

# Funding secured for new £5.2 million flood scheme in Hexham

Funding for the new schemes is from the Government's £5.2 billion investment to better protect 336,000 properties across England by 2027 by constructing flood and coastal defences, in addition to contributions from Northumberland County Council.

Up to £193 million of this will be invested in the North East, with flood alleviation schemes planned for Hexham and Team Valley, among others.

Approximately 90 properties were flooded from the River Tyne at the Bridge End and Tyne Mills Industrial Estates on 5 December 2015, during Storm Desmond.

Businesses on the industrial estates have been contacted with updates on the scheme including the design and construction timescales.

The proposed scheme will reduce flood risk posed by the River Tyne with approximately 600m of flood walls and grass embankments.

The improvement works to the Bridge End Industrial estate include the construction of a new flood defence wall and short sections of flood embankment from the Reiver Sports site to the existing flood embankment at Egger.

In the Tyne Mills Industrial Estate, there will a short length of embankment across the Skinnersburn connecting into a new flood defence wall running along the perimeter of Northumberland County Council's Tyne Mills depot through to the Peth Head pumping station.

The Environment Agency is in discussions with key landowners to gain agreement for construction access and permissions are being sought from the Local Planning Authority and Local Lead Flood Authority to carry out work on the scheme.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

"We are now entering into the final design stages for the embankment on the Skinnerburn and continue to remain committed to delivering an improved standard of protection for the business on the estates.

"Our ever-changing climate is expected to mean wetter winters, more intense rainfall and, unfortunately, more frequent flooding in future.

"Our proposed scheme aims to reduce the risk of flooding at both industrial estates and will protect homes and businesses up to the level of the Storm Desmond 2015 flood event.

"Once planning consent and access agreements are in place, BAM Nuttall, our

principal contractor is due on site in Hexham in December 2021, with completion of the scheme running into late summer/autumn 2022.”

A Citizen Space webpage is now available to provide the latest information on the Hexham flood schemes and is available via this link:

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/north-east/hexham-flood-alleviation-scheme>

Announcement of the funding comes ahead of the Environment Agency’s Flood Action Week, where people are being encouraged to find out more information on how to make their homes, businesses, and communities more resilient to flooding, and sign up for flood warnings.

People in flood risk areas should know [what to do in a flood](#) and they are encouraged to download the Environment Agency’s ‘[Prepare. Act. Survive.](#)’ [flood plan](#) to help reduce their risk.

All residents and businesses in the North East are encouraged to sign up to the Environment Agency’s flood warning service, which gives advanced notification of flooding via phone, text and email. It is the principal way that flood warnings are issued, and those who sign up can manage their registrations online so that they can receive warnings wherever they are.

To register for the Environment Agency’s flood warning service visit <https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings> or contact Floodline on tel: 0345 988 1188.

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## **WTO TRIPS Council November 2021: UK statements**

Thank you, Chair.

The decision to postpone MC12 is undoubtedly a disappointment, but it was the right call.

The health of MC12 participants is the key priority whilst there is uncertainty regarding the new variant.

We are grateful to the Director General for her inspiring leadership, as well as to the WTO Secretariat for their professional preparation of the Ministerial. Whilst we await confirmation of a new date, the UK will continue to engage actively in all key negotiations.

We are determined to see the WTO back in business and fit to meet the challenges of the 2020s

These uncertainties only underline the vital ongoing importance of innovation

in the fight to contain, treat, and prevent COVID-19, given the existing international IP framework's demonstrated ability to enable such action.

Despite MC12's postponement, our commitment to reaching a pragmatic and tangible outcome remains. As we have stated in previous TRIPS Councils, the UK has made concerted efforts to engage bilaterally with members on this file. We are committed to continue engaging with members to find a solution acceptable to all.

Collaboration by all is the way forward. We are encouraged by the tone of the discussions we have had, and as we are still all agreed on the need for tangible outcomes, we remain hopeful this tone will continue in the discussions. It is clear that compromises will be needed from all to achieve an outcome acceptable to all.

Of course, efforts to increase global and diversified production and supply of vaccines will continue, so will further research and development, underpinned by the IP framework. That said, it is clear we must now particularly concentrate on equitable distribution and administration of available vaccines in order to contain, treat, and prevent COVID-19, in all its variants. Ensuring vaccines reach people's arms is fundamental. We look forward to further practical discussions focused on areas of convergence in formats that are most suitable to that. To that end, we agree with keeping this session open and propose to reconvene when there is a solution at hand, not to reiterate known positions.

