

Wildlife protection plan to unlock Hampshire housebuilding

Defra has today (11 September) announced £3.9 million to unlock housing growth in south Hampshire in a scheme that will reduce harmful nitrates and aid wildlife recovery.

Housing growth has stalled in the Solent area for over a year due to concerns that nitrates were causing a range of negative environmental effects. These include excessive growth of green algae which smothers and damages rare habitats and wildlife, including the Solent's internationally protected estuaries, salt marshes and seagrass beds, as well as protected birds including curlews.

The government will invest £3.9 million in the first-of-its-kind project to set up an online 'nitrate trading' auction platform. Through this, housing developers will buy credits to create new habitats such as meadows, woodlands and wetlands – which will prevent harmful levels of nitrates from new housing from reaching the Solent's rare wildlife and habitats. This will also provide more outside spaces as part of government ambitions for a green, nature-based recovery from coronavirus.

Alongside this, a new nature reserve at Warblington Farm – a site covering 60 hectares of new woodlands and wetlands – opened this week, which will be funded through the credits which housing developers purchase. The new farm will help remove nitrates and in turn reduce pollution impacts on the Solent.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

I am thrilled to announce this funding which uses nature-based solutions to alleviate the housing pressure in the local area. Not only will this innovative scheme unlock thousands of much-needed homes for the local area, but it will provide habitat rich areas for wildlife in a true win-win.

As the nation recovers from coronavirus, it's more vital than ever that we build back greener, and this project will also help people connect with nature by providing more green spaces for them to enjoy.

Natural England played a key role in providing expert advice for the innovative scheme, including helping to select suitable sites to create new areas for habitat creation.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper added:

This is a beautiful part of Hampshire, rich with wetlands, coastal

inlets and shingle beaches, and it's no wonder that more people wish to live in the area, creating demand for new homes. More people does, however, mean more nitrogen getting into the environment, and this is causing the growth of green algae 'mats' in the Solent, affecting protected habitats and wildlife along the south coast.

This innovative new scheme that Natural England has helped design will not only help nature's recovery in the area, but also address the historic demand for new housing around the Solent.

It is but one example of how it is possible to find solutions to apparently intractable challenges, and to fund them, meaning that we can build more homes while at the same time protect and enhance the rich and varied wildlife of this unique area. It also reveals how it is possible to harness regulation in a positive way, to create incentives for the recovery of the local natural environment, in turn benefiting people living in the area.

The nitrate trading platform pilot will be rolled out over the next two years and delivered jointly with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government; Natural England; and the Environment Agency.

Housing Minister Christopher Pincher said:

Building the homes the country needs is central to the mission of this government and is an important part of our plans to recover from the impact of the coronavirus.

This innovative project will deliver new homes while protecting and enhancing our natural environment for today, and for future generations.

Defra is also currently in discussions with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust about a potential loan to purchase further land for the scheme.

Debbie Tann, CEO of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, said:

Nitrate pollution in the Solent wreaks havoc with our vital marine ecosystems, suffocating the life out of our seas. This is a really critical issue and, until recently, every new house built simply added to the pressure.

Now, thanks to Natural England and Defra, we are taking important steps towards addressing this problem – ensuring that houses can only be built if the nitrate impact is properly addressed. We are delighted that government is supporting our nature-based solution and this funding will enable us to create wonderful new nature

reserves for wildlife at the same time as helping to clean up our environment.

If the pilot is successful, it could be extended and rolled out to a number of other areas, providing a vital wider application to other parts of England. This will also inform the government's wider work on market-based solutions to environmental issues – such as carbon offsetting, biodiversity net gain, water quality and flood risk management.

The announcement builds on the [Environment Secretary's recent speech](#) where he set out a £5m pilot to establish a new Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment. This will improve the baseline understanding of habitats and species abundance across the country in every planning authority, in order to make the best decisions towards achieving the government's vision to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. This will better protect species and habitats and ensure that new developments really do mean net gain for people and for nature.

