

# Site visits to recommence and more digital case events planned

With the UK government now refining plans to move the country out of lockdown, we are scaling up our capacity to progress a greater number of cases.

In this update, we outline plans to restart site visits and an update on the work to implement digital events.

Continuing to decide planning appeals in a timely manner is crucial to the nation's economic recovery. Our teams have been working hard to keep casework moving during this challenging period. Since mid-March, we have issued more than 2000 appeal and other case decisions, published 13 local plan letters and continued to process nationally significant infrastructure project applications.

Despite having put a halt to site visits and public events that would contravene social distancing regulations, inspectors continue to make fair and robust decisions where they are satisfied they have the evidence necessary to do so. They are, and have been, deciding appeals:

- through written representations without face to face evidence;
- on a pilot basis, without visiting the site; and
- where possible progressing cases through holding telephone case conferences.

However, there are still many complex live cases that require a hearing or inquiry to gather evidence and it is our priority to ensure we can progress these as soon as possible.

Not being able to visit sites and hold public events has clearly had an impact on our ability to deliver at our normal capacity and, consequently, is impacting our ability to produce average appeal handling times. We are currently reviewing how we present these statistics to accurately reflect the Inspectorate's performance in terms of length of time for cases to reach conclusion.

## **Site visits**

As confirmed in the written ministerial statement laid in parliament today, we will begin to visit sites providing:

- 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.

If possible, inspectors will undertake site visits alone. If this is not

possible, and access needs to be provided by the appellant, we will contact the parties directly on how to conduct the site visit safely and adhere to government guidance on physical distancing.

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.

Around 60 cases are currently proceeding in a pilot which uses photograph or video evidence instead of a site visit. This is subject to the Inspector being satisfied that she or he has sufficient information to properly determine the appeal.

## **Digital events**

In [our previous update](#), we outlined the work to implement digital events. These are hearings and inquiries for different types of casework (e.g. planning appeals, national infrastructure, local plans etc) held via telephone or video conferencing.

This work, originally planned for implementation later in the year, has been accelerated in response to the urgent need to progress cases where:

- the Inspector may need to ask questions or hear cross examination for complex issues;
- there is high level of public interest and a public event needs to be held; and
- where the legislation governing particular casework requires such an event to be held in given circumstances (e.g. national infrastructure and local plan examinations).

The first fully digital hearing took place on Monday 11 May as a pilot. We hope that at least a further 20 examinations, hearings and inquiries will follow during May and June. By learning from preceding cases, we aim to scale up digital events to include high profile and contentious cases in the following months.

We are currently working with two local authorities to trial holding the local plan hearing sessions as digital events (by video/telephone conference) and, if the pilot is successful, our aim is to be able to offer this, where possible, for all current examinations.

We recognise the importance of continuing to hold public events, it is clearly also vital that we ensure all parties can have confidence in the process. Any changes we implement in terms of how we run events during this public health emergency need to be sustainable once the emergency has passed.

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

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## [Charity Commission responds to Select Committee questions](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]The Charity Commission has responded to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee's questions on 'the work of the Charity Commission.'

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## [New pumps keep £35 million flood defence scheme on track](#)

Press release

Work to overhaul Keadby pumping station near Scunthorpe has taken a significant step forward thanks to the arrival on site of the first 2 of 6 new pumps.



The new pumps at Keadby pumping station

It is all part of a £35 million investment to upgrade the 80-year-old pumping station which will bring both flood-risk and environmental benefits to the Isle of Axholme area which takes in some 500km of North Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire.

The two pumps were tested in Holland before they were shipped to England. Together, they have the combined power to fill an olympic swimming pool in about 5 minutes.

They have now arrived at Keadby as work on the project continues with

contractors and staff from the Environment Agency following recent Public Health England safe working advice.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

The first 2 pumps will be installed over the next 2 months; the remaining 4 pumps will be delivered and installed before the end of the year.

After the pumps are installed we will be able to finish refurbishing the pumping station and re-constructing the outfall to the River Trent.

Throughout the work we will continue to operate the pumping station to manage flood risk and water levels. The work is on schedule and the new pumps will be operational in early 2021, with the rest of the refurbishment complete by the end of 2021.

This project is part of the Environment Agency's £140 million asset repair programme for 2020. Work on the projects continue where it is safe for our teams and delivery partners to do so.

We are following the latest guidance from Public Health England to ensure the safety of our staff, partners and the communities we work in is a priority.

## **Project background**

The current station has reached the end of its working life because the pumps and the equipment are unreliable, costly to maintain and are increasingly at risk of breaking down. However, they will be maintained and will be fully operational until the station update is complete.

The scheme also includes the construction of new electrical equipment buildings within the existing site and rebuilding of the outfall headwall.

The contract was awarded to GBV, a joint venture between Galliford Try and Black & Veatch.

The pumps and motors are the first 2 of 6 to be installed. Each weighs around 10 tonnes. They have been delivered as part of GBV's scope of supply. They are Pentair Fairbanks Nijhuis pumps (from Holland). The new pumps are also 'fish-friendly' and will allow safe navigation for fish and eels on their natural migration. The measure is recognised as vital to protecting wildlife and improving the health of rivers.

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## **ESFA Update: 13 May 2020**

[unable to retrieve full-text content] Latest information and actions from the Education and Skills Funding Agency for academies, schools, colleges, local authorities and further education providers

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## **Recovered appeal: land at Moor Lane, Woodthorpe, York (ref: 3233973 – 13 May 2020)**

Decision letter and Inspector's Report for a recovered appeal for 516 residential units, a local centre, a sports pavilion and associated infrastructure, the demolition of existing buildings and structures, and creation of an Ecological Protection and Enhancement Zone and vehicular access arrangements.