

Alcester residents invited to give views on flood scheme proposals

Residents are being invited to share their thoughts on flood scheme proposals for the town of Alcester at an upcoming community drop-in session.

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The Environment Agency is inviting Alcester residents to give their views on a flood scheme for the town.

The town of Alcester lies on the confluence of the River Alne and River Arrow. It has been flooded a number of times over the years.

The Environment Agency is now carrying out investigations in the area to assess the current flood defences. Ground investigations are due to begin in the summer to determine the condition of the ground around the existing embankments in order to find the best method of working during construction. A hydraulic model is also being developed.

A public drop in session is to be held on 9 July between 4pm and 7pm at:

Alcester Town Hall
Henley St
Alcester
B49 5QX

Environment Agency project manager, Saffron Dhillon, said:

We would like to share some of our findings with the community and find out from them whether they are in line with their experience in previous flood events.

It would be great to see lots of local people at this event, so we can learn from their experiences and share information about the current proposals.

Contract to deliver HS2's green corridor boosts business in Lincolnshire

- 9,000 jobs around the UK are now supported by the delivery of HS2, with work well underway across 250 work sites
- Over 30,000 jobs will be supported by the programme at peak construction
- Over 320 of the 2,000 expected apprentices are already on board
- 2,000 businesses have provided work on HS2, 98% of which are British
- 350,000 new trees already planted and 46 areas of new habitat created for wildlife on Phase One

Lincolnshire business Crowder's Nurseries is already benefiting from its contract with HS2 – Britain's largest infrastructure project – to supply 7 million trees and shrubs which will create more than 650 hectares of new woodland between London and Birmingham along the HS2 Phase One route.

The family run SME was awarded the contract in 2016 and has already provided saplings and trees that have been planted along the line of route. HS2 is well advanced with the creation of a green corridor along the route of the new railway and, with 350,000 new trees already planted and 26 areas of new habitat created for wildlife.

The company employs 50 local people who are working on the HS2 contract – the largest contract in the company's history. They are part of the 9,000 jobs that are now supported by the HS2 project. Crowder's has also introduced a new apprenticeship programme, and have recruited 3 apprentices already this year.

Visiting Crowder's Nurseries and seeing the saplings being grown, HS2 CEO Mark Thurston said:

The HS2 project is a once in a lifetime opportunity for businesses across the UK to get involved and help deliver Britain's new high speed railway. Already some 2000 companies have worked with us, and the scale and longevity of the project means that there will be many more opportunities available for UK firms, particularly small and medium sized enterprises, to get on board.

Crowders is helping HS2 deliver our vision for a 'Green Corridor', helping HS2 meet its target for biodiversity no net loss and be the most sustainable high speed railway of its kind in the world. We will plant 7 million trees, covering an area of 33 square kilometres, with more than 40 species of tree, including those native to each area the railway passes through.

Managing Director of Crowder's Nurseries, Robert Crowder said:

Since being awarded the contract to deliver the supply of plants to HS2, we have embarked on a "Journey of Excellence", adopting new standards across our company which will benefit our company for years to come.

I am proud that we have started an apprenticeship programme and recruited 3 apprentices so far this year. We have made considerable progress in the first 3 years of this contract and expect to improve further as the project scales up over the next 7 years to completion.

The size of the HS2 project means that there will be thousands of opportunities within the HS2 supply chain, across many business sectors, requiring a wide range of capabilities, over a number of years that will be suitable for suppliers of all types and sizes. It is expected that every ten direct tier one major works contracts will result in over 10,000 indirect supply chain opportunities.

Last year, HS2 Ltd launched its Skills, Education and Employment Strategy, setting out interventions that will ensure that the UK not only has the skills to deliver the HS2 project, but to become a world leader in high speed rail. At peak construction, 30,000 jobs will be supported by the project, and 2,000 apprentices will be on offer.

ENDS

Oceans Apart? The UK & the Pacific: Partnerships & Shared Values

Tēnā koutou katoa.

Thank you for the invitation to address such an illustrious audience this evening. The New Zealand Institute of International Affairs plays a hugely valuable role in exposing and debating the international issues of our day. And it is a privilege to be addressing the Auckland branch for the first time, and on this topic – not least as Auckland is, very proudly, the biggest Pasifika city in the world.

My job this evening is to talk – no pressure – about the UK and the Pacific. Given that the Pacific spans almost a third of the globe, and is made up of a multiplicity of individual states and territories, each with their own culture, history, politics and beliefs, it is no small task.

