

News story: £200 million funding boost for England's roads

£46 million to help repair potholes.

Road users will benefit from an investment of almost £200 million to help improve the condition of local roads up and down the country, Transport Minister Jesse Norman announced in York today (December 14 2017).

This funding will go towards repairing almost 1 million potholes, and will also be used for highways maintenance, developing new technologies to improve highways resilience, and high quality cycle parks.

The £200 million announced includes:

The Transport Minister visited York to see the progress of the innovative pothole spotter trial and a new e-bike, which will be 11th vehicle to have cameras fitted to it as part of the pilot, which is also running in Thurrock and Wiltshire.

The trial sees high-definition cameras fitted to bicycles, buses and bin lorries to monitor road conditions. It gives councils detailed information so they can fill potholes when they occur as well as plan resurfacing works and help prevent potholes and other road defects.

Roads Minister Jesse Norman said:

People need great roads to get about, do business and see friends and family.

We're investing record amounts at present to improve the condition of our roads, so drivers and cyclists don't have to dodge potholes to travel safely.

We're also looking at how new innovations can help councils keep their roads in the best condition, saving money and planning their maintenance better.

Almost 1 million more potholes will be repaired by highway authorities in England, outside London, thanks to £46 million of additional funding, which is on top of the £75 million [Pothole Action Fund](#) already given to councils this year. The £250 million Pothole Action Fund was announced in the 2016 Budget and will fix more than 4 million potholes by 2020/21.

The next round of the local highways maintenance incentive fund was also launched today with £151 million to reward councils for efficiently planning roads maintenance. This money is part of just over £6 billion to authorities

to help keep their roads in a good condition.

A new £500,000 competition will also challenge councils to develop pilot projects of new connected technologies for the collection of road condition and pothole data.

A further £4 million will enable the government's Cycle Rail Programme to continue to be funded next year. The project pays for high quality cycle parking built at stations and has seen bike journeys at participating stations increase by nearly 40%. Since 2012, the Department for Transport has invested almost £35 million to build cycle facilities at stations, including cycle hubs which are secure and have retail and repair facilities.

The pilot Cycling and Walking to Work fund will also be extended by 6 months, with Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Liverpool benefitting from a share of £1.6 million.

[Press release: BBFC proposed to enforce age verification of online pornography](#)

Age verification will mean anyone who makes pornography available online on a commercial basis must ensure under 18s in the UK cannot access it. This is part of the Government's continuing work to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online.

The BBFC has unparalleled expertise in classifying content and has a proven track record of interpreting and implementing legislation as the statutory authority for age rating videos under the Video Recordings Act.

This, along with its work with industry on the film classification system and more recently classifying material for mobile network operators, makes them the preferred choice for regulator.

Digital Minister Matt Hancock said:

One of the missions of age verification is to harness the freedom of the internet while mitigating its harms. Offline, as a society we protect children from viewing inappropriate adult material by ensuring pornography is sold responsibly using appropriate age checks. It is now time that the online world follows suit. The BBFC are the best placed in the world to do this important and delicate task.

David Austin, Chief Executive Officer at BBFC said:

The BBFC's primary aim is to protect children and other vulnerable groups from harmful content and we are therefore pleased to accept the Government's proposed designation.

Age-verification barriers will help to prevent children accessing or stumbling across pornographic content online. The UK is leading the way with this age-verification regime and will set an international precedent in child protection.

The government's proposal must be approved by Parliament before the BBFC is officially designated as the age-verification regulator.

The regulator will notify non-compliant pornographic providers, and be able to direct internet service providers to prevent customers accessing these sites. It will also notify payment-services providers and other ancillary service providers of these sites, with the intention that they can withdraw their services.

The Government will shortly also publish guidance on how the regulator should fulfil its duties in relation to age verification.

Notes to Editors:

- Once designated, the regulator will develop and issue guidance (subject to parliamentary approval) on the age-verification arrangements for online pornographic material that it will treat as compliant and the role of ancillary service providers
- With regards to privacy, the regulator's guidance will set out the expectation that age-verification services and online pornography providers should have regard to the ICO's guidance on data protection and wider data protection laws..
- The Digital Economy Act requires that companies delivering adult content in the UK act responsibly by having robust age verification controls in place to prevent children accessing explicit material.
- The regulator will also have powers to take action where a person is making available extreme pornographic material on the internet in the United Kingdom. Extreme pornography is defined in section 22 of the Digital Economy Act.
- Age verification for online pornography is being taken forward alongside implementation of the Government's recently launched [Internet Safety Strategy](#).
- A 2016 report by the NSPCC found that nearly two thirds (65%) of 15-16 year olds and just under half (48%) of 11-16 year olds had viewed online pornography. Over a quarter (28%) of 11-12 year olds had seen pornography on the internet. It also found that children were just as likely to stumble across pornography (28%) as to search for it deliberately (19%).
- Research shows that viewing pornography at a young age can cause

distress, and can have a harmful effect on sexual development, beliefs, and relationships. Pornography tops the list of online risks named by children, with more than one in five young people expressing concern about such content according to [EU Kids Online research in 2013](#).

[News story: Brakes are off as reactor clean-up moves forward](#)

Engineers also used the wheels from a kitchen can opener, attached to the handbrake, to help steer a camera inside the Prototype Fast Reactor (PFR) for a survey inside the plant.

