

# UK is helping indigenous communities in Peten to protect and use their ancient traditional medicine

World news story

The British Ambassador in Guatemala, Nick Whittingham, met with the Mayan Council of Indigenous Spiritual Leaders of the Southern Peten, ACGERS, who are using the benefits of ancient traditional medicine as part of a UK funded project.



The project called “Green Health” is researching medical use of biodiversity (based on indigenous healthcare practices), to develop mechanisms protecting this knowledge, and consider how to use this to increase the health and prosperity of less favoured groups in Guatemala.

Other partners of the project are the University College London (UCL), Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG) and the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP). Originally funded with more than 3 million quetzals for three years, the project recently received an extra 500,000 quetzals allocation to fight the impact of COVID-19 and help communities to overcome economic hurdles associated to it.

Additional funding will help the Mayan Council of Elders to acquire the tools to protect many species that are at risk due to habitat loss and degradation. It will also help villagers to obtain additional income by gathering seeds of local species through forest transect walks; planting and nurturing of seeds in a local ethnobotany garden; and documenting traditional medicine used for respiratory syndromes.

This will create effective synergies between urgent income generation and participatory research to understand the role of traditional Q’eqchi’ knowledge in biodiversity use for medicinal as well as food security strategies. Ambassador Whittingham walked along the Mayan spiritual leaders in some of these special biodiversity areas, in Poptun, Peten.

## [A31 cash boosts cycling and pedestrian access to Ringwood street](#)

The work, which is being carried out by Hampshire County Council on behalf of Highways England, will improve safety and accessibility for non-motorists and will begin the process that will ultimately see access from West street to the A31 closed.

At the same time, the footpath will be widened along the north side of the street, and a new footway built over the 'brick bridge.' Highways England is planning further footway and cycleway improvements to coincide with its main scheme to improve capacity on the A31.

Funding for the scheme comes from a dedicated pot of money within Highways England, known as designated funds. Additional funding can be applied for from this pot and used alongside the main scheme to make potential improvements that will have a positive impact on local communities.

To keep disruption to a minimum for residents of Ringwood, Highways England is bringing forward the work planned for West Street. This much anticipated work will now start on Monday 15 February and is scheduled to finish by the end of July 2021. The work includes:

- Widening the footpath along the west side of West Street to improve accessibility for cyclists and walkers
- New kerbs and environmental planting
- Building a new footpath over the 'brick bridge'
- Widening the footpath over the 'old Stony' bridge
- Introducing new priority give way signs at both bridges to accompany the new and improved footpaths over them
- Resurfacing both bridges
- Laying new electrical cable along the length of West Street in advance of the main A31 work.
- Highways England will be putting up signage on the A31 to advise drivers of the West Street closure.

Highways England Project Manager for the A31 improvement scheme, Daniel Kittredge said:

We are delighted to be able to fund this work along West Street and improve cycling and pedestrian access for the residents of Ringwood. We have worked hard with Hampshire County Council to cover as much work as possible at this time and minimise disruption

to local residents.

It's exciting to see this work get underway, which will not only improve the environment of West Street but also enable us to complete essential cable diversions which is necessary to get ready for the main A31 upgrade work.

Councillor Rob Humby, Deputy Leader of Hampshire County Council and Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment, said:

Hampshire County Council has been working collaboratively with New Forest District Council and Ringwood Town Council to develop a programme of small-scale measures that support the Ringwood Town Access Plan. These measures will help improve pedestrian and cycle safety, while ensuring good access to the town remains after the closure of West Street.

The work taking place on West Street are weather dependent and may need to be re-arranged at short notice. If this is the case Hampshire County Council will update signage on site and also the [Hampshire County Council](#) website.

### **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

### **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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## **[Continued suppression of protests in the Russian Federation and the sentencing of Alexey Navalny: UK statement](#)**

Mr Chair,

The UK calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Alexey Navalny and all peaceful protesters and journalists arrested during the last two weeks by the Russian authorities.

The UK is worried by Mr Navalny's sentencing. The perverse ruling of 2 February targets the victim of a poisoning with a banned chemical weapon rather than those responsible, and shows Russia's failure to meet the most basic commitments expected of any responsible member of the international community. It also raises concern over the independence of the judiciary and wider rule of law in Russia. It is deplorable that Mr Navalny is being detained in relation to court decisions which the European Court of Human Rights determined to be arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable.

Furthermore, the UK is disappointed by the Russian MFA spokesperson's claim that the presence of foreign diplomats at the court was evidence of interference. This unfounded claim is particularly disappointing given the commitment of all OSCE participating States to accept each other's' representatives as court observers as a confidence building measure, adopted in the OSCE Copenhagen Document.

Mr Chair,

As stated at last week's Permanent Council, a free and independent media is a cornerstone of any democratic society. We are appalled by the Russian authorities' use of violence and arbitrary arrest of peaceful protesters and journalists. This continued violent suppression of individual expression is unacceptable. These events confirm a continuous negative pattern of shrinking space for the opposition, civil society, human rights defenders and independent voices in Russia. Russia must respect its citizens' right to freedom of expression, adhere to its national and international obligations and release those detained arbitrarily for exercising their right of peaceful assembly.

