

[Press release: New funding scheme to improve lakes and rivers in England](#)

A new £27 million scheme to improve the water environment across England has been jointly launched today by Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

The [Water Environment Grant scheme](#) will provide £9 million each year over the next three years to applicants applying for funding to restore local eco-systems and deliver substantial benefits to people and the environment.

Potential projects could include river restoration activities, removal of obstacles to help fish moving along rivers and streams or actions to improve the water quality.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

The Water Environment Grant scheme offers a fantastic opportunity for applicants from across the country to secure funding for projects to enhance the environment, boost wildlife and benefit their rural community.

This project will help us to deliver a balanced programme of environmental improvements across England and I am looking forward to seeing the creative and innovative projects of the applicants.

The scheme, funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, will award grants to non-profit ventures with greater support for projects which enhance water eco-systems.

WEG is now open to eligible applicants until 11 May 2018. Grants will be determined by the Environment Agency and Natural England and funding will be awarded in August 2018.

Successful applicants will be expected to start their projects before March 2019, with completion dates of March 2021.

[Apply for the Water Environment Grant now](#)

Lands Department follows up on the telephone exchanges in breach of uses specified in land lease

In response to media reports on HKT Limited's seven telephone exchanges in suspected breach of uses specified in the land lease, a spokesman for the Lands Department (LandsD) said today (March 20) that relevant District Lands Offices (DLOs) have already checked the lease conditions and inspected six of the telephone exchanges. Specific details are as follows.

Parts of the seven telephone exchanges in question are:

1. G/F, Tsuen Wan Telephone Exchange, No. 303 Castle Peak Road, Tsuen Wan, New Territories
2. G/F, Yuen Long Telephone Exchange, Nos. 170-184 Kau Yuk Road, Yuen Long, New Territories
3. 9/F, Mong Kok Telephone Exchange, No. 37 Bute Street, Mong Kok, Kowloon
4. G/F, Lai Chi Kok Telephone Exchange, No. 2 Yuet Lun Street, Lai Chi Kok, Kowloon
5. 10/F, East Telephone Exchange Tower, No. 38 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
6. 24/F, West Exchange Tower, No. 322 Des Voeux Road Central, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong
7. Basement, Lockhart Telephone Exchange Tower, No. 3 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

Except with the telephone exchange numbered (5) above, the DLOs concerned have discovered that the remaining six telephone exchanges have been converted to customer service centres suspected in breach of lease conditions. After considering legal advice, the DLOs are in the process of issuing warning letters to the owners requiring them to rectify the breach, otherwise the department will take further lease enforcement actions. As for the one remaining (i.e. No. (5) mentioned above), the DLO concerned expects to complete inspections in the near future.

On media reports that DLOs had notified the owner before conducting an inspection, the spokesman responded that DLOs will send their staff to conduct inspections upon receipt of complaints or referrals and, depending on the circumstances, owners will normally not be notified in advance. However, as the LandsD acts in accordance with the land lease conditions and there is no legislation empowering its staff to enter private premises to conduct inspections without permission, if they cannot enter the premises for site inspection and investigation, they will normally leave a contact slip at the premises or take the initiative to liaise with the owner, so as to arrange a date and time slot for entering the premises as soon as possible. Besides, LandsD's staff will collect relevant information or evidence outside the

premises or through other means and seek legal advice to confirm whether the land lease conditions have been breached.

The LandsD reiterates that the owner has the responsibility to rectify breaches found at its premises. Failure of rectification within a specified period will result in registration of the warning letter, issued by the LandsD, at the Land Registry, commonly known as “imposing an encumbrance”; and the LandsD reserves the right to take further lease enforcement actions. Even if the breaches were rectified, if the concerned use in breach of the land lease is repeated in future, the LandsD will consider taking further action after seeking legal advice, including re-entry of the land or vesting the property in the Government, or taking civil action according to legal advice.

As far as the seven telephone exchanges are concerned, relevant DLOs have been advised that applications for temporary waivers/permission in respect of four cases will be submitted by the owner to permit use other than those allowed under the lease. The applications, once received, will be processed in accordance with the established mechanism, and if approved, will be subject to an administrative fee and a waiver fee. A retrospective fee to be assessed at market rental dated back to the period from identification of the breaches to the grant of the waiver will also be charged.

The LandsD stresses that it is the responsibility of the owner to comply with lease conditions. Even when the owner submits application for temporary waiver/permission to the LandsD in respect of the lease breaches, the department would still consider taking parallel action to register the warning letter at the Land Registry (commonly known as “imposing an encumbrance”) so to allow members of the public and creditors (if any) of the owner knowledge of the lease breaches. If a case does not meet the prescribed criteria or the regularisation application is rejected, the LandsD will take lease enforcement actions against the breaches as soon as possible.

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One market – one Europe

Joint statement on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the European Single Market

by Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, and Boyko Borissov, holder of the rotating Council Presidency and Prime Minister of Bulgaria

Twenty-five years ago, our Single Market was created, and across the European Union many barriers were lifted. People embraced new freedoms and opportunities, and today Europeans travel freely, study, work, live and fall in love across borders.

European citizens can buy what they want, where they want, and benefit from greater choice and lower prices. European businesses – large and small – can expand their customer base and exchange products and services more easily across the EU.

Over the past 25 years, the integration of our economies throughout the Single Market has generated millions of jobs, and made the EU the world's largest economy. The Single Market is the jewel in the crown of our integration and this domestic market of 500 million people is the foundation for Europe's strength, at home and abroad.

The Single Market provides Europe's citizens with the freedoms and opportunities that were only a dream for our parents and grandparents, and our social market economy benefits us all. There are no second-class Europeans in our Single Market and so there is no room for second-class products or for second-class workers; meaning, the same pay for the same work in the same place, the same quality of food and the same safety of toys and other products.

Over the past 25 years, we have come a long way. We can now roam like at home, enjoy cheaper energy bills, and see our consumer rights protected, regardless of where in Europe we make purchases. And still, we continue to improve the functioning of our Single Market on a daily basis, from tackling unauthorised geo-blocking to giving consumers greater choice for their retirement savings or making public procurement contracts more accessible.

The European Single Market is 25 years young. A generation of Europeans has grown up with it and benefitted from it. We will keep making it stronger so that the next generation will benefit even more.