

Biodiverse Landscapes Fund: Stakeholder Engagement Event

World news story

The UK Government is inviting suppliers interested in hearing about the Biodiverse Landscapes Fund to join the Stakeholders Engagement sessions on January 13.



The Commercial Department within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is inviting suppliers interested to know more about DEFRA's Biodiverse Landscapes Fund.

One session will be held at 0930-1130 GMT, and one at 1430-1630 GMT. The two sessions will be identical. Interested suppliers can access [this link](#) for more information on the Stakeholders Engagement sessions to be held on 13th January 2022.

This event will be of particular interest to organisations with a track record of delivering high quality, large-scale projects in the interface between conservation and development. We will welcome bids from consortia and hope that this event will be helpful for organisations in forming consortia with others.

The landscapes Fund will target initially:

- Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, covering areas of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe
- Mesoamerica, covering areas of Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
- Western Congo Basin, covering areas of Cameroon, Gabon and Republic of Congo
- Andes Amazon, covering areas of Ecuador and Peru
- Lower Mekong, covering areas of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam
- Madagascar

Each landscape will be allocated £10m-16m over 7 years. Applications for

funding will open in early-mid 2022, with projects expected to start in late 2022.

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[PM meeting with the Sultan of Oman: 16 December 2021](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson met with the Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq al-Said, at Downing Street today.



The Prime Minister welcomed the Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq al-Said, to Downing Street today for discussions aimed at enhancing our bilateral relationship.

He welcomed the long-standing ties between the United Kingdom and Oman and looked forward to revitalising our partnership and deepening cooperation across trade, investment and defence.

The leaders noted the ongoing challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and discussed efforts to boost our economic recovery, such as a new UK-Gulf Cooperation Council free trade agreement. They highlighted the investment opportunities in green and renewable technology in the UK and Oman, including in wind power and hydrogen.

On regional security issues, the leaders discussed the continuing crisis in Yemen and the talks in Vienna to revive the Iran nuclear deal. They agreed to further strengthen our defence and security cooperation, recognising the strategic importance of the Duqm base in Oman for the UK.

The Prime Minister and Sultan Haitham committed to continue working closely together, looking ahead to a potential UK-GCC summit in 2022.

[International Human Rights Day 2021: UK statement at OSCE](#)

Mr Chair, we thank the Delegation of the European Union for raising this Current Issue.

International Human Rights Day on 10 December is an opportunity to reflect on the progress made on human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

In the OSCE, it is also a chance to consider the progress we have made on our commitments in the human dimension. Unfortunately, the current record in the OSCE region is not good. Recent years have seen political polarisation, and democratic backsliding by some participating States.

In light of those challenges, the UK was pleased to join 47 other participating States at the recent Ministerial Council in [a joint statement on human rights and fundamental freedoms](#). It was a strong demonstration of our joint commitments to democracy based on the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The UK has a long, proud and diverse history of freedom, and we will continue to stand up for freedom and democracy, building a network of liberty and advancing the frontiers of freedom.

Mr Chair, International Human Rights Day also offers an opportunity to reflect on the importance of human rights defenders, civil society and the media in highlighting human rights violations and abuses. In an OSCE context, it is regrettable that a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting was not held this year. It is a chance lost for civil society to hold participating States to account, and to exchange best practice and to discuss how all participating States can live up to our commitments in the OSCE.

As we look ahead to 2022, the UK will continue to actively call out human rights violations and abuses wherever they occur, working with human rights defenders, civil society and the media to uphold democracy based on the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you.

Firm linked to Grenfell Tower tragedy blocked from government housing scheme

- Rydon Homes blocked from government's Help to Buy loan scheme with immediate effect
- Sister company was lead contractor of Grenfell Tower refurbishment
- Levelling Up and Housing Secretary warns construction industry he will continue to go after those responsible for the building safety crisis

A company linked to the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower is being excluded from the government's Help to Buy scheme, pending the outcome of the Grenfell Inquiry. This follows concerns over unacceptable business practices in their company group, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove announced today (16 December 2021).

Rydon Homes Ltd will be blocked from the government's flagship home ownership scheme, Help to Buy, with immediate effect. It means they no longer have government support and cannot market their properties to first time buyers, with the offer of government backed loans.

It is the latest move by the Housing Secretary to target those with serious questions to answer in relation to the Grenfell Tower tragedy and help bring justice for the bereaved, the survivors and the Grenfell community.

Mr Gove has warned the construction industry there will be consequences for those who are responsible for the building safety crisis and those who are failing to help fix it.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry is considering worrying evidence of potentially unacceptable practices by Rydon Maintenance Ltd – the lead contractor for the refurbishment of the Grenfell Tower – before the tragedy that occurred in 2017, in which 72 people lost their lives. Rydon Maintenance falls under the same parent company as Rydon Homes Ltd and has directors in common.

The Secretary of State has now written to the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee and to Homes England, which oversees Help to Buy, to inform them that it would be against public interest to allow Rydon Homes to sell homes via the government scheme, given its close links to a company under scrutiny in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

It comes just days after the Housing Secretary welcomed a decision by the Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 to mutually end its partnership with Kingspan, a cladding firm linked to the tragedy. The deal had been condemned by the bereaved and survivors of the Grenfell Tower tragedy after serious questions were heard at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry over the manufacturer's role in supplying insulation for the tower and marketing its products for use on other high-rise buildings.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up Michael Gove said:

It is in the public interest to exclude Rydon Homes from the Help to Buy scheme with immediate effect given the extremely concerning evidence heard by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry about its sister company.

