

# Commonwealth stands together on the global response to coronavirus

Press release

The Prime Minister has issued a joint statement alongside 53 Commonwealth Heads of Government, vowing to stand together against the challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic.



The statement says the Commonwealth is committed to protect the health of all 2.4 billion of its citizens by improving access to essential health services and safe, effective and affordable medicines and vaccines for all, particularly the most vulnerable and high-risk populations.

They will work with international partners to address the global threat from the pandemic, supporting the G20 and International Financial Institutions' action plans to tackle the crisis. This includes protecting employment opportunities, particularly for the Commonwealth's 1.2 billion young people.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

It is imperative we stick together in times of uncertainty, which is why the UK is proud to stand with the Commonwealth family in the fight against Coronavirus.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said

We warmly welcome the commitment of all members of the Commonwealth to contribute to the global health response, protect vulnerable countries and support the global economy.

The UK and the Commonwealth family will continue to champion inclusion, protecting and strengthening initiatives which promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, such as 12 years of quality education for

all.

The joint statement is available [here](#)

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For journalists

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## **Digital diplomacy: UK's Asia Minister discusses science and business links with Vietnam as part of 'renewed focus' on relations**

Today's meetings – all of which took place virtually due to the ongoing disruption to international travel caused by COVID-19 – follow on from a similar day of engagement with the region last month. This reflects a drive towards building ties with Vietnam, not only as the current Chair of ASEAN and partner on the UNSC, but as an important strategic partner.

With the renewal of the UK-Vietnam Strategic Partnership Agreement, collaboration on tackling climate change ahead of the COP26 summit and the UK's application to become an ASEAN Dialogue Partner all on the agenda, these talks added new positive momentum to the UK-Vietnam relationship.

Speaking after today's virtual meetings, the Minister for Asia Nigel Adams said:

Through the conversations I have had today, it is clear that out of difficult times come opportunities, and that the UK-Vietnam relationship is set to go from strength to strength.

Whether that's in health cooperation with our scientists collaborating to help in the global fight against the disease, work on global issues like climate change, or business links with our bilateral trade tripling from less than £2bn to nearly £6bn in the last 10 years, it is clear that our partnership is growing.

In the post-COVID-19 new normal, we have an opportunity to recover together and better. While I cannot be in Vietnam this week, I am looking forward to fostering the growing relations between our two countries and the wider region as a whole, as part of our renewed focus on partners in South East Asia.

The day began with a meeting with Vice Foreign Minister To Anh Dung, where the Minister was joined by Her Majesty's Ambassador to Vietnam Gareth Ward. Then came a roundtable with Director General Long and senior members of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, to discuss Vietnam's role in the world and how best to address key global challenges and threats.

There were further roundtables on Vietnam's business environment and on shared healthcare challenges, including with members of Oxford University Clinical Research Unit, who have been supporting Vietnam's COVID response, before the day finished with a session on green recovery involving Vietnam's Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment, and Industry and Trade.

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## [End of mission of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Paraguay](#)

World news story

Mr Matthew Hedges will finish his term as Her Majesty's Ambassador to Paraguay in August.



Her Majesty's Ambassador Matthew Hedges

Mr Matthew Hedges took office at the British Embassy in Asuncion in August 2017. He will finish his mission in Paraguay in August 2020. Deputy Head of Mission [John Davie](#), who joined the British Embassy in Asuncion in June, will become Chargé D'affaires in the transition period after Mr Hedges' departure. The official announcement of Mr Hedges' successor as Her Majesty's Ambassador to Paraguay is expected shortly.

During his three years as British Ambassador, Mr Hedges promoted the expansion of commercial ties between the UK and Paraguay, overseeing multiple exchanges between experts and business leaders. Cooperation in education and defence became a signature of the Paraguay-UK relationship throughout his tenure. The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst resumed its scholarship program for Paraguayan military officers, while the BECAL and the Chevening programmes signed an alliance which increased the number scholarships for Paraguayan citizens. Projects on transparency, media freedom, rights of women to live free of violence and rights of the LGBTQI+ community were some of the areas in which the British Embassy also offered its cooperation. Throughout his posting, but especially during the coronavirus pandemic, he has led the embassy's efforts to support British nationals in the country.

Reflecting on his time in Paraguay, Mr Hedges said:

These have been an extraordinary three years in which I have found a new home, a passion for Jopara and mbeju, and a deep connection with the people and land of Paraguay.

