

# **Press release: Planned roadworks in the North West: summary for Monday 6 to Sunday 12 February 2017**

The following summary of planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week is correct as of Friday 3 February and could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

Drivers looking for roadworks information (such as overnight carriageway closures) for individual schemes should now [visit Traffic England](#). Some of our larger schemes have project pages giving other information. These can now be accessed from a [dedicated regional page](#).

## **M6 junctions 16 to 19: Cheshire smart motorway**

Work is underway to upgrade the M6 to a smart motorway between Crewe and Knutsford, converting the hard shoulder to an extra lane and introducing new variable speed limits. Narrow lanes and a temporary 50mph speed limit are in place for the safety of drivers and workers. The southbound carriageway will be closed overnight (10pm to 6am) between junctions 19 and 18 for two nights from Wednesday 8 February, and northbound between the same junctions overnight on Friday 10 February.

## **M6 junction 19 Knutsford to junction 20 (M56 interchange)**

Resurfacing work is due to take place on the northbound carriageway for two nights next weekend. The carriageway will be closed overnight between 10pm and 7am on Saturday 11 February, and between 10pm and 7am on Sunday 12 February. A diversion will be in place.

## **M6 junction 22 Newton-le-Willows**

Essential bridge maintenance work is underway to replace 40 corroded bearings on the M6 junction 22 bridges. Average speed cameras and a 50mph speed limit are in place. The work, between junctions 21a and 23, is due to be completed in the spring.

## **M6 junction 33 Lancaster to junction 32 (M55 interchange)**

Resurfacing work on the southbound carriageway is due to start on Monday 6 February. Two lanes will remain open during the day and one lane will remain open overnight. The southbound carriageway will also be closed overnight for

two nights from Wednesday 15 February, between 8pm and 6am. The scheme is due to be completed by early March.

## **M6 junction 34 Lancaster**

Lancashire County Council's new link road between junction 34 of the M6 and Heysham has now opened but finishing work will require lane and hard shoulder closures along the M6 through junction 34 to continue for the time being. More information is available on [Lancashire County Council's website](#).

## **M6 north of Tebay Services**

One lane will be closed during the day and two lanes will be closed overnight on the southbound carriageway for resurfacing work. The work is due to be completed by March and a temporary 50mph speed limit is in place.

## **M6 junction 45 Gretna Green to junction 44 Carlisle**

Resurfacing work is taking place on the southbound M6 overnight, with one lane remaining open to traffic. The scheme is due to be completed by the end of February.

## **M6/M62 Croft Interchange**

A major project is taking place to tackle congestion and improve the flow of traffic between the M6 and M62 at Croft Interchange. Variable speed limits will be introduced on new electronic information signs on the M62 and traffic lights will be installed on the link roads from the M6. Narrow lanes and a temporary 50mph speed limit are in place for the safety of drivers and workers.

## **M53 junction 1 Wallasey to junction 2 Upton**

Work to upgrade the safety barrier in the central reservation between junctions 1 and 2 on the M53 is due to start on Monday 6 February. Lane closures will be in place overnight, with some full carriageway closures later in the project. The scheme is expected to take around a month to complete.

## **M56 junctions 10 to 11 Warrington**

Work to upgrade the safety barrier and paint new road markings on the M56 near Warrington started on Monday 30 January. Lane closures will be in place overnight between 8pm and 5am, Monday to Friday. The project is due to be completed by the end of March.

## **M60 junction 8 Sale to junction 20 Rochdale**

A major smart motorway scheme is taking place to cut congestion and improve journey times on parts of the M60 and the M62 in Greater Manchester. The

scheme involves overnight slip road and carriageway closures, with narrow lanes and a temporary 50mph speed limit in place for the safety of drivers and road workers.

## **M61 to A580 Kearsley**

The southbound link road from junction 2 of the M61 near Kearsley to the eastbound A580 East Lancashire Road will be closed overnight for bridge repairs from Thursday 9 February. The work will take place between 8pm and 5am, Monday to Friday, and until 7am at weekends. The scheme is due to be completed by early February.

## **M62 junction 18 to M60 clockwise link road**

The link road from the westbound M62 onto the clockwise M60 will be closed overnight, between 10pm and 5am, for approximately one week for resurfacing work from Tuesday 7 February. A diversion will be in place.

