# Clifton & Treeton - Public Meeting (Thursday 12th September 2024 Storm Babet – October 2024 Community Questions

1. If The Environment Agency are stating the river levels are the highest on record, why was the water mark in my property lower than that experienced in the June 2007 flood event?

It is possible flood levels in properties were higher in 2007 as properties were impacted by surface water flooding before the river overtopped. In 2023 Rotherham Council were managing the surface water levels until it was no longer possible, meaning the first water to enter properties was when the River Rother overtopped.

1. Why did the Environment Agency's flood warning message fail? Many residents did not receive the warning.

The Environment Agency (EA) has a duty to warn and inform, which is done through the Flood Warning Service and Local Resilience Forum. A message was issued via the Flood Warning Service at 02:14am on 21st October 2023. The EA's records show there were 259 successful messages sent for the Catcliffe warning (i.e someone picked up the phone to receive the message or received the text) and 30 unsuccessful messages. The system will try to resend a message several times over the next 4 minutes. However, there are still a number of reasons why a message may not have been received at all by a customer, or at the time when it was first issued:  
  
• A member of the public does not have the most up to date contact details saved in their Flood Warning Service account. It is the responsibility of the account owner to maintain the most accurate and up to date contact details and can do this by logging in with the details sent to them via email and/or text message when they signed up.  
  
• A customer is not fully registered with the flood warning service.  
  
• A customer's phone provider is not signed up to/included in the Extended Direct Warning Service agreement with the Environment Agency.  
  
• Stormy/disruptive weather conditions may affect mobile/internet signal which could lead to a delay in receiving the warning in a timely manner.  
  
• Their device may have been switched off or on silent given the time of issue.  
  
• Their primary method device does not have answer phone activated.  
  
It is therefore vitally important that residents check the contact details they have registered with the Flood Warning Service and ensure they have included at least one telephone number alongside their email address. They can do this via [Sign up for flood warnings - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings) or by calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188

1. Why did the Council choose to evacuate? Would this not be the responsibility of the Environment Agency?

Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 the Council and the Environment Agency (alongside other public bodies such as the Police) have a duty to warn and inform the public. The Council took the decision, along with partners due to the developing risks, to advise people of the imminent danger and to consider evacuating.

1. The Council and Emergency Services were knocking on peoples doors to alert them of the flooding. Why didn't they knock on my door to warn me?

The partners present on the night, which was primarily the Council and the Fire Service initially, carried out the evacuation and determined the area based on the risks posed. It may be that the risk was deemed lower in some areas or attempts to alert the household were not heard and, in some cases, individuals had already taken the decision to leave the property. The main priority was to evacuate properties that were at immediate risk of flooding.

1. Can there be a flood siren?

Flood sirens were installed in the past as a means of providing a quick warning to those communities with sometimes less than half an hour before flood water could impact homes and businesses. Since the Flood Warning Service has become more comprehensive and advanced, sirens across the country have been decommissioned, often at the request of communities. The few sirens that are still operational are issued in an incident as a secondary means of warning customers, complementing the more targeted and bespoke Flood Warning Service. There can be issues with audibility of sirens, particularly where a large area is at risk and audibility may be affected by weather conditions at the time of sounding. Unlike the Flood Warning Service, which allows tailored messages to be sent to recipients by their preferred channels (phone, SMS, email), the sirens do not provide any qualitative information and in some cases have also been linked to wellbeing issues, triggering distress in individuals when they are sounded. The EA have stated they understand why this question is being raised in the community but would not see these as adding any benefit on the River Rother over and above the existing Flood Warning Service.

1. Why is planning permission still being granted which creates additional surface water run off?

The Council's Drainage Team are statutory consultees for all planning applications, all developments are closely scrutinised to ensure there will be no additional flood risk both to the development and the surrounding area. Any additional impermeable area must be attenuated on site to prevent additional surface water run-off.

