

Press release: Environment Agency to remove wrecks from River Thames at West Molesey

The boats at Cherry Orchard gardens in West Molesey, Surrey, have all been served with formal 'wreck' notices which, under Section 16 of the Thames Conservancy Act 1932, gives the Environment Agency the power to remove and destroy the boats – by blowing them up if necessary!

However, tomorrow's operation will see the boats lifted out by a barge-mounted crane, crushed and removed to the Environment Agency's depot at Sunbury for disposal. An Environment Agency patrol launch will also be on hand to manage river traffic.

Barry Russell, the Environment Agency's Waterways Manager for the non-tidal River Thames, said:

Irresponsible owners have allowed a number of boats to sink in this location. They then walked away from their responsibility to raise and remove them themselves, leaving the rest of the River Thames boating community to cover the costs through the boat registration fees they pay us, and which funds our service.

To maximise the cost-effectiveness of the operation, the River Thames Waterways team has secured the services of the barge-mounted crane and its crew from the Environment Agency's Operations Management team. It is normally used to support engineering projects such as the creation of flood defences. This represents a considerable saving compared to using external contractors. It will also seek to remove as many wrecks as possible until the barge is required for other duties elsewhere on the river.

Barry continues:

The boats we are removing are not a pollution risk, and are not obstructing the main navigation. These are the two criteria which would see us intervene as a matter of urgency. But they are an eyesore and have blighted the local riverscape for some considerable time, and enough is enough.

Despite our best efforts to trace and encourage the owners to do the right thing themselves, they clearly have no intention of doing so. Consequently, having followed due legal process, we are taking charge of the situation.

Where we can, we will seek to recover our costs from the owners. They can expect a hefty bill which, if they had maintained their

boats properly and not allowed them to sink in the first place, they would have avoided.

News story: UK troops deploy on largest NATO exercise in a decade

Hundreds of UK troops have arrived in the Netherlands today as part of an epic 2,500km road move to Norway for Exercise Trident Juncture, NATO's flagship exercise in 2018.

In Norway, 2,700 UK personnel will contribute to the large-scale and complex exercise which will test NATO's most important founding principle of collective defence in an article 5 scenario – when an attack on one is an attack on all.

With some 150 aircraft, 40,000 participants and 10,000 vehicles, this is the largest collective defence exercise NATO has conducted in over a decade.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

NATO is the bedrock of our defence where Britain plays a leading role. Whenever the call comes, the UK is foremost in stepping up to support our friends and allies across the globe.

This exercise demonstrates the strength of our collective defence. Together we are ready to tackle any threat, from any direction.

Earlier this week British Army vehicles and equipment were loaded onto Channel Tunnel trains before arriving in The Netherlands today as part of the complex logistical task of transporting a Battlegroup to Norway – a journey that includes road, rail and ferry.

Members of the Royal Logistics Corps are lending their expertise in support of the road move while in Norway soldiers from the Royal Irish Regiment, the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment and supporting units will train together with NATO allies.

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The River Thames Waterways team is carrying out an operation to remove a number of abandoned and sunken 'eyesore' wrecks from the River Thames.

News story: Building support for veterans' mental health

As the UK joins in marking World Mental Health Day, a unique fundraiser which aims raise tp awareness of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in veterans has been devised by a police officer at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl)

PC Paul Cocoran (known as Coco) is behind the project, called 'Not Just Another Brick In The Wall.' It will see volunteers carrying bricks dedicated to the veterans who have lost their lives on operations, or who have sadly taken their own life as a result of mental health issues.

Raising money for the Rifles Care for Casualties Charity, Coco has set a target of £100,000.

Coco said:

If you think if a veteran has problems, he forms an imaginary brick and throws it into his rucksack, if he falls out with his partner, that's another brick, until he's weighed down and can't cope.

We want to highlight the issue of PTSD. We're even taking a brick with a blank plate on, to show this is an ongoing issue and we need to do more.

The challenge will be to walk 45 miles of Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland, over three days, carrying the bricks to the finish. Each brick will have a brass plaque with the name of a loved one inscribed. Made and engraved by apprentices at Dstl, Coco hopes the collection will be housed at the Light Infantry museum after the event.

Bee Shute, Apprentice Manager from Dstl, said:

It is fantastic that some of our second year engineering apprentices will be supporting this project by inscribing the brass plaques.

Over 150 people have already signed up, including some currently suffering from PTSD.

Before becoming a PC, Coco had a full career in the Army and was involved in Army sport. As a veteran, he's done a number of unusual challenges, including walking the Coast to Coast way carrying an ironing board, and raising £10,000 by recreating a sitting room on the summit of Snowdon.

Coco added:

Not just another brick in the wall means that these aren't just names, they are soldiers who were sons, fathers, brothers. Seven Rifles veterans have taken their own lives in the last year alone. I don't want to inscribe another brick.

For more information, or to get involved, search for Not Just Another Brick In The Wall on Facebook, or email paulcocoran@hotmail.com

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