

An update following Storm Babet

We are writing to update you on how the Environment Agency (EA) and Suffolk County Council (SCC) are working together to support recovery in your community following the flooding by Storm Babet. We know the devastating impact flooding can have, which is why our top priorities are to help communities and further protect people and property.

SCC have previously contacted all homeowners who reported they were flooded by the storm. This update is providing additional information on what happened, the actions taken since and next steps for your community. It also provides links to where you can find further information.

The process for investigations and subsequent actions has been published on the SCC website.

What happened during Storm Babet?

A succession of weather fronts between 11 and 13 October brought significant rainfall totals (typically between 30-50mm) across Suffolk resulting in saturated land and full rivers. Storm Babet followed between 18 and 20 October with totals of 50-80mm and individual rain gauges recording more than 100mm, which resulted in widescale flooding across the region. Several river level measuring stations indicated flows close to, or exceeding, their highest on record. The weather remained wet for the rest of the month. Our current understanding is October 2023 was the joint second wettest October in East Anglia on record, dating back to 1871.

Suffolk saw the heaviest rainfall in East Anglia, which caused significant and rapid flooding of roads and properties. The event was characterised by the swift reaction of entire river systems rather than the more usual gradual progression of water downstream. A major incident was declared in Suffolk on the afternoon of Friday 20 due to significant disruption to travel and the high number of flooded communities.

Schools were impacted, and some children had to be hosted overnight. Many roads across the county became impassable with more than 600 stranded and abandoned vehicles reported. The flooding also interrupted water supplies in and around Ipswich.

The EA issued 25 flood warnings across Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex.

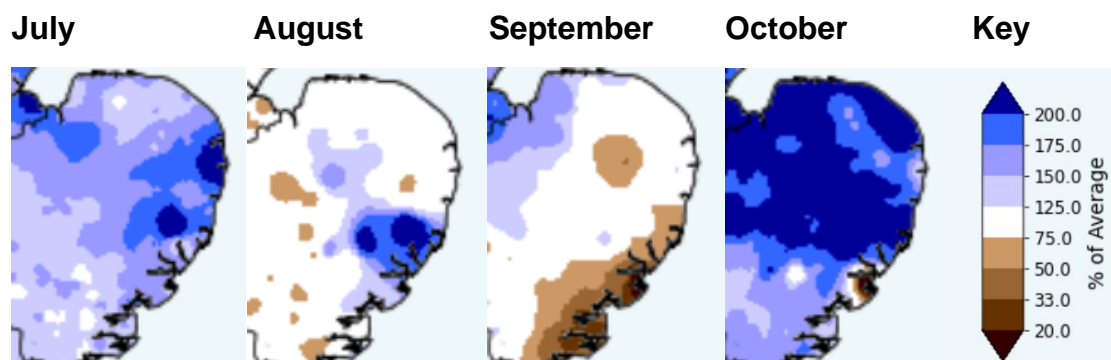
We have reports of 773 properties flooding internally, across 173 communities. This number may still rise as we continue to investigate the aftermath of the storm.

The following maps illustrate the average rainfall in East Anglia between July and October 2023 against the historical average monthly rainfall.



Floodline 0345 988 1188

Incident Hotline 0800 80 70 60



What are we currently doing?

The EA and SCC are working together to record the impacts of the storm, including the number of properties flooded. We are also working with partners and flooded communities to understand the full extent of the flooding and undertake flood investigations.

We continue to inspect for damage e.g. on flood embankments, highway infrastructure, collate flood data, and review our flood warning procedures.

Further Information on next steps for your community can be found on the Suffolk County Council website or through your local Parish Council

Where to go for further information

The links below provide useful information on how to find out if your home is at risk, sign-up for flood warnings and be ready to take action.

- National Flood Forum – advice and support for those affected by flooding - www.nationalfloodforum.org.uk
- Know your flood risk - <https://www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk>
- Link to further information about Flood Risk Management in Suffolk: [Flood Risk Management in Suffolk](#)
- Gov.uk has information on what to do before, during and after flooding:
 - To sign up for Flood Warnings: <https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings>
 - To check for flooding in the next 5 days: <https://www.gov.uk/check-flooding>
 - To look up your flood risk: <https://www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk>
 - Help with writing personal, business or community flood plans: <https://www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding>
 - If you would rather speak to someone please call Floodline on 0345 988 1188
- The Blue Pages provides a directory of available flood products: <https://bluepages.org.uk/>



- Communities Prepared free online workshop, which start in January 2024:
<https://www.communitiesprepared.org.uk/events/>
- Link to the Suffolk Riparian Ownership Guide (responsibilities for managing ditches and other watercourses): [Riparian ownership guide 2019](#)
- Find out about what Flood Risk Management is planned in your area - [Find out about flood risk management plans – Flood Plan Explorer \(data.gov.uk\)](#)

What happened in Debenham?

Storm Babet delivered heavy rainfall in the River Deben catchment between 19 and 22 October, with between 60 and 80mm falling across Suffolk.

