



St Ives & Brownshill Staunch Sluices

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Date: December 2024

Key Messages & Overview

High level lines to take can be found on our Citizens Advice Page here:

[St Ives and Brownhill Staunch Sluices Information Page - Environment Agency - Citizen Space \(environment-agency.gov.uk\)](https://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/citizen-space)

We're conscious of the level of public concern around the condition of the St Ives and Brownhill sluice structures.

Our evidence shows that the current condition of these structures is not increasing the risk of internal property flooding.

We're progressing a number of options through which we hope to secure funding for works on these structures but we have to work within the confines of current government policy and funding rules.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are the St Ives and Brownhill staunch sluices in such poor condition?

The St Ives and Brownhill sluice structures are in poor condition in part because they are coming towards the end of their anticipated lifespan, but also due to insufficient funding to maintain them to target condition (*see below points to further expand on this question*).

Why isn't there enough maintenance funding to maintain these structures?

Each year we bid for the funding we need for maintenance activities across the catchment, including maintenance of our assets. We generally do not receive the amount of funding we ask for.

To ensure the funding allocation we do receive is used in the most effective way, we have to prioritise. To do this each item of works is given a priority score based on several factors such as whether it's a legal obligation, the activity type, and the number of properties at risk.

For the Flood Risk Management System that St Ives Staunch Sluice falls within (FR/02/S063) only the electric supply, eel pass maintenance and control of invasive species attracted funding. This means all other work activities, including Engineering & Bridge Inspections, Rope and Seal Replacement, Operational Checks, Grass Control, Tree Works, stilling well flushing, embankment topographic surveys, weed control, PSRA works, vermin control, flood gate seal replacements, Operation & Safety improvements have not received funding and therefore could not be carried out.

Background info on funding received for 2024/25:

Nationally - £235.9m bid for, £120.3m received (£115.6m shortfall)

East Anglia - £32.6m bid for, £13.4m received (19.2m shortfall)

Great Ouse Catchment – £12.4m bid for, £4.9m received (£7.5m shortfall)

How is capital funding for flood risk managed?

There are certain rules we must follow to justify the investment of any public money. These rules are set by the Treasury and for flood risk investment specifically, by Defra.

In order to evidence the value for money that an investment provides we undertake an economic appraisal of the works we are seeking to carry out. In the case of flood risk management, it is unusual for there to be a financial return on an investment so instead, benefits are considered in terms of the value of damages and economic losses avoided due to a reduction in flood risk resulting from the investment. We need to be able to evidence that the expected whole-life benefits of a project exceed the whole-life costs.

Where projects cannot demonstrate sufficient benefits using these criteria, we are not able to spend public money on the project.

If we can evidence that a project represents value for money, we then identify how much funding a project is eligible for from Government Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA). This is calculated in line with Defra's Partnership Funding Policy. Under this policy, the amount of Grant in Aid funding available for a project is based on its qualifying benefits, expressed as flood and coastal erosion damages and losses avoided. Where a project isn't eligible for enough FDGiA to fund the whole project, Partnership funding from other sources are needed to enable the project to be delivered. Further details on Partnership Funding Policy can be found here: [Partnership funding for FCERM projects - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/partnership-funding-policy) (*further details are also in annex 1 of this document*).

The overall amount of FDGiA is limited each year and projects are prioritised by the Environment Agency on a national basis. The categories used to prioritise project bids varies from year to year, depending upon a number of different factors and the current economic climate.

At present, the national prioritisation approach is based on the principles approved by the EA Board in 2020 and Defra's Partnership Funding Policy. The current hierarchy for allocating funding is:

1. Approved urgent cases based on health and safety or statutory grounds and time bound partnership funding contributions
2. In construction by 1 April 2025 (sub ranked by adjusted partnership funding score high to low)
3. Remainder of programme ranked by adjusted partnership funding score (high to low)

Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCCs) may then set local priorities with advice from other stakeholders including Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs), Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) and coastal groups, to secure additional investment from alternative sources to manage risks efficiently.

Isn't the EA legally obligated to ensure these structures are operational?

