

UK, ITALY AND SINGAPORE ENGAGE WITH YOUTH TO TACKLE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES AT THE SINGAPORE COP26 YOUTH CLIMATE DIALOGUE

SINGAPORE, 18 MARCH 2021

Singaporean youth demonstrated their passion and commitment in shaping the environmental and sustainability agenda at the COP26 Youth Climate Dialogue.

Organised in partnership between the National Youth Council, British High Commission in Singapore, the Italian Embassy Singapore, and the National University of Singapore's Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Law (APCEL) and Energy Studies Institute (ESI), the dialogue was aimed at driving youth action and understanding their concerns on issues of sustainability and climate change.

Forging partnerships to engage and connect youth to international platforms

Such strategic partnerships with local and international organisations provide expanded opportunities for youth engagement in the environment and sustainability space, enabling young people to share their perspectives and ideas and connect with the larger global community.

Addressing the gathering via video, COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma noted how, across the world including in Singapore, young people were addressing the climate crisis with energy and passion. "I'm committed to young people's voices shaping the UK's COP26 Presidency. This is why we've established the COP26 Civil Society and Youth Advisory Council and we're co-hosting the Youth for Climate 2021 event in Milan with our COP26 co-hosts Italy."

Mr Sharma invited participants to share their thoughts on the four priorities for COP26: (i) Reducing carbon emissions, (ii) Strengthening adaptation and reliance to climate change, (iii) Opening up greater private and public climate finance flows, and (iv) Enhancing collaboration between government, business and civil society to tackle our shared climate challenges.

Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, in her opening remarks reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to engage partners, including the youth, on sustainability: "A sustainable future for Singapore is contingent upon the collective efforts of all stakeholders. Our youths have an important role to play in this journey of co-creation, with their greater stake in the future. The Government will co-create our nation's sustainability journey with youths to realise the Singapore Green Plan 2030."

Harnessing the energy of youth to drive sustainability efforts

In her opening remarks, Her Excellency Kara Owen, British High Commissioner to Singapore highlighted the importance of international and all-of-society collaboration to combat the impacts of climate change. "COP26 is a chance to achieve something transformational. Green and growth go together. They are not, do not need to be, and should not be a choice of either/or. Securing our collective climate future is a priority for the UK – not just across multilateral platforms like the UN, the Commonwealth and in our G7 Presidency, but it is also central to the SG-UK Partnership for the Future. We have a real chance to harness young people's ingenuity, creativity and passion to win this fight."

Raffaele Langella, Ambassador of Italy to Singapore, also stressed the importance of the youth contribution to raise the awareness of people about environmental problems and to define a strategy to address climate change. For this purpose, Italy will host the event "Youth4Climate: driving ambition" from 28 to 30 September where young delegates and the ministries, will participate to the preparatory conference Pre-COP26, and will discuss together.

Providing a platform for youth have a say on sustainability issues important to them

The dialogue saw representatives from partnering organisations engage in lively conversations with 20 youth participants comprising individuals in tertiary education, young professionals and youth advocates through panel discussions on the priorities and goals of COP26 and sharing sessions by organisations such as Singapore Youth for Climate Action (SYCA), which offered opportunities for youth to engage in proactive discussions with industry experts on the environmental plans for Singapore and the region. The event also saw Nigel Topping, the UK's High Level Climate Action Champion, engage with the youth participants via a virtual set-up.

Discussions centred around key international and local priorities on sustainability and the environment and the importance of youth engagement in addressing these challenges. Issues brought up included:

- Role of Singapore youth in driving environmental change in the run-up to COP26 and how awareness could be translated into action
- Importance of multilateralism during climate negotiations
- Support for loss and damages especially towards vulnerable countries
- Importance of corporate governance to combat climate change
- Decoupling economic growth and carbon emissions

Supporting youth through providing opportunities

for them to take action and create change

Chief Executive at the National Youth Council, Mr David Chua encouraged youth to seize opportunities to take action in his opening remarks, “There are many opportunities for us to participate, to shape, and to educate. And institutions and governments cannot create all of the opportunities. A lot of it falls also on young people. And as leaders, we need you to create a suite of opportunities out there in different dimensions and different facets of what we want to achieve, and at the same time, be conscious about bringing the community along”.

