

Defence Secretary announces boost for multi-billion-pound SKYNET 6 programme

Speaking at the DSEi conference today, the Defence Secretary outlined an ambitious and global vision for defence. He highlighted the UK's decisive contribution to the fight against Daesh and RFA Mounts Bay's role providing critical humanitarian relief in response to Hurricane Dorian.

Following the announcement that the MOD will receive an extra £2.2bn as part of the Spending Round last week, the Defence Secretary laid out his plan to invest in new capabilities across all five warfighting domains – land, sea, air, cyber and space.

In particular, the Defence Secretary announced the launch of a new competition to operate and maintain the UK's next-generation military satellite communications system, SKYNET 6.

Speaking at the DSEi conference today, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Fifty years ago Britain put its first satellite, SKYNET1, in space. Today we're having to deal with increasing threats to satellite-based navigation and the need for robust communications has never been more vital.

That's why we're developing SKYNET6 which will give our forces unparalleled capacity to talk to each other in any hostile environment.

50 years on from the launch of the first SKYNET satellite (SKYNET 1A) in November 1969 and following the success of subsequent SKYNET programmes, the MOD is upgrading its military satellite system providing secure, long-range communications to the armed forces and UK allies.

This upgraded system could be used to facilitate the transmission of secure communications from a ship at sea, support Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations, allow fighter jet pilots to receive or upload operational data in real-time, or enable land forces to conduct missions in remote environments.

Satellite communication systems are vital to operating effectively in hostile environments in which secure communications are required or commercial communication systems may have been disabled or are insufficient.

This contract, named SKYNET 6 Service Delivery Wrap (SDW), covers the operation of the UK's constellation of satellites and ground stations, and the provision and management of ground terminal infrastructure.

Further contracts, covering other aspects of the SKYNET 6 programme, worth approximately £6bn, will be announced in the coming months.

Julian Knight, Head of Networks at the MOD's Information Systems and Services organisation (ISS) said:

We are about to enter a vital phase of the SKYNET programme. This competition is a significant opportunity for industry to work at the very heart of our programme – delivering improved flight and ground operations.

We are seeking an innovative partner that will ensure effective and consistent Defence Satellite communications and will look to continually maximise performance and value for money.

The successful bidder will also negotiate the MOD's access to commercial satellite services, as well as managing the UK's contribution and access to systems owned and operated by the UK's allies.

SKYNET 6 SDW will require many of the same highly-skilled jobs currently employed by SKYNET 5 programme and will continue to contribute to the department's prosperity objectives.

[Defence Secretary keynote speech at DSEi 2019](#)

I don't intend to speak for too long. The kit, not the speeches, are the real reason you're here today.

But if you're going to take home one message from the UK, it is this – we are global. We are alive to the global threats. And we have the world class industrial base and the game-changing capability to deal with the danger.

To prove the point I want to briefly dwell on the success of our Defence and security sector. It is a story seldom told.

This is a sector that brings in sales worth more than £19bn to our economy. A sector that is the second largest in the world – accounting for 19 per cent of global export value over the past decade.

A sector that according to reports supports around 260,000 jobs directly and indirectly in the UK.

What's more our Defence is the spine of our nation, spreading wealth across our entire union from the South of England to the North of Scotland. Our average expenditure with UK industry equated to £290 spent on the security of every person living in the UK.

There is always the challenge of selling to wider Government what we in Defence do. It is true that what our Armed Forces do is often over a distant horizon, or below the deep ocean.

But the reality is, what we do, makes an enormous global difference. Defence is often upstream focusing on keeping danger away from these shores.

On this day, 18 years ago, terrorists hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, and flew them into the twin towers in New York.

For many it was the first awakening of the full horror of global terrorism. But it was because of our investment in Defence, because of the strength of our capability, that the UK was able to fight alongside our allies. And because of key procurement decisions we were able to operate side-by-side across the globe.

Look at how we've been taking the fight to Daesh in the past few years with our Typhoons, attacking the terrorists both day and night with power and precision, while our cyber capability eroded their communication channels and exposed the so-called caliphate for the sham it always was.

Our expertise was on display last year too when Russia deployed nerve agent on British streets to murder British civilians. We immediately called on our internationally renowned medical and scientific community at DSTL in Porton Down.

Their chemical and biological know-how identified the deadly use of novichok. But you do not grow the corporate knowledge of the UK's defence capability overnight. Which is why when that knowledge is channelled into the British forces' next generation needs, we provide world leading products to go alongside.

