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*January - March 2024 British Edition*

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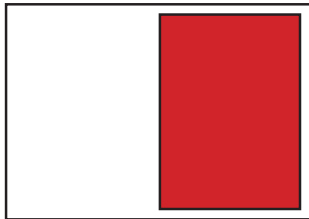
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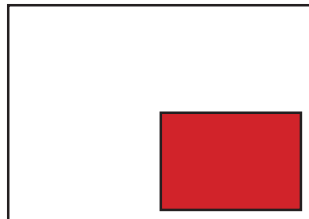
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*A beautiful heron flies over the calm water*



# News Roundup

*Summary of the main news and sports events over the last three months*

By Paul G Bazeley for Government World

## **January News Review**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine continued with Russia seemingly targeting the Ukrainian infrastructure with air strikes. A prisoner exchange between the two countries took place for the first time in around five months, with both sides releasing over 200 people. The prisoner exchange had been mediated by the United Arab Emirates. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also visited the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv to restate Britain's support for Ukraine during the conflict.



North Korean Supreme Leader, Kim Jon Un stated that the reunification of Korea was 'no longer possible' and dissolved



three organisations involved with reunification and inter-Korean tourism. He also asked the Supreme People's Assembly to amend the North Korean constitution to recognise South Korea as a 'primary foe and invariable principal enemy'.

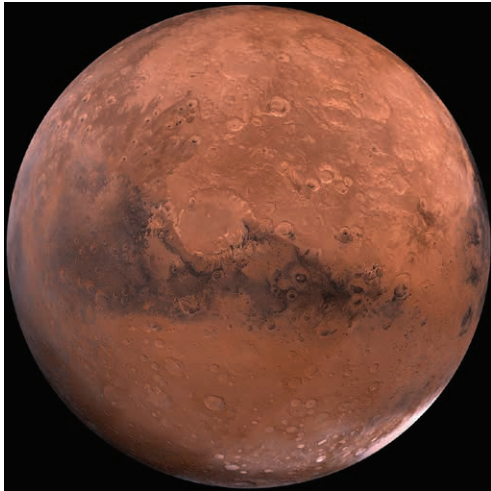
According to the Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant, a Dutch engineer released a malicious computer worm, known as Stuxnet, in an Iranian nuclear complex

in 2007. The engineer was recruited by the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands. The worm is said to have disrupted the Iranian nuclear program for years.



The European Space Agency probe Mars Express found large deposits of dusty ice beneath the equator of Mars. It is the largest deposit of water ice found on the planet.





South Korea banned the breeding and slaughter of dogs for consumption. The controversial practice will be banned from 2027 and is thought to have happened due to changing consumer habits.

Gabriel Attal became the youngest and first openly gay Prime Minister of France after succeeding Elisabeth Borne.



The animated short film *Steamboat Willie* and the German version of the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, along with other works published in 1928, entered the public domain in the United States.



*Oppenheimer*, directed by Christopher Nolan won five awards at the 81st Golden Globe Awards. Meanwhile, the film *Poor Things* won the award for Best Actress - Motion Picture Musical or Comedy and Best Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy. Lily Gladstone became the first indigenous woman to win Best Actress for her performance in the film *Killer of the Flower Moon*.

The former Paralympian Oscar Pistorius was released on parole. The South African had served eight and a half years for the murder of his girlfriend Reeve Steenkamp.

## **January Sports Review**

Premier League football clubs Everton and Nottingham Forest were charged with breaking financial fair play rules. Everton was given a 10-point deduction, which they appealed against, while Forest waited to hear their outcome.



In tennis, Jannick Sinner defeated Daniil Medvedev in five sets to win the men's Australian Open title. It is the Italian's first major singles title and the first time an Italian has won the tournament. On the women's

side of the draw, Aryna Sabalenka beat Zheng Qinwen in two sets to win the title for the second year in a row.



## **February News Review**

It was announced that King Charles III had been diagnosed with cancer following a medical examination. The cancer was thought not to be prostate



cancer, however, it was found during treatment on the Monarch for an enlarged prostate.

In the Israel-Hamas war, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) claimed to have found a Hamas data centre under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency Gaza Strip headquarters. Hamas announced that Israeli hostages had been killed and others injured due to Israeli airstrikes.



A report by the Office for National Statistics stated that the UK economy had shrunk for two consecutive quarters



after consumer spending had slowed down. The report meant the UK entered a technical recession.

The United Kingdom and the United States of America launched airstrikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen to try and relieve tensions in the Red Sea.

The United States announced 'a serious national security threat' after military intelligence indicated that Russia was intending to place nuclear weapons into space. Emergency talks were held between



the US, UK and Canada. While US House Speaker Mike Johnson claimed there was no need for alarm. Russia dismissed the claims saying they were a 'fabrication'.





Michelle O'Neill became the First Minister of Northern Ireland. It marked the first time an Irish nationalist has held the position. Emma Little-Pengelly became the deputy first minister, representing the Democratic Unionist Party as part of the power-sharing deal.

Germany voted to legalise the recreational use of cannabis for adults. It became the third European country to do so after Malta and Luxembourg.



At the Grammy Awards, Miley Cyrus won Record of the Year for her single 'Flowers', it was her first Grammy award. Meanwhile, Taylor Swift won Album of the Year for 'Midnights'. The win meant that Swift has won the award four times, she is the first artist to do so.



The film Oppenheimer won seven awards and 13 nominations at the 77th British Academy Awards. It was the most for a film at the event.

### **February Sports Review**

The Kansas City Chiefs beat the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 in the Super Bowl LVIII to win the title for the second consecutive year.



The Ivory Coast defeated Nigeria 2-1 to win their third Africa Cup of Nations.

Liverpool beat Chelsea 1-0 after extra time at Wembley Stadium to win the 23-24 EFL Cup.



The Red Bull Formula One leader Christian Horner remained in charge after being cleared of wrongdoing in an internal investigation, after

a female coworker accused him of 'inappropriate' behaviour.

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## **March News Review**

US President Joe Biden announced the construction of a temporary pier on the Gaza Strip. The pier was built to facilitate large-scale humanitarian aid efforts in the territory.



Catherine, the Princess of Wales, announced that she had been diagnosed with cancer following recent abdominal surgery and is undergoing chemotherapy.

Hungarian President Tamas Sulyok signed a bill to formally authorise the Foreign Ministry to ratify Sweden's accession to NATO. The news was not

taken well by Russia and its close ally Belarus.



MP Lee Anderson, formerly of the Conservative Party, defected to the Reform UK party, supported by Nigel Farage. Anderson was suspended from the Tory party after claiming that London Mayor Sadiq Khan was 'controlled' by Islamist radicals. The defection makes Anderson the Reform UK party's first Member of Parliament.

The British Government announced a ban on foreign state ownerships of newspapers, after a United Arab Emirates-led consortium made a controversial bid for the Telegraph Media Group. The group most notably publish The Daily Telegraph newspaper.

A scientific expedition to the bathymetric depression, off the coast



of New Zealand known as the Bounty Trough, discovered over 100 new species.

A Royal Air Force Plane carrying UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps and journalists had its GPS signal jammed when flying near Kaliningrad, Russia. Mobile phone signals were also said to be jammed on the flight. The Russian military is believed to have been behind it.



Russian President Vladimir Putin





won his fifth term in office after winning the Russian Presidential election with 87% of the vote.



The Vincent Van Gogh painting Head of an Old Farmers Wife in a White Hat sold at auction for over 4.5million euros.

The Francis Scott Key Bridge in

Baltimore, United States, collapsed after the container ship Dali struck a bridge column, after losing power.



Multiple vehicles fell into the water. At the time of writing four workers on the bridge and two others had died with two people being rescued from the water.

At the 96th Academy Awards, Oppenheimer won Best Picture, while Cillian Murphy won Best Actor for his role in the film and director Christopher Nolan won the Best Director award. The documentary 20 Days in Mariupol won the Best Documentary award; the film focuses on the siege of Mariupol during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

### **March Sports Review**

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund announced a \$2 billion offer to purchase both the ATP and WTA professional tennis tours.

**End**

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# The Shipping Forecast broadcast turns 100

January

From: Maritime and Coastguard Agency

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first broadcast of the Shipping Forecast.

Quintessentially British and symbolic of a nation steeped in maritime tradition, the 100th anniversary of the first broadcast of the Shipping Forecast should be celebrated as a key moment when safety became a priority at sea.

It was exactly one hundred years ago, on 1 January 1924, that the very first clipped, British tones were heard delivering a weather bulletin called Weather Shipping.

In the UK, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is responsible for the provision of maritime safety information (MSI) to ships at sea, which includes the broadcast of warnings and forecasts. The iconic Shipping Forecast is a BBC Radio broadcast produced by the Met Office on

behalf of the MCA. Although the Shipping Forecast officially came into existence in 1924, it was in October 1925 when it was first broadcast via the BBC.

We spoke to the Met Office's archivist Catherine Ross about the significance in 2024 of the Shipping Forecast.

"It's a national institution," Catherine, who has spent the past 11 years trawling the rich archives of the Met Office said.



That has so much more meaning behind it than just a forecast. It's iconic.

It's a history of the last 100 years of what's happened around our shores, from a weather perspective of course but also maritime safety; the two are heavily linked and it is a big part of why the Met Office even exists."

The history of the forecast goes back to 1861, when Vice-Admiral Robert FitzRoy developed a telegraphic messaging system to issue weather warnings to ships, following the loss of the steam clipper Royal Charter. The vessel foundered (sank) in a violent storm off the coast of Anglesey, with the loss of more than 450 lives, prompting FitzRoy's desire to prevent it happening again.

He was the main influence in the early

development of the Met Office, which was then primarily intended to improve safety at sea.

“It has saved thousands, possibly even hundreds of thousands of lives,” Catherine added.

It is impossible to accurately predict how many, but it really has been lifechanging for seafarers.

Its relevance has probably changed from when its sole purpose was to provide information to UK mariners, because of all the technology and internet it can now be heard from anywhere in the world.

It has 100 years of trust behind it now and it has taken on a cultural aspect far beyond the maritime world, which all adds to its iconic status.

Technology will continue to move on, but that distinctive sound it has will remain for as long as people want it.

It’s almost poetic, almost beautiful, in the way that fixed-pattern forecast is read out. I really like the sound of it and know a lot of people do, it is familiar and it’s a voice from home.

In fact, it’s the voice of home.”

