

Press release: Flood-hit farm groups given £800,000

The focus of this round of the [Facilitation Fund](#) is on developing a new approach to natural flood management, to help communities hit by the winter storms of 2015 and early 2016.

Organisations such as the National Trust, Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Rivers Trust are joining forces with farmers. They will plant trees, create water meadows and restore rivers to their natural meanders within river catchments in Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Northumberland, County Durham and Yorkshire.

In the 2 years since the scheme began 61 groups with 1218 land managers have been supported, covering more than 273,000 hectares of land.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

We are committed to helping farmers better protect their land, and surrounding communities, from flooding.

We're already investing £15 million in natural flood management schemes across the country, making sure we protect homes and businesses as well as protecting our precious wildlife.

This exciting scheme is a win-win and will see us build-up flood resilience while at the same time achieving some real benefits for our rich natural habitats including our ancient woodlands, grasslands and moorlands.

This is the latest in a series of natural flood management projects which demonstrate the government's commitment to using the best available mix of flood protection measures. It builds on £15m already committed to similar schemes across the country.

Chief Executive of Natural England James Cross said:

The Facilitation Fund is enabling farmers to use natural flood management techniques, such as slowing the flow through river restoration and tree planting, which not only help to cope with the extreme climatic events that the environment is throwing at us but also benefit nature.

We've relied heavily on local knowledge from our area advisers and the expertise of our partners to help groups put forward plans that will benefit nature at the same time as reducing the risk of flooding.

The scheme is designed to work with nature in [flood-hit communities](#), in response to priority actions identified in [Flood Action Plans](#).

The [projects funded this year](#) add to our learning around managing extreme climate events through natural flood management. This technique uses nature-based solutions to address flood management through activities such as:

- restoring ancient and native woodland
- creating more wet woodland
- management of grasslands, including traditional hay meadow
- management of moorlands to restore blanket bog and wet heathland
- restoration of river habitat
- improved soil management

Across England a total of £5.4 million has been committed through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund for groups of land managers to improve their local environment at a landscape-scale. This builds on the principles of partnership working to deliver ambitious, evidence-based actions that will deliver for the environment, business and local communities.

[News story: Pre-payment meter price cap comes into effect to protect millions of consumers](#)

Today the CMA's price cap on pre-payment meters has come into force to the benefit of around 4 million households.

Last June, following a [two-year investigation](#) into the energy market, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) decided to put in place a temporary price cap to protect some of the most vulnerable households in Britain.

The temporary cap is expected to reduce bills across Britain and will save the average household £80 a year. The CMA found that people using pre-payment meters had less choice and were paying disproportionately higher bills than customers paying by other means – including direct debit.

The price cap will remain in place until the end of 2020 when the smart meter roll-out – combined with other changes imposed on the industry by the CMA – is expected to tackle issues that prevent such customers accessing the better deals available to others.

Andrea Coscelli, Acting Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

Households across the UK deserve to get a fair deal on their energy bills.

On top of a number of measures to get competition working better, the CMA's pre-payment meter price cap means that more than 4 million consumers, many of whom are vulnerable, and who can't easily shop around for a better deal, will see their bills cut by around £80 a year each, saving British customers a total of £320 million per year.

[Newslinks for Saturday 1st April 2017](#)

Government accuses EU of trying to inflame Gibraltar dispute...



“The centuries-old dispute over Gibraltar is threatening to halt Brexit negotiations after the EU yesterday backed Spain’s claim to the British territory. Brussels chiefs sparked a diplomatic feud yesterday after including a veto for Madrid over the Rock’s future in their list of Brexit negotiating demands. UK politicians accused the EU of orchestrating a ‘shameful’ attempt to inflame the historic territorial wrangle. Despite Theresa May’s insistence that Gibraltar would not be used as a political pawn, the EU said Spain should be given a say over any future decisions relating to the territory.” – [Daily Mail](#)

- Spain charged with making a grab for ‘the Rock’ – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- What Gibraltar means for the UK and Scotland – [The Scotsman](#)

Scotland:

- Sturgeon threatens 'campaign of disruption' – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- First Minister sends letter seeking referendum – [FT](#)

Comment:

- The First Minister's guerilla strategy undermines May in Brussels – Alan Cochrane, [Daily Telegraph](#)

