

Levelling Up Fund boost to connect rural communities and restore rich rail heritage

- Chancellor visits County Durham tourist attraction to see how £20 million Government investment will develop a heritage railway line.
- Residents will benefit from 18km cycling and walking route, connecting rural communities to employment and educational opportunities.
- Funding will also reopen the UK's oldest road suspension bridge, and reroute the A68 Bypass near Bishop Auckland, to improve journey times.

Rishi Sunak toured the Locomotion tourist attraction in Shildon – the world's first railway town – to see where £20 million of government investment will fund a second building to house its collection. It will also deliver improvements so that heritage engines can run along the museum line, helping to boost jobs and the economy.

The area will also benefit from a 18km walking and cycling route alongside the railway, further connecting rural communities to jobs and education in Bishop Auckland and Newton Aycliffe.

This is one of the five projects in the North East of England to receive a share of £100 million from the £1.7 billion first round of the Levelling Up Fund, as announced by the Chancellor in October's Budget.

Following his visit, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

We are absolutely committed to levelling up opportunities across the whole of the UK so people have good jobs and greater opportunities.

It's fantastic to see how our £20 million investment will enhance this popular tourist attraction. This will boost access for rural communities so they can enjoy the area's rich railway heritage and connect people to key transport links nearby.

Once complete, Locomotion Building 2 will house up to 50 rail vehicles, expanding the museum's collection to 120. This will create the UK's largest rail vehicle display, spread across the museum's two buildings.

Durham County Council's successful Levelling Up Fund bid will also support the reopening of Whorlton Bridge, the UK's oldest road suspension bridge, linking nearby villages to the A66 and A67.

A visitor centre will also be developed to celebrate the bridge's transport heritage. In addition, funding will allow the rerouting of the A68 at Toft Hill, near Bishop Auckland, to improve journey times and the quality of life

for village residents.

This all builds on the Towns Fund awards announced for the region, totalling £53 million for Bishop Auckland, including one of the largest Town Deals in the country. That investment will provide infrastructure to support the town's development as a visitor destination, as well as a range of other improvements.

Further information:

- The first round of the Levelling Up fund announced at the Budget, will invest £1.7 billion in 105 local infrastructure projects across the UK. The full list of successful projects are [here](#).
- Photos are available on the Treasury's [Flickr](#) page.