

## More than 300,000 homes better protected from flooding since 2015

More than 300,000 homes are better protected from the effects of climate change compared with 2015, the Environment Agency has announced today (Wednesday 24 March).

Exceeding its target in delivering the government's £2.6 billion investment in flood and coastal defence schemes since 2015, the Environment Agency and partners have completed more than 700 projects to better protect more than 300,000 homes, nearly 600,000 acres of agricultural land, thousands of businesses and major pieces of infrastructure.

The milestone was reached with the completion of the Hull: Humber Frontages scheme, a £42 million project which will better protect the city of Hull from the devastation of tidal surges which caused flooding to hundreds of properties in 2013.

The delivery of the nation's new defences, which has continued through lockdown with Covid-secure working arrangements, will not only help to save the economy more than £28 billion in avoided damages over the lifetime of defence assets, but also provide reassurance and peace of mind for communities and encourage economic growth.

The successful delivery of the programme comes ahead of the start of the record £5.2 billion investment in 2,000 new flood and coastal defences between 2021 and 2027.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

The success of this programme is measured in numbers – 700 projects, 300,000 homes, nearly 600,000 acres of agricultural land, thousands of businesses and major pieces of infrastructure, on time and within budget. But the sense of security these protections bring to people, and the benefits to nature, can't easily be demonstrated on a spreadsheet.

With the COP26 climate talks coming to Glasgow this year, this programme is a fantastic example of adaptation in action, but there's a lot more to do.

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, said:

I pay tribute to our skilled teams and our partners who have worked so hard to achieve this – it's not easy to bring major infrastructure projects in on time and on budget.

The Environment Agency's six-year flood defence building programme has done exactly that, better protecting 300,000 homes against the damage and misery of flooding.

The climate emergency is bringing more extreme weather, so we must now redouble our efforts to make our communities more resilient in future

George Eustice, Environment Secretary, said:

This important milestone means that 300,000 households are better protected against flooding and coastal erosion. I commend the hard work of the Environment Agency and its partners in supporting flood-hit communities.

We know there is more to do, which is why a record £5.2 billion is being invested in 2,000 new flood and coastal erosion schemes over the next six years, to protect thousands more people, homes and businesses.

Some of the most significant schemes delivered by the Environment Agency since 2015 include:

### **Hull Frontages, Yorkshire**

The Humber: Hull Frontage scheme is a £42 million flood defence upgrade of the defences along the edge of the Humber Estuary to protect the city of Hull from tidal flooding. The scheme will reduce the risk of flooding from the estuary for 113,000 properties. Tidal flood defences at eight locations along the estuary foreshore, including at St Andrew's Quay Retail Park, Victoria Pier and Victoria Dock Village have also been upgraded, with more than seven kilometres of tidal flood defences along the estuary frontage now improved.

### **Ipswich Barrier, Suffolk**

The £67 million Ipswich Barrier is one of the most significant defences that the Environment Agency has constructed in recent years, protecting 1,600 homes and 400 businesses from flooding and the impacts of climate change over the course of the next century. Costing almost £70 million, the new flood defences centrepiece is a 200-tonne rotating barrier which can be raised in minutes, helping to keep the town safe from tidal surges during storms. The scheme will better protect homes and businesses in Ipswich over the next 100 years and provide a much higher level of protection from the type of tidal surge which threatened the town in 2007 and 2013, both of which were close to spilling over the previous defences.

### **Natural Flood Management**

One key example is at Smithills near Bolton, where log dams and tree planting help to store water in upland areas in order to reduce flood risk for

communities in Bolton downstream. The dams help to store the equivalent of four Olympic swimming pools' worth of water upstream. Around 38,000 native broadleaf deciduous trees have also planted to intercept surface water, create habitat for the local wildlife populations, and help with carbon sequestration, with more to come.

## **Boston Barrier, Lincolnshire**

The Boston Barrier gate is now fully ready and working, giving an enhanced level of flood protection to over 13,000 homes and businesses in the town. As the centrepiece of the flood scheme, the barrier gate can be raised in just 20 minutes, responding quickly to threats of North Sea tidal surges. With the whole of the £100 million Environment Agency scheme now two-thirds complete, the project will provide Boston with one of the best standards of flood defence outside of London. Once the scheme is fully completed in 2022, flood risk to over 14,000 homes and 800 businesses will be greatly reduced and allow for the effects of climate change for the next 100 years

Work is already under way on the delivery of some of the 2,000 new flood and coastal defences that will better protect a further 336,000 properties from flooding and coastal erosion by 2027, which will also see the implementation of the [Environment Agency's Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy](#).

