

Billingham System Review: Community Update

March 2021

This community briefing provides an update on the partnership-led review of watercourse systems in the Billingham area. It aims to provide you with progress to date on the review and an opportunity to discuss and understand flood risk, water level and asset management in your local area.



The Environment Agency, Witham First District Internal Drainage Board, the National Farmers Union and North Kesteven District Council have formed a partnership to undertake a review of the Billingham system (please see map). This collaboration seeks to identify the current issues and opportunities for managing water and assets in the area more effectively, recognising the impacts of the prolonged heavy rain over the winter of 2019/20.

What is the aim of the review?

The review will look at current management of the catchment, how the various authorities work together, and how we can promote and support a resilient community for the longer term. The review began following the high rainfall and flooding of

2019/20, but will also look back at previous significant events in the area as it is important to understand the scale of these events in order to focus on if and how risks can be mitigated. The figure below underlines the extreme amount of rain that fell in October 2019 alone (200% above the average for that month).

Water level management for the catchment, both the peaks and the lows, is the responsibility of no single organisation or individual. This review seeks to inform and advise communities on who does what, whilst highlighting the limitations and the opportunities. It will also recognise the specific challenges for the Billingham area, including the geography of a fenland system, aging defences and the influence of the River Witham.

How is the review being carried out?

This review of the Billingham system is focusing on four key themes:

1. Improving water management through the system
2. A resilient community and infrastructure
3. An engaged and informed community
4. A sustainable system for the future

These themes will be addressed by carrying out a detailed assessment of the how the system is currently managed, how the Main River and Ordinary Watercourses interact and what the key issues are. It will also recognise the limitations, from the availability of funding to address the extreme rainfall we are now seeing across the country.

We are talking to those who live and work in the area, listening to their concerns and seeking to understand what, where and how there are opportunities for improvement.

The partnership will develop a transparent approach to recommendations which will be adapted into a joint action plan. There are things we can do together now to make a difference, including how we engage with the community. Other options will need time to investigate to understand the benefit.

The Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project, working at a catchment scale from Lincoln to Boston, will be key to this long term and sustainable approach. This project aims to set the direction to achieving a resilient catchment through an ambitious programme of works such as flood defence improvement and flood plain

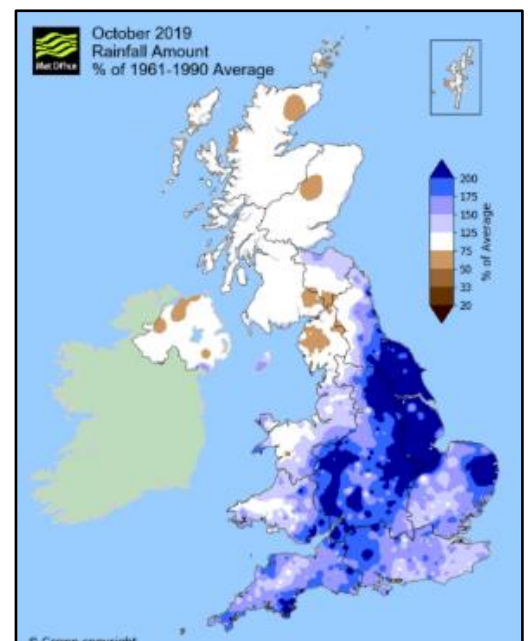


Figure 1: MET Office data showing the % rainfall amount above average for October 2019

restoration where beneficial. The outputs of this Billingham review will provide facts and evidence to support that important project.

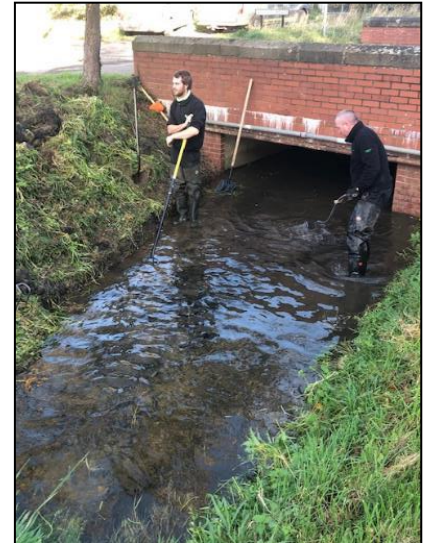
What has the review achieved so far?

Since May 2020, we have been gathering the baseline information, from flood extents, to feedback from those affected. We have also found opportunities for 'quick wins', primarily focused on reviewing and amending the annual routine maintenance works on the Main Rivers and improving our relationship with the landowners and tenants.

The Covid19 pandemic has made it difficult to engage with communities. Where we would have held public drop-in sessions, therefore we have focused on one-to-one engagement with farmers and Parish Council representatives. Whilst the high water levels over January and February this year have seen Officers diverted to Flood Incident Response, it has provided an opportunity to monitor the system and see how it copes with different rainfall events.

