

Transport update: proposed construction on the A303

I have been asked by my Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State, to make this Written Ministerial Statement. This statement concerns the application made under the Planning Act 2008 for the proposed construction by Highways England of a continuous dual carriageway on the A303 linking the Podimore Roundabout and the Sparkford Bypass.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make his decision within 3 months of receipt of the Examining Authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a Statement to the House of Parliament announcing the new deadline. The Secretary of State received the Examining Authority's report on the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Development Consent Order application on 12 September 2019 and the deadline for a decision was previously extended from 12 December 2019 until 17 July 2020 to allow for further work to be carried out.

The deadline for the decision is to be further extended to 20 November 2020 (an extension of 4 months) to enable further information to be provided by the applicant and interested parties on outstanding concerns raised by the Examining Authority and consideration of that provided information before determination of the application by the Secretary of State.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to give development consent.

Hong Kong and China: Foreign Secretary's statement in Parliament, 20 July 2020

Thank you Mr Speaker. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement updating the House on the latest developments with respect to China and in particular Hong Kong.

As I told the House on the 1st of July, the UK wants a positive relationship with China. China has undergone an extraordinary transformation in recent decades. Grounded in one of the world's ancient cultures, not only is China the world's second largest economy, it has a huge base in tech and science.

The UK government recognises China's remarkable success in raising millions

of its own people out of poverty. China is also the world's biggest investor in renewable technology, so it will be an essential global partner when it comes to tackling global climate change, and the Chinese people travel, study and work all over the world, making an extraordinary contribution.

So, Mr Speaker, let me be really clear about this. We want to work with China. There is enormous scope for positive, constructive, engagement. There are wide-ranging opportunities, from increasing trade, to cooperation in tackling climate change as I've said, in particular with a view to the COP 26 summit next year which the UK will of course be hosting.

But, as we strive for that positive relationship, we are also clear-sighted about the challenges that lie ahead. We will always protect our vital interests, including sensitive infrastructure, and we won't accept any investment that compromises our domestic or national security.

Mr Speaker, we will be clear where we disagree, and I have been clear about our grave concerns regarding the gross human rights abuses being perpetrated against the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

And Mr Speaker it is precisely because we recognise China's role in the world, as a fellow member of the G20 and a fellow permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, that we expect China to live up to the international obligations, and the international responsibilities that come with that stature. That is the positive, constructive, the mature, the reciprocal relationship that we seek with China: striving for good cooperation, honest and clear where we disagree.

And, Mr Speaker, we have been clear regarding the new National Security Law which China has imposed on the people of Hong Kong. A clear and serious violation of the UK-China Joint Declaration, and with it a violation of China's freely assumed international obligations.

On the 1st July, I [announced that we are developing a bespoke immigration route for British Nationals \(Overseas\) and their dependants](#), giving them a path to citizenship in the UK. And I can update the House that the Home Secretary will set out further details on the plans for a new bespoke immigration route for BN(0)s and their dependants before recess. This bespoke route will be ready by early 2021. In the meantime, the Home Secretary has already given Border Force Officers the ability to grant leave to BN(0)s and their accompanying dependants at the UK border.

Mr Speaker, beyond our offer to BN(0)s, today we are taking 2 further measures, which are a necessary and proportionate response to this new national security legislation, which we have now had the opportunity to assess very carefully.

First, given the role China has now assumed for the internal security of Hong Kong, and the authority it is exerting over law enforcement, the UK will extend to Hong Kong the arms embargo that we have applied to mainland China since 1989. To be clear the extension of this embargo means there will be no exports from the UK to Hong Kong, of potentially lethal weapons, their

components or ammunition. It will also mean a ban on the export of any equipment not already banned, which might be used for internal repression, such as shackles, intercept equipment, firearms and smoke grenades.

Mr Speaker, the second measure relates to the fact that the imposition of the National Security Law has significantly changed key assumptions underpinning our extradition treaty arrangements with Hong Kong. And I have to say that I am particularly concerned about Articles 55 to 59 of the law, which gives mainland Chinese authorities the ability to assume jurisdiction over certain cases and try those cases in mainland Chinese courts.

