

# Sheffield's River Sheaf screen gets £3m upgrade

Work has started on a £3 million project to improve the screen and replace the mechanical arm used to clear it.

The upgrade work is being done while adhering to strict Government guidelines on social distancing and is expected to be complete by the end of the year.

The Sheaf Screen prevents debris from travelling underground along the river where it may become lodged, creating a blockage. Blockages underground, in culverts, which are tunnels that carry water under roads, railways and buildings, are very difficult to clear and can result in flooding to the local area.

The screen currently needs regularly clearing using a combination of the mechanical arm controlled by an operator and manual labour, which can be very resource intensive during an incident. The current screen is in poor condition with some of the screen bars damaged or missing, so the screen is being replaced and two 'grabs' will be installed on an overhead monorail, making it easier to clear debris when it collects on the screen.

Phil Rogers, project manager at the Environment Agency said:

This upgrade work for the Sheaf screen is critical to help modernise this important piece of flood risk reduction equipment. The improvements mean that the grabs will work automatically around the clock to remove debris from the river and place in a skip for removal, significantly reducing the need for Environment Agency staff to be on site.

Sheffield has a history of river flooding, with the city experiencing floods in 1973, 1991, 2000 and 2007. Flooding from the River Sheaf in 1991 extended to the central train station and closed the East Coast mainline for four days. This flooding is caused because of blockages at culverts and bridges especially in the urban reaches of the River Sheaf and Porter Brook where large sections of the rivers are culverted.

Sheffield's Victorian-engineered underground waterway, known as 'The Megatron', was built in the mid-1800s below the city centre and boasts an impressive network of cathedral-like brick archways and interconnecting darkened tunnels to contain the overflow of water from a storm.

The Sheaf Screen in Sheffield city centre is located at the upstream end of a 750m culvert which carries the River Sheaf below the central train station and the markets area. It joins up with the Porter Brook which is also largely hidden from view in the city and heads towards its confluence with the River Don.

As well as natural vegetation, the Sheaf Screen regularly collects larger objects including mattresses, tree trunks, bikes, branches and pipes. If these weren't caught by the screen they could cause a significant blockage and increase the risk of flooding to the city.

While the work is in progress Sheaf Walk will be closed between Duchess Road and the A61. One lane of the A61 will occasionally be closed for deliveries to site. We apologise for any disruption this may cause while we carry out the work.

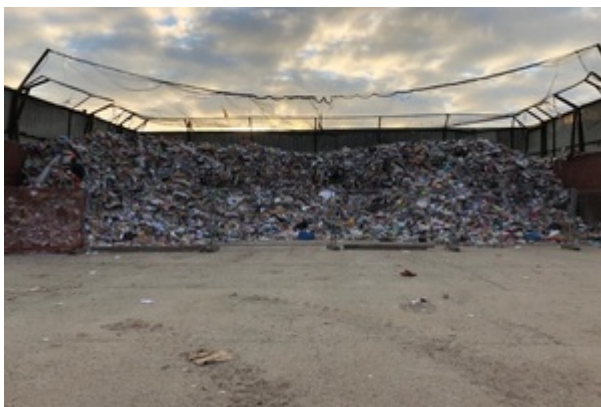
[Sheaf screen proposed works](#)

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## Regulating the waste industry during the coronavirus pandemic

Press release

The Environment Agency is continuing to protect people and the environment during coronavirus (COVID-19).



Remote ways of working have been used to carry out checks of permitted waste sites throughout the Midlands

It is using technology to carry out its role as an effective regulator where face-to-face visits are restricted due to government guidelines.

Whilst regulatory visits to sites that could cause serious environmental harm are continuing in the pandemic, in certain instances the organisation has carried out virtual inspections of permitted waste sites to check they are complying with regulations.

Using online services such as Zoom, checking CCTV video footage and requesting specific evidence to prove the sites are storing waste correctly,

the Environment Agency has been successfully carrying out its inspections.

