

## £11.6 million for Swindon as government funds vital new road

- multimillion-pound investment will help fund new road linking New Eastern Villages development with existing local road network
- planned works include new roundabout, signalised junction and footway – all of which will ease congestion and improve local journey times
- funding reiterates government commitment to levelling up transport infrastructure across the country as we build back better

Swindon will benefit from a multimillion-pound road scheme to provide fast journeys between the town and the planned New Eastern Villages development, Transport Minister Baroness Vere announced today (15 May 2021).

The project – supported by £11.6 million of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) and led by Swindon Borough Council – will include a new access road between the A419 Commonhead roundabout and the southern end of the new development, enabling the construction of 4,150 new homes.

A footway and shared-use path will run either side of the new road, ensuring ease of access for pedestrians and cyclists, while a new signalised junction at Commonhead and mini roundabout at Wanborough village will help manage traffic flow in the area.

The total cost of the scheme is £30.5 million, with DfT contributing £11.6 million and Homes England providing £18.9 million. Works are due to be completed by autumn 2022.

Transport Minister Baroness Vere said:

Our funding towards this new road scheme will help make the New Eastern Villages site a reality, providing a huge boost to Swindon's economy by supporting thousands of new homes and jobs.

This new scheme has been planned with everyone in mind and will ensure fast and smooth journeys for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians across the area.

As we build back better from the pandemic, we will continue to invest in our infrastructure to boost connections, drive regeneration and level up regions across the UK.

As part of the scheme, Wanborough will see the mini-roundabout realigned on Rotten Row, to encourage motorists to reduce their speed, as well as more pedestrian crossings and parking spaces. Better signage will also be put in place to help ensure heavy goods vehicles avoid travelling through the village.

The full New Eastern Villages development programme is set to bring 8,650 new homes to Swindon, along with 40 hectares of employment land, new shopping facilities and supporting services, as well as green corridors to enable healthy lifestyles and more active travel.

Councillor Gary Sumner, Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport and Planning, said:

The Southern Connector Road is an essential part of the infrastructure required to deliver the New Eastern Villages and I'm extremely pleased that we have managed to secure complete funding from the Department for Transport and Homes England for this really important link road.

We are investing £72.5 million into the road network around the New Eastern Villages, most of which has been secured from government. This investment in Swindon's future is a great vote of confidence for our town.

Sophie White, Homes England's Director of Infrastructure Grants, said:

We are committed to working with local authority partners to help them meet their housing needs by supporting the delivery of new infrastructure. This funding unlocks critical housing sites by providing road, pedestrian and cycle access routes for the New Eastern Villages communities that will be built in coming years. It supports the Council's vision by providing much-needed infrastructure improvements in Swindon.

[The Housing Infrastructure Fund](#) is helping to meet the government's target of 300,000 new homes across England by providing local authorities with grant funding for new infrastructure, to unlock new homes in areas that need them the most.

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## **Councils given further £200 million in next stage of successful rough sleeping programme**

- Councils to receive £203 million Rough Sleeping Initiative funding to help people off the streets – an 81% increase from the £112 million provided last year
- Funding will provide 14,500 bed spaces and 2,700 support staff

- Analysis shows programme has reduced rough sleeping by 32%
- Part of £750 million pledged to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping this year

More rough sleepers are set to be helped off the streets and into safe accommodation thanks to a further £203 million funding, Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP announced today (15 May 2021).

The funding will be allocated to councils across England and will support vital projects such as shelters, specialist mental health or addiction services, and targeted support to help rough sleepers off the streets for good.

It will be used by councils, charities and other local groups to fund up to 14,500 bed spaces and 2,700 support staff across England.

This funding is one part of an unprecedented £750 million investment this year to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping – part of the government’s drive to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.

Analysis of the Rough Sleeping Initiative – now in its fourth year – shows that the programme has reduced rough sleeping by almost a third compared to areas which have not taken part in the programme.

Building on the past success of the programme, funding has almost doubled this year and will provide additional support to help those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of people sleeping rough across England has fallen for the third year in a row, and by 37% in the last year alone.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

At the beginning of the pandemic we took swift and decisive action to bring rough sleepers in from the streets and settled them into longer-term accommodation in record numbers. That work continues, the results are clear and are a huge credit to all involved.

Ending rough sleeping is a personal mission for the Prime Minister and me – and we have made huge progress since he came into No.10, reducing rough sleeping by 43%.

To build on this progress, we are making the biggest ever investment under the Rough Sleeping Initiative to provide vital services to those who need it most, as part of our drive to end rough sleeping for good.

Minister for Rough Sleeping, Eddie Hughes MP said:

Across the country, there are staff and volunteers working

tirelessly to make a real difference to the lives of rough sleepers.

From providing bed spaces and night shelters, to funding dedicated support staff and medical treatment, today's funding will mean that crucial work to help people off the streets can continue.

This is part of an unprecedented £750 million of government investment this year to help us reach our goal of ending rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.

