

Press release: Oxford flood scheme moves a step closer

Updated: Now with links to YouTube videos about the Oxford scheme.

The £120m Oxford flood alleviation scheme, which will reduce flood risk to homes, businesses, and transport in Oxford and the surrounding area, has moved a step closer.

The Oxford flood alleviation scheme partnership has just announced that it has secured the funding for the scheme, which will include at least 15 hectares of new habitat creation, 7 new bridges and 2.6 kilometres of new flood defences.

More than £65m in funding has already been committed by Government. A record amount of partnership funding totalling over £55m has now been given by a wide range of partners. Investment has been secured from Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Thames Water Utilities and the University of Oxford.

Joanna Larmour, Project Director at the Environment Agency, said:

This is a huge scheme – one of the biggest the Environment Agency is working on – and when complete it will not only reduce flood risk to homes across Oxford but it will also protect vital infrastructure, enabling the city to keep moving during flooding. It will also benefit communities and wildlife in a number of ways, including improving existing public footpaths and creating new habitat for wildlife and improving biodiversity.

Today's fantastic news shows that working in partnership can help us get the best scheme for Oxford. We are very pleased that our partners have recognised the multiple benefits it will bring and helped us secure the funding required to progress the scheme to the next stage.

The scheme will benefit everyone who lives, works in or visits Oxford. As well as reduced property flooding, the railway and Botley and Abingdon roads will be protected keeping the city open for business during future flooding. There will also be fewer flood related electricity, telephone and internet disruptions. The scheme will allow Oxford's successful economy to continue to thrive and also provide environmental benefits and a longterm green legacy.

County Councillor Yvonne Constance said:

The flood relief channel has been a hope for many people for a long time. Now we are at the stage where it has the funding it needs to be made into a reality there will be thousands of homes and businesses protected from the devastating effects of flooding.

Clearly there is still much work to do, but this funding announcement means we can continue to work in partnership to move forward to the next stage.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of Oxford City Council, said:

The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme will bring huge benefits to householders in West and South Oxford, and to all parts of the business community. I am delighted that we have been successful in our application for this final tranche of funding.

HM Treasury approved the outline business case for the scheme in November 2017. This detailed that full funding for the scheme had to be committed before it could move to the next stage. This has now been confirmed, thanks to increases in contributions from the scheme partners.

The total amount covers the design and construction costs to deliver the scheme. The project team will now work on the Full Business Case, which will be submitted to HM Treasury later this year. Partners will continue to work together on ongoing negotiations with external companies for future investment in the scheme.

The Environment Agency will submit the planning application for the Oxford flood alleviation scheme in March. It will take approximately 3 years to build the scheme, which is designed to work with the natural floodplain west of Oxford.

[The route of the Oxford flood scheme](#)

[Flood risk in Oxford before and after the Oxford flood alleviation scheme](#)

[News story: Enforcement Undertakings accepted from United Utilities](#)

United Utilities have paid £155,000 to environmental charities as part of two Enforcement Undertakings (EUs). The EUs were offered to the Environment Agency after the company admitted causing sewage to pollute two watercourses in the summer of 2016.

Benefit to environment

EUs are a new kind of restorative enforcement sanction. Polluters can make an offer to the Environment Agency to pay for or carry out environmental improvements as an alternative to any other enforcement action and the Environment Agency decides whether this is acceptable.

In July 2016, a blockage in a sewage detention tank in Whaley Bridge, Derbyshire, caused sewage to overflow to the River Goyt, resulting in discoloration to the river downstream to New Mills, and sewage fungus being deposited on the river bed for at least a kilometre. Although no fish were found to have been killed, there was a short-term but significant impact on invertebrate life and the river habitat, in which fish such as trout and bullhead normally thrive.

In August 2016, a blockage in a sewer in Millbrook, Tameside, caused an overflow through a dislodged hatch cover, resulting in a similar impact on a shorter stretch of Swineshaw Brook which runs to the River Tame.

