

Stony Stratford Winter Flooding Briefing

May 2021

This is a briefing to inform and advise you of the flooding that took place in December 2020. We will explain what happened, what our role is during flooding and what the next steps are for Stony Stratford. You can send us any feedback on this update via [email](#)

Why are we communicating now?

Under usual circumstances, you would have already received much of this information, or been invited to attend an event to share your experiences, provide us with information and ask us questions. Our staff would have also carried out door to door surveys in flooded communities in the days after the flooding to understand the extent of flooding, gather data and evidence for subsequent investigations.

This was not possible during this event, partly due to restrictions but also due to the scale of the flooding and the number of communities affected. We rely on our staff to volunteer for incident response roles in addition to their normal duties, and whilst we had an appropriate number of staff available to support the response to the event (e.g. by operating flood assets, checking gauges, clearing trash screens, monitoring river levels, issuing warnings where necessary and supporting the emergency services), it proved impossible to bring in the number of additional staff needed across the Christmas period to support all affected communities because so many communities were affected across a large geography. Therefore the data gathering process has taken longer than it would normally have done. Thank you for your patience at this time.

What happened?

In December 2020 East Anglia received an exceptionally high amount of rainfall with a total averaged rainfall of 108 mm which was 195% of the monthly average. We received up to 55mm of rainfall, in various locations, in less than 24 hours between 23 and 24 December 2020 leading to widespread flooding across the River Great Ouse through Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and parts of Suffolk.

Across East Anglia we issued 27 flood alerts, 41 flood warnings and a severe flood warning between 23 and 24 December. The widespread flooding impacts were as a consequence of heavy rainfall on December 23, falling on an already wet catchment which was especially sensitive to intense rainfall.

Over 30 communities across this geography recorded property flooding as a result of either surface water or rivers, with 567 properties being affected to some degree.

In Stony Stratford we issued a flood warning on 24 December on the River Great Ouse. At least 49 properties flooded as a result of a combination of river and surface water flooding caused by prolonged rainfall overwhelming roads, rivers and gullies in your area. Flooded property numbers are still being substantiated and more information will be in the Section 19 flood investigation report.

Our role during flooding

We can't stop flooding, but we work to limit the impact from main rivers ([shown on this map](#)) and we help communities to prepare along with our partners. Local authorities are responsible for managing the risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses, and water companies own the public sewers and drains.



We provide 24/7 cover to respond to flooding incidents. We issue alerts and warnings to help people reduce the impact of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea. We also operate our assets - flood defences and structures, clear trash screens and river blockages to ensure that, wherever possible, rivers and streams are flowing freely. We are also part of a multi-agency incident command and control group, where we join with the Police, Fire & Rescue Service, local authorities and other professional partners to work together to minimise the impact of flooding to people and property.

Flood Warnings

We provide a Flood Warning Service for fluvial (river) flood risk. 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 07:45 on 22 December we issued a flood alert for the Middle River Great Ouse in Milton Keynes catchment: *be alert, stay vigilant and make early preparations*



FLOOD WARNING

At 11:50 on 24 December we issued a flood warning for the Low Lying River Great Ouse at Stony Stratford catchment: *flooding is expected, take action to protect yourself and your property*

If you did not receive the warnings issued as listed above please check that you are signed up to receive them by contacting Floodline on **0345 988 1188** or search for 'Floodline Warnings' on www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency. You can check if your property is at risk of being flooded by visiting our [website](#).

We're collating and processing the data received from our flood survey, and are reviewing our flood warning service to ensure 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.

What has happened since the flooding?

We have been working with flooded communities and our professional partners on the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) who include the Police, Fire & Rescue Service, local authorities and others to understand the full extent of the flooding.

We can now update you on this work in specific topics:

Maintenance and Riparian Ownership

We have permissive powers that enable us to undertake maintenance on main rivers however we prioritise activity based on available funds using a risk based approach. We have a [maintenance programme](#) for main rivers in the catchment that is funded by a combination of government grant and local flood funding raised via the Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee.

The responsibility for maintaining a watercourse usually lies with the [riparian owner](#), the person who owns the land on each bank. Landowners who own a watercourse or have designated flood risk management assets on their land do have rights and responsibilities. Landowners can continue to use and maintain the asset, but you usually must get consent from the responsible authority if you want to alter, remove or replace it.

As part of working more closely with any strengthened Flood Group for Stony Stratford we will be able to discuss future needs and explain maintenance plans.



Assets

During the floods, the vast majority of Environment Agency owned and maintained assets worked as they should, protecting people, property and critical infrastructure. For example, sluice gates were opened ahead of the flooding to enable the movement of water down the catchment and eventually out to sea.

As part of the recovery process we are carrying out over 5,000 checks on Environment Agency and third party assets (sluices, weirs, gates, locks and river banks) on main-river which were tested during the winter flooding to identify any flood damage or areas of concern. We're now over 95% of the way through the inspections and so far we've identified 22 assets in need of remedial works.

Community Resilience

We will be working with Stony Stratford Town Council to help improve your community resilience by creating [a community flood action plan](#) with the Community Flood Resilience Group.

What to expect next?

We are now assisting Milton Keynes Council with their section 19 flood investigation report which is a public statement of the circumstances of a flood event and what parties have a role in managing the risks. The investigation is not an in depth analysis of the flood risk or mechanisms and does not give any powers to require any parties to carry out any work. However, the report will also contain recommendations for future improvements to managing and responding to flooding in your area.

