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Spring 2022 British Edition

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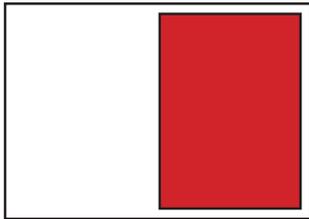
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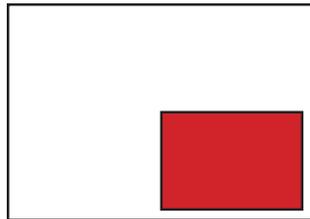
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Spring snowdrops



News & OPINIONS Roundup

Summary of the main news and sports events over the last three months

By Paul G Bazeley for Government World

January News Review

Sajid Javid announced that the COVID-19 isolation period in England was reduced to five days to counter the Omicron variant's impact on the health sector and businesses. By the end of the month, the Plan B restrictions, which included COVID passes for large events and mandatory mask-wearing in shops and on public transport, were lifted in England.

The Metropolitan Police opened an investigation into possible breaches of COVID-19 regulations in government buildings. On the final day of the month, the Sue Gray report was published. The report was an investigation into violations of lockdown rules in government buildings. The report highlighted three key areas: failures in leadership, drinking culture and little thought to behaviour while the nation was in a pandemic. Gray

stated some of the behaviour was 'difficult to justify' and that there were 'failures of leadership and judgement' from Number 10 and the Cabinet Office during these gatherings.

Prince Andrew handed back all his military titles and royal patronages to the Queen, his mother, due to his ongoing civil sexual assault case. It included him dropping the use of the 'His Royal Highness' title in an official capacity.

Ukraine accused Russia of being behind cyber-attacks that affected about 70 government websites. A message appeared

telling Ukrainians to 'prepare for the worst' before the sites went offline. The websites were restored after a few hours.

The UK supplied Ukraine with anti-tank missiles as tensions with their neighbour, Russia, increased. Russia had mobilised thousands of personnel and equipment the previous year as it wanted guarantees that Ukraine would not join NATO. Later in the month, the UK withdrew staff from its embassy in Kyiv amid fears of an imminent invasion.



The James Webb Space Telescope, the largest space telescope in history,

reached its intended destination a million miles away from Earth. It is hoped that the telescope will be able to look back to when galaxies and stars were formed and look for extra-terrestrial life, allowing us to understand the universe further.

The Power of the Dog won the Best Picture Drama category at the 2022 Golden Globes. In addition, Nicole Kidman won the best actress for her role in Being the Ricardos, and Will Smith won the best actor for his role in King Richard.

A South Korean citizen crossed the Korean demilitarised zone to defect to North Korea. Despite searching for several hours, South Korean troops could not find them. Military Chiefs had sent a message to North Korea asking for them to be protected. It is unknown if the person is alive.



Microsoft announced they intended to acquire the gaming company Activision Blizzard, for \$68.7 billion. The company would become part of Xbox Game Studios, a part of the Microsoft company, and would make it the third most prominent gaming company in the world.

Zara Rutherford became the youngest female pilot to fly solo around the world at the age of 19. The British-Belgium pilot successfully circumnavigated the globe in five months.

January Sports Review

The Australian Open tennis tournament took place. Rafael Nadal won the Men's singles, taking him to a record 21 grand slams, one ahead of Novak Djokovic and the great Roger Federer. Ash Barty won in the Women's singles, making her the first home player to win since Chris O'Neil in 1978. Before the tournament, most of the focus was on Novak Djokovic. He was detained by border force officials when attempting to enter Australia as it was claimed he didn't meet the visa requirements to enter the country. Djokovic sought and won an injunction. However, Alex Hawke, the Australian Minister for Immigration, used discretionary powers to deny Djokovic entry on the grounds of health and good order. It meant Djokovic was unable to defend his title.



Mason Greenwood, the Manchester United and England player, was arrested on suspicion of rape and assault after videos and images emerged on social media.

February News Review

The tension between Russia, Ukraine and NATO countries raised as Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the United States of America of trying to 'draw Russia into a war'. Soon after, Britain and America advised their nationals to leave Ukraine as Russia had



enough troops and equipment to launch an invasion.

Later in the month, Putin signed decrees that recognised the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) as independent. According to Russia, Russian forces were sent to Donetsk and Luhansk on the same day on a 'peacekeeping mission'. The Russian President also repeated that Ukraine joining NATO would be a security risk to Russia.

Following President Putin's recognition of the DPR and LPR, the European Union member states agreed to a new set of sanctions against Russia. Germany also suspended the Nord Stream 2 project, a natural gas pipeline from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea.

On 24th February 2022, Vladimir Putin ordered a military operation to 'demilitarise and denazify' Ukraine. The Russian President also stated that anybody who tried

to interfere or create threats to their country would see 'consequences you have never seen in history'.

Upon the news, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced a military mobilisation, with Ukrainian men aged 18-60 unable to leave the country. He also declared martial law across Ukraine as Russian troops began to strike multiple cities. Russian troops also began to attack Odesa and Mariupol, two port cities in Ukraine.

Many world leaders condemned the invasion of Ukraine, with countries around the world proceeding with further sanctions



against Russia and some of its prominent figureheads. In the following days, protests were seen worldwide in major cities.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced an end to all COVID-19 restrictions in England as the government moved toward its living



with the virus plan. He also stated that free self-testing would end on the 1st April 2022.

Four senior aides to Boris Johnson resigned after the Partygate scandal controversy. There were also letters of no confidence submitted and calls for the Prime Minister to resign. Nevertheless, the news and debate surrounding the matter seemed to diminish as tensions rose between Ukraine and Russia.

A huge leak from Credit Suisse, one of the largest banks in the world, exposed the details of 30,000 bank accounts. In addition, the data leak revealed the secret wealth of clients involved in human trafficking, corruption, money laundering and other serious crimes. The story highlighted the secretive banking laws in Switzerland, while Credit Suisse stated that due to the banking laws, it was unable to comment on its clients. Petrol and diesel prices reached an all-

time high in the United Kingdom amid the global energy crisis. The RAC blamed high prices due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and petrol retailers profiting.



Archaeologists announced that they had discovered a tooth in a cave in France that dates back 54,000 years. The finding suggests that homo sapiens lived in Europe 10,000 years earlier than previously thought. Along with the tooth and stone tools, there were also Neanderthal remains found, which suggests the two groups may have coexisted together.

The Isle of Wight recorded a wind gust of



122mph, a record for England as high winds hit the UK. The high winds caused some of London's O2 arena roof to be damaged, one of the towers at the Grain Power Station in Kent to collapse, and other damage across the United Kingdom.

Iceland announced it would end whaling by 2024 after the price of whale meat continues to decrease.

Queen Elizabeth II tested positive for COVID-19 and was suffering from 'cold-like symptoms'. The news came after Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, both were said to have caught the virus.

February Sports Review

The Winter Olympics took place in Beijing, China. Norway topped the medal table with 16 golds and 37 medals overall. The United Kingdom finished 19th in the medal table (the third time in a row) as they won gold in the women's curling and silver in the men's



curling. UK Sport said the result was a 'disappointment'.

The Africa Cup of Nations ended as Senegal beat Egypt in the final. The score was 0-0 and went to penalties, with Senegal winning them 4-2. The game saw the two Liverpool stars, Sadio Mane (Senegal) and Mohammed Salah (Egypt), go head-to-head.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, UEFA announced the 2022 Champions League Final would no longer take place in St. Petersburg and would be moved to another country. Likewise, the Formula One World Championships also announced that the Grand Prix scheduled in Sochi, Russia, would no longer go ahead this year.

Chelsea won the FIFA Club World Cup after a Kai Havertz penalty in extra time and saw the London club beat Palmeiras. The match was a 1-1 draw after 90 minutes and looked like it might go to a penalty shoot-out until a penalty handed Chelsea the win with only a few minutes of extra time left.

Liverpool beat Chelsea in the EFL cup final, winning 11-0 in a penalty shoot-out. It was a record ninth EFL cup win for Liverpool.

In the NFL, the Los Angeles Rams won Super Bowl LVI with a late touchdown to

beat the Cincinnati Bengals 23-20.

March News Review

Russia continued its war on Ukraine, with Russian President Vladimir Putin calling it a 'special operation'. Early in the month, the European Union removed seven Russian banks from the SWIFT financial messaging system. Russian stocks also took a big hit amid ongoing sanctions against the country, with some stocks, such as Gazprom, losing most of their value on the London Stock Exchange. In addition, many international companies, including Nike, H&M, Ikea, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Inditex and LVMH, halted operations in Russia due to the ongoing conflict with Ukraine.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky asked Western countries to impose a no-fly zone over Ukrainian airspace on several occasions. However, the request was repeatedly refused due to fears it could spark a much wider conflict with Russia.

Throughout the month, there was evidence to suggest that Russia had been targeting residential buildings in Ukraine, killing thousands of civilians. A theatre in Mariupol



was bombed in airstrikes by Russia and largely destroyed. The theatre was being used as an air-raid shelter holding over 1,000 people.

Several media outlets shared the news that Russia had asked China for military equipment. Unnamed US officials were also said to have claimed that China was willing to assist Russia. Russia denied that they had asked for any assistance from China. The US said that China would face severe consequences if it were to help Russia.

The port town of Mariupol was said to be mostly destroyed after constant strikes from the Russian military. However, towards the end of the month, most news outlets reported that the Russian army was retreating from certain positions. The withdrawal was seen as tactical, with Russians leaving the north of Ukraine to target the Donbas region.

Russia blocks access to Twitter, Facebook and government-sponsored websites, including the BBC, for spreading 'false information' regarding the 'special military operation' in Ukraine.

All remaining restrictions on international travel were ended in the UK. The news meant COVID-19 tests or passenger locator forms were no longer required whether or not the passenger had been vaccinated for COVID-19.



