

[Ambitious proposals to create and improve protected landscapes across England](#)

- Yorkshire Wolds and Cheshire Sandstone Ridge will be considered for status as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as well as extensions to the existing Surrey Hills and Chilterns protected areas
- New funding programme launched to support farmers to improve protected landscapes
- Renewed commitment to boost nature recovery and help more people from all part of society access Britain's most beautiful landscapes as we build back greener from the pandemic

Two of England's most iconic landscapes are being considered to become new Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), alongside extensions to the Surrey Hills and Chilterns AONBs, under plans to create new protected landscapes and improve people's access to nature.

The Yorkshire Wolds and the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge have been put forward to be recognised as protected areas and, alongside the two proposed expansions, the four areas will now be formally considered for 'AONB' status by [Natural England](#). Securing this designation would allow them to benefit from greater protections, so that more of England's beautiful landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

Delivering on the manifesto commitment to create new protected landscapes, taken together, the four areas being considered have the potential to deliver over 40% of the additional 4,000km² required to meet the UK's commitment to protect 30% of our land by 2030, which under UK leadership at the recent G7 Summit, all G7 members have now signed up to.

The Environment Secretary will also outline plans to drive nature recovery and people's access to nature in protected landscapes.

The plans will include a renewed drive to support nature recovery within our protected landscapes, working hand in hand with local authorities and the teams operating National Parks and AONBs, as well as efforts to enable more people from across society to benefit from access to England's most famous natural landscapes. They will also include options to strengthen the status and support given to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and government will consult on the proposals next year to ensure that plans are developed in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, including National Park Authorities and local authorities.

A new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is also being launched, which will provide funding to help farmers and other land managers in England based in National Parks or AONBs to make improvements to the natural environment and improve public access on their land – the next step in the Government's

landmark plans for a renewed agriculture sector outside of the Common Agricultural Policy. The funding will go towards one-off projects to support nature recovery; improve public access; mitigate the impacts of climate change; provide opportunities for people to enjoy and understand the landscape; and support nature-friendly and sustainable farm businesses.

Projects could include creating ponds or other wetland to support a variety of wildlife; providing new or easier public access opportunities and links to the Public Rights of Way network; conserving historic features on a farm; or even action to reduce carbon emissions or use of plastics on farms.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We have an opportunity to create a new chapter for our protected landscapes.

The work that we are going to take forward will contribute to our commitment to protect 30% of our land by 2030, and boost biodiversity, while designating more areas of the country for their natural beauty.

Our Farming in Protected Landscapes programme will provide additional investment to allow farmers to work in partnership with our National Park Authorities and AONB teams to improve public access.

Chair of Natural England Tony Juniper said:

Today's announcement signals an ambitious step forward in growing our family of precious national landscapes, as well as protecting and improving the ones we have.

One thing that has become very apparent recently, and especially during the pandemic, is the enormous benefit people get from having access to beautiful nature-rich landscapes. These can, however, be hard for many people to reach, thereby raising the question of how more can be done to bring nature and people closer together. On this, we see huge opportunities arising from the establishment of the England Nature Recovery Network, of which wilder national landscapes will be a vital part.

As Government's statutory landscape adviser, we look forward to continuing to work closely with Government, designated landscape bodies and stakeholders to deliver more for and through England's diverse landscapes.

The proposals follow the [independent review](#) led by Julian Glover which called for action to make our protected landscapes greener, more beautiful and open to everyone. The government will respond to the review's recommendations in

full later this year.

Julian Glover, who led the review, said:

Our national landscapes are the soul of England, beautiful, much-loved, and there for all of us, but they are also under pressure. We need to do a lot more for nature and more for people, too. Our report set out a plan for a brighter, greener future and I'm delighted that words are now being followed by action.

Today's announcements will contribute to the Government's commitment of protecting 30% of our land by 2030, and builds on [plans to boost biodiversity](#), protect our peatlands and create new woodlands as [set out recently by the Environment Secretary](#).

[New research shows 2 million people may have had long COVID](#)

- This amounts to 5.8% of the whole study population, with 2% reporting severe symptoms
- Prevalence of long COVID increased with age and was higher among women

Over 2 million people in England are thought to have had one or more COVID-19 symptoms lasting at least 12 weeks according to one of the largest studies of the virus funded by the government.

