

THE DEBENHAM HOLISTIC FLOOD ALLEVIATION PROJECT – Nov. 2017

At the head of the river Deben, Debenham has three tributaries that converge there carrying water drained from an extensive catchment area. Despite often having a dry river bed in summer in times of high rainfall Debenham village with its restricted river m³ capacity running through its midst cannot cope with a sudden deluge from the watershed and so floods, submerging homes, businesses and renders some streets and local roads impassable. Serious local floods are historically recorded e.g. 1816 by Dove; & more recently in 1903, 1912, 1927, 1936, 1944, 1956, 1968, 1993/4/5 ref: SCC Green Suffolk. August 26th 1912 was probably the worst with 4 ins [& 7 in places] of rain falling locally in 24 hrs., recorded in Freeman family diaries. No barley was carted and there was severe local flooding with shocks of corn being washed out of the fields in Framsdén.

Thirty-three Debenham homes were inundated in 1993. Since then surprisingly, in my opinion, more houses have been allowed to be built in low lying areas of the village and 248 properties are officially assessed as at risk of fluvial floods. Perhaps this is what has prompted the instigation of the Debenham Flood Alleviation Plan. A collaboration of Environment Agency, East Suffolk Drainage Board, Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust & SCC that has adopted a 'slow the flow' policy seeking the goodwill of local landowners to provide suitable pockets of their land in order to hold back floods and so regulate surges of water through Debenham village.

Two small water features have already been completed at Debenham Hall and Aspall Hall which will impound approx 640m³ in storm conditions. A third more substantial project has recently been undertaken by the creation of a permanent water feature (and silt trap) of about 0.26 ha at Hill House Farm, Aspall. The feature will have the capacity to temporarily store an additional volume of approximately 6,688 m³ of flood water during high flow events.

It will intercept and slow flood water, helping to reduce silt loads and improve water quality. The additional flood storage capacity is sufficient to attenuate all but the most extreme flood flows for this minor tributary. The feature and surrounding wet meadow will provide a range of valuable riverine and aquatic habitats. Besides helping spare the local community the ordeal of flooding, it was the benefit to their farms wildlife & conservation policy which was the main incentive for Peter and Joan Freeman to benevolently commit land to the project.

Further suitable sites are being sought and despite there being no DEFRA funding it is hoped the project will be embraced by more Deben valley landowners, unlike the 1818 Debenham to Woodbridge Canal proposal which was vetoed.

Does anyone hold record of the dates and TIMES of any of the above local floods please? I am told on authority it is a local old wives tale that Debenham flooding usually coincides with high tides - I wish to investigate the facts!

