

# Press release: Colliery tips in South Wales to be inspected over next 5 years

The work involves 315 inspections at 291 sites, including disused colliery tips, quarries and civil engineering structures.

Darren Bryant, Public Safety and Subsidence Principal Project Manager at the Coal Authority, said:

Regular inspection and monitoring of disused colliery tips and other historical mining features is important to monitor land stability, ensure public safety and for early identification of any environmental issues.

The Coal Authority has been providing tip and quarry inspection services for Natural Resources Wales since 2016, and in September 2018 we were successful in winning a 5 year contract to continue to provide these services.

As the government body responsible for managing the legacies associated with the historical coal mining industry of Britain, the Coal Authority has a vast amount of experience in the inspection, restoration and overall management of disused colliery spoil heaps and former mining structures.

We undertake a comprehensive inspection programme of our own portfolio that includes 40 disused colliery tips and approximately 800 other mining features. We do this by conducting on site assessments, utilising remote monitoring and telemetry equipment and by combining these with various ground movement and water level monitoring techniques to ensure our sites are managed safely.

Peter Cloke, South Wales Deputy Forest District Manager for Natural Resources Wales, said: "South Wales is unique in the fact we have such large numbers of people living next to our forests and using them for daily recreation, but due to our coal and steel industrial past we have many legacy issues to manage to ensure we keep them safe.

"We look forward to working with the Coal Authority on this contract and gaining from their extensive experience of managing historic industrial

liabilities.”

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## [News story: Changes to benefits for mixed age couples](#)

When single people reach [State Pension age](#), they move from working age benefits to pension age benefits.

Currently, couples can choose to make that transition when the older partner of the couple reaches State Pension age.

In 2012, Parliament voted to modernise the system and change the rule for couples so that the transition takes place when the younger partner reaches State Pension age. This will ensure the younger partner is in the same circumstances as other people of the same age, regardless of the age of their partner.

The government announced today that the change will be introduced from 15 May 2019.

Mixed age couples with a partner under State Pension age already in receipt of [Pension Credit](#) or pension-age [Housing Benefit](#) at the point of change will be unaffected while they remain entitled to either benefit.

If a mixed age couple claim working age benefits, the pensioner partner will not be subject to work-based conditionality. Any work-based conditionality for the younger partner will be tailored to meet their circumstances.

The government laid the commencement order today (14 January 2019) that brings this change into force from 15 May 2019. The commencement order also sets out who will be exempt from this change.

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## [News story: Independent Monitor, Julia Wortley, discusses her new role](#)

### **Striking a balance**

Disclosing police information on DBS certificates requires the right balance to be struck between public protection, and the rights of individual applicants. Julia Wortley, our new Independent Monitor, explains where her

role fits into ensuring this happens.

Julia says:

This is without doubt a challenging position, but one I am delighted to take on. I know the work of the DBS is vital in terms of helping people make safer recruitment decisions, and ultimately protects some of society's most vulnerable people.

In her role as Independent Monitor, Julia provides a fully independent element to the disclosure of police information for enhanced disclosure checks. Julia, who came into post in October, recently visited us at DBS to gain a greater insight into the work carried out.

It was lovely to come and visit the team – everyone was really welcoming. I am mindful that the disclosure process is a huge team effort involving hundreds of colleagues scattered across the UK, each fulfilling their respective roles in the different parts of the process.

## **Getting out and about**

In addition to visiting DBS disclosure staff, Julia also visited Barring staff in November, and has been out and about spending time with various police Disclosure Units.

When working with a complicated and complex process, such as the disclosure regime, shared among different teams in different geographic locations, it is essential that we always keep effective two-way communication channels open.

Julia then added:

It is also really important that each party recognises and respects the role that others have to play in ensuring that the disclosure process is efficient, effective and accountable.

## **Explaining the process**

Julia considers one of the significant challenges in disclosing information, is that it's often seen as a mysterious and complicated process.

In cases where an individual believes that information included by the police force is not relevant to the workforce applied for, or ought not to be disclosed, they should first contact the DBS in line with the [DBS disputes procedure](#).

The DBS will then work with the police to make a decision regarding the dispute.

If the police do not agree there is a mistake, the dispute will be referred to the Independent Monitor to carry out a review of the case.

Julia explains:

We are trying to apply a process consistently to every case, but each outcome will be different according to its own unique set of factors. Some time ago I was asked to consider "what makes a difficult decision." After careful thought, I concluded that the most difficult decisions all contain three of the following elements.

1. There will be, or could be, a significant impact on someone that flows directly from the decision
2. Not everyone will agree with you that you took the right decision
3. You don't necessarily have all the information or the quality of information you would like available to inform the decision

Julia believes that making decisions about what is included on an enhanced disclosure check, contains all three of the above elements. For this reason, the decisions are always difficult and challenging. She also understands that there is often a tension between quality and speed with which any task can be achieved.

## **Dedication and enthusiasm**

When asked what she has taken from her first contact with the departments involved in delivering disclosure information, Julia says:

What has impressed me, in all the conversations I have had, is the huge dedication and enthusiasm of everyone involved in this invaluable work.

