



Defend Lytham

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FLOODPLAINS ARE FOR DUCKS, NOT DEVELOPERS

The floodplain covers an area of approximately fifteen square kilometres to the North West of Lytham St Annes. It is a flat landscape of peat deposits which were formerly a series of shallow lakes. Today it is reclaimed and managed farmland with large geometric fields bordered by straight drainage ditches. Crossing this moss is Wild Lane, no more than a tarmac track, which affords views over the surrounding countryside. At present, the area is largely under water due to the recent heavy rains.

The land drainage of Lytham St Annes is unique. Most people will not realise that Liggard Brook and the Main Drain, which enter the Ribble at Lytham docks, drain all of this floodplain stretching up to Blackpool. Drains connect to it from Marton Mere and Stanley Park lakes in the North and from Kirkham and Warton in the East. In addition, it drains the land directly behind Lytham and St Annes. Floodplains do by their nature flood. When it rains, they soak up hundreds of thousands of litres of rainwater and gradually release it into the drainage system. If the area were to be developed, this natural drainage would be lost and replaced by rapid run-off.

According to the Environmental Agency's web site, the area is already one of high flood risk. The recent rains drew it to the Agency's attention last week when they categorised the Main Drain across the moss as a Flood Watch, which means that it was so full that it could flood imminently. People living on the floodplain should be prepared for flooding. We need to ask though whether the rest of us are at increased risk of flooding, both as a result of climate change and because of the pressure to build on this floodplain.

What is currently being suggested is an M55 link road to replace the existing moss road and a bisecting Heyhouses by-pass. Are these roads essential or will they just pile the traffic into a jam in Ansdell? Furthermore, a document issued by the government (PPG25) states that building on a floodplain used to hold excess water at times of flooding should be wholly exceptional and limited to essential infrastructure.

All new building developments increase rapid run-off into the adjacent drains and brooks. This increases the pressure on drains like Liggard Brook and the Main Drain. The Cypress Point development was passed by the council on the very day that the new pumping station at Lytham Docks was completed in 1995. No doubt then that the council anticipated increased flood risk. Is the station effective? An appraisal by Atkins in 2001 found many unforeseen problems with this automated facility. These problems include silting up of the gravity outfalls, which puts additional pressure on a system already working under strain. Lytham had red flood alerts as a result of the system failing to cope at high tide last year. The drains and ditches have been close to overflowing this winter. Hull, with similar topography to Lytham, and situated on the Humber flooded because its pumps were overwhelmed by the rising river and extensive run-off and subsequently failed. Our pumps are in a no less vulnerable position.

All this suggests that increased urbanisation at White Hills, the proposed site at Queensway and the aforementioned roads could increase considerably the flood risks to us all. Flooding brings untold misery, insurance claims and drives away both tourism and business. No further development should take place at these sites because, if the pumps fail, Lytham could well be inundated with water from the Moss.

The Moss is home to rural communities and a rich diversity of wildlife. Partnership between farmers and agencies should be encouraged, as should diversification into wildlife wetland parks, forestation and tourism. There are many initiatives around the country trying to create wetland reserves. Are we, on the other hand, in danger of ignoring this natural green jewel on our doorstep, which is home to owls, partridge, foxes, wild fowl, dragonflies, toads, butterflies, bats and all manner of other creatures? Indeed, it is presently home to over a hundred wintering swans and other water birds. Rather than securing its status as a national asset could we be in danger of being the generation that stood back and allowed the developers to concrete it over?

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