

[Press release: Flood wardens needed in Northumberland town](#)

Teams of volunteer Flood Wardens across the North East are playing a vital role in helping protect their communities.

The eyes and ears on the ground, they act as a link between the Environment Agency and communities at risk – getting vital information out to local residents.

And now the Environment Agency is calling on people to play their part in Ponteland.

At the River Pont in Ponteland there are 520 properties in the flood warning service area, with 69% of people signed up to receive free flood warnings.

And at the River Pont at Darras Hall, Kirkley Mill and Prestwick Carr there are 57 properties in the flood warning service area, with 33% of people signed up.

Flood Wardens play ‘vital role’

Colin Hall, who is the Environment Agency’s Flood Community Engagement Officer for Northumberland, is working with Ponteland Town Council. He said:

Being flooded is absolutely devastating and Flood Wardens play a vital role in supporting their community before, during and after a flood event.

It includes things such as checking water levels, reporting blockages in the river and monitoring weather forecasts to be a step ahead of a flood.

We also work with them to develop a Community Flood Plan, with key contacts and responsibilities to carry out in the event flooding takes place.

The local knowledge that wardens can provide on the ground is invaluable and helps communities be more flood resilient.

Raise awareness of flooding issues

Flood Wardens help ensure the Environment Agency’s flood warning messages reach the local community and are acted upon, and have a direct line through to the Environment Agency’s Area Incident Room in Newcastle.

Outside of a flood event, they can help raise awareness of flooding issues in the local community, encourage people to register to receive free flood

warnings and provide information to partners about vulnerable people or properties in the flood plain.

Anyone interested in becoming a Flood Warden or for help creating a Community Flood Plan contact Colin.Hall@environment-agency.gov.uk or call 020 7714 0547.

Residents can also sign up to receive flood warnings and find out what action they can take to protect themselves and their property by visiting the [Environment Agency website](#)

Press release: Water companies need to do more to protect the environment, report shows

Although there has been a gradual improving trend in environmental performance over recent years, the industry is not doing enough to reduce serious pollution incidents and comply with permits. Last year saw a rise in the most serious pollution incidents, with 'Category 1' incidents at 11. Previous reductions in serious (Category 1 and 2) incidents have also plateaued continuing at around one incident per week.

[The Water and Sewerage Companies' Environmental Performance Report](#) rates how well the big nine water and sewage companies (operating mainly or wholly in England) managed their impact on the environment in 2017. This is done across a wide range of measures – including pollution, managing sewage and complying with permits – and also compares individual company performance.

For the third year running, United Utilities and Wessex Water were the top performing water companies, and now Severn Trent Water has joined them. These companies received the top 4 star rating.

While the majority of companies delivered a 'good' or 'leading' performance, there are some poorer performers – the report reveals an urgent need by South West Water and Northumbrian Water to improve their performance which has seen them rated lowest this year. South West Water are the worst performer on pollution incidents and Northumbrian Water on permit compliance.

This comes in the face of record fines for the sector – in total more than £21million were issued as a result of 16 successful prosecutions by the Environment Agency. This has been driven by changes in Sentencing Guidelines. Earlier in the year, Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, called for fines for the most serious pollution incidents to be proportionate to the turnover of water companies.

Despite some good performances, the report demands far greater progress in 2018 and subsequent years. The Environment Agency has recently set out a more ambitious programme of environmental improvements which water companies will have to make between 2020 and 2025 – totalling £5billion of investment.

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

The leading companies in this report show that reducing their environmental impact can be done, so we look to companies to share good practice and improve quickly. But one serious pollution incident is one too many. We will always work closely with companies who want to do the right thing but we will take action against those who don't.

Over the last 30 years there has been a significant improvement in water quality and this has happened not only thanks to the industry's massive investment but also the Environment Agency's strong regulatory role

The environment will benefit from a further £5billion of investment from the water sector by 2025. We expect to see a clear and continued focus on environmental performance in the next round of water company business plans to be submitted in the autumn.

The report concludes with a reminder about the pressures on water quality and supply – with a growing population and climate pressures on the water environment, and increased public and legal expectation, water companies need to further rise to the challenge and improve promptly. The Environment Agency will work with and regulate the companies to help achieve a better environment.

[Press release: A boon for bees as Environment Agency trials pollinator project](#)

The beloved bumblebee is one of dozens of species set to benefit from an Environment Agency project to improve habitat for pollinators.

A pioneering pilot scheme in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire sees Environment Agency teams adapting their routine work in a bid to boost biodiversity.

The teams, who maintain thousands of kilometres of river and reservoir banks that serve as flood defences, have been experimenting with the frequency and timings of maintenance work, like grass-cutting, on the banks to see what best preserves the wildflowers and herbs bees need.

They have also compared the results of removing the grass-clippings or leaving them in situ – and have found that removing them helps plants like clover, ox-eye daisies, dandelions and buttercups flourish.

Tapping into expert guidance from a consultant botanist and entomologist, the trial aims to increase the native bee population including bufftail, solitary, carpenter, mining and leaf-cutting bees, as well as butterflies, moths, and other pollinators.