## **M66 Junction 1 Ramsbottom to Junction 4 at M60/M62**

Resurfacing work started on Monday 16 January between junctions 2 and 4 of the M66. Some bridge repairs and electrical work will also take place. The work will be carried out between 8pm and 6am and will require some lane or full carriageway closures. A temporary 50mph speed limit will also be in place, and the scheme is due to be completed by March.

## **A556 Knutsford to Bowdon**

A £192 million project is being delivered to build a new dual carriageway linking the M56 to the M6 in Cheshire.

## **A585 West Drive to Fleetwood Cycleway**

Work is taking place on a new shared footpath and cycleway between West Drive and Fleetwood. Narrow lanes and a temporary 30mph speed limit are being used along the route to help provide a safe space for workers constructing the new shared paths. Work will take place between 7am and 7pm each day with occasional overnight work. The project is due to be completed by the end of March.

## **A590 Lindal in Furness**

Work is being carried out to tackle flooding between Pennington Lane and Bank End Cottages. Narrow lanes and a temporary 30mph speed limit will be in place until completion at the end of March.

## **A595 Egremont**

Repairs are taking place to the safety barriers adjacent to Wyndham Place on the A595 and are due to be completed by the end of February. A contraflow

system is in place on the southern approach to the Main Street/East Road roundabout.

## **A66 Bassenthwaite Lake**

A contraflow system is in place while work is carried out on the embankment in the central reservation next to Bass Lake. The scheme is due to be completed in the spring.

## **A66 Thornthwaite (Osprey Site)**

Construction work is being carried out to protect the A66 from flooding, at the Osprey Site near Thornthwaite, by raising the height of the carriageway. Temporary traffic lights are in place along with a 40mph speed limit. The road will be closed overnight between 8pm and 6am from Monday 6 February until the end of March, with a diversion in place.

## **A66 Marron Bridge**

Maintenance work is underway on Marron Bridge, between Broughton Cross and Bridgefoot on the A66. The road will be closed overnight between 8pm and 6am from Thursday 9 February, with a diversion in place. The project is due to be completed by March.

## **A66 Brough**

Resurfacing and drainage work is taking place on the eastbound carriageway at Brough. Overnight lane closures will be in place, between 8pm and 6am, with traffic led through the roadworks by a contractor's vehicle. There will also be some lane closures in place during the daytime.

## **A665 Bury Old Road**

A scheme is taking place to upgrade the safety barriers on the A665 bridge on Bury Old Road over the M60 near junction 17. The work will be carried out between 8.30am and 11pm, Monday to Friday, with temporary traffic lights and lane closures in place from 6.30pm. Some overnight and weekend working may also be required. The Kenilworth Avenue junction with Bury Old Road will be closed throughout the scheme, with a diversion in place. The project is due to be completed by March.

## **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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## **News story: Venturefest Bristol and Bath: exploring future cities innovation**

Venturefest Bristol and Bath 2017 opened last week with a seminar on future cities. Leading businesses from the region discussed the technologies and challenges involved in developing cities that are fit for the future, in the first of a series of activities designed to help find solutions.

The Venturefest events help to identify fast-growth tech companies and start-ups within a region. They also provide a forum for organisations that are developing future cities technologies.

These might include communication networks and connectivity, seamless automation and robotics, as well as intelligent buildings, smart building bricks and in-home technology.

If you are an innovator based in Bristol or Bath over the next 9 months you can attend events that explore the themes from the opening seminar. The programme will include:

### **Smart city marketplace**

Some of Bristol and Bath's best future city-focussed start-ups and scale-ups exhibited at the launch event. They will be back in October to showcase new developments in their ideas. The marketplace will also see the launch of a crowdfunding bootcamp programme in association with CrowdCube.

### **Innovation showcase**

The showcase will highlight the strengths of the region's tech cluster, including solutions that are either in development or already in use, which are helping to meet the smart cities challenge.

### **Investor showcase**

Delegates will have the chance to meet a select audience of angel investors and venture capitalists. The investor showcase is part of the Silicon Gorge Partnership, which includes SETsquared, Idea Squares, Invest Bristol & Bath, TechSPARK.

### **Thought leadership conference**

The progress, productivity and promise of the region will be highlighted in

the October conference. You can see first-hand what the future of urban living looks like in Bristol and Bath. The conference themes will include smart energy, intelligent transport and smart money.

