# UK government scraps A1 Northumberland upgrade after £68m spent, leaving families displaced



In October 2024, the UK government abruptly cancelled a controversial scheme to widen part of the A1 in Northumberland, a decision that has sent shockwaves through the local community and left numerous families grappling with the emotional and financial fallout. National Highways had previously spent over £4 million on acquiring homes and land for the project, which was initially heralded as a significant upgrade to a 13-mile stretch between Morpeth and Ellingham. However, the decision was taken as part of a broader reassessment of road projects deemed "unfunded and unaffordable," following Labour's return to power just after the Conservative government had secured a Development Consent Order in May 2024, paving the way for the project.

For families like Melanie and Julian Wensby-Scott, who were forced to leave their beloved home, Northgate House, after nearly a decade of renovations, the cancellation felt like a cruel twist of fate. After years of uncertainty, during which the couple struggled to find an equivalent property amid a challenging housing market, they ultimately relocated to Cumbria, feeling as though they had been evicted from their own lives. Melanie poignantly recounted the heart-wrenching moment contractors arrived to board up their windows, stating, "I honestly felt like we were being evicted.” Their original home has remained vacant since 2019, a haunting reminder of dreams unfulfilled.

The emotional toll was echoed by Martin Beal, whose family had occupied Charlton Mires farmhouse for over a century. His words reflected the despair many felt: “I felt like I’d let my family down somehow because I couldn’t save our home.” His anguish was compounded by the fact that the property now stands empty and deteriorating, a stark reminder of the difficulties faced by those who caught up in the infrastructure project’s web. Following the cancellation, residents have been left with properties incurring costs like council tax and insurance yet sitting unused—a situation that Louis Fell, a land agent representing some of the affected families, described as a "mess."

Financially, the situation is daunting. The total expenditure on the A1 project reached an astonishing £68.4 million before its cancellation. This amount continues to grow as National Highways remains obligated to cover various costs associated with the now-unneeded properties, particularly as they face additional premiums for those left vacant. The Department for Transport identified the scale of costs—combined with inflationary pressures—as leading factors behind the difficult decision to scrap the scheme.

Under the Crichel Down rules, the properties should ideally be offered back to their original owners, yet the affected families have expressed a reluctance to return to homes that have languished in disrepair for several years. Martin Beal voiced frustration about the necessity of demolishing a house with a rich familial history, stating that it is “just ridiculous it has to be demolished for nothing.” The impending demolition would not only obliterate a piece of local heritage but also burden taxpayers with an estimated cost of £100,000.

In light of these unfolding events, National Highways has indicated that it is "sympathetic" to the challenges faced by the affected homeowners and maintains that discussions about the future of the purchased homes are ongoing. However, as properties sit empty, locals and advocates continue to push for a strategy that would allow these homes to be refurbished and made available to families in need, rather than allowing them to decay in plain sight of a community that thrives on its vibrant history and scenic beauty.

Ultimately, the saga surrounding the cancelled A1 scheme lays bare the complexities and human costs behind infrastructural decisions, demonstrating how policy shifts can unravel lives and legacies that families hold dear. The community is now left questioning not only the future of their landscapes but also the mechanisms through which such projects are approved, executed, and, as we have seen, abruptly terminated. As the dust settles on this latest chapter, one thing remains clear: the repercussions of this decision will echo long after the last house is boarded up.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yw15g0r05o), [[4]](https://www.theplanner.co.uk/2024/11/04/reeves-cancels-development-consent-order-a1-scheme)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c04lnek2d2xo)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpdxvppgjj0o), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cewxv7rdk8yo)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.theplanner.co.uk/2024/11/04/reeves-cancels-development-consent-order-a1-scheme), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yw15g0r05o), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c04lnek2d2xo)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpdxvppgjj0o)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8yl2rv0jo), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cewxv7rdk8yo)

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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 one couple who relocated to Cumbria, expressed distress over their homes being left vacant and deteriorating unnecessarily. The cancellation led to properties being unoccupied and falling into disrepair, causing significant emotional and financial strain for the former owners.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yw15g0r05o> - The cost of the A1 dualling project in Northumberland escalated to £68.4 million before its cancellation by the Labour government in 2024. The scheme aimed to upgrade a 13-mile section of the A1 between Morpeth and Ellingham. Despite previous postponements, the project faced increasing costs, with the Department for Transport citing financial challenges and the need to make difficult decisions about unfunded or unaffordable road schemes.
4. <https://www.theplanner.co.uk/2024/11/04/reeves-cancels-development-consent-order-a1-scheme> - In November 2024, Chancellor Rachel Reeves cancelled the Development Consent Order (DCO) for the A1 dualling project in Northumberland. The scheme, which had secured approval in May 2024, involved upgrading eight miles of carriageway between Morpeth and Felton and constructing a dual carriageway bypass. The cancellation was part of a broader decision to halt several road schemes deemed unfunded and unaffordable.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpdxvppgjj0o> - The UK government cancelled plans to dual a 13-mile section of the A1 in Northumberland due to projected costs exceeding £500 million. The scheme aimed to upgrade the road between Morpeth and Ellingham. The Department for Transport stated that the project represented poor value for money, leading to its cancellation despite previous approvals and planning.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c04lnek2d2xo> - The UK government announced the cancellation of the A1 dualling scheme in Northumberland, which had been approved by the previous Conservative administration. The project aimed to provide a continuous stretch of dual carriageway to Ellingham. The Department for Transport deemed the scheme 'unfunded and unaffordable,' leading to its cancellation despite significant investments in land acquisition and planning.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cewxv7rdk8yo> - Martin Beal, a farmer whose family home was acquired for the A1 dualling project in Northumberland, expressed feelings of abandonment after the scheme's cancellation. Despite the purchase, he continued to incur costs for the property, including council tax and insurance, and faced challenges in reclaiming the agreed-upon price. The situation highlighted the financial and emotional toll on individuals affected by the project's abrupt halt.