

Flood defence to protect baby graves

A new flood defence barrier to protect the graves of babies in Bathgate cemetery is being built, following a Christmas flooding incident.

The new barrier will be able to withstand a 1 in 75 year flood, councillors were told this week.

Parts of the graveyard close to Bathgate Water- the Bog Burn- were submerged following heavy rain on 29 December when almost 30% of the month's rain fell in one night.

What was particularly upsetting to many in the town was that the area worst hit contained the graves of babies.

Councillors on the town's Local Area Committee heard that work was almost complete on a new bund – a flat-topped earthwork which acts as a physical barrier between the cemetery and banks of the burn.

A report to the committee by the council Flood Risk Management team explained: "Works are currently on site to construct the bund to help mitigate future river flooding and is due to be completed early March 2022. The purpose of the bund is to direct flood water to a point downstream in an effort to reduce the risk."

Chairing the meeting, Cllr Harry Cartmill said: "The flooding issue caused a lot of heartache in the town. It was the children's part of the cemetery that was flooded, the second time it's happened."

Ronnie Fisher, the council's Design Engineering Manager answered questions from Cllr Cartmill on funding for wider

works to improve water flow through Bathgate around the Bog Burn.

There are long term plans to improve the area as a nature park and create flood mitigation measures as part of that work. The work is a partnership with the council and other bodies including the Forth Rivers Trust and SEPA.

Cllr Cartmil asked Fraser Keast, a Flood Risk Management Engineer with the council: "If we did get another flooding, God Forbid we won't, on the lines of what we had would these barriers withstand that, or could we potentially have other flooding issues. Would you be confident in saying it has been addressed?

Mr Keast told the meeting: "Every flooding event is different so a storm will be classed as a 1 in 50 or a 1 in 75, or 1 in 100 year event. When this project went out to consultants it came back as a 1 in 75 year design so it should sustain. If we had a 1 in 100 year event the bund would be overtopped. If there's a 1 in 50 event the water wouldn't come over the wall."

Engineers have to deal with surface water run off at the cemetery and this adds to water levels in the watercourse.

The December flooding was a combination of both out-of-bank flows from Bathgate Water but also by the accumulation of surface water run-off from higher areas of ground within the cemetery.

Meadow park pitches, across the other side of Bathgate water, were also flooded. As this area is treated as natural floodplain however it will not see any flood defences built.

Flooding hit many areas in West Lothian when after weeks of low temperatures and frozen ground, ice melt and rainfall led to saturated ground

Data from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's (SEPA) rain gauges at Slamannan and Harperrig reflect this with 70% of December's rain falling over the last week of the month.

The intensity of the rainfall on the 29 December equated to 35.6mm of rain falling at the Slamannan rain gauge, this equates to 27% of December monthly rainfall.

In spite of the intensity of flooding the council did not receive any reports of homes or businesses affected.

by Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter

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Bathgate, West Lothian.

Pictured is the new bund been built to protect the children's cemetery from the Bathgate water.

Picture by staff photographer Stuart Vance.