

Statement to Parliament: Notification of a contingent liability

I have today laid before Parliament a departmental minute describing a contingent liability (CL) of £4 million associated with Solum JV.

Solum JV was created in 2008 to help Network Rail (NR) deliver its agreed housing target. Since its formation, the Solum JV has delivered over 200 housing units, has c.200 more under construction (to complete by 2021) and a pipeline of c.1500 further units, subject to planning and other approvals.

This counter-indemnity, for which NR's CL of £4 million will be matched by its JV partner, Kier, will cover further multiple residential developments being built by the JV, initially at Twickenham and Walthamstow (Phase 2) stations.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 Parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which this minute was laid before the House, a member signifies an objection by giving notice of a Parliamentary question or a motion relating to the minute, or by otherwise raising the matter in the House, final approval will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

Press release: 10,000 new trees to boost roadside wildlife habitat in the South West

The work is taking place at 21 sites in Devon and Cornwall and involves the planting of 10,000 native trees and shrubs to fill or reduce gaps in hedgerow and woodland along the roadside.

In total the planting will provide around three extra miles of vegetation and connect over 105 miles of habitat on the verge and land adjacent to the A30 and A38.

The scheme is being delivered under Highways England's national Biodiversity Plan which is being supported by a £30 million national investment programme over the next five years.

The plan recognises road verges and associated land can be managed to provide areas of habitat, relatively free from human access, that may be scarce in the surrounding landscape.

These road verges can also be used to connect fragmented habitats in the wider landscape, enabling plant and animal populations to move and interact, and so become stronger and more resilient.

Ecologist Leonardo Gubert said:

Highways England is committed to protecting the environment through its biodiversity plan and improving the connectivity of habitats along our roads is one of our top nature conservation priorities.

The main aim of this improvement scheme is to reconnect wildlife habitat and ecosystems on a significant scale across our road network in the South West allowing species to move between core areas.

The work is expected to have a huge benefit for a wide variety of species of animals including insects, birds, and mammals, such as butterflies, bees, flies and dormice, suitable places to forage, shelter and breed.

Tree and shrub species being planted include oak, maple, holly, willow, honeysuckle and rose at locations between Pocombe Bridge and Pulsack on the A30 and Wrangaton and Bellamarsh on the A38.

The programme runs from Monday 5 February until Friday 16 March 2018.

The majority of planting will not require any traffic management but a few schemes may require lane closures at times and no delays are anticipated.

Highways England has also been undertaking a lowland heathland conservation scheme in Devon and Cornwall and has plans to expand its species rich wildflower meadows in the South West as part of a future improvement programme.

The lowland heathland is a priority for nature conservation because it is a rare and threatened habitat which supports a variety of scarce birds, animals and plants.

There are several areas on the Highways England network in Devon and Cornwall where road verges are either suitable for heathland species or are located adjacent to sites where heathland is present or has been historically recorded.

Work has included the planting and management of new heathland areas and aftercare at eight locations covering over 26,000 square metres across the Highways England network. Location sites are along the A30 and A38 including Dartmoor, Bodmin Moor and Goss Moor, and Haldon Hill.

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.

[News story: Attorney General appoints new Treasury Counsel](#)



Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP

The Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP, has appointed 5 new members to the Treasury Counsel team.

Tom Little and Julian Evans have been appointed as Senior Treasury Counsel to the Crown. The appointments will run for 3 years from 20 December 2017.

Joel Smith, Jonathan Polnay and Paul Jarvis have been appointed as Junior Treasury Counsel to the Crown. The appointments will run for 3 years from 21 November 2017.

Mr Mark Heywood QC is First Senior Treasury Counsel and heads the team of Senior and Junior Treasury Counsel. Treasury Counsel prosecute some of the most serious criminal cases in the country.

Miss Alison Morgan is First Junior Treasury Counsel.

The title "Treasury Counsel" derives from the days when all Crown Counsel at the Central Criminal Court were instructed by the Treasury Solicitor. That procedure was changed in 1908, and since then the Director of Public Prosecutions has instructed the permanent counsel there.

