

News story: Carbon-cutting rail schemes share in multi-million pound government funding boost

- five innovative projects to receive £350,000 each from government to adapt their schemes for the rail network
- announcement comes as rail minister welcomes industry response to DfT's challenge to cut diesel emissions on the network
- battery hybrid trains expected on the Lakes Line in the early 2020s could be an early example of the new technology

Solar panels that directly power trains and a system that uses hydrogen and oxygen to produce steam to power engines are just 2 projects that have been given a share of £1.75 million in government funding for use on the rail network, Rail Minister Andrew Jones announced today (31 January 2019).

Five projects have been chosen for development funding in the second round of the Department for Transport's (DfT's) First of a Kind (FOAK) competition, which focuses on innovative schemes that can cut the carbon footprint of the UK's railways – part of the government's drive to a cleaner, greener economy which is a key part of its modern Industrial Strategy.

It comes as rail industry leaders publish the interim Rail Industry Decarbonisation Taskforce report addressing the challenge set by the DfT last year for cutting emissions and removing diesel-only trains from the network by 2040.

Rail Minister Andrew Jones said:

We want a cleaner, greener rail network and transforming our trains will help make this a reality. The targets we set for 2040 are ambitious but are within our reach.

It is encouraging to see the huge efforts already underway to make this happen. This funding will be vital in helping these fantastic projects adapt to the demands of rail and enable their potential roll-out, delivering a cleaner, healthier network for passengers.

It also underlines the shared commitment of government and industry to ensuring we have a modern railway that protects our environment.

The FOAK competition, run by Innovate UK and part of the DfT's wider [Accelerating Innovation in Rail scheme, was launched in 2017](#) and focuses on two themes in this second round of funding – decarbonising of the railway and improving the passenger experience in stations. The five decarbonisation projects will get £350,000 each to allow them to be adapted for the rail

network.

Simon Edmonds, Manufacturing, Materials & Mobility Director, Innovate UK said:

Travelling or moving goods by train is rightly seen as more sustainable. Yet there is more we can do to make the railway cleaner and greener by decarbonisation. This can be achieved by deploying more energy-efficient systems, using lighter rolling stock and looking at technologies from other industries.

The pioneering projects for which we have announced funding today can reduce both the costs and the carbon footprint of the railway industry and help innovative companies succeed, both here and in export markets.

The taskforce report, authored by former Angel Trains CEO Malcolm Brown, concludes that the removal of diesel-only passenger trains can be achieved by 2040, and outlines aims for further investment on a range of alternatives including bi-modes, hydrogen and battery trains.

Among the priority lines for potential battery hybrid trains will be the Lakes Line in Cumbria. Train operator Northern will shortly submit a business plan for it to potentially be one of the first lines to benefit from this innovative technology.

Manufacturer Alstom, engineering company Viva Rail, and rolling stock owners Angel Trains and Porterbrook are also developing a range of alternatively-fuelled trains for the UK network, including battery hybrids and hydrogen powered units.

Malcolm Brown, Chairman of the Rail Industry Decarbonisation Task Force, said:

Our report sets out a credible set of options to meet the challenge to decarbonise. We believe that there is a real opportunity for the rail industry in Great Britain to become a world leader in developing and delivering low carbon solutions.

The report also highlights significant opportunities to cut carbon emissions in stations and depots, and underlines levels of support available from research and development funding.

The UK is a world-leader when it comes to clean growth – reducing emissions while seizing the economic opportunities. Since 1990 the UK has cut emissions by more than 40% while continuing to grow the economy.

Press release: Digital revolution to use the power of data to combat illegal wildlife trade and reduce food waste

- Jeremy Wright will also announce government's contribution to new fund, which will be up to £30 million, to spark a wave of tech innovation
- World-first 'data trust' could see conservationists sharing audio and image data to help tackle illegal wildlife trade
- This is part of Government's modern Industrial Strategy which will harness the power of technology to help make a real difference to people's lives

Pioneering digital technologies such as artificial intelligence could be used to crack down on global challenges as part of a world-first 'data trust' programme to be piloted in the UK.

More than £700,000 will be invested in the initiative to tackle issues such as illegal wildlife poaching and food waste mountains. The funding will help organisations such as [WILDLABS](#), [Tech Hub](#) and [WRAP](#) design the frameworks required to exchange data between organisations in a safe, fair and ethical way.

