

[Ash dieback project launches International Year of Plant Health](#)

Three thousand trees have been planted in Hampshire as part of a pioneering project to tackle the devastating tree disease, Ash Dieback.

The UK's first Ash Archive has been established using £1.9 million of government funding and is the culmination of projects spanning 5 years to identify ash with a high tolerance to the disease.

The archive is a major step towards maintaining and restoring ash in the British landscape. It is intended that it will provide the basis for a breeding programme of tolerant ash over time and will enable the development of orchards producing commercially available seed.

Today (17 January 2020), the government's Chief Plant Health Officer will visit the project to plant one of the last trees in the archive. The ceremony marked the beginning of [the International Year of Plant Health](#) – a global initiative to raise awareness on the importance of healthy plants and trees to protecting nature, the environment and boosting economic development.

Ash dieback is a highly destructive disease which was first identified in the UK in 2012. The fungus penetrates the leaves of ash trees, before growing inside the tree eventually blocking its water transport systems and causing it to die. Spores of the fungus travel in the wind, meaning the disease spreads easily and making it difficult to limit its impact. However, projects to identify trees which are tolerant to the disease mean that the population could recover over time.

Nicola Spence, Defra Chief Plant Health Officer, said:

I'm delighted to acknowledge the successes of the Ash Archive project and welcome the International Year of Plant Health by planting an ash dieback-tolerant tree.

This is a damaging disease to our native ash trees as well as our timber industry. That's why since 2012, the Government has invested more than £6m into ash dieback research and £4.5m to strengthen border security. As it stands, we currently have some of the most stringent import controls in Europe.

Alongside these measures it is vital that we continue to work on securing our ash trees for the future, so I'm thrilled to see the progress that has been made with the Ash Archive and look forward to the advances we can make with breeding these trees further.

Lord Gardiner, Biosecurity Minister, said:

The International Year of Plant Health is a timely reminder of the importance of our natural environment and the action that is required, from Government and beyond, to protect our island's rich heritage of trees and plants from dangerous diseases such as ash dieback.

That is why we are committed to funding innovation in this field. We look forward to continuing our work with Future Trees Trust and Forest Research to develop a genetic collection of trees that will contribute to keeping the iconic ash tree prevalent in our landscapes.

As part of [the Government Ash Research Strategy](#), Defra funded two projects which studied ash trees as they grew to identify those exhibiting a high degree of tolerance to ash dieback. These were then grafted on to ash rootstocks and grown in nurseries before being planted to form the archive. Working in collaboration with [Future Trees Trust](#), [Forest Research](#), [Forestry England](#), [Kew](#) Gardens and [Fera](#) the trees will now be used for further scientific research into the disease.

The next steps for the project are to monitor tolerance levels of the trees under real-world conditions and continue to refine the archive by removing any trees that are damaged by the disease and replacing them with newly-identified tolerant trees from the wider countryside and other trials.

Future Trees Trust Head of Research, Jo Clark, said:

It's exciting to finally see these trees planted. They have been selected from across Britain and we will continue to monitor them over the next five years to ensure we have the most tolerant individuals with which to commence a new breeding programme for ash, thereby retaining ash as a tree for timber purposes as well as biodiversity.

[Electric taxis to go wireless thanks to new charging tech trial](#)

- government investing £3.4 million in wireless charging technology trials at taxi ranks in Nottingham
- new technology could make it more convenient than ever to charge vehicles and could reduce cable clutter on streets
- electric taxis in Nottingham to be fitted with wireless charging hardware for 6 month trial

The UK could soon see a revolution in electric vehicle charging after the Transport Secretary announced today (17 January 2020) that £3.4 million will be invested in trials for wireless charging of electric taxis in Nottingham.

Wireless charging at taxi ranks could provide an alternative to plugs and chargepoints, meaning multiple taxis can recharge at once, supporting drivers to charge up more easily. It would also reduce clutter on our streets.

As more and more people make the switch to electric cars this new technology could also be rolled out more broadly for public use, helping everyday drivers of electric vehicles charge more easily on the go.

Electrifying taxi fleets in congested city areas is crucial in bringing down transport emissions and cleaning up our air. However, the time taken to charge could reduce a taxi driver's earning potential.

