



SNAITH & COWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Report to East Riding Yorkshire Council
in response to
Flooding of Snaith and East Cowick
February 2020

Foreword

This document has been prepared by Snaith & Cowick Town Council as their official submission to the independent Enquiry being led by East Riding of Yorkshire Council in response to the flooding of Snaith and East Cowick on 25 February 2020.

Information provided within this document has been supplied by a combination of Town Councillors, Council Staff and members of the public who all witnessed the sequence of events that led to the town being flooded, and who would be keen to ensure a full and as detailed a picture is presented to the Enquiry.

The content of the information provided by members of the public has not been changed from that originally given to the Town Council although it has been re-formatted as part of this overall submission.

Introduction

On Tuesday 25 February 2020 and for 4 days thereafter, parts of Snaith and East Cowick were subjected to a flooding event unprecedented in the area.

February 2020 has since been acknowledged as the wettest February on record and Met Office data suggests the area experienced a rise in average rainfall of over 350% in the days preceding this.

Parts of Snaith and East Cowick lie within Snaith Ings, which is the last in a sequence of designated flood basins which form the Lower Aire Washlands. A number of residential properties and businesses lie within these washlands. In the preceding days, excess water from the upper catchment area gradually filled the Lower Aire Washlands, reaching Pickhill Bank - which is the barrier bank separating Gowdall Ings from Snaith Ings - on Monday 24 February 2020.

On the morning of Tuesday 25 February, water continuing to flow down from the upper catchment areas began to overtop at Pickhill Barrier Bank and water started to fill Snaith Ings. Over the next 4 days, water continued to fill these washlands, eventually reaching Cowick Barrier Bank, the last defence bank in the Lower Aire Washlands. With water levels still rising, this then overtopped the Barrier Bank at Cowick a few days later and uncontrolled flood water spilled over in to East Cowick.

In total, 86 residential properties and 9 businesses were affected by flood water. This has been devastating for our community.

Whilst the waters have now receded and those affected are trying to rebuild their lives and property, both the Town Council and those who we serve are keen to ensure that an event like this does not happen again. Questions need to be asked of the Environment Agency as to their actions before, during and after the event to determine what lessons need to be learned so as to prevent others suffering the same loss and devastation as our community endured.

SUMMARY OF PROPERTIES AFFECTED;

Snaith: 28 Residential Properties / 5 Businesses

East Cowick: 58 Residential Properties / 4 Businesses

Timeline - Tuesday 25 February 2020

The timeline below relates to the initial sequence of events from TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2020 and the immediate actions taken during the first 12 hours of the incident. This has been compiled based upon evidence provided by Town Councillors and Council Staff.

04:00 hrs	Residents of Westgate House on Gowdall Lane woken by local Flood Warden to warn of possible flooding
07:30 hrs	Town Clerk received image (taken from Facebook) of flood water on Gowdall Lane, rendering the road impassable. Photo ref: 25.02.2002 0731hrs
08:07 hrs	Flood warning from Environment Agency sent via Text and E-mail. Affected areas stated as <i>Sewerage works on Gowdall Lane, Pontefract Road including Snaith Primary School and area bounded by Pontefract Road and Bourn Mill Balk Road. Also properties located off South Parkway. Lidgate including Ashfield House.</i> This is considered too late, inaccurate and no risk to life was mentioned. Photo ref: 25.02.2020 0807hrs
08:20 hrs	Town Clerk contacted ERYC Ward Councillor Caroline Fox to see whether she was aware or had been notified of flooding in Gowdall Lane.
08:50 hrs	Town Clerk spoke to ERYC Emergency Response Leader (Alan Bravey) who confirmed the Local Authority were unaware of the warning.
09:00 hrs	The Town Clerk, the Assistant Town Clerk, the Town Mayor and 1 Town Councillor met at the council offices to discuss the warning and to undertake a site visit of Gowdall Lane and Pickhill Bank to understand the situation.
09:35 hrs	Gowdall Lane flooded but no road closure in place - traffic still approaching floodwater unaware of danger ahead. Pickhill Bank close to overtopping. Gowdall Lane flooded by Sewerage Works. Photo ref: 25.02.2020 0935hrs
09:40 hrs	The Town Clerk once again spoke to Alan Bravey to advise of deteriorating situation found on Gowdall Lane
09:44 hrs	Alan Bravey contacted the Town Clerk to advise that sandbags were being deployed and a road closure team for Gowdall Lane were en route.
11:45 hrs	PICKHILL BANK STARTS TO OVERTOP
11:54 hrs	Water has started to fill initial fields of Snaith Ings. Photo ref: 25.02.2020 1154hrs
12:24 hrs	The field immediately east of Pickhill Bank is now full of water. Photo ref: 25.02.2020 1224hrs
13:00 hrs	Town Clerk spoke to Alan Bravey once more to offer update on hastily worsening situation. AB advised of a management meeting to discuss the emergency was to be held at 13:30hrs
13:01 hrs	Water has reached the culvert going under the A1041 Selby Road. The lower parts of The Yorkshire Car Centre and Autotech are now seeing water ingress. Photo ref: 25.02.2020 1302hrs
13:17 hrs	Town Mayor dialled 999 (Humberside Police) as situation on Selby Road continued to deteriorate rapidly. No sign of Emergency Responders to initiate road closure. Police Incident Log No. 248. Water is now in main part of garage forecourt.
13:25 hrs	Town Mayor approached a Humberside Police van (stood in queuing traffic on A1041 Selby Road) to which the 2 officers occupying the vehicle advised they were there to 'observe' only.