The aim of the scheme, which will be run by the Open Data Institute and the Government's Office for Artificial Intelligence, is to exploit the power of data exchange between organisations with the raw data and those with expertise to process it to tackle major global issues.

Exploring the potential of data trusts was a key commitment of the AI Sector Deal, a joint policy by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The Industrial Strategy sets out Grand Challenges to put the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future, ensuring that the UK takes advantage of major global changes, improving people's lives and the country's productivity.

The news comes ahead of a speech in which the Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright will announce a package of measures to spark a wave of innovation in tech for social good.

This includes the government's partnership with the [Social Tech Trust](#) to establish a fund of up to £30 million to provide access to finance and position the UK as a global leader in socially transformative tech. A further £1 million will be available to incentivise organisations to use tech to help tackle loneliness and bring communities together.

Digital Secretary, Jeremy Wright, said:

Technology is already making our lives easier in many ways but there is still so much untapped potential that we can deliver for social good.

As a world-leader in emerging technologies, the UK is best placed to foster these opportunities. The new policies announced today, backed by new funding, will encourage industry to deliver technological innovation to address issues as diverse as animal poaching, food waste and loneliness.

Business Secretary, Greg Clark, said:

From cutting food waste to tackling illegal wildlife crime, our innovators are working to harness the huge potential of data and artificial intelligence to solve international challenges.

Our modern Industrial Strategy identifies our unmatched heritage and strength in AI as a huge opportunity for the UK. We are leading the world in its development and use, benefitting from the highly skilled jobs and economic growth this technology creates.

The Open Data Institute defines data trusts as a legal structure which provides independent, third-party stewardship of data for the benefit of a group of organisations or people.

The new plans include:

A partnership between leading conservation charities , WILDLABS Tech Hub and technology experts to reduce the level of illegal trade of wildlife by sharing image data to assist border control officers around the world in identify illegal animal products from their smartphones.

Audio data could be used to train algorithms to detect gunshots or the underwater sound of illegal fishing vessels coming into protected areas then real-time alerts will be pinged to rangers.

WRAP will be working with food and drink businesses to track and measure food waste to develop solutions which could see savings passed on to consumers, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and water usage.

Royal Borough of Greenwich and Greater London Authority will be looking at how data collected through their Sharing Cities Programme, could help make certain data available in a data trust, including energy consumption data collected by sensors and devices in buildings; data about parking space occupancy and the availability of charging bays for electric vehicles. This third pilot is funded by Innovate UK through the ODI's R&D programme.

Jeni Tennison, CEO at the Open Data Institute said:

Increasing access to data can help people, communities and organisations make better and more timely decisions – such as which energy supplier to use, the route a bus should take, or whether to invest in creating a new product. But the people and organisations that have data, use it, and are affected by its use need to trust that it is stewarded well and shared equitably and for agreed purposes.

Data trusts are one potential way to increase sharing of data and unlock more social and economic benefits from data while protecting other interests such as people's privacy, corporate confidentiality or, as in the pilot we're doing on data about endangered animals, our environment. The ODI is also looking at other approaches to increased access to data, including data sharing models such as those adopted by the European innovation programme Data Pitch, where large organisations share data with startups in order to fuel innovation and answer specific challenges.

The Digital Secretary will also announce new measures to boost tech driven by social purpose during his speech at Doteveryone in London this morning.

This is part of his vision for 'tech for good' which will champion technology as a force to change lives for the better, increase engagement between the social and tech sectors and ensure charities understand how they can use technology to achieve their mission.

These include:

A [Social Tech Venture Fund](#), administered by the Social Tech Trust, which will see government and industry invest up to £30 million to support innovative solutions to encourage people to be healthier and help them to build connected communities. The Social Tech Venture Fund will increase access to finance and position the UK as a global leader in socially transformative tech;

£1 million to incentivise organisations to develop solutions to tackle loneliness and bring communities together; Government backing for a new [Digital Agenda Impact Awards](#) to showcase and celebrate tech for good innovations from across business, government and charity organisations;

A collaboration with the [Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology \(CAST\)](#) and its network of social sector partners to explore how best to support charities to embed digital in their strategy, services and culture;

Naming the organisations to benefit from a share of Government's £1 million Digital Leadership Fund, which aims to boost charity leaders' digital knowhow and how they can use technology to benefit their respective causes. Winners will include Age UK, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and Cornwall Museums Partnership.

