

Press release: Flood protection event for North East town

Residents in a Northumberland town are invited to find out more about potential options for flood protection.

The Environment Agency is carrying out an appraisal of flood defences in Ponteland and are considering a number of options to continue to protect properties from flooding as well as bring environmental improvements.

Residents are invited to a drop-in event which takes place on 23 January at Ponteland Memorial Hall, Darras Road, NE20 9NX. They can drop-in at any time between 2.30pm and 6.30pm.

Ponteland has a history of flooding from the River Pont and currently the Environment Agency maintains a range of assets in the area, including flood walls, embankments and pumping stations.

It is currently reviewing the condition of those assets and working with partners to better understand flood risk in Ponteland and develop a flood alleviation scheme to better protect properties in the town into the future.

The scheme aims to:

- Improve understanding of main river and surface water flood risk in Ponteland, with an improved model to support the scheme as well as the flood warning and incident response.
- Reduce flood risk to homes and businesses in Ponteland, and reduce the impacts on roads and utility infrastructure.
- Seek opportunities to provide environmental benefits as a result of any scheme.

During this year, working with partners and the community, the Environment Agency hopes to identify a preferred option for flood protection.

Vanessa Collins, Project Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

We are updating our flood modelling and investigating the existing flood defences in Ponteland to improve our understanding of flood risk and ensure the standard of protection can be maintained in the future.

We are considering a number of options in more detail over the next few months and we would like to hear the thoughts of residents.

We understand just how devastating it is to be flooded – we know there is a history of flooding in Ponteland – and we are committed to ensuring residents are protected.

We want to work closely with the community throughout this process and would encourage people to come along to find out more.

The latest information about the scheme and the potential options are available on the scheme's new [online consultation website](#).

[Press release: FCO statement on the attack on a police academy in Bogotá, Colombia](#)



An FCO spokesperson:

The UK deplores the bomb attack on the General Santander police academy in Bogotá, which has claimed innocent lives and injured many more.

We offer our condolences to the families of the victims and our thoughts are with all those affected by the attack.

Colombia has been steadfast in its rejection of violence for political ends. We reaffirm the UK's strong condemnation of all acts of terror, and our unwavering support to the Colombian authorities as they seek to ensure sustainable peace in Colombia.

Further information

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[Press release: Natural England's longest-serving Chair retires](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content] Andrew Sells retires today as Chair of Natural England after five years.

[News story: Landmark 1,000th waste shipment achieved in record time](#)

LLW Repository Ltd (LLWR) has facilitated its 1,000th shipment of waste around the UK and overseas for the year in record time.

The landmark figure has been achieved in quarter 3 of the financial year and marks a 30% increase on last year's record-breaking total at the same point in the calendar.

The increased pace of low level waste shipments is testament to LLWR's success in treating or diverting waste away from disposal at the LLW Repository in Cumbria.

Dave Rossiter, Head of Waste Management Services at LLWR, said: "We are diverting increasing amounts of waste, using road and rail, utilising a range of treatment, recycling and alternative disposal routes, such as appropriately licensed commercial hazardous waste landfill sites.

"It's ensuring that our people are busier than ever, arranging transports, but they are certainly up for the challenge.

"Around 5% of low level waste is now disposed of at the Repository, down from 95% a decade ago, and that means we are preserving valuable capacity, removing the requirement for a second Repository, at a projected cost to the taxpayer of over £2 billion."

Press release: Self Assessment returns: unbelievable excuses and dubious expenses

Most of our customers complete their tax returns honestly and on time but every year HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) receives some outlandish excuses and expense claims.

Some of the most bizarre excuses HMRC received from customers who missed the Self Assessment deadline include being too short to reach the post box and having fingers too cold to type. Here are some of the strangest from the past year:

1. my mother-in-law is a witch and put a curse on me
2. I'm too short to reach the post box
3. I was just too busy – my first maid left, my second maid stole from me, and my third maid was very slow to learn
4. our junior member of staff registered our client in Self Assessment by mistake because they were not wearing their glasses
5. my boiler had broken and my fingers were too cold to type

You can watch a YouTube video about the [most bizarre excuses](#).

As well as unbelievable excuses, every year we also receive some dubious expenses claims for unconvincing items like woolly underwear and pet insurance for a dog. Some of the most questionable include:

1. a carpenter claiming £900 for a 55-inch TV and sound bar to help him price his jobs
2. £40 on extra woolly underwear, for 5 years
3. £756 for my pet dog insurance
4. a music subscription, so I can listen to music while I work
5. a family holiday to Nigeria

All these excuses and expenses were unsuccessful.

You can watch a YouTube video about [dubious expense claims](#).

Help is available on [GOV.UK](#), from the Self Assessment helpline on 0300 200 3310, and on social media.

Angela MacDonald, HMRC Director General of Customer Services, said:

We want to make it as simple as possible for our customers to do

their tax returns and the majority make the effort to do theirs right and on time. But each year we still come across some poor excuses and expenses which range from problems with maids to televisions.

Help will always be provided for those who have a genuine excuse for not submitting their return on time but it's unfair to the majority of honest taxpayers when others make bogus claims.

If you think you might miss the 31 January deadline, get in touch with us now – the earlier we're contacted, the more we can help.

The deadline for sending 2017 to 2018 Self Assessment tax returns to HMRC, and paying any tax owed, is 31 January 2019.

HMRC will treat those with genuine excuses leniently, as we focus our penalties on those who persistently fail to complete their tax returns and deliberate tax evaders. The excuse must be genuine and we might ask for evidence. Those listed above were all declined on the basis that they were either untrue or not good enough reasons.

Customers who provide HMRC with a reasonable excuse before the 31 January deadline can avoid a penalty after this date.

The penalties for late tax returns are:

- an initial £100 fixed penalty, which applies even if there is no tax to pay, or if the tax due is paid on time
- after 3 months, additional daily penalties of £10 per day, up to a maximum of £900
- after 6 months, a further penalty of 5% of the tax due or £300, whichever is greater
- after 12 months, another 5% or £300 charge, whichever is greater

There are also additional penalties for paying late of 5% of the tax unpaid at 30 days, 6 months and 12 months.

Tax is automatically deducted from the majority of UK taxpayers' wages, pensions or savings. For people or businesses where tax is not automatically deducted, or when they may have earned additional untaxed income, they are required to complete a Self Assessment tax return each year.