

PM call with President Macron: 5 February 2021

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron.



The Prime Minister spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron this evening.

The leaders discussed the fight against coronavirus. The Prime Minister emphasised the important role world leaders will play in ensuring that vaccines are rolled out effectively so that we can defeat the pandemic. The leaders agreed that a successful global vaccination programme will require a collaborative effort between governments.

The Prime Minister outlined the UK's priorities for our G7 Presidency, including working together to build back better from coronavirus and tackling climate change ahead of the UK-hosted COP26 Summit in November.

The Prime Minister welcomed the agreement of the UK-EU Trade Deal in December. The Prime Minister said that the UK's departure from the EU offered a huge opportunity to deepen and widen our bilateral relationship with France and the leaders looked forward to working together to realise that opportunity.

The leaders discussed a number of international issues including Iran, Yemen, Libya and Russia. They agreed that European leadership from the UK, France and others continues to be instrumental in making the world safer and more secure.

The Prime Minister and President Macron agreed that cooperation remained crucial as we tackle the challenges ahead and resolved to stay in close contact.

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Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce meeting, 4 February 2021

News story

Joint statement on progress made by the taskforce at its meeting on 4 February 2021.



The latest meeting of the Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce was held yesterday (4 February 2021).

It was chaired by Transport Minister, Baroness Vere. Attendees included the Project Director Dana Skelley, plus representatives from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, the Greater London Authority, Transport for London (TfL) and the Port of London Authority.

Dana Skelley, speaking on behalf of the Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce, said:

At yesterday's Taskforce, I updated members on the programme review sessions conducted with TfL. These sessions were designed to

explore the specifications and designs for repair, and associated costs and timescales. Further to the completion of these sessions, there was agreement to using TfL funding, as provided by the Department for Transport (DfT) through the Extraordinary Funding and Financing Package agreed last October, to carry out activities which will de-risk the works programme.

In addition, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham provided an update on the feasibility study commissioned into the Foster & Partners and COWI temporary bridge proposal. We currently expect this study to be completed in the next 3 weeks.

DfT was grateful to have received the most recent business case for the bridge repair from TfL on 29 January, but it was accepted that a final and comprehensive case cannot be produced while other options are still under consideration and while DfT awaits further detail from LBHF on the financial case.

The Taskforce also heard the latest from TfL regarding the procurement for the temporary ferry service, with details of the 3 shortlisted bidders expected to be announced in the next few weeks. The timing for services beginning will depend on the winning bidder's proposals, though the need to have the ferry running as soon as possible is universally recognised.

Lastly, we clarified why river users were unable to travel under the bridge while engineers were onsite due to the potential for their work to accidentally trigger the acoustic monitoring alarms. The activation of an alarm would cause the bridge to be evacuated and any transits to be stopped.

The Hammersmith Bridge Taskforce was set up by the Department for Transport in September 2020 to work towards safely reopening the Hammersmith Bridge. The taskforce is chaired by Baroness Vere and includes representatives from TfL, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, Network Rail, the Greater London Authority and the Port of London Authority.

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[Five year project to sell surplus public sites exceeds its target](#)

- Target of raising £5bn for public funds is exceeded by almost £200m

- Surplus public sites to be re-used for a range of projects, including the development of new housing
- More than 2,100 sites have been sold in the past five years

In 2015, the government said it would raise £5bn by 2020 through selling off surplus sites for redevelopment projects, including the construction of new housing, commercial developments and the creation of new open spaces.

The [Annual Land and Property Disposals Transparency Report](#), which has been published by the Cabinet Office this week, shows that target has been exceeded by almost £200 million.

Cabinet Office Minister, Lord Agnew, said:

Through the Land and Property Disposals Programme, we have taken publicly owned sites which were no longer needed by the public sector and given them new purposes, including as sites for much needed new housing, business developments and the creation of new open spaces.

Vitally, we have also put £5.2bn back into the public purse, which will help to fund the public services that people up and down the country use every day.

Since the Land and Property Disposals Programme began, more than 5,200 hectares of land and hundreds of under-used and empty buildings which no longer had a purpose for the public sector have been sold.