In more recent times, when the arteries of worldwide trade have been threatened by hostile Iranian state action in the Strait of Hormuz, we've enlisted the global capacity of our Type 23s and Type 45s, built on shipyards on the Clyde, to defend the red ensign.

And, with Hurricane Dorian ravaging the Caribbean, we were the first nation to send support, dispatching RFA Mounts Bay, equipped with amphibious vehicles and helicopters to work alongside international aid colleagues, providing residents in the Bahamas with much needed humanitarian help.

A stark demonstration of Britain's ability to match global capability with global presence to deal with any eventuality. But that what's so remarkable about the British defence industry, is that we have strength and depth.

We don't just make the big platforms. We machine engineer the parts. We shape

the electronic systems behind them. We devise the niche capability and we innovate with the very best. For example, here today we have remarkable companies like Wiltshire-based companies Avon Protection, a world leader in Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE).

Not only does it supply the UK and its NATO allies with kit, it is also the primary supplier of Chemical Biological, Radiological and Nuclear respiratory equipment to the United States Department of Defense Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Special Operations.

Then we have dynamic firms like Reaction Engines in Oxfordshire currently building a hypersonic engine capable of reaching orbit. And my Lancashire constituents would never forgive me if I didn't mention their contribution, building the aft fuselage, horizontal and vertical tails of every F-35 built as well as on the tried and test Typhoon.

We're surrounded by brilliant examples of British expertise in the hall today. As the UK's new Defence Secretary we do however need to break the traditional cycle where our appetite didn't match our stomachs which led to the annual hollowing out of capability and plans, which ultimately lets down the men and women of our Armed Forces.

We have to invest in our global defence force if we want to make a global difference and last week's Spending Round announcements signalled our intent.

For those who didn't catch the headlines it's worth summarising. UK Defence secured an extra £2.2 billion. An increase of 2.6 per cent above inflation between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Well above government's commitment to grow the defence budget by 0.5% above inflation every year of this Parliament. It means that by 2020/2021 this year's £39 billion defence budget will rise to over £41 billion by 2020/21, the first time it's topped the £40bn mark.

It means that we'll continue to exceed our NATO commitment to spend 2 per cent of GDP on Defence. It means that the UK remains the largest NATO defence spender in Europe by far.

Above all, it means more money to keep investing in key capabilities such as offensive cyber, nuclear deterrent and shipbuilding. Defence will always continue to require sustained investment for the long-term.

But we're already making sure we put our money where our mouth is. Look at what's happening across the domains.

Let's start with shipping. Today 11 major warships are in build or on contract not to mention our next-generation of nuclear deterrent submarines.

We're looking to build Type 31 frigates and we're building Type 26 global combat ships, whose designs have won plaudits and contracts in Australia and Canada.

And with HMS Queen Elizabeth off to Westlant, our carrier strike is back

after an absence of a decade, giving us the unparalleled ability to project power and influence across the seven seas.

We're also investing in cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence. Yesterday on board the HMS Argyll I witnessed the first exercise involving our Maritime Autonomy Surface Testbed (MAST).

Effectively this is the next generation underwater drone swarm, operating autonomously but collectively, to scout ahead of a ship and spot trouble in advance.

Switching from sea to land, our Army is upgrading not only our Challenger 2 and Warrior vehicles but bringing in multi-role armoured vehicles to operate alongside AJAX, with a main gate decision due at the end of October.

Together these vehicles will deliver the Army's new transformational Strike Force, contributing to NATO Readiness and creating as well as sustaining more than a thousand jobs.

Companies like Qioptiq, less than 100 miles from my own constituency are involved in the sighting systems. They are here exhibiting today.

As a former infantryman, I'm delighted we're doing more to lighten the load of our soldiers in the field.

MOD has been working with BAE Systems to develop lighter ammunition, replacing the brass in the cartridge cases with stainless steel or titanium, reducing the load our troops have to carry by up to 26 percent along with the costs of transporting rounds to the front line.

We're applying the same blue-skies thinking to the air domain as well. Last year at Gatwick and Heathrow we saw the peril drone technology poses to our airspace.

Today I can announce that, from early next year, the RAF will be working with Leonardo on a three-year programme, looking at how to detect, track, identify and defeat rogue drones as this technology continues to evolve.

