

Press release: Opening access to the countryside

The country's first ever specialist centre to open up access to the countryside for wheelchair users and those with mobility needs as well as disabled and able-bodied horse riders, cyclists and walkers was launched today at Oxfordshire's Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve.

The new National Land Access Centre, located in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, has been designed to demonstrate the use, maintenance and installation of gaps, gates and stiles meeting the new British Standard for improved countryside access.

The centre has been developed by Natural England, in partnership with The British Horse Society, Centrewire and the Pittecroft Trust, to ensure those who usually struggle with access to the countryside can access the natural environment and enjoy England's beautiful countryside.

Natural England research shows there are around 519 million visits to paths, cycleways and bridleways in England each year.

However, mobility issues can be a major barrier to people heading to the countryside. Over 20% of England's population cannot use public rights of way, either because they cannot use stiles or kissing gates themselves, or they are accompanying someone who can't.

Deputy Chair of Natural England Lord Blencathra said:

This project is the culmination of many years of partnership working and determination to ensure that our countryside can rightfully be enjoyed by everyone.

Improved access will help to connect more people with their natural environment, giving them a chance to enjoy our countryside, its open space and fascinating wildlife— all key aspects of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

I am delighted that Natural England has played a key role in the partnership responsible for developing the National Land Access Centre, which has the potential to make such a difference to people's lives.

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Sarah Newton said:

Getting out into the countryside is an experience that many of us take for granted, but for disabled people it can often be much more difficult to access nature. The National Land Access Centre will

play an important role in ensuring everyone can enjoy the outstanding natural beauty our country has to offer.

John Cuthbertson, Chairman for the Disabled Ramblers, said:

I'm over the moon at the spirit of co-ordination and co-operation which has led to the development of the new National Land Access Centre.

Open access has got the ability to transform lives. We look forward to using the centre to test the new structures, helping to shape the future of access to the countryside.

Mark Weston, Director of Access for The British Horse Society, said:

We're very pleased to see the launch of the new National Land Access Centre, which builds on recommendations of the Bridlegate Trial started in partnership with Natural England in 2015.

The Centre will help to ensure the new British Standard becomes a reality, securing safe open access to the countryside not only for horse riders but for all users of the outdoors.

Today's launch of the National Land Access Centre also marks the 60th anniversary of Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, one of the first National Nature Reserves in the country to offer wider public access.

Since 1994, members of the public have actively been encouraged to explore the reserve through the removal of unnecessary stiles, gates and fences and the installation of easy-access gates. This is key to the National Nature Reserve Strategy, itself a year old in September, which seeks to see England's nature restored, enriched and reconnected to people.

Landowners, land managers, rights of way officers and other users will be able to book onto training courses at the National Land Access Centre to aid understanding of the new standard and its application. This will involve testing new equipment with a view to installing it across the nation.

The British Standard 5709:2018 for Gaps, Gates and Stiles requires 'the least restrictive option' to be made available to users. Its implementation will help ensure that everyone can access and enjoy the countryside.

Visitors to the centre will be able to access specialist equipment, try out new designs and touch and test real examples in situ to fully understand this new equipment in operation. They can learn about its installation and maintenance, and see what compliance with the British Standard looks like in practice.

More information is available about Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve,

Oxfordshire's National Nature Reserves and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Policy paper: The future for food, farming and the environment: policy statement (2018)

Updated: Replaced the policy statement with a HTML version and added the timeline as a separate document.

This policy statement sets out our expectations for agricultural policy for England over the next 10 years. It also outlines how the [Agriculture Bill](#) will set the foundations to achieve this.

This document focuses on policy for England. We will be working with the rest of the UK to develop any necessary UK-wide legislation and administrative common frameworks.

Corporate report: Statement of the Nuclear Decommissioning Funding Account, 2017 to 2018

This statement sets out the notional funding available from the consolidated fund for use by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) during 2016 to 2017 on its activities, and the funding that the NDA drew down from the consolidated fund during that period.

News story: UK Government Agriculture

Bill – Scotland myth-buster

The UK Government's Agriculture Bill was introduced on 12 September 2018. Agriculture is devolved to the Scottish Government and will remain devolved. This Bill does not change that. Claims of 'power grab' are completely false and misleading.

The UK Government is not seeking consent from the Scottish Parliament on this Bill as we are not legislating in areas of devolved competence in Scotland.

No powers that could constrain devolved policy choices in Scotland are being introduced.

For example, there is nothing in the Agriculture Bill which will stop existing Scottish Government policies – including the Voluntary Coupled Support and Less Favoured Area Support Scheme. They will still be possible under both retained EU law and the Agriculture Bill.

Contrary to claims, Scottish farmers will continue to receive the same level of funding as they currently do until the end of this Parliament in 2022

As we leave the EU, it is our intention that each administration can independently design policies that support their farming sectors and enhance their environment.

While these policies are still under development, the Agriculture Bill demonstrates a continued commitment by the UK Government to World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations on domestic support.

The Scottish Government has claimed powers enabling us to comply with our WTO obligations should be exercised jointly; however, the Scottish Parliament does not have the legal competence to act in this area.

While this is a reserved matter, the UK Government will work closely with the devolved administrations on this given their interest. Just as we did ahead of the Agriculture Bill's introduction.

We have offered to extend powers in the Agriculture Bill to the devolved administrations which would enable them to create their own farming support systems to replace the CAP.

Wales and Northern Ireland have accepted the offer.

The Scottish Government has chosen not to take any powers in this Bill. Agriculture is devolved and that is their choice. But our offer remains on the table.

We remain in discussions with the Welsh and Scottish Governments regarding red meat levy funds and legislative options.

We will continue to work with all parts of the UK to put in place a wider

common framework relating to agriculture once we leave the EU.

Scottish Secretary David Mundell said:

The UK Government has already agreed to commit the same cash total in funds for farm support for Scotland until the end of this Parliament.

This Bill ensures that new systems of farming support can be put in place after 2020 in England and Wales.

Farmers in Scotland need the same reassurance – and time is running out for the Scottish Government to act.

It is simply not acceptable for Scottish farmers to be kept in the dark about the future of agricultural policy in Scotland.

[News story: Celebrating 100 years of forestry at the UK's biggest forestry show](#)

The APF is the UK's largest woodland and forestry related show and takes place between 20-22 September 2018 at the Ragley Estate in Warwickshire.

The Forestry Commission England marquee will celebrate 100 years of the Forestry Act and the Forestry Commission. Experts will be on hand to:

- provide advice and support to the forestry sector and landowners who are looking to create and manage woodland
- explore the benefits to people, wildlife and timber of the public forest estate
- provide information on tree pests and diseases and how to reduce the threat of them
- showcase Forest Research's innovative science and research

Forestry Skills

The Forestry Commission, Royal Forestry Society and representatives from the new Forestry Apprenticeship Trailblazer group will also be in the Forest Workers' Zone of APF to talk career development and how to break into the industry.

Seminars

An in-depth Forestry Commission seminar programme will run over the three day event, covering topics including future incentives, timber markets, woodland creation and plant health challenges.

More information about the APF can be found on the [APF Exhibition website](#).