

Green Party respond to potential Syria airstrikes



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The Green Party has responded to reports of Britain planning to join the USA in bombing targets in Syria.

Jonathan Bartley and Caroline Lucas, co-leader of the Green Party, said:

“The horror of the chemical weapons attack in Douma, in Eastern Ghouta, at the weekend was truly sickening. The UK’s response must have the backing of parliament, debated and voted on by MPs free from party whips so they can decide on the evidence and with their conscience.

“The Green Party will always listen to all the evidence, and we are not persuaded that an attack would deter conflict. To the contrary, we believe there is a serious risk of further escalation which will only bring greater conflict and suffering to the people of the region. To bomb Assad without a serious, thought-out strategy risks making a horrific situation even worse, and this will be the key test of any British Government proposal.

“But tough action doesn’t have to mean military intervention and Britain should urgently explore every alternative to further bombing. This should start with a crack-down on Russia, including unilateral and international sanctions. Britain must also step up as a diplomatic leader and strain every sinew to get all relevant parties around the table for discussions to broker peace.

“In the longer term, and in recognition of the appalling failures of recent years in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere, we must enhance and expand UN peacekeeping and peace-building capabilities. Britain must too urgently take more refugees from the region to join those already settled here.”

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5 ways trade and tourism between Scotland and China is booming

This week First Minister Nicola Sturgeon is in China promoting trade, tourism and cultural links with the country.

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Asbestos removal company and managers sentenced after forging documents

An asbestos removal company, and two of its managers, have today been prosecuted after forging documents in order to obtain an asbestos licence from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Greater Manchester Magistrates' Court heard how, between 16 March 2012 and 10 March 2016, Excavation and Contracting (UK) Ltd used both forged medical certificates and forged asbestos training certificates for their asbestos removal operatives. These forged documents had been made by their asbestos operations manager, David Lloyd, and included medicals in the name of the company operations manager, Lee Cooper, and forged training certificates for Lee Cooper and the managing director, Brendan O'Halloran. The doctor who had allegedly issued these medical certificates had retired sometime earlier to live outside the UK.

The HSE investigation found the defendants had used forged documents to obtain an asbestos licence from HSE in order to trade. The investigation also found the company could not show that they had properly trained or adequately monitored their workers who were exposed to asbestos.

David Lloyd, of Hanwell Close, Leigh pleaded guilty to breaching Regulations 10(1)(a) and 22(1)(c) of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. He was sentenced to 12 weeks in prison suspended for two years and was ordered to carry out 200 hours of community service. He was also ordered to pay costs of £1,000.

Lee Cooper, of Shelley Close, Huyton, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulations

10(1)(a) and 22(1)(c) of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 and was ordered to undertake 80 hours of community service and pay costs of £1,000.

Excavation and Contracting (UK) Ltd of West Quay Road, Warrington, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulations 10(1)(a) and 22(1)(c) of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 and was fined £13,000 and ordered to pay costs of £10,000.

HSE inspector Matt Greenly said after the case: “Putting people at risk from asbestos by not training them or monitoring their health, as required by law, not only puts their lives at risk from an incurable set of diseases, but is also wholly unnecessary.

“There are ample affordable training providers and approved doctors who can carry out these functions at the convenience of the contractor. Taking deliberate shortcuts by creating forged documents will not be tolerated by HSE and we will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action against those that fall below the required standards.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

Press release: Security in the Gulf is vital to keeping Britain safe

In the UAE, Gavin Williamson met with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed, and his Emirati counterpart, Mohammed Ahmad Al Bowardi, reaffirming the historic and very successful defence relationship. He also commended the role the UAE, a Global Coalition partner, has played in the fight against Daesh.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our long-standing and deep relationship with our Gulf partners epitomises Britain's global outlook. Be it through our involvement in the Duqm port project in Oman or the opening of the Naval

Support Facility in Bahrain, we are committed to regional security and stability.

Gulf security is our security and what happens in the Gulf has a direct impact on the security of the British public at home.

