

Second round of Urban Tree Challenge Fund opens today

The Forestry Commission today (Monday 30 March) opens round two of the [Urban Tree Challenge Fund](#), which is for community and volunteer groups, town councils and individuals to apply for a share of the £10million pot to increase tree numbers in urban areas through small scale planting projects.

Launched in May 2019, the Urban Tree Challenge Fund aims to support the planting of more than 130,000 trees across England's towns and cities.

This announcement of round two opening follows the success of [round one](#), which saw thirteen large scale projects from local authorities and large organisations awarded grants to plant more than 50,000 trees in urban areas.

Planting more trees improves health and wellbeing, connects people with the outdoors, absorbs noise, reduces flood risk, cools temperatures through shading, and creates green spaces to help communities come together.

Successful applicants of round two will not start planting trees until the next planting season (winter 2020/21).

Forestry Minister Lord Goldsmith, said:

Our immediate priority is rightly our response to the challenges posed by the coronavirus. But, although these are unprecedented times, we want to continue to uphold the nation's commitment to the environment.

We have made sure that the applications for round two of the Urban Challenge Tree Fund can be completed online so individuals are not putting themselves at risk, and I encourage anyone thinking of applying to do so in a safe way, using digital platforms to plan their application with colleagues if necessary.

Our manifesto sets our ambition to have every new street lined with trees – and I am dedicated to working closely with the Forestry Commission to help make this vision a reality.

The scheme is being administered by the Forestry Commission, with applications for single planting projects of between 150 and 5,000 small trees invited. Applications that contain 500 or more trees are especially encouraged. Grants will fund the planting of trees and the first three years of their care to ensure they can flourish into the future.

The grant will be delivered as a challenge fund, and therefore requires 50% match funding from those who apply, through either money or labour.

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley, said:

The value of trees in urban areas cannot be underestimated. They provide homes for birds and other wildlife, offer shade and natural cooling effects, help to reduce flood risk, and provide huge benefits for our health and wellbeing.

I've already visited several successful projects from round one, from the Mersey Forest to Manchester City of Trees, and have seen first-hand the great work that has been achieved so far through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund. The reopening of the fund will build on the success of round one, and will add to the 50,000 urban trees already awarded.

Community tree planting is a great passion of mine, and I greatly encourage local volunteer groups and individuals to apply.

The scheme will support projects which can provide the greatest environmental and social benefits, and applications will be processed by the Forestry Commission. A map will be available to check eligibility before applying.

Councillor Rob Anderson, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport and Environmental Services, Slough Borough Council, is one of the successful bidders from the first round, and said:

The Urban Tree Challenge Fund is a fantastic opportunity for Slough. Having already planted Oak, Rowan, Lime, Pine and Spruce we are eagerly awaiting the time when the plant material reaches a level of maturity so we can all enjoy the new plantations.

The new planting will mean improvements relating to air quality, greater natural flood management, temperature reduction for high density urban areas and increased carbon capture.

Earlier this month, Defra and the Forestry Commission welcomed the new £640million Nature for Climate announcement from HM Treasury which will help to deliver against the manifesto commitments to increase tree planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by 2025, alongside peatland restoration and nature recovery.

The government is committed to growing woodland cover, and this spring will consult on a new English Tree Strategy looking at policies to expand, support and increase engagement with our woodlands.

Notes to editors

- We are continuing to open this fund on 30 March 2020 and currently will close applications on 31 May, but we will keep this under review.
- All application forms are available online and will need to be discussed by

your group virtually in line with [latest government guidance](#).

- The successful applicants of round two will not be expected to plant their trees until the next tree planting season (winter 2020/21).
- In round 2 of the fund, an application can contain up to three planting sites. Planting sites cannot exceed half a hectare and must contain a minimum of 150 and a maximum of 5,000 small trees per site. An applicant can submit up to a total of five applications.

[A trial using nature to help reduce flood risk hailed a success](#)

A trial to help test how nature based solutions such as creating wetlands can be used to help reduce the risk of flooding has been successfully completed at Marlfield Farm, in Earby.

This is one of a series of pilot projects which are part of Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme using natural flood management (NFM) techniques to help protect the people of Leeds and those living near the River Aire from the risk of flooding.

Evidence from these projects is being gathered to fully understand the benefits of NFM and develop how best to work with landowners, tenants and key partners in the future.

A team from the Environment Agency has been working with the River Stewardship Company and landowners at Marlfield Farm, which is on the border of Yorkshire and Lancashire, since last September to slow the flow of rainwater and provide better habitat for local wildlife. Works have included wetland creation, hedge and tree planting, leaky barrier installation and fencing off corners of fields from grazing so that more vegetation can grow which helps to store and slow the flow of water across land.

