

# Benson Weir walkway closure

30 November 2022

**We have had to make the difficult decision to close our walkway across Benson Weir to members of the public due to safety concerns.**

Until further notice, the walkway will only be accessible to Environment Agency staff who need to operate and maintain the weir.

A diversion route has been agreed with Oxfordshire County Council and is marked by signage. A map of the route is overleaf.

## Why are we doing this?

We understand that closing the walkway to the public will inconvenience members of the local community and visitors who wish to use this route. We apologise for this.

Unfortunately, the most recent structural survey of the weir has identified that the risk of structural failure, following an impact from a large floating object, is increased due to corrosion of the walkway supports. The weir has suffered in previous years from impacts from objects such as trees and large branches that have fallen in the river, and we need to minimise the safety risk this could have on members of the public.

Weirs are designed to withstand some level of impact, but their ability to do so reduces as their condition unavoidably deteriorates as the structure ages. That is why we carry out extensive refurbishment works during a weir's operational life of around 60 to 80 years, after which it will need to be replaced.

At Benson Weir, the only immediate way of eliminating the safety risk to members of the public is to close the walkway with immediate effect and to keep it closed until we have carried out the replacement of the walkway supports.

## Managing water levels and flood risk

We have developed a safe system of work for our staff and contractors to ensure they can continue to

operate and maintain the weir. This means we can still use it to manage water levels to support navigation, protect the environment and reduce flood risk. The local community's flood risk is therefore not affected.

Nonetheless, flood risk is always heightened during the winter months. Everyone should check if their property is at risk of flooding, and what to do if it is. Full details can be found on [www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding](https://www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding).

## What happens next?

We expect the walkway will have to remain closed during the winter months, but we will explore possible options of installing a protective barrier upstream of the weir. If we find a solution that works, and is affordable, we would re-open the walkway as soon as it is installed, provided the supports do not suffer any significant impact damage between now and that work being completed.

## Looking further ahead

We plan to invest £11m on extensive improvements to Benson Weir, with fabrication work starting in 2023 and construction starting in spring 2024. This is as part of a total planned investment of £67m on many weirs along the non-tidal River Thames.

Work at Benson Weir will include a completely new, wider walkway with an upgraded support structure, refurbishment of all the existing weir gates, and the installation of a fish and eel pass to help increase the spread and diversity of fish populations along the Thames.

## Contact us

Once again, we are sorry for the inconvenience the emergency closure of Benson Weir walkway will cause. If you would like to contact us, please call us on 03708 506 506 or email us at [enquiries\\_thm@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries_thm@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Diversion route

