

Press release: Defence Secretary confirms £1.7bn investment in Scottish military bases

Sir Michael Fallon outlined how Scotland will be home to several additional key Defence capabilities by 2020 to the Board and recognised its unique contribution to UK national security.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Scotland is on the frontline of defending the United Kingdom from growing threats at sea, in the air, and on land. Our commitment to the future of defence in Scotland is underlined by increasing investment in better infrastructure for the Armed Forces helping to keep us safe.

Scotland's 14,000 military regular and reserve personnel and 3,930 MOD civilians are set to benefit from:

- £1.3 billion investment into upgrades to HM Naval Base Clyde's waterfront, engineering support, accommodation and physical security ahead of the Dreadnought class of deterrent submarines arriving in Scotland from the early 2030s;
- £400 million investment at Lossiemouth as one of the RAF's three fast jet bases – upgrading its runways, taxiways and accommodation for the nine new Poseidon P-8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft and an additional Typhoon squadron;
- Being home to a versatile Army Adaptive Force Brigade, which specialises in operations, works alongside partner nations abroad, and provides resilience support to Scottish civil authorities and communities. Further, Leuchars Station will be expanded to become the main 'hub' for Army activity in Scotland.

The £178 billion Defence equipment programme supports 11,000 Scottish industry jobs and accounts for over 10% of the country's industrial base.

Scottish business is developing key military capabilities: the Queen Elizabeth Carriers being built in Rosyth; Offshore Patrol Vessels and Type 26 Global Combat Ships being built in Govan and Scotstoun; a new Active Electronically Scanned Array Radar for RAF Typhoons being built in Edinburgh.

Press release: Payback for illegal waste crimes

A skip hire boss has been found to have benefited from his illegal activity by almost £1million.

Raymond Shepherd could have to pay back £980,207 under the Proceeds of Crime Act – the agreed sum of his criminal activities – if he comes into future assets.

It's a debt for life for the 61-year-old, of Rookhope in County Durham. He ran Albert Hill Skip Hire in Darlington and was jailed for 18 months when he appeared at Teesside Crown Court for sentence on December 12, 2013.

He was also disqualified from being a company director for 10 years.

He was convicted following two separate trials of operating a waste facility without a permit, depositing waste without a permit and failing to comply with a suspension notice.

Environment Agency officers then began proceedings to make him pay back a sum of money which reflected the gain from his criminal activities.



Court hearing

On Thursday 23 February, following a 4-day confiscation hearing at Teesside Crown Court under the Proceeds of Crime Act, Shepherd was given a confiscation order to pay back £14,000 of available assets.

He could face up to six months in prison if he fails to pay.

And if he comes into future assets he will have to pay back more of the near £1million agreed benefit sum.

Shepherd contested the application arguing that the activities at the sites were carried out lawfully.

The result comes on the back of a large-scale investigation by the Environment Agency, called Operation Bachelor, which started in 2008. It has also resulted in two other men receiving suspended prison sentences and Albert Hill Skip Hire Ltd being fined £100,000.

A previous Proceeds of Crime hearing in August 2015 in relation to the same investigation saw Shepherd's son, Tony Shepherd, 41, of Winston, Darlington, ordered to pay back £350,000.

He was subsequently jailed for 3 years in May 2016 for failing to pay the sum. He still has to pay back the money, and potentially up to £1.2 million if he comes into future assets.



Debt 'will follow' Shepherd

Oliver Harmar, Area Director for the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

This is a debt that will follow Raymond Shepherd around for the rest of his life. It sends out a message to the industry that waste crime does not pay and not only will we hit people with court action but we'll then hit them in the pocket.

Shepherd's illegal waste operations were carried out in the interests of profit, unfortunately at the expense of the environment. Not to mention by not complying with regulations, he undermined legitimate businesses.

And the impact on the community must not be overlooked, including two major fires which took place at Dodsworth Street. The site is now cleared of waste.