# Biggest upgrade to UK farming schemes introduced by the Government since leaving the EU

January

From: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP

The biggest upgrade to the UK’s farming schemes since leaving the European Union has been set out by the Environment Secretary Steve Barclay at the Oxford Farming Conference today (4 January 2024).

The updates include funding uplifts, streamlined application processes, enhanced environmental incentives and support for the roll out of new technology. These will provide further support for British farmers, strengthening supply chains and helping deliver the Government’s commitment to continue to produce at least 60% of the food we eat in the UK.

Under the UK’s agricultural transition, new farming schemes are paying farmers to take actions that boost sustainable food production while delivering positive

outcomes for the environment. The schemes are designed to work for all farm types and sizes, with thousands of farmers across England already taking part, and replace the bureaucratic Common Agricultural Policy which saw 50% of funding go to the largest 10% of landowners.

Speaking at the conference, Steve Barclay reiterated the Government’s support for British farmers and outlined the Agricultural Transition Plan which has been designed using farmers’ feedback and aims to bring more farmers onboard the schemes and facilitate even greater environmental ambition.

The improvements include:

- A 10% increase in the average value of agreements in the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship driven by increased



payment rates, with uplifts automatically applied to existing agreements.

- A streamlined single application process for farmers to apply for the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier.
- Around 50 new actions that farmers can get paid for across all types of

farm businesses, including actions for agroforestry and those driving forward agricultural technology such as robotic mechanical weeding.

- Enhanced payments for 'creation' and 'maintenance' options to improve the long term incentives for farmers to create habitats and ensure they are rewarded for looking after habitats once they have

created them.

- Premium payments for actions with the biggest environmental impact or combinations of actions that deliver benefits at scale, such as £765 per hectare for nesting plots for lapwing, and £1,242 per hectare for connecting river and floodplain habitat.



Environment Secretary Steve Barclay said:

“Farmers do the essential job of keeping Britain fed. That’s why I’ll back British farmers and help support farming businesses.

We have listened to farmers’ feedback and set out the biggest upgrades to our farming schemes since leaving the EU, with more money, more choice and more trust to support domestic food production whilst also protecting the environment.

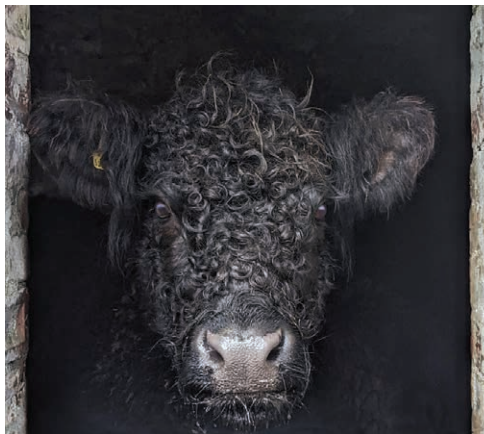
We’re also making it easier for farmers of every farm type and size to enter the schemes, and I encourage everyone to take a look at how you can join the thousands of other farmers and land managers who are already receiving our backing through the schemes.”

Farmers will be able to submit their applications for the 2024 offer from this summer, and the timeline for agreements being offered will be accelerated to help farmers benefit from the changes earlier than in previous years.

The application process will also be simplified in 2024 by enabling farmers to apply for the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship

Mid Tier through a single application.

Farmers and landowners can be paid for taking a range of actions under the government’s farming schemes, such as actions to improve soil health or providing nesting and foraging habitats for farmland wildlife. The Government has listened to feedback and introduced more ‘maintenance’ actions, alongside improving existing actions, to reward farmers who are already protecting the environment, for example through maintaining grasslands, wetlands and scrub. Farmers will also be paid more for existing actions to maintain habitats, with the price of maintaining species rich grassland, for example, rising from £182 to £646 per hectare.



The offer also includes more actions for shorter length agreements of up to three years to make the schemes more accessible for tenant farmers.

Today’s announcement builds on significant improvements to the farming schemes in 2023, with thousands of farmers already taking part. Around 8,000 farmers to date have applied to the Sustainable Farming Incentive 2023 and there has been a 94% increase in Countryside Stewardship agreements since 2020. This adds to the more than 50 Landscape Recovery projects to deliver large scale environmental benefits around the country.

It comes alongside ongoing support for farmer-led innovation and technology, with the Government committing over £168 million in grant funding to farmers in 2023 to drive innovation, support food production, improve animal health and welfare and protect the environment. This includes the Environment Secretary announcing a further £45 million at the Country Land and Business Association conference in November to fund robotic and automatic equipment and invest in research and development.

# Professor Adrian Michael Cruise awarded OBE for services to space

January

From: UK Space Agency

A UK scientist who established the Gravitational Wave Research Group at the University of Birmingham has been recognised in the New Year Honours for services to space, alongside leading figures from UK astronomy.

The New Year Honours recognise the achievements and service of extraordinary people across the UK.

Professor Adrian Michael (Mike) Cruise has played a significant role in making the UK an international leader in space science research. Currently Professor Emeritus at the University of Birmingham, where he established Gravitational Wave research, he made contributions to the first confirmed detection of gravitational waves in 2015.

Dr Paul Bate, CEO of the UK Space Agency, said:

“I would like to congratulate Mike on behalf of everyone at the UK Space Agency for this well-deserved award.

Mike is a distinguished leader in the space science community who has directly contributed to our fundamental understanding of the nature and history of the Universe, through his work on gravitational waves – ripples in space time. In recent years he has also supported the delivery of major UK investments in international space missions such as Ariel and the Rosalind Franklin Mars rover, chaired the UK Space Agency’s Science Programme Advisory Committee, and led the Royal



Astronomical Society as its President.

As an elected member of the European Space Agency’s Voyage 2050 Senior Committee, we will all continue to benefit from Mike’s expertise, as he helps to set the strategic direction for European space science for decades to come.” Gravitational waves are minuscule ripples in space-time thought to be triggered by massive events like the merging of black holes. Einstein predicted the existence of gravitational waves a century ago, and Professor Cruise’s work contributed to their first conclusive detection in 2015, from ground-based observatories.

To understand gravitational waves in more detail, scientists and engineers across the UK and Europe are now working on the development of a space-based gravitational wave observatory known as LISA (laser



Interferometer Space Antenna). The European Space Agency mission will involve 3 separate spacecraft flying in a triangular formation, linked by a laser measurement system.

The UK's leading role in this important mission, set to launch in the mid-2030s, has been supported by the work of Professor Cruise.

Professor Mike Cruise said:

“It is an unexpected honour to receive this award. The fact that several UK space scientists have been rewarded in the New Year's Honours list this year is a tribute to the strength of space science and astronomy in the UK, supported by the UK Space Agency and STFC. The space programme will inspire future generations of young scientists and engineers.”

The UK is home to some of the most talented space scientists and astronomers in the world. Also recognised in the New Year Honours were Dame Maggie Aderin Pocock for services to Science Education and Diversity, Professor Emma Bunce for services to Astronomy and Science Education, and Professor Philip Diamond for services to Global Radio Astronomy. The UK Space Agency congratulates them all.

# Pathway for zero emission vehicle transition by 2035 becomes law

January

From: Department for Transport, Office for Zero Emission Vehicles and Anthony Browne

80% of new cars and 70% of new vans sold in Great Britain will now be zero emission by 2030, increasing to 100% by 2035.

- the zero emission vehicle mandate, the government's pathway towards all new cars and vans being zero emission by 2035, is now law

- new regulations are backed by over £2 billion already invested by government to expand charging infrastructure and incentivise zero emission vehicles

- the mandate provides certainty to support the economy, industry and families, and is the largest carbon saving measure in government's net zero strategy.

The UK now has the most ambitious

regulatory framework for the switch to electric vehicles of any country in the world, thanks to new laws which commenced today (3 January 2024). Following extensive consultation with industry and manufacturers, the mandate provides them with the certainty they have called for to safeguard skilled British jobs.

Technology and Decarbonisation Minister Anthony Browne will visit a new bp pulse hub in London today to mark the occasion, where he will see their ultra-fast EV chargers in action and meet drivers who are benefiting



from the facility.

The zero emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate sets out the percentage of new zero emission cars and vans manufacturers will be required to produce each year up to 2030. 80% of new cars and 70% of new vans sold in Great Britain will now be zero emission by 2030, increasing to 100% by 2035.

This follows the pragmatic decision taken by the Prime Minister to delay the ban on new diesel and petrol cars from 2030 to 2035, putting the UK in line with other major global economies such as France, Germany, Sweden and Canada. This allows time for consumers to make the choice to switch to electric, and to level up our charging infrastructure.

The UK has overdelivered on every carbon budget to date, having cut

greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 50% since 1990. Recent Climate Change Committee analysis shows our more pragmatic approach has no material difference on our progress to cutting emissions, and households will now have more time to make the transition, saving some thousands of pounds at a time when the cost of living is high.

Technology and Decarbonisation Minister Anthony Browne said:

“Alongside us having spent more than £2 billion in the transition to electric vehicles, our zero emission vehicle mandate will further boost the economy and support manufacturers to safeguard skilled British jobs in the automotive industry.

We are providing investment certainty for the charging sector to expand our charging network which has already

grown by 44% since this time last year. This will support the constantly growing number of EVs in the UK, which currently account for over 16% of the new UK car market.”

In a boost for the economy, the new laws will help households make the switch to electric, supporting growth of EV sales in the second-hand market and incentivising charging to roll out more widely across the country.

The government’s schemes to lower the upfront and running costs of owning an EV includes the plug-in van grant of up to £2,500 for small vans and £5,000 for large vans until at least 2025 and £350 off the cost of homeplace chargepoints for people living in flats.

Latest statistics show that there has



been a 41% increase in zero emission vehicles registered for the first time.

The UK's charging network continues to grow at pace – there are now over 50,000 public chargepoints, with 44% more than this time last year, putting the country well on track to reach 300,000 chargepoints by 2030. The certainty of the ZEV mandate will give industry renewed confidence to invest in our infrastructure.

Additionally, last month the UK and EU agreed to extend trade rules on electric vehicles, saving manufacturers and consumers up to £4.3 billion in additional costs and providing long-term certainty for industry.

Akira Kirton, Vice President, bp pulse UK, said:

“We are pleased to host the minister at our most powerful EV charging hub in central London to mark the start of the ZEV mandate.

This mandate instils confidence in our strategy, reaffirming our plans to invest £1 billion over 10 years to continue to develop hundreds of EV charging hubs across the country by 2030 to bolster the UK's charging infrastructure.”