The Earby project will be the first of many NFM schemes in the area. The Yorkshire Dales National Park recently organised a tour of the site for farmers who were interested in installing NFM measures on their own land so they could see the works in action and learn from the project. A video to show the success of the NFM measures during Storm Ciara in February has been produced by the owners Marlfield Farm which can be viewed below

[Natural flood management at work at Marlfield Farm, Earby](#)

Any landowners interested in using natural flood management techniques on their land can contact the NFM project team by emailing:

LeedsFAS.nfm@environment-agency.gov.uk

Jenny Barlow, flood risk adviser with the Environment Agency, said a time-

lapse camera had been fitted on the farm to help show the difference that the project is making. It recorded the impact that these measures made to slow the flow locally during storm Ciara and Dennis.

She said:

We are very grateful to the landowners for working with us to trial these NFM techniques on their land and delighted as the initial results at Marlfield Farm are positive. This project will contribute to local flood risk reduction and provide wider environmental benefits, slowing the flow of water locally and to downstream communities including Leeds.

Earby has a history of flooding and although these natural techniques will not prevent this from ever happening again, we hope that our success at Earby will be a catalyst for more landowners to come forward and work with us to install more of these measures. These will have a cumulative benefit and should help the landscape to hold more water during flood events.

Natural Flood Management also offers huge potential for climate mitigation, for example, creating wetlands, restoring our uplands and planting trees can help to capture tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere.

Mr Daniel Procter, together with his wife Heather and parents Howard and Lynda, own Marlfield Farm. Daniel said:

We are pleased to support the trial of NFM techniques on our farm having witnessed first-hand how quickly the river reacts to flash flooding.

The features have already been tested and have responded well to recent flooding events, in particular to Storm Ciara.

We are also excited about the added environmental benefits of these measures. We keep rare breed sheep and are keen to strike a balance between farming and conservation. The creation of new ponds, wetland habitats and hedgerows will complement our existing efforts to boost the biodiversity on our farm and in the local area.

Adam Rollitt, Chief Executive of the River Stewardship Company who are

carrying out the works on behalf of the Environment Agency said:

It has been a privilege to have worked on this exciting project, complementing the river channel maintenance and engagement work that we are delivering further downstream in Leeds as part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme.

It is a fantastic example of what can be achieved when working with land owners and other partners, and it is great to see some of the early, positive results.

Leader of Leeds City Council Councillor Judith Blake said:

Natural flood management techniques are a very interesting and clever way of using the environment to help reduce the risk and impact of flooding.

The fact these measures will be in place so far upstream of Leeds shows how committed we are to a whole catchment approach to protect all our communities at risk of flooding from the River Aire.

Together with the engineering measures to be installed as part of phase two of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme, this shows how a range of different methods can be used to help achieve the same goal.

Recent storm events have highlighted once again how we need to get this work done as quickly as possible so we would call on the government again to work with us to complete phase two in full so all our communities can have the best level of resilience possible.

This work is part of a wider flood risk programme which has been funded by Leeds City Council to work with nature to reduce flow of water from upstream so the landscape can hold more water in times of flood. The wider Leeds NFM programme includes tree and hedge planting, re-channelling rivers to their natural courses, soil aeration, wetland creation and moorland restoration all of which have lots of benefits for people and wildlife.

Critical rail services protected in new deals for GWR and Southeastern

- government signs new contracts with Southeastern and GWR to ensure vital train services continue to connect the South of England and Wales during COVID-19 outbreak
- new agreements with Govia and First will ensure that those who need to can continue to travel and will provide certainty for staff working on the railways
- long-term capacity improvements have also been agreed as part of the contracts

Vital rail services that people across the South East, South West and South Wales depend on will continue to run thanks to new contracts signed between the government and rail operators GWR and Southeastern.

The new agreements with Govia and FirstGroup will also ensure that jobs are protected in the unprecedented circumstances brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, providing those who cannot work from home with the connections they need to get to where they need to and keep the country running.

In the longer-term, tens of thousands of passengers are set to benefit from improvements including increased capacity at peak times, more front-line staff and more fares trials for passengers. The direct awards will allow services to be stepped up when the rail network returns to normal following disruption from COVID-19.

Major improvements to be delivered by GWR include the planned introduction of additional new capacity in the Bristol and Exeter areas.

