

Highways England funds study to help £2.5m rivers scheme become a reality

The £150,000 donation has funded an environmental feasibility study which is now under way to develop, plan and cost a five-year plan for the Stafford Brooks Project.

The project – a partnership of Highways England, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Stafford Borough Council and the Environment Agency – wants to make major improvements to habitats close to the Rivers Sow and Penk.

It would restore and create new habitats on a range of sites across the area including Doxey Marshes, Kingsmead Marsh and Radford Meadows.

The work aims to enable wildlife to thrive in the area, mitigate flooding issues and allow people to be better connected to nature by improving public access to sites and creating more green space for families to enjoy.

These restored sites could become home to a variety of wildlife including otter, wading birds such as lapwing and snipe and a range of amphibians.

More snipe will be attracted to the restored river habitats under the Stafford Brooks Project.

Highways England spokesperson Peter Smith said:

We are delighted to be part of this project which will enrich the town environmentally, bringing more wildlife and biodiversity around the rivers for families to enjoy as well as addressing issues with flooding.

Highways England is very grateful to the people of Stafford for their understanding while we are carrying out the upgrade of the M6 between junctions 13 and 15. In addition to the benefits of the motorway upgrade, we are giving something back to the community with projects like Stafford Brooks, the benefits of which would be enjoyed for generations.

It is a very worthwhile scheme and we look forward to helping deliver the results of the study.

The study will identify around 25 sites which can be improved for biodiversity, flood mitigation and water quality. Action will be taken to help join up some sites so habitats are more resilient and wildlife less isolated.

Senior Conservation Manager for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, David Cadman, said:

We are incredibly excited to have an opportunity to link and restore a range of sites across Stafford to improve biodiversity, water quality, flood mitigation and access as part of forming a nature recovery network for the town.

Borough Council cabinet member for Economic Development and Planning, Frances Beatty, said:

This is fantastic news and a great example of how we are working alongside key partners to bring a very beneficial environmental scheme to fruition. It will see the enhancement and restoration of Kingsmead Marsh, supporting a variety of flora and fauna, including local rare plants such as purple loosestrife and brown sedge.

Our green spaces have great potential and by working on them collectively we can create a green recovery for the town that benefits people and wildlife for now and the future. One of the council's top priorities is Climate Change and we have recently approved a Climate Change and Green Recovery Strategy – and this work will support our aims within the plan.

Ragged robin will thrive as part of the works planned. Picture courtesy of Victoria Bunter .

Madeleine Gardner, Catchment Coordinator at the Environment Agency said:

It's great to be a part of this exciting project. Urban rivers and streams are a vital habitat for wildlife and the restoration of them can significantly improve river ecology and water quality.

This project will not only help to improve the River Sow and its tributaries but also support the health and wellbeing of local residents by providing better access to their rivers and green spaces. It will take us another step further towards delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan's vision of ensuring that our rivers become places where wildlife can thrive.

The grant for the study has come from the Highways England Designated Environment Fund which aims to ensure the road network works more harmoniously with its surroundings to deliver an improved environment. This includes creating new or enhancing existing habitats.

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.

Swarming drones concept flies closer to reality

Press release

A swarm of 20 drones, composed of 5 different types, with different operational capabilities has recently completed the largest collaborative, military focused evaluation of swarming Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in the UK.



Drone graphic

The exercise was the culmination of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl)'s 'Many Drones Make Light Work' competition, funded under the MOD's Science and Technology Portfolio through the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA). Following 2 earlier phases, the £2.5 million contract for Phase 3 was awarded in January 2019. This was for an Integrated Concept Evaluation activity to explore the technical feasibility and military utility of a swarm of up to 20 small UAVs operating collaboratively. This was awarded to an industry team led by Blue Bear Systems Research including Plextek DTS, IQHQ, Airbus and Durham University.

The swarm consisted of 5 different types and sizes of fixed wing drones

together with 6 different payload types, flying representative tasks at RAF Spadeadam in Cumbria. Three operators in Blue Bear's Mobile Command & Control System (MCCS) managed the entire swarm whilst simultaneously handling different, collaborative payload analysis tasks.

[Many Drones Make Light Work](#)

The UAVs flew simultaneous Beyond Visual Line Of Sight (BVLOS) cooperative tasks, with Blue Bear collaborative autonomy ensuring they all contributed to overall mission goals. Throughout the 2 weeks of trials, more than 220 sorties were undertaken.

The Dstl Project Technical Authority, said:

Dstl has been driving research in autonomous systems across different platforms and domains for many years. This is a significant step forward in our understanding of the capabilities of swarming drones and has been achieved through excellent collaboration across the MOD and with a number of Small and Medium Enterprise partners. This 18 month collaboration has resulted in the demonstration of an operationally relevant capability and will inform and de-risk future choices and decisions about swarming drone capability.

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[Interim CEO appointed for Office for Environmental Protection](#)

Natalie Prosser has been appointed by Defra as the Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Designate of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP).

She was confirmed in this post in agreement with the Chair-designate of the OEP, Dame Glenys Stacey, and the appointment was approved by the Civil Service Commission.

Natalie is currently General Counsel at the Gambling Commission. Her previous roles have included Director of Legal at Ofqual and regulatory and policy lead on the independent Farm Inspection and Regulation Review.

She will start her role in February alongside Dame Glenys. The role of the Interim CEO is time limited until December and will be focussed on setting up the new body pending the appointment of a permanent CEO.

Speaking about her appointment, Natalie said:

The OEP has such an important job to do, with the clear ambition to set the benchmark for excellence in environmental regulation.

