

Funding boost for country's woodlands and timber industry

Projects that tackle some of the greatest threats to our trees and forests will get a boost from government funding, it has been announced today (Monday 28 November). This is alongside additional investment announced for local authority tree planting initiatives which will see hundreds of thousands of trees planted in communities across England.

The funding will drive long-term woodland creation efforts, create jobs, boost biodiversity and support innovative approaches to tree health and resilience, in the face of climate change and the mounting threat of pests and diseases.

Successful applicants include:

- the University of Lincoln's ISILDUR project, which will work with tree nurseries to address labour shortages in the forest nursery sector by developing an intelligent robotics solution for plant processing;
- the University of Cambridge's TIMBER project, which is designing and creating prototypes for new building materials to drive home-grown, low-carbon and long-lasting construction nationwide;
- Red Squirrel South West, which will be given funding to develop a management programme for invasive grey squirrels across a 35-mile stretch of native North Exmoor coastal woodland, helping to regenerate woodlands and supporting the reintroduction of native species like red squirrels.

The United Kingdom consumes 53 million tonnes of wood and wood products each year; however, 81% is imported from abroad. The major investment announced today will support projects developing new technologies and working practices to help homegrown timber production meet a greater proportion of domestic demand. This will help to improve timber security and grow the United Kingdom's forestry and primary wood processing sectors, which support 30,000 jobs and contribute over £2 billion to our economy every year.

Alongside this, 57 local authorities across England have received nearly £10 million in funding through the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund to kickstart tree planting activity, create new green jobs and boost access to nature, such as by employing new staff to access the professional expertise needed to drive tree planting and woodland creation activity at a local level. Planting will take place across the country in areas with lower tree cover, as well as through ambitious schemes expanding existing woodlands in rural settings. It is expected that more than 100 new green jobs will be created across the country as a result, with an emphasis on upskilling professionals from outside the forestry sector. This will help to expand the industry's workforce, address skills shortages and help to grow the economy.

Trudy Harrison, Forestry Minister, said:

Our trees, forests and woodlands are the nation's lungs – filtering our air, capturing carbon, providing habitats and serving as a powerful weapon in the fight against climate change. At a local level, trees are the lifeblood of communities, essential to supporting wellbeing, beautifying our streets and improving people's quality of life while providing a safe haven for wildlife.

Protecting and restoring our precious natural world can work hand-in-hand with building a stronger, healthier economy. Using new technologies through these funds will build a bigger, better and more resilient forestry industry for the future, as we strive to deliver on our commitment to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

Sir William Worsley, Chair of the Forestry Commission, said:

These funds will unleash the potential of the forestry sector by championing nurseries, charities and businesses operating at the forefront of technological innovation. They will help more people across society get trees in the ground at an unprecedented pace and scale, whilst ensuring their resilience for future generations.

Through the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund, local authorities have set out a range of inspiring and ambitious plans which equate to more than 10 million trees being planted on public land across England by 2025. The funding will turn these aspirations into results, marking a significant step forward in our collective efforts to increase tree planting rates in England.

The urgent environmental and economic challenges of the day demand innovative solutions and the projects supported through the innovation funds will underpin our collective efforts to build larger, more diverse and more resilient treescapes across the country, whilst opening up new markets for timber and creating opportunities for growth.

Hannah Bartram, Chief Executive Officer, Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport, said:

The Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund is set to make a real difference, supporting local authorities to accelerate their tree and woodland planting plans and helping to tackle the climate change and biodiversity crises.

The fund has been well received and demand has been high – it will

support local authorities across the country, equipping them with the new staff, skills, and expertise needed to drive tree planting and woodland creation commitments.

Trees make our towns and cities healthier and more pleasant places to be, helping to moderate temperatures, reduce pollution, decrease flood risk and improve quality of life for people from all socio-economic backgrounds.

Also announced today, the Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF) and the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf) will reopen for new applications early in 2023, with some significant improvements to the funds based on stakeholder feedback. Now in their third and fifth rounds respectively, the reopening of both funds will see trees planted in rural areas (for LATF), as well as in towns and cities nationwide. It represents another step forward in the Government's drive to treble tree planting rates across England by the end of this Parliament.

This announcement forms part of wider government action to recover and restore nature, as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan and commitments to reach net zero by 2050.

