

Whittlesey (Nene) Washes Factsheet

Spring 2022

The Whittlesey (Nene) Washes Flood Storage Reservoir lies to the south of the River Nene, east of Peterborough. This factsheet aims to explain the partnership approach to operating and managing the Washes to reduce flood risk for the local community and businesses.

What are the Whittlesey (Nene) Washes and how do they work?

The Washes have been utilised as a flood storage area, in some form, since the 16th Century. They are formally registered under the Reservoirs Act (1975) and are now a critical flood risk asset for the River Nene and local area.

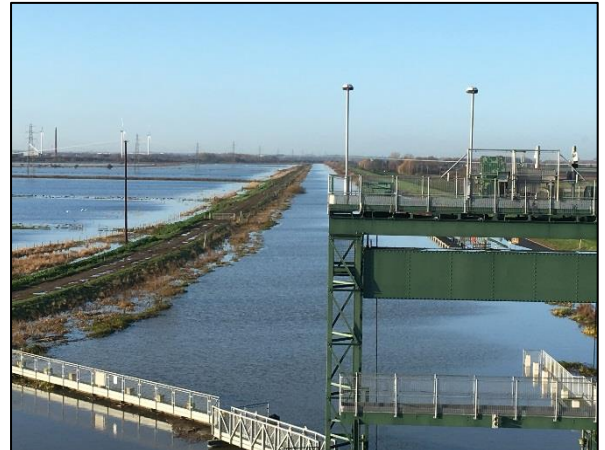
- The reservoir is approximately 20km long and up to 1.4km wide in places, and covers an area of 1,450 hectares
- It can temporarily store the equivalent of 14,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools of flood water
- It reduces the risk of flooding to properties as well as roads, railways and more than 8,000 hectares of farmland in the fenland area to the south east of Peterborough.



Whittlesey (Nene) Washes, Easter 1998 floods



Stanground Sluice in operation

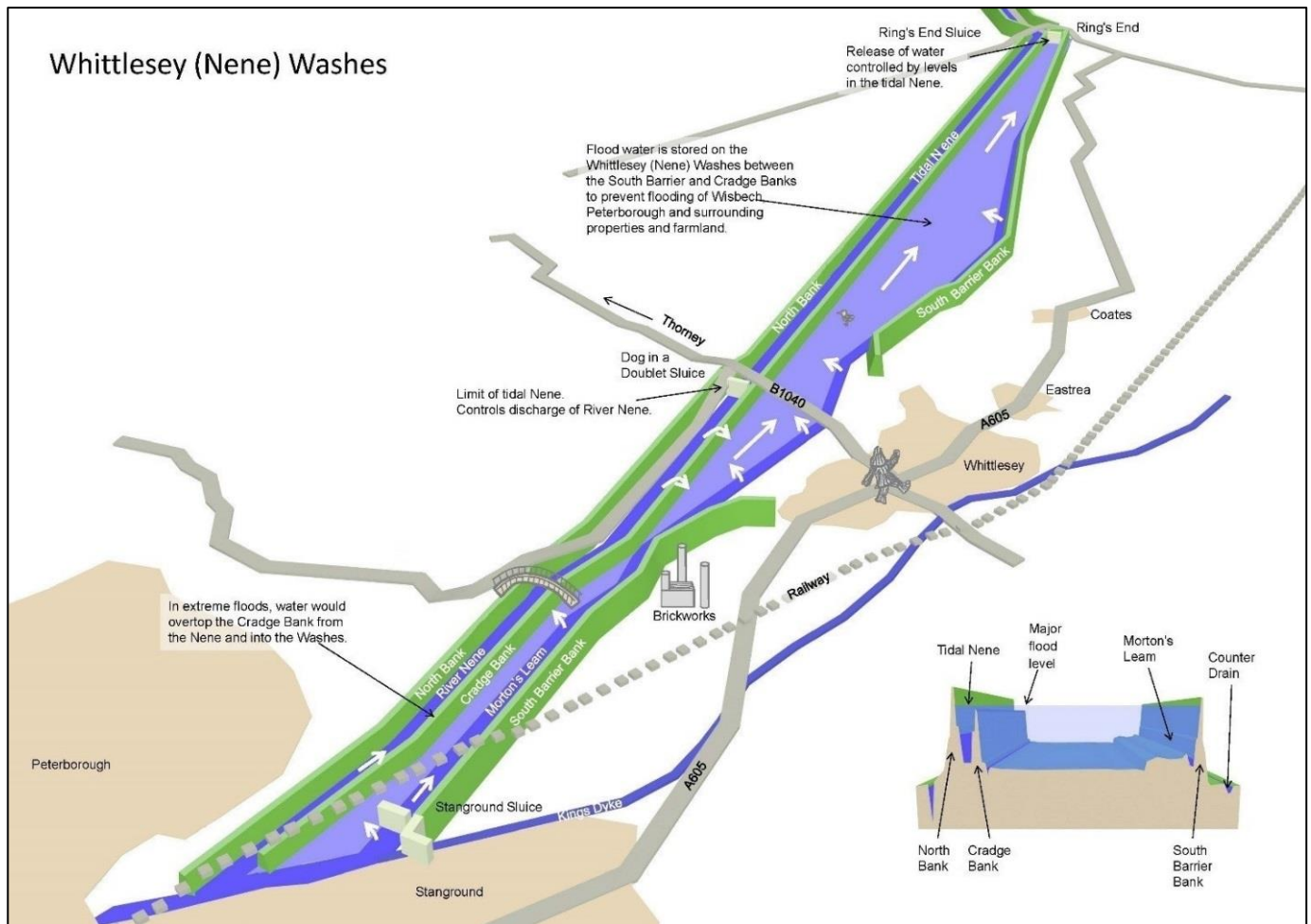


Cradge Bank (south of the R.Nene) operating, winter 2019 floods

The Dog-in-a-Doublet Sluice, located north of the Washes, allows the release of water into the tidal Nene. As with all tidal sluices, the River Nene will not discharge water during the high tide period. This is when the river is 'tide-locked'. When there is heavy or prolonged rainfall, and as much water as possible has been stored in the River Nene, we utilise the Washes to store flood water. This will also help mitigate any flood risk associated with the tide-lock period on the River Nene during extreme rainfall.