The study is based on self-reported data from 508,707 adults aged 18 and above who took part in REACT-2 rounds 3 to 5 carried out between September 2020 and February 2021.

Around a fifth of those surveyed reported having had a COVID-19 symptom previously, with over a third reporting persistent symptoms lasting at least 12 weeks. Around a tenth of those with symptoms said they lasted at least 12 weeks and were severe.

The findings suggest prevalence of persistent symptoms, or long COVID, increases with age, with a 3.5% increase in likelihood in each decade of life. It shows long COVID is higher among women, people who are overweight or obese, who smoke, live in deprived areas, or had been admitted to hospital. Persistent COVID-19 symptoms were lower in people of Asian ethnicity.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock said:

Long COVID can have a lasting and debilitating impact on the lives of those affected. Studies like this help us to rapidly build our understanding of the impact of the condition and we are using these findings and other new research to develop support and treatments.

We are learning more about long COVID all the time and have made £50 million of research funding available to support innovative projects, with clinics established across the country to help improve the treatment available.

COVID-19 is still a relatively new disease and to better understand its long-term effects the government is providing scientists with £50 million of research funding through the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) to help ensure the best treatments are available.

To help people suffering the debilitating long-term effects of this virus, the NHS has opened over 80 long COVID assessment services across England and last week the NHS published a £100 million plan to expand support, including £30 million to help GPs improve diagnosis and care for patients with long COVID.

Professor Paul Elliott, director of the REACT programme at Imperial, said:

Our findings do paint a concerning picture of the longer-term health consequences of COVID-19, which need to be accounted for in policy and planning. Long COVID is still poorly understood but we hope through our research that we can contribute to better identification and management of this condition, which our data and others' suggest may ultimately affect millions of people in the UK alone.

People with persistent symptoms at 12 weeks fell into 2 broad groups. In the first the most common symptom was tiredness and muscle aches. In the second, the most common symptoms were shortness of breath affecting normal activities, tightness in chest, and chest pain, with more people reporting that they had severe symptoms.

Health Minister, Lord Bethell said:

We are learning more about long COVID every day. Surveillance programmes like REACT-2 are absolutely essential to advancing our understanding of the long-term impacts of COVID-19.

We are completely committed to backing innovative research projects into long COVID. They add to our body of understanding and help us

develop better treatments to make sure people get the support they need.

The study was based on self-reported data and because many of the symptoms are common and not specific to COVID-19 it may overestimate the prevalence of persistent symptoms following COVID-19.

It adds to the growing body of evidence, including similar research from King's College London and University College London published today (24 June 2021).

Prevalence estimates in this study were weighted by age, sex, ethnicity, lower tier local authority (LTLA) population and deprivation to take account of:

The aim was to obtain prevalence estimates that were representative of the adult population of England as a whole.

[Natural England announces landmark new programme for protected landscapes](#)

Natural England is today (Thursday 24 June) announcing proposals for new protected areas across England, alongside an ambitious, landmark programme to examine how more areas could benefit from landscape improvements, and deliver more for people and nature.

Under these proposals, four areas will be considered for greater protections, with potential to deliver over 40% of the additional 4,000km² required to meet the Prime Minister's commitment to protect 30% of our land by 2030 for nature. They will also help deliver on the Government's commitment to safeguard more of England's beautiful and iconic landscapes for future generations as outlined in its 10 Point Plan for a Green Revolution.

Spread across the country, areas being considered for designation include:

- Yorkshire Wolds AONB – a tranquil landscape of rolling hills, valleys and open plateaux interspersed with ancient woodland, chalk streams, farm holdings and historic villages, extending north from the River Humber.
- Cheshire Sandstone Ridge AONB – a diverse, distinctive, and celebrated landscape located in the heart of Cheshire, in close proximity to the large populations of NW England, rich in heritage, archaeology, wildlife, and culture.
- An extension to the Surrey Hills AONB – to consider including areas of high scenic quality including chalk grassland, parkland and historic

features adjacent to the existing AONB.

- An extension to the Chilterns AONB – to consider many special features including chalk streams, magnificent beechwoods, native woodland and wildflower-rich hills, bringing nature closer to populations in North London.