The Rough Sleeping Initiative was launched in 2018 to help local areas provide tailored services to those living on the streets. With today's investment, the government has now allocated almost £400 million to 281 councils through the programme – which supports coordinated projects across areas including housing, mental health, addiction support and domestic abuse.

Examples of the work that the government is funding at a local level include:

- Rough sleepers in Birmingham will be offered a Befriending service to help them to stay in accommodation and manage the transition into housing. The service will help rough sleepers with cooking, shopping, utility management, and access to benefits.
- North Norfolk will work with Your Own Place to provide tenancy skills training and money management support to rough sleepers moving off the streets into rental accommodation.
- In North Lincolnshire, an Education and Training coordinator will build a Skills and Wellbeing pathway for rough sleepers to allow people to build up their confidence, learn new skills such as IT, literacy and CV writing, and is critical to improving confidence and wellbeing.
- In Newham an Assessment Centre will provide an immediate offer of accommodation away from the streets where rough sleepers can have their needs quickly assessed to minimise time on the streets

Funding from previous years of the programme is already having a transformational effect at a local level with local authorities reporting significant falls in the number of rough sleepers.

Today's announcement comes after the government made an additional [£212 million investment in new, secure, long-term accommodation for rough sleepers earlier this year](#), with 6,000 homes pledged by the end of this Parliament.

This is alongside the government's unprecedented Everyone In initiative, launched by the Housing Secretary at the start of the pandemic to protect rough sleepers, which has so far supported 37,000 people, with more than

26,000 already moved on to longer-term accommodation.

Examples of the work funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative to date include:

- In Reading, funding from RSI has been used to establish a housing led service to provide a range of accommodation options for people. The council has also used MHCLG funding to provide an out of hours tenancy support service which is available when many other services are not.
- Basingstoke and Deane Council used government funding to work with a team of psychologists at Southampton University to provide bespoke support to rough sleepers, as well as support for staff. Over the last 3 months the council has consistently reported zero rough sleepers.
- Mansfield District Council, alongside Action Housing, have set up an allotment project for residents currently living in temporary accommodation. In recent months, support workers have purchased outdoor clothing and equipment for residents to help them plant what they want.
- Plymouth City Council set up the Plymouth Alliance – bringing together service providers to deliver a rapid and flexible response to rough sleeping. With social distancing meaning that existing shared accommodation was not suitable, the council worked with a local Housing Association to create innovative “amazing grace spaces” – self-contained pods providing emergency accommodation for those in need.

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## [Surge testing to be deployed in Hackney](#)

Press release

Everyone over the age of 16 who lives or works in targeted areas within Shoreditch and Dalston should take a COVID-19 PCR test.



Everyone over the age of 16 who lives or works in targeted areas within Shoreditch and Dalston should take a COVID-19 PCR test.

Working in partnership with the local authority, NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing and genomic sequencing in targeted areas of Hackney. It follows the identification of confirmed cases of the variant first identified in India (B.1.617.2) and the variant first identified in South Africa (B.1.351).

The confirmed cases have self-isolated and their contacts are being identified.

Everyone who lives or works in the targeted areas is strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 PCR test, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

Enhanced contact tracing will be used for individuals testing positive with a variant of concern (VOC). This is where contact tracers look back over an extended period to determine the route of transmission.

By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent for genomic sequencing at specialist laboratories, helping us to identify VOC cases and their spread.

If you have symptoms you should [book a free test online](#) or by phone so you can be tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent to your home. If you have no symptoms, you should visit the [Hackney Council website](#) for more information.

People in this area should continue using twice-weekly rapid testing alongside the PCR test as part of surge testing.

Published 14 May 2021

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## [Surge testing to be deployed in](#)

# Blackburn with Darwen

Press release

Working in partnership with the local authority, NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing and genomic sequencing in targeted areas within the Blackburn area.



Everyone who lives, works or studies in targeted areas within Shear Brow and Corporation Park, Billinge and Beardwood, and Bastwell and Daisyfield, Blackburn with Darwen should take a COVID-19 PCR test.

Working in partnership with the local authority, NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing and genomic sequencing in targeted areas within the Blackburn area. It follows the identification of confirmed cases of the variant first identified in India (B.1.617.2).

The confirmed cases have self-isolated and their contacts are being identified.

Everyone who lives, works or studies in the targeted areas is strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 PCR test, whether they are showing symptoms or not, from Tuesday 18 May.

Enhanced contact tracing will be used for individuals testing positive with a variant of concern (VOC). This is where contact tracers look back over an extended period to determine the route of transmission.

By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent for genomic sequencing at specialist laboratories, helping us to identify VOC cases and their spread.

If you have symptoms you should [book a free test online](#) or by phone so you can be tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent to your home. If you have no symptoms, you should visit the [Blackburn with Darwen council website](#) for more information.

People in this area should continue using twice-weekly rapid testing alongside the PCR test as part of surge testing.

