

# [News story: Midlands Engine to roar ahead with ambitious new strategy](#)

The strategy is published today (9 March 2016), as the Chancellor Philip Hammond visits the region the day after delivering his first [Budget](#).

The [Midlands Engine Strategy](#) includes significant investment in skills, connectivity and local growth, while it sets out how the government plans to drive the region's huge potential and promote it to the world.

This builds on plans set out in the government's modern [Industrial Strategy](#) which includes the offer of additional support for industries – including those in the Midlands – through sector deals. The government has also set out a series of reforms to technical education, backed by an investment of more than £500 million, to ensure young people receive the training they need to take on the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future.

This new strategy sets out how the government will:

- Invest £392 million in the Midlands from the Local Growth Fund. This cash will support innovative projects including creating a global hub for space technology in Leicester and it will also be spent on transport improvements including £25 million to tackle congestion and improve major employment sites in the Black Country and £12 million to improve road connections around Loughborough. This is in addition to the £1.5 billion of Local Growth Fund investments in the Midlands that have already been announced.
- Invest £20 million in a flagship Midlands Skills Challenge to improve employment prospects for people living and working in the region. This will include providing additional work coaches, language training and testing innovative approaches to lifelong learning.
- Commit an additional £4 million to support the operation of the Midlands Engine Partnership over the next two years. The Midlands Engine Partnership brings together Local Enterprise Partnerships, local authorities, businesses, academic institutions and others into a voluntary, regional partnership that will support growth across the Midlands.

The government is also welcoming today the strategy being published by Midlands Connect and has already confirmed £17 million of funding to develop its proposals, which include the potential for up to ten additional trains per hour into central Birmingham.

Today's announcements are all part of plans to make the Midlands an engine for economic growth for the whole country. The Midlands already has huge economic potential – home to more than ten million people with an economy worth £217.7 billion – 13% of the UK's annual output. The government believes there are huge opportunities to build on this.

From May this year, Birmingham and the wider West Midlands Combined Authority area will benefit from a directly elected Mayor able to use powers over skills, transport and planning to drive local growth and HS2 will place the Midlands at the heart of England's high speed rail network.

The strategy also focuses on promoting the Midlands to the world and today's strategy includes the formation of a Midlands Trade and Investment Programme, which will include events in Europe, North America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Coinciding with this, the Department for International Trade is today hosting the inaugural Midlands Engine Trade Summit bringing together up to 400 delegates from businesses from across the region to help them seize global opportunities and grow their businesses.

Quality of life is also placed at the heart of today's plans with the Local Growth Fund investing £8 million to create a new world class teaching University in Hereford, £12 million to develop Black Country Garden City, offering new locations for high quality housing development and £6 million to catalyse the regeneration of Derby City Centre.

Chancellor Philip Hammond said:

The Midlands has enormous economic potential and it is more important than ever that we now build on its existing strengths to make sure it fulfils it.

The [Midlands Engine Strategy](#) is an important milestone, setting out the concrete actions we are taking, where we are not only investing in what it does well but also tackling some of the long standing productivity barriers in the region including skills and connectivity.

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It is a vital part of the government's work to create an economy that works for everyone, and all parts of the country.

Communities Secretary and Midlands Engine Ministerial Champion Sajid Javid said:

Backed by millions in investment, this new strategy will help create more jobs and boost skills in the region. It will also

showcase to investors here and abroad everything the Midlands Engine has to offer.

Midlands Engine Partnership chairman Sir John Peace said:

All parts of the Midlands already do a great job energising growth, creating jobs, investing in infrastructure, helping people to acquire valuable skills, and promoting their particular assets to attract investment and visitors.

This strategy represents a clear footprint for the Midlands Engine empowering us to think bigger, and work even closer together, across local economies and on a scale that makes sense in global markets.

Later this year, we will respond to the government's strategy by publishing an ambitious vision and action plan so we, together with government, succeed in unlocking the Midlands' great potential.

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## **£32million to reduce flood risk to over 2,000 homes**

The funding, which is allocated for 2017-18, is the largest capital budget for flood risk management in recent years and demonstrates the priority the Welsh Government places on supporting communities.

Later today, the Cabinet Secretary will update the National Learning to Live with Flooding in Wales conference on the Welsh Government's work to support those living at risk of flooding.