Alongside building new defences, the strategy sets out how the Environment Agency and partners will work to make communities more resilient to the effects of climate change, ensuring they are better prepared for when flooding sadly hits, and able to recover quickly. It will also ensure a greater use of nature to reduce flood risk.

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## **10 teams to lead celebration of creativity and innovation in 2022**

- Teams tasked with developing showstopper national moments as part of Festival UK\* 2022
- From augmented reality to space and new works of art, projects will bring science, technology, engineering, arts and maths into the heart of communities across the UK
- Festival UK\* 2022 forms part of a blockbuster year alongside Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the Birmingham Commonwealth Games

Ten creative teams from across the UK have been selected to develop a series of events, public engagement programmes and virtual projects as part of the Festival UK\* 2022, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden has announced today.

Festival UK\* 2022 is a major UK-wide festival of creativity and innovation,

which will feature 10 major public engagement projects designed to reach millions, bring people together and showcase the UK's creativity globally.

The teams have been selected from 30 shortlisted projects that took part in a paid research and development phase, following a rigorous assessment. They will now be tasked with taking their ideas through to completion ready for next year's festival.

2022 is set to be a year of celebration for the UK with three major events, Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Commonwealth Games and Festival UK\* 2022 all set to take place.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

These ten showstopper projects will wow audiences in towns and cities right across the country, and show off the UK and its creative genius to the world.

Alongside the Commonwealth Games and Platinum Jubilee, they will make 2022 a year to remember, bringing the nation together as we build back stronger from the pandemic.

Chief Creative Officer for Festival UK\* 2022 Martin Green said:

We asked 500 of the best creative minds in the UK to tell us what a festival of creativity could be. What they came up with has exceeded our expectations, and then some, which made deciding which 10 teams to commission very difficult. We believe the extraordinary breadth of talent, their thrilling ideas and geographic spread, will be ground-breaking, inspiring and exciting for millions of people across the UK and further afield.

The Festival, backed by £120 million of funding from the UK government, will be a showcase of UK British science, technology, engineering, arts and maths and the ten teams selected to take part will help to develop world-class talent and highlight the very best of British creativity and innovation.

The teams have been selected following an R&D phase that provided opportunities for 500 organisations and more than 100 freelancers, as well as emerging and under-represented talent – with more opportunities to come as the 10 projects are developed.

Drawn from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, they have been deliberately asked to work across borders to ensure the Festival brings together the whole country.

Each team was asked to develop ideas that would celebrate the UK and promote it on the world stage, as well as support the levelling up agenda.

The 10 teams will now develop major creative projects for the festival, which will reach millions globally, bring people together and showcase UK creativity to the world.

Dame Vikki Heywood CBE, chairman of Festival UK\* 2022 board, said:

It has been incredibly exciting to see hundreds of creative people from across the UK collaborate so imaginatively at such a difficult time and we've been bowled over by the positive response of those taking part in the R&D process. As the 10 commissioned projects go forward there will be many opportunities for everyone to participate in creative experiments across the worlds of Science, Technology, Engineering Arts and Maths from all ages and all corners of the UK in 2022.

Lord Mayor of Belfast Alderman Frank McCoubrey said:

We are impressed by the innovation and diversity of the work that has been carried out across all regions during the R&D project. It has provided much-needed support to local creatives during a challenging period and demonstrated how good teamwork creates strength and synergy. We're very much looking forward to seeing how the final projects develop and shape this exciting festival and we're confident that the Northern Ireland collaboration will further strengthen our already flourishing STEAM and cultural sectors.

Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair work and Culture Fiona Hyslop said:

It has been inspiring to see the Scottish STEM and creative sectors work together and share their talents throughout this process. This is an important opportunity to support freelancers and organisations in these sectors as we begin our recovery from the pandemic. I look forward to seeing how the successful Scottish team and the other shortlisted teams develop in the next phase of this collaborative project.

Welsh Government Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

It's very exciting news that we're now embarking on the next phase of the project. During what's been the most challenging of years, I'm delighted that we can help these sectors as we all look forward to a brighter 2022 – with creativity bringing communities together once more.



- World-building, inclusive co-design, immersive mobile technology, TV Drama, futures thinking in science, and live performance collide to produce an experimental and inspiring form of transmedia storytelling.

