

Press release: Major flood scheme construction underway

Environment Agency construction work gathers pace on the major flood scheme for Perry Barr and Witton, near Birmingham. The £32 million project will reduce flood risk for 1,400 properties currently at risk of flooding from the River Tame, including 950 homes.

The Environment Agency carried out a sod-cutting ceremony to mark progression into the main construction of the second phase. The event was attended by Chair of the Environment Agency Emma Howard Boyd. The flood defence scheme has been developed in partnership with Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The partnership ensures that disruption to the park users is minimised and that the local community are kept informed through construction.

The scheme, costing just over £32 million, is part of the Environment Agency's programme of £2.6 billion investment into flood defences across the country. The scheme was made possible through funding contributions from Birmingham City Council, Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Arts Council and crowd-funding.

The formal start to the second phase of the scheme was coupled with a tour of the Perry Barr and Witton Flood Risk Management Scheme. This phase of the scheme, will provide additional flood storage at Forge Mill in Sandwell Valley, which is upstream of Perry Barr and Witton, and will control the flow of flood water downstream. Work in the Country Park will include new fencing for improved animal pens at Forge Mill Farm, extending it as a visitor attraction. There will also be improvements to the entrance into the park for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders entering from the Old Newton Road.

The main aspects of this phase include the building of the new embankment, installation of the river outlet and temporarily re-diverting the river.

The first phase of the scheme was completed in spring 2017. Improvements were made to the existing upstream flood storage area at Perry Hall Playing Fields along with improvement works in Perry Barr and Witton, including wall repairs and wall raising along Brookvale Road, construction of walls along Tame Road and installation of a flood gate at the Atlas Industrial Estate entrance. These measures in isolation would not provide a big enough reduction in flood risk, so Phase 2 will provide the necessary flood water storage during a major flood, such as that experienced in 2007.

Emma Howard Boyd, chair of the Environment Agency, said:

It's great to see first-hand work starting at Perry Barr and Witton – a fantastic scheme which not only proves the value of partnership working but which also promises to improve public spaces too. A

keen cyclist myself, I'm pleased to see that as well as reducing flood risk the project will improve cycle paths and parkland in the area – a win-win for everyone.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

This excellent new scheme will better protect 1,400 more properties from flooding and will improve access to the wonderful Sandwell Valley Country Park for both local residents and tourists.

With funding coming from the government, local councils, the Arts Council and crowd funders, this project is a great example of how by working together, we can help protect our communities and improve our environment.

The scheme is due to complete in spring 2020.

Along with flood defences and flood management schemes, knowing your flood risk is also important when protecting your family and property from flooding. People can check their risk and register to receive free flood warnings by visiting GOV.UK or calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Press release: Company fined £50,000 for environmental offence

On 3 July 2018, Hereford Magistrates' Court fined the company £50,000 and ordered it to pay prosecution costs of £50,000.

The charge was brought by the Environment Agency under the Environmental Permitting (England & Wales) Regulations 2010.

Between July 2014 and October 2014, the company deposited over 5,000 tonnes of soil, stone, brick and concrete into two land hollows on land at Bage Farm, Madley. The hollows were a habitat for great-crested newts, a European protected species. The depositing of the waste had resulted in the disturbance, injury, and killing of some of the newt population.

As part of the fine the court ordered the company to pay the costs that it had avoided in failing to lawfully dispose of the waste.

The company had a previous caution for environmental offences committed in 2010 and 2011.

In mitigation, the company's barrister stated that the company had pleaded guilty to the offence and had no previous convictions. He also stated that the new population had thrived in the time following the offence.

Speaking after the case, Environment Officer Lyndon Essex, said:

Waste crime is a serious offence with tough penalties as it can damage the environment and undermine those who operate legally. This case sends out a clear message that we will not hesitate to take action to ensure the protection of the environment.

You can call the Environment Agency on 0370 850 6506 to find out how to responsibly manage any waste your business produces or visit <https://www.gov.uk/managing-your-waste-an-overview/overview>

Everyone can all play a part in helping to prevent waste getting into the hands of criminals. If you suspect that a company is doing something wrong, you can call the Environment Agency on 0800 80 70 60 or report it anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Press release: 'Critical asset' for predicting flooding in York being built

Anyone who frequently travels on the A59 between York and Harrogate is likely to have noticed a construction site at Skipbridge, Green Hammerton.

Taking place under the bridge, the Environment Agency is building a new channel to enable river flow meter readings to be taken.

Project manager Oliver Wilson said:

This is one of the Environment Agency's critical assets for our flood warning service and for managing water resource available for abstraction.

Having an early warning that the Ouse could overtop in York means we can act early to prevent flooding by closing flood gates in the city.

The project involves building a concrete lined channel under the width of the River Nidd.

But building structures in a river channel is no easy feat, so a cofferdam has been built.

One half of the river is dammed off to create a dry working area to enable construction on that side, before the other side is dammed and the new channel structure can be completed.

The construction under the river enables an ultrasonic device attached under the bridge to measure the exact flow of water coming down the Nidd, which joins the Ouse about a mile downstream at Nun Monkton.

There was an existing concrete channel built a number of years ago but due to the design and flow dynamics it created in the river the bed got silted up, causing incorrect flow readings and it not working as an effective gauge station.

The new channel is designed to make sure sediment passes through it and flow readings are accurate.

Mr Wilson added:

Lower river levels have enabled us to make really good progress and we expect the gauge station to be fully functioning this winter.

North Yorkshire County Council's Highways Department has carried out work on the bridge and road earlier this year and Northern Powergrid also recently installed an electricity line across the bridge.