Figures for COVID-19 began to rise steeply during the month, with figures in Scotland rising to an all-time high. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that approximately one in 13 people had COVID-19 in the week ending the 26th March.

A New York judge dropped the sexual abuse case against Prince Andrew after a settlement was made between the Prince and his accuser Virginia Giuffre. The settlement figure was not disclosed but is thought to be in the region of \$15million. Prince Andrew would also make a 'substantial donation' to Giuffre's charity which supports victims of sexual assault.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori were released from prison in Iran and returned to the UK. Both had been held in jail for suspected espionage. Zaghari-Ratcliffe had spent nearly six years in prison, while Ashoori had been held for over two and a half years. The UK government announced it had settled a near £400m debt owed to Iran to guarantee their release. The funds are said to be ring-fenced for humanitarian purposes.

P&O Ferries sacked 800 employees and replaced them with cheaper agency workers. Peter Hebblethwaite, the boss of P&O ferries, later admitted the decision to sack the 800 employees

without consulting the unions broke the law. The transport secretary Grant Shapps said the company had until the end of the month to rehire the 800 sacked seafarers. Shapps also stated the government had plans to make it illegal for ferry firms not to pay at least the minimum wage.



The shipwreck of Ernest Shackleton's ship Endurance was found in the Weddell Sea in the Antarctic. The ship, which sank in 1915, was found in excellent condition under the sea at a depth of 3,008m.

CODA won the best picture film at the Oscars in Los Angeles. Jessica Chastain

won best actress for her role in the movie The Eyes of Tammy Faye. However, the evening was marred by Will Smith, who got on stage and slapped comedian Chris Rock after he made a joke about his wife. Not long later, Smith was on stage to accept the best actor Oscar for his role in King Richard. In his acceptance speech, he apologised to his peers and the academy. He later issued a public apology to Rock.

March Sports Review

The Winter Paralympics began, with Russia and Belarus unable to compete, unless as neutral countries due to the war in Ukraine. China topped the medal table with 18 golds and 61 medals in total. Britain finished 14th with one gold, one silver and four bronze medals. Neil Simpson, accompanied by his guide Andrew Simpson, won the gold in Men's Super G, vision impaired.

The owner of Chelsea Football Club, Russian Oligarch Roman Abramovich, put the football club up for sale. He and the club had recently been imposed with UK sanctions amid the Russian war in Ukraine. At the time of writing, the club cannot sell additional tickets to matches, sell through its club store or buy and sell any players until it is sold.

End

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Super swift gates which automatically close off lanes to be trialled on National Highways' network

January

The innovation, SwiftGate, can be fully deployed in around five minutes compared to the 25 minutes it takes road workers to put out the taper of cones directing often fast-moving traffic away from a live lane.

SwiftGate is being installed at the A3 Hindhead Tunnel in Surrey which requires regular closures for essential maintenance work. To enable maintenance to be carried out safely, workers cone off the entrances on the north and southbound carriageways.

During 2019 there were 14 vehicle incursions into these roadworks putting the lives of workers at risk.

Now National Highways has teamed up with Kier and Highway Care to trial the automated taper gates which will be installed on the north and southbound carriageways of the tunnel.

The gates clearly and safely filter traffic out of the traffic lane. Cones can then be put out beyond the taper to clearly mark out the closed-off lane.

As well as avoiding the need for workers to manually set out tapers, the arms are a strong visual deterrent which will help avoid incursions, particularly at night-time.

Head of Lean and Continuous Improvement Martin Bolt, who has been overseeing the innovation for National Highways, said:

“Installing and removing a taper of cones in the face of traffic exposes our road workers to risk, particularly on elevated sections of road, bridges or tunnels where there may not be an embankment or place of safety.

If successful, SwiftGate is another step to zero live lane working for our

workforce as we work towards our goal of ensuring nobody is harmed while working or travelling on our roads.

The automated tapers free up workers to do other jobs and can be put out in just 50 seconds meaning work can begin straight away with less disruption for road users. We look forward to seeing SwiftGate in action at Hindhead Tunnel.”

One of the arms of SwiftGate currently being installed at the Hindhead Tunnel

Kier Highways Senior Project Manager Mark Sheppard said:

“The SwiftGate project will give us a great opportunity to trial something that is completely new to the National Highways network, that will modernise the standard approach to

road worker protection.

Traffic management installation can be a high-risk activity, so the opportunity to introduce an automatic solution that has the potential to remove the need to put our workforce in the 'firing-line', is a worthy project."

Highway Care Business Development Director Ben Duncker said:

"We are very pleased, after many months of hard work from the project team, that we are able to commence the trial of this exciting, safety innovation working collaboratively with Kier and National Highways.

We are confident that the system will be a success in not only improving the safety of our traffic management operatives but also improving customer journeys through the faster and more efficient closing and reopening of lanes.

Safety through innovation is our priority and the ability to trial such new solutions with National Highways is a testament to their commitment to making the roads safer for all users."

Hindhead Tunnel is the longest under-land road tunnel in the UK at 1.2miles

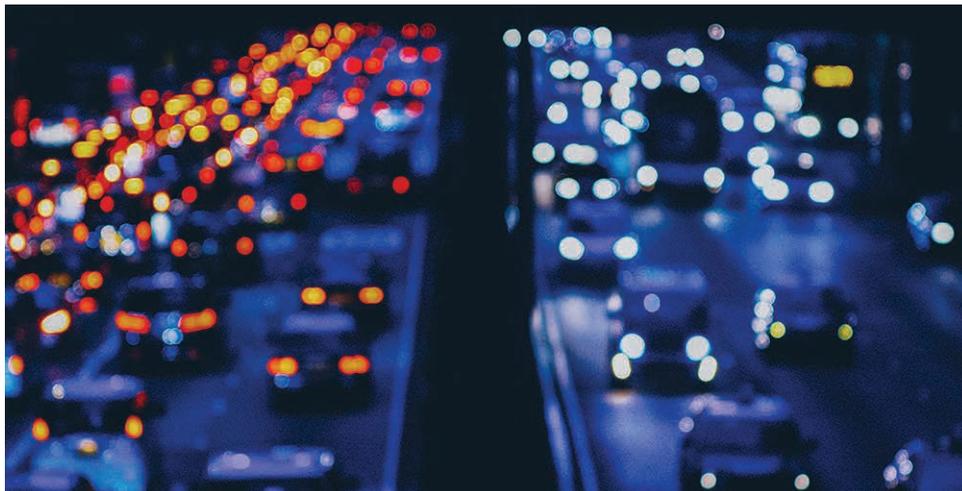
(1.83km)

SwiftGate follows the successful trials of an automated cone laying machine by National Highways, Highway Care and Kier. The Falcon ACLM vehicle puts out and retrieves cones, avoiding the need for a two-man team to lift and drop cones from the back of a moving vehicle.

A second automated cone laying machine being developed by King Highway Products through the National Highways' innovation fund is due to undergo further off-road testing shortly.

National Highways has a ring-fenced pot, the Innovation and Modernisation Fund, which is helping to maximise the opportunities offered by technologies such as automated vehicles.

It is part of National Highways' Digital Roads 2025 vision which will fundamentally change how our roads are designed, built, operated and used. The strategy sets out how the growth of digital technology and the move to electric, connected and autonomous vehicles will create the roads of the future.



Human case of avian flu detected in UK

January

Bird-to-human transmission of avian flu is very rare and has previously only occurred a small number of times in the UK.

The person acquired the infection from very close, regular contact with a large number of infected birds, which they kept in and around their home over a prolonged period of time.

All contacts of the individual, including those who visited the premises, have been traced and there is no evidence of onward spread of the infection to anyone else. The individual is currently well and self-isolating.

The risk to the wider public from avian flu continues to be very low. However, people should not touch sick or dead birds.

Avian flu, also known as bird flu, is a type of influenza that spreads among

birds. The UK has recently seen a large number of outbreaks and incidents of avian influenza in birds across the country of the H5N1 strain and Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the UK's Chief Veterinary Officer have issued alerts to bird owners.

Some strains of bird flu can pass from birds to people, but this is extremely rare. It usually requires close contact with an infected bird, so the risk to humans is generally considered very low. Human-to-human transmission of bird flu is very rare.

The case was detected after APHA identified an outbreak of outbreak of the H5N1 strain of avian flu in their flock of birds. Their infection was identified through the routine monitoring which is conducted on anyone who has close contact with infected birds. The infected birds have all been culled.

In line with the highly precautionary approach that the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) takes to identifying and stopping the transmission of avian flu, UKHSA swabbed this person and detected low levels of flu. Further laboratory analysis revealed that the virus was the 'H5' type, found in birds.

At this point it has not been possible to confirm that this is a H5N1 infection (the strain that is currently circulating in birds in the UK). Based on the available evidence, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been notified.

This is the first human case of this strain in the UK, although there have been cases elsewhere globally.

Professor Isabel Oliver, Chief Scientific Officer at UKHSA, said:

“While the risk of avian flu to the general public is very low, we know that some strains do have the potential to spread to humans and that’s why we have robust systems in place to detect these early and take action.

Currently there is no evidence that this strain detected in the UK can spread from person to person, but we know that viruses evolve all the time and we continue to monitor the situation closely. We have followed up all of this individual’s contacts and have not identified any onward spread.”

It remains critical that people do not

touch sick or dead birds, and that they follow the DEFRA advice about reporting.

The UK’s Chief Veterinary Officer, Christine Middlemiss, said:

“While avian influenza is highly contagious in birds, this is a very rare event and is very specific to the circumstances on this premises.

We took swift action to limit the spread of the disease at the site in question, all infected birds have been humanely culled, and cleansing and disinfection of the premises is underway. This is a

reminder that stringent cleanliness when keeping animals is important.

