

Budget 'utterly fails to address the challenges of our time', say Green Party



8 March 2017

- * **No mention of climate change in Chancellor's speech**
- * **'Woefully inadequate' resources for health and social care**
- * **'Utter failure' to address the air pollution emergency**

Caroline Lucas, the co-leader of the Green Party, has given a damning verdict on today's Budget. With the Chancellor refusing to give the NHS and social care the funding that experts say is needed, and with Phillip Hammond's speech failing to mention climate change, Lucas said that the Budget 'utterly fails to address the challenges of our time'.

Caroline Lucas MP said:

"This budget should have been an emergency intervention to end the chaos in health and social care and address the air pollution emergency, but instead it's another resounding failure from a Government that's got no ideas beyond an obsession with scaling back the state.

"With our NHS in peril and social care in the midst of a crisis this Budget was a chance for the Government to take a stand for the public services upon which we all rely. Instead they continue to push ahead with planned Corporation tax cuts, and their handout to high earners, while unveiling woefully inadequate funding changes for the NHS and social care. . The Government's obsessions with slimming down the state is causing misery – and their refusal to think again on this issue is inexcusable."

Lucas also slammed the Government for a 'climate failure' Budget and for refusing to act on air pollution:

"The Chancellor has utterly failed to get a grip on the air pollution emergency in Britain, and this budget simply won't go anywhere near far enough in cleaning up the filthy air which leads to 40,000 early deaths per year. With the cost of motoring dropping in recent years – and public transport costs skyrocketing – we should have seen the fuel duty escalator unfrozen and the money ploughed into public transport. Instead we've seen further handouts to the motor lobby and persistent neglect for cleaner, healthier forms of transport."

"This budget is another climate failure – with Chancellor failing to mention climate change even once in his speech.. Rather than reversing the solar tax hike or ploughing money into renewables the Chancellor seems hell bent on

drilling for more gas and oil in the North Sea, and handing further cash to the motor lobby with the fuel duty freeze. Britain should be leading the world in climate change technology and green jobs but instead we're lagging behind and laying the foundations for another dash for gas."

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Press release: M5 travel advice in Gloucestershire as Cheltenham Festival gets under starter's orders

Highways England has advised drivers using the M5 in Gloucestershire to plan ahead and allow extra travelling time during next week's world famous Cheltenham Festival.

The popular event runs from Tuesday, 14 March until Friday, 17 March with more than 200,000 people expected to attend throughout the week.

The Festival concludes with Friday's Gold Cup which can see more than 65,000 people attend on a single day. The busiest times on the roads are expected to be between 9.30am until 12.30pm each day. Queues are likely on the approach to M5 junction 10 southbound, and on all approaches to M5 junction 11.

Gareth Price, Highways England emergency planning officer for the South West, said:

Junctions 10 and 11 of the M5 are like to be busy on these days, particularly Friday, 17 March.

Our aim is to keep the Highways England network running whilst keeping road users safe and informed. We advise all drivers to check our traffic and travel information channels, set off early and allow plenty of time for their journeys.

Highways England provides up-to-date traffic information [via its website](#), via Twitter @highwaysSWEST, local and national radio travel bulletins, electronic road signs and mobile platforms.

Press release: Public exhibitions for A500 Etruria widening

Drivers, business owners and residents are invited to find out more about plans to widen a section of the road that connects the M6 with the city of Stoke-on-Trent.

Highways England is developing a scheme to widen the A500 from two to three lanes between Porthill (A5271) and Wolstanton (A527), helping to reduce congestion and improve journey times.

Highways England will be working in collaboration with Stoke-on-Trent City Council to ensure the scheme will tie in with the local authority's proposed improvements at the A500 Wolstanton junction and the associated access into the Etruria Valley site.

Highways England project manager, Malcolm Mitson, said:

This scheme will improve journeys for people using the A500 by easing the flow of traffic and reducing congestion, making journey times more reliable. And increasing capacity with a third lane will support the growth of the local economy as well as improve safety.

It is proposed the speed limit will be lowered from 70mph to 50mph, for safety and consistency with other parts of the route in urban areas.

It's also proposed to close the public footpaths that run alongside the A500, instead providing an alternative footpath/cycle way at a safer distance from the main carriageway, as well as safe pedestrian access to cross the road at Porthill junction.

The scheme, part of the government's £15.2bn road investment strategy, will take approximately 18 months to complete, with construction starting by spring 2020 and opening to traffic autumn 2021.

