

Joint Statement between the UK MOD and the Estonian MOD

Joint Statement from the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence and the Republic of Estonia Ministry of Defence.

Government ministers visit spaceport ahead of first UK launch

Science Minister, George Freeman, and Transport Technology Minister, Jesse Norman, joined representatives from the UK Space Agency to meet those behind the mission and saw Virgin Orbit's LauncherOne rocket and its carrier aircraft, Cosmic Girl – which will launch from Spaceport Cornwall – up close.

Ministers also toured the spaceport's new Space Systems Integration Facility, the first of its kind at a spaceport in the UK, where the satellites have been integrated into the rocket ready for launch. Spaceport Cornwall will deliver 150 direct jobs and 240 indirect jobs by 2030.

Science Minister George Freeman said:

The first ever satellite launch from UK soil, here at Spaceport Cornwall, will be a giant leap for our fast-growing commercial satellite and space sector. This is one of our most innovative industries, generating new opportunities in Cornwall and beyond, with high-growth companies such as Space Forge, Surrey Satellites, Astroscale, Inmarsat, Open Cosmos, and the thriving Scottish space cluster.

By establishing the UK as the leading European base to launch small satellites, we can build on our existing strengths in areas such as space manufacturing, in-flight manufacturing, satellite and debris retrieval, and launch licensing insurance and finance, to create jobs across the country, grow the economy and attract international investment.

Transport Technology Minister Jesse Norman said:

We have one of the most advanced space sectors in the world, and the first commercial space launch from the UK will be a landmark moment both for the country and for our transport sector.

The mission, which has been named 'Start Me Up' in tribute to the iconic British band, the Rolling Stones, will be the first orbital launch from the UK, meeting a key ambition of the Government's National Space Strategy, as well as being the first commercial launch from Europe and the first international launch from Virgin Orbit.

Both Cosmic Girl – an adapted Boeing 747 – and LauncherOne arrived separately in Cornwall last month, and the rocket is now in place under the wing of the aircraft.

Ian Annett, Deputy CEO at the UK Space Agency, said:

We are at the dawn of a new era for space launch in the UK and about to achieve the goal of putting satellites into orbit in 2022. This is an immensely proud moment for the UK Space Agency and all those who have worked so hard to make this ambition a reality.

Establishing orbital launch capabilities in the UK is already bringing new growth through investment and jobs into Cornwall and other communities across the UK, inspiring a new generation of space professionals whether in science, engineering, law and other disciplines.

Melissa Thorpe, Head of Spaceport Cornwall, said:

It's been phenomenal to welcome so many supporters of the UK space sector here to Spaceport Cornwall ahead of our first launch.

My team and I loved showing the world how much work and how much international collaboration is going into making this world-first a reality. This marks just the beginning of a global movement with Space For Good at its core.

Dan Hart, CEO Virgin Orbit, said:

We're honoured to be part of this historic mission to open up the UK's first international spaceport in Cornwall. With this mission we break new ground across the commercial space sector and important allied collaboration in space. Our company is here to serve our customers and their ambitions. Virgin Orbit is up and running and working to obtain final approvals to move forward.

The UK Government's [National Space Strategy](#) sets out how the UK will become the first country in Europe to launch satellites into orbit in 2022. Spaceport Cornwall is one of seven spaceport sites being developed across the UK which will help unleash a wave of innovation and create hundreds of new jobs across the country. All UK launches are subject to receiving a licence

from the Civil Aviation Authority.

Councillor Louis Gardner, Cornwall Council portfolio holder for economy, said:

We're delighted that ministers were able to visit Spaceport Cornwall as we gear up for the UK's first ever satellite launch.

This is an incredibly exciting time, not only for the Spaceport and those directly involved in "Start Me Up" but for Cornwall as a whole, and I'd like to pay tribute to all those involved for their hard work and dedication in getting us to this point.

We have a long and storied history of engineering excellence in Cornwall, and the potential benefits that Spaceport Cornwall brings to our economy have never been clearer. From new jobs and new investment to inspiring the next generation of tech pioneers and space professionals, this promises to be yet another red letter day in our shared history.

[Abolish Ofwat and stop the sewage dumping](#)

The sheer quantity of raw sewage being dumped into Britain's rivers and coastal areas is a scandal and a disgrace.

Everyone should be able to enjoy the wonderful natural beauties our country has to offer, with open green spaces and blue rivers. But the Conservatives are neglecting our natural environment and letting water companies get away with pouring millions of tonnes of sewage into our rivers.

In the last two years, across England and Wales, there have been almost a million sewage discharges, lasting more than 7 million hours in total. Meanwhile, the top water company executives took home £51 million in remuneration, including more than £30 million in bonuses.

It's time for the Government to stop ignoring the sewage scandal

Conservative MPs have utterly failed to stand up for their constituents and put a stop to this.

They have ignored the Liberal Democrat calls for a sewage tax and a ban on bonuses for the bosses responsible. They even voted against tougher action on

sewage dumping, and the Government plans to let it continue until 2050.