So I'd like to start with a disclaimer: that while I will refer to "the Pacific" as a shorthand for the region, the UK absolutely recognises the sheer diversity and complexity of the region. The experience of Pitcairn and Pitcairners is completely different from those of the people of Papua New Guinea and Fiji. The outlook of a Tongan will differ from that of someone from Nouvelle Calédonie. So the UK's strong bilateral relationships with our Pacific partners form the bedrock of our role in this region. And I hope you will take my comments on "The Pacific" in that context, and in that spirit – just as I hope you will forgive my best attempt at Pacific attire. So: disclaimers over.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the UK and the Pacific sit on opposite sides of the globe – we are quite literally oceans apart.

At first glance, you would expect those oceans, the geographical distance, the differences in size and economy, to result in shallower relationships.

But in fact, the opposite is the case. While the distance is great, the connections are close. We have more in common than that which sets us apart. We are all island nations with long seafaring traditions. We have strong historical connections. We are nations built on the shared values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance. We are – many of us – members of the Commonwealth.

And we all share a commitment to finding global solutions to global problems. To working with and through the Rules-Based International Order. And to working together to address the existential threat that is climate change, and to protect and preserve our oceans.

Pacific Uplift

Let me talk first about the UK's Pacific Uplift.

Historical connections between UK and Pacific Islands are many and varied. Three Pacific Island nations are Realm countries (Tuvalu, PNG & Solomon Islands – in addition of course to Australia and New Zealand), nine are fellow members of the Commonwealth, and our connections – for good or ill – stem from Captain Cook's first voyage through the Pacific 250 years ago. This was one of the far-flung corners of the British Empire and – whatever we may think of the Empire and its legacy, and that is surely a topic for another speech – the ties that are left are strong. A shared language, shared legal system, and critical, modern day security connections: for example the hundreds of Fijian soldiers who serve with pride and distinction in the British Army. And then there are also the more unusual legacies – such as the fact that the Duke of Edinburgh is regarded as a living deity on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu.

So the UK has long been in and of the Pacific. But in the 2000s, we scaled down our presence. We remained present and engaged in Fiji, PNG and the Solomon Islands, and covered other Pacific countries from non-resident accreditations – as I currently cover Samoa. But we closed our High Commissions in Vanuatu and Tonga. And quite frankly we stepped back too much

from our Pacific friends and partners.

We are now beginning to put that balance right. While New Zealand has its 'Pacific Reset' and Australia has its 'Step Up', for the last year the UK has been pursuing our 'Pacific Uplift' strategy. This will see us open three new High Commissions, in Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu later this year. That is a doubling of our diplomatic presence in the region. We have also doubled our team in Fiji, with new roles on development, trade, oceans, regional organisations and programmes.

And I am delighted to say that our Deputy High Commissioner to Samoa, Rob Contractor, is already in role, and in Apia as I speak. He is double hatted: Deputy High Commissioner Samoa, and Deputy Consul General Auckland, with a particular remit to enhance our relationships with the Pasifika of New Zealand. As we increase our presence we are considering – and consulting on – where we should focus our increased engagement in the Pacific, in a way that most furthers the interests of our Pacific partners, speaks to our shared agendas, and complements rather than duplicates the work of other partners in the region: Australia and New Zealand, first and foremost, but others, too.

So what is our focus? I don't want to pre-empt the results of those consultations. And in the new posts – Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu – it will be for the new High Commissioners and their teams to determine their priorities, within a wider regional context.

But I can say now that it is a given, a no brainer, a non-negotiable – however you want to put it – that our shared values, climate change and oceans will be at the heart of our agenda. So let me take each of those in order.

Our shared values

So what are the shared values of the UK and the countries of the Pacific. I would say the following: that we all believe in finding global solutions to global problems – and working with and through the Rules Based International Order.

We believe – as seafaring, trading nations – in freedom of navigation and secure shipping lanes, and in trade as a common good – as a driver of both prosperity and peace and stability.

We believe in democracy and the rule of law, good governance and human rights. And in the principle, enshrined at the UN, of equality amongst nations: that regardless of size or wealth, each country has an equal vote and an equal say on the world stage. That might is not right.

We believe in taking action to uphold the international rules – as we did collectively, in June last year, in reinforcing the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons at the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons – after chemical weapons were used in Salisbury, UK, and in Syria.

