

Minister Andrew Stephenson's statement on the Sudan Declaration

The Joint FCO-DFID Minister for Africa, Andrew Stephenson MP, has welcomed today's signing of the Constitutional Declaration by the Transitional Military Council and the Forces of Freedom and Change in Sudan. This agreement establishes the path for transition to a civilian-led government. He congratulated all parties for their commitment to achieving this deal for the future of Sudan.

Minister for Africa, Andrew Stephenson MP, said:

I welcome this historic moment for Sudan. This agreement responds to the demands of the Sudanese people who have tirelessly called for change and a better future. The signing of the Constitutional Declaration on 17 August is a vital step on the path to a peaceful and democratic future for Sudan. The people of Sudan now have the opportunity to secure freedom from repression, instability and hardship. The determination of all parties, and the support of the African Union and Ethiopia mediators, is to be commended.

This agreement sets out the structure and powers of Sudan's new government. There are, of course, outstanding issues to be addressed and we encourage all parties to engage constructively in resolving these in a timely manner. I welcome the commitment to begin work on a lasting peace agreement with the country's armed groups. Inclusive dialogue amongst all Sudanese people and respect for human rights are essential for a truly democratic transition to succeed. The UK will support Sudan's political and economic reforms, and assist the country in securing the democratic future its people have demanded and are entitled to.

Further information

£600 million boost for housing

- Chancellor Sajid Javid announces over £600 million to support the building of 50,000 new homes
- Fund will ensure necessary infrastructure is in place to unlock housing
- Move follows Chancellor's commitment to a step change in infrastructure investment with National Infrastructure Strategy this Autumn

Up to 50,000 new homes in high demand areas will be delivered through over £600 million of new investment for housing in England, the Chancellor announced today (Saturday 17 August).

The funding will be made available through the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF), originally launched by Mr Javid when he was Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Since it was launched, £1.3 billion has been allocated to deliver up to 76,500 homes.

The announcement today builds on this, and the £600 million will help deliver five new projects in London, Central Bedfordshire and Essex – all areas of high demand for new housing.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP said:

I want to see more homes built in the places people want to live, so more people realise the dream of homeownership.

But we need the roads, rail links, and schools to support the families living in those homes, which is why I set up a fund to put in place the infrastructure to unlock new homes in these areas.

And today I'm announcing hundreds of millions in new investment, helping more people get on the property ladder and allowing more communities to flourish.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

I am determined to help people make the dream of home ownership a reality and this investment of over half a billion will unlock thousands of new homes by providing essential infrastructure.

To build more, we need to provide the infrastructure and public services to match. This package will support existing communities and ensure they receive the roads and schools to sustain the homes being built.

Last year we built more new homes than any other year bar one in the last 30 years. There's more to do and I will be focusing relentlessly on getting Britain building.

While there are many sites all over the country that could be used for new housing projects, many lack the infrastructure needed to make building homes on them viable. This can be because they lack the roads, rail links, or schools required to unlock new development.

The HIF is designed to support local authorities that want to step up their plans to increase the overall housing supply, make more land available for housing, and deliver new physical infrastructure that supports new and

existing communities.

The boost to funding underpins the government's commitment to increasing the UK's housing supply and helping more young people to realise their dream of home ownership.

Notes

- The five specific projects announced by the Chancellor are:
 1. £218 million for the 'Beaulieu Station and North-East bypass' bid from Essex County Council to deliver a new train station and road improvements to unlock up to 14k homes.
 2. £156 million for the 'Meridian Water' bid from Enfield to deliver rail works, road infrastructure, land remediation, flood alleviation and utilities to unlock up to 10k homes
 3. £99.9 million for the 'Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community' bid from Essex County Council to deliver a new single carriageway link road and works to unlock up to 7.5k homes.
 4. £69.6 million for the 'Transformational Growth in Biggleswade' bid from Central Bedfordshire to deliver a new secondary school and transport infrastructure to unlock up to c.3k homes.
 5. £80.8 million for the 'East London Line – Growth Capacity' bid from the GLA to deliver transport upgrades to unlock up to 14k homes.

The Housing Infrastructure Fund is a government capital grant programme of up to £5.5 billion. The Fund is divided into 2 streams:

- Marginal Viability Funding: available to all single and lower tier local authorities in England – to provide the final or missing piece of infrastructure funding to get additional sites allocated or existing sites unblocked quickly
- Forward Funding: available to the uppermost tier of local authorities in England – for a small number of strategic and high-impact infrastructure projects. The announced projects are all successful 'Forward Funding' bids.

