

Press release: New flood scheme in Rugeley officially opened

Members of the Environment Agency, Cannock Chase District Council, the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Rugeley Town Council, Staffordshire County Council and the Trent Regional Flood & Coastal Committee visited Rugeley today (Monday 18 December) to mark the completion of the project.

The newly completed Rugeley flood scheme, which was delivered by the Environment Agency, will help to reduce the risk of flooding from the Rising Brook for 114 residential and 159 commercial properties. It also forms an integral part of Cannock Chase District Council's plans to regenerate parts of the town centre.

Work on the project, which started in December 2016, saw construction of a 350m long embankment, which is 4m high at its highest point, on Hagley playing fields. This embankment has created a flood storage area which will store water from the Rising Brook during times of heavy rainfall and then slowly release it back into the watercourse when levels no longer pose a flood risk.

Mark Swain from the Environment Agency said:

This scheme is fantastic news for the people of Rugeley as it will help reduce the risk of flooding to a significant number of residential properties and businesses. Not only that but it is an important step in unlocking Rugeley's potential for future investment, regeneration and growth, something which would be challenging if the town remained at risk of serious flooding.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP chairman David Frost CBE said:

This impressive project is very good news for Rugeley, protecting town centre homes and businesses from flooding and making the town a better place to live, work and visit.

This scheme means businesses will have a secure foundation when they make plans to expand, without the risk of their hard work literally being washed away. It is also creating an attractive green space for local people to enjoy.

Cllr John Kraujalis Corporate Improvement Portfolio Leader for Cannock Chase Council said:

This scheme is an excellent example of true partnership working in action. The improvements will provide protection and peace of mind to residents and commercial businesses alike that were at risk from flooding from the Rising Brook. The Environment Agency has also successfully procured and delivered a replacement footbridge on behalf of the Council which became unstable a number of years ago and was in desperate need of repair.

Gordon Alcott Economic Development & Planning Portfolio Leader for Cannock Chase Council said:

The works that have been carried out will unlock new development opportunities in Rugeley that have previously been constrained by the flood risk. The Council have already received a planning application for industrial units which could create approximately 60 jobs in the area that would have been affected by flooding prior to this work being carried out.

The scheme has been developed in partnership with Cannock Chase District Council and Staffordshire County Council, and funded by Government Flood Defence Grant in Aid, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP and the Trent Flood and Coastal Committee.

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[News story: People smuggler from Newport jailed for 5 years](#)

Adriano Bettoja-Allen, a British national aged 37, was sentenced at Blackfriars Crown Court on Thursday 14 December after pleading guilty to 2 offences of assisting illegal immigration which happened on 2 October and 9 October 2016 at Calais and Coquelles ports.

Sentenced alongside Bettoja-Allen for 1 count of the same offence was 50-year-old Wendy Thomas, also British, who was his co-conspirator in the Coquelles smuggling attempt. She received a jail sentence of 2 years and 9 months having also admitted the offence. Bettoja-Allen's wife Jeanette, aged 49 and from the Philippines, was linked to the Calais incident and was sentenced to 11 months, suspended for 2 years, 150 hours unpaid work, and a curfew. She pleaded guilty to assisting illegal immigration 3 days into her trial.

The Calais incident was uncovered after the arrest of Dawood Shahbeik at St Pancras International station on 2 October 2016. Shahbeik, a British national, was questioned and had his luggage searched by Border Force after arriving on the Eurostar from Calais. Examination of his mobile phone revealed several suspicious text messages referring to an individual who had been transported to a house in Newport. The luggage search also revealed a damaged Iranian passport and a large amount of cash. Shahbeik was arrested on suspicion of facilitating illegal immigration, an offence which he later admitted*.

One week after the Calais incident on 9 October, a second people smuggling attempt was identified, this time at the UK juxtaposed controls in Coquelles. On this occasion, Border Force officers stopped and searched a car driven by Wendy Thomas. A large black holdall covered by pillows and a large soft toy was discovered filling the entire boot space. When Thomas was asked what was inside she claimed it contained towels. When an officer unzipped the bag, two women were discovered lying side by side. Both were unresponsive and were taken to hospital for medical attention before being handed to the French authorities.

Officers then opened the rear passenger door and found a man hiding underneath two cushions and quilt spread across the car covering the foot wells. The man subsequently claimed to be an Iranian national and he was handed to the French authorities to be removed from the UK control zone. Thomas was arrested on suspicion of facilitating illegal immigration.

Both cases were passed to Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation officers.

Analysis of mobile phones belonging to Shahbeik and Thomas found that both of them had been in regular contact with Adriano Bettoja-Allen.

Bettoja-Allen and his wife Jeanette were both arrested and further enquiries revealed they had travelled through Calais on 2 October having earlier met up with Shahbeik in Dunkirk. When questioned about the text messages exchanged with Shahbeik the pair initially claimed that they referred to a soft toy which they had carried back to the UK on his behalf.

Checks also confirmed Thomas and Adriano Bettoja-Allen had travelled in separate vehicles from Folkestone to Coquelles on the same Eurotunnel train on 8 October. Bettoja-Allen returned to the UK alone the next day less than 2 hours after Thomas had been stopped by Border Force. Financial checks also confirmed a large cash deposit into Thomas' bank account in September 2016.

Assistant Director David Fairclough, from the CFI team, said:

Adriano Bettoja-Allen was revealed by our investigations to be the common link between what initially appeared to be unconnected incidents. Our investigations showed that far from being opportunistic attempts to undermine the UK's border controls, the offences had been carefully planned. The fact that two women ended up in hospital demonstrates the dangerous lengths people smugglers will go to.