National Theatre Wales

Lorne Campbell, Claire Doherty, Marc Rees

Centre for Alternative Technology  
Clwstwr

Rebecca Upton  
Shirish Kulkarni, Robin Moore

Disability Arts Cymru

Kaite O'Reilly

Ffilm Cymru Wales

Pauline Burt

Sugar Creative

Will Humphrey

Writer and Professor in Creativity,  
Swansea University

Owen Sheers

Youth Arts Network Cymru

Liara Barussi (Jukebox Collective),  
Gethin Evans (Frân Wen)

Nelly Ben Hayoun Studios Collective

- A cosmic adventure exploring immersive experiences, new technologies, science innovation, social media, youth culture and the power of imagination to change perspectives, dismantle boundaries and ignite the creative energy of towns across the UK.

Nelly Ben Hayoun Studios Team

Nerve Centre Collective

- An experiment in astrophysics, augmented reality, landscape, visual art and play, asking what happens to your perspective on everything when you look back at earth from space.

Nerve Centre

David Lewis, John Peto,  
Rachel McDermott

Astrophysics Research Centre, Queen's  
University Belfast

Stephen Smartt

Big Motive

Rebecca Walsh

Microsoft

Kieran McCorry

National Museums Northern Ireland

Aaron Ward

Composer, Producer, Sound Artist and Filmmaker

Die Hexen

Illustrator, Designer, Art Director and  
Creative Director

Rory Jeffers

Visual Artist and Author

Oliver Jeffers

Taunt

Fiona McLaughlin

NEWSUBSTANCE Collective

- A physical manifestation and celebration of the British weather and UK coastline; a large-scale installation that addresses global questions, encourages playfulness, elicits joy and presents an experiment in change.

NEWSUBSTANCE	Patrick O'Mahony, Ollie Howitt
Ivan Black Sculpture	Ivan Black
Global Head of Partner Engineering Amazon Prime Video & founder of Empowering Women with Tech	Natasha Sayce-Zelem
Space Engineer & Founder of Rocket Women	Vinita Marwaha-Madill

REDHOUSE	Emma-Jane Taylor, Benjamin Webster
Dose of Society	Ahmed Faïd, Nii Lartey
British Antarctic Survey	Dr Amélie Kirchgassner
Self-employed Writer, Curator and Artistic Director	Neville Wakefield

### Storyfutures Collective

- An experiment in film, broadcast and augmented reality, public archives, digital access and immersive storytelling asking who are we? Where did we come from and where are we headed?

StoryFutures Academy run by Royal Holloway, University of London and the National Film and Television School (NFTS)	Prof. James Bennett, Amanda Murphy, Angela Chan
British Film Institute (BFI)	Ben Luxford
ISOdesign	Damien Smith
Nexus Studios	Liam Walsh, Kim-Leigh Pontin
The Reading Agency	Hayley Butler
Uplands TV	David Olusoga, Mike Smith
Produce UK	Lee Baker

### Trigger Collective

- An experiment in mass participation, co-creation, shared histories, sustainability, installation, performance and spectacle through the lens of nature, multiculturalism and ritual and reclaiming space.

Trigger	Angie Bual, Jude Ho, Carl Robertshaw
Brigstow Institute	Prof. Peter Coates, Lydia Medland, Prof. Jane Memmott
Dock Street Events	Chris Clay, Jenny Hutt
THISS	Tamsin Hanke, Sash Scott
Wolves Lane Flower Company	Marianne Mogendorff

### Walk the Plank Collective

- An experiment in lighting technology, environmental science, geo-tracking, mass participation, exploring the beauty of the UK outdoors and asking questions about access, taking part, landscape and the future of public spectacle.

Walk the Plank	Creative Producer, John Wassell; freelance Lighting and Special Effects Designer, Richard Babington; freelance Theatre-maker and multidisciplinary Artist, Danielle Carbon Wilson
Extraordinary Bodies Lead Artist	Jamie Beddard
Siemens	Robin Phillips, Engineer Annabel Ohene, Engineer Nathaniel Fernandes
National Parks UK	Director of Communications Alastair Barber
freelance Dance and Movement Specialist	Ruth Jones
freelance Creative Leader, Musician, and Facilitator	Pete Moser

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## Governor Dakin's address on the first anniversary of Covid-19 in the Turks and Caicos Islands

Good afternoon. I have been invited to provide some personal reflections from the last year so I hope to explain what I think my long term memories will be when, perhaps, I look back on this period in five years' time. In other words the bigger picture.

