

[Official Statistics: Water situation report for England: January 2017](#)

Summary for January

January was wetter than December across much of England, but rainfall totals remain below average in many areas. England as a whole received 81% of long term average rainfall for January.

Modest soil moisture deficits remain across east and south-east England.

River flows and groundwater levels increased at the majority of indicator sites. River flows were below normal or lower for the time of year at almost all sites across England.

Groundwater levels were below normal or lower at two thirds of sites.

Reservoir stocks increased at two-thirds of reservoirs groups and were normal or lower at all but one reservoir. Overall stocks for England increased marginally compared to the end of December 2016 and were 83% of total capacity.

[News story: £170 million plan to dual vital Somerset road](#)

The key route between Sparkford and Ilchester is being upgraded to relieve the over-congested road and create 30 miles of dual carriageway between Mere and South Petherton.

The £170 million plan is part of the [government's £15 billion investment in our motorways and major A roads between 2015 and 2020](#) – the biggest in a generation.

More than 26,000 vehicles use this stretch of road a day, double the number it was designed for. Dualling the route will cut journey times and new junctions will enhance safety.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Almost 4 million trips are made on the A303 every year and we are investing more than £2 billion to improve these motorists' journeys, making them quicker and safer.

Tackling congestion on this vital road will also help boost the economy in the south-west, unlock thousands of jobs and homes and promote tourism.

Work will include making junctions safer as well as providing better links for pedestrians and cyclists.

Highways England is consulting on the 2 routes and is urging residents to have their say on the plans. The consultation runs from 15 February to 29 March 2017.

The preferred route between Sparkford and Ilchester is due to be announced in autumn this year. Work is expected to start in 2020.

Highways England chief executive Jim O'Sullivan said:

This scheme will be really good news for people travelling to and from the south-west, particularly during the busy summer months.

Our consultation and public exhibitions will provide an excellent opportunity to explain further our plans and to hear feedback from people on our proposals to deliver the scheme.

A separate consultation on building a [tunnel for the A303 near Stonehenge](#) is also underway. This will further improve journeys on the main road between London and the south-west.

Further details on upgrading the A358 between Taunton and Southfields will also be revealed shortly.

Highways England is holding the following public information events:

- 12.00 noon to 8.30pm, Thursday 23 February: Sparkford Inn Function Room, Sparkford
- 10.00am to 5.00pm, Queen Camel Memorial Hall, High Street, Queen Camel, Yeovil
- 10.00am to 6.00pm, Friday, 10 March: Davis Hall, Howell Hill, West Camel, Yeovil

[News story: Avian flu confirmed at a farm near Redgrave in Suffolk](#)

From:

First published:

13 February 2017

Last updated:

14 February 2017, [see all updates](#)

H5N8 avian flu has been confirmed at a poultry premises near Redgrave, in the district of mid-Suffolk.

The UK's Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer has confirmed H5N8 avian flu at a poultry premises near Redgrave, in the district of mid-Suffolk.

This follows the announcement of an initial 10km Temporary Control Zone around the premises on 13 February after laboratory analysis identified the presence of H5N8. Further investigations into the nature of the virus have now confirmed that it is the same highly pathogenic strain of H5N8 that has been found in wild and farmed birds in the UK since December 2016.

A 3km Protection Zone and a 10km Surveillance Zone have been put in place around the infected premises to limit the risk of the disease spreading. We have published [full details of the controls in place](#). Use our [interactive map](#) to check if you are affected by restrictions around any premises.

The affected premises is estimated to contain approximately 23,000 birds. A number have died and the remaining live birds at the premises will be humanely culled. A full investigation is under way to determine the source of the infection.

Public Health England advise that the risk to public health from the virus is very low and the Food Standards Agency is clear that bird flu does not pose a food safety risk for UK consumers.

[Read the latest advice and information on avian flu in the UK](#), including actions to reduce the risk of the disease spreading, advice for anyone who keeps poultry or captive birds and details of previous cases. Journalists with queries should [contact Defra press office](#).

[Press release: British Minister for Africa to visit Democratic Republic of Congo](#)

From:

First published:

13 February 2017

Part of:

FCO Minister for the Middle East and Africa, Tobias Ellwood, will visit Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo on 14-15 February.

Speaking before the visit Mr Ellwood said:

'I am delighted to be able to visit the Democratic Republic of Congo again. During my visit I hope to have the chance to better understand the current security and political situation in the country.

'The UK remains a serious and committed partner of the DRC, as our half a billion dollar annual contribution shows. Part of that commitment involves direct assistance to the government through MONUSCO to end ongoing conflicts, where the primary responsibility for achieving this of course sits with the government.

'But I will also be interested to see what progress has been made towards organising elections in 2017, including the implementation of the 31 December Agreement. The UK firmly believes that elections can always be organised where there is the will to do so, and that the greatest threat to DRC's stability will arise where the democratic aspirations of the Congolese people are not met.

'I take this opportunity to again present my condolences to the Congolese people for the recent loss of opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, whom I met during my last visit. He was an inspiration to many Congolese, whatever their political inclinations. In this period of mourning, and suspension of talks pending the formation of a new government, it would not be appropriate to discuss in detail international support for elections but I hope to do so with the new government in due course'.

[News story: UK Role in Fusion following EU Exit](#)

From:

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The UK government's intention to leave Euratom alongside leaving the EU was announced just over two weeks ago in the White Paper entitled "The United Kingdom's exit from, and new partnership with, the European Union". This has obvious implications for UKAEA – especially the continued operation of JET after 2018 and the UK's continued participation in ITER.

UKAEA has since received the following statement from the Minister of State

for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, Jo Johnson MP :

The research done at the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy is rightly recognised as world class and it has driven UK leadership in fusion R&D for many years. The Government has no intention of compromising this position following the decision to withdraw from the Euratom Treaty. Leaving Euratom is a result of the decision to leave the EU as they are uniquely legally joined. The UK supports Euratom, and we value international collaboration in fusion research and the UK's key role in these efforts.

Maintaining and building on our world-leading fusion expertise and securing alternative routes into the international fusion R&D projects such as the Joint European Torus (JET) project at Culham and the ITER project in France, will be a priority.

The Government is working closely with the UKAEA management and board on ways to achieve this.