

“We must face down the clear and present threat posed by Russia”

Moscow’s campaign against Ukraine and fellow democracies is undermining the very foundation of European security. And so, it is vital we face down the clear and present threat posed by Russia.

The Prime Minister will spearhead diplomatic efforts by talking to President Putin and travelling to the region in the coming days. Tomorrow, the UK will join talks at the UN Security Council to apply pressure on Russia to pursue the path of diplomacy. I will be flying out to Moscow within the next fortnight.

The stakes are high. Over 100,000 troops are now massed on Ukraine’s border. Russia has attacked Ukraine before, illegally annexing Crimea in 2014 and bringing war to the Donbas region, so the danger is real.

This malign activity goes beyond the borders of Ukraine. Russia is using its influence to fan the flames of discord in the Western Balkans. Russian forces are continuing to arrive in Belarus for a so-called “joint exercise” close to NATO’s borders. In recent days, Russia has intensified its brinkmanship by planning naval exercises off the Irish coast and increasing its naval presence in the Baltic Sea, prompting Sweden to send troops to reinforce one of its islands.

That is why we are reinforcing our diplomatic efforts with deterrence. We are offering NATO additional fast jets, warships and military specialists. We are doubling troop numbers to Estonia and have the HMS Prince of Wales on standby to move should tensions rise further. We are NATO’s biggest spender in Europe on defence and prepared to deploy our forces in line with that.

The United Kingdom is proud to be stepping up to take the lead in defence of freedom and democracy through credible deterrence and diplomacy. Even at the height of the Cold War, we were able to agree on the principles of a more secure Europe. Over more than four decades, we made huge advances towards a freer and safer world through agreements ranging from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act to the 1995 Dayton Agreement and the 2014 Minsk Protocol.

Yet Russia is jeopardising this hard-won progress with its reckless behaviour and unjustified aggression. It could not be more important for Russia to engage diplomatically rather than on the battlefield. That is why we have said many times, alongside our allies in NATO and through the G7 Presidency, that any further Russian invasion of Ukraine would be a massive strategic mistake with severe costs, including an unprecedented package of coordinated sanctions with our partners.

Our quarrel is not with the Russian people, but the policies pursued by their leaders. They repress freedom and democracy, seeking to silence courageous organisations like Andrei Sakharov’s ‘Memorial’, which has fought for decades

for human rights. And now they risk landing ordinary Russians in an intractable quagmire to rival the Soviet-Afghan war and Chechnya.

There is a way out of this situation. It lies in respecting our past achievements and sticking to our longstanding commitments to respect each other's borders. That can only start with Russia de-escalating, ending its aggressive campaign and engaging in meaningful talks. We are serious about improving security for all. In the last week, the US and NATO have presented substantive proposals on areas for discussion that would increase transparency and reduce risk. Together, we are urging Russia to sit down for proper negotiations, based on the key principles of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. The alternative can only end in tragedy: with an incursion leading inevitably to huge suffering and severe economic consequences through sanctions.

The ball is in Russia's court. I will continue to make the case with our allies and directly to Moscow for a diplomatic solution. But I am also ready to take the necessary steps to spell out the consequences of continued belligerence.

Ukraine has the right to determine its own future. However, President Putin made clear in his manifesto last summer – "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" – that he believed "the true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia". We cannot turn a blind eye to any attempt to impose that partnership by force.

What happens in Europe matters for the world. Over 30 years ago, we joined our partners in Moscow, where we agreed that fundamental freedoms like human rights are "matters of direct and legitimate concern to all". That same principle drives us today to stand steadfast with Ukraine in support of its future as a free democracy.

At this critical time, we are joining forces with our allies to show that there can never be rewards for aggression. By standing up for our ideas and ideals, we will together ensure the world is a freer, richer and safer place.