All powers relating to flooding and land drainage are permissive. The Environment Agency has permissive powers (not a duty) to carry out flood and coastal risk management work and regulate the actions of other flood risk management authorities on main rivers and along the coast. Legal responsibility for main rivers lies with the landowners (referred to as the Riparian Owner). If the Environment Agency chooses not to exercise its powers to maintain a flood defence or watercourse, it is not liable to third parties for losses, sustained as a result.

Consequently, the Environment Agency is not legally required to maintain flood defences but can decide, as it sees fit, whether or not to carry out maintenance works and the nature of any works it carries out. Such decisions will be informed by government policy and assessment of flood risk, funding or environmental priorities.

In the area where the St Ives and Brownhill Staunch Sluices are situated, the Environment Agency does have a statutory requirement to maintain water level for navigation purposes.

The structure was previously funded by DEFRA/MAFF funding which came with conditions that the structure would be maintained for its lifetime, doesn't this place a legal obligation on the Environment Agency now?

These structures have a long history, originally coming to be in the 16th century, and have been funded through various routes and under various policies over the years. Historic investment in these structures may have entailed conditions around ongoing maintenance however the current policy supersedes any previous agreements. We must now operate within current policy and funding rules set by Government.

Am I at risk of being flooded?

You can check your flood risk at [Check the long term flood risk for an area in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/urls/check-the-long-term-flood-risk-for-an-area-in-england)

If you are at risk of flooding, you can:

- Sign up for the Flood Warning Service and learn how to prepare for a flood here: [Flood alerts and warnings: what they are and what to do - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/urls/flood-alerts-and-warnings-what-they-are-and-what-to-do)
- Learn about what to do after a flood here: [What to do after a flood - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/urls/what-to-do-after-a-flood)

While we undertake many different activities to reduce the risk of flooding we cannot eliminate the risk of all flooding. Alongside traditional flood defences, we need a broader range of activities to ensure we have climate resilient places. This includes avoiding

inappropriate development in the floodplain, using nature-based solutions to slow the flow or store flood waters. It involves better preparing and responding to flood incidents through timely and effective forecasting, warning and evacuation.

Our data shows that the current condition of the St Ives Staunch Sluice, it not causing an increased risk of internal property flooding. We expect that this is the case for Brownhill Staunch Sluice too

How much impact does the condition of the structure have on flood risk?

Based on the evidence we have, we do not believe that the current condition of the St Ives Staunch Sluice increases the risk of internal property flooding.

We are currently reviewing the evidence relating to the Brownhill Staunch Sluice, but early indications are that the situation is likely to be the same.

How can we trust the modelling?

The river modelling has been carried out using the Environment Agency's draft Lower Ouse Model. This model is the best available modelled data we hold for the St Ives area at present.

The Lower Ouse Model, and its suitability for informing the St Ives Staunch Sluice project, has been reviewed by our National Modelling Team. Their review concluded that the model is acceptable for its purpose, determining the economic viability of carrying out a project to repair the structure.

River modelling also only forms one part of project development. When determining whether a project is viable, we assess a range of information including river modelling, costs, economic benefits, asset condition surveys, threshold surveys, property flooded information, historic flood reports and photographs of past flooding. The outputs of the river modelling have been supported by records of historic flooding, giving us further confidence in its findings and assessment of flood risk.

Why aren't the EA continuing to work to improve the modelling?

The modelling we have has been reviewed and is considered to be acceptable for its purpose. There will always be further improvements that could be made but, in this case, we do not expect that further work would produce significantly different results and therefore would not be a good use of further investment of public money.

How do I go about claiming compensation for the impact of high water levels?

We appreciate the stress and anxiety that flooding causes. However, the Environment Agency owes no duty, whether statutory or otherwise, to warn of floods or to prevent flooding and as such has no responsibility to compensate.

What are you doing to try and get these structures repaired?

We are investigating a number of difference angles which may enable us to carry out works on the St Ives and Brownhill Staunch Sluices, these include:

- investigating whether these two structures could be considered as special cases for investment given the legal obligation to maintain water levels for navigation,
- continuing to bid for maintenance funding, including for funding intended for larger scale repair works, and investigating a longer term approach which may support the use of navigation funding to support work on these structure.

Whilst we progress these options, we are continuing our inspection regime at both structures to ensure they remain safe and to monitor their condition.

Is it true that the Environment Agency want to change the structure from a sluice to a weir?

