

Press release: £6.2 million flood defence to protect A1(M) and Catterick complete

A multi-million pound defence to help protect residents from flooding and keep traffic moving on one of England's main north-south routes has been officially opened today (Friday 27 April).

It is the first time Highways England and the Environment Agency have worked together on a jointly-funded flood scheme that will offer better flood protection to the A1(M) at Catterick and 149 properties in the area.

In September 2012, the Catterick area suffered major flooding affecting 130 properties and closing the A1(M) for two days – costing the region's economy more than £2 million.

The new flood reservoir, located between Brough Park and the A1(M), uses large embankments up to 6m high to hold 91 million gallons of water – equivalent to more than 130 Olympic swimming pools.

The scheme will slow the flow of water through Brough Beck, which previously overflowed in severe weather. This has been managed by putting meanders in the beck and building a control structure incorporating two 'hydro-brakes' to control the flow of water.

Five hectares of new habitat have been created, including wetlands, bat habitats, owl nesting and meadowland.

Brown trout are a key feature of Brough Beck and re-routing provides increased fish habitat along the beck.

Once the habitat has become established, the area will be a haven for wildlife and provide a better experience for the public using the local bridleways and paths.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

As well as reducing flood risk to local homes and businesses, this flood defence will protect a main traffic artery through Yorkshire which has been affected in recent years.

We are always looking for innovative ways to get the most benefit from our flood schemes, and by also creating five hectares of new habitat, this is a fantastic example of how working together can bring multiple benefits for the local community, economy and environment.

The bulk of the £6.2m scheme cost has come from a special fund managed by Highways England to tackle environmental issues.

Peter Mumford, Highways England Executive Director of Major Projects and Capital Portfolio Management, said:

This area suffered badly due to severe weather in 2012 and the A1 is a vitally important route which supports the UK economy so we must do all we can to keep traffic moving freely along it.

We're pleased to have worked with partners on this solution which helps protect the local community and lets drivers have safe journeys.

Further funding for the scheme came from the Environment Agency (£1m), Local Levy (£412,000) and North Yorkshire County Council (£200,000).

The Environment Agency's own internal field operations teams delivered the construction work.

The scheme was made possible with support from Highways England, Local Levy and North Yorkshire County Council, Richmondshire District Council, the Parish Council and the local community.

Councillor Don Mackenzie, North Yorkshire County Council's Executive Member for Highways, said:

The council is very pleased to have worked in partnership with the Environment Agency and Highways England to bring this important scheme to a successful conclusion.

This flood storage reservoir will help to protect local residents from flooding and avoid a repeat of the closure of the A1 which occurred in 2012.

The Catterick flood storage reservoir had its first big test at the start of March after snow melt in the Dales led to flood water coming down the valley.

The reservoir worked as planned and held back the water from the A1(M) and Catterick village, storing it in the newly-created bowl, while slowly letting the water flow back out into Brough Beck at the other side at a speed that alleviated flooding.

At the opening ceremony, partners involved in the project and local residents were given a presentation on the scheme, before being given a tour of the site where an information board featuring artwork by a former Catterick

Primary School pupil was installed.

Statement to Parliament: Ministerial correction to closing speech on Thameslink upgrades across the south east

I wish to inform the House that an error has been identified in the [closing speech of the End of Day Debate: Thameslink upgrades across the South East, Official Report, 18 April 2018, Vol. 639](#). The correct information should have been:

As part of this upgrade, a fourth track and other improvements are being built north of Bedford, which will provide space for an additional train path from December 2020. Unfortunately, until these works take place, some difficult decisions have to be taken. East Midlands Trains' fast peak-time services will not call at Bedford or Luton from May 2018 to December 2020.

Press release: Government announces Tech Fund to support disabled people and their employers

The news came as the Minister spoke in Birmingham today (27 April) at Naidex, Europe's largest assistive technology conference.

[Access to Work](#) provides financial support to ensure someone's disability or health condition does not hold them back at work, and can cover assistive technology, workplace adaptations, transport and interpreters.

Previously, medium and large employers were required to pay a mandatory contribution towards the cost of assistive technology required by disabled employees.

