

Motion submitted by Councillor Mrs Laws

Reducing the B1040 Closure Risk owing to Flooding

Significant disruption is caused, both in Whittlesey and in neighbouring areas, each time the B1040 is closed because of flooding or potential flooding of the Whittlesey Washes flood storage reservoir.

Flood water is deliberately stored on the Whittlesey Washes when high water levels on the River Nene cannot be released downstream because of high tides. The Whittlesey Washes therefore play a vital role in reducing the risk of flooding in a wide area used for residential, commercial and agricultural uses.

Operation of the Whittlesey Washes system is managed by the Environment Agency (EA) primarily using control of the sluice gates at Stanground to allow ingress of water to the Washes, with water egress from the Washes back into the River Nene being controlled at Ring's End, some 18 kilometres further downstream. The EA monitoring station at Wansford is a crucial indicator for predicting the need to operate the sluice gates at Stanground.

Unfortunately, much of the sluice infrastructure is old and does not always function correctly. Additionally, monitoring equipment measuring water levels and the operations of the sluice gates has also proved not to be wholly reliable.

As a result, there have been several occasions recently where more water has been allowed to flow into the Whittlesey Washes than strictly necessary, or where water has not been taken off the Washes as quickly as possible because of equipment failure at Ring's End.

The amount of water on the Whittlesey Washes directly affects both the need to close the B1040 and the amount of time it needs to remain closed.

Closures of the B1040 have a significant financial and social impact on Whittlesey and its surrounding communities. Whatever can be done to reduce the number, or the length of time, of these road closures will have a major positive impact on the whole area.

Full Council therefore:

1. Agrees that FDC liaise with the EA to arrange for real-time or near real-time access to the EA data measuring cumecs (Cubic Metres per Second) of water flowing through the River Nene upriver at Wansford
2. Agrees that FDC liaise with the EA to arrange for readings to be made more widely available of the percentage opening of the automated sluice gates at Stanground Sluice (i) when the automated sluice gates are open and (b) when the cumecs measurement at Wansford is close to the level when the automated sluice gates at Stanground may be opened.
3. Agrees that FDC propose to the EA that a Whittlesey Washes Interest Group (WWIG) be established to improve communication between and decision-making by the EA, the Highways Authorities, North Level IDB and local councillors and landowners so far as management of water in the Washes is concerned.