

Press release: Playground ready for summer fun at Forge Mill Farm

Updated: Wrong image used in original article

Ongoing construction of phase 2 of the Environment Agency Perry Barr and Witton Flood Risk Management Scheme, meant that the children's play area at Forge Mill Farm, had to be closed whilst the wall was being built. In addition to the play area being ready for the start of school holidays, contractors have now moved access to their construction site, away from the main visitor car park, to ensure safety of visitors to the park.

Rachel Kelly, Environment Agency project lead for the scheme said:

We have been working closely with our partners and the local community, to ensure that we minimise disruption to the park users and safety is of our top priority, especially as the summer holiday season begins and more people come to enjoy the park.

A number of notice boards are now on display around Forge Mill Farm, the lake and RSPB, to give visitors the latest information on progress of Phase 2 of the Perry Barr and Witton Flood Risk Management Scheme, which will reduce the risk of flooding for 1400 properties in the area.

More information is available about the scheme on the [Perry Barr and Witton flood scheme page](#) or [contact the Environment Agency project team](#).

Along with flood defences and flood management schemes, knowing your flood risk is also important when protecting your family and property from flooding. People can check their risk and register to receive free flood warnings by visiting the [Environment Agency flood information pages](#) or calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

News story: Beavers arrive in the Forest of Dean

A pair of Eurasian Beavers have returned to the Forest of Dean today (24 July) for the first time for around 400 years.

It is expected that the beavers' activity in the Forest of Dean will improve biodiversity in their new 6.5 hectare home and may have the potential to

reduce local flood risk. Regular monitoring will continue on site throughout the three-year project to assess these ecosystem benefits.

The release was attended by Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, who announced £20,000 of new funding for the trial reintroduction of beavers in Devon to understand further the impact of bringing back one of England's native species.

Environment Secretary, Michael Gove said:

The beaver has a special place in English heritage and the Forest of Dean. This release is a fantastic opportunity to develop our understanding of the potential impacts of reintroductions and help this iconic species, 400 years after it was driven to extinction. The community of Lydbrook has shown tremendous support for this scheme and the beavers will be a welcome addition to local wildlife.

The project is an example of our wider approach to enhancing biodiversity. It is another step towards our aim of leaving the environment in a better state for future generations.

Forestry Commission Forest Management Director, West England Forest District, Kevin Stannard said:

Today's release of Beavers is a momentous occasion for the Forest of Dean.

We are looking forward to seeing the ecological and hydrological benefits the beavers will bring to the Greathough Brook.

I am proud to have led the Forestry Commission team, and support their commitment to connect people with nature here in the Forest of Dean.

The Forestry Commission unveiled plans for a trial reintroduction into the Greathough Brook in March 2017. Since then, Natural England granted Forestry Commission officials a licence to release beavers into a carefully chosen and secure site which is now being used to house the semi-aquatic mammals.

Hydrological and ecological monitoring on the site is producing valuable scientific data and work is underway to ensure this informs future reintroductions.

'Habitat engineers'

Rebecca Wilson, Head of Planning and Environment, West England Forest District, Forestry Commission said:

Beavers are natural habitat engineers, restoring complex wetland habitats and providing habitat for declining species whilst slowing the flow of water downstream. We are delighted to welcome beavers to the Forest of Dean and are keen to observe the many benefits they will bring to both local communities and the wider Forest of Dean environment.

Hydrologists from the University of Exeter are undertaking research into the impacts of beaver reintroduction at a number of sites in the U.K., including the Forest of Dean.

Professor Richard Brazier, a hydrologist from the University of Exeter said:

We have monitored the hydrology of the Greathough Brook for over a year now and shown quite clearly that the brook contributes to the flooding problems experienced in the village of Lydbrook. We now have a unique opportunity to study the impacts of beaver dams on the flood flows from this flashy and flood prone landscape. The study will be a valuable and important opportunity to quantify the benefits that beaver dams might deliver and therefore contribute to natural flood management in an upland, wooded catchment.

The Eurasian Beaver is a large semi-aquatic native mammal that was once widespread throughout Britain. They were hunted to extinction by the beginning of the 16th Century for their meat, fur and scent glands.

Keystone species

Beavers are a 'keystone species' – playing an important role in wetland ecology by creating ecosystems that provide habitats for many other plant, insect and mammal species. Few other animals, aside from humans, have the ability to so drastically modify and shape their surrounding environment. For this reason beavers are often referred to as "ecosystem engineers".

Records show that the Greathough Brook was once home to thriving populations of water vole, glow-worms as well as wood white and pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies. These species depend on light, warm conditions – conditions that can no longer be found with the decline in sheep grazing and shading from trees.

