

Ouse Washes: Middle Level Barrier Bank raising works

June 2021

The Middle Level Barrier Bank is the bank of the Ouse Washes reservoir extending from Earith to Welmore Lake Sluice. The work we are doing is to comply with recommendations made by the reservoir Inspecting Engineer and we have a statutory deadline to complete the works by, under the Reservoir Act 1975.

We started raising the bank in 2017 and we must complete the physical work by December 2022, and we must establish good grass cover by December 2024.

Due to environmental constraints on the Ouse Washes, we can only work between 15 July and 31 October. We have started ecological surveys and grass cutting and have met with our environmental stakeholders. Natural England has agreed an extended working window for this year from 1 June and we will use this time to do winter repairs and haul road work before we start the main bank works in July.

Ready for the demountable flood barrier to be installed next year. Openreach will be undertaking some utility protection works on 21 May 2021 for one day. The work will take place on the A1101 in Welney on the bridge. They intend to use a stop & go board traffic management system whilst they carry out this work.

Trespassing & vandalism

We have been experiencing problems with trespass and vandalism over the winter and spring. The metal security fencing, signage, gates are being vandalised and, in some places, removed which is providing unauthorised access to the site at Welney and Welches Dam in Manea.

For the duration of the Ouse Washes Section 10 works the Middle Level Barrier Bank is considered to be a construction site. By law our contractor Jackson Civil Engineering has to restrict access to all construction areas where the works are not complete. We want to keep you safe. Construction sites are dangerous places with many hidden hazards, and we are working hard to keep all the security fencing and gates secure and will do all we can to protect you.

Year 5 (2021) bank raising works

We need to finish all the bank raising works before we can start building the foundation for the demountable flood barrier at Welney. This is because the access to the haul road at Welney is the only way to bring clay in to finish the bank raising between there and the railway bridge. There's not enough room, and it won't be safe, to bring deliveries in at Welney and do the barrier works at the same time. We will also repair flood damage sustained during the winter.

Year 5 (2021)

- April – May Ecological surveys and grass cuts full length of the Middle Level Barrier Bank.
- June – July Haul road repairs and topsoil slip repairs.
- July - Oct Repair flood damage sustained during the winter.
- July – Oct Finish the bank raising work between:
 - Welney and the railway bridge
 - Welches Dam and the railway bridge
 - A142, Mepal and Welches Dam
- Sep – Oct Install the remaining 2 bird hides at the RSPB Reserve.
- October Reinstatement of the haul road.



Public footpath and bridleway access

Where is open?

- Welmore Lake Sluice to Welney
- A142, Mepal to Sutton Gault, will close for work from June 2021.
- Earith Sluice to Sutton Gault.
- South Level Barrier Bank – Sutton Gault to Short Drove.

Where is Closed?

- A142, Mepal to Welches Dam
- Welches Dam to railway bridge
- Welney to railway bridge

Diversions and closures are clearly signposted

Demountable flood barrier at Welney Wash road/A1101.

We held an online consultation from 12 March to 30 September 2020 asking communities for their views on the best time to close the Welney Wash Road to complete the demountable flood barrier works.

The full consultation response document can be viewed online on our information page <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/east-anglia-c-e/ouse-washes-section-10-works/> along with the Frequently Asked Questions documents. Our contractor has programmed the construction work to meet the preferred timings as best they can.

Year 6 (2022)

- April – May Ecological surveys and grass cuts on the full length of the Middle Level Barrier Bank.
- June Divert the public footpath north from Welney to Welmore Lake Sluice to Low Bank.
- June – July Build the abutment walls each side of the road. We should be able to do this work without the need for any traffic management on the road.
- July – Aug Full road closure so we can excavate and construct the foundation slab across the road. This will take about 6 weeks.
- Aug – Sep Temporary traffic lights in place while we install the stub walls that the temporary barrier attaches to.
- Sep – Oct Reinstate the footpath, fencing and tidy up the embankments.
- October Practical training session to install the barrier.

Visit our virtual room to find out more

We are opening a virtual exhibition room to provide an alternative way for community members and interested parties to find out more about the project and next steps. This virtual room will include a video, animations of how the Ouse Washes Flood Storage Reservoir works and how the demountable flood barrier will be constructed.

Here's the link to the virtual room <http://eaousewashesbanks.co.uk/> which will remain open for two months, until 31 July 2021.

Stay up to date and visit our information page for the most up to date information <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/east-anglia-c-e/ouse-washes-section-10-works/>



Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please contact our Public Liaison Officer: Monica Stonham via email ousewashesprojectea@gmail.com or call 07534 457348.

If you would like to be added to our mailing list to receive future updates about this scheme, please contact us through the email address and telephone number given above.

Thank you for taking the time to read this update.



The project is being carried out by JacksonHyder on behalf of the Environment Agency with support from:



Why we cut the grass on flood defences

May 2021

Floodline 0345 988 1188

Incident Hotline 0800 80 70 60

At this time of year, you will see our contractors out and about cutting grass on the Middle Level Barrier Bank. We have again this year received enquiries as to why is this really necessary. Especially when amongst the grass there may be pollinator friendly wildflowers and habitat for nesting birds.

Let's explain why we do this, the detailed planning behind it and how we're always working to create a better place in everything we do.



Our flood defences come in a range of shapes and sizes. Some are large moving barriers (like the Thames Barrier), others are made of glass, steel or concrete and many (like the Ouse Washes reservoir) are natural looking earth embankments. Often found in scenic locations, these embankments are great places to go for a walk, spend time with friends and family and be close to nature.

What many people don't realise is that the embankments are manmade – usually from clay, covered with soil and then grass – they help protect our villages, towns and cities from flooding during storm surges and times of high rainfall.

Just like any piece of engineering, they need regular maintenance to ensure they work when they need to. Some of our most important defences are our flood storage reservoirs, each one holds more than 25,000 tonnes of water. Maintenance of these reservoirs has to be done to a high standard because the consequence of the embankment failing could potentially put people's lives at risk and result in flooded communities. Grass has to be kept short on the banks to ensure it forms dense grass sods. These create a consistent root network, making the banks more resilient to erosion from waves, over topping and heavy rain.

Dense sods are just one part of it. Keeping the grass short means, we can monitor it for defects - often an early warning sign of something more significant. Shorter vegetation also discourages vermin from digging into the bank.

We know that for some people the sight of swathes of grass being cut can be distressing, especially when you take into account pollinators and nesting birds, we want to assure you that it's not an activity we do lightly. All our engineering and maintenance is guided by independent research and best practice borne out of a number of independent reports over the years. We have teams of biodiversity specialists whose role it is to advise throughout the year on the best time to carry out our maintenance work.

When carrying out the work we use specialist industrial mowers which are quieter than domestic lawn mowers. Before mowing the machine operator will walk over the site to try and identify any nesting birds or other habitat or hazards. Our staff are diligent and will stop work if they see something of interest to get further advice.

It's not all cut, cut, cut though. Across the country we work closely with organisations to create biodiversity. More about this is our next newsletter.

I hope this gives you an insight into why we maintain our flood embankments in the way we do and sheds some light on lots of the work you might not see.

