

Downtown Beijing to increase underground parking lots

Dongcheng District and Xicheng District of downtown Beijing will build multi-floor car parking towers this year to help citizens park their cars more easily, as parking is often difficult in these densely populated areas.

Dongcheng District announced on Feb.15 that it would build 13 parking towers this year. The district is home to a huge number of cars but limited parking spaces, often resulting in difficulty parking. The parking lots will be built in Nanluoguxiang, Dongsì and other sub districts, with parking space both on the ground and underground. The district also decided to scrap parking locks in hutongs, or narrow alleyways.

The downtown area in Beijing also plans to create more space in its bypasses. The Xicheng District will smooth Shoubi Street, a narrow road which often impedes traffic as it links two main streets, and build an underground parking lot there which can provide 500 parking units.

Moreover, Dongcheng District is also drafting an agreement which enables residents to park their cars at night in the parking lots nearby office buildings, in order to make more use of the parking space. A total of 2,800 such parking units are expected to be open to the public this year.

Press release: Jo Johnson demands tough penalties on student plagiarism

Universities Minister Jo Johnson is today (Tuesday 21 February) calling on university and student bodies to do more to deal with the spread of 'essay mills' – websites which provide custom written essays for students to submit as part of their degree.

The Universities Minister has asked for guidance aimed at universities and information for students to help combat the use of these websites, as well as other forms of plagiarism. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has also been tasked to take action against the online advertising of these services and to work with international agencies to deal with this problem.

The Minister is calling for the guidance to include tough new penalties for those who make use of essay mills websites, as well as the need to educate students about the potentially significant negative impacts on their future career if they are caught cheating.

Universities Minister Jo Johnson said:

“This form of cheating is unacceptable and every university should have strong policies and sanctions in place to detect and deal with it.

“Essay mill websites threaten to undermine the high quality reputation of a UK degree so it is vital that the sector works together to address this in a consistent and robust way.”

The spread of essay mill websites was uncovered in a QAA report, commissioned by the government, which was published last year. It found that the websites often advertise their services to students for a fee and many promote “plagiarism-free guarantees”, or essays tested against plagiarism detection software.

Further work by QAA has confirmed that there are now over 100 essay mills websites currently in operation. Prices charged by these sites vary depending on the complexity of essay and tightness of deadline. They can range from a couple of hundred pounds for a single essay to as high as £6,750 for a PhD dissertation.

Ian Kimber, QAA’s Director of Universities, Quality Enhancement and Standards said:

“Essay mills are a major challenge for universities and colleges because, unlike other forms of cheating, the practice is notoriously difficult to detect. We look forward to continuing our work with the government and sector colleagues in addressing an issue potentially damaging to students and the reputation of UK higher education.”

The new sector guidance and student information is expected to be made available for the beginning of the 2017/18 teaching year.

Following a request by the government to investigate the use of essay mills in the UK, the QAA published a report on this issue in August 2016 titled ‘Plagiarism in Higher Education – Custom essay writing services: an exploration and next steps for the UK higher education sector’. This report confirmed that essays mills are a “growing threat to UK higher education”.

Sector guidance on plagiarism has not been updated for some time. It is currently left to individual institutions to develop their own plagiarism policies in accordance with the requirements and indicators of sound practice set out in the [UK Quality Code](#).

[Green Light for Porthcawl Maritime](#)

Centre

The £5.5 million Porthcawl Maritime Centre is part of the Welsh Government's wider Tourism Attractor Destination programme which aims to create 11 must visit destinations across Wales.

Also, backed with funds from the Big Lottery, the Welsh Government as well as private and third sector funds, the Maritime Centre is the first phase of the Porthcawl Resort Investment Focus programme which aims to transform Porthcawl into a high quality signature destination within Wales that will attract new visitors to the area.

The development has the potential to accommodate 55 jobs as well as supporting jobs during the construction phase, providing employment opportunities for local people.

