

[Press release: Government launches consultation on community involvement in shale gas proposals](#)

Shale gas developers could be required to consult local communities, even before submitting a planning application, following the launch of the latest [government consultation](#) seeking to further reform shale industry practice in England.

Launched today (31 October 2018), the consultation seeks the views on whether to:

- require developers to publish relevant information
- open a meaningful dialogue with communities and stakeholders
- listen to residents and take account of what they say

Developers would then be able to address concerns where possible before submitting final proposals to local authorities.

Early engagement with communities at the pre-application stage would give local people an earlier say on proposals, whilst making developers aware of issues of importance to the community that may need to be resolved through working with the relevant local authority.

It's part of the government's commitment to speed up decision making, as it's recognised that no one benefits from unnecessary delays when determining planning applications.

Those with an interest have until Monday 7 January 2019 to respond.

Today's announcement follows the [consultation on re-designating exploratory drilling as permitted development](#). This closed on Thursday 25 October and a response is currently being considered.

Further information

View the [consultation documentation](#).

The new planning rulebook and existing guidance makes it clear that early engagement has potential to improve the effectiveness of the system for all those involved. However, the proposed reforms out for consultation seek to take it a step further by making it a formal requirement before submitting an application.

Office address and general enquiries

2 Marsham Street

London
SW1P 4DF

Contact form
<http://forms.communiti...>

General enquiries: please use this number if you are a member of the public
030 3444 0000

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[Press release: We bake a winner – could you?](#)

Building roads may seem a million miles from baking, but a good quality motorway, or major A road – those managed by us – is made up of many, distinctive layers, all with expertly picked and mixed ingredients.

Our Director of Asset Development, Safety, Engineering and Standards Nicola Debnam said:

Our roads connect the country together and our network helps four million journeys to be made safely and reliably each day. We want the people who use them to be safe and a big part of that is ensuring we have a good quality road surface too. Some people may not be aware of the incredible engineering that has taken place beneath their wheels to make them happen. But just like a cake, it really is a refined recipe.

We hope our new way of illustrating our work will encourage people who may not normally consider a career in engineering to think again – a job with Highways England could satisfy your career appetite!

Our teams of expert chefs design each road, building a number of special layers starting with a sub-base and finishing with the smooth icing of the surface layer.

Road surface expert Lyle Andrew, Director of Development for the Institute of Asphalt Technology, added:

Just as expert bakers carefully select and prepare their ingredients to make the finest cakes, highway engineers specify and use high quality constituents to ensure that the materials used in the construction of our roads make the perfect blend of strength, durability and smooth surface. An accurate proportion of each ingredient is as vital to the engineer as it is to the star baker.

Using our well tested basic recipe (we don't take any whisks!), our chefs will change the ingredients for each road as needed.

Starting with a sub-base of crushed stones, like a cheesecake base giving the cake a strong foundation and preventing a 'soggy bottom', it's followed by a base of coarse stones like a rich fruit cake full of fruit and nuts. Next our chefs work on the binder layer, which is like a sponge full of fine ingredients (flour and sugar), similar to a Victoria sponge. Finally, as with any quality cake our surface layer, like the good quality smooth icing, providing drivers with a smooth skid resistant surface while preventing surface water from seeping into the other layers. Each layer has a special purpose, whether providing support, drainage or load distribution.

Holding the winning cake design together is a layer of top quality sticky jam, otherwise known as the bond coat.

It works the other way too. In a Highways England-funded trial, Nottingham University has used every day sunflower oil, to help repair road surfaces. The University found that by placing capsules of the oil in asphalt, a material used for surfacing roads, they would 'heal' cracks in the road as they emerged by softening the asphalt around the crack.

So while you settle down to watch the Bake Off contestants battle it out , consider that if you love baking, you might love making a road.

Motorways and major A roads connect businesses, families and friends. Yet the country faces a shortage of the people that build them. That's why we're taking part in the [Year of Engineering](#) campaign, which aims to inspire young people to consider engineering as a rewarding career. The company is looking for a continuing pipeline of young engineers to deliver the multi-billion investment plans network, improving lives and making a positive difference to

the world.

If this has inspired you to consider a career in engineering please visit our [careers website](#) for further details.

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.

[Press release: Up to £50 million to develop world leading AI talent in the UK](#)

The Government has committed further investment to the UK's booming Artificial Intelligence (AI) sector by announcing up to an additional £50 million to attract and retain the world's top talent.

The announcement within this week's budget builds on the AI Sector Deal, worth up to almost £1 billion, launched earlier this year. As part of the government's modern Industrial Strategy, the sector deal set out how the UK will be at the forefront of the AI and data revolution.

