

Suffolk Flood Risk Joint Scrutiny Sub-Committee, 30 October 2015

Information Bulletin

The Information Bulletin is a document that is made available to the public with the published agenda papers. It can include update information requested by the Committee as well as information that a service considers should be made known to the Committee.

This Information Bulletin covers the following items:

1. [Suffolk Flood and Coastal News](#)
2. [Deben Holistic Management Project](#)
3. [Hydromorphological Harm](#)
4. [Channel Management Handbook](#)

1. Suffolk Flood and Coastal News

The latest issue of Suffolk Flood and Coastal News was published in July 2015 and includes information and updates on local and national issues relating to flood risk management, along with news from local partnerships, and information on training sessions for community emergency volunteers.

This document can be found by following this link:

<http://www.greensuffolk.org/assets/Greenest-County/Water--Coast/Suffolk-Flood--Coastal-News/July-2015.pdf>

For further information please contact: Jane Burch, Flood & Coastal Policy Manager
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[Back to top](#)

2. Deben Holistic Management Project

The Deben Holistic Water Management Project is a pilot project which has brought together all parties with an interest in the river (councils, water companies, landowners, water abstractors, environmentalists, the Environment Agency, Internal

Drainage Boards and the Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust) with the objective of linking all aspects of water management to develop new ways of delivering flood alleviation, provide more reliable water resources and improve water based ecosystems and water quality. After a comparison of all Suffolk's river catchments to identify which had the combination of features (environmental, water demand, flood risk and drought risk) most suitable for a pilot study, the Deben catchment was selected for the pilot.

The objective of the project is to view water in a holistic way, in order to provide sufficient water to supply homes and irrigate crops without damaging rivers and wetlands, and to conserve excess water whilst mitigating against flooding. There are many regulatory obstacles to overcome in achieving this and it will require a new approach to the concept of shared investment in water resources by all parties, including the environment.

The project commenced in March 2013 and is now progressing. Information updates are available on the project website at:

<http://www.greensuffolk.org/flooding/hwmp/>

For further information please contact: Jane Burch, Flood & Coastal Policy Manager, Suffolk County Council, Tel: 01473 264782, Mobile: 07595 091325, Email: jane.burch@suffolk.gov.uk

[Back to top](#)

3. Hydromorphological Harm

Any adverse impact on the physical characteristics of a waterbody (for example the shape, sinuosity or form of a river as made up by the banks and bed), that could affect its Water Framework Directive status can be defined as hydromorphological harm.

In Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk hydromorphological harm is normally caused by dredging the bed and banks of a river with the intention of aiding land drainage. This is different from the well planned and carefully executed de-silting and weed-cutting work involved in the sustainable management of rivers.

Hydromorphological harm:

- is responsible for destruction of protected species and their habitats;
- is in contravention of legislation including the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Water Resources Act 1991, Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations 2003 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010;
- causes long-lasting environmental damage – the gravels in many of our rivers are crucial to spawning fish. They are a remnant from the last glaciation and in our lowland rivers the natural processes that will lead to their replenishment could take thousands of years;

- may lead to deterioration in the Water Framework Directive (WFD) status of a water body;
- Potentially increases flood risk to land and property.

Hydromorphological harm may be recognised by:

- Fresh bed or bank material (e.g. gravel) deposited on the banks of the river;
- Dead fish or other aquatic organisms on the banks (e.g. freshwater mussels);
- Loose vegetation deposited on the banks, or a channel clearly stripped of in-stream vegetation;
- Large woody debris deposited on the banks (e.g. fallen trees and branches that look like they have come out of the river);
- Bare, steep earth banks containing digger-bucket marks or signs of recent machine activity (e.g. caterpillar tracks).

River maintenance and dredging is an emotive subject with landowners, and in the past river management has often worked against natural processes. However, in recent years a growing body of scientific evidence has demonstrated that a more naturally functioning river system will often afford greater flood protection to people and property and provide significant benefits to wildlife, water quality and landscape value as well as reducing the cost to the public purse of managing our rivers.

The Environment Agency reviews its maintenance programme based on the level of flood risk to people and properties in the catchment, and where possible undertakes minimal vegetation clearance both in the river channel and on the banks. This helps to maximise the amount of wildlife habitat that can remain whilst maintaining effective conveyance of water and land drainage.

This has meant that in recent years the Environment Agency has not done as much routine maintenance work as it used to do in various places across the country. Some landowners had come to expect this work and are not aware of the reasons behind the change in approach. In some instances this has led to landowners feeling the need to dredge rivers, which in a few cases has caused hydromorphological harm, something the Environment Agency is very keen to work with them to avoid.

For further information please contact to Andrew Raine (Environment Agency), Tel: 01473 706597, email andrew.raine@environment-agency.gov.uk. However, please report any incidents of hydromorphological harm to the Environment Agency's 24 hour incident hotline on **0800 807060**.

[Back to top](#)

4. Channel Management Handbook

Good channel management achieves effective flood risk and/or land drainage management, whilst preserving the natural form and environment of the

watercourse. The Environment Agency has recently produced a handbook which provides advice upon how to achieve this.

The handbook is written and structured with flood risk management authorities in mind, but those with an interest in channel management will also find it useful. It provides information on the principles of good management and the underpinning scientific concepts, so channel managers can make informed and appropriate decisions.

The Channel Management Handbook may be downloaded in PDF form from the following website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-management-handbook-for-flood-risk-management>

[Back to top](#)