The Minister said:

"The coast is the county's Unique Selling Point and the reason why most visitors come to the area. But to attract more visitors to the area we need to provide more exemplary facilities and services for residents and visitors. Porthcawl Maritime Centre will fulfil this need by providing an exciting and innovative 'year round' family centred attraction right on the waterfront.

"Our aim through the Tourism Attractor Destination programme is to focus efforts and investment on key projects in each region so we have a real impact on Wales' profile in this globally competitive market.

"The Seaquest Coastal Science and Discovery Centre is a very exciting project which will inspire young people to engage with science and consider careers in science. Congratulations to everybody who has been involved in bringing the project to this point and I wish you all the very best for the delivery phase."

Welcoming the decision, Mike Clarke, Chairman of Porthcawl Harbourside CIC said:

"It is impossible to fully describe how excited and proud the Porthcawl Harbourside CIC team are to receive the go-ahead for this project. This huge vote of confidence in our team and in the community of Porthcawl is tremendous. We believe this is possibly the biggest community-conceived and led tourism project in the UK, and we are now able to tender for the construction and get started."

Construction on the Maritime Centre is expected to begin in mid-2017. Over the next five years, the Tourism Attractor Destinations programme will see more than £85 million of EU, Welsh Government, Private and Charitable funds invested in tourism projects across Wales.

Statement to Parliament: Final local government finance settlement 2017 to 2018

I have today laid before the House, the [Report on Local Government Finance \(England\) 2017 to 2018](#), which represents the annual [local government finance settlement](#) for local authorities in England.

I would like to thank all colleagues in the House, and council leaders and officials, who contributed to the consultation after the [provisional settlement](#) was published before Christmas. Representations from nearly 200 organisations or individuals have been carefully considered before finalising the settlement.

[political content removed]. As we continue to bring the deficit down, local government, which still accounts for nearly a quarter of public spending despite the savings delivered since 2010, must continue to play its part.

At the same time, local residents rightly continue to expect excellent public services. I commend all councils for how they are getting on with the job. Public satisfaction with local services has been maintained, and councils are engaged in substantial efforts to modernise, transform local services, and reduce waste so that frontline services can be protected.

The 2017 to 2018 local government finance settlement supports councils to continue in that regard, and progresses funding reforms to make councils more self-sufficient.

We remain committed to increasing funding certainty for local government. In total, local government spends more than £120 billion a year and the 2015 Spending Review and 2016 to 2017 settlement delivered a flat-cash settlement for local government, providing 4 year funding allocations for the first time.

The settlement being published today is the second year of the 4 year offer which was accepted by 97% of councils. To enshrine this commitment to stability in law the Local Government Finance Bill establishes a legal framework for multi-year settlements.

Councils are able to use this increased funding certainty to continue

reforming the way they work and become more efficient, both in back-office functions and front line service delivery. Building on the £508 million savings already delivered from shared service arrangements, councils are using improved digital technology, new delivery models and innovative partnerships to deliver savings across local government.

We listened to the unanimous view that we must prioritise spending on adult social care services that councils provide to our elderly and vulnerable citizens. The Spending Review put in place up to £3.5 billion of additional funding for adult social care by 2019 to 2020.

Recognising the immediate challenges in the care market facing many councils next year, this settlement repurposes £240 million of money which was previously directed to local authorities via the New Homes Bonus to create a new adult social care support grant next year. It also grants councils extra flexibility to raise the adult social care precept by up to 3% next year and the year after.

These measures make available almost £900 million of additional funding for adult social care over the next 2 years, bringing the total dedicated funding available for adult social care to £7.6 billion over the 4 year settlement period.

But more money is not the only answer. We will bring forward reforms to provide a sustainable market that works for everyone who needs social care. And I welcome the consensus across both sides of the House that every area should move towards the integration of health and social care services by 2020, so that it feels like one service.

Council Tax referendum principles

We are committed to keeping Council Tax down, and will maintain referendum principles to protect hard-working tax-payers from rising bills. Council Tax in England has fallen by 9% in real terms from the levels [political content removed] in 2010, and is expected to be lower in real terms in 2019 to 2020 than it was in 2010 to 2011.