## Most vulnerable offered second dose of COVID-19 vaccine earlier to help protect against variants

- Second COVID-19 vaccine dose to be offered to the most vulnerable earlier to help protect against variants
- Strengthened surge testing, genome sequencing and enhanced contact tracing measures deployed across the North West to control spread
- Military providing planning and logistical support

The country's most vulnerable are to be offered their second COVID-19 vaccine earlier, the government has announced, as part of plans to tackle rising cases of the B.1.617.2 variant of concern first identified in India.

Appointments for a second dose of a vaccine will be brought forward from 12 to 8 weeks for the remaining people in the top 9 priority groups who have yet to receive their second dose. This is to ensure people across the UK have the strongest possible protection from the virus at an earlier opportunity.

The move follows updated advice from the independent experts at the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which has considered the latest available evidence on the variant and has recommended reducing the dosing interval to help protect the nation from the variant.

People should continue to attend their second dose appointments and nobody needs to contact the NHS. The NHS will let those who should bring their appointment forward know, when they are able to do so. Those aged under 50 will continue to get their first dose, with their second dose at 12 weeks, as has been the deployment strategy so far.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

It's vital we do everything we can and use every resource we have to ensure we continue to keep the nation safe. We have implemented measures at record pace to get on top of this new variant and control the spread.

Everyone has a role to play in this effort – accept the invite to get a jab when it comes, and if you live in one of the areas where we've introduced surge testing, get your free PCR test. Let's work to fight this together.



The move will be supported by targeted new activity to accelerate vaccine uptake amongst eligible cohorts in Bolton and Blackburn with Darwen.

In Bolton, this includes:

- increasing the delivery of vaccines through the 3 existing local vaccination sites and existing vaccine bus
- establishing an additional vaccine bus that will also target walk-in appointments
- NHS professionals supporting rapid deployment of additional workforce, with St John's Ambulance providing volunteers on a roving basis to target local businesses reaching out to those unable to take time off work
- extending pop-up sites, including at a community wedding venue
- expanding community engagement plans with supporting communications and direct engagement with local communities

In Blackburn with Darwen, this includes:

- extending opening hours at Burnley vaccination centre
- extending capacity at Blackburn Crypt vaccination centre, with plans being developed to take Pfizer vaccine
- increasing community pharmacy provision
- expanding a proactive communications campaign engaging local communities
- developing additional pop-up sites as needed

While there is no evidence to show this variant has a greater impact on severity of disease or evades the vaccine, the speed of growth is of note and the government is working quickly to ensure the appropriate action is being taken.

The latest data on the B.1.617.2 variant, published by PHE last night, shows the number of cases across the UK has risen from 520 last week to 1,313 cases this week. Most cases are in the North West of England, with some in London.

Minister for COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Nadhim Zahawi said:

Our vaccines are preventing tens of thousands of hospitalisations and deaths due to COVID-19 and there's early evidence to show the vaccine prevents serious illness from the variants in circulation too.

This move is a belt-and-braces approach to ensure as many people as possible have the full protection a vaccine has to offer – make sure to book in your jab when contacted.

Working in partnership with local authorities, strengthened local operations within BL3 postcodes in Bolton and other parts of England are helping to control the spread of COVID-19 variants. Genomic sequencing and enhanced contact tracing is deployed across the North West, with additional surge testing in locations where variants of concern have been identified to

rapidly break chains of transmission.

Currently, postcodes in Bolton, Sefton (Formby), Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire have additional surge testing in place for residents to contain cases of the B.1.617.2 variant. Testing will be ramped up this weekend in these areas to meet local needs, which will include additional mobile testing units, door-to-door testing and extra PCR test kits for community testing sites.

In Bolton, a new 100-strong Surge Rapid Response Team has been on-site all week. This team is supporting the local authority through door-to-door testing and encouraging residents to take a PCR test. The military, led by Colonel Russell Miller, is supporting efforts from a planning and logistics perspective.

£2 million funding has also been agreed for a pilot across the Greater Manchester region, testing ways to encourage people to comply with self-isolation rules if they test positive. The pilot will include 'support and engagement teams' who will work with households within 24 hours of a positive test to develop a personalised plan for their self-isolation.

This could include practical and emotional support for anyone who needs it, including children and vulnerable adults, or alternative accommodation where required. There will also be enhanced, targeted support and engagement for cultural communities. The pilot is expected to reach 13,000 people over 12 weeks.

Additional measures will be implemented in areas where clusters of cases have been detected to stop further spread. These include:

- enhanced testing and contact tracing, including enhanced community and surge testing in areas defined by the local authorities and regional teams
- increased genome sequencing of positive cases
- increased community engagement, including ensuring that messages are accessible in languages that are used by communities
- working closely with communities and community leaders to ensure that individuals are supported to test and self-isolate
- encouraging uptake for the age and risk groups currently prioritised for vaccination

The Department of Health and Social Care has also confirmed that surge testing is being deployed in Hackney where cases of the variant have been detected.

The government and its scientific experts are monitoring the evolving situation and rates of variants closely, and will not hesitate to take additional action as necessary.

The government continues to work closely with pharmaceutical companies to develop new vaccines specifically for the different variants.

[Latest data on the B.1.617.2 variant of concern](#)