

NEWS RELEASES

THE DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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WATER AND SEWERAGE INFRASTRUCTURE IS MAJOR SPENDING PRIORITY - SPELLAR

Spending on water and sewerage infrastructure is now a major priority alongside health and education, Minister of State, John Spellar, MP said today.

Speaking at the opening of a new £7.5 million Wastewater Treatment Works in Banbridge, he revealed plans for an accelerated programme of investment in Water Service's infrastructure. During the 2004/05 financial year, work will start or be ongoing on ten major water and wastewater treatment works totalling £150 million.

Unveiling a plaque to mark the opening of the new works, the Minister said: **"Spending on water and sewerage services will receive a substantial increase over the next two years following the budget announcement on 13 January. Overall spending on water and sewerage services will increase by 21% from £270 million this year to almost £328 million in 2005/06. This is a visible sign of our commitment to accelerate investment on infrastructure to improve compliance with environmental and drinking water quality standards and address the legacy of under-investment.**

"In total, over the next three years, Water Service plans to invest around £590 million to upgrade the water and wastewater infrastructure. This investment involving over 300 water and sewerage projects will bring benefits to customers right across Northern Ireland."

In addition, a major Public Private Partnership programme is being taken forward over the next five years in conjunction with the Strategic Investment Board totalling over £270 million.

The Minister added: **"£250 million will be targeted at upgrading wastewater treatment works over the next three years. This new £7.5 million works is designed to meet the needs of the Banbridge area for the next 25 years and will ensure the highest standard of effluent treatment is achieved improving the quality of discharges to the River Bann.**

"Today's opening of Banbridge Wastewater Treatment Works is an important step towards providing the people of Northern Ireland with modern sewerage services.

"To obtain the maximum benefit from these increases in investment the Government is undertaking a major programme of reform of water and sewerage services. The reform is designed to provide secure long-term funding to sustain this level of investment and ensure the services are fully self-financing, on an efficient and affordable basis by the end of the decade."

The new treatment works is built on the same site as the former Banbridge Wastewater Treatment Works, which was constructed in the 1950s. The new treatment works includes inlet screening batch aeration and a sludge treatment facility capable of meeting strict new discharge standards.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Capital spending will increase from almost £160 million this year to £219 million in 2005/06.
2. Investment of £3 billion over the next twenty years is required to upgrade the water and sewerage infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

3. Water Service aims to achieve 99% compliance with drinking water standards by 31 December 2006, and 80% compliance with wastewater discharge standards by 31 December 2005.



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