

£93 million for road upgrades as Transport Secretary pledges to build back better across the country

- vital road upgrades announced in North Yorkshire, Hampshire and the Midlands
- new and improved transport links will boost connections between key economic hubs across the country while making journeys safer and more reliable for motorists
- funding reaffirms government promise to level up transport infrastructure and build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, improving access to jobs and opportunities

As part of the government's commitment to fuel the economic recovery from coronavirus (COVID-19), the Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has today (30 January 2021) pledged £93 million for major road upgrades across the country.

The [Northern Powerhouse](#) is set to receive over half of the funding, with up to £56 million for a dramatic overhaul of the Kex Gill section of the A59 in North Yorkshire. This will significantly improve connectivity between the historic northern towns of Harrogate and Skipton. The proposed new road will divert traffic away from the landslip-prone Kex Gill part of the route, helping to remove traffic from nearby villages and offering more reliable journeys to thousands of people in the region every day.

The West Midlands will benefit from a £24 million investment to reduce congestion at Birchley Island, situated at the intersection of the M5, A4123 and A4034 – which is expected to boost employment, improve air quality and increase the region's manufacturing output. The proposed scheme will widen the existing carriageway on the roundabout and introduce additional lanes, all of which will improve connectivity between the Midlands and the national motorway network. Pedestrians and cyclists will also see improved facilities for greener travel at the intersection.

Elsewhere, Hampshire is in line for £13 million worth of crucial upgrades to the Redbridge Causeway bridges over the River Test, which carry roughly 60,000 vehicles a day. The bridges provide important access for local businesses and hauliers to the Port of Southampton, and link the New Forest waterside area to Southampton. Today's funding follows ministers' agreement to speed up delivery of the proposed maintenance work, which will ensure journeys in the region remain safe and reliable for tens of thousands of road users while more disruptive works – hampering people's ability to use the vital route – aren't needed in the future.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, said:

I am delighted to announce this significant funding package, which

will ensure millions of people can continue to travel easily and safely. It's further proof of this government delivering on its promise to level up the country – putting transport at the heart of our efforts to build back better from COVID-19.

The projects will help people access work and education, as well as ensuring vital connectivity for local businesses.

While everyone will see the benefits of these schemes in time, for now, it's important to remember to only travel for the permitted reasons while we continue to prioritise protecting public health and preventing the spread of the virus. Through staying at home, you can help stop the virus and save lives.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay said:

Upgrading the country's roads doesn't just help drivers – it'll mean more jobs, safer journeys and more reliable access to things like education and work.

This government is pressing ahead with our commitment to level up the country – even through this pandemic – ensuring that everyone has equal opportunity to get on in life regardless of where they live.

The total cost of the 3 schemes is expected to reach £107 million, with local councils providing the remainder of the funding following the Department for Transport's £93 million investment – pending the completion of all legal processes.

All new developments must meet local standards of beauty, quality and design under new rules

- Communities to be at the heart of plans for well-designed neighbourhoods, to help us Build Back Better
- Every council to create their own local design code so new developments can reflect what local communities truly want

- New 'Office for Place' to be set up, to help communities turn these designs into a local standard for all new developments
- More funding to help communities nominate local historic buildings for listing
- Proposals mean local communities will have the power to decide what buildings in their areas should look like, to help the country Build Back Better

Local communities will be at the heart of plans to make sure that new developments in their area are beautiful and well-designed, under proposals outlined by Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP today (30 January 2021).

In response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission report, the government is today:

- Proposing [changes to the National Planning Policy Framework](#) to place greater emphasis on beauty and place-making, and to ensure that all new streets are lined with trees.
- Publishing a [draft national design code](#) that provides a checklist of design principles to consider for new developments, such as street character, building type, façade, and the requirements that address wellbeing and environmental impact, which councils can use as a foundation for their own local design codes.
- Encouraging all councils to publish their unique design code, so residents have a real say in the design of new developments in their area.
- Creating an 'Office for Place' within the next year, which will support local communities to turn their designs into the standard for all new buildings in their area.
- Opening a new Community Housing Fund to support community-based organisations to bring forward local housebuilding projects for the £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme, backed by £4 million of support for local plan.
- And doubling the available funding for areas under the "local heritage listing – monuments men" campaign, with up to £1.5 million now available for communities to nominate local heritage sites including historical

buildings or modern architecture, art and memorials for inclusion in their council's local heritage list.

Taken together, these measures will help the country to Build Back Better and ensure that current and new residents alike will benefit from beautiful homes in well-designed neighbourhoods as we recover from this pandemic.