We work closely with Border Force colleagues to rigorously investigate allegations of immigration related criminality. This case should serve as a warning to anyone tempted to get involved with this kind of criminality. We will catch you, and put you before the courts.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit the [crimestoppers](https://www.crimestoppers.co.uk/) website.

*Dawood Shahbiek pleaded guilty to assisting illegal immigration and was sentenced at Blackfriars Crown Court in May 2017 to 18 months imprisonment.

[Press release: Pig keepers warned not to feed kitchen scraps to pigs due to](#)

African swine fever risk

The warning comes after the risk level of African swine fever entering the UK was raised over the summer following spread of the disease in Eastern and Central Europe.

There has never been a case of African swine fever in the UK and it does not affect humans, but it is potentially fatal to pigs. If the disease were to reach the UK it could have a devastating effect on our export market and would also mean the humane culling of pigs on infected premises to prevent further spread.

Keepers are being reminded that it is illegal to feed catering waste of any description or domestic food waste to farm animals in the UK, including pigs kept as pets, as some of the outbreaks of African swine fever in Europe have been attributed to wild boar or domestic pigs consuming contaminated pork or pork products. Viruses such as foot and mouth disease could also be introduced to the UK through food products. This includes food from vegetarian kitchens, as there is still a risk of cross contamination from products of animal origin such as milk.

Strict hygiene measures are essential in preventing disease – people should not take meat or meat products into areas where pigs are kept and should only eat food in designated areas such as staff rooms or the farm kitchen. Pig keepers, farm staff and anyone in contact with pigs should wash their hands before and after eating or preparing food.

UK Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens said:

The introduction of African swine fever would have an enormous impact on our pig industry. No matter how many pigs you keep, you need to be aware of the potential consequences of feeding waste food to your animals. Not only is it illegal, but you run the risk of spreading disease which could be fatal to your livestock.

You can purchase a range of pig foods from your local agricultural merchant that can be safely fed to your pigs and which is the most reliable way of giving them a balanced diet. Good biosecurity is also essential for minimising disease risk, such as providing dedicated clothing and boots for workers and preventing vehicles which may be contaminated from entering pig premises.

The UK suffered the consequences of pigs being fed illegal waste food in the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001. That outbreak is thought to have originated from pigs being fed catering waste containing the virus, which came from outside the UK. The outbreak resulted in the destruction of more than 10 million cattle and sheep and cost the UK many millions of pounds.

Chief Executive of the National Pig Association, Dr Zoe Davies, said:

The health of our pigs is fundamentally important to our sector. A notifiable disease outbreak would not only needlessly result in the loss of many pigs and annihilate our burgeoning export market, but would significantly impact on countless families, their staff, local businesses and tourism for months. Feeding illegal food waste, however harmless it might seem at the time, is just not worth the risk.

1. This press release is issued jointly by the Animal and Plant Health Agency, The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government, Scottish Government, The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland, The National Pig Association, The British Pig Association, The Pig Veterinary Society, The British Veterinary Association and Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) Pork.
2. [EU-wide animal by-product legislation](#) states that feeding farmed animals with catering waste or feed material containing, or derived from, catering waste is illegal. Doing so can result in prosecution.
3. Fruit and vegetable material that originated outside the kitchen, which has never entered the kitchen and which has not come into contact with material of animal origin can be fed, such as vegetables grown in domestic gardens. Some commercial food waste can also be fed if it has undergone the correct animal by-products processing and meets the requirements of the [Feed Hygiene Regulation](#). The safest option if you are in doubt is not to feed any food waste to your animals.
4. [More information about African swine fever and how to spot it](#). Additional information can be found on [AHDB Pork's website](#). If you suspect African swine fever you should notify [the Animal and Plant Health Agency](#) immediately.
5. For more information, contact Defra press office on 020 8225 7618 or out of hours on 0345 051 8486.

[Press release: Next generation Road Communications Network](#)

The Government company has let the contract for the next generation road communications network which will help reduce congestion, make journeys more reliable, and help drivers who get into difficulty.

The National Roads Telecommunications Service (NRTS) connects the company's seven regional control centres, the national traffic operations centre and the 30,000 roadside technology assets including message signs, CCTV cameras and emergency roadside telephones.

Today, 18 December 2017, Highways England has announced the award of the £450

million second NRTS contract, to telent Technology Services Ltd.

Chief Information Officer at Highways England, Tony Malone said:

Safety is at the heart of everything we do and this network, the central nervous system for England's motorways, enables us to operate safe roads. We are pleased to be working with telent Technology Services to deliver the reliability, resilience and innovation that will enable us to keep drivers safe and informed on our roads.

The 30,000-plus items of on road technology equipment for which Highways England is responsible, include 3,327 CCTV cameras, 3,774 message signs, 229 weather stations and 7,155 SOS phones. The network enables traffic information services to provide accurate, real-time travel information to drivers and travel news providers. The message signs help warn drivers of potential hazards and display real-time journey information.

The new service will renew equipment and deliver a service that will provide an open, flexible and scalable telecommunications network to meet the future needs of the business; it will also enable and support Highways England in the development of innovative services such as 'connected vehicles' and 5G.

Additionally the technology will continue to underpin the development and operation of the smart motorway and expressway programmes that are central to the modernisation of England's motorways and will help ensure the network continue to drive economic growth and prosperity.

The new contract will run from 16 March 2018 for 7 years.

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.