

Press release: Appeal for information following pollution in Hampshire

The Environment Agency is appealing for information in the Andover area following a pollution incident on the River Anton.

The Environment Agency were alerted to a pollution of oil on the River Anton close to Andover College on 4 April.

Since then, Environment Officers have been working on site to determine the source and reduce the impact on the environment, and booms have been deployed across the river to contain the pollution.

Adam Fulton, Area Duty Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

Our Environment Officers are working hard at the site to manage the environmental impact, and at the moment we have had no reports of dead fish.

We will continue to investigate the source of pollution, and are asking anyone who might be able to assist our enquiries to call our Incident Hotline on 0800 807060.

News story: Laser technology used in works to secure mine shaft

Works are now complete to secure an unrecorded mine shaft, which caused a ground collapse at Kilbowie Road, Clydebank.

The collapse was caused by a mine shaft that was not detailed in historical mining records, but we believe that it was used to extract coal, limestone and iron ore over 100 years ago.

While only a 6 metre diameter hole was initially visible at the surface, investigations using laser scanning technology identified this led to a 200 cubic metre void on top of the unrecorded mine shaft, which went down a further 56 metres.

Laser scan showing the void beneath Kilbowie Road

The depth of the mine shaft is the equivalent to the height of 14 double

decker buses stacked on top of one another.

Our team of experts designed a solution to safely:

- fill the shaft with 140 tonnes of stone and inject 217 tonnes of pressurised grout
- construct a reinforced concrete cap

This repair was further complicated by exposed utility services in the void that needed to be protected during the works. A fractured foul water sewer and storm water drain within the ground collapse also made the repair more complex, with water needing to be pumped over 150 metres around the void during the works.

The Coal Authority's works at Kilbowie Road, Clydebank

Tim Marples, Head of Public Safety and Subsidence, said:

"Our team has now completed works to secure the mine shaft and we've handed over the site to West Dunbartonshire Council who are leading on the road reinstatement works.

"It's been a complex repair project, but our team's been operating 7 days a week to ensure it was completed as quickly as possible.

"We'd like to thank residents for their patience while our works have taken place."

A West Dunbartonshire Council spokesperson said:

"Following the completion of the Coal Authority's repairs, work will begin to fill the void above the shaft, reinstate services, commence the road reconstruction and resurface the road.

"This phase of the repairs was anticipated to take up to 16 weeks, however, we hope to have completed this work by the end of June.

"If residents have any specific queries we would encourage them to email roads@west-dunbarton.gov.uk so that we can help."

Press release: Foreign Secretary on first official visit to Greece

The Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson is visiting Athens on 6 and 7 April.

The Foreign Secretary is visiting Greece to underline the strength of the UK-

Greece relationship and our cooperation on a wide range of areas including migration, organised crime and counter terrorism.

During his visit the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson will meet with the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias.

Speaking from Athens, the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Greece is an important partner for the UK. We work closely together on our joint security and defence objectives in the region and our shared goal of a Cyprus Settlement. As we prepare to leave the EU, I look forward to strengthening our historic ties.

Further information

News story: Foreign Office appoints new Non Executive Directors

Miranda Curtis has been appointed as lead non-executive director, and Sir Edward Lister has been appointed as a member non-executive director.

They take up their appointments with immediate effect.

Miranda Curtis's expertise is in building multinational leadership teams, the negotiation and oversight of international joint ventures, and cross-border deal making.

Sir Edward Lister's background is in facilitating large-scale urban regeneration schemes and coordinating major public & private sector partnerships.

Head of the UK Diplomatic Service, Sir Simon McDonald said:

I welcome Miranda and Sir Edward to the Foreign Office's Board. They know how to manage large projects in both the commercial and public sectors and will give us invaluable support.

Further Information:

Miranda Curtis is Non-executive director of Marks and Spencer Plc and Deputy Chair of the Royal Shakespeare Company. She spent her executive career in international media and telecoms, with over 20 years at Liberty Global. She joined the board of Liberty in 2010.

Sir Edward is Chairman of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). Previous roles include Chief of Staff to the Mayor of London, Deputy Mayor for Policy and Planning at City Hall and Leader of Wandsworth Council. He was also the Chairman of the Old Oak Common Development Corporation.

Speech: Our tax cuts will matter to millions: article by Jane Ellison

When I was first elected to parliament in 2010, the minimum wage was £5.80, average weekly earnings were £450, and the personal allowance – the point at which people start paying income tax – stood at just £6,475.

Today marks the beginning of the seventh new tax year since then and the national living wage now stands at £7.50, average weekly earnings have topped £500 and the personal allowance has been significantly increased. As of today, you can earn £11,500 before you start to pay income tax.

Millions of people across the country will now be better off, with a typical basic rate taxpayer saving more than £1,000 in tax compared to back then.

It also means 1.3 million people won't pay income tax at all any more – but the good news isn't confined to our lowest paid.

Alongside the increase to the personal allowance, we're also raising the threshold for those who pay the 40p income tax rate. Now, only those earning £45,000 or more will pay the higher rate, stopping more than half a million on middle incomes tipping into the top rate.

The measures may not grab headlines, but they matter. The government wants people to take home more of their hard-earned money, giving them the means to live well, realise their ambitions and look after their families.

Our plan for Britain means living within our means as a country, giving the lowest earners a pay rise through the national living wage, taking 1.3 million people out of tax altogether, helping hard-working families to keep more of what they earn by cutting taxes for 31 million people and doubling free childcare for nearly 400,000 parents.

We're following a long-term plan to get our tax system working for working people – a plan that will have spanned a whole decade.

As we've already promised, by 2020 the personal allowance will rise to £12,500 – 90 per cent higher than it was in 2010. And the higher rate threshold will stand at £50,000, protecting more and more people on middle incomes from paying the higher rate.

Today is an important milestone for the millions of people helped by these tax cuts. And with it, we are taking another step forward in our journey to becoming a country that really does work for everyone.