

## **HOUGHTON AND WYTON PARISH COUNCIL**

# **PARISH GUIDE ON VILLAGE FLOOD DEFENCES**

A series of meetings have been held with the Environment Agency over the last 12 months to review the villages flood defences and to address questions raised by parishioners and members of the Parish Council. One (and the most recent) of the meetings was a Public Meeting held in the Memorial Hall in November 2006.

This guide gives details from these meetings and provides a lot of useful information to put the risk of flood that the village faces into context.

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### **Context**

- The source of the River Great Ouse is in Northamptonshire and is the fifth longest river in England at 150 miles long. Water levels rise on our stretch of the river typically 36 hours after significant rainfall, collecting water from the 90 miles of river upstream from the villages.
- The village was seriously flooded in 1947. In recent years incidents of high water have occurred in 1998 and 2003, which resulted in some flooding to roads, etc, but not to houses to any significant degree.
- New flood defences are currently being constructed down stream from us at the Hemingfords and St Ives. The Environment Agency gave assurances that the impact of this scheme had been carefully assessed and no degradation in the standard of flood protection for the villages had been predicted.

### **Flood Risk and Insurance**

- As a village, we have flood defences that are designed to protect against a 1 in 100 years flood event (1% chance of flooding each year). This level of protection is maintained with the downstream introduction of new flood defences at the Hemingfords and St Ives.
- The Environment Agency put homes into one of three flood risk bands – Significant (greater than 1 in 75 chance of flood in 1 year), Moderate (between 1 in 75 and 1 in 200) and Low (greater than 1 in 200)
- H&W are in the “Moderate” category
- The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has a policy that UK insurers should not refuse to insure anyone within the “Moderate” category or above. See [www.abi.org.uk/Display/File/Child/553/statementofprinciples2005.pdf](http://www.abi.org.uk/Display/File/Child/553/statementofprinciples2005.pdf).

- Change in Insurance Company attitude to flood risk - Environment Agency are not aware of any shift at present, but the situation can be ever changing. The ABI have committed to the guarantee for homes with protection of better than 1:75 years, but individual insurance companies cannot be forced to comply (see also above).

## **Flood Defences**

The villages' flood defences principally comprise the flood bank and the Back Brook.

### **Flood Bank**

- The flood bank extends from the Meadow Lane/Thicket Road junction to just beyond Hartford Marina. This complete length is monitored and maintained by the Environment Agency (EA) to the 1:100 design level.
- The level of our flood defences are typically 200-300mm above the 1:100 design level to give some margin for erosion of the height of the flood bank and a safety margin. Typical areas that suffer erosion (or compaction) are the junction of Meadow Lane and The Thicket, the entrance to the campsite, and the "horse's field" close to the rear of the school.
- The safety margin may also give some protection against the effects of climate change in the short term. DEFRA have just issued (November 2006) new design guidance to the Environment Agency where the effects of climate change are taken into account for the first time for inland waterways. When the flood defences are next surveyed, these new design standards will be taken into account.
- The Environment Agency is funded by DEFRA via a fixed budget. The Environment Agency has to assess the benefit and prioritise all work against their overall budget.
- Given concerns about the seepage of water through the flood bank by Huntingdon Road as it leaves the Wyton end of the village, pilot samples have been taken of the flood bank. On the basis of these samples it has been concluded that the flood bank is doing a sufficiently effective job at this time. This area is kept under particular review.
- The wall at the end of Mill Street has cracks in it and the Environment Agency have now completed repairs to it. Further works may be undertaken in the future.
- Over the last 12 months the following significant work has been completed:
  - Refurbishment of the sluice at The Frying Pan (known as the Four Gate Sluice by the Environment Agency)
  - "Straightening" of the flood bank in the garden of The Moorings to remedy weaknesses and leaks that become apparent during the last periods of high water levels in 1998 and 2003.
  - Overhaul of the pumping station at the junction of Meadow Lane/Thicket Road, principally for staff safety reasons and to make it easier to access and operate during periods of high water
- The flood banks are inspected typically on a monthly basis, with grass being cut once a year. A parishioner pointed out that grass had been cut only twice over a period of several years on sections of the floodbank past the campsite. The Environment Agency gave assurances that this work would be done annually from now on.

### **Back Brook**

- The “Back Brook” that runs from field to the north of Wyton village (and the A1123) to the pumping station at the junction of Meadow Lane/Thicket Road and down onto the river meadows, is essential to the villages flood defences as it allows rainwater from the fields up to RAF Wyton to drain safely past the village and into the River Great Ouse.
- The Back Brook is maintained by the Environment Agency, responsibility for it being passed from the old Inland Drainage Board (IDB) for the area 3-4 years ago.
- Villagers expressed concern that the Back Brook was not being maintained (and in particular dredged) to the standards of the IDB. The Environment Agency explained that they had not committed to maintain the Back Brook to the same standard as the IDB, but they did assure that their standard should ensure that the Back Brook functions effectively to drain any water needed into the River Great Ouse.
- Work was completed during this autumn that has cut the banks of the Back Brook and ensured that the water course is open. Increasing efforts are being made to reach areas that are relatively inaccessible for cutting and clearance and this is being helped by longer term commitments to contractors that the Environment Agency use. Some use is made of chemicals and the Environment Agency confirmed that any chemicals were environmentally safe.

### **Flood Warnings**

- The principle method of advising people of impending flood situations is now through an automated system called “Flood Warnings Direct”. All people who have property in an area that is at risk of flooding (which the villages are) are encouraged to register with the “Flood Warnings Direct” system.
- The take-up of offers of flood warnings historically have generally been poor
- The Environment Agency have varied how hard-hitting national awareness campaigns are.
- Before the last campaign, in our flood area, 247 (4.6%) out of 5426 homes were registered for flood communications
- The last campaign, which was hard-hitting, raised the take-up to 2299 (42.4%) out of the 5426 homes
- Currently our flood warning area is from Offord to Earith. The Environment Agency are working to break this down into communities so that communications and warnings are more localised.
- HDC offered to carry any information on flood issues in “District Wide” a newsletter that goes to all Huntingdonshire homes 8 times a year. Parish Magazines and websites could also be used.

### **Guidance to Property Owners**

- Home (and other property) owners are responsible for their properties and the consequences of flooding. All property owners are advised to:
  - Register with “Flood Warnings Direct”
  - Follow the Environment Agency guidance in preparing for flood situations

- Considering methods of making their property more “flood resistant”
- The Environment Agency also offer guidance on restoring out home after a flood.
- Further details on all these aspects can be found on the Environment Agency website ([www.environment-agency.gov.uk/](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/))

### **Assistance to Vulnerable People**

- Assistance is provided on a coordinated multi-agency basis. No one agency has overall responsibility. Gaps that were apparent in the 1998 flooding have been largely fixed.
- Environment Agency is responsible for monitoring and warnings, operating and sandbagging their own defences
- HDC is responsible for civil protection, providing evacuation points, sandbags for residents, etc
- Police – evacuation coordination

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