Mr Speaker, the National Security Law does not provide legal or judicial safeguards in such cases, and I am also concerned about the potential reach of the extra-territorial provisions. So I have consulted with the Home Secretary, the Justice Secretary and the Attorney General, and the government has decided to suspend the extradition treaty immediately and indefinitely. And I should also tell the House that we would not consider re-activating those arrangements, unless, and until clear and robust safeguards which are able to prevent extradition from the UK being misused under the national security legislation.

Mr Speaker, there remains considerable uncertainty about the way in which the new national security law will be enforced. I will just say this, The United Kingdom is watching. And the whole world is watching.

And in the last few weeks, I have been engaged with many of our international partners, in a concerted dialogue about how we should best respond to events in Hong Kong.

On the 8th July, I spoke with our Five Eyes Foreign Minister partners. We agreed on the seriousness of China's actions and the importance of pressing Beijing to meet its international obligations. I welcome the fact that Australia, Canada and the US have taken a range of measures with respect to Hong Kong, including variously export controls and extradition, as we have taken today.

I also discussed the situation with our European partners including Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and the UK government also welcomes the EU announcement on the 13th July which sets out further proposed measures in response to the national security legislation.

A number of our international partners are also considering what offers they may be willing to make to the people of Hong Kong, following the UK offer in relation to BN(O)s.

And so I can reassure the House, that we will continue to take a leading role in engaging and coordinating our actions with our international partners, as befits our historic commitment to the people of Hong Kong.

Mr Speaker, as I said at the outset, we want a positive relationship with China. There's a huge amount to be gained for both countries, there are many areas, where we can work productively, constructively to mutual benefit

together.

For our part, the UK will work hard and in good faith towards that goal. But we will protect our vital interests, we will stand up for our values, and we will hold China to its international obligations.

The specific measures I have announced today are a reasonable and proportionate response to China's failure to live up to those international obligations with respect to Hong Kong. And I commend this statement to the House.

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[Local government ethical standards: letter to Secretary of State](#)

The Committee on Standards in Public Life has written to Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to ask when we might receive a formal response from the government to the Committee's 2019 local government report.

First virtual citizenship ceremony welcomed by Home Office minister

Local authorities will now be able to conduct citizenship ceremonies for individuals and households virtually.

As a result of coronavirus restrictions, group citizenship ceremonies have been suspended. However, citizenship ceremonies will now be allowed to take place via video conferencing. The move will allow applicants to complete their unique citizenship journey and become British citizens.

The first virtual citizenship ceremony has been led by Southwark Council, London, who will begin offering the option from today.

To mark the momentous occasion Home Office Minister, Kevin Foster, attended the UK's first virtual citizenship ceremony. He said:

This ceremony is a moment in history as it is the first to be undertaken virtually. It is good to see how the process has been adapted by local Councils to allow ceremonies to still take place during these difficult times.

Citizenship ceremonies are important as they recognise the commitment the new citizen has made to the UK, in establishing their home here, contributing to the economy, and having learned about life in the United Kingdom, its culture, laws and history.

Those aged 18 or over who have successfully applied to become a British citizen must attend a citizenship ceremony. During the ceremony, individuals make an oath or pledge; the event is administered in the local authority by a registrar.

Leader of Southwark Council, Councillor Peter John OBE, said:

Southwark Council's registration service helps about 3,000 people become British citizens every year. Our cultural diversity is one of the many great things about Southwark, and citizenship ceremonies help us to encourage new citizens to play an active part in the community.

The current epidemic means that in Southwark, like across the country, we're working hard to find new and innovative ways to deliver services I'm delighted that we can now offer virtual citizenship ceremonies too.

These measures are expected to be temporary. It is anticipated that local

authorities will resume providing group ceremonies in official premises once it is safe to do so and subject to national or local social distancing guidance.

Departments have worked together closely to deliver an efficient solution to the current restrictions. Due to coronavirus, the period over time to book a citizenship ceremony after receiving an invitation from the Home Office has been extended from 3 months to 6 months, to allow for greater flexibility.

[More information on the citizenship process can be found on GOV.UK.](#)