

Press release: Iconic Spaghetti Junction immortalised in new Birmingham attraction

To mark the 50th anniversary of work starting on the road and to celebrate 2018 as the Year of Engineering, Highways England can reveal that it will be celebrated in a model at the new attraction.

Construction started on the sprawling structure some fifty years ago and today it continues to carry more than 220,000 vehicles every day.

The road will be joining other notable landmarks from Birmingham including The Library of Birmingham, The Cube, New Street Station and the BT Tower.

Highways England's Regional Director, Catherine Brookes, said:

Spaghetti Junction is one of those structures that is known around the world and we're thrilled to see the road included as part of the new attraction.

The opening of the new attraction later this year also marks our Year of Engineering campaign which is designed to get children thinking about engineering and the world around them. It is also 50 years since work started to build Spaghetti Junction and it's timely that it should be recognised for its local and national significance in supporting the motorway network.

The first of 45 incredible scaled masterpieces are now being recreated by a specialist team of LEGO Model Builders.

More than 6,800 hours will be ploughed in to the design and construction of the entire MINILAND complex over the forthcoming months.

Construction of Spaghetti Junction took some four years to complete and its elevated position sees constant maintenance work taking place underneath it, often unseen by many motorists on their daily commute. Spaghetti Junction in numbers:

- Spaghetti Junction has 559 concrete columns, some reaching to 80 feet high
- Construction started in 1968 and took four years to complete.
- It is known officially as Gravelly Hill Interchange
- Today, it continues to carry more than 220,000 vehicles every day
- It is subject to regular maintenance work, which includes the replacing of the road surface, installation of new waterproofing material, painting and vegetation

To find out more about the Year of Engineering, head online to the [year of engineering website](#).

LEGOLAND Discovery Centre Birmingham is set to open to the general public this summer. More information can be [found online](#).

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: See behind Highways England's roadworks with 'Open Doors'](#)

Highways England is taking part in ['Open Doors'](#) and giving members of the public a unique chance to go behind the scenes of five 'live' construction sites to see how the roads and structures are built or maintained.

The national week-long initiative starts on Monday 19 March until Saturday 24 March and anyone interested in visiting the sites is urged to register for a place.

With 2018 being the ["Year of Engineering"](#) this is also an ideal opportunity for young people considering career ideas, adults thinking about a change in occupation, parents, guardians and people involved in education to come and find out about the diverse range of skills and professions needed on site.

Mike Wilson, Chief Highways Engineer and director of Safety, Engineering and Standards, said:

"Our roads connect the country with around 4 million journeys on them each day. With a record level of investment in roads now is an exciting time for us to show, as part of Open Doors, the hard work that goes on behind the roadworks.

"We want to inspire future generations to join Highways England and as well as organising our own activities in support of the Government's 2018 Year of Engineering campaign, this is an ideal opportunity for young people, parents and teachers to come to our construction sites and take a closer look at what we do."

The five Highways England sites taking part are below – there are limited spaces and registration is needed in advance via the [Open Doors website](#).

East of England

Three sites for the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon road scheme (Swavesey, Brampton and Ermine Street – A1198 near Godmanchester) – A14 project talk, guided bus site tour and Q & A session.

Midlands

M5 Oldbury Viaduct – a project talk, tour of the viaduct (above and below) to see work being carried out.

South East

M2 Stockbury Viaduct – a welcome talk and video and the opportunity to climb up scaffolding (using stair cases not ladders) to see where the bridge is being lifted.

With the UK needing an extra 20,000 engineering graduates a year, the Year of Engineering campaign is showing young people what an engineer is, and what they can achieve. Highways England need a continuing pipeline of young engineers to help deliver the massive investment planned for our motorways and major A-roads, benefitting the economy and improving people's lives.

To sign up for a visit at the Highways England's sites or for more details about the initiative visit the [Open Doors website](#).

The most recent Open Doors event saw over 3,000 bookings across more than 130 construction sites in England, Scotland and Wales.

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[Speech: Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons 87th](#)

Executive Council session: statement on the Salisbury incident

Mr Chair, Director General,

The statement that I deliver this morning is markedly different from our usual statements to the Executive Council. I did not expect to have to brief this Council on the first offensive use of a nerve agent of any sort on European territory since World War II.

