

# [UK welcomes Guatemala's commitment to the Global Ocean Alliance](#)

Guatemala officially stated its adherence to the Alliance on 17 September 2020, through a letter sent by its Minister of Environment, Mr. Mario Rojas.

The Alliance was originally launched by the UK at the UN General Assembly in 2019 to help drive urgent action to safeguard the global ocean and protect its precious wildlife. It strives for the '30by30 initiative', which is pushing for at least 30 per cent of the global ocean to be protected in Marine Protected Areas by 2030.

Guatemala has had a clear commitment to protecting the marine environment, by spurring various initiatives, from sea turtle conservation actions, to playing an active role at international negotiations on biodiversity.

UK International Marine Minister at the Department for Environment, Zac Goldsmith, said:

I congratulate and thank Guatemala for joining the Global Ocean Alliance. Our shared ocean is facing unprecedented pressures, and together we are making a powerful case for increased protection.

The United Kingdom also reaffirms its commitment to working with Guatemala to increase protect of its precious marine environment and wildlife.

Guatemala now joins 29 other countries in this initiative, they are: Belize, Belgium, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Ecuador, Finland, Fiji, Gabon, Germany, Honduras, Italy, Kenya, Luxembourg, Maldives, Monaco, Nigeria, Palau, Portugal, Seychelles, Senegal, St Kitts, Sweden, Spain, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Vanuatu.

[The Global Ocean Alliance](#) will push for the trebling of existing globally agreed targets so at least a third of the ocean is safeguarded in Marine Protected Areas over the next decade.

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# [Green social prescribing pilots open for applications](#)

A trailblazing scheme of £4.27m launches today (Monday 5th October) aimed at helping the mental wellbeing of communities hardest hit by coronavirus. The

project will examine how to scale-up green social prescribing services in England to help improve mental health outcomes, reduce health inequalities and alleviate demand on the health and social care system.

The fund, [announced in July by Environment Secretary, George Eustice](#), is now officially open for funding applications from potential delivery partners. Expressions of Interest to become a 'test and learn' site for this pioneering social prescribing project are welcome from partnerships of local health, care and environment leads.

Social prescribing connects people to community groups and agencies for practical and emotional support and to improve health and wellbeing. Evidence including from Natural England shows that [the NHS could save over £2 billion in treatment costs](#) if everyone in England had equal access to good quality green space.

Green prescribing could include support for walking and cycling groups, green gyms, and practical habitat management conservation tasks such as tree planting. For more vulnerable groups, it could include supported visits to local green space, activities such as gardening, and other outdoor activities to reduce isolation and loneliness.

Applications will need to:

- Be led by an Integrated Care System working with partner organisations, including organisations from the environment sector.
- Provide a clear explanation of how the project will help to address health inequalities and support coronavirus affected populations.
- Provide evidence of a whole system and partnership approach to project implementation.
- Demonstrate relevant experience and ability to deliver.

Four sites will be chosen from a range of locations across England which have been the hardest hit by coronavirus, focusing on areas with the greatest need and potential for impact, including to support recovery from coronavirus. The pilots will help establish what is required to scale up green social prescribing and the steps needed to increase patient referrals to environment and nature-based activities.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

We know that connecting with nature is good for us, and the pandemic has given us an even greater awareness of the link between our own health, and that of our environment.

I am delighted to open funding for these trailblazing projects which will test how we can increase use of green social prescribing services to improve the nation's mental health and reduce demand on our health system.

The projects will be jointly managed by Defra, Department of Health and

Social Care, Natural England, NHS England and NHS Improvement, Public Health England, and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure value for money and that a robust evidence base is being developed.

Chief Executive of Natural England, Marian Spain, said:

The evidence from Natural England's People and Nature survey shows beyond doubt that nature is good for our health. We have seen that demonstrated on a daily basis during the pandemic, with a resurgence in the use of urban parks, beaches and nature reserves and many people talking about the positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing. There is a compelling case, now more than ever, to provide more access to the outdoors for everybody as part of our health care system as the nation builds back greener from the pandemic.

But we have also seen the stark reality of the inequalities in access to nature. So, I'm absolutely delighted that Natural England will be supporting these projects to help more people – especially those we know are least able to connect with nature – to benefit through social prescribing to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Health Minister, Jo Churchill, said:

The new green social prescribing pilots will help people improve their overall wellbeing through activities like walking and gardening, while having a far-reaching positive impact on their mental and physical health, reducing loneliness and enhancing employability.

