

Preston & South Ribble

Flood Risk Management Scheme

The Environment Agency is working with its partners to provide new flood defences for Preston and South Ribble. Once complete, the Flood Risk Management Scheme will better protect thousands of local residents' homes and local businesses.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PROPOSED FLOOD DEFENCES ALONG VICTORIA ROAD AND REMOVAL OF THE LIME TREES

The Environment Agency (EA) understands that the lime trees along Victoria Road are an established and recognisable feature of the area. Any works impacting mature trees is always given serious consideration and alternatives sought. This FAQ explains the reasons behind the decision to remove 18 of these trees, the extensive work that's gone into exploring alternatives, and how we are committed to recognising the value of these trees while protecting homes and businesses from future flood risk.

Why is the EA proposing to remove some of the lime trees on Victoria Road?

Removing trees is not something the Environment Agency (EA) undertakes lightly. Extensive investigations, including tree root radar surveys and engineering assessments, were carried out to try and identify alternative designs that could preserve them. Unfortunately, due to the density and spread of the root systems, and the proximity of the trees to the required working area, it is not feasible to retain them and construct the flood defences.

The proposed design includes the removal of 18 trees, but three others at the viewing platform would not interfere with works and would not be removed.

Do the trees have a historic value?

As part of its investigations into the trees' background, the EA has received differing accounts from the community regarding their history. Research by the EA's Senior Historic Environment Advisor has so far been inconclusive. Additionally, our tree survey could not confirm the precise age of the lime trees, as growth has been restricted by the limited space along the riverbank, but it is likely that the trees are at least 100 years old.

The EA is exploring ways to preserve the legacy of the lime trees, including taking 180 cuttings from them, which will be propagated before replanting elsewhere in the community.

Does the Crown own the lime trees?

The trees are not owned by the Crown. The EA has held meetings with the landowner to discuss the trees and South Ribble Borough Council's Tree Officer has also been consulted.

Why are flood defences needed; isn't flooding caused by the surface water/ drainage issues in the area?

The EA is aware of the surface water and drainage issues in some areas of Walton-le-Dale, which fall under the responsibility of Lancashire County Council and United Utilities, and we are in contact with them to understand if improvements can be made.

The Flood Scheme's primary remit is to reduce the risk from fluvial (river) flooding, which is increasing due to climate change. The existing defences have come close to overtopping in the past, including in January 2025. ***Importantly, works to improve Walton-le-Dale's defences are pre-emptive; enhancing protection for properties near the river before a major flood event occurs.***

The existing flood wall along Victoria Road is also showing signs of movement and needs to be replaced with a more resilient flood defence. Recent flood modelling shows that raising the wall height by approximately 0.3 metres is required to reduce the risk of fluvial flooding to the community—a risk that is increasing due to climate change.

Why doesn't the EA consider other options and find another way to build the defences?

To provide a resilient, long-term defence, the proposed wall requires secant piled foundations that reach bedrock. These foundations would unfortunately cut through the lime trees' root system, which helps anchor the trees. Contractors will also need a working area for their machinery to operate safely. This requires clearance for the piling operations, which the existing tree canopy would obstruct.

The EA did consider constructing defences in front of the trees, closer to the river, but the cost would have made the Scheme unviable and, importantly, it would cause serious environmental harm to the river.

The EA also considered moving the flood wall further towards the pavement and highway. This is also not possible, due to the large number of services that run adjacent to the existing wall, which includes a critical fibre optic communications cable of regional importance. As part of the EA's surveys, it was noted that the tree roots appear to be causing damage to the pavement along Victoria Road and pose a risk to the services beneath it.

Why does the new wall need such deep foundations?

The proposed secant piled foundation creates an 'underground wall' of piles, which provides seepage cut off (this means it prevents water from going under the floodwall), and it provides a design life of 100 years.

The design is an adaptive approach, which means the wall can be raised in the future, to keep pace with climate change, without undertaking further work on the foundations.

The design also takes into consideration any further future deterioration of the lower river wall and erosion of the riverbank, making it a more robust solution.

Why is the EA removing trees, isn't this damaging to the environment?

Mature trees provide significant environmental benefits, and the EA is committed to compensating for the removal of any trees through its comprehensive planting programme of nearly 14,000 new trees across Preston and South Ribble. This includes 8,450 trees and 2,550 hawthorn hedges already planted at Fishwick Bottoms. The tree replacement ratio to date is almost 15:1; exceeding the Scheme's target of 12:1 and the EA's requirement of 5:1.

While younger trees cannot immediately replace those lost, the EA believes this programme will help establish a lasting legacy, contributing significantly to biodiversity and carbon sequestration in the years to come—as well as enhancing community spaces.

Why has the EA planted trees along Fishwick Bottoms and not in Walton-le-Dale?

Unfortunately, compensatory planting cannot always take place in areas where trees are removed, and alternative locations have to be sought. The nearest location to Walton-le-Dale for extensive planting was on the opposite side of the river along Fishwick Bottoms. The EA accepts that this area may not be fully accessible to all residents, but it will create an extensive wildlife habitat once established, which is its primary purpose.

We are unable to replant trees along Victoria Road, once the new defences are complete, due to the lack of space and the risk that the tree roots could damage the defences.

Why doesn't the EA use Natural Flood Management to resolve the flooding risk rather than build new walls?

The Environment Agency wholly supports Natural Flood Management (NFM) initiatives, and some flood schemes have been able to utilise it effectively where the landscape allows. Unfortunately, there are no opportunities for NFM to be utilised in and around Walton-le-Dale at the scale required to reduce the high flows that the River Ribble and the River Darwen experience during a flood.

Why has the EA not considered dredging or removing gravel from the river to alleviate the flooding risk?

The riverbed consists of rock, as well as sediment, which limits the amount of material that can be removed. In addition, the volume of material that would need to be dredged or removed, in order to reduce flooding, would be very large and not cost effective. Importantly, dredging also poses a serious environmental risk, as it may disturb pollutants buried within the River Ribble's riverbed and destroys river habitat and disturbs wildlife.

For further information about the Preston & South Ribble Flood Risk Management Scheme, please contact psr@environment-agency.gov.uk