



Mike Gray explains the proposals ...

There has been much publicity given already to the Environment Agency's (EA) proposed flood defences along the Foss. The lower sections have been divided into cells, and actions appropriate to each of these have been proposed, many starting in Spring 2019. Although there have been improvements to the Foss Barrier which have reduced the risk of flooding for many properties within the Foss Basin, the effects of the barrier weaken above the Heworth Green/Huntington Road roundabout. So many properties upstream of this roundabout are still at a high risk of flooding.

The construction of flood defences along the River Foss would be problematic, as many households back directly onto the River Foss. Building flood walls would therefore be impractical so another solution is required. The EA is proposing to build a flood storage area north-east of York. This would slow the flow of water and reduce the chance of flooding in York. This solution offers numerous benefits:

- it avoids constructing walls in people's gardens and on private land
- it is located in a single rural location but can provide benefits all along the Foss
- there are minimal visual and access impacts, especially when compared to 4 km of walls and embankments
- it lowers construction and maintenance costs
- there would be less disturbance during construction and the avoidance of road closures along main roads

The location proposed is north-east of Strensall, between Walbutt's House and East Lilling Grange Farm. This will utilise natural higher ground to the west of the River Foss, with an embankment constructed around the remaining boundaries.

The EA has conducted ground investigations to ensure that the land is suitable for constructing a flood storage area, and will also investigate whether material on site is suitable for constructing the embankment. This would both deepen the holding area and reduce the amount of extra material that would have to be trans-

## The Way Forward

ported to site. If you look across the site, for instance from the footbridge just above Walbutt's sewage plant or nearby roads, you can see the wooden structures that surround the test bores.

### How will the Flood Storage Area work?

During normal flows, the River Foss will flow freely through the storage area and exit through a control structure (outlet). This means the storage area will remain dry the vast majority of the time. When the flow increases beyond the set limit, the excess water will be redirected by the control structure into the storage area.

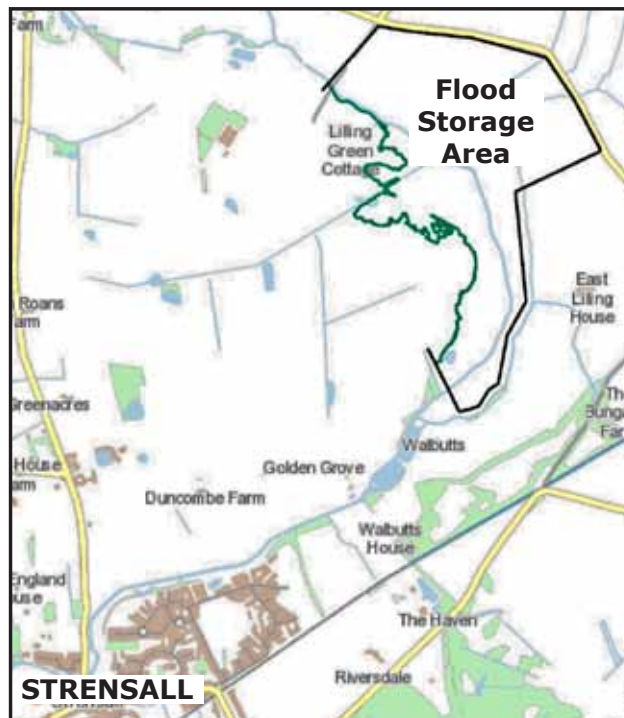
Once river flows decrease, the storage area will continue to release water at a controlled rate. Should the storage area become full, water will safely overflow via a spillway back into the river, and the storage area will no longer provide a benefit downstream.

### Flood Storage Areas Safety

The Foss flood storage area will be designed to the highest reservoir safety standards. This means it will have to be designed as if it permanently

stores water, even though this won't be the case. It will also be designed to withstand unprecedented flooding – even with roughly 4 times the flow we saw on Boxing Day 2015, it would still stay intact.

Under the Reservoir Act 1975 an independent reservoir engineer specialist - a panel engineer - must be appointed to ensure design, construction and maintenance all meet safety standards. The EA currently own and operate over 200 reservoirs and are familiar with the requirements to build and maintain a flood storage area.



### Timescales and Next Steps

October 2018 - April 2019: Detailed design activity  
Spring 2019: a planning application will be submitted.

