

# Environment Bill continues through Parliament

The Government's legislation to transform our environment has returned to Parliament today (26 May) for Report Stage and Third Reading in the House of Commons.

Through the Environment Bill, we will clean up the country's air, restore natural habitats and increase biodiversity. The Bill will also outline how the government will reduce waste, make better use of resources, and improve management of water resources in a changing climate.

The Bill will crack down on water companies that discharge sewage into rivers and will include a world-leading legally-binding species target for 2030, aiming to halt the decline of nature and to protect beloved British animals, such as red squirrels and hedgehogs.

Welcoming the Environment Bill back to Parliament, Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

As we build back greener from the pandemic, it is vital that we address the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss and protect and improve the environment for future generations.

The Environment Bill will ensure we deliver the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth, which is why it is essential that we complete its passage into law as soon as possible.

The Government has proposed a number of amendments to the Bill upon its return to Parliament.

We are aiming to halt the decline of nature by amending the Bill to require the Government to set and meet a [new legally-binding target on species abundance for 2030](#). This builds on plans to boost biodiversity, protect our peatlands and create new woodlands as set out last week by the Environment Secretary.

The Environment Bill will also re-focus the Habitats Regulations towards our objective to conserve and enhance biodiversity, and the Government will publish a Green Paper on these reforms later this year. The Green Paper will set out how we plan to deliver our domestic ambitions, as part of our objective of protecting 30 percent of terrestrial land by 2030. We want to ensure our regulatory framework is fit for purpose to drive the delivery of our new 2030 biodiversity target and reverse declines of species, including iconic British species like the hedgehog, red squirrel and water vole.

As announced in the Queen's Speech on 11 May, we will also be bringing

forward amendments later this year to [reduce the harm from storm overflows to our rivers, waterways and coastlines](#). New duties will require the government to publish a plan to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows by September 2022 and report to Parliament on the progress towards implementing the plan.

Work on implementing Environment Bill policies has continued at pace. We have already started work on developing legally binding environmental targets, and launched [consultations on the deposit return schemes for drinks containers, extended producer responsibility for packaging](#) and [consistent recycling collections](#) which will transform the way we deal with our rubbish.

We have [appointed Dame Glenys Stacey as Chair of the new, independent Office for Environmental Protection \(OEP\)](#), which will be created to hold the Government and public bodies to account for their environmental credentials. From July, it will be set up in an interim, non-statutory form, providing independent oversight of the Government's environmental progress and accelerating the foundation of the full body. The OEP will formally commence its statutory functions after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

We have also published a [draft Principles Policy Statement](#) which will put protecting the environment at the heart of future policy.

The legislation builds on this Government's decisive action to protect the environment as [set out in our 25 Year Environment Plan](#). Our binding commitment to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and [host the COP26 climate change conference](#) this year will keep the UK at the forefront of international work on these issues.

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## [First results from UK experiment point to a solution to one of fusion's hottest problems](#)

- UKAEA's new MAST Upgrade device is solving a major challenge for commercial fusion energy
- Tenfold reduction in heat on key fusion machine components
- Boost for the UK's 'STEP' programme to put fusion power on the grid for abundant, low-carbon electricity

Scientists at the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) have successfully tested a world-first concept that could clear one of the major hurdles in developing fusion energy.

Initial results from UKAEA's new 'MAST Upgrade' experiment at Culham, near Oxford, UK, have demonstrated the effectiveness of an innovative exhaust system designed to make compact fusion power plants commercially viable.

With no greenhouse gas emissions and abundant fuels, fusion can be a safe and sustainable part of the world's future energy supply.

Fusion energy is based on the same principle by which stars create heat and light. Using a machine called a 'tokamak,' a fusion power station will heat a gas, or 'plasma', enabling types of hydrogen fuel to fuse together to release energy that can generate electricity.

A key challenge in getting tokamaks on the electricity grid is removing excess heat produced during fusion reactions.

Without an exhaust system that can handle this intense heat, materials will have to be regularly replaced – significantly affecting the amount of time a power plant could operate for.

