

News story: Minister Wharton emphasises need for peace in South Sudan

In the first visit by a UK Minister to South Sudan this year, Minister Wharton saw the life-changing impact of UK aid in Juba and Malakal.

The Minister spent a day visiting the Protection of Civilian (PoC) site in Malakal where he met people who have been displaced from their homes. He witnessed the desperate humanitarian situation with more than 60% of the population – 7.5 million people – expected to be in need of food and facing potential famine as the worst food crisis since independence in 2011 caused by prolonged conflict and drought threatens lives and risks destabilising the region.

Minister Wharton heard about the challenging delivery conditions from aid workers, including the need for better security and improved infrastructure. This year, UK troops will deploy to support the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), providing engineering and medical support which will enable increased security at UN camps.

In Juba, Minister Wharton met with teachers and children at the Ustrautuna Primary School and saw how the Girls' Education South Sudan initiative is transforming the lives of a generation of girls, supporting 1.3 million children and over 3,500 schools to ensure children get an education despite the conflict.

International Development Minister James Wharton said:

“South Sudan faces a worsening humanitarian crisis with over half the population in urgent, desperate need and ongoing violence forcing over a million people to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

“I am proud of the lifesaving support that UK aid is providing for millions of the poorest people in South Sudan, including food, clean water, medicine, shelter and education to increase opportunities for the future.

“UK troops will support UNMISS by providing vital engineering and medical assistance to help improve security at UN camps and support UNMISS's capacity to protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access, which is central to their mission.

“The international community must now step up alongside Global Britain and help encourage the longer-term stability of South Sudan and the region, which is firmly in our interests.”

During high-level meetings with government ministers and officials, the Minister emphasised that it is first and foremost the responsibility of the country's leaders to alleviate the pressure on its people, and to work with

the UN, as well as NGOs, who are delivering vital, lifesaving aid to the South Sudanese people, and ultimately create lasting peace and stability.

The UK has provided more than £500 million of support to South Sudan over the past three years. Last year, UK aid in South Sudan:

- Fed 440,000 people
- Provided clean water and sanitation for 490,000 people
- Provided 660,000 people with health support, including mothers and children; and
- Provided 130,000 people with shelter and emergency non-food items.

[News story: Walker: Scottish views will play key part in forming EU exit plans](#)

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Minister for Exiting the European Union Robin Walker has been visiting Fort William, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

We want to ensure every nation and area of the United Kingdom can make the most of the opportunities ahead, the Minister for Exiting the European Union Robin Walker said during visits to Fort William, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The Minister was in Scotland to continue the Government's UK-wide engagement programme ahead of the start of EU negotiations. The Prime Minister has signalled that we will trigger Article 50 before the end of March, allowing formal negotiations to begin.

During the two day trip, the Minister travelled across the country listening to universities, businesses and charities about their top priorities for EU exit and views on how they can capitalise on the opportunities that our departure presents.

He visited both the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh, the Lochaber Chambers of Commerce and Age Scotland as well as attending roundtables with key business sectors.

Minister for Exiting the EU, Robin Walker said:

It's vitally important that we get a deal that works for all of the UK, and Scotland's voice will be heard loud and clear as we prepare for the upcoming negotiations.

Over the past two days I've spoken to people across Scotland, many with extensive experience in their sector, ensuring their views are heard as they are hugely important to us as we continue to form our negotiating strategy.

Working closely with all of the devolved administrations, the UK Government has held monthly meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) to engage with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments.

Housing numbers

During my last meeting with Wokingham Borough I was reminded that Wokingham has a target to build 856 new homes a year from 2013. (LEP study of housing need Feb 2016) That makes Wokingham's share of the West Berkshire total 30%, with the other Councils providing the rest of the 2855. Reading itself has a lower target of 699, despite having substantial brownfield redevelopment potential, the coming of Crossrail and the possibility of more starter home and smaller flats in the centre. Bracknell has to build just 635 a year. Going forward there needs to be a fair division of the requirement.

The total numbers needed in the future also should take into account any change of migration policy designed to lower the numbers of additional people coming to live and work in the country as a whole. The current high numbers of new home sis partly the result of adding 330,000 extra people each year to our population, as we wish anyone coming to live and work here to have access to decent housing. If the government sticks to its target of a substantial reduction and takes the necessary measures on leaving the EU, could the targets be lowered.

Were the Council to agree to a new settlement at Grazeley of 15,000 homes that would on its own provide 17.5 years worth of housing against targets. Would the development be spaced out over such a time period? Is it feasible to say no to building on any other large sites throughout such a long time period? Or might Grazeley add to the build rate? If other sites are granted on appeal or run over from past grants of planning, then we need to build even more infrastructure to take care of a faster build rate than present plans.

