

Speech: Shrove Tuesday reception 2017: Prime Minister's speech

I am delighted to welcome you to Number 10 and to have this opportunity as Prime Minister to thank you all for the service you give to our country and for the difference you make to so many lives, day in and day out.

There was some discussion about when in the Christian year we might hold this reception. I thought you might appreciate Shrove Tuesday, not just because of its position before the start of Lent – which is such an important time for all of us as Christians.

Today we have on display in the State Dining Room some historical records from Shrove Tuesdays in Britain dating back over 550 years. And I am grateful to Patricia Humphries from the National Archives who has come here today to talk us through them. Although I'm not sure all our pancakes will quite match the Shrove Tuesday feast held in Edinburgh for Mary, Queen of Scots in February 1564!

I am delighted in particular that we have here with us today people from all parts of the church and the United Kingdom – including the Black Majority Churches, the Network Churches, Parliament's own church, St Margaret's Westminster, and church leaders such as Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop Sentamu, and the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, who is standing down after more than 20 years.

Can I just say, Richard has been one of the great leaders of the Christian faith in our country – he is not just someone with an extraordinary presence and richness of thought who has in 20 years almost doubled church membership in his diocese and established over 30 new churches. I am sure you will join with me in paying tribute to his outstanding leadership and service – and wishing him well in the years ahead.

As Prime Minister I am hosting an annual reception for each of the main faiths in our country – and this one is of particular importance to me personally.

Growing up in a vicarage, I know first-hand the many sacrifices involved and the hard work that so many of you do, from the services and ministry in your churches to the comfort and guidance you provide to millions in our country at some of the most difficult moments in their lives.

Whether it is visiting the sick or bereaved; delivering faith-inspired projects, like the Christmas Day lunch that I join in my constituency each year; or acting as volunteers and aid workers in war-torn parts of the world – we owe you all a huge debt of gratitude and as Prime Minister, on behalf of the whole country, I want to say a very big thank you.

I also believe it is right that we should celebrate the role of Christianity

in our country. We have a very strong tradition in this country of religious tolerance and freedom of speech, and our Christian heritage is something we can all be proud of. We must continue to ensure that people feel able to speak about their faith, and that absolutely includes their faith in Christ.

I also believe that Christianity has an important role to play in making Britain a country that works for everyone.

Now, the Church will not always agree with everything that the government says – and the government will not always agree with the Church. But I think there are many areas where we can work together.

One is in addressing the persecution of Christians and religious minorities around the world which has been mentioned to me by some at the reception here today. It is hard to comprehend that today people are still being attacked and murdered because of their Christianity. We must reaffirm our determination to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs in peace and safety. And I hope to take further measures as a government to support this.

For all these reasons, I am delighted that we can take this moment today to celebrate the work that you do – and that we can do so much at such an important moment in the Christian calendar.

In the weeks ahead, as we look beyond Ash Wednesday to Easter, let us draw confidence in our Christian faith. And let us renew our determination to work together in the service of others, today and in the years to come.

So thank you again for coming here and I hope you will carry on and enjoy the rest of the reception.

Press release: Australian wheat 'investment' scam directors reap lengthy disqualifications

The High Court of Justice has made an order for the disqualification of Robert Ross White for 8 years from 15 February 2017. The allegations made out in Court were that he had failed to keep, preserve, or deliver up Agri Firma's records and that he had evaded his responsibilities as a director.

The Secretary of State previously accepted a Disqualification Undertaking from Richard John Lyon Henstock for 9 years, from 19 July 2016. Mr Henstock had not disputed both the above allegations. His avoidance of his duty as a director allowed the company to mislead its investors to believe a legitimate and valuable lease had been purchased for them for farmland in either

Lithuania or Australia, when there is no evidence that any land was purchased in respect of Lithuanian investment and the land purchase in Australia was never completed.

Assurances regarding the Australian wheat investment of 9% farming income and 11-15% capital gain were given, despite professional advice being received that this was unachievable and investor capital being reduced by undisclosed 65% up-front marketing and other fees.

The company was incorporated on 4 July 2011, traded from Bond St, London and went into liquidation on 9 July 2014 with an estimated deficiency of at least £538,667 and AUD\$661,500.

Proceedings are being contested by a third alleged director, with a trial expected in February 2018.

The disqualification prevents Mr White and Mr Henstock from directly or indirectly becoming involved (without the permission of the Court) in the promotion, formation or management of a company for the duration of their disqualification terms.