...as Johnson backpedals on security cooperation

"Boris Johnson insisted yesterday that Britain's commitment to European security was "unconditional" amid a mounting backlash over Theresa May's link between continued co-operation and a favourable Brexit deal. European leaders have widely condemned the prime minister for connecting security co-operation and trade in her letter to the European Union triggering Article 50. Mrs May made the connection 11 times in the letter and repeated it in articles in seven European newspapers, noting that the victims of last week's Westminster attack included nationals of other EU countries. European leaders accused Mrs May of threatening to withdraw co-operation crucial for the safety of the Continent if they did not bow to her trade demands." – [The Times \(£\)](#)

- Exports boom as Britain becomes fastest-growing developed economy – [Daily Mail](#)
- What has the EU done for the UK? – [FT](#)
- Neil skewers Smith over gloomy Brexit forecast – [Daily Express](#)

Comment:

- Why is it fine for Brussels to threaten Britain, but not for May to state mere facts? – Asa Bennett, [Daily Telegraph](#)

David Davis, Britain's Brexit street fighter



"This time David Davis cannot afford to mess it up. The man who blew his chance to lead the Conservative party and then threw away a prospective cabinet career finds himself entrusted with the most sensitive political task in a generation: delivering Brexit. The cliff edge that has always seemed to fascinate him lies ahead. Mr Davis has waited a long time for this chance. At the age of 68, a politician whose time appeared to have passed now holds Britain's economic and political future in his hands. But this time, to the surprise of some, the Brexit secretary seems determined not to squander his shot at history." – [FT](#)

- 'Great Repeal Bill' will create sweeping powers to change laws – [The Guardian](#)
- Trade talks in October if you sort out money and migrants, May told – [The Times \(£\)](#)

- EU officials set sights on 'orderly withdrawal' – [FT](#)
- Tusk's sets out his ten red lines for a deal – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- Europe moves to bar Britain from axing red tape – [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Confidence in delivery of new customs system 'collapses' – [The Independent](#)
- Irish MEP says UK shouldn't be punished but must show respect – [Daily Express](#)

Immigration:

- Government's migration target 'all but dead', say senior Tories – [The Sun](#)
- EU nationals won't have same access to work or NHS, says Gove – [The Sun](#)

Comment:

- The Article 50 letter should have been only one or two paragraphs long – David Allen Green, [FT](#)

David Laws: Britain has a steely negotiator in May, as the Liberal Democrats discovered

"Mrs May is also a person who is direct and straightforward to deal with. She generally avoids the silly political games which are designed to look clever, but which can often only irritate opponents. And she is rarely attracted to political and policy gimmicks, which win one day's favourable media coverage, but unravel shortly after. Finally, this piece of advice: Mrs May is not one of the world's great delegators. In government, she probably shared information and responsibility less with her Liberal Democrat and Conservative colleagues than in any other part of government. So forget Boris Johnson. Forget David Davis. Forget Liam Fox. This will be Mrs May's negotiation and she – and only she – will speak for Britain." – [Daily Telegraph](#)

- If May does go for a soft Brexit it could yet tear the Tories in two – Peter Osborne, [Daily Mail](#)
- Brexit doom-mongers are holding us all back – Janice Turner, [The Times \(£\)](#)
- Enough Remainers remain to put a spanner in the works – Charles Moore, [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Stop the chest thumping: successful negotiators build trust – Jonathan Powell, [FT](#)
- Repeal Bill will give the Tories a free hand, and we can only watch – Sam Fowles, [The Guardian](#)

Editorial:

>Today: ToryDiary: [If Britain needs a new party, we'll only find out after Brexit](#)

>Yesterday:

Kremlin critic praises May for standing up to Putin



“A multimillionaire who campaigns against Russian corruption has praised Theresa May for her tough stance against Vladimir Putin. Bill Browder, 52, said that previous prime ministers were naive “fancy public schoolboys” seduced by the luxurious lifestyle of the Russian president and his associates, but that Mrs May was “a vicar’s daughter who is not taking any shit from the Russians”. Mr Browder has accused Mr Putin of the assassination of political rivals to cover up state-sponsored corruption.” – [The Times \(£\)](#)

- Fallon claims Russia’s worldwide meddling is a threat to Britain – [The Sun](#)

Comment:

- Be thankful for a Prime Minister who tells it straight – Clare Foges, [The Times \(£\)](#)

>Yesterday: Gagik Tsarukyan in Comment: [Britain shows Armenia the path to prosperity](#)

Fallon won’t rule out cuts to Royal Marines

“Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon yesterday refused to rule out axing Royal Marine numbers – amid claims 200 could go. Insiders confirmed reports that plans had been drawn up to reduce the size of 42 Commando, cut overseas training, and re-role it from a frontline Commando unit to a training outfit... Under plans – that are yet to be enforced – Plymouth based 42 Commando will stop being one of three high readiness infantry outfits along sister units 40 and 45 Commando. Instead they will be re-roled to provide training exercises – including playing the enemy during war games.” – [The Sun](#)

