

# Press release: Major investigation smashes nationwide prison drone gang

Ringleader Craig Hickinbottom co-ordinated a gang of 10 others from his prison cell to carry out 49 drone flights into a number of establishments, with some flights carrying individual payloads worth as much as £85,000 behind bars.

A meticulous investigation that involved the analysis of drone and mobile phone data of the defendants – alongside the use of covert cameras to capture them piloting drones outside a prison – led to the criminal empire being dismantled.

The 11 gang members have now been handed sentences totalling over 32 years by a judge at Birmingham Crown Court after either admitting or being found guilty of a range of offences.

Prisons around the West Midlands were repeatedly targeted as part of the drugs conspiracy but analysis of drones used by the gang identified drops at prisons across the country and in Scotland between July 2015 and November 2016.

Stolen cars were used to transport contraband as close to prisons as possible before members of the gang loaded up drones and flew them to specific cell windows for distribution on the inside.

Prisons Minister Sam Gyimah said:

It is clear this gang ran a nationwide drugs operation, using sophisticated technology to transport substances into our prisons and heap misery onto the offenders they had in their clutches.

We have invested significant resources into boosting our prison intelligence units and I am delighted that their meticulous work – operating jointly with colleagues from law enforcement agencies – is having such a positive impact.

Criminals who involve themselves in this type of behaviour should be left in no doubt that we are continuously developing our means of investigation and will stop at nothing to bring them to justice. This case is clear evidence of the desire our staff have to win the war on drugs in prisons.

DC Andy Farmer, Investigating Officer from West Mercia Police, said:

This was a painstaking and complicated investigation undertaken by a small, dedicated team of detectives from West Mercia Police, assisted by the Regional Organised Crime Unit.

The prison system should be a safe environment for people to live and work in and a place of reform; this type of activity jeopardises the good order of the prisons and leads to difficult working environments for staff.

The defendants in this case are responsible for large scale supply of prohibited items into prisons which includes drugs, weapons, phones and tools which could be used to facilitate an escape or to conceal illicit items. The sentences reflect the serious nature of the offending by this group and should serve as a deterrent for anyone considering embarking on a similar venture.

The joint HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) and West Mercia police investigation started in July 2015, when police officers saw a package being thrown from a car towards a gate at the back of HMP Hewell in Worcestershire.

Over the next 16 months, prison and police officers intercepted 15 drone drops linked to the gang from prisons across the West Midlands, including HMP Hewell, HMP Featherstone in Wolverhampton, HMP Birmingham and HMP Stoke Heath in Market Drayton.

Some of the drones seized were analysed by Operation Trenton – the team of investigators that was by the Ministry of Justice earlier this year in response to the growing threat to prison security posed by drones. The intelligence gleaned was then passed to police.

It emerged during the course of the investigation that Craig Hickinbottom was the ringleader behind the criminal enterprise, using mobile phones to direct operations from his prison cell. Mervyn Foster was his key contact on the outside, involving himself in all of the individual drone flights.

Meanwhile, evidence revealed that Hickinbottom's partner, Lisa Hodgetts, managed the money on behalf of the gang and ensured everyone was paid. She has accepted that she laundered in the region of £125,000 for the gang.

Police discovered at one point that she paid Foster by giving him a static caravan and plot in North Wales and had told her local authority that she wanted to buy her £72,000 council-owned property outright, despite earning a modest income as a beautician.

As police built their case against the group, covert camera footage from the perimeter of one prison helped to identify a number of the gang members operating drones outside and analysis of mobile phone data helped to provide evidence of a link between those on the outside and offenders in prison.

Hickinbottom admitted four counts of conspiring to bring contraband into prison, and conspiracy to supply psychoactive substances.

Foster, who was described as the conspiracy's "prime organiser on the outside", worked with John Quinn, who admitted three counts of conspiracy and another of conspiring to supply psychoactive substances.