Charities are already using digital technologies to support their work. Breast Cancer Care developed the BECCA app, which gives patients information and emotional support after their treatment has completed. More than 15,000 women have used the app in the first year and the creators hope to reach 20,000 more by 2020.

Today's announcement builds on work the Government has already done in supporting the use of tech for social good. This includes helping to bring together the private, charity and public sectors to embrace technological advances to improve people's lives and the country's productivity.

Notes to editors

Quotes from organisations involved in data trust pilots

Sophie Maxwell, from WILDLABS Tech Hub said:

AI has the potential to revolutionise wildlife conservation and strengthen the technological tools needed to end wildlife crime. In order to harness this opportunity, however, we need to be able to distribute large-scale, well-curated data sets to machine learning experts. WILDLABS partners are very excited about collaborating with the ODI and Office for AI to deliver simple mechanisms that make it easy and safe for the conservation community to share data. It's collaborative efforts like this that will help us save threatened species around the world.

Mike Falconer Hall, New Product Development Manager at WRAP said:

WRAP's work focuses on forging powerful partnerships and delivering ground-breaking initiatives to support more sustainable economies and society. Carefully building and understanding the evidence which galvanises action is at the heart of everything we do. These pilots will give us the opportunity to build on our experience and explore different ways to create an environment where organisations can confidently share their data.

The Open Data Institute (ODI) is using funding from the Office for Artificial Intelligence and InnovateUK to support its work on the data trust pilots. This is part of Government's modern Industrial Strategy, putting pioneering technologies at the heart of plans to build a Britain which is fit for the future.

Data trusts operate by allowing multiple individuals or organisations – such as supermarkets, conservation charities or local authorities – to give some control over data to a new institution – the trust – so that it can be used to create benefits, either for themselves or other people, or both. That benefit might be to create new businesses, help research a medical disease, or empower a community of workers, consumers or citizens.

The Office for Artificial Intelligence is based in central government and responsible for overseeing implementation of the UK's AI strategy, policy.

About the Open Data Institute

The ODI was co-founded in 2012 by the inventor of the web Sir Tim Berners-Lee and artificial intelligence expert Sir Nigel Shadbolt to show the value of data, and to advocate for the innovative use of data to affect positive change across the globe. It is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan company headquartered in London, with an international reach. We work with companies and governments to build an open, trustworthy data ecosystem, where people can make better decisions using data and manage any harmful impacts.

The AI and Data Grand Challenge

The Industrial Strategy sets out Grand Challenges to put the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future, ensuring that the UK takes advantage of major global changes, improving people's lives and the country's productivity. Artificial intelligence and data is one of the four Grand Challenges which will see AI used across a variety of industries and put the UK at the forefront of the AI and data revolution.

Further information on the winners of the Digital Leadership Fund

[Superhighways \(c/o Kingston Voluntary Action\)](#) Kingston Voluntary Action will partner with London Plus, National Association for Voluntary and Community Action and the Foundation for Social Improvement to support small local charities to expand existing training – from basic software skills through to helping leaders embed digital tools and services.

[Tech Trust](#) Tech Trust will expand its occasional Charity Digital Tech Conference webinars to be a regular programme and create a live stream of the events so up to 200 organisations can take part remotely, increasing accessibility of the service for charities.

[Social Enterprise Kent](#) Social Enterprise Kent will host two-day Digital Leadership workshops for local social enterprises centred around cyber security. This will help charities create a digital strategy, take advantage of online tools, and learn how to best utilise social media. They will fund 15 social sector courses, reaching 105 social enterprise leaders.

[Cosmic](#) Cosmic will host 10 three-day Digital Leadership workshops, produce an e-learning platform for South West charity leaders and host a Digital Charities Summit in March 2019 to share learning.

[Voscur](#) Voscur will expand their training programme to 110 organisations through five two-day workshops, supported by a webinar series and host virtual drop-ins.

[Cornwall Museums Partnership](#) Cornwall Museums Partnership will expand their Rural Proofing Digital Leadership Programme by subsidising 90 places on 4 new Digital Leadership Insights and Ideas Seminars, a two-day Digital Leadership

Deep Dive Board Retreat and a new Digital Leadership e-learning module for rural heritage organisations.

