

Cotswold Water Park given greater protection by Natural England

- People and nature will be able to thrive side-by-side
- Park has gained national importance for its bird and plant populations

In a boost to Nature Recovery, all 177 lakes covering 2,000 hectares of the Cotswold Water Park have been given Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status.

Gaining the status will help Natural England work with all the owners and occupiers of the Park to protect and enhance its wildlife, while they continue to live, work, run businesses, and follow leisure pursuits there.

The Park was created and continues to expand as a result of mineral mining activity across Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, and is a leading example of how people and nature can thrive side by side. Such sites have been especially important during the pandemic, providing places to connect with nature and spend time outdoors.

Wildlife and recreation do not just co-exist in the Park but in many cases are inter-dependent. Land specifically managed to meet the needs of leisure users also provides invaluable habitat that encourages wildlife to flourish, such as the sailing clubs which manage marginal areas as scrub, providing an excellent habitat for breeding birds.

Breeding birds in the Park include scarce species such as little egret, little ringed plover and nightingale, alongside large numbers of ducks of several species, mute swans, greylag geese, coot and herons. The scrub and reedbed are full of breeding warblers including reed, sedge and Cetti's warblers, blackcaps and willow warblers, and around 35,000 waterbirds are present over the winter.

This expanded designation also ensures that Cotswold Water Park can play a key role in the Nature Recovery Network (NRN) recently announced by Natural England. The NRN Delivery Partnership brings together representatives from over 600 organisations to drive forward the restoration of protected sites and landscapes across England, helping to provide at least 500,000 hectares of new wildlife-rich habitat. Cotswold Water Park is a key link in the Nature Recovery Network and a great example of how working with a wide range of partners allows people to enjoy sustainable recreational activities while enhancing and creating rich habitats for nature.

Marian Spain, Chief Executive of Natural England, said:

I'm delighted to announce that Natural England has granted SSSI status to the Cotswold Water Park. Places like this are ever more important in bringing people and nature together, and giving us that contact with wildlife that's so vital for our health and well-

being. This extended designation is a testament to the efforts of the many bodies and individuals who have been involved in creating and managing the Water Park over many years, and living proof that some of our most important species can thrive hand in hand with homes, business and recreational activities. Special places like this form the vital backbone of a nature recovery network.

Paul Hazel, Chairman Cotswold Water Park Trust said:

The Cotswold Water Park Trust has worked for many years with its volunteers, land and lake owners and commercial operators, to try and protect and enhance the area's wildlife and habitats. The Trust is pleased, therefore, that Natural England has now formally recognised the significance of the Cotswold Water Park's biodiversity, and in particular its importance to breeding and wintering birds.

The Trust is particularly delighted that Natural England has formally acknowledged the part played in this success by a variety of stakeholders, including mineral operators, leisure providers and the public. It is crucial that the Cotswold Water Park moves forward as a balanced and sustainable example of how wildlife and people can successfully coexist, and that the public can continue to enjoy the benefits of living in, working in, or visiting this unique area. It is vital for all those who have an interest in the Cotswold Water Park to work together; the Trust hopes that Natural England will continue to work closely with all stakeholders so that progress towards achieving this vision can continue.

Notes to editors

The SSSI designation means the park and its wildlife have legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, so that Natural England must be consulted on any new proposals that could significantly affect the wildlife interest.

Cotswold Water Park (CWP) is a 40 square mile complex of 177 lakes formed by gravel workings along the upper River Thames on the borders of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire. There are 2 principal blocks of lakes: a larger one in the west centred on Ashton Keynes and a smaller eastern one centred on Fairford, with stepping-stones formed by recent workings in between.

Just 10 lakes covering 135 hectares within CWP were designated as being of Special Scientific Interest for their aquatic plants back in 1994. The park has since become of national importance for its bird and plant populations. The new designation covers all 177 lakes, protecting the large populations of breeding and wintering birds that live there, as well as the aquatic plants. As wildlife declines across the country, areas such as CWP are increasingly

important to ensure sustainable populations can thrive.

Recreational activities are abundant across the park, including swimming, sailing, angling, water-skiing, paddle-boarding and windsurfing.

The notification process:

As of 7 January 2021, the extended SSSI covering all 177 lakes has been formally notified to landowners and occupiers and other interested parties. There will be a 4-month period in which anyone can make representations or object to the notification. If all objections are resolved or none are submitted, the designation will be confirmed. If there are unresolved objections the Natural England Board will hear all of these; they must then decide whether to confirm the designation (with or without reductions). If the notification is not confirmed within 9 months of the date of notification, the notification falls.

Representations can be made via:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-england/cotswold-water-park>.

Moderna COVID-19 vaccine authorised by UK medicines regulator

- Moderna vaccine meets regulator's strict standards of safety, efficacy and quality
- The UK has ordered an additional 10 million doses of the vaccine, taking its total to 17 million
- Doses available for UK from spring

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine has been authorised for use by the medicines regulator.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has accepted the recommendation of the Commission on Human Medicines and authorised the Moderna vaccine following months of rigorous clinical trials involving tens of thousands of people and an extensive analysis of the vaccine's safety, quality and effectiveness.