Deputy Director of APCEL, Assistant Professor Tara Maria Davenport concurred with the sentiment, pointing out that the youth present at the event represent “the first generation to know, without doubt, that we are destroying our Earth and probably the last that can do anything about it” and urged decision-makers at the international and local levels to “bring youth onboard at the earliest possible stages of the policy-making and planning processes.” Asst. Prof Davenport affirmed APCEL’s commitment to furthering the goals of the Paris Agreement by partnering with other like-minded thought leaders in furthering the environmental rule of law, including through the Climate Change Litigation Initiative (CCLI), which will contribute to the discourse on climate change litigation and provide relevant tools to policymakers and wider stakeholders.

Deputy Executive Director of the Energy Studies Institute, Associate Professor Lee Poh Seng, also said that to further capacity building efforts among youth and educators in Singapore, the ESI hopes to launch a Sustainability Seminar Series that will adopt a coordinated and balanced approach to climate change and energy education and enculturation. He said the ESI looks forward to working with relevant ministries and agencies, industry, institutes of higher learning, and research institutes to mount this effort together.

Notes to editors:

About COP 26

COP refers to the decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In November 2021, the UK will be hosting the 26th annual session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, or ‘COP26’, in Glasgow. At the summit, delegates, including heads of state, climate experts, and negotiators, will come together to agree on coordinated action to tackle climate change. As well as the negotiations, there will also be space for countries, international organisations and other delegates to showcase climate action, highlight diverse climate change issues and share knowledge. See <https://ukcop26.org/>

About COP 26 Youth Climate Dialogue

The COP26 Youth Climate Dialogue is a youth engagement session ahead of COP26. Organised in partnership between the British High Commission in

Singapore and the Embassy of Italy in Singapore, along with the National Youth Council and the National University of Singapore's Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Law and Energy Studies Institute, the dialogue provides a platform for youth in Singapore to engage in climate positive transitions through the sharing of ideas, knowledge and resources. The event focused on understanding the key areas of climate change that are most critical to today's youth and encouraged discussions to draw out the relationship between local challenges and opportunities with the wider Commonwealth community.

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[Government launches new £5bn 'Project Gigabit'](#)

- First areas to benefit from £5bn government funding for fastest broadband connections to help recovery from the pandemic, growth and levelling up
- Extra £210m worth of vouchers released to help those with slow speeds
- £110m to connect up to 7,000 rural GP surgeries, libraries and schools
- Call for evidence on using satellite and 5G technology to connect very hard to reach areas

More than one million hard to reach homes and businesses will have next generation gigabit broadband built to them in the first phase of a £5 billion government infrastructure project.

Up to 510,000 homes and businesses in Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Cumbria, Dorset, Durham, Essex, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Tees Valley will be the first to benefit as part of 'Project Gigabit'.

Their available speeds will rocket to more than 1,000 megabits or one gigabit per second. It means families no longer having to battle over bandwidth and will give people in rural areas the freedom to live and work more flexibly. Contracts for these first areas will go to tender in the spring with spades in the ground in the first half of 2022.

In June the government expects to announce the next procurements to connect up to 640,000 premises in Norfolk, Shropshire, Suffolk, Worcestershire,

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The government-funded projects will prioritise areas that currently have slow connections and which would otherwise have been left behind in broadband companies' rollout plans.

Gigabit broadband is being rolled out rapidly – from one in ten households in 2019 to almost two in five today. The UK is on track for one of the fastest rollouts in Europe and for half of all households to have access to gigabit speeds by the end of this year.

Project Gigabit will accelerate our recovery from covid, fire up high growth sectors like tech and the creative industries and level up the country, spreading wealth and creating jobs the breadth of Britain.

The successful Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is also being relaunched with up to £210 million to give people in eligible rural areas immediate financial help to get gigabit speeds.

On top of this the government is making up to £110 million available to connect public sector buildings – such as GP surgeries, libraries and schools – in the hardest to reach parts of the UK with this revolutionary infrastructure.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Project Gigabit is the rocket boost that we need to get lightning-fast broadband to all areas of the country. This broadband revolution will fire up people's businesses and homes, and the vital public services that we all rely on, so we can continue to level up and build back better from this pandemic.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

Project Gigabit is our national mission to plug in and power up every corner of the UK and get us gigabit for the future.