This season marks the third year of the 5 year pilot – and also marks the third annual [Bees Needs Week](#), an initiative by government, conservation groups, industry and retailers to raise awareness of simple things anyone can do to support pollinators, like growing more flowers and leaving patches of their garden to grow wild.

At the same time, biodiversity officers have also been making the most of EA-owned buildings like pumping stations and unused land to install bee boxes, hotels and havens made of natural scrap material – many of which were occupied almost immediately.

Nikki Loveday, biodiversity officer with the Environment Agency, said:

It's our mission to protect people and wildlife and this is a brilliant example of how being flexible and innovative can help us achieve more for our environment.

We're adapting how we carry out vital maintenance on our flood defences and looking for any opportunity to support our precious pollinators and the wider ecology.

Ultimately, if we can make small changes at no cost we'll aim to share our learning and inspire others to do the same to have a big impact.

Meanwhile, a series of workshops for staff are helping them learn more about pollinators and how to identify and create simple habitats. More than 50 staff have already putting this training to use in their daily work – for example, drilling holes in wooden posts for carpenter bees when fixing fences.

Entomologist Steven Falk, an expert in bees, hoverflies and other pollinators, who has delivered the training and advised on the project, said:

Bees and other pollinators put approximately a third of all the food we eat onto our plates, and it's so important we support them

by protecting and enhancing their habitat.

We know from experience that doing the right things, like enriching their nesting and foraging spaces, will increase the population of our pollinators. Even small changes can make a big difference of lots of people do them at lots of sites.

The Environment Agency is in a good position to contribute since it oversees so much land and it gives me great pleasure to work with them to give a boost to our bees.

For more on small actions you can take to support pollinators, visit <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/bees-needs/>.

Press release: Fish released to boost North East rivers

The Environment Agency has released more than 8,000 young fish into North East rivers to give stocks a boost.

The trout – bred at Kielder Salmon Centre in Northumberland – were released into the tributaries of the River Tyne.

There was 4,000 each released into the River Ouseburn at Woolsington and Brunton Park, and the River Team near Kibblesworth and Beamish.

The fish were released to the two recovering river system to support wider restoration projects and encourage natural recovery of fish stocks in the future.

Niall Cook, Fisheries Technical Officer at the Environment Agency in the North East said:

It's hoped by giving the two rivers a boost it will help aid their natural recovery. Restocking is just one of the many things we do together with our partners to develop fisheries, including reducing the impact of any industrial legacy and pollution incidents.

But we're also working hard to improve habitats and remove barriers to fish migration which make it difficult for fish to reach their natural spawning grounds.

Water quality is the best it's been for decades and targeted and appropriate restocking has helped the restoration of natural fish stocks and viable fisheries. In fact returning salmon have already

been seen in the lower reaches of the River Tyne recently, which is great news.

Fish releases

Each year Environment Agency staff release thousands of salmon and trout from Kielder Salmon Centre into the River Tyne and its tributaries. The centre breeds 360,000 salmon and between 10,000 and 20,000 trout every year to compensate for the construction of Kielder Reservoir and ensure the River Tyne and its tributaries continue to flourish.

In addition, last year they released 40,000 fish including chub, dace, roach, bream, barbel, tench, grayling, crucian carp and rudd into rivers across the North East which were reared at the Environment Agency's fish farm near Calverton, Nottinghamshire, using funding from rod licence sales.

The Environment Agency releases fish into our waterways annually. Fisheries officers target fish stocking activity using data from national fish surveys to identify where there are problems with poor breeding and survival.

Angling is a great way to keep healthy and enjoy the natural environment. All rod licence income is used to fund work to protect and improve fish stocks and fisheries.

Fishing is free for children under 16, although those aged between 12 and 16 still need a junior licence. For anyone over 16, a full annual licence costs from just £30, with some short term and concessionary licences also available. [You can buy your fishing licence online](#)

[Press release: Biscathorpe residents meet regulators of oil and gas industry](#)

Communities in and around Biscathorpe are being invited to learn more about how the oil and gas industry is regulated.

The public information session for the proposed exploratory oil well in Biscathorpe is being held at Donington on Bain village hall, from 1pm until 8pm on Wednesday 18 July.

Local people will be able to meet with the authorities responsible for ensuring that oil and gas operations are carried out in a way that protects people and the environment.

Regulators attending the event include the Environment Agency, Lincolnshire County Council, Public Health England, the Health and Safety Executive, and the Oil and Gas Authority.

The event comes after Egdon Resources received environmental permits and planning permission to carry out drilling in search for oil at Biscathorpe, near Louth.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

The UK is recognised globally as a leading example for oil and gas industry regulation. We have some of the strictest controls in the world, as well as some of the toughest penalties and safeguards.

We regulate a huge number of industrial sites across England, and have decades of expertise in the assessment and mitigation of environmental risk, as well as the protection of local communities and their environment. We'd welcome the opportunity to speak with anyone who wants to find out more.