

Skeldergate: findings from the public meeting

June 2020

As part of our plan to better protect the city of York from flooding, we have been working in Skeldergate to determine what actions could improve flood protection here. 'Hard' defences such as flood walls are not feasible for this area of York, so we are proposing to install Property Flood Resilience measures to eligible properties. We had planned to hold a public drop-in in the area to discuss this decision with residents, but we couldn't go ahead with this due to the coronavirus pandemic.

As an alternative, we held a virtual public meeting on 18 June to share our plans with residents in the Skeldergate area, and give them the opportunity to ask questions. This took place using Zoom, with a 20 minute presentation from the project team and a 40 minute question and answer session. In total, over 30 people attended.

Information we provided

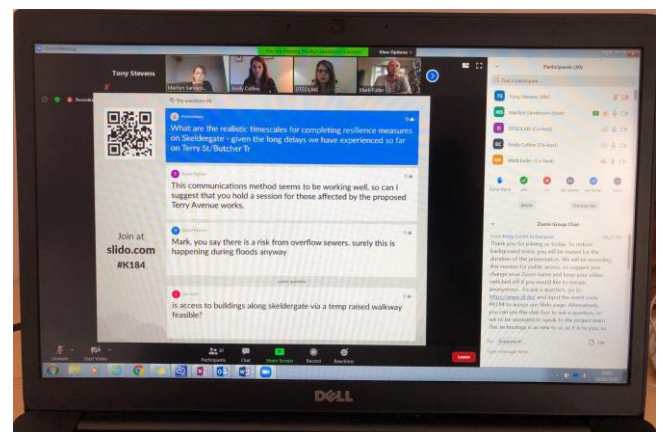
We provided an overview of:

- The options that have been considered to reduce flood risk in the area;
- The financial and technical feasibility of these options, and why Property Flood Resilience proved to be the only viable option;
- What Property Flood Resilience is and what residents can expect to receive through our scheme.

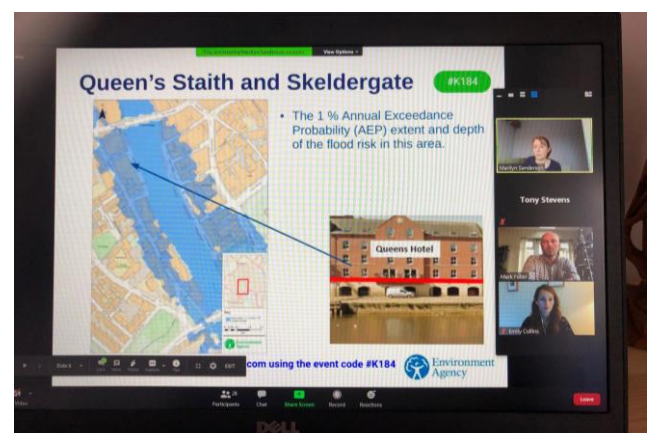
How we advertised the event

We publicised the event using a range of methods including:

- Facebook and Twitter posts;
- Letters sent to properties in the flood risk zone;
- A press release to York Press;
- Invitations to local Councillors;
- Email invitations to our city-wide mailing list.



Screenshot of the Zoom public meeting during the Q&A session.



Screenshot of the Zoom public meeting during the presentation.



Questions and comments from the meeting

We asked meeting attendees to submit their questions to us via the Zoom chat function during the meeting, and used our 'Slido' page (<https://www.sli.do/>) to enable people to pose questions before the meeting began. The questions and answers below are those which were asked and given in the meeting.

– When will work start and how noisy will it be?

PFR measures will vary from property to property. The first stage will be getting the consultants to go out and survey the property. They will then come back with a detailed report on what products they can offer. There will then be a discussion between the EA, the contractors and the residents as to what is best suited to the property. The installation shouldn't be very intrusive or particularly noisy. We will be contacting eligible homeowners this autumn to give details about our offer of a free PFR survey of their property.

– As flooding is a short term inconvenience, does seepage present a problem?

Flooding is a short-term inconvenience, yes, but over a number of hours water can seep under a defence and cause serious problems. The movement of water underneath flood defences is a recognised issue which needs to be overcome to build an effective defence. All of the other flood defences we have built in York have underground seepage cut-offs, which prevent flood water from seeping under the above-ground part of the defence.

– How will the PFR scheme work with a block of flats?

Within an apartment block, a free survey will be offered to those apartments at flood risk e.g. on the ground and first floor, to find out which PFR measures should be installed. Examples of PFR measures include flood doors, barriers and air brick covers. There is also the option of installing sump pumps which can extract water which gets in underneath the building. Floors above the flood level will not require PFR measures to be installed.

– Do these defences apply to garages?

If a property has an adjoining garage and the flow route for flood water goes through the garage, we will be applying PFR measures to the garage as well to prevent the property from flooding.

– If PFR measures fail in the future, are they covered for upgrades and replacements in the future?

The current funding is just for products at this time, so no, it does not cover replacements or upgrades down the line.