Installing wireless chargers at taxi ranks offers drivers the chance to recharge while waiting for their next passengers, so they can help the environment and start their journeys quicker. The technology, allowing for shorter and more frequent bursts of charging, will also benefit cars with smaller batteries, ending 'range anxiety' for drivers.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Taxi drivers up and down the country are at the vanguard of the electric vehicle revolution, playing a leading role in reducing air pollution in our city centres where people live, shop and work.

New wireless technology will make using an electric taxi quicker and more convenient, allowing drivers to charge up at taxi ranks before heading off with their next passenger.

Andrea Leadsom, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said:

Charging technology, including wireless, is vital in giving consumers confidence to make the switch from petrol to electric cars. This pioneering trial in Nottingham, and others like it, will help us take crucial steps towards lower emissions and cleaner air.

We are determined to end our contribution to global warming entirely by 2050 – and delivering cleaner and greener transport systems is a key part of this.

Minister for the Future of Transport George Freeman said:

Funding innovative transport technologies like wireless charging is a crucial part of our [Future of Mobility strategy](#) to support UK leadership in decarbonisation.

We are determined to harness UK science and engineering to bring down transport emissions and help make journeys greener.

Councillor Longford, Deputy Leader at Nottingham City Council said:

Nottingham is excited to host the trial of this new type of innovative charging technology, keeping us ahead of the pack, and helping to promote cleaner taxis in our city and potentially take us a further step forward towards our goal of being carbon neutral by 2028.

Ten Nissan and LEVC electric taxis in Nottingham will be fitted with wireless charging hardware for 6 months to trial taxi rank-based charging. The project, a collaboration between organisations including Cenex, Sprint Power, Shell, Nottingham City Council, Parking Energy, Transport for London and Coventry University could speed up charging and help reduce congestion in city centres.

Nottingham City Council will own the vehicles and provide them to drivers rent free. If successful, this technology could also be rolled out more broadly for public use, helping every day drivers of electric vehicles charge more easily on the go.

Electric taxi drivers have already benefited from measures including the exemption of zero-emission taxis from the higher rate of vehicle excise duty and £20 million for 27 local authorities to install electric taxi chargepoints across England and Scotland. The government is also offering a £50 million grant fund that provides drivers with up to £7,500 off the price of a new, eligible, purpose-built taxi.

Today's announcement of the trial follows nearly £40 million funding announced in July 2019 for the [development of electric vehicle charging technologies](#) that could rapidly expand the UK chargepoint network for people without off-street parking.

Innovations which have already received investment include underground charging systems that don't require on-street structures, suitable for busy urban streets, and solar powered charging.

[Sexual harassment victims to “have their say” on laws designed to protect](#)

them

Feeding into plans to strengthen protections for employees across the UK from sexual harassment, the survey will allow the public to have an impact on Government policy, and ensure those policies are targeted in the right places.

The survey – which will go out to 12,200 people from every walk of life – will build a picture of how many people are affected, asking people about their experiences of sexual harassment inside and outside the workplace; where they experience harassment; and what forms of harassment they have experienced.

ComRes, in their 2017 research for the BBC, claim that 40% of women (and 18% of men) have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour at work at some point.

Minister for Women, Victoria Atkins, said:

“Sexual harassment is wrong and survivors must be able to share their stories. This survey will help us build a clear picture of who is affected and where. Working together with business, we can stamp it out.”

The survey is part of a package of commitments to tackle sexual harassment at work, including a new statutory Code of Practice so employers better understand their legal responsibilities, and a consultation on new plans to tackle harassment at work – including giving explicit legal protections to workers, such as waiters and shop assistants, against harassment from customers.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has this week published a draft version of the Code of Practice, advising employers on how to make their workplace safe from sexual harassment.

The initial consultation, which ended in October, asked for views on:

- strengthening and clarifying the law to give explicit protections against third party harassment in the Equality Act 2010
- how best to ensure that employers take all steps they can to prevent harassment from happening, including considering if a new legal duty is needed
- the evidence for extending Equality Act 2010 workplace protections to volunteers and interns;
- whether the three-month time limit for employment tribunal claims under the Equality Act 2010 should be extended.