We are seeing a growing number of cases in birds on both commercial farms and in backyard flocks across the country. Implementing scrupulous biosecurity measures will help keep your birds safe.”

UKHSA follows up all individuals who have been in contact with a confirmed case of avian influenza. For those with the highest risk exposures, we contact them daily to see if they have developed symptoms so that we can take appropriate action.

People are also offered anti-viral treatment after exposure to infected birds. This is to stop the virus reproducing in their body if they have picked it up and should prevent them from becoming unwell. It also helps reduce the risk of passing the infection on to others.

We also swab people even if they don’t have symptoms, to help our surveillance programmes and make sure we identify anyone infected so that we can take action to control any risk of transmission.



National effort to vaccinate vulnerable communities receives funding boost

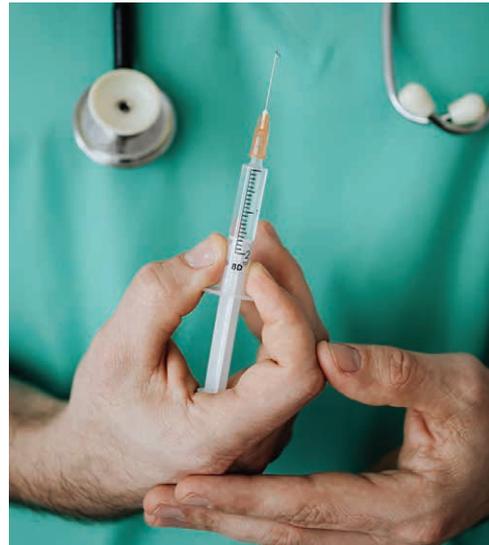
January

- Councils with low vaccine uptake awarded share of £22.5 million to get hard-to-reach communities vaccinated
- 60 councils to benefit from Community Vaccine Champions scheme which will mobilise thousands of volunteers
- Part of national drive for people to be vaccinated in fight against Omicron - An army of vaccine volunteers will help millions of people in hard-to-reach communities get jabbed, backed by £22.5 million of government funding.

Community Vaccine Champions from Bradford to Brighton will be tapping into their local networks and encouraging people in their community to come forward and get vaccinated.

The funding, allocated today to 60 councils, will provide an opportunity to deliver bespoke projects in their region,

help identify barriers to accessing accurate information and provide tailored support, such as phone calls for people without easy access to digital technology, helplines, and linking to GP surgeries as well as other initiatives,



including:

- In Derby and Newham roving vaccinators and a vaccine bus will visit workplaces, places of worship and local highstreets.
- Videos shared on social media featuring local sporting stars, TV actors, local community and faith leaders and local NHS staff in Southampton.
- Developing a community transport in Reading to support access to vaccination sites/pop-ups (working with existing local community) and considering 'Grab a Jab' taxis scheme.

According to NHS statistics, over 4.6 million people aged 18 or older remained unvaccinated in the 60 local authorities selected to take part in the Community Vaccine

Champions programme.

Communities Minister Kemi Badenoch MP said:

“In England more than 80% of eligible adults over 18 have had a booster and for over 50s it is 90%. This is a great take-up so far, but we need to do more as we know that the unvaccinated are up to eight times more likely to be hospitalised than those who are jabbed.

By funding Community Vaccine Champions – an army of volunteers who are at the heart of their communities - we can reach those yet to be vaccinated and encourage them to protect

themselves and the NHS.”

Councillor John Merry, Deputy City Mayor and Lead Member for Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing at Salford City Council said:

“The support we received via the Community Vaccine Champions scheme has been vital in our fight against COVID-19. This financial boost has enabled us to roll out a range of activity to improve vaccination take up across the city and tackle vaccine hesitancy among some of our communities.”

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

“Thanks to the pace and scale of our COVID-19 vaccination programme, we are in a much better position than this time last year.

We are doing everything we can to reach those who haven't yet come forward for their jabs and we know some people are more likely to listen to those they trust, such as community and religious leaders - that's why we are giving extra funding to our brilliant Community Champions.

The offer of a vaccine will always be available, it's not too late. Please come forward as soon as you can so we can learn to live with this virus.”

In December 2021, according to NHS statistics, over 4.6 million people aged 18 or older remained unvaccinated in the 60 local authorities we have selected to take part in the Community Vaccine Champions programme.

More than 14,000 volunteers joined the first Community Champions scheme in 2021 – helping the vulnerable and isolated across the country throughout the pandemic.



Unboxed 2022

by Jackie Bazeley

In 1851 the Great Exhibition was held to great acclaim and it was this achievement that inspired the 1951 Festival of Britain which was also a huge success. Indeed my own grandparents travelled from Durham to enjoy the spectacle. In its turn the Festival of Britain motivated Theresa May to announce in September 2018 a £120 million nationwide celebration, which became known as the Festival of Brexit.

The aim of the festival was to evoke pride in creativity and innovation in Britain, at home and around the world, after leaving the European Union. However Theresa May first postponed the event and then, nine months after making the announcement, stepped down as Prime Minister. Her aim was unfulfilled and what was a nod to past triumphs has now become a somewhat, seemingly lesser event, albeit that the price tag is understood to remain at a £120 million and paid by the taxpayer. On taking the Prime Minister role, Boris

Johnson retained the idea of a festival. However after much criticism, rightly or wrongly, the Festival of Brexit was rebranded in October 2021 as 'Unboxed' and organisers called for "daring, new and popular ideas" that would unify the four nations. The project is part of the 2022 Birmingham European Games, of which Martin Greene (formerly Head of ceremonies for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics) is Creative Officer and also Chief Creative Director of Unboxed. It will also be held alongside the Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrations. Martin Greene said of the event: "Unboxed represents an unprecedented and timely opportunity for people in the UK and beyond to come together and participate in awe-inspiring projects that speak to who we are and the ideas we have" and "find out what will define our future."

The event, now no longer relating to the European Union exit, is based around ten projects that supposedly

will be 'showstoppers' and captivate audiences across the UK and globally, whilst heralding innovative talent in Britain and is anticipated to leave a lasting legacy across the UK.

Commencing in March and running to October Unboxed brings together UK talent in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths to work on the anticipated spectacular projects which people will be able to visit in person, digital media or broadcasts. The event is also expected to engage school children, young people and communities through various opportunities including volunteering, employment, training and school outreach opportunities.

In summary the ten projects audience are invite to experience are:

- About Us (locations: Paisley, Derry-Londonderry, Caernarfon, Luton, Hull):

A touring light and vision show taking audiences on a journey through time and space investigating the earth's history and people's connections to one another from the Big Bang to the present.

- PoliNations (locations: Edinburgh, Birmingham): A pop-up forest garden celebrating global origins of the UK's plants and population. This will be executed through "immersive installations, live music, talks and performances".

- Dandelion (locations: across Scotland with two major music and food festivals in Glasgow and Inverness): Schoolchildren and young people will take part in the largest ever community growing experiment undertaken in Scotland. Live events will explore the science of future growth.

- GALWAD: A Story from our Future (locations: Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Swansea, TV and Online): this event puts a spotlight on Wales' talent in "film and TV, creative technology and live performance with the imagination and talents of Welsh communities for a new kind of story which invites audiences to explore the moral dilemmas and possibilities of our future."

- Tour de Moon (locations: Leicester,

Newcastle, Southampton and satellite locations across England): A celebration of ideas inspired the Moon to be held on a festival site and created for young people and their families.

- Our Place in Space (locations: Derry-Londonderry, Belfast, Divis and Black Mountain, Cambridge and Ulster Transport Museum): A scale-model sculpture trail of the solar system, designed by Oliver Jeffers, which can be visited physically or experienced in augmented reality from any global location.

- SEE MONSTER (location: Weston-super-Mare): A decommissioned North Sea offshore platform installed will be transformed into a public art installation.

- StoryTrails (locations: Blackpool, Bradford, Bristol, London Borough of Lambeth and Lewisham, Lincoln, Sheffield, Slough, Wolverhampton, Swansea, Newport, Dundee, Dumfries, Swindon and Omagh): "StoryTrails will bring to life untold stories using augmented reality in civic spaces to see BBC and BFI archive footage and learn the story of where they live".

- Dreamachine (location: Edinburgh, Cardiff, London, Belfast): - An artwork seen with your eyes closed which explores

the potential of the human mind in a collective experience.

- Green Space, Dark Skies (location: online): A series of interventions celebrating the UK landscape, using a new lighting technology for an online experience.

For more detailed information on the projects go to <https://unboxed2022.uk>

Whilst the above would appear to be very creative, in all its forms, will the potentially futuristic approach to the festival win over the audience? Should Brexit be mentioned? Would my grandparents have travelled from Durham to see the projects? Clearly events have moved on since the 19th century and comparison is difficult however, that was once proclaimed as a celebration of global Britain appears to have been reduced to an event without the 'pomp and ceremony' that our nation is so good at. Will it be a success, only time will tell and with the rather large price tag, hopefully it is!



Free PPE for frontline extended for another year

January

- Move follows public consultation, which received over 5,000 responses from across the health and care system
- Easier way of centrally ordering PPE to be tested by staff

The offer of free Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to frontline health and social care staff in England has been extended for another year.

Supporting frontline workers remains a priority for the government and, following a public consultation, NHS trusts, primary care and adult social care providers will continue to receive COVID-19 PPE free of charge until 31st March 2023 or until infection prevention control (IPC) guidance is withdrawn or significantly amended. This is to ensure staff and their patients are protected.

The government is also developing an improved platform for the procurement

of PPE that will be quicker and easier to use. Health and social care providers have been invited to test-drive the new platform and help design a service that works best for them. The new and improved features will enable quick ordering options and status updates.