Foster had others assist with packaging and transport: Terry Leach, Ashley Rollinson, Yvonne Hay, 41, and her boyfriend Francis Ward. Foster obtained some of the drugs he sent in from Artaf Hussain, who pleaded guilty to being concerned with the supply of cocaine.

On the inside, Hickinbottom was assisted with distribution in jail by cousin and co-conspirator John Hickinbottom. His cellmate Sanjay Patel used one of the illegal mobile phones which had been flown in – an offence he admitted.

The total drugs seized from those drones had a potential prison value of £370,000. There were a further 34 flights to prisons across the United Kingdom, including flights to HMP Perth in Scotland and HMP Doncaster.

The contents of the packages from those drones are unknown. Based on the value of the items seized, police estimated that the prison value of items from the remaining flights would be in the region £1.2million.

### **Background on counter-drone work**

- Last year, a team of investigators – known as Operation Trenton – was formed in response to the growing threat to prison security posed by drones, which have been used as a method of smuggling drugs and mobile phones into establishments.
- Working alongside national law enforcement agencies and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the 40-strong team inspects drones that have been recovered from prisons in a bid to identify and track down those involved in smuggling contraband.
- The efforts are helping to effectively tackle the use of drones technology. So far, 17 people have been convicted for using drones to get contraband into prisons. They are serving sentences of more than 50 years in prison as a result of their illegal actions.
- The specialist team of officers contain staff from the police and HMPPS. They bring together intelligence from across prisons and the police to identify lines of inquiry, which will then be passed to local forces and organised crime officers.
- The Government is taking unprecedented action to tackle the supply and use of drugs, including an innovative drug testing programme, the training of over 300 specialist drug dogs, and upgrades to CCTV cameras across the estate.
- We have also invested heavily in modern technology, including the roll-out of body worn cameras and £2m on handheld and portable mobile phone detectors to help clamp down on drug-dealing behind bars.
- A £3million intelligence hub has also been established to tackle organised gang activity behind bars.
- We are also investing over £14million annually to build the HM Prisons

and Probation Service Serious Organised Crime Unit and enhance our intelligence and search capability, allowing us to better gather, interrogate and use intelligence to disrupt criminal activity at national, regional and prison level.

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## **Press release: Regulators approve new nuclear power station design**

The UK Advanced Boiling Water Reactor (UK ABWR), designed by Hitachi-GE, is suitable for construction in the UK, the regulators confirmed today following completion of an in-depth assessment of the nuclear reactor design.

The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales, the regulators who undertake the Generic Design Assessment of new reactor designs, are satisfied that this reactor meets regulatory expectations on safety, security and environmental protection at this stage of the regulatory process.

ONR has issued a Design Acceptance Confirmation (DAC) and the environment agencies have issued a Statement of Design Acceptability (SoDA) to Hitachi-GE. Horizon Nuclear Power is proposing to build and operate two of these reactors in Wylfa Newydd on Anglesey and Oldbury-on-Severn near Thornbury in South Gloucestershire.

Dr Jo Nettleton, Deputy Director for Radioactive Substances and Installations Regulation at the Environment Agency said:

We've concluded that the generic design of the UK ABWR should be capable of meeting the high standards of environment protection and waste management that we require in the UK. We only came to this conclusion after carefully reviewing the submissions provided by Hitachi-GE and their responses to the questions and issues we raised. We've also carefully considered all the comments we received from people during our public consultation and we're grateful for all who took part for taking time to respond.

Mark Foy, ONR's Chief Nuclear Inspector said:

The completion of the generic design assessment of the UK ABWR is a significant step in our regulation of the overall process to construct this type of reactor in the UK, ensuring that the generic design meets the highest standards of safety that we expect in this country. We're already working on our assessment of Horizon's site licence application and on the development of the site specific

safety case to progress, in due course, the construction and operation of these reactors at Wylfa Newydd.