Treasury Counsel are appointed by the Attorney General. They are divided into 2 groups: Senior Treasury Counsel and Junior Treasury Counsel.

[Press release: Results of first UK Government Severn Growth Summit Poll revealed](#)

A key poll taken at first UK Government Severn Growth Summit has revealed that 97% of delegates felt that the removal of the Severn tolls would be of benefit to Wales.

During the live poll carried out by Cardiff based award-winning company, Doopoll, it was also revealed that 90% (139 out of 155 respondents) of the guests feel that their business will be boosted by the abolition of the Severn Tolls.

Over 300 guests from either side of the Severn estuary attended the inaugural event at the Celtic Manor Resort, held to explore how links between the South Wales and South West England economies can be strengthened following the abolition of the Severn Tolls.

Companies on both sides of the border are already benefitting from the removal of VAT from the crossing tolls earlier in January. Later this year, the tolls will be consigned to history when they are abolished altogether by the UK Government.

The poll also revealed:

- 80% of delegates felt that removal of the tolls will give them access to a wider market (168 out of 203 respondents)
- Almost 60% of respondents felt that road links were a challenge of cross border working (119 out of 200 respondents)
- 86% of respondents cited faster rail links between Bristol and South Wales as important to them (out of 151 responses)

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The Severn Growth Summit has sparked the biggest commercial conversation for the west of the UK in a generation. It is clear from these findings that we have a golden opportunity to capitalise on the ambitions of industries from both sides of the Severn Crossings.

From Bath, all the way across to Swansea, we can create a critical mass that can raise prosperity, create closer collaboration and

competition and improve social and cultural opportunities for people who live in the region.

I am delighted to see almost universal recognition from this live poll that scrapping the tolls will benefit Wales – this will be the biggest economic stimulus in decades and it fits my approach of making politics fit the economy rather than the economy fit politics. Exporting goods to the rest of the UK from Wales is of vital importance, with 8 out of 10 lorries destined for the UK market – scrapping the tolls will help our economy go from strength to strength.

[Press release: Government ushers in a new generation of town houses](#)

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid today (4 February 2018) confirmed government backing to create a new generation of town houses in cities like London and Manchester to ease pressure on valuable open spaces and help growing families.

Under the changes it will be easier to build upwards on existing blocks of flats and houses as well as shops and offices.

For example, an additional 2 levels could be added to a property – provided it was in keeping with the roofline of other buildings in the area.

It will ensure councils can protect valuable open space in inner city areas, maintain the character of residential areas, safeguard people's privacy and stop unwanted garden grabbing. These developments must remain in keeping with the character of the local area, including the preservation of listed buildings and conservation areas.

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The answer to building new homes isn't always an empty plot, or developing on a derelict site.

We need to be more creative and make more effective use of the space we already have available.

That's why we are looking to strengthen planning rules to encourage developers to be more innovative and look at opportunities to build upwards where possible when delivering the homes the country needs.

Delivering development in built up areas is an important part of the government's [housing white paper](#) proposals.

This policy will be included in the revised draft National Planning Policy Framework, which is due for consultation in early 2018.

The government consulted on a proposal to amend national planning policy to give greater emphasis to this matter as part of the [housing white paper](#) published on 7 February 2017.

In February 2016, the government [consulted](#), jointly with the Mayor of London, on proposals to support building upwards in London to deliver new homes through development plan policies, a permitted development right or Local Development Orders.

Responses offered support for a policy approach to the principle of building upwards.

The [government response](#) to the consultation, published alongside the [housing white paper](#) in February 2017, set out the intention to “take forward the policy option through the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) to support the delivery of additional homes by building up”, as part of a package of measures to support building at higher densities and using land more efficiently.

The consultation draft of the revised National Planning Policy Framework will be published in early 2018, and will include building up policy alongside others to make efficient use of land and buildings, and building at higher densities.

This policy will be incorporated into the updated National Planning Policy Framework.