

[Press release: Environment Agency minded to approve application at Horse Hill](#)

The application is for a bespoke environmental permit to drill a new well, drill a side track to the existing well and to carry out flow testing. Horse Hill Developments Limited have also applied for a Standard Rules Permit to store oil on site. In deciding whether or not to issue the permits, the Environment Agency will take into account all relevant considerations and legal requirements.

Before the Environment Agency grants the bespoke environmental permit there will be a further consultation period, which closes on 4 August 2017, to allow people to comment on the application.

[Further information on the bespoke application, a copy of our draft decision document and details of how to comment.](#)

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

An environmental permit sets out stringent conditions that a site must adhere to. We will not issue an environmental permit for a site if we consider that activities taking place will cause significant pollution to the environment or harm to human health.

Although we are minded to approve the application for the bespoke permit we are still in the determination process and a final decision has not yet been made. We want to hear from the public and understand peoples' views on the application. Everybody has the chance to see what the bespoke permit may look like and to raise any additional concerns before we make any final decision.

- [How you can participate in decisions on applications for environmental permits](#)
- [Information on the environmental permits and permissions you need for onshore oil and gas operations in England](#)

[News story: Joint Nature Conservation](#)

Committee Chair reappointed

Professor Chris Gilligan will join the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) from 1 June 2017 for three years.

All appointments to the JNCC are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. The appointment complies with the Governance Code on Public Appointments. There is a requirement for appointees' political activity, if significant) to be declared. Prof Gilligan has not declared any significant political activity during the past five years.

The JNCC was established in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) as a non-departmental public body. The JNCC advises the UK Government and Devolved Administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on UK-wide and international nature conservation. Remuneration is £40,000 per annum based on a time commitment of 104 days.

Professor Gilligan is Professor of Mathematical Biology at the University of Cambridge, where he recently completed a four year term as Head, School of Biological Sciences. He has chaired a number of complex bodies and recently chaired Defra's Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Taskforce. He is currently a Trustee of the Natural History Museum.

Professor Gilligan's current research is focused on establishing and testing a theoretical framework that identifies the mechanisms that control invasion, persistence, scaling and variability of epidemics within changing agricultural and natural landscapes.

Press release: Water companies make environmental improvements but Environment Agency urges more action

The majority of the UK's water companies achieved close to or exceeded targets set to improve water quality, according to a new report published by the Environment Agency today.

Wessex Water and United Utilities were the top performing water companies, repeating last year's success. In a year when the Environment Agency introduced tougher standards, water companies made good progress in meeting the new targets. However, the total number of pollution incidents increased by 160 in 2016, the first increase since 2012.

While water companies continue to improve their reporting of pollution to ensure impact can be minimised and wildlife protected downstream, the Environment Agency has urged some water companies to make significant improvements to bring down pollution levels.

The report which ranks the nine big water and sewage companies in England on a range of measures needed to protect the environment also showed:

- All companies achieved the target to complete work to build and upgrade infrastructure which will improve water quality, water resources and river biodiversity.
- Eight out of nine water companies gained full marks for protecting water supply security. This is crucial following the dry winter as some rivers, reservoirs and groundwaters are lower than normal for the time of year but there are no water supply issues.
- Safe recovery or disposal of sewage sludge took place 99.9% of the time and was mostly used to improve agricultural land, generate heat or power. And compliance with permits at sewage treatment and water treatment works is at 98.6% on average, while good is still short of the 100% target.
- The number of serious pollution incidents has continued to decline. However there was an increase in total numbers of incidents and of the most damaging pollution incidents, nine up from four in the previous year.

Dr Toby Willison, Executive Director of Operations for the Environment Agency, said:

Water companies work hard to protect the environment. We have set more stringent targets and we are glad to see overall improvements but want to see more effort to avoid pollution incidents.

As a fair and effective regulator we are committed to publishing results, highlighting best practice but also taking action to address any poor practice.

While we welcome the good progress being made we will continue to address any failings and will take enforcement action in the most serious cases.

2016 was also the first year to see several million pound fines handed out by the courts to water companies for pollution incidents.

All water companies provide an essential public service and affect the health

of rivers and how water can be used downstream by others. High environmental performance from water companies protects rivers and seas, supports wildlife and ensures people can enjoy the environment. Water companies also contributed £127 million last year to reduce risk of sewers flooding homes and protect local communities.

Annual water and sewerage company environmental performance reports are available on GOV.UK.

News story: Self-service approach reduces fees for some low-risk licences

The MMO has introduced an automated process for obtaining permission to carry out activities which are a low risk to the marine environment. Applicants are now able to self-assess their proposals against specific criteria using a new assistance tool. Where projects qualify they can complete an online form and instantly get a licence for their activity.

The new self-service scheme, which covers six categories of activity, has also enabled the MMO to reduce the associated cost for such applications from £175 to £50.

Some of the activities which may qualify for the new scheme are:

- Burial at sea
- Maintenance of existing structures and assets
- Minor removals
- Non-navigational clearance dredging
- Beach maintenance activities
- Deposit of markers

Continued improvement of marine licensing processes

Where people or organisations want to undertake activities in the marine area they may need prior permission (a 'marine licence') from the Marine Management Organisation under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Such activities [may include construction, dredging, deposits or removal](#).

The MMO is continuing to enhance the marine licensing process to ensure that it is as efficient as possible, maximises value for money and proportionately manages risks to the marine environment.

It launched a fast-track scheme for some marine licence applications in 2013, which it extended in 2014. The MMO has carried out a further review of this

process and the activities eligible for it. It has identified that a number of activities covered by the scheme were sufficiently consistent in nature and extent that they could be considered low risk to the marine environment and be suitable for self-service.

Proportionate approach to regulation

The MMO is able to lower the fee for such licences by removing the need for manual consideration by its case officers. Instead it has carried out risk-assessment work for the relevant activities in advance. As a result applicants who meet self-service criteria will be provided with a licence containing pre-determined standard conditions relevant to the activity selected.

The MMO is supporting applicants to assess their circumstances against self-service criteria by adding a function to its free online Geographical Information System (GIS). This tool helps applicants to understand any sensitivity associated with the location of their proposed activity and determine whether the self-service criterion is met.

More information about and guidance on the activities eligible for self-service processing is available in the [marine licensing section](#).

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