

# Alok Sharma heralds green cities of the future on Kenya visit

- International Development Secretary pledges new UK aid to help build green cities across Africa with quality infrastructure.
- Alok Sharma announces new UK Centre for Cities and Infrastructure which will help African governments plan, build and run environmentally friendly cities.
- Visit to Kenya comes ahead of the UK-Africa Investment Summit in London on January 20.

The International Development Secretary today (Tuesday 14 January) pledged new UK aid support to build the African cities of the future, so the continent can continue to thrive and reach its economic potential.

Alok Sharma, on a visit to Kenya, announced he would set up a UK Centre for Cities and Infrastructure, which will turbo-charge investment in fast growing cities across the developing world.

The Centre will provide British expertise to African governments and city authorities to improve the way cities are planned, built and run, including making them more environmentally-friendly. It will focus on improvements to infrastructure, including water and energy networks.

During his trip, Mr Sharma also announced an expansion of the Department for International Development's (DFID's) Cities and Infrastructure for Growth programme to Ghana, Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

The programme helps UK businesses invest in quality, resilient infrastructure, boosts access to reliable and affordable power and creates construction jobs.

International Development Secretary, Alok Sharma said during his trip to Kenya:

Our new UK aid support, announced ahead of the UK-Africa Investment Summit, will contribute to creating the African cities of the future, using British expertise to provide quality, green infrastructure across the continent.

Infrastructure is the backbone of economic growth. It helps the poorest people access basic services such as clean water and electricity, creates jobs and boosts business.

I've seen this first hand as I've travelled across Kenya and am proud to see British companies thriving here. This will benefit people and businesses across Africa, but also back at home in the UK, creating a successful future for all of us.

Mr Sharma's trip came ahead of the [UK-Africa Investment Summit](#) next Monday (20 January), which will create new lasting partnerships to deliver more investment, jobs and growth, benefitting both Africa and the UK.

African cities produce more than half of the continent's income, but too many suffer from poor connectivity and congestion which continues to hinder growth.

The continent's urban population is 472 million and set to double over the next 25 years. This growth provides an opportunity for African cities to prosper if the right infrastructure and jobs are available with UK support.

On Sunday, Mr Sharma visited Kisumu, in western Kenya, where British businesses such as drinks company Diageo and solar power provider Azuri Technologies operate.

Diageo makes beer in its modern, environmentally-friendly brewery in the city, using sorghum plants from nearby farms. This in turn boosts incomes of Kenyan farmers and helps them provide for their families.

Azuri, whose UK base is in Cambridge, provides pay-as-you go solar energy systems to off-grid homes across Africa, including in the Kisumu area. This is helping families to store food in fridges and providing light for children to do their homework.

Yesterday, The International Development Secretary opened the Securities Exchange in Nairobi. He was there for the listing of East Africa's first green bond, which DFID supported Acorn Housing to develop, by providing British expertise.

Later, Mr Sharma visited a climate-friendly student housing complex in Nairobi, which the bond is helping Acorn to build.

Yesterday evening, he met female entrepreneurs and tech start-ups in the Kenya capital, which are attracting international interest and investment.

At the event it was announced new UK company Circle Gas is investing £17m to scale up clean cooking technology, which DFID helped to develop.

## **Notes to editors:**

- For details on the [UK-Africa Investment summit click here](#)
- The new UK Centre for Cities and Infrastructure is backed by £48 million of UK funding. Of this total funding £30 million will go to support projects in countries across Africa.
- The Cities and Infrastructure for Growth programme in Africa is to receive an extra £15million of UK aid funding for its expansion. DFID has previously announced Africa funding through the programme in Uganda, Zambia and Ethiopia. The programme also works in Asia.
- Circle Gas raised money from private investors including mobile phone company Safaricom to produce clean cooking stoves for sale across East Africa. These are cheaper than charcoal stoves and are better for the environment and customers' health. DFID provided a total of £1.2 million

of funding to support the initial development of the technology.

- DFID is already supporting emerging urban areas in Kenya, helping them draw up economic plans and improve their ability to attract investment, through the Sustainable Urban Economic Development Programme.

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## Civil Service Retirement Fellowship appointment



The Civil Service Retirement Fellowship has announced that Madeleine Alessandri CMG has been appointed as the organisation's new National Honorary Chair with effect from the beginning of this year.

Madeleine is currently the Prime Minister's Adviser on National Resilience and Security and UK Deputy National Security Adviser. She has been in government service since 1988 working in a number of overseas and UK postings with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. She has recently been appointed the new Permanent Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office and will take up the post in February.

She will be supporting the launch of the CSRF's new communications & marketing plan that will be focused on raising the profile of the charity and highlighting the important services they provide to former civil servants and their dependents.

