



# Response from regulators and government agencies to COVID-19

We have produced a short note summarising the key documents from the UK's planning and environmental regulators and government agencies regarding their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which we have summarised below.

The following regulators are covered:

- 1. The Planning Inspectorate
- 2. The Environment Agency
- 3. The Office for Nuclear Regulation
- 4. UK Atomic Energy Authority
- 5. Natural England
- 6. The Canal and River Trust
- 7. Natural Resources Wales
- 8. Welsh Government Planning Inspectorate
- 9. The Marine Maritime Organisation
- 10. The Forestry Commission

**NOTE**: We have only provided what seem to us to be the key points. Should you wish to rely on a document, you should read the document in full for yourself and/or seek specific legal advice.

#### THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE ("PINS")

PINS has published a number of documents: a general update and three sets of "<u>Detailed Guidance</u>" (which all have broadly similar messages). PINS states that it is "in the process of updating" this Guidance and suggests checking for updates regularly.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **GENERAL UPDATE**

More inquiries and hearings to be held virtually in June 28 May 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

This is PINS's general update (last updated on 28th May 2020) as to what customers can expect from PINS.

Decisions are being issued: 2,500 since lockdown began.

Virtual hearing arrangements continue: a successful virtual hearing was held on 11 May. Another 20 planning inquiries/hearings and 15 hearings on NSIPs are planned for virtual events in June.

PINS plans to make virtual events by video (using Microsoft Teams) or telephone "our standard option" for the majority of events in future, whilst not abandoning face-to-face events.

As lockdown restrictions eased, 600 site visits were planned in May where the Inspector could visit safely and it was required to progress the case. Where site visits are not required, work is progressing on the case.

#### THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE ("PINS") CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **APPEALS WORK**

Planning Appeals, Rights of Way and Commons Act 2006 – site visits, hearings and inquiries

25 March 2020 updated 28 May 2020

#### Key point(s)

No physical hearings or inquiries are being arranged or taking place at the moment.

Temple Quay House remains closed and staff are continuing to work from home where possible.

Work continues where possible:

Inspectors are now re-starting site visits where safe and appropriate to do so. Inspectors are also progressing cases that can proceed without a site visit or the parties would agree that written representations would be appropriate following Inspector's questions.

The first fully virtual hearing took place on Monday 11 May as a pilot: PINS is building on this with a further 20 planning hearings and inquiries during June and 15 hearings on NSIP matters. A Local Plan hearing will take place via telephone and a full Examination is planned for July.

Case officers will be in contact with individual appellants and local authorities as necessary as soon as practicable in order to make all required arrangements. Officers should be contacted for individual case inquiries.

#### THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE ("PINS") CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **NSIP EVENTS**

## Coronavirus (COVID-19) and NSIP Events

24 March 2020 updated 28 May 2020

#### Key point(s)

Temple Quay House remains closed and no visitors are permitted. Telephone and emails are still being accepted.

Submissions should be made using the project-specific webpage and email wherever possible, as the post is still subject to delays. PINS requests that those with email, who have not yet arranged to accept emails from PINS, contact their Case Team to provide consent to emails.

Examinations are continuing via written submissions and the publication of documents online. PINS are now notifying parties where it is possible to conduct events via telephone or videoconference. Where examinations are making use of online events PINS will publish additional guidance to parties to facilitate those events. Progress on examinations and on pre-examination matters can be monitored from the main National Infrastructure projects webpage.

Preparations by parties should continue – including inter-party discussions – where possible.

The project-specific webpage remains the point of reference for notifications and submissions to the Examination.

The Examining Authority may exercise discretion on existing deadlines where circumstances make it difficult for written submissions to be made.

Where relevant, parties should continue to make written submissions which may support the examination of evidence via an Unaccompanied Site Inspection in the future or respond to requests for evidence relating to an alternative to an Accompanied Site Visit in future.

Some Unaccompanied Site Inspections have begun, following changes to Government Guidance.

If an Accompanied Site Inspection is required on a specific project, and can be undertaken in line with Government guidance, this will be notified on the project-specific website.

Parties should check the NSIP website for updates.

#### THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE ("PINS") CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **LOCAL PLANS**

#### Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Local Plan Examination Hearings

24 March 2020 updated 28 May 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

The recent Written Ministerial Statement states that the Government expects the planning system to operate under COVID-19 restrictions, partly by moving to digital events and processes. Inspectors are expected to take decisions about whether and how virtual events should proceed, and how fairness can be ensured.

Trials are ongoing with two local authorities with hearing sessions as digital events. This will be phased in for other LP examinations.

Inspectors will begin exploring with Local Authorities and Programme Officers how examinations can be moved forwards with fair participation: virtual hearings in some cases, arranging autumn hearings for others and keeping arrangements under review.