Southeastern passengers will see space for thousands of extra passengers during the morning and evening peak times, while more front-line staff will be recruited to help passengers with their journeys.

Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, said:

We are taking decisive action across the board to ensure vital rail services continue, allowing those people who cannot work at home to get to work – particularly our NHS, emergency services and other vital industries.

These contracts will keep services running in the short-term but also are positive news for passengers in the future, focusing on more reliable services, extra capacity and improvements to the stations they use every day.

These are unprecedented times and the rail network is central to our national resilience.

The deals announced today (30 March 2020) guarantee vital services in the short term and tangible improvements in the long term.

These agreements will run concurrently with the [emergency measures agreements](#) announced earlier this week which will see the government temporarily take on the revenue and cost risk associated with individual franchises. These measures ensure that key services will keep running across the UK.

Great Western Railway, owned by FirstGroup, has been awarded a direct award for 3 years, extendable to 4. Southeastern, owned by Govia, has also been awarded a direct award for up to 2 years.

Running since 2005, the Great Western franchise provides services from London to the West and South West of England and South Wales, local/regional services in South West of England and commuter services in the Thames Valley. It is one of the largest and most diverse franchises in the UK, with major commuter, business and leisure markets.

Southeastern has been running the train service between London and Kent and parts of East Sussex since 2006. It operates one of the busiest networks in the country including the UK's first domestic high-speed service with Javelin trains.

Government cracks down on spread of false coronavirus information online

Specialist units across government are working at pace to combat false and misleading narratives about coronavirus, ensuring the public has the right information to protect themselves and save lives.

The Rapid Response Unit, operating from within the Cabinet Office and No10, is tackling a range of harmful narratives online – from purported 'experts' issuing dangerous misinformation to criminal fraudsters running phishing scams.

Up to 70 incidents a week, often false narratives containing multiple misleading claims, are being identified and resolved. The successful 'Don't Feed the Beast' public information campaign will also relaunch next week, to empower people to question what they read online.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

We need people to follow expert medical advice and stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. It is vital that this message hits home and that misinformation and disinformation which undermines it

is knocked down quickly.

We're working with social media companies, and I'll be pressing them this week for further action to stem the spread of falsehoods and rumours which could cost lives.

When false narratives are identified, the government's Rapid Response Unit coordinates with departments across Whitehall to deploy the appropriate response. This can include a direct rebuttal on social media, working with platforms to remove harmful content and ensuring public health campaigns are promoted through reliable sources.

The unit is one of the teams feeding into the wider Counter Disinformation Cell led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, made up of experts from across government and in the tech sector.

The Cell is engaging with social media platforms and with disinformation specialists from civil society and academia, to establish a comprehensive overview of the extent, scope and impact of disinformation related to coronavirus.

The Culture Secretary will be contacting social media companies this week to thank them for their good efforts to date, assess the progress made and discuss what other potential measures can be put in place to ensure accurate, honest information consistently reaches users of their platforms.

Penny Mordaunt, Paymaster General said:

Holding your breath for ten seconds is not a test for coronavirus and gargling water for 15 seconds is not a cure – this is the kind of false advice we have seen coming from sources claiming to be medical experts.

That is why government communicators are working in tandem with health bodies to promote official medical advice, rebut false narratives and clamp down on criminals seeking to exploit public concern during this pandemic.

But the public can also help with this effort, so today we implore them to take some simple steps before sharing information online, such as always reading beyond the headline and scrutinising the source.

The public can help stop the spread of potentially dangerous or false stories circulating online by following official government guidance – the 'SHARE' checklist (see further information). This includes basic but essential advice such as checking the source of a story and analysing the facts before sharing.

Certain states routinely use disinformation as a policy tool, so the

government is also stepping up its efforts to share its assessments on coronavirus disinformation with international partners. Working collaboratively has already helped make the UK safer, providing ourselves and our allies with a better understanding of how different techniques are used as part of malicious information operations – and how to protect against those techniques more effectively.

These measures follow recent advice from the National Cyber Security Centre, which revealed a range of attacks being perpetrated online by cyber criminals seeking to exploit coronavirus earlier this month.

This included guidance on how to spot and deal with suspicious emails related to coronavirus, as well as mitigate and defend against malware and ransomware.

Further information

To help the public spot false information the government is running the SHARE checklist and [Don't Feed The Beast campaign here](#). This gives the public five easy steps to follow to identify whether information may be misleading:

- Source – make sure information comes from a trusted source
- Headline – always read beyond the headline
- Analyse – check the facts
- Retouched – does the image or video look as though it has been doctored?
- Error – look out for bad grammar and spelling

[Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick on COVID19 response](#)

Good afternoon,

I would like to update you on our response to COVID-19.