These remote ways of working have been used to carry out checks of permitted waste sites throughout the Midlands, including Tom White Waste, which has 3 permits for its two sites in Coventry.

David Hudson, Area Environment Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

We've been able to innovate and use technology to continue to regulate throughout this pandemic. Working remotely, we have received all of the necessary paperwork and photographs from Tom White Waste and carried out a meeting with them on Zoom, which included a site tour via their real time CCTV, to check their sites comply with the regulations of their permits. In this case we were satisfied the company has shown good practice and complied with the regulations.

Coronavirus is not an excuse to operate illegally. We are continuing to work closely with businesses and industry to help them meet their legal requirements and we are continuing to enforce regulatory requirements, while following the government's guidance on social distancing.

We make clear in our approach to regulation and enforcement that we expect operators to take all reasonable steps to comply with regulatory requirements using contingency plans to help them comply.

Businesses and householders should carry out checks to ensure that they are using legitimate companies to deal with their waste. To check if a waste carrier is genuine visit the Environment Agency's [public register](#).

Anyone who suspects a company is operating illegally can call the Environment Agency 24/7 on 0800 80 70 60 or report it anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

## **Notes to editors**

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## **[New funding for Defence Innovation Priorities](#)**

News story

£1m of Defence Innovation funding has been set aside for civil sector support for the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) innovation priorities.



Industry and academia are being urged to submit their ideas to help MOD with its most pressing problems to face future threats.

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) will oversee the [Innovation Focus Areas](#) and is particularly keen to hear from those who've never before worked with Defence.

Last year, MOD outlined its five [innovation priorities](#) which were considered to be the priority themes and topics, with shared risks and issues. The challenges are to:

- Integrate information and physical activity across all domains: how can we integrate information and physical activity across domains (particularly space and cyber), and synchronise with wider government to increase understanding and operational tempo?
- Deliver agile command and control: how can we deliver agile command and control, to make faster, better decisions and generate decisive advantage in complex operations?
- Operate and deliver effects in contested domains: how can we operate and deliver military outcomes in denied and contested domains?
- Defence people, skills, knowledge and experience: how can we access people with the right skills, knowledge and experience?
- Simulate future battlespace complexity: how do we represent future battlespace complexity and higher levels of integration in training, wargaming and experimentation?

Suppliers can bid for funding by submitting their ideas through the [Open Call for Innovation](#). If you have an idea and aren't sure if it fits the bill, DASA's Innovation Partners are [on hand to advise](#).

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# Joint Statement from the UK, Australia, Canada, and United States on Hong Kong

Press release

Joint statement by UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Canadian Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne, and US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo responding to China's proposed new security law for Hong Kong.



Signatories to this statement reiterate our deep concern regarding Beijing's decision to impose a national security law in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has flourished as a bastion of freedom. The international community has a significant and long-standing stake in Hong Kong's prosperity and stability. Direct imposition of national security legislation on Hong Kong by the Beijing authorities, rather than through Hong Kong's own institutions as provided for under Article 23 of the Basic Law, would curtail the Hong Kong people's liberties, and in doing so, dramatically erode Hong Kong's autonomy and the system that made it so prosperous.

China's decision to impose the new national security law on Hong Kong lies in direct conflict with its international obligations under the principles of the legally-binding, UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration. The proposed law would undermine the One Country, Two Systems framework. It also raises the prospect of prosecution in Hong Kong for political crimes, and undermines existing commitments to protect the rights of Hong Kong people – including those set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

We are also extremely concerned that this action will exacerbate

the existing deep divisions in Hong Kong society; the law does nothing to build mutual understanding and foster reconciliation within Hong Kong.

Rebuilding trust across Hong Kong society by allowing the people of Hong Kong to enjoy the rights and freedoms they were promised can be the only way back from the tensions and unrest that the territory has seen over the last year.

The world's focus on a global pandemic requires enhanced trust in governments and international cooperation. Beijing's unprecedented move risks having the opposite effect.