Examinations where hearings have been completed and consultation is required on main modifications and/or additional evidence, LAs are to discuss with the Inspector how these can progress.

Inspectors are working on reports for examinations where all hearings and consultations have concluded.

Everyone is required to engage in the process proactively. Ultimately decisions are for the Inspector in her/his discretion. Parties must appreciate that there may be delays.

Examination websites will be kept updated and Programme Officers should be contacted for more information (bearing in mind that they will be receiving significant numbers of requests).

#### **ENVIRONMENT AGENCY ("EA")**

The EA has published a number of COVID-19, time-limited, regulatory position statements ("RPS"), available <a href="https://example.com/hee/">here.</a>. The EA is clear that each RPS sets out when they apply and the conditions that you must comply with. The conditions include (i) specific conditions, including any requirements to notify the EA or get the EA's approval to rely on the RPS, and (ii) requirements concerning pollution and harm to human health. The EA's position is that if you comply with both the specific conditions and the requirements, they will "not normally take enforcement action against you." The RPSs provide the relevant contact details for notifying the EA or seeking their formal agreement.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **GENERAL**

# Environment Agency regulatory response to coronavirus

28 April 2020

#### Key point(s)

This document sets out the EA's priorities, expectations, approach to enforcement during the coronavirus outbreak and information on the RPSs.

The EA expects that you take all reasonable steps to comply with regulatory requirements, using contingency plans to help with compliance. If that is not possible due to exceptional circumstances, then:

- 1) notify your usual regulatory contact;
- 2) minimise any unavoidable non-compliance;
- 3) minimise the effects of any unavoidable non-compliance;
- 4) prioritise complying with regulatory requirements that directly protect the environment and human health;
- 5) keep records showing why a non-compliance occurred, for example records of staff absences, contractors being unavailable or supply chain failures.

They also address the factors that they will take into account during this time when applying their enforcement and sanctions policy.

#### **AGRICULTURE**

COVID-19 and spreading slurry or milk on land, or storing slurry: RPS C12

23 April 2020

If you follow the conditions in this RPS, you can:

- store slurry without complying with all the requirements for storing silage, slurry and agricultural fuel oil;
- spread slurry or milk on some areas of agricultural land where it would not normally be allowed.

You must obtain written agreement from the EA before you can use this COVID-19 RPS.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

## MONITORING AND REPORTING

Monitoring emissions from installations, radioactive substances and waste activities: RPS C7

16 April 2020 updated 28 May 2020

\*NB The name of this RPS has changed

#### **Key point(s)**

Holders of installation, waste or radioactive substances (nuclear or non-nuclear) activity permits must operate in accordance with the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations (2016).

On 22 May 2020, the RPS was updated to include water discharge and groundwater activities. On the same day, the expiry date was extended to 30 September 2020.

The EA normally expects all permit holders to comply in full with all the conditions in their permits. This includes conditions requiring them to monitor emissions to air and water and do other environmental monitoring.

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), you can make certain reasonable adjustments to those monitoring requirements.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies if you cannot comply with the monitoring requirements specified in your permit due to COVID-19 restrictions.

## MONITORING AND REPORTING

Reporting for installations, radioactive substances and waste permits: RPS C10

21 April 2020

## You must get written agreement from the EA before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

Holders of installation, waste operation or radioactive substances activity permits must operate in accordance with the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016.

The EA normally expects all permit holders to comply in full with all the conditions in their permits. This includes conditions requiring them to submit data and reports to us.

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), you may delay sending the EA certain data, reports and other records that are required by your permit.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies if you cannot comply with the reporting deadlines specified in your permit due to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.

You must tell the Environment Agency before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### RADIOACTIVE SUBSTANCES REGULATION

Accumulating radioactive waste that you cannot transfer because of COVID-19: RPS C13

27 April 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

You usually need a permit to accumulate radioactive waste under regulation 13 and Schedule 23 of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (EPR). Your permit limits how long you can accumulate radioactive waste, and the amount of radioactive waste you can accumulate.

If you are using the exemption in Schedule 23, Part 6, paragraph 4(7) of EPR, you usually need to comply with the maximum accumulation period of 26 weeks.

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), you can accumulate radioactive waste:

- above the limits in your permit;
- for longer than allowed in your permit or under the exemption.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies where you accumulate radioactive waste that you are unable to transfer to destinations in the UK and overseas as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) business disruption.

It applies to waste sealed sources and to other radioactive waste that you transfer for recycling, treatment or disposal. However, this only includes waste types that you are authorised to accumulate under your permit or the exemption.

You must tell the EA before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

You must continue to comply with the other requirements in your permit or the exemption and with the conditions in this COVID-19 RPS.

#### RADIOACTIVE SUBSTANCES REGULATION

COVID-19 and exceeding permit limits for medical use of radioactive substances: RPS C15

30 April 2020

You usually need to comply with the limits in your permit under regulation 13 and Schedule 23 of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016. These numerical limits restrict both the amount of radioactive:

- material (including sealed sources) that you can keep and use;
- waste that you can accumulate and dispose of, on or from your premises.