I'm joined today by Dr Jenny Harries, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

As of 9am today:

127,737 people have now been tested for the virus.

108,215 have tested negative.

19,522 have tested positive.

Of those who have contracted the virus, 1,228 have, sadly, died.

The virus is indiscriminate

It doesn't matter who you are, where you are or how old you are.

We each have a part to play by staying at home, protecting the NHS and helping to save lives.

We all have a duty to one another to keep everyone safe.

So today I would like to give you two updates, before answering questions.

The first on the plans I have put in place to ensure that every corner of the country can confront the coronavirus epidemic.

The second on what the government is doing to shield the most vulnerable people in society.

On the first question, I have put in place in all parts of the country procedures to ensure that everywhere can be ready to move forward together. All parts of the country are now on an emergency footing.

This is an unprecedented step in peace time.

We haven't done anything like this since the Second World War.

This means that we're establishing strategic co-ordination centres across the whole country.

Each centre is led by gold commanders.

We are bringing together senior members of the emergency services

- the police, the fire service, the ambulance service
- with local authorities and the NHS, to lead communities through this challenging period.

From Cornwall to Cumbria.

And we have embedded within each of these groups members of the armed forces – including some of the finest military planners in the world.

These groups are planning the local response to the virus.

Using their expertise, their judgement and their leadership to ensure a comprehensive, a coordinated, and consistent response across the country.

One issue that they have been helping us to coordinate and about which I know there is a lot of concern is the provision of personal protect equipment.

We simply cannot and should not ask people to be on the frontline without the right protective equipment.

We have a clear plan to ensure that those serving this country at this time

have the right equipment.

We have established the National Supply Distribution Response Team and they are supported now by the armed forces and other emergency services who are working round the clock to deliver the equipment to the people who need it most:

- 170 million masks
- 42.8 million gloves
- 13.7 million aprons
- 182,000 gowns
- Almost 10 million items of cleaning equipment
- and 2.3 million pairs of eye protectors

all delivered to 58,000 NHS Trusts and healthcare settings including GP surgeries, pharmacies and community providers.

Every single GP practice, dental practice and community pharmacy has had a PPE delivery. All care homes, hospices and home care providers have or will shortly receive a delivery.

To NHS and social care workers, all those who rely on this equipment and to their families and loved ones watching this afternoon – we understand.

And we will not stop until we have got you the equipment that you need.

Last weekend, at this press conference, the Prime Minister and I explained why 1.5million people who are extremely vulnerable to the virus, due to their underlying health conditions, needed to stay at home for a period of 12 weeks and avoid face to face contact.

Since then, the NHS have written to almost a million of these people and outlined the steps that they need to take to protect themselves.

We have also established a dedicated web page on gov.uk which those in receipt of a letter should go to, to let us know whether or not they need further assistance over the course of the next 12 weeks. There is also a new phone number, which is on the letter they have or will receive shortly.

If this applies to you, I know that you will find this a very worrying time.

You will be thinking about how you can continue to access the medicine that you need, how you can get the food and other essential supplies that you rely on.

If you don't have family or friends or neighbours nearby who you can rely on then the NHS will deliver your medicines through the community pharmacy network.

And if you register online or using the phone service that we have set up, letting us know you need support, then we will deliver food and supplies to your doorstep.

And this weekend I saw for myself first-hand the first deliveries being made.

The packages included cereal, fruit, tinned goods, teabags, biscuits, toiletries and other essentials.

The first 50,000 will have been sent out by the end of this week and we are ramping up production to send out as many as are required for as long as it takes.

If this applies to you, while you will now have to be at home for a prolonged period of time and that will be difficult, I want you to know that you are not alone. We are here to support you for as long as you need us.

We have all been hugely impressed by the commitment and the dedication of those working in social care, in local councils delivering essential public services like ensuring that the bins continue to get collected. None more so than me, as the Secretary of State for Local Government.

We all respect the 12,000 heroic former doctors and nurses and paramedics who have come back to work and been deployed this weekend.

And I think we have all been moved by the number of people who have signed up to be one of the NHS Voluntary Responders – today we can announce an extraordinary, three quarters of a million people have signed up to do that.

In every city, in every town, in every village, there is going to be work to be done and in each of us there is the power to do it.

And so please take part, please play your part, please consider your friends, your family, your neighbours when you are shopping, please call the elderly and support them.

When this is done, and it will be done, we all want to be proud of the part that we've played together.

Thank you very much.