

[Press release: £45 million investment in rural broadband](#)

Rural businesses and communities are set to benefit from improved broadband access as part of a £45 million boost by the government.

The new funding for the government's [Rural Broadband Infrastructure Scheme](#) adds to the £30 million investment announced last year, increasing the total pot of funding available to £75 million.

The money will be made available through grants to local authorities that have already applied for funding, in areas where broadband services at speeds of 30Mbps or faster are not available or planned. The funding will be used to support full fibre wherever possible.

It follows the launch of the Government's [Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review](#) this week which outlined plans to prioritise hard-to-reach rural areas for roll out of full fibre connectivity.

Visiting North York Moors National Park today, Lord Gardiner will announce that North Yorkshire is one of the local authorities to receive funding through the scheme with a grant offer of over £11 million.

Rural Affairs Minister Lord Gardiner said:

I am delighted to announce today that North Yorkshire has been awarded a grant of £11 million towards improving its broadband infrastructure.

Rural areas should not be left behind in the connectivity slow lane, missing out on the opportunities high speed broadband can bring. The funding made available through the Rural Broadband Infrastructure Scheme champions our countryside communities and businesses by opening up access to broadband of at least 30 Megabits per second, in some of the most hard to reach areas.

The increased funding for the Rural Broadband Infrastructure Scheme follows a positive response and a high number of applications from local authorities. It is part of planned investment of at least £3.5 billion into our rural economies by 2020, supporting the quarter of businesses in the UK which are based in the countryside.

The scheme is delivered by the Rural Payments Agency and supports those rural areas which are not currently scheduled to receive broadband as part of commercial delivery plans or under the Government's [Superfast Broadband Programme](#), which expects to give access to superfast broadband to around 97% of UK premises over the next few years.

With nearly a fifth of people living in the countryside, it is important that the needs of rural communities are heard loud and clear across government. In addition to driving forward high speed internet, the government is championing housing availability and supporting job creation.

Lord Gardiner is today visiting the North York Moors National Park as part of National Parks Week where he will also meet a number of young workers and apprentices. North York Moors supported 120 apprentices through its Apprenticeship Programme, amounting to over 50,000 working days.

[News story: Ofqual confirms its apprenticeship End Point Assessment approach](#)

Ofqual today (26 July 2018) put in place the final piece of the jigsaw in its [approach to its External Quality Assurance \(EQA\) of apprenticeship End Point Assessments](#) (EPAs), with the publication of a tailored set of rules.

[These Conditions and guidance](#), which come into force tomorrow, relate specifically to our regulation of EPAs as a component of an apprenticeship programme. Our end-to-end process is designed to ensure that EPAs are developed effectively and monitored throughout the life of the assessment.

Since taking on its role as an EQA provider, Ofqual has already agreed to provide external quality assurance for 55 standards produced by Trailblazers, with another 37 in the pipeline. We have also aligned our review of Assessment Plans with the Institute for Apprenticeships' "Faster and Better" programme. We have published [details of the status of EPAs where Ofqual has been asked to provide EQA](#). A total of 42 Ofqual-regulated Awarding Organisations are currently on the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) register of End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs).

Our work as an EQA also includes a technical evaluation of a proposed EPAs. We do this to ensure that EPAOs have interpreted assessment plans correctly and consistently so that employers get what they want and expect from the assessments. We have already looked at 19 EPAs and have asked EPAOs to make changes where required. We are also planning to communicate our technical evaluation findings more widely, to inform the Institute, the EQA community and employers.

The final stage of our EQA approach is the day-to-day regulation of live assessments. Today's publication follows a consultation on our proposals (between February and May 2018), to ensure that our approach to regulating EPAs is appropriately tailored to these assessments. An analysis of the consultation responses is also published today. We have been pleased to

engage with EPAOs and employers on our EQA approach, and will continue to do so. With these rules in place, we are now beginning a programme of work on the delivery of EPAs. This will include a programme of audits to help understand how the EPAOs we regulate are mitigating risks around the capacity and capability of EPA assessors.

Where an apprenticeship trailblazer group has selected Ofqual as the external quality assurer (EQA) for its apprenticeship standard, all EPAOs offering EPAs for that standard must be (or become) Ofqual-regulated and all EPAs must meet these new conditions and our General Conditions of Recognition. We are not lowering the recognition bar, but have streamlined our recognition process for organisations seeking to offer EPAs, and we will be publishing further information in the coming weeks so that all organisations are able to decide at an early stage whether Ofqual regulation is for them. We are also aligning our processes with ESFA, and have published an MoU between our two organisations.

Press release: Highways England warns of litter risk in soaring temperatures

With dry conditions on roadside verges, items thrown from passing vehicles such as glass bottles, cigarette butts and plastic can spark fires.