Today's move also builds on the [government's landmark Environment Bill](#) which will tackle the biggest environmental priorities of our time, including introducing biodiversity net gain, which will ensure that the new houses we build are delivered in a way which protects and enhances nature.

[£300 million to boost UK manufacturing productivity by 30%](#)

- Companies from Solihull to Flintshire receive £300 million government and industry funding boost
- projects to develop digital robots to weld metal parts and augmented reality headsets to help engineers make repairs to equipment set to benefit
- investment will give a crucial lift to aerospace, automotive, pharmaceuticals and food & beverage sectors as the UK builds back better from the pandemic

Businesses with creative ideas to boost the UK's manufacturing capabilities, including using robotics, AI and augmented reality, are set to receive £300m of joint government and industry funding, Business Secretary Alok Sharma confirmed at London Tech Week today (11 September 2020).

Through the Manufacturing Made Smarter Challenge, the government will invest £147 million – backed by further funding from industry – to support businesses implement new tech to boost their manufacturing productivity, helping them reach new customers, create thousands of new highly skilled

jobs, slash carbon emissions and reduce prices for consumers.

The first £50 million of the funding is being allocated to fourteen cutting-edge manufacturing projects involving around 30 small or medium businesses, 29 larger enterprises and nine universities, with the rest of the funds due over the next 5 years.

A company behind one winning project – the Digital Designer Robot – aims to offer machine-to-person ‘digital assistance.’ When a business needs a bespoke product, it will be able to use a digital robot to help design it and upload the design quickly onto a supplier’s website – so the product can then be sampled, prototyped and manufactured by the supplier.

The virtual assistant would also offer expert advice and guidance, by ‘conversing’ with businesses to ask questions, listen to feedback, and provide suggestions. This could reduce the time it takes to manufacture products, as well as cut costs and waste thanks to a more precise design process.

Another is developing super lightweight, aluminium bikes for children using robots, whilst another is pioneering the use of AI to help businesses design new products.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Increasing productivity is vital for any business, and having the right new technologies in place can help manufacturers make better products to compete and thrive.

By helping manufacturers to reduce costs, cut waste, and slash the time it takes to develop their products, this multi-million pound uplift will help fire up the cylinders of productivity as we build back better from the pandemic.

Other winning projects include:

- WeldZero (West Midlands): This project will explore the use of robots, sensors and automation to improve accuracy when welding metal parts on production line. The machines will also collect and feedback valuable data to help improve the manufacturing process, leading to stronger and higher-quality parts, as well as quicker production, in industries including automotive and construction.
- Smart Connected Shop Floor – real-time data integration with multi-sector applicability (Bristol): GKN Aerospace is leading a cross-sector team trialling digital technologies, including augmented reality headsets for engineers, so manufacturing businesses can guide them through repairs. The project will also use ‘smart’ devices to exchange information between old and modern computer systems.
- The Digital Sandwich – Digitised Food Supply Chain (Chelmsford): Raynor Foods Ltd, a leading UK sandwich supplier who helped supply the NHS during the coronavirus pandemic, is creating a major piece of software

where food and drinks businesses can connect online to share valuable data. This information exchange will increase productivity, improve cashflow, help boost food quality and reduce waste within in the supply chain. The platform includes small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), who don't usually have access to this kind of technology and will benefit sectors including pharmaceutical, aerospace and automotive.

- Dialog (Wales): This project, led by Atlas Copco IAS UK Limited, brings together affordable, automatic and human-interacting robots to help machines make quicker and better decisions, making production more efficient.

Today's funding was announced at London Tech Week – an annual event celebrating innovation, talent and development of the tech sector.

The Manufacturing Made Smarter programme will also support technology SMEs through growth accelerators – partnerships between the government and the private sector where experts will work with businesses to identify barriers to growth and ways to overcome them. It will also create a national network of innovation 'hubs' where businesses can partner or share advice, to help spur growth and creative ideas.

This announcement follows the opening of a competition in July under [Manufacturing Made Smarter: Digital Supply Chain](#), where firms of all sizes can apply for up to 70% of the funding they need for industrial research projects.