The EU offers were accepted by the Environment Agency in October 2017 and were completed in January 2018. United Utilities made a total of £155,000 in donations to the Wild Trout Trust, the Ramblers Association and the Healthy Rivers Trust. This money will be used to fund environmental improvements and research in the affected catchments and to restore endangered footpaths.

The company also spent a further £10,000 removing rubbish from Swineshaw Brook and also paid the Environment Agency's incident response and investigation costs in full. In response to both incidents United Utilities had acted quickly to stop the pollution and resolve the cause. As part of the EUs the company also committed to improving their infrastructure and asset maintenance schedules in order to reduce the likelihood of this happening again.

Mike Higgins, an Environment Officer with the Environment Agency, said:

Enforcement Undertakings allow polluters to positively address and restore the harm caused to the environment and prevent repeat incidents.

They offer quicker and more directly beneficial resolution than a court prosecution and help offenders who are prepared to take responsibility for their actions to voluntarily make things right. We will continue to seek prosecutions against those who cause severe pollution or who act deliberately or recklessly.

Please report any environmental issues to the Environment Agency's 24 hour Incident Hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Press release: Major flood exercise from the source of the Trent to the Humber

A major exercise is taking place this week that will test the response to a large flooding incident along the whole of the River Trent, the third longest river in the country.

The scenario will test how the Environment Agency, emergency services, councils, government departments, utility companies, the Met office and the military exchange information, provide aid and test local and regional emergency plans.

The exercise is based on a long period of wet weather that has saturated the region, followed by an intense storm which causes significant flooding.

Local Resilience Forums from Staffordshire to Humberside will be involved alongside Strategic and Tactical co-ordination groups, with the Environment Agency injecting scenarios along the way to keep everyone focused and ensure it challenges those involved.

Paul Lockhart, East Midlands Flood Risk Manager at the Environment Agency said:

We don't get second chances during a major flooding incident so it is essential that we test our response through exercises like this one, to make sure every organisation can work together to do everything possible for communities when we are faced with the real thing.

We appreciate that major flooding events don't take place regularly and therefore many people often don't think about the potential consequences. It is great for the public to know that so many organisations will be looking out for them if the worst happened, but whilst we can reduce the risk of flooding, major weather events do occur which test flood defences.

Flooding is dangerous and can happen very quickly. The effects can be devastating. There are a number of things you can do to prepare for flooding to keep yourself and your family safe. Find out if your home is at risk, sign up for flood warnings and be ready to take action. Visit www.gov.uk/flood or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Learning from the exercise will be used to shape how organisations respond to a major flooding incident on the River Trent in the future.

[Press release: £12,159 penalty for unauthorised Leominster scrap metal facility](#)

Following his guilty plea at Hereford Magistrates' Court, Gillum (aged 75), was fined £3,340 and ordered to pay £8,669.54 in costs, along with a £150 victim surcharge.

The charge was brought by the Environment Agency under Regulations 12(1)(a) and 38(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 and 2016, also sections 34(5) and 34(6) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Gillum traded as Leominster Scrap Metal, from a site off North Road, Leominster between August 2015 and September 2017.

Following a report from a member of the public, Environment Agency officers investigated claims of an illegal scrap metal facility in operation. Officers found piles of miscellaneous scrap metal around the Site. They could see the ground contaminated with oil and found scrap motor vehicles, gas cylinders, wheels, batteries and metal sheeting. Burning of waste had also taken place.

Mr Gillum was advised that he needed an Environmental Permit or an exemption, to carry out the activities at the site. A few months later, an exemption was registered, however on a visit to the site in November 2015, Environment Agency officers noted that conditions of the exemption were not being met. The exemption was de-registered in April and following further illegal activity at the site, an enforcement notice was served in July 2016 requiring Gillum to remove all waste from the site. This Notice was not complied with.

Environment Agency Officers required that Gillum provided waste transfer notes relating to his business. Another enforcement notice was issued, but Gillum failed to provide the required documents. Gillum was interviewed under caution in November 2016, where he confirmed that he was a registered waste carrier and admitted that he had operated the scrap metal business for a few years.

