

Veterans step up to support those in need during COVID pandemic, new research finds

The study, carried out by King's College London, found that 60% of veterans have volunteered in their community to help individuals affected by the pandemic.

Of those veterans already volunteering, 66% reported as having increased their time spent helping others, as a result of COVID.

The initial finding from the OVA sponsored study underlines the contribution that ex-service personnel make to society at large. Many use their skills learnt from the armed forces, as well as their public service ethos, to play an important role in their communities.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

These findings show the huge contribution that veterans make to their communities.

Their commitment to serving this country does not end when they leave the military.

It's humbling to see that so many have stepped up to help those in need during this extraordinary year.

As we approach Christmas, Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer is also urging veterans struggling with their mental health to reach out for support.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

Christmas can be a difficult time for many, particularly this year with the effects of COVID.

But help is available and I urge any veteran who may be struggling with their mental health or loneliness to access the range of support that is available.

A range of support is available for those struggling with their mental health over the Christmas period, including:

- The Veterans' Gateway, a first point of contact which puts veterans in touch with local support services. Anyone can call 0808 8021212 to reach their helpline, which is running 24/7 over Christmas and New Year, or text 81212.

- The Veterans' Welfare Service, part of Veterans UK, is trained to provide free, confidential advice and support on a wide range of issues. Anyone in need of support can call 0808 1914218 and ask for contact from the Veterans Welfare Service. Read details of the helpline's Christmas opening hours.
- Veterans can also call the free Samaritans helpline on 116 123, which is running 24/7 over Christmas and New Year.

Support for loneliness for veterans includes:

- Mind is a leading mental health charity that offers wide ranging support for a number of issues. Their befriending service can help veterans feel connected to others through frequent conversation and companionship. Find out more about Mind's services to prevent loneliness.
- The Royal British Legion offer localised support to prevent isolation in the veteran community, including a telephone buddy service and a home visiting service. Contact the Legion to find out more.

As well as the increased time spent volunteering, the King's study, called Veterans-CHECK, has today found that 88% of veterans gave to charity in the last 12 months. The study also found that 20% have given more to charity this year, because of their desire to help more during the pandemic.

Professor Sir Simon Wessely, Director, King's Centre for Military Health Research, King's College London said:

What this study shows is that our veterans have been affected by the COVID pandemic in similar ways to all of us.

But they have also continued to contribute to this country, much as they did during service, with so many of them now employed as key workers or volunteering.

I am sure everyone will want to acknowledge and thank the veteran community for all they are doing to support the nation at this time. The spirit shown by Cpt Tom Moore continues through the generations.

The Veterans-Check study will continue into the New Year, where it will report on the health effects on veterans during the pandemic.

In England, mental health services now includes:

- The Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS), an enhanced service for veterans which helps tackle early signs of mental health difficulties
- The Veterans' Mental Health Complex Treatment service (CTS), which helps veterans who have complex mental health problems emanating from their military service
- Over 800 accredited 'veteran friendly' GP surgeries, which have been specially equipped to care for ex-forces personnel

- Over 50 Veteran Aware hospitals

The work of the OVA includes:

- Pulling together all functions of government, and working closely with the charity sector, in order to ensure this nation's life-long duty to those who have served
- Ensuring that every single veteran and their family knows where to turn to access support when required
- Helping to generate a 'single view of the veteran' by making better use of data to understand veterans' needs and where gaps in provision exist
- Improving the perception of veterans

[Next steps in Government's £5 billion gigabit broadband plan](#)

A consultation has been launched on the draft procurement strategy for the UK Gigabit Programme setting out plans to connect the first one million homes and businesses with gigabit speed broadband and maximise coverage in the hardest to reach 20% of the UK by 2025.

Homes and businesses that do not yet have access to superfast broadband will be prioritised. Their speeds will rocket from less than 30 megabits per second to more than 1,000 megabits per second, or one gigabit per second.

Gigabit-capable broadband connections offer the fastest and most reliable speeds available. They will pave the way for new and unexpected social benefits alongside jobs and economic growth over the coming decades, and revolutionise rural communities by giving people the freedom to live and work more flexibly. The strategy details a broad range of interventions to deliver gigabit broadband: contracts for a record £5 billion in public funding, broadband vouchers and other innovative solutions across all nations of the UK.

