

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Update for Waterway Users

June 2020: Guidance Note 7

General update

We continue to be delighted to see so many people out enjoying our waterways. As ever we ask all our waterways users to continue to follow Government Guidance on social distancing and to stay alert. The latest Government guidance can be found at www.gov.uk/coronavirus. Following the Prime Minister's latest announcement on 23 June we are now writing to update you on what this means for our waterways.

Overnight stays

We are pleased to let you know that overnight stays on boats will be allowed from 4 July 2020. This includes private leisure boats as well as commercial hire boats and hotel boats. Individuals and operators should follow Government guidance on social mixing outside of household groups. This is not only great news for private boat owners but also for the hire boat and hotel boat businesses who have not been able to operate so far during the lockdown. We very much look forward to supporting these waterway businesses to restart and have already produced some information, with support from British Marine, which businesses can use with their customers. For other waterways businesses, Government is reviewing the Inland Waterways and Coastal Boat Use Guidance (issued on 11 June) in light of the latest announcements by the Prime Minister. In the meantime, some additional information to help businesses prepare is available at www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19.

Safety on the water

You may have seen that our teams have been out on the lock side preparing to restart assisted passage at many of our locks. We are now able to offer assisted passage at many sites across our waterways. We will continue to bring more sites online with assistance as soon as safe working practices and the necessary mitigations are in place to protect both our customers and staff from the risk of contracting Coronavirus. As every lock site across the waterways is different, we have implemented site specific measures to manage the risks. At the majority of sites we are still aiming to maintain 2m social distancing in order to reduce the need for either customers or staff to take additional precautions, however we will provide local information as required.

Our aim is to restart assisted passage at all but a few locks across the waterways by 1 July at the latest. However there are a few sites on our waterways where staff or family members are shielding or that are extremely busy with visitors and mitigation has not been possible. Assisted passage at these sites may not restart for some time. There are also a handful of sites where we are doing urgent works and therefore assisted passage will not restart until those works are complete. We will be issuing local communications to share the latest information about assisted passage at sites and any local disruption to the service.

We also need to make you aware that this is a dynamic situation and we may have to stop assisted passage at a site should it not be possible to maintain the safety of customers or staff. We will continue to review our safe systems of work in line with Government guidance and hope to keep any disruption of service to a minimum. Please be aware that working under the current restrictions and without the support of our trusted volunteers means that maintenance and service may take longer than usual, so please be patient with our teams as they go about their work, respect social distancing and be mindful of others.

We have now started to reopen some of our facilities such as car parks, slipways and toilets. Again, we will be able to restart provision at some sites sooner than others so please bear with us. We will be communicating locally as facilities restart.

Boat registration

Finally, with such a high level of interest in water-sports and waterside activity, we are reminding people that both powered and unpowered boats need to be registered if kept or used on our waterways. You can find out how to register a new boat with us at <https://www.gov.uk/register-a-boat/who-to-contact>. If you need to renew a registration, you can call our dedicated Boat Registration team on 0330 159 1983 (Mon-Fri 8-5). For any general boat registration enquiries please call 03708 506506 (Mon-Fri 8-5) or email boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Our Boat Registration team are dealing with a high volume of email enquiries and applications at the moment. We do thank all of our customers for being patient as it may take longer than normal for you to get a reply. Can I also remind you that we do not recommend that you send postal applications at the moment. As the team are working from home, these are taking a lot longer to process.

If you have any general enquiries not related to boat registration please call 03708 506506 (Mon-Fri 8-5) or email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

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

Alice Mayne

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To keep up to date with local information, see the following websites:

River Thames: <http://riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk/>

Anglian Waterways: <https://www.visitanglianwaterways.org/>

River Medway: <http://allingtonlock.co.uk/home.php>