The new system, known as a 'Super-X divertor', would allow components in future commercial tokamaks to last for much longer; greatly increasing the power plant's availability, improving its economic viability and reducing the cost of fusion electricity.

Tests at MAST Upgrade, which began operating in October 2020, have shown at least a tenfold reduction in the heat on materials with the Super-X system.

This is a game-changer for achieving fusion power plants that can deliver affordable, efficient electricity.

UKAEA is planning to build a prototype fusion power plant – known as STEP – by the early 2040s, using a compact machine called the 'spherical tokamak'. The success of the Super-X divertor is a huge boost for engineers designing the STEP device, as it is particularly suited to the spherical tokamak.

### [The Super-X factor: UKAEA's world-first fusion exhaust system](#)

UKAEA is announcing the results at today's official opening of the MAST Upgrade facility, where guest of honour, British astronaut Tim Peake, is creating his own artificial 'star' by running a plasma test on the machine.

MAST Upgrade is funded by the UK Government's Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, the Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and the EUROfusion consortium.

UKAEA's Lead Scientist at MAST Upgrade, Dr Andrew Kirk, said:

These are fantastic results. They are the moment our team at UKAEA

has been working towards for almost a decade.

We built MAST Upgrade to solve the exhaust problem for compact fusion power plants, and the signs are that we've succeeded.

Super-X reduces the heat on the exhaust system from a blowtorch level down to more like you'd find in a car engine. This could mean it would only have to be replaced once during the lifetime of a power plant.

It's a pivotal development for the UK's plan to put a fusion power plant on the grid by the early 2040s – and for bringing low-carbon energy from fusion to the world.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

This is an incredible breakthrough for fusion energy in the UK. Just seven months since MAST Upgrade was powered up, it may already have found a solution to one of fusion's greatest challenges.

Innovative projects like this one are crucial to cementing our status as a science superpower, and I am excited to see how it develops.

EPSRC Executive Chair, Professor Dame Lynn Gladden, said:

The UK has been a leader in the development of fusion energy for many years, strongly supported by EPSRC since the early 2000s. These first results from the MAST Upgrade project demonstrate that fusion as an energy source has the potential to radically change the world's energy supply.

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**West Midlands tech firm secures UK's**

# first General Export Facility with HSBC UK backing

A West Midlands-based exporter has become the first UK business to take advantage of a new offer from the Government's credit agency, UK Export Finance (UKEF), securing the funds they need to sell internationally and grow their business through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Simworx, a tech company based in Kingswinford, recently completed the first [General Export Facility \(GEF\)](#), a new scheme launched by UKEF, with support from HSBC UK. Through GEF, UKEF can guarantee 80% of any facility offered by a bank to finance the costs of exporting. It means financial support, like loans, are now much easier to access for smaller UK businesses with global ambitions.

Simworx is a leader in the design, development and manufacture of attractions for the global theme park and entertainment industries, with recent projects completed in countries such as Malaysia, New Zealand and Vietnam. The company employs 30 people in the West Midlands, supporting highly skilled local jobs through international exports.

The seven-figure facility from HSBC UK, guaranteed by UKEF, will provide additional working capital, helping to ease cash flow constraints as a result of the pandemic and enable Simworx to raise advance payment guarantees to secure and complete significant overseas contracts worth typically between £1 million and £8 million.

With exports contributing to 90% of its annual turnover, the ability to raise payment guarantees will prove critical for Simworx and its future expansion plans. The business has built a strong presence in the Far East, Middle East and Northern Europe for its advanced simulation technology products and has identified these 'emerging markets' as key growth areas for the business post-COVID-19.

There's no greater thrill than coming up with an idea for an attraction, seeing it built and installed, and then experiencing people's reactions. Despite COVID-19 presenting a series of extraordinary challenges for our business, and the leisure and entertainment industry as a whole, we're now witnessing a healthy return of enquiries from our partners worldwide.

