

# Mark Worthington reappointed as independent HS2 Construction Commissioner

News story

The HS2 Construction Commissioner has been reappointed and will continue to investigate unresolved disputes and provide independent advice on making a complaint.



Mark Worthington has been reappointed as independent HS2 Construction Commissioner for a further 3 years.

Mark will continue to independently investigate matters that have not reached a satisfactory conclusion through HS2 Ltd's complaints process. He will also provide independent, impartial decisions as well as advice on how to make a complaint and will continue to build relationships across industry and community groups, local authorities, HS2 Ltd and contractors.

Mr Worthington's main functions include:

- ensuring that people affected by HS2 know who the Construction Commissioner is and what they do
- mediating in unresolved disputes between HS2 Ltd and individuals or bodies, including claims under the small claims scheme
- monitoring complaints and providing reports marking trends and providing advice on how to reduce the instance of complaints where possible
- developing and maintaining good relationships with members of the public, community and industry groups, local authorities, HS2 Ltd, contractors and businesses

Awarded an OBE in 2005 and knighted in 2014, Sir Mark has more than 20 years of experience working with government – including as Baroness Thatcher's private secretary from 1992 to 2013 and director of her private office – and has served as the Director of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

## [Build Back Better Business Council meeting: 9 November 2021](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson chaired a meeting of his Build Back Better Business Council.



The Prime Minister chaired a meeting of his Build Back Better Business Council on 9 November, alongside the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the Business Secretary and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Speaking to his council of UK business leaders, the Prime Minister provided an update on the latest action Government has taken to help deliver sustainable growth and build back better – highlighting the success of the recent Global Investment Summit. He also reflected on the ongoing COP26 summit, remarking that, together with the green ambitions of the private sector, we have the tools to tackle climate change.

The discussion began with an update from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who ran through several measures from the Budget and Spending Review that will support efforts to level up the UK. He also thanked industry leaders for helping to support jobs and businesses over the course of the pandemic, noting that today we have more people in work and growth is up.

The group discussed a range of the Council's key priorities, including accelerating the roll out of electric vehicle infrastructure, supporting the private sector to deliver place based growth, promoting business innovation, boosting skills and digital literacy, and encouraging more private sector investment in R&D and fast growth firms.

The Prime Minister drew the meeting to a close by remarking on the progress

that has been made under the pillars of innovation, infrastructure and skills, putting the UK economy on a high-growth, high-productivity path. He concluded that Government will continue to work hand in glove with businesses to achieve that ambition and support the industries of the future.

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## [Get Boosted Now](#)

News story

The Prime Minister has announced a huge ramping up of the COVID-19 booster vaccination programme to protect us all from the Omicron variant.



The latest data suggests Omicron is extremely transmissible [so book your booster](#) now. Everyone aged over 18 will be offered a booster vaccine by the end of December.

The Omicron COVID-19 variant is spreading fast and therefore, if Omicron is left unchecked the NHS is at risk of being quickly overwhelmed.

- A booster jab gives over 70% protection from the new variant.
- [Prime Minister's announcement](#) (12 December 2021).

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# Boost for Thames Estuary as Freeport opens for business

- Thames Freeport expects to create 21,000 jobs and provide £2.5 billion boost to local economy, helping to level up the country
- The freeport will be a leading player in the UK's green energy revolution and bring industry together with local schools, colleges and universities
- The opening comes just weeks after the UK's first freeport opened in Teesside

Thames Freeport has opened for business today (15 December 2021), as the government delivers on its central mission to level up across the United Kingdom.

The freeport estimates it will draw £4.5 billion of new investment and create 21,000 skilled jobs, bringing greater prosperity to some of the country's most deprived communities.

Positioned on the doorstep of the UK's busiest ports and largest labour market of London and the south east, the freeport will create a new global gateway for trade and benefit communities such as Thurrock, Barking, Dagenham and Havering, which have high rates of unemployment and child poverty.

The launch comes just weeks after the UK's [first freeport opened for business in Teesside](#).

Thames Freeport covers a 34 km-wide economic corridor and is supported by a share of £200 million of government funding and tax incentives.

The freeport will be a world class hub of innovation and put the region at the forefront of the cutting-edge sectors of the future, with significant investment in hydrogen technology, battery storage and electric vehicles.