Free, centrally-procured PPE relieves the financial burden of PPE procurement done on an individual basis, and also enables access to quality PPE of a reliable standard.

Health Minister Edward Argar said:

“Throughout the pandemic we have taken swift action to secure the PPE health and social care providers need to ensure staff, patients and

residents are protected.

We are extending the offer of free PPE to help relieve pressure on the health and care system, working hand in hand with providers to develop a new ordering platform that works best for them.”

A public consultation was launched in October 2021 to determine whether to extend the central, free provision of PPE. Over 5,000 responses were received, from a range of people and organisations, including primary and social care providers, community health care services, and PPE wholesalers and suppliers. 95% of respondents were in favour of extending the offer of free PPE.

Following customer testing and trial launch, the new PPE portal will be rolled out to all eligible users from April.



UK defence procurement spend worth almost £2 billion a year to Scotland

January

This is the equivalent of £360 per person in Scotland. For the whole UK, the figure was £20.5 billion, working out at an average of £310 per person.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart said:

“These figures show that defence not only plays a crucial part in the security of the United Kingdom but also contributes significantly to delivering high-skilled jobs and investment in Scotland, not least through shipbuilding.

The prosperity generated by defence employment in Scotland and around the UK, alongside our Plan for Jobs, is helping us build back better from the pandemic.”

Defence investment in Scottish shipbuilding will see order books full until the 2030s.

Over the last 15 years, Scotland has delivered six Type 45 destroyers, two aircraft carriers, five offshore patrol vessels and already has orders for eight Type 26 frigates from BAE Systems at Govan and five Type 31s from Babcock’s just-completed Frigate Hall at Rosyth.

Last year, steel was cut on two more ships for the Royal Navy (HMS Belfast

in Glasgow and HMS Venturer in Rosyth).

Defence’s footprint in Scotland also includes the Ministry of Defence directly employing around 4,000 civilian staff.

The Future Soldier programme announced a £335m investment in the Army’s Scots estate, which is expected to unleash £1bn in wider economic benefit.

And last week, the ninth submarine hunting Poseidon aircraft - vital to maintaining the security of the UK and our NATO allies - arrived at RAF Lossiemouth.

Lossiemouth will also see its ranks rise by around 500 in preparation for the arrival of the E-7 Wedgetail, the RAF’s new early warning and control aircraft.



Unnecessary train announcements binned in ‘bonfire of the banalities’

January

- government to review and remove train announcements that add unnecessary noise and disruption to journeys
- the Department for Transport will ensure train operating companies retain important safety messages and work with accessibility groups so that passengers receive the necessary information
- announcement follows the publication of the government’s Plan for Rail, which puts passengers back at the heart of the railways

Quieter train journeys are set to become the norm after the government announced it will identify and remove repetitive and unnecessary onboard announcements on trains in England.

The changes mean that passengers will no longer be bombarded with unnecessary ‘tannoy spam’ that distracts

from important safety-critical messaging.

Working closely with the Rail Delivery Group, passenger groups including Transport Focus, and train operators, the Department for Transport (DfT) will identify how the vast number of announcements can be cut or reduced



while maintaining vital obligations to ensure train travel remains accessible for all. Messages that play a safety critical role, or that ensure the railways are accessible for all, will remain.

The review will take place over the course of this year, with redundant messages identified and starting to be removed in the coming months.

Banal announcements set to be culled include self-evident instructions, such as having your ticket ready when leaving the station and contradictory calls for passengers to keep volume levels low while onboard announcements blare out. There will also be new curbs on the maximum frequency at which remaining announcements will be heard.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps

said:

“Train passengers are all too often plagued by an endless torrent of repeated and unnecessary announcements.

In line with the passenger improvements, we are rolling out with our Plan for Rail we want to see improvements to the railways for those who use them day in day out.

That’s why I’m calling for a bonfire of the banalities to bring down the number of announcements passengers are forced to sit through and make their journey that little bit more peaceful.”

As passengers come back to the railways, DfT will continue to ensure journeys are more comfortable to all users and that passengers continue to receive the important information they need about their journey.

Officials will work with accessibility groups to ensure that access for all is maintained.

The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, launched last year, puts passengers at the heart of the railway. To improve the comfort and enjoyment of train travel,

customer service will be modernised and upgraded across all stations and, on trains, focused on providing passengers with better communication and a more personalised service.

Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of the independent watchdog Transport Focus, said:

“Passengers will welcome a review intended to cut out unnecessary announcements. Transport Focus looks forward to helping with the review so passengers get the information they want, including those with additional accessibility needs.”

Jacqueline Starr, CEO of the Rail Delivery Group, said:

“We know people want the most relevant and timely messages on their journeys and to help with this, train operators are continuing their work to improve customer information, including cutting unnecessary onboard announcements.

We’re also going further by asking customers what they want to know and using their responses to plan more useful and consistent announcements across the network, helping people have a better experience travelling by train.”

The image is a vertical collage. At the top left is a poster for the 'NORTH BANK EXHIBITION' in London, featuring a colorful geometric design. To its right is a circular logo for 'THE GREAT WYCOMBE AND DISTRICT' with 'WYCOMBE MANUFACTURERS' written around the perimeter. Below these is a small graphic of a train ticket with 'WELTERS OF WYCOMBE' printed on it. To the right of the ticket is a square graphic with concentric white lines on a dark background. Below this is a dark grey banner with 'Keith Welters' in a stylized white font and 'FURNISHING' in a smaller white font to the right. Underneath the banner is the 'welters' logo in a large, bold, lowercase sans-serif font, followed by 'ORGANISATION' and 'WORLDWIDE' in smaller, spaced-out uppercase letters. Below that is the tagline 'Design and Innovation' and the website 'www.welters-worldwide.com'. At the bottom right of the collage is a detailed bronze figurine of an elephant standing and facing left.



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COVID-19: What we know so far - part 7

by Paul Bazeley

In the previous article, we saw in the New Year as cases rise, particularly of the Omicron variant. Although the UK had seemed to avoid another lockdown, Plan B was in place to try and slow the spread of the virus, and many feared that cases could rise significantly after the Christmas and New Year period. Also, the vaccination and booster programme had continued to move quickly, and the UK was waiting for the outcome of the Partygate scandal report.

What has happened since?

A brief overview.

As we moved into 2022, cases of the virus rose in the first few days of the year, as many predicted. On 4th January, the UK recorded over 200,000 COVID-19 cases for the first time. Figures released suggested that one in 15 people had the virus

on New Years' Eve. However, Boris Johnson continued to state that no more measures would be needed and that we should "ride out this Omicron wave without shutting down our country once again". In a piece written for the Daily Mail, Health Secretary Sajid Javid wrote that we must learn to "live alongside" this virus in 2022 and that more restrictions would only be an "absolute last resort".

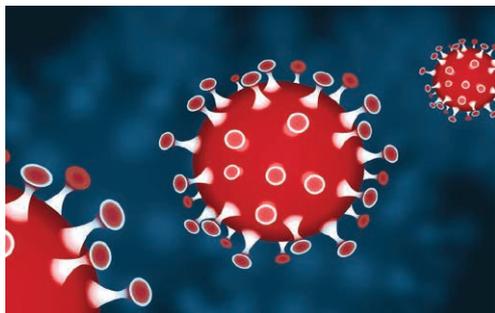
Professors Chris Witty and Johnathan Van-Tam were knighted in the New Year's honours list, and Dr Jenny Harries and Dr June Raine were both made Dames. At the same time, a surge in holiday bookings occurred after those in England who were fully vaccinated no longer had to take a pre-departure COVID test and were no longer required to isolate on arrival, while waiting for their PCR test result.

There were further allegations about social gatherings at Downing Street, with witnesses saying that Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his wife Carrie attended a party with around 40 others. Following the news, two polls revealed that most of those asked thought that the Prime Minister should resign following the Partygate scandal. Mr Johnson later admitted he attended the party but insisted he "believed implicitly" that it was a work gathering. Downing Street also apologised to Buckingham Palace after it was revealed that two parties were held on the eve of Prince Philip's funeral while the country was under restrictions.

There were calls from all parties for Boris Johnson to resign as Prime Minister due to the Partygate scandal. The MP

Christian Wakeford' crossed the floor' and joined the Labour Party, describing Mr Johnson's conduct as disgraceful. After continuing pressure, the Prime Minister announced that the Sue Gray report into the Partygate scandal would be published in full. The Metropolitan Police then ask that some references in the report be made minimal due to ongoing police investigations.

The Sue Gray report was published at the end of the month with it concluding "a number of these gatherings should not have been allowed to take place or to develop in the way that they did. There is significant learning to be drawn from these events which must be addressed immediately across government."



It also criticised a drinking culture within the government, a failure of leadership and little thought in the behaviour while the country was being asked to abide by strict lockdown rules. The Prime Minister accepted the report's findings and said changes would be made to how the Cabinet Office and Downing Street are run.

Moving into February, as many as nine Tory MPs call for a vote of no confidence for Boris Johnson following the Partygate scandal. There was speculation that Chancellor Rishi Sunak could become the next PM, which he downplayed when asked. While further evidence, including a picture of Mr Johnson with tinsel around his neck, surfaced as the pressure on the Prime Minister mounted. As investigations into the gatherings continued, Downing Street staff were sent questionnaires to fill in. However, coverage of the Partygate scandal began to diminish over February as tensions between Russia and Ukraine increased.

It was announced that COVID-19 restrictions would end in England on the 24th February, including the need to isolate after testing positive for the

virus. The move was seen as a move towards learning to live with the virus. The government also confirmed that free lateral flow testing would end for most people on the 1st April 2022. In addition, Nicola Sturgeon announced that the legal COVID measures would be lifted on the 21st March in Scotland.