1. Why did the Council resurface my road, when that money could have been spent on flood defences?

The Council’s Highway repair budgets are ringfenced for improving the condition of the Highway Network. The funding that the Council accesses for Highway repairs is provided through the South Yorkshire Mayor Combined Authority and also through Council Capital allocation. The Council would not be in a position to use this funding for any other purpose, for example supporting flood alleviation schemes. The way the Council manage Highway Assets is identified in Rotherham Councils Highway Asset Management Plan a copy of which can be found here; [Highways Asset Management – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/roads-pavements/highways-asset-management/3)  
  
Rotherham Council, working in partnership with Environment Agency to continue to design and implement flood alleviation schemes throughout the borough.   
Information on this can be found at [The 6 Priority Flood Alleviation Schemes – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/water-management-flooding/the-6-priority-flood-alleviation-schemes)

1. Why can't the river be dredged?

Multiple studies, including those by CIWEM, ICE, and ADA, have shown that dredging is primarily beneficial in pumped drainage systems, typically in low-lying areas. The Environment Agency's 2017 research confirmed that dredging is not effective in managing flood risk in natural river systems, except at specific points like weirs or culverts.   
  
Dredging can lead to increased flow, downstream flooding, harm to wildlife, and damage to property. Even if dredging were effective, it would only be a temporary solution as the river would naturally re-accumulate sediment. The Environment Agency focuses on a catchment-wide approach to flood risk management, considering various factors and implementing appropriate measures. In upper and mid catchment areas like Catcliffe, measures such as building walls or flood storage are more suitable and cost-effective for reducing flood risk. Given the potential problems and limited effectiveness of dredging in natural river systems, it is not considered a viable option for Catcliffe. Alternative measures that are more targeted and sustainable are preferred for managing flood risk in this area.

1. Why didn't Parkgate & Rotherham Town Centre experience flooding, when Catcliffe and Treeton did, even though the river levels were the highest on record? Was Catcliffe & Treeton sacrificed?

In November 2019 the largest river flows were recorded in the upper Don to the centre of Rotherham and then in the lower Don at Doncaster. In Storm Babet in October 2023 the flows in the upper Don were still substantial but not as exceptional as those of November 2019. In October 2023 the most exceptional flows were in the upper Rother catchment which explains why flooding was experienced in Catcliffe during October 2023 but not 2019

1. Was the Environment Agency's warning system overloaded by the number of calls? Is that why many residents didn't receive a message?

No, the Flood Warning Service has the functionality to send messages to everyone located within multiple Flood Warning Areas. During the period of 19-21 October, the system successfully issued 171 Flood Alerts and   
Warnings across Yorkshire and 761 across England. When the Flood Warning Service issues a warning it is sent directly to anyone either signed up to the service, or with a mobile phone company that is part of the Extended Direct Warning service agreement with the Environment Agency. If a message wasn't received, there are a few possible reasons for this, this can be found under Q02

1. Is the Environment Agency's warning system fit for purpose?

The Environment Agency would like to reassure residents that the Flood Warning Service is fit for purpose and has successfully issued tens of thousands of flood warnings since the current iteration was launched seven years ago. The Environment Agency Flood Warning Service is a national system which is continuously monitored and assessed for improvements, as are the flood warnings we maintain and issue locally in Yorkshire.   
  
In October 2023, the Environment Agency took the decision to utilise an automated flood warning service to ensure that a warning and informing service could be provided due to the risk of industrial action. The automated system issued warnings when the river level triggers were reached, and the flood warning message referenced that the warning was issued through an automated system due to industrial action. We acknowledge the warning on this occasion did not meet the 2 hours lead time we aim to provide.  
  
The ongoing program of enhancements in Flood Incident Management services aims to enhance public safety, reduce economic losses, and establish a more resilient infrastructure for managing future flood events. We have allocated £32 million over a five-year period to improve river forecasting models, which will encompass rivers in the Catcliffe area. Additionally, the EA are collaborating with the Met Office to increase the resolution of rainfall data, further improving capacity to forecast impacts and provide timely warnings to the public.

1. Why was the warning issued automatically, and not have a human element when it was known that flooding were likely?

For much of 2023 the Environment Agency's resourcing for incidents was impacted by industrial action. As a result, the decision was made to use automation of Flood Warnings to safeguard the service (so that Flood Warnings would still be issued even if the EA were short staffed). A large number of the warnings issued during Storm Babet were issued via automation, including the one for Catcliffe.   
  
The EA is not currently being affected by industrial action and is therefore planning to issue alerts and warnings manually when needed in the months ahead, with automation as an additional resilience measure. Following a consultation with EA incident duty staff and Local Resilience Forum partners on the best use of automation in an incident, improvements have now been made.

