

Press release: Totnes flood defence scheme gets £3.8 million upgrade

Totnes' improved flood defence scheme had its opening ribbon cut by Philip Rees, Chairman of the South West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, and South Hams District councillor John Tucker on Friday 7 December 2018.

The Environment Agency's £3.8 million improvements were needed to reduce the significant risk of river and tidal flooding. The scheme was financed by Defra grant-in-aid through the South West Flood and Coastal Committee and £110,000 from South Hams District Council.

Totnes is a historic town and the Environment Agency has made sure the flood defences are sympathetic to the built and natural environment, whilst reducing flood risk to more than 400 homes and businesses.

George Arnison, Environment Agency Flood Risk Funding Manager, said:

The risk of flooding in Totnes has increased over time. This is partly due to changes in land use in the area and partly due to the effects of climate change on rainfall patterns and sea levels.

The scheme that we opened in Totnes on Friday, which raises and extends the town's flood defences over a distance of nearly 1.5 kilometres, reduces that risk significantly. Over 400 houses and businesses are now significantly better protected from river and tidal flooding.

The flood defences stretch along the River Dart from Broadmarsh Industrial Estate downstream to the Steam Packet Inn. They comprise a mix of different measures to ensure the works were sensitive and sympathetic to both the built and natural environments.

About 500 metres of existing flood defence wall was raised plus 140 metres of new flood wall built at Broadmarsh Industrial Estate and Morrisons' car park.

One of the new flood gates in Totnes

The Environment Agency built new flood walls between properties in Totnes town centre and Marsh Quay and added flood resilient balconies, windows and doors. There are also new flood gates, a slipway and 150m of raised riverside wall. Glass flood panels were used at the Waterside Bistro to ensure customers can still enjoy views of the river.

At Steamer Quay, the Environment Agency replaced 70m of failing quay wall. This work includes specially designed habitat niches in the masonry cladding for estuary organisms to live in, including the nationally important species of tentacled lagoon worm.

Other environmental enhancements included planting over 140 trees and working with the Dartington Estate to restore 7 hectares of wetland upstream of Totnes at Queensmarsh. This has created a mosaic of habitats including grazing marsh, ponds, reed bed and wet woodland, benefiting wetland birds, otters, fish, amphibians and invertebrates.

Cllr John Tucker, Leader of South Hams District council, said:

It's very satisfying to see the hard work of all the agencies involved come to fruition in these improved flood defence works.

I'm pleased that we're able to protect homes and businesses from the worst effects of flooding while still maintaining the character of Totnes, and preserve and protect wildlife habitats at the same time.

The flood defence improvements are needed because of changes in land use in the area and a changing climate.

Flooding has devastating costs for people and businesses. The Environment Agency is investing £2.6 billion from 2015 to 2021 to reduce the risk of flooding for at least 300,000 homes and businesses across England.