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), you can exceed these numerical limits.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### Key point(s)

This COVID-19 RPS only applies to radioactive:

- material that is used to carry out medical diagnosis or treatment in humans;
- waste that arises from these procedures.

It only applies if you need to obtain additional radioactive material, or generate additional radioactive waste, as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19).

You must tell the EA before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

# REGULATED INDUSTRY INSTALLATIONS (NON-WASTE)

Emissions to air from large combustion plant during black start events: RPS C11 21 April 2020 You need a permit under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 to operate a Part A 1.1 combustion activity. That is those with a rated thermal input of 50MW or more, known as large combustion plant (LCP).

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), you may exceed certain emission limit values (ELVs) stated in your permit during black start events. Black start means when you restore electricity supply after a significant electrical emergency, as instructed by the National Grid.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies to the ELVs stated in your permit for emissions to air from your LCP.

You must notify your EA regulatory officer by email before using this COVID-19 RPS.

#### REGULATED INDUSTRY INSTALLATIONS (NON-WASTE)

Emissions to air from large combustion plant in the transitional national plan: RPS C18

21 May 2020

\*NB This is entirely new

When Large Combustion Plant operators can delay meeting new emission limit values scheduled to take effect from 1 July 2020 because of coronavirus (COVID-19).

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), you can continue to operate under the current emission limit values (ELVs) in your permit until your plant is able to meet the new Annex V ELVs.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies:

 to Large Combustion Plant currently within the Transitional National Plan.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### Key point(s)

 where upgrades to meet the new Annex V ELVs are delayed by coronavirus.

You must get written agreement from the Environment Agency before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

Cleansing and PPE waste at a healthcare waste management facility: RPS C1

27 March 2020 updated 27 May 2020

\*NB The name of this RPS has changed

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

Exceeding waste storage limits at permitted sites because of COVID-19: RPS C2

6 April 2020, updated on 17 April 2020 This COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS) only applies to waste from cleaning people or places infected or potentially infected with COVID-19.

It has been updated to include separately collected personal protective equipment (PPE) waste, coded 15 02 03. The expiry date has been extended to 30 September 2020.

It allows this infectious or potentially infectious waste to be safely stored and treated at a healthcare waste management facility.

This COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS) allows you to temporarily store more waste than your permit allows if you cannot remove waste from your site because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 RPS you can exceed waste storage limits without applying for a permit variation.

This COVID-19 RPS does not apply to radioactive waste or to mobile plant.

You must notify the EA by email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk before using this COVID-19 RPS.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

Incinerating specified healthcare wastes at a municipal waste incinerator: RPS C4

15 April 2020

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

PPE waste from home healthcare workers treating patients with COVID-19: RPS C5

15 April 2020

#### Key point(s)

Your environmental permit states the waste types and quantities you can accept. Normally you will breach your permit conditions if you accept waste types or quantities beyond those stated in your permit.

This COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS) only applies to operators of permitted municipal waste incinerators.

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 RPS you can accept and incinerate COVID-19 infectious waste at a municipal waste incinerator without varying your environmental permit.

You must get written agreement from the EA before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

Normally personal protective equipment (PPE) waste from healthcare workers treating patients in their own homes would be:

- coded as healthcare waste (18 01 03\* if infectious, or 18 01 04 if non-infectious);
- collected separately from the patient's home through a courier collection service, or taken back to the relevant NHS England (NHSE) hospital or practice for disposal.

If they follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), NHSE healthcare workers treating patients with (or suspected) COVID-19 in their own homes can dispose of PPE waste through the householder's normal non-recyclable waste collection.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies to PPE waste generated by NHSE healthcare workers treating patients with (or suspected) COVID-19 in their own homes.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

Social distancing when signing and handing over waste transfer and consignment notes in person: RPS C8

20 April 2020, updated on 4 May 2020

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

COVID-19 and packaging waste: registering as a packaging producer: RPS C9

20 April 2020

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

COVID-19 and delaying hazardous waste consignee returns: RPS C14

30 April 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

When you transfer waste, to comply with the regulations, you can use:

- paper waste transfer notes (including season tickets);
- consignment notes (including multiple collections);
- an electronic handset.

You normally, sign and hand over paper copies or obtain a digital signature in person.

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement, you do not have to do either of these in person:

- sign and hand over paper copies of waste transfer and consignment notes;
- obtain a digital signature on a handset.

You must still comply with all other waste transfer requirements.

Obligated packaging producers are usually required to register with the Environment Agency directly or through a compliance scheme on or by 7 April each year. They must provide complete and accurate information as required on registration.