Tim Jones, Natural Resources Wales's Executive Director for North and Mid Wales, said:

It is our job to ensure that any new nuclear power station will meet high standards of environmental protection and waste management, ensuring that our communities and environment are kept safe.

Following a public consultation on our initial findings, we have concluded that the UK ABWR design is acceptable. We will now work on the detailed assessments of the permits, licences and consents that Horizon Nuclear Power will need to have in place to build Wylfa Newydd.

The regulators have documented progress of each stage of their assessment through a series of [reports](#).

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. The regulators began assessment of Hitachi-GE's UK ABWR in 2013.
2. Generic Design Assessment (GDA) is a joint process between the Office for Nuclear (ONR) Regulation, Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales (NRW).
3. The Office for Nuclear Regulation is the nuclear safety and security regulator for the UK.
4. The [Environment Agency](#) and [Natural Resources Wales](#) are the environmental regulators of nuclear sites in England and Wales respectively.
5. Information on Generic Design Assessment on the joint regulators' [website](#)
6. All assessment reports, decision documents and a copy of the Design Acceptance Confirmation (DAC) and Statement of Design Acceptability (SoDA) are available online. [Office for Nuclear Regulation Environment Agency Natural Resources Wales](#)
7. The DAC and SoDA are valid for a period of ten years from issue and can be extended subject to review and agreement of the regulators. The Statement of Design Acceptability (SoDA) is being issued jointly by the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales. GDA applies to both England and Wales.
8. The issuing of a DAC and SoDA does not mean that construction of a new nuclear power station can start. In addition to GDA the operator (Horizon Nuclear Power in this case) must obtain a nuclear site licence and relevant consents from ONR, environmental permits from the Environment Agency or Natural Resources Wales and planning permission

(Development Consent Order) from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's Secretary of State.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-operators-of-new-nuclear-power-stations>

9. Horizon Nuclear Power submitted an application for a Nuclear Site Licence to build and construct a UK ABWR power station at Wylfa Newydd to ONR in March 2017. ONR is in the process of assessing the application.
  10. Horizon Nuclear Power submitted an [application to NRW for a Radioactive Substances](#) Regulation environmental permit in November 2017.
  11. For more information, please contact the ONR press office on [onr@onr.gov.uk](mailto:onr@onr.gov.uk) or 020 3028 0505.
  12. For the Environment Agency media team contact [newsdesk@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@environment-agency.gov.uk) or 020 3025 5623
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## [Speech: Justine Greening: our ambition is to leave no community behind](#)

Thank you for that introduction and thank you to Reform, KPMG and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for bringing us all together today. I'm so pleased to have this chance to speak to all of you.

I'm going to talk about three things:

- Firstly, the problem: why Britain has never cracked social mobility;
- Secondly, solutions: my ambitions for helping everyone to become the best version of themselves through their education; and
- Thirdly, everyone's problem needs everyone's solution – if we're going to achieve anything then social mobility, equality of opportunity needs to be a common ambition – with schools, colleges, universities, but also businesses, civil society, local communities all playing their part.

### **The problem**

So, firstly, setting out the problem. And I think of all the speeches I've made, this might be the most personal.

Because social mobility has been such an important part of my own life, I didn't think I'd get to where I am now. Looking ahead as a child, I'm not sure I could ever have guessed I'd be doing what I'm doing.

I went back to my old school last month, Oakwood Comprehensive in Rotherham. We all start somewhere and that school was my start.

I spoke to some of the children who are there now, and met some of the teachers who taught me. It was a fantastic visit. And as I looked at the children there now, you can't help ask a simple question: who could they be.

And that questions matters because too often in this country the answer to that question – for any child – is too much about where they happen to start.

The reality is that in modern Britain where you start still too often decides where you finish.

This is a defining challenge for us as a nation. We have talent spread evenly across this great country – the problem is that opportunity isn't.