And we share a recognition that we live on a shared planet with finite,

common resources that must be managed for the benefit of all: that we have a duty of kaitiakitanga, or guardianship, for our land and oceans.

The Commonwealth is a part of that Rules Based International Order, and is rooted in our shared values. As the current Commonwealth Chair in Office, the UK is focused in particular on increasing collaboration and cooperation on climate change, oceans, cyber security, and maximising intra-Commonwealth trade. The Commonwealth Trade Advantage – namely that trade between Commonwealth countries is about 19% cheaper than elsewhere – is relatively well known. But Commonwealth members are working hard to reduce non-tariff barriers between members – for example Vanuatu is leading the cooperation on “supply-side connectivity” across the Commonwealth membership with a focus on the agricultural sector – and the Commonwealth has also been actively supporting existing trade in the Pacific, not least through the Hub and Spokes II programme, which aims to help Fiji become a hub for trade and investment in the Pacific.

The Commonwealth is also active on human rights. With £1.8M UK funding, the Pacific Commonwealth Equalities Programme is working through the South Pacific Community to build capacity on human rights. And there have been smaller scale projects, too: in Samoa, for example, the Commonwealth Secretariat has supported the critical work of the National Ombudsman in documenting and communicating the problem of domestic violence.

Of course the UK’s work on values and human rights is not limited to work within the Commonwealth. This year we have launched a campaign, in partnership with Canada, to champion media freedom around the world – including in the Pacific. Media freedom plays an essential role in protecting all other human rights and freedoms. It is a vital foundation for any prosperous and healthy liberal democracy: in the UK, in the Pacific, and globally. To that end we are hosting a Global Conference for Media Freedom in London later this month.

Climate Change

I want to turn now to the existential challenge that is climate change. If you save Tuvalu, so the saying goes, you save the world. Pacific Island Nations have contributed minimally to the emissions that are causing global temperatures to rise. But they are on the front line of its impacts, in terms of temperature and sea level rises, and extreme weather events. And they are also in the vanguard in terms of championing urgent action to tackle climate change.

The UK, by contrast, led the world to wealth through fossil fuels in the Industrial Revolution, and has contributed in no small way to greenhouse gas emissions to date. So it is imperative that the UK now leads the drive in the opposite direction, in weaning ourselves off fossil fuels domestically, and in championing climate action internationally.

So it is a no-brainer (to use the technical term) that tackling climate change is a central plank of the partnership between the UK and its partners in the Pacific.

Last month, the UK became the first major economy to legislate for Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. That means emissions from homes, transport, farming and industry will have to be avoided completely or – in the most difficult examples – offset. This was in response to advice from the UK's Committee on Climate Change, which said that if other countries followed the UK, we would have a 50-50 chance of staying below the recommended 1.5C temperature rise by 2100. (You will know that a 1.5C rise is considered the threshold for dangerous climate change.)

The UK has led the way in reducing our domestic emissions, and in championing the low carbon economy. And this year we have gone almost three months without coal: finding our energy from renewable or other low-emission sources.

We are equally ambitious in terms of our international work to tackle climate change.

In December last year, the UK and New Zealand co-hosted a Wilton Park Forum on Climate Change and Resilience in the Pacific. The forum brought together leaders from the Pacific, development partners, civil society, academics and officials to consult on climate finance; the oceans / climate nexus; climate change and security; and climate change-related displacement and migration.

The UK is also putting its money where its mouth is. UK International Climate Finance expenditure in Pacific Island countries has amounted to approximately \$88 million since 2016. This has covered a range of areas including renewable energy and wastewater management, but has a particular focus on strengthening climate and risk resilience. We have also provided £9.6m of funding through the UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme for CommonSensing, an innovative international project in partnership with Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to support and build climate resilience and enhance decision-making through the use of satellite remote sensing technology.

And we have contributed £1.4M for the Pacific Nationally Determined Contributions Hub to help Pacific countries implement their Paris Agreement commitments.

We take our global responsibilities seriously: as a member of the P5, the G8, as the fifth biggest economy in the world. The British Prime Minister – and we will find out in July who will take over from Prime Minister May – is the UN Secretary General's resilience champion, and will co-host the Secretary General's Climate Action Summit in September.

The UK is also bidding to host COP26, in 2020, in partnership with Italy. We are well placed to be committed, ambitious and effective hosts. And – if successful – we will deliver a robust agenda to support the mitigation and adaptation challenges facing Small Island Developing States.