Greater concentration will now be placed on the quality, design and the environment in planning than ever before, with the local community fully involved in how they want new developments to look and feel. For example, the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework will set an expectation that good quality design will be approved while poor quality will be rejected, and includes a commitment to ensure that all streets are lined with trees.

The measures mean the word "beauty" will be specifically included in planning rules for the first time since the system was created in 1947 – going back to a previous time when there was a greater emphasis on whether a building was considered attractive to local people.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

We should aspire to pass on our heritage to our successors, not depleted but enhanced. In order to do that, we need to bring about a profound and lasting change in the buildings that we build, which is one of the reasons we are placing a greater emphasis on locally popular design, quality and access to nature, through our national planning policies and introducing the National Model Design Codes.

These will enable local people to set the rules for what developments in their area should look like, ensuring that they reflect and enhance their surroundings and preserve our local character and identity.

Instead of developers forcing plans on locals, they will need to adapt to proposals from local people, ensuring that current and new residents alike will benefit from beautiful homes in well-designed neighbourhoods.

The government has published a [new National Model Design Code](#) that outlines the design standards new developments are expected to meet. This provides a checklist that will guide local councils to create their own, unique, local design code, centred on genuine community involvement so residents have a real say in the design of new developments, embracing the history, culture and heritage of their local area.

It is the government's ambition that every council will produce a local design code and guide, to set expectations for beauty and well-designed homes and places in their local area and to give a simple process to local

communities so they can have their say.

Nicholas Boys Smith, Chair of the Design Body Steering Group, said:

There is no fundamental reason that prevents the creation of streets and squares, homes as places where we can lead happy, healthy, and connected lives. In these places we can know more of our neighbours and be more joyful as we go about our daily lives. As a society we have not done this, and we are paying the consequences.

I am delighted that the government is implementing so many of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission's findings and would like to thank them for their work to undertake this. I am honoured to be asked to chair the transition board of the Interim Office for Place and look forward to our work to help deliver new places and manage existing places to be beautiful, popular, healthy and sustainable.

Our ultimate purpose will be to make it easier for neighbourhood communities to ask for what they find beautiful and to refuse what they find ugly.

Victoria Hills, chief executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute said:

As a member of the government's Design Body Steering Group, I welcome MHCLG's commitment to good quality design. The RTPI has long called for design to be an integral part of the planning process. A survey in 2020 revealed that 88% of our members wanted greater powers to reject poor design and lacked the capacity and resources to do so.

I am therefore delighted that the government has listened and pledged to not only strengthen the National Planning Policy Framework to empower local planning authorities to prioritise design and drive up quality, but has also committed to inject much-needed funding in this area.

I am also pleased that communities will be at the heart of this process. It has never been more important, in the wake of the pandemic, that communities have a say on how their local area looks. Planners and the planning system must play an active role in driving up design quality in all areas of England and we look forward to making an ongoing contribution to this work in advance of the forthcoming Planning Bill.

The government is also putting support in place for councils and communities to help them set expectations of design quality in their area. This includes

the creation of an 'Office for Place' within the next year which will pioneer design and beauty within the planning system. The new organisation will draw on Britain's world-class design expertise to support communities to turn their visions of beautiful design into local standards that all new buildings will be required to meet.

An interim Office for Place will be established in the department immediately with a transition board chaired by Nicholas Boys Smith, tasked with considering what form the organisation should take, informed by responses to the planning reform consultation.

This team will this year be piloting the National Model Design Code with 20 communities and empowering local authorities to demand beauty, design quality and place-making, through training on the principles outlined in the National Model Design Code.

[Expressions of interest](#) are now open for the first 10 councils to sign up, with these to receive a share of an initial £500,000. The proposals are now out for consultation for a period of 8 weeks.

The government is also relaunching the Community Housing Fund, making £4 million available to help Community Land Trusts (CLTs) bid for funds to support them to prepare bids for the £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme. This programme is the largest investment in affordable housing in a decade and will provide up to 180,000 new homes across the country, should economic conditions allow.

This will help to diversify the homebuilding sector, improving design, sustainability and build quality by developing modern methods of construction.

The government is also encouraging communities to nominate historic buildings and other heritage assets such as memorials and plaques for their council's local heritage list – helping to protect the historic buildings and heritage truly valued in their area.

Following an overwhelmingly positive response to the expressions of interest launched in October 2020, funding has been doubled – to £1.5 million – allowing 22 areas to now be involved in the pilot, instead of the 10 originally announced.

This follows the appointment of Charles O'Brien as the government's Listing Heritage Adviser to help conserve some of England's historic buildings as part of the most ambitious local heritage campaign for 40 years. This is the first time such a post has been created since the 1980s and has echoes of the famous Monuments Men who battled to save historic buildings and artefacts from bulldozers during the Second World War.

