

The jury's out on River Ouseburn future

An innovative project to involve communities in decisions about the future of their local river has taken place in the North East.

The first of its kind in the country, Ouseburn Citizens' Jury is made up of members of the public and looked at what a 'thoroughly modern river' should be.

The jury, which took place at the end of January and was run by an independent facilitator on behalf of the Environment Agency, debated local issues, shared ideas and questioned environmental experts on all aspects of the water environment.

The findings from the jury will help inform the Environment Agency's future water management plans. And as a direct result of the project, the Environment Agency and Northumbrian Water are developing a potential bid to Ofwat's Innovation Fund to help finance an innovative partnership led through education in the local area.

The River Ouseburn

Clean and plentiful water

Catherine Saxon, Area Director of the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

Protecting and improving England's rivers, lakes and streams is essential to ensuring we have clean and plentiful water now and in the future.

We are facing some tough challenges, particularly from climate change and population growth. We need to work with everyone who uses, and is responsible for, water, across all sectors of society, to ensure the needs of all are reflected in our future plans.

Citizens' juries are an excellent way of gaining views from the wider public and we greatly value the input of everyone who has taken part.

The Ouseburn jury listened to evidence from a broad range of environmental experts, including Northumbrian Water, Woolsington Parish Council, the National Farmers' Union, Newcastle City Council and the Tyne Rivers' Trust.

The final six recommendations from the Ouseburn Citizens' Jury include better

education, appropriate and fair legislation and incentives for behaviour change, improved funding for improvements, more action to manage pollution, a co-ordinated partnership approach to changes, and a better balance between development and wildlife.

Rob Carr, from the Environment Agency in the North East, attended the jury. He said:

This was a great way to connect with the Ouseburn community and seek their recommendations, which we hope to turn in to actions, improving the environment for people and nature.

Mike Madine, Head of Wastewater Service Planning, Quality and Performance at Northumbrian Water, added:

The citizens' jury was a fantastic event and it gave us the opportunity to see how our communities feel about our ambitious plans to improve the water environment.

During the discussions, it became clear that our communities have clear support for many of our current initiatives, including projects such as Bin The Wipe, our pollution reduction plans and our Water Environment Improvement Programme.

Already 33 of our 34 bathing waters have been highly rated as "excellent" or "good", but our ambition is to have the best beaches and rivers in the country. Through events such as this we can engage with our communities to help meet our goals.

We are grateful for the Environment Agency for allowing us to be a part of this country-first experience.

Jury member Emily said she learned a lot during the experience, adding that she enjoyed 'potentially making a difference to the local area' and learning that 'water is so much more than just for cleaning and drinking – there are many aspects of water that are overlooked'.

Further citizens' juries will take place elsewhere in the country up until the end of March.

UK and Albania sign Agreement to

deepen economic relationship and political efforts to tackle serious organised crime

Press release

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Albania Duncan Norman signed the Agreement with Minister for Foreign Affairs Olta Xhaçka in Tirana.



The UK and Albania will do more together to tackle organised crime and stop it spreading throughout Europe, including to the UK, following a new Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement between our countries. The Agreement signed today (5 February) sets out the UK and Albania's ambitions for our future relationship including the strengthening of political, economic, security and cultural ties. As well as deepening our shared work against organised crime, the Agreement will allow for more cooperation on good governance and political cooperation – improving the security of the Western Balkans to make both Albania and the UK safer.

By signing the Agreement, the UK has reaffirmed its commitment to a close relationship with Albania and to playing a continued positive role in the Western Balkans.

The Agreement will also allow the UK and Albania to build on their trading relationship going forward. The preferential trading terms it secures will enable British business to trade as they did before 1 January 2021. Total trade in goods and services between the UK and Albania was worth £158m in 2019. The Agreement also paves the way for increased trade and investment in the future.

FCDO Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas Wendy Morton said:

I welcome the signing of the UK – Albania Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement which sets out our ambitious vision for the

future relationship between our countries. Together we will be building even stronger partnerships to tackle organised crime, improve governance, support justice reform and wider economic development.

The signing of this Agreement benefits exporters and consumers in both of our countries, including British businesses such as Vodafone, who are flourishing in Albania.

Minister for International Trade, Ranil Jayawardena MP, said:

Today's Agreement supports a trading relationship worth £158m in 2019 and provides the foundation for deeper trade and investment ties in the future, benefitting businesses and creating jobs in both our countries. I look forward to working in partnership as we continue to strengthen our bonds through trade.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Albania, Duncan Norman said:

The signing of this Agreement marks a significant and positive step forwards in the UK – Albania relationship. Albania offers great opportunities for UK companies and investors expanding into south-east Europe and the signing of the Agreement marks a new era of increased investment in both our economies. Our Agreement also allows us to continue and build on our close cooperation across a wide range of areas, including the environment, energy, finance and education.