The government has committed to raising productivity and earning power in the UK by spending 2.4% of GDP on R&D across the UK economy by 2027.

Further quotes

Rich Ingram, Director of funding recipient Account Management Online Ltd, said:

Moving beyond ready-made products available from online stores, AMO's Digital Designer Robot provides the opportunity to define made-to-order products and get a price in real time including bought in tooling, sub-assemblies and parts.

We are excited how this capability delivers benefits in many industries where design requirements are unique, bringing faster, more available and resilient sales resource to customers to help them buy. Automation cutting costs and creating competitive advantage by immediate service response.

Discontinuous innovation generates high rewards for taking high risks: we are proud to be working in partnership with Government helping us manage risks and supporting our R&D in this ground-breaking area to help us turn our ambitious ideas into real world solutions for selling to the benefit of UK PLC.

Chris Courtney, challenge director for Made Smarter at UK Research and Innovation, said:

Digital technologies have the power to radically transform how we manufacture and deliver the products and services of today and the future and I am delighted that we have managed to secure the funding for this vital programme. Our ambition is to support the UK to become a leader in the manufacturing industry and the development of the next generation of technology solutions that will shape how the world works.

The current COVID challenges all sectors are facing only underline the vital importance of manufacturing in the UK across all sectors. There are enormous opportunities to innovate in this area, we have world leading industries, a powerful scientific and research community, a vibrant technology sector and I'm excited to see how this powerful coalition transforms the future of manufacturing.

Hamid Mughal, MMS Industrial Advisory Group chair said:

We have tremendous manufacturing capability in the UK and recent events have reinforced the importance of strengthening this sector for national resilience and economic growth. Rapid advances in Digital and disruptive Manufacturing technologies provide us with the perfect opportunity to shape this outcome.

By harnessing the potential of this technology, we will be able to make a transformational improvement in productivity, sustainability and global competitiveness and create new products and services that forge modern digital enterprises. This programme is a key step forward as it will help UK Manufacturing companies to jointly address this challenge and develop cost-effective digital solutions for deployment in our Manufacturing Sector.

Notes to editors

The Manufacturing Made Smarter Round 1 Competition

The Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) Manufacturing Made Smarter Round 1 Competition offers grant funding investment in projects that focus on the use of industrial digital technologies (IDTs) to transform the productivity and agility of UK manufacturing.

In total 34 applications were submitted, totalling approximately £100 million of total project spend. Following independent assessment and an expert review, 14 projects have progressed to start comprising £50.5 million of total project costs including £20.1 million total grant.

Confirmed competition winners

[Get more information about competition winners.](#)

About the Manufacturing Made Smarter Round 2 Competition

The ISCF Manufacturing Made Smarter: Digital Supply Chain competition offers funding for business-led consortia carrying out projects costing up to £3 million to support the research and development of innovative digital technologies, and work with technology developers and manufacturers to rethink and restructure the way they design and operate manufacturing supply chains.

Application for feasibility studies

Find out more and [apply for funding towards feasibility studies into digital technologies to transform supply chains in UK manufacturing.](#)

Application for industrial research

Find out more and [apply for funding towards an industrial research project in digital technologies to transform supply chains in UK manufacturing.](#)

Addressing the use of chemical weapons in Syria

Thank you very much, Mr President, and I want to thank Undersecretary-General Nakamitsu again for another of her briefings.

Mr President, in August 2013, when hundreds of people were killed in a UN-verified Sarin attack on Ghouta, the use of chemical weapons in Syria was regrettably added to the list of violations in an already brutal war. Following that Ghouta attack, this Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2118. In that resolution, we – all of us – condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We endorsed the procedures for destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme. We decided that Syria should not produce or use chemical weapons ever again. We decided that they should comply fully with the OPCW and the United Nations. And we noted Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Now, Mr President, some Council members would have you believe that this was the end of it, that Syria's chemical weapons programme was entirely destroyed, that the Syrian regime never used or produced them again, and that any use was by non-state actors or that attacks were staged. They maintained that Syria has and continues to comply fully with the OPCW.

