

Plans for a flood storage area in York approved by planning chiefs

Proposals to create a flood storage area on the River Foss north of Strensall were approved by York City Council's planning committee today (Thursday).

The new flood storage area will better protect 490 vulnerable homes between Strensall and The Groves area of York from flooding. This scheme, in the rural area 2km north of Strensall, will also reduce flood risk to key transport routes and result in benefits to the environment including tree planting, wetland creation and improvements to river bank habitat.

The purpose of the storage area is to help reduce peak flows in the river, therefore reducing flooding downstream. During heavy rain, the structure fills with water, temporarily holding back flood water and reducing the flood risk to properties along the Foss Corridor, towards York city centre. Once the flood has passed the water in the storage area will subside. For the vast majority of time the structure will not need to be used in this way which means that farming practices will be able to continue in the area.

Project manager Richard Lever, from the Environment Agency, said:

These areas are not like reservoirs and do not store water permanently. They are designed to be dry in normal weather conditions and only fill up for short periods during large flood events.

Unlike other physical flood defences, a flood storage area can be built at some distance from the communities they protect and therefore have less impact than building formal defences.

During a flood event, the level of the River Foss can rise rapidly exposing properties, roads and land to the risk of severe flooding. This is likely to increase with more extreme weather conditions predicted due to climate change. Currently there are no flood defences along the Foss Corridor and a flood storage area is the only viable option.

Out of all the projects included in the Yorks Flood Alleviation Scheme, this proposal will deliver the largest benefits in terms of numbers of properties protected.

Mr Lever said:

As well as reducing flood risk, the storage area will also have environmental benefits. This scheme will facilitate the growth of

valuable wetland habitat, create space for local wildlife and help improve water quality downstream.

Materials for building the embankment for the storage area will be taken from within the site, creating pits which fill with water and act as permanent shallow ponds.

Discussions about the proposals have been held at parish council meetings, public events and with landowners, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the Foss Internal Drainage Board and Natural England.

The planning application for the flood storage area will also need to be approved by Ryedale District Council as it falls with the boundary of both councils.

Following the severe flooding in York in Dec 2015, where over 600 properties were flooded, central Government committed £45m to fund projects to better protect properties in the city.

Environment Agency flood schemes protected almost 130,000 properties during the winter 2019/20 flooding, even though water levels were higher in some places than the floods of 2007 when 55,000 properties flooded.

Since 2015, the Government has invested £496m flood defences in Yorkshire – more than any other region – better protecting more than 66,000 properties

For more information about York's Flood Alleviation Scheme [visit](#)

Make sure you are prepared for a flood event and find out if you are at risk [visit](#)

New Transformation Business Group created

Over the past few months, leaders from across HMRC have worked together to set out a 10-year tax strategy and how we will achieve it. To support this, we are creating a Transformation Business Group, to be led by Joanna Rowland in a new Director General role.

Joanna has headed the HMRC programme and project management profession since January 2018 and became interim Director General for our Covid-19 response last August, leading the implementation of the Chancellor's packages to support businesses and jobs such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

During this time Joanna passed a recruitment panel for substantive promotion to another Director General role and has been confirmed by the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary directly into this new role.

The new transformation group will have 3 core functions:

- directly delivering our major cross-cutting programmes, while ensuring collaboration across HMRC's other business groups
- exercising oversight and coordination of the portfolio, both the major changes and the range of projects that will continue to be delivered from other business groups
- leading HMRC's project delivery function, setting standards and ensuring project professionals are trained, developed and perform to those standards

HMRC's Executive Committee (ExCom) will work with senior change leads across the department to agree which programmes require the dedicated oversight of this new group. While the group gets established, its remit will focus on establishing the standards all projects will work to, continuing to oversee the COVID-related projects and taking leadership of the flagship Making Tax Digital programme.

Key to the successful implementation of our long term HMRC strategy will be our ability to lay out, in a clear multi-year roadmap, the combination of policy, process, people and IT changes we need to make.

As we develop planning processes to support this, we will need to work together to ensure the roadmap is complete, coordinated and delivered. The new Transformation Group will support and enable the direct delivery of major cross-cutting programmes together with oversight and coordination of a portfolio of wider change projects which, together, move us forward.

Joanna will report to Angela MacDonald, HMRC Deputy Chief Executive and Second Permanent Secretary, who said:

I'm delighted to announce Jo's appointment, which is critical for delivering the support our customers need in these exceptionally busy and challenging times and will be key in helping us to build trust in our administration of tax and customs.