13:34 hrs	Town Mayor rang 999 again due to lack of response from Humberside Police to initial report. An estimated 3ft of water is now enveloping Yorkshire Car Centre and Autotech. THIS TOOK ONLY 17 MINUTES from when first call was made to police. STILL NO RISK TO LIFE ISSUED BY THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY.
13:37 hrs	A1041 Selby Road submerged by water.
13:50 hrs	Video Clip: A1041 Selby Road
14:15 hrs	Town Clerk received e-mail from ERYC that the A1041 Selby Road and Gowdall Lane were now subject to an Emergency Road Closure due to the flooding.
14:30 hrs	Town Council opened their offices to act as the Incident Command Centre.
15:50 hrs	Initial team of emergency responders (namely Humberside Police) held first incident meeting.
17:05 hrs	Bronze Command Meeting held in Town Council office. Emergency responders included Humberside Police, Humberside Fire & Rescue, Coastguard, ERYC and Snaith & Cowick Internal Drainage Board. Environment Agency represented by off-duty engineer (who was actually on paternity leave).

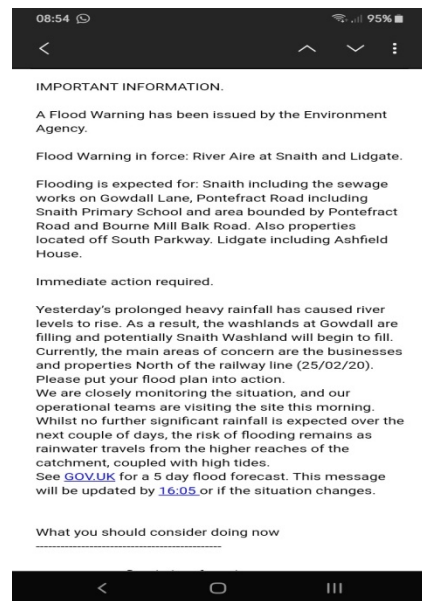
Photo Library to correspond with the timeline above;



Ref: 25.02.2020 0731hrs



Ref: 25.02.2020 0935hrs



Ref: 25.02.2020 0807hrs



Ref: 25.02.2020 1154hrs



Ref: 25.02.2020 1224hrs



Ref: 25.02.2020 1302hrs

Evidence received from Residents and Business Owners

[BEV & CHRIS MARLOWE](#)

[YORKSHIRE CAR CENTRE, SELBY ROAD, SNAITH](#)

Tuesday 25/02

4:00am

Abby Marlowe (our daughter) and Danny Leake woke up by neighbour (Both registered with EA Flood Warning System). It was the Gowdall Flood Warden (who wants to remain anonymous) and she informed them she believed their house would flood and also dads garage (Yorkshire Car Centre).

4:31am Water lapping up against bank and rear of garage.

Called Chris Marlowe who came to Showroom/Forecourt of Yorkshire Car Centre. He viewed river but looked okay at this time and how it had been for previous 3 weeks. Chris and Abby put higher value vehicles on charge and both Battery Starting Packs, pumped up tyres and took empty fuel cans to fill when Petrol Station opened to enable them to move quickly if the Flood Warning came.

5:27am

First Stick (measuring device) that was placed at garages, Gowdall Lane at 5:00am is already approximately 1 metre.

7:01am

Second Stick that was placed at 6:00am is approx 1.5 metre under water. Added another stick.

7:34am

Water coming down Gowdall Lane towards Westgate House but still approx 50-75 metres away.

7:34am Photo Ref: [Westgate House 0734hrs](#)

Third stick placed at 7:02am now 1.5 metres deep in water.

9:11am

Water now completely over land over the road (garage area) and fully down Gowdall Lane past fence of Westgate House.

10:25am

A Marlowe and B Marlowe spoke with Environment Agency Staff working at Sluice Gate on river bank that separates Gowdall 'Reservoir' from Snaith. Vicky Whiteley from Snaith Town Council Office also present and was also informed by EA that area wasn't going to flood however promised that she would get some sandbags delivered for our peace of mind.

She later told B Marlowe (believe 28/02) 'do you think I would have been stood there endangering my own life if I'd have know what was coming an hour later!'

EA also inspected garden area as water was just at kitchen windows level. They informed that house and Yorkshire Car Centre would not flood.

10:40am Photo Ref: [Westgate House Kitchen](#)

Prepared kitchen by putting washer, dryer, etc and contents from base units just in case.

11:14am

Water coming into the kitchen.

11:30am

Told by EA Westgate House and Yorkshire Car Centre are not going to flood even though was at kitchen window level. Informed that river had peaked, assured don't worry the water can't get any higher as would have to go over flood bank at Snaith.

12:01pm Photo Ref: Westgate House Kitchen

Water approx 2 foot in kitchen, fridge now floating.