Oceans

My third and final theme is Oceans. It was not for nothing that early European explorers referred to the islands of Samoa as the Navigator Islands:

it takes one to know one. We are all seafaring nations, by and of the sea. And when I was at the Conference of the Pacific Community two weeks ago, delegate after delegate – from the Prime Minister Puna of the Cook Islands, to Deputy Prime Minister Fiame of Samoa, to the Foreign Ministers of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands – talked about how the oceans are central to their way of life, to their economy and wellbeing – and about the critical task of protecting those oceans now and in the future.

So what are we doing on Oceans? The UK provides over £90 million of funds to two Commonwealth oceans programmes that directly benefit the Pacific. The first is the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, which supports 17 Commonwealth small island developing countries in the Pacific and Caribbean in identifying the potential of their marine economies in a sustainable, resilient, and integrated way. The intention here is to promote growth, innovation, jobs, and investment whilst safeguarding healthy seas and ecosystems.

The second is the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance, which is part of the Commonwealth Blue Charter action group and is jointly led by the UK and Vanuatu. The Alliance consists of a group of countries who pledged ambitious actions to reduce plastic pollution.

The Clean Oceans Alliance encourages members to commit to one of the following:

- Banning the sale and manufacture of microbeads in cosmetic and personal care products;
- Significantly reduce the number of single-use plastic carrier bags;
- Take steps to eliminate all avoidable single-use plastic waste.

Over 20 countries have pledged to this alliance so far. And as I sat at the table at the Pacific Community, country after country talked about their plans to ban or restrict the use of single use plastics. We all share the same goals.

We also want to do all we can to harness thought leadership in the region. So it's good news for all of us that the University of the South Pacific won a new 5 year £1.6 million UK research grant and will partner with other world leading research centres in studying the urgent challenges facing our oceans.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in addition to being the British High Commissioner to New Zealand and Samoa, I am also the Governor of the Pitcairn Islands. Pitcairn is the smallest and most remote of the members of the Pacific Community. Situated in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, two days away by boat from the nearest other human settlement, it has just 50 inhabitants. But despite its size and isolation, it is deeply committed to playing its part in protecting our oceans, and has a Marine Protected area of 835,000km².

But Henderson Island, one of the three uninhabited Pitcairn Islands, has the dubious accolade of having the highest density of plastic pollution anywhere in the world. So last month we sent a scientific expedition to Henderson Island, focused on clearing up the plastic, studying it and its impact on the

environment, setting up cameras to monitor plastic pollution build up and impact, and highlighting the plight of plastic pollution to the wider world. The pictures are truly shocking. But we hope that both the science – and the images – will help galvanize cultural change in how we consume and manage plastic waste.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen we are living in interesting times. The tectonic plates of geopolitics are shifting under our feet – here in the Pacific as indeed they are elsewhere. There is a growing consensus – though not yet universal – of the existential challenge of climate change, and the pollution of our seas. But we are in the foothills of efforts to tackle those challenges. Economic, climate and political resilience are more important than ever – and nowhere more than in the Small Island Developing States of the Pacific.

So that is why the UK is increasing its presence and engagement in the region. We want to bring our power, influence and expertise to bear, and we want to work in partnership with our friends in the Pacific, on the basis of our shared values, as we all seek – urgently – to protect and preserve this beautiful world that we live in.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Penny Mordaunt sets out plan to empower UK women

- Women & Equalities Minister today sets out plans to financially empower women from school to retirement
- Measures will include a review of enforcement of equal pay legislation and improved information for parents around family friendly entitlements
- New chair and remit for the Women's Business Council will also be announced, working with sectors to tackle their gender pay gaps

Despite generally doing better in education, women are more than three times more likely to work part time – with less chance of seeing their wages grow, tend to work in lower paid industries and jobs, and have lower private pensions wealth.

Speaking to stakeholders this morning, the Minister for Women and Equalities will say:

"I want everyone in our country to be able to thrive in life. That means being able to be in control of the choices you make and have the opportunities you have to seize. We must be honest that many women do not have those choices or opportunities, and as a consequence are not able to be

as financially resilient or independent”.

“This inequality is faced at every stage of a woman’s life – from how she is treated in the classroom, to the caring roles she often takes on, and the lack of savings or pension she accumulates. This road map is intended to define and guide how we tackle the barriers women face as they journey through life.