We have already made rapid progress, with almost 40 percent of homes and businesses now able to access next-generation gigabit speeds, compared to just 9 percent in 2019. Now we are setting out our plans to invest £5 billion in remote and rural areas so that no one is left behind by the connectivity revolution.

That means no more battling over the bandwidth, more freedom to live and work anywhere in the country, and tens of thousands of new jobs created as we deliver a game-changing infrastructure upgrade.

Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach said:

We're already building Full Fibre broadband to 20 million homes and businesses under our own steam – including in rural and hard-to-reach areas – and we welcome this as a vital next step to connect the toughest parts of the UK.

We'll be considering these proposals for the final 20% with interest and we're keen to support the Government. This is a massive opportunity to level-up the country and boost the bounce-back after the pandemic, so it's important the process moves quickly and that all operators do their bit.

Greg Mesch, CEO of CityFibre, said:

Project Gigabit is another welcome accelerant that will propel the UK towards a Full Fibre future, supporting economic growth and levelling up opportunity right across the country. As the nation's largest independent Full Fibre platform, with a build programme underway to a third of the UK market, CityFibre is ready to extend our network even further to reach rural communities. We look forward to participating in this important programme to ensure no one is left behind.

Gareth Williams, Gigaclear CEO, said:

As a rural operator already delivering multiple 'Superfast' BDUK contracts, we are naturally delighted to see the next step in the development of the Outside In programme.

We are fully supportive of the Government's ambition to roll out gigabit capable connectivity across the country as quickly as possible, the importance of which has been further highlighted by the COVID pandemic.

We look forward to playing an active role in meeting this ambition and will review these opportunities in detail.

James Saunby, Vice Chair of Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA) said:

The launch of Project Gigabit is very exciting to the independent networks sector. The flexible approach means that a wide range of independent operators will be able to contribute to the deployment of a gigabit capable network for all areas. Rural areas can finally join the 21st century.

Delivery Plan for Project Gigabit

The government is today [responding to its public consultation Planning for Gigabit Delivery in 2021](#) which sought views on how to spend its record £5 billion funding commitment for gigabit broadband in hard to reach areas.

It outlined a strategy to make local, regional and cross-regional contracts available for broadband network providers of all different sizes to bid for. The first procurements to be announced are:

- 110,000 to 130,000 premises in Durham, South Tyneside & Tees Valley and areas of Northumberland – including Darlington, Stockton, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Sunderland, Gateshead and South Tyneside
- 60,000 to 80,000 premises in West Cumbria including in the Lake District National Park
- 30,000 to 50,000 premises in North and West Northumberland and East Cumbria – including Brampton and Rothbury
- 120,00 to 140,000 premises in Cambridgeshire and adjacent areas – including Peterborough and parts of Northamptonshire, Essex, Hertfordshire and Rutland
- 40,000 to 60,000 premises in East Cornwall – including Launceston, Callington and Looe
- 30,000 to 50,000 premises in West Cornwall – including in Cambourne-Pool-Redruth and Penzance and the Isles of Scilly

On top of these six regional contracts, there will be further local supplier contracts in Essex and Dorset. This first release of procurement contracts for England follows [central Scotland recently being named as the first area to receive Project Gigabit funding](#). The UK and Scottish government are discussing the potential for further Project Gigabit contracts in Scotland, which could be delivered alongside Scotland's R100 programme.

There are already major programmes delivering gigabit broadband in the devolved administrations, including R100 in Scotland and Phase 3 of the UK government's previous superfast broadband programme in Wales. Project Gigabit builds on the £2.6 billion Superfast programme, which is now predominantly funding gigabit-capable rather than superfast connections.

In Northern Ireland, the UK government has invested £150 million in Project Stratum, which will connect approximately 76,000 homes and businesses to gigabit broadband. The [first live connections](#) under the scheme were delivered last week in County Tyrone.

Additionally between September and December 2020, the government approved a further £490 million in new contracts via the Superfast Broadband programme to connect a further 172,000 premises to better broadband in Scotland, Cheshire, West Yorkshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Devon and Somerset.

Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme

For rural homes and businesses across the UK currently struggling with slow broadband speeds, the government is investing up to £210 million to build on the success of its [Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme](#).

Launched in March 2018, the scheme provided eligible areas across the UK with vouchers to cover the installation costs of bringing gigabit connectivity to people's homes and businesses. So far more than 66,000 vouchers worth up to £127 million have been issued to premises across the UK.