This COVID-19 regulatory position statement only applies to obligated packaging producers who have been unable to meet these requirements because of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the measures the government has introduced.

Normally, if you receive or dispose of hazardous waste, you must send quarterly consignee returns under the Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2005 (SI 2005/894 as amended, the Regulations).

This RPS applies to the quarterly deadline of 30 April 2020.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

COVID-19 and temporary storage of incinerator bottom ash aggregate: RPS C16 30 April 2020

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT (EXCLUDING RADIOACTIVE WASTE)

COVID-19 and storing waste at unpermitted sites due to exceeding your storage limits: RPS C17

4 May 2020

#### Key point(s)

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS), you can temporarily store incinerator bottom ash aggregate (IBAA) at your permitted site when your permit does not authorise this waste type.

You must email the EA and get their agreement before you use this COVID-19 RPS. Contact your EA area regulatory officer, site inspector or local compliance team to do this.

This COVID-19 regulatory position statement (RPS) applies if coronavirus restrictions mean you will exceed waste storage capacity on your permitted site, or the storage limits of your registered waste exemption. It temporarily allows you to:

- store your waste at an unpermitted site that you control;
- exceed the storage limits of your registered waste exemption for a T1 to T32 or S1 and S2 exemption.

This COVID-19 RPS does not apply to radioactive waste or to mobile plant.

You must meet the conditions in this COVID-19 RPS. Before you use this COVID-19 RPS and store waste at an unpermitted site that you control, or above exemption limits, you must email the EA to get our approval. When we assess whether to approve your request, we will also look at your compliance history.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### WATER INDUSTRY

Water and sewerage company OSM and UWWTR sampling affected by COVID-19: RPS C3

6 April 2020

#### Key point(s)

If you follow the conditions in this COVID-19 RPS you can reduce regulatory sampling carried out in accordance with your permit in relation to Operator Self-Monitoring (OSM) and the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations 1994 (UWWTR) monitoring. It applies to monitoring of discharges of:

- treated sewage effluent from waste water treatment works;
- trade effluent from water treatment works.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies if your sample collection or analysis is affected by:

- staff shortages due to COVID-19;
- restricted access caused by people or places being infected or potentially infected with COVID-19.

You must get written agreement from your Environment Agency water company account manager before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

#### WATER INDUSTRY

Storing treated sewage sludge you cannot move because of COVID-19 restrictions: RPS C6

16 April 2020, updated on 22 April 2020 You usually need an environmental permit or exemption to store treated sludge. Normally, if you supply dewatered treated sludge to farmers to beneficially spread on agricultural land, they would store it using a S3 waste exemption.

If sewerage companies follow the conditions in this COVID-19 RPS they can store dewatered treated sludge not at the place it will be used, without an environmental permit.

This COVID-19 RPS only applies to treated sludge as described in the Sludge Use in Agriculture Regulations. It does not apply to septic tank sludge (which can go to a sewage works) and waste containing sewage sludge (which is covered by the Environmental Permitting Regulations).

You must get written agreement from your EA water company account manager before you use this COVID-19 RPS.

#### OFFICE FOR NUCLEAR REGULATION ("ONR")

The ONR has provided a position statement on a number of issues including nuclear safety, social distancing at nuclear sites and how ONR are working.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **ONR Position**

23 April 2020 updated 21 May 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

The updates are in bold text.

Nuclear safety – ONR is continuing to obtain assurance that nuclear site licensees and other dutyholders are adequately resourced to continue to safely and securely carry out their activities. ONR remains satisfied with industry's response at this time and there has been no significant change to dutyholders' safety and security resilience. All licensed sites are required to determine minimum staffing levels necessary to ensure safe and secure operations and contingency arrangements in the event that these levels are not met. This condition is specifically designed to ensure that industry can adequately manage and control activities that could impact on nuclear safety and security under all foreseeable circumstances, including pandemics.

Social distancing – We are supporting national efforts to ensure that social distancing and shielding measures are being properly observed at licensed nuclear sites, and our regulatory focus includes assurance from site licensees that they are applying the public health measures introduced to reduce the spread of coronavirus, where appropriate.

ONR expects the UK's nuclear industry to continue to make responsible and conservative decisions as it responds to the challenges of the pandemic, and the ONR is working closely with the industry to ensure that social distancing is being properly followed, in line with public health guidance.

ONR remains in regular contact with licensed sites and duty holders to gain assurance, as necessary. Should the ONR identify instances where sites are failing to apply the relevant public health guidance, ONR will consider taking action in line with our Enforcement Policy Statement.

It also provides an update regarding ONR ways of working during COVID-19.