And I'm pleased that we've signed a statement of intent with Italy who, alongside Sweden, will support joint working on the Tempest and our Future Combat Air Strategy.

I'm looking forward to working with Italian and Swedish counterparts, as well as others, to put the Tempest programme into hyper-drive and take Global Britain into the stratosphere.

Fifty years ago Britain put its first satellite, Skynet1, in space. Today we're having to deal with increasing threats to satellite-based navigation. So the need for robust communications has never been more vital.

That's why we're developing Skynet6 which will give our forces unparalleled capacity to talk to each other in any hostile environment.

And I can announce the launch of a new competition for an industry partner to operate and manage the Ground Stations, infrastructure and technology involved in this programme.

And just as we upgrade our capability in space we're also bolstering our strength in cyber too.

The nature of warfare is changing. In an Information Age the challenge is not just to prepare for contingency but to operate and engage constantly.

That means we need to be able not just to repel threats from our online frontline but the ability to strike out. We need to gather, co-ordinate and exploit the information we receive across all the domains much more effectively.

That's why we're initiating a major programme of change, managing our people differently, adjusting the way we run our operations and maintaining our long-standing association of working with GCHQ in this area so we can be more agile in tackling dangers and grasping opportunities.

But we know that you only produce great kit if you have great partnerships between policy makers and product makers. That's why I want to see a step-change in our partnership with industry.

We're determined to go out of our way to help you giving you the certainty and confidence you need to create great capability. So as well as investing we're planning for the future.

A few days ago we published our Defence Technology Framework. It will help concentrate our collective minds by assessing the technologies needed to drive our defence modernisation and deliver battle-winning technologies.

Now you need to help us. So we're helping you. But we expect something in return We need industry to show willing. Willingness to strengthen your competitiveness, willingness to benefit our own procurements, willingness to seize those export opportunities.

The Army's newly announced industrial engagement framework marks the start of that journey. But the end point will see a fundamental shift in mindset from the regional to the global.

Britain has long been a nation of makers, from the steam engine to the turbo jet, from Watt to Whittle.

We remain a world leading exporter and as DSEI shows, the potential of our Defence sector is limitless.

But seizing our opportunities, realising our potential, demands we think big. It demands we all have a vision.

My vision for Defence is one that returns pride to the places in which things are made.

A vision where our kit is wanted not simply because it carries a stamp saying made in Britain. But because it carries a stamp that proudly proclaims made in Barrow or made in Birkenhead.

It's a vision where every part of the country is famed for its particular brand of expertise from air to autonomy. So we might be living through challenging times but if you're looking for solutions you've come to the right place.

Tomorrow is here today.

I hope you leave with the message that UK Defence is on the up, that our Defence industrial base remains the spine of our nation, allowing our forces to be the tip of our spear for Global Britain.

[Highways England's A1 Birtley to Coal House improvement application accepted for examination](#)

Yesterday, Tuesday 10 September, The Planning Inspectorate accepted for examination, an application by Highways England for proposed improvements on the A1 Newcastle Gateshead Western Bypass. The application proposes widening of the A1 south of Gateshead to four lanes, between junction 65 and 67 on the southbound carriageway and three lanes with lane gain between junctions on northbound carriageway to provide additional capacity.

The application was submitted on 14 August 2019 and the decision to accept the application was made in accordance with section 55 of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended). (The Planning Inspectorate has 28 days from the day after the date of receipt of an application to decide whether or not to accept it).

The decision and a copy of the application documents can be viewed at [the project page on the Inspectorate's National Infrastructure Planning website](#)

The Planning Act 2008 (as amended) sets high standards for applications and places a strong duty upon developers to involve the local community, local authorities and other stakeholders in the development of their proposal, ahead of submission.

Sarah Richards, Chief Executive of The Planning Inspectorate said: "After careful consideration, we have decided the application submitted by Highways England meets the required tests set out in the legislation to be accepted for examination."

It is now for the applicant to publicise the application has been accepted to

proceed to examination and invite people who are interested in the proposal to register with the Planning Inspectorate as an Interested Party by making a Relevant Representation.

Interested Parties in an application can:

- Say what they agree or disagree with in the application and why
- Comment on what other people have said in their representations
- Attend a Preliminary Meeting and say how they think the application should be examined
- Request that an open floor hearing is held
- Attend an open floor or issue-specific hearing
- Request to speak at a hearing.

Sarah Richards said.

