

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Urgent update for boaters

19 May 2020: Guidance note 5

We are keen to get people boating as soon as we can. We currently have teams out along our waterways making preparations safely and swiftly. Our priority is health and safety of our customers and staff and because of the nature of the rivers and our structures this work is ongoing.

You can now do all non-powered water sports on EA waterways and some waterways will be ready for leisure cruising as early as this week, with the rest by 1 June, unless hazards in the waterways prevent us from doing so.

We have written to boaters and navigation groups regularly throughout the Coronavirus pandemic to update you on lockdown restrictions and changes on our waterways. Today we are sharing more information about some of our work and updates on specific waterways.

You will be aware that on Wednesday 12 May the Government announced that water sports can resume including motor cruising, in accordance with the guidance of the relevant Navigation Authority. Now, all non-powered water sports can take place on EA waterways as long as they follow Government social distancing guidance, respect the needs and safety of our residential boating community and are extra vigilant in the water.

We are working hard to make sure powered boats can start leisure cruising on our waterways from 1 June at the latest. In order to be ready for this we have reassured boaters they can now visit their moored boats (subject to approval of your marina operator or boat club) to check them, carry out maintenance and ensure they are ready for use.

Our preparations involve carrying out a thorough (reach-by-reach) inspection of the channels, mark hazards, check the operational condition of our assets and issue safety advice to protect river users. We know there are some hazards out there such as sunken boats, shoals and fallen trees and our teams will be identifying and clearing these to make the waterways safe. We ask all boaters currently making essential journeys to be extra vigilant of unmarked hazards.

We will complete all inspections within 2 weeks, revise our guidance and get powered boats moving again no later than 1 June. Hazard markings, signage and safety advice will be in place by then. Where we identify hazards, we may have to continue to minimise movement on those reaches until we can complete the urgent maintenance work and local notices will be issued to inform you.

Where we do complete this sooner we will let local users know through local communications. On the Medway and some reaches of the Great Ouse, The Nene and the Thames this could happen as early as this week, followed by the remainder of the Thames and the Anglian waterways by 1 June.

We must still work under conditions of social distancing. This means we will not be able to provide some assisted passage at locks for the time being and some maintenance work may take longer to complete under the new Government safe working practices guidance.

From the 1 June, our normal time restrictions for our short stay moorings will be in place again. This means people currently moored on our short stay moorings will need to resume continuous cruising or return to their permanent mooring. If you are experiencing difficulty moving because you are isolating or shielding, please get in touch with your local waterways team.

You may also have received notification today that the Boat Safety Scheme Examination suspension has now been lifted, with a framework designed 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.

Specific waterway information

River Wye: We ask those using non-powered boats on the River Wye to be aware of different Government restrictions which are in place in Wales and to adhere to 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.

Rye Harbour: Operational for commercial shipping and leisure boat activity when tides permit and under social distancing and Government safe working practice guidance.

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

These are unusual times for us all. Please support us as our staff adjust to new ways of working. I can assure you we are all committed to getting boats moving as soon as is safe to do so for our customers and staff. Most importantly respect Government social distancing guidance and stay safe.

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

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