

Virtual Events remain for now; greater flexibility of events to be offered in future

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on the capacity of our operations but we have made headway on progressing casework where possible. Since the start of lockdown, we have issued 3,500 appeal decisions; 1120 of these since we restarted site visits in May (under normal circumstances we would have expected to have issued around 5,600 in this time period). We have also made significant progress on holding virtual hearings and inquiries.

Greater flexibility via the new Business and Planning Bill

The Government announced yesterday (25 June) a set of measures as part of the [Business and Planning Bill 2019-21](#) bringing forward temporary changes to the planning system to support economic recovery. And there is further clarification around the supporting temporary measures that the Government proposes to ensure the planning system continues to operate effectively in yesterday's [Written Statement made by Housing Minister Chris Pincher](#). The Bill also includes new measures that will grant the Planning Inspectorate the ability to use more than one procedure – written representations, hearings and inquiries – at the same time when dealing with a planning appeal, enabling appeals to happen more quickly. It will also allow scope for Inspectors to be more flexible, given the difficulty in operating physical inquiries and hearings at present. These changes would bring us in line with the legislative provisions in Wales where this flexibility is already in place.

The ability to use a flexible procedure approach will allow our Inspectors to decide on the scale of cross-examination or investigation via hearing required. For example where parties have made good progress in narrowing down the issues, less cross-examination may be needed. Conversely where an Inspector is not satisfied that they can obtain the necessary information via written procedure, they can introduce a hearing and/or cross-examination.

We have been working hard to continue processing appeals during these exceptional times. We welcome any measures that build on the Rosewell Recommendations and provide Inspectors with the flexibility to consider all the evidence needed to make a fair and robust decision.

It is anticipated that these new measures will come into effect in late July before Parliamentary summer recess. However, in the short term, we will continue to plan and run events in a virtual capacity to protect our staff and customers and maintain a stability of service while the coronavirus (CV-19) pandemic continues.

Virtual Events

Until it becomes safe and reliable to hold physical public gatherings involving several households indoors we cannot hold Hearing or Inquiry-events like we used to. We have been contacting main parties to reschedule previously postponed events to as an early a new date as possible.

We have increased the number of virtual events following a series of successful trial events.

To date we have successfully progressed 11 cases via a series of virtual events including three National Infrastructure projects, three inquiries and one local plan hearing. Each of the six larger cases required a series of virtual events; the longest being up to three events per day over a period of seven days.

At the same time a lot of preparations have gone into further increasing the number of virtual events to take place in July. So far arrangements have been finalised for an additional 18 cases to be progressed over the next five weeks, including the South Oxfordshire Local Plan examination which involves several virtual events daily over a four-week period. Arrangements for additional cases in July are continuing to be firmed up. We have received positive feedback from participants and useful suggestions on how we can continually improve the experience of all parties.

The video below explains our approach to site visits and virtual events.

[Our approach to site visits and virtual events during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

Whilst we are progressing virtual events, we are actively looking at options to resume some face-to-face hearings and inquiries and they will continue to be part of our future once the current situation has eased. Experiences collected in holding virtual events will also be useful to inform what role virtual or a blend of face to face and virtual events may be able to play in the longer term in widening options and access.

Progressing casework and support to our customers

This week the Government issued the latest coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance including a relaxation of the social distancing and opening of additional business types. However, there are no changes to the [current advice we have issued to our customers](#) due to the continued restrictions on numbers of unrelated persons who can be together indoors or outdoors.

We are continuing to do site visits where it is safe to do so and where social distancing measures can be adhered to.

Customers wishing to submit an appeal should use our online service in the first instance: <https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk>. All appeal and other documents should be submitted on-line or by email as our offices are closed. This ensures that appeals are processed quickly. We have, however made provision for a limited number of staff to collect post sent to our offices.

Documents sent to us by post have to be scanned and then sent to the relevant casework team causing significant delay. We hope our customers understand the need to keep our staff safe and support us by using our online services.

For the latest information on casework arrangements in Wales please visit GOV.WALES.

[Defra food waste initiatives bear fruit](#)

Every year, 190,000 tonnes of edible food goes to waste from retailers and manufacturers which could be redistributed. Defra is taking bold action to tackle this issue head on – spearheading a number of initiatives to get more surplus food to those who need it.