UK leads global action to tackle sexual violence in conflict

- The Foreign Secretary will announce new support to prevent sexual violence in conflict today (November 28) as he hosts an international conference in London.
- James Cleverly will also launch a new three-year strategy putting survivors at the centre of tackling this abhorrent crime around the world.
- Attendees will include Nadia Murad, a survivor of sexual violence in conflict, her fellow Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr Denis Mukwege, and HRH The Countess of Wessex.
- Angelina Jolie will deliver a video message at the conference.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is bringing representatives of around 70 countries together today, to drive forward urgent action to tackle the scourge of sexual violence in conflict – including in Ukraine, Ethiopia and Colombia.

New evidence has shown that an estimated 20 to 30 per cent of women and girls in conflict-affected settings experience sexual violence.

The two-day conference in London this week (28-29 November) will put survivors of this abhorrent crime at the centre of the global response.

Nadia Murad and Dr Denis Mukwege – who won a joint Nobel Peace Prize for their work to combat sexual violence – will be in attendance alongside the Countess of Wessex and International Criminal Court prosecutor Karim Khan. Other survivors, government ministers and representatives of NGOs will also be there to share what they have learned and agree a united response to prevent atrocities from taking place in future.

This week's conference marks 10 years of the UK Government's landmark Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI).

When opening the conference, the Foreign Secretary will announce a new three-year strategy to tackle sexual violence in conflict which will be backed by up to £12.5 million of new funding.

Developed with survivors, experts in the field, parliamentarians, academics, and NGOs, the strategy focuses on tackling these crimes in seven key countries: Ukraine, Bosnia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq and South Sudan.

Addressing the conference, Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is expected to say:

The very threat of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war should bring immediate international condemnation, and swift action to stop those attacks before they start.

So today, we stand in solidarity, to support survivors and to bring justice. But also to send an unequivocal message to those who order, allow or perpetrate sexual violence: we will not tolerate it and we will push for perpetrators to be prosecuted.

Along with the strategy, the Foreign Secretary will also launch:

- A new partnership between the UK Government and the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, which could use virtual reality technology to make survivors' experience in court less traumatic.
- A new Accountability Commission and Task Force (ACT) for Survivors initiative, developed by the UK to increase successful prosecutions and strengthen other forms of justice. It will provide support for countries with high levels of sexual violence in conflict, to strengthen their national justice systems so they are fit for purpose. This could include mentoring for prosecutors, setting up rapid response mechanisms in crises, and training and support from the UN Team of Experts.
- A new 'What Works To Prevent Violence' report which lays out the scale of the issue and puts forward methods, based on evidence, to prevent them. The first phase of the UK's 'What Works to Prevent Violence'

programme has shown reductions in violence of around 50%, even in the most challenging circumstances.

- Work to translate commitments into action to promote the rights and wellbeing of children born as a result of conflict-related sexual violence. This could include improving national laws, policies and practices.

The UK has been at the vanguard of efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence for the past decade, ever since former Foreign Secretary William Hague and Angelina Jolie jointly launched PSVI in 2012. Angelina Jolie will deliver a video message at the conference, and Lord Hague will speak in person on the 29th.

Since then, the UK has supported nearly 100 projects across 29 countries – from safe shelters in Bosnia, to judicial support in Iraq and Colombia, and training for peacekeepers in East Africa.

The current situation in Ukraine, as well as recent events in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, demonstrate that work to combat conflict-related sexual violence is still as important as ever.

Last week the Foreign Secretary announced on a visit to Ukraine an additional £3.45m towards projects in the country and the wider region, much of which will go towards addressing sexual and reproductive health.

FCDO Minister of State, Lord (Tariq) of Wimbledon, the Prime Minister's Special Representative for the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and Co-Host of the Conference:

Hearing from survivors of sexual violence in conflict inspires us, as they show incredible courage, in providing chilling testimonies of why we must all stand up for survivors, with survivors. Sexual violence is something no person should face in any circumstance. Yet we know that in 2021, tragically, it was perpetrated in at least 18 countries. This must stop.

Thanks to the guidance of survivors, working with many allies over the 10 years since we launched the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, we have made some good progress, but we ALL must recognise that more needs to be done to prevent this abhorrent crime, including its use as weapon of war. We know that support and justice is vital for survivors and that perpetrators of these crimes must be fully held to account. We will accelerate this work globally by strengthening our response, so that we put survivors at the heart of everything we do.