#### **UK ATOMIC ENERGY AUTHORITY ("UKAEA")**

The UKAEA has published a news story regarding their current working arrangements. It has also published a procurement policy note on COVID-19.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

## Coronavirus measures at UKAEA

17 March 2020, updated on 24 March 2020

## Coronavirus measures at UKAEA

17 March 2020, updated on 20 May 2020 How working arrangements at the UK Atomic Energy Authority are changing due to the coronavirus

# Procurement Policy Note 02/20: Suppliers relief due to COVID-19

20 March 2020, updated 17 April 2020 updated 19 May 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

In line with current guidance, the UK Atomic Energy Authority has now suspended all but essential on-site operations at Culham, and has asked all staff not involved in that activity to work at home. UKAEA has remote access systems that should allow other work to continue.

UKAEA is acting now to support suppliers so we can ensure service continuity during and after the current COVID-19 outbreak.

In line with current guidance from UK Government, the UK Atomic Energy Authority has now resumed work on some key projects, which need to progress to enable UKAEA to meet important deadlines.

Staff working on these projects are following strict UKAEA protocols (adhering to Government advice) to ensure they are safe. All staff who can work from home continue to do so, with UKAEA's remote access systems working well.

UKAEA is continuing to support suppliers so we can ensure service continuity during and after the current COVID-19 outbreak.

UKAEA is also running a series of online events.

This Procurement Policy Note (PPN) sets out information and guidance for public bodies on payment of their suppliers to ensure service continuity during and after the current coronavirus, COVID-19, outbreak.

The note emphasises that contracting authorities must act now to ensure suppliers at risk are in a position to resume normal contract delivery once the outbreak is over.

There are a number of guidance notes accompanying this note and they are available <u>here</u>.

#### NATURAL ENGLAND

Natural England has published guidance on access to green spaces (with DEFRA, the EA and Forestry Commission) and an operational update in relation to how it will exercise its functions during the Covid-19 outbreak. Regulatory work – including SSI consents, wildlife consents/investigations, planning and marine consents – is a priority and will continue.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

Coronavirus – guidance on implications for Natural England's development management advice and wildlife licensing

22 March 2020

#### Key point(s)

Consultation requirements continue to apply. All planning consultations should be sent to: consultations@naturalengland. org.uk. Planning casework has been identified as a priority: however, NE may request more extensions than normal. Cases posing the greatest risk or offering the greatest opportunities will be prioritised.

Where environmental impact information cannot be provided as envisaged (i.e. where surveys cannot be carried out) NE will be as flexible as possible in accepting best available evidence. Government advice is that outdoor fieldwork should be able to continue with appropriate measures in place.

Wildlife licensing applications cannot be accepted by post and should be submitted electronically. Details are provided. Licensing is a priority area of work so will continue, although may be affected by staff absences.

Where licensable works are likely to be affected by Covid restrictions, they should not be commenced until they can do so in line with government guidance. If they must proceed, or are interrupted after starting, it is advisable for contingency plans to be drawn up and submitted where there may be significant changes in avoidance, mitigation, compensation or monitoring.

Coronavirus – Guidance on access to green spaces (with DEFRA, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency)

27 March 2020, updated 1 May 2020 Guidance for the general public on access to green spaces.

#### NATURAL ENGLAND CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **Operational Update**

4 May 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

A number of work areas are to be paused or reprofiled. Highest priority work areas include customer enquiries, wildlife licensing and Incident Investigation services, SSSI consenting services, agri-environment work, planning casework and essential work (including livestock management and health and safety) on National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

Regulatory work will therefore continue, remotely as far as possible, and essential visits will be carried out. Advice on how to make contact is in the more detailed note of 22 April 2020.

Other fieldwork and site visits are suspended.

Landlords are reminded that they have no right to obstruct PROW. In very limited circumstances where large numbers of people are using routes they may wish to consider measures such as displaying notices in relation to social distancing.

National Trails remain open: however, people must follow the government's social distancing advice. NNRs are available for people who live nearby to exercise, but facilities such as car parks remain closed.

# Updated guidance on accessing green spaces

13 May 2020

Updated guidance for the general public on accessing green spaces in light of the government's decision to lift some restrictions in England.

Advice to land managers and landowners given in the Operational Update of 4 May 2020 is reiterated.

#### NATURAL ENGLAND CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **Operational Update**

19 May 2020

#### Key point(s)

National nature reserves remain open: facilities (such as hides, visitor centres etc) are still closed but NE is looking to reopen car parks. Some car parks will remain closed until further notice because of additional health and safety requirements: a list is provided.

NE continues to follow government guidance on working safely, and is operating as described in the previous operational update. Work that allows NE to progress the government's key policy ambitions for the environment (such as the 25 Year Environment Plan) will also continue.

Essential fieldwork will begin to be restarted where it is safe to do so.

Management work on National Nature Reserves is currently limited to essential tasks that are critical for e.g. public safety.

Advice is provided for farmers regarding accessing the RPA and for NGOs in relation to funding.