- Cutting Marines a threat to Special Forces, ex-officers warn – [The Times \(£\)](#)

More defence:

- Defence Secretary announces £90 million support for new F-35 fighter – [The Sun](#)
- UK defence role lies with the US, insists Fallon – [The Guardian](#)

Hunt to ban 'ambulance-chasing' law firms from advertising in hospitals



"Hospitals are set to be banned from letting ambulance-chasing lawyers advertise on wards and in waiting rooms. The Health Secretary will introduce fines for trusts that continue to allow law companies to distribute flyers on their premises. Jeremy Hunt said he was becoming 'increasingly concerned' at how lawyers are 'intimidating' patients and families. He also paid tribute to the Mail for exposing the 'aggressive and opportunistic tactics' used by these firms to win new business." – [Daily Mail](#)

- Ban on nurses working agency shifts is dropped after protests – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- NHS chief abandons waiting time targets for non-emergency surgery – [The Independent](#)

Comment:

- Four radical ideas that really would save the NHS – Kate Andrews, [Daily Telegraph](#)

Javid condemns developers using Help to Buy to trap people in punishing leaseholds

"Developers are abusing the Government's flagship Help to Buy scheme by selling new-build homes with punishing leases. By the end of last year, leasehold houses made up 15 per cent of properties in the taxpayer-funded project. But the arrangement means buyers do not own their home outright and are forced to pay yearly ground rent to the freeholder – with some fees doubling every decade... Communities Secretary Sajid Javid this week criticised the 'practically feudal practices' of developers who build new houses and sell them as leasehold and is planning a clampdown." – [Daily Mail](#)

Hilton joins campaign for Osborne to resign from the Commons





“Steve Hilton, the former No 10 strategist, backed a crowdfunding campaign yesterday to force George Osborne out of the Commons. The former Downing Street guru, known for his blue-sky thinking, had a fraught relationship with Mr Osborne when the pair worked alongside David Cameron. Mr Hilton left his role as strategy director in 2012 as tensions escalated. Despite a close friendship with Mr Cameron that went back to the 1990s, Mr Hilton proceeded to criticise his former boss’s policies and manner of governing. Now he appears to have turned on Mr Osborne. He linked on social media to the fundraising campaign, which is calling on the Tatton MP to give up his seat now that he has accepted the editorship of the *Evening Standard*.” – [The Times \(£\)](#)

- Cameron starts to ‘put some hay in the barn’ on £120,000-a-time speaking circuit – [Daily Mail](#)

Warsi wants Britons who fight for Israel prosecuted

“British citizens who volunteer for the Israeli army should be prosecuted like others who fight for foreign forces, according to Baroness Warsi. The former Senior Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said people should only be legally allowed to fight for the state they are a citizen of. It is currently possible for anyone to join the Israel Defence Force (IDF) through the “Mahal” program if they meet specific background and age requirements. But while people fighting for various foreign forces have faced prosecution upon their return to the UK – including some who claim to have been opposing the Assad regime in Syria – those who temporarily join up with the IDF have not. Baroness Warsi said the UK government’s current policy on the issue was not “brave enough”.” – [The Independent](#)

Fresh poll blow for Corbyn





“Jeremy Corbyn is less popular in London than the leader of Ukip despite the capital having voted strongly for Remain in the referendum. The Tories, meanwhile, have closed the gap with Labour under his leadership in the capital. A poll of London voters by YouGov found that Mr Corbyn is the least popular of all the national party leaders. The overwhelming majority of 2015 Labour voters in the city believed that he was doing a poor job, with 60 per cent saying he was doing badly and 25 per cent saying he was doing well.” – [The Times \(£\)](#)

News in Brief:

- Fifty grammar schools change admissions to favour poorer pupils – [Daily Mail](#)
- Taxpayers’ £31 million debt to Google – [The Times \(£\)](#)
- Venezuela’s Supreme Court shuts down parliament – [Daily Telegraph](#)
- Trump demands solution to US trade deficit with China – [FT](#)
- Le Pen’s request for a £2.6 million loan from Russia – [The Sun](#)
- Biggest rail spending cuts since the crash ‘could endanger lives’ – [The Independent](#)
- Expenses watchdog accidentally leaks salaries of MPs’ aides – [Daily Mail](#)
- Congress set ablaze as riots sweep Paraguayan capita – [The Guardian](#)
- Spending on Scottish pupils falls by £1bn in seven years – [The Scotsman](#)
- Northern Irish parties invited to ‘intensive’ talks to restore devolution – [Belfast Telegraph](#)

[Newslinks April 2017](#)

[Press release: Energy reforms come into force today](#)

- Energy suppliers to focus help on vulnerable households
- Part of plan to improve energy efficiency of 1 million homes by 2020

Homes across Great Britain will get extra support to make their homes cheaper and easier to keep warm thanks to Government reforms that have come into force today.