1. Why can't the warning be issued sooner? Will the Environment Agency look at the trigger levels?

The Environment Agency are continuously improving the flood warning service and the river levels used as considerations to issue warnings. After each warning has been issued, the EA do something called "validation" where they follow a process to gather evidence to assess the accuracy and timeliness of the warnings and alerts issued  
  
The EA have reviewed the Catcliffe warning and will create an additional consideration level for duty officers to use when issuing the warning. This will alert relevant duty officers if the regulators are no longer maintaining river levels, and will be used in conjunction with forecast, upstream river levels and on-the-ground intelligence. It is in place for duty officers to use.  
  
The EA have carried out a review of the triggers for the Treeton flood warning following Storm Babet and have aligned the trigger level for Treeton with Catcliffe. The change at Treeton was reflected in Rotherham Council’s Section 19 Report issued in August.   
  
The warning is there to serve the community and the EA are happy to hear more community thoughts on it and work with the community to help improve the understanding around the Flood Alert (be ready) and the resulting Flood Warning (take action) and the resources for customers such as Check for Flooding.

1. Why can't someone go round and knock on everyone's door as an alert?

Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 the Environment Agency’s role is to warn and inform, which is done through the Flood Warning Service and the Local Resilience Forum. The Environment Agency's incident role does not include alerting communities in person. The EA hold multi-agency meetings with local authorities and emergency services to ensure the communities are receiving support where it is required. The Environment Agency, working in partnership with Local Authorities, will work with communities and flood groups to support the development of community flood plans. Once flood alerts are issued, these plans should be implemented.

1. Can the Environment Agency's warning message be more personalised for our area?

The Flood Alert that covers Catcliffe (Lower River Rother River Rother and its tributaries from Renishaw to Rotherham) covers a large area, so making this personalised would be difficult as specifying where the flooding will impact can be harder to forecast. The Flood Warning is specific to Catcliffe. However, during storm Babet the initial warning was automated, due to industrial action, and so used generic text. All updates following this were specific to Catcliffe including the update just over an hour later. The EA are not currently being affected by industrial action and so any warning would be written by Flood Warning Duty Officers, with the message being personalised for Catcliffe. Where time and resource allows, the EA can include more specific information, depending on the information provided and the scale of an incident (issuing the warning is always the priority).

1. As flood warnings, why were our reported concerns (the day before the flooding) ignored?

The Environment Agency Flood Warning Duty Officer was in contact with two Catcliffe Flood Wardens on the 20th Oct 2023 between 2-10pm. Concerns were noted and information regarding the current forecast, expected levels and the operation of the regulators was given. As with any changing situation like this, the forecast information would have been the best available at the time of the call and the duty officer advised the Flood Wardens to call back if they needed an update. The EA is supporting the Catcliffe residents interested in becoming Flood Wardens and part of that will be looking a ways we can better work together.

1. If there are only 3 people in the Environment Agency's Incident Control Room, will our calls into the Environment Agency cause delays with issuing the warning?

Flood Wardens have access to Flood Warning Duty Officers in the EA Yorkshire area. This is not repeated across all EA areas but it is something our Yorkshire Incident Team feels brings a benefit to both the community and the EA's understanding of the incident. Flood Warning Duty Officers will always try to answer or return calls to Flood Wardens but this can be impacted by the scale of the incident and the needs of other professional partners. Issuing the warning is always the first priority of the duty team, and this will always be actioned before taking or returning calls.

1. Why wasn't a severe flood warning issued?

A Severe Flood Warning indicates risk to life or significant impact of local infrastructure. The decision to issue a Severe Warning is not based on specific river levels but is a multi-agency decision informed by input from professional partners such as the emergency services and the local authority. It was not discussed in this case as the information in relation to the forecasted river levels did suggest this level of risk. When the risk became apparent, the focus was on evacuating affected areas and managing associated activities.

1. Why do I get flooded from surface water? All of the new development is contributing to the flooding.

Surface water was managed by the pumping operation the Council carries out to lift surface water into the river Rother when levels reach the gravity outfall. Due to the river over topping, the pumping operation was no longer a viable option and had to cease. Overtopping river water enters surface water drains and then flows in reverse through the pipework reemerging through road gullies and manholes throughout the affected area. Also as surface water no longer has an outlet this volume will add to the flooding from the river water.

