

All ranks common room opens at RAD Benson

The exciting new £400,000 facility will provide a relaxed environment where personnel and families can purchase refreshments, meals and snacks. Located in the Junior Ranks Mess building at the heart of the domestic site and managed by Sodexo, it will significantly enhance the current provision.

The Station's vision was for a relaxing, welcoming all-ranks facility that would reduce isolation and provide flexibility in catering for personnel on the busy operational unit. With support from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), particularly the commercial and finance teams, that vision is now a reality.

Working closely together, DIO, Sodexo and the Station agreed plans, coordinated fixtures and fittings and delivered the innovative facility. Despite the added complications of lockdown, it progressed quickly and was opened within 9 months of approval. Funding for the project was from both public and non-public funds, including a grant of £150,000 from the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Andy Honnor, DIO's Regional Head for the South East said:

This project is the result of a good relationship with RAF Benson and their request for a facility which would enhance the lived experience of their personnel. We were able to adapt plans used for a similar project elsewhere to create a much-improved social space, tailored to the needs of RAF Benson personnel, where they can relax, eat, drink and meet friends. We hope they enjoy the improvements we've made.

The counter in The Common Room. Crown Copyright/RAF Benson 2020.

Group Captain Adam Wardrope, Station Commander of RAF Benson said:

This new Common Room is a fantastic facility and it will make a huge difference to the whole force here. It's been a real team effort to keep driving forward with this project, despite all the challenges that lockdown posed, and we really appreciate how hard DIO and Sodexo have worked to help make our vision a reality.

Paul Anstey, CEO Government & Agencies, Sodexo UK & Ireland said:

The approach focuses on the wellbeing of serving members of the

military and their families, helping to relieve isolation and boredom. Working in collaboration with the DIO and the team on-site has given us an opportunity to create an environment for military personnel to relax in, that's aligned with the latest high-street dining trends and where everyone is welcome.

The facility was officially opened on 11 September 2020 by the RAF Chief of Staff for Personnel, Air Vice-Marshal Maria Byford, and the Controller of the RAF Benevolent Fund, Air Vice-Marshal (Retired) Chris Elliot.

Real milestones in £5.2 million environment improvements

The company, which runs the country's motorways and major A roads, signed off the five-year programme of biodiversity, landscaping and heritage works a few weeks ago by finishing work in a lay-by along the westbound A66 right on the ancient border between Cumbria and Durham.

In a real hands-across-the-Pennines moment, the work has transformed the rather non-descript resting area near Stainmore into a visitor stop-off in its own right, complete with renovated historic marker stone and four new display boards chronicling both the human and natural history of the area.

New information board chronicling the history of the border area has transformed this layby along the A66 near Stainmore

Highways England project manager Dion Auriac said:

Our motorways and major A roads are the arteries of the economy – keeping businesses, commuters, tourists and goods and services on the move. However, we're determined to minimise the impact of our roads on the environment and enhance their surroundings where possible.

At Stainmore we've improved the experience for drivers taking a quick break and better acknowledged the significance of this gateway location – and it's just one of dozens of improvements we have or will be delivering across Cumbria and North Lancashire in a 10-year period.

Work at the layby, in the North Pennines area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), is part of a wider package of projects from a special ring-fenced

'designated fund' for environmental improvements in the Government's road investment strategy (RIS) which began a second five-year programme in April.

The same fund has helped Highways England support the high profile Get Cumbria Buzzing campaign to breathe new life into roadside verges as well as a host of other initiatives across three biodiversity, landscaping and heritage strands. Over the past five years the work has included:

- The biodiversity work helping transform roadside verges and boost pollinator habitats through better stewardship and native species planting – the programme including supporting Cumbria Wildlife Trust's Get Cumbria Buzzing initiative along the A595 and A66; a species-rich grassland project along the M6 from Preston up to the border with Scotland; and working with partners in the A590 Morecambe Bay nature improvement area (NIA) to help enhance and restore 13.5 hectares of roadside vegetation with insect, butterfly and reptile habitats benefiting as much as bees.

An investment in biodiversity along the region's major A roads and motorways is helping to boost native plant and wildlife.

- Work to improve cultural heritage along the A66 including enhancing the environment around local landmarks like the 17th century octagonal sandstone Countess Pillar near Penrith and the iron age Castle How Hillfort on the western shore of Bassenthwaite – as well as replacing a missing 19th century milestone near Whinfell Park and restoring a second historic – and heritage listed – milestone near Crackenthorpe Hall.

A missing 19th century milestone near Whinfell Park has been replaced with a faithful replica where it stood in the verge along the eastbound A66 east of Penrith

- Landscaping to help enhance Cumbria's tourism 'offer' including the work at Stainmore layby and another A66 layby at Troutbeck west of the M6 at the gateway to the Lake District National Park and world heritage site. Views from the layby open towards the Lakeland high fells and a general layby enhancement and biodiversity improvement project has included cleaning and tidying up the layby and verge, wildflower seeding and planting of heather and bilberry as well as planting birch, holly, hazel and elm trees.