Mr President, however inconvenient they may find the truth, unfortunately

their interpretation is not borne out by the facts. Independent United Nations and OPCW fact-finding missions have concluded that chemical weapons have been used in Syria on over 40 occasions since 2014, including the Sarin attack on Khan Sheikhoun on the 4th of April 2017, which killed hundreds, and the chlorine attack on Douma on the 7th of April 2018, which killed dozens of people. These technical missions comprise different experts from many countries who, over many years, all independently came to the same conclusion.

Now, Mr President, it remains impossible, over seven years after Resolution 2118 and following 83 monthly reports from the Director General of the OPCW, for this Council to verify the complete destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme. As we've been told again by the High Representative today, due to the unresolved gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria's declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention, that declaration cannot be considered accurate and complete.

The outstanding issues are significant, and they go to the heart of Syria's compliance – or rather, non-compliance – with the convention for the following reasons:

Since 2014, the number of chemical agents identified by the Declaration and Assessment Team as having been in Syria's possession has more than doubled when compared to their initial declaration. The fate of more than 400 tonnes of chemicals and thousands of ammunitions is unclear. This includes the whereabouts of 5.2 Tons of DF, which is a key component of Sarin, and 2000 aerial bombs, a delivery system for chemical weapons, including the sarin used in the Khan Sheikhoun incident in 2017.

Since their initial declaration in 2013, the Syrian authorities have themselves admitted to having produced chemical weapons not in the original declaration. That includes Ricin, which the Syrian authorities admitted in 2014. And then Soman, which the regime admitted to in 2016, along with what they call 'R&D activities' on Nitrogen Mustard, which they admitted in 2019. Other so far undeclared chemical agents or their precursors or degradation products have been also detected and identified by the OPCW.

Furthermore, the fact that the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism and now the OPCW's Investigation and an Identification Team (IIT) have found the Syrian authorities responsible for using chemical weapons on no fewer than seven occasions is inconsistent with claims that Syria has no chemical weapons capability. And it's notable that the first IIT report confirms that Syrian-made aerial bombs of the type unaccounted for in the declaration were used as a delivery system for the attacks in Ltamenah in March 2017.

So after six years of outstanding compliance issues and further confirmation of the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons, we welcome the robust, proportionate and reasonable action taken by the OPCW Executive Council in its decision of 9 July. The Executive Council accepted the findings of the IIT report, provided a deadline for Syria to comply finally with its obligations and recommended the Conference of State Parties should take actions that Syria failed to comply.

And just as the OPCW Executive Council has a role in upholding compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and its own decisions, so the Security Council, this Council, has a clear and distinct obligation to address the repeated breaches of UNSCR 2118. These breaches include: the use of chemical weapons, as identified by both the JIM and the IIT; the retention and production of chemical weapons to carry out attacks; and the lack of full compliance with the OPCW. We should do as we decided in Resolution 2118 and take action in response to noncompliance and the threat to international peace and security. Not to do so would be a dereliction of his Council's duty.

Mr President, this Council should be able to act in unity on the basis of the findings by two independent bodies, which have identified the perpetrators of these chemical weapons attacks. And so it's a matter of great regret that some Council members have sought to politicise what should be a nonpartisan issue and have attempted to undermine and block investigations into chemical weapons use in Syria and their perpetrators. They have spread conspiracy theories and disinformation designed to block, undermine and call into question the integrity and reports of the Joint Investigative Mechanism and the IIT.

This disinformation we've seen in action today in the form of lengthy, somewhat random assertions about various incidents, which it is claimed undermine the many independent expert teams that have carried out their work. Mud is thrown everywhere in the hope that some will stick somewhere. An anecdotal approach is taken rather than the evidence-based approach, which is taken, in contrast, by the teams carrying out the investigations, which includes the consistency and corroboration of evidence and information obtained from the Fact-Finding Mission, coupled with information obtained through interviews, analyses of samples, reviews of laboratory results and analyses of munition remnants, reports and advice from experts, specialists and forensic institutes, all of which allowed the conclusion to be drawn that units of the Syrian Arab Air Force were responsible for attacks.