In a message to the conference Angelina Jolie will say:

When human beings are physically assaulted in this way, and in some countries for decades, there has to be a decisive global response. When there isn't, it sends a message to both the victim and the perpetrator that we don't truly regard this as a significant crime that needs to be punished and prevented. So this conference should in my view, take a hard look at what has succeeded and what has not.

Dr. Mukwege, Medical Director at Panzi Hospital and 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, said:

The PSVI Conference is organised so that all of us attending in London can listen to survivors' voices. This is not the first conference where survivors have spoken up demanding justice, but I hope it will be one of the last – we need to attend as we count down to end wartime sexual violence.

We are all here today because of survivors. All of them attending this conference represent thousands of others awaiting care, justice and reparations. Very few survivors have received the holistic care – including justice – that they deserve. As the survivors are sharing their recommendations, requests, and opinions, I ask everyone not only to listen to them but also pledge a commitment to act and support their demands.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad said:

It's time to use every tool we have: sanctions, international trials, and universal jurisdiction to show that sexual violence in conflict will not be tolerated.

We must make state and non-state actors think twice about the consequences of these crimes. Ending the status quo of impunity is essential for preventing people around the world from being subjected to experiences like mine.

Energy storage backed with over £32 million government funding

- £32.9 million government funding awarded to projects across the UK to develop new energy storage technologies, such as thermal batteries and liquid flow batteries

- energy storage will be crucial as the UK scales up secure, clean and affordable renewable energy, with cutting-edge projects led by innovators across the UK
- developing energy storage will further strengthen the UK's energy security by helping unlock the full potential of home-grown renewables

Over £32 million government funding has been awarded to UK projects developing cutting-edge innovative energy storage technologies that can help increase the resilience of the UK's electricity grid while also maximising value for money.

Five projects based across the UK will benefit from a share of over £32 million in the second phase of the [Longer Duration Energy Storage \(LDES\) competition](#), to develop technologies that can store energy as heat, electricity or as a low-carbon energy carrier like hydrogen.

The variable nature of renewables like solar and wind power means that energy can be produced when it is not needed, such as during extended periods of high wind. However, new energy storage technologies can store excess energy to be used at a later point, so the energy can be used rather than wasted – meaning we can rely even more on renewable generation rather than fossil fuels, helping boost the UK's long-term energy resilience.

This builds on the aims set out in the [Energy Security Strategy](#) earlier this year, to ensure a more flexible, efficient system by encouraging flexibility with large-scale, long-duration electricity storage to balance the overall system.

Minister for Climate Graham Stuart said:

Accelerating renewables is key to boosting our energy resilience. Energy storage helps us get the full benefit of these renewables, improving efficiency and helping drive down costs in the long term.

This £32.9 million government backing will enable green innovators across the UK to develop this technology, helping create new jobs and encouraging private investment, while also safeguarding the UK's energy security.

The funding announced today follows the first phase of the LDES competition, which saw £2.7 million awarded to 19 projects. This second phase provides further funding to the most promising projects from Phase 1, enabling them to build prototypes and demonstrators to bring their projects to life.

The LDES competition provides government backing to accelerate the development and commercialisation of innovative energy storage technologies, in turn supporting the UK's transition to relying on renewables, while also encouraging private investment and new green jobs – with an estimated 100 jobs supported through these projects.

Energy storage projects who have received funding

StorTera Ltd, based in Edinburgh, will receive £5.02 million to build a prototype demonstrator of their sustainable, efficient, and highly energy dense single liquid flow battery (SLIQ) technology. SLIQ will offer flexibility to the grid by storing electricity which can then be released when weather dependent technologies such as wind turbines and solar panels have periods of decreased energy generation.

Sunamp Ltd, based in East Lothian, will receive £9.25 million for a project that will trial their advanced thermal storage system in 100 homes across the UK. They will extend their existing heat battery to provide increased storage duration and capacity and pair it with household energy systems to tackle periods of low renewables generation on the grid.

The University of Sheffield will receive £2.60 million to develop a prototype modular thermal energy storage system, enabling optimised, flexible storage of heat within homes, providing benefits for both the occupant and the grid. The prototype energy systems will be manufactured by Loughborough University and deployed at the Creative Energy Homes campus at the University of Nottingham, demonstrating the technology within lived-in homes.

RheEnergise Ltd will receive £8.24 million to build a demonstrator near Plymouth of their 'High-Density Hydro®' pumped energy storage system. The system uses an environmentally safe mineral-rich fluid more than two and half times denser than water, to create electricity from gentle slopes, without requiring steep dam walls or high mountains like traditional hydropower. The project will use surplus electricity to pump the fluid uphill, then later when electricity is needed by the grid, the fluid will be released back down the hill through turbines to generate electricity.

EDF UK R&D, in partnership with the University of Bristol, Urenco and the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), will receive £7.73 million to develop a hydrogen storage demonstrator utilising depleted uranium at UKAEA's Culham Science Centre in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. Electricity will be converted to hydrogen via electrolysis and stored for future use – either directly as hydrogen, or converted back to electricity via a fuel cell when required.

Dr. Gavin Park, CEO, StorTera Ltd said:

Long duration energy storage is key to a more sustainable future and better utilisation of renewable energy. This competition to accelerate the commercialisation of the most innovative technologies is a great initiative and StorTera are thrilled to have been selected to demonstrate the potential of our single liquid flow battery.

Patrick Dupeyrat, Director EDF R&D UK said:

Hydrogen is an exciting and provable future solution for the UK's

energy industry. Following the launch of this project, our demonstration technology will be a world first, allowing us to utilise depleted uranium to store hydrogen and provide grid flexibility. The UK's net zero future needs hydrogen and nuclear in the mix, and HyDUS, which innovatively combines the two, makes perfect sense. We have every confidence that HyDUS will succeed and are delighted that the government has backed the project with critical research funding.

Stephen Crosher, Chief Executive of RheEnergise Ltd said:

Over the next decade, Long Duration Energy Storage can make an important contribution to the UK energy market, and indeed globally. Long Duration Energy Storage is a key to delivering the energy transition and will help strengthen the resilience and security of the UK's energy system. It will be essential to the effective operation of the grid as it balances intermittent renewable generation, it helps to create effective base-load power from renewables, whilst at the same time keeping costs low. Our storage system offers a solution.

BEIS's contract is incredibly welcome and will enable us to accelerate the commercial deployment of our High-Density Hydro® storage system in the UK and overseas. With the BEIS contract in place, we will be seeking planning consent for our Devon project before the end of the year.

We are also pursuing a number of project opportunities elsewhere in the UK, continental Europe and Canada. Drawing upon our work in Devon and the government's welcome support, we expect to have our first 5MW grid-scale project in operation in 2026.

Andrew Bissell, CEO, Sunamp said:

We are thrilled to have received this very significant funding award, which is the result of outstanding work from our own and our partners' product, materials and engineering teams. The money will be used to develop and test in 100 homes a first-of-a-kind thermal energy storage technology aimed at replacing fossil fuels and bringing forward the electrification of heat.

EXTEND systems in homes will help the UK ride out lulls in renewable energy generation and will allow homeowners to cut their carbon emissions and benefit from lower cost tariffs for flexible demand and participation in grid-supporting measures.

Dr Rob Barthorpe from the University of Sheffield said:

Our focus now is to make this happen. We intend to successfully demonstrate these technologies within lived-in homes, and to work with our industrial partners on scale up and commercialisation activities to bring them to market as soon as possible. We believe these technologies have the potential to play a significant role in maximising usage of renewable sources, and could provide real help to consumers during events such as the current energy crisis.

Notes to editors

The £68 million Longer Duration Energy Storage Demonstration competition is funded through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's £1 billion [Net Zero Innovation Portfolio](#), which aims to accelerate the commercialisation of innovative clean energy technologies and processes through the 2020s and 2030s.

This competition is being conducted in two phases, and across two streams. The two competition streams are designed to support technologies at different stages of development, with Stream 1 supporting actual demonstrations of technologies closer to commercialisation, and Stream 2 supporting prototype demonstrations of earlier stage innovations. Funding for Stream 2 is in the form of Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) contracts.

Phase 2 builds on Phase 1, giving further funding to several Phase 1 projects to build and demonstrate their technology.

Millions invested to support vulnerable people navigating legal issues

- £12 million to help vulnerable people struggling with legal problems
- focus on early intervention to resolve issues before going to court
- 33,000 supported since October 2020

The funding will be awarded to charities and organisations providing support for people facing disputes – helping them to better understand their issues and avoid costly court proceedings.