[Age UK, Midlands](#) Age UK Midland will expand their Be Digital programme and roll-out their face-to-face workshops to train leaders in teams rather than individually, to share learning throughout the Age UK network, embedding digital in their organisation.

[Age UK, South Lakeland](#) Age UK South Lakeland will expand their training beyond Cumbria to nearby districts with digital skills gaps by hosting 27 additional workshops for up to 30 people.

[The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association](#) Guide Dogs' will expand their Digital Transformation programme to digitally upskill their trustees and senior leadership on e-learning platforms and face to face workshops to enable them to provide meaningful digital services to 500,000 visually-impaired citizens.

[DotEveryone](#) DotEveryone will improve their existing training programme material and deliver five additional workshops.

[Media Trust](#) Media Trust will increase the reach, relevance and accessibility of their digital marketing strategy training workshops and target socially and economically disadvantaged areas that have a high level of charities.

[School for Social Entrepreneurs](#) The School for Social Entrepreneurs will expand the reach of their two-day workshops, benefitting more charity leaders

[Social Misfits Media](#) Social Misfits Media will expand their current training programme by partnering with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and Lightful to equip 360 leaders across 120 organisations in five regions.

Examples of 'tech for good' companies who have benefited from Government support:

Government helped to establish [Bethnal Green Ventures](#) an early-stage investor in companies and organisations that use technology to radically change people's lives for the better. It is best known for its 12-week accelerator programme, which provides investment, co-working space and intensive mentoring and support. To date, Bethnal Green Ventures has supported 95 ventures, investing £1.9 million and having a combined positive impact on 18 million lives.

[GoodGym](#) supports runners to get fit by doing 'good'. Its platform helps runners to help others by enabling them to come together to tackle problems as part of their run. Partner organisations like AgeUK refer isolated older people who are then matched with runners on regular visits. GoodGym is a charity and free to participate in though many runners donate £10 monthly.

[Nationwide's 'Open Banking for Good'](#) is a challenge fund calling on fintechs to use Open Banking technology to help address financial inclusion issues. Nationwide has made £3m available to fund solutions. This financial inclusion

fintech fund was formed as part of Cabinet Office and DCMS's Inclusive Economy Partnership.

Speech: TheCityUK Annual Dinner 2019: Chancellor's speech

Paul, thank you very much for those kind words of introduction, and for inviting me to speak to you again tonight.

Let me start where you left off, by offering my thanks to John, as he steps down later this year as Chairman of TheCityUK's Board.

I know you are a keen singer John. So let me just say that your leadership was pitch perfect...and best of luck with the next gig.

And, of course, thanks to you too, Paul, as you start your final year as Chairman of the Advisory Board.

This really is the changing of the guard for TheCityUK, and I thank you both for your exceptional leadership over a critical period.

Let me also pay tribute to all of you in this room.

You lead and champion a crucial sector of the British economy...

...supporting business with capital and services...

...and households with mortgages, insurance and pensions.

You contribute over £176 billion of GVA to our economy...

...creating a trade surplus of over £75 billion at the last count...

...and employing more than 2 million people in every region and nation of the UK.

But as the world changes, so must The City.

And I want to talk this evening about how we work together to ensure that your sector remains at the forefront as Britain rises to the challenges of a changing world...

...and that the UK continues to be a world-leading finance and business centre long after the Brexit turmoil has died down.

There is a story about a politician whose wife would introduce him at speaking events, by saying:

I am afraid my husband cannot speak for more than ten minutes, or he will have a problem with his throat – I will slit it.

My wife, sadly, isn't here tonight, but with the dessert still to come, I promise you I will pretend she is.

Let me start by updating you on Brexit.

I do, of course, understand your frustration at the Brexit process.

I cannot make it go away...

...(the frustration nor the process)...

...but I can try to explain what is happening and what is likely to happen next.

Last night's vote gives us, for the first time, a clear commitment by Parliament to support a deal.

But it is, of course, a deal with significant differences to the one that has been agreed with the EU...as I think the EU quickly observed!

So we face a challenging task in seeking to persuade the EU to move its position. But that is what we will be seeking to do.

The PM also made a very important commitment to those who were seeking to prevent a "No Deal" outcome.