1. The statement that developments are controlled to a greenfield runoff rate is not true.

All greenfield sites are set to a greenfield runoff rate, this is based on the amount of surface water run-off that would enter the river if the development was not built. The developer must calculate the natural greenfield run-off rate in order to have planning permission granted. The Councils Drainage Team are statutory consultees for all planning applications to ensure that the discharge rates will not increase flood risk outside of the development.

1. When was the Environment Agency aware of the 40 minute delay for the community to receive the flood warning?

For much of 2023 resourcing for incidents was impacted by industrial action. As a result the EA made the decision to use automation of flood warnings to safeguard the service (so that flood warnings would still be issued even if short staffed). A large number of the warnings issued during Storm Babet were issued via automation, including the one for Catcliffe. The automation process is not an instantaneous one; it takes time for data to transfer from physical readers into digital systems, be verified, transferred into the Flood Warning System and aligned to the recipients with meaningful information for them to use. Typically, this process from river level trigger to receipt of warning takes around 30-40 minutes. However, there was no delay between the issuing of the Catcliffe Flood Warning through the flood warning delivery service and the receipt of the verified automation data. Please find a timeline which breaks this down:  
  
• 1.36am - River Level telemetry indicates the river has reached the height which the flood warning should be issued.  
  
• 1.36am - 02.14am - River level data and messaging data is verified and set up to be transferred from automation system to Flood Warning Service delivery system.  
  
• 02.14am - Automation verified data reaches the Flood Warning Service delivery system  
  
• 02.14am - Flood Warning Service delivery system issues flood warning.   
  
04.00am - Report of first property to flood fluvially.  
  
The EA is not currently being affected by industrial action and is therefore planning to issue alerts and warnings manually when needed in the months ahead, with automation as an additional resilience measure. Following a consultation with EA incident duty staff and Local Resilience Forum partners on the best use of automation in an incident, improvements have now been made.  
  
The EA have reviewed the Catcliffe and Treeton warning, further information can be found under A13  
  
The warning is there to serve the community and the EA are happy to hear more community thoughts on it and work with the community to help improve the understanding around the Flood Alert (be ready) and the resulting Flood Warning (take action) and the resources for customers such as Check for Flooding.

1. Why wasn't there more resources at Catcliffe and Treeton, between 02:30 and 03:30, to warn people?

Due to the information provided by the Met Office and the Environment Agency, there was limited warning that the river Rother was going to over top and cause flooding. Council staff were on site to manage the surface water flood risk and these staff assisted the Emergency services to alert residents to the imminent flooding.

1. Why was I excluded from the Property Flood Resilience (PFR) grant?

The Grant is issued from Defra and not form the local authority the guidance on eligibility can be found at:  
 [Flood recovery framework: guidance for local authorities in England - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-recovery-framework-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england/flood-recovery-framework-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england)

1. Why was the survey cost taken from the Property Flood Resilience (PFR) grant? Shouldn't the Council cover these costs?

As the scheme is run by DEFRA the rules around the funding for the survey and specific works is set by them. Further details can be found at:  
[Flood recovery framework: guidance for local authorities in England - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-recovery-framework-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england/flood-recovery-framework-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england)

1. Why did we not receive sandbags, even though there was a risk of flooding?

Sandbags are only effective for moving water around properties. When used against river flooding they provide little to no benefit. In a recent test conducted at an accredited British Standard Institute test tank, by Mary Dhonau OBE and Simon Crowther BEng (Hons) C.WEM MCIWEM, sandbags were tested for their effectiveness at preventing water ingress. Four sandbags (a similar number to if a local authority had issued the sandbags to a household) were placed in front of a door and were subjected to a steady flow of water. After just 59 seconds, these four sandbags were breached by the water. When 10 sandbags were positioned at the door, they held back the water for just two minutes before being breached.

1. What is the probability of securing funding for the potential next step schemes to reduce risk of flooding at Catcliffe and Treeton?

Before The Council can bid for funding for a scheme, they are required to understand the viable options in reducing flood risk. To do this, funding to carry out feasibility studies is required which is the case with most schemes. Any project would need to demonstrate that it wont cause increased flood risk further down stream and must be cost beneficial.

1. Whilst the Council and Emergency Services were warning some street in the early hours of the morning, why wasn't our street warned?

The Council and Emergency services attempted to warn and inform as many residents as possible, prior to start of the evacuation. The Environment Agency flood warning was issued approximately 1 hour 45mins before the first property was flooded. Due to the late hour and the limited time available to visit properties, this did not allow a lot of time to warn individual properties before the flooding occurred and therefore agencies present had to focus on areas of most risk.

