

# [A decade of flood forecasting: saving lives](#)

This has led to an evolution in the UK's ability to forecast, mitigate against and respond to flood events. The Flood Forecasting Centre ([FFC](#)) was set up in 2009 bringing together [Met Office](#) meteorologists and [Environment Agency](#) hydrologists to provide crucial, timely warnings to emergency responders helping them make the critical decisions that save livelihoods and keep people safe.

Floods Minister Rebecca Pow said: "It has been fascinating to see first-hand the incredible work taking place at the Flood Forecasting Centre as we celebrate its 10-year anniversary. This week alone, the FFC's forecasts have helped colleagues at the Environment Agency to issue well over 200 flood alerts and warnings to help keep homes, businesses and communities safe.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how the FFC develops an even deeper understanding of how we predict and prepare for weather events over the coming years. This work builds on the government's £2.6 billion investment in new flood schemes to better protect 300,000 homes by 2021."

The FFC was set up in 2009, following recommendations made in the Pitt Review, to better understand how rainfall impacts river catchments and flash flooding. Over the 10 years since its inception it has helped reduce the impact of a number of extreme weather events, including:

[Wainfleet](#), June 2019 – parts of Lincolnshire saw around 2.5 times the monthly average rainfall between 10-12 June. The Met Office issued severe weather warnings for rain several days in advance enabling the Flood Forecasting Centre to provide timely, key information to the Environment Agency incident room in Lincoln which was then able to issue a severe flood warning to local residents. This led to the successful evacuation of around 600 homes – meaning nobody was harmed.

[Winter storms of 2013/14](#), From mid-December to early January, the UK experienced a spell of extreme weather as a succession of major winter storms brought widespread impacts to the UK. Initially most of the weather impacts related to the strong winds, however, as rainfall totals accumulated the focus of concern turned to flooding, including large river catchments such as the Severn and Thames. FFC guidance enabled emergency responders and local communities to make strategic decisions, such as moving huge water pumps onto the Somerset Levels, which mitigated impacts and protected lives and property.

Met Office Chief Executive Professor Penny Endersby said; "Climate projections ([UKCP18](#)) suggest that whilst the UK may begin to experience drier summers overall, summer storms are likely to be more intense, and we are likely to see warmer but wetter winters in future, both of which will have a crucial bearing on the FFC's operations. The risk and impacts of flooding are

likely to increase over the coming years, so we will need to continue to adapt our services. As we look to the future it is clear that through collaboration and cooperation, together we can ensure that the UK can continue stay safe and thrive.”

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, said: “It’s great to be back in Exeter to celebrate 10 highly successful years of this essential life-saving multi-agency service. The FFC is part of the heroic unseen efforts that go on 24/7 to help protect people and properties against the risk of flooding.

“Our flood defences reduce the risk of flooding, and our flood warnings help keep communities safe when it threatens. But we can never entirely eliminate the risk of flooding. Checking your flood risk on gov.uk is a crucial step towards protecting yourself, your loved ones and your home.”

Forecasting skills are constantly evolving and developing thanks to world leading, cutting-edge science and technology and the collaboration between the Met Office and the Environment Agency. With higher maximum daily temperatures and more intense rainfall affecting the UK the impacts of flooding are likely to be greater in coming decades. The ability to accurately forecast flood events will therefore become ever more important.

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## [Government provides more funds for local authority air quality action](#)

The government has announced the latest round of funding to help local authorities improve air quality across England.

Since it was established, the [Air Quality Grant](#) scheme has awarded more than £61 million to a variety of projects, benefitting schools, businesses and residents, reducing the impact on people’s health and creating cleaner and healthier environments.

Local authorities are encouraged to bid for a portion of at least £2 million of central government support for a wide range of projects to improve the air we breathe.

Applicants in previous years have been awarded funding to install electric vehicle charging points, improve cycling infrastructure and develop local online air quality resources.

These projects have contributed to the significant improvement in air quality in the UK in recent decades. Between 2010 and 2017, we have achieved reductions in primary emissions of harmful fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen oxides by 10% and 29% respectively, and levels of nitrogen

dioxide at the roadside are now at their lowest levels since records began.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

We know the impact air pollution has on public health, which is why we are continuing to provide funding to local authorities to help them to take action to improve air quality for the benefit of schools, businesses and residents. This is part of the much wider strategy to tackle air quality.

