

Ōhiti Road | Ōmāhu flood resilience project Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

As of August 2025

Cyclone Gabrielle made it plain: our flood defences, in places, were no longer enough.

This project – one of several now underway across Hawke’s Bay – is part of a broader effort to reduce flood risk, protect lives, and help our communities move forward with confidence.

For Ōhiti Road and Ōmāhu, that means building a 960m stopbank beside Taihape Road, lifting part of Ōhiti Road to meet it, and adding a second stopbank near the subdivision – along with stream works, drainage upgrades, and erosion protection.

Here’s what you need to know: what’s planned and how this local work connects to something much larger.

About the project

1. What is the purpose of this project?

Part of the Government’s North Island Weather Event (NIWE) recovery programme, the Ōhiti Rd | Ōmāhu project aims to reduce flood risk for 11 Category 2C properties along Ōhiti Road and nearby. The goal is to reclassify these homes to Category 1 – the lowest risk.

The preferred solution is a new stopbank, designed to protect against a 1-in-100-year flood. The design includes embankments and some road raising on the Ōmāhu side of Taihape Road to ensure protection doesn’t shift the risk elsewhere.

2. Why is this project needed?

Ōhiti Road was hit hard by Cyclone Gabrielle. While most homes in the area avoided formal Section 72 notices, they were flagged as high risk for future flooding. A stopbank is the best option to provide targeted, reliable protection. It will give Category 2C properties 1:100-year flood protection and, just as crucially, buy time for safe evacuation in larger events.

Timeline and construction

3. When will construction start?

Construction is set to begin in October 2025, once final designs are confirmed and consents secured. Major works are likely to take six to eight months, wrapping up mid-2026. Some early enabling works, including stream maintenance, have already been completed.

Design and impacts

4. Why is a stopbank the preferred solution – and were other options, like wetlands or natural floodplains, ever on the table?

Yes – a full range of flood mitigation options was explored early on, including wetlands, natural floodplains, and upstream diversions into Lake Rūnanga. But in terms of cost, effectiveness, and deliverability, the stopbank came out clearly ahead.

It's the only solution that fits within the project's scope and budget while offering strong mitigation to the 11 Category 2C properties. Larger-scale alternatives would require major infrastructure and fall outside the current mandate. Broader catchment strategies may still have a role to play – just not in this phase of the work.

5. Will this project affect nearby properties or key infrastructure like Taihape Road?

Flood modelling shows only minor effects on upstream areas – including Taihape Road – even in a 1-in-100-year flood. The distance involved (over 4km) and local topography help limit any impact.

As part of the works, Taihape Road will be raised east of Broughton's Bridge to help protect it from Ohiwia Stream. These improvements are based on detailed hydraulic modelling and are designed to reduce risk – not shift it. We'll also be adding erosion protection. Our consent conditions are clear: no new flood risks – and we intend to meet them.

6. Will the stopbank worsen flooding during extreme events like Cyclone Gabrielle?

No. The stopbank is designed to offer protection in a 1-in-100-year flood – and to give residents vital time to evacuate in more extreme events.

Nothing can fully defend against a storm the scale of Gabrielle (initially assessed as a 1-in-710-year event, now revised to 1-in-400), but this stopbank will significantly reduce the risk to life and property. Final assessments on Gabrielle-scale impacts will be shared once modelling is complete.

7. What is a 100-year, 1% or 1-in-100-year flood?

It's a statistical measure, not a prediction. A 1-in-100-year Average Recurrence Interval (ARI) or 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) flood means there's a 1 percent chance of that level of flooding happening in any given year. It doesn't mean it only happens once every hundred years – in fact, major floods can and do occur closer together.

The proposed stopbank at Ōhiti Rd | Ōmāhu is designed to manage these kinds of events. In larger floods, like Cyclone Gabrielle, the system will still help by slowing the water and giving people more time to evacuate safely – but it won't offer full protection. A solution that could withstand a Gabrielle-scale event would be hugely expensive and require much more land.

8. How is community feedback being used in the project design?

Community input is at the heart of this project. We began by working closely with Category 2C property owners and have since broadened engagement to include the wider community.

A dedicated Stakeholder Advisory Group (STAG) will soon be established to keep that dialogue going. Feedback is already shaping design decisions, informing modelling requests, and helping to guide both the technical and engagement approaches.

Mana whenua and tangata whenua

9. How is HBRC working with mana whenua and tangata whenua on this project?

Our relationship with mana whenua is a cornerstone of this project. Partnership with mana whenua is crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of infrastructure projects. Mana whenua has been actively engaged in discussions regarding the stopbank's design and location, ensuring that cultural and environmental values are respected. Our mana whenua engagement process is ongoing as we strive for meaningful collaboration.

Engagement with tangata whenua Piringa Hapū Ōmāhu Marae has been instrumental as this project and stopbank will provide flood protection for their community and land.

The bigger picture: the NIWE programme

10. What is the North Island Weather Event (NIWE) resilience programme?

The NIWE programme is a multi-million-dollar Central Government investment in flood protection across the North Island. In Hawke's Bay, it funds seven major resilience projects – including Ōhiti Road | Ōmāhu, Pākōwhai, Pōrangahau, Waiohiki, Wairoa, Whirinaki and Havelock North.

Alongside these major builds, HBRC is also upgrading pump stations, stopbanks and river telemetry systems (which monitor and relay live river level and rainfall data).

11. Why is this investment needed? Haven't we always had flood protection?

Climate change and recent extreme weather have exposed the limits of our older flood protection systems. This investment strengthens our region's defences – and helps us adapt to a future where more intense storms are expected.

12. Who is paying for it?

Funding comes from both central and regional government. Through its North Island Weather Event (NIWE) resilience programme, central government has committed \$200 million to flood protection across Hawke's Bay, with HBRC contributing \$42 million – a combined programme budget of \$242 million. The funding is time-sensitive, so the work needs to be delivered quickly and within budget.

The budget for the Ōhiti project is \$10 million. Central government is covering 75 percent, with the remaining 25 percent funded by HBRC through a general rate paid by all Hawke's Bay ratepayers – not a targeted rate.

13. Will these projects stop flooding completely?

No flood protection system can eliminate all risk. But these projects will reduce the likelihood and severity of flooding – and give people more time to respond during an emergency.

14. What is land categorisation, and how does it relate to this project?

Some flood-prone properties were classified as Category 2C after Cyclone Gabrielle, meaning people living on these properties were at high risk of life for large-scale flood events. These projects aim to reduce that risk, so affected properties can be reclassified as Category 1 – allowing people to stay, rebuild, and move forward with confidence.

In Ōhiti most of the affected properties don't carry Section 72 notices – and for the one that does, that designation will be reviewed once mitigation works are complete. The focus is on building effective flood mitigation that allows people to stay safely in their homes.