

News story: Defence Secretary pays tribute to Sikh community

The Defence Secretary joined members of the British Sikh Association at a special Vaisakhi dinner at the Lancaster Hotel in London, where they put pen to paper to formally recognise the strong ties between the Sikh community and the Armed Forces.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

A diverse military is a strong military which is why we're committed to making sure our forces better represent the society they serve – this Covenant signing is yet another demonstration of this.

Sikhs have a rich history with the Armed Forces, from their unsurpassed courage at the Battle of Saragarhi 120 years ago, to the hundreds of thousands of Sikhs who fought for Britain during the First and Second World Wars. We will work with the Association to ensure that tradition continues.



During his speech at the British Sikh Association The Defence Secretary paid tribute to the rich history that Sikhs have with the Armed Forces

170 Sikhs currently serve in the Royal Navy, Army and the Royal Air Force, with many more around the UK serving as Reservists. The British Sikh report published on Tuesday also found that 69% of Sikhs would support their child taking a career to defend the nation.

This signing of the Armed Forces Covenant is a demonstration of the commitment to ensuring a more diverse force. The MOD is aiming to make sure 10% of recruits come from Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds by 2020 and is making progress with BAME personnel currently making up nearly 6% of new recruits, an increase on the previous year.

Amongst others, the Association has made pledges to urge more than 2000 members, representing 24 employers across the country, to provide job opportunities for service leavers and promote the unique skills that they bring to the work place. They also agreed to support the Cadet Expansion Programme by promoting the benefits of becoming a Cadet Force volunteer and will link Sikh communities with personnel.

Dr Rami Ranger, Chairman of the British Sikh Association, said:

The Covenant demonstrates our commitment as citizens of the United Kingdom to our illustrious Armed Forces, whilst at the same time recognising their round-the-clock, 365 days a year commitment for our freedom.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation, enshrined in law, that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly and not disadvantaged due to their service.

Over 1,500 businesses and organisations across the UK have already signed, making practical pledges that have made a difference across the Armed Forces community.

[Press release: Oxford flood alleviation scheme uncovers a piece of the city's history](#)

The findings include ancient road surfaces, culverts, pottery, and other objects which have helped date an ancient crossing point of the River Thames and its tributaries, at what is now known as Old Abingdon Road.

The Oxford flood alleviation scheme project team commissioned the archaeological study as part of the detailed design for the scheme. Part of

the proposed scheme is to construct new culverts to carry flood water beneath the road. These investigations have enabled the team to carefully plan where the new culverts will go to minimise impact on the ancient structures lying beneath.

The route of the Old Abingdon Road is thought to be part of a stone or earth causeway known as Grandpont, which also includes Folly Bridge, built by Robert d'Oilly who built Oxford Castle in 1071. Grandpont had over 30 different arches or culverts which crossed the rivers, streams and marshes in the area, with over 7 of these thought to be beneath the Old Abingdon Road. The causeway may have dated from the Saxon period as there is evidence of 2 fords in this area from that time (source: [Historic England](#)).

From past investigations in this area it is believed that there were culverts beneath the road dating from Norman (1066 to 1154) and later medieval (12th to late 15th century) times. The culverts were designated 'scheduled monuments' in October 2012. Our findings suggest there are more culverts along this road.

Joanna Larmour, Project Director, said:

Our archaeologists found that as the ground was quite compacted beneath the various road surfaces, they had to use hand digging tools to complete their investigations.

We found some great pieces, including pottery shards from a medieval jug, a horseshoe from the late 17th Century to 18th century and most importantly for us, evidence of ancient culverts. These all help us understand just how long this has been a river crossing and a route into Oxford.

The investigation found a total of 6 pottery shards, 4 pieces of clay tobacco pipe, 2 pieces of ceramic building material, 6 iron finds including nails, a horseshoe, a connecting piece from a harness, 7 pieces of glass from a post-medieval bottle or flask, and a window pane.

These were all hidden amongst a series of medieval and post-medieval road surfaces which the team had to break through to get to the oldest features underneath.