Spring/Summer 2019: Environment Agency approval to start construction.

Late 2019/early 2020: Subject to planning and environmental approvals being granted and the finances being in place, construction should start.



## A New Foss Year

**A list of all 2019 events is enclosed with this issue, and of course the full calendar of events is on our website.**

**Monday 4 March** Circular Walk 5 miles Farlington via Whenby. Meet at Blacksmiths' Arms, Farlington at 10.00. Contact: Bob Jowett.

**Tuesday 2 April** Circular Walk Easingwold via Oulston. 7 miles. Meet at 10.00 at the free car park in Easingwold. Lunch after. Contact: Bob Jowett

**Weekend 5 - 7 April** 'Clean for York' weekend with litter picks at various points from Foss Bridge to Sheriff Hutton. Please let Barry know if and when you are available. Contact: Barry Thomas

**Thursday 11 April** Circular Walk 1.5 miles Sheriff Hutton. Coffee/light lunch after. Meet at 10.00 at Highwayman Pub, Sheriff Hutton. Contact: Anne Bednarski

**Tuesday 16 April** Sheriff Hutton circular walk via Stittenham, 5 m. Or via Low Mowthorpe Farm 6.9 m. Route and lunch will be discussed on the day. Meet near church at Sheriff Hutton. Contact: Bob Jowett.

**Wednesday 17 April** AGM preceded by talk by Richard Lever of Environment Agency "Update on Flood Alleviation Project at Walbutts, Strensall". Meet 7.00 Strensall Village Hall. Contact: John Millett

**Saturday 27 April** Litter Pick on Foss. Meet at footbridge opposite Morrisons. Information on car parking from contact. Contact: Barry Thomas

**Thursday 2 May** Moor Monkton walk 5.5 miles. Meal afterwards at Red Lion, Poppleton. Meet on Moor Monkton Main Street/Church Lane near telephone box. Contact: Anne Bednarski

### CONTACTS

Anne Bednarski 01904 764086

John Millett 01904 491290

Barry Thomas 01904 490081

barry1thomas@googlemail.com



*This photo of two adult swans with ten cygnets was taken during 2018 on Walbutts Lagoon by Lee Mills, a manager from Walbutts Treated Water Plant.*

*That's one of the largest numbers of cygnets we have seen – has anyone ever seen more?*

## An emergency clean-up



*Plastic debris mounting up on the fallen branch - yet to be removed.*

In mid-November a sharp-eyed member reported a large fallen tree branch across the Foss near Landing Lane in Haxby. Despite contacting the Internal Drainage Board, a large amount of plastic debris began to pile up against the branch. As well as this, there was a large plastic drum on the bank next to the tree.

With the help of another member, four bags of rubbish were collected and the plastic drum removed. All was taken to the tip.

Unfortunately, we still await removal of the tree branch.





Eight RFS members met at the footbridge on Foss Islands Road on 20 October, a fine, warm day. We had a disappointing start when it was found that the engine of the CYC boat and pontoon would not start. So we decided to split into three groups to concentrate on litter picking along the banks downstream to Blue Bridge.

The usual black spots were at the Castle car park and the Castle Mills

*How many bikes can one river hold?*



## A cleaner Foss



*Litter pickers display their 'catches'*

lock area. However, we also found a significant level of litter in Wormald's Cut at the back of the Rowntrees Wharf. We collected a significant amount of litter etc, as can be seen from the photograph; and with time to spare we removed a significant amount of green growth from the paved area at Castle Mills lock.

Our Society gained a good level of publicity as a result of everyone wearing an RFS tabard, and we had some positive banter with several members of the public. My grateful thanks go to the RFS members who turned up on the day.

*Barry Thomas*

Eight walkers met on 11 October for this year's last walk. In dry and mild weather we set off on a circular walk from the Dutch House and headed towards Oulston Reservoir. After passing Burton house, we crossed the stepping stones and reached the Reservoir in time for coffee.

## Walking out the year

We walked back past Close House and returned to Dutch House before 1.00 pm having done 5½ miles. This was an enjoyable walk, but we were disappointed to find problems with the signage and stiles on

the route. Also, some of the right of way paths had been ploughed.

As always, the Dutch house made us very welcome and we enjoyed our lunch there.