Madeleine said:

I'm delighted to be joining the CSRF as its new Chair and I look forward to getting involved over the coming months.

Working with the Chief Executive and his outstanding team, we have an exciting year ahead. We will be boosting our profile across government and beyond to attract new donors and volunteers which will enable us to provide an even better service to our beneficiaries.

The CSRF was founded over 50 years ago as a charity to support former civil servants and their dependents. Its current services include a local community group network, national befriending schemes and the provision of information and advice. The charity receives no government funding and relies on fundraising activities and donations to support its work. It will be celebrating its 55th anniversary this year with events and activities around the country.

Further information is available on the [Civil Service Retirement Fellowship website](#).

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## [Triggering the JCPoA Dispute Resolution Mechanism: Foreign Secretary's Commons statement](#)

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Iran nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPoA].

Mr Speaker, I addressed the House yesterday on the [wider concerns in relation to Iran's conduct in the region](#).

The strategic aim for the UK, and our international partners, remains as it has always been: to de-escalate tensions, to hold Iran to account for its nefarious activities, and to keep the diplomatic door open for the regime to negotiate a peaceful way forwards.

Iran's destabilising activity should serve as a reminder to us all of the danger to the region, and to the world, if Iran were ever to acquire a nuclear weapon. We cannot let that happen.

With that in mind, today, the E3, consisting of the United Kingdom, France and Germany, have [jointly taken action to hold Iran to account for its systematic non-compliance with the JCPoA](#).

As the European parties to the deal, we have written to the EU High Representative, Josep Borrell, in his capacity as Coordinator of the JCPoA. We have formally triggered the Dispute Resolution Mechanism, thereby referring Iran to the Joint Commission.

Mr Speaker, let me set out the pattern of non-compliance by the regime that left us with no credible alternative. Since last May, Iran has step-by-step reduced its compliance with critical elements of the JCPoA, leaving it a

shell of an agreement.

- on 1 July 2019, the IAEA reported that Iran had exceeded key limits on low enriched uranium stockpile limits
- on 8 July IAEA reported Iran had exceeded its 3.67% enriched uranium production limit
- on 5 November, the IAEA confirmed that Iran had crossed its advanced centrifuge research and development limits
- and then on 7 November 2019, the IAEA confirmed that Iran had also restarted enrichment activities at the Fordow facility, a clear violation of JCPoA restrictions
- on 18 November, the IAEA reported that Iran had exceeded its heavy water limits
- and on 5 January of this year, Iran announced that it would no longer adhere to JCPoA limits on centrifuge numbers

Each if these actions were individually serious. Together, they now raise acute concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Iran's breakout time, the time it would need to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon, is now falling, a matter of international cause of concern.

Time and time again, we have expressed our serious concerns to Iran, and urged it to come back into compliance. Time and time again, in its statements and, more importantly, through its actions, it has refused, undermining the very integrity of the deal and flouting its international commitments.

Iran's announcement on 5 January made clear that it was now effectively refusing to comply with any of the outstanding substantive restrictions the JCPoA had placed on its nuclear program.

Just to be clear, on that date, the Iranian government stated, I quote, that its "nuclear program no longer faces any operational restrictions, including enrichment capacity, percentage of enrichment, amount of enriched material, and research and development."

So, with regret, the E3 was left with no choice, but to refer Iran to the JCPoA's Dispute Resolution Mechanism. The DRM is the procedure set out in the deal to resolve disputes between the parties to the agreement.

Alongside our partners, we will use this to press Iran to come back into full

compliance with its commitments, and honour an agreement that is in all our interests.

The European External Action Service will now coordinate and convene the DRM process. As a first step, it will call a meeting of the Joint Commission, bringing together all parties to the JCPoA within 15 days. This process has been explicitly designed to allow participants flexibility and full control at each and every stage.

So let me be clear to the House.

We are triggering the DRM, because Iran has undermined the objective and purpose of the JCPoA, but we do so with a view to bringing Iran back into full compliance. We are triggering the DRM to reinforce the diplomatic track, not to abandon it.

For our part, as the United Kingdom, we were disappointed that the US withdrew from the JCPoA in May 2018.

And we have worked tirelessly with our international partners to preserve the agreement. We have upheld our commitments, lifting economic and financial sanctions on sectors such as banking, oil, shipping and metals. We lifted an asset freeze and travel bans on listed entities and individuals. We have sought to support a legitimate trade relationship with Iran.

The UK, France and Germany will remain committed to the deal and we will approach the DRM in good faith, striving to resolve the dispute and bring Iran back into full compliance with its JCPoA obligations.

And as I made clear to the House yesterday, the government in Iran has a choice. The regime can take the steps to de-escalate tensions and adhere to the basic rules of international law. Or sink deeper and deeper into political and economic isolation.