## About Venturefest Bristol and Bath 2017

Venturefest Bristol and Bath is one of a series of Venturefest events across the country, supported by Innovate UK. Ian Meikle, Director for Infrastructure Systems at Innovate UK, said:

Bristol & Bath is one of the UK's most important technology clusters, playing a global role in the development of smart city technology.

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## Speech: Greg Hands speech to British Chamber of Commerce in Germany

Thank you to the British Chamber of Commerce in Germany for inviting me to speak at your annual gala. I accepted the invitation from Peter Brock immediately.

Not only because I have some important messages to get across, but also because there is almost no UK politician with closer natural bonds to Germany than me.

In fact, I was a little surprised when you told me you wanted me to deliver this speech in English, as I would have been as happy to give it in German – as I did a 25 minute speech in German in Munich to the Vereinigung der Bayerischen Wirtschaft in November.

The speech wasn't a problem, although the 45 minute long question and answer section was more challenging! Returning to my story, I took advantage of free movement of labour to move to what was then called West Berlin, in 1985, to take a job as a Bädewarter, in the exotic location of the Sommerbad Kreuzberg, in an area, then as is now, with a strong Turkish influence.

I lived for much of the years 1985 to 1988 in West Berlin, doing whatever holiday jobs I could find, ranging from the Kaufhaus des Westens (or KaDeWe) to McDonalds.

I was lucky to have studied the German language at school. Only 20% of British schoolchildren did so in the 1980s – now the figure is unfortunately below 5%. I want to see that number go back up!

The first part of Germany I entered, as a schoolboy in 1981, was North Rhine Westphalia.

I was travelling to spend 2 weeks in Gummersbach. An enjoyable experience – albeit not quite as exciting as West Berlin 4 years later!

So I had 6 years of German at school – and some school visits – behind me, but nothing that would have prepared me for the unique challenge of ‘Berlinerisch’ when I arrived in Berlin in March 1985.

I took every advantage of the opportunities there.

My wife is from Berlin, and I am the proud father of 2 children who are just as happy speaking German or English.

My wife is the German teacher at an inner London school, so she is doing her bit to help!

My children have all the advantages of bilingualism and occasionally take advantage of having 2 nationalities.

Before the last World Cup, I asked my son, ‘Which country are you going to support in the tournament?’

‘Papa,’ he said, ‘I will start with England and then switch to Germany’. He is a clever boy.

So I have a lot of human capital in the British-German relationship.

I also have a lot of political capital in it.

For 12 years, ever since I became an MP, I have been an active member of the Königswinter group, I attend the Petersberger Dialog not far from here, and I have been to 7 different CDU and CSU Parteitag, of the sister parties of our UK Conservative Party. Some of my best German friends are politicians from North Rhine Westphalia.

Part of the reason for my political interest is that in the 1980s I wasn’t only interested in doing holiday jobs in West Berlin. I took full advantage of the city’s unique geography to visit East Berlin and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – in fact, some 48 times. And also to Czechoslovakia, Poland and so on.

It was very easy in those days to see an alternative system to ours, just 20 minutes to cross over at Checkpoint Charlie or Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse. These days, by the way, it’s a long way to Pyongyang or Caracas.

Emerging one afternoon in 1985, in East Berlin, as an 19 year old opened up a whole new world for me, in every sense.

Once one got used to the cheap beer – not an insignificant attraction at that age – one quickly realised that this Germany was rather different to the one on this side of the Wall.

I met political prisoners, like my friend Heiko, who was imprisoned, merely for seeking to make what was a legal application to leave the country. I met people who were scornful of their political masters, in a way that one doesn't experience even in today's world of anti-politics.

Trade – or lack of it – was a key part of the experience. Most of the goods were shoddy or expensive, or sometimes both. Mouldy oranges from Cuba. Expensive and unreliable electronics from domestic firms like Robotron. Cars which were consciously outmoded and outdated, made of cardboard, like the Trabant and the Wartburg.

And this was in the Eastern Block's most successful economy – the GDR. Further afield, the situation could be much worse.

So I was given an early lesson in the importance of the free market and the great value of free trade. An early lesson which I carry with me today.