Press release: Man fined after pleading guilty to fishing offences

Christopher Myers, 27, of Surrey Place, Willington, Crook, appeared before Newton Aycliffe Magistrates Court on Wednesday 4 July where he pleaded guilty to fishing using illegal equipment, killing and being in possession of trout about to spawn.

He was ordered to pay a total of £1,180, which includes a fine of £800, costs of £300 and a victim surcharge of £80.

The offence happened at 2100 on 21 November last year when Environment Agency Fisheries Enforcement Officers were carrying out patrols at Waskerley Beck, Wolsingham.

They observed three men on the beck. Myers was at the water's edge shining a torch into the water and carrying a large gaff – a one meter long metal hook

– with a number of fish impaled upon it. A second man was wearing a headlamp torch and the other was carrying a landing net that contained a number of fish.

After officers made themselves known to the poachers, all three ran, dropping the fish and equipment. Myers was caught and arrested while his accomplices escaped. Four dead trout were found in Myers nearby vehicle.



Seized equipment and eggs web

During a voluntary interview at the scene, Myers denied taking any fish, stating that he didn't know who the other men were, that he did not know how the fish got into his pick up and that he was not the driver that night.

Officers found a total of 13 dead sea trout, 11 of which were females ready to spawn. Between them, they were carrying around 35,000 eggs. Their loss could have a major impact on future sea trout stocks in the River Wear.

In mitigation, Myers stated he didn't know how serious these offences were and said he was very sorry.

The Environment Agency's Kevin Summerson said: "This level of illegal activity could have a serious impact on the sustainability of future stocks of sea trout in the River Wear. That's why we take reports of suspected poaching seriously and work closely with the police to take action where appropriate. We're pleased the court has also recognised seriousness of the crime in sentencing.

"At this time of year salmon and sea trout are returning to rivers to spawn

and protecting returning fish is vital to maintaining a healthy fish population.

“We’ll continue to target all aspects of illegal fishing activity, particularly where serious illegal and potentially damaging methods are used.”

The court also ordered the forfeiture of all seized items: gaff, net, torches and fish.

Under the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, lights are prohibited, as are gaffs, and landing nets if used without an authorised rod and line. It is also illegal to fish during the close season for migratory fish.

Anyone discovered committing offences could face a substantial fine and imprisonment. The Environment Agency urges anyone to report illegal fishing by calling 0800 80 70 60.

You can buy a licence at <https://www.gov.uk/fishing-licences> and don’t forget that all fishing licence income is used to fund work to protect, improve and develop fisheries, fish habitats and angling. If you want to fish a new river this season, why not visit the fishinginfo website to find details of different venues, river levels and angling clubs.

Press release: Natural flood management scheme for Yorkshire Dales communities

Running through the dale from just south of Kidstones to its confluence with the River Ure just down from Aysgarth Falls, Bishopdale Beck can quickly overtop and cause flooding in heavy rain.

The main road through the dale, the B6160, can become impassable and result in local residents in villages, such as Kidstones and Newbiggin, being unable to access vital infrastructure including schools, doctors’ surgeries and shops.

But now a natural flood management (NFM) scheme aims to better protect the community in Bishopdale, which was chosen as one of three schemes in Yorkshire to benefit from an equal share of £501,000 of Government funding NFM initiatives.

Measures will be selected from a range of NFM interventions, including run-off management, using earth bunds and leaky wooden dams, peatland restoration, woodland creation, riparian buffer strips and management of

floodplain grazing.

Simon Stokes, of the Environment Agency, said the scheme has been made possible by partner organisations coming together.

He said:

We look forward to working with the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and the local community in delivering this project.

We hope that this project will really showcase partnership working and deliver a noticeable increase in resilience to flooding for the communities in the Bishopdale Beck catchment as well as improving the environment for both people and wildlife.

The Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust has been working with landowners to create individual farm plans, something which the partner organisations say they are keen to do more of in the Dales.

Tarja Wilson, of Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), said:

The idea is simple: farmers in the hills can take measures to slow down flood waters, both benefitting their businesses and lowering the risk of homes being flooded downstream.

In Bishopdale farmers are working collaboratively through the Wensleydale Facilitation Fund to consider how they can carry out natural flood management on their holdings.

Natural flood management isn't a silver bullet which will solve flooding downstream, but it has multiple benefits for farmers, such as improving water quality and reducing flood risk. It can be a genuine win-win, for farmers and the wider community.

The scheme will be developed in close consultation with communities and landowners to ensure interventions complement existing agricultural businesses.

Local farmer and landowner Robert Brown said:

It's great to see investment in the uplands for natural flood management. Previous projects have been very successful and it's good to see lots of local farmers and landowners getting involved.

Dan Turner, of the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, said:

The Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust is really looking forward to working in partnership with the YDNPA and EA on the Bishopdale natural flood management project.

We believe that this could be a real flagship project, delivering natural flood management on a catchment scale while also providing other benefits, such as wildlife, and reducing diffuse pollution.

We have been working closely with farmers in the catchment for many years, so it's great to once again, work together to creating a more resilient catchment, that's both profitable, sustainable and working with the natural environment.

The scheme will complement peatland restoration work delivered through Pennine PeatLIFE, an EU LIFE project co-funded by the Environment Agency and water companies.

The project delivery partners, the Yorkshire Peat Partnership, have been working with land owners in Bishopdale to restore upland blanket bog habitat in the area.

These habitats are vital for water storage, with healthy bogs storing and holding more water and sediment.

The two other areas to get a share of the £501,000 Government funding announced in the 2016 autumn budget for natural flood management schemes in Yorkshire are Brompton Beck, near Northallerton, and Backstones Beck in Ilkley.

The funding was part of a national £15million NFM programme which, in addition to delivering flood risk reduction and environmental enhancements, aims to contribute to the growing evidence base for NFM.