

## **Assisted passage**

We now have measures in place which enable us to provide assisted passage at 31 of our locks along the non-tidal River Thames. These are: St Johns, Grafton, Radcot, Northmoor, Shifford, Pinkhill, Eynsham, Kings, Osney, Abingdon, Culham, Clifton, Days, Benson, Cleeve, Goring, Whitchurch, Caversham, Blakes, Sonning, Marsh, Hambleden, Marlow, Boveney, Romney, Old Windsor, Bell Weir, Penton Hook, Chertsey, Shepperton and Teddington. Special arrangements are in place for Teddington, as outlined [here](#).

We are working hard to increase the number of sites where we are able to provide assisted passage with adequate protection for anyone using, visiting or working at the site, from catching or spreading Coronavirus, in line with Government's requirements.

This is not always straightforward for a variety of reasons. All our sites are different in terms of the relationship between working and public areas. Some, and the routes between them that our staff must take, are in very close proximity to each other, or run through each other. Providing appropriate measures, especially at sites which attract significant numbers of daily visitors – walkers, runners and cyclists as well as boaters of all types – and where legally protected public rights of way exist, is challenging. But we know how important assisted passage is in terms of your overall boating experience, and providing the best levels that we possibly can is a priority for us.

The physical measures you may have seen at our sites, such as fencing and signage, are an indicator of the effort involved, but just an indicator. Physical measures have to be backed up with appropriate systems and processes and we are making good progress. This includes, from 1 July until the end of September, a further 10 seasonal lock keepers in addition to the 3 already employed, to boost the number of staff available, and provide additional cover when our permanent staff are on a day off, on holiday, or unwell.

At sites where measures are in place to enable assisted passage, even with the recent additions to our lock keeper workforce, assisted passage may not always be available. Sometimes, due to colleagues being absent for the reasons given above, our lock staff will need to carry out duties at more than one site. They may also need to carry out other important tasks on site which may need to take priority over assisted passage – operating weirs to manage water levels for example, or dealing with an incident. Occasionally, given the sometimes limited opportunity for carrying out this work due to weather conditions or the flow of traffic through a lock, basic site maintenance such as cutting grass might need to take priority. We know that the presentation of our sites is as important to you as it is to us, and would ask you to respect our lock keeper's decision if they sometimes focus on this work to get the job done during their normal working hours before the lock gets busy, or rain falls.

Please also be aware that some of our staff or their families are currently shielding. At these sites, and at others where it is simply not possible to put adequate protection measures in place, we may not be able to offer assisted passage. Even at those sites where we can, it may occasionally be necessary to stop doing so at short notice. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case – the sheer number of people on site, or damage to some of the protection measures, such as fencing, for example. We have already experienced this at some sites. If we need to withdraw assisted passage at any of our sites we will not do so lightly, but we will not hesitate to do so if we must. Protecting everyone at our sites from coronavirus is our priority.

## **Camping and lock and weir fishing**

We are keen to re-open these facilities where we can, but we need to ensure we are able to put in place appropriate measures to minimise the risk of contracting Coronavirus for our customers, our staff and the general public. We also need to make sure we can adhere to government guidelines. Due to campsites and lock and weir fishing sites being in or near to our restricted operational areas, and the additional measures required to make the sites safe, we cannot offer these services for now.

We are committed to providing you with the best possible boating experience we can this summer, with the resources available to us, and in the extraordinary circumstances we all find ourselves in. We understand that the limitations on the levels of service we are able to provide may be a source of frustration, but please do be patient with, and respectful towards our lock staff who are doing their

very best to provide the best service possible under extremely trying circumstances – as is everyone in our team.

We will be updating the information on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) to reflect the latest position.

Many thanks

Vicky

**Vicky Sanders**

Waterways Operations Manager, Thames

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**We will provide an efficient and high quality service and in doing this we want you to respect our staff - we won't tolerate threatening, abusive or violent behaviour. Visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)**

	<p>For the latest guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- INTRANET.EA.GOV</li><li>- NHS.UK/coronavirus</li><li>- GOV.UK/coronavirus</li></ul>	
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