We as politicians, and also as business leaders, need to make the strong case for free trade.

This has never been more true than today, when for the first time since 1989, free trade is coming under political attack.

In the words of our Prime Minister, Theresa May, we want the UK to be the most passionate, compelling and convincing advocate for global free trade.

Let me turn to the UK-Germany relationship.

It is a relationship that I hope very much will remain strong and dynamic.

The UK's vote to leave the EU was not us turning our back on our friends in the EU, but to build a more global Britain alongside a strong Europe.

This comes at a time when the voices of economic nationalism and anti-globalisation are becoming louder.

We cannot let them drown out the voices of free and open trade.

### **3 myths about Brexit**

There are some who claim the UK's vote to leave the EU is symptomatic of this trend.

Specifically, that the UK, a once great outward looking nation, is now turning its back on the world.

That by leaving the EU, we are threatening both its core principles and future stability.

And finally, that the UK is undermining its own chances for future economic success.

These are the classic myths of Brexit. Tonight, I want to address each myth



in turn and reiterate beyond any doubt, that the UK will be the global champion of free trade.

## **Britain in the world**

Let me start with Britain's place in the world.

Today's global climate is seeing a slowdown in the growth of global trade.

Protectionist measures are starting to increase.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has warned that, for the first time, trade-restrictive practices are now being instigated at a faster rate than they are being removed.

Yet amidst this climate, it is this UK government that continues to state its intention to be at the vanguard of a freer global trading system.

Free trade has helped hundreds of millions of people escape the scourge of poverty; allowed businesses the world over to gain access to global supply chains and the flow of technology and ideas; and put power in the hands of consumers – giving them access to greater choice than ever before.

We are strongly committed to free trade!

Whilst we remain an EU member, the UK will fulfil its commitments to push forward trade deals with Japan and Canada; and outside the union, we will continue to champion moves towards a more open global economy, as we take our seat as an independent member of the World Trade Organisation.

But in Brexit, we also see an opportunity.

This is our moment to build a truly Global Britain. A Britain, that whilst maintaining and, where possible, strengthening ties with its European neighbours, also looks to the opportunities beyond the borders of Europe, as well.

Britain has always been a country with big ambition. We now have an opportunity to realise that potential.

We will revive trading relationships with global partners, including those in the Commonwealth and emerging economies from east to west.

Doing business with the wider world is vital.

Since joining the EU, exports as a percentage of GDP has broadly stagnated in the UK. In 2015, it stood at 27%, well behind Germany's impressive 47%. In fact, we are the lowest in the EU28 – second lowest is Greece.

So I am delighted that some of the world's fastest growing economies, from North America to the Gulf to China, have already shown interest in striking future trading deals with the UK.

We will also not forget our global responsibilities.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, NATO, the G7 and the G20 – the UK will continue to play a leading role in tackling the world's most pressing problems – from climate change to terrorism.

We are the only G7 country to meet its obligations to spend both 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence, and also 0.7% of GNI on international development.

The UK doesn't do isolationism; internationalism is in our DNA.

## **EU / UK**

Let me turn to the second myth, concerning our relationship with the EU.

The UK has no intention of undermining the stability of the EU, nor do we want to become more distant to our European neighbours.

We want the EU to be a success and we want its member states to prosper. That remains overwhelmingly and compellingly in Britain's national interest.

On 24 June 2016, I didn't wake up and feel any less European. I remember consoling my son, who was in tears, and trying to explain what the result meant.

Being European is an intrinsic part of my British identity.

Our shared values of democracy, tolerance and diversity will endure. No referendum can change that.

But I am, above all, a democratic politician. More people voted to leave the EU in Britain than have voted for anything else in our British history.

They gave this government a democratic instruction, which we must now deliver on.

We want to be the best friend and neighbour to our European partners.

We want to continue to have the closest possible relationship on trade, whilst also maintaining our defence, security and cultural ties.

These ties have sowed peace throughout the continent for 70 years. No-one is turning the clock back.

Looking forward, our first priority will be to build a strong and vibrant future trading relationship with the EU.

I hope, as Chancellor Merkel too has said, that these negotiations can be done in parallel, alongside the negotiations about our exit.

We want to maintain the greatest possible access to the single market, the destination for 44% of our exports, just as I'm sure EU businesses would like continued access to the UK market, with which they trade a €70 billion

surplus.

