

News story: Work under way on Phase One of HS2 a year on from Royal Assent

- on the first anniversary of Royal Assent for Phase One of HS2 (23 February 2018), work is under way between London and the West Midlands to build Britain's future railway
- £70 million of funding has begun to be distributed to those affected by the railway construction
- over £13 million of homeowner payments remain unclaimed and are still available for those living near the Phase One route in rural areas

Just one year after Her Majesty the Queen granted Royal Assent for Phase One of HS2, significant work is under way in preparation for Britain's new high speed railway line, with over £13 million of homeowner payments still available for those living along the route.

The government is encouraging eligible homeowners in rural areas to [apply for a payment under the Homeowner Payment \(HOP\) scheme](#) which launched on February 23 last year – the same day that Parliament approved the [High Speed Rail \(London – West Midlands\) Hybrid Bill](#).

The scheme was set up as a way of sharing the future economic benefits of the railway with local people. Over £7 million of payments have already been made under the HOP scheme, with more than £13 million still to be claimed.

Nusrat Ghani, HS2 Minister, said:

HS2 will be the backbone of our national rail network – improving vital links between some of our biggest cities, driving forward economic growth and regeneration and helping us build a Britain fit for the future.

One year on from Royal Assent we are making real progress, with significant contracts boosting jobs and prosperity whilst we ensure the new railway is not limited to providing faster, better journeys for passengers, but leaves a lasting legacy of improvements along the route for generations to come.

Over £7million has already been paid to homeowners living near Phase One of the route under the HOP scheme. I urge those who are eligible to take full advantage of the £13 million still available under the scheme to ensure the future economic benefits of the railway are shared with rural communities affected by the line.

Construction has already begun along the Phase One route, which will run from London to the West Midlands and is due to be mostly completed by 2025. The first train services are expected to run on the line from 2026.

Enabling work has already begun, contracts for the main civil engineering works including bridges, tunnels, embankments, viaducts and station designs have been awarded, and procurement of the Euston master development partner and London stations, rolling stock and rail systems contracts are under way.

In addition, £70 million of funding has begun to be distributed to those affected by the railway construction, with more funding available for communities and businesses.

Mark Thurston, Chief Executive of HS2 Ltd said:

Since Royal Assent there has been significant progress at HS2 in developing our capability to deliver Europe's largest infrastructure project, and our focus is on designing and preparing the way for the new railway.

Over the last year HS2 has awarded major contracts that will support 14,000 jobs, the National College for High Speed Rail opened its doors to train the future members of our industry, all alongside a major programme of early works.

As construction work continues to ramp up, we remain acutely aware of our responsibilities to those communities that we impact. Minimising disruption is at the heart of our design, while we retain our aim of creating a 'green corridor' consisting of new woodland, wildlife habitats and new amenity facilities to leave a lasting legacy of high quality green spaces all along the route, including the planting of 7 million trees.

Since Royal Assent:

- enabling works are under way in various locations along the line of route – these include archaeological work uncovering the hidden history of Britain, extensive environmental works to mitigate the impact of the railway on the countryside, site clearance and essential utility works
- first recipients of the £40 million [Community and Environment Fund \(CEF\)](#) and [Business and Local Economy Fund \(BLEF\)](#) have been awarded funding for projects along the Phase One line of route, with a further £5 million made available for communities along the HS2 Phase 2a route from the West Midlands to Crewe
- allocations for local authorities under the £30 million Road Safety Fund have been announced, delivering high quality road and cycle safety projects to ensure that England's roads remain among the safest in the world
- the £5 million [Woodland Fund](#) has opened for applications, helping local landowners create new native, broadleaf woodlands and enhance existing woodland sites
- main works civils contracts worth an estimated £6.6 billion awarded to construct the bridges, tunnels, embankments and viaducts needed to drive economic growth and provide seamless journeys

- station design contracts have been awarded, appointing leading creative firms to ensure passengers on our world-class railway will experience modern and accessible stations
- procurement processes are under way for the Euston master development partner, London stations construction contracts, rolling stock contract and rail systems contracts
- land assembly programme is under way
- first temporary track closures necessary for the on-network works have taken place
- Old Oak Common depot decommissioning is under way

HS2 will create around 25,000 jobs during construction as well as 2,000 apprenticeships. It will also support growth in the wider economy, worth an additional 100,000 jobs.

