

News story: New Northern Forest gets Government backing

Ambitious plans to create a new 'Northern Forest' along the M62 corridor have been kick-started today following an announcement by the Prime Minister Theresa May.

Following backing from the Environment Secretary Michael Gove, over the next 25 years the Woodland Trust and Community Forest Trust are aiming to plant more than 50 million trees from Liverpool to Hull, with the government today providing almost £6 million to launch the first project of its kind for more than a quarter of a century.

Spanning more than 120 miles between the cities of Bradford, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, the proposed Northern Forest will help boost habitats for woodland birds and bats and protect iconic species such as the red squirrel – alongside providing a tranquil space to be enjoyed by millions of people living in the area.

The announcement forms part of the government's upcoming 25 Year Environment Plan, which will set out how we can be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it.

Further details on the Government's strategy to build an environment fit for the future will be set out this week.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

It is vital that we leave our planet in a better state than we found it, with cleaner air, stronger protections for animal welfare and greener spaces for everyone to enjoy.

Progress is being made. We're investing over £3billion in improving air quality, tackling marine pollution by banning harmful microbeads and increasing sentences for animal cruelty to five years.

But to create an environment fit for the future we can't stop there, and that is why we are supporting the creation of this new Northern Forest and will shortly be setting out our ambitious vision to further support the environment and protect its good health for generations to come.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Trees are some of our most cherished natural assets and living evidence of our investment for future generations. Not only are

they a source of beauty and wonder, but a way to manage flood risk, protect precious species, and create healthier places for us to work and live.

This new Northern Forest is an ambitious and exciting project that will create a vast ribbon of woodland cover in northern England stretching from coast to coast, providing a rich habitat for wildlife to thrive, and a natural environment for millions of people to enjoy. This new forest will help us deliver a Green Brexit and help to deliver on our pledge to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

Austin Brady, Director of Conservation at the Woodland Trust, said:

The Northern Forest will accelerate the creation of new woodland and support sustainable management of existing woods right across the area. Planting many more trees, woods and forests will deliver a better environment for all – locking up carbon on a large scale, boosting wildlife habitat and greening our towns and cities.

The Woodland Trust and Community Forests will use new and innovative mechanisms to engage communities and a wide range of partners in delivering the forest.

With the Government backing growth, investment and jobs across the Northern Powerhouse as part of efforts to create an economy that works for everyone, the Woodland Trust and Community Forest Trust estimate this new forest will generate more than £2 billion for the country's economy. The area's breathtaking scenery and landscape is famous across the world, and this scheme will help bolster it for future generations.

The first planting will begin in March this year, supported by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, at the Woodland Trust's 680-hectare Northern Forest flagship site at Smithills, Bolton. The Woodland Trust is already committed to investing over £10 million in this project and several others over the wider forest area.

The Northern Forest will connect the five Community Forests in the north of England – the Mersey Forest, Manchester City of Trees, South Yorkshire Community Forest, the Leeds White Rose Forest and the HEYwoods Project – with green infrastructure and woodland created in and around major urban centres such as Chester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Manchester.

It will follow on from the successful National Forest, which transformed 200 square miles of industrial site in the heart of England. The forest now attracts over eight million visitors a year and has seen wildlife like otters, water voles and dragonflies flourish.

News story: Statement from the Justice Secretary on John Worboys

John Worboys was convicted of horrific crimes. My thoughts and unreserved sympathy are with his victims for whom news of the Parole Board's decision to order Worboys' release must have reawakened the most appalling memories.

It is a priority for this government that victims of rape and sexual assault have full confidence in the criminal justice system. While sentence lengths for these horrific crimes have increased by over 30% since 2010 and more victims are coming forward, there is still more to do.

While it is right that the Parole Board should remain an independent body, I believe that there is a strong case to review how to allow greater openness about the decision-making process.

We also need to make sure arrangements across the criminal justice system ensure victims are both heard and, if they wish, kept informed about their case.

I have talked to the Victims' Commissioner, Baroness Newlove, and the Chair of the Parole Board, Nick Hardwick, about what changes we could make to help victims of crime and provide greater transparency about the Board's work. I want to make sure we consult victims groups and others, and to start this work now so that decisions can be taken before Easter.

Press release: Professor Nick Hardwick welcomes government support for transparency

Professor Nick Hardwick, Chair of the Parole Board said:

"I welcome the support from the Lord Chancellor for my call for greater transparency of the parole system.

"It is sad that it has taken the Warboys case to get us to this point. I hope it will mean that in future we will be able to be more open with victims and the public about our decision making and that provides reassurance that the safety of the public is always uppermost in our minds."

News story: Government announces plans to extend pub opening hours for Royal Wedding

The government has launched a [public consultation](#) on plans to extend licensing hours on the nights of Friday 18 and Saturday 19 May until 1am the following morning, to give everyone the chance to celebrate the occasion.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

The Royal Wedding will be a time of national celebration, and we want everyone to be able to make the most of such an historic occasion.