12:10pm(ish) Truck of sand bags arrived (lost and couldn't get through to Snaith side because Gowdall Lane was flooded). They dropped off around 20 at the gate but couldn't help to place at kitchen windows.

12:18pm

Water bursting over flood defences in Snaith field towards Yorkshire Car Centre at an alarming rate.

12:36pm Photo Ref: Yorkshire Car Centre 1236hrs

Water past the fence/gate and house.

Water begins to flood onto forecourt area of Yorkshire Car Centre.

13:28pm Photo Ref: Westgate House Hallway

Water up to banister in kitchen.

14:21pm Photo Ref: Yorkshire Car Centre

Yorkshire Car Centre is now 3ft under water and covering the road which is at a higher level.

14:21pm Photo Ref: GRM

GRM Engineering (over the road from Yorkshire Car Centre and at a higher level) is now flooding. Photo shows that our cars that we placed there to save from flood water as unaware earlier of the severity to come. (Higher value vehicles had been removed from forecourt 1st were now damaged with flood water and many had to left and became fully submerged).

A contributing factor was major difficulties getting vehicles through to a safe area (towards Iron Bridge, Carlton) because of one side of road closure whilst water was being monitored by EA (traffic lights) approximately 3 weeks previously. Exact date applied for under Freedom of Information Act.

Members of the public stopping traffic so that could push vehicles out of the flood water.

17:14pm

Road now closed by the police but unsure of exact time this was done.

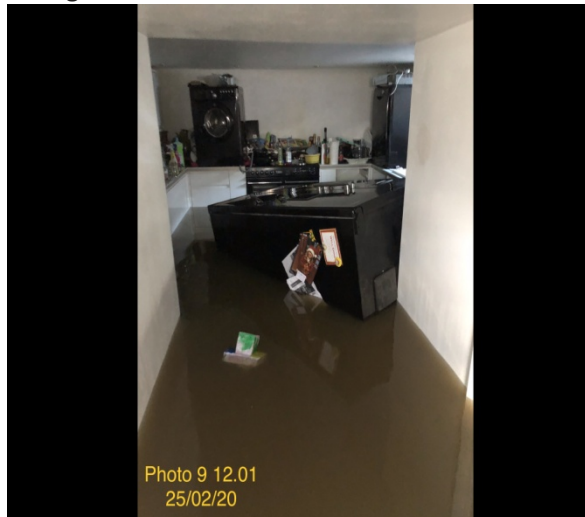
Westgate House 0734hrs



Westgate House Kitchen 1040hrs



Westgate House Kitchen 1201hrs



Yorkshire Car Centre 1236hrs



Westgate House Hallway 1328hrs



Yorkshire Car Centre 1421hrs



GRM 1421hrs



NOTES FROM MR PAUL COOPER RESIDENT OF COWICK and MEMBER OF INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Mr Paul Cooper is a local farmer who has lived in the area all his life. He is also a member of the Cowick and Snaith Internal Drainage Board (IDB) which is part of the Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Board. The in-depth knowledge that both Paul and the members of the local IDB had as to the drainage and dyke system and the overall lay of the land was invaluable to the response of this emergency.

It is, however, the view of many who were closely involved in dealing with the emergency that this knowledge was - at times - overlooked by the formal response agencies. It is known that when the command centre was relocated from the office of Snaith & Cowick Town Council to Snaith Fire Station (which was the right action to take) that the IDB were not invited to Bronze Command Meetings for over 24 hours. The response to the emergency was not always cohesive and not to include the IDB in meetings for this length of time was considered by the Town Council to be unacceptable.

On two occasions. High Volume Pumps were requested by the IDB as an urgent requirement; the first on Wednesday 26 February and the second on Thursday 27 February. It was minuted twice that these requests were not expedited as quickly as the IDB would have liked.

Flooding notes 2020 submitted to us by Mr Cooper;

Tuesday 25 February 2020

The River Aire started to over top at Pickhill Bank at approximately 8am, and by 1pm it had flooded the Garage and surrounding properties at Snaith and entered George Street to go and flood 30 properties.

At 2pm the Cowick and Snaith IDB asked the representative of the Environment Agency if Cowick and Snaith IDB could block three culverts under the Railway at East Cowick to stop the water flooding East Cowick. We were told this was not allowed.

Wednesday 26 February 2020

Water had by now began to run through the culverts towards East Cowick and it was therefore too late to block the water as the culverts were under water.

During Wednesday and Thursday 27 February 2020 the water gradually flooded approximately 60 houses in East Cowick.

Thursday 27 April 2020

At this stage it was thought by the Environment Agency that the water could go to the back of Cowick Hall into West Cowick, thereby putting properties in Little London Lane under threat of flooding.

Sand bags were distributed and the householders were told to prepare for evacuation. Luckily the water did not get as far as West Cowick, this was because of the action taken by Cowick and Snaith IDB, the Environment Agency and the Fire Brigade and East Riding Council.

Cowick and Snaith IDB hired a 360 excavator to take two culverts out of a open drain to allow water to flow quicker to the IDBs New bridge Pumping Station. This meant that water could be pumped away quicker.

A total of fourteen mobile pumps were brought in by East Riding Council, The Environment Agency and Fire Service to drain water from East Cowick village.