Notes to editors

Published 5 February 2021

New UK Government Covid testing site opens in Glasgow Pollok

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About the AF Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2021-24)

News story

The Government Analysis Function D&I Strategy launched in February 2021



People are central to the success of the Government Analysis Function. Diversity is a strength and it's vital that all analysts feel able to bring their authentic self to work, safe in the knowledge that diverse perspectives and experiences are both valued and respected.

Our vision as a Function is to create a truly diverse and inclusive analysis community that is reflective of the UK society we serve. We are delighted to share the [Analysis Function Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for 2021-2024](#), which outlines our vision for creating a truly inclusive place to work and build a career.

The approach outlined in this strategy is delivery-driven and has been comprised by members for members, based on evidence from 2020 Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) survey and subsequent consultation sessions. It will remain agile and iterative, adapting and developing alongside our own understanding of the analytical community and the challenges faced by our members.

As a Function, we all have a duty to take meaningful action and achieve genuine change through ownership, understanding and accountability. If you would like to influence and drive forward positive change at Function level, we would encourage you to join our Diversity and Inclusion Working group.

Please contact Eleanor.Williams@ons.gov.uk for more information.

Published 5 February 2021

New vaccines partnership to rapidly respond to new virus variants

A new partnership between the UK Government and vaccine manufacturer CureVac has been established to rapidly develop new vaccines in response to new Covid-19 variants if needed.

Both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines are safe and effective and appear to work well against the Covid-19 variants currently dominant in the UK.

The new agreement will utilise UK expertise on genomics and virus sequencing to allow new varieties of vaccines based on messenger RNA technology to be developed quickly against new strains of Covid-19 if they are needed.

The Government is establishing an expert advisory group to identify the variants that the UK could need vaccines against.

Through the agreement announced today, the UK has placed an initial order for 50 million doses of new vaccines to be delivered later this year if they are required.

This is in addition to the broader portfolio of 407 million doses already secured by the UK Government to date.

Almost all vaccines developed through this partnership against new Covid-19 strains will be variants of an existing jab by CureVac which is currently undergoing Phase 3 clinical trials, meaning it should be possible to accelerate clinical trials ahead of submission to the regulator for approval. The UK will use its partnership with CureVac to boost the UK's capacity to develop and manufacture variant vaccines in the UK, strengthening our domestic capabilities.

The process is similar to the method used to update flu vaccines each year – updated and accelerated using the newly-proven mRNA technology that can be reformulated against variants more quickly than older and more traditional vaccine technologies. mRNA technology is already being used in the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines approved for use in the UK.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

The UK's vaccine programme has been a national success story so far, and we are determined to make sure we're as prepared as we can be in the long-term if new variants of Covid-19 emerge.

This fantastic new partnership means we can work to swiftly tweak and rollout new variations of existing vaccines if we need to, while also building up Britain's vaccine manufacturing base in the process.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

The vaccines we are deploying now are safe and effective, with the latest evidence suggesting they provide protection against new strains of Covid-19.

But we must be prepared for all eventualities and bolster onshore UK manufacturing capacity to develop vaccines to combat new variants of the disease, taking advantage of our world-leading genomics expertise.

This will help ensure we can continue to provide everyone with a high level of protection against the virus and save lives.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said:

While the vaccines currently being deployed in the UK appear to work well against the Covid-19 variants currently dominant in the UK, the virus continues to mutate and it is likely that our vaccines will have to adapt to continue to offer the best possible protection. Being able to create these new vaccines at speed will allow our scientists to keep ahead of the virus as they do every year with the influenza vaccine.

Vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

This is exactly the kind of work that will stand us in good stead as we continue our monumental national effort to end this pandemic and return to normality.

Of course we urge people to continue to take up the chance to have a vaccine when they are invited to – all of which are safe and have been proven to be effective against the virus.

Interim Chair of the Vaccines Taskforce Clive Dix said:

Today's agreement will mean the UK is better prepared for the

emergence of any significant new virus variant.

Because these mRNA vaccines can be rapidly adapted we will be ready to respond swiftly to new strains and update vaccines in the same way the flu vaccine is updated each year – a vital part of ending the pandemic once and for all.

The UK Government's new expert advisory group will look at both current and potential future virus variants. This will involve using the world-leading UK Science Surveillance networks alongside genomic sequencing technologies and clinical trial capabilities to allow the rapid identification of and response to virus variants.

To date, the UK Government has invested over £300 million into manufacturing a successful vaccine.

The UK was the first country in the world to procure, authorise and then deploy both the Oxford/AstraZeneca and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines.