

How DVLA helps to connect people to nature



With the changing of the seasons, our natural environment outside our offices here in Swansea can look particularly striking. So it's a good time to take stock of what we do in DVLA to look after our local environment and reduce our impact on it.

Why we look after our environment

This is really important to us in DVLA, and it's something we've been actively doing for a number of years. We're also bound by both legal and governmental commitments to reduce our environmental impacts and enhance the flora and fauna which exist on our estate.

These commitments are set out in our [Strategic Plan](#), [Sustainability Report](#) and our [Biodiversity Action Plan](#). I'm head of DVLA's Sustainability Team and we're the team responsible for ensuring the commitments are carried out. It's not just a job to us though, it's a passion that goes beyond just meeting these obligations. We also want to encourage other staff to share in the joy we find in nature and educate them in the importance and value of the natural world.

Our three sites are in residential and industrial locations and are relatively small (around 40 acres in all, or roughly 40 football pitches). Within these sites we have dedicated conservation areas, ponds, grassed areas and verges that we leave untouched, as well as protected ancient hedgerows. All of these are supporting an increasing number of wildlife and plant species, including otters, bats and small blue butterflies. Last year, we counted at least 12 species that are listed in [Section 7 \(Priority Species List\)](#) of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.



Zero cost, maximum benefit

This has cost us nothing to do, has had no negative impact on the effective running of the estate and is bringing pleasure and increased knowledge to many of our staff. To help us with this work we've found many experts already working in DVLA who have enthusiastically shared their knowledge and expertise.

We have a chairperson of the local ornithological society, who has undertaken bird surveys and led bird walks around the estate in their own time. We also have conservation experts who help us monitor and analyse wildlife, and advise us on how we can develop our estate's biodiversity. There's even an avid forager who has shown us how to find food in the unlikeliest of places (including rough patches of ground!)



The best bits...

To me, the most wonderful thing I've seen from our work in encouraging nature to flourish is the joy that everyone gets from it. Colleagues send us lovely

photos of the birds and wild flowers they've spotted on site. They also tell me how their lunchtime walks around the sites, looking at the natural environment we're helping to prosper, let them take a break from the pressures of work and recharge their batteries. This just shows the difference connecting with nature can make to us every day.

Here at DVLA we're extremely lucky to live and work in a beautiful part of the world, and we're making the most of our little bit of that. We're doing our bit to help people connect to nature, and I'd like to pass on the [United Nations environmental challenge](#) to us all: in this busy world, why not find a way to experience nature, breathe it in, and remember that by keeping our planet healthy, we keep ourselves healthy too.

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[Driving and your eyesight: staying safe on the road](#)

If you drive, it goes without saying that you know you need your eyes on the road at all times. What you might not know is that DVLA has minimum eyesight standards that all drivers need to demonstrate so they can be allowed to drive.

So how do we decide on the vision standards for driving? DVLA's Vision Panel Secretary Dr Gareth Rees tells us more about his role and these standards.



I've been a doctor for 41 years and have been DVLA's Vision Panel Secretary for 10 years. My main role is to liaise between DVLA and the [Honorary Medical Advisory Panel on Visual Disorders](#). The panel meets every 6 months and is made up of eyesight specialists, who provide DVLA with expert advice on how to apply and interpret the law when [assessing fitness to drive](#).

Think your eyesight's getting worse? Act now

We all have busy lives, and sometimes we might overlook the signs that our eyes are not as good as they were. You might be finding it harder to judge distances, you might be struggling to read the newspapers, or it's getting more difficult for you to drive at night. These are just a few signs that [your eyesight may be deteriorating](#).

In line with [advice from optometrists](#), our advice is that you should get your eyes tested at least every 2 years. But if you recognise any of the signs above, don't wait – go and get checked out straight away with your optician or doctor. If they advise you to tell DVLA about your eyesight, you can do this [online or by writing to us](#).

If you don't meet the eyesight standards, stop driving immediately and tell DVLA.

After you tell us about your condition

Don't worry – usually, most people who [tell us they've got a medical condition](#) are still allowed to drive.

If you have a 'progressive' (worsening) condition but can still meet the eyesight standards for driving, you may get a short-term licence rather than a full-term one. This type of licence lasts for 1, 2, 3 or 5 years and when it's due for renewal, we let you know.

It's better to be safe than sorry. So if you're in doubt, get it checked out.

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[Driving with Parkinson's disease](#)

Parkinson's disease is a progressive condition that may affect someone's ability to drive safely. Dr Wyn Parry, DVLA's Senior Medical Adviser, tells us more about driving with this condition.



