

## Flood Management - the Broader Picture

**Evidence of climate change in the UK is growing all the time. Every year records are being broken, for storms, heat waves, rainfall, and floods. This means that the risk of being flooded is increasing and this is not just in low-lying areas. Following the disastrous inland flooding of 2007, the government commissioned the independent 'Pitt Review'.**

A key recommendation from the Pitt Review is that the Environment Agency (EA) will be given the task of making flood management more 'joined up' by having an overview of all types of flooding. This will include not only river and sea flooding, but also groundwater and surface water flooding too.

The Government's Strategy for managing flood risk is called 'Making Space for Water'. This suggests that building ever higher defences is not sustainable, and as a society, we need to identify areas where flooding can be allowed to protect developed areas elsewhere.

### Effect on development

National Planning Guidance sets out how flood risk should be considered at all stages of the planning process to reduce future loss of life and damage to property from flooding. Havant Borough Council is producing a Local Development Framework, including a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, which should identify appropriate sites for future development.



*Flood in Emsworth 10 March. Modern houses built above the flood level have no insurance problems even when surrounded by water.*

The EA is a statutory consultee on proposed developments and will generally ensure that

1. The development does not increase flood risk to an existing community;
2. The development itself is not at risk from flooding

The EA will be consulted by the planning authority over any major development and will follow the general guidelines for smaller developments. However, it must be emphasised that they can only advise the planning authority. The authority can decline to take this advice in its entirety, as sometimes other criteria, such as a perceived economic need for development, might take precedence.

In a place like Emsworth, however, the rules will be enforced meaning that a developer must ensure that their development, for example on the proposed Hampshire Farm site, neither floods nor increases the risk of flooding in other areas. They can do this by a number of means, including using permeable surfaces, together with ponds known as 'balancing ponds' to collect water from torrential rains and feed it into the ground slowly rather than letting it pour into watercourses and flood other houses.

Developments such as the 'Kings Oak' development in Hermitage include a balancing pond, although in this case there has been controversy about its size and future management. Such engineering works can be expensive and, as with any other aspect of development, constant vigilance is needed to ensure a satisfactory outcome. Changes in existing areas can also increase run-off and contribute to the problem of flash flooding. (See *paving driveways*.)

### Sea level rise

As well as more violent weather, climate change is producing sea level rise. Government guidance to the EA suggests that we should be planning for at least a 1m rise in sea level along the south coast over the next 100 years. Since 2005 when this guidance was published, evidence has been growing that sea level rise could be considerably faster than this.

In order to identify how best to manage flood and erosion risk over the next 100 years, the EA and local authorities have been developing Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) and Coastal Strategies.

1. The North Solent Shoreline Management Plan will set out high-level policy for managing the coastline.
2. The Portchester to Emsworth Strategy will identify how to implement the SMP policy. This is currently being formulated and a public consultation on it will begin in the New Year (2009). The EMS will carry more details of this in its next issue.

The effects of sea level rise are not just higher tides. In addition, less of our current beaches and mud flats will be exposed at low tide, and deeper water can mean larger waves increasing storm damage.

### Policy for Emsworth

In planning work and allocating resources, the EA emphasises that its priority is to reduce risk as much as possible, with the highest priority of protecting human life.

The policy for the management of coastal defences will be determined by the Portchester to Emsworth Strategy. The existing defences in Emsworth are generally in a good condition. However, flooding did occur on 10 March as a result of overtopping due to a rare combination of storm surge, high tide and large waves. These conditions are estimated to be likely to occur on average once every 20 years. Flooding around the millponds was made worse by the heavy rainfall filling the local rivers in this area.

Due to the risk of property flooding from the Westbrook, it has been designated a "main river" and the EA has taken over responsibility for it from Southern Water and Havant Borough Council. The EA have already undertaken works to improve the sluice gate at the outfall and have plans in next year's budget to begin a feasibility study looking into what else can be done to reduce flood risk further.

The EA already have a maintenance programme for the Ems and the Westbrook, including an ongoing programme of inspections and clearing silt and in-stream vegetation.

I would like to thank Andrew Gilham of the Environment Agency for much of the information on which this article is based. However, interpretation and any errors are entirely my responsibility.

*Richard Jannaway*

### East Head Defence

**A policy of 'adaptive management' to hold the line has been proposed in the Environment Agency's Coastal Defence Strategy for East Head. This strategy is supported by Chichester Harbour Conservancy (CHC) and Chichester District Council amongst others.**

**There will be an initial scheme to safeguard East Head in the early years of the strategy and this will involve a significant recycling of beach material into the vulnerable hinge and neck at the southern end of the feature. It will also see the construction of a buried sill behind the recharged area to ensure that, if there is a catastrophic break through into Snowhill Creek, a tidal channel does not develop. It also promotes the controlled management of the groynes and breastworks to allow improved sediment flow into East Head and the development of natural beaches. These and other measures will be available in the medium and long term to manage and respond to the evolution of East Head in the face of predicted sea level rise and increased storminess.**

**However, it is unlikely to attract national government funding so funds will have to be obtained from other sources.**

*Edited from a Press Release, July 2008*

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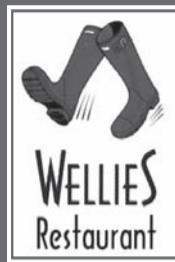
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