

Readout of Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace's phone call with US Secretary of Defense Dr. Mark T. Esper

News story

The Defence Secretary has had a phone call with his US counterpart to discuss ongoing collaboration and shared challenges



The Defence Secretary and US Secretary of Defense Dr. Mark T. Esper earlier in the year at the Pentagon

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace conducted a phone call with U.S. Secretary of Defense Dr. Mark T. Esper today and underlined the continued importance of the two nations' respective contributions to NATO.

Both defence leaders discussed strengthening NATO through mutual support to, and collaboration with, allies and maintaining military readiness in the era of constant competition, despite the global COVID-19 pandemic.

They discussed the ongoing operations and conflicts in Afghanistan, against Daesh in Iraq and Syria and the situation in Libya. They also discussed concerns about Russian and Chinese disinformation and agreed to continue to work together to mitigate the effects of this malign activity.

Mr Wallace also expressed his gratitude for the United States' continued partnership, and the vital friendship of one of our staunchest Allies.

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£11m Caton Road, Lancaster Flood Risk Mitigation Scheme continues in line with Covid-19 guidelines

Work is continuing on the multi-million flood risk management scheme in Lancaster in line with government safety guidelines to ensure that flood risk in one of the city's most important commercial areas is significantly reduced.

On completion, the £11million project will protect homes and businesses as well as helping to safeguard jobs. Key features will include new flood defence walls and embankments stretching from Skerton Bridge to junction 34 of the M6. Additional works will take place on the right bank of the river to reduce the risk of flooding to homes and businesses on Aldrens Lane.

The project is being done in partnership between Lancaster City Council and the Environment Agency who are working with VolkerStevin, Boskalis Westminster and Atkins (VBA Joint Venture Limited), and remain on site to deliver the flood mitigation scheme.

Latest construction activity is centered on flood walls being put into place along the Millennium Cycle Path near the River Lune.

Gary Bowker, Project Engineer and Project Manager for Lancaster City Council said "We are doing everything we can to make sure that work continues safely and that delays are kept to an absolute minimum. It's vital that we deliver this scheme for our communities."

"Our priority in these difficult times is the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and the public. As a result we have temporarily closed the drop in centre on Caton Road and will not be holding any public events for the foreseeable future."

"I am pleased that we are starting work on the Millennium Cycle Path section this month and delighted that we have worked so hard as a team to overcome obstacles including flooding in February this year, to continue safely in our efforts to provide this vital, and life changing scheme"

Andy Brown, Flood Risk Manager for the Environment Agency in Lancashire, said: "In line with government advice, the project team are continuing to deliver this flood risk management project and are working with our staff and contractors to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those working on this important scheme.

"Many residents and business owners across Lancashire will understand first-hand the devastating consequences that flooding can have on homes, livelihoods and communities. This is why it is vital that we continue to invest in projects like this, which drastically reduce the risk, and bring

peace of mind to local residents.

“The safety of our staff, partners and the communities we work in remains a priority for us and we are thrilled with the progress made so far on this scheme.”

Government to give VAT from donated PPE to healthcare charities

- recent VAT revenue from PPE donated to the NHS and care homes will be given to charity
- money to support frontline workers affected by Covid-19
- donations made to Care Workers Charity and NHS Charities Together

The Care Workers Charity and NHS Charities Together will benefit from the government donation, which is expected to be worth hundreds of thousands of pounds.

The government introduced a temporary zero rate of VAT on PPE on 1 May to reduce costs for care homes and businesses buying the essential equipment during the Covid emergency.

The amount to be donated to charity will reflect the VAT collected on donations made from 1 March until 30 April – the period between PPE donations starting and when the zero VAT rate became effective.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay said:

Frontline health workers are fighting coronavirus day in, day out – in our hospitals, care homes and communities. Whilst we will never be able to fully express our gratitude to them, we want these donations to be a small sign of our appreciation.

From the Treasury and the whole government, we say thank you for all you are doing.

Health Minister Jo Churchill said:

I’m delighted that these donations will be going to such a worthwhile cause, helping those that selflessly care for others.

These charities are doing fantastic work, supporting our amazing NHS and social care staff, who continue to display incredible determination and resilience as they lead the struggle against this

invisible killer.

VAT is due on assets donated by businesses where they paid and reclaimed VAT when they originally purchased the goods.

Businesses will have until the end of June to tell HMRC what VAT they have paid, giving them time to complete their usual accounts and identify these costs. Affected businesses should contact ppe@hmrc.gov.uk for further information.