Beavers are well known for their ability to fell trees to dam shallow watercourses and create pools to make them feel safe. The associated wetlands, interconnecting beaver canals, coppiced woodland, glades and deadwood provides rich and diverse habitat for an abundance of wildlife including plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

Lydbrook has been subjected to several flooding events due to high volumes of water quickly running down the Greathough Brook and into the culvert system. This trial will identify how the beaver's dam building behaviour can help to

hold larger volumes of water higher upstream in the natural pools and wetlands that will be created within the valley. The dams are permeable, allowing water to be gradually released downstream and slow the flow of water.

Funding for the Forest of Dean project was secured in part by grants from The Gloucestershire Environmental Trust and Forest Holidays.

Background

1. [Forestry Commission England](#) is the government department responsible in England for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woods and forests and increasing their value to society and the environment.
2. Funding for River Otter Beaver Trial: The Secretary of State has agreed to provide £20,000 of funding for the River Otter Beaver Trial, in Devon to support analysis of research and the development of management protocols for this species. Continued research in this area is key to understanding the impacts of beaver reintroductions and ensuring that an informed decision can be made on the long term status of beavers in England.
3. The Greathough Brook is a short, steep stream in the Forest of Dean. Arising on the southern flanks of Ruardean hill it runs through a narrow wooded valley before entering the village of Lydbrook and flowing through a series of culverts north into the River Wye. Knowledge gained from the Forest of Dean trial will help to inform decisions on the status of the beaver in England going forward.

News story: Developing a council smart energy system: apply for funding

[Perth and Kinross Council](#) is to invest up to £150,000 in a series of studies to develop a smart energy network for its estate.

The system should manage and control:

- the generation of renewable energy
- the storage and use of renewable energy
- trade of any excess energy, both within and outside of the council

It could involve generating energy at a school, and then using and storing that energy at another building, such as a care home.

The best ideas could receive further funding to develop and test them in a second phase.

Funding is under SBRI (the Small Business Research Initiative) and supported by the [CAN DO Innovation Challenge Fund](#) for business innovation across Scotland.

Solutions should reduce costs and emissions

The council is looking for ideas that would reduce energy costs and CO2 emissions. They should also explore how new income could be generated through energy storage assets.

Proposed solutions must:

- develop local renewable capacity and storage
- develop an energy management platform
- offer communication with and control of all the network's generation and storage
- be able to trade across the network
- investigate and develop potential income from sales of stored electricity

Competition information

- the competition opens on 20 August 2018, and the deadline for registration is at midday on 10 October 2018
- any organisation that can demonstrate a route to market for its idea can apply
- we expect phase 1 contracts to be worth up to £30,000 and to last up to 6 months
- we expect phase 2 contracts to be worth up to £175,000 and to last up to 18 months
- successful projects will attract 100% funded development contracts
- there will be a briefing event on 28 August 2018, where you can find out more about the competition and how to submit a quality application

[Press release: Upgrades to busy M3 junction at Winchester backed](#)

96% of people who responded to the non-statutory consultation backed the need for the improvements to this junction, which will be redesigned under the plans to create dedicated free flow lanes which will allow drivers travelling between the M3 and the A34 to avoid using the junction roundabout.

The roundabout itself will be rebuilt to allow for the additional lanes to run through it, increasing capacity and making it easier for traffic to interchange between the M3 and the A34. This will reduce queuing and make

journey times more reliable.

Highways England Project Manager Simon Hewett said:

More than 110,000 vehicles use this busy junction each day to interchange with the A34 and routes into Winchester, often more than 6,000 each hour during peak times. Regular road users know that often becomes congested, with queues backing up onto the main carriageway.

The upgrade to M3 junction 9 will create new dedicated link roads to separate out local and long distance traffic. Through traffic will not have to stop at the roundabout, freeing it up for local traffic and commuters. We are improving access for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians, with the upgrade including a new 4m side cycle path with a new footpath next to the cycleway to the River Itchen.

We are aware of people's concerns about traffic merging between the A34 and A33; this was the most common point raised during the consultation period and we are reviewing a number of options to address this.

A public consultation on the upgrade was held from 9 January to 19 February. 854 responses were received during this consultation. Information events were held in the Winchester area for the public and stakeholders including local authorities, landowners and businesses, so people could look at the plans and speak to members of the project team.

96% of people who responded to the consultation questionnaire said they agree that improvements are needed at the junction. 98% of people were concerned about traffic congestion at the existing M3 junction 9, with 92% concerned both about road safety and reliability of journey time.

Today's announcement paves the way for work on the upgrade to start in the 2021, subject to statutory processes. The upgraded junction is expected to be fully open to traffic in 2023.