#### **Operational Update**

3 June 2020

Update on Natural England's operations with update on access arrangements to reflect the change in regulations permitting groups of up to six people to meet outdoors.

NE asks people to:

- Think about avoiding travel to coastal or countryside beauty spots, as parking has been extremely busy and social distancing may not be possible.
- Not to have BBQs or fires the risk of wildfires is very high and two sites are currently closed following large fires (Hatfield Moor and Thursley).
- Take litter home.
- Stay on marked paths and follow any local signage.
- Keep dogs on leads.

#### **CANAL AND RIVER TRUST**

The Trust has issued guidance for users of towpaths in relation to use during the pandemic, and guidance for boaters. This includes a relaxation of the requirement to move boats every 14 days. The Trust has also published a statement that it will extend boat licences by a month from their current date of expiry.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **Key point(s)**

## **Guidance for towpath visitors** 24 March 2020

Users of the towpath are asked to restrict use, especially of stretches with boats moored along them, and observe social distancing requirements.

#### **Guidance for boaters**

24 March 2020, extended 16 April Leisure boaters are asked to stop all non-essential travel. In consequence the Trust is suspending the requirement to move every 14 days. Following extension on 16 April, this will be reviewed again on 9 May 2020.

Workers whose role is critical for the safe management of the waterways (for instance those carrying out statutory inspections of canal structures and maintaining essential services) will continue to work.

# Statement relating to extension of boat licences

24 April 2020

The Canal & River Trust is extending all boat licences by a month in response to the pandemic.

#### **Update**

11 May 2020

From 13 May 2020, restrictions on boat owners visiting their boats will be lifted. However, general navigation is still not permitted so travel should be minimal, e.g. for essential services and repairs. Visits should not be made overnight.

Angling, canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding may be resumed from the same date although not over long distances as navigation is still restricted.

This applies only to the canals managed by the Trust in England: on those it manages in Wales, restrictions apply as previously.

#### CANAL AND RIVER TRUST CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### 13 May 2020

Update

#### Key point(s)

Update on phased reopening of navigation across waterways in England.

From 13 May: boaters may undertake short trips, avoiding locks or staff-operated structures if possible, and returning home – or to their home mooring – overnight.

From 23 May: mooring exemptions will come to an end and guidance for continuous cruisers comes back into force. Boats without a home mooring should move from their current mooring within 14 days off this (though short stay summer moorings will also resume on the 23rd so if moored on one of these you will need to move off then). Boaters in a high-risk group who need to shield or self-isolate can agree special arrangements with their licence support officer.

From 1 June: it is anticipated that navigations will reopen in full so longer journeys should be possible. According to current guidance however those who do not live aboard should not stay overnight. The Trust is seeking guidance as to whether overnight stays will be permitted once full navigation resumes.

This applies only to England: restrictions in Wales continue to apply.

#### Update

15 May 2020

The phased reopening of navigation and return of angling and paddle sports has now commenced.

Again, this applies only to England as the Welsh government continues to apply 'stay at home, stay local'.

#### Our response to coronavirus

5 June 2020

Updates for canal and river users on using the waterways. The majority of navigations are now open save for those listed in stoppage notices (link provided on page).

## Coronavirus and paddle sports

9 June 2020

Guidance for those wishing to return to paddle sports, including a reminder that a licence is required to use any kind of unpowered craft on the Trust's network

#### NATURAL RESOURCES WALES ("NRW")

NRW has published an updated on its response to the Coronavirus pandemic, which collates the various aspects of how it has adapted its functions, and is available <a href="here">here</a>. It has closed all car parks, play areas and toilets in the reserves, woods and forests it manages, as well as all mountain bike trails are also closed.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

# Protecting Wales' environment during the COVID-19 crisis

27 April 2020

# Our response to the Coronavirus pandemic

28 April 2020 updated 17 June 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

NRW are continuing to carry out high priority work across wales, including flood protection, commercial forestry, preventing and tackling forest fires, and pollution monitoring, where possible, in compliance with social distancing measures.

NRW's car parks, mountain bike trails and visitor centres remain closed in line with current guidance which also advises against unnecessary travel. Its forestry teams continue to patrol its car parks to ensure that local people are accessing walking trails in a socially responsible way.

NRW also is continuing to carry out livestock checks to ensure the welfare of NRW livestock on our National Nature Reserves and maintain annual arrangements with local graziers on these sites where appropriate.

#### Visiting NRW's sites

NRW have begun to reopen some of the car parks at its woodlands and nature reserves. Most of its walking and running trails are now open.

#### NRW's work as a regulator

NRW has explained that it expects businesses and individuals to continue to comply with environmental regulations and their permit conditions. If a regulated business or individual is facing problems complying with their permit conditions as a direct result of the exceptional circumstances we currently face, then they should:

- Inform NRW of the issues and how they are being managed as early as possible.
- Prioritise compliance with those permit conditions that directly protect the environment.
- Take all practicable alternative measures to prevent and minimise any harm to the environment or risks to public health
- Keep clear and comprehensive records of the decision made and actions taken.