In 2015, to North Rhine Westphalia, the UK exported €9.5 billion of goods and services. €14 billion went in the other direction – almost 50% more. This includes automotive, machines, metals, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and much more.

The UK actually imports more from Germany, as a whole, than from all of the Americas combined.

That is why we will aim to pursue a bold and ambitious free trade agreement with the EU.

One which allows for the freest possible trade in goods and services between companies and consumers in the UK and those across Europe.

In all trade negotiations, countries set out the institutions, industries and values they must maintain; whilst also outlining the flexibility they have to reach an agreement.

This is the first and arguably most important step.

Both the UK and EU member states will keep their national interests at the heart of the negotiations throughout the exit process – and this is as it should be. Anything else would be a dereliction of duty.

But the long-standing tradition of cooperation between the UK and the EU will give us a strong starting point for such negotiations.

Both sides will be seeking to keep as close a relationship as possible in many areas.

Ultimately, we want the best deal for Britain, but this doesn't have to come at the expense of other member states. Trade is not a zero sum game; nor are security or defence.

Businesses around the world have told me that a severe dislocation in our trading arrangement would be unhelpful and unwelcome.

Look at our interlinked supply chains. Five countries, including the UK and Germany, are involved in manufacturing each Airbus plane. One in 5 BMW engines is made in the UK.

That is why Prime Minister Theresa May emphasised the need of a phased process of implementation regarding a future trading arrangement.

This will avoid a disruptive cliff edge, allowing enough time for businesses to prepare for new arrangements.

This is the common sense approach and ensures businesses from Dusseldorf to Dundee, and consumers from Cottbus to Cardiff don't suffer.

Businesses in the UK and here in North Rhine Westphalia must help ensure that

pragmatism triumphs over political point scoring and over abstract political ideas – for the sake of all our interests.

Jobs and consumers must come first.

Most people in this room should not be surprised when I say that of all Germany's Bundesländer, North Rhine Westphalia is the one of greatest economic importance to the UK.

A relationship born initially out of necessity and the ashes of conflict, is now one of vibrant economic exchange.

You are our biggest trading partner, receiving 30% of our exports to Germany.

61,000 Germans work for the 1,400 British companies based here.

We are your third biggest investor.

National Express now run 2 regional rail services here in North Rhine Westphalia, winning contracts thanks to rail liberalisation in both countries.

A.O. World Plc – a UK online electrical retailer, which does next-day delivery of washing machines and other appliances – is revolutionising service delivery in Germany and has recently opened its European headquarters, 50km away from here, in Bergheim-Paffendorf – creating 300 jobs.

But it is a 2 way street.

Every day, over 100,000 people wake up in the UK to go and work for 578 companies from this state.

Behind these figures lies an undeniable truth. The fortunes of Germany and the UK are inextricably linked.

So let's approach the coming years as partners with a shared purpose: harnessing the principles of free trade to secure our mutual economic well-being.

## **Economic future**

The final myth I want to address is that the UK will somehow be less competitive and less successful outside the EU.

Having served as the number 2 UK Treasury Minister, I know very well the strength of the UK economy.

It would be wrong to underestimate its resilience and potential.

The UK's fundamental economic strengths will not change.

We have a business environment that is second to none. A low regulation economy combined with a widely admired system of contractual law.

Our world beating universities feed a highly skilled and flexible workforce, and London is widely considered the financial capital of the world.

Our recently launched Industrial Strategy means we will continue to pioneer a whole host of new technologies, working with industry and universities, to ensure Britain remains the location of choice for many sectors – from automotive to fin tech to aerospace.

And global business realises this.

Since the referendum, around £16 billion has been invested in the UK from overseas – a clear vote of confidence.

Siemens have confirmed future investment in UK R&D; and chemical distribution firm Brenntag will invest over £50 million, over the next 5 years, in the UK.

The political infrastructure is now also in place.

My newly established Department for International Trade places trade firmly at the heart of government policy making.

This department will serve as a perennial symbol of the UK's global spirit.

We have an ambitious remit: to promote UK companies abroad; to continue to attract the highest levels of inward investment in Europe as well as promote outward investment; and to develop our trade policy capability – which has already seen the number of UK trade policy experts quadruple since the referendum.