NHS Charities Together is a membership organisation representing, supporting and championing NHS Charities. They support the NHS on a variety of projects.

The Care Workers Charity provides crisis cash grants to care workers. This includes those working in residential social care, home care, supported living care and day care.

The donation will be split equally between the two charities. Both the Care Workers Charity and NHS Charities Together are run nationwide and people across the UK will be able to benefit.

Ellie Orton, Chief Executive of NHS Charities Together said:

“We’re really pleased to receive this donation and put it towards supporting NHS staff, volunteers and patients as they deal with the Covid crisis. NHS charities are working closely with trusts across the UK to put that support in place.”

Karolina Gerlich, Executive Director of the Care Workers Charity said:

The Care Workers’ Charity is delighted to accept the donation from HM Treasury. The charity exists to support care workers, give them a voice and to advocate for the social care workforce.

There are about 2 million care workers in the UK, many of whom exist on a low income. This means that if they are impacted by a crisis, it is all too easy for them to be plunged into a financial crisis. The charity supports care workers by offering grants for everyday living costs and emergencies that enable individuals and families to maintain a quality of life. This donation will boost our collaborative efforts with care workers, key industry stakeholders and policy leaders to reach a consensus from which the social care sector can become stronger and more cohesive. Care workers nurture and protect the most vulnerable people in our society and they deserve to be recognised and appreciated.

The Department for Health and Social Care will make the donation of the VAT on the government’s behalf.

Further information

HMRC estimates that the donation will be between £500,000 to £1 million.

[Building supply companies abandon merger during CMA investigation](#)

News story

Kingspan has abandoned its proposed deal with Building Solutions during an in-depth CMA probe.



The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has therefore today confirmed that it will be cancelling its Phase 2 merger investigation into the takeover.

Kingspan is the leading provider in the UK of standard foam sandwich panels, which are commonly used as insulated cladding on commercial and industrial buildings such as large waste facilities. Building Solutions also sells a range of insulation and specialist construction products through a variety of businesses, including Steadmans, Trimform, Advanced Cladding and United Roofing Products.

After [completing its initial Phase 1 investigation in April 2020](#), the CMA found that the proposed deal could result in customers facing higher prices or lower quality products.

It found that Kingspan and Building Solutions are 2 of only 3 key suppliers of standard foam sandwich panels in the UK and would only face serious competition from one other UK-based supplier – Tata Steel – after the deal. Competition from suppliers of products imported from outside the UK and suppliers of other products sometimes used as insulated cladding is also very limited.

The CMA had moved to an in-depth, 'Phase 2', review after its concerns were not addressed by the firms.

Kingspan and Building Solutions have now decided to abandon the deal and so the CMA will be cancelling its investigation.

More information is available on the [case page](#).

For press queries, email press@cma.gov.uk or call 020 3738 6460.

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[£150 million A585 Windy Harbour to Skippool improvement under way](#)

Press release

Work on £150 million bypass and junction improvements along the A585 near Poulton-le-Fylde in Lancashire is getting into its stride after government approval.



Highways England's Windy Harbour to Skippool improvement – which will ease journeys along one of the busiest sections of the A585 between the M55 and Fleetwood – was approved by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps on 9 April after a planning inspectorate examination last year.

Highways England's senior project manager Jonathan Stokes said:

The new road and associated improvements will tackle existing congestion, help secure and improve opportunities for housing and jobs, and contribute to improved connections to the motorway network.

While it will be several months before local people and other road users will be able to see very much going on along the route we'll be producing a regular project newsletter to keep people informed.

Although significant roadworks are several months away, key preparation work has started – with construction workers operating to government guidance related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The work includes constructing a project site office and continuing archaeological investigations along the path of the 70mph dual carriageway new bypass south of Little Singleton.

To mark the start of the work, the first project newsletter has just been published and is being delivered to thousands of homes across the area from today (Thursday 21 May). Future editions will be published online on the [project webpage](#) where anyone interested in the work can also sign up for regular free email alerts. Anyone with questions can email the project team at a585windyharbourtoskippool@highwaysengland.co.uk

The new road and improvements to the junctions at Windy Harbour and Skippool are expected to take about three years. Work will initially be undertaken away from the existing road before moving on to reconfiguring the existing junction at Skippool and creating new junctions at Skippool bridge and Garstang Road. Finally, the existing route will be converted to a local road with enhanced provision for walking and cycling.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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