

# Rural businesses to benefit from £35m government fund

Rural businesses across the country are set to benefit from a guaranteed £35 million in government funding to create new jobs, boost tourism, and unlock growth in rural areas. This figure could be increased to £50 million if there are enough high-quality applications.

The government's Growth Programme, which opens for expressions of interest on Monday 4 November, provides grants for rural start-ups and businesses to purchase state-of-the-art equipment and machinery to grow their business or open up opportunities for tourism.

The scheme has already granted £99 million to 546 local businesses across England, creating 3,771 new jobs in rural areas.

In Sheffield, the farmers behind the brand Our Cow Molly secured a grant of more than £160,000 to invest in a new processing unit, which allowed them to produce higher quality fresh milk and ice cream – creating six new jobs.

Elsewhere, the North York Moors Railway Trust was awarded a grant to preserve 50 historic train carriages and steam engines, helping to increase visitor numbers, encourage more overnight stays in the local area and create additional jobs in the community.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

Our dedicated fund for rural businesses has created more than 3,700 jobs and supported a diverse group of businesses, tourism operations and start-ups to unlock their full potential.

This next round of funding will help more businesses to grow and local areas to prosper – and I would urge any rural enterprise to look into what this scheme could do for them.

I would also encourage farmers to consider how they might use this funding to branch out and diversify their businesses, making the most of emerging trends and tastes and looking ahead to new opportunities.

For this funding round of the Growth Programme, the threshold for minimum grants has come down from £35,000 to £20,000, meaning that more small or micro-businesses can be eligible for a grant for their projects.

Paul Caldwell, Chief Executive of the Rural Payments Agency, said:

The Growth Programme provides funding to the 98% of the rural

economy in England that isn't directly engaged in farming. From heritage railways to creameries and vineyards, small and micro-businesses have benefited from the investment available under the Growth Programme in recent years.

We are looking to support applications from businesses with ambitious plans to grow their business and provide wider benefits to their local community.

I would urge all interested applicants to submit their expressions of interest as soon as possible to ensure they have plenty of time to complete a full application if their project is assessed to be eligible.

The RDPE Growth Programme handbook is available on GOV.UK and contains information on which projects are deemed eligible for a grant and how to apply.

Interested parties need to send an Expression of Interest form to the Rural Payments Agency, outlining how they meet the criteria for the scheme – from creating new jobs, increasing business turnover and improving productivity.

If the Rural Payments Agency considers the project to be eligible, the applicant will then be invited to submit a full application. The deadline for all Expressions of Interest is Sunday 16 February 2020.

---

## **Government acts to improve road safety by closing mobile phone loophole**

- plans revealed to bring the hand-held mobile phone offence into the 21st century
- updated law will prevent hand-held phone use in any capacity while driving going further to boost road safety and reduce accident rates
- follows government work to improve road safety, including the launch of the Road Safety Action Plan and THINK! campaigns

The government has confirmed it will close a legal loophole which has allowed drivers to escape prosecution for hand-held mobile phone use while behind the wheel.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps today (1 November 2019) announced that he will urgently take forward a review to tighten up the existing law preventing hand-held mobile use while driving.

At present, the law prevents drivers from using a hand-held mobile phone to

call or text. However, people caught filming or taking photos while driving have escaped punishment as lawyers have successfully argued this activity does not fit into the 'interactive communication' currently outlawed by the legislation.

The revised legislation will mean any driver caught texting, taking photos, browsing the internet or scrolling through a playlist while behind the wheel will be prosecuted for using a hand-held mobile phone while driving.

Grant Shapps, Transport Secretary said:

We recognise that staying in touch with the world while travelling is an essential part of modern day life but we are also committed to making our roads safe.

Drivers who use a hand-held mobile phone are hindering their ability to spot hazards and react in time – putting people's lives at risk.

We welcome the Transport Select Committee's report, and share their drive to make our roads even safer which is why this review will look to tighten up the existing law to bring it into the 21st century, preventing reckless driving and reduce accidents on our roads.

It is already a criminal offence to use a phone while driving without a hands-free device. This latest move will see the government go further to ensure the law reflects the use of devices that allow other distracting activities.

The impact of this behaviour is proven – if a driver looks at their phone for just 2 seconds when travelling at 30 miles per hour, whether to reply to a message or send a quick snap, they will travel 100 feet blind, drastically increasing the chance of an accident.

The review will be urgently taken forward with further proposals expected to be in place by next spring, making the offence clearer for drivers and police forces.

Nick Lloyd, Head of Road Safety at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents said:

Drivers who use their phones are up to 4 times more likely to crash. RoSPA highlighted this loophole in the summer and is delighted that such prompt action is being taken to ensure that all hand-held mobile phone use is to be prohibited, making our roads safer for all.

This action comes alongside further measures to tackle phone use while driving, including a review of road traffic policing and

wider traffic enforcement to look at how roads policing currently works, its effectiveness, and where improvements could be made.