In the last year alone, a total of 277 surplus sites, including many previously used brownfield plots, were sold, taking the total number of receipts over the past five years up to 2,206.

Almost a quarter of the sites sold in the past year were bought by private individuals or small businesses.

The top ten house builders in the UK bought a further four per cent of the sites while housing associations purchased two per cent, helping to push forward the government's commitment to bring forward the new housing the country needs.

For further details access the [Annual Land and Property Disposals Transparency Report](#).

Doing more with less – report on funding for disaster relief

News story

GAD's new report for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies looks at how disaster risk financing can meet as many humanitarian needs as possible.



The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) has assessed the ways that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) can make the greatest use of available funds. The report has been published by the Centre for Disaster Protection.

GAD's involvement

'Financing the forecast-based early action protocols' has been written by the Deputy Government Actuary Colin Wilson, and GAD actuary Georgina Bedenham.

In it, they consider ways that the IFRC can manage the risks and examine the funding options available to the IFRC.

Planning and responding

The IFRC has developed early action mechanisms through forecast-based financing.

These response plans, or early action protocols, set out just when the IFRC should respond to a disaster, what it should do and what level of funding is available.

Maximise impact

Report co-author Colin Wilson said: "There are several steps that disaster relief organisations should consider, especially as not all disasters will occur at the same time.

“They should have resources ready should a disaster materialise, make sure the funds are used effectively in order to maximise humanitarian impact, and plan how to address any potential funding shortfalls.”

The report is available to view at [the website of the Centre for Disaster Protection](#).

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Media Freedom Coalition statement concerning media freedom in Belarus

The Media Freedom Coalition expresses its deep concern about continued attacks on media freedom and the targeting of independent journalists in Belarus. Media freedom is an important part of democratic societies and essential to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Since the contested presidential election was held on August 9, authorities in Belarus have restricted access to information and have led a brutal and sustained campaign to persecute and harass independent journalists and those from foreign media organizations and prevent them from performing the vital role of objectively reporting on events and holding authorities to account. Access to unfettered information is vital for citizens during protest. Independent journalists play a key role in informing citizens on the causes of unrest and state responses.

Some 400 journalists and media workers in Belarus have faced various forms of repression in the course of the election and its aftermath. On January 12, 2021, media consultant Andrei Aliaksandrau was arrested for allegedly providing financial support to protestors. On December 22, members of the Press Club Belarus were arrested and charged on tax evasion.

On January 19, the Belarusian courts confirmed their rule of December 3 which rescinded the official media status of independent news website Tut.by, thereby stripping its journalists of the official protection they have the right to expect when doing their job.

Tut.by journalist Katsiaryna Barysevich remains in custody under criminal charges of the alleged disclosure of medical secrets of the late Raman Bandarenka, who died after reportedly being beaten by security forces. On November 15, independent journalist Yekaterina Bakhvalova was arrested and had criminal charges brought against her after filming police officers firing stun grenades during a memorial for Raman Bandarenka. Authorities detained another 23 journalists who were covering this event.

It is deeply troubling that RFE/RL journalist Ihar Losik felt the need to go on hunger strike in order to bring attention to his unjust imprisonment. We are relieved Mr. Losik has halted his hunger strike but remain concerned about his ongoing detention. Sadly, this is only one example of the impact of the authorities' blatant contempt for media freedom.

These are not isolated incidents but tragic examples of the authorities' wider campaign to restrict the fundamental freedoms of opinion and expression, by violently suppressing peaceful political protests by opposition supporters and demonstrators. These actions have also been strongly condemned by UN human rights experts and the likeminded international community.

We reaffirm our unequivocal condemnation of the targeting, harassment and detention of journalists and media workers. We call on Belarus to protect media freedom, desist from shutting down Internet access, and respect international human rights law. We strongly urge Belarus to implement OSCE Moscow Mechanism report recommendations on freedom of expression and the media. Political prisoners must be immediately released.

We call on Belarus to release journalists and other media workers who have been arbitrarily detained and hold accountable those responsible for attacks on journalists and media workers.

Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.