Today's announcement also takes forward the recommendations of the [major independent review](#) – led by writer Julian Glover – into our protected landscapes. Natural England welcomed the Review which set out a compelling vision for more beautiful, biodiverse and accessible National Parks and AONBs. It warned that challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and a changing, urban society mean that new approaches are needed to get the most out of England's most-loved landscapes.

Responding to the Review's calls for bold action, and in addition to the proposals for two new AONBs and extensions to two existing AONBs, Natural England will be considering proposals for new National Nature Reserves. It will also implement a more collaborative and swifter process to new National Park and AONB designations.

Natural England has also set out its ambition to develop new approaches that will drive nature recovery and improve people's connection with nature, particularly focusing in and around towns and cities. The programme will focus on improving people's quality of life, addressing inequalities in access and connection to the natural environment which have been [well-evidenced through the Covid pandemic](#). This could include building on the idea of 'national park cities', focusing nature restoration next to where people live.

Chair of Natural England Tony Juniper said:

There is no denying the wide-ranging benefits that our protected landscapes bring – from enhancing our wellbeing, providing places for living and working communities, to playing a crucial role in nature recovery and combatting the climate emergency.

I'm delighted to see the growth and protection of these areas is an increasingly prominent Government priority. I look forward to working closely with Defra, National Parks England and the National Association for AONBs to make these special areas richer in nature, accessible for all to connect with for their well-being and to deliver a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Also being announced today, a strategic and visionary map for 'England in the 21st Century' will be developed, reflecting the spirit of the 'Hobhouse Map' which led to the establishment of the first National Parks 70 years ago.

To create this England-wide assessment, Natural England will work with stakeholders and communities to identify conservation needs across England, including any remaining places suitable for future National Park or AONB designation and those places where alternative forms of action will be more

appropriate and are wanted by local communities.

Nature England is also transforming its joint working with National Parks England and the National Association for AONBs, through a new [delivery agreement](#). This will deliver a step change in joint delivery of multiple and integrated benefits for people, nature and climate through England's finest landscapes.

Today, the [Environment Secretary will set out the government's support for improved nature recovery and public access in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#) ahead of a consultation on draft proposals later this year. The statement will also outline a new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme to support farmers and other land managers to improve their landscapes and create thriving destinations for communities to enjoy. As Government's statutory landscape adviser, the proposals for new designations will be delivered by Natural England, who will also be supporting the new programme for farmers in protected landscapes.

Natural England is Government's Statutory Advisor on landscapes in England, with duties and powers to conserve and enhance landscapes that include the designation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The designation process is likely to take several years and will be a collaborative process including local stakeholders at every step.

These new areas of landscape designation have been selected through an evidence-based assessment from proposals that have been made to Natural England over the last 10 years.

'Ending the cross-border mandate would cut off the last lifeline into the country for millions of vulnerable Syrians in the northwest'

Thank you, Mr President, and I thank the Secretary-General and our briefers today.

As we start deliberations on the cross-border mechanism, humanitarian need should be front and centre of our decision-making.

13.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance across Syria. That's more than the entire population of London or Moscow.

Seven years ago, we came together to pass resolution 2165, authorising the cross-border mechanism. As we heard from Sonia Khush of Save the Children in

February and Dr Amani Ballour in March, this created a vital system whereby humanitarian assistance could reach all Syrians, wherever they lived.

Earlier this week, 27 NGOs operating in Syria wrote to this Council asking for an expansion of the mandate to ensure continued delivery of food, shelter, protection and other lifesaving services.

The UN has repeatedly outlined the implications of non-renewal: the UN's vaccination program would cease, the provision of food assistance to 1.4 million people each month would end, and critical medical items that supported 10 million treatments in 2020 would stop.

Ending the cross-border mandate would cut off the last lifeline into the country for millions of vulnerable Syrians in the northwest.

The issue of cross-line access continues to be debated. Let me be clear: the UK supports all efforts to improve cross-line.

But we should recognise the impact of the loss of the Yaroubiyah crossing in the northeast, where needs have risen by 38% since January 2020. Health facilities now face chronic shortages of medications such as insulin, painkillers, and drugs used to treat chronic diseases.