Last year, the first tranche of our [£15 million food waste initiative](#) saw [four companies receive a combined £4 million](#) to drive this effort forward. A year on, this ambitious work is bearing real fruit – with new schemes already diverting tonnes of edible food to charity centres across the country and new highly skilled teams in place to find new, innovative ways to reach hard to reach surplus food.

A second fund of £3 million, delivered by our partner organisation WRAP as part of their Resource Action Fund, is currently supporting 17 redistribution organisations carry out Food Waste Prevention work across the country. In light of the coronavirus outbreak, £2 million has been awarded to redistribution organisations to help charities with their food offer during this challenging time, which is still open for [small grant applications](#).

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

I am determined that we find new and innovative ways to ensure perfectly good, nutritious food does not end up in the bin and is instead redistributed to those who need it.

We have already committed £15 million to cut food waste, and have increased this during the coronavirus pandemic to support this effort even more. This huge challenge has highlighted the value of food and, more than ever, the importance of ensuring good food does not go to waste.

Two organisations helping to spearhead the charge in reducing food waste are FareShare UK and Company Shop Group. Each received nearly £2 million in the first round of Defra funding last year,

Company Shop Group, which consists of the UK's largest commercial redistribution organisation Company Shop and social enterprise Community Shop, redistributes surplus food and household products to people working in the NHS, emergency services and food supply chain, and to those in low-income communities.

Using the £1.9 million in funding from Defra, the company has kick started a project to target the hardest to reach surplus food and redistribute this to where it is needed most. Its social enterprise Community Shop, which runs a network of five social supermarket stores across England, also received £50,000 in Covid-19 funding to support its efforts to combat the challenges of the pandemic.

Jane Marren, Managing Director of Company Shop Group, said:

We welcome the significant steps the Government has taken to support the reduction of food waste, and its recognition and investment in the surplus redistribution industry which is a crucial mechanism for achieving ambitious waste reduction targets.

We strongly believe business is a powerful force for social good, and this approach has never been more important than in today's circumstances. The funding provided by Defra and WRAP will enable us to redistribute even more surplus stock, support our food, drink, retail and hospitality industries, and most importantly, enable us to provide a life-line to even more communities in need.

FareShare has also used the £1.9 million they received in Defra funding, as well as an additional £444,000 during the coronavirus period, to enable them and their network partners to access many thousands of tonnes of surplus food with new equipment, vehicles and staff – saving this from the bin and delivering it to charities and communities across the country.

Lindsay Boswell, CEO of FareShare UK, said:

Getting good food to vulnerable people in the UK and cutting down food waste is our top priority, and this has never been more important than now during the coronavirus pandemic. The £1.9 million of Defra funding in 2019 helped us significantly, and combined with subsequent coronavirus grants, FareShare has gained access to many thousands of tonnes of surplus food.

The organisations we work with do truly amazing work and we're very proud to be working with them to help thousands of people across the country.

One beneficiary of emergency coronavirus funding was Oxfordshire-based charity SOFEA, which in partnership with FareShare rescues and re-distributes hundreds of tonnes of surplus food each year to charities throughout the

Thames Valley region, supporting families in need while reducing food waste.

Through the £5 million [COVID-19 Emergency Surplus Food Grant](#), SOFEA have been awarded £50,000 to provide additional warehouse racking and the installation of two walk-in freezers.

Richard Kennell, CEO of SOFEA, said:

The funding will allow us to increase our capacity to handle all types of food, including ambient, frozen and chilled. As we come out of the Covid-19 crisis it will enable our charity partners to be sure they can access a regular supply of nutritious food for their clients, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic where we expect to see increased need.

[Surveys being carried out for Tadcaster flood scheme](#)

The Environment Agency says that it has been working with flood engineer specialists to develop the plans since the government committed to invest £9 million in the scheme last autumn.

This was in addition to the £1 million Local Growth Fund investment in the scheme through the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Hydrological and hydraulic modelling of the flood risk has already been undertaken, as well as environmental and ecological appraisals of the river, the surrounding area and its habitats.

Following the completion of the surveys, a shortlist outlining options for how the flood defence improvements could look will be published in July.

The options will consider different types of flood defences in the town, as well as the possibility of a flood storage area upstream and the use of natural flood management.

