

Bank Raising and Desilting Works

December 2024

The Middle Level Commissioners provide flood risk management to protect 8,516 households, 1,643 commercial and industrial properties, over 57,000 hectares of agricultural land and infrastructure.

What we are doing

In October 2024, we started the first stages of desilting works.



The first bucket lifted at Cottons Corner

The works are complex and extensive, needing a main works compound and three satellite compounds, with on-water and on-bank operations working concurrently in two locations along a 17km stretch of the Middle Level Main Drain over the next 6-months.

Detailed surveys indicate that up to 90cm of silt needs to be removed to restore the Main Drain to its design bed level. The silt is removed and placed on our land either side of the drain and left to dry for a minimum of 12 months, before being levelled and grass seeded.

Progress and next steps

We have completed the section from Cottons Corner to Three Holes Bridge and Aqueduct to Mortons Bridge. Navigation along this stretch to Three Holes remains open. Banksmen are on hand to facilitate boats passing by any plant.

Our next steps are construction of crane pads at Neeps Bridge, Rungay’s Bridge, Magdalen Bridge and Peter’s Drove Bridge along with preparation of access points to the pontoons in the next sections.

The upcoming sections of work are scheduled as follows:

Date	Location
December 2024	Pingle Bridge to Aqueduct and Mortons Bridge to Neeps Bridge
January 2025	Rungays Bridge to Neeps Bridge
February 2025	Magdalen Bridge to North Hook Bridge
March 2025	North Hook Bridge to Rungays Bridge
April 2025	Peters Drove Bridge to Magdalen Bridge and Sluice Road to Peters Drove Bridge

Please note that these dates are approximate and may change due to weather conditions or potential mechanical breakdowns.

We expect this phase of the project will be finished in April 2025.



Machinery used for lifting silt onto the embankment

Public Access

For safety reasons, we will close sections of the embankment to the public where work is actively being carried out.

Please observe the footpath closure signs, ensure children are supervised, and keep dogs on a lead.

We will only reopen sections of the bank when it is safe to do so. This means that even if work has finished in a section, it may remain closed for safety reasons. We will keep you updated.

Environmental

During our work, we have noticed a significant amount of rubbish and discarded items on the banks. We want everyone to enjoy the environment, so please dispose of your rubbish responsibly and take your litter home.

Community engagement

In October, we joined forces with Balfour Beatty, to inspire Year 6 students with a fun and educational session on flood resilience.

We explored the water cycle and shared tips on how to save water, while encouraging the students to think creatively about sustainable solutions.

We talked about eco-friendly rain gardens, and held a competition where students designed their perfect rain garden.



We will be returning in the Spring to help the school create the perfect rain garden from the competition winners' designs. Balfour Beatty will provide the materials and expertise to bring the gardens to life.

During October and November, we attended Parish Council meetings in Christchurch, Stow Bardolph, and Marshland St James to inform local communities about the ongoing works. The response was positive, with many questions about the desilting works.

Future works

Over the last 18 months we have been collecting information to give us a more robust evidence base and a much-improved understanding of the needs of the whole catchment. The outline business case for desilting and bank raising across 190km of watercourses and 300km of raised embankments was approved in 2021 with a cost of £23.9 million funded by government grant. However, the complexity and cost of the scheme was underestimated.

Until very recently, our plan was to complete the Main Drain desilting and deliver follow-on phases of desilting and bank raising within the total value of our grant funding by the agreed end date of 31 March 2027.

We have been undertaking, and had planned, further surveys and assessments to rescope the next phases.

Our scheme is part of the Environment Agency's national flood risk management investment programme. However, due to inflationary pressures across the programme, funding availability is now uncertain.

This means we are unable to move forward efficiently with confidence to deliver to time and budget.

We must use public funding wisely, so it is almost certain that we will need to close the current scheme following delivery of the Main Drain desilting.

We will use the knowledge, data and information we have gathered so far to reassess our approach and together with our partners and local and national government, establish what the next investments within our system will be.

Contact Us

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support in our work. We will continue to keep you up to date with project progress.

If you would like to know more about the Middle Level Commissioners or the works we are carrying out, please get in touch.

You can contact our Public Liaison team by:

Email: bankraising@middlelevel.gov.uk

Website: <https://middlelevel.gov.uk>