

Planners give green light to Otter Valley project

East Devon District Council has approved a pioneering project to help a river valley on England's Jurassic Coast adapt to climate change and create an internationally important wildlife reserve.

The EU-funded Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP) will reconnect the River Otter to its historic floodplain and return the lower Otter Valley to a more natural condition; creating more than 50ha of intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh and other valuable estuarine habitats.

LORP is a partnership between the Environment Agency, local landowner Clinton Devon Estates, and the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust that currently manages the estuary. It also has the support of Natural England, RSPB and Devon Wildlife Trust.

The success of the £15 million project rested on it being given the thumbs up by East Devon District Council. Planning approval means work on the project can start this spring (2021) and be completed by early 2023.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project is mainly funded by the European Interreg programme through an initiative called Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts (PACCo). It is partnered with a similar project in the Saône Valley in Normandy, France. Both are pilot projects that aim to demonstrate an important principle – that early adaptation to climate change brings greater benefits than a delayed response or inaction. If successful, the adaptation model for these two projects will be rolled out to other locations in the UK and France.

The Lower Otter estuary lies within the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Planning approval marks the culmination of seven years of public consultation, careful planning and detailed discussions between a wide range of stakeholders.

The River Otter is already known as one of the first locations in England to successfully reintroduce the beaver.

Although much loved, the Lower Otter Valley has been heavily modified by human hand in the last 200 years with the construction of an embankment, a road, a rubbish tip, an aqueduct and an old railway line. These structures are difficult and expensive to maintain and restrict natural processes including the movement of water. This reduces habitat quality and diversity. Since the creation of an embankment in the early 19th Century, the River Otter has been disconnected from much of its natural flood plain.

The creation of new habitats and restoration of the site will be achieved by breaching the embankment. This will allow a much greater extent of the original floodplain to flood at high tide and drain at low tide producing

important intertidal habitat, mudflats and saltmarsh for wading birds. There will also be areas of reedbed and grazing marsh.

Once established, the new site will become a wildlife reserve of international importance within five years, fulfilling the aspirations of all partners involved.

Mark Rice, Environment Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

Climate change is affecting the way we manage our coasts and estuaries and we must adapt to that change.

The Lower Otter Restoration Project is an example of how we can do that.

We aim to deliver long term benefits for people and wildlife by working in partnership and through more sustainable management of the Otter Estuary.

Dr Sam Bridgewater, Head of Wildlife and Conservation at Clinton Devon Estates, said:

The Estate is proud to be associated with this project. Coastal communities must adapt as sea levels rise and storm events become more frequent.

It is our belief the Lower Otter Restoration Project will provide a more sustainable and certain future for the threatened Otter valley. It will also deliver very significant benefits to people and wildlife.

The granting of planning approval is a major step forward in helping us deliver this vision.

We have worked very closely with a wide range of stakeholders who have helped us reach this milestone and we are grateful for their input over the years.

The project website can be found at www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk

E3 foreign ministers' statement on

JCPoA: 6 January 2021



Statement by the UK, France and Germany:

"We are deeply concerned by the commencement by Iran on the 4th of January of uranium enrichment up to 20% at the underground facility of the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant. This action, which has no credible civil justification and carries very significant proliferation-related risks, is in clear violation of Iran's commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) and further hollows out the Agreement.

"This is a serious negative development which undermines the joint commitment of JCPoA participants on 21 December to preserve the JCPoA. It also risks compromising the important opportunity for a return to diplomacy with the incoming US Administration.

"We strongly urge Iran to stop enriching uranium to up to 20% without delay, reverse its enrichment programme to the limits agreed in the JCPoA and to refrain from any further escalatory steps which would further reduce the space for effective diplomacy.

"We remain in close contact with the other remaining JCPoA participants to assess how to best address Iran's non-compliance within the framework of the JCPoA."

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Coventry and Oxford set to be UK's

first all-electric bus cities

- areas could be awarded up to £50 million each to introduce all-electric bus services
- up to 500 buses could be replaced – saving 1000s of tonnes of CO2 each year – and helping the country build back greener
- 19 towns and cities applied to the [all-electric bus competition](#)

Coventry and Oxford are developing proposals to become the first parts of the UK to run all-electric bus services, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced today (6 January 2021).

The cities are developing business cases in an England-wide competition to switch an entire town or city's bus fleet to electric vehicles.

Subject to successful business cases, each area could be awarded up to £50 million to not only replace its entire fleet of buses with all-electric versions, but to also install new infrastructure, such as charging stations, and pay for electric grid updates.

The change to a cleaner and greener bus fleet will help improve air quality and reduce emissions, helping further deliver on the government's efforts to decarbonise the transport network, as well as support local businesses and jobs in the UK developing green buses.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

As we build back greener from Covid-19, we can provide people with more environmentally-friendly transport and cleaner air.

Coventry and Oxford could soon be at the forefront of our plans for a new era of bus services, helping us develop the green transport network of the future and support jobs right here in the UK.

The government received 19 bids from across England to become the first all-electric bus town or city. Applicants were required to:

- demonstrate buy-in from stakeholders in their local areas
- outline existing plans to reduce greenhouse gases and improve air quality
- show how the plan would tackle an existing air quality problem.

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said:

This news is brilliant for Coventry and the West Midlands, and I am delighted the Secretary of State and his department have once again put their faith in our region to deliver.

Turning all of Coventry's bus fleet electric is not only a major boost to public transport in the city, but it will also help tackle the climate emergency we face both here in the West Midlands and the wider UK.