Nearly 5000 people responded to the consultation which the government will respond to, setting out the next steps, this spring.

Notes to editors:

The survey will go out to people in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern

Ireland.

The government promised to:

- Introduce a new statutory code of practice on sexual harassment, which will be developed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission under its Equality Act 2006 powers
- Work with Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), Equality and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) and employers to raise awareness.
- Commission a survey to gather regular data on the prevalence of sexual harassment
- Consult on non-disclosure agreements
- Consult on the evidence base for a new legal duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace
- Consult on strengthening and clarifying the laws on third party harassment in the workplace
- Consult on whether further legal protections are required for interns and volunteers
- Consult to explore the evidence for extending employment tribunal time limits for Equality Act 2010 cases
- Ensure the public sector takes action to tackle and prevent sexual harassment
- Work with regulators for whom sexual harassment is particularly relevant to ensure they are taking appropriate action

UK Government supporting City of London to mobilise billions of pounds of investment to transform Africa

Billions of pounds of investment in Africa will be generated by the City of London under initiatives announced by International Development Secretary Alok Sharma today (Friday 17 January 2020).

The announcement comes as African government and business leaders arrive in London ahead of the [UK-Africa Investment Summit](#) on Monday 20 January – the first event of its scale.

More African businesses are listed on the London Stock Exchange than any other finance centre outside the continent. But African assets still only account for around 1% of total investments managed by the City.

Today's announcements will help more money from private investors like pension funds flow into Africa by making it easier, quicker and more secure to invest. This will also ensure that money is going directly to support green and sustainable development.

The three new initiatives, backed by almost £400 million of UK aid support, include:

1. Extra support to the UK's Financial Sector Deepening Platform which will improve the financial systems and regulations of 45 developing nations in Africa, to build more confidence for international investors; lead the way to boost green finance products and improve access to bank accounts and loans for African entrepreneurs.
2. Collaboration with the City of London on a competition for fund managers to identify new investment products for Africa, which could be listed on major stock exchanges like London, making it easier and more appealing for global investors to put money into African projects at scale.
3. A new facility with the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) to develop more local currency bonds, allowing businesses and governments in Africa to raise investment in their own currencies and reduce the risks and costs associated with borrowing in foreign currencies, because of potentially damaging exchange rate fluctuations. This will help African countries better plan and invest in their future.

International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Africa's substantial investment potential is clear, with many African countries outstripping global economic growth in recent decades. The UK is already the top financial exchange for Africa's businesses and we want investors to seize the exciting opportunities that Africa offers.

These new initiatives, announced ahead of the UK-Africa Investment Summit, will make it easier, greener and more secure to invest in Africa, mobilising billions of pounds of sustainable investment to help end poverty.

These announcements come on the same day that a new World Bank International Development Association (IDA) Sterling bond will be listed on the London Stock exchange, which is expected to raise hundreds of millions of pounds for high impact investment across Africa.

President of the World Bank Group David Malpass said:

By 2050, one in four global consumers will be African. But Africa currently attracts less than 4 percent of global Foreign Direct Investment. Strong actions from countries to improve rule of law and take on vested interests could create the right incentives to spur investment by strengthening financial systems, building confidence in financial markets, and enabling more productive private sector activity.

On behalf of the World Bank Group, I'd like to thank the UK

government for their leadership in supporting investments in Africa. Working together with us in global cooperation, the countries of Africa can meet their ambitions to boost growth, create jobs, and lift people out of poverty.

Minister for Investment Graham Stuart said:

The UK's position as a world centre for finance makes it well positioned to support increased private sector investment into Africa, creating more jobs, driving economic growth and financing vital infrastructure projects. Today's announcements are a brilliant step forward in supporting that objective.

Notes to Editors

- For details on the UK-Africa Investment summit click [here](#).
- Over £17 billion has been raised on the London Stock Exchange by 112 African companies in the last 10 years which today are worth more than £125 billion.