We know we need to think innovatively when tackling health inequalities to ensure everyone can really make the most of life.

I would strongly encourage those who want to make the most of nature and our natural capital and to advance the health and wellbeing of their local communities to apply.

James Sanderson, NHS England director of personalised care, said:

We know how important it is to our mental health and wellbeing to get outside into parks, gardens and the countryside, and for patients we know that sometimes non-medical care can be effective and less disruptive.

Social prescribing connects people to all sorts of community based activities, depending on what matters to them, including activities in green spaces, so it is exciting to see this project roll out so

that we can explore how green social prescribing can be scaled up in a way that will benefit even more people.

Aimee Stimpson, National Lead for Healthy Places, Public Health England:

Public Health England is delighted to be involved in this cross-government project, one of the first to be confirmed as part of the Shared Outcomes Fund.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made many more of us aware of how much we value and rely on outdoor spaces to support our health and wellbeing.

There is a huge opportunity for green social prescribing to help people maintain a healthy weight, boost mental health and reduce health inequalities.

After an assessment of the funding applications, the four successful pilot sites will be announced early 2021 and will run for over two years.

Today's announcement builds on the government's commitment to transforming mental health services and increasing social prescribing, set out in the [NHS Long Term Plan](#) and supported through the work of the National Academy of Social Prescribing.

Earlier this year, [DHSC awarded £5 million in funding to The National Academy for Social Prescribing \(NASP\)](#) to support people to stay connected and maintain their health and wellbeing following the coronavirus pandemic.

The [government's 25 year environment plan](#) sets out an ambition to help more people, from all backgrounds, to engage with and spend time in green and blue spaces in their everyday lives, and the [government's forthcoming Environment Bill](#) will put the environment at the centre of policy making to ensure that we have a cleaner, greener and more resilient country for the next generation.

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## [Ministerial Commission of Work for the Animals in Science Committee: 2020 to 2021](#)

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## Coronavirus update on testing and treatments

Mr Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement on coronavirus.

The virus is spreading, both here and overseas. In the last week, over 450,000 people tested positive for coronavirus in Europe, almost double the number of cases a month ago. And here in the UK, the number of hospital admissions is now the highest it has been since mid June.

Last week, the ONS said that while the rate of increase may be falling, the number of cases is still rising. Yesterday, there were 12,594 new positive cases. The rise is more localised than first time round, with cases rising particularly sharply in the North East and North West of England, and parts of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Now, more than ever, with winter ahead, we all must remain vigilant, and get this virus under control.

Mr Speaker, I now want to turn to the operational issues in data publication, and the future plans for medicine licensing, and of course the announcement of 40 hospitals made by the Prime Minister on Friday night.

### **Testing**

Mr Speaker, I want to take the first available opportunity to set out to the House the technical issue around case uploads, discovered by Public Health England on Friday night. This is an ongoing incident, and I come to the House straight from an operational update from my officials.

On Friday night, Public Health England identified that over the previous 8 days, 15,841 positive test results were not included in the reported daily cases. This was due to a failure in the automated transfer of files from the labs, to PHE's data systems.

I want to reassure everyone that every single person who tested positive was told that result in the normal way, in the normal time frame. They were told that they needed to self-isolate, which is of course now required by law.

However, these positive test results were not reported in the public data, and were not transferred to the contact tracing system. I want to thank colleagues who have been working since late Friday night, through the weekend, to resolve this problem. And I want to set out the steps that we have taken.

First, contact tracing of these cases began first thing Saturday.

We brought in 6,500 hours of extra contact tracing over the weekend, and I can report to the House that as of 9am, 51 per cent of the cases have now been contacted a second time for contact tracing purposes.

I want to reassure the House that outbreak control in care homes, schools, and hospitals has not been directly affected. Because dealing with outbreaks in these settings does not primarily rely on this particular PHE system.

Second, the number of cases did not flow through to the dashboards that we use for internal and external reasons to monitor the epidemic. Over the weekend, we updated the public dashboard. This morning, the JBC presented to me their updated analysis of the epidemic, based on the new figures.

The Chief Medical Officer has analysed that our assessment of the disease, and its impact, has not substantially changed, as a result of these data.

