

Press release: Government launches plan to ban plastic straws, cotton-buds, and stirrers

The Government has today (22 October) set out its plan to ban the distribution and sale of plastic straws, drinks stirrers and cotton buds to protect our rivers and seas.

The plan is subject to a [consultation](#) launched by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

In England, it is estimated that annually [we use](#) 4.7 billion plastic straws, 316 million plastic stirrers and 1.8 billion plastic-stemmed cotton buds. An [estimated](#) 10% of cotton buds are flushed down toilets and can end up in waterways and oceans.

Even though non-plastic alternatives are readily available, these single-use plastic items are used for just a few minutes but take hundreds of years to break down. Cleaning up the effects of littering costs local Government millions of pounds every year.

In order to eliminate these items from use, the Government intends to introduce a ban on their distribution and sale. The ban would come into force at some point between October 2019 and October 2020, subject to the views collected during consultation.

We recognise there are instances where using plastic straws is necessary for medical reasons and our consultation seeks views on how to ensure those who need straws for medical and accessibility reasons can still use them. For example, pharmacies will still be able to sell plastic straws and restaurants, pubs and bars will be able to stock some straws for use on request. The Government will work closely with stakeholders to ensure these exemptions are crafted exactly right.

Launching the consultation, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Our precious oceans and the wildlife within need urgent protection from the devastation throw-away plastic items can cause.

In England we are taking world-leading action with our ban on microbeads, and thanks to the public's support have taken over [15 billion plastic bags](#) out of circulation with our 5p charge.

I commend retailers, bars and restaurants that have already committed to removing plastic straws and stirrers. But we recognise we need to do more. Today we step-up our efforts to turn the tide on plastic pollution and ensure we leave our environment in a better state than we inherited it.

The announcement follows the success of the government's world-leading ban on [microbeads](#) and 5p charge on single-use plastic bags, which has seen distribution by [major supermarkets drop by 86%](#).

Greenpeace UK's political adviser Sam Chetan Welsh said:

Our society's addiction to throwaway plastic is fuelling a global environmental crisis that must be tackled.

Ministers are doing the sensible thing by looking to ban single-use plastic items that can be easily replaced with better alternatives or that we can simply do without. But this should be just the start.

If we are to protect our oceans from the scourge of plastic, the flow of waste needs to be cut off at the tap. And that means the companies producing and selling all this packaging must take responsibility for it and cut down the amount of plastic ending up in our shopping baskets.

Kate Nicholls CEO of UKHospitality said:

We wholeheartedly welcome this consultation on an issue of vital importance and one which hospitality has already taken significant action.

Since UKHospitality's Unpack the Future of Hospitality summit in the spring, thousands of pubs clubs, restaurants and hotels across the UK have changed their straws and stirrers to biodegradables, or adopted policies that cut or eliminate their use in their venues.

The Government is seeking views on how we can cut plastic waste and we look forward to continued engagement to play a part in achieving that goal.

It is estimated there are over [150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans](#) and every year one million birds and [over 100,000 sea mammals die](#) from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste. A [recent report](#) estimates that plastic in the sea is set to treble by 2025.

Today's move builds on the Prime Minister's recent visit to Kenya, where she announced a further five African Commonwealth Countries (Seychelles, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and the Gambia) have joined the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance, pledging their support to end the scourge of plastics in our oceans. The Alliance, announced in April during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), sees countries across the Commonwealth join forces in the fight against plastic, whether through a ban on microbeads, a commitment to cutting down on single-use plastic bags, or taking other steps to eliminate avoidable single-use plastic.

The UK government has committed [a £61.4 million package of funding](#) to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place.

The government is also looking at further ways to reduce avoidable waste and recycle more as part of its Resources and Waste Strategy to be published later this year.

Further information:

- Single-use plastics can be [defined](#) as all products that are made wholly or partly of plastic and are typically intended to be used just once and/or for a short period of time before being disposed of.
- The figure that plastic in the sea is set to treble is taken from the [Future of the Sea](#) report, 2018.
- The [consultation](#) will be open for six weeks.