I'll start with what I believe will be my strongest positive and my strongest negative memory of the last twelve months, then talk about some of the big lessons I think I'll remember, and end with my darkest potential fear and greatest possible hope for the year ahead.

The strongest positive will be about our people. Everyone in the Islands ended up on the front-line during COVID and the vast majority were magnificent throughout, and continue to be so. True – a very small number – failed the integrity test I described at the very start of the pandemic, putting others at risk while they sought either profit or momentary gratification – but compared to the rest of the world these individuals were a very small percentage of our number. I'm immensely proud of the people of TCI.

Beyond the population there are people who we have all relied on, many in front of me today, and many of us owe you more than we will ever know, such as Desiree Lewis (the Permanent Secretary of Health) and Denise Braithwaite (the CEO of the Hospitals) and those in support or alongside them, who have spent the full year working relentlessly – 15 hour days or more – often seven days a week.

I include in this list, because I saw it close up, the last Premier whose work ethic over the last year, and the attention to detail she paid to health, should be recognised today as we reflect back on where we were and where we got to. Health is after all a devolved issue. I should say I see all the same characteristics in the new Government who will now steward us towards the second anniversary next year. If the last 12 months was about a successful defence, the next 12 months is all about our counter-attack and how completely we all throw ourselves into regaining the initiative and retaking control of our future. More on this later.

When I think about the people who got us through this I include people across every profession and with any, and every, job title, in both the public and private sector, who adjusted and innovated and delivered in a way that has not only kept these Islands safe, but also kept us functioning in relative normality, compared to the rest of the region and indeed the world. You know who you are – so if you recognise in yourself the contribution you made – I can only thank you on behalf of us all.

And so to the overpowering negative. There is one thought that overshadows and that is the loss of our people to this wretched virus with – perversely – numbers of deaths now increasing, even as the vaccine is available on the Islands for those that wish it; a theme I will return to at the end.

Those lives shortened, and the sorrow it brings to those left behind, will be the abiding memory of this year. Attending a young Police Officers funeral service, and the prospect of attending a service to mourn a further Police Officer, struck down not in the direct line of duty but through the impact of COVID, are memories that I will hold, but wish I didn't have to.

Having lost my own father to COVID my family isn't left untouched by this year's events and when all other memories have gone this is the one that will of course abide. There will be others listening who know exactly how this feels, and will also know that none of us want others memory of this period to be attached to this type of direct personal grief.

There are of course other consequences of this year that have hit families in other ways. For some this will have been the toughest year of their lives economically. When tourism stops the economy here stops. The obvious lesson from this year must be about diversification but it surely must also be about starting on the journey of having a proper safety net in place, that can catch the most vulnerable and most deserving, quickly, when unexpected calamity occurs.

And on that point, another memory I will hold is the magnificent NGO's, in these Islands, who managed to achieve so much with so little. While we didn't say so at the time Mandy – my wife – spent time working alongside them, regularly packing up food parcels – so our family had a very good and very regular insight into just how much good, these very good people in the TCI did, on behalf of the poorest of our Residents.

Quite probably the longest term consequence is that, as we acknowledge a year of COVID, we must also acknowledge a year that the schools have been closed. I'm personally delighted they are now on a planned course to full reopening.

Education has been disrupted globally this year and what the longer term impact of that will be, no one yet knows, but there has to be an impact and every Government must plan for it, which I know ours is.

So as I think about this year I will think about the children of these Islands, what they were asked to sacrifice and how they managed, brilliantly, the challenges that none of us would have wished to face, at their age, particularly the disruption to friendships, fun and childhood freedoms as well as lessons.

Looking back, I will recall we started the pandemic without the means to fight it. We had little high dependency care capability, we had no Intensive Care Unit. We had little PPE. We had no testing capacity on the Islands. We had no closed ventilators. We had modern hospitals, but with very limited bed capacity, and those risked being overwhelmed extremely quickly. We had insufficient staff in our hospital. We had, and we continue to have, a health system built on treatment of our most serious cases outside our shores and when we were most in need, the region was closing down to us. All this, underpinned by a National Health Insurance Program that going forward cannot sustain, over the long term, the sort of costs that the pandemic has imposed but also modern medicine will bring.

The extremely tough and well observed lockdown – the use of emergency powers – the closure of the international borders and the stopping of our economy – not least because the rest of the world stopped travelling – saved us from the first wave of the pandemic and gave us just enough breathing space to build up capacity to give ourselves a fighting chance, although that capacity has recently been sorely tested.