She told them that yesterday would not be their last chance to attempt to persuade the House to do so – and that there will be an opportunity to repeat last night's vote on February 14th.

So we now have a clear timescale: the PM will work up a new proposal to put to the EU over the coming days.

She will negotiate on the basis of that proposal for the very best deal it is possible to secure – and will bring that back for approval by the Commons.

If that approval is not forthcoming, there will be a further opportunity for Parliament to reach a majority decision about how to proceed on February 14th.

Navigating Brexit in good order is clearly our most immediate task – but it is not the only challenge on the horizon.

Nor, over the long-term, is it necessarily the most significant.

The City would be facing profound change, even if we were not leaving the EU.

The global economy is changing; an irreversible shift of wealth and power is taking place.

Dramatically higher savings rates in some Emerging Market economies...

...and the growth of a vast new middle class...

...mean the geographical balance of asset holdings is changing at a breathtaking pace.

At the same time, the technology revolution is having a profound impact on our economy and society...

...forcing us to take radical action to ensure we have the skills and talent we need for the future.

Against this backdrop, and even without Brexit, we would have had to make the case all over again for Britain as the best place in the world for financial and business services.

And we have a plan to do so.

We start from a position of strength.

The City has a long history of dynamism and agility, and significant structural advantages, that mean it is well-positioned to respond to challenges and turn them into opportunities.

The fundamentals of our economy are robust...

...we are dealing with the deficit, cutting taxes, and tackling the productivity challenge through our modern Industrial Strategy...

...and it has grown continuously for eight years – proving remarkably resilient in the face of Brexit uncertainty.

Paul, you rightly challenged me on what the government is doing about investment and infrastructure.

And I have an answer:

Through initiatives like the National Productivity Investment Fund...

...the government is delivering the biggest sustained programme of public sector investment since the 1970s...

...and is committed to 2.4% of GDP being spent on research and development, in a partnership with industry to ensure Britain remains at the cutting edge.

But despite these successes I am not for one moment, complacent about our economic performance; I know we will only stay ahead by being one step ahead of the competition.

So let me set out my vision for the future prosperity of the UK's finance sector – and then, I promise, it will be time for dessert.

First, our future success will depend on becoming more, not less open as an

economy.

The deal that we have negotiated with the EU – which remains in my opinion the best basis for a negotiated Brexit...

...means that we will retain close economic and trading links with our EU neighbours, including in financial services, even as we leave the EU.

But of course, that relationship will evolve...

...and over time we must expect EU business to be a gradually declining share of our financial services exports...

...as a steadily rising proportion will be with the fast-growing economies beyond Europe.

We are well equipped to make this transition.

We have always had a global outlook – part of the world, not just part of Europe.

Our historic relationships mean we are uniquely well-positioned to build trade and economic partnerships with the fastest expanding markets.

And we should not underestimate the significance of the change that is underway in the global balance of financial power...

...nor the scale of the opportunity it represents.

Emerging and developing economies together are home to 85% of the global population and 90% of people under 30...

...and their economies already account for nearly 60% of global economic activity and one third of global trade...

...but they account for just 10% of the global financial system.

So, as savings accumulate and the new middle class grows exponentially...

...there is an enormous opportunity for the City.

The government is taking action to support you to take advantage of this profound transformation.

Our Global Financial Partnerships strategy is an ambitious programme to build Financial Services links with sophisticated financial centres around the world...

...that will provide new levels of market access and new channels into emerging and developing economies for UK businesses.

That strategy will utilise the new flexibilities at our disposal as we leave the EU...

... as well as leverage existing approaches, like bilateral Dialogues and regulatory cooperation.

So that a Bank based in London can deliver services as easily to a business on the other side of the world as it can today to one on the other side of the Channel.

We are already seeing the first fruits in insurance agreements signed in recent weeks with the US and Switzerland.

I am grateful for your support and input in developing this strategy – and I look forward to working with TheCityUK to build on this momentum in the months ahead.

In parallel with these profound changes, the rising tide of protectionism is imposing tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars of trade.

I am clear that Free Trade is the only way to secure prosperity around the world.

So we need to make and remake the case for free and open markets.

But we must also make the case for reform.

And nowhere is that reform more needed than in liberalising the rules for trade in services.

Services now account for 65% of global GDP...