20 town and city centres in England transformed through ambitious regeneration projects

- 20 places in England to be transformed through an ambitious regeneration programme with Wolverhampton and Sheffield the first areas selected
- Homes England to turbocharge regeneration and deliver new housing as part of Levelling Up White Paper
- £120 million for Mayoral Combined Authorities will deliver 7,800 homes

in the North and Midlands on disused brownfield land

Towns and cities across the country will be transformed thanks to a radical new regeneration programme that will breathe fresh life into disadvantaged communities.

Under plans set out in the Levelling Up White Paper, due to be published next week, derelict sites in towns and city centres will be transformed creating new homes, jobs and beautiful new communities across England.

Wolverhampton and Sheffield will be the first of 20 places that will be supported by government to deliver ambitious regeneration projects that will boost local communities and create urban areas people will be proud to live and work in.

In Wolverhampton, local leaders are being given the tools that will catalyse the revival of the city and the wider Wolverhampton to Walsall corridor, building on the government's £20 million Levelling Up Fund investment and the new DLUHC headquarters in the city centre.

In Sheffield, new regeneration opportunities will capitalise on the government's £37 million Levelling Up Fund and the upcoming Integrated Rail Plan electrification and upgrades which will cut journey times between Sheffield and London to just 87 minutes.

The 20 areas will be prioritised within the new £1.5 billion Brownfield Fund. In addition, to kickstart regeneration efforts in these regions, and as part of a wider package of brownfield funding worth £120 million, £28 million will be allocated to the West Midlands Combined Authority and £13 million for the South Yorkshire Combined Authority, to fund the projects most needed to support local levelling up ambitions.

The regeneration programme will be spearheaded by the government's housing delivery agency Homes England, which will be refocused and tasked to support the Levelling Up agenda. It will use its extensive powers and expertise to help local leaders deliver the regeneration of large areas of towns and cities, as they adapt to economic trends like the rise of online shopping.

The UK government will also welcome working in continued partnership with the devolved administrations to explore how to best support places across the UK to reach their full potential.

Homes England will partner with local leaders, the private sector and community groups to turbocharge regeneration and deliver new housing, health and education and leisure facilities, roads and railways.

Local authorities will be helped to ensure that the record government investment in infrastructure worth over £96 billion is used to its full potential. This includes £12 billion in affordable housing, the £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund and a £2.6 billion Shared Prosperity Fund as well as access to DLHUC's £1.5 billion Brownfield and Land Fund.

The 20 areas will benefit from developments combining housing, leisure, and business in sustainable, walkable, beautiful new neighbourhoods.

Levelling Up Secretary Rt Hon Michael Gove MP said:

We are on a mission to regenerate the nation, transforming derelict areas in our towns and cities into thriving places people are proud to live and work in.

We are refocusing Homes England and empowering local leaders to support levelling up, delivering Kings Cross style transformational regeneration projects across the country – starting in Wolverhampton and Sheffield.

This huge investment in infrastructure and regeneration will spread opportunity more evenly and help to reverse the geographical inequalities which still exist in the UK.

Homes England chair Peter Freeman CBE said:

A sense of a place and indeed a pride of place are crucial to thriving communities. Our expanded mandate will allow us to further support ambitious local leaders in delivering placemaking and regeneration alongside a wide range of public and private sector partners.

We have many years of experience undertaking a broad range of brownfield land and regeneration projects which combined with full use of our statutory powers and funding means we're well positioned to transform places and communities.

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said:

Here in the West Midlands we have been the real pioneers of a brownfield-first approach to housing, using government cash to remediate derelict old industrial sites and turn them into thriving new communities – all whilst protecting irreplaceable greenbelt land.

So I am absolutely delighted that the government are continuing to support our work, putting further funding on the table so we can build on the progress we have already made. I am particularly pleased to see the new funding for Wolverhampton, which is really at the heart of the brownfield revolution taking place in the West Midlands.

Dan Jarvis, the Mayor of South Yorkshire, said:

I warmly welcome this support for regeneration in Sheffield and South Yorkshire. It's a much needed recognition of the potential of our region.