So, in the future, I will reflect that at the end of the first year we were in an immeasurably better place than when this pandemic started. The extraordinary amount of hard work and grind by so many people who made that possible is a memory I will also hold of this year, for some time.

Another positive memory I will hold is the role the UK played. They stepped up. Facing a crisis alone is not a place you want to be – particularly when you were as ill-prepared as we were, and while it's probably more appropriate for others to talk of the UK's practical, comprehensive and rapid delivery of the stores, equipment and expertise we needed, I will personally remember a group of UK colleagues, here and in London, who fought for TCI as if their very lives depended on it.

If I believe we made the right decision locking the country down quickly, another memory will be the belief that the elected Government took a brave decision – and I use that word in its most positive sense – to open our international borders in July, and then keep them open. I pay tribute to the then Government for having the courage to do this, and then hold that position. That decision has positioned us in the region as, presently, the standout tourism destination.

What we and the industry have learned over the last eight months, while others have stayed shut or oscillated in their position, is how to deliver a

safe tourism experience and our top end visitors know it, admire it, and will remember it as will the wider industry.

We also now have the data – because of testing prior to departure of our visitors – to tell us that not only are tourists not bringing the virus with them (because of our pre-testing model) they are also staying extremely safe while here – and I attribute much of that to the protocols the hotels and villas are observing, but also the excellent take up of vaccine we have seen in their front-line staff. Our main industry has done an excellent job.

There is a good dictum that you should never let a good crisis go to waste and beyond burnishing our tourism reputation I believe in the future we will look back on this period and see it as the moment that a consensus emerged amongst politicians, senior officials and across the medical profession, that Healthcare on the Islands requires a root and branch review. I know the Premier has this in his sights.

The pandemic put Heath under just the right amount of strain that it hasn't (yet anyway) been broken but it has given us a forensic insight into its weaknesses. Our hospitals need greater capacity and capability. Our partnerships across public and private medicine have to be strengthened. The affordability of our treatment abroad programme has to be examined. Our past lack of investment in public health and mental health provision needs to be questioned.

And the good news is that necessity, being the mother of invention, means progress is already underway. Our overall health system and the relationships between medical practitioners and officials are immeasurably stronger in March 2021 than they were in March 2020; that is a welcome foundation on which to build. While there is ongoing and complex arbitration between the Government and the Hospital, the working relationships between the CEO and the PS are outstanding. Public Health England, who have been magnificent partners to us throughout this year, stand ready to help if and when that help is needed but there is a huge amount of experience and local knowledge now accumulating that can be released when required.

But now we turn to the most important points I wish to make, my greatest fear and greatest hope, because these look to the 2021 rather than reflecting on 2020. We cannot change the past but we can all influence the future and what I'm about to say places exactly the same amount of power, to influence that future, in each and every residents hands. It is the great equaliser of this year. Rich or poor, old or young, whatever your ethnicity, you, the population, not the Government, through your own personal decisions will decide whether 2021 is an opportunity seized or an opportunity squandered.

I believe the end of this first year does start to mark a hinge moment, a moment when we have to start to look towards individual responsibility for our protection rather than government imposed restrictions to govern our collective behaviours around our personal health. The later got us through the last year but the former will not only get us through 2021, but reignite our economy and return our personal liberties.

What all of us here in this hospital know, but what we need the whole Territory to understand, is that the COVID virus is not going to give up and go away. Quite the opposite, it is mutating, it is getting stronger, it is becoming more deadly, it is being transmitted at a faster rate. We don't need epidemiologists or the World Health Organisation to tell us this, we can see it with our own eyes here in TCI. People are getting sicker, faster and getting sicker with more deadly results. If we include residents we have sent overseas for treatment in just the last 7 days, four from TCI have died. All of these deaths occurred after the vaccine was available – which would have prevented their death.

I confidently predict more deaths, there is no reason to think any other way. The restrictive measures we have in place clearly are reducing contagion, but not eliminating it, and those catching the virus are becoming more likely to die. Sat behind this, the Hospital has on several occasions' risked being overwhelmed. The Government could of course return us – on a regular cycle – to a lockdown and stop the Islands economy, or keep ramping up and down restrictions, forever, but why should we now need to do that? There is no action Government can now take – in terms of restricting your behaviours or closing down parts of the economy that offers the protection that an individual can now take, themselves, by taking the vaccine.

I promised to be straight and clear in my inauguration speech. The issue for me, as Governor, is that rather than the uptake of the vaccine increasing week-on-week, as more and more evidence accumulates that this is the life-saving remedy, the uptake of the vaccine is starting to flatten off. We had an extraordinary roll out – efficiently delivered and administered – but momentum is seemingly cooling.