The accelerated approach to awarding contracts for the £5 billion will mean every telecoms provider – from the very small to very large – can take part.

This will drive competition, boost regional economic growth and create new jobs.

Matt Warman, Minister for Digital Infrastructure, said:

Today we've set out our bold programme of national infrastructure projects to future-proof the UK's internet networks so we can build back better from coronavirus and create new jobs and economic opportunities.

We will begin these procurements rapidly so broadband providers big and small can move quickly to get the job done and level up communities with this much faster, next generation broadband.

[Planning for Gigabit Delivery in 2021](#) includes a series of maps of large and small areas covering the whole of England where government intervention and subsidy is likely to be required to deliver gigabit-capable networks. It also shows the areas expected to be delivered through normal commercial rollout.

The consultation anticipates up to 26 large regions of England that are most likely to attract commercial investment but require subsidy to reach the hardest 40,000 to 80,000 premises in each area. The government expects larger broadband suppliers, including challengers to incumbents, to bid for these areas and prioritise people with slow speeds.

This includes areas of Northumberland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Devon, Dorset, Sussex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire.

In addition there will be smaller contracts to connect around 1,000 to 8,000 premises, to stimulate competition across a wider range of small, medium-sized and rural specialist telecoms providers and help them to scale up.

This could include areas of Cumbria, Westmoreland, Yorkshire, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Herefordshire, Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, Kent and Sussex, depending on where these providers wish to compete.

In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, the R100, Project Stratum and Superfast Cymru projects respectively are rolling out large scale superfast contracts which will deliver gigabit connections over the coming years.

The UK Government will work closely with the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from early 2021 to develop plans to complement these contracts and extend gigabit coverage across the UK.

DCMS is also exploring how to make available a small number of contracts covering very large areas that are the least commercially attractive to build in. This would help make sure that no areas are left behind – even those where there is a limited prospect of competition.

As well as these supply side market interventions, the government is also seeking industry views on how to extend its successful Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme from April 2021. The scheme allows people in rural areas to request a gigabit connection with the government subsidising the installation costs. This would help broadband suppliers respond to increasing consumer demand for gigabit broadband while the new procurements get up and running.

The government will also continue its programme to connect public and community buildings – such as council houses, schools, libraries and GP surgeries – so they act as full fibre ‘hubs’ off which industry can build their networks and connect surrounding homes and businesses.

These new procurements for gigabit infrastructure are set to begin in Spring 2021. The government will now seek industry and local authority views on the strategy to define small and large procurement boundaries, as well as ensuring that priority areas are served.

The recent Spending Review set out the timeline for how the first tranche of £1.2bn of funding will be made available to industry over 4 years. The commitment to spend £5 billion stands, and the government will accelerate this investment if industry can demonstrate it has the capacity to deliver further and faster.

ENDS

Industry quotes:

Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach, said:

This is a big step towards levelling-up the UK. Whilst private investment will pay for the vast majority of broadband upgrades across the country, we're keen to help Government reach more isolated communities.

At Openreach, we've got the biggest and best team of engineers in the industry, with unrivalled experience connecting rural homes and a huge ambition to match.

We've all seen the importance of having decent broadband this year, so we're keen to crack-on and do the lion's share. We're also convinced that Full Fibre technology can be a huge catalyst for the UK's future prosperity so there's no time to delay.

Greg Mesch, CEO of CityFibre, said:

We welcome this announcement about the first stage of the Government's £5 billion rural broadband programme, which will enable every corner of the country to access the digital infrastructure needed to support a new agile, green and balanced economy.

It is in everyone's interest to ensure Britain's consumers and businesses get connected as quickly as possible, regardless of where they are. We are pleased that Government is committed to making this a truly competitive process. This will deliver value for money, unlock additional private investment and speed up rollout.

At CityFibre, our UK-wide full fibre rollout to 8 million premises is well underway. We are creating up to 10,000 new jobs, and as we enter our second decade, we are ideally placed to deliver this vital infrastructure across the UK, ensuring nowhere is left

behind.

Lloyd Felton, County Broadband CEO, said:

Continued growth in the rollout of full-fibre broadband is much-needed, as a recent Ofcom report revealed, only 18% of the UK can access 'full-fibre' services. It is vital that we take the opportunities to invest in full-fibre infrastructure now, to ensure Britain's broadband is future-proofed and accessible to all UK properties.