And Ofwat – the water regulator – has become the powerless accomplice in the Conservatives' environmental crimes.

It has given six of the eleven water companies a passing grade on pollution, even as they continue pouring sewage into our rivers. Ofwat labels three companies "top performers", even though they are responsible for more than 2.6 million hours of sewage dumps in the last two years.

That has to change. **So the Liberal Democrats are calling for Ofwat to be abolished and replaced** with a tough new independent regulator with real powers to protect our beaches and rivers from sewage dumps.

Our new regulator would force water companies to clean up the mess they're making by investing their profits in fixing our sewage system and reducing leaks. It would have the power to hand out unlimited fines and, if necessary, to prosecute companies who fail to meet these legal duties.

It's time for the Government to stop ignoring the sewage scandal and start taking real action to clean up our rivers.

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Author:

[**Inspection Report Published: An inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office's Hong Kong British National \(Overseas\) visa route**](#)

News story

This inspection focused on how the route has been working since its launch, including the ability to rapidly scale up operations and learnings taken from, and into, other immigration routes.



Publishing the report, David Neal said:

I welcome the publication of this report, which looks at the efficiency and effectiveness of the Hong Kong BN(0) route.

The inspection found that the Home Office is performing well overall and has built a flexible, resilient, and engaged workforce. My inspectors identified good working practices and a customer service-focused approach amongst Home Office teams, however greater transparency in terms of published customer service data was required.

Most applicants undergo a fully digital experience and requirements for the route are relatively straightforward. The Home Office has learned lessons from the establishment of the European Union Settlement Scheme, although inspectors found that more could be done to capture best practice from the Hong Kong BN(0) operation for the benefit of future routes.

The use of multiple case working systems presented problems which affected the accuracy and timeliness of data collation and management information, and the Home Office should look to expedite the move to a single system to drive improvements.

I made three recommendations in this report. I am pleased that the Home Office has accepted all my recommendations and that work is already underway to tackle the issues raised

This inspection report was sent to the Home Secretary for publication on 11 July 2022.

Published 8 November 2022

The Conservative Property Penalty

The British people are suffering terribly because of the chaos of this Conservative Government.

People will be paying twice as much to heat their homes this winter as they did last year. Food prices are soaring. The country is in the grip of a cost-of-living crisis.

And now, **thanks to the Conservatives' disastrous mini-budget, we are facing a mortgage crisis too.** Millions of families are already struggling to pay a Conservative Property Penalty of hundreds of pounds on their monthly mortgage payments.

no one should lose their homes simply as a result of the Conservatives' reckless mismanagement of our economy.

Never again can the Conservatives claim to be the party of homeowners.

They are doing nothing to help. Instead, Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt are planning to make things even worse, with more cuts to pensions and benefits, more unfair tax rises, and more cuts to essential public services.

That's not good enough. **The Government must step up to help.**

Liberal Democrats have consistently led the way on action to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. We were the first to call for a windfall tax on the record profits of the oil and gas giants, more than a year ago. And we were the first to call for a freeze on people's energy bills in the summer.

We have also consistently been calling on the Government to support the most vulnerable during this cost-of-living crisis, including by:

- Reinstating the £20-a-week uplift to Universal Credit, and increasing pensions and benefits at least in line with inflation.
- Doubling the Warm Homes Discount and extending it to all those on Universal Credit and Pension Credit, to take £300 a year off the heating bills of around 7.5 million vulnerable and low income households.
- Doubling the Winter Fuel Payment, giving up to £600 a year to 11.3 million elderly pensioners to help with their heating bills.
- An emergency home insulation programme to cut people's energy bills, starting with homes in or at risk of fuel poverty.

And now we say: **no one should lose their homes simply as a result of the Conservatives' reckless mismanagement of our economy.**

That's why the Liberal Democrats are proposing a new Mortgage Protection Fund, paid for by reversing the Conservatives' unfair and unnecessary tax cuts for the big banks.

This Fund would be targeted at those most at risk of repossession – homeowners on the lowest incomes and those seeing the sharpest rises in mortgage rates.

Anyone who sees their mortgage payments rise by more than 10% of their household income would get a grant to cover the cost of that rise for the next year, up to a maximum of £300 a month. Only the payments on someone's main home would qualify, so this would not apply to private landlords or second homes.

And it's not just homeowners who are paying the price for all this Conservative chaos, so **we are also calling for the Government to act urgently to protect renters.**

We are continuing our long-standing campaign for an immediate ban on "no fault" evictions, to stop landlords threatening to evict current tenants just so they can hike their rents. The Conservatives have been promising a ban for years, but failed to deliver. There should also be a moratorium on evictions purely on the grounds of rent arrears, and extended notice periods for landlords, as there was during some of the pandemic.

Liberal Democrats have long been fighting to give renters more security and protect them from unfair rent hikes, including longer tenancies of three years or more, with fair annual rent increases built in, to give renters certainty. That fight is more important now than ever.

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