Thank you, Chair.

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## [Oral statement to update on the Omicron variant](#)

Mr Speaker, with permission, I'd like to make a statement on the Omicron variant and the steps we're taking to keep our country safe.

We've always known that a worrying new variant could be a threat to the progress that we've made as a nation.

We're entering the winter in a strong position, thanks to the decisions we made in the summer and the defences that we have built.

Our vaccination programme has been moving at a blistering pace and this weekend we reached the milestone of 17 million boosters across the UK.

This means that even though cases have been rising, hospital admissions have fallen a further 11% in the past week and deaths have fallen by 17%.

But just as the vaccination programme has shifted the odds in our favour, a worrying new variant has always had the opportunity to shift them back.

Last week I was alerted to what is now known as the Omicron variant, now designated a Variant of Concern by the World Health Organisation.

We're learning more about this new variant all the time.

But the latest indication is that it spreads very rapidly, it may impact the effectiveness of one of our major treatments for COVID-19, Ronapreve, and as the Chief Medical Officer said this weekend, there's a reasonable chance that our current vaccines may be impacted.

I can update the House that there have now been five confirmed cases in England, and also six confirmed cases in Scotland and we expect cases to rise over the coming days.

The new variant has also been spreading across the world.

Confirmed cases have been reported in many countries: including Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal.

In this race between the vaccines and the virus, the new variant may have given the virus extra legs.

So, our strategy is to buy ourselves time and to strengthen our defences while our world-leading scientists learn more about this potential threat.

On Friday, I updated the House about the measures that we've put in place including how within hours, we'd placed six countries in Southern Africa on the travel red list.

Today, Mr Speaker, I'd like to update the House on more balanced and proportionate steps that we're taking.

First, measures at the border, to slow the incursion of the variant from abroad.

On Saturday, in line with the updated advice from the UK Health Security Agency, we acted quickly to add four other countries to the travel red list: Angola, Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia.

This means anyone who's not a UK or Irish national, or resident – who's been in any of these countries over the previous 10 days – will be refused entry.

And those who are allowed entry must isolate in a Government-approved facility for 10 days.

Beyond this red list, we're also going further to put in place a proportionate testing regime for arrivals from across the world.

So we'll require anyone who enters the UK to take a PCR test by the end of

their second day after they arrive and to self-isolate until they've received a negative result.

The regulations for this have been laid before the House today, and will come into effect at 4am tomorrow.

Second, we've announced measures to slow the spread of the virus here in the UK.

We're making changes to our rules on self-isolation for close contacts in England to reflect the greater threat that may be posed by this new variant.

So close contacts of anyone who tests positive with a suspected case of Omicron must self-isolate for ten days, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated or not.

Face coverings will also be made compulsory in shops and on public transport in England unless an individual has a medical exemption.

The regulations for self-isolation and face coverings have been laid before the House today, and will come into force at 4am tomorrow.

But I can confirm to the House that there will be a debate and votes on these two measures to give the House the opportunity to have its say and to perform valuable scrutiny.

My Right Honourable Friend, the Leader of the House, will be setting out more details shortly and we'll be reviewing all these measures that I've set out today after three weeks to see whether they're still necessary.

Third, Mr Speaker, we're strengthening the defences we've built against the virus.

We're already in a stronger position than we were when we faced the Delta variant.

We have a much greater capacity for testing, an enhanced ability for sequencing and the collective protection that's offered by 114 million jabs in arms and so I would like to update the House on our vaccination programme as well.

Our COVID-19 vaccination programme has been a national success story.

We've delivered more booster doses than anywhere else in Europe and we've given top-up jabs to over one in three people over the age of 18 across the UK.

I'd like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the NHS, the volunteers, the armed forces and everyone else that has been involved in this life-saving work.

Our vaccines remain our best line of defence against this virus, in whatever form it attacks us.

There's a lot we don't know about how our vaccine responds to this new variant.

But although it's possible that they may be less effective, it's highly unlikely they will have no effectiveness at all against serious disease.

So it's really important that we get as many jabs in arms as possible.

Over the next few weeks, we were already planning to do six million booster jabs in England alone, but against this backdrop of this new variant, we want to go further and faster.

So I asked the JCVI, the Government's independent expert advisers on vaccinations, to urgently review how we could expand the programme, and whether we should reduce the gap between second doses and boosters.

