

Environment Agency Position Statement: Disposing of Freehold Land along the River Thurne near Potter Higham, Norfolk

Flood risk and climate change: Land adjacent to the River Thurne near Potter Higham is particularly vulnerable to flooding and the impacts of climate change.

Climate change affects the main sources of flooding within Broadland, namely:

- Higher-than-normal tidal water levels coming up the rivers, filling the space between the flood embankments and then overtopping onto the adjacent floodplain.
- water from heavy rainfall coming down the rivers and similarly spilling across the floodplains.
- overtopping or breaching by the sea of the flood defences and dunes along the low-lying coast, the likelihood of which will also be increased by higher sea levels.

Broadland rivers have very shallow gradients to drive their flow, and at high tide, sea water flows back into the rivers, raising water levels some distance upstream. Drainage of the rivers into the sea through Great Yarmouth is dependent on the 'tidal window', the period around low tide. A rise in sea level means high tides will be higher and extend further inland, while the higher low tide level will reduce the 'tidal window' compared with today, also resulting in higher water levels retained upstream for longer periods of time.

We continue to experience sea level rise, primarily due to climate change, through thermal expansion of water in the oceans and the melting of ice as the atmosphere warms. Over the period 1990-2020, the sea level measured at Lowestoft has risen by 4.2mm per year. Projections for climate change in the locality suggest that in 100 years' time, the sea level compared to 1981-2000 will be at least around 500mm (0.5m) higher and possibly 1000mm (1.0m) higher. Additionally, climate change is expected to cause an increase in winter rainfall by 10-30% over the same period.

Impacts: The frequency and severity of flooding to properties at risk along the River Thurne will increase with time; this means greater depths of flooding and more extensive internal damage. The associated health and safety risks are also likely to rise.

Additionally, the frequency of road closures and disruptions to utilities servicing the bungalows will also increase.

Future Management: There is uncertainty regarding the future management of flood risks in the Upper Thurne. The future of the flood risk management assets, such as the embankment adjacent to the bungalows, is unknown. These assets may or may not continue to receive public funding for maintenance, and their management actions beyond the immediate future are uncertain. Drainage of the area requires Internal Drainage Board pumping stations (maintained and operated by the IDB) working in combination with flood risk embankments, which are largely maintained by the Environment Agency under permissive powers. Conversely, the flood protection provided by the embankments relies on the IDB pumps to remove water from the flood compartments, creating space for a tidal surge, as happened in 2013.

Different actions to manage flood risk are likely to be appropriate at different times over the next 100 years as sea levels get progressively higher and river flows increase. There will be future decision points and choices made between different possible actions, not least concerning what can be afforded. The [Broadland Futures Initiative](#) (BFI) is an ongoing partnership exploring various options for managing the Broads. The outcome of this strategy will not be available until at least 2028.

Why is the Agency Disposing of Land?

The Environment Agency is not actively seeking to dispose of land at River Thurne and does not consider it surplus: it remains operational land.

The Environment Agency has received a number of claims from leaseholders to buy the freehold of their house under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. These claims are considered on a case-by-case basis and are subject to formal valuation by a RICS surveyor specialising in leasehold enfranchisement.

Each transfer contains an acknowledgement from the tenant that they are buying the freehold of their property in the full knowledge that there is a high probability of flooding, and that the property will be significantly affected in future by the changing climate.

A separate disposal has also been agreed with the Broads Internal Drainage Board (IDB) to facilitate construction work for replacement IDB pumps.

Environment Agency Considerations

The Environment Agency opposes any intensification or proliferation of development in this area and relies on the Local Planning Authority to control this. Additionally, the freehold transfer also contains a restriction against development without the Environment Agency's prior consent. This consent is required in addition to all other planning requirements and consents, such as planning permission, or the requirement for a Flood Risk Activity Permit.

As of March 2025, disposals have been agreed for 13 Lease A bungalows.

The EA reserves the right not to agree to any further disposals. However, if a disposal is agreed, it must be demonstrated that:

- Value for money for the public purse is achieved.
- The EA can continue its duties unimpeded now and in the future.
- Disposals do not create obstacles to future management of the area or the Norfolk Broads as a whole, details of which are currently unknown.

Lease B bungalows are subject to different management criteria and must be considered separately.

The Environment Agency does not currently intend to extend the term of the Thurne Bungalow Management Company (TBMC) lease, which expires in 2085.

Date issued: 14th March 2025

We would like to ask a few questions for clarity.

1. Who produced this statement and what, or who prompted the production of such a statement?
2. Who is the intended audience for this Position Statement?
3. Is this Position Statement the EA's current policy?
4. Is this document part of a larger document and if so, could the RTTA see the entire document?
5. The RTTA has been informed by the Thurne Bungalow Management Company that the EA wishes to dispose of all land along the River Thurne. From this Position Statement it appears this is incorrect. Are we correct in assuming that and that the

EA is not actively seeking to dispose of land and bungalows and the TBMC statement is incorrect?

6. The Statement additionally states that the EA does not currently intend to extend the 99 year lease, which expires in 2085. Does this mean that extension of the lease has already been discussed and with whom?

7. Would the EA object to the RTTA publishing the document to its members?

Answers to RTTA queries on EA Statement

Dear Diana Cornell,

I am writing in response to your request for information, received 26 March 2025, regarding River Thurne on the Broads.

We respond to requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR).

We have consulted with our technical team and their answers to your specific questions are below:

- *Who produced this statement and what, or who prompted the production of such a statement?*

It was produced by the Flood & Coastal Risk Management team. It is in response to ongoing discussions and queries regarding leasehold enfranchisement and in the light of ongoing climate change and potentially higher water levels.

- *Who is the intended audience for this Position Statement?*

Thurne Bungalow Management Company and Thurne Bungalow leaseholders seeking to enfranchise.

- *Is this Position Statement the EA's current policy?*

This is the Environment Agency's current position in relation to disposal of land along the River Thurne.

- *Is this document part of a larger document and if so, could the RTTA see the entire document?*

No it is not.

- *The RTTA has been informed by the Thurne Bungalow Management Company that the EA wishes to dispose of all land along the River Thurne. From this Position Statement it appears this is incorrect. Are we correct in*

The Position Statement confirms correctly that the Environment Agency is not actively seeking to dispose of land on the River Thurne. As stated in the statement, any claims received under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

- *The Statement additionally states that the EA does not currently intend to extend the 99 year lease, which expires in 2085. Does this mean that extension of the lease has already been discussed and with whom?*

The Environment Agency received an enquiry from TBMC, through their agent, about the possibility of extending the term of the existing lease to 999 years. This is not something that the Environment Agency is currently considering. As set out in the statement, the Environment Agency does not consider the land to be surplus and it remains operational land.

- *Would the EA object to the RTTA publishing the document to its members?*

No.

Please refer to the [Open Government Licence](#) which explains the permitted use of this information.

Rights of appeal

If you are not satisfied with our decision, you can contact us within two calendar months to ask for the decision to be reviewed. We will then conduct an internal review of our response to your request and give you our decision in writing within 40 working days.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the internal review, you can then make an appeal to the Information Commissioner Office, the statutory regulator for EIR and FOI. The address is: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire. SK9 5AF.

Tel: 0303 123 1113 (local rate) or 01625 545 745 (national rate) | Fax: 01625 524 510 Email: casework@ico.org.uk | Website: www.ico.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

Teresa Chapman

East Anglia Area Customers and Engagement team