

News story: US-UK Trade Working Group lays groundwork for potential future free trade agreement

The International Trade Secretary, The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP, and the US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, jointly chaired the plenary session of the first meeting of UK-US Trade and Investment Working Group on Monday 24 July.

The first meeting of the Trade Working Group, made up of representatives from several US and UK government agencies and delegations from the UK and US, will focus on providing commercial continuity for US and UK businesses as the UK leaves the EU and exploring ways to strengthen trade and investment ties ahead of the exit.

The Working Group will also begin to lay the groundwork for a potential, future free trade agreement once the UK has left the EU, and explore where we can collaborate to promote open markets around the world.

International Trade Secretary, The Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP said:

It is a testament to the political will in both countries that this Working Group is meeting just a month after Ambassador Lighthizer and I discussed it in June. This will be our forum to strengthen the bilateral trade and investment relationship and deepen the already extensive economic ties between the UK and US.

The immediate priority is to give businesses on both sides of the Atlantic certainty and confidence. Early discussions will focus on providing commercial continuity for US and UK businesses as the UK leaves the EU.

The working group will also start to lay the ground work for potential negotiations on an ambitious free trade agreement. The US is our single largest trading partner therefore we have a strong foundation on which to build.

US Trade Representative, Ambassador Robert Lighthizer said:

I warmly welcome Dr Fox and his team back to Washington to kick off the first meeting of the US-UK Trade and Investment Working Group.

We expect this Working Group to be a key mechanism to deepen our

already strong bilateral trade and investment relationship, and to lay the groundwork for our future trade relationship once the UK has left the EU.

I look forward to building on our already strong economic relationship and furthering our mutual goal of achieving free and fair trade and investment to create good-paying jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trade between the two countries is already worth about £150 billion a year.

The US is the single biggest source of inward investment into the UK, and, according to US statistics, the UK and US have around \$1 trillion invested in each other's economies.

Policy paper: Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006: post-legislative scrutiny

This memorandum provides a preliminary assessment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It has been prepared by Defra for submission to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

News story: Lifeboat charities to receive £1 million grant boost

Local rescue services will benefit from £1 million in funding to help ensure the safety of water users across the UK.

The money, made available by the 'Inshore and inland rescue boat grant scheme', can be used to purchase lifesaving equipment, such as boats, life jackets and safety gear.

Maritime Minister John Hayes said:

We value and support the lifesaving work that goes on every day by

our dedicated local waterway rescue services. Their commitment and skills keep our rivers, lakes and inshore areas safe.

The additional funds provided by the scheme will ensure that these tireless volunteers and charities can get the boats, equipment and other resources they need to provide round-the-clock lifesaving services.

Since its launch in 2014, the scheme has made a real difference to local rescue services, having helped over 80 charities in their role to assist those in danger on and around our waterways.

Earlier this year, Portsmouth and Southsea Voluntary Lifeguards used a lifeboat funded by the grant scheme to save the lives of those on board 2 different vessels off the coast of Portsmouth.

View a [map of charities](#) that have benefited from over £2.6 million of government funding over the last 3 years.

Charities have until 6 September to submit their bids to the Department for Transport, which is running the scheme with advice from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Royal Yachting Association and devolved administrations.

Read about [how to apply under the 2017 to 2018 scheme and eligibility requirements](#).

[Press release: Crackdown on unfair leasehold practices](#)

Radical new proposals to cut out unfair abuses of leasehold have been announced by the government today (25 July 2017) in a major move that will deliver a fairer, more transparent system for homebuyers.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has set out plans to ban new build houses being sold as leasehold as well as restricting ground rents to as low as zero. This can often expose homebuyers to unreasonable and long-term financial abuse.

Leasehold generally applies to flats with shared spaces, but developers – particularly in the north west – have been increasingly selling houses on these terms.

With 1.2 million leasehold houses currently recorded in England and the number of leasehold sales rapidly growing, the government is taking crucial action to make future leases fairer.

Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

It's clear that far too many new houses are being built and sold as leaseholds, exploiting home buyers with unfair agreements and spiraling ground rents. Enough is enough. These practices are unjust, unnecessary and need to stop.

Our proposed changes will help make sure leasehold works in the best interests of homebuyers now and in the future.

Other measures, which are now subject to an [8-week consultation](#), include:

- setting ground rents to zero levels – in recent years these have increased significantly, in some cases doubling every 10 years
- closing legal loopholes to protect consumers – such as leaving some leaseholders vulnerable to possession orders
- changing the rules on Help to Buy equity loans so that the scheme can only be used to support new build houses on acceptable terms

The terms of some leases are becoming increasingly onerous to those purchasing leasehold flat or house, who often find they need to pay thousands of pounds to their freeholder to make simple changes to their homes. Recent cases include:

- a homeowner being charged £1,500 by the company to make a small alteration to their home
- a family house that is now unsaleable because the ground rent is expected to hit £10,000 a year by 2060
- a homeowner who was told buying the lease would cost £2,000 but the bill came to £40,000

Ground rents are charged on all residential leasehold properties but evidence shows that they are becoming increasingly expensive. Under government plans they could be reduced so that they relate to real costs incurred, and are fair and transparent to the consumer.

The proposed prohibiting of future houses being sold as leasehold will apply to all houses apart from a few exceptional circumstances where leasehold is still needed – such as houses that have shared services or built on land with specific restrictions.

The [consultation](#) will last for 8 weeks from Tuesday 25 July 2017.

These proposals relate to England only.

Department for Communities and Local Government [statistics](#) estimate there were 4 million residential leasehold dwellings in England in the private sector in 2014 to 2015 and of these 1.2 million were leasehold houses.

Official Statistics: UK natural capital: ecosystem accounts for freshwater, farmland and woodland

Official statistics are produced impartially and free from political influence.