

## EAST ANGLIA

# East of England most at risk of flooding – report

By ALASDAIR MCGREGOR

Major improvements are needed to ensure the country is better protected against flooding, two hard-hitting reports reveal today.

One investigation highlights the eastern region as being particularly under threat, while a government-commissioned review has concluded Britain was ill-prepared for last summer's floods, which caused devastation across large parts of the country.

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) warns the UK's power, water and transport systems are stretched to the limit and need extra capacity to prevent blackouts and shortages when the country is hit by floods in the future.

In a special section on the East, the ICE report states that drainage systems in places like Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge are already working at full capacity and that pressure would only be increased as the region moves towards meeting its target of building 500,000 homes by 2021.

"No other area of the UK is in such real and immediate danger from flooding as the east of England. It's at risk from all sides: coastal erosion and flooding, tidal surges, river flooding and overflowing drains in towns and cities," the report states.

ICE said investment in new infrastructure had been reduced by economic and regulatory pressure to a point where "there is no longer any spare capacity available to provide alternative sources of power or water treatment should key utilities be compromised by flooding".

The Flooding: Engineering Resilience report also said funding for flood defences was not sufficient or secure, undermining industry confidence, and there were not enough skilled engineers to deliver protection from flooding.

The report coincides with the release of a government-commissioned review from Sir Michael Pitt, which contains 92 recommendations on how Britain should be better equipped in the event of future crises.

Britain's vulnerability was highlighted this time last year when places such as Hull were devastated



IN DANGER: Flooding in Yarmouth near the Haven Bridge last year.

by flooding. Then, in November, communities along the Norfolk and Suffolk coastline narrowly missed being swamped by a North Sea tidal surge.

ICE president David Orr said: "If we stretch our critical infrastructure to work a 100pc of capacity, then any failure will mean a severe loss of service. We need to invest to make sure our infrastructure is resilient..."

The report also highlights the vulnerability of the Norfolk Broads should controversial proposals to abandon flood defences along 25 square miles go ahead and also highlights the threat to major roads such as the A12 through Suffolk.

Concerns have also been raised about an increasing number of homes being built on floodplains, which was also highlighted in the Sir Michael Pitt review.

Sir Michael argues the government's annual £800m food defence budget for 2010 and 2011 is "about right" and that the money should be spent more wisely.

He said: "What we are arguing is

that we were not well prepared last summer for the scale of flooding that took place. Most of the recommendations are not expensive."

Sir Michael's recommendations include local authorities being given a more clearly-defined leadership role in overseeing the maintenance of drainage networks, a joint nerve centre from which the Met Office and Environment Agency can issue better flood warnings and new building regulations detailing drainage systems and appropriate construction materials.

A spokesman for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) said the government was working to ensure that infrastructure was resistant to flooding and robust back-up was in place where it was most needed.

She added: "Work includes assessing the vulnerability of infrastructure to natural hazards and working with industry and operators to ensure it's resilient. More details on this work will be provided as part of our formal response to the Pitt report."

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ICE report

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