The JCVI published its advice in the last hour.

First, it advised that the minimum dose interval for booster jabs should be halved from six months to three months.

Second, that the booster programme should be expanded to include all remaining adults aged 18 and above.

Third, that these boosters should be offered, by age group, in a descending order to protect those who are most vulnerable to the virus.

So, priority will be given to older adults and people over 16 who are at risk.

Fourth, that severely immunosuppressed people aged 16 or above who've received three primary doses should now also be offered a booster dose.

Finally, that children aged between 12 and 15 should be given a second dose, 12 weeks from the first dose.

I have accepted this advice in full.

With this new variant on the offensive, these measures will protect more people more quickly and make us better protected as a nation.

It represents a huge step up for our vaccination programme, almost doubling the number of people who will be able to get a booster dose to protect themselves and their loved ones.

And I know that we're asking more from NHS colleagues who've already given so much throughout this crisis.

But I know that they will be up to the task.

The NHS will be calling people forward at the appropriate time, so that those who are most vulnerable will be prioritised.

And I'll be setting out more details of how we're putting this advice into

action in the coming days.

Mr Speaker, our fight against this virus is a global effort, and so I'd also like to update the House on the part that the UK is playing. We currently hold the presidency of the G7.

And earlier today I convened an urgent meeting of the G7 health ministers to co-ordinate the international response.

We were unanimous in our praise for the leadership shown by South Africa, who were so open and transparent about this new variant. And we were resolute in our commitment to working closely with each other, the World Health Organisation and, of course, the wider international community to tackle this common threat.

Mr Speaker, our experience of fighting this virus has shown us that it's best to act decisively and swiftly when we see a potential threat, which is why we're building our defences, and putting these measures in place without delay.

Scientists are working at speed, at home and abroad, to determine whether this variant is more dangerous.

And I can assure the House that if it emerges that this variant is no more dangerous than the Delta variant, then we won't keep measures place for a day longer than is necessary.

COVID-19 is not going away, and so we'll have to keep seeing new variants emerge.

So if we want to live with the virus for the long-term we must follow the evidence and act in a proportionate and responsible way if a variant has the potential to thwart our progress.

And as we do this, we are taking a well-rounded view, looking not just the impact of these measures on the virus, but the impact to the economy, education, and non-COVID health, such as mental health.

And I'm confident that these responses that we set out today are balanced and responsible steps that are proportionate to the threat we face.

Mr Speaker, this year, our nation has come so far down our road of recovery, but we always knew that there'd be bumps in the road.

But this is not a time to waver.

It's a time to be vigilant and to think about what each and every one of us can do to slow the spread of this new variant.

Getting a jab when the time comes, following the rules that we've put in place and getting rapid, regular tests.

If we all come together once again, then we can keep this virus at bay and

protect the progress that we have made.

I commend this statement to the House.

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## [UK government publishes pioneering standard for algorithmic transparency](#)

- The Cabinet Office's Central Digital and Data Office has developed an algorithmic transparency standard for government departments and public sector bodies with the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation
- The standard will be piloted by several public sector organisations and further developed based on feedback
- The move makes the UK one of the first countries in the world to develop a national algorithmic transparency standard, strengthening the UK's position as a world leader in AI governance

The UK government has today [launched](#) one of the [world's first national standards for algorithmic transparency](#).

This move delivers on commitments made in the [National AI Strategy](#) and [National Data Strategy](#), and strengthens the UK's position as a global leader in trustworthy AI.

In its landmark [review into bias in algorithmic decision-making](#), the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI) recommended that the UK government should place a mandatory transparency obligation on public sector organisations using algorithms to support significant decisions affecting individuals.

This call for transparency around the use of AI systems has been strongly supported domestically and internationally, including by civil society organisations such as [The Alan Turing Institute](#) and [Ada Lovelace Institute](#), and international organisations such as the [OECD](#) and [Open Government Partnership](#). These renowned organisations have advocated for greater transparency to help manage the risks associated with algorithmic decision-making, bring necessary scrutiny to the role of algorithms in decision-making processes, and help build public trust.

The Cabinet Office's [Central Digital and Data Office](#) (CDDO) has worked closely with the CDEI to design the standard. It also consulted experts from across civil society and academia, as well as the public. The standard is organised into two tiers. The first includes a short description of the algorithmic tool, including how and why it is being used, while the second includes more detailed information about how the tool works, the dataset/s that have been used to train the model and the level of human oversight. The standard will help teams be meaningfully transparent about the way in which



algorithmic tools are being used to support decisions, especially in cases where they might have a legal or economic impact on individuals.