I am writing to the authorities to ask what thought is going in to future targets in the light of these issues.

[Synthetic drugs are making headway in Afghanistan, UN agency reports](#)

14 February 2017 – Methamphetamine is increasingly being seized by law enforcement in Afghanistan, and there is also evidence that it is being produced in the country, according to the first of its kind assessment on synthetic drugs released today by the United Nations drug and crime agency.

After spending eight-months gathering information on drugs known locally as 'glass,' 'tears of love' or 'sheesha,' the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) concluded that "there are strong indications that methamphetamine use is establishing itself among opiate users, which are already one of the most vulnerable parts of Afghan society."

"The report comes in a timely fashion, adding another layer of understanding to the very complex Afghan drugs situation," said UNODC's Director of Public Affairs, Jean-Luc Lemahieu.

He praised Afghan contribution to the report, noting that the country has had "impressive" growth in capacity.

The Afghanistan Synthetic Drugs Assessment includes missions to five provinces in Afghanistan, where interviews were conducted with over 100 key sources, drug users and law enforcement officials at government offices, health service centres and drug treatment providers.

"Although data and information remains scarce, reports from law enforcement officials, drug treatment providers, forensic experts and drug users in Afghanistan point to a differentiated market for synthetic drug," the investigators reported.

Source: UNODC's Afghanistan Synthetic Drugs Situation Assessment

"Increases in the number of methamphetamine seizures, together with reports of methamphetamine manufacture and increases in treatment registrations in certain parts of the country, suggest that synthetic drugs are of growing concern in Afghanistan," says the report.

Among its findings, the report noted that the largest number of methamphetamine treatment registrations have been reported by treatment centres in Kunduz province, in the north-east of Afghanistan, and Nimroz province, to the south-west of Afghanistan.

It also found that the current national drug control law seems to provide a much lower penalty framework for methamphetamine compared to other drugs such as heroin or cocaine.

Investigators conclude that the issue must be studied more thoroughly by national and international partners.

Traditionally Reared Pedigree Welsh Pork Awarded Protected Status

The European Commission has today awarded Pork from traditionally reared Pedigree Welsh Pigs with Traditional Specialities Guaranteed (TSG) status. It joins a number of Welsh products that have been successful in achieving EU protected status. These include PGI Welsh Lamb and Beef, PDO Halen Môn/Anglesey Sea Salt, PGI Pembrokeshire early new potatoes, Conwy Mussels, PGI Carmarthen Ham and PDO & PGI Welsh Wine.

Unlike geographically specific protected foods, Pedigree Welsh Pork can be produced anywhere in Europe, providing the animals are pedigree and are registered with the British Pig Association or a similar breed association. Pig keepers using the TSG designation will be encouraged to become members of the Pedigree Welsh Pig Society who will be able to offer help and support to ensure pigs are reared according to traditional methods, keeping to the high standards of husbandry.

The application process for TSG status began over 4 years ago with support and funding from the Welsh Government. Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths welcomed the announcement. She said:

“I would like to congratulate Pedigree Welsh Pig Society for gaining the first Traditional Specialities Guaranteed (TSG) EU status in Wales. I am pleased the Welsh Government was able to assist the application with funding and support.

“This is further confirmation of what we already know – Wales produces world leading food and drink. Our Protected Food Name basket is growing, which gives recognition to the dedication of our producers to quality and it ensures their products are protected under EU law.”

Bob Stevenson, Chairman of the Pedigree Welsh Pig Society and an eminent pig vet said:

“Consumers can now be 100% certain when buying traditionally reared Pedigree Welsh pork that provenance is assured and that the meat has been produced in a way that has prioritised the well-being of the animal throughout its entire life.”

“This is a great accolade for Wales’ native pig breed and one that will help further elevate the profile of Welsh pork”, says Melanie Cargill, representative of a new initiative to develop the pig industry in Wales. “Shoppers are increasingly looking for assurance when it comes to their food purchases and this gives discerning customers that something extra.”

“Being only the third TSG awarded in the UK, it really demonstrates how unique the Welsh pig is.”

Lesley Griffiths also spoke of the Welsh Government’s intention to ensure Protected Food Names continue to be recognised after the UK leaves the European Union:

“We are working closely with Defra, who act as the link to the EU, to ensure a future for protected food names when we leave Europe. There are other countries outside of Europe with protected food names and this sets a precedent for the UK to consider a similar reciprocal scheme in the future.”