

Yarm flood defences to be reviewed

Press release

The Environment Agency is carrying out a review of Yarm's flood defences to ensure the best protection for 500 homes and businesses.



Yarm flood gates

Flood gates in Yarm which reduce the risk of flooding from the River Tees could be renewed as part of a significant review of defences in the town.

The Environment Agency maintains 1.3km of flood wall in the town, which protects over 500 homes and businesses and is intersected with a series of flood gates that allow access to public areas as well as to some individual properties.

It is currently reviewing all the flood defences in the town to ensure they continue to offer the best possible protection for the whole community.

Best possible protection

Simon Wilson, Environment Agency Senior Advisor in the Flood and Coastal Risk Management team in the North East, said:

The Environment Agency is carrying out a review of Yarm's flood defences to ensure local people continue to have the best possible protection from the River Tees.

We have recently made repairs to some of the flood gates and they continue to function and protect the town, but their condition is deteriorating and we are taking steps now to stop this becoming a problem in the future.

Those that serve public areas such as footpaths and car parks will be replaced, and we are contacting residents with flood gates on their properties this week to consider whether they should be

replaced or removed in favour of a more robust and continuous flood wall.

We want to find out more about how the gates impact access and how they are operated, with our priority being the safety of all residents in Yarm.

The Environment Agency is carrying out this project within the current government coronavirus guidelines to ensure the safety of staff and residents.

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UK sanctions Myanmar military generals for serious human rights violations

UK sanctions Myanmar military generals for serious human rights violations following military coup

- Three individuals sanctioned for serious human rights violations
- Foreign Secretary announces new work to stop UK businesses working with Myanmar's military
- New measures put in place to ensure UK aid is not diverted from the most vulnerable to the military government. The UK will enforce immediate asset freezes and travel bans against three members of the Myanmar military regime for their role in serious human rights violations during the coup, the Foreign Secretary has announced. The measures are being taken in tandem with Canada which is also today announcing action against the regime.

These sanctions are in addition to the sanctions against 16 individuals from the Myanmar military already listed by the UK.

Today's sanctions, which have been made under the UK's sanctions regime relating to Myanmar, represent further action by the UK alongside allies to send a message to the Myanmar military that there will be consequences for its human rights violations. The sanctions come into force immediately.

Myanmar's military and police have committed serious human rights violations, including violating the right to life, the right to freedom of assembly, the right not to be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention, and the right to freedom of expression.

The UK will impose sanctions on:

- The Minister of Defence, General Mya Tun Oo for his responsibility for serious human rights violations by the military
- Minister for Home Affairs, Lt General Soe Htut for his responsibility for serious human rights violations by the Myanmar Police Force
- Deputy Minister for Home Affairs, Lt General Than Hlaing, for his responsibility for serious human rights violations by the Myanmar Police Force

In response to the coup and subsequent human rights violations, the Foreign Office and Department for International Trade have also launched an enhanced due diligence process to mitigate the risk of military businesses operating in the UK and associated illicit money flows.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The UK condemns the military coup and the arbitrary detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political figures.

We, alongside our international allies will hold the Myanmar military to account for their violations of human rights and pursue justice for the Myanmar people.

Alongside today's announcement further safeguards are now being put in place to prevent UK aid indirectly supporting the military led government following the conclusion of an aid review, announced immediately after the coup. Support for government led reforms has been axed and planned programmes will close. Instead the government will put in place measures to ensure aid is reaching only the poorest and most vulnerable in Myanmar

The UK has led a strong, coordinated international response to support the Myanmar people and put pressure on the military. This includes; leading a statement by G7 Foreign Ministers on 3rd February; convening an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council and coordinating a statement from all members condemning the coup on 4th February; and co-leading a Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council on 12th February.

The UN HRC session secured a resolution, agreed by consensus that called for the immediate and unconditional release of all persons arbitrarily detained in Myanmar, and the lifting of the state of emergency imposed by the military.

ENDS

COVID-19 home testing kits now easier to order

- Home test kits can now be ordered over the phone by calling 119, without needing access to the internet
- NHS Test and Trace partnership with Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) to improve home testing service for people with visual impairments
- New video-call support service with specially trained NHS Test and Trace staff will assist people with vision impairments to test at home

People who do not have access to the internet can now order PCR home testing kits over the phone by calling 119, without needing an email address or any other digital requirement.

