Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project

Newsletter 06
July 2025

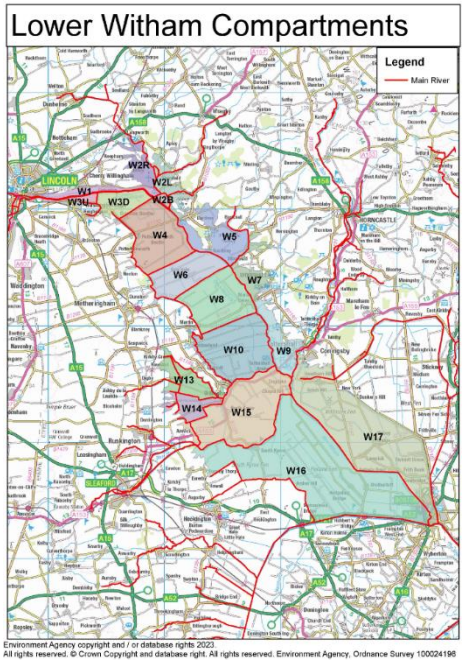
This newsletter is given to interested parties in the Lower Witham area. It provides an update on the development of a project to increase flood resilience in the Lower Witham Fens. If you wish to receive future copies of this newsletter or would like further information, please contact us at lowerwitham.floodresilience@environment-agency.gov.uk

Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project

The Lower River Witham is mostly a large area of drained marshland between Lincoln and Boston. Historic drainage infrastructure, including embanked channels and pumping stations has enabled highly productive arable land to be farmed and communities have established in the area.

Some of these embankments are now over 200 years old. The extent and frequency of flood incidents is increasing pressure on flood risk management and drainage infrastructure. This is putting the local community and economy at risk. Flooding in 2019, and again during Storms Babet and Henk in the winter of 2023/24, has highlighted the need to update the long-term strategy to manage flood risk in the area.

This project aims to improve the catchment's resilience to flood events and reduce the harm caused by flooding where possible.



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Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project Phase One- Grand Sluice and embankments

Phase One of the Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project is focused on repairing and reinforcing critical flood defences and improving catchment flood resilience. This is whilst longer term strategies are planned. Grand Sluice in Boston and embankments along the River Witham and some of its tributaries are flood defences currently included in Phase One.

Grand Sluice

Works have now begun on the preparatory works for the Grand Sluice Refurbishment.

Our contractors, Jackson Civil Engineering Ltd., are on site and have set up a compound behind the Boston Rowing Club. This will be used as their working area. A barge is also in position on the water to transport materials from the compound to Grand Sluice and is equipped with a crane that will be used during the works. This summer's work will involve installing stop log liners in each of the three channels. This will prepare Grand Sluice for the main refurbishment works, which are scheduled to begin in summer 2026.

A barge equipped with a crane that will be used during the Grand Sluice refurbishment preparatory works.

In May, the project team hosted drop in events within the community. These were held at both Fenside Community Centre and the Boston Market.

Over 50 people attended to learn more about the preparatory works that will be taking place this summer. These events provided an opportunity for people to ask questions and express any concerns, leading to many productive discussions.

Below, you can find answers to some of the most frequently asked questions from these events.

Grand Sluice FAQs

Will these works include road closures?

Although there are no planned road closures, there will be short durations when our contractors will need to operate traffic marshals during the delivery of materials. These will be scheduled to cause as little disruption as possible.

Is aquatic weed flushing being considered as part of the refurbishment?

Yes. The project team are now finalising designs for tilting gate flaps, which are planned to be installed on the new vertical lift gates. These new gates will be installed as part of the main works due to start in 2026. The aim of the tilting flaps is to improve the efficiency of aquatic weed flushing without losing as much water from the system as weed flushing does now.

We don't plan to open the sluice gates to flush weeds during our contractor's normal working hours (08:00 - 18:00) this summer. Instead, we'll coordinate with the Canal and Rivers Trust to do this in the evenings or during weekends when necessary.

Embankments

The project team has worked hard to develop the Full Business Case for the Phase One Embankment works. This has now been submitted for approval. Once approved this will confirm the funding for the project and will allow the team to begin delivering works on the ground.

Lower Witham Sustainable Recovery Pilot project

Throughout May the project team have been continuing face-to-face farm and landowner meetings within the project area with contractors, Arup. These meetings have helped to deepen the team's understanding of past flooding impacts, people's aspirations for the area, and how some of the proposed measures could work within the landscape.

After gaining first hand insights into the area, Arup have been assessing the short list of potential measures against specific criteria. Their analysis aims to help us understand which measures may be technically viable, determine how well these could work together to form a master plan for the area, and if they contribute towards achieving the project's goals.

We have recently sent a draft of this report to our project partners to gain their feedback. Next, we will share this information with our Stakeholder Steering Group, which includes farmers and landowners for further discussion.

