

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Update for waterway users

June 2020: Guidance note 6

General update

We are glad to see boaters getting back out and enjoying the waterways.

Thank you to all of our waterway users for their patience as we have worked to safely and swiftly prepare for access to the water again since the lifting of some Government lockdown restrictions on water sports on 12 May. Environment Agency staff have been working hard to make the necessary preparations to get all water-based recreational activity going again.

We are delighted to announce that, private leisure boating has resumed for day trips on all of our navigable waterways from 1 June as promised in previous guidance to you, our boating customers. Some were opened ahead of schedule, such as the River Medway and certain stretches of the Thames.

As ever, the health, safety and wellbeing of our waterway users and staff is our primary concern. To adhere to social distancing there are some changes to the way we typically provide services so do please read our further updates below. We also continue to ask everyone to follow Government social distancing guidance, respect the needs and safety of our residential boating community by staying more than 2 metres away, and be extra alert and vigilant on and beside the water.

Safety on the water

We have now completed a thorough (reach-by-reach) inspection of river channels, marked hazards, checked the operational condition of our assets and issued safety advice to protect river users. Where we have identified hazards, we may have to continue to minimise movement on those reaches until we have completed any essential maintenance work.

Urgent maintenance work will continue throughout June and we hope to lift local restrictions wherever possible by 1 July. As ever we will let local users know about temporary restrictions and when they are lifted through local communications. While this work continues, we ask all waterway users to take extra care when navigating and to report any issues to their local waterways team. It is important that we all still maintain social distancing.

Some of our sites are extremely busy with pedestrians, cyclists and other towpath users. They have become honeypots for outdoor recreation and picnicking. Because of the nature of these sites it can be quite difficult for our lock staff to carry out their work without coming into contact with members of the public and maintain social distancing requirements. For this reason, assistance at locks may not be possible for the time being, as we continue to protect the safety of our staff and waterway users. Therefore please be patient, plan ahead and bear with us as we work to find suitable solutions. Pre-booking may be required at some locks and local updates will be provided as assisted passage resumes at each site.

Please also be aware that volunteering will be limited for the remainder of this season as many of our volunteers are shielding. Our lock keepers and other waterways staff continue to work hard to deliver the Navigation service, please support them to work safely by respecting social distancing requirements and exercise patience and caution.

Facilities

Essential facilities are still available including pump out and water supply. Please be aware that cash payments are limited at sites due to safe working practice guidance; we therefore ask people to be prepared to make card payments wherever possible.

Visitor moorings and overnight stays

As before, leisure boaters can now visit their boats (subject to approval of your marina operator or boat club) and use for short day trips. However, unless your boat is your primary residence (i.e. you permanently live on it), overnight stays on your boat are not currently permitted. We will review this as Government guidance changes.

Please note that from 1 June, normal time restrictions for our short stay moorings have been reinstated. This means that people currently moored on our short stay moorings will need to resume cruising or return to their permanent mooring. If you are experiencing difficulty moving on from one of our moorings, because you are self-isolating, shielding or are a key worker, then please get in touch with your local waterways team. All applicable charges and conditions on our visitor moorings will therefore resume with immediate effect. We will try to ensure that there is sufficient visitor mooring capacity for leisure cruising over the coming weeks, but please be patient as cruising resumes.

Hire and trip boats

We are keen to welcome commercial hire boats back onto the waterways when it is permitted under Government guidance. The re-opening of these businesses will be dependent upon the completion of a relevant risk assessment by each business operator to ensure safe operation. We are working closely with British Marine and other Navigation Authorities to advise businesses about returning safely to the water when restrictions are lifted, including producing leaflets and signage that businesses can use to inform customers on safe navigation (please see attached example flyer).

Quick reminder

You may also have received notification that the Boat Safety Scheme Examination suspension has now been lifted, with safe systems of work in place to prevent transmission of the virus by the use of social distancing between the boat owner and examiner. New guidance has now been prepared for boat owners to help them prepare for examinations. This can be found at www.boatsafetyscheme.org/COVID.

We would also like to remind you that all powered and non-powered boats, including canoes, paddleboards and row boats, must be registered for use on the waterways by law.

Please be aware that due to changing our ways of working to meet Government guidance we are not able to process applications by post at the moment.

To renew your registration, please call 0330 159 1983 (Mon-Fri 10-4) or email boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk

For any general navigation enquiries including making a new application customers should call 03708 506506.

Specific waterway information

River Wye: We ask those using unpowered boats on the River Wye to be aware of the different Government restrictions that are in place in Wales and to adhere to specific country guidance.

River Stour: Some reaches of the River Stour pass through private land and involve portaging around structures over private property where vulnerable people are shielding. This means you may not be able to use boats on some parts of the river. We ask that you adhere to local signage and respect Government guidance on social distancing at all times.

Lydney Harbour: Owners can now access their boats for maintenance purposes. Assisted passage will be in place once all health and safety checks have been completed. However boaters are reminded to comply with Welsh legislation where necessary.

Rye Harbour: The harbour is operational for commercial shipping and leisure craft activity when tides permit and under Government social distancing and safe working practice guidance.

These are unusual times for us all. Please support us whilst our staff adjust to new ways of working. I can assure you that we are all committed to navigating back to a new kind of normal as soon as it is safe to do so for our customers and staff. Most importantly, please respect Government social distancing guidance and stay safe.

You will appreciate our National Customer Contact Centre is very busy at this time. Please help us by only getting in touch if it is essential. If you do need to contact us, please call 03708 506 506 or email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

For the full Government guidance on Coronavirus go to www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Alice Mayne

Deputy Director for Navigation and Commercial Development

customer service line **03708 506 506**

incident hotline **0800 80 70 60**

floodline **03459 88 11 88**

Page 3 of 3