Local providers, like County Broadband will continue to be the frontline driving force to realise the new targets for connecting more properties to future-ready broadband networks, supported by the private funding we have in place.

Like other full-fibre broadband providers, County Broadband remains committed to delivering a major programme to enable thousands of properties in harder-to-reach, deeper rural areas, access to full-fibre, gigabit-capable broadband.

However, we are supportive of any Government funding which will assist in the overall delivery of full-fibre broadband to the hardest-to-reach areas. We are looking forward to understanding more about the Government's plan to support the delivery of full-fibre networks across the United Kingdom.

Notes to Editors:

- The [National Infrastructure Strategy](#) outlined how the Government is working with industry to target a minimum of 85% gigabit-capable coverage by 2025, and will seek to accelerate rollout further to get as close to 100% as possible.

[New £5 million project to save woodlands](#)

- The project will restore the ravine woodlands in the Peak District National Park
- The project will tackle ash dieback in the ravines

The future of the beautiful ravine woodlands in the Peak District is looking brighter thanks to £5 million in funding.

The LIFE in the Ravines partnership project, led by Natural England, will tackle the threat that ash dieback poses to the forested river valleys of the Peak District. The project has received £3.6m in funding from the EU LIFE programme, with the remainder coming from project partners.

The Peak District's scenic ravines are treasured by locals and visitors alike, especially during the pandemic where more people have been seeking solace in nature. LIFE in the Ravines will save several woodlands, including the iconic 5 dales of the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve, such as the well-visited Lathkill. All the sites are part of the Peak District Dales Special Area of Conservation, recognised as of international importance.

Lathkill Dale, Peak District

Natural England's chief executive Marian Spain, said:

I'm so pleased that Natural England and its partners are able to work together to support Nature's Recovery. This innovative project will help restore the landscape and wildlife of this much-loved area of the country following the devastation of ash die back. That means people who live and visit the Peak District will be able to appreciate the natural beauty of the woodland habitats once again and for generations to come.

Project partners include the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and the Chatsworth Estate. The project is also working with the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire Dales District Council, the Arkwright Society, the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust.

Ash dieback disease, caused by a fungus lethal to ash trees, arrived in the Peak District in 2015. The ravine forests of the Peak District are dominated by ash, so the whole woodland area could be devastated without intervention. The woods already have high levels of infection and have lost mature trees. The loss of ash threatens all the woodland wildlife, from rare beetles and moths to birds such as redstarts.

LIFE in the Ravines will help 900 hectares of forest survive this threat with a programme of tree planting and woodland management. Small and large-leaved lime and wych elm trees, historically present in the woods, will be planted to step into the spaces left behind when ash trees die. The project won't give up on ash, it will seek out trees that might be resilient to the disease and give a helping hand to natural ash regeneration. Planting aspen, willow and other trees will build resilience and add to the diversity of wildlife in the woods.

The project will pioneer some specialist techniques, including using drones for the first time in the Peak District to aid planting on the steep, rocky slopes of the dales.

The LIFE in the Ravines programme will help these special ravine woodland ecosystems survive beyond ash dieback, thrive into the future and help counter other threats such as climate change and flooding.

The lessons learnt from the programme will be useful for others battling ash dieback across Europe, especially in other ravine woodlands in the UK such as those of the Mendips.

Natural England leads several other ambitious conservation projects that have benefitted from LIFE funding. These include Dynamic Dunescapes, working to restore sand dunes across the UK and LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES, saving seagrass and other delicate underwater habitats around our coasts.

Dave Savage, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust regional manager (Dark and White Peak), said:

We are really excited to be involved in this scheme to reduce the impact of this potentially devastating disease. The woodlands managed by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust in the White Peak are dominated by ash trees meaning we will lose a great deal of our tree cover. LIFE in the Ravines will have a dramatic impact on the wildlife in the woodlands, increasing the diversity of trees but also the biodiversity of the woodlands themselves.

Julian Woolford, chief executive of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, commented:

At the end of a difficult year we are very excited about the project's funding success. Ash dieback is really hitting hard across the UK. LIFE in the Ravines will make a big difference to protected woodlands across the White Peak.