People attending the exhibitions will be able to see plans of the proposals, find out more about the scheme and ask questions of the project team.

Highways England will be attending events being run in conjunction with Stoke-on-Trent City Council on:

- Wednesday 15 March, 9am to 3pm, at Middleport Medical Centre, Newport Lane, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 3NP
- Thursday 16 March, 2pm to 8pm, at Bradwell Lodge Community Centre, Bradwell Lane, Porthill, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 8PS

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.

Mark Drakeford responds to the UK Government's Spring Budget

The Spring Budget included £149m of additional revenue funding between 2017-18 and 2019-20 and an extra £52m of capital funding for Wales between 2017-18 and 2020-21.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford:

"Ahead of the Budget, I wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to outline my concerns about the UK Government's intention to press ahead with £3.5bn cuts to public spending in 2019-20. We still have no clarity about these looming cuts, which could result in our Budget being reduced by £175m.

"The UK Government's efficiency review will not report until the autumn. I am not prepared to wait until then to find out the impact of more cuts to our Budget. I am seeking urgent assurances from the UK Government that we will discuss early findings well before the autumn.

"In these uncertain times, we have been clear about the need to end austerity and invest in our valued public services and the economy.

"Additional revenue funding is always needed against the backdrop of continued cuts to our Budget as a result of the UK Government's pursuit of the damaging policy of austerity.

"Since 2010, our Budget has been cut by 8% in real terms. Today's Spring Budget was yet another missed opportunity to end austerity.

"Despite the ongoing cuts to our funding, we have prioritised funding for social care in Wales and spending health and social care is 6% higher in Wales than in England. I'm pleased the

Chancellor has followed the Welsh Government's lead and recognised the importance of social care to the health service.

"In Wales, we have also acted to support those small businesses which have been disproportionately affected by the independent Valuation Office Agency's revaluation. We have put in place £20m of targeted support for 2017-18, on top of our Small Business Rates Relief scheme.

"The Welsh Government's Cabinet will now decide how we maximise the additional revenue funding and the very modest increase to our capital budget to support our investment priorities."

"We have said for some time that the Swansea Bay Region city deal is ready to be signed – we fully recognise the importance of the deal and the positive long-term economic benefits it will bring across the region. It is disappointing the Chancellor didn't use this Budget to bring the deal to its conclusion immediately."

Press release: Work completed early as part of the A12 becomes the A47

The change sees what was the A12 between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft now become a part of the A47. This ensures that the A47 is a continuous trunk road from Peterborough to Lowestoft, while the A12 is a continuous trunk road between Ipswich and London.

Work started in mid-January and was expected to be completed tomorrow (Wednesday 8 March), but was actually completed last Wednesday (1 March). Most of the affected signage has had patches stuck on detailing that the road is now the A47 rather than A12, while signage that needed replacing now displays the new road name.

This has delivered on one of the commitments in the Government's Road Investment Strategy, which will see a record £15 billion invested in England's motorways and trunk roads, with £3 billion of that in the East of England.

Highways England project sponsor Steve Cox said:

Highways England is committed to ensuring that our work causes minimal disruption for drivers across the East of England, and we are pleased to have been able to complete this work early to ensure that is the case. This work now ensures that both the A47 and A12

are continuous trunk roads connecting our important towns and cities.

The renumbering follows recent improvement work to the A47 Acle Straight as the road passes through The Broads, which saw improvements to traffic signs and road markings at the A1064 roundabout, Wherryman's Way and the Halvergate junction.

It also comes ahead of consultations into major upgrades elsewhere on the A47 that will be start in 2020, with a series of consultations into these set for the public to share their views at to be launched shortly. These works will include:

- dualling of the A47 between Norwich and Dereham
- improving the A11 and A47 Thickthorn junction
- dualling the A47 between Norwich and the Acle Straight
- improving two junctions at Great Yarmouth, including reconstructing the Vauxhall roundabout

Martin Wilby, chairman of the Norfolk County Council's Environment, Transport and Development Committee, said:

We support the work that Highways England has recently been carrying out in the east of the county and, like many people in Norfolk, are looking forward to their forthcoming consultation on the major improvements they intend to make to the A47. These upgrades to the A47 will make a huge difference to the county and its prosperity, and we'll be working with Highways England to do all we can to ensure they can get underway as soon as possible.

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