The loss of Bab al Salam in the northwest has had a similarly huge impact. Assistance now travels across lines of control and multiple checkpoints. Airstrikes in areas facing conflict have damaged warehouses and destroyed trucks carrying humanitarian supplies. If deliveries are able to make it through undamaged, there are persistent delays, often lasting up to three weeks.

Without expansion, therefore, we cannot tackle the growing food crisis, nor overcome the impact of COVID-19 and fulfil the requirements of Security Council Resolution 2565 to ensure equitable access to vaccines.

This is why we continue to insist that we should approach this mandate, this issue, on the basis on humanitarian need, renew the mandate for Bab al-Hawa, and re-authorise the crossings at Bab al-Salam and Yaroubiya. Anything less would be a dereliction of our responsibility to the 13.4 million Syrian people that remain in need of assistance.

Thank you, Mr President.

Addressing the fragile security and political situation in the Central

African Republic

Thank you, Mr President. [I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Ndiaye for your briefing today, and for your work in particularly challenging circumstances. Through you, I would ask you to pass on our deepest thanks to the women and men of MINUSCA. I also thank President Lourenço for his contribution to the discussion this morning and for the perspective he brings from the region through his delegation. We are also grateful to the other briefers.

Mr President, it's clear from the briefings that we've heard this morning, and from the reporting, that the Central African Republic today faces a series of complex challenges. A fragile security and political environment. Armed groups fomenting instability, frankly, in order to line their own pockets. Enormous unmet humanitarian needs. And now, a new factor of instability: Russian private military companies acting in concert with the national armed forces to obstruct MINUSCA and to violate the rights of the civilians and citizens of the Central African Republic.

In the face of all of this, the United Kingdom commends the continued resilience and courage of the people of the Central African Republic, and of the women and men of MINUSCA who continue to put their lives at risk to protect civilians. I want to underline, as others have this morning, our utmost concern at the significant increase in Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) violations against MINUSCA. These are unacceptable and they must stop immediately.

The United Kingdom is also deeply troubled to hear further reports of violations of international humanitarian law, and of human rights violations and abuses, including acts of sexual violence. We know these are being committed not only by armed groups – something we have, sadly, come to expect – but also by members of the national armed forces and the Russian private military personnel accompanying them.

Now, I know my Russian colleague, in her statement, will deny this, but the evidence is increasing and overwhelming, and I hope they will reflect on the role they want to play in the Central African Republic and their responsibilities as a permanent member of this Council. And I join France and others in calling on MINUSCA for clarity on the status of Russian private military personnel and for more granular reporting on the question of violations, and on who is committing those violations.

We are encouraged, Mr President, by President Touadera's commitment to address impunity. But we now urge the government to take concrete steps to investigate all allegations and to take preventive action. Justice and accountability is a fundamental building block of any viable path towards stability and development.

At the same time, we express our concern over further allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by some MINUSCA personnel, and urge all contributing

countries to swiftly address such allegations in line with the UN's zero-tolerance policy.

Mr President, we are extremely worried by the further deterioration in the humanitarian situation over the course of the last six months; as we've heard, an estimated 2.8 million people are now in need of protection and assistance. We urgently call on all actors to respect the principles of humanitarian access, including the protection of humanitarian workers, in line with Security Council Resolution 2417. And as Deputy SRSB Brown is here, I want to thank her directly for her own personal efforts and the risks she has taken in this regard.

It is now imperative that all political actors, including government, armed groups and opposition move ahead with constructive and inclusive national dialogue. This is essential to deliver stability and development to the people of the Central African Republic.

And we've heard today from our briefers and from others what needs to be done to make progress. So we continue to support the engagement of the peace agreement co-guarantors and other regional actors in bolstering these efforts, and we welcome the joint visit of the African Union, ECCAS, the EU and the UN. Above all, however, we look to the Central African authorities to live up to their responsibilities, to find a sustainable exit from the current crisis, and to advance an inclusive settlement. This is the only route to a lasting peace.

Finally, if I may, Mr President, as others, including President Lourenço, have raised the issue of the arms embargo, let me briefly set out our view, which chimes with that of others. In light of the volatile situation, we believe it is important to maintain the arms embargo as it stands, pending further progress on the key benchmarks set out by this Council in April 2019, in particular regarding weapons management. We agree the time may come to act to increase the Central African Republic's defensive capabilities, but that time is not now.

Thank you, Mr President.