Speech: Matt Hancock speaking at the Annual CBI Chinese Dinner

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Or, as I hope translates to English: good evening Ambassador Liu and honoured guests.

It's a real privilege to be here tonight to celebrate Chinese New Year with you all and mark the arrival of the Year of the Dog.

I was born in the Year of the Horse; apparently Horses like me 'are either naturally good public speakers or have a habit of talking too much'.

I'm not sure which one applies to me – let me know in a couple of hours after I've finished...

It's an exciting time for relations between our two countries. As we open the next chapter in our golden era, look at the breadth of the cultural, political and economic partnership just over the past two months.

The V&A Museum has opened a brand new design gallery in Shenzhen, the first branch of a national British museum outside the UK.

The historic Terracotta Warriors are on display in Liverpool.

And the Prime Minister visited China to meet President Xi and Premier Li, signing over 9 billion pounds worth of commercial deals, building on the vast rise in trade over the past decade.

And as we look forward to the Year of the Dog, I want to take a moment to look at this vital relationship.

And especially, talk about how we can use the transformational power of new digital technology to make this golden era even more golden.

Making the most of change

The world around us is changing faster than ever before. And yet the blistering pace of change we're currently seeing is probably the slowest that we'll see in the rest of our lifetimes.

And it's down to the incredible potential of new technologies, especially AI, which are constantly learning and getting exponentially better every single day.

Both China and Britain understand the potential of this fourth industrial revolution – and the need to relentlessly pursue new technology.

This forward thinking approach has been at the heart of our strengthening relationship over the last decade, and we've seen some remarkable hi-tech success stories over the past few months.

Huawei has recently announced a new commitment to 3 billion pounds of procurement from the UK. Gordon – thank you for your personal commitment and Huawei's vote of confidence in our world-leading tech industry. You provide the sort of leadership which is crucial for forging this sort of relationship.

Cambridge-based Astra Zeneca and Chinese tech giants Alibaba have announced they're coming together to build smart health systems, to help chest patients in China get vital treatment more quickly.

And the futuristic driverless pods used at Heathrow's Terminal 5 will soon be appearing in China thanks to a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding.

And it's not just tech firms and start-ups that are making the most of these opportunities.

Tech is revolutionising all sectors, whether through autonomous vehicles helping us drive more safely or machine learning making it easier for doctors to find cancerous cells, saving and improving lives.

The question that matters is how we can seize these opportunities of change to expand the potential to make both our nations more prosperous and better places to live.

Looking forward

We share this ambition and determination. AI pioneer and founder of Google China Dr Kai-Fu Lee recently said the UK is home to the 'hottest AI companies in the world, producing breakthroughs of global significance'.

Here, we're investing heavily in AI and robotics and are working hard to attract the best and brightest research talent from all over the world.

We are determined to be one of the leading places in the world for the

development and deployment of AI. And we will share that global leadership with China.

Our universities – the second biggest destination for Chinese students – lie at the heart of this revolution.

But we cannot do this solely from our shores. To make the most of these opportunities we will need to reach common understanding and co-operate on a wide range of issues. We must do this together.

And let's be frank. China and the UK come at some of the questions around, for example data protection, from very different philosophical backgrounds.

This makes it more important than ever that we understand each other – and respect each other's point of view – so we can come to the right solutions and work together.

We, for instance, have stronger protections for data and intellectual property. And while we ask China to respect these protections, we also respect China, and the progress we have seen in mutual understanding.

I was delighted that in December, we partnered with you in the first bilateral science and innovation strategy that China has developed jointly with another country.

This outlines, in the most advanced way yet, shared principles for intellectual property.

Agreements like this are crucial to unlocking the vast opportunities of co-operation and harnessing this technology for good.

We want to work ever closer with China, and other tech-minded countries around the world.

And I was delighted that during the Prime Minister's recent visit, agreements were signed on emerging technologies across the board – twelve in total, including space, smart cities and autonomous vehicles.

For this is the future. Countries that work with, not against, technology, will be the ones that flourish.

Flourishing as two vibrant, prosperous nations using technology to drive growth and make life better for our citizens and people across the world.