Our approach to decarbonising transport has already attracted record investment in gigafactories and EV manufacturing, including:

- Nissan's recent investment of over £3 billion to develop 2 new electric vehicles at their Sunderland plant
- Tata's investment of over £4 billion in a new 40 GWh gigafactory
- BMW's investment of £600 million to build next generation MINI EVs in Oxford
- Ford's investment of £380 million in Halewood to make electric drive units
- Stellantis' £100 million investment in Ellesmere Port for EV van production

The government also continues to support the rollout of EV infrastructure. Applications for the first round of the £381 million Local EV Infrastructure Fund are currently being assessed. This funding



will deliver tens of thousands more chargepoints in local areas across England and transform the availability of charging for drivers without off-street parking. The government has also launched a £70 million pilot to support the deployment of ultra-rapid charging points at motorway service areas.

Andrew Brem, General Manager of Uber UK, said:

“London is Uber's top city for EVs worldwide, with well over 10,000 electric vehicles on the platform in the capital. However, the availability and up-front cost of EVs can still be a barrier for many drivers.

The ZEV mandate coming into force is a significant moment which will help to drive down the costs of EVs and increase supply – accelerating the uptake of EVs over the next decade.”

As part of our Plan for drivers, we intend to consult on ways to make installations cheaper and quicker for chargepoint operators, review the grid connections process for chargepoints, and also consult on the expansion of permitted development rights to make installations easier.



# Digital pathology to improve cancer screening and save lives

January

From: Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England, UK National Screening Committee and The Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson CBE

Government to take forward UK National Screening Committee recommendation on use of digital images to make it easier to identify cancer and speed up diagnosis.

- Digital pathology to speed up and support diagnosis for cancer patients
- Government and NHS England back UK National Screening Committee recommendation on digital pathology
- Reviewing tissue sample images digitally will boost breast, bowel and cervical cancer screening

Screening for breast, bowel and cervical cancer will be made quicker and more effective under plans to roll out the use of digital images to detect cancer.

The Department of Health and Social Care is taking forward the recommendation of the UK National Screening Committee to increase the use of digital pathology to examine body tissue samples as part of screening programmes.

This will help:

- clinicians to gain second opinions on whether samples obtained are cancerous
- laboratories to work more efficiently and quickly, including allowing reporting off site
- make it easier to identify cancer
- speed up diagnosis for patients

The announcement comes after the NHS expanded the bowel cancer screening programme earlier this month, sending out hundreds of thousands of testing kits for people to use at home to detect

cancer at an earlier stage.

The government has also opened 141 community diagnostic centres delivering more than 5 million additional scans, including for cancer, and earlier this year invested a further £10 million for 28 new breast screening units and over 60 life-saving upgrades to services in the areas where they are most needed.

Health Minister Andrew Stephenson said:

“We know the earlier cancer is detected, the sooner it can be treated, and the greater the chances of survival and recovery.

Cancer is already being diagnosed at an earlier stage more often, and the NHS is seeing and treating record numbers of cancer patients.

Increased use of digital pathology will help the NHS to go further and faster, and provide another weapon in our battle against cancer.”

In 2020, the UK National Screening Committee was asked by the National Coordinating Committee for Breast Pathology and the Royal College of Pathologists to consider the evidence regarding the use of whole slide imaging.

This is a technique that allows slides to be reviewed digitally on a computer screen, rather than with a microscope. The technology enables an image of the entire glass slide to be created in high resolution, which can then be stored and



viewed on a computer screen or mobile device and saved for later review.

A trial then assessed whether using digital microscopy was as effective as using microscopes and slides for screening samples and, with results confirming it was, the committee agreed it is a safe option to complement or replace light microscopy.

Chair of the UK National Screening Committee Professor Sir Mike Richards said:

“We need a high level of evidence when it comes to screening programmes so, alongside the National Institute for Health and Care Research, we sponsored vital research to assess the effectiveness of this technique.

Following that research, I’m pleased that the UK National Screening Committee’s recommendation to allow the use of digital pathology has been approved. Its use will support flexibility for pathologists, and make sharing samples for second opinions or quality assurance easier and more efficient.”

Some areas of the NHS have been early adopters of digital pathology, but the recommendation, published today and

accepted by the government, will allow the roll-out across the NHS.

NHS England is expected to follow by issuing guidance to pathology teams on the best way to use the technology.

Steve Russell, National Director for Vaccinations and Screening at NHS England, said:

“The NHS’s successful national screening programmes - bowel, breast and cervical - are saving thousands of lives every year by identifying people at risk and spotting cancers early.

While we are already using some digital innovations to improve the accuracy of cancer diagnosis, we look forward to further utilising digital pathology imagery for the benefit of screening patients.”

The UK National Screening Committee is an independent scientific advisory committee that advises ministers and the NHS across the UK on all aspects of screening. They meet 3 times a year and consider work undertaken by the sub-groups on various conditions and existing programmes.

# Government to quash wrongful Post Office convictions

January

From: Ministry of Justice, The Rt Hon Alex Chalk KC and The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Hundreds of innocent postmasters who were wrongfully convicted due to the Horizon scandal will have their names cleared under new laws to be brought forward by the government.

- legislation to be introduced within weeks overturning wrongful convictions of hundreds of postmasters
- exoneration will ensure innocent people can receive swifter compensation
- compensation payments expedited for trailblazers who took first legal action against the Post Office

The blanket exoneration will overturn hundreds of convictions, brought about thanks to erroneous Horizon evidence, clearing the names of many people

who have had their lives ruined. The Government has committed to making sure these convictions are overturned later this year, meaning victims do not need to wait years and years for the justice they deserve.

Once this legislation is passed and convictions have been quashed, individuals will be entitled to at least £600,000 in compensation to rebuild their lives.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said:

“This is one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in this country’s history, with hundreds of people having their lives ruined and reputations dragged through mud.

Too many still have wrongful convictions tied to their name, and we cannot continue to fail them.

We must do everything we can to exonerate and compensate these innocent people, and make sure they finally get the justice they deserve.”

The government has also confirmed that it will take action to make sure the postmasters who played a crucial role in first exposing the Horizon scandal receive the compensation they deserve.

These individuals – also known as the Group Litigation Order cohort – who did not receive a criminal conviction but paid out considerable sums of money because of the Horizon failures, will receive at least £75,000 in compensation upfront.

The government will also consult the independent Advisory Board on the approach to compensation



payments, to see if there are further steps we can take to hold the Post Office to account and speed up payments for everyone impacted by the scandal.

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice Alex Chalk said:

“Fairness is a core pillar of our justice system and there can be no doubt hundreds of innocent post-masters and mistresses have suffered an intolerable miscarriage of justice at the hands of the Post Office.

These are truly exceptional circumstances, and we must right this wrong quickly, ensuring those convicted can be fairly and swiftly compensated.”

Minister for Postal Affairs Kevin Hollinrake said:

“Postmasters have been fighting for years to get the justice they deserve, and today’s announcement will ensure wrongful convictions are overturned and swifter access to compensation.

The Post Office Horizon Scandal is widely described as the biggest miscarriage of justice in our history and

it’s important that steps like we’ve announced today are being taken to right the wrongs of the past.”

Sir Wyn Williams’ Inquiry, set up in 2020 to look at issues of governance in the Post Office, will continue its vital work and provide a full public record of how this miscarriage of justice was able to take place.

In the coming days, the government will consider whether this blanket exoneration should apply to the small number of convictions which have been upheld by the appeal courts.

The government recognises that this Bill may lead to the overturning of some convictions that were rightfully brought. In line with the wishes of some of the victims, the government will therefore introduce safeguards to make sure anyone who was rightly convicted, and is now trying to take advantage of compensation schemes, can be prosecuted in the future.

Legislation will apply to England and Wales only. Conversations with other UK jurisdictions remain ongoing.



# Funding to help hundreds of rough sleepers off streets

January

From: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Felicity Buchan

Over £17 million to help rough sleepers into long term housing as cold weather bites. Money to provide more bed spaces for areas most in need.

Hundreds of rough sleepers will be helped off the streets and into long term settled accommodation thanks to over £17 million of government funding. The money has been given to local authorities across England most in need so they can provide more bed spaces for people who are sleeping rough this winter and more long-term secure accommodation.

London boroughs including Hammersmith, Lambeth and Greenwich collectively received over £3 million, with all local authorities in the capital able to benefit. Nottingham City Council received over £400,000, Bristol City Council over £300,000 and Hastings & Eastbourne Borough Councils almost £250,000.

This brings the total funding for the Rough Sleeping Initiative to over £547 million and forms just one part of a wider package of support backed by over £2 billion of government funding over 3 years. This includes helping individuals find work, manage their finances and access mental and physical health services.

Minister for Rough Sleeping Felicity Buchan said:

“As the cold weather continues this winter, our mission to help people off the streets is even more urgent. We are determined to deliver our manifesto pledge to end rough sleeping and today’s announcement demonstrates our continuing commitment to supporting the most vulnerable in our society with access to a safe and warm home, backed by over £2 billion of government funding over 3 years.”

The winter period is particularly high-risk for individuals who are sleeping rough, increasing the demand for immediate

‘off the street’ accommodation so the funding package includes £4 million available to local authorities facing the greatest pressures in rough sleeping in England.

Meanwhile over 1,000 people have been housed through the Housing First Pilots in Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, and the West Midlands Combined Authority, providing long term housing for the homeless. The scheme has reported that the vast majority using the scheme (92%) found a home within a year and said they feel safer, less likely to be a victim of crime and less likely to be involved in antisocial behaviour.



# New Government WhatsApp Channel to provide public information

January

From: Cabinet Office and Alex Burghart MP

Government launches new Whatsapp Channel to provide helpful opt-in information to the public.

New WhatsApp Channel will communicate important information directly to people's phones.

System is entirely opt-in and will amplify key messages like information on childcare support and cost of living payments.

Town crier announces launch of new communication channel outside Parliament.

The Government has launched a new account on WhatsApp Channels, allowing members of the public to subscribe to receive important updates to their phones.

WhatsApp Channels are used by a range of organisations, from news sites to football clubs and increasingly

by Governments - providing single message alerts or updates to anyone subscribed to them.

WhatsApp makes it clear that the channels are one-way only and users can opt in or out at any time.

Cabinet Office Minister Alex Burghart said:

We are always looking for new ways to communicate with the public. WhatsApp is a hugely popular platform in the UK so we hope our new and entirely opt-in WhatsApp channel will be a useful way of providing people with updates from the government. We're looking forward to seeing how people respond to this service and will develop it over time based on users' feedback.

