

Press release: Prestigious award for Highways England's 'Road to Growth'

Highways England's plan setting out how the country's motorways and major A roads will unlock economic growth and support development for decades to come has been recognised by a leading independent professional body of economists.

The Institute of Economic Development (IED) hailed the company's strategic economic growth plan, "The Road to Growth" as "greatest economic impact" at their 2017 annual awards.

The plan includes Highways England's Innovation, and Growth and Housing Funds.

Highways England's Executive Director of Strategy and Planning, Elliot Shaw, said:

It is a great achievement to have been recognised by the Institute of Economic Development for our innovative approach to unlocking economic growth. While we continue to successfully deliver the Government's Road Investment Strategy, we are actively looking ahead to 2020 and beyond. It is this strategic and innovative thinking that is showing the difference we are making.

Highways England's Senior Strategic Implementation Manager Alice Darley receiving the award

Announcing the award Bev Hurley, Chair, Institute of Economic Development, said:

We would like to congratulate Highways England as the first winner of our Greatest Economic Impact award. The Road to Growth is the first strategic economic growth plan for Highways England and draws upon extensive research, consumer and stakeholder feedback. It is closely aligned with the Government and Department of Transport's vision for a high performing road infrastructure that positively impacts the economy, employment and housing markets.

Highways England has made 'supporting economic growth' one of its five strategic priorities and at the same time has set funding aside for innovation, some strategic projects that could unlock growth and produced a planning guide setting out how to work with the organisation. Whilst the overall approach may not yet be fully measurable, it was considered clear from the documents submitted that this shift to concentrate on economic growth can make a considerable difference to the economic growth of locations across England.

The Road to Growth and details of Highways England's Growth and Housing Fund can be [found on our web page](#).

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: Couple ordered to pay over £62,000 for River Leadon pollution](#)

The Bennions of Rosehill Farm, Dymock, were each fined £5,500 and each ordered to pay £25,798 in costs along with a victim surcharge of £170.

More than 15,200 fish were killed as a result of the incident in which hundreds of tonnes of digestate were discharged into the river. Fish killed including brown trout, chub, eel, dace, roach, lamprey, and bream. The Bennions are the sole partners of the partnership that own and run Rose Hill Farm.

The incident, on the 22 July 2016, occurred when an employee was instructed by Mark Bennion to fertilise one of the orchards. The employee turned on the irrigation system designed to take the digestate fertiliser from a lagoon to the orchard.

However, he had not physically checked and therefore did not know that the valve linked to the standpipe in another field was partly open. As a result, when the fertiliser entered the irrigation system, it discharged out of the standpipe, across the field and into the Preston Brook.

The discharge pump operates at 100 tonnes an hour, therefore a very large amount of polluting digestate entered the watercourse. The discharge was the worst in 10 years in the area.

Mark Bennion liaised with Environment Agency officers and submitted a proposal for dredging the brook in order to remove all contaminates. This was completed on 12 August 2016.

Surveys conducted after the incident show the fish population within the

watercourse have been significantly adversely impacted. The Leadon is an important habitat for eels and a significant number of adults were lost as a result of the pollution.

In passing sentence, the Magistrates sought to achieve a balance between the major adverse impact on the watercourse and the powerful mitigation put forward on the defendants' behalf. The Bennions were both previously of good character, with no previous convictions, and co-operated with the Environment Agency immediately after the incident. Their remorse was evident throughout the investigation and court hearing. Since the incident the Environment Agency have restocked the river with more than 15,000 fish. The restocking process will continue over the next 4 years.

Speaking after the case an Environment Agency spokesperson said:

Agriculture uses 70% of the land in England and farmers have a major impact on the environment. Most farmers act responsibly and we work with the industry to respond to incidents, tackle the root causes of pollution and promote good practice.

But where farmers are responsible for serious pollution incidents, we will not hesitate to take enforcement action, including prosecution. Agriculture is the single biggest source of serious pollution incidents and all farmers have a duty to prevent it.