Local authorities are in the best position to address the issues they face around their roads, and we are looking forward to receiving ideas for innovative schemes to reduce emissions and encourage cleaner, more active transport.

Minister for the Future of Transport George Freeman said:

We know we need to step up the pace and clean up our air for everyone – from children on their way to school, to commuters travelling to work, and communities around the country.

This vital funding will help councils to take forward exciting new technologies, improving air quality and making our communities cleaner, more vibrant places to live.

Applications for the grant for 2019-20 are open from 4 October to 7 November 2019.

The Air Quality Grant forms part of the wider UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations, which includes a £3.5 billion investment into air quality and cleaner transport. The plan is supporting the uptake of low emissions vehicles, getting more people to cycle and walk, and encouraging cleaner public transport.

As a result of this plan, and alongside the Air Quality Grant, the government is working with 61 local authorities – and providing £495 million in funding – to reduce nitrogen dioxide concentrations through local plans that are effective, fair, good value, and will deliver required improvements in the shortest time possible.

In addition to this plan, last year we also launched the Clean Air Strategy, the most ambitious air quality strategy in a generation which aims to halve the harm to human health from air pollution by 2030, and has been praised by the World Health Organisation as “an example for the rest of the world to follow”.

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# UK and Vietnam commit to further strengthen trade ties

The UK and Vietnam have today (Friday 4 October) committed to further strengthening trade and investment ties.

The 11th meeting of the UK-Vietnam Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETCO) was held in Ha Long Bay today. Discussions focused on a range of issues including bilateral trade and investment ties, cooperation in education, healthcare, energy, agriculture and financial services.

Trade Policy Minister Conor Burns and Vice Minister of Industry and Trade Hoang Quoc Vuong agreed to further collaboration on issues currently preventing UK businesses trading in Vietnam. This includes:

Current caps on foreign ownership of companies in Vietnam, which limits opportunities and means that in some sectors only 49% of a company can be owned by a foreign business.

- Lack of regulatory framework in the Vietnamese Fintech sector, which means licenses are granted at the discretion of the authorities and UK businesses find it difficult to enter the market.
- Sections of Vietnam's renewable energy sector not being aligned with internationally recognised standards, increasing costs for UK business who want to invest in the sector.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU on 31 October, markets like Vietnam will provide significant opportunities for both UK businesses and households.

Total trade between the UK and Vietnam was worth over £6 billion last year alone.

Vietnam is one of the world's fastest growing economies and is predicted to be become one of the top 20 global economies by 2050, with GDP increasing by over 7% in 2018.

## **Trade Policy Minister, Conor Burns said:**

Vietnam is one of the most dynamic markets and a key trading partner for the UK going forward, with UK exports to the nation worth over £800 million last year.

As we approach 31 October, our aim is simple – to promote British businesses overseas and strengthen our trading ties globally. Vietnam is one of the world's fastest growing markets and our trade talks are making big strides in making it easier for our two countries to do business.

The first official UK-Vietnam JETCO took place in 2007. To date, it has:

- Given UK pharmaceutical companies the ability to export vaccines to Vietnam that have been in the UK market for over 5 years without the need for local clinical trials, allowing life-saving drugs to enter the market.
- Committed to further collaboration on promoting English language skills and mutual recognition between UK and Vietnamese universities, helping to support an estimated 12,000 Vietnamese students studying in the UK.

During his visit, Minister Burns visited Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi where he met with leading British businesses operating in the country.

Mr Burns also attended the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the University of Bedfordshire and its local partner, Hong Bang International University providing 6 new joint degree programmes in Vietnam.

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## [UK and Tunisia sign continuity agreement](#)

The UK government has signed a trade and political continuity agreement with Tunisia in London today.

- Trade between the UK and Tunisia was worth £378 million in 2018.
- The UK has now secured trade with countries accounting for £100 billion.
- The agreement will ensure British businesses and consumers benefit from continued access to the market after we leave the EU.

The British Ambassador to Tunisia Louise De Sousa signed the agreement with the Tunisian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Nabil Ben Khedher.

Welcoming the agreement, UK Minister for the Middle East Dr Andrew Murrison said:

The signing of this agreement demonstrates the UK's commitment to Tunisia, working together to support our shared long-term ambitions for a deeper economic partnership.