Helen Charles, Director of Public



Policy, WhatsApp at Meta, Europe said:

We're pleased that the UK Government is using WhatsApp Channels to give people in the UK better access to reliable information through the most private broadcast service available.

As a trusted, verified account the UK Government channel will focus on reiterating important information which is relevant directly to the public in areas like updating on public services, news updates that affect a large part of the population or pointing to new guidance and public resources.

Like any new communications method being used by Government - the UK Government channel will be continuously reviewed to ensure that it is being used effectively to provide timely and relevant information. Users can expect to regular updates from across government on a weekly basis.

From Tuesday followers of the UK Government WhatsApp channel will be notified that they can get discounted rail tickets from the Great British Rail Sale

Examples of other UK Government channel posts include:

Reiterating public health advice like announcing winter flu jabs

Deadline reminders like self-assessment tax return deadlines

New information on extra support the public can receive, like cost of living payments and government-linked discounts and other benefits

Childcare support updates

The Government will also use the channel to share trusted and essential information from partner organisations like UK Health Security and Public Health England health alerts.

The channel will be a publicly run information service, similar to gov.uk or official government social media accounts. It will not be used for political or campaign purposes and will be managed by government officials.

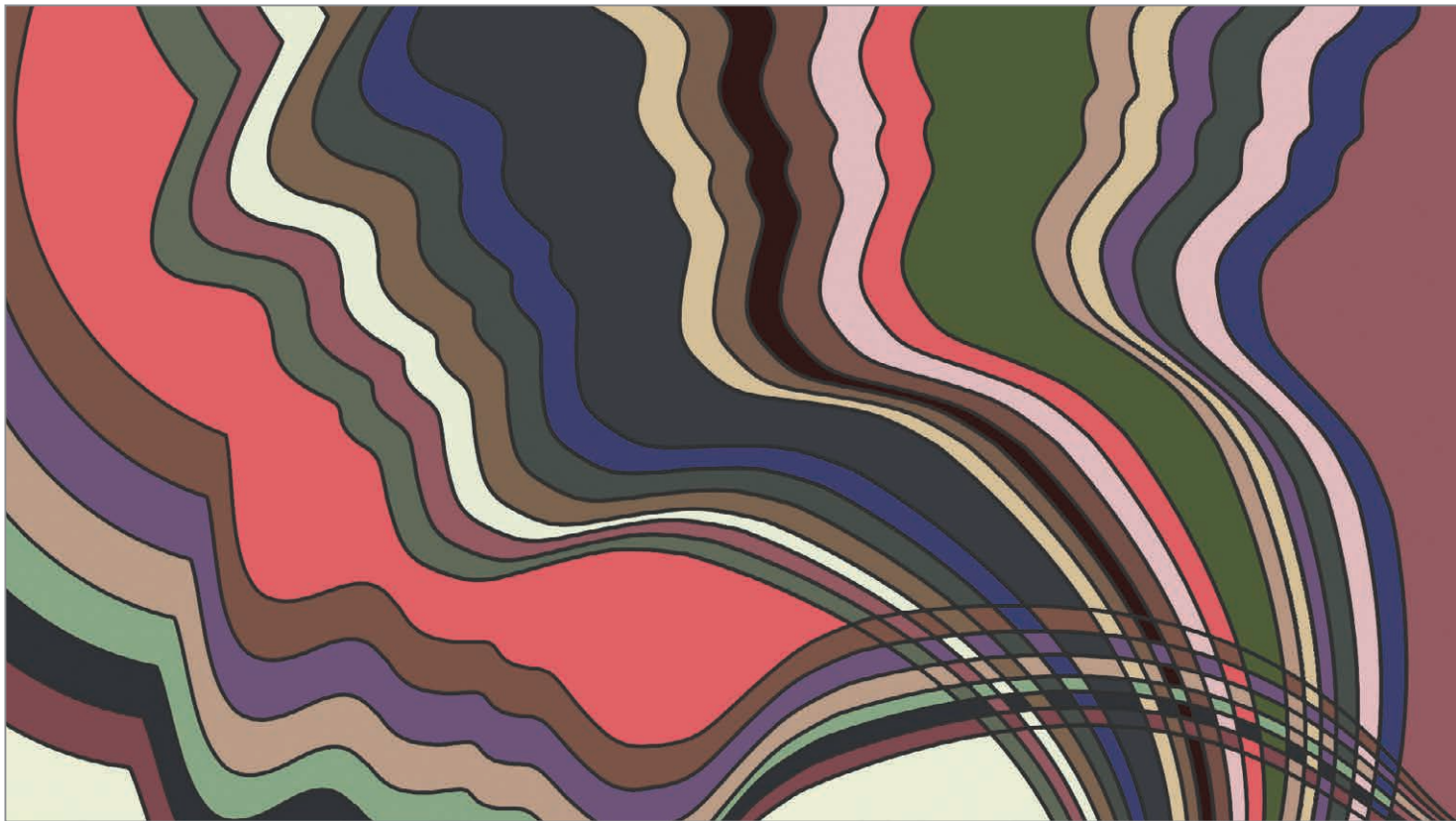
Anyone with a WhatsApp account can follow the new UK Government WhatsApp channel by searching for 'UK Government' in the 'Updates' section of the app and choosing to follow the account.

The channel is entirely separate from the national emergency alerts system, which was tested in 2023 and which provides alerts only when there is a direct risk to life. Unlike emergency alerts, users must opt-in via WhatsApp to subscribe to the Government WhatsApp channel.

Critical information and updates will always be published to gov.uk - the UK Government's official website, in the usual way, and the WhatsApp channel will help amplify information to those who opt in. The channel is intended to help reach more members of the public who might not otherwise receive Government updates.

To mark the launch of this new channel of communication, town crier Alan Myatt made a public announcement outside Parliament. The video of this can be found here: <https://youtube.com/shorts/a6tBIBsD0eQ>

You can subscribe to the UK Government WhatsApp Channel here: <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VaGDHQ6GpLHKEdIUt03L>



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# Tax saving for 38,000 pubs as alcohol duty freeze takes effect

February

From: HM Treasury and Gareth Davies MP

More than 38,000 pubs are set to benefit from six-month freeze to alcohol duty from today.

- The great British pub receives further boost from today as a six-month alcohol duty freeze to 1 August 2024 takes effect.
- This tax saving will help support around 38,175 pubs to face rising costs.
- Duty freeze comes in addition to £4.3 billion in business rates cuts and duty protection for pints sold in pubs.

Pubs and hospitality venues have received a tax saving today, 1 February 2024, as a six-month alcohol duty freeze takes effect.

British pubs are a significant part of the fabric of communities across the UK and a further freeze on alcohol duty

will help to support the sector while the government continues to bring down inflation while driving growth and investment.

This will impact around 38,175 pubs across the country and was announced as part of a multi-billion support package



by Chancellor Jeremy Hunt in his Autumn Statement which also included £4.3 billion business rates relief.

Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Gareth Davies, said:

“The great British pub remains a critical part of communities across the country, that’s why we’re helping to keep costs low by freezing alcohol duty, reducing business rates, and supporting on energy costs.

Our decisive action has also helped to more than halve inflation last year, protecting pubs and other businesses from the higher costs they would have otherwise faced.

And we need to stick to our plan, so we can deliver the long-term change our country needs to deliver a brighter future for Britain, and improve

economic security and opportunity for everyone.”

The six-month duty freeze, from 1 February to 1 August 2024, follows the biggest reform of alcohol duties taking effect last August, where, for the first time in over 140 years the UK’s alcohol duty system simplified so the duty paid reflects the amount of alcohol in it.

These reforms cut duty on pints in pubs by up to 11p when sold in supermarkets. Not increasing alcohol duty in line with inflation has now saved a further 3p to the duty on a typical pint of beer, 2p to a pint of cider, 4p to a glass of whisky, or 18p to a bottle of wine.

Welcoming the decision by the Chancellor to freeze alcohol duty, Nuno Teles, Managing Director, Diageo Great Britain, said:



“By freezing duty until August, HM Treasury has listened to the industry’s plea for support and decided to back our homegrown sector, that employs so many people across the UK, and we urge the Chancellor to continue to back pub-goers, hospitality owners and producers.”

Andy Slee, Chief Executive of the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) said:

“While trading has been tough for pubs and independent breweries, the government’s continued support is very welcome. The beer duty freeze for six months provides some certainty for brewers as the new alcohol duty system is embedded.

As part of this, the government introduced Draught Relief allowing beer destined for the pub to have a lower rate - and already there are signs that this is working to support pubs.”

The duty freeze formed part of a multi-billion pound support package for the alcohol duty industry announced at the Autumn Statement.

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure business rates relief was extended for a fifth year to 2024-25. This means around

230,000 retail, hospitality and leisure properties will receive 75% relief, up to a cap of £110,000 per business, on their business rates bills from the 2024-25 tax year. This is a tax cut worth nearly £2.4 billion and comes on top of one third of business properties being taken out of paying business rates completely thanks to other government reliefs.

The small business multiplier for business rates was also frozen for a fourth consecutive year, protecting over a million ratepayers from an inflation increase in their bills.

August 2023’s historical alcohol duty reforms saved on taxes in three ways. Firstly, on draught drinks in the pub for all draught products below 8.5% alcohol by volume (ABV) through increasing Draught Relief. This is part of this government’s Brexit Pubs Guarantee commitment for every pint in every pub to pay less duty than their supermarket equivalent. Secondly, tax was cut on lots of popular drinks in shops like sparkling wines and ready-made drinks. Finally, the new Small Producer Relief was announced to help small businesses and start-ups create new drinks, innovate and grow.



Individual, family and community cremated remains interment solutions



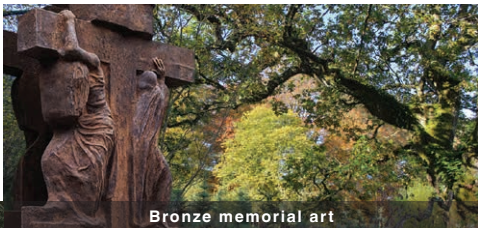
Woodland and Border Stone memorial orbs for cremated remains interment



Large scale family and community mausolea installation for fully body interment



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# Government confirms over £64 billion funding package for councils

February

From: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and The Rt Hon Michael Gove

The final local government finance settlement for 2024-25 makes available £64.7 billion for local government - an increase of 7.5% in cash terms.

More than £64 billion to bolster council budgets in England and ensure they can deliver frontline services has been confirmed by the Levelling Up Secretary.



The final local government finance settlement for 2024-25 makes available up to £4.5 billion more for councils in England in 2024-25, an above-inflation increase of 7.5% on the previous year – with £64.7 billion for local government overall.