This means that people without access to the internet or digital services can order PCR tests to use in their homes, if they have symptoms. The home testing service is available to everyone in the United Kingdom with COVID-19 symptoms, and can still be accessed through the [home testing online portal](#).

In order to improve accessibility of testing services, NHS Test and Trace has worked with and sought feedback from a number of charities, including the RNIB, Macular Society, Thomas Pocklington Trust and Visionary.

NHS Test and Trace has worked particularly closely with the RNIB, undertaking trials with volunteers with differing levels of vision quality to understand the changes that would have the most impact. Following recommendations, new tools are being introduced for those ordering home test kits who are vision impaired, including:

- improved boxes that are easier to assemble for the returning of tests
- instructions in braille, audio (CD) and large print
- an RNIB information line you can call to hear a recorded version of the instructions

Additionally, the government is planning the spring launch of 'Be My Eyes' specialist video support, an app that customers can download that will offer customers with vision impairments live video assistance where an assistant will 'act as their eyes'. The assistants are specially trained NHS Test and Trace staff.

NHS Test and Trace's network of more than 850 test sites also has access to language translation services. Home test kit easy read instructions are translated into Hindi, Bengali, Polish, Indian Punjabi, Pakistani Punjabi, Slovak, Somali, Urdu, Gujarati, Arabic, Mandarin and Chinese, and are being made available in both hard copy and online.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

With more than 6 million PCR home tests conducted, home testing has not just improved convenience for many people who would have struggled to get to a test site, it has made testing more accessible for those who are shielding, self-isolating or awaiting elective hospital surgery.

We've made further improvements to accessibility, including the introduction of practical new tools for the vision-impaired, and a non-digital user journey for the digitally excluded, where people can call 119 to order a test kit, register test samples and receive results.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

We're working with partners, like the Royal National Institute of Blind People, to better understand the end-to-end experience of users to break down any and all barriers to testing in our communities.

I encourage everyone with symptoms to get tested at one of more than 850 test sites we've set up. Those who cannot make it to a test site can order a home testing kit online or, now, by calling 119.

Sarah Lambert, Head of Social Change at RNIB, said:

RNIB began campaigning for a more accessible test in April last year, and were pleased to be invited to work with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), trialling measures to improve it from May.

As a result of this work, it's good to see the launch of instructions for the kit in a range of formats including braille, audio and large print and new less-fiddly packaging. It is also welcome that people without an email address can now access a test. We look forward to further changes in the coming months too.

We're keen to work with the government to make sure future projects build in accessibility from the start.

Alexander Hauerslev Jensen, CCO, Be My Eyes said:

Be My Eyes video support provides the best possible experience for getting issues resolved efficiently – for any product or service – and we can't think of a better application for this platform than using it to make COVID home tests more accessible to people who are blind or partially sighted.

Since the start of the pandemic, the UK's rapid work has seen us build the biggest testing system, conducting more tests in total than any other major European country.

Hundreds of thousands of tests are processed every day, and more than 8.6 million people, including those testing positive and their close contacts, have been asked to self-isolate thanks to the work of NHS Test and Trace. Nearly everyone can access a test locally, as more than 850 test sites are in operation and the median distance travelled for a test is just 1.9 miles.

NHS Test and Trace has also continued to deliver some of its best turnaround times for home test kit results since the service launched last May, with a median turnaround time of 35 hours. We received more than 260,000 home test kits during this reporting week, with the service ensuring that those who are required to take a COVID-19 test are able to access one without visiting a test centre and meeting demand despite the current weather conditions.

Edward Bates, 30, from Winterton was a participant in one of the RNIB and DHSC trials for blind and partially sighted people and said:

It was really great to be part of the trial to improve the accessibility of the home test. I found the digital version of the instructions really helpful as I was able to read them using my screen reader software.

I am really pleased these improvements are being made so blind and partially sighted people are able to get access to a test whenever they need one.

Berni Warren, who has diabetic macular oedema (DMO) had previously ordered a home COVID-19 PCR test with the help of her husband. Berni has used the new Be My Eyes service to order and use a home test and said:

I did it with my husband and I did it completely wrong. I also needed a lot of help from him. This trial was an opportunity to do it myself, so I used Be My Eyes because then I knew I could do it independently and I wanted to do it independently. I didn't want to rely on any other help from my family, and they are all at work anyway.

