



Monday 4th March 2019

## Pollution incidents linked to tunnel

The Environment Agency is investigating two incidents which resulted in pollution to a West Yorkshire stream last week.

Hole Bottom Beck is one of several watercourses that come together to form Bradford Beck. It flows northwards from Queensbury, passing within yards of a disused railway tunnel which is the focus of an ongoing engineering project being undertaken by AMCO-Giffen, under contract to Highways England. Part of the work involves pumping an estimated 6.6 million gallons of floodwater from the tunnel into a culvert which Hole Bottom Beck flows through.

Last Tuesday (26th February), the contractor was seen loading a piece of pumping equipment - described by a witness as "looking fire-damaged" - onto a wagon which had arrived two hours earlier with an identical piece of equipment. Also that morning, locals reported smelling diesel and seeing pollution in the beck, extending for at least 200 metres from the exit of the culvert close to Brow Lane in Clayton.

Members of the public reported the incident to the Environment Agency on Friday (1st March) and an officer attended site during the afternoon; however he was unable to discuss the matter with AMCO-Giffen as their staff had left for the day. The officer acknowledged that patches of diesel could still be seen on the surface of the water for a considerable distance from the culvert.

Diane Fogarty, who owns land nearby, said: "We live in a valley so all noise tends to get amplified but, since they started pumping in January, the rushing water has been loud enough to keep us awake on occasions.

"The pollution is a disgrace. We've had to stop our dogs drinking from the beck; it's affected a lot of vegetation on the banks and the smell is awful. It's got into our lake which we've spent a lot of time, effort and money on over the years, creating a valuable wildlife habitat; there are hundreds of fish in there now. I can't tell you how angry we are about this.

"If an individual had caused the pollution, the authorities would come down on them like a tonne of bricks, but these big companies seem to get away with anything. It's about time the Environment Agency stepped in and put a stop to it. Why aren't they taking enforcement action?"

Professor Barney Lerner, Chair of The Friends of Bradford's Becks, said: "I understand that the contractors working in the tunnel do not hold a permit to discharge into Hole Bottom Beck; neither am I aware of any application having been registered for a groundwater discharge exemption. This would enable a moderate flow of clean, uncontaminated groundwater to be legally discharged to the beck.

"Why has work been allowed to start without this essential paperwork being in place?"

"In January we witnessed heavy, black sediment all the way down Hole Bottom Beck. The pollution reached beyond the confluence with Clayton Beck, a mile downstream. This chokes the bed of the river, suffocating the aquatic invertebrates that fish and birds feed on.



“The diesel pollution is odorous, unsightly and contaminates bank-side vegetation. It is harmful to farm animals, dogs and wildlife that might drink from the beck. I am deeply saddened to find that, yet again, one of Bradford’s becks is being thoughtlessly polluted through unauthorised discharges.”

On Friday (1st March), a member of the Queensbury Tunnel Society - which is campaigning to reopen the tunnel as a cycle path connecting Bradford and Keighley to Halifax - carried out an inspection of the culvert. He reported that the water being discharged into Hole Bottom Beck from a drain running from the tunnel was thick with suspended solids, although its volume was smaller than on previous visits. Again, the Environment Agency was informed.

Graeme Bickerdike, Engineering Co-ordinator for the Society, said: “There’s been comparatively little rainfall this winter so the water level in the beck is quite low. We’ve therefore had concerns about the pumping operation as the amount of floodwater entering the watercourse is sometimes so great that it comes through the culvert’s stonework, rather than just out of the drain.

“We have recorded some sediment in the discharge before but, on Friday, the water was black. There was also a smell of diesel around the midpoint of the culvert - where the drain is - which we hadn’t noticed closer to the entrance.

“The current engineering works are taking place 1,500 yards into Queensbury Tunnel and the floodwater is being pumped into the watercourse within a designated confined space. Unfortunately, in these circumstances, even regulatory bodies would have difficulty gaining insight and gathering evidence about a contractor’s activities and whether they are being properly controlled.

“Whatever happened in the tunnel last week, the mitigation measures clearly proved ineffective.”

Photos and video of the pollution were posted on social media over the weekend and, on Sunday, a member of AMCO-Giffen staff was seen taking samples from Hole Bottom Beck.

In 2015, a similar operation to pump floodwater from the Halifax end of Queensbury Tunnel was halted by the Environment Agency after Strines Beck was polluted by a discharge thick with silt.

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**(Please note that the photos of the diesel pollution supplied with this press release were taken on Friday 1st March, at least three days after the pollution was first observed.)**

**To link to videos of the pollution or embed them on your website:**

(Diesel pollution) <https://youtu.be/kQpmUTkqm8k>

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/kQpmUTkqm8k?rel=0" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>`

(Silt discharge) <https://youtu.be/1UJGXsZcJGE>

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/`



1UJGXsZcJGE?rel=0" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>

A collection of high-resolution photos for Media use is available from:

[www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml](http://www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml)

More general information on the campaign is available from:

[www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/](http://www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/)

## Contacts

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## Notes for editors

Queensbury Tunnel was built by the Great Northern Railway between 1874 and 1878 as part of the Halifax, Thornton & Keighley Railway. Work was initially expected to take two years but was delayed significantly by two of the seven construction shafts having to be abandoned due to water ingress. At least ten navvies lost their lives during the work.

The tunnel, which is 2,501 yards (2,287 metres) long, opened to freight traffic in October 1878 and passenger trains in December 1879. The line between Holmfild and Queensbury, which included the tunnel, was officially closed on 28th May 1956. Track lifting took place in 1963.

Queensbury Tunnel would be the longest in the UK to host a shared path if the proposal to reopen it for such a purpose is successful. Currently Combe Down Tunnel in Bath holds that position at 1,829 yards (1,672 metres). The longest in Europe is the 2,931-yard (2,680 metres) Uitzu Tunnel on the Plazaola Greenway in northern Spain. However plans are being developed to restore Rhondda Tunnel in South Wales for cycle path use; this has a length of 3,443 yards (3,148 metres).

The Historical Railways Estate (HRE), part of Highways England, is responsible for inspecting, maintaining and limiting the liability associated with around 3,200 disused railway bridges, abutments, tunnels, cuttings, culverts and viaducts. HRE's remit was formerly fulfilled by BRB (Residuary) until its abolition on 30th September 2013.

HRE's proposed abandonment scheme has been split into two phases, the first of which is for preparatory works and got underway on 1st October. Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that the original estimated cost of these works was £560,000, but has since risen to £1,109,040. The scheme's main phase requires planning permission and has been costed by AMCO-Giffen, the appointed contractor, at £3.016 million.



On 22nd October, Bradford Council informed Highways England that it would need to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment to accompany any planning application due to the complex relationship between the tunnel - most of which would be allowed to collapse - and historic local mine workings.