And for many people it's a whole lifespan of missed opportunities. If you start school behind on your vocabulary and language skills, often you don't catch up.

By the time you're 11 you're on a different path to your better off classmates, by the time you're 16 and leaving school – you're in a totally different place.

And once you enter the workforce, you may well have fallen too far behind to even think about competing for the most rewarding jobs. And, worst of all it's always been like that for some people and some places in Britain.

But it doesn't have to be.

And if we want to move things on from purely discussing the problem to articulating a real solution then we have to start by asking why haven't we cracked it already? Why has social mobility been static for so long?

And I think it comes down to a number of things:

- A simplistic search for the silver bullet policy, a magic wand that grants equality of opportunity at a stroke.
- The fact that so many worthy social mobility initiatives have been driven by government alone. And that has meant chopping and changing on policy – with no longevity to any approach.
- There's been insufficient involvement from businesses, employers – who are, in any country, the opportunity makers.
- Too often improving social mobility has been done to local communities rather than with them. We've had one size fits all policies, when what works in Derby is often, generally, going to be different to what works in Scarborough.

- And for an individual, government's attempts to improve their prospects have tended to come at sporadic moments in their life – sometimes when it's already too late.

## A new approach

So how do we move towards a solution?

I'm an optimist – I was optimistic about what I could achieve in my life and I'm optimistic about us changing the status quo in Britain today, and making sure that every child can go as far as their talent and hard work takes them.

To achieve this, I believe we need a new approach that's:

- Comprehensive – not just one silver bullet, but a portfolio, a strategy.
- An approach that works across someone's whole life.
- A national strategy – but tailored for different local areas.
- And a common mission that is shared not just by government but also by business, civil society and communities.

And today, I'm launching a [plan](#) which puts improving social mobility at the heart of all our education policy, for the first time. Schools and teachers are at the centre of this but they can't tackle this on their own.

This will be driven by a Department for Education that finally now has all the right pieces under the same roof: from early years, to schools, to universities, to technical education, to apprenticeships, to adult learning.

And our plan doesn't shy away from the complexities of tackling social mobility but it does put a structure, an architecture to it, to enable us to work in a more coordinated way.

So how does it fit together?

This plan is about education but it sits alongside wider Government efforts to create jobs, invest in housing and our new [Industrial Strategy](#).

Crucially, the overarching ambition of this plan is to leave no community behind. We will relentlessly target effort and resources at the parts of our country where people have the toughest challenges and fewest opportunities.

I'm talking about those places where disadvantage builds and then accumulates. Where the schools and colleges struggle. Teachers aren't attracted to work there, businesses don't grow and invest there because there isn't a ready-made skilled workforce on their doorstep.



And so talented young people, and these communities produce every bit as much talent as many others, have to leave to find opportunity elsewhere and the place stays as it was and local businesses still don't do any better.

We need to reverse these negative cycles and that starts with education.

Right now we are now investing £41 billion in schools and that's due to go up. Resourcing does matter. If we could buy our way out of this problem we'd have done it by now – but I'm determined to be more strategic about that investment and make sure our resources are targeted at those communities and schools that need them most.

So we'll be targeting over £800 million of our current investment towards the more disadvantaged people and places.

I'm clear that this is the right thing to do – because everyone deserves a fair shot in life.

But unlocking Britain's hidden talent is also the smart thing if we want to build a Britain that's fit for the future. It's an economic imperative as well as a social one.

Because if we could even just improve the attainment of disadvantaged children across the whole country to the same level as disadvantaged children in London, this alone would provide a boost of more than £20 billion to our economy.

And, ultimately, there is no question that if we're going to make the most of ourselves as a country, and make Brexit a success then we need to make sure every person and every place is fulfilling its potential.

### **Lifestage ambitions**

So all that means that no community left behind is our first overarching ambition. We will also take a whole life approach with four core life stage ambitions for overcoming disadvantage at every stage of someone's life.