During her speech the Cabinet Secretary will also confirm over £144million capital funding for flood risk management, in addition to the £150million coastal programme, over the five year Government term. Of this, £5million will support design and development work for coastal risk management projects.

The Cabinet Secretary will also use the speech to announce that £1million of the flood budget will be ring-fenced each year for the next four years to support smaller scale works and maintenance to be carried out by Local Authorities.

This follows the successful trial of a grant scheme to support smaller works, which provided funding for 73 projects to reduce risk to 700 properties across Wales. This demonstrates it is not just big expensive flood schemes

which make a difference to communities.

Speaking ahead of today's conference, the Cabinet Secretary said:

"Flooding can have a devastating impact on the lives of those affected. We know that climate and weather patterns are continuing to change and as a result flooding is likely to become more frequent. We therefore need to do all we can to reduce the risk to our communities while helping them to adapt to the risks they face which are beyond control.

"I am pleased to confirm we will be providing £32million in 2017-18, our largest capital budget in recent years, to help reduce the risk of flooding to thousands of homes and businesses. This highlights the priority we place on protecting and strengthening communities against flooding."

Changes will also be made to make sure focus and funding is going to the areas most at risk. Future flood programmes will be prioritised by making use of the Communities at Risk Register alongside local knowledge and data of historical flood events.

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## **International Women's Day: Overcome prejudice, support engagement and promote women's empowerment**

8 March 2017 – In his message on International Women's Day, Secretary-General António Guterres stressed that while women's rights are human rights, in these troubled times, the rights of women and girls are being reduced, restricted and reversed.

He asserted that women's legal rights, which have never been equal to that of men's on any continent, are being eroded further. Women's rights over their own bodies are questioned and undermined and they are routinely targeted for intimidation and harassment, including in cyberspace. Mr. Guterres underscored that in the worst cases, extremists and terrorists build their ideologies around the subjugation of women and girls and single them out for sexual and gender-based violence, forced marriage and virtual enslavement.

He emphasized that only by empowering women and girls can their rights be protected and their full potential be ensured.

## Imbalances



A woman in Sudan holds a poster promoting the collective abandonment of female genital mutilation. Photo: UNICEF/UNI73778/Holt

Historic imbalances in power relations between men and women, exacerbated by growing inequalities within and between societies and countries, are leading to greater discrimination against women and girls.



Transparent. Photo: Belinda Mason, Silent Tears

Denying the rights of women and girls is not only wrong in itself; it has a serious social and economic impact that holds us all back.

## Women benefit all



Women on the job at a workshop in the Dominican Republic. Photo: UNDP Dominican Republic

Gender equality has a transformative effect that is essential to fully functioning communities, societies and economies.



Abissdoum Charlotte, 26, with her 7-week-old triplets, Morouta, Nasifaté and Nasif, is receiving postnatal and newborn care at the Cooperative Clinic of Sikecoudji, in Cotonou, Benin. Photo: UNFPA/Ollivier Girard

Women's access to education and health services has benefits for their families and communities that extend to future generations. An extra year in school can add up to 25 per cent to a girl's future income.



Women and technology – the attitude gap. Photo: UN Women/Gaganjit Singh

When women participate fully in the labour force, it creates opportunities and generates growth. Closing the gender gap in employment could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025.



Students of Computer Sciences at Khowaja Institute of Information Technology (KIIT) in Hyderabad, Pakistan learn computing skills. Photo: Visual News Associates/World Bank

Increasing the proportion of women in public institutions makes them more representative, increases innovation, improves decision-making and benefits whole societies.



Women in Pakistan build their knowledge and skills at an FAO-supported rural livelihoods school. Photo: FAO/Farook Naeem

Gender equality is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global plan agreed by leaders of all countries to meet the challenges we face. Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls specifically for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and this is central to the achievement of all the 17 SDGs.

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## [More evidence of the Tories secret deal with the leadership of Surrey County Council – Teresa Pearce MP](#)

Teresa Pearce, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, in response to the release of FOI letters by Surrey County Council, said:

“Despite Theresa May’s claims to the contrary, this is more evidence of the Tories secret deal with the leadership of Surrey County Council.

“There is a huge crisis in social care which todays budget won’t fix. What we need from the Tories is a long term sustainable plan, rather than sweetheart deals for Tories councils.

“Theresa May needs to come clean. We need full disclosure of the terms of the deal and reassurance that all councils will be treated the same way not just the lucky few the Tories favour.”