News story: Rule changes to speed up rollout of mobile and fast broadband in rural areas

The reforms to the outdated legislation will reduce the costs of housing phone masts and other communications infrastructure on private land. This opens the way for faster and more reliable broadband and mobile services, particularly in rural areas.

The changes to the UK's Electronic Communications Code will:

- bring down the rents telecoms operators pay to landowners to install equipment to be more in line with utilities providers, such as gas and water
- make it easier for operators to upgrade and share their equipment with other operators to help increase coverage
- make it easier for telecoms operators and landowners to resolve legal disputes, and
- help to drive investment and stimulate the continued growth, rollout and maintenance of communication technology infrastructure, an increasingly significant area of the UK's economy.

Minister for Digital Matt Hancock said:

> The laws that we've brought into force today strike another blow to diminish the digital divide. Improving mobile and broadband services for people struggling with poor connections is a top priority for us – we want everyone to benefit from the digital revolution. Removing these outdated restrictions will help promote investment and give mobile operators more freedom to improve their networks in hard-to-reach places.

Press release: Foreign Secretary statement on bombing in Kabul

I am appalled by this despicable attack on a cultural centre in Kabul which has claimed so many innocent lives, and my heartfelt condolences go out to the victims and their families.

We remain determined in our resolve to help the Afghan people overcome terror

and we are committed to supporting the Afghan Government in seeking a brighter future for its people.

Initial reports suggest that Daesh in Afghanistan have claimed responsibility. The disregard for humanity shown today bears all the hallmarks of their hateful ideology which must be countered wherever it is found. This is what the brave men and women of Afghanistan are committed to doing, with the help and support of their regional and international partners, the UK included.

News story: Behind the headlines: calorie guidelines remain unchanged

Over the past couple of days, the national media has reported on Public Health England's (PHE) upcoming campaign on calories. Much of the coverage suggests PHE is changing the guidelines on how many calories people should consume in a day. This is incorrect. Below are the facts about calorie guidelines and the campaign.

The government dietary recommendations on how many calories the population should consume in a day to maintain a healthy weight have not changed. Women should still aim to consume 2,000 calories a day from food and drink, men should aim for 2,500.

The new campaign, due to launch in the spring of 2018, aims to help people be more aware of and reduce how many calories they consume from the 3 main meals of the day, in particular when eating on the go. There will be a simple rule of thumb to help them do this: 400:600:600 – people should aim for 400 calories from breakfast and 600 each from lunch and dinner.

The rule of thumb is based on the principle that's been in healthier and more sustainable catering: nutrition principles for years: on average, 20% of daily energy and nutrients should come from breakfast and 30% from both lunch and dinner. All other snacks and drink consumed between meals should make up the difference.

What is new about this campaign is that we are working with high street food chains to offer healthier choices and help get the message out there that many of the extra calories being consumed are out of the home.

We are absolutely not telling the public what to do but to give them the facts and one of these is that two thirds of us are overweight or obese and this is largely to do with eating too much. As we are the sixth most overweight nation on the planet, we believe it is a sensible thing to do.

Press release: Multi-million pound road improvements to unlock homes and jobs

The improvements, worth just over £67 million in total, will mean opportunities in Wigan, Greater Manchester, Marlow in Buckinghamshire, Newton in Nottinghamshire, Cumbria and Plymouth.

Highways England is making a £16.6 million contribution towards the schemes from its Growth and Housing Fund, alongside private sector developer contributions and other public funding making up the rest.

Jim O'Sullivan, Highways England Chief Executive, said:

> Each of these improvements will ensure England's strategic road network continues to make a valuable contribution to the prosperity of our country.
>
> We will continue to use our Growth and Housing Fund, working with a range of local stakeholders to unlock further development sites around the country.

The designated £100 million fund was set up as part of the government's £15 billion investment in roads and provides financial contributions towards the cost of road improvements needed for new developments that provide new jobs and much needed homes.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

> Transport investment is crucial to a strong and resilient economy – that's why we are making the biggest investment in roads in a generation, spending £23 billion across the country to improve journeys for motorists.
>
> These upgrades from Highways England will benefit the regions, giving a boost to businesses and better access to the jobs and homes that people want.

The Designated Fund is part of Highways England's award-winning "The Road to Growth" strategic economic growth plan. The plan received national recognition from the Institute of Economic Development (IED) for having the "greatest economic impact" at their 2017 annual awards ceremony.

