Managing flood risk on the Severn Estuary

Gloucestershire

January 2011
We are the Environment Agency. It’s our job to look after your environment and make it a better place – for you, and for future generations.

Your environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, we are making your environment cleaner and healthier.

The Environment Agency. Out there, making your environment a better place.
Introduction

We work to create and maintain a rich, healthy and diverse environment for present and future generations. This includes finding effective ways to manage flood risk. Flooding is a natural process, but one that can have a major effect on people, communities, the economy and the environment. We cannot prevent all floods but we can prepare for them and reduce their likelihood, as part of our flood risk management planning.

There are three editions of this brochure that summarise our strategy to manage flood risk on the Severn Estuary. The three editions cover
- South East Wales,
- Gloucestershire, and
- South Gloucestershire to Hinkley Point, Somerset.

We are keen to hear your views about our plans and in this brochure we:
- explain the current level of flood risk and the effects of climate change;
- describe our proposals for the Severn Estuary;
- describe the impact of our proposals.
Why is the Severn Estuary special?

The Severn Estuary has the second highest tidal range in the world and has been a focus for human activity for many centuries. Its floodplains cover 50,000 hectares of land, provide a home for around a quarter of a million residents and include £14 billion of important infrastructure.

All of this is set within a unique and internationally designated natural environment that has a very high level of protection under both European and UK wildlife law. The tidal flood risk affects the whole estuary. Wave action adds to the flood and erosion risk in the western half of the estuary. Near Gloucester the greatest flood risk is caused by high river flows.
Over the years many miles of tidal flood defences have been built along the estuary. This has enabled significant agricultural, residential and industrial development. As a result, the natural function of the floodplain – to store flood water – has been lost.

Some areas are more prone to flooding than others. As a general rule, the urban areas have more protection from flooding than the rural areas.

Our study area covers the Severn Estuary coastline and tidal floodplains extending between Lavernock Point (Penarth), up the northern coastline to Gloucester, and back down the southern coastline to just west of Hinkley Point.

**Flood risk and climate change in the estuary**

When we talk about flood risk we mean a combination of the chance (or probability) of a particular flood happening and the impact it would have. By examining both the chance and the impact together, we can calculate the scale of flood risk and assess its importance to people, property and the environment. In the Severn Estuary, flood risk currently varies from a 1 in 1,000 (lower risk) to a 1 in 10 (higher risk) chance of flooding in any year.

We are fortunate that people have been keeping good quality records of tides and water levels in the Severn Estuary for over 100 years. These show that the average sea level is gradually rising, due to climate change and changes in the shape of the Earth’s crust. This will continue into the future, although the exact speed of change will depend in part on our changing climate.

We believe we should plan for a rise in sea level of approximately 1 metre over the next 100 years, and for river flows to increase by up to 20 per cent. The Severn Estuary Flood Risk Management Strategy takes this into account. If no action is taken and defences are not maintained or improved, much of the low-lying land around the estuary will flood several times a year, making it difficult to continue present land uses.
What is a Flood Risk Management Strategy?
To prioritise our flood risk management activities and expenditure we contribute to and produce plans at a range of levels. At a very large scale Shoreline Management Plans (SMP) provide a framework for the future management of flood risk and erosion on long extents of coastline. These plans are jointly owned by the Environment Agency and Local Authorities. Conservation organisations, Drainage Boards and the public have helped in their development. There are Shoreline Management Plans (SMP) for the Severn Estuary and for the North Devon and Somerset coast that provide us with coastal management policies. From these we have produced the Severn Estuary Flood Risk Management Strategy, which identifies how we will manage flood risk over the next 100 years. This strategy takes into account technical constraints, costs, and the environmental and social impacts within the Severn Estuary area over the next century.