In addition, the investigations found some structural features including stone kerb, a roadside ditch likely to be from the 12th Century, and a culvert, now demolished, which is likely to be Norman or Medieval similar to the known, scheduled culverts.

From these finds and using existing historical knowledge, we can build up quite a picture of life in this area.

The type of soils and gravels in this area suggest that it had firmer soil deposits than the rest of the floodplain, and indicate why it was chosen as a suitable crossing point of the River Thames. The medieval causeway was probably cambered, with drainage ditches either side carrying run off into

the streams of the Thames that ran beneath the causeway in a stone culvert. The other culverts in this area have a raised roof, and if this culvert had the same, the causeway would have had a hump-back at this point. From the artefacts found, we know that the route has been used as a crossing from medieval times, up to the present day.

In the late 17th to 18th centuries, the route underwent a major rebuild, which we can tell from the deposits and material that we found. It is possible that this is when our culvert was demolished. The surfaces from this time lie within a series of kerb stones.

The Oxford flood alleviation scheme project team have shared these finds with Oxford City and County Archaeologists as well as Historic England (due to their responsibility for scheduled ancient monuments). They will follow this work up with more archaeological investigations in different locations in the scheme area, which will be completed over the coming months.

Catherine Grindey, Senior Archaeologist for the Environment Agency, said:

From our perspective, the archaeological evaluation was a great success. We have had many questions answered and have better information on which to base our plans.

This knowledge means that the team can finalise the scheme design in the Old Abingdon Road area, and ensure it has minimal impact on the history beneath the road.

The detailed design of the scheme will be shared at a public consultation from 5 May to 6 June 2017, which will be run both online and at a series of 4 events in the scheme area:

- 2pm to 8pm, Thursday 11 May 2017 at West Oxford Community Centre, OX2 0BT
- 2pm to 8pm, Friday 12 May 2017 at South Oxford Community Centre, OX1 4RP
- 2pm to 8pm, Monday 15 May 2017 at Oxford Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre, OX1 1RL
- 2pm to 8pm, Thursday 18 May 2017 at St Luke's Church, OX1 4XB

The consultation will also give local communities the opportunity to give feedback about some of the scheme features they have told us they are most interested in, such as the new bridges we will be installing, footpath furniture and signage.

Keep up-to-date with the scheme via the [Oxford flood scheme webpage](#), via our [Facebook page](#), on [Twitter](#) and via our scheme newsletter. If you would like to sign up for our newsletter, please email oxfordscheme@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Notes to editors

The Oxford flood alleviation scheme is a partnership project involving the Environment Agency, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Vale of White Horse Council, Oxford Flood Alliance, The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, University of Oxford, Thames Water and Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

The scheme will involve lowering parts of the floodplain and widening some of the rivers and streams that run through it, to create more space for floodwater, and reduce flood risk to the city. It is currently estimated to cost £120 million.

For media enquiries Mon-Friday 9am to 5pm please call 03708 506 506. After this time, please call the Duty Communications Officer on 0800 141 2743.

Ofcom consultation

I receive a great deal of correspondence from my constituents about poor service from telephone and internet companies. I am aware how much delays in getting repairs done, missed appointments and starting a new service costs in terms of time and money.



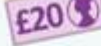


I have received the communication below from the Chief Executive of Ofcom. They are consulting on proposals to require phone and broadband to pay automatic compensation in these cases. The consultation ends on 5 June and you can access it at:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-1/automatic-compensation>

“Ofcom has today set out new proposals to require phone and broadband companies to pay automatic compensation – either a cash payment, or a credit on a bill – to customers who suffer slow repairs, missed appointments or delays to starting new services.

When a customer’s landline or broadband goes wrong, that is frustrating enough without having to fight to get fair compensation from the phone company. So we are proposing new rules to force providers to pay money back to customers automatically, whenever repairs or installations don’t happen on time, or when people wait in for an engineer who doesn’t turn up. This would mean customers are properly compensated, while providers will be incentivised to work harder to improve their service.