Funding is being awarded to local authorities on a highly competitive basis, providing grant funding for new infrastructure that will unlock new homes in the areas of greatest housing demand across the country.

[Letter to The Times from Emma Howard](#)

Boyd, Chair of Environment Agency

PROTECTING OUR RIVERS AND STREAMS

Your latest attack on the Environment Agency (“Toothless Environment Agency lets farmers pollute rivers”, 17 August) is another misleading mix of fact and fiction.

It is true that the EA doesn’t have a specific budget to enforce the new regulations to protect watercourses against diffuse pollution from agriculture. We don’t have all the resources we’d like to do so: the government grant for our environmental work has been cut by more than half since 2010, and we would like to see that restored.

It is also true, as your article acknowledges, that the EA always planned not to enforce the law for the first year after it came into effect in April 2018 and to provide advice to farmers instead. We made that clear [when the scheme was launched](#): “The Environment Agency will roll out the rules through an advice led approach, working with farmers to meet the requirements before enforcement action is taken.”

We think that was the right approach. These were a set of new rules to which farmers needed time to adapt. All good regulators seek first to work with those they regulate through support and guidance, and only use enforcement when necessary. And [as I have made clear](#) we do need to work with farmers to provide advice, practical support and best practice to help them protect their land and our environment.

But it is not the case that we “let farmers pollute rivers”. We can and do take enforcement action, up to and including prosecution, against those who cause serious pollution incidents. We target persistent offenders. And we are having some success: in the last quarter (April-June 2019) the number of serious pollution incidents caused by farmers dropped to five, compared with 23 in the same period last year.

Protecting and enhancing the water in our rivers and streams is a top priority for the Environment Agency. In the same quarter that we helped secure that big drop in serious pollution from farming, we also enhanced 951km of watercourses across the country. We did that by working with farmers to reduce the impact of diffuse pollution, with the water companies to improve sewage treatment, and with the environmental NGOs like the WWF and Rivers Trust. We also removed barriers to eel and fish migration to help restore our rivers and wildlife to their natural state.

We will always strive to do the best we can for the people and places we serve. And we are always open to fair criticism. But I hope that in future reporting on the Environment Agency’s work you will acknowledge our successes as well as our challenges. We’d be happy to meet and show you what we do to create a better place.

Emma Howard Boyd

Chair, Environment Agency

Public to have their say on the food system of the future

British shoppers will be able to buy environmentally friendly, healthy and affordable food under plans for a radical shake-up of the UK's food industry.

As one of the first steps, the government is today launching a call for evidence, giving everyone from consumers, farmers and food producers, to scientists and academics, an opportunity to shape how we produce, sell and consume food in the UK.

Their views will inform the first major review of the nation's food system in nearly 75 years, led by entrepreneur Henry Dimbleby, to ensure the food industry is fit for the future, supports growth, enhances the environment and is resilient to the challenges posed by climate change.

The review will look at what is working well already and the role of new technology to revolutionise our food supply – from innovations like vertical farming and robotics, to carbon neutral manufacturing and crops that tackle climate change. No idea is too big or small to be considered.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

As well as keeping us alive and healthy, food plays a central role in our culture and our national life. The threats from climate change, loss of biodiversity and the need to deliver safe and affordable food gives rise to new challenges we must address.

As we leave the EU and seek to capitalise on the opportunities this can provide for the UK's farmers and food producers, we have the chance to reshape our food system from farm to fork to ensure it is ready to deal with these 21st century pressures.

So I am delighted to launch this call for evidence to build on the excellent work Henry Dimbleby has already done on this important review. We should not underplay the importance of the food we eat for our environment, our health and our society, and I encourage people to share their views on the way ahead.

Independent Review Lead Henry Dimbleby said:

We're launching the call for evidence today to gather insights and inspiration to help transform our food system.

These could be policies or ideas that make it easier for us to make more informed decisions about the food we eat; that make food production more environmentally sustainable; that help food businesses and communities to thrive; or that could put our country at the forefront of innovation in the coming years.

Whether you are someone who works in a food business, a farmer, a food processor, an interested citizen – whoever you are – we want to hear from you. We can't wait to read your submissions and hear about your ideas.

Prue Leith CBE restaurateur, food writer, cookery campaigner and broadcaster said:

For too long we have tinkered with food and food education. But we really need to grasp the nettle and do something radical. The National Food Strategy is an opportunity not to be missed, for our generation and for our children and grandchildren.

