

Flooding affecting the B1127 at Potter's Bridge

October 2024

The Environment Agency and its predecessors have been managing the main river outfall to the sea at Easton Broad for several decades using plant to excavate the beach, channel and outfall. We have managed the site to help control water levels on Easton Broad as consistent levels are beneficial to the status of the designated features of the site. This is principally breeding birds in the spring and summer months from February onwards through to September. However, even with channel clearance, the road will still be regularly subject to fresh and seawater flooding as it is low lying and undefended. We do understand that road closures on the B1127 when it floods impact and disrupt daily life for local residents. As a result, we are working collaboratively with Suffolk County Council, Natural England and the local landowners regarding this issue.

This section of coast, which is otherwise undefended, has been subject to an ongoing average coastal erosion rate of 2 to 3 metres per year. Since 2021, ongoing erosion and natural processes have rendered the outfall redundant, and it is now located on the beach. Management of the freshwater drainage has therefore been by opening a channel through the beach, bypassing this redundant outfall. Historically, machinery has been permanently located on site, however, this is no longer permitted. This management approach is a resource intense activity during storm season, which requires regular attendance of operatives on site and the use of large plant, tracking to the beach from the farm access at Easton Lane, to coincide with optimum tidal working windows. Once channel clearance is undertaken, prevailing weather conditions can infill the excavation rapidly. Both Natural England and the Environment Agency acknowledge that the current management regime is not sustainable. We must prioritise our work on rivers and the coast so that it reduces flood risk for people, homes and businesses. Furthermore, in 2023 the Environment Agency needed to obtain a court warrant to access the site due to the landowner refusing permission for us to access the site to carry out channel clearance.

We are aware that, due to recent heavy rainfall, the water levels on Easton Broad have reached the point where there is flooding of the road at Potters Bridge. In January 2024 we issued a Flood Risk Activity Permit to the local landowners to enable them to undertake channel clearance work to help alleviate high water levels on Easton Broad. We cannot instruct the landowners to undertake channel clearance, and they are not obliged to do so. They have, however, recently undertaken some work and at the time of writing water levels on the Broad are falling.

The Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) states that the policy intent for Easton Broad is to maintain a non-intervention approach for the medium term (2025-2055), supporting development of a natural coastline and opportunities for environmental transition to more sustainable saline habitats. There is also recognition within the SMP that the B1127 road at Potter's Bridge will become increasingly exposed to flood risk over time. Channel clearance work at the outfall will not stop floods occurring. This road has always been subject to periodic flooding during weather events and ongoing climate change is likely to make the situation worse in the future. The B1127 road is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council Highways and any new improvement project to manage flood risk to the highway is for them to consider and develop. This is a sensitive coastal environment, and we will support Suffolk County Council with technical advice and guidance, working with Natural England and other external bodies.