Working with the Alan Turing Institute, up to £50 million will be invested in new Turing AI Fellowships to help bring the best global researchers in AI to the UK. The funding will allow the UK to attract, retain and develop world leading research talent.

DCMS Secretary of State Jeremy Wright said:

Through our modern Industrial Strategy we're joining with industry to invest close to £1 billion in AI, to position the UK as one of the best places in the world to develop and use this exciting new technology. This investment will help us to recruit and retain the best talent in AI and ensure that we are leading the way on research and development in the sector.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

The huge potential of artificial intelligence to transform our economy and our lives for the better, from revolutionising cancer treatment to combating financial fraud, is at the heart of our modern Industrial Strategy.

This investment is the next step in our commitment to make Britain the world's most innovative economy, with highly-skilled jobs in every part of the UK.

Adrian Smith, Director of The Alan Turing Institute commented:

In order to realise the significant opportunities for innovation and growth offered by the data and artificial intelligence revolution, it is essential that we nurture and grow the very best academic talent and expertise. We are delighted to be working with the Government Office for AI to deliver the Turing AI Fellowships, bringing the best global researchers to collaborate with us in the UK and driving forward impact in these technologies for the benefit of science, society and the economy.

AI technologies offer the potential to drive productivity up by up to 25 per cent by 2035. The UK is already home to some of the biggest names in the business such as DeepMind and is well placed to seize the opportunities that AI brings.

Investing in leading academic talent will secure the UK's international competitiveness and help us to ensure we have the necessary skills and talent in the UK to help us reap the potential benefits that AI offers across all sectors.

Also announced at budget was a new review between the Office for AI and Government Digital Service (GDS) on how government can use AI in new ways to drive improvements in public services and wider economic benefits.

The Office for AI and others in HMG will work with the Alan Turing Institute to finalise the details of the programme over the next few months, with a view to the first fellows being in place by Autumn 2019.

Press release: British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference

The British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference (BIIGC) is a consultative forum established by Strand Three of the Belfast Agreement. It aims to 'bring together the British and Irish Governments to promote bilateral co-operation

on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of both governments’.

The BIIGC is not an executive body and, as the Belfast Agreement states explicitly, “there will be no derogation from the sovereignty of either government”.

The BIIGC is ‘concerned with non-devolved Northern Ireland matters’ and will include a discussion on East-West issues. It will take place in Dublin and be co-chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Rt Hon David Lidington MP, and Simon Coveney TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, and Charles Flanagan TD, Minister for Justice and Equality, will also be in attendance.

The BIIGC last met in London on 25 July 2018.

Press release: Number of children in long-term workless households at lowest level in over a decade

The [independent figures from the Office for National Statistics](#) today revealed that the number has been falling year on year since 2010, down 74,000 on the last year alone.

This is welcome news for the next generation, with evidence showing that growing up in a home with parents in work is linked to better performance in school and the increased likelihood of being in work as an adult.

Around 9 in 10 children now live in a home with at least one working adult, with 3.3 million more people in work than in 2010.

Latest figures also show that the number of children living in lone parent long-term workless households has fallen 70,000 on the year.

The fall in numbers comes as the government’s welfare reforms are making sure it pays to be in work, with flexible payments designed to ensure that claimants are always better off in work.

Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey said:

Helping people into work and supporting parents and children is at the heart of what this department does. Over the last 8 years we have achieved something quite extraordinary, transforming this

country's employment opportunities and with it, children's futures. And today we should celebrate that the number of children living in long-term workless households is at its lowest level for over a decade.

And with the latest budget announcements for Universal Credit, we intend to help even more families as we increase the amount people can earn by £1,000 before their benefit payment begins to be reduced – making sure it pays to work and helping people come off benefits.

The figures come while the UK has the lowest rate of unemployment since the 1970s and, in more good news for homes across the country, wages are outpacing inflation for the seventh month in a row.

More information

Children who grow up in workless families are almost twice as likely as children in working families to not reach the expected attainment level at all stages of their education – analysis has shown that three-quarters of children in workless families fail to reach 5 full GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and maths.

Compared to children from working families, those from workless families are also more likely to be workless in adult life. The [Improving lives: Helping Workless Families](#) policy paper includes research on the impact of children being in a workless family.

Contact Press Office

Press Office

Caxton House

Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

London Press Office (national media and London area enquiries only – not questions about personal claims)
020 3267 5144

Out-of-hours (journalists only)
07623 928 975

England and Wales (local media enquiries)
029 20 586 then 097 or 098 or 099

Scotland (local media enquiries)
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