“I’m confident today’s announcement will be the first step in a long-term commitment by this government to empower everyone in this country, helping them truly reach their full potential, from birth to retirement.”

The decisions made at every stage of a woman’s life – from the subjects she studies at school, to taking time out of work to care for relatives – accumulate over time and impact on her financial independence when she retires.

67% of girls aged 11-21 think that women do not have the same chances as men. 60% of boys aged 15-16 thought their best subject was a STEM subject, compared to only 33% of girls. However, in reality, girls tend to outperform boys in STEM subjects at GCSE. We will pilot different approaches to education about gender roles, spending £2 million so children will learn about different careers at primary school age and invest in programmes to increase participation in STEM subjects.

When they begin their working lives, it is important that both men and women are supported to balance their job and their home life. The government will therefore look at how we can continue to better support organisations in delivering family friendly policies, through the largest upgrade to workers’ rights in a generation.

The government recognises that carers play a vital role – 60% [2.7 million] of the estimated 4.5 million total informal carers are women. This government made a manifesto commitment to consult on a new right to carers’ leave, as enjoyed in many other countries.

If a couple splits, we want to ensure women don’t struggle when they retire. Sadly, 42% of marriages end in divorce, but only 36% of asset sharing agreements include sharing of pensions – this means women lose out on financial security later in life. Government will be updating the online divorce process to ensure couples are aware of the benefits of pension sharing.

Chartered Management Institute CEO, Ann Francke, said:

“Gender inequality is a complex issue with many causes rooted throughout education, society, culture and the workplace. The Government’s Gender Equality Roadmap acknowledges this; and breaks down the problem into its many component parts, aiming to offer practical solutions and success measures for each.

“It’s ambitious, comprehensive and collaborative. Well-executed it is a potential game changer and an excellent source of practical insight, policies

and advice to help all UK organisations go further, faster to achieve gender balance.”

Chief Operating Officer of FDM Group, Sheila Flavell, said:

“It’s inspiring to see a cross-government initiative designed to address gender inequality in the workplace. This proactive approach is critical for tackling issues such as pay gap discrepancies, unconscious discrimination and the barriers which all too often prevent people from getting ahead in their careers. It’s vital that these issues are addressed to ensure men and women can progress without missing out, whilst juggling a busy career and home life.”

A refreshed Women’s Business Council (WBC) will also launch as part of today’s announcement, with a new chair, Fiona Dawson, the Global President of Mars Food, Drinks and Multisales. The WBC will focus on tackling individual sectors to ensure they are closing their gender pay gaps and that female staff have the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

New Chair of the Women’s Business Council, Fiona Dawson, said:

“I am delighted to take over as Chair of the WBC, building on the terrific work led by Dame Cilla during her tenure.

“The plan announced by the government today gives us a fantastic opportunity to renew the fight for women’s equality, and it will be my immediate priority to ensure that our partners are doing everything in their power to help women progress in the workplace.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The Government Equalities Office is also undertaking a piece of work with key representative bodies, business leaders and the thriving third sector to ensure continued activity to address the barriers outlined in the roadmap and to bring women’s voices into the heart of policy making.

Statistics:

- Girls are slightly more likely to get a top grade in maths GCSE, but boys are over 50% more likely to take maths at A Level.
- On average women enter the labour market with higher qualifications than men – but earn less per hour from the start.
- By the time their first child is 12, mothers’ average hourly wages are a third below fathers’.
- Women live longer, but women aged 55 to 64 are almost 20% less likely to have a private pension, and those who do have almost 40% less wealth in their pension.

To ensure women are safe in the workplace, government is also taking forward measures to tackle sexual harassment – shortly launching a consultation to ensure legislation is up to scratch. This will include strengthening and

clarifying the laws on third party harassment, exploring whether protections need to be extended to interns and volunteers, and examining whether the three month time limit for workplace discrimination and harassment cases needs to be extended.

Sitting alongside the plan, an annual Gender Equality Monitor will bring together metrics from across government to monitor important gender equality issues in the UK and help hold all parties, including government, to account. An interactive tool to make the data more accessible will be launched next year.

The Government will be announcing further progress on implementing its Good Work Plan this summer, including providing support to working families and vulnerable workers. The Good Work Plan comes as the latest response to the independent Taylor Review of impact modern working practices (2017). The review found that the strength of the UK's labour market is built on flexibility but that a clearer focus was needed on quality of work as well as the quantity of jobs.