#### NATURAL RESOURCES WALES ("NRW") CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **Key point(s)**

#### Changes to specific regulations

NRW have relaxed a number of specific obligations, and particular timescales. These include:

- Delaying requesting water abstractions returns for the period
   1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 until further notice;
- Surveys for the purposes of a species licence application should normally be no less than two years old, but surveys will be accepted from the last three years this season.
- The rules on the spreading of waste milk on agricultural land have been relaxed, and an amended <u>U10 exemption</u> can be applied for.

#### Ongoing work

Environmental permitting consultations, felling licence applications and environment impact screening requests are being processed as normal, save that the NRW are not carrying out site visits unless there is an essential reason, such as a significant environmental concern.

#### Development planning advice service

NRW are still processing planning consultations but may take longer to provide advice and may exceed the normal published service standards

It is focussing on delivering our statutory service, and are unlikely to be able to provide advice as part of its for Discretionary Planning Advice.

#### Increasing burial capacity

NRW advises that managers of a cemetery and need to increase burial capacity please discuss this with NRW.

NRW will be able provide advice on the suitability of the site and to prevent or limit groundwater pollution.

All potential sites will need to be environmentally screened and risk assessed.

#### NATURAL RESOURCES WALES ("NRW") CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### NRW's Species Permitting Service Coronavirus COVID-19 Questions and Answers

30 April 2020

## Key point(s)

NRW explains that, whilst it has received a number of enquiries asking whether ecological consultants should be surveying or attending site during the COVID-19 outbreak, it is not in a position to provide advice on such enquiries. It advises that individuals follow government advice on the outbreak and liaise with clients to reach a suitable agreement.

It is still working and aiming to process licence applications within the timescales stated.

Where it is not possible to complete surveys at all this year, NRW anticipates that such surveys are completed at the first available and appropriate opportunity once restrictions are lifted. In exceptional circumstances, NRW may consider a scheme based on an enhanced mitigation package, providing it satisfies the three tests.

#### Continuing to care for our environment despite COVID-19

30 April 2020

# Bathing water season delayed

15 May 2020

Coronavirus: Guidance for reopening natural and outdoor cultural sites for recreation

29 May 2020

NRW has provided an update from the work being carried out by its team members that are still operating on site.

NRW has announced that the start of the bathing water season will be delayed until at least 22 June this year to ensure important water sampling takes place in order to maintain Wales' high bathing water standards for the future.

This advisory guidance complements the wider suite of information published by Welsh Government in preparation for the gradual reduction in restrictions on public movement. It has been developed by managers of public access to natural and outdoor cultural sites, giving a common understanding and sharing best practice.

#### WELSH GOVERNMENT PLANNING INSPECTORATE ("WG-PINS")

<u>WG-PINS</u> has written to all Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) in Wales with updated advice and clarification on what the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions)(Wales) Regulations mean for planning services generally but specifically, site visits and publicity. It had previously written to all chief planning officers in Wales on <u>27 March</u>. The latest advice, issued on <u>29 April</u>, is summarised below.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### Local Development Plan Preparation – Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

18 March 2020

#### Key point(s)

In light of the exceptional circumstances being experienced through the COVID-19 virus, progressing an LDP in line with the legal obligations set out in both the Delivery Agreement/Timetable and Community Involvement Scheme will not be possible. WG-PINS emphasises it is taking a pragmatic approach.

WG-PINS makes specific recommendations to certain councils at different stages of the LDP process.

#### In general terms:

- For those LPAs who are currently, or are about to consult on a draft DA, careful consideration should be given to the formal start date of LDP preparation. The exceptional circumstances may mean that the commencement of plan preparation may have to be postponed for several months.
- For those LPAs not specified above the current exceptional circumstances will have a bearing on the ability to move forward over the forthcoming months. The Welsh Government is sympathetic to the pressures faced by all LPAs in the current climate. Whilst development plan coverage remains a key priority you should consider whether existing approved DAs can be adhered too, alongside CIS engagement plans. It would also be advisable to prepare a revised DA which can be submitted at a later date when greater clarity is available.

#### Coronavirus (COVID-19): Planning Inspectorate Wales Update

29 April 2020

#### Site visits

The issue which has, to date, prevented many authorities from processing new applications is site visits, either in relation to posting site notices or for the purpose of assessing and analysing site conditions, including enforcement. These activities cannot be undertaken from home so are a reasonable excuse to travel for the purpose of the Coronavirus Regulations. These activities must, however, be carried out in compliance with the requirements of the Coronavirus Regulations. Before officers undertake a site visit they must consider:

• whether the purpose of the site visit could be achieved through other means;

#### WELSH GOVERNMENT PLANNING INSPECTORATE ("WG-PINS") CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### Key point(s)

 whether the Coronavirus Regulations and guidelines on physical distancing issued under regulation 7A can be complied with and maintained while on site.