We are assembling the tools to ensure the UK becomes a beacon for open trade around the world.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, standing here in North Rhine Westphalia, I am always reminded about what can be achieved when our two nations pull together to defend our shared values across trade, culture, defence and security.

The formation of this federal state 71 years ago ushered in that unprecedented level of cooperation.

It was the start of a bilateral relationship which preceded the very existence of the European Union.

It showed that our ties were strong enough to endure whatever uncertainties the second half of the 20th Century would bring.

They remain strong now, and will continue to be so in the future.

Like I said before, no referendum can change that.

Thank you.

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## **News story: Business Secretary and TUC host corporate governance roundtable**

From:

First published:

6 February 2017

Part of:

Business Secretary Greg Clark today discussed executive pay and how workers' voices can be better heard in the boardroom as he co-hosted a roundtable with TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady.

Experts from top businesses, institutional investors, unions and academia also took part in the discussion as part of a series of events to help inform the Government's consultation on corporate governance reform.

Chaired by the High Pay Centre's Director, Stefan Stern, the event focused on identifying practical ways of improving the connection between boardrooms and employees, and options for ensuring that executive pay is set on a fair basis.

### **Following the meeting, Business Secretary Greg Clark said:**

"We have one of the most admired systems of corporate governance in the world and it is important that we hear from as many people as possible to understand how we can make further improvements to equip us for the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

"It was valuable to host a discussion with such a diverse group, all with the common goal of making sure Britain remains the place where business is done the best."

### **General Secretary of the TUC Frances O'Grady said:**

"This is an important conversation to have about British corporate governance.

"Workers on boards is a common sense idea to ensure the voices of ordinary workers are heard at the highest levels. Common across much of Europe, the evidence shows that workers on boards are valued by other board members and work well for business, workers and the broader economy.

"We stand ready to help make it a reality."

The full list of participants at today's event is as follows:

## **Big business:**

- Nationwide
- Rolls Royce plc

## **Institutional investors:**

- Aberdeen Asset Management
- Hermes Investment Management
- Legal and General Investment Management

## **Business representative bodies:**

- Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- Institute of Directors (IoD)

## **Trades unions:**

- IF Metall, Sweden
- Prospect
- Trade Union Congress (TUC)
- Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW)
- Unite

## **Academics and think tanks:**

- Board Intelligence
- The High Pay Centre
- Involvement and Participation Association (IPA)
- IPPR
- Royal Holloway College
- Tomorrow's Company

The corporate governance reform green paper consultation is open until 17 February. The views of businesses, investors, employees and consumers with an interest in corporate governance reform are welcomed. The full consultation paper and views can be submitted [online](#).

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## **News story: Defence Secretary praises 'good partners' Croatia during visit**

Sir Michael Fallon welcomed Croatia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Damir Krstičević to sign an agreement aimed at developing existing security and Defence relations.

At the Ministry of Defence in London today they discussed Britain's bilateral relationship and explored ways the UK can work together with Croatia on joint

activities.

The Defence agreement focuses on developing the UK-Croatian Defence relationship including focus on: existing joint operations to support stability, peace and security; effective deployments together on future international operations; and further opportunities and benefits for defence procurement and equipment support.

By signing the agreement the Defence Secretary has also confirmed the UK will hold annual Defence talks with Croatia, which will be held at policy director level.

This year Croatia is contributing to the NATO high readiness force which the UK is leading, by providing a platoon of Military Police and a Civil Military Co-operation Team. Croatia will also contribute to the German Enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania.

Croatia has around 100 troops deployed on operations in Afghanistan, where 500 UK personnel are based in Kabul to provide officer training and wider assistance and advice.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Croatia is a good partner of the UK with our Armed Forces' serving together within NATO in Afghanistan and in Europe. The UK will continue to play a leading role in NATO and I welcome Croatia's commitment to the high-readiness force that we are heading this year.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and Croatia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Damir Krstičević signed a Defence agreement during the visit. Crown Copyright.

During their meeting the ministers also discussed the Defence Secretary's meeting with Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic in October and HMS Defender's visit to the port of Split last June.

The UK enjoys good relations with several states in southern and south eastern Europe. In September the Defence Secretary visited Bulgaria and Albania as part of his regional engagement, and last month met UK personnel providing training to the Armed Forces in Ukraine.