This year, in addition to the further flexibility on the Adult Social Care Precept, we are proposing a core Council Tax principle of 2% for principal authorities, or £5 – whichever is greater – for all shire district councils, and for police and crime commissioners in the lowest quartile.

100% business rates retention

To reduce local government's dependence on central government for funding – long campaigned for by councils – we have announced that by the end of this Parliament, local government will keep 100% of the income raised locally through business rates.

Councils will take on new responsibilities to be funded from this additional income – estimated to be around £12.5 billion – as central government grants are phased out. And to ensure councils with less business rates do not lose

out, there will continue to be redistributions between authorities.

The Local Government Finance Bill, currently before Parliament, provides the legislative framework for these reforms. This will allow us to continue to work closely with interested parties over the coming months on the more detailed aspects of reforms.

A consultation has already been conducted. The [government response](#) to that announced that, in the reformed system, Revenue Support Grant, Rural Services Delivery Grant, the Public Health Grant and the Greater London Authority Transport Grant will be funded through retained business rates.

Taken together these account for around half of the additional retained business rates that we estimate will be available to councils. We will continue to engage with local government on the remaining responsibilities to be devolved as part of these reforms but it has already been confirmed that the devolution of Attendance Allowance funding is no longer being considered as part of the business rates retention reforms.

A [further consultation](#) has been published seeking views on many of the important aspects of the new system – for example, how growth in business rates can best be rewarded, and how the system can help authorities to manage and share risk. Responses to that consultation are invited by 3 May.

Pilots of these reforms will take place from April 2017 in Liverpool, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, West of England, Cornwall and Greater London. We have also confirmed that we are interested in building on the existing pilot scheme and will be inviting all councils to apply to participate in piloting aspects of 100% business rates retention from April 2018. We will be publishing more information about this process shortly.

Conclusion

Reforms to local government finance, based around 100% business rates retention offer a bold and innovative response to the twin challenges of promoting economic growth and securing more self-sufficient and sustainable local government. They will help determine the role, purpose and means of delivery for local government in the years ahead.

The 2017 to 2018 local government finance settlement provides the financial stability authorities need as they transition towards the reformed system in 2019 to 2020; these longer-term reforms will ensure the councils people rely on for their local services are both sustainable, and more self-sufficient.

[Statement to Parliament: Minister](#)

Duncan statement on US State Visit petitions

Thank you, Mr Turner. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

In response to the two petitions which have triggered this debate, and having listened to the arguments of both sides, I would like to set out the position of Her Majesty's Government, and explain the thinking behind it.

The State Visit as people have mentioned is a uniquely British construct. No other country is able to offer a State Visit in quite the same way as we do. It is distinctively British.

Over the course of her reign, Her Majesty has hosted over 100 of them. All such visits are a rare and prestigious occasion. But they are also our most powerful diplomatic tool. They enable us to strengthen and influence those international relationships that are of the greatest strategic importance to this country, and even much more widely to other parts of the world as well. In answer to the Honourable lady who speaks for the front bench, the opposition, recommendations for state visits are made on the advice of government through the Royal Visits Committee, not by parliament as such. That committee is attended by representatives of the Royal Household, Downing Street, the Cabinet Office, the Department for Trade and is chaired by the Foreign Office.

In an uncertain and increasingly dangerous world, the ability to work closely with key countries is of critical importance. Strong alliances and close relationships are a central stabilising pillar for world security.

This is an increasingly unstable world. Yet always within that world, and throughout modern history, the United States and the United Kingdom have worked together, side by side, to bring peace and security during times of danger and uncertainty. Especially with the world as it is today, that is why a State Visit matters so much. Put simply, diplomacy matters.

The relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States is built around a common language, the common principles of freedom and democracy, and common interests in so many other areas besides.

Our relationship is undoubtedly special. On security, on defence, on trade, on investment, on all of these issues, the United Kingdom and the United States are, and will remain, the closest of partners.