Queen Elizabeth II tested positive for COVID-19; she was said to be continuing with 'light duties' at Windsor Castle. The Queen later cancelled some engagements due to suffering cold-like symptoms. Buckingham Palace confirmed that the Queen had returned to work at the beginning of March.

Despite numbers of the virus significantly dropping in February, cases again began to rise at the beginning of March. However, despite the rise in numbers, all remaining travel restrictions in the UK ended. The news saw unvaccinated arrivals no longer required to take a test and passenger locator forms abandoned.

The NHS launched a Spring

booster programme, offering booster jabs to anyone over 75, in a care home or anyone over the age of 12 that is classed as clinically vulnerable. The news was a welcome relief to many as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released data that estimated 4.3 million people were infected with COVID-19 during the week ending the 19th March, a rise of 1 million from the week before. The upward trend of cases continued throughout the month.

The Metropolitan Police confirmed it had issued 20 fixed-penalty fines to people involved in breaches of lockdown rules concerning findings over the Partygate scandal. However, the Police said it would not identify those who had been fined.

Finally, the government announced the list of those still eligible to receive free lateral flow tests in England. The list included NHS staff, care home residents, those working in high-risk settings (prisons, care homes) and patients in hospitals where a test is required for their care.

Where are we now?

We are now entering April, meaning

that lateral flow testing is no longer free for most of the UK population, something many are unhappy about. Cases seem to be rising again, and we no longer have any COVID-19 restrictions. Although the Spring booster campaign for those seen most at risk is underway, a rise in hospital admissions is a concern for some. As the UK currently suffers from some freezing weather, questions are being asked about whether living with the virus is the right thing to do.

What does the future look like?

As always, we can't give a definitive answer. However, data has constantly suggested that gathering outside is far safer, so as we hopefully enter a warmer period, it could perhaps help to reduce cases. On the other hand, we could also be riding another wave due to all restrictions in England being lifted. If this is the situation, case numbers may drop in the coming weeks. It is also probably likely that booster vaccinations will be rolled out to other groups as time goes on.

Also, it should be noted that the UK aren't alone in their relaxation of restrictions. A significant number

of other countries seem to be of the mindset that we now need to learn to live with the virus. We are now past the two-year mark since the first lockdown in the UK, and the world seemed to stop. Two years later, it seems clear that governments and countries are now keen to move away from costly restrictions and get back to the 'new normal'. Whether or not the risk is worth taking is yet to be seen.

A follow-up article will feature in a future edition of Government World.



PM call with President Putin of Russia: 2 February 2022

February

The Prime Minister spoke to Russian President Putin this afternoon.

The Prime Minister expressed his deep concern about Russia's current hostile activity on the Ukrainian border. He emphasised the need to find a way forward which respects both Ukraine's territorial integrity and right to self-defence.

The Prime Minister stressed that any further Russian incursion into Ukrainian territory would be a tragic miscalculation.

The Prime Minister underscored that, under NATO's open door policy, all European democracies have a right to aspire to NATO membership. This right fully applies to Ukraine. He

also reiterated that NATO is a defensive alliance.

The leaders agreed that aggravation was in no one's interest. The Prime Minister stressed the importance of dialogue and diplomacy, and



the need to include Ukraine in talks.

The Prime Minister and President Putin welcomed communication between the UK and Russia on a number of important issues including climate change, the situation in Afghanistan and the Iran nuclear deal. They agreed to apply this spirit of dialogue to the current tensions in order to find a peaceful resolution.



Search is on for young space entrepreneurs ahead of first UK rocket launches

February

With Britain's first satellite launches set to take place this year, the SatelLife Competition is looking for the best new ideas for how to use data collected from space to benefit daily life, from supporting local communities and the NHS, to monitoring the environment and tackling climate change.

The competition is now in its fifth year, with previous winning ideas including drones carrying medical supplies, a pin badge to monitor air pollution and an app to track abandoned shopping trolleys.

This year will see the first satellite launches taking place from UK spaceports, with the first horizontal launch from a carrier aircraft expected from Spaceport Cornwall, followed by vertical launch from Shetland's SaxaVord Spaceport and Space Hub Sutherland.

Satellites support the economy and everyday life, and this competition

gives people aged 11-22 the chance to test their ideas with space experts and perhaps one day become part of one of the UK's fastest growing industries which already employs 45,000 people.



Science Minister George Freeman said:

"Britain is set to become the first nation in Europe to offer small satellite launch, building on our world-leading satellite manufacturing industry. Seeing satellites launch from the UK for the first time will be a huge moment for the UK space tech sector.

The SatelLife Competition is designed to inspire the next generation of British space scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs, by helping our young innovators unleash their imaginations and turn their ideas into real-life proposals that could eventually transform our lives - from supporting our transition to Net Zero, to improving local healthcare services."

The UK Space Agency is committed

to championing the power of space to inspire people and to offer greener, smarter solutions for businesses, supporting a more sustainable future.

British ESA astronaut Tim Peake said:

“It has been amazing to see so many people inspired by my mission to the International Space Station and I hope that when satellites launch from the UK, it will help to show young people that there are all sorts of jobs in the space sector, including developing new applications for the data we get from space.

Satellites are playing a huge role in our daily lives, from monitoring climate change, to watching television and I know that young people will have some fantastic ideas for new ways they can improve our lives. I can't wait to see what they come up with, the possibilities are endless!”

Previous winners include Lowena Hull, from Portsmouth, who, in 2019, had an idea to track abandoned supermarket trolleys using satellites.

Lowena Hull said:

“The SatELife competition was an

amazing chance to research into all the different ways satellite data can be implemented to help tackle a whole host of problems in both the local community and nationwide.

My advice for anyone looking to get involved with the SatELife Competition is to take a good look around and think: are there any problems either locally or



globally I would like to try and solve? How might I be able to use satellite data to come up with a solution? Take your time with research and consider both feasibility and how might you implement your solution. Good luck!”

There is a total of £50,000 prize money up for grabs which will be shared across three age groups; 11-14, 15-18 and 19-22.

The judging panel will be made up of experts including industry representatives and the UK Space Agency, Satellite Applications Catapult and European Space Agency (ESA). The UK is the leading investor in ESA's business applications programme and hosts the European Centre for Space Applications and Telecommunications in Harwell, Oxfordshire.

All winners will go on to pitch their ideas to a panel of 'dragons' at the Harwell Space Cluster in June for the chance to win further prizes. Previous prizes have included further funding, patent advice and invitations to discuss job opportunities as well as introductions to the other relevant experts for further help.

7 out of 10 people have experienced potential rip-offs online, worrying new CMA research reveals

February

In a poll of over 2,000 UK adults:

- 7 out of 10 had experienced misleading online practices
- 85% believed businesses using them were being dishonest with their customers
- And 83% were less likely to buy from them in the future

The CMA has today launched a brand-new campaign “The Online Rip-Off Tip-Off” to help shoppers spot and avoid misleading online practices that could result in them being ripped off.



With almost one-third of all retail purchases now taking place online, after the pandemic fuelled a surge in internet shopping, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has become increasingly concerned about the impact of these “sneaky” sales tactics on consumers.

Research commissioned by the CMA shows that these practices, which are carefully designed to manipulate shoppers, can lead to wasted time and money, as well as anxiety and stress, and so cause significant financial and emotional harm. It revealed that 71% of people shopping online had encountered these tactics, and 61% described their experience as negative. This is exacerbated by the fact they are often hard to spot and people don't know how to avoid them.

The survey also revealed that, of those

who had experienced misleading online practices, the biggest concern was about hidden charges (85% of respondents), followed by subscription traps (83%), fake reviews (80%) and pressure selling (50%).

To tackle this, and further support its enforcement work, the CMA is today launching its “The Online Rip-Off Tip-Off” campaign, fronted by TV presenter and consumer champion Angellica Bell.

Andrea Coscelli, the CMA's Chief Executive, explained:

“As online shopping grows and grows, we're increasingly concerned about businesses using misleading sales tactics, like pressure selling or hidden charges, to dupe people into parting with their cash.”

He added:

“None of us would accept these tactics in the real world. But we might not realise how much they influence what we buy online. So, we’ve launched “The Online Rip-Off Tip-Off” to help hand the power back to shoppers.

We continue to crack down on practices that could break the law, such as fake reviews. But to tackle this problem from all angles, it’s vital shoppers are armed with the tools they need too. It’s only when we all know what these tricks are, and how they are designed to manipulate and mislead, that we are better equipped to avoid them.”

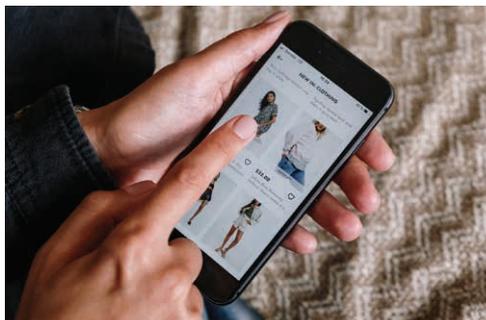
According to the UK-wide survey, many respondents reported that they had wasted money on a disappointing product or experience, spent cash they couldn’t afford to or wasted time trying to undo the harm caused. 85% of those questioned believed that businesses using such practices are being dishonest with their customers, with 83% being less likely to buy from them in the future.

Angellica Bell, co-presenter of The Martin Lewis Money Show, sets out why it’s so important to know what you might be up against when shopping online:

“Sometimes we feel under pressure when buying online or often doubt whether a deal is too good to be true. Through the CMA’s ‘Online Rip-off Tip-off’ campaign, we want to help people, let them know the signs to look out for and how best to report a sneaky sales move. Just because you’re online and not on the high street, you can still take a moment to think about the purchase before you pay. Don’t feel pressured into anything, and make sure you shop around.”

The campaign also has the support of Citizens Advice, to whom consumers can report problems with misleading practices that they have encountered online.