So, I phoned Be My Eyes to give me a hand and it was brilliant – really, really good. It gave me the confidence to do it properly and safely. The test is a bit fiddly, but to have someone to talk you through it really helped, because then I knew I was doing it right. I wouldn't have had the confidence to know I was doing it the right way otherwise and I would have worried sending it off.

What I was really worried about was the swab, because I couldn't see it at all. I couldn't see which end I had to hold and that was the most useful bit of the test. The person from Be My Eyes was so

patient and explained things so well. I didn't feel rushed and I found it so useful and would definitely recommend it.

NHS Test and Trace and Be My Eyes partnered to improve the accessibility of COVID at-home testing. Paralympic gold medalist in cycling, Lora Fachie, MBE was a member of the test group for the programme and said:

The lady who I connected with was fantastic at just directing me.

She just took charge and provided clear instructions and put me at ease as I was feeling a bit apprehensive about the whole thing.

For those with sight loss, it can be challenging to understand and follow the procedure for self-testing without some help. Those who are blind or experiencing sight loss across the United Kingdom can soon call the NHS for visual assistance with taking the at-home COVID test directly from the [Be My Eyes app](#).

Susanna McGibbon appointed as Treasury Solicitor, HM Procurator General and Permanent Secretary, Government Legal Department

News story

Susanna McGibbon has been appointed as Treasury Solicitor, HM Procurator General and Permanent Secretary, Government Legal Department



The Cabinet Secretary, with the approval of the Prime Minister, has appointed Susanna McGibbon as the new Treasury Solicitor, HM Procurator General and

Permanent Secretary, Government Legal Department (GLD). The HM Procurator General aspect of the role is made by Royal Warrant and has been approved by the Queen.

The Attorney General, Suella Braverman, said:

“I am delighted that Susanna McGibbon will be the next Treasury Solicitor. Susanna is not only one of the Government’s best lawyers but also one of our best leaders and this was evident in the role she played in co-ordinating the Government’s legal response to the pandemic. I know that Susanna will be an excellent leader of the Government Legal Department and I look forward to working with her.”

The Cabinet Secretary, Simon Case, said:

“Susanna’s appointment is excellent news for the Government Legal Department. She has exceptional legal skills and a strong track record in advising on complex legal matters. Susanna is an inspirational leader in the Civil Service, and I’m confident she will take this forward in her new role to become an outstanding Treasury Solicitor.

I would like to thank Peter Fish for his leadership of the GLD since November and wish him all the best for the future.”

“I am deeply honoured to be the next Treasury Solicitor. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to lead the Government Legal Department, an outstanding legal organisation committed to the highest standards of professionalism, at this important time for our country. I want to pay tribute to colleagues across the Department for their incredible work supporting the full range of government priorities in these challenging circumstances.

I am looking forward to leading GLD in tackling the challenges and embracing the opportunities of 2021 and beyond. I want to thank Peter Fish and Jonathan Jones for their immeasurable contribution to the Government Legal Profession and wish them well for the future.”

Susanna is expected to take up post on 8 March. Arrangements for appointing her successor will be announced in due course.

Notes for Editors:

- Susanna is currently Director General, Government Legal Department and Director General Legal Group, Department for Work and Pensions, where she leads and manages the Government Legal Department, as a member of the Board and Executive Committee, in support of the Treasury Solicitor. She is also a member of the DWP Executive Team, providing expert senior legal advice.
- Prior to that Susanna was Director of Litigation at GLD, conducting domestic litigation on behalf of most government departments. She has also been Legal Director for the Department of Communities and Local Government, Department for Trade and Industry and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.
- Treasury Solicitor is the government’s most senior legal official and

Permanent Secretary of the Government Legal Department. In addition, the Treasury Solicitor acts as head of profession for the wider Government Legal Profession, which includes a number of government legal teams outside GLD.

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Webinar: All you need to know about submitting a successful application – 25th February 11am-12pm

News story

Sign up to our webinar to discover what you need to know (from the Regulator's perspective) on submitting a successful application of incorporation or conversion to a community interest company.



Sign up to our "All you need to know about submitting a successful application " webinar taking place on 25th February 11am-12pm [here](#)

This is your chance to get some tips on how to complete a successful application of incorporation or conversion to a community interest company, and to acquire further information on what the Regulator looks at when considering an application and solutions to the common errors that we see.

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