This was one of the worst pollution incidents on a watercourse in the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire area in the last 10 years. It significantly affected a stretch of the River Leadon catchment.

We are pleased that the court has accepted the seriousness of the case and imposed appropriate penalties.

We appreciate reports from the public to the Environment Agency's Incident Hotline on 0800 80 70 60 which allows our staff to respond swiftly to protect people, wildlife and the environment – and also to investigate environmental offences which may have occurred.

Press release: First joint exercise with the fire service in the south west to test flood defence barriers

Environment Agency field operatives will roll out up to 120 metres of temporary defence barriers, in partnership with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and

Rescue Service officers. This will be the first joint exercise of its kind in the south west, although the fire service has previously helped deploy barriers during live incidents.

The exercise will take place at the Ashley Road recreation ground, next to the River Avon, from 10am to 1pm. Teams will deploy 3 types of barriers and seepage pumps to practise their joint response to flooding.

Robbie Williams, Environment Agency Operations Manager for the Wessex Area, said:

We are investing to reduce flood risk in Salisbury as part of a £2.5 billion investment nationally to better protect 300,000 homes by 2021.

Salisbury is at risk from flooding from 5 rivers running into the city and their close proximity to homes and businesses, so it's important we limit the overall impact and extent of flooding, and keep people safe.

Joint exercises like this will help us be better prepared for any future incidents as we'll be able to deploy the barriers more quickly and efficiently when flooding is expected, helping to protect communities and the local economy.

Jason Moncrieff, Station Manager for Salisbury, Wilton and Amesbury, said:

Across our area, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has a number of communities at high risk of flooding. It is great to have this opportunity to work closely with Environment Agency colleagues, both to test how we can support them when flooding is expected, but also to better understand how they work and the defences they have available.

The exercise site is 1 of 4 areas in the city where temporary defence barriers would be deployed in a real life river flooding incident.

These measures are supported by the Salisbury Operating Flood Working Group, which launched a multi-agency flood plan outlining the city's emergency response last year. Volunteer wardens were also recruited by Salisbury City Council to act as the eyes and ears of the community for any flood risks.

Partner agencies and some schools have been invited to observe the exercise, including Wiltshire Council, Salisbury City Council, Wiltshire Police and wider members of the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Resilience Forum.

One of the Environment Agency's new Incident Command Vehicles will also be on site recording footage of the exercise. The WiFi-enabled vehicle acts as a mobile incident room and a temporary headquarters for staff out in the field,

enabling better site management, situational awareness and visibility in flood risk communities.

Local residents will be informed about the exercise in advance and invited to stop by to find out more. Ashley Road and the formal footpath around the edge of the recreation ground will still be accessible to users.

Residents can sign up to receive flood alerts by phone, email or text message. Residents can [register online](#) or by calling the 24-hour Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

There are 3 types of barriers. The Innero and Geodesign barriers are aluminium frames which expand into shape before being lined with plastic sheet to create a waterproof wall, with the Floodstop barrier being a plastic structure linked together for more specific deployments.

Three teams of 8 people (6 Environment Agency, 2 fire service) will rotate on the hour between each barrier type, overseen by site controllers.

The Salisbury Operational Flood Working Group members are Salisbury City Council, Wiltshire Council, the Environment Agency, Salisbury Cathedral, Salisbury BID (Business Improvement District) and Highways England.

The media are invited to attend the exercise at 11am on Tuesday 5 December and carry out a brief tour of the site and carry out photo/filming/interview opportunities with approved spokespeople from the Environment Agency and Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. Please confirm your attendance with the Environment Agency press office by emailing communications_wessex@environment-agency.gov.uk.

On arrival the media should report to the information stand on site, to be signed in and given high visibility jackets for safety and identification purposes. Press officers will assist with this process. Please note, the Environment Agency cannot accept any liability if health and safety procedures are not followed.