Compensation payments would be set by Ofcom, and designed to reflect the degree of harm suffered by consumers. Here is how Ofcom’s automatic compensation scheme would work:

Problem	A landline or broadband customer would be entitled to compensation if...	Amount of compensation
Delayed repair following loss of service	Their service has stopped working and it is not fully fixed after two full working days.	 £10 for each calendar day that the service is not repaired
Missed appointments	An engineer does not turn up for a scheduled appointment, or it is cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice.	  £30 per missed appointment
Delays with the start of a new service	Their provider promises to start a new service on a particular date, but fails to do so.	  £6 for each calendar day of delay, including the missed start date

We estimate that our plans would mean up to 2.6 million additional customers could receive up to £185m in new compensation payments each year. Currently, there are 7.2m instances where landline or broadband customers suffer delayed repairs, missed appointments or delays to new installations. Financial compensation from companies, totalling around £16.3m, is currently paid out in 1.1m of these cases.

Around one-third of small and medium-sized enterprises choose residential landline and broadband services and would also benefit from our compensation proposals.

We are consulting until 5th June and plan to publish a statement at the end of the year”.

With best wishes

Helen

[Reassurance to all EU citizens living and working in the Wokingham constituency](#)

I have always said to those worried that I am sure all EU citizens living and working legally in Wokingham now will be free to stay if they wish after Brexit. The UK government has always indicated that is it wish, but pointed out we need the same assurance for our citizens living on the continent. At last Mr Juncker, the President of the Commission, seems to have said as much. He regards, he says, such a matter as one of “respecting human dignity”. He said “This is not about bargaining”. Exactly.

I will continue to press the EU to do the right thing, as I want all to be

reassured that there will be no forced evictions of people following Brexit. I know we all in Wokingham want those full reassurances. We seem to be much closer to them today.

Press release: Illegal angler hooks hefty fine

A fishing trip to Lincolnshire has landed a man from Manchester with £597-worth of penalties after he was found breaking angling laws.

Mr John Handley of Herristone Road, Manchester, left his rod in the water unattended and was fishing without a licence at Lakeside Fishery, Wragby, on 21 June 2016.

He was discovered by Environment Agency enforcement officers, who carry out patrols designed to catch illegal anglers in the act – and protect the sport for those who do follow the rules.

Mr Handley was proved guilty in absence at Lincoln Magistrates' Court on 13 March 2017. He was fined £440 – £220 for each offence – and ordered to pay costs of £127, as well as a victim surcharge of £30, bringing the total penalty to £597.

Adam Basham, Environment Agency enforcement team leader, said:

By leaving his rod unattended, Mr Handley could have injured wildlife, and his refusal to buy a fishing licence harms the future and protection of the sport, effectively cheating the tens of thousands of anglers who do follow the rules.

We never hesitate to take action against offenders.

Leaving a fishing rod unattended is an offence under Environment Agency byelaws because of the danger it poses to fish and other wildlife, which can become entangled in the line or swallow the hook.

Anyone who wants to go fishing needs to buy a fishing licence. A full yearly fishing licence costs from just £30 and are available online at www.gov.uk/get-a-fishing-licence, by calling the Environment Agency on 0344 800 5286, or from your local Post Office branch. Short-term and concessionary licences are also available.

The money from licence sales supports fish, fisheries and fishing, and

protects the future of the sport. It funds a wide range of projects to improve facilities for anglers, including protecting stocks from disease and illegal fishing; restoring fish stocks through re-stocking; eradicating invasive species; and fish habitat improvements. The income is also used to fund the Angling Trust to provide information about fishing and to encourage participation in the sport.

A small number of anglers refuse to buy a licence, cheating the sport and their fellow anglers. For the minority who flout the rules, the most common offence is fishing without a valid licence, which could land them with a fine of up to £2,500 and a criminal conviction.

In 2015/16, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire enforcement officers checked 3,710 licences and reported 73 for fishing illegally, bringing in fines and costs totalling £16,810.

Last year in England, the Environment Agency checked more than 62,000 fishing licences and prosecuted more than 1,900 anglers for rod and line offences, resulting in fines and costs in excess of £500,000.

To help crack down on illegal fishing, the Environment Agency urges people to report suspect activity by calling its incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.