

Beccles Winter Flooding Briefing

Introduction

This briefing is to inform and advise you about the flooding that took place in December 2020. Much of it you will already know. We will explain what happened, what our role is, how we work with partners and what the next steps are for your community. It will not give all the answers you want at this early stage.

What happened?

In December 2020 East Anglia received an exceptionally high amount of rainfall, the River Waveney area received 50mm in 18 hours, and a total of 71mm in 96 hours.

Across Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk we issued Flood Alerts to 21 different areas and Flood Warnings to 16 locations during the flooding between 24 December and 2 January 2021. The flood alert for the tidal River Waveney from Ellingham to Breydon Water was in place and updated every 8 hours from 6pm on Christmas Eve to 10am on 2 January 2021.

A flood warning for the tidal River Waveney from Ellingham Marshes to Belton was in place from 4:30pm on Boxing Day until almost 9am on 29 December. We are aware that flooding took place before the flood warning was issued and we are currently investigating the reasons why.

Between 24 and 29 December 2020 flooding occurred at Beccles Quay, The Maltings, Fen Lane, Bridge Street and at properties and businesses off Northgate and Puddingmoor. Unfortunately, up to 20 properties were affected, although this number may be higher if other properties were flooded but were not reported to us.

Flooding was from a combination of sources. River levels were high due to heavy rainfall. The River Waveney was also prevented from draining due to the natural tide locking effect of high spring tides on the Broads river system.

Heavy rainfall resulted in large volumes of surface water run off draining to Fen Lane. Surface water was unable to drain away as river levels were high. Water was also reported coming up through the drains on Fen Lane and Bridge Street and up through the ground and via service ducts.

Our role during flooding

We cannot stop flooding, but we work to limit the impact and we do help communities to prepare. We provide 24/7 cover to respond to flooding and pollution incidents. We issue alerts and warnings to help people reduce the impact of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea. Our primary roles during flooding are:

- providing a warning and informing service
- operating the flood defences and structures we own and manage
- being part of a multi-agency incident command and control group

Environment Agency (EA) staff and contractors were working in the wider area responding to incident reports and checking defences. Not all the defences in Beccles itself are maintained or operated by the Environment Agency, but staff visited Beccles in response to reports of flooding to ensure all defences were operational and had not been damaged.



Flood Warnings

We provide a warning and informing service through our Flood Warning Service. We have a network of both rain gauges and river gauging stations to monitor the height and flow of rivers. If a river level is measured or forecast to reach above a typical range this means that flooding is possible, and a flood warning or alert may be issued.



FLOOD ALERT

At 18:08 on 24 December we issued the flood alert for the tidal River Waveney from Ellingham to Breydon Water; *be alert, stay vigilant and make early preparations.*



FLOOD WARNING

At 16:32 on 26 December we issued two flood warnings for the Tidal River Waveney from Ellingham to Belton, and for Isolated Properties along the River Waveney; *flooding is expected, take action to protect yourself and your property.*

If you did not receive the warnings issued as above, please check that you are signed up to receive them by contacting Floodline on **0345 988 1188** or sign up at: <https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings>.

Managing and responding to flooding

Waveney Norse (on behalf of Beccles Town Council) operated the penstock sluices on the surface water drainage system. However, the combination of high river levels and high volume of surface water is likely to have compromised the effectiveness of the penstocks. Waveney Norse also installed the flood boards. During the event additional sandbags and wedges were put in place (partly by residents) to reduce leaks. Given the complexity of the flooding in Beccles we have been working with partner organisations to understand and investigate what happened. The December flood event highlighted issues with surface water drainage when river levels are high and possible groundwater flooding in addition to flooding from the River Waveney.

We attended a meeting on 22 April with our partner organisations where we discussed our responsibilities during flood incidents. We identified several immediate actions that can be taken to ensure the existing management measures and defences are effective and reduce the likelihood of properties flooding again.

What has happened since the flooding?

We are now working on the recovery side of the incident collating flood data and our contractors, Broadland Environmental Services Ltd. (BESL), have been inspecting flood structures in Beccles and across the area. We sent out a flood survey to affected residents to complete and we have been reviewing our flood warning procedures and replying to customer enquiries. We have been working with partners and flooded communities to understand the full extent of the flooding. We want to update you on this work in specific topics.

Maintenance

Beccles benefits from an existing flood defence consisting of a brick wall and wooden flood boards at access points and slipways. There are also three penstocks which allow the surface water to drain into the River Waveney. The flood boards and penstocks are owned by Beccles Town Council but operated on their behalf by Waveney Norse.

Data

We have collated and processed the data already received from our recent flood survey, but we would like to encourage anyone who has not completed the survey to complete it by using the following link.

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/l7HEVS/> if you require a paper copy please call Tina Starling on 07500 884454.



All the data we capture is reviewed and the results help to inform our flood warning service, ensuring we provide an accurate and timely warning service for future flooding. We will let you know if changes are made to your flood warning service.

Community engagement

Once we have collated all the flood data, the Environment Agency and all its partners would like to set up a drop-in event with the residents and business owners to share our findings. The priority is to update the community on the winter flooding and look at the options available to mitigate flooding and support the community to be more resilient in the future. We will be working with Beccles Town Council to arrange the drop in later in the summer.

Please contact Tina Starling at tina.starling@environment-agency.gov.uk or Paul Cunningham from Beccles Town Council townclerk@beccles.info if you would like to be involved.

Flood Investigation Report

We are collaborating with Suffolk County Council who are undertaking a Flood Investigation Report into the flooding that occurred. It will establish the causes of flooding and make recommendations for future improvements to managing and responding to flooding in Beccles. The final report will be published on the Suffolk County Council website.

Beccles Flood Risk Management Project

We are in the early stages of a long-term project to investigate ways to reduce the number of people and properties at risk of flooding from the River Waveney into the future. We have undertaken an 'initial assessment' report which produced a number of potential ways to improve the management of flood risk in Beccles.

Options include:

- Maintaining the existing flood wall but replacing the flood boards with flood gates.
- Individual Property Flood Resilience (PFR) measures i.e. flood doors or barriers, air brick covers.

We will also be undertaking a number of surveys and additional assessments of the existing defences in Beccles. Information from the Christmas flooding will help to inform our work within the project to ensure it considers, and addresses, all sources of flooding.

Have you been flooded? – Please let us know

We are very keen to know about all the properties that have been flooded, so that any data we capture can help inform future decisions. If you have not contacted us to report flooding at your property, please let us know, as we are very keen to know the full extent of the flooding in Beccles. Please email enquiries_eastanglia@environment-agency.gov.uk or call 0203 025 5472.

Where can I find out more?

Register with our Flood Warnings Direct service by visiting our website: <https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings> or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

You can check if your property is at risk by visiting: <https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding>

Contact us

Your local contact is Charlotte Scales available on: PSOENS@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Or you can send us any feedback on this update by emailing enquiries_eastanglia@environment-agency.gov.uk.