The package includes the £600 million in extra support to bolster council budgets, including £500 million for social care, announced on 24 January. This support was announced following the consultation on the provisional local government finance settlement.

The additional funding was welcomed by leading local government organisations such as the Local Government Association, County Councils Network and District Councils Network.

The additional funding has been made possible because of the government sticking to the plan and making the right long-term decisions to deliver on our economic priorities of halving inflation -

which has already more than halved - growing the economy and reducing debt.

The government is also supporting all councils through the sector-wide Funding Guarantee, ensuring that all councils will see an increase in Core Spending Power of at least 4% before any local choices on council tax – an increase from the 3% announced at the provisional settlement.

Councils will be able to increase council tax by up to 3% without a local referendum, with a further 2% for those responsible for adult social care services. The government's manifesto commits to continuing to protect local taxpayers from excessive council tax increases. The referendum principles strike a fair balance and we have been clear local authorities must be mindful when taking any decisions relating to council tax.



The Secretary of State has also confirmed additional council tax flexibilities today for some failing councils, reflecting the most serious of circumstances. This decision has been taken in light of the scale and nature of these failings, the individual council's financial situation, and the need for ongoing government intervention to drive improvement and recovery. We have been clear to each of the councils that in implementing any additional increases, they should take steps to mitigate the impact on those least able to pay.

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove:

"Today, I set out the final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024-25. This makes available up to £64.7 billion for local authorities in England, an increase in Core Spending Power of up to £4.5 billion, or 7.5% in cash terms, on 2023-24.

This settlement, and the changes we have made to address concerns raised through the consultation, will provide local authorities with the tools to support their local communities, continue to reform their services for the long-term, and to help communities prepare for the future."

The final local government finance settlement includes:

- A total funding package for councils worth £64.7 billion for the next financial year – an increase of up to £4.5 billion or 7.5% in Core Spending Power compared with 2023-24.
- The most relatively deprived areas of England will receive 18% more per dwelling in available resource through this settlement than the least deprived areas.
- £1.5 billion in additional funding for social care compared to 2023-24, bringing the total grant funding for social care through this settlement to £8.7 billion.
- An extension to the Funding Guarantee to ensure every council sees at least a 4% increase in Core Spending Power before



any council tax decisions locally.

- A £15 million increase in the Rural Services Delivery Grant, rising to £110 million in 2024-25, in recognition of the additional costs faced by councils serving dispersed populations.
- An additional £3 million for the Isle of Wight and £0.15 million for the Isles of Scilly, in recognition of the unique circumstances facing island authorities.
- Stability for councils by maintaining our approach to other grants, such as continuing to increase the Revenue Support Grant in line with the Consumer Price Index.

As part of our efforts to return the sector to sustainability in the future, we are also asking local authorities to develop and share productivity plans.

We ask for plans to be published by July 2024 before the House rises for the summer recess. Plans must be agreed by Council Leaders and members and published on local authority websites, together with updates on progress. We expect them to cover four main areas:

- Transformation of services to make

better use of resources;

- Opportunities to take advantage of advances in technology and make better use of data to inform decision making and service design;

- Ways to reduce wasteful spend within systems, including specific consideration of expenditure on consultants and discredited staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programmes – this does not include programmes designed to promote integration and civic pride, and counter-extremism; and

- Barriers preventing activity that government can help to reduce or remove.

Alongside this ask, we will establish a new productivity review panel, made up of sector experts including the Office for Local Government and the Local Government Association.

The government remains clear that the '4 day working week' and other equivalent arrangements of part time work for full time pay do not deliver value for taxpayers. Following consultation on levers in future financial settlements, the government will carefully consider responses as part of wider policy development.

## Over £1 billion awarded to roll out lightning-fast broadband in hard to reach towns and villages

February

From: Building Digital UK, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Julia Lopez MP

UK Government has signed £1 billion in contracts to connect around 677,000 rural homes and businesses to lightning-fast full fibre.

- UK Government has now signed £1 billion in contracts to upgrade broadband infrastructure in rural communities through its Project Gigabit programme

- Milestone means suppliers are working

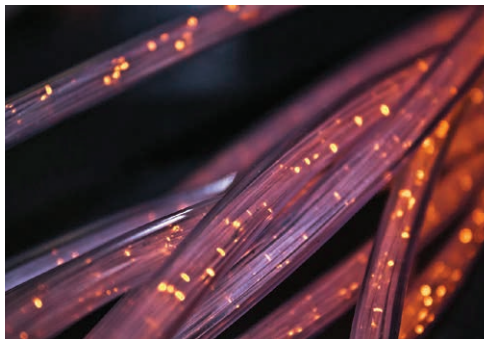
to connect around 677,000 rural homes and businesses to lightning-fast full fibre across England

- Comes as six new contracts are signed to connect hundreds of thousands of hard-to-reach premises

The government's rollout of next-generation broadband is steaming ahead with around £1.1 billion in contracts now signed to connect 677,000 rural homes and businesses across England.

Project Gigabit is a flagship programme to connect hard-to-reach areas which, without government intervention, would miss out on the industry's rollout of faster, more reliable 'gigabit-capable' broadband.

Six new contracts worth more than £450 million have been announced today (6 February), allowing suppliers



to immediately begin detailed surveying work to connect around 236,000 premises across England, with the first premises expected to be connected in early 2025.

Five of these latest contracts will be delivered by broadband provider CityFibre, serving rural communities in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Sussex, Kent, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes. A further contract to upgrade premises in Nottinghamshire and West Lincolnshire has been awarded to Hull-based supplier Connexin.

Full fibre is capable of delivering speeds of up to 1,000 megabits (or one gigabit) per second - up to 30 times faster than superfast connections which rely on traditional copper cables. The upgrades will help grow the economy, create jobs and deliver long-term change for a brighter future by making it easier to set up a business, and giving rural communities access to networks designed to meet people's needs for decades to come as the demand for fast connections continue to rise. Gigabit speeds mean households can download a high-definition film in under one minute, stream and download entertainment

and shop online across several different devices at once.

Data and Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez said:

"We're wasting no time in our mission to bring lightning-fast broadband to rural areas - with a billion pounds in contracts already signed with broadband companies to get our next-generation network up and running.

Project Gigabit is already driving growth, creating jobs and putting an end to snail's pace internet speeds, and we will continue to work rapidly to ensure people feel the benefits of our rollout to even more places across the UK as quickly as possible."

Greg Mesch, Chief Executive Officer at CityFibre, said:



"We're thrilled to be a key delivery partner for the government on this critical infrastructure project, transforming the digital capabilities of rural homes and businesses across the country. But that's just the start. We're continuing to expand our commercial rollout alongside Project Gigabit, extending infrastructure choice, multi-gigabit speeds, and unparalleled reliability to hundreds of thousands of additional premises in these regions."

Furqan Alamgir, CEO at Connexin said:

"Through the award of this contract, we are delighted to be able to play our part in the UK government's mission to level up and bring gigabit connectivity to our rural communities.

At Connexin our mission is not just about connecting people but also about how such connectivity can improve lives. We believe that everyone has the right to the same opportunities, and we firmly believe in digital inclusion and what it can unlock.

We look forward to working with BDUK to future proof the infrastructure

and bring hyperfast broadband to the region.”

As a result of this investment, CityFibre has committed to offer 40 apprenticeships - a minimum of eight per year - across the UK in telecoms and highways maintenance for the duration of the contract, giving young people the chance to develop vital new skills and build a rewarding career. It comes as the country marks National Apprenticeship Week, a government-led campaign celebrating the impact apprentices make to communities, businesses, and the wider economy.

Connexin has also committed support to community initiatives such as volunteering charitable hours and will provide career mentoring and apprenticeship programmes to a diverse range of candidates in these local communities.

The UK is building gigabit networks faster than any country in the EU, thanks in part to government measures to stimulate competition and bust barriers to rollout. Last month the government announced that gigabit coverage had reached 80 per cent of the UK, up from just 6 per cent in 2019, and the UK is on track to achieve 85 per cent by 2025.

## New funding supports UK role in global exploration to the Moon, Mars and Venus

February

From: UK Space Agency

UK scientists and engineers will play a role in major global missions to the Moon, Mars and Venus, thanks to new funding from the UK Space Agency for work towards international space science and exploration projects.

The Space Science and Exploration



Bilateral Programme will help Royal Holloway develop software for the Indian Space Agency (ISRO) Chandrayaan-2 orbiter to detect ice under the surface of the lunar south pole.

Another project will see the University of Leicester lead on a Raman spectroscopy instrument for iSpace's commercial rover and lander missions investigating water ice on the Moon, helping us to understand whether this is a resource that could be used for longer term lunar exploration.

Other projects to receive a share of the £7.4 million funding include the Open University and universities of Sussex, Aberdeen and Cambridge teaming up with NASA, the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).



The announcement coincides with the Global Space and Technology Convention (GSTC), taking place in Singapore this week to showcase the rapidly growing sector in Asia and opportunities for international collaboration. These projects, alongside a UK delegation at the GSTC, highlight how the UK supports its world-class scientists to work with partners around the world as set out in the National Space Strategy.

Andrew Griffith MP, Minister for Space at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, said:

“From exploring water on Mars and the possibility of sustained human activity on the red planet, to how galaxies evolved over time, our more than £7 million investment is pushing the boundaries of space discovery and putting the UK at the heart of some of the most important global space missions.

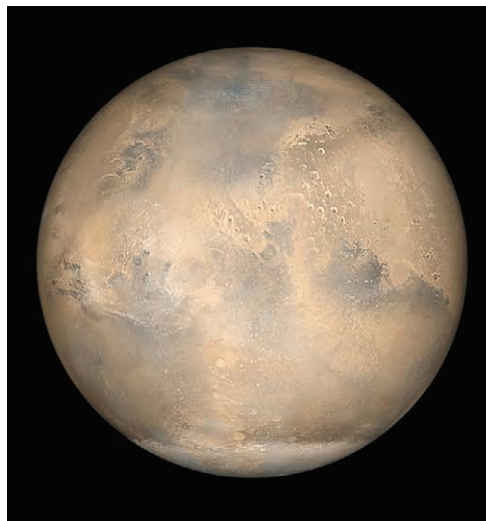
With top UK universities from Sussex to Aberdeen leading these groundbreaking endeavours, our country is at the heart of exploring beyond our planet, working with partners in Japan, India, North America and around the world, and growing our economies.”