Here is further information on the three initiatives announced today:

UK Financial Sector Deepening Platform – £320 million

- Since its foundation by the Department for International Development in 2002, the Financial Sector Deepening Platform has strengthened financial markets across developing countries, benefiting over 41 million African consumers and entrepreneurs with improved access to banking and financing.
- The new £320 million UK aid will run over the next five years, supporting a further 22 million people and 3.9 million small businesses across 45 countries in Africa, including giving them access to mobile banking for remote communities.
- It will support developing African economies like Kenya and Uganda to strengthen financial structures and regulation, encouraging more global investment, as well as supporting countries like Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe to build new financial systems following conflict or economic hardship.
- The Financial Sector Deepening Platform will also build stronger financial links across African nations, allowing UK investors to invest in multiple economies with greater security, and develop new financial products aimed at supporting local small businesses, especially those run by female entrepreneurs, to access financing.
- It will also build on successes in Kenya and Nigeria to create more green investment opportunities in Africa – supporting local regulators, issuers and policy makers to develop green bonds.

Competition to identify and develop new investment products for

Africa – up to £45 million

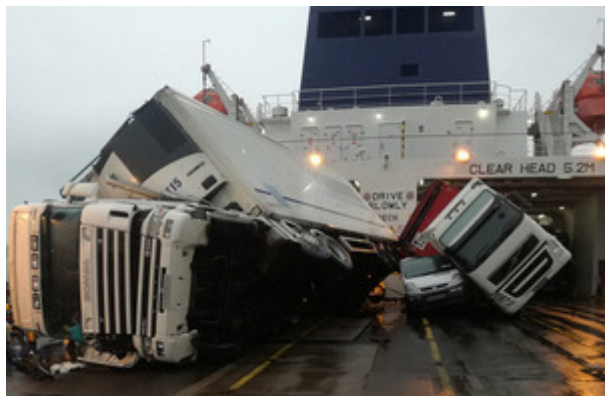
- A new collaboration with the City of London will identify and develop new listed investment products which boost development in poorer African nations, with up to £45 million UK aid support.
- Subject to a successful competition, UK aid could be used to support the development of the new investment products that are created, or invest in them, with DFID funding going directly to projects in Africa, like funding new hospitals or clean energy power, which will generate further private investment.
- The products will be able to be traded on public stock exchanges like the London Stock Exchange, boosting overall investment potential, and will be available to pension funds, other institutional investors and eventually retail investors.
- With this initial financial backing from UK aid, the new investment products will bring opportunities to invest in Africa to more institutional investors, who are responsible for much larger sums of capital than is currently available to developing African countries.

IFC Cross-Border Risk Facility – £30 million

- Backed by £30 million funding from the UK, DFID and the IFC are working on creating a new facility to deliver £80 million of local currency finance for a greater number of currencies across Africa.
- This will help to build the market for local currency finance ensuring that international financial markets work better for the needs of developing countries and generate new opportunities for UK-based investors.
- Local currency finance helps to reduce the risk and costs of damaging exchange rate fluctuations, helping African countries better plan and invest in their future.
- This builds on the success of UK-aid backed local currency bonds, including the Kenyan green bond:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/alok-sharma-heralds-green-cities-of-the-future-on-kenya-visit>

ENDS

[European Causeway report published](#)



Our accident investigation report into the cargo shift on board ferry European Causeway during heavy weather on 18 December 2018, is now published.

The report contains details of what happened, the subsequent actions taken and the recommendation made: [read more](#).

Statement from the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents

The MAIB investigation identified that the forecast weather conditions had not been sufficiently considered when setting the course of the ship, nor the application of lashings to freight vehicles loaded aboard. The investigation further highlighted the problem of freight drivers remaining in their cabs on the vehicle deck when the ferry is at sea. Drivers remaining in their vehicles not only put themselves at risk, they place at risk other passengers, and anyone who has to rescue them. Perhaps, most importantly, crucial emergency responses, such as to a fire, can be delayed until all passengers are accounted for.

I have written to the senior management of short sea ferry companies around the United Kingdom to further highlight the dangers posed by freight drivers remaining on vehicle decks, and to encourage them to take a collective approach to eliminate this dangerous practice.

In addition to the work that they have already undertaken, we have recommended that P&O Ferries Ltd enhance their safety management system, to provide ship's crew with better guidance concerning the stowage and lashing of freight vehicles in adverse weather conditions.

Earlier last year, we issued a [safety bulletin](#) highlighting the dangers of drivers remaining in vehicle cabs while ferries at sea.

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