Speaking after the case, an Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation said:

This case demonstrates that we are willing to take tough action on

illegal operations such as Leominster Scrap Metal. Our investigations started with a tip-off from a member of the public, and has resulted in a successful prosecution.

In mitigation, the court took into account that Gillum has traded for 25 years and has suffered some ill health. Gillum apologised for not “moving with the times” or appreciating the consequences of his actions. He said that he was not aware of the sensitive receptors around his site, but had spent £15,000 to put in the necessary infrastructure.

If you see or suspect illegal waste activities, report it anonymously to Crimestoppers: www.crimestoppers-uk.org or call 0800 555 111 or via the Environment Agency Incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

[Press release: Camera footage helps secure fisheries conviction](#)

Body worn camera footage captured by Environment Agency officers on patrol has been used to support a conviction for the first time.

Callum Bell, 26, of Lyndsey Street in Houghton-Le-Spring, was fined for obstructing Fisheries Enforcement officers during an incident at Ouston near Chester-le-Street in June last year.

The footage shows Bell using insulting and threatening behaviour towards the two officers as they investigated an illegal fishing offence.

He appeared at Newton Aycliffe Magistrates’ Court on Wednesday, 31 January, where he pleaded guilty to two offences of wilfully obstructing the officers in the execution of their duty, and two offences of using threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour towards the two officers. He was fined £534 and ordered to pay costs of £530.

In a separate offence from the same incident, David Daniel Bilverstone, 23, of Northlands in Chester-le-Street was charged with fishing without a licence. He failed to appear and the case was proved in his absence. He was fined £110 and ordered to pay costs of £180.

Threatening towards officers

Acting on behalf of the Environment Agency, Chris Bunting told the court that on 18 June last year, the enforcement officers were carrying out a patrol of the freshwater lake Ouston Springs. They saw Bilverstone fishing with a rod and Bell seemingly asleep on the bankside.

One of the enforcement officers took Bilverstone aside to fill in an offence report form. He said he goes sea fishing and claimed he didn't know he needed a licence.

At this point Bell awoke and walked towards where the officers were standing by the lake side. It was apparent he was affected by alcohol. He quickly became aggressive and threatening towards the two officers.

He tried to grab the offence report book, threatened to push them in the lake and twice lunged towards one of the officers, trying to grab the officer's baton from its holster. Over the course of several minutes he continued to be verbally abusive, repeatedly swearing and making threats.

Even after the officers had finished dealing with the illegal fishing offence, he continued to shout abuse towards them from across the lake.

When interviewed, Bell said he was drunk and hadn't meant to obstruct the officers. In court, he offered an unreserved apology for his actions.

'Safety of staff is paramount'

Rachael Caldwell, Environment Agency Enforcement Team Leader for the north east, said:

Bell was told on more than one occasion that he was being recorded by the cameras but he continued to be threatening and abusive.

Our officers are doing an important job to ensure people are fishing legally and taking action against those that aren't. The safety of our staff is paramount and they shouldn't have to put up with any kind of abusive or threatening behaviour.

This is the first time cameras worn by our officers have been used to support a conviction. Our preference is to prevent hostility in the first place and I hope this serves as a warning to others that their actions are being recorded and will be used in future court proceedings. Hopefully people will think twice before acting in such a way.

Environment Agency enforcement officers in the north east first trialled the use of body worn cameras last year to help reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour, assaults and threats against staff. It's expected they will be rolled out to teams elsewhere in the country in the coming months.

The cameras – which are the norm among many enforcement agencies – can be used in a variety of ways, including at visits to poor performing waste sites, illegal waste sites, during fisheries and navigation patrols and even during incident response.

Officers must follow clear guidelines on use of the cameras, including telling people they are being filmed, and deleting any footage after a month

unless it is used for evidential purposes.

Fishing is free for children under 16, although those aged between 12 and 16 still need a junior licence. For anyone over 16, a full annual licence costs from just £30, with some short term and concessionary licences also available. [You can buy your rod licence online](#)