As part of the government's drive to ensure disabled people can benefit from

the latest advances in technology, this cost will now be waived for all employers under the new Tech Fund.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, Sarah Newton, said:

We know that assistive technology has the power to transform lives, helping to break down the barriers disabled people can face at work and so many other areas of their everyday lives.

Access to Work is providing support to disabled people across the country, and I hope that through the new Tech Fund more disabled people and their employers will be able to benefit from advances in assistive technology that can help create more inclusive workplaces.

Employers will be able to make a significant saving through the Tech Fund. Before the new rules were introduced, medium employers paid the first £500 towards technological solutions and large employers paid the first £1,000, with both paying 20% of the cost thereafter up to £10,000.

Paul Luigi Giuntini is a social worker from Scotland who is registered blind and has one hand. Through Access to Work, Paul is able to fund cutting edge assistive technology to help him do his job.

Paul's support includes Orcam, a lightweight camera which clips onto the wearer's glasses that can recognise faces and read from any surface in real time.

Paul said:

Access to Work funding is essential for disabled people, as it helps reduce the barriers and difficulties that disabled people face in trying to get into and maintain full-time employment.

Without the support of Access to Work, I would not have been able to obtain and sustain my current employment. I believe that this funding should be promoted so that disabled people are given every opportunity to improve their life situation.

Access to Work is part of a range of support available to ensure that disabled people can enter, and thrive in, the workplace. This includes supported work experience placements, the government's [Disability Confident](#) scheme and personalised support package.

Follow DWP on:

[News story: Further restrictions on neonicotinoids agreed](#)

Further restrictions on neonicotinoid pesticides have been approved following a vote by EU member states today.

The UK voted in favour of the proposals that will see a ban on outdoor use of three neonicotinoids – Clothianidin, Imidacloprid and Thiamethoxam.

Currently, their use is banned for oilseed rape, spring cereals and sprays for winter cereals, but they can be used to treat sugar beet, various horticultural crops and as seed treatments for winter cereals.

In November last year the Environment Secretary Michael Gove said [tougher restrictions on neonicotinoids are justified](#) by the growing weight of scientific evidence they are harmful to bees and other pollinators.

This followed advice from the [UK government's advisory body on pesticides](#) which said scientific evidence now suggests the environmental risks posed by neonicotinoids – particularly to our bees and pollinators – are greater than previously understood, supporting the case for further restrictions.

Research estimates the value of the UK's 1,500 species of pollinators to crops at £400-680 million per year due to improved productivity.

A Defra spokesperson said:

We are committed to enhancing our environment for the next generation, and welcome the vote today in support of further restrictions on neonicotinoids.

The Government has always been clear we will be led by the science on this matter. The weight of evidence now shows the risks neonicotinoids may pose to our environment, particularly to the bees and other pollinators is greater than previously understood.

We recognise the impact a ban will have on farmers and will continue to work with them to explore alternative approaches as we design a new agricultural policy outside the European Union.

The current restrictions will stay in place until the new measures comes into force following a phasing out period of around eight months, giving farmers and businesses time to adjust.

Unless the scientific evidence changes, the government will maintain these increased restrictions post-Brexit.

The UK reserves the right to consider emergency authorisations. We will only

do so where there is a real need for the products and the risk to bees and other pollinators is sufficiently low.

[News story: Meeting of the Australia-UK Trade Working Group](#)

The Australia-UK Trade Working Group met in Canberra on 19 to 20 April 2018.

It was the third meeting of the Trade Working Group since it was established in September 2016 by:

- the Hon Steven Ciobo MP, Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism, and Investment
- the Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP, the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade

The meeting brought together senior officials to identify practical steps Australia and the UK can take to deepen their existing trade and investment relationship.

The delegations were led by officials from:

- the UK's Department of International Trade (DIT)
- Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

They included representatives from a wide range of UK and Australian government departments.

The Trade Working Group continued to build momentum towards the shared commitment to begin bilateral FTA negotiations once the UK leaves the European Union.

Discussions covered a range of topics to help build a shared understanding of both countries' approaches and ambitions for the future bilateral trade and investment relationship.

The Trade Working Group also discussed broader trade policy issues of mutual interest, including World Trade Organization processes and the wider regional and plurilateral trade landscape.

The Trade Working Group reflects a strong political commitment by Australia and the UK to take a leadership role in the global rules-based multilateral trading system.