These ambitions are logical, they may seem obvious – but in the past we haven't structured our work together like this. And if we achieve them, we can change this country for the better.

So, Ambition One starts at the beginning with the early years, improving early language and literacy so all children have the best start to their education, and can get on the right path, literally from day one.

And the research is clear – falling behind early on has a profound impact. Some children simply have less vocabulary, less reading ability, poorer language skills, so they can't understand as much when they get to school and they can't communicate as well as they need to.

And, actually, it is incredibly difficult for them to ever to catch up. If you're not at the expected standard in language aged 5 then you're eleven times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths at age 11.

That is why I am putting early language and literacy, closing the word gap, right at the top of my to do list.

We're introducing new English hubs that will train specialist teachers in literacy and closing the word gap – these specialists will focus on the schools that need this most, in the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

Today I'm also announcing £50 million investment for nurseries in schools, which will be targeted at disadvantaged children so that the children who can benefit the most from high quality provision have more high quality places available.

We are also investing £20 million in the development of early years professionals.

And we will mobilise others who are in a position to help. We will train Health Visitors who routinely check on a child's health at the age of two, on how to identify children who are already getting left behind on language skills – and how to support the parents who, overwhelmingly, want to do their best for their children but need to know better how.

Ambition Two and we move into school years, a more established part of the strategy. Closing the attainment gap, and making sure every child is at a good school where they can achieve their true potential.

We start here from a strong base – the reforms we've made over the last seven years have transformed much of the education system.

And standards are rising:

- There are an 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools since 2010.
- And thanks to our increased emphasis on phonics pupils in English schools are rising up the international league table in reading and literacy.

But it's not everywhere and it's not for every child.

In eleven London boroughs all children attend a good or outstanding secondary school; but only one in five pupils in Blackpool and Knowsley do.

This is a systemic problem and to change things we need to shift our focus. By investing in the teaching, the professionals on the frontline – developing the home grown teaching talent that's already there and is the key to school improvement. And tomorrow I'll be launching a consultation on strengthening Qualified Teacher Status.

And we will make schools in the more challenged areas real career hotspots by investing in the development of the teachers who go to build a career there.

And we'll do more to make sure our strongest tools for school improvement are targeted towards the areas that need the most.

At the same time, we're working on a new targeted approach for the most vulnerable children – Looked After Children, Children in Need, Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. It's not acceptable that these children's life chances are so much worse than their peers – they deserve a fair chance, like everyone else.

And for those bright children from less well off backgrounds who need a bit of extra help to fulfil their potential, I'm announcing a £23 million Future Talent programme, something I know the Sutton Trust has called for, for some time.

The attainment gap is closing but with our Ambition Two we need to work out how to close it once and for all.

Ambition Three is improving post 16 choices so all young people have the world class skills and qualifications to get on.

A key area here is technical education. We know that for too long, too many students going to Further Education colleges to gain a vocational or technical qualification have had to settle for second best.

They've had to navigate between thousands and thousands of possible qualifications – many of which hold little value to employers and don't actually lead to the job they were hoping for.

And this, disproportionately, affects the most left behind places and people. Just under 75% of young people in Barnsley do Further Education – whereas in Kensington it's 20%.

So in the greatest shake-up of Technical Education in 70 years we are introducing new T-Levels for 16 to 19 year olds, a proper, high quality alternative to A-Levels focused on routes to skilled employment. These will be backed by £500 million investment per year, and goes alongside our wider investment in apprenticeships and new Institutes of Technology.

And this is fundamental: unless we can strengthen post 16 education routes and make them gold standard for all our young people we won't crack social mobility and we won't make the most of our investment in those young people whilst they're in schools and early years.

In summary – no more compromising on quality in Technical Education.

Ambition Four is making sure everyone can make smart career choices and progress in their careers so when young people do make the leap from education to the job market, it's about more than just going into 'work'. It's about a career, not just a job.