Oxfordshire County Council Leader, Cllr Ian Hudspeth, said:

Oxfordshire's bid comes at a time when our council is determined to take concerted climate action to cut vehicle air pollution and expand the provision of bus services with our [Zero Emission Zone](#) and [Connecting Oxford](#) plans. This council is committed to offering our residents a clean and environmentally sustainable future through a series of steps including through better public transport.

The government will work with the 2 local authorities to finalise their business cases over the coming weeks.

The all-electric bus towns and cities competition is part of a wider package of measures to improve services and make bus journeys greener, easier and more reliable.

In February 2020 the government announced [£5 billion for a new golden era for buses and active travel](#). The UK's first-ever long-term bus strategy will be launched in the coming months to ensure buses are prioritised into the future.

[Education Secretary statement to Parliament on national lockdown](#)

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement regarding schools in national lockdown.

The last thing any Education Secretary wants to do is announce that schools will close and this is not a decision that the government ever wanted to take.

I would like to reassure everyone that our schools have not suddenly become unsafe, but limiting the number of people who attend them is essential when the COVID rates are climbing as they are now. We must curb the escalating cases of COVID throughout the country and prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed. That is why today I am setting out the contingency plans I had prepared but had hoped to never have to implement.

I would like to thank all our teachers, all our education staff and social workers for all they have been doing to keep children and young people safe and learning.

During lockdown, early years settings remain open nationally to all, providing vital early education and childcare. Schools will be open too for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

Those at university will predominantly study online, although there are a small number of exceptions including those studying medicine, healthcare and education.

Unwelcome though this latest lockdown is, and I am very conscious of the real challenges parents are facing with their children at home, we are far better placed to cope with it than we were last March. We are now better prepared to deliver online learning. This is an important step forward in supporting children to make the progress they so desperately need and we will also do what we can to help their parents. I would like to say thank you to all those parents and carers who are having to step up once more to take on the challenges of home learning.

We have set out clear, legally binding requirements for schools to provide high-quality remote education. This is mandatory for ALL state-funded schools and will be enforced by Ofsted. We expect schools to provide between three and five teaching hours a day, depending on a child's age.

If parents feel their child's school is not providing suitable remote education they should first raise their concerns with the teacher or headteacher and failing that, report the matter to Ofsted.

Ofsted will inspect schools – of any grade – where it has serious concerns about the quality of remote education being provided.

We have also been significantly stepping up the digital support we are providing to schools and parents. The fantastic Oak National Academy continues to provide video lessons for all ages across all subjects and yesterday the BBC announced it will be delivering the biggest push on education in its history, bringing 14 weeks of educational programmes and lessons to every household in the country.

Our delivery of laptops and tablets continues apace. We have purchased more than one million laptops and tablets and have already delivered over 560,000 of these to schools and local authorities, with an extra 100,000 this week alone. By the end of next week we will have delivered three quarters of a million devices.

We are also working with all the UK's leading mobile network operators, to provide free data for key educational sites. We are very grateful to EE, Three, Tesco Mobile, Smarty, Sky Mobile, Virgin Mobile, O2 and Vodafone for supporting this offer. We have also been delivering 4G routers to families who need to access the internet.

Another area where we have learned lessons is on exams. Last year, all four

nations of the UK found their arrangements for awarding grades did not deliver what they needed, with the impact felt painfully by students and their parents. Although exams are the fairest way we have of assessing what a student knows, the impact of this pandemic now means that it is not possible to have these exams this year. I can confirm that GCSEs and A and AS Level exams will not go ahead this summer. This year we are going to put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms.

The department and Ofqual had already worked up a range of contingency options. While the details will need to be fine-tuned in consultation with Ofqual, the exam boards and teaching representatives, I can confirm now that I wish to use a form of teacher-assessed grades, with training and support provided to ensure these are awarded fairly and consistently.

I know students and staff have worked hard to prepare for the January exams and assessments of vocational and technical qualifications, and we want to allow schools and colleges to continue with these assessments where they judge it is right to do so. No college should feel pressured to offer these and we will ensure all students are able to progress fairly, just as we will with VTQs in the summer.

I know there is, understandably, concern about free school meals. We are going to provide extra funding to support schools to provide food parcels or meals to eligible children. Where schools cannot offer food parcels or use local solutions, we will ensure a national voucher scheme is in place so that every eligible child can access free school meals while their school remains closed.

Finally I would like to turn to our programme of testing for the virus. There has been a brilliant, concerted effort in secondary schools and colleges to deliver testing for the start of this term and none of the work done to roll this out is going to be wasted. Regular testing will take place of staff and students in school and, in due course, help us to reopen schools as soon as possible. Testing is going to be the centre of our plans to return children back to school back to the classroom and back to college as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker, I never wanted to be in a position where we had to close schools again. I believe that schools should always have their gates open welcoming children and always being at the heart of their community. The moment that the virus permits, all our children will be back in school with their teachers and their friends. But until then, we have put in place the measures we need to make sure that they continue to progress and for this reason I commend this statement to the House.

[Hong Kong pro-democracy arrests:](#)

Foreign Secretary statement

Press release

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab comments on the arrest of over 50 pro-democracy politicians and activists under the National Security Law in Hong Kong.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The mass arrest of politicians and activists in Hong Kong is a grievous attack on Hong Kong's rights and freedoms as protected under the Joint Declaration.

These arrests demonstrate that the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities deliberately misled the world about the true purpose of the National Security Law, which is being used to crush dissent and opposing political views.

The UK will not turn our backs on the people of Hong Kong and will continue to offer British Nationals (Overseas) the right to live and work in the UK .

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