*Bob Jowett*



**Did you know that the River Foss Society is on Facebook too?**



In April 2018 we became aware of grants offered to not-for-profit community groups by the Guildhall Ward for up to £2,000. Our committee backed the idea of placing a new interpretive sign placed on the River Foss at Monk Bridge. Forming a natural 'park', this area is popular with local residents and members of the public who visit, and use the seats next to the River Foss.

We promoted a sign because we felt that it



## A sign for the times

would not only educate about wildlife and plants on the Foss but also be a guide to appropriate feeding of ducks and geese. It would improve the area and attract local residents as well as reduce anti-social behaviour. And the sign would also be a meeting point for walks and activities on this part of the Foss.

On 11 July we were awarded a smaller grant of £1,000. We then needed to find ways to achieve a durable and robust sign on a smaller budget. It was decided to adapt the design of signs existing at Earswick and Strensall, both funded by River Foss Society. We worked closely with Signs Express to bring this project in for the amount of the grant plus a small amount from the Society.

Once the Council had checked for possible buried cables, the sign was successfully installed on 11 December. The official inauguration on 14 December was attended by eight River Foss Society members, Ann from

the Groves Association and local Councillor Denise Craghill.

We would like to thank the following:

Serena King, who originated the idea of the sign; Jack Woodhams on the Guildhall Ward Committee who managed the Grant Applications; Dave Meigh, City of York Council, who helped with the administrative parts of the contract; John Millett, our Chairman, who provided invaluable advice and records for the two previous signs installed on the Foss by the society; local Councillor Denise Craghill; Ann, the Chair of the Groves Association, and all of those on the



Ward Committee who voted in favour of our proposal. Finally, thanks to Ian at Signs Express and his team for the work in adapting the artwork, and producing and installing the sign. We are delighted with the very professional job they have done.

*Michael Reakes*

Ed. note: We thank Michael for all his work as well!

Don't forget our website:

[www.riverfossociety.co.uk](http://www.riverfossociety.co.uk)



# Water voles along the Foss

We've long heard reports of water voles and otters being seen in and around the river at various points, so as part of our drive to better understand what wildlife we have in

our backyard we decided to carry out a survey along the banks. In cooperation with, and mainly thanks to the efforts of, St Nicks we obtained some joint Local Nature Partnership (LNP) funding. This allowed us to run training courses on what to look for in the way of riparian mammal traces, primarily otters and water voles in this case, and even to buy some waders so that we could wade along the river and closely examine the banks for any traces.

Taking advantage of the low flow rates (and warm water) in August and September, a group of volunteers from RFS and St Nicks waded up the river in stages from Yearsley Baths to West Nooks. We found clear evidence of both water voles and otters in several places along that stretch of the river. We were looking for poo (inevitably, as water vole droppings are vegetable based, and quite distinctive in shape and content from rat droppings, whilst otter spraint is rank and fishy). Other distinctive signs included burrows, characteristically chewed grass stems, and for otters, scrapes and hiding places.

So far so good, but were the water vole traces we found from active colonies, and if so, how big were the colonies?

The next stage was to make some rafts to moor along the banks where traces had been found. This we did during an evening session at St Nicks, and finally in November we started putting them out at suitable points. They will be recovered before the end of the year and possibly reused in the spring. The expectation is that water voles will use the rafts as latrines, and by examining them (in the dry from the banks) on a regular basis, we can get an idea of how many water voles we have. The current generation of rafts uses polystyrene for floata-



*Using the new waders to investigate*

tion, sandwiched between plywood sheets: not ideal, but common practice. For the next generation, Yearsley Baths have agreed to let us have some obsolete floats which will be far more resistant to degradation. We will also be experimenting with corks to see how long they will keep the rafts afloat.

The Foss is not an easy environment for water voles, being prone to sudden rises in river level which, although normally only lasting for a few days, are very disruptive to animals living in burrows at or near the normal water level. The banks are also very steep, and neither these nor the borders of the river have much vegetation thanks to the over-enthusiastic cleaning up and mowing that always seems to be going on. It therefore seems likely that the water vole population along the Foss is periodically reinforced by the healthy colonies living on Strensall Common, which is less prone to serious flooding.

We will survey the reaches upstream from the Common next year, but the suggestion is that whereas walkers (with and without dogs) scare off mink downstream from the common, that does not happen above Walbutt's where the path leaves the river. We don't know how many mink there are around here, but there are certainly some, and they are vicious predators who find water voles easy to catch, so it will be interesting to see what we find.