Giving Homes England a wider focus on regeneration is also a very positive move, as is their commitment to support local and regional leadership. We've always argued for a more joined up approach, and lasting progress can only be driven from our communities. The key challenge will be ensuring that this comes with the long-term, transformative investment we need, and that it connects not just housing and buildings but skills, public services and environment.

We're looking forward to working with the government to realise the ambition we all share to create a better future for Sheffield and South Yorkshire.

The government will also launch a £1.5 billion Levelling Up Home Building Fund next week, providing loans to small and medium sized builders and developers to deliver 42,000 homes with the vast majority going outside London and the South East – helping to rebalance the economy and spread prosperity and opportunity more equally.

A total of £120 million of funding will also be given to 7 Mayoral Combined Authorities to transform derelict brownfield sites into vibrant places where people want to live and work. Seven MCAs – West Midlands, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, Liverpool, South Yorkshire, North of Tyne, and Tees Valley stand to gain 7,800 homes.

A further £30 million is being awarded to 3 Mayoral Combined Authorities in Greater Manchester, Tees Valley and West Midlands on disused brownfield land. Meanwhile, £8 million from the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF) is being allocated to 13 councils which will release land for a further 898 homes. The BLRF has so far awarded £69 million to support councils to release their brownfield land for 6,856 homes by March 2024.

The government has already made significant investment into Levelling Up and regenerating much loved towns and cities. Through programmes like the £900 million Getting Building Fund, the £400 million Brownfield Housing Fund, the £150 million UK-wide Community Ownership Fund, and the £3.6 billion Towns Fund – the government has supported places to grow their local economies.

The £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund is investing in Infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK, including Sheffield, Aberdeen, Aberystwyth, and County Antrim. Future rounds of the Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will build on this investment.

UK Minister for the Pacific and Environment visits Costa Rica in first overseas visit after COP26

Lord Goldsmith concluded his visit to Costa Rica on 27 January – celebrating their pioneering leadership on climate and the environment, and developing the close partnership between the two countries just a few weeks after the UK hosted the UN climate conference.

Environment Minister Andrea Meza and Lord Goldsmith travelled across the country, to see some of the scalable work that is underway.

Together, they visited indigenous peoples, national parks, research centres and farms – and saw how Costa Rica's Earthshot Prize-winning programme is paying people for the benefits they can provide by managing land sustainably.

They saw the positive impacts of bringing Costa Rica's decarbonisation plan to life – with an ambitious transport electrification plan building on the success of running the country on over 98% renewable energy for seven consecutive years.

And Lord Goldsmith heard about Costa Rica's Natural Asset Company initiative, an innovative financial mechanism that will incentivise conservation and sustainable land use.

Over a quarter of Costa Rica's land is protected. The country contains 5% of the planet's biodiversity in just 0.03% of the earth's landmass, and more than half of Costa Rica is under canopy – the result of a national campaign to double the rainforest in a generation.

During his visit, Lord Goldsmith commended President Alvarado on the expansion of the Cocos Island National Park, making Costa Rica one of the first countries in the world to protect 30% of their waters.

And alongside Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama, Costa Rica made headlines at COP26 when the four countries announced that they are now working together to protect some of the world's most important and biodiverse environments in the Eastern Pacific Tropical Marine Corridor – set to become the largest transboundary marine protected area in the world.

Lord Goldsmith praised their leadership and announced that the UK will provide an initial £2m as part of the newly established Blue Planet Fund – financed through UK Aid, and drawing on decades of experience gained through the Blue Belt that protects an area of ocean larger than India around the UK Overseas Territories.

Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado thanked the UK for their support and said:

We must move ahead with actions to protect our planet, and in this particular case, the oceans. Protecting nature is a fundamental step in combatting climate change. Healthy oceans are vital to protecting hundreds of marine species that are important for ecosystems and for the people in our region.

Costa Rica continues to work hand in hand with the UK in this year of the COP26 Presidency – building on months of cooperation ahead of the conference in Glasgow, and during negotiations behind the scenes.