Channel desilting work has taken place on the Lower Barlings Eau, between Short Ferry Bridge and the pumping station inlet. This is to allow water pumped from the River Trent and into the River Witham to move up the channel to the Short Ferry Pumping Station. From there it is pumped via a pipe into the River Ancholme to alleviate low water levels.

The Sustainable Recovery Pilot project is a Fens 2100+ pilot project. Fens 2100+ is developing a Fens-wide approach to managing flood risk in a way that balances the needs of people, the environment and agriculture, both now and in the future.

Channel desilting work on the Lower Barlings Eau.

River Witham Flood Warning Service improvements

Our Flood Resilience Team has made improvements to the Flood Warning Service for communities along the River Witham between Lincoln and Boston.

From now on, flood warnings will be issued for either a breach or overtopping scenario. Traditionally Flood Warnings are issued when overtopping is expected to affect property. It will now be possible to let communities know about a breach as soon as we become aware.

The existing five fluvial Flood Warning Areas for the River Witham have been divided into 21 smaller areas to make warnings more specific. Six additional Flood Warning Areas have also been created for places that are not at risk from overtopping but could still be affected if a breach happened. These changes, going live this month, will make warnings timelier and reduce false alarms for those unlikely to be affected.

To sign up for flood warnings, go to www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188. You can also check current flood warnings and river levels at www.gov.uk/check-flooding.

The team is also trying out a new way to raise awareness about flood risks with *Flood Ready Eddie*, an interactive AI chatbot. Residents in the Lower Witham can 'chat' with Eddie by scanning a QR code or sending a text, to learn how to stay safe and prepared.

If you'd like more details about the changes in your area or can help spread the word about Flood Ready Eddie through social media, newsletters, or postcards, please contact the Flood Resilience Team at frt.lincsandnorthants@environment-agency.gov.uk

Resource Allocation

The budget for managing our flood defence assets in 2025/26 is similar to last year. However, because we look after a large number of structures and available funding remains lower than required, we must continue to prioritise maintenance work. This will include activities that offer the highest flood reduction for people, homes, and businesses, while upholding our legal responsibilities. We are also seeing more frequent extreme weather events, in particular winter storms. This puts further pressure on our already ageing asset base and can increase operating costs.

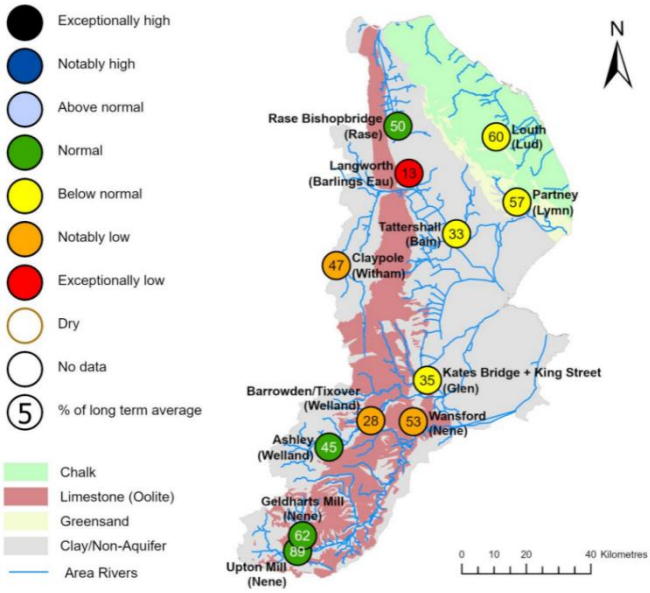
Water situation

Since our last newsletter, spring began with dry conditions. May saw less rain than usual across Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, with rainfall totals between 44% to 92% of the long-term-average (LTA). June was another dry month, continuing the pattern of below-average rainfall. Precipitation ranged from 35% to 48% of the LTA, classifying conditions as below normal for the time of year. Notably, April to June 2025 was the second driest on record for the Witham to Chapel Hill hydrological area.

The persistent dry and hot weather led to high soil moisture deficits (SMD) throughout June, which ended the month at exceptionally high levels across all Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire hydrological areas.

The Trent-Witham-Ancholme transfer scheme was operational throughout May and June, supplying water to both the Witham and Ancholme rivers.

You can read the full monthly water reports for different areas in England, as well as a national summary on GOV.UK.



Monthly mean river flows for indicator sites during June 2025. This is shown as a percentage of the respective long-term average.

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How resilient are you?

Are you prepared for future floods?

Although defences reduce the likelihood of flooding, the risk can never be removed entirely. To begin to be more resilient take some practical steps to help reduce the impact of flooding to your home or business. To find out if you are at risk, how to prepare, stay safe and sign up for (free) flood warnings visit Flooding - GOV.UK or call Floodline on **0345 988 1188**.

Contact us

Lowerwitham.floodresilience@environment-agency.gov.uk

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