On 8 March, the United Kingdom Delegation informed the OPCW Technical Secretariat that 2 people, Sergey and Yulia Skripal, had been taken seriously ill on 4 March in the city of Salisbury following exposure to a nerve agent. The police were treating it as attempted murder, and were investigating the case thoroughly. A UK police officer, one of the first responders, also fell seriously ill. We committed to update the Technical Secretariat and the OPCW Executive Council when more information became available.

My [Prime Minister made a statement](#) yesterday evening to the United Kingdom's Parliament. She said our analysis had confirmed that the substance used was a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia, part of a group of agents known as 'Novichok' agents. My Prime Minister set out the United Kingdom's conclusion that it is highly likely that Russia was responsible for this attack.

This conclusion is based on a number of strands of evidence, including:

- the positive identification of the chemical agent by experts at the United Kingdom's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down
- our knowledge that Russia has previously produced this agent and would still be capable of doing so
- Russia's record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations; and
- our assessment that Russia views at least some defectors as legitimate targets for assassination

We can see only 2 plausible explanations for the use of such a chemical nerve agent: it was either a direct act by the Russian state against the United Kingdom, or a case where the Russian government had lost control of this potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others.

On 12 March, my Foreign Secretary summoned Russia's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and asked him to explain how this Russian-produced nerve agent could have been deployed in Salisbury against Mr Skripal and his daughter. He asked Russia to provide immediate, full and complete disclosure of the Novichok programme to the OPCW. And he asked for Russia to respond within 24 hours – in other words, by the end of today.

My Foreign Secretary spoke to the Director General yesterday to update him on the situation. He also thanked the Director General and the OPCW Technical Secretariat for their offer of technical assistance.

Mr Chair, States Parties to the Convention take on a duty to uphold and enforce its fundamental tenets. We commit not to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons. We commit not to transfer, directly or indirectly, chemical weapons to anyone. We commit never to use chemical weapons. We commit not to engage in any military preparations to use chemical weapons. And we commit not to assist, encourage or induce anyone to engage in prohibited activity.

The stark conclusion is that it is highly likely that Russia, a fellow State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and fellow member of this Executive Council is implicated in chemical weapons use, whether by failure to control its own materials or by design. And in whichever scenario, Russia has failed, for many years, to declare chemical weapons development programmes dating from the 1970s.

This attempted murder, using a weapons-grade nerve agent in a British city, was not just a crime against the Skripals. It was an indiscriminate and reckless act against the United Kingdom, which put the lives of innocent civilians at risk. This incident has demanded a large scale response from our first responders in the police and medical services, with substantial assistance from our military specialists. The United Kingdom is fortunate enough to have extensive, dedicated and robust capabilities to respond to such an event. Not every country has this. That is why building capacity for effective national implementation of the Convention is so important. We have supported and invested in technical assistance programmes, including through the OPCW, to build capabilities globally to respond to cases of alleged or actual chemical weapons use.

All of us in this room should be aware: if the norm against chemical weapons use continues to be eroded, if we don't stand up to enforce the fundamental tenets of the Convention, what has happened in the United Kingdom could happen in any one of our countries. Indeed, in the last 13 months alone, chemical weapons attacks have taken place in Syria, in Iraq, in Malaysia and now in the United Kingdom.

Those who have used chemical weapons cannot be immune from the consequences of their actions. We must all do all that we can to bring perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks to justice, whoever they are, and wherever they may be. The United Kingdom was proud to join the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. We encourage all States Parties to join it to demonstrate their own commitment to end use of chemical weapons once and for all, to stand together against chemical weapons use, and to take action to hold perpetrators accountable.

Mr Chair, we will keep the Technical Secretariat and this Council informed of developments as soon as our legal processes allow. With your permission, Mr Chair, I will return to this issue later in this Council Session if there are any further updates.

Press release: 20 years after the Northamptonshire Easter floods

The Environment Agency and its partners are calling on people to take steps to prepare for flooding and keep themselves and their families safe, 20 years after the Easter floods of 1998 caused devastation in Northamptonshire.

In 1998, an unusually wet spring led to severe flooding, with thousands of homes across the county affected. Two people lost their lives and over 150 people were hospitalised.

Northamptonshire County Council, Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, Northamptonshire Police and the Environment Agency worked together both over the course of the floods and during the recovery process. In the 20 years since Easter 1998, great strides have been made to help protect over 7,000 properties that are at risk of flooding in the county.