National Investment and Funding Plans
Shoreline Management Plans
Strategies
Schemes

How we manage flood risk
We work to protect people and property from flooding and we spend money where it provides best value for the taxpayer. This means allocating public funds where they will provide the greatest reduction in flood risk, in the most cost effective way. To do this we target areas where we can reduce risks to the largest number of homes. At the same time we aim to improve the quality of our most important wildlife sites, to help Government meet its legal obligations for protecting the environment.

The Government is committed to managing flood risk where it is sustainable and cost effective to do so. However, as sea levels continue to rise there will come a time when the cost of protecting some properties will outweigh the value of what is at risk. Alternative actions to adapt to the impacts of flood risk need to be considered.

Flooding is influenced by coastal and river processes, as well as urban drainage and land use. In this strategy we are concentrating on tidal flood risk because it affects the whole estuary and a huge number of properties.

We reduce the risk of flooding by:
- providing flood warning systems;
- working with local authority planners to restrict development in flood risk areas;
- encouraging the use of flood resilience measures for existing properties in flood risk areas;
- maintaining and constructing flood defence projects.
Impacts on the environment

The Severn Estuary is of international importance for nature conservation and is designated as a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and for wetland features (Ramsar Site). Together these designations form part of what is known as the European Natura 2000 network of sites.

As sea levels rise, one response is to consider reinforcing the existing flood defences along our coastlines. As a result, the rising sea levels will reduce the areas of saltmarsh and mudflat in front of the tidal defences. This process is called ‘coastal squeeze’. In the Severn Estuary, this effect would cause loss of internationally important habitat, which is protected by European and UK law. This loss of habitat must be avoided or compensated by the creation of habitat elsewhere. This issue has been taken into account in the SMP policies and further developed in this strategy.

We have considered potential impacts on people, habitats, species, cultural heritage and the landscape. The issues are described in a Strategic Environmental Assessment Report, which supports this strategy. Key issues for areas around the estuary are identified later in this publication.
Choosing the best approach

The aim of this strategy is to identify how we can best manage flood risk over the next century. The strategy must be:

- technically feasible and adaptable to change
- economically justifiable
- socially and environmentally acceptable.

The Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan, from which this strategy has been developed, has already set broad coastal management policies. We are developing these in more detail within this strategy. We have used a clearly defined approach to assess flood risk management options, as set out by Government. We looked at the costs and benefits of each option using a standard method. We have focussed on specific areas that are at risk of flooding and within each area we have considered all options that comply with the agreed policy. We have considered these options in detail to determine the preferred action at each location, and when we need to take action. Throughout this process we have worked with a range of organisations and experts, to share ideas and inform our decisions.

From policy to action
Let us know your views

The following pages show specific sections of the Estuary, as they are now and how we propose they might be in the future. There are two additional editions of this brochure showing the proposals for other parts of the Estuary. These can be viewed online at www.severnestuary.net/frms/publications.html.

Once you have read through our proposals we would like to hear your views. You can comment in several different ways:

• Complete the questionnaire with this brochure and post it to us via the FREEPOST address shown on the bottom of the form.

• Complete our online version of the questionnaire at www.severnestuary.net/frms/publications.html and email or post it back to us.

• Alternatively you may like to take part in our automated e–consultation, please go to https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/portal

Unfortunately we will not be able to respond individually to your comments. However, we will publish a summary of the responses we receive in the Spring of 2011. You will be able to see this on www.severnestuary.net/frms/publications.html.

The deadline for sending us your comments is 18 March 2011.
Tidenham to Lydney

Our Proposals

The railway embankment south of Lydney

- The railway line is an important transport link, wholly in the control of Network Rail. We would not maintain the embankment. The railway itself will have a 1 in 100 chance of tidal flooding in any year.

Realignment of embankments at Lydney

- We propose to realign the defences after 2060. This will ensure we can continue to manage flood risk to 100 properties and Lydney Harbour into the future. Realigning the defences will allow us to create valuable habitats that are being lost as a result of flood risk management and sea level rise.