The new vouchers worth up to £1,500 for residents and up to £3,500 for businesses will go live on 8 April 2021 and mean that rural areas will not have to wait for supplier contracts under Project Gigabit to reach them.

There will be a new online postcode checker available so people can check if their home or business is eligible for a voucher.

Public sector buildings

Project Gigabit will invest up to £110 million to connect public buildings such as rural schools, doctors' surgeries and libraries to gigabit broadband. This will help GPs provide remote video consultations and allow whole classes of schoolchildren to be online at once with no interruptions.

The government wants to connect up to 7,000 rural public buildings in order to improve public services. They will act as hubs to get gigabit-capable networks into the heart of countryside communities and incentivise other broadband companies to build off them.

The Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) continues to engage with local bodies and government departments to identify suitable projects, and expects the first of these to be progressed this summer.

Very Hard to Reach Areas – Call for evidence

The UK has some very remote places that may be too expensive to build a gigabit-capable broadband network to, even with substantial public subsidy.

Thanks to completed or pending government-funded projects, less than 0.3% of the country or less than 100,000 premises are likely to fall into this category.

For these premises, which are mainly located in remote and isolated locations in Scotland and Wales, and some National Parks in England, a [call for evidence](#) has been launched to explore the barriers to improving their broadband and how innovative new technologies might help change this.

This could lead to the government encouraging industry to use new wireless equipment, low-orbit satellites or high altitude platforms to beam faster connections to far-flung homes and businesses.

The government has already made investments in wireless, satellite and hybrid-fibre technologies, and continues to explore emerging technologies in this area. Some of these technologies are also gigabit-capable and eligible for UK Gigabit Programme funding today.

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Notes to Editors

Alongside the Delivery Plan for Project Gigabit, DCMS has today published an [update on the work of its Barrier Busting Taskforce](#). The Taskforce has played a key role in improving the environment for digital infrastructure investment and deployment. It has already delivered a number of key changes, including:

- Launching the [Digital Connectivity Portal](#), to provide guidance to both operators, local authorities, landowners as well as other stakeholders, on core issues including best practice guides to street works, the Electronic Communications Code and how to engage with operators.
- Working closely with the Department for Transport (DfT) to make it easier for operators to access roads for digital infrastructure deployment. This has included delivering the new Street Manager service, which Street Works UK described as bringing “the coordination of street works into the digital age”.
- Passing the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Act to address the issue of unresponsive landlords holding up digital infrastructure deployment and support the 10 million people living in blocks of flats in the UK.
- Exploring further barriers in relation to access to land through a consultation on potential reforms to the Electronic Communications Code.
- Coordinating a series of workshops for Code users, focused on delivering better ways of working in key areas such as identifying commonly agreed positions for fixed and mobile template agreements, ensuring compliance with the Ofcom Code of Practice and an agreed approach to communications.
- Working with property developers and across Whitehall to create a comprehensive solution which will ensure new build developments are built with fast, reliable, resilient, gigabit-capable connections.
- Publishing consultations on reforms to planning regulations for mobile network development, to support the deployment of 5G infrastructure and extend existing mobile coverage.
- With Ofcom, publishing a 5G technology guide to support councils and counter misinformation about 5G.
- Engaging with local authorities to promote best practice and help facilitate deployment, including the appointment of designated Digital Champions, publication of guidance on land access and valuation, and resolution of operator performance issues.
- Resolving dozens of small-scale real-world barriers to deployment.

The [Budget](#) introduced a world-leading super deduction tax break. Over the next two financial years ending in March 2023, companies will be able to cut their tax bill by up to 25p for every £1 they invest in qualifying new plant

and machinery assets, ensuring the UK capital allowances regime is amongst the world's most competitive. This will give companies a strong incentive to make additional investments, including telecoms firms investing in gigabit network build

Millions pledged for schools and hospitals in rural Scotland to 'go gigabit'

- £2 million boost will connect 91 NHS surgeries and hospitals in the most isolated parts of Scotland to gigabit broadband
- Another £1 million to build a 'high-speed Highlands' with full fibre broadband for nearly 200 schools, hospitals and GP practices
- £2 million project has finished connecting 21 Shetland schools and council buildings to gigabit speeds
- Adds to £4.5 million to put thousands in Scotland first in line to get next-generation broadband through Project Gigabit

It comes as the government announces Project Gigabit, an ambitious [£5 billion project](#) to roll out top-of-the-range gigabit connections to every corner of the country, the first pound of [which will be spent in Scotland](#).