Commenting on the disqualification, Mark Bruce, Chief Investigator at the Insolvency Service, said:

In this case, the pooling of investors' funds with that from other associated investment vehicles has prevented any ability to trace most of Agri Firma's investment capital through various offshore accounts. Regarding Mr Henstock, even without records it has been possible to shed light on a number of claims made to investors and evidence that these were materially misleading.

Both registered directors have abrogated their duties, facilitating the scam which this investment became. These disqualifications should give a clear message regarding such behaviour.

Notes to editors

Agri Firma Capital Ltd (CR0 No. 07692576) was incorporated on 4 July 2011 and traded from Mayfair House, 124 Bond St, London W1S 1DX.

The Company went into liquidation on 9 July 2014 with an estimated deficiency of at least £538,667 and AUD\$661,500.

Robert Ross White's date of birth is in October 1957 and he resides in Worcester.

The High Court of Justice ordered the disqualification of Robert Ross White for 8 years from 15 February 2017. The allegations made out in Court were that Robert Ross White (Mr White) failed to keep, preserve, or deliver up

Agri Firma Capital Ltd's (Agri Firma's) records. As a consequence, it is not possible to:

- identify all company assets. For example; a loan of AUD\$94,318 was made from Agri Firma to an offshore company on 15 July 2013. Without any company records, it is not possible to test whether the loan was ever repaid
- ascertain the full scale of its liabilities, identify all investors, or trace the disposal of unidentified investor monies
- trace the disposal of estimated investor monies, put aside for product purchase, of at least £126,582.23 and AUD\$93,471.08
- ascertain the causes of its failure

In addition Mr White abrogated his responsibilities as director of Agri Firma Capital Ltd from 2 August 2013 to 9 July 2014, with the result that it was controlled by his co-director, who was not appointed as a director. His co-director was subject to a disqualification under The Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 and did not have leave of the court to act.

Richard John Lyon Henstock's date of birth is in November 1937 and he resides in South Northamptonshire. The Secretary of State accepted a Disqualification Undertaking from Mr Henstock, effective from 19 July 2016, for 9 years. The matters of unfitness, which Mr Henstock did not dispute in the Disqualification Undertaking, were that Richard John Lyon Henstock failed to keep, preserve, or deliver up Agri Firma's records. As a consequence, it is not possible to

- identify all company assets. For example; a loan of AUD\$94,318 was made from Agri Firma to an offshore company on 15 July 2013. Without any company records, it is not possible to test whether the loan was ever repaid
- ascertain the full scale of its liabilities, identify all investors, or trace the disposal of unidentified investor monies
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- ascertain the causes of its failure

In addition Mr Henstock abrogated his responsibilities as director of Agri Firma Capital Limited from 4 July 2011 to 9 July 2014, in this period it:

- was controlled, without the leave of the Court, by an individual subject to a ban, under The Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, from acting directly or indirectly in its management
- misled investors, contributing to their losses estimated at £508,667 and AUD\$661,500. Marketing material, as well as a lease document issued to investors, led them to believe that a legitimate and valuable lease had been purchased for them for farmland in either Lithuania or Australia. However, there is no evidence that any land was purchased in respect of Lithuanian investment and the land purchase in Australia was never completed. The company brochures made assurances of Agri Firma's extensive farming experience and 16% returns received by customer in the previous quarter, when there is no evidence from available records that

it ever purchased any land, upon which it could carry out farming. Regarding the Australian investment, assurances of 9% farming income and 11-15% capital gain were misleading, when investor capital was reduced by 65% up-front marketing and other fees. The proposed agents for the Australian investment had advised the company that the 8-10% envisaged return to investors was achievable. A direct association between investors and a service provider was implied, misleading investors regarding their level of involvement in the investment. Follow-up communications in June 2014 indicated that the project had value and the plantation was progressing. However this was not the case and the land purchase had fallen through.

A disqualification order has the effect that without specific permission of a court, a person with a disqualification cannot:

- act as a director of a company
- take part, directly or indirectly, in the promotion, formation or management of a company or limited liability partnership
- be a receiver of a company's property

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings. Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a [range of other restrictions](#).

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 7674 6910 or 020 7596 6187

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

Press release: Foreign & Commonwealth Office statement on the Tunisia Inquests

We welcome the thorough work by the Coroner and his team for more than a year on this important investigation, resulting in today's conclusions.

The Sousse attack was the largest loss of British life to terrorism since 7/7, and devastated the lives of so many. Our deepest sympathy remains with all those people caught up in this horrific attack and we hope that the Inquest process has been of some help to the families.

