

Environment Agency urges communities to stay vigilant

The Environment Agency is urging communities in England to [check their flood risk](#) and [sign up to flood warnings](#) as minor river and surface water flooding impacts are possible across parts of England today (26 December) and into Friday.

The weather outlook is improving, however groundwater levels continue to rise after recent rainfall meaning that a risk of minor localised groundwater flooding impacts remains in the south of England and in North Lincolnshire, although any impacts are expected to be minimal.

As of 2.30pm on Thursday 26 December there are 30 flood warnings – meaning flooding is expected – and 88 flood alerts – meaning flooding is possible – in place across the country.

Clare Dinnis, Flood Duty Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

While the weather outlook is improving, groundwater levels continue to rise after recent rainfall meaning that there is a continued risk of groundwater flooding in parts of southern England over the next few days.

We continue to monitor rainfall and river levels closely and to operate our flood defences, reducing the risk of flooding to thousands of homes and businesses and helping to keep people safe. Our pumps also remain in place in Somerset where our focus is on reducing levels of water on Currymoor.

Sadly around 100 properties have flooded since Thursday, but over 18,500 properties have been protected by flood defences across England.

We advise people to sign up for flood warnings, stay away from swollen rivers and not drive through flood water – just 30cm of flowing water is enough to float your car.

The advice to stay safe during wet weather comes as the Environment Agency and the AA published [research](#) showing that three quarters of drivers (74%) would risk driving through flood water, despite it being the leading cause of death during a flood.

You can check your flood risk, sign up for free flood warnings and keep up to date with the latest situation at <https://www.gov.uk/check-flood-risk>, call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or follow @EnvAgency on Twitter for the latest flood updates.

Counter-poaching troops help with historic Black Rhino move in Malawi

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles have recently returned home from a 3-month counter-poaching deployment in Malawi. Based in Liwonde National Park they work with African Parks to train current and new rangers, helping to crack down on the illegal wildlife trade by improving patrolling effectiveness and information sharing skills.

Towards the end of the deployment the soldiers assisted with the careful offloading of the rhinos who had travelled by air and road from KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The project was led by African Parks in conjunction with Malawi's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

There are around 5,500 black rhinos in the wild today as they are poached for their horn. This project will help boost the rhino population in the region and help preserve this critically endangered species for the next generation.

Since their release, African Parks is continuing to intensively monitor the rhinos as they settle in to their new environment.

Major Jez England, Officer Commanding British Army Counter Poaching Team in Liwonde:

This latest counter-poaching deployment has been hugely successful. Not only do we share skills with the rangers, improving their efficiency and ability to patrol larger areas, but it also provides a unique opportunity for our soldiers to train in a challenging environment.

Helping with the rhino move was a fitting end to our time in Malawi, getting up close to the animals we are here to help protect was an experience the soldiers won't forget.

Photo credit: African Parks

So far, the Army has helped train 200 rangers in Malawi and thanks to effective management and an overhaul of law enforcement by African Parks and the DNPW, supported by the British Army, no high-value species have been poached in Liwonde since 2017.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The illegal wildlife trade is the fourth largest transnational crime behind drugs, arms and human trafficking and can have hugely destabilising consequences. With this deployment our Armed Forces have once again demonstrated their versatility and value by contributing to the conservation work taking place in Malawi.

Working with local communities, host Governments and wildlife groups is key to our approach, we want to see sustainable, community led solutions that help promote security and stability for both the people and wildlife of Africa.

The counter-poaching ranger partnering programme is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and delivered by the British Army. The UK Government has committed over £36 million to tackle the illegal wildlife trade between 2014 and 2021. Part of this is to help support transboundary work to allow animals to transit more safely between areas, and across national borders.

International Environment Minister Zac Goldsmith said:

The UK is taking the lead in countering the illegal wildlife trade – including poaching for rhino horn which is a disastrous and destructive trade that threatens the very existence of the precious black rhino species.

This deployment demonstrates the vital role the UK can play in that effort by sharing skills with international partners engaged in the fight against poaching and smugglers.

Photo credit: African Parks

Nearly 30 million walks demonstrates huge popularity of England's coastal paths.

As families across the country embark on a traditional Boxing Day walk, new figures out today (26 December) reveal the huge popularity of England's coastal paths with 29.1 million walking trips made over a six-month period,

boosting local economies and bringing health and wellbeing benefits to visitors.

The [never-before-released data](#) was collected by Natural England – the government’s adviser on the natural environment. It shows the significant value of coastal walking for health and wellbeing, with 97% of people feeling refreshed and revitalised as a result of their visit.

The data also revealed that visits boosted the economy by £350 million, with day-trippers spending on average £8.65 per day in coastal shops and overnight visitors spending on average £36.73. This supported more than 5,900 full-time equivalent jobs along the English coast.

Natural England is currently establishing a 2,700-mile path around the entire English coastline. Walkers will be able to enjoy, explore and experience some of our finest and most important cultural and natural heritage – from the white cliffs of Dover, to the industrial heritage of the North East. When completed, [the England Coast Path](#) will be the longest continuous coastal walking route in the world.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

“The popularity of the English coast is fantastic news for the millions of people who visit, work and live along it, and there is no better way to relax and enjoy the natural environment than by walking along our beautiful shores.

“We are committed through our 25 Year Environment Plan to encourage more people connect with nature, and I encourage everyone who can to get outside during the festive period to enjoy the outdoors.”

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

England’s wonderful coastline is a national treasure. This research reveals how the coast brings people closer to our magnificent wildlife, contributes to local economies while promoting our health and wellbeing.

Our flagship England Coast Path is taking people through some of the finest and most important landscapes in England, opening up access to historic landmarks, natural wonders and breath-taking scenery, enabling more visitors to experience, recognise and value the benefits of our environment.

Hilary McGrady, Director General of the National Trust, said:

As a nation of islanders, our coastline holds a special place in many of our hearts. We know that people seek out coastal places – to experience the beautiful landscape, as somewhere peaceful to

pause, or simply to spend time with family and friends. The National Trust's long running work to protect our coast has given us a deep insight into the benefits that spending time by the sea can bring.

We welcome the findings of this research, which emphasise the importance of caring for the coast and making sure it is rich in natural beauty and cultural significance, where both nature and people can flourish.

Gemma Cantelo, Head of Policy and Advocacy for the Ramblers, said:

There's something really special about walking near the sea and it's wonderful to see that England's coastal paths have a place in the hearts of millions of walkers. We're immensely proud of our dedicated volunteers who have worked tirelessly to support Natural England's fantastic work.

At a time when we're facing a climate emergency, rising obesity levels and a mental health crisis, this report highlights the difference National Trails can make in enabling more people to connect to nature and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of walking our beautiful coastline, as well as the significant economic boost they bring to local communities. This important report once again demonstrates that investment in walking is money well-spent.

Today's study, which collected data from July 2017 and January 2018, will provide a baseline to help evaluate the benefits of English coast paths to local economies and communities..

Once complete, the England Coast Path will become a National Trail – the nation's finest and most popular long-distance paths. It will be a continuous, easy-to-follow, well-maintained walking route which is being carefully designed to help with managing recreation alongside other land uses.

The work connects long-established national trails such as the 630-mile South West Coast Path with new sections such as the 58-mile stretch between Minehead and Brean Down in Somerset. The most recent part of the path opened in September 2019, increasing access to the Tees Valley coastline [with a 10-mile route from Newport Bridge to North Gare](#).

Further information

[Read the full report here](#)

The number of visits to the path were estimated using data from: automatic people counters (managed by Natural England); a survey of 2,000 people walking on English coastal paths conducted for the purpose of the study; and counts of visits made during the survey.

The data was collected through a survey undertaken between July 2017 and January 2018 at 32 locations on coastal paths around England. The locations used for the survey were selected to represent the diversity in English coastal paths and their use.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 places a duty on the Secretary of State and Natural England to secure a long distance walking trail around the open coast of England, together with public access rights to a wider area of land along the way for people to enjoy.

Natural England is working on the entire coastal route, with new sections also opened in Cumbria, Norfolk, Dorset, Kent, Somerset, Yorkshire, Northumberland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Lincolnshire.

The England Coast Path will be our longest, newest and most challenging National Trail, passing through some of our finest countryside and coastal locations.