Jo has done an incredible job leading the delivery of the COVID-19 support schemes over the past few months and has substantial previous experience in leading transformation programmes across government.

Joanna, who will base herself in Portsmouth, commented:

Over the last few months, HMRC has rightly won plaudits for the work we have done to support customers and the UK economy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I've been proud to lead our

response and thrilled to see the can-do attitude of our people that has helped us achieve so much in such a short period of time.

I want to carry this energy forward into the longer-term transformation of our department to meet the challenges ahead as we recover and reshape our economy in the post-Brexit world and create a world-leading digital tax and customs authority.

New additions to the travel corridor lists for England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- Israel, Jerusalem, Namibia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Virgin Islands added to list of travel corridors for England, Wales and Northern Ireland having been assessed by the Joint Biosecurity Centre as posing a lower infection risk
- no countries are being removed from the travel corridors this week
- travellers urged to check the latest advice from the FCDO before travelling and will be required to fill in a passenger locator form before returning home

Israel, Jerusalem, Namibia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Virgin Islands have been added to the [travel corridor list for England](#), Wales and Northern Ireland following a decrease in risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) in these destinations.

From 4am on Saturday 21 November 2020, passengers arriving into England, Wales and Northern Ireland from these destinations will no longer need to [self-isolate](#) so long as they haven't been in or transited through any other non-exempt countries in the 14 days preceding their arrival.

The travel corridor applies for Israel in its entirety, and Jerusalem in its entirety. For the Occupied Palestinian Territories, only East Jerusalem is included in the travel corridor. The remainder of the Occupied Palestinian Territories are not included. Travellers arriving from locations that are not included will still need to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival in the UK.

This decision is driven by public health considerations based on epidemiological evidence.

There will be no removals from the travel corridors this week.

At the same time, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has updated its [travel advice](#) to no longer advise against all but essential travel to Israel, Jerusalem, Namibia, Rwanda, Uruguay, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Virgin Islands. The changes reflect the latest assessments by Public Health England (PHE) of the risk to travellers in these destinations.

The government has made consistently clear it will take decisive action if necessary to contain the virus, including removing countries from the travel corridors list rapidly if the public health risk of people returning from a particular country without self-isolating becomes too high.

[National restrictions](#) introduced on 5 November 2020 remain in place meaning everyone must stay at home unless travelling for a very limited set of reasons, including for work or education. This means people can no longer travel to take holidays or travel internationally unless for work or other legally permitted reasons. Those in breach of the rules face penalties starting at £200 and rising to a maximum of £6,400.

The travel ban on Denmark introduced on 7 November 2020 is also still in place. British nationals, Irish nationals and people with the right to reside in the UK who have been in or transited through Denmark in the 14 days before their arrival in the UK will need to self-isolate along with all other members of their household for 14 days from the date they were last in Denmark.

COVID-19 has profoundly changed the nature of international travel. Travellers should always check the latest advice from the FCDO, given the potential for changing coronavirus infection rates to affect both the advice about travelling to other countries and rules about self-isolation on return.

All travellers, including those from exempt destinations, will still be required to show a complete [passenger locator form](#) on arrival into the UK unless they fall into a small group of exemptions.

Penalties for those breaching the self-isolation rules when returning from non-exempt countries have increased from £1,000 for first offences up to £10,000 for subsequent offences, mirroring penalties for those breaching self-isolation following a positive COVID test or contact from Test and Trace.

Third round of Indonesian and UK governments' Joint Trade Review

The ongoing Joint Trade Review is a collaboration between Indonesia and the UK to assess the current state of our bilateral trade and investment relationship, as well as looking to identify possible opportunities to enhance bilateral cooperation for the future.

The review is based on empirical analysis and engagement with various stakeholders, including businesses operating in both countries. It will result in a joint report which will include recommendations to both governments.

In the latest phase of the Indonesia-UK Joint Trade Review the Indonesian Ministry of Trade and the UK's Department for International Trade, held a third round of discussions on 18-19 November 2020. The Indonesian delegation was led by Director General of International Trade Negotiation, Mr. Iman Pambagyo, and the UK's delegation led by Director of Bilateral Trade Relations, Cathryn Law.

Both parties shared the same view on the importance of this Joint Trade Review, particularly during the challenging state of global pandemic.

Excellent progress was made towards further strengthening our bilateral trade relations at the meeting, with discussions focused on enhancing trade and investment performance across a wide range of potential sectors, including education, agricultural products, food and beverages, technology, pharmaceutical and healthcare, infrastructure and transportation, wood and wooden products, renewable energy, financial and professional services, and the creative economy.