[Press release: Public to have say on new National Parks](#)

For the first time in nearly 70 years, the public will have their say on how the country's most cherished landscapes can be enhanced for future generations.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove and writer Julian Glover are today [inviting views on how England's 10 National Parks and 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty \(AONBs\) meet the nation's needs](#) in the 21st century and whether there is scope for the current network to expand.

With more than half the population living within half an hour of a National Park or AONB – and over two million people calling these landscapes home – a call for evidence will explore how access can be improved and communities better supported – alongside which parts of the country could benefit from greater protection.

The public will also have input on whether housing and transport in protected landscapes could be improved, the role they play in our cultural heritage, and how these iconic areas can boost habitats for wildlife.

The evidence will form part of the [recently-launched review](#) into protected landscapes – led by Julian Glover – which is ensuring our National Parks and AONBs can be fit for the 21st century.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

For so many of us our love for nature is intrinsically linked with our protected landscapes, from holidays spent in National Parks to weekend rambles across our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We want to ensure the people who live, work in and visit these cherished places have a say in their future. As we look afresh at these precious landscapes, I look forward to hearing from everyone who shares an interest in conserving and enhancing them for the next generation.

Through the designated landscapes review, launched in May, Julian Glover and an advisory panel are currently exploring how these iconic landscapes can be enhanced, alongside considering the case for expansion.

Weakening or undermining the existing protections or geographic scope is not part of this review, which is instead focusing on how designated areas can boost wildlife, support the recovery of natural habitats and connect more people with nature.

The review is of the key commitments of the government's [25-Year Environment Plan](#), which outlines its vision for improving the environment over a generation by connecting people with nature and helping wildlife to thrive.

Lead reviewer Julian Glover said:

It's an honour to lead a review into something as precious as England's finest landscapes. From the Jurassic Coast of Dorset to the wilderness of the Cheviot Hills, they are still rich in beauty, local life, plants and animals – and enjoyed by millions of people.

But already, in this review, I've seen the pressures too. Local people need jobs and housing, farmers who look after the landscapes need help to survive, and biodiversity is under threat as the numbers of things such as birds and butterflies decline.

The good news is that I know we can do better – and in this review we are hearing lots of ideas about how to do it. Now we're offering a chance for everyone who loves our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Beauty to have a say.

Chair of National Parks England, Margaret Paren, said:

Our protected landscapes are special and worthy of celebration. We are keen to ensure their beauty is enhanced; they are loved by and accessible for everyone; and that they continue to support thriving communities.

But what of the future? Big challenges exist and people have different views about how they should look, feel and be managed. We

all want our national parks to be the best they can be and to continue to benefit society in a rich variety of ways. We hope lots of people will respond to this call for evidence and the opportunity it presents to secure our best landscapes for the future.

Chairman of the National Association of AONBs, Philip Hygate, said:

The AONB Family and NAAONB are enjoying working with Julian and his review team.

We recognise that maintaining vibrant, healthy and diverse local communities is essential to the future of AONBs. AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards have long engaged with and supported anyone who cares about our outstanding national landscapes and we will continue to work to improve the connection between people and nature.

Sir Arthur Hobhouse's landmark report in 1947 paved the way for the creation of England's network of designated landscapes, with the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act passed in 1949 to open up the countryside and connect more people with nature.

Now, AONBs and National Parks are some of our most cherished sites, spanning from the Lake District, which was recently announced as a UNESCO World Heritage site, to the picturesque Cornwall AONB.

The nation's 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks cover a quarter of England's land and are home to over 2.3 million people. They also generate over £20 billion for the rural economy, and support 75,000 jobs.

The [call for evidence](#) closes on 18 December. Evidence received will form part of the designated landscapes review, which will report back next year with recommendations.