Changes to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) will make sure energy companies give support to people struggling to meet their heating bills, with plans to extend the scheme from April 2017 to September 2018 also confirmed.

Consumer Minister, Margot James said:

The big energy firms already have to help households save gas and electricity bills, by improving homes so they are easier and cheaper to keep warm.

We're strengthening this obligation today and making sure they prioritise low income households as part of our plan to insulate 1 million homes by 2020.

The reforms, which were consulted on last year, will simplify the scheme, with energy companies required to provide struggling households with energy efficiency measures to make their homes warmer and bring their bills down.

As well as an increased focus on low income and vulnerable homes, eligibility will be extended to social housing tenants in EPC bands E, F and G, and local authorities will also be able to help match people with energy suppliers.

Suppliers will also be required to install a minimum 21,000 solid wall insulations per year, up from the earlier proposal of 17,000.

There will be continuing protection for the delivery of energy efficiency measures in rural areas, with a requirement that 15% of suppliers' Carbon Emissions Reduction Obligation be delivered in these areas.

ECO has proved a very effective delivery mechanism with around 2.2 million measures installed in around 1.7 million properties between 2013 and the end of January 2017.

- The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) is focused on insulation measures (e.g. solid wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft and room in roof insulation amongst others).
- Under the part of the part of ECO focused on fuel poverty, households can also receive heating measures, including first time central heating and more efficient boilers.
- The energy companies obligated are British Gas, The Co-operative, EDF Energy, EON Energy, First Utility, npower, OVO Energy, Scottish power, SSE, Utilita, Utility Warehouse, Extra Energy, Spark Energy, Flow Energy, Economy Energy.
- There are three ways to qualify under the Affordable Warmth element of the scheme: i) those in receipt of certain means tested benefits ii) those living in social housing with an EPC of E,F or G and iii) those referred to suppliers by local authorities under the newly-introduced

flexible eligibility. Suppliers can also refer households who are in or at risk of fuel poverty or vulnerable to living in a cold home.

- The 18-month extension will provide industry with time to adapt their IT and delivery models to deliver insulation rather than boilers to fuel poor households.
- Eligibility for certain measures under Affordable Warmth is extended to social housing in Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) bands E, F and G in order to allow measures to be provided to social tenants who are most in need and more likely to be fuel poor.
- Households are usually identified by the installation companies who fit the energy efficiency measures on behalf of energy companies.
- A small proportion of customers are also referred via the Energy Saving Advice Service.
- For independent, expert advice and to find out if you are eligible for support, contact the Energy Saving Advice Service on 0300 123 1234. Calling hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. (Calls cost no more than a national rate call)

[Buying a new car? Vehicle tax rates have changed](#)



Vehicle tax rates are changing for cars and some motorhomes first registered with DVLA from today. These changes do not affect cars registered before 1 April 2017 – but their rate of tax has increased today in line with the Retail Price Index.

If you're thinking about buying a new car or motorhome, read on because this will affect you.

For the last 12 months we've been working hard to make sure that you get the

facts about the changes before you buy a new car.

We've been busy communicating this message on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) since last November and have updated GOV.UK information about the changes. Our press office has been issuing press releases to national, local and specialist publications.

In January, we launched a digital advertising campaign to new car buyers with simple messages driving people to GOV.UK to read the facts. As a result of all our combined digital communications, almost 700,000 people have visited the information.

We've been [blogging regularly](#), as well as putting messages on our printed literature. Over at our contact centre we have an automated telephone service to quickly answer your questions. This has been really effective so far with almost all of the calls relating to the changes using the service.

We've also been working closely with our stakeholders in the motor industry to help them get ready behind the scenes for the new rates. This includes updating the existing first registration service, creating a specially designed toolkit to use with their customers and running webinars in January and February.

So if you are thinking about buying a new car or motorhome from today, you're probably aware of the changes by now. But make sure you have a look at [new vehicle tax rates](#) information to see how it affects you.

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