More than 33,000 people have been supported by organisations receiving similar government grants since October 2020 and nearly two-thirds of cases were resolved before reaching court.

Justice Minister Lord Bellamy said:

Those who most need support should be able to access it quickly and easily, which is why we're increasing funding for organisations providing this vital service.

Early intervention helps prevent people from undergoing lengthy court proceedings – saving time, money and unnecessary stress.

It adds to more than £5 million of investment this year, including a £1 million cost-of-living grant, to help organisations respond to increasing demand for free legal advice. Specialist guidance is offered in person, by telephone or online, to help deal with problems before they escalate or to support those who need to appear in court.

The grant will replace the current Help Accessing Legal Support grant worth £3.2 million which is due to end in June 2023.

The funding benefits people in difficult situations including Helen (not her real name), who was supported by an organisation funded by the grant after leaving an abusive relationship. She continued to suffer harassment from her ex-partner and contacted her local free advice charity who provided guidance on navigating family court proceedings. Helen was able to secure protective court orders aimed at restricting her ex-partner's access to the family home and preventing violent behaviour against her and her daughter.

Helen said:

[The advisor] gave me sound legal advice to help me make choices to keep me safe and get my house back.

If I had not had access to the [advice] it is quite likely that I may have not had the courage or the understanding to go to court to seek these orders, or even worse, that I would have returned to an abusive and volatile relationship as I would not have had any other option.

This legal support is provided by organisations across the country, using the funding where it is needed.

Cara Walker, Mobile Legal Adviser at Norfolk Community Law Service, said:

Providing outreach legal help to people is vital in a large rural county like Norfolk. The Ministry of Justice funding enables me to work with clients on a long term basis in community settings, who have a range of complex legal problems-including welfare benefits, domestic abuse and immigration.

Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group, said:

Our Advice and Advocacy Service provides social care and legal expertise to families, including parents whose children are in need or subject to child protection enquiries and relatives raising children who cannot live at home.

The Help Accessing Legal Support Grant is funding our new webchat service for families and is enabling us to provide more intensive support to callers to our advice line, allowing more children to live safely and thrive within their families and safely averting them entering a care system already in crisis.

Further information on how charities and organisations can bid for the funding will be made available shortly.

A Night of Rhapsody with HSBC, British Embassy, British Council

British-rooted international bank HSBC Philippines together with British Embassy Manila and British Council Philippines brought guests to the final weekend performance of the hit musical “We Will Rock You” at the new state of the art Samsung Performing Arts Theater in the Philippines.

“At HSBC, we value the importance of partnerships that leverage on our global connectivity to bring international opportunities and experiences to our retail and corporate customers in the Philippines. Together with our partners, we are excited to showcase the best of Britain more so given the growing linkages between the two countries,” shared Sandeep Uppal, President and CEO of HSBC Philippines.

Guests had an exclusive pass to touch, feel, taste and hear everything British, as they celebrated with HSBC Philippines, British Embassy Manila and British Council Philippines this entertaining passage of an unforgettable recreation of what makes Britain great in the eyes of the world. The British experience included interactive photo nooks that featured the famous landmarks and icons such as the Big Ben, London Bridge, Westminster St. subway, tasted a British inspired menu and saw a display of the British brands.

“I’m delighted that the British Embassy was able to partner with HSBC to put on ‘A Night of Rhapsody’ – a great celebration of British culture, music and theatre. There’s no better way than Rock and Roll Diplomacy to break down barriers and show our friends in the Philippines what British talent and creativity is all about,” said His Majesty’s Ambassador to the Philippines Laure Beaufils.

"I'm very grateful to all the artists and staff behind 'We Will Rock You' for making this happen and allowing us to take part in their adventure, and I'm very grateful to HSBC for their friendship and collaboration. I look forward to many more opportunities to share the best of British culture and to show the world that the UK is fun, modern, and engaging."

There was also an exclusive opportunity for guests to meet Sam Sewell, associate producer of the "We Will Rock You" musical. Select guests also had a chance to go on a backstage tour and photo opportunity with the cast.

"With music, singing and dancing being a core part of the Filipino culture, we hope we were able to bridge this passion to life with a British flavor through the hit musical "We Will Rock You," shared Peter Faulhaber, Head of Wealth and Personal Banking, HSBC Philippines.