As we start to see the green shoots of recovery, we're extremely grateful to be the first export business in the UK to benefit from the new scheme put in place by UKEF. I would also like to thank our banking partner HSBC UK for backing our business and making this process completely seamless.

**Graham Stuart MP, Minister for Exports, said:**

I am delighted that Simworx are the first business to take advantage of our new General Export Facility (GEF). It's so important to our recovery that we provide the means for more UK businesses to grow sales in foreign markets. GEF is a real game-changer in our support to SMEs and I encourage more businesses to follow in Simworx footsteps. GEF provides working capital to allow businesses to invest in export markets and grow their business overall.

Simworx is the first of what I hope will be a long list of SMEs who we will back through GEF. Research shows that companies that export are more productive, profitable and pay higher wages on average than their non-exporting peers, so we are determined to help more companies start that journey in support of the Chancellor's Plan for Jobs.

**Anne Lockett, UKEF's Export Finance Manager, said:**

The success of Simworx showcases UKEF's ability to support SMEs in a wide variety of sectors. The flexibility that GEF offers enables even more small businesses to access UKEF support. This deal in partnership with HSBC UK will help Simworx achieve their export growth ambitions and support highly skilled jobs in the West Midlands.

**Ian Tandy MBE, Head of Trade for HSBC UK, added:**

Businesses have faced huge challenges since the start of the pandemic and this is a clear example of how vital exports will be to the economic recovery and future growth.

We're proud to work with UKEF to support some of the UK's leading businesses who are committed to growing overseas as they execute their long-term strategies.

The UK is home to some of the most innovative firms in the world and it's encouraging to see that recent challenges have not dampened the appetite that exists to succeed on the global stage.

Simworx supplies a wide range of turnkey simulation technology products to the international theme park and entertainment industries, including 3D and 4D Dynamic Simulation Attractions and 4D Effect Cinemas. Its bespoke attractions are designed to delight, thrill and inspire people.

[GEF](#) aims to free up funds for UK businesses, particularly SMEs, to cover the

costs of international trade whilst providing the ability to fulfil export contracts and scale up business operations.

## **HSBC UK**

HSBC UK serves around 14.5 million customers across the UK, supported by 32,000 colleagues. HSBC UK offers a complete range of retail banking and wealth management to personal and private banking customers, as well as commercial banking for small to medium businesses and large corporates.

## **HSBC Holdings plc**

HSBC Holdings plc, the parent company of HSBC, is headquartered in London. HSBC serves customers worldwide from offices in 64 countries and territories in its geographical regions: Europe, Asia, North America, Latin America, and Middle East and North Africa. With assets of \$2,959 billion at 31 March 2021, HSBC is one of the world's largest banking and financial services organisations.

## **About UK Export Finance**

[UK Export Finance](#) is the UK's export credit agency and a government department, working along-side the [Department for International Trade](#) as an integral part of its strategy and operations.

Established in 1919, it exists to ensure that no viable UK export should fail for a lack of finance from the private market. It provides finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and get paid for export contracts.

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# **[Digital Local Land Charges Register continues to grow as Welwyn Hatfield joins](#)**

## **News story**

Borough council is the latest local authority to transfer its local land charges data to HM Land Registry's digital register.



Image credit: Adch/Shutterstock.com

From today (Wednesday 26 May), anyone requiring local land charges (LLC) searches in the local authority area of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will need to get them from HM Land Registry rather than going directly to the council.

Councillor Nick Pace, Executive Member for Governance and Public Health at Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, said:

We're really pleased to have partnered with HM Land Registry to migrate our LLC data onto its central, digital register. It will help make the property buying and selling process quicker and easier, greatly benefiting residents and businesses in Welwyn Hatfield.

Mark Kelso, Programme Director for HM Land Registry's Local Land Charges Programme, said:

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council is the latest local authority to offer its customers access to HM Land Registry's LLC Register. I am delighted that people buying property in Welwyn Hatfield will now have access to instant local land charges search results, making it quicker and simpler to buy and sell property in the area.