And ahead of the CBD COP15, the UN biodiversity conference, the UK and Costa Rica are asking the world to sign up to ambitious targets that will put the natural world on the road to recovery during this decade.

The UK and Costa Rica co-lead global alliances committed to significantly increasing protection of the world's land and ocean that now represent 120 countries and counting, over 40% of global GDP, and almost a third of the world's population.

And together with France, the UK and Costa Rica lead the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People campaigning for the protection of at least 30% of the planet's land and ocean by 2030.

UK Minister for the Pacific and Environment, Zac Goldsmith, said:

From the Osa Peninsula to Sarapiquí, it has been a privilege to see Costa Rica's immense natural beauty first-hand. It is rightly a huge source of national pride. At COP26 in Glasgow, it was the leadership of nature-rich countries like Costa Rica that helped the UK presidency bring nature from the margins of the conversation on climate change into the heart of our response.

And I am delighted that the Glasgow commitment to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 was signed by 141 countries representing over 90% of the world's forest cover – including Costa Rica.

The UK committed £1.5 billion to support countries in their efforts to protect and restore their forests, and empower the indigenous people and local communities for whom they are home.

Costa Rica is set to tap into the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance coalition that has already mobilised \$1 billion, including an initial £200m from the UK.

And through our new Blue Planet Fund, the UK will provide an initial £2m of scientific and technical assistance to help Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama expand and connect marine protection covering over 500,000 km² of ocean in the Eastern Tropical Marine Corridor, including key migratory routes for sea turtles, whales, sharks, and rays.

Reconciling our lives and our economies with the natural world around us is the defining challenge of our age – and I am pleased that the UK is working ever more closely with leading countries like Costa Rica to make that happen.

Costa Rican Environment Minister, Andrea Meza, said:

Visits like Minister Goldsmith's have allowed us to show what Costa Rica is doing to make nature part of our development model as well as the significance of protected areas. Visiting indigenous peoples helps us understand the role of these communities, how we can benefit when we protect nature, and what the critical needs are that we need to address.

Similarly, we can demonstrate what we're doing with the Payment for Environmental Services programme, and how important this resource mobilisation is for these families – to be able to continue implementing strategies to diversify their income, and adopt more sustainable productive practices. We are really grateful to have a strategic partner like the UK.

Speaking at a meeting of the Forum of Ministers for Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean in San Jose on 27 January, Lord Goldsmith and Minister Meza urged leaders from across government, sectors, and society to work together – to make sure that everyone feels the benefits of accelerating the transition towards a decarbonised, net-zero, nature-positive global economy.

Jubilee Tree Planting at the Bahamas National Trust's Retreat

The Commanding Officer of the Royal Navy ship HMS Medway and the British High Commissioner, Sarah Dickson, joined BNT President Geoff Andrews and Executive Director Eric Carey to "plant a tree for the Jubilee."

Since the beginning of 2020, HMS MEDWAY has been deployed to the Caribbean as the Royal Navy's permanent presence in the region. She provides support and humanitarian aid in the event of a hurricane or other natural disaster and works side-by-side with regional law enforcement, helping to stop the flow of illegal drugs from South America to Europe and North America. The ship is visiting Nassau from January 25 – 28 as part of its preparations for the 2022 hurricane season. The Commanding Officer, Chris Hollingworth was joined by the UK's Defence Attaché, Lt Col Simon Westlake, who leads on defence

cooperation between the UK and The Bahamas.

The year 2022 will see celebrations for Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. To mark the 70th anniversary of her reign, a unique tree planting initiative known as "The Queen's Green Canopy" has been created. The aim of this initiative is to inspire everyone, from individuals to community groups, schools, and corporates, to play their part in enhancing our environment. With a focus on planting sustainably, the Queen's Green Canopy encourages planting trees to create a legacy, which will benefit future generations.

The Retreat Garden National Park was an ideal location for this inaugural tree planting as HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, as patron of The Bahamas National Trust, officially opened The Retreat in 1985 as the BNT's then-Headquarters. Two Lignum Vitae trees were planted in the park in to honour the jubilee.