If remote assessment is not possible, the person responsible for the site visit will need to ensure compliance with the duty to take all reasonable measures to maintain a 2 metre distance between people on any land or buildings where the site visit is to take place.

Site visits must not be carried out by an officer who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild.

Site visits must not be undertaken to homes where anyone has coronavirus symptoms or is self-isolating.

All site visits should be subject to a risk assessment prior to travel to ensure compliance with the Coronavirus Regulations can be maintained.

#### Site notices and other publicity

Authorities are encouraged to expand the use of direct letters to neighbours as information about planning proposals may not be passed on through word of mouth as it was before the restrictions. Staff resources and office closures may be affecting whether authorities can print and post neighbour notification letters. If this is the case local planning authorities are encouraged to use the Notify service offered through The Government Digital Service.

#### **Determination timescales**

WG-PINS do not intend to change the determination timescales set out in the DMPWO. The Welsh Government acknowledges that statutory timescales will not be met in many cases due to these unprecedented times.

If an authority is unable to determine an application within the prescribed timeframe, a request for an extension of time should be made to the applicant, setting out the reasons for doing so. Authorities should be reasonable in the length of extension requested.

#### WELSH GOVERNMENT PLANNING INSPECTORATE ("WG-PINS") CONTINUED

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### Coronavirus (COVID-19): Planning Inspectorate Wales Update

27 May 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

Unaccompanied site visits have begun, along with access required site visits where access to a site can be gained with the authorisation of the land owner and without any other party present.

No hearings or inquiries are currently being arranged. WG-PINS are actively exploring how holding digital events may work.

#### MARINE MARITIME ORGANISATION ("MMO")

The MMO has issued some limited guidance as to adjustments it has made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It continues to provide its services during the unfolding events around the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

# A guide to current financial and welfare support for the fishing industry

published 24 March 2020, updated 3 April 2020

# Coronavirus – Temporary changes to how we process fishing vessel licence applications

3 April 2020

#### Update on Fisheries Response Fund: Support for aquaculture businesses

6 May 2020

#### **Key point(s)**

To assist industry stakeholders, the MMO has put together a financial and welfare support guide for the fishing industry to signpost the support that has been announced so far to assist businesses and individuals.

Changes have been made by the MMO as to how it handles fishing vessel licensing applications.

The guidance sets out a six-staged process which will enable licences to be processed entirely electronically.

English aquaculture businesses producing seafood for the food supply chain may now apply for grants up to a maximum of £10,000 per farm from the government's £10 million Fisheries Response Fund.

#### FORESTRY COMMISSION ("FO")

The FO has issued some limited guidance as to adjustments it has made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It continues to provide some services

#### Subject, Document Title & Date

#### **OPERATIONAL UPDATE**

# Forestry Commission operational update: coronavirus

3 April 2020, updated 27 April updated 15 May updated 9 June

#### **Key point(s)**

FO's National Office in Bristol, Area Offices in York, Penrith, Santon Downham, Farnham and Bullers Hill, and Admin Hub offices in the East and West of England are all closed, so do not telephone and do not send post.

The FO is conducting "priority grant and regulatory site visits" and "critical tree health work" (including site visits), but only where it is safe to do so and whilst observing advice on social distancing.

The FO is processing felling licences online here.

The FO suggests that, if coronavirus restrictions continue, in some cases the Woodland Officer **may** request a site visit, but the FO is looking at how to avoid the need for site visits.

For felling licences, legacy grant agreements or illegal felling, please use the Admin Hub email addresses listed under "Contacts" here.

Private forestry operations can continue in accordance with the appropriate guidance <u>here</u>.

The window for claims under the "Countryside Stewardship, Environmental Stewardship and Basic Payments Schemes" for the RPA and "Forestry Commission Farm Woodland claims" schemes has been extended until 15 June but claims should be made as soon as possible., ideally by email or obtain proof of postage. Contact the Admin Hub if you have difficulties meeting the deadline.

The FO is working with Natural England to progress Higher Tier applications remotely (this deadline passed on 1 May 2020). Further information may be needed to progress your application, including a site visit. If there are issues with application, agreement or claim deadlines or requirements, contact Rural Payments as soon as possible:

ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk or 03000 200 301

#### FORESTRY COMMISSION ("FO") CONTINUED

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#### **Key point(s)**

Port inspections and export work have been deemed essential to allow import and export trade to continue.

Regulated outbreak management of high priority pests and diseases also continues, in accordance with guidelines.

Car parks and facilities are being re-opened as and when it is safe to do so; this will not be uniform across the country, so check where is closed here.

#### **CONTRIBUTORS**



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Rachel joined Chambers in 2017
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