

Ilkley gets green light for first river bathing site in England

Part of the River Wharfe in Ilkley will be added to the list of bathing waters in England from 2021.

This follows a public consultation which ran from 7 August to 2 October 2020 on designating the area of the River Wharfe which runs between Ilkley Main Bridge and Beanlands Island at Ilkley in Yorkshire. It is a popular swimming and paddling spot for both local residents and visitors to the area.

The new status means that the Environment Agency will regularly take samples from the river to assess whether action is needed to cut bacteria levels, helping to ensure the water is cleaner and safer for swimmers, and improve the Wharfe's water quality. Monitoring will begin from May 2021.

Today's announcement comes as Yorkshire Water confirmed a new partnership to improve water quality in the River Wharfe, bringing together the Environment Agency, Bradford Council, National Farmers Union (NFU), Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and landowners upstream of Ilkley.

It has also set out plans to reduce storm overflow discharges into the river by 20%, increasing the use of smart tech to predict and prevent pollution incidents.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

The residents of Ilkley and the surrounding area have shown their overwhelming appreciation for the River Wharfe as an asset to enjoy and protect. I am delighted that this stretch of river will be the first river to host a designated bathing water site.

Unfortunately, we all know that water quality won't change overnight. It will take time and we need farmers and businesses to commit to achieve the necessary improvements. I am pleased to see Yorkshire Water stepping forward with new proposals today to help move things in the right direction.

The Environment Agency has been monitoring at bathing water sites on the coast and at certain lakes since the 1990s, and in this time there have been significant improvements to water quality. In 2019, 98.3 per cent of England's bathing waters met the minimum bathing water standard and for the first time since the relevant regulations were brought into force, more than 70 per cent of bathing waters achieved the highest standard

Responses to the consultation were received from a wide range of interested

parties across the country, including Ilkley residents, NGOs, conservation groups and local water company Yorkshire Water.

In total there were 1073 replies, the largest response to date for a proposed bathing water designation, with 998 of respondents in favour of making the site a designated bathing water area.

[Situation of British Nationals abroad due to COVID-19](#)

World news story

The UK is working with international partners to understand where and how British travellers have been affected and to minimise disruption as far as possible.



Nick Whittingham, British Ambassador to Guatemala, said:

Country-specific travel restrictions are a matter for each country's own government. Our overriding concern is always the safety and security of British nationals. We are in close touch with international partners and monitoring the situation closely. We are not aware of large numbers of travellers stranded in Guatemala at this time. British travellers should follow the guidance and requirements of the country they are in, and speak to their airlines for the latest travel options in the first instance, whilst we work to ensure commercial routes to the UK remain open. Information will be updated constantly in our [website](#) and social media channels.

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Seeking cooperation in order to achieve a two-state solution

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. As others have done, I'd like to pay tribute to his tireless work in this role to de-escalate tension and advance peace between the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I look forward to continuing to work with Nikolay Mladenov in his new role and to welcoming his successor.

Mr President, let me first express the UK's sadness at the death of the Palestinian child, Ali Ayman Abu Alaya, following clashes between the Israel Defense Forces and Palestinian civilians. We have urged Israel to ensure that its investigation is swift and comprehensive. Unfortunately, the death of Abu Alaya is not an exceptional occurrence. He is the most recent of 23 Palestinian civilians to have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank this year. The toll is unacceptable, and the UK continues to urge restraint in the use of live fire and potentially lethal force by Israeli forces. We also condemn the killing of an Israeli civilian by a Palestinian in the same period.

As the Secretary-General's report notes, throughout this year, we have seen further settlement advancement, including in highly sensitive areas around East Jerusalem. We have seen the highest level of demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures since 2016 and ongoing evictions of Palestinians from their homes. In East Jerusalem hundreds are at risk, including those eight families facing imminent eviction in Silwan. The United Kingdom's position on these issues is clear and well known. Settlements are illegal under international law. They are an obstacle to peace and they undermine the physical viability of the two-state solution. Demolitions and evictions in all but the most exceptional of circumstances are illegal under international law and cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians. We urge the government of Israel to cease these policies in order to build confidence with the Palestinians and encourage the pursuit of dialogue.

However, as resolution 2334 recognises, settlements are not the only obstacle to peace. The people of Israel deserve to live free from the scourge of terrorism and anti-Semitic incitement, which gravely undermine the prospects for a two-state solution. It is critical that the Palestinian leadership continue their efforts to tackle them. We also condemn violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. The Israeli security forces must provide appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

Mr President, I would like to raise the Commissioner General's urgent call for additional funding for UNWRA. The UK has contributed £51 million, or approximately \$69 million, to UNWRA in 2020 and engaged closely with the Commissioner General. We call on states who have cut their funding in recent

years to support UNWRA now. We must do what we can to deal with the immediate needs of refugees throughout the region, to preserve stability and to ensure that those in need do not suffer. We are clear that we must work with UNWRA in the longer term to help them to reach a secure and sustainable financial footing.

Mr President, recent Arab-Israeli agreements have shown that dialogue triumphs over hostility. We as the international community must now work with the parties alongside the incoming US administration to ensure that the closer ties and benefits of these normalisation agreements are also extended to the Palestinians. We urge the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to also enter into a political dialogue, with the goal of ending the occupation and delivering a two-state solution.