Matthew Upton, Director of Policy at Citizens Advice, said:



“While many firms play fair, too often we hear of online shoppers being duped by fake reviews, time-pressured claims or seriously dressed-up deals.

We hope ‘The Online Rip-off Tip-off’ campaign helps shoppers spot underhand sales tactics - like offers that seem too good to be true or any pressure to buy now, and report them.

By doing this we can help to bring unscrupulous traders to book, and all shop safer online.”

Paul Scully, UK Government Consumer Minister, said:

“I urge shoppers to take heed of the CMA’s campaign to stay savvy online and to report problems to Citizens Advice.

This Government is working to build back fairer from the pandemic by clamping down on misleading tactics, subscription traps and fake reviews. This means we’re shoulder-to-shoulder with consumers and the vast majority of businesses doing the right thing.”

Case Study

Londoner Jo Robinson, 46, shares her experience: “When I was buying Christmas gifts for my girls, I spent time online researching the latest gadgets, clothing and event tickets, and spent over £800 on presents alone.

“It’s frustrating to know that many of the deals I went for weren’t the last chance to buy that I believed at the time. And some of the items when they arrived didn’t match the description or live up to the reviews. It makes you distrust buying off the internet. Lots of the deals are too good to be true and when they turn up it’s not the quality you expected so it makes you feel ripped off.”

The aim of the Online Rip-off Tip-Off campaign is to make consumers aware of these misleading online practices and provide tips on how to avoid them. Find out more at www.gov.uk/ripoff-tipoff

If people in England and Wales want further advice or wish to report a concern they should contact Citizens Advice. Consumers in Scotland should contact Advice Direct Scotland, and shoppers in Northern Ireland should contact The Consumer Council.

HGV operators can now use aerodynamic features and longer cabs to reduce fuel consumption and emissions

February

- government changes legislation to permit the use of aerodynamic features and elongated cabs on lorries
- changes made to reduce fuel consumption and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions as we continue to build back greener from coronavirus (COVID-19)
- welfare and safety for drivers also improved through reduced blind spots and increased space

More environmentally friendly heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) are allowed on Britain’s roads, thanks to new government regulations coming into effect today (14 February 2022).

The new rules will allow haulage companies to choose vehicles with elongated cabs and aerodynamic features fitted on the back, which help reduce fuel consumption.



A 2013 study estimated that these aerodynamic improvements to HGVs could result in fuel savings of 7% to 15%.

The regulations come into force as the government continues to deliver on its commitments to build back greener from the pandemic.

The design of elongated cabs also improves driver vision, boosting safety for other road users. The extra space means more comfort for the driver, such as by facilitating a larger bed in sleeper cabs.

Aerodynamic rear devices are flaps that are fitted on the back of trailers to reduce the vehicle's aerodynamic drag without using up load space. They were previously not permitted for use on Great Britain's roads under regulations that have been in place since 1986.

Roads Minister Baroness Vere said:

“This is another brilliant step, not just in our efforts to reduce emissions across our transport network, but also to improve safety on our roads.

I hope operators will make use of these new regulations, introducing vehicles with these features into their existing

fleets to reduce fuel consumption and boost safety, as we build back better from COVID-19.”

Phil Lloyd, Logistics UK's Head of Engineering Policy, said:

“Allowing the use of aerodynamic features and elongated cabs on HGVs is fantastic news for our transport sector, which is looking to improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions.

These features are vital in helping to reduce emissions and improve air quality and Logistics UK welcomes the design

of elongated cabs that improve driver vision and provide drivers with much-needed additional comfort space.”

The Department for Transport has published good practice guidance on the use of aerodynamic rear devices on HGVs in urban and rural areas.

This follows separate legislation last year to allow greener, longer goods vehicles to be rolled out as the government responded to its consultation on longer-semi trailers reducing mileage, congestion and carbon emissions.



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UK's LGBT+ Rights Envoy visits Argentina

February

The UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy on LGBT+ rights, Lord Nick Herbert, visited Argentina this week, meeting with counterparts in the Argentinian Government and with civil society organisations. LGBT+ information app, QUIR, was launched at the British Embassy Buenos Aires by local civil society organisation Kidz. This trip is part of Lord Herbert's activity this year to galvanise ambitious action on LGBT+ rights ahead of the Safe To Be Me

conference in London.

The UK and Argentina work together closely on LGBT+ rights. As co-chairs of the Equal Rights Coalition - an intergovernmental body consisting of 42 member states, multilateral organisations, and around 120 civil society organisations - the UK and Argentina lead global action on this issue.

Throughout 2022, Lord Herbert is visiting countries in every corner of the world to drum up support for LGBT+ rights and galvanise ambitious action ahead of this June's Safe To Be Me Conference. The UK will work with countries on their own path to equality, offering support to create the conditions for greater freedoms and equality.

This week, Lord Herbert met with Cecilia Meirovich, Director of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Alba

Rueda, Subsecretary of Diversity Policies at the Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity.

Lord Herbert hosted 80 guests from civil society and the LGBT+ community at the British Embassy in Buenos Aires to launch QUIR – an application designed by civil society organisation Kidz that provides information on LGBT+-friendly local services. According to their creators, QUIR was born out of the need to find a safe space where LGBT+ consumers can access accommodation, cultural and recreational activities, personal care, health professionals, gastronomy, bars, nightlife, spas and other leisure that guarantee a hate-free experience.

PM Special Envoy Lord Herbert said:

“The UK and Argentina work closely together to promote LGBT+ rights



internationally. I welcome the opportunity to meet partners from across Argentina to discuss progress on this vital issue. We have been discussing the Equal Rights Coalition, which the UK has co-chaired with Argentina since 2019, and which has made great progress in mobilising more countries and pushing for greater global action. This June's Safe To Be Me Conference in London aims to be a pivotal moment in the fight for LGBT+ equality and I look forward to welcoming our Argentinian partners to the event."

Mac's Zimmermann, entrepreneur and creator of the QUIR app, said:

"As an LGBTIQ person, choosing where to go out, consulting a health professional or looking for a place to stay



has always been a complex situation. Inappropriate comments, discriminatory treatment, being denied access or thrown out for no apparent reason, and even physical violence are some of the ways in which LGBTIQ people are violated. It is very important for me to have the possibility to develop a project like this, and to be able to present it to Lord Herbert at the Embassy is an immense privilege. It is my deepest wish that this product gets into the hands of all those who need it and can make the lives of people in the community a little easier and more pleasant, guaranteeing them an experience free from mistreatment, discrimination or harassment."

Andre Rivas, President of Asociación Familias Diversas Argentina said:

"We are facing a key moment to unite international efforts to advance the rights of LGBT+ people globally. For this reason, we are focused on the fundamental issues of tackling violence and discrimination, advancing legal protections, ensuring inclusive access to public services and guaranteeing decent employment for our community."

The Safe To Be Me Global Equality Conference is taking place in London

from 29 June to 1 July 2022. It will be the UK Government's first global LGBT+ conference and will bring together governments, businesses, parliamentarians and civil society to achieve a step change in global equality. The conference is focused on 4 overarching aims:

- Tackling violence and discrimination by bringing communities and leaders together to agree on new plans and how to target funding to apply these globally
- Advancing legal protections and decriminalisation by accelerating progress on legislative reform and creating the conditions for equality
- Ensuring inclusive access to public services by enabling delegates to share lessons and make commitments on key issues such as access to healthcare and HIV/AIDS prevention
- Making the business and economic case for equality by identifying best practice, strengthening advocacy and supporting businesses to take up the mantle of change, including ensuring international standards on LGBT+ inclusive practices are upheld

Britain will lead by example in standing up to Vladimir Putin

February

Our unprecedented package of sanctions will leave no corner of his regime unscathed

Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine exposes Vladimir Putin's regime for what it is: mendacious, bellicose and calculating. His Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, told me directly that Russia would not invade. Last week, they claimed to be pulling back their forces. They have lied to the world and their own people again and again. This is not just an assault on the innocent people of Ukraine, their sovereignty and their future. It is also an attack on the security and freedom of Europe.

With so much at stake, the United Kingdom is leading the charge to rally international support for Ukraine and to respond alongside our allies with strength. That's why we have been at the forefront in supplying defensive weapons and economic support to Ukraine. We

have also been consistent in calling out Russian disinformation and the false flag operations aimed at creating a pretext for invasion.

Yesterday, I summoned the Russian ambassador to the Foreign Office, where I made clear that he should be ashamed and Russia had lost its last shred of credibility within the international community. Shortly, I will embark on a round of shuttle diplomacy across Europe and the United States to galvanise a united, decisive and determined response to this aggression.

The UK is proud to lead by example. We warned repeatedly alongside our allies that any further invasion would incur massive consequences with severe costs. We have been working in lockstep to show Moscow that we mean what we say. Our unprecedented package of economic sanctions will leave no part of the Putin regime unscathed.

We are hitting more than a hundred companies and oligarchs at the heart of the Russian establishment with sanctions worth many hundreds of billions of pounds.

Our targets range from Russia's largest defence company and its second biggest bank to leading members of President Putin's inner circle. This will deliver the highest economic cost the Kremlin has ever seen.

We are freezing Russian banks' assets in the UK, and preventing Russian companies from raising finance in our markets. We will prevent Russia from raising sovereign debt in the UK.

By closing these major financial lifelines worth billions of pounds, we will cripple Russia's economic development in both the short and

long term. And we are working with our allies to maximise the pressure through measures like excluding Russia from using the SWIFT financial system.

We will substantially strengthen trade restrictions – including our toughest export controls against Russia – to hammer its electronics, telecoms and aerospace industries. In this way, we will degrade Russia's military development for years to come, blunting the potential growth of Putin's war machine. We are also banning Russia's flagship airline, Aeroflot, from our airspace.