While ministers have also announced that they will consider the current penalties in place for hand-held mobile phone use, there are no plans to ban hands-free phone use.

Anthony Bangham, National Police Chiefs Council Lead for Roads Policing, Chief Constable said:

I welcome the government's announcement to review the law in this area.

Technology has moved on since the original offence was introduced and it's important to ensure any distraction to a driver is kept to an absolute minimum to keep all road users as safe as possible.

The government also targets distracted drivers by challenging the attitudes, behaviours and social factors that lead to accidents in its award-winning THINK! campaigns.

These are the latest steps taken by the government to improve road safety following the launch of the [Road Safety Action Plan](#) earlier this year, which set out over 70 measures to reduce the number of people killed and injured on roads around the country.

---

## **Infrastructure revolution to unlock thousands of new homes**

The Chancellor today announced more than £250 million funding for vital infrastructure that will unlock over 20,000 homes nationwide.

This investment, from the Housing Infrastructure Fund, will pay for roads, schools, public transport and utilities in seven places across the Midlands, the East of England and South East. This money will ensure new homes can be built in areas of high demand where people want to live, connecting businesses with their workforce – boosting jobs, growth and living standards.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sajid Javid said:

When I was Housing Secretary I set this fund up to help ensure homes can be built in areas that need it the most, and enable people to live where they want.

I have now launched an infrastructure revolution and this step-change in funding will ensure that all parts of the country benefit as we level-up opportunities.

This £250m will increase the number of houses available to buy and help support people to achieve their dream of home ownership.

The Government is committed to levelling-up communities across the country so that all areas benefit from investment and growth.

Ministers are investing record amounts in roads, rail, housing and broadband to ensure Britain has the modern infrastructure needed to thrive, and allow local economies to flourish via a National Infrastructure Strategy.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

This government is committed to building the houses this country needs, so that more people can realise the dream of owning their own home.

This [£250m] funding will ensure that communities have the right infrastructure to enable new homes to be built, such as road and transport improvements.

### Further information

- Breakdown of funding being announced today:

Project	Funding	Number of homes that it unlocks
'Slyfield Area Regeneration Project' bid from Surrey County Council to support the reallocation of a water treatment facility	£52.3m	1,500 homes
'East of Ipswich Strategic Highway Works' bid from Suffolk County Council to deliver transport infrastructure	£19.8m	2,000 homes
'St George's Barracks' bid from Rutland County Council to deliver a new school and infrastructure	£29.4m	2,245 homes
'A40 Smart Corridor' bid from Oxfordshire County Council	£102m	5,050 homes
'Swale Transport Infrastructure' bid from Kent County Council to deliver road improvements to two junctions of the A249	£38.1m	7,899 homes
'Melton Mowbray Southern Distributor Road' bid from Leicestershire County Council	£14.7m	2,340 homes

- The government has announced record investment in infrastructure, including committing £75m to continue to develop plans for Northern

Powerhouse Rail and pledging to fund the Leeds-Manchester route as the first phase

- The government has also committed £28.8bn to a National Roads Fund to ensure that roads are maintained to the highest standard
- We have also reached in-principle agreement on the Shared Rural Network to radically improve mobile coverage, and committed £5bn to delivering gigabit-capable broadband to ensure nowhere is left behind.

The government has committed, at Autumn Budget 2017, to increase housing supply by the end of this Parliament to its highest level since 1970, on track to reach 300,000 homes a year, on average, by the mid-2020s. Over 222,000 additional homes were delivered in 2017/18 – the highest level in all but one of the last 31 years, and a 53% increase since 2009/10

---

## [Commitment to peace in Kosovo for future generations](#)

Thank you, Mr President.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Special Representative and his team for his statement and for their continued commitment to Kosovo's developments, as laid out in the comprehensive reports on the activities of the UN's mission in Kosovo. And I would also like to thank Deputy Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and Ambassador Vlora Citaku for their intervention this afternoon.

Mr President, we welcome the focus in the report on the government of Kosovo's commitment to respecting human rights, ensuring equal access for minority communities, improving transparency and strengthening the rule of law. We take note of the progress made in this reporting period, including the reopening of the Special Chamber of the Supreme Court, efforts to standardise judicial practice across Kosovo, progress in the prosecution of war crimes, the return of displaced persons and the identification of missing persons, the adoption of child protection legislation and the the first report on respect for human rights.

There remains, however, more to do. We urge Kosovo to redouble its efforts to address the high level of corruption and organised crime and to work to strengthen its judicial system. We welcome the important work of UNMIK and EULEX to this end. As regards to the fight against crime, we agreed it is legitimate and necessary for the Kosovan police to operate across Kosovo, including in the northern municipalities in accordance with the law.

This council should welcome the arrests of individuals suspected of involvement in smuggling and organised crime, both Kosovo-Albanian and Kosovo-Serb, as was the case during the recent Kosovo police operation. But noting the concern expressed by the Special Representative regarding the arrest of two UNMIK officials during this operation, it is also important that international personnel carrying out their duties should be treated in accordance with international law, just as they must adhere to their mission's mandates and codes of conduct. I welcome SRSG Tanin's briefing this afternoon on the outcome of UNMIK's internal view on this incident. We will consider these findings carefully.