To conclude, Mr President, unilateral steps will not deliver peace, a settlement to the conflict must be negotiated directly and reflect the religious and national interests of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Compromise will be needed on both sides. The U.K. continues to believe that a two-state solution is the only viable long term solution. It is the only way to end permanently the Arab-Israeli conflict and preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity. As we move into a new year and a new era for the region, the international community must redouble its efforts to support the Israeli and Palestinian leadership in delivering this peace for both their peoples.

Thank you.

[Operation Brock to be deployed in Kent tonight](#)

The company said any HGVs which arrive in Kent tonight will be diverted to Manston Airport to park.

Operation Brock is being set up tonight on the M20 motorway in Kent as part of a plan to keep traffic moving on the M20 during periods of cross-Channel disruption. It involves using a contraflow road layout on the M20 London-bound carriageway between junctions 9 and 8 (from Ashford to Maidstone) and directing lorries heading for mainland Europe onto the coastbound carriageway, where they can be queued if necessary.

A long concrete moveable barrier is put in place to allow the contraflow to happen safely.

Operation Brock will replace Operation Stack, which was activated overnight on Sunday as an initial response after the French government's announcement that it would not accept any passengers or hauliers arriving from the UK for a period, and the subsequent closures of the Port of Dover and Channel

Tunnel.

Operation Brock opens up more of the road network in Kent because it means traffic can continue to move in both directions on the M20, whereas Stack effectively closes it to coastbound traffic.

Hauliers are advised to avoid travelling to Kent as disruption could last for several days.

The moveable barrier will be installed on the M20 tonight and will create a new layout with a contraflow system reopening the M20 in both directions. Once deployed, this will allow traffic to continue travelling in both directions on the motorway at the same time as port bound HGVs are queued, if necessary, on the coastbound carriageway until they can travel through to the Port of Dover or Eurotunnel.

The barrier was recently successfully tested and is part of a series of measures – known as Operation Brock – aimed at keeping the M20 open in both directions during periods of cross-Channel disruption.

To make sure the barrier is deployed and removed safely, the M20 will be closed coastbound between junction 7 (for Maidstone) and junction 9 (Ashford), and London-bound between junctions 9 and 8 (Maidstone East), overnight tonight (8pm to 8am). The M20 will reopen by 8am Tuesday morning with the new road layout in place. Whenever the M20 is closed, signed diversions will be in place.

What will the M20 look like from Tuesday morning?

- The M20 will close in both directions overnight between junctions 7 and 9 (coastbound) and junctions 9 and 8 (London-bound) tonight (Monday 21 December) for the installation of the moveable barrier.
- Depending on traffic levels, the M20 should reopen by 8am on Tuesday 22 December, with the contraflow in place. Drivers will need to follow the different layout on the M20 from just north of Junction 8 (for Hollingbourne/Leeds) to Junction 9 (Ashford). Lorries heading for mainland Europe could be routed down the coastbound carriageway, with a 30mph speed limit in place. All other traffic will be directed onto the contraflow, with two lanes in each direction operating at 50mph.
- Operation Brock will remain in place until further notice

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 21 December 2020

Good afternoon,

I want to update everyone on one thing and that's what's happening at our borders and especially at Dover.

Last night at 11pm the French Government imposed restrictions on UK freight crossing to France when accompanied by a driver.

And so today I chaired a meeting of the Government's emergency, COBR committee

in order to co-ordinate a UK-wide response.

And it is vital first to stress that these delays

– which are only occurring at Dover –

only affect human-handled freight,

and that is only 20 per cent of the total arriving from or departing to the European continent,

which means the vast majority of food, medicines and other supplies are coming and going as normal.

You may also be aware – in fact I'd be amazed if you weren't –

that the government has been preparing for a long time for this exactly kind of event.

So working with the Kent Resilience Forum, Kent County Council and Highways England,

we've activated our long-prepared plans,

with the result that we have already been able to reduce the number of lorries waiting on the M20 from 500 to 170.

The site at Manston Airfield is ready to cope with any overflow.

And, of course, we are working with our friends across the Channel to unblock the flow of trade as fast as possible.

The Government at all levels is communicating with our friends in Paris

I have just spoken to President Macron – we had a very good call – we both understand each other's positions and want to resolve these problems as fast as possible.

I know that Grant is also speaking to his counterpart and we are working to a solution, as I say, as fast as we can

to allow freight traffic to resume between the UK and France,

and ensure that lorries can travel in both directions in a Covid-secure way.

I want to stress that we in the UK fully understand the anxieties of our friends about Covid, their anxieties about the new variant,

but it is also true that we believe the risks of transmission by a solitary driver sitting alone in the cab are really very low.

And so we hope to make progress as fast as we possibly can.

I want to repeat that these delays only apply to a very small percentage of food entering the UK,

and as British supermarkets have said, their supply chains are strong and robust,

so everyone can continue to shop normally.

And to our international friends and partners I want to say very frankly:

We understand your concerns,

And I hope that everybody can see that as soon as we were briefed as a government of the fast transmissibility of this new strain at about 3.15pm on Friday afternoon,

We lodged all the necessary information with the World Health Organisation

And we took prompt and decisive action the very next day to curb the spread of the variant within the UK.

And we want to work with our colleagues, with our friends around the world, as we have from the beginning to develop new treatments and new vaccines.

And today I can announce that half a million people in the UK have now received their first dose.

As we've seen throughout this pandemic, this virus alas can move all too swiftly from one nation to another,

But it is steadily being defeated by an international response

An international response that is bringing the hope of vaccines to the entire

world,

And in that the UK will continue to play our full part.

I'll now handover to our Secretary of State, Grant.