

York Flood Alleviation Scheme

Update on the Clifton Ings Flood Alleviation Scheme

March 2024

Introduction

This briefing note gives an update on the Clifton Ings Flood Alleviation Scheme. The project is part of the York Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS), with the Environment Agency investing £31 million of government funding to improve flood defences in the Clifton and Rawcliffe area. This will provide a high standard of protection against future flooding, benefitting 135 homes and protecting local businesses as well. It will also reduce the risk of flood water spilling on to Shipton Road, keeping an important transport route into the city open.



Photo: Building the structure for Blue Beck pumping station

Update on construction

Despite adverse weather conditions throughout the autumn and winter, our contractors have continued working and made good progress with the scheme. The full length of the new embankment, stretching from Rawcliffe Country Park to Homestead Park, was finished ahead of schedule last year but wet weather in the autumn meant that it couldn't be seeded with grass cover; this will have to wait until springtime this year.

Work on Blue Beck pumping station (shown in the photo above) began last year and has also continued during the winter. This involves building a structure to house two pumps, each with a capacity of removing 500 litres of water per second. Once in place, these new pumps will lift water

accumulating in Blue Beck basin and transfer it into Ings Dyke and finally the River Ouse. This should prevent it backing up and spilling onto Shipton Road. Work has also been progressing to provide a power supply for the pumping station. This has involved clearing an area along the allotment track off Shipton Road to lay ducting to the electricity kiosk.



Photo: Temporary pumps taking water from Blue Beck

During periods of extreme weather, we have always brought in temporary pumps to reduce the risk of flooding from Blue Beck. However, during a weekend of particularly heavy rainfall in early February, these were overwhelmed and so water began to collect in the culvert leading to Blue Beck, causing localised flooding just off Shipton Road. To prevent this happening again, we have brought in some extra temporary pumps and have set a lower threshold for the alarm to be activated. Once the new permanent pumping station is operational, the risk of flooding in this area will be greatly reduced.

Improving access to the site

We appreciate how access restrictions to the Ings during construction of the scheme have made it harder for people to use this space over the last few years. We have reviewed our schedule for this year and decided to bring forward some work so that we can reopen the allotment track at the end of July, a few months earlier than originally planned. This means visitors will be able to gain access to the middle section of the Ings from Shipton Road, rather than having to use either Rawcliffe Country Park or Homestead Park. However, Rawcliffe Meadows will remain closed off until the end of 2025 to allow the grass cover there to become established.

Environmental Enhancements

In this final year of construction, we will be making several environmental improvements to the site before it reopens. Four new ponds, two in Rawcliffe Country Park and two in the cornfield, will be dug to provide ecological 'corridors' for existing newt populations, enabling them to move easily between Blue Beck and Rawcliffe Country Park. The locations for these were fenced off in the autumn last year, in preparation for work to start then. Sadly, the ensuing wet weather resulted in a delay in this work as the ponds would have filled with water before pond linings could be laid. However, with spring returning, we will resume work on these as soon as the ground dries out. Once completed, the area around each pond will be planted up with tussocky grass and then reeds planted into the ponds to provide the right sort of cover for newts. We will also build some hibernacula (shelters made of natural materials) for the newts to hibernate in during the winter months.


During February this year over 500 tree and hedgerow seedlings were planted on the site, to mitigate the loss of 150 trees that had to be felled to allow our work to go ahead. This represents about two thirds of all the trees we committed to planting as part of the programme of work; for every tree removed we are planting five new ones. The remainder will be planted in the autumn this year, as part of the final stage of landscaping on this site.

How we're reducing
the risk of flooding
for York



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 consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/yorkshire/yorkfas/

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Tansy Beetle surveys



Photo courtesy of Nicholas Westerman: Two tansy beetles on a leaf of the tansy plant.

As part of our ecological monitoring programme on the Ings, we have carried out annual surveys of tansy beetle populations since 2021. Results from last year indicated that insect numbers are stable in one location but declining near the pond in Rawcliffe Meadow where the vegetation is more overgrown. So we took action to create better conditions for them to thrive and have cleared some trees and scrub from around the pond. This year Friends of St Nick's will remove bindweed and plant new tansy seedlings in this area to continue this process of habitat improvement.

Another survey will be done this summer before handing over to St Nick's to continue these for a further five years. We will share these results with the Tansy Beetle Action Group (TBAG) so they can include them in their monitoring of populations across the country.

Results from the turf translocation and plug planting trials

To mitigate damage to the Site of Special Scientific Interest in Rawcliffe Meadows, we have been trialling different methods of replacing and extending the combination of grassland species found in that area of the Ings.

In November 2022 we held two 'plug planting' days on Rawcliffe Ings to plant seedlings of meadow grassland species, typical of those found in Rawcliffe Meadows. Around the same time our contractors also translocated (moved) sections of turf from Rawcliffe Meadows to a separate site on Rawcliffe Ings. Last summer staff from the Floodplain Meadows Partnership (FMP) surveyed both sites and supplied us with results from the first year of growth. In spite of the difficulty of carrying out this type of work, these look promising. Professor David Gowing from the FMP reported that the translocated turves from Rawcliffe Meadows have been moved successfully and that the survival rate for plug plants has also been good in this first year. However, the grass on the Ings remains very vigorous. So the long-term success of our restoration programme will require sustained management to keep soil fertility levels low to keep this growth under control. We are currently working on plans to ensure this happens.

New benches and signposts planned for the site

Just before work began in 2021, we organised a field trip for Year 5 pupils from Clifton and Rawcliffe Primary School to the Ings. They then produced designs for wooden signposts and benches, inspired by the history and ecology of the site. We gave the best ones to a chainsaw sculptor to use to create some new signposts and benches. These will be installed on the Ings once construction comes to an end, later this year.





Photo: tree planting on the Ings



Photo: the new flood embankment

Find out more

To find out more about the Clifton Ings Flood Alleviation Scheme, you can:

Contact us by email at: yorkfloodplan@environment-agency.gov.uk

Check out our website: <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/yorkshire/yorkfas/>

Phone us via the Environment Agency's National Customer Contact Centre: 03708 506 506.

Remember to ask to speak to a member of the Clifton Ings Flood Alleviation Scheme team.

If you want to receive briefings about the scheme by email, please use the email address on this newsletter to contact us.

Clifton Ings Flood Alleviation Scheme in a nutshell

Construction phase one: Autumn/Winter 2021

Initial enabling works and building an alternative Sustrans cycle track.

Construction phase two: Spring 2022 to Autumn 2024

Raising the height of the existing embankment, extending it at the south eastern end in Homestead Park, constructing the northern extension into Rawcliffe Country Park, building a new pumping station for Blue Beck.


Embankment & Habitat restoration: access restrictions in place until autumn 2025.

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