I joined DVLA as Senior Medical Adviser after thirty years in the NHS. It's my job to advise on how certain medical conditions can affect someone's ability to drive. After blogging last year about [driving with diabetes](#), this time I'd like to focus on driving with [Parkinson's disease](#).

Parkinson's disease affects the nervous system and may affect the muscles, causing movement problems. In some circumstances, it can even affect the functions of the brain.

Driving a vehicle safely

Being able to drive a vehicle requires high levels of skill and ability. A driver either needs to be unaffected by a medical condition, or have a medical condition that is controlled so that symptoms are highly unlikely to cause any problems.

Sadly, Parkinson's is a progressive condition and deterioration is inevitable. It'll affect many activities, including driving. This is why it is so important that all drivers who are diagnosed with Parkinson's must [tell DVLA](#). The rate of deterioration varies, but recognising that it will happen is important. It allows the patient and their family time to make plans for any lifestyle changes that may be necessary.

Knowing you will eventually lose the ability to drive is never easy to accept. But it may be more bearable if the person has time to adjust and plan alternative ways of travel. For example: public transport, taxis, or lifts from friends and relatives.

For [professional drivers](#), who must demonstrate a greater level of fitness to drive, it may involve reviewing work options for the future.

How DVLA makes a decision about drivers with Parkinson's



Once DVLA is told about a driver with Parkinson's we'll ask the driver for information about their condition. We'll also talk to the [healthcare professionals](#) involved in their diagnosis and treatment – like their GP, consultant or specialist nurse.

Information we usually ask for includes details about how long the individual has had Parkinson's, the level of deterioration and any changes in treatment. All this information is crucial for us to be able to make an informed decision on whether they can continue to drive safely.

Where possible we always try to offer a driving licence to a driver with a medical condition, but only if it's safe to do so. Our priority is to always maintain road safety for the driver and other road users.

For many drivers with medical conditions like Parkinson's, we might offer a short-term driving licence. This could be for one or three years. We tend to start going down this route when a driver's condition begins to deteriorate – a longer term licence may be offered earlier on, with subsequent licence periods getting shorter over time.

For more information about driving with Parkinson's

You can visit [Parkinson's UK](#)'s website.

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[Taxing your vehicle doesn't have to be taxing...](#)



Did you know it's [UK law](#) that all vehicles must be taxed or declared off-road?

If you've got one or more of the 39 million vehicles registered in the UK, it's quicker and easier than ever to keep on top of your responsibility to stay legal. Don't get caught out by not taxing your vehicle.

If you're not sure when your tax is due, you can check with us at any time using our [Check if a vehicle is taxed](#) service. You'll still get a paper Vehicle Tax Reminder (V11) in the post, reminding you when your tax is due – nothing's changed there.

Can't manage the cost all at once? You can pay by [Direct Debit](#).

It's never been easier to tax your vehicle [online](#) or by 'phone, on 0300 123 4321. Both these options are 24/7.

Or, if you prefer, you can tax at a [Post Office](#) that deals with vehicle tax.

So many different ways to tax your vehicle and stay within the law – there's really no excuse not to.

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[Buying a new car? Vehicle tax rates have changed](#)



Vehicle tax rates are changing for cars and some motorhomes first registered with DVLA from today. These changes do not affect cars registered before 1 April 2017 – but their rate of tax has increased today in line with the Retail Price Index.

If you're thinking about buying a new car or motorhome, read on because this will affect you.

For the last 12 months we've been working hard to make sure that you get the facts about the changes before you buy a new car.

We've been busy communicating this message on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) since last November and have updated GOV.UK information about the changes. Our press office has been issuing press releases to national, local and specialist publications.

In January, we launched a digital advertising campaign to new car buyers with simple messages driving people to GOV.UK to read the facts. As a result of all our combined digital communications, almost 700,000 people have visited the information.

We've been [blogging regularly](#), as well as putting messages on our printed literature. Over at our contact centre we have an automated telephone service to quickly answer your questions. This has been really effective so far with almost all of the calls relating to the changes using the service.

We've also been working closely with our stakeholders in the motor industry to help them get ready behind the scenes for the new rates. This includes updating the existing first registration service, creating a specially designed toolkit to use with their customers and running webinars in January and February.

So if you are thinking about buying a new car or motorhome from today, you're probably aware of the changes by now. But make sure you have a look at [new vehicle tax rates](#) information to see how it affects you.

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