For if we have learnt one thing this past generation, then we have learnt this.

Free markets, in a proper framework, have been the most powerful force for good the world has ever seen – underpinned by the protection of property, openness to trade and sound finance.

China's journey is testament to this fact. Britain may have pioneered the market economy but, by God, China is proving it works.

You have lifted people from poverty more quickly than ever before in human history. We salute you.

And what's more, the free market rests on an understanding that business, done right, is a force for good in the world.

You can't run a good business unless you're solving problems for someone else. Solve them so well that they're prepared to pay you.

This is how prosperity is built. Our nations both understand this.

Conclusion

The UK and China are no strangers to changing history through our innovation and enterprise.

And as we celebrate the Year of the Dog, let's channel this spirit and just imagine what more we can do when we work together in the years ahead.

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Speech: Four years since the illegal annexation of Crimea: article by Boris Johnson

On the night of 22 February 2014, the most powerful men in Russia gathered in the Kremlin and resolved to seize Crimea from Ukraine.

They would later make elaborate efforts to give their decision a veneer of legitimacy – including by staging a bogus referendum – but that meeting between President Vladimir Putin and his security chiefs was designed to seal the fate of Crimea's people.

We know this because Mr Putin said as much. In a documentary for Russian television, broadcast in 2015, the President described the sequence of events.

He decided to grab Crimea during that conclave in the Kremlin 3 weeks before the sham referendum. All those claims about how he acted to protect the region's people or uphold their wishes were, by Mr Putin's own account, utterly mendacious.

So it was that Russia seized 10,000 square miles from Ukraine and broke the first principle of international law – that countries may not acquire territory or change borders by force.

Mr Putin [formally annexed Crimea](#) into the Russian Federation on 18 March 2014. Four years after that event, we should remind ourselves of the enormity of what happened and redouble our determination to stand up for our values and uphold international law.

Russia's land grab in Crimea amounted to the first forcible annexation of the territory of a European country – and the first forcible redrawing of a European frontier – since 1945.

In the process, Russia broke so many international agreements that listing them all is a challenge. To select a few examples, Mr Putin trampled upon [Article 2 of the United Nations Charter](#), the [Helsinki Final Act](#) and the Russia-Ukraine Treaty of Friendship.

He also broke Russia's specific pledge, contained in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, to respect the "existing borders of Ukraine" and "refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine".

And after annexing Crimea Mr Putin went still further, igniting and vigorously fanning the flames of conflict in eastern Ukraine. To this day, Russia continues to deploy troops and tanks in a conflagration that has claimed over 10,000 lives and driven 2.3 million people from their homes.

[Flight MH17 became another victim of this tragedy](#) when a Russian missile launched from an area controlled by Russian proxy fighters blew this passing airliner out of the sky, killing 298 innocent people, including 10 Britons.

All the while, reports have emerged from Crimea of the [oppression of the indigenous Tatar population](#) and the harassment of those opposed to Russian annexation. Despite repeated calls from the UN General Assembly, Russia has refused to allow international human rights monitors to enter the peninsula.

In the end, the security of every nation depends on the essential principle that countries should not change borders or acquire territory by force. That is why the fate of Crimea matters to all of us.

We all have an obligation to stand up to Russia in a measured and resolute way. That means sustaining our Crimea-related sanctions against Russia for as long as the region remains under Kremlin control, and keeping further sanctions in place whilst the [Minsk Agreements in eastern Ukraine go unheeded](#).

These measures are intended to demonstrate that no country, however large, can dismember its neighbour and break international law without consequence.

Nevertheless, while holding fast to our principles, we should engage firmly and purposefully with Russia. We need to communicate with clarity and directness our concern over the Kremlin's actions.

There is no contradiction between dialogue and deterrence – indeed the one can reinforce the other – as I made clear when I [visited Moscow in December](#). As permanent members of the Security Council, Britain and Russia also share

special responsibility for international peace and security.

Our motto with Russia must be to 'engage but beware' and both halves of the formula should be pursued with equal resolve. But we must never forget the terrible consequences of that late night gathering in the Kremlin.