I hope that this relaxation of the licensing hours will allow people to extend their festivities and come together to mark what will be a very special moment for the country.

Licensing hours orders have previously been made for occasions of national significance including the Queen's 90th birthday, the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in 2011, and the World Cup in 2014.

Chief Executive of the British Beer and Pub Association, Brigid Simmonds, said:

This is great news for pubs and pub-goers and shows the government has listened to our calls to put pubs at the heart of the Royal Wedding celebrations.

Visitors see the Great British pub as a cultural icon, almost as much as the Royal Family. Extended hours would give a £10million boost to the trade and make the most of the expected increase in tourism.

The government proposes to make a licensing hours order under Section 172 of the Licensing Act, which would extend opening hours for the sale of alcohol to benefit those premises in England and Wales which are not normally licensed until 1am.

The 4-week public consultation will give the public the opportunity to submit their views on the proposals. The government will also seek the views of specific stakeholders, including the police, licensing authorities and alcohol awareness groups.

The Royal Wedding will coincide with the FA Cup Final. There have been no reports of increased disorder as a result of the previous extensions to licensing hours including the extension for the weekend of Her Majesty's 90th birthday, which coincided with 2 Euro 2016 matches involving England and Wales, and the extension of licensing hours during the World Cup 2014.

[News story: Retailers and academics join government effort to tackle acid attacks](#)

This is part of a series of voluntary commitments proposed by the government.

Today the government has published the details of the voluntary commitments, as well as a list of those retailers who have already signed.

Waitrose, B&Q, Morrisons, Wickes, Co-op, Screwfix and Tesco are among the major brands to sign the voluntary commitments on the responsible sale of corrosive substances. The British Independent Retailers Association will this month be encouraging all its members to sign up.

The publication comes as the University of Leicester launches a major research project, commissioned by the Home Office, into the motivations of offenders who carry and use acid in violent attacks.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins, said:

Acid attacks have a devastating impact on their victims, leaving both emotional and physical scars. I'm pleased that so many of the UK's major retailers are joining our fight to combat this scourge and signalling they are committed to selling acids responsibly.

This is the next step of our [acid attacks action plan](#) that has already seen us consult on new laws to restrict young people's access to acids.

It is also vital we gain an insight into the motivations and behaviours of those who carry out these unspeakable attacks, which is why we have commissioned a major piece of research that will help us understand more about this crime.

The [voluntary commitments](#) will see the retailers:

- agree not to sell products to those under 18 that contain potentially

harmful levels of acid or corrosive substances – including applying Challenge 21/25 policies when asking for age identification, staff supported by till alerts, supervision and inclusion of these products in age restricted sales training.

- agree that equivalent age restriction measures are applied to products sold online.
- Agree to comply with the Poisons Act and promote awareness to staff and what this means for the sale of products which contain levels of acid and other corrosive substances which are either regulated or reportable under the Act.

The voluntary agreement has been introduced now to ensure immediate action is taken by retailers on a voluntary basis, in advance of new legislation including the ban on sales to those under 18 being brought before Parliament and put into effect. We welcome the support and action being taken by retailers now to restrict access.

National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Corrosive Attacks, Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Kearton said:

The use of acid to commit acts of violence is particularly abhorrent – perpetrators aim to leave their victims with horrific and life-changing injuries.

Tackling the scourge of acid attacks requires a coordinated approach across a number of different organisations and sectors. I commend all those major retailers and independent stores which are now taking steps to help prevent acid attacks from taking place.

The majority of us find it hard to believe that anyone would choose to throw acid over another person. This new research project will enable us to improve our understanding of why offenders are motivated to use acid as a weapon and assist us in stopping attacks in the future.

The academic research being undertaken at the University of Leicester will see criminologists examine the motivations and decision-making processes behind carrying and using acid as a weapon, the characteristics of offenders and their relationships with their victims, as well as how the substances are purchased and transported.

Professor Teela Sanders from the University of Leicester's Department of Criminology said:

This project taps into the expert skills of researchers at the

University of Leicester with case file analysis and interviews with serious violent offenders in prisons. This most needed research on this phenomenon will produce important recommendations for government to take forward.

The steps announced today form part of the Acid Attack Action Plan announced by the Home Secretary in July 2017. The Home Office also recently concluded its consultation on proposals to ban the sale of products containing the most harmful corrosive substances to under 18s, make it an offence to possess a corrosive substance in a public place without good reason and introduce minimum custodial sentences for those repeatedly caught carrying acid without good reason.

National President of British Independent Retailers Association (BIRA), Vin Vara said:

BIRA represents thousands of hardware stores across Britain.

As specialist retailers we want to make sure that our customers get the expert support and advice they need to ensure the responsible sale of any of our products.

We take our duty to supply and sell these substances very seriously and we are happy to back the government's commitment to address and limit the sale of them.