Ninety-one GP surgeries and community hospitals in rural parts of Scotland – including remote island services on Arran, Jura, Lewis, Mull, Shetland and Orkney – will join the digital fast lane with gigabit broadband upgrades.

The UK government pledged a further £2 million to extend investment to an additional 41 NHS Scotland sites, under plans to create an infrastructure revolution for isolated areas of the country.

A further £1 million has also been pledged to extend full fibre to even more schools, hospitals and doctors' surgeries across the Highlands, meaning 199 public buildings will now enjoy faster internet speeds thanks to a £7.3 million total investment through our Local Full Fibre Networks scheme. Up to 37 sites are expected to receive connections this month and all are due to be completed by March 2022.

And in the northern isles of Yell and Unst in Shetland, work as part of a £2 million project to connect 21 schools, council buildings and other public sites to fibre broadband has now been completed marking a big tick in the UK government's checklist to level up isolated Scottish communities.

Matt Warman, Digital Infrastructure Minister, said:

We know that improving connectivity is a top priority for people in Scotland, and this broadband boost will enable dozens more doctors' surgeries, schools and other valued public buildings to raise productivity and deliver better quality services.

This is on top of the £5 billion Project Gigabit we're launching today, the first pound from which will be spent in Scotland, that is setting out to deliver next generation speeds to every corner of the UK.

The UK government has already invested over £15 million to provide gigabit-capable connections with local authorities and other public bodies in Scotland, but today's launch of Project Gigabit marks the beginning of even more investment.

Last month we announced the first tranche of funding from Project Gigabit will be spent in central Scotland: £4.5 million to upgrade 5,300 homes and businesses that were due to get superfast through the Scottish Government's 'Reaching 100%' (R100) programme but will now get even faster gigabit connections.

Both governments are working closely together to scope how Project Gigabit will work in the rest of Scotland, including an assessment of its distinct characteristics and the challenges this could pose to delivery, and consideration for how it will align with the R100 programme.

Projects will be developed jointly by the UK Government and Scottish Government through a collaborative approach, in which the Scottish Government is expected to be the lead partner on implementation management on behalf of DCMS.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart said:

"The UK Government is investing millions of pounds to ensure people in remote areas of Scotland benefit from fast, reliable internet connections. Upgrading broadband in NHS surgeries, hospitals, schools and councils across rural Scotland will transform public services at the very heart of our communities, helping us to build back better from coronavirus."

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Notes to editors

New sites to benefit

Highlands

- Bualnaluib Primary School, Aultbea
- Bower Primary School, Lyth Wick
- Gergask Primary School, Laggan Bridge
- Great Glen Way Office, Strathoich, Auchterawe Road, Fort Augustus

- Harbour Building, Harbourmasters Office, Kinlochbervie, Larg
- *Maintenance Depot, Sir Archibald Road, Thurso
- Staffin Primary School, Staffin, Portree
- Strathconon Primary School, Strathconon, Muir or Ord
- Aviemore Depot, Achantoul, Aviemore
- Forvie Centre, Colliston, Ellon

NHS Scotland sites

- Carloway Medical Practice
- Carnwath Health Centre
- Creich Surgery
- Dalry Health Centre
- Dunvegan Health Centre
- Fyvie Health Centre
- Glencairn Gp Surgery
- Tobermory Medical Practice
- Southernness Surgery
- Langabhat Medical Practice (Leurbost)
- Lorn Medical Centre
- Migdale Hospital
- Patna Resource Centre
- South Ronaldsay Practice
- Springfield Health Centre
- St Brendans Hospital
- The Glebe Medical Centre
- The Shiskine Surgery
- Barr Surgery
- Kyles Medical Centre
- Armadale Medical Practice
- Dalbeattie Clinic *Dounby Surgery
- Isle Of Arran War Memorial Hospital
- South Uist Medical Practice
- Carradale Surgery
- Dunbeath Health Centre
- Lochgoilhead Practice
- Habost Clinic (The Group Practice)
- Killlearn Health Centre
- Lady Home Hospita
- Loudoun Medical Centre
- Inveraray Surgery
- Staffin Nurse Base
- Stromness Surgery
- Arran Medical Group
- Kingshill Medical Practice
- Furnace Surgery
- Victoria Hospital Annexe
- Westray Surgery
- Whiting Bay Surgery

[Defra announces funding boost and new partnership with Forest for Cornwall](#)

Defra and Forest for Cornwall have today [19 March] joined forces to form an innovative new National Woodland Creation Partnership pilot to drive regional tree planting. This new partnership will be supported through an initial £120,000 uplift from the Nature for Climate Fund, the Forestry Minister Lord Goldsmith has announced.