The vaccine is 94% effective in preventing disease, including in the elderly. The government was one of the first to sign an agreement with the company to supply the vaccine on behalf of the UK, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.

The government has agreed to purchase an additional 10 million doses of the Moderna vaccine on top of its previous order of 7 million, taking the total to 17 million. As agreed when the UK originally pre-ordered the vaccine,

supplies will begin to be delivered to the UK from spring once Moderna expands its production capability.

The vaccine will be available for free and the government is working with the devolved administrations to ensure it is deployed fairly across the UK.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This is fantastic news and another weapon in our arsenal to tame this awful disease.

Through our vaccine delivery plan we have already vaccinated nearly 1.5 million people across the UK. The Moderna vaccine will boost our vaccination programme even further once doses become available from the spring.

While we immunise those most at risk from COVID, I urge everyone to continue following the rules to keep cases low to protect our loved ones.

Nearly 1.5 million people in the UK have already been vaccinated with the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccines, with more than 1,000 vaccination sites live by the end of the week across the UK to rapidly scale up the vaccination programme.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) will submit updated advice on which groups to prioritise for vaccination before doses become available.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Vaccines are the key to releasing us all from the grip of this pandemic, and today's news is yet another important step towards ending lockdown and returning to normal life.

The UK was one of the first countries in Europe to sign a deal with Moderna, and I'm delighted our Vaccine Taskforce has secured an additional 10 million doses of their highly effective vaccine to protect the British public and save lives.

From the scientists and trial volunteers to our world-class regulators and clinicians, we are enormously grateful to everyone who has played their part in this national effort to defeat the virus and get our country back on its feet.

The NHS has decades of experience in rolling out successful widespread vaccination programmes and is putting into place extensive preparations for the roll-out of the Moderna vaccine ahead of the spring.

The Moderna vaccine will be deployed through similar methods:

- hospital hubs for NHS and care staff and older patients to get vaccinated
- local community services with local teams and GPs already signing up to take part in the programme
- vaccination centres across the country, ensuring people can access a vaccine regardless of where they live

Vaccine Deployment Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

The NHS is pulling out all the stops to vaccinate those most at risk as quickly as possible, with over 1,000 vaccination sites live across the UK by the end of the week to provide easy access to everyone, regardless of where they live.

The Moderna vaccine will be a vital boost to these efforts and will help us return to normal faster.

Through the Vaccines Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 367 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccines so far. To date, the government has invested over £230 million into manufacturing a successful vaccine. In the Chancellor's Spending Review, published on 25 November, it was announced that the government has made more than £6 billion available to develop and procure successful vaccines.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said:

The highly effective Moderna vaccine is another impressive success for science and is another testament to the hard work of researchers and selfless clinical trial volunteers.

This vaccine will save lives once doses become available, but it is crucial we all continue to follow the rules to protect each other until enough people have been protected.

Interim Chair of the government's Vaccines Taskforce Clive Dix said:

This is another important milestone in our efforts to end this pandemic, and I would like to thank those in the government's Vaccine Taskforce who have worked so hard to negotiate agreements with vaccine developers.

A key objective for the Vaccine Taskforce is to ensure we have a range of vaccines to deliver to the UK population. The addition of the Moderna vaccine to the UK's portfolio is important to reach

that goal.

The Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines are being rolled out to priority groups. The [full prioritisation list can be found here](#) and is as follows (in order of priority):

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
5. All those 65 years of age and over
6. All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

Vaccination will be managed by the health services in each nation:

- NHS England and NHS Improvement
- NHS Wales
- NHS Scotland
- Health and Social Care Northern Ireland

Through the government's Vaccines Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 367 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccine candidates, including:

- BioNTech/Pfizer for 40 million doses
- Oxford/AstraZeneca for 100 million doses
- Moderna for 17 million doses
- GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur for 60 million doses
- Novavax for 60 million doses
- Janssen for 30 million doses
- Valneva for 60 million doses

UK vaccine manufacturing

The UK government invested £100 million to fund a state-of-the-art manufacturing innovation centre in Braintree, Essex, in collaboration with the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult, to accelerate the mass production of a successful COVID-19 vaccine in the UK. Due to open in December 2021, the centre will have the capacity to produce millions of doses of vaccines each month, ensuring the UK has the capabilities to manufacture both vaccines and advanced medicines, including for emerging diseases, far into the future.

The government has also provided £4.7 million funding to the Catapult to ensure that the UK has the best skills and expertise in vaccine manufacturing and advanced therapies.

The government has created the UK's first dedicated Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (VMIC) and accelerated its development with £93 million of investment. This investment will rapidly accelerate the construction of the facility, enabling us to bring it online sooner. It will also have expanded capability for advanced vaccine process development, fill and finish and bulk manufacture. In addition, the facility's capacity will be significantly increased to be able to respond to this pandemic. Once open, it will be able to manufacture 70 million vaccines doses in just 6 months – enough for the UK population. Located in Oxfordshire, the centre will be the UK's first not-for-profit organisation established to develop and advance the mass production of vaccines. This will boost the UK's long-term capacity against future viruses.