John Everitt, forestry manager at Chatsworth Estate, added:

We are very excited at Chatsworth about working alongside the other partners on this project to help restore some of the most important woodlands within the Peak District. We have observed and tracked the rapid decline of these internationally significant habitats over the past 3 years due to the onset on ash dieback. It will be fantastic to help diversify these woodlands and create resilient habitats that will hopefully stand the test of time, benefiting the environment for years to come.

Ian Clemmett, lead ranger for the White Peak Estate, National Trust, said:

It's inevitable we are going to see some big changes in our ash woodlands over the next few years because of ash dieback. LIFE in the Ravines is a tremendous opportunity to tackle those changes and

to futureproof our woodlands through careful management. The National Trust is delighted to be a partner in this work, helping to conserve and enhance our woodlands here in the White Peak for the benefit of wildlife and people alike.

Sarah Fowler, chief executive of the Peak District National Park, said:

Ash woodlands in the White Peak are amongst our most cherished places in the Peak District, providing sanctuary not only for wildlife but people too. Such areas have never been more crucial to our wellbeing and 'green recovery' than during the recent months of the pandemic. LIFE in the Ravines will be at the forefront of sustainable and resilient woodlands where there is a very real risk of the landscape picture we have known for generations being dramatically altered in the years ahead. I'm delighted to see so many partners coming together on such a pioneering approach to nature recovery in the National Park.

The River Dove about Ilam Rock

Image credit: National Trust

Notes to editor

- This £5m partnership project, led by Natural England, will restore 876ha of ravine woodland within the Peak District Dales Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This is 16% of the UK's ravine woodland, a European Priority Habitat. All the project sites are now heavily infected with ash dieback fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, which usually leads to tree death. Without intervention, in some areas the whole woodland would be lost. LIFE in the Ravines will replant trees historically found in the woods such as *Tilia cordata* (small leaved lime), *Tilia platyphyllos* (large leaved lime) and *Ulmus glabra* (wych elm), alongside others such as aspen *Populus tremula* and willow *Salix* species. The woods are too far from seed sources for these species to rely on natural regeneration. The project will also seek to retain ash in the woods.
- Project partners: the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust, the Chatsworth Estate. The project will also work with: Peak District National Park, Derbyshire Dales District Council, the Arkwright Society, the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust.

EU LIFE funding

- The EU's LIFE fund has agreed to support this £5 million project prior to the UK's exit from the EU. EU LIFE is giving £3.6 million funding. The rest of the funding will come from project partners and supporters.

- In August 2016, the government guaranteed EU-funded projects where UK organisations bid directly to the European Commission on a competitive basis, while we are still a member of the EU. Where EU LIFE funds are awarded to UK organisations they will be underwritten by the Government, even where projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU.

About Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide.

Within England, Natural England is responsible for:

- promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity
- conserving and enhancing the landscape
- securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation
- contributing in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment
- find out more on [Natural England's website](#) and follow us on [Twitter: @NaturalEngland](#).

Natural England leads several other ambitious conservation projects that have benefitted from LIFE funding. These include Dynamic Dunescapes, working to restore sand dunes across the UK; and LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES, saving seagrass and other delicate underwater habitats around our coasts.

About Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

- Media enquiries: contact the media team at Derbyshire Wildlife Trust on 01773 881188.

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, a Registered Charity, is the only organisation working to protect all wildlife across the county. We are one of 47 in The Wildlife Trusts Partnership, a nationwide network of local trusts. We manage 47 nature reserves throughout Derbyshire, advise local authorities and landowners on nature conservation issues and run a range of conservation and education projects. We are committed to The Wildlife Trusts' strategy of creating Living Landscapes – robust, connected landscapes that address the challenges facing our wildlife and countryside. Find out more at www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

About Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, a registered charity, is the leading nature conservation body in the County of Staffordshire. It protects and enhances our wildlife and wild places and promotes involvement, enjoyment and understanding of the natural world. With the support of over 17,000 members, it manages 31 sites covering over 4,000 acres including sites of

international, European and national importance. As part of The Wildlife Trusts, the Trust is the local face of the largest organisation in the UK concerned with the conservation of all forms of wildlife.