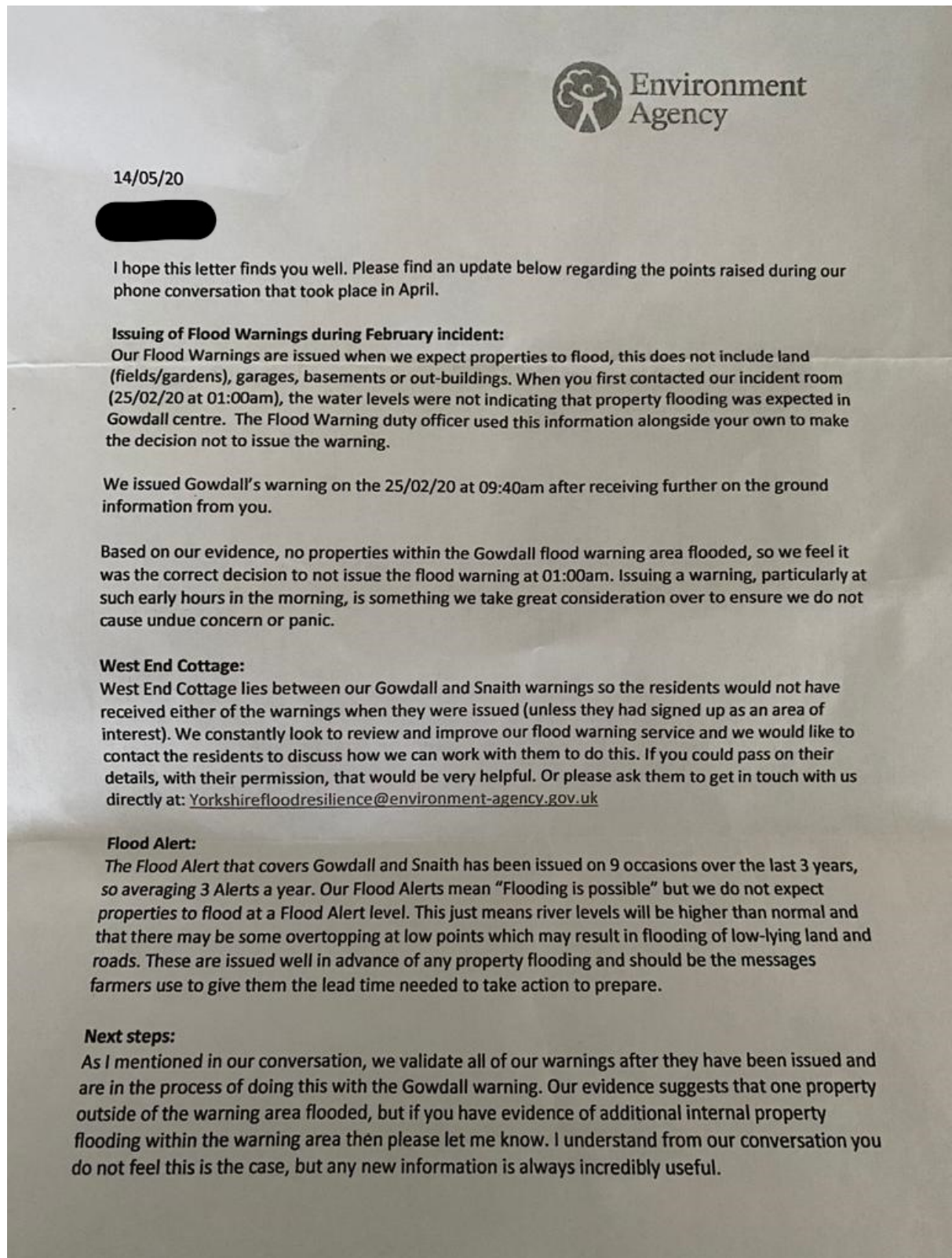
Cowick and Snaith IDB decided to cut an open drain from the M62 motorway drain to the Carr drain, measuring 918 metres in length, to allow the water to free flow to the IDB pumping station at New Bridge. This worked very well and allowed water to clear from East Cowick village.

Friday 28 February 2020

East Cowick village hall was opened for East Cowick residents and emergency workers.

Letter Received from Environment Agency

Attached below is a copy of some correspondence between the Flood Warden for Gowdall and the Environment Agency, which we consider should be included for information.



I know you expressed a desire for warning trigger levels to be lowered, especially because you feel the older residents of Gowdall need more lead time to prepare. As mentioned above, the Alert does indicate the prepare stage, and we would generally only reduce a warning's trigger level if properties had flooded before it was reached, which did not happen in Gowdall.

We are very cautious about reducing a trigger level where this has not happened to avoid the risk of creating a warning which is issued too soon and too frequently without flooding to properties taking place.

I appreciate this might not answer all your questions, or give you the next steps you hoped for. If you wish to discuss any of this further please do not hesitate to get back in touch with me.

When things have returned to some sort of "normality", I would really welcome the chance to meet you in person and to see Gowdall in order to help me learn more about this area and how we can support your role as flood warden.