Press release: Winners of Highways England Supplier Recognition Awards announced

The combined efforts of Highways England contractors who worked tirelessly to repair and rebuild a storm-damaged road in Cumbria have been honoured at the company's annual Supplier Recognition Scheme awards. Pulling out all the stops, this vital route was repaired, making a real difference to an area where tourism plays a vital part to the local economy.

Kier Highways, and Cubby Construction JV with the local supply chain completed the work three weeks early, under budget and without a single incident. It meant the local community had the A591 back in action in time for the start of the tourist season and Highways England could notch up a 'first' by delivering improvements on a local road network.

The Cumbria nomination was among 130 entries in this year's awards which also recognised companies for achievements in various fields including safety, customer service, sustainability, capability, value and inclusion. The supply chain – ranging from small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to international organisations – carries out around 90 per cent of Highways England's work.

Jim O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of Highways England said:

We need and value the expertise, ambition and innovation our supply chain partners bring, because without them we cannot deliver the £15 billion Government investment.

We have achieved a great deal since April 2015, and there is much more to do. We are responsible for the largest road building programme in a generation, and have thousands of miles of road network that need to be maintained to a high standard. It is imperative that we achieve this while keeping our network open to traffic, and ensuring the safety of our customers and workforce.

That is what our awards are all about, recognising the contribution our supply chain partners make to the important work we do.

Safety, health and wellbeing

Awarded to suppliers who show industry leading commitment to improving organisational, workforce and road user health and safety.

Winner: A-One+ and Postpullers UK Ltd for a collaborative approach to the development of an innovative solution to remove embedded safety barrier posts. The system reduces the safety risks faced by the workforce: requires

only one operator, not two or three; reduces the amount of machinery needed to remove the barrier posts and gets the job done more quickly.

Highly commended: HW Martin (Traffic Management) Ltd; Manchester smart motorways (Balfour Beatty, Carillion, Costain & Bam/Morgan Sindall JV); Carnell Support Services Ltd

Customer Experience

Awarded to suppliers who have demonstrated industry leading commitment to customer service.

Winner: Costain for the work they did to get to engage with communities, stakeholders, road users and community teams working alongside the construction team on the A556 Knutsford to Bowden scheme. The work they did demonstrated a clear understanding of our customer service strategy, and enabled them to build upon the basics to improve customer service. To achieve this, they used a wide variety of communication channels from VMS to social media to communicate with customers, alongside using commercial providers such as TomTom and ABTA.

Their whole ethos was to think about things differently. That pro-active, customer focused, lessons learned approach was what elevated this submission into the winning bid.

Highly commended: Carillion Morgan Sindall JV

Communities

Awarded to suppliers that have engaged with community groups from the outset, understood what really matters to them and identified ways in which they can work differently.

Winner: Carillion Morgan Sindall JV for work on the A1 Leeming to Barton widening and motorway upgrade. They showed a dedication for changing the face of construction by revolutionising their commitment to social responsibility across the industry, by: proactively working with media to talk about the work they do; health-checks for HGV drivers; showcasing archaeological findings and targeting donations that will positively impact on local communities.

Delivering sustainable and environmental solutions

Awarded to suppliers who have integrated environmental, social, economic and management aspects of sustainable development into the delivery of Highways England contracts.

Winner: Interserve Construction for empowering communities through social value mapping. The company worked alongside an environmental regeneration charity, Groundwork, to track their key objectives. This method enabled a better understanding of the key factors impacting communities where Interserve Construction were operating and their influence on employment, job

creation and supply chain spend. This method has ultimately helped Interserve Construction to better identify how they can help Highways England meet their sustainability targets. For example; M3 Black Dam Improvement and M11 Stansted schemes.

Highly commended: Graham Construction

Inclusion

Awarded to suppliers that have created opportunities to bring people into the workplace, developed skills and created an environment where differences are valued and utilised.

Winner: Skanska UK Ltd for their work to initiate and encourage daily conversations with their colleagues, partners, clients and the wider sector about becoming more diverse and inclusive; how together there can be a culture in which everyone feels they can be themselves. They have tracked the impact of this work over the last six years, and have seen an increase in diversity and inclusion engagement scores from 66% to 82%.

Highly commended: VINCI Construction UK Ltd – Taylor Woodrow

Building capacity and capability

Awarded to suppliers that have developed their employees' skills and capabilities through delivery of Highways England contracts.

Winner: HW Martin (Traffic Management) Ltd for their work in building an employment and skills infrastructure. They actively managed the supply chain, bringing on board people from local SMEs, having a commitment to accessible entry level employment (for people from all backgrounds) and offering training opportunities for local people and SMEs – this includes apprenticeships and a self-funding skills development academy.

