# UK government cancels A1 widening after £68m spent, leaving families devastated



In an emotional saga that encapsulates the struggles faced by families caught in the crosshairs of infrastructural ambitions, the UK government has officially cancelled plans to widen a section of the A1 in Northumberland. Initially set in motion by a government announcement in 2014, the nearly decade-long project saw National Highways spending over £68 million to facilitate what was then touted as a necessary upgrade for the region. The abrupt decision came in October 2024, just two months after a development consent order was granted, leading affected families to express despair at the loss of both their homes and their dreams.

Among those severely impacted are Melanie and Julian Wensby-Scott, who were forced to uproot their lives from Northgate House, their cherished home near Morpeth. With heavy hearts, they moved to Cumbria, a significant distance from their established life and community. Reflecting on their plight, Melanie recounted the moment National Highways contractors arrived as they packed up their belongings, saying, "I honestly felt like we were being evicted." What began as hopeful plans for renovations in 2009 turned into a distressing ordeal as government plans rendered their property obsolete.

Martin Beal, who had been with his family farm for generations, echoed similar sentiments of anguish following the forced sale of Charlton Mires. The farmhouse, a cherished family home since 1904, remains empty since 2022, its future uncertain. Unbeknownst to them, the cost incurred by National Highways is not just financial; it also embodies the emotional toll and memories tied to these homes. "I felt like I'd let my family down somehow because I couldn't save our home," Beal admitted sorrowfully. The ill-fated project saw resources consumed—around £4 million was expended on land acquisition alone—while local community ties disintegrated for those displaced.

The cancellation of the A1 upgrade was framed by the government as a necessary measure in light of fiscal constraints, labelled as "unfunded and unaffordable" by Chancellor Rachel Reeves. This decision, while financially motivated, has ignited backlash from local officials and campaigners who had long argued for the project's significance in enhancing both economic prospects and road safety in the region. As a result, the very fabric of communities remains frayed, leaving many wondering about the long-term implications of such abrupt policy shifts.

Only recently, National Highways expressed an intention to manage the properties that have become liabilities due to the project's cancellation. Their plans, while vaguely promising, have not provided comfort to families like the Beals and the Wensby-Scotts, who seek more than just asset management; they crave resolution to their personal tragedies. As it stands, under the Crichel Down rules, the families are entitled to reclaim their properties. Yet, the harsh reality is that returning to homes that have fallen into disrepair is not a prospect they are willing to entertain.

Concerns have also been raised regarding the rising financial burden on the taxpayer, with maintenance costs escalating by nearly £30,000 a month for properties left to fall apart. Land agent Louis Fell highlighted the absurdity of assets "just sitting here rotting," suggesting that refurbishment and subsequent housing solutions could be a much more constructive use of the funds.

The saga illustrates not merely a local conflict over property but a broader commentary on the fraying relationship between government entities and the communities they serve. While financial management was cited as the impetus for cancelling the A1 scheme, the emotional and psychological costs borne by families remain incalculable. As the dust settles, questions linger: what lessons will be learned, and how can infrastructure planning be improved to prevent such heartbreak in the future?

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yw15g0r05o)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cewxv7rdk8yo)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.theplanner.co.uk/2024/11/04/reeves-cancels-development-consent-order-a1-scheme), [[6]](https://www.northumberlandgazette.co.uk/news/politics/government-pulls-plug-on-plans-to-dual-13-miles-of-the-a1-in-northumberland-4846436), [[7]](https://ngmw.co.uk/2024/11/01/a1-upgrade-scheme-in-northumberland-cancelled-in-new-budget/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cewxv7rdk8yo), [[6]](https://www.northumberlandgazette.co.uk/news/politics/government-pulls-plug-on-plans-to-dual-13-miles-of-the-a1-in-northumberland-4846436)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.northumberlandgazette.co.uk/news/politics/government-pulls-plug-on-plans-to-dual-13-miles-of-the-a1-in-northumberland-4846436), [[7]](https://ngmw.co.uk/2024/11/01/a1-upgrade-scheme-in-northumberland-cancelled-in-new-budget/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo> - In October 2024, the UK government cancelled a project to widen part of the A1 in Northumberland, despite National Highways spending over £4 million on acquiring properties and land for the scheme. Affected families, including the Wensby-Scotts, expressed distress over their homes being left vacant and deteriorating. The Wensby-Scotts had to relocate to Cumbria, facing emotional and financial challenges. The cancellation led to properties being unoccupied and deteriorating, causing further distress to the former owners.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cewxv7rdk8yo> - Martin Beal, a farmer from Northumberland, felt abandoned after his family was forced to move from their farmhouse at Charlton Mires in 2022 for the A1 dualling scheme. Despite the project's cancellation, Beal continued to pay nearly £1,000 monthly for a property he no longer occupied. National Highways stated they were in the final stages of approving the relevant agreements, but Beal remained liable for bills and awaited the agreed compensation.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yw15g0r05o> - The cost of the A1 dualling project in Northumberland rose to £68.4 million before its cancellation by the Labour government. The project aimed to upgrade a 13-mile section of the A1 between Morpeth and Ellingham. Expenditures included £4 million on property purchases, £15.8 million on preliminary design, and £31.6 million on construction preparation. The Department for Transport cited financial challenges in deeming the scheme 'unfunded and unaffordable'.
5. <https://www.theplanner.co.uk/2024/11/04/reeves-cancels-development-consent-order-a1-scheme> - Chancellor Rachel Reeves cancelled the A1 dualling project in Northumberland, which had secured a development consent order in May 2024. The scheme aimed to upgrade eight miles of carriageway between Morpeth and Felton and construct a dual carriageway bypassing the A1 between Priests Bridge and Burgham Park. The government deemed the project 'unfunded and unaffordable', leading to its cancellation despite previous approvals.
6. <https://www.northumberlandgazette.co.uk/news/politics/government-pulls-plug-on-plans-to-dual-13-miles-of-the-a1-in-northumberland-4846436> - The UK government cancelled plans to dual 13 miles of the A1 in Northumberland, including an eight-mile upgrade between Morpeth and Felton and a five-mile upgrade between Alnwick and Ellingham. The decision was criticised by local officials and campaigners, who argued that the project was vital for the region's economy and safety. The cancellation was part of a broader move to cut costs and focus on projects deemed more affordable.
7. <https://ngmw.co.uk/2024/11/01/a1-upgrade-scheme-in-northumberland-cancelled-in-new-budget/> - The A1 upgrade scheme in Northumberland was cancelled in the latest UK Budget, despite being approved in May 2024. The plan aimed to dual 13 miles of the A1, extending the continuous dual carriageway up to Ellingham. The cancellation was attributed to the project being 'unfunded and unaffordable', with previous approvals and investments rendered moot by the government's decision.