Julia is someone who describes her lifelong core objectives as upholding fairness, and protecting vulnerable people from harm. She believes her role as Independent Monitor fits perfectly with her deep-rooted commitment to both.

When considering what she wants to achieve in the future, Julia concludes:

It is my ambition to continue to work closely with the DBS, the police and wider Home Office to ensure that the enhanced disclosure process is as efficient, effective and compassionate as it possibly can be.

More information about the Independent Monitor and the post's statutory duties can be found here: [Role of the Independent Monitor](#) (PDF, 115KB, 1 page)

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## **[Press release: Sir Alan Duncan statement on Guatemala and the CICIG](#)**

The Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office said:

The UK is extremely disappointed by the announcement of the Guatemalan Government on Monday 7 January unilaterally terminating their agreement with the UN on the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a decision which has since been suspended by the Constitutional Court. CICIG has made a valuable contribution to the fight against corruption and impunity in Guatemala, strengthening the national institutions of Guatemala in the process.

The UK, along with the EU and other international partners, has been a strong supporter of CICIG and we value their work and close cooperation with the Office of the Public Prosecutor of Guatemala.

The UK supports the statement made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations rejecting the Guatemalan government's decision to unilaterally terminate the agreement establishing CICIG and calling for the Guatemalan Government to allow CICIG to continue its important work until the completion of its mandate in September this year.

The UK supports the statements made by the G13 donor group and the EU, and calls on the Government of Guatemala to respect the rule of law and the importance of strong, independent institutions, which are vital for ensuring security and prosperity.

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## **[Speech: PM statement in the House of Commons: 14 January 2018](#)**

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the further assurances and clarifications we have received from the European Union on the Northern Ireland Protocol.

As a proud Unionist, I share the concerns of Members who want to ensure that in leaving the European Union we do not undermine the strength of our own union in the UK.

That is why when the EU tried to insist on a Protocol that would carve out Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK's customs territory, I said no.

And I secured instead a UK-wide temporary customs arrangement – avoiding both a hard border on the island of Ireland and a customs border down the Irish Sea.

I also negotiated substantial commitments in the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration to do everything possible to prevent the backstop ever being needed – and to ensure that if it were, it would be a temporary arrangement.

But listening to the debate before Christmas it was clear that we needed to go further.

So I returned to Brussels to faithfully and firmly reflect the concerns of this House.

The conclusions of December's Council went further in addressing our concerns.

They included reaffirming the EU's determination to work speedily to establish by 31st December 2020 alternative arrangements so that the backstop will not need to be triggered.

They underlined that if the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered it would indeed apply temporarily.

They committed that in such an event, the EU would use their best endeavours to continue to negotiate and conclude as soon as possible a subsequent agreement that would replace the backstop.

And they gave a new assurance that negotiations on the Future Relationship could start immediately after the UK's withdrawal.

Since the Council and throughout the Christmas and New Year period I have spoken to a number of European leaders and there have been further discussions with the EU to seek further assurances alongside the Council conclusions.

And today I have published the outcome of these further discussions with an exchange of letters between the UK Government and the Presidents of the European Commission and European Council.

The letter from President Tusk confirms what I said in the House before Christmas – namely that the assurances in the European Council conclusions have legal standing in the EU.

Mr Speaker, my Rt Hon Friend the Attorney General has also written to me

today confirming that in the light of the joint response from the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission, these conclusions “would have legal force in international law”, and setting out his opinion – “reinforced” by today’s letter – “that the balance of risks favours the conclusion that it is unlikely that the EU will wish to rely on the implementation of the backstop provisions.”

And further, that it is therefore his judgement that “the current draft Withdrawal Agreement now represents the only politically practicable and available means of securing our exit from the European Union.”

Mr Speaker, I know that some Members would ideally like a unilateral exit mechanism or a hard time limit to the backstop.

I have explained this to the EU and tested these points in negotiations.

But the EU would not agree to this, because they fear that such a provision could allow the UK to leave the backstop at any time without any other arrangements in place and require a hard border to be erected between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

I have been very clear with them that this is not something we would ever countenance – that the UK is steadfast in its commitment to the Belfast Agreement and would never allow a return to a hard border.

But it is not enough simply to say this. Both sides also need to take steps to avoid a hard border when the UK is outside of the EU.

Failing to do so would place businesses on the island of Ireland in an impossible position having to choose between costly new checks and procedures that would disrupt their supply chains or breaking the law.

So we have the backstop as a last resort.

But both the Taoiseach and I have said consistently that the best way to avoid a hard border is through the future relationship – that is the sustainable solution. And that neither of us want to use the backstop.

So since the Council we have been looking at commitments that would ensure we get our future relationship or alternative arrangements in place by the end of the Implementation Period, so that there will be no need to enter the backstop and no need for any fear that there will be a hard border.

And that is why in the first of the further assurances they have provided today, the EU has committed to begin exploratory talks on the detailed legal provisions of the future relationship as soon as this Parliament has approved the deal and the Withdrawal Agreement has been signed. And they have been explicit that this can happen immediately after this House votes through the agreement.

