

After years of dither and delay, it is welcome that progress is finally being made on runway expansion – Andy McDonald

Andy McDonald MP, Labour's Shadow Transport Secretary, commenting on the Government's statement on Heathrow, said:

"Labour has consistently been pushing for a decision on runway expansion in the South East of England so after years of dither and delay, it is welcome that progress is finally being made.

"However, there are still outstanding issues including how Heathrow expansion can be squared with meeting the UK's climate change objectives and demonstrating that local noise and environmental impacts can be minimised.

"This can be achieved, but only in the context of a coherent aviation strategy that works for the country not just London. It starts with confirming our membership of the European Aviation Safety Agency, as well as action on cleaner fuels and improving road and rail access to our international gateway airports."

Research and analysis: ACRE advice: increasing photosynthetic efficiency in wheat trial

This document is the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE's) advice to government in considering a request from Rothamsted Research for a trial of genetically modified (GM) wheat. This research is looking at the impact of the genetic modification in field conditions.

The committee concluded that all appropriate measures have been taken to avoid adverse effects to human health and the environment from the proposed trial.

[News story: UK invests in new submarine training school on the Clyde](#)

HM Treasury this week approved the Initial Gate Business Case for the new submarine school to be built at Scotland's largest military establishment this week. Final design approval is expected soon, which will allow work to begin later this year.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

We are now making a long-term investment of hundreds of millions of pounds to improve and upgrade the waterfront at Clyde to make sure it is ready to support the United Kingdom's whole submarine fleet.

As well as a boost to the Scottish economy, this will also bring welcome stability for our personnel, who work hard to help keep Britain safe and secure.

The new schools will provide academic and technical training for all Royal Naval personnel entering the submarine service from 2022. It is an important step for both the Royal Navy and Scotland as it means all submariners' careers, whether afloat or ashore, will be principally conducted from Faslane as part of a £1.3 billion investment in making the Clyde Britain's submarine hub.

All 11 Royal Navy submarines will be based at HMNB Clyde from 2020, seeing the number of people employed at the base will rise from 6,800 people to 8,200. The school will support the Astute hunter killer submarines, as well as the delivery of training for the new Dreadnought nuclear deterrent boats, which provide the United Kingdom with its continuous nuclear deterrent.

Head of the Submarine Service, Rear Admiral John Weale said:

Our new single integrated operating base will make significant improvements to the work-life balance of our 5,000 submariners.

By putting our boats and training in one place, our submariners can put down roots in Scotland knowing that they are no longer required to commute from one end of the country to another.

The re-location of submarine training from HMS Sultan and HMS Raleigh is consistent with the Better Defence Estate Strategy, published in November, which set out the department's plans sets out plans to achieve a more efficient, modern and capability focused defence estate and bring greater harmony to Service families.

Key milestones in the development of a Submarine Centre of specialisation at HM Naval Base Clyde include:

- A drumbeat of arrivals of the last four Astute class submarines on the Clyde due to be commissioned into the Royal Navy between 2018 and 2024 (eventually replacing the Trafalgar class).
- The move of the last two Trafalgar class submarines, HM Submarines Talent and Triumph, to the Clyde in 2019 and 2020 from Devonport (Plymouth). On current plans, the end of service date for Talent is 2021 and for Triumph is 2022.
- The move of the Submarine Escape Rescue Abandonment and Survivability Training capability from Hampshire to the Clyde by 2019.
- A new Nuclear Support Hub, providing modern standard effluent disposal by 2020 which will remain compliant with Scottish and UK environmental standards.
- The Faslane Nuclear Infrastructure Continuous Availability Programme to replace or refurbish Nuclear Facilities by 2024.
- The four Dreadnought nuclear deterrent submarines will start to arrive at Faslane from the early 2030s (replacing the Vanguard-class boats).

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[News story: Government property reductions deliver billions to public purse](#)

The government reduced its estate by over 300,000 square metres – the equivalent of seven Wembley stadiums – and delivered running cost savings of £176 million in the last financial year, according to the latest [State of the Estate report](#) from the Cabinet Office.

Speaking today at the 2017 Government Property Conference, Minister for the Constitution Chris Skidmore announced that since 2010, rationalisation of the estate has reduced its size by a quarter, delivering over £1 billion in running costs.

The sale of surplus properties, including Admiralty Arch and the Old War Office, resulted in a further £1 billion in capital receipts in 2015-16 – a notable step towards the pledge to deliver £5 billion in receipts by 2020.

The report shows that vacant space within the central government estate now only represents 1.4% – well below the average in the private sector of 8.9%.

The Minister outlined how the Government Property Unit's pioneering Government Hubs and One Public Estate programmes are revolutionising the way government uses its property to deliver savings to the taxpayer, homes and jobs, whilst revolutionising the way the Civil Service works.

He highlighted the progress made in setting up a new central body that will take ownership of all relevant government land and property. The body, which will be called the Government Property Agency, has an executive team in place and is expected to go live by the end of 2017.

Chris Skidmore, Minister for the Constitution, said:

The progress that we have made over the past year in rationalising the government estate is something that I am very proud of. Not only are the sales and savings that we have made substantial, but the way in which we are managing our buildings will bring about positive, and lasting change.

Whether releasing land for housing, or revolutionising the way in which civil servants work, we can be confident that we are using the government estate in the most productive way possible.