

Bats, bees and trees: DVLA's latest biodiversity action plan

The recent publication of our fourth [Biodiversity Action Plan \(BAP\)](#) marks another milestone in our commitment towards a more sustainable future. Although it focuses on our specific aims for the next few years, together with our [new Sustainability Report](#), the BAP also ensures that decisions about the future of DVLA will include the development of biodiversity across our estate.

Whilst publishing the plan is not a legal requirement for the agency, it does help us stay compliant with legislation and government targets. Meeting targets is not the only reason for doing this though. We recognise that biodiversity is vitally important in fighting climate change, and in ensuring good health and well-being within our local community and further afield. The plan supports our commitment to ensure we address these related challenges of public health, climate change and biodiversity, both now and for future generations.



The DVLA estate includes three sites in the Swansea area which provide a variety of different habitats including urban and industrial. We're proud of the progress we have made in the development of biodiversity on our estate and over the next five years we will focus on three main areas we want to improve.

Our habitats

One of the main focuses is the habitats that we already have on the estate. On one grassland habitat surrounding a car park, we counted more than 16 species of plants and in a parkland area, we identified 25 species. We have many trees on the estate including Alder, whose catkins [provide an early source of pollen for bees](#).

We will target the areas we have identified as priority habitats in the BAP, meaning they are important for preserving biodiversity, such as hedgerows and ponds.

We plan to firstly maintain these habitats so that we do not lose any species and, where we can, look after these habitats in a way that improves their condition, making them better examples of these types of habitat. These management techniques include partially clearing vegetation from our pond and introducing tree and shrub planting in our woodland and parkland habitat. We will also time hedge cutting to avoid nesting season and allow leaves to gather below hedges to provide shelter for insects and hibernating hedgehogs.



Our species

Our second priority will be to ensure the species currently using our estate continue to be present in healthy numbers in years to come. We have focused on key species whose needs will not be met by the general habitat conservation plans.

We have two bee colonies at one of our sites. Bee populations are coming under pressure and numbers are decreasing rapidly, so we want to make sure

that our population remains healthy by renewing the bee hives we currently have on site and introducing new hives where appropriate.

We also have six species of bats recorded on site, all of which are all legally protected. We plan to encourage these bats to continue using our site by providing bat boxes and identifying trees and buildings where they can roost. We will also work to minimise the light spill from our external lighting, ensuring there are dark corridors connecting their roosting areas.



Common lizards were found on one of our sites and although lizards are not rare, they are coming under increasing stress from development, so it is good to see a medium size population here. We will maintain the site and provide winter shelters to ensure these species continue to be present in healthy numbers.

The site is home to lots of different wild flowers. These include wood vetch and betony, the presence of which suggest that at one time the landscape looked very different. Our plans include taking action to preserve the area and adding signage to ensure the plants are not stepped on or disturbed.

Our community

Our final priority is to engage with our staff and the local community. When we are able to, we will give local schools an opportunity to use our green spaces to encourage children to learn more about the natural environment and how important it is to protect this amazing resource. We will raise awareness of wildlife gardening with our staff and create a sign-posted trail to raise awareness of the biodiversity on site. We plan to include local schools in a biodiversity day and we are creating an official biodiversity steering group

to oversee the progress.



The sustainability team, with help from the official biodiversity steering group, will make sure these objectives are achieved. This group will be made up of staff from across DVLA including colleagues from Estates and the communications team who will help raise awareness with our staff and the wider community.

If you are interested in Biodiversity on the DVLA estate, you can find out more in [the Biodiversity Action Plan](#), and read more about our goals for a sustainable future in [the new Sustainability Report](#).

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5/2020: Council Tax information letter **– 8 December 2020**

A new statutory Breathing Space scheme, introducing the breathing space moratorium and mental health crisis moratorium, will commence on 4 May 2021. The scheme aims to help people in problem debt to better manage their finances, seek professional debt advice and reach sustainable solutions.

This letter reminds authorities of the upcoming scheme, what their new obligations will be, and outlines the next steps to ensure that they receive

notifications from the Insolvency Service.

[School Teachers' Review Body \(STRB\) remit letter for 2021](#)

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[UK and Mexico sign trade deal](#)

The UK-Mexico Trade Continuity Agreement will particularly benefit the automotive, pharmaceutical, textiles, agriculture, food and drink industries and other manufacturing industries – the sectors where the UK has the highest amount of trade with Mexico.

Both countries have also committed to start negotiating a new and ambitious free trade agreement next year, which will go much further than the existing deal.

This agreement also represents another step towards the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), to which we aim to apply for formal accession in early 2021. Both sides have agreed that our future bilateral negotiations should run in parallel to this process.

Joining CPTPP would put the UK at the centre of an increasingly influential trade network of 11 dynamic economies in the Indo-Pacific region that already accounts for 13% of global GDP and would rise to 16% with our accession.