The diagram overleaf shows how the River Nene and Whittlesey (Nene) Washes interact in flood conditions. In flood conditions, water is diverted out of the River Nene and into Moreton's Leam through Stanground Sluice to start filling the Washes. During an extreme flood event, water will also overflow the Cradge Bank (on the south side of the River Nene) into the Washes when levels in the river are high. The South Barrier Bank then contains the flood water on the Washes to the south, creating the flood storage area.





When the River Nene is 'tide-locked', water may cover the North Bank Road during periods of high tide and the road may be closed. This may happen before or during using the Washes for flood storage which often results in the closure of the B1040 and/or North Bank Road. This is for safety reasons and the decision to close and reopen either road is made by Cambridgeshire County Council or Peterborough City Council respectively. The safety of road users is paramount, and the road will only reopen once it has been inspected for any damage or debris.

Water is released from the Washes back into the Tidal River Nene through Rings End Sluice. Every flood event is different, and there are multiple factors that influence how long it takes to empty the Washes. This includes how much water has been stored, the tidal cycle and its effect on the Dog-in-a-Doublet Sluice, and further rainfall events. In some instances, some of the low-lying fields could take months to drain.

Myth buster: It is important to note the risk of flooding in the area is not the result of opening the flood gates in Northampton. The River Nene and its water catchment is large and complex, with many tributaries flowing into the river at various points along its course. We consider the whole catchment and all towns and cities when operating our flood risk assets.





How are the Washes managed?

The River Nene and Morton's Leam are Main Rivers, which means the Environment Agency are able to use their permissive powers to maintain the reservoir banks, flood defences and watercourses where it reduces the risk of flooding to people and their homes. The types of activities carried out include grass cutting and vermin control along flood defences, weed cutting of the watercourses, and de-silting of sections of the tidal lengths where it reduces the risk of flooding. These works are carried out by the EA, contractors and partners, such as North Level District Internal Drainage Board. Regular inspections and operational checks of assets are also carried out, as well as additional checks during and after flood events.

In addition there are ad-hoc works to flood defence structures to ensure they remain resilient, such as repairs or improvements to sections of flood banks and mechanical repairs to sluice structures.



2012-15 South Barrier Banks Scheme



De-silting of the tidal River Nene, on behalf of the EA, by North Level District IDB



Strengthening works of Cradge Bank

The Whittlesey (Nene) Washes are also important for local wildlife as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area, and Ramsar site. As native fenland, the process of intermittent flooding supports a natural and needed process which benefits flora and fauna in the Washes. Another example of a flood storage area replicating natural fenland flooding is the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Welney Nature Reserve in Cambridgeshire.

Working in partnership

Whilst the Environment Agency leads on maintenance and operation of the Flood Storage Reservoir, water level management for the area is delivered through a strong partnership approach. As well during a flood event, this includes partnership funding of flood defence schemes, joint delivery of maintenance work and a collaborative approach to engaging with communities and businesses.



Thanks to a successful community grant funding bid by 'Growing Fenland Stakeholders Whittlesey Working Group' to the Combined Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Authorities Market Towns Initiative Board, three new electronic information signs are now in operation. They are located on the A605 facing east at Syers Lane and facing west at Plough Road, with another on the B1040 East Delph just before East Delph Garage on the left hand side. They will give motorists instant notice of any current road closures, as well as local events.





Know your flood risk

There are many ways in which you can plan ahead for flooding.

Go online here <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk> to:

- Check if you live in an area that is at risk from flooding
- Sign up to the Flood Warning Service to get advance notice of when river or sea flooding is expected that could affect your home. You can also do this by calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.
If you use the B1040 and North Bank Road you can also sign up to these Flood Warning Areas as an 'area of interest', so you'll know when the roads are likely to be closed.
- See templates to help you put together Flood Plans for your home or business. Call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 for a hard copy.
- You can monitor your local River and Sea Levels Online and see the current flood warnings that have been issued.

If flooding is expected, there are quick ways to limit the impact in your home, such as putting soil in bags to go across doorways or down the toilet/sink. For information on flood products to help reduce the impact of flooding on your home, such as flood doors and airbrick covers, visit www.bluepages.org.uk.

You could also prepare an Emergency Bag of essential items. This might include spare glasses, waterproof coat, medication, water, food, insurance documents and pet food. You could consider hand sanitiser and a face covering too.

There are also flood guides, information and stories from homes and businesses who have made adaptations to help them recover more quickly after a flood on the following sites:

- Property Flood Resilience E-magazine produced by Mary Dhonau <http://www.marydhonau.co.uk>
- Or see Mary Dhonau's Flood Guide for Homeowners here for ideas: https://knowyourfloodrisk.co.uk/sites/default/files/FloodGuide_ForHomeowners.pdf
- If you are at risk of flooding, for advice and support visit: <https://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/>

For more information

	Contact number	
Environment Agency	General Enquiries 03708 506 506	Floodline 0345 988 1188
Cambridgeshire County Council	General Enquiries 0345 045 5200	
Peterborough City Council	General Enquiries 01733 747474	Emergency 01733 864157
North Level District IDB	General Enquiries 01733 270333	