It will secure legal rights of public access for the first time to typical coastal land including foreshore, beaches, dunes and cliffs.

[Low-emission cars to help make UK diplomats “the greenest in the world”](#)

- Foreign Office to replace diplomats’ cars with all-electric or hybrid models
- FCO aiming to become the “greenest diplomatic service in the world”
- Change is part of wider FCO effort to reduce carbon footprint

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is replacing diplomats’ official cars with low-carbon vehicles as part of an ambitious programme to cut emissions and become the greenest diplomatic service in the world.

The UK’s Oslo and Holy See Embassies have already replaced their cars, and 30 other UK posts around the world will be among the first to receive either an all-electric or hybrid Jaguar I-Pace by April 2020. Fast charging stations will be installed at posts as part of the programme.

Converting to low-emission vehicles for its entire fleet is part of a wider Foreign Office effort to improve its environmental footprint.

The FCO is committed to achieving the targets set for all government

departments to have a 25% electric fleet by 2022 and an all-electric fleet by 2030.

The FC0 is also extending the use of solar energy on its buildings to reduce its carbon footprint and eliminating the use of single-use plastics across its global estate – saving 142,000 items from going to landfill every year.

Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, said:

Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time, and our fleet of flag cars is a high-profile tool for demonstrating the UK's international leadership on climate change diplomacy.

I want us to be the greenest diplomatic service in the world. Shifting our vehicles away from petrol to all-electric will help us achieve this.

The UK will host COP26 in 2020. The event in Glasgow next year will be the UN's 26th climate change conference, and bring together over 30,000 delegates from around the world, including climate experts, business leaders and citizens to agree ambitious action to tackle climate change.

Notes to editors:

1. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that transportation is responsible for 24 per cent of all global CO2 emissions.
2. In 2018-19, the FC0 UK/domestic greenhouse gas emissions were 7,753 tCO2e (tonnes of Carbon Dioxide equivalent), representing a 60 per cent reduction compared to 2009-10 and ahead of the 2020 Greener Government Commitment target. Of this, the FC0 fleet accounted for 94 tCO2e.
3. The first 30 Posts set to receive a low-emission flag vehicles are: 1) Abu Dhabi 2) Atlanta 3) Brasilia 4) Brussels 5) Bucharest 6) Calgary 7) Chicago 8) Colombo 9) Dubai 10) Hanoi 11) Kiev 12) Kingston 13) Lisbon 14) Madrid 15) Mexico City 16) Montreal 17) Moscow 18) Paris 19) Pristina 20) Riga 21) Rio De Janeiro 22) Sao Paulo 23) Singapore 24) Stockholm 25) Sydney 26) Taiwan 27) Tallinn 28) The Hague 29) Vilnius 30) Zagreb
4. Embassies can now only purchase petrol or diesel vehicles as a last resort in locations where electric vehicles are not serviceable or available.
5. Action taken to eliminate single-use plastics across the FC0 global estate has seen a 98% reduction in the UK of single-use plastics, and 15 Posts now operate entirely free of single-use plastics. Upon completion,

the campaign is expected to see the FCO's single-use plastic footprint cut by 99%, saving 142,000 items from entering local landfills per year.

2020 financial levels confirmed for commercial vehicle operators



The Office of the Traffic Commissioner has today (24 December 2019) confirmed the levels against which applications and continuations will be assessed from the start of 2020.

There will be no change to the rates of finance, which must be available to support a licence or application. Therefore, operators will continue to be required to demonstrate rates of finance as follows:

- Standard national and international licence applicants will be required to demonstrate £8000 for the first vehicle and £4450 for each additional vehicle they request to be authorised.
- To support a restricted licence or application operators will be required to show £3100 for the first vehicle and £1700 for each additional authorised vehicle.

Operators making variation applications will be required to demonstrate financial standing for their existing fleet and any additional authorisation against these levels.

Any applicant or licence holder appearing at public inquiry before a traffic commissioner after 1 January 2020, where evidence of financial standing is requested, will be required to continue to satisfy these levels.

The [Senior Traffic Commissioner's statutory guidance document on finance](#) will reflect the above rates.

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