

Second large donation to fund school's major IT project

Friends of Gosforth School (FOGS) has received a further £3,000 donation from LLWR to help finance the purchase of 16 iPads for students.

The group is in the final stage of a three year plan, initially to purchase 60 iPads and the infrastructure required to allow them to function in and around the primary school.

LLWR donated £3,500 to the scheme in 2019 and the funding has helped the school ensure that disadvantaged youngsters with no access to personal computers at home receive equipment amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teachers have been able to send work via the school app to be completed at home, and also relay key messages around COVID guidelines.

Rachel Jones, Chair of FOGS, said: "We are delighted to have been awarded £3,000 by LLWR this year, in our third year and final phase of our IT Funding Project.

"This will allow us to purchase additional iPads for use by the pupils and teachers on a daily basis, giving access to a broader range of activities to engage the children and deliver positive learning and results.

"The kids have loved completing a wide variety of IT activities which have enhanced their learning of core curriculum subjects. The iPads have allowed the pupils to work in small groups or pairs to complete coding, make videos and explore other means of recording their work and achievements."

The latest FOGS target is to fund 66 iPads, ensuring one per two pupils, plus one for each teacher, and 50 have so far been purchased, plus a Mac Mini, and the school wi-fi has been upgraded at a cost of £2,100.

"Increasing the number of iPads we have in school is particularly important to us this year to help us use the equipment COVID safely and reducing the number of children needing to share equipment," Rachel added.

FOGS is a charity comprising volunteer parents and community members, plus school representatives, launched to raise funds to enhance the learning experience of pupils.

Northern Ireland Secretary to Outline Centenary Plans

Secretary of State Brandon Lewis is to formally launch the UK Government's plans to mark Northern Ireland's centenary next year.

At a Policy Exchange event in Belfast later, Mr Lewis will announce a £3million funding commitment for the anniversary, unveil centenary branding – 'Our Story in the Making: NI Beyond 100' – as well as outlining further details regarding the centenary programme.

Speaking ahead of today's launch, Mr Lewis said: "2021 marks 100 years since the creation of Northern Ireland, which paved the way for the formation of the United Kingdom as we know it today. We will use this opportunity to hear untold stories, to promote Northern Ireland on the world stage and to celebrate its people, culture, traditions and enterprise; and its vital contribution to the United Kingdom.

This past year has not been easy but I believe we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel. As we look forward to 2021, the Government is planning an exciting programme to promote Northern Ireland's potential across the UK, and also internationally. Next year is the time to shine a light on what makes Northern Ireland so special, and to look forward to a bright future.

Last month, the Government launched the Shared History Fund, making available £1million to support the engagement of a wide range of arts, heritage, voluntary, community and other non-profit organisations with the history of the centenary of Northern Ireland

The Centenary Forum is meeting regularly, ensuring we listen to diverse perspectives as we create a bold and ambitious centenary programme. The Forum provides an opportunity for a broad spectrum of people, including those from across the political parties, business, tourism and the voluntary and community sectors, to come together to shape the delivery of the programme of events to mark this significant national anniversary. The Historical Advisory Panel is also working to provide advice to the Forum, and to the Government, on the historical facts of the period, as well as seeking to encourage and support a deeper public awareness of the history of the centenary.

Notes to editors

6/2020: Council Tax information letter – 15 December 2020

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Bats, bees and trees: DVLA's latest biodiversity action plan

The recent publication of our fourth [Biodiversity Action Plan \(BAP\)](#) marks another milestone in our commitment towards a more sustainable future. Although it focuses on our specific aims for the next few years, together with our [new Sustainability Report](#), the BAP also ensures that decisions about the future of DVLA will include the development of biodiversity across our estate.

Whilst publishing the plan is not a legal requirement for the agency, it does help us stay compliant with legislation and government targets. Meeting targets is not the only reason for doing this though. We recognise that biodiversity is vitally important in fighting climate change, and in ensuring good health and well-being within our local community and further afield. The plan supports our commitment to ensure we address these related challenges of public health, climate change and biodiversity, both now and for future generations.



The DVLA estate includes three sites in the Swansea area which provide a variety of different habitats including urban and industrial. We're proud of the progress we have made in the development of biodiversity on our estate and over the next five years we will focus on three main areas we want to improve.

Our habitats

One of the main focuses is the habitats that we already have on the estate. On one grassland habitat surrounding a car park, we counted more than 16 species of plants and in a parkland area, we identified 25 species. We have many trees on the estate including Alder, whose catkins [provide an early source of pollen for bees](#).

We will target the areas we have identified as priority habitats in the BAP, meaning they are important for preserving biodiversity, such as hedgerows and ponds.

We plan to firstly maintain these habitats so that we do not lose any species and, where we can, look after these habitats in a way that improves their condition, making them better examples of these types of habitat. These management techniques include partially clearing vegetation from our pond and introducing tree and shrub planting in our woodland and parkland habitat. We will also time hedge cutting to avoid nesting season and allow leaves to gather below hedges to provide shelter for insects and hibernating hedgehogs.



Our species

Our second priority will be to ensure the species currently using our estate continue to be present in healthy numbers in years to come. We have focused on key species whose needs will not be met by the general habitat conservation plans.

We have two bee colonies at one of our sites. Bee populations are coming under pressure and numbers are decreasing rapidly, so we want to make sure that our population remains healthy by renewing the bee hives we currently have on site and introducing new hives where appropriate.

We also have six species of bats recorded on site, all of which are all legally protected. We plan to encourage these bats to continue using our site by providing bat boxes and identifying trees and buildings where they can roost. We will also work to minimise the light spill from our external lighting, ensuring there are dark corridors connecting their roosting areas.



Common lizards were found on one of our sites and although lizards are not rare, they are coming under increasing stress from development, so it is good to see a medium size population here. We will maintain the site and provide winter shelters to ensure these species continue to be present in healthy numbers.

The site is home to lots of different wild flowers. These include wood vetch and betony, the presence of which suggest that at one time the landscape looked very different. Our plans include taking action to preserve the area and adding signage to ensure the plants are not stepped on or disturbed.

Our community

Our final priority is to engage with our staff and the local community. When we are able to, we will give local schools an opportunity to use our green spaces to encourage children to learn more about the natural environment and how important it is to protect this amazing resource. We will raise awareness of wildlife gardening with our staff and create a sign-posted trail to raise awareness of the biodiversity on site. We plan to include local schools in a biodiversity day and we are creating an official biodiversity steering group to oversee the progress.



The sustainability team, with help from the official biodiversity steering group, will make sure these objectives are achieved. This group will be made up of staff from across DVLA including colleagues from Estates and the communications team who will help raise awareness with our staff and the wider community.

If you are interested in Biodiversity on the DVLA estate, you can find out more in [the Biodiversity Action Plan](#), and read more about our goals for a sustainable future in [the new Sustainability Report](#).

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[5/2020: Council Tax information letter – 8 December 2020](#)

A new statutory Breathing Space scheme, introducing the breathing space moratorium and mental health crisis moratorium, will commence on 4 May 2021. The scheme aims to help people in problem debt to better manage their finances, seek professional debt advice and reach sustainable solutions.

This letter reminds authorities of the upcoming scheme, what their new obligations will be, and outlines the next steps to ensure that they receive notifications from the Insolvency Service.