About Chatsworth Estate

- Chatsworth is home to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and is located in the Peak District National Park. The house, many of its contents and much of the surrounding landscape are leased to a registered charity, the Chatsworth House Trust. The Duke and Duchess pay rent to the charity to live at Chatsworth and work with the charity and others to welcome Chatsworth's visitors. Every penny of visitor admission goes directly to the Chatsworth House Trust, which is dedicated to the long-term preservation of Chatsworth House, the collections, garden, woodlands and park for the long-term benefit of the public. The charity promotes the study and appreciation of Chatsworth as a place of historic, architectural and artistic interest and of natural beauty, and encourages the use and enjoyment of Chatsworth by visitors for education and recreation.

About the National Trust

- The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895 by 3 people, Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. This year, the charity celebrates its 125th anniversary, and these values are still at the heart of everything it does. To help mark this significant moment in its history, the Trust has committed to achieving carbon net zero emissions by 2030, and establishing 20 million trees to help tackle climate change, creating green corridors for people and nature near towns and cities, running a year-long campaign to connect people with nature and continuing investment in arts and heritage. Ensuring everyone who visits feels welcome, and more people can access its places continues to be another key aspect of the charity's work. Entirely independent of Government, the National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline and hundreds of special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The National Trust receives more than 26.9 million visits each year to the places it cares for that have an entry fee, and an estimated 100 million visits to the outdoor places looked after by the charity. Together with 5.9 million members and more than 65,000 volunteers, they help to support the conservation charity in its work to care for nature, beauty, history. For everyone, for ever.
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WTO Dispute Settlement Body: UK statement under Agenda 9

World news story

The UK delivered this statement on 18 December under Agenda 9: Appellate Body Appointments – Proposal by Various Members



The WTO is based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Thank you, Chair.

The United Kingdom continues its support for this proposal for the launch of the selection process and we refer to our previous statements on this agenda item. We also support the statement made by Mexico on behalf of all co-sponsors.

This month marks a year since the Appellate Body has been able to hear new appeals, and a year since Members have had recourse to a two-stage dispute settlement system. At a time when the wider trading system is under strain, ensuring the fulfilment of rights and obligations of all Members under the Dispute Settlement Understanding is essential.

We have listened carefully to concerns and recognise the need for reform. We encourage all Members to reaffirm the value of, and Members' investment in, the rules-based multilateral trading system. We look forward to working with all Members to ensure that we do not become accustomed to the current impasse on dispute settlement.

Finding a solution and engaging in reform discussions should not stand in the way of Members accessing two-stage dispute settlement, a central pillar of the multilateral trading system. We therefore call on all Members to launch the Appellate Body selection process for all seven vacancies so we can restore the system to full functioning while we prioritise discussions on a permanent solution.

Thank-you.

[DASA showcases tomorrow's technology today](#)

News story

Defence and Security Accelerator links investors to best innovators to boost UK capabilities and prosperity



Top innovators pitched their businesses and novel technological ideas to investors at an event by the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA).

More than 45 investors attended the virtual Investment Showcase earlier this month with 14 companies presenting their innovative business opportunities and associated technologies that have the potential to offer better performance and increased capability for defence and national security – as well as offering multiple uses across other sectors.

[Video of what DASA offers.](#)

The companies were split by technology area, to allow investors to easily identify those sessions of particular interest.

The innovations on display ranged from different software that tackles fake news and reduces harmful content to innocent audiences; a medical point of care innovation that provides a diagnostic answer in ten minutes on a patient's need for antibiotics; to drone software that could transform the signal denied autonomy aspect of the drone market; and others.

Categories showcased were:

- Cyber, Analysis and Training Software
- Medical Software and Scanning
- Advanced Materials

- Drones and Drone Software

An invited audience of investors saw each company present their business opportunity and growth plans.

All companies presenting have previously received either defence or security funding via DASA.

DASA offers our funded companies the opportunity to access business mentoring and finance advice, with pitch training a core training element.

DASA is resolute in its support of UK companies to help them reach the next level of development and funding necessary to take their innovation into the market place.

Investors who are interested in more details about UK innovations are welcome to [get in touch with DASA](#) to find out more about those companies that showcased and the associated investment opportunities.

The companies are looking at a spectrum of investment opportunities and are interested in syndicated as well as individual investments.

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