1. Why has the Property Flood Resilience (PFR) grant taken so long? A lot of the work have already been completed by the residents.

A number of factors have delayed the PFR works going ahead:  
  
Grant programs often involve complex application processes, approvals, and disbursements, which can take time to set up and deliver.  
Coordination challenges - Implementation requires coordination, which has complicated timelines and lead to delays.  
Public Awareness and Engagement - Some residents were not fully aware of the grant process or requirements, which has slowed down applications and approvals.

1. Between the floods in 2007 and Storm Babet, what has been done to stop flooding to Catcliffe and Treeton.

Whilst flooding can never be fully stopped, a number of things have been carried out to increase resilience at Catcliffe and Treeton. Since 2007 the Environment Agency has worked closely in partnership with the Council to improve the flood response in Rotherham. A number of things have been delivered in partnership including;  
  
• An Improved joint agency pumping response to support with reducing the risk of surface water flooding.  
  
• Following the floods in 2007, the Environment Agency installed a penstock on the river Rother. This penstock closes when we experience high levels in the river Rother and prevents river water entering the drainage system.  
  
• Following the flooding in 2007, the Environment Agency, reinforced the sheet pile wall at Catcliffe with concrete to repair a low spot in a buckled section of the wall.  
  
• In 2009 the Environment Agency recruited 3 flood wardens in the Catcliffe area.  
  
• The Environment Agency installed a generator for additional resilience at Canklow regulator. During 2007 there was a power outage meaning the Canklow regulator could not operate.  
  
• The Council are progressing a project to install a permanent pumping station at Catcliffe to manage surface water.  
  
• The Environment Agency have joined 6 other partners across South Yorkshire in developing the Connected by Water action plan. Connected by Water is a South Yorkshire alliance working with communities and businesses to build flood resilience and reduce the impact of the climate emergency.  
  
• Following Storm Babet, The Environment Agency have secured funding to carry out repair works to Treeton Reservoir in 2025. They are currently carrying out interim repair work and a continency plan will be in place over winter.

1. What are the next steps?

Full details on next steps to reduce flood risk can be found in the Section 19 for Storm Babet:  
[Flood Investigation Report - Storm Babet – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/water-management-flooding/flood-investigation-report-storm-babet)

1. Why did the Council demolish the previous houses along Orgreave Road, and then give planning permission for the current houses, even though we knew they would flood?

Prior to the 2007 floods, drainage and flood risk was not a priority for planning approval, the Councils drainage team only became statutory consultees in the Planning process following the Pitt Review, after the 2007 floods. This review was the catalyst for the creation of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

1. Is the Treeton Lane Bridge acting as a bottleneck for the River Rother?

Initial modelling shows that Treeton Lane, Bridge does restrict flows in the River Rother, one of the next steps that the Council are carrying out is to review if a reduction in the depth of the bridge deck can reduce the risk of flooding in both Catcliffe and Treeton Village's. Further details on the next steps can be found at:

[Flood Investigation Report - Storm Babet – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/water-management-flooding/flood-investigation-report-storm-babet)

1. Why is there no difference between the extent/depth maps in the Section 19 report when comparing Meadowgate Regulator operating and not operating?

There are small differences in the maps, but the maps essentially show that had Meadowgate regulator been operational, the river would have still overtopped the defences in Catcliffe due to the scale of the event.

1. Why are we not being relocated, if we are going to keep flooding?

One in six properties within the United Kingdom are at risk of flooding and it is not feasible to relocate all residents who are at risk. The Council is committed to working with the Environment Agency to identify improvements which will reduce the flood risk to properties where possible. These "next steps" are detailed in the Section 19 Report.

1. Why is it always a reactive response after the event, rather than a proactive response?

Flooding can be unpredictable, making it difficult to anticipate when and where it will occur, thus complicating proactive planning. Catcliffe already has an existing flood defence on the River Rother and a routine operation of deploying pumps to manage surface water (and minimise the risk of flooding from this source) as river levels rise and prevents surface water entering via existing gravity systems. Climate change has also played a larger factor in how effective the existing defences currently are. Traditional flood defences were often designed based on historical data and past flood risks. Climate change is leading to more extreme weather patterns, challenging their effectiveness in modern extreme weather events.