The five schemes announced today are:

A404/A4155 Westhorpe Interchange improvements, Buckinghamshire

The scheme will create the opportunity for up to 560 jobs at the Globe Business Park and enable over 22,000 sqm of vacant space that would be brought back to life and used by businesses. In total, the project will receive funding of £1.75 million which is being made up of £1.18 million from the Growth and Housing Fund, £500,000 private finding and an additional £63,000 provided by the Local Enterprise Partnership. Work on the scheme is expected to commence late 2018/spring 2019.

M58 Wigan Link Road (Greater Manchester)

This package of work is designed to improve accessibility in the area, help to reduce congestion and create smoother journeys for drivers. The scheme will also unlock the Pemberton Park development site and 250 new homes and support the delivery of a further 170 homes and 2,600 jobs at the neighbouring ‘Bell Site’. The £23.6 million package of work will be funded by £5 million from the Growth and Housing Fund, a public funding contribution from Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council, £10.9 million from Greater Manchester growth deal and £3.1 million provided by private developers. The site is expected to be open to traffic during winter 2020.

A46 RAF Newton (Nottingham)

Allocated £2.9 million from the Growth and Housing Fund, a new link bridge over the A46 will be installed connecting the former RAF Newton site with critical transport links and public amenity services in central Bingham. The scheme will also receive £970,000 of private funding and will unlock the land to create up to 550 local homes and deliver substantial benefits to improve safety and conditions for vulnerable road users.

A590 Cross-a-moor (Cumbria)

This scheme will see an upgrade of the existing junction at Cross-a-Moor, Cumbria into a four arm roundabout which will provide a number of key local development sites with direct access to the A590 trunk road. The £5.05 million scheme has been allocated £3.05 million from the Growth and Housing Fund, £2.03 million in third party match funding which will include £1.73 million of private funding and a contribution from South Lakeland District Council. The scheme will also unlock 106 local homes, and three further sites with the potential to deliver 895 new homes In the future.

Forder Valley Link Road (Plymouth)

This £37.84 million package of works includes the construction of the Forder Valley Link Road which will connect the A386 at Derriford to the A38 to the east of the city. Allocated £4,470 from the Growth and Housing Fund, the link road will form part of a range of transport interventions that will help to accommodate a number of developments and will unlock up to 651 homes, and 1,227 additional jobs. The scheme will also be funded by a private match of

£6.4 million.The scheme is fully supported by both the local authority and the LEP (local enterprise partnership, with a substantial £22.55 million of other public (LEP) funding also being brought forward to enable the scheme to progress.

Highways England's Growth and Housing Fund has so far made contributions of over £77 million to improve 21 improvements, unlocking over 38,000 new homes and more than 44,000 jobs around Swindon, Exeter, Weston Super Mare, Darlington, Scunthorpe, Grantham, Warrington, Honiton, Derby, Foxdenton (Oldham), Taunton, Durham, Daventry, Southampton, Leicestershire and Whiteley (Hampshire).

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: Supporting veterans through membership of the VAPC

Jonathan Jelley, Chairman of the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee
Photo: All rights reserved

On 14 December 2017, the Centre for Public Appointments launched a new campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of being a public appointee.

The campaign aims to increase diversity on public boards but also to make a wider audience aware of the benefits of such appointments. The Cabinet Officepublished the Public appointments diversity action plan to coincide with the launch.

I was appointed as Chairman of the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee in Eastern England by the Minister of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans in February 2015. With a long background in voluntarily supporting the oldest military charity SSAFA, taking on this role was a natural extension to the work I was already doing in supporting veterans and their families.

Since taking on the role the Eastern England VAPC have set out to change our way of working by establishing a clear plan of action and to seek new recruits with different backgrounds in order to execute it.

We are now playing an increasingly important and influential part in the work supporting our veterans and their families. We have provided leadership and direction, worked with Veterans UK in support of their work as the executive and representing what we discover on the ground to an array of stakeholders including the minister.

From a personal perspective, it has helped me to gain broader experience and to develop further skills but it has also allowed me to contribute my expertise and knowledge in support of veterans and to influence the decisions that affect them and their families.

This is why I was delighted to support the government’s recent campaign to increase awareness of the work that can be done through membership of public bodies such as the VAPC.

Jonathan Jelly MBE, East of England VAPC

I encourage others to apply for these positions as they offer unique opportunities to broaden skills and experience as well as making meaningful contributions to society.