

Emergency bill to strengthen coronavirus (COVID-19) response plans

Emergency measures to give ministers powers to take the right action at the right time to respond effectively to the progress of the coronavirus outbreak will be introduced to Parliament this week, the Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock has today set out.

The [measures in the coronavirus bill](#) are temporary, proportionate to the threat, will only be used when strictly necessary and will be in place for as long as required to respond to the situation.

They are intended to protect life and the nation's public health and ensure NHS and social care staff are supported to deal with significant extra pressure on the health system.

They fall into 5 key categories:

- containing and slowing the virus
- easing legislative and regulatory requirements
- enhancing capacity and the flexible deployment of staff across essential services
- managing the deceased in a dignified way
- supporting and protecting the public to do the right thing and follow public health advice

To ensure the NHS and adult social care have the additional staff capacity they need to respond to increasing demands on services during the outbreak, the powers enabled by the bill will allow recently retired NHS staff and social workers to return to work without any negative repercussions to their pensions.

NHS staff will also be covered by a state-backed insurance scheme to ensure they can care for patients if, for example, they are moving outside their day-to-day duties while making use of their skills and training.

Paperwork and administrative requirements will be reduced to help doctors discharge patients more quickly when clinically appropriate, to free up hospital space for those who are very ill and enable clinicians to focus on delivering care.

Volunteers will have extra employment safeguards, allowing them to pause their main jobs for up to 4 weeks while they help care for patients in the health and care system, and will receive a flat rate of compensation to mitigate lost earnings and expenses. This could benefit more than 3 million people who already volunteer in health and care settings and bolster the NHS's capacity to respond to the virus.

Changes to councils' duties under the Care Act will enable them to prioritise people with the greatest care needs and make the best use of the adult social care workforce.

Other measures in the legislation include:

- allowing police and immigration officers to support and enforce public health measures, including powers to detain people and put them in appropriate isolation facilities if necessary to protect public health
- making arrangements for statutory sick pay for those self-isolating without symptoms from day one
- allowing small businesses to reclaim statutory sick pay payments from HMRC
- allowing more phone or video hearings for court cases to stop the spread of the virus in courts
- enabling Border Force to temporarily suspend operations at airports or transport hubs if there are insufficient resources to maintain border security

The bill allows the 4 UK governments to switch on these new powers when they are needed and, crucially, to switch them off again once they are no longer necessary, based on the advice of the 4 Chief Medical Officers.

The bill builds on the Treasury's recent investment of £12 billion to support public services, people and businesses through the disruption caused by COVID-19 in the 2020 Budget. It follows considerable action from the government to control the epidemic, including a nationwide public health campaign and a cross-government 'war room' of communications experts and scientists.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We are doing everything we can to protect lives and support the NHS, guided by the best scientists and clinicians in the world.

The new measures we will be introducing in the Emergency

Coronavirus Bill this week will only be used when it is absolutely necessary and must be timed to maximise their effectiveness, but crucially they give the government the powers it needs to protect lives.

By planning for the worst and working for the best we will get through this, but this is a national effort and we must all work together – from businesses prioritising the welfare of their employees, to people thoroughly washing their hands.

I also want to pay tribute to our brilliantly selfless NHS and social care staff who are working tirelessly to care for our friends and loved ones in this unprecedented period.

Chief Medical Officer for England Professor Chris Whitty said:

Our approach to responding to this outbreak has and will remain driven by the scientific and clinical evidence so we do the right thing at the right time.

The measures included in this bill will help support our frontline workers, protect the public and delay the peak of the virus to the summer months when the NHS is typically under less pressure.

It is important everyone continues to play their part by avoiding non-essential contact and travel as well as washing their hands regularly for 20 seconds with soap and water.

Chancellor announces additional support to protect businesses

This includes unlimited loans and guarantees to support firms and help them manage cashflows through this period. The Chancellor will make available an initial £330 billion of guarantees – equivalent to 15% of UK GDP.

At last week's Budget, the Chancellor provided £30 billion of support to the economy to deal with the crisis by investing in public services, increasing support for vulnerable people and providing business with tax reliefs and loans.