The completion of the environmental projects in the North West is being celebrated as Highways England announced plans to pump £936 million into its designated funds programme over the next five years between 2020 and 2025. The money will support work – often delivered in locally based partnerships and driven by local people's priorities – to improve the environment along roads, give a better deal for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders, tackle air and noise pollution and look at innovative ways of delivering a better strategic road network for everyone.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Nearly 80,000 workers used flexible furlough in July in Scotland

- 78,400 Scottish workers got back to work part-time in July according to new figures
- Claims in Scotland for the Self Employment Income Support Scheme reach £318 million
- Number of UK workers in retail on furlough halved from the start of the pandemic from 1.85m to 789,000

Nearly 80,000 workers in Scotland returned to their jobs part-time in the first month flexible furlough was introduced, statistics published today show.

Flexible furlough began on the 1st July to give businesses the flexibility to bring employees back part-time, whilst the government still pays 80% of wages for the hours not worked.

78,400 workers went back to offices, shops, restaurants and factories to work on a part-time basis.

Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

These figures show the success of our furlough scheme- making sure people's jobs are there for them to return to.

That so many businesses have been able to get back to trading, and bring their staff back to the workplace is a testament to the impact the scheme has had.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

These figures show that people in Scotland are coming off full-time furlough and getting back into work.

Our jobs schemes have supported people while they were unable to work, kept them connected to their employer, and are now helping them get back to work – flexibly where that is appropriate.

The UK Government is currently supporting nearly half a million jobs in Scotland, down from a high of more than 930,000 at the end of July. That is really good news, as it means that people are getting back to work.

At the height of the pandemic, 1.85million employments in the UK retail and wholesale sector were furloughed, but today's figures show that number dropped to 789,000 by the end of July with more than a million people off furlough.

Today's news comes as 9.6 million jobs have been supported through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

This support for furloughed workers and businesses will continue through the £9 billion Job Retention Bonus and other interventions in the Chancellor's Plan for Jobs – including the £2bn Kickstart scheme.

[Outdoor use of metaldehyde to be banned to protect wildlife](#)

Press release

Restrictions on the use of metaldehyde



The outdoor use of metaldehyde, a pesticide used to control slugs on farms and in gardens, is set to be banned in Great Britain from the end of March 2022 in order to better protect wildlife and the environment, farming Minister Victoria Prentis announced today.

The decision takes into account advice from the UK Expert Committee on

Pesticides (ECP) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) about the risks that metaldehyde poses to birds and mammals.

Metaldehyde will be phased out by 31 March 2022 to give growers and gardeners appropriate time to switch to alternative slug control measures. It will be legal to sell metaldehyde products until 31 March 2021 with use of the products then allowed for a further 12 months until 31 March 2022. Small quantities of product for gardens should not be disposed of at home and can be disposed of through local authority waste facilities.

While slugs can cause significant damage to farmers' crops and gardeners' plants, pesticides containing ferric phosphate can provide effective control without carrying the same risks to wildlife as metaldehyde slug pellets.

Alternative methods of pest control also include cultural techniques like planting slug resistant crop varieties, selectively timing irrigation and harvest and sowing seeds more deeply into the soil.

"The scientific evidence is clear – the risks metaldehyde poses to the environment and to wildlife are too great.

"The government is committed to building back greener from Coronavirus and the restrictions on the use of metaldehyde are another step towards building a cleaner and greener country for the next generation."

Decisions on the use of pesticides are based on careful scientific assessment of the risks in order to ensure they will not harm people or pose unacceptable risks to the environment.

The government is committed to leaving the environment in a better state under the ambitious [25 Year Environment Plan](#) and the forthcoming [Environment Bill](#) will put the environment at the centre of policy making to ensure we have a cleaner, greener and more resilient country for the next generation.

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[UK Government Minister visits Inverness coronavirus testing site](#)

News story

The drive-through site in Inverness is part of UK Government investment throughout Scotland to boost coronavirus testing capacity



UK Government Minister David Duguid has today [18 September 2020] visited the Inverness drive-through coronavirus testing site, located at UHI Inverness campus.

The site is one of six drive-through testing sites across Scotland funded by the UK Government. Mr Duguid visited the facilities and thanked the dedicated team who are running the site.

Following the visit Minister Duguid said:

Today was a fantastic opportunity to see how the site in Inverness works. It allows people living in the area to get tested quickly.

I was delighted to meet some of the inspirational staff who are working round the clock to protect people in Inverness and prevent the spread of coronavirus. This facility is crucial for containing and managing outbreaks at a local level.

I would like to thank the Inverness team for their contribution to our fight against coronavirus.

The site is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. In Scotland this includes six drive-through sites, the Lighthouse Lab in Glasgow, 22 Mobile Testing Units and now two walk-through sites – all funded by the UK Government. More walk-through sites are expected to open across Scotland in the coming weeks.

This is just one part of the UK Government support for people in Scotland throughout the pandemic. In Scotland, the UK Government has protected more than 930,000 jobs and granted thousands of businesses loans, airlifted critically ill patients from remote communities, helped convert temporary hospitals and procured millions of pieces of PPE. It is also providing an extra £6.5 billion for the Scottish devolved administration.

Everyone over the age of five with coronavirus symptoms, however mild, can get a free swab test that takes less than a minute. Tests should be booked or ordered as soon as symptoms begin via the [NHS Inform website](#) or by calling 119 and you can expect your result the next day.

Testing is available for everyone, with additional support for vulnerable

groups and people with disabilities.

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