Local land charges searches are normally required in the property-buying process. Most local land charges are restrictions or prohibitions on the use of the property such as planning permissions or listed buildings. The local land charges search will reveal whether a property is subject to a charge which then informs a buyer's decision to buy a property or parcel of land.

HM Land Registry is working in partnership with local authorities to migrate their local land charges data to a central, digital register as part of a phased approach. Once migrated, anyone will be able to get instant online search results via GOV.UK using the [Search for Local Land Charges](#) service.

HM Land Registry's business customers can use their existing portal and



Business Gateway channels or their usual search providers to access local land charges data for those local authorities which have migrated.

Customers will need to continue to submit CON29 enquiries to the local authority.

For an overview of the service, watch [our short video](#).

For more information, read about the [Local Land Charges Programme](#).

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## **£401 million investment into upgrades to deliver brighter rail future**

- extra £317 million investment into major Transpennine route upgrade to make train journeys across the north faster, greener and more convenient
- new stations set to open in Leeds and the south-west, alongside significant investment to improve freight links, to boost economic growth
- announcement coincides with completion of first phase of £1.5 billion Midland main line upgrade, introducing new electric trains

Passengers and freight operators across the north and Midlands will see faster, greener and more reliable rail services, as the government announces a significant funding boost into the railways today (Wednesday 26 May 2021).

Investment of £317 million into the set-piece Transpennine route upgrade will boost punctuality, reliability and connectivity for passengers between York, Leeds and Manchester, and £69 million of improvements to increase freight capacity between the Port of Southampton and the Midlands will boost economic growth.

£15 million from the [New stations fund](#) will also build new stations at Marsh Barton in Exeter, and White Rose and Thorpe Park in Leeds, to connect communities, support retail growth, improve access to employment and leisure, and support greener travel choices.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Modernising and upgrading our vital transport links is critical to levelling up every part of this country, unleashing our economy and spreading opportunity as we build back better.

Following closely after our reforms to deliver a modern, green and innovative railway that meets the needs of the nation, this package of £401 million investment will help deliver reliable, punctual services that passengers across the UK can count on.

Transport Ministers Chris Heaton-Harris and Andrew Stephenson set out how the total package of £401 million will build on existing investments to improve rail connectivity, journey speeds and capacity across the country.

On Monday, the Rail Minister visited Kettering station to see how major government funding is already introducing more modern services for passengers.

Chris Heaton-Harris saw the completion of the first phase of the £1.5 billion Midland main line upgrade, which has successfully delivered the launch of East Midlands railway's first electric services.

Cutting carbon emissions by 77% on the route between Corby and London St Pancras, and running on a newly completed additional track between Kettering and Corby, the fleet delivers greener journeys, more late night and early morning services, and extra seats for passengers.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

The scale of today's investment demonstrates our commitment to delivering more punctual, greener and comfortable services right across the country.

From the vital Transpennine and Midland Main Line upgrades, new stations giving communities in Yorkshire and the south-west rail connections for the first time, and a shot in the arm for freight operators, we're building a brighter future for the railways.

Transport Minister Andrew Stephenson will visit major works taking place along the Transpennine route in Yorkshire today, including at Leeds, Hambleton and Colton, to see electrification works that form an important part of the government's agenda to achieve zero carbon by 2050. Proposals for even more extensive electrification on the route are currently being considered.

The bulk of the new funding into the Transpennine route upgrade will be used to improve connectivity between Leeds, Manchester and York, and deliver electrification and upgrades between York and Church Fenton.

As one of the busiest stretches of track in the North, with over 100 trains passing through each day, these works will improve reliability and enable new and upgraded hybrid trains to run under electric power.

Transport Minister Andrew Stephenson said:

Additional investment into the Transpennine Route Upgrade will cut delays and create a more punctual network, with electrification helping deliver greener journeys on this key route.

Only by investing in, modernising and expanding our railways can we provide passengers with the reliable and resilient services they expect, and create a transport network that is fit for the future.