

Deputation to the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee

24th Feb 2025

We would like Thames Water and Camden Council to:

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to hold back potential floodwater and the silt it carries down from Hampstead, to safeguard numerous downstream areas across north and west London.
2. Ensure that this plan is fully funded and implemented within the next five years.
3. Fully implement the recommendations in Camden's Section 19 report on the 2021 floods¹ and its Flood Risk Management Strategy 2022 to 2027².

We trust that Camden Council will involve their Planning and Highways Departments in developing and implementing this plan.

We would also like Camden Council to mandate that all developments that affect the footprint of a building within Hampstead, regardless of size, achieve runoff rates lower than the Greenfield standard. This mandate should cover new builds as well as extensions to existing buildings including basements and garden rooms, as well as other developments that remove soil. Furthermore, to protect other parts of Camden and boroughs further downstream, we recommend that the same mandate should apply across Camden.

Background

The 2022 Strategic Flood Response Framework for London³ projected the following worst case scenario outcomes if the surface water flooding risk isn't tackled:

- Flooding of up to 87,000 properties and 21,000 businesses.
- Just over 40 fatalities and thousands of casualties primarily in lower ground floor flats.
- Evacuation of up to 314,000 people (25,000 of which may require additional assistance).
- Short to medium term shelter requirements for 117,000 residents.
- Infrastructure impacted including roads, railway lines, gas, electricity and water.
- Closure of schools in affected areas for over 1 month.

¹ <https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/0/July+2021+Flood+Investigation+-+London+Borough+of+Camden+-+FINAL.pdf/ea22f061-4c05-a590-6240-02955630c2ef?t=1657007121150>

² <https://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/s108746/13a%20Appendix%201%20-%20Camden%20Flood%20Risk%20Management%20Strategy.pdf>

³

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_strategic_flood_response_framework_2022_v5.0_june_2022_-_public_facing.pdf

The Greater London Authority's interim London Surface Water Strategy⁴ recommends that Thames Water and local councils collaborate in implementing a strategic "catchment-based approach" to prevent more surface water flooding.

Hampstead, the highest point in central London, receives the highest rainfall in the city and serves as the source of four underground rivers.

During extreme rainfall events, Hampstead not only discharges surface water runoff but also intercepted groundwater, groundwater storm surges and large quantities of silt through the sewers to various downstream areas. (See video of water flowing from Netherhall Gardens into Finchley Road on 12th July 2021: <https://x.com/adamjac/status/1416027900919361541>)

Water flows from the western side of Hampstead to South Hampstead and Kilburn Priory, then to Maida Vale and other areas susceptible to flooding in Brent, Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea⁵.

In the areas downstream from Hampstead:

- There are numerous vulnerable self-contained lower ground floor flats.
- Many of these flats have been flooded in the past, with some experiencing multiple incidents.
- Several properties are completely below ground level, and some lack secondary exits.
- In Camden during the 1975 flood, one fatality occurred, and in the 2021 flood, an elderly man was only rescued from drowning by his neighbours at the last moment.
- Some owners whose properties were flooded in 2021 are finding it difficult to obtain flood insurance.
- There are bottlenecks in the system, for example in Goldhurst Terrace.

Silt-laden water from heavy rainstorms also flows down the eastern side of Hampstead and Hampstead Heath regularly flooding South End Green with major disruption to the storerooms beneath businesses and shops, properties and transport, including the south approach to the Royal Free Hospital. This water and silt goes on to impact other flood zones in Camden and beyond.

South Hampstead Flood Action Group

11th February 2025

These recommendations are supported by:

- Vicki Harding, Committee Member, Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum
- John Vedelago, Chair, South End Green Flood Action Group
- Edward Flaherty, Senior Flood Engagement Officer, National Flood Forum

⁴ <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/climate-adaptation/surface-water-flooding/londons-surface-water-strategy>

⁵ See Thames Water's report on Counters Creek: <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/home/about-us/investing-in-our-region/counters-creek/counters-creek-main-report.pdf>