There have been 56 fires recorded on grass verges across England in the past 10 days near to the motorway and major A-road network managed by Highways England.

Recently, on the M5 in the Midlands, Highways England worked with the emergency services to support a serious fire involving a HGV that was carrying hay. The incident took place on the southbound carriageway last Thursday afternoon between junction 7 (Worcester south) and Strensham Services.

As well as having to deal with the fire on the vehicle and one on the carriageway, crews also had to damp down the nearby woods and a field beyond that, highlighting the scale of the problem.

Highways England emergency planning officer, Frank Bird, said:

Smoke from roadside fires can drift across motorways posing a hazard to drivers. We've seen an increase in fires on grass verges near some of our motorways, for example on the M42 in the Midlands.

With the land being so dry, it often only takes a small spark to take hold. We'd urge people to avoid throwing any items from

vehicles at any time, but particularly in these hot conditions. Please take all of your litter home with you or dispose of it in a proper manner.

West Midlands Fire Service Station Commander, Marc Hudson, said:

As people would have seen across the country fire services have been dealing with a large number of grass and outdoor fires, many of these are easily prevented by people taking extra care in these very dry conditions.

With the hot, dry weather, any glass object has the potential to refract the sun's light and it's so easy for a fire to start from a discarded cigarette.

Littering at the side of the road significantly increases the risk of fire and has the potential to tie up valuable resources that could be used elsewhere which in turn could put people's lives at risk.

While Highways England clears litter, picking it up close to fast-moving traffic puts road workers at risk. It is also unsightly as well as a risk to wildlife and the environment. The company urges road users to take their litter home and are working with partners such as Keep Britain Tidy to tackle the problem at source and make littering socially unacceptable.

Every year, Highways England removes about 200,000 sacks of litter from across our motorways. Clearing litter from busy roads such as motorways is a huge challenge costing time and money which could be better spent on other priorities.

Drivers travelling in this heat wave are being advised to:

- take a bottle of water with them before setting out to ensure they stay hydrated
- plan and leave plenty of time for their journeys
- check the weather forecast for their destination
- check travel conditions before setting out and, where it is safe to do so, during journeys
- ensure their cars are fit for the journey

Figures for fires on grass verges across England in the past 10 days near to the motorway and major A-road network managed by Highways England:

East region – total of 12 incidents

Road Incidents

M25 6

A11 1

Road Incidents

M40 1
A1M 2
M4 2

West Midlands region – total of 7 incidents

Road Incidents

M42 2
M5 3
M6 2

South East region – total of 11 incidents

Road Incidents

M2 1
M20 2
M3 2
M23 1
A20 1
A2 3
M25 1

North East region – total of 16 incidents

Road Incidents

M62 9
M621 1
M1 3
A180 1
A1M 2

North West Region – total of 2 incidents

Road Incidents

M60 1
M61 1

East Midlands Region – total of 4 incidents

Road Incidents

M1 2
A57 1
A1 1

South West Region – total of 4 incidents

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.

[Press release: Dover dredging application decision](#)

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has approved an application from Dover Harbour Board (DHB) to carry out aggregate dredging at Area 521, known as the South Goodwin Sands.

The marine licence granted by the MMO gives DHB permission to extract up to 3 million tonnes of aggregate by trailer suction hopper dredging, which is proposed to be undertaken between September 2019 and September 2020. This follows an application [DHB originally made to the MMO in May 2016](#). The aggregate is required to provide fill material for the wider Dover Western Docks Revival project.

The decision follows extensive public consultation, during which over 1,300 specific representations from the public were received. Issues raised during this consultation were taken into account by the applicant, the MMO and its primary advisers in determining the application.

The MMO believes it was appropriate to grant the licence because it is satisfied, on the basis of the evidence provided, the assessments that have been undertaken and on advice from its primary advisers, that sufficient measures were proposed to protect the marine environment, prevent interference with legitimate users of the seas and mitigate impacts to any other relevant matters. These measures have been captured in the marine licence conditions.

John Tuckett, Chief Executive of the Marine Management Organisation, said:

“We understand the strength of feeling surrounding this development, both for and against. As a regulator that has to balance and manage competing uses of the marine environment we accept that not everyone will be happy with the decisions we make.

“However we are entirely impartial in our marine licencing process and consider and are satisfied that this decision is based on the best available

evidence and is proportionate and complies with relevant policy.”

The MMO is committed to transparency and helping people to access the evidence on which it bases its decisions. Details about this case, including the MMO’s decision report and Marine Conservation Zone assessment are available online via the public register of marine licence applications (case reference MLA/2016/00227) and via a [page on the MMO’s website](#).

Companies wanting to carry out commercial aggregate extraction may also need other permissions, such as from the Crown Estate as the owners of the seabed. More information is also available on the [Crown Estate’s website](#).

It is now up to DHB to decide whether they proceed with the dredging project.

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