Dr Paul Bate, Chief Executive of the UK

Space Agency, said:

“These projects present an opportunity for UK science to make crucial contributions to ground-breaking global missions that will deepen our understanding of the Moon and our neighbouring planets.

This funding, which builds on previous early-stage awards, will help catalyse international investment into the UK space sector and highlights the value we place on sharing knowledge and expertise with our counterparts overseas to break the boundaries of space exploration.



The Global Space and Technology Convention in Singapore is the ideal setting to share this news and showcase the benefits of expanding our work with global partners.”

Marie-Claire Perkinson, Chair of the Space, Science and Exploration Committee at UKspace said:

“The UKSpace Space Science and Exploration Committee welcome this opportunity for academic contributions to the bi-lateral programme in support of global agencies. Developing strong relationships through these projects is a key step toward future industrial collaboration.”

The projects, which have already received a total of £400,000 following an initial funding round, all demonstrate both UK scientific excellence in critical areas of space science and exploration technology – such as detector and hardware development, pipeline processing, optics and spectroscopy – and opportunities to work closely with international counterparts including support for mission candidates making progress in similar areas.

The work by Royal Holloway will support ISRO's ongoing Chandrayaan programme, which began in 2003 and has been making ground-breaking steps in developing our understanding of how we may be able to use lunar resources for deeper exploration of the Moon. In August last year, its Chandrayaan-3 mission became the first in the world to successfully land on the lunar south pole.

The iSpace commercial mission will see experts at the University of Leicester lead the development of the Raman spectroscopy instrument – which helps analyse and identify molecules – that will support the Japanese programme to establish resource utilisation infrastructure on the Moon that could benefit future lunar exploration missions.

These projects are seeking to develop space science instruments that will help us to better understand our Universe and Solar System. The UK Space Agency is supporting UK contributions to international space missions with funding from the Space Science and Exploration Bilateral Programme. The programme is providing important new opportunities for the UK to partner with space agencies around the world on groundbreaking science missions. It has already invested in the Japanese space agency's LiteBIRD

and NASA's HelioSwarm missions currently in development, enabling UK scientists and engineers to participate in landmark missions to make globally significant discoveries in space science.

## The projects

### **Chandrayaan-2 and Shukrayaan (Royal Holloway and ISRO, India) - £306,000**

Processing of multi-band radar and developing analysis software for missions to detect lunar south pole sub-surface ice and map surface of Venus.

### **Star-X (University of Leicester and NASA, USA) - £650,000**

High-level science data products, accessible via a web portal, and a UK data archive, for the study of Universe formation using the time-domain method and “multi-messenger” astrophysics.

### **FIR missions (University of Sussex and NASA, USA) - £1.1 million**

Provision of superconducting detectors, detector systems, optics, filters and data pipelines for a potential probe mission to investigate formation of planetary systems and the evolution of galaxies.

### **HABIT (University of Aberdeen and JAXA, Japan) - £320,000**

Provision of instrument monitoring air and ground temperature, wind, humidity and hydration state of salts, for a Mars rover/lander studying water cycle, chemistry, and habitability

### **I-MIM (The Open University and CSA, Canada) - £2 million**

High performance detectors for the Mars multispectral and stereo imager for the International Mars Ice Mapper mission to map accessible water ice deposits on the Martian surface.

### **Lunar Spectroscopy (University of Leicester and iSpace, Japan) - £1.5 million**

Lead development of the raman analytical spectroscopy instrument, based on the raman laser spectrometer, for commercial small lunar landers and rovers that will explore the lunar surface for space resource utilisation.

### **CosmoCube (University of Cambridge and NASA, USA) - £1.5 million**

Lead for project, payload and science, mission and space platform for a cube-sat that will deploy a precision radiometer to measure spectral distortions in the Universe's cosmic microwave background.

# Government plans to boost dental workforce by cutting red tape

February

From: Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom

New proposals would give the General Dental Council powers to provisionally register dentists trained overseas to start delivering care as quickly as possible.

- Highly skilled dentists with qualifications obtained overseas must currently undergo lengthy registration process to work in UK
- New proposals would give the General Dental Council (GDC) powers to

provisionally register those dentists to start delivering care as quickly as possible

- Plans are part of wider government and NHS plans to boost the dental workforce and improve access to care for patients

Patients will benefit from plans to boost the dentistry workforce by cutting red tape and making it quicker and easier for dentists from overseas to work in the UK.

Under current rules, highly skilled dentists who qualified overseas and are attempting to register to practise in the UK are required to pass exams that can take years to complete - meaning lengthy delays in them being able to provide dental care.

The government's proposals - which are the subject of a public consultation being launched today (16 February 2024) - mean GDC, which regulates dentists working in the UK, would be given new legal powers to provisionally register

dentists with overseas qualifications. This would speed up the process and encourage more dentists trained abroad to come to the UK as part of a long-term plan to improve access to dentistry services.

Around 30% of all dentists on the GDC register qualified outside of the UK, and in 2022, 46% of new additions to the register were trained overseas. The government's proposals would mean that overseas-qualified dentists would be able to start practising in the UK as quickly as possible.

Primary Care Minister Andrea Leadsom said:

“Our dental recovery plan will create millions more dental appointments, improve access for patients and ease pressure on the sector. Our hard-working dentists deserve our gratitude and this is the start of our plan to put the sector on a sustainable footing.



Strengthening the workforce is key to our ambitions and our proposals would abolish red tape that currently prevents fully qualified overseas dentists from working in this country, while ensuring the highest standards of care and patient safety.

We have a long-term plan to make access to NHS dental care faster, simpler and fairer for all, and I want to make sure we hear views from across the sector as we drive this forward.”

GDC would be given autonomy in setting the terms for provisional registrations to ensure the highest levels of patient safety and quality of care are maintained. Those on the provisional register will be able to work in the UK, but only under the supervision of a fully GDC-registered dentist.

The consultation forms part of the government and NHS’s wider dental recovery plan, which aims to significantly improve access to dental care across the country. It goes alongside work as part of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan to increase training places in the UK for dental professionals by 2032, with the number of dentist places increasing by 40% to 1,100.

Other measures in the plan include dentists being offered additional payments for taking on new NHS patients and ‘golden hellos’ worth £20,000 over 3 years for those willing to go and work in underserved areas. These and other measures are expected to create an additional 2.5 million dental appointments.

Jason Wong, Interim Chief Dental Officer for England, said:

“Improving access to dental appointments for patients is a priority for the NHS, and increasing the number of dentists available would make it easier for patients to get the dental care they need.

The NHS dental recovery plan represents an important milestone for dental services across the country - opening up more appointments for patients - and these proposals could be another vital step towards transforming NHS dental services

to ensure faster access for patients.”

Stefan Czerniawski, Executive Director, Strategy, GDC, said:

“We very much welcome the government’s openness to new ideas for ways of streamlining international registration.

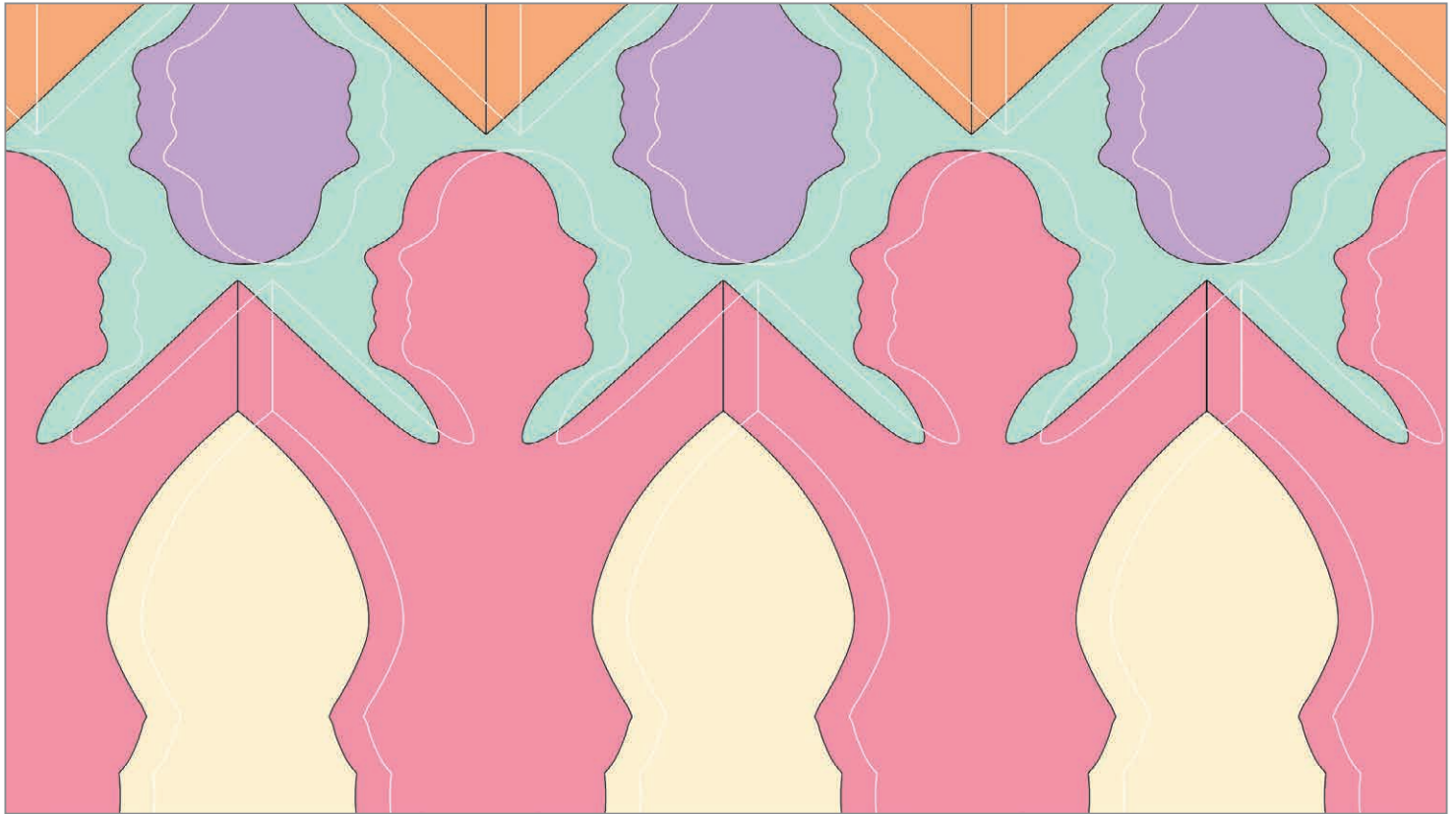
Provisional registration is an exciting opportunity that will require commitment and collaboration from across dentistry on the design and delivery of the new approach.