The Indonesian head of delegation provided an update of Indonesia's current trade policy, including the signing of the world's largest regional agreement Regional Comprehensive and Economic Partnership (RCEP) during The Fourth RCEP Summit on 15 November 2020 and the progress of other bilateral trade negotiations. The UK delegation provided updates at the meeting about the recently signed trade agreement between the UK and Japan and ongoing EU discussions.

As G20 members, both Indonesia and the UK place great importance on this trade review process to help boost future growth and support economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Director General of International Trade Negotiation, Pak Iman Pambagyo, said:

During the past two days, both sides had productive discussion on the outstanding issues in 10 potential sectors and agreed "the solution-oriented basis" as the best approach to address the challenges and barriers within the potential sectors. I also

acknowledged that both sides had strongly expressed their commitments to finalize and sign the report in January 2021 and had identified the next steps of JTR after it is completed. We believe this Review will open a pathway to better bilateral economic relations in the future and elevate both countries to the next altitude.

Director of Bilateral Trade Relations, Cathryn Law, added:

This week we made substantial progress on the UK-Indonesia joint trade review. Indonesia is an important partner for the UK, as the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. We are looking forward to finalising our review soon with agreement to further enhance our bilateral trade and investment across a range of key sectors.

Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 19 November

Mr Chair,

Two weeks ago, we listened as Professor Wolfgang Benedek delivered his report under the Moscow Mechanism into the human rights violations in Belarus. The UK, together with a majority of other OSCE participating States, expressed again our shock and regret at what has happened and continues to happen in Belarus. We called on the Belarusian authorities to immediately change their approach, cease violence against peaceful protestors and engage in a national dialogue with all sectors of society.

It is now over 100 days since the fraudulent Presidential elections of 9 August, which were the context for the political crisis and turmoil that has unfolded in Belarus. The Belarusian authorities have not ceased their campaign of repression. Almost 30,000 peaceful demonstrators and journalists have either been arrested or detained. Over 900 people face charges in politically motivated criminal cases. The authorities deploy weaponry against their citizens, throw stun grenades into crowds causing injuries, and forcibly enter the homes of those they accuse of harbouring protestors.

Students have been expelled from their universities and academics removed from their positions for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of speech. One week ago, on the day of our last Permanent Council meeting, a 31 year old Belarusian and opposition supporter, Mr Raman Bandarenka, died from his injuries in hospital in Minsk, after being savagely beaten – allegedly by plain clothed representatives of the Belarusian authorities.

The case of Mr Bandarenka is a further shocking example of the repression that is being carried out by the Belarusian authorities on its own people. A full and transparent investigation must be carried out into Mr Bandarenka's death, and those responsible brought to justice. All such violence must stop. Our thoughts and prayers are, of course, with Mr Bandarenka's family and friends at this difficult time.

Mr Chair,

Since the illegitimate Presidential elections, the Belarusian authorities have committed massive and systematic human rights violations with impunity. In his independent report, Professor Benedek informed this Permanent Council of the evidence of the Belarusian authorities acting with excessive violence, and their involvement in torture and other ill-treatment. He also noted the general impunity under which the Belarusian security forces have been operating.

Yet since the election, not a single criminal case has been brought against the Belarusian security forces. This is despite the clear evidence of excessive violence documented by Belarusian human rights defenders, journalists and media workers, and broadcast around the world. Those members of the Belarusian media have themselves been subject to serious attack. Their dedication and bravery and the importance of the work they do was recognised earlier this week when [the Belarusian Association of Journalists was awarded the first Canada/UK Media Freedom Award](#) at the Global Conference for Media Freedom 2020.

The Belarusian government's attempts to hide their actions have not only seen journalists, media actors and civil society attacked. They also expelled two UK diplomats from our Embassy in Minsk for legitimately observing protests – a wholly unjustified action, and another example of the Lukashenko regime's attempts to prevent others shining a light on what is happening in Belarus.

Mr Chair,

The tragic death of Mr Bandarenka highlights the importance of immediate action by the Belarusian authorities. We call – yet again – on the Belarusian government to end their campaign of violence against protestors, release all those unjustly imprisoned and detained, and hold perpetrators of the violence to account. We request the authorities fully investigate all accounts of abuses and violations.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to implement the recommendations in Professor Benedek's recent report and seek a peaceful and democratic solution to the current ongoing crisis. In that regard, we remind the Belarusian authorities of the offer made by the Chair in Office to facilitate a national dialogue with the representatives of the opposition and civil society.

Thank you.