Paraguay and the UK have much to offer each other in business, education, addressing global challenges like climate change, and shared values. This work will continue after I leave, through my excellent embassy colleagues and successor, who is due to arrive in a few months.

After his time in Paraguay, Mr Hedges will join the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in London as Director for Asia.

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**[First concrete pour a solid sign work is back on-site](#)**

News story

The first concrete pour on the Sellafield site since restart has successfully been completed today, on the Sellafield Product and Residue Store Retreatment Plant site.



Continued progress on the foundations for the new storage facility.

Around 450m<sup>3</sup> of specialist concrete was poured to progress the foundations for the facility, which will be a vital part of the safe and secure management of our stockpile of special nuclear materials.

The plant is needed to retreat, repackage and consolidate this material in a form suitable for long term storage in modern facilities until circa 2120.

Sellafield Ltd, head of projects, Steve Harnwell said:

This is great news – the team have done some exceptional work to get to this moment; and it is really a great achievement during the uncertainty of COVID-19 to get the project back to delivery of critical path scope.

Over the last 16 weeks, the team have worked incredibly hard and collaboratively alongside our supply chain One Aim to achieve this.

The arrangements put in place to ensure a safe, work place and safe close proximity work methods with engagement with trade unions has all been key to achieving this success.

Sellafield Ltd, interim projects director Neil Crewdson added

It's a testament to the skills and dedication shown by all our people, supply chain and trade union engagement throughout lockdown and into restart; that we have been able to continue vital work like this, safely and at pace, with the extra constraints we have in place.

This week has also seen the start of installation for the welfare cabins for the main construction workforce on the facility, work that was scheduled for

March before lockdown paused it.

The installation of the cabins is the first step to providing a construction hub that will provide welfare accommodation, a canteen and kitchen and office accommodation to be in place for the main construction workforce following completion of the base slab.

This is part of increasing the welfare facility to allow the expansion of the project for the major build to start in October this year.

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## [Q Developments win Homes England masterplanning award for planting housing on Surrey garden centre site](#)

Homes England is delighted the award for Best Masterplan & Placemaking at the Housing Design Awards has gone to Q Developments for their housing scheme with an “English village feel” in Alford, Surrey.

The reuse of this former garden centre site allows for organic growth of an existing village. The project will deliver 56 new homes via a mixture of houses and apartments arranged around a shared village landscape, which allows for new future connections with the existing village and amenities.

The masterplan and placemaking category is a first for 2020 and was sponsored by Homes England – the third year that the agency has supported the Housing Design Awards, which have been handed out this week.

Leigh Johnson, Head of Master Development at Homes England, said:

“Congratulations to John Pardey Architects, Q Developments and Waverley Borough Council. Their winning design is all about creating that elusive English village feel. This masterplan meets all the criteria of the BFL12 design guidance and its response to the site’s local distinctiveness with clear pedestrian and cycle routes through the site.

“It’s a scheme that puts people and the homes at its heart of design and not the car, a true mix of tenure and types of homes to deliver a thriving and mixed community of future occupants.”

Carl Gulland, Director at John Pardey Architects said:

“We don’t take lightly the privilege of adding new homes and places to existing rural communities. At Alford we thought really hard about how to

create a contemporary addition to a historic Surrey village that would resonate with the true qualities and character of place rather than resort to hollow caricature, and ensure future connectivity.

We wholeheartedly believe our proposal will improve the village for the wider community as well as new residents.”

Mark Randall, Architect at Q Developments said:

“For over 20 years we have been promoting the value of good design, developing homes in places where people want to live. Following the garden centre’s closure in 2018, we drew upon the history of the Surrey vernacular and historic settlement formations in order to knit this landscape-led scheme into the existing village.

“The house types offer generous accommodation on large plots and maximise the opportunities for natural daylighting, energy-efficient contemporary living, and home working. We hope that through the award’s recognition of the quality of our scheme, our past award-winning projects and future work, we can continue to promote the value of good residential design whilst regenerating brownfield sites such as this.”

Leigh Johnson added:

“Homes England and Design for Homes chose to include the new award to demonstrate that good quality, well considered masterplans are key to delivering successful places to live. In fact, I’d like to congratulate all the shortlisted schemes for their contribution to raising design standards in housing.”

This year’s shortlisted schemes are [here](#) and the winner of the masterplan award is [here](#).