While VMIC is being built, the government established a Rapid Deployment Facility with £8.75 million of investment to manufacture at scale.

The government has made a multi-million-pound investment in a manufacturing facility in Scotland, creating a major UK vaccine facility and to support rapid scale-up if its candidate is successful. This unique facility will establish a permanent UK capability to manufacture inactivated viral vaccines – one of the most proven, widely used vaccine formats. It is one of few Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) containment facilities in Europe and has the capacity to produce up to 200 million doses of COVID-19 viral vaccines in 2021.

Liverpool City Council: Best Value Inspection

It is a matter of public record that Merseyside Police have for many months been conducting an investigation which has resulted in a number of arrests made on suspicion of fraud, bribery, corruption and misconduct in public office, both in December 2019 and in September 2020. Further arrests were

made on 4 December 2020 in connection with offences of bribery and witness intimidation. This investigation involves a significant connection to Liverpool City Council.

On Monday 7 December the Secretary of State met with officers from Liverpool City Council at his request and was given a range of assurances about the steps taken to improve governance in the Council. This was followed up with a [letter sent to Liverpool City Council on 8 December](#) seeking written assurances, including on the steps the council has taken to improve governance and to ensure that the council is operating properly and in line with its Best Value Duty. Liverpool City Council submitted their response on Friday 11 December.

On 17 December the Secretary of State [announced the appointment of Max Caller CBE](#) to carry out an inspection of Liverpool City Council's compliance with its Best Value Duty in relation to the authority's planning, highways, regeneration and property management functions and the strength of associated audit and governance arrangements.

A letter informing the council of the Inspection was also sent on the day of the announcement.

On 7 January Mervyn Greer and Vivienne Geary were appointed as assistant inspectors.

[CMA to investigate Google's 'Privacy Sandbox' browser changes](#)

The investigation will assess whether the proposals could cause advertising spend to become even more concentrated on Google's ecosystem at the expense of its competitors. It follows complaints of anticompetitive behaviour and requests for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to ensure that Google develops its proposals in a way that does not distort competition.

Third party cookies currently play a fundamental role online and in digital advertising. They help businesses target advertising effectively and fund free online content for consumers, such as newspapers. But there have also been concerns about their legality and use from a privacy perspective, as they allow consumers' behaviour to be tracked across the web in ways that many consumers may feel uncomfortable with and may find difficult to understand.

Google's announced changes – known collectively as the 'Privacy Sandbox' project – would disable third party cookies on the Chrome browser and Chromium browser engine and replace them with a new set of tools for targeting advertising and other functionality that they say will protect

consumers' privacy to a greater extent. The project is already under way, but Google's final proposals have not yet been decided or implemented. In its recent market study into online platforms digital advertising, the CMA highlighted a number of concerns about their potential impact, including that they could undermine the ability of publishers to generate revenue and undermine competition in digital advertising, entrenching Google's market power. More information can be found in the [CMA's Online platforms and digital advertising final report](#).

The CMA has been considering how best to address legitimate privacy concerns without distorting competition in discussions of the proposals with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), through the [Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum](#). As part of this work, the CMA has been engaging with Google to better understand its proposals. The current investigation will provide a framework for the continuation of this work, and, potentially, a legal basis for any solution that emerges.

The CMA has received complaints including from Marketers for an Open Web Limited, a group of newspaper publishers and technology companies, which allege that, through the proposals, Google is abusing its dominant position.

Given the importance and potential impact of Google's proposed changes, the CMA was already considering the Privacy Sandbox, in conjunction with the ICO and Google. Given the concerns raised by the complainants, it has decided that this work should be conducted in the context of a formal investigation.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA said:

As the CMA found in its recent market study, Google's Privacy Sandbox proposals will potentially have a very significant impact on publishers like newspapers, and the digital advertising market. But there are also privacy concerns to consider, which is why we will continue to work with the ICO as we progress this investigation, while also engaging directly with Google and other market participants about our concerns.

The CMA has an open mind and has not reached any conclusions at this stage as to whether or not competition law has been infringed. The CMA will continue to engage with Google and other market participants to ensure that both privacy and competition concerns can be addressed as the proposals are developed.

Today's announcement follows the CMA's advice to Government, via the Digital Markets Taskforce, on the need for a new regulatory regime for digital markets. As it continues to work with Government on these proposals, the CMA will use its existing powers to their fullest extent in order to protect competition in these markets.

More information can be found on the [investigation into Google's Privacy Sandbox browser changes case page](#).

Statement from International Coordination and Response Group for the victims of Ukrainian International Airlines Flight PS752

One year ago, in the early morning of January 8, 2020, Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 was downed by two Iranian military surface-to-air missiles near Tehran.

Today we honour the memory of those who perished and offer our sincere condolences to all who mourn the victims of the PS752 tragedy. We share the grief of the families, relatives and friends who lost loved ones. We urgently call on Iran to provide a complete and thorough explanation of the events and decisions that led to this appalling plane crash.

Our countries will hold Iran to account to deliver justice and make sure Iran makes full reparations to the families of the victims and affected countries.