

# Increasing flood resilience in the River Great Ouse

The floods of December 2020 in the River Great Ouse catchment were caused by continued heavy rainfall on already saturated ground. Flooding affected many homes and communities across the region.

Over the last year, the Environment Agency has worked with local communities to better understand the effects of the flooding, and to help improve resilience to such flood events.

It has invested around £30 million\* in flood defence schemes, repairs and improvements to the thousands of flood risk assets in the River Great Ouse catchment. The Environment Agency owns or operates 1,141 of these assets. A further 5,000 assets are owned or operated by other agencies such as internal drainage boards and local authorities.

An improved flood warning service has been activated and is ready for winter. The 25 highest risk areas in the River Great Ouse catchment can now receive earlier flood warnings than ever before. This free service gives those affected more time to prepare for flooding, and to protect their families and homes.

For properties in areas not protected by flood defences, the Environment Agency is looking at the potential for new schemes and also other measures such as Property Flood Resilience (PFR).

The Environment Agency has also supported a number of local flood action groups to help them better prepare their communities for future flood events.

Simon Hawkins, Environment Agency Area Director, said:

The Environment Agency has worked constantly over the years to better protect thousands of properties from flooding in the River Great Ouse catchment.

Since December 2020 we have taken a range of measures to improve flood resilience across the region. We have engaged with communities affected by flooding and inspected and repaired thousands of flood defence assets. Our flood defence capital programme has continued to progress, with more flood defence schemes under construction.

Flooding will continue to be a threat to our region. The effects are devastating to those affected and disruptive to many people, with recovery costs that can be huge.

We can never eliminate flooding and we urge people to be prepared for flooding by following the 'Prepare, Act, Survive' guidance.

## **Investment in the area's flood defences over the last 10 years**

Between 2011 and 2021 the Environment Agency has invested over £77 million in building and funding flood defence schemes that now better protect more than 15,500 properties in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire from flooding and erosion.

The schemes have been completed by the Environment Agency working on its own, or in partnership, and by sponsoring organisations through government Grant-in-Aid (GiA).

The types of scheme include:

- Flood and erosion protection
- Replacement flood defences
- Natural flood management
- Major flood gates
- Pumping station refurbishments
- Reservoir protection
- Individual property flood resilience measures

## **Working with communities to increase flood resilience against the effects of climate change**

More extreme weather events caused by the climate emergency are being increasingly felt, and flooding will become more likely everywhere. River level records will be broken time and again and more intense rainfall will cause severe surface water flooding.

To find out what you need to do, go online and search 'Prepare for Flooding'.

\*This figure includes £24.6 million allocated for capital schemes and £3.8 million in maintenance for the financial year 2020 to 2021. For the financial year 2021 to 22, £11.3 million is allocated for capital schemes, and £3.7 million for maintenance. The Environment Agency has issued advice to riparian property owners on their responsibilities, specifically, on how to prevent blockages to rivers that could increase flood risk.

## **Further information**

Throughout history the River Great Ouse catchment area has been subject to flooding. Serious floods took place in 1912, 1947, 1953, and in more recent memory in 1998.

In December 2020, many properties flooded across the River Great Ouse catchment. This occurred following several days of heavy rainfall on already saturated ground leading to swollen rivers causing a combination of surface water and fluvial flooding.

Property flooding was reported across a wide area and 143 communities were

affected in some way.

## **Flood defence investment in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire, since 2010**

(figures stated are up to end of March 2020)

In Cambridgeshire, we have invested £74.6 million in flood defences since 2010, providing better protection for around 15,600 homes.

In Bedfordshire, we have invested £3 million in flood defences since 2010, providing better protection for around 185 homes.

## **Investment in flood defences nationally**

- A record £5.2 billion will be invested between 2021 and 2027, creating around 2,000 new flood and coastal risk management schemes to better protect 336,000 properties across England.
- These schemes will help to avoid £32 billion in wider economic damages, reduce the national flood risk by up to 11 per cent, and reduce the risk of considerable disruption caused by potential future flooding to the daily lives of over 4 million people.