The standard will be piloted by several government departments and public sector bodies in the coming months. Following the piloting phase, CDDO will review the standard based on feedback gathered and seek formal endorsement from the Data Standards Authority in 2022.

By publishing this information proactively, the UK government is empowering experts and the public to engage with the data and provide external scrutiny. Greater transparency will also promote trustworthy innovation by providing better visibility of the use of algorithms across the public sector, and enabling unintended consequences to be mitigated early on.

Publication of the standard comes after the UK government sought views on a proposal to introduce transparency reporting on public sector use of algorithms in decision-making, as part of its [consultation](#) on the future of the UK's data protection regime. The UK government is currently analysing the feedback received.

**Lord Agnew, Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, said:**

Algorithms can be harnessed by public sector organisations to help them make fairer decisions, improve the efficiency of public services and lower the cost associated with delivery. However, they must be used in decision-making processes in a way that manages risks, upholds the highest standards of transparency and accountability, and builds clear evidence of impact. I'm proud that we have today become one of the first countries in the world to publish a cross-government standard for algorithmic transparency, delivering on commitments made in the National Data Strategy and National AI Strategy, whilst setting an example for organisations across the UK.

**Adrian Weller, Programme Director for AI at The Alan Turing Institute and Member of the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation's Advisory Board, said:**

Organisations are increasingly turning to algorithms to automate or support decision-making. We have a window of opportunity to put the right governance mechanisms in place as adoption increases. This is why I'm delighted to see the UK government publish one of the world's first national algorithmic transparency standards. This is a pioneering move by the UK government, which will not only help to build appropriate trust in the use of algorithmic decision-making by the public sector, but will also act as a lever to raise transparency standards in the private sector.

**Imogen Parker, Associate Director (Policy) at the Ada Lovelace Institute, said:**

Meaningful transparency in the use of algorithmic tools in the public sector is an essential part of a trustworthy digital public sector. The Ada Lovelace Institute has called for a transparency register of public sector algorithms to allow the public – and civil society who act on their behalf – to know what systems are in use, where and why. The UK government’s investment in developing this transparency standard is an important step towards achieving this objective, and a valuable contribution to the wider conversation on algorithmic accountability in the public sector. We look forward to seeing trials, tests and iterations, followed by government departments and public sector bodies publishing completed standards to support modelling and development of good practice.

**Tabitha Goldstaub, Chair of the UK Government’s AI Council, said:**

In the AI Council’s AI Roadmap, we highlighted the need for new transparency mechanisms to ensure accountability and public scrutiny of algorithmic decision-making; and encouraged the UK government to consider analysis and recommendations from the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, and the Committee on Standards in Public Life. I’m thrilled to see the UK government acting swiftly on this; delivering on a commitment made in the National AI Strategy, and strengthening our position as a world leader in trustworthy AI.

**Sir Patrick Vallance, UK Government Chief Scientific Adviser and National Technology Adviser, said:**

We need democratic standards and good governance for new technologies, such as AI, that will enhance the way we work and benefit society. The launch of this new standard demonstrates this government’s commitment to building public trust and understanding of the application of these technologies, including exploring increased transparency in public sector use of algorithms.

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# [DIO awards new delivery partner contracts for US Visiting Forces sites](#)

News story

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) has recently awarded three new contracts to support infrastructure upgrades at UK armed forces bases used by the United States Visiting Forces (USVF).



Representatives from DIO and the contractors. (Crown Copyright MOD 2021).

The Delivery Partner Technical Support contracts have been awarded to AECOM, Tetra Tech and Mace, which is a consortium of Mace, Turner Townsend and Atkins. They have been brought in to maintain oversight of project performance and to provide information to DIO that enables appropriate and timely intervention to keep the programmes on track to meet their objectives. They will also be responsible for project management technical services including technical design and managing construction.

## **DIO's Air Programme Director, Steve Rix, said:**

I am pleased to welcome our Delivery Partners to the DIO USVF Infrastructure Programme team and look forward to working with them to ensure we continue to support our USVF customers' needs, enabling them to execute missions from their bases in the UK.

The contracts will initially run for five years as the USVF continue to increase their investment in the UK estate.

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