– Can piling be undertaken from a large pontoon on legs, as the crane built and floated to work on the Guildhall reconstruction?

There are various different ways of piling, but it's not the method that's in question. It's the challenge of doing so in a way which brings costs down and makes a scheme achievable in Skeldergate. As well as this, a long length of Skeldergate has no foreshore at all between the buildings and the river so there is no space to put sheet piles in anyhow.

– You say PFR surveys are available for homeowners. Does this include leasehold apartment blocks, and is this through management agents or leaseholders?

It is available to all properties within the flood risk zone. For leasehold properties, as well as the residents, we will be contacting the registered property owner as they would have to give permission for the measures installed.



- What are the realistic timescales for completing resilience measures in Skeldergate, given the long delays that have been experienced so far on Terry Street/Butcher Terrace?

There's no denying that we have experienced long delays for PFR in the York area. However, we have now got contractors in place to carry out the surveys as soon as they possibly can. We will get in touch with homeowners in the Autumn and start scheduling surveys. Once the surveys are completed, we will arrange for the installation of PFR adaptations to be completed as soon as we possibly can.

- You say there is a risk of overflow from the sewers, but surely this is happening during the floods anyway?

Manholes can overflow with river water and sewage - known as 'storm water' - during a flood. It often happens when Skeldergate floods but it's not noticeable because the road is already flooded. If you have flood defences underground and you're keeping the river water out, this becomes much more of an issue.

- Is access to buildings along Skeldergate via a temporary raised walkway feasible?

This is something which is already in place at one end of Skeldergate and we have considered a similar set up for other properties. It is feasible, but the infrastructure needed to manage it would be considerable, it would take a long time to install and it would need to be left in place for long periods. In February, the access walkway was left in place for six weeks. It could cause more of a hindrance than a help, and may not be financially justifiable, so is unlikely to be provided.

- Property Flood Resilience measures are already installed at Woodsmill Quay. There have been three floods this year and they have prevented residents from accessing the property.

Please see the answer to the question above, which explains why we may not be able to maintain access to properties during a flood. With regards to the existing PFR measures in the property, the survey we are offering will look at the property as a whole, including what products are in place and how the property floods. If existing products are not effective, we will look to find out why and install new or additional products as necessary.

- Emperor's Wharf has a car park with 50 car parking spaces on the ground floor. How important is the protection of car parks from flooding?

We don't automatically protect car parks – our responsibility and the funding we are given is to protect people and properties. The reason those car parks are there is because the planning approach is to allow them to flood. This provides extra storage for flood water where it will cause less damage to property than in residential areas downstream.

- Could sandbags and pumps be positioned on the roads leading down to the river from Skeldergate?

In Tower Gardens and Clementhorpe we have successfully built sandbag walls and used pumps to capture any seepage, preventing these areas from flooding. This approach could work in Skeldergate but they require a lot of time and manpower to put in place – we would need to install the pumps and sandbags early and maintain them throughout the flood. In addition they may not be totally effective. Even if we prevent water from flooding the roads, it could still get into the localised drainage system and cause surface water flooding.

- PFR works okay at Woodsmill Quay but the flood water keeps coming.



With the onset of climate change, it does feel like flooding is getting worse. We are seeing higher and higher peak river levels – the trend is that peak flood heights are rising by 8mm a year on average. We have developed a long term plan which will aim to use storage areas and natural flood management techniques to slow the flow of water upstream. In Pickering in North Yorkshire this approach has worked well.

- Sandbags were used on Skeldergate and Buckingham Street in February. Positioning on the other side of the road is the same height.

We saw three large peaks in water levels on the River Ouse in February. One of those peaks was forecast to be very high, so we activated one of our contingency plans where we placed sandbags on the opposite side of Skeldergate to prevent water from flooding properties on the far side of the street. Thankfully, the actual flood level didn't match the forecast. If we had put sandbags on the other side of the road, surface water flooding via the drains would still have occurred.

- Who would fund the ongoing cost of deploying and maintaining sandbags during infinite flood events – is it included in current funding?

We haven't considered sandbags as an option. It is usually down to the local authority to place sandbags. They are still used where they can serve a good purpose but it's better to replace them with a permanent defence where possible. Permanent defences can be deployed more quickly, require less staff to construct and maintain and are more sustainable, so sandbags would be a difficult option to take forward.

- We have PFR adaptations but they haven't worked.

This may be because flood water is coming from other sources. We will need to get the surveyors to look at the property as a whole to find out where the water is coming in.

- The sandbags across the bottom of Albion Street last February were very satisfactory, but were taken away after a day.

These were put in place based on our contingency plans after the high flood water level forecast. Once the water levels had dropped, we decided to remove them.

Next Steps

- We will be in touch with residents in the autumn to arrange for Property Flood Resilience surveys to be completed.
- We recommend that residents sign up to our email mailing list for Skeldergate by emailing us at yorkfloodplan@environment-agency.gov.uk .

If you have any further questions about these proposals please contact us at yorkfloodplan@environment-agency.gov.uk