So too, Iran's response to the DRM will be a crucial test of its intentions and goodwill.

We urge Iran to work with us to save the deal. We urge Iran to see this as an opportunity to reassure the world that its nuclear intentions are exclusively peaceful. We urge the Iranian government to choose an alternative path, and engage in diplomacy and negotiation to resolve the full range of its activities that flout international law and de-stabilise the region.

And I commend this statement to the House.

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# Council Tax information letter: 14 January 2020

This letter sets out the impact on the administration of Council Tax of 2 pieces of legislation which have recently been laid before Parliament. These are the Council Tax (Demand Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 and the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

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## Arts Minister launches call to save a Medieval guide for hermits

- Written in Middle English, the work is a guide for hermits, anchorites and religious recluses
- Arts Minister Helen Whately leads call to save the “unique record”

Arts Minister Helen Whately has placed an export bar on a 15th century Middle English decorated manuscript designed to act as a guide for those entering the life of a religious hermit.

‘The Myrowr of Recluses’ is believed to have been written in the early 1400s in London by an unknown scribe and is a translation of the Latin ‘Speculum inclusorum’. It is designed to be a guide for anchorites or hermits who were religious recluses that retreated from society in order to dedicate their lives to prayer and contemplation.

It is estimated that there were around 200 anchorites or hermits in England in the 13th century with more women entering the life than men, however there is little evidence as to how many were living at the time the manuscript was written.

The work details the reasons – both virtuous and in some cases misguided – that people seek to become an anchorite, the activities of an anchorite’s life – principally prayer, meditation and reading – and what can be expected in this world and the next for those who observed the vocation faithfully.

The only other known version of the ‘The Myrowr of Recluses’ is an incomplete manuscript held by the British Library which dates from the mid-15th century. The discovery of the manuscript at risk of export has revealed previously unknown sections of the text and is of huge significance for the study of the lives of medieval women and anchorites.

## **Arts Minister Helen Whately said:**

This beautiful decorated manuscript is a precious record of the life of hermits in 15th century England and it would be a sad loss if it was sold abroad.

I hope that a buyer can be found to save this fascinating piece of history for future generations to study and learn from.

The Minister's decision follows the advice of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA). The committee noted that the manuscript was a fascinating example, rich in potential for study and future research. They also noted that the manuscript's rich provenance shed light on the history of the production of and later collection of medieval works.

## **Committee Member Leslie Webster said:**

Unknown to scholarship until recently, this handsomely decorated copy of a guide to the austere life of an anchorite offers a rich new avenue of exploration into the nature of women's religious education in the early fifteenth century, and how such texts were circulated. Almost certainly written for female anchorites, the text seems to be linked to the Benedictine nuns at Barking Abbey, a foundation dating back to Anglo-Saxon times, and in the fifteenth century, renowned as a house of educated women, inspired by its Abbess, Sybil de Felton.

Amongst other unique content, this particular manuscript also gives a precise date for the beginning of the text's composition: 'this Wednysday bi the morrow, the even of the blissed virgyne seynt Alburgh, the secunde yeere of the worthy christen prince oure souerayn liege lord the kyng Henry the Fiftis' – or Wednesday, 10 October 1414. Such contemporary detail makes the manuscript a vivid witness to the period, as well as of great importance to our understanding of later medieval thought and society. It is a fascinating treasure that deserves to be saved.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds of the manuscript's outstanding significance for the study of collecting history, the medieval book trade and the history of anchoritic life in England.

The decision on the export licence application for the manuscript will be deferred until 13 April 2020. This may be extended until 13 August 2020 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £168,750 .



## ENDS

### Notes to editors

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the manuscript should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200. □
2. Details of the manuscript are as follows: The Myrowr of Recluses is a manuscript on paper, a Middle English guide to the life of an anchorite. It was produced in England, perhaps in London, in the first half of the 15th century. It contains 66 original leaves, and measures 200 x 140mm. It is generally in good condition. The binding dates from the 19th century. □
3. Provenance: Roger Saddlar and Robert Leche (16th century); John Wylde (17th or 18th century); William Ford (1771-1832), Manchester bookseller; Joseph Brooks Yates (1780-1855), Liverpool merchant and antiquary; his grandson, the collector Henry Yates Thompson (1838-1928); his nephew, Allan Heywood Bright (1862-1941) of Barton Court, Colwall, Herefordshire. The manuscript remained in the family of Allan Heywood Bright from his death in 1941. Sold in his descendants sale, Christies, 16 July 2014, lot 12, to the present owner. □
4. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by The Arts Council, which advises the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria. □
5. The Arts Council champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk) □