Complaints procedure:

With regards to your request to know the complaints procedure in writing, it is as follows; email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk or call 03708 506 506

Best wishes

Carolyn Jarvis

Yorkshire Flood Resilience
Engagement Advisor
07795 800722

Historical Report

This was a report compiled prior to the February floods outlining the confidence and belief in the improved Snaith defences and based on the fact that the Environment Agency had spent money wisely to protect Snaith. Cllr. David Bromley of Snaith & Cowick Town Council has made these observations over a period of time as a frequent walker along the River Aire.

Report on Flood defences

I have been monitoring the success of the flood defence work.

The Environment Agency have also been regularly on site at critical periods and following conversations with Environmental Agency staff all agreed that the work has been successful in protecting Snaith.

Scenario 1;

This was a low level situation where flood water entered the new channel for the first time and water was actually draining down the new reworked channel at a faster flow than in the actual river.

Scenario 2;

This was at a medium level of flooding and water again travelled via the new channel and was approx two metres below the fortifications.

Scenario 3; 15th November 2019

This coincided with a high tide and high volumes of water from the upper end of the river, again the new channel transported water via the new channel approx. one metre below the new fortifications.

On this occasion flooding occurred up stream and Hirst Courtney was only inches away from flooding at the Sloop Inn, water overflowed to the flood plain on the opposite bank.

There was a safety margin of one metre at the new fortifications at Snaith with water flowing rapidly away.

Admittedly this is a very casual survey but it shows that on early valuation Snaith is much safer from flooding.

I propose that the council write again to Bentley Construction to describe the completed work with a view to following up with the Environment Agency to reduce the High Risk flood classification for Snaith.

Images of the effects of Flooding

A number of images have been received by the Town Council of the damage caused by the flooding. These have been set out below;

Property Nr. 17B Back Lane, East Cowick



George Street - Snaith

Residents report water coming up from the drainage system. The photograph below was taken at approximately 1123hrs on Wednesday 26 February 2020;



Impact of Water Levels Upstream

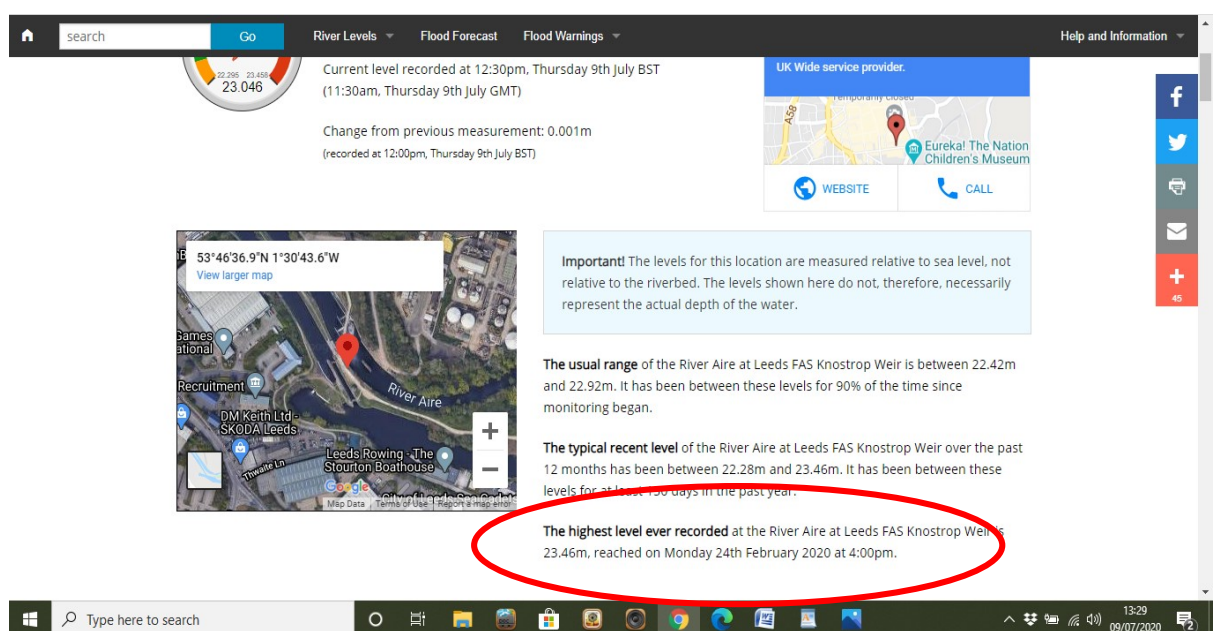
The image below depicts the water levels recorded at Snaith Ings in the lead-up to the flooding event, during the floods and that recorded in the weeks thereafter. The graph demonstrates a huge surge in water flow over a very short period of time.