Following on from the successful [Northumberland Forest Partnership announced by the Environment Secretary in 2019](#), the Government is backing this Cornwall Council-led woodland creation partnership to help identify sites in Cornwall for woodland creation and bring local stakeholders on board. Partnership Forum members include Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Duchy of Cornwall, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, Natural England, Woodland Trust, National Trust, Tamar AONB, ConFor, CLA, NFU, South West Water, Cornwall Association of Local Councils, and West Country Rivers Trust.

The ambition of Forest for Cornwall, set out and led by Cornwall Council as a key part of its Carbon Neutral Action Plan, is to ensure that the woodlands created are best suited for the needs of communities in Cornwall. A mix of targeted tree and woodland planting will be carried out to achieve this, including:

- planting trees to provide shade in urban areas to help counter the high rates of skin cancer shown in the county
- planting trees in areas of high deprivation to provide well-being benefits for local communities
- enabling economic benefits for the county by developing well-designed woodlands of scale to encourage visitors
- planting woodlands to enhance nature's recovery and flood mitigation

Today's announcement highlights the essential role that local authorities and their partners have to play in achieving the Government's ambition to increase tree planting rates to 30,000 hectares per year across the UK by 2025. To meet this ambition, a locally led approach to tree and woodland creation is needed, and local partners are in a unique position to inform the delivery of tree planting on the ground.

Forestry Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

This exciting new partnership in Cornwall emphasises the importance of working together and using a locally-led approach to help build back greener.

I am pleased to announce that through the government's Nature for

Climate Fund, trees will be planted where they are most needed, allowing more communities in Cornwall to have access to nature and in turn, to experience real benefits for health and wellbeing.

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley said:

Trees are the backbone of our urban and rural environments and essential in tackling the climate emergency. As the largest land managers in England and the government's expert forestry advisors, we are excited to be part of this new pilot. This partnership will be crucial for deciding where trees need to be planted in Cornwall to provide maximum benefits for people, climate and nature.

Councillor Edwina Hannaford, portfolio holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change at Cornwall Council, said:

We are delighted that Defra is supporting our Forest for Cornwall Programme.

As part of our commitment to tackle climate change, we are working with partners to appropriately plant hundreds of thousands of trees in our beautiful county. This funding will enable us to support more landowners and land managers who want to plant trees in different areas.

In 2019 Cornwall Council issued a climate emergency and has set the ambitious target of being carbon neutral by 2030. As it grows the Forest for Cornwall will help us towards reaching that goal and help us create a better, greener future for the next generation.

By growing, protecting and restoring our trees, forests and woodlands we can help reduce carbon emissions, encourage biodiversity and nature recovery, grow our sustainable timber market, and improve people's health and wellbeing.

Defra is committed to protecting and restoring our natural environment. This is part of a series of Nature for Climate Fund announcements this spring, leading up to the publication of the government's action plan on trees, woodland and forestry.

In recent months, the government has announced [£12.1 million of investment for tree planting in Community Forests](#) across the country, as well as a [new £3.9 million pot to support innovative planting schemes](#) in towns and cities and near rivers to reduce flood risk.

Dartmoor line rail services will be restored for first time in half a century

- first Restoring Your Railway scheme delivered, with rail passengers to benefit from return of daily services between Okehampton and Exeter later this year
- scheme will reconnect communities across Devon, reinvigorating local economies, boosting tourism to Dartmoor National Park, and improving access to jobs and education
- more than a third of a billion pounds-worth of government investment in the south-west, including £37.4 million for upgrades of the coastal rail line between Holcombe and Dawlish

Regular passenger services are set to be restored on a popular railway line in the south-west of England for the first time in almost 50 years, thanks to £40.5 million of investment, the government has announced today (19 March 2021).