...and as much as 80% of the most developed economies.

So liberalising trade in services would be one of the simplest and quickest ways to rebalance global trade.

Doing so would be:

...good for the global economy as a whole – IMF analysis shows that reducing trading costs for services by 15% could boost total GDP of G20 countries by more than \$350 billion this year...

...good for developing countries, with the IMF and World Bank estimating that liberalising services trade could raise manufacturing productivity in these economies by over 22%...

...and exceptionally good news for the UK as the world's second largest exporter of services.

So I very much welcome the start of formal negotiations in Davos last week on the eCommerce agreement between 75 WTO members.

But we must go further still.

The UK will lead the world in arguing for services liberalisation, through pushing for ambitious services provisions in Free Trade Agreements...

...and multilaterally through the wider WTO reform agenda...

...using our expertise to shape and influence the liberalisation of the global services economy.

In the new global economy, our world-leading record on innovation and technology will secure the UK's competitive advantage.

Nowhere is that truer than in financial services.

The FinTech revolution is driving a remarkable transition in the way we access financial services – changing the way these services work, and the structure of the industry.

And Britain is at the forefront of it.

We've heard a lot about 'unicorns' over the last few weeks. But frankly, I'm more interested in growing tech 'unicorns', than slaying Brexit ones..

A record-breaking £12 billion was invested in UK Fintech in the first six months of last year alone – so I expect to see a lot more of them, grazing contentedly in UK fields, in future.

But alongside investment and innovation, a safe and transparent regulatory environment – one that fosters, rather than stifles, innovation – will be a key location driver for cutting edge technology businesses in the years to come.

So we've set up the Cryptoassets Taskforce to provide certainty about regulation and tax while protecting consumers and markets in the face of growing use of cryptoassets and distributed ledger technology.

We are leading the world in meeting the ethical challenges of technology innovation, by establishing the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation...

...and through the Regulators' Pioneer Fund, we are supporting our statutory regulators to develop world-leading regulatory responses to the challenge of new technology.

Finally, for the professional services industry, Britain must remain open to talented professionals from around the world. And it will.

As we leave the European Union, free movement from the EU will end...

...and we will move to a globalised immigration system.

But the Immigration White Paper is clear, it proposes removal of the cap on numbers for highly skilled workers, and the resident labour market test; and the continuation of short-term business mobility.

Our objective is a system that responds to public concerns about freedom of movement, while protecting our economy...

...by making sure that businesses can get the talented people they need, when

they need them, with minimal friction.

We have announced a 12-month engagement period – and I urge the City to engage constructively with this process.

Domestic skills will also be crucial to the future of this sector. And I'd like to thank TheCityUK, and Mark Hoban in particular, for their crucial work on our domestic skills pipeline.

I look forward to hearing your proposals soon.

The City has long been a world-leading financial centre;

Our history is one of innovation, resilience and openness.

Our success today is built on a complex ecosystem, not easily or quickly replicable by others.

But to remain ahead, we must evolve, as we have done continuously in the past.

Managing our exit from the EU...

...developing new opportunities in our domestic market...

...and building our presence in the fast-growing Emerging Market economies.

Fighting for liberalisation of trade in services...

...embracing and shaping technology...

...leading the regulatory response to it...

...and developing the skills we need for our future.

Working together...

...capitalising on London's strengths...

...we will build the most cyber-secure; best regulated; most innovation-friendly financial centre in the world.

The trading location of choice.

Match fit, and ready for the future.

Let's do it together.

News story: Readout from PM Business Council: 30 January 2019

This afternoon, the Prime Minister hosted the first meeting of her Industrial, Manufacturing and Infrastructure Business Council at Downing Street.

The council, co-chaired by Sir Roger Carr, Chairman of BAE Systems and Ian Davis, Chairman of Rolls Royce, is one of five business councils formed by the Prime Minister to advise on how to create the best business conditions in the UK after its leaves the EU.

Business Secretary Greg Clark and Cabinet Secretary Sir Mark Sedwill also joined the meeting.

The Prime Minister welcomed the members of the council, who represent companies from industries including automotive, energy and advanced manufacturing. She also provided an update on Brexit, following the votes on the next steps in the Commons.

They discussed a range of opportunities and policy issues that are critical to these industries and spoke about how we can work together to implement change that will improve the productivity and competitiveness of companies of all sizes across the UK.