Once more, we call on Russia to demonstrate its commitment to its international obligations, including its commitments in the OSCE, to release all those detained during peaceful demonstrations, and to release Mr Navalny without delay.

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## **Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 4 February 2021**

Mr Chair,

It was almost six months ago to the day that the Belarusian people went to the polling stations to vote for their choice of President. But this election, like many others in Belarus, was neither free nor fair, nor did it meet international standards. Opposition candidates were arrested and their supporters detained; domestic and international independent observers, were unable to monitor, with the invitation to Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) issuing too late; votes were rigged and counts and

results falsified.

ODIHR had reported the shortcomings of previous Belarusian parliamentary and presidential elections. But this time the people of Belarus demanded change. They wanted their votes to count. They wanted to participate. That is the essence of democracy and for which this organisation is here to develop, to support and to protect. They used the only means at their disposal, to go out on to the streets and demonstrate. When they did so, they did so peacefully and it has been a mark of the demonstrations ever since that they are peaceful and orderly.

The response from the Belarusian authorities over the past 6 months has been tough to witness – tens of thousands arbitrarily detained, with at least five fatalities; the offices of independent media organisations raided; journalists attacked and arrested; all leading opposition figures either exiled or imprisoned on trumped up charges; opposition signs banned; internet access regularly shut down and appalling reports of torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment inside detention centres. All the while, the authorities have acted with impunity and without any attempt to investigate any of the allegations.

Mr Chair,

The UK has spoken out about the situation repeatedly. We will continue to do so. We have acted correctly, both with partners in invoking the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism and in holding those responsible for human rights violations to account through sanctions. The Belarusian authorities have complained that this is interference in their internal affairs. That is not the case. As an OSCE participating State, Belarus freely entered into commitments to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms. It has failed to do so, and it is right that it is held to account for those failings. The UK will continue to act to uphold our shared commitments at the OSCE and in defence of the Rules Based International System, which exists to protect us all.

Throughout the last six months, the Belarusian government has ignored calls from its own people and the international community to engage in peaceful and inclusive national dialogue to help resolve the situation. Belarusians are calling for their democratic rights to be respected through new elections, which are free and fair. It is difficult to see how there can be any substantive proposals towards a democratic solution when there are now over 200 political prisoners in jail and key opponents exiled from their country.

Mr Chair,

The UK stands in solidarity with those calling for democratic change in Belarus. I use this opportunity today, to remind the Belarusian authorities that there is a roadmap out of the crisis – release those arbitrarily detained, release all those held on political grounds, allow those in exile to return, stop attacking independent media, properly investigate the allegations of abuse including torture, and engage with OSCE partners in implementing the recommendations in Professor Benedek's report in full.

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## M6 milestone after weekend closures

Highways England is constructing a bridge over the M6 at junction 19 at Knutsford to improve traffic flow between the motorway and the A556 and reduce congestion around the junction roundabout.

Work to lift dozens of steel bridge beams into place over the motorway was completed on Monday 1 February with the M6 re-opening after two successive weekend closures. A drone video released today shows how much progress was made during the work.

January's torrential rain damaged Acton Bridge along the A49 over the River Weaver near Northwich and meant plans to use a long-standing A54 and A49 diversion route during the Friday and Sunday night closures had to be altered at the last minute. Highways England had to use the A50 instead, prompting a 'thank you' message to residents.

Highways England project manager Khalid El-Rayes said:

"During the first weekend we were forced to change the diversion route at very short notice. Last week, when it became clear the bridge would not be repaired in time, we worked hard to advise local people we'd be using the A50 again, including writing to about 800 householders along the route.

"We would like to thank people in Holmes Chapel, Knutsford and everyone along the A50 for their patience and support over the last couple of weekends. They have helped us reach a significant milestone in this important project to provide smoother, safer and more reliable journeys for local people and everyone else relying on what is one of the busiest junctions in the North West."

The work to crane the 18 pairs of 40 tonne bridge beams – each up to 42 metres in length – into place over the motorway involved 100 contractors delivering some 12,000 hours of activity safely. Over the two weekends, United Utilities staff were also involved in completing a water mains diversion at the roundabout as part of the overall project.

Pictures from a drone show how much progress was made during the two weekend motorway closures

Pat Cumming, senior project manager for AmeySRM which is the lead contractor on the Highways England M6 Junction 19 project, said:

This was a tremendous achievement and a real team effort. I'm extremely proud of everyone involved. We will continue to work together safely and efficiently to deliver the project with minimal

disruption to Highways England customers.

Highways England revealed today it had also used the two weekend closures to do routine motorway maintenance away from the bridge site – with vegetation clearance, gully cleaning and litter picking among the tasks completed and reducing the need for lane and carriageway closures in the area at other times. Features of the operation over the two weekends included:

- Clearing or cutting overgrown vegetation and trees along 26 miles
- Cleaning almost 500 gullies, 108 manholes and more than two miles of drainage
- Removing 200 tonnes of silt along about 12 miles of the motorway
- Collecting ten cage van loads of large debris – including bumpers, tyres and ladders – and litter picking, filling over 800 black plastic bags
- 22 safety barrier repairs and all refuge areas cleaned and jetted

The new bridge is set to open in the summer. More information on the project is available at the [M6 junction 19 scheme page](#)

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