[Press release: Tree Champion: we must preserve our urban trees](#)

Aimed at local authorities, charities and community groups, the manual provides advice on selecting the right tree for the right place in towns and cities – ensuring the views of local communities are at the heart of decision-making and residents are properly consulted before street trees are felled.

Released during [Green GB Week](#) – a week of action dedicated to celebrating clean growth – the toolkit has been designed in recognition of the important role urban trees play in the environment. These include improving health and wellbeing, encouraging people to enjoy the outdoors, absorbing noise and reducing temperatures.

Bringing together knowledge from organisations such as the [Forestry Commission](#), [Forest Research](#) and the [Animal and Plant Health Agency](#), the manual provides tips on choosing planting location, tree type and soil to maximise the environmental benefits, as well as highlighting the long term threats to trees from pests, disease and climate change.

Government Tree Champion Sir William Worsley said:

Whether they're rooted in countryside woodland or in urban cityscapes, trees make our environment more attractive and a healthier place to live and work – which is why expertise in the planting and maintenance of urban trees is vital.

I hope this Urban Tree Manual will help to improve decision-making around the country to make sure our invaluable trees are preserved now – and for future generations.

The toolkit builds on work already underway by local authorities to help trees flourish, featuring case studies such as the planting at [The Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park](#) which focused on choosing climate change resilient trees, and [Observatree](#) – a collaborative citizen science project which aims to spot new pest and disease threats to UK trees.

The release of [the Urban Tree Manual](#) forms part of the government's wider work to protect and promote our precious trees, including our commitment to plant one million trees in our towns and cities and eleven million trees nationwide over the course of this parliament.

Protecting and planting more trees is a key part of our ambitious [25-Year Environment Plan](#), which will ensure we leave this environment in a better state for the next generation.

[Press release: 'Forgotten lands' to receive forestry boost](#)

A new project to help landowners create vital new woodland and unlock the economic benefits of forestry has been launched in Cumbria's 'forgotten

lands’.

The government’s Tree Champion Sir William Worsley today visited forestry project Snowdon Close in the area to launch the pilot Forestry Investment Zone.

With Cumbria’s ‘forgotten lands’ not traditionally seen as ripe for tree planting, the government will trial a new approach and work to encourage investment in the zone through measures such as the existing Countryside Stewardship and Woodland Carbon Fund grant schemes. A Forestry Investment Zone officer will also offer tailored support to businesses.

Government will also work with the forestry and timber processing industry to accelerate planting as new approaches to rural funding and payment for public goods are developed.

The pilot launch comes during Green GB Week, an annual week dedicated to highlighting the opportunities clean growth offers the UK – and raise understanding of how business and the public can contribute to tackling climate change.

Forestry Minister David Rutley said:

Planting more trees is central to our ambition to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

This innovative new pilot project will not only help landowners realise the benefits of woodland creation, but also drive forward our commitment to plant 11 million trees.

The Cumbria pilot is the first of its kind, with the ‘forgotten lands’ being the perfect place to establish large-scale forestry projects in order to bring economic and environmental benefits to the area. The project will focus on productive forestry, landscape enhancement, farming and local employment.

During his visit to the north east, Tree Champion Sir William Worsley said:

It is wonderful to be in Cumbria today to see this exciting new pilot kick off and to witness what will hopefully be the beginning of widespread investment in the forestry sector.

By making it easier for this area to be used for woodland creation we are not only helping the environment, but also giving the region a valuable economic boost.

The Cumbria Forestry Investment Zone pilot is scheduled to run for two years, and will be used as a test-case for rolling out the initiative more widely around the country.

Open consultation: Renewable Heat Incentive: biomass combustion in urban areas

Defra's [Clean Air Strategy](#), published in May 2018, proposed that further support under the Renewable Heat Incentive should not be available for biomass installations in urban areas with access to the gas grid.

This consultation sets out details of the proposed restrictions and asks for views on the scope and nature of these changes to RHI eligibility.