If this House approved the deal tomorrow, it would give us almost two years to complete the next phase of the negotiations. And, of course, we will have the option to extend the Implementation Period if further time were needed

for either one or two years. It is my absolute conviction that we can turn the Political Declaration into legal text in that time, avoiding the need for the backstop altogether.

The letters also make clear that these talks should give “particular urgency to discussion of ideas, including the use of all available facilitative arrangements and technologies, for replacing the backstop with permanent arrangements.”

And further that those arrangements “are not required to replicate the backstop provisions in any respect.” So contrary to the fears of some Hon. Members, the EU will not simply insist that the backstop is the only way to avoid a hard border. They have agreed to discuss technological solutions and any alternative means of delivering on this objective – and to get on with this as a priority in the next phase of negotiations.

Second, the EU has now committed to a fast track process to bring our future trade deal into force once it has been agreed. If there is any delay in ratification, the Commission has now said they will recommend provisionally applying the relevant parts of the agreement so that we would not need to enter the backstop.

Such a provisional application process saved four years on the EU-Korea deal and it would prevent any delays in ratification by other EU Member State parliaments from delaying our deal coming into force.

Third, the EU has provided absolute clarity on the explicit linkage between the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration, and made that link clear in the way the documents are presented.

I know some colleagues are worried about an imbalance between the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration because the EU cannot reach a legal agreement with us on the future relationship until we are a third country.

But the link between them means the commitments of one cannot be banked without the commitments of the other – and the EU have been clear that they come as a package.

Bad faith by either side in negotiating the legal instruments that will deliver the future relationship laid out in the Political Declaration would be a breach of their legal obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement.

Fourth, the exchange of letters confirms that the UK can unilaterally deliver all of the commitments we made last week to safeguard the interests of the people and businesses of Northern Ireland and their position in our precious union.

For it gives clear answers to address some questions that have been raised since the deal was reached...

...that the deal means no change to the arrangements which underpin north-south cooperation in the Belfast Agreement...



...that Stormont will have a lock on any new laws the EU proposes should be added to the backstop...

...and that the UK can give a restored Northern Ireland Executive a seat at the table on the joint committee overseeing the deal.

Mr Speaker, President Juncker says explicitly in his letter that the backstop "would represent a suboptimal trading relationship for both sides."

We have spoken at length about why we want to avoid the backstop. But it is not in the EU's interests either.

For this backstop gives the UK tariff-free access to the EU's market.

And it does so with no free movement of people, no financial contribution, no requirement to follow most of the level playing field rules and no need to allow EU boats any access to our waters for fishing.

Furthermore, under these arrangements, UK authorities in Northern Ireland would clear goods for release into the EU Single Market with no further checks or controls.

This is unprecedented and means the EU relying on the UK for the functioning of its own market.

So the EU will not want this backstop to come into force – and the exchange of letters today makes clear that if it did, they would do all they could to bring it to an end as quickly as possible.

Nevertheless, Mr Speaker, I fully understand that these new assurances still will not go as far as some would like.

I recognise that some Members wanted to see changes to the Withdrawal Agreement: a unilateral exit mechanism from the backstop, an end date or rejecting the backstop altogether – although it should be said that this would have risked other EU Member States attempting to row back on the significant wins we have already achieved such as on control over our waters or the sovereignty of Gibraltar.

But the simple truth is this: the EU was not prepared to agree to this.

And rejecting the backstop altogether means no deal.

Whatever version of the Future Relationship you might want to see – from Norway to Canada to any number of variations – all of them require a Withdrawal Agreement and any Withdrawal Agreement will contain the backstop.

And that is not going to change however the House votes tomorrow.

And to those who think we should reject this deal in favour of no deal, because we cannot get every assurance we want...

...I ask what would a no deal Brexit do to strengthen the hand of those

campaigning for Scottish independence – or indeed those demanding a border poll in Northern Ireland?

Surely this is the real threat to our Union.

Mr Speaker, with just 74 days until the 29th March the consequences of voting against this deal tomorrow are becoming ever clearer.

With no deal we would have: no Implementation Period, no security partnership, no guarantees for UK citizens overseas, and no certainty for businesses and workers like those I met in Stoke this morning. And we would see changes to everyday life in Northern Ireland that would put the future of our Union at risk.

And if, rather than leaving with no deal, this House blocked Brexit, that would be a subversion of our democracy, saying to the people we were elected to serve that we were unwilling to do what they had instructed.

So I say to Members on all sides of this House – whatever you may have previously concluded – over these next 24 hours, give this deal a second look.

No it is not perfect. And yes it is a compromise.

But when the history books are written, people will look at the decision of this House tomorrow and ask:

Did we deliver on the country's vote to leave the European Union?

Did we safeguard our economy, our security and our Union? Or did we let the British people down?

I say we should deliver for the British people and get on with building a brighter future for our country by backing this deal tomorrow.

And I commend this Statement to the House.