The Environment Agency says any flood alleviation scheme it creates is modelled to make sure it does not increase flood risk upstream or downstream and, if it does, that risk will be mitigated.

Due to the Covid-19 situation the Agency says it is unable to hold face-to-face public meetings, so 3D visualisations and aerial computer-designed 'fly-through' videos of the options will be made available online.

A Tadcaster flood alleviation scheme website will also be launched soon,

containing a detailed written overview of each option and a frequently asked questions section.

Nearer the end of the year the Environment Agency says it is aiming to have a community information hub where residents can drop-in and ask questions to a staff member.

Robin Derry, Environment Agency flood risk advisor for Tadcaster, said:

Since we held our last drop-in event in the town last November we have received a number of suggestions from residents through boxes placed in businesses throughout the town.

We will continue to update residents with our newsletters, as well as through the town council and Tadcaster Flood Action Group.

We have also launched a Tadcaster Flood Scheme Facebook page, where residents can get regular updates.

The Environment Agency says it is aiming to have a consultation on the draft final design before the end of the year.

Tadcaster suffered devastating flooding in December 2015, which resulted in part of the bridge over the River Wharfe collapsing, splitting the town in half for over a year.

Nicola Eades, of Tadcaster Flood Action Group, said:

Tadcaster Flood Action Group is fully supportive of the plans for a new flood alleviation scheme for our town.

Over the years we have worked closely with the Environment Agency to help bring about a greater level of resilience for the community and will continue to do so to ensure a successful scheme is built which will help protect and enhance our town.

To join the Tadcaster flood alleviation mailing list, email tadcasterfas@environment-agency.gov.uk and to sign up to receive flood warnings, [click here](#) or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

To download a guide to the meaning of flood alerts and flood warnings for Tadcaster [click here](#).

Competition concerns found in digital advertising merger

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been investigating the anticipated purchase of Outbrain by Taboola. Both companies supply, amongst other things, content recommendation services to publishers, including major UK news sites.

Content recommendation is a type of digital advertising where readers visiting publishers' sites are shown other content they might be interested in, often based on personalisation algorithms. When a reader clicks on a content recommendation advert, the publisher receives a share of the revenue generated. This type of advertising is one of the ways publishers make money from their web pages.

Taboola and Outbrain are the 2 largest providers of content recommendation services to publishers in the UK, with a combined market share of over 80%. They supply very similar services and are each other's main competitor. In particular, the companies' internal documents and information received from publishers showed the strong competition between the companies.

If the merger were to go ahead, the CMA is concerned that publishers in the UK will have a reduced choice of supplier for content recommendation services. This could result in a worsening of terms for publishers and a reduction in their share of advertising revenue. A large proportion of the publishers contacted by the CMA were concerned about the impact of the deal if it goes ahead.

Joel Bamford, CMA Senior Director of Mergers said:

Online advertising, including content recommendation, is a really important revenue stream for publishers, including news websites. Our merger investigation has found that the current competition between Taboola and Outbrain means publishers can negotiate better revenue share deals and contract terms. If the companies were to merge, this competition in content recommendation would be reduced, and publishers could lose out.

If the merging businesses are unable to offer remedies which address the CMA's concerns, the deal will be referred for an in-depth Phase 2 investigation.

For more information, visit the [Taboola / Outbrain merger case page](#).

For media queries, contact the CMA press team on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

Fatal accident at Waterloo underground station

News story

Fatal accident at London Underground Bakerloo Line platform, Waterloo, 26 May 2020.



A train (not involved in the accident) in the northbound Bakerloo Line platform at Waterloo

At about 10:11 hrs on Tuesday 26 May 2020, a person fell between the platform edge and the stationary northbound Bakerloo line train from which they had alighted at London Waterloo underground station. They suffered fatal injuries as the train subsequently started moving and departed from the platform.

Our investigation will aim to identify the sequence of events, and consider factors relating to supervision of the platform-train interface and any relevant underlying factors.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry, the British Transport Police or by the industry's regulator, the [Office of Rail and Road](#).

We will publish our findings, including any recommendations to improve safety, at the conclusion of our investigation. This report will be available on our website.

You can [subscribe](#) to automated emails notifying you when we publish our reports.

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