The development and construction industry should be in no doubt: I will continue to go after those who put lives at risk, are responsible for the building safety crisis and are failing to play their part in fixing it. The Grenfell community and innocent leaseholders deserve better.

The Secretary of State is reviewing our work in this area and will be setting out further proposals in due course.

The Help to Buy: Equity Loan scheme provides a low-interest loan towards a first-time buyer's deposit. Customers need a 5% deposit, and the government lends up to 20% of the value of the home (up to 40% of the value if you are purchasing in London).

Homebuilders selling Help to Buy homes under the new scheme must comply with more stringent conditions that aim to drive quality and consistent building standards.

Help to Buy homebuilders must agree to follow the Consumer Code for Home Builders, the New Homes Ombudsman, the Building Safety Charter and fulfil planning permissions and building regulations. They must also display their Home Builders Federation (HBF) star ratings when they advertise homes and give homebuyers a new home warranty before they complete their purchase.

Find out more about the [Help to Buy: Equity Loan scheme](#).

Billions more for councils to build back better

- Levelling Up Secretary confirms £53.9 billion funding package for councils
- An extra £3.5 billion available, including access to more than £1 billion for social care
- One-off grant worth £822 million for councils to spend on vital frontline services

Councils in England will receive £53.9 billion in funding for the coming financial year, including more than £1 billion of additional funding for social care.

The comprehensive package represents the largest cash-terms increase in grant funding for 10 years and makes an extra £3.5 billion available compared to 2021-22, including a grant worth £822 million for councils to spend as they see fit to best meet local needs.

The funding set out by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities today (16 December 2021) will enable councils to continue to deliver vital services and look after the most vulnerable in their communities. It will also support councils to play a significant role in the government's transformative levelling up agenda as the country builds back better from the pandemic.

At the same time, this settlement will protect residents will also be protected from excessive council tax increases. From next year, the amount council tax can be increased by without a vote has been reduced to 2%, with an extra 1% for councils with adult social care responsibilities.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up Rt Hon Michael Gove said:

Councils continue to deliver for their communities and have a major role to play in our central mission of levelling up the country.

Today's funding package represents a real-terms increase from last year's settlement and will make sure councils can improve vital frontline services, support vulnerable people and protect residents from excessive council tax rises as we build back better from the pandemic.

The [Provisional Finance Settlement](#) includes:

- **More funding for social care:** The government is making more than £1 billion of additional funding available for social care, ensuring councils can improve conditions for carers and those in need. In addition, £162 million will be allocated to prepare councils for social care reform and to help move towards providing a fair cost of care.
- **Preventing excessive council tax rises:** Residents will continue to have the final say over excessive council tax increases. From next year, the amount council tax can be increased without a vote has been reduced to 2%, with an extra 1% for councils with adult social care responsibilities.
- **New Homes Bonus:** £554 million has been allocated to English councils in 2022/23. This brings the total amount of funding awarded under the New Homes Bonus to £10 billion, which has seen over 2.3 million additional homes being built, of which more than 560,000 are affordable homes. The government remains committed to reforming New Homes Bonus to improve how housing growth is incentivised, and our response to the consultation

on the New Homes Bonus will be published in the coming months.

- **Lower Tier Services Grant:** Providing £111 million to councils with responsibility for services such as homelessness, planning, recycling and refuse collection and leisure services. The funding floor has been updated so that no council will have less funding available in 2022/23 than this year.
- **Continued support for rural areas:** The government recognises rural areas can face additional cost pressures, which is why the £85 million Rural Service Delivery Grant will continue to be provided.
- **Business Rates Retention pilots:** Continuing the 100% Business Rates Retention pilots in Cornwall, Greater Manchester, Liverpool, West Midlands and West of England and 67% Business Rates Retention for London councils, enabling them to control more of the money they raise locally.
- **Revenue Support Grant:** An uplift to the Revenue Support Grant in line with inflation, worth over £70 million.

The government has also announced today a [package of measures](#) to improve the timely completion of local audits, including £45 million additional funding over the next 3 years to support local councils with increased costs relating to new audit requirements. These measures will help improve transparency and accountability in councils.

The government is committed to ensuring that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. The data used to assess this has not been updated in a number of years, dating from 2013-14 to a large degree, and even as far back as 2000. Over the coming months, DLUHC will work closely with the sector and other stakeholders to update this and to look at the challenges and opportunities facing the sector before consulting on any potential changes.

As part of this options will be considered to support local authorities through transitional protection. Councils should note that one off grant funding provided in the Local Government Finance Settlement in 2022/23 will be excluded from potential transitional protections.

The provisional settlement consultation will be open for 4 weeks, closing on 13 January 2022. The government will provide confirmation of the final local government finance settlement once consultation is complete in the New Year.

In addition, the Home Office has today published the provisional police funding settlement, which includes setting out funding allocations for Police and Crime Commissioners. The policing system will receive up to £16.9 billion to tackle crime and recruit more officers in 2022/23, a £1.1 billion increase on last year.

Further details on all of the above, including allocations for individual councils and our consultation document can be found on the [Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement page](#).

On 27 October 2021, the government set out the outcome of the multi-year Spending Review. Core Spending Power for local authorities is estimated to increase by an average of 3% in real terms each year, including investment in Adult Social Care reform. The government is providing around £1.6 billion additional grant in LGDEL in each year, including funding for Supporting Families and Cyber Resilience.

The £1 billion for social care comes from an additional £700 million of new grant funding going into social care and a 1% Adult Social Care council tax precept, including flexibility rolled over from last year.

There will be additional council tax flexibility for shire districts, police authorities and for the 8 lowest-charging fire and rescue authorities.