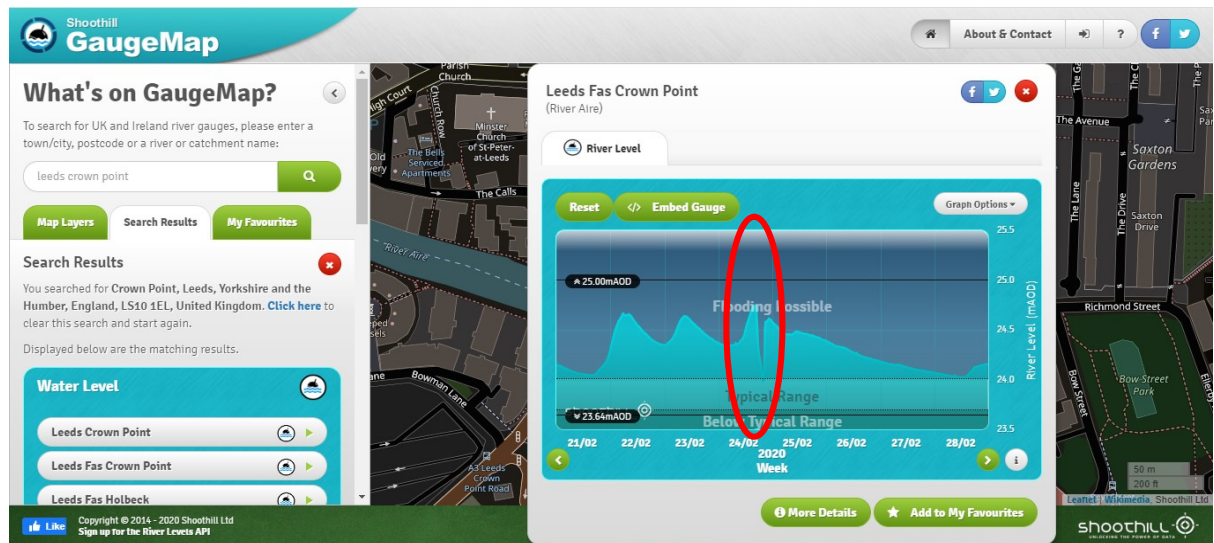
The water which filled Snaith Ings and caused so many properties and businesses to flood was NOT a result of a breach of the riverbank, nor was it a result of a period of heavy rainfall causing localised flash flooding. The people of Snaith and Cowick are therefore keen to understand where this water actually came from?

It is well known that the City of Leeds, through which the River Aire flows, has been the focus of some heavy investment by the Environment Agency in the form of a £50M Flood Alleviation Scheme including the installation of two new Weirs at Knostrop and Crown Point.

The image attached below indicates a record high level of water at Leeds FAS Knostrop Weir on Monday 24 February 2020;



A further illustration below of the Leeds FAS Crown Point Weir also indicates a sudden drop in levels from a height of 24.678m down to 24.02m within the space of a few hours.



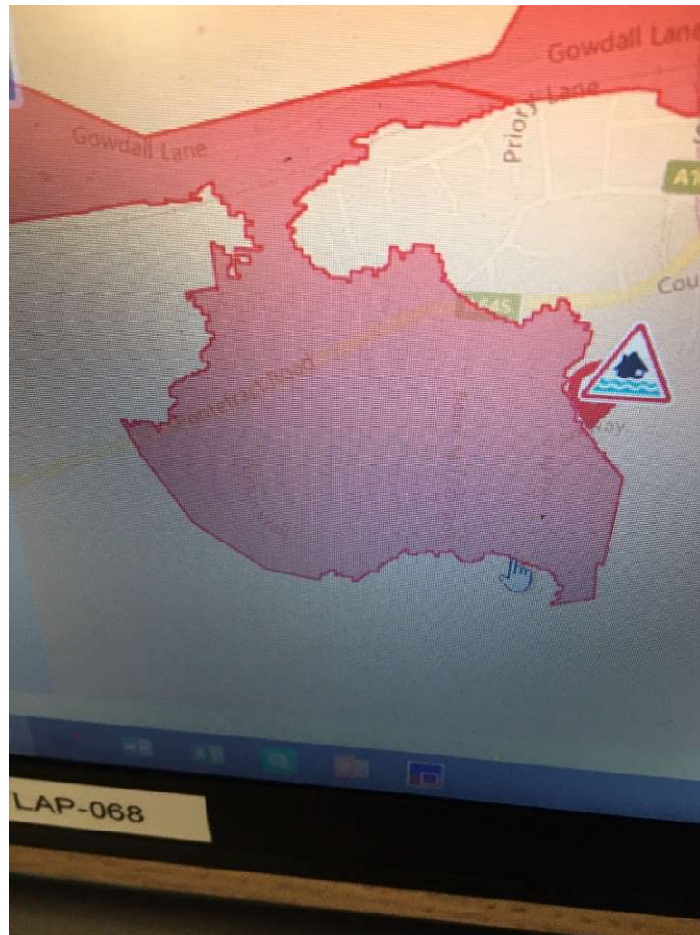
Questions that are immediately raised are;

1. Has the weir been opened?
2. Where has the water gone so suddenly?
3. How does this impact on the River Aire and the Lower Aire Washlands downstream?
4. Was it the intention of the Environment Agency to 'sacrifice' the smaller towns and villages downstream to 'save' the City of Leeds?

Warnings Provided by the Environment Agency

As mentioned earlier, the first notification from the Environment Agency regarding possible flooding in our area came through shortly after 08:00am on Tuesday 25 February. By that time, as was later discovered, Gowdall Lane (adjacent to the Water Treatment Works) was already under several feet of water and Gowdall Ings was almost at capacity and threatening to spill over into Snaith Ings.

The image below shows the catchment of the first warning issued by the EA;



Much of this area was not at any risk whatsoever, particularly the area to the south of Pontefract Road and the Punton Walk estate. If water were to reach some parts of the area highlighted, the entire town would be have flooded as the highest point in Snaith is included in that area.