If anyone would like to join in these adventures, you will be most welcome. Please contact Mike Gray via [sdmike05@gmail.com](mailto:sdmike05@gmail.com) or on 07596 366342.

*Mike Gray*



*Preparing a raft to help count voles*



# Fishing the Foss

This past season we saw the Foss at a low level in many locations due to the hot spell. As always, duckweed was very much in evidence at many locations. Even with the low water levels and weed, many small fish have been seen whilst chub, dace and roach have been in evidence. My records show regular catches of these as well as occasional perch and bream. One great surprise was to see the first tench above Huntington Road for some time. As fish can move up to several miles it would seem that during hot weather they can find better pools.

Angling is prohibited by the Environment Agency (EA) in the annual 'close' season from 15 March to 15 June. This is to protect the fish during spawning at those times. Many anglers, myself included, would prefer to do away with this close season but to ban the use of keepnets at those times. Anglers contribute to the health of a river by looking out for any problems. With a total ban this does not get done.

We were pleased that the fishing rights of York and district Amalgamation of Anglers have recently been clarified by notices affixed at Strensall; the bailiffs are now able to remove anybody fishing illegally. Shepherds' Angling Club holds yearly matches along Huntington



*A tench - not often seen above Huntington Road*

Road but lack of parking keeps many of us away from these.

Nearly every time I fish on the Foss I see a flash of blue. I've tried to estimate a kingfisher's speed by timing it over a quarter mile: 8 seconds. That's over 100 mph! One actually flew under my rod at Huntington - a collision would have been disastrous, but the bird was

clever enough to miss. I have twice had one perch on my rod during these encounters, an intriguing situation. While fishing at Strensall in October a small copper butterfly rested on a wild flower next to me. This plant was possibly *Brassica Nigra*, black mustard, a dainty yellow flower, still flowering in autumn where the banks have previously been cut. Apparently an example of management success.

I have not seen a water vole for a few years. And I estimate the quantity of fish in the Foss to be about 50% less than 10 years ago. It is my belief that the reduction in fish numbers is due to the presence of otters. To that end, I had a letter published in *Angling Times* entitled 'Otter Nonsense'.

Anyway, I do still enjoy my weekly visit to the River Foss.

*David Findlay*

## An essential service

Last October a small RFS group was given a tour of the sewage treatment plant at Walbutt's above Strensall. Our thanks go to Yorkshire Water for giving us this rare opportunity and to the staff at the site for welcoming us, showing us round, and answering all our questions about the process.

1. Walbutt's receives up to 3500 cubic metres of raw sewage daily from Haxby, Strensall, Earswick and Huntington
2. Treatment stage one is a screen to remove debris such as wet wipes and sanitary products which go to landfill.
3. Stage two slows the flow to remove (road) grit which is recycled or sent to landfill.

### On the Foss

Editor: Beth Shurter Tel. 01904 631125  
email: york.beth2@gmail.com

Secretary: Alison Scott Tel. 01904 766206  
email: alisonscott3029@hotmail.com

Membership: Elaine Mephram  
Tel. 01904 769168  
email: membership@riverfossociety.co.uk

4. Stage three is a settlement tank from which sludge is removed via a rotating scraper. Aluminium sulphate (the only chemical added) helps it settle. It goes to Naburn by tanker for further processing.
5. Stage four is a set of biological filters: beds of porous stones provide a massive surface on which bacteria and invertebrates grow and remove suspended solids and unwanted bacteria.
6. Stage five has six parallel humus tanks containing microporous beads which act as a suspension medium for a final bacterial purification to reduce phosphate, ammonia, aluminium and heavy metals.
7. Finally, the water goes into a lagoon to allow settlement of any remaining sludge before undergoing a battery of tests as it is discharged into the Foss. Walbutt's complies with two sets of legislation. UK regulations require daily sampling both onsite and at a Yorkshire Water laboratory. EU regulations require monthly checks, also carried out off-site.
8. The Haxby (Cobbs Cottage) site pumps all its sewage to the Walbutt's site. Both it and Haxby Storm Tanks STW have consent to discharge screened and diluted sewage into the Foss during storm conditions when the system is overloaded. Walbutt's has neither the facility nor consent to do so.

*Mike Gray*