At Benhall Green rainfall gauge near Saxmundham there was 44mm of rain recorded in a 12-hour period on the 20 October.

River levels in the River Deben at Brandeston reached their highest on record.

Rain fell quickly onto saturated ground causing surface water run-off and high river levels. Flooding occurred from the main rivers; Aspall Watercourse, the Cherry Tree Watercourse and Derry Brook Watercourse. There may also have been flooding from surface water run-off.

We have records of 61 properties flooding internally although these figures are likely to be refined as further information is gathered. Areas affected include Chancery Lane, Water Lane, High Street, Low Road, Cherry Tree Lane and Fen Street.

Flood Warning

Much of the flood water approached Debenham not only as surface water and overland flow, but from three key contributing tributaries: the Aspall Watercourse; Cherry Tree Brook and Derry Brook. Our only water level gauge is on the Aspall tributary, but this did not register the flood warning trigger river level before flooding occurred, potentially due to water approaching the village as overland flow. As a result, properties in Debenham were flooded before we were informed of the flooding situation, and our warning was issued in response to incoming information.

We aim to provide both a timely and reliable flood warning service, unfortunately the sheer intensity of rainfall and rapid rise in water levels meant we could not do so for Debenham on this occasion.

We are in the process of collating and recording data regarding the impacts of recent flooding. We are analysing this information and will undertake a thorough validation of our flood warning



service, including reviewing the flood warning and alert target areas as well as the thresholds which trigger them. We are investigating potential ways of improving the accuracy and timing of information provided by our flood warning service.

What have we been doing?

EA officers visited Debenham on 23 and 24 October to investigate and speak to residents. We collected evidence of water levels and flow routes to help identify the source of flooding and any immediate actions for relevant partner organisations. Relevant partners in Debenham are SCC as the Lead Local Flood Authority, Suffolk Highways and Babergh and Mid Suffolk Council.

Yearly, vegetation at the sides or in the channel which may inhibit the water flow and contribute to risk of flooding is cut back. When heavy rain is forecast and flooding could be expected, our teams check rivers for blockages, remove debris such as fallen trees and clear weed screens that could exacerbate flooding.

What are the next steps?

The EA and SCC are working closely to undertake Flood Investigations. The report will establish the causes of flooding and make recommendations for future improvements to managing and responding to flooding in Debenham. The lead authority for these investigations in Debenham is the EA and we continue to work closely with SCC who will publish the final report.

If you have any photos, videos and accounts of the flooding can you please fill in the short survey available here: <https://forms.office.com/e/WPfN1DAv8a> If you have already reported this to EA or SCC, you do not need to complete this form.

The EA are already progressing a flood risk project in East Anglia to install property flood resilience (PFR) measures, such as waterproof flood doors and air brick covers to individual properties at Significant risk of flooding (2% Annual Exceedance Probability) in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. 30 properties in Debenham were assessed as at Significant risk of flooding, and consequently were offered a PFR survey and the opportunity to join the project in the summer of 2022. Of those 30, 10 properties agreed to join the project and are scheduled to have PFR installed in 2024.

In early 2024 we are hoping to invite the other 20 properties who did not join this project, but who flooded in Storm Babet, to join a subsequent Debenham PFR project. We are also investigating what can be offered to the remainder of properties flooded in Debenham. This will happen alongside the flood resilience grant being administered by SCC.



Property Flood Resilience Grant

Suffolk County Council is preparing the PFR grant application process to comply with government requirements and intends to **launch in early 2024**. All properties that have been reported to the Council, via the Highways Reporting Tool, will receive a direct communication when the scheme is launched.

In summary, eligible property owners (both domestic and commercial) can apply for **up to £5,000 (including VAT)** to help make their property more resilient to future flooding. Up to **£500** of the grant can be used to contribute towards survey costs.

Property owners will be responsible for sourcing their own surveyor and grants of up to **£5,000 incl. VAT (including survey costs)** will be paid retrospectively to the property owner once the Council receives proof of the completed installation and invoicing for the approved measures.

Further information into the grant eligibility and conditions can be found on the Suffolk County Council website here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/about/flood-recovery-information-for-suffolk>.

Information on Natural Flood Management in Debenham

Natural Flood Management (NFM) ponds have recently been constructed at Hill House Farm and Mill Green Farm (Hog & Hen). Both ponds are designed to have a “normal” water level retained in them to maximise environmental benefit during dry conditions. In time of higher river flow levels, the ponds are designed to fill and have a restricted outfall pipe to release their water at a slower rate. The aspiration is for this retained volume of water to reduce peak flow in the receiving watercourse. They are however not designed to manage flood risk in bigger flood events such as Storm Babet.

Important numbers and contacts

Floodline - to find latest information or report flooding

Telephone: 0345 988 1188 / Textphone: 0345 602 6340
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Incident Hotline - to report blockages or areas of concern and flooding

Telephone: 0800 80 70 60

If you have any questions please contact: enquiries_eastanglia@environment-agency.gov.uk