Existing Situation

The railway embankment south of Lydney

- The railway embankment limits the extent of tidal flooding, although some flooding of agricultural land occurs during high tides.

Existing defences at Lydney

- In Lydney there are embankments with rock armouring that protect mainly grazing land. There are around 100 properties in the flood plain. Their risk of tidal flooding is a 1 in 200 chance or less in any year.

Environment and heritage features

- The coastline in this area falls within the Severn Estuary European Nature 2000 sites.
- One scheduled monument (Broadstone) and three listed buildings lie within the floodplain with a 1 in 200 chance or less of tidal flooding.

Flood risk and climate change

- Properties in this area currently have a 1 in 200 chance or less of tidal flooding in any one year.
- In the future, as sea levels and storminess increase, the level of flood risk will increase. Even if the existing defence structures were maintained at their current height, by 2100 the risk of tidal flooding of property would increase to a 1 in 100 chance in any one year.
- By 2110 there would be annual tidal flooding even if defences are kept at the same height.

Managing floods in the Severn Estuary Gloucestershire

Environmental and heritage issues and opportunities

- Maintaining the defences along the existing coastline means that intertidal habitats will be increasingly submerged by sea level rise affecting the Severn Estuary European Nature 2000 sites.
- Realigning defences at Lydney will allow us to create up to 200 ha of mudflat and saltmarsh habitat by 2110.

Existing defences and shoreline

- Environment and heritage features
- Maintenance of existing defences in 2110 without defences
- Interdependently important nature conservation site
- After 2060 we propose to realign the defences
- Flood risk and climate change
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Managing flood risk in the Severn Estuary

**Existing defences at Awre**

The earth embankments at Awre are in poor condition with a 1 in 10 chance of tidal flooding of agricultural land in any year.

**Existing defences on the east bank**

The earth embankments of Slimbridge and along the Gloucester and Sharpness canal provide protection to around 200 properties so that they have less than a 1 in 200 chance of tidal flooding in any year.

**Our Proposals**

We expect the defences at Awre to cease to function within 5 years. We hope to work with landowners to manage a transition to saltmarsh as is occurring nearby at Brims Pill.

**Realignment of embankments at Awre**

Realigning defences at Awre will allow us to create up to 153 ha of mudflat and saltmarsh habitat by 2030.

**Realignment of embankments at Slimbridge**

Realigning defences at Slimbridge will allow us to create up to 230 ha of mudflat and saltmarsh habitat by 2030.

**Continued maintenance of defences**

We will continue to carry out maintenance and improvements work on the embankments to ensure continued protection to around 200 properties. The risk to homes from tidal flooding will be less than a 1 in 200 chance in any year. Works will include improving capacity of drainage outfalls to help mitigate flooding from high rainfall.

We anticipate working with British Waterways to investigate how the canal banks could be best integrated with flood management requirements.

**Slimbridge and Awre**

**Slimbridge and Awre**

**Existing Situation**

The existing defences between Slimbridge and Saul ensure the risk of property flooding by the tide is less than a 1 in 200 chance but there are local flooding problems where water from inland cannot drain at high tide. The Gloucester and Sharpness Canal banks help reduce tidal flood risk.

**Environmental and heritage features**

- The coastline within the majority of this area falls within the Severn Estuary European Natura 2000 sites.
- On the west bank there are no environmental features with statutory designations within the floodplain.
- On the east bank, there are 58 listed buildings in the floodplain, as is the Frampton Pools Site of Special Scientific Interest. These features typically have less than a 1 in 200 chance of tidal flooding in any year.

**Security and climate change**

Sea levels and storminess will increase in the future, but the high level of the embankment will continue to provide the current level of protection from the tide. Local flooding from inland water could get worse.