The Environment Agency has taken no decisions on the future of the St Ives or Brownhill structures.

Changing the sluice structures into fixed weirs would be one way of maintaining water levels for navigation with lower maintenance needs compared to sluice gates but we would need to carry out a full options appraisal to determine any future changes to the structures. The type of funding and amount of funding we have available to us will impact on the options available to us too.

Why has the primary purpose of the structure changed from FCRM to Navigation on Gov.uk?

We are always working to improve the data on our assets and this data is made public on .gov.uk. As a result of the latest data and evidence we now hold on these structure, we have updated the data to reflect that the primary purpose of the assets are navigation and the secondary purpose remains as flood risk.

This change has no impact on our ability to access FCRM funding, nor the rules around it.

How can I stay up to date with progress?

We have created a Citizens Advice Page so that you can check for updates on our progress around these structures. You can view the page here: [St Ives and Brownhill Staunch Sluices Information Page - Environment Agency - Citizen Space \(environment-agency.gov.uk\)](https://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/citizen-space/st-ives-and-brownhill-staunch-sluices)

Annex 1: Funding our FCRM assets

Government funding policy for capital works using Grant in Aid changed in 2011 with the introduction of the Flood and coastal resilience partnership funding policy (partnership funding policy). This sets out that eligibility for capital Grant in Aid is calculated based on the flood and coastal erosion damages and losses avoided.

Where existing assets requiring capital interventions do not secure sufficient benefits using these criteria, they are not eligible for full funding from Grant in Aid.

All projects supported by partnership funding will need to meet specific criteria, and as a minimum in every case, demonstrate that in present value terms the expected whole-life benefits exceed the whole-life costs of the scheme.

This policy supersedes all previous grant arrangements and applies to all capital investments to refurbish, repair, replace or build new flood defences.

What will Government FDGiA funding pay for?

There are four categories under which projects can attract FDGiA. These are:

- All benefits arising as a result of the investment, less those valued under the other outcome measures (Outcome Measure 1).
- Households moved from one category of flood risk to a lower category (Outcome Measure 2)
- Households better protected against coastal erosion (Outcome Measure 3)
- Statutory environmental obligations met through flood and coastal erosion risk management (Outcome Measure 4)

For all outcome measures, benefits in relation to any new properties (residential or non-residential) or existing buildings converted into housing after 1 January 2012 will not be counted. To qualify under OM2 and OM3, households must be permanent dwellings, e.g. not temporary or seasonal accommodation including mobile or static caravans.

How much national funding might a project attract?

The maximum amount of funding on offer to each project will be based on the value of qualifying benefits under Outcome Measures 1, 2 and 3, plus the number of environmental outcomes achieved under Outcome Measure 4, each multiplied by the relevant payment rate. Dividing this amount by the whole life costs of the project determines the share of project costs justifiable to national budgets. This is expressed as a percentage score; the PF Score.

All projects supported under this approach will need to achieve a PF Score of 100% or above. Many projects will achieve this and qualify for full funding. In other cases, cost savings and/or other sources of funding may need to be found. Both of these reduce the whole-life costs of the project to national budgets. Where a PF Score is below 100%, the deficit describes the amount of cost savings and/or contributions necessary in order for the scheme to proceed.

Assets which provide a benefit for navigation are not subject to this funding policy. However, capital funding for these assets is subject to a bid under Government spending reviews. When sufficient funding is not made available, the Environment Agency must prioritise its activities.

Grant in Aid for flood benefits and Grant in Aid for navigation benefits can be used together to fund works.

The Environment Agency secures resource funding for maintenance following a bid under Government spending reviews. It has normally been the case that the overall settlement received is less than the sum of money required to fully maintain the existing assets. The Environment Agency therefore prioritises activities in areas where the consequences of not undertaking maintenance are the greatest.

To refurbish and restore assets the Asset Recondition allocation is treated as capital and is part of the original £5.2bn capital settlement. A REC project can be defined as corrective, infrequent and a one-off activity that restores the standard of service to FCRM assets. It must be bid for in a similar way to the maintenance programme and as such assets in high consequence systems will be prioritised over assets in lower consequence systems. There is also a limit of £500k per asset and projects must not last longer than 2 years.