As Hong Kong's stability and prosperity are jeopardised by the new imposition, we call on the Government of China to work with the Hong Kong SAR Government and the people of Hong Kong to find a mutually acceptable accommodation that will honour China's international obligations under the UN-filed Sino-British Joint Declaration.

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## [More inquiries and hearings to be held virtually in June](#)

Continuing to decide planning appeals in a timely manner is crucial in supporting the nation's economic recovery. The recent [Written Ministerial Statement](#) laid in Parliament on 13 May outlined the planning system's vital role in delivering housing and economic growth. Our Inspectors and Casework teams have been working hard to continue to progress cases and issue decisions while our office is closed.

We have delivered decisions on just under 2500 cases since lockdown began. We have also been accelerating the work to implement virtual hearings and inquiries across all of our casework types. Further to our successful first virtual hearing on 11 May, and decision issued 27 May, we are now planning to hold at least another 20 hearings and inquiries and an additional 15 hearings

for National Infrastructure projects in June.

Since 13 May when the restrictions were eased, we have restarted site visits where:

- the Inspector can visit the site safely under current physical distancing guidance; and
- the case requires the Inspector to visit the site in person in order to progress the case.

This has meant over 600 site visits programmed for May. Not being able to visit sites and hold public events until this time has clearly had an impact on our ability to deliver at our normal capacity and, consequently, is still impacting our ability to provide meaningful average appeal handling times to our customers. It will take some time for our service to return to normal and customers are likely to experience a slower service than we would like to provide.

## **Applying new technology to our work**

We already have a programme of work in place to make better use of technology in how we work, including running events (hearings, examinations, inquiries) in a virtual way, using digital methods. The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially accelerated our work to do this.

There are two strands to our work. Firstly, cases where site visits may not be necessary and secondly, moving face to face events into a virtual environment.

## **Site visits**

In our last update we highlighted that we are trialling how in some instances we can progress cases without a site visit. This might include prior approval cases where the issue in dispute relates to the interpretation of the General Permitted Development Order or some enforcement appeals depending on the specific grounds lodged and the nature of the evidence.

To date 20 decisions have been issued following this process, and others to follow. However the choice to go down a 'no site visit required' route remains with the Inspector being satisfied that she or he has sufficient information to properly determine the appeal.

## **Virtual events**

We have been scaling up the work to implement virtual events using digital tools in place of face to face events. We have prioritised case that we had postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are learning from each event with the aim of making virtual events our standard option for the majority of events in future. This approach covers all hearings and inquiries for our different types of casework (including planning appeals, national infrastructure, local plans) that are currently held face to face. Our



working definition of virtual includes the use of video technology and phone where necessary.

While social distancing measures remain in place, we will seek to run hearings and inquiries virtually in the first instance to keep our customers and employees safe and to minimise the potential for spreading the virus; and ensure that we keep our hearings and inquiries casework moving.

The implications of running virtual hearings and inquiries have been rigorously considered. As with face to face events, it can take several weeks to arrange and we must liaise with parties and others to agree dates and ensure everyone is able to participate. We are confident that we can maintain professional standards and the Franks Principles while running virtual hearings and inquiries.

The inspector will run the event in the normal way, but with participants invited to join via Microsoft Teams or by phone. Participants will receive details of any requirements, guidance and support, taking into account any representations received.

See our [latest detailed guidance for more information](#).

## **Next month we anticipate:**

- 10 planning appeal hearings in June. We are also working on re-arranging the vast majority of all postponed planning hearings in June to take place as soon as possible in the following months.
- 8 postponed inquiries virtually in June, with the remaining ones to be re-arranged at the earliest opportunity
- 15 hearings being held across four [Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects](#) in June (and more in July). All of these are already notified on the respective project webpages for these schemes.
- One Local Plan hearing to take place via phone conference; one full Local Plan examination to be conducted virtually in July.

Whilst we are progressing virtual events, this is not the end of face-to-face hearings and inquiries. Face-to-face events will continue to be part of our future once the current situation has passed.

For the latest information on casework arrangements in Wales please visit [GOV.WALES](#).