Tunisia represents opportunities for UK companies and this agreement gives exporters and consumers the certainty they need to continue trading freely and in confidence as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

The Agreement will ensure British businesses and consumers benefit from continued trade with Tunisia after we leave the European Union. It provides,

among other trade benefits, tariff-free trade of industrial products together with liberalisation of trade in agricultural, agri-food and fisheries products.

This will further help to strengthen the trading relationship between the UK and Tunisia, which was worth £378 million last year, an increase of 3.0% on the previous year.

In addition to growing trade, today's agreement seeks to deepen UK-Tunisian cooperation across foreign policy, economic, social and cultural ties. The Agreement provides a framework for policy dialogue and to strengthen cooperation on important issues like education, trade, environmental and human rights matters; reaffirming Britain's commitment to a close relationship with Tunisia and North Africa.

Minister of State for Trade Conor Burns said:

The UK government is committed to ensuring that businesses are fully prepared for Brexit. Today's signing ensures that UK and Tunisian businesses, exporters and consumers can continue to trade freely after the UK leaves the EU on 31st October.

I am confident that this agreement will usher in a new phase of greater cooperation between our two countries and help pave the way for increased bilateral trade and investment in the future.

## Notes to editors

- This agreement will be subject to the domestic parliamentary procedures in both the UK and Tunisia before it is brought into force.
  - This agreement is designed to take effect when the EU-Tunisia agreement ceases to apply to the UK.
  - The UK has now secured agreements with countries that accounted for £100 billion of trade in 2018.
  - Trade between the UK and Tunisia was worth £378 million in 2018.
  - Statistics sourced from ONS 'UK total trade: all countries, non-seasonally adjusted January to March 2019 release'. Figures relate to 2018.
  - Under the new agreement UK consumers will continue to benefit from lower prices on goods imported from Tunisia, such as textiles and clothing. Consumers in Tunisia will continue to benefit from lower tariffs on products such as machinery and mechanical appliances produced in the UK.
  - The UK-Tunisia Association Agreement replicates the effects of the existing trade and non-trade provisions as far as possible. It will come into effect as soon as the existing EU-Tunisia Association Agreement ceases to apply to the UK.
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# Planning Inspectorate publish an updated Inquiries Review Action Plan following Bridget Rosewell's recent visit

Today, 4 October 2019, the Planning Inspectorate have published an update to the [Inquires Review Action Plan](#) (PDF, 813KB, 45 pages) first published in May. The Action Plan sets out how the recommendations from the Rosewell Review into Planning Inquiries are being implemented. This update follows on from the [visit paid to the Inspectorate by Bridget Rosewell on 19 September](#).

Since the publication of the Inquires Review findings in February 2019, significant progress has been made with over half of the 22 recommendations delivered and all others well under way. Most importantly, all planning appeal inquiries are now following the new inquiries process.

## Progress against the 22 Recommendations

- 1 Improving the submission and validation of appeals
- 2 Reforming the statement of case ✓
- 3 Streamlining the process for deciding the appeal mode to be used ✓
- 4 Issuing a start letter more quickly ✓
- 5 Preparing for the inquiry (start letter to start of inquiry) ✓
- 6 Costs of the Inquiry
- 7 Statements of Common Ground ✓
- 8 Requiring early inspector engagement ✓
- 9 Preparation in approaching the examination of the evidence ✓
- 10 The timely submission of inquiry documents
- 11 Inspectorate to enforce timely submission of docs including with sanctions ✓
- 12 Encouraging early identification of Rule 6 parties ✓
- 13 The conduct of inquiries and the role played by inspectors ✓
- 14 Use of technology
- 15 The role of interested parties during the event ✓
- 16 Allocation of time post inquiry for the inspector to write up the case ✓
- 17 Decisions made directly by the Secretary of State
- 18 Inspector availability and the management of casework ✓
- 19 The number of withdrawn inquiry appeals ✓
- 20 The benefits of a policy feedback loop
- 21 Implementing the proposals and monitoring future performance ✓
- 22 Reforming data collection and performance measurement

Since the start of issuing Decisions in the new 'Rosewell style' in March

2019, decisions from 15 inquiries have been issued using the new process and [timeline](#) all within the expected timeframe of 24-26 weeks; over 90% have been within 24 or less; under 10% within 26 weeks.

The Action Plan is a live document and will be updated again in February 2020 and June 2020.