Press release: Welsh Secretary visits new US Embassy in London to promote UK-US trade ties

Cultivating and nurturing the strong UK-US trading relationship topped the agenda when Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns met with the Ambassador of the United States to the UK, Robert W Johnson at the new US Embassy building in south London earlier today (22 Feb).

Mr Cairns and Mr Johnson discussed providing certainty, continuity and increasing confidence for UK and US businesses as the UK leaves the EU and how the UK Government is committed to a post-Brexit economy that gives the UK and the USA even more opportunity to trade than ever before.

The meeting comes hot on the heels of the Secretary of State's three-day mission to New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania last week (12-14 Feb).

With the aim of attracting American businesses to invest in Wales and build on a trading relationship already worth more than £3.9 billion, Mr Cairns met with companies operating in sectors from cyber security to pharmaceuticals.

Businesses in Wales already have strong links with some of the strongest and fastest growing economies in the world. There are over 250 American companies based in Wales such as GE Aviation, Ford and General Dynamics.

Welsh companies exported more than £2 billion to the world's largest economy in the year to September 2017.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

As our largest trading partner, the US remains an enormously important market for Wales as well as the rest of the UK.

During last week's trade mission to the USA so many of the businesses I met looked upon the UK as the bridge between America and Europe and a partner of choice for trade.

I was delighted to have the opportunity today to discuss the positive meetings I had there, and to discuss how we can take the

next positive steps to create more investment and exporting opportunities for companies on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ambassador of the United States to the United Kingdom Robert W Johnson said:

Wales is an important partner for the United States.

There is a significant amount of trade and investment between us, which is great news for workers in Wales and America.

But there is still a lot of potential for us to do more business, and together we are going to help more companies cross the Atlantic and find new opportunities to succeed.

Speech: Attorney General speech at the Modern Slavery Summit

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you this morning. Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to pass on my thanks to the CPS for organising and hosting this important summit on prosecuting Modern Slavery crimes.

On behalf of the UK Government may I also pass on a very warm welcome to you all. Many of you have travelled a long way to be here, and I hope this summit will be an important step in improving international dialogue and combatting the crimes of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking.

As we are all very well aware, modern slavery exists in all our societies. It respects neither borders nor jurisdictions and its victims are subject to the most appalling mistreatment and exploitation, this brings our task at this summit into sharp focus.

I know you will be looking at identifying ways to better support victims and witnesses, and establishing a strong, active international network to tackle Modern Slavery.

In the last 8 years, the UK has clearly demonstrated that with the right will and mind-set it is possible to transform our approach to Modern Slavery.

The then Home Secretary, and current Prime Minister, identified modern slavery as a significant problem, and since then this Government has put in place an ambitious strategy and dedicated legislation to tackle it.

Prior to 2010, there was no bespoke legislation and the law enforcement response was not sufficiently coordinated or effective to deal with this type of offending.

Giving law enforcement agencies the tools to tackle modern slavery is paramount in achieving successful prosecutions, and at the same time protecting victims. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 does just that. The Act not only consolidates all modern slavery legislation into one Act, assisting both the police and prosecutors but introduces other equally important measures to improve the criminal justice response. For example :

- the introduction of maximum life sentences for perpetrators;
- the provision for civil prevention and risk orders', which stop potential acts of trafficking or forced labour from taking place; and
- the introduction of a statutory defence for those forced or coerced to commit crimes like cannabis farming – which will also help safeguard victims from abuse.

These measures are now beginning to have a real impact and – we are seeing a real rise in convictions for new offences prosecuted under the Modern Slavery Act and at least 56 Slavery and Trafficking Prevention and Risk Orders to restrict offender activity are in place.

In addition to these new measures and tools, training remains important. Investigators and prosecutors need to be well trained so they are readily able to identify elements of Modern Slavery in their cases. They also need to be aware of the new tools they have available to tackle these crimes and prevent further offending from taking place and to identify and protect victims.

As well as a criminal justice response, it is important that there other powers and regulations in place to stop the exploitation of vulnerable victims and to disrupt potential crimes before they take place.

The Modern Slavery Act established an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. Their job is to work with law enforcement agencies, local authorities and third sector organisations to encourage identification, prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of modern slavery crimes – across the UK and internationally. This role is essential in order to advise the Government on improvements to the system and to encourage joined up working across the UK.