Conditions inside the reactor make it impossible for workers to access, meaning photographs taken by the piece of kit help in understanding how best to go about dismantling the redundant facility.

Chris Irwin, Senior Design Engineer, came up with the innovative concept. He said:

I was opening a can of beans at home and realised that the cutting wheel of a can opener was exactly what was needed to make the required diamond-shaped wheel.

I bought four of them and took the wheels off. The camera needed to be guided over obstacles within the reactor, so we realised the incremental nature of the clicks on a handbrake would give us the precise control that we needed.

This is the latest in a long line of novel approaches developed by the company's workforce, with blu-tack and Cillit Bang among the everyday items that have previously been used to help deliver safe and cost-effective clean-up on behalf of the site's owner, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

We are delivering one of the most challenging closure programmes in Europe, but this is another example where innovative, simple solutions prove critical in safely delivering complex projects.

PFR is one of three reactors at the former centre of fast reactor research. It was closed down in 1994, 20 years after it began producing power.

Press release: Farmer fined for illegal waste site

A County Durham man has been convicted of operating an illegal waste site in a prosecution brought by the Environment Agency.

Stephen Anthony Suddes, 53, appeared at Newton Aycliffe Magistrate's Court on Wednesday 13 December 2017 for operating a waste facility without a permit at his Thornley Pit House farm in Bishop Auckland.

Suddes, who has two previous convictions for waste offences, admitted the charges. He was handed a fine of £1,640 and ordered to pay costs of £1,500 and a £165 victim surcharge.

Under the same prosecution, Kevin Gray, 53, of Wear Street, Tow Law, on 6 September pleaded guilty for depositing controlled waste on a site without an environmental permit. He was fined £400 and ordered to pay £1,000 costs.

Acting on behalf of the Environment Agency, solicitor Laura Taylor told the court that Suddes deliberately and flagrantly disregarded the law over several months.

Environment Agency officers visited Suddes farm several times between 24 May 2016 and 31 October 2016. Each time they observed illegal activity including large piles of waste containing metals, wood, plastics, rubble and soils, and clear signs that waste had been burnt. On two occasions they recorded a white van owned by Kevin Gray Building Services tipping construction and demolition waste on the farm.

David O'Toole of the Environment Agency said:

Suddes has repeatedly put the environment at risk by deliberately ignoring the law for financial gain. Illegal waste activity such as this has a detrimental impact on the community and environment, as well as undermining legitimate businesses. We'll continue to work hard to ensure enforcement action is taken against those who flout the law.

Anyone who suspects that waste is being disposed of on an illegal waste fire is urged to report the matter to our incident hotline on 0800 807060.

Press release: North East youngster's winning design for flood wardens

A Sunderland youngster flooded with creativity has designed a winning logo for the region's Flood Wardens.

The Environment Agency hosted a special assembly at Hetton Lyons Primary School to present year 5 pupil Sally Lockey with a flood warden jacket.

Her design beat more than 300 submitted across the north east and will now be printed on all of the new blue flood warden jackets in the region.

And the new logo will also be printed on pavements outside north east schools with Rainworks spray – an invisible spray which will only show the logo when it rains.

It means pupils at the school will be reminded of the importance of being floodaware at key times.

Coun. James Blackburn, Hetton Town Mayor David Wallace, and flood wardens from Durham were at the special assembly to congratulate the youngster.

Winner Sally Lockey with her logo design

Important job for youngsters

Taryn Al-Mashgari, Flood Community Engagement Officer who covers the Tyne and Wear area, said:

The winning logo will be worn by flood wardens right across the north east so it was an important job for these youngsters.

We got more than 300 entries, which is fantastic, and it was tough for the judging panel. But the winning logo incorporated all of the aspects of a flood warden and that's why we chose it.

We're working closely with schools to make sure young people understand what it means to be flood resilient and how they can be prepared, so that communities are prepared for future generations.

We've talked to them about the importance of flood wardens and what they do and it's been fun for the children to come up with this new design.

L-R: Taryn Al-Mashgari, Environment Agency; Flood warden Margaret Horseman; Mayor David Wallace with the flood emergency 'grab bag' given to the school; Flood warden Sue Williams, and Coun. James Blackburn, with logo design winner Sally Lockey wearing the flood warden jacket and with the new Rainworks

stencil.

School presentations

Environment Agency Flood Engagement Officers gave presentations at schools across the north east during the competition to raise awareness of flooding with children and start them thinking about how to prepare for flooding.

Sarah Staward, Year 5 teacher at the school, added:

The children really enjoyed learning about flooding and the role and qualities of the Environment Agency flood wardens. The competition also supports our work as an eco-school.

Flood wardens are community volunteers who support their communities during flooding incidents – including activating a community's flood action plan, ensuring the most vulnerable in their community are safe and working closely with the Environment Agency.

Flood warden Sue Williams, who congratulated Sally at the assembly, said:

These new flood warden jackets are excellent as the blue colour identifies us as flood wardens and distinguishes us from organisations at the scene. The winning symbol is fantastic and captures everything about our role.

[Communities are urged to check their flood risk and find out how they can prepare for flooding](#)