In the past, this has been an area where we've essentially let people walk down a career of blind alleys – and not just at age 16 or 18. We haven't offered enough guidance or support to people in work either.

And so too many people don't get on the career path they'd like or that would suit or stretch them, because they lack the networks, the smart advice, the life skills and the confidence that employers look for.

So instead of careers with progression, these people end up trapped in low paying jobs.

We all lose from this.

Because Britain needs more skilled workers. We need more trained engineers, more modern construction workers, more coders.

But you can't aim for an opportunity if you don't know it exists – and that's why we need businesses to show people the path forward into careers that they never thought were for people like them.

Alongside our Ambition 3, work on technical education, it's why for the first time my department is building an unprecedented partnership with businesses up and down the country,

It's why we held our first ever [Skills Summit](#) with major employers at the DfE two weeks ago.

And I believe business is up for this. In fact, we've got leading businesses and employers who are Skills Partners – committed to work with us.

And we will work together to create millions of career encounters for students, thousands of technical work placements, 3 million apprenticeships, many more in work retraining opportunities.

To achieve all this we must inspire, incentivise and also insist businesses of all sizes to reach out to the places that need the most support, following the example of businesses like KPMG who are second in the Social Mobility Employers Index.

All of this is a journey – but we have already made a start.

### **A common ambition**

This leads me into my final point. This needs to be for everyone, everywhere, delivered by everybody.

This plan I'm launching today is a call to arms to join our national mission: to make a better offer to everyone growing up in this country,

To make life about what you can be – not where or how you start. For everyone to have the chance to become the best version of themselves.

I've said that social mobility initiatives in the past have had no longevity – that's why this time we want to focus on building lasting success through partnership.

And so I'm asking employers, education professionals, communities, voluntary

groups and many more to come together and join a united effort to put social mobility at the heart of your work.

This partnership is particularly vital at local level, and I believe we can already point to places where working in Partnership works.

I've established local [Opportunity Areas](#) in 12 of the places where poor social mobility is most entrenched, bringing together local schools, colleges, local businesses and local authorities to work with us and identify some of the key problems in their areas; be that the lack of good careers advice or too many children starting school behind on their vocabulary.

And they're coming up with practical, concrete solutions and priorities. This is what we need – last mile politics, with national policy, but tailored at a local level and making sure it works in practice.

And it's great to have some of the chairs and board members from Opportunity Areas here today. Thank you for everything you are already doing.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we all know what the prize is here. It's every young person with opportunity on their doorstep – so they don't have to move away from their roots to find it.

It's communities feeling they have an actual stake in this country, an equal shot – no longer having to watch their best talent get up and go.

It's businesses having the skilled workers they need to create prosperity and compete. It's our economy finally operating to its true potential – a post-Brexit Britain that leads the world in skills, productivity and prosperity.

This is about lifting all of us up, smoothing the path for everyone – it's all of us doing better. I believe, together, we can do something transformative.

I've said social mobility has been an important part of my own life. And one of the key things I've learnt is that optimism matters. A belief you can get to where you want to be.

I have optimism now that as a country we can crack this and get to where we need to be. It will take collective determination, persistence, single-mindedness, sheer bloody-mindedness. And an unbreakable conviction that things can change.

That's how I think about this, that's how I feel about this. If you care too, if you want equality of opportunity, now is the moment and you need to get involved.

I want everyone to get on board. But for those who want to stay focused on talking about the problem rather than helping with solutions, I ask just one thing – don't complain change isn't happening fast enough.

I want the widest coalition possible, one that goes way beyond government. It's decision time if you want to play your part.

No country has got this right yet – but Britain can lead the way.

This should be what we stand for in the 21st century. A country like no other that has unlocked the talents of everyone for the benefit of all. It is possible, and it is now time to make it a reality.

Thank you.