Mr President, we welcome the progress made by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office over the last few months. We urge Pristina, Belgrade and the members of this council to cooperate fully in the interest of achieving justice for victims. And we call on both Pristina and Belgrade to press ahead with domestic prosecutions for historic crimes. The interests of all victims and their families must be at the centre of judicial proceedings. Efforts to locate missing persons and the provision of support to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, regardless of their ethnicity.

We particularly welcome the joint declaration of representatives of religious groups in Kosovo in support of survivors of sexual violence. The United Kingdom is committed to supporting victims and preventing sexual violence in all its forms, as shown during Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex's recent visit to Pristina, during which she focused on support for survivors from all communities.

With regard to the Kosovo elections on the 6th of October, we echo the European Union Election Observation Mission's statement. The elections were calm and well administered and the Central Elections Commission worked with dedication, professionalism and transparency, although we continue to be concerned by reports on the level of pre-election intimidation in some Kosovo Serb areas. We have been following the reports of staff suffering ill health at the National Counting Centre. We await the outcome of the investigation. We must not allow this incident to sow suspicion and distrust.

Mr President, Kosovo has voted for change. We call on the party leaders to work diligently to form a new, stable government to tackle the pressing issues facing the country. The UK expects this new government to uphold and strengthen the rule of law, to improve inclusivity in a multi-ethnic state and to commit itself to strengthening regional security.

Dialogue with Belgrade must be a priority. We call on both Belgrade and Pristina to remove obstacles to its resumption. Pristina must remove tariffs and Belgrade must stop its de-recognition campaign. For dialogue to succeed, both sides must refrain from provocative rhetoric and actions. We welcome Kosovo's completion of two more common crossing points, but we regret that the implementation of many other aspects of the Brussels agreements remain unaddressed by both parties. The people of Serbia and Kosovo have much to gain from the resumption of talks and a comprehensive, sustainable, implementable deal to their mutual and lasting benefit.

Mr President, the twentieth anniversary of the NATO intervention fell during this reporting period. This was an important moment for reflection. We remember the victims on all sides of this conflict and remind ourselves of the reasons for this intervention. We renew our commitment to building good, neighbourly relations so that peace can be safeguarded for future generations. The Kosovo of today is almost unrecognisable from the Kosovo media reported on across the world in 1999. We thank the members of this council, UNMIK staff, the European Union, NATO, the OSCE, K4, the Kosovo Special Prosecutor's Office and, most importantly, the government and institutions of Kosovo for their ongoing pursuit of Kosovo's progress and developments.

In closing, Mr President, the UK pays tribute to the work of the special representative and his team and we look forward to continuing to support them in their endeavors.

Thank you very much.

---

## [HMCTS response to Justice Select Committee report on court and tribunal reforms](#)



Responding to the report, Susan Acland-Hood, the CEO of HM Courts & Tribunals Service said:

Improving access to justice is at the heart of our courts and tribunals reform programme.

Change will always challenge the status quo. But by re-designing the justice system around those who use it, we can provide more accessible, comprehensible and user-friendly services.

More than 250,000 people have used our new online services since last year with over 80% satisfied with their experience. We will



continue to prioritise the needs of all users, particularly the most vulnerable, as we progress the programme.

We don't believe the report presents a balanced assessment of reform, but along with colleagues at the Ministry of Justice and the senior judiciary, will take the time to carefully address the committee's findings and respond fully in due course.

## **Supporting guidance:**

We have made reforms to the way in which HMCTS operates including:

- in 2016, the Lord Chancellor and senior judges set out their vision for the £1.2bn HMCTS Reform programme, to modernise the courts and tribunals system and reduce complexity in processes
- four new online services have been delivered to the public covering Divorce, Probate, Civil Money Claims and Social Security Appeals and have been used by over 250,000 people with user satisfaction rates over 80%
- we have begun using the Common Platform in the magistrates' courts, which in time will deliver a single online system enabling the police, the CPS, HMCTS and legal professionals to access and share all relevant information about a case
- we used to reject 40% of paper divorce applications because they were incorrectly filled in. The new online service has received over 65,000 applications and the rejection rate has dropped to under 1%
- two Courts & Tribunal Service Centres (CTSCs) have been opened in Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent with a third due to open in Loughborough in 2020. CTSCs are transforming the way we deliver justices services and manage cases by providing a centralised, national service for all users
- Wi-Fi has been installed in all of our courts and tribunals, and more than 80,000 professionals are accessing Wi-Fi in our courts each week
- we have closed underused, dilapidated court buildings, raising £125m to invest more effectively in improving our justice system
- a new system for summary offences has handled over 68,000 Transport for London and TV Licensing cases, cutting delays and inefficiency.

## **Links**

Published 31 October 2019