more activity that we are launching today which you may have heard about. Today we are launching the Action Oak initiative and this particular initiative is intended to ensure that we, Defra, the RHS and others can bring together world-leading research in order to ensure that the oak, one of our most iconic species, can be protected from the predators and pests that increasingly pose a threat to this amazing example of the glory in the garden that is England. And of course that work, the Action Oak initiative, is simply one of a number of areas of collaboration which Defra seeks to lead with people in this room and with industry beyond it.

And Sir Nicholas has already spoken about the new senior cross-industry alliance which meets for the first time on Wednesday and it will bring together the nurseries, retailers, tree suppliers, landscapers, foresters and of course our Chief Plant Officer Nicola. To ensure that all of the usual rivalries that exist in the commercial world are put aside so we can have one joint endeavour in order to provide the highest levels of biosecurity, in order to provide them with the reassurance they need. And in particular, we should note that here at Chelsea decisions have already been taken without waiting for Government in order to ensure that the appropriate protections are in place.

And that's the case the RHS here has banned from its show. Nine of the overseas growing species that are already known to be a Xlyella risk, including rosemary and oleander. And of course where the RHS have led, other

nurseries are leading, Barcham is a specialist tree grower has again displayed outstanding leadership in the way it grows its own stock and makes sure it never imports any plants from immediate release. I believe that it's through working together with the best in the industry and making sure that we use the expertise that we have that to provide that higher level of biosecurity which Nicholas has asked for and is so important.

Because since we published our biosecurity strategy in 2014, I believe that we in this country have built a stronger reputation for setting the highest standards of biosecurity for plants and trees. Our approach is based on science combined with grassroots visualise and with the inspections which our expert team are responsible for. But we all agree in this room that there is no room for complacency and I do believe that there are opportunities as we leave the European Union to tighten our security further.

In the ten years' time, I wanted to be able to say that our oaks are thriving, that pests have been kept at bay, and I want my children and grandchildren to be able to come to Chelsea to marvel at the diversity of what is on show here. To pleasure and joy in the nature world around them, and to know that the power that there is in flowers is their preserved and enhanced for generations yet to come.

Thank you all very much.

Press release: Leeds natural flood management plans on show in Skipton

A team from the Environment Agency, who are leading the pilot as part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme, will be at the Upper Aire Land Management Project event at Skipton Auction Mart on Wednesday 23 May, looking to meet local farmers and landowners to seek out potential new pilot sites to trial the techniques.

Working with natural processes to reduce flood risk, known as natural flood management (NFM), is an important part of managing and reducing flood risk in a sustainable way alongside more traditional engineering solutions.

The team is hoping to build on the existing work done in the catchment by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and others, working with farmers to seek further potential sites in the upper Aire catchment to test natural flood management techniques like tree and hedgerow planting, leaky barriers and brash dams to help slow down the flow of water during a flood.

The interventions also create habitat for wildlife and help regenerate rural and urban areas through tourism.

Catchment wide approach

The natural flood management pilots form part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme, led by Leeds City Council in partnership with the Environment Agency, which has a catchment wide approach to reducing flood risk to Leeds.

This £500,000 pilot programme forms part of plans to plant hundreds of thousands of trees that will support second phase of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme.

Leader of Leeds City Council Councillor Judith Blake said:

Having started the Upper Aire tree planting in March, it is vital we work with as many farmers, landowners and stakeholders as possible as only through a partnership approach will we be able to achieve our united goal of protecting all our communities along the River Aire catchment from the risk of flooding. A lot has been achieved already through the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme, but we know much more needs to be done requiring significant investment in a range of measures to put in place everything we can to avoid a repeat of the devastation of the Christmas floods of 2015 to our city and region.

Adrian Gill, Area Flood Risk Manager at the Environment Agency said:

The Environment Agency is committed to reducing flood risk and improving the environment for people and wildlife. The natural flood management pilot we are leading in the Aire catchment provides us with a fantastic opportunity to work with farmers and landowners to secure potential sites to trial new techniques and develop future plans for the catchment.

The pilot sites will enable the team to test a range of monitoring techniques and start to build and gather an evidence base to increase their understanding on the benefits of NFM in reducing flood risk. The pilot programme is being used by the Environment Agency and Leeds City Council to develop a co-design approach to working with landowners, tenants, local authorities and other key partners such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the White Rose Forest. This will help to then develop future plans for the catchment.

Pilot launch

The first of thousands of trees to be planted across the upper River Aire catchment took place on the 20th March, as part of the pilot natural flood management project. Cllr Judith Blake CBE, leader of Leeds City Council, planted the first tree on site at Eshton Beck, Gargrave, witnessed by volunteers, landowners, local authorities and partners. The site now has 450

trees planted, and will play an important role in seeing how natural techniques can slow the flow of water and reduce the risk of flooding downstream.

Following the successful opening of the £50million first phase of the scheme serving the city centre, Holbeck and Woodlesford in October last year, phase two identifies measures further upstream including the Kirkstall corridor which was badly hit by the 2015 Christmas floods. It also looks at areas beyond the city boundary to further reduce the possibility of the river flooding in Leeds, as well as additional measures to offer protection for the South Bank area of the city centre which is a key future economic driver for Leeds.

Phase two is taking a catchment wide approach to reducing flood risk to Leeds through the implementation of natural flood management measures, proposals to create new woodland areas could more than double the canopy coverage throughout the River Aire catchment. Proposals also include a flood storage areas and the removal of existing obstructions along the river to improve capacity in the river. Hard flood defences will also be used and will take the form of walls, embankments, landscaping and terracing.

An outline business case for phase 2 has been completed, which was submitted at the end of January 2018. Outline design for engineered options is being progressed, which will be followed by a tender process with an aim to awarding the construction contract award in autumn 2018.

Farmers or landowners interested in finding out more about the natural flood management pilot can contact the project team by emailing LeedsFAS.nfm@environment-agency.gov.uk

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