By contrast, some Council members would have you put aside the evidence-based approach of independent investigators in favor of what Russian and Syrian military police, engaged in a bloody battle against the Syrian people, say they've discovered.

Mr President, when the Council sought to take action on the basis of the findings of the JIM in 2016, Russia used its veto to block it. When the JIM found the Syrian regime was responsible for the chemical attack in Khan Sheikhoun, they used their veto to stop the JIM's work. When the OPCW Conference of States Parties established its own identification team, they refused to recognise it and have sought since to impugn its cross-regional representation. As many have said today, it's vital for upholding the international nonproliferation regime that organisations such as the OPCW and the United Nations are able to act without interference and without politicisation of their work.

Mr President, I don't want to dwell on these issues of division. I believe that the majority of this Council accept the findings of the United Nations

and the OPCW and are strong supporters of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, its staff and its integrity. And we hope that when the time comes, members of this Council will act on the evidence and on their conscience.

Mr President, others have mentioned the issue of Mr Alexey Navalny. We are gravely concerned by the poisoning of Mr Navalny by Novichok, a banned chemical weapon. A similar nerve agent, you will recall, was previously used with lethal effect in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has full confidence in Germany's findings, and we stand united with them.

The use of a banned chemical weapon is absolutely unacceptable. As this Council reaffirmed last November in a presidential statement, any use of chemical weapons anywhere at any time by anyone under any circumstance is unacceptable and a threat to international peace and security. The Russian Federation should urgently conduct a full and transparent investigation into this use of a banned chemical weapon and should uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention. We cannot allow this behaviour to become normalized.

It's difficult not to conclude, Mr President, that Russia's attacks on the international architecture to prevent the use of chemical weapons are not only designed to protect its Syrian clients, but to protect itself.

That, Mr President, is a sad state of affairs. It is also a very dangerous state of affairs for all of us.

Thank you, Mr President.

Right of Reply by Sonia Farrey, UK Political Counsellor at the UN, at the Security Council briefing on Syria

It would take too long to address all the familiar allegations and inaccuracies, but I do want to respond to the point raised on the White Helmets.

The UK is proud of its support to the White Helmets and their life-saving search and rescue activities in Syria, alongside other donors. The organisation is estimated to have saved over 115,000 lives and provided essential services to more than four million Syrians.

Allegations linking the White Helmets to terrorist groups are baseless and are part of a concerted disinformation campaign by the Syrian regime and Russia seeking to undermine the White Helmets' valuable work.

[Meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement](#)

Joint Committee on 10 September

The Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee met today at Lancaster House, London. The meeting was chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Michael Gove, and the European Commission Vice President, Maroš Šefčovič, alongside the co-chairs of the Committee, the Paymaster General, Penny Mordaunt, and Michel Barnier. Representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive and the EU 27 Member States also joined by videolink.

This meeting was an opportunity for both parties to set out their positions. Vice President Šefčovič detailed the European Union's concerns, and requested that the UK withdraw the UK Internal Market Bill. The UK Government made clear that the legislative timetable for the Bill would continue as planned.

The UK Government reiterated its commitment to implementing the Withdrawal Agreement, including the Northern Ireland Protocol. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster updated the Committee on the significant steps already taken to implement the protocol, with investment to support Northern Ireland businesses and new IT systems. The UK Government also stressed its obligations to the citizens of Northern Ireland, its determination to uphold the constitutional status of Northern Ireland within the UK, and its responsibility to provide good governance for the whole United Kingdom. As co-guarantor, along with Ireland, of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the Government's commitment to that agreement remains absolute.

The Protocol makes clear that Northern Ireland is fully part of the customs territory of the United Kingdom and that there will be unfettered access for goods moving from Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom. It is essential that, in the implementation of the Protocol, nothing undermines those fundamental principles.