This coincides with news that the Pfizer vaccine may well become in short supply in the UK and while the UK will send us as much vaccine as the TCI population can use – in terms of full transparency – we cannot in all conscious ask for more to be sent if the clinicians and medical officials on the Islands are uncertain if future deliveries will be used before their expiry date. We cannot have vaccines being thrown away here when there are those in the UK who want the vaccine but have yet to receive it.

Having attended a forum with Premiers and Ministers from across the Caribbean last week, where a cry from the independent Caribbean was for easy access to vaccines as they look enviously on at us, the one memory I do not want to hold from this anniversary is that this month marks the moment the vaccine program to TCI started to falter because the demand for it, was not there.

For TCI to miss this opportunity, the opportunity to prevent loss of life, the opportunity to prevent our hospitals being overwhelmed, for us to choose to rely on curfews and restrictions and masks – indefinitely – when the door to normality has been opened and the route clearly signposted would, along with the deaths already mentioned, be the darkest of memories for me – a once in a century opportunity offered and then missed.

So on this anniversary what we must do in Team Health and Government is redouble our collective efforts at public education, answer the publics

concerns respectfully and diligently, continue to deliver the vaccine – as we all have – efficiently and safely to all those who want it. As of 21 March – 12,935 persons have been vaccinated, without any incident, which is 34% of our population. That’s a good start, but only a start.

So we must also explain to those who have yet to be vaccinated that at some future point the program – as constructed – will be closed, the supply will have halted, and the country will have to move on – indeed the world will have to move on – with some – hopefully most of the population safe – and some of it at risk – and at risk through personal choice.

I use this opportunity again to say, when you take the vaccine you are taking it for yourself, your family, all those you come into contact with, for their health, for their future prosperity and for their future liberty. You are doing it – literally – for your country and your TCI brothers and sisters.

In strong contrast the memory I want to hold – the memory I believe I will hold – is that together we all created the safest destination and home in the Caribbean for ourselves and our visitors alike, and that our reputation for this secured us an unbelievably positive future for these Turks and Caicos Islands as a world and regional leader.

This future is ours to have if we have the collective courage to seize it. Please (please) register for the vaccine and more than that encourage those you care about to do so to. This is a moment for all of us to be leaders and recognise that the power of one, the power of individual decision making, has the power to change these Islands future.

And with that, may God Bless these Turks and Caicos Islands.

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## **British Embassy welcomes environmental ideas ahead of COP26**

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# PM statement at coronavirus press conference: 23 March 2021

Good afternoon everybody, thank you for joining us,

When I asked you to go into lockdown exactly a year ago

it seemed incredible that in the 21st Century

this was the only way to fight a new respiratory disease –

to stay at home

to avoid human contact

to shun so many of the patterns of behaviour that are most natural and obvious to all of us.

But we did it together

to protect the NHS

to save lives.

And for the entire British people it has been an epic of endurance and privation,

of children's birthday parties cancelled

of weddings postponed

of family gatherings of all kinds simply deleted from the diary.

And worst of all in that time

We've suffered so many losses

and for so many people

our grief has been made more acute

because we have not been able to see our loved ones in their final days

to hold their hands

or even to mourn them together.

And at the right moment, we will come together as a country to build a fitting and a permanent memorial to the loved ones we have lost

and to commemorate this whole period.

For month after month our collective fight against Coronavirus was like fighting in the dark against a callous and invisible enemy,

until science helped us to turn the lights on and to gain the upper hand.

And I want to renew my thanks to everyone responsible for the astounding vaccine roll-out

which has enabled us to protect more than 28 million people across the whole of the United Kingdom with a first jab

and administer more than 30 million doses in total.

And I want to thank everybody for their courage, your courage, discipline and patience.

When people come to describe this epidemic to future generations,

we'll tell the story of the heroes of the NHS and social care

of pharmacists, teachers, armed service personnel, shop workers, transport workers, the police and so many others.

But in the end this was unlike any other struggle in my lifetime, in that our entire population has been engaged,

and it's thanks to all of you therefore that we can continue on our roadmap to freedom.

We will meet our targets, offering a first dose to everyone over 50 by the middle of next month, as well as those under 50 who are clinically vulnerable,

and offering a first dose of the vaccine to every adult by the end of July.

And cautiously but irreversibly, step by step, jab by jab,

this country is on the path to reclaiming our freedoms.