Commander Chris Hollingworth said:

It is a pleasure to be in The Bahamas as we prepare for the 2022 hurricane season. We have seen first-hand the impact of extreme weather on vulnerable communities. Planting a tree is an ideal way to support the environment and reduce carbon emissions.

The British High Commissioner said:

2022 will be a busy year of activity, with the Platinum Jubilee of our shared Head of State, Queen Elizabeth II, linking the UK and The Bahamas in celebration. It is great to have HMS Medway visiting and planting a tree to kick us off in January. There will be plenty more Jubilee action to come.

Eric Carey, the BNT's Executive Director, welcomed this activity at The Retreat Garden:

We are fortunate to have this oasis in the city of Nassau. The BNT welcomes partnerships that encourage sustainable environmental activity. Working together, we can have a positive impact to last for generations.

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About the British High Commission

The British High Commission in Nassau maintains and develops relations

between the UK and The Bahamas. We work in The Bahamas on a wide range of issues including political, environmental, security and the shared Commonwealth agenda. We also work on furthering the UK as a partner for trade and destination for inward investment and collaborating on global issues.

[Website](#)

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About the BNT

The Bahamas National Trust (BNT) was created by an Act of Parliament in 1959 to build and manage the national park system of The Bahamas. Possibly the only non-governmental organization in the world charged with such a responsibility, the BNT works daily to conserve and protect the natural resources of The Bahamas through science, stewardship and education for present and future generations. There are currently 32 National Parks managed by the BNT with more than 2 million acres of marine and terrestrial areas protected.

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[Discharge of raw sewage lands firm in hot water](#)

The successful prosecution at Leeds Crown Court on Friday 28 January 2022, was brought by the Environment Agency following a pollution incident in November 2017. Caused by the failure of a valve at Yorkshire Water's Dale Road sewage pumping station in Cockersdale near Bradford, an estimated 20 million litres of raw sewage was discharged into Tong Beck over a four day period between the 4th and 8th November 2017.

The unpermitted discharge of raw, untreated sewage can cause serious harm to aquatic life. An investigation into the impact of the pollution by the Environment Agency found that it had caused significant damage to the ecology of the beck and led to the death of hundreds of adult and juvenile brown trout downstream of the pumping station.

Yorkshire Water's Dale Road site used to be a sewage works but was converted into a pumping station. The station is automated and unmanned. The pumping station incorporates an underground well into which sewage flows under gravity. From the well sewage is sent by large pumps via a rising main to a local sewage works.

The Environment Agency had raised concerns following issues with the pumps at the pumping station in 2010/11 and in response Yorkshire Water had upgraded the pumping station and renewed the pumps in 2012. During the re-fit, the company installed what was intended to be a temporary isolation valve on the rising main just outside the boundary of the pumping station. The isolation valve was intended to be a temporary measure and was not installed to the same standard as permanent infrastructure, neither was it mapped by Yorkshire Water on its asset record system or scheduled for inspection.

To deal with the fact that the pumping station is not manned there is a telemetry system at the pumping station which monitors whether the pumps are working. However, there was no telemetry monitoring of the rising main. As such, the telemetry system did not notify Yorkshire Water's monitoring station of the failure of the valve or the resulting loss of sewage from the rising main.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

All businesses, including water companies have a responsibility to ensure their activities do not present a risk of harm to people and the environment. Yorkshire Water's failure to adequately safeguard its systems has led to significant damage to the ecology of Tong Beck, which may take many years to recover. We welcome the ruling by Magistrates in Leeds today and hope that this sends a strong message to others that the Environment Agency will hold polluters to account.

In mitigation, Yorkshire Water expressed remorse. They said they acted quickly once they became aware of the discharge. They commissioned their own sampling and analysis, monitored the watercourse over the following days, undertook a full clean-up of the site and immediate area and undertook repairs to ensure the pumping station was brought quickly back into operation.