A new Thames Freeport Skills Accelerator will also bring industry together with local schools, colleges and universities to provide training and job opportunities so that local people can gain the skills they need and secure employment.

Minister for Levelling Up Neil O'Brien MP said:

This is a truly exciting and momentous moment for London and the south east.

Thames Freeport will turbocharge the region's green energy credentials, inject billions into the economy and help level up by creating jobs and opportunities for local talent.

Ford's Dagenham site is a great example of how British businesses

will directly benefit and help to put our country at the forefront of the industries of the future.

Ruth Kelly, Chair of Thames Freeport, said:

The Thames Freeport will be a new centre of excellence for the country.

The Thames Freeport partners come together to offer a platform for global Britain.

The freeport provides Ford with a great opportunity as a test bed for customer-focused mobility technologies; London Gateway has fantastic global connections and land ready for development now; while the Port of Tilbury continues to deliver growth across processing, advanced manufacturing and next generation logistics.

At the Budget in March 2021, the Chancellor announced 8 successful prospective freeports locations in England, following a fair and open and assessment process. These include:

- East Midlands Airport
- Felixstowe & Harwich (known as Freeport East)
- Humber
- Liverpool City Region
- Plymouth & South Devon
- Solent
- Teesside
- Thames

Teesside Freeport opened for business in November and has a specific focus on green energy and offshore wind power.

Freeport East, including the ports of Felixstowe & Harwich, will begin initial operations later this month as eligible businesses that base themselves in the tax site start to benefit from tax incentives.

The government is continuing to work with other freeports to ensure they reach this important milestone as soon as they are able.

The UK government also remains committed to establishing the freeport programme in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as soon as possible and are confident our model embraces the highest employment and environmental standards.

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# Prime Minister announces COVID-19 Inquiry Chair

**Update: 28 February 2022**

The Inquiry now has its own independent website.

Visit the [UK COVID-19 Inquiry website](#) for the latest news and updates.

Today (Wednesday 15 December) the Prime Minister has appointed the Rt Hon Baroness Heather Hallett DBE as Chair of the forthcoming public inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Inquiry, set to begin its work in spring 2022, will be established under the Inquiries Act 2005, with full powers, including the power to compel the production of documents and to summon witnesses to give evidence on oath. Additional panel members will be appointed in the new year to make sure the Inquiry has access to the full range of expertise needed to complete its important work.

The Inquiry will play a key role in examining the UK's pandemic response and ensuring that we learn the right lessons for the future. The Prime Minister will now consult Baroness Hallett and ministers from the devolved administrations on the terms of reference for the Inquiry and will publish them in draft in the new year.

Those most affected by the pandemic – including those who have sadly lost loved ones – must also have an opportunity to play their proper role in the process. Once the terms of reference have been published in draft, Baroness Hallett will take forward a process of public engagement and consultation – including with bereaved families and other affected groups – before the terms of reference are finalised.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I want to thank Baroness Hallett for agreeing to take on the position of Chair of the COVID-19 Inquiry.

She brings a wealth of experience to the role and I know shares my determination that the inquiry examines in a forensic and thoroughgoing way the government's response to the pandemic.

The Rt Hon Baroness Heather Hallett DBE, said:

I am honoured to be appointed to chair the COVID-19 Inquiry. The

pandemic has affected us all, some much worse than others. I am acutely conscious of the suffering it has caused to so many.

In the new year I shall be seeking views from those who have lost loved ones and all other affected groups about the Inquiry's terms of reference.

I want to assure the British public that, once the terms of reference are finalised, I shall do my utmost to ensure the Inquiry answers as many questions as possible about the UK's response to the pandemic so that we can all learn lessons for the future.

Baroness Hallett retired from the Court of Appeal in 2019 and was made a crossbench life peer. She has previously conducted a range of high-profile and complex inquests, inquiries and reviews, including acting as coroner for the inquests into the deaths of the 52 victims of the 7 July 2005 London bombings; as chair of the Iraq Fatalities Investigations; and as chair of the 2014 Hallett Review of the administrative scheme to deal with 'on the runs' in Northern Ireland.

Baroness Hallett is currently acting as coroner in the inquest into the death of Dawn Sturgess, who died in July 2018 following exposure to the nerve agent Novichok. A new chair for that inquiry will be appointed early in the new year.