

Press release: Beavers arrive in Essex to play their part in flood prevention

The mixed pair of beavers are now getting to know their new home – a fenced enclosure covering 4 hectares of woodland on the Spains Hall estate in Finchingfield, near Braintree.

It is hoped the beavers, sourced from an established fenced colony in Devon, will help reduce the risk of flooding in the village by building dams along the brook flowing through the enclosure.

The beavers are expected to get to work quickly, but the results of their labour may take a few months to be felt downstream.

Their enterprising activities are being complemented by a man-made natural flood management scheme on a second strand of Finchingfield Brook, which features a 'leaky dam' approach. This consists of securing tree branches or trunks across a watercourse, which helps slow the flow after heavy rain. The scheme should also create wetland that will release water in drier periods.

Eventually, using data collected by Environment Agency equipment stationed along the watercourses and other sensors installed around individual leaky dams and the beaver enclosure, scientists will be able to establish if this approach is more successful than more conventional flood prevention methods.

The beavers will have plenty of trees to get their teeth stuck into and a boundary fence helping to keep them safe.

Beavers have not been found in Essex for 400 years since they were hunted to extinction, although they have been reintroduced in small numbers in other parts of the country in recent years.

The project is being led by Archie Ruggles-Brise, whose family has lived on the estate for 250 years, and has been supported by the Environment Agency, Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust and local councillors. The project was enabled thanks to locally raised funding from the Anglian Eastern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC).

Archie said:

We are delighted to welcome beavers back to the estate, and to East Anglia, for the first time in almost half a millennium.

It's especially exciting to be able to utilise their unique skills to deliver flood risk reduction and biodiversity benefits locally.

It will be fascinating to see how the beavers perform alongside the man-made natural flood management dams and we are fortunate to have lots of high-tech devices and expert support in place to record the

changes.

As a farming estate this is an unusual venture for us but by working with others we are confident the beavers and the wider project will bring benefits to everyone locally. Once the beavers have settled in we will be offering tours and photographic opportunities so people can get up close to these magical animals.

Environment Agency Area Director Dr Charles Beardall said:

We are extremely pleased we have been able to support the first release of beavers back in to East Anglia after many years absence.

It will be fascinating to watch how they progress and to see the benefits they will provide for improving water quality and natural flood protection.

A spokesperson for the Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust said:

We welcome the opportunity to support Spains Hall Estate and other partners with this project, which aims to reduce the flood risk to Finchingfield and support the development of flood alleviation projects that use natural processes.

We are also excited to see what benefits the introduction of beavers will have, not only to reducing flood risk but to the biodiversity of the local area. This is a great opportunity to see how this species can shape the water environment.

The beavers were officially released by popular TV ecologist and BBC One's The One Show wildlife reporter, Mike Dilger.