**Environmental and heritage issues and opportunities**

- Maintaining the defences along the existing coastline means that intertidal habitats will be increasingly submerged by sea-level rise affecting the Severn Estuary European Natura 2000 sites.
- Realigning defences at Awre will allow us to create up to 153 ha of mudflat and saltmarsh habitat by 2030.
- Realigning defences at Slimbridge will allow us to create up to 230 ha of mudflat and saltmarsh habitat by 2030.

- We anticipate working with British Waterways to investigate how the canal banks could be best integrated with flood management requirements.

- We will continue to carry out maintenance and improvements work on the embankments to ensure continued protection to around 200 properties. The risk to homes from tidal flooding will be less than a 1 in 200 chance in any year. Works will include improving capacity of drainage outfalls to help mitigate flooding from high rainfall.

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- We anticipate working with British Waterways to investigate how the canal banks could be best integrated with flood management requirements.
Flood risk and climate change
• Around 300 properties benefit from the existing defences at Newnham, Westbury and Arlingham, though the standard of protection provided varies.
• Important infrastructure currently protected includes the A48 road and railway.
• In the future, as sea levels and storminess increase, the level of flood risk will increase. Even if the existing defences were maintained at their current height, by 2030 the risk of tidal flooding would increase to a 1 in 10 chance in any year in some locations.

Existing Situation

Newnham, Westbury and Arlingham

Flood risk and climate change

• Around 200 properties benefit from the existing defences at Newnham, Westbury and Arlingham, though the standard of protection provided varies.
• Important infrastructure currently protected includes the A48 road and railway.
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Our Proposals

Continued maintenance of defences
• We will continue to maintain and repair the defences in the future.
• At Newnham we propose to raise defences in phases to keep pace with climate change. Between 2030 and 2050 the embankments are likely to be raised by up to 0.9m in total.
• This will ensure that the chance of tidal flooding remains at 1 in 50 in any year for around 30 properties at Newnham.

Defence improvements on the Westbury bank
• Towards 2030 we propose to carry out embankment raising to provide a 1 in 50 chance of tidal flooding in any year.
• Between 2030 and 2060 we propose to carry out further improvements to keep pace with climate change. This will ensure that the chance of tidal flooding remains at 1 in 50 in any year for around 65 homes.

Realignment of embankments after 2060
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Our Proposals

Continued maintenance of defences

Maintenance will include regular and post-storm surveys, with repair work and grass trimming when necessary.

Between 2030 and 2100 we expect to raise the embankments by up to 0.3m in total.

These phased improvements would be timed to keep pace with climate change. This will ensure that the chance of tidal flooding is 1 in 200 or less in any year for around 600 properties.

Environmental Issues and Opportunities

Works proposed on both banks will ensure environmental features within the floodplain will continue to have a 1 in 200 chance of tidal flooding or less in any year.
Flood risk and climate change
• In the future, as sea levels and storminess increase, the level of flood risk will increase.
• At Minsterworth and Longney, the current level of protection from flooding will not be affected until after 2060. After this the chance of flooding increases to 1 in 20 in any year.
• At Elmore Back, as a result of climate change by 2030 there will be a 1 in 10 chance of flooding in any year.

Existing defences
• The defences in this area are earth embankments.
• The flood risk to most properties is a 1 in 200 chance or less.
• At Elmore Back, there is a 1 in 20 chance of flooding of houses in any year.

Environmental and heritage features
• Walmore Common SSSI and SPA plus two listed buildings lie within the floodplains; the risk of tidal flooding to these features in any year is currently 1 in 200 or less.
• On the east bank eight listed buildings lie with the floodplains; risk of tidal flooding to these structures in any year is currently 1 in 50.

Our Proposals
Continued maintenance of embankments between Ballow and Minsterworth
Maintenance will be carried out to ensure that the embankments remain secure. After 2060, improvements will be carried out to ensure the risk of tidal flooding of properties remains at a 1 in 200 chance or less in any year.