Areas of discussion included skills and training, both in the workplace and in education, and the role of technology in improving productivity, infrastructure and investment. They also spoke about the importance of engaging with young people about business and its importance on their lives and our economy.

All looked ahead to exploring and taking forward their ideas further before their next meeting.

- Ian Davis, Chairman, Rolls Royce – Co-Chair
- Sir Roger Carr, Chairman, BAE Systems – Co-Chair
- Tony Walker, MD, Toyota Europe
- Cressida Hogg, Chairman, Land Securities
- Dame Angela Strank, Head of Technology Downstream & BP Chief Scientist
BP
- Richard Gillingwater, Chairman, SSE
- Liv Garfield, CEO, Severn Trent
- Andrew Churchill, Executive Chairman, JJ Churchill
- Arthur Pinder, MD, A & G Precision
- Emma Bridgewater, CEO, Bridgewater
- Michael Ryan, President, Aerostructures and Engineering Service,
Bombardier
- David Thomas, CEO, Barratt Developments PLC
- Stephen Phipson, CEO, EEF

Speech: Unacceptable conditions in Syria

Thank you Mr President, and let me give thanks to the role of Kuwait of humanitarian co-penholders and by thanking Kuwait and Sweden for their outstanding efforts – especially the renewal in December of UNSCR 2449 on cross-border aid to Syria for another year. Let me also set out the United Kingdom's full support for SRSR Pedersen and our ongoing belief that only a political solution based on Resolution 2254 of this Council can bring sustainable peace.

But Mr President today I'm going to focus my comments on humanitarian issues and let me take Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock's four points as a guide.

So firstly in northwest Syria the United Kingdom is concerned about the growing presence of HTS and the implications of any increase in violence for the ongoing humanitarian response. We remain highly concerned for the 3 million vulnerable people in the area – over 2 million of whom are entirely reliant on cross-border aid. 50 per cent of the population of that area have been displaced from their homes – sometimes multiple times – stretching scarce resources beyond their limits and putting further strain on host communities.

Mr President, we must not lose sight of the risks. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock has spoken of a catastrophic humanitarian impact if a military intervention takes place. It is vital that the ceasefire negotiated by Russia and Turkey is maintained.

Mr President, the situation of the estimated 42,000 people in Rukhban remains of serious concern. Eight children have died there in the last month. Sustained humanitarian access is crucial. It is welcome to hear that verbal approvals have been given and security guarantees made. This must now be followed through on the ground and in reality. The second convoy is vital but it will not alone solve the problem. Our focus must be on ensuring quality access for the United Nations and its humanitarian partners. That means access for the UN to independently assess needs, deliver assistance and monitor the impact of that assistance. We urge the Syrian authorities and those with influence over them to ensure that this happens.

In 2018 the United Nations asked the Syrian authorities to undertake 1382 missions. Over half were never approved. We should all be able to agree that this is unacceptable.

Mr President, let me say that I agree with the Russian Ambassador's comment that politicisation of humanitarian assistance is unacceptable. In that regard the United Kingdom is deeply concerned that conditions in former

opposition-held areas that the regime now controls. Claims that life there has returned to normal are false. People there risk arbitrary detention, conscription and discrimination based on their perceived attitude towards the Assad regime. This is clearly not an environment for safe, dignified, voluntary refugee return – the conditions set out by UNHCR.

Up to one-third of people living in areas that have changed control in the past year are in so-called “hard to reach” areas. They are only hard to reach because the Syrian authorities do not allow the United Nations’ sustained humanitarian presence in those areas and thus humanitarian needs are particularly severe. Again this is unacceptable. The Syrian regime should not politicise humanitarian assistance. For our part, Mr President, the United Kingdom will continue to fund humanitarian assistance according to need – not any other criteria. Those funds from the United Kingdom have been distributed by the United Nations and their humanitarian partners all over Syria, as set out in the various documents and reports of OCHA and others.

The Syrian crisis has been the United Kingdom’s biggest ever humanitarian response. We have mobilised \$3.5 billion of support since 2012, including a new commitment of over \$450 million at the last pledging conference in Brussels.

Let me close Mr President by saying I agree entirely with the French Ambassador’s comments about reconstruction.

Thank you very much, Mr President.