Together, these new proposals will make sure that local residents are at the heart of new developments in their community, with beauty, wellbeing and a communal spirit at its centre as we Build Back Better.

The government has also confirmed that £2.2 billion of new loan finance

announced in the Spending Review to support housebuilders across the country will be provided this year.

This includes £150 million over 4 years to support a new 'Help to Buy' scheme for self and custom builders.

This is alongside nearly £20 billion in multi-year capital investment to underpin the government's long-term housing strategy, including a National Home Building Fund, with initial funding of £7.1 billion over the next 4 years to unlock up to 860,000 homes.

The 190-page '[Living with Beauty](#)' report published in January 2020 proposed a new development and planning framework, with 3 principle goals – to ask for beauty, refuse ugliness and promote stewardship.

It contains 45 policy propositions which recommend how central and local government, the development industry, and the wider public can seek to ensure that new development is of high-quality design and is carried out with greater community consent.

Recommendations from the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report that government will be taking forward include:

- making beauty and placemaking a strategic policy
- putting an emphasis on approving good design as well as refusing poor quality schemes
- asking local planning authorities to produce their own design codes
- asking for new streets to be tree-lined
- improving biodiversity and access to nature through design

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[UK commits to maintain funding share of Caribbean Special Development](#)

During a pledging conference on 29th January, the UK committed to maintain its share of funding to the Caribbean Development Bank's Special Development Fund, pledging up to £21m over the next four years to continue supporting

life changing projects in the Caribbean.

The Special Development Fund provides loans and grants to support projects in the most vulnerable countries in the region to tackle poverty, inequality and global challenges such as climate change and access to quality education.

For example, in Haiti, the Caribbean Development Bank has worked alongside the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank to improve primary school outcomes. The provision of tuition waivers, which allow students between 6 and 12 years old to access primary education, have supported over 260,000 children to complete their primary education.

The fund is replenished every four years and the UK's pledge cements its position as one of its largest donors.

Countries that will continue to benefit from the fund include Haiti, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname.

This commitment follows the announcement of £4.5 million additional funding from the UK Government to the Special Development Fund in September 2020 to support countries in the region with their COVID-19 recovery.

The pledged funding will help Caribbean countries better cope with the COVID-19 crisis, help mitigate the wider social and economic impacts, increase funding to tackle climate change, strengthen resilience to disasters, and protect the most vulnerable.

HMCTS online event, 21 January 2021: Court safety for legal professionals

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1. 18 February 2021

updated questions and answers document.

2. 9 February 2021

Updated the questions and answer document

3. 5 February 2021

Operational questions and answer document updated.

4. 29 January 2021

Questions and answers published.

5. 22 January 2021

First published.

[Coronavirus testing facility opens at Royal Mint](#)

A new walk-through coronavirus testing facility has opened for people with symptoms to book appointments at the Royal Mint's Visitor Centre Car Park as part of the UK Government's drive to continue to improve the accessibility of coronavirus testing for local communities.

Testing at the new site, in Llantrisant, Rhondda Cynon Taf, started on Thursday 28 January with appointments made available each day.

The site is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history which has the capacity to process more than 700,000 tests a day and includes more than 800 sites across the UK. In Wales, this includes 10 drive-through sites, 20 walk through sites, 22 mobile units, plus the Newport Lighthouse Lab which is working round the clock to process samples.

In March, prior to the setting up of the new testing centre in its car park, the Royal Mint transformed its visitor centre into an emergency production line – making 1.9 million medical visors for the NHS.

Before the new testing facility opened on Thursday afternoon, Welsh Secretary Simon Hart visited the site to thank staff and to learn about how UK Government testing facilities are rolled out at speed in communities.

Welsh Secretary Simon Hart said:

The network of testing centres set up across the length and breadth of Wales by the UK Government and its partners is truly impressive.

It was fantastic to see the work that goes into setting up these facilities at speed and the dedication of the people who operate them.

Along with the rollout of vaccines, easily accessible testing is vital as we continue to combat the virus. Walk-through centres,

like the one in Llantrisant, are crucial in this effort.

Testing at the new Llantrisant site is only available for those with coronavirus symptoms – a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste. Anyone with one or more of these symptoms should book a test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119.

The testing centre is being operated in partnership with Mitie and will offer self-administered tests.

Simon Venn, Mitie Chief Government & Strategy Officer, said:

Our priority during the pandemic is to support efforts to fight COVID-19 and help keep the country running. Testing is a critical part of the UK's strategy to combat coronavirus and we're proud to support the UK Government with this vital task.

A big thank you to all the NHS staff, Mitie employees and other frontline heroes in Llantrisant, who are working tirelessly to keep us all safe.