The Department for Transport, Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR) are working together to reopen the line between Exeter and Okehampton to passengers all year round. Since 1997, the line has only been open during the summer after a regular service was withdrawn in 1972.

A service will initially run every 2 hours later this year, with the expectation it will increase to an hourly service towards the end of 2022. This will benefit students heading to colleges in Exeter as well as tourists travelling in the other direction towards Okehampton for Dartmoor, easing congestion on local roads.

This is the first project to see services restored under the government's [Restoring Your Railway Fund](#), launched in January 2020 to reinstate axed local services and restore closed stations. The fund is focused on delivering schemes that can level up the country, reinvigorating high streets, reconnecting cut-off communities and boosting opportunity across the country.

The government has also announced £37.4 million of funding for the critical third phase of works to improve resilience on the coastal railway between Holcombe and Dawlish. This is in addition to a £341 million package of rail enhancements already committed across the south-west.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Restoring the connections between our communities and building new ones is key to unlocking our nation's potential and levelling up across the UK.

The massive investment we are making into the railways of the south-west will quite literally lay the tracks to more jobs, tourism and opportunities across the region.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

The return of all-year services to the picturesque Dartmoor line for the first time in half a century is a milestone moment in our efforts to restore our railways.

Reversing lost railway connections breathes new life into our high streets, drives tourism and investment in businesses and housing, and opens new opportunities for work and education.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

Building on vital new investment to protect the coastal railway between Holcombe and Dawlish and a host of upgrades and new stations, we're delivering on our ambitious plans in Devon and Cornwall.

This funding will provide passengers with reliable, punctual journeys, and improve connections between communities as we build back better from coronavirus (COVID-19).

[Network Rail](#) is set to begin work later this summer on a rockfall shelter and netting to address instability on an area of steep, high cliffs to the north of Parson's Tunnel between Holcombe and Dawlish.

This is part of the [South West Rail Resilience Programme](#) to create a more resilient railway after storms caused significant damage to the line in 2014, closing the railway for 8 weeks and severing the south-west peninsula from the rest of the network.

Phase 1 of the programme – to build a new £80 million seawall on the seafront west of Dawlish station to protect 360m of railway and homes behind it – was completed in July 2020 and opened by the Rail Minister in September.

Work on the second phase of the new seawall – to extend it a further 415m eastwards from Colonnades to Coastguards – began in November 2020 with support from an innovative 8-legged jack-up barge, known as a 'Wavewalker'. Work is ongoing and is expected to be completed by 2023.

Exeter College Principal and Chief Executive John Laramy CBE said:

The return of the Okehampton to Exeter rail line full-time is great news for the region as we look to build connectivity across the south-west. As we all know, enhanced connectivity is a key driver

for productivity and this development will open up new opportunities to support the growth of our economy within this area.

We have students study with us from across the south-west region and another rail route into the heart of Exeter can only be a good thing, not only for learners themselves but also for the city of Exeter.

Pamela Woods, Chair of Dartmoor National Park Authority, said,

Opening up the line to Dartmoor with a regular train service is very much welcome as we celebrate our 70th year as a national park. Providing a sustainable route to access Dartmoor via regular rail links supports our green travel strategy, reduces congestion and provides a more accessible way for all to enjoy the national park.

We are looking forward to working with GWR to provide visitor information at Okehampton station, to make the most of the opportunities this presents to support our tourism businesses and the local economy.

Today's news comes on top of £341 million of rail enhancements already announced in the south-west, including:

- the development of a new £53 million depot in Exeter, providing enhanced servicing facilities for trains and improving the availability of trains in the region, including for the Dartmoor line
- ongoing capacity upgrades at Bristol East Junction, worth £132 million, and £60 million station improvements at Bristol Temple Meads as part of the [Bristol Rail Regeneration Programme](#)
- contribution of £7.8 million for Edginswell station in Torbay from the third round of the [New Stations Fund](#) – the station is planned to be opened in 2024
- investment of more than £8.48 million for improvements at a number of stations across the region including:
 - £1.7 million for delivery of accessibility and car parking improvements at Castle Cary station, with construction to start in spring 2021
 - £6.6 million for station improvements and new car parking at Taunton station, with construction to finish in spring 2021
 - £183,000 to upgrade the previously derelict station building at Saltash station
 - contractual support through the [GWR franchise agreement](#) for the Plymouth station scheme, with construction ongoing until 2029