Some of the key activities as part of this review to date include:

- ❖ A review of routine maintenance for over 30km of Main River to provide the greatest benefit from the funding available, including introducing improved methods of managing the channel.
- ❖ Inspections of all culverts on Main Rivers completed during the dry summer period of 2020, with 'quick wins' actioned such as blockage and silt berm removal.
- ❖ Design and/or completion of recovery works in the system following the 2019/20 rainfall, including repairs to pump stations and over £900k to repair and reinforce damaged or weakened defences.
- ❖ Sonar survey of the Billingham Skirth pointing doors and outfall into the Witham.
- ❖ Walkovers by the partnership of the Main Rivers and Ordinary Watercourses to fully understand current water level management in the system.
- ❖ An audit of customer complaints and enquiries raised over 2019/20, identifying and implementing ways to improve how we engage with people.
- ❖ One-to-one site visits with those directly impacted by flooding, ensuring their input into this review.
- ❖ Online survey completed with landowners and tenants.
- ❖ Further refining of the best way to carry out a partnership-led system review, now also being applied to a review for the Upper Witham.
- ❖ Aligning with the Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project Team for longer term options in the system.



What are the next steps?

As the review has developed, the scale of the information gathered so far has underlined why a partnership approach is so important. Over the coming months, the partnership will take that baseline information and develop a long-list of mitigation measures for the system, sharing long term options with the Lower Witham Project Team. We will then apply a transparent decision-making process to formulate this into a deliverable action plan which we make a commitment to engage the community on.

We will also continue to improve how we engage with the community, such as clearer points of contact for queries and information on supporting homeowners and landowners with managing flood risk.

If you would like to discuss issues in your area, or would like to receive further updates on the review, then please contact Abigail Jackson by calling 02030 255877 or emailing APWitham@environment-agency.gov.uk

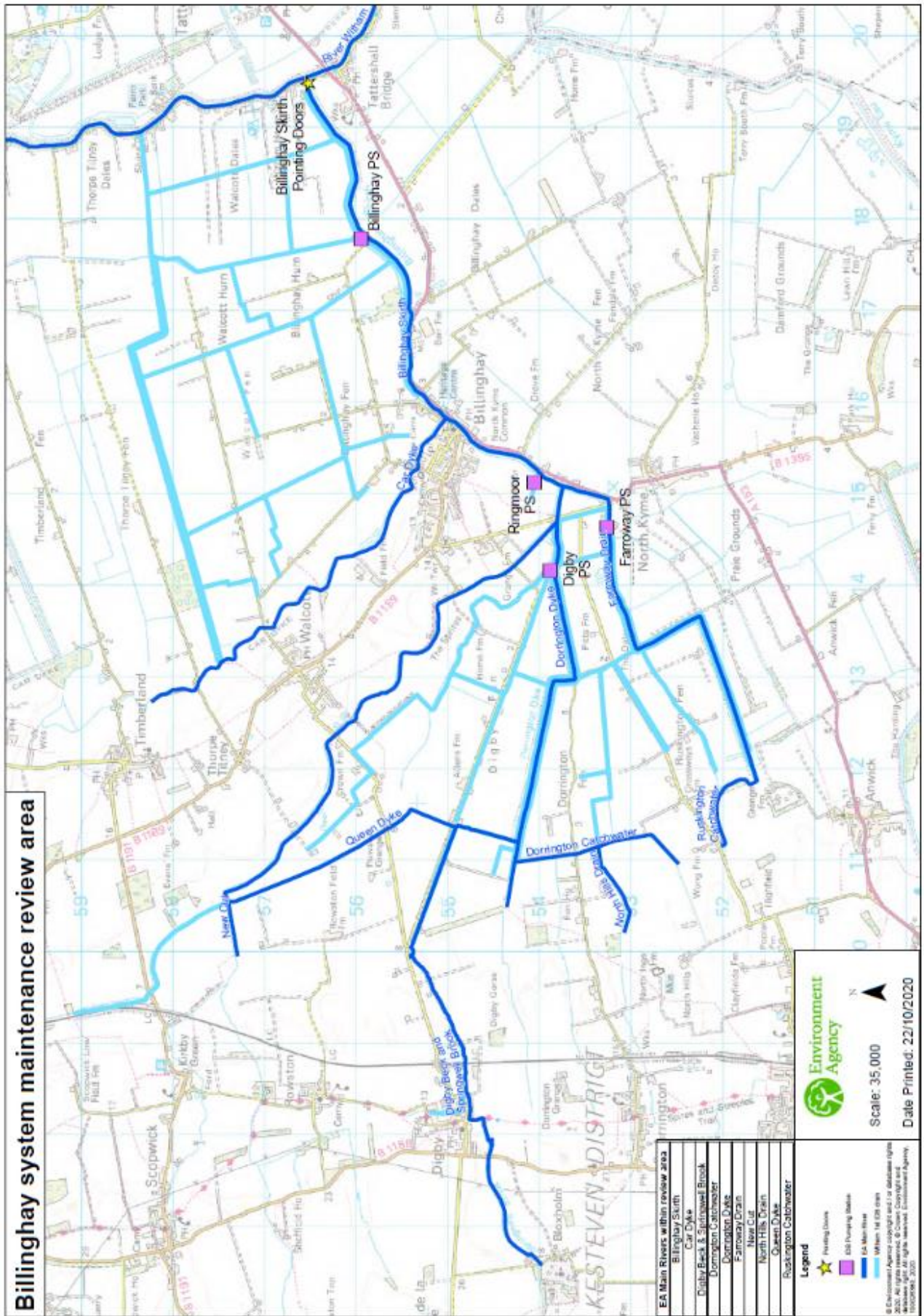
Useful links

To find out more about being a riparian owner: [Owning a watercourse - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Find out if your area is at risk of flooding: www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding

If your area is at risk, encourage people to sign up to receive free Flood Warnings. This is really easy to do. Just call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or do it online www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings.

Reporting a Flood Incident: 0800 80 70 60 (24-hour service)



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