The Defence Secretary also visited personnel on board HMS Middleton and HMS Bangor, which were alongside at Port Zayed. Mr Williamson reiterated how grateful he was for the access and facilities that the UAE provides the UK. The UAE is the most visited port globally by the Royal Navy, highlighting the value Britain places on this relationship in its support to regional stability and security.

In Oman, Mr Williamson met the Minister Responsible For Defence, Badr bin Saud al Busaidi, to discuss the potential embedding of Omani officers to work and train alongside UK Armed Forces as Loan Service Personnel. It will be a unique arrangement for the UK as it does not currently have any other Loan Service Personnel embedded with our world renowned Armed Forces.

They also reviewed the work taking place at the Duqm port facilities which, in time, will host UK warships and is large enough to welcome the UK's future flagships, aircraft carriers HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. They also discussed Exercise SAIF SAREEA 3 which will be the largest UK-Oman joint exercise for 15 years. Almost 5,500 British troops from all three services will train side by side with the Sultan's Armed Forces, sharing experiences and trialling new concepts.

Press release: Homes England investment accelerates development of more than 5,000 homes at Ebbsfleet Garden City

Homes England has completed a £74 million deal that will unlock the next phase of development at Ebbsfleet Garden City in Kent – funding a range of infrastructure works that include earthworks to fill in a lake to prepare the land for the development of more than 5,000 new homes.

The infrastructure works will unlock 657 acres of land that will be used to develop up to 5,290 new homes – accounting for around a third of the total Ebbsfleet Garden City housing development – as well as around 180,000 sq ft of commercial development.

The Homes England supported enabling works through a loan deal to Henley

Camland include preparing land for the development of housing on both the Castle Hill site and the Eastern Quarry at Ebbsfleet. Henley Camland, the residential infrastructure and place-making firm which recently purchased the Eastern Quarry site from Landsec, has simultaneously agreed land deals for 2,900 homes to be developed. 2,600 of these homes will be delivered by Countryside Properties and Clarion Housing Group in a new joint venture, while Barratt Homes will build 300 homes on this part of the wider site as a direct result of the works funded by Homes England.

Representing one of Homes England's largest deals of the past 12 months, the £73.97m loan is being made through the Home Building Fund (HBF). The HBF helps unlock or accelerate the delivery of residential and mixed-use housing developments through both development loans and loan funding for the infrastructure needed to prepare land for development.

More than 1,000 of these new homes at Ebbsfleet will be provided by 2021, with the full scheme due to be completed over the next decade.

Nick Walkley, Chief Executive of Homes England, said: "At Homes England we're using our land, finance and expertise to speed up the delivery of new homes. The vital infrastructure works that we're funding in Ebbsfleet will bring forward the development of many new homes by around four years overall and, importantly, will mean many more homes can be built in the earlier phases of the development as a result of our support with the significant infrastructure costs."

The HBF loan will also mean other important services to support the housing development, such as a new secondary school, can be delivered much sooner than would have been possible without Homes England's support. A 'fast track' route through the site connecting Bluewater to Ebbsfleet International Station will also be created.

Ian Piper, Chief Executive of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation who oversee Ebbsfleet Garden City, said: "This from Homes England, when combined with the investments already made by Ebbsfleet Development Corporation in key utilities infrastructure, is key to delivering the new homes that are required to create our vision for the Garden City. It is a good example of public bodies working together to deliver great places".

Ian Rickwood, CEO of Henley, which has secured the delivery of 2,900 homes through a series of simultaneous deals commented: "Following Homes England's investment and our quick succession of deals with various housebuilders, £1bn worth of quality homes will be delivered at a time when the UK is in dire need of them. We've worked hard alongside our partners to unlock these homes, as well as the new senior school and remain committed to bringing forward more homes and infrastructure at Ebbsfleet Garden City."

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For further information please contact Lisa Cattanach, Communications Manager at Homes England on 0115 852 6904 / 07880 475445 / email: lisa.cattanach@homesengland.gov.uk