We are sanctioning more of the Russian elite, including President Putin's former son-in-law Kirill Shamalov as well as the heads of major Russian missile suppliers and aircraft manufacturers. They will be unable to travel to the UK and any assets based here will be frozen. We will also be sanctioning the Belarus regime for their craven role in aiding and abetting Russia's actions.

The Kremlin is leading the Russian people into a quagmire and turning Russia into a global pariah. This is the moment to take a hard-headed approach, which means being ready to accept short-term pain for long-term gain – in the knowledge that the

pain felt by Putin will be exponentially higher. German Chancellor Scholz has recognised how vital this is by suspending Nord Stream 2, as Europe moves to cut its dependence on Russian gas.

With Ukraine's future in peril, we must unite in putting a stop to President Putin's aggressive ambitions. He is hell-bent on realising his dream of recreating a Greater Russia with swathes of Europe in his sphere of influence.

That is why he also tries to needle other free democracies on Russia's doorstep. He made that clear in his fact-free diatribes this week, smearing our allies



in Eastern Europe with the false accusation that they moved “against Russia” by joining Nato – which is a purely defensive alliance.

We know Russia is willing to build an invasion on lies, so it could not be more important to stay vigilant. We have set up a new government Information Cell dedicated to rebutting the Kremlin's fake narratives designed to justify the unjustifiable.

At this defining moment, we stand with Ukraine, its people and its democracy and will continue to support them economically, politically and defensively. I saw their courage and fortitude on my visit to Kyiv last week.

They have risked their lives to choose freedom and are ready to do so again. We cannot – and will not – rest until the Russian economy pays the price and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity are restored.

By Liz Truss, UK Foreign Secretary

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Independent review into police management of registered sex offenders

March

Today the Home Secretary Priti Patel has appointed Mick Creedon, Former Chief Constable of Derbyshire Constabulary, to undertake the independent review which was a promise set out in the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (2021).

Mr Creedon has over 37 years' experience in policing, counter-terrorism and security, and will be taking up the post imminently.

The review will consider the consistency of the management of registered sex offenders across England and Wales, and whether the current capabilities to manage them are fit for purpose. It will specifically look at how consistently the police use their capabilities to manage the risk posed by registered sex offenders and whether the regime protecting the public from them could be strengthened further.

The review, which is independent of government, will consider evidence in relation to factors including (but not limited to):

- police resourcing
- consistency of offender management
- information-sharing
- management tools and orders
- risk assessment, management, and prioritisation
- training

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

“The UK has some of the toughest powers in the world to deal with sex offenders and we are committed to ensuring that the system is as robust as it can be.

“Mick brings a wealth of policing and criminal justice expertise to this role and I am delighted he has agreed to chair the review.”

On taking on this role as the independent reviewer, Mick Creedon said:

“I’m really pleased to be offered the opportunity to lead this review on behalf of the Home Secretary. The question of how the police best manage offenders released from custody but rightly subject to

restrictions is a complicated one. The public deserve protection, and at the same time the demands on the police service continue to grow. I intend to gather as many views as possible, to work with those leading and involved in this work, and will seek to provide a fully independent review and realistic proposals to ensure the longstanding MAPPA arrangements provide the best protection for the public, and the effective monitoring and management of offenders living in the community.”

The review will be undertaken in line with the Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy (2021) which aims to prevent, tackle and respond to all forms of child sexual abuse, while also building on the findings of the government’s end-to-end review into the criminal justice response to rape (2021). It will commence imminently and will aim to report back to the Home Secretary, Safeguarding Minister and Crime and Policing Minister by the end of this year.

Water is the most important thing there is

March

Water is about the most important thing there is: it's essential for life and everything else. Water – its quantity and its quality - is the single biggest X factor for the state of nature. And as someone said to me a few years ago, the thing about water is that it gets everywhere. So you'd better make sure you have the right amount, of the right quality, in the right places.

If we want to fix water we need to fix the climate

Let's start with the strategic picture. The biggest determinant of the state of our waters in fifty years won't be what the Environment Agency or Parliament or the government or the water companies do but what happens to our climate.

That's because climate change is driving heavier and more violent rainfall which is overloading our sewage systems more frequently, leading to more discharges into rivers; overwhelming urban drainage systems more often, causing more surface

water flooding in our towns and cities; raising sea levels, causing higher risks of dangerous coastal flooding; washing more contaminants into our rivers, causing greater pollution; and driving hotter temperatures and lower summer rainfall, causing higher drought risk, damaging water quality and killing river wildlife.

So if we want to fix water, we need to fix the climate. The Environment Agency is playing its part in that, by regulating down the emissions of greenhouse gas that cause climate change, by helping communities adapt to its effects through building more flood defences and by helping create more resilient cities through our planning role. We are also walking the walk ourselves with our own commitment to make the EA a net zero carbon emitter by 2030.

Water quality

Water quality is a big issue.

Some things are better than they were.

Largely down to tougher regulation, there are now far fewer serious pollution incidents damaging our waters than three decades ago, sewage treatment works now discharge much lower amounts of harmful chemicals into our rivers, and the bathing waters around our coasts are in the best condition they have been since we started monitoring them. As our waters have improved, nature has recovered. Otters, which were almost extinct by the 1960s due to the pesticides then in our rivers have now returned to every county of England.

Some things are flatlining. Only 14% of our rivers meet the criteria for good ecological status, and that number has stayed the same for the last several years. That's because we are still seeing too much pollution from sewage, farming, industry and road-run off. And some things are getting worse, with new threats to our waters, including microplastics and so-called forever

chemicals.

How do we get our water quality to the state we want? Everyone has a role to play. The polluters – largely water companies and farmers - need to obey the law, stop polluting, and pay the full cost of cleaning up any damage they do. The politicians, the public and the media need to keep the pressure on the polluters to clean up their act. The EA and the other regulators need to regulate robustly and have the powers and resources to do so. And all of us need to treat water better and use it wisely.

Water quantity

Water quantity – too much or too little - is an even bigger issue.

Let's start with too much. We face a growing risk of catastrophic flooding as the climate changes.

Flood defence works: last month the nation faced something we have not seen before - three named storms inside a week. While some 400 properties did sadly flood over that period, our flood defences meant that over 40,000 homes and businesses which would also have flooded did not. And nobody died. Compare that with 1953, when an East Coast storm surge killed over 300 people.

The good news is that over the last decade, while storms and rainfall have progressively worsened, we have actually seen a reduction in the numbers of properties flooded as a direct result of the government's investment in flood defence. That is why the EA is proud to have completed on time, on target and on budget our last six year flood defence building programme which has better protected 300,000 homes, and why we are now embarking on a new six year programme that is twice the size in terms of cost, more than 50% bigger in terms of the numbers of flood defence schemes we will build, and which will better protect well over 300,000 additional homes and businesses as well as a lot of national infrastructure.



But in the face of the climate emergency, building more flood defences is no longer enough on its own. The Environment Agency's new flood strategy which we launched in 2020 sets out a new approach: that in addition to continuing to reduce the risk of flooding by building and maintaining flood defences, which we will, we will also help make communities more resilient to flooding when it does happen so lives are not endangered and life can get back to normal quickly afterwards.

We are doing that through our own flood schemes, which also now include property level protection and natural flood management to slow the flow of water and the impact of flooding; by working with water companies and other utilities and with partners like Network Rail and National Highways to help make the country's infrastructure more resilient; and through our statutory planning role by helping design and build places which are resilient to flooding and other climate shocks.

But the biggest of all risks is not too much water but too little. This is about avoiding what I have called The Jaws of Death: the point on water companies' planning charts some 20 years from now when if we don't intervene, the demand for water in this country will

outstrip supply. We face that risk due to a toxic combination of the changing climate making water supply more erratic and increasing demand as our population grows.

There's good news here too. We know how to avoid the jaws of death: reduce demand by using less water more efficiently; and improve supply, including by investing in the right infrastructure. And we have a plan to do that: an initiative the Environment Agency has launched with the water companies, the other regulators and the government, called the National Framework for Water Resources.

This includes hard targets which the water companies have pledged to meet: that the risk of needing severe water restrictions will be limited to no more than 0.2% in any given year; that we will get water consumption down to 110 litres of water per person per day from the current average of 150 litres or more; that water companies will halve leakage, which currently loses around 20% of water put into the public water supply; and develop new supplies through reservoirs and transfers. We are working with the water companies, the other regulators and the government to ensure all this gets done. It's vital that it does, because while good water quality is essential, the right water quantity is existential.

RAF's first synthetic fuel drone flight

March

Under Project Vermeer, the Royal Air Force has enhanced their ground-breaking work in using sustainable aviation fuel by successfully flying a four-meter drone with synthetic fuel.

Synthetic kerosene is entirely fossil fuel-free, made by mixing raw materials with high sugar levels, such as food waste, with bacteria to create an oil substance that is then converted into aviation fuel using chemicals and heat.

As the process does not require large-scale infrastructure, synthetic kerosene can be made anywhere, making it an attractive option for military deployments around the world.

The breakthrough signifies the RAF's commitment to creating a more sustainable future as it can be used across all platforms from remotely piloted air systems to fighter jets, with a significantly reduced carbon footprint compared to traditional fossil-based fuels.

Defence Procurement Minister Jeremy Quin said:

"This is an exciting moment for the RAF and British industry as they continue to develop

pioneering solutions to help address climate change. These new approaches will maintain our world-class fighting forces whilst reducing our carbon footprint."

Air Vice Marshal Lincoln Taylor said:

"The RAF needs to ensure that we are at the forefront of technology to safeguard our own resilience and operational capability, whilst minimising our damage to the environment. Fuel scarcity and cost will only ever increase in its impact on our operations and synthetic fuels for our aircraft are one potential solution to this situation as we look to secure the objectives of the next generation RAF of



tomorrow.”