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## [News story: Launch of new East West Railway Company puts UK's own 'Silicon Valley' rail link on fast track](#)

Bletchley Viaduct 1973 – not used since the early 1990s, the viaduct will be reopened. [ukrailpix.co.uk](http://ukrailpix.co.uk)

A direct rail link between the university cities of Oxford and Cambridge took a step closer today (14 December 2017), as Transport Secretary Chris Grayling officially launched the [East West Railway Company](#).

The Transport Secretary launched the new company, which will oversee the restoration of the link between the two academic powerhouses, nearly 50 years to the day since the closure of the old Varsity Line at the historic Second World War site of Bletchley Park.

The Transport Secretary also visited nearby Bletchley Station and Bletchley Viaduct, which are being re-opened as part of the new route. Bletchley Park, so vital in the UK's Second World War effort, was a key stop on the old Varsity Line and is at the heart of the East West Rail line as it sits halfway between Oxford and Cambridge.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

We are making the biggest investment in the railways since Victorian times to meet the growing demand for rail travel, while also boosting business and increasing productivity.

East West Rail is the perfect example of how we can revitalise the railways, grow the network and unlock jobs and housing growth. And Bletchley Park – the home of World War II codebreakers – is the perfect location to mark the historic occasion, because the line will be key to the development of this corridor as a world-class

centre for innovation, technology and high-skilled jobs.

East West Rail will be one of the country's most strategically important rail projects, with its direct link through the corridor dubbed the UK's own 'Silicon Valley' when it is completed in the mid-2020s.

The new line will also create a direct link between East Anglia and central and southern England, delivering benefits for passengers and businesses regional and nationally by unlocking additional housing and economic growth.

Mr Grayling met with Rob Brighthouse, interim chair of the East West Railway Company, regional council leaders and Milton Keynes South MP Iain Stewart for the launch.

He also met with Cyril Bleasdale who worked on the original Varsity Line construction in the 1960s and helped to build the Bletchley Viaduct.

Mr Bleasdale said:

I remember when we had our own little ceremony where I dug the first spade for it in 1962, so I'm delighted that the viaduct could be part of this historic line from east to west.

Rob Brighthouse, interim chair of the company, said:

This railway has huge potential to spread prosperity all the way along the line, making life better for those who live and work here.

That's why it's so important to deliver it quickly and cost effectively; and that's what the East West Railway Company has been set up to do. We are working very closely with local representatives, to make sure we build a railway that works for the passengers and the communities it will serve.

Councillor Ian Bates, on behalf of the East West Rail Consortium, said:

We welcome the formal launch of the East West Railway Company and its real emphasis on accelerating delivery of the Oxford to Cambridge link in support of economic growth. The consortium has played a pivotal role getting us to this point, and we have pledged to continue working in partnership to ensure there are trains on tracks at the earliest opportunity.

When the line opens, it will have interchange stations with 4 main railway lines radiating out of London, but it will run under or over each, minimising any risk of delay. The aim is to build a route that allows future upgrades to

be incorporated with as little disruption as possible.

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## **Statement to Parliament: Grenfell Tower fire 6 months on**

Today marks 6 months since the Grenfell Tower tragedy and my thoughts very much remain with those affected.

A national memorial service will take place at St Paul's Cathedral today to mark 6 months since the Grenfell Tower tragedy which the Prime Minister, ministerial colleagues and I will attend. This will provide the opportunity for us to remember those who tragically lost their lives, comfort the bereaved, and for all of us to reflect on how, together, we move forward.

I am determined those who lost their lives, their families and friends, the survivors and the community will not be forgotten and are supported in getting the help they need and deserve.

On 11 December I wrote to all colleagues with an update on some of the work being undertaken to support those affected and I plan, with Mr Speaker's permission to make an Oral Statement to the House before recess.

Above all, I am determined that the lessons of the Grenfell fire are learnt and never forgotten so that a tragedy like this can never, ever happen again.