We must take on that challenge in a focused and dedicated way and we must establish ourselves so that we can make the wise and well informed decisions that will enable us to make best use of our powers and our voice in order to protect and improve our environment. I am so delighted to be able to play my part in establishing the OEP as the world leading environmental regulator that it needs to be.

Dame Glenys Stacey, Chair-designate of the OEP, said:

I am delighted that Natalie will be our interim CEO. She brings an in-depth understanding of public law, regulation and enforcement, and her experience in shaping and developing organisations independent of government and with oversight functions will be invaluable.

I am looking forward to working closely with Natalie to set up the OEP, a new and independent environmental watchdog. We have a one-off opportunity to build a truly capable and committed organisation.

The OEP will be created by the Environment Bill and will be a new, independent statutory body with the principal objective of contributing to environmental protection and the improvement of the natural environment. It was announced this week that the Environment Bill is being carried over to the next parliamentary session, with Report Stage recommencing early in the Second Session, with Royal Assent expected in the Autumn.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow also announced this week that the OEP will have its headquarters in Worcester – part of the Government's commitment to ensuring that opportunities are spread fairly across the country.

The appointment of the interim CEO and confirmation of the OEP's location demonstrates the Government's commitment to a green recovery and maintaining environmental standards now we have left the European Union.

[Gradings under review for Salvation](#)

Army Housing Association

Press release

The GUR lists registered providers whose compliance with RSH's economic standards is being investigated.



The Regulator of Social Housing reports that Salvation Army Housing Association has been placed on its gradings under review list today (28 January 2021).

Salvation Army Housing Association's current grades are G2/V2. The regulator notifies that a provider's grading is under review when its compliant grade (G1 and G2 for governance, V1 or V2 for viability) is being investigated in relation to an issue which may result in a downgrade to a non-compliant grade (G3 or G4 for governance, V3 or V4 for viability).

The regulator is currently investigating matters which may impact on Salvation Army Housing Association's compliance with the Governance and Financial Viability Standard. The outcome of the investigation will be confirmed in a regulatory judgement, once completed.

The regulator's [gradings under review list](#) and [Salvation Army Housing Association's regulatory judgements page](#) are available on the website.

Notes to editors

1. The GUR lists providers where we are investigating a matter that might result in them being assessed as non-compliant in relation to the regulator's Governance and Financial Viability Standard.
2. The [regulatory standards](#) can be found on the RSH website.
3. The Regulator of Social Housing promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation

focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.

4. For press office contact details, see the [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.

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Jenrick announces free admission to the proposed UK Holocaust Memorial

- Government to provide free entry for all visitors to the proposed new national Memorial and Learning Centre, in perpetuity.
- Commitment ensures everyone can pay their respects, contemplate and honour, the six million Jewish men, women and children who were murdered in the Holocaust and all other victims of Nazi persecution.
- Announcement puts the new national memorial on a similar footing to the most important monuments and museums in UK.

The government will provide free entry, in perpetuity, to everyone visiting the proposed new Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced today (28 January 2021).

Giving universal free access to the memorial puts the UK on the same footing as the most important monuments and museums and will reassure Holocaust survivors their testimony will be freely available to all when they are no longer able to tell the story themselves, forever.

The Memorial, which is planned to be built next to Parliament in Victoria Tower Gardens, will be the focal point for national remembrance of the six million Jewish men, women and children murdered in the Holocaust and all other victims of Nazi persecution.

The learning centre will be a world-class facility, giving visitors powerful and engaging experiences to learn about the Holocaust and subsequent genocides through a variety of mediums including historic photographs, film footage and audio recordings.

Government support will supplement funds raised from visitor donations and

other charitable contributions to cover the running costs of the Memorial and Learning Centre which, subject to planning permission, is expected to open in 2024. The government has already announced that it will contribute up to £75 million towards construction costs, to be supplemented by £25 million from charitable donations.

The Communities Secretary also announced a further £25,000 funding to support the work the Wiener Library does in using its archive to bring closure to families who lost loved ones during the Holocaust.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Free entry, in perpetuity, to the proposed UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will mean that there are no barriers to people commemorating and learning about the evils of the Holocaust and is keeping with our national tradition of free entry to monuments and museums of great national significance.

As first-hand testimony from survivors becomes rarer and rarer, it is incumbent on all of us to be their witnesses. The Memorial will serve as a continual reminder to us all of why we need to make a stand against antisemitism, racism and hatred, whenever and wherever we find it – something that this government will always do.

Ed Balls and Lord Eric Pickles, Co-Chairs of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, said:

This is the clearest demonstration of the Government's commitment to addressing Holocaust Remembrance. Free access will widen the visitor base and enable the centre to extend its message and work to a greater range of people. The centre will work closely with other institutions, both national and international, to tackle Holocaust denial and Antisemitism.

Marie van der Zyl, Board of Deputies of British Jews President, said:

We welcome the news that entry to the proposed Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will be free to all visitors. We thank the government and the Secretary of State for this important announcement.

UK and international visitors will now have the opportunity to discover the truth about the Shoah, genocide and the dangerous places to which racism leads.

We hope this will increase understanding; help stop the lies and falsehoods surrounding this terrible period; and enable us all to

confront prejudice wherever it is found.

Karen Pollock CBE, Chief Executive, Holocaust Educational Trust, said:

The Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will do immeasurable good for Holocaust education and remembrance in this country and I am delighted that it has been confirmed that this important resource will be accessible to all. We must ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust are never forgotten, and that its lessons are learnt for generations to come.

Sir Ben Helfgott MBE, Holocaust survivor, said:

The Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will ensure that the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust are never forgotten and that the testimonies of those who survived are protected and remembered. These are fundamental to conveying the lessons of tolerance and understanding.