And the JBC has confirmed that this has not impacted the basis on which decisions about local action were taken last week. Nevertheless, this is a serious issue which is being investigated fully.

I'd like to thank Public Health England and NHS Test & Trace who have worked together, at speed, to resolve this issue and I want to thank everyone for their hard work over the weekend.

Mr Speaker, this incident should never have happened but the team have acted swiftly to minimise its impact. And now it is critical that we work together to put this right, and to make sure it never happens again.

## **Treatments**

Mr Speaker, another important area of our coronavirus battle plan is treatments.

As the House knows, the only treatment known to work against coronavirus was discovered here in the UK. And as we leave the EU, I want to use the opportunity to improve how quickly we get new drugs to patients here.

The UK is joining with Canada, the United States, Australia, Switzerland and Singapore, in Project Orbis, which will allow international regulators to work together to review and approve the next generation of cancer treatments faster.

This means pharmaceutical companies can submit treatments to be reviewed by several countries at the same time so we can co-operate with the best medical regulators in the world. And make approvals quicker so we can get patients the fastest possible access to new drugs.

This is an exciting development, and we will join this scheme fully on 1 January 2021 after the end of the transition period.

Because we will stop at nothing to bring faster access to live-saving

treatments on the NHS.

## **New hospitals**

Mr Speaker, we are investing in our hospitals too.

And 2 weeks ago I announced to the House that we are investing an extra £150 million to expand capacity in urgent and emergency care so hospitals have the space to continue treating patients safely in the pandemic.

On Friday, I am delighted that my Right Honourable friend the Prime Minister set out the 40 hospitals that will be built by 2030, as part of a package worth £3.7 billion. With 8 further new schemes invited to bid for future funding, also to be built by 2030, including mental health facilities.

This is the biggest hospital building programme in a generation.

And this investment comes on top of the record extra £33.9 billion a year that the government will be providing to the NHS by 2023 to 2024 that we passed into law right at the start of this Parliament.

Mr Speaker, these 40 new hospitals across England will support our mission to level up our NHS.

So even more people have top-class healthcare services in their local area.

And so we can protect the NHS long into the future.

## **Local action**

Finally Mr Speaker, it is critical that our rules are clear on a local level, so that the public can be certain of what they need to do to suppress this virus.

And I will update the House in due course on what action the government is taking so we can have a more consistent approaches to levels of local action, working with our colleagues in local government.

For now, it is essential that people follow the guidance in their local area and if they need to check the rules, that they check their local authority website.

## **Conclusion**

Mr Speaker, history shows us that the battle against a pandemic is never quick and it is never easy.

It requires making major sacrifices and difficult choices. And I know that this has been a tough year for so many, and that we are asking people to persevere, as winter draws in.

Because the only safe path is to suppress the virus, protecting the economy,

education and the NHS, until a vaccine can make us safe.

And I commend this statement to the House.

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## Foreign Secretary's speech to United Nations General Assembly 2020

Mr. President, Excellencies,

The Beijing Declaration was a watershed moment, uniting countries to advance gender equality and further the empowerment of women and girls.

25 years on, we have made great strides. So at the start of 2020, more girls were in school than ever before. Fewer were dying during pregnancy and childbirth.

But COVID-19 has halted that progress.

We've seen a global surge in gender-based violence.

On top of that, an estimated 20 million adolescent girls who may not return to school, which in turn increases the risk of harm, including from things like female genital mutilation and child marriage.

We can't build back better without focusing on gender equality and without the empowerment of women and girls.

So the UK is working with our international partners to ensure gender equality is a central element of the COVID-19 recovery. We will continue to champion 12 years of quality education for every girl in the world.

And as co-leaders of the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence, we will tackle the root causes of violence, including using education to stop violence before it starts.

We will continue our work on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, supporting survivors and holding the perpetrators accountable.

Next we will champion women's rights, so at the most basic level, women can decide for themselves when to have children, and how many to have.

Next year, through our Presidency of COP26, we will be promoting a clean, inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19.

And we want to give a voice to the most affected by climate change, including women and girls.



Global Britain is proud to be a force for good in the world, holding up democracy and human rights as our guiding lights.

We must use this moment as a catalyst for change, so that all women and girls have equal rights, so that they can fulfil their potential.

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