The US is the world's greatest power, and in the light of America's absolutely pivotal role, we believe it is entirely right that we should use all the tools at our disposal to build common ground with President Trump.

As the baton of office passed seamlessly, constitutionally, from one President to another, we were already well placed to have a productive and meaningful engagement with the wider new Administration. The British Embassy

in Washington has been working with key administration figures over many months. British Secretaries of State have built relationships with their opposite numbers following their Congressional confirmation process.

The Prime Minister's visit last month was of enormous significance. The Foreign and Defence Secretaries met their opposite numbers only last week and on Friday I met Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly.

This Government places our national interest at the heart of our government's decision-making, and the Special Relationship is a central part of that national interest. It is a relationship which transcends political parties on both sides of the Atlantic and it is bigger than individual personalities. It is about the security and prosperity of our two nations.

Mr Turner, The Prime Minister's meeting with President Trump in Washington last month identified many areas of common interest where we will work with the new Administration. A State Visit will provide the opportunity to advance these common interests further.

In respect of timing, which has been mentioned in this debate, State Visits are not necessarily the sole preserve of long-serving Heads of State. In the past a State Visit has been extended to the Presidents of South Africa, France, South Korea, Finland and Poland, amongst others, each within their first year of office.

The Government strongly believes that it is a perfectly legitimate decision to use the full impact of an invitation to maximise the diplomatic significance of a State Visit at the start of President Trump's term of office. Both President Obama and President George W Bush visited the UK on a State Visit during their first term in office, so it is entirely appropriate that President Trump should be invited in his first term too.

But let me be also be clear: neither the precise timing nor the content of the proposed visit have yet been agreed.

Mention has been made of the prospect of the President addressing Parliament in some manner or other. The fact is, on only three occasions in the past century has the guest addressed both Houses of Parliament as part of their State Visit: President de Gaulle in 1960, President Mandela in 1996 and President Obama in 2011.

But in any event, Mr Chairman, as the House and you are both aware, whether this ever happens is an issue solely for the relevant Parliamentary authorities to determine. Comment on whether or not this might happen has, on this occasion, completely run ahead of itself.

Because the simple fact is that no request has ever been received from Washington for any Parliamentary event to take place. The question of perhaps addressing a meeting of Parliament has never even been mentioned. Therefore, Mr Turner, any discussion or judgement about this possibility is purely speculative.

But within the views that have been expressed about the appropriateness of a

State Visit for the President there lurks too, I would argue, a fundamental principle that Members of this House should consider very seriously. It is the principle of freedom of speech.

President Trump was democratically elected by the American people under their own constitutional system. To have strong views about him is one matter: but to translate a difference of opinion into a demand to ban him is quite another.

Given the understandable questions on certain policy stances which arise with any change of government, it is prudent for us to work closely alongside the United States as the new administration charts its course. And already we see the importance of that engagement with the Prime Minister's early meeting with the President eliciting key commitments on NATO, echoed by the Vice President in Munich on Saturday, and laying the groundwork to establish a swift post-Brexit free trade agreement. Mr Turner, in February 1917, a century ago, the Spectator magazine published its view on the US and the UK. It read:

It would be easy to write down a hundred reasons why unclouded friendship and moral co-operation between the United States and Britain are a benefit to the world, and why an interruption of such relations is a detriment to progress and a disease worldwide in its effects.

It went on:

But when we had written down all those reasons we should not have expressed the instinctive sentiments which go below and beyond them all. To our way of feeling, quarrelling and misunderstandings between the British and American peoples are like a thing contrary to Nature.

They are so contrary to Nature that the times of misunderstanding have always seemed to us abnormal, and a return to friendship not an achievement of wise diplomacy but merely a resumption of the normal.

It is that historic normality that is reflected in this invitation. This is a special moment for the Special Relationship.

Mr Turner, the visit should happen. The visit will happen. And when it does, I trust that the entire United Kingdom will extend a polite and generous welcome to President Donald Trump.