Through this Strategy we have the opportunity to improve the nation's health and embrace sustainability and I urge everyone to engage with it.

Ian Wright CBE, Chief Executive Food and Drink Federation said:

Today's announcement signals the serious commitment from government to the first independent review of the food and drink sector in over 70 years. We are absolutely delighted that Defra will be leading this work, with the Food and Drink Sector Council playing a leading role in shaping the strategy as it develops.

Food and drink is part of our critical national infrastructure. The National Food Strategy will ensure that UK food and drink remains a vital national asset, and continues to be one of the UK's biggest success stories.

FDF will be submitting evidence, and we would encourage everyone up and down the food and drink supply chain to do the same.

Minette Batters, National Farming Union President said:

British food is amongst the best, safest and most affordable in the world and UK farming plays a crucial role in providing the raw ingredients that form the backbone of our country's food system. It's time we took pride and interest in our food industry, which is

worth over £120 billion to the national economy and employs 4 million people.

The NFU is pleased to work with Henry Dimbleby to continue the development of a food system that delivers high quality, safe and affordable food for all.

Professor Judy Buttriss, Director General of British Nutrition Foundation said:

The Call for Evidence to help develop Defra's National Food Strategy provides an opportunity to shape a strategy that looks at food, nutrition and the environment in the round, through multiple lenses. The opportunity should not be missed.

Good nutrition is as much about eating more of some things as it is about cutting back on others. The integrated message of variety, balance and nutrient density – making every calorie count – needs to be reflected in food production right through to what we teach children in school.

Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive of Sustain said:

We need a food system that can reliably provide us with good, health-promoting food, now and for generations to come. This means averting dangerous climate change and restoring the natural systems on which we all depend for our food, water and clean air.

The whole system must also support decent livelihoods in farming and fishing, in perpetuity. These are tall orders, but it is the great task of our generation to tackle these fundamental issues that will underpin our ability to sustain human life and pursue social progress. We look forward to the National Food Strategy spearheading transformative action to create the social, economic, policy and legislative conditions for better food, farming and fishing to thrive and accelerate into the mainstream.

Iain Ferguson, Industry Co-Chair of the Food and Drink Sector Council said:

The National Food Strategy offers a once in a generation opportunity. We encourage everyone in the industry to contribute their ideas to help create the sustainable food system of the future. The Food and Drink Sector Council will give Henry Dimbleby and the review its full support.

Together these findings will inform the Government's trailblazing new National Food Strategy, published next year.

British Embassy Sponsors the First Youth Leadership Summit for the 4Rs

The first Youth Leadership Summit for the 4Rs (Reject, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) was held on 13-14 August. Organised by environmental organisation, Seeds of the Ocean and the British Embassy in Guatemala the Summit was held at the Auditorium of the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala.

The goal of the summit was to empower a new generation of young leaders to promote actions to reduce pollution from the abuse of single-use plastics and other disposable products. The event brought together, over two days, more than 100 young people from different parts of the country, who received training through workshops and keynote speeches on garbage pollution, the negative impact of solid waste on the environment and waste management strategies in Guatemala.

The summit is a free empowerment programme aimed at young people interested in reducing pollution by solid waste in the country, applying the 4Rs of sustainability. During the event, the youth also participated in leadership workshops, the development of skills for writing proposals and budgets, planning of environmental campaigns and use of communications to raise funds that could allow each young person to carry out their ideas pro-environment.

The British Ambassador to Guatemala, Carolyn Davidson, said:

We developed this Summit to create a space for young people to learn about the impact of single-use plastics on the environment and how to take action to tackle the root causes of this problem.

A key aspect of the programme is the small grant fund 'Mini-Grant: The 4Rs', through which participants who, once they have completed the two days of training, can apply and compete for a prize to support implementation of their ideas.

The British Embassy in Guatemala and Seeds of the Ocean will reward the three best ideas with a cash amount, so that they can invest it in the execution of their projects. The prizes are 1st. Place: Q 2800, second place Q 2000, and 3rd. place Q 1200. In addition, Marfund –a partner organization of the project- will deliver another prize with the same amount. In addition to the economic fund, the young winners will have three follow-up sessions where they will be guided for the correct implementation and impact evaluation of their projects.

The Founder and Executive Director of Seeds of the Ocean, Alerick Pacay, said:

The British Embassy in Guatemala is the official sponsor of this activity. They believed in the project since it was just an idea embodied in paper. Subsequently, other institutions such as the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala joined this event through its Department of Biology, and other partners as well.