Highly commended: Costain M1 smart motorways

Managing down cost/improving value

Awarded to suppliers who have demonstrated significant achievement by delivering Highways England contracts in smarter, more efficient ways.

Winner: A-One+ and Urbis Schreder Ltd for taking an existing lighting unit, used on 24 overhead gantries in Yorkshire to display information to road users, and adapting it to meet Highways England specifications. The result was an improved LED lighting unit, which is more visible to road users (especially at night). In addition, by making these changes, the whole life costs of the units was lowered, disruption to road users reduced (the control gear for the units is installed in the hard shoulder, meaning future maintenance can be done from there, without the need for lane closures) and road worker safety is improved (reduces the need for working from height).

Highly commended: Carnell Support Services Ltd

Supply chain management

Awarded to suppliers that demonstrate Highways England's strategic agenda, values and principles through supply chains.

Winner and Chairman's Award: Kier Highways and Cubby Construction JV with local supply chain for the "Reconnecting Cumbria" Project. This saw national, regional and local organisations working together to repair Cumbria's local road network following an unprecedented series of devastating, severe weather events in December 2015. Through collaboratively working with its supply chain, other contractors and stakeholders including Highways England, Cumbria County Council, Lake District National Park and United Utilities, the winning companies enabled Highways England to deliver works on Cumbria's local road network – a first for the government company – three weeks early, under budget and without a single incident.

Winner: Kier Highways for their work with BSI and ToweDuffy in Area 3 to unlock a new certification process which saw the largest number of SMEs achieve the national standard for Collaborative Business relationships (BS11000) as part of a single assessment. Not only did it reduce costs and result in efficiency savings for Highways England, but it has helped promote collaborative working, improved how information is shared and better delivery.

Highly commended: Costain, Aggregate Industries and Walters; Chevron Traffic Management and Kier Highways, HTM, Golden Orb Solutions, Consillium

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: New £192 million A556 set to open after weekend work](#)

Cheshire's brand new A556 dual carriageway is set to open for the first time a week today (6 March) following a second round of weekend junction and carriageway closures to complete the project.

The M56 junctions 7 and 8, M6 junction 19 and the existing A556 will all be closed next weekend as work to open the new £192 million Knutsford to Bowdon

dual carriageway nears completion.

Work during the first of the 3 scheduled weekend closures was completed successfully on Monday morning allowing Highways England to confirm next weekend's arrangements – another full 56 hour weekend closure running from 9pm next Friday night (3 March) and 5am on the following Monday morning (6 March).

Highways England project manager Paul Hampson said:

We made some excellent progress at the weekend and we won't need another full weekend closure until next week – as scheduled. Everything is looking promising for the road to open a week on Monday.

Next weekend's closure will allow the old road to be finally sealed off to through traffic and for the motorway junctions to be tied into the new dual carriageway.

Motorway users will be diverted to alternative junctions to leave or join the M6 or M56:

- drivers on the northbound M6 heading for Manchester and Manchester Airport will need to stay on the M6, join the westbound M56 at Lymm Interchange (M6 junction 20) and then join the eastbound M56 at junction 10 (Stretton)
- drivers on the westbound M56 heading away from Manchester and wanting to join the southbound M6 will also need to travel to junction 10 at Stretton – joining the eastbound M56 from there to travel back to Lymm Interchange and access the southbound M6

Local diversions which will be strictly monitored will also be in place with access to the A50, Chapel Lane and Mereside Road. A one way system, travelling southbound, will be in place at Bucklow Hill to allow access for residents and businesses located between the Bucklow Hill and Mere junctions along Chester Road. Vehicles must use Mereside Road and Chapel Lane to access Chester Road. Traffic marshalls will be at Mere and Bucklow Hill junctions to facilitate the local diversion.

Over the weekend, only the northbound exit slip at junction 19 of the M6 will remain partially open – allowing drivers to access the southbound, local authority section, of the A556 towards Northwich.

Drivers are advised to build in some extra time for the diversions and to check traffic conditions before setting out on journeys. Highways England provides live traffic information [via its website](#), local and national radio travel bulletins, electronic road signs and mobile apps.

Information is also available from Twitter via @highwaysNWEST as well as services in other regions. Providing they can do so safely, road users can also call the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000 to

keep up to date with road conditions.

The new road and the motorway junctions will be closed for finishing works during the project's third and final full weekend of closures between 9pm on Friday 10 March and 5am on Monday 13 March.

Construction of the new A556 link road, between the M56 and the M6, started in November 2014 and is part of a £15 billion government investment in motorways and major A roads by 2021 which is being delivered by Highways England as part of the Northern Powerhouse initiative.

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