We need to move at pace, but we need to take the time to get this right - and we will work with stakeholders across the dental sector and 4 nations to do so.”

Following conclusion of the 3-month consultation, responses will be analysed and fed into a final report. They will also be used to finalise the legislation that is planned to be laid before Parliament for MPs to debate.







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# Better kips for better trips: £16 million boost to transform truckstops for lorry drivers

March

From: Department for Transport and Guy Opperman

38 truck stops in England will be upgraded with new showers and restaurants, more secure fencing around rest areas and new parking spaces for HGVs.

- 38 truckstops will deliver better rest areas, improved welfare facilities and more secure parking
- upgrades made possible thanks to £16 million in joint government and industry investment to improve roadside facilities



- measures will help attract more people to the haulage sector, boost working

conditions and grow the economy to deliver a brighter future

Lorry drivers across England will benefit from more parking spaces, better welfare facilities and safer rest areas thanks to £16.5 million in joint government and industry investment.

Today (4 March 2024), the Roads Minister confirmed that 38 truckstops across England will invest £6 million from the Department for Transport (DfT), with a further £10.5 million coming from industry, to significantly improve their facilities for lorry drivers. The upgrades will include new showers and restaurants, as well as better lighting and secure fencing around rest areas so drivers can feel safer and sleep with greater peace of mind. The measures will also create around 430 new parking spaces for heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) to free up local roads.

Today's measures are part of our plan to grow the economy by improving working conditions for lorry drivers, supporting new jobs in the haulage industry and attracting more people towards a brilliant career in logistics, to deliver a brighter future for all.

The crucial improvements will also help decarbonise the haulage sector by installing new chargepoints to power electric HGVs and solar panels on lorry driver facilities to make them as sustainable as possible.

The measures follow £15 million in joint government and industry funding for similar improvements announced in September last year as part of the fund's first application window. This takes the total joint investment from the department and the sector to improve lorry roadside facilities to up to £31 million.

Roads Minister, Guy Opperman, said:

“Our lorry drivers are the backbone of a successful economy, ensuring food, goods and crucial medical supplies can get where they need to be, all over the country.

That’s why it’s only right we leave no stone unturned when it comes to supporting our lorry drivers as part of our plan to grow the economy, and today’s £16.5 million in joint government and industry funding will provide them with the safe, spacious and modern facilities they deserve.”

From the Ashford International Truck Stop in Kent to Bardonia Truck Park in Leicestershire and Immingham Lorry Park in Lincolnshire, the funding will be spread across England to ensure all lorry drivers across England can benefit from better roadside facilities and better working conditions.

The new investment comes from the government’s HGV parking and driver welfare grant scheme, a joint investment between government and industry to support the haulage sector and provide lorry drivers with modern, secure facilities all across the country.

The scheme draws on the national survey on lorry parking, 2022, which provides important evidence as to what improvements are needed and where to boost the nation’s roadside infrastructure. With hauliers required to take mandatory breaks and rest periods, building better roadside facilities will improve the quality of HGV drivers’ rest and recovery, ensuring everyone can feel safe on our roads.

Britain’s roads are already among the safest in the world and the government is committed to helping the sector improve driver welfare, boost drivers’ security and continue to guarantee road safety.

Declan Pang, Director of Policy and Public Affairs at the Road Haulage Association (RHA), said:



“We are delighted to see the government’s match funded grant scheme being awarded to projects which will make a tangible difference to the experiences of lorry drivers and provide much needed additional parking capacity to address the well-known shortage of spaces.

We are pleased to see facilities operators contribute funding and commit to improving security and conditions at the sites they operate. We look forward to seeing the positive impact the funding will have across the range of projects.”

Lorry drivers are also benefitting from smoother and improved roads thanks to the largest ever funding increase of £8.3 billion to resurface over 5,000 miles of local roads all the way through to 2034, made possible by reallocated High Speed 2 (HS2) funding.

Today’s announcement comes after £200 million to roll out up to 370 zero emission trucks and a further £2 million given to small and medium-sized businesses in a separate competition to boost innovation and green tech in freight to decarbonise the sector.

The government has also invested £645,000 to support the brilliant Generation Logistics campaign from the CILT and Logistics UK, which is raising awareness of the logistics sector and its career opportunities to boost recruitment and retention of a more skilled and diverse workforce.

This latest investment comes on top of the government's Plan for Drivers to put drivers back in the driving seat, which includes a crackdown on disruptive roadworks and better digital information to boost sat-nav accuracy, and new measures to make it easier to switch to electric vehicles and install more chargepoints.

Ron Perry, owner of Dan Perry & Sons, said:

“The DfT welfare grant scheme goes a long way towards realising our ambitious project of delivering modern, secure and appealing facilities for lorry drivers to park overnight.

Without the grant from the department, this project simply would not be viable for us. We very much look forward to delivering the improvements so that we can provide lorry drivers the fantastic facilities they deserve.”

# Young people urged to wear seat belts in new life-saving campaign

March

From: Department for Transport and Guy Opperman

- **THINK!** launches **CLICK**, the first new seat belt campaign for 13 years
- aimed at young men, it will highlight how a simple click can save lives
- partners include various county football associations, which will promote belting up on matchday

A new campaign to remind young men to **CLICK** their seat belt in a bid to shift attitudes and save lives on roads across England and Wales has launched today (18 March 2024).

Every week, 4 young people aged 17 to 29 are either killed or seriously injured on our roads when not wearing a seat belt, with young men more likely to not wear one, especially on short or well-known journeys. In 2022, 30% of fatalities among 17- to 29-year-olds were unbelted. To help combat this, alongside targeted

advertising on roadside posters, radio and social media, **CLICK** will collaborate with several partners, including various county football associations and local clubs to promote ‘belting up’ when travelling to matchdays to keep themselves and their teammates safe. Taxi and private hire vehicle companies, including Uber, are also supporting the campaign and looking to introduce direct reminders to passengers to wear their seat belt when making journeys in cabs.

Roads Minister, Guy Opperman, said:





“We know how important wearing a seat belt is, reducing the risk of death for drivers in a collision by 50%.

This campaign is part of the government’s plan to make our roads even safer and aims to make clicking in a seat belt second nature to young men, who currently run the highest risk of death or serious injury – reminding them that a simple CLICK can save lives.”

Backed by £1.2 million of funding, this campaign – the first seat belt specific campaign since 2011 – pulls on relatable, personal moments between friends to drive home the consequences of not wearing a seat belt. It acts as a reminder that something as simple as clicking your seat belt could save your life and that of your friends.

RAC road safety spokesman, Rod Dennis, said:

“To most people, it’s second nature to wear a seat belt, but every time someone forgets to click theirs into place, they’re putting themselves and other passengers at risk.

Young male drivers are much more likely to be seriously injured or killed than any other age group because they haven’t

buckled up. For this reason, we’re in full support of THINK!’s ‘CLICK’ campaign urging all car occupants to wear their belts in transit, but especially young male audiences for whom this message could literally save lives.”

The campaign will also serve as a reminder of the importance of wearing a seat belt when travelling on a minibus, bus or coach, with operators expected to clearly signpost rules and individual responsibilities when it comes to belting up, and with passengers over 14 expected to take responsibility for themselves and ensure they are buckled up.



## Nature and Technology

welters® environmental orbs in this image have, over time, become one with nature. The moss and ferns have grown over the top of the orbs, almost camouflaging them at the base of a tree where mushrooms already grow in abundance.



# The age of the flying taxi draws closer with the Future of Flight action plan

March

From: Department for Transport and Anthony Browne

Drone technology could transform our skies and boost the UK economy by £45 billion by the end of the decade.

- flying taxis and routine emergency service drones should be a reality by 2028
- new action plan will make sure regulation and infrastructure is in place to support exciting greener, quieter aviation technologies
- comes as Aviation and Technology Minister visits pioneering UK company Vertical Aerospace in Bristol to see technology first-hand

Flying taxis, crime-fighting drones and critical 999 care deliveries could all be a reality by 2030 thanks to the government and industry's joint Future of Flight action plan, announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) today (18 March 2024). Setting out a roadmap for drones and

novel electric aircraft in the UK, the plan details how technology once confined to the realm of sci-fi could transform our skies, with studies estimating drone technology could boost the UK economy by £45 billion by the end of the decade.

It details plans for the first piloted flying taxi flight by 2026 and regular services by 2028, regular drone deliveries across our skies by 2027 and demos of autonomous flying taxis without pilots on board by 2030 – transforming how people and goods are transported.

Aviation and Technology Minister, Anthony



Browne, said:

“Cutting-edge battery technology will revolutionise transport as we know it – this plan will make sure we have the infrastructure and regulation in place to make it a reality.

From flying taxis to emergency service drones, we’re making sure the UK is at the forefront of this dramatic shift in transportation – improving people’s lives and boosting the economy.”

The plan was unveiled on the same day the minister is due to visit Vertical Aerospace in Bristol – one of the UK companies making flying taxis and at the cutting edge of innovation in aviation.

These greener, quieter flying taxis are already undergoing the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) authorisation process and have been made possible thanks to rapid advances in battery

technology, meaning they are light enough to stay in the air and powerful enough to cover the distances needed.

Some of the other actions set out in the plan include:

- allowing drones to fly beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) so that the sector can grow without limiting the skies for other aircraft
- breathing life into smaller aerodromes by setting out how they can operate as vertiports for electric aircraft that take off vertically (sometimes known as electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft)
- developing standards to improve security for drones to boost public safety
- engaging communities and local authorities so that they can enjoy the economic and social benefits of these technologies

First imagined in the Flightpath to the Future in 2022, this joint plan between industry and government sets out the strategic direction of the sector over the next 5 years, striking a balance between innovation, security, safety and cutting emissions.

The benefits of this new technology are already being seen in the UK. West Midlands Police uses drones to tackle violent crime and antisocial behaviour. In July 2023, a drone team was deployed, successfully identifying 2 offenders and another suspect at a speed and distance that would have taken ground officers hours to track down.

Drones are also helping frontline NHS staff save lives. For 6 months between October 2022 and March 2023, the UK drone service provider Skyfarer partnered with University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust and Medical Logistics UK to test drones to deliver surgical implants and pathology samples between sites. In one case, drones reliably helped cut delivery times of surgical implants between Coventry and Rugby hospitals from up to an hour to just 18 minutes – a 70% decrease.