He said he would take further action as the situation evolved and today outlines further measures including:

To ensure that businesses have access to the funds they need, we are

providing:

- support for liquidity amongst large firms, with a major new scheme being launched by the Bank of England to help them bridge Coronavirus disruption to their cash flows through loans
- increasing the amount businesses can borrow through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme from £1.2 million to £5 million, and ensuring businesses can access the first 6 months of that finance interest free, as Government will cover the first 6 months of interest payments
- including new legal powers in the Covid Bill enabling us to offer whatever further financial support we think necessary to businesses

Providing £20 billion of business rates support and grant funding to help the most-affected firms manage their cashflow through this period by:

- giving all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England a 100% business rates holiday for the next 12 months
- increasing grants to small businesses eligible for Small Business Rate Relief from £3,000 to £10,000
- providing further £25,000 grants to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses operating from smaller premises, with a rateable value over £15,000 and below £51,000

Mortgage lenders have agreed they will support customers that are experiencing issues with their finances as a result of Covid-19, including through payment holidays of up to 3 months. This will give people the necessary time to recover and ensure they do not have to pay a penny towards their mortgage in the interim.

Confirmation that government advice to avoid pubs, clubs and theatres etc. is sufficient for businesses to claim on their insurance where they have appropriate business interruption cover for pandemics in place.

To support the food industry and help provide meals for people who need to self-isolate, we will relax planning regulations to allow pubs and restaurants to start providing takeaways without a planning application.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

We will do whatever it takes to protect our people and businesses

from the effects of this global economic emergency brought on by the Coronavirus pandemic.

The interventions I am setting out today will help support businesses of all sizes – so they can continue operating during these unprecedented times.

The action announced today means that over £3.5 billion in additional funding will be provided to the devolved administrations for support to businesses in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

OTS seeks a new board member

To support its work and further development, the OTS would like to identify an exceptional individual with relevant experience to join its board as one of its independent members.

The [advertisement](#) is now live and has a closing date of 6 April 2020.

Launch of Covid-19 Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]Exchange of letters between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England, 17 March 2020.

UK's first 'super' National Nature Reserve created on Purbeck Heaths

With the increasing need for a bigger, better and more joined-up approach to nature conservation, seven leading partners have come together to help protect wildlife by creating the UK's first ever 'super' National Nature Reserve (NNR) on the Purbeck Heaths in Dorset.

The new [Purbeck Heaths](#) NNR 'knits' together 11 types of priority habitat to enable wildlife to move more easily across the landscape. This will give rare and varied wildlife, including the sand lizard, the Dartford warbler, and the silver studded blue butterfly, a better chance of adapting and thriving in light of the current climate crisis.

The new super NNR combines three existing NNRs at Stoborough Heath, Hartland Moor, and Studland and Godlingston Heath linking them with a significant amount of new land including nature reserves and conservation areas managed by seven partners.

It is 3,331 hectares (8,231 acre) in total, expanding the current NNR in Purbeck by 2,335 hectares (5,770 acres). The new designation has resulted in a landscape-scale haven more than three times its original size, and similar in size to the town of Blackpool.

The expansion will create the largest lowland heathland NNR in the country providing tremendous benefits to wildlife by allowing all species the opportunity to move around the landscape more easily. Building resilience into the landscape will help tackle the decline in nature, with [41 per cent of species in decline in Britain since 1970](#).

It will also offer a public benefit by giving people more opportunity to explore and in turn help improve the health and wellbeing of more than 2.5 million people who visit Purbeck every year.

By working together and combining land, expertise and a common vision, the National Trust, Natural England, RSPB, Forestry England, the Rempstone Estate, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, along with other landowners and managers, are taking important strides forward in landscape-scale conservation and nature recovery.