A copy of the consultation report and announcement flyer can be found on the Highways England [website](#) where anyone interested in the scheme can also sign up to receive updates.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Statement to Parliament: Annual update on Crossrail 2018

It has been another productive year for the Crossrail project with a number of key milestones achieved and progress made across all areas. The programme is now 93% complete and is entering the critical testing and commissioning stage.

In May as part of the second stage of the Crossrail opening strategy, TfL Rail took over operation of the former Heathrow Connect service to Heathrow Airport as well as some local services between Paddington and Hayes & Harlington. This builds on the introduction of new Class 345 trains on the Liverpool Street to Shenfield route in June 2017. Fifteen of the new trains are now in regular service.

All core track work was completed last summer, which enabled the first Elizabeth line train to make its maiden voyage through the central tunnels in February this year. The new Abbey Wood station opened to existing rail passengers, and the construction and fit-out of the other new Elizabeth Line stations continues to progress with the installation of lifts and escalators and completion of architectural finishes. The Department for Transport and Transport for London (TfL) – the joint sponsors of the project – continue to work with Crossrail Limited to ensure operational readiness in advance of the opening of the Elizabeth Line.

As reported in the [update to Parliament last year](#), cost pressures have increased across the project. Both the department and TfL remain committed to the successful delivery of this project and have agreed an overall funding envelope for delivery of the project of £15.4 billion. This will enable the completion of the project at a cost lower than planned under the last Labour government. The anticipated cost of the project was previously estimated at £15.9 billion in 2007 and increased to £17.8 billion in 2009, before the Coalition Government took steps to bring down the costs following the June 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review.

The additional funding is being provided to both Crossrail Limited and Network Rail. £300 million is being made available to Crossrail Limited, with the Department for Transport and TfL contributing £150 million each.

Around £290 million is being provided for completion of the programme of works on the national rail network, and is being funded by the Department for Transport and Network Rail. It remains the case that over 60% of the project's funding has been provided by Londoners and London businesses.

Further details on Crossrail Limited's funding and finances in the period to 29 May 2018 are set out in the table below.

This year, the Crossrail project's health and safety indicators have remained industry leading, with a strong performance demonstrated throughout the year with all the key indicators exceeding the corporate objectives for the year 2017/18.

Network Rail have also delivered a significant programme of Crossrail related surface works, successfully connecting the existing rail network with the Elizabeth Line tunnels at Pudding Mill Lane, Plumstead and Westbourne Park. They have also completed the largest and most complex signalling upgrade ever undertaken by Network Rail on the approach into Paddington on one of the busiest stretches of railway in the country.

There have been planned changes in the leadership and governance of the project as we approach the final stages of delivery. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew Wolstenholme for his work in progressing the programme and acting as a champion for Crossrail during his time as Chief Executive. He has been succeeded by Simon Wright as Chief Executive and Programme Director. Crossrail Limited's Board has been restructured to keep the management of the programme efficient and cost effective while maintaining the people and structure necessary to deliver the railway through to full opening. As part of this, both the department and TfL have appointed new non-executive directors to the Crossrail board to provide increased scrutiny and assist in the transition of the project as it enters its final stages.

As with all projects of this nature, there have been a number of engineering and technical challenges that have already been surmounted in order to build the first new railway for a generation, and there will continue to be challenges right up until the final completion of the project.

The new railway will transform travel in, to, and across London, with the positive economic benefits being felt across the country. Its legacy will continue to support many thousands of jobs, over 1000 apprenticeships and a supply chain that is spread across the length and breadth of the UK.

During the passage of the Crossrail Bill through Parliament, a commitment was given that an annual statement would be published until the completion of the construction of Crossrail, setting out information about the project's funding and finances.

The relevant information is as follows.

The numbers above are drawn from Crossrail Limited's books of account and have been prepared on a consistent basis with the update provided last year. The figure for expenditure incurred includes monies already paid out in relevant period, including committed land and property expenditure where this has not yet been paid. It does not include future expenditure on construction contracts that have been awarded.

Total funding amounts provided to Crossrail Limited by the Department for Transport and TfL in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2018) £11,713,723,131

Expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Limited in relation to the construction of Crossrail in the period (30 May 2017 to 29 May 2018) (excluding recoverable VAT on Land and Property purchases) £1,619,238,000

Total expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Limited in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2018) (excluding recoverable VAT on land and property purchases) £12,506,215,837

The amounts realised by the disposal of any land or property for the purposes of the construction of Crossrail by the Secretary of State, TfL or Crossrail Limited in the period covered by the statement. £18,462,238