As the situation worsened, the lack of a visible response from the relevant agencies in those first few hours was alarming and scenes of chaos emerged. Key moments recalled by members of the Town Council and its staff who were present as the incident unfolded include;

1. There was a slow response to the ERYC implementing a road closure on Gowdall Lane. At one point, the Town Mayor had to step into the path of an oncoming vehicle who would otherwise have ploughed straight into the flood water as this was hidden on approach by the brow of the hill. Why did this take so long to implement as this was a clear danger?

2. Comments were made about the lack of personnel from the Environment Agency present during the morning of Tuesday 25 February before Pickhill Bank began to overtop. Surely the water levels in the Gowdall Ings were being monitored to know that it was about to reach capacity? Where were the EA staff to assess the situation?
3. The ERYC were not aware of the likelihood of flooding until a call was made from the Town Clerk to the ERYC Emergency Coordinator shortly after 09:00hrs. Gowdall Lane and a residential property were already flooded by this time. Gowdall is part of the East Riding of Yorkshire so why was the local authority not informed/aware of this?

As members of the Town Council and its staff walked eastwards along Gowdall Lane, residents living on Gowdall Lane approached to ask questions about whether they thought their properties were going to flood; they were unable to answer them as they had no real understanding of the situation and did not possess the expertise and knowledge to be able to provide answers. Advice was given to start and try to protect their properties and remove anything they thought was valuable and at risk. Why were these properties not being individually approached by either the EA or the ERYC to warn them of the high possibility that they would be affected in some way, even if the extent to which their homes flooded was not known at that point.

The same group from the Town Council approached a Humberside Police vehicle which was driving down Gowdall Lane and asked them if they had come to enforce the road closure; the answer was 'No - we've just come for a look'. This was incredulous; there was still no official police support to the ensuing incident. Vehicles were still driving up Gowdall Lane and it was all becoming very chaotic.

On reaching Selby Road, this was particularly visible. Selby Road (A1041) lies in the flood plain and is one of the major routes in and out of the town which runs north over the River Aire into Carlton, North Yorkshire.

The bridge over the River Aire was already under traffic control due to it being used to site generators being used by the EA to power pumps taking water out of the watercourse on the northern side of the river.

As can be clearly seen in photos in a previous section of this report, the water was rising very rapidly and the staff from The Yorkshire Car Centre were frantically trying to move cars from the showroom and forecourt out on to Selby Road and up to higher ground. This - and the impact of the traffic restrictions on the bridge - made Selby Road gridlocked in a very short space of time. Yet again, a Humberside Police vehicle was sat in the queuing traffic but no effort was made to try and assist. Emergency calls to 999 by both the Town Mayor and a Town Councillor were not responded to with adequate urgency.

As the situation worsened, both the primary and secondary schools in Snaith decided to notify parents that schools were being closed as a precaution at 1pm to allow parents to collect their children before the road became impassable.

As previously mentioned in the earlier Timeline, the Town Mayor and another Councillor made calls to 999 to request assistance on Selby Road but no immediate response was provided. It was approximately 13:45hrs when a senior member of Humberside Fire & Rescue attended the

scene (who may not have been on duty) and began to take command of the situation on Selby Road and started to turn vehicles around.

Council staff then proceeded to open up the office and make preparations for it to be used as the Command Centre. The first 'official' Command Meeting was then held at approximately 16:00hrs, led by Humberside Police.

Snaith Ings Exceedance Notes 19/02/2020

On Sunday 1 March 2020, an A3 piece of paper was found on the meeting table inside the Town Council office. It was entitled 'Snaith Ings Exceedance Notes 19/02/2020'. Who left this document or how long it was left on the table before it was found has never been determined.

What was of particular concern and note to the Town Council was the date; Wednesday 19 February 2020. This was **7 DAYS** prior to the overtopping of Pickhill Bank.

It is apparent that the Environment Agency were considering the likely options should the water spill over the barrier bank and into Snaith Ings, which is what should be expected of such an agency, but what isn't understood is why no action was taken to advise the relevant authorities (i.e. the East Riding of Yorkshire Council), the Town Council or the likely affected residents of this.

It is appreciated that plans such as these may be routinely drawn up but in the days following its creation, surely the water levels across the Lower Aire Washlands were rising at such a rate that this plan would likely move from being theoretical to actual?

It was very worrying to see that the way the flooding event unfolded had been predicted in advance, yet none of the pre-emptive measures were put in place to minimise its effect.

It has been said several times in this report that whilst the flooding may not have been prevented, having more advance warning may well have allowed those affected more time to save personal belongings before they were evacuated.

The Town Council have approached the Environment Agency on two occasions about this document but have been met with an unacceptable response. Copies of the document were sent to the local MP, Andrew Percy, as well as Humberside Police and Humberside Fire and Rescue.

Stories of Community Support

Throughout the floods, the Town Council were overwhelmed to see how the community came together to support each other and we would like to take some time to acknowledge some of those efforts. This list is by no means exhaustive and we know there were many other acts of kindness and generosity that made a huge difference to those whose properties were flooded and to the Emergency Responders and volunteers on the 'frontline'.