It's been an extensive and long-running investigation by our officers and shows just how seriously we take waste crime. We'll continue to take action against those operating outside of the law and the regulations.

Long-running investigation

The Environment Agency worked closely with other organisations including Durham County Council, Darlington Borough Council, Durham Police, Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and the Health and Safety Executive during the long-running investigation.

The jurors at Raymond Shepherd's trials heard how the company's premises at Dodsworth Street were full with illegally-held waste.

Between July 2008 and May 2010 he and his company, Albert Hill Skip Hire Ltd, operated an illegal waste transfer station at Whessoe Road in Darlington.

He did the same at Dodsworth Street from July 2008 until the site got a permit in April 2009, but by November 2009 the first enforcement notice had been served on the company requiring that he operate legally within the terms of his notice.

In 2010 enforcement notices were served, in 2011 a suspension notice was served and in 2012 the permit was revoked. Investigations found the company had been depositing and storing waste on an access road, and cement-bound asbestos was also found on the site.

Following conviction, the waste carrier's registration was revoked. The site is now clear of all waste.

[Paying for local government](#)

I joined in the Parliamentary debate on Council funding on Wednesday. I urged the Secretary of State to complete his review of how much each Council receives, and do more to help Councils like Wokingham and West Berkshire that are at the bottom of the tables for grant assistance.

The government has pledged to come forward with proposals to reduce the extremes between the highest paid and lowest paid Councils in the country. Some say that Councils with substantial deprivation deserve more money than Councils in more affluent areas. Of course if there is more need of public service this should be reflected in grant levels. But we also have to take into account the higher costs of provision in an area like Wokingham. It is also the case that Wokingham and West Berkshire have growing populations of elderly people with excellent longevity, in need of considerably more social care.

Labour criticised the government for treating Wokingham too well compared to areas with higher grants. I pointed out that Wokingham still gets poor treatment in terms of grant per head compared to many parts of the country.

[Blether Tay-Gither – Storytelling in Dundee](#)



[From Blether Tay-Gither](#) :

Our February Blether will be on Tuesday 28th February – at 7pm in Madigan's Food Emporium and Bookshop, Castle Street.

The theme this month is "Tales Frae Ower the Water."

Hope to see some of you there – all welcome!

Beijing to replace all taxis with new energy vehicles

Beijing is aiming to gradually replace its petrol-powered taxis with greener new energy vehicles to help reduce air pollution starting from this year.



A new engery car is on the road in Beijing. [File photo/ecns.cn]

The plan is contained in a discussion document on preventing and solving air pollution problems in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region and neighboring provinces, which was issued on February 14, according to National Business Daily.

All petrol-and diesel-powered taxis being taken out of service would need to be replaced by electric or liquid petroleum gas (LPG) powered cars. Any vehicles that taxi companies plan to buy should be electric or other types of new energy cars.

Statistics show that Beijing currently has about 71,000 taxis in total, out of which 67,000 are conventionally powered, the National Business Daily reports.

It is estimated the market size would reach 9 billion yuan (about 1,309 million USD) if all the taxis in Beijing were replaced by electric or natural-gas-powered vehicles, according to National Business Daily.

Experts say once the plans in the discussion document implemented, it will not only contribute to the environment, but stimulate China's new-energy

vehicle industry.

However, it is not easy for green powered taxis to compete with traditionally powered ones at present, due to concerns over longer time needed on charging and the limited mileage of electric vehicles, says Liu Tao from the Beijing Taxi Cum Automotive Leasing Association

Purchasing a traditionally powered vehicle would generally cost between 60,000 yuan (about 8,725 USD) to 70,000 yuan (about 10,179 USD), but an electric vehicle would cost about 140,000 yuan (about 20,359 USD), Liu said.

But if the number of new energy vehicles is increased, that cost will go down, say Li Liangjin, CEO of CAOCAO, a Chinese travel service platform.