Accordingly, the measures set out in the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill are designed to create a 'safety net' that ensures ministers can always deliver on their obligations and take steps to best ensure the prosperity and protect the enormous progress the people of Northern Ireland have made in recent decades.

The UK Government underlined its determination to continue to engage in Joint Committee discussions constructively, with the aim of finding a satisfactory outcome for both sides.

Ensuring 12 years of quality education

for children around the world

Thank you Mr President, and first I would like to thank Niger for organising this debate to discuss such an important issue and mark the first ever International Day to Protect Education from Attack yesterday.

Thank you also to SRS Gamba, Executive Director Fore and Dr Tsolakis for their contributions to this discussion. We extend our sincerest gratitude to Rimana for sharing her personal experiences and efforts to promote girls' education. Your testimony attests to the importance of children's participation in discussions concerning peace and security issues that concern them. And we very much hope that we still have the opportunity to hear from Hadiza and we very much support your work to promote education.

Education is a human right that plays a vital role in building stable communities founded on mutual respect, greater understanding and equal opportunity. And yet, increasing numbers of attacks against educational facilities gravely undermine this right. We are deeply concerned by the global increase in attacks and threats of attack on educational facilities, including in Burkina Faso and Mali. We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to include Burkina Faso and Cameroon in next year's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict. We call on all parties to conflict to respect and protect access to basic human rights, including quality education, and put in place measures to end and prevent attacks on educational facilities.

We know attacks on educational facilities disproportionately impact girls and are often intended to impede girls' access to education. This is particularly troubling as ensuring access to quality education for women and girls at all levels, and including in situations of armed conflict, is key to eliminating gender inequality and discrimination. Girls already face significant challenges in the Sahel region and globally, including high levels of child marriage and sexual violence and harassment and attacks and threats of attack make them even more vulnerable to violations. Mass school closures globally because of the Covid-19 pandemic have also exacerbated these challenges, particularly for girls, whose access to education is even lower in crises.

This is why the United Kingdom calls for 12 years of quality education for all girls by 2030. The United Kingdom is harnessing the full breadth of our efforts – diplomatic, humanitarian, development and military – to protect education from attack. We are providing \$117 million to Education Cannot Wait, the global fund for education in emergencies, \$6.5 million of which we announced this year as an additional uplift to support Covid-19 specific emergency education in fragile contexts. Our commitment includes up to \$39 million specifically earmarked to the Sahel and neighbouring countries, helping up to 100,000 children – 50 percent of whom are girls – receive the quality education they deserve.

The United Kingdom has also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and accompanying Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities for Military Use. These instruments recognise the power of safe, inclusive, quality

education from childhood to adulthood to establish routine and purpose in chaos, supporting post-conflict reconstruction, reintegration and peace.

More than 100 Member States have recognised this and endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration as a key tool for protecting education in conflict. I would like to join others in congratulating St Vincent and the Grenadines for endorsing yesterday.

We know some Member States are concerned that the Declaration and Guidelines are inconsistent with or go beyond existing law. We conducted a full review and concluded that the Guidelines complement existing international humanitarian and human rights law, reflecting the best operational practice that the UK already follows and facilitates compliance by providing clear, flexible and practical guidance.

We applaud the tremendous efforts of Niger and Belgium to ensure reference in the Declaration is included in the presidential statement adopted today in spite of opposition, we strongly urge Member States who have not done so already to endorse the Declaration and commit to avoiding military use of educational facilities. We offer our full support and assistance to those who take these critical steps.

Finally, armed forces are essential to protecting students, teachers and educational facilities in conflict zones. The United Kingdom Armed Forces is one of the first in the world to have a dedicated policy on human security, integrating into military planning and operations the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. We strongly urge Member States to integrate guidance on military use of educational facilities into military planning and operations.

Protecting education from attack is a strong investment in our collective global future. It's time we take it seriously.

Thank you, Mr President.