Around 3,800 UK businesses export goods to Mexico, which the OECD expects to become one of the world's 10 largest economies within a generation and which has a market of over 130 million consumers.

This agreement guarantees UK businesses the certainty they need to operate in the Mexican market. It could save around £59 million worth of duties that would have been levied on UK exports to Mexico under WTO terms.

Tariffs on UK car exports will remain at 0%, compared to up to 20% under WTO terms. This could save around £29 million in duties in 2021 on UK exports of vehicles. Tariffs applied to UK beverage exports – such as wine, beer, cider, gin and tea – also remain at 0% compared to up to 20% under WTO terms.

Scotch Whisky and Irish Whiskey will retain their protected Geographical Indications (GIs) in Mexico under the UK-Mexico spirits agreement which was signed earlier this month. Tequila and mezcal will also continue to be protected in the UK.

The UK and Mexico also set out their commitment to a joint political dialogue covering all bilateral and international matters of mutual interest, including continuing and intensifying all areas of current cooperation.

“This deal supports a trading relationship worth more than £5 billion and locks in access to each other’s markets.

“We look forward to working together with our Mexican friends and allies on a new and ambitious trade agreement in 2021. This will allow our two countries to go much further in areas such as data, digital trade, investment, intellectual property and services.

“This is also the seventh trade deal we’ve secured with a member of CPTPP, the grouping of 11 dynamic economies around the Pacific. So, it’s another really important stepping stone toward the UK joining CPTPP, and I look forward to making our application to do just that early next year.

“Together we’ll enjoy even more success by seizing this opportunity to take our trade to new heights. International Trade will help us to overcome the challenges of coronavirus and drive economic growth across our United Kingdom.”

“This deal is great news for businesses on both sides. It provides certainty for the thousands of British firms who already export to Mexico – and is a firm foundation for negotiating a new, more ambitious agreement next year.

“Together with our friends and allies in Mexico, we can now look forward to deepening and strengthening our trading partnership, boosting our businesses and creating better jobs in both countries.”

The UK has now secured trade deals with 58 countries, accounting for £198bn worth of trade annually. This accounts for 96% of the value of trade with non-EU countries that we set out to secure agreements with at the start of the trade continuity programme.

“All credit goes to DIT officials at home and in market for securing another important trade deal with Mexico. This deal should be seen as a starting point and can set a positive tone to strike a much more comprehensive agreement tailored to UK priorities in the future. Whether gaining market

access for services firms or advancing digital trade, there's a lot of potential for government and business to uncover."

"Today's announcement that the UK is signing a Continuity Agreement with Mexico is excellent news for exporters of British gin. Gin is one of the UK's most important and fastest growing food and drink exports and Mexico is one of our key target growth markets. In 2019, we exported nearly £6.5m worth of gin to Mexico, an increase of 43% on the previous year.

"Today's news that UK exporters will retain tariff free access on gin exports, means Mexico will continue to be one of the biggest trade opportunities for our gin exporters, both big and small. We would like to commend DIT on more great work to secure these important continuity agreements for British exports."

New interim chair of Ofqual

Press release

Roger Taylor to step down at the end of the year



The Chair of Ofqual, Roger Taylor has today (15 December) informed the Secretary of State for Education that he will step down at the end of the year.

Mr Taylor was initially a member of the Ofqual board in 2012 before being appointed as Chair in December 2016.

He will be replaced by Ian Bauckham CBE, who has been appointed as interim Chair from January 2021, pending the appointment of a Chair for a fixed term period through fair and open competition.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Following Roger Taylor's decision to step down as Ofqual Chair at

the end of the year, I'd like to thank him for his contribution over the last eight years.

Throughout this time, he has shown absolute commitment to ensuring qualifications are of the highest possible standard, while recognising the role they play in opening doors for both young people and adults.

I am delighted that Ian Bauckham, who is already a member of the board, has agreed to act as interim Chair until a substantive Chair can be appointed. This will help see a smooth transition for work on exams and assessments in 2021 and beyond.

Former Ofqual Chair Roger Taylor said:

Ofqual is an organisation of enormously dedicated and professional people who care deeply about the importance of qualifications and their role in supporting the benefits of high-quality education. After what has been a very difficult summer, I am leaving the organisation in good shape and in good hands. We have put in place measures for young people sitting exams in 2021 which represent the best approach to these difficult times.

I am delighted that Ian Bauckham CBE will be taking over as Chair. Ian knows the organisation well, having been on the board since spring 2018. I look forward with confidence to its future success in ensuring there are excellent qualifications appropriate for the needs of all young people and learners.

Interim Ofqual Chair Ian Bauckham said:

I was pleased to accept the role of interim chair of Ofqual and very much look forward to the year ahead as we continue our work to oversee examinations and qualifications across England.

Mr Bauckham is the CEO of Tenax Schools Trust, a multi-academy trust, and Chair of Oak National Academy. He has been a member of the Ofqual board since March 2018 and a member of the Ofqual Standards Advisory Group since 2015.

ENDS

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