“A major priority for us over the next few weeks is to ensure that the people and communities who may be affected by this proposal have the opportunity to give us their views.”

Ends

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate's Press Office, on: 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

More information on this application, including details of the developer's website, is available in National Infrastructure's [Programme of Projects](#)

Notes to editors:

The Planning Inspectorate is an agency of the Ministry for Housing, communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and operates within the policy framework prescribed in the Planning Act 2008, secondary legislation and the National Policy Statements.

The process in a snapshot

There are six key stages within the process. The summary below provides examples of when and how people have an opportunity to provide evidence to the Planning Inspectorate. Pre-application

Key activities:

- Project development / developer's pre-application consultation and publicity.
- Environmental impact assessment preparation and scoping, where required.

Public involvement:

- Have their say on the proposal to the developer through their pre application consultation Acceptance by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State

Key activities:

- The Secretary of State has 28 days from the day after receipt to decide whether or not an application should be accepted for examination

Public involvement:

- Details will be posted at the Planning Inspectorate's website on how to register as an interested party – once an application has been accepted for examination and publicised by the developer.
- Opportunity to legally challenge a decision not to accept an application.

Pre-examination

Key activities:

- Single Inspector or a Panel of three or more Inspectors appointed.
- Preliminary Meeting called and held.
- Procedure and timetable set for examination.

Public involvement:

- Register to say what you agree or disagree with in the application
- Submit your representation
- View application documents submitted by the developer on the Planning Inspectorate website
- Attend the Preliminary Meeting
- Say how the examination should be conducted.

Examination

Key activities:

- A maximum of six months to carry out the examination

Public involvement:

- Submit more detailed comments in writing
- Comment on what other people have said
- Request and attend an open-floor hearing
- If being held, request to speak at open-floor and / or issue specific hearing(s)
- Comment on the local authority's Local Impact Report – detailing the impact of the scheme on the local area.

Decision

Key activities:

- A maximum of three months for Planning Inspectorate to issue a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State, with a statement of reasons.

- The relevant Secretary of State then has a further three months from receiving the recommendation in which to issue the decision.

Post decision

Key activities:

- Six weeks for any legal challenge.

Public involvement:

- Opportunity to challenge.

[Defra responds to Wild Justice challenge: releasing gamebirds on protected sites](#)

The way in which the release of gamebirds on or near protected sites (Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation) in England is managed will be reviewed following a proposed legal challenge, Defra has today (11 September 2019) confirmed.

This will not result in any immediate changes for owners or occupiers of land.

In response to a pre-action protocol (PAP) letter from Wild Justice, Defra accepted in principle the annual release of non-native gamebirds, specifically the Common Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge, can be considered a 'plan or project' requiring appropriate assessment within the meaning of the Habitats Directive.

While not accepting the argument that current laws do not provide for appropriate assessment in such cases, Defra proposes to undertake a review to consider the legislative arrangements around the relevant activities and whether there are ways in which their effectiveness could be improved. The detail of this review will be developed over the coming weeks.

Upcoming review and next steps

Defra will undertake a review to consider the legislative arrangements in England around the relevant activities and whether there are ways in which their effectiveness could be improved. The detail of this review will be developed over the coming weeks. A review of this nature will take time to conduct and it will only be after a thorough examination that it will become

clear if any subsequent change is necessary.

What to do if you release gamebirds on protected sites

This will not result in any immediate changes for owners or occupiers of land.

The legislative regime surrounding gamebird releases will remain unchanged in the immediate term and there will be no impact on the industry. The industry will be kept informed of progress with the review in due course.

Committee on Radioactive Waste Management visit to Dounreay



Members of CoRWM in front of Dounreay Fast Reactor (DFR) Dome.

On 3 September, a small delegation of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) visited the Dounreay site to receive an update on the treatment and storage of higher activity radioactive wastes at the nuclear site.

Members received a number of presentations on progress being made to decommission the site and in particular the proposals for recovering and treatment of the radioactive waste around the Shaft and Silo.

They also took the opportunity to revisit the Dounreay Cementation Plant, the Intermediate Level Waste stores, and the Low Level Waste disposal facility operating successfully since its opening in 2016.

Sir Nigel Thrift, Chair to the CoRWM commented on “the impressive levels of commitment and professionalism of the whole team at Dounreay” adding “how useful the visits are in understanding the practical delivery of a highly complex programme of decommissioning”.

Photo credit: Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd (DSRL).

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