[Press release: Better Broadband Scheme extended for another year](#)

A scheme designed to help those people struggling with the slowest broadband speeds in the UK has been extended for another year, Digital Minister Matt Hancock announced today.

- Scheme offers immediate assistance to those in hardest to reach places
- More than 10,000 UK homes and businesses have already had their broadband speeds boosted through the initiative

The “Better Broadband Scheme” provides a subsidy of up to £350 to enable access to an affordable basic broadband service to those people unable to get broadband speeds of at least 2Mbps.

Minister for Digital, Matt Hancock said:

Thanks to the UK Government’s rollout of superfast broadband, more than 94 per cent of the UK can now access superfast broadband speeds and thousands more homes and businesses are being reached every week.

There is still more to be done to get decent broadband to all and the Better Broadband Scheme helps people with the very worst broadband, to provide immediate assistance to those most in need. I’m delighted to say we are extending the scheme to help people in some of the most rural and hard to reach areas of the country.

Already more than 10,000 homes and businesses have benefitted from the Scheme, with subsidies that are worth over £3 million in total. Originally due to conclude at the end of 2017, the steadily growing popularity of the scheme means that it will now be extended until the end of 2018.

Households and businesses that are eligible to take advantage of the Scheme are provided with a unique code by the Government that they can use to obtain an affordable basic broadband connection. The code does not have a specific fixed value but the subsidy contributes towards the installation and hardware costs to ensure that the customer’s first year costs are no more than £400.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. Taking out a broadband service under this Scheme will not prevent your premises from being considered for superfast broadband in the future.
 2. People can check what broadband services are already available to them by using the GoSuperfast checker , and what their current broadband speed is, using the ADSL availability checker.
 3. If, after making these checks, they believe their speed is less than 2 Mb per second and they have no other options available enter your postcode below to find out how to apply for help.
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[News story: Royal Navy ship set for Australia, Defence Secretary reveals](#)

The Defence Secretary had announced that [the ship would sail to the Asia Pacific whilst addressing the crew on-board in Devonport on Friday](#), and has now provided further information of the deployment.

During recent conversations with Australian Defence Minister Marise Payne and Minister for Defence Industry Christopher Pyne the Defence Secretary reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening the Australia-UK defence relationship and exploring opportunities for our Armed Forces to work together.

The visit of HMS Sutherland, a Type 23 anti-submarine warfare frigate, offers further opportunities for the Royal Navy and the Australian Navy to collaborate.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Though we may be currently battling against each other on the cricket field, when it comes to defence, we stand together with Australia as allies not opponents. Our countries have fought alongside one another since the First World War and we continue to stand strong in the face of today's intensifying global threats.

I am pleased to announce that HMS Sutherland will set sail across the world next year and look forward to strengthening our close relationship with Australia.

The Type 23 frigate HMS Sutherland will deploy to Australia in the New Year.

The ship will visit Sydney, Perth and Adelaide and provides an outstanding opportunity for joint exercising. The deployment has the added benefit of showcasing Britain's cutting-edge anti-submarine warfare technology.

Australia and the UK remain extremely close trading partners, exchanging £13.1bn of goods and services in 2016. In that year we also agreed to establish a bilateral Trade Working Group to begin scoping out the parameters for a future Free Trade Agreement. This week International Trade Secretary Liam Fox is in the country to advance the UK/Australia trade relationship, following a visit from Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin earlier this month.

In August this year both countries' Foreign and Defence Secretaries strengthened the already close relationship in the [9th annual Australia-UK Ministerial talks \(AUKMIN\)](#), agreeing on further joint work on cyber, Commonwealth and modern slavery. This deployment is a tangible demonstration of that commitment.

Whilst in the country earlier in the month, Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin [announced the intention to look at the feasibility of fitting an Australian radar on future British warships](#). The 'CEAFAR' radar, developed by CEA Technologies, is already in service with the Australian Navy and a capability study to fit the radar to British ships will begin early next year.