The Future of Flight action plan contains measures to make drone applications and assessments easier by creating new and simple digital platforms that operators can use – ensuring companies and public services are no longer shackled by red tape and get drones up and flying quicker.

It will also enable the development of vertiports – mini-airports for drones and electric aircraft that take off vertically – by

developing certification standards and reviewing the use of existing infrastructure to deliver at speed, boost safety and security and put the passenger first.

Industry partners will also undertake multiple industry-leading trials to explore new ways to operate drones beyond the visual line of sight and demonstrate electric aircraft – keeping accidents to a minimum and making the most of technological advances. This could include finding and repairing faults quicker on our railways with fewer delays and cancellations



for train passengers, providing new connections across the UK and using technology to help our emergency services.

The Future of Flight action plan comes ahead of the fifth meeting of the Future of Flight Industry Group, a joint force established in February 2023 for government and industry leaders to tackle the biggest challenges facing the sector and set ambitious goals as emerging aviation technologies become more commonplace.

Duncan Walker, Chief Executive of Skyports and Chairman of the Future of Flight Industry Group, said:

“The UK is home to one of the world’s most important aerospace industries and is in an ideal position to be a pioneer in the next era of aviation. The government and industry have a joint commitment to support the development, industrialisation and introduction of new aviation technologies. Continued collaboration will ensure that we capitalise on the significant domestic and international market opportunities presented by the future of flight.”

By supporting research and development in electric aircraft and drones, and with the help of key partners like the CAA, the action plan aims to usher in a new era

of eco-friendly aviation and boost the economy with new investments, ensuring the UK captures the full potential of this emerging global industry as a force for good and a driver of growth.

Sophie O’Sullivan, Head of Future Safety and Innovation at the UK Civil Aviation Authority, said:

“Aviation stands on the cusp of its next, potentially biggest, revolution since the invention of the jet engine. Drones, eVTOL and other different vehicles have the potential to change transportation options forever.

We welcome the firm direction the government’s Future of Flight action plan provides for the industry as it continues to innovate. Our role in this bright future of aviation will be enabling technological advances and providing regulatory support while ensuring that all forms of new aviation technology enjoy the same high safety standards as traditional aviation.”

Anne-Lise Scailierez, CEO of UK drone trade association ARPAS-UK, said:

“Drones help professional teams capture data from the sky in a safer, cheaper, smarter and greener way and, in the future, they will help transport cargo and

people. ARPAS-UK and the industry are looking forward to actively and collectively implementing the actions in the plan so that we can accelerate the safe use of drones by end-user industries. We thank the DfT, CAA and all involved parties for making it happen.”

Not only is the Future of Flight action plan a testament to the government’s commitment to advancing aviation technologies, but it gives industry the confidence to continue breaking barriers in the sector. Vertical Aerospace, whose pioneering innovation in electric vertical take-off aircraft is creating a cleaner, quieter way to travel, is just one of several UK-based manufacturers that will benefit from the plan.

Stephen Fitzpatrick, Founder and CEO, Vertical Aerospace, said:

“The UK has a long heritage in aerospace and the publication of this plan sets out how we will lead the next revolution of flight. With government and business working together, we can unleash the huge economic, environmental, and social benefits of zero emissions flight globally. Vertical is hugely proud to be at the forefront of leading this new chapter.”



# Five years of beaver activity reduces impact of flooding

March

From: Environment Agency

A project to reintroduce beavers to East Anglia has successfully reduced the impact of flooding and drought by storing millions of litres of water over 5 years.

Five years ago, Spains Hall Estate in Essex and the Environment Agency released the first pair of beavers in East Anglia for more than 400 years. With free reign across a 10-acre woodland stream, the beaver family, now numbering 11, has created 9 dams. These are estimated to store 3 million litres of water in ponds covering almost a quarter of the woodland.

An animation produced by catchment-scientists from AtkinsRéalis reveals the scale and speed of the changes occurring over 5 years.

Data collected by Kings College London demonstrates that the way water flows

across the farm has also changed. The beavers increasingly building bigger dams to trap more water each time it rains. These changes mean that storm water flows downstream more slowly, some even being held for several months as it's slowly released back into the river. This helps alleviate low river water levels in summer.



“Matt Butcher, local Environment Agency catchment manager, said:

We are delighted that the beavers have thrived and improved the landscape. Their work has demonstrated that nature-based solutions can be used to tackle challenges in smaller river catchments. We initially supported this work as a pilot study and have been really impressed with the results.

We have since helped the estate scale-up their beaver activity through more direct support, along with other partners. This has enabled the construction of two much larger beaver enclosures.”

The original woodland stream has been transformed in numerous ponds, estimated to store 3 million litres of water.

Molly Howell, an assistant environmental scientist at AtkinsRéalis, which produced the animation, said:

“The animation is such a powerful tool to convey such a dramatic change in a simple way. The chance to track beaver-led changes over such a long time has been a great opportunity for us. It means we have real-life insights that we can use to support both the Estate and their partners, but also bring to our wider work.

It’s a great example of how we’re able to use digital tools within a natural environment. This enhances our understanding of what’s happening on the ground, so we can use that data to better inform how we support the project.”

Archie Ruggles-Brise, Spains Hall estate manager, said:

“This is a massive milestone for us. We took a chance 5 years ago that bringing beavers back would be beneficial, and it’s proven to be better than we could ever have imagined. Locally, there is widespread support for the beavers and their work, with the community really taking them to their heart. You can even find beaver greetings cards, beaver beer and beaver-themes on local menus!”

# £10 million to support suicide prevention

March

From: Department of Health and Social Care and Maria Caulfield

- £10 million for 79 charities across England to help prevent suicide
- New funding will benefit helpline services, support in schools and groups in area with highest rates of suicide
- Delivers on government’s suicide prevention strategy which sets out plans to prevent self-harm and suicide to save lives
- Organisations benefiting include helplines, groups providing therapy to men at risk of suicide and charities providing targeted support in high-risk areas

People struggling with their mental health will be better supported thanks to a £10 million funding boost for organisations working to prevent suicides.

A total of 79 organisations, including a suicide prevention helpline, will receive funding through the



government's Suicide Prevention VCSE Grant Fund. This will expand access to support services covering every region in the country, including the areas with the highest rates of suicide.

Both national charities and small community-led charities, which provide tailored support for local areas, will receive new funding to support people with their mental health.

Many charities will deliver services through partnerships and alliances, to help ensure joined-up support for individuals seeking help.

This represents an important milestone in delivering the suicide prevention strategy, which sets out the government's actions to prevent self-harm, suicide and save lives.

Minister for Mental Health Maria Caulfield said:

Every suicide is a tragedy which leaves a terrible mark on the families and communities affected.

Non-profit organisations play a hugely important role in supporting people with their mental health and preventing suicide in England.

This new funding will support people who need it the most and build on the brilliant work happening across the country on suicide prevention.

The fund was announced in the 2023 Autumn Statement to support charities in either meeting increased demand for suicide prevention services, or to support a range of diverse and innovative activity that can help to prevent suicides in England.

The organisations set to receive grants include James' Place Charity and PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide -



both have been awarded £625,000.

James' Place Charity will use the funding to prevent men dying by suicide in Liverpool, Newcastle and London, and will provide 2 full-time-equivalent therapists in each James' Place centre, to help save the lives of men in active suicidal crisis.

PAPYRUS aims to establish 6 new community hubs, largely down the east coast of England, which will go towards engaging and training parents and caregivers, providing them with free resources and free training.

Professor Sir Louis Appleby, the national advisor to the suicide prevention strategy, said:

The new funding is in recognition of the role of voluntary organisations large and small in suicide prevention.

They offer support to people in crisis or on the margins of society because of poverty, disability or prejudice.

They often work alongside the NHS but in settings where many who need help feel more comfortable.

The new government strategy says

that bringing down the suicide rate is a national priority, and the ability of the voluntary sector to reach people at risk is vital.

We Hear You CEO, Lucy Kitchener, said:

Along with every other charity we know, We Hear You is finding fundraising extremely challenging right now.

Hearing the news that we have been awarded suicide prevention funding is wonderful, therefore.

Better still, this grant will fund counselling sessions with the people who come to our service feeling the most distraught.

Public Health England figures show that 1 in 10 suicides are from people with a chronic health condition. We Hear You supports people who are affected by cancer and life-threatening conditions.

The Samaritans will receive a grant of £530,000, to support its 24/7 helpline services and wider innovative suicide prevention activities.

This will include:

postvention, which is an intervention that takes place after a suicide by supporting

the family and friends of the person who has died, in schools and colleges preventing suicides in high-risk locations research to increase understanding of the needs of callers and how to reach people who don't use the service targeting groups including marginalised communities, such as ethnic minorities, LGBT, and people in the justice system  
Julia Bentley, CEO of Samaritans, said:

This funding will help Samaritans continue our mission to save lives.

The voluntary sector plays a crucial part in suicide prevention and, in this

challenging environment, financial support for charities has never been more important.

Today's announcement is a welcome step towards the resourcing needed to deliver the national suicide prevention strategy.

The suicide prevention strategy commits to more than 130 measures, from prevention and earlier intervention, through to more targeted and proactive support for people in crisis.



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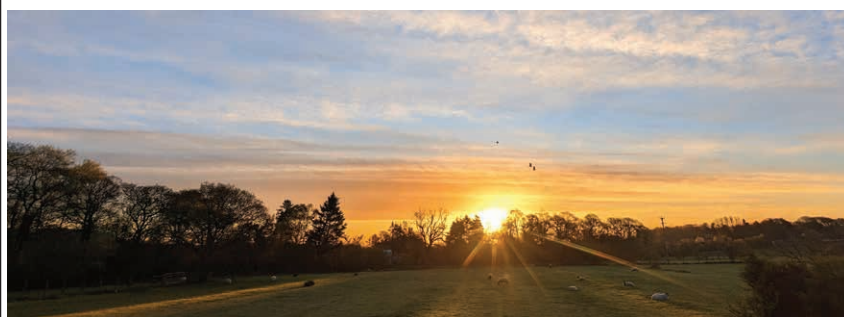


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## Forthcoming articles under consideration

- What can be done to reduce childcare costs?
- Is there anything that can be done to reduce the drug-driven crime in the UK?
- What can we do to reduce the amount of illegal waste taking place throughout the country?
- What is seabed mapping and why is it being done?
- Tobacco and Vapes Bill - will it pass and if so, what does it mean?



considered by our Editorial Department for the Spring edition as alternatives to the final chosen cover

**COVER OPTIONS**

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