More recently the Government has used the Immigration Act 2016 to extend the remit and strengthen the powers of the Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority. Its new mission will be to prevent, detect and investigate worker exploitation across the entire economy.

The Modern Slavery Act also includes a world-leading transparency in supply chains measure requiring certain businesses to report how they are eradicating modern slavery from their organisation and their supply chains. By forcing business to report on this, it has made them much more aware of potential modern slavery crimes. Most importantly, the Modern Slavery Act

has provisions to give protection to overseas domestic workers, a duty on public authorities to notify the Home Office when they come across potential victims.

Crucially, we have found that where support for victims of this crime, who are typically extremely vulnerable and often reluctant, or fearful of engaging with law enforcement, is prioritised prosecution rates are higher and the chance of a successful prosecution much more likely.

The National Referral Mechanism – the NRM – is the UK system for identifying and providing access to support to potential victims of modern slavery. The Modern Slavery Act ensued that this support was extended to all victims of Modern Slavery in England and Wales.

The NRM should act as bridge – helping victims to be lifted out of situations of exploitation; providing specialist care and support to enable them to begin to recover and rebuild their lives; and facilitating their return to the relevant community.

We recognise that the NRM does not always do this for victims, and that is why we are committed to reforming it to ensure better results for victims.

Having a regulatory environment which encourages collaboration between law enforcement agencies, first line responders and licensing authorities is essential in tackling such a wide ranging crime and our research reflects that this aligned approach produces better outcomes for victims. The global prevalence of Modern Slavery is significant, and whilst it is a largely hidden crime the International Labour Organisation and Walk Free Foundation in 2016 estimated that there are 40.3 million caught up in Modern Slavery globally. This is a conservative estimate and in reality there could be many more victims worldwide.

No country can tackle modern slavery alone and I am proud to be part of a Government that is leading the fight against this horrendous crime internationally.

To drive further progress and collaboration at the international level, the Prime Minister convened a group of world leaders at a modern slavery event during the UN General Assembly in September 2017. Leaders and senior ministers from 21 member states attended the event and 42 countries have now endorsed an ambitious Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. This sets out the practical steps that countries will take to effectively respond to modern slavery and fulfil the commitments set out by the international community. At that meeting the Prime Minister also announced that the UK would double its aid budget spend on modern slavery to £150m.

£33.5 million of this is set aside in a Modern Slavery Fund, managed by the Home Office, and of this £11 million has been allocated to an innovation fund to trial new approaches to tackle and reduce the prevalence of modern slavery and to identify interventions that could be scaled up.

This £11 million fund is currently supporting 10 successful projects which are being taken forward by a range of organisations including NGOs, universities and multilateral organisations. These projects target issues such as tackling slavery in supply chains, supporting victims, exploring vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation and helping to share skills and expertise with overseas partners.

It should not be surprising that the majority of the victims referred to us are from countries other than the UK. In the last year there has been a significant increase in referrals from Sudan and Ethiopia with the most referrals coming from Vietnam and Albania.

In response, we are increasing bilateral engagement with and increasing the operational response in countries from which a high number of vulnerable people are exploited and trafficked into the UK.

Building strong partnerships is the key to improving our understanding of the context that leads to vulnerable people being exploited and trafficked to the UK to better inform our approach and operational response so this can be disrupted. This conference is an excellent step in improving that collaborative approach.

We are increasing law enforcement cooperation, including through establishing joint investigation teams and greater intelligence sharing, to tackle this crime and bring perpetrators to justice. Additionally we are working with international law enforcement agencies to improve the international operational response. For example, the UK has encouraged Interpol to strengthen its understanding of modern slavery and its enablers to better understand international law enforcement challenges and gaps.

We all share a moral duty to end Modern Slavery, a duty that transcends party politics and country borders and which unites us in our determination to root out this dreadful crime from our society.

I welcome the opportunity this summit brings to create a unified, international approach to tackling modern slavery and ensure that victims receive the support and assistance they need to begin the process of rebuilding their lives.

The leadership we show at this summit is therefore important. The task of tackling modern slavery is an urgent one, so we need swiftly to put our words into practice and hold ourselves to account for the progress that can be made.