The EA has invested £12 million in flood risk management in Northamptonshire over the last 2 decades. This investment contributed towards the completion of a number of works, including the construction of a flood storage reservoir at Weedon and significant improvements on the flood defences at Far Cotton and St James.

The EA is planning with its partners to invest a further £1.8 million by 2021 to reduce flood risk to even more people and properties across the county.

In addition to this investment, the EA has also made progress by using modern technology to improve the way it can warn people when flooding is possible. Over 4,500 properties in Northamptonshire are now signed up to receive flood warnings via their landlines, mobile phones or email addresses through the EA's free flood warning service.

Although the EA and its partners work around the clock to protect people and their property from flooding, the risk can never be completely eliminated. A third of properties at risk are still not registered to receive flood warnings, as residents have not signed up to the EA's free flood warning service. The EA urges people to prepare themselves and their loved ones for flooding by signing up now.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Flooding is always devastating for those affected, and I know this has been the case for people and businesses in Northamptonshire.

That is why we have invested almost £12m in Northamptonshire flood

defences in the past 20 years with a further £1.8m planned by 2021 to reduce the risk even further for home owners and businesses.

Environment Agency Area Flood Risk Manager Ben Thornely said:

Although we can reflect on 20 years of progress being made since the significant floods of 1998, we also recognise that flooding remains a risk to local communities across Northamptonshire. Our staff and our partners work around the clock to protect people and their properties from flooding, but we can never stop the risk completely.

This is why our free flood warning service is so important. Flood warnings give people valuable time to prepare for flooding – time that allows them to move themselves, their families and precious items to safety. Our flood warnings save lives and enable the emergency services to prepare and help communities.

I'd urge residents across the county to check whether they are at risk of flooding and to sign up for flood warnings, by visiting www.gov.uk/flood or calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Cllr Ian Morris, county council cabinet member for transport, highways and environment, said:

Working with partners as the Lead Local Flood Authority for the County, an enormous amount of work has been done in the past two decades to tackle local flood risks.

The Pathfinder projects have empowered communities to tailor-make measures for their local areas, while the award-winning Flood Toolkit provides an online resource which acts as a central point of information for all flood-related issues.

However, we cannot be complacent and we recognise that we must continue to work together with the people of Northamptonshire to further reduce flood risk.

Cllr Mike Hallam, Northampton Borough Council's Cabinet member for environment, said:

Such events can be disastrous and it can take an age to recover from the devastation they leave in their wake.

A huge amount of work has been done in the past 2 decades to minimise the risk of such an awful event occurring again in Northampton but we remain ready to offer whatever support is needed in the event that it does.

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service's Deputy Chief Fire Officer David Harding, who served during the flooding 20 years ago, said:

As in 1998, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service is there to help and protect people.

Advances in both training and equipment mean we are well prepared and equipped to respond to all emergency incidents requiring our services, including flooding, but our aim is to help prevent incidents before life is at risk. In this respect I urge everyone to help themselves and be prepared by signing up to the flood warning system.

[News story: Defence People Innovation Challenge Launch Event](#)

Following on from the Market Interest Day held on the 7 February 2018 to gather feedback from industry on the development of the competition. The [Defence People Innovation Challenge](#) will be officially launched on the 27 March 2018 at a Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) launch event in London.

Suppliers are invited to attend the event and submit ideas which are focused on the five sub-challenges; Recruitment, Skills and Training, Retention, Motivation and Rehabilitation, as outlined in the competition summary document.

People are central to Defence. We employ 195,520 full time military and civilians and 32,240 Part Time Reserves (as at 1 January 2018). We rely on the skills, commitment and professionalism of our people and place heavy demands on them. Recruiting, training and retaining the right mix of capable and motivated people is essential to success both on operations and at home.

Spending on People accounted for around 30% out of £36 billion Defence spending in 2016-17. Defence must continually keep its costs and activities under review to ensure that the best result is achieved with the resources available. This includes exploring all opportunities to consider how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our people and the supporting processes, behaviours and cultures.

The Defence People Innovation Challenge is intended to pull through innovative thinking from the private sector to help both address the challenges and consider how to integrate and exploit the benefits within current Defence structures.

Up to £3 million is available for this challenge in the first year with further funding available in future years.

The competition closes at 5pm on Wednesday 16 May 2018.

If you have any queries on how to enter this competition, please email the DASA inbox accelerator@dstl.gov.uk.