

News story: Skipton Flood Alleviation Scheme officially opened

The £17.8 million project, led by the Environment Agency, helps to protect 378 homes and 165 businesses in the town centre from flooding from Eller Beck and Waller Hill Beck, which rise very quickly after heavy rain. The project is designed to provide the town with this new level of protection over the course of the next 100 years.

Skipton has suffered from flooding from these becks as recently as December 2015. Prior to this Skipton has experienced a significant flooding in 1908, 1979, 1982, 2000, 2004 and 2007. A life was lost as a result of the 1982 flood.

Construction of the scheme started in March 2015, where two flood storage areas have been created upstream of Skipton at Eller Beck near Skipton Golf Club, and Waller Hill Beck to slow the flow of water from the surrounding hills, reducing the risk of the becks causing floods in the town centre.

The new flood storage areas can hold a combined total of 111 million gallons of water equivalent to 168 Olympic sized swimming pools, or 5.2 million bathtubs.

Eller Beck near Skipton Golf Course is the larger of the two storage areas. A 13 metre high, 610 metre wide earthworks dam has been built which can hold 433,000 cubic metres of water or 95 million gallons. Normal flows pass unrestricted through a pipe known as a culvert within the dam, but during a flood, a barrier called a penstock will be lowered to block off the culvert inlet so that water can be held back to form a reservoir.

The dam at Waller Hill is 9 metres high, 105 metres wide, and has the capacity to hold 72,000 cubic metres of water, or nearly 16 million gallons. A concrete culvert with inlet and outlet has been constructed to allow the beck to flow during normal conditions, which allows high river flows to be held back.

The scheme also includes 300 metres of new flood defence walls including new raised walls that have been constructed in the town centre at Morrison's car park, and near private gardens and a children's play area further upstream in the town. Some of the defences have been clad in matching stone to blend in with other buildings in the conservation area.

Environmental considerations include an otter ledge running through the culvert as well as an otter hedge running around the outside of Eller Beck Dam. These new wildlife-friendly additions will help to open up access for any local otter populations. A significant number of trees have also been planted around the two sites as well as further up the catchment including alder, oak, white willow as well as holly, hazel and blackthorn hedgerows.

Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, said:

Skipton is a town which knows the devastating impacts of flooding. We can never prevent all flooding, but we can reduce the risk of it happening and the damage if it does. I am delighted that this scheme will see hundreds of homes and businesses better protected for years to come.

This scheme forms part of more than half a billion pounds worth of government funding which we are investing across the whole of Yorkshire between 2015-2021 to reduce flood risk to nearly 60,000 properties.

The majority of the funding for the project has come from the Environment Agency which has contributed over £11m. Further funding also came from the Defra Growth Fund (£1.7m), North Yorkshire County Council (£750k), Yorkshire Regional Flood and Coastal Committee £300k and Yorkshire Water (£250k).

The scheme will also open up land to development for businesses which will have a positive impact on job creation and economic activity in the area and therefore benefits from Government Growth Deal funding, a deal between government and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) to transform regional economy. The awarding bodies are the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Enterprise Partnership which awarded the scheme £1.2m, and Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership, which extended a further £1.5m.

The scheme has also been made possible with support from Skipton Town Council, local businesses, the local community, and Craven District Council, who played an integral part in the successful application for significant Local Growth Funding.