Snaith Prioory

As one of the Emergency Centres identified in the Town Councils Emergency Plan, the Reverend Eleanor Robertshaw opened the church as a respite area and, being located so close to the Command Centre, it quickly became a focal point where both responders and affected residents could seek warmth, hot food and emotional support. Snaith Prioory remained open 24 hours a day for over 2 weeks, supported by a fantastic team of church members and other residents who wanted to help. Many donations of clothes, food and toiletries were left here too.

Snaith & District Community Sports Hall

The Sports Hall was another of the identified Emergency Centres and was used by those evacuated as a place to stay whilst other accommodation was sought. Large items of furniture and bedding, along with food and clothing, were also donated here and the hall remained open 24 hours a day whilst the floodwaters were still rising as a refuge to those who needed it.

Local Businesses

Many of our local businesses maintained a continual supply of hot food, sandwiches, cakes and drinks to the Emergency Responders, completely free of charge and even when their own businesses were suffering with the lack of customers due to the town being almost isolated by water. An incredibly supportive gesture. Kealey's Butchers and Marios Pizza dropped off much needed sustenance to the Command Centre during that first night and many others kept that going through the next few days with food parcels from Bon Appetite, Kitchen, and other businesses further afield.

East Cowick Village Hall

East Cowick Village Hall is one of the designated Emergency Centres and this opened up to both residents and emergency responder once the situation in East Cowick worsened. This was voluntarily led by Gwen Cooper, whose husband Paul was already out providing invaluable support as a member of the IDB. Other members of the local community provided assistance to keep this facility open 24 hours a day for nearly a week.

Pear Tree Nurseries

Pear Tree Nurseries is run by a local family who own a flower shop in the town centre. John Wright and his family offered up sand from their quarry to fill sand bags which were so desperately needed. Teams of volunteers worked 24 hours a day at the peak of the crisis to supplement the sandbags that were being delivered by both the ERYC and the EA. No financial reward was sought by John and his family just wanted to do their bit in helping the community.

2 lads with wheelbarrow

Two younger members of our community assisted in the effort with moving sandbags to people's property using a wheelbarrow they had purchased out of their own money. This was an incredibly generous gesture which was recognised by many.

T2T / Rotary / Rubicon

Once the waters had begun to subside, we were very fortunate in that a number of volunteer recovery specialists came to help those who were flooded, particularly those who were vulnerable or without insurance. Two of these groups, Rubicon and T2T were made up of ex-military personnel or fire-fighters who helped residents remove furniture and other belongings which were damaged by floodwater. They also helped to lift carpets and strip walls back to brick in order to let the properties dry out ready for renovation. A volunteer from Rotary UK, who had been based in Doncaster following the floods there in December 2019, was also able to bring a vast wealth of knowledge in volunteer coordination and led many clean-up operations in the following weeks.

Conclusion

The flooding our town experienced in February 2020 was unprecedented. However, the main question that must be answered remains;

Where did this water come from and to what extent did the Environment Agency expect or understand the impact this would have?

For many, the sheer volume of water that inundated our area was a devastating shock. This was not case of flash-flooding from a short period of intense rainfall. Nor was it a breach of the river wall. This was water that had been gradually building behind Pickhill Barrier Bank and other washland reservoirs upstream of Snaith Ings for some days prior to Tuesday 25 February 2020. We know the River Aire was not breached and it is recognised that the washland reservoirs upstream, and ultimately Snaith Ings, operated as they were designed to do.

For some living within the floodplain itself, the risk of their property being affected by floodwater was known but ultimately it was the lack of timely warnings given to residents to prepare for that floodwater that has caused the greatest consternation. Why was this? This was not a sudden influx, but the gradual rising of water levels.

The residents of East Cowick were flooded due to the overtopping of the Cowick Barrier Bank, the last defence of Snaith Ings. Once this occurred, the water had a free rein, finding the path of least resistance, despite the heroic attempts by the IDB to try and channel the water away from homes and businesses. It is asked yet again, where did this volume of water come from and how much advance warning did the Environment Agency have?

This then raises the question as to whether the Environment Agency released the upstream water in a managed and coordinated manner to allow flood defences to protect communities downstream of Leeds. It is understood that the Environment Agency are planning to spend more money on Phase 2 of the Leeds Flood Protection Scheme - is this appropriate considering the impact further down the river? It is also clear that defences along the River Aire and the River Don are currently inadequate and it is only a matter of time before further LIFE THREATENING situations occur downstream of LEEDS. Surely the obvious approach to take is to delay Phase 2 until defences are built downstream that can accommodate the water released from the Upper Aire and Don Valleys.

On reflection, flooding may have been inevitable but some of the financial and emotional losses incurred could perhaps have been avoided with advance notification. As mentioned earlier, the Environment Agency had considered the likely impact of floodwater some days prior to Tuesday 25 February 2020; why was this not acted upon? Documents show that the Environment Agency had full knowledge of the defensive capabilities of downstream defences.

Snaith & Cowick Town Council have written to the Environment Agency on a number of occasions since the flooding event, asking these very questions but an acceptable response has yet to be received.

The residents of Snaith and Cowick have a right to know these answers and to better understand what lessons have been learned from this event.