This super reserve is a rich mosaic of lowland wet and dry heath, valley mires, acid grassland and woodland, along with coastal sand dunes, lakes and saltmarsh. Conifer plantations are also being carefully restored to heathland.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

This new super nature reserve is a great example of what can be achieved through partnerships and collaboration. It demonstrates how by working together we can secure a brighter future for our wonderful natural environment. By creating bigger, better, and more joined-up wild places like this one, we will achieve big benefits for both people and wildlife.

In facing the twin and deepening challenges of global heating and wildlife loss, we need to think and act on a larger scale. Today's move marks a shift in gear and a new era for nature recovery in England. Comparable ambition is visible in other partnerships that are established or forming across the country, not only setting the scene for species recovery, but also increased resilience to

climate change.

Defra Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

I commend all of the partners coming together to deliver this landmark milestone for wildlife and people – the UK's first super National Nature Reserve. Purbeck Heaths is a trailblazing example of how landscape-scale conservation can help wildlife thrive, improve people's well-being, and build resilience to climate change.

Through our landmark 25 Year Environment Plan we will deliver a greener future, and the collaborative spirit of Purbeck Heaths marks a significant step towards putting our ambitious plans to leave the environment in a better state than we found it into action.

The National Trust, which already had 746 hectares (1,843 acres) of land in the NNR, has designated a further 644 hectares (1,591 acres).

Mark Harold, National Trust Director of Land & Nature, said:

For generations to come, Purbeck Heaths will be at the heart of a healthy, resilient landscape brimming with wildlife. As well as creating a special place for wildlife to recover and move around freely, we hope to inspire people to engage with nature and explore the great outdoors.

All the rare and beautiful wildlife living in and beyond the reserve will benefit hugely from a landscape where habitats are bigger, in better condition and better connected – and where natural processes are restored. Here they will be able to spread and build more resilient populations.

Purbeck Heaths is one of the most biodiverse places in the UK – home to thousands of species of wildlife, including 450 that are listed as rare, threatened or protected. Indeed, Purbeck includes the richest recorded 10km square for biodiversity in the UK.

All six native reptiles call this reserve home – including endangered smooth snakes and sand lizards. Heathland birds include breeding nightjars, Dartford warblers and woodlarks. And raptors such as hen harriers, marsh harriers, merlins, hobbies and ospreys all find these productive hunting grounds.

At least 12 species of bats live on the NNR. The Purbeck Heaths are some of the last strongholds for many specialist insects and other invertebrates, such as southern damselflies (Britain's rarest dragonfly) and the Purbeck mason wasp. This reserve is also home to Dorset's only colony of small pearl-

bordered fritillary butterflies.

Rare plants include marsh gentians, great sundews and lesser butterfly orchids. And there are at least two fungi that are found nowhere else in England and Wales – the sand earthtongue and *Roseodiscus formosus*.

Emma Marsh, Director, RSPB England, said:

The RSPB and its partners in the Purbeck Heaths NNR have been working for decades to restore Purbeck's heathlands and the designation of the Purbeck Heaths super NNR is a fantastic recognition of our collective success.

We're excited about the opportunity to make this an even wilder landscape, where some of our rarest wildlife can find a home. Together we're forging ahead to achieve even more success for both nature and people at a landscape scale.

Further information

- Visit www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/project/wild-purbeck for more information
- Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. Established in 2006, our work is focused on enhancing England's wildlife and landscapes and maximising the benefits they bring to the public.
- The new Purbeck Heath National Nature Reserve is the first super NNR, merging other protected sites to enhance habitat and improve landscape resilience for people and for wildlife.
- England's 222 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) form part of a UK-wide network of nature reserves covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Natural England manages 143 of these NNRs to ensure that our finest wildlife and geological sites are protected, conserved and enhanced for present and future generations. These features are of national and often international importance, and many NNRs are important for study and research. From Lindisfarne in Northumberland to The Lizard in Cornwall, and from the Suffolk Coast in East Anglia to the Stiperstones in Shropshire – NNRs are the very best places to experience the natural world at first hand.
- A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is one of the country's very best wildlife and/or geological sites. There are over 4,100 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England, covering around 8% of the country's land area. Many SSSIs are also National Nature Reserves (NNRs) or Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).