# Volunteers in Leicester pioneer natural flood defences amid rising UK risks



In the heart of Leicester, a group of volunteers is actively engaging with the city’s waterways to develop innovative solutions that address the increasing threat of flooding. With the UK facing intensifying rainfall due to climate change, the need for effective flood management has become critical. This movement aligns with growing recognition among authorities that incorporating natural methodologies can enhance flood resilience considerably.

At a tributary of the River Soar, these volunteers are reinforcing wooden structures designed to alter the flow of water, slowing it down rather than allowing it to rush straight through. Dan Scott, who leads the initiative at the Trent Rivers Trust, explains that these structures are intended to transform the river's behaviour, offering a vital buffer during periods of heavy rain. Scott highlights that the installations are not just a makeshift solution but part of a broader strategy that complements traditional flood defences like retention basins and canals. Such traditional methods, while crucial, increasingly face limitations as extreme weather events become more frequent.

Recent government assessments reveal that over 6.3 million properties in the UK are currently at risk of flooding, a figure expected to exceed eight million by 2050. The alarming statistic underscores the urgent need for innovative flood management strategies. Steven Forest, director of the Flood Risk Management Program at the University of Hull, states that "flooding is a really urgent societal problem." He points out that climate-related events have already inflicted significant financial losses, with insurance payouts linked to flooding reaching over £570 million in recent years.

Beyond the physical measures, there is a philosophy emerging that calls for integrating water into urban design, drawing inspiration from countries like the Netherlands. This approach prioritizes the allocation of space for natural flood drainage, while in the United States, the establishment of vegetation "buffer zones" following Hurricane Sandy serves as a successful model. However, implementing such strategies faces challenges; there is a palpable resistance among some communities and policymakers who may prefer visible infrastructure over less tangible solutions. As Scott observes, convincing stakeholders that non-concrete solutions can be equally effective entails a cultural shift in understanding the potential of natural flood management.

Government initiatives have begun to reflect a shift in attitude towards these natural strategies. A £2.6 billion fund announced earlier this year allocated a significant portion for traditional infrastructure but revealed a growing interest in incorporating natural solutions. This follows the launch of a £25 million program by a previous government specifically aimed at natural flood management, reflecting a growing recognition of its importance. As Geoff Whittle, a local councillor, noted, the continuing support for these approaches is a positive indication of their effectiveness.

Moreover, the achievements of community groups, such as the Shipston Area Flood Action Group in Warwickshire, which has implemented over 700 leaky barriers and ponds, demonstrate the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives. These local efforts have proven instrumental in reducing flood risks for numerous communities, underscoring the pivotal role community-led projects can play in national flood management strategies.

Ultimately, these initiatives foster a sense of agency among volunteers like Lis Gibbs, who articulated the satisfaction derived from making a tangible difference, particularly in the face of overwhelming climate challenges. By embracing both innovative and traditional approaches to flood management, UK towns are not only mitigating immediate risks but are also laying the groundwork for more sustainable, resilient urban environments in the future.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.spacedaily.com/reports/UK_towns_harness_nature_to_combat_rising_flood_risk_999.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-flood-management-programme-initial-findings/using-the-power-of-nature-to-increase-flood-resilience> - This UK government publication discusses the use of natural flood management (NFM) techniques to enhance flood resilience. It highlights community-led initiatives, such as the Shipston Area Flood Action Group in Warwickshire, which implemented over 700 leaky barriers and ponds to slow water flow during heavy rainfall, reducing flood risk for 17 villages and towns. The report emphasizes the importance of integrating NFM measures alongside traditional flood defenses to effectively manage flood risks and protect communities.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-chief-executive-natural-flood-management-essential-in-battle-against-climate-change> - In this announcement, the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan, underscores the critical role of natural flood management (NFM) in combating climate change-induced flooding. The article details various NFM projects, including one in Cumbria that involved building earth dams, leaky barriers, planting 8,000 trees, and creating offline flood storage ponds to slow or store water. It also highlights the Shipston Area Flood Action Group's efforts in Warwickshire, which have significantly reduced flood risks for multiple communities.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flood-and-coastal-risk-management-national-report/flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-report-1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024> - This UK government report provides an overview of flood and coastal erosion risk management activities from April 2023 to March 2024. It includes case studies of various flood defense schemes, such as the Perry Barr and Witton project in Birmingham, which constructed a new flood storage reservoir to protect nearly 1,800 properties. The report emphasizes the importance of both traditional and natural flood management measures in reducing flood risks and highlights ongoing efforts to enhance flood resilience across the country.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-chief-executive-natural-flood-management-essential-in-battle-against-climate-change> - In this announcement, the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan, underscores the critical role of natural flood management (NFM) in combating climate change-induced flooding. The article details various NFM projects, including one in Cumbria that involved building earth dams, leaky barriers, planting 8,000 trees, and creating offline flood storage ponds to slow or store water. It also highlights the Shipston Area Flood Action Group's efforts in Warwickshire, which have significantly reduced flood risks for multiple communities.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-chief-executive-natural-flood-management-essential-in-battle-against-climate-change> - In this announcement, the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan, underscores the critical role of natural flood management (NFM) in combating climate change-induced flooding. The article details various NFM projects, including one in Cumbria that involved building earth dams, leaky barriers, planting 8,000 trees, and creating offline flood storage ponds to slow or store water. It also highlights the Shipston Area Flood Action Group's efforts in Warwickshire, which have significantly reduced flood risks for multiple communities.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-chief-executive-natural-flood-management-essential-in-battle-against-climate-change> - In this announcement, the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan, underscores the critical role of natural flood management (NFM) in combating climate change-induced flooding. The article details various NFM projects, including one in Cumbria that involved building earth dams, leaky barriers, planting 8,000 trees, and creating offline flood storage ponds to slow or store water. It also highlights the Shipston Area Flood Action Group's efforts in Warwickshire, which have significantly reduced flood risks for multiple communities.