Working with British company C3 Biotechnologies Ltd and the US Navy, the initial trial created 15 litres of fuel in laboratory conditions. Following successful engine testing, the fixed-wing drone completed a 20-minute test flight in Wiltshire, providing valuable data that indicates the fuel performs consistently to a high standard.

Chief of US Naval Research Rear Adm Lorin C. Selby said:

“It is exciting and game-changing to work with our allies in the UK to develop a more efficient synthetic aviation fuel.

“The U.S. Navy is committed to finding innovative solutions to operational challenges, and the ability to manufacture this fuel without large infrastructure requirements would be ground-breaking for deployed forces.”

The RAF and partners are continuing with the next phase of the project, with work underway to refine the process and develop deployable manufacturing facilities.

This is the second big win for the RAF as they secured a Guinness World Record four months ago with a successful flight on synthetic fuel.

Project Vermeer began in summer 2021 and demonstrates the RAF's commitment to investing in emerging technology, as highlighted in the Integrated Review and Defence Command Paper.

£2.5 million package announced to help disabled people travel more confidently

March

- £2.5 million package to improve the accessibility of transport for disabled people

- Accessibility Minister announces £1.5 million to help disabled people travel more confidently

- £1 million new funding to enhance access to lifeline ferry services

The government has today (29 March 2022) announced a £2.5 million package to support disabled people travel more confidently on our transport network as it reopens after coronavirus (COVID-19).

The new funding will include £1.5 million allocated to support all 13 Mobility Centres across England roll out a ‘Hubs Mobility Service’. These vital services help people stay mobile after they have been advised to stop driving or if they are unable to learn to drive due to their disabilities, offering them advice

on alternatives such as powered wheelchairs, community transport and local services.

The hubs have been successfully piloted at 7 of the centres over the past 2 years and have already helped over 4,000 people regain and retain confidence to travel. The real-life benefits of staying mobile were highlighted in the Inclusive Transport Strategy, which sets out the link between reduced mobility and access to transport with loneliness and social isolation.

Ahead of the announcement, Accessibility Minister Wendy Morton visited Queen Elizabeth’s Foundation (QEF) for Disabled People’s Mobility Centre in South London last Thursday (24 March 2022), where she met people who had benefitted from the Mobility Centre’s services, to help them stay connected and

independent.

Wendy Morton Accessibility Minister said:

This funding will help people travel with confidence and comes just in time as our nation rebuilds from COVID-19.

We want to help everyone to be mobile and these vital Hubs Mobility Services will provide life-changing travel advice, keeping people connected to their friends, work and support networks.

I was delighted to meet people benefitting from this service and to hear about the difference this important work has made to their lives.

The visit coincided with QEF's 40th anniversary, celebrating opening the UK's first Mobility Centre and their first Mobility Open Day since the pandemic.

The Minister was able to see and experience some of the assessments funded by the Department for Transport and carried out at Mobility Centres, including for people interested in using wheelchair accessible vehicles, adapted cars and powered wheelchairs.

Karen Deacon, QEF Chief Executive,

said:

We were delighted to welcome Minister Wendy Morton to QEF's Mobility Service to discuss how important it is to support people to improve their independent mobility and access public transport, to enable people to live the life they choose.

Whether that be for young children through the fantastic Bugzi powered wheelchair, or people with a life-long disability or who have had a life changing medical event.

Independent mobility and public transport should be equally accessible



to everyone, and it was great to see the Minister personally experiencing the challenges some face when relearning to drive in an adapted car and listening to the day-to-day travel challenges disabled people face on public transport.

DfT has also announced that it will provide £1 million to lifeline ferries and seaports serving the Isle of Wight and Isles of Scilly to improve accessibility. The funding will improve access to services for passengers with disabilities.

The government has also confirmed that the 1,000th accessibility audit has been conducted at Oban station in Scotland. As part of the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, the government committed to audit all 2,565 rail stations in Great Britain.

This 1,000th audit is a huge milestone as we highlight existing areas of excellence and identify scope for improvements. They will help produce a new public database, so people can better plan their journeys in advance and, along with input from disabled passengers, will shape future investment in accessible rail travel.

National Highways funding innovative new trial to treat carriageway spillages more quickly

March

When a major incident happens, essential police investigations involving detailed forensic work are often required.

While this forensic work takes place, access for National Highways teams to treat any spillages like oil and diesel is restricted.

Yet it can take just 90 minutes for fluids such as these to damage the road surface.

And if the surface cannot be treated in time, it means resurfacing work is required, adding to further congestion and delays for motorists caught up in the aftermath of the incident.

Now National Highways is joining forces with the Forensic Collision Investigation Network (FCIN) and Kier Highways for a special trial, involving significant research and development, and adopting ground-breaking innovation.

The trial, worth more than £270,000, is funded from the National Highways Innovations Designated Funds programme and incorporates techniques in a 'real-world' testing environment.

Forensic evidence such as tyre marks and debris - usually found on the road following a major incident - will be placed on the trial area, alongside diesel and oil samples, where specialists will test fluid-based treatments to see if they can absorb the spillages without destroying the evidence at the same location.

The products and their application will be put through their paces under strict testing conditions on the new 200-metre road surface at Santa Pod Raceway near Northampton.

National Highways On-Road Service Delivery Manager, Sian Norman said:

"We're always looking to improve how we design, build, maintain and operate our road network.

This trial is incredibly exciting because it means we can look in detail at how some of the products work in treating spillages and what impact it might have on any forensic evidence on the road.

During any incident, we work very closely with

police colleagues to make sure the area is kept sterile for forensic investigation but we're always aware that we need to get the road back open as soon as it is safe to do so.

By investing in innovation, we can explore new technology and solutions to reduce disruption to road users and communities that live alongside our network.

We're really pleased to be working with the Forensic Collision Investigation Network and look forward to seeing how the trial



progresses.”

The estimated cost to the economy of a full carriageway closure during a busy period for around two hours is nearly £750,000.

If the road is fully closed for four hours, that increases to almost £3 million.

Following the trial, it is hoped that a new Standard Operating Procedure will be rolled out across England’s police forces to ensure that the new approach is used consistently around the country.

Once in place, it will help to reduce closure times and costs incurred to motorists from congestion.

Head of the FCIN, Frances Senior said:

“The Forensic Collision Investigation Network are delighted to work with National Highways on this innovative research.

All road users will have been impacted by post collision road closures at some point in time, but the police response to these incidents is often a painstaking and detailed process. Forensic examinations on our road network are unlike other forensic examination scenes, which can be processed slowly with more control over the elements and mitigating the impact on the public.

In partnership with National Highways and Kier Highways, we will jointly test our scientific

methodology and approach, enabling us to obtain valuable data from which we can evaluate the impacts of spillage treatments on likely forensic evidence types.

I’d like to thank National Highways, Kier Highways and Santa Pod Raceway for enabling this trial to happen, our collective ambition to preserve and maximise forensic evidence whilst reducing the impact of road closures on the network will be hugely beneficial for everyone involved in major incidents.”

Carla Vicente, Kier Highways project manager, said:

“We have worked closely with National Highways and FCIN to find a suitable location where we could create a mock collision site. We needed an area where we can replicate the strategic road network and safely trial sustainable products and new techniques that can treat spillages during an ongoing investigation.

This currently isn’t common practice due to investigation sites needing to remain a sterile environment under a full closure. If the trial is successful and we can find a new product, application method and develop a way that allows the treatment of spillages to happen without compromising any evidence, the road can be opened quicker, reducing time, cost and disruption to customers.”

Tarmac, one of the UK’s leading sustainable

building materials and construction solutions business, has resurfaced a stretch of the Santa Pod racetrack where cars often reach speeds of more than 300mph.

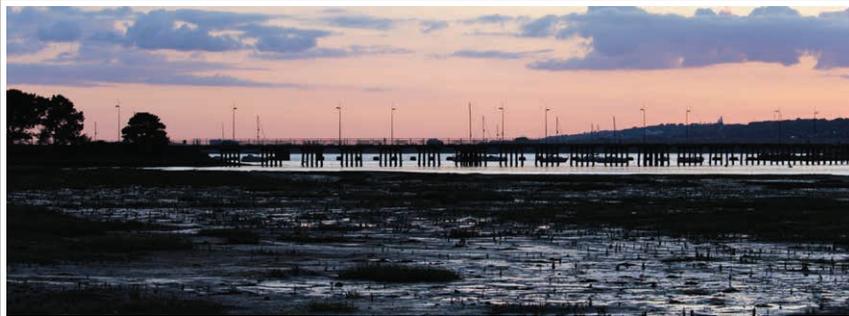
Richard Vine, Tarmac’s regional director for contracting, said:

“We are delighted to be supporting National Highways by using some typical highway surfaces, including Stone Mastic Asphalts (SMA) in one lane, a high-friction surface course in lane two and a third surface of hot-rolled asphalt and pre-coated chippings.

This will enable specialists to test many different scenarios. Anything that can be done to minimise the disruption of road closures caused by spillages is worthwhile.”

National Highways Designated Funds programme is divided into four funding streams aimed at making the biggest difference and delivering lasting benefits; environment and wellbeing, users and community, safety and congestion and innovation and modernisation.

Other achievements include 124 biodiversity initiatives, 150 safety improvements on single carriageway roads to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured and over 6,500 lights and traffic signals converted to LED.



Forthcoming articles under consideration

(guest contributors welcome - please contact office@government-world.com)

- Bishop James Jones call for Royal Commission of future of policing
- Child sexual abuse, international fraud & misconduct in public office
- COVID-19 - where are we now?
- Increasing tensions between Russia and Ukraine
- Trial to banish loud engines and exhausts on Britain's noisiest streets
- Is there a legitimate role for facial recognition in law enforcement and policing?

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