

Press release: 20 years after the Northamptonshire Easter floods

The Environment Agency and its partners are calling on people to take steps to prepare for flooding and keep themselves and their families safe, 20 years after the Easter floods of 1998 caused devastation in Northamptonshire.

In 1998, an unusually wet spring led to severe flooding, with thousands of homes across the county affected. Two people lost their lives and over 150 people were hospitalised.

Northamptonshire County Council, Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, Northamptonshire Police and the Environment Agency worked together both over the course of the floods and during the recovery process. In the 20 years since Easter 1998, great strides have been made to help protect over 7,000 properties that are at risk of flooding in the county.

The EA has invested £12 million in flood risk management in Northamptonshire over the last 2 decades. This investment contributed towards the completion of a number of works, including the construction of a flood storage reservoir at Weedon and significant improvements on the flood defences at Far Cotton and St James.

The EA is planning with its partners to invest a further £1.8 million by 2021 to reduce flood risk to even more people and properties across the county.

In addition to this investment, the EA has also made progress by using modern technology to improve the way it can warn people when flooding is possible. Over 4,500 properties in Northamptonshire are now signed up to receive flood warnings via their landlines, mobile phones or email addresses through the EA's free flood warning service.

Although the EA and its partners work around the clock to protect people and their property from flooding, the risk can never be completely eliminated. A third of properties at risk are still not registered to receive flood warnings, as residents have not signed up to the EA's free flood warning service. The EA urges people to prepare themselves and their loved ones for flooding by signing up now.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Flooding is always devastating for those affected, and I know this has been the case for people and businesses in Northamptonshire.

That is why we have invested almost £12m in Northamptonshire flood defences in the past 20 years with a further £1.8m planned by 2021 to reduce the risk even further for home owners and businesses.

Environment Agency Area Flood Risk Manager Ben Thornely said:

Although we can reflect on 20 years of progress being made since the significant floods of 1998, we also recognise that flooding remains a risk to local communities across Northamptonshire. Our staff and our partners work around the clock to protect people and their properties from flooding, but we can never stop the risk completely.

This is why our free flood warning service is so important. Flood warnings give people valuable time to prepare for flooding – time that allows them to move themselves, their families and precious items to safety. Our flood warnings save lives and enable the emergency services to prepare and help communities.

I'd urge residents across the county to check whether they are at risk of flooding and to sign up for flood warnings, by visiting www.gov.uk/flood or calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Cllr Ian Morris, county council cabinet member for transport, highways and environment, said:

Working with partners as the Lead Local Flood Authority for the County, an enormous amount of work has been done in the past two decades to tackle local flood risks.

The Pathfinder projects have empowered communities to tailor-make measures for their local areas, while the award-winning Flood Toolkit provides an online resource which acts as a central point of information for all flood-related issues.

However, we cannot be complacent and we recognise that we must continue to work together with the people of Northamptonshire to further reduce flood risk.

Cllr Mike Hallam, Northampton Borough Council's Cabinet member for environment, said:

Such events can be disastrous and it can take an age to recover from the devastation they leave in their wake.

A huge amount of work has been done in the past 2 decades to minimise the risk of such an awful event occurring again in Northampton but we remain ready to offer whatever support is needed in the event that it does.

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service's Deputy Chief Fire Officer David Harding, who served during the flooding 20 years ago, said:

As in 1998, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service is there to help and protect people.

Advances in both training and equipment mean we are well prepared and equipped to respond to all emergency incidents requiring our services, including flooding, but our aim is to help prevent incidents before life is at risk. In this respect I urge everyone to help themselves and be prepared by signing up to the flood warning system.