

Northumberland river overtops bank during heavy rain

The natural phenomenon, which had been expected and prepared for by the Environment Agency and its partners, has seen part of the river merge into adjacent Caistron Lakes near Rothbury.

Around half of the river is now flowing from the main River Coquet into the lakes area, which is currently holding anywhere between 100,000 and 500,000 cubic metres of water.

The impounded water is currently being held in place by the lake's raised aggregate bank, which has since experienced erosion due to the overflow of water from the lakes returning to the River Coquet. This bank is now at risk of failure.

The Environment Agency is working with partners including Northumberland County Council, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and Northumbria Police to reduce the risk to the local area.

Water will be released downstream

Should the bank fail, it will release water from the lakes area downstream, and while the extent of the floodplain means this additional water won't create a sudden impact, it does have the potential to raise river levels more quickly than normal and flood agricultural and low lying land and some recreational areas including low lying public rights of way, public roads and the Cow Haugh car park at Rothbury riverside.

Northumberland County Council is working to address any public safety concerns through the temporary closure of footpaths, car parks, and play areas in low lying areas and the flood plain, when river levels dictate.

Partners are working together with the landowner to find a solution to the lake bank erosion.

A meeting in 2019 involving agencies including the Environment Agency, Northumberland Rivers Trust, Natural England, and landowner, fisheries and council representatives, discussed the potential issues with the River Coquet and the likely future overtopping or breach.

River has been closely monitored

Andrew Turner, Area Duty Manager at the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

We've been closely monitoring the River Coquet over recent years and since our meeting in 2019 we have developed a robust incident response plan to minimise the impact on the community and

environment.

The overtopping into Caistron Lakes – a set of man-made ponds – took place last weekend (6 Feb) during heavy rain and high river levels. We're assessing the current situation and looking at options to ensure a gradual release of the stored water.

Our priority is the safety of the public and we will keep people informed of our activities and the latest information.

Caistron Lakes were created many years ago when the River Coquet overtopped into a sand and gravel extraction site. The new breach will ultimately create a new channel for the River Coquet. Andrew added:

Longer term, we will be working with Natural England to monitor the impact this has on the main River Coquet and the environment. The Coquet is a naturally wandering river and erosion, switching channels or the formation of new channels is an entirely normal occurrence.