Environmental and heritage issues and opportunities
• On the west bank two listed buildings and Walmore Common SSSI and SPA will still receive a high level of protection with the risk of tidal flooding to these features maintained at 1 in 200 chance or less any year.
• On the east bank the retreated defences will ensure that listed structures within the villages of Downend and Castle End continue to be protected.

Realigning the defences will allow us to recreate valuable habitats that are being lost as a result of flood risk management and sea level rise.

Changes to defences at Elmore Back and Longney after 2030
At Longney, we propose to realign the defences between 2030 and 2060. The new banks will ensure we can continue to manage flood risk to all properties into the future. There are 3 properties at Minsterworth that are located within the area of increased flood risk. We will work with the owners to help them to make their properties more resilient to flood risk.

At Elmore Back, the defences will become less effective after 2030. Properties will need to become more resilient to flooding to remain habitable. We will work with the owners to help them achieve this over time. Realigning the defences will allow us to re-create valuable habitats that are being lost as a result of flood risk management and sea level rise.
**Managing flood risk in the Severn Estuary**

**Gloucestershire**

**Our Proposals**

**Realignment of embankments**

- To manage the increasing flood risk to around 100 properties on the Minsterworth bank we will need to maintain some banks and realign others. We will also work with property owners to make houses more resilient to flooding.

- The change to Minsterworth is proposed within the next 20 years. Realigning defences will provide some benefit to Gloucester when the river is in flood due to heavy rain.

- Realigning the defences will allow us to recreate valuable natural habitats.

**Environmental and heritage issues and opportunities**

- Realigning defences at Minsterworth will allow us to recreate valuable natural habitats.

- The realigned defences will ensure that the listed structures within the floodplain will continue to be protected.

**Continued maintenance of defences**

- We will continue to maintain the embankments near Rea. After 2030 the embankments will be raised to ensure continued protection to around 100 properties. It may be preferable to realign the embankments for greater security. The level of protection will be maintained with a 1 in 100 chance of tidal flooding in any year.
What you can do if you are at risk of flooding

If your home or business is at risk of flooding, either now or in the future, there are lots of things you can do to help yourself, either individually or as a community.

We provide a range of information and guidance:

**Floodline Warnings Direct** – a free service, where you can sign up for flood warnings sent direct to you by telephone, mobile, email, SMS text message, fax or pager. This will help you know in advance when flooding is going to occur.

**Preparing for a flood** – practical information on topics such as making a personal flood plan for your home, making a community flood plan and creating a flood warden scheme. We also offer advice on how to help prevent, delay or limit the amount of floodwater entering your property. If your property is liable to flooding, follow our advice on how to arrange it so that if flooding occurs your home or business will suffer the least amount of damage and be habitable quickly afterwards.

**During a flood** – how to stay safe during a flood and protect your property.

**After a flood** – advice on what to do to get back to normal as quickly as possible after a flood.

Our local flood incident management teams also provide help and advice and will have a good understanding of your local area. Call our national Floodline (0845 988 1188) and ask to be referred to your local team. Alternatively visit our website: [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

**The National Flood Forum**

The National Flood Forum (NFF) is a charity run by those who have experienced flooding. It provides support and advice to communities and individuals who have been flooded or are at risk of flooding. The NFF work closely with a range of agencies, including ourselves.

They offer practical information including advice on home insurance, and how to form a community-based flood action group. These groups help local residents and businesses find ways of minimising the effects of flooding and are very effective.

There are a range of products and services on the market that can help prevent floodwater entering your property. The NFF publish a directory of these, known as The Blue Pages Directory. You can find out more on [www.floodforum.org.uk](http://www.floodforum.org.uk).
Would you like to find out more about us, or about your environment?

Then call us on
08708 506 506* (Mon–Fri 8–6)

email
enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

or visit our website
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 (24hrs)
floodline 0845 988 1188

*Approximate call costs; 8p plus 6p per minute (standard landline).
Please note charges will vary across telephone providers.